

EVOLUTION OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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Summary

Evolution of Anthropology deals with the rise of social and cultural anthropology as a scientific discipline in Europe and the United States. This contribution raises issues like the evolution and separation of anthropology from everyday knowledge and by what means a discipline is established. The integration of man, society and ideas contains the key elements of scientific development. By following in the tracks of the founders we will get a clear picture of the maturing of anthropology - its pioneering goals, its function in society, and its professionalization as a scientific discipline. It is possible to consider this study as divided into two major parts coinciding with theoretical paradigms, i.e. evolutionism with its search for general laws, and the functional and historical schools which pursued anthropology as a social science. Both these approaches increasingly refined and sophisticated, and reinforced by a growing interest in ecology, continued to develop in an unbroken tradition in Europe and America. The focus is on the history of ideas, that is, the formation and transformation of ideas through their transmission in the social networks of the scholarly community.

1. Introduction

Social (or Cultural) Anthropology is one of the major internationally recognized, basic research, social science disciplines. It claims to be a general science of all societies and cultures, in existing, as well as previously existing forms. In this way, anthropology must move back and forth between the concrete, in the form of people's specific living conditions, and the more abstract (and general) goal of trying to understand human societies, regions and the world's totality. Although we can think of anthropology as a "category" as old as the first great commercial civilizations, in the sense of observing and reflecting on human nature, on man and cultures distant in time and/or in space, a

much narrower definition will be used here. Academic anthropology was established following the turn of the Twentieth Century. In the United States for instance, the teaching of anthropology started early at Harvard University and the University of Pennsylvania, and by the turn of the century some thirty-three universities and colleges offered instruction in the subject. However, about half of them were adjunct to sociology, philosophy or psychology. Across the northern border some Canadian museums were founded in the 1840s and a Division of Anthropology within the Geological Survey of Canada was created in 1910. Academic training programs, however, developed quite late, with the first university appointment of an anthropologist at Toronto in 1925. In Europe the development in Germany, France and England was, as we will see, even more differentiated.

In the end, history always regards the present as the product of the past. Yet, we encounter problems when trying to give a historical account of the rise of anthropology, whether one tries to give an overall view of the science, or one is restricted to a limited field. An almost trivial fact is the discipline's scope. The fields of anthropology are numerous, broad and deep, and subject to constant changes both in space and time. Thus, the history of anthropology must not only be seen as a catalogue of dates, names and facts, but as the development over time of national traditions. Each of them having a perspective or a configuration of its own, yet sharing some features of anthropology in other national traditions. Thus, it has been argued that anthropology is a scholarly activity that no one, including the practitioners, can accurately define. It borders most academic disciplines and bridges the gap between the social sciences and humanities. Nor are the distinctions between concepts such as ethnography, ethnology and anthropology very clear. Founded in 1839, the Société Ethnologique de Paris stated that ethnology is a synonym for anthropology as a whole, while the Ethnological Society of London regarded ethnology only as its comparative aspects. Later it was suggested that ethnology was a historical approach while social anthropology dealt with contemporary communities. In Germany *Volkskunde* accounted for folklore while *Völkerkunde* or *Ethnologie* indicated the broader comparative social science. Similar is the American distinction between ethnography as descriptive and ethnology as comparative. Russian *Etnografia* covers anthropology as a whole and in the Nordic countries ethnography, ethnology and anthropology have in the past been treated as synonymous.

The unifying focus of anthropology is the study of mankind, its history, social structures and cultural forms. In the United States the subject is divided into social and cultural anthropology, archaeology, human biology and linguistics. In Europe this has not been the case and social anthropology has remained a separate subject. In any case the scope of anthropology encompasses issues covered by history, linguistics, archaeology and human biology although the degree to which this occurs varies from department to department. The field has historically had a major influence on the other social sciences since several major approaches, such as structural functionalism, structuralism, and structural Marxism, were elaborated upon a great deal within social anthropology.

