Österreichisches MUSEUM für VOLKSKUNDE

Austrian Museum
of Folk Life and Folk Art

The Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art was founded in 1895 and has been located at the renovated Josefstädter Schönborn Garden Palace since 1917. It contains collections of historical popular art from Austria and its neighbouring countries. The newly conceived and designed display on the ground floor gives an overview of pre-modern folk culture and allows insight into the unique folk art collections of the Museum.

Österreichisches MUSEUM für VOLKSKUNDE

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of Folk Life and Folk Art

Display Collection of Historical Popular Culture

Accompanying Booklet

Vienna 1998
Selbstverlag

Österreichisches Museum für Volkskunde
Verein für Volkskunde

Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art
Display Collection of Historical Popular Culture

Booklet accompanying the permanent exhibit of the
Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art

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Directorship: Hofrat Dr. Franz Grieshofer

Scientific concepts and texts:
Klaus Beitl
Franz Grieshofer
Margot Schindler
Bernhard Tschofen

Translation into English:
Franz Antonowicz
English version edited by
John Bendix and Margot Schindler
with the assistance of
Ian Blake, Eric Breitbart and Alexander Fenton

Exhibit Layout:
Architectural Bureau of Elsa Prochazka
Ursula Klingan
Volker Thurm-Nemeth
Barbara Plankensteiner

Exhibit Graphics and Booklet Layout:
A & H Haller

Photographs:
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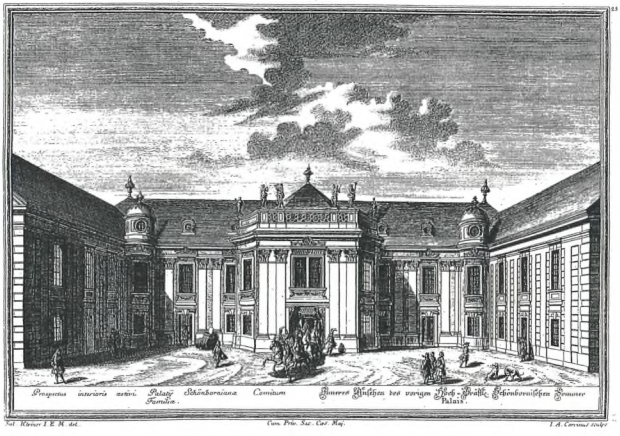
Schönborn Garden Palace
Baroque Staircase

Preface

In the spring of 1994, after about ten years of renovation, the Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art opened its new, permanent exhibition. The resumption of the exhibition also marks the 100th anniversary of the Society and of the Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art in Vienna.

The museum was founded in 1895 by the ethnographers Michael Haberlandt (1860-1940) and Wilhelm Hein (1861-1903) then at the Natural History Museum in Vienna. The inspiration for the new museum came from the Society of Ethnography and Popular Culture which was also founded by Haberlandt and Hein in 1894. After several years of collecting, the museum was first opened in 1898 in the main hall of the Vienna Stock Exchange on the Ringstraße, where it remained until 1917, though there was little space for the museum pieces. Towards the end of the First World War, the museum was transferred to the Josefstädter Schönborn Garden Palace in the Laudongasse, a palace which had been due for demolition but was made available by the city authorities to house the museum. The sumptuous baroque mid-section of the former aristocratic summer palace which faces the street was built from designs by Johann Lukas Hildebrandt between 1706 and 1711, along with the section overlooking the park that gives the museum the character it has today.

The museum was initially conceived to serve the entire "Cisleithanic" territory, meaning the Austrian side of the Leitha River which separated Austria from Hungary ("Transleithanic" refers to the Hungarian half of the imperial territory). With the exception of the regions of the Dual Monarchy united under the Hungarian crown, the museum items were gathered from all parts of the empire. Through extensive expeditions, and with the help of local agents, material was collected from Vorarlberg to East Galicia, and from north Bohemia



Schönborn Garden Palace
Courtyard, Salomon Kleiner, copperplate engraving, around 1737

to Bosnia-Herzegovina. In addition, agents were employed in individual regions to reinforce the collection by assembling groups of rural artefacts from single areas.

The initial collection methods followed the ethnography of the time, which was extensive but superficial. The research was gradually enriched under the influence of specialized individual disciplines, above all, research on farmhouses, a particular interest of the Anthropological Society in Vienna. The field of "comparative ethnography" emphasized in that era dealt with areas outside Austria, particularly mountain regions that had remained untouched (such as Graubünden, the Aosta valley, Savoy and the Basque region – and also other "relic landscapes" such as Brittany in France). In the same way, during the First World War, extensive ethnographic collections were gathered from the Balkan countries.

During the economic slump of the First Austrian Republic, the collection was augmented through the inclusion of pieces from the various federal states, particularly from the former west Hungarian area, now

Burgenland. At that time, the entire stock of the museum was displayed in crowded exhibits. Until the outbreak of the Second World War, scientific evaluation of the pieces was continued by Michael Haberlandt and his son, Arthur (1889-1964), who followed in his footsteps as museum director.

The collection was stored in protective shelters during the Second World War and the exhibition was opened once more in 1945, initially under the administration of Leopold Schmidt (1912-1981). The emphasis was placed on the present Second Republic of Austria, embedded in its historical environment, and focused on Austrian uniqueness. Extensive renovations of the museum building from 1956 to 1959 made it possible to mount permanent exhibits in different rooms by separate subject categories. Parts of the exhibition illustrating regions and subjects made it possible to reflect regional structure and the morphological development of popular culture. Using detailed labelling, pictorial evidence, photographic documentation and maps depicting the original sites of the objects found, an effort was made to assert the concept of "historicization" of popular culture museologically and to interpret the pieces in their living context. This was achieved through intensive scientific work conducted by the museum staff, by the design and employment of cartographic indexes and through the development of a collection archive, that accompanied the already considerable facilities of the museum and photograph libraries.

The problem of increasingly cramped space in the museum, which endangered the exhibits, was one that remained unresolved for half a century. It was only in the sixties that the then Federal Ministry of Art and Education began to promote the establishing of museum branches in palaces in and around Vienna. This not only

eased the space problem for the Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art, but also enhanced the visibility and effectiveness of such a rich collection. Some of the branches included the Gobelsburg Castle Museum, near Langenlois in Lower Austria, the exhibit of religious folk art together with the convent pharmacy in the former Viennese Ursuline Convent, and the (since closed) Raab's Castle Fairy-Tale Museum in the Waldviertel. The decisive step in the museum's expansion occurred in the seventies, through Adolf Mais's (1914-1982) work to decentralize the museum. Through the founding of the Ethnographic Museum in Chateau Kittsee in northern Burgenland as an affiliated museum society with its own corporate body, the historical collection of folk art from the eastern and southeastern countries once part of Austria could be synthesized and presented as a specialized study collection. This brought new value to the collection. During the time of a divided Europe, the resources of the museum were a uniting element, helping to preserve understanding and appreciation for the cultures and folklore of neighbouring peoples. The founding ideas of the museum were convincingly validated when the Iron Curtain was opened and the Ethnographic Museum in Chateau Kittsee became a recognized partner in the Central European network of ethnographic museums.

The final precondition for the extensive reform work of the Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art was the acquisition and construction of collection buildings, such as the former air-raid shelter in Schönborn Park close to the main building of the museum, which offered ideal conservation conditions, and also Mattersburg, a former mill, which is situated outside Vienna in mid-Burgenland. Here long-needed special warehouses could be created for the large

collections of furniture, traditional costumes and textiles. In addition, various other large buildings could be used to cover at least the medium-term needs.

All these steps of decentralization were very time-consuming and accompanied by continuous museological analyses. They formed the basis for the completed renewal of the Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art. The work carried out in the general rehabilitation of the museum turned out to be long-term due to irregular financing. The work included the restoration of the entire exterior of the Baroque Schönborn Garden Palace – namely the façades overlooking the street, park and inner courtyards – from 1982 to 1984. From 1984 to 1992, the reorganization, restoration and adaptation of the interior of the museum took place, such as the exhibit rooms, further study collections (ceramics, metal, graphics, verre églomisé pictures, etc), scientific departments (library, photograph library, archives), restoration studios, workshop areas, administration and the acquisition and renovation of all infrastructural facilities (such as central heating, sanitary, electrical and security equipment, specialized elevators for the handicapped and for goods, electronic data processing equipment) as well as a "Museum Café" with outdoor service. Financing difficulties interrupted the restoration in 1987 and 1988.

The Society of Ethnography and Popular Culture, as a private, legal entity of the Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art which belongs to the Union of Federal Museums, was responsible for the general restoration. The Society and the Museum are represented by their president and director. The financing of the general renovation project, which cost about 16 million Schillings, was covered almost equally by grants from the Federal Ministry of Science and Research, responsible

for the museum, and from the conservation funds of the city of Vienna, as the owner of the building.

Fortunately, as the Society and Museum celebrate their 100th anniversary in 1994/1995, the Museum has modern facilities at its disposal. A permanent exhibition, new in concept and arrangement, and focussing on "popular culture predominantly from the pre-industrial era", allows the public "to use the perspective of today on yesterday's objects".

Epiphany, 1994 **Klaus Beitl**

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New Display Collection Configurations
Architectural Bureau of Elsa Prochazka

Popular Culture in the Museum
or
one must imagine everyday life

"Rightly viewed no meanest
object is insignificant"
Thomas Carlyle

In an essay from the series "Things and Non-things", the communications scholar and philosopher Vilém Flusser distinguished between two states of being for bottles: those which are a part of culture, and those which are waste. He assigned one existence to remembering and the other to forgetting, but both bottles had liminal qualities: those belonging in the museum and those which were superfluous. "Because cultural studies tend not only to recall a part of what has been forgotten, but also to bury another part even more deeply", they help make history and determine what is worthy of being preserved. The starting point for every museum collection is therefore empty bottles – produced to be emptied and to end as waste. The path followed by a bottle on its way into the museum can thus be regarded as an expression of "the human ability which really deserves to be called human; the ability to become detached from things and to regard them from completely original points of view."[1]

The significance of artefacts is constantly changing. The museum of cultural studies, as a place where they are interpreted, contributes to this and determines how things appear, what they represent and what information they convey. Therefore museum presentations cannot remain constant but from time to time must subject idea, content and appearance to fundamental revision. During such reorganization phases questions naturally emerge which both relate to the basic possibilities of museum work and are directed at the

specific problems of how to treat the relics of popular culture. The answers are bound to be subjective, but must nevertheless be well-founded.

It was therefore only logical that the phase of massive expansion and renovation which occured approximately ten years ago in the Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art, was accompanied by the wish to reorganize the permanent collection. The museum debate of the seventies and the impetus in ethnography which lay behind it had put enormous pressure on the exhibition, the major part of which stemmed from 1958-1960. Understandably, the main ideas from the discussion about democratizing museums as institutions were integrated into the new concept. In concrete terms this meant the history of everyday life instead of popular art, and function instead of beauty – requirements which in the end seemed to contradict the relatively unchanged collections.

