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ROBERT GORDON LATHAM, DISPLAYED PEOPLES, AND THE NATURAL HISTORY OF RACE, 1854–1866*

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ABSTRACT. *In 1854, the Crystal Palace reopened at Sydenham. Significantly, it featured a court of natural history. Curated by the philologist and physician, Robert Gordon Latham, it was designed to provide the public with an ethnological education. Understanding Latham's project is of particular importance for broader understandings of the scientific importance of displayed peoples and mid-nineteenth-century debates on the nature of human variation. Recent scholarship has shown considerable interest in the relationship between exhibitions of foreign peoples and anthropology, particularly within the context of world fairs. Nevertheless, anthropologists are routinely claimed to have used fairs merely to display or publicly validate, rather than to make, scientific knowledge. Meanwhile, the 1850s and 1860s are often seen as having witnessed the emergence of a new 'harder-edged' scientific racism as, older, elastic definitions of 'race' were successfully overthrown by one rooted in biological difference (most commonly exemplified by the anatomist Robert Knox). By examining how Latham produced and used his museum of human types, this article proposes an alternative approach. It suggests that displayed peoples were used as ethnological specimens and that Latham's work is at a particularly significant crossroads for the mid-nineteenth-century remaking of 'race'.*

In 1855, the Quaker physician, superintendent of the insane, and asylum reformer, John Conolly observed that 'scarcely a year [passed] in which, among the miscellaneous attractions of a London season' one could not find 'some exhibition illustrative of the varieties of mankind'. Their abundance stemmed from the 'commercial relations of England' which allowed duly 'extensive opportunities of intercourse with all the races of men'. Delivering his presidential address to the Ethnological Society of London, presumably he echoed the thoughts of his audience when he argued that, given such opportunities, 'no country' ought to be more successful in conducting ethnological research than Britain, especially since no city provided more 'instructive illustrations of all parts of this science as in

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London'. Despite such auspicious prospects, Conolly lamented that, until recently, voyagers' and travellers' tales had inspired interest merely from their 'marvellous character' and that displayed peoples seemed to have 'been merely regarded as objects of curiosity or of unfruitful wonder'. Disgracefully, he argued, such exhibitions were rarely publicly instructive and performers' improvement had 'scarcely occupied' patrons' thoughts; instead, performers left British shores 'having gained small notice from the ethnologist, and excited no moral interest even among the most serious or the most philanthropic'. Instead, displayed peoples 'arrive[d] in a state of barbarism, and without possessions or knowledge; and they depart[ed] from civilized communities equally ignorant and equally destitute'. Disapproving of the squandered opportunities for ethnological research, Conolly called upon fellow colleagues to subject displayed peoples to their own rational, inquiring gazes.[1]

Conolly strikingly affirmed the potential importance of commercial human displays for ethnological research. Paying to see living foreign peoples perform was enormously popular in the nineteenth century. For a shilling or more, the public flocked to see specially imported foreign, often colonized, peoples perform songs, dances, and other ceremonies as demonstrations of their 'singular' nature. Not only were such shows common, but they were profitable, publicly accessible, and amongst some of the most popular forms of metropolitan entertainment.[2] As Conolly's testimony indicates, ethnologists were keen to take advantage of displayed peoples for their own research; yet, his contention that displayed peoples played no significant role in ethnological theorization is worth re-examining in light of the redefinitions that marked British ethnology in the mid-nineteenth century. Between the mid-1840s and early 1870s, the scholarly study of human variety was institutionalized with the emergence of dedicated learned societies. The Ethnological Society of London (f. 1843) and Anthropological Society of London (f. 1863) provided scholars with the possibility of formal affiliation. Meanwhile, the wrangling between these societies that led to their amalgamation under the auspices of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland (f. 1871) contributed to formative discussions on the discipline's practitioners, methodologies, and theoretical scope. Rather than taking Conolly's claims as an accurate account of the relationship between human exhibitions and mid-nineteenth-century ethnological practice, they are recast in this instance as a zealously partisan attempt to redefine that relationship in ways that would have significantly boosted the standing of both his colleagues and the Ethnological Society. Using the example of Robert Gordon Latham's curatorship of the Court of Natural History at the Crystal Palace, Sydenham, this article explores how displayed peoples were formally incorporated into ethnological education and practice. Exploring often forgotten relationships between mass culture and

[1] John Conolly, *The ethnological exhibitions of London* (London, 1855), pp. 5–7.

[2] Sadiah Qureshi, *Peoples on parade: human exhibitions, empire and anthropology in nineteenth-century Britain* (Chicago, IL, forthcoming).

ethnological practice suggests that, despite Conolly's claims to the contrary, exhibited peoples were transformed into ethnological specimens that became both the objects and means of ethnological investigation amongst the lay and learned.

This re-evaluation is significant for broader understandings of the scientific importance of displayed peoples and mid-nineteenth-century debates on the nature and significance of human variation. Recent scholarship has shown considerable interest in the relationship between exhibitions of foreign peoples and anthropology, particularly within the context of world fairs where anthropologists often curated displays of foreign peoples.[3] Nevertheless, anthropologists are routinely claimed to have used fairs merely to display or publicly validate, rather than to make, anthropological knowledge. Moreover, such activities are often dismissed as pseudo-science, predominantly because of the ostensibly objective nature of science and modern understanding that 'races' are not identifiable natural kinds.[4] Building on valuable work that incorporates the *völkerschauen* (people shows) into the history of German anthropology, this article traces Latham's use of displayed peoples as ethnological specimens.[5]

Meanwhile, it has been argued that the early to mid-nineteenth century witnessed considerable shifts in racialist views of human difference. Throughout the eighteenth century, for instance, a wide variety of cultural, environmental, and physical factors underpinned the classification of humans into distinct varieties. Crucially, such classifications are often regarded as having been relatively elastic when compared to their modern descendants.[6] Between the early to mid-nineteenth century, a 'harder-edged' form of racism is commonly argued to have emerged whilst older, elastic definitions of human variation were successfully overthrown. This shift is attributed to many factors, including the debates over slavery, the diminishing importance of environment in explaining human difference and the emergence of scientific racism.[7] Most pertinently, figures such as the

[3] Robert Rydell, *All the world's a fair: visions of empire at American international expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago, IL, 1984); and Nancy J. Parezo and Don D. Fowler, *Anthropology goes to the fair: the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition* (Lincoln, NE, 2008), document anthropologists' involvement, most obviously in the 1893 Chicago and 1904 St Louis exhibitions. See also Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral vistas: the expositions universelles, great exhibitions and world's fairs, 1851–1939* (Manchester, 1988); Lee D. Baker, *From savage to negro: anthropology and the construction of race, 1896–1954* (Berkeley, CA, 1988), pp. 79–80; and Pascal Blanchard et al., *Human zoos: science and spectacle in the age of colonial empires* (Liverpool, 2008), pp. 1–49, especially p. 44 n. 48.

[4] Colin Kidd, *The forging of races: race and scripture in the Protestant Atlantic world, 1600–2000* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 1–18.

[5] Nigel Rothfels, *Savages and beasts: the birth of the modern zoo* (Baltimore, MD, 2002), and Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and anti-humanism in imperial Germany* (Chicago, IL, 2001).

[6] Roxann Wheeler, *The complexion of race: categories of difference in eighteenth-century culture* (Philadelphia, PA, 2000); David Bindman, *From ape to Apollo: aesthetics and the idea of race in the eighteenth century* (London, 2002); and Colin Kidd, *British identities before nationalism: ethnicity and nationhood in the Atlantic world, 1600–1800* (Cambridge, 1999).

