The Orient and Europe*

By Prof. V. Gordon Childe

TEN years of excavation throughout the Old World have yielded results startling enough to affect our concrete picture of human history. From this vast field I want to gather together some new facts that should mould our total synthesis. But my aim in so doing will be not to attempt in an hour an impossible reconstruction of human history. I shall rather focus attention on some new data which will permit a concrete answer to a rather abstract question. Why is a prehistorian asked to preside over a section in this Association from which historians, as such, would be *de facto* excluded? In a word, on what grounds can prehistory in general and British prehistory in particular claim to be a science?

Is prehistory experimental? Yes, but only within very narrow limits and in a restricted sense. Normally only one sort of experiment is open to the archaeologist, an experiment that can never be repeated—I mean excavation. Or does prehistory work? Can it formulate general rules that serve as guides to successful action? Yes, but only as to how to acquire fresh knowledge.

The prehistorian's aim is to reduce to an ordered and intelligible system the scattered and isolated splinters of evidence collected through surveys, excavations, and chance discoveries. But only a few regions and short periods have as yet been so thoroughly explored and investigated that the facts of themselves make an intelligible pattern. We have to fill up the gaps with guesses and assumptions.

The title of my address is intended to recall an assumption which has exercised a profound formative influence on archaeological studies, which is indeed held by many as an axiom above discussion. In 1899 Montelius stated this faith in the book, entitled, like my address, "The Orient and Europe". "At a time when the peoples of Europe were so to speak without any civilization whatsoever, the Orient and particularly the Euphrates region and the Nile valley were already in enjoyment of a flourishing culture. The civilization which gradually dawned on our continent was for long only a pale reflection of Oriental culture."

In 1899 such a statement was very much more an affirmation of faith than a deduction from accumulated data.

Restated in simpler, but still not altogether unambiguous terms, the statement quoted from

Montelius resolves itself into the following propositions, treated as axioms: (1) Civilization in the Orient is extremely ancient; (2) civilization can be diffused; (3) elements of civilization were in fact diffused from the Orient to Europe; (4) the diffusion of historically dated Oriental types provides a basis for bringing prehistoric Europe within the framework of historical chronology; (5) prehistoric European cultures are poorer than contemporary Oriental cultures, that is, civilization is later in Europe than in the East. To-day, none of these propositions except No. 2 need be treated as "postulates rather than as conclusions from the results of investigations"; for the excavations published during the last five years have provided abundant data by which to test the axioms' validity.

Let me first summarize the results of excavations in Hither Asia that tend to establish the first axiom—the antiquity of Oriental culture. The beginning of the historical or Dynastic period in Egypt and Sumer now constitutes a fairly accurately dated horizon. The coincidence of Egyptian and Mesopotamian sources is now close enough to permit of this horizon being dated with general consent about 3100 ± 100 B.C. The latest additions to knowledge resulting from Frankfort's masterly operations at Tel Agrab, Tel Asmer and Khafaje intensify our appreciation of the high level of Oriental civilization and emphasize the long duration of the Early Dynastic Age. The Sin Temple at Khafaje was rebuilt five times. In the same period the Temple of Abu at Tel Asmer underwent four reconstructions.

The Early Dynastic period itself was far from the beginning of urban life. In the Tigris-Euphrates delta it is preceded by two periods, termed respectively the Jemdet Nasr and Uruk phases, during which monumental buildings were already being erected. At Erech below the earliest Dynastic temple ruins, the German excavators uncovered the wall stumps of a gigantic edifice that had been reconstructed once or twice in the Jemdet Nasr period. These walls in turn rested on ruins of a no less imposing building, the Red Temple—a veritable cathedral adorned with a mosaic of clay nails and with friezes of stucco beasts. The Red Temple itself was twice remodelled and was after all only the successor of a still earlier, but no less monumental, cathedral, termed in view of its unusual stone foundations the Limestone Temple. Now you do not build a

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cathedral every fifty years, even if it be built only of mud brick. This series of three prehistoric temples with their several reconstructions must cover a period of several centuries.

But even in the Limestone Temple we are dealing with a highly organized urban civilization presupposing centuries of experimentation and development. Some aspects of that development are explicitly revealed in the archaeological record. From the floor level of the Limestone Temple the Germans sank a shaft 17 m. or just under 60 ft. deep to virgin soil. It was dug entirely through the debris of prehistoric dwellings. As one winds down the ramp into that dizzy abyss one can distinguish in the pit wall eighteen layers marked by hearths, floors, stumps of walls, and heaps of sherds and artefacts. Admitting that I am now guessing perhaps rashly, I cannot believe that the al'Ubaid culture represented in the lower levels at Erech is later than 4500 B.C.

