

Charles Gabriel Seligman

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ONE of the pioneers of anthropology passed from the scene with the death of C. G. Seligman. Since 1898, when he joined Haddon, Myers, Rivers, and MacDougall as a member of the Torres Straits Expedition, he has been concerned with all aspects of anthropological interest, matching his wide range of scientific concern with as wide a geographical range of localities where he worked. It is not necessary here to repeat the story of his extensive field work – in New Guinea, Sarawak, Ceylon, and the Sudan – for this is known to all anthropologists through his reports, which have long been standard, and may be read in the account of his activit[i]es which A. C. Haddon contributed to the volume published in Seligman's honor in 1934.¹ Rather it may be permitted to recall here the development of those interests, and the contributions not only of Seligman himself, but stimulated by him in his students and associates.

Seligman was born in London, December 24, 1873, and into the period between this date and that of his death on September 19, 1940, he packed the achievement of several ordinary life-spans. His early medical training shaped an interest in physical anthropology and the problems of race that eventuated in his useful little book in the Home University Library Series, *The Races of Africa*, and in many less well-known papers. His medical specialty, pathology, proved useful to him after he had entered anthropology, as is to be seen in some of his early observations on native disease. His interest in psychology developed steadily, and he was especially attracted by the possibilities inherent in the application of the psychoanalytic method to anthropological problems, his last paper dealing with a problem in this general field. As if all this, plus his ethnological research, were not enough, he became a distinguished collector of Chinese jades and a recognized authority on Oriental art; such a paper as *The Roman Orient and the Far East* attests to the thoroughness with which he pursued this scholarly avocation.

His influence, though quietly exerted, was widely felt. As the first holder of the Readership in Anthropology in the London School of Economics, and later as Professor in the same institution, he was in a key position to guide students in the path of sane scholarship, and many of the best-known names of present-day British anthropology owe much to him. Among these students we may name Malinowski, Driberg, Evans-Pritchard, Schapera, Firth, Nadel, and Fortes. In addition must be counted the many members of the Colonial service who sought his advice through personal consultation or by letter when faced with the problem of realizing possibilities to observe native folk, or of organizing for publication such notes as they may have made during a tour of duty.

Seligman was essentially an ethnographer. His passion was for documentation – and of documentation there could not be too much nor could it be carefully enough checked. "Theories will be out of date in ten years," he would say again and again, "it is the facts on which they are based that will always be of use." And this is perhaps why he so markedly in his own work eschewed theory; why his own books and papers are so completely presentations of data.

For some years before his death, Seligman was a semi-invalid, the victim of an infection resulting from his field work in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. During this period he spent the major portion of his time at his home in the countryside at Toot Baldon near Oxford, where, in a very real sense, the anthropological world came to him. Here one would encounter a Colonial administrator home on leave, a Sinologist interested in Seligman's jades, a younger colleague fresh from the field, or some older, better established figure in anthropology. Here were discussions of the problems arising out of Seligman's varied interests, and those of his wife and distinguished collaborator; with whom, it should be noted, Seligman began the tradition, now commonplace in anthropology, that field work can be most effectively carried on by anthropological couples, man and wife.

Yet always beyond and about the shop-talk was the genial personality of the host, his shrewd and penetrating observations, his cordial

¹ *Appreciation*, in *Essays Presented to C. G. Seligman* (London, 1934), pp. 1-4.

hospitality. Few English anthropologists called him by his title, and fewer still ever spoke of him as anything but “Sliggs.” In that name was comprised not only the respect aroused by the solid body of his scientific achievement, but also the warmth of personal feeling he aroused in all who had the good fortune to know him.

Seligman’s bibliography, to 1934, appeared in the volume issued in his honor that has been mentioned above; his publications since its appearance are as follows:

1934. “Primitive Practices and Ideas,” “Ritual and Medicine” (Broadcast Addresses), *Inquiry into the Unknown*, ed. Theodore Besterman (Methuen), pp. 38-62.
 “Anthropological Research in the Southern Sudan,” (Lecture to Dominions and Colonies Section, 27 Feb. 1934), *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, LXXXII, pp. 539-547.
 “Bow and Arrow Symbolism,” *Eurasia Septentrionalis Antiqua*, IX, pp. 349-354.
 “Barium in Ancient Glass” (with H. C. Beck), *Nature*, 133, p. 982.
 “Early Pottery from Southern China,” *Trans. Oriental Ceramic Society*, 1934-35, pp. 26-34.
1935. “Psychology and Racial Differences” (Lecture, Inst. Med. Psychology), in *Psychology and Modern Problems*, ed. I. A. Hadfield (University of London Press), pp. 53-106.

1936. “Chinese and Japanese: a Study in Character and Temperament” (Inaug. Address, Midland Med. Society), *Birmingham Medical Review*, XI, pp. 277-283.
 “Early Chinese Glass from Pre-Han to T’ang Times” (with H. C. Beck & P. D. Ritchie), *Nature*, 138, p. 721.
 “A Note on Rhytons,” *Custom is King (Essays presented to R. R. Marett)*, pp.113-115.
 “Patterns of Culture” (Symposium betw. British Psychological Society, Medical Section, and R. A. I.), *Man*, 1936,150.
1937. “The Roman Orient and the Far East” (Lloyd Roberts Lecture, 1935, Royal College of Physicians), *Antiquity* XI, pp. 5-30.
 (Repr. Smithsonian Report for 1938, Washington, 1939, pp. 547-568).
1938. “Chinese Socketed Celts,” *Antiquity*, XII, pp. 86-87.
 “A Portable Altar from Ceylon,” *Eurasia Septentrionalis Antiqua*, XII, pp. 136-138.
 “Far Eastern Glass: Some Western Origins” (with H. C. Beck), *Bull. Mus. Far Eastern Antiquities* (Stockholm), No.10, pp. 1-64, plates and text figures.
 “The Placenta as Twin and Guardian Spirit in Java,” *Man*, 1938, 18.
1940. “Glass-making in Nupe” (with S. F. Nadel), *Man*, 1940, 107.
 “A Note on Neurosis in Three Celebrated Chinese Painters,” *Character and Personality*, IX, pp. 49-50.

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