Colin Renfrew

2004 Balzan Prize for Prehistoric Archaeology

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Andrew Colin Renfrew, Lord Renfrew of Kaimsthorn, is among the most eminent personalities in the world of archaeology today. He is among the promoters of outstanding innovations in processual archaeology, author of a series of brilliant works on central themes in European and world prehistory that are marked by great interpretative acumen and have had a revolutionary impact. He has had, through his great intellectual depth and balanced critical vision, an almost unequalled influence in the world of Western archaeology, displaying an extraordinary capacity in organizing studies, promoting theoretical debate and raising awareness of the ethical aspects of the profession of archaeologist.

Andrew Colin Renfrew, Lord Renfrew of Kaimsthorn, is among the most eminent personalities in the world of archaeology, and his research is marked by two exceptional characteristics: on the one hand, a powerful impact and influence on British, European and world archaeology that is unequalled among the scholars of his generation, both in terms of theoretical elaboration and brilliant concrete applications; on the other, critical ability and highly developed sensitivity to the demands of the discipline of archaeology. This is not considered from a point of view limited to one or more geographical areas, or one or more periods, but open to a conception that might be defined as universal. As a leading figure in the so-called “New Archaeology” in Britain, which is now commonly referred to as “processual archaeology”, he has been one of the most penetrating innovators in the field. His excavations have been carried out not only in Great Britain, but more importantly in Greece at Saliagos, Sitagroi, Phylakopi, Markiani and Keros.

Most of his works have become classics because of their extremely clear-sighted, precise contributions on broad themes approached with great perceptiveness and always sustained by a balanced preliminary critique of previous works, an exhaustive presentation of the methodological criteria adopted and a survey of future avenues of research.
His contributions to the revival of European archaeology and Western archaeology in general have been unique and rigorous, but without the excesses of parallel American trends. A personality of great intellectual depth, balanced judgment and great influence in the field, he has, since the 1970s successfully applied the theory of systems in his brilliant analysis of the civilisations of the Cyclades of the third millennium B.C. Moreover, in his numerous writings on cultural change, which have always adopted a social perspective, he has been particularly effective in replacing the traditional classificatory method by an interpretative and explanatory approach. His acute chronological analyses have also had a great impact. Since the 1970s, scientific methods based on carbon-14 dating have made it possible to free important aspects and phases of European prehistory – especially in the Bronze Age – from the traditionally recognized precedence and influence of the great urban civilizations of the ancient Orient. In the 1980s, Colin Renfrew pioneered more innovations in archaeological theory, with special attention to social archaeology and cognitive archaeology. He published a brilliant study on the problem of Indo-European origins, in which he established relationships between phases of economic development, technological innovation, social structure and demographic processes. The book re-opened the debate on an extraordinary, fascinating subject: the localization of the nucleus of the Indo-Europeans in eastern Anatolia, against the weight of traditional opinion, and the achievement of Indo-Europeans in agriculture and Neolithic sedentarization. Propounding a new view of the relationship between linguistics and archaeology, Colin Renfrew has suggested revolutionary solutions for the Indo-European problem. His book on the parallel procedures of artists and archaeologists – an unusual subject for a professional archaeologist – is a study of great finesse, offering new points of view and unexpected reflections.

The essential theme of the relationship between archaeology and the physical sciences, present ever since his initial research on obsidian in Anatolia, was later established on firm institutional grounds as well as on the level of the organization of research through the foundation of a laboratory of genetic research at the McDonald Institute. The Institute has always dealt with themes of great importance for prehistorical and historical research, like the population of the Pacific Ocean and the genetic prehistory of the domestication of the horse. The fundamental integration of archaeology, paleoclimatology and genetics is the foundation upon which he guides research.
As the author, with P. Bahn, of a successful manual of archaeology as a global discipline that reveals the open, universal vision that is inherent in it, Colin Renfrew has dedicated himself, on a political level as well, to the extremely important struggle against the sacking of archaeological sites, founding a centre devoted to this very serious problem for the cultural heritage of mankind. The centre has put a great deal of pressure on the government of the United Kingdom to sign the 1970 UNESCO Convention. Colin Renfrew has been a stimulating and unflagging driving force behind the theoretical debate on the function and methods of archaeology. He has also turned his attention to the study of the distinctive perspectives and traditions which the great extra-European civilisations, such as China and India, employ when reflecting upon their own past.
Mr. President,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

To be the recipient of the 2004 Balzan Prize for Prehistoric Archaeology, here in the Accademia dei Lincei, is a great honour and one for which I am deeply grateful. It is an honour which has meaning for me in several different ways.

