1-1-1991

Ethnographic Classification and the Science of Progress

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Herbert Spencer

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sketches that include Cushing's research on North American Indian Games, which he conducted with Culin and which was later used in Culin's major publication, "Games of the North American Indians." Culin also maintained scrapbooks documenting his work for the world expositions of Madrid (1892) and Chicago (1893), as well as his outside professional activities. The archives also reflect his activities as founding member of both the American Folklore Society and the American Anthropological Association, as well as his role in several other professional associations.

Culin and the Native American objects he collected for the Museum are now the subject of the exhibition "Objects of Myth and Memory: American Indian Art at The Brooklyn Museum," opening in the fall of 1991 and then travelling to the Oakland and the Heard Museums. A fully illustrated catalog, the research for which was accomplished mainly from the Culin Archives, is available for purchase for $28.95.

Two grant requests are pending which would make the Culin Archives more fully accessible to the public through preservation, description and arrangement. A finder's aid to the Culin Archives held at The Brooklyn Museum and other repositories will be produced if funding is received. We would be grateful to hear of any information regarding the location of Culin correspondence in other archives or other hands. Please send information directly to Deirdre E. Lawrence, Principal Librarian, at The Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY 11238.

CLIO'S FANCY: DOCUMENTS TO PIQUE THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION

Ethnographic Classification and the Science of Progress

Caught unexpectedly at press time with no material for either of our substantive departments, and not wishing this number of HAN to be only bibliographic, I foraged my shelves for something short, piquing, and otherwise not easily available. With the prior piece on ethnographic categories (HAN XVII:1, "Included in the present classification") in mind, my attention was drawn to a large folio on my evolutionary shelf: the volume of Herbert Spencer's Descriptive Sociology dealing with Types of Lowest Races, Negrito Races, and Malayo-Polynesian Races (1874). Although third in the series, following the volumes on the English and on the civilizations of Middle America and Peru, this was, from an evolutionary point of view, the foundation for the rest. As others have noted, it was the ultimate source (via Sumner, Keller, and Murdock) of the Human Relations Area Files; its resonances in later British social anthropology (via the Cambridge Moral Science Tripos and Radcliffe-Brown) are also evident. My first thought was to reproduce one of Spencer's tabular presentations, or perhaps the list of 65 sources from
which David Duncan gathered extracts on the 17 groups that were included. In an order determined by the amount of information contained in each table (but not without its hierarchical implications), these were the Fuegians, Andamans, Veddahs, Australians, Tasmanians, New Caledonians, New Guineans, Fijians, Sandwich Islanders, Tahitians, Tongans, Samoans, New Zealanders, Dyaks, Javans, Sumatrans, and Malagasy. However, since the tabular presentation of the "structural" and "functional" characteristics of even the lowest, least complex, and least documented of the low would have presented typographical problems, I reproduce here instead portions of Spencer's two page "Provisional Preface." on the assumption that though the volume may exist in most major research libraries, many readers of HAN will not already be familiar with it [G.W.S.]

In preparation for The Principles of Sociology, requiring as bases of induction large accumulations of data, fitly arranged for comparison, I, in October, 1867, commenced by proxy, the collection and organization of facts presented by societies of different types, past and present. . . . [A]fter having brought the mode of classification to a satisfactory form, and after having had some of the Tables filled up, I decided to have the undertaking executed with a view to publication: the facts collected and arranged for easy reference and convenient study of their relations, being so presented, apart from hypotheses, as to aid all students of Social Science in testing such conclusions as they have drawn and in drawing others.

The work consists of three large Divisions [Uncivilized Societies; Civilized Societies--Extinct or Decayed; Civilized Societies--Recent or Still Flourishing]. Each comprises a set of Tables exhibiting the facts abstracted and classified, and a mass of quotations and abridged extracts, otherwise classified, on which the statements contained in the Tables are based. The condensed statements, arranged after a uniform manner, give, in each Table or succession of Tables, the phenomena of all orders which each society presents--[they] constitute an account of its morphology, its physiology and (if a society having a known history) its development. On the other hand, the collected Extracts, serving as authorities for the statements in the Tables, are (or rather, will be when the Work is complete) classified primarily according to the kinds of phenomena to which they refer [i.e., the major analytic categories of the tables], and secondarily according to the societies exhibiting these phenomena; so that each kind of phenomenon, as it is displayed in all societies, may be separately studied with convenience.

In further explanation I may say that the classified
compilations and digests to be thus brought together... are intended to supply the student of Social Science with data standing towards his conclusions in relation like that in which accounts of the structures and functions of different types of animals stand to the conclusions of the Biologist. Until there are has been such systematic descriptions of different kinds of organisms, as made it possible to compare the connexions, and forms, and actions, and modes of origin, of their parts, the Science of Life could make no progress. And in like manner, before there can be reached in Sociology, generalizations having a certainty making them worthy to be called scientific, there must be definite accounts of the institutions and actions of societies of various types, and in various stages of evolution, so arranged as to furnish the means of readily ascertaining what social phenomena are habitually associated.

... Of course, the tabular form fills these purposes but approximately. To preserve complete simultaneity in the statements of facts, as read from side to of the Tables, has proved impracticable: here much had to be inserted, and there little; so that complete correspondence could not be maintained. Moreover, it has not been possible to carry out the mode of classification in a theoretically-complete manner, by increasing the number of columns as the classes of facts multiply in the course of Civilization. To represent truly the progress of things, each column should divide and sub-divide in successive ages; so as to indicate the successive differentiations of phenomena. But typographical difficulties have negative this: a great deal has had to be left in a form which must be accepted simply as the least unsatisfactory.

... The facts here brought together in the Extracts and abstracted in the Tables, furnish by no means such full accounts as are desirable. In some cases there is doubtless to be found other evidence than that here collected [1]. But it is proper to point out, in further explanation of deficiencies, that the Extracts and Tables herewith issued were those first gathered and abstracted, and that the mode of procedure was naturally at that time least complete.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

John Burton (Anthropology, Connecticut College) is working on a volume tentatively entitled "Representing Africa: Essays on the History of African Anthropology," starting with early images of a dark continent, down to the changing usage of "tribe" and contemporary issues of ethnic and nationalistic identity.

Jorge Canizares (History of Science, University of Wisconsin) is undertaking doctoral research on the impact of