

Early Ethnographers in the Long Nineteenth Century: Call for Papers

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“Early Ethnographers in the Long Nineteenth Century” is a transnational and interdisciplinary research project (2024–2026) coordinated by Han F. Vermeulen (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology), Fabiana Dimpflmeier (Gabriele d’Annunzio University of Chieti-Pescara), and Maria Beatrice Di Brizio (Centro di Ricerca Mobilità Diversità Inclusione sociale (MODI) – Università di Bologna). It is supported by the History of Anthropology Review (HAR), the EASA’s History of Anthropology Network (HOAN), and *BEROSE International Encyclopaedia of the Histories of Anthropology*.

Project Statement

This project focuses on ethnographic accounts from the Long Nineteenth Century, either based on fieldwork or borrowing descriptive and comparative data on ‘peoples and nations’ from first-hand reports by travellers and other in situ observers. Adopting a widely inclusive transnational perspective, this project explores European and extra-European intellectual traditions. It envisages early ethnographic studies as a fundamental part of the history of anthropology and ethnography.

Call for Papers: “Exploring the Ethnographic Archive: Early Ethnographers in the Long Nineteenth Century” (6 December 2024, online)

The Boasian school and the “Malinowskian revolution” (Jarvie 1964) have equated ethnography with fieldwork. Since then, with Anglo-American anthropology emerging as a major research tradition, ethnography worldwide has been considered valid only when based on fieldwork. This assumption has led to a marginalisation of earlier (or different) conceptions of ethnography, which have been mostly ignored or sidelined. As demonstrated in *Before Boas* (Vermeulen 2015), ethnography emancipated during the eighteenth century out of moral history, or *historia civilis*, and mostly consisted of a research programme for describing and comparing cultural and social aspects of ethnic groups and nationalities. In 1740, the German historian Gerhard Friedrich Müller urged colleagues to carry out a “Völker-Beschreibung” in Northern Asia, with *Völker* in the plural: “a description of peoples”. In 1767 and 1771, German historians coined the terms *ethnographia* and *Ethnographie*. The Austrian historian of Slovak origin Adam František Kollár defined *ethnologia* in 1783 as “notitia gentium populorumque”: a study of peoples and nations. When the subject was introduced in England in 1834, George Long translated ethnography as “nation-description”. In 1871 Edward Burnett Tylor used the expression “rational ethnography” to denote the scientific study of culture (Tylor 1871, 1: 19), envisaging this field of enquiry as a “branch” of ethnology (ibid.: 23).

Arguably, ethnography acquired different denominations over time and space. It included descriptions of peoples either living in a foreign country or within the observer’s society, thus merging with folklore studies, anthropology, law studies, and sociology. In mid-nineteenth-century Britain, ethnography was practised as the study of physical, linguistic and moral (i.e. sociocultural) characteristics (Stocking 1987). In the early nineteenth century, ethnographic inquiries conducted within the observer’s own society were frequently included in the field of statistics, as in the French *statistique départementale* or in German *Statistik* (*Staatenkunde*), which was conveyed to France through Alsace as a “science de l’état” (Bourguet 1988), later developed into *Ethnologia Europaea*.

We could tentatively define ethnographic accounts as descriptive studies of human populations based on empirical research abroad or at home. What seems distinctive is an orientation towards a systematic empirical study of physical and moral characters, of languages, law systems, religions, habitat, manners and customs. These studies were not necessarily founded on intensive (long-term) research, involving both living in a native community and learning the local language, but they were descriptive and often recorded during inquiries in the field. Examples of field-based ethnography in a foreign country are the mural encyclopaedia of Peru by José Ignacio de Lequanda and Louis Thiébaud (1799), George Turner’s *Nineteen Years in Polynesia* (1861), and Tylor’s *Anahuac* (1861). We could also point to ethnographic studies of folklore in several parts of Europe, such as the *Floresta de rimas antiguas castellanas* [Collections of ancient Castilian rhymes] by Fernán Caballero

(1821–1825), the volume on *Patrañas: or Spanish Stories* (1870) by the British folklorist Rachel Harriette Busk, or Wilhelm Mannhardt’s two volumes on *Sittenkunde* in Germany (1863–1868). Third, ethnographies could be library studies, compiled by armchair ethnographers who culled their data from reports by travellers. Examples of armchair ethnography are two studies from Germany: Heinrich Berghaus, *Grundlinien der Ethnographie* [Basic Principles of Ethnography] (1849) and Theodor Waitz, *Anthropologie der Naturvölker* [The Anthropology of Natural Peoples] (1859–1872); and three studies from Britain: James Cowles Prichard’s *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind* (3rd ed. 1836–47), Robert Gordon Latham’s *Descriptive Ethnology* (1859), and Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* (1871).

For these reasons, our project views ethnographic accounts as empirical descriptions of “peoples and nations” either based on fieldwork – in a foreign country or within the observer’s society – or deriving descriptive data from published and/or manuscript sources. The complexity of early ethnography’s interrelations with similar fields of knowledge, and the variability of its research practices – going from fieldwork to armchair data collection – lead to the following research questions:

- What characterised ethnography in various intellectual traditions and over time?
- How was ethnography related to other fields of inquiry, including history, archaeology, geography, natural history, anthropology, law studies, statistics, and folklore studies?
- Which intellectual traditions contributed to the development of ethnographic knowledge in various national or transnational contexts?
- When was ethnography conceptualised as a separate field of inquiry?
- To what extent were ethnographic accounts interlaced with *ars apodemica*, travel reports, and other literary genres?
- How did ethnographers conceptualise data collection and what were their research methods?
- Was fieldwork considered a defining criterion of ethnography in various national traditions?
- Was ethnographic research prepared with the help of training, instructions, or questionnaires?
- How was ethnographic research funded? Possibilities include funding by individuals, learned societies, academies of sciences, museums, other institutions.

The research project “**Early Ethnographers in the Long Nineteenth Century**” will unfold over a three-year period closing in 2026 and result in the publication of a selected bibliography of ethnographic accounts and a special issue or an edited volume collecting case studies on early ethnographers from the Long Nineteenth Century. Divided into four stages, the project is designed as follows:

- A call for references will be issued in March 2024, followed by a call for papers in May 2024;
- A conference will be held on 6 December 2024 to present and discuss case studies;

- A workshop will be organised in September 2025 to present and discuss papers;
- The papers will be included in a special issue or an edited volume to be published in 2026.

The result will be a vital contribution to the history of anthropology and to studies of the ethnographic archive.

As part of the first stage of the project, we are happy to launch the **Call for Papers** for the conference “**Exploring the Ethnographic Archive: Early Ethnographers in the Long Nineteenth Century**”, which will take place **online on 6 December 2024**, supported by the *History of Anthropology Review* (HAR), the History of Anthropology Network (HOAN), and *BEROSE International Encyclopaedia of the Histories of Anthropology*.

We invite the international community of the histories of anthropologies to present critical cases from the ethnographic archive dating back to the Long Nineteenth Century, bringing in perspectives on early ethnographers from European and extra-European traditions.

Please submit by **31 July 2024** an abstract no longer than **250 words** (including **paper title, name of the presenter, affiliation, and e-mail address**) to: early.ethnographers@gmail.com. The final conference programme will be disseminated in the fall of 2024.

For the Call for References, see BEROSE <https://www.berose.fr/article3312.html>