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General Anthropology

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PREFACE

Anthropology covers such a wide scope of subjects that it is difficult for one person to be equally conversant with all its aspects. For this reason coöperation of a group of students, most of whom have worked in close contact for many years, seemed a justifiable solution of the task of preparing a general book on anthropology. Thus a greater number of viewpoints could be assembled, and the unavoidable divergence in the handling of diverse problems by a number of authors is, we hope, offset by the advantage of having the special points of view in which each author is interested brought out.

The necessity of limiting the book to a certain compass has compelled us to treat a number of problems rather briefly. Thus the relation of personality to culture, education, acculturation, the historical development of anthropological theory, have been only lightly touched.

The editor wishes to express his thanks to his collaborators.

FRANZ BOAS

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGES

INTRODUCTION, by Franz Boas 1–6

Subject matter: History of mankind, 1 — Methods: Archaeology, 1 — Methods: Comparative, 2 — Limitations of comparative method, 3 — Problems of laws of historic development, 3 — Historic sequences, 3 — Dynamics of change, 4 — Problems of anthropology, 4 — Aspects of culture: Man and nature, 4 — Man and man, 4 — Subjective aspects, 5 — Interrelations between the various aspects of social life, 5 — Descriptive anthropology, 5 — Anthropology, history, and sociology, 5 — Purpose of book, 6.

I. GEOLOGICAL AND BIOLOGICAL PREMISES 7–23

Geological Premises, by N. C. Nelson 7–16

Geological background, 7 — Divisions of the Cenozoic era, 9 — Subdivisions of the Pleistocene epoch, 9 — Glacial moraines, 11 — Pluvial and interpluvial evidence, 12 — Valley terraces and marine shore terraces, 12 — Absolute chronology of the Holocene epoch, 15.

Biological Premises, by Franz Boas 16–23

Description of species, 16 — Heredity, 16 — Selection, 19 — Environment, 20 — Origin of species, 20 — Footnotes, 22.

II. HUMAN ORIGINS AND EARLY MAN, by James H. McGregor . . . 24–94

Primates, 25 — Australopithecus africanus (the Taungs ape), 28 — Man and apes, 31 — Origin of the human branch, 38 — Man, 42 — Types of man, 43 — Pithecanthropus erectus (Ape-man of Java), 44 — Homo modjokertensis, 50 — Sinanthropus pekinensis (Peking man), 51 — Eoanthropus dawsoni (Piltdown man), 56 — Homo heidelbergensis, (Heidelberg man), 60 — Homo neanderthalensis (Neanderthal man), 61 — Homo sapiens, 74 — The "Grimaldi race," 79 — Cro-Magnon man, 81 — Rhodesian man, 87 — Footnotes, 91 — General references, 94.

III. RACE, by Franz Boas 95–123

Races and local types, 95 — Variability of local types, 95 — Methods of observations, 95 — Types, 99 — Phenotypes and genotypes, 100 — Generalized types, 101 — Parallel development, 102 — Selection, 103 — Environmental changes, 103 — Population and race, 104 — Local races, 105 — Mixture, 106 — Isolation, 107 — Domestication, 108 — Internal secretions, 110 — Races of man, 111 — Theories of the origin of modern races, 116 — Racial physiology and psychology, 117 — Eugenics, 121 — Footnotes, 122 — General references, 123.

IV. LANGUAGE, by Franz Boas 124–145

General characteristics of language, 124 — Communication between animals, 124 — Categories of classification, 126 — Phonetics, 127

CHAPTER PAGES

— Selection of material used for expression, 128 — Sound symbolism, 132 — Grammar, 132 — Grammatical processes, 133 — History of languages, 134 — Linguistic families, 135 — Mixed languages, 136 — Independent origin of similar grammatical processes, 138 — Distribution of languages, 139 — Culture and speech, 141 — Footnotes, 144 — General references, 145

V. Prehistoric Archaeology, by N. C. Nelson 146–237

Definition, 146 — Problems of prehistoric archaeology, 148 — Methods, 148 — Achieved results, 149 — Technological evolution of material culture traits, 150 — Stone-flaking process, 152 — Stone-chipping process, 157 — Stone-pecking and grinding processes, 160 — Stone-chiseling, sawing, and drilling processes, 162 — Bone and wood-working industries, 164 — Metal industries, 167 — The Eolithic phase, 170 — The Paleolithic industries, 172 — Development of archaeology in Africa, 196 — Southern Asia, 199 — Central Asia, 200 — Northern Asia, 200 — Indonesia, 201 — Australia and Tasmania, 202 — Melanesia, 203 — Micronesia, 204 — Polynesia, 204 — Oceanian-American connections, 208 — America, 212 — General world considerations, 216 — General conclusions, 230 — Footnotes, 235 — General references, 237.

