

THE METHOD AND THEORY OF

V. GORDON CHILDE

Barbara McNairn

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ABSTRACT: THE METHOD AND THEORY OF V. GORDON CHILDE

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This thesis examines the work of V. Gordon Childe (1892-1957), one of the most outstanding figures in the development of archaeology. Childe was unique among his contemporaries not only for his exceptional achievement in synthesising European and Oriental prehistory on a hitherto unprecedented scale, but also for the depth of his methodological, theoretical and ultimately philosophical enquiry into archaeological procedure. Although Childe himself especially valued his contribution to archaeology as the originator of new interpretative concepts and methods of explanation, his explicitly theoretical work is not widely known today and indeed was largely ignored by his contemporaries. Here an attempt is made to redress the balance, not by depreciating Childe's role as a synthesiser, nor by overstating his explicit concern with theory, but rather by viewing both these aspects of his work as integral parts of an overall enquiry into prehistory.

The thesis thus begins with an outline of the development of Childe's synthesis of European and Oriental prehistory in relationship to the development of his theoretical framework. This is followed by a more detailed analysis of the theoretical content of the synthesis itself and by a closer examination of his work on archaeological classification, historical theory and philosophy of knowledge. In tracing Childe's intellectual genesis and development from his entry

into archaeology in the early twenties to his tragic death in 1957, one follows a remarkable journey through philological theory, Oriental diffusionism, functionalism, Darwinism and Marxism. The picture which emerges is one of an archaeologist grappling with complex and often contradictory theoretical systems, in an attempt not only to perceive the patterns in prehistory, but to understand the historical process itself.

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## INTRODUCTION

Since it is now known that classification systems and interpretative models play a crucial role in shaping the archaeologist's view of the past,<sup>(1)</sup> it is evident that the theoretical basis of archaeology needs to be evaluated before a clear picture of the past can be obtained. To this end it is necessary to build up an historical perspective, for present theory and methodology can only be fully understood when seen as part of a developmental process; we have inherited from past archaeologists not only their accumulated store of data but also their classification systems and interpretative devices.

This thesis examines the thought of V. Gordon Childe, (1892-1957) one of the foremost figures in the development of archaeology. To his contemporaries Childe was seen, above all, as

the systematizer, the lineal descendant of Montelius as an acute and unwearied constructor of chronological schemes, the man who could survey the European scene with scholarly detachment and always distinguish the prehistoric woods amid the close-set trees of archaeological detail. (2)

At a time when the major trend was towards detailed particularistic research, Childe's texts such as The Dawn of European Civilization (1925), The Danube in Prehistory (1929), or Prehistoric Communities of the British Isles (1940) stand out as great works of synthesis patterning

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(1) For the influence of theory on the archaeologist's approach see D. Clarke (1972) 1-10, and J. Hill (1972) 61-108.

(2) S. Piggott (1958a) 77.

the whole of European prehistory. Childe had succeeded in collating work which had hitherto been scattered throughout Europe in various libraries and museums. The geographical and linguistic barriers separating the individual centres of research were thus broken down and European archaeologists were provided with an overall framework for their enquiries.

As well as his work as a synthesiser, however, Childe made other important contributions to archaeology. A significant part of his work was concerned with explicitly theoretical issues, work which in many ways anticipated the later developments of the discipline in the sixties and seventies. Early in his career, for example, Childe became directly involved in interpreting and revising the classification systems then employed in archaeology, i.e. culture and the three ages. This was important to him since he believed that a significant and systematic classification system was the first criterion of a scientific discipline.<sup>(3)</sup>

Furthermore, Childe was explicitly concerned not only with classification but also with the historical interpretation of archaeological data. This involved him in an examination of various types of historical models for example the magical, the religious, the anthropological and the Marxist outlooks. In his choice of Marxism as the most valid historical model, Childe

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(3) Childe (1935c) 1.

emphasised its particular suitability for archaeological methodology.

Since "means of production" figure so conspicuously in the archaeological record, I suppose most prehistorians are inclined to be so far Marxist as to wish to assign them a determining role among the behaviour patterns that have fossilized. (4)

However, this affinity between Marxist theory and the necessity of the archaeologist to make inferences from the material remains of past societies cannot be seen as the overriding factor influencing his choice. Childe held strong philosophical views on the nature of reality as a self-sufficient, creative and constantly changing process. In his eyes, Marxism was the only historical model to approximate to this viewpoint; the others failed on account of their inability to accept change.<sup>(5)</sup>

It is this explicit concern with classification, historical theory and philosophy, together with the considerable scope of his perspective on prehistory which make the work of V. Gordon Childe eminently suitable for an historiographic study of archaeological theory. Because of Childe's importance in the development of the discipline it is hardly surprising that several papers have in fact been published on aspects of his life and work. In chronological order these include the following:

A. Ravetz (1959) "Notes on the Work of V. Gordon Childe",

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(4) Childe (1958a) 72.

(5) Childe (1945c) 21-6.



The New Reasoner 10, 56-66; J. Allen (1967) "Aspects of V. Gordon Childe", Labour Monthly 12, 52-59; and P. Gathercole (1971) "Patterns in Prehistory: An Examination of the Later Thinking of V. Gordon Childe", World Archaeology 3, 225-32. Moreover it is likely that further work will soon be available and here reference must be made to Sally Green (Sheffield) and Peter Gathercole (Cambridge) both of whom are currently preparing biographical studies for publication.

CHAPTER 1    The Overall Development of Childe's Thought

Vere Gordon Childe was born in 1892 in New South Wales, Australia, to the Rev. S.H. Childe. He was educated at the Church of England Grammar School, Sydney and at Sydney University where he graduated in Latin, Greek and Philosophy in 1913. In the following year he came up to Queen's College, Oxford on a graduate scholarship in Classics and obtained a First. He then went on to complete a B. Litt. thesis on the subject of Indo-European origins.<sup>(1)</sup>

Reading my Homer and my Veda with the guidance of Schrader and Jevens, Zimmer and Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, I was thrilled by the discoveries of Evans in Prehellenic Crete and of Wace and Thomson in prehistoric Thessaly. Indeed I hoped to find archaeological links between the latter area and some tract north of the Balkans whence similar links might also lead to Iran and India. This search - naturally fruitless - was the theme of my B. Litt. thesis at Oxford and set me trying to discover in the libraries of Oxford and London about the already celebrated 'Pre Mycenaean' pottery of the Ukraine and hence of its analogies in the Balkans, Transylvania and Central Europe. (2)

Childe did not pursue his research further at this point but returned to Australia in 1916 to become actively involved in what he was later to term "a sentimental excursion into Australian politics".<sup>(3)</sup> During the remaining two years of the First World War he participated in the

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(1) It is unfortunate that Childe did not leave a copy of this thesis in the hands of Oxford University. This practice was only made compulsory in 1956.

(2) Childe (1958a) 69.

(3) Idem.

anti-conscription movement as a member of the Australian Union of Democratic Control. In 1919 he became private secretary to John Storey, who in the following year was appointed premier of New South Wales. Storey's death in 1921 however, effectively put an end to Childe's political career and he returned to England the following year.<sup>(4)</sup>

It is significant in this context that Childe's first book did not concern archaeology but Australian politics. How Labour Governs, published in 1923, by a small left-wing press in London,<sup>(5)</sup> was an analysis of the development of the labour movement in Australia during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The book is centred on the bitter struggles which divided the movement in these years, between the parliamentary party leaders, the Syndicalists of the Industrial Workers of the World and the Australian Workers Union.<sup>(6)</sup> Here Childe's sympathies lay clearly with the anti-parliamentarians, his main argument being that the repeated failure of the movement to put a collectivist programme into practice was the result of its imitating and participating in the parliamentary system. Childe held that the ill-educated working class

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- (4) During his stay in Australia Childe did in fact enter academic life, but he was forced to resign from his position as tutor in the department of Ancient History at Sydney University on account of his pacifist convictions. S. Green (1976) 9ff.
- (5) I.e. by the Labour Research Department of the Communist Party.
- (6) See introduction by F.B. Smith to the second edition of How Labour Governs (1964) v-x.

man could not compete in the parliamentary situation which was the creation of the upper classes and thus embodied their traditions.

How Labour Governs has been seen as a gesture of withdrawal from politics.<sup>(7)</sup> Not only was Childe convinced that the structure of the labour movement made timidity and corruption inevitable, but he was also persuaded of the sentimentality of engaging in politics on behalf of a class in which there was increasing apathy and disunity. Childe's withdrawal, however, was not a withdrawal from the left, but rather from "the vulgar reactionary quality of much of Australian social and political life."<sup>(8)</sup>

On his way from Australia to England, Childe travelled overland through Europe where he gained a personal knowledge of many of the European collections. In the anthropological journal Man (1922) he published an article on the state of archaeological studies in Czechoslovakia and Hungary after the disruption caused by the First World War. Here he drew attention to the difficulties encountered by archaeologists in a time of national bankruptcy. Foreign publications were difficult to obtain and travel outside the country almost impossible. In particular Childe mourned the death of Dr. Jaroslav Palliardi, one of central Europe's most outstanding students. Palliardi had spent thirty years investigating

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(7) Ibid., ix.

(8) R. Gollan cited in J. Allen (1968) 52.

the archaeological material of his Moravian homeland. Unfortunately the results of his work were only partly published and mostly in Czech. At the time of his death he had been engaged in writing his final results. In his private possession was one of central Europe's most important collections of antiquities including the painted pottery from Znojmo. In the following year Childe had the good fortune to view this collection which was then being housed at Moravska Budejowice (Mährisch-Budwitz), under the guidance of Palliardi's pupil and collaborator, Vildomec. Palliardi's work was to be of prime importance for Childe's own research. His stratigraphically established sequences of pottery types for Southern Moravia were to provide the basis for Childe's four Danubian periods adumbrated in "When did the Beaker Folk Arrive?" (1925), in the first edition of The Dawn of European Civilization (1925) and in The Danube in Prehistory (1929) where they became expanded to six.

Childe's career as an archaeologist effectively began in 1922 when, at the age of thirty, he took up the post of librarian at the Royal Institute of Anthropology in London. Here he resumed his original quest for the homelands of the Indo-Europeans, focusing his attention initially on south-eastern Europe. His search, however, was not confined to this region and by 1925, while he had not yet located the original cradle of the Indo-Europeans, he had attained a broad knowledge of the archaeological

remains from the whole of prehistoric Europe. The outcome of this was the publication of a broad synthesis of European origins, The Dawn of European Civilization.

Written at a time when archaeological research was generally conducted on a regional basis, this holistic vision of European prehistory was to earn him the lasting respect of his colleagues.<sup>(9)</sup>

In The Dawn Childe attempted to reach a balanced explanation of the foundations of European culture within the context of two rival schools of thought; the Orientalists, who held that the cultural development of prehistoric Europe was dependant on the diffusion of Oriental civilization, and the Occidentalists, who saw the evolution of European prehistory as essentially a self-sufficient process. Although at the time evolution and diffusion were generally considered to be mutually exclusive opposites,<sup>(10)</sup> the debate between these two schools did not fall into a neat diffusionist versus evolutionist dichotomy. The situation was complicated by the fact that the major protagonists of both schools were firm diffusionists. On the one hand, G. Elliot Smith, the leader of the Oriental School, stressed the unique contribution made to world progress by the Egyptian 'Children of the Sun' whose globe-wandering activities brought civilization to the whole

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(9) S. Piggott (1958a) 75-79.

(10) For the growth of the invasionist-diffusionist view of European history and its relationship to an independent evolutionary model see G. Daniel (1971) 140-153.

world.<sup>(11)</sup> On the other, Gustav Kossinna, the major proponent of the Western School, attributed what he considered all the higher elements in human culture to another wandering people, the Indo-Europeans, or the Aryans.<sup>(12)</sup>

When we come to evaluate Childe's reconciliation between the two schools, it is immediately obvious that he has not, in fact, effected a compromise between Oriental and Occidental diffusionism, but between Oriental diffusion and the independent evolution of European culture.

The Occident was, I would submit, indebted to the Orient for the rudiments of the arts and crafts that initiated man's emancipation from bondage to his environment and for the foundation of those spiritual ties that co-ordinate human endeavours. But the peoples of the West were not slavish imitators; they adapted the gifts of the East and united the contributions made by Africa and Asia into a new and organic whole capable of developing along its own original lines. (13)

Here Childe considered that the turning point in Europe's relationship with the Orient lay in the Bronze Age.

By the sixteenth century B.C. the new organism was already functioning and the point had arrived when the Westerners were ready to assume the role of masters. Among the Early Bronze Age peoples of the Aegean, the Danube Valley, Scandinavia and Britain, we can recognise already the expression of those very qualities of energy, independence and inventiveness which distinguish the western world from Egypt, India or China. (14)

From the Bronze Age onwards he seemed assured of the subsequent development of European culture into modern

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- (11) G.E. Smith, (1928).  
(12) G. Kossinna, (1921).  
(13) Childe (1925a) xiii.  
(14) Ibid., xiii, xiv.

civilization and thus he terminated The Dawn at this point.

My task is then to exhibit the creation out of the cultural capital common to many lands of the new force, the growth of which has ultimately transformed the face of the world. Since the germs of the new are evidently active in the Middle Bronze Age that period puts a natural term to my enquiry. (15)

Childe argued that the new creative force which he could detect in the central European Bronze Age was due to a fusion of Oriental and Occidental culture. Above all however, he emphasised the contribution of battle-axe invaders from south Russia, considering these to have prevented the cultural stagnation which he had witnessed further west, in the megalithic province, where there had been a similar fusion of Oriental and Occidental culture. He was not, however, explicit as to why they should have had a creative influence on European pre-history. This question was not to be answered until the following year in The Aryans (1926), which was published as a sequel to The Dawn, as part of the same history of civilization series.

In The Dawn Childe was primarily concerned with the first phase in European prehistory, in which diffusion from the Orient was considered to be the main agent of culture change. In the first edition he defined two major channels of diffusion between the Orient and Europe, the Mediterranean Seaway and the Danube valley. At this time he assigned primacy to the former, envisaging the

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(15) Ibid., xiv.



rise of Iberian civilization as the direct result of colonization from the East. As he himself was later to remark, while those sea voyagers did not hail directly from Egypt, they recognisably bore the emblems of Elliot Smith's "Children of the Sun".<sup>(16)</sup> Subsequently, however, they were to be relegated to a position of secondary import and the major emphasis was to shift from the Aegean-Iberian seaway to the Danubian thoroughfare.

In The Aryans as in The Dawn Childe was ultimately concerned with an explanation of the origins of European civilization. What particularly fascinated him was that although the initial steps in the process had taken place in the Near East, it was in western Europe where the most developed stage had been realised.

Why . . . had Europe, starting on the race 1,500 years behind Mesopotamia and Egypt, outstripped these pioneers in a millennium? Why did our continent continue to progress while the Ancient East stagnated or declined? (17)

Here his main argument was that man's development from savagery to civilization is closely related to his intellectual development which is, in turn, conditioned by the language he employs; the more flexible his language, the more refined his world view point and consequently the greater his ability to manipulate external objects. In Childe's words, "to inherit an exceptionally delicate linguistic structure gives a people a vantage point on the

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(16) Childe (1958a) 70.

(17) Childe (1926a) 314.

path of progress".<sup>(18)</sup> Childe went on to apply this line of reasoning to the Indo-Europeans in order to explain their progressive role, not only in European, but in world history.

In The Aryans Childe equated the original Indo-Europeans with the vast complex of battle-axe cultures spreading across Europe from Jutland to south-west Russia. Furthermore, he located their original homeland in the latter region. Thus the argument for the progressive quality of the European Bronze Age, advanced in The Dawn, becomes easier to understand. Previously the special role assigned to the battle-axe invaders in the creation of a highly original European culture had been explained solely as a result of their being vehicles for Oriental inspiration. This, however, could not have been the only reason, since in other areas, direct Oriental inspiration had eventually resulted in stagnation or decline. It is only when the philological factor is included that Childe's view of their contribution can be fully appreciated.

The Aryans was followed in 1928 by The Most Ancient East which was essentially the Oriental counterpart to The Dawn, comprising a survey of the archaeology of pre-historic and protohistoric Egypt, Mesopotamia and India. This in turn was followed by two more major archaeological

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(18) Ibid., 3.

texts; the monumental Danube in Prehistory (1929) and The Bronze Age (1930), both of which embodied and extended his view of the pattern of prehistory as advanced in The Dawn. As Piggott has remarked five major works of scholarship in five years is an astonishing output for anyone.<sup>(19)</sup>

In 1927 Childe was appointed to the Abercromby chair of Prehistoric Archaeology at Edinburgh University, a post which he held until 1946 when he became director of the Institute of Archaeology in London. During his stay in Scotland, he continued to keep in close contact with the current developments in continental and oriental archaeology and was thus to establish Edinburgh University as "one of the great centres of international academic archaeology".<sup>(20)</sup>

It was during this time that he began to explore and experiment with Marxist theory. Marxism as a model of the past, presents both a structural analysis of socio-culture in terms of economy, sociology and ideology, and a principle of socio-cultural change in which changes at the economic level determine changes in the sociology and ideology.<sup>(21)</sup> Thus in contrast to diffusionism which seeks to explain innovation by reference to external

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(19) S. Piggott (1958b) 306.

(20) Ibid., 307.

(21) For a brief outline of Marxist theory see below p.239 ff.

events,<sup>(22)</sup> Marxism looks primarily within the socio-cultural system for the explanation of culture change. The two principles, however, are not totally contradictory. Marxism does allow for external contact as a mechanism of change and similarly diffusionism does allow for some internal development. During the thirties and forties, however, the two were generally regarded as mutually exclusive. On the one side official Marxist theory rejected diffusion as an explanation of change, considering it to be bourgeois or capitalist,<sup>(23)</sup> while on the other hand academics in the West largely ignored the explanatory potential of Marxism as a model of the past, regarding it as communist dogma.<sup>(24)</sup>

In Man Makes Himself (1936) Childe presented a summary of the archaeological sequences described in The Most Ancient East and an historical interpretation of the period under consideration with the aid of a Marxist theoretical framework. Unlike his previous texts this was a work addressed to the general public.

This book is not intended to be a manual of archaeology still less of the history of science. It is meant to be readable to those who are not concerned with the detailed problems about which

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- (22) Diffusionism cannot explain the origin of any new cultural trait except in Harris's terms by "passing the buck" to another. This results in a regressive series of interactions until the primary occurrence is located. See M. Harris (1968) 375.
- (23) See below p. 265.
- (24) See below pp. 277, 278.

specialists argue heatedly. It must therefore ignore such problems and avoid moreover the technical terms and outlandish names that make text-books on prehistory (including my own) scientific, but hard to follow. (25)

Here the archaeological record was interpreted as documenting man's progress from savagery to civilization. Childe argued that by improving his material equipment man was exerting control over nature and thus achieving success as a species in adapting to his environment. His definition of success, which was borrowed from Darwinist theory, was purely numerical and in his eyes neutral and scientific.

It was in Man Makes Himself that he gave his first full account of his 'neolithic' and 'urban' revolutions as periods of transition between major economic stages. Childe believed that a consideration of revolutions so remote in time from today would prevent emotional bias and thus vindicate the idea of progress against what he termed "sentimentalists" and "mystics".(26)

This attempt to rationalise his belief in progress, however, was not wholly convincing and resulted in a rather mechanistic interpretation of the historical process, in which man was totally determined by his material conditions. Childe himself was later to criticise this view, considering that it fell short of Marxism in failing to emphasise that science can only be applied, means of production only operated, within an institutional framework

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(25) Childe (1936a) vii.

(26) Ibid., 16.

that is not itself entirely economic.<sup>(27)</sup>

In Man Makes Himself Childe utilized both the Marxist structural analysis of socio-culture and the Marxist view of socio-cultural change. When he came to write the 1939 edition of The Dawn, however, he adopted only the former component of Marxist theory, denying the possibility of independent evolution having occurred to any significant extent in prehistoric Europe. As he himself later pointed out at that time in his life he was unwilling to recognise the positive contribution of prehistoric Europeans in the development of European culture.

Embittered hostility to and fear of the archaeological buttresses of Hitlerism enhanced my reluctance to recognise the positive aspects of all European barbarisms. (28)

This clearly shows that Childe considered his archaeological theory to have been influenced by the political climate of these years. Since the publication of The Aryans in 1926, the whole Aryan thesis had been steadily acquiring disreputable connotations as a result of its adoption by the Nazi creed as ideological support for Hitlerism. Childe was aware of this and pointed it out on several occasions. In an article entitled "Is Pre-History Practical?", published in Antiquity, he wrote the following:

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(27) Childe (1958a) 72.

(28) Idem.

In 1933 it can hardly be alleged that Prehistory is a useless study, wholly remote from and irrelevant to practical life. In one great country at least, interpretations of the supposed facts of Prehistory, imperfectly apprehended by an untrained mind of undoubted genius, have revolutionised the whole structure of society. No one who has read Mein Kampf, or even the extracts therefrom in The Times, can fail to appreciate the profound effect which theories of the racial superiority of 'Aryans' have exercised on contemporary Germany. In the name of these theories men are being exiled from public life and shut up in concentration camps, books are being burned and expression of opinions stifled, just as in the name of religious ideas they were during fifteen long centuries of darkness. (29)

Another occasion was prompted by an article in the Edinburgh Evening News on May 5th 1936 entitled "Are you an Aryan?" This was a report on the International Congress of Ethnology, to be held in the city in the following year, which, as the article pointed out, was to be heavily financed by the German Research Institute. Childe was doubtful of the need of another International Congress since there were two already existing; The International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, and the International Congress of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences. Also he was dubious about the motivation behind the German financial contribution.

In view of the connexion between ethnology and the political philosophy of the Third Reich, one wonders if this generosity is entirely inspired by a disinterested desire to further international science or an attempt to secure "that recognition in kindred countries that the Nordic peoples must feel themselves a Schicksalgemeinschaft" desired by Reichminister für Innern, Dr. Frick in his circular translated in Nature, February 24, 1934.

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(29) Childe (1933a) 410.

As a representative of the Royal Society of Edinburgh at the First International Congress for Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences and of the University of Edinburgh at the Oslo congress, I feel bound to direct the attention of the readers of *Nature* to this engagingly frank report lest they find themselves supporting an organization in competition with the two "genuinely" international congresses. (30)

It was in this context that Childe began to ignore his original thesis concerning the creative quality of the European Bronze Age and with it, its possibly embarrassing explanation of progress. Although he had never advanced a racialist explanation of progress, his emphasis on the superiority of the language and intellect of the Indo-Europeans was perhaps too close for comfort to the German doctrine of genetic superiority. Thus, while in the 1925 edition of The Dawn, Childe had attempted to achieve a balance between Oriental diffusion and the independent evolution of European culture in the 1939 edition he came firmly down in the Orientalist camp.

In 1942 Childe published his second popular work entitled What Happened in History. This was essentially an extension of the theme presented in Man Makes Himself. Now his perspective is broader and the field covered more comprehensive. Chronologically his survey includes the civilizations of the Iron Age until the fall of the Roman Empire and the geographical area under consideration comprises Europe in addition to the Orient.

Written in the third year of World War II, Childe at

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(30) Childe (1936c) 1074.



this time held a basically pessimistic view of the future development of European civilization, believing that it was about to enter another 'Dark Age'. He was determined, however, not to let this shake his belief in progress and one of the reasons for the enormous geographical and chronological span covered in the book was to achieve a historical perspective on such a 'Dark Age'.

What Happened in History (1942) . . . was a real contribution to archaeology as a concrete and readable demonstration designed for the bookstall public that history as generally understood can be extracted from archaeological data. I wrote it to convince myself that a Dark Age was not a bottomless cleft in which all traditions of culture were finally engulfed. (I was convinced at the time that European Civilization - Capitalist and Stalinist alike - was irrevocably heading for a Dark Age.) So I wrote with more passion and consequently more pretensions to literary style than in my other works (31)

In What Happened in History Childe's interest lay only in what he termed "mainstream" cultures, i.e. those which in his eyes had made significant contributions to the cultural capital of mankind. Here he traces the course of this mainstream from its sources in Egypt and Mesopotamia to its confluence in the Hellenistic Mediterranean, and, while his survey terminates with the fall of the Roman Empire, he nevertheless has a clear view of its subsequent course through the feudalism of the Middle Ages in Atlantic Europe to the capitalist economy of modern times.

It is significant that what Childe considered as

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(31) Ibid., 73.

mainstream reflects quite a different pattern of prehistory from that envisaged in his earlier works. In the first edition of The Dawn he had laid considerable emphasis on the European Bronze Age as an important turning point in world history, the time when the Westerners had vindicated their dependence on the Orient and had assumed the role of masters. Furthermore he had located within this period the germs of the creative process which was in his eyes to culminate in modern western civilization. In The Aryans he had gone on to trace the origins of the new force to the incursion of Indo-European nomads from south Russia, seeing these as a major progressive force in world history. Now, in What Happened In History, his estimation of the progressive character of both the European Bronze Age and the Aryans has clearly changed. In fact there is very little reference to either subject in the text. Analysed from a Marxist viewpoint, he attempts to show how the rapid technological development in the Bronze Age had little if any effect on the basic neolithic economy of Europe.<sup>(32)</sup>

In What Happened In History Childe's theme has a double aspect, being both the growth of civilization in the Orient and the irradiation of European barbarism by Oriental civilization. His explanation of culture change thus makes reference to both internal evolution and diffusion. Never, even in his most avowedly Marxist phase, did Childe follow the contemporary Russian example and abandon

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(32) Childe (1942a) 113.

diffusion as a mechanism of change. Three years later, in his introduction to a conference on the 'Problems and Prospects of European Archaeology', he makes it clear that he saw the Russian approach as a reaction against the ideology of imperialism rather than an understanding of the work of Marx or Engels.<sup>(33)</sup>

It was also during his stay in Scotland that Childe first turned his attention to the problems of British pre-history. As in the field of European origins he attempted a broad synthesis which was presented in The Prehistory of Scotland (1935), Prehistoric Communities of the British Isles (1940) and Scotland Before the Scots (1946). These were written at a time when the invasionist hypothesis which had dominated British prehistory since the end of the nineteenth century, was in full swing.<sup>(34)</sup> Both The Prehistory of Scotland and Prehistoric Communities of the British Isles were strongly influenced by this hypothesis. In each case Childe sought to explain almost every innovation, both major and minor, by reference to foreign stimulus, in particular, invasion. The archaeological record in Britain was thus seen to be punctuated by a series of invasions occurring not only at the beginnings of the Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages, but at fairly regular intervals throughout each of these major stages.

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(33) Childe (1945d) 6.

(34) For a survey of the role of the invasionist hypothesis in British prehistory, see J.G.D. Clark (1966).

In Scotland Before the Scots, however, Childe attempted to reassess the role of invasion in Scottish prehistory by viewing it in the context of the internal development of society. Thus, while he did not deny the presence of invaders in ancient Scotland, he focused the narrative on the Scottish material in its own right rather than on tracing its continental background. Childe had acquired this approach from Russian prehistorians.

This book embodies the substance of Six Rhind lectures delivered to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland under the title, "The Development of Tribal Society in Scotland in pre-Roman Times". They were an attempt to present a slice of prehistory in a way quite novel to English readers. The prehistory of the British Isles was undoubtedly punctuated by a series of invasions. Accounts of it are liable to be so engrossed with tracing the successive invading groups to their Continental cradles and defining what contribution each introduced that they have little space left to relate what the several societies did when they got here. Our Soviet colleagues have criticized perhaps a little too harshly this idiosyncrasy of British prehistorians, but for their part have shown how the internal development of societies themselves can explain a wide range of archaeological facts. Their applications of Marxism to prehistory have produced narratives that seem more historical than a succession of invasions and yet are just as objective and solidly based on observed data. (35)

Written at the height of the influence of invasionist theory on British archaeology, Scotland Before the Scots was not well received among British archaeologists. Stuart Piggott, for example, did not consider it to be as good a work as its predecessor, The Prehistory of Scotland.

In 1935 he published the first modern treatment of the prehistory of Scotland seen within the

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(35) Childe (1946a) v.

framework of that of the remainder of the British Isles and of the European continent. The Prehistory of Scotland still remains required reading for the student, and, it must be admitted, is a far more satisfactory performance than his work of a decade later Scotland Before the Scots, where he attempted to interpret the evidence in terms of the Marxist model of social evolution. (36)

To many of his contemporaries Scotland Before the Scots must have seemed a conscious Marxist pose. Childe liked to shock the archaeological establishment<sup>(37)</sup> and was no doubt aware that the employment of an explicitly Marxist theoretical framework in the context of Scottish prehistory would have had a disquieting affect on his colleagues. Glyn Daniel, however, writing in 1958, maintained that despite its "intellectual contortions" the work was certainly no pose, but rather an attempt to answer historical problems.<sup>(38)</sup> In 1971, he again emphasised this point, arguing that it showed Childe's disillusionment with his modified diffusionism.<sup>(39)</sup> Certainly, Childe himself believed it presented a picture of the past which was more realistic and more historical than one based solely on the invasionist hypothesis.<sup>(40)</sup>

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(36) S. Piggott (1958b) 308.

(37) Ibid., 312.

(38) G. Daniel (1958) 66.

(39) Idem. (1971) 149.

(40) Childe (1958a) 73.

During his stay in Scotland, in addition to developing his synthesis of British, European and Near Eastern prehistory, Childe also began to write on archaeological theory and method. It is important, however, not to overestimate his concern with theory at this time. Today, Childe is generally regarded as the major exponent of the concept of an archaeological culture in British prehistory, but it was not until the mid-fifties that he went into the concept in any detail.

Culture may be defined and used in a number of different ways.<sup>(41)</sup> In its most general sense it refers to "customs" or "a way of life", a usage which was fairly common in nineteenth century literature including archaeological texts. The term is also widely employed in a more specific sense as referring to all aspects of human behaviour that are not innate reflexes or instincts. In both these senses it can refer to many different levels of organizational complexity.

In the first edition of The Dawn Childe used a concept of culture to pattern the archaeological record into distinct geographical units occupying the same time zones, but he did not suggest that his usage of the term was significantly different from that in common parlance. Indeed it was not until 1929, in the Preface to The Danube

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(41) See A. Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn (1952) for a review of the various interpretations and definitions of the culture concept. For the development of the concept in British and American archaeology see B. Trigger (1978) 75-95.

in Prehistory, that he first indicated that he was employing the term in a specialist sense peculiar to archaeology.

We find certain types of remains, pots, implements, ornaments, burial rites and house forms - constantly recurring together. Such a complex we shall term a cultural group or just a culture. (42)

Childe's definition of the term as a unit of classification for material remains, was essentially a partitive definition of culture in the wider sense as comprising both the material and non-material aspects of human society. Childe, however, did not always employ the term in the narrow archaeological sense and in many instances the context indicates a broader definition. That he did not always specify the particular usage of the term often results in a certain amount of ambiguity in his work.<sup>(43)</sup>

In the early thirties Childe was concerned with dispelling the confusion between culture and race.<sup>(44)</sup> This was a matter of great importance to him, for he was a witness to the far-reaching political programmes based on a misunderstanding of these concepts. Here he emphasised that while racial characteristics were inherited biologically, culture was transferred socially and was thus independent of race.

Childe's most detailed work on culture during this period was published in 1935. In "Changing Methods and Aims in Prehistory" he advanced what he termed his

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(42) Childe (1929) v, vi.

(43) See below p. 123 ff.

(44) Childe (1933a), idem. (1933b).

functional interpretation of culture, where culture is seen as an integrated whole. Although he did not present a formal structural analysis of culture, he did differentiate between material and spiritual culture, both of which he saw in functionalist terms as allowing man to adapt to his environment.

In the same paper Childe offered a novel interpretation of the three age model.<sup>(45)</sup> Christian Thomsen's use of the three ages as a system for ordering museum material into a relative chronological sequence, together with the empirical testing of this sequence in the Danish bogs by Worsaae is usually taken to mark the scientific foundations of archaeology. Almost a hundred years separate Childe's functional-economic interpretation of the three ages in 1935, from Thomsen's original formulation in A Guide to Northern Antiquities in 1836.<sup>(46)</sup> During this time the model had developed in a non-systematic fashion, acquiring not only new classificatory criteria but a multiplicity of extra subdivisions, e.g. Eolithic, Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic. Childe retained Thomsen's original criteria for the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages, i.e. the material used for the principal cutting tools and weapons. These were viewed as significant indices of particular economic and social systems. However, when he came to sub-divide the Stone Age, he employed economic and

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(45) For a detailed discussion of Childe's work on the three ages see below p. 143 ff.

(46) For the history of this model see G. Daniel (1943) and R. Heizer (1962).



not technological criteria, i.e. Palaeolithic was defined as food-gathering and Neolithic as food-producing. In fact Childe viewed the three age model as basically a four-fold structure comprising Palaeolithic, Neolithic Bronze and Iron Ages.

It is interesting that in his original formulation Childe argued that the Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages were all preceded by economic revolutions. These were neatly integrated within the functional-economic interpretation of the ages as representing stages of transition between economic phases. Later, however, he replaced the Bronze and Iron Age revolutions by the urban revolution - a concept which indicated the central importance of the urbs rather than bronze or metal working. The urban revolution was thus less easy to accommodate within the structure of the ages - basically it implied a different model of the past.

Indeed, as early as 1943, Glyn Daniel pointed out that Childe's functional-economic interpretation of the past differed from Thomsen's three ages.

To equate the First Economic Revolution with the change from Mesolithic to Neolithic does not mean that the two systems - The functional-economic stages and Thomsen's technological stages are identical; nor does it make it any more convenient to call them both by the same name: they remain separate and different groupings of human history - the one technological, the other functional-economic. (47)

Although Childe's interpretation of the ages does not

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(47) G. Daniel (1943) 48.

explicitly constitute a separate model, it certainly implies one. Why therefore did Childe himself never attempt to give it separate status outwith the three age framework? Clearly he saw a definite correspondence between his functional-economic stages and Thomsen's ages.

Childe belonged to a school of Marxist thought in which the "means of production" (i.e. the technology) rather than the "mode of production" (i.e. the economy) was viewed as the major determining force in society.<sup>(48)</sup> Furthermore he believed that especially in primitive societies cutting tools and weapons comprised a significant part of "the means of production".<sup>(49)</sup> It was this theory which lay behind his attempt to view the three ages as a multi-level model of the past and also behind his attempted marriage of the three ages to Morgan's model of savagery, barbarism and civilization.

It is obvious from the work already outlined that Childe believed that archaeology should not restrict its objectives to the classification of data, but should also be concerned with the historical explanation of these classes. Childe had stressed this as early as 1935 in his presidential address to the Prehistoric Society,<sup>(50)</sup>

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(48) See below p. 220.

(49) Childe (1946c) 19.

(50) Childe (1935b) 1-15, see also idem (1946d) 243-51.

when he introduced the materialist<sup>(51)</sup> conception of history to British archaeologists. In Man Makes Himself (1936), What Happened in History (1942) and Scotland Before the Scots (1946) he had gone on to interpret the archaeological record in terms of this model. It was not until after the war, however, that he was to devote papers exclusively to historical theory.<sup>(52)</sup>

Childe believed that historical interpretation was largely conditioned by the social context of the historian. He was looking for a law of history which would somehow transcend the subjective limitations of cultural background. Here, he attributed to Marx the first exposition of the distorting effect of ideology on historical analysis. Moreover he saw Marxism as a system which, being conscious of this danger, was expressly guarding against it.<sup>(53)</sup> In addition he was searching for a law which would admit the creative changeable nature of reality. In "Rational Order in History" in 1945 and in more detail in History (1947), Childe analysed the various historical outlooks associated with idealism, empiricism and dialectical materialism, rejecting all theories but historical materialism on account of their inability to explain or even accept change.

Childe belonged to a school of Marxist thought in

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(51) At this time he termed it the 'realist' view of history, see below p. 191.

(52) Childe's work on historical theory is discussed in detail below, see Pp. 191-235.

(53) See below p. 236.

which change in the technological development of society was seen to be the foundation of history, conditioning and limiting all other activities.<sup>(54)</sup> Here he integrated Marxism and Darwinism by considering invention in social evolution as equivalent to mutation in organic evolution, i.e. as a source of variation upon which natural selection operates. In fact Childe argued that historical materialism discloses a "sort of natural selection" which operates a "survival of the fittest" among human societies. The test of fitness, however, he emphasised.

is shown to be not success of nations in destructive war or competitive commerce as racialists and economic nationalists have pretended by a perversion of Darwinism. It is something more positive - the harmony between the means of production on one hand and property relations together with the political, religious and artistic super-structure thereon on the other. (55)

An invention could only be accepted if it could be integrated within the existing economic, sociological and ideological framework of society. If this were not the case, Childe held that there were two possible alternatives, either the invention could be suppressed, resulting in technological stagnation, or the structure of society could be adjusted accordingly and such a period of adjustment he termed a 'revolution'.

According to Childe archaeology had an important role to play in the construction of general laws or theories of history. Working together with anthropology it could

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(54) Childe (1951a) 70.

(55) Childe (1947b) 82.

provide the material required for the induction of such laws, its specific role being to test the schemes of social evolution advanced by ethnographers on the basis of synchronic analysis of contemporary cultures.<sup>(56)</sup>

Social Evolution published in 1951 was devoted exclusively to this purpose.

The evolutionary series of organisms, postulated by Lamarck, was converted into a historical series by palaeontology; . . . Can archaeology render a similar service to the evolutionists in anthropology? . . . Now the archaeological record discloses sequences of . . . cultures, stratigraphically established in several areas. In other words, it reveals the chronological order in which societies have appeared. How far does this "observable scheme" really provide the basis for a "logical" one? Let us compare homotaxial cultures - that is cultures occupying the same relative positions in several observed sequences - to ascertain whether the agreements between them can be generalised as stages in cultural evolution - the evolution of Society in the abstract. (57)

Here Childe was especially interested in testing Morgan's model of savagery, barbarism and civilization which he considered to be the best evolutionary scheme proposed to date.<sup>(58)</sup> Childe portrayed Morgan in the classic image of the 19th century evolutionist who insisted that the history of society consisted of a series of identical transformations, similar responses by a uniform brain, to similar environmental conditions.<sup>(59)</sup>

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(56) Idem. (1946d) 243-251.

(57) Childe (1951a) 15, 16.

(58) Ibid., 11.

(59) Ibid., 7.

In Social Evolution Childe briefly surveyed the culture sequences in savagery, before selecting four distinct geographical regions, temperate Europe, the Mediterranean Zone, the Nile valley and Mesopotamia in which to trace the respective culture sequences through barbarism to civilization. The results of his enquiry, however, were not wholly in agreement with Morgan's thesis of parallel evolution. While Childe saw the end result, civilization, and the starting point, savagery, to be abstractly similar in each sequence, he was unable to trace even an abstract parallelism in the intervening steps, which, on the contrary, showed divergence and convergence.

Childe's conclusion, it should be noted, at once differentiated him from contemporary thought in the U.S.S.R. where parallel evolution was accepted as official doctrine.<sup>(60)</sup>

One of the consequences of Childe's interest in historical theory was a deeper appreciation of the philosophical premises which lie at the heart of all disciplines including archaeology. Throughout his career Childe had been fascinated by philosophy<sup>(61)</sup> but it was not until the late forties, after the publication of History, that he first wrote papers on specifically philosophical issues.<sup>(62)</sup>

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(60) M. Miller (1956) 80f.

(61) Childe (1958a) 73.

(62) Childe's basic philosophy is discussed below in Chapter VI, p. 236.

In 1948 he delivered the L.T. Hobhouse Memorial Trust Lecture at Kings College London. This was entitled "Social Worlds of Knowledge", and was focused on basic epistemological problems confronting the social scientist. In the following year it was published by Oxford University Press. That same year, another paper, "The Sociology of Knowledge" was published in the left-wing journal, The Modern Quarterly. This was basically an attempt to show how Durkheim's sociological approach to knowledge agreed with the fundamental premises of Marxist epistemology. Further insight into Childe's philosophical position at this time is afforded by the discussion in "Magic, Craftsmanship and Science" (1949) on the relationship between magic and science. In 1956 he published Society and Knowledge, a more comprehensive work which reflects the thought of a lifetime's study. Here he not only goes into the meaning of knowledge in some depth, analysing the various ways in which it can be communicated, but also outlines his basic philosophical beliefs concerning the nature of reality.

Childe's methodological, historical and philosophical theory is expressed in its most developed form in Piecing Together the Past published in 1956. This was based on a series of lectures given at the Institute between 1946 and 1955 on "the principles of archaeological classification, the current terminology and the implicit interpretative concepts".<sup>(63)</sup> At the time work of this kind was relatively

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(63) Childe (1956a) v.

novel to British archaeologists.

Archaeological technique has been expounded lucidly and even vividly in several recent manuals. Atkinson, Cookson and Kenyon, Crawford and Wheeler have admirably explained how archaeologists can identify, recover, record and conserve data for history. The methods used in classifying such data and in extracting history from them have not been so comprehensively and systematically explained in any modern English book. (64)

The text is thus a pioneer attempt to analyse archaeological theory and methodology. For a work of this kind, however, the style is surprisingly casual. There is no bibliography nor are there footnotes, and the chapter headings are only very loosely indicative of the content therein. While appropriate to informal lectures, this style is not wholly suitable to the demands of a precise analytical thesis. It is thus perhaps unfortunate that the conclusions of Childe's lifelong investigation into archaeological theory and methodology are presented within this frame.<sup>(65)</sup>

The post-war years, however, were not exclusively devoted to historical, archaeological and philosophical theory; Childe was as concerned as ever with his European studies. In 1947, he was obliged to publish another

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(64) Idem.

(65) Childe himself was apparently uncertain about publishing the material of these lectures in book form. S. Green (1976) 60 based on a personal communication with Mr. Paul Ashbee.



edition of The Dawn to encompass new data made available during the war. While a more sympathetic attitude towards the Soviet evolutionary theory had led him to revise his view of culture change in the context of the Battle-axe cultures,<sup>(66)</sup> it had not altered either his basic diffusionist premises or his Orientalist position. In fact these had been strengthened by new geological evidence from Jutland which by indicating a comparatively late date for the Ertebolle culture had lessened the likelihood of independent development of food production in Europe. Thus, the 1947 edition of The Dawn was, like its predecessor in 1939, firmly Orientalist in outlook. In the following years Childe was to continue to uphold and maintain this Orientalist stance and both Prehistoric Migrations, published in 1950, and the chapter in The European Inheritance, edited by Barker, Clark and Vaucher, were dominated "by an old-fashioned over-estimation of the Orient's role".<sup>(67)</sup>

It was only in the mid-fifties when he was involved in rewriting New Light on the Most Ancient East (1954) and The Dawn of European Civilization (1957) that Childe again began to recognise a unique and progressive force in the European Bronze Age. Thus in the sixth edition of The Dawn as in the first, he attempted to balance Oriental diffusion against Occidental adaptation and independent evolution.

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(66) See below pp. 90,91.

(67) Childe (1958a) 73.

The primacy of the Orient remains unchallenged. The Neolithic Revolution was accomplished in South-Western Asia; its fruits - cultivated cereals and domestic stock - slowly diffused thence through Europe, reaching Denmark only three centuries or so after the Urban Revolution had been completed in Egypt and Sumer. Ere then the techniques of smelting and casting copper had been discovered and were being intelligently applied in Egypt and Mesopotamia, to be in their turn diffused round the Mediterranean during the third millennium, but north of the Alps only at its close, if not already in the second. The development of industry and commerce in Greece and subsequently in Temperate Europe was as much dependent on Oriental capital as the industrialization of India and Japan was on British and American capital last century.

On the other hand, European societies were never passive recipients of Oriental contributions, but displayed more originality and inventiveness in developing Oriental inventions than the inventors' more direct heirs in Egypt and Hither Asia. This is most obvious in the Bronze Age of Temperate Europe. In the Near East many metal types persisted unchanged for two thousand years, in Temperate Europe an extraordinarily brisk evolution of tools and weapons and multiplication of types occupied a quarter of that time. (68)

What is radically different, however, is his explanation for this rapid technological development. Whereas previously he had attributed the originality of the Bronze Age to a fusion of Oriental and Occidental culture in which Aryan Battle-axe invaders from south Russia played a prominent role, now he does not view any particular group as being the catalyst in the process, but rather looks for causes within the socio-economic structure of Bronze Age society. As early as 1930 he had emphasised that bronze working involved full-time specialists who

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(68) Childe (1957a) 342, 343.

were supported from the surplus of the primary producers.<sup>(69)</sup> In the Orient the concentration of surplus in the hands of a god-king or priest-king had been facilitated by intensive irrigation agriculture. In Man Makes Himself and in What Happened in History, he had gone on to argue that, while such concentration was necessary for the initiation of a bronze industry, the social structure supporting it had proven too rigid for subsequent progress in the Orient.

