

# The Renaissance Foundations of Anthropology

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THE comparative point of view of anthropology rests on a recognition that there are physical and cultural differences among human populations which must be taken into account in any attempt to generalize about mankind. It is anthropology's recognition of the scientific importance of such differences which chiefly distinguishes it from other disciplines concerned with man and human behavior. The history of this idea is therefore a particularly important part of the history of anthropology.<sup>1</sup>

It is the thesis of this paper that the anthropological tradition of interest in differences among men had its beginnings in the Italian Renaissance of the 14th and 15th centuries and specifically in Renaissance archaeology. The first differences which were recognized as significant to a general understanding of mankind were the cultural and linguistic differences between Classical antiquity and what was then the present. It was only after the beginnings of an archaeological perspective had been established that the interest in differences was extended to contemporary contrasts.

Renaissance studies of Classical antiquity not only stimulated a general interest in

differences among men, they also provided models for describing such differences. When the problem of describing contemporary non-Western cultures arose, there were Renaissance studies of Roman customs and institutions to serve as precedents. Similarly, Renaissance grammars and dictionaries of Classical Latin and Greek became models for the description of spoken languages in all parts of the world, and the study of the ancient monuments of Italy and Greece became the basis for archaeological reporting elsewhere. The beginnings of physical anthropology were delayed, because the study of Classical antiquity in this case offered little precedent.

In order to demonstrate the Renaissance origin of the comparative point of view of anthropology, it is necessary to show first that there was no continuous anthropological tradition of comparative studies stretching back through the Middle Ages to Classical antiquity, and second that the interest in differences of custom and language and in local antiquities, characteristic of some writers of the period of the voyages of discovery, was related to a fundamental change in men's attitude toward Classical antiquity which was the essence of the Italian Renaissance.

## I

It is a fact that there was no continuous anthropological tradition of comparative studies in Classical antiquity and the Middle Ages. There were, however, a number of individual writers in both periods who displayed some interest in cultural differences. The number of such writers was not large, and their anthropological interests made little impression on their contemporaries; if they were respected it was for other qualities. Such ancient writings of an anthropological nature as still survived were discovered with great enthusiasm by Renaissance scholars and only then began to influence effectively the development of anthropology.

The essence of the anthropological point of view is that in order to understand ourselves we need to study others. In contrast, the ancient Greeks for the most part held that the way to

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a by-product of research on the early history of archaeology. Its central idea is the result of thinking about the history of anthropology in the framework provided by Arnaldo Momigliano's Sather Lectures of 1962, "The Classical foundations of modern historiography," and Erwin Panofsky's work on the significance of the Renaissance (Panofsky 1960, 1962). Momigliano's Sather Lectures have not yet been published, but key portions of his argument are available in earlier articles (Momigliano 1955, 1960).

My argument, inspired by Momigliano, that there was no continuous anthropological tradition in Classical antiquity, is intended to challenge the notion common among anthropologists interested in the history of their discipline that anthropology begins with Herodotus and has had a more or less continuous development since. This notion is derived from such earlier studies as Myres 1908, Sikes 1914, and Trüdinger 1918, where its presence reflects the influence of the idea of progress.

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understand ourselves is to study ourselves, while what others do is irrelevant. This was the view taken by such influential thinkers as Thucydides and Socrates, for example. It was congenial to Greek ethnocentrism and contributed to the lack of any sustained interest in the customs and languages of "the barbarians," i.e., all non-Greeks. The Romans acknowledged the natural superiority which the Greeks liked to claim and therefore endeavored to identify themselves with the Greeks as far as possible. Instead of studying the differences between the Greeks and themselves, a procedure which would have implied an acceptance of their barbarian status, the Romans traced their ancestry to the heroes of Greek legend, identified their gods with Greek ones, imitated Greek manners, and used the grammatical categories of Greek to describe the Latin language.

In this context of general indifference the few writers of Classical antiquity who took an interest in anthropological comparison are conspicuous exceptions. The earliest and most important of such writers was Herodotus, whose *History* was written about the middle of the 5th century B.C. Herodotus displays as much interest in the customs of the Egyptians, Scythians, and other "barbarian" peoples as he does in Greek and Persian political history, and it has been said on this account that he is "the father of anthropology" as well as "the father of history."<sup>2</sup> The epithet is misleading, as will be seen from the discussion which follows.

