

A SYSTEM OF  
CATALOGUING ETHNOGRAPHIC MATERIAL  
IN MUSEUMS.

ANNEXURE 7

The Scheme that is here described for the compilation of a card catalogue of ethnographic material in museums is the outcome of considerable study of the routine needs of a museum ethnographic department and the convenience of students, and of anxiety over the very backward state of our records of the material culture of the native peoples of South Africa. The scheme was originally outlined in SAMAB, September 1940, with arguments in favour of its adoption which need not be repeated here. Such modifications as now appear are the result of my own attempt to put the scheme into practice, and of some helpful criticisms and suggestions from other museum workers, and in particular from Dr. N.J. van Warmelo, Government Ethnologist.

The most important change is that general information concerning the different specimens no longer appears on the individual cards. This will be discussed later.

To assist those who undertake the work there are included lists of terms to be used for the various objects, a list of works where terms to be used in descriptions of some of the objects may be found, and a table of South African tribes arranged and numbered according to groups. There is also a specimen of the cards to be used with particulars as to where they may be obtained.

It is earnestly hoped that all South African museums which have in their collections objects of South African ethnography, however few they may be, will adopt this system of cataloguing, in order that we may have a uniform system throughout the country, and that we may through it be enabled to build up a proper picture of South African native material culture.

INSTRUCTIONS.

Each object should have a separate card, unless a number of objects are identical, e.g. several arrows. Even if several objects have been given the same number they can be separated as 1a, 1b, 1c, etc.

The following information should be given:-

1. Registered number of object, preceded by the museum's initials, e.g. SAM 56.
2. Tribe or group and number indicating division and subdivision as shown in table, p.
3. Locality, district, and province, where object was obtained.
4. Name of object, according to terminology given later.
5. Native name of object. This should be given in the singular and checked in the latest standard dictionary of the language concerned.
6. Photograph or sketch of object, with scale or measurement. The main measurement should be given and in some cases where photography is used it may be necessary to sketch details that do not show up, e.g. incised patterns.

7. Description of object. a. details of appearance such as are not evident from the picture, e.g. nature and colour of the materials, or the shape of such parts as cannot be seen, e.g. the concave base of a basket. Particular care should be taken to be accurate in describing materials, e.g. not to call all basketwork material "grass". Where possible the scientific name of the raw-material should be given. b. information obtained with the specimen and pertaining to it alone e.g. "belonged to Dingaan's favourite wife".
8. How and when obtained - by whom collected, given, or sold, and date of entry into museum. Loan collections, if accepted, should be kept apart, and not given to ordinary serial registration numbers.
9. Where object is to be found in museum - noted in pencil for domestic convenience.
10. For items 2,3,5 and 7b, it should be indicated whether the information is known to be absolutely authentic or is merely concluded from various types of evidence. This should be done by putting next to the statement a letter referring to the following key of the possible classes of information.
  - A. Information supplied by donor, seller or collector and known to be authentic.
  - B. Information supplied by donor, seller or collector but not certain.
  - C. Conclusion from known collecting field of donor, seller or collector.
  - D. Conclusion from evidence in record book or on label on specimen.
  - E. Conclusion from correspondence or conversation.
  - F. Conclusion from comparison with authentic specimens.
  - G. Conclusion from nature of materials or technique used.
  - H. Conclusion from native name given.
  - I. Conclusion from place name given.
  - J. Conclusion from tribal name given.
  - K. Conclusion from literature.

All but "A" to be marked in red ink, so as to make it at once apparent that the information is not absolutely authentic. Without this precaution it is impossible, in the present state of our collections, to approach the study of material culture in a scientific manner.

Attached hereto is a specimen of the card that should be used, showing the way of setting out the information. The information should be written in a clear hand or typewritten. If any item of information is uncertain, and there is reasonable hope of being able to check it, it may be written temporarily in pencil.

The arrangement of the cards in the filing cabinet, after the information has been recorded on them, depends largely on the reference requirements of the museum concerned. For ordinary reference purposes it seems to me that the most useful is a first division according to objects, with sub-divisions according to tribal groups. Division into subjects is a research requirement, and one which would itself need considerable research. Rather than divide the cards themselves into subjects, which would involve making duplicates for objects that belong to more than one subject, it would be better to keep a short separate index, with a card for each subject, and on the card the names of all objects likely to be connected with that subject.