

FOOTNOTES FOR THE HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

ON THE ANATOMY OF AMBIDEXTROUS ANTHROPOLOGISTS

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In recent months attention has been called to the failure of finding any physical deviation of the human brain as a possible explanation for mental qualities (Wade, 1978; Gould and Geschwind, 1978). These reports recall an earlier attempt by an anthropologist to explain his own special abilities as the result of unique physical structure of his brain. Edward S. Morse, Director of the Peabody Academy of Science at Salem, Massachusetts (now the Peabody Museum of Salem), and an authority on Japanese archaeology and ethnology, was ambidextrous, and was well known for his ability (emulating his mentor, Louis Agassiz) to draw on the blackboard with both hands simultaneously. Thinking his brain structure might be different, Morse kept a jar of formalin on his desk with the label, "Reserved for the brain of E. S. Morse," and made arrangements for eventual anatomical examination.

As readers familiar with the careers of John Wesley Powell and W. J. McGee will no doubt recall, Morse was not the only anthropologist of his generation to make such post-mortem arrangements; nor was he the only one whose expectations were to be disappointed. When his brain was removed according to plan following his death December 20, 1925, the anatomists at the Wistar Institute could not detect any abnormality. After examining also the brains of the psychologist G. Stanley Hall and the physician Sir William Osler, H. H. Donaldson (whose neurophysiological researches had been cited by Boas in The Mind of Primitive Man) and his co-worker concluded that "the arrangement of the gyri and sulci does not give a basis from which mental abilities may be inferred."

Donaldson, H. H. and M. M. Canavan. "A Study of the Brains of Three Scholars--Granville Stanley Hall, Sir William Osler, Edward Sylvester Morse." Jour. Comp. Neurol. 46 (1928):1-95.

Gould, S. J. and N. Geschwind. "The Brains of Geniuses." Science 202 (1978):372-374.

Wade, N. "Brain that Rocked Physics Rests in Cider Box." Science 201 (1978):696.