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The George Combe Papers

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SOURCES FOR THE HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

I. THE GEORGE COMBE PAPERS

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An important peripheral source of information about early Euroamerican anthropology is the collection of manuscripts focussing on the Scots phrenologist George Combe (1788-1853). The collection is located in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, the city where Combe lived and worked. For six weeks during 1975 I used the collection intensively. I found it abundant, well organized, well preserved and of great use in my attempt to reconstruct the broad intellectual history of anthropology in the early 1800's.

The Combe collection comprises 314 bound volumes that can be divided into ten categories of varied anthropological relevance. 1) MSS. 7201-7375 consist of hundreds of letters to Combe, many of them written by prominent scientists, politicians and theologians within and without the United Kingdom. 2) MSS. 7376-7398 consist of letters written by Combe himself and compiled in letter drafts, letterbooks and the letter copybooks Combe used when traveling. The letterbooks contain some but by no means all of Combe's replies to the letters he received from 1824 through 1844. Unlike a few of his correspondents, Combe wrote legibly, and the letter copies are in good shape. Correspondents of importance to anthropology were Samuel George Morton and Charles Caldwell in the United States, J. Barnard Davis and John Elliotson in England, and Adolphe Quetelet in Belgium. The letters to and from Combe document a close intellectual relationship between anthropologically oriented physicians and phrenologists.

A third category of manuscripts (MSS. 7399-7434) contains notebooks and journals of Combe's overseas tours. Included here is a fascinating diary beginning with Combe's 1841 tour of Germany and concluding shortly before his death with a brief autobiography. Combe's account of America in the Age of Jackson is astonishingly perceptive. 4) MSS. 7435-7438 are miscellaneous personal papers, including poetry and an unfinished novel. 5) MSS. 7439-4751 are detailed notes of Combe's many public and professional lectures, some dated and arranged in chronological order

and others undated and arranged alphabetically by topic. 6) MSS. 7452-7455 are phrenological "developments," i.e. phrenological analyses with cranial measurements of prominent people, accompanied by reports of their mental abilities and shortcomings. The remaining four categories (7-10) contain material probably of primary interest only to Combe biographers: the papers of Combe's wife Cecelia (MSS. 7456-7473); maps and plans of the city of Edinburgh (MS. 7474); financial papers (MSS. 7475-7512); and legal and other miscellaneous papers (MSS. 7513-7515).

Anyone curious about the scientific history of Euroamerica in the period that spawned professional anthropology would find the George Combe papers a rich and reliable account of the times. For further information contact me or the Keeper of Manuscripts, National Library of Scotland.

II. GUIDE TO MANUSCRIPTS IN PSYCHOLOGY

Michael M. Sokal, of the Worcester Polytechnic Institute, has compiled a 64 page Guide to Manuscript Collections in the History of Psychology and Related Areas by culling relevant entries from the National Union Catalogue of Manuscript Collections volumes for the period 1959 to 1975. The Guide includes descriptive information on some two hundred collections, and is indexed both by repository and by a few major headings (such as child psychology, mental hygiene, etc.). Although only three of the entries relate directly to anthropologists, it is possible that researchers may nevertheless find this compilation useful. Copies are available for \$2.50 (postpaid) from Dr. Sokal, Department of Humanities, W. P. I., Worcester, Mass. 01609.