European Ethnology and American Anthropology

In offering these observations on European Ethnology and American Anthropology as a portion of a festschrift for Professor Sigurd Erixon, it would seem quite appropriate to begin with various comments by Professor Erixon, himself, in his paper, "European Ethnology in Our Time", the lead-article in the first number of this new journal.

As Erixon properly noted, discussion of any such topic must include consideration of its context, which includes not only various associated contemporary manifestations but an examination of antecedent developments as well. It is relevant here to recall Smith's reminder that "The study of culture is itself a culture. Anthropology itself is a learned and patterned way of life of a group of people. ... Anthropology also has a history." The trends and currents of the past are indeed fundamental to a better understanding of the variations and discrepancies characterizing the types of activities and interpretations now found in ethnological research on Europe.

One of the most formidable barriers to facilitating effective communication in the pursuit of a comprehensive mastery of European ethnology on a broad topical front may well be encountered in the very thorny problems of terminology. Quite conceivably, trouble would be experienced at the very outset in terms of the precise designation of the academic discipline or sub-discipline within which a specific researcher works. There appears to be virtually no inclination to reconcile the gross differences in these traditional designations of the major fields as followed in the European countries and in the United States, as the paper by Erixon described. Precedents and traditions enduring throughout a considerable span of time have created an imposing maze of ambiguities and contradictions, with a number of lacunae still obvious, and often embarrassingly, present.

It is indeed tempting to ponder the rewards of such an initial task as the establishment of a uniform terminology under the auspices of this journal. However, reality forces the recognition of the high probability of reactions from academic concerns and traditions outside ethnology which would undoubtedly mean strong resistance to, or at least the ignoring of, such overtures; similarly discouraging reactions could be expected from within ethnology, itself. Consequently, it appears far more practical to strive now for more effective communication and more fruitful

1. With the constantly expanding volume of scientific literature, the announcement of a new journal evokes rather mixed emotions. On the one hand, the prospect of adding to an already overwhelming body of data is resented, often with an accompanying advocacy of greater attention to quality; in contrast, however, is the real satisfaction over a tangible manifestation of interest in and growth of yet another facet of knowledge. As data accumulate and sub-areas of specialization emerge, there is often justification for new journals which provide improved opportunities for communication among potential colleagues. While numerous scholars, probably many more than is commonly believed, have been interested in European ethnology, their efforts have tended to be diffused, with communication among them suffering accordingly. The prospects for more significant collaboration through the pages of Ethnologia Europaea are indeed exciting; for a facet of research much too neglected thus far, this journal could well mean the marshaling of vigorous research activities resulting in valuable insights and perspectives in the study of human behavior, cultural variation, and cultural change.


4. Erixon, op. cit.
collaboration among the interested scholars through means other than a standardized terminology.

What is studied and how it is studied would seem to be much more rewarding concerns than does the precise academic endeavor under which a study is conducted. In this regard, it would appear highly beneficial if the study of European ethnology approximated, in conceptualization and in methodology, certain characteristics and qualities found in present-day American anthropology. A number of these characteristics and qualities were noted by Erxen; a useful beginning might well be made in transferring the broadly inclusive approach that Erxen recognized in general ethnology to European ethnology — the only significant difference being the spatial limitations of the latter. Similarly, general, or, henceforth in this discussion, European ethnology could be further equated with the comprehensive approach of general anthropology, or, in essence, American anthropology.

Conceived in this manner, European ethnology should ideally embrace, with no warranted protest, the various specialties relevant to the study of culture, or human behavior. This coverage should be applied to all of Europe and also to peripheral areas, where consideration of these is necessary to complete the perspective or to appraise accurately particular phases of culture history, throughout the gamut of written records and perhaps earlier. The relevant data would obviously become more plentiful and richer in detail as the present time is approached.

Leaving various specialties to individuals so inclined, the total effort of all those scholars working under the heading of European ethnology could benefit greatly from the tremendous range of variation in European cultural patterns (a feature, to be sure, duplicated or parallel in several other areas of the world) and the rich depth of documentary data (virtually unmatched elsewhere in the world). The data from these combined gamuts of space and time give firm promise of sampling instances which will contribute significantly to the fund of knowledge on the nature of culture and on cultural processes.

This richness, in the not too distant future, will provide the type of basis which Kluckhohn ascribed some years ago to the American Southwest. Consequently, as in the case of the Southwest, European ethnology would be in such a position that scholars could deal with problems of process, which Kluckhohn described as "genuinely scientific questions." This situation would be a far more valuable achievement than would be the mere amassing of additional, haphazard descriptive data, important as these undoubtedly are. Both in variety of manifestations and in chronological depth of written records, Europe, as an area, far exceeds the American Southwest (or, indeed, most of the world's cultural areas). With some encouragement, hopefully supplied by the creation and continuation of this journal, there is good reason to expect that the number of interested scholars in various phases of research could easily approach, or even surpass, the appreciable number of scholars concerned with the American Southwest. As data accumulate, the need for greater insights for better understanding and the need for increasingly refined methods and controls will constitute stimulating challenges to many researchers. As in the American Southwest, or in other frequently studied areas, there is no foreseeable exhaustion of legitimate and rewarding research projects or problems. A relatively unexploited frontier of cultural research, internal in nature, awaits the concerted effort of sophisticated, imaginative, and vigorous scholars in a situation rather reminiscent of that which precipitated the founding several years ago of the American Society for Ethnology.

Acculturation studies have tended to concentrate upon the contacts between the advanced technological societies of Europe and America and the so-called underdeveloped areas of the world. There are ample opportunities to do equally valid and significant studies in the ethnographical phases of European ethnology. Similarly, numerous instances are available to provide valuable data for further insights in such topics as the innovative process; the role of artisans and other specialists in a culture; the nature and function of leadership, either in terms of hereditary royalty or nobility or in terms of those who have attained positions of prominence or influence despite their origins in the masses of common people. Opportunities to study the closely associated topics of enculturation, social stratification, and social mobility are unlimited.

Data on the influences and ramifications of population genetics as well as other aspects of demographic studies are present in many contexts throughout the area and, in more restricted fashion, in time.

Diaries, journals, and a wealth of less personal documentation, such as public records of both church and municipality, all give promise of a richness and depth in detail that is simply impossible to find in the non-literate, or only recently literate, world. Added to the more conventional forms of culture-personality investigations, these sources again amount to a great wealth of information for the researchers to probe and analyze.

The European area further provides a variety of excellent opportunities to investigate, through more than two millennia, the ongoing interaction between a Great Tradition (or several) and innumerable Little Traditions, as these have been conceived by Redfield and others.

Language and culture studies, in terms of the more conventionally recognized major languages and the far more numerous dialects, afford a variety of instances for further testing and refining such topics as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, glottochronology, componential analysis, and other concerns of the linguists.

Studies of human groups, i.e., communities, of various systems of cultural

Walfischfängerkommandeur Peter Lohrens und Albrecht Dürer's „Underweysung“
Aufriss und Symbolik der Eichenholzschachtel von 1687

Unter den Schätzzen des Städtischen Museums in Flensburg befindet sich eine große, runde Schachtel. Ihr Eichenholzdeckel ist reich geschnitzt und mit einem stilisierten Zweig versehen. In der Mitte des Deckels befindet sich ein Relief der Fischerei. Unter der Schachtel befindet sich eine Gruppe von Fischen, die in Bewegung sind.

I. AUFRISS DES EICHENHOLZDECKELS

