



BRUCE GRAHAM TRIGGER (1937-2006)

Bruce Trigger excelled in multiple fields of research and analysis of many cultures. In terms of culture, his foci from the outset centred on Nubian Egyptian on the one hand, and Canadian Amerindian on the other. His first academic publication investigated 'The destruction of Huronia,' (*Transactions of the Royal Canadian Institute* 33.1.68 [1960] 14-45), and he continued to write in both disciplines simultaneously for virtually the rest of his life. At the same time, and whilst also teaching full-time at McGill University in Montréal from 1964, he also developed to an incredibly high standard what has become the best known of his three 'hats' – that of historian, theologian and critic of archaeological theories and developments in their various manifestations worldwide. Within this last discipline he produced one of his several magnum opus and unquestionably his most influential publication, *A History of Archaeological Thought*, in 1989. His second edition of the volume, published in 2006 only months before his death from cancer on 1 December, fully justifies the term 'revised.' It is indeed "in many ways a new book," as noted by Norman Hammond in his excellent obituary of Trigger on 7 December 2006 in *The Times*.

Bruce Trigger was born in Preston, Ontario, on 18 June 1937. Although excited by ancient Egypt from boyhood, he had from the beginning consciously decided to study in departments of Anthropology rather than Egyptology, as the latter "focused mainly on philological and art historical approaches" that he himself declined to do. He

obtained his B.A. in Anthropology at the University of Toronto in 1959, and his Ph.D. in Anthropology at Yale University in 1964, the latter funded by a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship award. His thesis "sought to trace the changing size and distribution of population of Nubia from the beginnings of agriculture in that region to the Moslem conquests



Bruce G. Trigger, photographed by his daughter Rosalyn, whom I thank for allowing its publication here.

of the 1500s [and] sought to prove that most changes in population size and distribution could be accounted for by four variables: environmental changes, changes in agricultural technology, changing patterns in warfare and trade," and was co-supervised by William Kelly Simpson and the New World archaeologist Michael Coe. During this time he also served as chief archaeologist for the 1962 Yale/Pennsylvania excavations at Arminna West in Egyptian Nubia directed by Simpson, and as staff archaeologist with the

1963-1964 Oriental Institute Sudan Expedition, both for the UNESCO campaign and his only Old World fieldwork. He accepted a teaching position at the Department of Anthropology of Northwestern University in Illinois for 1963-1964, then returned to Canada when he was hired by McGill University's Department of Anthropology in Montréal, Québec in 1964.

He remained at McGill for the remainder of his career and his life, by personal choice although repeatedly offered more lucrative positions by more 'prestigious' universities elsewhere, and was made Professor Emeritus in 2006 shortly before his death. His wife Barbara Welch, herself an academic in the



field of Caribbean economic and physical geography, died only seven weeks later of heart failure on 18 January 2007. Married in 1968, they are survived by their two daughters, Isabel and Rosalyn.

He often was the invited, guest or main speaker at multiple academic conferences and sponsored lectures throughout his career, and has been the recipient of numerous academic awards and other honours: Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada from 1976 and recipient of its Innis-Gérin Medal in 1985, recipient of the Québec government's Prix Léon-Gérin award in 1991, Officer of the National Order of Québec in 2001, and Officer of the Order of Canada in 2005, amongst many others not mentioned here. Perhaps his most cherished honour was his adoption in 1989 into the Great Turtle Clan of the Wendat (Huron) Confederacy, with the name Nyemea. His research was the subject of a full session at the 2004 Society for American Archaeology (SAA) conference, which was published in expanded form as *The Archaeology of Bruce Trigger: Theoretical Empiricism* in October 2006 as a volume outlining his influence in, almost exclusively, New World archaeology. He outlined his own academic development and career in a reflective and insightful interview by his former student, Eldon Yellowhorn ('Bruce Trigger on his Life's Work in Archaeology: An Interview,' *Journal of Social Archaeology* 6.3, 307-327), from which his own descriptions of his academic streamlining and thesis goals have been quoted above.

Trigger published his first book, *History and Settlement in Lower Nubia* (1965), a revision of his 1964 Ph.D. thesis, wearing the hat of what would later be called a 'Nubiologist.' His first and only site report, *The Late Nubian Settlement at Arminna West* (1967) is the direct result of his UNESCO fieldwork, as is also *The Meroitic Funerary Inscriptions from Arminna West* (1970). Ironically, given his remarks concerning Egyptological academic emphases, virtually all his other early Nubian articles as well as the occasional later paper discuss aspects of the Meroitic language, and he also edited three issues of the *Meroitic Newsletter/Bulletin d'Informations méroïtiques* (1, 5 and 9). His far more general volume, *Nubia Under the Pharaohs* (1976) for Thames and Hudson's wide-ranging 'Ancient People and Places'