[7] Nancy Leys Stepan, *The idea of race in science: Great Britain, 1800–1960* (London, 1982); idem, 'Biology and degeneration: races and proper places', in Sander L. Gilman and J. Edward Chamberlain, eds., *Degeneration: the dark side of progress* (New York, NY, 1985); Seymour Drescher, 'The

anatomist Robert Knox have been taken as emblematic of a new form of biologically rooted determinism.[8] Whilst acknowledging the emergence of new theories of human difference, this article takes a different approach. It argues both that theoretical and methodological approaches to human variety were more heterogeneous than commonly supposed and that Latham's work is a particularly instructive example for the mid-nineteenth-century remaking of 'race'.

I

In 1854, the Crystal Palace reopened at Sydenham in a building newly designed by Joseph Paxton, twice the size of the original 1851 venue and with a substantially different catalogue of exhibits. Its major displays included courts devoted to the Egyptian, Italian, Greek, Roman, Pompeian, Medieval, Byzantine, and Renaissance periods, with further courts specializing in modern sculpture, portraits, and industry.[9] The Palace was set amidst vast landscaped gardens, adorned with babbling fountains and a lake featuring an island inhabited by full-scale models of antediluvian monsters and extinct reptiles uncovered by geologists.[10] Although a private enterprise, the palace was committed to the same ideal of national education that had underpinned its parent.[11] Yet, unlike Paxton's original glass edifice, Sydenham was a pantheon of national education and entertainment, rather than an international trade fair; it was conceived as 'a three-dimensional encyclopaedia of both nature and art, with a much wider syllabus than at Hyde Park, that would help visitors to understand evolution and civilisation in relation to their own times'.[12] Significantly, Sydenham was substantially cheaper than most London exhibitions. Public accessibility was critical since, from the outset, Sydenham was run by the Crystal Palace Company. It was intended to 'make a profit by reforming the public's habits of observation' and

ending of the slave trade and the evolution of European racism', *Social Science History*, 14 (1990), pp. 415–50; and Hannah F. Augstein, ed., *Race: the origins of an idea, 1760–1850* (Bristol, 1996).

[8] For influential examples see Robert C. Young, *Colonial desire: hybridity in theory, culture and race* (London, 1995); Philip D. Curtin, *The image of Africa: British ideas and action, 1780–1850* (2 vols., Madison, WI, 1964), II, p. 377; and Catherine Hall, Kith McClelland, and Jane Rendall, eds., *Defining the Victorian nation: class, race, gender and the Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 191–2. Significantly, Catherine Hall, *Civilising subjects: metropole and colony in the English imagination, 1830–1867* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 48–9 and 275–6, shifts focus away from this view of Knox. Compare with Peter Mandler, 'The problem with cultural history', *Cultural and Social History*, 2004, pp. 94–117.

[9] Jan R. Piggott, *Palace of the people: the Crystal Palace at Sydenham, 1854–1936* (London, 2004); Robert G. Latham and Edward Forbes, *The natural history department of the Crystal Palace described* (London, 1854); Samuel Phillips, *Guide to the Crystal Palace and its park, Sydenham* (2nd edn, London, [1854]); and [Edward McDermott], *Routledge's guide to the Crystal Palace and park at Sydenham* (London, 1854).

[10] James A. Secord, 'Monsters at the Crystal Palace', in Soraya de Chadarevian and Nick Hopwood, eds., *Models: the third dimension of space* (Stanford, CA, 2004), pp. 138–69; and Ralph O'Connor, *The earth on show: fossils and the poetics of popular science, 1802–1856* (Chicago, IL, 2008).

[11] Jeffrey A. Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: a nation on display* (New Haven, CT, 1999); Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral vistas*; and Peter H. Hoffenberg, *An empire on display: English, Indian and Australian exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley, CA, 2001).

[12] Piggott, *Palace of the people*, p. v.

thus encouraged education and moral improvement through visual means, whilst also catering to less cerebral needs in courts devoted to eating and drinking.[13] The public quickly took advantage of the opportunities offered with 1,322,000 visitors in the first year alone, including 71,000 children.[14]

Guidebooks to the palace usually suggested that visitors start their tour from the south wing; those heeding such advice entered a court of natural history that included tableaux designed to catalogue visually the world's flora, fauna, and peoples. Erected under the directorship of Latham and Edward Forbes, professor of botany at King's College, London, the court was a major innovation for the new Crystal Palace. A small-scale museum of man displayed in his natural habitats, it had been designed to offer an ethnological education. Moving through the court of natural history, visitors were greeted with stuffed animals, growing plants, and models of foreign peoples arranged against painted backdrops. The court's displays were divided into the New World on the south-west side and the Old World on the south-east as if on world map (Figure 1). Starting from the entrance in the south wing, visitors were led into the New World. In the display for Australia, they could see a platypus, Tasmanian wolf, an emu, cassowary, a group of Papuans, and two Australian men, one of whom was shown on the verge of hurtling a stick. The display for the Indian Islands included three Javanese people from the lower classes smoking opium, groups of people from Sumatra and Borneo, bears, and birds. For India, a group of Hindus, birds, a hog, and an elaborate display of a tiger hunt were chosen, whilst the Chinese display included a yak and some Tibetans. The most extensive tableau was devoted to Africa with examples of peoples from the eastern coasts, Niger, Sierra Leone, and South Africa, including the San and Zulus. The animals included a hippopotamus, camel, giraffe, hyena, lion, monkeys, antelopes, and gazelles. In the South American corner, a Mexican was shown saving a fellow countryman from danger, with a jaguar killing a deer, an alpaca, ostriches, and a tapir also featured. In the North American display, Anishinabe were engaged in a war dance to emphasize their ferocity and were surrounded by a beaver, squirrel, black bear, puma, ocelot, porcupines, and otters. Finally, in the far end of the south-west transept, the visitor could see a display of the Arctic regions populated by reindeer, dogs, an arctic fox, birds, and a Greenland hut.

The human models were extraordinary objects and clearly the primary attraction. The white plaster casts were painted in tones simulating skin whilst features such as hair, eyebrows, eyes, fingernails, jewellery, individualized facial features, and expressions all contributed to their remarkably 'life-like appearance'.[15] Latham arranged the models into visual narratives that were ostensibly representative of their respective ethnicity and that drew heavily on travel literature. For instance, a Krenak (Botocudo) group were shown quarrelling

[13] Secord, 'Monsters at the Crystal Palace', p. 139.

[14] Piggott, *Palace of the people*, p. 61. Piggott notes that 60 million people visited Sydenham in its first twelve years.

[15] 'A visit to the Crystal Palace', *Lady's Newspaper*, 10 June 1854, p. 364.

