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Title:

**“Three Long Rows of Empty Shelves...”:  
Curt Nimuendajú as Collector and Researcher  
for the Ethnological Museums  
of Hamburg, Leipzig and Dresden<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

In 1928/29 and 1930, the Brazilian anthropologist of German origin Curt Nimuendajú was twice contracted by German ethnological institutions (above all, museums) for organizing ethnographical collections and carrying out anthropological research among indigenous, principally Gê speaking, peoples in various regions of today's Maranhão and Tocantins states in Brazil. This is not only a less-known part of Nimuendajú's biography, but also an example of a kind of academic cooperation difficult to imagine nowadays. The collections arranged, partly destroyed during World War II, are still deposited in the ethnological museums of Hamburg, Leipzig and Dresden along with a great number of letters and other documents linked up with them, but not yet published. This paper is about partial results of a research project regarding Nimuendajú's relations with German Museums in the 1920ies and 1930ies mainly based on unpublished material.

## Introduction

This paper is a small contribution to the history of Brazilian anthropology and, partially, of German ethnology. But it is, above all, about the history of two field expeditions in Brazil and the ethnographic collections resulting from them.

The Brazilian anthropologist of German origin Curt Nimuendajú is nowadays considered one of the pioneering figures in the history of Brazilian anthropology in its pre-institutional period. In 1928/29 and 1930, he was twice contracted by German ethnological institutions for organizing ethnographical collections and carrying out anthropological research among indigenous, principally Gê speaking, peoples in various regions of today's Maranhão and Tocantins states in Brazil. This is not only a less-known part of Nimuendajú's biography, but also an example of a kind of academic cooperation difficult to imagine nowadays. The collections arranged, partly destroyed during World War II, are still deposited in the ethnological museums of Hamburg, Leipzig and Dresden along with a great number of letters and other documents linked up with them, but not yet published. This paper is about partial results of a research project regarding Nimuendajú's relations with German Museums in the 1930ies.

I discovered the subject some years ago by reading a kind of non-scientific biography of Nimuendajú (besides, there are only two biographies about him up till now, and both are non-scientific), published in 1979 in former GDR by a journalist and *Heimatforscher* (a kind of regionalist amateur researcher), Georg Menchén. In his *Nimuendajú – Brother of the Indians*, Menchén, who died in 1989, published a part of the letters exchanged between Nimuendajú and his interlocutors in Germany. But the main problem with that book is that Menchén's use of sources and his construction of narrative are not very confidential, because the author used to substitute lack of information by imagined episodes, often with romantic traits.

In 2009, I started e-mail contacts with German ethnological museums for verifying if the collections organized by Nimuendajú still existed and if the documents cited by Menchén could be consulted. The answers were positive.

In 2010/11, during a seven month post-doc research in Germany, financed by Brazilian CNPq<sup>2</sup>, it was possible to realize a survey about the collections organized by Nimuendajú for German ethnological museums and the documentation related to it (Schröder 2011). Research was done, among others, in the following places and institutions:

- ◆ Grassi Museum in Leipzig;
- ◆ Archives of the Institute of Ethnology at Leipzig University;
- ◆ Museum of Ethnology in Dresden;
- ◆ Museum of Ethnology in Hamburg;
- ◆ Ethnological Museum of Dahlem in Berlin;
- ◆ Ethnological Museum in Munich.

Indeed, in Hamburg, Dresden and Leipzig, there still can be found the majority of ethnographic and archeological objects collected by Nimuendajú for German museums, which confirms the information of two former publications (Becher 1955; Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde Dresden 1983). But the hook for this paper is that a detailed evaluation of new data contained in original sources only partially analyzed till now permits to make some interesting conclusions about the collector as well about the historical context of his activities.

## The main actors

Among the main actors involved in the whole story of the two expeditions for German ethnological museums – Nimuendajú, Fritz Krause, and Otto Reche – certainly, the first is the most known in the international anthropological community.