The long wait made necessary during the reconstruction also proved its worth in terms of content. It soon became clear that interiors do not become more dramatic if they originate from a working class milieu instead of from a farming culture, and it became more and more apparent that the extant collections were much more interesting than a history of everyday life illustrated by token objects. It cannot be denied that such thoughts were strengthened by the museum debate[2], which increasingly centred on the banality of such everyday presentations. It was clearly necessary to raise new questions about the objects collected in the building. This appeared to be the only way to arrive at a presentation which would meet the requirements of an ethnography museum without ignoring the specific nature of these collections. The fact that in the Viennese case these were not identical with collections in the many local and

regional museums dealing with popular culture was a natural consequence of the city environment.

The Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art cannot and will not become either a museum of local history or an historical institution for the establishing of identities. It is not the purpose of this museum to counter the "loss of familiarity resulting from the speed of change" – to use a catch phrase of Hermann Lübbe – through encountering the familiar mystification of things. The claims in dealing with objects aim rather to visualize the connections between existence and material culture, and in so doing, not let them seem more simple than they actually are.

The stocks were obviously collected under quite different premises than would be valid today. The interest in popular customs had only just begun to take scientific shape when the young discipline of ethnography established an institutional framework in the form of a society and a museum in the Vienna of the late nineteenth century. In the decades after the Hungarian Compromise, the Austrian Museum was a museum for all the crown lands united under the Dual Monarchy: from Bohemia and Moravia in the north to Transylvania and Bosnia in the south, and from Bucovina and Galicia in the east to Vorarlberg and Tyrol in the west. The last decades of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy left their mark on this museum and the spirit of the time has been preserved in these collections in a way which has hardly been equalled anywhere else.

Vienna museologist Rudolf von Eitelberger, founder of the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry (1864; later the Museum of Applied Art) and a significant contributor to the concept of the Ringstraße Museums, had already expressed the wish at the Vienna World Exposition of 1873 not only for a museum of ethnology,

but also for a museum of Austrian ethnography. The rapid cultural changes in fin-de-siècle Vienna led to a hitherto unknown level of interest in people's own culture and past. The earlier efforts to create ethnograpic collections fitted very well into this multidisciplinary and more cultural-historical interest. However, the two museum founders, Wilhelm Hein and Michael Haberlandt, with their respective backgrounds in ethnology and anthropology, added a special note to the prevailing enthusiasm for the past.[3] Faced with the challenge of the modern, their goal was to create comparative collections of the various kinds of popular arts and crafts, so as to be able to document the specific and the binding principles of regional and national popular art before it was too late. Even though the collection would be situated in the centralist capital, it is noteworthy that this comparative collection concept was intentionally aimed against the nationalism which was spreading throughout the monarchy.

The museum is thus, in a sense, a monument to this monarchy, and it remained so until long after the First World War. Over a third of the stocks were collected before 1918. An early emphasis was on furniture, textiles and ceramics, together with frequent serial collections of, for example, distaffs, flails for washing or products of different European cottage industries of the nineteenth century. The historicity of these items – a significant proportion of the objects have been in the museum for longer than the time between their manufacture and their inclusion in the collections – calls for a discussion of the historical significance of such a museum collection.

This collection now actually possesses a double historical character. Perhaps the very examination from the present standpoint of what a historic collection

is itself indicates the multiple significance of the objects. The meaning, regardless of how conveyed, should not appear as unchangeable truth but as a thoroughly constructed and deconstructable meaning. This is also why one can rely on a polymorphous contextualization – in other words the dissolution of the classic arrangement of the exhibits according to techniques or regional aspects. As a reaction against mythomaniacal ethnographic perspectives in the first half of this century this may well have been reasonable as a contribution towards establishing a specific Austrian identity. But in the end this orientation is partly responsible for the widely-held view of popular culture as a closed and finalized cultural form.

Admittedly, there is a great temptation to take a collection which does not fit into the concept of everyday-orientated ethnography, and forcibly adapt it within a framework of ideas. Recent museum discussions have rightly criticized as token exhibitions those whose exhibits were useful only as illustrations of the intended messages, and museology has recently – and rightly – returned to insisting that presentations be adapted to the material at hand rather than be based on wanting the impossible.[4] The underlying thought is that museum exhibitions are an independent medium which can neither be a substitute for books nor can compete with the new media.

In the relationship of contemplation to information, different criteria apply to cultural museums than to collections that serve aesthetic pleasures.
That there are further intentions is suggested by the permanent exhibition title "Display Collection of Historical Popular Culture". Not only are historical objects collected here, but it is also possible to learn about a particular historical and cultural combination, namely that of popular culture. For reasons given above, this museum is

capable of providing such information only to the extent that sufficient and appropriate items are available. This means that the emphasis must lie primarily on the pre-industrial way of life, and that this way of life, inadequately designated "historical popular culture", can at best be presented in terms of its symbolic configurations.

To use a deliberately vague image, the Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art has always regarded its main task in the liminal area between so-called material and so-called spiritual culture. It was never an agricultural museum, nor a museum of human industry and work. Even furniture or tools were not collected primarily to display or conserve home decor or as evidence for dying handicrafts, but out of an interest in popular aesthetics. At the risk of being accused of museological heresy, this is by no means a disadvantage. The advantage of concentrating on popular art is that far less prominence is given to functionality, a functionality that interferes in some newly acquired collections, including some that claim to show the everyday in its historical significance.

Greater difficulties arose from the absence of clear boundaries for what is designated as historical popular culture. The term itself implies that historical and traditional mean the same thing. This is not the case. It is far more important to inject dynamism into such a weighted presentation, since a large proportion of the exhibits belong to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and therefore attest to precisely that process of modernization through which what is passed on becomes transformed into traditional culture. Or to put it more simply: that it is impossible to extend popular culture into the present, for reasons of insufficient space and resources, must not create the impression that the historical popular culture represented in the displayed

objects is a long valid constellation which has suddenly come to an end or is complete.

Complaining about the poor quality of what has been handed down is one of the standard museological excuses, and segments of culture which are not represented by surviving material objects are in fact threatened with oblivion. It is a frequent wish of the applied cultural disciplines that the apparently faceless underprivileged classes had left more behind, but this wish is as naive as it is understandable. A richer source by no means guarantees that richer pictures can be drawn, because even a series of objects cannot reveal their meaning without appropriate intervention. The danger is perhaps even greater for objects presented as a series than for mixed batches – themselves always the target for accusations of arbitrariness – because the exhibits in an ethnography museum do not offer anything like a demonstration of everyday life as it was experienced. This can be changed neither by revision of the collecting methods, nor by the previous emphasis on the presentation of unworthy objects. "But in the end, the authenticity of the evidence, or as in some presentations the sheer quantity of material, ... is capable of uniting collections of objects with the presentation of a topic, of suggesting immediate associations with reality, as if the objects themselves were everyday life."[5]

The newly conceived display collection of the Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art is intended to reveal everyday life through the medium of the objects handed down. The objective is to uncover hidden engrams of historical cultural practice in the objects that were once collected as popular art. These generally offer very little in the way of familiar or everyday aesthetics and this can protect against all too rapid interpretations. Thus the presentation keeps its

distance from any reproduction of real circumstances. It not only bears witness to the museology of the exhibits placed on display, but also attempts, through the use of distancing perspectives, to render visible those facets of meaning which would otherwise remain hidden. For this reason, furniture is treated exclusively as sculpture and even the two small rooms which can be walked through are only sparsely furnished and lack any sense of being lived in.

Even more so than in other museums, the concept of a cultural museum – especially an ethnography museum – is a continual balancing act between the native and the foreign, between nearness and distance. Through the ethnographic practice of the past, exhibits are sanctioned as witnesses of native and home traditions that affect the people themselves. The aesthetic aspects are frequently the same as those of antique collecting, decoration to create atmosphere and cosiness. The well-meaning inclusion of the recent history of everyday life, which often occurs today, makes little difference because enamel pots and old sewing machines are no less capable of being trivially aestheticized than verre églomisé pictures, earthenware jugs or flails. The objects appearing in ethnographic collections are already known in some fashion; whether due to function, form, or estimated appeal. Their significance beyond the known or the visible lies in darkness and the task of the museological balancing act is to reveal meaning.

A simple scheme was deliberately chosen for the major division of the stocks: man in his relation to the environment, to his work, to historical experience and to society. Thus it is actually concerned with a panorama of pre-modern everyday existence that comes to life exclusively through individual images. Each of these illuminates only a small selection of the possible

topics and always does this with an eye to the "categories" of the individual thematic areas. Thus these are the main compass points from which the exhibits can be viewed, and they are at the same time the most important means to defamiliarize oneself from accustomed viewpoints. It is not facts which are important, but their cultural effects and their significance. For example, the area "man and work" does not present a picture of how work might have been performed during the pre-industrial, agrarian period. Instead, the relics presented as examples are intended to indicate the importance of individual characteristics of this system for basic mentalities, closely interwoven with material existence. The effort is therefore aimed at releasing the objects from their banality and also at achieving a situation which does not immediately imply a discussion about popular culture. "When everyday life is cut off from the greater whole, the functional, instrumental perspective becomes dominant; the useful characteristics of the objects are demonstrated but neither social meaning nor cultural significance are included."[6]

In this case, the superior perspective, the "greater whole", is the process of modernization. This stands – sometimes more, sometimes less clearly – behind the contextualization and interpretation of the individual sections. This may appear strange in a museum which does not write "from – to" in the headings, but the attraction lies precisely in the subtle illumination of the changes to the material and social structure of a culture that are caused by modernization which, on superficial observation, appear to be static.[7]

The means for developing more than an answer to the "out of what?", "what for?" and "where from?" questions derived from the nature of the pieces handed down have clearly had to be adapted in many

different ways to the various requirements in the course of the exhibition. The collections of exhibits already discussed range from polymorphically stocked, purely content-orientated sections, to specialized studies motivated by regional or practical considerations. Abstraction of the meanings – which can point in any number of different directions – by individual themes, attempts to achieve a density that would be difficult to draw from the material through one-dimensional questioning. This is the reason for deciding on a strict museological concept. Although a temporary exhibit may well benefit from the integration of illustrative material, reproductions and graphical explanations, the display collection, in its search for timelessness, should place even more emphasis on the objects that have been handed down. This is done deliberately and in the belief that "Everyday human life [is] at the centre of material culture"[8] – i.e., that material culture must also make everyday life behind the facts conceivable.

It is certainly true that such an open-ended presentation does not make it any easier to take in a display collection, especially as it also requires a certain amount of reading and must always be viewed in a multi-dimensional way. The questions addressed to the material, as well as being penetrating, should also be unrestricted. Therefore categories such as dissemination or chronology receive less attention than in older exhibitions. A cartographic index allows no other context than the spatial – a limitation analogous to the photographic representation of specific implements in practice and on site, bound as it is by functional thinking. In contrast, writing, which is still the most common and the most restrained medium, has the distinct advantage of not making the observation of the material superfluous.