How did Herodotus happen to develop an interest so foreign to the main current of Greek thought? A good case can be made that he learned it from Persian sources. There is no question that Herodotus had access to such sources. He was born a Persian subject in Halicarnassus, a cosmopolitan Greek city on the coast of Asia Minor. In his youth he travelled extensively in the western provinces of the Persian Empire, collecting information which he later used in his *History* (1921-38). Some of the Persian historical traditions which he incorporated in the *History* were evidently derived from sources in the Persian nobility.<sup>3</sup>

The Persians had no less national pride than the Greeks did, but they managed to combine it with a respect for the customs and languages of

others which was unique in the ancient world.<sup>4</sup> Herodotus illustrates the Persian attitude by telling how the Persian king, Darius the Great, rebuked the Greeks who were present at his court for their intolerance toward "barbarian" customs. Herodotus says:

If it were proposed to all nations to choose which of all customs seemed best, each, after examination, would place its own first, so strongly is each persuaded that its own are by far the best. ...That all men have this feeling about their customs may be concluded from many proofs, among them this. When Darius was king he summoned the Greeks who were with him and asked them for how much money they would be willing to eat the dead bodies of their fathers. They answered that there was no price for which they would do it. Then he summoned those Indians who are called Callatians, who eat their parents, and asked them, with the Greeks present and understanding what was said through an interpreter, what price they would accept to burn their dead at death (i.e., follow the Greek custom). The Indians cried aloud and begged him to avoid such sacrilegious speech. Such is the nature of custom, and I think it is rightly said in Pindar's poem that custom is lord of all (Bk 3 ch. 38; 1921-38, 2:50).

Darius had evidently taken the trouble to inform himself about some of the differences in custom among his subjects.

It was this same Darius who had his deeds recorded on the cliff at Bisitun in Old Persian, Babylonian, and Elamite, the three languages most likely to be understood by educated travellers in this area. The Bisitun inscriptions are famous today because they provided the basis for the decipherment of the cuneiform script, but the cultural significance of the repetition of the king's message in three languages is rarely noted. Earlier ancient rulers simply expected any subject who was interested in reading royal inscriptions to learn the official language.

The Jews, who benefited greatly from the Persian policy of toleration, preserved its memory long after the Persian Empire had fallen. The Book of Esther in the Old Testament, written in the second half of the 2nd century B.C., is a historical romance laid at the court of the Persian king Xerxes, the son of Darius, who ruled from 485 to 465 B.C. Part of the local color which is provided to authenticate the story is a statement that royal dispatches were issued "to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language." This phraseology is

<sup>2</sup> It was Cicero who called Herodotus "the father of history" (see Momigliano 1960:29) and J. L. Myres (1908: 125) who called him "the father of anthropology." Momigliano (1960:44) concludes that "Herodotus has really become the father of history only in modern times."

<sup>3</sup> Wells 1923; Glover 1924:60-61; Myres 1953: 159-160.

<sup>4</sup> The best general account of Persian imperial policy is still that of Eduard Meyer (1953-56, 4. Band, 1 :20-89). Meyer contributed a summary of this account in English to the eleventh edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica (article Persia). A detailed study of Persian toleration is badly needed.

repeated each time the issue of a royal order is mentioned.<sup>5</sup>

The Persian royal tradition appeared again in the 1st century B.C. exemplified by Mithridates the Great, king of Pontus, who claimed descent from one of the companions of Darius. Mithridates is said to have spoken fluently the languages of the 25 peoples who were under his rule: "quinque et viginti gentium quas sub ditione habuit linguas percalluit."<sup>6</sup>

If the ancient Persian interest in differences of culture and language led to the formation of a body of written literature of a more or less anthropological character, however, the *History* of Herodotus is its principal and perhaps only surviving document. Almost the whole of Old Persian literature perished after the conquest of the Persian Empire by Alexander the Great in the 4th century B.C.

No tradition of comparative cultural study developed in antiquity out of Herodotus' work. On the contrary, Herodotus was attacked time and again as a liar, and it was his statements about the unfamiliar customs of the "barbarians" which his Greek and Roman readers found particularly difficult to believe. As Arnaldo Momigliano has pointed out, Herodotus had many admirers in antiquity who praised his work as a model of literary style and an inspiring account of the heroic deeds of the Persian war, but none of them ever went so far as to defend him from the charge of being a liar. Herodotus' credit for veracity was not restored until 1566, when Henri Estienne argued that the information on differences in custom available in his day demonstrated the credibility of Herodotus' data on cultural variation (Momigliano 1960; Estienne 1566:xxix-xxxii; see also Legrand 1932; Spiegelberg 1927; Burn 1962:1-17).

The only lasting effect which Herodotus' ethnographic information had on Greek and Roman thought was that it inspired a tenuous thread of interest among philosophers in the fact that customs are different in different areas. As early as the end of the 5th century B.C. some of the teachers of rhetoric and ethics were asking whether there was in fact any absolute standard by which to distinguish between what is honorable and what is shameful, since the same act may be honorable in one place and shameful in another (Diels 1959:405-416; Taylor 1911:102-105; Untersteiner 1954:304-310). This

debating problem became part of the standard repertory of Greek philosophers, and every teacher needed a few handy examples of contrasts in custom to which he could refer. As a very minor part of his comprehensive effort to organize knowledge and provide materials for teaching, Aristotle made a collection of examples of odd customs, only a few fragments of which have come down to us (Heitz 1869:297-299; Moraux 1951:130-131). A similar collection was made in the 1st century B.C. by Nicholas of Damascus, a later member of Aristotle's school (Jacoby 1926-30, A: 384-390, C:255-261; Reimann 1895; Wacholder 1962: 70-88). The examples in these collections were compiled from the works of earlier writers on history and geography, including Herodotus. The philosophers did not make fresh ethnographic observations of their own.

