The Vienna "Kulturkreislehre":

Significant Early Attempts to Combine Ethnology and Prehistory for a Universal Historiography

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Abstract. – This study examines the cooperation between representatives of ethnology and prehistory in Vienna in the period from 1910 to 1960. The focus is on the theory of cultural circles conceived by the two priest ethnologists Wilhelm Schmidt and Wilhelm Koppers, which the prehistorian Oswald Menghin applied to prehistory for the first time in 1931. However, the parallelisation of prehistoric and ethnological cultures was methodologically controversial. Fundamental discussions led to fractures and new alliances. Koppers entered into an alliance of convenience with V. Gordon Childe to combat the Nazi doctrine of race from an ethnological and prehistoric perspective. Robert Heine Geldern developed a migration theory about the prehistory of Southeast Asia based on the work of Menghin and the Austronesian language family introduced by Schmidt. In the postwar period, the cultural circles theory was abandoned in Vienna and a universal-historical approach was developed, which also included advanced civilisations ("high cultures") and prehistory. [*Vienna school of ethnology, history of anthropology, Wilhelm Koppers, V. Gordon Childe, diffusionism, Austronesian migration, Robert Heine-Geldern*]

Introduction

The Vienna school of ethnology linked the "cultural circle theory" with prehistory in order to lend more credibility to the ethnological "primordial cultures" (*Urkulturen*) that they postulated. With his monumental work "World History of the Stone Age" (*Die Weltgeschichte der Steinzeit*) in 1931, the Austrian prehistorian Oswald Menghin tried to accomplish synthesis and thus set new standards for cultural-historical ethnology. However, the parallelization of prehistoric and ethnological cultures was methodologically contestable and led to fundamental discussions between representatives

of ethnology and prehistory. A separate section is devoted to Southeast Asia, which became a key region of ethnology and prehistory in Vienna through Robert Heine-Geldern. This study reflects on the most important stages of this collaboration in the period from 1910 to 1960.[1]

Prehistoric Hypotheses: Wood and Bone Cultures

When the German cultural-historical method was founded in ethnology in the first decade of the 20th century, the field of prehistory was weakly developed outside Europe. Systematic approaches were, as Fritz Graebner stated, "only available in North America and Japan" (1911: 74).

In order to achieve a relative chronology for the cultural strata in the respective regions of the earth, the integration of prehistory was the "main demand for the future" (ibid.: 75) for cultural-historical ethnology. Father Wilhelm Schmidt, the founder of the Viennese "Kulturkreislehre" in 1912, also correctly identified a "local limitation of contemporary prehistory", i.e. that prehistory could not provide objects made of easily perishable materials, such as tools made of wood and all wickerwork products (Schmidt and Koppers 1924: 108). He thus stated that Graebner's demand to integrate prehistory into cultural-historical ethnology was hardly possible at that time.

To address this research gap on the prehistoric side, Schmidt developed far-reaching prehistoric hypotheses that were discussed until the 1950s and sometimes led to heated debates. As is well-known, Schmidt further developed the cultural circles conceived regionally by Leo Frobenius, Bernhard Ankermann, and Fritz Graebner and connected them within universal history with small-scale hunter-gatherer groups, which he grouped together as "Pygmies." He noticed a common feature: Pygmies used neither stone nor metal tools to make bows and arrows. "The Paleo and 'Eolithic' Ages," according to Schmidt, must have already been preceded by a "wood and bone or shell age" (Schmidt 1910: 107f.). From this Schmidt drew the conclusion that the recent Pygmy peoples were representatives of the oldest

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human *Urkultur* (ibid.: 280, 304), which he also linked to the idea that the earliest forms of religious belief were monotheistic.