In the first place, there is gratitude for the recognition which the Balzan Prize Committee has accorded to the subject of Prehistoric Archaeology by its selection of this as one of the academic fields for the 2004 Balzan Prize. For the techniques of archaeology have been developing in recent years to the extent that it is just beginning to be possible to sketch a broad outline of the origins of humankind, from those remote ancestral apes of several million years ago, through our more proximate hominid ancestors to the emergence of our own species, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, in Africa more than 100,000 years ago and to its subsequent dispersals. The study of prehistory can go on to tell the story of the sedentary revolution and the origins of food production some 10,000 years ago, apparently through processes working independently in different parts of the world, and then to the rich and varying trajectories of development leading in different ways to different kinds of complex society and different civilisations, and to the inception of literacy in several places. If you seek to ask: ‘What is it to be human?’, then prehistoric archaeology can begin to provide you with the outline of an answer, although there is still much that we do not know or do not understand about the origins and nature of the human condition. It is gratifying that, by its choice of subject, the Balzan Prize Committee has recognised this.

My own interest in the subject was greatly kindled when, at the age of 12, I first had the pleasure of visiting Italy with my parents, and we visited Cerveteri and then Tarquinia and discovered (from our point of view) the Etruscans. Some years later, as an undergraduate at Cambridge, reading Natural Sciences, I had the pleasure of following a summer course in Etruscology at the Uni-
versità per Stranieri in Perugia, at which that distinguished archaeologist, and subsequently winner of the 1984 Balzan Prize for Altertumswissenschaften or Sciences of Antiquity, Professor Massimo Pallottino, was one of the teachers. When I changed to Archaeology in Cambridge my own researches took me to Greece to investigate the emergence of civilisation in the Aegean, and so it was a great pleasure to see Professor Pallottino again in these very rooms at the Accademia dei Lincei in January 1993 where I had been invited to deliver a paper on ‘The Roots of Ethnicity’.

Prehistoric archaeology today has an increasing engagement with neighbouring disciplines in the sciences as well as the humanities. It has been my own good fortune to collaborate profitably with some first-class scholars in those disciplines to investigate such topics as the reconstruction of prehistoric trade routes by characterisation analysis, the impact of the radiocarbon revolution on European prehistory, the controversial origins of the Indo-European language family, and the application of molecular genetics to the reconstruction of demographic history. Recently I have been concerned with the development of what has been termed cognitive archaeology, a subject which I believe has an eventful future. But archaeology also has a political dimension, and recently membership of the upper house of the British parliament has allowed me to encourage legislation to protect the cultural heritage and to work against the continuing destruction of that heritage through the looting of ancient sites to provide antiquities for the private collector, the unethical museum director and the unscrupulous dealer. Here it is public opinion and the press which have crucial roles to play.

So it gives me additional pleasure today to receive this prize, named to commemorate a great champion of a free and independent press, Eugenio Balzan; to do so here in the Eternal City, so central to European and world history, and in the rooms of the Lincei, one of the very earliest societies in the world for the promotion of scientific and interdisciplinary research. It is a great encouragement to the study of Prehistoric Archaeology and so, I hope, to furthering our shared understanding of the human condition.

Colin Renfrew
A Panoramic Synthesis

by Colin Renfrew

A panoramic synthesis of his career,
realized on the occasion of the 2004 Awards Ceremony

BEGINNINGS

Prehistoric Archaeology – the study of the vast expanse of human history before the existence of written records, undertaken on the basis of the surviving material remains – seems today, at least to me, a subject of quite remarkable interest and significance. To some it may seem altogether devoid of relevance either to the present time or to their own lives, merely the study of artefacts in dusty museum cases, themselves the product of persons long dead and best forgotten. But if one aspires to understand what it is to be human, then one approach to that issue is to seek to understand how it is that we have come to be what we are, both collectively and individually. That inquiry tallies with much of the fascination of cosmology and the origins of the universe, with DNA and the origins of life, and with evolution and the origin of species. We seek to understand the origins of humankind, and of the diverse cultures and civilisations which humans have created.

But if that fascination is clear to me today, it was not until I had been doing something rather different, after reading Natural Sciences as an undergraduate at Cambridge University for two years, that I felt the need to study prehistoric archaeology systematically, and then to go on to do doctoral research and pursue these matters further. Indeed my own research career has not been one of the sudden early recognition of a well-defined goal and of the subsequent systematic effort to attain it. It has rather been one of using what seemed the available research methods to make some small advance on a particular promising topic and then to pause to re-define the question. For that reason, in trying to give a brief academic autobiography it seems best to proceed chronologically - as perhaps befits an archaeologist.

