**Graebner, Fritz (1877-1934)**

Robert Fritz Graebner was a German ethnologist whose theory of *Kulturkreis* (culture circle) launched a cultural historical approach to ethnology. After finishing his dissertation on medieval history, Graebner worked as an assistant at the Royal Museum of Ethnology in Berlin (1899-1906), where he studied the cultures of Oceania. He compared artefacts and plotted them geographically in order to discover patterns of cultural traits. To explain the spread of a cultural trait from one geographical area to another, he elaborated on Leo Frobenius’ (1873-1938) diffusionist approach and developed the principle of *Kulturkreis* or culture circle: Graebner assumed that functionally related cultural traits originated in one or a few particular places and diffused in radiating culture circles. His theory contradicted the school of evolutionism prevalent at the time, which argued for the linear, uniform and progressive evolution of human cultures in a manner similar to biological evolution. In 1911 Graebner published *Methode der Ethnologie* (‘Method of Ethnology’) in which he attempted to establish criteria for identifying affinities and chronologies between cultural elements. Graebner was invited to visit Australia by the Australian government in 1914; he consequently became an enemy alien at the outbreak of World War I. During his internment, he studied the differences in Indo-European, Hamito-Semitic, Mongolian and Polynesian myths as well as different calendar systems. His findings were published in *Das Weltbild der Primitiven* (‘The World View of the Primitives’) in 1924.

*Claudia Kotte, Humboldt* *Universität*

**List of works**

Graebner, F. (1905) ‘Kulturkreise und Kulturschichten in Ozeanien’ in *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 37: 28-53.

------ (1911) *Methode der Ethnologie,* Heidelberg: Winter.

------ (1924, 2011) *Das Weltbild der Primitiven: Eine Untersuchung der Urformen weltanschaulichen Denkens bei Naturvölkern*, Hamburg: Severus.

**References and further reading**

Harris, M. (1968) *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture*, New York: Crowell.