Thinking about the appearance of the ideal museum is one of the most important driving forces behind practical museology. But it would be futile if the museum as an institution did not have the capacity to give the objects some kind of meaning, and this should not be ignored. It therefore seems only right and proper – especially in an ethnography museum, whose collections have been handed down more or less by chance – to include in the presentation and interpretation, something of the subjectivity of the view on the museological material. The idea behind the fact cannot do it any harm.

With regard to Krzysztof Pomian's definition of the museum as "one of the institutions whose function it is to bring about a consensus over a particular form, to contrast the visible with the invisible [...]"[9], sufficient emphasis should be placed on the discursive possibilities of the museum. However, agreement on the value of the collected, the preserved, and its interpretation is possible only through a dialogue between the museum and its public.

Bernhard Tschofen

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Distaffs
Central Dalmatia, Bosnia, around 1900

"National Costumes"
Moravia and Silesia, coloured lithographs
Vienna, about 1880

The Ethnographic Perspective

An ethnographic museum is a museum for cultural studies. It collects objects which have become witnesses to the past as a result of changes in the way of life and in values. The meaning of this past and the cultural-historical images these objects are supposed to represent depend on point of view and are subject to changing evaluations.

The Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art, established in 1895 and located in Schönborn Garden Palace since 1917, is concerned with objects and their traditions. It displays them in a manner which intends to point out their significance; it views them in a way which seeks out the culture that stands behind the objects. This way of observing handed down objects is a means for detecting the influence of everyday life in the appeal of popular art.

The "ethnographic" view has changed frequently since the culture of the people became a topic for writers and later a subject for investigation. This museum is itself part of a history of collecting and of ethnographic ideas, a history which is illustrated through the objects accumulated here over four epochs.

Alpine Landscape
Wall decoration, miniature, on tree fungus
Upper Austria, end of the 19th century

Country and People

The beginnings of an interest in the culture of a people are varied and lie for the most part outside the scientific tradition. They have their common roots in Enlightenment thinking, in the altered view of the structure of society during the eighteenth century, and in a new conception of nature which gave rise not only to enthusiasm for landscapes but also to an interest in their inhabitants.

At the same time, state scientific and population policy generated a broad spectrum of regional statistical activities dealing with the "traditions and customs" of the people. The contemporary travelogues and art also directed a romantic interest towards the picturesque aspects of the "life of the folk". The Alpine countries in particular were believed to contain the sought-after culture, remote from civilization, internally exotic and originating from a better time.

Peoples and Cultures

Ethnography began to establish itself as an independent discipline towards the end of the nineteenth century. The "study of the people" was stimulated by an ethnographically orientated anthropology fascinated by prehistory and by the antiquarian and mythological interests of the philological disciplines. The common interest was directed towards a traditional culture which was chronologically and socially only vaguely defined, but believed to be in danger of extinction.

The Viennese founders of the museum, Michael Haberlandt and Wilhelm Hein, set as their objective the ethnography of the Austrian nations in the Dual Monarchy. They intended through comparative collections to discover the functions, origins and contexts of a pre-modern popular art threatened by standardization. The intent of serial collections of distaffs, Easter eggs or ritual masks were paralleled by written discourse, as in the regional ethnography contained in the 24-volume work the "Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Word and Image".

"Return from the Alp"
Lithograph, after M. Ranftl
Vienna, around 1860/70

"Hungarian Dairy"
Tableau of figures
Hungary, late 19th century

People and Home

The understanding of popular culture as a timeless, deep-rooted phenomenon soon made the nascent science vulnerable to nationalistic narrowing. The cultural pessimism during the period following the First World War favoured the increasing ideological colouring of topics and objectives. A Germanic-Nordic agricultural lore – allegedly handed down as a continuous tradition – was constructed, and a mythical symbolic world was discovered which became an area of applied folklore practice. Thus harvest traditions served to idealize the farming community, and symbol research found the symbols it was looking for, such as representations of the sun, or the tree of life, in many objects of so-called popular art.

Even in serious scientific work, categories such as region and tribe were placed above the exact historical and social location of recorded phenomena. The "Atlas of German Ethnography", whose material was collected between 1929 and 1935, remained the model for other national atlases during the postwar period.

Culture and Everyday Life

In recent decades, the discipline of ethnography has been fundamentally revised in content, method, and theory, and this has led in turn to a re-orientation of the practical work in the cultural museums. The discussion about second-hand culture – designated "folklorism" – threw doubt on some traditions and made that which had been handed down increasingly questioned. Everyday culture became the centre of interest as a historical and socially determined system for coping with life.

Current thinking conceives the task of ethnography to be the description and analysis of the culture and way of life of broad segments of the population in their everyday context both in the past and in the present. Ethnography as an extended cultural term also includes all forms of cultural activity in both the material and the symbolic arenas.

Group of Farmers at Table
Ferdinand Andri
About 1935

Sea of Lights, Heldenplatz, Vienna
The new protest culture as an ethnographic topic, 1993

Despite its individual dynamics, popular culture is a culture of long time-spans. It appropriates nature and explores its possibilities and limits. Unwritten laws governed the methods for dealing with resources, and traditional societies developed their own systems for using these resources in the best possible way.

The pre-industrial era and its continuing influence on agricultural regions offered only a limited pool of materials and tools. In practice, tool and material use was continually refined and adapted to prevailing circumstances. Even in times of increasing specialization, natural forms and the properties of the simplest materials, such as wood, grass or bark, gave the objects in daily use their appearance.

One example is the practice of manufacturing pieces of equipment from a single piece of wood, and this has survived into our own century. This enabled a wide range of products to be manufactured using only a small number of tools: not only beehives, seating furniture, vessels, bowls, and containers of archaic appearance, but also figurative sculptures. All are variants of a single basic technique, worked from a solid piece of wood using adzes and knives.

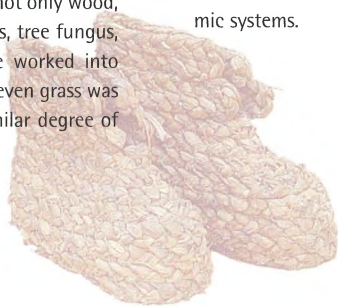
Beehive
Hollowed-out trunk showing Saint Johannes Nepomuk
Bohemia, around 1830

"Croatian Shepherd in Raincloak"
Coloured etching
Vienna, around 1821

Materials

In view of the limited transport modes, it was important in pre-modern economic systems to use the locally available raw materials as effectively as possible. The simplicity of these products, which often provided self-sufficiency, contrasts with the variety of their materials and the manner of their manufacture. The forest provided not only wood, but also resin or pitch, leaves, tree fungus, roots and bark, which were worked into primitive vessels. Straw and even grass was processed further with a similar degree of versatility.

The unconventional aesthetics of many of the artefacts produced by popular culture can thus be partly explained as a way of dealing with materials that seems foreign today. Much owes its appearance to a double improvisation. Both raw materials – including utensils that are no longer used – and tools were applied in a far greater variety of ways than has become usual in more differentiated economic systems.



Straw Shoes
Danube region,
Around 1900

Madonna
Probably Tyrol or Styria, around 1500

Wood

The popular culture of the Alpine countries is predominantly a culture based on wood. In many regions it was the preferred building material; the ease with which it could be worked made it extremely versatile. After being split it could be used as a roof covering; later, after sawing, it was available to various handicrafts for further processing. Most of the objects for daily use were manufactured, at least in part, from wood, including shoes or vessels.

Container
Crafted from one piece of wood
Dalmatia, 19th century

Flour Container
Turned
Aosta Valley, Italy, 19th century

The demand for wood as a building material, for processing and mining salt and metals, and during many centuries for shipbuilding, had turned it into a much sought-after trading commodity. In the Alpine valleys, the existence of an entire trade was based upon this fact. The forest workers, who were mostly without property and in the service of landowners, formed a particular culture, separate from agrarian society and possessed their own tools and ways of working, thinking and living.

Votive Tablets

Depicting accidents while felling timber
Salzburg, dated 1745; Tyrol, dated 1826

Salt Pot

Carved in the shape of a chicken
Savoy, France, dated 1773

The Cultivated Landscape

The history of mankind is characterized by the struggle with nature. Man, himself a part of nature, began to cultivate and to control her. Starting from a natural landscape, he created a cultural one.

Through the geological structure of the landscape, climate, and vegetation, nature set limits to man's settlement activities and cultivation. The use of the limited resources which were available demanded that people adapt to the prevailing natural conditions. This led to the development of different economic systems such as agriculture, mining, trade and industry.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century people started to appreciate nature both in terms of its economic value and in terms of its aesthetic qualities. Both the Alps and the Danube region became favourite areas for adventure and relaxation. Human cultural activities formed an integral component: the cultivated landscape and the agricultural buildings contributed as much as did the sacred and industrial monuments.

St. Pankraz in the Ulten Valley, South Tyrol
Gottfried Seelos, dated 1871

Forms of Settlement

The cultural activities of man manifested themselves in the settlement and cultivation of nature. The physical structures still in evidence are primarily the result of agriculture during the Middle Ages.

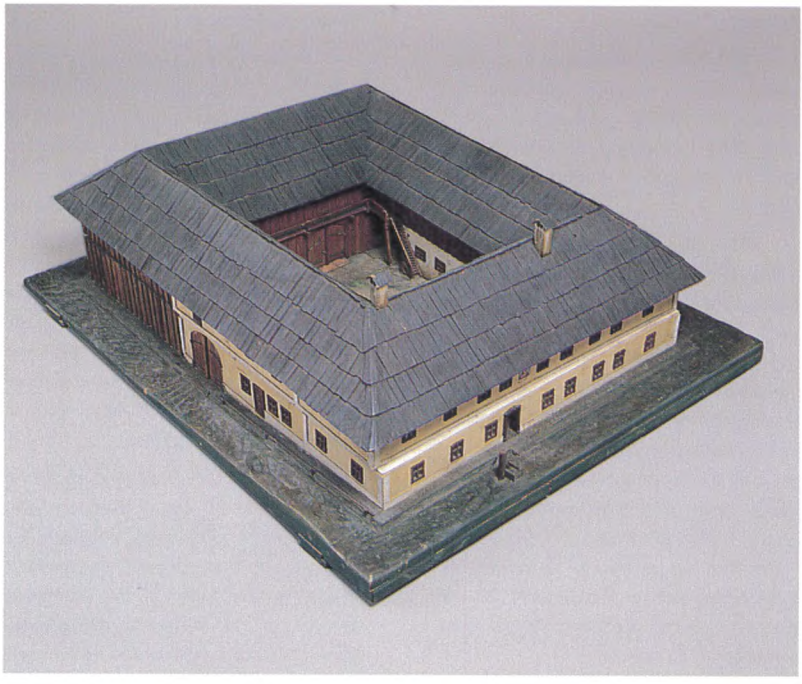
The Old Bavarian and Alemannic settlements, with their hamlets and communal farming plots, which displaced the previous slavic and romance populations, were followed during the High Middle Ages by systematic expansion in the east of the country and the development of the Alpine valleys. The enclosed village systems – villages built along one main road or around a village green with strip farming plots – originate from this period, as do the cattle farms that were mainly promoted by monasteries and by feudal lords. At the same time, the economy and culture in the towns began to flourish.

