

TYLOR'S TONGUE: MATERIAL CULTURE, EVIDENCE, AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

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In the course of a conversation in your Drawing Room a few months ago you mentioned the superstitious habit of some people in carrying the chopped-off tip of a tongue as a charm. At the same time you asked me if I ever could obtain one that had actually been carried to let you have it. Quite unexpectedly a few days ago I managed to obtain one that had been carried for some length of time and I now enclose it in this envelope in the hope that you may find it useful in adding to your collection of such things. It is a genuine specimen. I have not carried it about myself in order to qualify it.

So wrote Albert William Brown to Edward Burnett Tylor from Tunbridge Wells on 13 October 1897. Brown was a college exhibitioner reading natural sciences at

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Christ Church, Oxford, on whose notepaper the letter was written. Edward Burnett Tylor was Reader in Anthropology and Keeper of Oxford's University Museum, of which at the time the Pitt Rivers Museum was the 'ethnographical department'. By this time Tylor was one of the world's leading anthropologists. His books, in particular *Primitive Culture* (in its three editions of 1871, 1873, and 1891) and *Anthropology* (1881), had brought him wide fame.

What we here call 'Tylor's tongue' continues to be held at the Pitt Rivers Museum as an object of study and wonder, a source of delight, or distaste, to the museum visitor, and a challenge to any historian of anthropology.¹ What follows is an attempt to provide an understanding of the context within which 'Tylor's tongue' can be made sense of, to make it seem less of an unredeemable historical curiosity.

Background

As the manner in which people see and understand the world is structured primarily through conversations and values shared with others, so the production of knowledge and the production of social relationships are closely intertwined. The nature of the social production of knowledge, however, is often difficult to document. Fortunately, much anthropology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was created through a flow of material artefacts (objects and photographs) with accompanying and/or related correspondence. Analysis of the surviving artefacts and records allows us to reconstruct the series of micro-practices that worked together to create a picture of the world for a nascent anthropology.

It is a commonplace of anthropological analysis that structures of reciprocity are central to the identity and cohesion of social groups, and it takes no great act of imagination to use this insight to analyse the links between the individuals and

Natural History Museum, London, for access to Lady Tylor's notebook. Except where otherwise indicated, all quotations are from correspondence held in the Tylor Papers in the manuscript collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. References to Tylor's published writings are given by their original date of publication. However, all Tylor's publications have been reprinted in facsimile with original pagination in his *Collected Works*, edited by George W. Stocking (Tylor 1994). Freire-Marreco's bibliography of Tylor's works (Freire-Marreco 1907) is also reprinted there. References are also made to items in the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum. These are referred to by their accession numbers. Full records for each of these are available on the Museum's on-line, searchable, and regularly updated database at <www.prm.ox.ac.uk/databases>.

¹ The 'chopped-off tip of a tongue' (PRM 1917.53.614) is kept in a small glass-topped cardboard box in drawer number 61.1 in the Museum's court, where it is visible (under glass) to the visitor adventurous enough to pull out the drawer.

institutions that formed the community of anthropology in the later nineteenth century. An emphasis on the flows of materials also helps to counteract the rather static notion of the archive as a repository of knowledge (Richards 1993), allowing us to see that knowledge was created through a series of active and activating relationships that had their own dynamics. Material culture was not just important in structuring relationships between academics and their informants around the globe, it was also—through the medium of museums—important in opening up the results of anthropology for public discussion and appreciation.

We are concerned here with one key figure within late-nineteenth-century anthropology: Edward Burnett Tylor. We focus on his material culture collections in order both to gain insights into the forms of evidence he considered important as a basis for his writings, and to map his social and intellectual connections, which helped structure his approach to anthropological problems. And we approach his collections primarily through his extensive correspondence with professionals, missionaries, traders, and other interested parties around the world in order to gain objects for his research. The conventional view is that material culture was of 'secondary interest' to Tylor (Chapman 1987: 37; see also Chapman 1981), especially when compared to someone like General Pitt Rivers, whose collection of some 20,000 objects provided the founding collection of the museum with which Tylor had such a long association. We aim to show that artefacts, which were viewed by Tylor as cultural facts—that is, aspects of cultural forms rendered into material forms amenable to empirical study, were so basic to Tylor's view that it is easy to overlook his interest in them. Indeed, recourse to material things was a fundamental aspect of much of his writing.

Tylor worked at Oxford's University Museum/Pitt Rivers Museum for more than twenty years,² from 1883 to his retirement in 1909, while his publications and private papers suggest that his interest in the material world predated his appointment at Oxford. For example, it seems that an important early influence on Tylor was the notable collector Henry Christy, whom he met whilst travelling in Mexico as a young man. Indeed, Tylor's biographer R. R. Marett credited Christy with sparking Tylor's interest in ethnology (Marett 1936: 193). Tylor and Christy maintained their friendship on their return from Mexico, and in his notebooks Tylor refers to visits they made together to museums in the 1860s. These notebooks also contain brief details of other museums and collections that Tylor visited, including sketches of objects and what we think may be transcriptions of museum labels.³

² Although Tylor was Keeper of the University Museum as a whole, once the Pitt Rivers Museum was founded as its 'ethnographical department' in 1884, it was the latter's collections that took his interest. Over the following years, the Pitt Rivers became independent of the University Museum. On the early history of the Museum, see Blackwood 1991.