Based on these hypotheses, Schmidt (1915–1916: 607) postulated a new theory on nomadism, which he further developed together with his student Wilhelm Koppers (Schmidt and Koppers 1924: 506, 512). The theory assumed that the domestication of herd animals had its starting point in southern Siberia. There, the reindeer had been "made the first herd animal" by primeval hunters analogous to the domestication of the dog. Schmidt and Koppers relied on the research results of the Danish anthropologist and archaeologist Gudmund Hatt (1919), who proved empirically that Samoyed hunters and gatherers not only hunted wild reindeer but also tamed them to use them as lures for other wild animals (Vajda 1968: 59). Schmidt and Koppers, in contrast to Graebner, elevated nomadism to a distinct and worldwide "pastoral cultural circle" derived from hunter-gatherers that played an important role in the development of advanced civilizations or "high cultures" (*Hochkulturen*). The theory on nomadism of the Vienna school was intended to reform the conventional evolutionist so-called "three-stage theory" but also to debunk the studies of Eduard Hahn, who derived nomadism from sedentary agriculture in Mesopotamia and did not regard it as an independent economic form (Hahn 1905: 96f.). As conclusive as this theory of the Vienna school was, it lacked any substantial archaeological evidence.

To a certain extent the Vienna school's nomadic theory also included a consideration of seasonality. For the Asian regions, Koppers emphasized, nomadism did not always follow the same course, which is why a distinction had to be made between summer and winter sojourns. He referred to ethnographic examples of the Turkic Tatars, as documented by Arminius Vámbéry (Schmidt and Koppers 1924: 522). In this elementary sense, a notion of seasonality was indeed intrinsic to the Vienna school's nomadic theory. However, the term transhumance for the economic form in which livestock raising farmers combine their herds' seasonal migrations with their own fixed residences is not yet used in the writings of Schmidt, Koppers, and Menghin. Only Schmidt's disciple Dominik J. Wölfel, who was not an advocate of the cultural circle theory, began to use the term in his detailed descriptions of transhumance in the context of his linguistic-historical research on the Mediterranean region and the Canary Islands (Wölfel 1942: 119; Vajda 1968: 30).

The task of testing these hypotheses with methods of prehistory was undertaken by Oswald Menghin, who was the first to apply the cultural

circle theory and methodology to prehistory (Veit 2013: 189). He came into contact with Schmidt's complex body of theory as early as 1910, but it would be another two decades before he presented his major synthesis "Die Weltgeschichte der Steinzeit" (Menghin 1931) to the public. The book was the first work to approach prehistory in a global perspective. Menghin largely followed Schmidt's conception. He devoted extensive space to the "alithic wood culture" (Menghin 1931: 88f.), from which he derived the three prehistoric cultural circles: bone culture, blade culture, and hand-axe culture (Urban 2021: 246). Menghin also postulated a Bone Age that preceded the Stone Age. He called it the "Protolithic bone culture," which he associated with the Arctic culture area, where bones played an important role in tool making (Menghin 1931: 87, 501f.; Urban 2021: 238). However, he could present no archaeological evidence for this. He also commented succinctly on the reindeer question: "Whether reindeer husbandry occurred, we do not know" (Menghin 1931: 239). Schmidt (1937: 270) stated that Menghin's book had brought the results of ethnology and prehistory "to a certain extent to a common ground," but the central hypotheses of the ethnological cultural circle theory remained unproven.

Interestingly, Menghin's book was very positively received in the USA and Great Britain, in contrast to Germany and Austria. The US anthropologist Franz Boas, for example, immediately adopted (1932 [1928]: 133) Menghin's bone culture in his book "Anthropology and Modern Life," which has been reprinted several times up to the present. British prehistorians like V. Gordon Childe (1931) praised Menghin's work because he had attempted to reconstruct the prehistoric period globally and summarize it in one work. Others such as Robert MacAlister (1931: 202) and Miles C. Burkitt (1931: 845; 1933: vii) were so enthusiastic about Menghin's book that they repeatedly called for an English translation. Obvious deficiencies in content were rarely addressed. South America, for example, was hardly represented, which was actually surprising, since Schmidt (1913) provided the best ethnological justification for the cultural circle theory for this region. Menghin only attempted to fill this regional gap during his "second career" in South America, after he fled to Argentina in April/May 1948 as a wanted war criminal (Kohl and Pérez Gollán 2002: 569, 574).