VI. Invention, by Franz Boas 238–281

Discovery and invention, 238 — Fire and cooking, 239 — Mechanical principles, 241 — Mechanical principles used in implements, 243 — Compound implements, 250 — Search for materials, 251 — Stone, 252 — Wood, 253 — Food, 253 — Intoxicants and narcotics, 255 — Medicine and poison, 255 — Preparation of skins, 255 — Bark cloth, 256 — Basketry and mat weaving, 256 — Spinning, 258 — Weaving, 258 — Sewing, 258 — Pottery, 259 — Metal work, 260 — Application of inventions, 261 — Devices for obtaining food, 261 — Protection against attack, 263 — Shelter, 263 — Clothing, 265 — Ornaments, 266 — Transportation, 267 — Games and tricks, 269 — Medicine, 270 — Writing, 271 — Science, 274 — Footnotes, 278 — General references, 281.

VII. Subsistence, by Robert H. Lowie 282–326

General categories, 282 — Appraisal of the hunting stage, 285 — Cultivation, 290 — Domesticated animals, 302 — Pastoral nomadism, 312 — Economic determinism of culture, 318 — Footnotes, 322 — General references, 326.

VIII. The Economic Organization of Primitive Peoples, by Ruth Bunzel 327–408

Introduction, 327 — Value, 331 — Property, 340 — Types of economic structure, 351 — The Zuñi, 351 — The Kwakiutl, 357 — The Trobriand Islands, 361 — Economic mechanisms in primitive cultures, 367 — The division of labor, 369 — Individualism and collectivism in production, 374 — The distribution of wealth, 377 — Kinship claims in the distribution of wealth, 381 — Dowry, 382 — The bride price, 383 — Affinal exchange, 387 — Gifts and hos-

CHAPTER PAGES

pitality, 390 — Intertribal economics, 396 — War, 400 — Footnotes, 404 — General references, 408.

IX. Social Life, by Gladys A. Reichard 409–486

Family organization on different economic levels, 411 — The sib, 414 — Totemism, 426 — Marriage, 430 — Exogamy and endogamy, 431 — Forms of marriage, 431 — Extramarital relations, 435 — Restrictions and preferences, 437 — Betrothal, engagement, wedding, 440 — Divorce, 449 — Kinship terms, 450 — Prestige, 458 — Woman in primitive society, 465 — Education, 470 — Ethics and etiquette, 478 — Footnotes, 483 — General references, 486.

X. Government, by Julius E. Lips 487–534

Food-gatherers and hunters, 491 — Arctic hunters and related tribes, 498 — Harvesters and related tribes, 502 — Indians of the Plains, 512 — Simpler farming societies, 515 — Herdsmen and related societies, 519 — Polynesia, 523 — Conclusion, 525 — Footnotes, 527 — General references, 534.

XI. Art, by Ruth Bunzel 535–588

Antiquity and universality of art, 535 — Esthetic emotion, 536 — The decorative arts, 539 — Problems of form, 540 — General formal principles, 558 — Style, 564 — Symbolism, 576 — Footnotes, 586 — General references, 588.

XII. Literature, Music, and Dance, by Franz Boas 589–608

Literature, 589 — Music, 602 — Dance, 605 — Footnotes, 607.

XIII. Mythology and Folklore, by Franz Boas 609–626

Myth and folk tale, 609 — Mythological concepts, 609 — Origin of tales, 610 — Dissemination of tales, 612 — Origin of elements of tales, 613 — Character of mythological concepts, 614 — Myths, 616 — Effect of individual thought upon mythology, 618 — Esoteric and exoteric mythology, 620 — Relation of mythology to other aspects of culture, 622 — Footnotes, 624 — General references, 626.