Curt Unckel was born on April 17, 1883 in Jena, Thuringia, Germany and immigrated to Brazil in 1903. From 1905 to 1907, he lived two years among a Guarani group in a village of the Batalha River in the hinterland of São Paulo

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<sup>2</sup> *Conselho Nacional de Pesquisa*, of the Ministry of Science and Technology. The scholarship was a PDE facility (process n. 200455/2010-9). Hereby, I express again my gratitude to CNPq for having made possible this research. The author also expresses gratitude to CNPq for supporting further studies about the work and life of Nimuendajú and his contacts with German ethnology by having granted a special scholarship for distinguished productivity called *Produtividade em Pesquisa* (PQ modality; process n. 307304/2013-2).

state, where he was adopted by an indigenous family and received his name Nimuendajú, whom he registered as his family name in 1922 when opting for Brazilian citizenship. In 1913 he moved from São Paulo to Belém, where he maintained his permanent address until his death in December 1945 in a Ticuna village, in São Paulo de Olivença municipality, in the Upper Solimões region in Amazon. The cause of his death is still unclear, although the murder hypothesis is considered the most accepted (Oliveira 1999). More than four decades dedicated to the ethnology of indigenous peoples yielded him, yet during lifetime, the recognition of being one of the most important experts on the indigenous peoples of Brazil in the first half of the century (Grupioni 1998: 164) and, according to some authors, even being the greatest for all that period (Kraus 2004: 44-45).

Krause (1881-1963) was a German ethnologist principally known among americanists for his 1908 expedition to the Araguaia region in Central Brazil. He found employment at the Ethnological Museum in Leipzig from 1912 on, being his director since 1927, but he also taught as professor at Leipzig University from 1925 to 1945. Krause developed a different approach to ethnology, which he called “ethnological structuralism”. But, even having strong psychological inspiration, it was very different from later French structuralism à la Lévi-Strauss. Krause’s intellectual effort aimed at finding a new theoretical way of his own between the mainstream tendencies of German ethnology at that time (see Wolfradt 2011 for Krause and his own structuralist approach). Being co-founder of the German Ethnological Society (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Völkerkunde – DGV*) in 1929, Krause had a strong position in the institutional scenario of German ethnology at that time, but after World War II his arrangements and engagements with National Socialism rendered him the status of a person hardly tolerated in Eastern Germany under the communist regime. Nevertheless, his political sympathies did not appear in any one of the correspondences with Nimuendajú (for an obituary on Krause see Damm 1966).

Reche (1879-1966), an ethnologist *and* physical anthropologist, on the other hand, was one of the most prominent exponents of Nazi anthropology. Being full professor for (physical) anthropology and ethnology at Leipzig University since 1927, he was director of its Institute for Anthropology and Ethnology, later renamed as “Institut für Rassen- und Völkerkunde” (Institute for Racial Stu-

dies and Ethnology) (for the academic vita of Reche see Geisenhainer 2002). But, as in the case of Krause, his ideological and political ideas did not appear in the correspondence with Nimuendajú.

There are other German scientists directly and indirectly involved in the history of the two expeditions, but their roles are secondary in comparison with the three main actors mentioned above, because they never were direct interlocutors of Nimuendajú, exchanging letters only with Krause or Reche. Among these “secondary” actors should be mentioned Georg Thilenius (1868-1937), director of the Hamburg Museum of Ethnology, and Arnold Jacobi (1870-1948), zoologist and director of the Dresden Museum of Zoology and Ethnology, because of their involvement in financing the expeditions. Their correspondence with Krause and, on a smaller scale, with Reche, reveal, above all, financial and logistic preoccupations and less interest about the fieldwork circumstances, but this impression might be result of the letters’ subjects, because they received the copies of all the letters sent by Nimuendajú to Krause from the fieldwork areas.

