

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Digitising and Re-examining Vere Gordon Childe's 'Dawn of European Civilization': a celebration of the UCL Institute of Archaeology's 80th Anniversary.

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This article presents a detailed examination of Gordon Childe's *The Dawn of European Civilization*, one of the best known books in European Archaeology. An overview of the book, its scope and influence is provided, as well as an analysis of its complex theoretical structures and philosophical context. Detailed sequential analysis of all six editions reveals how the original was repeatedly reinvented by Childe over a thirty year period in response to advances in European archaeology, his own theoretical interests and external political factors. The importance of the book for the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century archaeology and its role as an 'ancestral text' are assessed.

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## Introduction

In 2017, to celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UCL (formerly University of London) Institute of Archaeology, UCL Library Services and the Institute have digitized one of the most influential books on European Archaeology: *The Dawn of European Civilization*, written by Vere Gordon Childe (1892–1957), former Director of the Institute (1946–1956) and one of the most celebrated archaeologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The project is intended to open up *The Dawn* (as it is known) to new audiences, create new discussions and facilitate research. Full-text open access is provided through UCL Digital Collections<sup>1</sup> to all six editions published by

Kegan Paul between 1925 and 1957 (Childe 1925a, 1927a, 1939, 1947, 1950, 1957) and Childe's own personal copies of the third, fourth and fifth editions, recently discovered in UCL Library Stores, that he used as 'proofs' to update subsequent editions.

The project also offers opportunity for fresh examination of *The Dawn*, which has received little attention from scholars since the 1980s, when there was considerable disagreement over Childe's legacy (Trigger 1980: 11–14; Sherratt 1989: 153). Previous research will be explored, supplemented by contemporary reviews of the book. Historical and theoretical contexts will be examined. Childe's voice will be heard from letters discussing *The Dawn*, emphasizing that he was a sociable writer, exchanging ideas with academic colleagues. Each edition will be analysed, for *The Dawn* is both one book and many; a reinvention and a palimpsest of the

old and the new. Influences on the book, new archaeological evidence and new theories, as well as external political forces, will be considered.

### Overview

First published in 1925, *The Dawn* was Childe's first archaeological monograph (Gathercole, Irving and Díaz-Andreu 2009: 204). Subsequently revised five times to reflect archaeological discoveries and Childe's changing ideas, it is an individualist reconstruction of European prehistory and a celebration of European progress and cultural hegemony (Childe 1925: xiv):

'My task is to exhibit the creation out of the cultural capital common to many lands of the new force, the new growth which has ultimately transformed the face of the world'.

The innovative concept of 'cultures' was used to order and date material from Minoan Crete, the civilizations of the Mediterranean, peoples of the Steppes and the Danube, Scandinavia, Eastern Europe, the 'Alpine Civilization' and the prehistoric cultures of Atlantic Europe, including Britain. Cultures examined ranged in date from the late Palaeolithic and Mesolithic, which initially received only cursory attention, to the end of the Bronze Age, with the focus shifting in each edition between the Bronze Age and the Neolithic according to Childe's changing ideas.

Theory was important in *The Dawn*. Childe conceived the whole within an overarching philosophical scheme derived from the German philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). Hegelian philosophy, rooted in the European Enlightenment, was rationalist and held that all reality is capable of being expressed in categories within a system of absolute idealism. Childe described the foundation of European civilization as 'a peculiar and individual manifestation of the human spirit' (Childe 1925a: xiii). Use of cultures gave

significance to space and time, historical period and geographical place; it was rigorous, rational and empirical. A range of theories, notably the popular concept of diffusion (the spread of innovations from one individual or group to another), was combined with detailed archaeological evidence to explain social, economic and technological change. Childe has been criticised as a 'dilettante in archaeological politics' (Daniel 1986: 414), but this misrepresents him; he was a social scientist for whom the relationship between archaeological data and theory was crucial. *The Dawn*, from first edition to last, explores and illuminates this relationship.

The book was never a best-seller and never reviewed in the British press. It was translated only into French in 1949 and Russian in 1951 (Gathercole, Irving and Díaz-Andreu 2009: 204). Its technical terminology, complex cultural sequences and Marxist approach limited its popular appeal (Daniel 1962: 102; Gathercole 2000: 7). Its real strength lay in its intellectual innovation and breadth of archaeological detail, which have secured its lasting reputation and its place as an ancestral text for European Prehistory. Daniel (1962: 99) described *The Dawn* as 'not merely a book of incomparable archaeological erudition, but a new starting point for prehistoric archaeology'. By 1931, it was being used as a comparative reference work for newly-discovered artefacts (Bowen 1931); by 1950, it had become 'the long-accepted standard work on European prehistory' (RMP 1950: 45). Students used it to study European Archaeology (Clark 1976: 165; Klejn 2012; Piggott 1958: 77). Although never without its critics (Fewkes 1940: 552; Fraser 1926; Moberg 1959: 110), the book remained influential in European Prehistory for thirty years, encompassing both East and West, even Soviet-dominated Warsaw Pact countries (Thomas 1982: 245). Today, although many of the ideas and chronologies of *The Dawn* have been disproved, it is still referenced widely in current scientific research (e.g. Douglas Price et al. 2004).