The closest approach to an anthropological study in Greek after Herodotus appears to have been the description of India and its peoples by Megasthenes, written in the 3rd century B.C. (Müller 1874-83, 2:397-429; McCrindle 1877; Stein 1931). Megasthenes was ambassador of the Greek ruler of western Asia, Seleucus Nicator, at the court of Chandragupta, where he had excellent opportunities to see Indian life at first hand and to question informants. He was active only about 20 years after the Persian monarchy had been overthrown, and he represented the state which had inherited the lion's share of the former Persian territory. It is not unlikely that the Persian tradition of tolerant awareness of cultural differences influenced him, as it had influenced Herodotus. Only fragments of Megasthenes' work have been preserved, but it evidently contained substantial sections on Indian customs and beliefs as well as descriptions of the country and of Indian plants and animals. Like Herodotus, Megasthenes was branded as a liar by later Classical writers. The charge was inaccurate; Megasthenes' weakness was not mendacity but an innocent inability to distinguish the circumstantial narratives of Indian mythology from factual reports of areas he had not visited personally.

In Latin literature the only work of Classical antiquity which resembles an ethnographic report is a treatise entitled *On the origin, location, customs and peoples of the Germans*, written by Cornelius Tacitus in A.D. 98 (Tacitus 1938; Norden 1922; Walser 1951; Syme 1958:46-48; 126-128). This work is better known by the short title *Gerrmania*, but the longer one gives a clearer idea of its contents. The whole treatise is

<sup>5</sup> Esther 1:22,3:12, 8:9, quoted from the Revised Standard Version.

<sup>6</sup> Gellius (mid 2nd century A.D.), *Noctes Atticae*, Bk. XVII, ch. xvii; 1927-28, 3: 262-263.

not much longer than a modern journal article, and it conveys rather less ethnographic information than does Herodotus' description of the Scythians. Nevertheless, the fact that a Roman should write any separate work on a foreign people is notable in itself.

Tacitus was a Roman lawyer and civil servant, and it is not at all certain that he was ever in Germany. At the time he wrote his essay on the Germans, the Roman emperor Trajan was on the left bank of the Rhine, and the timing suggests that Tacitus was motivated by a desire to persuade the emperor to undertake an invasion of Germany. The *Germania* certainly reads like an article of the sort written by the political commentators of today to explain the background of current events and perhaps influence public policy at the same time. The author took advantage of the opportunity to read his fellow citizens a moral lesson by praising the Germans for maintaining certain values which Tacitus identified as part of the older Roman tradition and which he felt that his contemporaries were neglecting. In discussing those German customs which conflicted with Roman values, however, Tacitus' attitude was one of marked disapproval.

The *Germania* failed to influence Trajan's foreign policy, and it inspired no interest among the Romans in making more detailed studies of the Germans or of other foreign peoples. In fact, it had little effect on anyone's thinking until after its rediscovery in the Renaissance, when a new tradition of interest in cultural differences had developed on a different basis. In this new context the *Germania* was read with enthusiasm and attention for the ethnographic information it contained. It was hailed as a "golden book," and it had a considerable influence on pioneer ethnographic writings.

There is a certain amount of information on human differences scattered through the rest of ancient literature, particularly in works on geography, such as that of Strabo, and in more encyclopaedic works, of which the *Natural History* of the elder Pliny is the chief example that has come down to us (Strabo 1917-32; Plinius Secundus 1938-63). The information provided by the geographers consists of brief references to foreign customs which the author considered sufficiently peculiar to amuse his readers. It is present only as incidental detail, the main emphasis being on physical geography, the location of cities, and varieties of animals and plants. The complete lack of an anthropological perspective is particularly striking in Pliny's

*Natural History*, a work which includes four books on geography (Books III-VI) and one on man (Book VII). There is a section at the beginning of the book on man in which Pliny provides a catalogue of the fabulous anatomical freaks with which the imagination of the ancients peopled the more remote parts of the earth; thereafter, he discusses human variation only in terms of Greek and Roman examples.

Such information on foreign customs as we find in ancient literature is greatly reduced in value by the tendency of ancient writers to copy well-turned phrases from one another and show greater concern with form than with content. In discussing barbarians, men felt free to transfer an interesting statement of a peculiar custom from one people to another. Thus, statements made by Greek writers about Scythian customs were applied by Tacitus to the Germans. Evidently differences among barbarians were not considered important enough to require accurate reporting by historians and encyclopaedists. The result was the development of a series of ethnographic commonplace such as that barbarians use neither images nor temples in their worship; that they live by war and pillage; that they do not appreciate the value of precious metals; and so forth.<sup>7</sup>

During the Middle Ages some Arabic writers showed more interest in cultural differences than was common in Classical antiquity, but their work failed to influence the European tradition of the time. A certain number of Arabic works were translated into Latin and circulated in Mediaeval Europe, but these were chiefly mathematical and medical works. No significant influence of Moslem interest in cultural differences can be traced in Europe until the time of Giovanni Leone Granatino ("Leo the African") who completed the Italian version of his Description of Africa in 1526 (Granatino 1957). Renaissance scholars of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries were, on the whole, hostile to Arabic learning, which they compared unfavorably with that of the ancient, Greeks.

