
INTRODUCTION

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This volume of the *European Journal of Archaeology* is dedicated to the memory of Andrew Sherratt (1946–2006) and Bruce G. Trigger (1937–2006)

Vere Gordon Childe (b. 1892), perhaps the best-known archaeologist of all time, died more than 50 years ago, on 19 October 1957. The dedication of a whole volume of the journal of the European Association of Archaeologists to celebrate Childe is well deserved. He epitomized, long before its time, much of what the EAA endorses, including the promotion of ‘the development of archaeological research and the exchange of archaeological information in Europe’ and ‘proper ethical and scientific standards for archaeological work’ (EAA statutes, article II:1–2). He encouraged this with his work, publications and continuous contacts with many scholars all over Europe. He also supported ethical and scientific standards, explicitly fighting against the abuses of Nazism, and through his academic positions and his writings he actively supported the professionalization of archaeology in Europe. His research exemplifies the feasibility of interpreting the whole of European prehistory as one singular, albeit varied, entity, and his vision of Europe’s prehistoric past, more than that of those who had preceded him,¹ became an intrinsic part of the collective memory of Europe. Some of his key proposals, embodied in terms such as ‘Neolithic Revolution’ and ‘Urban Revolution’, transgressed the narrow boundaries of the archaeological profession to become shared by many outside our discipline. This was partly because Childe’s writing style made his books attractive to scholars from a wide range of fields and also to the wider public, contributing in this way to the acceptance of archaeology as a professional discipline not devoid of public appeal.

This special volume aims to remember Childe by putting together a number of articles looking at particular aspects of both his biography and work. As regards his biography, the first four contributions review Childe’s academic career in Europe:² his student years in Oxford (Champion), his period as professor in both Edinburgh (Ralston) and London (Harris), and his role as an active member of international

organizations (Díaz-Andreu). In contrast to other overviews published before, the authors in this section pay major attention not only to what Childe did, but also to the context in which he worked and produced his work. Although the literature about Childe is extensive – he is probably the archaeological scholar about whom the greatest numbers of studies have been written³ – these contributions have succeeded in finding new avenues for discussion of his original contribution to archaeology in a number of ways. The many limitations in our knowledge about the background in which he developed his scholarly career can be addressed by exploring new sources, including the file on Childe kept by the British Secret Service, some unpublished papers by, or relating to, Childe in the Edinburgh University Library Special Collections and in the London Institute of Archaeology Archive, and his notebooks in the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (Champion, Ralston, Harris). Much of the rich epistolary correspondence maintained by Childe throughout his life is also kept in a wide range of archives, and its study helps to enhance our image of Childe in novel ways, such as his role in internationalism (Díaz-Andreu).

A second group of contributions in this volume delves into an appreciation of Childe's contribution to archaeology, mainly on the basis of his published writings and also with reference to exchanged correspondence. Articles provide a picture of a scholar involved in continuous discussion about new findings with those who were creating the data (László) and focus on the ways in which his work influenced the understanding of the European archaeological sequence not only in prehistory itself (Chapman), but also beyond its geographical limits (Coningham and Manuel) and its chronological span (Jastrzębowska). Childe's Marxist convictions and the increasing effect that they had on his interpretations of European prehistory are also analysed (Gathercole). A more personal note is added by the only contributor, other than Gathercole, who met Childe (Brothwell), who indicates that the challenge of understanding him as a person can benefit from developments in modern medicine and psychology. These may indicate a disability that could explain Childe's awkward behaviour, something agreed on by all those who knew him. Finally, this issue includes, in a newly revised and expanded form, a document that had been circulating in manuscript for many years – a complete and extremely valuable bibliography of Gordon Childe's work elaborated by Peter Gathercole and Terry Irving.

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NOTES

1. Childe had not been the first one to attempt an overview, for others had preceded him (Hoernes 1892; Montelius 1899; Müller 1905; Myres 1911).

2. His years in Australia have been examined elsewhere (Evans 1995; Gathercole et al. 1995; Irving 1995).

3. For some books, edited volumes, and major articles about Childe see: Clop et al. 2007; Gathercole 1994; Green 1981; Harris 1994; Lech and Stepniowski 1999; McNairn 1980; Manzanilla 1987; Patterson and Orser 2004; Sherratt 1989; Trigger 1980; Wailes 1996.

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