So, the main axis of communication existed between Krause and Nimuendajú. But there was also another direct interlocutor for Nimuendajú, which must be mentioned: Carlos Estevão de Oliveira (1880-1946) of the Museu Paraense Emilio Goeldi, one of his most important allies in the Brazilian institutional scenario, but also a personnel friend until the rest of his life. All the letters of Nimuendajú to Carlos Estevão archived at the State’s Museum of Ethnology and Archaeology of São Paulo have already been published by Thekla Hartmann (see Nimuendajú 2000), and some of them offer accounts about the fieldwork activities for the German museums.

## Sources

The primary sources of this research are letters and additional documents, lists of objects, maps, photos, and the ethnographic objects by themselves, all being archived and deposited in the ethnological museums of Leipzig, Dresden and, in minor scale, Hamburg.

In the Ethnological Museum at Grassi Museum Leipzig could be found almost the entire documentation of the two expeditions. The quantity of visual materials is quite scarce, while the number of well conserved correspondence is remarkable. The following original letters were found:

- ◆ 53 letters exchanged between Nimuendajú and Krause about the two expeditions;
- ◆ 12 letters between Nimuendajú and Reche regarding the second expedition;
- ◆ 10 between Krause and Reche regarding the second expedition;
- ◆ 29 between Krause and Thilenius about the two expeditions;
- ◆ 28 between Krause and Jacobi about the first expedition.

There is more correspondence, principally between Krause and the Swiss ethnologist Felix Speiser (1880-1949), the Swedish ethnologist Baron Erland Nordenskiöld (1877-1932), director of the Gothenburg Museum, and the Austrian ethnologist Father Wilhelm Koppers (1886-1961), from the *Anthropos* journal, but these letters only represent a minor part of the entire correspondence regarding the two expeditions.

The documentation archived at the Grassi Museum allows reconstructing completely the history of the first expedition, while, in the case of Nimuendajú's second expedition for German museums, this is only possible with the documents found in Dresden. Nimuendajú's letters generally are long, detailed, and have minimal spacing. They often contain vivacious descriptions of the fieldwork conditions and about his research style, together with detailed ethnographic information and numerous critical observations about indigenous politics as well as about the kinds of relationship between the indigenous and non-indigenous population. The language of these letters frequently is not scientific and generally is a mixture of formal German writing style and popular expressions. All the letters were written in German, with no exception.

In those letters can be found a Nimuendajú quite different from the one known by his scientific monographs and articles. By comparison, the language of Krause and Reche and that of the other German ethnologists involved is quite sober and even bureaucratic, but Krause is the only one among the

German part who makes some ironic comments in some passages, which adds a different style to some of his letters, making them more interesting.

At the depot of the Museum of Ethnology in Dresden, there could be found the following letters, or as originals or as photocopies:

- ◆ 15 letters between Nimuendajú and Krause;
- ◆ 34 letters between Nimuendajú and Reche; and
- ◆ 14 between Krause and Reche.

On a smaller scale, there are also some letters between Krause and Thilenius and Jacobi and between Reche and Thilenius and Gustav Antze, from the Hamburg Museum. The documents archived in Dresden allow reconstructing the major aspects of the second expedition. As for the style of the letters, there can be made the same observations as in the case of the correspondence archived at Leipzig.

So far, it was not possible to visit the archive of the Hamburg Museum of Ethnology, but this does not represent any problem, because the entire correspondence between the three museums could be localized in Leipzig and Dresden, and there was no direct contact between Nimuendajú and the Hamburg museum staff. The main problem with the Hamburg museum is that it probably stores in its depositary the most complete of all Nimuendajú collections in Germany, but this information can only be confirmed after consulting the results of the latest depot inventory.

## **Contact and contract**

Nimuendajú was a self-taught anthropologist and never had the benefit of an academic education and career. He had his first contact with the European academic environment when he succeeded to publish his famous ethnographic monograph about Guarani religion and worldview in the at that time highly respected *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, in 1914, by mediation of German ornithologist Emilie Snethlage (1862-1929) who was nominated director of the Goeldi Museum in Belém that year. These contacts with German ethnology were interrupted by World War I, but after the war Nimuendajú managed to maintain a

regular correspondence with Theodor Koch-Grünberg (1872-1924) for nine years, from 1915 to 1924, only terminating with the death of Koch-Grünberg<sup>3</sup>. Having published various articles in periodicals as *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, *Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen*, *Anthropos*, and *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, Nimuendajú achieved a reputation as a specialist in indigenous ethnology and linguistics of Lowland South America in the midst of the 1920ies.