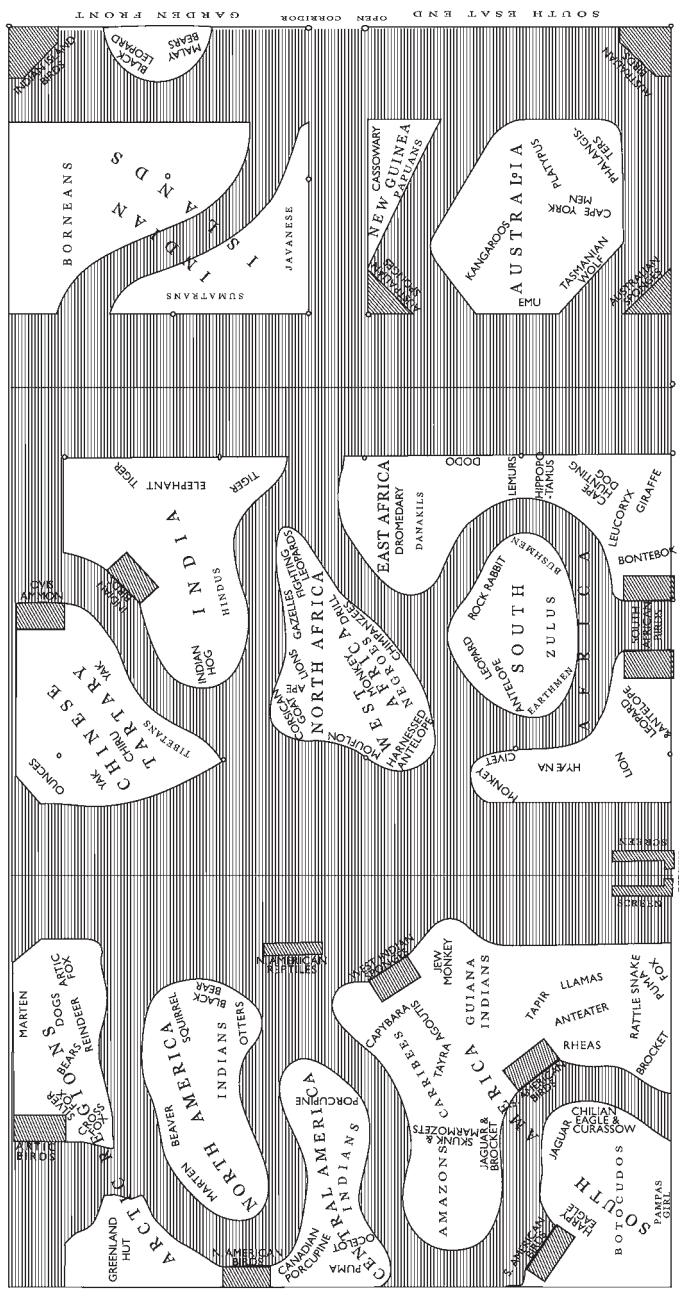

Fig. 1. Map of the Natural History Department, Sydenham (after Samuel Phillips, *Guide to the Crystal Palace and its park, Sydenham* (2nd edn, London, [1854]), between pp. 116–17).

whereby, Latham explained, the wooden plugs adorning their lips and ears were frequently 'torn out' and the fleshy shreds 'to which they belong[ed] left hanging'.[16] Rather than being fictionalized, Latham chose to reify a disagreement that was originally reported in *Travels in Brazil* (1820) by Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neuwid. Latham used the book's original illustration, supplemental drawings from Johann Baptist von Spix and Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius's *Travels in Brazil* (1824), and casts from the anatomy professor Anders Retzius.[17] Meanwhile, the Zulus were engaged in the search for a lost article, in which case, he clarified, 'a Fetish-man, a medium-man, mystery-man, or conjuror … is called in, and set upon the suspected parties, who sit around a circle. The conjuror then works himself, like the Pythoness of the old oracles, into a state of rabid excitement, and keeps it until he fixes upon the culprit.'[18]

A guidebook specifically for the court of natural history helped viewers to interpret the displays. Significantly, the guidebook's accessibility, both in terms of cost and style, makes it likely that it was one of the most widely used ethnological works of the 1850s. Written by Latham and Forbes, it cost just 6*d* and numbered ninety-two pages. Its cover illustration featured interwoven humans, animals, and plants which both reflected and promoted their classification as natural historical specimens. Given the novelty of ethnology, Latham devoted seventy-four pages to explaining his subject. In a move ridiculed by *Punch*, he began by explaining that 'ethnology' had been derived from two Greek words, *ethnos* and *logos*, and denoted the 'science, not exactly of the different nations of the world, but of the different varieties of the human species'.[19] Throughout, the guidebook was divided into subsections explaining the habits and customs of each nation of displayed peoples. Each description included details of the people's physiognomy, personality, clothing, geographical range, religion, language, means of subsistence, architecture, social customs, and ceremonies.

The importance of describing peoples' 'manners and customs' was greatly indebted to eighteenth-century notions of human variation and shifting patterns of writing history. Throughout the eighteenth century, diverse factors, including complexion, physiognomy, language, religion, physical make-up, clothing and political, social and economic organization, helped to classify humans into distinct varieties.[20] By the late eighteenth century, scholars incorporated these factors into a model of social development wherein humans naturally passed through four distinctive stages characterized by a nation's modes of subsistence. Usually defined by hunting, pasturage, agriculture, and finally commerce, each

[16] Latham and Forbes, *Natural history department*, p. 60.

[17] Prince Alexander Philip Maximilian (zu Wied), *Travels in Brazil in the years 1815, 1816 and 1817*, trans. H. E. Lloyd (London, 1820); and Joh. Bapt. von Spix and C. F. Phil. von Martius, *Travels in Brazil in the years 1817–1820*, trans. H. E. Lloyd (London, 1824).

[18] Latham and Forbes, N*atural history department*, p. 54.

[19] Ibid., p. 6 and 'Punch's handbooks to the Crystal Palace', *Punch*, 27 (1854), pp. 8–9 at p. 8. Many other courts also had a dedicated guidebook.

[20] Wheeler, *Complexion of race*; Bindman, *From ape to Apollo*; and Kidd, *British identities before nationalism*.

stage was associated with given practices of social, political, and civil organization, as well as by manners and morals.[21] As these theories were incorporated into historical analysis, the nature of explaining the past changed. Manners and customs were transformed from 'simply a matter of curiosity – a digression of the main narrative – to an issue of central importance' because they were representative of a peoples' 'relative civilisation, the social organisation or the state of religious belief'.[22] In the nineteenth century, the often twinned notions of diachronic human variation and developmental civilization (stadial or otherwise) remained both powerful and relevant to discussions of human history and national difference.[23] In this light, the guidebook drew on older generic forms of comparative historical writing that remained of fundamental relevance for early to mid-nineteenth-century discussions of human variation.

Meanwhile, defining ethnology as the study of human varieties was a barbed indication of Latham's position within contemporary debates regarding the plausibility of dividing humans into more than one species. The belief that all human beings were descended from common ancestors, later known as monogenesis, followed from orthodox interpretations of Genesis wherein Adam and Eve were the ultimate progenitors of humanity.[24] Proponents of human unity did routinely distinguish between different varieties although the exact number varied: Latham followed the French comparative anatomist Georges Cuvier in outlining three (Caucasian, Mongolian, and Negro).[25] In Britain, this was both the most respectable and commonly held position throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Several scholars nevertheless proposed multiple acts of creation or centres of survivors of the post-diluvian mooring of Noah's Ark to account for observed variation. As early as 1655 Isaac de la Peyrère's *Prae-Adamitae* proposed that humans had existed before Adam.[26] In the late eighteenth century, Henry Home, Lord Kames, proposed several creative acts to account for the different human nations. For other scholars, now most commonly known as polygenists, even if there had been a single act of creation, the variations between humans constituted sufficient grounds to classify them as separate species. Such works quickly became the focus of refutations intended to maintain religious orthodoxy and remained so for decades.[27] Latham contributed to these discussions by using the guidebook consistently to stress human unity whilst also promoting and reinforcing his use of the taxonomic matrices created by cleaving humanity

[21] Ronal Meek, *Social science and the ignoble savage* (Cambridge, 1976).

[22] Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: the discovery of the past in eighteenth-century Britain* (London, 2004), p. 27.

[23] Peter Mandler, '"Race" and "nation" in mid-Victorian thought', in Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, and Brian Young, eds., *History, religion and culture: British intellectual history, 1750–1950* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 224–44. [24] Kidd, *Forging of races*. [25] Augstein, ed., *Race*, pp. ix–xxxiii.

[26] Stephen D. Snobelen, 'Of stones, men and angels: the competing myth of Isabelle Duncan's pre-Adamite man', *Studies in the History and Philosophy of the Biomedical Sciences*, 32 (2001), pp. 59–104; and David N. Livingstone, *Adam's ancestors: race, religion and the politics of human origins* (Baltimore, MD, 2008).

[27] Hannah F. Augstein, *James Cowles Prichard's anthropology: remaking the science of man in early nineteenth-century Britain* (Amsterdam, 1999).

along the lines of civilized and savage; heathen and Christian; hunter-gatherer, agricultural farmer, and commercial capitalist; European, Mongolian, and Negro.