The evocative power of the material remains of the past have always impressed me: during the war years (well before I was ten) my father used to take me on his
bicycle to visit mediaeval parish churches in southern England, and in these dimly-lit buildings the presence of the past seemed almost tangible. When I was twelve we made our first family visit to the Continent of Europe in a red MG, starting with the Bayeux Tapestry and visiting the vividly impressive sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Through a breakdown with the car we went by chance, to pass the time, to Cerveteri, the great Etruscan cemetery, and so became acquainted with that vast necropolis and indeed, for the first time, with the Etruscans. Later, through the Latin master at my school, I was able to take part in the excavations in Canterbury (a key Roman, Saxon and mediaeval centre) under the direction of the brilliant field archaeologist Sheppard Frere, for several years, Easter and summer. So I can claim to have been a keen amateur archaeologist at an early age.

But at school the teaching in the sciences seemed clearer and more compellingly interesting than that in the humanities, answering real questions about the world. It offered the opportunity of learning how (and in some senses why) things worked. The sciences, especially physics, offered a clear procedural path to the understanding of things. So I opted for the science sixth form and won a place to read Natural Sciences in Cambridge. Archaeology at that time, although a strong interest, did not seem a very viable career option.

Cambridge in 1958 offered a dazzling range of opportunities, in addition to the lectures, laboratory practicals and supervisions in Physics, Chemistry, Biochemistry, Mathematics and the Philosophy of Sciences (which Part I of the degree course entailed) with excellent student theatre, good debates in the Cambridge Union Society and other diversions. But by the time of the Part I (second year) examinations I was more and more uncertain what career path to follow on leaving the University a year later. Although I enjoyed these subjects and did reasonably well, my maths was not good enough for me to be a theoretical physicist and look into the really deep mysteries of nature in cosmology or particle physics. Nor did I find the Biochemistry practical work compelling, despite the presence of Francis Crick and other Nobel prizewinners. Future life as a commercial scientist, like that of my father, did not seem all that attractive. On the other hand, archaeology seemed more and more tempting, and I was fortunate that the Director of Studies in Archaeology in my college was the distinguished and very encouraging Glyn Daniel. In Cambridge it is easy to change subjects, so I took Part II of the course in Archaeology (over two years) and then went on to do doctoral research.
More decisions! What to choose for a research topic? Already in 1961 I had taken part, as an undergraduate, in the excavations at Nea Nikomedeia, an early farming village in north Greece, and had seen the vast wealth of material relating to Greek prehistory in the museums, especially in Crete and in Athens. There were clearly other possibilities – during University vacations I had visited prehistoric Malta with my parents and been impressed by the great prehistoric ‘temples’, and had seen the enigmatic megalithic tombs of Spain. And then the Etruscans were always tempting. But my eye had been caught in the National Museum in Athens by the extensive collections from the Early Bronze Age of the Cyclades, about which surprisingly little was known, despite their central place in much of the literature. And they included the beautifully simple sculptures of the time, which I had already seen in Paris, and which had influenced modern masters such as Brancusi and Giacometti. So I wrote to a number of scholars to see if they thought that would be a fruitful field of research. All took the trouble to reply, and most were very encouraging, agreeing that this was a neglected field. So that was the decision, and in 1962 I began research, based at the British School at Athens as well as in Cambridge.

In the Long Vacation, before beginning research, five friends and I had planned to undertake an archaeological tour of the Soviet Union by car. But travel visas were refused, so instead we undertook an extensive camping tour of Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, ending up bedraggled but triumphant in Vienna. This led us to a range of archaeological sites, where the excavators were extremely cordial – visitors from the West were then unusual. Among others we visited the great Bulgarian tell mound of Karanovo and admired the extensive excavations of the neolithic and copper age villages there. This wealth of material seemed little known, except locally, and little understood, and the experience later proved useful.

EARLY RESEARCH

One of the fascinations of archaeology is the challenge of the procedure of seeking to make some sense of the past through the activity of fieldwork, mainly excavation, and from the study of the artifacts which one finds, and from the context in which they are found. In the philosophy of science one learns: ‘L’homme propose, la nature dispose’. In prehistoric archaeology, similarly, it is up to the researcher to construct a picture, or a hypothesis or a model, and it is
then the data (material culture rather than nature) which indicate whether one is on the right track or must return to the hypothetical drawing board and think again. Perhaps I was lucky in coming rather late to academic archaeology, initially self-taught in some ways, and with some background in scientific thought and in the philosophy of science. This brought the methodology of archaeology into the foreground, and it did not always seem satisfying. For many archaeological interpretations are rather dubious. If one is of a sceptical disposition one tends to ask ‘how do we know that?’, and the answer is rarely clear-cut. These are epistemological issues, and at that time the epistemology of archaeology was not always very clear. During the Long Vacation in 1960 before I started attending archaeology lectures I sat down and read a number of standard archaeology textbooks, of which some of the best were by the leading European prehistorian Gordon Childe. Yet it soon became clear that some of his conclusions were based on rather sweeping assumptions. And as concerned the archaeology of the prehistoric Indo-European-speaking peoples which he had discussed in his early book *The Aryans*, the methodology seemed to me very dubious indeed.

