

I.

FURTHER BURIALS AT BLOWS, DEERNESS, ORKNEY. BY W. G. GRANT, F.S.A.SCOT. WITH NOTES ON THE POTTERY FOUND THERE AND ON THE BRONZE AGE POTTERY OF ORKNEY AND SHETLAND BY J. GRAHAM CALLANDER, LL.D., F.S.A.SCOT., DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ANTIQUITIES.

On the 13th of January this year, Dr Marwick, the Director of Education, having rung up to inform me that he had received information of the discovery of an urn-burial in Deerness, we both went out at once to investigate. The discovery had been made on the farm of Blows, by the farmer Mr Aim, only a very few feet distant from the spot where, in the spring of 1929, he had come upon the cist-burial which was described by Dr Marwick in these *Proceedings*, vol. lxiii., 1928-9, pp. 377-9. In that cist it will be remembered was found a steatite urn which is now preserved in the Kirkwall Antiquarian Museum. The importance and significance of the present discovery is thus, it need hardly be said, very greatly enhanced by its immediate proximity to the former.

Mr Aim was fortunately able to accompany us to the site, which is about 100 yards south of the former Free Church of Deerness, and near the highest part of a very extensive natural mound, known locally as Howan Blo. The soil at the place is only a few inches in depth, and Mr Aim had come upon the interment while howking up some of the underlying soft clayey rock for farm purposes a few days previous to our visit. On removing a flat stone he found that it was the cover-stone of an urn (fig. 1) which was about two-thirds full of incinerated bones. He had removed the bones and placed them carefully in a heap outside, but seeing that the urn was badly cracked he very wisely decided to leave it as it was and report the discovery to Dr Marwick.

We found that a sufficient cavity had been excavated in the soft clayey rock and the urn simply placed therein without any enclosing stone cist. The vessel was exceedingly friable, and as it chanced to be hard frost on the day of our visit, we decided it would be better to leave it until the ground should thaw. In the heap of charred bones, however, we noticed some small shards of pottery, and as conditions were unsuitable there, we put the lot in a box and brought them back with us for closer examination.

As Dr Marwick had to go away on official work, he was unable to accompany me when I went back a few days later to extract the urn. In spite of somewhat elaborate plans, it proved impossible to get it out whole; in fact it had retained its shape only by the support of the encircling earth. With great care, however, it was possible to disinter it with so little damage, that after it had been sent to the National Museum for treatment, Mr Edwards' skilful hands were able (as may be

seen from the accompanying illustration) to effect a complete and admirable reconstruction.



Fig. 1. Cinerary Urn from Blows, Orkney.

After the charred bones, etc., had been spread out on my garage floor, I picked out every scrap of pottery that was to be seen, and sent them likewise to the Museum for examination. The greater part, unfortunately, had decomposed and reconstruction proved impossible. From the surviving fragments, however, a rough idea of the original size and shape of the vessel could be deduced, and it was clear that it had not been one of the so-called "incense-cup" type. It seems probable also that it had not been entire when first put into the larger urn, because, curiously enough, Mr Aim had never noticed any of the small shards until our first visit. Had it been placed in the urn on top of the charred bones, it is hardly credible that Mr Aim, on first looking into the larger urn, would not have observed it even in its state of collapse; and from its size it could not possibly have been a container for more than a relatively small proportion of the accompanying mass of bones. The function and purpose of this smaller vessel must then, unfortunately, be left undetermined.

In the course of our extraction of the larger urn, an extraordinary surprise awaited us. As we were carefully digging away the soil and rock surrounding it, we were amazed to come upon still another interment at a distance of 5 feet. Underneath a covered stone we found an urn-shaped cavity about 15 inches deep, about 12 inches wide at the top, and about 5 inches wide at the bottom—approximately full of dark

greasy matter which was certainly human remains. Though the cavity was urn-shaped, not the slightest trace of pottery was to be seen, and I am satisfied that the remains had been interred therein without any sort of containing urn whatsoever.

