

## French-Swedish-American Crossroads

### Alfred Métraux, Erland Nordenskiöld, and the Gothenburg School of Ethnography

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#### Introduction

Anthropologist, historian, writer, poet, photographer, and human rights activist Alfred Métraux was born in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1902, but spent most of his childhood in Mendoza, Argentina. Back in Europe, he finished high school and first attended l'École de Chartres where he trained in history. Soon, however, he enrolled as a student of Marcel Mauss at l'École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris. Mauss, himself the best and last of the armchair anthropologists guiding his students with rules and advice, encouraged all of his students to get out in the field as soon as possible. And Métraux indeed became one of the most intense field workers of his generation, conducting ethnographical and archaeological investigations in South America, Easter Island, Haiti, Africa, and postwar Europe. At the age of twenty-three, he wrote the first methodological essay on field research in France: "De la méthode dans les recherches ethnographiques" which in 1925 appeared in *Revue d'ethnographie et des traditions populaires* (Métraux 1925a).

Mauss' teachings were instrumental. Later, when Métraux explored Easter Island he stated in a letter that "[y]our predictions were correct, once again you got it right ... I must say my memory of your courses has served as a valuable guide to me. Once again your teaching will have borne fruit in the field" (Fournier 2005: 283). Yet, the formative years for Métraux's career in anthropology were spent in Sweden. As a member of the "Gothenburg School" he joined a circle of friends and scholars with interest in the Gran Chaco, Easter Island, and Celebes. These were "the very happy days" that influenced much of his thinking concerning theory and method (GEM 1950a). In 1928, he returned to the country of his childhood as the founding director of the Institute of Ethnology of the University of Tucumán. He stayed in Argentina until 1934, then he moved to Hawaii to work for the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, before taking up a position as a research scholar at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., and teaching briefly at Yale, Berkeley, Sorbonne, Mexico City, and Santiago de Chile.

Under Mauss, Paul Rivet and George-Henri Ri-

vière French ethnology as a critical and politically oriented science became a part of *la belle époque* in the 1930s. *L'art nègre* became a concept that covered everything from American jazz to exotic African masks, and erotic voodoo, and Métraux, involved with the surrealists, gained firsthand knowledge of Africa, and later as director of the Marbial UNESCO project compiled the major part of his fieldwork for his classical study of voodoo in Haiti. By then a new generation of anthropologists with Métraux and Claude Lévi-Strauss was being formed in opposition to the conservative nationalistic trends, including the academic philosophy. Métraux joined the United Nations in 1946 and was appointed the headship of UNESCO's Race Division in Paris four years later. "Unfortunately, my present activities at Unesco are taking me far away from South American Indians, and I am dealing with practical matters such as race questions, industrialisation, and primitive cultures. I do not regret it, however, because I can live again in Europe and participate in the great revolution of our time, but I do envy those who can carry on with purely scientific activities" (GEM 1950a). He held his position as director of Social Sciences for UNESCO until he took his own life on Good Friday, 1963. Lévi-Strauss described him as a very friendly person but also "... profoundly neurotic, going from euphoria to a state of the deepest depression," and added: "[b]ut now, then I think back on it, it seems to me that his private life was a long preparation for suicide" (Lévi-Strauss and Eribon 1991: 36).

#### The Gothenburg School

Alfred Métraux was taken by surprise the day he first joined the "Gothenburg School of Ethnography" in Sweden. It was more of a laboratory session or a workshop than an ordinary lecture. Baron Erland Nordenskiöld was the teacher and Métraux soon realized that very few of the sessions took place at Gothenburg University but rather at the ethnographical museum or in the teacher's home in the centre of the city. At the museum, a day in class usually started with Nordenskiöld picking up a book from the shelves behind him and beginning to glance through the pages. Usually it was a very old and fragile book, but it was obvious that he always was fully familiar with its content. In just a moment, he found what he was looking for and he started to read, standing at the short end of a long conference table with his students gathered on both sides. In a corner behind Nordenskiöld, a door was open to his small office (Lindberg 1995: 362).

He wanted his students to learn about important older sources such as Claude d'Abbeville's "Histoire de la mission des pères Capucins en l'isle de Maragnan" (Paris 1614) and von Murr's "Reisen einiger Missionarien der Gesellschaft Jesu in Amerika" (Nürnberg 1785). As for the most important of the earlier narratives of the Gran Chaco, he referred "Descripción chorographica del terreno, rios, árboles y animales" written by Pedro Lozano in 1773. Some of the other books he introduced for his students were "Documentos para la Historia de la provincia Cartagena de Indias" (Corrales 1883) and "Reise im Innern von Brasilien 1817–21" (Wien 1832–37) by a German traveler named Pohl. Thus, Nordenskiöld expected his students to master English, German, French, Spanish, and even some Latin. This was no problem for Métraux who was fluent in French, English, German, and Portuguese. As for Swedish he was a very fast learner.