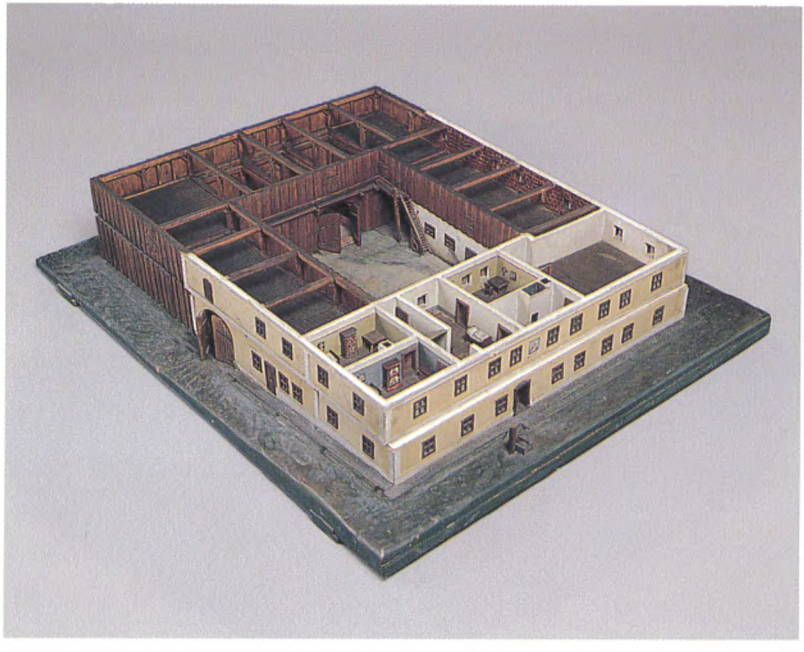
House and Home

For a long time, farmhouses were key indicators of human dwelling forms and an expression of phylogenetic type. More recent research, however, takes account of the dependence of this dwelling form on natural building materials, climate, techniques and economic structures. It observes the traditional forms of building in the course of their historical change, and investigates the influences on style of the major cultural epochs. Under the term "house landscapes", an attempt was made to catalogue the regional farm types in terms of location and period.

The single farmhouses of Salzburg and Tyrol, and the Upper Austrian four-sided enclosed farmhouses, represent the two ends of a continuum of structural possibilities. The origin of this farmhouse development can be seen in the unstructured, clustered farm complex of the early Middle Ages. The eastern part of the country, on the other hand, is characterized by corner-structured farmhouses and extended farmhouses.

Upper Inn Valley House Group
Model
Tyrol, dated 1918





Four-sided Enclosed Farmhouse

Model, Dopplerhof near Lambach
Upper Austria, 1927

Weathervane
Mühlviertel, Upper Austria, 19th century

External House Decorations

Even in the earliest legal systems, the house was a protected place. No stranger was allowed to cross the threshold uninvited. Locks were fitted to the door and gate to safeguard possessions. Patron saints, blessing signs or even symbols for preventing disaster were intended to protect house and livestock from misfortune and damage.

As personal property, the house was artistically designed, not only inside but also outside; carved purlins, painted window shutters, carved balcony railings, and artistically designed doors and windows are evidence for this. The carved flower box decorations from the Ötz and Kauner valleys in the Tyrol are early examples of the custom of decorating houses with flowers.

Window Flower Box Decoration
Homemade
Ötz Valley, Tyrol, 1895

Fire, Hearth and Oven

"Wheeled Fire Tong"
Lower Austria, 19th century

Apart from the making of tools, the use of fire was the most important step in the development of culture. Fire enabled humans to warm, cook, and protect themselves; it formed the prerequisite for the exercise of various handicraft techniques. Fire was considered sacred in many cultures and the hearth a cultic place.

To use fire in a closed room, appropriate structures were needed. By raising the cooking place up to table height (stove) as well as by enclosing the fire (fireplace), people in the Middle Ages already experienced a significant improvement in their cooking as well as in their heat supply.

The development of different hearths, however, also influenced the room arrangement in houses. By creating a smoke-free room ("Stube" or parlour), the hearth or fireplace moved into the remaining room ("Vorhaus" or entrance hall). From this room, the kitchen evolved by yet another partitioning. In other cases, a separate cooking area ("Rauchküche" or smoke kitchen) could be added to the living area and was put under a joint roof. In the design of the house, creating a means to draw away smoke was always of special importance.

Cooking Utensils

There is a structural connection between the fireplace, the cooking utensils and the preparation of meals. A distinction has to be made between cooking on an open fire and cooking in an oven. Kettle hooks and kettle determined food preparation on a low hearth. On it, mostly stews were prepared. For the table-high hearth, the andiron, tripod, and especially the swinging arm hung with the big copper kettle are characteristic. The most important cooking utensil was the pan in which the various dough-based meals were prepared.

Shallow earthenware tripod saucepans or cooking pots for cooking on the fireplace were most commonly used in southeast Austria. They were placed in the fire using wheeled fire tongs. Ovens for baking were often found outside the house.

Trivet Kettle
Bell metal
Bolzano, South Tyrol, 18th century

Three-legged Pot
Earthenware
Haslach, Upper Austria, 19th century

The Smoke Room

Within the spectrum of Austrian houses, "Rauchstubenhäuser" ("smoke room houses") have a special position. This house type, with its large central multi-purpose room, attracted the attention of researchers quite early due to its archaic character. The smoke room represents an extension of forms from the late Middle Ages, and it survived in the eastern Alpine region into this century.

The smoke room is characterized by a double hearth which consists of a front-loading stove and an oven. The operation and heating of this hearth shaped the room's appearance, which, at the same time, served for cooking, working, living, sleeping, and as a room for keeping small domestic animals.

"Smoke Room"
Model based on an original in Amberg near Fresach, Carinthia, dated 1932

Cultural Patterns and Characteristics of an Era:

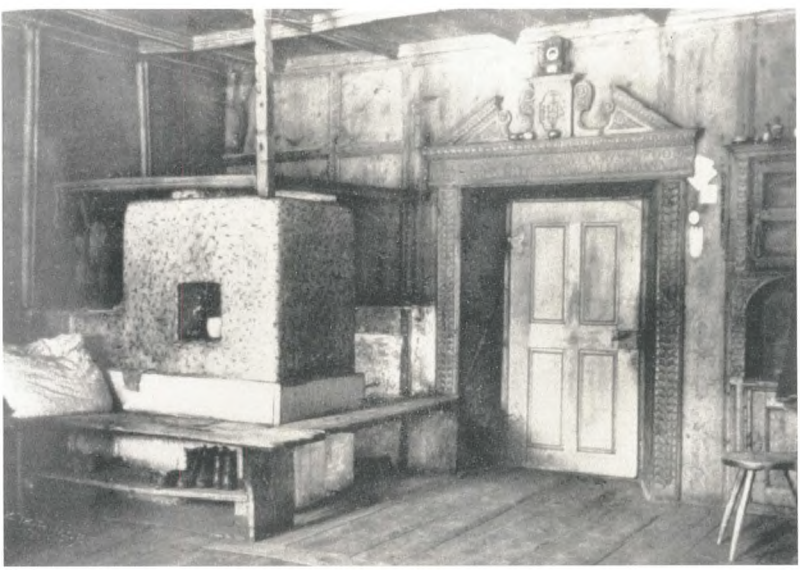
Upper Inn Valley Farmhouse Parlour

The dwelling, in the sense of an environment formed by humans, is the place where a culture of living was able to develop. Prerequisite was the creation of the parlour as a separate room heatable without smoke within the house. This came about, probably first in the alpine region, with the help of the rear-loading stove, which formed the basis for the significance of the parlour.

In Tyrol, which, like its neighbouring regions, had profited from the economic and cultural upturn of southern Germany after the Thirty Years' War, the parlour, with its panelled walls and ceilings as well as its corresponding furniture, reached a high stage of development early on. Thanks to its essentially unchanged structure, with its diagonal arrangement of table and stove, this living form was retained into the nineteenth century. It is no surprise, therefore, that the various types of sitting rooms as the embodiment of rural comfort have been at the centre of ethnographic research and museum work from the outset.

The panelling of this sitting room from 1700, which has been in the Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art since 1914, probably comes from Pettneu am Arlberg. It was there, according to entries in the local church records, that the couple "Iohanns Lechleitner and Magdalena Prantaverin", who immortalized their names on the doorframe on April 11, 1698, baptized their son Johannes Franciscus.

Upper Inn Valley Parlour
Probably Pettneu, Tyrol, dated 1700



Upper Inn Valley Parlour
Probably Pettneu, Tyrol, dated 1700
Pictures taken on site in 1914

Home Decorative Style:

Chests, Cupboards and Chairs from Tyrol and Vorarlberg

Joiner at the Bench
Upper Bavaria,
Late 18th century

Furniture takes a pre-eminent position in the design of living and utility rooms. The selection of "furniture for storing and keeping things" (chests and wardrobes) as well as "supporting furniture" (chairs) from western Austria (Tyrol and Vorarlberg) in the room display, which has been arranged as a "study collection", can be regarded as an example of a regionally and socially differentiated chapter in the cultural history of types, forms, and motifs.

These pieces of furniture were usually manufactured by rural master craftsmen: carpenters, wood turners, cartwrights, and especially joiners. With the flourishing of towns and their guilds, models of town life came to the countryside. With this, a development started which led to the formation of a characteristic estate culture, reflected in the housing and cultural styles of country towns and villages in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From the middle of the nineteenth century, estate-based culture was gradually replaced by new forms of living and cultural styles of the industrial era.

Our ethnographic interest today concentrates on the cultural significance of pieces of furniture as articles of daily use that are predetermined for specific purposes (manufacture, form, and function) and as indicators of collective attitudes.

Chests: Early Forms

The most important and at the same time oldest and most widespread piece of furniture for keeping things in is the chest. The German term for chest is derived from the Indo-European word *dereu(o)* "tree" and has come to mean "a device or utensil made from a tree". Such "one-tree chests" have survived from earliest times, and represent the first stages of this piece of furniture; they were still used in remote Alpine valleys long after the Middle Ages.

Saddle-roof chests with cornerposts and tongue-and-groove joints are documented as carpenters' work since Gothic times. The gabled cupboards show similar elements of form.

Chests: Late Middle Ages, Early Modern Times

In place of the manufacture of chests by means of carpenter's axes and adzes, the invention of the saw brought about more sophisticated and specialized manufacture by joiners. Among their products one finds bolstered chests, differentiated according to whether they are constructed as corner-, front-, or side-bolstered chests. Characteristic for this style are bodies clearly raised from the floor and by smooth dowelled walls.