Beyond the Cultural Circle Theory: Southeast Asia

The constructive integration of prehistory into cultural-historical ethnology did not only concern the theory of cultural circles. It is worth remembering Viennese ethnologist Robert Heine-Geldern, who introduced the term Southeast Asia in 1923 and thus initiated a regional field of subdisciplines. The new term also included archaeological prehistory (Heine-Geldern 1923: 753–766). Subsequently an intensive collaboration with Menghin ensued, which is hardly ever mentioned in the history of research. Their friendly relationship of cooperation went so far that Heine-Geldern even passed on essential data he had compiled about Indonesia to Menghin for evaluation. The correspondence with Heine-Geldern's most important archaeological informant Pieter Vincent van Stein Callenfels about the excavation site Guwa Lawa (today Gua Lawa) in Sampung on East Java formed a substantial source of information for Menghin (1931: 128). The significance of van Stein Callenfels' archaeological work is reflected in the fact that Heine-Geldern later dedicated a separate work to him (Heine-Geldern 1945). Thus, Menghin was able to prove his postulated Protolithic bone culture not only for the Arctic region but also for Southeast Asia (Menghin 1931: 128). Conversely, Menghin informed Heine-Geldern about archaeological collections of East Asian materials, which he became acquainted with during his visits to the British Museum in London and to the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities (Östasiatiska museet) in Stockholm (Heine-Geldern 1928: 813; 1932: 594).

This academic cooperation bore fruit despite Menghin's and Heine-Geldern's fundamentally different political and theoretical attitudes. It is difficult to deny, however, that Menghin's work on the Stone Age of East Asia (Menghin 1928) was largely based on Heine-Geldern, who in turn adopted much of Menghin's prehistory. Menghin's tripartite division of paleolithic cultures into hand axe, blade, and bone cultures was transferred to Southeast Asia by Heine-Geldern (1932: 544), as was the term "Quadrangular adze culture" (*Vierkantbeilkultur*) (Heine-Geldern 1945: 139) for the Late Neolithic, which, as Heine-Geldern pointed out, was "borrowed from an oral suggestion by Menghin" (Heine-Geldern 1932: 566). Heine-Geldern's engagement with archaeology also had important repercussions in another interdisciplinary debate of those decades. Schmidt, appropriately, is considered to this day as the researcher who first identified the Austronesian language family. On this linguistic basis and by including prehistory, Heine-Geldern developed a theory of the Austronesian migration.

According to him, it had proceeded in the second millennium B.C. from South China to India and via Laos and Vietnam to the Malay Peninsula and to today's Indonesia, and from there further to Oceania and Madagascar (Heine-Geldern 1932: 576; 1935: 308).

This collaboration also had an impact upon important members of the next generation of ethnologists in Vienna. A first example is Christoph Fürer-Haimendorf, who studied ethnology under Koppers and Heine-Geldern and prehistory under Menghin at the University of Vienna from 1927 to 1931. His ethnological dissertation dealt with the so-called hill tribes of Assam and Northwest Burma. He then became a graduate assistant (*wissenschaftliche Hilfskraft*) to Koppers and in November 1934 his research assistant. During this time, Fürer-Haimendorf was intensively engaged in analyzing the prehistoric archaeology of Australia. His extensive work "On the Prehistory of Australia" ("Zur Urgeschichte Australiens"), which appeared in *Anthropos* in 1936, was intended to fill an important gap in research from the perspective of the theory of cultural circles. Menghin (1931: 109f.) had hardly addressed this region in his *Weltgeschichte*. However, Fürer-Haimendorf (1932: 629; 1936: 7, 31, 436, 449) largely followed Heine-Geldern's theses regarding certain Neolithic finds on the settlement history of Australia. It was also Heine-Geldern who convinced Fürer-Haimendorf (1990: 6) to henceforth make India and no longer Australia his field of research (Macfarlane and Turin 1996: 548). This career plan worked out: in 1935 Fürer-Haimendorf received a one-year Rockefeller Fellowship, which enabled him to conduct his first field research among the Naga of Assam, along the north-eastern frontier of India.