It has never been suggested that the geologically very recent delta of Lower Mesopotamia was the cradle of food-production. It is in fact evident that the al'Ubaid farmers who settled on the freshly emerged land-surface there brought with them from older regions a culture already mature. In the last five years the excavations of Mallowan and Speiser in Assyria and Syria have given us glimpses of what preceded al'Ubaid in the Fertile Crescent. It is true that history does not fully dawn there until relatively late—until the time of the Dynasty of Akkad indeed. But relations with Lower Mesopotamia were so close and so continuous that the archaeological record provided by the prehistoric levels of Gawra, Nineveh, and Chagar Bazar can be proved parallel to that from the protohistoric levels of Sumer. So when we find in Gawra XIII pottery and other relics typical of the earliest or al'Ubaid phase of Sumer's prehistory, we have no reason to doubt that al'Ubaid in Assyria is virtually contemporary with al'Ubaid in Sumer. But Gawra XIII already boasted a cluster of three handsome and monumental temples, decorated with painted buttresses and niches, and grouped round a court 20 m. by 14 m. in area.

The al'Ubaid temples at Gawra are perched upon a tell, formed from the ruins of older settlements, and rising already 25 m. to 30 m. above the plain. Below the al'Ubaid foundations come settlements belonging to the Tel Halaf culture. Mallowan found the same culture beneath, and therefore older than, al'Ubaid remains at Arpachiya, 38 ft. below the historical horizon at Nineveh and in deep layers at Chagar Bazar. The Tel Halaf culture is accordingly older than the al'Ubaid—if you want a guess, I would hazard 5000 B.C. as a moderate date—but it is no less

sophisticated. Monumental circular buildings, cobbled streets, delicate and beautifully painted vases, ingeniously carved stone beads and stamps already used for sealing property attest already a well-organized society, an advanced economy, highly developed craftsmanship.

The Tel Halaf culture must have flourished for several generations. Mallowan uncovered at least five building levels at Arpachiya and seven at Chagar Bazar; and yet at Gawra, Nineveh and Chagar Bazar the oldest Tel Halaf foundations rest upon the ruins of villages characterized by painted pottery of the Samarra style. Guessing frankly once more, these might take us well back into the sixth millennium B.C.

Yet the culture revealed even in these remote depths resembles the European neolithic only in the most formal sense—in the continued use of polished stone adzes and some other tools. The earliest cultures of the Fertile Crescent, like its Early Dynastic cities, are so unlike anything we know in Cis-alpine Europe before Roman times, are economically so far ahead of Köln-Lindethal or Skara Brae or even Tószeg as to seem almost incommensurable. Yet some comparison is inevitable if Montelius's fifth postulate is to be objectively criticized.

The abruptness of the contrast may to-day be softened by reference to a region that is more than spatially intermediate between Mesopotamia and Europe.

The results of the long campaign conducted at Alişar Hüyük by the Oriental Institute of Chicago, which were published this year, have given the first definite clue to the culture-sequence on the plateau. In particular, they provide the skeleton of a chronology.

Below the Hittite foundations on the acropolis at Alişar (but not on the terrace) came a deposit with Cappadocian painted ware now termed Early Bronze Age or Alişar C. Below that, five building layers, accounting for 11 m. of deposit, represent the Copper Age or Alişar B. This must end by 2000 B.C. A beginning towards 3000 B.C. might be inferred from an imported Mesopotamian cylinder of Jemdet Nasr style, stone figurines like those regarded as Anatolian intruders in the Early Dynastic layers of Gawra and Tel Asmer, and animal pendants of stone remarkably like those from the Early Dynastic temple of Sin at Khafaje. To this same Copper Age belong the ruins and burials at Ahlatlibel near Ankara. It was a period when commerce was sufficiently organized for metal to be common and seals to be useful.

