Introduction to Anthropology: Holistic and Applied Research on Being Human

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CONTENTS

MODULE 10: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF CLASSIFICATION

Classification

The process of **classification** is one of the most fundamental analytical procedures employed in anthropology. Classification involves the sorting and grouping of copious quantities of items into a smaller number of classes, or *types*, that can be analyzed to tell us something about humans. The resulting series of types is referred to as a **typology**. You are already familiar with one classification system from the Early Hominin module, which describes the complex hominin family tree. This is a good example of biological classification: hominins are classified into orders (e.g., primate), Family (e.g., Hominid), Genus (e.g., Homo), and species (e.g., sapiens). Classification is also one of the cornerstones of the archaeology subfield. For example, imagine an archaeological excavation in which thousands, or even tens of thousands, of ceramic sherds are recovered. By themselves, the sherds are chaotic and overwhelming in their sheer quantity. So, before they can be studied in any meaningful way, they must be sorted into recurring types on the basis of shared **physical attributes** such as color, surface decoration, and construction method (see Figure 10.1). Other common physical attributes include size, shape, and raw material (e.g., obsidian, chert, metal, etc.).
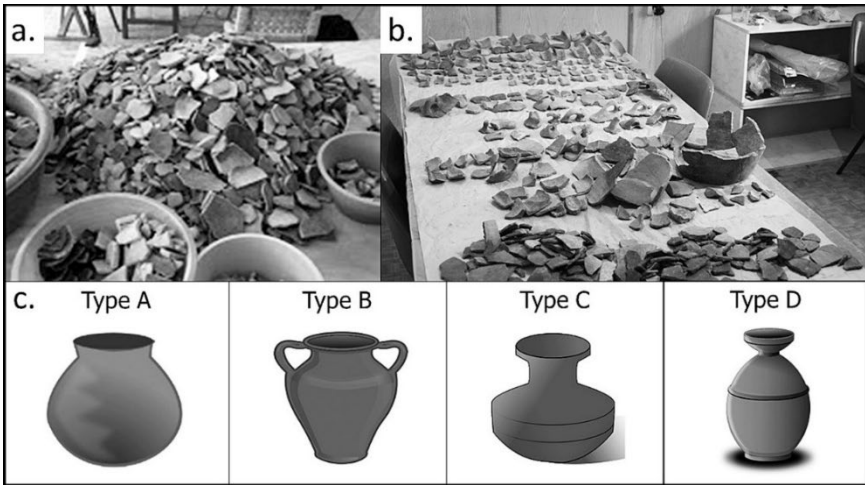
Figure 10.1. Hypothetical example illustrating the classification of ceramic sherds (a, b) into four distinct ceramic types (c, d). Image used with permission from *Experiencing Archaeology: A Laboratory Manual of Classroom Activities, Demonstrations and MiniLabs for Introductory Archaeology* Homsey-Messer et al. 2019(opens in a new tab).

Anthropologists also classify cultures, not just artifacts and hominins. Like ceramic sherds, the large quantity and great diversity of human cultures (in both time and space) have prompted archaeologists to construct cultural typologies as well. The most common in use today is **Elman Service's** (1962) "**Bands-Tribes-Chiefdom-States**" typology, which groups human societies according to attributes such as population size, subsistence mode (i.e., how they get their food), settlement pattern (e.g., isolated village versus network of cities), architecture type (i.e., small ephemeral grass huts versus grandiose stone temples); and economic, socio-political, and religious organization (see Figure 10.2). While this typology is not without problems (see section 10.2 below), it does help organize a great amount of cultural diversity into a few manageable types, which is crucial for both communication and research.
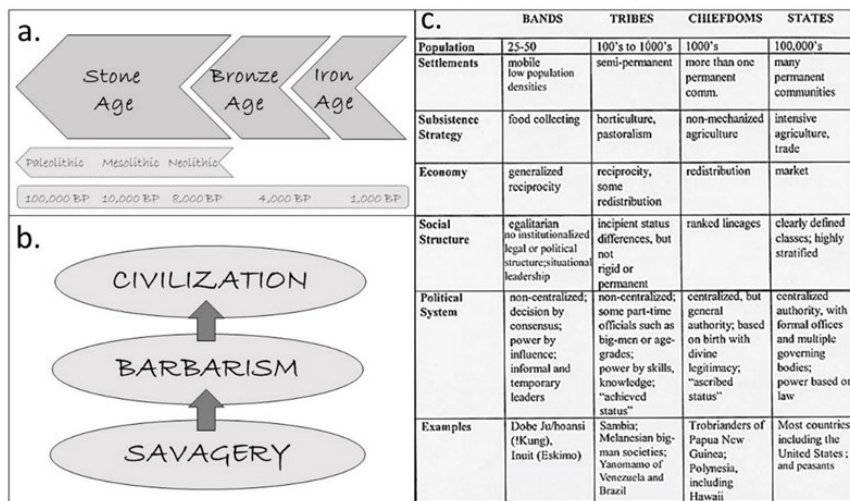
Figure 10.2. Two 19th century typologies based on technological attributes: Thomsen (a) Morgan (b), and Service's 20th century typology in common use today (c). Adapted with permission from *Experiencing Archaeology: A Laboratory Manual of Classroom Activities, Demonstrations and MiniLabs for Introductory Archaeology* Homsey-Messer et al. 2019.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Classification