In his final work The Prehistory of European Society (1958)<sup>(70)</sup> Childe argued that in Europe and the Aegean the bronze industry no longer demanded as high a concentration of surplus as was necessary in the Orient, since both areas benefitted, even indirectly in the latter case, from a share of Oriental capital. They could thus start a bronze industry without adopting the rigid Oriental social structure, which in Childe's eyes prohibited progress.

Basically, Childe envisaged two main stages in the diffusion of the bronze industry from the Orient to Europe. Firstly, he saw the spread of metallurgy to the Aegean to be the result of cultural stimulation in a direct supply area of Oriental industry. Secondly, he held that the subsequent development of the Aegean industry in turn created a demand for raw material in continental Europe and thus stimulated a bronze industry in this area.

For Childe, the clue to the rapid technological

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(69) Childe (1930a).

(70) This was published a year after Childe's death in 1957.

development in the latter region lay in the position of the metallurgist within the socio-economic structure of Bronze Age society. Unlike his counterpart in the Oriental civilizations, the European bronze worker was not reduced to a state of economic servitude. This was because the social surplus gathered by the European chieftains was not sufficient to support full-time specialists, who had consequently to divide their services among several patrons. Thus, according to Childe, they were in the favourable position of being able to pool the experience of a number of societies, while remaining free from bureaucratic control.

From "Retrospect" a brief autobiographical note written shortly before his death in 1957, it is clear that Childe was well satisfied with The Prehistory of European Society whose argument he saw as "a final answer to those who told us: 'the true prelude to European history was written in Egypt, Mesopotamia and Palestine while the natives of Europe remained illiterate barbarians.'"<sup>(71)</sup> At the same time whether his particular analysis be accepted or not, the text exemplified better than any other work he knew "how what everyone will accept as history could be extracted from archaeological finds."<sup>(72)</sup> Furthermore in his eyes it illustrated what scientific history ought to be like.<sup>(73)</sup> Finally, while he does not draw

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(71) Childe (1958a) 74.

(72) Idem.

(73) Idem.

attention to the fact, Childe had at last found a possible explanation for progress in Europe which was sociological and could not be interpreted in racial terms. As noted previously while Childe had never advanced a racist thesis, his initial emphasis on the superiority of the language and the intellect of the Aryans was uncomfortably close to the German doctrine of genetic superiority. (74)

Certainly in "Retrospect" he did not wish to draw attention to his original philological thesis. In fact he was even reluctant to admit to his early recognition of the distinctive quality of the European Bronze Age, implying that this was a comparatively recent realization.

In rewriting New Light on the Most Ancient East in 1954 and The Dawn of European Civilization in 1956, I began to realize how right Hawkes had been in 1940 when in his The Prehistoric Foundations of Europe he had insisted that by the Bronze Age, Europe had achieved a kind of culture distinctively of its own. I saw not only that this was so but also why. (75)

Childe was thus apparently so unwilling to admit to his early philological thesis that he misrepresented his own intellectual genesis and development. He did not as he suggested in "Retrospect", start off a confirmed Orientalist and only in his later works achieved a more balanced view of European prehistory. In fact he began by attempting to achieve a synthesis between Oriental diffusion and the independent evolution of European culture. It was during the thirties that he came firmly down in the Orientalist

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(74) See above p. 19.

(75) Childe (1958a) 74.

camp, and in doing so rejected his original synthesis. In the fifties, then, Childe's recognition of the creative quality of the European Bronze Age was not a new realization but rather a true recognition in the sense of a knowing again.

CHAPTER II      The Synthesis of European and Near  
Eastern Prehistory

The Dawn of European Civilization, first published in 1925, did not win immediate acclaim as the archaeological classic it was later recognised to be. What reviews it did receive, however, were good.

This book is the most important of its kind which has hitherto been produced; and it belongs to that important class of book which synthesises knowledge. Never before has the whole field of European origins been surveyed by a specialist who writes clearly and intelligibly, and who is (1) apparently familiar with all European languages.

Until then, although local sequences had been worked out in various regions throughout Europe, there had been little or no communication between regional practitioners who were often separated by national, geographical and linguistic frontiers. Such an environment was inconducive to the collation of material, thus hindering any higher level of synthesis. Childe, however, was adequately equipped to deal with such conditions. He was both a talented linguist and a keen traveller and was thus able to gain access to material scattered throughout Europe in various libraries and museums. This was the essential groundwork upon which his synthesis was based.

The Dawn was first and foremost an archaeological text-book containing descriptive surveys of a multiplicity of cultures scattered in time and space throughout prehistoric Europe. Many of these cultures, in particular

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(1) O. Crawford (1926) 89.

those in south-east Europe were relatively unknown to British archaeologists at the time, their inclusion in the text being the direct outcome of the author's own travels. As a reference book, The Dawn thus afforded the specialist a secondary source, descriptive of European cultures to circa 1500 B.C.<sup>(2)</sup> What made the text scientific in Childe's eyes was the wealth of contextual information and technical detail contained therein.<sup>(3)</sup>

To the modern reader, however, these long and elaborate descriptions fall short of the standards required by the scientific method. The approach is on the whole highly intuitive, there being no standardized method of describing individual items, classes of items or indeed cultures. Furthermore the text abounds with terms such as 'typical' or 'characteristic' which today would require a more precise definition. Neither are the visual aids, which are few and far between, at all helpful, resembling bad artistic impressions rather than scientific illustrations.<sup>(4)</sup>

In the long term, what was more important than the individual descriptions of specific cultures, however, was the overall framework within which these were ordered. Indeed the pattern of prehistory advanced in The Dawn was

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(2) S. Piggott (1958a) 75.

(3) See above pp. 15, 16 where Childe differentiates his popular works from his scientific texts.

(4) Piggott, op. cit. 77; also Crawford, op. cit., 90 for a criticism of Childe's maps.



to become the standard framework for scholars for the next thirty years. Before going on to discuss the main structural elements in this pattern, however, it is essential to consider the overall objective of the text. In the preface Childe summed up his major theme as "the foundation of European civilization as a peculiar and individual manifestation of the human spirit."<sup>(5)</sup> As noted previously, he was a firm believer in progress and in his eyes modern western society represented the culmination of all past progressive attainment.

The material basis and spiritual context of modern life are the cumulative result of the achievements and discoveries of the past. . .

The monuments of early man are but insignificant bits of flint and stone, bronze and baked clay. Yet such fragments embody concretely the achievement of our spiritual ancestors. In such rude implements are revealed the pre-conditions of our gigantic engines and of the whole mechanical apparatus that constitutes the material basis of modern life. Progress is an indivisible whole in which the invention of a new way of hafting an axe formed a necessary prelude to the invention of the steam-engine or the aeroplane. In the first innovations the germs of all subsequent improvements were latent; and the first steps on the path of discovery were the hardest. Thus the achievements of our nameless fore-runners are in a real sense present in our cultural heritage today.<sup>(6)</sup>

From this passage it would seem that Childe's criterion of progress was basically technological. There are suggestions in the preface, however, that he placed primary value not so much on progressive technology in

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(5) Childe (1925a) xiii.

(6) Ibid. xiii-xv.

itself, but on the creative and inventive mind expressed therein. Above all he valued the qualities of "energy, independence and inventiveness" which in his eyes differentiated the modern European from Orientals and Africans.<sup>(7)</sup>

Childe saw his main task in The Dawn to trace the origins of the new "force", the growth of which he considered to have ultimately changed the face of the world,<sup>(8)</sup> and here he attempted to seek a reconciliation between two rival viewpoints.

On this topic sharply opposed views are current. One school maintains that Western Civilization only began in historic times after 1000 B.C. in a little corner of the Mediterranean and its true prehistory is not to be found in Europe but in the Ancient East. On the other hand, some of my colleagues would discover the origin of all the higher elements in human culture in Europe itself. I can subscribe to neither of these extreme views; the truth seems to me to lie in between them. <sup>(9)</sup>

As was pointed out in Chapter I, his original balance between the two schools lay in a synthesis of Oriental diffusion with the independent evolution of European culture. Childe postulated that there were two main phases in European prehistory after the Palaeolithic, in the first the development of European culture was determined by diffusion from the Orient, and in the second European culture developed along its own independent lines.<sup>(10)</sup> Childe argued that the original priority of the Orient over

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(7) Ibid., xiii, xiv.

(8) Ibid., xiv.

(9) Ibid., xiii.

(10) See above pp. 10, 11.

the Occident was due to favourable climatic conditions in the former area.

The effect of the glaciations of northern Europe must have been to produce in Africa and south-western Asia a moister and more temperate climate than prevails there today. While conditions in our Continent only permitted the sort of life still lived by Esquimoux, the contemporary inhabitants of North Africa and Western Asia enjoyed an environment eminently favourable to cultural progress . . .

It must then be admitted that true civilizations had grown up, and were well established in the Ancient East while Europe was still sunk in epipalaeolithic barbarism. The well-known identity between the earliest domestic animals and cultivated plants of Europe and Asia is a valid argument for the view that the gifts that distinguish the neolithic culture from the palaeolithic, came to Europe from the Ancient East. (11)

Childe considered the transition to the second phase to have occurred in the middle Bronze Age, and it was here that he saw the clearest manifestation of the genius of the prehistoric Europeans.

The true originality of our ancestors was displayed not in inventing what early climatic conditions had reserved for others, but in the manner in which they adapted and improved the inventions of the Orient. In this sense the early inhabitants of our continent were truly and remarkably creative and before the end of the second millennium had outstripped their masters and created an individual civilization of their own. But it was not the fruit of a miraculous birth, but the result of the diffusion and adaptation of the discoveries of the Orient and it is that which we must trace in this book. (12)

Since The Dawn was specifically concerned with the first phase in European prehistory, the main argument in

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(11) Ibid., 22, 23.

(12) Ibid., 23, 24.

the text is firmly Orientalist and diffusionist. Thus, if viewed out of context, it could quite easily give a false impression of his overall intellectual position at this time. Even when considering this phase, however, it is significant that Childe took pains to emphasise the contribution of the recipient cultures. Indeed on occasion this was stressed to a point which suggested a strong European bias.

We have seen that Minoan civilization was deeply indebted both to Mesopotamia and Egypt. Now I must insist that it was no mere copy of either, but an original and creative force. As such Crete stands out as essentially modern in outlook. The Minoan spirit was thoroughly European and in no sense oriental. A comparison with Egypt and Mesopotamia will make the contrast plain. We find in Crete none of those stupendous palaces that betoken the autocratic power of the oriental despot. Nor do gigantic temples and extravagant tombs like the Pyramids reveal an excessive pre-occupation with ghostly things. The consequences of this distinction are reflected in Minoan art. The Cretan artist was not limited to perpetuating the cruel deeds of a selfish despot nor doomed to formalism by the innate conservatism of priestly superstition. Hence the modern naturalism, the truly occidental feeling for life and nature that distinguish Minoan vase paintings, frescoes and intaglios. Beholding these charming scenes of games and processions, animals and fishes, flowers and trees we breathe already a European atmosphere. Likewise in industry the absence of the unlimited labour-power at the disposal of a despot necessitated a concentration on the invention and elaboration of tools and weapons that foreshadows the most distinctive feature of European civilization. (13)

The debate between the Orientalists and the Occidentalists was largely perpetuated by the absence of an absolute chronology for prehistoric Europe. At the time,

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(13) Ibid., 29.

the only method of estimating the dates of the culture sequences, established in Europe by stratigraphical and typological techniques, was to tie them in with the historically dated systems of the Near Eastern civilizations.<sup>(14)</sup> This was impossible, however, without making two important diffusionist assumptions. Firstly one had to assume that the cultural similarities existing between Europe and the East were the result of 'contact' between the two areas. Secondly one had to assume the direction of the contact. While both the Orientalists and the Occidentalists held the first assumption in common, they of course, differed radically as concerns the second and thus the chronological systems proposed by adherents of each school were significantly different. On the one hand, the Occidentalists stressed the antiquity of European prehistory, estimating dates of circa 3000 B.C. for the Neolithic in Spain and in north-west Germany, and on the other the Orientalists emphasised the priority of Near-Eastern civilization giving much later dates for Europe on the basis of contact from the East. A vicious circle thus arose, no one could validate either the Oriental or Occidental thesis by reference to a chronological system which was itself constructed upon diffusionist premises assuming the direction of the contact.

Childe's entire chronological structure for prehistoric Europe was based on the assumption of diffusion

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(14) Renfrew (1973) 28-47.

having occurred from the Orient to the Aegean and thence to continental Europe through three main channels of communication: (1) via Iberia and the Atlantic seaboard, (2) via the Balkans and the Danube and (3) via the amber routes over the Alps. Recently these have been authoritatively analysed by Professor Colin Renfrew who has shown that there are in fact serious difficulties in accepting Child's evidence for diffusion and the dating system established thereon.<sup>(15)</sup> Childe never fully examined the reasons for inferring 'contact' between the respective regions. Frequently diffusion was assumed on account of traits isolated from their cultural context. Furthermore the mechanics of the process were usually taken to be either invasion or migration on the assumption that the transference of a culture trait involved the bodily transference of the authors of that culture.

Childe believed that each of the three channels of communication between the Aegean and northern Europe had played a different role in contributing to European progress. Since the part played by the passage via the Alps was developed later in his work,<sup>(16)</sup> the following discussion will concern only the first two.

In the first edition of The Dawn Childe's main emphasis was on the link between the Aegean and the Iberian peninsula. At the time this was a major bone of contention

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(15) Ibid. especially Chapter VI, 109-119.

(16) I.e. in The Prehistory of European Society (1958).

between the Occidental and Oriental schools. While the former saw the development of Iberian culture wholly in insular terms, the latter sought an explanation for important turning-points in this development by reference to Oriental influence.

One of the major issues in the debate concerned the origin of megalithic architecture on the peninsula.<sup>(17)</sup> At the time, this was an important question not only for the internal development of Iberian culture but for the prehistory of Europe as a whole, since the extensive distribution of megalithic architecture was generally considered to be the result of diffusion from a single centre. Where the two schools disagreed was on the question of the location of this presumed centre. While the Occidentalists proposed an Iberian origin, the Orientalists favoured an Egyptian one. The former argued that the dolmen was the local invention of the Mesolithic inhabitants of Spain, being in effect an artificial cave and thus an extension of Palaeolithic and Mesolithic burial practices. The latter, however, sought the proto-type of the megalithic in the Egyptian mastaba, seeing here a rational explanation of many of the features of megalithic sepulchres. In this context they attributed the wide distribution of megaliths to the religious practices of Egyptian prospectors in search of gold.<sup>(18)</sup>

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(17) Childe (1925a) 129-137.

(18) Ibid., 132.

For Childe there were serious difficulties in both arguments. He did not like the fact that the Orientalists had to change Montelius's classic typological series of megalithic monuments. Instead of postulating a simple linear development from dolmen through passage and gallery graves to megalithic cist, the latter viewed both the dolmen and megalithic cist as degenerate forms.<sup>(19)</sup> Secondly he was not altogether happy with the prospector hypothesis since no valuable metal had in fact been discovered in megalithic tombs. But he was even less convinced by the Occidental argument. While he was fairly sympathetic to the idea of some continuity between Palaeolithic and Neolithic burial practices, he was unwilling to derive Aegean and Egyptian burial practices from the West. "It would be absurd to argue that the Western barbarians taught the Egyptians and Cretans the cult of the dead."<sup>(20)</sup>

Here Childe again attempted to balance the two viewpoints. While he accepted the Oriental initiative he was not unappreciative of the Occidental contribution. At first he envisaged the initial diffusion of the idea of the dolmen.

Perhaps early voyagers did in fact originally introduce the idea of the dolmen to the West. But their conceptions of the future life were not wholly strange to those of the aborigines. The latter then may have adopted the new idea together with some arts such as the polishing of stone and navigation and have spread it in a barbarized version throughout the western world.

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- (19) Ibid., 131.  
(20) Ibid., 133.  
(21) Ibid., 133, 134.





At a later date, however, he postulated the arrival of actual colonists, 'traders' rather than 'prospectors' from the eastern Mediterranean bringing with them the corbelled vault and metallurgy. "Thus there arose in the Iberian peninsula a veritable counterpart of the maritime civilization of the Aegean, albeit infused with original elements."<sup>(22)</sup>

Childe did not, however, consider that these megalithic builders had made any significant contribution to further progress in Europe.

The great civilization of Los Millares in Spain like that of the Arabs later on, succumbed to a process of slow degradation. Perhaps it was too oriental to survive on Western soil. The megalith-builders of the Atlantic, despite their stupendous monuments, played on the actual evidence derived from the monuments themselves, a much smaller role than recent writers have attributed to them. (23)

In the second edition of The Dawn they were thus relegated to a position of secondary import and the major emphasis shifted from the Aegean-Iberian seaway to the "Danubian thoroughfare".<sup>(24)</sup> Childe held the culture of the Danubian peasants to be one of the most progressive in European pre-history. In his own words the Danubians "created a civilization whence pulsed the life blood of progress throughout the greater part of our continent".<sup>(25)</sup>

The origin of the Danubian culture was again another important point of controversy between the Oriental and

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(22) Ibid., 137.

(23) Ibid., 302.

(24) Childe's term, see Childe (1927b).

(25) Childe (1925a) 171.

Occidental schools.<sup>(26)</sup> Schliz had ascribed the Danubian culture to the immigration of Cro-Magnons from the West, Kossinna to the descendants of the Ertebolle folk from north-west Germany. Vassits on the other hand looked to Troy. Childe, while not specifying direct immigration from Troy did support a Mediterranean origin.

In a general way the Danubian culture has Mediterranean affinities. The Spondylus shells point in that direction; figurines are common in the Mediterranean basin; the spiral though at home in the Danube, subsequently flourished in the Aegean; the occurrence of shoe-last celts in Thessaly I may be significant. The scanty anthropometric data could be interpreted as supporting a Mediterranean origin. A skull from the lowest stratum at Vinca was long headed. Schliz' study of the skeletons found with spiral-meander pottery in Silesia, Bohemia, Saxony and in the Rhine valley revealed a short, moderately doliocephalic race. He even admits a certain resemblance to the skulls of Sergi's Mediterraneans, but declares there are important differences and ultimately claims the Danubians for a branch of the Nordic race. Finally the grains from Danubian II settlements (none certainly belonging to the first period have been studied) belong to species which are common in the Mediterranean basin. (27)

Whereas Childe saw the vilizing influence of the sea-voyagers ending in stagnation, he considered the Danubians to have made important contributions to European progress. In outlining the reasons for this Childe was careful to balance the Oriental and Occidental elements in the creation of the new European cultures. At the same time he referred to the incursion of nomads into the Danubian province,

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(26) Ibid., 175, 176.

(27) Ibid., 176.

considering these to have prevented cultural stagnation in the north and to have introduced bronze metallurgy into Hungary.

The cultural province whose fortunes have just been sketched turns out to be the pivot of civilization in Europe. The Danubian I peasants in their gradual expansion carried with them the domestic animals and cultivated plants and diffused the 'neolithic arts' among their western neighbours. The incursion of nomads prevented stagnation in the north and introduced the Hungarians to the metal tools and weapons invented long before by the Sumerians. Then the beaker folk linked the Danube commercially with the Aegean and Trojan metallurgy discovered the tin of Bohemia. Out of these impulses arose the Aunjetitz culture upon which both the Nordic and Hungarian bronze ages are based. Finally the Danubians in the Hungarian plain inspired by Bohemian and Mycenaean models created out of their own copper culture a Central European civilization that could vindicate its independence of the Mediterranean by force of arms. (28)

In The Dawn Childe argued that the nomads who invaded the Danubian province were derived from a vast complex of Battle-axe cultures spreading from south-east Russia to north-west Germany.<sup>(29)</sup> And here he represented them as vehicles for Mesopotamian influence reaching the Danubian province via the great European plain.<sup>(30)</sup>

Aside from this brief outline however, Childe was not concerned to explain in depth why the Danubian cultures should have progressed while their Iberian counterparts declined. At this time he did not believe that the problem of progress in Europe could be answered by archaeology alone, but only by archaeology working together with

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(28) Ibid., 201.

(29) Idem.

(30) Idem.

philology.<sup>(31)</sup> Consequently he deferred consideration of the problem until The Aryans, published in the following year where he examined the philological and archaeological data in some detail.

Since Childe's interest in philology is not well known, it is important to be reminded of the special place which it held in his work. Indeed it can now be seen as a significant formative influence on his thought, providing him with the initial motivation to enter prehistory.<sup>(32)</sup> In the twenties Childe's special interest in south-eastern European archaeology was unusual among British prehistorians who, on the whole, tended to concentrate on their more immediate environment. Childe sometimes explained his deviation from the norm as a result of his being an Australian, but in "Retrospect" he makes it very clear that his initial interest in the area had been a philological one, since it was here that he expected to discover the original homelands of the Indo-Europeans.<sup>(33)</sup>

By the nineteen twenties, however, the Aryan question was no longer a purely philological one but had acquired a strong racialist component. The original Aryan was popularly depicted as a tall dolichocephalic man with fair hair and blue eyes. Moreover this grouping was widely acclaimed as the highest and most noble of all the human

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(31) See below pp 62, 63.

(32) Childe (1958a) 69.

(33) Idem.

racess. The doctrine of the superiority of the Aryan race had a profound effect on all western thought in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>(34)</sup> It was best received however, in Germany where it was popularised through the works of such writers as Arthur de Gobineau and Houston Chamberlain. Here it was to become one of the theoretical foundations of Hitlerism.

History has shown with terrible clarity that each time Aryan blood has become mixed with inferior peoples the result has been the end of the culture sustaining race . . . All that we admire on this earth - science, art, technical skills and invention - is the creative product of only a small number of nations, and originally, perhaps of one single race. All this culture depends on them for its very existence. If these nations are ruined they carry with them all the beauty of this earth into the grave . . .

All great cultures of the past have gone on to destruction because the original creative race died of blood poisoning. Always it has been the same thing - the final cause for such destruction came from the error that all culture is independent of man, when just the opposite is true - creative man must guard his own culture.

This point of view is bound up with the iron law of necessity and the law of victory for the best and the strongest. Who wants to live also must fight, and he who does not want to fight in this world does not deserve to live . . . The man who knows the laws of race and pays no attention to them . . . hinders the triumph of the best races as well as all human progress. He joins the sphere . . . of helpless beasts . . .

If mankind were to be divided into three categories, founders, maintainers and destroyers of culture, the

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(34) For the history of the Aryan myth see L. Snyder (1939) and idem (1962), also L. Poliakov (1974). For a survey of the role of racist theory and philology in archaeology see Daniel (1962) 102 ff.

Aryan stock alone would represent the first category of founders. From them come the fundamentals of all human creative effort. (35)

Childe was aware of these developments and warned of the dangers of the misapplication of the Aryan thesis in modern politics.

The apotheosis of the Nordics has become linked with policies of imperialism and world domination: the word 'Aryan' has become the watchword of dangerous factions and especially of the more brutal and blatant forms of anti-Semitism. Indeed the neglect and discredit into which the study of Indo-European philology has fallen in England are very largely attributable to a legitimate reaction against the extravagancies of Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and his ilk, and the gravest objection to the word Aryan is its association with pogroms. (36)

The Aryans was largely devoted to tracing the first appearance of the Indo-Europeans in history and to reviewing the various hypotheses concerning their original homeland. Here Childe enlisted the aid of linguistic palaeontology which attempts to reconstruct the original form of the mother tongue from a comparison of known words among the Indo-European languages. This in turn provides an opportunity to reconstruct the original environment of the first Indo-European speakers. The method of linguistic palaeontology, however, is beset with problems, one of the major being the chronological co-ordination of one trait with another. Furthermore the general distribution of these constructed traits has proven to be so wide as to

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(35) Hitler cited in Snyder (1962) 155-7.

(36) Childe (1926a) 164.

accommodate several conflicting theories.<sup>(37)</sup>

After reviewing the arguments for an Asiatic, central European, north European and south Russian homeland, Childe tentatively identified the latter as the most probable centre of origin for the first Indo-Europeans.<sup>(38)</sup> Like Kossinna, whom he considered his chief opponent in the field, Childe equated the vast complex of Battle-axe cultures, spreading from north-west Germany across eastern and central Europe to the south Russian steppes, with the original Indo-Europeans. Childe, however, vehemently opposed his opponent's thesis of a north-west European homeland for the authors of the Battle-axe cultures and argued instead for the priority of the south Russian area. While Kossinna envisaged diffusion from the Jutland region throughout Europe and into south Russia and beyond by bands of warrior pastoralists and cultivators, Childe reversed the direction of these invasions seeing the Jutland culture as the result of migration from the south-east.

Interestingly, both viewpoints relied to a large extent upon archaeological data since the clues afforded by linguistic palaeontology were either so general that they accommodated both centres without much difficulty, or they were so hypothetical that they could be easily ignored if unsuitable. The German school in particular was so convinced of the validity of the archaeological case for a northern origin that they tended to make minimal use

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(37) J. Mallory (1976) 44-56.

(38) Childe op. cit. 183-204.

of linguistic data. Basically their main argument was that the Nordic Battle-axe culture could be satisfactorily explained as the result of an indigenous evolutionary process in north-west Germany.<sup>(39)</sup> After the recession of the ice-cap at the end of the last glaciation circa 10,000 B.C. the area of the Baltic depression became occupied by descendants of palaeolithic reindeer hunters. On the shores of the numerous lakes throughout the region these hunters created a vigorous hunting-fishing economy with a highly developed bone and flint industries (Maglemosian). Kossinna regarded these as the ancestors of both the Indo-Europeans and the Finns, supposing that they spoke an agglutinative tongue from which Indo-European and Finno-Ugrian later evolved. About 6,000 B.C. the climate in Europe became warmer resulting in the further retreat of the ice-cap and the subsequent filling up of the Baltic depression by salt water. While the more conservative of the hunter-fishers (The Finns) spread to the north and east in order to retain a lifestyle based on a fresh water economy, the more adaptable took advantage of the new environmental conditions and created the famous Ertebolle culture. About 4,500 B.C. these people went on to domesticate plants and animals, invent pottery and polished stone axes. Kossinna then envisaged a southward migration which was to account for the basic division of the Indo-European group into 'satem' and 'centum' languages. Those who were to

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(39) Ibid., 164-168.



pronounce 'k' as 's' went south and created the Danubian civilization. In Hungary they discovered and began to exploit local copper ores, casting their distinctive battle-axes. Meanwhile the section left on the Baltic learned the art of dolmen building which had been transmitted to Scandinavia via Ireland from Spain. Then, there began a phase of rapid development in the arts and of further expansion in all directions. Although Kossinna's main argument relied heavily on archaeological data, it should be noted that he also attempted to draw anthropological support for his thesis. At a time when race and language were seen to equate, this was standard practice. Kossinna thus sought in the prehistoric remains of ancient Germany for tall dolichocephalic skeletons, the forerunners of the modern Nordic type.

Childe challenged both the anthropological and archaeological evidence for Kossinna's thesis. Firstly, he argued that the skeletal evidence from northern Germany was not securely dated, nor did it reveal a pure dolichocephalic type.

In the sphere of ethnology, the bases of the theory are not so stable as might be wished. The skulls on which Kossinna relies to prove the Nordic character of his Maglemose-Dobbertin folk are by no means certainly dated; in any case the Nordic race can scarcely be derived from the western Cro-Magnon stock, but had eastern or Central European antecedents. It can nevertheless be regarded as generally probable that a sort of proto-Nordic element was present in the North in the days of the Maglemose culture and of the later kitchen-middens, as it had been in the last phase of the Old Stone Age in South Germany. On the other hand the bodies interred

in the early dolmens, as Kossinna himself points out, belonged according to Kan Fürst to individuals who, although dolichocephalic, were short of stature, i.e. to members of that same Eurafri-can race which built the other dolmens in Western Europe and the long barrows in Britain. (40)

In common with the majority of his contemporaries Childe agreed that the original Aryans belonged to the Nordic race as characterised in northern Europe today.<sup>(41)</sup> As the racialist ideals of the Third Reich began to be realised, however, Childe was to seek a more precise definition of the relationship between linguistic and racial groupings.<sup>(42)</sup> In addition, Childe argued that there were important elements in the culture of north-west Germany which could not be explained as the results of internal development, but on the contrary could only be regarded as intrusive. In particular he was referring to the battle-axe which both he and Kossinna saw as the characteristic symbol of Aryan culture. In contrast to the simplicity of Kossinna's thesis of internal development from palaeolithic antler horns, Childe's argument for a south Russian origin for the battle-axe is long and tortuous involving a number of unsubstantiated assumptions.

Childe maintained that the German stone battle-axes were in fact imitations of the copper axe-adze of which there were frequent examples in Hungary. These in turn he explained by assuming that they were amalgamations of two Mesopotamian axes, one with the blade paralled to the

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(40) Ibid., 179.

(41) Ibid., 159-164.

(42) Childe (1942a) 176.

shaft and the other with the blade of right angles to the shaft. On this basis he inferred that the development of the axe-adze could be most satisfactorily explained as occurring in the South Russian steppes since this area had possible contacts with Mesopotamia in the third millenium. As he himself admitted, however, this hypothetical typological series could not be used as proof until validated in the archaeological record.<sup>(43)</sup>

In The Aryans as in The Dawn Childe was ultimately searching for an explanation of the foundations of modern western civilization. Now, however, since the data base had been extended to include philological as well as archaeological sources, the overall argument is much more comprehensive than was previously attempted. Basically, Childe emphasised that man's social evolution is closely related to his intellectual development which is in turn influenced by his language.

Man's progress from savagery to civilization is intimately bound up with the advance of abstract thinking, which enables him to rise above the chaos of particular sensations and fashion therefrom an ordered cosmos. The growth of reasoning in its turn goes hand in hand with the development of language . . . Words are the very stuff of thought . . . Moreover, intellectual progress may to a large extent be measured by the refinement of language. (44)

Consequently, he did not consider that the problem of progress in Europe could be tackled by archaeology alone,

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(43) Childe (1926a) 190.

(44) Ibid., 3.

but by archaeology working in conjunction with philology.

Favourable climatic conditions, peculiar natural resources, a happy conjuncture of trade routes do not suffice to explain this phenomenon; behind it lurks the true historic fact of personal initiative. That archaeology cannot grasp, indeed the concrete person lies beyond the sphere of prehistory. But an approximation thereto in terms of racial individuality is attainable with the aid of philology. Language, albeit an abstraction, is yet a more subtle and pervasive criterion of individuality than the culture-group formed by comparing flints and potsherds or the "races" of the skull-measurer. And it is precisely in Europe, where the critical point of cultural evolution lies enshrouded in the gloom of the prehistoric period, that the linguistic principles just enunciated are most readily applicable . . . It is perhaps then not overbold to hope that a collaboration between the two prehistoric disciplines of philology and archaeology, at least in this modest domain, may help to solve certain problems that either science alone is powerless to resolve. (45)

The main argument in the text, however, is clearly a philological one, the role of archaeology being to supplement and clarify individual points. For Childe the clue to progress in Europe lay in the Indo-European languages spoken by our ancestors. Not only did he consider these languages to be particularly fine vehicles of thought, but he also emphasised that they reflected the high intellectual development of the Indo-Europeans.

The Indo-European languages and their assumed parent-speech have been throughout exceptionally delicate and flexible instruments of thought. They were almost unique, for instance, in possessing a substantive verb and at least a rudimentary machinery for building subordinate clauses that might express conceptual relations in a chain of ratiocination. It follows then

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(45) Ibid., 4, 5.

that the Aryans must have been gifted with exceptional mental endowments, if not in enjoyment of a high material culture. This is more than mere inference. It is no accident that the first great advances towards abstract natural science were made by the Aryan Greeks and the Hindus, not by the Babylonians or the Egyptians, despite their great material resources and their surprising progress in techniques - in astronomical observation for example. In the moralization of religion too Aryans have played a prominent role. The first great religions which addressed their appeal to all men irrespective of race or nationality, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism, were the works of Aryans, propagated in Aryan speech. . . Nor were the potentialities of Aryan speech solely intellectual. Poetry in which a fixed metrical structure combines with sweet sounding words to embody beautiful ideas seems peculiarly Aryan. (46)

In assessing what he saw as the positive contribution of the Aryans to world progress, Child considered that it was in continental Europe where their role as "founders of Western Civilization" was most evident.<sup>(47)</sup> Here, as in The Dawn he contrasted their achievement with that of the megalithic builders where he saw "not a vestige of progress".<sup>(48)</sup>

It seems as if these people were wholly absorbed in the cult of the dead and as if superstitious observances monopolized and paralysed all their activities. Complete stagnation ruled in industry, and to find parallels to their culture we have only to visit the Pacific Islands which have been exposed to a similar influence. (49)

In Britain he traced the first signs of progress to the Battle-axe invaders whom he saw as Aryan.

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(46) Ibid., 4, 5.

(47) Ibid., 209, 210.

(48) Ibid., 210.

(49) Idem.

The rich and varied furniture of the intruders' round barrows is in striking contrast to the monotonous poverty of the grave goods from the older long barrows. We know now that the battle-axe wielders were admixed with Aryans, and the truly Western civilization which henceforth ruled in Britain was obviously promoted by them. (50)

Again in Scandinavia, he attributed the rise of a creative and original culture primarily to Aryan influence.

In Scandinavia the contrast to France and the Iberian peninsula is even more fundamental. Here, too, men built megalithic graves, but their furniture here is totally different to anything discoverable further west. And besides the megalithic tombs were other graves covering the remains of a people, who, whether they came from South Russia or represented a section of the pre-dolmenic population, were, we believe, Aryan in character. It was these who inspired the higher developments even in the megalithic culture of the north. The interaction of the two types of civilization was the mainspring of a rapid progress. And ultimately the division was overcome; the Aryans imposed their authority and their culture - partly, if you will, a borrowed culture - on the whole region, welded the disparate racial groups and the scattered clans into a national unity in which western and eastern ideas were blended to an European whole and called forth a progressive society no less brilliant in trade than in war. The gulf between French and Scandinavian culture at the beginning of the II<sup>nd</sup> millenium is enormous. The superiority of the former is the measure of the contribution made by the Aryan element to European civilization. (51)

In the Danubian province, while he did not associate the initial appearance of the Aryans with an immediate rise in culture standard, he did nevertheless argue that the subsequent development of a highly original culture was primarily due to their influence.

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(50) Idem.

(51) Ibid., 210, 211.

Just where the Nordic invasions had been the most persistent we find a Bronze Age art and industry which are truly European in their originality. The ferment which transmuted the societies of agricultural clans into the heroic tribes of the Bronze and Iron Ages, thus opening the way to initiative and individuality, we regard as Aryan.

Thus the Aryans do appear everywhere as promoters of true progress and in Europe their expansion marks the moment when the prehistory of our continent begins to diverge from that of Africa or the Pacific. (52)

In The Dawn Childe had distinguished within the European Bronze Age the 'germs' of the new 'force' which was, in his eyes, to culminate in modern civilization. While he had attributed this to a fusion of Occidental and Oriental culture in which Battle-axe invaders from South Russia played a significant role, he had not been fully explicit as regards the nature of this role.<sup>(53)</sup> In The Aryans however, the reasons for their importance became clear. It is not only because they were the vehicles of Mesopotamian influence,<sup>(54)</sup> but also because they possessed a highly flexible and delicate linguistic structure, which according to Childe, was a necessary prerequisite of progress.

Childe was careful to point out that his was not a racialist explanation of progress but a philological one.

How precisely did the Aryans achieve all this? It was not through the superiority of their material culture. We have rejected the idea that a peculiar genius resided in the conforma-

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(52) Ibid., 211.

(53) Childe (1925a) 302, 303.

(54) See above p. 54.

tion of Nordic skulls. We do so with all the more confidence that, by the time Aryan genius found its true expression in Greece and Rome, the pure Nordic strain had been for the most absorbed in the Mediterranean substratum: the lasting gift bequeathed by Aryans to the conquered peoples was neither a higher material culture nor a superior physique but . . . a more excellent language and the mentality it generated. (55)

At the same time, however, he did not consider the assumed physical characteristics of the original Aryans to be entirely irrelevant.

The fact that the first Aryans were Nordics was not without importance. The physical qualities of that stock did enable them by the bare fact of superior strength to conquer even more advanced peoples and so to impose their language on areas from which their bodily type has almost completely vanished. This is the truth underlying the panegyrics of the Germanists: the Nordics' superiority in physique fitted them to be the vehicles of a superior language. (56)

In his later work, Childe was to make no reference to this early explanation of progress in Bronze Age Europe. Indeed during the thirties and forties, because he chose to deny the progressive quality of European prehistory, he effectively shelved the problem.

In "Retrospect" he attributed the strengthening of the Orientalist position not so much to the inherent merits of the Orientalist stance, but to his revulsion from an Occidental thesis which he saw as providing ideological support for Nazism.<sup>(57)</sup> While he does not comment on his

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(55) Childe (1926a) 211, 212.

(56) Ibid., 212.

(57) Childe (1958a) 72.



position as regards the Aryan question at this time, it is clear from his writings during the thirties and forties that he was bitterly opposed to the use of the Aryan thesis to validate the persecution of 'non-Aryan races'.

It was not until the mid-fifties that Childe again began to appreciate the creative quality of the European Bronze Age. By this time, however, he attempted to explain this phenomenon purely in terms of sociological and historical inferences made from the archaeological record and without reference to the role of the notorious Aryans. This development will be discussed later in the chapter.<sup>(58)</sup> Firstly, it is necessary to look at his work on the Oriental sequences if a full appreciation of his synthesis is to be gained.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, what Childe regarded as the first scientific excavations in the Orient were just beginning, and their results known only from brief reports in the Antiquaries Journal, The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society or The Illustrated London News.<sup>(59)</sup> In particular, the excavation of the forgotten Indus civilization, the sensational discoveries in the Royal tombs at Ur and the excavation of

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(58) See below, p. 92 ff.

(59) Childe (1958a) 71.

the neolithic settlements at Badari had greatly extended the nineteenth-century picture of the ancient East.<sup>(60)</sup>

Childe's basic contribution in this context was to incorporate the fresh data into an overall scheme of the development of Oriental civilization. In The Most Ancient East published in 1928, he presented a survey of the rise of civilization in Egypt, Mesopotamia and India, from the earliest farmers until circa three thousand B.C.

In Egypt his account begins with a description of the finds from El Badari, newly excavated by Guy Brunton and Caton-Thompson. At the time this was considered to be the earliest neolithic culture yet discovered.<sup>(61)</sup> Thereafter followed a description of the first and second Predynastic cultures and finally an account of the rise of the dynasts. In Mesopotamia the material was discussed under three major headings; the First Prediluvian Culture, the Second Prediluvian Civilization and the Sumerian Civilization at the end of the IVth Millenium, each heading being indicative of a different cultural stage. In India, however, it was not yet possible to trace the development of the Indus civilization and he could thus only generalise on the mature stage.

In each of the three major centres surveyed, Childe was interested in: (1) presenting a broad description of

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(60) Childe (1928) xiii.

(61) For an outline of archaeological discoveries in the Orient see Daniel 1973, pp. 68-77, 132-145, 190-227.

the geographical context of the culture concerned, (2) indicating the general socio-economic level attained by the culture (in other words to make inferences as to economy, social organization etc.), (3) outlining the main archaeological types i.e. bone, ceramics, ivory, flint etc., and (4) attempting to elucidate the origin of the culture.

These accounts, like their counterparts in The Dawn, were largely intuitive and followed no set pattern of approach. Each of the four main areas indicated above were thus not discussed in any particular order, the question of origins for example might occupy the first or last (or indeed both) positions in any one account; important inferences concerning the economy, sociology or ideology were frequently juxtaposed between detailed descriptions of particular items.

In the first edition of The Most Ancient East, Childe reserved the final chapter for a consideration of the relationship between the Orient and Europe. Only sixteen pages long, this is perhaps the most significant section in the book in terms of the overall development of his thought. Not only does it contain the essence of his argument in favour of the priority of Oriental invention but it also includes the germs of much of his subsequent work on food production and metallurgy. Childe opened the chapter with an affirmation of the antiquity of Oriental civilization. Fairly rapidly however, this

develops into an assertion of the Orient's priority over European culture.

In the preceding pages I have tried to conjure up a picture of the Oriental world prior to 3,000 B.C. The first salient feature in the picture is the hoary antiquity of the civilization in the region under review. By the end of the IVth millenium the material culture of Abydos, Ur or Mohenjo Daro would stand comparison with that of Periclean Athens, or of any medieval town. Metallurgy, rightly taken by historians as marking an epoch in human progress, had certainly been practised intelligibly even a thousand years earlier. In no part of Europe outside Crete was metal demonstrably in use before the third millenium, and its general employment on a scale comparable to that exemplified in Susa I dates only from the second. The stage of higher barbarism represented at Badari and in Fayum must, on the most modest reckoning, have been reached in the sixth millenium before our era. In the whole of Europe we can attribute to such remote antiquity not a single food-producing community outside Crete, unless perhaps the disgusting savages who left the shell-mounds on the shore of the Littorina Sea cultivated a little barley . . .

The Orient's claim to the origination of all the primary inventions is thus beyond dispute, once the diffusionist postulate be accepted. (62)

From this point, Childe went on to attempt to prove the validity of the diffusionist hypothesis by reference to the continuity in the cultural tradition of the Orient, and between the Orient and Europe.

But the accuracy of the postulate is guaranteed by the fundamental continuity that characterised the Oriental world no less than its antiquity. And the same threads that held together the various centres of Oriental civilization can be shown to bind thereto the European barbarisms of prehistory.

This continuity is not just an abstract identity. The foundations of life are not just agriculture

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(62) Childe (1928) 220, 221.

and stock raising but the cultivation of cereals and the breeding of cattle, sheep and swine . . .

Archaeology affords positive proof of the continuity of tradition in metallurgy. In ancient mines in Sinai, the Caucasus, the Austrian Alps, Spain and Cornwall, the hammers used for breaking the ore all consist of a grooved stone, lashed into the fork of a stick by thongs, fitting in the groove. The generic similarity of the oldest tools and weapons is still better known. (63)

Childe's attempt to confirm his Orientalist stance without any explicit reference to the problem of chronology, however, was not wholly successful. Without an absolute time scale for prehistoric Europe, neither the priority of Oriental invention nor the diffusionist postulate can be fully accepted. This is clear enough in the former case which is obviously a chronological question involving a comparison in time, but it is also true as concerns the latter. Before cultural similarities can be accepted as proof of diffusion they need to be chronologically tested in order to show a continuity in time as well as in space.

Childe never seriously considered the possibility of the independent evolution of European culture before the Bronze Age, and his application of the diffusionist paradigm to this stage in prehistory is evident throughout. It is perhaps most apparent in his search for primary centres of innovation - standard diffusionist practice based on the assumption that all major inventions occurred only once and [from] thence spread to the rest of the world.

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(63) Ibid., 221, 225.

Childe insisted for example, that a primary centre of food production was "more than just a methodological postulate"<sup>(64)</sup> even although at the time he could not support this claim from the archaeological record. He continues,

It would at least be absurd to suggest that men began cultivating plants whose range in nature is quite limited like wheat and barley, at several independent centres in that circumscribed region. It would be hardly less fantastic to assume that domestication of cattle, sheep and swine happened more than once. The common traits of what is not very happily termed the "neolithic culture" are too numerous to deny some unity behind it. (65)

In The Most Ancient East Childe advanced several reasons for the diffusion of agriculture from the Orient, all of which he was to uphold throughout his entire career. Firstly, he argued that the primitive methods of agriculture would inevitably lead to soil exhaustion and the necessary migration of the community in search of new land. Secondly, he saw smaller communities breaking off from the mother community because of internal disagreement and thirdly, he envisaged the conversion of food gatherers into food producers during lean years.