As early as the thirteenth century, the chests were decorated by means of ornamental iron fittings. The visible sides were adorned with carving (scratched, notched, flat-cut), which became increasingly elaborated, and colour contrasts were achieved by blackening the carved ornaments as the first step towards furniture colouring.

Corner Post Chest
Paznaun Valley, Tyrol, 16th century

Chests: Renaissance Forms

The side-bolstered chest, which was still in use until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a medieval construction form used in rural furniture, was supplemented in the seventeenth century by the pedestal chest. In the latter, the body of the chest stood on a pedestal that formed an independent part of the construction. At that time, the chest walls were mostly dovetailed, in accordance with the corner joints developed by joiners in early modern times.

Characteristic for the chests of that epoch are: three-panel structure of the exposed sides, framing with ledges and rods, decorative techniques in inlaid wood, sawn-out patterns, stencil- and inlaid-painting, pseudo-architecture (gatetower motifs), heraldic signs (the double-headed eagle), rosettes, leaves and plants, arabesques and grotesques. These chests are part of a prestige culture in the countryside and in the villages that was shaped by the Renaissance and had, in some cases, a long-lasting effect on regional style.

Side-Bolstered Chest
Coffered
Probably Vintschgau, South Tyrol, around 1600

Chairs

With the rise of the joiner's trade during the Renaissance period, the chair with backrest developed parallel to the older stool. In the rural areas, however, it was not until the eighteenth century that board chairs with backrest and four legs replaced the old stools with three legs and no backrest. Even then, the stool could not replace either the movable bench or the bench attached to the wall of the sitting room.

In the seventeenth century, patterns for chair backrests – the double-headed eagle, grotesque faces, leaves, rocailles – were taken over from the towns and replicated innumerable times by the village joiners. In the nineteenth century, the oval backrest forms of plank chairs from the Tyrolese Ötz Valley, derived from classicist garland motifs, show similarly "countrified" forms.

Board Chair
Schnals Valley, South Tyrol, 18th century

Board Chair
Ötz Valley, Tyrol, around 1800

Alpbach Furniture Painting

The painted furniture from the remote Alpbach valley, a side valley of the Lower Inn Valley, is distinctive, and it has been established that inlaid painting already existed there in the middle of the seventeenth century. This technique, which provides a transition from natural wood furniture to furniture painting, became an independent style of the valley and was preserved until the nineteenth century. Bare wood served as the base, only outlines were painted, and small panels were filled in with transparent colours.

Folk art research has described three stages of development or stylistic periods of Alpbach furniture. According to oral tradition the highest achievements were connected with the names of the Pletzacher family: Veith Pletzacher (1661 – 1736) and his son Bartlmä (1705 – 1772).

Wardrobe
Inlaid painting on bare wood
Alpbach, Tyrol, around 1780

Wardrobes

The wardrobe became popular in farmhouses at different times, depending on region. Evidence from the Austrian Alpine regions points to the eighteenth century. This development was connected to the increasing influence of the joiner's trade, bringing about the acceptance of wardrobes over chests.

Under the influence of Baroque furniture art, luxuriously designed and painted pieces of furniture were first adopted in farmers' furniture in economically more favoured regions: double-door wardrobes with bevelled corners and headpiece garlands and four-panel structuring of doors. The flourishing of furniture painting led to the formation of "modern" furniture regions, as in the more accessible Tyrolese Lower Inn Valley.

Gabled Wardrobe
Two-doored, side-bolstered
Puster Valley, South Tyrol, dated 1806

Regional Stylistic Variation:

The Montafon Parlour

Man and Environment

The Montafon in the Vorarlberg is one of the western Austrian valleys in which a distinctive style of rural living culture could develop. The relative wealth which the valley enjoyed for a time during the eighteenth century was connected ultimately to the difficult conditions in the valley itself: these conditions promoted a mobility and cultural permeability that gave the valley its special character and early on brought ways of thought and behaviour from other environments in the farmers' world.

In the Vorarlberg, traditional bare wood furniture was used longer than in any other Austrian region: painting – in restrained colours – always remained the exception. Instead, the characteristic regional style was created out of the changing and often simultaneous combination of Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo, and Classicist elements.

Features of this Montafon style are the interplay of the distinctive characteristics of different woods with the inlaid slate panel, in the case of the octagonal tables, or the enhancing of the panelling by means of panes typical for the time, as well as the fixed mounting of sitting room buffets. It is natural to see in this style an early orientation towards bourgeois living in a regional culture influenced by agrarian life.

Wall Panelling
Detail, Montafon, Vorarlberg, dated 1807

Parlour Door
Montafon, Vorarlberg, dated 1807

Agriculture

The popular culture of the pre-industrial era was predominantly agrarian. Right from its very beginnings, ethnography regarded agriculture as an area of special interest, less in terms of historical, social, and economic issues than in terms of traditional lifestyles and work styles of farmers.

Despite or because of advancing mechanization and the dwindling of the farming population, old agricultural tools were looked at with increasing curiosity. They became a symbol for the ideologically revered work of farmers.

Only a more recent perspective has taught us to look at tools as part of a certain economic system, and to recognize structural change in the way tools have changed. Accordingly, the conventional wooden plough stands for the medieval agricultural revolution that introduced the three-field crop rotation system, whereas the grain dressing mill symbolizes the innovations of the agricultural reforms of the eighteenth century.

Milking Scene
Josef Lechner
Buchberg near Bischofshofen, Salzburg, early 20th century

Agricultural Tools

In land cultivation, it did not take long for specialized forms to emerge: forestry, cattle (horn) farming and grain (corn) farming as well as viticulture and the cultivation of vegetables. Each of these agricultural forms required special tools which, as the centuries passed, were adapted to current needs though their basic shapes remained the same.

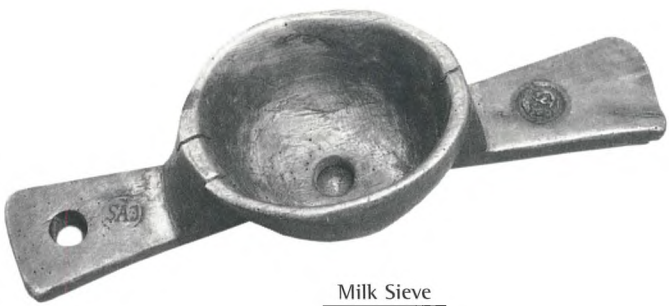
Farmland was cultivated with spades, shovels, hoes, ploughs and harrows. For sowing, the farmers used sowing sheets, sowing baskets, or sowing tubs, depending on the various regional customs. For harvesting, sickles and grass or grain scythes, along with their sharpening tools, as well as rakes, hayforks, and threshing tools were needed.

"Tyrolian Farmer Couple"
Illy Kjäer, dated 1942

Butter and Cheese

It was usually the landowner who provided the cattle necessary for running the alpine dairy farm. In return, the landless farmers had to pay their tribute in cheese. The required increase in milk quantities made the use of alpine pastures indispensable.

Every alpine dairy farm had the necessary tools for milking and for butter and cheese production. Fat or hard cheese was customarily produced in the western Alps; low-fat or soft cheese, as well as sour cheese, was produced elsewhere.



Milk Sieve
Graubünden, Switzerland, 19th century

Farmer, Tool, Symbol

Ever since the Middle Ages, the work of the rural population has been a subject for artistic expression that reflects the role of the farmer in society. In this way, the cliché of the farmer as a "guardian of tradition" became fixed in the course of the nineteenth century.

This myth about farmers was also applied to things of daily use. It was not the function of these items, or the importance they once possesed for those who had produced and used them that evoked interest, but the often naive self-portrayal by farmers of their world and of their symbols. Referred to as "folk art", they eventually became desirable collector's items.

Whetstone Container
Rauris, Salzburg
Around 1900

Whetstone Container
Graubünden, Switzerland
19th century

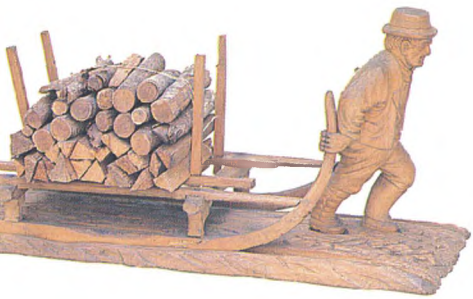
Whetstone Container
Fleims Valley, Trentino, Italy
Around 1890

Whetstone Container
Tyrol
Dated 1790

Whetstone Container
Graubünden, Switzerland
Dated 1739

Whetstone Container
Paznaun Valley, Tyrol
Around 1890

Pre-modern Transport



A substantial portion of agricultural work consisted of transportation tasks. From sowing to harvesting, from driving the cattle up to the alpine pastures to bringing the finished dairy products down to the valley, things had to be hauled from one place to another under the most diverse environmental conditions, challenging both man and material. With time, pre-modern agriculture produced a complex repertory of methods and tools, all of which had one purpose: using the limited resources available with as little effort as possible.

The required power was provided by people, on the one hand, and by animals, primarily cattle, horses, and oxen, on the other. In the course of many centuries, some transport methods have not changed but have only been refined and adapted to current needs. In this connection, the medieval monasteries contributed an important impetus, particularly in the harnessing of horses to carriages.

Since it was invariably mass that had to be moved, natural gradients had to be used, and because animals were often unpredictable, the transport tasks were among the most dangerous activities of the working year. Not even the mechanization of agriculture which started in the nineteenth century has brought significant changes in this regard.

Wood Hauler
Johann Georg Kieninger
Hallstatt, Upper Austria, around 1890

Transport by people

The means used to transport loads were manifold. Carrying rings sometimes made it easier for people to carry loads on their heads. Carrying sticks were placed across the shoulders either lengthwise or transversally like yokes, and on them solid containers or bundled goods could be hung. In mountainous regions or when harvesting grapes, where people had to have their hands free, they preferred to carry loads on their backs. Baskets, wooden back baskets, wooden back frames, and carrying sheets are among the basic forms that are adapted to the respective needs.

Wherever the terrain allowed, people would drag and pull the loads. In some alpine regions, such simple transport methods – for example, the hay sledge – has been used up to the twentieth century, and small multi-purpose sleds were based on the same principle.

Transport using animals

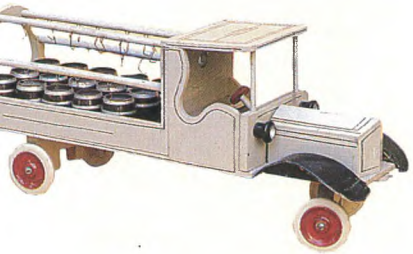
To make optimum use of the strength of animals and, at the same time, to protect them as valuable agricultural capital, increasingly refined methods of harnessing animals to carts and of transporting loads were developed until the time agriculture was mechanized. In the end the animals' capacity depended on the fit of the collar harness or the yoke and on the type and appropriate loading of the vehicle. It is not surprising that specialized craftsmen designed this equipment with great care.

