Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society

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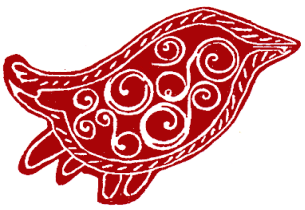

Title: Review: "The archaeology of Ireland", by R. A. S. Macalister. 2nd edition, revised. (London: Methuen, 1949)

Author: M. J. O'K.

Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society, 1950, Vol. 55, No. 181, page(s) 68

Published by the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society

Digital file created: November 6, 2015

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No. 22 includes 'Bishop Nicholas French and the second Ormonde peace, 1648–9.' By Rev. Professor Patrick J. Corish, B.A., D.D. ; 'Sir Robert Peel's Select Irish Library.' By Professor Norman D. Palmer, Ph.D.

No. 23 'The identification of some pestilences recorded in the Irish Annals.' By Sir William P. MacArthur, M.D., F.R.C.P., D.Sc. 'Writers of the Nation, 1842–5'. By Kevin M. McGrath, B.A.

No. 24 'Sidelights on the chronology of St. Patrick.' By Ludwig Bieler, Ph.D. ; 'The request of the Irish for English Law, 1277–80.' By Jocelyn Otway-Ruthven, M.A., Ph.D. 'Sharman Crawford on the repeal question, 1847.' By Brian A. Kennedy, M.A.

It is regretted that beyond this meagre notice of the contents of each number space does not permit even a limited review of these articles. Members who are interested in any phase of Irish history which has been touched upon would be well advised to join the Irish Historical Society, the treasurer of which is A. J. O'Connell, M.Comm., University College, Dublin.

J.T.C.

The Archaeology of Ireland. By R. A. S. Macalister. Second edition, revised and rewritten. Pp. xiii+386 ; XVI plates, 39 text figures. Methuen, London. 1949. 30/–

Since this book was published the death of its author has occurred. Professor Macalister, in his 80th year, has passed on and his going leaves a vacant place in the ranks of Irish archaeology which will never be filled, for there could never be another quite like him. Previous to his appointment as professor of Celtic archaeology at University College, Dublin, Dr Macalister had built up a brilliant reputation on his work in Palestine. When he took up this appointment in Dublin he threw himself wholeheartedly into his new duties and it is true to say that for many years he *was* Irish archaeology. There was no department of Irish studies that he did not fearlessly enter and he did not hesitate to cross swords with established authorities in these other fields.

His publications were numerous and all were written in his own inimitable style, full of freshness and vigour ; his books and papers are packed with provocative ideas. His inventive genius and soaring imagination often led him to cast off the scientific shackles of caution and carefully qualified statement, and enabled him to clothe fully and to his own satisfaction (if to no one else's) the bare bones of archaeology. If, as a result, Irish prehistoric man sometimes appeared somewhat overdressed, perhaps that was no great harm.

In 1928 there appeared his *Archaeology of Ireland*, a book which has been used by all who since have studied Irish archaeology. It is a mine of information and is full of valuable references to the work of others. It has for long been out of print and hence this new edition. It is much more than a new edition, it is a complete re-write and it incorporates much of the information brought to light by Professor Macalister himself and many others during the intervening twenty-one years.

So much has been accomplished in those few years that it is obvious that the time has not yet come for anyone to attempt a general survey of Irish archaeology. Almost every excavation provides new evidence which necessitates a re-orientation of some view held previously and this will continue to happen for a very long time to come. In writing his new book Professor Macalister was aware of all this, but it is clear that even he, prodigious reader and worker though he was, was unable to keep in touch with all the latest developments. The attempt at a conspectus at this juncture could therefore not possibly succeed.

Few scholars will follow him in his revolutionary attempt to cast overboard the generally accepted outline basis of Irish prehistoric chronology ; and his division of the time covered by the neolithic, bronze age and early iron age periods into proto- deutero- and epimegalithic, will find few adherents. His treatment of the problems connected with the Beaker Folk is likewise unsatisfactory at best, and at worst, misleading and dangerous. Some of his assertions on this subject may be correct, but if so, they are right for the wrong reasons ; and not only archaeologists but also students of Celtic languages would be glad of more information in support of the categorical assertion that the Beaker Folk brought the Gaelic language to Ireland.

Throughout, the specialist will question detail after detail and hardly a page will escape a diligent blue pencil. This will do such a reader no harm, but unfortunate indeed will be the plight of the amateur or the student who attempts to introduce himself to Irish archaeology through the medium of this book.

M. J. O'K.

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