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Author(s): Andrew Sherratt

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V. GORDON CHILDE: ARCHAEOLOGY AND INTELLECTUAL HISTORY*

If archaeology is the study of the past through its material remains, prehistory is one of its most important branches. Yet prehistory is a very young subject, its very name being little more than a century old.¹ In the story of its development, Gordon Childe occupies a very special place, not only as the most distinguished European prehistorian this century, but as one of the first to combine a professional mastery of the subject with a wider vision of its significance.²

Of course there were others before him who studied prehistoric archaeology, under whatever name; but by and large they were concerned with a single period or area — usually that in which they were engaged on excavation. Perhaps because he was not primarily a fieldworker, Gordon Childe had no such encumbrance. As a result of his appointment to a chair at Edinburgh in 1927, he was able to range widely over the prehistory of an area from Scotland to northern India, from the Stone Age to the end of antiquity. Almost single-handedly he moulded a series of site reports and regional studies into a comprehensive view of the pre- and proto-history of Europe and the Near East.

But he did more than merely bring together disparate branches of the same subject, divided by different origins and institutional commitments. In writing a comprehensive prehistory of Europe, he had to choose an appropriate narrative model for the kinds

* Gordon Childe was one of the founding members of the board of *Past and Present*. A shorter version of this article was delivered as a Past and Present Open Meeting Lecture in November 1987, thirty years after his death. I am grateful to those of Childe's contemporaries, colleagues and pupils who have shared their recollections with me.

¹ C. Chippindale, "The Invention of Words for the Idea of Prehistory", *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, liv (1988), pp. 303-14.

² On Childe's life, see S. Green, *Prehistorian: A Biography of V. G. Childe* (Bradford on Avon, 1981); for a careful evaluation of the development of Childe's thought and the influences on it, B. G. Trigger, *Gordon Childe: Revolutions in Archaeology* (London, 1980); a useful survey of his views, B. McNairn, *The Method and Theory of V. Gordon Childe* (Edinburgh, 1980); also S. Piggott, "Vere Gordon Childe, 1892-1957", *Proc. Brit. Acad.*, xxxiv (1958), pp. 305-12; for a sympathetic evaluation of his later thought, P. Gathercole, "'Patterns in Prehistory': An Examination of the Later Thinking of V. Gordon Childe", *World Archaeol.*, iii (1971), pp. 225-32; for a contrary view, G. Clark, "Prehistory since Childe", *Bull. Inst. Archaeol.*, xiii (1976), pp. 1-21.

of conclusions which could be distilled from raw archaeological observations. For archaeology in Childe's hands was more than just "piecing together the past" (to use the title of one of his own books about the craft side of his subject):³ it was a means of finding answers to some of the great questions about the early history of human societies, which had been central to the European intellectual tradition long before there was any conception of prehistoric archaeology at all. Childe's contribution was to set a growing body of factual material in the context of long-standing debates on matters such as evolutionary models of social development, the relationship between Europe and the orient, and the significance of technological change, which had been conducted (from the Enlightenment onwards, but pre-eminently by Marx) largely in isolation from firm archaeological knowledge. By placing his work in this larger setting (as I shall attempt to do later in this article) it may be possible to see why — despite the transformation in prehistoric studies which has taken place since he wrote — he occupies such a crucial position in the history of the subject.

Childe's output, by any standard, was massive. He wrote some twenty substantial books, many of them successively rewritten and updated, and some translated into a dozen languages; and a rapid count of his published articles comes to something around 240: a daunting total.⁴ In his writings he had two audiences in mind: a technical, archaeological one (not only in this country, but also more widely in Europe), and a more popular but educated audience, reached by people like Julian Huxley or Hyman Levy through the medium of publishing houses such as the Cobbett Press, the Watts Thinker's Library or Pelican Books. This serious and perhaps rather self-consciously intellectual forum (in which Childe, as a Marxist, found sympathetic company) was viewed with a certain amount of suspicion by many of his archaeological colleagues, but it must be seen as an enterprise in its own right, and not just an exercise in popularization — of the kind which, with coffee-table books and television, has now grown to industrial proportions. It was an attempt to engage in reasoned debate with a wider world of scholarship than was immediately available in his own subject. As Jacquetta Hawkes put it in 1963, "Professor Gordon Childe has long been the sole prehistorian with both the ability and the will to draw his subject

³ V. G. Childe, *Piecing together the Past: The Interpretation of Archaeological Data* (London, 1956).

⁴ For a list of Childe's publications, see Green, *Prehistorian*, pp. 176-90.

from its rustic and academic backwaters and make it contribute to the main streams of thought".⁵ In combining these roles he became the natural choice of editors needing a comprehensible account of prehistoric developments in volumes such as the *Cambridge Economic History*, *The European Inheritance*, or the (Oxford) *History of Technology*.⁶ Through works such as these, his name became widely known beyond his own subject, and still today he is one of the archaeologists most frequently cited in the early chapters of general historical summaries.

In tracing the progress of his thought, it is important to follow it on both levels. Although in terms of his archaeology there is a certain sameness about his output over his last thirty years of work, and Grahame Clark has gone so far as to say that "He had achieved what he was going to achieve [in the discipline of prehistoric archaeology] essentially by 1930",⁷ it is in his more general writings that one can see the way in which he wrestled with the wider significance of his subject. While his professional interests remained circumscribed by the problems in European and Near Eastern archaeology which he set out to tackle in his B.Litt. days, it was in his exploration of new ways of thinking about prehistoric social changes that the larger story lies.

Yet despite the fact that many current schools of archaeology still hail him as a founding father, much of his writing about prehistory has been completely superseded. The progress of archaeological discovery since his death has been remarkably rapid. New information has accumulated at an ever increasing rate, and with the help of new methods many of his fundamental ideas have been put to the test. The results have not been kind to his theories. It would not be unfair to say that many of his principal conclusions about the European Neolithic and Bronze Ages have been shown to be largely incorrect. One by one, his major postulates about prehistoric European societies have been knocked over. After a generation not much of his detailed explanatory edifice is left.

⁵ Quoted on the cover of the Fontana paperback edition of *Social Evolution* (London, 1963). The book was first published by Watts in 1951.

⁶ V. G. Childe, "Trade and Industry in Barbarian Europe till Roman Times", in M. Postan and E. Rich (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, i (Cambridge, 1952), pp. 1-32; V. G. Childe, "Prehistory", in E. Barker, G. N. Clark and P. Vaucher (eds.), *The European Inheritance*, i (Oxford, 1954), pp. 3-155; V. G. Childe, "Early Forms of Society", in C. Singer, E. J. Holmyard and A. R. Hall (eds.), *A History of Technology*, i (Oxford, 1954), pp. 38-57.

⁷ Clark, "Prehistory since Childe", p. 4.

What remains, however, is his commitment to archaeology as a social science:⁸ if not exactly in the way which he envisaged (for the social sciences have themselves moved a long way from the works in which he found inspiration), at least in a way far removed from the antiquarian condition of archaeology as he found it. It is because his enterprise has been continued that we can now, with hindsight, more clearly discern both the failures and inconsistencies in his position and the positive elements of his achievement.

I

CHILDE'S CAREER: ARCHAEOLOGY AND POLITICS

It is unnecessary to do more than briefly rehearse the facts of Childe's life, since they have been admirably set out in Sally Green's recent biography.⁹ He was born in 1892 in New South Wales, and had a somewhat oppressive upbringing as the son of the Anglican rector of a parish in north Sydney, a man of High Church sympathies who had emigrated to Australia in 1878. This gave Gordon Childe both an interest in books and an entrenched dislike of established religion which was later to colour his views both of Near Eastern civilization and the megalith-builders of neolithic Europe. His growing interest in radical politics was thus something that he nurtured in private. He was rather shy, conscious of both his unprepossessing appearance¹⁰ and somewhat indistinct speech, and his academic achievements helped to compensate for a certain social awkwardness. His rebellious attitudes were expressed in a rather idiosyncratic style of dress, a studied shabbiness or — as recorded in later photographs — incongruous combinations of broad-brimmed hat, waistcoat and shorts. At the University of Sydney Childe excelled both in Greek and philosophy, and was awarded a graduate scholarship in classics tenable at Oxford.

He arrived in 1914, at the age of twenty-two, in a university increasingly emptied by the war, and perhaps manifesting many features of the world which he so much disliked. Yet academically, he had come home. He began work for the Diploma in Classical

⁸ V. G. Childe, "Archaeology as a Social Science", in *Third Annual Report* (Institute of Archaeology, Univ. of London, 1947), pp. 49-60.

⁹ Green, *Prehistorian*.

¹⁰ Attributed by Max Mallowan, *Mallowan's Memoirs* (London, 1977), p. 235, to a childhood illness. Nevertheless "This impractical man, an innocent abroad, clumsy with his hands and an indifferent digger, through his imaginative mental powers shed lustre on any activity in which he was engaged": *ibid.*, p. 234.