Aside from transport with sledges, sleighs and carts, pack animal transport especially across mountain passes and to bring supplies to alpine pastures played an important role until the twentieth century.

Wooden Backframe
With a painted devil's face
Salzburg, around 1800

Collar Harness
Alpine, around 1800

Paths, Goods, Markets



Nowhere is the process of modernization as evident as in the revolution of the economic system. Conditions of space, time, capital, and merchandise underwent fundamental change and subjected daily life to new rules. With the establishing of modern means of transportation, which greatly speeded up communications, the villages came to more closely resemble the centres, and the cities themselves experienced unprecedented growth.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, roads were populated by pedlars and proud carters who conveyed goods over land and to the dispersed consumers. The advent of the railroad entailed a new orientation to time and distance by the end of the century: cultural exchange as a whole began to gain momentum.

Nevertheless, earlier cultural and economic patterns lived on in rural areas until well into the twentieth century. These included the orientation to market towns on market days and the reluctant acceptance of modern trade. In the general stores, for example, buying on credit was just as usual as paying in cash.

Beer Wagon
Homemade Toy
Vienna, 1929

Itinerant trade

People sold commercial products on foot until not too long ago. Needy pedlars often opted for an itinerant trade and a sometimes oppressive dependence on producers and distributors; they brought their goods on their backs to their customers. The lot of members of the Jewish minority, who during the Biedermeier era were not allowed to ply a trade, was not any better.

The goods sold included novelties from the city and the country as well as household goods, textiles, and handicrafts. The fact that pedlars were a beloved subject of home industry carvers was due to their common origin in poor marginal regions where it was necessary to have some sort of side business.

Transport of goods

In the preindustrial economic system, which measured distance in walking hours and days, voluntary mobility was the exception. It depended on important road connections and waterways and remained the privilege of a relatively small part of the population. Many goods were produced only for consumption where they were made or in local markets confined to small regions.

The significance of carters and of artisans such as farriers, cartwrights, harness makers, and saddlers was due to the importance of horses in traffic and transport – even ships were pulled upstream. Nevertheless, the railroads eventually changed the status of these craftsmen and challenged even the last bastions of self-sufficiency.

Bottle Merchant
Home industrial product
Grödner Valley, South Tyrol, mid-19th century

Bird Merchant
Tyrol, after 1800

Trade and Market

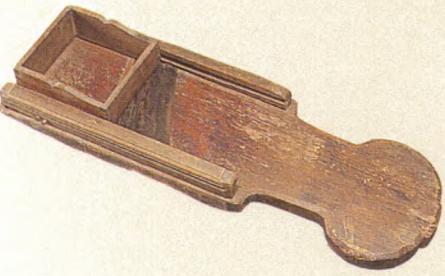
In a world dominated by agriculture, most larger towns were also important marketplaces. They were centres of various crafts and of commerce and trade. These central towns exerted a great influence on the lifestyles of the surrounding rural regions because it was in them that the ultimate value of goods and labour were defined.

Even though it was in the bigger centres that the modern economic system had its origins, the goods trade and the culture connected with it had already reached smaller towns in the nineteenth century. Aside from articles of everyday use, stores increasingly started to sell groceries and luxury goods – symbols of a modest wealth.

"Mixed-Goods Store"
Toy store
Vienna, around 1840

Guild Symbol of the Danube Boatmen
Vienna, dated 1846, renovated 1883

Domestic Economics



The eating habits of agrarian society were based almost entirely on self-sufficiency. Nature dictated alternating periods of dearth and abundance, and people reacted to them by introducing times for fasting and times for feasts. The harvest period in the autumn, and the slaughtering period in the winter were followed by months of shortage in the spring. As a result, storing and preserving foodstuffs was a matter of survival to which a great deal of time and skill had to be dedicated.

Even in towns, but principally in rural areas, most of the food products were made and processed at home. The equipment found in older kitchens reflects something of the importance of such unity of production and consumption.

In these kitchens, not only was food cooked and prepared, as is now customary in the small kitchens of today's market-dependent industrial society, but small animals were also slaughtered and smoked, butter was churned, and lard was extracted. Preindustrial domestic economy meant a complex system of practices and utensils available to preserve a great variety of foodstuffs. Only with modernization did many of these procedures become superfluous.

Cabbage Grater
Eastern Austria, early 20th century

Stockpiling Supplies

The supplying of finished foodstuffs by commerce and trade is a consequence of modernization. Formerly, people did not have mechanical refrigeration systems or chemical preservatives, thus domestic stockpiling following traditional methods was of great importance. The stockpiling of food for an entire home, however, limited the variety, and depended on how much one knew about these methods and on how one managed to ration the available food.

If a household wanted to acquire foodstuffs for the coming winter, it required a great deal of available space. The containers, barrels, sauerkraut and meat tubs, shelves and meat hooks alone took up considerable space. Small mills, squeezers and crushers, and other special tools for baking or for domestic milk processing needed to be accommodated as well.

A View of the Storeroom in the Ackerl House
Photograph by Johann A. Bünker
St. Lorenzen, Styria, 1913

Preservation

To keep foodstuffs from spoiling and to protect them against pests and rodents, they had to be stored in suitable rooms, cabinets, and containers. The boundaries between kitchen and pantry were fluid and cellar space inside and outside the house was indispensable. There stood the cupboards and chests, racks and shelves for a great variety of open and closed vessels made of wood, straw, clay, or glass.

The most important preservation methods were drying, smoking, salting, pickling, marinading, and cooling. All basic foodstuffs, grain, meat, vegetables, fruit, milk, and eggs were treated in this way and preserved for at least a limited period. Not only did this require large quantities of suitable vessels and tools but also a great deal of labour, effort that was reduced only when home appliances became available.

Honey Jar
Earthenware
South Tyrol, mid-19th century

The Order of Existence

The way of thinking that lay behind the popular culture of the pre-modern era, and behind the day-to-day routine of living and working, belonged to a great extent to an agrarian world. Not only did it determine the belief and the actions of the rural population, but even life in urban and aristocratic spheres was based on it.

The fact that man was given only limited tools to influence the course of events was in keeping with the religious conception of the world. This world-view determined how nature was viewed: the personification of seasons and months or the manner in which stars were depicted was not contradictory to Christian teaching and imagery. Year and day, life and work: all rested "in the hands of God".

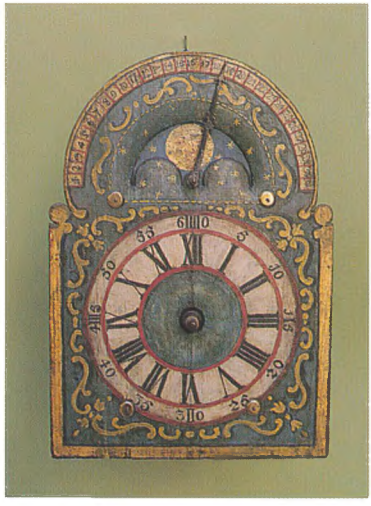
Our existence on earth was thought to be a reflection of the divine order, and the teachings of the Bible were omnipresent in everyday life. Starting with the first parents, Adam and Eve, parables and motifs for people's entire lives were provided. As was true of Christian dogma and the lives of the saints, their portrayal aimed at a pious life in accordance with the Gospel.

Clock Stand with Chronos
Home industrial product
Grödner Valley, South Tyrol, late 18th century

Time

In the agrarian world, time passed slowly, its course not susceptible to change. Similarly, the working year had to be adapted to the natural year. Every year, the months and seasons brought with them the same chores, just as the course of the sun determined the activities of a single day. Life in accordance with this set rhythm and dependence on nature was by no means idyllic, but rather a prerequisite for survival.

This is why the representations of seasons and months in folk art tell us less about what people actually did than about an ideal concept of a harmonious life. This is how the calenders and timepieces suffused with Catholic imagery should be understood: as individual reflections of a conception of the world that penetrated far into sociopolitical spheres.



Astronomic Clock
With moon-phase display
Tyrol, late 18th century

Month Plate
Allegory of "July"
Friaul, Italy, 2nd half of the 18th century

Belief

Until the Age of Enlightenment, when our world first started to lose its magic, popular culture drew a great part of its mythological repertory from Christian belief. There was no insurmountable contradiction between a secular tradition of symbols and the world of Christianity. Popular theology and aesthetics turned seemingly alien practices of thinking and belief into matter-of-fact elements of the mental equipment of large parts of the population.

Thus, folk art always considered Biblical tradition as a source for contemporary interpretations which could be phrased in the language of the time. For example, in its folk art, the Protestant minority that existed in and around former west Hungarian towns developed its own motifs. Scriptural texts and blessings depicted the Christian and Protestant teachings in a more picturesque manner than is usual for a Protestant dogma that is otherwise committed to words.

Temple of the Son of Man
Perhaps Oberammergau, Bavaria, around 1700

The History of the People

Collective memory is the most important source of popular works. This is where historical popular culture derived its motifs, way of thinking and point of view. The pre-modern everyday life of broad sectors of the population was embedded in an historical experience which obeyed principles different from those found in books or expounded by learned persons. It transmitted these through pictures, signs and symbols.

Consequently, the 'modest history of the people' is never separated from the 'grand history' of events and rulers: the fate of the masses was far too caught up in the development of political conditions. But the point of view of collective thinking was a subjective one. For this reason, many classified historical epochs according to wars and personalities that represented the 'good' or the 'bad' times.

Individuals became aware of their roles as subjects of the huge Hapsburg Empire through experiences decisive for their personal biographies such as joining the army or taking part in a military campaign, tasks which were normally fulfilled with steadfast patriotism in accordance with the mores of the time.

Napoleon Bonaparte
Home industrial product
Grödner Valley, South Tyrol, 1st half of the 19th century

"Vivad Laudon"
Majolica jug with a portrait of G. Laudon, dated 1790

Memory and Event

Specific events rather than the slowly unfolding history of social conditions become engraved in popular memory. Battles, peace treaties and revolutions are the themes of the world of images. Until the nineteenth century, their portrayal was not restricted to documentary works. They also embellished articles of everyday use such as furniture, marksmen's targets, textiles for the home, or pipe bowls.

With the growing interest of the media in the events of the day, modern elements were introduced into the understanding of history. The combination of pictures and historical ornaments made events reproducible. Thus, during the bourgeois revolution of 1848, an enormous demand developed for lithographs depicting the events. By the latter part of the nineteenth century, as later during the First World War, patriotically decorated toys and handicrafts were available to the population both in the towns and in the country.

Memory and the Individual

Collective memory tends to combine historical experience with the memory of and by individuals. These individuals provide chronological frames of reference and symbolize historical events or circumstances in the minds of the people. One such symbol in the popular experience of history consisted of the Napoleonic Wars, which were linked, for the sake of simplicity, with the person of Bonaparte. During the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, events in the distant past were always classified as "before" or "older than" Napoleon.