But he was short of money, and this seems to have been a permanent cause for concern until the end of his life. At least, this regularly appears as one of the topics in his letters. So he accepted to realize archeological excavations and ethnographic studies for the Ethnological Museum of Gothenburg, from 1923 to 1927, sponsored by the museum's director, Erland Nordenskiöld (Nimuendajú 1929, 2004). But in 1926 the relationship with his sponsor became complicated, with the cooperation ending in 1927. So the continuity of Nimuendajú's studies was at risk.

In this delicate situation, a recommendation of Swiss ethnologist Felix Speiser was welcome. Speiser was introduced to Nimuendajú by Koch-Grünberg, by letter and directly in Belém. On February 25, 1927, Speiser wrote a letter to Krause, introducing Nimuendajú as an excellent collector and field-worker:

Es handelt sich also für Herrn Nimuendajú [sic] darum, seine Existenz auf eine neue Basis zu stellen. Er könnte dies wohl ziemlich leicht, indem er sich von der Ethnographie völlig zurück zieht, doch wird es ihm sehr schwer, sich von der ihm zur Lebensweise gewordenen Ethnographie ganz zu trennen. Es wäre auch für die Ethnographie an sich ein Verlust, wenn sie fürderhin auf die Mitarbeit eines der besten Kennen der Indianer Brasiliens --- als der Herr N. wohl bezeichnet werden darf -- verzichten müsste.

Ich erlaube mir daher -- im Einverständnis mit Herrn Nimuendajú, --- Ihnen mitzuteilen, dass er sehr gerne Aufträge ethnographischer Art von Ihnen

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<sup>3</sup> The entire correspondence between Nimuendajú and Koch-Grünberg will be published in 2016 in an edited volume organized by Michael Kraus (Bonn University), Ernst Halbmayer (Marburg University), Nelson Sanjad (Museu Pararense Emilio Goeldi), and the author of this paper.

entgegen nehmen würde, in der Weise, dass er für Sie an bestimmten Stellen sammeln würde. Es sind ihm grosse Gebiete S-Amerikas bekannt, und da er so wie so schon in Brasilien wohnt, wird er mit relativ geringen Kosten irgend ein Gebiet besuchen können, das Sie ihm als Sammelgebiet angeben werden. Dazu ist er von großer persönlicher Anspruchslosigkeit.

Es wäre also hierdurch Ihrem Museum eine Gelegenheit geboten, sich wertvolle Originalsammlungen zu beschaffen, wie des Herrn Nimuendayù Arbeit für die Ethnographie weiterhin gesichert wäre.<sup>4</sup>

Krause's reaction was positive, but he preferred to contact also his old friend, the Baron Nordenskiöld on November 12, 1927<sup>5</sup>:

[...] Ehe wir uns aber auf eine derartige grosse Angelegenheit einlassen möchten wir über einige Punkte klar sehen. Und da Sie mehrere Jahre lang mit Herrn N. in der gleichen Weise gearbeitet haben, so möchte ich Sie um Auskunft bitten insbesondere über die wissenschaftliche Befähigung des Herrn N. Ich kenne ja verschiedene seiner Veröffentlichungen in der Zeitschrift für Ethnologie; doch geht aus ihnen nicht hervor, inwieweit sie etwa von den mitunterzeichneten Herausgebern jeweils überarbeitet sind. Wir möchten deshalb vor allem wissen, ob Herr N. die Fähigkeit besitzt zu rein wissenschaftlichen Forschungen, insbesondere zu Sprachaufnahmen, ethnologischen Untersuchungen einzelner Völker oder zur Erforschung bestimmter ethnologischer Aufgaben, die man ihm stellen könnte, wie z.B. der Sozialorganisation einzelner oder mehrerer Stämme oder dergleichen. Und wie steht es mit seiner Befähigung um Sammeln völkerkundlicher und archaeologischer Gegenstände? Sind seine Sammlungen so zusammengestellt, dass man ein wissenschaftlich befriedigendes Bild der Kultur der betreffenden Stämme erhält? [...]