2. Bureau Anthropology

The rise of American anthropology became theoretically divided between evolutionism with its search for general laws, and the historical school, which pursued anthropology

as a social science. Both these approaches, gradually refined and sophisticated, and reinforced by a growing interest in ecology, continued to develop in an unbroken tradition in America, where local ethnographic data drawn from Native American cultures encouraged their persistence. In Washington D.C. John Wesley Powell created the Bureau of American Ethnology on the 3rd of March 1879 and served as its undisputed leader until 1893, while Franz Boas, born in Germany and schooled in geography at Heidelberg and Kiel, became affiliated with the American Museum of Natural History and later with Columbia University in New York. Nothing indicates that they were friends, but despite all theoretical and methodological differences, they respected one another. The fact that Boas seldom challenged Powell might be because the latter, to some extent made it possible for him to work in the United States: Moreover, Bureau money assisted Boas at a time of great need, and Powell and his associates also contributed to his growth as an anthropologist. Another reason is the fact that Powell's influence had begun to decline due to bad health, just as Boas' reputation had begun to spread widely.

Some thirty years before Powell, an Indian agent named Henry Rowe Schoolcraft made an attempt to create a bureau of anthropology. Thus, in 1847 we find for the first time, systematic research in the field. Schoolcraft was under orders from the Indian Bureau and also had his mission ratified by Congress. He formulated a tablet with 348 questions covering topics such as history, geography, astronomy, medicine, social organization, trade, property, crime, mythology, religion, customs, hunting, war, dance, death, clothing, intellectual capacity, race characteristics, and language. Fellow Indian agents, missionaries, military commanders, and others in close contact with natives were requested to fill out the survey, and from these notes Schoolcraft compiled his *Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States per act of Congress*, in six folio volumes issued between 1851 and 1857. It contained vocabularies of Indian languages, grammatical analyses, myths of various tribes, biographies of chiefs and warriors, narratives of captives, histories of Indian wars, emigrations, and theories of their origin. The illustrations with 336 full-page plates of beautiful steel engravings also made Schoolcraft's work an outstanding, but painfully disorganized, publication.

Schoolcraft's main purpose with this giant investigation, as with the subsequent creation of the Bureau of American Ethnology, was to obtain accurate knowledge of the Indian tribes in order to carry out a progressive Indian policy. "The present plan of collecting information respecting their actual condition, character, and prospects, is based on an appeal to the entire official organization of the Department on the frontier; and is believed to be the most efficient one that can be pursued to collect a body of authentic information, which may serve as the record from which the tribes are to be judged," Schoolcraft wrote. He presented his "Plan for the Investigation of American Ethnology" to the Smithsonian Institution in 1846, emphasizing the need for consideration of anthropology as a separate science. For some unknown reason Schoolcraft's plan was not accepted.

However, Civil War veteran John Wesley Powell proved himself to be a scientific empire builder. Using his position as head of one of the great western surveys of geology and geography, Powell became influential in the making of public policy,

particularly the issues of how to dispose of the public domain and how to deal with the native inhabitants of these areas. His early research indicates an emphasis on collecting, both the artifacts of Indian life, and the facts of their existence as he observed them. He gathered songs, Indian words, marriage and burial rituals, myths, habits and customs, details on the dwellings of former inhabitants of the region, and hieroglyphs, as well as their manufactured articles, the fruits they ate, the seeds they planted, pottery, basketry, clothing, and other physical objects. All of these collections were sent to the Smithsonian Institution.

With the establishment of the Bureau of American Ethnology as a part of the Smithsonian Institution, anthropology was finally institutionalized in the US. According to its official declaration the results sought by the Bureau are: (1) Acquirement of a thorough knowledge of the tribes, their origin, relationship to one another and to the whites, locations, numbers, capacity for civilization, claims to territory, and their interests generally, for the practical purposes of government; and (2) the completion of a systematic and well-rounded record of the tribes, for historical and scientific purposes before their aboriginal characteristics and culture are too greatly modified or are completely lost.

Powell employed some specialists, mostly staff from his geological survey team, to gather, edit, and analyze ethnographical material. In addition he contracted a number of army officers, missionaries, and agency employees, to gather material that the bureau staff otherwise would not have been able to collect. He printed a pamphlet in 1880 as "An Introduction to the Study of the Indian Languages" and in quick succession, it was followed by other manuals on the study of mortuary customs, sign language, medical practices, tribal governments, and mythology. Major Powell edited all bureau publications himself. Each year he summarized the activities, current undertakings and the economic situation, before the Smithsonian and Congress, in an *Annual Report*. In this volume he also made space for theoretical discussions. The major serial publication of the Bureau became its bulletins, which continued until the final incorporation of the bureau into the Smithsonian Institution in 1965. Here, longer monographs were presented. In 1910, each edition numbered 9,850 copies and was distributed to members of the White House, other authorities, and of course, to libraries in the United States and abroad. From the "Geographical and Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region" the bureau inherited a serial publication called "Contributions to North American Ethnology." It was terminated in 1893 after only eight volumes, and equally short lived were two other minor publications entitled "Miscellaneous Publications" and "Introductions". A major research field in the early years was linguistics, with no less than eleven of the first twenty bulletins dealing with native languages.