**First and Second Editions**

In 1921, Childe returned to Britain from Australia to work in London as a Research Officer for the Australian Labour government of John Storey. But later that year, Storey died unexpectedly and, following an election, the Labour Government was defeated. This change of government in 1922 brought an abrupt termination to Childe's political position in Britain. He decided to remain in Britain and resume the academic career he had abandoned in 1917. (Green 1981: 37–40). He re-established contact with John L. Myres (1869–1954), Wykeham Professor of Ancient History at the University of Oxford, his former teacher (Champion 2009), who provided generous support. Through his influence, Childe joined the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1923 and was appointed its librarian in 1925, making many useful contacts amongst British and European Archaeologists (Green 1981: 48–49).

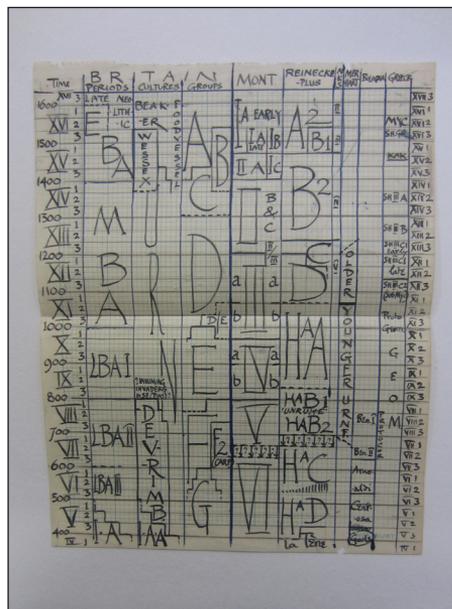
*The Dawn* begins life in a letter written by Childe to Myres on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1923. Their mutual friend, British Museum curator Edgar John Forsdyke (1883–1979) 'says that a book about the European Neolithic and Bronze Ages for Aegean and British students is needed'; hesitantly, Childe proposes writing one, although he is concerned about his lack of reputation (1923b):

'I do not think that the Press would consider favourably a work from an unknown member of the proletariat.'

Myres' reaction was positive and in December, Childe sent him a plan of the book (Childe 1923c). For the next two years the men exchanged a flurry of letters; by March 1924 Childe's chronology had been sufficiently finalised to be shared in a lecture to the Society of Antiquaries, by October the book was in its final stages (Childe 1924; Trigger 1980). The book was not published by Oxford University Press as Myres originally proposed – they had rejected it (Childe 1923c)—but by Kegan Paul, as part of the

*History of Civilization* series, which already contained books by Myres and other members of the Royal Anthropological Society. It was overseen by Charles Kay Ogden (1889–1957), who became a life-long friend of Childe (Green 1981: 51). The title of *The Dawn* pays tribute to Myres, echoing his book, *The Dawn of History* (1911). Further indications of the close links between Childe and the archaeological circles surrounding Myres and celebrated Minoan archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans (1851–1941) can also be found within *The Dawn*. Its chronological tables are similar to those in Wace and Thompson's (1912) *Prehistoric Thessaly* (Champion 2009: 25) and a hand-drawn prototype (Fig. 1) preserved in the UCL Childe Archive (Misc. 6) emulates Evans' fashionable 'Modernist' style.

The first edition of *The Dawn* unfolded an accessible, unifying synthesis of European Archaeology and fulfilled Childe's desire



**Figure 1:** Draft of one of Childe's chronological charts for *The Dawn* done in the Modernist style popularised by Sir Arthur Evans in his work. Undated. (Photo UCL Institute of Archaeology).

to produce 'something different' (Childe 1923c). In spite of editorial problems, poor-quality illustrations and poor spelling—the latter ironed out in the second edition—it galvanized archaeologists; Forsdyke (1927: 159) commented that it was the beginning of prehistoric research and Childe's career. Reviewers praised its impartiality, originality, scope and clarity (Anon 1925: 236; Rostovtzeff 1926: 500; Crawford 1926: 89). But it was also idiosyncratic and marked by Childe's prejudices: his dislike of religion and negative views of its influence on the megalithic cultures of France – 'its votaries, preoccupied with their gloomy ritual and fettered by sacerdotal conservatism, originated nothing' (Childe 1925a: 284, 29) are amongst some of the more unusual ideas advanced.