Classification in anthropology offers several advantages. First and foremost, it creates order out of chaos, thereby, facilitating communication among professionals. It is certainly much easier to talk about a greater proportion of "Type B" pottery than this tongue-twister: "cord-marked, grit-tempered pottery constructed from kaolinitic clay using the coil method characterized by a body wider than its spout and exhibiting stirrup handles on either side." Secondly, constructing typologies based on shared physical attributes enables us to create relative chronologies; one you are familiar with already is Christian Jürgensen Thomsen's (1836) famous **"Three-Age" typology** which is still in use today (Figure 10.2.a). Thomsen's classification categorized cultures into three types or "ages": Stone, Iron, and Bronze. Archaeologists regularly use these terms generically to facilitate communication of a new site and its relative age.
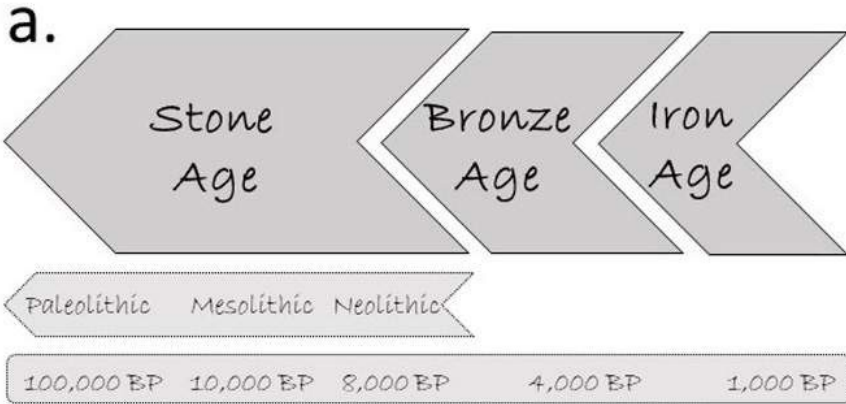
Figure 10.2.a. Thomsen's (1836) "Three-Age" typology. Adapted with permission from Homsey-Messer et al. 2019.

Despite these advantages, we must be careful when working with typologies since there are several disadvantages as well. For example, look at Figure 10.2 again: this seems like a very convenient way to divide time, since we do see a general shift from the use of stone, to bronze, to iron throughout prehistory. But are these types mutually exclusive? Consider the gunflints (stone) used in (metal) guns until about the time of the American Civil War. Or onyx (stone) mortars and pestles used today in India and elsewhere (including many American chefs who feel stone is superior to other materials). This, then, is one of the main disadvantages of typologies: they tend to pigeonhole artifacts into one type when, in reality, they may have characteristics of more than one type. There is also the issue that changes in material doesn't necessarily correlate with culture change. Plows, spears, and many other implements were made during the Stone, Bronze, and Iron ages as farming and warfare occurred in each.

Another set of problems is illustrated by anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan's (1877) typology illustrated in Figure 10.2.b. (see Module 2: A Brief History of Anthropology). The first is obvious: Morgan's hierarchy is clearly a politically motivated typology designed to justify the mistreatment of cultures deemed "inferior" to Westerners, and the people who lived on land they wanted to exploit and colonize. Second, Morgan constructed this typology based on the attributes valued by Western cultures, such as

agriculture, metallurgy, and written language. These are **etic** attributes (versus **emic**) that are not necessarily valued by a band of hunter-gatherers or tribe of mountain pastoralists for whom farming, metal tools, and written language have little (if any) value. Were a hunter-gatherer to classify human societies, they might use very different categories, such as skill in oral storytelling.

b.

CIVILIZATION

BARBARISM

SAVAGERY
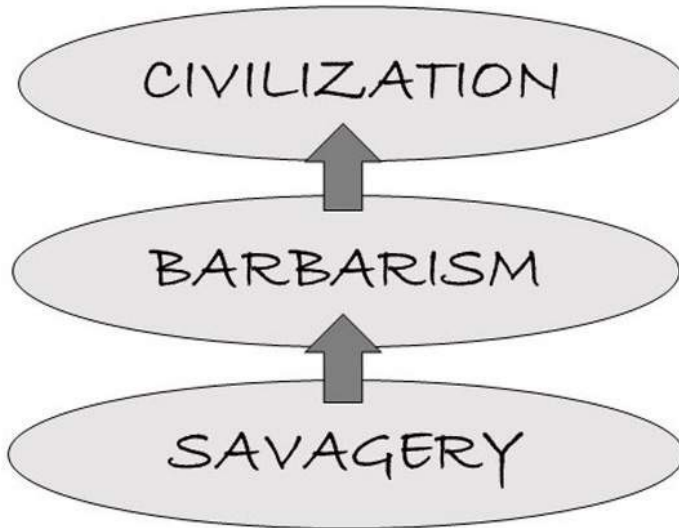
Figure 10.2.b. Lewis Henry Morgan's (1877) typology. Adapted with permission from Homsey-Messer et al. 2019.

Service's typology (see Figure 10.2.c. below) attempts to overcome some of these problems by utilizing less subjective attributes and less derogatory type names, but it still suffers from the use of etic attributes (i.e., valued by those doing the classifying, not those being classified), and the (albeit inadvertent) creation of a progressive timeline in which societies are thought to evolve from less complex (Bands) to more complex (States). We know now that this not true; in fact, many societies have done just the opposite and shifted from greater to lesser complexity over time due to changing climate, warfare, and resource (over)exploitation. For example, the Classic Period Maya were a state-level society covering a large portion of Central America—present-day southeastern Mexico to El Salvador—between approximately

AD 250 and 900. The cities of Tikal, Copan, and Chichen Itza were sprawling metropolises that rivaled contemporary cities in Europe in both size and wealth; in fact, some archaeologists have dubbed Copan the "Paris of Mesoamerica." Around AD 900, a number of factors converged to fundamentally destabilize the state. Drought, coupled with deforestation and overuse of the land, led to widespread erosion and reduced maize crops. This, in turn created economic troubles and undermined faith in the priests, who were supposed to intercede with the gods on behalf of the troubled masses. Long story short: the Mayan state began to fission, and ultimately, the people abandoned majestic centers for smaller, more sustainable villages and hamlets in the hinterlands. Social and environmental factors have led to a similar scaling down of other major civilizations as well, such as the Harrapan state in northwest India, and the Mississippian chiefdom in the American heartland.