The intellectual climate of Mediaeval Europe was favorable to comparative studies. European Christians were much concerned about religious differences but only for the purpose of suppressing them. Other cultural differences were assigned little importance; it was differences in character and morality among

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<sup>7</sup> Schroeder 1921; compare John George Clark Anderson's review of the influence of commonplaces in the *Germania* in Tacitus 1938:xxvii-xxxvii.

individuals which were considered significant. At the same time, there was a literary interest in monsters and marvels, derived from the Classical literary tradition represented by the elder Pliny, which biased the expectations of travellers to distant lands. Thus, Mediaeval writers added little new information on differences among men to the stock which they had inherited from the geographical compilations of Classical antiquity.

In the 13th century, however, the Europeans had their attention forcibly attracted to the Mongols, a strange people from the eastern end of the world about whom the European literary tradition provided no information. Jenghiz Khan defeated the Russians at the Kalka River in 1223; Batu overran Russia between 1237 and 1240, and in 1241 he destroyed the armies of Poland and Hungary, supported by French and German contingents. In 1259 Berke invaded Poland again and defeated a crusade sent against him from the west. Here were "barbarians" whom the Europeans obviously could not afford to ignore. Many emissaries were sent to the new rulers of Asia with orders to collect information while conducting their official business. Respect for the military power of the Mongols led to some sober and factual reporting. The most informative of the European envoys to the Mongol courts were the Franciscan friars Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, who travelled in Asia between 1245 and 1247, and Willem van Rubroek, who made his trip in 1253 and 1254. These men wrote accounts of their experiences among the Mongols which were intended primarily as military intelligence reports but included a certain amount of information on Mongol customs. Pian del Carpine's *History of the Mongols* fills 68 small pages in English translation; a little over one quarter of it is devoted to presenting ethnographic information. Rubroek's *Itinerary* is nearly twice as long (130 of the same size pages) and about one fifth of it deals with Mongol customs (Wyngaert 1929: 1-130, 145-332; Dawson 1955).

A few years later (1275-1292) Marco Polo, the son of a Venetian merchant, spent 17 years in the service of Kublai Khan as an official of his imperial administration, eventually returning to Italy with many marvellous tales to tell. He was taken prisoner by the Genoese in a sea fight in 1296 and spent two or three years in a Genoese prison. There, in 1298, his story was written down in rough French by a fellow prisoner, Rusticiano of Pisa. Marco Polo's narrative is very different in tone from the earlier Franciscan reports. It is, in a sense, propaganda for Kublai

Khan, whom Marco served loyally and greatly admired; it also reflects a personal interest in cultural differences which Marco says he learned from the Great Khan himself (Polo, ch. 16; 1938, 1: 86). However, the ethnographic information in Marco Polo's book is neither very extensive nor very accurate. It is intermingled with much fabulous material on the "wonders of the east" which reflects a characteristically Mediaeval attitude (Polo 1938; Olschki 1960: 138-146).

The influence of the works of Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, Willem van Rubroek, and Marco Polo on European thought was not proportional to the value of the information they provided. Pian del Carpine's brief account of the Mongols was reproduced in the *Speculum Historiale* of Vincent of Beauvais, compiled between 1256 and 1259 as part of Vincent's great encyclopaedia, the *Speculum maius*, a popular Mediaeval work of reference. Marco Polo's picturesque narrative was also widely read. The more detailed and informative work of Willem van Rubroek was used by Roger Bacon, who met the author, and through Bacon's influence it had a modest circulation in England. It was unknown to continental scholars, however, until it was printed in the 16th century (Dawson 1955:2, 88; Bacon 1900, 1:305).

Roger Bacon, who lived from about 1214 to about 1292, was one of the most original thinkers of his time. He had a vision of a comprehensive science in the service of religion which he expounded to Pope Clement IV in his *Opus maius* of 1267; (Easton 1952). Part Four of this work contains a description of the world, occupying more than 70 pages, in which the reports of Pian del Carpine and Rubroek are both utilized. Here, if anywhere in Mediaeval literature, we might expect to find a foreshadowing of the comparative point of view of anthropology. Bacon does, indeed, stress the fact that the customs of men are different in different regions, but he goes on to explain that the differences are determined by the astrological influence of the planets, so that the way to study them is to determine the precise latitude and longitude of every place. There is no suggestion that direct observation of human behavior might be useful.<sup>8</sup> Bacon derived this theory of astrological determination from the pseudo-Aristotelian *Secret of secrets*, a work which profoundly influenced his thinking (Easton 1952: 73).