*The Dawn* did much to facilitate broad-based archaeological research, providing easy access to material for scholars who lacked linguistic skills or the connections to obtain literature from politically-inaccessible countries (Trigger 1968: 533). But the book is also remarkable for its kaleidoscope of ideas. Forsdyke (1927: 159) commented:

'His unique knowledge of the facts is joined to an almost unique tolerance of other people's ideas, a tolerance that is sometimes wearisome to the reader, when theory after theory is laboriously examined in order to be thrown out'.

Although Childe did not fully articulate his definition of archaeological cultures until *The Danube in Prehistory* (Childe 1929: vi–viii), *The Dawn* was his first attempt to use the concept, which had been developed by German archaeologist Gustaf Kossinna (1858–1931). Childe grouped archaeological data from throughout Europe into distinctive cultures represented by assemblages of artefacts bounded in time and space (Childe 1929: vi–viii; Trigger 2006: 242). Each culture constituted an ethnic group or people, which he examined in terms of economy, social and political organization and religious beliefs

(McNairn 1980: 73; Thomas 1982: 245). Relationships between cultures were analysed to build chronologies, explain cultural development and assess relationships, using contemporary theories – predominantly diffusion, but also migration, trade, synchronicity and environmental adaptation (Childe 1925a; McNairn 1980: 73; Trigger 2006: 242). Some of these are now long-discredited: the idea that battle-axes invented by one culture could not be reinvented by another (Childe 1925a: 150; Trigger 2006: 218); Aryan invaders; the 'Prospectors' of British archaeologist Harold Peake (1857–1946), oriental sea voyagers in search of gold and precious stones with magic properties (Childe 1925a: 132). Other ideas were more enduring: the importance of the Danubian Corridor for the spread of farming, and Mediterranean Sea routes for cultural and technological exchange.

Childe's ideas about cultures were not developed alone, as the extensive lists of acknowledgements in all editions make clear. He travelled and researched in Europe when first writing *The Dawn* and was well-acquainted with many European archaeologists. He claimed that he adapted the idea of cultures from Continental literature (Childe 1958a: 70, 1942a):

'I used to use the early writers reluctantly when I had to as quarries from which to extract facts (preferably pictures) from a chaos of silly theories!'

But British colleagues were also already using it (Trigger 2006: 242) and Childe himself named Egyptologist William Matthew Flinders Petrie (1853–1942) as an early influence (Childe 1942a). When Childe wrote *The Dawn* some scholars saw civilization as emerging in the Ancient Near East and others in Europe. He did not subscribe to either of these 'extreme views'; instead, he felt that Europe was indebted to the Orient for ideas, but had 'adapted them into a new and organic whole' (Childe 1925a: xiii). Although this *ex oriente lux* theory had long been used, Childe was the first archaeologist to examine

the relationship using Marx's 'Asiatic mode of production' (Hölleland 2010: 7; Sherratt 1989: 182), creating a prehistoric Europe where secularism, egalitarianism and innovation thrived in contrast to the despotic societies of the Near East (Rowlands 1984: 148).

Although in later editions, Childe altered *The Dawn* to reflect Soviet Marxist ideas, the first version was strongly influenced by German scholarship. Childe's devotion to Hegel was long-standing. In a letter to Myres, he comments (Childe 1923a):

'.... (as a neo[p]latohegelian I am unable to envisage a fact altogether divorced from a theory or vice versa)'.

Liberal Hegelian political views dominated amongst students of Francis Anderson, Childe's tutor at the University of Sydney (Moore 2015) and at Oxford, he regularly discussed Hegel and Marx (Palme Dutt 1965: 539). The Hegelianism of *The Dawn* also points to another left-wing influence current during the 1920s: 'Western Marxism'. Western Marxists, notably Rosa Luxemburg, Antonio Gramsci and György Lukács, focused on the Hegelian and humanist components of Marx's thought. Childe has been criticised by Marxists for failing to employ class conflict in his work, but this was not a pre-occupation for Western Marxists (Jacoby 1981). In Britain, such ideas were publicised by the *Workers Dreadnought* newspaper produced by socialist Sylvia Pankhurst (Jacoby 1981: 77). The proof-reader of the first edition (Childe 1925a: xv) was the suffragette Maud Joachim (1869–1947), an associate of Pankhurst. Child may have met her through their mutual friend, the Labour MP George Lansbury, who was to later visit him at Skara Brae (Crawford 2001: 311; Green 1981: 69).