Although the study of Britain and Continental Europe formed a significant subdivision of British ethnology, the natural history court only illustrated the peoples of Asia, Africa, and the New World. The omission may have been particularly puzzling given Latham's own research on the subject including *Ethnology of the British colonies and dependencies* (1851) and *Ethnology of Europe* (1852).[28] Latham excused himself by arguing that visitors would already be sufficiently acquainted with at least a rudimentary knowledge of how British and European peoples were differentiated from one another.[29] *Punch* proposed a suitable addition featuring a costermonger, donkey, and thistle (Figure 2). Alternatively, the magazine suggested that perhaps the addition was not necessary after all, since there would 'always be found among the visitors themselves a collection of living curiosities of the various populations of Europe'.[30] The substitution of visitors for specimens of British types neatly encouraged visitors to compare themselves with the peoples on display and to observe their progress from such relatively lowly states of social organization and moral purpose (Figure 3). Intriguingly, critics of working-class visitors acidly compared them to the models, snobbishly proposing that they were more likely to enjoy the natural history court than the Greek sculpture because, since the models were not art, they were more easily appreciated by the plebeian multitudes.[31]

Both official and unofficial guidebooks suggested a potential for improvement believed to be inherent in all humans, whilst the overarching theme of progress was reinforced by the overall arrangement of Sydenham's gardens and courts. For instance, the antediluvian monsters were arranged in a temporal narrative showing their emergence from the waters on to *terra firma*. Once visitors had passed by such scenes from 'deep time', they could walk uphill to the Palace entrance and physically retrace life's development from bygone cataclysms.[32] On reaching the Palace, they entered the court of natural history before moving to the other displays devoted to human civilization in its progressive historical manifestations. The intertwined narratives of temporal and moral development reflected and consolidated the common attempt to define human variation as the outcome of processes that operated diachronically; thus, human exoticism came

[28] Robert. G. Latham, *Ethnology of the British colonies and dependencies* (London, 1851); and idem, *The ethnology of Europe* (London, 1852). See also James C. Prichard, *The Eastern origin of the Celtic nations proved by a comparison of their dialects with the Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, and Teutonic languages, forming a supplement to 'Researches into the physical history of mankind'* (Oxford, 1831).

[29] Latham and Forbes, *Natural history department*, p. 5.

[30] 'Punch's handbooks to the Crystal Palace', p. 8.

[31] Kate Nichols, *Greece and Rome at the Crystal Palace: classical sculpture and modern Britain, 1854–1936* (Oxford, forthcoming).

[32] Martin Rudwick, *Scenes from deep time: early pictorial representations of the prehistoric world* (Chicago, IL, 1992); Secord, 'Monsters at the Crystal Palace'; and O'Connor, *The earth on show*.

Fig. 2. Suggestion for a tableau of British natural history ('Punch's handbooks to the Crystal Palace', *Punch*, 27 (1854), p. 8).

to be used as a sign of historical lag behind those who, like the Victorians, felt that they had successfully achieved the most developed forms of human civilization, even when such variation was presented in a synchronic space.[33] In this light, the official tableaux presented displays of peoples in need of moral and mental improvement within an intended sequence that reaffirmed the overall theme of temporal and moral development from a visitor's first steps on to the Palace's grounds.[34] Despite the directors' intentions, it would be easy to overlook Sydenham's potential to offer multiple narratives of the past. Visitors did not necessarily follow the advice of guidebooks; instead, they could use one of several entrances and move between and through courts in numerous paths. Thus, the peripatetic tracings of history could chart the decline and fall of empires, or ahistorical relationships between them, just as easily as performing the linear progression from monsters to Victorians.[35]

[33] On diachronic variation see James C. Prichard, 'On the various methods of research which contribute to the advancement of ethnology, and of the relations of that science to other branches of knowledge', *British Association for the Advancement of Science Official Report* (London, 1847), pp. 230–53.

[34] Piggott, *Palace of the people*, p. 126.

[35] Nichols, *Greece and Rome at the Crystal Palace*.

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Fig. 3. John Leech, 'Some varieties of the human race' (*Punch*, 28 (1855), p. viii).

Latham did not content himself with simply promoting human unity, but drew on contemporary scientific research to substantiate his position. Doing so ensured that his guidebook thereby encapsulated contemporary ethnological debate which was then presented in digestible form to a broader, lay audience than more traditional scholarly works. For instance, skin pigmentation remained an unresolved issue and relevant to discussions of human unity. In the eighteenth century, complexion had often been explained with reference to physical geography. Common observations, such as humans becoming darker-skinned the closer one approached to the equator, and thus hotter climes, helped to sustain arguments that skin coloration was a function of exposure to heat, rather than an intrinsically different feature of darker complexions. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries critics began raising their heads and the structure of the human skin, rather than climate or environment, gained ground in attempts to

resolve how colouring developed.[36] Some writers were even willing to argue that darker skins featured an extra layer of pigmented tissue, marking their owners as a different species.[37] Latham used the guidebook to present this continued debate to the public and used detailed information regarding the skin's structure, including cross-sections of skin taken from a contemporary German histological manual, to dismiss any anatomical distinction between human varieties and to affirm that their differences were in 'degree only'.[38] Latham's references to contemporary ethnological debates, mobilization of technical literature, and decision to stress human unity unequivocally indicate both the intended educational aspect of the court and the perceived utility of the guidebook in introducing ethnology to the lay public.

Furthermore, there are indications that the public did take up such invitations to muse on human variation. One reviewer noted:

> The real object of interest presented to the shilling visitor are the eating and drinking courts, where he can be taught to contemplate the requirements of his inner man, after which, by an easy suggestion, you will find him amongst the stuffed animals, intensely taken up with the strange and questionable shapes of his fellow-man; he can do without Blumenbach and Pritchard [sic], or even Latham, their own great progenitor here, because he can make his own comparisons; like the monkey at the looking-glass, he can study his own views of the development theory on the spot; he is touched with a fellow-feeling as he exclaims before the chimpanzee 'is he not a man and a brother'?[39]

The rhetorical questioning of the chimpanzee's relationship to humanity sarcastically made light of the shilling visitors' eating, drinking, and ostensibly intellectual musings. By denigrating the use made by such visitors of the natural history court, the journalist's comments nevertheless suggest that, despite his disapproval, there were patrons who felt that the court presented them with sufficient material to stimulate their own thoughts on the natural history of humans without resorting to scholarly tomes no matter how authoritative or irritating to other observers.

The journalist's allusions are also indicative of the range of contemporary debates to which the material at Sydenham could be made relevant. For instance, development became the talk of the town within Victorian society as early as 1844 when the anonymous publication of *Vestiges of the natural history of creation* proposed an explanation of the Creation that depended upon the natural law of evolution

[36] On broader challenges to environmentalism see Mark Harrison, *Climates and constitutions: health, race, environment and British imperialism in India, 1600–1850* (Oxford, 1999); Dror Wahrman, *The making of the modern self: identity and culture in eighteenth-century England* (New Haven, CT, 2006), pp. 83–126; and Warwick Anderson, *The cultivation of whiteness: science, health and racial destiny in Australia* (New York, NY, 2003).

[37] Marie-Jean-Pierre Flourens, 'On the natural history of Man', *Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal*, 27 (1839), pp. 351–8.

[38] Latham and Forbes, *Natural history department*, p. 42; and A. Kolliker, *Manual of human histology*, ed. and trans. George Busk and Thomas H. Huxley (London, 1853), p. 106.

[39] 'Leader', *Crystal Palace Herald*, n.s., Aug. 1854, p. 33.

through development.[40] By 1853, the book had been through ten editions and generated considerable discussion regarding the possible identity of the author and the nature of natural development in 'drawing rooms, libraries, churches, pubs, clubs, and railway carriages'.[41] Likewise, the anonymous writer echoed the slave's cry that had become an iconic rallying cry for abolitionists: 'Am I not a man and a brother?' The pointed reference was to raging debates on slavery in the United States, where the notion of multiple human species found much greater sympathy, and which ultimately contributed to the American Civil War between 1861 and 1865.[42] Such broad discussion is just one example of the potential for visitors to wander in the court closely examining models of foreign peoples whilst reflecting on the relationship between development, progress, and human variety. Moreover, the reproduction and circulation of such discussions not only reflected interest in the court, but also laid foundations for widespread public engagement with the ethnological material by ensuring the court's displays a vibrant life beyond the palace's shimmering walls.

