

Anthropology in Oklahoma

By ROBERT E. BELL and WILLIAM E. BITTLE

ANTHROPOLOGY is literally the study of man. Its methods are many, the range of activities of its students are diverse, and the theoretical studies within the field are varied. In the course of a year, one finds anthropologists digging in the Middle East, or along a minor tributary of the Missouri, studying the Navajo world view, examining the shattered fragments of a fossil skull, learning the mechanics of an unimportant Indian language, deciphering a series of Maya pictographs, measuring the growth of school children in a large urban center, or detailing the treatment of the aged in a society of which one has probably never heard. The few releases to the press which tell of such activities more frequently announce the discovery of a lower level cache in a Middle-American pyramid than the results of an analysis of Delaware systems of kinship groupings—an investigation which would throw light on the resistance of the tribe to Indian Service land programs. These reports but sample the differing researches undertaken by contemporary anthropologists, and do little more than present a few isolated and disconnected data of the discipline; yet they show why the general public conceives of anthropology as an esoteric and impractical discipline.

Despite its extreme heterogeneity, anthropology stands as a unified science. Its many general activities, so distinct in their immediate ends, and so disparate in their techniques, are knit together in the common concern of the anthropologist with culture.

This crucial concept, enunciated in much its present form in the mid-nineteenth century, is given perhaps most simply by Tylor, who writes: "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." Thus, culture is conceived of as an all-inclusive complex, encompassing those common modes of behavior and belief which characterize the members of an organized human aggregate—a society. The importance of this concept as an orienting interpretation can-

not be over-emphasized. In areas so apparently remote from human behavior as organic evolution, we find the notion of culture a necessary consideration.

Similarly, in all of the other activities engaged in by anthropologists, this crucial concept appears as central. The archaeologist's classification of human artifacts, or products of human workmanship, has ultimately as its aim not the establishing, for purely academic purposes, of sterile categories, but instead the providing of a systematically organized body of data in which evidences of the course of human development may be sought. The modest potsherd, occurring as a single example in a dusty Arkansas river site, may establish the fact of trade relations between one group of prehistoric peoples and another, and set the context for the comprehension of a multitude of technological changes in subsequent developments of that particular culture.

The historic change in type of artifact itself reflects a change in culture. For a change in type is a change in mode of manufacture, and this mode is most certainly one of Tylor's "capabilities and habits." Change cannot, as Wissler imagined, be conceived of in terms of cultural need, and the availability of improved methods, but must instead be examined against the total background of culture. And thus, with these sequences in types of artifacts, the total fabric of culture is slowly made to emerge, and provides more satisfactory explanation for such subsequent culture change.

An example more familiar to us might be the following. American history is, for the most part, quite incomprehensible without reference to European history, and ultimately to world history. It appears, further, that the more detailed the European background, the more exact the representation of the history of this nation. Thus, when the motives of Napoleon are examined, the sale of the Louisiana Territory is seen as an attempt by France to disrupt an upstart country.

But by far the most frequent concern of anthropologists is the study of primitive,

or better, pre-literate, peoples. This is reflected well in the stereotyped professional worker, whose office is filled with African shields, katchina dolls from the Hopi, baskets, drums, beaded pieces, and above all, files of dusty notes on the burial customs and daily diet of one obscure tribe or another. The same professional is, similarly, rarely at a loss in conversation, citing freely from the literature on the Manus or the Ba-Ila to bolster a point in discussion. Why, one may ask, are anthropologists so monomaniacally obsessed with pre-literate peoples, and to what possible use may such studies be put in other disciplines, or more practically, to the solution of the pressing problems of the modern world?