Trigger (1980: 49) has suggested that the mystic quality of Childe's early writings may have been derived from the German historical concept of the 'Four Empires', which saw civilization shifting from the Near East. Forsdyke was quick to point out *The Dawn's* debt to Hoernes' *Urgeschichte der bildenden*

*Kunst in Europa* (1898), which Childe himself reviewed for *Nature* (Childe 1925b). Childe's relationship with Kossinna was perhaps closer than generally accepted. In 1927 Childe wrote an admiring review, defending Kossinna's latest work (1927b; he also wrote an article for Kossinna's *Festschrift* (Childe 1928). These German influences were not always viewed positively by colleagues. One reviewer wrote: 'perhaps Kossinna is allowed a little too much influence' (Anon 1926: 236) and Childe was told by Forsdyke that he was being rejected for positions at Oxford University because he was viewed by some as 'pro-German' (Childe 1924).

### **Third Edition**

For fourteen years, Childe made no attempt to update *The Dawn*. Abercromby Professor of Archaeology at Edinburgh since 1927, he focused his energies on new books and excavations (Green 1981: 560). The third edition that emerged from this hiatus was enlarged and completely rewritten to make space for new discoveries and 'fresh complications' (Childe 1939: xvii). Childe re-wrote the book in about two years. In August 1937, a letter to American anthropologist Carleton Coon (1904–1981) reveals he was re-drawing his chronological tables and had sorted out most of the chapters (Childe 1937). In October 1938 he wrote to H.L. Beales of Pelican Books, stating that *The Dawn* 'is now being rewritten as it is quite out of date' (Gathercole 2000: 7).

Childe used the new *Dawn* to promote his Marxist ideas and serve his political agenda. He believed that European Archaeology 'has been harnessed to the service of a political dogma' (i.e. Fascism, 'Hitlerism') and Europe was approaching 'the end of an era of free research' (Childe 1939: xvii). Reviews praised Childe as 'a staunch defender of scientific truth' (Fewkes 1940: 550). For much of the 1930s, his political disquiet was shared by few of his European colleagues (Díaz-Andreu 2012: 28). Childe also had concerns that colleagues in Britain might abandon the 'robust idea of

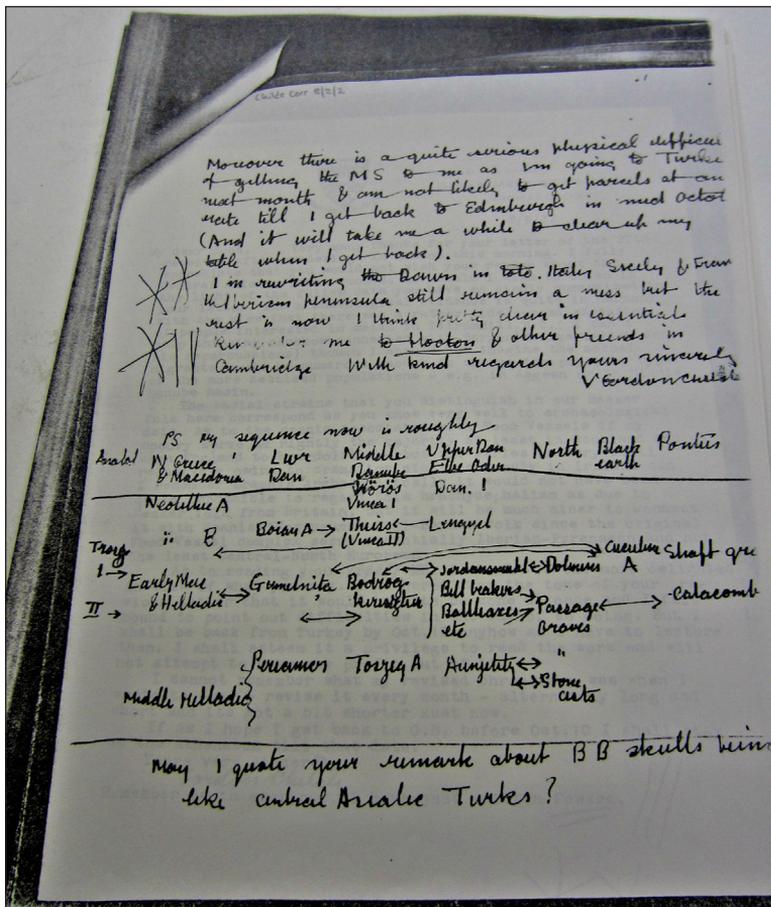
progress' for the 'pessimistic philosophy of fascism' (Childe 1934). Although Fascist organisations were active in Britain, his concerns were unfounded. Other eminent British archaeologists spoke out (Díaz-Andreu 2009) and Childe himself named only Laurence Austine Waddell and George Pitt-Rivers, grandson of General Pitt-Rivers, as Fascist sympathisers amongst archaeologists (Childe 1934; Moshenska 2010; Griffiths 1980: 324).

