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978-0-521-60049-1 - A History of Archaeological Thought: Second Edition

Bruce G. Trigger

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A History  
of  
Archaeological  
Thought

Second Edition

In its original edition, Bruce Trigger's book was the first ever to examine the history of archaeological thought from medieval times to the present in world-wide perspective. Now, in this new edition, he both updates the original work and introduces new archaeological perspectives and concerns. At once stimulating and even-handed, it places the development of archaeological thought and theory within a broad social and intellectual framework. The successive but interacting trends apparent in archaeological thought are defined and the author seeks to determine the extent to which these trends were a reflection of the personal and collective interests of archaeologists as these relate – in the West at least – to the fluctuating fortunes of the middle classes. Although subjective influences have been powerful, Professor Trigger argues that the gradual accumulation of archaeological data has exercised a growing constraint on interpretation. In turn, this use of data has increased the objectivity of archaeological research and enhanced its value for understanding the entire span of human history and the human condition in general.

Bruce G. Trigger is James McGill Professor in the Department of Anthropology at McGill University. He received his PhD from Yale University and has carried out archaeological research in Egypt and the Sudan. His interests include the comparative study of early civilizations, the history of archaeology, and archaeological and anthropological theory. He has received various scholarly awards, including the prestigious Prix Léon-Gérin from the Quebec government, for his sustained contributions to the social sciences. He is an honorary fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and an honorary member of the Prehistoric Society (UK). His numerous books include the first edition of *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge 1989); *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas, Volume I* (Cambridge 1996), coedited with Wilcomb E. Washburn; and *Understanding Early Civilizations* (Cambridge 2003).

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*To* BARBARA

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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Since the first edition of *A History of Archaeological Thought* was published in 1989, there has been a significant upsurge of interest in the history of archaeology and a vast increase in the publication of books and papers relating to this topic. As recently as the 1970s, one or two significant books and a handful of papers dealing with the history of archaeology were published each year. At the height of their influence in the 1970s, processual archaeologists proclaimed that the history of archaeology was irrelevant for understanding the development of the discipline, which they argued was shaped by the deployment of ever more rigorous forms of scientific method. This view reduced the history of archaeology to being little more than a form of entertainment or propaganda. Today, a growing number of archaeologists, who accept that what archaeologists believe influences not only the questions they ask but also the answers they find acceptable, maintain that all archaeological interpretations must be evaluated in relation to their historical context. This growing interest has transformed the history of archaeology into being an established subdiscipline of archaeology with its own international bulletin, symposia, encyclopedias, textbooks, and publication series. An increasing number of studies, often based on painstaking archival research and oral histories, are examining the archaeology practiced at specific times and in specific places from a variety of analytical perspectives. These works have made a new edition of *A History of Archaeological Thought* essential.

Archaeological theory and practice have also changed radically since the 1980s. The last fifteen years have witnessed the growing diversification of postprocessual archaeology and the spread of some of its key ideas throughout archaeology, as archaeologists have striven to understand better how human beliefs and behavior relate to material culture. At the same time, Darwinian and behavioral

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archaeology have been challenging processual archaeology's long-standing monopoly of materialist explanations of archaeological findings and there is growing interest in the possible constraints that psychological and biological factors exert on human behavior and beliefs. The collapse of the communist regimes of Eastern Europe and of the Soviet Union and the growing impact that an increasingly transnational economy has been having on regional, national, and supranational loyalties in various parts of the world have encouraged a renewed interest in culture-historical archaeology and its key concept, ethnicity. Under these conditions, the inadequacies of the processual/postprocessual dichotomy that arose in the 1980s and early 1990s are becoming ever more evident. Theoretical diversity is increasingly being appreciated as a source of enhanced understanding rather than regarded as a threat to archaeology. As a result, efforts are being made to produce broader theoretical frameworks within which diverse approaches can be synthesized and assigned mutually supportive roles.