Another example is the U.S. anthropologist Edwin M. Loeb, who conducted ethnological field research in Sumatra in 1926 and 1927. His book "Sumatra. Its People and History" (Loeb 1935) was published in January 1935 by the Institute of Ethnology at the University of Vienna, and Heine-Geldern (1935) contributed the archaeological part to it. Research on prehistory in Sumatra was continued in Vienna, above all by Frederic Martin Schnitger. He was born in Java in 1912 but grew up in Holland, where he began Oriental studies in Leiden. In 1936, he moved to Vienna and graduated from the University of Vienna in January 1937 with a degree in ethnology. His dissertation, "A Contribution to the Archaeology and Cultural History of Sumatra" ("Ein Beitrag zur Archäologie und Kulturgeschichte von Sumatra"), was supervised by Koppers and Menghin (Schnitger 1937a; Anderl and Mittersakschnöller 2021: 698). In terms of content, however, it drew on the thesis of Heine-Geldern, who had postulated and elaborated external

cultural-historical influences from China and India for the megalithic cultures on the island of Nias. The study of the megalithic cultures on Nias was also quite revealing from an ethnological point of view, as these ancient stone objects occupied a central place in the festivals and rituals of the islanders. Schnitger examined the cultural heritage of the megaliths on Sumatra in 1935 and 1936 and supported the insightful thesis of Heine-Geldern, who had never traveled to the region, through actual field research. His dissertation was published in English in 1937 in the Leiden-based journal *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie* (Schnitger 1937b). It is considered to be the first dissertation on the archaeology of Sumatra (Anderl and Mittersakschnöller 2021: 698). Schnitger's best-known book, "Forgotten Kingdoms in Sumatra" (1939), was the one intended for a wider public, to which Fürer-Haimendorf contributed an appendix on the prehistoric archaeology of Assam (Fürer-Haimendorf 1939). Both authors followed Heine-Geldern's thesis about the common origin of megalithic culture in Southeast Asia and India. While Fürer-Haimendorf continued his anthropological career first in India and then in Great Britain with an increasingly functionalist orientation (Gingrich 2021: 1607), Schnitger died a presumably violent death in the Mauthausen concentration camp in 1945, shortly before the end of the Second World War.

Fractures and New Alliances

As mentioned before, Menghin became acquainted with the cultural circle theory through Schmidt. However, it was Koppers (1931: 223) who had introduced Menghin to this theory in the summer of 1918. The academic relationship between the two was marked by a long-standing collaboration, but it ended abruptly in 1931 and henceforth lay in ruins. The trigger was Koppers' book review of Menghin's "Weltgeschichte der Steinzeit." It contained twenty-one pages and showed that Koppers did not agree at all with Menghin's views. He claimed that the adaptation of the theory of cultural circles to prehistory had been done too hastily because the ethnological cultural circles themselves were still too uncertain. The main point of Koppers' criticism concerned Menghin's positioning on the so-called "Indo-European question" (Koppers 1931: 238–241). In his very influential work, Menghin advocated the Northern thesis (Rebay-Salisbury 2011: 48), which was incompatible with the ethnological theory of cultural circles (Schmidt 1935: 139f.).

Menghin saw Koppers as the main representative of the Vienna school of ethnology and had not expected such a negative review from him. After the publication of the book review in *Anthropos* in June 1931, he communicated his disappointment to Fritz Kern, a German medievalist with whom he had a close friendship:

> It was a mistake, after all, that I cast the book before swine, that is, before the German academic public, instead of having it published in English, as I initially intended
> (Bonn University Archives, Fritz Kern papers 11B; Menghin to Kern, June 15, 1931; translation by the author).

Koppers' criticism was also followed by other negative reviews from prehistorians in Germany (Jacob-Friesen 1932). At this point Menghin turned away from political Catholicism. His first political activities in connection with the NSDAP can be dated to 1923 (Obermair 2024: 143). He maintained them even though National Socialism had been banned from legalized party politics in Austria since June 1933. For Koppers, whose assistant Fritz Flor was arrested in January 1934 for National Socialist activities (and dismissed from the University of Vienna a few months later) (Koll 2021: 316), further collaboration with Menghin was no longer possible.