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<sup>4</sup> Staatliche Ethnographische Sammlungen Sachsen (SES), Leipzig, 1928/43, Krause, November 12, 1927.

<sup>5</sup> SES, Leipzig, 1928/43, Krause, February 25, 1927.

Nordenskiöld replied on November 15 that<sup>6</sup>

[...] Was Nimuendajú betrifft, muss ich sagen, dass ich ihn für einen vortrefflichen Forscher halte, der für uns mit geringen Mitteln eine sehr wertvolle Arbeit ausgeführt hat. [...]

[...] Warum ich jetzt die Verbindung mit ihm abgebrochen habe, liegt daran, dass er nicht richtig mit den Brasilianern umzugehen versteht.

Wahrscheinlich ist er zu ehrenhaft, um ihnen zu schmeicheln, wenn es notwendig ist. Mit den Indianern dagegen versteht er sich vorzüglich. Was seine hier veröffentlichten Abhandlungen betrifft, so sind diese ganz selbständig ausgearbeitet. [...]

In the meantime, Nimuendajú and Krause had exchanged some letters trying to come at terms between Nimuendajú's detailed explications about field-work possibilities and the interests of the museum. Nimuendajú, for example, prepared a list of research possibilities in different regions of the Amazon and adjacent areas, in a letter from August 12, 1927<sup>7</sup>. But the factors which determined the final decision were the museum's interest to acquire ethnographic objects from the region between the Middle Tocantins River and the Mearim River, in Maranhão, with the aim 'to fill out regional gaps' in its collections.

But not only Nimuendajú was short of money, the Grassi Museum, too, because of the permanent budget crises of most museums and scientific institutions in postwar Germany. So, to find a solution for the mutual interests, Krause succeeded, in longwinded negotiations, to convince Thilenius, from the Hamburg Museum of Ethnology, and Jacobi, from the Dresden Museum of Zoology and Ethnology, to support an expedition and share the costs. As a return service, Nimuendajú had to collect three copies of every object to be redistributed among the three museums. This obligation was even subject of a detailed contract, which Nimuendajú considered unnecessary, because, from his point of view, he had to assume all the "real" risks, including his health and financial outcome.

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<sup>6</sup> SES, Leipzig, 1928/43, Krause, November 15, 1927.

<sup>7</sup> SES, Leipzig, 1928/43, Krause, August 12, 1927.

## The expeditions

On September 17, 1928, Nimuendajú wrote a letter to Krause explaining his worries about the expedition's success:

Zu einer Erkenntnis bin ich uebrigens gekommen nachdem ich die Einkaeufe gemacht und die Tauschwaren fuer die verschiedenen Staemme eingeteilt hatte: Trotzdem ich die zu diesem Zweck vorgesehene Summe bedeutend ueberschritten habe bemerke ich dass sie zu einer restlosen Erledigung meines Programmes nicht ausreichen. Wahrscheinlich werde ich ueber die Apinayé und die ihnen nordoestlich vorgelagerten Horden nicht weit hinauskommen. Den Vorstoss nach Sueden zu den Karaô und Šerénte werde ich aufgeben muessen und die Canellas und Guajajára werden wohl etwas knapp wegkommen. - Wenn es sich nur darum handelte, die verschiedenen Staemme einfach kulturell zu belegen so waere alles gut und schoen, aber vor mir sehe ich im Geist DREI lange Reihen leerer Museumsschraenke stehen die ich alle fuellen soll. Trotzdem glaube ich zuversichtlich dass es mir gelingen wird, alle drei Institute zufrieden zu stellen.<sup>8</sup>

„Vor mir sehe ich im Geist DREI lange Reihen leerer Museumsschraenke stehen die ich alle fuellen soll“ – “In my mind I see THREE long rows of empty shelves which I shall fill up all“. This is the citation in the title of this paper.

