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# **B**REATHING LIFE INTO THE ARCHIVES: REFLECTIONS UPON DECONTEXTUALIZATION AND THE CURATORIAL HISTORY OF V.G. CHILDE AND THE MATERIAL FROM TÓSZEG

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*Abstract:* What is the fate of the material from old excavations? This article aims to generate attention towards this question by discussing the fragmentation of assemblages due to long and disjointed excavation campaigns as well as the eagerness of museums to have representative objects from famous sites. The challenge emerging is the need to explore ways of reinstating objects that may be widely dispersed and entirely decontextualized into our database. The tell at Tószeg-Laposhalom, Hungary, is used as a case study with particular attention to the campaign of 1927. This case is important for several reasons. Tószeg is a key European Bronze Age site. It is also a good example of a site with numerous excavation campaigns and many different teams being involved. Moreover, the 1927 campaign, which is documented through the correspondence between the partners, was V.G. Childe's first excavation, and the data recovered played a key role in his Central European Bronze Age chronology.

*Keywords:* Childe, Hungarian Bronze Age, museum collections, Tószeg

## **THE ROLE OF MUSEUMS IN SHAPING COLLECTIONS**

The Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (CUMAA) contains within its collection material from important sites from around the world and within its archives hints of how these objects were acquired. One such site is Tószeg-Laposhalom, a Bronze Age tell in Hungary, and working with that material has provoked an inquiry into its further history as revealed through letters kept in the paper archive. This journey back through the history of the collection has made us aware of how its perceived nature, in terms of its importance and its role in ongoing research, has changed through time. This article aims to use this specific case study to reflect upon both the historiography of a site and the challenge we face when integrating older collections into modern investigations.

Throughout the history of museums it has been common to acquire material directly from different archaeological excavations, indeed the urge for acquisition may be seen as deeply embedded within the *raison d'être* of museums (for a discussion of the history of collecting, see, for example, Pearce 1995). It is a practice governed by the emphasis upon museum collections as representative; the more representative the collections are of world culture the more prestigious the museum. In consequence, excavations were often approached as a kind of quarry from which different interested partners would acquire their share. Historically many sites were excavated first to satisfy the need of museums to obtain materials and only secondly in pursuit of knowledge of the site itself. An interesting early example of the desire for object possession driving recovery is the King of Naples Charles III who, when newly crowned, ordered excavation at Herculaneum. The finds from the excavations were housed in a suite of rooms built for this purpose in 1750 at his new palace (Bignamini and Jenkins 1996:231). The practice of using excavations as a means of enriching museum collections and the implications that arise from this, including a ready acceptance of the fragmentation of site assemblages, are not merely a quaint characteristic of the early days of museums. Rather, it was routine until recently and is still, at times, an accepted and almost expected practice. Such fragmentation has particularly affected the most significant sites, as even more 'stakeholders' had vested interests in them. Our aim in this article is to examine how this practice has exercised an enormous but rarely discussed influence upon how objects, sites and cultures can be articulated within the museum space itself. We will also briefly consider the effect of these influences on how amenable this material now is for further studies.

One of the reasons for the current lack of interest towards detached objects and fragmented assemblages can be found in the growing significance given to 'context', and the simultaneous tendency to interpret context solely as the immediate associations recorded during excavation. In particular, as attitudes towards acceptable excavation practice and the standard of recording have become more demanding, material from sites investigated in the past has become intellectually irrelevant. It is therefore important that we learn to utilize these objects in ways that are not dependent upon a narrow understanding of their original context. Otherwise the sole role of older museum collections will become one of illustrating the past (i.e. being representative of generic ideas about cultures) rather than being part of the basis for investigating past conditions. Thus, the underlying issue arising from reconsidering such fragmented site assemblages is the importance we assign to, and how we understand, 'context'.

Until a few decades ago culture was commonly defined through reoccurring collections of artefacts, which meant that the presence rather than the relationships of the artefact was stressed. This approach is exemplified by V.G. Childe, to whom we shall return later. Since the 1980s archaeology has, however, become increasingly concerned with 'context' and in turn its focus has moved from the single artefact to the social practices and agencies that produced it. It follows that objects that were previously valued for their contribution to classification and as representatives of cultures are currently treated as insignificant unless their

'original contexts' can be established. This has left objects detached from their excavation context appearing archaeologically meaningful only as remainders and reminders of earlier approaches, while in their own right they are considered almost valueless. Therefore, in pursuing an epistemological position that is grounded upon the importance of context, older objects in museums have become sidelined, and we have allowed an apparently unbridgeable intellectual gap to appear between our interpretative frameworks and older archaeological data.

In addition, as our agendas and interpretations move on, the assemblages recovered at any given time are made to appear inseparable from the theoretical climate of that time. When we reject the interpretations of a site and its assemblage, and distance ourselves from the way in which it was recovered, we have a tendency to also reject the potential information for further exploration which lies in the objects themselves. The consequential inability to utilize earlier excavated material has severe implications. First, the physical archaeological record will be decreased. In many places, as for example the area around Tószeg, substantial numbers of sites have been already excavated, and they were often preserved in conditions that we would now consider exceptional. By not utilizing these excavations we are limiting ourselves to a less rich portion of the potential record. Second, rejecting the earlier material as of limited academic value means that new knowledge can depend only upon the results of new excavations. As the number of archaeological sites is finite and opportunities to excavate are dependent on practical and political circumstances, the potential for increasing our knowledge-base will decrease over time. It is therefore an important challenge for the discipline, as also recognized by multinational enterprises such as the AREA (Archives of European Archeology) archival project (Schlanger 2002), to consider how to revitalize old material in such a manner that we can use it along with newly acquired assemblages to expand our knowledge and come to new interpretations.

