

KUML



ÅRBOG FOR JYSK ARKÆOLOGISK SELSKAB
1957

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Restoration of passage grave at Tustrup

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V. Gordon Childe and Seán P. Ó Ríordáin.

In 1957 the British Isles suffered the loss of two of their outstanding archaeologists by the death of Professor Gordon Childe in Australia, and that of Professor Seán Ó Ríordáin in Ireland. It is no way derogatory to Ó Ríordáin's memory to say straight away that of course Childe was the greater figure of the two: his stature as a prehistorian was in fact such that one cannot think of his having a counterpart in any country. He was by far the greatest international archaeologist that our science has so far produced, and he contributed in no small way to the development of prehistoric archaeology from an amateur status to that of an academic discipline.

The fact that Childe was an Australian by origin gave him the advantage of being able to view the scene of prehistoric Europe with detachment: he once remarked this in conversation with a Danish archaeologist. Beginning as a classic and a philologist, his Indo-European studies led him to lay the foundations of a systematic knowledge of Central European prehistory, and from there he logically extended his survey to include the Ancient East. In his successive books – *The Dawn of European Civilization*, *The Danube in Prehistory*, *New Light on the Most Ancient East*, and *Prehistoric Migrations in Europe*, he developed a consistent theme which, together with other aspects embodied in such other books as *Man Makes Himself* and *Social Evolution*, found its final concise expression in the posthumous *Prehistory of European Society*. He believed he could perceive, by means of archaeological evidence, a consistent pattern in the development of human societies in the Old World, and it is by his demonstrations of this thesis that he will be best remembered. To the professional archaeologist, however, there is not only this achievement, but Childe's masterly synthesis of archaeological material over a huge field, and his influence in moulding archaeological thought through the concepts of cultures and their inter-relationships, first demonstrated in *The Danube* in 1929.

Childe conducted excavations while he held the Chair of Prehistoric Archaeology at Edinburgh, but he was never really at home in the field. Ó Ríordáin's strength lay not so much in his comparative studies but in his capacity as a field-worker and an excavator. In a long series of campaigns in Ireland he practiced and taught the principles of sound excavation technique in a country where there was much need of reformation in such matters. His work at Cush, and above all at Lough Gur, are enduring memorials to his skill and flair; the Tara excavations, which although in their early stages were already bringing to light the most remarkable evidence bearing on prehistoric and early historic Ireland, were cut short by his death, but will, one hopes, be carried on by those pupils he so brilliantly trained, one of whom now fills the Chair in Dublin which Ó Ríordáin had held since 1943.

But it was not only in Ireland, and as an excavator of exceptional ability, that Ó Ríordáin was known to colleagues. He had wide interests in European prehistory, begun when he was holder of a Travelling Scholarship in Archaeology of the National University when he had just graduated, and at international congresses, and other occasions formal and informal, he acted as the unofficial ambassador for Irish archaeology in no small degree.

Stuart Piggott.