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Contemporary Ethnographic Studies and Research Trends in the German Democratic Republic

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Since our discussions take place within the general framework of cultural anthropology, I feel that three relevant observations need to be made first which do not pertain to East Germany alone, but rather to continental Europe in general: the structural difference between anthropology as a discipline in the United States and on the Continent, the divergent interpretation of the term "folklore" in its Anglo-American and German usage, and the importance of museums as centers of research in Europe.

In most of the European countries "anthropology" refers to physical anthropology alone. Archaeology, ethnology, and linguistics are separate and usually also independent disciplines, each with its own institute and academic chair within a Faculty of Philosophy (Ishida 1965; Hultkrantz 1967). In the German-speaking countries a further distinction is made between ethnology and folklore which, again, form separate and only loosely connected disciplines. An explanation for this distinction can be found perhaps in the trichotomy which characterizes the development of ethnology in Germany: traditionally, a distinction was made between what could be called "national" ethnology (Volkskunde) and "global" ethnology which goes back to F. Ratzel and A. Bastian and which included the primitive cultures of the world as well as the high cultures (Hochkulturen)
of Europe and Asia. A third type of ethnology, mainly characteristic of the nineteenth century, limited itself to the study of nonliterate societies (Naturvoelker) and is best exemplified by the work of Theodor Waitz and his Anthropologie der Naturvoelker (1859).

"National" ethnology was first to develop systematically in Germany as a field of study, if not as an academic discipline. As Ethnographie, Folklore, or as Volkskunde it dealt and still deals with the study of all traditional aspects of German culture such as folk housing and building, settlement, costumes, customs and manners (Sitten und Gebraeuche), folk beliefs, narratives, songs, dances, etc. Although Volkskunde was originally largely ethnographic-descriptive and rural-oriented (Lutz 1958), strong attempts have been made ever since the early 1950s to make it more current and to develop it into a truly comparative study of European ethnology (Erixon 1951 and 1967). Primarily, however, it is its holistic approach to the study of traditional culture which distinguishes German folklore from folklore as we find it in Britain and America. As practiced here, at least until very recently, folklore would have to be considered the study of the "verbal arts" or of "oral traditions" only (Riedl 1966). Because of this conceptual difference in the use of the terms "folklore" and Volkskunde, and in order to keep confusion at a minimum, the term "ethnography" will be used in the remainder of this paper whenever Volkskunde is meant.

Finally, the third point that needs to be made is that most larger European museums are much more engaged in actual field work,
research, and teaching than is the case in the United States. Many of these museums have their own publications and through them make important contributions to the study of man and his behavior.

The situation of ethnological studies in East Germany more or less conforms to this general European pattern. When looking at the fields of ethnology and ethnography in the German Democratic Republic, the first impression one receives is that the study of the latter is stressed at the expense of the former. This applies to teaching as well as to research performed. The overall quality of the ethnographic publications is generally quite high—despite the frequent Marxist-Leninist interpersions which seem largely superfluous. What make some of these publications particularly valuable and useful to students of Eastern Europe are the frequent contributions, in German, from other countries of the Socialist bloc.

As in most other European countries, ethnographic work in East Germany usually reflects a historical-descriptive approach. However, there appears to be a definite attempt to make ethnographic research more relevant and to keep up with new developments in Western Europe. For this very purpose a methodologically oriented symposium was held in Bad Saarow during December 1967. Scholars from seven European countries participated in this symposium, the results of which were recently published under the title Probleme und Methoden volkskundlicher Gegenwartsforschung (Jacobit and Nedo 1969). Two general trends are noticeable in this new development: a focusing on the sociocultural problems arising out of the nineteenth century industrialization.
urbanization, Landflucht, and the decline of the once so important (to German ethnography) village life, and, secondly, a desire to participate and to cooperate in the newly revived field of comparative European ethnology.

Most of the ethnographic and ethnological work carried out in the German Democratic Republic is centered in the cities of Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, and Bautzen. Aside from universities and museums, the single most important factor in the study of German ethnography is the German Academy of Sciences in Berlin (Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin) and its affiliated institutes. The most important of these is the Institute for German Ethnography in Berlin (Institut fuer deutsche Volkskunde), with branches in Dresden and Rostock. Under the direction of two renowned ethnographers, the folklorist Adolf Spamer and the Finno-Ugric expert Wolfgang Steinitz (both now deceased), the institute in Berlin became the main center of ethnographic studies in East Germany. While all areas of folk culture are represented at this institute, its main strength lies within the field of folklore (oral traditions).

Also located in Berlin and equally important is the Institute of Ethnology and German Ethnography of Humboldt University (Institut fuer Volkerkunde und deutsche Volkskunde). For Berlin we should also mention the Academic Institute for History which conducts ethnohistorical studies of the Barbarikum (late prehistory and early history of Europe), and the Museum of Ethnography.

While Berlin, then, leads in the field of German ethnography,
Leipzig is the main center of ethnological studies in East Germany. Both its Museum of Ethnology and the Julius Lips Institute of Ethnology and Comparative Legal Sociology (Julius-Lips-Institut fuer Volkerkunde und vergleichende Rechtssoziologie) of Karl Marx University are well known—the Museum for its fine Australian, Oceanian, and North Asian collections, and the Institute for the work on North American Indians by its late director Julius Lips and his wife Eva Lips, the present director.

