Morgan And Soviet Anthropological Thought

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I

THE object of this paper is not to define Morgan's influence on Soviet anthropology or the accommodation of Morgan's ideas to Marxist, Leninist or Stalinist thought, but rather to illustrate Morgan's position in Soviet anthropology with several concrete examples drawn from pre- and post- World War II Russian anthropological literature, and to get a glimpse of Soviet anthropological theory in the process.* Some conclusions as to Morgan's influence on Soviet anthropology and the nature of the affinity between the Marxian and Morganian outlooks can undoubtedly be suggested on the basis of such a cursory analysis; however, such conclusions can by no means be considered as exhaustive or definitive.

In dealing with Russian anthropological sources of the post-Revolutionary period, it is important to bear in mind the fact that it is almost impossible to differentiate in these sources between distinct schools of thought, at least on a synchronous plane. Whereas, as will be shown, Soviet anthropological opinion (or perhaps, better, doctrine) has changed, and its positions on a number of problems have shifted with time, these changes and contradictions are largely the expressions of a shifting climate of official opinion, rather than the results of an empirical quest. Thus rarely will one find two authors disagreeing on any problem of magnitude; on the other hand, any new theoretical stand is likely to be heralded or confirmed by an official edict issued from above, or to reflect some obvious change of policy in other realms of Soviet thought or behavior. Polemics, in the American sense of the word, are largely non-existent in the Soviet anthropological press; on the other hand, one may find on the pages of *Soviet Ethnography* at least one example of the type of abject confession which is known, in other fields of Soviet activity, such as literature, music and biology, to be the accepted form of intellectual recantation.

With these points in mind, it is possible to approach the matter of Morgan's standing in Soviet science and to arrive at a few statements of fact and conjecture regarding it. In section II, Morgan's position in Russian ethnological and archeological literature during the third decade of the 20th century is briefly outlined: in section III, it is contrasted with that evidenced in this same literature following World War II.

II

The fundamental characteristics of Soviet ethnology of the pre- World period are perhaps made most evident in an article by Kagarov[1] in a VOKS publication in the English language. These characteristics may be defined as (1) a primary interest in the "social structure of pre-class society ,"[2] (2) an extensive use of schemes or systems of the type in vogue in pre-Boasian American anthropology,[3] and (3) an uncompromising evolutionism. One is struck by the fact that all three of these traits are shared, to some extent, by Morgan and Marx. And, in effect, it is largely because of these characteristics, in addition to a few minor ones, that Morgan is praised by the Soviet authors.

Thus, Matorin[4] states that Soviet ethnography is largely filiated, in its ideas, from Lewis H. Morgan's outlook; "the main framework of Morgan's theory," he says, "remains unchanged."[5] There is even a hint at a more direct connection between Morgan's thought and that of Soviet anthropology than between the latter and the doctrines of Marx and Engels. This, however, might have been something of a slip-up on Matorin's part, since another source of approximately the same period,[6] dealing with the historical development of marriage and the family, refers to Morgan under a heading of 36 titles together with a few

* The author is most grateful to Dr. A. L. Kroeber, who was kind enough to read the manuscript and to suggest its publication.

[1] Kagarov, 1933.
[2] Ibid., p. 88.
[3] Ibid., vid. pp. 89-92.
[4] Matorin, 1933.
[5] Ibid., p. 6.
[6] Wolfson, 1937.

other bourgeois scholars such as Havelock Ellis, Bachofen and Frazer as "literature for critical reference," whereas most of the references (61 titles) consist of works by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and of resolutions of the Comintern and the Central Committee of the Communist Party. It is also significant that J. Sternberg is appraised in benign way as "no Marxist, but a follower of Morgan's traditions."[7] It would thus seem that, at this point in the history of Soviet anthropology, Morgan's main contribution was his scheme; details of process, on the other hand, were in the domain of Marxist dialectics.

The fact that the Morganian evolutionary scheme was the basis of Soviet historical reconstruction at this time is amply illustrated not only by the statement of Matorin's quoted above, together with numerous elaborations of this scheme devised by Tolstov, Zolotarev, Krichevsky and Bernstam and reviewed by Kagarov,[8] but also by the positions of those engaged in Soviet archeological research. Bogayevsky[9] outlines a series of correlations between the classical Paleolithic and Neolithic stages and Morgan's substages of Savagery and Barbarism; Efimenko's[10] elaborate and monumental treatise on the Paleolithic in the USSR, a generally excellent source of information, establishes these correlations in tabular form.