At the same time, he also outlined his argument for the diffusion of civilization. Basically he saw this as a necessary function of the Orient's demand for raw material, in particular for the bronze industry, arguing that this led not only to cultural stimulation in supply areas but also to the migration of craftsmen. In the

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(64) Ibid., 228.

(65) Idem.

following years Childe was to go into the economic and sociological implications of metallurgy in more depth and this in turn was to result in a more detailed analysis of the mechanisms of diffusion involved in the spread of civilization.

The first step came with the publication of The Bronze Age in 1930, a work which like The Dawn was an archaeological synthesis of a period in European prehistory. The field covered, however, is much narrower being focused on the Bronze Age in western Europe and in central Europe north of the Alps. Also the format is quite different, in addition to general summaries of cultural groupings, the text contains large descriptive chapters devoted specifically to Bronze Age typology.

In the first chapter which contained the major theoretical discussion, Childe introduced two important points referring to the economic and sociological implications of metallurgy. Firstly he argued that the effective working of the metallurgical process involved industrial specialization and thus the freeing of certain members of the community from active involvement in the food quest. Secondly, on the assumption that bronze was the first indispensable article of trade (in contrast to luxury goods) he argued that bronze working required the loss of neolithic self-sufficiency.<sup>(66)</sup>

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(66) Childe (1930a) Chapter I esp. pp. 1-12.

This work heralds a significant change in Childe's attitude towards European prehistory. Whereas previously he had stressed the positive aspects of the recipient cultures in contributing to the development of European prehistory, now he paints a very negative picture.

In our period it is not possible to point to a single vital contribution to material culture originating in Europe outside the Aegean area.

And, if it be argued that this poverty in material culture was counter-balanced by an inherent spiritual superiority, we can point to the cannibal feasts of the Knoviz peoples and the human sacrifices depicted on the Kivik tombstone. Certainly Bronze Age burials suggest a monogamous family and a high status for women. But, after all, few Orientals could actually afford a harem, and the queens of Egypt were buried with sufficient pomp. It would be just silly to say that Scandinavian decorative art was superior to Babylonian or Minoan. And no-one in their senses will compare the Swedish rock-carvings with even a poor Egyptian bas relief or the Trondholm horse with a Sumerian bull of circa 3000 B.C. (67)

Nevertheless he still assumed a direct cultural link between Bronze Age and modern Europe. However whereas previously he had taken the nature of this link to be self evident, now he is more specific as to its form.

The roots of modern civilization were struck down deep into this unpromising soil. The general economic and social structure that may be inferred from the late Bronze Age remains persisted with surprisingly few modifications throughout the Roman Period in many parts of the Empire. The native houses and fields of the Roman Britain did not differ essentially from those of the latest Bronze Age. And after all the direct ancestors of the Romans themselves had been just an Urnfield folk comparable to the inhabitants of the Lausitz and Alpine slopes. Even in Britain many elements of pure Bronze Age culture survived

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(67) Ibid., 238.-239.



unchanged by subsequent migrations and invasions till late in last century. For example, travellers describe huts and a foot-plough, exactly like these known directly or inferred in Bronze Age Britain, as still current in the Hebrides. Despite the upheavals of the Early Iron Age and the Migration Period one is inclined to believe in a considerable continuity both in blood and tradition between the Bronze Age and the modern populations. (68)

With his new analysis of bronze working Childe felt himself to be committed to an economic interpretation of archaeological data.<sup>(69)</sup> During the thirties and forties he was to explore and define the potential of this approach to the past. The next step came with the rewriting of The Most Ancient East in 1934, which was necessitated by the fastly increasing rate of discovery in this field.

Obliged by unexpected new discoveries to rewrite The Most Ancient East, I not only read excavation reports but visited Mesopotamia and India. I saw how the beginnings of literacy in three great river valleys coincided with the erection of the first monumental tombs and temples and the aggregation of the population into regular cities. Indeed at Ur and Erech I saw how rustic villages had grown into vast townships just as English villages had grown into manufacturing towns. Now the latter transfiguration was familiarly attributed to an 'industrial revolution'. Demographically the birth of literacy in the Ancient East also corresponded to a revolution, the Urban Revolution. The upward kink in the population graph, deduced from monuments, must be due at least partly to the emergence in addition to the farmers, of a new order of professionals who did not grow or catch their own food. . . . But if the Urban Revolution had added an order of professionals to the farmers, the latter were themselves offspring of a revolution. The adoption of food-production must have been, and from the available data, had been, followed by a still greater expansion of population than on the foregoing analogy would amply justify the term

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(68) Ibid., 239.

(69) Childe (1958a) 71.

'Neolithic Revolution'. So in New Light on the Most Ancient East, despite the occasional invocation of undocumented events in the wings, a truly historical pageant of economic development was presented on the stage. (70)

In the final chapter, now entitled "The Mechanism of Diffusion", Childe integrated his new economic interpretation of the urban revolution with his Orientalist hypothesis. Here he argued that the economic and sociological processes of urbanism accelerated the diffusion of civilization from the Orient to Europe. In particular he was referring to three main processes, population increase, trade and war.

As in the Industrial Revolution of Britain the new means of livelihood thus made available would result in a multiplication of the proletariat. At such times the population is likely to outgrow the demand for labour and to resort to emigration. The expansion alone would accelerate the processes of diffusion.

Much more profoundly would the new demand for raw materials affect the pace and the very mechanisms of diffusion. Egypt, Sumer, and the Indus cities were now clamouring for vast supplies of timber, building stones and ore, for spices and precious stones for the adornment and service of temples, tombs and public buildings, and for the equipment of artisans and soldiers. The new industrial cities must enter into closer relations with the world of peasant communities that had been created by the first revolution. (71)

Childe argued that these relations were not always friendly, and peaceful trade was often followed by military aggression. This in turn, however, provoked migration and the diffusion of civilization from the East to the West. In this context he described the origin of Minoan Civilization to refugees fleeing from Menes' conquest at the time

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(70) Ibid., 71.

(71) Childe (1934) 284-285.

of the unification of the Egyptian kingdom.<sup>(72)</sup>

It was not until 1936, in Man Makes Himself that Childe gave the first full account of his new economic ideas, and here he emphasised his debt to Marxism.

Marx insisted on the prime importance of economic conditions, of the social forces of production, and of the applications of science as factors in historical change. His realist conception of history is gaining acceptance in academic circles remote from the party passions inflamed by other aspects of Marxism. To the general public and to scholars alike, history is tending to become cultural history, greatly to the annoyance of Fascists like Dr Frick.

This sort of history can naturally be linked up with what is termed prehistory. The archaeologist collects, classifies, and compares the tools and weapons of our ancestors and forerunners, examines the houses they built, the fields they tilled, the food they ate, (or rather discarded). These are the tools and instruments of production, characteristic of economic systems that no written documents describe. (73)

Childe applied this model to the archaeological sequences in the ancient Orient which were interpreted as documenting the development of man from his first emergence on the planet to a civilized state. This was seen as a steady upward process in which man progressively increased his control over non human nature. Indeed one of the major aims of the book was to justify a belief in progress from a scientific standpoint and in the face of world war and depression. Here it is interesting that as well as providing him with a model of socio-cultural change, Marxism also suggested to Childe a means of explaining stagnation

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(72) Ibid., 288.

(73) Childe (1936a) 7.

in the Orient after the inception of urbanism. Until now Childe had been primarily concerned to explain culture progress in Europe and had neglected the equally important question of decline in the Orient, essential to an overall understanding of change. Very briefly, Childe argued that the accumulation of surplus necessary for the inception of urbanism, had resulted in a division of society into classes, a ruling class of kings, priests and officials and a lower class of peasants and manual labourers. According to Childe, such a social structure was inconducive to further change.

One of the major effects of the class division in Childe's eyes was the separation of theoretical from practical knowledge. He argued that while the theoreticians, the kings, the priests etc., were members of the upper classes, the craftsmen, exponents of practical knowledge, were relegated to the lower classes. As a result the new learning of the upper classes was, "all too often fettered by subservience to superstition and divorced from the applied sciences that produced results."<sup>(74)</sup> Furthermore he maintained that the priestly class suppressed the motivation for further invention in the craftsmen, whom he considered to have been the pioneers of progress before the revolution.

Such rulers had few incentives to encourage invention. Many of the revolutionary steps in progress

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(74) Ibid., 262.

- the harnessing of animals' motive-power, the sail, metal tools - originally appeared as "labour saving devices". But the new rulers commanded almost unlimited reserves of labour recruited from subjects fired with superstitions faith and captives taken in war; they had no need to bother about labour saving inventions. (75)

The outcome was a society dominated by magic and superstition. This, he argued, prevented man from further progress through the understanding of nature by practical experimentation.

The pursuit of the vain hopes and illusory shortcuts suggested by magic and religion repeatedly deterred man from the harder road to the control of Nature by understanding. Magic seemed easier than science, just as torture is less trouble than the collection of evidence.

Magic and religion constituted the scaffolding needed to support the raising structure of social organization and of science. Unhappily the scaffolding repeatedly cramped the execution of the design and impeded the progress of the permanent building . . . The urban revolution, made possible by science, was exploited by superstition. (76)

Here it should be noted that Man Makes Himself constituted a radical departure from the texts hitherto published. The Dawn, The Most Ancient East and The Danube in Prehistory were first and foremost archaeological text books comprising fairly detailed syntheses of archaeological data within the cultural diffusionist framework. Man Makes Himself, however, was essentially a history of man's social evolution from a hunting

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(75) Ibid., 261.

(76) Ibid., 267-8.

gathering stage to civilization based on the archaeological patterns presented in the earlier texts, yet unencumbered by the detailed discussions undertaken therein.

Interestingly, Trigger sees the difference between the two types of work as illustrating a tension in Childe's approach between particularising and generalising aims.<sup>(77)</sup> It is difficult, however, to see in what way either the aims or indeed the texts are incompatible with one another in an overall research strategy. The general works, and here we may include What Happened in History and The Pre-history of European Society were essentially historical interpretations of the data presented in the larger more descriptive texts. Furthermore while the latter were addressed to professional archaeologists and students the former were specifically designed for the bookstall public.<sup>(78)</sup> Thus far from illustrating a conflict in Childe's objectives, the two types of work can be seen as complementary pieces of research in an overall enquiry into European and Oriental prehistory.

During Childe's lifetime field research in both Europe and the Near East was being undertaken at an unprecedented rate and Childe was constantly having to revise his texts to keep abreast of new information. By 1939,

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(77) B. Trigger (1968) 533.

(78) Childe (1936a) vii; (1958a) 73.

he felt it necessary to publish another edition of The Dawn. Here he reorganised his descriptions of cultural groupings according to a Marxist model of socio-culture, thus introducing a new level of patterning into his work.<sup>(79)</sup> While this did not affect the overall framework of the text, it did structure his accounts of individual cultures which had not previously followed any set formula or model. It is significant, however, that although he adopted the Marxist structural analysis of culture, he did not utilize the Marxist theory of socio-cultural change as he had done in Man Makes Himself. Unlike the major contemporary Russian archaeologists Childe placed little emphasis on independent evolution as an important causal factor in social change.

To have acknowledged the possibility of independent evolution having occurred in Europe might have provided support to an Occidentalism which, by now, had become little more than a pseudo-scientific justification for the policies of Nazism, a creed repugnant to Childe in all its manifestations. Indeed the misrepresentation of archaeological evidence in Germany led him to conclude:

Perhaps we are standing at the end of an era of free research. Over a large part of our Continent prehistory has been harnessed to the service of a political dogma. Reliable additions to knowledge there can hardly be expected now. (80)

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(79) Childe (1958a) 72.

(80) Childe (1939a) xviii.

Whereas previously Childe made it clear that his aim was to balance the role of the Orient and the Occident in the development of European culture, now he makes no mention of this initial objective. He no longer considers the ancient Europeans to have made any positive contribution to the development of modern civilization, and is concerned only with defending and strengthening the Orientalist hypothesis. This was no simple task since as noted previously neither theory could be substantiated without an independent chronology for prehistoric Europe.<sup>(81)</sup> Both the short chronology of the Orientalists and the long chronology of the Occidentalists were based on theories which assumed in advance the direction of culture flow between the Orient and Europe. In this context Childe writes,

The long chronology may be gratifying to the local patriotism of North Europeans. Assuming the identity of the Battle-axe folk and the Indo-Europeans, it relegates the Aryan cradle to the Baltic coasts or Central Germany. For this reason it is on its way to becoming a statutorily sanctioned dogma in Germany - and is suspect scientifically. But this long chronology and its consequences cannot be refuted by a single concrete fact. It is rejected here essentially on the grounds of general probability. (82)

Here he introduced an interesting theoretical argument in support of his thesis, in which he compared the patterns of prehistory based on the long and short chronologies with a hypothetical zoning pattern deduced from

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(81) See above pp. 47, 48.

(82) Ibid., 327.



basic diffusionist principles. It was pointed out previously<sup>(83)</sup> that one of the most important methodological postulates of diffusionism was the existence of a primary centre of innovation and diffusion. It was generally assumed that the influence of this centre decreased with distance, thus cultures far away from the centre were expected to be of lower cultural status than those nearer it. In this context Childe envisaged a simple pattern comprising a series of cultural zones throughout Europe and the Mediterranean, each possessing a different cultural status according to its distance from the Orient. For the Bronze Age Childe showed how the patterns of prehistory based on both the long and short chronologies agreed with this model.

Moving from the metropolitan civilizations of Egypt, Babylonia and the Hittite realm at the centre, our map IV discloses:

- (1) Fully literate city dwellers in peninsular and insular Greece;
- (2) Illiterate townsmen in Macedonia and Sicily;
- (3) Sedentary villagers with at least a specialized bronze industry and regular commerce to support it, in the Middle Danube basin, in South-east Spain and perhaps the Kuban;
- (4) Less stable communities less highly differentiated, in the Upper Danube basin, Southern and Central Germany, Switzerland, England and South Russia;
- (5) Self-sufficing neolithic societies in Southern Scandinavia, Northern Germany and Orkney;
- (6) Groups barely emerging from savagery in the far northern forests.

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(83) See above pp. 72, 73.

Even by adopting a long chronology, i.e. by taking the maximal dates for the Oriental ornaments copied in period IV, this picture will not be seriously distorted. Egypt and Mesopotamia, but not Anatolia, retain their capital status. The Aegean world, and with it Sicily, descend one grade in the scale. Central Europe, South-east Spain and Britain still rank as Bronze Age, Scandinavia, and Orkney remain neolithic. But South Russia loses grade. (84)

However for the previous periods Childe argued that only the pattern produced by the short chronology coincided with the classic pattern deduced from the premises of diffusion.

For the earlier periods, the adoption of a long chronology has disconcerting results. The Vardar-Morava continuum must be interpreted as the result of a southward spread of Danubian culture; the Battle-axe cultures must start spontaneously in Central Europe or Denmark, and thence flood the Caucasus, Anatolia and Greece. The spread of megalithic tombs must be reversed so that Minoan tholoi and even Egyptian mastabas became final elaborations of architectural forms created in the barbaric west or north. We are left in period I with neolithic Westerners and Danubians, certainly a stage or two below the contemporary Halafians of Hither Asia and Badarians in Egypt, but no longer connected therewith by recognisable intermediate stages. . . .

Our short chronology preserves for the New Stone Age the same sort of pattern as prehistory (on any chronology), offers in the Bronze Age, and history discloses from the second Iron Age . . . Moving from the centres of fully literate urban life in Egypt and Mesopotamia map I shows;

- (1) "Bronze Age" townships in Crete, Anatolia and peninsular Greece.
- (2) Sedentary neolithic villagers in Thessaly, the Balkans, South-eastern Sicily and South-east Spain.
- (3) Semi-nomadic self-sufficing peasants on the Danubian löss lands and in Western Europe,

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(84) Childe (1939a) 326, 327.

including perhaps Southern England.

(4) Only food-gatherers on the North European plain and in the northern forests. (85)

Childe's argument, although quite ingenious is unconvincing. The use of an unverified zonal hypothesis as a standard against which to accept or reject particular patterns of the past; is not strictly scientific.

Three years later, in the midst of World War II, Childe published his second popular work, What Happened in History (1942), in which he traced man's progress from the hunting-gathering stage until the end of the Roman Empire. Here, as noted in Chapter I, his interest lay only in what he termed 'main stream' cultures. (86)

Prehistory and history do indeed show how culture grows more and more diversified through the differentiation of societies in response to special stimuli - geographical, technical or ideological. What is, however, even more striking is the growth of intercourse and exchange between societies. If the streams of cultural tradition go on multiplying, they none the less tend to converge more and more, and to flow into a single river. A main stream with ever-growing emphasis dominates the whole drainage system to canalize the waters of fresh springs. Cultures are tending to merge into culture. (87)

Childe's account is centred on the course of the 'main stream' from its source in Egypt to its confluence in the Hellenistic Mediterranean and while his survey terminates with the fall of the Roman Empire, he nevertheless has a clear view of its subsequent course through the

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(85) Ibid., 327, 328.

(86) See above p. 20.

(87) Childe (1942a) 28.

feudalism of the Middle Ages to the capitalist economy of modern times.<sup>(88)</sup> Thus, as Daniel has noted, the 'main stream' is little different to the classic patterns of history advanced by nineteenth century historians.

It was the stream that came from Greece and Rome, and behind those classical lands, from Palestine, Babylonia and Egypt. The origins of civilization, and therefore history, was to Childe something that occurred in what he called the Most Ancient East, and Breasted before him had called the Fertile Crescent. (89)

It is, however, significantly different from the pattern suggested in his earlier works. In The Aryans he had laid considerable emphasis on the contribution of the prehistoric Europeans, in particular those speaking Indo-European languages, to modern civilization. As in The Dawn and The Bronze Age he had indicated a close relationship between the European Bronze Age and modern civilization, seeing in the former the true foundations of the latter. It is therefore of special interest to consider the place of the European Bronze Age in the context of the main stream analogy.

It is evident that a significant change has occurred in Childe's perspective of progress in Europe. Previously he considered the rapid development of bronze tools and weapons in northern and central Europe to have constituted the most distinctive and progressive feature of European prehistory. But now, analysed from a Marxist viewpoint,

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(88) Ibid. 31, 32.

(89) G. Daniel (1975) 343.

he argued that the emergence of a bronze industry in Europe did not solve what he saw as the basic contradictions in the neolithic economy. Childe maintained that shortage of land, due to the uneconomic and extravagant farming techniques of the neolithic peasants, led to competition for land and subsequently the desire for improved weapons. In places this had resulted in the creation of a ruling class extracting surplus from a conquered peasantry in order to pay for bronze metallurgy. The new industry was thus geared to the demands of a warrior aristocracy, and metal was used primarily in a martial context rather than for agricultural or manufacturing purposes. Thus, according to Childe,

The new bronze industry neither absorbed any appreciable proportion of the surplus rural population, nor equipped it to conquer virgin lands. Pressure on the land was thus unrelieved. Moreover at least in Denmark and southern England, the costly bronze armament merely consolidated the authority of ruling groups as did knight's armour in the Middle Ages. Here Bronze Age burials reveal 'an aristocratic world with a richly developed upper class life based on organized luxury trade and the labour of the lower classes.'

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Furthermore, he makes no reference to any contribution which the Aryan peoples might have made to the mainstream tradition. In fact, at this time, he considered that the parent group could not be identified, either archaeologically or by its physical racial type.<sup>(91)</sup> Here, he emphasised that the term Aryan should be used in a

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(90) Childe (1942a) 157, 158.

(91) Ibid., 150.

linguistic sense only, referring to the Asiatic branch of the Indo-European language group. In this context, he totally dismissed the Nazi use of the term. "As used by Nazis and anti-Semites generally, the term 'Aryan' means as little as the words 'Bolshie' and 'Red' in the mouths of crusted Tories."<sup>(92)</sup>

While Childe is not explicit about his changed viewpoint, it is relatively easy to infer the reasons behind it. Writing in the third year of the war, he had seen the consequences of unsubstantiated speculation supporting the ideological convictions of Nazism. A natural revulsion from Hitlerism had led him to reject Occidentalism in any form.<sup>(93)</sup>

In What Happened in History as in Man Makes Himself Childe adopted an explicitly Marxist interpretation of the archaeological record, inasmuch as he stressed the important role of the economic basis of society in influencing the sociological and ideological superstructures. As in the 1939 edition of The Dawn, however, the adoption of a Marxist analysis coincided with a consolidation of his Orientalist hypothesis. This is not to say the two viewpoints are contradictory. One can, and indeed Childe did, integrate diffusion into a Marxist model of change. But Childe's emphasis on diffusion as the main explanation of culture change in prehistoric Europe was not typically Marxist.<sup>(94)</sup>

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(92) Idem.

(93) Childe (1958a) 72.

(94) See below p. 265.

As a result of closer contact with the U.S.S.R. during the war years, Childe did however become more sympathetic towards the Soviet view of culture change. This shift in his attitude is perhaps best illustrated in two works published in the immediate post war years, Scotland Before the Scots (1946) and the fourth edition of The Dawn (1947). In neither case did he alter his basic Oriental diffusionist stance but in both he exhibits a willingness to admit the possibility of alternative theories of culture change. (95)

In continental Europe, the main change in his argument was in the context of the Battle-axe cultures. Previously he had considered the cultural similarities linking the latter to be the result of the migration and invasion of warrior pastoralists from south Russia through central Europe to north-west Germany. Now, since he was more open to the Russian argument that the internal development of society was a major factor of culture change, he could also better appreciate the Russian view of the development of the Battle-axe cultures, while not wholly accepting it. In contrast to the migration-invasionist thesis advanced in the west, Soviet archaeologists emphasised the cultural continuity in the development of European society, illustrating precedents for the Battle-axe cultures in Danubian II and even in the Mesolithic

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(95) For brief discussion of Scotland Before the Scots see above p. 22 ff.

hunter-gatherers. In this context, they argued that the similarities existing between the various groupings of Battle-axe cultures could have been transmitted during the normal intercourse which takes place between highly mobile bands of pastoralists. While Childe was impressed by this argument he did not consider that the development of the Battle-axe cultures could be wholly explained without recourse to external influences.

The Soviet account is certainly more economical of undemonstrable assumptions than any migrationist interpretation. But there are difficulties in Krichevskii's version that the Battle-axe cultures arose out of Danubian and Black-earth peasant cultures as a result of purely internal social development . . .

This development could hardly be understood without reference to external stimuli. No hunter-fishers on their own could have started breeding sheep or cultivating cereals in Denmark, Sweden or Central Russia where no sheep nor cereals grew wild. The stone battle-axes were derived from antler axes, not so much directly as through metal translations. Food production and metal were alike introduced in most of the battle-axe provinces. But introduction need not imply migration, but only diffusion. (96)

Apart from this modification however, the 1947 edition of The Dawn was very similar to its predecessor of 1939, presenting the same zonal argument in favour of the Orientalist position.

As noted previously, Childe maintained this Orientalist stance throughout the remaining years of the forties

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(96) Childe (1947a) 174, 175.



and the early years of the fifties.<sup>(97)</sup> In the middle of the decade, however, he returned dramatically to his original viewpoint concerning the progressive character of the European Bronze Age.

European societies were never passive recipients of Oriental contributions, but displayed more originality and inventiveness in developing Oriental inventions than had the inventors' more direct heirs in Egypt and Hither Asia. This is most obvious in the Bronze Age of Temperate Europe. In the Near East many metal types persisted unchanged for two thousand years; in Temperate Europe an extraordinarily brisk evolution of tools and weapons and multiplication of types occupied a quarter of that time. (98)

In this context he emphasised as before

that even in prehistoric times barbarian societies in Europe behaved in a distinctly European way, foreshadowing, however dimly the contrast with African or Asiatic societies that has become manifest in the last thousand years. (99)

His analysis of the situation, however, is radically different from that presented in the earlier works where he had attributed a major role to the Aryan peoples in the foundation of both the European Bronze Age and modern civilization. Now he insisted that

the explanation must of course be sociological not biological. Science, like technology is the creation of societies not races; its precepts and results are transmitted by social tradition, not 'in the blood'. (100)

Childe himself, of course, had not advanced a 'biological' explanation of progress in Europe. On the contrary, he

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(97) See above p.36.

(98) Childe (1957a) 342-343.

(99) Childe (1958b) 9.

(100) Idem.

had taken considerable care to differentiate between his own linguistic hypothesis and a racialist one.<sup>(101)</sup>

Nevertheless his view of the Aryans as "founders of Western Civilization" was not significantly different from that of the Germanists, and it was, no doubt, the similarity of his analysis to that exploited by the Nazi party during the thirties and early forties, that led him to reject the thesis in its entirety.

Childe's return to his original view of the European Bronze Age was thus not a return to his original philological thesis. Now his argument is firmly based on his economic interpretation of the Bronze Age as expounded as early as nineteen-thirty. Basically, Childe had argued that bronze working required full-time specialization and thus the liberation of certain members of society from the food producing processes. This, he had emphasised, could only be achieved by the accumulation of a surplus food supply. In Man Makes Himself and in What Happened in History he had gone on to show how in the Orient this surplus had been concentrated in the hands of divine kings or priest-kings and the members of a small aristocratic class. However, while he considered that such a social structure was essential in bringing about the new economy he argued that it inhibited further technological progress.

In The Prehistory of European Society (1958) Childe

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(101) See above pp. 66, 67.

upheld the main points in this argument. As before he emphasised that the division of society into classes had "meant in practice the economic degradation of the mass of the population"<sup>(102)</sup> with the craftsmen reduced to utter dependence on "the state both for their food and raw materials"<sup>(103)</sup> This, he suggested, not only relieved the craftsmen of responsibility for decision making but deprived them of a market for labour-saving devices and so of all stimulus for fresh inventions.

Now a prehistoric metal-worker presumably would have no difficulty in persuading of the superiority of metal weapons or tools his fellow-clansmen or his war-chief, who would have to use them. It would be quite another matter to convince a divine king whose active participation in combat is enormously exaggerated in his monuments, while clerks wielding pens would not be interested in saws or sickles. At the same time the peasantry were so thoroughly stripped of surplus produce, that is, of purchasing power, that they could not afford metal tools. (104)

Similarly he stressed that the class division had important ideological consequences, bringing about not only the separation of theoretical from practical knowledge but the devaluation of the latter.

Finally, the relegation of craftsmen to the lower class excluded them from literacy and isolated the pure sciences of Egyptian and Sumerian clerks from the applied science of miners, smelters, smiths and potters. Craft lore could not be committed to writing but continued to be handed on by precept and example. Just for this reason it

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(102) Childe (1958b). 93.

(103) Ibid. 93.

(104) Idem.

remained empirical and particular while learned science was not fertilized by experience gained in workshop practice. (105)

A society controlled by divine kings or priests gave little emphasis to "Custom", i.e. "the society's collective experience, the wisdom gathered and tested by ancestral generations, the science of the period."<sup>(106)</sup> This became replaced by "laws and regulations imposed on Society by - or in the name of - gods above and outside society."<sup>(107)</sup> Thus according to Childe the society was dominated by an elite whose knowledge of the world had not been gained by practical experimentation and was thus in his eyes of limited value. It was this ascendancy of magic and religion over the applied sciences that he believed prohibited further technological progress.

Childe maintained that the Bronze Age economy emerged in Europe in a different manner and thus had different results. As early as 1925, he had argued that the peoples of the Aegean were the first Europeans to be affected by the growth of civilization in the Orient, seeing the diffusion of urbanism from the latter region as the result of a number of processes; war, trade migration etc. At this time, while he had emphasised the progressive character of Aegean culture, stressing its European, as opposed to Oriental, 'spirit', he had offered no explanation for this.

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(105) Ibid., 96.

(106) Ibid., 93, 94.

(107) Ibid., 94.

Now, however, he puts forward an argument in support of this viewpoint. As before he envisaged the actual immigration of craftsmen from the ancient civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia.

Let us admit that prospectors from the older centres of civilization had discovered the lodes of ore and other raw materials whose value had first been appreciated in the Near East. Let us admit that coppersmiths, goldsmiths, seal-engravers and other artisans had emigrated to the Aegean coasts. In neither case had they arrived as agents of a foreign state or as emissaries of alien profit-making concerns. The hypothetical prospectors no doubt would and could have come only because they were assured of a certain market in Egypt and Mesopotamia. (108)

What is new, however, is his understanding of the economic and sociological context of the rise of urbanism in the area. He argues that since the peoples of the Aegean could draw on Oriental surplus by use of their raw materials, mercenaries, raids and piracy, they were able to develop a bronze industry without submitting to the repressive social structure of Oriental civilization.

The Urban Revolution in Greece and Crete had not created a single State capable of restricting free movement of individuals. It had created a number of virtually independent kinglets, each rich enough to be a generous patron. (109)

Thus for Childe the emergence of the new economy in the Aegean did not create an impassible economic gulf that divided society into irrevocably opposing classes. Although there is some evidence for a division between rich and poor, wealth seems to be more evenly distributed.

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(108) Ibid., 111.

(109) Ibid., 157.

"Judging by the contents of private tombs, quite a generous share must have been dispersed through a broad middle-class of townfolk and 'companions'." (110) Furthermore it was in this class that Childe placed the Aegean craftsman, favourably contrasting his position with his Oriental counterpart. (111) Finally, whereas he had come to view the Oriental market as unconducive to change, he considered the opposite to be true of the Aegean commercial system.

Early Aegean craftsmen were producing for an international market and not just to satisfy demands constituted by the traditional tastes and habits of a single society. Each community would develop divergent fashions and working practices. A craftsman should adjust his techniques and his output to the consequent local variations of demand. Thus he was encouraged not merely to maintain a fixed standard of technical competence . . . but also to introduce innovations that should by their efficiency or beauty attract discerning purchasers. (112)

Nevertheless, despite its progressive elements, Aegean civilization, like Oriental civilization declined and eventually collapsed. In Childe's eyes,

Too much real capital was squandered in destructive dynastic struggles of which the legendary Trojan war was just the culmination. Barbarian hordes, some at least exploited and trained by Myceneans, after annihilating Hittite civilization and ravaging cities of the Levant, eventually finished off the Mycenean civilization, rotten with internal contradictions. The half-legendary Dorian Invasion finally plunged the Aegean world into a Dark Age. (113)

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(110) Ibid., 161.

(111) Ibid., 98 .

(112) Ibid., 113.

(113) Ibid., 161.

As Renfrew has pointed out, Childe's argument for the beginnings of a central European Bronze Age was in most respects the exact counterpart of his theory for the origins of Aegean civilization.<sup>(114)</sup> Just as he had envisaged Oriental prospectors establishing a bronze industry in the Aegean, now he saw metallurgists from the latter region founding a European industry. Similarly, precisely as he had emphasised the Aegean industry's initial dependence on Oriental capital, how stressed the European debt to Minoan-Mycenean surplus.

The Aegean surplus . . . served as the foundation for a bronze industry in Temperate Europe in which Aegean traditions of craftsmanship could operate freely. . . The commercial system thus disclosed had been called into being to supply the Aegean market: it was the accumulated resources of the Minoan - Mycenean civilization that guaranteed to the distributors a livelihood, indeed an adequate recompense, for the hazards and hardships of their travels. . . In the Early Bronze Age peninsular Italy, Central Europe, the West Baltic coastlands, and the British Isles were united by a single system for the distribution of metalware, rooted in the Aegean market. (115)

Although he inferred economic unity, Childe insisted that this did not entail any political or cultural agreement. On the contrary, he laid considerable emphasis on the diversity and variation existing within European society at this time. Here, he envisaged a multiplicity of ethnic groups, ranging from nomadic pastoralists to agricultural villagers, all ultimately based on a mixed farming economy. While in most cultures he saw no

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(114) C. Renfrew (1973) 99.

(115) Childe in Renfrew 1973, 99.

explicit evidence for the concentration of political and economic power either by chiefs or gods, in a few instances such as Wessex, he inferred the existence of rich aristocracies. In this context, he considered that only a few societies could produce the amount of surplus required to support a resident smith. As a result Childe postulated that the metallurgists were forced outside the kinship structure of tribal society. While this was perhaps detrimental to their personal security, it gave them a freedom not enjoyed by either their Aegean or Oriental counterparts.

In any case despite all disabilities European metal-workers were free. They were not tied to any one patron or even to a single tribal society. (116)

Childe believed that it was this freedom of the metallurgist, together with the nature of the market he was producing for, which explained the rapid development of the European bronze industry.

A market of this kind offered every inducement to originality on the part of the producers. At the same time their very itineracy and far-flung commercial contacts should fertilize native genius. They met on the frontiers of their territories colleagues working to satisfy the divergent tastes of other societies and perhaps employing ores or metal of different composition. Among the wares they handled they would see products of more distant schools of metal-work for comparison with familiar local types. Thus the peculiar structure of the European bronze industry induced an effective pooling of experience, gained in different environments, and of traditions evoked by divergent popular tastes. As a

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(116) Childe (1958b) 169.



result European bronze workers did display inventiveness and ingenuity to an exceptional degree. (117)

As he had done initially, Childe now inferred a close relationship between Bronze Age society in Europe and modern western civilization.

In temperate Europe by 1500 B.C. had been established a distinctive politico-economic structure such as had existed a thousand years earlier in the Aegean, but nowhere else in the Bronze Age world. . . . The author had neither the space nor the knowledge at his disposal to show in detail how closely this Bronze Age system foreshadowed the peculiarities of European polity in Antiquity, the Middle Ages and Modern Times. Obviously all the essential features outlined above were replicated in Classical Greece. Slavery and totalitarianism temporarily distorted the pattern within the Hellenistic monarchies and the Roman Empire. But barbarian Europe outside their frontiers was a direct continuation of Bronze Age Europe just described. . . . The national states that eventually emerged were indeed enormously larger than our Bronze Age tribes and fewer in number. But they have all shown themselves just as mutually jealous in policy and as competitive economically. All have been increasingly dependent on a supra-national economic system for vital raw materials as well as the disposal of their own products. (118)

Here Childe made the interesting suggestion that throughout this time the craftsmen, the exponents of the applied sciences preserved their traditional freedom of movement within the supranational economy. In this context he added,

The metics at Athens, the way-faring journeymen of the Middle Ages, and the migrant craft unionist of the nineteenth century are the lineal descendants of the itinerants just described. But so were the Natural Philosophers and Sophists in Classical Greece, the traveling scholars of medieval Europe, and the

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(117) Ibid., 169, 170.

(118) Ibid., 172, 173.

natural scientists who from the days of Galileo and Newton to 1945 freely exchanged information and ideas by publication, correspondence, and visits regardless of political frontiers. (119)

By preserving their freedom outwith the tribal or national frontiers, the craftsmen and their "lineal descendants" were allowed to advance their knowledge of the world unrestricted by contemporary social structures. And since in Childe's eyes this understanding was the essential prerequisite to technological invention, it offered him an explanation of the rapid technological progress of European society.

What is immediately striking about Childe's new argument is its hypothetical status. As Piggott has commented with reference to the role of the Bronze Age metallurgist, "this technological <sup>emancipation</sup> is no more than an assumption, in its very nature impossible to document in archaeological terms." (120) While we might not go as far as this in limiting archaeological inference, certainly it is true that Childe offered no evidence from the archaeological record to support his view of the role of the metallurgist or his "lineal descendants" in contributing to progress in Europe. Neither did he convincingly substantiate his argument that the development of the European Bronze industry was only possible because of the immigration of Oriental craftsmen and the injection of Oriental capital

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(119) Ibid., 173.

(120) S. Piggott (1965) 126.

into the European economies. Childe, then, offered a socio-economic analysis of the European Bronze Age and its relationship to modern civilization, but was unable to verify it in the archaeological record. Had his life-work not been so tragically cut short it would have been interesting to see if he would have approached this problem of substantiation.

Today, of course, it is not only Childe's final interpretation of the European Bronze Age which has been brought into question, but also certain fundamental links in his structure of European prehistory, together with the diffusionist assumptions at the heart of his thesis.<sup>(121)</sup> With the tree ring calibration of radio carbon dates for prehistoric Europe a new pattern is emerging which illustrates the chronological precedence of many European cultures over their assumed parent cultures in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>(122)</sup> Indeed Renfrew has distinguished a "fault line" which snaps the basic chronological and cultural links between Europe and the Orient. Childe's framework has collapsed. As Renfrew has emphasised European prehistory will have to be rewritten,<sup>(123)</sup> a task which will require years of work by many scholars.

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(121) C. Renfrew (1973) 84-108.

(122) Ibid., 104.

(123) Ibid., 19.

CHAPTER III    The Concept of Culture

Childe is generally regarded as one of the major exponents of the concept which has dominated theory and practice in archaeology since the second decade of the twentieth century, i.e. the concept of an archaeological culture. Popularized in British archaeology through texts such as The Dawn of European Civilization (1925) and The Danube in Prehistory (1929), the idea of culture quickly replaced the older, geologically inspired paradigm, and in Childe's words prehistory vindicated its character as a human in contrast to a natural science.<sup>(1)</sup>

In a recent historical survey of the development of archaeology, Glyn Daniel has listed four factors which contributed to the death of the old epochal idea. The first was the demonstration of the contemporaneity of the alleged epochs. The second was the extension of prehistoric research, first to eastern Europe and Africa and then all over the world. The third was the new orientation which archaeology received in the early twentieth century from human geography and anthropology. Finally, the fourth was the marriage of Near-Eastern and Aegean archaeology with European prehistory.<sup>(2)</sup>

And here, Daniel like Childe, emphasised the significance of the introduction of the culture concept in terms

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(1) Childe (1935c) 3.

(2) G. Daniel (1975) 239.

of the overall theoretical development of the discipline.

It was a complete reorientation of prehistoric material and marked the change from the study of man as an animal to the study of him as a human being. It was in a word, the change from the geological to the historical and anthropological attitude to prehistoric man. (3)

With the concept of culture archaeologists thus transcended the limits of a purely epochal model of the past. The pattern of prehistory could be seen not solely as a vertical series of epochs, but as having a horizontal as well as a vertical component. A new and exciting vision of prehistory emerged in which prehistoric groups were seen to weave intricate patterns with one another across time-space continua which previously had been considered as uniform epochs.

Prior to its general adoption by archaeologists, however, the term culture had already a long history of usage in the English language. Some of these earlier, pre-archaeological usages of the term were current in Childe's day and indeed are commonly employed at the present time. Thus in order to clarify Childe's particular definition of culture it is first of all essential to examine the etymological development of the term.

At its root the term culture embraces the Latin verb *colere* meaning to cultivate or to tend.<sup>(4)</sup> Initially this was applied in a purely agricultural context, but even in ancient times it came to be used with regard to the mind,

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(3) Ibid., 243.

(4) *colo, colui, cultum.*

the body and the Gods.<sup>(5)</sup>

In its first applications in English during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the primary notion of cultivation was retained. Bacon for example in 1626 writes "These . . . were slower than ordinary wheat . . . and their Culture did rather retard than advance."<sup>(6)</sup> Dryden in 1697 referred to "The Culture suiting to the sev'ral kinds of seeds and plants".<sup>(7)</sup> During this period the term was also applied to mind and the body. In 1510 More refers to "the culture and training of their myndes"<sup>(8)</sup> and in 1628 Hobbes writes in describing the ancient Lacedaemonians "Amongst whom . . . especially in the culture of their bodies, the nobility observed the most equality with the commons".<sup>(9)</sup>

By the beginning of the nineteenth century a secondary concept had emerged which referred to high degree of cultivation of the mind and refinement in tastes and manners. This usage is illustrated in Wordsworth's Prelude "Where Grace of Culture is utterly unknown".<sup>(10)</sup> This was also, as Kroeber and Kluckhohn have pointed out, the older meaning of the term civilization which is the

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- (5) For examples of its use in classical literature see C. Lewis and C. Short (1966) 369.  
(6) The Oxford English Dictionary (1933) Vol. II, 1249.  
(7) Idem.  
(8) Idem.  
(9) Idem.  
(10) Idem.

nearest synonym to culture.<sup>(11)</sup> In archaeological literature during the nineteenth century the term was employed primarily in an Oriental and Aegean context, where it was used either synonymously with civilization as denoting the general way of life of a people, or as representing a stage in the growth of civilization.<sup>(12)</sup>

In Britain the first use of the concept in the sense which is widely employed in anthropology today, goes back to Edward B. Tylor in Primitive Culture (1871). Here the term no longer refers primarily to the process of cultivation or to the degree to which it has been carried out, but rather to a state or condition sometimes described as extra-organic or super-organic in which all human societies share.

Culture, or civilization . . . is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. (13)

Tylor derived this concept from the German, Gustav E. Klemm (1802-1867) whose idea of culture Kroeber and Kluckhohn see as representing a stage in between the eighteenth century usage in the sense of cultivation and the modern post Tylorian usage.<sup>(14)</sup>

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(11) For the relationship between the two terms see A.L. Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn (1952) 11-18. This text contains one of the most comprehensive treatments of the culture concept to date.

(12) G. Daniel (1975) 242, 243.

(13) E. Tylor (1871) 1.

(14) For an analysis of Klemm's use of the term culture see Kroeber and Kluckhohn op. cit., 24, 25.

In 1929 when Childe first defined the term culture, he applied it solely to a grouping of associated material remains which the archaeologist discerns in the archaeological record.<sup>(15)</sup> He thus introduced a new and discrete usage of the term which was significantly different from the current anthropological usage. Unlike the latter which embraced a theory of non biological or social inheritance, Childe's usage was, at least on face value, purely a classificatory device for ordering archaeological data. Childe, however, never limited his use of the term to this specifically archaeological level, but also employed it in the wider anthropological sense. Indeed it is clear that he saw the anthropological thesis of non biological inheritance to underly his own definition of the term for his uses this theory to justify his equation between the archaeologist's cultural grouping and a "people". Unfortunately, however, Childe did not explicitly differentiate between the anthropological and archaeological definitions of the culture concept until relatively late in his career and this gave rise to a certain amount of ambiguity in his usage of the term.

A second problem to arise in the development of the culture paradigm concerned the classification of the cultures themselves. In the twenties and early thirties Childe had regarded cultures as 'a priori' in the sense of

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(15) See below p. 111.



being self-evident on inspection of the archaeological record.<sup>(16)</sup> By the forties and fifties, however, the broad cultural groupings which previously had been considered as unified wholes could be seen to constitute several discrete groupings.<sup>(17)</sup> As the cultural differentials had become more refined, the number of cultures perceived in the archaeological record had increased accordingly.

In his later years, Childe thus came to recognise that the classification of cultures was neither as objective nor as self-evident as he had hitherto assumed. While this led him to look more carefully than previously at the nature of his cultural groupings, he only very briefly touched upon the problem of subjectivity itself and thus failed to appreciate the extent to which it would affect archaeological methodology as a whole. Today most archaeologists are aware that their data offers a vast range of potential patterns which can be implicitly or explicitly selected depending on the theoretical framework of the archaeologist. A major task confronting archaeologists is thus to examine the nature of the theoretical devices employed in the discipline and to elucidate the way in which these relate to the data. It is only through an understanding of the tools of perception that both the potential and the limitations of our picture of the past

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(16) Childe (1935c) 3.

(17) Childe (1951a) 40.

can be appreciated.

In this chapter it will be shown that during the course of Childe's work, these two problems, firstly the terminological ambiguity and secondly the subjective nature of the classification of cultural groups, became increasingly apparent as major obstacles to a clear and definite role for the term culture in the discipline. Throughout his career, however, Childe tended to evade rather than confront these fundamental problems thus delaying the day of reckoning until after his death. What was in fact required was a complete rationalization of the model if it were to be meaningfully employed in the discipline.<sup>(18)</sup>

Childe's failure to confront the problems inherent in his use of the culture model, however, must be viewed in the intellectual environment in which he was writing. It is only relatively recently (i.e. in the 1960s and 1970s) that archaeology has reached a stage of what D. Clarke has termed "critical self consciousness"<sup>(19)</sup> in which there is a general evaluation of the theoretical and philosophical constructs employed in the discipline. Childe's writings belong to the stage immediately prior to this development, characterised theoretically in terms

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(18) For a discussion of the need to define the main archaeological entities such as artefact, type, culture, etc. see D. Clarke (1968) 24-32.

(19) D. Clarke (1973) 6-18.

of a cultural-diffusionist model of prehistory. In terms of archaeological consciousness the period was as yet "innocent"<sup>(20)</sup> in that archaeologists on the whole were largely unaware of the need to clarify and define their theoretical frameworks.