³ See, for example, Book I (1862) and Book XI (1863); both held in the Tylor Papers in the manuscript collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum.

Despite this well-documented aspect of his life and career, his employment in the University Museum in general and his role in developing the collections at the Pitt Rivers in particular have not been emphasized in the major reviews of his work and influence (e.g. Stocking 1987, 1995; Holdsworth 1994). However, we are not—as it may seem—trying to recruit a respected ancestor for museology and material culture studies. Rather, we are attempting to highlight Tylor's previously neglected interest, and the fact that this took quite different forms from those that characterize our contemporary views of material things. We hope this will lead to useful insights into the origins of museum collections in late-nineteenth-century empirical interests, as well as allowing us to reflect on what we are today trying to learn from material culture. A final aim is to contribute to the demonstration of the biographical and historical importance of collections and their attendant documentation (see, for example, Peers 1999, O'Hanlon and Welsch 2000, Gosden and Knowles 2001). Because material things were important to Tylor, we can use his collection as a 'fossil record' of his intellectual interests, especially when analysis of it is combined with analysis of his correspondence, which reveals—at least to some degree—why he wanted objects and how he used them.

We focus on two trains of thought stimulated by attention to Tylor's collection and his collecting practices. The first is the nature of the evidence he sought to collect. Tylor and his contemporaries referred to objects as *Realien*, rather than as 'curios' or any of the other terms that people collecting 'in the field' tended to use. Referring to Tylor's two earliest volumes, *Anahuac: Or Mexico and the Mexicans* (1861) and *Researches into the Early History of Mankind* (1865), Andrew Lang wrote that they were 'a series of essays towards a history of civilization, a history necessarily based rather on *Realien*, savage weapons, implements, arts and crafts, and on myths, customs, and beliefs, than on written materials' (Lang 1907: 3). Tylor worked within a broad comparativist tradition, drawing in examples from around the world to illustrate stages in a progressivist human history and survivals from earlier stages. Such a framework paid little attention to the contextual details of life within which objects were made and used, and focused instead on how well artefacts fitted within an overall pattern of life. For instance, Tylor was disturbed by the existence of shell money among the Tolai of eastern New Britain, Papua New Guinea, an example of which was sent to him by the Reverend George Brown in April 1882.⁴ Currency and formal rates of exchange were not supposed to exist in savage society. In writing on 3 December 1886 to thank the Reverend Brown for the gift, Tylor agreed that the material contrasted 'remarkably with the general rude condition of these islanders'.⁵ He had a clear framework into which to

⁴ Though the material in question was sent to Tylor in 1882, it was not formally accessioned into the Museum's collections until 1977 when it was found amongst Tylor's correspondence. It was accessioned as PRM 1977.4.1.

⁵ Letter from E. B. Tylor to the Reverend George Brown; Mitchell Library, MLA 1686–22.

place his *Realien* and was perplexed when things did not fit. However, for a second-hand observer such as Tylor, objects represented vital proof for what his (often untrained) informants told him; they were vital reassurances for the arm-chair anthropologist, even when they did not fit his preconceptions.

The second strand of evidence we pursue here is that provided by his collection, with the related correspondence. This helps illuminate the sets of connections through which Tylor worked and exchanged objects, photographs, and information. This 'exchange community' was vital to Tylor's social persona, but also to the development of his thought and writing about the world, forming the site for the social production of his knowledge. This evidence is important for us in two ways: first, for helping us understand how Tylor viewed anthropological evidence and the role his collection played in that; and secondly, for helping us show how his collection can be used today to reconstruct something of his social and intellectual world. We begin with Tylor's view of evidence.

Radical Empiricism

Collection was basic to Tylor's view of anthropology. Collecting facts and collecting objects were seen by him as part of the same process of accumulating empirical support for his general ideas. Indeed, Tylor's major work *Primitive Culture* (1871, 1873, 1891) strikes the modern reader as an accumulation of barely related instances of cultural practice drawn at random from around the world:

A first step in the study of civilization is to dissect it into details, and to classify these in their proper groups. Thus, in examining weapons, they are to be classed under spear, club, sling, bow and arrow, and so forth; among textile arts are to be ranged matting, netting, and several grades of making and weaving threads; myths are divided under such headings as myths of sunrise and sunset, eclipse-myths, earthquake-myths, local myths which account for the names of places by some fanciful tale.... Such are a few miscellaneous examples from a list of hundreds, and the ethnographer's business is to classify such details with a view to making out their distribution in geography and history, and the relations which exist among them. (Tylor 1871, I: 7)