The first expedition started in September 1928 and finished in May 1929. Fieldwork was done with the Apinayé, Krĩkateyé, Kreapimkateyé, Pukobyê, Guajajara and Canela (Apanyekrã and Ramkokamekrã). Nimuendajú described fieldwork circumstances in his detailed letters to Krause, but also to Carlos Estevão, in Portuguese. As can easily be suspected, the original idea of collecting three copies of every object was impossible to be entirely achieved, due to 'real life' circumstances in the field, and had partially to be given up.

The letters express profound cultural pessimism regarding the survival of the visited groups as culturally distinguished collectivities. This is very explicit in

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<sup>8</sup> SES, Leipzig, 1928/43, Krause, September 17, 1928.

the case of the Apinayé, while Nimuendajú became more optimistic after having initiated fieldwork among the Ramkokamekrã whose culture he considered a kind of 'gold claim' for ethnographic research, but in his eyes this Canela group was constantly threatened by non-indigenous influences of all kinds or, in Nimuendajú's words, by "the Christians", "Christianity" or "the neo-brazilians".

But sometimes his letters also include some comical observations, for example about the Guajajara Indians, neighbors of the Canela: "Bananal [village] was still more civilized than Lagoa da Pedra. There I also had the pleasure, among other things, to see Indian wives with bobbed hair (*Bubiköpfe*) dancing tango being accompanied by accordion, and they pleasantly me invited!"<sup>9</sup>

On the whole, the expedition was very successful from the point of view of the three museums, but the collector, in his own descriptions, hardly managed to return to Belém because of the hardships of various field situations. He seems to have returned quite ill and without any penny in his pockets, so that the three museums decided to arrange some extra resources in an emergency action.

One month after Nimuendajú having finished the expedition, Krause asked in a letter from June 27, 1929 about his future plans and started to suggest other contractual work for German museums and research institutions<sup>10</sup>.

The second expedition was financed by the ethnological museums of Leipzig and Hamburg and by the Institute of Ethnology of Leipzig University and with the support of *Notgemeinschaft der Deutschen Wissenschaft* (Emergency Society for the Promotion of German Sciences). During this expedition, from February to September 1930, Nimuendajú realized fieldwork with the Apinayé, Xerente, Krahô and, again, the Canela-Ramkokamekrã. His main interlocutors in Germany were Krause and Reche.

His descriptions of the indigenous peoples maintain a pessimistic view. While during the first expedition ethnographic information was only requested for completing the description of the objects collected, for the second expedition there was agreed on writing a monograph (with the title *Die Timbira*), which

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<sup>9</sup> SES, Leipzig, 1928/43, Krause, February 15, 1929. (translation: P.S.)

<sup>10</sup> SES, Leipzig, 1929/71, Krause, S. 700, June 27, 1929.

should be a complementary publication for the planned exhibition of the objects. This monograph, about the Apinayé and the Canela, was subject of protracted negotiations between Krause and Nimuendajú, but after all was not published in its original format. The budgetary situation for German scientific institutions became so critical in the final years of the Republic of Weimar that this plan of publication had to be abandoned, although Nimuendajú became thoroughly dissatisfied.

It is interesting to note, though not surprising, how the indigenous peoples involved were seen by the parties of the contracts. A superficial lecture of the correspondence permits easily to conclude that the German museum staff, including Krause with his field experience, saw the Amerindians primarily as suppliers of interesting objects for the museum's depots. Nimuendajú, for his part, once having entered 'the field', chose a quite different position, assuming a role which nowadays would be called engaged anthropology.

As in the case of other fieldwork realized, he generally played down the results, transforming them into 'failures' or at least 'small successes' before receiving any written reaction of the addressees of his letters and shipments (with the objects). This seems to have been a kind of preventive strategy, as he knew the expectations of European museums where armchair anthropologists often did not have any idea about the difficulties to come upon in field (but this was not the case of Krause).