Archaeology, taught by Professor Percy Gardner and J. D. Beazley, famous for his painstaking studies of Greek vases; but much of the excitement in the study of Greek archaeology was coming from the emerging story of the prehistoric Aegean, and specifically from the presence of two scholars of notable vision and archaeological achievement: Professor J. L. (later Sir John) Myres and Sir Arthur Evans, Extraordinary Professor of Prehistoric Archaeology and formerly Keeper of the Ashmolean. Evans's excavations at Knossos had won him world fame; but he was equally notable for the breadth of his knowledge of the surrounding areas — the prehistoric Balkans (where he had travelled widely as correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*) and the contemporary civilizations of the east Mediterranean.¹¹ His friend Myres, who was Wykeham Professor of Ancient History from 1910 to 1939, was no less polymathic. Trained in both classics and geology, he had organized the archaeological collections in Cyprus and excavated in Greece before taking up academic posts in Britain. Of his influence on Childe I shall have more to say later on; in fact for much of the war he was on special operations in the east Mediterranean, collecting intelligence and directing Greek irregulars in cattle raids on the Turkish coast — for he combined his scholarship with an intimate knowledge of the realities of life in the Aegean.¹²

Childe at first took part in military exercises, but already in 1915 he had made known his anti-war views and in 1916 moved out of his college, Queen's, to share lodgings with Rajani Palme Dutt, a founding member of the British Communist Party. Childe was an active member of the University Socialist Society and supported the No-Conscription Fellowship, as well as other radical causes. Nevertheless he continued to work hard at his academic studies, and transferred from the Diploma to do a B.Litt. under Myres on "The Influence of the Indo-Europeans in Prehistoric Greece". Its combination of archaeological evidence with a wider perspective from comparative philology is characteristic of his early work. At the same time he took

¹¹ Childe's only fellow student on the Diploma course was Joan Evans, Arthur Evans's younger half-sister, whose *Time and Chance* (London, 1943) gives a history of the Evans family, including an account of her half-brother's archaeological career and that of their father, the eminent prehistoric archaeologist Sir John Evans. She recorded her personal impressions in her autobiography *Prelude and Fugue* (London, 1954), including a poem which she wrote at the time, beginning: "The science of prehistory's a mysterious kind of game, In which the winner's privilege is to invent a name" — a reference to the practice of naming prehistoric groups after eponymous sites.

¹² J. N. L. Myres, *Commander J. L. Myres, R.N.V.R.: The Blackbeard of the Mediterranean* (10th Myres Memorial Lecture, London, 1980).

the examinations for Greats, and was awarded a First. With these achievements he returned to Australia in 1917.

He spent four years there: first, in attempting to find an academic post, which was blocked because of his political views; and then actively engaged in politics as private secretary to the newly elected Labour premier of New South Wales. Then, in 1921, he was sent to London as Research and Publicity Officer to liaise with European labour movements and prepare press releases; but within two weeks of landing the Labour government had fallen. Childe, seen as a political appointee, was dismissed.

He remained in London, searching for a job in either the political or the academic world. Indeed he pursued the two activities in tandem, writing *How Labour Governs*,¹³ translating archaeological works in French, Italian and Russian, and visiting Continental museums. In 1925, through Myres's good offices, he was appointed librarian to the Royal Anthropological Institute and published his first book, *The Dawn of European Civilisation*, soon to be followed by studies of *The Aryans* and *The Danube in Prehistory*.¹⁴ It was largely on the strength of *The Dawn* (as it was inevitably known) that Childe was appointed, now thirty-five, to a newly created chair at Edinburgh, and given the security to pursue his research. The chair had been established by a bequest from Lord Abercromby, and it might have been designed for him in its stipulation of a knowledge of European languages and a grasp of European prehistory as a whole. Childe spent nearly two decades in Edinburgh, in a job whose teaching responsibilities were not onerous and where he could largely devote himself to research. He took the opportunity to travel more widely, including visits to the Near East, North America and the Soviet Union, and he continued to write with the same industry as before. He revised *The Dawn*, wrote a companion volume on the Near East, summarized the Bronze Age, explored Scottish prehistory, and wrote his two masterpieces of popular scholarship, *Man Makes Himself* and *What Happened in History*.¹⁵ Increasingly his thoughts were directed

¹³ V. G. Childe, *How Labour Governs: A Study of Workers' Representation in Australia* (London, 1923).

¹⁴ V. G. Childe, *The Dawn of European Civilisation* (London, 1925, and successive editions thereafter); V. G. Childe, *The Aryans: A Study of Indo-European Origins* (London, 1926) — both in the "History of Civilisation" series edited by K. C. Ogden for Kegan Paul; V. G. Childe, *The Danube in Prehistory* (Oxford, 1929).

¹⁵ V. G. Childe, *The Most Ancient East: The Oriental Prelude to European Prehistory* (London, 1928), revised as *New Light on the Most Ancient East* (London, 1934, and successive editions thereafter); V. G. Childe, *The Bronze Age* (Cambridge, 1930); V. G. Childe, *Skara Brae: A Pictish Village in Orkney* (London, 1931); V. G. Childe,

(cont. on p. 157)

towards the growth of fascism and the approach of war; *What Happened in History* was a direct response to the conflict, which cut him off from Continental contacts and led him to reflect on the vicissitudes of civilization.

The end of the war coincided with an opportunity to move back to London (where in any case he had spent as much time as possible during the years in Edinburgh). Mortimer Wheeler had since 1927 been trying to set up an Institute of Archaeology as part of the University of London, and it finally took shape a decade later in the august setting of St. John's Lodge in Regent's Park.¹⁶ With Wheeler as its part-time director, it accumulated an impressive range of expertise — albeit on a rather shoe-string basis — which successively embraced the fields not only of British, Near Eastern and environmental archaeology, but also the technical disciplines of conservation and photography necessary for a fully professional approach. When Wheeler was appointed Director General of Archaeology in India, the committee charged with finding a successor unanimously put forward Childe's name, and he became the first full-time director of the Institute in 1946.

It was a happy move. At the Institute there was a full archaeological team and an enthusiastic group of students, in contrast to his lonely archaeological presence in Edinburgh. London also gave more immediate access to a wider network of stimulating friends and the intellectual life of the capital. In his inaugural lecture, "Archaeology as a Social Science", he stressed the general significance of archaeology to wider concerns. In this period he discovered a common enterprise with other Marxist scholars and was involved in the founding of *Past and Present*,¹⁷ and wrote his contributions to general histories of economy and technology.¹⁸ He wrote accounts of archaeological methodology, and explored ideas of social evolution.¹⁹ His interest in the history of science led him to write a general book on epistemology, *Society and Knowledge*, and he continued to revise his classic, *The Dawn*.²⁰ These various threads he drew together in his last synthesis,

(n. 15 cont.)
The Prehistory of Scotland (London, 1935); V. G. Childe, *Man Makes Himself* (London, 1936); V. G. Childe, *What Happened in History* (Harmondsworth, 1942).

¹⁶ J. D. Evans, "No. 1: The First Half-Century — and After", *Bull. Inst. Archaeol.*, xxiv (1987), pp. 1-25.

¹⁷ C. Hill, R. H. Hilton and E. J. Hobsbawm, "Past and Present: Origins and Early Years", *Past and Present*, no. 100 (Aug. 1983), p. 3.

¹⁸ See n. 6.

¹⁹ Childe, *Piecing together the Past*; V. G. Childe, *Social Evolution* (London, 1951).

²⁰ V. G. Childe, *Society and Knowledge: The Growth of Human Traditions* (New York, 1956); Childe, *Dawn of European Civilisation*, 6th edn., revised (London, 1957).

The Prehistory of European Society, published in the year after his death.²¹

He was not, perhaps, a natural administrator — an activity which more resembled his style of driving than his skill at writing prehistory.²² His driving, indeed, was as legendary and as idiosyncratic as his taste in clothes. Edward Pyddocke recounts an incident when Childe, giving him a lift, stopped at a set of traffic lights. After several cycles of red and green Pyddocke gently intimated that it was perhaps time to move off. "Oh, sorry — I thought you were driving", was Childe's reply. When the lease on the Institute's premises in St. John's Lodge ran out and the move to construct the present building in Gordon Square was contemplated, it was clear that the Institute was entering a new phase, and perhaps needed more practical steersmanship. With characteristic generosity, Childe agreed to give up his post a year before his official retirement, in order to allow his successor to manage the move.

After a climactic year in which he received a Festschrift²³ and the Gold Medal of the Society of Antiquaries, he donated much of his library to the Institute and sold off the rest, and moved to the Athenaeum to contemplate retirement. He visited several of his ex-students abroad, and planned a visit to Australia. Leaving the Institute was the end of a lifetime's work; and as John Evans, its present director, has recently written, "with his post he gave up, quite literally, his reason for living". There was also a sense of personal loneliness: in the words of Peter Gathercole, "he remained to the end quite unreconciled to his bachelorhood".²⁴ When he left for Sydney, thirty years after taking up his chair in Edinburgh, it was with a sense of finality; as we now know, he had made a conscious decision to end his life.

Nevertheless he was not idle. He completed his last book on the voyage, and a recension of it for *Past and Present*.²⁵ He lectured, and visited old friends in Australia; received an honorary degree and

²¹ V. G. Childe, *The Prehistory of European Society* (Harmondsworth, 1958); see also S. Piggott, "The Dawn: And an Epilogue", *Antiquity*, xxxii (1958), pp. 75-9.

²² Wheeler spoke of his "astonishing incapacity" in administrative matters: J. J. Hawkes, *Mortimer Wheeler: Adventurer in Archaeology* (London, 1982), p. 321.

²³ "Contributions to Prehistoric Archaeology Offered to Professor V. G. Childe in Honour of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday by Twenty-Seven Authors", *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, new ser., xxi (1955).

²⁴ Evans, "First Half-Century", p. 19; P. Gathercole, "Gordon Childe: Man or Myth?", *Antiquity*, lvi (1982), p. 198.

²⁵ Childe, *Prehistory of European Society*; V. G. Childe, "The Bronze Age", *Past and Present*, no. 12 (Nov. 1957), pp. 2-15.

broadcast on Australian radio. Yet he did not like much of what he saw, and wrote scathingly of Australian society in letters home. He also composed three documents: an autobiographical note, later published under the title "Retrospect"; another, giving his view of the main tasks confronting archaeology in Britain, which was given the title "Valediction"; and finally, a personal letter to his successor was accompanied by a memoir to be read in ten years' time.²⁶ In it, he set out his personal attitude to life in general, and his own in particular. "Now I have seen the Australian Spring; I have smelt the boronia, watched snakes and lizards, listened to the 'locusts'. There is nothing more I want to do here . . . Life ends best when one is happy and strong". That life ended in the Blue Mountains, near to his childhood home.