As a contribution to such a debate we argue that more imaginative uses of collections must be developed as well as more flexible ways of exploring the question of what is a 'context'.

## **THE DE- AND RECONTEXTUALIZATION OF OBJECTS**

Meaning is assigned to objects through associations; therefore if the associations are broken the object loses its meaning. In current approaches the 'meaning' of an archaeological object is primarily recognized as its relationship to other objects and its place within a specific site matrix. The archaeological process, from excavation to storage, initiates a sequence of disruptions to these associations, making the need to reassign meaning through comparison and classifications a seminal part of that same process.

Excavation itself interrupts existing associations between objects and creates new ones, and it may be considered the first stage in an oscillating sequence of de- and recontextualization. The form and qualities of the latter depend, at least in part, upon creating new associations for the object, in effect recognizing new contexts. For an object this may be done by maintaining a link to other objects

either through associations due to, for example, physical characteristics, or through associations created by field records, which maintain the object as part of a larger matrix, i.e. 'the assemblage'.

In the processes of recontextualization and signification it has been common practice that 'the assemblage' becomes a primary nexus of association, acting as a signifier and providing relatively rigid meanings for objects. All objects belonging to an assemblage achieve association to each other. The concept of an assemblage cannot, however, be maintained when its materials have been separated. In such situations the single objects have to find their significance in terms either of other objects outside the original assemblage or through their incorporation within other contexts such as museum collections. Such associations enable the construction of new meaning by emphasizing, for example, the comparative and classificatory qualities of objects or contemporary values. It should therefore be recognized that the single object has not only many potential contexts beyond that of the assemblage but also many potential meanings.

When addressing fragmented assemblages it is therefore useful to expand our concern from a singular focus upon the object in relation to its physical associations prior to excavation, to explorations of relationships that aim at re-establishing other contexts which the object may have inhabited. While objects can never be reinstated in their original on-site matrix, attempts can be made to reconnect them with meaningful counterparts.

## THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

An archaeological object also has meaning in the present and as such may be argued to inhabit a contemporary context. We expect to see artefacts within the context of a museum and within its various displays. These contexts follow rules that we recognize and they create associations that become meaningful to us. We create associations based on various types of similarities between objects, typically these are spatial, temporal, material or typological characteristics. As such it appears appropriate to us that groups of objects can be approached both physically and mentally as belonging together. Thus, in addition to the excavation and recording we create new contexts for understanding objects in the present through their display as coherent entities. Through this we mould onto a physical object layers of meanings and contexts.

The categorization of objects initiated through excavation is in this way followed by actions in museums, which physically separate the objects. This reinforces divisions that prevent further interpretations. This is not unique to museums but in fact runs through all archaeological categorization. The manner in which museums physically affect access to objects does, however, make the impact even more significant. As the example of Tószeg will show, the international dimension of the modern museum world means that tracing the original excavation assemblage can often be logistically as well as mentally challenging. With these issues in mind it is interesting to note that the idea of virtual museums has so far mainly focused upon presenting the collections of a particular museum

rather than re-linking materials from sites now held in different collections around the world.

Once an assemblage has been split and stored in a museum or museums the published accounts of the site and material become in many ways more real than the physical material itself. When we refer to Tószeg, or in fact any site, we are actually referring to the excavators' conceptualization of objects, the associations they saw between them and their interpretations, as well as the site's subsequent reputation, rather than the physical remains that once constituted the site. The archaeological site, particularly one as important as Tószeg, has a tendency to become more than its physicality, so that the name alone can refer to a collection of understandings without the need to return to the physical site or its material. The point to be stressed, however, is that the ways in which the archaeological object and assemblages are approached have a substantial impact upon our ability to recognize the interpretative potentials still present in the object. If we wish to get beyond current interpretations of a site, we must return to its various objects as well as to the associations between them; we must return to the context of the assemblage. This possibility of revisiting the assemblages without imposed categorization is, however, rarely realized and is often nearly impossible, especially for older sites.

## THE CASE STUDY

Tószeg-Laposhalom is a Bronze Age tell site situated on the flood plain of the Tisza river in northern Hungary. As with other tell sites in the region it was originally a distinct landmark with its mound (rising to between 5 and 8 m above the surrounding ground) forming a hillock on the plain beside the river. It is thought to have been originally about 360 m long, 180 m wide and covering some 7 ha. Most of the original site has now vanished due to building work, erosion and excavation, and radical protection initiatives had to be made recently in an attempt to preserve the rest of the site (Márton 2001). The tell, having numerous layers of occupation (22 horizons according to Mozsolics 1952) has been classified as being from the Nagyrév, Hatvan and Fúzeabony Bronze Age groups, with later dispute about the identification of the latter culture (Bóna 1979–80; Kovács 1988a). The material excavated includes many small cups, encrusted vessels and domestic wares relating to a range of pottery forms and activities (see Fig. 1).