Today the introduction of the concept of culture into archaeology is generally considered to be a major turning point in the history of the discipline.<sup>(21)</sup> It is thus interesting that during the twenties the importance of the transition from the epochal to the cultural paradigm was not made wholly explicit by the exponents of the new concept. As Trigger has pointed out neither Crawford nor Peake saw the need to define the term, Burkitt on the other hand offered a curiously elliptical definition.<sup>(22)</sup> Childe himself employed the term as the classificatory basis of three of his major texts, The Dawn of European Civilization (1925), The Aryans (1926) and The Most Ancient East (1928) without any prior discussion as to meaning. Considering the novelty of the concept at that time this lack of definition illustrates a less conscious attitude towards theory than that prevailing in the discipline today.

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(20) Ibid., 6.

(21) See Daniel (1975) 236-251; idem. (1962) 16 ff.

(22) B. Trigger (1978) 82, 83.

Indeed it was not until 1929 in a brief statement on archaeological procedure in the Preface to The Danube in Prehistory that Childe first defined the term. Here he limited its field of application to a material level only, i.e. as a unit of classification for material remains.

We find certain types of remains, pots, implements, ornaments, burial rites and house forms constantly recurring together. Such a complex of associated traits we shall term a cultural group or just a culture. We assume that such a complex is the material expression of what today would be called a people. Only where the complex in question is regularly and exclusively associated with the skeletal remains of a specific physical type would we venture to replace people by the term race. (23)

While he did not acknowledge it at the time, Childe later made it clear that he derived this specifically archaeological usage of the term from German prehistorians, in particular from Gustav Kossinna his main rival in the field of Aryan philology.

It was . . . in Northern Europe and especially in Germany . . . that archaeologists first came to see clearly that assemblages of type fossils might characterise not only distinct periods of time, but also distinct nations or tribes within a single period. And it was German prehistorians who first came to term such recurrent assemblages of type-fossils "Kulturen" . . . It was formed explicitly before the end of the nineteenth century by Gustav Kossinna a philologist and Germanist who turned from the humanities to archaeology.

"Sharply defined archaeological culture provinces coincide at all times with quite definite peoples or tribes, cultural regions are ethnic regions cultural groups are peoples." (24)

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(23) Childe (1929) v, vi.

(24) Childe (1956a) 28.

During the early thirties one of Childe's main concerns was to explicate and validate his equation of an archaeological culture with what he considered to be a sociological and linguistic grouping, a "people", rather than with the biological grouping, a "race". This was prompted by a deep concern with the use of archaeological, anthropological and philological theory to support racialist policies in Germany.

In "Races, Peoples and Cultures in Prehistoric Europe" (1933) Childe pleaded for a strictly scientific definition of the term race as a group of persons all sharing perceptible and measurable peculiarities that have been and can be inherited. And in this context he outlined the difficulties involved in the classification of racial groupings in prehistory.

Living men are usually classified racially according to stature, head-form, shape of the nose, colour of the skin, eyes and hair, extent and quality of the hair, and so on. But from ancient times only skeletons, and they generally fragmentary, are preserved. Comparatively few of the features used to differentiate between living races can be recognised on such material. In practice only head-form, stature, and in favourable cases the shape of the nose are available. And stature has been shown now to be rather a matter of diet than of stable hereditary factors. (25)

Here he warned that the simple classification of skulls into dolichocephalic and brachycephalic, i.e. long and round heads in fact masked the diversity of prehistoric populations and was thus of only limited value.

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(25) Childe (1933b) 195.

At this time Childe saw a people in essentially sociological and linguistic terms illustrating this by two concrete examples

The English people includes representatives of three distinct layers of prehistoric invaders as well as of Anglo-Saxons, Danes, Normans, Flemings and later arrivals. . . . But all now share, besides a common language and common institutions, quite a number of peculiarities in material culture, (26) such as baths and water closets. In the same way the Jews are a people. Despite their comparative segregation and consequent inbreeding they do not all conform to a single physical type; indeed three distinct stocks have been distinguished. . . . Community of traditions and language has united all three distinct stocks into a single people, but not yet into a physical race. (27)

It would thus seem that Childe considered a people to represent a single society, though not necessarily corresponding to a single political system, to be a linguistic unit and to have a common material culture and social tradition.

As in The Danube in Prehistory he defined the prehistorians' culture as a grouping of associated traits found in the archaeological record, this time differentiating between material and spiritual components.

Prehistoric archaeology for its part has, particularly since the war, been working with the concept of a "culture". It finds that groups of distinctive traits mostly peculiarities in material culture, (dress, armament, ornaments, domestic architecture), but also more spiritual characteristics such as burial rites and artistic styles, tend to hand together and be associated in a given continuous region at a given period. Such a group of associated traits is what the

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(26) For definition of "material culture" see below p. 120.

(27) Childe op. cit., 198, 199.

archaeologist terms a culture. (28)

(My emphasis)

In terms of the archaeological definition of a culture as a grouping of material remains, Childe's reference to "material culture" is clearly redundant, only making sense in the context of a broader definition which includes material and non material components. Childe however, neither attempted to define this broader concept or to indicate its relationship to the archaeological definition. Nevertheless it is clear that he saw the broader concept to underlie his own specifically archaeological definition. As the following passage shows, as well as using archaeological data, he also employed the anthropological thesis that culture is a social heritage to back his argument that the prehistorians culture group corresponds to a people rather than a race.

What name is to be given to this group that is the culture's author? Popular writers and a few scientists, mainly German, still use the term race here . . . But only quite exceptionally do the skeletal remains associated with a given culture belong exclusively or even predominantly to a single physical type. . .

It is thus obvious that a culture need not correspond to a group allied by physical traits acquired by heredity. Culture is a social heritage; it corresponds to a community sharing common traditions, common institutions and a common way of life. Such a group may reasonably be called a people. (29)

(My emphasis)

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(28) Ibid., 197, 198.

(29) Ibid., 198.

It is important to note that during the thirties because of the widespread misidentification of language with race, it was essential to contrast the social nature of the former with the biological character of the latter, hence Childe's equation of language with a people. From this point, however, Childe went on to make the further equation between linguistic and cultural groups.

Language goes not with race but generally with the group we term a people, and so it is generally linked with culture as previously defined. In prehistory the culture may very well represent also a linguistic group. (30)

It was only later in his career that he realised that the two need not necessarily coincide. (31)

In a paper entitled "Is Prehistory Practical?" (32) published in the same year as "Races, Peoples and Cultures in Prehistoric Europe", Childe again stressed the need for a scientific definition of the terms employed in archaeology and related disciplines. This was important to him since he was deeply concerned about the use of what he termed the "supposed facts of Prehistory" (33) to support the racist programme of the Third Reich in Germany.

The suppression of thought during the Dark Ages was justified by an appeal to supposed revelations, vouchsafed to individuals, and the interpretations thereof. The latest onslaught on the freedom of the spirit appeals to alleged scientific facts. The justificatory

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(30) Ibid., 200.

(31) See below p. 122.

(32) Childe (1933a) 410-18.

(33) Ibid., 410.



documents this time actually exist in the public world - in museums and in the fields - open to every competent observer to examine, analyse and compare. But these documents can no more be profitably studied without laborious preparatory training than can the movement of stars or the behaviour of electrons. Prehistory in its several branches is just the objective and critical study of precisely those data upon which the political theories of Houston Chamberlain and Adolf Hitler purport to be built. But for the purpose of such systematic study the several sciences that compose Prehistory have had to elaborate an exact terminology, and in doing so have often defined a given term in a different way to vulgar speech and sometimes even differently to colleagues in allied disciplines. The lay man may well be pardoned if he takes these technical terms at their face value but the resultant confusion may have disastrous effects. (34)

In particular Childe underlined the necessity for a scientific definition of race and a deeper understanding of the processes of biological and social evolution.

Since the "racial hygiene" theories, which were being propagated in Nazi Germany with such devastating practical results, were directly based on misconceptions of these processes this was a matter of practical as well as academic importance, hence the title of the paper.

Childe's major point was that the outstanding feature of man's history on earth was not so much a change in his biological makeup, but a change in his external equipment.

A reasonably clear record of the physical characteristics of our species extends over only some 20,000 years. During that time the physical structure of man . . . has undergone only relatively minor modifications. In the same period

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(34) Idem.

his material equipment has been revolutionized, his control over his environment incredibly enlarged. . .

From the standpoint of geology or zoology the time occupied by this transformation is trifling; but it is a transformation in culture not in hereditary physical structure; in external equipment not in the germ plasm of the species. (35)

(My emphasis)

In this passage Childe is clearly using culture on a broader anthropological level rather than in the specialist archaeological sense defined in The Danube in Prehistory. As noted previously, however, he did not clarify the relationship between these discrete usages until much later in his career.

In "Is Prehistory Practical?" Childe again argued that cultural or social evolution being independent of biological evolution, (36) the archaeologist's culture did not correspond with a racial grouping. Here he was quite explicit as to the relevance of this point in the realm of modern politics.

In the prehistoric past as obviously today, culture was independent of physical race, was not a matter of biological heredity but of social tradition.

Ignorance of this fact, or rather the careless use of the word race as coloured by biological theory for the prehistoric group distinguished by a peculiar culture, has naturally reinforced the false analogy between men and poultry in misleading "racial hygenists" and their political interpreters. If we replace the word race here by "people" we shall more easily avoid such confusions. (37)

(My emphasis)

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(35) Ibid., 413.

(36) Childe freely interchanged "society" with the anthropological definition of "culture".

(37) Ibid., 417.

In 1935, in "Changing Methods and Aims in Prehistory" his presidential address to the Prehistoric Society, Childe presented his most comprehensive treatment of the culture concept to date. Here he introduced what he termed a functional interpretation of culture where culture is viewed "not as a dead group of fossils or curios but as a living functioning organism"<sup>(38)</sup> This was a method of approach which he gained from contemporary anthropological theory.

The study of living human societies as functioning organisms has revealed to archaeologists this approach to their materials. It has led to the correct definition and interpretation of the concept of a culture. (39)

Childe had always kept in close contact with the theoretical developments in anthropology which he considered to be the sister discipline of archaeology in the science of man.<sup>(40)</sup> Functionalism it should be noted had risen primarily as a reaction against the controversy raging between the Evolutionists and Diffusionists. Denying the value of the speculative reconstruction of history, Functionalists emphasised the need to study existing societies, intensive field research comprising a major part of their programme. An important aspect of their approach to cultural analysis was the employment of the analogy between organic structure and social structure, an old analogy

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(38) Childe (1935c) 10.

(39) Ibid., 3.

(40) Childe (1946d) 243 ff.

which goes back at least to Hobbes and finds its fullest elaboration in Spencer.<sup>(41)</sup> Functionalists, then, tended to stress the unity of the cultural system and to emphasise the inter-relationships between the different components in that system.

In Britain there were two major schools of functionalist thought, one represented by Radcliffe-Brown and the other by Malinowski.<sup>(42)</sup> Whereas the former tended to concentrate their attention on social structure, the latter studied all aspects of society including man's biology, psychology, culture and environment.

While Childe admitted a debt to Malinowski's functionalism in shaping his view of culture,<sup>(43)</sup> he did not employ the latter's broad definition of the term which embraced not only implements and consumer goods but ideas, habits and values.<sup>(44)</sup> As in his classic statement in The Danube in Prehistory, he again limited culture to a grouping of material remains which the archaeologist discerns in the archaeological record.<sup>(45)</sup> Where Childe came closer to the functionalism of Malinowski than of Radcliffe-Brown was in his view of the adaptive value of the cultural system.

Tools and cultivation plots, vessels and hut-foundations reveal the equipment used by the community in the daily business of securing

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(41) M. Harris (1968) 526.

(42) Ibid., 514-567 for a summary of Functionalism in British anthropology.

(43) Childe (1958a) 72.

(44) For Malinowski's definition of culture see Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) 44, 47.

(45) Childe (1935c) 3.

food and shelter; the techniques of their manufacture and cultivation reveal the science, the collective experience that the group is applying to those ends. We see material culture as an adaptation to an environment to use a biological term. (46)

Even here, however, his approach was distinctly Childean, for unlike Manlinowski it was not the culture as a whole but only the material component which he considered to have any adaptive potential. The "spiritual" element in Childe's eyes could and often did hinder progress. (47)

This of course was a major argument in Man Makes Himself for the stagnation of civilization in the ancient Orient. (48)

It is important to note in this context that Childe defined "material culture" in a very specialist sense which is not obviously deduced from his definition of culture as defined above. Here it was taken to denote that aspect of man's social learning which fulfils an essentially utilitarian function in securing food and shelter and thus in his eyes aiding the survival of the group.

Material culture, as defined here, is just the assemblage of devices that a community has invented or learnt to enable it to survive and expand. (49)

According to Childe, therefore, the archaeologist's culture while comprising a grouping of material remains, i.e. of relics and monuments, was not limited to material culture in this sense.

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(46) Ibid., 10.

(47) Ibid., 14.

(48) See pp. 79, 80.

(49) Ibid., 11.

The archaeologist is not entirely restricted to material culture; his material includes items which must be assigned to the domain of spiritual culture. Amulets and megalithic tombs, sculptures in the round and designs painted on vases have no obvious utility; from the materialist standpoint they do not help their makers and builders to get more food or rear more offspring. (50)

It is interesting that during the thirties Childe regarded the archaeologist's culture to be an observed fact in the sense of self-evident on inspection of the archaeological record.

The culture is not an a priori category elaborated in the studies of philosophers and then imposed from outside upon working archaeologists. Cultures are observed facts. The field worker does find specific types of tools, weapons, and ornaments repeatedly associated together in graves and habitations of one kind and contrasted with artefacts found in graves and settlements of another kind. (51)

Later in his career, however, he was to become more aware of the subjective element in the classification of cultures. As archaeologists began to distinguish a multiplicity of cultures in what had originally been viewed as single cultural groups, it became clear that they were in fact exercising a choice in the patterns which they perceived in the data.

Between the general discussion of culture in "Changing Methods and Aims" and the more detailed analysis of the concept in the fifties, Childe's views on culture can only be gleaned from brief passages in texts and papers

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(50) Ibid., 14.

(51) Childe (1935c) 3.

concerned with other subjects. For example in the introductory chapters to two of his popular works, Man Makes Himself (1936) and What Happened in History (1942) he devoted considerable attention to the relationship between biological and cultural evolution using culture in the broad anthropological sense of the term. It was only in the latter work, however, that he explicitly discussed the idea of an archaeological culture.

Archaeologists classify the objects of their study not only by function into knives, axes, huts, tombs and so on, but also into different "types" of knives, axes, dwellings and graves. The several types of knife or tomb each fulfil roughly the same function; the differences between them repose upon divergences in the social tradition prescribing the methods of their preparation and use. In each functional class archaeologists can distinguish a variety of types current over a restricted area at a given period in archaeological time. The totality of recognised types current simultaneously in a given area is termed a "culture". (52)

By now Childe was more cautious than in the thirties as to the nature of the sociological counterpart of the archaeologist's culture. Whereas previously he had attributed linguistic unity to the group now he warned that this was not necessarily the case.

It would be rash to try to define precisely what sort of social group corresponds to the archaeologist's "culture". Since language is such an important vehicle in the formation and transmission of social tradition, the group distinguished by the possession of a distinct "culture" might be expected also to speak a distinct language. Nevertheless language and culture need not coincide. The

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(52) Childe (1942d) 25, 26.

differences in equipment between Denmark, England, France and Germany are insignificant in comparison with the differences between Danish, English, French and German. (53)

As before, however, he emphasised the adaptive value of material culture, again stressing the biological analogy.

The human species is not physiologically adapted to any particular environment. Its adaptation is secured by its extracorporeal equipment of tools, clothes, houses and the rest . . . Material culture is thus largely a response to an environment. (54)

In the immediate post-war years Childe's brief discussions of the culture concept in works such as Scotland Before the Scots, published in 1946, serve to illustrate the fundamental continuity in his theoretical standpoint.

Prehistorians can distinguish two or more assemblages of relics and monuments that have divergent distributions in space but belong to the same stage or period. Technically such contemporary or systadial assemblages are termed cultures. Prehistorians assume that each culture represents a distinct "people" or society. (55)

By the late forties, however, there is a suggestion of a change in Childe's attitude to the definition of culture, for as the following passage shows he is beginning to question the usefulness of the term in denoting the archaeologist's assemblage of associated traits.

In any given archaeological period we find often juxtaposed in a small area, different assemblages of tools, weapons, ornaments, house types, burial rites and other archaeological traits repeatedly recurring together. Such recurrent assemblages

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(53) Ibid., 26, 27.

(54) Ibid., 27, 28.

(55) Childe (1946a) 2.



we term - rather unhappily - cultures. We assume that each represents the durable part of the equipment or culture of an historical human society. Our assumption is just as well founded as is the palaeontologists' assumption that a fossil represents the harder part of an organism that was once clothed with flesh and lived. So archaeologists likewise try to re-clothe with flesh their bare bones, to grasp their so-called cultures as the durable expressions of living and functioning organizations of men. (56)

(My emphasis)

While Childe does not explicitly state the reasons for his change in attitude these can easily be inferred. By this time the concept of culture was widely employed in the social sciences as a whole to denote learned modes of behaviour, comprising both the material and non-material aspects of human society. The specialist sense peculiar to archaeology where culture is defined as a classificatory unit for material remains was thus significantly out-with the mainstream definition. If its usage in this sense was not explicitly stated, or if it were freely interchanged with culture in the wider sense, as it had been in Childe's own work, ambiguities could arise.

By 1951 Childe felt it necessary to examine the relationship between the archaeological and anthropological view of culture in some detail and in Social Evolution he devoted a whole chapter to the meaning of culture in both these senses. This was the first time that he had explicitly differentiated between the two usages. Basic-

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(56) Childe (1949a) 3, 4.

ally he argued that the archaeologist's conception of culture differed in degree rather than in kind from the anthropologist's. As before he defined an archaeological culture as "an assemblage of associated traits that recur repeatedly".<sup>(57)</sup> Now, however, he qualifies this statement, "These traits are mostly material objects,"<sup>(58)</sup> thus by implication at least extending his definition of an archaeological culture to comprise something other than material objects.

Culture in the anthropological sense he saw as basically a holistic concept comprising all aspects of human behaviour that are not innate reflexes or instincts.<sup>(59)</sup>

It is everything that men derive from nurture, from human society, rather than from nature or the sub-human environment. It includes language and logic, religion and philosophy, morality and law, as well as the manufacture and use of tools, clothes, houses and even the selection of food to eat. All this men must learn from their fellows in society. The human infant has to learn from parents and seniors how to talk, how to dispose of his excrement, what to eat and how to prepare it, and so on. All these rules belong to the collective tradition, accumulated and preserved by the society into which a human being is born. (60)

In addition to this holistic level, however, Childe also recognised a partitive level of culture i.e. the acquired behaviour patterns of particular groups. It was with this level that he equated the archaeologist's culture.

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(57) Childe (1951a) 30.

(58) Idem.

(59) Ibid., 31.

(60) Ibid., 31, 32.

As societies have lived in different historical environments and have passed through different vicissitudes, their traditions have diverged, and so ethnography reveals a multiplicity of cultures, just as does archaeology. (61)

In Social Evolution Childe argued that the social traditions which determine culture are expressed in habits of thought and action, in institutions and customs, all of which are essentially immaterial and exist only so long as the society that inculcates, sanctions and preserves them is alive and active. While writing preserves language and with it clues to other non-material aspects of past societies, the prehistorian does not have reference to this important source material. For Childe, however, this was not as great a problem as it might appear at first sight.

For all culture finds expression in action - action in the material world. It is indeed through action alone that culture is maintained and transmitted; a belief that exists only in somebody's head forms no part of culture and has no existence for history or anthropology. Some of the actions dictated by, and expressive of, culture effect durable changes in the material world. All such fall within the purview of archaeology. It is indeed just these human actions that have provided the material out of which archaeological cultures are constructed. (62)

Childe thus emphasised that the archaeologist's knowledge of his cultures was not limited to a material level.

In a word, the archaeological record is by no means restricted to tools of production and weapons of war. Under suitable conditions we

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(61) Ibid., 32.

(62) Ibid., 33.

can learn a great deal about the mode of production as well as the means of production.(63) The role of secondary and primary industry and of trade can be estimated from observed facts. The extent of the division of labour and the distribution of the product can be inferred with some confidence. Plausible guesses can be made as to the existence of slaves, the status of women, and the inheritance of property. Even the ideological superstructure can be made the subject of cautious hypotheses. (64)

When Childe wrote Social Evolution he had been working with the idea of culture for over twenty five years, also he had been deeply involved with both historical and philosophical theory. It was thus to be expected that his depth of understanding of both the limitations and potential of the concept would have increased. Even the briefest glance at the chapter shows that this is in fact the case. Whereas previously he had considered the archaeologist's culture to be an empirical entity immediately apparent on inspection of the archaeological record, now he was aware of a subjective element in the classification of data.

Culture and society are abstractions. No two products of handicraft are strictly identical. Every family of craftsmen and every member of such a family, have their own tricks of style. No two villages yield precisely the same complex of relics and traits. The subjective element comes in deciding which idiosyncracies should be ignored in defining a culture. Frankly, it is hard to say which should be disregarded as purely individual and which should be taken as social traits, the *differtiae* of new cultures. (65)

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(63) The mode of production is roughly equivalent to the economy, the means of production to the technology.

(64) Childe, op. cit., 34.

(65) Ibid., 40.

At this time archaeologists were having to confront this problem directly since the broad cultural groupings which they had assumed to be unified wholes in the thirties were now seen to constitute several discrete groupings depending on the criterion selected as the classificatory basis. As noted previously as the cultural differentials became more refined, the number of cultures perceived in the archaeological record expanded accordingly.

German and Austrian archaeologists have been busily distinguishing new ceramic styles and making them symbols, and often the eponyms, of new cultures. Plainly there must be limits to this subdivision. In England down to 1928, prehistorians recognised in their "Early Bronze Age" a single culture, archaeologically symbolized by one type of pot, termed a "Beaker", and identified with a single invading people, the "Beaker-folk". In 1948 at least four distinct kinds of Beaker have been distinguished and each attributed to different bands of invaders!

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However, while Childe recognised that the classification of cultures was not as objective as he had hitherto assumed, he did not discuss the matter in any depth and thus failed to emphasise its enormous implications for archaeological classification as a whole. The problem is in fact one of subjectivity and concerns the fundamental relationship between the archaeologist and his data. It is now widely recognised that the patterns perceived in the archaeological record are determined not only by the patterns inherent in the material itself, but also by the theoretical framework of the archaeologist. In other words it can now be

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(66) Ibid., 40, 41.

seen that archaeologists are looking at their data through theoretical spectacles which colour their perception. It is this realization which constitutes the foundation of Clarke's stage of "critical self consciousness". (67)

The second area in which Childe's thinking had notably broadened since the thirties was in his appreciation of the nature of the sociological counterpart of the archaeologist's culture. By now he had realised that it did not necessarily correspond to either a linguistic grouping or a single society.

The boundaries of the several fields of culture do not necessarily co-incide. The archaeologist has to rely mainly on material culture - instruments of production, transport devices, house plans, fashions of dress, artistic styles - in defining societies. Judged by these criteria, Europe, North America and Australia might easily seem to enjoy a single culture and therefore to represent a single society. But of course this relatively uniform cultural province is divided into several linguistic provinces, though language is a very important part of culture. It is split into a still larger number of economically and politically independent States, and many sociologists would identify State and society. At the same time each of these States is subdivided into smaller societies that may even cut across political boundaries - into churches and clubs, economic classes and professions and so on. The dress, housing, diet and even language of such groups within a single State often diverge very substantially. An archaeologist might take the material culture of each such group as representative of a distinct society. (68)

Childe was thus very cautious as to what type of sociological grouping the archaeologist's culture corres-

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(67) D. Clarke (1973) 6-7.

(68) Childe (1951a) 38.

ponded to.

So for the archaeologist the unit or society must remain the group enjoying the same culture - i.e. giving concrete expression to common traditions. Such a group may comprise a number of settlements or local communities. Perhaps we might call its members a people, but we should have no right to assume that this people as a whole spoke a single language or acted as a political unit, still less that its members were related physiologically or belonged to one zoological race. (69)

While he still attempted to equate a culture with a "people", the equation has lost much of its former significance on account of his rejection of the salient features of a "people" as previously defined. In fact as the above passage shows the term now denotes nothing more than the unit of society corresponding to the archaeologist's culture. Childe, however, did not seem to fully appreciate the significance of his rejection of language and social unity as criteria of a people. Early in his career he had rightly argued that the archaeologist's culture did not necessarily represent a race. His mistake had been to assume that it corresponded to a "people" which at that time he saw as a sociological and linguistic unit. However, instead of admitting that he was wrong in making this assumption he chose to redefine the term "people" to such an extent that its previous meaning was completely lost.

During his stay at the Institute of Archaeology

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(69) Ibid., 40.

Childe was accustomed to devote a course of lectures every alternate year to "the principles of archaeological classification, current terminology and implicit interpretative concepts".<sup>(70)</sup> The outcome of this was Piecing Together The Past (1956), his most detailed statement of archaeological theory and methodology. In the same year he published A Short Introduction to Archaeology which contained, in addition to chapters explaining the fundamentals of primitive technology and the main types of monuments found in the field, a precis of the theoretical argument advanced in Piecing Together The Past.

In both these works Childe's analysis was based on what he considered to be the three main co-ordinates in archaeological classification, functional, chronological and chorological. According to Childe these answered the questions 'What was it for?' 'When was it made?' and 'Who made it?'.<sup>(71)</sup> This tripartite basis, however, perhaps needs extending, for the third question 'Who made it?' in fact assumes and is based upon a more fundamental question. Strictly speaking since chorology is the scientific study of the geographical extents and limits of phenomena, the only question it can legitimately answer is 'Where is it found?' or 'What is its distribution?' The question of authorship is a distinct question which can only be considered after the functional, chronological and distri-

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(70) Childe (1956a) v.

(71) Childe (1956a) 14-16; (1956b) 26-48.



butional factors have been determined. It is thus interesting that Childe saw only three rather than four basic co-ordinates. Presumably he considered the question of authorship to be so closely related to the question of distribution as not to require separate study.

For Childe a culture was fundamentally a chorological and not a chronological unit.<sup>(72)</sup> Cultural groupings he argued could not be used to denote periods of time but must themselves be classified chronologically. During Childe's lifetime this was an important and crucial point. At this time the key to the chronology of prehistoric Europe lay in the pattern of stratigraphically established culture sequences and it was thus normal practice to use cultural names to denote both geographical units of archaeological relics and monuments, and periods of relative chronology, i.e. that period during which a particular culture flourished.

In 1935 Childe had admitted that to a certain extent this practice was convenient, but even then he had warned that where there was the slightest danger of confusing the chronological with the cultural classification such usage was to be depreciated. At this time he suggested that if one wished to denote a period of time it was best done by using geological or climatological terms or dates in calendar years, thus removing the possibility of ambiguity.

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(72) Childe (1956a) 112; (1956b) 45, 46.

Twenty years later in Piecing Together The Past he is even more firmly opposed to the practice of applying one and the same name to both a period and a culture, considering this to have been responsible for "horrible confusion".<sup>(73)</sup> Here he attempted to separate the chronological from the chorological co-ordinates by using a numerical system to denote the former and cultural terms for the latter.<sup>(74)</sup>

Childe however was not wholly enthusiastic about the system and expressed several reservations as to its practical application. Firstly, he pointed out that there was a real danger that bizarre cultural terms might be replaced by equally bizarre numerical terms.

But even in the well-explored provinces of the British Isles, northern Europe and Greece, recent surprises have warned us that familiar and well-recognised cultural sequences may be susceptible of extension and subdivision. Allowance for such refinement can be made by using Roman numerals for the major periods already recognised. Divisions in each could then be denoted by letters and subdivisions by Arabic figures, so we might have III B 1 (or even III B 1 c using a lower case letter for further subdivision).<sup>(75)</sup>

Secondly he emphasised that numerical designations had only a limited regional validity, for example in Britain despite its relatively small size there was no system that could be applied to the province as a whole.<sup>(76)</sup>

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(73) Childe (1956a) 95.

(74) Ibid., 95-101.

(75) Ibid., 100.

(76) Ibid., 101.

Childe's concept of an archaeological culture was based on the notion of an archaeological type which he considered to be the smallest unit of archaeological classification. Essentially a type was an abstraction, a grouping together of phenomena. The archaeologist, he emphasised was not interested in unique objects but rather in those which had been accepted and replicated by society. Indeed it was this very replication which, in Childe's eyes, constituted the essence of the type. "Types are just creations of individuals that have been approved, adopted and objectified by some society."<sup>(77)</sup> The prehistorian, thus, according to Childe only deals with the individual as a member of a class, ignoring what he termed "the particular peculiarities, accidental or intentional, that in fact distinguish each specimen."<sup>(78)</sup> This is of course where the personal viewpoint of the archaeologist is of crucial importance for how does one decide which traits are to be selected and which are to be rejected. As pointed out previously Childe was aware of and alluded to a subjective element in archaeological classification.<sup>(79)</sup> In Piecing Together The Past, he again raised this issue.

Finally, how precisely should types be defined for chorological - and for that matter for chronological - classification? No two hand-made articles are identical. All types are abstractions obtained by ignoring the minor deviations of individual specimens. Archaeologists have in practice proceeded not by group-

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(77) Ibid., 9.

(78) Ibid., 6.

(79) See above p. 127.

ing together ever wider assemblages of increasingly abstract types, but rather by subdividing such groups by discriminating even more concrete types. How far can such discrimination profitably procede? (80)

Here he argued that no general rules could be laid down a priori and while he offered a few practical hints on how to procede in two concrete instances he was largely content to leave the solution of the problem to the archaeologist's own discretion.

When types are significantly associated, i.e. in a context which indicates contemporary use, the notion of culture arises. Here Childe emphasised that simple juxtaposition does not necessarily imply association for this might be the result of chance. In such instances he advocated the use of Braidwood's term "aggregate".

When a group of types are found together under circumstances suggesting contemporary use they are said to be associated. Mere physical juxtaposition does not guarantee association. A number of stone implements may turn up together in a gravel pit dug in a Pleistocene river channel. The gravel consists of debris picked up by the river and its tributaries anywhere in its large catchment area and promiscuously dumped together where the force of the current abated. There is no guarantee that all the implements included in the gravel had been made or used together or even in the same geological period; some might have been washed out of older gravels laid down millenia earlier and then mixed with others made and used on the surface of those older gravels. Braidwood describes such a fortuitous collection as an aggregate. (81)

He made the further provision that cultures must

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(80) Childe (1956a) 124.

(81) Ibid., 31.

illustrate more than one aspect of human behaviour, for example a recurrent assemblage of stone tools never found in any recognisable type of dwelling or grave or even associated with broken bones of game indicative of a selection of menus, he termed an "industry" not a culture.<sup>(82)</sup> While this is an exceptionally limited view of an industry it does show that Childe recognised the presence of different types of assemblages in the archaeological record and was attempting to differentiate between those which in his eyes had attained cultural status and those which could not be included in this category.

In Piecing Together The Past as in Social Evolution Childe drew attention to the fact that archaeologists were beginning to discern an ever increasing number of cultural groupings in their data, often distinguished on the basis of quite fine criteria.<sup>(83)</sup> This of course was a major blow to his earlier thesis that cultures are observed facts. In effect it meant that he had not only to look more carefully at the nature of these groupings but to examine in more detail the way in which they were differentiated. This necessitated a close look at the geologically inspired concept of a type fossil. Here Childe emphasised that type fossils were often constituted by very insignificant aspects of behaviour.

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(82) Ibid., 33.

(83) Idem.

To distinguish one culture from another, the most convenient differentiae, the most serviceable diagnostic fossils are offered by the more superficial, often indeed trivial, idiosyncracies of behaviour - traits that are least obviously integrated with the total pattern. (84)

Many other types indicative of highly significant cultural behaviour were of little value for diagnostic purposes because they occur over vast areas of time and space. While they are essential for describing cultures they are unsuitable for differentiating them.<sup>(85)</sup> In order to determine the significance of a proposed type fossil as a cultural differential Childe believed that the subjective element could be largely overcome by reference to distributional analysis. Here he argued that if a type were truly diagnostic of a culture, its distribution should exhibit an intelligible pattern cluster around one or more recognisable foci.

The standard distributional pattern for a relic that is a good diagnostic type will be a nucleus of thick set dots surrounded by a penumbra, or several such nuclei. (86)

It is interesting to compare this model with that proposed in the 1939 edition of The Dawn where Childe advocated a similar pattern against which to test his short chronology for prehistoric Europe.<sup>(87)</sup> In neither case did he attempt to verify the model or even indicate the evidence upon which it is based. The existence of a

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(84) Ibid., 113.

(85) Ibid., 33.

(86) Ibid., 116.

(87) See above p. 84, 85.

primary centre of diffusion and the pattern of diffusion therefrom, however, cannot be taken as axiomatic but rather as a hypothesis requiring verification. That Childe did not see this, especially in a work explicitly devoted to archaeological theory, is thus significant for it illustrates an important blind spot in his approach where he is so strongly influenced by the diffusionist paradigm as to lose sight of the hypothetical nature of its fundamental premises.

Childe stressed that a culture should not be distinguished by a single type but by a plurality of well defined diagnostic types thus avoiding any unnecessary proliferation of cultural groups. However, while he admitted that a quantitative element entered into the definition of culture he argued that statistics could only have a limited use in the discipline.

We say that a type to be diagnostic of a culture must 'normally' have been found associated with other diagnostic types. And 'normally' presumably means 'n' times. Yet it is impracticable to fix a precise numerical value for n. Carved stone balls were once found in association with other types distinctive of the Rinyo culture. In the absence of any other association for these curious objects, we have to assume that the remaining one hundred and twenty balls found in isolation belonged to the Rinyo culture and can be used to illustrate its one time distribution.

Of course a few stray specimens of a diagnostic type far from the region of its main concentration do not suffice to prove the spread thither of the culture they should typify. But laborious statistical calculations are hardly necessary to unmask the spurious chronological claims of such strays. (88)

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(88) Childe (1956a) 122, 123.

Childe emphasised at several points throughout the text that the archaeologist's culture was not constituted by type fossils, they merely provided the framework for further study.

The substance of the record is constituted by the houses of the living and the dead with the evidence of daily activities and the solemn rituals they supply, the craftsmen's tools through which the practical science of past ages was applied, the carvings or paintings that directly express ideas and ideals. If their arrangement and classification depend upon the most variable and improbable play-things of fashion, that does not exempt or preclude the archaeologist from studying and presenting the permanent contributions made by the age and by the society and in each case is defined by its most ephemeral fancies. (89)

Once a cultural grouping had been distinguished in the archaeological record with the aid of diagnostic types, Childe argued that the next step was to enumerate all types and phenomena associated with them, thus providing the basis for inference concerning the behaviour of the group. Here Childe divided a culture into three main components, economy, sociology and ideology, this being the first time that he had advanced a formal structural analysis.

E C O N O M Y

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|----|------------------------|--|
| I  | <u>PRIMARY ECONOMY</u> | (A) Habitat (B) Food supply<br>(C) Warmth and Shelter.   |
| II | <u>INDUSTRIES</u>      | (A) Stoneworking (B) Metallurgy<br>(C) Bone, horn and ivory<br>(D) Carpentry (E) Pottery<br>(F) Textiles and basketry<br>(G) Hides (H) Other natural<br>materials. |

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(89) Ibid., 38.



- III TRANSPORT (A) By water (B) By land.
- IV TRADE
- V WAR

S O C I O L O G Y

- I DEMOGRAPHY
- II FAMILY AS AN INSTITUTION
- III TOWN PLANNING
- IV STRUCTURE

I D E O L O G Y

- I SCIENTIFIC (A) Writing and numerical notation (B) Counting (C) Measurement (D) Geometry (E) Calendrical Science (F) Medicine and Surgery.
- II NUMENOLOGICAL (A) Burial rites (B) 1. temples and sanctuaries, 2. figurines, idols and phalli, 3. anticonic ritual objects (C) Rites.
- III ARTISTIC (A) Graphic Arts (B) Musical Instruments (C) Personal Ornaments.
- IV SPORTIVE (A) Knuckle bones, dice, draughts-men (B) Cursus and ball courts (C) Toys and Rattles. (90)

As in 1935 Childe stressed that culture should be viewed as an organic whole and not as a mechanical aggregate of traits.<sup>(91)</sup> It is thus perhaps somewhat surprising that he does not accompany his detailed compilation of the contents of culture with a discussion as to how the major subdivisions inter-relate within the whole.

In fact the only place where he even briefly considers

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(90) Ibid., 129-131

(91) Ibid., 34.

this problem is in a chapter entitled "What is it for?" but here he is only concerned with the inter-relationship between what he terms spiritual and material culture. As before he defined the latter in a specialist utilitarian sense.

The bulk of the archaeological record falls within the domain, tritely termed 'Material Culture'. Most archaeological data, that is to say, result from actions directed towards the satisfaction of needs that Homo Sapiens shares with other animals. Of course such satisfaction is in all cases sought or obtained in a distinctively human way and in particular with the aid of extra corporeal organs - artefacts, not organically attached to the human body nor yet produced from it like a spider's web. With this qualification it may be said that at least a large proportion of our relics and monuments served, albeit only very indirectly and in a roundabout way, to the procurement of food, shelter, warmth, protection against foes human and non human, and hygiene.(92)

While he did not define "spiritual culture" he gave examples as to what is to be included in this class.

For descriptive purposes the monuments and relics resulting from . . . ritual, sportive or artistic activities may be relegated to the category of "Spiritual Culture". (93)

His main point was that since no society could indulge in ceremonies, games and ornaments, unless it produced enough food and shelter to support itself, the "spiritual culture" could legitimately be called a superstructure supported by the productive system.(94)

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(92) Ibid., 44, 45.

(93) Ibid., 44.

(94) Idem.

The gravest omission in Piecing Together The Past however, was not the lack of discussion as to the functional inter-relationships between cultural components. In a work concerned not only with the principles of archaeological classification but also with "implicit interpretative concepts" it was to be expected that Childe would have discussed the general theory underlying his use of an archaeological culture. In particular one would have thought it essential to clarify the relationship between this specifically archaeological definition of culture and the broader concept with which it was closely interwoven. There is only one brief passage in the text, however, where Childe even hints that culture could be defined in a sense other than the way employed by archaeologists.

And it was German prehistorians who came to term such recurrent assemblages of type-fossils "Kulturen" - a word unhappily translated into English as "cultures", used in a partitive sense, but used in much this sense by ethnographers too! (95)

As the above passage shows, at the end of his career, Childe was clearly unhappy about the use of the term culture in the specialist sense which he himself had introduced into British archaeology thirty years previously.

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(95) Ibid., 28.

CHAPTER IV    The Functional-Economic Interpretation of  
the Three Ages

At the same time as he introduced his functional conception of culture to the Prehistoric Society in 1935, Childe also presented what he termed his functional-economic interpretation of the three age model of Stone, Bronze and Iron.<sup>(1)</sup> Before going on to discuss this interpretation, however, it is essential to outline the development of the model prior to 1935, for, unlike the cultural paradigm the three ages had a relatively long history in the discipline and had undergone several fundamental changes in the course of its evolution.<sup>(2)</sup>

In 1836 Christian Jurgensen Thomsen published Ledetraad til Nordisk Old Kyndighed which was translated into English in 1848 as A Guide to Northern Antiquities.<sup>(3)</sup> This contained what was undoubtedly the most explicit and detailed statement of the idea of three ages of Stone, Bronze and Iron to date.

The Age of Stone, or that period when weapons and implements were made of stone, wood or bone, or some such material, and during which very little or nothing at all was known of metals . . .

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(1) Childe (1935c).

(2) Indeed the concept of three ages has a long and fascinating history stretching back to classical antiquity. As yet, however, its development has not been traced in any detail. See R. Heizer (1962) and G. Daniel (1967) 90-109 for pre-Thomsen development. For the history of the three ages in archaeology see Daniel (1943).

(3) By Lord Ellesmere.

The Age of Bronze, in which weapons and cutting implements were made of copper or bronze, and nothing at all, or but very little was known of iron or silver . . .

The Age of Iron is the third and last period of the heathen times, in which iron was used for those articles to which that metal is eminently suited, and in the fabrication of which it came to be used as a substitute for bronze. (4)

The simplicity of Thomsen's technological model, however, was not to endure long. With the discovery of the antiquity of man and of manufactured tools associated with the bones of extinct animals, important structural changes had to be made in order to accommodate the long duration of the first age. In 1865 Lubbock divided the Stone Age into two major periods, the Palaeolithic and the Neolithic.

I. That of the Drift; when man shared possession of Europe with the Mammoth, the Cave Bear, the Woolly-haired rhinoceros and other extinct animals. This I have proposed to call the "Palaeolithic" Period.

II. The later or polished Stone Age; a period characterised by beautiful weapons and instruments made of flint and other kinds of stone; in which, however, we find no trace of the knowledge of any metal, excepting gold, which seems to have been sometimes used for ornaments. For this period I have suggested the term "Neolithic". (5)

He thus introduced new geological and ecological criteria into what had been hitherto a purely technological scheme.

By the end of the nineteenth century it was shown that these three sets of criteria did not coincide. To accommodate a period which was geologically recent with

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(4) Thomsen in Daniel (1967); for full quotation see pp. 93-95.

(5) J. Lubbock (1865) in Daniel op. cit., 120.

chipped stone implements the term Mesolithic was suggested by Allen Brown,<sup>(6)</sup> but Boyd Dawkins<sup>(7)</sup> disapproved of the suggestion and the term was not generally accepted until the nineteen twenties.

European archaeologists working on the Bronze Age in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century were likewise seeing major divisions in their material. Italian archaeologists, for example Pigorini, Collini and Orsi, proposed an "Eneolithic Period" between the end of the Stone Age and the beginning of the Bronze Age.<sup>(8)</sup> In Hungary at the International Congress at Budapest in 1876, Francois Von Pulszky proposed the recognition of a Copper Age between the Stone Age and the Bronze Age. Sir William Wilde in his Catalogue of the Antiquities in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy in 1863 likewise distinguished between a copper and bronze industry. French archaeologists were also beginning to recognise a copper stage prior to the Bronze Age. In 1865 Jeanjean in his L'Age du Cuivre dans les Cevennes argued for a copper age in the south of France calling it Durfortian after the Grotte des Morts at Durfort. The researches of Saint Venant, Raymond and Chatelier in Brittany seemed to confirm the existence of this Copper Age. Chantre in 1875/76 in his

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(6) J.A. Brown (1892).

(7) W.B. Dawkins (1894).

(8) G. Daniel (1950) 146 ff.

L'Age du Bronze regarded the Bronze Age as a unitary phase preceded by the Copper Age.

The Iron Age at this time did not undergo any major alterations as far as its meaning or implications were concerned. It was realised, however, that throughout the greater part of historic time in Western Europe man had been using iron so the term early or pre-Roman Iron Age was usually employed to specify the initial phase.

During the nineteenth century the three age model served as the basis for an elaborate chronological structuring of archaeological data from prehistoric Europe. Thus as well as advocating additional ages, archaeologists at this time began to seriate the ages themselves. Undoubtedly the most influential subdivision of the Stone Age was that by Gabriel de Mortillet in 1869 and 1872, in which he recognised four major periods in the Palaeolithic: (1) Epoque du Moustier; (2) Epoque du Solutré; (3) Epoque d'Aurignac and (4) Epoque de la Madeleine.<sup>(9)</sup> In 1872 in his paper at the International Congress at Brussels he dropped the Epoque d'Aurignac and divided the Palaeolithic into two major divisions, a Lower containing Chellean, Mousterian and Solutrean and an Upper consisting of Magdalenian. He also hoped to bring the Neolithic into line by terming it Robhousien after the Swiss site of Robhousen.

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(9) G. Daniel (1975) 103 ff.