The period after the French Revolution, including as it did events decisive for the development of Central Europe, was marked by the beginning of greater political openness. Emperor Franz, the Tyrolian rebels under Andreas Hofer, and even Metternich and later Radetzky, were popular heroes whose portraits were distributed in hitherto inconceivable numbers thanks to home industrial production of paintings and new reproduction techniques.

Recruit's Jug
Majolica
West Slovakia, dated 1723

Symbol and Memory

The masses think in terms of images, and historical experience is closely tied to historical symbols. The double eagle as the heraldic symbol of the Holy Roman Empire and the Austrian Empire (after 1804), is one of the outstanding motifs of the popular art of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The coat of arms was not only a sign of power, but also a decorative motif in its own right: a liberated ornament.

The basic symmetrical form of the double eagle motif corresponded to the aesthetic preferences of the people. Historical exactness did not play an important role and it is not always clear which coat of arms the double eagle was really supposed to represent: the Habsburg imperial eagles with the haloes and the imperial crown in the middle, or the Austrian, double-crowned eagle.

Mug
Majolica with double eagle motif
Pisotti Atelier, Salzburg, early 19th century

Snuffbox
Double eagle motif
Bruneck, South Tyrol, dated 1816

Sheepbell Collar
Double eagle motif
Fleims Valley, Trentino, dated 1784

Peoples and Imagery

The understanding of foreign peoples and cultures is supported by pictures, as is the popular experience of history. These are the pictorial expressions of more or less persistent ideas about the strangeness of the "others" and the validity of one's own culture. Wars in particular, as a form of cultural contact filled with suffering, were a decisive element in the formation of stereotypes of European peoples.

The idea that individual nations had certain typical characteristics which distinguished them from their neighbours was widespread throughout the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. At the same time, the concept "nation" was still applied until the nineteenth century to a small, not linguistically separated group within the wider boundaries of the Dual Monarchy.

The idea of the origin of nationalities first arose as a result of the crises within the multi-national state. It became the subject of scientific interest and started to exert an influence on the public image of the national popular cultures. In the end, this was the basis not only of the folkloric tendency during the last decades of the Dual Monarchy, but also of the fundamental idea of the Ethnography Museum with its comparative collections from the Austrian Crown Lands.

Mechanical World Theatre
Mechanical toy display from the Prater Amusement Park
Vienna, around 1850

Tableau of Peoples

"Short Description of the Peoples Found in Europe and their Characteristics"
Styria, early 18th century.

Images and Stereotypes

The stereotyped images of the cultural characteristics of foreign peoples are a popular assimilation of collective historical experience. They arose against a background of historical events, enmities and alliances. Awareness of external differences, such as different physiognomy or dress habits, and political experience led to images and stereotypes that became very deep-rooted. Sometimes symbolic details, such as a certain hairstyle or hat shape, were sufficient to produce the corresponding effect.

Frequently, the comical and caricatured image of foreigners went hand in hand with the stylization of national folklore. Such traditional stereotypes and idealization of peoples must be borne in mind in the imagery of the supposedly peaceful group of nations within the former Dual Monarchy.

Stereotypes: "Images of Turks"

The Turks have been depicted in Austrian popular art more frequently and in more different ways than any other foreign people. This is associated with the fact that the period following the Turkish wars was not only a phase of general cultural development but also the golden age of a popular art filled with the joy of imagery and connected to the world of the Baroque. Furthermore, the Mohammedan Turks were the first people from a foreign cultural background to confront the inhabitants of Central Europe directly.

The pictorial representations and also the presence of the Turkish theme in popular plays, with Turks portrayed as having more or less brutal customs, are part of the symbolic triumph of the baroque West. In later times, the stereotype of the Turk became mixed with the general enthusiasm for the exotic culture of the Orient. Although occasionally used in a friendly, humorous way, some stupid prejudices are even today a breeding ground for hostility to foreigners.

Water Trough Figure
Radlach, Carinthia, mid-19th century

History and Religion:

Catholic and Protestant Country Furniture

As part of the immediate living environment, historical furnishing provides information about personal and collective attitudes, status, and religious beliefs. In the area of present-day Austria, where members of Protestant denominations have always been a minority, the symbolism and painting of country furniture of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century predominantly mirrors Roman Catholic imagery.

In spite of the Counter-Reformation and the several banishments of Protestant communities from the country, the new religion took root in the archbishopric of Salzburg, which also included parts of the Tyrol and the right side of the Ziller valley. Here nineteenth century furniture reflects the Protestant tradition. This is expressed through a preference for motifs from the Old Testament and by keeping firmly to Protestant imagery.

In the Pinzgau region in Salzburg during the eighteenth century, a regional style of unpainted furniture developed which also has characteristics of a hidden (crypto) Protestantism. Starting from the lack of any form of Catholic symbolism, different pictorial and religious impulses have been followed.

Lamb of God
Chest detail, with the coat of arms of the Bishopric of Brixen
Ziller Valley, Tyrol, dated 1774

Chest
'Blue type' from the Tyrolean, Catholic side of the Ziller Valley
Tyrol, dated 1774

Chest
'Green type' from the Salzburg, formerly Crypto-Protestant side of the Ziller Valley
Tyrol, around 1770 but dated 1873

Cupboard
Fusch, Salzburg, dated 1737

Chest
Fusch, Salzburg, dated 1770

Estate Culture

Man and Society

The objects of a historical collection of popular art stem for the most part from the feudal system and its transition into modern class society. They are not only products of social conditions but they also mirror social perceptions and realities. If the organization of estates is itself the theme, then it is almost always as an idealized system, ordained by God, in which the individual estates have their fixed position and destiny. This is just as true of subjects as of the ecclesiastical and secular rulers.

There are enormous differences in what has been handed down from the individual estates. As a result, social conditions are depicted in a very uneven way and in some cases there appears to be no history at all. When the lower classes are the subject of popular pictorial works, they are mostly seen from the viewpoint of the "higher estates". Objects from the everyday life of the privileged have survived much better and in greater numbers than objects of the masses.

Despite snobbery and the fact that the different estates ridiculed each other, their mutual relationships were also characterized by Christian charity. The conception of the world coupled patriarchal privilege with duties, even when these were limited to gestures and symbols.

Chess Game
By Rupert Griessl for Count Hans Wilczek
Dated 1898

"The Three Estates"
Tyrol, around 1800

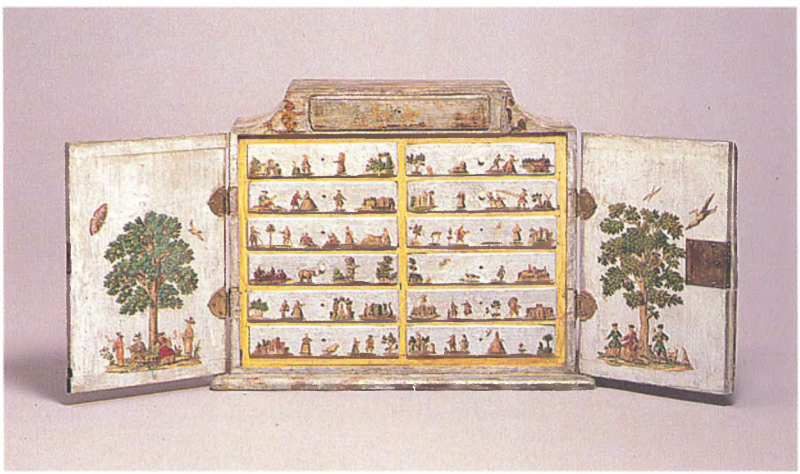
Powder Horn
Austria, early 18th century

Nobility: Hunting as a Privilege

Until 1848, hunting was a privilege of the nobility in Austria-Hungary, as it was in most European countries. Despite this, hunting themes and motifs occupy a central position in the products of popular culture, especially from the eighteenth and nineteenth century. This is connected with the profession of hunting in the service of the nobility, which was often glorified in romantic usage.

"Emperor Franz Josef I as Hunter"
Probably Th. Haiml
Bad Ischl, Upper Austria, dated 1905

Yet the "pleasure of the nobility" in the ancien régime was mostly the "burden of the people", since the farming classes, even those who possessed land themselves, were confronted with excessive stocks of game that damaged forest and field. Against this, the farmers had no recourse. In addition, the number of beaters required for the older forms of hunting were considerable: assisting in netting or battue was one of the duties of subjects. Thus, the fact that hunting repeatedly aroused the subversive fantasies of the people was not just connected with an occasional extra piece of meat acquired through poaching.

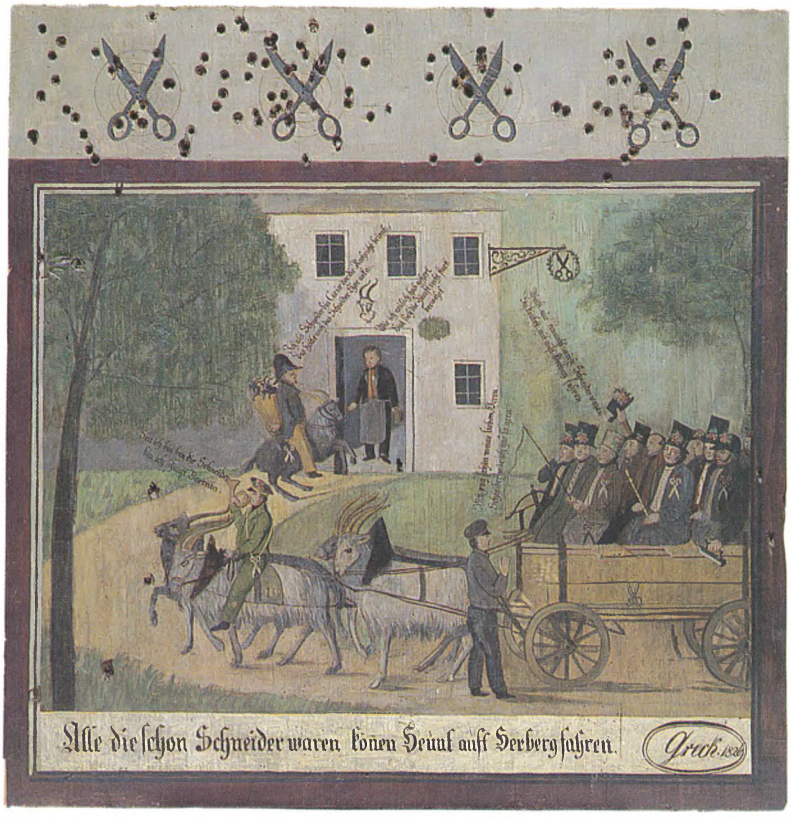


Chest
Applied coloured copperplate etchings
South German, 18th century

Estate Taste and Style

Existing objects are indicators of social organization. They demonstrate material and stylistic preferences of the individual estates and thus shed light on the specific attitudes and mentalities of their respective users. Although examples from the upper classes are frequently imitated, the forms, fittings and motifs – of, for example, small pieces of furniture – enable socially determined tendencies to be recognized.

