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Title: Review: "The Celts: the people who came out of the darkness", by Gerhard Herm (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976)

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the old to the new, would have been helpful but, as pointed out above, this is an extremely difficult task and by no means a clear-cut one at the present state of knowledge.

Ireland is not too well catered for in the main. Sources appear to consist largely of works of a general nature by S. P. Ó Ríordáin (1953) and E. E. Evans (1966) respectively and the newer archaeology as exemplified by excavations in the north of Ireland, in the Boyne valley, in Co. Mayo — in fact, in almost every part of Ireland — are not always noted, certainly not to the same degree as comparable ones in Britain. One of the drawbacks of relying on general sources is that inaccuracies tend to creep in, e.g., the mention of a Class I henge called 'The Lios' at Lough Gur (p. 113). From the description I take this to be Circle B, more commonly known as The Grange Stone Circle or The Great Stone Circle, certainly no henge. The name 'Boyne passage-graves' appears to be applied to all Irish passage-graves (p. 94). Proud as one must be of the Boyne area, I think that the other passage-grave cemeteries of Loughcrew, Carrowkeel and Carrowmore are entitled to retain their individuality.

Understandably, the author is more at home with the British material and one has only to glance at the impressive index, which lists upwards of 500 actual sites, to perceive what a valuable work of reference the book is for those desiring an overall view of the subject. The illustrations are many and are excellent, some of the plates being superb. The work can be recommended wholeheartedly to students of archaeology, whether pursuing the subject at university level or, as many do nowadays, at a more leisured pace for private instruction. Indeed, before having read more than the first few chapters I experienced a pang of regret that such a book had not been available in my own student days, the fare then being, alas, in my memory of it at least, a good deal more indigestible than this very readable volume.

C. O'Kelly

The Celts: The People who Came out of the Darkness by Gerhard Herm. Econ Verlag 1975. English translation 1976. Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London. £6.50.

This account of the Celts is extremely detailed and far-ranging, a good deal more so than the average book on the subject which as a rule begins with the earliest identifiable beginnings of this redoubtable people, perhaps with the battle-axe and urnfield cultures, and ends at the period when Rome, having overcome one set of 'barbarians', is about to succumb to another. The author of the book under review, however, begins long before this, shortly after 5000 BC, in fact, by tracing in some detail the supposed movements of peoples along the dolmen trail to north-western Europe and he ends, anticlimactically, at the Court of King Arthur. This is certainly very good value if quantity were the only criterion since a great deal of interesting information is packed into these prefatory sections, but if the reader is intent on getting to what after all is the nub of the book, the Celts themselves, he might have a justifiable grievance.

Nor are these preliminaries in any kind of ordered sequence. Herr Herm tends to hop disconcertingly between the centuries so that, at one moment one may find oneself on the way to Rome with Hannibal while, a few pages later, one is with Alexander, a century earlier, trudging painfully through the frozen snow towards the Shipka Pass, to use the author's own words (33). For those lacking the author's encyclopaedic knowledge of this era of human history the process is unsettling. At times one cannot but suspect that extraneous details are brought in because they have caught the author's fancy or imagination in the course of his researches, undeniably thorough as the latter undoubtedly are. The Atlantean hypothesis seems to be a case in point. Following Jürgen Spanuth, Herm postulates the existence near present-day Heligoland of the legendary city of Atlantis, centre of a rich civilisation before it was allegedly overwhelmed by earthquake and seismic waves in the fifteenth century BC. "There would remain nothing for those who had survived this "twilight of the Gods" but to search, numbed with cold, for new regions where there was still the warmth to which they were accustomed. They donned their horned helmets, took up their lances . . . . . ., girded the "Germanic hilted-sword", one of the finest weapons ever forged, and went south with their forces." (95).

The extract above brings me to another aspect of the work, the style. While it is perfectly legitimate for him to aim at popularising his subject, many readers may find the author's journalistic style not to their taste in a work such as this, though the sub-title of the book, *The People who Came out of the Darkness*, might have prepared them, as might a glance through the chapter

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heads — *A Roman nightmare, It began on the Volga* — and, a rather apposite one — *Ireland: the Fly in the Amber*. If one does not object to the above, however, and to a certain degree of sensationalism in the way happenings and descriptions are presented there is much of interest and indeed of profit.