Sydenham's human displays were particularly important for those interested in ethnology who craved formal instruction beyond that provided by showmen. London boasted anatomical museums such as Dr Kahn's, wherein visitors could peruse waxwork models of human anatomy (including shockingly explicit examples of afflictions to which only sinful flesh was vulnerable).[43] Foreign peoples were sometimes featured as either performers or models alongside more usual fare; for instance, Kahn exhibited Maximo and Bartola (the 'Aztec Lilliputians'), Martinus and Flora (San children exhibited as the 'Earthmen'), and the 'Niam-Niams', a race of men from Abyssinia ostensibly sporting tails.[44] At Savile House, Leicester Square, in 1853, Reimers's Anatomical and Ethnological Museum had exhibited over 300 waxwork models including a 'Gallery of Nations', which claimed to exhibit 'at one glance the varied types of the Great Human Family'.[45] Despite auspicious beginnings and touring Europe throughout the 1850s, the Museum had passed into Londoners' memory by the time Sydenham opened its doors. The British Museum did make some ethnological and natural historical material publicly available but, despite having an Ethnographical Room, relevant material was scattered about the building and not arranged in order to illustrate ethnological theory. Meanwhile, even the most enthusiastic showmen could not match either Latham's expertise in communicating the latest research on human

[40] [Robert Chambers], *Vestiges of the natural history of creation* (London, 1844).

[41] James A. Secord, *Victorian sensation: the extraordinary publication, reception and secret authorship of 'Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation'* (Chicago, IL, 2000), p. 522.

[42] J. C. Nott and Geo. R. Gliddon, *Types of mankind: or ethnological researchers based upon the ancient monuments, paintings, sculptures, and crania of races & c.* (Philadelphia, PA, 1854).

[43] Richard D. Altick, *The shows of London: a panoramic history of exhibitions, 1600–1862* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 341–2.

[44] Bernth Lindfors, 'Dr Kahn and the Niam-Niams', trans. Teresa Bridgeman, in Blanchard et al., *Human zoos*, pp. 229–38.

[45] Handbill 1853, John Johnson collection of printed ephemera, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Waxworks, 3 (41).

variety or the resources of his museum in displaying such a broad spectrum of ethnic groups. Thus, although London hosted other displays of natural history and human models were not unknown, in the mid-1850s, Sydenham offered an unrivalled object lesson in contemporary ethnology by virtue of presenting human models, exhibited in naturalistic environments, and curated by a leading scholar. Moreover, given its lower entrance fees, it not only competed, but presumably triumphed, with London's shows for custom.

Although clearly successful in attracting crowds, Sydenham did present other problems. Latham presented his museum as an uncontentious project, but as his colleagues soon made clear, the public presentation of human variation provoked tension since scholars had yet to agree on the nature of ethnology itself and the best way to present it to both learned and lay audiences.

II

The importance of Latham's directorship is suggested by his alteration of the Crystal Palace Company's original plans. Originally, William Thomson, curator of the Museums of Natural History and Anatomy at King's College, London, had been charged with overseeing the ethnological, zoological, and raw produce collections. By 1852, the Company had published three short pamphlets in which Thomson outlined plans for the collections. Initially, the Company sought donations and their 'list of desiderata' for the ethnological collection included donations of casts of hands and faces, weapons, national costume, drawings, indigenous art, and religious or devotional objects.[46] However, once appointed, Latham adjusted the enterprise by conceiving of his museum.

Meanwhile, 1853 provided a particularly rich selection of exhibited foreign peoples in the metropolis and Latham quickly took advantage of their presence. Many of the models of people were, in fact, casts taken from individuals either being exhibited or living in London between 1853 and 1854. These included members of a troupe of Zulus, Maximo and Bartola, Flora and Martinus, and two Australian aborigines, Dick and Tom.[47] Where local examples were less forthcoming, Latham attempted to obtain copies of casts that had been taken from life from other ethnological collections such as those of Retzius, from whom examples of the Krenak and a young Pampa girl were taken. Similarly, Latham also included indigenous peoples from British Guiana (now Guyana) modelled from life during an expedition by Sir Robert H. Schomburgk, a German naturalist and

[46] Piggott, *Palace of the people*, p. 127; William Thomson, *Crystal Palace, Sydenham. Natural history department. Ethnological collection* (London, 1852); idem, *Crystal Palace, Sydenham. Natural history department. Raw produce collection* (London, 1852); and idem, *Crystal Palace, Sydenham. Natural history department. Zoological collection* (London, 1852).

[47] Robert G. Latham, 'Ethnological remarks upon some of the more remarkable varieties of human species, represented by individuals now in London', *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London*, 4 (1856), pp. 148–50.

explorer later knighted by Queen Victoria.[48] The efforts to which Latham went to procure casts in preference to awaiting donations or using sculpted models is revealing; not only were displayed peoples considered legitimate ethnological specimens that might be used fruitfully, but the opportunities they provided for research and training were also being actively exploited.

Latham's approach was seen as both admirably innovative and a promising basis for future research. Before the opening ceremony, one journalist was optimistic about the project but felt that it required further development because 'Dr. Latham cannot expect to complete his ethnological collection from the types of races brought to the port of London in one year.'[49] Another reviewer felt that a portion of 'Dr. Latham's ethnological collection is nearly perfect' with the 'varied races of mankind, from the most savage and intellectual, to the states verging on civilisation' exhibited in their 'appropriate conditions'.[50] Conolly opined that the displays were 'calculated to be largely instructive' and that the court's displays were accurate and relevant enough for a 'detailed critical report of the figures, & c.,' to be 'very interesting' for ethnological research.[51] Conolly also used Sydenham as an example to bolster arguments that a national collection, possibly housed in the British Museum, and arranged 'with a view to the particular illustration of different branches of ethnological inquiry, would greatly facilitate the progress of ethnology.[52] In later years, Edward Burnett Tylor, the first British anthropologist to obtain a university readership, felt that the models were sufficiently useful to keep photographs of them in his personal collection.[53] In this context, the models entered and circulated within a new visual economy of photographs and their collectors, whilst helping to create and reinforce the role of the models in studying human variation. Intriguingly, it also raises the possibility that Tylor may have felt they were at least as useful as anthropometric photographs which, in the mid-1860s, became the focus of attempts to create new methods of obtaining anthropologically useful information.[54] Meanwhile, Latham's own reputation was significantly enhanced by his curatorship of the museum.

There were detractors. One member of the Ethnological Society, Richard Cull, was irritated that 'models of the wretched little idiots exhibited in London last year as Aztecs' had been included since they were not 'types of any race'. Similarly, Cull was concerned that the court was 'calculated to mislead' since too much attention had been paid to physical differences and not enough to linguistic or mental attributes: 'The exhibition of physical man is merely the

[48] D. Graham Burnett, 'Exploration, performance, alliance: Robert Schomburgk in British Guiana', *Journal of Caribbean Studies*, 15 (2000), pp. 11–37.

[49] 'The Crystal Palace', *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 23 Apr. 1854, p. 7.

[50] 'A visit to the Crystal Palace', *Lady's Newspaper*, 10 June 1854, p. 364.

[51] Conolly, *Ethnological exhibitions of London*, pp. 38–9.

[52] Ibid., pp. 41–2.

[53] Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (catalogue numbers PRM 1998.210.3 and PRM 1998.211.9). Reproduced in Qureshi, *Peoples on parade*.