C.	BANDS	TRIBES	CHIEFDOMS	STATES
Population	25-50	100's to 1000's	1000's	100,000's
Settlements	mobile low population densities	semi-permanent	more than one permanent comm.	many permanent communities
Subsistence Strategy	food collecting	horticulture, pastoralism	non-mechanized agriculture	intensive agriculture, trade
Economy	generalized reciprocity	reciprocity, some redistribution	redistribution	market
Social Structure	egalitarian no institutionalized legal or political structure;situational leadership	incipient status differences, but not rigid or permanent	ranked lineages	clearly defined classes; highly stratified
Political System	non-centralized; decision by consensus; power by influence; informal and temporary leaders	non-centralized; some part-time officials such as big-men or age-grades; power by skills, knowledge; "achieved status"	centralized, but general authority; based on birth with divine legitimacy; "ascribed status"	centralized authority, with formal offices and multiple governing bodies; power based on law
Examples	Dobe Ju/hoansi (!Kung), Inuit (Eskimo)	Sambia; Melanesian big-man societies; Yanomamo of Venezuela and Brazil	Trobrianders of Papua New Guinea; Polynesia, including Hawaii	Most countries, including the United States; and peasants

Figure 10.2.c. Service's 20th century typology. Adapted with permission from Homsey-Messer et al. 2019.

Service Classification

Despite the pitfalls of Service's classification, the pull to classify societies has been long-lived. And while other classifications have waxed and waned in popularity, the Service typology is still the most widely used. In the end, it facilitates communication, creates order out of millennia of diversity, and allows anthropologists to compare and contrast cultures separated by expanses of time and geography. Importantly, it also creates what

archaeologists call **material correlates**. Material correlates are the physical remains that are associated (or 'correlate') with certain human behaviors. For example, material correlates for an agricultural society would include items such as sickles, millstones, storage containers, and granaries; none of these materials would be expected to be found at a hunter-gatherer camp. One of the most useful aspects of the Service typology is that it creates such material correlates. Below, we describe each of these types in terms of size, architecture, subsistence, social structure, political organization, and economic system.

Bands

Band level societies are characterized by small populations sizes—often less than 100—who subsist by hunting, gathering, and fishing wild foods. Bands move frequently since different foods come available in different seasons. They move strategically from one location to the next, often in a complex plan tied to the seasons and local weather. To an outsider, these movements may look "nomadic." Because Bands move often, their architecture is of a temporary nature, and often made of locally available materials such as grass, trees, and leaves. This does not mean it's inferior; just that they can put it up and take it down quickly. Thatch and leaf huts are surprisingly water-tight and comfortable. However, Bands do not have the social hierarchy and inequality that characterizes most chiefdoms and states. Rather, they are what anthropologists call **egalitarian**, meaning that there are few to no differences in wealth, power, or social status. Bands maintain this egalitarian system by focusing on the values of cooperation and minimizing material goods because material goods can quickly create desire, jealousy, and hoarding. A good example of this value can be seen in the 1980 cult classic film, *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. Set among the !Kung San in modern day South Africa at the edge of the Kalahari Desert, the film follows Xi, a San tribesman who discovers a glass Coke bottle tossed out of a plane window high above by a careless pilot, but Xi and his band attribute it to having come from the gods. The bottle quickly becomes popular as a play toy among the children, a musical instrument, and an efficient kitchen utensil for mash tubers. Soon, everyone wants the one and only bottle all the time, and they begin to feel things they never had before such as jealousy, greed, and competition. Thus, the bottle brings discord to the previously harmonious tribe, and Xi is sent

out into the unknown world beyond the Kalahari to return the bottle to the gods by throwing it off the world's end. Although this film is fictional, it highlights the role material goods have in creating inequality and power differences.

Video 10.1. Check out the video clip from *The Gods Must Be Crazy*.

To minimize this natural tendency toward inequality, Bands practice something anthropologists call **leveling mechanisms**. Leveling mechanisms are behaviors that "level the playing field," so to speak, and nip inequality in the bud before it becomes a problem. Perhaps the most famous example comes from anthropologist Richard Lee, who lived with the !Kung San for a year in the 1960s. Lee was well provisioned with the niceties of home (cigarettes, food tins, etc.), but did not share his stash with any of the San because he was studying their hunting-gathering methods and did not want to influence their lifestyle. Although this approach gave him the most accurate data, the San came to see him as a "miser." Lee, being well aware of the animosity created by his perceived greed, decided to buy the village a large ox on Christmas Day, which the San celebrated with a village-wide feast. Lee notes that he was rather pleased by his own generosity and looked forward to presenting it to the group, assuming they would be overwhelmed with gratitude toward him. Thus, he was quite surprised and offended when the San belittled his gift saying that the ox was "boney and scrawny" and not even enough "to make soup out of." Offended and irked by their lack of gratitude, Lee retreated to his research base.

Later, he discovered that the feast had gone on as planned, and the ox was cooked and feeding the entire village. When Lee challenged them about this, they replied that no gifts are completely generous acts. All gifts have an element of calculation: one ox did not wipe out a year's hording of tobacco and other goodies. Lee writes, "…after all, to kill an animal and share the meat with people is really no more than the [San] do for each other every day with far less fanfare."