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<sup>8</sup> Bacon 1900, 1:300-301. Bacon took most of his geographical and ethnological information from Pliny.

Our review of pre-Renaissance writings by Europeans concerned with cultural differences can be summed up by saying that works of this sort were not numerous, and that the best ones were neglected or disbelieved. The intellectual climate of Europe was not favorable to a native development of anthropology either in Classical antiquity or in the Middle Ages, and the European tradition successfully resisted Persian and Mongol influence in this direction.

## II

When a broader perspective was finally developed, it did not originate with observations of contemporary differences but with the study of Greek and Roman antiquity. The first cultural contrast to be recognized was that between the present and the past. This recognition was an achievement of the Italian Renaissance and, in fact, was the new idea which generated the greater part of the Renaissance movement. Only when men had learned to see differences by studying the past were they able to observe contemporary differences in the world around them in any systematic fashion.<sup>9</sup>

Before the Renaissance, Europeans were no more sensitive to differences in time than they were to differences in space. The only remote past which the Greeks and Romans recognized as different enough to form a contrast with the present was a realm of mythological fantasy, and when the myths ceased to be acceptable in their literal sense they were reinterpreted as allegories. The Christians transferred the allegorical method to the interpretation of biblical texts, thus destroying the documentary value of these texts as records of a non-Classical culture.

In the Middle Ages Europeans recognized no significant difference between themselves and the ancients. The distinction between a Classical and a Mediaeval period was an invention of the Renaissance which would have been incomprehensible to the people of earlier times. The fact is that the cultural tradition of Greece and Rome continued unbroken into the Middle

Ages. Latin was everywhere the language of education and continued to be the common written language of Europe. Educated people were therefore not entirely cut off from ancient literature, although books became very scarce. Some ancient writers continued to be read, chiefly the later ones of Christian Rome. Stories from ancient literature and history were retold and illustrated in art. The fact that some changes had taken place was recognized, but the changes were regarded as isolated discrepancies, not sufficiently significant to establish a systematic contrast between antiquity and the present. Where their attention was not called to a specific difference, people simply assumed that the ancients behaved in familiar ways; thus Alexander the Great appeared in Mediaeval romances as a feudal monarch, and the heroes of ancient Rome were depicted in Mediaeval dress in paintings and book illustrations. As Erwin Panofsky puts it, "For want of a 'perspective distance' classical civilization could not be viewed as a coherent cultural system within which all things belonged together" (1960: III). The Renaissance has done its work so well that it now requires some effort to understand this Mediaeval point of view.

In the 13th century, with the rise of scholasticism and the High Gothic style in art, there was a general abandonment of the Classical tradition in philosophy, literary style, architecture and sculpture, the change being particularly marked in France. In architecture, for example, Classical ornament was almost systematically eliminated. The Latin language was not abandoned, but it was modified in syntax and vocabulary to fit the new patterns of scholastic thinking, and Classical writers were no longer taken as models of literary style.<sup>10</sup>

The Renaissance began in the 14th century as a reaction against the new ideals of the 13th. The founders of the Renaissance wanted to turn again to Classical models and restore the old tradition. Their attack on the work of their immediate predecessors, however, led them to emphasize the differences between current practice and Classical values, so that the cultural contrast between antiquity and the present gradually came to be recognized. The Renaissance learned to see antiquity at the "perspective distance" stipulated by Panofsky.

The man who was most influential in starting the Renaissance movement was Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca, 1304-1374), and his

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<sup>9</sup> There is an immense literature on the Italian Renaissance. For present purposes the most useful research guides to this literature are Stark 1880 and Cosenza 1962. Novices in the Renaissance field should be warned that there has been much controversy among historians in recent years regarding the differences between the Renaissance and the Middle Ages (see Ferguson 1948 and Helton 1961). In this controversy I follow Panofsky, because I find his arguments convincing. The neo-Burckhardtian approach of this paper therefore represents a deliberate and reasoned choice among the alternatives.

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<sup>10</sup> This paragraph is based on Panofsky 1960: 101-103.

interests shaped its development.<sup>11</sup> Petrarch was a poet and essayist, an artist with language who was more concerned with literary form than with content. He collected the works of ancient writers, particularly the Roman poets and orators, modelled his Latin style after theirs, imitated their literary forms, and wrote on subjects which they suggested to him. Antiquity for Petrarch represented an ideal of perfection in every department of life, an ideal to be imitated as faithfully as possible. In order to imitate Classical antiquity, however, it was first necessary to study it. Petrarch's own studies of Roman literature were too personal and unsystematic to initiate a tradition of scholarship, and for this step we must look to his friend and admirer, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375), who wrote treatises on Classical mythology and topography as well as the prose stories for which he is now more famous (Voigt 1894: 159-180; Hortis 1879; Wilkins 1927). The first systematic observations of archaeological monuments were made about 1375 by another friend of Petrarch's, the physician and mechanical engineer Giovanni Dondi (1318-1389) [Sarton 1948:1676-1677; Rossi 1871 and 1888:330-334; Bormann and Henzen 1876:xxvii-xxviii; Panofsky 1960: 208-210].

