

## THE GERMAN ETHNOGRAPHIC TRADITION AND THE AMERICAN CONNECTION

Han F. Vermeulen

Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle

During recent years, the history of German anthropology has received increased attention, but the eighteenth-century roots of German ethnology have been relatively neglected. Zimmerman (2001), Penny (2002), and Penny and Bunzl (2003) deal with German anthropology (ethnology) during the nineteenth century. Zammito (2002) and Eigen and Larrimore (2006) have examined German physical and philosophical anthropology during the eighteenth century. Historians' lack of attention to the rich eighteenth-century German ethnographic tradition has also meant that its influence on research traditions in other European countries and in the USA has been insufficiently acknowledged. This is deplorable, since the German ethnographic tradition was important for the rise of ethnology in Europe, Russia and the United States during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In the following I shall summarize research on the German tradition (Vermeulen 1992, 1995, 1999, 2006) and list some materials that indicate a link with early ethnological research in the United States. My main point is that the roots of socio-cultural anthropology, designated by the names ethnography and ethnology, need to be studied in an international context.

The German ethnographic tradition precedes the usual dating of the origins of socio-cultural anthropology in the English- and French-speaking world. The canonical view has been that anthropology started as the study of non-Western "others" in the work of Tylor, Bastian and Morgan in the UK, Germany and the USA from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. To be sure, there have been scholars who examined such Scottish and French Enlightenment authors as Rousseau, Diderot, Voltaire, Hume, Ferguson, and Robertson, but these philosophers have usually been relegated to the category of "predecessors."

Contrary to the standard account, the development of a descriptive type of anthropology took place not in Scotland, the United States, or France, but in German-speaking areas, including Austria, Switzerland and what later became Germany. Under the influence of German-speaking historians, natural historians, geographers and linguists, a type of anthropology was developed that focused on national diversity in the world, on what the Germans call the plurality of peoples (*Völkervielfalt*). This ethnological anthropology first emerged during a series of research expeditions in the Russian empire, undertaken from the 1720s. These expeditions were generally but not exclusively undertaken by young students trained at the Central German universities of Leipzig, Jena, and Halle, adhering to the basic principles of the early Enlightenment: critical, rational, empirical, comparative, and universal. An ethnological kind of anthropology emerged that was named "ethnography," at first in German (1740), then in neo-Greek (1767-71). The term "ethnology" surfaced later, first in Vienna (1781-3), then in Lausanne (1787), and in Jena (1787).

The first traces of such an ethnological way of thinking can be found in the work of Gerhard Friedrich Müller, one of the academic members of the Second Kamchatka Expedition led by Vitus Bering (1733-43). During the expedition Müller dealt with the history and description of Siberian peoples and conducted ethnographic studies on topics including shamanism (Hintzsche and Nickol 1996). He wrote extensive instructions to other members of the expedition, including Georg Wilhelm Steller (Bucher 2002), stimulating them to conduct ethnographic research, including the collection and drawing of ethnographic objects. Due to political problems, however, most of his ethnographic work remained unpublished. Summarizing his instructions to J.E. Fischer, which contained 923

queries, some very detailed, Müller used the German equivalent of ethnography, “Völker-Beschreibung” (description of peoples) in 1740 (Müller 1900: 83). While Müller did not use the term ethnography, this concept developed thirty years later, together with its German counterpart “Völkerkunde.”

In the early 1770s, August Ludwig Schlözer and Johann Christoph Gatterer, universal historians working at the University of Göttingen, introduced these concepts in their attempts to reform world history and expand its scope to include all of the world’s peoples. The early work of Schlözer, *Allgemeine Nordische Geschichte* (1771), was important, as it succeeded in supplanting earlier “myths” with new ideas on the origins, descent and migration of nations in northern Europe and Asia, using their languages as a basis for classification—a method Schlözer borrowed from G.W. Leibniz, the German philosopher actively pursuing comparative language studies. Schlözer introduced the terms “Völkerkunde” (ethnology), “Ethnographie” (ethnography) as well as “ethnographisch” (ethnographical) and “Ethnograph” (ethnographer) to a German audience in 1771-2. Schlözer was not the first to use these terms, but he used them often and in strategic places in his argument, and he was the first to apply the ethnographic perspective in Göttingen. As far as we know, the historian Johann Friedrich Schöpferlin first used the term in a Latin text published at Nördlingen (Swabia) in 1767. Schöpferlin spelled it as “ethnographia” and contrasted it to “geographia”—possibly arriving at the coinage under Schlözer’s influence (Vermeulen 1996: 8-9; 2006: 129). The main conclusion from this material, corroborated by Gatterer’s work, is that “Völkerkunde” was the general concept in the German-speaking countries and that “Ethnographie” was seen as the first stage of this new discipline.