By the time linguistics (at first called philology) had emerged as a distinct field of inquiry, aimed at discovering the general principles of all human languages and their manifestations in the variety of actual speech. Powell established the genetic relationship among North American languages by a classification that identified fifty-eight separate language families, more than one-third spoken by tribes inhabiting California and Oregon. Twenty-six were considered to be isolates, that is single languages with no established relatives, and five of the families (algonquian, athapascan, siouan, shoshonean, and eskimauan) had a wide geographical distribution.

Later, in 1929, linguist Edward Sapir arranged Powell's language stocks into six major groups and more recent work has revealed additional relationships among the American Indian languages.

With the creation of the Bureau of American Anthropology, Powell achieved all but one of the elements involved in the formation of a scientific discipline. He specified the area of research, incorporated and developed a conceptual scheme, and also contributed to the establishing of field-work as the main anthropological method of research. Although Powell and his staff were self-educated, the Bureau created a separation between professionals and amateurs, i.e. what we now recognize as institutionalization. At Columbia University, Boas finalized the process of professionalization with the separation of research and education.

3. The Historical School of Franz Boas

Franz Boas was born in Minden, Germany, on July 9, 1858. At nineteen he entered the University of Heidelberg, then moving on to Bonn and finally Kiel. He studied mathematics, physics and geography and completed his doctoral thesis about the understanding of the color of water in 1881. He considered his university studies as a compromise reflecting the prolonged tension between *Naturwissenschaften* (natural science) and *Geisteswissenschaften* (humanities). Closest to anthropology were his geographical studies focused on the interaction between man and nature. German idealism and Immanuel Kant's philosophy of knowledge as dependent upon consciousness were also attractive. From Kant he learned that human perceptions are not objects, but rather pictures or representations. Since these perceptual representations are the only proofs of an external physical world, one may question how faithfully these mental impressions really represent the physical objects. While the natural sciences explained phenomena on a materialistic basis, idealism argued that history was an expression of ideas. Each culture had its own *geist* or unique history. The Neo-Kantian philosophers held that the *Kulturwissenschaften*, the human and historical sciences, required a subjective approach which would yield understanding (*Verstand*) and provide concrete idiographic insight into the mental symbolism involved - a type of knowledge which no amount of external objective observation and causal explanation could possibly supply. Cultures could not be measured by universal standards, neither were human institutions the result of reason, but emotions.

Exactly how and when Franz Boas picked up his interest in anthropology is unclear. In a letter to his parents dated October 24, 1882, however, he relates that he had participated in a meeting held by Berlin's anthropological society. After the meeting he made the acquaintance of Rudolf Virchow (1821-1902) and Adolf Bastian (1826-1905) who soon became his teachers and mentors. The latter was one of Germany's most famous critics of the theories of social evolution. He emphasized analysis of empirical data and demanded evidence of assumed historical connections. After he had completed his doctoral degree, Boas went to Berlin to work at the Royal Ethnographic Museum under Bastian. A couple of months later he was given the opportunity to join an expedition heading for Cumberland Sound and the eastern coast of Baffin Island in the Canadian Arctic. It was a joint enterprise of the Berlin Museum, the Anthropological Society of London and the Bureau of American Ethnology. His travels on foot, by boat,

and by dog-sled covered some 2,400 miles, and resulted in the first accurate charts of the shores of Cumberland Sound and eastern Baffin Island. Boas' work was far more than a mere description of the Inuits - in remarkable detail he described tribal distribution, intertribal relations, seasonal movements, and travel routes in Hudson Bay and Strait, Baffin Island, and areas to the west and north. Back in Germany he worked at the museum, but took the opportunity in 1886 to return to the United States - this time for fieldwork in the Hudson Bay area. In the following year he moved permanently to New York taking up employment as an editor for the *Science* magazine. His career as an American anthropologist started as a museum curator at the Museum of Natural History and flourished at the University of Columbia - making him the most important contributor to American anthropology ever.