Archaeologists also are becoming more aware of what is known about the nature of scientific enquiry. In the 1960s, the naive empiricism of many American archaeologists was challenged by a dogmatic positivism that stressed the need to create knowledge by formulating and testing deductive propositions about human behavior. More recently, a growing appreciation of relativism and a reviving interest in the role played by beliefs in influencing human behavior have promoted a growing appreciation of realist and idealist epistemologies. As a result, a growing number of archaeologists have come to view the positivism and ecological determinism of the 1960s as outmoded and erroneous. A second edition of *A History of Archaeological Thought* is needed not only to survey the theoretical developments of the last fifteen years but to take account of the important insights gained as a result of these developments as they relate to viewing the entire history of archaeological thought.

In this second edition, I also seek to rectify the shortcomings of my original work. In addition to correcting factual errors, I have tried to provide a more balanced coverage by paying more attention to classical and other forms of historical archaeology, as well as to prehistoric archaeology in continental Europe and other non-English speaking parts of the world. I also pay more attention to gender issues and discuss in some detail the work of R. G. Collingwood, André



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Leroi-Gourhan, and other archaeological theorists who received little or no attention in the first edition.

To keep this edition about the same length as the first one, I have had to condense or omit sections of the original work that seem less important in the early 2000s than they did in the late 1980s. The material that appeared in the chapter on “Soviet Archaeology” has been broken up and now appears, often in abbreviated form, in the chapters dealing with culture-historical, early functional-processual, and recent archaeology. The amount of coverage devoted to Gordon Childe also has been reduced, and hindsight has permitted the treatment of processual and postprocessual archaeology to be simultaneously condensed and clarified.

The need for concision also has compelled me to recognize more clearly than I did in the first edition that I am writing an intellectual history of archaeology. The primary focus of this edition is on the development of the main ideas that have guided archaeological thought, not on great discoveries, the development of analytical techniques, or the accumulation of factual knowledge about the past, although I acknowledge that these are important and worthwhile topics. This book also does not attempt to provide a balanced coverage of archaeological research done in all countries or regions of the world, or to describe the networks of archaeological researchers that have played a key role in shaping archaeological thought. Likewise, although I recognize that social, political, economic, and institutional factors have played important roles in the development of archaeological thought, tracing these influences is not my primary goal. While these topics are discussed, insofar as they are necessary for understanding the development of archaeological theory, I have taken care that this book does not become primarily a social or institutional history. Finally, because I view archaeology from a world perspective, my primary emphasis is on comparison rather than providing detailed accounts of specific events, which are now being examined in a growing number of books and monographs.

After 1989, I spent twelve years researching and writing *Understanding Early Civilizations* (2003a), the goal of which was to develop a better understanding of archaeological and anthropological theory. My findings have been applied in the present work. As a result, my critiques of various theoretical positions are more specific and detailed than they were in the first edition. I am also prepared to

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project certain trends into the future, subject to the understanding that these are extrapolations, not predictions, which I do not believe are possible in the social sciences.

The original edition of *A History of Archaeological Thought* was based to a considerable extent on my previous writings, as detailed in my Preface to that work. In many respects, that edition betrays its piecemeal origins. Although the second edition is based on the first, it is also grounded on considerable original research and has been rewritten and reshaped from beginning to end. Scarcely a sentence has not been altered and much new material has been substituted for the original text. I hope that careful planning and thorough revision have resulted in a more unified as well as an updated work.