series, considered early Nubian development from the Palaeolithic through into the Napatan period, explicitly "treat[ing] Nubia as a case study of the social, economic, and cultural development of the adjacent hinterland of an ancient civilization"(p. 9). All but the first of these four volumes, it may be noted, deal with distinctly different research data, foci and methodologies as well as different periods of Nubian cultural development. He brought *History and Settlement* up to date at the 1980 Nubian conference published in *Meroitica* 7 (1984), but Trigger's interest in Nubia already had waned by this time and he had returned to his long-standing interest in Egyptology from an anthropological rather than the art historical or philological viewpoints he had earlier eschewed as an incoming undergraduate. The lack of post-UNESCO progression of Nubian studies over the 1970s and early 1980s undoubtedly was a factor in his declining interest. He had been so very positive of future prospects in his glowing 1978 *Antiquity* review of W.Y. Adams' theoretical directions and perspectives of Nubian cultural history in *Nubia: Corridor to Africa* (1977), envisioning further disciplinary progress that, in Nubian studies, simply did not occur until much later. Nonetheless, few other than he would have been able to pen his thoughtful contribution on such a sensitive subject as 'racial identity' to Brooklyn Museum's *Africa in Antiquity* exhibition that year. Nubia also loomed large in another essay published in 1978 in which he compared and contrasted 'The Inter-Societal Transfer of Institutions' in Christian Nubia, the Kushite state, and Anglo-Saxon England. For Nubian studies, 1978 essentially was his last 'hurrah.' Thereafter, with the exception of a few contributions to *Festschriften* honouring friends and colleagues and the occasional use of Nubia as a case study, he maintained his hand in Nubia only through invited reviews.

Switching to his Nile Valley Egyptological hat in the late 1970s, he is best known for his contribution to *Ancient Egypt: A Social History* (1983), where he outlined Egypt's development from earliest times through to the end of the Early Dynastic period and set the scene for his co-authors Barry Kemp, David O'Connor and Alan Lloyd to continue. The first three of these four papers, including Trigger's, already had appeared the previous year in the first



The Cambridge History of Africa volume. After nearly a quarter-century, it remains an insightful read. His (surprisingly) first *direct* venture into non-Nubian Egyptology, a 1979 essay investigating 'Egypt and the Comparative Study of Ancient Civilizations,' for a small and lamentably under-appreciated volume entitled *Egyptology and the Social Sciences: Five Studies*, already had prepared the way for Trigger's use of Egyptian civilisation for one of his main theoretical interests stated explicitly in his title. He developed the theme for his last book to focus specifically on the Nile Valley, *Early Civilizations: Ancient Egypt in Context* (1993), the direct result of a series of four lectures he presented the previous year at the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Psychology at the American University in Cairo. In large measure, this volume is the genesis from which he then developed his monumental *Understanding Early Civilizations* (2003), as he himself noted in its preface (p. vi). He repeatedly discusses and integrates various periods of ancient Egyptian civilisation over varying lengths of text, whilst Nubia is barely mentioned and its people, period and place names do not even appear in the volume's detailed index.

Virtually all discussion generated about Trigger and his profound influence on the discipline of archaeology has focused with much justification firstly on his role as 'historian and critic of archaeological development' and secondarily on his North American, especially Canadian, research. His Egyptian and Nubian contributions have been far less influential within their disciplines, for two reasons. Firstly, until much more recently when compared to his other research foci, the disciplines themselves have not ventured very far into current (then and now) methodological resources, theories and outlook. We have been – and very much still are, although attitudes are changing – far more 'traditional' in our approaches to the archaeology of the Nile Valley than archaeologists concentrating in other regions of the world, including and especially North America. Egyptology and Nubiology are not normally found in academic departments teaching from Trigger's – and, in its various forms, the 'new' archaeology's – constantly evolving perspectives (the two are not, by any means, the same). Indeed, only recently have we even considered investigating

the archaeology of areas beyond the Nile Valley itself. And, secondly, Trigger's Egyptological and Nubiological publications themselves are for the most part more 'traditional' than his writings elsewhere, and most often are published in journals and other volumes most of our departments are unlikely to have obtained for their libraries and our students unlikely to browse in libraries where they are found.

It would seem more than appropriate, at this time and for this journal, to include a bibliography of Bruce Trigger's *direct* contributions to Nubiology and Egyptology, as many are not found in mainstream publications for the disciplines. Most I cannot find cited elsewhere in Egyptological or Nubiological literature, whilst those I have found extensively cited there inevitably are his both more 'accessible' and 'traditional' publications. What follows below is but a small portion of his 50 years of academic publication, in order to provide an immediately accessible collation for future consumption in our field. His complete bibliography, from which this list has been compiled, may be found in R.F. Williamson and M.S. Bisson, eds., *The Archaeology of Bruce Trigger: Theoretical Imperialism*. Montréal/Kingston, 2006, pp. 259-288.

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