During World War I he was an outspoken critic of arms support to France and Great Britain and also spoke out against the American anti-German climate in general. Those who disagreed with his pronouncements were anathema; none escaped his sharp tongue. His position as honorary philologist at the Bureau of American Ethnology was abolished, primarily, it is believed, because of an article in the December 1919 issue of *The Nation* in which he impugned the veracity of President Wilson. Although often considered controversial, Boas was highly respected as a scientist. He held membership of a great number of scientific societies and associations and was elected chairman of the Academy of Science in New York 1910. In addition he received honorary titles in anthropological and geographical associations in Germany, France, Austria, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Italy and Russia. In 1910 he founded an international school in Mexico for archaeological and anthropological research. He also contributed to the acceptance of anthropology as a field of section H in the American Association for the Advancement of Science - an academy where he was elected vice-president in 1895 and president in 1931. He formed a committee in 1916 to draw the lines for teaching, and stipulated requirements for a formal education in anthropology. A few years later, Boas presented the results of the working-committee and announced that anthropology had passed the metamorphosis from a museum-based science to a professional university discipline. The kernel of scholars around him had matured, and he strategically arranged their appointments all over the country. On his death in 1942 he left a legacy of reshaped anthropology and a generation of recognized scholars such as Alfred Kroeber (1876-1960), Robert Lowie (1883-1957), Paul Radin (1883-1959), Edward Sapir (1884-1939), Ruth Benedict (1887-1948), and Margaret Mead (1901-1978).

Whether the greatness of Boas lay more in his intellect or his character, would be difficult to say. His authority and sparkling intellect exerted a compelling influence on many of his young students. Margaret Mead remembered how they talked of Boas endlessly. They all felt some kind of moral responsibility - to present a bad piece of work was considered almost as a betrayal of Professor Boas. He was a surprising and somewhat frightening teacher, but his lectures were polished and clear. Mead recalled that he would occasionally look around and ask a rhetorical question which no one would venture to answer. He contributed to the anthropological method of fieldwork with the setting of high standards. Not only did he send his pupils out in the field, but he also demanded their full participation in the life of the natives. An anthropologist should learn the language to be able to converse, listen, and share their daily life. To observe a

society from the outside was not enough, one had to adopt and penetrate it. The main objective was to capture individual life-stories, not generalizations.

Kroeber's, Mead's, Benedict's, Sapir's, and others students' admiration of Boas eventually created a myth of his achievements. On the other hand, Boas' reputation has also led to an over-reaction with regard to the weakness of his work. Most of his critics fail to place his work in the context of a maturing science. They take a great deal of the discipline's fundamental content for granted - concepts and perspectives which were in no way a given at the time. In the 1950s and 60s, anthropologists Marshal Sahlins (1930-), Leslie White (1900-1975), Julian H. Steward (1902-1972) and Marvin Harris (1927-2001) frankly regarded Franz Boas as unscientific. White and Steward returned to the idea of cultural evolution in the 1940s and Harris developed their theories into cultural materialism, a controversial and well-known school of thought. From their point of view, Boas never produced a positive theoretical contribution to ethnology and demonstrated no capacity for synthesis.

Boas' career was astonishing, and covers university and museum appointments, prominent membership in a series of scientific associations, honorary titles, and a written production comprising at least seven hundred titles. He was the last intellectual giant who managed to engage himself in every part of the wide scope of the anthropological discipline, working in cultural anthropology, sociology, linguistics, urban anthropology, archaeology, physical anthropology and geography. His collections of data included the fields of American Indians, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, Swedes and Africans, as well as community studies from New York, Toronto and Worcester. His attitude towards, and analysis of, empirical data makes it difficult to put a theoretical label on him - one might associate him with several anthropological theories but it is hard to identify him with any of them. To understand Boas' interpretation of reality one must first learn to know Boas himself, as he radically changed his views over time.

The essence of Boas' school of historical particularism, appeared successively during three phases of his career. The first step was a massive attack against the evolutionary theories with a series of detailed analyses of Indian cultures. Of primary interest were Indian myths, as the thinking of a people (*Völkergedanken*) could only be captured in this way. Every people expressed their character in mythology, revealing their opinions of good and bad, right and wrong, and beautiful and ugly. The effort to prepare a concordance of American mythology persisted through the transition from semi-professional anthropology, to the Bureau, to Boas' early work. By the early twentieth century, resources for this task were still limited to the Bureau and the American Folklore Society. Boas suggested collaboration in order to publish materials on the major American groups in 1890. Failing due to lack of publication funds, Boas in 1905 returned to the idea of a myth concordance. As chairman of an American Anthropological Association committee, he suggested that material should be listed by "catch-words" for incidents, and each member of the committee was expected to collect such catch-words for the area of his specialization. Boas apparently conceived the work as growing out of his own mythological element studies of the Northwest coast, but his students were less clear about what was intended. Boas' growing data on mythology, crafts, and social organization did not fit the evolutionary theories. The simple and