This *Dawn*, like all Childe's anti-Nazi writings (Gathercole, Irving and Díaz-Andreu 2009), should be placed into the wider context of contemporary European Popular Front against Fascism (1935–1940) writings. The Popular Front was a European organisation formed by a number of left-wing organisations, including European Communist Parties, to organise joint resistance to Fascism (Fyrth 1985; Taylor 2014: 2). This resistance had a strong intellectual and literary component and books were deliberate political interventions (Taylor 2014: 2). Many of Childe's political friends were members, including his former Oxford University political mentor G.D.H. Cole, his Communist friends, Jack Lindsay and Rajani Palme Dutt, and his friends amongst the Cambridge Scientists (Taylor 2014). Childe himself was to come under investigation by M15 (the British Security Service) because of his communist connections and involvement in the National Council for Civil Liberties and The Left Book Club, linked to the Popular Front.<sup>2</sup> The emphasis placed on the Near Eastern origins of European civilization in *The Dawn* is shared with biologist Julian Huxley's *We Europeans – a survey of racial problems* (Huxley 1936), written to support the Popular Front.

Political involvement with the activists of the Popular Front seems to have revitalised Childe's long-term interest in Marxism. He reminisced (1958a: 73) that he paid 'lip-service' to Marxism in the third edition, emphasising the influence of Oriental and Aegean civilization in a series of radiating zones of transition, and downplaying

European creativity (Trigger 1980: 120). He re-organised his cultural groupings according to a functionalist Marxist model, insisting that cultures must be studied as functionally interrelated parts (Trigger 1980: 96), perhaps under the influence of both Soviet archaeologists and his Popular Front colleagues, notably Cole (McNairn 1980: 30, 104; Trigger 1980: 118–119). But Childe struggled to balance Marxist ideas of parallel development and independent invention with his long-term belief in diffusion. He could not, for example, accept the idea that the 'Battle-Axe Cultures' of Central Europe resulted from convergent social evolution in several regions, preferring to see migration at work (Childe 1939: 166–169). He also rejected Marxist ideas of class conflict as a mechanism of change, preferring the concept of 'revolutions', used widely by intellectuals in the 1930s (Trigger 1980: 175–176).

Childe had long been interested in the origins of Indo-Europeans or Aryans, wavering between the views of Kossinna, who favoured North–West Europe, and those of Myres and the Finnish archaeologist Aarne Tallgren (1885–1945), who favoured the south Russian Steppes (Salminen 2017: 10). Even in 1933, he still claimed: 'very few of Kossinna's presumptions are really ridiculous and none demonstrably false' (Childe 1933). In the third edition, he finally rejected Kossinna, condemning the 'Nordic myth' (Childe 1939: 172). He adopted the short chronology of European prehistory over the long chronology because 'it is on the way to becoming a statutorily sanctioned dogma in Germany –and is suspect scientifically' (Childe 1939: 327). But a letter to Coon (**Fig. 2**) reveals that he did not abandon long-held beliefs easily, revising his chronology 'every month -alternatively long and short' (Childe 1937). Reviewers praised the new edition, but found this 'tugging with chronologies' confusing and the complex ideas 'uneven' (Fewkes 1940; Hawkes 1940a).



**Figure 2:** Letter from Childe to American anthropologist Carleton Coon, with a rough draft of his chronological tables for the third edition of *The Dawn*. 1937. (Photo UCL Institute of Archaeology).

**Fourth Edition**

The fourth edition of *The Dawn*, published in 1947, was necessary because stocks of the previous edition had been destroyed by bombing during World War II. Childe took the opportunity to re-write the book incorporating new information, particularly from the USSR, Denmark and Italy (Childe 1947: xix), the product of renewed communication between European archaeologists in the aftermath of World War II. Like the 1944 'Conference on the Problems and Prospects of European Archaeology', the fourth edition of *The Dawn* reflected the international perspective that archaeologists were increasingly

adopting post-war (Evans 2008). Surviving proofs offer fascinating insight into Childe's working methods: new references were added, blocks of text were discarded and carefully-typed pages of new ideas and information, sometimes in confusing multiple versions, were inserted. Chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11 dealing with the archaeology of Central and Northern Europe were most substantially re-written, with entire sections replaced and supplemented. Acknowledgement of his proof-readers, his friends Robert Stevenson (1913–1992), Keeper of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland and Stewart Cruden (1915–2002), Inspector of

Ancient Monuments for Scotland, suggests that the fourth edition had been substantially re-written before 1946, when Childe took up his new position as Director of the Institute of Archaeology in London (Green 1981: 106).