The uncompromising evolutionism of Soviet thought is well exemplified by a number of critical remarks made by Kagarov about Russian anthropologists of the old school. Thus, Sternberg is briefly given his due but is cited for unfortunately being "influenced by the theory of diffusion."[11] Bogoras' *The Spreading of Culture over the World* represents a stage "outgrown by the author himself,"[12] Bogoras himself thus apparently joining the ranks of a "group of old specialists" who are "wholeheartedly altering their views."[13] Psychological interpretations are also considered inadmissible, and it is Sternberg, once again, who is criticized by Kagarov for "overestimating the role of the sexual factor." All these criticisms, it may be noted in passing, are characteristically of content rather than of method. On the other hand, Azadovsky[14] speaks of culture as something by which "in the individual is revealed the general" in a manner suggesting Kroeber's and White's superorganicj in post-war times, however, as will be seen, the concept of the superorganic is sharply criticized.

Morgan's prestige is frequently increased in the Soviet literature by repetition of a legend which was apparently started by Engels himself. The legend refers to the fact that Morgan was supposedly "hushed up" by other bourgeois scientists, because his theories undermined the moral foundations of bourgeois society. This legend is stressed in Matorin,[15] and is also used in post-war sources.

Finally, a specific point of the Morgan scheme seems to have greatly appealed to the Soviet school: that Morgan "proved the communistic character of the primitive community." Such is the belief in the communistic nature of primitive society among Soviet anthropologists that N. Ya. Marr, the virtual dictator of Soviet linguistics until 1950, when he was purged and crucified in *Soviet Ethnography* by no less an authority than Joseph Stalin himself,[16] set up a scheme of linguistic evolution in which the plural came before the singular and thought was "the collective awareness of collective production with collective tools"[17] ("mind is minding")[18] In this connection, anthropology is justified in dealing with primitive society, since society to come will evidence, as Marx says, "the reemergence of the archaic social type in the highest form."[19]

III

The orientation and positions of Soviet anthropology have undergone a number of changes since World War II, although, as a prominent American anthropologist once put it, "the game still goes on." Morgan is still highly revered but, oddly enough, sometimes for reasons which are the very opposite of those which contributed to his high position in the pre-war Soviet pantheon. Primitive social structure

[7] Matorin, 1933, p. 12.
[8] Kagarov, 1933.
[9] Bogayevsky, 1933, p. 27 and ff.
[10] Efimenko, 1938
[11] Kagarov, 1933, p. 97.
[12] Ibid., p. 98.
[13] Matorin, 1933, p. 15.
[14] Azadovsky, 1933, p. 52.

[15] Matorin, 1933, p. 6.
[16] Stalin, 1950a and b.
[17] Meshchaninov, 1933a, p. 118.
[18] If one interpolates this definition into that of language as given by Marr and quoted by Meshchaninov 1933b, in the volume of essays published in honor of N. Ya. Marr in his heyday – "language is the collective manifestation of the collective consciousness, the fomlulation and all-inclusiveness of which is dependent on thought and techniques of world conception" (p. 27) – the result is truly startling.
[19] Kagarov, 1933, p. 88.

is still stressed, as may be seen from the careful review given by Kislyakov[20] of a work by M. O. Kosven entitled *Matriarchy*. This review also shows the existence, in Soviet thought, of an underlying evolutionary scheme related to that of Morgan. Bachofen is mentioned in this review and, this time, he is the one to be "hushed up" by bourgeois scholars. It should not be concluded from this statement that Bachofen replaces Morgan as the major ancestor-hero of Soviet anthropology; the review makes the point, in particular, that the precedence of matriarchy over patriarchy was first established by a Russian scientist, Millar, whose works were read by Marx, and who was "in advance of McLennan."[21] Also, one is reminded of the "marvelous statements on matriarchy made by Lenin and Stalin."

