

Consider how useful Childe's criteria for the emergence of towns and/or states are for interpreting the emergence of social complexity in the Eastern Mediterranean in the Bronze Age. Answer with reference to a case study of your choice from the Aegean, or Near East/Cyprus, or Egypt.

When interpreting the emergence of social complexity during periods of Ancient times, the ten point criteria, created by V. Gordon Childe, is something which is used to judge the complexity of an Ancient state. The criteria follows the idea of the 'Urban Revolution' which took place during the Bronze Age and makes up the foundations of what is thought to make up a complex civilisation. The characteristics which were laid out by Childe include: long distance trade; writing skills; the production of agriculture which can support both the State and specialist craft workers; etc. Elements of the different points which are laid out in Childe's criteria can be seen across different Ancient civilisations, in different capacities, such as the point of "Monumental architecture", where monuments from ancient civilisations can be found globally (e.g. Angkor Wat in Cambodia, Petra in Jordan, Luxor Temple in Egypt; etc.). However, Childe's criteria is disputed by the fact that Childe believed that for a civilisation to be considered 'socially complex', they had to demonstrate all ten of the criteria which he laid out; this creates arguments against Childe, because there are civilisations from the Ancient world are classed as being 'socially complex' without demonstrating all of the criteria, rather only displaying a few of the points. For example, the Olmec's (from Mexico) are considered to be among the first socially complex Mesoamerican civilisations (predating the Mayans by 1500 years, and the Aztecs by a further 1000 years) but they do not have a writing style that has been deciphered¹. By Childe's view, this would make the Olmec's not a socially complex civilisation; the argument against Childe is that there is the ability to be a socially complex society without meeting all of the ten point criteria Childe laid out.

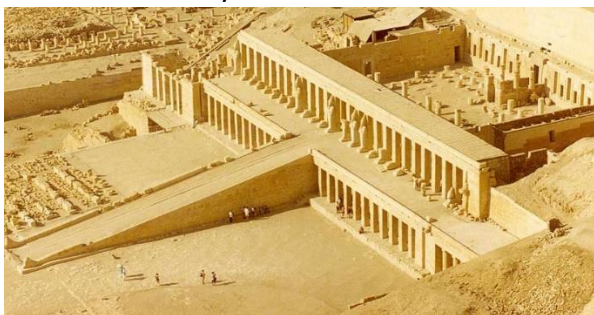
When looking at socially complex societies during the Bronze Age, the use of Childe's criteria may be of benefit. Using the example of Ancient Egypt, the Bronze Age (3000. BC. – 1200. BC.) spanned from the end of the Predynastic era (5000. BC. – 3100. BC.) until the middle of the New Kingdom (1567. BC. – 1070. BC.) and saw many changes take place within Egyptian civilisation. One of the criteria points laid out by Childe is that to be a complex society, a civilisation needed to produce monumental architecture. Egypt is one of the civilisations which has left a multitude of examples of monumental architecture. Architecture that has been left behind from Bronze Age Egyptian era is some of the most recognisable and studied monuments; the criteria laid out by Childe is met when considering Egyptian architecture as an example of its social complexity. Architecture from the Bronze Age of Egypt include the Temple of Hatshepsut (built around 1479. BC.), the Pyramid of Djoser (approximately 2630. BC.) and Abu Simbel (approximately 1244. BC.). Monuments served as a show of power by the Pharaoh ruling at that time, they were made larger and more elaborate, to demonstrate both the Pharaoh's power and the wealth of Egypt. The Temple

¹ Khan Academy, 2017, Accessed: 14.04.2020, Available at: <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/world-history/world-history-beginnings/ancient-americas/a/the-olmec-article>

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of Luxor (in what was once Thebes, Egypt's capital) was added to and built upon by around 30 different Pharaohs during Ancient times; among those was Rameses II (who also ordered the construction of Abu Simbel near the border of Sudan) who built multiple statues in his own honour, one of which being among the largest Egyptian monuments created (the Colossus of Rameses II). Monuments could also be used as a form of propaganda, an example of which is Rameses II constructing monuments and artwork that boasted about Egypt's victory in the Battle of Kadesh, against the Hittites (1274. BC.), despite the battle ending with no real victor.

Based off of Childe's criteria for what constitutes as a socially complex civilisation, Bronze Age Egyptian civilisation would meet the criteria point of having "truly monumental public buildings"². In support of Childe's criteria point about monumental architecture helping to make a civilisation more socially complex, there is merit in the idea. By having long lasting monumental architecture such as that of Egypt, it helps to establish the fact that because these Ancient civilisations were able to construct such structures, there was both the ability to plan and execute ambitious monuments and the wealth within the civilisation to fund its creation. These help to classify a civilisation as socially complex because they have the means and ability to show off the skills and wealth of the area.



The Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut³

Another characteristic laid out by Childe in his criteria is "in point of size the first cities must have been more extensive and more densely populated than any previous settlements"⁴. There were many cities throughout Ancient Egypt which can be considered as fitting the criteria laid out by Childe. Among these cities are Thebes and Memphis, both of which spent part of the Bronze Age serving as the capital city of Egypt. Both cities are known for being large in population, much more than that usually seen in the cities of the Ancient world. In Thebes, modern day Luxor, "by 1500. BC., it [Thebes] had a population of 75,000"⁵. Following the criteria which Childe laid out regarding the social complexity of ancient

² Childe. V.G, 'The Urban Revolution', Liverpool University Press, 1950, pg12

³ Ancient History Encyclopedia, The Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut, Accessed: 15.04.2020. Available at: <https://www.ancient.eu/article/1100/the-temple-of-hatshepsut/>

⁴ Childe. V.G, 'The Urban Revolution', Liverpool University Press, 1950, pg12

⁵ 'Ancient Top 10'. Episode 7.Series 1. The History Channel. Original air date: December 5th 2016 (Accessed: 13.04.2020)

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civilisations, the Egyptian civilisation would, again, meet the criteria, given that the cities that were seen in it at the time of the Bronze Age were more "densely populated" and "extensive" than others which had preceded it, and was further populated and developed than a large number of the cities which could be seen during the same time periods, barring prominent ones of different areas.

A point which Childe laid out is that of the need for "regular 'foreign' trade over quite long distances"⁶. While Egypt's needed few imports of basic supplies, as their agriculture made up for the majority of what would otherwise be imported in, there were some imports that were necessary and came from distances away. For example, the most commonly used material for writing was papyrus, which was mostly imported from Byblos (a Lebanese port). Good trade relations were made, from early on in Egyptian civilisation, with Lebanon; Egypt did not have their own timber which could be used, therefore having to import it in, also from Lebanon. Other imported materials include the mineral of Lapis Lazuli from modern day Afghanistan or Anatolia. Childe's criteria, when looking at Egyptian civilisation during the Bronze Age, is met fairly well and in some fashion. The criteria can be considered as helpful to interpret what civilisations were socially complex during the Bronze Age and where others lacked.

While some of the points laid out by Childe can be applied to most ancient civilisations, there are some civilisations which are considered to be socially complex and advanced for the Bronze Age period, despite not meeting all of Childe's ten point model. Using the criteria, as it was originally intended by Childe (to class as socially complex, all of the criteria must be met) would not be completely helpful when interpreting about the Bronze Age civilisation complexity. When looking at the criteria point of "the invention of writing", Childe's idea can become difficult to use. There is well known evidence that during the Bronze Age of Egypt, there was a written and widely used form of writing, in the form of hieroglyphics, with translations being able to be made using the Rosetta Stone (discovered in 1799). This would therefore mean that the Egyptians meet the criteria point and could be classed, by Childe's standards, as socially complex. However, other civilisations which are widely regarded as complex and advanced for their period, do not meet the same point. The Aztecs, for example, meet the criteria point of having highly populated cities, with the population of the city of Teotihuacan (northeast of modern day Mexico City) believed to have peaked at over 100,000 (possibly as high as 200,000) during the Bronze Age. While one point is met, the point about the invention of writing would not be, as the Aztecs have not been found to have had any form of written language. While only considering the case study of Ancient Egypt, the ten point model which Childe laid out would work well and with the points being met to class Egypt as socially complex; on the other hand, other case studies

⁶ Childe, V.G, 'The Urban Revolution', Liverpool University Press, 1950, pg15

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would not be classified as complex by Childe's standards, despite being widely considered to be so (e.g. the Aztecs), because all of the criteria were not met.



The city of Teotihuacan with the Pyramid of the Sun in the background⁷

When attempting to interpret the social complexity of Eastern Mediterranean civilisations during the Bronze Age, there are some cases where the use of Childe's ten point criteria model would work well and help to show off the complexity within the civilisation. Civilisations such as Egypt are examples of this, as the points laid out by Childe can all be seen to some degree within Egypt over the course of the Bronze Age, and then later on into the ages that followed. Monumental architecture, the invention of writing and densely populated cities are some of the criteria points which help to establish as Egypt as a socially complex civilisation during the Bronze Age. However, there are drawbacks to the model that Childe created; this can be seen in the fact that, using Childe's idea, a civilisation would only be considered to be socially complex if it met all ten of the criteria points. This is unhelpful because although Egypt is complex and fits all of the structure, there are civilisations which are widely agreed as being 'complex' and 'advanced' for their respective periods, despite not having evidence of all of the criteria being met. The Aztecs had no written language but had large cities and monumental architecture (e.g. the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan, which is the one of the largest pyramids in the world), however, they are still considered to be a complex society.

The use of Childe's criteria for the emergence of towns and/or states when interpreting the social complexity of civilisations during the Bronze Age has some merits to it, in that it can be used to justify the reasoning for why a civilisation is classed as complex; but the drawbacks to it are that it requires all of the criteria to be met in order for a classification to be made, which will take away the ability for civilisations, which have been widely accepted as complex, to be named as such.

⁷ History.com, Teotihuacan, Accessed: 15.04.2020, Available at: <https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-americas/teotihuacan>

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