Taken together, these three burials in such close proximity on the mound of Howan Blo seem to me to constitute an archæological problem of very great significance. In the first case we have a cist containing a mass of incinerated bones and a unique type of steatite urn; in the second, a much larger urn of baked clay containing incinerated bones and fragments of a smaller urn, but with no enclosing cist; in the third decomposed human remains placed simply in an urn-shaped cavity. Are these three burials utterly unrelated in time or do they not, by their close juxtaposition, imply common date or at least Age? If so, what Age? Professor Brøgger regards the first as dating from the Bronze Age and concludes that steatite export from Shetland to Orkney was taking place even at that distant period.¹ Into these questions, however, I do not propose to enter—leaving them to be dealt with by my friend Dr Callander who has kindly agreed to add a description of the urn and its contents.

In conclusion, I wish to record my sincere thanks to Mr Aim for reporting this interesting find, and for his exceeding kindness not only in affording me every assistance himself, but also for handing over the urn to be preserved in the Museum in Kirkwall along with the associated steatite urn already there.

Professor Alex. Low, M.D., of Aberdeen University, who examined the bones, reports: "The bones are very fragmentary, but some pieces of skull bones can be identified as human, they have been very thoroughly cremated and little organic matter is left." Parts of the bones were coated with a slag-like material.

THE POTTERY FOUND AT BLOWS AND THE BRONZE AGE POTTERY OF ORKNEY AND SHETLAND. By J. GRAHAM CALLANDER, LL.D.

The two vessels of pottery found in the burial at Blows, Deerness, Orkney, are hand-made. While the greater part of the larger vessel was recovered, little more than half of the base and the adjoining portions of the wall of the smaller survived.

The first pot is a cinerary urn of dark-coloured ware reddened on the outside and on the top of the rim (fig. 1). It is considerably larger

¹ *Den Norske Bøsetningen På Shetland-Orknøylene*, p. 56, Oslo, 1930.

than the average urn of its class. The ware is hard, and the few small pieces of stone that it contains may have occurred naturally in the clay from which it was fashioned. Between the mouth and the shoulder is a slight concavity, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches broad, after which the wall contracts gradually to within 3 inches of the base where there is a gentle inward curve. It is devoid of ornamentation. The vessel measures 15 inches in height, $12\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter externally across the mouth, $12\frac{3}{8}$ inches at the shoulder, and 5 inches across the base. The rim, measuring 1 inch in breadth, is flat, being bevelled, and projecting a little towards the inside (fig. 9, No. 1). The wall shows a general thickness of $\frac{5}{8}$ inch. Unlike the usual Scottish cinerary urn the rim is not homogeneous with the rest of the wall, but has been made separately and applied to it. This is clearly evident, as several sections were detached when it arrived at the Museum, and the parts of the wall from which they had been separated were rounded on the top. At the first glance it seemed that two vessels were represented by the shards.

The fragments of the second urn are of reddish ware blackened on the exterior. It is fairly hard, but the whole inner surface has weathered off. As in the larger vessel, the clay seems to contain a very small natural mixture of little bits of stone. It has measured about $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches across the bottom, and at the most a height of only $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches remains attached to the basal fragments. The angle formed by the outside of the wall and the base is not nearly so obtuse as that in most of our Bronze Age pottery, as it is only about $97\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$, and the curve at the base is very short (fig. 9, No. 2). Had these fragments of pottery been found unassociated with other relics they might have been identified as parts of domestic pots dating from times later than the Bronze Age. But as they were found within a cinerary urn containing cremated human remains they must be classed as parts of an urn of cinerary type also. Though its occurrence in an urn of this class may suggest a use similar to that of an incense-cup urn it can in no way be considered as belonging to that type of vessel, as its size and form betray no resemblance to that.

This discovery is of considerable importance, as so far as I can learn, it is the first clay urn found in the Orkneys that has been clearly described. Certainly there are a few accounts of pottery having been found in prehistoric graves in these islands, but while the circumstances of their discovery have at times been quite well recorded, the descriptions of the vessels are lacking in detail. Their shape and ornamentation or want of it has not been stated.

A clay urn, three-quarters full of bones and ashes, measuring 13 inches in height and 12 inches in diameter at the mouth, found in the centre of a short cist in a mound in the parish of Deerness, Orkney, seems

to have been a cinerary urn.¹ One of the rude stone implements which have been found in profusion in Orkney and Shetland was found in the north-west end of the grave. The mound measured about 15½ feet in diameter and 4½ feet in height, and the cist 2 feet 3 inches long, 1 foot 3 inches broad, and 1 foot 4 inches deep.