The site is also important for showing some variation in house sizes between the levels and there are well-preserved examples of decorated hearths and ovens. Foremost, however, the importance of the site is due to the key role it has played in the construction of Bronze Age chronologies for central Europe (e.g. Childe 1929; Mozsolics 1952; for discussion see also Schalk 1981). The significance of the site was recognized early, as discussed later, and by the early 1920s it had acquired a reputation as rich and well stratified. It continues to be a key site among Bronze Age tells and it is commonly referred to in syntheses of the European Bronze Age (e.g. Harding 2000). The fact that many different excavation campaigns have taken place means that material from the site is well known; but this is also the reason



Figure 1. Cups from the CUMAA collection from Tószeg. Photograph courtesy of CUMAA.

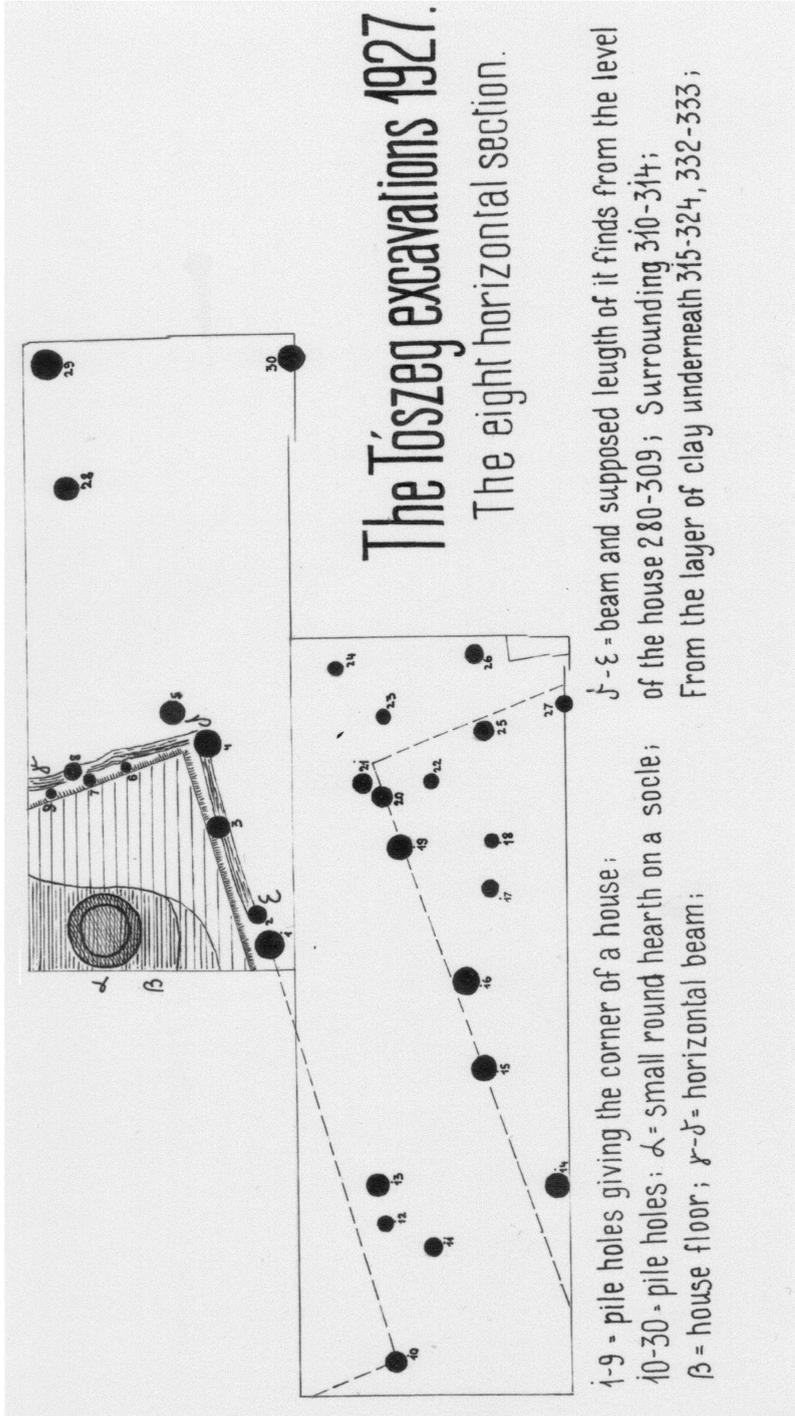
why its material is now so fragmented that a full account of where all the objects are is difficult to piece together. This, therefore, is just an outline of the excavation history of Tószeg, with particular attention to the 1927 Cambridge–Hungarian excavations, which is used as a basis for considering the issues raised earlier.

Although informal quarrying on the tell is likely to have occurred earlier, the first recorded excavation of Tószeg happened in 1876. This excavation took place as a result of finds made by F. Márton, a local farmer, which were made public just as Hungarian archaeologists were planning their ‘entry’ into the scene of international archaeology through the organization of the eighth session of the International Congress of Archaeology and Anthropology (Bóna 1994:101; Schalk 1981:67–68). The excavation was clearly a ‘show-piece’ of Hungarian prehistory, and its excavation was conducted specifically as an event for the congress held in Budapest (Kovács 1988b:17). According to Makkay (1991:110), the most important guests each received a small Tószeg pot to take home! Much symbolic and political ‘capital’ became invested in the excavation. Some 100–130 m<sup>2</sup> were excavated and many international scholars visited the site (Bóna 1994:102). Bóna has pointed out how as a result of this, the original assumption of this being a typical Neolithic and Bronze Age settlement distinct to the great Hungarian plain was modified. L. Pigorini from Italy pronounced the site similar to the *terramara* sites of northern Italy. Pigorini’s argument persuaded other foreign prehistorians, such as R. Virchow from Berlin, J. Mestorf from Kiel and I. Undset from Oslo, and Tószeg became internationally known as a pile-dwelling or a *terramara*. In a letter of 17 June 1926 from V.G. Childe to L.C.G. Clarke (curator of CUMAA) this interpretation is apparent, as he writes ‘A dig at the site [Tószeg] would be of quite