AS WE HAVE SEEN, anthropology is concerned above all with human behavior; and human behavior is a wonderfully complex, varied, and subtle thing, tempting study, yet resistant to it. The nature of the anthropologist's problem disallows, at the outset, the traditional laboratory methods of the physical or biological scientist, for the human is perhaps the most refractory of all experimental animals. The problem which faces us, then, is the determination and utilization of a kind of "natural" laboratory, and this laboratory is the field—where the society is found. The field is not, of course, limited; it may be a large urban center in the Midwestern United States, or a remote island in the Indian Ocean. But the remote island in the Indian Ocean, or less fancifully, the small community of rural Indians in Oklahoma, provides a number of advantages to the large urban center, not the least of which is the factor of its small population. In basic research, the simplest possible case is the first to be considered; and it is the small community or tribe which anthropologists conceive to be the simplest case.

In studies based on such small communities, wherein the various relationships between political groupings, social arrangements, and religious and magical techniques are relatively transparent, the anthropologist obtains information on system which he is able to generalize for all human behavior. There is not, in short, a

difference in kind between the small community and the large one, but rather a difference in complexity. One does not encounter the problem which confronts the theorist, whose systems, derived frequently from the behavior of animals, are not without modification applicable to human learning. For human behavior, and the constructions of human societies, everywhere share many features in common; though in detail, variation may seem near infinite. It is this latter point we may address with profit.

The recognition of this similarity between human groups gave rise in the nineteenth century to one of the typical errors of the social evolutionists who assumed for mankind a homogeneity of culture process. To the human mind were attributed certain basic ideas, which, given the appropriate context, manifested themselves in one or another social stage. Nineteenth century European society was seen as exhibiting the apex of social development, both in degree of complexity and in degree of perfection. Thus, monogamy, the capitalist system, Protestantism, and something called a democratic government, were conceived of as characteristics. The way of life in Europe was literally *the* way of life, rather than one of a variety of ways of life. But as materials were gathered from societies in other parts of the world, it came to be realized that for any given problem which the members of a society face, a host of solutions may be equally effective. The details of organization need not be the same universally. And whereas monogamy provided an adequate solution for the regulation of marital affairs in England, in another society, where hunting and gathering predominated as the means for exploiting the environment, polygamy was more suitable.

It is in this way that the anthropologist has contributed. Simply put, the viewpoint of the discipline is a relativistic one. The specific form of institutions in any society is comprehensible only in terms of the total

culture. What appears to us at the moment to be the only reasonable solution to a problem, may well be ineffective in another society which does not share the totality of our problems. The notion of cultural relativism, based upon the comparison of details from a number of cultures, has provided anthropology with one of its chief vehicles for research into our own society, as well as one of its most potent weapons in the fight against irrational beliefs in one's own ethnic group as the center of culture.

THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA provides one of the most complete laboratories for anthropology to be found north of the Rio Grande. Some thirty-five tribes are represented here, as diverse in culture as any people who ever occupied the continent. The problems which confront them, in a situation where they are submerged by an effectively alien culture, are manifold, and for the most part, unknown. The types of adjustments which they have made, and are daily making, can only be imagined. Many of these people still participate to a large extent in the old modes of behavior, dating back, with little modification, to the time before the frontier crossed the Mississippi.

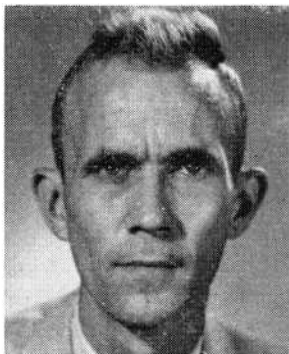
The need for basic research is great, and the materials are available. The historic changes in the family structure of various Indian groups and the attendant changes in other aspects of their culture have implications for an understanding of the changing family structure in our own society. Work has been in progress at the University for some years now on one aspect of this problem; and it is hoped that this project may be continued and expanded, and exploited for whatever information it can provide.