XIV. Religion, by Ruth Benedict 627–665

The concept of the supernatural, 628 — Mana—supernatural power as an attribute of objects, 634 — Animism—supernatural power as will and intention, 635 — Techniques of religion, 637 — Behavior toward the personalized universe, 639 — Forms of religious behavior, 642 — Prayer, 642 — Divination, 643 — Sacrifice, 644 — Taboo, 644 — Fetishes and amulets, 645 — Tutelary spirits, 646 — Summary, 647 — Varieties of primitive religions, 647 — Siberia, 648 — The Pueblo Indians of the Southwest, 650 — The Plains Indians, 652 — The Dobuans of Melanesia, 654 — Recurring aspects of the religious complex, 656 — Ceremonialism, 656 — Vision and ecstasy, 658 — Cosmology and belief, 660 — Ethical sanctions, 663 — Footnotes, 664 — General references, 665.

XV. Methods of Research, by Franz Boas 666–686

FIGURES

FIGURES		PAGE
1.	Diagrammatic correlation of Mediterranean and Baltic marine terraces with Alpine glacial phases	15
2.	A tentative phyletic tree of the Primates	27
3.	Skull of *Australopithecus africanus* (the Taungs ape)	30
4.	Left lower molar teeth of anthropoid apes and man to show the fifth cusp, characteristic of the Dryopithecus pattern	33
5.	Median sections of anthropoid ape and human skulls to show extent of frontal and sphenoidal sinuses	34
6.	The *os centrale* of the carpus	35
7.	Skull of *Pithecanthropus erectus*	45
8.	Comparative views of sectioned lower jaws showing the inner surface of the right half	57
9.	Reconstruction of the skeleton of a Neanderthal man	73
10.	Points of measurements of the skull	97
11.	Cross sections of faces	99
12.	Distribution of frequencies of form in fraternities, and distribution of family lines	101
13.	*Os Incae*	108
14.	Elementary flake production	153
15.	Improved flaking of Acheulian-Levalloisian times	156
16.	Precise flaking of Upper Paleolithic and Neolithic times	157
17.	Pressure chipping of Solutrean and Neolithic times	158
18.	Pecking and grinding processes	161
19.	Chiseling and grinding processes	162
20.	Sawing process	163
21.	Drilling processes	164
22.	Eoliths of exceptionally artificial appearance derived (one excepted) from the Pliocene gravels of the Kent Plateau, England	176
23.	Typical Pre-Chellean core and flake implements derived from valley terrace formations of Pleistocene date	176
24.	Typical Chellean core implements derived from valley terrace deposits	176
25.	Typical Acheulian core implements	178
26.	Typical Levalloisian implements	178
27.	Typical Mousterian implements	178
28.	Typical Aurignacian implements, ornaments	180
29.	Typical Solutrean implements, ornaments	182
30.	Typical Magdalenian implements, ornaments	183
31.	Typical Azilian-Tardenoisian-Maglemosian implements	184
32.	Typical Early Neolithic implements	186
33.	Typical Middle and Late Neolithic implements	188
34.	Typical Neolithic (Robenhausian) implements	190
35.	Typical bronze implements	192

FIGURES PAGE
36. Typical implements of the later Iron Age . . . 194
37. Map showing known geographic range of culture stages . . . 220
38. Diagram representing section of the American continent from north to south . . . 224
39. Diagram of a section of the continental world showing the estimated space and time distribution of the successive culture levels . . . 228
40. The fire drill . . . 240
41. Throwing clubs and knives . . . 242
42. Australian boomerangs . . . 243
43. Eskimo throwing board . . . 244
44. Noose trap of the Kwakiutl Indians . . . 245
45. Friction drums . . . 247
46. Musical instrument, New Ireland, and Mexican two-tongued drum . 248
47. Bushman gora player and end of gora . . . 248
48. String instruments . . . 249
49. Types of weaving . . . 256
50. Twilled matting . . . 256
51. Cat's cradles of Eskimo . . . 257
52. Knots used by Eskimo . . . 257
53. Coiled basketry . . . 258
54. Cross section of smelting furnace . . . 260
55. Wolf trap . . . 261
56. Fish basket . . . 262
57. Plan and sections of Eskimo tent . . . 263
58. Menominee hut . . . 264
59. Eskimo snow hut and section . . . 265
60. Suspension bridge of rattan, Celebes . . . 268
61. Dog travois . . . 269
62. Ojibwa picture writing . . . 272
63. Dakota symbols of names . . . 273
64. Pictographic writing of Ibo . . . 273
65. Mexican picture writing . . . 273
66. Nautical map, Marshall Islands . . . 275
67. Maya numerals . . . 276
68. Symbols of numbers, Aztec . . . 276
69. Quipu . . . 277
70. Diagram showing method of squaring sides of a box . . . 278
71. Rawhide box, Sauk and Fox Indians . . . 537
72. Coiled clay water jar, Prehistoric Pueblo . . . 541
73. Wooden mask, Urua, Congo . . . 548
74. Carved house post, Haida . . . 548
75. Canoe prows, New Zealand and Dutch New Guinea . . . 549
76. Prehistoric clay bowl, Arkansas . . . 550
77. Terra cotta head, Yoruba, Africa . . . 550
78. Modeled clay vessels, New Mexico and Costa Rica . . . 551
79. Primitive basketry . . . 555
80. Poncho, Titicaca, Peru . . . 556