But beneath the lowest Copper Age floors, von der Osten's shaft pierced 8.5 m. of debris, divisible into seven building levels, before reaching virgin soil. The earliest Anatolian culture, represented

by Alişar A, is already so advanced that it is accurately termed Chalcolithic. However sparingly used, copper, silver and lead were common enough to indicate well-established commercial channels of distribution and specialized producers. Stamp-seals were already employed. But certain pot-forms and fabrics are already comparable to the Central European; two-handled tankards, like those of the Hungarian Copper Age, occur in the topmost layers only (Alişar A2); for the rest, lugs take the place of handles, but a distinctive shape is a high-pedestalled bowl, at first with a remarkably Danubian profile. The fabric is self-coloured, black to red, but generally muddy and sometimes particularly black inside and round the rim, but brownish below on the exterior. The Anatolian Chalcolithic seems rooted in the fourth millennium B.C., but how far back remains quite uncertain.

Despite conspicuous divergences, the Copper Age and Chalcolithic cultures of Central Anatolia are patently related to, and continuous with, those of north-western Anatolia, long known from Schliemann's excavations at Troy. Re-excavation there under Blegen has substantially enhanced the impression of the antiquity of Anatolian culture. If the Americans have not yet provided unimpeachable data for determining the absolute age of the earlier 'cities', they have at least filled in and expanded the scheme propounded by Schliemann and Dörpfeld. The Troy that the Achaeans might have sacked about 1200 B.C., did Lord Raglan allow us to believe in a Trojan War, was not VI but VIIa. Troy VI goes back on the strength of Helladic imports to 1500 B.C. Cities V, IV and III turn out to be quite important settlements, divisible into several architectural levels, and making up together a formidable accumulation 4 m. deep. Troy II, thus separated from the Mycenaean horizon, can no longer be brought down to the Shaft Grave epoch, however neat Åberg's typological comparisons may look. It is firmly anchored in the third millennium, whatever its precise limits may be. Troy I below it was already a city, girt by an imposing wall. Its citizens were executing monumental sculptures that provide a new limiting date, on Montelius's assumption, for the statue-menhirs of Atlantic Europe. By this time, as Miss Lamb has shown at the contemporary Lesbian township of Thermi, copper and even bronze were already being worked, celts might have hammered flanges, battle-axes were used in war, while trade brought marble vases from the Aegean Islands. Remains of a still earlier phase of culture may be discerned at Kum Tepe. Soundings there produced pedestalled bowls like those from the earliest Chalcolithic of Alişar that seem still missing in Troy I and the contemporary Lesbian site.

The experiments in Anatolia thus go far to re-enforce with objective facts the antiquity and relatively high level of Oriental culture assumed in axiom 1. Moreover, taken in conjunction with Heurtley's excavations in Macedonia, they concretely demonstrate connexions between Asia and Europe that are the precondition for admitting axiom 3, and provide a crucial instance for testing axiom 5, that is, for comparing demonstrably contemporary cultures in Europe and Asia. Heurtley has convincingly demonstrated the Anatolian ancestry of the Early Macedonian Bronze Age culture; it begins with fully developed horned tubular lugs growing from the bowls' rims. The evolution of this odd type that appears fully formed in Europe can be traced stratigraphically on the Asiatic side. It emerges as a finished product first in phase B at Thermi; its earlier stages are illustrated in phase A. For once we have, fully documented, a cultural spread which is irreversible; in this concrete instance axiom 3 becomes a conclusion from ascertained facts.

Implanted in Europe, Anatolian culture appears poorer than its Asiatic parents. Even in phase A, Thermi was quite a township, the contemporary Troy I a fenced city. Their economy was so far advanced that copper and even bronze could be used for tools as well as weapons; metal was so plentiful that quite a lot was left lying about for Miss Lamb to find. The Early Macedonian settlements which are not older than Troy I give the impression of rustic villages. For all the metal collected among their ruins, they might be neolithic. Macedonia was still veiled in mists which the Oriental sun must pierce before an economic system comparable even to the Anatolian could function.

But if the Early Bronze Age culture of Macedonia is unambiguously rooted in Asia, the later neolithic culture which it supersedes is no less securely linked with that of Vinča and Tordos in the Middle Danube basin beyond the Balkan ranges. Comparison of the Macedonian relics with those from the Morava-Middle Danube-Maros sites shows that we are dealing not with two cultures, but with different facies of one and the same culture. We may reasonably speak of a Vardar-Morava culture extending from the coasts to the Maros.

How such a continuum was constituted remains a question for debate elsewhere. Its absolute antiquity cannot be defined with precision. For our purpose the supreme importance of the Vardar-Morava complex is that it establishes at least once a continuity of culture from the Aegean to the Danube basin. Whatever be the chronological horizon of that continuity, its existence provides a justification for admitting axiom 3—diffusion from Asia to Central Europe is likely.

(To be continued.)