As Schlözer and Müller had been in close contact in 1761-62, when Schlözer was Müller’s assistant in St. Petersburg, it is probable that Schlözer brought Müller’s idea of a comprehensive description of peoples from Russia to Germany, developing it into a more general study of peoples called “Völkerkunde” (Vermeulen 1999). I once concluded that ethnography had come into being when the universal historians Schlözer and Gatterer introduced the term at the University of Göttingen in the early 1770s (Vermeulen 1992, 1995), but I now realize that the “Völkerkunde” they presented was a later development and on a more abstract level than the ethnography practiced by historians and natural historians such as Müller and Steller working in Siberia during the 1730s and 1740s. It is now clear that the idea of an interrelated series of “ethnographies” first occurred in the context of the natural and cultural-historical exploration of Russian Asia (Vermeulen 1999, 2006). Thus, the terms “Völker-Beschreibung” and ethnography first arose in the work of German historians associated with the Second Kamchatka Expedition working in Siberia, while “Völkerkunde” and ethnology appeared a few decades later in that of German-speaking historians connected to the University of Göttingen (Germany) or operating in Vienna (Austria) and Lausanne (Switzerland).

It was long believed that the term “ethnologia” had been coined by the Swiss theologian Alexandre-César Chavannes in a text written in French in 1787. But it first surfaced in the work of the Austrian-Slovakian historian Adam Frantisek Kollár in 1781-3. In a study written in Latin in 1783, Kollár defined *ethnologia* as “notitia gentium populorumque,” the study of nations and peoples. Not only was Kollár’s use of the term older, it was also much closer to the meaning Schlözer had given to “Völkerkunde” than that given by Chavannes to “ethnologie,” who defined it as “l’histoire des progrès des peuples vers la civilisation” (see Vermeulen 1995: 46-47). Kollár relied on Schlözer’s work and concentrated on the same research problem (the origin of peoples and nations) with the same methods, historical linguistics and the comparison of languages. Characteristic of the German tradition

was an ethnological perspective, rather than a determination to contrast levels or stages of civilization.

While ethnography as a scientific way of describing peoples or nations was first practiced in Russia and in Siberia, ethnology originated in the academic centers of East and Central Europe and dealt with comprehensive, comparative and critical study of peoples—in principle, of all peoples and nations. Thus, we must recognize that ethnography as such began when German-speaking historians started an ethnological discourse focused on the description and comparison of the world's peoples and nations during the eighteenth century.

This type of study served an apparent need and the terms ethnography and ethnology were quickly adopted by scholars throughout what later became Germany. The German ethnographic tradition reached Switzerland and Austria, and was exported to neighboring countries such as Bohemia, the Netherlands, and France. Perhaps surprisingly, the terms ethnography and ethnology were applied in the USA earlier than in France and the UK.

Ethnology was known in the United States at least as early as 1802, when Thomas Jefferson added an appendix to the Instructions issued to the Lewis and Clark Expedition (1804-06) entitled "Ethnological Information Desired" (Hallowell 1960: 17). Although Patterson (2001: 167) ascribes this text to the American naturalist Benjamin Smith Barton (1803), he mentions that Jefferson corresponded with Barton about this subject in February 1803, and gave instructions to Meriwether Lewis in June 1803. Following the Louisiana Purchase (1803), which nearly doubled the size of the United States, Jefferson and/or Barton requested that Lewis and Clark obtain "ethnological information" from each of the "tribes" they encountered regarding their health, morals, religion, history, subsistence activities, warfare, amusements, clothing, and customs (summarized in Patterson 2001: 13). Lewis and Clark undertook inquiries similar to those pursued in Siberia by Müller and others in 1733-43, though Müller's list of questions was much more elaborate.

Jefferson had an intense interest in Amerindian languages and assiduously collected Indian vocabularies, assuming that the comparative study of languages would lead to discovery of "the affinity of nations." He had contact with Native Americans beginning in his childhood, and he gave detailed descriptions as well as statistical tables in his Notes on the State of Virginia (1787). Barton published comparative ethnological and linguistic material in his New Views of the Origin of the Tribes and Nations of America (1797). Edward G. Gray places this material in an international framework and links the American studies to the linguistic work going on in the Russian empire under the supervision of the German naturalist Peter Simon Pallas (1787-89), who was working on Catherine the Great's project to assemble specimens of two hundred of the world's languages. In 1786, George Washington asked government agents in Ohio to collect Indian vocabularies which would "throw light upon the original history of this country and ... forward researches into the probable connection and communication between the northern parts of America and those of Asia" (Gray 1999: 112).