Nordenskiöld, when lecturing, always seemed somewhat nervous at the beginning. Starting slowly, hesitating, and appearing uncertain of himself, he gradually became more confident, his words flowing with enthusiasm, enthraling his audience. We may safely assume that Métraux on this very first day followed a lecture that touched upon the Indian cultures of Gran Chaco. According to Henry Wassén, the last of Nordenskiöld's students, hardly a day went by without Nordenskiöld talking about the Argentinian Chaco (Wassén 1966–67: 343–345). Putting down the book, Nordenskiöld passed around a map and showed his students a couple of museum objects pertaining to the passage he had just read. Nordenskiöld regarded the artefacts as living documents, not only telling a specific tribal history but also revealing something important about human history in general (Lindberg 1996: 26). He told his students that it was impossible to make a sharp distinction between archaeology and ethnography. Archaeology is of great importance when determining whether a certain cultural element is of American origin, particularly in the case of those discoveries made in the western parts of South America, he argued. Archaeology's potential lies in its capacity to disseminate understanding for those cultural changes which took place in pre-Columbian time via a systematic collection of descriptive data and organization of this in chronological sequences. Ethnography could, on the other hand, provide the basis for an interpretation of archaeological artefacts.

As for mapping, Nordenskiöld explained that geographical knowledge was a most important complement to archaeological and ethnographical data. As always, he emphasized that nature forced a series of changes upon culture which could be traced

through specific historical sequences of adaptation. The environment was primarily a limiting factor, but this did not exclude the possibility that the environment could also function as a cultural generator in the shape of new inventions. Thus, the outlining of migration patterns was a priority. Nordenskiöld was convinced that when an ethnic group migrated from one area to another they attempted to retain and adapt their old culture to the new environment to as great an extent as possible. A related issue was what *caused* groups to migrate. Labour migratory waves and seasonal migrations were the usual reasons, but relocations could also be the result of war, water shortages, and even religious beliefs. He made his students realize that migration indeed could be productive, giving rise to new innovations and cultural enrichment by the interaction with other ethnic groups. To make his point, he spoke quite a while about the largest post-Colombian migration in South America, i.e., the western expansion of the Guarani-speaking tribes which took place a few decades before Pizarro's conquest of the Inca civilization. As Lowie (1933: 160) noted he was able to steer "a middle course between an outdated evolutionism and an extravagant diffusionism ..."

When Métraux joined the group in Gothenburg his teacher was among the most experienced ethnographical fieldworkers in Europe and an international recognized authority on the Indians of South America. Born on July 19, 1877, Erland Nordenskiöld was the son of the famous explorer Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld. After making it through the Northeast passage in 1879–80 the older Nordenskiöld and his ship returned to Sweden in glory. He was honored with the title of Baron by the Swedish king and Nordenskiöld and his wife Anna Mannerheim established themselves as one of the most prominent couples in the high society of Stockholm. Popular and scientific publications made the family temporarily rich, but money was of no importance for a man who lived for science and culture. Large sums were invested in a summer estate at Dalbyö, and the remaining part of his wealth was lost in some daring and unsuccessful business ventures. At the time of Adolf Nordenskiöld's death in 1902, the family was virtually bankrupt.

The scientific achievement of his father made an everlasting impression on Erland Nordenskiöld and his older brother Gustaf. The latter made a name for himself by making the first scientific excavation of the Mesa Verde Cliff Dwellings in the American Southwest. But tragedy soon ended Gustaf Nordenskiöld's future as a promising scientist. Diagnosed with tuberculosis he died in 1895 at the age of twenty-seven. Often tormented by sickness, Erland Nor-

denskiöld did not have a happy childhood. He never felt at ease in school, spending most of his time by himself, developing a special interest in the secrets of nature. In his late teens, he finally applied himself to formal studies, taking a degree at Uppsala in 1898. At the age of twenty-two, he turned down an offer to go to Stanford as graduate student in favour of his first expedition to South America in 1899. He was pursuing the same kind of success as his father and brother had experienced, and in this regard his first expedition to Tierra del Fuego failed. He managed to publish several reports and articles in Swedish and German journals, but his ventures in South America did not make the headlines anywhere.

A telegram announcing his father's death reached Erland Nordenskiöld in the heart of South America. He was leading his second expedition to South America, traveling in the Chaco-Cordillera of northwestern Argentina in company with ethnographer Eric von Rosen, botanist Robert Fries, Eric Boman, and Gustaf von Hofsten. At his second attempt at fame and glory, Nordenskiöld staged a large-scale scientific investigation, covering zoology, botany, mineralogy, ethnography, and archaeology. The so-called Chaco-Cordillera expedition was successful, indeed, promoting the careers of Boman, von Rosen, and Fries as well as his own. Yet, it proved quite difficult to administer and keep together an expedition of such proportions. Von Rosen and Boman ended up in a very heated dispute and the latter left the group, perhaps at gunpoint. Nordenskiöld was walking a tightrope, trying to maintain his close friendship with von Rosen and at the same time defending Boman against the verbal attacks of von Rosen. Boman was later to become a prominent archaeologist at the National Museum of Buenos Aires and Nordenskiöld continued to hold him in high esteem, especially his archaeological excavations and reports. Another matter that tormented Nordenskiöld in the field was a severe doubt of his own scholarly identity. Although Count Eric von Rosen was considered to be the official ethnographer of the expedition, young Nordenskiöld began to spend more and more time in the Indian villages they visited. Those initial meetings with the Mataco, Chané, Chiriguano, and other tribes during the Chaco-Cordillera Expedition 1901–02 turned his life in new directions.