Childe was unusual in combining an interest, and even starting careers in, politics and prehistory. Both were expressions of his interest in human affairs. His approach to the prehistory and early history of Europe was thus more than an antiquarian curiosity. Although it is a commonplace to assert that, coming from the antipodes, he saw European prehistory as an outsider (not unlike the metaphorical observer from Mars), quite the reverse is true. As the product of a colonial culture — an Anglican rectory and a department of classics — he was, like many others, in search of his European roots. In a famous sentence in the preface to the first (1925) edition of his otherwise highly technical work on *The Dawn of European Civilisation* he defined its theme as "the foundation of European civilisation as a peculiar and individual manifestation of the human spirit". It is a theme, conceptualized with increasing sophistication, that runs throughout his work. As Michael Rowlands has made clear in a brilliant essay,²⁷ it was an attempt to push back into prehistory the familiar story of "The Rise of the West" — a story which goes back to the beginning of European historiography and continues to occupy historians as diverse as W. H. McNeil, Hugh Trevor-Roper and J. M. Roberts. Childe's answers began with the intellectual assumptions of the Romantic movement — the Aryans and Indo-Germanic philology — and ended with the answers of the Enlightenment — oriental despotism and the progress of science. To translate

²⁶ V. G. Childe, "Retrospect", *Antiquity*, xxxii (1958), pp. 69-74; V. G. Childe, "Valediction", *Bull. Inst. Archaeol.*, i (1958), pp. 1-8; the letter and memoir were later printed as part of the editorial matter in *Antiquity*, liv (1980), pp. 1-3.

²⁷ M. Rowlands, "Conceptualising the European Bronze and Early Iron Ages", in J. Bintliff (ed.), *European Social Evolution: Archaeological Perspectives* (Bradford, 1984), pp. 147-56.

these ideas into archaeology, with a raw material of broken potsherds and partial house-plans, was an act of outstanding imagination — the wonder is not that it was done well, but that it was done at all.

II

STRUCTURING THE PAST: ANCESTRY AND EVOLUTION

While histories of archaeology conventionally describe, in classic Whig fashion, a series of discoveries that lead up to the present sum of knowledge, a more sophisticated view must attempt to describe the forces which create and structure knowledge of the past. It is thus necessary to put Childe's attempt into a longer perspective, and to situate it within a broader intellectual context.

The growth of a consciousness of the past is one of the features of European development since the end of the middle ages, and is intimately connected with three important processes: global expansion, industrialization and the creation of ethnically coherent nation-states. Each of these has given rise to questions of identity — national, social and cultural — on several different levels. Such identity can be defined in relation to immediate predecessors or neighbours (the French, the Celts, the Germans, the Slavs); in relation to other civilizations (the classical world, Egypt, Islam, the east in general); or in relation to more distant societies — the “other cultures” of ethnology and anthropology. These successive encounters and their perception in terms of identity or otherness by dominant groups within western societies (including their use as metaphors for other social conflicts) were instrumental in forming the academic categories within which we still organize our knowledge, as Hugh MacDougall, Martin Bernal and Edward Said have recently pointed out in relation respectively to English history, classical studies and orientalism.²⁸ While world encounters have been important in raising general questions such as the definition of “civilization”, territorial disputes within Europe have focused more immediate attention on ethnic origins and nationality.

The importance of such questions of identity for models of the past lies in their implications for development through time. Such relationships can be visualized in various ways, all of which require

²⁸ H. A. MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History* (Montreal and Hanover, 1982); M. Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilisation*, i, *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785-1985* (London, 1987); E. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978); cf. R. Thapar, *The Past and Prejudice* (New Delhi, 1975).

some concept of time depth. They may be conceived in terms of common ancestry, expressed as a family tree: identity is here seen in terms of the genealogies of peoples.²⁹ A different (though sometimes complementary) image is that of superimposed layers, in which a superior or inferior position may take on a moral aspect, with higher groups more worthy of respect than lower ones. These metaphors have not been confined to human identities. Overseas expansion brought about an encounter not just with other societies but with other species as well: the global variety of the animal and plant kingdoms whose systematic classification prompted the questions of relationship and ancestry that were answered by Darwin, and that had their physical exemplification in fossils from different layers of rock. Each of these sets of ideas has interacted with, and provided models for, the others — not always with happy results, as when the confusion of biological and cultural taxonomies produced intellectual racism, and the idea of social stratification gave human inequality an apparently geological permanence.

In translating patterns of contemporary variety into reconstructed relationships in time, however, social theorists were handicapped more severely than biologists. For when evolutionary biologists came to look for exemplification of their theories, they could appeal to the fossil record — long studied in its own right by antiquarians, and increasingly systematized by geologists. Social theorists had access to no such well-ordered body of observations about the remote past. While biblical narrative and ancient history provided some information about earlier civilizations, it contained only mythological references to events such as the origins of farming or the beginnings of urban life. Social theorists could thus only speculate on these matters; and, as a result, speculative prehistory long preceded the actual evidence of prehistoric archaeology.

Study of the past: science or romance?

These multiple questions of relationship did not, of course, all present themselves simultaneously; local problems alternated with a growing scale of external encounters. A consequence is that at some periods attention has been focused on European national problems, as in the early nineteenth or the early twentieth century; at others, it has been

²⁹ Or, in more abstract form, through the idea of inheritance: for instance, the medieval scheme of the Four Empires, resurrected in Hegel; or the many metaphors of cultural succession: see E. R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley, 1982), p. 5.

directed outwards to a wider range of overseas questions, as in the mid-eighteenth or the later nineteenth century. Reflecting these attitudes, writers about the past have alternated between two approaches: a retrospective approach to questions of cultural identity, working backwards to solve problems of immediate ancestry (who were the Celts? Who were the Greeks?); and a more abstract approach, arguing forwards from first principles to formulate more global questions ("In the infancy of society . . ."). Each has produced its own kind of history and archaeology. The first group is characterized by a Romantic attachment to place and often by a direct (and often nationalistic) involvement with the areas of their concern; while the second group is more typified by "scientific" attitudes and positivist assumptions. Neither side, needless to say, has had a monopoly of truth, and both embody often hidden political assumptions. One emphasizes cultural specificity and tradition, the other is more willing to prise its specimens loose from their context for comparative study. Individual disciplines may swing between these attitudes, and the current state of any subject (as with archaeology today) is the result of a continuing dialectic between alternative approaches.

What this means is that, in tracing intellectual history, the threads often seem to skip a generation. There is a nationalist thread, from Luther through Herder to Kossinna and early Childe, interwoven with a rationalist thread, from Montesquieu through Morgan and Marx to later Childe. The following excursion attempts briefly to disentangle them.

From fictitious genealogy to philosophical prehistory

In the middle ages questions of national relationship and ancestry were expressed literally in the form of a family tree.³⁰ These were the pedigrees of rulers, not peoples, for it was they who defined the polities. The genealogies of leading dynasties were traced back to the Romans, and beyond them the Trojans: hence Geoffrey of Monmouth's interest in Brutus, son of Aeneas, who gave Britain its name and its first national mythology. A shift of emphasis towards ethnicity, however (with a particular concern for language), first became evident at the time of the Reformation, which produced some of the themes that would later serve as arguments for more specific kinds of nationalism: religious reformers and German humanists combined to emphasize the importance and antiquity of the Germanic tradition, hoping

³⁰ For this section, see especially MacDougall, *Racial Myth*.

thereby to emancipate northern Europe from its dependence on Italy and the Mediterranean. They combined Tacitus' idealized view of the ancient Germans (written as propaganda in his own time) with an extrapolation of biblical narrative.³¹ Luther himself traced the origin of the Germans to Ashkenaz, great-grandson of Noah; Abraham Ortelius held the Teutonic tongue to be the true language of Adam. It is no accident that philology was later to strike such strong roots in German soil.

Biblical narrative and accounts by ancient authors long remained the basis of conceptions of life in earlier times.³² Speculation about a more remote past, and a more systematic attempt to define the character of early civilizations, came to prominence in the Enlightenment, when European cultures became more aware both of their oriental neighbours and of the inhabitants of their overseas possessions.³³ External observations were again linked to internal concerns, in terms of the idea of progress and the notion of civilization, defined as the increase of knowledge and the advance of social conditions and morals. This involved investigation of problems such as the origins of language, the early condition of humanity, and the development of laws. In elaborating a universal history, Enlightenment writers sought to bring together both the newly known primitive world and the older civilizations of the Mediterranean and the orient in the light of their own political agenda. This had important consequences for the way in which the role of ancient cultures came to be viewed.

One aspect of this is the beginnings of the idealization of Greece. As Michael Vickers has recently pointed out,³⁴ the values of the *ancien*

³¹ The megalithic tombs of northern Europe (the first prehistoric monuments to invite attention) were traditionally attributed to giants, after the description of the world before the Flood in Genesis vi: "There were giants in the earth in those days". This explanation was illustrated by J. Picardt in a description of Drenthe in his *Korte beschryvinge van eenige vergetene en verborgene Antiquiteten* (Amsterdam, 1660).

³² In maritime western Europe the Phoenicians were for long to play a role in historical imagination, because of their skills in seafaring; the idea of their trading for Cornish tin appeared already in the sixteenth century, and recurs constantly thereafter; see G. Daniel, *The Idea of Prehistory* (London, 1962), p. 13. This diffusionist paradigm thus grew up in parallel with the Germanic migrationist one.

