ARCHAEOLOGY OF EUROPE

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Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the last 200 years of theory and practice in European archaeology. It also summarizes the pre- and protohistory of Europe from three million years ago until the beginning of the Middle Ages. As a science, European archaeology got its start during the Renaissance, when the classical world was rediscovered. But it was not until the end of the nineteenth century—when typology, classification, systematic excavation, and relative chronology emerged—that archaeology became an academic discipline. By the twentieth century, European archaeology's major tenets had been established as had conflicting schools of archaeological thought, including cultural-historical, processual, and post-processual archaeologies. The pre-and-protohistory section is divided into five chronological parts, each of which outlines the major temporal, cultural, and technological shifts in European history. The text also highlights major finds that significantly altered or enriched the archaeological record. The first section covers Europe's origins in the Palaeolithic period, while the second focuses on the emergence of farming and social complexity in the Neolithic and Copper Age. In the third section, the Bronze Age and the rise of elites is discussed, while the fourth covers the Iron Age and the prominence

of Celtic chieftains and their highly organized societies. The fifth section highlights the interplay and infighting between barbarian Europe and Rome and discusses how these and other tensions contributed to the eventual demise of the Roman Empire. At the end, an annotated list of references including suggestions for further reading is provided.

1. Introduction

When the Iron Curtain fell in 1989, European archaeology was utterly transformed. Europe opened, and so did communication lines among archaeologists from Spain to Russia and from Norway to Italy. Terrain that was once impenetrable and research that for decades was unreachable suddenly became available to archaeologists, as colleagues from East and West began to do the once-unimaginable—to share research. This exchange has incited rich dialogue in the past decade. It has also stirred tremendous controversy, as findings that had long gone unchallenged in the West suddenly met with opposition from the East, and vice versa. Nationality and ethnicity and questions of how different nations interpret their archaeology have also come to the fore in recent years and have caused archaeologists to dissect their own motivations and those of their predecessors. As Europe continues to unite, the role of the 200-year-old science of archaeology is taking on increasing importance. Europe consists of a multitude of nations and ethnic groups and over time, and due to wars borders have shifted tremendously. This has generated much speculation and many conflicting theories about the historic origins of Europe.

The physical boundaries of Europe and European history are defined by the Atlantic in the West, the Urals in the East, the Mediterranean, the Black Sea and the Caucasus in the South, and Scandinavia and the Arctic Sea in the North. Europe has four major river systems that serve as communication and transport routes. The first is the western route, which connects southwest Europe north of the Alps with northwestern Europe by way of the Weser and Rhine rivers. From here, connections either lead to southeast Britain and the Thames or follow the North Sea coast up to Jutland and western Norway. To the south, the Rhone empties into the Mediterranean. The second route, the Elbe/Oder line, connects Denmark and the western Baltic with Bohemia, the Carpathians and beyond, but also plays a part in connections throughout northwestern Europe. Northern Europe is, in turn, connected to eastern Europe as far as the Black Sea and north of the Carpathians by the third route, which comprises the Vistula, Dniepr, and Dniester Rivers and their connecting river systems. The fourth route is the main east-west communication vein in Europe: the Danube. It connects eastern and western Europe from the Black Sea to southwestern Europe north of the Alps. The Danube links with both the Elbe and the Rhine, and also empties into tributaries that lead to the Balkans and the Carpathians.

Other European river systems mainly served regional needs connecting coastal and inland areas. Sea communication also played a major role in shaping cultural connections from the Copper Age onward. The waters of southern Scandinavia and the Baltic helped maintain the region's strong Nordic cultural traditions, just as the Atlantic seaboard during certain periods was unified by common cultural traditions based on

maritime communication from Ireland to Iberia. The same is true for the Black Sea and its circumpontic communication system. Finally, from the Neolithic onward, the Mediterranean served as the major communication zone which culminated in the Bronze Age civilization of the Eastern Mediterranean.

The two main sections of this chapter—the Practice of Archaeology in Europe and the Pre- and Protohistory of Europe—present an overview of the theories and methods that characterize European archaeology and offer a brief summary of historical movements, figures, and significant finds.

2. The Practice of Archaeology in Europe

2.1 History of Archaeological Thought in Europe

2.1.1 The Early Developments

Even during classical antiquity, people speculated about the human past. But it was not until the fifteenth century that the study of the classical world, historical monuments, and human origins became widely accepted. These separate studies eventually merged into an independent discipline known as archaeology. The new discipline got a boost in 1709 and 1748, when *Herculanum* and *Pompeii* were discovered. Suddenly classical antiquity became a popular subject for scholars, collectors, and artists across Europe and collecting curios and rarities rapidly turned into the latest fashion. The book, *The History of the Art of the Ancients*, by Johann Winckelmann (1717–1768) incited great interest in ancient monuments and megaliths. As more and more antiquities were accumulated, scientists began to search for means of sorting and classifying them. Christian Jurgensen Thomsen (1782–1865) offered a solution when he arranged artifacts from the Copenhagen museum's collection according to material. He put all the stone objects in one section, all the bronze in another and all the iron in another. He then assumed that the three materials represented three chronological periods. The "three age" system—still used by archaeologists today—was born.

Additionally, Jens Jacob Asmussen Worsaae (1821–85) introduced new methods of excavation by examining the stratigraphic levels and positions at which artifacts were found. In 1865, John Lubbock (1834–1914) published *Prehistoric Times*, in which he became the first person to try to synthesize prehistory. John Evans (1823–1908) and Oscar Montelius (1843–1921), along with other lesser-known scientists, then began to produce typologies of material objects. Paul Reinecke (1872–1958) used the typology of hoard finds to create a detailed chronology of the Bronze and Iron Ages in Central Europe.

