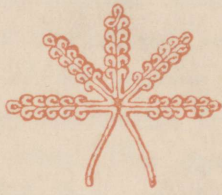


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THE
ESTONIAN NATIONAL
MUSEUM
EESTI RAHVA MUUSEUM

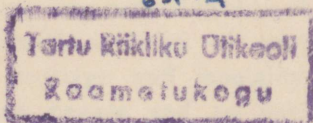


TARTU, 1926

There are about 20 museums at present in Estonia. About 5—6 of them possess more or less remarkable ethnographic collections. Among the museums of Estonia the Estonian National Museum occupies the first place in regard to extent of the native ethnographic collections, the arrangement and the scientific work. It represents at its present stage a kind of National Central Museum. Of the many departments of the museum the ethnographic department is the most remarkable from the scientific and national point of view. This department contains more Estonian material than all the other museums together.

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I. The time before the foundation of the Estonian National Museum.

In order to form a proper opinion of the museum conditions of this country, we must look back into the past. The first museum in Estonia was founded by the Gelehrte Estnische Gesellschaft ("Estonian Learned Society", founded 1838.) in Tartu. By its nature it belonged to the so-called historical museums and its chief speciality has remained archaeology. Of the same character were also the museums founded in other towns and supported by learned societies. In the museums a few rare Estonian ethnographic objects were to be met with and these more as curiosities than as objects of scientific value. Not until 1894/95. a larger collection of objects was begun to be made by the initiative of the "Estonian Learned Society" in the district of Setu (Setumaa) and on the Estonian Islands. A collection of about 700 objects was arranged and exhibited in Riga on the archaeological exhibition in 1896. Chiefly with this the work of the Society in ethnographic proper began and ended. The collections made by the German societies in other towns were even less extensive than this small collection.

These learned societies of aristocratic spirit with their German language and mentality were inaccessible for the Estonian people and so were their collections. In these circles the Estonians were looked upon as a people incapable of development and destined to perish, who could be chosen only for experiments, not as co-



operators. Thus it became imperative that there should arise among the Estonians a new national and democratic "museum-movement", which was inspired by the romanticism of the national revival. Already in 1869, at the Tartu choral-festivity the thought of founding a new national museum was openly expressed. The first attempts were made by the "Estonian Society of Literates" (Eesti Kirjameeste Selts), which, however, was soon dissolved.

The next attempts were made by the "Estonian Students' Society" at the organization of O. Kallas in 1892., and by the "Estonian Agricultural Society" in 1904. The results were insignificant.

In the meantime the collecting of folklore material had been successful. This Dr. Jakob Hurt conducted with great enthusiasm and loving attention to detail especially from 1888 until his death 1906. The result of this labour was a collection of 160 volumes in manuscript, containing 100,000 pages. This collection contained an enormous number of folk-songs, fairy-tales, proverbs, descriptions of superstitious customs etc. M. J. Eisen, who is at present Professor of Folklore in the University of Tartu, has in later time laboured on making another collection, which now amounts to 60,000 pages. At the same time was begun the collecting of national airs on the initiative of Dr. O. Kallas. It amounts to 16,000 airs with about 200,000 lines of text.

These voluminous collectings, only due to private donations and unpaid co-operation, encouraged others to begin the preservation of various articles of national culture.



II. The Estonian National Museum (1909—1926.).

The idea of founding a national museum arose again after the death of Dr. J. Hurt. An institution was required for preserving the collections of the deceased and for continuing his work as collector, which it was intended to extend to objects of National Cultural Importance, which in consequence of economic developments had begun to decay rapidly.

In 1909 the "Estonian National Museum Society" began its activity. Its aim was to promote the investigation of the Estonian nation and country in all respects. In addition to this it desired to found a national library. It was intended to create a kind of central institution for concentrating the Estonian productions pertaining to material as well as intellectual culture.

The lack of specialization was unavoidable, as the Estonians possessed no other scientific institutions, and as there was not the slightest hope of co-operative work from the German Societies and the University.

To satisfy the many needs, which went on increasing all the time, the Estonian museum could reckon only upon the assistance of the society. The Russian government institutions at first looked upon the new institution with suspicion, and later on created many obstacles. The revenue had to be obtained from subscriptions, festivities, the sale of flowers etc. Work under such conditions demanded great sacrifice and



optimism, and the promoters of the museum, with Dr. O. Kallas at the head, had these two qualities in ample measure. They managed to interest and engage in co-operation the whole of the Estonian nation and in a short time make the support of the museum a national watch-word.

After a few years of organization-work, during which money had been collected, the museum was provisionally installed in rooms taken for the purpose and all the existing collections were combined. It became possible to undertake work at a larger scale and two chief directions were taken. Firstly, the collecting of ethnographic material and secondly, the creation of archives. It was left to the "Estonian Literary Society" to continue the collecting of folklore material.

The ethnographic collecting-work was conducted on a regional basis, by the parishes. University students, pupils of art-schools, teachers etc. were given scholarships for assistance in this work. Special stress was laid on national artistic productions such as, woven tissues, gloves, embroideries and similar objects. The years 1911—1913 were a period of hard work. In 1913 about 150 collectors were busy securing 5,625 objects. In the preceding year the respective figures were 45 and 4,566, in 1911 20 and 3,306. Because of the hurried manner, in which the collecting was done, and the insufficient preparation of the collectors, the results left much to be desired. Still a great many valuable objects were saved from the dangers of the subsequent wars and revolutions, otherwise



many of them would probably have been lost. At the beginning of the world-war the collecting work diminished reaching its minimum in 1918.

