

# A SHORT CIST BURIAL ON NORTH UIST AND SOME NOTES ON THE PREHISTORY OF THE OUTER ISLES IN THE SECOND MILLENNIUM B.C.

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## INTRODUCTION

IN July 1957 members of Edinburgh University Archaeological Society were engaged on the excavations at Sollas, North Uist then being conducted on behalf of the Ministry of Works under the direction of Mr (now Professor) R. J. C. Atkinson. Several of the party took the opportunity during the course of their leisure hours to examine a short cist below Newton House (Nat. Grid Ref. NF 887773). Their attention was drawn to the site by the owner of the land, Mr John Macaskill, who had discovered the cist during ploughing operations in 1955, following which the capstone was removed for building material.<sup>1</sup> As it would appear that this is the first short cist in the Outer Isles to have been fully excavated in recent times, the authors have taken the opportunity in the later sections of this paper to gather together all the material relevant to short cist burials in this region.<sup>2</sup>

## THE EXCAVATION

The site 300 yards due west of Newton House lies on a strip of plough soil about a foot thick which overlies the considerable depth of blown marine sand – the general cover of the coastal *machair* of the Long Island. At the time of excavation no structural remains were visible above the turf but at a depth of about five inches below the present ground surface was located the cist, which consisted of four slabs of local gneiss (fig. 1). A fifth slab, originally forming one of the ends of the cist, had been removed prior to excavation but its position was marked in the sand by an earthy patch. The bases of the stones were set at an average depth of 20 inches below the turf, at which level was found the complete skeleton of a young adult female lying in a crouched position facing north-west towards the sea (Pl. X). The chance discovery in 1955 appeared to have left the bones untouched except that the left femur had been rotated through 180 degrees. Examination of a section cut through the sand which filled the cist revealed that subsequent to its original construction the cist had apparently silted up through the trickling of material under the cover slab.

The body had been deposited on its chest, the knees being drawn up to the waist and both arms tucked under the right cheek in an attitude of repose. The general position of the bones of the thorax was compatible with a gradual subsidence following decomposition of the flesh.

<sup>1</sup> A brief description of the cist appeared in *Discovery and Excavation, Scotland 1957* (1958), 18.

<sup>2</sup> One of us has elsewhere published some notes on the folklore connected with the N. Uist cist burials: Megaw, J. V. S., *Folk-Lore*, LXVIII (1957), 483-8.