Similarly, an exhaustive study of the ways in which the local tribes have adjusted to the dominant Anglo culture is imperative. We have in the State "acculturation in progress." There are none of the problems which face the anthropologist

who hopes to reconstruct the past from the fragments of the present. We have the past with us. We can literally, therefore, follow the people about from day to day and evolve a clear picture of their adjustment. Such information has not only great importance for Indian policy in this State and others, but it has crucial importance for United States policy abroad, in the underdeveloped areas of the world. The minimal success with which such programs as Point Four have met attests to the accuracy of the warning by anthropologists that the introduction of new technological devices, and the encouragement of more effective methods of exploitation of the environment could not be undertaken without a full realization of the importance of the cultural context. No aspect of culture, however basic it may seem, can be considered *in vacuo*. Methods may be made available which would increase the productivity of the land, but the inertia of traditional cultural values may well resist such change. Often, the simple recognition of the importance of moon phases in the local agricultural cycle will mean the difference between success and failure. Contemporary agricultural methods are relatively facile, and a planting or harvesting delay of a few weeks, though objectively unimportant, may be crucially important to the local farmer.

These cultural differences, reflected most evidently in what appear as irrational biases, seem evident. But they are evident only when they have been detected and interpreted in the situational context. We may consider an example taken from the Oklahoma groups.

When the allotments in severalty were made to the various Western tribes, members of the Kiowa-Apache and Wichita tribes (among many others) found themselves in possession of 160 acres of land. Historically, the Kiowa-Apache (affiliated for a long time with the Kiowa) participated in the hunting economy of the Plains tribes. Agriculture had not been practiced



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

"*Prehistoric Oklahomans*," in the April issue (1952) was the first contribution to the Quarterly by Dr. Robert E. Bell, Chairman of the Department of Anthropology. Mr. William E. Bittle joined the staff of the department as an instructor in 1952. Linguistic and cultural methodology is his field of major graduate interest. He has published "Language and Culture: A Comment on Voegelin's View" (Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, VIII, 1952), and "Language and Culture Areas: A Note on Method" (Philosophy of Science, XX, 1953). Oklahoma is a very important area for anthropological study, and the Quarterly is very glad to publish this survey.



by this group historically, and yet the Indian Service had presented them with land more or less well adapted to tillage. Throughout this century, the majority of the Kiowa-Apache, as well as members of most of the other Plains tribes, have eschewed farming, and have by now developed a leasing system, whereby their land is rented out to local Anglo farmers for several year periods.

The Wichita, on the other hand, aboriginally practiced agriculture. But their adjustment to farming in contemporary times is little better than that of the Plains tribes. To a society where the division of labor designates to the male the job of farming, the Wichita, who traditionally designated farming to the women, have difficulty adjusting. Their apathy toward farming, as well as that of the Kiowa-Apache, is usually attributed to laziness or lack of initiative. But in the context of old and well-established patterns, this apathy appears not as unwillingness to exploit the earth, but rather as an inability to accept the patterns of exploitation thrust upon them by a dominant group. As before, this problem might easily have been handled, had the conception of the division of labor been taken into account. The Plains tribes, even, to whom agriculture was a novelty (to some a degenerate novelty) could, with little difficulty, have been drawn into an agricultural orbit.

But it should not be assumed that the applications of anthropology are most effective only in economics. The difficult problems which face the social services in the State, in dealing both with urban and rural populations, as well as minority group members, can in part be lessened by background information on the peoples with whom they work. Perhaps one of the most dramatic examples of such difficulties is to be found in the problem of hospitalization. Where we are inclined to seek medical care as an almost automatic response to illness, there is noticeable among many Indian groups a great reluctance to seek such care. This reluctance, in certain cases, reaches the point of absolute refusal, attended by feelings that hospitalization is tantamount to death. It is not enough that the social worker should indicate the need for hospitalization. For this indication is meaningless to the individual whose notions of curing vary altogether from our own, and whose knowledge of Anglo methods gives rise only to skepticism.

