THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
Department of History
Semester I 1972-73

HISTORY 674

Historical Methods for Verbal Societies

Each week two papers will be presented and one period will be devoted to lectures. Six or twelve week exams will not be given, except for those who wish to take a six weeks examination. But the grade will not count towards the final grade. More details at the first meeting.

Readings seem relatively light, but they are not! Many require extra effort because they deal with unfamiliar disciplines. Readings should be completed by the first session of each week, barring the first one, because the general principles relevant to each discipline and presented in the readings are taken as a point of departure, not one of arrival for the class.

Required Textbooks:
D. McCall, Africa in Time Perspective (abridged MC)
C. Gabel and N. Bennett, Reconstructing African Culture History (abridged GB.)

Although the textbooks deal with Africa only they have a much wider relevance and the course hopes to achieve a wider geographical coverage. It is a general course in methods. Africa is merely the most used example.


It is obvious that students would do well to be acquainted with the basic notions of "classical" historical method. A book such as R. J. SHAPER, A Guide to Historical Method (paperback, Dorsey Press 1969) is useful (esp. parts III and IV). Among the classics BLOCH, M., Apologie pour l'histoire (translated) is a favorite. For "modern" history see F. GILBERT and S. GRAUBARD, Historical Studies Today, NY 1972 (abridged GG).

There is no reading period except for Week 9 when the basic texts on linguistics are introduced.
Week I

**Introductory.** Some thoughts about History
- Verbal societies
- Outside written sources and verbal societies

Week II

**Oral Data:** Oral Tradition (OT): Its nature.

**Paper:** The isnad of hadith or a case study of transmission in a given society, e.g., Ewe, Rwanda, Tonga, Hawai, Tikopia, etc.

**Paper:** Different types of tradition in a given society.

**Required Reading:** Vansina, Once Upon a Time - Daedalus, 100, 2, 1971, pp. 442-468 or reprint in GC: p. 14-439; MC 1-27. Vansina, Oral Tradition (abridged OT, chapter 2).


Week III

**Decoding a Tradition:** What does a tradition mean: levels of meaning?

**Paper:** Esthetics and accuracy...: a case, e.g. Rwanda, The Mwindu Epic, a Serb or other epic.

**Paper:** Anthropological Myth and History: either positions or a case-study.

**Required Reading:** OT, chapters 3 and 4, CB 57-82, MC 38-61.


Week IV

**Assessing a Tradition:** Cultural notions of History and Historical Concepts.

**Paper:** The importance of variants: a case, e.g. Malagasy traditions.

**Paper:** Divergent Traditions, e.g. Fipa, Igala, Southern Lwoo, etc.

Recommended Reading: papers on notion of Time (there are many), Cause (very few), Space (many, Fate (few)), Truth (very few) and History in general. For the last, M. Mead, Homogeneity and Hypertrophy: A Polynesian-based Hypothesis in Highland et al., Polynesian Culture History, Honolulu 1967 (abridged POL) is the most stimulating.


Week V:
Assessing and Collecting Traditions: How to collect.

Paper: The case of the Ifa divination texts or the Kumuhuona legends (Hawai) or others; assessment of the tradition.

Paper: Critique of a plan for collection on a case, e.g., Soga, Ewe, etc.


Week VI:
Chronology: Written Records of Traditions: The chronology of Oral Tradition

Paper: a chronology, e.g. based on age-grades; on recurrence of ceremonies, etc.

Paper: Contamination of Traditions by Writing: a case


Recommended Reading: papers dealing with time or chronology. A good example, G. Dieterlen, -A. 1971, I, 1-7 vs. M. Griaule, Masques Dogons, Paris, 1938. Contamination of tradition is commented upon occasionally in recent times. The interlacustrine area should be a good case (Uganda. Cfr. S. R. Karugire, A History of the Kingdom of Nkore, Oxford, 1971, esp. p.2-5, and tracking the references down. Any body of successive writings on the same area is worth investigating (e.g., Bunyoro, Yoruba, Benin...
Week VII: Archaeology I. Introduction.

Paper: A Field Report analyzed, e.g. Ingombe Ilede, Igbo Ukw, Sanga
Zimbabwe, Kilwa, Tegdaoust, etc.

Paper: Archaeology and ethnography: questions about pottery or the
Phalaborwa case, or the Inca case, etc.

Required Reading: MC 28-37; GB 1-24, Graham Clarke, Archaeology and
Society, Ch. II-IV, VI-VII. C. Gabel, Analysis of Prehistoric
Economic Patterns, 1-68 (all), N.Y. 1968.