FIGURES PAGE
81. Blanket of mountain goat wool, Tlingit, Alaska 559
82. Zuñi medicine altar 559
83. Fringe from legging, Thompson Indians 561
84. Coiled basketry tray, Hopi Indians 562
85. Designs from ancient pottery bowls, Mimbres Valley, New Mexico . . 563
86. Wooden shield, Dyak, Dutch East Indies 563
87. Ancient Pueblo bowl, Hopi 564
88. Diagram of Hopi water jar 564
89. Painted house front representing Thunderbird catching a whale, Kwakiutl Indians 571
90. Carved spoon handles representing beaver, Tlingit Indians 572
91. Painted wooden box, Tlingit Indians 573
92. Haida drawing illustrating a myth 574
93. Tlingit mask representing dying warrior 574
94. Ancient Bushman drawings 580
95. Female Figurine, Baoulé, Ivory Coast and Fetish Representing Antelope, French Sudan 581
96. Feather sticks, Zuñi 582
97. Votive placque, Huichol Indians, Mexico 583

PLATES

I. Skulls of seven Paleolithic types of man 53
II. Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon man: A comparison 75
III. Winged being pollinating sacred tree 292
IV. Casa de las Monjas, Chichen Itzá, Maya, and Maya relief carving . . 544
V. Head of a maize goddess, Copan, Honduras 545
VI. African Negro Mask, Dan Ivory Coast 547
VII. Clay effigy vessel, Chicama, Peru 553
VIII. African pile cloths, and carved wooden bowl 557
IX. Pueblo Indian pottery 565
X. Masks, Sepik River, New Guinea 579

INTRODUCTION

FRANZ BOAS

Subject matter: History of mankind. The science of anthropology deals with the history of human society. It differs from history in the narrower sense of the term in that its inquiries are not confined to the periods for which written records are available and to peoples who had developed the art of writing. Anthropological researches extend over the whole of humanity regardless of time and space. Historical inquiry reaches out hesitatingly beyond the domain of written records. Archaeological and later remains, and survivals of early times that persist in modern culture, are utilized to extend the span of time and to fill in details for which written records are not available. In these inquiries the fields of anthropology and history are in close contact.

Since anthropology deals with mankind as a whole, the problem of the earliest appearance of man and his rise from lower forms, the differentiation of human races, and the development of languages and of cultural forms are included in its field of researches. Every manifestation of human life must be utilized to clear up the march of historical events.

In anthropological research relating to early times and primitive people the individual appears rarely, if ever. For prehistoric times no record of individual activity exists, and the tradition of illiterate peoples gives no clue of considerable value or reliability throwing light upon the influence of individuals upon historical events. In the general history of humanity the individual disappears in the social group to which he belongs. Among illiterate peoples the dynamic processes that shape history must be studied mainly by observation of the living generations.

Methods: Archaeology. It may well be asked whether a history of mankind can be reconstructed when no written records of events are available. Archaeological remains may be placed in chronological order by a study of the sequence of deposits in which they are found. Under favorable conditions, as for instance in Scandinavia, the regularity of deposits permits even a fairly accurate chronological de-

termination of the age of deposits. In other cases also an approximate absolute chronology is made possible by means of geological or other evidence.