³³ This process had begun much earlier in Renaissance Italy, where early ethnographic observations had recalled Lucretius' description of a mythical Stone Age in *De rerum natura*, v.1282, and had even led to the recognition of stray finds of neolithic axes as ancient artefacts. These speculations were known to French Jesuits in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries: see D. L. Clarke, *Analytical Archaeology* (London, 1968), pp. 4-7; A. Cheynier, *Jouannet: grand-père de la préhistoire* (Paris, 1936), pp. 8-10. This was the germ of the evolutionist paradigm.

³⁴ M. Vickers, "Imaginary Etruscans: Changing Perceptions of Etruria since the Fifteenth Century", *Hephaistos*, vii-viii (1985-6), pp. 153-68.

régime were closely bound up with the idea of imperial Rome. As a counterpoint to this, revolutionary interest began to appeal to the republican and democratic ideals of classical Greece. Winckelmann's aesthetic studies gave a new status to Greek art, appropriate to the idealization of its politics. This libertarian view of the Greeks articulated with another characteristic attitude of the time: the theme of the orient as other. While this conception had its origins with the Greeks themselves in their confrontation with Persia (and accounts for the longevity of the theme of the Trojan War), it was given contemporary relevance in eighteenth-century Europe by its congruence with the situation of the western powers and the Ottoman empire, giving new meaning to the old opposition of Europe and Asia, the west and the east, Christianity and Islam, liberty and despotism, industry and stagnation. For behind the egalitarian rhetoric and the universalist interests of the Enlightenment was a firm conception of the superiority of European culture. Seeking a rational explanation of these differences, Montesquieu found it in climate and geography — the beginning of a long tradition of environmental determinism. He pointed particularly to the role of the state in organizing irrigation works in oriental societies, and its consequences in terms of slavery, state ownership of land and despotic rulership. This he contrasted with the relative liberty of Europe, whether under republican or monarchical government. This line of thought has its heirs in Marx's Asiatic mode of production and Wittfogel's Oriental Despotism, both of which have coloured interpretations of early Near Eastern societies down to the present time.³⁵

Equally significant as an intellectual framework pre-dating the recovery of direct evidence by archaeology was the emergence of ideas of successive types of society derived from the comparison of contemporary primitive peoples. This was particularly a feature of the Scottish Enlightenment, and is well exemplified in Adam Smith's categorizations of "hunters, the lowest and rudest state of society, such as we find it among the native tribes of North America", "shepherds, a more advanced state of society" and "a yet more advanced state of society . . . husbandmen who have little foreign commerce"; and in Thomas Pownall's more picturesque description of the succession of the "Woodland-Men" and the "Land-Workers" who "as at this day, eat out the thinly scattered race of Wood-Men".³⁶

³⁵ Montesquieu, *L'esprit des lois*: see J. Shklar, *Montesquieu* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 93-110; K. A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism* (New Haven, 1957).

³⁶ A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) (London, 1893 edn.), p. 541; T. Pownall, "A Description of the Sepulchral Monument

(cont. on p. 165)

Here, in embryo, is the outline of an evolutionary view of stages of social and economic progress, from savagery to civilization, through despotism to liberty, that will become important in the scientific social and economic writers of the nineteenth century, including Marx.

Romanticism and the search for roots

What separated Marx from the Enlightenment, and interrupted the continuity of a comparative and relatively deterministic approach, was Romantic nationalism. Here the ethnic concerns raised at the time of the Reformation were again to the fore, this time in the context of empire and of the consolidation of nation-states from a polyethnic basis. These interests, combined with other features of the Romantic movement (such as the reaction from industrialization and an interest in rural landscapes) brought about the genesis of a systematic study of prehistory. For although Enlightenment speculations about the primitive condition of man seem to cry out for archaeological exemplification, there was in fact no systematic archaeology to put to them. It was the Romantic concern with origins, especially local origins and national roots, which led to a methodology capable of investigating prehistoric times, and which was in turn to contribute to the rise of a new science of prehistory in the succeeding phase of later nineteenth-century positivism.

Intellectually, the new attitude can first be discerned in the writings of Johann Gottfried Herder.³⁷ Although closely linked to earlier, Enlightenment interests, he had a new conception of the relationship between peoples and places. Human nature is not uniform. It manifests differences of race and national character. Particular peoples have an inherent genius or spirit which derives in part from the land they inhabit, but is not simply determined by it — it is an immutable essence that they carry with them. It is no coincidence that these views were developed in Germany, with its crisis of identity in relation to France and its own disunity, and with an older tradition of ethnocentric concern. Now, in a wider world, this was to be generalized into *Rassenkunde*, the investigation of the varieties of the human species: their physical types, their manners and their customs — the old unity of anthropology.

This gave a new meaning to the metaphor of the family tree. As
(n. 36 cont.)
at New Grange, near Drogheda, in the County of Meath, Ireland", *Archaeologia*, ii (1773), p. 241.

³⁷ I. Berlin, *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (London, 1976), pp. 165 ff.

Martin Bernal has written, "Trees . . . provide the ideal Romantic image. They are rooted in their own soils, and nourished by their particular climates; at the same time they are alive and grow. They progress and never turn back".³⁸ The classic application of the tree model is Indo-European philology, part of the Romantic concern with language. The relationship between Sanskrit and the European languages had been explicitly recognized by Sir William Jones in 1786, and interest in it was fuelled both by European nationalism and a growing involvement with India. This discovery was seized with enthusiasm in Germany, where much of the detailed comparative work was done; and *indogermanisch* was used more or less synonymously with Indo-European. The superiority of Indo-European as a vehicle for thought became increasingly explicit in German writings, as a natural extension of the idea of the distinctiveness of cultures and their different roles in world history. Although anti-Semitism was not yet explicit, the two branches of Old World culture — the Indo-European and the Semitic — were often consciously counterposed.

As well as these philological concerns, there were also opportunities for the development of practical archaeology. For Britain and France, the sea-borne struggle for the east Mediterranean territories of the decaying Ottoman empire brought a closer acquaintance with the lands of ancient civilization and the beginnings of systematic investigation of their antiquities.³⁹ Napoleon's invasion of Egypt was a comprehensive exercise in cultural and political imperialism, and the plans, drawings and crates of antiquities which he sent back marked a new phase in Egyptology. British intervention in Palestine initiated a similar practical interest in biblical archaeology, and led to successive waves of military, missionary and academic activity. The strategic importance of Naples to naval activity in the east Mediterranean also gave an opportunity for archaeological work: the British envoy Sir William Hamilton dug at Pompeii and collected "Etruscan" (actually Greek) vases. Like the Rosetta Stone and the Elgin Marbles, these ended up in the growing collections of the British Museum.

These strands of political involvement and academic interest coincided in Greece. English philhellenism fitted well with the Romantic aesthetic and its taste for the cultures and scenery of remote, mountainous and exotic places, and paralleled the enthusiasm for Celtic

³⁸ Bernal, *Black Athena*, p. 205.

³⁹ M. A. Silberman, *Digging for God and Country: Exploration, Archaeology and the Secret Struggle for the Holy Land, 1799-1917* (New York, 1982).

culture in Scotland and Wales.⁴⁰ Libertarian identification with the Greek people brought Romantic involvement in Greece to a new pitch with the outbreak of the War of Independence in 1821, and the commitment of Shelley and Byron. German scholarship canonized a scarcely less Romantic view of ancient Greece, institutionalized in the German university system by Humboldt's reforms which gave *Altertumswissenschaft* a cardinal role in education and the formation of a new ruling class. This new, professional German classical scholarship, building on the tradition of Indo-Germanic philology, began to stress the northern roots of Greek culture, as transmitted by the northern Dorians or their mythical precursors, the Minyans.⁴¹

Similar ethnic concerns also played a major part in promoting antiquarian and archaeological enquiry within mainland Europe, both as part of the consolidation of empire (the French enthusiasm for the Celts as an indigenous civilization distinct both from the Germans and the classical world) and as a focus for the aspiration of national minorities in Austria and Prussia.⁴² Here the lack of coincidence between national and ethnic or linguistic boundaries began to create increasing tensions, and the post-Napoleonic map of Europe took little account of nationality. Substantial minorities such as the Czechs and Magyars aspired to some degree of autonomy within polyethnic empires: the middle classes were vocal in their protests against alien rule and in their claims to use their own languages. Germans and Poles, on the other hand, aspired to unification. Both of these factors led to an interest in national origins and national culture, and produced a burst of enthusiasm for Europe's pagan past.

Prehistory was thus explored in the spirit of Goethe's exhortation to "nurture love for our common fatherland and for the memory of our great forebears". The French sought out their *monuments celtiques*, the Germans and the Slavs sought a more direct continuity between

⁴⁰ See, for instance, H. Trevor-Roper, "The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland", in E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983). Comparisons were explicitly made between the "folk" poetry of Homer and that of the bogus Gaelic bard, Ossian.

⁴¹ Notably in the work of Karl Ottfried Müller. The term "Minyan" was applied by Schliemann to a type of Middle Bronze Age pottery, on which Childe was to publish his first article.

⁴² For the development of prehistoric archaeology in central Europe, see K. Sklenář, *Archaeology in Central Europe: The First 500 Years* (Leicester, 1983), with special reference to its social and political context; also H. Kühn, *Geschichte der Vorgeschichtsforschung* (Berlin, 1976); K. Jazdzewski, *Urgeschichte Mitteleuropas* (Warsaw, 1984), ch. 2.

the historical nations and their prehistoric predecessors with the help of new philological tools, in order to support territorial claims. Each side also exploited classical authors such as Tacitus to the full, and the Czechs supplemented them with forged Old Slavonic epics. Both produced images of an ideal society and its folk heroes, which owe a great deal to the contemporary theatre. One example in a more permanent medium is the gigantic statue of "Hermann the Liberator" (Arminius the Cheruscan) near to where this Germanic chieftain had defeated three Roman legions in the Teutoburger Wald.