In a mound lying to the north of the famous stone circle, the Ring of Brodgar, there was found an urn of baked clay mixed with small gravel, standing in the north-west corner of a cist.² The urn was 5 inches in height and the same in diameter, with an average circumference of 17 inches, but it fell to pieces on being exposed to the air. There is no mention of human remains having been discovered with it. In another cist nearer the edge of the mound a large steatite urn containing calcined bones was also discovered. The mound was 62 feet in diameter and 9 feet in height, and the central cist containing the clay urn 2 feet 9½ inches long, and 1 foot 7 inches wide. The clay vessel in all probability was a cinerary urn, possibly resembling the smaller one from Blows.

In the National Museum are preserved the greater part of a large urn and a typical incense-cup urn from Orkney. The first exhibits 11½ inches of the lower portion of the vessel, the whole of the upper part being wanting, and where broken measures 10½ inches in diameter. It was found on the North Hill of Shapinsay. Although the circumstances of its discovery are unknown, from the character of the ware and as the shape of the lower part is singularly like that of the larger urn from Blows, there need be no hesitation in identifying it as a cinerary urn, and not a domestic pot. The incense-cup EC1 in the Museum Catalogue is entered there as having no locality and its dimensions are incorrectly stated. It has been figured and recorded by Sir Daniel Wilson as having been "recovered from the foundations of an ancient ruin in the island of Ronaldshay, Orkney."³ Dr Joseph Anderson has referred to it as coming from South Ronaldsay.⁴

While in Orkney in the summer of 1932 I called on the farmer at Breck, St Andrews. Amongst other antiquities which he had found on his farm, were fragments of the lower part of a very coarse pottery vessel, the wall being about 1 inch thick. He said he thought that the deposit was sepulchral, although no human remains were noticed. This had all the appearance of being a cinerary urn.

Records of discoveries of Bronze Age burial pottery in Shetland are more numerous, and as much of it is preserved in the Museum we know exactly what we have to deal with.

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. vii. p. 135.

² *Ibid.*, vol. ii. pp. 59 and 60, and vol. x. p. 540.

³ *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*, 2nd ed., vol. i. p. 424, pl. vi. fig. 78.

⁴ *Scotland in Pagan Times—The Bronze and Stone Ages*, p. 48, fig. 47.

A small cemetery of cinerary urns containing cremated human remains was discovered in a small hillock near the head of Culla Voe, Papa Stour, Shetland.¹ Three large urns of dark-coloured ware simply buried in the mound, standing on their bases, and covered by a flat stone were first unearthed. Two were destroyed, but the third (fig. 2) was acquired by the Museum. The presence of the last urn was suggested by a small circle



Fig. 2. Cinerary Urn from Culla Voe, Shetland.



Fig. 3. Cinerary Urn from Culla Voe, Shetland.

of stones set on edge, 2 feet in diameter, peeping through the surface. The fourth urn (fig. 3) found in the same hill contained a solid mass of burnt bones and hardened clay. This vessel was presented to the Museum by the Rev. D. G. Barron, D.D., who also described the discoveries to the Society. Dr Barron had reason to believe that other urns had been found in the same knoll. The two urns which have been preserved are almost identical in form and in the character of the ware. The lower part of the body is of light-brown colour, but the upper part is black. In each case the body of the vessel is of inverted conical shape, with a pronounced shoulder above which is a short concave everted brim. There is no ornamentation on the vessels. In both of them

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xxix, p. 46.

a considerable part of the rim is missing, but there is a complete vertical section of each surviving. The first urn (fig. 2 and fig. 9, No. 3) measures 18 inches in height and $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches across the base, and the diameter at the mouth and shoulder has been about 13 inches and 15 inches respectively. This vessel has an incrustation of soot under the shoulder. The other urn (fig. 3) measures $17\frac{1}{2}$ inches in height and 5 inches across the base, its mouth and shoulder having been respectively about $13\frac{1}{2}$ inches and $15\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter.