[54] Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw histories: anthropology, photographs and museums* (Oxford, 2001).

natural-history part of man. It is to be hoped that means are adopted to teach the spectators, that however important this may be as a part, it is only a part of the great science of Ethnology.' The problem lay partly in the sheer difficulty of addressing Cull's interests since features 'of the mind and its productions, especially that earliest and wonderful production, verbal language, cannot be displayed'.[55] The lack of attention devoted to language must have been especially disappointing given Latham's philological talents and experience. After all, between 1839 and 1845, Latham had been a professor of English Language and Literature at University College, London, and was the well-known author of the successful textbook *The English language* (1841).[56] Hence, despite Latham's intellectual outlook and the guidebook's confident pronouncements on what ethnology *was*, Cull undermined attempts to promote the court as a wholly representative enterprise.

In later years, a conflagration of unknown cause reduced the models to ashes; the loss was sufficiently great to be mourned by the *Anthropological Review* which noted that 'Amongst the important anthropological events which have taken place during the past year (1866), the destruction by fire of the statues of various savage tribes in the Crystal Palace, deserves to be chronicled. Inaccurate as these representations no doubt were' the educational loss would be immense, since they had been the 'only materials generally accessible to the public in London, by which the popular mind could render itself familiar with the aspect of many of the races of man'. The *Review* hoped that replacement models, similar to those forming the Paris Gallery of Anthropology at the Jardin des Plantes, would be commissioned. Just as Latham had done, the *Review* called for the casts, in all cases, to be 'coloured with the precise tints of the original skin'. Furthermore, it was especially important that 'the greatest possible care should be taken, not merely to surround them with all necessary accessories of costume and furniture, but to maintain the expression of the living subject as far as possible' since casts made from dead faces did not always 'indicate the true physiognomy of the individual'.[57]

Given the objections raised by Cull and the *Anthropological Review*, it is significant that the opposition did not extend to the very decision to create a court of natural history or its potential utility for both current and future research. Instead, Cull's frankly expressed qualms were based on issues of who constituted an ethnic type (certainly not Maximo and Bartola) and fears that the brand of ethnology presented was simply too visual to do justice to the theoretical and methodological diversity of contemporary ethnological practice. Meanwhile, anthropologists called for the destroyed models to be quickly replaced. The cross-channel search

[55] Richard Cull, 'On the recent progress of ethnology', *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London*, 4 (1856), pp. 297–316, especially p. 297.

[56] W. H. Brock, 'Hunt, James (1833–1869)', *Oxford dictionary of national biography*.

[57] 'Disastrous fire at the Crystal Palace', *Daily News*, 31 Dec. 1866, p. 5; and 'Anthropological news', *Anthropological Review*, 5 (1867), pp. 240–56 (especially pp. 241–2).

for inspiration was not unsurprising since James Hunt, founder of the Anthropological Society, was a devotee of the influential French anatomist Paul Broca, who helped to found the institutional framework of mid-century French anthropology. Its self-conscious alignment with Paris did not, however, prevent the *Review* calling for the emulation of Latham's choice to use live human subjects, painted casts, and naturalistic backgrounds modelled on natural habitats. The utility of human models continued to be promoted in later years. For example, at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 human models were similarly arranged into ethnology sub-courts and featured prominently in anthropologists' use of the exhibition's artefacts as the subject of journal articles or as tools to learn disciplinary useful ways to observe typological human variation.[58] Despite the anxiety and disagreement about how best to present the material to the public or ethnologists, Latham's guidebook glossed over both the tensions regarding Sydenham's displays and, in turn, the heated negotiations on the discipline's future.

Between the 1840s and 1870s, the institutional framework associated with the scholarly study of human variety underwent considerable transformations, helping to redefine the discipline's practitioners, intellectual scope, and methodologies. In 1837, the reformist physician Thomas Hodgkin helped to found the Aborigines' Protection Society.[59] The Society's establishment followed in the wake of a report in 1836 of a parliamentary select committee on aborigines, originally set up to enquire into the ravages visited by colonial governments upon indigenous populations worldwide.[60] Hodgkin was convinced that the moral obligation to protect indigenous peoples would be strengthened and supported by the scientific study of humanity. His interests were complemented by members such as the Bristolian physician James Cowles Prichard and helped to attract others to the society who, whilst sharing its philanthropic commitments, were primarily interested in pursuing their scholarly interests in human difference.

In 1843, a breakaway faction of the Aborigines' Protection Society formed the Ethnological Society of London.[61] Moral philanthropy and the scholarly study of human variety were hardly mutually exclusive; nevertheless, those primarily interested in pursuing the science of 'man', as opposed to the political campaigning

[58] Qureshi, *Peoples on parade*. Also see Efram Sera-Shriar, 'Beyond the armchair: early ethnographic practice and the making of British anthropology, 1813–1871' (Ph.D. diss., Leeds, forthcoming), and, for a later period, see Benoît De l'Estoile, 'From the colonial exhibition to the museum of man. An alternative genealogy of French anthropology', *Social Anthropology*, 11 (2003), pp. 341–61.

[59] Zoë Laidlaw, 'Heathens, slaves and aborigines: Thomas Hodgkin's critique of missions and anti-slavery', *History Workshop Journal*, 2007 (64), pp. 133–61.

[60] Zoë Laidlaw, 'Aunt Anna's report: the Buxton women and the aborigines select committee, 1835–1837', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 2004 (32), pp. 1–28; and select committee on aborigines (British settlements), *Report from the select committee on aborigines (British settlements); with the minutes of evidence, appendix and index* (London, 1837).

[61] George Stocking, *Victorian anthropology* (New York, NY, 1987), especially pp. 239–73; and idem, 'What's in a name? The origins of the Royal Anthropological Institute: 1837–1871', *Man*, 6 (1971), pp. 369–90.

of its parent organization, felt a need to generate a distinctive institutional identity. By establishing a forum dedicated to pursuing their interests, the new Society helped to bring together previously disparate interests and individuals. Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, scholars interested in Biblical hermeneutics, natural history, political economy, philology, liberal politics, theology, abolitionism, missionary, and travel literature all contributed to the study of human variety.[62] From its inception, ethnology thereby emerged as a synthetic discipline and which was partly reflected in the fact that the Society's original members were primarily comprised of military officers, civil servants, clergymen, and physicians. The Society's publications included the *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London* (1848–56, new series 1869–70), the *Ethnological Journal* (1848–66), and *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London* (1861–9). Periodical literature and meetings helped to bring coherence to the emerging discipline and facilitated broader intellectual exchange. By the early 1850s, however, the activity and membership of the early years had waned, generating considerable uncertainty as to the Society's future. By the 1860s, a fresh influx of a new and relatively young generation of professionals led to the total membership rising from 40 in 1860 to 211 in 1863. Mainly in their twenties and thirties, the new participants overwhelmed the original members and contributed to growing tensions.[63]

In 1863, under the leadership of Hunt, then secretary of the Ethnological Society, another breakaway faction formed the Anthropological Society of London. The final straw appears to have been illustrations for an article on Sierra Leone by Robert Clarke, a colonial administrator in Sierra Leone.[64] Strongly objecting to the images that were selected to appear in print, Hunt tendered his resignation from the Ethnological Society at the same meeting and immediately promoted his vision of anthropology's future as a scientific discipline. He commissioned translations of foreign works such as Carl Vogt's *Lectures on man* (1864, Hunt edited and dedicated the work to Broca) and founded (and often secretively edited and financially subsidized) a substantial periodical literature including the *Transactions of the Anthropological Society of London* (1863), *Anthropological Review* (1863–70), and *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London* (1864–70).[65] Hunt's dissent has often been seen as primarily an attempt to create a home for those opposed to the political, intellectual, and humanitarian commitments of the Ethnological Society.[66] Yet, given the dispute over images it seems likely that the political and methodological importance of communication has been underestimated in the Society's fissure. For Hunt, the issue of public communication was critical in establishing the sound foundations of a new discipline. Given the

[62] Wheeler, *Complexion of race*; and Kidd, *Forging of races*.