In sum, leveling mechanisms, a strong value on cooperation, and an intentional eschewing of material things allow Bands to retain a high level of egalitarianism. This means that they do not have social ranked classes, and no one adult holds power over another. Leadership is informal, achieved during one's lifetime due to charisma and skill; it is called upon only when needed, and can shift seamlessly from one to another without the formal elections characterizing chiefdom and states. Recognizing Bands, prehistorically, can be tricky since the few material possessions they have are organic and don't preserve well. Material correlates include wild plants and animal remains, stone tools (bone and wood tools decompose quickly), campfires, and postholes. Postholes are the circular soil stains left when huts are burned down or decompose. Because Bands move frequently, they do not invest time in making ceramic pots (though the technology is not unknown to them) and instead utilize fiber nets, reed and bark baskets, and animal skin containers; all of which only preserve under special circumstances, such as in a very dry cave.

Prior to the "agricultural revolution" (see Module 9: Development of Agriculture), all human populations were **hunter-gatherers**. The Bands that moved less often and stored wild food surplus were probably the most likely to adopt agriculture or to notice that wild seeds left behind would grow on site the following year. Even among those who did store food, there often needed to be some cause for them to give up their egalitarian lifestyles. Today, there are very few Bands left, mostly due to pressure from Western nations. Examples include the Australian Aborigines, the Agta, the !Kung San, the Hadza, and the Kanak Inuit. Many contemporary social practices by neighboring states threaten the culture and lifestyle of these societies, including oil and gas extraction, gold and diamond mining, deforestation to plant monocrops like palm trees (used for palm oil in many of our snack foods), and climate change. For example, the !Kung San, who were forced into the marginal Kalahari Desert during the colonization of Africa, once again are finding themselves fighting for their land. Although the South African government set aside land for them in the 1970s, today, they are being forcibly removed because diamond deposits have been found underneath the land. Climate change has drastically and negatively impacted the Kanak Inuit of Greenland. The Kanak's cultural identity is intricately wrapped around dog sled hunting of whale and seal, but climate warming has

caused the ice to melt, sea levels to rise, and the marine mammals they survive on to move northward and out of reach. The result is that the Kanak are using gas powered boats to hunt and must import much of their food on ships which, ironically, burn fossil fuels and further contribute to climate warming.

Video 10.2. Check out the video clip from "Why the native people of the Kalahari are struggling to stay."

Video 10.3. Check out the video from NBC News that discusses the vanishing way of life for the Inuit in the Arctic.

Tribes

Tribes are characterized by a somewhat larger populations than Bands, but they are still relatively small, generally less than 5,000 people. They hunt, gather, and fish wild foods, but supplement their diet with plants cultivated in gardens. These are generally wild plants, such as the plantains and cassava grown by the Yanomamo. These gardens keep Tribes in one place longer than Bands, though they do periodically relocate their villages for the soil to replenish nutrients and game to repopulate. Like Bands, Tribes have little to no significant social hierarchy or substantial differences in wealth and power. That said, there are status distinctions, and tribal elders, sometimes called **"Big Men"** achieve status over their lifetime. For example, in the Trobriand Islands, elders are well known for their skill in gardening (which includes skilled magic), food surpluses, and generosity in giving away gifts of food. This **achieved status** differs from **ascribed status** in that it is achieved over one's lifetime through skill, work, and charisma. In contrast, ascribed status is inherited and passed down from generation to generation (e.g., the Royal Family in Britain). Achieved status differences are quite fluid, being neither rigid nor permanent, and Big Men's political power is essentially limited to their ability to persuade or harangue others into doing what they want.

The economic organization of Tribes is generally based on **reciprocity**, or gift giving among equals. While this may sound quaint and childlike, reciprocity is actually very strategic in two important ways. First, the giving of gifts creates bonds and relationships, as well as imposes obligations (to return the gift). Think about gift exchanges with friends or family around holidays or birthdays. If you gave a thoughtful gift to a good friend, who didn't reciprocate this action on your birthday, that sends a signal that they may no longer value the relationship. Creating relationships that you can count on in tough times is an important safety net: if you were generous toward someone in the past and come on hard times, there is an obligation for that person to now help you. Second, gift giving also confers status on the gift giver. The more you give, the more highly others think of you, and the more status you accrue. Status can then be used to convince others to follow or support you.

Perhaps the most famous example of generalized reciprocity is the **Kula Ring**, a trade system practiced by the Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea. Long, dangerous sea voyages were undertaken to trade along a circular route. A trader traveling in a clockwise direction would give necklaces of red shells (**soulava**) as gifts to his trading partner, but a trader traveling in a counterclockwise direction would give armbands of white shells (**mwali**). Kula exchange solidified bonds between male trading partners in the short term, but also served to gain status in the long term and created an important safety net in times of trouble, such as a typhoon destroying crops. The Trobriand Islanders have been studied extensively by anthropologists. One reason for this is their use of magic, especially among fishermen. This ritualistic use of magic has led many to characterize the Trobrianders as "primitive." However, in his poignant short article "Baseball Magic," George Gmelch points out that Trobriander use of ritual isn't any different from another society's, including American baseball players, who are (in)famous for their repetitive routines and activities, such as touching their caps, washing their hands, or wearing certain shirts. In both, ritual is used most often in situations that are risky and vulnerable to failure: in baseball, this is pitching, and in Trobriand fishing, it is deep sea fishing. Conversely, ritual isn't utilized as much (if at all) in situations that are more predictable and safer: in baseball, this is playing the outfield, and in Trobriand fishing, this is lagoon fishing. Gmelch's article reminds us that, regardless, of our type of

socio-political organization, all humans engage in ritual and "magic."