De Mortillet's system was basically an extension of the principles of geology applied to archaeology. In his Prehistorique (1883) he wrote

Suivante d'une excellente méthode adoptée en géologie - il ne faut pas oublier que la paléoethnologie découle directement de la géologie - j'ai donné à chaque époque le nom d'une localité bien typique, parfaitement connue et étudiée; seulement, au lieu de dire: époque de Chelles, époque du Moustier, époque du Solutre et époque de la Madeleine; pour simplifier, en supprimant l'article, j'ai transformé en adjectif le nom de la localité, le terminant par d'une consonance uniforme. C'est encore là un procédé emprunté à la géologie. (10)

Thus although his classification was based on sites, the subdivisions represented not cultures but periods of time deduced from techno-typological criteria. To a certain extent this tradition of subdividing the ages was carried on into the Bronze and Iron Ages by Montelius and others. Montelius's scheme for the Bronze Age was developed in three famous works; Les Temps Préhistoriques en Suede et dans les autres Pays Scandinaves (1895), La Civilization Primitive en Italie depuis l'Introduction des Métaux (1895) and Die Chronologie der Alttesten Bronzezeit en Nord - Deutschland und Scandinavien (1900).<sup>(11)</sup> In northern Europe Montelius recognised five phases which he numbered I-V, in Italy he identified only I-IV with a subdivision in phase I. Montelius's use of numbers to

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(10) De Mortillet in Daniel *ibid*, 108.

(11) *Ibid.*, 147.



distinguish postulated periods was a significant departure from the French named epochs and formed the basis for the numerical chronologies of the pre-radiocarbon dated schemes of the twentieth century, in particular those of Childe.

Similar schemes were devised during the last quarter of the nineteenth century for subdividing the Iron Age. In 1872 Hildebrand distinguished the Halstatt and La Tène phases in the pre-Roman Iron Age. In 1875 De Mortillet adopted this dual division but termed the second phase Gaulish or Mar/ian Iron Age. In 1885 Otto Tischler divided La Tène into three periods on a typological basis.

During the nineteenth century, then, the major theoretical influence on the three age model came from contemporary geology. The Ages and their subdivisions were thus viewed as "epochs" and considered to represent units of sidereal time. By the turn of the century, however, the practical demonstration of the contemporaneity of many of the alleged epochs led archaeologists to look more closely at the nature of their basic units. And with the recognition that the variation in the archaeological record could be explained by changes in social tradition as well as changes in time, the concept of culture began to replace the epoch as the primary unit of classification. However, while this necessitated changes in the intricate substructure of the three age model it did not seriously affect its overall role in the discipline.

It was only during the course of the twentieth century with the expansion of archaeological research from a European to a global basis, that the usefulness of the major divisions as chronological periods came to be questioned. In this wider context it became apparent that the model had only a very limited field of application and could in fact be only usefully employed in the Old World, in particular Northern Europe. In America, Africa or Australia the existence of "Stone Age" or "Iron Age" peoples side by side with modern civilization high-lighted its basic weakness as a chronological framework. Childe, himself, it should be noted, was among the first to point out the inadequacies of the model in this respect.

Geological periods have an absolute value and are applicable equally to all continents and latitudes only because they are so enormously long that temporal differences between events in distinct areas are relatively insignificant. Natural history must take these periods as units. The fossil flora or fauna characteristic of a geological period did not presumably appear simultaneously all over the world, but originated in one centre from which it slowly spread. But with the geological period, defined by the fossils, as unit, the time occupied by the spread is imperceptible. With his limitations and for his purposes the palaeontologist must ignore time lags between regions, for him all Edaphosauri are 'contemporary'.

The prehistorian of humanity cannot afford to make abstraction of such lags. Judged by their industries the New Zealand Maoris in the days of Captain Cook and the Tasians of the Nile Valley before 5000 B.C. were both 'neolithic'. Polished stone axes treated as Leitfossilien would make the Maoris of 18th century A.D. contemporaries of the Egyptians who nevertheless lived sixty centuries earlier in terms of human history! A period which telescopes into nothingness the whole of written history is useless as a chronological frame for prehistory.

Typological periods can have at best a regional validity, can provide a convenient but provisional framework for classifying local antiquities. Thomsen's three ages did enable him to arrange his collection of Danish relics in the right chronological order. It would have broken down had it been extended to collections from Greece to Greenland. To determine what Danish products should be displayed as contemporary with Bronze Age relics from Greece or Esquimoux Stone Age artefacts a time scale quite independent of the material must be invoked. (12)

However, while he rejected the three ages as a chronological framework, he did not believe that the model had outlived its role in the discipline. By a revolutionary shift in emphasis he suggested that it could provide a useful framework for socio-economic development.

What then is to become of the hallowed terms, Palaeolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age. Can they survive as designations of true periods of time which could be expressed in terms of solar years in our calendar? Obviously not. But I should like to believe they can be given a profound significance as indicating vital stages in human progress. (13)

Elsewhere he made it clear that he considered the criteria selected by Thomsen, i.e. the material used for the principal cutting tools and weapons, to be meaningful indicators of economic and social systems.

The archaeologist's division of the prehistoric period into Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages are not altogether arbitrary. They are based upon the materials used for cutting implements, especially axes, and such implements are among the most important tools of production. Realist history insists upon their significance in moulding and determining social systems and economic organization. (14)

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(12) Childe (1935c) 2.

(13) Ibid., 7.

(14) Ibid., 9.

These criteria are no superficial symptoms, but organically bound up with the economy and structure of the societies to be classified. After all, cutting tools constitute, at least in the less well equipped societies, a decisive part of the means of production at the disposal of those societies. In fact a comparative study of societies classified on this basis brings out very prettily the influence of the means of production on the mode of production. (15)

Thus Childe believed that with the aid of a Marxist model of history he could interpret the three ages of Stone, Bronze and Iron in socio-economic terms. However, before going on to examine the economic and sociological values which he gave to the ages, it is essential to consider the classificatory basis of the interpretation. For while Childe stressed the advantages of a model based on technological criteria, the three age system at this time was no longer purely technological in basis but during the course of its development had acquired in a non-systematic fashion other classificatory criteria. This was most evident in the context of the Neolithic which by this time was characterized by a whole set of diverse criteria, i.e. by polished stone axes, by pottery and agriculture as well as by a geological age - the holocene.

In "Changing Methods and Aims in Prehistory" Childe retained Thomsen's original technological criteria for the

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(15) Childe (1946c) 18, 19. Here it should be noted that in Marxist terminology, "means of production" is roughly synonymous with technology; and "mode of production" with economy. For an outline of Marxist theory see below p.

Bronze and Iron Ages, i.e. the material used for the principal cutting tools and weapons, while emphasising economic criteria for the subdivisions of the Stone Age. "Neolithic will mean 'food producing' and will point a contrast to the food-gathering economy of the Old Stone Age."<sup>(16)</sup> While he argued that this definition of the Neolithic agreed passably with classical definitions, he had in fact to reject the polished stone axe as a criterion of Neolithic culture.

The polished stone axe that marks the neolithic period of the typologist was and is used by food-gatherers. The great comb-ware culture of north-eastern Europe exhibits the typologically neolithic traits of polished stone and pottery, but its economic foundation was food-gathering; its economy is palaeolithic though its industry is formally neolithic. Conversely a typical group of self-sufficing food producers like the Badarians apparently used no polished stone axes; presumably they had no use for them since timber was scarce or non-existent. A polished stone axe is not, therefore, a conclusive or necessary sign of a neolithic culture. <sup>(17)</sup>

Furthermore as the following passage shows he was not wholly convinced as to the usefulness of pottery as an indice of the Neolithic.

But pottery used to be regarded as exclusively neolithic. Yet Dr. Leakey found sherds in a pleistocene deposit in Kenya. And recently Burchell and Reid Moir have eloquently restated the case for palaeolithic pottery in Europe too. Their arguments and others have convinced me that palaeolithic pottery is a possibility to be reckoned with. <sup>(18)</sup>

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(16) Childe (1935c) 7.

(17) Ibid., 8.

(18) Idem.

At this time, however, Childe was not completely wholehearted in his rejection of the technological criteria and did in fact give a separate status to those cultures which he regarded as "formally neolithic" while based on a hunting gathering economy.

Some term like opsipalaeolithic or opsimiolithic ought to be adopted to describe cultures which are formally neolithic or contemporary with neolithic cultures, but still preserve the food gathering economy of the Old Stone Age. (19)

It is interesting that at this point Childe tentatively retained the equation between the Palaeolithic and the pleistocene, suggesting that if "the cultivation of plants in the upper pleistocene could be established the significance attached to the terms palaeolithic or neolithic would have to be changed."<sup>(20)</sup> Elsewhere he writes,

The Old Stone Age was indeed so enormously long that it may be treated as a universal period, equivalent to the geologists' pleistocene. But in considering its end the time lag between the different areas is of crucial importance. The equivalence between pleistocene and palaeolithic is preserved by many archaeologists through the insertion of a Mesolithic Age, to which are assigned some post glacial archaeological remains from countries, like Britain and North-Western Europe in general, which were only affected by the neolithic revolution long after the end of the Ice Age. To the mesolithic would then be assigned those remains that are later than the geological pleistocene but older than the beginnings of the New Stone Age locally.<sup>(21)</sup>

Later in his career, however, Childe was to become

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(19) Idem., see also (1956a) 88 where he makes the same point.

(20) Idem.

(21) Childe (1936a) 50.

more critical of this equation, considering it to have arisen from a lack of understanding of the difference between absolute and relative chronology. In this context he was firmly opposed to the introduction of the concept of Mesolithic into the model, believing it to have caused further confusion.

This innovation can only be regarded as deplorable. For it sanctioned and stereotyped a confusion foreign to the founders of the Three Age system. Thomsen had to arrange the prehistoric material from a small and homogeneous area. In Denmark Stone, Bronze and Iron described real Ages - periods of time which followed one another in that order. Because the same sequence was observed in Egypt and Hither Asia it did not follow that the several "Ages" were everywhere contemporary. Thomsen probably never envisaged this possibility. His immediate successors, like Worsaae explicitly denied it; the Bronze Age began in Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean much earlier than in the North.

But with Lubbock's division of the Stone Age, one half of it had been identified with a geological period, the Pleistocene. (22)

Throughout his career Childe consistently advocated an economic basis of classification for the subdivisions of the Stone Age, while retaining the technological criteria for the major ages. In other words he employed an essentially mixed model of the past. In Piecing Together The Past (1956) he defended such practice arguing that it was quite logical to introduce a new basis of classification for the subdivisions. (23) The situation

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(22) Childe (1951a) 19, 20. It should be noted, however, that Childe continued to use the term Mesolithic, see Childe *ibid.*, 28; (1954b) 43.

(23) Childe (1956a) 86.

is complicated, however, by the fact that while Childe thus characterised the Palaeolithic and Neolithic as subdivisions of the Stone Age, in his initial functional-economic interpretation he seemed to give the Palaeolithic, Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages equal status as economic stages. This identity of status was emphasised by the fact that the Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages were all preceded by economic revolutions.

Childe retained this four-fold structure until very late in his career when he replaced it by a five-fold division. In Piecing Together the Past he argued that the lower and middle Palaeolithic represented a technological grouping which was separate and distinct from the upper Palaeolithic/Mesolithic assemblages. Childe termed the first subdivision of the Stone Age the Protolithic or Palaeolithic and the second subdivision the Miolithic.<sup>(24)</sup> The Neolithic was retained as the third subdivision but unlike the Protolithic and the Miolithic it was defined by economic criteria, i.e. food production.<sup>(25)</sup> The Bronze and Iron Ages were defined traditionally by the material used for the principal cutting tools and weapons.<sup>(26)</sup>

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(24) Ibid., 86.

(25) Ibid., 87.

(26) Ibid., 89, 90. Although Childe was aware that the term Bronze Age was technically incorrect, many bronzes in fact being made of copper, he did not see this as a sufficient reason for the introduction of a chalcolithic stage.



Daniel in his critique of the three ages in 1943, argued that Childe had in fact introduced a new and alternative model of prehistory which did not coincide with Thomsen's three ages. In his eyes they were two "separate and different groupings of human history - the one technological, the other functional-economic"<sup>(27)</sup>. Certainly, Childe's reinterpretation of the three ages suggests a separate economic model. Childe, however, never attempted to give it a distinct status outwith the three age framework. During his lifetime archaeological research was not geared to gaining direct access to economic facts. Rather these had to be inferred from the technology. Even in 1956 Childe drew attention to this in the context of the neolithic.

In practice the criterion is not so readily applicable; from a few bones it is not easy to distinguish domesticated from wild animals; actual remains of vegetable foods are only in exceptional circumstances preserved. Hence all evidence for farming might be missing unless farmers made specialized and easily recognisable implements for reaping or grinding grain - and there are no reasons for suspecting that the very earliest farmers did.

Prehistorians once hoped to dodge this practical difficulty, believing that all farmers manufactured pots and most at least polished stone for axe-blades. Since 1950, however, it has been demonstrated that the earliest farmers in Palestine, Cyprus, Kurdistan and Baluchistan did not make pots, while at least in Palestine they made no recognisable axes at all and certainly made none with polished edges. (28)

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(27) Daniel (1943) 48.

(28) Childe (1956a) 87, 88.

Practical reasons aside, however, it is clear that Childe believed that Thomsen's ages did in fact coincide with major stages in man's socio-economic development. As indicated above Childe held a Marxist view of society in which a particular level of technology was seen to correspond to a definite form of economy and sociology. In terms of this model, the stone, bronze and iron technologies should be indicative of economic and social systems suited to the specific demands of each technology.

### The Stone Age

Childe made two major points concerning Stone Age economy, firstly that it was self-sufficient and secondly that it lacked full-time specialization.<sup>(29)</sup> Interestingly, he saw these traits as characteristic of both Palaeolithic and Neolithic stages, although the latter represented a food producing, and the former a food gathering economy.<sup>(30)</sup> While Childe was aware that trade was carried out during the Stone Age he believed that it was confined to luxuries.

Trade in the sense of transmission of commodities from one group to another is indeed quite well attested in the Stone Age, even in the Old Stone Age. But the objects of Stone Age trade were always luxuries - if not merely shells or similar "ornaments" at least things that men could easily have done without. A Stone Age community was, at least potentially, self-sufficing. <sup>(31)</sup>

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- (29) Childe admitted the possibility of part-time specialization. Childe (1957b) 4.
- (30) For general discussions of Neolithic and Palaeolithic economies see Childe (1935c) 7; (1936a) 54-117; (1954b) 40-44.
- (31) Childe (1951a) 25, 26.

Childe assumed that metal was the first indispensable article of commerce as contrasted with luxuries which at a pinch societies could do without. In this context he argued that two factors contributed to the conversion of metal from a luxury into a necessity.

On the one hand under the peculiar conditions of the alluvial valleys like the Tigris-Euphrates delta, where even stone is scarce, the greater durability of copper or bronze tools may have made them actually more economic than stone or obsidian. On the other hand, in war, especially for in-fighting, a copper dagger or knife is much more reliable than a flint one, the latter may break just at the awkward moment when you must stab your enemy or perish. (32)

When Childe discussed the social structure of the Stone Age he made no attempt to assess any changes in society which might have occurred as a result of the food-producing revolution. Basically, he argued that during the Stone Age, society was organised along kinship lines - a type of structuring which like Durkheim he saw as "mechanical" as opposed to "organic".

Community of employment, the common absorption in obtaining food by similar devices guarantees a certain solidarity to the group. For co-operation is essential to secure food and shelter and for defence against foes, human and subhuman. This identity of economic interests and pursuits is echoed and magnified by identity of language, custom and belief, rigid conformity is enforced as effectively as industry in the common quest for food. But conformity and industrious co-operation need no State organization to maintain them. The local group usually consists either of a single clan . . . or a group of clans related by habitual intermarriage. And the sentiment of kinship is reinforced or supplemented by common rites focused on some ancestral shrine or sacred

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(32) Childe (1942a) 71.

place. Archaeology can provide no evidence for kinship organization, but shrines occupied the central place in preliterate villages in Mesopotamia, and the long barrow, a collective tomb that overlooks the presumed site of most neolithic villages in Britain, may well have been also the ancestral shrine on which converged the emotions and ceremonial activities of the villagers below. However, the solidarity thus idealized and concretely symbolized, is really based on the same principles as that of a pack of wolves or a herd of sheep. Durkheim has called it "mechanical". (33)

At the same time he argued that this type of society was potentially an example of what Marxists termed "primitive communism".

The means of production of the Stone Stage are not incompatible with "primitive communism" if that means the collective ownership of gardens, flocks and herds and such instruments of production as are jointly used, like fishing nets. (34)

### The Bronze Age

In 1930 Childe published The Bronze Age a work in which he attempted to rehabilitate Thomsen's second age as a major stage in economic as well as technological development. Here he argued that the invention of bronze metallurgy was a major advance in the history of science implying a knowledge of the radical transformation of the physical properties of substance by heat. Secondly, he emphasised that the general use of metal presupposes regular and extensive trade relations. Each farmer must sacrifice his self-sufficiency in order to purchase metal tools from experts.

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(33) Childe (1950e) 7.

(34) Childe (1946c) 20.

At the same time, within a given ethnic group, the individual farmer must sacrifice his economic independence and the village its self-sufficiency as the price of the new material. Each Neolithic household could and did manufacture the requisite knives, axe-heads and awls of flint, stone or bone; the Neolithic village need never look beyond its own domains for the necessary material - nor did, it save in the case of luxury articles such as shells. But metal tools the farmer must . . . purchase from the expert, the village smith. And the latter must, except in exceptional circumstances, import his raw materials from outside the communal boundaries. This is perhaps the essential difference between the Neolithic and the Bronze Ages. (35)

Thus as early as 1930 we find that Childe's basic argument concerning the essential characteristics of the Bronze Age is already formed. As the following passages show he was to uphold the main points in this argument throughout his career. In 1935 when he introduced his functional-economic interpretation of the three ages he writes,

The regular use of metal generally broke down this independence and self-sufficiency. The smith, like the miner is a specialized craftsman; his materials, the metals or their ores, have nearly always to be obtained from other regions or peoples by some more or less regular system of trade or barter.

The use of copper and still more of bronze is thus the symptom of a radical change in economic structure in the direction of modern conditions. It indicates specialization of labour and the beginnings of regular foreign trade. (36)

And in 1951,

In the first place it marks, perhaps, the beginning of specialization of labour - what Engels more accurately designates "the separation of handicraft from agriculture". . . On

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(35) Childe (1930a) 8, 9.

(36) Childe (1935c) 7, 8.

ethnographic evidence smiths are generally full-time specialists; they neither grow nor catch their own food, but get it in return for the products of their craft. As far as archaeological evidence can go, this applies to prehistoric bronze-smiths. They are the first full-time specialists attested in human history.

Secondly the regular use of copper or bronze was possible only in so far as regular trade was organised. (37)

One of the most interesting points in Childe's argument was that the craftsman could not easily be accommodated within the kinship social structure of Stone Age society.

Under Stone Stage barbarism security of the person and property is guaranteed by the blood feud - by collective vengeance of the victim's kindred upon the aggressor and his kin. But the itinerant metal-worker has no kinsmen on the spot to avenge him. The new class of specialists do not easily fit into the old social structure organised on a kinship basis. A Bronze Stage can begin only if the mode of production and the organization of society be adjusted to meet these requirements. (38)

While in Europe Childe envisaged the exclusion of the craftsman from kinship society, in the Orient he postulated the breakdown of the clan structure and its replacement by class society, that is by groups no longer related by kin but by territory. Here Childe argued that the concentration of social surplus necessary for the inception of a bronze industry was secured by a divine king and a small class of nobles who appropriated as taxes and rent the tiny surpluses produced by the peasants. Childe considered the

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(37) Childe (1951a) 25.

(38) Childe (1946c) 25.

social structure in the Oriental Bronze Age to be "organic" rather than "mechanical". Group members after the specialization of labour could not all be identified by a common purpose, but held differentiated functions.<sup>(39)</sup> This "organic solidarity", however, was achieved by economic classes with different interests; on the one hand a tiny ruling class who annexed the bulk of the social surplus, and on the other the vast majority who were left with a bare subsistence and effectively excluded from the spiritual benefits of civilization.<sup>(40)</sup>

As noted previously Childe's inferences as to the different types of social structure in the Bronze Age were of crucial importance when he came to explain culture change in both the Orient and Europe.<sup>(41)</sup> However, while he had attempted in 1936 to illustrate how the structure of Bronze Age society had prohibited culture progress in the ancient East it was not until the mid fifties that he used the social structure in Bronze Age Europe as an explanation for the rapid technological progress in that area.<sup>(42)</sup>

### The Iron Age

Childe attempted only a very general analysis of Iron Age economy and social structure. Indeed the Iron Age as

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(39) Childe (1950e) 16.

(40) Idem.

(41) See above p. 79, 96 ff.

(42) See above p.96 f.

a technological and economic stage rarely features in his work as a whole. While he wrote several books and articles specifically on the Stone Age or Bronze Age, for example The Bronze Age (1930) and "The Stone Age Comes to Life" (1954) there is no corresponding work on the Iron Age. Even in his general works the Iron Age plays only a minor role. In Man Makes Himself (1930) or "Early Forms of Society" (1954) the narrative is concluded by the Bronze Age. In Social Evolution (1951) although he shows the transition to the Iron Age made by particular cultures in separate regions, he does not refer to the Iron Age as a whole in his quite substantial discussion of the three ages at the beginning of the book.<sup>(43)</sup> Likewise in Piecing Together the Past (1956) the Iron Age is conspicuously absent from his discussion on the three age system. One is further disappointed to find that in articles such as "Archaeological Ages as Technological Stages" (1944) and "The Social Implications of the Three Ages" (1946), that the Iron Age does not receive the same depth of analysis as the Stone or Bronze Age. Indeed in both these articles the primary focus is on the Bronze Age. Nevertheless Childe did in fact argue that during the Iron Age a new type of civilization different in character from civilization in the Bronze Age was first firmly established.

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(43) Childe (1951a) 17-29.



Provided they could take the trouble - generally a lot of trouble - almost any community could provide itself with metal from local materials and forge therefrom tools that, however inferior to the best bronze ware, were still a good deal more efficient than stone ones.

Iron was therefore effectively obtainable without the large capital accumulation indispensable for the regular use of copper or bronze. It was in fact obtainable by people independent of kings or chieftains concentrating the social surplus, and used in production more freely and widely than bronze had ever been . . .

A technology based upon a metal so easily available could work under relations of production different from those indispensable when copper or bronze was the basis, such extreme concentration was no longer necessary. Now while monarchies of the Bronze Age type persisted in Egypt, Mesopotamia and, for that matter China, it is a truism of ancient history that many Iron Age societies in Italy, Greece, Syria and Palestine (before Solomon) were organized as republics. (44)

Childe's reinterpretation of the three ages, then, fundamentally altered his view of the model in the discipline. No longer did he see it as a chronological framework for the classification of cultures but rather as a socio-economic model of the past based on techno-economic criteria. In this context it was to be expected that it should correspond with other socio-economic models of the past especially if these have a similar classificatory basis. Childe himself certainly believed this. In 1951 he writes,

I have spent twenty years trying to give some such values i.e. economic and sociological to the traditional "Ages" and to make these archaeological stages coincide with what sociologists and comparative ethnographers recognised as main stages in cultural evolution. (45)

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(44) Childe (1946c) 30, 31.

(45) Childe (1951a) 22.

Indeed throughout his career Childe had frequently approached the past using a combination of Lewis Morgan's model of savagery, barbarism and civilization and the three ages. In What Happened in History (1942) for example, he equated savagery with the Palaeolithic as a descriptive label for the hunting-gathering stage of man's evolution, barbarism with the Neolithic for the subsequent food-producing stage and the first two thousand years of civilization with the Bronze Age.<sup>(46)</sup> Before attempting to assess how successful Childe was in correlating the two models, it is first of all necessary to examine the main features of the Morgan model. This was basically a sociological model concerned with the development of social institutions from the family to the state. Morgan envisaged an evolution from sexual communism to monogamy, from gens to state, from matrilineality to patrilineality.<sup>(47)</sup> Like Childe's interpretation of the three ages it was based on techno-economic criteria

LOWER SAVAGERY	fruit and nut subsistence
MIDDLE SAVAGERY	fish subsistence and fire
UPPER SAVAGERY	bow and arrow
LOWER BARBARISM	pottery
MIDDLE BARBARISM	domestication of animals (Old World), cultivation of maize, irrigation, adobe and stone architecture (New World)

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(46) Childe (1942a).

(47) See M. Harris (1968) 180 ff. for summary of Morgan's scheme.

UPPER BARBARISM      iron tools  
CIVILIZATION          phonetic alphabet and writing<sup>(48)</sup>

Childe had a great admiration for this 19th century model and while he recognised many of its faults he regarded it as the best attempt of its kind.<sup>(49)</sup> For Childe Morgan's importance lay in three factors.

The subject of his investigation is not the evolution of individual institutions isolated from their social context, but the evolution of society as a whole. Secondly, he attempts at the start to determine the order in which the societies that are to document his theses are to be arranged. At least, he laid down in advance the framework of a sequence - the so-called "ethnical periods" - and formulated criteria by which the position of any observable society in the sequence could be recognised . . . Finally, the criteria Morgan selected are technological, and therefore comparable to the objects of archaeological study.<sup>(50)</sup>

Furthermore Childe believed that the intrinsic importance of Morgan in the history of anthropological theory had been enormously enhanced by the fact that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had adopted his scheme.<sup>(51)</sup> Neither Marx nor Engels were anthropologists and in seeking source material for their studies on pre-capitalist economic structures it was natural that they should turn to the work of eminent authorities in that field.<sup>(52)</sup> Morgan's model

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(48) Morgan in Harris (1968) 181.

(49) Childe (1951a) 11.

(50) Ibid., 6, 7.

(51) Ibid., 9.

(52) They did not, however, refer to the work of archaeologists such as Worsaae, Morlot, Lubbock and de Mortillet. See Daniel (1967) 140.

based as it was partly on technological criteria proved to be just the right type of material suitable for conversion into a consistent materialist approach to the past.

SAVAGERY - the period in which the appropriation of natural products, ready for use, predominated; the things produced by man were, in the main, instruments that facilitated this appropriation.  
BARBARISM - the period in which knowledge of cattle breeding and land cultivation was acquired, in which methods of increasing the productivity of nature through human activity were learnt.  
CIVILIZATION - the period in which knowledge of the further working up of natural products, of industry proper, and of art was acquired. (53)

By 1951, however, Childe had to confess that his socio-economic interpretation of the three ages did not coincide with Morgan's three ethnical periods. While Palaeolithic and Mesolithic society could be placed in Morgan's stage of savagery, and Neolithic societies in the subsequent stage of Barbarism, Bronze Age societies could not be so easily equated with civilization. Here Childe had to admit that there were a wide variety of socio-economic systems founded on this one technological base.

Bronze Age societies in the Old World are found to differ enormously among themselves in their political and social organization, in their economic structure and even in their level of technological achievement. Many Bronze Age villages in temperate Europe and even in Asia Minor are no larger, nor apparently more articulated, than Neolithic hamlets in the same region. On the other hand, Bronze Age Egyptians, Sumerians, Minoans and Chinese were fully literate and dwelt often in large cities. So this one archaeological Stage covers two major ethnographic or sociological Stages - Barbarism and Civilization, as

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(53) F. Engels (1954) 46, orig. 1884.

these terms have just been defined. (54)

Moreover, he even acknowledged that civilization was in fact possible without bronze technology, here making one of his rare references to New World civilizations.

It cannot even be contended that the use of metal - for instance in imposing industrial specialization and trade or by making advanced transport available - was an essential precondition for Civilization. For in the New World the Mayas, in virtue of their refined calendar and their hieroglyphic writing, must be deemed to have reached that status. Yet on archaeological criteria they must be labelled Neolithic, since they made no use of metal tools or weapons. . .

Accordingly the archaeological division between the three Ages provides no serviceable basis for a subdivision of Barbarism into stages. (55)

#### THE NEOLITHIC AND URBAN REVOLUTIONS

When Childe introduced his functional-economic interpretation of the three ages in 1935, the concept of revolution was clearly an integral part of his scheme. At this time he envisaged three revolutions at the beginning of the Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages respectively. These were viewed as transition points of critical importance between the stages.

The first revolutionary advance was made when some group or groups began to cultivate plants and/or to breed food animals. . . That revolution in human life may be termed the neolithic revolution. . .

I have tried in my Bronze Age to show how the next of the classical "periods" is delimited by an economic revolution of almost equal scope . . . Bronze Age implies an economic revolution which has evoked and provided a living for specialized craftsmen and merchants. . .

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(54) Childe (1951a) 26.

(55) Ibid., 26, 27.

The Iron Age is demarcated by an economic revolution of even more significance. . . Cheap iron tools opened up new and more fertile lands for settlement and thus made available new supplies of food. Distribution maps vividly illustrate the dramatic expansion of population as a result of the Iron Age Revolution. (56)

In the following year in Man Makes Himself he writes,

The archaeologist's ages correspond roughly to economic stages. Each new age is ushered in by an economic revolution of the same kind and having the same effect as the "Industrial Revolution" of the eighteenth century. (57)

In the same text, however, Childe replaced the Bronze and Iron Age revolutions by the concept of an urban revolution, thus destroying his original neat pattern. Whereas the Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Age revolutions were closely connected to the Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Stages respectively even the term "urban" was significantly outwith the three age framework. Etymologically it specified the "urbs" or city as the key feature of the process rather than the change to a particular techno-economic level. Here it should be noted that Childe did in fact quite often associate his urban revolution with Morgan's stage "civilization".<sup>(58)</sup> Indeed it can be argued that since "urbs" is closely related in meaning to civilization that the urban revolution is more appropriate to the Morgan model than to the three ages. Certainly, as Daniel remarked in 1943, the urban revolution

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(56) Childe (1935c) 7, 8.

(57) Childe (1936a) 39.

(58) Childe (1950e).

can only be rather uncomfortably accommodated within the three age structure, by viewing it as the transition to the Bronze Age in Orient and to the Iron Age in Europe. (59)

### The Neolithic Revolution

Childe was aware of the revolutionary implications of food production before he coined the phrase, Neolithic revolution. In the first edition of The Most Ancient East he writes,

The greatest moments - that revolution whereby man ceased to be purely parasitic and, with the adoption of agriculture and stock raising, became emancipated from the whims of his environment, and then the discovery of metal and the realization of its properties - have indeed passed before the curtain rises. (60)

It was not until 1935 in "Changing Methods and Aims in Prehistory" that he introduced the idea of a Neolithic revolution.

The first steps in progress that distinguish man from other animals - the control and production of fire and so on - go back to the Old Stone Age. But all palaeolithic peoples relied for sustenance as far as we know, exclusively on hunting, fishing and collecting. The first revolutionary advance was made when some group or groups began to cultivate plants and/or to breed food animals. Cultivated plants and domesticated animals put the cultivator, the herdsman and the mixed farmer in control of their own food supply; they can within certain limits augment the supply according to demand. And so population can expand to a degree impossible even amongst the most favourably situated hunters like the Magdalenians in the Dordogne or the Kwakiutl in British Columbia. It is one of the many services rendered to prehistory by Prof. Elliot Smith to have insisted on the revolutionary contrast between

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(59) Daniel (1943) 47, 48.

(60) Childe (1928) 2.

food-gatherers and food-producers. Following his lead Harold Peake and others have proposed equating the beginning of the neolithic with the beginning of food-producing economy. That revolution in human life may be termed the neolithic revolution. Neolithic will mean "food-producing" and will point a contrast with the food-gathering economy of the Old Stone Age. (61)

Here Childe acknowledged the important role which Prof. Elliot-Smith had played in bringing archaeologists to an understanding of the significance of the change-over from a food-gathering to a food-producing economy. Indeed in 1928 Smith had emphasised that "it was the agricultural mode of life that furnished the favourable conditions of settled existence, conditions which brought with them the need for such things as represent the material foundation of civilization". (62) Prior to food production he believed that man was in a natural state of innocence.

Natural Man is thus revealed as a naked, harmless, truthful child, good-natured, honest and considerate, with an aptitude for pictorial art and craftsmanship . . . Though timid and friendly, he is always ready to fight for his life . . .

Though skilful and competent, Natural Man displays no innate desire to build houses, or to make clothes, to till the soil or to domesticate animals. He has neither religion nor social organization. (63)

Since he held that man was by nature uninventive he sought an explanation for the changeover to food production in environmental stimuli. Here he stressed the unique

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(61) Childe (1935c) 7. See also (1947b) 7.

(62) G. Elliot Smith (1928) 37.

(63) Ibid., 26.



conditions prevailing in the Nile valley in approximately 4000 B.C.

What was it then, it may be asked, that brought to an end this era of simple life with its complete freedom and peacefulness? From the evidence at our disposal there seems to be very little doubt that the presence of an abundant crop of barley on the banks of the Nile in Upper Egypt was the predisposing factor in creating the vast revolution in the affairs of mankind which prepared the way for the creation of civilization . . .

It cannot be too strongly emphasised that the whole development was due to the fact that the Ancient Egyptians were favoured with an altogether unprecedented type of environment. They enjoyed the privilege of living in a rich land which provided them with barley, millet and ground nuts, and with ample supplies of meat and game - beef, mutton, gazelle; ducks, geese, quails and other birds . . . Is it any wonder that the Egyptians forsook the nomadic life and settled in definite places in the valley to take advantage of the riches which Nature offered them? (64)

In his later writing Childe was to characterise Elliot-Smith's thesis as disguised theology, labelling his Egyptian cradle of civilization as a "Nilotic Eden". (65)

In the twentieth century the doctrines of Creation and the Fall have been revived under the guise of Diffusionism. I am sure that Elliot Smith, the founder of the English Diffusionist school, had no intention of reviving theological dogmas in his polemic against Tylor and his concept of evolution. Yet that in effect is what Diffusionism has led to . . . Savages are represented by Diffusionists as totally without initiative, without the desire or the capacity for inventing a device, a myth or an institution. All major inventions were made but once by some chosen people . . . Since no people can civilize itself, civilization must be a miracle, the result of supernatural intervention. (66)

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(64) Ibid., 36-39.

(65) Childe (1951a) 12.

(66) Ibid., 12, 13.

Childe argued that Elliot Smith believed he had rationalized this miracle by reference to the unique environmental circumstances of the Nile, but this he insisted was itself a myth which was exploded by the discovery of early civilization in Mesopotamia.<sup>(67)</sup> Nonetheless despite the vehemence of Childe's attack against Elliot Smith's thesis there are many points of similarity between his own explanation of the changeover to food production and that of Smith's. Indeed Childe's environmentalist approach can be seen as merely a broader application of the same basic thesis. In the first edition of The Dawn he explained both the lack of progress in Europe and progress in the Orient to the climatic conditions brought about by the recession of the last glaciation.<sup>(68)</sup> His argument, however, was not well developed and the reader is left to his own devices to assume in what way the environment of western Asia was "eminently favourable to cultural progress".<sup>(69)</sup> In the first edition of The Most Ancient East, however, he is more explicit and after describing the fertile Oriental parklands during the last glaciation he writes,

The pleasant grasslands of North Africa and Southern Asia were naturally as thickly populated by man as the frozen steppes of Europe, and it is reasonable to suspect that in this favourable and indeed stimulating environment man

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(67) Ibid., 13.

(68) See above p. 46.

(69) Childe (1925a) 22.

would make greater progress than in the ice-bound north. (70)

With the retreat of the last glaciation and the subsequent drying up of the grasslands he argued,

That event would certainly tax the ingenuity of the inhabitants of the former grass-land zone to the utmost. Enforced concentration in oases or by the banks of ever more precarious springs and streams would require an intensified search for means of nourishment. Animals and men would be herded together round pools and wadis that were growing increasingly isolated by desert tracts, and such enforced juxtaposition might almost of itself promote that sort of symbiosis between man and beast that is expressed in the word "domestication". (71)

Childe was to retain this argument throughout his entire career. The following passage was written over twenty years later,

Food production - the deliberate cultivation of food plants, especially cereals, and the taming, breeding, and selection of animals - was an economic revolution - the greatest in human history after the mastery of fire . . . The conditions of incipient desiccation . . . would provide the stimulus towards the adoption of a food-producing economy. Enforced concentration by the banks of streams and shrinking springs would entail an intensive search for means of nourishment. Animals and men would be herded together in oases that were becoming increasingly isolated by desert tracts. Such enforced juxtaposition might promote that sort of symbiosis between man and beast implied in the word "domestication". (72)

As Braidwood later pointed out Childe's environmental determinism was not wholly satisfactory.

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(70) Childe (1928 ) 26.

(71) Ibid., 42.

(72) Childe (1952a) 23-25.

There had been three earlier periods of great glaciers and long periods of warm weather in between . . . Thus the forced neighborliness of men, plants and animals must also have happened earlier. Why didn't domestication happen earlier too, then? (73)

Furthermore, the results of Braidwood's field work in the Near East led him to question the extent of the environmental change at the beginning of the food-producing era.

In southwestern Asia . . . our colleagues in the natural sciences see no evidence for a radical change in climate or fauna between the levels of the Zarzian and those of the Jarmo or Hassunah phases. (74)

Since Braidwood could find no sufficient cause in the external environment for the changeover to food production, he sought an explanation in man's cultural development, in particular his knowledge of plants and animals. (75)

In my opinion there is no need to complicate the story with extraneous "causes". The food producing revolution seems to have occurred as the culmination of the ever increasing differentiation and specialization of human communities. Around 8000 B.C. the inhabitants of the hills around the fertile crescent had come to know their habitat so well that they were beginning to domesticate the plants and animals they had been collecting and hunting. (76)

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(73) R. Braidwood (1951) 86.

(74) R. Braidwood and B. Howe (1960) 181.

(75) It is interesting to note the similarity of this thesis to that of Charles Darwin who in (1875) 325-7 argued that farming could only begin when man had acquired sufficient knowledge of plant and animal biology to permit cultivation and domestication. This view was influential during the nineteenth century and both H. Roth (1887) and E. Tylor (1881) proposed similar arguments.

(76) R. Braidwood (1960) 134.

More recently Binford has suggested that Childe's propinquity theory is in fact one of population disequilibrium.<sup>(77)</sup> Climatic change involves a reduction in the available amount of food in a given area and consequently the balance between food supply and population is disturbed. Like Childe, Binford believes that disequilibrium between population and food supply in a given region may provide a sufficient incentive towards food production, but unlike Childe he does not attribute the disequilibrium to a reduction in food supply brought about by climatic change. Instead he proposes that it was increase in population which caused the disequilibrium.

In Childe's analysis, however, population increase is seen not as a stimulus to, but rather a consequence of, the Neolithic revolution.

Barbarism or food production, whether by agriculture or stock breeding or the combination of both as mixed farming, initiated the Neolithic Stage. Its beginning is often called the Neolithic revolution, using the term by analogy with the industrial revolution, for there are reasons for supposing that it was followed by a somewhat comparable relative increase in population. Archaeologically, Neolithic villages and settlements are larger than Palaeolithic and Mesolithic. In ethnography, barbarous populations are generally substantially denser than savage groups.

In theory, the same area used as pastures, and still more as corn fields or yam gardens, will provide food for more men than the same area used only for hunting and collecting. In theory again, food can be produced for an expanding population merely by extending the cultivated area and by allowing herds and flocks to multiply. (78)

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(77) L.R. Binford (1968) 328 ff., for the role of population pressure in archaeological explanation see P. Smith (1972) 5-18.

(78) Childe (1954b) 43.

Furthermore according to Childe the degree of population growth following a techno-economic revolution was a measure of the success of that revolution. And here, as the following passage shows, he was clearly employing a numerical or quantitative definition of success as it is used in the biological sciences in the context of the evolution of species.

Success in survival, expressible in numerical terms measures the biological value of a species' inherited endowments. The same standard should apply to material culture. Advances in material culture should then promote a numerical increase in the community that creates or adopts them. Advances of critical importance to humanity should be followed by such a multiplication as to be conspicuously reflected in the population curve. We should then have a criterion of progress possessing all the objectivity of number.

A familiar example from English history shows that our expectation is justified. A dramatic upward twist in the population graph after 1750 reflects the profound significance to the whole English people of that application of new methods of production and transportation termed the Industrial Revolution. Prehistoric revolutions in material culture, reflected equally in the population curve, should delimit stages in progress in a scientific classification. (79)

Childe, however, was aware of the difficulties involved in obtaining estimates of prehistoric populations.

Unhappily prehistoric communities ex hypothesi kept no vital statistics that we can study. And estimates of prehistoric population densities are beset with many difficulties. Burials provide certain indications, but reliable inductions are impeded by the number of unknown factors: how long was a given cemetery in use? Were all the

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(79) Childe (1935c) 11. For Childe's view of the relationship between biological and cultural evolution see 231 ff.

members of the community accorded ceremonial burial or was that privilege restricted to a small aristocracy? What proportion died away from home on campaigns or hunting expeditions? Above all what allowance must be made for disturbance in the centuries or millenia since the interments and for graves not yet discovered? (80)

In this context, however, he argued that even a most general comparison between the remains from the Palaeolithic/Mesolithic and the Neolithic periods shows a definite increase in the quantity of finds from the latter period.

Even the imperfect data now at our disposal permit of provisional comparisons of population-densities at successive ages or stages. No doubt the chance of a skeleton, a hut-site or a grave surviving is inversely proportional to its antiquity. But even so, the number of palaeolithic and mesolithic skeletons known from France is tiny in comparison with the thousands assigned to the neolithic age. Yet the former is distributed over a period ten or twenty times as long. The comparison gives a distinct if inconclusive indication that the neolithic revolution, the adoption of a food producing economy, did promote an expansion of population as it should on our theory. (81)

The limitations imposed by the archaeological record, however, should be firmly kept in mind. Firstly as Childe admits, there is more chance of recovery from the Neolithic period. Secondly farmers tend to leave more remains, especially facilities, than hunter-gatherers. (82)

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(80) Ibid., 11, 12.

(81) Ibid., 12.

(82) K. Flannery (1972) 23-53, following P. Wagner  
Flannery makes the distinction between two kinds of human artefacts, implements and facilities. Implements are human artefacts which transmit or move kinetic energy, facilities store up potential energy or impede its transfer.

As yet comprehensive estimates of prehistoric population figures remain a task for the future. (83)

Childe assumes a direct relationship between population size and food supply.

Now the density of population is determined by the food supply which is in turn limited by natural resources, the techniques of their exploitation and the means of transport and food-preservation available. (84)

Recent research, however, has shown the complexity of restraints on the mechanisms of population growth. In particular cultural restraints such as infanticide, abortion and lactation taboos are now known to contribute to maintaining stable populations. (85)

In addition to increasing the population Childe saw the Neolithic revolution as providing the circumstances for an economic surplus.

The Neolithic Revolution had other consequences besides increasing the population. . . . The new economy allowed, and indeed required, the farmer to produce every year more food than was needed to keep himself and his family alive. In other words it makes possible the regular production of a social surplus. (86)

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- (83) F. Hole and K. Flannery (1967) 147-206, presented estimates of population densities in South Western Iran during the prehistoric era, 0.1 persons per square kilometre in the late palaeolithic, 1-2 persons per square kilometre in early dry farming, up to 6 or more per square kilometre after irrigation.
- (84) Childe (1950) 4.
- (85) See E. Deevy (1960) 194-204; D.E. Dumond (1965) 302-24; J. Birdsell (1958) 189-205; M. Halbwachs (1960).
- (86) Childe (1950e) 6.



Childe, however, did admit that in exceptional circumstances certain hunters and gatherers could achieve a surplus.<sup>(87)</sup> These cases are, however, perhaps less exceptional than Childe supposed. In the Near East the home of the Neolithic revolution, two pieces of research may be referred to in this context. Firstly, Harlan's now well known experiment in Turkey. Here Harlan harvested a kilo of wild einkorn in an hour and estimated that a family of four could harvest a metric ton in three weeks, more grain than a family could possibly consume in a year.<sup>(88)</sup> Secondly, Zohary estimated that in eastern Galilee mixed stands of wild emmer wheat and wild barley would produce 500-800 kilos of grain harvest in rainy years, i.e. that in certain conditions wild wheat and barley form stands as dense as those in a cultivated field.<sup>(89)</sup>

Recent ethnographic research on subsistence economies of modern hunter-gatherers has also shown that the potential of economic surplus is not restricted to food producing economies. Far from being on the brink of starvation they have an abundance of food resources, notable cases in this context being the Boratse, the Kung bushmen, the Hadza and the Dorobo.<sup>(90)</sup>

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(87) Childe (1954b) 41, 42.

(88) J. Harlan (1967) 197-201.

(89) D. Zohary (1969).

(90) L. Binford, op. cit., 326.