The chapters on Ireland (and the same applies throughout the book) follow the well-ploughed furrows of previous writers, carefully avoiding, or perhaps not always being conscious of, the many rocks and pitfalls which strew the Celtic landscape. Herm asserts that there were Celts in Ireland in Hallstatt times and that, in about 300 BC, other tribes entered via Britain, as a result of which the premise that Brythonic was spoken here must be assumed. To allow for the Goidelic element he brings other tribes from Spain, all of which has been heard many times before in linguistic debates. As far as the archaeological record goes not a single one of these visitors, peaceable or otherwise, has left an undeniable grave or oppidum or even a humble dwelling in this country.

These quibbles apart, the book is easy and enjoyable to read and has the considerable merit in many instances of summarizing aspects of the Celts about which whole volumes have been written. One calls to mind Maria Gimbutas's *Bronze Age Cultures in Central and Eastern Europe* which is encapsulated in pp. 77-80 and the Indo-European controversy in Chapter V. For those not concerned with, or not desirous of pursuing, the thorny question of Ireland's involvement in the Celtic migrations, the relevant chapters are very useful and present the orthodox point of view. Arthurian fans will enjoy the final chapter, *The Celtic Court of King Arthur*, although I would not care to claim without due consultation that Professor Alcock would find himself among their number.

There are 13 maps, 24 illustrations, a useful Chronology, a Bibliography (select), an Index (also rather selective) and an attractive dust jacket. All in all, very good value at present-day prices.

C. O'Kelly

A Dictionary of Irish Biography. By Henry Boylan. Gill and Macmillan, Dublin. 1978. pp.385. £11.

One reason for the issuing of this dictionary in 1978 was to preserve a fifty-year rhythm of publication, since it is meant as a successor to Crone's *Dictionary of Irish Biography* published in 1928, which in turn succeeded *Webb's Compendium of Irish Biography* (1878). The present compiler tells us that he has aimed at steering a middle course between the conciseness of Crone and the diffuseness of Webb, and even a casual glance at the pages will show that he has indeed succeeded in producing brief but readable biographies of Irishmen of every period.

A problem faced by Mr. Boylan was deciding who should qualify as 'Irish'. Birth in Ireland was an obvious qualification even if it meant the inclusion of such unavowed Irishmen as the Duke of Wellington and Lord Kitchener. Yet an overseas birth did not disqualify so that Charles Bianconi also gains recognition — to which he undoubtedly has a greater claim than has his successor on the page, one Isaac Bickerstaff, dramatist, who was born in Dublin. It would have been absurd, as pointed out in the introduction, to have excluded Maria Edgeworth, James Connolly, Countess Markievicz or James Larkin on similar grounds. An even greater loss, from the author's point of view, would have been Éamon de Valera, to whom is devoted nine columns of text. (Arthur Griffith rates only two and a half columns, Michael Collins and W.T. Cosgrave one each; even Pearse and Connolly are allotted but a single column apiece).

Again, as the author so rightly indicates, selection of subjects was bound to be personal and subjective to a degree. So a subjective Corkman might be forgiven for the impression that the Dublin connections of Boylan and Webb—Crone was from Belfast—have led to a certain imbalance in favour of the east coast. To take an example, both Ambrose and Bernardo O'Higgins are mentioned in connection with the South American liberation movement, but not Daniel Florence O'Leary, trusted aide of Simon Bolivar. Similarly, Dublin historians such as Ball, Gilbert and Maxwell merit inclusion but one searches in vain for references to Richard Caulfield, to John Windele or, more surprisingly still, to Dr. Charles Smith. One misses also the names of such well-known southern personalities of the national renaissance as Thomas Ashe, Austin Stack Diarmuid Lynch, J.J. Walsh, Mary MacSwiney and Liam Lynch.

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