Petrarch particularly admired the poetry of Virgil and Cicero's prose, but he knew also the works of perhaps 15 to 20 other ancient Roman writers from manuscripts which were more or less readily accessible in northern Italy. He studied Greek, though only with limited success, and owned a manuscript of Homer and several of the works of Plato. The selection of ancient literature available gradually increased as Petrarch's followers became more numerous and began to exchange copies of the manuscripts they found. The search for manuscripts was carried on chiefly in Italy at first, but shortly after 1400 Italian scholars discovered the riches of the monastery libraries north of the Alps and began purchasing manuscripts in Greece and at Constantinople. The greater part of ancient Greek and Latin literature which has survived was known in Italy by about 1430.<sup>12</sup> By this time also a tradition of teaching ancient literature was well established. The effective beginning of Greek studies in Italy dates from the appointment in 1396 of the Byzantine scholar

Manuel Chrysoloras to teach Greek at Florence (Symonds 1888: 108-113; Voigt 1894:219-228).

The discovery, reproduction, and teaching of ancient literature occupied the energy of Renaissance intellectual leaders until well into the 15th century, allowing little opportunity for the development of systematic study. Then, with many new resources available, the foundations of modern scholarship were laid by three remarkable men, Ciriaco de' Pizzicolli of Ancona (1391-1452), Lorenzo Valla (1406-1457), and Biondo Flavio of Forli (1392-1463).

Ciriaco de' Pizzicolli founded the discipline of archaeology.<sup>13</sup> In 1421 he had occasion to study the Latin inscription on the triumphal arch of Trajan at Ancona and was inspired by the idea that archaeological monuments could provide a more direct testimony of antiquity than the literary tradition. He devoted the rest of his life to studying ancient monuments in the field, copying inscriptions and recording ancient sculpture and architecture in Italy, Dalmatia, Greece, Turkey, and even Egypt. Once, at Vercelli in northern Italy, an ignorant priest asked Ciriaco his business, and the archaeologist replied, "Restoring the dead to life" (Pizzicolli 1742:55). The remark is still a good statement of the business of archaeology.

Ciriaco's concern with ancient monuments implied no rejection of the literary tradition of antiquity; he regarded the two kinds of evidence as complementing one another. He was himself an enthusiastic student of ancient literature and collected many important Greek manuscripts on his eastern travels. Some of his field notes were made in the margins of a copy of Strabo's *Geography* which was his guide to the identification of many ancient sites.

Little of Ciriaco's work has come down to us in the form it left his hands. Only a few pages of his voluminous original field notes (*Commentaria*) have survived, and we know his work chiefly from copies of extracts made by contemporaries who were interested in the evidence he provided. He wrote no work of synthesis of his own. Nevertheless, his influence on posterity was considerable.

Lorenzo Valla was the founder of the Renaissance tradition of linguistics (Mancini 1891; Gaeta 1955; Valla 1962). His major linguistic work was a manual of literary style

<sup>11</sup> On Petrarch see especially Voigt 1894; Essling and Müntz 1902; Nollhac 1907; Venturi 1929; and Mommsen 1957.

<sup>12</sup> On the recovery of Latin and Greek manuscripts see Symonds 1888: 127-142; Voigt 1894:229-259; and Sabbadini 1905-14.

<sup>13</sup> Bodnar 1960:8-15 gives an extensive bibliography of works relating to Ciriaco; to it should be added Essen 1958. The basic source on Ciriaco's life is Scalamonti 1792. On the value of his field records see Lehmann-Hartleben 1943 and Ashmole 1956.

entitled *Elegances of the Latin language* which was begun before 1435 and finished in 1444 (Valla 1962, 1:1-235; Mancini 1891: 261-275). It is a descriptive study of Classical usage based on specific examples from ancient texts. Valla's perspective view of ancient Latin enabled him to recognize that linguistic change had occurred, and his descriptive method made study of such change possible. The *Elegances* was first printed in 1471 and went through 26 editions before 1500.

Valla also stimulated Renaissance interest in cultural differences by translating Herodotus into Latin. He is probably best known, however, as the founder of historical criticism. He earned this title by an attack, written in 1440, on the authenticity of the so-called "Donation of Constantine," a forgery of the time of Charlemagne on which the popes had, for several centuries, based their claims to temporal power (Valla 1922 and 1962, 1: 761-795). Valla's attack on the "Donation" includes such explicit criticism of abuses in the church that he has been hailed as a forerunner of Luther. He had the further audacity to criticize St. Jerome's Latin translation of the New Testament, which he proposed to correct by comparison with the original Greek. A comparable degree of intellectual independence had brought Jan Hus to the stake only a few years earlier, but the triumph of the Renaissance in Italy introduced an interlude of toleration which not only saved Valla from persecution but made it possible for him to be appointed a papal secretary.