At the same time, Koppers sought an alliance with the British prehistorian V. Gordon Childe, who also advocated a diffusionist concept of culture and, like Koppers, rejected the extreme position advocated by Grafton Elliot Smith and William J. Perry (Brami 2019: 325). Childe held a materialist worldview while being an explicit opponent of National Socialism. Between October 1933 and March 1934, Childe published five articles in which he explicitly attacked the racist ideology of the Nazi state (Díaz-Andreu 2009: 97f.; Meheux 2023). Childe was particularly critical of the political instrumentalization of Gustav Kossinna's writings on prehistory, which were elevated to a new guideline for teaching history in German schools in a decree issued by Wilhelm Frick, the Nazi minister of the interior (Childe 1934). Here the fundamental agreement between Koppers and Childe becomes apparent, since the "Nordic"-oriented theory of cultural circles advocated by Kossinna had been explicitly rejected by Graebner (1911: 76) and the Vienna school of ethnology (Schmidt 1935: 137f.; Koppers 1959: 111).

The first personal meeting between Koppers and Childe took place in July 1934, at the First World Congress of Anthropology and Ethnology in London. Koppers gave the lecture "The Indo-European Question in the Light of Historical Ethnology" and argued that the origin of the Indo-Eu-

ropeans was to be found on the southern Russian steppes. Childe, who was sitting in the audience, supported Koppers' "Eastern thesis" (*Ostthese*) (Koppers 1934: 185–187; 1935: 2). Childe soon had the opportunity to position himself explicitly as a sympathizing affiliate of the Vienna school of ethnology. The well-known German "race theorist" Hans F. K. Günther (1934: 233) held that Indo-Europeans were to be equated with the origin of the Nordic race and polemicized against Koppers for advocating the Eastern thesis. Childe (1935: 235) then disavowed Günther in June 1935 as "the leading representative of the anthropological creed of contemporary Germany." Referring to Koppers, he clarified that the claimed traces of the Nordic race among the "Aryan-speaking" peoples of Asia were not archaeologically verifiable (ibid.: 236).

When it became apparent that a commemorative publication (*Festschrift*) for Herman Hirt (Arntz 1936), the leading Indo-Europeanist in Nazi Germany, was planned to support and expand the Northern thesis with the methodology of cultural history and anthropology with over forty contributions, Koppers and eight colleagues decided to publish a refutation. This refutation was to clarify and strengthen the Eastern thesis. Among the authors was V. Gordon Childe, with whom Koppers had corresponded in advance. The concluding sentence of Childe's essay, "The Antiquity of Nordic Culture," read as follows:

> If Indogermanen really be the agents in the diffusion of the stone battle-axe, they cannot have started from Denmark but must have arrived there quite late in their wanderings (Childe 1936: 530).

Battle-axes and corded pottery were generally considered to be guide fossils for the Indo-European migration, whose origin Childe did not locate in northern Europe, as the representatives of the Northern thesis claimed. Koppers (1936) dealt in his contribution with the cultural comparison of the inner-Asian widespread horse cult and the horse sacrifice complex, which he traced back culturally to Turko-Altaic or Turko-Mongolian groups, where he also placed the center of origin of the oldest horse herders. Despite fundamentally different political views, the collaboration between Childe and Koppers was intense and can be understood as an alliance of convenience in the context of National Socialism.

The view that the origin of Indo-Europeans was to be sought in the southern Russian steppes was diametrically opposed to the racial doctrines of the Nazi state. Both Schmidt and Koppers were dismissed from the University of Vienna in 1938 in the wake of the Nazi seizure of power (Gin-

grich 2005: 110; Rohrbacher 2021: 1490f.). On the politically highly charged "Indo-European question," Menghin (1936) did not support Koppers or Childe but rather another emerging alliance that advocated Herman Hirt's Nazi Northern thesis. While Schmidt, Koppers and Heine-Geldern had to go into exile in 1938, Menghin became Minister of Education in Vienna, and under his leadership numerous dismissals at universities took place until the end of May 1938 (Ash 2017: 55f.; Urban 2021: 267f.; Obermair 2024: 268f.).