Small items of furniture, such as the aristocratic chest of drawers or writing desk, belonged to the personal sphere. The possession of such furniture by the mass of the population did not start to become significant until living comfort began to improve, bourgeois living habits became established and the people acquired literacy. In the rural and romantic cultural atmosphere of bourgeois milieus, inlaid hunting scenes in Renaissance style gave way to rustic colourfulness.



Marksman's Target
From a middle-class shooting club
Probably Lower Austria, dated 1826

Societal Forms

Feudal society did not know the social openness which developed in the course of modernization. Access to specific professions and offices was strictly regulated and social status was determined by background and family. In spite of this, the old social system included a large number of associations and societies, such as the formal craft guilds, the unions of the miners, the religious brotherhoods, and the informal fraternities.

Other than what was practiced at home or in private, culture as a system of thinking and behaving was predominantly passed on within these associations. Existing objects indicated the identification of the groups by means of symbols. This strongly hierarchical social organization, whose objectives were stability and retention of power by the elite, first began to relax as a result of the Josephine reforms (late eighteenth century). The successive liberalization of trade, culminating in trade freedom (1859), allowed even Jews and non-Catholics to carry on a craft and the right of free association (1867) made possible the founding of numerous bourgeois associations in the late nineteenth century.

Poverty

The underprivileged classes, who had neither rights nor possessions, offer a drastic demonstration of how selective historical tradition really is. Material evidence of poverty has hardly ever been retained in museums and archives. The few objects which have survived pass on, almost without exception, the view of the upper classes, for whom day-labourers, pedlars and the infirm often represented no more than figures of fun.

For centuries, the poorest classes had been part of the social system, albeit at the edge. The exclusion of all "non-conformists" did not begin until the Enlightenment and its care for the poor. The Christian view of the world professed by estate society included an obligation to provide charitable care. As was true for the whole of life, the giving of alms was also aimed at life after death. The washing of feet, as still practiced on impoverished subjects by the Hapsburg emperors every Maundy Thursday as late as the nineteenth century, should also be understood as a demonstrative act of Christian charity.

Foot-Washing Cup
Souvenir of a foot-washing
by Emperor Franz Joseph, given as a present
Vienna, dated 1860

Beggar Leaning on a Walking Stick
Home industrial product
Grödner Valley, South Tyrol, 1st half of the 19th century

Pedlar
Home industrial product
Fassa Valley, Trentino, mid-19th century

Pastoral Pride:

Upper Austrian Rural Furniture

Man and Society

Nothing has had a more profound influence on the image of folk art than so-called peasant furniture, which corresponded to the lifestyle of a rural elite only from the mid-eighteenth century. The crisis of the estates and the gradual infiltration of enlightened ideas, along with agricultural reforms, brought a new upswing to the peasantry. The rural workmen's skills let farmers share the feeling of wealthy baroque living.

It was also in that phase of cultural change that clear regional differences of style first developed. In the Upper Austrian region, where the refined way of living was reflected in the addition of a second parlour on the upper floor, joiner-painters developed their own colourful painting style. Imposing wardrobes and beds with decorative headboards replaced the older furniture forms. The influence of convents and monasteries on form and selection of motifs cannot be overlooked.

These prestige furniture pieces, as parts of a trousseau, were made to be show pieces from the outset. They were the furniture for the so-called "proper" sitting-room and remained there until, with the next generation, new pieces came into the house. The painted scenes of wedding ceremonies corresponded to this lifestyle of demonstrative prosperity.

Wedding Scene
Detail from a bed headboard
Urban Huemer
Aigen near Offenhausen, Upper Austria, dated 1781

Wardrobe
Showing the four Evangelists and Mary's crowning
Urban Huemer
Aigen near Offenhausen, Upper Austria, around 1780

The "Joiners in Aigen" near Offenhausen

In contrast to the bare wood furniture of western Austria, furniture from the Danube regions is characterized by its colourfulness. Particularly in the central area of Upper Austria, baroque furniture painting experienced its heyday towards the end of the eighteenth century. The "Joiners in Aigen" near Offenhausen (in the Wels District) were counted among the most distinctive workshops; their products were originally termed "Gunskirchen Furniture".

Several generations can be identified from the painting style, among them Urban Huemer (1728 – 1790), whose wedding bed is regarded as his main work, and Andreas Huemer (1761 – 1819), the "Warwara" painter.

The depiction of a wedding banquet at the footboard of the bed is a reminder that furniture used to be ordered on the occasion of a wedding. It was a part of the dowry which was shown to the public at the so-called "Brautfuhr" (in which the bride is guided through the village and her dowry displayed).

Chairs with Old and Young Farmer's Couples
Urban Huemer
Around 1780

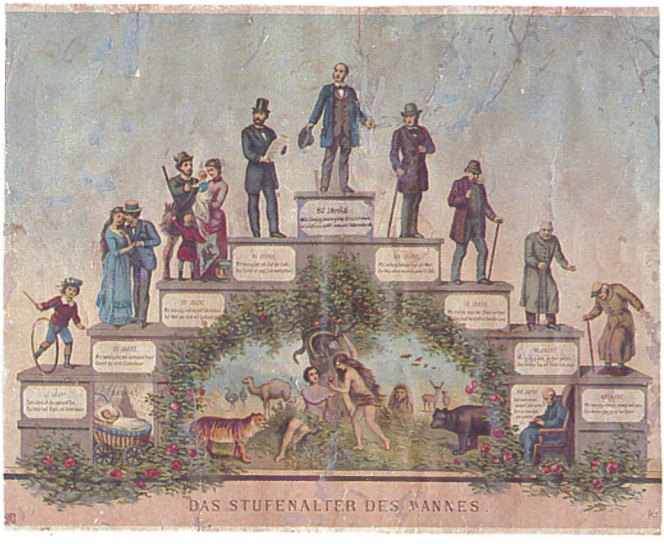
Lifestyles in Transition

The dynamic of popular culture is reflected in the changes to daily life, its organization and its environment. The process of modernization not only led to the discovery of an ideal picture of ancient folk culture but also brought more variety in cultural practice. Style and taste, values and concepts are reflected to a great degree in the domestic environment.

In rural areas, house furniture has undergone many changes in the course of the last century. Increasingly, homes became the centre of interest and awareness, and were decorated with often factory-made, prestige objects, and with proud keepsakes and epigrams. The extended agrarian family, comprising several generations and often idealized due to its integrating functions, was gradually replaced by the bourgeois nuclear family. Children were considered independent beings for the first time, and the progressive separation of living and working areas started to restrict and define the role of women: as the guardians of order and comfort at home.

Social changes were also expressed in the formation of both private and semi-public objects. Such objects are the carriers of a traditional culture coloured by personalization and reflecting the mentalities of the different milieus.

Embroidered Picture
Christian wall decoration
Lower Austria, around 1880
"Hope is the wanderer's stave
from the cradle to the grave"



"The Stages of Man"
Chromolithograph, E. May Art Publishers
Frankfurt am Main, around 1880/90

Personal Culture

The decline of the estate order introduced increasing individualization and privatization of lifestyles. Not only origin determined status now, but increasingly so did age- or gender-specific factors. This in turn had an effect on the organization and design of the personal environment of individuals: children and the elderly were assigned their own place, and the individual life stages were seen as phases that had to be organized and designed in a specific manner.

Children experienced most of the changes: now they became the subjects of increasing pedagogic interest. Childhood and school-time, with the rituals corresponding to these spheres, made children familiar with the roles they had to perform in society. Through objects and pictures, the most common bourgeois virtues were imparted.

Grandfather with Child
Providing religious instruction
Styria, mid-19th century

"The Medal for Diligence"
Based on a picture by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller,
Around 1830

Wall Hanging
Lower Austria, around 1900

Domestic Culture

It was in the organization and design of the intimate and semi-public areas that the cultural dimensions of a new era first manifested themselves. In Catholic Austria, new bourgeois values such as order, diligence, and thrift merged with older Christian concepts: happiness in marriage and the family was still put under God's protection, and Christian wall decorations gained importance and became sought-after articles, mass-produced by modern reproduction techniques.

Starting in the late nineteenth century, textile wall decoration was already fostered in schools as a female domain. Embroidered pictures, epigrams, poems, dollhouse parlours, and verses imparted the main cultural ideas of the individual social strata. Together with prestigious objects of decoration and of daily use, they helped to strengthen the external reputation of the family and the feeling of belonging within it.

Dollhouse Parlour and Kitchen
Amateur model
Vienna, 1928

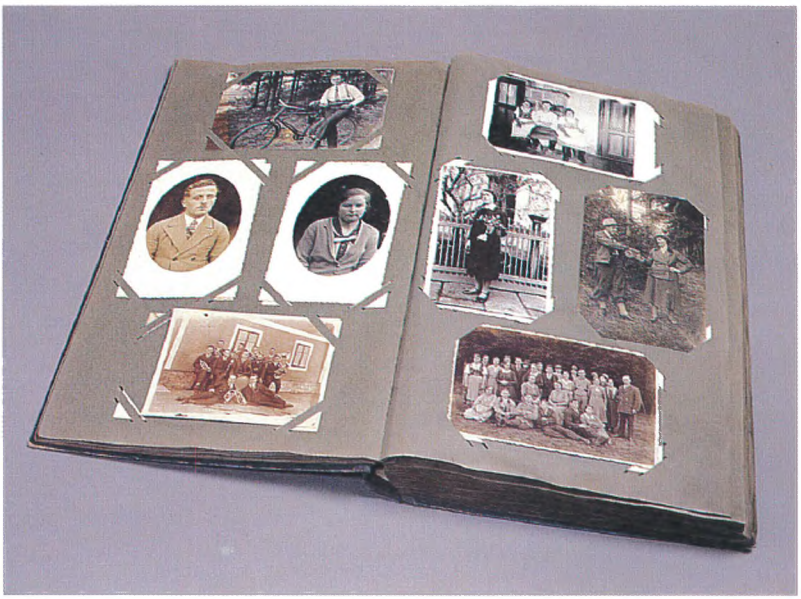


Photo Album
Wetzles, Waldviertel, Lower Austria, from around 1915-1940

Remembrance Culture

With the transition to the modern nuclear family, objects of remembrance and souvenirs became to be increasingly important. Highlights of one's own life and transitions to new stages of life, such as engagement and wedding, were recorded in symbolic presents and pictures. The simplification of manufacturing and reproduction techniques for such objects and the new technology of photography made personal things the subject of pictures for ever-wider segments of the population.

In the centre there was an evocation of community and the family sense of belonging together. Behind it there was belief in the bond of a common tradition: a belief that is reflected in the elaborate hair pictures in which the individual family members lived on in their photographic portraits.

Remembrance Picture
Miniature with flower appliqué
Vienna, around 1860

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