All of this became clearer to me as I began my doctoral research into the prehistory of the Cycladic islands of Greece. The prevailing idea that the way of life (or ‘culture’ in archaeological parlance) of these people was the result of direct influence from the Near East, as some had argued, seemed unrealistic. Moreover, one reason for choosing this topic was that bold claims had been made in the literature for the dynamic role of the Cycladic islanders around 2500 B.C., who had allegedly sailed as far west as Iberia, setting up ‘colonies’ and teaching the locals the skills of metallurgy. A similar influence on their part was sometimes claimed in the prehistoric Balkans. Closer knowledge of the Cycladic material suggested that both these claims were ill founded. So the resulting doctoral dissertation set out first to classify the finds and systematise our knowledge for the archaeology of the Cyclades themselves. There I was lucky in that my surveys had hit upon what seemed to be the first settlement of neolithic date (i.e. pre-bronze-age) known in the area, the small island of Saliagos near Antiparos, and it had proved possible to organise an excavation there (in collaboration with John D. Evans), producing rich new material. This was my first excavation as a field director and it was a productive one. Secondly, for the Aegean as a whole it seemed appropriate to develop models of change that relied less upon outside influences and more upon internal economic and social processes. And thirdly, it was now possible to call into question some of the very long-range arguments
for change in prehistoric Europe, by examining more closely the long distance links with the Cyclades which had earlier been proposed.

Archaeological reasoning has to be based upon concrete evidence. The trouble with some of the supposed long-distance links, however, is that the arguments were often based upon rather vague similarities between finds in one area and those in another. For instance, representations of the human figure (‘figurines’) in the Balkans were often compared with those very striking figurines in the Cyclades, and on the basis of these similarities direct contact between the regions was inferred. Similar arguments were used for prehistoric Spain, not just with the figurines but with architectural features such as the shape of tombs or similarities in defensive walls. One solution, however, was to look at finds which had been claimed as actual imports from one region to another and seek to document by scientific examination whether or not real long-distance trade had taken place. Here I was lucky, for in the Cyclades there is one island, Melos, which is a source of the black volcanic stone, obsidian, which had been prized for the production of chipped stone artefacts in prehistoric times. One approach was to see if a way could be found of distinguishing Melian obsidian reliably from obsidian from other sources. With a friend in Cambridge, Joe Cann (whom I had known since school days), who had become a petrologist, this question was investigated. We obtained obsidian samples from most of the known obsidian sources in the Old World and tried to see if there was a scientific technique which might allow us to distinguish between them. He suggested trace element analysis using optical emission spectroscopy. And we soon found that the method gave good results, allowing us to distinguish between the products of the different known sources. Then using samples from archaeological sites we were able to determine from which source they had come, and so built up a clear picture of prehistoric trade routes. Our initial work was published while I was still a research student, with the encouragement of my Professor, Grahame Clark, and further analyses allowed the reconstruction of very early trade routes in the Near East as well as the Mediterranean. The key point here was that, through the scientific characterisation of obsidian, we were able to use hard evidence to resolve some of these tricky questions about early contact. Other workers have since done more extensive work along these lines. This was a satisfying case where hard data could be used to cast light upon social as well as economic questions of early contact and early exchange. It was also a first lesson in the value of collaborative research: I was no petrologist and would not
have been able to generate the data which Joe Cann was able to do, although I
could define the problem and visualise how those data could resolve it.

In 1965 I was fortunate again in marrying Jane Ewbank, an archaeology
student whom I had met in the archeology library in Cambridge and who had
dug with us at Saliagos. She went on to do research on plant food residues in
archaeological sites, and her book Palaeoethnobotany, based on her doctoral
dissertation, later went on to become a standard work.

THE EXPLANATION OF CULTURE CHANGE

In 1965 we moved to the University of Sheffield in northern England, where
I was lucky enough to be offered a lectureship in the Department of Ancient
History, which was setting up a degree course in Prehistory and Archaeology.
In teaching, of course, one learns. And it was possible now to think more care-
fully about some of the basic problems not only in prehistoric archaeology but
in human life and history more generally, such as the question: what causes
long-term change? A distinguished American archaeologist, Marija Gimbutas,
who had visited our excavations at Saliagos, invited me to teach for a term at
the University of California at Los Angeles, and it was there that I came into
contact with the more theoretically oriented anthropological archaeology which
then prevailed in the United States. I was lucky too that the foremost American
theorist Lewis Binford was then teaching there. We got on well and I became
acquainted with his brand of processual archaeology which chimed very well
with my own sceptical approach. Talk of the ‘New Archaeology’ was topical
in Britain as well as in America, and in 1971 I organised a conference in Shef-
field on ‘The explanation of culture change’, which the leading theoretical
archaeologists in Britain and the United States attended. The format was one
of pre-circulated papers which were not read at the meeting but discussed and
which were subsequently published. The emphasis was indeed upon questions
of theory, until that time insufficiently addressed by archaeologists.