However, the claim of priority mentioned above for a Russian scientist is one of the minor manifestations of an important change in anthropological and other concepts, a change which has occurred in Soviet Russia following the last war: the emergence of nationalism, and, with it, the reintroduction of the notion of "a culture" as opposed to that of evolutionary stage, the admission of diffusion as a historical process, a somewhat greater emphasis on origins ("ethnogenesis") and less emphasis on a functional interpretation of the structure of primitive society, and, last but not least, much sharper and more specific criticism of Western anthropological work. Among minor corollaries to this major reorientation might be mentioned a harshly critical attitude toward the concept of the "superorganic," toward which Soviet scientists seemed more inclined in pre-war days, a favorable appraisal of Boas (but not of his school) despite a negative attitude toward the empirical approach which has been expressed in no uncertain terms in both pre-war and post-war sources, and the use of both somatological and linguistic evidence in problems of "ethnogenesis."

Detailed citations illustrating all of these new trends would take us outside our subject. However, most of the new attitudes of Soviet anthropology have some bearing on the Russian reappraisal of Morgan and may be exemplified by statements in which Morgan is concerned.

The survival of evolutionism in modern Soviet doctrine is well shown in an article entitled *Lenin and Contemporary Problems in Ethnography*[22] This article deals mainly with Lenin's evolutionary scheme, evidently largely derived from Morgan and Marx, which Lenin outlined, in particular, in one of his letters to Gorki. One of the features of this scheme was that it equated the "primeval horde" stage with the biological stage of the pithecanthropinae. This existence of an intermediary stage between ape and man, the author makes a point of emphasizing, was already "hinted at" by Morgan in the form of a stage which he, and Engels after him, named the lower stage of Savagery. The point made leaves no doubt as to the preeminence of Lenin over Morgan; in it may be seen the persistence of evolutionism as well as the emergence of nationalism in post-war anthropology.

The exact relationship of evolutionism and nationalism, especially in its more strictly scientific aspects, such as the notion of "a culture," is nowhere better clarified than in an article by Kushner[23] entitled *The Teachings of Stalin on the Nation and National Culture and their Meaning for Ethnology*. There, what in pre-war days had been termed a "stage" is redefined as "culture content." "Culture form" on the other hand is that which accounts for national differences, the nation being defined as "a historically compounded society, originating on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychic formation, manifested in a common culture."[24] These "teachings of Stalin" may thus be seen as permitting the use of "culture" as a term susceptible of taking the plural, without interfering with the previously established evolutionistic concept of stage.

That this was quickly taken advantage of by Soviet anthropologists may be seen from the near-absence of articles dealing with broad schematic problems in *Soviet Ethnography* from 1947 through 1950, and the publication of such papers as *The Problem of Somatological Continuities in the Period of the Fatyanovo Culture* by T. A. Trofimova.[25] This article not only speaks of the "Fatyanovo culture," but uses the data of physical anthropology to establish historical connections, a method of research which would have been considered inadmissible in pre-war days, when physical type was considered the "product of social environment,"

[20] Kislyakov, 1949.
[21] Ibid., p. 215.

[22] Tolstov, 1949.
[23] Kushner, 1949.
[24] Kushner, 1949, p. 6.
[25] Trofimova, 1949.

race was denied, and it was said that man was "created by labor," not biological evolution.[26]

To return to Morgan, it is evident from the preceding that, theoretically, Morgan's position as a great evolutionist, although perhaps a little shaken, could very well be still upheld in Soviet circles, without any prejudice to the "teachings of Stalin." Yet, if one turns toward a consideration of diffusion as a concept in Soviet theory, one notes that Morgan's position in the Soviet pantheon is now being upheld in quite a different way.

An article by Averkyeva[27] published in one of the first post-war issues of *Soviet Ethnography* to reach the United States is not yet entirely clear on this reappraisal of Morgan. Leslie White, however, is commended, together with Meggers, as one of the few sensible anthropologists left in the United States and as a defender of Morgan; a return to Morgan's ideas, in this article, is seen as the only solution from the impasse in which American anthropology has placed itself. White is also favorably quoted, in passing, as advocating the study of culture in terms of itself, again a hint at a favorable attitude toward the concept of the superorganic, reminiscent of pre-war days, a hint which in subsequent articles not only remained unamplified, but was forgotten.

