



BESONDERS/EXEMPLARISCH **Morphomatische Fallstudien zu Biographie und Portrait**

Abstract

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Fashioning the Uniqueness of Things in the History of Anthropology

In anthropology, the founding concept of culture reserves a special place to diversity. In contrast to sociology, which imagined societal development from unity (or homogeneity) towards greater difference, anthropologists of the 19th c. acknowledged “diversity” and difference as constituting society and culture. Therefore, proceeding to a closer observation and documentation of culture meant describing the differences of groups within a society (totems, clans, kingdoms) and also between cultures. Toward the end of the 19th century, this led to an obsession with the specificity of material culture as major indicator of such differences. Ethnographic objects in the museum collections were identified with ethnic groups. Labelling an object with the name of such a group became the most important act for transforming it into part of the collection. Collecting objects from the same basic type, like weapons, but with formal variations (bows and arrows with different points) was considered to be the best approach to understand cultural differences. Each object was taken as an indicator of a specific culture, and it should be unique, formally differing from any other culture. The number of formal variations of a basic type of things corresponded with the number of ethnic groups or cultures. The uniqueness of objects with particular forms was perceived as an indicator of differences between so called “local cultures”.