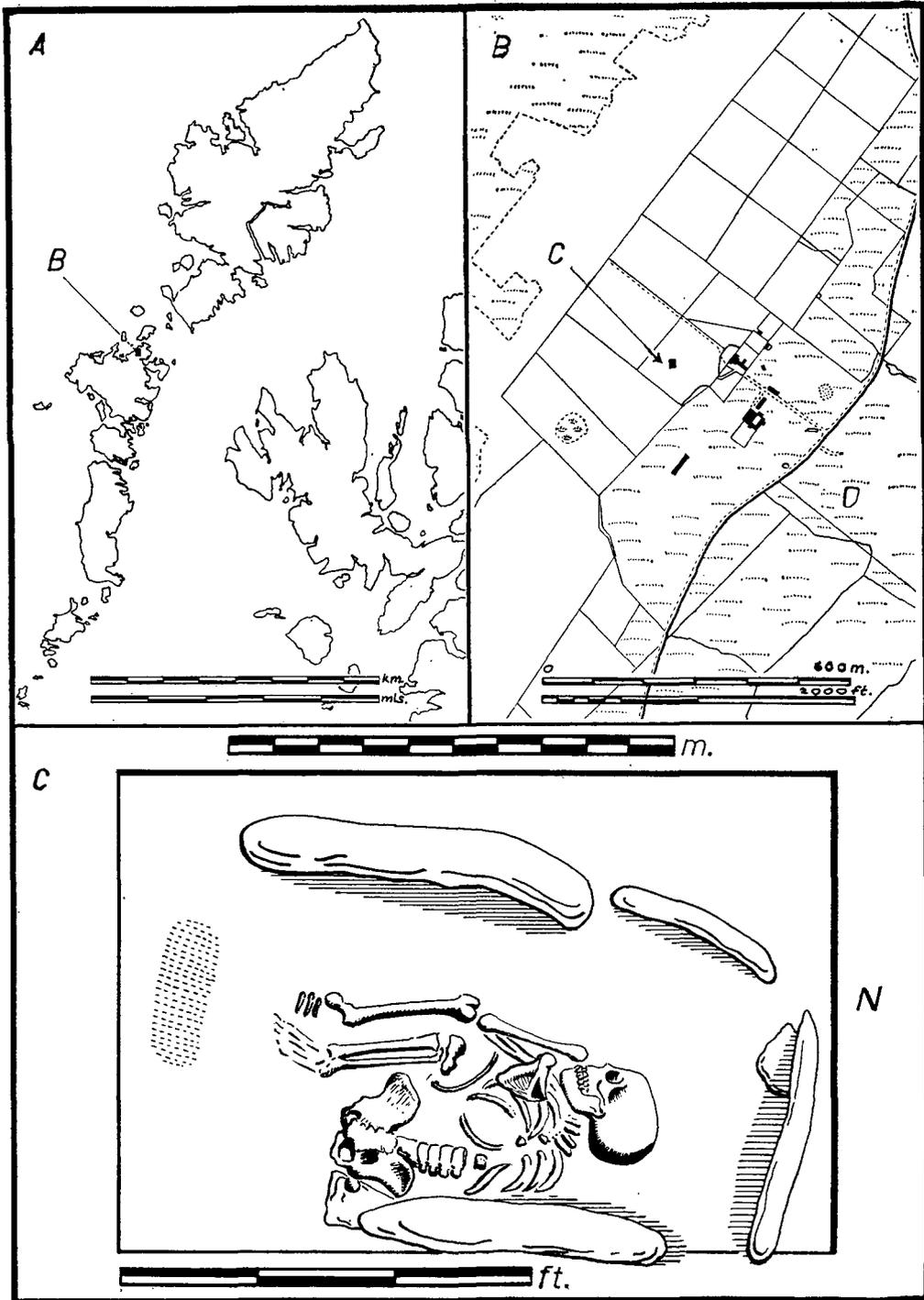


FIG. 1. Newton, North Uist. Location maps and plan of short cist. (Scale of A in units of ten: A and B based on the Ordnance Survey map with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office)

## SMALL FINDS

Although the area in the immediate vicinity of the skeleton appeared to be undisturbed, careful sifting of the sand both above and below revealed only a large marine pebble. In the disturbed upper levels of the filling of the cist were found a fragment of cremated bone and two small sherds. Of the latter, the paste of one was dark and crude and contained micaceous tempering. The other fragment was of a much finer creamy yellow paste. Professor R. J. C. Atkinson, who was good enough to examine the pottery, is of the opinion that the fabric of both sherds is comparable with that found in wheel-house contexts. The main mineral component of the pebble, which is plano-convex in section and heart-shaped in plan, is schist, the predominant rock type of the island,<sup>1</sup> but it is also veined with transverse bands of white quartz. The broader end of the stone is slightly pitted.<sup>2</sup>

## THE SHORT CIST BURIALS OF THE OUTER ISLES AND ASSOCIATED FINDS

In addition to the site just described there are records of some fifty cists in the Outer Isles which may be regarded as belonging to the 'short' class. Details are given in the appended list (p. 76 ff. below); those of which the classification is doubtful are so marked. All the sites are coastal and lie mostly on the fertile *machair* (fig. 2). The apparent virtual absence of the type from Lewis and Harris may in part be due to lack of adequate field work in the northern islands. Of the cists whose grave contents have been recorded there are eight enclosed inhumation burials and five cremations. An interesting feature of cist distribution in the Isles is the frequency in which they occur in cemeteries, either flat or covered by a mound – the Newton cists (List Nos. 10 and 11) clearly form part of such a cemetery. In two of the cemeteries the burial rite was inhumation while in the third recorded example cremation was practised. The mound at Sithean an Altair (List No. 6) contained cremations with a single central inhumation.