Two cinerary urns from Shetland were presented to the Museum in 1866.¹ One formed of yellow clay with a pink tinge has been restored, and is complete but for the top of the rim (fig. 4 and fig. 9, No. 6). It is of truncated oval form and measures 14 inches in height, $11\frac{3}{4}$ inches across the mouth, $12\frac{3}{4}$ inches at the widest part, and 5 inches across the bottom. The whole exterior is decorated with twenty-three or twenty-four horizontal rows of vertical finger-nail impressions encircling the vessel. It was found in a "fairy knowe" at Housegord, Weisdale. The second was found in a field at Flemington in the same parish, in a hole in the ground under two slate stones. It was full of bones, presumably burnt. The urn, which is of a dirty brown colour, wants the base (fig. 5 and fig. 9, No. 7), but what remains measures $8\frac{3}{4}$ inches in height. It is shaped like two truncated cones placed mouth to mouth, the upper part above the shoulder being much shorter than the under part. It measures 9 inches in diameter at the mouth and $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches at the shoulder. The space between the rim and the widest part bears an incised horizontal zigzag line.

In a mound at Quarff, Shetland, at least six cists were discovered from which fragments of three urns of steatite and one of clay (fig. 6 and fig. 9, No. 4) were recovered and purchased by the Museum.² The

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. vi. p. 325.



1 0 3 6 inches.

Fig. 4. Cinerary Urn from Housegord, Shetland.

² *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xxxiv. p. 340.

largest cist measured 4 feet by $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet by 2 feet, and yielded a human skull and the base of an urn of steatite. This seems to have been a typical Bronze Age short cist containing an unburnt skeleton placed in a crouching position. The largest of the remaining cists measured $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet by $1\frac{1}{2}$ foot by 2 feet. One of these contained the clay urn which was full of ashes. It is of truncated oval shape and bears no ornamentation. The upper part is darkened with soot but the lower is of reddish colour. It measures 9 inches in height, $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter at the mouth, $9\frac{3}{4}$ inches



1 0 1 2 3 Inches

Fig. 5. Cinerary Urn from Flemington, Shetland.



1 0 1 2 3 Inches

Fig. 6. Cinerary Urn from Quarff, Shetland.

at the bulge, and $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches across the base. The lip is flat and bevelled inwards.

The greater part of a nice urn, very similar in shape to the last, from Nisetter, Shetland, is also in the Museum (fig. 7 and fig. 9, No. 5). There is no information about its discovery, but it may be taken as a cinerary urn. Formed of dark-coloured steatitic clay it measures $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches in height and $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches across the base. The diameters of the lip and shoulder are unobtainable as most of the lip is gone. The mouth would be about $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. It is a specially interesting vessel because the fractured parts reveal how, at least, the upper part was fashioned. After the lower portion of the wall had been formed the top edge was thinned and rounded, and two separate strips of clay, had been superimposed to complete

the upper portion. I have already drawn attention to this way of making certain vessels.¹ In fig. 8 are shown three methods of building



Fig. 7. Cinerary Urn from Nisetter, Shetland.

up the walls of Scottish prehistoric vessels by adding strips of clay; No. 1 is seen in a food-vessel from Kilspindie, East Lothian; No. 2 in a cinerary urn from Longniddry in the same county; and No. 3 in a vessel from Skara Brae, Orkney. The method adopted in the Nisetter urn resembles that shown in No. 2.

The last example in the Museum was found in Fair Isle, in the centre of a small mound only 8 feet in diameter and 2½ feet in height, buried in the soil and covered closely with a flat stone.² It contained a quantity of greyish powder resembling bone ash. A small steatite urn which is also in the Museum was found a little to one side of it. The pottery vessel which is unornamented and

formed of dark steatitic clay has been badly restored, as it now appears as a vessel 11 inches in height with an oval mouth measuring 17½ inches and 13¼ inches in cross diameters. Probably it had more resembled the urn from Quarff before it was broken. On a flat space to the west immediately adjoining the mound ten or twelve cavities were discovered excavated in the ground, each being covered with a flat stone and containing "a small quantity of white substance resembling bone ash."

Two discoveries of beaker pottery have also been recorded from Shetland. One small piece was found in Unst, and last summer Professor Bryce discovered three small fragments in a short cist at Fraga, Scatness.³

In the space of a few square yards at Blows, in Orkney, we have seen that burnt human bones were found in a steatite urn and in two of clay, and osseous remains in a cavity



Fig. 8.

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxiv. p. 194, fig. 2.

³ *Antea*, p. 34.