first class importance: (1) the place has always been cited as a *terraramara*. After thus being introduced to the scene of international archaeology, more or less well-documented excavations of the site followed at regular intervals. The Austrian F. von Hochstetter participated in 1879 in an excavation on the site, which was organized by Friedrich von Harkánye and in which F. Márton also was involved (Schalk 1979:9, 1981:6). F. von Hochstetter died before publishing the drawings from the excavations, but the Norwegian I. Undset used some of this material in an article about the *terraramaren* in Hungary (1889). A total of 413 artefacts from Tószeg were housed at the Natural History Museum in Vienna (Schalk 1979:9). Schalk (1981:6) also lists B. Pósta as having excavated on the site in 1888, the results of which were summarily published. Dr Lajos Márton (son of F. Márton) from the Hungarian National Museum excavated on the tell from 1906–1912 and also participated in the 1927 excavations. His work on the site, which shows a distinct concern with digging according to levels rather than spits (Kovács 1988b:18), laid some of the foundation for the later chronological schema, but only saw limited publication, partly due to his ill health. His first account was published in the reports of the Hungarian National Museum (Márton 1906), but a fuller, more detailed account was first published posthumously by other Hungarian colleagues (Banner et al. 1959). The 1920s saw increased collaboration with foreign specialists. The Dutch archaeologist A.E. Van Giffin and the German G. Bersu visited the site in 1923 together with L. Márton, F. Tompa and J. Hillebrand from the National Museum in Budapest (Kovács 1988b:18; Schalk 1981:6). Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology funded an excavation in 1927. The following year, Tompa and Márton, on the initiative of Van Giffin and financed by his friend Baron van Heeralt, invited the Institute of Archaeology in Groningen (The Netherlands) to fund an excavation for which they received half of the finds. This amounted to some 140 objects (J. Lanting pers. comm.; Schalk 1981).

The excavation in 1948 was the first extensive scientific investigation of a central European Bronze Age tell, and the approaches taken mirror changes in archaeological field techniques during this time. It was conducted by Amelia Mozsolics, and the results were published in the first edition of *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* in 1952. This publication is the only full excavation publication for the site (Csalog 1952; Mozsolics 1952). Over 600 artefacts from this campaign are in the National Museum of Hungary in Budapest. The most recent excavation, the 1973–1974 campaign conducted by Bóna and Stanczik, has only been partly published in an annual of the Szolnok County Museum (Bóna and Stanczik 1979–80). This campaign is nonetheless central for the development of tell archaeology in Hungary as it confirmed the importance of digging according to levels (Kovács 1988a:83, note 9) and resulted in an acceptable stratigraphic sequence that ties up better with the 1927 one than the 1948 excavation did.

Of particular interest to us here is the 1927 campaign, since some of the interactions between the partners involved are documented in the archive of CUMAA. The development of this campaign is documented in letters exchanged between Louis C.G. Clarke (director of the CUMAA from 1922 to 1937), V. Gordon Childe (who at that time worked as a librarian at the Royal Anthropological



**Figure 2.** An example of the plan drawings from Tószeg, presumably prepared for the exhibition in Cambridge in 1927. Photograph courtesy of CUMAA.

Institute, London), Ferenc Tompa (Head of the Archaeology Department of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest) and Dr J. Hillebrand (Head of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest) from 1926 to 1928. These letters were collected by Clarke to be presented to the museum at a later unknown date. They show this as a period of negotiation over participation, concerns about practical and financial arrangements, such as packing and transport of finds, and the selection of artefacts to be sent to Cambridge. One also gains a strong impression of the different personal relationships that developed between the partners as well as their distinct objectives regarding the excavation.

The outcome of the exchanges was one excavation campaign in 1927 under F. Tompa's supervision with both V.G. Childe and L.C.G. Clarke spending some time in the field, as well as subsequent excavations at other sites in Hungary attended by Clarke alone. Another result was Clarke negotiating possession of the whole collection from the 1927 excavation: 330 stratified artefacts as well as several unstratified ones. Clarke also bought objects directly from the owner of the site. This means that Cambridge has one of the most important collections of Tószeg material outside central Europe. The whole collection was entered into the accessions book in 1928 and the material was put on display as part of an exhibition following the excavation (Fig. 2). There was also a feature in the *Illustrated London News* in September 1927 (Childe 1927). Following their inclusion into the museum collection some of the Tószeg artefacts were later used in exchanges with other museums, as discussed later.