An article by Levine[28] in the following issue of *Soviet Ethnography* first clarifies the new attitude. The point made there was that Morgan, no more than Tylor, saw no contradiction between diffusion and evolution and "did not ignore diffusion."[29] More than that, Western criticism "imputes to Morgan those mistakes of evolutionism to which he is much less prone than Tylor."[30] Morgan's greatness, we are told, resides mainly in his "materialism" and the fact that his periodizations are based on "stages of production."[31] Morgan is thus credited for having "rediscovered" Marxism.[32] If we compare this view of Morgan with that held in pre-war Soviet literature, we note that, whereas before the war, Morgan was revered for his evolutionistic scheme, the dialectics of history being considered by Matorin as more specifically Marxian, the new view of Morgan places his scheme in the background and sees Morgan essentially as a small replica of Marx, and like Marx an authority because he is "materialistic" in his understanding of process.

This same article contains a rather amusing criticism of Lowie. Lowie, it is said, "quotes extracts from Morgan's diary on his travels in Europe to show his (Morgan's) provincialism, but in reality only illustrates his own tendencious attitude towards Morgan."[33] This criticism is not amplified in any way.

Levine's article also includes a formal disapproval of White's "idealistic" concept of culture, in which White errs, despite his other good points.[34] Also: "White is sharply negative toward Boas. In this respect he is wrong."[35] However, his criticism of the Boas school is quite acceptable.

A somewhat later article by Tolstov[36] takes up Morgan again, and this time defines the new attitude toward him without any ambiguity. "Defenders of Morgan (Leslie White) attempt to make him the symbol of a fight to reestablish the traditions of evolutionism. Actually, the strength of Morgan resides precisely in the fact that he is not an evolutionist, but an historic materialist; the undoubtedly frail evolutionistic methodological elements in him are his weakness."[37] Morgan's evolutionism is thus responsible for the fallacy of some of his conclusions. Authority is given this judgment by the fact that "the bases of evolutionism were severely condemned by Marx in his review of Bastian."[38]

The name of Morgan frequently figures in the rather thorough analyses and criticisms of bourgeois trends in Western anthropology which, of late, have become more frequent. The Averkyeva[39] article marks the first manifestation of increased attention being given to Western developments. Levine's[40] is the next in this series. The Tolstov article mentioned above in connection with Lenin's evolutionary scheme contains the statement:

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[26] Bogayevsky, 1933, p. 23.
[27] Averkyeva, 1947.
[28] Levine, 1947
[29] Levine, 1947, p. 237.
[30] Ibid., p. 238.
[31] Ibid., p. 238.
[32] Ibid., p. 238. ("Rediscovery" of Marx is one of the consistent patterns of Soviet anthropology. Marr is credited with this remarkable feat in an essay in his honor; Morgan is credited with it at least three times [Levine, 1947, p. 238; Tolstov, 1949, p. 15; Potekhin, 1949, p. 13] on the basis of an original statement to that effect by Engels.)

[33] Levine, 19471 p. 236.
[34] Ibid., p. 240.
[35] Ibid., p. 236.
[36] Tolstov, 1947.
[37] Ibid., p. 15.
[38] Tolstov, 1947, p. 15
[39] Averkyeva, 1947.
[40] Levine, 1947.

> One of the central tactical goals of Soviet enthnographic science is a systematic, unpitying, consistent disclosure of the newer reactionary concepts of bourgeois ethnography ("anthropology" in the Anglo-American sense).[41]

An article by Levine, Roginsky and Cheboksarov[42] equates the racism of Hitler to that of Churchill, Coon and Hooton. Butinov[43] analyzes the new American doctrine of "psychoracism," stemming from Spengler (a forerunner of Rosenberg) and advocated by the criminal-psychiatric school of Kardiner (a disciple of Rosenberg).[44] Potekhin[45] in a paper entitled *The Goals of the Fight with Cosmopolitism in Ethnography* says: "Lonely does the figure of Lewis Morgan stand in the history of bourgeois science."[46] Here, as in the other sources mentioned previously, Morgan is praised for coming close to a materialistic understanding of history." American ethnography has executed a head-spinning *salto mortale* from the elemental-materialistic position of Morgan through the Boas school to the mysticism of Kroeber and the whole ethno-psychological school."[47] This accords with the position of Soviet critics that Kroeber and Kardiner exemplify little more than variants of the same general fallacious approach. A quotation from Kroeber on the subject of pooling world cultural resources in view of dealing with cultural crises is followed by a quotation of Lenin, apparently considered relevant:

> The personal characteristics of modern professors are such that one may meet among them people of exceptional density.... The social position of professors is such that only those who sell science to the interests of capital are allowed to occupy it, if they agree to contradict the socialists and propound the most incredible nonsense, the most shameless incongruities and rubbish.

