

III.

NOTICE OF A SHORT CIST AT FRAGA, SCATNESS, SHETLAND.

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On the promontory of Scatness, at Fraga, just on the other side of the voe from Jarlshof, a burial cist was discovered a number of years ago. From information received from the owner of the croft, Mr Shewan, it appears that it was exposed during the removal of a cairn from a small sandy hillock close to the western shore of the peninsula. After the stones of the cairn had been taken away, a large slab was revealed, which proved to be the covering stone of a stone cist which contained a complete skeleton. During a visit to Jarlshof my attention was directed to the site by Mr Strachan of the Office of Works, and, with the permission of the proprietor, on 2nd July I exposed the cist once more by the removal of the covering turf. The capstone was no longer present, but the cist was filled to the brim with dry, clean sand. With the assistance of Mr P. Murray Threipland, I cleared out the cist and carefully riddled the sand in the hope that some relics might be discovered which were missed when the cist was opened in the first instance. When emptied, the cist proved to have the standard features of a cist of the Bronze Age, but its dimensions were rather greater than usual. It was carefully built, the four stones of which it was formed being strictly vertical and enclosing a space exactly rectangular. The side stones were specially heavy slabs, measuring 5 feet and 5 feet 5 inches respectively, while the end stones were lighter and placed well within the ends of the lateral slabs. The

¹ *Antikvarisk Tidskrift för Sverige*, vol. xxii., No. 5, pp. 1-60.

internal measurements were 3 feet $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches by 2 feet 5 inches, while the depth was about 2 feet. There were no flooring slabs and there was no clay luting in the angles. The long axis lay east and west.

No article of bronze was discovered, but more than a dozen small fragments of a clay vessel were caught in the riddle. A number of these showed a simple ornament arranged in zones, and one fragment showed part of the thin everted lip characteristic of a beaker of the Bronze Age. The fragments were sent to the Museum of Antiquities, and Dr Callander reports as follows:—

“All that remains of the urn consists of three fragments, each measuring about 1 square inch, and eleven smaller pieces. It is quite impossible to determine the shape or size of the vessel, but from the character of the ware, the thickness of the wall, and the ornamentation there is no doubt that the vessel has been of the beaker variety of the Bronze Age. The ware is very dark in colour, with many small concretions of yellow ochre mixed throughout. The wall of the vessel has been decorated by a broadish band of irregularly formed upright zig-zags and by at least two narrow bands of crossed lines showing a lozenge pattern. These bands are separated by plain spaces. All these designs have been incised with a sharp pointed tool while the clay was still moist.

“This record of the discovery of a beaker burial in Shetland is of considerable importance, as hitherto there seems to be only one other record of this class of pottery being found in these northern isles. In the National Museum is a rim fragment of a beaker urn of red ware, ornamented with transverse rows of punctulations and incised lines, from Unst. Unfortunately, no details of the discovery seem to have survived.”

Most of the bones of the skeleton were recovered, but, owing to previous disturbances, they were not arranged in any kind of order. The skull was unfortunately reduced to minute fragments, but portions of the jaws and a number of teeth were recovered by the riddle. The dentition had evidently been complete. There was some small amount of wear on the crowns of the second molars, upper and lower, and the tips of the canines. The cusps on the other teeth were intact. There was no trace of caries of the teeth or of periodontitis. The bones, having lain in dry sand, were in excellent preservation. All the epiphyses were fully united, but the first and second sacral vertebræ were still ununited with one another in the region of the bodies. These facts, combined with the slight wear in the teeth, indicate that the individual had died at an early age, say between twenty-one and twenty-five. The long bones are robust and well marked, and are obviously male bones.

The following are the measurements of the long bones:—

Right Humerus	34·7 cm.
„ Femur	47·4 cm.
„ Tibia	37·8 cm.

From these measurements the stature calculated by Pearson's formulæ comes out at 5 feet 7 inches. This stature is higher than that yielded by the majority of skeletons found with beaker urns in Scotland.

The femur and tibia show an exaggerated degree of torsion, the angle in the case of the femur being 28 degrees and in that of the tibia 39·5. The head of the tibia is further slightly retroverted; the external condylar surface is markedly convex behind and is continued downwards on the posterior aspect of the condyle. The anterior border of the talar surface at the lower end shows an exceedingly well-marked facet continuous with the main articular surface, but marked off from it by a distinct ridge. The bone is not platycnemic, the index being as high as 66·6. These features of femur and tibia are exactly like those demonstrated for the Ackergill and Rennibister bones,¹ and indicate in this instance also the adoption of an habitual posture which seems to have been that of squatting.

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxi. 1926-27, pp. 303-307.