These nationalistic motivations were accompanied by a more generalized Romantic concern with the strange and picturesque. There was a great interest in graves, pagan shrines and idols, and sacrificial stones, in much the same spirit as the growing fascination with Gothic architecture and medievalism. Moreover the soil of Europe was being turned over as never before by quarrying, building and agricultural operations, so that finds of archaeological material were increasingly common. Collectors accumulated quantities of prehistoric stone and bronze artefacts; local societies for the study of antiquities were founded, as well as regional and national museums. The sheer quantity of new material made possible a more systematic classification and study, including the recognition of different periods of prehistory. It is significant, however, that it was in Denmark, unaffected by competing nationalisms and with a long pagan period lacking literary sources before the middle ages, where these methods were taken furthest. The result was a recognition of three successive "Ages" in European prehistory, of Stone, Bronze and Iron, used in organizing the newly founded National Museum in Copenhagen. This "Three Age" system was nevertheless met by hostility from German (especially Prussian) archaeologists; and its acceptance outside Scandinavia had to await a less nationally committed prehistory.

Positivist science and "national science"

Prehistory (though not yet given that name) was thus an offspring of the Romantic movement; but it was a conceptually unsophisticated kind of prehistory, which has left its legacy in popular concepts of the Ancient Britons or Asterix and Obelix. What was to transform it or at least to give it a slightly schizophrenic existence (which it still has) was the growth of later nineteenth-century science, particularly biology, and the attitudes of positivism. In reaction to nationalistic and historical models, archaeology found a place among the natural sciences under the rubric of anthropology, and with an ahistorical,

comparative emphasis. The science of prehistory (*préhistoire*, *Vorgeschichte*) was counterposed to humane, nationalistic history. Often this was associated with the rise of new institutions or departments — in Oxford, for instance, the Ashmolean was joined by the Pitt Rivers Museum. Prehistoric archaeology formed part of a growing scientific endeavour, based in laboratories and closely associated with both physical anthropology and geology. This reflected both the growing success of science and industry at home and the changing nature of the colonial encounter, as it moved from adventurism to systematic exploitation. Comparative studies of the native peoples of the colonies began to flesh out some of the generalizations of the Enlightenment: recent hunting and simple farming peoples became evidence for successive transformations of human economy and society.

Of particular importance to these new ideas was the recognition of the high antiquity of the human species and the definition of an early phase of the Stone Age, the Palaeolithic. This extended the prehistoric time-scale, and gave scientific status to prehistory by bringing it into relationship with geology and evolutionary biology: recognition of the Ice Age replaced the Flood as a suitably dramatic backdrop of environmental change, and skeletal remains previously dismissed as pathological were recognized as the bones of “fossil man”. Study of the palaeolithic was centred in France, whose river gravels and limestone caves provided abundant evidence for a vast period before the lake-villages and megaliths of the later Stone Age, the Neolithic.

Perhaps because of the image provided by geological stratigraphy and the patterns of palaeontology, the idea of successive strata or steps — *Stufentheorie* — became a common motif in both the natural and social sciences, usually allied to the idea of progressive change: from hunting to farming, household economy to national economy, magic and religion to science, *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, status to contract, mechanical to organic solidarity. The Three Age system received widespread acceptance because of its congruence with these ideas; yet these schemes were elaborated largely without reference to archaeology, by comparing ethnographic observations and treating “primitive” societies (*Naturvölker*) as representatives of earlier stages of human progress. In Berlin Eduard Hahn investigated the contribution of domestic animals to human economies and speculated on the origins of agriculture and the plough; from New York, Lewis Henry Morgan synthesized the variety of human family systems into a series of stages that correlated with advances in material culture — the bow and arrow, pottery, farming, metalworking — and marked

the progress from savagery to barbarism and civilization.⁴³

Marx himself, in creating a materialist science of society, was not much concerned about the earlier periods of prehistory; and for the historical periods he drew on earlier conceptions in defining a series of material productive forces and their property relations: "In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as progressive epochs of the socio-economic order".⁴⁴ He was, however, interested in Morgan's ideas, and made extensive notes on *Ancient Society* which after his death were elaborated by Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*⁴⁵ as a materialistic (and largely technologically determined) conception of history.

So strong was the idea of progressive evolutionary stages that Darwin's model of descent with modification, which was essentially a tree model, was often accommodated in popular perception to Herbert Spencer's view of evolution as a progression from simple to complex (applied not only to sociology but to sciences as diverse as cosmology and psychology). These assumptions underlay not only the classic works of late nineteenth-century anthropology and prehistory,⁴⁶ but also Darwin's own treatment of human evolution in *The Descent of Man*. Nevertheless the idea of phylogeny did find reflection in anthropology, in Taylor's "lines of culture" and Pitt Rivers's studies of the ancestry of tools. It was more directly applied in physical anthropology, where a new science of skull-measuring came into being to define the pedigrees of races, with a pseudo-geological classification of "higher" and "lower" — which in less scrupulously

⁴³ E. Hahn, *Die Haustiere und ihre Beziehungen zur Wirtschaft des Menschen* (Berlin, 1896); L. H. Morgan, *Ancient Society: or, Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery, through Barbarism to Civilization* (New York, 1877).

⁴⁴ K. Marx, Preface to *Contribution to a Critique of the Political Economy* (London, 1859). This formulation was essentially a continuation of Hegel's idea of world progress. Marx was equivocal about whether the Asiatic mode of production constituted a necessary step in the emergence of the others, reflecting a more general European ambivalence towards the orient.

⁴⁵ F. Engels, *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staates, im Anschluss an Lewis H. Morgans Forschungen* (Zurich, 1884).

⁴⁶ F. B. Taylor, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilisation* (London, 1865); J. Lubbock, *The Origin of Civilisation* (London, 1870); *The Evolution of Culture and Other Essays by the Late Lt. Gen. A. Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers*, ed. J. L. Myres (Oxford, 1906); these assumptions were perhaps a necessary precondition for developmental discussion of social change, in opposition both to "degenerationist" views (advanced, for instance, by Archbishop Whately) and the cyclical view inherent in Lyell's uniformitarianism. See in general J. W. Burrow, *Evolution and Society: A Study in Victorian Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1966); and T. Ingold, *Evolution and Social Life* (Cambridge, 1986).

scientific hands might be translated into "dear" races and "cheap" races.

In this way biological ideas of human phylogeny reinforced the continuing Romantic belief in a congruence between language, culture and race. The comparative philologist Max Müller, lecturing on "the science of language", reconstructed an Aryan culture that lay behind the Greek, Roman and Teutonic achievements, allowing historians like E. A. Freeman to trace English liberties to a common root with those of the Greeks themselves.⁴⁷ And Heinrich Schliemann, Homer in hand, carried the heroic age of Greece (at least to his own satisfaction) back into the Bronze Age.

From 1890 onwards such nationalistic trends again took over from the wider concerns of comparative anthropology. The term *Vorgeschichte*, indicative of an ahistoric, disinterested, geological approach, began to be replaced by *Urgeschichte*, stressing again the continuities with modern nations. Archaeological images — like those of *nos ancêtres les Gaulois* — became part of the "mass production of traditions", often by the state itself.⁴⁸ German imperialism, increasingly conscious of its late arrival in the colonial enterprise and lacking a history of national unity, placed great stress on patriotism and early Germanic history. Relations between the Germanic tribes and the Romans on the imperial frontier were investigated by a *Limeskommission*, and celebrated in the new Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum at Mainz. The Slav peoples of the Austro-Hungarian empire also looked to their roots, to define their identities in opposition both to Germans and to Magyars. In direct reflection of current territorial questions, much energy was expended on defining the supposed boundary in prehistoric times between the Germans and the Slavs, a critical role being played by the Lausitz culture — a late Bronze Age group occupying the area between the middle Elbe and the Vistula. The general interests of the German Anthropological Society were overtaken by those of the new German Society for Prehistory, whose aims were exemplified by its founder Gustav Kossinna in his definition of prehistory as "*eine hervorragend nationale Wissenschaft*".⁴⁹

⁴⁷ MacDougall, *Racial Myth*, p. 120; J. W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 174, 191.

⁴⁸ E. J. Hobsbawm, "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914", in Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds.), *Invention of Tradition*. (Note that Gauloises cigarettes still carry the image of a Late Bronze Age helmet — with added wings.)

⁴⁹ G. Kossinna, *Die Deutsche Vorgeschichte: Eine hervorragend nationale Wissenschaft* (Würzburg, 1912). Kossinna was of Lithuanian extraction, born in Tilsit "on the margins of German ethnicity, where Germanic nationalism combated other forces":

(cont. on p. 172)

These trends were paralleled in other areas of German scholarship. There was a tendency for the homeland of the first Indo-Europeans (*Urindogermanen*) to be shifted from central Asia or the Caucasus, where the Romantics and positivists had looked for it, to Germany itself where it could be sought among the various neolithic groups now recognized on the basis of their pottery. In somewhat similar fashion, the classicist Julius Beloch stressed the indigenous, European nature of Greek culture and its background, independent of the Semitic east Mediterranean; and such academic suspicion of the Semitic contribution to European culture was fuelled by populist anti-Semitism following the mass immigration of east European Jews. Nor were these attitudes confined to Germany. In a widely read article in *L'Anthropologie* for 1893 Salomon Reinach — himself an assimilated Parisian Jew — condemned both the theory of an eastern origin of the Aryans and the idea of Semitic influence, as two aspects of what he called *le mirage oriental*. He asserted the independence of European civilization, “a revindication of the rights of Europe against the claims of Asia”.⁵⁰

European archaeology at the beginning of the twentieth century

While there were many common currents affecting the different branches of European archaeology, therefore, there was no consensus on the interpretation or even the basic structure of European prehistory. Moreover differences of interpretation corresponded to a significant extent with national (though not always nationalistic) attitudes. It may be useful here to summarize this intellectual geography.