Like the previous edition, the fourth edition of *The Dawn* is a political text: a love-letter to Stalinist Marxism and a rare survivor of Anglo-Soviet cultural co-operation destroyed by the descent of the Iron Curtain in 1946–8. Between 1941 and 1946, there was great enthusiasm in Britain for their stalwart Russian allies. Intellectuals praised the Soviet Union; Soviet visitors toured British mines and factories, celebrations included Anglo-Soviet lectures and concerts; the Poet Laureate wrote an *Ode to the Red Army* (Rose 2002: 49–50). VOKS (the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries) had been active in Britain since the 1930s (Lygo 2013) and Childe was a member (Green 1981: 125). He was able to benefit from the new 'entente', for as he reported to Myres, 'VOKS has at last discovered what archaeology is' (Díaz-Andreu 2009: 102). Writing to Crawford, he enthused about the material he obtained through Milikovskiy, Chief of the International Book Department, VOKS, but he also discovered a faster route, through Zonoff, Second Secretary of the Embassy (Childe n.d.). One of Childe's surviving letters to Zonoff illustrates the cordial nature of relations (Childe 1944) (**Fig. 3**).

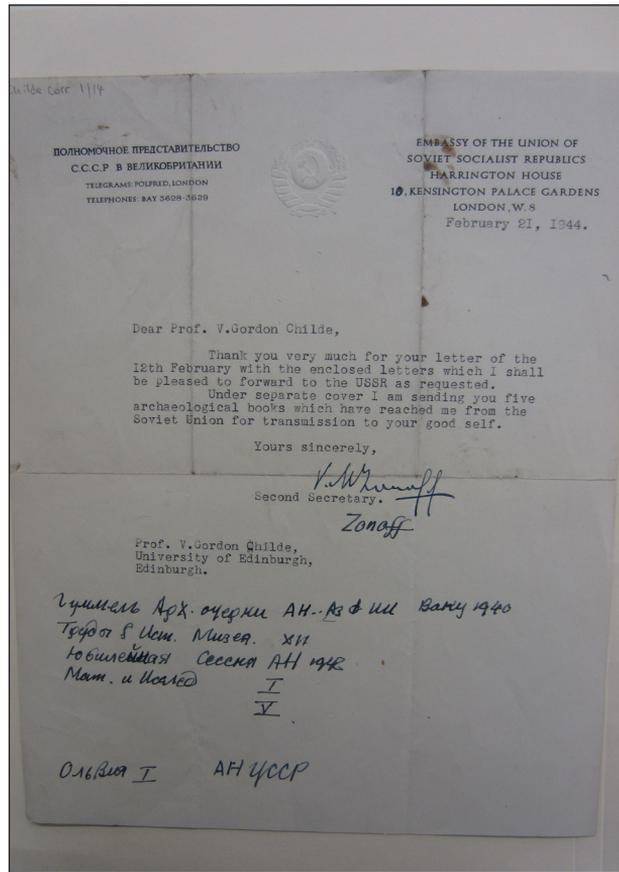
Building on his earlier political interests, Childe placed increasing emphasis on new ideas in Marxist social theory that were emerging in the 1940s, crucially about technology and 'modes of production' (Olsen 2009; Trigger 2006: 354). Childe, following the Communist philosopher Maurice Dobb, was one of the earliest British intellectuals to adopt these concepts, which were influenced by Stalin's Marxist writings (Olsen 2009: 189). Childe's breakthrough came in 1942, when researching for the Munro Lectures on the Prehistory of the USSR. Initially he complained to Crawford that he

'understands little of what I read in Russian' (Childe 1941); but later he states: 'I've come round a long way to orthodox Marxism' (Childe 1942b). These new interests found their way into *The Dawn*: the Danubian I culture is described as 'perhaps even communistic', peaceful and democratic (Childe 1947: 100–101). Childe was more open to Soviet ideas about internal development. Reversing his previous ideas about 'Battle-Axe Cultures' he stated: 'the traits actually common to the several distinct Battle-axe cultures are too few and too abstract to afford sufficient basis for the assumption of a migration in either direction' (Childe 1947: 174; McNairn 1980: 36).