Erland Nordenskiöld embarked on his third expedition to South America in 1904 and travelled for more than a year and a half in Peru and Bolivia. This third journey turned out to be of outmost importance for his future professional career. First, it made official his shift from the field of natural science to anthropology, or ethnography as it was called at the

time. Second, his fieldwork also formulated a scientific problem which was to guide much of his future research, i.e., the relationship between the Andean cultural area and the Indian tribes of the lowlands. The archaeological remains in Mojos shared more common denominators with the distant Indian cultures in northern South America and Central America than with the geographically neighbouring Andean cultural area. Firstly, the people who had built the great earthen mounds in Mojos practiced secondary funerals which had never occurred in Peru. Secondly, the archaeological finds were dominated by three-legged clay pots unknown from highland grave excavations in northern Argentina, Bolivia, and Peru. On the other hand, such finds were common in Ecuador, Colombia, and Central America. Many years later, he was to formulate these observations into his reconstruction of temporal sequences in South America. The most controversial part of it was his idea that more developed forms of cultural expressions in the Amazon region had, via early migrations, spread from there to the Central American high cultures.

Back in Sweden, he was confronted with new and unexpected difficulties. He got an appointment as assistant to curator Hjalmar Stolpe at the ethnographical department at the National Museum in Stockholm. Quickly learning the trade of museum work, Nordenskiöld soon had success with a major exhibit of collections made by missionaries working in Africa. After the death of Stolpe in 1907, it was taken for granted that Nordenskiöld would succeed him. But old enemies of his father were on the move and they somehow managed to prevent his appointment and instead install the less qualified Carl V. Hartman for the position. Nordenskiöld finally made headlines, not as a victorious explorer and scientist but as a victim of the intrigues between the prominent families in Stockholm. Disillusioned, Nordenskiöld “escaped” the hostile environment going on yet another fieldtrip to South America. For almost two years, he lived among the Indian tribes in Argentina and Bolivia, alone in the field and moving from tribe to tribe in the Chaco. Lonely and with his professional career shattered to pieces, he still experienced true happiness for perhaps the first time in his life while dancing naked at the Pilcomayo with his Indian friends. Some twenty years later, Métraux wrote him a letter from the field, telling him that the Indians still spoke of him with respect and esteem. It was, of course, pleasant news for Nordenskiöld, but it also made him long for another fieldtrip, preferably to the border area between Colombia and Venezuela (GEM 1929). No such journey was ever made.



Nordenskiöld scored his first major success in 1910 with a popular book entitled “Indianlif” (“Indian Life”) which, as the title suggests, gave an intimate picture of the daily life of the Indians of Gran Chaco. Although being a traveller’s account, the book is an important description of the Indian tribes in the area. The following year, Nordenskiöld published “Indianer och hvita” (“Indians and Whites”), which aside from its ethnographical content was a strong political statement. He described the ongoing poverty, enslavement, and even genocide of the Indians of South America, and related the situation to the Western civilization in general. In both these books, the readers also find a quite explicit critique of contemporary Sweden, the injustices and the huge differences between the life conditions of rich and poor in his own country.

With no position available in Stockholm, Nordenskiöld accepted the appointment as a curator of a small city museum in Gothenburg. He was not too happy, speaking of it as being exiled to a town dominated by trade and not culture and science. It was in 1913, and before starting his work in Gothenburg, Nordenskiöld returned to the field. Once more he challenged the establishment by taking his wife Olga with him to the Indians of Bolivia and Peru. The trip was scheduled for three years, but had to be cut short by the outbreak of the World War. Nordenskiöld began to teach ethnography and geography at Gothenburg University in 1916. Seven years later, he acquired a privately financed professorship in “general and comparative ethnography,” an appointment that symbolically marked the beginning of modern anthropology in Sweden.

### Museum Work

Working and studying on a daily basis in the museum, all the students got a clear picture of Nordenskiöld’s vision for an ethnographical museum. Although no record shows whether Alfred Métraux assisted Nordenskiöld during the preparation for an exhibit or not, it is very likely that he did, due to the immense number of temporary exhibits at the Gothenburg Ethnographical Museum during this period.