During this time also I was thinking more about culture change in the Ae-
gean and preparing a book, based partly on my doctoral thesis, which would set
out to explain the development of the Aegean bronze age in processual terms,
relying mainly on processes at work within the Aegean rather than on diffusion-
ist ideas of externally-motivated change coming from the Near East. Influenced
by innovative work by Binford and by Kent Flannery I decided to adopt a systems approach, taking in turn each of the ‘subsystems’ of the Aegean culture system (subsistence, craft technology, social organisation, trade, the cognitive system etc.) and examining how the feedbacks between them created a ‘multiplier effect’ leading to long-term growth and change. Trade and exchange was seen as one of the powerful forces working for growth, not because of outside influences but through the growth of local interactions with their significant economic, social and cognitive effects. These ideas came together in my 1972 book *The Emergence of Civilisation: the Cyclades and the Aegean in the Third Millennium B.C.*

**THE RADIOCARBON REVOLUTION**

The 1960s were a time when radiocarbon dating, invented by Willard Libby in 1949, was first being systematically applied to prehistoric Europe. The dates sometimes seemed much earlier than expected and a controversy was building up about the validity of the method, which had been criticised by some scholars who thought that many of the radiocarbon determinations were coming out older than they ought to. It was natural to compile a register of the few dates available for prehistoric Britain and for other areas such as the Aegean, the Balkans and Iberia. It had already dawned on me that there was something rather doubtful about the traditional chronology for the Balkan copper age, which put the development of copper metallurgy there contemporary with the full early bronze age of the Aegean, as seen, for instance, at Troy. And the sequence at the tell mound of Karanovo in Bulgaria seemed to present problems for the traditional view. In 1965, after our wedding, Jane and I had travelled for the summer (as British Council/ Bulgarian Government scholars) to Bulgaria to look at the Bulgarian neolithic and copper ages, and we came to understand the culture sequence rather better. It seemed that the contemporary of early bronze age Troy would not be the copper age of Bulgaria (Karanovo phase V) but the Bulgarian early bronze age (Karanovo VII), much later in the Karanovo sequence. It was already clear that revisions would have to be made to the traditional chronological system.

Glyn Daniel put into my hands an article by the American radiocarbon scientist Hans Suess, a fascinating paper in which he used radiocarbon determinations on samples from the Californian bristlecone pine, dated independently by
tree-ring dating, to suggest that the radiocarbon time scale needed calibration, and that the calibrated (i.e. true) dates would be several centuries earlier than the radiocarbon determinations. There were clear arguments to suggest that this would apply worldwide, not just in California. This was something of a bombshell, since it would put the Balkan chronology still earlier, not later as the critics of the radiocarbon method had been suggesting. I applied this approach to the dates for the early bronze age Wessex culture of south Britain. For some time it had been thought to be strongly influenced by developments from the late bronze age of the Aegean, associated with the great site of Mycenae. In a paper ‘Wessex without Mycenae’ (modelled on the concept of ‘French without tears’) I suggested that the calibrated radiocarbon dates were right, and that the developments in Wessex were several centuries earlier than the Aegean comparisons, and entirely independent. It was clear that the same thinking could be applied to the Balkan copper age question, with the hypothesis that copper metallurgy had originated independently in Europe, and that (as the Karanovo sequence had been suggesting) the Aegean comparisons were in fact much later than the Balkan ones. This was set out in an article entitled: ‘The autonomy of the south-east European copper age’. It was possible also to suggest that the megalithic tombs of Iberia and indeed of north-west Europe as a whole were earlier than, and entirely independent of, their supposed Mediterranean precursors. Radio broadcasts and a television programme followed (entitled ‘The tree that put the clock back’, referring to the bristlecone pine), and then a book: Before Civilisation, the Radiocarbon Revolution and European Prehistory.