### The Urban Revolution

In Childe's analysis the Neolithic revolution quite clearly indicated an economic change from food gathering to food production and equally clearly marked a transition period between what he saw as two economic stages, the Palaeolithic and the Neolithic. This is not the case with the urban revolution. As noted above the term refers to the urbs or the city as the centre of the process rather than to any specific economic change.<sup>(91)</sup> Furthermore, the economic stage which the urban revolution initiates is not clearly stated. It may be associated with the beginning of the Bronze Age, or with the beginnings of both the Bronze and Iron Ages, or with the sociological stage civilization.

Urbanism is not an easy concept to define and can be approached by a number of avenues, ecological, sociological, functional etc.<sup>(92)</sup> Childe himself employed a "trait complex" approach by which he hoped to identify the "urbs" or city by a set of inter-related traits. In "The Urban Revolution" (1950), his definitive work on urbanism, he listed ten traits common to the oldest cities.

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(91) See above p. 169.

(92) See P. Wheatley (1972) for five different approaches to urbanism. He lists (1) reliance on ideal-type constructs, (2) formulation of ecological theories, (3) delineation of trait complexes, (4) conceptualization of the city as a centre of dominance and (5) an expedient approach usually based on the size of the urban population.

1. SIZE: The first cities were more extensive and more densely populated than previous settlements.
2. COMPOSITION AND FUNCTION: In these two aspects the urban population differed from that of any village by the inclusion of full-time specialists, craftsmen, transport workers, merchants, officials and priests.
3. SURPLUS: Each primary producer paid his surplus to the god or king who thus concentrated the surplus. Without this concentration owing to the low productivity of the rural economy, no effective capital would have been made available.
4. MONUMENTAL BUILDINGS: These distinguish the city from the village and symbolise the concentration of social surplus.
5. UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL SURPLUS: Priests, civil and military leaders and officials absorbed a major share of the concentrated surplus and thus formed "a ruling class".
6. WRITING: Writing was invented in order to facilitate the administration necessitated by the social organization.
7. THE INVENTION OF SCIENCES: The invention of writing in turn allowed the elaboration of the exact and predicative sciences, i.e. of arithmetic, geometry and astrology.
8. NATURALISTIC ART: Other specialists give a new direction to artistic expression. Artists in the early centres

of civilization began to carve, model and draw likenesses of persons or things, not with the naive naturalism of the hunter but according to conceptualized and sophisticated styles.

9. TRADE: Regular "foreign" trade in both luxuries and essentials was common to all early civilizations.
10. STATE ORGANIZATION BASED ON RESIDENCE RATHER THAN ON KINSHIP: In the city specialist craftsmen were both provided with raw materials needed for the employment of their skill and also guaranteed security in a state organization based on residence rather than kinship.<sup>(93)</sup>

Adams in The Evolution of Urban Society (1966) makes two important objections to this type of approach. Firstly he criticizes the mixed nature of Childe's set of criteria, and secondly he argues that since the list is descriptive rather than explanatory it is more suitable for the recognition of stages rather than the understanding of process.

One objection to such listing is that it gives us a mixed bag of characteristics. Some, like monumental architecture, can be unequivocally documented from archaeological evidence but also are known to have been associated occasionally with non-civilized peoples. Others, like exact and predicative sciences, are largely matters of interpretation from evidence that is at best fragmentary and ambiguous. And still others, if not most of Childe's criteria, obviously must have emerged through a gradual, cumulative process not easily permitting distinctions in kind to be kept apart from those merely in degree. Moreover,

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(93) Childe (1950e) 9-16.

these characteristics differ radically from one another in their importance as causes, or even as indices, of the Urban Revolution as a whole. The significance of the reappearance of representational art - indeed, its initial appearance insofar as it deals with the human figure - for example is not immediately apparent.

A more basic objection to any such listing is that its eclecticism embraces fundamental contradictions as to purpose. Childe echoes Morgan in seeking to identify the Urban Revolution by a series of traits whose vestiges the specialist can conveniently recognise. This was a reasonable procedure for Morgan's purpose, the initial delineation of a succession of stages, but with Childe, on the other hand, we enter an era in which the emphasis shifted towards providing accounts with explanatory power as well. (94)

More recently Peter Wheatley made the important point that there was little functional inter-relationship between the ten traits.<sup>(95)</sup> Like Adams he viewed these traits as essentially delineatory in nature rather than explanatory and consequently of little value to an understanding of process. It is important to note, however, that both Adams and Wheatley pointed out that in this eclectic list of traits Childe saw the primary causitive factors of urbanism as the growth of technology and the increasing availability of food surpluses as deployable capital.<sup>(96)</sup>

Perhaps the most intriguing question arising from Childe's view of urbanism concerns the relationship between bronze metallurgy and the urban revolution, i.e. the extent

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(94) R. Adams (1966) 10, 11.

(95) P. Wheatley (1972) 612.

(96) Adams, op. cit., 12; Wheatley, op. cit., 612.

to which Childe saw this major technological change as playing a causative role in the transition to an urban society. In 1930 Childe published The Bronze Age in which he attempted to interpret this archaeological age as a major stage in economic as well as technological development. Not only did bronze metallurgy indicate an important technological breakthrough but it also implied regular and extensive trade.<sup>(97)</sup> Furthermore he argued that the development of internal and foreign commerce pre-supposed a degree of political stability.<sup>(98)</sup>

In Man Makes Himself (1936) Childe listed bronze metallurgy as one of the several inventions which paved the way to urban life.

A second revolution transformed some tiny villages of self-sufficing farmers into populous cities, nourished by secondary industries and foreign trade, and regularly organised as States. Some of the episodes which ushered in this transformation can be discerned, if dimly, by prehistory. The scene of the drama lies in the belt of semi-arid countries between the Nile and the Ganges. Here epoch-making inventions seem to have followed one another with breathless speed, when we recall the slow pace of progress in the millenia before the first revolution or even in the four millenia between the second and the Industrial Revolution of modern times.

Between 6000 and 3000 B.C. man has learnt to harness the force of oxen and of winds, he invents the plough, the wheeled cart and the sailing boat, he discovers the chemical processes involved in smelting copper ores and the physical properties of metals, and he begins to work out an accurate solar calendar. He has thereby equipped himself

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(97) Childe (1930a) 7.

(98) Ibid., 9.

for urban life, and prepares the way for a civilization which shall require writing, processes of reckoning, and standards of measurement - instruments of a new way of transmitting knowledge and of exact sciences. In no period of history till the days of Galileo was progress in knowledge so rapid or far-reaching discoveries so frequent. (99)

In 1942 we find essentially the same argument.

Metallurgy, the wheel, the ox-cart, the pack-ass and the sailing ship provided the foundations for a new economic organization. (100)

According to Childe, then, the invention of bronze metallurgy did not in itself bring about urbanism. Rather it was seen as one of several significant technological changes which were to result in the urban revolution. Nevertheless, it is clear that Childe considered it to be the crucial invention. Not only was bronze the first luxury to become a necessity, but it demanded full-time specialization and the concentration of social surplus on a large scale. (101) The latter in Childe's eyes was an essential element in the transformation from village to urban life.

Childe argued that the surplus could be accumulated in two ways, neither of which was mutually exclusive.

Either each farming unit must produce more food without a proportionate increase in home consumption, or the number of units must be multiplied so that the little surpluses each of them produces can somehow be pooled to swell a total available for distribution. (102)

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(99) Childe (1936a) 118, 119.

(100) Childe (1942a) 79.

(101) Childe (1954b) 46.

(102) Idem.

According to Childe it was the second procedure which led to the urban revolution. In this context he considered that irrigation had played an important role in increasing the yield.

It is obviously no accident that the revolution was first achieved in sub-tropical countries. In them, under intensive cultivation, even a small area will support a large population. In particular, irrigation-farming in the valleys of the Nile, the lower Tigris-Euphrates, and the Indus with its tributaries, yields an exceptionally high return per acre, permitting a considerable density of population. (103)

He argued, however, that it was not the increased yield per se, but rather the concentration of individual yields which was the critical factor in the urban revolution. Furthermore, he believed that irrigation works required the co-operation of a substantial labour force for digging canals and embankments.

Since Childe's death the role of irrigation in urbanism has been reconsidered. It is now generally agreed that the construction and maintenance of simple irrigation systems do not require either large labour forces or elaborate administration. Some scholars nevertheless still consider irrigation farming to be a vital element in the process of urbanism. Flannery for example has calculated the percentage of land in Iran suitable for hunting gathering (30 per cent), dry farming (10 per cent) and irrigation farming (1 per cent). Corresponding to

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(103) Ibid., 46.



each of these land types he saw important increases in population. He thus argued that it was the widening gap between population size and critical land surface rather than agricultural surplus alone which led to social stratification.<sup>(104)</sup> Another school of thought sees the introduction of large-scale irrigation to be a consequence rather than a cause of the appearance of dynastic state organization.<sup>(105)</sup> More recently, however, Joan Oates has pointed out that the situation in reality was probably more of a spiral than an either-or relationship.

The differentiation of society that was to culminate in the bureaucratic administrations of later Mesopotamia depended initially on the food surpluses which irrigation served not only to increase, but for the first time to make secure. This economic situation must have encouraged the social and political developments that in turn made possible the more ambitious hydraulic schemes. (106)

As with the Neolithic revolution Childe judged the success of his urban revolution with reference to a numerical criterion.<sup>(107)</sup> However, while he considered it to have been ultimately successful in that it allowed considerable population increase, he was not wholly enthusiastic about the means whereby this success had been attained. As noted previously he argued that the cost was

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- (104) K. Flannery (1972).  
(105) R. Adams, *op. cit.* 68 ff.  
(106) J. Oates (1972) 306.  
(107) Childe (1936a) 160, 161.

high, i.e. the division of society into economic classes with opposing interests and the suppression of the majority of the people by a small class of kings and priests.<sup>(108)</sup> Furthermore, he argued that it was the rigidification of the class structure that prohibited further technological progress in the Orient.<sup>(109)</sup>

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(108) See above pp. 79, 80.

(109) Idem.

CHAPTER V      Historical Theory

Childe was unique among his contemporaries, not because he made historical inferences from the archaeological record, but because of his direct interest in the nature of these inferences, i.e. in historical interpretation and historical explanation. It was during the thirties that he first made it clear that he intended to interpret archaeological data according to a Marxist view of history,

It is an old-fashioned sort of history that is made up entirely of kings and battles to the exclusion of scientific discoveries and social conditions. And so it would be an old fashioned prehistory that regarded it as its sole function to trace migrations and to locate the cradles of peoples. History has recently become much less political - less a record of intrigues, battles and revolutions - and more cultural. That is the true meaning of what is miscalled the materialist conception of history - realist conception would as Cole says be better - it puts in the foreground changes in economic organization and scientific discoveries. (1)

Interestingly, following Cole he saw Marxism as a realist rather than a materialist outlook. The former in 1934, had argued that the phrase "materialist conception of history" was fundamentally misleading in that it implied asserting the supremacy of matter over mind, or even of denying the existence of mind altogether. (2) Historical

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(1) Childe (1935c) 9, 10.

(2) G. Cole (1934) 14, 15.

materialism, however, not only accepts the existence of mind or consciousness but sees it as a vital force in the historical process. Cole thus argued as follows,

Marx called his conception of history "materialist", because he was determined to mark it off sharply from the metaphysical Idealism of Hegel and his followers. Where he wrote 'materialist' it would be natural in our day to write 'realist', for it is Realism and not Materialism, that we are accustomed to contrast with Idealism as a philosophical point of view. (3)

In 1934, Childe visited the U.S.S.R. for the first time, and as he was later to recall in "Retrospect" it was then that he began to appreciate the explanatory potential of Marxism as a model of the past.<sup>(4)</sup> Childe, however, was not totally won over to Soviet theory, in particular he opposed the narrow evolutionism propogated in the Soviet Union, emphasising the importance of diffusion as a mechanism of culture change.

Here it is important to keep in mind that during the first half of the twentieth century, evolutionism and diffusionism were generally regarded as two entirely separate and distinct approaches to the historical process based on different philosophical views not only on the nature of man, but on the direction of the historical process. Diffusionism was closely linked to a view of man as uninventive and conservative, culture change taking place only in

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(3) Ibid., 16.

(4) Childe (1958a).

exceptional circumstances.<sup>(5)</sup> At the same time primitive man was generally seen as spiritually superior to modern man despite the advance in the latter's technological equipment. Evolutionism on the other hand embraced a view of man as naturally inclined towards change, distinguishing "progress" as the main characteristic feature of the historical process.<sup>(6)</sup>

The Russian opposition to diffusionism, however, taught Childe to look more closely at evidence for diffusion.

Before accepting similar devices, employed by two cultures, as proofs of diffusion, it is essential first of all to determine the chronological relations of the respective cultures . . . The likelihood of diffusion may be increased by spatial and quantitative considerations. . . The discovery of intermediate spatial links and the multiplication of common traits enhance the probability of diffusion between two cultures. <sup>(7)</sup>

Furthermore while he accepted diffusion as a mechanism of change he disassociated himself from contemporary diffusionist schools in England and Germany which he considered to be methodologically unsound. "To prove diffusion they too often relied on superficial resemblances and abstract agreements."<sup>(8)</sup>

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(5) For a summary of diffusionist thought see Harris (1968)

(6) <sup>373-392</sup> For evolutionary theory from the 18th century onwards see Harris, *ibid.*, 8-250. For the concept of progress in archaeology see B. Trigger (1978) 54-74.

(7) Childe (1935c) 13, 14.

(8) *Ibid.*, 13.

In the following years Childe was to look at the implications of diffusion in more detail and to attempt to integrate it within an overall evolutionist viewpoint. Very briefly to anticipate his main argument Childe held that there was no contradiction between evolution and diffusion. On the contrary, diffusion, which he saw as essentially "the pooling of ideas" was effective in "building up from many sides the cultural capital of mankind".<sup>(9)</sup> In other words it was an important mechanism of social evolution, a significant factor in promoting progress.<sup>(10)</sup> Throughout his career Childe maintained a firm belief in progress, and it was this belief which linked his thought to that of Marx, Darwin, Spencer and a whole tradition of evolutionary thinking.

In "Changing Methods and Aims in Prehistory" Childe emphasised that he saw one of the major purposes of history to be the definition of progress. And it was in this context that he felt archaeology to be of paramount importance.

Evidently archaeology can extend and enrich history equally in the wider domain unilluminated by written documents. And such extension and enrichment is essential if history is worthily to fulfil her functions.

One of these is surely to define progress. To ask 'have we progressed' is of course meaningless - the question can only be answered in the affirmative. It is for history to say what this

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(9) Childe (1937c) 4.

(10) Ibid., 14.

progress has consisted in and to provide standards for determining it. But the written record is too short, too broken and too one-sided. To reach a judgement unbiased by personal prejudices, one must survey a much wider field than that covered by written documents. In the short time-spans they illumine, accidental ups and downs are relatively so prominent that general tendencies can hardly be isolated from them. Archaeology can survey the vicissitudes of man's material culture, of human economies, not only over the beggarly 5000 years patchily illumined by written records, but over a span of 5000 centuries. It opens up a span wide enough for the accidental features of the landscape to assume their correct proportions. (11)

In the following year in Man Makes Himself (1936) Childe again took up the problem of progress. Basically he was concerned to illustrate that, viewed from an impersonal scientific standpoint, history may still justify a belief in progress in the days of depression as well as in the heyday of Victorian prosperity. In this context he attacked what he termed the pessimistic or mystical attitude conspicuous in the writings of his contemporaries.

Some are inclined, like the Ancient Greeks and Romans, to look back wistfully to a "golden age" of primeval simplicity. The German "historical school" of Roman Catholic missionaries and their archaeological and anthropological instructors have revived and reclothed in scientific terms the medieval doctrine of the "Fall of Man" through tasting of the tree of knowledge. A similar outlook is implicit in some writings of the English diffusionists. (12)

At the same time he also criticized the German view of progress which identified advance in human culture with

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(11) Childe (1935c) 10, 11.

(12) Childe (1936a) 1, 2.

advance in inherent genetic qualities.

On the other hand, the Fascist philosophy, expounded most openly by Herr Hitler and his academic supporters, but sometimes masquerading as eugenics in Britain and America, indentifies progress with a biological evolution no less mystically defined. (13)

Childe was thus aware of the subjective nature of the concept of progress.

As scientists we cannot ask History: "Have we progressed?" Does the multiplication of mechanical devices represented by aeroplanes, hydro-electric stations, poison gas and submarines, constitute progress? A question so formulated can have no scientific meaning. There is no hope of any agreement upon its answer. That would depend entirely upon the caprice of the enquirer, his economic situation at the time, and even on the state of his health. (14)

And, in trying to rescue the concept from subjectivism, he argued that the question, "Have we progressed?" should be replaced by the question "What is progress?" because in his eyes the answer could be given in objective numerical terms.

It is unscientific to ask "Have we progressed?", if only because no two people need give the same answer, the personal equation can hardly be eliminated. But it may be legitimate to ask, "What is progress?" and here the answer may take on something of the numerical form that science so rightly prizes. But now progress becomes what has actually happened - the content of history. The business of the historian would be to bring out the essential in the long and complex series of events with which he is confronted. (15)

However, as the above passage clearly shows, what

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(13) Ibid., 2.

(14) Ibid., 2, 3.

(15) Ibid., 4.



Childe ended up with was not so much an objective definition of progress but rather a concept of progress stripped of all its connotations of advancement or improvement. It is thus interesting that he was unable to abandon the concept entirely.

The concept of "progress" as of "decline" is not a scientific but a metaphysical concept. As Harris has emphasised from a scientific point of view nothing is added or subtracted by calling a particular trend progressive or retrogressive.

Consider for example the change involved in continental glaciations. As the glaciers retreat, the earth may be regarded as exhibiting progress toward a tropical climate, or with no less justification the very same retreat may be regarded as a retrogression away from an arctic climate. By the same token, it is altogether a matter of no scientific consequence for us to describe the recent evolution of American agriculture as progress toward corporate monopolies (16) or retrogression away from small family units.

In Man Makes Himself Childe emphasised that it was not only the concept of progress which was coloured by the historian's personal viewpoint, but his whole perspective of the past. According to Childe this was particularly true in the context of the political model popular in Britain at that time.

In fact, ancient history and British history tended to be presented exclusively as political history - a record of the manoeuvres of kings, statesmen, soldiers and religious teachers, of wars and persecutions, of the growth of political institutions and ecclesiastical systems.

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(16) M. Harris (1968) 37.

Incidental allusions were indeed made to economic conditions, scientific discoveries, or artistic movements in each "period", but the "periods" were defined in political terms by the names of dynasts or party factions. That sort of history could hardly become scientific. No standard of comparison is manifest in it independent of the prejudices of the individual teachers. The age of Elizabeth is "golden" primarily to a member of the Church of England. To a Roman Catholic periods when Protestants were burned inevitably seemed preferable. (17)

It was at this point that he introduced a Marxist view of history as an alternative to the political model, and implicitly as a more objective world viewpoint.

Fortunately the exclusive claim of political history to the title is no longer unchallenged. Marx insisted on the prime importance of economic conditions, of the social forces of production, and of the applications of science as factors in historical change. His realist conception of history is gaining acceptance in academic circles remote from the party passions inflamed by other aspects of Marxism. (18)

He does not, however, make it clear in what way the economic model overcomes the basic subjectivity problem inherent in patterning the past. Rather this is taken as self evident and it was only relatively late in his career that he again raised this problem. (19)

In Man Makes Himself Childe's main point about the Marxist model was its suitability in a prehistoric context.

This sort of history can naturally be linked up with what is termed prehistory. The archaeologist collects, classifies and compares the tools and weapons of our ancestors and forerunners, examines the houses they built, the fields they tilled, the food they ate (or rather discarded).

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(17) Childe (1936a) 6.

(18) Ibid., 7.

(19) See below p. 251.

These are the tools and instruments of production, characteristic of economic systems that no written document describes. (20)

Here he particularly emphasised the relevance of the Thomsen model based on the material used for the principal cutting tools and weapons, arguing that such implements were among the most important tools of production. Furthermore, according to Childe, it was this factor which Marxism specified as the determining force in the historical process.

Realist history insists on their significance in moulding and determining social systems and economic organization. (21)

At this point it would thus seem that Childe was upholding an essentially technological rather than a sociological or economic interpretation of Marxism. To a certain extent of course this was conditioned by the type of material with which he was working. As a prehistoric archaeologist he had direct technological evidence for the productive forces, the relations of production or the mode of production being more elusive and having to be inferred from the archaeological data.<sup>(22)</sup> Contemporary archaeologists in the Soviet Union, however, were unconstrained by such considerations and their periodization of prehistory was firmly based on the "relations of production".<sup>(23)</sup>

In What Happened in History, published in 1942, Childe

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(20) Childe op. cit., 7.

(21) Ibid., 9.

(22) See below p. 269.

(23) See below p. 264.

again discussed the materialist conception of history which this time he characterised as an economic and not a technological model. Here he was concerned to emphasise the reciprocal interplay between ideology and economy in particular the effect of the former on the latter. Basically he argued that the function of ideology is to hold society together and to lubricate its workings and in this guise it reacts on technology and material equipment. (24) He thus, like contemporary functionalists emphasised the integrative, rather than the contradictory, elements in society. (25)

Even the student of material culture has to study a society as a co-operative organization for producing means to satisfy its needs, for reproducing itself - and for producing new needs. He wants to see its economy working. But the economy affects and is affected by its ideology. (26)

In this context he argued,

"The materialist concept of history" asserts that the economy determines the ideology. It is safer and more accurate to repeat in other words what has been stated already: in the long run an ideology can only survive if it facilitates the smooth and efficient functioning of the economy. If it hampers that - the society and with it the ideology must perish in the end. But the reckoning may be long postponed. An obsolete ideology can hamper an economy and impede its change for longer than Marxists admit. (27)

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(24) Childe (1942a) 23, 24.

(25) See above p. 118 ff.

(26) Childe, op. cit., 23, 24.

(27) Ibid., 24. In History (1947) Childe also makes this point, see below p. 223.

Childe's argument is interesting and is directed against the Marxist view of history as a dialectical process in which contradictions lead to higher levels of synthesis through revolutions. Basically what Childe is arguing is that the revolution, i.e. the transcendence of the contradictions is not inevitable.

Although, as can be seen from the above discussion, Childe consciously employed a specific historical model from the thirties onwards, his treatment of historical theory before and during the war was limited. Apart from the brief reference to what he termed the realist conception of history in "Changing Methods and Aims in Prehistory", the subject was confined to summary passages in the introductions to popular texts. It was only after the war that he became deeply involved with historical theory, the first publication on this theme being "Rational Order in History" (1945) which as the title suggests was concerned with patterns in the historical process.

In this paper, Childe was particularly concerned to illustrate the inadequacies of historical models based upon world outlooks which in his eyes did not admit the reality of change in the historical process. Childe considered the search for a permanent reality outwith the historical process to be a feature of most historical models until comparatively recently.

In the history of historiography, as in that of science, one can trace persistent efforts to find behind the constant flux all too obtrusively

experienced in actual life, a permanent reality exempt from change, a durable order behind apparent chaos, a transcendent unity above the struggling mob of events. (28)

For Childe it was insignificant whether this unity was seen in secular or theistic terms.

Now, if you once admit such an order above the process of history, does it make much difference in practice whether you call it Jehovah, or Economic Laws or Evolution? (29)

All such theories, according to Childe, eliminated real novelty from the historical process. In ancient Greece for example, he argued that,

The true reality was . . . conceived as a system of eternal laws from which all real change was eliminated. Human history, too, should become repetitive, cyclical and its constituent elements should be reducible to recurrent instances of eternal transcendental laws. (30)

Similarly in modern times,

Buckle and many successors have tried to explain history by geography and meteorology, while the racialists invoke physical anthropology - "Blood and soil". Both parties seem to hope that geography and human biology can be reduced to systems of unchanging laws, if not to such exactitude as physics or chemistry. The classical economists, again, had formulated laws that may - or may not - adequately describe the operations of early industrialism. Economic historians have then gone on to elevate these laws into statutes, invested with overriding and compulsive force, and have invoked them to explain the policies of Solomon or Solon! (31)

In this context Childe praised the German Idealist philosopher Hegel for his acceptance of novelty and for his view

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(28) Childe (1945c) 22.

(29) Ibid., 24.

(30) Ibid., 23.

(31) Ibid., 23.

of history as a creative process.

Hegel really tried to present the history of man and of the universe as a creative process in which genuinely new values, unprecedented qualities and novel events emerged. (32)

He was unsuccessful, however, according to Childe, in that he postulated the existence of a transcendent unity above the process.

For him the process became the self-manifestation of the Absolute Idea acting in accordance with its own eternal nature, the logical laws of thought. The Absolute was thus raised above the process like a sort of deity, so that the process must culminate in a predetermined synthesis. (33)

In Childe's eyes the idea of transcendence was unnecessary, since for him history was essentially a self-sufficient process with its own inherent order.

The historical process is untrammelled by any external laws, but creates its own laws. It has not to conform to any rigid mathematical order, but yet manifests a growing order which reason can partially comprehend. (34)

Here Childe emphasised man's difficulty in comprehending this order, arguing that it was not expressible by laws of the same type as physical or chemical laws which can be regarded as immutable for specific practical purposes. According to Childe the laws of history (here he included Darwin's principle of natural selection) had little predicative value.

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(32) Ibid., 24.

(33) Ibid., 24.

(34) Ibid., 25.

From Darwin's principle of selection or from Marx's materialist conception you cannot deduce a particular event, as you can from the law of gravity. They merely provide clues for disentangling order in seeming chaos. With the aid of such conceptions the historian can define tendencies, not uniformities. (35)

(Childe's emphasis)

Nevertheless like Marx, Childe did believe that man could become conscious of his role in the historical process and thus enter upon a new stage in his development.

We can at least conceive of an historical order consciously developed by the rational co-operation of its human agents in the process. That, I suppose, is what Marx meant in calling contemporary society "the closing chapter in the prehistoric stage of human society". (36)

(Childe's emphasis)

In History, published two years later in 1947, Childe began by contrasting scientific and sociological laws. While the former could be tested empirically in the laboratory, (37) this was not the case with the latter.

Now it is all too true that no one can conduct such experiments in economics, politics or international organization. We cannot in practice frame conditions so as to isolate and thus discover one factor - a single "cause" as that word is understood in experimental physics, genetics or medicine. So-called experiments like the League of Nations, the Builders' Guild and the various Co-operative Commonwealths fall far short of the conditions obtainable in a laboratory . . . Even a comparative sociology aiming at the establishment of general rules and a general scheme recurrent in many "instances", the differences between which can be ignored, . . . can make little headway. On the one hand the number of observed and observable instances is very limited; on the other it is

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(35) Ibid., 26.

(36) Idem.

(37) Note, however, that not all scientific laws can be tested in a laboratory, e.g. geological laws.



questionable how far these instances are  
genuinely independent. (38)

It should be emphasised that for Childe the value of a  
scientific law was that it provided a maxim for action. (39)  
Consequently as man's scientific knowledge had developed  
so had the practical application of that knowledge in the  
world.

Notoriously man's control over external nature  
has been achieved through knowledge of nature.  
It has progressed hand in hand with the systemi-  
zation of such knowledge in the natural sciences.  
And advance has been fastest where the results of  
the experimental sciences - geometry, mechanics,  
physics and chemistry - can be applied and has  
been accelerated by the adoption of experimental  
methods in other sciences - medicine, genetics,  
agronomy. (40)

And here he suggested that man's lack of success in the  
social sphere was due to his inability to comprehend the  
workings of society.

A reasonable inference has been that the painful  
discrepancy between humanity's control over the  
external environment and its incapacity to control  
the social environment is due to the absence of  
any science of society, the failure of sociology  
to become genuinely empirical and the impossibi-  
lity of conducting experiments under laboratory  
conditions in human relationships. (41)

Childe, however, was not wholly pessimistic about the  
possibility of achieving laws of history, for while it  
lacked laboratory conditions for practical experimentation,

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(38) Childe (1947b) 2, 3.

(39) Ibid., 3.

(40) Ibid., 2.

(41) Ibid., 2.

Mankind ever since its first emergence has been continually experimenting not only in controlling external nature, but also in organizing that control co-operatively. The results of these experiments are embodied on the one hand in the archaeological record - the concrete relics and monuments of the past - and on the other hand in documents transmitted orally, pictorially or best of all in writing. (42)

History, then was the scientific study of all these sources.

In Childe's words,

History . . . should yield a science of progress (43) though not necessarily an exact science, like physics, nor an abstract descriptive science, like anatomy. It should, in other words, disclose, if not mathematical laws or a static general scheme, an order in its own way as intelligible as that of astronomy or anatomy. (44)

It is important to consider the implications of Childe's view of the historical process in the context of the possibility of the construction of historical laws. On the one hand he firmly rejects the possibility of achieving historical laws with any predicative value since if this were the case it would of course contradict his basic premise concerning the truly creative quality of the historical process. However, on the other, he does not wish to say that the attempt to discover historical laws is of no value. Indeed he emphasises that there is a pattern in the historical process which can be comprehended

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(42) Ibid., 3.

(43) This is a good example of Childe using the term "progress" as a synonym for the historical process itself.

(44) Childe, op. cit., 3.

by reason. For Childe if there was no logical pattern in history, the study of history would be superfluous.

The historian's business would be to ascertain the happenings that are interesting and to describe them in chronological sequence and in an artistic literary form.

If this be so, it is hard to see why one should study history. If the aim be to interest the reader why not invent your incidents like a novelist. (45)

According to Childe then, the aim of the historian was to discover patterns in the historical process, not merely to record or describe events, and to emphasise this point he distinguished between chronicle and history.

The former records "what was done and in what year it happened"; history must exhibit also "the reasons and causes of events". History, in fact, must possess an order beyond mere succession in time. (46)

In History the bulk of the text comprises an analysis of four different views of historical order commencing with the theological conception and concluding with historical materialism. Firstly, however, Childe was concerned to illustrate the role of the historian in a tradition of historiography. Basically he made two main points here; firstly that the historian has almost always belonged to the ruling class or at least been closely identified with it.

The first Sumerian clerks were drawn from the temple priesthood and servants of the city god, who was also the largest landowner in each

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(45) Ibid., 33.

(46) Ibid., 34.

city-state. . . In Egypt, where the pharaoh was an actual god, the clerks were his officials or agents of his nobles . . .

The clerks of the Middle Ages were in much the same position as Sumerian scribes; . . . In Greece and the Roman empire . . . the authors of histories were generally citizens and well-to-do citizens at that . . . Even in contemporary Britain . . . the principal market for history-books is formed by the ruling class and its favoured dependants and imitators in the middle classes. (47)

By beginning with an analysis of the class position of the historian Childe was adopting a classic Marxist approach to historical theory. Marx himself particularly emphasised the class nature of knowledge.

The ideas of the ruling class are in every age, the ruling ideas ie the class which is the dominant material force in society is at the same time its dominant intellectual force. (48)

And this was echoed to a greater or less extent by a whole tradition of his successors. (49)

Secondly, Childe argued that to write history must necessarily involve selection by the historian as to what is to be regarded as important or memorable. Here he emphasised that this selection was conditioned by the social environment of the historian, in particular, his social class.

Now no chronicler nor historian can attempt to record all events; from the superfluity of happenings he must select what he regards as memorable. His selection is determined to a very small extent by his personal idiosyncracies,

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(47) Ibid., 21, 22.

(48) Marx (1845) in T. Bottomore and M. Rubel (1956) 78.

(49) Z. Jordan (1967).

but on the whole by tradition and social interests. Indeed, save for personal memoirs and diaries, the standard of the memorable is a social one, dictated by interests shared by the whole community, or more precisely by the ruling class in each community. (50)

At this point Childe was unconcerned with the problem of subjectivity, arguing that,

It is just no good demanding that history should be unbiased. The writer cannot help being influenced by the interests and prejudices of the society to which he belongs - his class, his nation, his Church. (51)

It should be noted, however, that later, when he did go further into the problem, he seemed to exempt Marxism from the subjectivity dilemma. (52)

As indicated above Childe's main concern in History was to analyse four major conceptions of historical order which he categorised as follows, (53)

1. "The theological and magical conceptions of historical order";
2. "Naturalistic theories of historical order";
3. "History as a comparative science" and
4. "History as a creative process".

Before going on to consider the content of these categories however, it is interesting to examine the classification itself, one of the most striking features of the system

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(50) Childe (1947b) 22.

(51) Ibid., 22.

(52) Childe (1949c) 309.

(53) These are in fact chapter headings.

being the close relationship between the different categories and broad philosophical world outlooks.

The theological and magical (the first grouping) is closely associated with idealism in the broadest sense as the world outlook in which "spirit" or "mind" is viewed as the primary reality and matter as secondary. Furthermore, the naturalistic theories of historical order and history as a comparative science (the second and third groupings) can be linked with empiricism where matter is viewed as primary and mind as secondary. Finally, history as a creative process,<sup>(54)</sup> (the fourth grouping) is closely associated with dialectical materialism. Unfortunately, Childe himself does not explicitly define the basis of his classification and thus the relationship between his historical orders and philosophical world viewpoints has to be inferred from the text.

This, however, is not difficult and in reviewing History for The Modern Quarterly, George Thomson was quick to recognise the pattern to Childe's work. Indeed he does not avoid the temptation to rationalize it presenting it as a categorization clearly based on three different philosophical systems.

The greater part of the book is devoted to an examination of three different conceptions of historical order, the "theological", the "naturalistic", and the "scientific", corresponding to subjective idealism, mechanical

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(54) I.e. historical materialism, see below p.

materialism and Marxism.

(55)

In doing so he thus makes explicit what is implicit in the text. At the same time while he undoubtedly makes a neat equation between Childe's categories and the philosophical systems underlying them, he misrepresents Childe's own approach which was not quite so clear-cut nor consistent. As noted above, Childe distinguished four main types of historical order, the theological, the naturalistic, the comparative and the creative, not three. In order to make his equation Thomson had therefore to subsume the chapter on history as a comparative science under naturalistic theories. Childe, however, preferred to make a distinction. For Childe "comparative" theories were not "naturalistic" in that they did not attempt to apply the laws of the natural sciences to the historical process but sought to generate their own descriptive laws based on comparisons between discrete sections of the historical process. The issue is complicated, however, by the fact that Childe includes cyclical theories in both categories. There would thus seem to be some grounds for Thomson's rationalization.

1. Theological and Magical Conceptions of Historical Order

Childe's main objection to the theological conceptions of history was that the source of order in the historical process was regarded as extrinsic and not intrinsic to that

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(55) G. Thomson (1949) 267.

process. Consequently it was in Childe's eyes unverifiable by the scientific method and for that reason rejected by him.

The Divine Government of the world certainly gives unity to history, all significant historical events are reduced to effects of one single cause - God's Will. But the unifying principle cannot be demonstrated by history or deduced from it, but has to be imported from without. It is apprehended by faith, not by reason. It has accordingly no place in any conceivable science of history, but belongs where it began in the pre-scientific era. (56)

Childe differentiated "magic" from "religion" as follows,

Magic is a way of making people believe they are going to get what they want, whereas religion is a system for persuading them that they ought to want what they get. (57)

Consequently he argued that magic is more primitive and older than religion. Childe treated the "great man" theory of history as magical which at first sight seems rather odd. The reason, however, goes back to the position of the divine king in ancient history.

In the theocratic monarchies of Bronze Age Egypt, Mesopotamia and China, the king was not only the author of law and the sustainer of social order, he was also regarded as responsible for the material welfare of the kingdom. By magic rites that he alone could perform, the Egyptian pharaoh ensured the rising of the sun, the annual flood of the Nile and in general the fertility of crops, herds and game . . .

It would be perfectly reasonable on such a theory to regard the king as the one efficient cause of all historical events. The ancient royal annals are thus the first expressions of the still popular great Man theory of history. (58)

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(56) Childe (1947b) 36, 37.

(57) Ibid., 37.

(58) Ibid., 37, 38.



Childe saw the "great man" theory of modern times to be a continuation of the earlier viewpoint even although by this time the "great man" had been freed from the dependence on God's government. And here he makes it clear that he considered the thesis to negate the possibility of patterning the past.

Plainly if such cataclysmic personalities have mysteriously emerged from time to time and have "changed the course of history" and "turned it into a new channel" any conception of an historical order must go by the board. (59)

In Childe's eyes the fundamental defect of the "great man" thesis was that it ignored the social environment, the economic context and the technological basis from which the "great man" arose and in which he operated.<sup>(60)</sup> He was presented as a "Jack in the box" who emerges miraculously from the unknown to interrupt the real continuity of history.<sup>(61)</sup> In this context Childe tended to reduce the importance of the "great man" and quotes from Engels to support his thesis, "in default of a Napoleon, another would have filled his place".<sup>(62)</sup> While Childe admitted that this was a hypothetical argument incapable of being tested, he emphasised that "the objective fact in history is that when a man was necessary he was found."<sup>(63)</sup>

It is relevant here to draw attention to Childe's

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(59) Ibid., 40.

(60) Ibid., 42.

(61) Ibid., 43.

(62) Ibid., 42.

(63) Ibid., 42.

view of the role of the inventor. Again he emphasised the importance of the society as a whole rather than the individual. For example he saw Watt's contribution towards the steam engine as small in comparison to the "social capital" to which he contributed, that is, the accumulated inventions and discoveries that society had transmitted to him from the latest improvements in iron-founding and valves to the discovery of the control of fire itself in the Old Stone Age.<sup>(64)</sup>

## 2. Naturalistic Theories of History

Under naturalistic theories of historical order Childe deals with four main types of historical order which he terms geometrical, geographical, anthropological and political. Childe defined as naturalistic all theories that either attempt to depict historical events as instances of immutable laws comparable to the laws of mathematics or astronomy, or which represent the historical order by an abstract but eternal theme or chart.<sup>(65)</sup>

Geometrical History: Childe interpreted a geometrical view of history as one in which the past is viewed in terms of mathematical rules. Here he gives the example of the cyclical history first expounded in classical antiquity and made popular in his own day by Spengler. According to this view the historical process is seen to describe a circular

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(64) Ibid., 12.

(65) Ibid., 43.

not an onward-going path. Again as with the great man thesis Childe's main objection is that it ignores the technological and economic basis of society.

As soon as the historian extends his survey to embrace science, technology and even those aspects of strategy that are directly dependent upon technology the superficiality of analogies between the several periods of man's history is laid bare.

In these domains it is perfectly obvious that history does not describe a circle but is a cumulative process. And that is really just as true of every aspect of history. (66)

Geographical History: Basically Childe argued that geographical environment while an important factor in explaining the variety of human cultures could not explain historical change. For example, in Childe's words,

Look how long it was before the inhabitants of Britain began to seriously utilise coal for fuel though its combustible properties had been known since the Bronze Age some three thousand years ago! (67)

Geographical environment, then, according to Childe, should be taken into account when attempting to explain historical processes but only as a background for historical development not as a decisive governing factor. While Childe, elsewhere, stressed that he saw culture as an adaptation to the environment<sup>(68)</sup> here he makes it clear that he viewed the relationship between the two as a reciprocal process. Not only have men been adapting to their environment but,

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(66) Ibid., 46.

(67) Ibid., 49.

(68) See above pp. 119, 120.

"throughout their history have been experimenting with increasing success in adapting their environment - even the climate - to their habits and needs."(69)

Again this is a classic materialist stance summarising the root of Marx's dialectical method, i.e. the reciprocal interaction between man and nature. Basically Marx argued that the environment was a significant factor in shaping man's nature. However, unlike empiricists who saw man's role as purely passive, he stressed man's practical activity in changing his environment and thus, at the same time, in changing his own nature.(70)

Anthropological History: What Childe termed the "anthropological" conception of history was basically the thesis that the inherent qualities of the different races of mankind are fixed in character. According to Childe not only was this an old belief stretching back to the biblical notion of a chosen people, but from the beginning it was closely associated with the belief in the inherent superiority of certain peoples or races.(71) Furthermore, he emphasised that this in turn was used as justification for many racialist policies throughout history.

Childe argued that with the publication of Darwin's theory of evolution last century, the anthropological conception of history had gained a quasi-scientific status

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(69) Childe, op. cit., 50.

(70) For Marx's theory see A. Schmidt (1967), also see Z. Jordan (1967) 16-64.

(71) Childe (1947b) 50-57.

owing to the misapplication of biological concepts to the historical process. As noted previously he was deeply concerned about the role of such theories in contemporary politics and thus saw it as a matter of practical as well as academic importance to clearly analyse the relationship between biological and cultural evolution.

History as a department of political economy: Childe traced the laws of political economy from the Renaissance and from the rise of a new class of bourgeoisie. Here he argued that these laws were all based on a few 'a priori' truths, one of which, the premise of self-interested motivation, gave rise to the concept of economic man.

By exaggerating this tendency of Humanism and idealizing its product the bourgeois economists of the Industrial Revolution in England created a monster, Economic Man. From his supposed "nature" they deduced "eternal laws" that ought to govern the activities of all human societies in producing and exchanging goods as Newton's laws governed the motions of planets and billiard balls. (72)

Childe made two criticisms of this type of economic interpretation of history. Firstly he questioned the basic premise of "economic man" motivated only by materialistic desires, pointing out that it was being challenged even in its own day. Unfortunately, however, Childe does not explicitly state why he considered the concept to be a myth but takes it to be self evident. This is particularly regrettable in that Childe himself had been strongly

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(72) Ibid., 57.

influenced by economic determinism, especially during the thirties and early forties when he wrote Man Makes Himself and What Happened in History.

Secondly, Childe argued that while these laws were scientific in that they were based on observed economic processes, they only applied to one given system, capitalism, and could not be extended to other economic periods.

In so far as economic laws were genuinely scientific, i.e. were correct descriptions of how goods were actually produced and exchanged, they only applied to a given economic system . . .

Adam Smith and his immediate successors were, in fact, trying to describe capitalism in the early days of the Industrial Revolution . . . They were in truth the academic champions of the rising class of capitalist manufacturers against the still dominant landed aristocracy. Some of their successors in Britain and still more in America have championed the same class against the workers in trade unions and in the socialist movement. All assume explicitly a free movement of goods and an equal mobility of labour and therefore tacitly modern means of transport and communications and legal freedom for workers and employers. It would be a manifest absurdity to apply deductions from such technological and sociological assumptions to, say the early Middle Ages when land transport was confined to pack-horses and peasants were tied to the soil. (73)

Here Childe quotes from a postscript to Das Capital in support of his thesis,

Marx, of course, "expressly denies that the general laws of economic life are one and the same no matter whether they are applied to the present or the past. According to him every economic period has laws of its own. (74)

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(73) Ibid., 58, 59.

(74) Ibid., 58.

### 3. History as a Comparative Science

Under this heading Childe grouped two different historical conceptions, the "cyclical" which he discussed in the previous chapter and the "parallelistic". According to Childe both were similar in that they were based on comparisons between different sections of the historical process treated as discrete units.

If human history could be cut up into a number of consecutive or parallel slices, each might be treated as an instance or an example of generalized history. By comparing them we should discover recurrent features common to all the instances examined. Then, making abstraction of or ignoring differences, we should be left with a general chart or specific description of abstract history. (75)

Childe had relatively little to add to his previous rejection of the cyclical method except to note that it had, in his eyes, been refuted in practice. Here he was specifically referring to Spengler's predictions in The Decline and Fall of the Next where he foresaw the rise of revived Caesarism - "a Germanic totalitarian world-state foreshadowing even in detail that New Order which Herr Hitler tried in 1939 to impose on a curiously ungrateful world". (76)

Childe took the defeat of Hitler in 1945 to be the experimental refutation of not only Spengler's thesis but also of the cyclical thesis as a whole.

Childe's main criticism of the parallelistic view of

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(75) Ibid., 61.

(76) Ibid., 62.

history was that the historical process was a unified interrelated whole not a series of discrete sections.

Is it legitimate or profitable to carve history into bits, label them "civilizations" and then treat them as distinct and independent instances of general laws? Are the bits thus isolated really separate representatives of a species from a comparison of which an inductive description can be constructed like the anatomical chart of the human body based on a dissection of a number of distinct bodies? Are Toynbee's "civilizations" not rather like the several limbs or organs of one such body? (77)

Here he argued that in order to justify the isolation of the units, Toynbee had to minimize the relationships between them. Furthermore, Childe restated the argument that he had originally made against the cyclical interpretation of history.