## **Implicit theories**

Organizing collections for museums does not happen in a theoretical or methodological vacuum. As in the case of ethnographies, there does not exist any mere description, because any description is based on some theoretical choice, at least implicitly (Bruck 1987). Composing museum collections and the selection of its objects by itself implies decisions based on explicit and implicit theories (Clifford 1988). And the history of the Nimuendajú collections at the Hamburg, Leipzig and Dresden museums only confirm this affirmation. In the case of Nimuendajú, we have to take into account his acquaintance with con-

temporary German ethnology, that is, his lectures and correspondence with German ethnologists at that time.

The objects of Nimuendajú's ethnological practice match with the occupations of americanist anthropology Boasian style: register indigenous cultural manifestations, especially those threatened to disappear, by writing down indigenous texts, collecting their objects and shooting photos before it is too late.

Other important indicators of theoretical visions are Krause's brief comments about the ethnographic collections at Leipzig and Dresden, which would need to be 'completed' for two main reasons: (a) lack of 'material' of whole 'cultural areas or provinces' (a diffusionist argument) and (b) the idea that cultures can be represented by a sensible and discerning selection of objects for offering a 'complete' image of an indigenous culture by its materialized aspects.

## **The collections, nowadays**

The original object lists archived at the Grassi Museum in Leipzig indicate altogether 2478 ethnographical and archeological objects collected by Nimuendajú. In addition to objects from the Apinayé, Canela, Guajajara, Krahô, Kreapimkateyé, Krĩkateyé, Pukobyê and Xerente, there are also a great number of archeological pieces. Besides, the first collection of objects was offered by Nimuendajú to the museum in November 1927. 2478 objects deposited: this, at least, was the situation until 1943. But on December 4, 1943, Leipzig suffered a heavy bombing raid, and one bomb hit a wing of the museum where numerous objects had been exposed. So, from the original 2478 objects, only 613 remained undamaged. In other words, the Nimuendajú collections in Leipzig suffered a 75% loss in only one night of World War II. This means, too, that the collections at the Grassi Museum are the most affected by war among the three museums.

The Dresden museum, for his part, received 354 objects (Apinayé, Canela-Ramkokamekrã, Guajajara, Kreapimkateyé, Krĩkateyé and Pukobyê) from the first expedition. Although that collection was not so tragically affected

like the one in Leipzig, the total losses sum up 81, or 23% (KV = *Kriegsverluste* = 'lost by war': 81; more objects registered as 'missing' / *fehlt*: 5). So, currently the Nimuendajú collection at Dresden is composed of 273 objects, some of them even having been shown, in 2010, in a local exposition about Amazonian indigenous cultures (Kästner 2009).

According to an Excel list received by e-mail on October 13, 2010, the Hamburg Museum of Ethnology must have received three contingents of objects on three different data, according to the museum's books of register:

- ◆ 346 objects of the Apinayé, Canela (Apanyekrã and Ramkokamekrã), Guajajara, Kreapimkateyé, Krĩkateyé and Pukobyê on October 26, 1929, as well as four dancing masks of the Ramkokamekrã;
- ◆ 302 objects of the Ramkokamekrã on February 25, 1931; and
- ◆ 139 objects of the Apinayé, Krahô and Xerente on April 4, 1932.

There are strong indications that the Nimuendajú collections at Hamburg represent the most complete and most well preserved of the collections which resulted from the two expeditions in 1928/29 and 1930.

Like in the case of other ethnographic collections, the history of Nimuendajú's two expeditions financed by German institutions reveal that those collections are much more than a set of objects whose organization is based upon some explicit or implicit criteria of the collectors and their financiers. With their objects and their complementary documentation, they offer differentiated information and insights about various aspects of anthropological practices in specific historical contexts. So, the collections and their documentation become, indeed, sources which 'talk' as much about the indigenous producers and users of the objects as about the anthropologists involved in their collection.

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