Primate Behavior

Apes of the World. Their Social Behavior, Communication, Mentality, and Ecology. RUSSELL H. TUTTLE. Noyes, Park Ridge, NJ, 1987. xx. 421 pp., illus. $55. Noyes Series in Animal Behavior, Ecology, Conservation and Management.

Apes of the World "is meant to serve as a source book for a wide spectrum of biological and social scientists, most particularly those who would draw upon knowledge of apes to model human behavioral evolution." It succeeds. The 37-page index brings you quickly to the topic of your choice, and depending on your luck, you may find yourself offered as much as half a page of references—out of the more than 1500 cited. Each of the eight chapters, from taxonomy to sociality, has the same structure: a brief review of issues precedes a historical survey of the literature on gibbons, then orangutans, chimpanzees, bonobos, and gorillas. The survey is encyclopedic until 1984, and spotty thereafter. It is written as if by an intelligent computer limited to a few local rules: one paragraph and up to five key points per paper, accuracy essential, humor desirable. Remarkably, the whole is readable. Tuttle would probably attribute this to his light touch. The humor helps, but precision is the key. Tuttle has identified the highlights in every paper. He gives the impression of having read and thought about each one, and has found all sorts of gems.

Apes of the World is the second serious review of ape behavior, preceded only by *The Great Apes* of Robert and Ada Yerkes, published in 1929 (which despite its title included the lesser apes, or gibbons). Yerkes and Yerkes's choice of topics was dictated by their hope of showing the value of apes for psychobiological research; Tuttle's selection follows *The Great Apes* closely. This has the merit of allowing him to examine how knowledge has changed since 1929. Yerkes and Yerkes considered, for instance, that orangutans were less intelligent than the African apes, whereas now no clear differences among the great apes are seen. The disadvantage is that *Apes of the World* misses opportunities for wider biological comparisons. There are no graphs, one table, few monkeys, and virtually no mention of animals other than primates. There is almost no attempt at synthesis: even the summary chapter is a synopsis. The review of behavior in captivity is confined to studies of intelligence and communication. Some important subjects get short shrift. At one extreme, for instance, there is no account of species status in the wild, and at the other we find the rich analyses of chimpanzee political relationships reduced to "Some individuals tended to assist one another if one of them was threatened by conspecifics." In a book on behavior and ecology that gives 20 pages each to "positional behavior" and "lodge sites and nesting" such omissions are odd.

This is less a criticism than a caution against false expectations. *Apes of the World* performs an enormously valuable service by collating a dispersed literature and by pointing to gaps in our knowledge. With ape populations crashing throughout Africa and Asia, and with long-term prospects for conservation looking generally exceedingly dim, many populations of wild apes must be studied within the next decade if at all. Tuttle's catch-all compilation of field studies emphasizes the apparent differences in behavior between populations and implies that to understand them we need far more systematic documentation, whether of tool use, communication patterns, or social organization. The apes offer numerous clues to human evolution, but the clues are disappearing. Now is the time to get them.

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Prophecies and Politics of the Maya

Heaven Born Merida and Its Destiny. The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel. Translated and annotated by MUNRO S. EDMONSON. University of Texas Press, Austin, 1986. x, 309 pp., illus. $37.50. The Texas Pan American Series. Text in English and Mayan.

The Maya civilization of Central America was the only truly literate society encountered by the Europeans in their discovery of the Western Hemisphere five centuries ago. At the time of the Conquest, the Maya of the lowland country of what is now Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras had been literate for well over a thousand years. The primary and pervasive medium for writing was the screen-fold book of bark paper starched with lime plaster and painted upon with glyphic characters fully capable of conveying the spoken Maya languages. The central functions of literacy for the Maya were political and religious. The written word legitimated power in rulers and governments, and texts carefully wove the histories of these into the cycles of destiny, of time, nature, and the heavens.

"Seizure of the chiefs, possibly Pat Ay and Op Ik of Valladolid (1776–1800)." [From *Heaven Born Merida and Its Destiny*; Princeton Collection of Western Americana, Princeton University Library]

Inevitably, the 16th-century Christian friars who worked among the Maya found themselves confronted with political and religious recalcitrance that focused on literacy in the ancient writing system. Hence they worked to destroy that literacy and to replace the Maya language with Spanish and Latin. In the view underlying Munro Edmonson's bold and innovative translation of the Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel, the Europeans succeeded primarily in driving the ancient system of political thought underground, disguised in alphabetic script but true to the intent of hieroglyphic antecedents—indeed, probably true to hieroglyphic books still used by apostate Maya communities at least until the beginning of the 18th century. The Books of Chilam Balam are manuscripts named after the Yucatecan towns in which they were found. In 1933 Ralph Roys published an English translation of the Chumayel manuscript, a distinguished contribution to Maya ethnohistory.

"Chilam" is an official title pertaining to sorcerers and prophets of the aboriginal Maya. Roys and Edmonson agree that in the case of these manuscripts "Chilam" is to be translated as "mouthpiece" or "spokesman." Where Roys and Edmonson significantly part company is in the reference implied by "Balam": Roys regards this as the name of an individual and extraordinary prophet who lived just before the contact with the Europeans. Edmonson, on the other hand, proposes the term "Chilam Balam" to mean

the spokesperson of the Jaguar, an official title designating the prophet of the "katun," or cycle of 20 360-day years in the Maya calendar. On this difference hinges a completely new understanding of the books of Chilam Balam as given by Edmonson. For rather than interpreting the books as a compressed compilation of events and declarations occurring in the decades just before and after the Conquest and pertaining primarily to a single prophet, Edmonson envisions a whole series of Chilam Balams spanning centuries. He proposes the books to be enduring chronicles of katun prophecies and of the power politics accompanying the right to "seat" the katun and the spokesperson of the Jaguar in different towns allied to different major factions of Maya, the Xiu and the Itza. As described by Edmonson in his introduction, these ancient enemies struggle to command the prophecies of the cycles over generations, with time providing not merely a passive framework but rather an instrument of action and aggression as they fight over the organization of the cycles themselves.