As an example, we might cite a case which developed among the Navajo. The Indian Service hospital had found great difficulty in bringing ailing persons in to receive treatment. In some instances, main force was resorted to, when the case was

critical. The advice of an anthropologist, who had worked extensively with the people was sought, and he indicated the following with regard to the Navajo viewpoint. In distinct contrast to the Western tradition, the Navajos do not conceive of a fundamental contradiction between mind and body. To them, as indeed to many other groups of people, the human organism is an integrated whole, the several parts being inseparable. This view is but a component of a wider view: that the human being is a part of a wider order, which is encompassed by the Navajo universe. Illness or disease in the human organism is conceived of as disorder in the world. Thus, any specific treatment of the individual is irrelevant and useless. In order to provide relief for physical illness, it is necessary first of all to remove the cause for the illness, and to restore the unity of things; and this involves not the removal of viruses from the system, but rather the ceremonial re-integration of the individual into the world from which, for one reason or another, he has become separate. Thus, the Navajo, to whom various drugs are administered, was for his part not being treated at all. The Navajo method of curing involved the treatment of the entire organism, and was cast in the context of world re-integration or renewal. Ceremonials were held, extending over several nights; and during these rituals, the individual was identified with various of the deities and symbolically was re-incorporated with these deities. The psychological aspects of the treatment were invariably more impressive than the physiological aspects, the latter, in our own case, receiving the greatest attention.

Here we note, in dramatic form, the varying responses or adjustments to the situations which are objectively the same. But the fact of objective similarity, as we noted earlier, is not important. What the anthropologist seeks to determine is the conception of the situation as conceived by the people themselves. And once this conception has been determined, then the transition from one way of life to another, the rejection of one set of values and the adoption of another, can be made less painfully and more completely.

PERHAPS ONE of the most important problems of anthropology in Oklahoma is that which concerns the research plans and needs at the University.

By way of basic research, the collection of information on the cultures which have become nearly extinct is important. For purposes of establishing historical connections between various tribes, it is imperative that such materials be assembled. Despite the many years of collecting which

have preceded us, there are amazing gaps in our data. One reason, of course, is found in the eclectic approach of many earlier travelers and missionaries, whose interests were narrative rather than scientific. Such materials, as we need, will also provide us with the all-important historical context, in terms of which contemporary change must be discussed.

In linguistics, we find very much the same problem. The necessity for assembling materials on language is as great as that for assembling cultural materials. A framework, which it is hoped will provide a useful vehicle for the collection and analysis of linguistic materials, is the Linguistic Survey of Oklahoma, founded here last year. One of the initial steps in the program outlined by the Survey is a perusal of the literature available on Oklahoma languages, and the preparation of a current bibliography which will serve as a guide for research. Many interesting problems of the relationships between language and culture depend, for their solution, on adequate data on both of these phenomena for all tribes in the State.

In the past few years, there have been several major projects, most still in progress, undertaken by members of the faculty. Two of these are concerned with historic changes in the kinship structures of the Caddoan and Southern Siouan peoples. The problem revolves around the specific changes which have occurred in the kinship systems, particularly in terms of the differential cultural contexts of the several tribes studied. This is an elaborate comparative study which has thus far included, for the Caddoan peoples, work on the Wichita (already published), the Pawnee and the Caddo proper, as well as the North Dakota Arikara; for the Southern Siouan peoples, work on the Quapaw, Omaha, Osage, Ponca, Otoe, and Iowa.

In addition to the kinship studies, major research is in progress dealing with the development of the peyote church in Oklahoma. In this latter work, the various forms of the church are being correlated with the cultural contexts into which they have been adopted, and efforts are being made to account for the movement of the ritual from its place of origin in Mexico. This, too, is fundamentally a problem in culture change, which must of necessity rely upon historical documents as well as materials gleaned from contemporary members of the cult.

An extensive program of archaeological work is at present being conducted in the State. Many of the reclamation programs proposed by the Federal Government threaten important sites within Oklahoma, and there is a pressing need to at least

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Joseph Quincy Snyder. Dissertation—"Preparation and Characterization of Heterocyclic Ketimines." Directed by Associate Professor Porter Louis Pickard.

Percival A. Wesche. Dissertation—"The Life, Theology, and Influence of Henry Clay Morrison." Directed by Associate Professor John Samuel Ezell.