The major archaeological and ethnographical collections came from South America – according to Wassén (1932: 251 ff.) they covered ninety-six tribes or ethnic groups and sixty-four excavation sites. The collections made by Nordenskiöld counted more than 20,000 numbers from Bolivia only. The museum was in its most expansive phase ever securing a substantial collection from the Jiva-

ro (Shuar) of Ecuador made by the Finnish ethnographer Rafael Karsten. Nordenskiöld and the museum did also support the work of Curt Nimendajú in the Xingu, a collaboration that was continued by Métraux and Robert Lowie after the death of Nordenskiöld. Several German scholars had a close cooperation with Nordenskiöld, notably Max Uhle and Theodor Koch-Grünberg. To enrich and complement the existing collections, Nordenskiöld regularly exchanged objects with Kaj Birket-Smith at the National Museum in Copenhagen and Paul Rivet in Paris. He was also in close contact with the Museum of American Indian in New York, Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin, the Linden Museum of Stuttgart, and the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford (GEM 1916–1932).

Nordenskiöld argued that an ethnographical museum should serve as a deposit of ethnographical objects for the benefit of future generations. It had to be an institution that provided both joy and learning for the general public, as well as a research centre capable of providing the specialized scholar with material documentation (see Lindberg 1997). Thus, he was very critical of the old “cabinet” style in which the visitor lost himself in the abundance of objects. Moreover, he considered the old comparative method to be of limited value.

Organizing objects by tribal and regional affiliation, Nordenskiöld implemented various theoretical schools to accomplish a holistic view of the Indian cultures. His geographical approach was enforced by maps and landscape photographs as well as images of the villages and their inhabitants. In order to demonstrate cultural distribution and ancient and present migratory routes, the artefacts were accompanied by distribution maps, while innovations and technical evolution were illustrated by tableaux and photos. His display of Sigvald Linné’s microscope studies of ceramics with data, photos, and maps were indeed innovative for its time (Linné 1932: 80; Wassén 1932: 250; Fig. 6). As for labels they should be easy to understand for the no specialist. He rejected the idea of museum or exhibit catalogues because they would become far too expensive for poor people. Nordenskiöld’s museum project was as much a social project as an ethnographical one.

Nordenskiöld’s international contacts had expanded when he moved from Stockholm to Gothenburg in 1913, and by the end of World War I he was internationally recognized as one of Europe’s leading scholar on the native cultures of South America. Most of his earlier field reports and investigations were written in German, but the increasing exchange with Mauss and Rivet resulted in a number of articles published in French journals. For his ma-

jour endeavour – “Comparative Ethnographical Studies” in ten volumes (Nordenskiöld 1919–38) – he preferred English but arranged for a French translation that still remains unpublished. Including his treatises on Amerindian inventions and an outlining of the copper and bronze ages in South America, it stirred international attention. Among others, Melville Herskovits of Columbia University praised the serial publication, stating “... I only wish that I may be able to write such a work regarding Africa” (GEM 1925).

In 1922, Professor J. Alden Mason of the Field Museum of Natural History wrote: “Possibly you have read in scientific and other periodicals that this institution is about to inaugurate five years of work in Latin-America. I would be delighted to hear from you any suggestions or ideas which you may care to write me concerning what you consider the most important problems to be studied in Latin-America, together with your practical advice for the prosecution of them. We suggest the following: – a reconnaissance, mainly archaeological, of Colombia; a similar reconnaissance of northern Mexico; ethnological researches on the Tapuya of eastern Brazil and on the tribes of the upper Madeira, and the complete excavation of a small Maya site. It is doubtful if we will be able to prosecute all of these, but several at least will be done, and we are commencing at once the work in Colombia ...” (GEM 1922a). At the time, Nordenskiöld had also formed an agreement with Robert Lowie to edit and compile a “Handbook of South American Indians” in two volumes. Frederick Webb Hodge’s “The Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico” (1907–10) had been hugely successful and the Bureau of American Ethnology wanted a similar edition for South America. Nordenskiöld was to be working mainly with European scholars including Koch-Grünberg, Karl von den Steinen, Rivet, Métraux, and Karsten.

Already in 1915, during a raging First World War, Nordenskiöld began contemplating staging an international Congress of Americanists in Sweden (GUB 1915). The suggestion that an international congress of this magnitude should be held in Sweden led to divided opinions both in France and in the United States. Franz Boas sided with Nordenskiöld and Rivet in promoting a Congress in Sweden, while scholars like Aleš Hrdlička and William Henry Holmes made the proposal that there should be a meeting in Paris. But Nordenskiöld was determined, knowing that he had the support of German, Austrian, and Dutch scholars. “It must be held in a country that has been neutral during the war,” he argued, adding that “members of the congress should be, first and foremost, specialists.” (GEM 1922b).

Finally, it was decided that proceedings of the Congress would be split between the Netherlands and Sweden. Originally scheduled for 1922, the 21st Congress of Americanists was not convened until August 1924 (Congrès International des Américanistes 1925). Papers pertaining to North and Central America were presented in The Hague, and lectures and discussions about the Inuit and South American peoples took place in Gothenburg. A post-seminar for Eskimo studies was planned for Copenhagen and yet another international meeting in Prague was put on the agenda (GEM 1921; 1924a). However, the world economy was very unstable and post-war Europe suffered from depression, epidemics, and starvation. Despite financial difficulties, Nordenskiöld managed to offer Waldemar Bogoraz of Leningrad and a few others modest travel grants (GEM 1924b). A special invitation was also extended to John Cooper of the Catholic University in Washington D.C., who was, according to Nordenskiöld, “one of the few scholars who really have a great knowledge of the old Spanish sources.” Boas stressed that the participation of Edward Sapir was equally important, but in the end only Cooper was able to come to Sweden (GEM 1923; 1924c, d, e).