Reviewers praised the new edition and welcomed the new material (RMP 1950: 45). But large parts of the book were left unrevised, causing contradictions. Peake's 'Prospectors', long abandoned by archaeologists, inadvertently survived in Iberia (Childe 1947: 273). Childe continued to make sweeping statements, emphasising long held prejudices. The Armorican Megalithic culture was roundly dismissed: 'the whole society was so obsessed with funerary cult that material advancement was neglected' (Childe 1947: 309).

### **Fifth and Sixth Editions**

The last decade of Childe's life saw him at the pinnacle of his fame and influence (Trigger 2006: 351). Two new editions of *The Dawn* (Childe 1950, 1957) followed in quick succession, as Childe strained to keep up with the post-war explosion of ideas, finds and scientific discoveries in archaeology. Proofs of both editions highlight Childe's difficulties in assembling and interpreting the increasingly unwieldy data. There were so many changes that Childe abandoned his previous method of inserting re-written pages in the proof and simply wrote numbers in the margin, directing the publisher to longer separate documents that are now lost (**Fig. 4**). Correspondence with Crawford (Childe 1955) suggests that the final editions each took about two years to write, using a



**Figure 3:** Letter from Zonoff, Second Secretary of the Soviet Embassy, to Childe with a listing in Russian of the books delivered to him. 1944. (Photo UCL Institute of Archaeology).

body of material Childe had been assembling since the early 1950s: of 66 general notebooks preserved in the UCL Childe Archive, 25 can be dated to later than 1951.

There are indications that Childe had grown bored with his great book; he dismissed it as akin to a 'politico-military history' (1958a: 70) and in a letter to Crawford (Childe 1955), does not want to revise it again, although it is 'hopelessly out of date'. He instead used his last book *The Prehistory of European Society* (1958b) to present his final ideas about European prehistory (Trigger 1968: 534). Childe believed, as did others (Moberg 1959: 111), that only he could write a synthesis of European archaeology: 'I doubt anyone but I could do it' (Childe 1955). This view was justified: the

number of Pan-European specialists had always been small (Milisauskas 2011: 7) and few archaeologists were as committed to internationalism or enjoyed his extensive contacts on both sides of the Iron Curtain (Díaz-Andreu 2009).

The final editions of *The Dawn* remain committed to Marxist ideas, although Childe was growing disillusioned with Soviet archaeology and politics (Klejn 2012: 169). In 1952, the fifth edition of the book was translated into Russian and in its foreword, Soviet archaeologist Aleksandr Lvovich Mongayt (1915–74) criticised its 'dogmatic orientalism' (Klejn 2012: 167). In the preface to the sixth edition Childe addressed these criticisms and devoted more space to Soviet theories of 'in situ' cultural evolution and the