### **CHILDE AND THE CUMAA'S INVOLVEMENT IN TÓSZEG**

Childe's involvement with Tószeg was his first direct experience of excavation work. In the early 1920s, having abandoned his political career in the Australian Labour Party, Childe had returned to his interests in European prehistory and was travelling around Europe looking at sites and collections which he referred to in a number of small articles. According to Makkay (1991) Childe was particularly concerned with looking for a site to study for what would become *The Dawn of European Civilization* (1925) and *The Danube in Prehistory* (1929). He eventually found Tószeg, but before this, between 24 October 1923 and 1 December 1924, he was in correspondence with Ferenc László, the curator of the Szekely Múzeum in Transylvania, concerning the possibilities of excavating the Neolithic site of Erösd.<sup>1</sup>

In a letter dated September 1924 Childe wrote in the following manner:

I am informed that owing to your separation from Hungary the work has had to be stopped for lack of funds. Now I am wondering whether, if a museum here were to put up the money, your museum and Dr. László would be willing to carry on the work on the same terms as formerly i.e. to share the product equally with us. The Director of the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology authorises me to state that he is prepared to spend sixty pounds 60 stg. in supporting the excavation of the site. He would

of course expect in return a fair and equal share of the material found, especially vases, figurines and pintaderas. (quoted in Makkay 1991:108)

Childe then appears to have handed negotiations over to Clarke and in a postcard to him dated the 2 September 1925, which is now in the Cambridge archives, he writes:

László ... tells me he is digging in Erösd again and has found a house full of vases. Does this mean he is working the plan I suggested to you about a year ago? I never heard the final outcome of your negotiations with Rumania. V.G. Childe.

The deal had been agreed but was later postponed when László received an offer from the Romanian Minister for Education which would let him be in sole control of the excavation and the finds. Any further negotiation was brought to a sudden end with the unexpected death of Ferenc László on 16 September 1925 (Makkay 1991) only a few weeks after Childe wrote the above postcard. From a letter dated 18 March 1926 we can see, however, Childe's own interpretation of the events and his subsequent bitterness:

I have now got the true history of the Erösd dig and now that I am clear of those unspeakable swine can tell you officially and formally. It is quite clear that the Rumanians [sic] deliberately prevented the execution of the plan. As soon as they got wind of the prospect of financial support coming from England they put up a small sum at the disposal of the Sepsi Szent Gyorg Museum [for the finds] to be retained in Rumania and the results published in Rumanian. They would not even allow László to accept a very good offer from a Leipzig publisher who would have done a very good job with plenteous coloured plates such as only the Germans can make. But Parvan of Bucarest has taken the matter in hand and says he will publish the posthumous manuscript. The Rumanians [sic], though knowing nothing of prehistory, are bigoted and jealous of all foreigners and indeed all educated men. In Sepsi Szent Gyorgi and all through Transylvania there is a regular reign of terror. László himself was a martyr to this tyranny; for he was forced to go up to Koloszvar when ill and despite his doctor's orders, to take an examination in Roumanian [sic] and died as the result.

The political situation in this part of Europe was at the time very complex with borders being reassigned following the First World War and strong nationalistic feeling emerging. It is not so surprising therefore that the Romanian government wanted to keep sole control over its important cultural heritage at a time when it was re-establishing its national identity. Childe's outraged reaction reflects his disappointment and frustration, but also maybe his detachment from the growing nationalistic claims to archaeological data. It is interesting in this context to note

that his reflections in 1922 upon the state of archaeology in central Europe only focused upon issues of access, whether physically or through publication (Childe 1922). We should also bear in mind that the nature of the deal Childe and Clarke were attempting to strike was one that would deprive a financially impoverished Eastern European country of some of its best archaeological material, not only removing the artefacts but also publishing the site only in English. At the end of the letter dated 18 May 1926 we find however the first mention of the site of Tószeg. Childe's first description of the site is clearly coloured by his experience with Erösd:

I have found however a magnificent Bronze Age site in a civilised country that is just waiting to be dug. This is Tószeg on the Tisza near Szolnok still in Hungary<sup>2</sup> thank God. Casual excavations at the site have yielded a huge mass of fantastic ceramic and bone and horn artefacts which enrich the Nemzeti Múzeum at Budapest. Director Tompa would love a scientific excavation there and in return for finance would give the supporter almost all the undoubtedly rich booty since the bulk would only duplicate what is already at BudaPest [sic].

In the summer of 1926 Childe and the young anthropologist C. Daryll Forde travelled together around Yugoslavia, Romania and Hungary carrying out research on European Megalithic monuments. They apparently did not visit Tószeg itself (Fortes 1976); but Childe, writing to Clarke on 22 July, describes Tompa and the head of the National Museum as 'very charming people' which leads us to assume that having heard of Tószeg by May he then met Tompa in July to discuss funding an excavation there.

By January 1927 Childe and Clarke were engaged in negotiations with Tompa which had a similar tone and content to those Childe had undertaken with László. Hungary at the time was suffering severe financial problems brought about by the Treaty of Trianon following the First World War and the museum was having to sell off large parts of its collection as well as solicit support from abroad for excavations. Throughout the collection of letters in the Cambridge archive there are references to money sent and material received, as well as the funding for excavation at Tószeg and trial excavations at Nagyrév in January 1927. The letters between Childe, Clarke, Tompa and Hillebrand at the same time became increasingly friendly as personal relationships developed which transcended the practical arrangements.

On 25 March 1927 Tompa sent a letter acknowledging the receipt of £100 from Clarke and it was eventually decided that Childe and Clarke would join the excavations that spring. When Childe arrived he was, much to his annoyance, struck down with tonsillitis, which kept him in bed for most of the project. He wrote to Clarke on 19 April 1927:

I am quite weak at the moment can't possibly go out to a village and dig. Tompa has planned to start at Tószeg on Thursday workers already engaged



**Figure 3.** Photograph of the excavation team from 1927 presumably at Tószeg. In the background V.G. Childe (with sun hat and pipe). In the foreground F. Tompa third from the left. Photograph courtesy of CUMAA.

and accommodation arranged. Of course he will begin as fixed. Let us know when you are coming.

