

2. REMAINS FROM A SHORT CIST DISCOVERED AT LEITH IN 1884.

In February 1884 a short cist was exposed during excavations in Merrilees Close, Leith. This cist with its contents, two human skeletons and a food vessel, was presented to the University of Edinburgh, where it remained in the Anatomical Museum until 1956. In this year, on account of the impending reconstruction of the Anatomical Museum, these relics have been transferred to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland.

No description of the Leith find appears to have been published previous to Sir William Turner's memoir of 1915.¹ This includes details of the construction of the cist, an illustration of the food vessel, and a summary description with measurements of the two skulls. Before being transferred to the Museum of Antiquities, the skeletons were re-examined. The new observations appear worthy of record in their archaeological as well as their anatomical bearing.

Turner notes that one skull (A) though injured, was complete with its facial skeleton and mandible, while the other (B) was represented only by the braincase. Of the rest of the skeletons he remarks merely that "the limb bones were so friable that, as a rule, they were not preserved." This might be taken to mean that more was visible in the grave than is now present in the collection. However, when the remains are examined, it proves that one skeleton is present almost in its entirety, while the other is represented only by a few imperfect vertebræ, parts of the pectoral and pelvic girdles, and the larger bones of the limbs. The complete skeleton is clearly to be associated with the better-preserved skull A, and the other with skull B.

This state of affairs makes it appear likely that the two burials were made successively, as in the cist at Balbie, Burntisland,² rather than simultaneously as in the irregularly shaped cist at Thurston Mains, Innerwick.³

Turner concluded that skull A is female and skull B male. Professor R. W. Reid subsequently re-examined the skulls and regarded both as male.⁴ When the fragments of both pelvises have been reassembled it becomes evident that in fact both skeletons are *female*.

In both skeletons it has been possible to measure the length of the right femur; in skeleton A the left tibia is also measurable. The femur of skeleton B has the remarkable length of 490 mm., which by Trotter and Gleser's table⁵ corresponds to a stature of 1752 mm. (5 ft. 9 ins.). This great length of thigh-bone may have weighed with Turner in assigning a male sex to skeleton B, but the slenderness of the bone is quite consistent with its being female.

Skeleton A is that of a much shorter woman. Her femur is 422 mm. long, and her tibia 348 mm. The corresponding stature estimations are 1583 mm. (5 ft. 2½ ins.) and 1625 mm. (5 ft. 4 ins.); from the combined length of the two bones an estimate of 1603 mm. (5 ft. 3 ins.) is obtained. It must be remembered that for various reasons these estimates can only be accurate to within a couple of inches.

The vertebral column of skeleton A displays two unusual developmental abnormalities. In the second cervical (axis) vertebræ the two halves of the vertebral arch have remained ununited (*spina bifida occulta*). The same anomaly exists also in the fifth lumbar vertebra but in this there is also a failure of ossification (*spondyloschisis*) within each half of the vertebral arch.

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¹ *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, II, 171-255.

² *P.S.A.S.*, LXXXII, 299-301.

³ *P.S.A.S.*, LXXIV, 138-45.

⁴ *Biometrika*, 20 B, 379-88.

⁵ *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, N.S. 10, 463-514.