

*Published in Current Anthropology, Vol. 9, Nos. 2-3, p. 219 (1968). Some of my basic views on archaeological classification are expressed here.*

## On the Interrelationship of Archaeology and Ethnology

By B. K. Swartz, Jr. from [selected writings](#)

Several additional points might be made on Chang's article (CA 1967 8:227-34). Chang claims (p. 227; italics mine) that "ethnology.....is used here in its *conventional* sense, including what is usually known as cultural or social anthropology....." If I read this correctly, ethnology is to him a synonym for all areas of anthropology excepting physical anthropology. Perhaps this is its conventional meaning in some circles (though I even question this), but it certainly is not its *traditional* meaning. Ethnologists are practitioners of the culture-historical method and are interested in synthesizing descriptive data to discover uniformities. This would include cultural reconstruction.. Social anthropologists, in contrast, are practitioners of the comparative method and are interested in atomizing collected data to discover regularities. This would include the formulation of structural models. Ethnologists, social anthropologists, and archaeologists are all cultural anthropologists. Chang's article might be said, then, to deal with "Major Aspects of the Interrelationship of *Archaeological Technique* and *Cultural Anthropology* (archaeology cannot be treated as a content area here, since it is included in cultural anthropology).

Unfortunately, there are still drawbacks. Chang, like most American archaeologists, somehow "short-circuits" to the comparative method when attempting to generalize. Synthesis need not stop at historical reconstruction. Cultural taxonomy is certainly also a desirable goal. The concept of a three-dimensional culture area has always intrigued me. Chang has simply ignored this avenue of study. Perhaps we could retitle his work "Major Aspects of the Interrelationship of Archaeology to Ethnography and Social Anthropology." I consider his title a misnomer.

Chang, again along with most American archaeologists, confuses the operations of classification and interpretation. Brainerd (1951) clearly distinguishes between the two levels of procedure and insists that classification for time-space placement must precede interpretation for cultural reconstruction. Classification proceeds on the analytical level, and is historical; interpretation proceeds on the synthetic level, and is functional. Different units must be used on the two levels. Many archaeologists believe that a classification is no good unless the categories (usually termed "types" and "modes") can be culturally interpreted. This is continually implied in Chang's statements. Types and modes (despite Rouse's definitions) are valuable to archaeologists because they can order materials in time and space and are historically valid, not necessarily culturally valid. When they are, it might be well to designate them by new terms; I would like to call the culturally valid counterpart of a type a *functional type* or *trait* and the culturally valid counterpart of a mode an *element*.

A disturbing feature of modern theoretical discussion is an implicit belief that generalizing must proceed in the area of social organization. I feel Chang has given slim attention to ecology and has largely ignored interpretative studies in the area of ideology. Crucial omissions are Clark's (1952) work in ecology and Steward's (1955) concept of Culture Type.

The ideas expressed above are further clarified in Swartz (1967).

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