When I visited UCLA in 1967, Marija Gimbutas had suggested that we should together organise an excavation in Greece, and I proposed that we should dig a settlement mound in northern Greece, Sitagroi, where Jane and I had discovered pottery on the surface relating to the Balkan copper age as well as material from the Aegean early bronze age. It might therefore be possible here to find stratigraphic confirmation, within the Aegean, of the newly proposed relationships between the Aegean and the Balkans. Sitagroi went on to produce a wonderful stratigraphy, some 11 metres deep, a first class sequence of radiocarbon dates, and evidence of the earliest metallurgy in the Aegean. We were able to claim stratigraphic confirmation of the new chronology based upon calibrated radiocarbon dates from a well-stratified site, with pottery and other finds relating directly both to the Balkans and to Troy and the Aegean world.
In 1972 we moved to the University of Southampton. There was the opportunity to develop further some of these ideas. The question of early monument building and of megaliths could be explored by excavating in the Orkney Islands, off the north coast of Scotland, where there was a remarkable series of stone-built chambered tombs. Quanterness was one of these, and we were able to study its architecture and aspects of the society which had built it, speculating about their social organisation. Once again the radiocarbon chronology served to confirm that monument building there had local, north-west European origins, which owed nothing to alleged Mediterranean precursors. We also went back to the Cycladic islands and excavated the bronze age town of Phylakopi on Melos, one of the first to be investigated a century earlier and in need of re-examination. We were fortunate enough to find an undisturbed late bronze age shrine. This gave rise to thoughts on the problems involved in the archaeological investigation of prehistoric religion, soon reflected in the ensuing publication: The Archeology of Cult. The Southampton years saw the graduation of several first class students who have gone on to develop distinguished careers in archaeology.

ARCHAEOLOGY AND LANGUAGE

In 1981 we moved back to Cambridge, where the Department of Archaeology has a large research school of more than 60 research students. From Cambridge it was possible to organise further excavations at early bronze age sites in the Cyclades (in collaboration with Lila Marangou and Christos Doumas) at Markiani on Amorgos and Dhaskalio-Kavos on Keros. The Department has a good reputation for original thinking, and this was a time of debate in theoretical archaeology, some of it generated by Ian Hodder, then a lecturer in the Department. We managed simultaneously to maintain both the debate and cheerful good relations, so that Cambridge remained attractive to researchers of different theoretical persuasions. There was also time for some fresh thought, and I returned to the topic which Gordon Childe had considered half a century earlier in his book which I had found so dubious during my first serious archaeological reading in 1960: the Indo-European question. The question seemed a simple one. If most of the languages of Europe as well as of Iran and North India and Pakistan belong to one language family, and did so already in classical times, what was the historical origin of this remarkable linguistic unity? The answer is much less simple. Indeed the question raises the methodological
problem as to how one may reasonably speculate about prehistoric languages if (by definition) there is no written record of them from the time in question. I came to the view that the old explanation – with a Proto-Indo-European homeland in the steppe lands north of the Black Sea around 3000 B.C., with mounted warrior nomads riding out to conquer the rest of Europe – was a myth with no good archaeological foundations. So I suggested that a far more plausible explanation for so radical a change, affecting the whole of Europe and beyond, might be the demographically and economically much more significant process of the spread of farming. That would imply a homeland in Anatolia around 7000 B.C. The resulting book *Archaeology and Language, the Puzzle of Indo-European Origins* proved even more controversial than *Before Civilisation*, and has provoked continuing discussion (and often scepticism) among historical linguists.

We were fortunate that the book attracted the attention of a wealthy and archaeologically very well informed businessman, Dr. D.M. McDonald, who came to Cambridge and after discussion offered to endow a research institute which would carry his name. The establishment of the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research has given the opportunity of following a number of fresh lines of investigation. One of these is the new field of Archaeogenetics – the application of molecular genetics to the study of the human past. And a generous endowment from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation allowed us to consider the question of ‘knowability’ in the prehistory of languages through a series of conferences bringing together historical linguists, archaeologists and molecular geneticists. These have generated a series of fresh ideas and approaches, well illustrated by the titles of the symposium publications themselves: ‘Time Depth in Historical Linguistics’; ‘Nostratic: Examining a Linguistic Macrofamily’; ‘Archaeogenetics, DNA and the Population Prehistory of Europe’; ‘America Past, America Present, Genes and Languages in the Americas and Beyond’; ‘Examining the Farming/Language Dispersal Hypothesis’; ‘Phylogenetic Methods in Historical Linguistics’ etc. In some of these areas the outcome of the debates is not yet clear, but at least the issues and the appropriate methodologies are becoming evident.