In France, with its wealth of palaeolithic material (including the spectacular cave-paintings), prehistory continued its alliance with geology and evolutionary anthropology, and its *loi du progrès de l'humanité*. Reinach's attitudes reflect a more general tendency to see important developments as autochthonous, and prehistoric archaeology as the record of indigenous evolution and achievement. French thought was long to be dominated by Gabriel de Mortillet's conception of prehistory as a geological sequence, with its succession of *ages*,

(n. 49 cont.)

H. Kühn, *Geschichte der Vorgeschichtsforschung* (Berlin, 1976), p. 338 (a syndrome neatly characterized by T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*: “stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch”). For a survey of Kossinna's career, and a somewhat tendentious comparison with Childe, see U. Veit, “Gustaf Kossinna und V. G. Childe: Ansätze zu einer theoretischen Grundlegung der Vorgeschichte”, *Saeculum*, xxxv (1984).

⁵⁰ S. Reinach, “Le mirage oriental”, *L'Anthropologie*, iv (1893), pp. 539-78, 699-732.

périodes and *époques* named after European type-sites — a practice which still to some extent survives in palaeolithic studies. Its more general application was ensured by the *loi du développement similaire*, which predicted that other areas would essentially conform to the French sequence. Some movement of peoples was allowed, on the analogy of palaeontological migrations, to account for sudden irruptions: the Romans, Celts or — in the Bronze Age — the supposed ancestors of the gypsies.

Germanic scholarship, however, occupied the heartland of Continental Europe, where migrations were of the essence. Kossinna's own training was in philology, and he translated its methodology into prehistory. His retrospective method, which he termed *die siedlungsarchäologische Methode* (that is, reconstructing the process of occupying a landscape by a particular people), was based on the definition of distinctive sets of artefacts representing particular ethnic groups whose roots could be traced back into the past. Archaeological assemblages could be used to define cultures, which represented peoples. His journal *Mannus* published excellent local studies in the new, detailed manner; technically, much of the new work was of a very high order, yet its generalizations inevitably involved successive waves of Germanic expansion from northern Europe.

These attitudes were also manifested even by a moderate German prehistorian, the outstanding figure of Carl Schuchhardt who was an old enemy of Kossinna.⁵¹ From his position in the Berlin museum, in charge of both Schliemann's Aegean collection and German prehistoric antiquities, he was able to survey the whole of Europe and wrote a magisterial survey, *Alteuropa*.⁵² Yet its whole structure was a description of "*die Indogermanisierung unseres Erdteils*", the Indo-Germanization of our continent. The ancient Mediterranean was *vorindogermanisch*, and dominated by the Iberians, originally from Africa. Farming came about indigenously among the late palaeolithic population of Thuringia — there was no consideration of its exotic economic basis (of the kind which Eduard Hahn, for instance, had done so much to illuminate) — and spread south. The west European megaliths were the forerunners of Mycenaean tholos tombs. Troy

⁵¹ Derided for his background in classical archaeology by Kossinna, who found his attitude to German prehistory "pathological": Kühn, *Geschichte der Vorgeschichtsforschung*, p. 339.

⁵² C. Schuchhardt, *Alteuropa in seiner Kultur- und Stilentwicklung* (Berlin, 1919, and editions to 1941). The emphasis on ethnicity only became dominant in the 1935 edition, however, and was perhaps a concession to the climate of the time rather than a personal view.

was an outpost of Europe, its Nordic origins clearly indicated in its architecture, the Homeric *megaron* with its predecessors in Bronze Age Brandenburg.

In contrast to this Continental hegemony, archaeologists in Britain and Scandinavia maintained a different emphasis: the former reflecting a map of Europe seen from the sea, the latter eager to articulate an alternative to German nationalism. Both saw much more direct (and often maritime) links to the orient, especially via the Atlantic route and the Mediterranean. Differing both from French evolutionism and German migrationism, they espoused diffusionism.⁵³

Danish archaeologists had maintained a critical view of nationalistic archaeology in Germany (despite their central position in the postulated Nordic *Urheimat*), preferring instead to refine the divisions of the Three Age system. But this was never seen as a purely indigenous, evolutionary succession: they looked elsewhere for the origins of these innovations, especially to the ancient Mediterranean civilizations and Bronze Age Greece. Rather than trace migrations of peoples, they looked instead to the peaceful medium of trade as a mechanism by which to outflank the militaristic models dominating central Europe. Instead of dealing with whole cultures, they emphasized the stylistic development of individual artefacts — the typological method — which could be traced across a network of interregional contacts (and incidentally provide much-needed chronological anchorage points in historically dated sequences). These developments are associated particularly with the Swede, Oscar Montelius.⁵⁴

In Britain, where there was a less intimate knowledge of Continental archaeology⁵⁵ and more concern with the Mediterranean, these ideas were received sympathetically. The idea of maritime contacts was especially appealing,⁵⁶ and Arthur Evans agreed with Montelius' idea of an east Mediterranean origin for the megaliths in the neolithic

⁵³ There was a parallel use of this term in ethnology, associated principally with the Catholic, anti-evolutionist *Kulturkreislehre* of Koppers and Schmidt in Vienna, but it made little contribution to mainstream prehistory. Its existence was one reason why Gordon Childe emphasized the concept of progress in the 1930s.

⁵⁴ O. Montelius, *Der Orient und Europa* (Stockholm, 1899); O. Montelius, *Die Typologische Methode* (Die älteren Kulturperioden im Orient und in Europa, i, Stockholm, 1903); O. Montelius, "Handel in der Vorzeit", *Præhistorische Zeitschrift* (1910).

⁵⁵ This is to put it mildly: in fact there was profound ignorance and provincialism.

⁵⁶ The Phoenicians had long played a role in English visions of the past, where Romanticism had not bred xenophobia but even encouraged the image of exotic traders bartering for Cornish tin; and by the nineteenth century (in contrast to French attitudes) the Phoenicians were seen as models of maritime enterprise. The relative neglect of their archaeology until recently in Britain related to the growing exclusiveness of classics from the 1930s onwards.

period. It is significant that his own work in Crete (and that of Myres in Cyprus and Woolley in the Turkish Hatay) were conceived as building up links along the sea routes from the Near East. As with German nationalism, however, this view could be taken to extremes: the lunatic wing of British archaeology was represented by Grafton Elliot Smith and the Egyptocentric hyper-diffusionists. They believed that the Egyptians (who were essentially Asiatic rather than African) had carried civilization all over the world, an "exotic leaven" which was responsible for all cultural change. European megaliths, with their Atlantic distribution, were no more than reflections of the tombs and obelisks of the Ancient Egyptians. Elliot Smith's disciple W. J. Perry was to take this doctrine further, seeing Egyptians as setting out in boats to proselytize a heliocentric religion. Nonsense? Yet it was reissued under the early imprint of Pelican Books, and was eagerly consumed by a British public in the fading years of overseas colonialism.⁵⁷

This, then, is the somewhat schizophrenic intellectual environment within which Gordon Childe undertook his early studies of prehistory. There were many conflicting attitudes, some deeply rooted in earlier modes of thought, and many bodies of knowledge which had never been considered in relation to each other. Above all, there was a growing archaeological record which could be interpreted in very different ways in relation to radically different ideologies.

III

CHILDE'S SYNTHESIS OF PREHISTORY

Childe's achievement was twofold: he brought order to a multitude of local sequences of prehistoric cultures and integrated them into an overall picture; and he explored some general principles of building social and economic models to explain these patterns. Because he never quite overcame the intellectual preconceptions of his background and training, he did not fully achieve the satisfactory synthesis he was seeking; but he nevertheless gave European prehistory a coherence that made systematic progress possible.

His first achievement was based on an unrivalled knowledge of the material evidence, the result of tireless visits to museums all over Europe: *The Danube in Prehistory* alone records research visits to some sixty institutions. By constructing local sequences of cultures

⁵⁷ W. J. Perry, *The Growth of Civilisation* (London, 1924; Pelican edn. 1937).

and then tying them together over longer distances using typological cross-datings, pivoting on relatively well-investigated areas such as Moravia and Bohemia, he was able to build up a framework in a transect across Europe. This integrated account bridged the dichotomies between northern Europe and the Aegean, and between British and Continental scholarship. Without nationalistic preconceptions, he made use of German methods and observations (notably the equation of an archaeological culture with a prehistoric people), taking the best of Kossinna and Schuchhardt without their excesses. In this way he was able to define a succession of periods, and map contemporaneous developments within them. This produced a standard framework, free so far as possible from outside assumptions. The result was complex but objective, comprehensive and explicit; and it provided a means of defining patterns of cultural change.⁵⁸ Having done this for Europe he applied a similar methodology to the Near East, using his synoptic viewpoint to integrate observations made by the more diverse and specialized disciplines of Assyriology and Egyptology and write a general account of their prehistory and early history.⁵⁹ This was his technical contribution.