The general picture recalls that of Orkney and Shetland where also cists may be surmounted by tumuli, be single or in cemeteries and contain either cremated or inhumed remains.<sup>3</sup> A particularly close parallel exists between Childe's type C graves and that from Heisker (List No. 19) and Port na Long (List No. 7).<sup>4</sup> Four cup marks occur on the presumed cover slab of one cist from Portain (List No. 14). These symbols occur in frequent association with Food-Vessel burials. Typical examples are those on the cap-stones of cists at Ballinvally, Co. Meath, Tillicoultry, Clackmannan, and on an isolated slab in the chambered tomb of Cairnholy I as

<sup>1</sup> For a full geographical and economic survey of the parish of North Uist see Davies, G. L., *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 72:2 (1956), 66-80.

<sup>2</sup> Mr R. G. Galloway lately of the Dept. of Geography, University of Edinburgh, who kindly examined the pebble, believes these pittings to be the result of marine abrasion and not of artificial working.

<sup>3</sup> Childe, V. G.: *Scotland before the Scots* (1946), 133-4.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, 16; Martin Martin is of course a somewhat doubtful source and the Heisker example quoted is the best of several vague hints. Our colleague Mr James Barber of the City Museum, Plymouth, has suggested that this and one or more of the cists from Sithean an Altair (List No. 6) should be regarded as stone boxes (literally) for enclosing an urn. While there are no examples of cinerary urns in short cists known from the mainland there are several recorded from Orkney and Shetland; see p. 67 below.