Sometimes remains may be dated through affiliation with objects of known age that belong to neighboring cultures for which written records are available. Thus many of the remains of past cultures of Europe have been dated with a fair degree of certainty. The written records of Egypt and western Asia throw light upon the history of contemporaneous European peoples who lacked the art of writing.

Archaeology, however, can do no more than give us a very partial record of the life of man. The earlier the time of deposit and the more unfavorable the climate for the preservation of objects, the more fragmentary will be the remains, for only the most resistant material will outlast the ravages of time. Even under the most favorable conditions only the remains of the material culture of man will be preserved. Nothing pertaining to the intangible aspects of life can be rescued with the help of the spade. Thus we may learn about skeletal types, about implements and utensils used, about the steps in their manufacture; but no information is forthcoming to tell us about languages, customs, and beliefs. These are evanescent, and there would be no way of recovering them if they did not leave traces in the lives of later generations.

Methods: Comparative. The science of linguistics shows most clearly how and to what extent conditions found at the present time may be utilized for reconstructing the past. The written history of some European languages carries us back to periods that lie centuries before our era. Sanskrit is known for even earlier periods. Linguistic science, by comparing the present forms of speech and their known development, has enabled us to reconstruct the history of words and of grammatical forms and to demonstrate that most of the languages of Europe and many of those of western Asia are derived from a common fundamental source which in course of time has given rise by differentiation to the modern languages. The ancient language cannot be reconstructed, but the probable forms of many roots and in part the manner of their grammatical treatment can be discovered. Comparison of related forms throws light upon the history of their differentiation. Experience has shown that studies of this kind, particularly in languages for which no historic records exist, must be carried on with great caution, because accidental similarities occurring in the speech forms of remote parts of the world may easily give a

deceptive impression of relationship. For this reason geographical contiguity is not unimportant in the interpretation of isolated similarities in vocabulary or grammar.

Limitations of comparative method. The study of cultural forms may avail itself of similar methods. The geographical distribution of the same or decidedly similar cultural traits may be utilized for a reconstruction of cultural dissemination and development. When only slight and incidental cultural similarities occur, caution is necessary in assuming historical connections.

It is one of the important methodological problems of anthropology to investigate how far geographical distribution of cultural phenomena may be used for historical reconstruction. The mere fact of historical connection may be interpreted in diverse ways, for ordinarily there is no evidence of chronological sequence. Dissemination may have occurred in one of at least two opposite directions, so that it may be impossible to determine the source of cultural elements. Neither is it possible to be sure whether a particular phase of culture is not rather the local development of a widely spread ancient trait that has flourished than the source from which the more generalized trait sprang.

Similar problems confront us, although not to the same extent, in the study of bodily form. When the same bodily type occurs among the inhabitants of neighboring countries there is little doubt as to their common origin. When slight similarities are found in regions far apart it is conceivable that this may be due to common origin or to parallel biological development.

The study of the geographical distribution of similarities, if used with due caution, is a means of clearing up part of the history of mankind. The materials secured by these methods reveal a fragmentary picture at least of its course.

Problems of laws of historic development. When these data are assembled the question arises whether they present an orderly picture, or whether history proceeds haphazardly; in other words, whether an orthogenetic development of human forms may be discovered and whether a regular sequence of stages of historical development may be recognized. If this were true, definite laws governing historical sequences could be formulated.

Historic sequences. These problems may be attacked from two points of view. We may compare the observed sequences and see whether in all parts of the world they fall into regular order or whether

each area has its own peculiar character that is not comparable with the sequences observed in other districts.

Dynamics of change. We may also study the changes that are happening under our eyes in various countries and observe how they are brought about. If homologous sources of change are found, they may be called laws of social change and we may expect that they manifest themselves in every country and among every people. Biological, linguistic, and cultural change may be studied from this angle. For these inquiries we have to understand the interrelations between individual and society: the life of the individual as controlled by his social experience, and the modifications that society undergoes through the actions of individuals. We must also inquire whether society as a whole undergoes autonomous changes, biological, linguistic, and cultural, in which the individual plays a passive rôle. We might call this subject the dynamics of cultural change.

Problems of anthropology. These considerations enable us to define three great problems of anthropology:

1. The reconstruction of human history.
2. The determination of types of historical phenomena and their sequences.
3. The dynamics of change.