In sum, reciprocal actions create strong bonds within Tribes and serve as an important route to achieving status. As previously discussed, though, status is not permanent and certainly not inherited; Big Men must achieve their own status independent of their relations. Historic Tribes include the Iroquois Confederacy and the Celts of Northern Europe. The Celts, which share some traits with chiefdoms and are one of the cultures that doesn't fall neatly into one of Service's four types, are perhaps most famous for their ritual sacrifice of what is known as the Bog Bodies. These individuals, who were brutally murdered in multiple ways (e.g., hanging, stabbing, drowning), were buried in bogs across Northern Europe. Irish archaeologists have recently suggested that the bodies were sacrificed as the ultimate gift to the gods, and the gods were expected to reciprocate a healthy harvest in return (Granite 2016). Today, the most well- known societies organized at the tribal level include the Yanomamo of Brazil, the Masai of Kenya, and the Dani from Papua New Guinea. Like Bands, Tribes are threatened by the encroachment of modern states.

Chiefdoms

Chiefdoms are characterized by significantly larger populations than Bands or Tribes—5,000 to 20,000 people—and support themselves through the full-time farming of domesticated crops such as wheat, rice, or corn and occasionally through herding domesticated animals. Chiefdoms cover large geographic regions and have what social scientists call a **settlement hierarchy**, which is essentially what we currently see in the US with many small towns, fewer large towns, a few major cities, and a "capital." Their architecture typically includes large scale monuments such as pyramids, ritual centers, plazas, stockades, and palisades. Also, the majority of fortifications do not serve a protective function. Rather, they serve as social barriers that separate the elite from the commoners in the same way that gated communities do today. Chiefdoms are led by hereditary chiefs who have both political and religious power, which is then passed down to their children. Status is *ascribed* (i.e., inherited), and whether one is of low or high social status depends on how closely they are related to the chief. As you might guess, the burials of chiefs are quite elaborate, including exotic grave

goods and sometimes sacrifices, both animal and human. The "beaded burial" in Mound 72 at Cahokia, a Mississippian center located near present day St. Louis, contains two high ranked individuals buried with an elaborate beaded blanket made of thousands of hand-carved marine shell beads from the Gulf of Mexico. Archaeologists originally assumed both individuals were male warriors, which led to the myth that the Mississippian chiefdom was a patriarchal society dominated by ranked male warriors. Recent research, however, shows that the beaded burial, and many others at Cahokia, are a male-female couple. Thus, the division of elite and commoners was based on class and *not* gender as originally thought.

The economic organization of Chiefdoms is based on **redistribution**: a system in which goods, services, and/or labor flow from the population to the central authority represented by the chief. It then becomes the task of the chief to return (i.e., redistribute) these in another form and at a later date. You are probably more familiar with redistribution than you might think. Redistribution is found in all societies. For example, in the United States, we pay federal taxes to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) every April 15th. In 2020, for example, over $6.55 trillion tax dollars were redistributed by the federal government in the form of federal services and infrastructure such as the federal highway system, military, Social Security, and Medicare. Some economic practices that appear to be reciprocal gift exchanges (as we discussed above), after closer inspection, turn out to be redistribution. A good example of this is the **potlatch** system of the Native American groups living in the United States and Canadian northwestern Pacific coast, such as the Kwakiutl and Tlingit. Though banned by the English colonial government in the 1700s, traditionally, two groups of clans would perform highly ritualized exchanges of food, blankets, and objects. The ceremonial exchange, called a potlatch, conveyed status and prestige on its participants: by giving away more goods than another person, a chief could build his reputation as a generous gift giver, gain respect within the community, and ultimately gain new followers.

It is this potlatching, then, that some anthropologists believe is responsible for the rise of inequality and social classes within a society. The idea goes something like this: charismatic Big Men (or sometimes Women) achieve status and wealth via reciprocal gift exchanges. Their gifting and

generosity confer status on them, gains them followers, and creates obligation to "return the favor" in loyalty. This then leads to potlatching, in which multiple Big Men vie for power and followers by out-doing one another. Eventually, someone is unable to out-do the others and one big-man emerges as leader. In his article, "The Potlatch Plot," anthropologist William Rathje argues that potlatching underpins the rise of the Classic Period Maya. In this scenario, elites emerged as victorious Big Men due to their generosity. They then solidified the power they had won by building "monstrous visual symbols" such as pyramids, ball courts, public plazas. This effort effectively tied up the labor pool, impeding their competitors' ability to build their own monstrous symbols while, simultaneously, the builders were revered for their apparent "generosity" redistributed to the people.

Potlatching may seem foreign to us at first, but it is nearer to home than you might think. Like redistribution and reciprocity, we can see potlatching at work in our own culture, too. For example, Rathje illustrates how Bill Gates, who he dubs the "Big Man of the Computer Age," is the ultimate modern potlatcher. In his quest to become the nouveau elite of the internet, Gates gave away gobs of Microsoft Web browsers. As Rathje writes: "…his followers became legion…his competitors simply could not match [Gates's] largesse. Netscape's Jim Barksdale, who had been the Big Man of the Internet browsers, simply lacked the resources to keep up with such generosity and his power waned" (Rathje 2000). Closer to home, we may recognize potlatching among major companies vying for our brand loyalty, such as the major cellular providers constantly having to one-up their promotions to compete with the other. Or think about Superbowl parties, weddings, and frat parties — with the different hosts playing the role of "Big Man" and trying to create a bigger and better experience than the previous event that friends and family attended. They do all of this in the hopes that they will be regarded as the best host and, therefore, have plenty of followers and status.