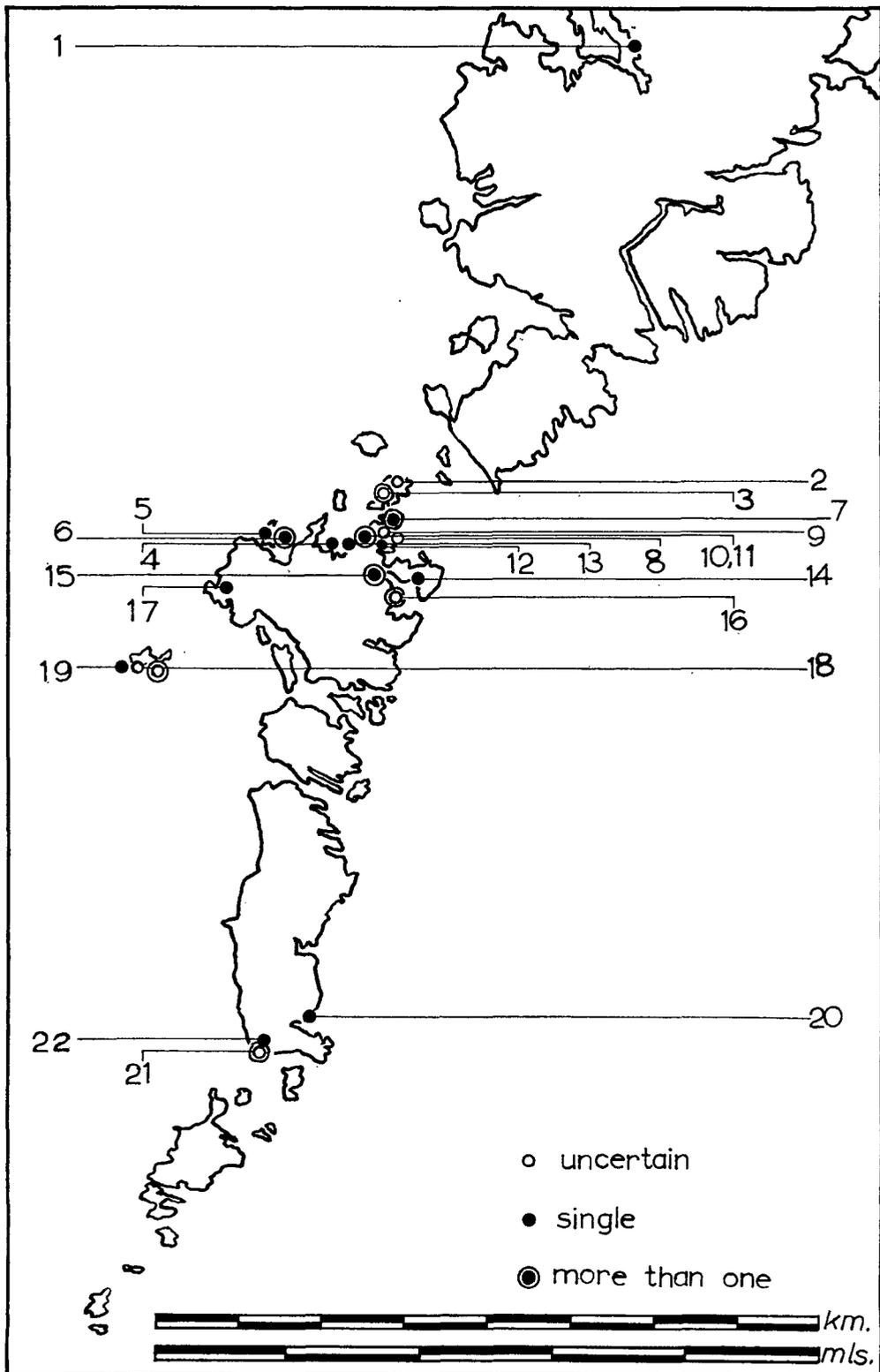


FIG. 2. Distribution of short cists and associated structures in the Outer Isles.  
 For explanation see List, p. 76 ff. Scale in units of ten.

well as on a second stone from near the antechamber of the same monument.<sup>1</sup>

To this same cultural horizon may belong the massive cist from Port na Long (List No. 8) which, because of its similarity in construction and although containing no grave goods, can be tentatively added to Childe's list of extended burials of his Scottish Stage IV.<sup>2</sup>

A feature shared by three of the cists in our area is the deposition of quartzite pebbles within the grave, a fairly common practice in Late Neolithic contexts and indeed the belief in the magical properties of quartzite has survived into comparatively recent times.<sup>3</sup> The closest parallels to Newton are from beaker burials of the Inner Isles and mainland.<sup>4</sup> The only other stone find as yet recorded from an Outer Isles cist is the polished axe of typical Neolithic form from Vallay (List No. 5), illustrated by Beveridge.<sup>5</sup>

#### AN EXCURSUS ON POTTERY

Of other associated finds from Hebridean short cists the only pottery is the sherds from Lochs (List No. 1), which from Beveridge's description sound temptingly like beaker, and the urn from Port na Long (List No. 7 and fig. 3A). This is a simple barrel-shaped vessel of fairly coarse paste but lacking the shell tempering characteristic of the mass of wheel-house ware from the islands.<sup>6</sup> It is to be assumed that this is a pot referred to, but not illustrated, by Beveridge although the flat stone which he claimed fitted as a lid<sup>7</sup> (preserved with the urn in the National Museum of Antiquities (reg. nos. EA.77-8)) is slightly smaller in diameter than the mouth of the pot. Again, the incisions on the base hardly constitute a regular pattern as suggested by Beveridge. On the outer surface of the pot is a single and more or less central impression. In form this simple urn is close to the steatite urns of the Orkney and Shetland short cists which Childe suggested fulfilled the role of Food-Vessels, the large clay pots being comparable to cinerary urns. If this should seem a far cry we may quote the fragments from two further vessels in the National Museum, both coming from Treklet, N. Uist. The smaller urn (reg. no. GT.285; fig. 3B) has a bucket-shaped lower part of the body inturning towards the rim with the suspicion of a shoulder, which upper part is decorated by two bands of incised running chevrons separated by a single horizontal line. The lower band is broken by the beginning of an apparent 'Greek key' design of small stamped circles. Both

<sup>1</sup> Piggott, S. and Powell, T. G. E., *P.S.A.S.*, LXXXIII (1948-49), 118, 139-40 and fig. 15; here the connection of the cup-and-ring marks of SW. Scotland with the Middle Bronze Age is emphasised. On the wider implications see Piggott, *P.S.A.S.*, LXXXVIII (1954-6), 197-8. Recently Professor C. F. C. Hawkes has suggested a definite link with Iberia in these symbols (*in litt.*); see also Ashbee, P., *The Bronze Age Round Barrow in Britain* (1960), 66-68.