As president of the American Philosophical Society, Jefferson chaired a committee in 1798 that issued a Circular Letter, a short questionnaire in which information was sought about "the past and present state of this country." Its fourth point "inquire[d] into the Customs, Manners, Languages and Character of the Indian nations, ancient and modern, and their migrations." There was also a query relating to "researches into the Natural History of the Earth," and one dealing with archaeological remains, such as "plans, drawings and descriptions of ... ancient Fortifications, Tumuli, and other Indian works of art." In

addition, it expressed the desire to “procure one or more entire skeletons of the Mammoth, so called, and of such other unknown animals as either have been, or hereafter may be discovered in America” (Jefferson et al. 1799). This short list, following the old tradition of distributing questionnaires, was the first of its kind in the United States. In Russia, however, Müller had issued more elaborate lists seventy years earlier. Although the Letter did not mention the term ethnology, the idea was clearly present, and Gilbert Chinard (1943) saw the Letter as “the charter of American ethnology” (Hallowell 1960: 26). Therefore, the fact that Jefferson and/or Barton added an appendix on “ethnological information desired” to the instructions of the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1802 (or 1803) was not an isolated coincidence. It indicates that these scholars were knowledgeable about the new study introduced in German-speaking countries.

Ethnology was first defined as “the science of nations” in the United States in 1828 in Noah Webster’s An American Dictionary of the English Language. The term appeared in France in 1829-34 in André-Marie Ampère’s classification of sciences. Not until 1842 was it used in Britain, in Richard King’s prospectus for the establishment of an ethnological society in London. Ethnological societies were founded in Paris in 1839, in Washington in 1842, and in London in 1843. The term “ethnographique” was first used in France in G. Engelmann and G. Berger’s Porte-feuille géographique et ethnographique in 1820 (Blanckaert 1988: 26), whereas “ethnographie” was first included in the dictionary of Pierre Boiste in 1823, the Dictionnaire de l’Académie française in 1835, and the Complément du Dictionnaire de l’Académie française in 1839. In England the term “ethnography” first surfaced in the Penny Cyclopaedia of 1834, the work of Cardinal Wiseman of 1835, and that of James Cowles Prichard in 1836 (Vermeulen 1995: 53-4). While I have thus far found no early traces of “ethnography” in American primary works, it remains intriguing that ethnology surfaced in the United States so much earlier than in both France and Britain.

Just exactly how the new study of ethnology found its way from St. Petersburg, Göttingen, and Vienna to Washington and Philadelphia remains to be established, but it is likely that Jefferson was familiar with scientific developments in Göttingen. Diplomatic relations between the United States and Germanic states may have influenced scholarly exchange. Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison served as ambassadors to France; the electorate of Hanover and Washington maintained diplomatic relations after the treaty between Britain and America had been signed in September 1783. As Patterson (2001: 8, 12) summarizes the situation, the American scholars had to make clear “that nature was neither hostile nor immutable in the Americas,” that “culture could ... flourish in the United States,” and “that the United States was indeed a good risk.” Jefferson corresponded with the French explorer Constantin-François de Volney and with the idéologues in Paris, who were well informed of developments in Göttingen. Alexander von Humboldt, who studied at Göttingen in 1789-91, visited Jefferson in Washington after his South America expedition (1799-1804). Von Humboldt held Göttingen in great esteem and later stated that he had received “the more noble part” of his education at “the famous university of Göttingen.”

Why these new ethnological ideas took root in North America earlier than in France or Britain is open to debate. But it is clear that there was a strong and continuous ethnographic tradition in the German-speaking countries, which did not pass unnoticed elsewhere. And it may well be that circumstances in the United States in the early nineteenth century more closely resembled those in Russia seventy years earlier than those in early-nineteenth-century France and Britain colonizing overseas.