In the end, the Americanists’ Congress turned out to be a multidisciplinary event, with representatives from social and cultural anthropology, ethnography, archaeology, linguistics, geography, history, and physical anthropology. The theoretical orientation was dominated by concepts of evolution, diffusion, cultural areas, and cultural elements. A split between a European view of diffusion (the *Kulturkreis* theory) and an American cultural history based upon historical connections and diffusion within the American continents was obvious. The German-Austrian position was held by Schmidt and Koppers, while the American version was represented by Boas, Clark Wissler, and Robert Lowie. As I have stated elsewhere (Lindberg 2008: 169), it is quite interesting to note that there – at this major international conference in 1924 – was no trace of what Adam Kuper (1996: 1) has referred to as the “functionalist revolution” of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. And indeed, Lowie much later stated that Nordenskiöld’s “charts are a thorn in functionalist eyes” and added a quote from Parsons: “Wisdom in ethnology, as in life, lies in having more than one method of approach” (Lowie 1937: 252).

Besides participating in the Congress with his paper “Sur un mode américain du rite du balancement” (Concerning an American Rite of Balance) twenty-two-year-old Métraux (1925b) got to hear and talk with numerous famous anthropologists such as Franz Boas, Stewart Culin (of the Brook-

lyn Museum), Max Uhle, Karl von den Steinen, and Theodor Koch-Grünberg. The Congress was a tremendous success for Nordenskiöld and his students. Rivet spoke of the Swedish museum as “un Musée incomparable” and some of Nordenskiöld’s ideas were instrumental when he in 1938 managed to move the Parisian collections from Musée d’ethnographie du Trocadéro to the newly established Musée de l’Homme in the Palais de Chaillot. Mason wrote Nordenskiöld another letter stating that “... from everyone who visited Gothenburg I hear the most enthusiastic reports, not only of the success of the congress, but of your museum, which is uniformly admired as the best in Europe if not in the world” (GEM 1924f.). The “Gothenburg School of Ethnography” was no longer in the periphery, but internationally recognized.

### A Laboratory of Anthropology

Among the students that Métraux befriended in Gothenburg were Sigvald Linné, working on a thesis concerning the technique of ceramics, and Karl Gustav Izikowitz who studied the musical instruments of the South American Indians. As all the other young students, they were also involved in Nordenskiöld’s ongoing research. Some of them sorted and studied ceramics, those who showed a talent for drawing prepared maps for his books and articles, and one of them was fully occupied making carefully drawing the position of each single knot on the numerous Inca quipus in the museum (Manker 1967: 74–77). In exchange, Nordenskiöld committed himself seriously to his students’ dissertation topics.

Métraux deeply admired and respected Nordenskiöld for this, testifying that Nordenskiöld always shared his knowledge and experience with his students, a generosity that characterized him both as a teacher and private person (Métraux in *Nya Dagligt Allehanda* 1933). He always encouraged his students to broaden their knowledge, not limiting themselves to research pertaining to the South American Indians. From his visits to museums in Hamburg, Leipzig, Berlin, and Copenhagen, Nordenskiöld made extensive notes on the material culture of the different regions of Africa (GEM B.6072). He tried to engage some of his students in this field, but most of them were too profoundly inspired by his lectures on South America to consider any other area of research.

The close collaboration between teacher and students did not, however, evolve into a situation of equality or democracy. The teacher was never a “buddy” in those days. On the contrary, there were

strict rules of conduct, guiding the relationship between disciple and teacher. Everybody addressed each other with their formal titles, even after having known each other for years. Nordenskiöld also required and expected a lot from his students. They were supposed to be as professional as he was and he did not tolerate sloppiness or so-called minor errors in a scholarly paper or book. Why should you trust the major arguments in a book if you find a lot of trivial mistakes in the text, he asked his students in a rhetoric manner (Lindberg 1995: 367).

The young Alfred Métraux seems to have been quite uncomfortable with theory. This was one of the reasons why he immediately felt at home with the scholarly work in Gothenburg. His teacher was never impressed by grand theories and poorly documented speculations. Most of his lectures were concentrated on methodology and as a rule he took his point of departure in his own fieldwork experiences. Nordenskiöld had visited and lived among the Ashluslay, Choroti, Mataco, Tapiete, Toba, and Tsirakua in Chaco. From the northeastern part of Bolivia he knew the Chacobo and Itonama, and he had also met the Atsahuaca in the border region of Bolivia and Peru. Following the rivers, he encountered Cavina and Mosetene Indians at Rio Beni, groups of the Chané at Rio Itiyuro in northern Argentina and Rio Parapiti in Bolivia, the Chimane at Rio Maniqui, and Guarayú-pauser, Huanyam and Huari following the Rio Guaporé. Some of the places he visited on several occasions were the Chiriguano and Churápa villages close to Santa Cruz de la Sierra in the eastern part of Bolivia (see Lindberg 1995).