COGNITIVE ARCHAEOLOGY

During the 1970s, in the early days of the ‘New Archaeology’ (or processual archaeology), one of the main needs had been to create a more coherent Social Archaeology, and that was the subject of my Inaugural Lecture in Southampton.
By the 1980s, however, it was clear that we had to address more directly the question as to how archaeology could give us more information about the way people thought – about their thought processes, the use of symbols, about organisation and intelligent innovation, as well as about religious beliefs and ideologies – what one might term cognitive archaeology. That was the subject of my Cambridge Inaugural Lecture in 1982 entitled: ‘Towards an Archaeology of Mind’. The need for a systematic approach towards early religious behaviour was one which preoccupied me while preparing _The Archaeology of Cult_, and such questions underlay a conference on ‘The Ancient Mind’ around that time. Cognitive archaeology has indeed been one of the directions where the McDonald Institute has sought to make a contribution with its periodical _The Cambridge Archaeological Journal_ (under the editorship of Chris Scarre) and its research fellows in that subject, such as Francesco d’Errico and Steven Mithen, have gone on to do very interesting work. The publication of the American psychologist Merlin Donald’s book _Origins of the Modern Mind_ in 1991 provided a stimulus, and the Institute has held and published symposia on ‘Modelling the early human mind’, ‘Cognition and material culture’ and ‘Rethinking materiality: the engagement of mind with the material world.’ I have come to feel that in discussions about ‘mind’, the role of material culture, which is itself produced by human action, has been insufficiently emphasised, and recently I have been trying to develop a ‘Material Engagement’ approach, in which the knowing and purposeful engagement between humans and the material world would be the central focus of attention. The aim is to develop an approach avoiding the Cartesian separation between ‘mind’ and ‘body’ which underlies so much thinking in the Western tradition. Taking a long-term perspective on human affairs, it is in the creation of material culture that humans have distinguished themselves from other species, and it is in these processes that the essential elements in human action and human thinking are to be understood. That remains a task for the future, to which I hope to contribute further with the encouragement which the Balzan Prize has afforded.

There may be other approaches to such understanding, and it seems that many contemporary artists are likewise seeking to explore, in their engagement with the material, different aspects of the experience of being human. During my time as Master of Jesus College (1986-1997) I participated in the organisation of a series of exhibitions there of works by leading contemporary sculptors, held biennially in the summer under the title ‘Sculpture in the Close’. These contacts with some of the leading artists of today emboldened me to write Fig-
uring It Out: the Parallel Visions of Artists and Archaeologists which tried to explore some of these ideas in a preliminary way, and they were further considered in the McDonald Institute’s recent symposium and publication:

‘Substance, memory and display: archaeology and art’. They are well developed also in a recent volume of the student-produced periodical Archaeological Review from Cambridge devoted to the theme: ‘Art and archaeology: unmasking material culture’.

It is my belief, as noted above, that Prehistoric Archaeology offers a very special avenue towards the understanding of the human condition, allowing us to look from a distance, as it were, at what it is to be human, and how we have got to where we are. In this connection, however, it is important to note that we can only learn more about these issues from the preserved material record of the human past. And that record today is gravely threatened not only by the natural processes of destruction, by building work and by modern farming methods. Its most serious threat comes from the looting of archaeological sites, deliberately undertaken with funds provided by private collectors, by unscrupulous dealers and even by some of the world’s leading museums. Since becoming a member of the House of Lords I have tried, with the support of the Illicit Antiquities Research Centre at the McDonald Institute, to draw attention to these problems. I am happy to say that the British Museum now has an acquisition policy which prevents it from acquiring unprovenanced antiquities which have appeared on the market since 1970, and most museums in Britain now take the same line. Unfortunately this was not generally so in the United States or in some European countries. For while some American museums, like the University of Pennsylvania Museum, have strict and ethical acquisition codes, some of America’s most prominent museums in practice did not. Some of them supported what I considered to be the irresponsible position of the American Association of Art Museum Directors whose permissive approach to the acquisition of unprovenanced antiquities would, I believe, have as its inevitable (if indirect) consequence the continued looting of archaeological sites. [The AAMD adopted a more acceptable position in 2008.] The hope of the archaeologist to make an important contribution to our general understanding of the human condition cannot be fulfilled if the cultural heritage of humankind goes on being destroyed in the unfortunate manner which we have seen in the concluding decades of the twentieth century and subsequently.
ENVOI

Prehistoric archaeology today is a cooperative endeavour. Any field project requires a team of researchers, and most projects in archaeological science depend upon the collaboration of a number of research workers. It has been my good fortune to be a member of several such teams. Furthermore, it is a continuing and necessary task to construct the theoretical frameworks by which we may come to make warranted statements about the early human past, and to understand to some extent the processes of change which have led to long-term developments and to the varying fortunes of the human condition at different times and places. I hold it to be a privilege to have participated and to continue to participate in these undertakings, sustained by the exchange and sometimes the polemic of international scholarship. I am deeply grateful to the Balzan Prize Committee for noting my part in present-day research in our field, and in particular for their recognition of the contribution which that field of Prehistoric Archaeology has to make to our understanding of the world and of our place in it.
Colin Renfrew’s project consists of two lines of research which he has actively been involved in. Both are in the field of prehistoric archaeology and involve young researchers in different ways.