## References

- Barton, Benjamin Smith. 1959 [orig. 1803]. *Ethnological Information Desired*. In Reuben G. Thwaites, ed., Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804-1806. New York: Antiquarian Press, vol. 7, 283-287.
- Blanckaert, Claude. 1988. *On the Origins of French Ethnology: William Edwards and the Doctrine of Race*. In George W. Stocking, Jr., ed., Bones, Bodies, Behavior: Essays on Biological Anthropology. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 18-55.
- Bucher, Gudrun. 2002. "Von Beschreibung der Sitten und Gebräuche der Völcker." Die Instruktionen Gerhard Friedrich Müllers und ihre Bedeutung für die Geschichte der Ethnologie und der Geschichtswissenschaft. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.
- Chavannes, Alexandre-César. 1787. Essai sur l'éducation intellectuelle avec le Projet d'une science nouvelle. Lausanne: Isaac Hignou.
- Chinard, Gilbert. 1943. *Jefferson and the American Philosophical Society*. Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 87: 263-276.
- Eigen, Sara and Mark Larrimore, eds. 2006. The German Invention of Race. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Gray, Edward G. 1999. New World Babel: Languages and Nations in Early America. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hallowell, A. Irving. 1960. *The Beginnings of Anthropology in America*. In Frederica de Laguna, ed., Selected Papers from the American Anthropologist, 1888-1920. New York: Row, Peterson & Co., 1-90.
- Hintzsche, W. and Th. Nickol, eds. 1996. Die Grosse Nordische Expedition: Georg Wilhelm Steller (1709-1746), ein Lutheraner erforscht Sibirien und Alaska. Gotha: Justus Perthes Verlag.
- Jefferson, Thomas et al. 1799. *Circular Letter*. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 4, xxxvii-xxxix.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1962 [1803]. *Letter to Benjamin Smith Barton, 27 February 1803*. In Donald Jackson, ed., Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, with Related Documents, 1783-1854. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 16-17.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1962 [1803]. *Jefferson's Instructions to Meriwether Lewis, 20 June 1803*. In Jackson, ed., Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 61-67.
- Kollár, Adam Frantisek. 1783. Historiae iurisque publici Regni Ungariae amoenitates [Amenities of the History and Constitutional Law of the Kingdom of Hungary.] 2 vols. Vindobonae, typis a Baumeisterianis.
- Müller, Gerhard Friedrich. 1900 [1740]. *Instruktion G.F. Müller's für den Akademiker-Adjuncten J.E. Fischer: 'Unterricht, was bey Beschreibung der Völker, absonderlich der Sibirischen in acht zu nehmen'*. In Fr. Russow, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der ethnographischen und anthropologischen Sammlungen der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu St.-Petersburg*. Sbornik muzeia po antropologii i etnografii poi Imperatorskii Akademii Nauk'/Publications du musée d'anthropologie et d'ethnographie de l'Académie impériale des sciences de St.-Pétersbourg, vol. 1, St.-Pétersbourg, 37-83, 84-109.
- Patterson, Thomas S. 2001. A Social History of Anthropology in the United States. Oxford/New York: Berg.
- Penny, H. Glenn. 2002. Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Penny, H. Glenn and Matti Bunzl, eds. 2003. Worldly Provincialism: German Anthropology in the Age of Empire. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

- Schlözer, August Ludwig. 1771. Allgemeine Nordische Geschichte [Allgemeine Welthistorie XXXI]. Halle: J.J. Gebauer.
- Vermeulen, Han F. 1992. The Emergence of 'Ethnography' ca. 1770 in Göttingen. History of Anthropology Newsletter XIX (2): 6-9.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1995. Origins and Institutionalization of Ethnography and Ethnology in Europe and the USA, 1771-1845. In Han F. Vermeulen and Arturo Alvarez Roldán eds., Fieldwork and Footnotes: Studies in the History of European Anthropology. London: Routledge, 39-59.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996. Taal-, land- en volkenkunde in de achttiende eeuw. Leiden: Oosters Genootschap in Nederland, No. 23.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1999. Anthropology in Colonial Contexts: The Second Kamchatka Expedition (1733-1743) and the Danish-German Arabia Expedition (1761-1767). In Jan van Bremen and Akitoshi Shimizu, eds. Anthropology and Colonialism in Asia and Oceania. Richmond: Curzon Press, 13-39.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2006. The German Invention of Völkerkunde: Ethnological Discourse in Europe and Asia, 1740-1798. In Eigen and Larrimore, eds., The German Invention of Race, 123-145.
- Webster, Noah. 1828. An American Dictionary of the English Language. 2 vols. New York: Harper.
- Zammito, John H. 2002. Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Zimmerman, Andrew. 2001. Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

## **'DOING ANTHROPOLOGY IN WAR ZONES': INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES ON ANTHROPOLOGY IN WARTIME**

Andrew Evans  
SUNY New Paltz

Despite the explosion of work in the history of anthropology over the last several decades, one area that still remains relatively unexplored is the connection between war and the anthropological disciplines. The recent conference, "Doing Anthropology in Wartime and War Zones," held in Tübingen, Germany on Dec. 7-9, 2006, addressed this topic and raised questions that will undoubtedly energize future research. The symposium was jointly sponsored by the Collaborative Research Center on War Experiences, as well as the Ludwig-Uhland-Institut für Empirische Kulturwissenschaft, both at the Eberhard Karl University in Tübingen. The central theme of the Tübingen Research Center is the experience of the First World War, and many— but not all— of the papers at the symposium dealt with this subject. The conference was truly international and interdisciplinary, with scholars from Germany, Austria, Russia, and the United States offering contributions from the fields of history, anthropology, art history, and science studies. Participants met in the beautiful Fuerstenzimmer (Princes' room) of the old Tübingen castle.

In his opening comments, Reinhard Johler (Tübingen) observed that the First World War has generally been ignored in the history of the anthropological disciplines, even though the War created a series of new spaces— discursive, material, ideological— in which anthropologists worked. Johler laid out the questions that framed the conference's deliberations. What were the connections between war and anthropology in the nineteenth