Scholars then began to identify ethnographic communities and to seek ways of classifying them. General Augustus Henry Pitt Rivers (1827–1900) applied the idea of evolutionary development to ancient and archaeological objects and established an archaeological exhibition that can still be seen in Oxford. Influenced by the "three age" system and Charles Darwin's (1809–82) pivotal book *The Origin of the Species*, the British anthropologist Edward Tylor (1832–1917) came up with three stages of human development: savagery, barbarism, and civilization. As part of their research, scholars

also began to run large-scale excavations in hopes of unearthing more objects to study and classify. In 1846, the Iron Age cemetery in *Hallstatt* (Austria) was excavated. Around the same time, Jacques Boucher de Perthes excavated the Paleolithic site at *Abbeville* in the Somme valley and Edouard Lartet (1807–91) excavated Paleolithic sites at *Aurignac*, *La Madeleine* and *La Moustier*. In 1869, Gabriel de Mortillet (1828–98) proposed a classification system that revolutionized studies of the Paleolithic and which is still used today. In his system, he divided artifacts into distinct periods: the *Mousterian, Solutrian, Aurignacian*, and *Magdalenian*. The Alpine glaciers, too, became a topic of intense study as scholars realized they were formed during the early history of Europe. In other parts of Europe, spectacular rock art sites, such as the cave of *Altamira* near Santander (northern Spain), were found. When the skull of a *Neanderthal* was found near Düsseldorf in 1856, the mystery of human origins was pushed into the limelight of Paleolithic research.

2.1.2 Cultural-historical Archaeology

In the twentieth century, cultural-historical archaeology came to the forefront. Data was used to reconstruct major steps in the cultural development of prehistoric people in different regions in Europe. Cultural-historical archaeologists enumerated three major factors responsible for culture change: invention, diffusion, and migration. Invention is defined as a process of transformation of new ideas into innovations that prove successful over the long-term. Diffusion is a process of transmitting these innovations from one group to another. Migration is an actual movement of people from one region to the other and can speed up innovation. Culture changes were believed to be of external character triggered in most cases by people in the eastern and southern part of Eurasia. Another major concern of early cultural-historical archaeologists was the typological development of material culture and the study of interregional similarities and differences within the three distinct categories they set up. As a result, chronology became a prime focal point.

The major figure of early cultural-historical archaeology was Gordon Childe (1892–1957), who proposed highly influential models of the diffusion of agriculture and metallurgy. He studied the history of the invention and diffusion of these major technological achievements of prehistoric people from the Near East to Europe. An important component of the cultural-historical school was the introduction of the concept of archaeological culture, which developed in the early twentieth century and was propagated—and then abused for national ends—by the German archaeologist Gustaf Kossinna (1858–1931). Archaeological culture was defined as an array of material objects of distinctive character in a delimited space and time and as the remains of specific people and/or ethnic groups. Such an understanding of archaeological culture is based on the assumption that artifact production is of normative character and applies to individual groups of people. Consequently, certain categories of material objects are regarded as the fossilized remains of distinct groups of people. Thus a place where objects such as pottery or bronze tools were developed was regarded as proof of the existence of a group of people who produced these objects in this particular place. Further studies revealed that a correlation between people and archaeological culture was not always warranted. The complexity of activities and processes that shaped

material culture came to the fore. It is now assumed that particular archaeological cultures are a direct reflection of social communities.

2.1.3 Processual Archaeology

Processual archaeology, also known as "new archaeology," was developed in the United States in the 1960s, mainly at the universities of Michigan and Chicago. Its major figure in the United States was Lewis R. Binford, while in Europe it came from the combined work of David Clarke and Colin Renfrew. Processual archaeologists proposed a social theory that was embedded in the tradition of cultural evolution and cultural ecology. In it, culture is defined as an extrasomatic means of human adaptation to the environment and is divided into three subsystems: technological, social, and ideological. Technology is regarded as the most important of the three, but each is required for adaptation to the environment. Culture change is viewed as stemming from environmental conditions and population growth. Although each culture system tries to maintain homeostasis, it must adapt to circumstance. Processual archaeology rejects particularism, psychological reductionism, and the belief in free will. Archaeological records are treated as fossils: static objects which are a passive reflection of functional use. They are the result of complex, mechanistic systems of causality.

Processual archaeologists have come up with numerous procedures to analyse the past. Their work is always scientifically-based and focuses on the search for laws and the explicit testing of hypotheses. They argue that archaeological evidence is formed by processes determined by laws of human behavior and laws of nature. Accordingly, patterns in archaeological records reflect patterns in human behavior. Processual archaeologists believe the formal and spatial patterns of material culture must be used to reconstruct social organization. They do this by applying the Middle Range Theory, which comprises the analysis of the material and theoretical correlates of behavior. This concept has been used in modern ethnoarchaeology in order to study relations between domains of human behavior (such as hunter-gatherer mobility) and their material correlates in contemporary tribal communities. Processual archaeologists assume that there is a considerable degree of law-like regularity in human behavior. In order to achieve postulated tasks, processual archaeologists adopted new methods and techniques such as sampling strategies, problem-oriented artifact typologies and sophisticated statistical methods. Processual archaeology was later enriched and expanded by the achievements of behavioral archaeology as advocated by Michael B. Schiffer and his students. They focused their attention on site formation processes that introduced variability into the archaeological record.

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