Because of the competition inherent within Chiefdoms, they are generally short-lived. Competing factions lead to either 1) splitting off into smaller Tribes, or 2) merge (by force usually) into larger states/empires. Prehistoric Chiefdoms include the Mississippian culture (ca. AD 900-1350), which was a large earthen mound-building culture centered on the Mississippi River and its tributaries, the Olmec of Central America (1200-400 BC), Great

Zimbabwe in South Africa (AD 1000-1400), and the Moche of South America. Historically, the Celts functioned somewhat as a Chiefdom, though as noted above, they don't fit neatly into the Tribe nor the Chiefdom category. While they had reciprocity-based economic systems, typical of Tribes, they were farmers living in large villages with ascribed Kings/Queens. Native Hawaii was also organized as a Chiefdom—though some argue it was a state—when encountered by James Cook in 1778. Queen Lili-uokalai was the last reigning chief before the Kingdom's overthrow in 1893 that was caused largely by disease that killed Hawaiians. Today, there are no societies organized as Chiefdoms, so anthropologists have only the archaeological and historic record to learn from.

States

The state level of social organization is likely the most familiar or well known. States have large populations (over 20,000 people) covering large geographic regions, large urban centers, and intensive agricultural or industrial bases. They have an extensive road system and trade networks that are often regional or global in scale. States generally occupy clearly defined territories demarcated by political boundaries that separate them from other political entities, which may or not be states. An exception to this definition is the Islamic State (IS), which seeks to infiltrate many modern political boundaries. For example, Ancient Egypt was a State bounded on the west by desert, where forager or tribal nomadic peoples lived. To the east and south were other States such as Kush and Babylon, though these changed during the span of Ancient Egypt.

Mesopotamia, Ancient Greece, and the Olmec comprised a series of city-states competing for territory with other city-states. City-states consisted of a city and the surrounding towns, farms, and grazing lands. Each city-state had its own government, laws, money, and foreign colonies that provided valuable resources. While politically separate, city-states tend to be culturally similar to their neighbors. For example, Athens, Sparta, and Corinth were Ancient Greek city-states; they were all Greek but competed against each other in war and trade. Economically, States utilize a system of market exchange, currency, and taxation. Politically, they have centralized bureaucracies in which administrative offices are ranked in a hierarchy, with

the top offices delegating specific functions to lower ones.

States typically exercise a monopoly over the use of force, which is generally reserved as a last resort; one hallmark of a weak state is frequent use of physical force to maintain order. In contrast, most strong States utilize one of three general methods to maintain power: 1) coercion, 2) **hegemony**, and 3) ideology. Coercion entails physical brute force, and the use of terroristic activities to intimidate or terrify subjects, such as the human sacrifice practiced by the Aztecs in what is today central Mexico. The Aztec State instilled fear in their enemies, including the Spanish, by sacrificing them. The religious justification was that these offerings were needed as gifts to the gods, who would reciprocate with the continuation of the world and the sun would rise every day. Politically, it was savvy because such fear goes a long way toward deterring would-be rebels.

Hegemony refers to military and economic dominance of one State over another. Usually, it doesn't entail violence, but a show of "soft power" to intimidate subjects. The word hegemony derives from a Greek term that translates as "dominance over" and was used to describe relations between the Greek city-states. The dominant city-state at any given time is known as the *hegemon*. For example, the city-state of Sparta was the hegemon of the Peloponnesian League in the 6th-4th centuries BC. A modern example is Ukraine, which was pressured to ally with the East by Russia and with the West by the U.S. and European Union. When the Ukrainian president attempted to ally with Russia, he was ousted in the "Euromaidan Revolution" in 2014 and fled to Russia for protection. In response and punishment to Ukraine, Russia annexed Crimea using hegemony. Crimea was ethnically mostly Russian, so they didn't put up a fight and, politically, it was an easy feat. Having Crimea allowed Russia to cut off Ukraine from its major seaports, and they were crippled economically. Russia already had a military presence in Crimea and all they did was bring out the tanks, "flex their muscles," and Ukraine backed down. Although many other states complained, the Russian hegemon did not budge.

Finally, ideology refers to the creation of a shared cultural vision and use of common symbols among culturally diverse groups. Ideology often takes the form of images, symbols, nostalgic events, and slogans that grab people's

attention/emotions. In many modern states, such as the United States, this often includes engaging in pop culture and social media by appearing on TV shows, allying with popular celebrities, and utilizing social media to spread a message. In Ancient Persia, King Darius maintained an expansive empire in an ideologically, and very anthropologic, way. He painted murals at his palace of people in traditional dress from all over the empire willingly bringing him tribute. He also put pictures of a bowman (a person symbol representing patience, balance, and virtue) on ancient "billboards" and coins used as the common currency ("How Art Made the World" 2006).

Generally, States have well-entrenched social hierarchies. Unlike Chiefdoms, they are not necessarily kin-based, and divisions are based on social and economic class or castes. However, archaeological evidence suggests that this may not have always been the case. The Harrapan State, occupying the Indus Valley region of northern India circa 2600 BC, is a good example. Here, archaeologists don't find material correlates typical of entrenched inequality, such as disparities in burial treatment (e.g., exotic grave goods and elaborate burial), house size, and access to material goods. In fact, Harrapan society seems to be marked by a surprising degree of similarity throughout the valley. City plans are virtually identical throughout the valley, and all houses had access to public sewers, wells, and baths. There is also a remarkable standardization in material goods like masonry bricks, clay seals, pottery, games and children's toys, and clay "dice" that served as units of weight. Archaeologists have even excavated the actual balances or scales (likely for trade goods) that were used with these clay weights, which suggests a concern with exact measurements. Given this preoccupation with standardization and similarity, perhaps it should come as no surprise that the Harappan State lacks evidence social inequality. However, the Harappan State is one of just a handful of States that appear to have not been marked by social stratification and inequality, both of which have been correlated to decreased upward mobility, societal disruption, and even collapse.

Video 10.4. Check out the video from Researchers chart the rising wealth inequality across millennia.