In brief, to legitimise the comparative method and make its inferences plausible Toynbee, like Spengler has to ignore just those human activities that in history are unambiguously cumulative and revolutionary. (78)

It is worthy of note that in "The History of Civilization" published in Antiquity 1941, Childe had proposed an alternative to this type of historical structuring. Basically he suggested replacing the politico-geographical units by archaeological periods. This he suggested would allow comparisons between civilizations and would not obscure their interrelations. (79) For example Sumerian, Egyptian and Indus civilizations could be viewed as

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(77) Ibid., 63.

(78) Ibid., 64.

(79) Childe (1941) 1-14.



different aspects of Bronze Age civilization rather than totally unrelated. Furthermore he argued that with the archaeological framework the progressive enlargement of the continuum leading to modern civilization could be graphically traced. This was obviously very important to Childe for as noted previously much of his research was concerned ultimately with the relationship between modern civilization and its prehistoric precedents.<sup>(80)</sup>

#### 4. History as a Creative Process

In the final chapter Childe gives a short analysis of Marxist historical theory which, he considered to be the only theory of history which accepted both the changeful nature of the historical process and its self sufficiency. Thus in these two fundamental aspects Marxist historical theory was based on a philosophical world outlook which coincided with Childe's own.<sup>(81)</sup> This point perhaps needs emphasising since his rejection of the various historical theories other than Marxism was an account of their failure to present the historical process in these terms.

In History, Childe makes it clear that he saw Marxism as basically a technological model.

Now the simplest aspect of historical order is . . . the progressive extension of humanity's control over external nature by the invention and discovery of more efficient tools and processes. Marx and Engels were the first to remark that this technological development is the foundation for the whole

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(80) See above pp. 44, 45, 100.

(81) There are important differences; see below pp. 236, 261 ff.

of history conditioning and limiting all other human activities. (82)

(my emphasis)

He did not, however, deny the importance of social relations in the productive processes.

Indeed, the whole productive activity in which tools or machines are used for the provision and distribution of food, warmth and other human needs in all known societies and at every period of recorded history is and has been a social activity involving the co-operation of smaller or greater numbers of people. Whether you like it or not, you must secure the co-operation of your baker and through him of an indefinite chain of other persons right down to the wheat growers of Manitoba and Iowa if you want a loaf. (83)

And here Childe quotes from Marx in support of his thesis,

In the social production of their livelihood men enter into definite relations that are necessary and independent of their wills; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage in the development of their material forces of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real basis on which is reared a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. (84)

The above passage from the Preface to The Critique of Political Economy is generally recognised as Marx's classic statement on the materialist principle of history, and usually it is taken to represent an economic, not a technological interpretation, of history. It is thus interesting that Childe interpreted it in technological terms.

Thus Marxism goes on to assert that all constitutions, laws, religions and other so-called spiritual results of man's historical activity are in the long run determined by the material forces of

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(82) Childe (1947b) 69, 70.

(83) Ibid., 70.

(84) Ibid., 71.

production - tools and machines - together with, of course, natural resources and skills to operate them. Thus the Materialist Conception offers a clue for the analysis of the data of history and opens up the prospect of reducing its phenomena to an easily comprehensible order. (85)

Lilley in his review of History in The Modern Quarterly has argued that Childe in fact misinterpreted this particular passage.<sup>(86)</sup> For here Marx clearly states that it is the economic structure as a whole which constitutes the real foundation of society. Childe's statement, however, would confine the determining element in society to the forces of production, i.e. to the technology, together with the skills required to operate it. It should be pointed out, however, that Childe was not alone in upholding a technological interpretation of Marxism<sup>(87)</sup> and indeed there are certain passages in Marx which can be interpreted in this way.<sup>(88)</sup> By the majority of its exponents, however, Marxism is usually considered to be an economic rather than a purely technological model.<sup>(89)</sup>

In explaining what he considered to be the major principle of Marxism, i.e. its technological determinism Childe warned that this clue was not to be used slavishly.

A quite superficial survey of history would disclose tragic discrepancies between progressive technology and moribund political or religious institutions. In the first place, "at a certain

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(85) Ibid., 71, 72.

(86) S. Lilley (1949) 264.

(87) H.B. Acton (1955) 13 ff.

(88) Ibid.

(89) J. Saville (1973) 7.

stage in their development the productive forces of society came into contradiction with the existing relations of production, i.e. in legal terms, with the property relations, within which they have worked before. From the forms of development of the forces of production, these relations turn into their fetters". (90)

Here he drew attention to the Marxist theory of revolution as a means of breaking the "fetters" on the productive forces. Childe, however, emphasised that although this was desirable it was not inevitable and in this context he gives the example of the stagnation of certain Bronze Age societies.

In Mesopotamia, Egypt and China theocratic despotism, relations of production appropriate to the productive forces of the Bronze Age, persisted into the Iron Age. They effectively fettered the exploitation of the new forces represented by iron with the result that technology also stagnated. The whole life of these societies stagnated too, the first two eventually perished altogether. From a Marxian analysis all that one can deduce is the dilemma - revolution or paralysis. History does not disclose an unfaltering march to a pre-determined goal. The materialist conception implies that, if science and technology are to progress, the relations of production must be adjusted accordingly. (91)

In another review of History in The Modern Quarterly Christopher Hill criticized Childe's treatment of revolution, arguing that he did not give sufficient emphasis to the form that the revolution would take.<sup>(92)</sup> While Childe saw it in terms of "adjustment" between the productive forces and the productive relations, Hill characterised it as essentially

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(90) Childe (1947b) 72 quoting from Marx 1859.

(91) Ibid., 73.

(92) C. Hill (1949) 261.

a class struggle. Furthermore he argued that Childe did not clearly analyse the concept of class. This criticism was echoed and extended by Thomson who held that Childe did not analyse the various historical orders in terms of their class basis, and to him this constituted the main weakness of the text.<sup>(93)</sup>

While Childe perhaps did not give as much emphasis to the class struggle as some of his Marxist contemporaries would have liked, it is not true that he did not understand either the role of class in society or its relationship to ideology. As noted previously one of his first priorities in History was to analyse the class position of the historian in the development of historical studies. In particular he emphasised that the historian's outlook was conditioned by the social class to which he belonged, this usually being the ruling class.<sup>(94)</sup>

Childe's treatment of the notion of class, however lacking the bitter polemic which surrounds much of the Marxist literature at this time, could be interpreted by his contemporaries as devoid of revolutionary zeal. Today, however, works containing the latter quality are often sadly dated, the revolutionary spirit being seen as dogmatism and adherence to the party line rather than a true understanding of Marxism. One of the enduring merits of

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(93) E. Thomson (1949) 267.

(94) See above p. 207 ff.

Childe's work is that while obviously sympathetic to a Marxist viewpoint it never descends into anti-capitalist propaganda.

In History as in What Happened in History, Childe was careful to emphasise the important role of ideology in the historical process. Here, he was particularly concerned with its capacity to hinder technological progress.

Ideologies, religious creeds, national loyalties and so on may very seriously impede progress. . . . History bristles with examples of the hindrances imposed by superstitions on science and its applications; the Church's ban upon the Copernican theory and Islam's opposition to printing are notorious cases. (95)

Childe did, however, admit that ideology could in fact be progressive and thus aid technological development, and here he quotes from Stalin in support of this claim,

There are new and advanced ideas that serve the advanced forces of society. Their significance lies in the fact that they facilitate the progress of society, and is the greater, the more accurately they reflect the needs of development of the material life of society. New social ideas and theories indeed arise only after the development of its material life has set new tasks before society. But once they have arisen, they become a most potent force which furthers the material progress of society. (96)

It should be noted at this point that Childe's reading of Marxism was not confined only to Marx, he was also acquainted with the work of Engels, Lenin and Stalin and in History he quotes from all these sources. While many

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(95) Childe (1947b) 76.

(96) Idem.

scholars in the west did not acknowledge the latter as source material for Marxism, Childe seemed at this time to have respect not only for his writings but also for his role as a politician. (97)

As indicated above Childe's view of the creative, changeful nature of reality negated the possibility of historical models with any predicative potential. (98) Thus, unlike many of his Marxist contemporaries Childe denied that historical materialism could foresee the future course of world history,

No theory of history can foretell what new discoveries science has in store, what productive forces will thereby be put at the disposal of society nor precisely what economic organization or political institutions will be suited to their exploitation. Analysed from the standpoint of dialectical materialism history will show how institutions and beliefs have, in fact, in the past been related to technological and scientific developments. (99)

At the same time, however, he did not wish to push this point too far, and argued somewhat optimistically that Stalin using the principles of historical materialism had successfully predicted the course of world history.

Scientific history makes no claim to be a sort of astrology to predict the outcome of a particular race or an individual battle for the profit of sportive or militaristic speculators. Its study, on the other hand, will enable the sober citizen to discern the pattern the process has been weaving in the past and therefrom to estimate how it may be continued in the immediate future. One great statesman of today has successfully foreseen the course of world history and him we have

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(97) See below pp. 226, 227.

(98) See above pp. 202, 203, 205.

(99) Childe op. cit., 83.

just quoted as an exponent of Marxist historiography. (100)

Childe's attitude towards prediction is thus ambivalent. At the heart of the problem was his insistence on the wholly creative quality of reality which, if pressed to its logical conclusion, would certainly negate the possibility of historical laws. Obviously if reality was totally creative, constantly bringing forth genuine novelties no existing laws could encompass these emergent qualities. It was Childe's strict adherence to this philosophical belief which separated him from his Marxist contemporaries who claimed that Marxism did in fact have some predicative value. Indeed they latter maintained that they were able to foresee the resolution of the contradictions in the historical process in a stage of world communism which was regarded as the inevitable outcome of the historical process according to the laws of dialectical materialism.

However, while Childe could not accept this he did not wish to deny that there was a pattern to the historical process or that the construction of laws was not a suitable goal for historians. As noted above, Childe differentiated historical laws from scientific laws which have a high predicative potential. (101) Historical laws on the other hand were just shorthand descriptions of the way in which

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(100) Ibid., 83.

(101) Ibid.,



historical changes came about. They neither cause nor govern these changes but serve to limit the range of incalculable factors without excluding such altogether.

It is important to note in this context that Childe believed that archaeology could contribute to the construction of historical laws. While he did not consider the possibility of it generating its own laws, he held that it was a useful tool for testing theories developed in other disciplines, especially those which lacked archaeology's time perspective.<sup>(102)</sup> In particular he considered that it could test the evolutionary schemes of nineteenth century anthropologists which were constructed on comparisons between contemporary primitive societies. While Childe criticized the comparative method in that it transformed an observable logical geographical scheme into a hypothetical chronological one, he did not believe that this invalidated the hypothesis of social evolution. Like all scientific hypotheses these needed to be tested by observation and it was in this context that archaeology could play a crucial role.

Now the archaeological record discloses sequences of . . . cultures stratigraphically established, in several areas. In other words, it reveals the chronological order in which societies have appeared. How far does this "observable scheme" really provide the basis for a "logical" one? Let us compare homotaxial cultures - that is cultures occupying the same relative positions in the several observed sequences - to ascertain whether the agreements between them can be

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(102) Childe (1946 )

generalized as stages in cultural evolution, the evolution of society in the abstract. (103)

Here Childe especially wished to test Lewis Morgan's evolutionary scheme which he considered to be the best of its kind to date. As noted above Morgan envisioned human history as comprising three major ethnical periods, savagery, barbarism and civilization, of which the first two were further subdivided into three sub periods, lower, middle and upper.<sup>(104)</sup> Morgan was also interested in the development of the family structure and in this sphere he recognised five successive forms; (1) the consanguine, (2) the punaluan; (3) the syndyasmian; (4) the patriarchal; and (5) the monogamian.<sup>(105)</sup> Basically this was an evolution from group marriage to the modern nuclear unit. In terms of kinship Morgan recognised the following sequence; (1) Malayan; (2) Turanian-Ganowanian and (3) Aryan-Semitic which in modern classification correspond to Hawaiian, Iroquois and Eskimo types. As regards social structure the sequence begins with the first two stages of the family, a promiscuous horde, followed by one in which brothers and sisters are forbidden to marry. The next phase is dominated by matrisibs. These combine to form phratries which in turn combine to form tribes and then confederacies. All of these, it should be noted, were distinguished from

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(103) Ibid., 16.

(104) See above pp. 165, 166.

(105) For survey of Morgan's scheme see M. Harris (1968) 180 ff.

true political organization based on reckoning of rights and property relations. The true political units were the township, the county and the state.

As Harris has pointed out Morgan's approach is a remarkable attempt to co-ordinate many different levels of society in one comprehensive scheme.

The overall effect therefore is of a diachronic and synchronic system of unprecedented structural and chronological scope. The overall movement from systems based on sex and kinship to those based on territoriality and property was connected by a series of negative and positive feedbacks to family form, kinship terminology and the technological criteria of the ethnical periods. (106)

Today in the light of new evidence Morgan's scheme can be seen to be untenable in many respects. Nevertheless as Eleanor Leacock has noted his three major ethnical periods have stood the test of time.

In spite of the disfavour into which Morgan's work fell, his general sequence of stages has been written into our understanding of prehistory and interpretation of archaeological remains, as a glance at any introductory anthropology text will indicate. (107)

Childe portrayed Morgan as a parallel evolutionist in the nineteenth century vein where cultures are seen to evolve to and from similar conditions in a tandem. In Social Evolution then the aim of the text was to use the culture sequences in four different geographical regions, (1) temperate Europe, (2) the Mediterranean zone, (3) the

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(106) Ibid., 182.

(107) E. Leacock (1963) cited in Harris *ibid.*, 185.

Nile valley and (4) Mesopotamia as empirical examples against which to test the thesis of parallel evolution.

In comparing them to see if they exhibited uniformity or parallelism in their transition from barbarism to civilization, Childe argued that although the starting point savagery and the end result civilization were abstractly similar, in each case the intervening steps did not exhibit even an abstract parallelism. For example as regards the rural economy,

In Tasian and Badarian Egypt farming was at best on a par with, and perhaps even subordinate to, the food-gathering activities of hunting, fishing and collecting; in the sequel the relative importance of hunting rapidly declined. In temperate Europe we saw just the reverse: in Central and Western Europe hunting was relatively less important in Neolithic stage I than in the succeeding stage II . . . Again, in Greece as well as in Hither Asia and Egypt the first definable rural economy was organised so as to permit really sedentary farming. . . In temperate Europe shifting cultivation was the rule throughout the Neolithic and most of the Bronze stages . . . In the last-named area we observed a separation of the more pastoral from the agricultural communities; nothing parallel was disclosed by archaeology in Egypt or Mesopotamia . . .

So the observed developments in rural economy do not run parallel; they cannot therefore be used to define stages common to all the sequences examined . . . In fine, the development of barbarian's rural economies in the regions surveyed exhibits not parallelism but divergence and convergence. (108)

From here Childe goes on to argue that the same is true as regards the social structure.

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(108) Ibid., 161, 162.

The fragmentary record of the development of social institutions in the several sequences, in so far as it is decipherable at all, suggest no closer parallelism. (109)

Childe then strongly differentiated his viewpoint from a parallelistic stance, proposing instead a model of convergent evolution in which cultures evolve to and from similar conditions through dissimilar steps. As Harris has noted, however, the dichotomy between the two viewpoints has perhaps been exaggerated and here he emphasised that Morgan himself was not a strict parallelist but did in fact accept diffusion as one of the mechanisms by which the substantial uniformity of sociocultural evolution was made possible. (110)

It should be noted in this context that unlike the Boasian school in anthropology, (111) Childe did not consider that the phenomenon of convergence invalidated the thesis of social evolution /or indeed the analogy between social and organic evolution. And here he emphasised that in certain aspects the patterns of biological and social evolution were very similar.

To Lamarck and Darwin "evolution" described a process by which new species emerged - that is to say, a process of variation and differentiation. Organic evolution is never depicted pictorially by a bundle of parallel lines, but by a tree with branches all up the trunk and each branch bristling with twigs. In so far as the archaeological record could be represented by such a figure, it

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(109) Ibid., 164.

(110) Harris (1968) 177-179.

(111) Ibid., 176, 177.

would disclose a process analogous to organic evolution. In fact, differentiation - the splitting of large homogenous cultures into a multitude of distinct local cultures - is a conspicuous feature in the archaeological record.<sup>(112)</sup>

Childe was aware, however, that it was convergence, i.e. the levelling up of distinct cultures by diffusion,<sup>(113)</sup> which distinguished social from organic evolution. As noted previously Childe emphasised that diffusion was peculiar to social evolution.<sup>(114)</sup> Cultural innovations unlike organic mutations could be transmitted from one generation to another, or from one society to another by non biological mechanisms. In fact Childe defined diffusion as the adoption by one independent society of innovations initiated by another.<sup>(115)</sup>

So in this respect Childe admitted that the analogy between the two process/broke down.<sup>(116)</sup> As Gathercole<sup>(117)</sup> has emphasised, however, this is no cause to postulate a major crisis in Childe's thinking as Ravetz<sup>(118)</sup> and Allen<sup>(119)</sup> have done. To do this is to overlook the basic continuity in his argument from the thirties onwards. Childe had never denied that biological and social evolution

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(112) Childe (1951a) 166.

(113) Ibid., 166-168.

(114) Ibid., 168.

(115) Ibid., 179.

(116) Ibid., 175.

(117) P. Gathercole (1971) 227.

(118) A. Ravetz (1959) 60-3.

(119) J. Allen (1967) 57.

differed in certain crucial aspects. Indeed as noted previously he devoted considerable energy to clearly illustrating these differences.<sup>(120)</sup> So the argument in Social Evolution is not new but rather a reaffirmation of long held beliefs.

Furthermore, as Gathercole points out, far from denying the usefulness of biological concepts in social evolution Childe argued that,

With certain modification the Darwinian formula of "variation, heredity, adaptation and selection" can be transferred from organic to social evolution, and is even more intelligible in the latter domain than in the former. (121)

Here Childe argued that the source of variation in social evolution, i.e. invention was actually more comprehensible than its biological counterpart mutation.

Not only does no one know the cause of the modification in the submicroscopic segment of a chromosome that produces a mutation, no one can predict when it will occur or in what direction . . . . But invention is something that everyone is doing every day - say in devising a substitute for a mislaid corkscrew or composing a really new sentence in an essay. (122)

Similarly he argued that although the mechanism of social heredity was different from biological heredity it was nevertheless a familiar and intelligible process. "It is effected by example and by precept, by education, advertisement, and propaganda."<sup>(123)</sup> Furthermore he emphasised that

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(120) See above p. 116.

(121) Childe (1951a) 175.

(122) Ibid., 175, 176.

(123) Ibid., 176.

adaptation to the environment was as much a condition for the survival of societies as for organisms. Here however he stressed the importance of the social environment, both internal and external, to which a society adapts arguing that this is much more variable than geography or climate. (124)

Finally he pointed out that selection had operated in social evolution as it had in biological evolution.

In the five hundred thousand years of humanity's existence an infinity of innovations must have been attempted or suggested. Owing to a rigorous process of selection, only a fraction have survived as being in the long run beneficial. (125)

However he warned that the term could only be applied to social evolution in a very limited sense, since the mechanisms of selection were very different from those operative in biological evolution.

In the "survival of the fittest" it is first those members of a population who carry the mutation who survive and multiply at the expense of those individuals who lack it. And then the new species thus established spreads by eliminating other species. (126)

(Childe's emphasis)

While he accepted that similar selective mechanisms operate within and between societies he stressed the cumulative rather than the eliminative aspect of the historical process.

Even in prehistory, when the change of culture in one region is so abrupt and drastic that we speak of one culture replacing another and infer the

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(124) Idem.

(125) Ibid., 177.

(126) Idem.



conquest of the region by a foreign society, most of the old achievements survive to be incorporated into the new culture . . . . At the same time the spread of invention is, . . . not always, nor even usually, affected by competition between societies or cultures and the elimination of one or more competitors as independent entities. Diffusion generally means the adoption by one independent society of innovations initiated by another. But that again is a cumulative process. (127)

In Social Evolution, then, Childe was using the archaeological record in a new and exciting fashion as a testing ground for social theory. Here it should be noted that he was in fact realizing what many archaeologists today consider as a major objective for archaeology. It is now well known that in the late sixties and early seventies archaeologists began to reject what they considered as the historical objectives of archaeology, i.e. the reconstruction of the past, emphasising instead its function as a social science in contributing to the explanation of social behaviour.<sup>(128)</sup> What is particularly interesting about Childe's work was that it embraced both these objectives. Unlike many "new" archaeologists Childe did not set up a dichotomy between historical interpretation and social explanation, i.e. between history and the social sciences.

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(127) Ibid., 178, 179.

(128) See B. Trigger (1970) 26-37 for a discussion of the relationship between historical and scientific aims in archaeology.

CHAPTER VI    The Philosophical Background

One of the major points to emerge from the previous chapter was the importance of Childe's philosophical world viewpoint in his assessment of historical models. It was seen that Childe had very strong beliefs in the nature of reality which he characterised as a creative self-sufficient process with its own dynamic pattern. In denying a creator or a source of reality outwith the historical process he placed himself firmly in a materialist, as opposed to an idealist, philosophical tradition.

Childe particularly emphasised the changeful nature of reality, and thus in these two fundamental aspects, i.e. nature's materialism and its changefulness, his world outlook coincided with a Marxist one. There were, however, important differences, for while Childe emphasised nature's changefulness he did not employ the Marxist explanation of change.<sup>(1)</sup> In fact he did not philosophise on the problem of change in any depth. Here, however, it is important to note that Childe's explicitly philosophical writings were not primarily concerned with the nature of reality. Rather this was assumed as self-evident. Indeed his only discussion of the topic was in the final chapter of his book Society and Knowledge, published in 1956.

Childe's philosophical works were for the most part

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(1) I.e. Marxist dialectics, see below pp. 261, 262.

concerned with the problem of knowledge. For Childe the interpretation of archaeological data raised epistemological questions. Archaeologists want to observe cultures, "but the instrument of observation is itself culture. The results of observation must be expressed in the categories which we have inherited from our own society."<sup>(2)</sup> Childe was thus very aware of the subjective nature of observation. Not only had man's way of looking at the world changed through time as his culture had changed, but his observation of that perception had also changed. In other words his knowledge of past knowledge had varied depending on the conceptual model employed. For Childe the major problem in this context was thus one of interpretation. Aware of the relativity of world viewpoints he did not wish to interpret a past society's system of beliefs within an alien conceptual framework, i.e. according to the logic of the twentieth century. On the other hand, however, he did not consider the interpretation of a past society within its own frame of reference to be a legitimate goal. Childe attempted to transcend this problem by his understanding of the nature of real knowledge which he characterised as essentially practical. Here he made the interesting suggestion that the archaeological record, which in his eyes was the remains of the practical manifestation of knowledge, allowed the archaeologist to gain access to the society's objective

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(2) Childe (1949a) 5.

knowledge rather than to its subjective world viewpoint.

It should be noted in this context that Childe's argument had significant practical consequences as regards his approach to archaeology. Since he was concerned only with what he termed "true knowledge" he felt no obligation to attempt to reconstruct past conceptual frameworks. Rather than try to interpret the fossilized behaviour patterns<sup>(3)</sup> of extinct societies according to a hypothetical system of beliefs and thoughts, he was concerned only with what he termed their "real historical function", i.e. their economic, social and scientific significance judged from a historical perspective.

As well as raising this question of subjectivity, Childe's excursion into philosophy brought to light an even more fundamental issue. Since he believed that knowledge had an essentially practical function to ensure the survival of the species, what then was the use of archaeology? In the end, however, Childe was unable to find any immediate practical value for the discipline.<sup>(4)</sup> Nonetheless he did hope that archaeological knowledge would contribute to human understanding and thus help people to act more humanly.<sup>(5)</sup>

As noted in Chapter I, Childe published two articles

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(3) For Childe the archaeological record was constituted of the fossilized results of human behaviour, see Childe (1956a) 1.

(4) See below p. 258.

(5) Idem.

specifically on the problem of knowledge "Social Worlds of Knowledge" (1949) and "The Sociology of Knowledge" (1949). These were followed in 1956 by Society and Knowledge published for the World Perspective Series in which the "most conscious and responsible minds"<sup>(6)</sup> of the day outlined their basic philosophical understanding and beliefs. Childe's philosophical thoughts, however, were not confined to these works and other publications to be taken into consideration include "Magic, Craftsmanship and Science" (1950) and Piecing Together The Past (1956).

In "Social Worlds of Knowledge" Childe examined the environment of man throughout history, both in terms of its content and extent, and in terms of man's perception of it. Here he made two main points. Firstly, he argued that as we go back in history the environment in which man acts becomes smaller in extent and poorer in content;

To any European society in the twentieth century the whole Earth is an effective element in the environment to be taken into account in planned activity. The most unlettered Englishman may send letters to New Zealand and eats meat from Argentina. To realise the shrinkage of this world in the past it suffices to look at a series of maps - a portulan of the fifteenth century, a reconstruction of Ptolemy's map a thousand years earlier, or of that of Hecataeus nearly a thousand years earlier still, and, finally, the extant copy of an Akkadian map of the late third millenium B.C. The latter was prepared by learned men of a literate and civilized people . . . Yet it shows a tiny world, floating in a primeval ocean with Babylon as its centre . . .

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(6) R.N. Anshen introducing the World Perspective series in Childe (1956a) ix.

Of course, as we go back, known worlds grow poorer in content as well as smaller in extent. Plainly we must gradually drain off the discoveries of modern science. . . . To recapture the environment of a past society we must, then, divest it of many of the physical, chemical, biological and geological properties that we should find in it. (7)

Secondly, he held that man's way of perceiving his environment had changed through time. Here Childe argued that the environment to which a society adjusts is a world of ideas, collective representations that differ not only in extent and content, but also in structure.<sup>(8)</sup> Childe's basic premise in this paper was that thought is patterned by fundamental intellectual constructs which he termed "categories of knowledge"<sup>(9)</sup> after Durkheim. His main argument was that these categories are neither timeless nor a priori but change with changes in society and to illustrate this point he showed how the concepts of number and space have evolved through time.<sup>(10)</sup>

Similarly Childe emphasised that the "laws of logic" were likewise not immutable but had changed throughout history.

Levy-Bruhl, you remember, styles natives' thinking "prelogical" . . . Primitive thinking does not

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- (7) Childe (1949a) 10-12.  
(8) Ibid., 16.  
(9) The categories are "priceless instruments of human thought which human groups have laboriously forged through the centuries and where they have accumulated the best of their intellectual capital". E. Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1913) 19, in Childe (1949a) 18.  
(10) Ibid., 14-16.

conform to the rules formulated by Aristotle. Nor did the thinking of the ancient Egyptians and Sumerians. In his masterly study of the oldest extant results of speculative thinking about Nature, Frankfort can quote text and text where in the "mythopoeic thought" of the Bronze Age civilizations of the Orient, the principles of identity and non-contradiction seem to be ignored, while space and causality are employed very differently from the usage of Newton or Kant. (11)

Childe was thus highly aware of the subjective element in observation, of the very important interaction between the observer and what is observed. The way of observing necessarily affects the observer's knowledge of what is observed. Here Childe gave the example of the approach to primitive, and to early civilized, man employed by nineteenth century ethnographers who imposed a nineteenth century world outlook upon the thought patterns of people with very different ways of thinking.

All have cheerfully assumed that contemporary savages, the Sumerians, the Egyptians, the Ionians, started out, as modern science tries to with mind and matter, subject and object, neatly and rigidly separated. They have then to assume that these societies erroneously put back into the object elements proper to the subject - personifying natural phenomena, peopling nature with ghosts, spirits and gods, infusing her with mana, and gratuitously postulating personal beings to push and pull what really is an automatic machine! We know now where they went wrong. Having first killed the culture they wanted to study as an object, they dissected and disarticulated its corpse and then tried to re-animate isolated members with equally isolated infusions from their own culture. (12)

The important problem for Childe was thus to find a way out

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(11) Ibid., 17.

(12) Ibid., 23, 24.

of the subjective limitations of cultural background. It was, in his eyes, essential to avoid imposing a modern conceptual framework upon primitive or prehistoric outlooks. He did not, however, as stated previously, consider the interpretation of a culture within its own frame of reference as a possible goal.

"All history" wrote Collingwood, "is the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind", and, more explicitly, "The historian re-enacts, in his own mind the thoughts and motives of the agent". But that too, is impossible. Empirically - to take what should be an easy case - I cannot "re-enact in my mind" Pythagoras' thoughts and motives" when he "discovered" his theorem; . . . I can follow his proof. But that does not make me rush off to sacrifice an ox. Still less can I guess why Babylonian clerks a thousand years before Pythagoras covered hundreds of tablets with problems laboriously devised to illustrate the theorem . . . But theoretically, too, the task is impossible. Collingwood tells me in effect to empty my head of all the ideas, categories, and values derived from my society in order to fill them with those of an extinct society. But that is doubly impossible. On the one hand the drainage process would not leave a tabula rasa, but nothing at all . . . On the other hand, there would be nothing to put into that nothing, since collective representations exist only for societies, and would be extinguished with the extinction of the society for which they existed. (13)

In "Magic, Craftsmanship and Science", published in 1950, Childe again emphasised this point.

Now the late R.G. Collingwood asserted that a historian must "re-enact in his own mind the thoughts and motives of the agent". Let me say at once that I do not believe that rethinking dead men's thoughts is the business of the historian at all. I do not believe it is really possible even with written documents to disclose the deceased's avowed intentions. Without such

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(13) Ibid., 24, 25.



clues it is plainly hopeless to try and capture the precise emotions and hopes that inspired, for instance, the builders of Stonehenge. (14)

Childe did, however, consider that he had a way out of the subjectivity dilemma based on what he regarded as the nature of "real" or "true" thought.

In practice the separation of subject from object is transcended. Real thoughts of the past have issued in action. Real thinking has already been objectified. To study a past society there is no need to turn its real thoughts into objects, for that has already been done. The relics and monuments studied by archaeology are patently objects, and need no translation into an alien conceptual framework. (15)

Here, he rested his argument on the practical nature of real thought on the following passage from Collingwood,

Purely theoretical thinking is not real thinking and does not lead to real knowing . . . Real thinking is always to some extent experimental in its method. It starts from practice and returns to practice. (16)

In "Magic, Craftsmanship and Science" Childe went on to devote considerable attention to the important question of the relationship between real or true knowledge and false knowledge. Here, characterising magic as false knowledge and science as true knowledge, he defined the latter as "those simple truths of which men in all ages possessed a store" from J. Frazer's The Magic Art (1925) (17)  
It is perhaps surprising that he did not attempt a more

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(14) Childe (1950 ) 1.

(15) Childe (1949a) 25.

(16) Collingwood in Childe, *ibid.*, 25.

(17) Frazer in Childe (1950) 5.

concrete definition of the term considering the important role it plays in his approach to the interpretation of archaeological remains. He does, however, supplement it in a footnote by two passages, the first from Malinowski, the second from Collingwood.

If by Science he understood a body of rules and conceptions, based on experience and derived from it by logical inference, embodied in material achievements and carried on by some sort of social organization - then even the lowest savages have the beginnings of science . . .

The sort of natural science which is inseparable from an intelligent exploitation of the natural world, means watching and remembering and handing down from father to son things which it is useful to know. (18)

Magic he attempted to define behaviourally rather than psychologically since in these terms it could be subject to empirical study while in the latter terms it could not.

Confine the term to those activities in which the practitioner claims to be utilizing forces different in kind from those recognised as normal and necessary in everyday life - by the common sense of his society. Then the prehistoric archaeologist will be silenced, as motives and beliefs lie outside his purview. But in practice such a subjective criterion is hard to apply even in ethnography, or, for that matter, in a study of English coal miners or medical practitioners. For instance, Mr. T.E. Williams who himself studied under Malinowski and who confesses a predilection for psychological interpretations, finds the borderline between magic and common sense (i.e. science) elusive. The "medicines", wen, administered to their gardens by his Keraki can have only a magical utility. "Yet it may be," he writes, "that in native estimation their use is almost as much a matter of common sense, as, say, erecting a pole to support the yam vine." Such

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(18) Childe, *ibid.*, 5.

an ambiguous criterion has plainly no part in a scientific definition. It is safer to follow behaviourist lines and to rely on the overt act than its alleged motive. Frazer has amply illustrated the appropriate behaviour patterns. So, whenever we observe people systematically performing acts that in the light of modern knowledge have proved futile and irrelevant to their manifest purpose but which conform to the pattern he has defined, let us frankly call them magical. (19)

Childe makes two main points in this paper. Firstly he argues that there is no rigid separation between scientific and magical activities - more specifically that magical activities supplement science. This is primarily directed against Malinowski's thesis that science and magic differ in subject matter, mental process, social organization and pragmatic function. (20)

Secondly he shows with reference to archaeological research that magic has a long history stretching back to the Old Stone Age, thus disproving the "Fall of Man" thesis of the Kulturhistorische Schule where magical practices are viewed as perverse innovations accumulated by societies that not only failed to evolve but have actually degenerated. (21)

Accordingly, as far as archaeological evidence goes, magical practices are as old as Homo Sapiens or even older, magical procedures were habitually invoked to supplement the conspicuously efficient skill and material equipment of the earliest hunters whose lives are really known to us, craft

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(19) Ibid., 9, 10.

(20) Ibid., 4.

(21) Ibid., 7.

tools were invested with magical power in the New Stone Age, when competent flint-miners resorted to magical rites and surgeons acted on the familiar magical theory of disease, and the oldest relevant documents left by our cultural ancestors show the applications of science in craftsmanship hedged about with magical precautions. In other words the available archaeological evidence, exiguous though it inevitably be, suffices to indicate that a belief in magic has been a "universal faith" in a temporal as well as a spatial sense. There is not a scrap of evidence to suggest that it was a cancerous growth that at a late stage and among constitutionally inferior races obstructed the natural current of rational science. (22)

As in "Social Worlds of Knowledge" Childe emphasised that the prehistorian should not aim to recreate the magical practices and motives of past societies.

Accordingly the prehistorian of science must renounce any pretension of re-enacting in his own mind the thoughts and motives of its pre-literate pioneers; for the precise rites, spells and taboos that accompanied their successful activities cannot be revived. There is at any time a finite - and generally quite modest - number of ways of attaining any attainable result. The number of imaginable ways of attaining the unattainable, is literally infinite . . . Secondly the practice of magic is the outcome and expression of a distinctive pattern of thought or logic. Our preliterate precursors were thinking thoughts that we cannot recapture not so much because they would be expressed in an untranslatable language, in a system of conventional symbols the meanings of which have perished with the society that sanctioned and maintained the conventions. They are unthinkable rather because they conformed to a totally alien logic. (23)

Similarly in Piecing Together The Past, his most detailed analysis of archaeological methodology, published in 1956,

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(22) Ibid., 17.

(23) Ibid., 17, 18.

Childe again stressed this point, this time even more forcibly. Indeed he gives the example of the manufacture of a Mousterian scraper to illustrate that our lack of knowledge of the total manufacturing process is in fact advantageous in that it highlights and separates the real knowledge of the manufacturer from the illusionary aspects. Here he imagined the total process to be something as follows,

To make a D-scraper, collect a flint nodule  
(1) at full moon, (2) after fasting all day,  
(3) address him politely with "words of power"  
(4) . . . strike him thus with a hammerstone,  
(5) smeared with the blood of a sacrificed mouse. (24)

And in this context he emphasised that,

Technical and scientific progress has of course just been discovering that (1), (2), (3) and (5) are quite irrelevant to the success of the operation prescribed in (4). These acts were, we now know, futile accessories, expressive of ideological delusions. It is just these that have been erased from the archaeological record. Errors expunged, knowledge stands out all the clearer to be re-known. (25)

Thus it would seem that for Childe the fact that the archaeological record was limited to the material remains of past societies was in some ways a blessing in disguise, allowing for a clear interpretation of a past society's "true" as opposed to "false" knowledge. Here it should be noted that this lack of interest in the subjective world

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(24) Childe (1956a) 171.

(25) Ibid., 171, 172.

viewpoint of past societies can be traced back to a classic Marxist source. Indeed it was Marx himself who emphasised that just as one does not evaluate an individual in terms of what he thinks of himself, so one does not judge a period in history in terms of its own consciousness. (26)

The strength of Childe's commitment to this viewpoint, however, was not typical of his Marxist contemporaries. As Gathercole has pointed out, at that time notable Marxists were explicitly expressing the hope of reconstructing the past thoughts and beliefs of former societies. (27)

In "The Sociology of Knowledge" published in 1949, Childe begins with a discussion of the relationship between mind and matter, subject and object. Here he pointed out that this was a distinction learnt only in a relatively recent part of man's evolution. In the Oriental Bronze Age for example, the subject/object dichotomy was not clearly differentiated. Childe termed this type of world outlook mythological. It was not until the separation between subject and object was made explicit that knowledge became a problem. How could the subject know the object?

In this context Childe discussed very briefly the epistemological basis to empiricism, idealism and dialectical materialism. As in "Social Worlds of Knowledge" he rejected a passive role to the mind as only reflecting

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(26) Marx in the Preface to the Critique of Political Economy in Bottomore and Rubel 1956, 52. That Childe had read the Preface can be assumed from his quotations therefrom in History (1947) 71.

(27) P. Gathercole (1971) 230.

external reality. While he emphasised the active role of mind in patterning external reality he differentiated himself from an idealist in that he did not believe that (1) man's fundamental intellectual constructs, i.e. the categories of knowledge were innate, and (2) the mind created the categories and their contents.<sup>(28)</sup>

Childe attributed to Marx the discovery that the categories are neither absolute nor eternal but are conditioned by the productive forces used by society and must change with the appropriate relations of production.<sup>(29)</sup> He warned, however, that philosophers and natural scientists had been disregarding this finding.

Academic philosophers naturally ignored a discovery that would disturb the tranquility of their ivory towers. Natural scientists in the meantime were content to go on transcending the subject-object opposition in practice, unworried by epistemological or metaphysical puzzles, till they realised quite recently that their empirical data just will not fit into the categories of Aristotlian logic and that observation alters the object observed. (30)

Anthropologists, on the other hand, in particular Emile Durkheim, had already become aware of the relativity of knowledge.

Logic presents different characters at different periods of history; it develops like societies themselves . . . Its laws, far from being graven from all eternity on the mental constitutions of men, depend upon factors that are historical and consequently social. (31)

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(28) Childe (1949c) 303.

(29) Idem.

(30) Idem.

(31) Durkheim in Childe, *ibid.*, 305.

Childe's primary aim in this paper was to show that Durkheim's epistemology had several important points of agreement with Marxist philosophy; firstly as concerns the practical function of knowledge, secondly as regards the social structure of knowledge and thirdly with respect to the social content of knowledge.<sup>(32)</sup> While Childe upheld all of these three points, it is significant that he disagreed with Durkheim's thesis concerning the origin of the categories of knowledge. Very briefly, he considered these to be ultimately based on the technological component of society rather than, as Durkheim had suggested, in society itself.

What Durkheim overlooked was that no people can survive at all without some rudiments of practical techniques - for securing food, producing fire, fashioning tools and so on. And after all even an infant can begin to change its environment directly, by appropriate actions of its own. At first, no doubt these actions would be accompanied by irrelevant symbolic gestures or noises. In primitive societies the effective manipulations of hunting, fire-kindling and tool-making are certainly mixed up with symbolic actions and magical practices. But with the gradual growth of technical skills, successful craft practices began to infect society's view of nature. The decisive contributions of the "natural philosophers" of ancient Iona, as Farrington's recent book so brilliantly explains, was that they tried, for the first time as far as we know, to construct a model of nature based on the successful operations of the crafts. They at least started the search for a method of explanation, a model of reality based on the analogy of processes completely under social control and therefore intelligible. While the muscular energy of men, cattle and donkeys were the only motive-power regularly controlled by society, the search could not reach a satisfactory model. It

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(32) Ibid., 305-309.



is water-power, steam and electricity that have made a completely depersonalized model of nature conceivable. (33)

In specifying the technological component as the main determining influence on the ideology, Childe was of course showing a strong Marxist bias. However, leaving no doubt as to his theoretical stance, he reserved the concluding paragraphs in the paper for a staunch defence of Marxist philosophy.

Firstly Childe emphasised that it was Marx who had initially discovered the distorting effect of ideology (used in the negative sense as false dogma) on a society's world outlook. And here he suggested that Marxism had banished both classical economics and Hegelian metaphysics to the domain of ideology. He was aware, however, that Marxist critics had taken this as a refutation of Marxism itself, seeing the latter also as an ideology which distorts reality. Childe strongly disagreed with this viewpoint arguing that Marxism was a scientific system which was conscious of this danger and expressly guarding against it. Unfortunately however, Childe did not specify in what way Marxism overcomes this problem and thus does not adequately answer this very important criticism. Nevertheless he had to admit that Marxism like other world outlooks was relative and socially determined. Here he argued that the sociological limits of knowledge can be transcended only in so far as to

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(33) Ibid., 307, 308.

guide the next step in practice and in this context he finished on a fitting revolutionary note, "We need not predict what will happen thereafter when ideological distortions have been eliminated by the abolition of classes with class interests".<sup>(34)</sup>

In Society and Knowledge (1956) Childe presented his final and most comprehensive analysis of his theory of knowledge. Here his entire approach is founded upon two basic premises, which even he himself seems to have considered as controversial at least in some circles.

To deserve the name, I contend, knowledge must be communicable and in that sense public and also useful, I mean capable of being translated into successful action. The first qualification may come as a shock to mystics, whether religious or not. The second would certainly scandalise a Greek of the age of Plato and Aristotle and many academic scientists today who follow them in the pursuit of "science for its own sake".<sup>(35)</sup>

Childe differentiated knowledge as "communicable" firstly from stimulus-response which is transmitted biologically and secondly from memory which he argued was similarly instinctual being a strictly private experience analogous to conditioned responses. Childe thus imposed very important limitations on the nature of what he regarded as "communicable" restricting the term to communication on a symbolic level only. Indeed he further limits communication to only certain types of symbolic vehicles, primarily language and mathematics.

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(34) Childe op. cit., 309.

(35) Childe (1956c) 4.

Other kinds of symbols may convey and express ideas but knowledge as here defined does not find expression in the symbols of art or religion any more than in dreams, the private symbols of the Unconscious (a mythical entity imagined but successfully used by psychoanalysts). (36)

Childe deduced the practical utility of knowledge from what he considered to be its historical and biological function as a mechanism to ensure the survival of Homo Sapiens.

Homo sapiens seems to be literally omnivorous. No innate appetite guides a weaned child what to eat as it impels a calf to eat grass. Many poisons look eminently appetizing. If men had to learn their avoidance by trial and error, human mortality would have been so heavy that the species would hardly have multiplied. Just as organisms with several reflex responses have managed better to survive and multiply more economically than those more scantily equipped, just as animals that learn by experience are still better fitted to survive and reproduce their kind, so men, who can learn from one another's experiences have been the most successful species biologically. If then we say that historically the biological function of knowledge has been to ensure the survival and multiplication of Homo sapiens, we are not in fact importing into biology an extraneous teleological idea any more than we say the same of the clam's shadow-closure reflex or the rat's capacity to learn by experience. Biologically all mechanisms for controlling and directing any organism's behaviour in accordance with environmental conditions have proved their utility, and have themselves survived, by enabling their possessors to survive and multiply. Communicable knowledge is just the latest in time and the most successful of such mechanisms. Who can then deny that knowledge is useful at least biologically? (37)

Childe's definition of knowledge as "an ideal reproduction of the world serviceable for co-operative action thereon"<sup>(38)</sup> is essentially a confirmation of his argument

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(36) Ibid., 67.

(37) Ibid., 8, 9.

(38) Ibid., 54.

concerning the practical function of knowledge. The term "co-operative" in this context is interesting for at first sight it would seem to differentiate his view of knowledge from that of both Marx and Durkheim, neither of whom made this qualification. Childe used the term, however, in an extremely loose sense extending its meaning to cover all social activities, even war.<sup>(39)</sup> In fact, he used it as synonymous with social in the sense of pertaining to society. Unless this peculiarly Childean usage is kept in mind it is easy to misinterpret the basic points in his argument.

Childe chose the term "reproduction" as opposed to "reflection" in his definition of knowledge in order to highlight the activity of the observer in the act of observation.