The first line of research is devoted to the development of “Material Engagement Theory”, the study of past ways of thinking through the material culture that has survived, a research area which Colin Renfrew has been trying to develop since his 1982 Cambridge Inaugural Lecture: *Towards an Archaeology of Mind*. The second line of research involves the development and expansion of archaeological fieldwork in the Early Bronze Age cultures of the Cycladic Islands of Greece, the subject of Renfrew’s 1965 doctoral dissertation and subsequent work.

1. *Development of “Material Engagement Theory”*. In April 2005, Dr. Lambros Malafouris was appointed Balzan Post-Doctoral Research Fellow in Cognitive Archaeology at the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research in Cambridge to work on the first part of the project. Professor Renfrew and Dr. Malafouris organized two major symposia:

- The first symposium, “The Cognitive Life of Things. Recasting the Boundaries of the Mind” was held at the McDonald Institute on 7-9 April 2006. The papers presented at this symposium, after peer review, were published as a McDonald Institute Monograph in 2010 (Malafouris and Renfrew 2010).

- The second symposium, “The Sapient Mind: Archaeology meets Neuroscience”, was held at the McDonald Institute on 14-17 September 2007. It was co-organized with Professor Colin Renfrew and Professor Chris Frith (Department of Cognitive Neuroscience, UCL). The papers presented in this symposium
have been published as a special Theme Issue by the “Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society” in 2008, and in 2009 by Oxford University Press under the title *The Sapient Mind: Archaeology Meets Neuroscience*. (Renfrew, Frith and Malafouris 2008; 2009). The publication of “The Sapient Mind” has also received extensive coverage in “New Scientist” (14 May 2008).

In addition, the links between archaeology and neuroscience formed the basis for a seminar co-organized by Lambros Malafouris and Colin Renfrew, entitled “Steps to a Neuroarchaeology of Mind” (Exeter, 15-17 December 2006). Selected papers from this session were published in a special section of the “Cambridge Archaeological Journal”, 18(3) October 2008.

The quality of Dr. Malafouris’ research and the scientific impact of his work as Balzan Fellow were reflected in his frequent invitations to speak at conferences and institutions in the UK and overseas. For instance, from 2005 to 2008 he was invited to present papers at Edinburgh, UK (Interactive Mind AHRC workshop 2005), San Juan, Puerto Rico (SAA 2006), Berlin, Germany (European Platform 2006), Exeter, UK (lecture at the University of Exeter 2007), Southampton, UK (Innovation and Evolution workshop 2007) and Oxford, UK (Classical Archaeology Seminar 2007) and the Center for Interdisciplinary Research (ZiF), Bielefeld, Germany (The Enculturated Body workshop 2008). Additionally, he has refereed articles for “Cambridge Archaeology Journal”, the “Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, Series B”, and “Science”. For his innovative cross-disciplinary work in the area of “neuroarchaeology” and the extended mind, Dr. Malafouris was featured in “Seed Magazine’s Revolutionary Minds Series” (August 2008 issue).

Publications


2. *Archaeological fieldwork in the Early Bronze Age cultures of the Cycladic Islands of Greece*. A junior colleague of Colin Renfrew, Giorgos Gavalas, was involved in completing the publication of an earlier phase of the work on the site of Dhaskalio, on the island of Keros, which has been then published in Monograph form by the McDonald Institute of Archaeological Research (Renfrew et al. 2007).

Thanks to the award of the second half of the Balzan Prize to Colin Renfrew, it has been possible to conduct the excavation of the site of Dhaskalio and Dhaskalio Kavos during the excavation seasons of 2006, 2007 and 2008. Preliminary reports on the 2006-2007 and 2008 excavations were published in “The Annual of the British School of Athens” (Renfrew et al. 2007; 2009). No further excavation is planned. The excavations involved the participation of a number of young graduate archaeologists, several of whom will be contributors to the final report, now in preparation.

**Publications:**


Biographical and bibliographical data

Colin RENFREW (Lord Renfrew of Kaimsthorn), born on 25 July 1937 in Stockton-on-Tees, United Kingdom, is a British citizen.

Present position: Senior Fellow, McDonald Institute for Archaeology Research; Emeritus Disney Professor of Archaeology, University of Cambridge. In 1991 he was awarded a life peerage, and chose the title “Lord Renfrew of Kaimsthorn”.

He has served as a member of the editorial boards of important reviews and journals, such as “New Directions in Archaeology” (Cambridge University Press), “Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory” (Academic Press), “The Journal of Social and Biological Structures”, “The Journal of Anthropological Archaeology”.

He has made television programmes with the BBC and also various radio programmes.

**Major Publications**
- *The Emergence of Civilisation. The Cyclades and the Aegean in the Third Millennium B.C.* (1972)
- *Investigations in Orkney* (1979)
- *Problems in European Prehistory* (1979)
- *Approaches to Social Archaeology* (1984)
- *The Archaeology of Cult, the Sanctuary at Phylakopi* (1985)