In carrying out this reformation, he did not radically question the assumptions of contemporary prehistoriography: his emphasis in successive books down to 1930 shifted gradually from migration to diffusion, but he invoked conventional archaeological explanations. In looking at the early Near East, however, with its richer pictorial record, he became more aware of technology and its social context, and saw how a Marxist approach to prehistory might be applied. His later work was an elaboration of these themes, in terms both of history and social evolution, through which he attempted to see the significance of his reconstruction of European prehistory. While the answers which he gave were unsatisfactory, partly because of a flaw in his chronology and partly because he did not entirely emancipate himself from earlier ways of thought, he showed how general models could be used to illuminate the detail of prehistoric change.

The early synthesis: culture history

Childe's early approach owed much to J. L. Myres, whose scholarship preserved a Victorian breadth, but also a commitment to philology

⁵⁸ Childe, *Dawn of European Civilisation*; Childe, *Danube in Prehistory*.

⁵⁹ Childe, *New Light on the Most Ancient East*.

as the key to history.⁶⁰ Myres's interest in ethnology (like his enthusiasm for Herodotus) was based on a belief in the unity of language, culture and race, balanced by a sensitivity to geography. His general writings⁶¹ were characterized by a reliance on the categories of physical anthropology (Mediterranean, Alpine and Nordic races) and a more fundamental polarity between Indo-European and oriental cultures. The arrival of Indo-European peoples — "the coming of the North" — was the decisive turning-point in European history, creating the condition for the new civilizations of Persia, Greece and Rome, "Eastern and Western in name, but held and directed on both sides by long-lost brothers and true kinsmen". The Indo-Europeans had organization and rationality, the orientals had an aptitude for trade but a tendency to religious obscurantism and political tyranny.⁶² The Mycenaean — to Myres "totally un-Hellenic"⁶³ — were part of the earlier, oriental and Mediterranean, story.

Childe's early work shows a tension between his fascination for the Indo-European problem and his ambivalence towards it as an explanation of historical differences. His work at Oxford was directly concerned with the question of the Indo-Europeanizing of Greece; he went more deeply into the German and east European archaeological literature than Myres, and favoured (correctly, as the decipherment of Linear B was to demonstrate) a pre-Mycenaean date.⁶⁴ In writing *The Dawn* for the "History of Civilisation" series, however, he carried this detailed evaluation of Continental scholarship much further, but

⁶⁰ He was instrumental in the formation of a School of Geography at Oxford and active in attempts to introduce the teaching of anthropology. It is characteristic that when his contributions to the first edition of the *Cambridge Ancient History* (1923) came to be revised fifty years later, it required six specialists to cover the ground.

⁶¹ For example, J. L. Myres, *The Dawn of History* (London, 1911); J. L. Myres, "The Ethnology and Primitive Culture of the Nearer East and the Mediterranean World", in E. Eyre (ed.), *European Civilisation: Its Origin and Development* (Oxford, 1935), pp. 83-177; J. L. Myres, "The Ethnology, Habitat, Linguistic and Common Culture of Indo-Europeans up to the Time of the Migrations", *ibid.*, pp. 179-244.

⁶² Hence the curious (but still powerful) image of classical Greece as unconcerned with trade and immune to luxury, in which the irrational has to be explained as an anomaly.

⁶³ Myres, *Dawn of History*, p. 165, presumably because of the ostentation of the Shaft Graves, with their golden finery. It was only in 1953 that the Mycenaean (Linear B) script was recognized as an early form of Greek. To those who saw Mycenaean Greece as an extension, via Crete, of the orient, no wonder this discovery was to prove hard to swallow.

⁶⁴ V. G. Childe, "On the Date and Origin of Minyan Ware", *Jl. Hellenic Studies*, xxxv (1915), pp. 254-75; V. G. Childe, "The Influence of Indo-Europeans in Prehistoric Greece" (Univ. of Oxford B.Litt. thesis, 1916, not preserved). Childe seems to have convinced Myres that Middle Bronze Age ("Minyan") Greece was at least Indo-European: Myres, "Ethnology, Habitat, Linguistic and Common Culture", p. 213.

managed to set on one side any talk of Indo-Europeans.⁶⁵ Instead he was more concerned to strike a balance between orientalists (who ignored prehistoric Europe) and occidentalists (who downplayed any oriental contribution). Some oriental intrusions, like that of the megalith-builders, he saw as too oriental to survive on western soil; but some immigrants from south Russia (who he in fact believed to be Indo-European) had brought Mesopotamian metallurgy and new dynamism. The west had thus received inspiration from the east, but not by slavish imitation; they adapted it into a new and original whole, represented by the Bronze Age cultures of the Aegean, the Danube valley and northern Europe — in whose energy, independence and inventiveness he recognized qualities distinctively European.

But he had not completely exorcised the Indo-European *Volksgeist*. In another volume of the "History of Civilisation" series, entitled *The Aryans*, he released his pent-up speculation about a problem which continued to fascinate him to the end of his life. While he summarized opposing views with admirable detachment, he showed the extent to which it still influenced his thought; for in the epilogue he eulogized Greek and Persian achievements, and spoke of the Indo-Europeans' possession of "a more excellent language, and the mentality which it generated". Appearing in the year after the publication of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, it was an embarrassment that propelled him to find a materialist model more suited to his Marxism and to seek in the social context of technology the answer to European uniqueness.⁶⁶

The later synthesis: revolutions and their beneficiaries

The book that best represents the originality of his contribution in this phase is *Man Makes Himself*, the fruit of his researches on the

⁶⁵ It is instructive to compare Myres's comprehensive, but relatively superficial, account in his *Cambridge Ancient History* chapter (1923) with Childe's detailed cultural sequences in *The Dawn* (1925); but for all that, Myres's higher dates (reflecting his geological knowledge) have proved nearer the truth.

⁶⁶ In a lecture written in 1933 he defended the practical importance of prehistory precisely because it is "just the objective and critical study of precisely those data on which the political theories of Houston Chamberlain and Adolf Hitler purport to be built": V. G. Childe, "Is Prehistory Practical?", *Antiquity*, vii (1933), p. 410. The reaction to Nazism effectively ended general acceptance of the equation of race and culture. It is noteworthy that while "national character" was a common subject for books in the 1920s — for example, E. Barker, *National Character and the Factors in its Formation* (London, 1927) — by the 1940s it was more common to find titles such as H. Fyfe, *The Illusion of National Character* (London, 1940). The Nazi abuse of prehistory strengthened Childe's belief in an eastern homeland for the Indo-Europeans, and may have contributed to his distrust of high chronologies for prehistoric Europe, which were advocated by German nationalist prehistorians.

Near East. Written during the depressed years of the 1930s, it was also an assertion of a deeper trend, underlying the surface events and partisan interpretations of history, which might properly be labelled progress. Over the long term, the increase in human numbers and their independence from environmental controls are some measure of man's evolutionary success; and just as the Industrial Revolution marked a crucial turning-point, so prehistory too was punctuated by periods of sharply accelerated growth. Childe thus visualized the transitions from hunting to farming, and from farming to urban life, as two comparable "revolutions", which he termed the Neolithic and Urban Revolutions — separating savagery from barbarism and barbarism from civilization. In this way he returned to nineteenth-century and Enlightenment ideas: but with the addition for the first time of archaeological evidence for these events.

He was therefore able to describe the early movements of pottery-bearing populations as part of the spread of farming from the Near East (where plants and animals were first domesticated) and the colonization of Europe by agriculturalists. Farming made possible the first village communities, and the development of crafts such as potting, carpentry and weaving. These societies were relatively egalitarian, with no evidence for chieftainship. But the Near East continued to produce innovations: the plough, the cart and the sailing-boat, as well as the cultivation of tree crops. The concentration of fertile land in alluvial basins and oases limited its supply, but made it amenable to improvement by irrigation. Economies became more specialized and reliant on exchange and trade; the settlements larger and more permanent, containing craft workers such as metalsmiths, and defended by walls. A new level of social differentiation was now achieved, with rulers, priests and craftsmen supported by the surplus from peasant farming; the power of the temple and the state were expressed in monumental architecture, the complexity of their transactions recorded for the first time in writing. Together these led to a revolution in human knowledge and the exploration of practical mathematics.

This picture is very broadly correct, and acceptable today as a description of the beginning of urban life. But to take it further, he developed a more specific hypothesis about the role of metallurgy. Despite his use of the term "revolution", it is clear that he did not see it in Marxian terms, as the resolution of a contradiction: it is a consensualist model in which all parties initially benefited — although unequally — from the change. He thought the concentration of the

agrarian surplus was a necessary pre-condition for the genesis of a metallurgical industry. The contradiction arose later, as a consequence of the relegation of the practical craftsmen to a lower class, divorced from the theoretical expertise of the literary class which was devoted largely to religion: science was thus fettered by subservience to superstition. The result was stagnation and arrested growth; instead of technical progress, a succession of unstable empires competed for control of finite resources — their methods of internal control becoming increasingly totalitarian.⁶⁷

His growing fascination with technology had in the mean time been reflected in study of the developmental sequences of European Bronze Age tools and the diffusion of new techniques.⁶⁸ Here he saw a more dynamic picture, the result of free craftsmen able to innovate and experiment. This gave him the clue to how the model might be extended to European prehistory, a theme that he worked out in increasing detail down to his last book, *The Prehistory of European Society*. The urban revolution had created the concentration of capital necessary for the formation of a bronze industry; but, once created, its techniques and knowledge could be passed on. Because metallurgical knowledge was diffused from the orient, European metalsmiths did not pay the price of subjection. Knowledge of metalworking techniques was spread by oriental colonists and Mycenaean prospectors; and metalsmiths — because no single community could concentrate the surplus to support them permanently — wandered freely, like the metics of ancient Athens. The hoards of bronzes from prehistoric Europe were their stock-in-trade, hidden in times of danger. The stimulus to trade given by the need to acquire copper and tin was responsible for the opening-up of Europe and the growth of an unfettered, proto-capitalist economy. Archaeological ages were technological stages; but within those stages the same technology could produce despotism or liberty depending on specific historical conjunctures. Europe benefited from the mistakes of the orient; and its liberties were founded on the freedom of its craftsmen. That “peculiar manifestation of the human spirit” had a technological base.