² *Ibid.*, vol. xi. p. 530.

covered with a flat stone. It is significant to note that in Fair Isle an almost identical set of phenomena was observed, the only differences being that one clay urn and not two were found at the latter place and there were ten or twelve cavities instead of one containing human bones.

When these records are brought together and compared, they throw a new light on the prehistoric burial customs of Orkney and Shetland. So far as they go it would seem that in these islands the Bronze Age inhabitants did not closely follow their contemporaries in other parts of Scotland in the shapes of their sepulchral pottery.

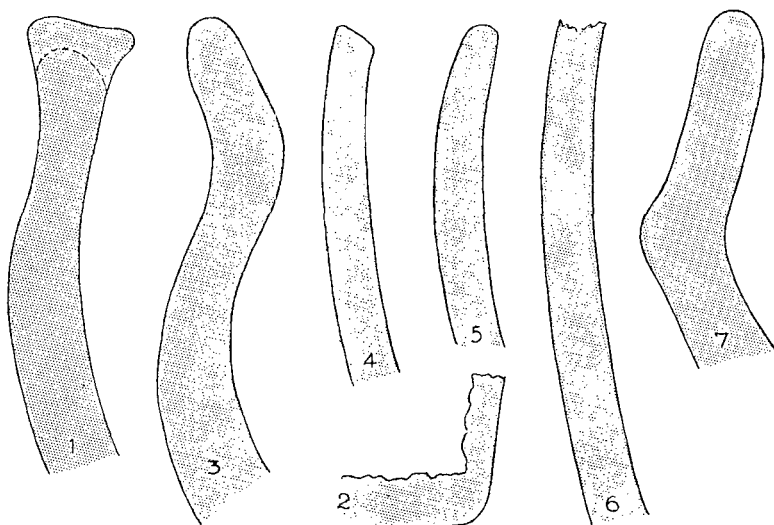


Fig. 9. Sections of Bronze Age Pottery from Orkney and Shetland. (¼.)

In Orkney many short cists containing incinerated human bones alone have been unearthed, and in others there were steatite urns with burnt and unburnt remains. From their size these cists might have been assigned to the Bronze Age, but the discovery of a large number of those structures containing burnt bones and ashes and one also a large stone urn, in the mound covering the ruins of the broch of Okstrow, Birsay,¹ indicated a later date. Again we have to deplore a vague account. The stone urn is stated to have been bowl-shaped, and if we are to understand from this description that it was of flattened semi-globular form, we might assign these graves to the time of the Vikings, who made steatite vessels of that form.

The objects found in this building consisted generally of typical broch

¹ *Archeologica Scotica*, vol. v. p. 76, fig. 4.

relics dating to the early centuries of the Christian era or even earlier, but among them was a free ring-headed pin of bronze of a type occasionally found in Viking graves in Scotland, and more commonly in Norway,¹ so that the probability of these graves being those of Vikings is strengthened. The position in which they were found shows that the burials had been made long after the broch had been deserted, when it had become a ruin. But we have seen that cinerary urns of clay have been found in the same burial mounds as urns of steatite, not of Viking type, near the Ring of Brodgar, in Orkney, at Quarff, in Shetland, and in Fair Isle, and there is the new record from Blows. On this evidence we may be justified in assigning the large steatite burial urns and the short cists containing cremated remains, to the Bronze Age of these Islands.

Regarding the forms of the clay urns, the large example from Blows may be classed with the two from Culla Voe, Shetland. The urn from the former place has the same concave lip though perhaps less pronounced. This is a form that does not seem to have been met with on the Scottish mainland. In the large collection of cinerary urns in the National Museum the vessel which in form most closely resembles the decorated example from Housegord, and the plain ones from Quarff, and Nissetter in Shetland, is one from Slackend, Aberdeenshire, though if the mouldings were removed from many of our cordoned type we would get much the same shape. Another feature to be noted is that only two of the Orkney and Shetland urns bear ornamentation, the one from Housegord and the one from Flemington on the same estate. The latter it may be mentioned resembles in form some of the south country vessels.

It should be recalled that Professor Brøgger assigned the steatite urns to the Bronze Age.²

¹ Rygh, *Norske Oldsager*, p. 80, fig. No. 682.

² *Den Norske Bosetningen På Shetland-Orknøyene*, p. 56.