



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
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**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**



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BOOK REVIEWS

Barbara McNairn, The Method and Theory of V. Gordon Childe. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1980. 184 pp., bibliography, index. 3.75 U.K. pounds.

Bruce G. Trigger, Gordon Childe: Revolutions in Archaeology. London, Thames and Hudson, 1980. 207 pp., bibliography, index. 10.00 U.K. pounds.

Some years ago I presented a paper at a graduate seminar on the epistemology of prehistory, which I introduced with a poem of Thomas Hardy's. The poem was about a coat (a material object) and Hardy dwells on the past activities of its owners, drawing on the clues it contains. It was, Ham Parker said, an "ethnographic apparel". The question of how and what we know about man before written descriptions of persons and actions, so much shapes what we do as archaeologists that it warrants the closest examination and re-examination.

Kuhn's notion of scientific paradigms has become so much ideology in many social 'sciences', the discipline of archaeology not excepted. New paradigms are blasted off in campaigns to re-direct the course of prehistoric studies with monotonous regularity. They gain little and are symptoms of a continuing concern with the way in which our 'evidence' fundamentally determines our ability to understand the past. In many areas there seems little agreement as to what the evidence is: how is it that after 100 years of study we in New Zealand still have no real agreement on ways in which routine analysis of stone debris is to be carried out? From another angle, what sort of 'models' of prehistoric New Zealand society will we uncritically use in twenty years time when the results of the current massive programmes of obsidian sourcing have borne fruit?

These two books about Gordon Childe won't answer these particular questions, but they will 'raise our consciousness' about the ways prehistorians have gathered and digested evidence, and how much of our basic vocabulary and concepts derive from issues considered by Childe.

Most of his synthetic and the few technical works are currently in print (12 to be exact, including the early How Labour governs but they are not all readily available to the New Zealand student. For this reason both these works which draw together key elements of Childe's writings are welcome.

Barbara McNairn's is the more modest in scope but it gives close coverage to central issues such as the concept of culture and its attendant difficulties for the archaeologist. The work relies heavily on quotation with restricted, sensible discussion introducing it, and comment on its current value.

Bruce Trigger's works Beyond History (1968) and Time and Traditions are exemplary, commonsense, detailed considerations of the direction of current prehistoric studies. He musters a patience that few archaeologists can match for the flood of tendentious theory coming from the United States. His account of Gordon Childe's life and writings is therefore of considerable interest. It is more intellectual biography than biography, although the development of Childe's thought is tied in closely with his political views and the society of his time. This adds to the interest of the positions developed here and does not lapse into gossip. Four chapters are spent on the earlier synthetic works, and their relationship to Childe's political views and the way that he came to see prehistoric studies. Five chapters cover the broader relevance of prehistoric studies, closing with two chapters on the "New Archaeology".

Of the two books, Trigger's concern with drawing out the current implications of Childe's work is more fully realised. McNairn's coverage of the long and short European chronologies, for example, is skimpy. As the cheaper of the two books, I believe her book will still have a place in undergraduate studies. Trigger's book is of the first importance and I hereby declare it "archaeological book of the year".

Kevin Jones

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Michael King, The Collector. Auckland, Hodder and Stoughton, 1981. 196 pp., plates, appendices, bibliography, index. \$13.95.

When I went from Otago University to the Taranaki Museum in late 1973 I inherited a gallery of pictures of my predecessors in my room (including to my surprise Herries Beattie, who was director in the early 1920s). There was one odd man out in the line-up - Andreas Reischek junior. Among much else, Michael King's book discusses the link between Reischek and former Taranaki Museum director Rigby Allen which explains, to an extent at least, what he was doing on my wall in New Plymouth.

King has written a fascinating book about an extraordinary character. Andreas Reischek senior was an Austrian who spent the years 1877-1889 in New Zealand working for museums in Christchurch, Auckland and Wanganui and collecting a vast array of Maori material and natural history specimens that were almost all shipped back to his homeland. In a century when the first place for western, specifically European, science was unquestioned, Reischek took to a logical conclusion the habit of plunder that Europeans carried to remote parts of the world. His activities and that of others like him is one of the factors that has led to the present extreme sensitivity of many third world and other countries on the retention of cultural material. The attempt to return to this country Maori remains which were stolen by Reischek from burial caves near Kawhia Harbour is one instance of the difficult issue of 'repatriation' now being faced by governments and museums.

In addition to his acquisition of Maori material, Reischek collected natural history specimens, especially birds. The rarer they were, the more highly prized. It is said that in four expeditions to Little Barrier Island he shot 150 stitch-birds. He is, nonetheless at his most human when overcoming considerable hardship and difficulties on a bird-collecting expedition to Fiordland in 1884.

The Collector is well produced and thoroughly readable. It is also an important book. King emphasises the strand of early German and Austrian contributions to science in New Zealand - perhaps overlooked following two world wars. The book also confronts us with some difficult ethical areas with which museums in New Zealand as in Europe may be increasingly concerned.

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Nigel Prickett