[63] Stocking, 'What's in a name?'; and William F. Bynum, 'Time's noblest offspring: the problem of man in the British natural historical sciences, 1800–1863' (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge, 1974).

[64] Robert Clarke, 'Sketches of the colony of Sierra Leone and its inhabitants', *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London*, 2 (1863), pp. 320–63.

[65] Carl Vogt, *Lectures on man: his place in creation and in the history of the earth* (London, 1864).

[66] Stocking's *Victorian anthropology* has proved seminal in this respect.

reasons for Hunt's departure, and his subsequently zealous stewardship of such a large and newly established periodical literature, it may also be argued that he left the Society in order to create and exert greater editorial control over both images and publications because they played such a critical role in his new methodological and intellectual schema.[67] Between 1863 and his premature death in 1869, Hunt provided a figurehead for the new science. Thereafter, despite an uneasy coexistence for several years, the Ethnological Society and Anthropological Society merged in 1871 to form the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland and the diversity of the societies' periodicals was subsumed into the newly founded *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* (1872–1906).

These institutional wranglings have traditionally been interpreted as taking place during, and contributing to, the reconceptualization of human variation from an elastic category based on physical, social, and cultural considerations to an unchangeable, inherited trait based primarily, or even solely, on physiological, anatomical or biological differences, and the emergence of 'scientific racism'.[68] These shifts are often argued to have been coupled with the ostensible transformation of 'armchair' ethnology into modern anthropology; or, in methodological terms, the assumed shift from humanistic textual and philological approaches to scientific investigation rooted in biological science and, ultimately, fieldwork.[69] Huxley's *Man's place in nature* (1865), appears to confirm the new disciplinary landscape:

> Ethnology is the science which determines the distinctive characters of the persistent modifications of mankind; which ascertains the distribution of those modifications in present and past times, and seeks to discover the causes, or conditions of existence, both of the modifications and of their distribution … Ethnology, as thus defined, is a branch of Anthropology, the great science which unravels the complexities of human structure; traces out the relations of man to other animals; studies all that is especially human in the mode in which man's complex functions are performed; and searches after the conditions which have determined his presence in the world. And anthropology is a section of Zoology, which again is the animal half of Biology — the science of life and living things.[70]

As with Conolly, however, Huxley was by no means an independent commentator; rather, he was instrumental in negotiating the merger between the two societies.[71] His well-known account of the relationship between ethnology and anthropology, and by implication their appropriate institutional alignments, was not simply an outline of the disciplines' future topographies, but a partisan appraisal of the polemical refashioning that ultimately contributed to the creation of the Anthropological Institute and late nineteenth-century anthropology.

[67] Sera-Shriar, 'Beyond the armchair'.

[68] Stepan, *The idea of race in science*.

[69] Henrika Kuklick, *The savage within: the social history of British anthropology, 1885–1945* (Cambridge, 1991); and Fredrik Barth et al., *One discipline, four ways: British, German, French and American anthropology* (Chicago, IL, 2005). Sera-Shriar, 'Beyond the armchair', revises this historiography.

[70] Thomas H. Huxley, 'On the methods and results of ethnology', in *Man's place in nature: and other anthropological essays* (London, 1900), pp. 209–52 at pp. 209–10.

[71] Stocking, *Victorian anthropology*, pp. 254–7.

Between the 1840s and 1860s, the theorists most emblematically associated, or credited, with the shifting disciplinary landscape of ethnological and anthropological practice are Prichard, Knox, and Hunt. Prichard is an exceptionally important figure. Raised a devout Quaker and subsequently an Anglican convert, he came to be regarded over his lifetime as the 'greatest writer' that 'treated of the Science of Ethnology, and investigated and classified the nations and kindreds and tongues of voice-varying men'.[72] His major works, *Researches into the physical history of mankind* (1813; 3rd edn 1836–47) and the more widely known and digestible *Natural history of man* (1843), drew on his Edinburgh medical training, voracious reading in multiple languages, and exceptional linguistic skills to fend off the challenge from religious heterodoxy, whilst helping to lay the methodological and intellectual foundations of British ethnology.

Knox and Hunt are frequently cited as exemplars of a new tide of Victorian racism and aggressive imperialism in the mid-nineteenth century.[73] It is not difficult to see why. Knox is infamous for opening *Races of men* (1850) with the sensational claim 'Race is everything: literature, science, art, in a word, civilization depend upon it.'[74] Meanwhile, Hunt's 'On the physical and mental characters of the negro' (1863), presented at the annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (f. 1831) pronounced:

> first, that there is as good reason for classifying the negro as a distinct species from the European as there is for making the ass a distinct species from the zebra; secondly, that the negro is inferior intellectually to the European; thirdly, that the analogies are far more numerous between the negro and the ape than between the European and the ape. There was in the negro that assemblage of evidence which would induce an unbiased observer to make the European and negro distinct species.[75]

Yet, Knox's and Hunt's views are not only deeply offensive now, but were also highly controversial and deemed utterly unacceptable by many contemporaries. Hunt's paper was immediately 'met by hisses and catcalls for defending the subjection and slavery of African-Americans, and supporting belief in the plurality of human species'.[76] Similarly, Knox was widely criticized for his materialism and, despite being exonerated of all charges, remained tainted from guilt-by-association after being caught buying bodies for his Edinburgh anatomy

[72] Thomas Hodgkin, 'Obituary of Dr. Prichard', *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London*, 2 (1850), pp. 182–207 at p. 182.

[73] Andrew Porter, ed., *The nineteenth century*, Oxford History of the British Empire (5 vols., Oxford, 1998), III.

[74] Robert Knox, *The races of men: a fragment* (London, 1850), preface and Evelleen Richards, 'The "moral anatomy" of Robert Knox: the interplay between biological and social thought in Victorian scientific naturalism', *Journal of the History of Biology*, 22 (1989), pp. 373–436.

[75] James Hunt, 'On the physical and mental characteristics of the Negro', in *British Association for the Advancement of Science Official Report* (London, 1863), p. 140.

[76] Brock, 'Hunt, James (1833–1869)'. See also Anon., 'Exchange by William Craft and Dr. James Hunt at the annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England, August 27, 1863', in C. P. Ripley, ed., *The black abolitionist papers* (5 vols., Chapel Hill, NC; London, 1985), I, pp. 537–43.

school from the murderers William Burke and William Hare. On account of such stigmatization, he initially failed to be admitted to the Ethnological Society, but later gained acceptance in 1858 when Hunt helped to negotiate his admission.[77] Meanwhile, Latham's work has been variously seen as primarily philological, an outmoded form of descriptive natural history that was heavily indebted to, or even imitative of, Prichard, glossed over in favour of the sensational racism of Knox and Hunt, or ignored altogether.[78] There are, however, more constructive ways to frame Latham's work.

Latham both retrained as a physician and built his medical career whilst still a professor of English before pursuing his ethnological interests. Among men of science, particularly those interested in ethnology, Latham rose to prominence after Prichard's death in 1848. Elected to the Royal Society in the same year, Latham quickly published *Natural history of the varieties of man* (1850) in the same year as Knox's *Races of man*; he also served as vice-president of the Ethnological Society and was commissioned to begin work on the court of natural history in 1852. Publicly, Latham's profile was enhanced by his curatorship of Sydenham, authoring the court's guidebook and contributing to other works devoted to explicating science for the broader public.[79] His curatorship is also indicative of how Latham's work cannot be fully accommodated within frameworks that propose that the mid-1800s, and particularly Knox's work, ushered in a new era of scientific racism and the successful overthrow of older approaches in favour of anatomical, physiological, or biological notions of human variation.[80]

Latham bridged the world between the scholarly elite and lay public in both his writings and practice. As a trained philologist, and self-conscious follower of Prichard, he used language and natural history extensively in his ethnological research; however, Sydenham demonstrates why Latham cannot accurately be characterized as taking a primarily humanistic, text-based approach, as Prichard ostensibly did, or having adopted anatomy and physiology as his primary rationale for defining human variation, as Knox and Hunt were wont to do. Rather, Latham's research was clearly a heterogeneous mix of many elements, including natural history, philology, anatomy, and physiology. Rather than witnessing the emergence or consolidation of a single approach to the study of human variety, Latham's work suggests that it would be more accurate to argue that the mid-nineteenth century saw a substantial *proliferation*, not homogenization, of intellectual and methodological approaches accompanying the scholarly study of human variation. Such diversity is suggested by Latham's own approach and affirmed by the dissent voiced over his displays in the court of natural history. Likewise, Latham's connections within the gentlemanly network of scholars

[77] Richards, 'The "moral anatomy" of Robert Knox'.