For Tylor, the breadth of the examples he used to support his broader conclusions was a major reason for the success of the work. Exemplification could be provided by tools or tales, with differences between the linguistic and the material being of no real importance. Large parts of the prefaces to the later editions of *Primitive Culture* (Tylor 1873 and 1891) dealt with the factual basis of his work. Discussing the success of the book, which was probably the most influential single work of anthropology written in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, Tylor writes that 'a perceptible movement of public opinion has here justified the

belief that the English mind, not readily swayed by rhetoric, moves freely under the pressure of facts' (Tylor 1891, I: xviii). The contrast here between the global and heterogeneous scope of Tylor's examples and the singularity of the 'English mind' is striking, but Tylor was content that his mind could reach out and appeal to others of like type through the weight of the factual evidence.

Facts were not ends in themselves, however, so that 'when a general law can be inferred from a group of facts, the use of detailed history is very much superseded' (Tylor 1865: 3). Tylor saw his task as an ethnographer as having two stages: first, gathering as wide-ranging a set of material as possible on all aspects of human life; and second, extracting general principles, tendencies, and laws from the mass of the particulars in front of him. This process paralleled the basic movement of all human history, a continuous shift from the concrete to the abstract; which, as Stocking points out (1987: 307), was also the supposed movement from simple societies to complex ones. The English mind of the Victorian period was furnished with all sorts of abstract principles. These reflected the complexity of society and allowed different individuals to engage in specialist study of various aspects of the social and physical world. Tylor was a pioneer in a new branch of study, ethnography, but in order to create suitable generalizations to raise ethnography to the level of a science he needed to start from basics. The most basic aspects of the human apprehension of the world were provided by sense impressions. 'Deep as language lies in our mental life,' Tylor wrote, 'the direct comparison of object with object, and action with action, lies yet deeper' (Tylor 1891, I: 298). Savage mentality was too literal and concretely minded, producing false metaphors and analogies, but human history comprised a progressive movement that led to a more perfect correlation between the ideal and the real. Sense impressions preceded ideas, which preceded words (Stocking 1987: 309).

In creating the new science of ethnography, Tylor was engaged in a minor recreation of human history. Working from sense impressions provided the most secure basis for his ideas and words: 'Words of description will never give the grasp that the mind takes through actual sight and handling of objects, and this is why in fixing and forming ideas of civilisation, a museum is so necessary' (Tylor 1883: 57). Objects were the most basic of social facts. Without the systematic study of artefacts, ethnography would rest on an insecure basis. Tylor collected: and his collection included fire-drills, rattles, potatoes, and hoes; together with myths, stories, and accounts of kinship. Because of the primary nature of our sensory appreciation of the world, objects were most valuable as the basis for generalizations. Subsequent commentators have focused on Tylor's generalizations, rather than their empirical basis. Museum collections were to be the bedrock of ethnography, an idea that led Tylor to the University Museum and thence to the Pitt Rivers.

Tylor and Material Culture

Despite all we have said so far, it would also be true to say that Tylor had no interest in material culture! This is because no separate category of material culture existed at the time he was writing. In contrast to our modern usage, myths and kinship were considered along with weapons and weaving as elements of culture of equivalent type. When Marett's intellectual biography of Tylor appeared in 1936, however, it did include a final chapter entitled 'Material Culture' (Marett 1936: 193–211), suggesting that the category developed sometime during the first third of the twentieth century, although more needs to be done to establish the truth, or otherwise, of this hypothesis. Recent commentators have had a rather presentist view, expecting to find in Tylor's writings discussions of objects separate from his broader analyses. Given the lack of such a separate attention to objects, it has been easy to conclude that Tylor had no interest in them. However, the more correct conclusion is that Tylor had no interest in objects paralleling our present interest in the material world. The concept of material culture, in the modern sense, has only been developed within the later history of anthropology in which social relations have become the dominant theme and all other aspects of human life have been regarded as supports for understanding them. In our contemporary self-reflexive world, it is thus useful to be able to look again at Tylor's work in order to reconsider our interests by contrasting them with his.

The best way of understanding Tylor's interest in objects as evidence is to look at his collection, its structure, and his collection practices. According to the computerized records of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Tylor's personal collection, which Lady Tylor gave to the Museum after his death in 1917, comprises an estimated 3500 individual objects (PRM collection 1917.53). Another seven objects passed to the Museum after her death four years later.⁶ We can add to this some 1300 objects that Tylor personally gave to the Museum between its foundation in 1884 and his death. Presumably, Tylor was also responsible for a number of other objects entering the collections, without his name being recorded in association

⁶ The possible role of Lady Tylor in the development of both Tylor's thought and his collection has received little attention. Contemporary accounts allude to their mutual devotion. J. L. Myres recalled that in Tylor's later years, when his health was failing, Lady Tylor would accompany her husband to his lectures, 'watchful for confusion among the specimens' (Myres no date). What remains of Lady Tylor's own writing leaves little doubt as to her pride in, and support of, her husband's academic achievements, which she recorded in a notebook for more than fifty years (Natural History Museum, London: General Library Manuscripts MSS TYL). Further research may reveal something of her contribution to her husband's theoretical approach and to his collecting activities. It was not unusual in the Victorian and Edwardian periods for well-to-do women to collect with their husbands, though social conventions and the accessioning practices of museums have resulted in men's names being privileged.

with them. And we should add that some 70 further objects associated with Tylor have accession dates after 1921.⁷ We focus here on the 1917 bequest.