At this point a digression may be made to present a few more passages from Potekhin's article, which marks, in some respects, the climax of a number of post-war trends in Soviet science.

> Among some Soviet ethnographers and folklorists, the idolization of European bourgeois science has not yet died. As yet not all of our scientists consider it their patriotic duty to propagandize, first and foremost, the accomplishments of Russian science; on the contrary, in some works there transpires a certain disdain for Russian ethnographers and folklorists. We will mention in this connection Prof. Prop's work *The Historical Roots of the Folk Tale*, a deservedly severe appraisal of which has already been given by our community and our press. Both Russian and foreign researchers have written on the folk tale, and it is precisely the Russian ones who give a scientific, materialistic interpretation of the folk tale. Prof. Prop passes over in silence everything the revolutionary democrats did, as well as the work of Maxim Gorki, who is essentially the founder of Soviet folkloristics. Prof. Prop consistently refers to the intuitivist Levy-Bruhl, to the fashistisizing ethnographer Frobenius, to the mystic Kroeber and, as a result, gives a totally unscientific interpretation of the folk tale. Prof. Prop acts like a landless cosmopolitan, for whom the matter of Russian priority in science does not exist, to whom the honor of the fatherland is not dear. Prof. Prop hushes up the indubitable fact that Russian folklorists always stood higher than Western European folklorists, and exaggerates the merit of various European "authorities."[48]

Following this tirade another victim, Professor Ravdonikas, is selected and is criticized for the fact that too many references to foreign sources "clutter" his pages.

This same article indicates why Russian scientists refuse to enter into cooperation with those of the West:

> And finally, the aim of the fight with cosmopolitanism consists in systematically and unpityingly unveiling all the apostles of cosmopolitanism in foreign ethnography. The propagandist of cosmopolitanism is no "fellow-scientist," but a mercenary of reaction, of imperialist aggression. The criticism of American cosmopolitanist ethnographers on the pages of Soviet Ethnography has so far consisted of a few reviews. This criticism has not been sharp enough, but has been conducted in a somewhat objectivistic manner, frequently without the necessary political conclusions and evaluations.[49]

As for Morgan, it is suggested that his fame in the USSR is on the decline. Before the war, Soviet anthropology seemed to owe him most of its framework. In the years following the war, he became merely the exponent of an approach which Marx and Engels and, after them, Lenin and Stalin, had carried to much greater heights; in addition, evolutionism had become only a part of the Soviet concept of culture. The latest Soviet paper to mention him already states that he only "came close" to a materialistic conception of history. It is probable that future Soviet science, if it is to pay its respects to him at all, will use him only as a symbol, a mere figurehead

[41] Tolstov, 1949, p. 15.
[42] Levine, Roginsky and Cheboksarov, 1949.
[43] Butinov, 1949.
[44] Butinov, 1949, p. 13.
[45] Potekhin, 1949.
[46] Ibid., p. 13.
[47] Ibid., p. 15.
[48] Potekhin, 1949, pp. 22-23.
[49] Potekhin, 1949, p. 25.

occasionally to remind its adepts that there was once hope for the Anglo-American science of "anthropology."

It could perhaps be put forth that the retreat from Morgan as an all-pervasive influence from the stage of Soviet social science has not been without salutary effects. If one compares the Soviet anthropology of the 1930s with that of the late '40s, one is surprised to find that, in many respects, the idiom used today in ethnology, archeology, physical anthropology and probably linguistics-though little has come out on linguistics since the recent purge of N. Ya. Marr – is closer to that of the Western anthropologists than it was a decade and a half ago, if we disregard anti-cosmopolitanist tirades. Whereas the older version of Soviet anthropology could occasionally produce such valuable works as Efimenko's *Primeval Society*,[50] an article such as Tokarev's *Towards Posing the Problem of Ethnogenesis*[51] would have been impossible. This article is devoted to a careful evaluation of the evidence generally used in the reconstruction of the history of ethnic groups considered as historical units, and examines the problem of ethnic origins with a rigor and a sense of problem which many American archeologists have not come close to emulating.

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[50] Efimenko, 1938.
[51] Tokarev, 1949.