Childe's work: an assessment

Childe's knowledge of his material was immense, and his vision of its importance went far beyond that of his contemporaries. His pages

⁶⁷ The analogy with the events then taking place in Nazi Germany was made explicit in his description of the “oriental centralisation” of the later Roman empire: *What Happened in History*, p. 286.

⁶⁸ V. G. Childe, *The Bronze Age* (Cambridge, 1930).

sparkle with erudition and insight. Yet his answer to the problem which he set himself was already old-fashioned. He had come to a subject whose definition was only half a century old, and whose basic information was still accumulating, and gave it a maturity of expression which allowed it to be taken seriously by its sister sciences; but his interpretations were still fixed in the context of the nineteenth-century debates in which the subject had its origins.

One handicap in getting the story right was the lack of an independent European chronology. We now know, thanks to radio-carbon dating, that European neolithic and Bronze Age cultures were much older — both absolutely and in relation to the Near East — than Childe thought them. In this sense, Europe's peculiar character was no more than an artefact of his dating: there was no "slavish dependence" because the originals did not then exist. Thus megaliths long preceded the pyramids, and European bronze industries were already flourishing by Mycenaean times. But it is significant that Childe consciously chose his chronology: in a lecture in 1938⁶⁹ he actually set out two schemes, one of which strikingly resembles the present picture and anticipated by three decades the results of radio-carbon; but he rejected it on the grounds that European cultures were always retarded in relation to Near Eastern ones, using detailed and often dubious typological synchronisms. Thus his chronology was already implicit in his choice of model.

Another conceptual block, closely related to this, was the anachronism of many of his models. His idea of the penetration of Europe by oriental colonies has considerable validity as a description of the activities of the Phoenicians in the west Mediterranean in the first millennium B.C.; but this was quite different from the relationship of the second-millennium Mycenaeans with their European hinterland. To project this picture back to the world of the megalith-builders was simply to continue a habit of thought well established in the seventeenth century. Similarly, the truly nomadic Scythians were very different from the early inhabitants of the steppe lands, while the metics of ancient Athens were no analogy for the craftsmen of the Bronze Age. These ideas were projected back into very different societies, for which there are no historical analogies, and for which better parallels might be found in other parts of the world; but Childe was inhibited from using ethnographic models by his Eurocentric

⁶⁹ V. G. Childe, "The Orient and Europe" (presidential address to Section II, Anthropology, of the British Association), in his *The Advancement of Science* (London, 1938), pp. 181-96.

preoccupation. To him, the Maori or the Melanesians were not like the prehistoric Europeans, because they had no role in the creation of European civilization. Nor were the Incas and the Aztecs, or even the Chinese, to be spoken of in the same breath. Childe's archaeology, like his upbringing and education, were firmly Eurocentric. The prophet that played him false (in Grahame Clark's phrase)⁷⁰ was not Marx but Herder.

Moreover what he took from Marx was specifically his most typically nineteenth-century aspect, the preoccupation with technology. Marx appealed to him because his own views represented a similar translation of Hegelian dialectic into industrial materialism, a vision of the relationship between east and west expressed in the language of tools and economies. To this Childe added his own anti-clericalism and a rather naïve rationalism. He was still fighting nineteenth-century battles, as is clear from his forays into epistemology:⁷¹ true knowledge is useful in changing the world and therefore survives when error (magic and religion) is burnt out. This stark dichotomy between the usefulness of technology and the encumbrance of religion gives his otherwise sophisticated and well-informed descriptions a painful simplicity: it was not so much technological determinism but a technocentricity which caused him to overemphasize its importance in the societies he studied. It was as if the mystique which formerly attached to the Indo-Europeans had been transferred to metal-working.

As his ideas became more abstract, so his archaeology became more mechanical, failing to do justice to the detail of the archaeological record. The conclusion of his final summary, *The Prehistory of European Society*, was allegory rather than explanation, as he perhaps realized. At the end of his life, he had taken the wrong track too many times to go back. Having surveyed his subject — both its raw material and the ideas which motivated it — he could not go beyond his nineteenth-century inheritance. "Now I confess that my whole account may prove to be erroneous; my formulae may be inadequate; my chronological framework — and without such one cannot speak of conjunctures — is frankly shaky". His final disillusionment was intellectual as well as personal.

⁷⁰ "Intellectually . . . Marxism exerted a seriously inhibiting effect"; "at the end of his life he realised that his prophet had played him false": Clark, "Prehistory since Childe", p. 8.

⁷¹ Childe, *Society and Knowledge*; V. G. Childe, *Magic, Craftsmanship and Knowledge* (Frazer Lecture, 1949, Liverpool, 1950); it is significant that Sir James Frazer was also influenced in his unfavourable view of religion by his clerical parentage.

Archaeology since Childe

Childe died just as the post-war boom began to bring both a rapid growth of archaeological work and the routine application of scientific methods of analysis. New university departments brought an industrial increase in scale to teaching and research, and now his ideas were tested in the field and in the laboratory. While everyone was now discussing models of the past, Childe's explanations — the first explicit ones — were easy to criticize. Radio-carbon dating seemed to confirm Europe's cultural autonomy in prehistoric times,⁷² and it did not take long for Childe's shaky chronological and intellectual framework to be overturned. In a period of scientific enthusiasm, Childe's humanistic concerns were pushed into the background. A new professionalism made Childe's efforts look amateur. Archaeology as anthropology dealt ruthlessly with his caricature of savage society — the very name consigned it to a different age. Large-scale interdisciplinary work opened up ecological perspectives and revealed sites in their landscapes, filling in a whole dimension of prehistoric life missing from Childe's picture.

This phase of positivist enthusiasm culminated in the New Archaeology, which — while respecting Childe's pioneering attempts to make sociological sense of prehistory — was in many respects an inversion of his ideas. Vague influences from far-off regions seemed less compelling reasons for prehistoric developments than very tangible local processes of population growth and environmental change, summarized in often deterministic models derived from comparative ethnography. The new prehistory, too, celebrated the independence and native inventiveness of Europe: but megaliths and Mycenae alike owed little to the orient, and the answers lay in endogenous processes of social change.⁷³

Inevitably, perhaps, in the perspective of intellectual history, such views have also come to be seen as typical of their time. Recent years have brought about a rediscovery of some of Childe's insights, in respect of both the interpretation of archaeological material and the wider setting of European prehistory.

⁷² Colin Renfrew hammered home the message in successive articles: C. Renfrew, "Colonialism and Megalithism", *Antiquity*, xli (1967), p. 276; C. Renfrew, "The Autonomy of the South-East European Copper Age", *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, xxxv (1969), p. 12; C. Renfrew, "Wessex without Mycenae", *Annual Brit. School of Archaeol. at Athens*, lxiii (1968), p. 277.

⁷³ This description applies to British and American writing on prehistory; in Germany the rejection of Kossinna and a suspicion of general theory in the post-war period led in effect to a revival of Montelius, and German prehistorians have only slowly accepted the validity of radio-carbon dating.

As enthusiasm for the deterministic models of ecology and systems theory has waned, interest has shifted back to the artefacts themselves and to how culture works. Childe's approach has been seen as foreshadowing a current concern with culture as a socially constructed reality and the historically specific conditions of its creation.⁷⁴ More practically, Childe's grasp of the meaning of archaeological material has been appreciated again: for instance, his discussion of the relation between ostentatious burial practices and political instability⁷⁵ has been recognized as more fruitful than pseudo-scientific attempts to "measure" social differentiation from the evidence of burial as if this were a simple reflection of living societies. Such insights have also been applied beyond the field of prehistory, and his observations on the reconstruction of vanished classes of material from their imitations in other media have found sympathetic echoes even in classical archaeology.

So also with Childe's fundamental concern: the relationship between prehistoric Europe and the Near East. Now purged of the erroneous distractions resulting from a false chronology and anachronistic conceptions, the core of his reconstruction again demands attention. European culture cumulatively absorbed and reinterpreted many features whose origins lay in the Near East, from agriculture to Christianity. A particular complex of features, including the plough, wheeled vehicles, horses, woollen textiles and alcoholic drinks, as well as some of the metallurgical features Childe identified, arrived in Europe shortly after the Urban Revolution and arguably as a consequence of it.⁷⁶ This continuing transformation of European culture, together with early commercial contacts by sea with the east Mediterranean, created the conditions in which the societies of historical Europe emerged. To understand this process, with a wealth of new information from a further generation of fieldwork, is a major task for prehistoric archaeology; and it is one that demands a vision as broad as Childe's own.

Childe thus stands halfway between the heroic age of later nineteenth-century prehistory and the anonymous professionalism of the present-day discipline. He combined the breadth of vision characteristic of a formative period of European thought with the grasp of

⁷⁴ See, for instance, the articles in I. Hodder (ed.), *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology* (Cambridge, 1982).

⁷⁵ V. G. Childe, *Progress and Archaeology* (London, 1944), pp. 85-7.

⁷⁶ A. G. Sherratt, "The Secondary Exploitation of Animals in the Old World", *World Archaeol.*, xv (1983), pp. 90-104.

detail required to found a systematic study of prehistoric times. His sense of the importance of the past, derived as much from awareness of an older European scholarship as from the narrower concerns of archaeology, created a subject which still bears his imprint. Prehistoriography is still a dialogue with the ghost of Childe.

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Andrew Sherratt