In the Museum's accessions book for the 1917 bequest, the items in the Tylor collection are more or less ordered according to familiar categories: prehistoric stone tools, weapons, musical instruments, games, pots, fetishes, inscriptions, offerings, pendants, etc. It seems that the initial intention was to subdivide the listing according to such conventional categories: at the top of the first page appears the heading 'Prehistoric', followed a few pages later by the heading 'Weapons', but no other heading is used and the ordering is sometimes haphazard, though similar items are more or less grouped together. It is unclear from the extant documentation what order, if any, the objects were in when they arrived at the Museum and whether the incomplete ordering in the accessions book reflects in some way Tylor's own ordering. Unsurprisingly, his collection follows his general interests, with large numbers of games, pendants, fetishes, and offerings. It is, of course, impossible to provide here a detailed account of Tylor's collection. The Museum's computerized database is now available online and interested readers are referred to that resource for further information. Further research into the collection itself, its labelling and documentation, as well as into the way in which it was catalogued on arrival would further our understanding immeasurably.

Collecting Networks

Tylor's correspondence, and his collections of photographs and other objects, are raw materials we can use to examine the dissemination of anthropological knowledge and the networks of exchange and collaboration that emerged during the early years of the discipline (Edwards 2001: 27). Tylor seems only rarely to have made or kept drafts of his letters. What survives, therefore, is a scattered and partial archive. This undoubtedly causes analytical difficulties, but it also provokes fresh approaches to the challenges of reading collections and their associated documentation. Though many of the exchanges are incomplete, occasionally the surviving correspondence reveals tantalizing glimpses of the conversations concerning the material world that Tylor had with friends and colleagues in Oxford and beyond; what Stocking (1994: xxi) has referred to as Tylor's 'epistolary ethnography'. Reading around the words on the page, and making what we can of the silences, helps us to evoke a clearer picture of the relationships Tylor engaged in to

⁷ The latest addition to 'the Tylor collection' is a patinated Hornfels flake from South Africa that was apparently given to the Museum by Tylor in 1901 but not accessioned for more than 100 years (PRM 2002.53.1). As the Museum's actual holdings continue to be checked against the computerized database, other previously unaccessioned Tylor material may emerge in the future.

further his interests and those of the Museum. Additionally, consideration of the geographical spread of his correspondents and the extent of their familiarity with Tylor's work (as suggested by references to it in their letters) can be used to augment this reconstruction of his approach to the study of the material world.

The relationships Tylor cultivated on behalf of the Pitt Rivers worked on many levels. A complex picture of social interactions can be extracted from the extant documentation, allowing for an appreciation of how Tylor viewed his professional role and responsibilities, and how the evidential possibilities of material culture were regarded within the academic community and beyond. Tylor's intellectual interests were mapped out in his correspondence, as were his social relationships, which extended well beyond one-on-one communication to create a dynamic structure of informants and academics. Tylor's talents were best suited to seeking objects that could be incorporated into the Museum's typological displays, and to analysing them in his writing and lectures, rather than to dealing with hands-on collection management. This was left to his assistant, Henry Balfour, who became the first curator of the Pitt Rivers in 1891. The success of Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871, 1873, 1891) and the popularity of his *Anthropology* (1881) had extended and cemented Tylor's international reputation. Seemingly, he capitalized on this for the Museum's benefit, using his global network of contacts to support his collecting activities.

Even before he moved to the Museum, Tylor engaged in correspondence concerning objects that was prompted by an appreciation of his work. R. R. Redding of San Francisco, for example, was so inspired by the discussion of fly-fishing in Tylor's *Anthropology* that he 'determined to procure' for Tylor a type of fish-hook used by the Native communities living in the Kern River Valley in southern California. From reading *Anthropology*, Redding had learned: 'how to classify the facts that come under my own observation; and, what is equally significant, that the smallest items of observed facts, in the history of man's physical or mental development, are neither trivial nor unimportant' (R. R. Redding to Tylor, 5 January 1882). Redding was concerned about a statement that Tylor had made regarding the emergence of fly fishing, which he claimed 'seems not to have been known in ancient times' (Tylor 1881: 214), and wished to provide evidence that the method was practised by at least one tribe of Native people in southern California when the State 'was first occupied by white men'.

