

Introduction to  
Anthropology:  
Holistic and Applied  
Research on Being  
Human

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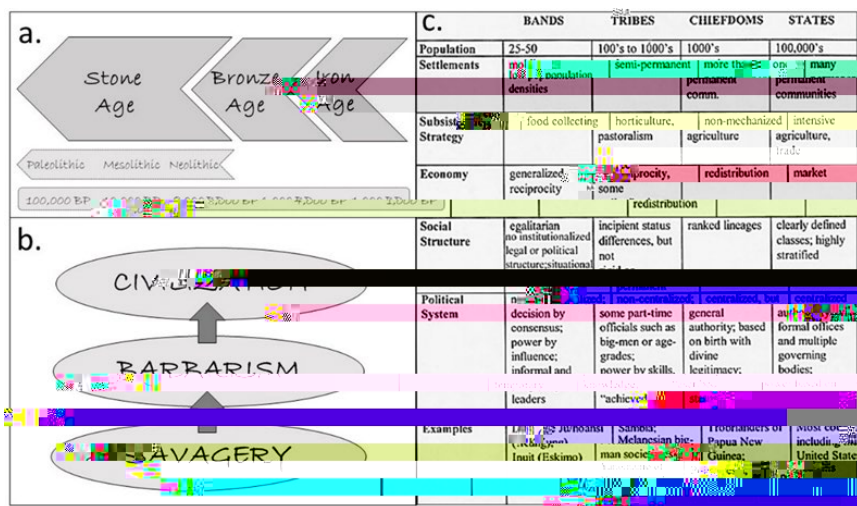
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Hypothetical example illustrating the classification of ceramic sherds (a, b) into four distinct ceramic types (c, d). Image used with permission from *Experiencing Archaeology: A Laboratory Manual of Classroom Activities, Demonstrations and MiniLabs 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 (1962) “ ” 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-



. 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](#).

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

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.



agriculture, metallurgy, and written language. These are attributes (versus ) 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.

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



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

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 millenTc 0.012 Tw T-1.9 (p)1 (/)-1.



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.



### *Must Be Crazy*

### *The Gods*

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 hoarding 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

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.

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

T e r a t e . - 1 1 8 5

The economic organization of Tribes is generally based on \_\_\_\_\_ ,  
or gift giving among equals. While this may sound quaint and childlike,

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



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 \_\_\_\_\_ : 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., redistribu

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]



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) \_\_\_\_\_, and 3) ideology. Coercion entails physical brute force, and the use of terroristic activities to intimidate or terrify subjects, such as the human sacrifice

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 vi -1.28n4 (d)-eb.5 (o)9 (t)-2..5 (it)-2.5 (y)3.9 (i)8.1.-1.9 (

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 as being at the “top” of the social hierarchy; a mindset that has justified centuries of dim cp4h(a)2.8 (t)03.6

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.

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.

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









: 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 -0.007 Tw -16.733 -63.96i7 Tw -16 -0.0 a “capital”).

: N.007u0ckces of red shells given by a trader as gifts to his trading par

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