In the first edition, I thanked for their help Rosemarie Bernard, Chen Chun, Margaret Deith, Brian Fagan, Norman Hammond, Fumiko Ikawa-Smith, Jane Kelley, Philip Kohl, Isabel McBryde, Mary Mason, Valerie Pinsky, Neil Silberman, Peter Timmins, Robert Vogel, Alexander von Gernet, Michael Woloch, and Alison Wylie, as well as other colleagues who sent me reprints of their papers. For help with the second edition, I wish to thank especially Wakoh Anazawa for generously sharing with me his perspectives on the history of Japanese archaeology; Mario Bunge and Oscar Moro Abadía for their close reading of the first edition and their numerous helpful comments on it; Stephen Chrisomalis for his research on the concept of ethnicity and his summaries and evaluations of the many papers on the history of archaeology published between 1989 and 2002; Michael O'Brien and his coauthors for providing me in advance of publication with a copy of their trendsetting book *Archaeology as a Process*; and Peter Rowley-Conwy for sharing with me on an ongoing basis the findings of his important research on the development of prehistoric archaeology in Scandinavia from 1835 to 1843. I am most grateful to Randall McGuire for reading and commenting in detail on a preliminary draft of the entire book. I also thank for their help Brian Alters, Linda Beringhaus, André Costopoulos, Nicole Couverture, Marguerita Díaz-Andreu, John Galaty, Heinrich Härke, Alice Kehoe, Kristian Kristiansen, Harry Lerner, Michael Lever, Tim Murray, Nadezhda Platinova, Jonathan Reyman, Ulrike Sommer, George Stocking, Thomas Patterson, and numerous undergraduates who since the 1970s have taken my courses, "The History of Archaeological Theory" and "Current Issues in Archaeology," as well as graduate

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students who have participated in various seminars. A detailed review of the original edition of my book by L. B. Vishnyatsky et al. (1992) was very helpful for revising my treatment of Soviet archaeology. It was translated for me from Russian by Natasha Pakhomova.

I further thank Petra Kalshoven for her skillful editorial work. She provided my manuscript with American spelling and grammar, as well as assiduously challenging how I expressed my ideas and not infrequently the ideas themselves. Her knowledge of both classical archaeology and sociocultural anthropology made her a most helpful and welcome critic and the result is a more accurate and reader-friendly book. I am also most grateful to Diane Mann for expertly turning my numerous index cards into a bibliography and for word-processing the final versions of the manuscript, Rose Marie Stano for keeping my accounts, and Cynthia Romanyk for her help with mailing and communications. Jenna Friedman and Rosalyn Trigger helped to verify the references and Rosalyn Trigger prepared the new illustrative material for submission to the publisher. I also thank Cathy Felgar (Cambridge University Press) and Mary Paden (TechBooks) for overseeing production of this book, Lindsey Smith for securing permission to use illustrations, Susan Stevenson for expert proof-reading, and Catherine Fox for preparing the index. Last, but not least, I thank Frank Smith for his good advice at every stage in the production of this book.

As in the first edition, sources for specific facts and ideas are provided between brackets in the text, whereas the Bibliographical Essay at the end of the book supplies a more general guide to the sources that are relevant for each chapter.

Research for the first edition was greatly assisted by a sabbatical leave from McGill University and a Canada Council Leave Fellowship in 1976–1977 and a second sabbatical leave and a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Leave Fellowship in 1983. The second edition was largely drafted during a sabbatical leave in 2004 and work on it has been supported since 2002 by the stipend attached to my James McGill Professorship.

This book is written from the perspective of ontological materialism and epistemological realism. These are positions that I am convinced any social scientist who believes in the evolutionary origin of the human species must adopt. I also appreciate the value of relativist critiques of knowledge for promoting sound scientific practice.

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I developed my understanding of relativism from traditional (materialist) Marxist philosophy. Although I accept the importance of theories of culture for understanding human behavior, I reject cultural determinism, just as I reject ecological determinism and unilinear evolutionism. Inspired by the work of Gordon Childe, I have long sought to reconcile a materialist approach with efforts to account for the cultural and historical diversity that characterizes both human behavior and the archaeological record.

This book goes to press at a time that should see archaeology consolidate its position as a mature social science devoted to the study of past human behavior, culture, and history by means of material culture. Much of this development will come about as the result of fractious theoretical confrontations being balanced by a growing emphasis on theoretical accommodation and synthesis. Archaeology also will establish its credentials as the only social science with a broad enough temporal perspective that the historical significance of all the other social sciences has to be established in relation to it.

Last but not least, I rededicate this second edition to my wife Barbara, with love and gratitude for all the happiness and purpose she brings to my life. I also thank her for providing Fisherman's Retreat, a haven where over three summers I was able to focus on this book. She also has read the entire manuscript and made valuable contributions to improving its clarity.