Redding's discussion of the channels through which he secured for Tylor both the hook and the associated information illustrates well the status of mentor that Tylor seems to have occupied for many of his correspondents, encouraging them to initiate and extend collecting networks on his behalf:

The fact was so curious and interesting that I determined to procure one of these fly hooks if still in use. Mr C. P. Converse, who resides at Visalia, has a Summer sheep farm in the valley at the head waters of Kern River, where a few of this tribe of Indians still hunt and fish. I asked him to procure for me

one of these fish hooks and to obtain all the information he could in relation to the length of time it had been in use. He brought me the hook which I inclose [*sic*].⁸

Redding's comments and tone echo those of many of Tylor's other correspondents in other parts of the world. Taken together they suggest that the creation of the Pitt Rivers Museum was not only of great interest to the academic community, but that it was regarded as an important endeavour by a much broader range of people, with Tylor's popular fame being an important factor in the development of the collections.

Three primary strands of communication emerge from the extant correspondence. These reflect the levels of dialogue Tylor maintained and, when read in conjunction with his published work and other contemporary documents, provide valuable insights into how institutional collections were developed and subsequently used during the late Victorian and early Edwardian periods; what Stocking (1995: 30) has called the 'heyday of classical evolutionism'. Unsurprisingly, Tylor's professional colleagues, who were frequently geographically if not theoretically distant from him, were the most prolific and thorough of his correspondents. The lively correspondence between Tylor and such professional anthropologists as Franz Boas, A. W. Howitt, and Walter Baldwin Spencer, as well as between Tylor and such anthropologically minded colonial officials as Sir Everard im Thurn, provokes critical insights into the kinds of objects Tylor sought and the questions he asked of them.

For example, in a series of letters written between 1896 and 1902, Tylor and Boas discussed a Haida mask, part of a collection Tylor had purchased for the Museum in 1891 from the Reverend Charles Harrison.⁹ When closed, the mask depicts a raven with a small human figure standing above its head while the inner mask is of a human face. Intrigued by Boas's discussion of the concept of the soul amongst the Nootka (Nuu-chah-nulth) in the *Sixth Report on the North-Western Tribes of Canada* (Boas 1890: 44), Tylor sought his opinion of the recently acquired Haida mask. Enclosing a photograph, Tylor remarked:

When shown open, the way in which the little man springs upright above the human mask is so surprisingly like your description of the soul that I am led to conjecture that the little man is either life-soul, or guardian spirit, or medicine or totem spirit, but which must be determined by those who like yourself have been in more intimate contact with the people. (Tylor to Boas, 26 November 1896; Boas Papers, American Philosophical Society Archives)

⁸ As with the shell-money (see note 4 above), though the hook in question was sent to Tylor in 1882, it was not formally accessioned into the Museum's collections until 1988 when it was found amongst Tylor's correspondence. It was accessioned as item PRM 1988.16.1.

⁹ For an illustrated account of the Harrison collection, see Bedford 1998a.

Boas replied that such information could come only from the maker or owner of the piece concerned, and it was not until six years later that he was able to write to Tylor with the news that the item was 'evidently a potlatch mask' representing 'Nenkilstlas, the mythical raven' made by Charles Edenshaw, the noted Haida carver. Apparently, while conducting fieldwork in the Queen Charlotte Islands, Boas's colleague, John R. Swanton of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, had used Tylor's photograph to elicit information about the mask from the Haida community at Masset. According to Boas, Edenshaw told Swanton that when the different strings were pulled, the figure on the top of the mask shook its hand 'which means that the person who wears the mask is higher in rank than all the tribes that were invited [to the potlatch]' (Boas to Tylor, 2 June 1902). The mask and its meanings became the focus of an excavating and exchange of information by and between a number of parties: Tylor and Boas, Boas and Swanton, Swanton and Edenshaw; and, ultimately and indirectly, between Edenshaw and Tylor.

If objects are mediators through which knowledge, prestige, and historical and cultural interpretations flow, then the biography of this knowledge within the museum space and beyond, as well as the biographies of objects themselves within and outside their own cultural context must be considered (Hoskins 1998). Though Tylor clearly went to some effort to find out more about this object, the information received was not transferred to the Museum's records. Nor, indeed, was Harrison's own description of the mask in his book *Ancient Warriors of the North Pacific*, published some years later:

The *Ni-kils-tlas* was the most important, inasmuch as it represented that important creature, the raven.... The mask depicted the raven's head with an Indian standing on top and a human face in miniature in the centre of the forehead. The symbolism it was intended to convey being the raven as the creator or perhaps the original ancestor of man and the raven's male slave. (Harrison 1925: 87)

We can only speculate as to whether Harrison elaborated on its symbolism to Tylor when he sold him the collection that included the mask, though there is little in the accession records to suggest that he did so. Furthermore, although Tylor kept in contact with Harrison for some years and negotiated further collections through him, there are no references in the correspondence we have located so far to indicate that Tylor ever questioned him further about the mask or mentioned Boas's findings to him. Neither did Tylor mention Harrison in his correspondence with Boas, although we may assume that Boas was aware of Harrison's collection, which was apparently well known to anthropologists at the time (Bedford 1998b: 29). It would appear that while objects were the focus of exchanges of information, the information was not always passed on or recorded.