<sup>2</sup> Childe, *op. cit.*, 119-20, supplemented by Sir Lindsay Scott's group from the Crinan district - on his 'sea route' - all with the normal Food-Vessel associations; *P.P.S.*, xvii (1951), 71-72. The most recent study of these cists in the north of England is Corcoran, J. X. W. P., *Journ. Derbs. Arch. and Nat. Hist. Soc.*, LXXV (1955), 91-97.

<sup>3</sup> Mitchell, A., *P.S.A.S.*, xviii (1883-4), 286-91.

<sup>4</sup> e.g. Crichton Mitchell (now Stewart), M. E., *P.S.A.S.*, LXVIII (1933-4), List Nos. 34, 55, 66 and 211.

<sup>5</sup> Beveridge, E., *North Uist, Its Archaeology and Topography* (1911), 268; see here also p. 69 below.

<sup>6</sup> e.g. Kilpheder and Sithean a Phiobaire, S. Uist: Lethbridge, T. C., *P.P.S.*, xviii (1952), 188-90 and figs. 6-8; one eagerly looks forward to the publication (in C.B.A. Research Report No. 6) of Mrs Alison Young's survey, 'The Sequence of Hebridean Pottery', delivered to the C.B.A. conference on 'Problems of the Iron Age in Northern Britain' 7th October 1961; see here footnote 4 to p. 69.