A week later he wrote with detailed descriptions of the state of his tonsils and the news that he would be returning to London to have them out by 1 May, rather than make the situation worse by remaining where he was 'too weak to be much use ... even if I didn't collapse altogether with a high fever'. He intended however to 'nevertheless go down to Tószeg tomorrow or Tuesday to get an exact idea of the site and its stratification' (Childe 24 April 1927). It appears then that Childe saw very little of his first excavation (Fig. 3).

During that summer Clarke and Tompa exchanged numerous letters concerning the practicalities of transporting such a mass of fragile material from Hungary to Cambridge. The collection was finally sent early in July 1927 and was followed by an exhibition devoted to it in September 1927, which adequately illustrates the importance that Clarke laid upon this acquisition.

## MOTIVATIONS

For the Hungarians the motivations behind involving Childe and the CUMAA in the excavation at Tószeg were not entirely financial, despite appearances to that

effect. A letter from Tompa to Clarke dated 14 November 1927, discussing further excavations at Nagyrév, Tiszasa, Seleta Cave, Aggteleki, Borsod and Szihalom that the CUMAA was involved in, clearly describes Tompa's practical and ethical considerations:

We have chosen these places because there the success is certain; the lodging places there abouts are decent and from the material found there Hungary's most important prehistorical cultures would be represented in the Cambridge collection.

It was not only important for a museum to acquire collections from Hungary to boost its reputation, but also for Hungary, at a time when it had emerged as a defeated nation after the First World War, to make itself known around the world through representation in museums of high repute. For Tompa a theme running through his interaction is the insistence upon thoroughness, full documentation and consistent labelling. He also clearly hoped for proper publication of the finds and the results.

While biographies as well as edited volumes have been written about Childe (e.g. Green 1981; McNairn 1980; Trigger 1980) they pay very little, if any, attention to what Childe was actually doing during the very formative years from 1922 to 1927 when he developed as a major European prehistorian. For Childe the first hand experience of being involved in Tószeg's excavation remained an important source of knowledge and interest in his subsequent archaeological work. He himself mentions later that his attempt to fit the Hungarian urnfields into a quadripartite division in 1927 was directly based on the culture-sequence stratigraphy that he, Tompa and Márton established for Tószeg (Childe 1969: 190). The lasting impact of this chronology amongst some archaeologists is revealed in statements such as: 'The basis for chronology [in Hungary] until ten years ago was the sequence established by Childe and Tompa at Tószeg' (Coles and Harding 1979: 70). It is, however, interesting to note that in Childe's chronological scheme (1929) the phasing begins with the earlier, and thus the lowest strata, that is, phase A1 is assigned to the Nagyrév period and strata XIII–XVII. In contrast, the schemes proposed later by other scholars follow the logic of the excavated sequence with the top strata named a–f which means that the Nagyrév strata becomes p–y (Mozsolics 1952) or o–p (Bóna 1979–80). Or in other words, while Childe presents the site in terms of a time sequence from early to later, the experienced tell excavators present it in terms of the excavated sequence from the top downwards. This makes the sequence proposed by Childe less firmly tied in with the actual progression of an excavation and rather hints at its character as a theoretical construction imposed upon the excavated material. With Childe's strong interests during the late 1920s in culture groups, invasion and phases, and the possibility that he remained somewhat detached from the actual excavation work, this comes as no surprise. This impression is further confirmed by two factors. One is the exceedingly short period between the excavation season and the publication of the chronology based on Tószeg, which gives the impression of a preconceived

chronology in wait of data to be applied to it. The other is Childe's explicit desire to find a suitable site for chronological studies, which influenced his travels in central Europe in the early 1920s and prompted his interest in Tószeg. Childe clearly argues for the selection of Tószeg for an excavation on the basis of the richness of its material and the possibility of finding stratified material. This is, for example, illustrated by his letters to Clarke dated 22 July 1926 where he lists Tószeg's advantages:

I think we ought to concentrate on Tószeg (i) because we know it is a very productive site and Buda Pest has already such a representative series from it that we are sure of getting plenty (ii) because it is stratified and if properly excavated and published will enable us to arrange a lot of stray finds in chronological order.

While Childe recognizes the museum's desire to expand its collection, his own motivation was clearly gaining access to a stratified sequence. In his syntheses of the central European Bronze Age Childe made use of Tószeg as a means of establishing a chronology. In his publications he uses Tószeg in a manner that presents the site as a type-site or makes it appear almost synonymous with groups such as the Únetice (e.g. Childe 1929) or Maros (Childe 1930, 1969). His use of terminology such as 'Tószeg ware' and 'Tószeg type' in *The Danube*, in a scheme worked out only months after he returned from Hungary (Childe, 1969: 190), also illustrates how he used the site as a basic reference point for the Copper and Bronze Age in central Europe. The importance of Tószeg thus appears to be augmented by Childe's emphasis on it in his publications and was a result of the significance it held personally for him. It is, therefore, worth emphasizing again that this was the first time that Childe participated in an excavation, and that through this he gained his first experience with 'raw' excavation data, in other words, data that had not already been assigned to strata and types.