Years of experience in the field had made Erland Nordenskiöld an outstanding ethnographer and a keen observer. Efficiency was the trademark of his collecting, whether it concerned observations, ethnographical collections, or other forms of information. Initially trained as a natural scientist, he kept his field notes or written records short, i.e., condensed into “facts” in the sense of keywords, geographical locations, Indian names, etc. Obviously, he regarded his diaries as nothing more than an aide-mémoire. He never made any fuss about the length of his fieldtrips, although he spent more time in the wilderness than most of his Americanist colleagues. He never suggested any kind of “ethnographer’s magic” in Malinowski’s sense, nor did he try to portray himself as a hero in a dangerous environment. He and his students discussed both the joy and the suffering of the fieldwork situation. His own work had its limitations by the mere nature of his expeditions. Always constrained by the goals of the museum, Nordenskiöld could never find the opportunity to do extended fieldwork in a single place.



His most important advice was to approach the peoples to be studied with outmost respect, and he also urged his students to make their writings into a defence of the natives' social and political rights.

A strong humanitarian appeal was as present in Nordenskiöld's teaching as in his writings. With passion he told his students that any categorical statement about the character of some "primitive people" was as unscientific as any similar statement concerning people in Europe (Lindberg 1996: 76). It did not take long before Métraux discovered the many life histories visible in Nordenskiöld's ethnography. The individuals were always present in his books, articles, and reports, more or less visible in the midst of ethnographical data. The Chocó (Emberá) shaman Selimo Huacoriso was one of those persons. Nordenskiöld described him as a healer specialized in herbs. He was a man who possessed an extraordinary observation skill, and displayed a keen knowledge of tribal myths and traditions. Although Selimo was a very good storyteller, he still remained a very private person. Much more open was young Camilo Hinche of the same tribe. Nordenskiöld remembered him as a most pleasant comrade in the field, always happy and very easy-going. On the surface we can see the usual relationship between the investigator and his key-informants, but by and by their interaction turns into a relation of trust and affection (Lindberg 1996: 68–76). It is obvious that he regarded both Selimo and Camilo worthy of attention as individuals, not merely as samples of some sociocultural phenomena. Among the notes and unpublished manuscripts of Nordenskiöld there are few fragmentary chapters for a book he was never able to complete. The working title was "The Role of the Individual in Indian Society" (GEM n. d.).

Three questions within the framework for the historical oriented anthropology that Nordenskiöld developed became central to the study of the New World's Indian cultures.

What did the pre-Columbian Indian culture's look like, what changes had taken place since the arrival of the Europeans, and how could such changes be explained in terms of migration, diffusion, innovation, adaptation, or acculturation? He formulated these problems as the relation between independent inventions and cultural loans with the spread of ideas and material cultural elements through intertribal contacts. Cultural change is a result of innovations, dispersal, and adaptation, he argued and added that the question is a great deal more complex than the obvious polarization of evolution versus diffusion. It would be premature to assume that an invention has been made twice just because it

is discovered in two geographically separate areas. For instance, take the drum with a skin membrane. In most areas of America it is a pre-Columbian innovation, but in some places the drum was introduced by White and Black immigrants.

Nordenskiöld sought his answers to these problems using a comparative method based upon analyses of ethnographic collections, cartographic reconstruction, and a meticulous research of older literature. The comparative analyses were primarily based upon comparisons between tribes, geographic prerequisites, or with artefacts as the basis. In the actual mapmaking Nordenskiöld developed the standard procedure by noting the presence of a cultural element with numeric indexes to a following bibliography. In this appendix the "evidence" was reproduced in the form of a quotation in the original language. In order to publish his results internationally he developed the mentioned serial publication called "Comparative Ethnographical Studies" (1919–1938). In "Eine geographische und ethnographische Analyse der materiellen Kultur zweier Indianerstämme in El Gran Chaco" (1918; see the English translation 1919), he made a comparison of the material culture of two Indian tribes living as neighbours. The comparative approach was broadened in later volumes, to cover the entire Gran Chaco region. In "The Copper and Bronze Ages in South America" (1921), he discussed the evolution of the civilizations of South America in pre-Columbian time, and in "Modifications in Indian Culture through Inventions and Loans" (1930b) and "Origin of the Indian Civilizations in South America" (1931), he set out to trace cultural changes before and after Columbus' discovery of the New World. Another very important contribution was his 1929 Huxley Memorial Lecture in London, which he published under the title "The American Indian as an Inventor" in the same year. It caused considerable attention and became something of conclusion to his protracted museum studies.