Recommended Reading: S. B. Binford, L. R. Binford, New Perspectives in
Archaeology, Chicago, 1968, 1-48, part II and III; S. Piggott,
Ancient Europe, Chicago, 1965, p. 1-23 and literature cited
there; M. I. Finley, Archaeology and History - GG, 281-299.
Most of this deals with the amount of social structure that can
be reconstructed from archaeological remains. Two technical
texts are W. W. Taylor, A Study of Archaeology, N.Y. (Arcturus)
1967, and Hole F., Heizer, R.F., An Introduction to Prehistoric
Archaeology, N.Y. 1965, both still favorites., N. J. Vander
Merwe, R.T.K. Scully, The Phalaborwa story, World Archaeology,
3 (1971/72), p. 178-196 plus reference. For pottery see e.g.
N. David, The Ethnography of Pottery. On Inca: Work by J. V.
Murra, C. Morris and D. Thompson on Huanuco from American
3, p. 344-362, and eventual further publication.

Week VIII: Archaeology II. The Chronology of Archaeology (especially C.14).

Iconography and monuments (lecture)

Paper: interpret the iconography of Ife, Benin or rock art in Africa
(iconography or monuments from other continents are welcome).

Required Reading: MC 107-119; GB 115-138; Graham-Clarke o.c., 132-168;
H. Barker, JAH, 1972, XIII, 2, 177-187; Dyck, W., Recent Developments in C 14,
Current Anthropology, 1967, 8,4, p.349-351; Renfrew,
C., C 14, and the Prehistory of Europe, Scientific American,Oct,
1971, p. 63-72 (a bombshell), Mauny, R., Les fossiles directeurs
en archéologie ouest-africaine, HTA, 257-262, can be replaced by
the fishhook study of K. Emory, Hawaiian Archaeology: Fishhooks,

Recommended Reading: H. C. Fritts, Tree Rings and Climate, Scientific
American, May, 1972, p. 92-100; a monograph on excavations
(excavation report); a monograph on iconography. F. Willet's
Ife in the History of West African Sculpture, London, 1967, is
is a good example. J. Devise, Archéologie et histoire en Afrique,
Journal of World History, 1970, XII, 4, p. 539-559, shows what can
be expected for that continent.
History 674  
Syllabus  
Mr. Vansina

Week IX: Linguistics I


In later weeks we will use mainly D. Daley, Language and History in Africa, London, 1970 (abridged DAL). One could read non assigned papers now.

Week X: Linguistics II: The Comparative Method

Paper: Comparative Bantu (e.g., use Guthrie's Comp. Bantu I and relevant articles in DAL or a problem on Austronesian or Athabascan.

Paper: Protovocabulary as a source. (Any language group OK. including an IndoEuropean one, or I.E. itself).

Required Reading: Bloomfield, 425-495; Lehmann, 193-231; Greenberg 66-74; DAL 20-49; 146-159, especially the last (Ch.S. Bird on Mande); D. Dalby, Levels of Relations, African Language Studies, VII, p. 171-179.

**Week XI**

**Linguistics III:** Borrowing, onomastics, dialect geography and lexico-statistics.

**Paper:** Loanwords in a particular language: e.g. Swahili, Hausa, Javanese (from Sanskrit), Spanish (from Arabic) or any other.

**Exercise:** in Lexicostatistics or **Paper** in onomastics or dialect geography.


**Week XII:**

**Anthropology I:** structural/functional arguments; analogy; retentions (survival).

**Paper:** Festivals and History (e.g. Festivals in Nigeria).

**Paper:** Retentions or Survivals? Can they be of use? Do they even exist?

**Required Reading:** MC 72-88; GB 25-44, 83-114; E. Sapir, Time Perspective in Aboriginal America, Mandelbaum, 389-462.

**Recommended Reading:** F. Graebner, Methode der Ethnologie, 1911; C. A. Schmitz, Historische Volkerkunde, 1967; W. Schmidt, The Cultural Historical Method in Anthropology, N. Y., 1939 (For those who do not read German don't identify with Grabner!). Also F. Boas, Race, Language and Culture, N.Y. 1940, p. 295-304 for a negative review by the leading U. S. Culture historian of the day. (All Histories of Anthropology comment on the U.S. and the Viennese Historical schools).
Week XIII: Anthropology II: Distributions.


Paper: A study of distributions (e.g., xylophones in Africa, Banana in Africa, "Divine Kingship", etc.)


Week XIV: Anthropology III: Reconstructing Societies and Cultures, Chronology of Cultural Data.

Paper: Zaria and Abuja, or I. Goldman, Ancient Polynesian Society, Chicago, 1971 (evaluation and critique), or a similar study.

Paper: Historical Sequence of Culture in the Tropical Forest Zone of South America (start, and R. Lee, I. Devore, Man the Hunter, Chicago, 1968 with W. Lathrap's article and bibliography there).


Week V: Synthesis I: Biological evidence: plants, animals, men, other possible evidence.

Paper: a case study of plant, animal or human biological data and history. (either history derived from the genetics or diffusion of plants or animal(s) and problems raised by their integration into a new biological and human environment.

Paper: A Theory of migration, e.g. Bantu or Polynesia, using all sorts of evidence.

Recommended Reading: Biological books cited in introduction to syllabus.

Week XVI: Synthesis II. Discussion, recent views, overflow.