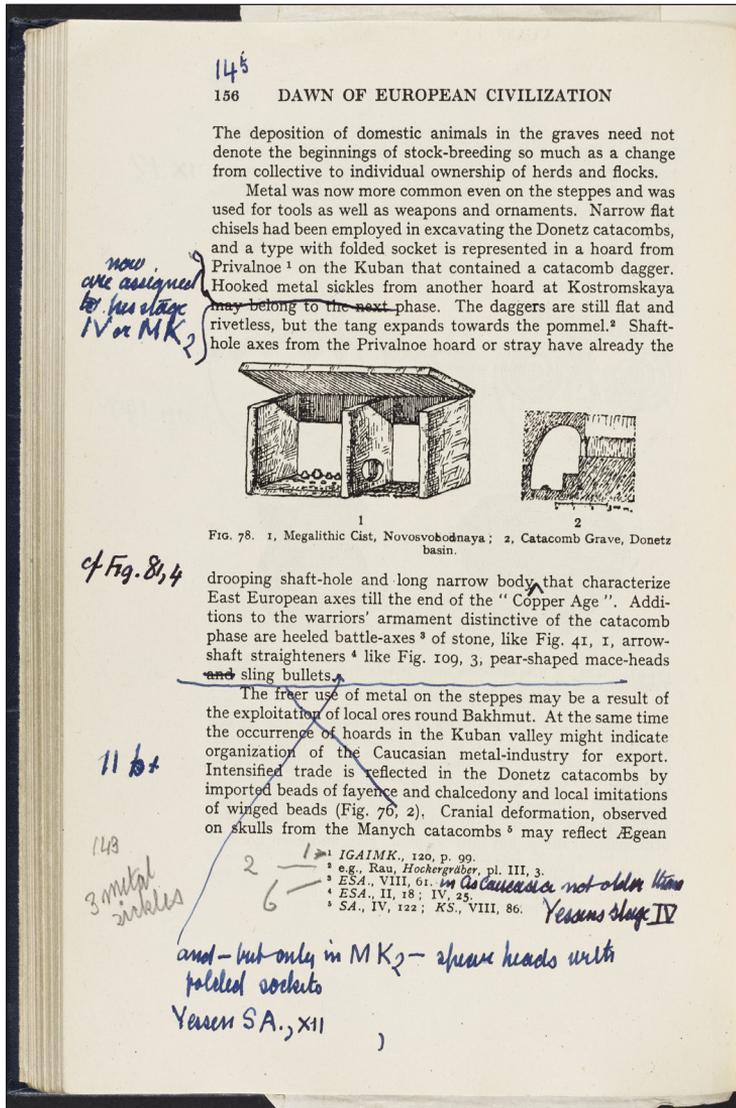


Figure 4: Page of Childe's own copy of the fifth edition of *The Dawn* used as a 'proof' for his revisions for the sixth edition of. 1955–57. (Photo UCL Library Services).

survival of Mesolithic cultures (Childe 1957: iii). Colleagues in the Communist Party of Great Britain Historians Group claimed that 'his sense of reality now led him to oppose the excesses of diffusionism' (Jenkin 1957), but Childe never really gave up the idea (Sherratt 1989: 102).

The sixth edition is a sophisticated, forward-looking book, perhaps in part due to the proof-reader, prehistorian Isobel Smith (1912–2005), then studying with Childe

and working as his assistant (Brothwell 2005). Inspired by Hawkes (1940b), Childe returned to his original idea of the dynamism of prehistoric European cultures and his focus on the Middle Bronze Age (Trigger 1980: 158). There were major changes to the order and content of almost all chapters. Out-dated theories, notably of Kossinna and Montelius, were removed and new developments included, for example the translation of Linear B (Childe 1957: 27). Although the

sixth edition still used the short pre-14C chronology, the importance of new radio-carbon dates for European Prehistory was acknowledged (Childe 1957: iii; Milisauskas 2011: 12). There were flashes of insight that help to explain the book's continuing importance today: for example Childe speculated that early farmers 'might perfectly well have taken to their boats and paddled or sailed on the alluring waters of the Mediterranean to the next landfall – and then the next' (Childe 1957: 16), a theory supported by recent analysis of the genome DNA of populations bordering the Mediterranean coast (Paschou et al. 2014).

There has been considerable debate over Childe's later archaeological thought (Clark 1976: 3; Daniel 1980; Trigger 1980: 13–14) and criticisms had begun during Childe's life-time, perhaps contributing to his final depression and suicide Daniel 1980. As European archaeology expanded post-war, archaeologists became uneasy about the potential inaccuracies and inadequacies of pan-European narratives written by one man and sceptical about the survival of Childe's elaborate chronologies in the face of independent radio-carbon dating (Moberg 1959: 110; Milisauskas 2011: 12). The final review of *The Dawn* criticised Childe's socio-economic interpretations as 'hypothetical' and condemned the final edition as: 'difficult to read, complicated and confusing' (Moberg 1959: 110). Archaeologists wanted a different European prehistory, for now without *The Dawn*.

## Conclusion

Digitization has offered an opportunity for re-examination of *The Dawn of European Civilization*, celebrated during Childe's lifetime and subsequently by historians of archaeology. Childe's wide-ranging contacts and international perspectives ensured that for thirty years, *The Dawn* provided a detailed reconstruction of European archaeology to archaeologists across the Continent, an access of particular significance at the height of the Cold War, when most studies

of European Archaeology stopped at the borders of Soviet territory. Through its innovative use of cultures and wide-ranging explanations for cultural change, *The Dawn* also provided working tools for examination, cross-comparison and dating on a sliding scale, from local societies to transnational transformations.

Like all Childe's work, *The Dawn* demonstrated his love of theoretical experimentation. Theory gave *The Dawn* much of its complex character, but it also compromised it: some areas, particularly where new data became available, were updated, others were neglected, causing awkward discrepancies. Childe's use of Soviet Marxist theory also caused difficulties. Critics disapproved, but more significantly, Childe changed his views between editions and often preferred more traditional theories, particularly diffusion. Childe was no 'lone genius', but a connected thinker amongst his archaeological peers and wider left-wing intellectual circles, and his creativity was stimulated by political theories and events. Today, *The Dawn* in all its editions represents an important record of the changing ideas and knowledge of 20<sup>th</sup> century European archaeology and an ancestral text for both European prehistory and archaeological theory. But it is also still a 'living' text. It has never been out of print and is still widely used for archaeological research. It is to be hoped that digitising *The Dawn* will bring it to new audiences interested in both the history of archaeology and current research alike.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/library/digital-collections/collections/childe>.

<sup>2</sup> See V. Gordon Childe Security Services Files. National Archives TNA: PROKV2/2148.

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### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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