How to use this book

All information about museums and in the lists has been updated as far as possible to reflect the situation in Summer/Autumn 1982. The following remarks are intended to elucidate the questions this book can be expected to answer.

1. Aim

The purpose of the inventories is to provide a survey of the ethnographic collections in Switzerland. The present lists cannot supply a complete documentation of every single object from any particular tribal culture to have been acquired by a Swiss museum. Thus the lists replace neither the detailed catalogue of the individual pieces included in a collection nor the work done on or with the original objects.

2. Arrangement of the inventories

The lists are arranged alphabetically according to the places where the museums are located and, within the single institutions, alphabetically according to continents (excluding Europe). The collections from Europe have been taken into account to a limited extent as appendices to the lists or in the statistical survey (the collection in figures), where information was available. References to material concering folklife make no pretensions to completeness!

3. Information on the single museums

Each museum is thus presented by means of:
- an introduction: information on the opening hours, staff, library and archives, history and significance of the collections, exhibitions and other mueseum activities (as of 1982).
- lists of sources and possibly publications
- a survey of the number of collection units and of the arrangement of the lists
- inventory surveys arranged according to continents and major continental regions.

4. Bibliography and Index

All bibliographical references have been combined in a single bibliography. An index of the names of countries, regions and tribes can also be found at the end of the volume.

5. Arrangement of the collection

In respect of the classification of the collections according to provenience on the one hand and for the disposition of the tables on the other, various preliminary decisions have had to be taken, in which it was essential to take the diverse situations of the single museums into account as regards sources. The desire to work out a practical survey which would both fulfil elementary ethnological demands and be as historically accurate as possible was confronted with a wealth of information on individual accessions to museum collections. Thus in their present form the lists are the result of repeated subjective evaluation and decision with a view to giving prominence to what we deemed important and putting aside for the present what we judged to be distracting.

The following headings indicate the most important decisions, while explaining the classification of the pieces in the collections in various categories and the division of the tables into six columns.

5.1. Distinguishing "Collections" from "Miscellaneous Acquisitions"

Major emphasis has been placed on single, self-contained collections plus the documentation pertaining to them and not on listing important individual pieces.

In contrast to Volume I, it has not been possible to distinguish consistently between Collections (more than 20 pieces related according to provenience – geographical and ethnic origins, who the collector was – and/or the material, manufacturing techniques and function) and Miscellaneous Acquisitions (i.e. single objects and smaller groups of three to approximately twenty objects, for example various acquisitions of different local origin from different collectors). A survey of the miscellaneous acquisitions of a continental collection classifid in 30-year periods (cf. Vol. I) has only rarely been realizable.

Only insufficiently identified and catalogued material has been placed under the heading of "Miscellaneous".

5.2. Year of Acquisition

The single acquisitions of collections are generally listed in chronological order, the year they were registered at the museum being decisive. Where various collection dates exist, they are mentioned after the collector's name in column 5.

If there are several dates (usually separated by slanted lines) in the first column, this is to indicate that a particular collector provided the museum in question with pieces over a period of years, sometimes with considerable intervals in between. These separate acquisitions have as a rule been combined in a single entry.

5.3. Classification within the Continents and Names Used to Designate Provenience (Table Heading and Columns 2 and 3, cf. Maps 1-4 with the division according to major areas pp. 27–35)

For the purposes of the present survey the common classification of museum pieces according to continents and subcontinents has been standardized. Maps 1-4 and their legends establish the course of the boundaries. Together with the designations introduced for large, connected regions and the names of countries, which are often only of an informative nature and have not been able to be brought completely up to date, column 2 thus yields a rough geographical grid for provenience.

In column 3 the ethnic unit whose culture is documented is listed in so far as it could be determined on the basis of the collector's or respective museum's records as available when individual lists were made. The spelling of these names has not been standardized.

5.4. Number of Objects

Usually the number of inventory units is given. These administrative units may include several similar or closely related pieces; hence the number of single objects need not agree with the number of inventory units listed.

5.5. Collector

Under the heading of "Collector" the names of those people from whom the respective museum acquired the groups of objects in question (by buying or trading, as a gift, request or loan, or on the basis of a working relationship) will be found. If the pieces were collected on the spot by the collector

personally, this is indicated by the addition "Expedition" (also: exp.) or – if the collecting was a by-product of a different activity (e.g. in the case of missionaries, geologists, businessmen) – "primary" (also: pr.).

The addition of "secondary" (also: sec.), on the other hand, indicates a collector who systematically assembled material on a culture or a comparative topic second-hand.

The location behind a collector's name indicates his place of residence; it is not included if the collector lived or lives in the same town as the respective museum.

Dates in the column refer to when the collection in question was assembled (for possible discrepancies with regard to the date of acquisition by the museum see above, 5.2.). Unfortunately details about collectors are often unavailable.

5.6. Remarks

This column contains a brief characterization of the collection (and in many cases information on important single pieces) and published sources (in so far as this information was accessible when the lists were being made). The publications mentioned are generally ones containing a documentation of either the whole collection in question or at least a considerable part of it.

6. Concluding remarks

Compromises have had to be made both while compiling the surveys and while editing them within the framework of the SEG/SSE Museum Committee. Some readers may wish they had more detailed information on the pieces summarily included under the heading of "Miscellaneous". Others will miss a classification of the collections according to functions within the single cultures and in a systematic comparison, like the one on which the presentation of Zurich's African collection has experimentally been based (cf. Vol. I). Some might have welcomed an index of collectors, others might have liked more precise references to archived documentation. In view of the size of the collections and the major gaps in documentation, the work involved in making such desirable additions would have been too great.

We hope that the inventory surveys, in spite of all their inadequacies, will be used often and will help and stimulate museum ethnologists in their work.

The SEG/SSE Museum Committee, as editors of this volume, would be pleased to hear from readers with new ideas or suggestions for improvement.

(English Version by Eileen Walliser, Riehen)