Recent Approaches to Social Classification

Perhaps the greatest criticism leveled at the Service typology is that it, inevitably, gets interpreted through an evolutionary lens in which societies naturally "evolve" progressively from small "simple societies" to large "complex" societies. This has led to the unfortunate devaluing of archaeological sites associated with Bands and Tribes, and they are often overlooked in favor of the "sexier" sites associated with Chiefdom and States. Similarly, contemporary Bands and Tribes are constantly under threat by Western states that still view themselves at being at the "top" of the social hierarchy; a mindset that has justified centuries of discrimination, exploitation, poverty, and genocide.

Even though anthropologists recognize and acknowledge these concerns, it has been a difficult association to shake off. Today, most anthropologists subscribe to a **neoevolutionary** approach toward social organization in which we recognize the need to classify to facilitate communication and study change, but acknowledge that social change is *multi-directional*, rather than uni-directional. The Maya example discussed earlier demonstrates that large complex societies may become reorganized into smaller-scale societies to weather social stresses such as climate change, overexploitation of resources, and social unrest. Finally, this approach also helps anthropologists recognize greater variability in Bands, Tribes, Chiefdoms, and States. For example: the large earthen mounds at the Poverty Point site in Louisiana were once believed to have been built by tribal hunter-gatherers over many decades or centuries. To everyone's surprise, new research at the site showed that the mounds were built by these same hunter-gatherers in just a few weeks to months, something that would have required significant leadership to engineer and construct. Archaeologists have also found materials originating from over 1,400 miles away, such as copper from the Great Lakes, shells from the Gulf of Mexico, and quartz crystals from the Ozark Mountains.

Such an extensive trade network and leadership to build large-scale monuments is, typically, a Chiefdom or State characteristic. Yet, we know that Poverty Point was built by hunter-gatherers and long before agriculture was adopted in the United States. Both the Classic Maya and Poverty Point examples illustrate nicely that Service's typology, while still widely used by anthropologists, is limited in its ability to accurately characterize the vast variability in human social organization through time and space.

Video 10.5. Check out the video from Washington University in St. Louis presents Dr. Tristan Kidder discussing the mystery of Poverty Point.

Summary

Typologies offer the benefit of being able to concisely discuss complicated objects or groupings in a succinct manner, but they also tend to oversimplify those objects and groups.Anthropologists must be cognizant of these issues and ensure they don't perpetuate inaccurate evolutionary perspectives on societies and other cultural aspects. People organize themselves in ways that make sense to them based on *their* culture and cultural norms. Therefore, these organization types cannot be compared to each other in terms of "simple" versus "complex." Rather, it is imperative that we can remain culturally relative rather than imposing our own values on other cultures.

Review Questions

- **T/F.** Classification is a useful tool to help organize a vast amount of cultural diversity into a few manageable types to facilitate communication.
- **T/F.** An etic classification system creates categories based on the values of the culture associated with the system.
- **T/F.** Tribal groups are characterized by small (<100 people) groups relying exclusively on domesticated resources.
- **T/F.** Chiefdoms are typically short-lived due to competition between factions.
- **T/F.** The Service typology is inevitably an evolutionary framework to describe natural cultural evolution from simple to complex.

Discussion Questions

- Think of some examples of leveling mechanisms in our own culture. Are they as successful in creating greater equality in a state as they are in a band?
- Think of some examples of redistributive economics in our own culture. Are these systems fair? Do they promote more or less equality?
- What are some examples of potlatching in our modern society?
- Is it possible to study the variation in human societies without using a classification system? Can Western cultures ever shed the almost subconscious paradigm of ever-increasing complexity with us at the top? How does this reinforce racism and poverty?
- Lewis Henry Morgan placed the Australian Aborigines in the "Savagery" type by using his Western, etic technology attributes such as farming, metallurgy, and written language. What if the Aborigines (or any other band-level society) were to create their own typology of human societies? What emic attributes might they value instead?

Activities

1. *Button Activity:* arrange a collection of buttons or beads (your grandmother's sewing kit is a great resource to raid) into different classes based on physical attributes such as size, color, shape, surface decoration (e.g., plain, metallic, glassy etc.), and raw material (e.g., plastic, metal). Try classifying them into several types such as gender, age, socioeconomic status, and/or function. For each, explain what physical attributes you used and why. For example, if you placed a small, pink, bunny-shaped button in the "child" type when classifying by "age," then you would write down the attributes of <u>color</u> (pink is feminine), <u>size</u> (children have small buttons for small fingers), and irregular <u>shape</u> (adults tend to have more circular buttons). Did you use some buttons in more than one category (type)? Were you forced to pigeonhole some buttons into a type, just to make them fit somewhere? Finally, do you think someone from another culture would come up with the same classification as you did? Why or why not? These may be "fake" artifacts, but don't scuff. These, perhaps even more saliently than real artifacts can, illustrate the advantages and disadvantages of classification and the fact that our typologies can be very much clouded by our own cultural biases and assumptions.

2. If you are an instructor, we recommend *The Penny Game, by* Cathy Small, which brilliantly highlights the strategy of gift-giving in tribal reciprocity. The original "Penny Game: An Exercise in Non-Industrial Economics" can be found in *Strategies for Teaching Anthropology*, edited by Patricia Rice and David McCurdy, pp. 71-77, 1999. This activity is best done during a class period of 50 minutes or more. For a condensed version that works well in either small seminars or large lecture classes, see "Brother Can you Spare a Penny?" in *Experiencing Archaeology: a Laboratory Manual of Classroom Activities, Demonstrations, and Minilabs for Introductory Archaeology*, by Homsey-Messer et al., 2019.

