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N. N. Mikloucho-Maclay Institute
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**Problems
of the European
Ethnography
and Folklore**

Summaries
by the Congress
Participants

Moscow 1982

II Congress
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PROBLEMS OF THE EUROPEAN ETHNOGRAPHY AND FOLKLORE

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The Problem of Ethnographic Reconstruction of Primeval Hunter-Gatherer Society

The problem of reconstructing the history of primeval society with the aid of ethnographic study of modern primitive-communal societies is among the most important problems facing the science which treats the past of mankind. In recent times the development of a scientific procedure for using ethnographic source materials with a view to effecting this reconstruction has been in the focus of researchers' attention in many countries, including the Soviet Union. Soviet scientists have published, in particular, a special collection of articles devoted to this problem (Ethnography as a Source of Reconstruction of the History of Primeval Society. Moscow, 1979, in Russian).

In the present author's opinion, which is set forth in an article included in the aforementioned collection, the best solution to the problem is the method of ethnographic modelling. It is based, in the final analysis, on the wide utilization of data pertaining to various backward societies which are studied by ethnography and a comparative analysis of these data with a view to disclosing in them the general and the specific - universals, on the one hand, and features inherent exclusively in individual societies, on the other. Because each society which stands at a certain level of development, alongside specific features intrinsic exclusively to this concrete society, exhibits phenomena typical of other societies of an identical level.

Many ethnographic materials show that the traditional organisational principles of primeval social structures coincide whatever their conditions of life, in other words, whatever geographic zones of the globe are populated by hunters and gatherers. Consequently, these principles bear a universal character. Primeval structures are characterised, first, by plasticity and adaptability to changing conditions, second, by an existence of a primary universal adaptive dynamic system whose core is formed

by the community. The dynamism of this system finds expression in its ability to develop and transform. On its basis proceeds the transition to higher levels of socio-economic development. Finally, they fall into surface and deep-seated structures. The latter become formed on the basis of relations necessary for the very existence of society, predominantly socio-economic.

The components of primeval cultures form two large blocks. One is characterized by an infinite variability of elements and the uniqueness of their combinations, the latter, on the contrary, by common features of types. The former is underlain by those social structures which the author will conventionally refer to as surface ones, the latter by deep-seated structures above all, the basic collective production unit of primeval society - the community. The contrastive relationships, or dialectical combinations of these two cultural blocks - two types of social structure - express the unity and, at the same time, multiformity of primeval society as a socio-cultural entity. The traditional societies of hunters and gatherers, whose history developed in different geographic and historical conditions, exhibit features of a common type in practically all respects that pertain to the socio-economic basis of their existence and are sometimes profoundly different in many other respects. Being an instrument of society's adaptation to the environment, the deep-seated structures do not display essential changes with changes of environment. They form, as it were, a stable foundation which enables society to hold out and survive in any conditions.

In the author's opinion, these universal phenomena, or deep-seated structures, which reflect certain regularities of social development, should form the basis of reconstructing the society of primeval times.

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Ethno-Culturology and Ethnographic Studies

1. The paper sets out to substantiate a new type of studies of ethno-cultural phenomena. Their direct emergence was expressed in a joint system of comparative-typological investiga-