End of the Cultural Circle Theory, Separate Ways, and High Culture Studies

In contrast to Koppers, Schmidt devoted himself intensively to prehistory during his exile in Switzerland. Besides the prehistoric Wood and Bone Age, he likewise postulated a prehistoric Bamboo and Antler Age based on ethnological findings (Schmidt 1942: 30). After the end of the Second World War, prehistorians and anthropologists increasingly criticized the Vienna cultural circle theory. The German prehistorian Günter Smolla, for example, reviewed the wood and bone culture postulated jointly by Schmidt and Menghin and concluded that there had never been an "alithic period" in human cultural history. He did concede that wood had most likely been used from the beginning, but the oldest verifiable human tools were made of stone (Smolla 1953: 99). The theory on nomadism of the Vienna school was also increasingly shaken. For example, the Austrian ethnologist Karl Jettmar (1952), citing Soviet Russian studies, pointed out that reindeer herding was a relatively recent phenomenon and thus stood not at the beginning but at the end of the series of animal domestications.

Despite the persistent criticism, which also came from the closest circle of his dissertation students (Hermanns 1949), Schmidt (1951) stuck to his theory on nomadism and defended the cultural circle theory until the end of his life in 1954 (Haekel 1956: 23; Gingrich 2005: 141). Koppers, however, reacted differently and opened himself to criticism. According to his own statements, he had already had doubts about the correctness of the theory on nomadism in 1937 at the Second Turkish History Congress, in Istanbul, since it could not be reconciled with the "facts of prehistory" (Koppers 1959: 121). In June 1952, at an international anthropological congress in New York, he revoked the "pastoralist culture circle" and with it an essential aspect of the cultural circle theory (Koppers 1952b: 79). However, he did not retract the overall conception until after the death of his teacher, and af-

ter it had been recanted at the Institute of Ethnology by his successor, Josef Haekel, at the first Wartenstein Symposium, in 1958 (Koppers 1959: 121; Pusman 2008: 268). Koppers continued to adhere to the cultural-historical method of ethnology as well as to the possibility of providing "ethnological proof of God" on an empirical basis.

Fig. 1: Meeting of the Conseil Permanent in the Senate Hall of the University of Vienna, from left to right: Wilhelm Schmidt, Robert Heine-Geldern (both seated), and Wilhelm Koppers (standing), Fourth International Congress of Anthropology and Ethnology, September 1–8, 1952

(Source: private archive Stephanie Wiesbauer)

Against this background, which Wernhart (2022: 188) aptly described as "rearguard action," Koppers attempted to redefine the relationship between prehistory and ethnology in numerous articles in the 1950s (Koppers 1951a–b; 1952a–c; 1953; 1957). Thus he continued his criticism of Menghin from 1931 and distinguished between the possibility of free and bound parallelization. In contrast to bound parallelization, free parallelization allows the ethnological interpretation of prehistoric finds without a direct genetic connection. He saw illustrative examples of genetic parallelization among the Yámana (or Yahgan) in South America and the Pueblo in North

America (Koppers 1951b: 50f.; 1953: 4). Koppers' differentiation was taken up by some prehistorians, as the example of the German prehistorian Karl Narr (1955) shows. Koppers, however, went one step further. At the Fourth World Congress of Anthropology and Ethnology, in Vienna in September 1952, he argued for a "historical-ethnological proof" in which prehistory should not play a decisive role (Koppers 1953: 16).