These problems have to be investigated in the domains of biological and of social phenomena. The latter include language, the study of which, on account of its technical requirements, is best separated from other cultural manifestations.

Aspects of culture: Man and nature. Culture itself is many-sided. It includes the multitude of relations between man and nature; the procuring and preservation of food; the securing of shelter; the ways in which objects of nature are used as implements and utensils; and all the various ways in which man utilizes or controls, or is controlled by, his natural environment: animals, plants, the inorganic world, the seasons, and wind and weather.

Man and man. A second large group of cultural phenomena relate to the interrelation between members of a single society and between those belonging to different societies. The bonds of family, of tribe, and of a variety of social groups are included in it, as well as the gradation of rank and influence; the relations of sexes and of old and young; and in more complex societies the whole political and religious

organization. Here belong also the relations of social groups in war and peace.

Subjective aspects. A third group consists of the subjective reactions of man to all the manifestations of life contained in the first two groups. These are of intellectual and emotional nature and may be expressed in thought and feeling as well as in action. They include all rational attitudes and those valuations which we include under the terms of ethics, esthetics, and religion.

Interrelations between the various aspects of social life. In a systematic presentation of the data of anthropology we are compelled to treat these subjects separately. Nevertheless the biological and cultural life of man is a whole, and we cannot do justice to all the important problems of human history if we treat social life as though it were the sum of all these separate elements. It is necessary to understand life and culture as a whole.

Descriptive anthropology. A descriptive anthropology would represent the lives of all the peoples of the world and of all times. Certain types may be selected, and a number of peoples will appear as varieties of such types. According to the purpose of the presentation, the order may be geographical, if primarily intended to elucidate the order of cultural phenomena in space and time; or it may be according to types, if the object is the study of laws of sequence or the investigation of dynamic relations.

Anthropology, history, and sociology. While the results of the former arrangement connect anthropology with history, those of the latter connect it with sociology. If regular cultural sequences could be found, these would represent an orderly historical cycle. If laws of sequence and of social dynamics could be found, these would be sociological laws. It is one of the important tasks of anthropology to determine how far such regular sequences and sociological laws exist.

When this task has been achieved the principal problem remains, that of understanding a culture as a whole. Neither history nor sociological laws are of considerable help in its solution. History may tell us the sources from which bodily form, customs, and beliefs have been derived, but it does not convey any information regarding the way in which a people will behave owing to the transmitted characteristics. Sociology may teach us the morphology and general dynamics of society; it will give us only a partial insight into the complex interaction of forces, so that it is not possible to predict the behavior resulting from the historical events that made the people

what they are. This problem is essentially a psychological one and beset with all the difficulties inherent in the investigation of complex mental phenomena of the lives of individuals.

Purpose of book. The purpose of the present book is to present those data that are necessary for an intelligent handling of the problems here outlined.

CHAPTER I

GEOLOGICAL AND BIOLOGICAL PREMISES

GEOLOGICAL PREMISES

N. C. NELSON

Geological background. Human remains have been found in strata of great antiquity. To understand their significance it is necessary to explain the general results of the study of the origin and nature of their chronology.

Paleontologists and geologists have been equally active unraveling the later history of the earth as recorded respectively by the stratified rock formations and by the gradually changing character of the fossilized organic remains inclosed in them. The thickness of the deposit is said to be more than fifty miles. Earth movements of various kinds have buckled and often disarranged the proper order of the successive formations. In many regions the strata have been so tilted that they stand in vertical order or even completely tipped over, although first deposited as horizontal layers. The total time required for their formation has lately been calculated by physicists to lie somewhere between a billion and a billion and a half years. Such round-numbered figures are not of course to be taken literally; still their general reliability is vouched for by a variety of objective evidence, as for example the rate at which new formations are built up today and the relative radium contents of the ancient rocks in question. This geological column serves therefore as a convenient time scale; and by a study of the thickness of its successive formations, of the nature of the rock materials which compose them, and of the plant and animal fossils inclosed in them, a fairly orderly and intelligible story has been unfolded concerning the shifting positions of land and sea and concerning the changes of climate, as revealed by the responsive changes in the form of organisms. In this time-and-life scheme early man and the precursors of man take their place; for that reason it is imperative for archaeology to take some account of an otherwise essentially extraneous body of knowledge.