Clarke's motivation was clearly to augment the museum collection by the inclusion of important central European material, and to him any 'good' site would have satisfied this objective. In his involvement with the Tószeg excavation he was nonetheless very conscientious and continuously concerned with ensuring the proper labelling and cataloguing of all the finds. This concern he shared with Tompa, while Childe rather expresses some impatience with the slowness of the process. Thus, in their professional aims Tompa and Clarke were much more akin than either of them were to Childe. It is therefore interesting to note that it is Childe, rather than the museum curators, who refers to the material in terms such as 'rich booty'. It may be that this primarily reveals what he assumed would be attractive to the museum, but one may also discern a certain detachment from the objects themselves, which for him might have been primarily a means towards an end.

## FOLLOWING THE OBJECTS

Artefacts were removed from the tell site of Tószeg during at least eight separate excavations – 1876, 1879, 1888, 1906–12, 1927, 1928, 1948 and 1973–4. In some of these excavations the artefacts maintained a link with the on-site matrix through field recording, for instance most of those conducted from 1927 onwards, but for many their only link to the site is through the name of them as an assemblage. The context of the site has been replaced with the context of the excavated assemblage.

Furthermore, some of these assemblages have been split further and integrated into separate museum collections. The museum therefore becomes a separate context within which the objects may retain links to each other but not to those in other museums. This process is clearly illustrated by the Tószeg material that came to the CUMAA from the 1927 excavation. Already in June 1928 some objects were sent to the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. Later in 1950 four cups and several sherds from Tószeg were exchanged with the Peabody Museum, Harvard, for material from Central America (CUMAA archive, S. Haskell and P.H. Kervick pers. comm.). The Peabody Museum later exchanged some of these objects with the Museum at the University of Pennsylvania. (S. Haskell and P.H. Kervick pers. comm., C. Boulis pers. comm.) In addition, sometime before 1984 one vase, two cups and a lid were sent to the Department of Archaeology at Sheffield, presumably to be part of a teaching collection there, although these objects have not proved to be further traceable. The motivation behind these exchanges was usually to build up representative collections, but it carries with it an explicit disregard for the original context of the object.

Material from Tószeg in the American Museum of Natural History in New York illustrates an even less transparent route of transferral and is described in a monograph published in 1969 by Foltiny. That collection is a result of two separate events. The first was a private sale by a Mrs Delilha de Kovach in 1923 about which very little is known, and the second was a sale by the Hungarian National Museum in 1925 as a result of financial need following the Trianon treaty (Foltiny 1969). The combined material is described as ‘The Hungarian Collection’ and contains artefacts not only from Tószeg but also from other Bronze Age Hungarian sites, much of which is unstratified.<sup>3</sup> In the 1940s one jar was exchanged with the Peabody Museum (K. Mable, pers. comm.), which in 1965 exchanged a ‘mix of material from Central Europe’ with the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania.

## CONCLUSION

The case study shows something about the contorted routes through which museum collections were formed, and suggests something about the creation of the new contexts within the museum collection – ‘The Hungarian Collection’, ‘Sammlung Hochstetter’, or ‘The Tószeg material’. Most significantly, the case study illustrates how the roots and larger contexts of these fragmented assemblages tend to be lost. The Tószeg material in CUMAA appears as an unaltered account of the 1927 excavated material. The migration of objects out of this assemblage would not

automatically be included in any investigation of the material. Some of its history was only discovered here through detailed archival work.

How does this affect our archaeological work? As argued in the introduction, excavated objects become recontextualized in museums in ways that introduce new interpretative potentials and meaning. Losing sight of the larger history of these objects will, however, reduce the perspective we can bring to them, and our ability to challenge and expand the meanings imposed by the mere inclusion in museums. The objects from the 1927 excavation at Tószeg are many things, including valuable and representative objects from the central European Bronze Age. To properly gain from these various aspects of the objects that are collected in museums, we need, however, to understand and approach them through this multivocality. Concerns that can be pursued include investigating change in the role the objects have within the museum collections themselves, for instance what exchange value today do the sherds and cups have compared with material from Central America, or how are the objects used to make comparison between sites and through time, or how are they used to inform and challenge our thinking about other people and former times?

The objects, however, also continue to have value as archaeological data. There might be more comparative material from Bronze Age tells now, but the 1927 Tószeg material is the basis from which Childe's central European chronology was constructed. The material itself, rather than its representation in the form of phases, illustrations and names, should continue to play a role in detailed chronological revisions and synchronization between different sites. But apart from their chronological importance, the objects are also significant in themselves because they are objects made in the past. Considering, for instance, the ceramics from Tószeg, their multiple physical aspects mean that they can still, despite their decontextualization, be explored from a number of angles. They can be investigated as individual objects that inform us about available technologies and practices at the time of their manufacture. They can also be studied as expressions of particular traditions. For instance, the use of incrustated ware, and the identification of specific local characteristics should be investigated. This would help to clarify whether this type of pottery was used in a different way (i.e. perhaps more frequently and applied to a wider range of ceramic types) than on other tell sites. Such analysis, furthermore, should be integrated into discussions of, for example, the socio-cultural implications of the obvious emphasis in pottery production upon small cups, that might be personal possessions, and the degree of standardization within site assemblages of certain forms or the lack thereof. These questions and more are urgently needed to be asked of collections such as Tószeg, and can be asked of the material despite both its decontextualization and its dispersal; but to ask them we also need to appreciate how the particular selection of objects that we have was created. We need to overcome the loss of confidence in the objects that the fragmentation of the assemblages has instilled in us.