Most prehistorians regarded Koppers' demand as an inadmissible intrusion into their field of research. In particular, Richard Pittioni (1952: 288), part-time professor and chair of prehistory at the University of Vienna since 1946 (Friedmann 2011: 73), rejected the "fundamental justification of bound parallelism." He referred to the great temporal difference between prehistoric and ethnological cultural forms, which would prohibit a direct "correlation." All recent cultural forms, he argued, however "primitive" (*urtümlich*) they might appear, arose only after the Stone or Ceramic Age (Pittioni 1952: 290). The historical depth that ethnology can reckon with is limited to a maximum of 10,000 years and is thus relatively small (Pittioni 1954: 82). Therefore, he introduced the temporal term "ethnologic" (*Ethnologikum*) to distinguish ethnological from prehistoric cultural forms (Pittioni 1952: 290). For Pittioni, this resulted in an "absolute independence of prehistory" as a historical discipline (ibid.: 289), a demand that also manifested itself on an institutional level through the "prehistoric working group" he founded within the Anthropological Society in Vienna (Pittioni 1950). Pittioni abruptly terminated ongoing attempts to continue collaboration between prehistory and ethnology as suggested by Koppers.

In the further course of this interdisciplinary debate, Koppers limited his approach to the field of high culture research (*Hochkulturforschung*) of the Late Neolithic. He argued that "genetic links of prehistoric and ethnological cultures" could be found where high cultural developments "have overgrown and destroyed conditions even less" (Koppers 1953: 3). With this postulate, Koppers took up the research of Heine-Geldern, who methodologically combined high culture research with socio-cultural anthropology and archaeology. Before Heine-Geldern returned to Vienna from US exile in 1949, he and US archaeologist Gordon F. Ekholm developed a transpacific diffusion theory, according to which seafaring groups brought elements of Asian "high cultures" from East and South Asian coastal areas across the Pacific into the Andean region and Mesoamerica from 700 B.C. onward (Heine-Geldern 1954; 1955). This refuted the common view of the independent emergence of the American high cultures (Dostal 2002: 451). Koppers and Heine-Geldern now jointly argued that the emergence of the

high cultures of Egypt, the Mediterranean, China, Japan, India, and Southeast Asia had a unified starting point in the Near East. This monogenetic approach in high culture studies was seen as a universal-historical counter to Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, and Karl Jaspers, whose approaches to the philosophy of history assumed multiple and independent centers of high cultures (Koppers 1957).

Summary

This article can be summarized in the following four points: 1) The Vienna school of ethnology developed a number of hypotheses about prehistory that could only be verified by a collaboration between ethnology and prehistory. Among the central hypotheses was the assumption of an alithic Wood or Bone Age that preceded the Stone Age. Equally important was the assumption of a monogenetic origin of the domestication of herd animals, which originated in southern Siberia and spread from there across the globe. Despite great efforts, prehistory has not succeeded in finding material to prove the hypotheses. The nomadic theory of the Vienna school also included seasonality for the Asian regions. However, the term transhumance was not used. It is only found in the works of Schmidt's disciple Dominik J. Wölfel, who, like Robert Heine-Geldern, was not a supporter of the cultural circle theory. 2) Menghin's collaboration with Heine-Geldern, a Viennese Southeast Asia specialist, brought greater success. As could be shown, Heine-Geldern in cooperation with Menghin developed a migration theory on the prehistory of Southeast Asia, based on the Austronesian language family as introduced by Schmidt. This interdisciplinary research was taken up by Heine-Geldern's students and continued through intensive fieldwork in Assam and Sumatra. 3) After a long and intensive collaboration, disagreements arose between Koppers and Menghin in 1931, which led to the end of their collaboration in the mid-1930s. The decisive factor was their different positions on the origin of the Indo-Europeans, which was highly charged politically in the context of National Socialism. Until now, it was little known that Koppers entered into a short-term alliance of convenience with the British prehistorian V. Gordon Childe in order to combat Nazi racial doctrine from the perspective of ethnology and prehistory. 4) The progress in prehistory did not confirm the cultural circle theory. On the contrary, in the early 1950s, Koppers had to abandon the pastoral cultural circle due to facts of prehistory. A few years later the whole

cultural circle theory was revoked. In cooperation with Heine-Geldern, a universal-historical approach in high culture research succeeded, including prehistory. In conclusion, it can be noted that the hypotheses of the cultural circle theory have significantly stimulated prehistory. Whether the stone cultures were actually preceded by wood or bone cultures also seems possible from today's perspective but can be neither verified nor falsified (Urban 2021: 237).

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