Valla was a versatile scholar who wrote philosophical and devotional essays, current history, polemics, and verse as well and the linguistic and critical works mentioned. In addition, he was one of the discoverers of manuscripts of ancient literature.

Biondo Flavio also made important contributions to Renaissance linguistics and archaeology, and he was the first to undertake a systematic study of ancient Roman culture.<sup>14</sup> His first work was an essay on the language spoken by the ancient Romans, written in 1435.<sup>15</sup> Leonardo Bruni and others had suggested that Latin was only the literary language of ancient Rome, while the spoken language was like the Italian of their own day. This theory in effect

projected the 15<sup>th</sup> century situation into the past, in Mediaeval fashion, and blurred the new perspective view of antiquity. Biondo defended the Renaissance position by presenting evidence that the spoken language of the ancient Romans was a form of Latin. In doing so, he displayed an essentially modern view of dialect differences.

Between 1444 and 1446 Biondo wrote the first archaeological monograph intended for publication. It was entitled *Rome restored* and was a study of the topography and monuments of the ancient city based on a combination of literary evidence and observations of surviving remains. Printing was introduced into Italy in 1464, and Biondo's *Rome restored* became the first archaeological work to be published by the new process, appearing in 1471. It had a profound influence on later work. Biondo followed up his study of ancient Rome with another one which provided similar topographic treatment of the antiquities of other parts of Italy. *Italy illustrated*, as this work was called, was written between 1448 and 1453 and printed in 1474.

Biondo's study of ancient Roman culture was written between 1457 and 1459 and was first printed about 1473. It was entitled *Rome triumphant* and included sections on religion, government, military organization, life and customs, dwellings and transportation, and public honors. There were also frequent comparisons with customs and institutions of the author's own time which reflect the beginnings of an anthropological point of view.

Biondo was also a historian concerned with more recent events. His *Decades of history from the decline of the Romans*, written between 1438 and 1453, is a general history of Italy from the end of the 4th century to the year 1441, the first survey of the Middle Ages from the Renaissance point of view and a work which had a great influence on later scholarship in the Mediaeval field. It ends with an account of the arrival of envoys from Ethiopia at the papal court.

The Renaissance scholars whose work we have discussed treated antiquity as a different world from the one they knew, remote but accessible to all through its literature and its monuments. The Renaissance education of their time spread the view that the ancients were both different and worthy of study. Men trained in this tradition were better prepared than any of their predecessors to observe and record contemporary cultural differences when the opportunity presented itself.

<sup>14</sup> Biondo Flavio 1927:xix-cxciii (by Bartolomeo Nogara), and notes kindly provided by Margaret T. J. Rowe. Biondo, of course, wrote in Latin, although the titles of his works are given in English in the text of this paper.

<sup>15</sup> *De verbis Romanae locutionis*; Biondo Flavio 1927: 115-130.



The importance of the Renaissance point of view in making men sensitive to cultural differences is clearly seen in the records of early Portuguese and Spanish explorations in Africa and the Atlantic. The accounts of most of the early explorers are limited to relating their own adventures, discussing problems of navigation, and indicating the physical characteristics of the new lands and the opportunities for trade which they presented. The rare writers who devoted some attention to the natives and their customs in the early days of the great voyages of discovery were all either educated Italians or men who had been exposed to Italian Renaissance influence.

The first great program of western voyages, that of Prince Henry the Navigator of Portugal, took place in the 15th century and was contemporary with the first flowering of Renaissance scholarship in Italy. After sending ships to explore Madeira and the Azores, Prince Henry turned his attention in 1434 to the west coast of Africa, looking for slaves and gold. In 1441 his captains reached the Senegal at the northern edge of black Africa, and Europeans stood at the threshold of their first contemporary new world. Thereafter, voyages along the West African coast for trade and further exploration were frequent. Although a number of the captains who participated in these voyages wrote reports which have come down to us, only one made a systematic attempt to provide some ethnographic information on the peoples he visited. He was an Italian merchant, Alvise Ca' da Mosto (1432-1483), member of the Venetian nobility, who made two voyages to West Africa for Prince Henry, one in 1455 and the other in 1456. His account of what he saw in Rio de Oro, the Canary Islands, Senegal and Gambia was printed in 1507 (Ca' da Mosto 1937: 1-84).

The Renaissance tradition of scholarship was taken to Spain in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century by Elio Antonio de Lebrija (1444-1522), an Andalusian educated at Bologna, and Pietro Martire d' Anghiera (1457-1526), an Italian scholar attached to the court of Ferdinand and Isabella. Lebrija was a notable pioneer in linguistics. His Latin-Spanish and Spanish-Latin dictionary, published in 1492-95, was the first bilingual dictionary to include a modern spoken language, and his Spanish grammar, published in 1492, was the first grammar of a spoken language inspired by Renaissance scholarship (Lebrija 1926, 1946, 1951). While based on a Latin grammar which Lebrija had written earlier, the Spanish grammar is by no means a mechanical application of the rules of Latin to

Spanish. Where differences between Latin and Spanish struck his attention, Lebrija attempted to describe the Spanish constructions in their own terms. He was especially interested in pronunciation and proposed a reform of Spanish spelling to bring it more into line with the results of his analysis of the sounds of the language. Lebrija's work set a precedent for the later efforts of missionaries, many of them Spanish or Spanish trained, to describe the native languages of America.