The example of Tószeg illustrates how an object is transformed when moving between different contexts. Once in a museum the objects become many things, including bargaining pieces, representatives of cultures and areas, things to be

collected rather than evidence for the past in their own right. The object's potential for multiple meanings is at the same time illustrated by the alternative attitudes that the various excavators and museum curators have had towards the material. They have been seen as the building blocks of a chronology, symbols of Hungarian nationhood to be displayed abroad, as representative samples desired by collectors, or as bargaining pieces. These meanings build up around the objects and affect not only interpretations but also practices that restrict access to them. Thus the importance of Tószeg is partly a direct result of Childe's personal interest in it and the work of curators like Tompa and Clarke in disseminating the material around the world. Meanwhile, by understanding the 'formation processes' of the contexts in which we now find the various objects, a starting point for new interpretations of these objects can be constructed. We can then see the objects as components of contemporary museum practice, while at the same time recognizing that they are still relevant data for analysis of the past.

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### NOTES

1. Some of the letters from Childe relating to the attempt at setting up a collaborative project at Erösd are published by A. László (1973); they provide a vivid prelude to 'the story' told here.

2. The various references to Romania and Eastern Hungary (Transylvania) in this text should be understood in the context of this being an area with a large Hungarian population that was transferred to Romania after the First World War.

3. Material from Tószeg has spread out to various museums and departments, including the following (based on Bóna 1994, information from Emily Schalk and further independent research):

*Central Europe:*

The National Museum, Budapest, and various regional museums including those in Győr, Kassa (Kosice), Kecskemet, Kiskunfelegyhaza, Kolozsvár (Cluj region), Szeged, Szolnok, Temesvár (Timioara). Material is also held by individual owners.

*Western Europe:*

Austria (Vienna, Naturhistorische Museum)

England (Cambridge, CUMAA; London, The Institute of Archaeology; Oxford, The Pitt Rivers Museum; Sheffield, Department of Archaeology)

Germany (Berlin, Museum Für Vor- und Frühgeschichte Archäologie Europas – the finds were formally at the Akademie der Wissenschaften of East Berlin; Marburg University of Marburg)

Italy (Rome)

The Netherlands (Groningen, Institute of Archaeology)

North America:

Boston, The Peabody Museum at Harvard University; New York, American Museum of Natural History; Pennsylvania, Museum of Archaeology, University of Pennsylvania.

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**ABSTRACTS****Nouvelle vie pour les archives: réflexions sur la décontextualisation et l'histoire curatoriale de V.G.Childe et du matériel de Tószeg***Mary Leighton et Marie Louise Stig Sorensen*

Quel est le destin du matériel provenant d'anciennes fouilles? Cet article cherche à attirer l'attention sur cette question en examinant la fragmentation des collections due à de longues et incohérentes campagnes de fouilles ainsi qu'à l'empressement des musées de vouloir exposer des pièces représentatives provenant de sites célèbres. Le défi en résultant est la nécessité d'examiner comment réintégrer dans notre base de données des objets peut-être largement dispersés et complètement isolés de leur contexte. Le tell de Tószeg Laposhalom (Hongrie) est présenté comme étude de cas avec une attention particulière à la campagne de fouilles de l'année 1927. Cette étude est importante pour plusieurs raisons: Tószeg est un endroit clé de l'âge du bronze européen. En même temps, c'est un bon exemple de site où de nombreuses campagnes de fouilles ont été dirigées par de multiples équipes différentes. En plus, la campagne de 1927, documentée à travers la correspondance entre les partenaires, était la première fouille de V.G.Childe, et les données récupérées sont éminentes pour la chronologie de l'âge du bronze de l'Europe centrale.

*Mot-clés:* âge du bronze hongrois, Childe, collections de musée, Tószeg

**Den Archiven Leben einhauchen: Gedanken zur Dekontextualisierung und der kuratorischen Geschichte von V. G. Childe und dem Material von Tószeg***Mary Leighton und Marie Louise Stig Sørensen*

Was ist das Schicksal des Fundmaterials alter Ausgrabungen? Der vorliegende Beitrag verfolgt das Ziel, durch die Diskussion der Fragmentierung von Sammlungen &ndash; die sich aus langen und unzusammenhängenden Grabungskampagnen sowie auch dem Bestreben von Museen, besonders sehenswerte Objekte von bekannten Fundplätzen zu besitzen, ergibt &ndash; die Aufmerksamkeit auf dieses Thema zu lenken. Der hieraus erwachsende Ansatz ist die Notwendigkeit der Sondierung von Möglichkeiten zur Wiedereingliederung von Objekten, die weit verstreut und völlig ihres Kontexts beraubt sein können, in unsere Datenbasis.

Die Tellsiedlung von Tószeg-Laposhalom (Ungarn) wird hier unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Grabung von 1927 als Fallstudie genutzt. Dieses Beispiel ist aus verschiedenen Gründen von besonderer Wichtigkeit: Einerseits ist Tószeg eine bronzezeitliche Fundstelle von europäischem Rang. Weiterhin ist es ein gutes Exempel für einen Fundplatz mit zahlreichen Grabungskampagnen und vielen beteiligten Teams. Zudem war die Kampagne des Jahres 1927, die durch die Korrespondenz zwischen den Partnern dokumentiert ist, V. G. Childe's erste Grabung; und die dabei erzielten Ergebnisse spielten eine Schlüsselrolle in seiner mitteleuropäischen Bronzezeit-Chronologie.

*Schlüsselbegriffe:* Childe, Museumssammlungen, Tószeg, ungarische Bronzezeit