irrational were not survivals from an ancient period. History could not be apprehended as creation obeying universal laws - it must be seen as the different expressions of ideas. All the similarities that the comparative method stressed were general, superficial, and apparent. Nor could any proof be established that similar phenomena everywhere should have developed similarly. In a lecture on polyandry among the Todas and Eskimos, he ascertained that the two ethnic phenomena with which we are dealing, are not the same. So our task is not to emphasize the similarities but to go into detail with the dissimilarities. To understand a phenomenon we have to know not only what it is, but also how it came into being, Boas argued. Thus, our problem is historical. He stressed the inductive method with detailed studies in order to reveal variations. Similarities were often convergent, not identical. They may have been superficially corresponding, but have developed through different processes. Only identical forms, developed from identical processes, could be apprehended in terms of causality. Each cultural trait had its own complex history and the total sum of such traits became the very special history of a people. Boas concluded that the fact that many fundamental cultural elements are universal, or at least found in many separate geographical regions, can never be explained by an all-embracing system of human evolution. "Every attempt to deduce cultural forms from a single cause is doomed to failure, for the various expressions of culture are closely interrelated, and one cannot be altered without having an effect upon all the others."

In the second phase he emphasized the anti-intellectual aspect - discrediting the Western concept of universal rationality. One must analyze cultures according to their own principles. He rejected the general assumption that human institutions were the results of reason, and instead argued that emotions dominated mental activity and behavior. Reason, rationality, democracy, moral, and economic complexity were nothing more than a set of habits determined by cultural tradition. Man was captured by his culture, and his thoughts reflected tradition, not intelligence. In later publications, a third phase emerged. He then focused on cultural dynamics and the interaction between man and nature by tracing the internal and external elements that created and reshaped cultures. The main principals were diffusion and modification - the process of adaption that gave each society its own unique history.

The Mind of Primitive Man (1911) launched a new controversy - that of nature versus nurture fought over three decades by Boas and his students, against the eugenics of the natural sciences. This prolonged debate between the American disciplines of anthropology and biology, over the role of nature/race and nurture/culture in the human development, both culminated and terminated with the publication of young Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928). Once more Franz Boas had prevailed in a theoretical controversy, but at the cost of cultural determinism. In his last decade, Boas severely attacked Nazi racial theories and thus had great impact on the racial assumptions of American intellectuals generally.

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Biographical Sketch

Christer Lindberg, Lund University, Lund, Sweden Professor and head of the undergraduate as well as the Ph.D. program at the Department of Social Anthropology at Lund University, Sweden. He is also appointed associate professor of comparative religion at the Åbo Akademi University in Finland. A substantial part of his research has been carried out in collaboration or with assistance from scholars in history, archaeology, ethnology, sociology, and art, as well as with museum curators. His doctoral thesis presented the life and career of the ethnographer (and pioneering anthropologist) Erland Nordenskiöld in the field of the history of anthropology. While the focus is on the history of ideas, he had, in the thesis as well as in various essays and articles preferred the biographical method which traces the formation and transformation of ideas through their transmissions in the social networks of the scholarly community. Prominent anthropologists that figured in his writings concerning the history of anthropology are Morgan, Frazer, Boas, Radin, Mauss, and Lévi-Strauss, thus reflecting his particular interest in American, French, and British anthropology and dealing with both historical and a-historical traditions in anthropology. The importance of American anthropology for the development of the discipline is as well an important background for his interest in Native American cultures. *Den gode och den onde vilden* ("The Noble and Ignoble Savage") is a book dealing with the historical importance of the European encounter with the New World , while *I lönnlövet's skugga* ("In the Shadow of the Maple Leaf") by contrast deals with contemporary issues in the relationship between the Canadian nation state and its indigenous peoples. He also works with photography – teaching visual anthropology, making exhibits, and publishing two photo books, *Parisian serenade* (2009) and *Det gröna hjärtat* ("The Green Heart"). Lindberg made two periods of fieldwork in Canada and a minor field trip to Bolivia, but most of his research is based on historical documentation.