The "Estonian Students' Society" had laid the foundation of the archives in the first years of the museum, by presenting it with a library of 14,000 volumes, dealing with Estonia and the Baltic countries. To this additions were made from private collections, printing establishments, censor's archives, from duplicate collections of the Russian Academy of Science etc. At the end of the first ten years of work (1920.) the archives contained about 30,000 volumes, while the number of ethnographic objects amounted to 20,000.

In the beginning of its activity the museum was situated in one story of a small building, provided by the town council. The collections had to be stored packed up in boxes. Only a few rooms could be used for temporary exhibitions. In the meantime money had been collected from private sources for erecting a special building. The sum however did not reach the necessary amount, and during the war years the inflation wiped it out nearly entirely.

The years of war and revolution (1914—1920.) caused great difficulties also for the museum. A great change in the existence of the museum took place at the foundation of the Estonian Republic (1918.). As a result of this the State's attitude towards the museum underwent a radical change, and this institution, which had so long been treated with official contempt, now received a certain amount of State support.



In the first years of its existence the young state could not render much assistance. Only the year 1922. was the turning-point of the development of the museum. Although the museum still remained under the management of the museum society, the State from this time began to support it. It was also made a public institution as a result of the agricultural reform. At "Raadi-mõis", a confiscated estate in the neighbourhood of Tartu, one half of the mansion was in 1922. assigned to the museum. In the autumn of the same year the museum was removed to its new domicile. For the present the burning question of proper premises has been satisfactorily solved. An event of great importance was the appointment of the first expert, the Finnish ethnographer Director Dr. J. Manninen, who was appointed Lecturer of Ethnography at the University of Tartu.

In the last years special stress has been laid on the systematic completion of the collections. The implements of fishery, forestry and agriculture have increased especially. The collecting has been done at the expense of the Ministry of Education. In addition these sums have been granted for scholars to be sent out every summer to the number of 15—20, whose reports on special subjects constitute the ethnographic archives. During the last years the museum work has been extended to the Finno-Ugrian peoples. At present there are about 500 objects from the culture of the Livonians, Ingermans, Mordvians, Hungarians etc. A larger collection from the Finnish Lap culture will soon arrive.



In the same year when the museum moved to "Raadi-mõis", an art-department was also founded, which made it possible to house a considerable art collection, which Baron v. Liphart, the former proprietor of "Raadimõis" handed over to the University of Tartu. Part of the rooms in the new building were suitable only for exhibiting art objects.

With the subsidies obtained from the State, it was possible to make the necessary repairs and procure furniture and equipment, and on May 15, 1923. the museum was opened in its present provisional shape. The ethnographic department had to be content with four rooms, while to the art-department seven were assigned. The other rooms were used as store-rooms. Not until 1925. was the second half of the mansion placed at the disposal of the museum. The arrangement of this part is going on at present.



III. The Museum at present.

1. The present exhibits in the **ethnographic section** number 1,842 only. The whole number of objects, including the prehistorical ones, amounts to about 30,000. The greater part of the objects has been stored away. Almost half of the whole number belong to the textiles. According to the report of 1925, (Jan. 1.) there were 3,784. girdles and ribbons, 1,204 bonnets, 649 head-dresses, 1,245 pairs of gloves etc. Among the wood-work the collection of tankards deserves mention, it contains more than 1,300 objects. The whole number of trinkets amounts to 2,300. The district of Setumaa and the Islands are remarkably well represented; in these places the historic culture had been preserved until the present day. On the whole one may say that the collections are satisfactory and compared with the population they rank among the first in the world.

At present the chief work consists in fitting up the new exhibition rooms in the second half of the building, and it is hoped to finish this work during 1927. With this the possibility opens of showing in about 20 rooms nearly 12,000 objects, which ought to give a perfect idea of Estonian ethnography. During the next years the Finno-Ugrian department is to be opened, and for this purpose 4 rooms have been set apart.

2. The **art-department** contains a whole number of plaster-casts and paintings deposited by the University of



Tartu. The art-collections pertain partly to the museum, partly they have been received as temporary deposits.

3. One of the most interesting departments in the Estonian National Museum is the **archives**, which on January 1, 1926. contained 40,864 volumes of books; 5,743 volumes of magazines and newspapers; 717 pages of maps and a great number of minor printed matter. As there is no independent national library in Estonia, the one just mentioned, is intended as a substitute. It is the endeavour of the museum staff to collect into this present library as completely as possible a) all Estonian books and printed matter; b) books in foreign languages dealing with the Estonians and Finno-Ugrians; c) books printed in Estonia or the Baltic countries in foreign languages and d) books and articles written by Estonians.

The library contains works, which are not to be found in other Estonian libraries. The collection of magazines and newspapers is of great value. During the last years the archives have greatly developed. In accordance with the new printing law, it has since 1919 been receiving two copies of every printed work issued in Estonia. Through the financial improvement it was possible to increase the staff considerably, and by means of a lottery to purchase at last (1924) for the library a suitable building (Aiatän. 42/44). In this building are located the office of the museum and the Bibliographic Institute. A Reading-Room has been established at the library and may be used there, but books are not lent out.



4. Out of the Library has developed the **Bibliographic Institute**, which is situated in the same building, and is supported by the united efforts of the Estonian National Museum and the Estonian Literary Society. Until now its work has consisted in indexing of older magazines and newspapers. The work has been done on Melvil Dewey's system. The collections of the archives have been used for material.

Juridically the Estonian National Museum has remained on the same private legal basis, just as it was when founded. It is intended to convert it into a public museum after the completion of the ethnographic department next year (1927).

The Estonian National Museum has gained a prominent place in Estonian history and hopes to keep it also in future. The present supporters of the museum possess the same amount of optimism and good-will as the first promoters had, and therefore they look into the future with the same hopefulness as the whole of the Estonian people, who are trying hard to derive every possible benefit from the newly gained national independence, which was obtained after such a severe struggle and so many sacrifices.

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