Many of the letters Tylor received from his professional correspondents refer to an object or objects solicited by him, or give contextual information concerning

an item already acquired regarding its use and meanings, as understood by the collector, among the source community. These letters contain rich descriptions about the functions of objects, often including indigenous terminology and secondary information concerning how each object was procured. Some letters contain sketches or diagrams, and occasionally photographs illustrating the object in use; this is particularly the case for the many documents concerning games sent in response to Tylor's known interest in this subject (see, for example, Tylor 1879, 1880, 1896). The detailed information provided in these letters was then utilized by Tylor as evidence to support and illustrate his theoretical arguments. It also seemingly determined the physical place of the artefacts themselves within the developmental series being constructed in the Museum. The evolutionary approach that Tylor applied to intangible aspects of culture could be reconstructed within a museum showcase. Indeed, Tylor argued that museum display could be more effective than verbal explanation:

All who have been initiated into the principle of development or modified sequence know how admirable a training the study of these tangible things is for the study of other branches of human history, where intermediate stages have more often disappeared, and therefore trained skill and judgement are the more needed to guide the imagination of the student in reconstructing the course along which art and science, morals and government, have moved since they began, and will continue to move in the future. (Tylor 1883: 57)

In contrast to recent thinking about material culture, which emphasizes the multiple meanings of objects and the potential slippage between these meanings, in Tylor's view objects were bound by the categories to which they were assigned on arrival in the Museum. Moreover, detailed discussions of symbolism and interpretation were reserved for anthropologists, while the basic level of information necessary for the museum audience was assumed to be self-evident from the arrangement of the displays. Objects could transmit knowledge merely by being placed alongside similar artefacts, and their very materiality promoted an understanding of how they related to objects from other areas and periods: 'I should much like to possess one or two genuine "soul-catchers". They are of the greatest value to enable the public to realise what the barbaric doctrine of souls really is' (Tylor to Boas, 21 December 1889; Boas Papers, American Philosophical Society Archives, Philadelphia).¹⁰

Given the limited labelling known to have been used in the Museum at the time, it is difficult to understand quite how a Victorian audience was expected to reach such a conclusion. As is now well known, very little is in fact understood

¹⁰ And, indeed, in October 1898 the Museum received a Haida 'soul catcher' from Boas (PRM 1898.36.1), which is on permanent display in the Museum Court in 'Case 70.A—Objects Made from Ivory and Bone'.

about how museum visitors absorb information presented in displays and what their expectations are. Although a number of recent critics of earlier museum displays of colonized peoples have attempted to extract from extant museum records the messages those displays may have projected to contemporary audiences, the assumptions visitors held before entering museums and the ways in which arrangements of objects from other cultures confirmed or refuted those perspectives are still little understood (see, for example, Coombes 1994, Jenkins 1994, Baringer and Flynn 1998). None the less, the numerous references in Tylor's letters to 'gap-filling' and 'series development' suggest he believed that the careful arrangement of material objects could project messages integral to the explication of his evolutionary approach. Though this could be inferred from his published work, it is confirmed in his professional correspondence: 'Can you purchase for us in the North West Coast one of the plaited baskets formerly used for boiling salmon by means of red-hot stones and a few of the stones as used. This is a missing stage in the museum, and much wanted' (Tylor to Boas, 9 October 1890; Boas Papers, American Philosophical Society Archives, Philadelphia).¹¹

The strands of communication we have identified demonstrate that Tylor directed his collecting towards geographic regions that held the most interest for him intellectually, and that in response to these known interests, persons working in these regions would assist him in his search for material evidence. Though his interests were undoubtedly encyclopaedic, the cultural areas that inspired him most were the Pacific and North America, and this is reflected in the amount of correspondence concerning these areas. It is possible that this geographical bias was at least partly shaped by the nature of British colonial expansion. However, while Tylor's collecting efforts purported to develop global series, there is little evidence in the surviving correspondence to suggest that he consistently solicited materials from Africa or, to a lesser extent, Asia. Instead, for these parts of the world he appears to have relied upon serendipitous donations or suggested purchases from contacts living in or travelling through them. Further study of the papers of Tylor's colleague Henry Balfour, who travelled extensively in Asia and Africa and collected for the Museum during these visits, may shed further light on the nature of the division of labour within the Museum and the cultural and theoretical interests of its first staff.