Reproduction is used to emphasise that knowers do not just receive impressions and passively reflect them as mirrors do. They produce a pattern from them. (40)

As in his previous papers, Childe argued that the outlines of this pattern were formed by basic conceptual constructs which Durkheim had termed categories.

A category connotes the outline of a pattern, the kind of relation holding between elements in a pattern that is itself presumed to be a component pattern of the external world. It is not perhaps under this title that categories are familiar to every reader - I mean "space", "time", "causality", "substance", and so on. Each denotes a way in which empirical data are supposed

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(39) Ibid., 55.

(40) Ibid., 54.

to hang together to form a pattern and the kind of pattern thus formed. (41)

Childe's discussion of the categories in Society and Knowledge followed similar lines of thought to that presented in both "Social Worlds of Knowledge" and "The Sociology of Knowledge". As before he emphasised their social nature stressing that they were both derived from society and that they changed with changes in society. (42) Likewise he insisted on the relativity of truth which he defined as the correspondence between the conceptual model of reality and reality itself.

Each society may erect its own proper and distinctive reproduction of the external world, and the several reproductions or worlds of knowledge may differ in structure as well as in content since the categories have been shown to be neither so universal nor so eternal as older philosophies pretended. There thus may be, and indeed are and have been, many divergent and even contrasted conceptual worlds expressed in equally disparate systems of propositions or "truths". That is why there must be degrees of truth. For the several ideal reproductions of reality cannot all correspond equally closely to that reality. (43)

Furthermore he re-emphasised his argument on the practical nature of verification.

There can only be one test of truth as thus defined, only one criterion by which to decide whether a conceptual reproduction does in fact correspond to the external world. That is action. For we have insisted from the beginning that the function of knowledge is practical, it is to furnish a guide to action. From the propositions that express it, can be deduced practically serviceable rules for behaviour. The success of action, guided by the rules thus deduced is the

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(41) Ibid., 73.

(42) As before he especially emphasised the importance of the technological component, *ibid.*, 69-95.

(43) Ibid., 108.

decisive test of the proposition from which they  
are derived. (44)

Here it should be noted that this emphasis on practice as the test of truth is a classic Marxist argument, once more illustrating Childe's debt to this materialist philosophy.

The question whether human thinking can pretend to objective truth is not a theoretical but a practical question. Man must prove the truth i.e. the reality and the power the "this sidedness" of his thinking in practice. The dispute of the reality or the non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question. (45)

In the final chapter of Society and Knowledge, Childe gave an interesting insight into his personal beliefs. In its essence he saw reality as a changeful creative process which is neither teleological nor cyclical.

Reality is an activity, a process that is neither repeating itself over and over again nor yet is approximating to a predetermined goal or the realization of a preconceived plan. It is on the contrary genuinely creative, constantly bringing forth what has never been produced before, genuine novelties.

I could indeed adduce arguments in support of this thesis. Half a million years of human history show not only some repetitions, but much more the repeated emergence of novel inventions, unprecedented patterns of behaviour and of social organization, fresh needs, desires and aspirations, in a word new values. In natural history "natural selection" is "a mechanism for generating an exceedingly high degree of improbability". (46)

At the same time, however, he did not see it as a wholly unpredictable process.

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(44) Ibid., 107.

(45) Marx (1945) in J. Bottomore and M. Rubel (1956) 67.

(46) Childe op. cit., 123.

That is not to deny any pattern, any order to Reality, or to suggest that the pattern that will unfold is arbitrary, capricious and unrelated to the knowable realized pattern expressed in History. On the contrary it must be a continuation and development of the existing pattern, already realized and knowable, and therefore determined by the latter in general but not in detail. Creation is not a making something out of nothing, but re-fashioning what already is. (47)

For Childe, then, the pattern of reality was incomplete and created itself in a developmental process through time.

Furthermore, in his eyes, there was nothing outwith this process, whether this be conceived in terms of God or the Absolute. And in denying transcendence he had thus to deny the cognitive value of transcendental experiences.

I must deny the revelation in religious experience, whatever that may be, of any Reality transcending the process. That is not to deny all value to such experience, but only cognitive value - truth. (48)

At its lowest he viewed religion as an assurance which enabled men to participate in Reality, at its highest as the originator of new ideals of the Good and the Beauty. However, because these ideals were imagined he denied any eternal or absolute value to them.

As stated previously Childe considered knowledge to have an essentially practical function. He did not, however, believe that the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake was futile or meaningless. Indeed he seemed to regard this type of activity as an important source for

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(47) Ibid., 124.

(48) Ibid., 130.

discoveries of great practical utility. As regards his own role in society he wrote the following,

I am an archaeologist and devote my time to trying to gather information about the behaviour of men long since dead. I like doing this and my society pays me quite well for doing it. Yet neither I nor society can see any immediate practical applications for the information I gather; we are indeed quite sure that it will not increase the production of bombs nor butter. Still, we like to think that even archaeological knowledge may someday prove useful to some society. Indeed I might even venture to hope that the archaeological knowledge embodied in the present book may be useful in helping readers to think more clearly and so to act more humanly.(49)

Childe thus saw himself as essentially a producer of knowledge, and although aware of his own mortality, there is a hint that he hoped to attain immortality of a kind through the acceptance and propagation of his knowledge by society.

Society is immortal, but its members are born and die. Hence any idea accepted by Society and objectified is likewise immortal. In creating ideas that are accepted, any mortal member of Society attains immortality - yes, though his name be forgotten as his bodily form dissolve. Personally I desire no more. (50)

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(49) Ibid., 127.

(50) Ibid., 130.



CHAPTER VII    Childe and Marxism

As Daniel has pointed out the most important single problem of Childe's lifework concerns his debt to Marxism.

The great puzzle of Childe at all times was to what extent he was a Marxist (or a Marrist) and to what extent he paid lip-service to an Outsider philosophy? (1)

In this thesis references to Marxism have been numerous and it is clear that it must be considered as a major intellectual force in Childe's thought. The manner and degree to which Marxism influenced his work as a whole, however, cannot be fully appreciated without an outline of the basic issues involved in Marxist theory.

Here the first point to be stressed is that Marxism as such is not a homogenous doctrine but has undergone many interpretations and revisions during the course of its development.<sup>(2)</sup> In its broadest sense it refers to the system of thought founded on the work of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and his collaborator Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) characterised by an economic interpretation of society and a materialist philosophical world outlook. Very briefly, Marx's principle of social analysis comprises a division of society into three major components, economy, sociology and ideology. Of these the economy is regarded as fundamental and as providing an explanation for the form taken by the

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(1) G. Daniel (1958) 66.

(2) See Z. Jordan (1967) for the development of Marxism.

sociology and ideology.<sup>(3)</sup> Here it should be noted that the economy, or in Marxist terminology "the mode of production of material life,"<sup>(4)</sup> is further subdivided into the "productive forces" i.e. the technology together with the skill required to work it, and the "relations of production" i.e. the social relations under which the technology operates. For Marx the major motivating source of historical change was the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production. Here, he argued that while the productive forces are constantly developing owing to new inventions, the relations of production at any given period are comparatively fixed and resist change. It is thus that the relations of production which begin by "expressing" (i.e. serving) the needs of the development of the forces of production, end by becoming the "fetters" upon this development. Marx held that as science and technology progress the relations of production have to change in order to meet the demands of the new technology. Thus commences the "period of social revolution" when "the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed".<sup>(5)</sup>

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(3) The main source for Marx's method of approach to society is the Preface to The Critique of Political Economy first published in 1859. The following account of Marxist strategy is taken from this famous passage which can be read in full in T. Bottomore and M. Rubel (1956) 51-53.

(4) For discussion of the meaning of "the mode of production" see M. Harris (1968) 232.

(5) Marx (1859) in Bottomore and Rubel, op. cit., 52.

In sociological terms this was seen as a struggle between the exploiters and the exploited. The concept of class is central to historical materialism.<sup>(6)</sup> Very briefly Marx held that each major economic structure or system brings into being its own division of society into economic classes with opposing interests.

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an interrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that ended either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes. (7)

In the historical materialism of the Soviet Marxist school this approach has been systematically developed and embedded in a system of universal world processes that is held to constitute the materialist dialectics. The latter, it is claimed, provide a general explanation of the "driving forces" behind movement and development in the world, the source of all change being the contradiction inherent in all things. Dialectics is in essence the Hegelian formula of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis applied to all levels of phenomena. Dialectical materialism or the "modern materialism"<sup>(8)</sup> accepted both the principle of evolution

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(6) T. Bottomore (1973) 19.

(7) Marx 1848 in Bottomore and Rubel, op. cit., 200-1.

(8) The term "dialectical materialism" was coined by Plekhanov and Lenin. Engels called it simply "modern materialism", see Jordan (1967) 3.

and the principle of sudden leaps to which gradual change necessarily leads. In Anti-Duhring (1888) Engels formulated three laws of the dialectic, the law of the impenetration of opposites, the law of transition from quantity into quality and the law of the negation of the negation, the third law being a restatement of the Hegelian triad.<sup>(9)</sup>

It is well known that Marx's major concern was an analysis of contemporary capitalism and his writings on pre-capitalist society play a comparatively minor role in his work as a whole. Until 1941,<sup>(10)</sup> the definitive listing of evolutionary stages was that given in the Preface to The Critique of Political Economy in which he distinguished the Asiatic, Ancient Feudal and Modern Bourgeois epochs in world history, the third being the last antagonistic form of society. Out of capitalism, Marx predicted the rise of a new type of society in which economic classes were destroyed and class conflict finally resolved. Furthermore it was to be a time when man realised his true humanity and lived in harmony with himself and with nature.

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(9) I.e. thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis, in which thesis and anti-thesis are merged, for the first negation stands for the negation of the thesis, i.e. for the anti-thesis; and the negation of the negation for the synthesis, see Jordan, op. cit., 167-182 for a general account of the laws of the dialectic.

(10) In 1939-41 a manuscript written by Marx in preparation for The Critique of Political Economy was published under the title of "Outlines of A Critique of Political Economy". This contained a section entitled "The Formen" in which he dealt with pre-capitalist economies in some detail, see Hobsbawm (1964).

Communism as complete naturalism is humanism and as complete humanism is naturalism. It is the definitive resolution of the antagonism between man and Nature, and between man and man. It is the true solution of the conflict between existence and essence, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species. It is the solution of the riddle of history and knows itself to be this solution. (11)

Marx's belief in the general progressive nature of history links his thought to that of Darwin, Morgan, Spencer and Tylor as well as to a common heritage of eighteenth century doctrine. As Harris had remarked, its only distinction lies in the strength of its apocalyptic emphasis. (12)

From his anthropological notebooks it is now known that Marx had a fairly broad knowledge of ethnology and towards the end of his life was working on a materialist analysis of primitive society based on the work of the American Lewis Morgan. Marx, however, never lived to complete the task which was finished by Engels in The Origin of the Family published in 1884. This text together with Morgan's Ancient Society (1877) was to become the main theoretical source for Soviet archaeology until well into the present century. (13)

It is interesting that at the time of Childe's visit to the U.S.S.R. in 1934, Soviet archaeology was undergoing a major theoretical upheaval in order to align it with

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(11) Marx 1844 in Bottomore and Rubel, op. cit., 244.

(12) M. Harris (1968) 222.

(13) P. Tolstoy (1952) 8-17.

official Marxist theory.<sup>(14)</sup> Archaeology as it had existed prior to 1930 was replaced by the history of pre-capitalist societies.<sup>(15)</sup> At the basis of the new discipline was the idea that archaeological remains are not to be studied for their own sake but are only sources for understanding and reconstructing the society which produced them. Accordingly, the ultimate aim of archaeology was to reconstruct the forms and stages of society prior to capitalism.<sup>(16)</sup> After extensive study and discussion the orthodox developmental scheme of world stages was given as follows. This, as Childe pointed out was a classification based on the "relations of production".<sup>(17)</sup>

- I Pre-class society: a. the formation of human society; b. pre-clan era; c. clan (rodovoye) matriarchal society; d. clan patriarchal society; e. stage of decomposition of the clan (transition from the clan to the village community).
- II Class society, slave holding formation:
  - a. Oriental, primitive slave-holding society;
  - b. developed, ancient slave-holding society.
- III Feudal system: a. early feudalism; b. later or developed feudalism.
- IV Capitalist society.
- V Classless society: a. socialism; b. communism. Communist society is the final stage of development and is not subject to further changes.<sup>(18)</sup>

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(14) M. Miller (1956) for the development of Russian archaeology.

(15) Ibid., 71 ff.

(16) Ibid., 77, 78.

(17) Childe (1944b) 23.

(18) Miller, op. cit., 78, 79.

At the same time Soviet archaeology took a firmly evolutionist standpoint and the formation of the Russian and European peoples was seen as a spontaneous and autochthonous stage by stage process.<sup>(19)</sup> This it should be noted was principally directed against the Indo-European and racist theories propagated in the West. Diffusion and migration were rejected as bourgeois concepts and the expression "the great migration of peoples" was prohibited and dropped from use.<sup>(20)</sup>

It is interesting to note that 1934 was also important for Soviet archaeology in that it marked the death of N.Y. Marr, one of Russia's most prominent post-revolutionary archaeologists. Like Childe, Marr had strong philological interests, his major concern being the development of the Indo-European language family. Here his most notable contribution was to abandon the western hypothesis of an original Indo-European mother tongue, replacing this by a new linguistic thesis - the now infamous Japhetic theory.<sup>(21)</sup> Basically this asserted that the development of the Indo-European languages was not divergence from a common source but rather convergence from a multifarious linguistic base i.e. the Japhetic languages of the Mediterranean basin. In this context Marr attempted to apply Marxism to linguistic theory by viewing language as part of the superstructure

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(19) Ibid., 80.

(20) Idem.

(21) For discussion of this thesis see J. Ellis and R. Davies (1950) 209 ff.

and relating changes in this sphere to changes in the mode of production. In archaeology the main effect of Marr's theory was to intensify the narrow evolutionist framework adhered to by the orthodox school. Marr's thought was very influential in Soviet archaeology for almost thirty years until 1950 when it was finally denounced by Stalin as a gross vulgarization and perversion of Marxism.<sup>(22)</sup>

Marxism, however, is not solely a set of beliefs but has a strong practical component which takes the form of political activism. It was Marx himself who insisted on the unity of theory and practice. "The philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways, the point, however, is to change it".<sup>(23)</sup>

In effect, then, to be a Marxist usually implies some commitment to left wing or communist politics as well as subscribing a certain type of social and philosophical analysis. Although in this thesis we are primarily concerned with the theoretical aspects of Marxism, it is important to note that Childe himself did not limit his Marxism in this way. As Green has shown, in addition to his direct participation in Australian politics, throughout his thirty five years in Britain, Childe kept in close

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(22) The attack on Marr was undertaken in a series of articles in Pravda all of which were published in English, see Ellis and Davies op. cit., 234 ff.

(23) Marx 1845 in Bottomore and Rubel (1956) 69.



contact with left wing movements and his commitment to the communist cause was never doubted by his friends within the party. (24)

Because of the close relationship between Marxist theory and practice, a discussion of Childe's Marxism which does not examine his politics is no doubt a limited one. Yet it is outwith the framework of the present thesis to analyse either his political activities or beliefs. No doubt this would be an interesting line of research, but it belongs to the domain of the biographer or modern historian, rather than the prehistorian. What will be discussed, however, is Childe's attitude towards Soviet scholarship in particular archaeology for this is, of course, very relevant to his own work as an archaeologist. (25)

The first point to stress in this context is that Childe did not begin his work in European prehistory with a Marxist interpretation of the past. As he himself admitted in "Retrospect", his initial view of European prehistory was essentially "a preliterate substitute for the conventional politico-military history with cultures, instead of statesmen, as actors and migrations in place of battles". (26) What Childe did not admit in "Retrospect", however, was the extent to which his thinking at this time

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(24) S. Green (1976) 30 ff.

(25) See below p. 275 ff.

(26) Childe (1958a) 70.

diverged from Marxism. In fact his initial explanation of progress in Europe with its emphasis on intellectual development as a primary causative factor of culture change could be regarded as the very antithesis of historical materialism. While a Marxist would seek the explanation for man's intellectual development in his technological, economic and social evolution, Childe saw in the former an explanation for the latter. It was, of course, the close correlation which Childe postulated between linguistic and intellectual development which led him to view the Aryan-speaking peoples as an important progressive force in European prehistory and as the founders of modern civilization.

In "Retrospect" Childe traced the beginnings of his economic approach to The Bronze Age published in 1930, where he argued that the use of bronze implied both regular trade and the social division of labour.<sup>(27)</sup> It was not until 1935, however, that he further developed this line of approach and in "Changing Methods and Aims in Prehistory" he extended his economic analysis of the Bronze Age to cover the Stone and Iron Ages. The result was a novel interpretation of the three ages as economic stages initiated by important economic revolutions.

In the previous year Childe had visited the U.S.S.R. for the first time and as well as visiting museums in

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(27) Childe (1958a) 71.

Leningrad and Moscow, (28) he acquired some knowledge of Soviet archaeological theory. As noted above, at that time the Soviet view of the past was dominated by a strong evolutionary thesis based on Engels's interpretation of Morgan, the main prehistoric model being the sociological one outlined on page 264. Childe, however, did not approve of the Russian periodization of world history based on the "relations of production". While he understood the reasoning behind the adoption of this scheme and admitted the importance of social structure in influencing technological development, in his eyes it was not suitable for archaeological classification.

The mere knowledge of bronze, the smith's presence alone, did not of itself produce even new tool types, nor enlarge social productivity by saws, wheeled vehicles or metal sickles. Iron of itself does not draw men on to fresh devices . . . In other words as Stalin puts it "the relations of production constitute just as essential an element in production as the productive forces of society" - its tools and the traditional skill of the operatives. . .

For this reason a classification based on the property relations within which tools were used might be more significant (than a technological model). Soviet archaeologists have in fact tried to build up a system on this basis speaking of a "pre-clan stage" a "stage of the matriarchal clan" and so on. However sound this may be in theory the trouble is that the archaeological record is, to put it mildly, vague as to the social organization of preliterate communities. The scheme would therefore lack one essential qualification for a scientific discipline. (29)

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(28) Childe writes of his visit in an article to the Prehistoric Society. See Childe (1935d) 151-154.

(29) Childe (1944b) 23.

Here Childe suggested that the technological model was in fact more helpful than its sociological counterpart to a Marxist view of the past, arguing that it illuminated the contradictions in the economy central to the Marxist view of change.

Indeed it might be claimed as a justification for the traditional system that it does permit us to detect just those contradictions between the material forces of production and the relations of production on which Marxism lays such stress. (30)

Childe's functional-economic interpretation of the three age model, however, radically altered his view of its role in the discipline. No longer was it seen as a chronological framework but rather as an index of what he termed "human progress". (31) In other words like the Soviet model it demarcated socio-economic stages in world history. Unlike the latter, however, it was not conceived in narrow evolutionist terms. Childe did not follow the Russian example and abandon diffusion as an important mechanism of change.

A pseudo-Marxist materialist might indeed represent the stages of progress, the archaeologist's "ages" as mere adjustment evoked by the environment independently though not simultaneously, in various regions. But no sane prehistorian will contend that the strandloopers who have left the kitchen middens in Denmark began of their own initiative to cultivate emmer or to tame sheep. For no wild emmer grew in Denmark to cultivate and no wild sheep ranged the forests for the strandloopers to tame. The distinctive elements of Danish neolithic cultures - the plants cultivated and the animals bred can only have reached the Baltic by some sort of diffusion. (32)

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(30) Ibid., 23.

(31) Childe's use of the term progress was discussed above<sup>d</sup>.

(32) Childe (1935c) 12. 193 ff.

In the 1939 edition of The Dawn, Childe thus considered that he had been paying lip service to Marxism.<sup>(33)</sup> For while he adopted the Marxist structural analysis in his descriptions of cultures, "first the food quest, then secondary industries and trade, only thereafter social and religious institutions",<sup>(34)</sup> he did not adopt the current orthodox evolutionist view of socio-cultural change.

It should be remembered, however, that in the Orient Childe had not restricted his employment of Marxist theory in this way. Here he explained culture change without reference to external events as an evolutionary process in which society developed through three major socio-economic stages, food-gathering savagery, food-producing barbarism and civilization.<sup>(35)</sup> Furthermore, in the context of Scottish prehistory Childe had explicitly experimented with the Marxist evolutionary model and indeed believed that this gave a more satisfactory picture of the development of Scottish culture than the current diffusionist model.<sup>(36)</sup> Nevertheless he did not fully endorse the Soviet theory but had to admit migrations and the impact of foreign cultures "the internal development of Scottish society in accordance with 'universal laws' simply could not explain the archaeological data from Scotland; reference to Continental data actually documented the solvent effects of external factors."<sup>(37)</sup>

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(33) Childe (1958a) 72.

(34) Idem.

(35) See above pp. 16, 78.

(36) Childe (1958a) 73.

(37) Idem.

Here it is noteworthy that in the previous year he had made it clear that he saw the Soviet approach to be a reaction against the ideology of imperialism rather than an understanding of the work of Marx or Engels.

I cannot altogether avoid the feeling that Soviet prehistorians have gone further than necessary in their revulsion from German theory. Their rejection of prehistoric migration is not inspired by any text of Marx or Engels known to me, but is I suspect an addition to the Materialist Conception of History prompted by the special conditions of international politics, a counter blast to ideological imperialism. (38)

Indeed it is clear that Childe's thinking was never in keeping with the Soviet orthodox view. In the context of his historical and philosophical theory he was seen to deviate from the latter in two important ways. Firstly he did not employ the dialectical laws current in Soviet theory and secondly he gave little emphasis to the role of class in the historical process.

In the U.S.S.R. the laws of the dialectic had been elevated to the status of ultimate laws of nature from which all others are derived. (39) Marx's approach to history and society was thus seen as subordinate to the laws of the dialectic on which it was considered to have been based and from which it gained its meaning. In effect, then, the laws of the dialectic were raised above the historical process representing eternal laws immune from change. Obviously they could find no place in Childe's

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(38) Childe (1945a) 6.

(39) See Jordan (1967) 394 ff. for the minimalistic and maximalistic application of the dialectical laws.

view of reality which denied transcendence of any kind, either religious or non religious.

In his discussion of Marxism in History (1947), Childe omitted to deal with the laws of the dialectic or to acknowledge their increased importance in Soviet theory. Indeed it can be argued that it was only through this omission that he was able to represent "dialectical materialism" as "a view of history freed from transcendentalism and dependence on external laws".<sup>(40)</sup> In History, then Childe chose to represent Marxism as a principle of historical analysis rather than as a vision of the laws of change operative on all levels of phenomena. Nevertheless by refusing to openly criticize the dialectical laws it would seem that he was reluctant to express the very basic differences between his view of Marxism and that propogated in the U.S.S.R. at that time.

What Childe could not avoid, however, was a rather unorthodox attitude towards other crucial aspects of Marxist theory. This is particularly true of his approach to the problem of prediction. Unlike the Soviet Marxists Childe did not consider a stage of world communism to be the necessary outcome of the historical process according to the laws of dialectical materialism.

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(40) Childe (1947b) 68, note "dialectical materialism" usually refers to the philosophy of Marxism rather than to its historical theory. Childe's use of it in this context is thus unusual.

It is doubtless a fitting goal, but not one to which history leads fatally and inevitably. There is no guarantee that our society will not vanish like the Mayan or become fossilized like the Chinese, no guarantee that Homo Sapiens will not become as extinct as Archaeopterix or Hipparion. (41)

Childe's refusal to acknowledge the existence of the dialectical laws can be taken as an implicit rejection of their validity and consequently of their role as predicative tools. Furthermore, there are hints that his faith in the progressive nature of the historical process was beginning to wane towards the end of his career. As noted previously it had been severely shaken by the second world war when he became convinced that European civilization was irrevocably heading for another Dark Age. (42) By the early fifties it seems that this apprehension had grown since now he was no longer thinking in terms of the end of European civilization but rather of impending "cosmic catastrophe". (43) Nevertheless despite this underlying pessimism it is interesting that he still upheld Marxism as a possible means of salvation and the Marxist vision of communist society as a possible alternative to his own catastrophic prophecy.

For thirty years of the prolonged death agony of bourgeois civilization in western Europe, The Labour Monthly has consistently exposed the ideological distortions in which real issues are obscured in social consciousness. Every month its masterly analyses of the internal and foreign economic, industrial and political situation have

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(41) Childe op. cit., 81.

(42) See above p. 20.

(43) See below p. 275.



uncovered the substantial trends and presented its readers with grim realities. But it has just as consistently been able to point out rational routes that from time to time might have avoided disaster. For its analyses have been constantly illumined by the positive vision of a classless and peaceable society as the logical culmination of the historical process. Today as cosmic catastrophe looms daily nearer the stimulus of the Labour Monthly is still more needed. (44)

The second major deviation from the Soviet norm concerned the use of the concept of class. As indicated in Chapter V both Hill and Thomson considered his treatment of this concept to be unsatisfactory. (45) While the former believed that he had underplayed the role of class conflict in the historical process, (46) the latter argued that he had not given sufficient emphasis to the class basis of the various types of historical orders. (47) These criticisms were in keeping with the current Soviet view of the importance of the relations of production vis-a-vis the means of production. While Childe had never denied the significance of the productive relations in the development of society he remained remarkably uninfluenced by his Marxist contemporaries' emphasis on class, but throughout his career remained true to his techno-economic interpretation of Marxism. Presumably it was this apparent disinterest in class which led Thomson to underestimate Childe's

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(44) Childe (1951c) 342.

(45) See above p. 224 f.

(46) C. Hill (1949) 261.

(47) G. Thomson (1949) 267.

understanding class in historical analyses. As noted above one of Childe's first priorities in History was to place the historian in a social class and to emphasise both his allegiance to that class and the influence of his class outlook on his view of the past.<sup>(48)</sup>

However, despite these criticisms History was well received among Childe's fellow Marxists in Britain who considered it "to amount to a demonstration that historical materialism is the only satisfactory interpretation of history."<sup>(49)</sup> With the publication of History, then, Childe not only made his commitment to a Marxist model explicit but allowed the reader to follow the intellectual path leading him to that point. Perhaps above all, however, History illustrated Childe's dispassionate search for a key to understanding the historical process. That this search led him to Marxism was perhaps inevitable in view of his understanding of reality. That it diverged considerably from the orthodox was perhaps also inevitable on account of Childe's intellectual sincerity - clearly it was not his purpose to validate the official Russian viewpoint.

This is not to say, however, that Childe was unsympathetic towards Soviet policy or scholarship. Indeed on the contrary, throughout his career he spoke favourably both of the experiment in socialism in the U.S.S.R. and of

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(48) See above p. 206 ff.

(49) S. Lilley (1949) 263.

Soviet learning. In 1935 for example, in reviewing his visit to the U.S.S.R. in the previous year for the Prehistoric Society, he expressed his approval of the co-ordination of archaeological research under the State Academy of the History of Material Culture (G.A.I.M.K.) in Leningrad openly praising the organization of the new state museums.<sup>(50)</sup> Although he was not unaware of the propagandist nature of Soviet archaeology, his report underplayed the degree of state control over the archaeologist's thinking, making no reference to the disappearance of dissident archaeologists. It was hardly surprising then that his article provoked a reply stressing just these points. In "Russian Archaeology: the other side of the Picture"<sup>(51)</sup> Clark thus attempted to balance Childe's rather rosy description of Russian archaeology. Drawing on Professor Tallgreen's account of Soviet prehistory, he conceded that the museum organization might merit some praise. But he emphasised that this had been totally enforced by the state and that it had coincided with the disappearance of many notable Russian archaeologists.

The fact we wish to underline is that the re-arrangement of museum collections has been carried out in accordance with "new obligatory rules". Archaeology in Russia has, in fact, become a department of Bolshevik propaganda. It is, moreover, clear from Professor Tallgreen's account that savants who have declined to submit

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(50) Childe (1935d) 51-154.

(51) Clark (1936) 248-249.

to the dictation of the propaganda chiefs have been ruthlessly removed. (52)

Childe did not reply directly to Clark's article, but in 1940 in another report on Soviet archaeology he expressed concern "lest dislike of the Soviet's foreign or domestic policy should lead men of science to take an unduly gloomy view of the position of archaeology in Russia".<sup>(53)</sup> Here he attempted to draw attention to improvements in Russian archaeology since his visit in 1934, referring to new publications in particular "Sovietskaya Archaeologiya" which he argued was better than the earlier journals. Nevertheless he had to admit that the sentiments expressed in the editorial were discouraging in particular the two following views of Soviet archaeology.

La Lutte implacable contre les ecrits pseudo-scientifiques fascistes en matiere d'archeologie, le dévoilement incessant des falsifications fascistes des fails archeologiques constituent le devoir direct des archeologues sovietiques qui edifient la veritable science objective; La Lutte sans merci contre les alterations de tout genre du marxisme-leninisme. (54)

Interestingly, however, he did on this occasion attempt to defend the Russian sociological model of prehistory.

"Gentile", "pre-class" . . . may be inconvenient categories. I doubt if they are really more deceptive than the terms "neolithic", "Bronze Age" as used in English as late as ten years ago. Prehistoric archaeology, being based so largely on a study of tools and weapons naturally lends itself to a materialist interpretation. (55)

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(52) Ibid., 248.

(53) Childe (1940b) 110.

(54) Ibid., 110.

(55) Idem.

In 1952 in "Archaeological Organization in the U.S.S.R." Childe wrote another staunch defence of Russian archaeology, comparing it favourably with its British counterpart.<sup>(56)</sup> As early as 1940 he had argued that in Britain not only was the scientific status of the discipline unrecognised but that the government did not give it enough financial aid.<sup>(57)</sup> As a result archaeologists were forced to compete with each other for limited financial resources, this in turn having a detrimental effect on their work, since it led to an emphasis on sites of special interest rather than the less attractive, though no less theoretically important, domestic sites. In the Soviet Union, however, because archaeology was totally integrated within the state system, archaeologists could concentrate on the total excavation of domestic sites in order to obtain knowledge about rural economy, population density, social structure, etc. Furthermore, sites could be selected in order to solve theoretical problems. Unlike the British archaeologists, the Soviets were not distracted by the need to select sites "likely to yield show pieces for display in museum cases nor buildings that can be opened to the public at 6d per head."<sup>(58)</sup>

Similarly, he defended the freedom of thought in the U.S.S.R. arguing that Marxism as a philosophy of history did not restrict the archaeologist's approach.

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(56) Childe (1952d) 23-26.

(57) Childe (1940 ) 22-25.

(58) Childe (1952d) 25.

Let me remind you that Marxism does not mean a set of dogmas as to what happened in the past (such would save you the trouble of excavating to find out!) but a method of interpretation and a system of values. (59)

As regards publication he attempted rather unconvincingly to argue that the British archaeologist was in fact as restricted as his Soviet counterpart, since both were competing with their colleagues for the limited space available in archaeological journals. What he omitted to refer to, however, was the degree of censorship prevalent in the U.S.S.R.

Here it should be noted that Childe's article is of special interest in that it was written shortly after Stalin's denunciation of Marr in Pravda. As indicated above the latter had exerted a profound influence on the course of Soviet archaeology since the revolution, and had been largely responsible for the narrow evolutionist view of socio-cultural change adopted by the party. According to this viewpoint cultural development was seen solely as an aucthononomous and stage by stage process, i.e. as a pattern of parallel evolution. His denunciation by Stalin thus marked a significant turning point in Soviet archaeology opening the way for the acceptance of diffusion and migration as explanations of culture change.

From his article it is clear that Childe positively welcomed the change in direction for he had never approved

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(59) Idem.

of the Soviet rejection of diffusion and migration as explanatory concepts. Indeed as noted previously he saw this primarily as a reaction to western theory - here he terms it "an ideological defence against Hitlerism".<sup>(60)</sup>

Thus, in "Archaeological Organization in the U.S.S.R." Childe again demonstrated his allegiance to the Soviet Union, his sympathy with the ideals of socialism clearly causing him to overlook the less attractive aspects of the system.

It would seem that Childe remained true to the communist cause until the end of his life, even during the crisis period in 1956 when the Soviet Union invaded Hungary. In the West this was seen as conclusive evidence of the oppressive nature of the Soviet regime and the communist party consequently came under fierce criticism. Childe, however, continued to attend meetings of the left and his participation in the 35th anniversary meeting of the communist journal The Labour Monthly has been taken as unequivocal proof of his commitment to socialism.<sup>(61)</sup> Nevertheless, despite Childe's obvious sympathy with the politics of the U.S.S.R. it is interesting that his work was never wholly accepted in Russia.

Among bourgeois scholars, there are not only our ideological enemies, there are also progressive scholars who are friends of our country and who understand very well the universal significance

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(60) Ibid., 26.

(61) S. Green (1976) 58.

of our science. One of these persons among English archaeologists for example, is Gordon Childe. Childe has not yet succeeded in overcoming many of the errors of bourgeois science. But he understands that scientific truth is in the socialist camp and is not ashamed to call himself a pupil of Soviet archaeologists. (62)

As noted above Childe had only once attempted to bring his thinking into line with the orthodox viewpoint and furthermore he had on occasion openly criticized Soviet methodology. In a state where conformity was obligatory it was thus to be expected that his thinking could not earn unqualified praise.

To say that Childe diverged from the Soviet viewpoint, however, is not to say that his approach is unmarxist, for as Saville has noted, Marxism and Soviet scholarship are not necessarily one and the same. Indeed, Saville has argued that it is the mistaken identification between them which has damaged the reputation of Marxist studies.

Since Soviet writings in the fields of history and the social sciences, with few exceptions, has been at best uninteresting and at worst a farrago of quotation-mongering dogmatism and biased selection, the consequences for the reputation of Marxist studies have been depressing. (63)

While Childe's journey into Marxism led him into the realms of Soviet scholarship, his course was relatively unaltered by contact with the latter. Thus the Marxism

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(62) Mongait (1950) in M. Miller (1956) 151.

(63) J. Saville (1975) 5.



of Childe was always an individual interpretation on Childe's part. Childe never adhered to superficial or popular conceptions but took from Marx what would best serve his archaeological purpose. For Childe, Marxism could serve archaeology, he did not try to subserve the discipline to a political, to an "Outsider" philosophy.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

When Childe first entered British archaeology in the twenties it was characterised by a narrow insular approach which was, in Piggott's words, "sadly provincial".<sup>(1)</sup> Childe, however, was never content to work within the confines of this tradition but broke through the barriers of provincialism to establish a truly European perspective. His first achievement, then, was to stir British archaeology from the insular torpor in which it had slumbered since the days of Huxley, Lyall, Geikie and other champions of the Antiquity of Man.<sup>(2)</sup> In an age of specialist and particularistic research Childe's texts such as The Dawn and The Danube provided an overall framework for the prehistory of the British Isles, allowing it to be seen as part of a larger development rather than as a closed and unrelated segment of the past.

Childe's texts, however, were not only important for their overview of European prehistory. Just as significant for the future development of the discipline was the new methodology which they espoused. While Childe was not the first to introduce the concept of culture into British archaeology, it was largely through his work that it became firmly established as part of archaeological procedure.

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(1) S. Piggott (1958) 75.

(2) G. Clark (1941) 147.

Here one must be reminded that at the time of The Dawn British archaeology was dominated by a model of the past which was essentially an outgrowth of the geological approach of De Mortillet and the typological approach of Montelius, Sophus Muller and the Scandinavian school.<sup>(3)</sup> While this model had played a crucial role in the development of the discipline, providing archaeologists with their first systematic approach to the past, at the same time it had serious disadvantages for the study of prehistory. Under the influence of the geological paradigm the essentially social nature of archaeological data had become submerged in the abstract typological methodology of the natural sciences. Consequently archaeologists had tended to concentrate on the artefacts for their own sake and to forget about the people who made them. As Childe himself pointed out, "they presented an evolution of implements and arms but left them dead fossils not the expressions of living human societies."<sup>(4)</sup> With the concept of culture, however, archaeologists were provided with a model which allowed access to the people behind the data. The archaeological record could not be interpreted in human and historical terms, and, as Childe stated, with the new idea the discipline vindicated its character as a human in contrast to a natural science.<sup>(5)</sup>

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(3) G. Daniel (1950) 247.

(4) Childe (1940a) 3.

(5) Childe (1935c) 3.

It would be a mistake, however, to over-emphasise Childe's explicit concern with methodology in the early texts. Indeed it is noteworthy that although he wrote three major works, The Dawn, The Aryans and The Most Ancient East in terms of the new cultural paradigm, he did not draw attention to the novelty of his approach. In fact it was not until 1929 in the now famous passage in The Danube in Prehistory that he first explicitly defined his new usage of the term, and it was not until the mid thirties that he specifically discussed its significance for the development of the discipline.<sup>(6)</sup> This is not to undervalue the fact that at an early stage in the history of archaeology, Childe became directly involved with the theoretical basis of the discipline. Rather, it is to point out that at first, despite his affecting important changes in the theoretical basis of the discipline, his actual discussion of theory was fairly limited.

It is clear that his major objective at this time was to solve the riddle of the origins of European civilization, and here the most important point to emerge is that this was at first closely integrated with his search for the original homelands of the Indo-Europeans or Aryans. While Childe admitted in "Retrospect" that it was the latter quest which had initially inspired him to enter archaeology,<sup>(7)</sup>

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(6) Childe (1935c) 1-15.

(7) Childe (1958a) 69.

he did not acknowledge the important role he had originally assigned to the Aryans in the development of European prehistory as "founders of Western Civilization".<sup>(8)</sup> At the same time he omitted to refer to his text The Aryans, written as a sequel to The Dawn, as part of the same general enquiry into European origins. In fact in "Retrospect" Childe misrepresents his early thesis on the origins of European culture by overemphasising his debt to the Oriental diffusionist school. While the theme in the earliest editions of The Dawn may have been as Childe states, "the irradiation of European barbarism by Oriental civilization",<sup>(9)</sup> this was only because he closed the text at the point when Europe developed a truly distinctive and progressive culture and began to evolve independently of Oriental influence. Also it must be emphasised that it was in Bronze Age Europe, not in the Orient, where Childe detected the "germs" of the new force which was to culminate in modern European civilization.

Childe then did not start off as a confirmed Orientalist but tried to balance the achievements of east and west in the development of European civilization. The pivot of this balance was clearly Bronze Age Europe and it was precisely here that he saw the role of the original Aryans to be of crucial importance. For it was only by reference

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(8) See above p. 64.

(9) Childe (1958a) 70.

to the invasion of Aryan, Battle-axe nomads from south Russia that he could explain the origin of the new progressive elements. While Childe had not seen the importance of Aryans in racial terms, his emphasis on their superior language and intellect was perhaps too close for comfort to the racist thesis. Certainly, during the thirties and forties he ignored this early thesis and indeed very subtly tried to negate it by arguing that Bronze Age European culture was insignificant in terms of world progress in that it did not overcome the limitations of neolithic economy.<sup>(10)</sup> At the same time he attempted to strengthen the Orientalist position by showing how the pattern of European prehistory based on the short chronology coincided with an ideal diffusionist zonal pattern.<sup>(11)</sup> Here it must be pointed out that whereas initially he had envisaged an important causal relationship between Bronze Age culture in Europe and modern civilization, now he excludes the European Bronze Age from the mainstream of culture progress to modern civilization. Childe continued to uphold this Orientalist position until late in his career when he not only re-accepted the progressive nature of the European Bronze Age but attempted to explain this in economic and sociological terms. At the same time by reference to the role of the "lineal descendants" of the Bronze Age metallurgist he was able to re-establish the

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(10) See above p. 88.

(11) See above p. 84 f.

direct link which he had originally postulated between the European Bronze Age and modern civilization. (12)

It is interesting that in "Retrospect" Childe was unable to admit to his earlier thesis, implying as he does that he first appreciated the unique quality of the European Bronze Age after reading Hawkes's The Prehistoric Foundations of Europe (1940). One is thus forced to conclude that he was unable to accept the similarities between his early work and the Nazi theories so repugnant to him as an avowed socialist and humanitarian.

Here it is important to note that as well as causing him to discard his initial view of the origins of European civilization, the rise of racialism in western Europe had another significant effect on Childe's thought. Because of the serious political consequences of the misapplication of biological and cultural theory in contemporary Germany, Childe became aware of the practical necessity for a clear definition of the terms employed in archaeology - in particular the concepts of race and culture. Thus, not only did he warn his colleagues of the dangers in the use of partially comprehended biological concepts in the discipline, but he himself attempted to clarify the relationship between biological and cultural evolution and at the same time to explicate the meaning of the associated terminology.

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(12) See above p. 100.

The thirties were in fact a period of considerable theoretical reorientation for Childe. As well as exploring the potential of Marxist economic theory in prehistory Childe also began to investigate contemporary anthropological theory and here he attempted to combine a Marxist economic approach with a functionalist view of culture. From Marx Childe claimed that he had obtained the idea of the economy as the integrating force in society and from Malinowski the concept of culture as a functioning organic whole.<sup>(13)</sup> However, while in "Retrospect" he suggested that the influence of Malinowski was equal to that of Marx,<sup>(14)</sup> his approach is in fact considerably closer to Marxism than to functionalism. In the first place his emphasis on the economy as the integrating force in society is in direct contrast to the strategy of Malinowski where the economic system is deliberately submerged and priority given to subjective bio-psychological actions.<sup>(15)</sup> Secondly, like that of Marx, Childe's approach was essentially diachronic while Malinowski's was primarily synchronic - i.e. limited to an analysis of contemporary cultures.<sup>(16)</sup>

Childe's "functional" interpretation of culture was functionalist in that it stressed the adaptive value of the

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(13) Childe (1958a) 72.

(14) Idem.

(15) M. Harris (1968) 562-564.

(16) Ibid., 546.



cultural system in relation to the environment. However, unlike Malinowski it was only the material culture which he considered to have any adaptive potential. The spiritual element could and did, in Childe's eyes, hinder progress.<sup>(17)</sup> Furthermore, while Malinowski emphasised the harmony existing between the different aspects of the socio-cultural system, Childe was aware of contradictions and conflict. However, since he did not give as much emphasis to conflict, especially to class conflict as his Marxist contemporaries would have wished, it is perhaps here that we can detect the moderating influence of Malinowski's functionalism.

Similarly, when we come to examine Childe's "functional economic" interpretation of the three ages the primary emphasis is on the economic not the functionalist aspects. In fact it is only by reference to the concept of revolution, which one should be reminded was originally an integral part of his scheme, that any debt to functionalism can be discerned. Basically it was the functionalist conception of culture which suggested to Childe both an "objective" way of pin-pointing revolutions and of confirming their importance in the historical process. Since culture was an adaptation to the environment replacing biological adaptation, its success could theoretically be measured numerically. Points of critical importance, then, could be

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(17) See above p. 80.

determined by significant expansions in the population.

During the forties and fifties Childe continued to maintain a strong interest in theory, in particular that of history and philosophy and it was at this time that he came to adopt a sociological approach to knowledge based on the work of Durkheim and of Marx. Childe had very strong beliefs in the nature of reality which he characterised as a creative and self sufficient process with its own inherent pattern, and it was those beliefs which were ultimately decisive in his choice of a historical model. In fact for Childe Marxism was the only approach to the past founded on a philosophical world outlook akin to his own. It is important to note, however, that his basic philosophical viewpoint did not wholly coincide with a Marxist one for while he stressed reality's changefulness and its self sufficiency he did not account for this changefulness in terms of the dialectical laws. In fact Childe did not seem to approve of the Hegelian elements in either Marxist philosophical or historical theory. Certainly in his analysis of historical materialism in History he focuses on Marx's basic strategy making no attempt to tie this in with an overall dialectical thesis. In this approach he deviated from the orthodox Marxism of his day, as he did in a number of other respects, for example in his attitude towards class struggle, prediction and culture change.

Childe was never content to remain within the confines of any particular theoretical system be it Marxism,

diffusionism or functionalism. Rather he attempted to synthesise these systems in order to achieve a comprehensive approach to prehistory which would apply to all levels of socio-cultural phenomena, and at the same time would offer him a model of socio-cultural change. For Childe there was a pattern to prehistory beyond the succession of events in time and it was towards discovering and explaining that pattern that he devoted his lifework.

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B.S.A. Annual of the British School of Athens  
J.H.S. Journal of the Hellenic Society  
J.R.A.I. Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute  
P.P.S. Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society  
P.S.A.S. Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland

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