3. For instructors, we also recommend *The Skin Game* by Claire Smith and Heather Burke which exemplifies for American students—who generally see Australian Aboriginal society as simple and childlike—the complexity behind Aboriginal kinship and marriage. The original "Skin Game: Teaching to Redress Stereotypes of Indigenous People" can be found in *Archaeology to Delight and Instruct*, edited by Heather Burke and Claire Smith, pp. 80-101, 2007.

Key Terms

Ascribed status: A position or inherited status in society, with the associated rights and responsibilities, determined without individual initiative or choice, and passed down from generation to generation (e.g., by being born into a particular family like the Royal Family in Britain or by being female); compare to achieved status.

Achieved status: An achieved position within society, and the associated rights and responsibilities, resulting from an individual's actions, talents, work, charisma, and accomplishments throughout their lifetime; compare to ascribed status.

Band: A small mobile group of related people, usually hunger-gatherers, among whom there is relatively little social differentiation or hierarchy; leadership is by consensus and group membership is fluid. Bands use leveling mechanisms to maintain egalitarian systems and equality.

Big Men: Individuals in some tribal societies, sometimes tribal elders, who achieve higher status and power owning to personal entrepreneurship and skillful use of social obligation, rather than to inheritance of wealth.

Chiefdom: A kin-based, competitive, and ranked society in which access to resources and power, as well as ascribed social status, are determined by hereditary proximity to the chief, who often controls the redistribution of goods and is wealthy as well as politically and religiously powerful. Chiefdoms have settlement hierarchy and cover large geographic regions with significantly larger populations than bands or tribes, supported by full-time farming of domesticated crops and animals.

Classification: Involves the sorting and grouping of copious quantities of things into a smaller number of classes, or types, according to qualities or characteristics, that can be analyzed to tell us something about the objects themselves.

Egalitarian: A type of social structure that emphasizes equality among different statuses.

Emic perspective: A personal perspective of a culture developed within that culture, through immersion and participation.

Etic perspective: An outside, presumably objective or standardized, perspective of a culture developed through observation and interview.

Hegemony: Military and economic dominance or leadership of a state, country, or social group over another. Usually it does not entail violence, but rather a show of "soft power" to intimidate subjects, generally practiced in state level societies.

Hunter-gatherers: Members of nomadic groups that depends on hunting, fishing, and foraging for subsistence.

Kula Ring: A trade system practiced by the Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea.

Leveling mechanism: A practice or behavior that "levels the playing field" to prevent or minimize inequality, often practiced by band level societies.

Material correlates: The physical remains associated or correlated with certain human behaviors.

Mwali: Armbands of white shells given by a trader as gifts to his trading partner when traveling in a counterclockwise direction, while participating in the Kula Ring.

Neoevolutionary Theory: an approach toward social organization that acknowledges social change is multi-directional, rather than uni-directional

Physical attribute: A quality, feature, or characteristic something has (e.g., size, shape, or color). Shared physical attributes help construct typologies which enables the creation of relative chronologies.

Potlatch: A form of redistributional and ceremonial exchange found among many Native American groups in the United States and Canadian northwestern Pacific coast. Two groups of clans would perform highly ritualized exchanges of food, blankets, and ritual objects to convey status and prestige to its participants.

Reciprocity: The sharing of goods and services among people, or gift giving among equals, generally practiced by tribe level societies.

Redistribution: A system that involves the exchange of goods and resources through a centralized organization, generally practiced by chiefdom level societies.

Service, Elman: Elman Service was an American cultural anthropologist who developed the "Bands-Tribes-Chiefdom-States" typology.

Settlement hierarchy: The arrangement of settlements into a hierarchy based on their population or other criteria (e.g., most parts of the United States consist of many small towns, fewer large towns, a few major cities, and a "capital").

Soulava: Necklaces of red shells given by a trader as gifts to his trading partner when traveling in a clockwise direction, while participating in the Kula Ring.

State: A politically autonomous form of society with a strong centralized government, a large population, substantial settlements, a social hierarchy with a stratified class system, and a market economy; states did not develop in pre-Columbian North America.

Three Age typology: Still used today, Christian Jürgensen Thomsen developed this typology to classify categorized cultures into three types, or "ages": Stone, Iron, and Bronze. Archaeologists regularly use these terms generically to facilitate communication of a new site and its relative age.

Tribe: A social grouping larger than a band that has a steady subsistence based on farming, herding, or a mixed economy but is still largely egalitarian with an emphasis on reciprocity practices. Tribes have social institutions based on kinship and age without significant hierarchies or substantial differences in wealth and power.

Typology: A system of classification that sorts items according to morphological, technological, functional, or other attributes; typologies can be used to construct chronologies

Suggested Readings

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Kohler, T. A., Smith, M. E., Bogaard, A., Feinman, G. M., Peterson, C. E., Betzenhauser, A., ... & Bowles, S. (2017). Greater post-Neolithic wealth disparities in Eurasia than in North America and Mesoamerica. *Nature 551*(7682):619-622.

Lee, R. B. 1969. Eating Christmas in the Kalahari. *Natural History* 78 (14): 1-6.

Rathje, W. 2000. The Potlatch Plot. *Discovering Archaeology* 2(5):26-28.

Service, E. 1962. *Primitive Social Organization.* Random House Studies in Anthropology, New York.

Videos

The Gods Must Be Crazy **video clip** (Coca Cola Bottle scene): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qs7LwthA3Ms

PBS News Hour: *Why the Native People of the Kalahari are Struggling to Stay.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJiuyKLM2vo

TEDTalk, Jared Diamond, *Why Do Societies Collapse?* https://www.ted.com/talks/jared_diamond_why_do_societies_collapse?language=en

Mystery in Louisiana. Washington University. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJ8YjsnkgJQ.

NBC News, *On Thin Ice: Inuit Way of Life Vanishing in Arctic.* https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/thin-ice-inuit-way-life-vanishing-arctic-n152806