### Collaboration

Nordenskiöld was invited to Berkeley where he held Alfred Kroeber's chair for a semester in 1926. Then, joined by his wife and the archaeologist Sigvald Linné in Panama, Nordenskiöld embarked on his last expedition. Traveling through Panama and Colombia they spent some six months in 1927 together with the Cuna and Emberá Indians. Once more he managed to collect interesting ethnographical and archaeological data. Nordenskiöld published several accounts of the Panama and Colombia experience;

popular writings as well as professional reports in the latter volumes of the mentioned serial publication (1919–38). Much attention was given to the pictorial writings of the Cuna Indians (1925), a work of translation and interpretation that was continued in Sweden in collaboration with key informant and tribal “secretary” Ruben Perez Kantule. In view of his health, however, the expedition to Panama and Colombia was fatal. When he returned to Sweden, he was marked by the sickness that shortly would take his life.

Meanwhile, Métraux was back in Paris, preparing the defence of his thesis. Eva, his first wife, translated Nordenskiöld’s “Forskningar och äventyr” into a revised French version entitled “Explorations dans l’intérieur de l’Amérique du Sud” (GEM 1926). Lasting for a few years, an intense collaboration between Nordenskiöld and his French colleagues Mauss and Rivet, and especially Métraux, was formed. In 1927, the latter donated a small collection of fourteen ethnographical objects from Argentina and Peru to the Gothenburg museum (GEM 27.14.1–14). “I am very grateful for everything you have done for me,” Métraux wrote and promised to secure major collections for the Gothenburg museum in the future. He was in need of money, however, and it was difficult to get a position in France. Nationalism rules everywhere, he complained. But both, Mauss and Rivet expected his thesis to pass with honour at Sorbonne, and the latter was trying to find a position for him in South America. Such an arrangement would enable him to go into the field – “I do not wish to be a library ethnographer,” he stated (GEM 1927).

In February 1928, Métraux attended a new “very interesting” course given by Mauss. He was frequently referring to the Gothenburg museum and its wonderful collections. Mauss holds your work in highest esteem, Métraux assured Nordenskiöld (GEM 1928a). Two months later, he was even more enthusiastic as he, together with George-Henri Rivière, was to organize a major exhibit of pre-Columbian art at the Louvre’s Pavillon du Marsan (GEM 1928b). On display were more than 1,000 objects, mostly from Mexico and Costa-Rica and Métraux wrote the catalog “Les arts anciens de l’Amérique” (1928a). We do not know for sure, but it is plausible that the success of the exhibition made it possible for Nordenskiöld to publish his richly illustrated and lavish volume entitled “L’Archéologie du Bassin de l’Amazone” (1930a) in Paris. Be as it may, the work in which Nordenskiöld presented his twenty-year-old hypothesis of a lost high culture in the Amazon was among the lasting and most important of his scholarly career.

At last, Métraux defended his thesis “La civilisation matérielle des tribus Tupi-Guarani” (1928b) and received a “très honorable” judgement. Some of his friends in Gothenburg followed: Gösta Montell on “Dress and Ornaments in Ancient Peru” (1929) and Sigvald Linné with his internationally recognized thesis “Darien in the Past” (1929). By then, Métraux had moved to South America, taking up a position as head of the Ethnographical Museum at the University of Tucumán, Argentina. His first report “Contribution à l’Ethnographie et à l’Archeologie de la province de Mendoza” (1929) reached Nordenskiöld in March 1930 and soon after they exchanged photos from various regions of the Chaco area (GEM 1930a; 1930b). A year later, Métraux had another monograph in print, this time on the Chipayas (1931). For Gothenburg he was also able to acquire a complete ethnographical collection from the tribe in question. Nordenskiöld expressed his deepest gratitude and praised Métraux for his photographs. They are not only scientifically valuable, they are true works of art, Nordenskiöld wrote (GEM 1931b).

Nordenskiöld was very enthusiastic as well. Within weeks he was expecting a visit from his Cuna friend Ruben Perez Kantule. In several letters he told Métraux about their idea of writing a book on the Cuna together (GEM 1931a). He did also contact Robert Redfield in Chicago about persuading Kantule to write an article “... on the relations existing between his tribe and the whites and the negroes, respectively. It is ten to one he does not do anything of the kind, but should he do so, his contribution would doubtless prove highly interesting as he is a very shrewd and intelligent man, and writes Spanish very well. I think it especially important that the Indian problem – in its character of being a social problem – be presented from a purely Indian point of view” (GEM 1931).

Later in the year, Métraux announced that he intended to visit Gothenburg in the very near future. He arrived in the middle of January 1932 and Nordenskiöld immediately prepared a new exhibit with a section of photographs and object that Métraux had donated to the museum (GEM 1931c). The teacher and his former student, now the closest of friends, had a good time together in the early spring. None of them could know that it would be their last. Just a few months after Métraux’s return to Argentina he was reached by a telegram, telling him the sad news that Baron Erland Nordenskiöld had died on July 5, 1932, at the age of fifty-five.