Dresden, largely because of its excellent Museum of Ethnology and the work it produces, is another important center for ethnological studies in the German Democratic Republic. Ethnography is represented through the branch of the Berlin Institute of German Ethnography and the State Museum of Folk Art.

A little known yet interesting aspect of East German ethnography is the study of the Sorbs, which is centered at the Academic Institute for Sorbian Ethnography at Bautzen (Akademie-Institut fuer sorbische Volksforschung). The Sorbs, or Wends, are a western Slavic minority group living in the area between the Elbe and Oder rivers, best known to us as Lusatia (Lausitz). Sorbistik, as the Germans call it, is also studied and taught at the Sorbian Institute of Karl Marx University in Leipzig. The best collection of Sorbian ethnographic material is housed in the Spreewald Museum at Luebbenau.

Most of the institutes of the German Academy of Sciences, and even the Academy itself, were established after the last war. The increase in staff in the various institutes and museums, as well as
the newly founded publications, are characteristic of the postwar
developments in East Germany. The Academy, its various institutes,
and most of the larger museums all publish their own journals and
periodicals. The Berlin Institute of German Ethnography puts out
three publications: the yearbook Deutsches Jahrbuch fuer Volkskunde,
since 1955; the journal Demos, which is devoted mainly to ethnographic
and folkloristic reports and articles from the Eastern European
socialist countries, since 1960; and a monograph series entitled
Veroeffentlichungen des Instituts fuer deutsche Volkskunde, since
1950.

Ethnology is also represented through three major publications
put out by the ethnological museums of Leipzig and Dresden. The
Leipzig museum publishes the yearbook Jahrbuch des Museums fuer
Voelkerkunde zu Leipzig, continued after the war with Volume 10
(1951), as well as its Veroeffentlichungen des Museums fuer
Voelkerkunde zu Leipzig, continued from 1958 with Volume 9. The
Dresden ethnology museum publishes the series Abhandlungen und
Berichte des Staatlichen Museums fuer Voelkerkunde Dresden, con-
tinued from 1962 with Volume 21.

While these publications constitute the main outlets for
ethnographic and ethnological research in East Germany, four more
need to be mentioned because they are relevant to our topic: the
Sorbian Institute at Bautzen has published since 1953 Lutopis
instituta za serbski ludospyt [Annals of the Institute of Sorbian
Studies], and since 1954 Spisy instituta za serbski ludospyt
Volkskundliche Informationen, published by the Department of Ethnology and German Ethnography of the German Academy of Sciences at Berlin (Sektion fuer Voelkerkunde und deutsche Volkskunde), began appearing, primarily for the purpose of disseminating information about ethnographic events, publications, research endeavors, etc., to the general public. This department was established in 1956 to coordinate ethnographic and ethnological research within the German Democratic Republic. It consists of three committees representing ethnology, ethnography, and museology.

The last publication to be cited is Ethnographisch-archaeologische Zeitschrift published by the Academic Institute of History since 1953 and appearing under its present name since 1960. As was pointed out earlier, this institute deals with late prehistoric and early historical problems primarily as they affect Germany. It is part of the Institute for Ancient History.

Academic training in both ethnology and ethnography consists of four years of study leading to the "State Examination" (Staatsexamen)—roughly the equivalent of our Master of Arts degree. Students of ethnography spend one of these years in the field or at museums doing practical work. Special emphasis is placed on regional or area specialization and on language training. Aside from the major language(s) of a chosen geographic area, students are required to master at least two world languages. Majors in ethnography are furthermore required to have a working knowledge in Latin. Little
wonder that there seems to be a critical shortage of students (Kothe 1967:250). The original admission policies of the university institutes may further have contributed to this shortage: by 1961 the Institute of Ethnology and German Ethnography at Humboldt University in Berlin admitted only four students in each of the two fields "every second year" (Lips 1961:65). To alleviate the shortage of trained ethnographers in the East German museums Humboldt University has offered since 1966 a four-year correspondence course leading also to the "State Examination." The correspondence students meet twice annually for fourteen days of intensive lectures and practicums, completing each time the requirements of a full semester. The Ph.D. can be obtained after three years of additional studies. Career opportunities are largely confined to museum positions or to cultural-political work within the government (Lips 1961:65).

The information presented in this paper may no longer be accurate in all respects by the time of its publication. Recent reforms within the Academy and the universities of East Germany have made certain structural changes necessary. Thus, at Humboldt University in Berlin, the two disciplines of ethnology and ethnography are now combined under ethnography within the history section. At the Academy a new department of "Art History--German Ethnography" has been established within the Central Institute of History which will greatly influence the direction of future ethnographic research in the German Democratic Republic.
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Kothe, Heinz

Lips, Eva

Lutz, Gerhard

Riedl, Norbert F.

* The articles by Lips and Kothe are the only ones that could be obtained on the topic of this paper. They do not always agree on detail, perhaps because of the time difference between their publication. Kothe's article has since been pointed out to me as being biased.