Edmonson's view of the books of Chilam Balam will no doubt raise controversy among scholars of the Maya. Among other things, he has reorganized the text completely to follow his posited scheme of katun cycles. Further, he proposes that the Maya maintained knowledge of their ancient Long Count well after the Conquest—a view that challenges established opinion that the Maya had reverted completely to a Short Count of katuns by the time of the Spanish arrival. There are also many ways to translate the often obscure passages of the manuscript into English. One clear organizational advantage of Edmonson's work is the parallel display of the English and Maya texts. This allows immediate comparison and evaluation of the translation.

Despite the controversy, Edmonson's Chilam Balam of Chumayel must be regarded as a masterly and substantive contribution to the ethnohistory of the Maya. From the ongoing decipherment of Maya texts rendered in stone from the Classic Period of the civilization, centuries before the Spanish Conquest, it is certain that Maya politics indeed revolved around prophecies that tied historical events to cycles of time as declared by great leaders. The meaning of the ritual passages in Edmonson's poetic translation of the Chilam Balam of Chumayel is perhaps obscure, but the metaphors display certain intriguing correspondences to those of Classical texts of the 6th through 9th centuries A.D. In sum, Edmonson has usefully tapped into the essential nature of Maya political rhetoric. The last independent Maya state did not fall in the deep forest of Peten, Guatemala, until 1697—nearly two centuries after the advent of the Europeans. It is now clear that the Maya of Yucatan, despite their European masters, only gradually and grudgingly yielded their vision of destiny and the statecraft it underwrote.

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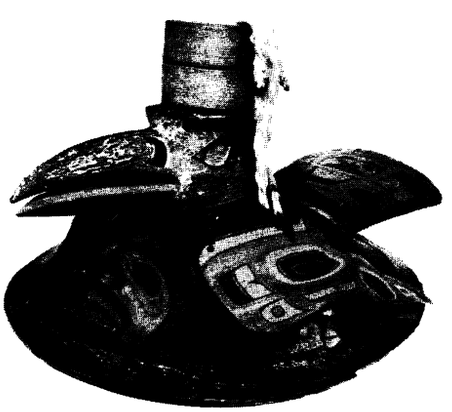
A Museum Centenary

Raven's Journey. The World of Alaska's Native People. SUSAN A. KAPLAN and KRISTIN J. BARSNESS, with contributions by six others. University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1986. 208 pp., illus. $39.95; paper, $24.95.

Raven's Journey celebrates the centenary of the University Museum and the study of anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania. The handsome catalogue documents a newly installed exhibit of the museum's Alaska collections from the Athapaskan peoples of the interior, the Eskimo of the Bering Sea and north coast, and the Tlingit Indians of the southeastern coast. Among many northern peoples of the New World the Raven was an important creator-trickster figure; here he represents a unifying theme of the exhibit.



"Raven barbecuing," Tlingit clan hat. "When the Raven killed the king salmon, a large crowd of small birds and squirrels rushed to the scene. Raven saw that one salmon was not sufficient for the crowd. He thought of a scheme. He made the crowd dig a hole in the ground large enough for the salmon to go in, and after this was done, he sent them after some skunk cabbage leaves to wrap around the salmon for the barbecue. They packed in a pile of this, but Raven said that what they brought was unclean." Sending them for more, "Raven cooked the salmon in the leaves that were brought, and ate it all before the crowd returned." [From *Raven's Journey*; collected by L. Shotridge, 1918]

Tlingit men in dancing costumes, about 1895. *Left*, "Chief Coudahwot" wearing painted costume; *right*, Louis Shotridge's father, Yeilgooxu, wearing woven costume. "Ceremonial regalia displayed or worn at potlatches assumed enormous values over the years and became symbols of a clan's noble and ancient ancestry." [From *Raven's Journey*; courtesy Alaska State Library]

Over 200 objects are featured in excellent black-and-white captioned photographs, and 27 of these are additionally shown in color. The pieces are presented functionally, by cultural group. Four essays "featuring some of the Museum's collectors and collections" (p.13) precede the actual catalogue.

Eleanor King and Bryce Little's piece on George Byron Gordon recounts the history of the museum under its first director. A little-known figure in museology, Gordon had high standards for the museum's collections and "sought to build Museum holdings into the finest and most comprehensive in the United States, if not the world" (p. 22). His interests led him to Alaska in 1905, where he visited 18 native groups, collected more than 3000 objects, and acquired over 300 photographs. He returned again in 1907 to complete fieldwork initiated in 1905. Of major interest was Gordon's relationship to George Heye, the fate of whose "Legacy in Limbo" at the Museum of the American Indian is currently awaiting decision. From 1908 to 1916 Heye housed and exhibited the major part of his magnificent collection at the University Museum. At the time of his death in 1927 Gordon had overseen the expansion of collections from all over the world and especially the addition of thousands of objects from North America; he had established at Penn one of the earliest academic programs in anthropology and had overseen construction of a large building complex to house the museum's growing collections.