Pietro Martire considered the discovery of America to be the most interesting event of his time. Although he never visited the New World himself, he became its first systematic reporter, beginning at once, with the return of Columbus in 1493, to collect information on American explorations from the men who were participating in them. His position at court enabled him to keep in close touch with events, and he entertained and questioned many of the explorers on their return to Spain. He saw the objects they brought with them and examined the captives they exhibited to the king. The information he collected was communicated immediately in elegant Latin to the popes and the community of Renaissance scholarship. A small volume in Italian based on his letters was published in Venice without the author's name in 1505. Pietro Martire's own Latin version of his reports was published in parts, the first in 1511, the first three in 1516, and the entire work in eight parts in 1530, after the author's death. It was entitled *New World decades* (Salas 1959: 13--00 and references; Wagner 1947; Anghiera 1892 and 1912).

Pietro Martire took a special interest in ethnographic and linguistic information about the natives of the newly discovered lands. His letter of November, 1493, to Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, which became Book I of the first *Decade*, includes a brief vocabulary of Taino words recorded from the natives of Hispaniola whom Columbus brought back from his first voyage. This vocabulary is our earliest European record of any New World language, Pietro Martire's ethnographic information is relatively abundant and is presented in a notably objective fashion, the only American customs which he feels called upon to condemn outright being cannibalism and human sacrifice. The fairness of his attitude toward both cultural and physical differences is well illustrated by a passage in which he gives his reactions to the sight of the lip plugs worn by some Mexicans whom Cortes had sent to the Spanish court:

I do not remember ever having seen anything more repulsive; they, however, consider that there is nothing more elegant under the orb of the moon, an example which teaches us how absurdly the human race is sunk in its own blindness, and how much we are all mistaken. The Ethiopian considers that black is a more beautiful color than white, while the white man thinks otherwise. The hairless man thinks he looks better than the hairy one, and the bearded man better than the beardless. It is clearly a reaction of the emotions and not a reasoned conclusion that leads the human race into such absurdities, and every district is swayed by its own taste (*Decade* 4, bk. 7; Anghiera 1892, 2:41-42),

Darius the Great would have approved this statement.

The anthropological importance of Pietro Martire rests on more than his own

objective reports on American ethnography, however. It was he who inspired the actual explorers of the New World to make notes on native customs. He provided a focus of interest in such matters at the Spanish court, questioning returning travellers, demanding reports, distributing information, and over the years creating a public interest which stimulated others to publish the information they had collected in far countries. To give only one specific example of his influence, a good case can be made on circumstantial evidence that Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés was stimulated to write his *General and natural history of the Indies* by the visit he paid to Pietro Martire in January, 1516, and by reading the first three *Decades* published in the same year. There is no doubt that Fernández de Oviedo came to regard himself as Pietro Martire's great rival as an expert on New World matters. Once started on his American research, however, Fernández de Oviedo drew on a Renaissance background of his own. He had travelled in Italy between 1497 and 1502 and had read extensively in Classical literature. He utilized this background to compare New World customs with those of antiquity in a much more systematic fashion than Pietro Martire had done (Salas 1959: 122-125).

No one who makes a general survey of the literature bearing on historical ethnology which has come down to us from 16th century Europe can fail to be struck by the fact that it provides better and more detailed information on New World cultures than on those of the other parts of the world which the Europeans were exploring at the same time. The difference can be credited very largely to Pietro Martire's influence.

### III

The significance of the Renaissance to the history of anthropology is that it created a "perspective distance" at which antiquity or any more recent culture might be seen whole and observed with a respect that would make it an acceptable object of study. The perspective of anthropology owes much to the experience of Europeans in the great voyages of discovery, but it did not originate in the observation of contemporary differences. Travellers see only what they are prepared to see, and men's eyes had first to be opened by the study of Classical antiquity in a framework which contrasted it with their own times.

It is paradoxical in a sense that Renaissance admiration for Classical antiquity should have made men more ready to study linguistic and cultural differences in the world around them. Why did they not concentrate exclusively on the study of Classical antiquity? Many, of course, were content to do so. But the Renaissance movement was more than a nostalgic return to the past. It was a dynamic reform movement which asked the advice of the past in order to handle the problems of the present, and it was born in comparison. There were always many Renaissance thinkers for whom the present had to be part of the equation.

The enthusiasm of the Renaissance for Classical antiquity had the further effect of cracking the shell of ethnocentric prejudice which had traditionally isolated the men of the west. If the Greeks and Romans were the great masters, ever rivalled since, it was ridiculous for any modern people to claim an exclusive excellence. A touch of humility toward the great past made possible the impartial curiosity of men like Pietro Martire d' Anghiera.

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