Most artefacts now in ethnographic museums such as the Pitt Rivers were not collected by anthropologists. As a corpus of data, the letters to Tylor from missionaries, colonial officials, traders, and aspiring scientists can be drawn upon both to examine how he negotiated social networks with those whom he viewed as sources of artefacts, and to illuminate how those individuals viewed their own connection with the Museum, as mediated through Tylor. In her study of the relationships between the Smithsonian Institution and fur-trade employees in North

¹¹ So far as we are aware, no such basket was ever added to the Museum's collections.

America, Debra Lindsay has noted that collecting objects and data for scientific institutions in metropolitan centres was seen as a means of gaining prestige; as well as, for some, providing a diversion from the discomforts of daily routine (Lindsay 1993: xv). Similar considerations may be seen as informing Tylor's correspondence with individuals who were on the margins of the academic world, and of Victorian society more broadly, yet whose contributions were recognized by him as being essential to his research. The nature and tone of his correspondence with such individuals suggests that the rigid social divisions that characterized the era meant little to Tylor, quite possibly as a result of his Quaker background. Instead, he cemented relationships with those who provided him with specimens and first-hand observations by acknowledging them in his publications, supporting their own writing, and sending them offprints of his papers:

I got the hooks & the box from Captain Martin of our Mission Schooner 'John Hunt', & promised him that they should be presented to your Museum in his name. When you write next, please devote a small scrap of paper to an acknowledgement of receipt that I may hand it over to him as a bait to catch more specimens. (Lorimer Fison to Tylor, 17 August 1883)¹²

Tylor obviously put a lot of effort into sustaining his networks. For example, he made a special effort to strengthen the trading relationship he established with W. L. Williamson of Brown's River, Tasmania. Williamson, described by Tylor's brother-in-law, F. F. Tuckett, as 'a well-known character & dealer in shells, & ancient & fish-like articles with smells to match', owned 'a sort of higgledy piggledy museum in a little shed near the beach' and was an avid collector and dealer in coins and ethnographic artefacts (F. F. Tuckett to Tylor, 13 February 1895). Williamson provided Tylor with numerous flints and other stone implements, which Tylor used to develop his general theories on the evolution of civilization. In return for tools, Williamson wanted 'a fair equivalent' of coins and other articles, for instance 'Old Oak Pannells [*sic*]', 'Old Firearms', 'Norman relics', 'or any thing that would be an attraction to my little Curio Business' (W. L. Williamson to Tylor, 16 July 1897; PRM Manuscript Collections, Westlake Papers, Box 2, Folder 1, f.11-13).¹³ For Williamson, the arrangement with Tylor was more than just good business. Tuckett informed Tylor that this 'simple' and 'modest' man was 'evidently gratified by his communication with you & your mention of him in your papers, of which he would like to have some more copies' (Tuckett to Tylor, 13 February 1895). Williamson had also supplied the Smithsonian Institution with flints, and from the tone of his letters it can be inferred that he regarded himself as

¹² This material—two pearl-shell lures, a turtle-shell hook, and a bamboo 'lime' box—was accessioned in 1885 as PRM collection 1885.8.

¹³ W. L. Williamson is identified in the Museum's records as one of the sources of 87 Tasmanian stone tools given to the Museum by Lady Tylor in 1917 (PRM 1917.53.157-.243).

the local specialist in archaeological matters. Communication and collaboration with as eminent a scientist as Tylor undoubtedly legitimized his activities. Assisting Tylor was a means by which individuals such as Williamson could participate in the creation of the Pitt Rivers Museum. Tylor respected them for their observations and encouraged them to support the Museum and the science of anthropology through meeting his requests for specimens and commenting on his published interpretations of them. His recognition of their knowledge and contributions strengthened the collecting network, ensuring that the flow of objects to the Museum was maintained.

The final strand of communication we wish to touch upon concerns a network of exchange relationships that was determined by Tylor's own social position and intellectual fame. This network was dominated by correspondence from persons who probably had very little detailed understanding of Tylor's work but who knew him personally and were aware that he was involved in developing a museum collection. Given the public interest in science and the perceived pedagogical value of museums during this period, it is not surprising that Tylor's surviving correspondence contains several letters from members of the public wishing to donate to the Pitt Rivers Museum objects related to Tylor's interests. Typical examples are letters accompanying gifts from members of Tylor's family or his acquaintances who had perhaps at some point had a conversation with Tylor concerning the Museum, or were familiar with his published work, and who had happened upon an object that they thought would interest him. Typical is a letter written to him by his cousin Elsie Howard:

Some time ago I remember that you were interested in potatoes that have been carried in the pocket for rheumatism, so I think I will send you, in case you care to have them, these two potatoes which were given me yesterday. They have been carried for more than three years by an old gentleman here, the master of a city company, who has the firmest belief in them,—indeed I feel rather brutal to accept them, but he said he should begin on another one! (Elsie Howard to Tylor, 16 April 18?? (year unknown))¹⁴

Generally, these letters reveal their writers to have had little more than a basic understanding of the meanings of the objects—combined, however, with an assumption that they would be understood and appreciated by Tylor.¹⁵ Others are written in response to requests for information or objects. These cover an extensive cultural, historical, and geographical range, and provide intriguing glimpses into

¹⁴ These were included in the major donation by Lady Tylor in 1917 and were accessioned as PRM 1917.53.606–.607.

