9. An Iron Implement and other Relics from Falla Cairn, Roxburghshire.

In the *Proceedings of the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club* for 1929[1] Mr P. B. Gunn describes the excavation, in the previous year, of a Bronze Age round cairn situated 650 yards S.S.W. of Falla Farm, in the parish of Jedburgh, Roxburghshire.[2]

The cairn, which measured 70 feet in diameter and 5 feet in height, was composed of surface stones and soil, and there was a layer of loose stones on some parts of the bottom as if to level irregularities in the ground. On the original ground surface, to the east of the centre of the cairn, was a short cist sealed with a cover-stone on which rested a boulder 2 feet in diameter; the ends of the cist were formed of single slabs, and at each side were three slabs with a layer of thin slabs on the top. The report continues: "The cist contained fragments of incinerated bone. Nuts, beech and hazel, were lying on the floor, also fragments of an iron plate; these had doubtless been introduced at some recent opening: the irregularity of the top of the cairn suggests such an occurrence. An urn may possibly have been removed at that time." In the centre of the cairn, also on the original surface, was a heap of stones lying north and south and extending a little beyond either end of the cist. On top of this heap were burnt bones, while directly above it, but only 18 inches below the surface of the cairn, were more burnt bones associated with fragments of a cinerary urn. Dr W. C. Osman Hill has kindly examined the bones and has found no evidence against their all having come from a single individual. Lastly, a flint scraper was found in the body of the cairn on the west side.

The relics were deposited in the National Museum at the time, and have recently been formally presented to the Museum by Mrs Oliver of Edgerston.

The cinerary urn (Pl. XXII, 1) is of "collared" type, that is to say typologically

[1] Vol. xxvii. pp. 104–6.

[2] National Grid Reference 36/705133.

early in the development of urns. Though very fragmentary it has now been restored, with some degree of certainty, to give a height of 14·7 inches, with a diameter at the mouth of 12 inches and at the shoulder of 13·2 inches. The rim is simply rounded. The collar, 2 inches high, is decorated with four rows of deep oblique cuts arranged in a herring-bone pattern. Under this the neck is deeply hollowed, and bears impressions of a thick whipped cord to form alternating panels of horizontal and vertical lines. Below the neck the undecorated body, as usual a muddy-brown colour, contracts sharply to the base which is only 4 inches across.

The scraper is roughly circular and made from a broad flake of pale grey flint, retouched nearly all round. The maximum diameter is 1·15 inch and thickness ·35 inch.

By far the most interesting discovery, however, are the iron fragments stated to have been found in the cist. Although this is literally true, the fragments were not present in the cist when it was first opened: they appeared there the following morning, having evidently fallen in from the side of the trench during the night.[1] The fragments were badly corroded and only the largest piece—a plate 6½ inches long, 4–4¼ inches wide, and $\frac{1}{10}$–$\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick—has survived. From the base to a little over half the length of the plate the sides are parallel, and equipped on one face with flanges which no doubt gripped a wooden stock: beyond that point there are no flanges, and the sides splay out slightly to the cutting-edge which is set at a narrow angle to the short axis of the blade. The back of the plate is flat. A similar implement was included in the Romano-British hoard of iron objects found at Blackburn Mill, Berwickshire,[2] while the Museum possesses other examples from Traprain Law and the Roman fort at Newstead. The exact purpose of these implements is conjectural. Professor Childe has described the Blackburn Mill specimen as a hoe,[3] but Mr F. G. Payne, who is shortly to publish a paper on the subject in the *Archæological Journal*, informs me that he considers them to be ploughshares. Until his paper appears it will be wiser to suspend judgment, though it may be remarked that, while the presence of a ploughshare in a cairn is difficult to explain, a digging-implement could easily be the legacy of a secondary burial in the Iron Age or Roman Period. Finally, it is necessary to make one important amendment to the description of the skeletal remains in the report. While the bones found on top of the stone-heap in the centre of the cairn are, as stated, exclusively incinerated, the handful of bones found in the cist comprise both burnt and unburnt fragments, of which the latter are by far the most numerous. Dr Hill reports that the unburnt bones came from a reasonably grown adult.

What light does the foregoing reconsideration of the relics throw on the sequence of interments in the cairn? In the first place, the excavators' assumption that the cist had been previously rifled is not borne out by the evidence. The cist itself showed no trace of disturbance; the absence of an urn is, unfortunately, an all too common feature of this type of burial; and hazel-nuts not infrequently accompany both Neolithic and Bronze Age interments.[4] Whether the cist represents the primary burial, as the excavators thought, is, however, an open question. The fact that it was eccentrically placed in the cairn is not, in itself,

[1] Information from Mr James Fairbairn and confirmed by Mr Gunn.

[2] *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxvi. p. 315, No. 59. Dr Joseph Anderson (Museum Catalogue, 1892) described it as part of a turf-spade for cutting peat, which the other so described, Curle's No. 62, certainly is as shown by its wing. *Cf.* E. E. Evans, *Irish Heritage*, figs. 87 and 89, 4.

[3] *Scotland Before the Scots*, Pl. xvi. and p. 144.

[4] E.g. *Archæologia*, vol. lxxxv. p. 106; Mortimer, *Forty Years' Researches, etc.*, pp. 68, 176 and 193.

an insuperable objection to that view, since the cairn may well have been enlarged and reshaped at the time of the cremation burial. On the other hand, it is at least possible that the primary interment was not in a cist but in a pit beneath the stones in the centre of the cairn, and was missed by the excavators who did not penetrate below the original ground-level.[1] In this case the cist, like the cinerary urn, would be intrusive, while, if the cist burial were the later of the two, the fragmentary condition of the urn, and the dispersal of the cremated bones, some of which were found at a lower level in the cairn and others on the floor of the cist itself, would be explained. Short cists are not unknown in the Iron Age,[2] and the slab construction of the Falla cist is more appropriate to Iron Age than Bronze Age technique. The sequence of events suggested above is thus consistent with all the evidence, and at least provides an opportunity for the insertion of the iron implement into the cairn if it does not explain its presence. No emphasis is laid upon it, however, since the evidence is entirely inferential and may still be put to the test by re-excavation of the central area below the stone-heap.

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