Special section
Archaeology and Indo-European languages

A century on, we are sufficiently far removed from the Victorian view of the world that to read the literature of later-19th-century ethnology and archaeology is to explore a strange country. Some of its landmarks – rude hatchets from the Drift and *Kjökkenmöddings* – are familiar, though their names have often been changed. Some can surprise: the best of the early textbooks of prehistory begins its second volume with 50 pages on the narcotic arts (Wilson 1862: chapter 16). And the intellectual atmosphere over that landscape is not one which many people today would breathe happily, a comparative ethnology in which the central questions are of race, and the great story of history will trace the superior thread that climbs bravely from some dark bone-cave – by a route that winds across Europe through Thermopylae and Rome, Aachen and Tournai, Florence and Rome (again) – to achieve at last the heights of Birmingham and Pittsburgh.

Different, also, in the ethnological atmosphere was a willingness to address the largest of issues, if only because no agreed frontiers to archaeological inference had been reached. Take, to choose just one essay from hundreds, Andrew Lang, a quintessentially Victorian author, writing in *Fraser's Magazine*, a quintessentially Victorian periodical, on 'Primitive belief and savage metaphysics' (Lang 1882); his subject is a large one, the fundamentals and nature of earliest religious belief, with evidence coming from folklore and the Classical world, from the innate morals of all men, and from the savages and their fetichisms. The particular cause of this essay was Charles F. Keay's *Outlines of human belief among the Indo-European races*. Answering the Indo-European question, as an inquiry in language, race, and culture, would be the particular contribution of archaeology and of linguistic history to that great story of the rise of Europe from darkness. John Baldwin had remarked (1869: 53–4): 'Archaeological investigation has brought to view civilized peoples much further back in the past than history ever supposed possible. Linguistic science enables us to trace others much older.'

So it was that Gordon Childe could in the 1920s address the fundamentals of European later prehistory with equal reason in terms of place, *The Danube in prehistory* (Childe 1929), or of race and language, *The Aryans: a study of Indo-European origins* (Childe 1926).

Indo-European studies remain out of general favour in anglophone archaeology, less for the particular memory of Aryan destiny as it was understood in the 1930s and 40s, than for a lack of confidence in the direct contribution that the pattern of archaeologically recognized culture-groups can make to questions of language and ethnicity in prehistory. There are notable exceptions of course; Christopher Hawkes has been interested for many years; Marija Gimbutas at the University of California leads a school of Indo-European archaeology; the *Journal of Indo-European Studies* thrives; questions of ethnicity, real and perceived, are inescapable in European protohistory. And elsewhere, in the Soviet Union for example, these matters are a larger research concern.

Colin Renfrew's *Archaeology and language*, subtitled *The puzzle of Indo-European origins*, has helped to bring the old issue closer to centre stage again, at least in the English-language literature. This number of ANTIQUITY includes, as well as a book-review by Jim Mallory (page 607), three papers prompted by *Archaeology and language* which make up this special section:

Christopher Ehret writes on the general issues in relating material culture, language and ethnicity, and the means by which speeds of language-change can be estimated. Dr Ehret's own research interests are mostly in African history, and he is co-editor of the major recent study (Ehret & Posnansky 1982) of that other great question of language and material culture,

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the relation of Bantu-speaking peoples to the archaeology of the African Iron Age.

For Europe specifically, there are two papers, by **Marek Zvelebil** & **Kamil V. Zvelebil** and by **Andrew** & **Susan Sherratt**, which look at Renfrew's model and its implications, and develop their own views of the place of an Indo-European phenomenon in the archaeological order of ancient Europe.

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Language change and the material correlates of language and ethnic shift

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Too often our confreres in scholarship attend to safely narrow topics and confront synthesis and scholarly imagination only as its adversaries. Colin Renfrew has never been averse to wide-ranging synthesis, and his new book, *Language and archaeology: the puzzle of Indo-European origins*, continues in that tradition. Unfortunately, amidst well-taken points, he also gives new life to old misconceptions about the nature of language change and, in opposing other correlations of archaeology and the early Indo-Europeans, so artificially limits the possible social and material accompaniments of language shift as to make difficult to explain perhaps a majority of the innumerable language shifts of the past 30,000–40,000 years of human history.

I come to these matters as one whose own research focus has been on African history and prehistory and on furthering the development of linguistic methods and evidence for historical reconstruction, but who has retained an avocational interest in Indo-European studies. Much of my recent effort has been directed toward completing the historical-comparative reconstruction of a language family, Nilo-Saharan, of notably greater internal differentiation and time depth than Indo-European. From an African perspective the problem areas of *Language and archaeology* seem to reflect widely-shared conceptual inclarities among Europeanists about the relation of change in languages to social and cultural change, and their possession of a not always appropriate body of analogues for recognising the range of conditions in which communities shift from the speaking of one language to the speaking of another. The course of my discussion may seem excessively rudimentary at some points, but its intent is to build a logic of interpretation which others may find useful in extending and clarifying their own thinking.

How languages change

Change proceeds in a language through the accumulation of different particular changes in

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