¹⁵ There are exceptions. For a detailed account of the systematic collecting activities of his nephew Louis in South Africa, and a discussion of the relationship between Louis's interests and activities and his uncle's, see Hobart, Mitchell, and Coote 2002.

drawing-room conversations involving the customs of other cultures and places, including rural Britain, as the extract from Tylor's cousin, Elsie Howard, just quoted, illustrates. The network was extended further still through Tylor persuading friends and acquaintances to ask their overseas contacts to send material to the Museum, often with extremely positive results:

Here are a couple of Jain rosaries, which my friend Chester Macnaghton has sent me for you from Rajkut. He says 'they are very common cheap little things, but I am told they are of the sort always used, tho[ugh] others are known. But if these are the sort required, I can send you as many more as you like'. (J. Holland to Tylor, 9 January 1891)¹⁶

Most of the people who supplied Tylor with objects were unlikely to have the opportunity to see their contributions on display in Oxford. Yet many people sent him objects purely as gifts, to him or to the Museum; with nothing being expected in return, other than the gratification of having been of assistance. Tylor's contacts rarely seem to have questioned how their selections fitted into his scheme, and while he may occasionally have explained their anthropological value as he understood it, it is unlikely that all those who participated in the circuitous journeys of artefacts to the Museum shared or even knew about his perspective.

Conclusion

The late-Victorian world of anthropology and museums is both familiar and strange. Focusing on it, as we have done here, helps us to reflect on our own views and actions. In a world of amateur observers and collectors 'seeing was believing', with objects providing verification for observations that might otherwise be doubted by professionals such as Tylor and the museum-going public. Artefacts played their role as *Realien*, grounding what might otherwise have been dubious observations or hearsay. A fact was a fact, whether a myth or a mask, and this led to what seems to us today an odd conjunction of classification of information on mythology and kinship, together with material things. The heterogeneity of the classification is more marked as we no longer believe in the progressivist scheme of history it was supposed to demonstrate. The existence of money in pre-contact Papua New Guinea no longer runs up against a fixed expectation of the position of such groups within a world-historical scheme.

A lack of interest in the cultural contexts in which objects were made and used also strikes the modern reader. Tylor's interest in comparison seems to block any

¹⁶ The present whereabouts of these rosaries is not known. Tylor gave a large collection of rosaries to the Pitt Rivers Museum in 1916 (collection PRM 1916.34) but these particular examples do not seem to be among it.

concern for contextualizing detail. However, still today works of general intent appear that use objects and observations from a wide range of societies to explore theoretical issues. We need only think of Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency* (Gell 1998), where reference is made to objects from all over the world with the aim of exploring and demonstrating theoretical points concerning social relations and objects.

Primitive Culture is not an easy read these days, weighed down as it is by a mass of detail; but the use Tylor made in it of material culture is not all that foreign to our present purposes, although the idea of a firm factual basis and the exact nature of the theoretical superstructure these facts sustained are strange to us. And, of course, social networks and their role in the production of knowledge still exist and may not have changed as much as we might like to think.

A study of the relationships between Tylor and his colleagues and supporters of the Pitt Rivers Museum can illuminate our understanding of the extent to which material culture was viewed as a major form of evidence for the study of cultural development during the late Victorian era. Here we have only been able to offer glimpses of the evidence that further excavation of the documentary records might provide of the routes through which objects arrived in museums. For some of the participants in Tylor's collecting network, the social act of creating collections for a major museum, and the inter-relationships engendered by these processes, were what was important. Study of the histories of collections allows us to develop insights into how the characters of those involved helped sustain relationships at least as much as did intellectual compatibility. Writing on 30 August 1883 of a 'better' example of a Fijian trumpet he intended to send him, Lorimer Fison advised Tylor, who had only recently arrived in Oxford and had yet to make his mark, on how to play it: 'This may help you in your own endeavours to blow the better trumpet when it reaches you. If you are successful, you will make a sensation at Oxford when "the mournful blast of the barbarous horn" makes itself heard'.¹⁷

Through his contacts and connections, recorded for posterity in his correspondence, Tylor built his reputation and the collections of the museum in which he worked. It is in this context that it made perfect sense for a college exhibitor at Christ Church to send Tylor a 'chopped-off tip of a tongue'. Today its continued existence seems to tell us more about the activities and ways of thinking of late-nineteenth-century anthropologists than it does about the folk practices of the inhabitants of Tunbridge Wells. It is now 'Tylor's tongue'.

¹⁷ The present whereabouts of this instrument is not known. It does not appear to be in the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum.

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