

## V.

NOTICE OF THE DISCOVERY OF AN URN OF STEATITE IN ONE OF FIVE TUMULI EXCAVATED AT CORQUOY, IN THE ISLAND OF ROUSAY, ORKNEY. BY MR GEORGE M. M'CRIE, CORQUOY.

The cluster of mounds explored is situated a few yards to the north west of the farm house of Corquoy, and are locally known as "Manzie's" (or Magnus's) mounds. They have always been considered as burial-places. The measurement of the largest mound (in which the urn was found) was about 50 feet in circumference, and the top  $5\frac{1}{2}$  feet above the surrounding level, but there is no doubt it stood much higher within living memory. The others are smaller. A trench was dug from the north into the centre of the largest mound.

A cist was found almost in the centre of this mound, and at about the level of the surrounding ground. It consisted of a top and bottom stone (flat slabs partly naturally plane at the edges, and partly chipped into form), with four side stones, the whole neatly pieced and cemented with tempered red clay, probably from the Sourin burn some little distance off.



Urn of Steatite (7 inches high).

The stone is of a hard blue nature, unlike any in the *immediate* neighbourhood, but like some to be found on the shores of the island. The cist was oblong in form, placed lengthways to N. and S., and measured inside about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet by 2 feet by  $1\frac{1}{2}$  depth. It was almost wholly filled with clay, ashes, and very minute fragments of bones, which crumbled

to the touch. Marks of fire were visible on the stones, and fragments of what seemed to have been peat were among the contents. In the centre

of the cavity of the cist was the urn. It stood mouth upwards, and was completely filled with clay, bone fragments, &c., of the same kind as outside. The material of the vessel is steatite, heavy and hard, but full of cracks, and rather brittle in parts. It measures  $9\frac{3}{4}$  and 8 inches across the mouth, and stands 7 inches high; the thickness irregular, but averaging  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch; weight about 3 lbs. About one-third of the base was wanting when found, and a small portion of one of the sides has given way, but the piece can be accurately fitted in, being preserved.

The remaining mounds contained stone cists similar to the foregoing. Two of them were almost square in shape, and the smallest of all measured only 12 inches by 6 inches, and was without the clay cement. No urns were found or remains of any kind, except comminuted bones, and the smallness of the fragments of bone prevented anything being ascertained regarding their character. One small piece of what is apparently a frontal bone has been preserved.

It may be mentioned that in several of the mounds the side stones were buttressed by irregular blocks, more firmly to support the weight of the earth above.

[Mr Anderson stated that this appeared to have been a small cemetery of those peculiarly interesting interments which in his paper on the "Relics of the Viking Period in Scotland" he had correlated with a special class of interments in Norway of the later Iron Age. They are interments after cremation, and they differ from Celtic interments in having the burnt bones deposited in an urn of stone instead of the large ornate vessel of baked clay which is the invariable rule in Scotland. These stone urns, both in Norway and in this country, are usually of steatite. Some are of large size, one now in the museum being 20 inches high and  $22\frac{1}{2}$  in diameter. They often bear the marks of the chisel or knife with which they have been scooped out, but occasionally, as in the case of this one from Rousay, they have been smoothed and polished. The isles of Orkney and Shetland (which, as is well known, were colonised by the Norwegians in the later period of their Paganism) are the only

localities on this side of the North Sea in which this class of burial has yet been found. They are therefore but little known, and up to this time no relics of distinctive character have been found with them except the urns. It is unfortunate that we have no detailed accounts of the phenomena of the burials, most of which have been investigated more with reference to the objects they have contained than to the phenomena they may have presented. In all probability the examination of these mounds during their excavation by some one who knew the differences between the phenomena of Celtic and Scandinavian burials might have detected evidence not obvious to the unskilled eye, and thus settled the question].

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