Maxwell Jeffers Wilcomb, Jr. Dissertation—"A Study of Prairie Dog Burrow Systems and the Ecology of Their Arthropod Inhabitants in Central Oklahoma." Directed by Assistant Professor Cluff Hopla.

Randolph Orville Yeager. Dissertation—"Indian Enterprises of Isaac McCoy, 1817-1846." Directed by Professor Asa Kyrus Christian.

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sample such sites before they are lost altogether. A great number have already been excavated, but these represent but a few of the sites which still remain untouched.

This is but a sampling of the work now being conducted, and represents only the major projects. There are, in addition, of course, researches of smaller scope on which the departmental members and students are working.

In terms of programs with other departments in the University, joint plans are just now being made. In the graduate program, interdepartmental seminars are being prepared, and a variety of students in the several departments in social science are taking work in other departments of the same branch. This co-operation is, to some extent, being reflected in the undergraduate curriculum. It is hoped that the techniques of such fields as psychology, sociology, and geography may be applied in joint efforts, which will produce far more significant results than can be obtained by a single discipline. With an increasing awareness on the part of the people of the State of the contributions of anthropology, and other social sciences, perhaps these co-operative programs are not too far in the future.

... *Oklahoma University*

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Spell it as they would, the school was making progress in the University Building.

Dr. L. Haynes Buxton, M.D., brother of Professor Buxton, invested and lost in the ill-fated effort to establish Oklahoma University. In the spring and summer of 1894 his announcement of practice, appearing in local papers, showed his residence as "the University Building, Harrison Avenue." He may have been living there as a way of recovering some of his financial loss. He was later Territorial Superintendent of Health, and continued his practice in Oklahoma City.

On November 8, 1894, appeared a news item that the Territory of Oklahoma had leased the "Buxton University Building" for the coming session of the legislature. It is probable that only one session was held in the building.

Through 1893 and the early part of 1894 the Guthrie Board of Trade strove to salvage part of its investment, having inherited the mortgage on the building. In January, 1894, the property was sold for \$1,000, this amount being credited to the "museum fund." This covered part of the interest due on the loan. After changing ownership through individual hands, the property was sold to Logan County in 1896. The former University building was used as a county court house for more than a decade. Then county bonds were voted and money made available to erect a new court house, the short-lived but historic University Building being razed to make place for the present Logan County Court House, on the same site and facing in the same direction as the "Buxton University Building."

The building fared much better than did the man who envisioned Oklahoma University. Evidently he sincerely believed, as did other loyal Guthrie boosters, that an early start would insure a fair share of college attendance. But, as the school struggled awhile for existence, he spent his time in and out of jail, rather hopelessly fighting the charges brought against him. Transferred from Topeka to Guthrie, "The trial of Professor Buxton began late this afternoon (March 4, 1893) in Commissioner Boles Court. The defense waived examination and Prof. Buxton is placed under \$15,000 bond." Early in June, availing himself of a writ of habeas corpus, he appeared again in district court. It seems that he had been in jail through the spring months. A demurrer to the fourteen points was sustained, the court ruling that no offense against the United States had been

established. However, Judge Green, on motion of the federal attorney, held the defendant for trial at the September term of the Federal Court. The new bail of \$1,000 was too much for the college president and he was remanded to jail. A news story includes the significant observation that, "The appearance of Professor Buxton showed that prison life this hot weather is showing on him."

He was finally legally cleared of any wrongdoing in promoting Oklahoma University, and Mr. Wenner remembers that the judge scored the publishing company and the federal marshal for their part in the case. Broken financially, as well as in health and spirit, the disappointed minister and educator moved "out west" where he spent his remaining years.

Oklahoma University is only one of several Oklahoma colleges that began bravely and hopefully, struggled awhile, and then succumbed, moved to another location, or merged with another institution. The University of Oklahoma entered its first building in September, 1893, and has grown steadily into what we now lovingly and proudly call "OU," even though it is not and never has been Oklahoma University.

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