[78] The classic account, which has been consistently reproduced, remains Stocking, *Victorian anthropology*, especially pp. 239–73.

[79] Robert G. Latham, *The varieties of human species: being a manual of ethnography: introductory to the study of history* (London, [c. 1860]).

[80] Stepan, *The idea of race in science*.

interested in ethnology and public presence suggests that, during the 1850s, both ethnologists and polite society looked to Latham, rather than to Knox, for their ethnological educations. It is in this vein and in Latham's hands particularly, that human displays became resources to be drawn upon in efforts both to redefine what 'race' actually meant and how it could be productively studied by the lay and learned.

III

It may be tempting to read Conolly's address as an accurate description of ethnological practice in the mid-nineteenth century and of the relationship between displayed peoples, ethnologists, and paying customers. In light of the institutional and intellectual redefinitions involved in studying human variety during this period, however, his argument is clearly more appropriately interpreted as a passionate, reformist polemic intended to promote the interventionist protection of displayed peoples whilst using them to bolster the Ethnological Society of London's social standing. By arguing that displayed peoples ought to be subjected to investigations he and his colleagues deemed rational, he opened two desirable possibilities. First, ethnologists would be able to produce usable accounts of the full range of exhibited peoples. Secondly, ethnologists could potentially play a role in certifying the authenticity of the showmen's advertised claims. Undoubtedly, achieving such a regulatory function would have allowed the Society to exert considerable control over how exhibited peoples were displayed, promoted, and studied. Tellingly, in 1855, Conolly's address appeared as a pamphlet entitled *The ethnological exhibitions of London* and so became available as a manifesto for ethnology's future: its very name betraying anxiety about how commercial exhibitions ought to be used and by whom. Ultimately, such a highly polemical intervention essentially caricatured a highly complex network of critically engaged intellectual interest on the part of the lay public and ethnologists.

Latham's natural history court at Sydenham indicated that exhibited peoples were quickly incorporated into the emerging science of ethnology. The press regularly suggested that the shows were of especial interest for a study of human variety; yet, it was Latham who ultimately expended considerable efforts to make such material available to a diverse audience and to incorporate formally displayed peoples into contemporary debates regarding human classification and development. His displays were available until 1866, when a fire badly damaged the majority of the collection and the directors decided not to replace it due to a lack of funds. Between the palace's opening and the blaze, however, the natural history court contributed towards promoting an ideal of education by visual means and promoting displayed peoples as legitimate and useful natural historical specimens.

The importance of the court of natural history has been considerably underestimated. Attendance figures alone suggest that a significant proportion of the population walked amongst the court examining the models. Many more are

likely to have known about the displays through the press. Coupled with Latham's guidebook, the court endorsed a partisan vision of the subject matter and investigative mode that was most suitable for the ethnological research. Sydenham simultaneously provided Victorians with one of the most accessible and widely used nineteenth-century displays of ethnological theory and practice whilst materially demonstrating how ethnologists felt that the 'rational' investigations of exhibited peoples was to be achieved. Discussing the models, a recent history of Sydenham proposes that 'London had only recently become accustomed in recent years to the sight of living "savages".'[81] Unfortunately, this account ignores the longstanding metropolitan tradition of exhibiting foreign peoples.[82] Seeing living foreign peoples on display was not novel; it was, however, new to see them as inanimate casts used in a highly accessible, institutionalized setting to illustrate contemporary ethnological debates and so formally incorporate displayed peoples into the study of human variation as both subjects and experimental objects.

Acknowledging displayed peoples' use as scientific resources is especially important given the considerable activity aimed at defining what counted as human difference, the significance of such variation, and how it should be studied in the mid-nineteenth century. The lasting significance of such debates has been overshadowed by the interest historians have devoted to the legacy of the Anthropological Society and sensational figures, such as Knox or Hunt. Although it is fair to regard ethnology as a disciplinary predecessor to anthropology, it is problematic to disregard the late 1850s and figures such as Latham because they appear to have been superseded in the 1860s by a new generation of anthropologists.[83] This is especially so when Latham continued to publish into the late nineteenth century and provided the lay public with the most accessible and widely read introduction to Victorian ethnological theory in the form of his commercially successful guidebook to the natural history court at Sydenham.[84] Likewise, arguing that human differences shifted towards being defined and studied primarily, or solely, in physical terms erases significant diversity between ethnological practitioners in the 1850s. It is important to recognize, however, that from the late 1850s onwards, ethnologists were engaged in a period of disciplinary redefinition which involved fresh demarcations of their subject matter, analytical framework, and methodology. Examining commercial exhibitions of displayed people within this climate of dispute highlights how displayed peoples and Sydenham were both made relevant and contributed to changes in the way that research into human difference was conducted.

Tellingly, once home in Africa, one exhibited Zulu man later recalled that, when in England, the group was taken to see the 'doctoring houses' where the dead were taken to be 'cut up and dried'. He remembered that when 'we were at

[81] Piggott, *Palace of the people*, p. 126. [82] Qureshi, *Peoples on parade*.
[83] George Stocking, *After Tylor: British social anthropology, 1888–1951* (London, 1995); Kuklick, *Savage within*. [84] Latham and Forbes, *Natural history department*.

the door we saw dead men standing up as if they were alive, so we feared to go in'. When asked why the English cut up their dead, he recalled:

> I heard that the doctors were the people who liked dead men, and that if the graves were not taken care of their people stole the bodies for them; we were also told that the man of our party who died at Berlin was only buried because we were there, and that he was afterwards taken out and cut up, to see if he was made inside like the white people.[85]

Whether this interview is taken to be the Zulu's own words, or the missionary who transcribed his testimony and subsequently arranged for its publication, the comment suggests a widespread realization that displayed peoples were considered usable experimental material. Moreover, where possible, the opportunities displayed peoples provided for research were adopted with enthusiasm. For instance, when Flora, the 'Earthwoman', died in London in 1864 her body was rushed off for dissection by London's medical men.[86]

Rather than arguing that displayed peoples were the crux of ethnological investigation in the nineteenth century, it would be more appropriate to recognize the extent to which they were clearly regarded as valuable in campaigns for a more comprehensive descriptive project than the piecemeal examinations we know took place. This is especially important for histories of anthropological thought. Ethnologists' hopes may not initially have materialized into systematic examinations of every exhibited individual, but, in the late nineteenth century, this began to change as anthropologists played an increasingly important role in exhibiting foreign peoples at international fairs. German anthropology in particular used the *völkerschauen* (people shows) as abundant sources of experimental material.[87] London's shows, however, belonged to an earlier period that was formative to the very notion of constituted suitable material for ethnological, and subsequently anthropological, investigation. Ultimately, by playing a role in redefining human variety and the means used to study it, Latham and displayed peoples helped to redefine the science of human variation and to secure the future value of performers' bodies to anthropological research: dead or alive.

[85] Anon., 'A South African native's picture of England', *Munger Africana Library Notes*, 9 (1979), pp. 8–19, at p. 17.

[86] W. H. Flower and J. Murie, 'Account of the dissection of a bushwoman', *Journal of Anatomy and Physiology* (1867), pp. 189–208.

[87] Rothfels, *Savages and beasts*; and Zimmerman, *Anthropology and anti-humanism*.