Despite the required distance between teacher and student, the relationship between Nordenskiöld and Métraux became very close, both professional-



ly and private. As scholar and human rights activist, a young Métraux was very much influenced by the teachings and writings of Nordenskiöld. The field-work “style” that Métraux adopted, to approach the Indians with ease and respect, was the way of Nordenskiöld. In all of his lectures, Nordenskiöld drew his students’ attention to old published and unpublished sources, and when Métraux started to publish his journal *Revista de Etnología de la Universidad de Tucumán*, he included unpublished manuscripts as well as bibliographies of missionaries and explorers of South America. The two men seem to have shared a common feeling of being outsiders, and Métraux’s experience at the University of Tucumán with no libraries, no colleagues, and very few students was almost identical to Nordenskiöld’s early “exile” in Gothenburg. By 1928, Nordenskiöld had become “Cher Monsieur,” and thereafter they corresponded as “dear friends.” The respect and confidence they shared for each other is evident by the fact that it was Métraux, and none of Nordenskiöld’s other friends, colleagues, or students, who knew that he valued his private library to 40,000 Swedish crowns (GEM 1933d).

#### Aftermath

At Berkeley, Lowie managed to take over Nordenskiöld’s sponsorship of Nimuendajú’s researches in the Amazon as noted above, but the proposed “Handbook of South American Indians” was postponed for quite a long time. Eventually edited by Julian H. Steward and published by the Bureau of American Ethnology in seven volumes it became more of an American enterprise. However, Métraux and Claude Lévi-Strauss participated, and the former contributed significantly with his Chaco ethnography to Vol. 1 (1946) as well as to Vol. 3 (Steward 1948) co-writing with Nimuendajú. From a comparative perspective, Métraux also wrote a chapter on religion and shamanism (1949) before falling out with Steward.

The ethnographical museum in Gothenburg kept an ongoing exchange with Métraux in Tucumán and later at the Bishop Museum. Walter Kaudern succeeded Nordenskiöld as director and rearranged some of the collections. The third floor of the museum was concentrated to the Americas, the middle reserved for the Malayo-Polynesian peoples, while the first floor displayed collections from Asia and Africa (GEM 1936). The National Museum of Copenhagen did also acquire a part of “Dr. Métraux’s valuable collections from El Gran Chaco.” Kaj Birket-Smith confessed to their mutual friend Paul

Rivet that “... my first love was South America, but in Denmark it is nearly impossible to be an ethnologist without specializing in the Eskimo” (RL 1929; 1934). Still, with Nordenskiöld gone things were not the same. “There are no more students at the university,” Kaudern told Métraux, referring to the termination of Nordenskiöld’s personal professorship at the academy. “But, we still have visits from foreign scholars who stay at the museum for longer or shorter periods” (GEM 1936b).

The “Swedish connection” was kept alive for the rest of Métraux’s life. Most of the former circle of students had become close friends and valued colleagues. After moving to the Bishop Museum, Métraux kept a regular correspondence with Kaudern concerning Polynesian collections as well as articles for his new journal *Ethnological Studies*. Métraux was impressed by the high scientific standard of the journal and immediately offered to submit an article on Easter-Island or on the Toba Indian of the Argentine Chaco (GEM 1936a). Another good friend was Henry Wassén whom Métraux assisted in the translation of his manuscript “Los cuentos cunas” (GEM 1933c). They maintained a regular correspondence for almost thirty years. Métraux did also spend some time in the field accompanied by Stig Rydén, but their collaboration was, for one reason or another, not without frictions (GEM 1933a; 1933b).

By the 1950s, Métraux was back in Europe, working for UNESCO. In the correspondence he describes himself as some sort of an administrator, with less and less time for science. “I hope that some day I shall be able to return to the field of South American ethnography and write the general book on the tropical Indians which I started a few years ago and never did finish” (GEM 1950a; s. p. 2). Another letter, written five months later, reads: “Upon returning from a trip in Germany, I found your letter, with the volumes and reprints which you kindly sent to me. I was glad to have your letter, which means that, more and more, I am resuming my old European acquaintances and being re-integrated in the Swedish anthropological family of which I was, once, a member” (GEM 1950b).

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## Magical Causation of Death in Archaic Societies

### Cultural Anthropology in the Light of the Cognitive-Developmental Approach, Exemplified by the Scrutiny of Causes and Consequences of the Mystical Interpretation of the Death

Georg W. Oesterdiekhoff

#### 1 Introduction

Numerous ethnologists and experts have reported that adult humans of many traditional, archaic, primitive, or premodern societies, at least those of the lesser developed societies among this type or range, do not understand the inevitability of the physical death. Huge percentages of the premodern or illiterate humankind did really believe that humans would never die due to aging, accidents, or biological processes. This does not imply that those peoples believed in the biological eternity of the physical appearance or individual life in this world, next to their belief in the immortality of soul. They rather took the belief in the possible indestructibility of a human's personality and physical appearance for granted without thinking about it or without expressing this implicit assumption. They saw themselves and others living – without having any idea that really everybody of those has to pass away and vanish from earth physically. Hence, they took every death as a singularity but not as an occurrence that everybody has to face in any case earlier or later in life. Henceforth, they took every death as resulting from violence in form of magic and sorcery. Without mystical interventions humans would not die because nobody dies for natural, biological, or physical reasons. Gods, ghosts, and sorcerers are said to be the single origins and makers of every single death happening in the world. Thus, a certain