<sup>7</sup> Beveridge, *loc. cit.*

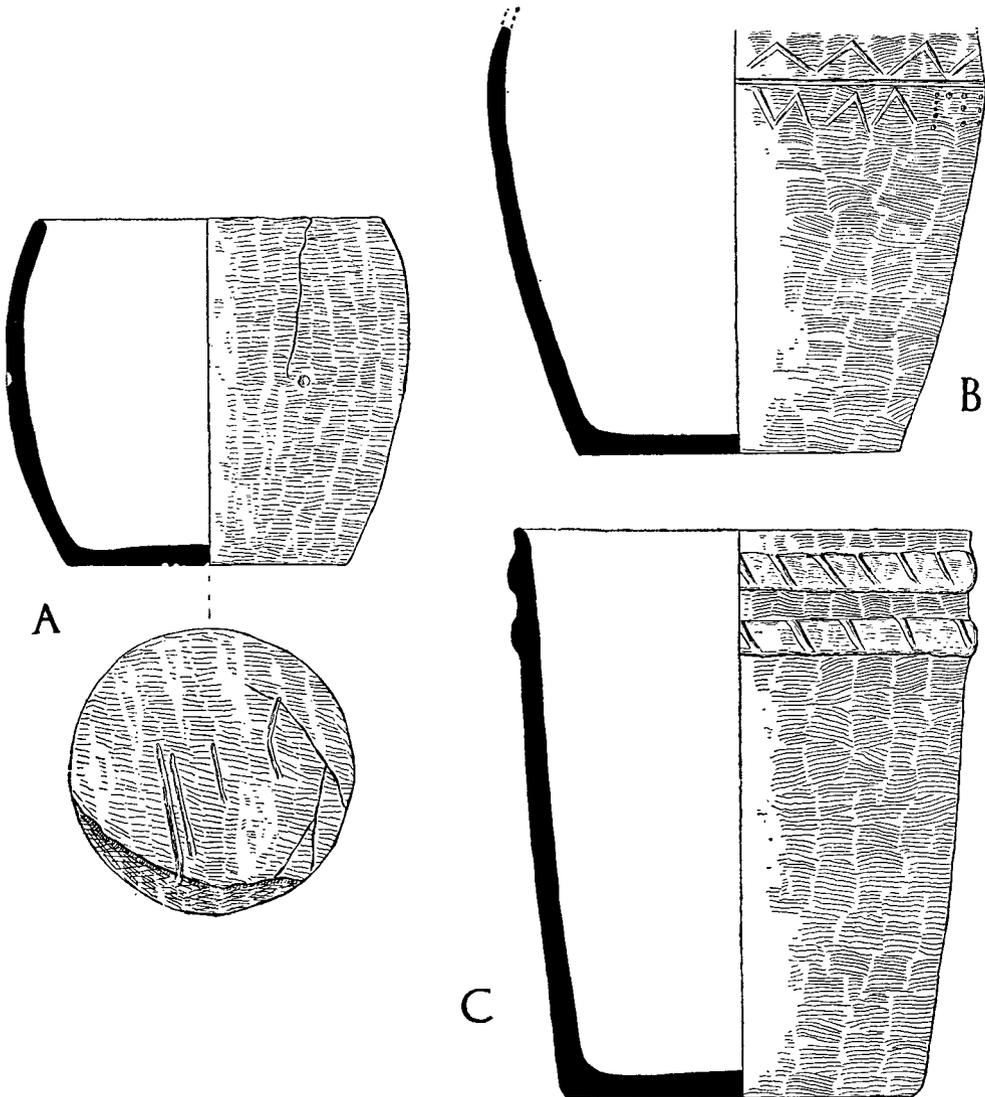


FIG. 3. Pottery from (A) Port na Long and (B, C) Trecklet, North Uist.  
(National Museum of Antiquities, 1/3)

profile and design can best be matched on an incomplete vessel from Flemington, Shetland, which Childe suggested might be regarded as a late and degenerate version of the South-West Scottish biconical urn.<sup>1</sup> These vessels therefore might be seen as taking the place of collared urns, absent from the West Highlands and Northern Isles.

<sup>1</sup> *Prehistory of Scotland* (1935), 141 and Pl. X d; still a most useful summary of the Orkney and Shetland vessels, both of steatite and pottery, is Callander, J. G., *P.S.A.S.*, Lxvii (1932-3), 345-53.

However, in opposition to this view is the evidence of the pot in the National Museum from the Colleonard hoard, Banff (reg. no. EA.18), found with seven flat bronze axes mainly of Megaw and Hardy type I,<sup>1</sup> packed in it. Flat based with a slightly splayed foot and inturned bevelled rim, the vessel is decorated on the outer surface first of all just below the rim with a line of irregular impressions, then just below the inturning by an incomplete and crudely scratched zig-zag and finally by an oblique slashed cordon about half-way down the body of the pot. The early second millennium B.C. dating offered for the find – confirmed to a degree by its supposed discovery in a recumbent stone circle<sup>2</sup> – is clearly within the earlier part of our full Bronze Age. Professor Piggott and Mrs Stewart point out that the stylistic links with the pot lie within the range of Lough Gur class II ware and the secondary Neolithic Ronaldsway culture of the Isle of Man. Piggott first mentioned the similarities between the Highland cordoned urns and Lough Gur II in a review of Glasbergen's thesis on the Eight Beatitudes (N. Brabant) barrow group, which contained the proof of the Southern British origin of the 'Hilversum' and, through them, the so-called 'Dutch Deverel' or 'Drackenstein' urns.<sup>3</sup> Recently Mr May and Dr Collins, in publishing a group of cremation burials at Gortfad, Co. Londonderry, which included a very 'Hilversum' looking urn,<sup>4</sup> added a short discussion on the evolution of cordoned urns from the overhanging, or collared, form. The latter's neolithic ancestry, through Dr Isobel Smith's flat based Fengate ware from Mortlake round based and cord impressed bowls, is perhaps nowhere so clearly to be seen as in the pot found stratified above early Peterborough sherds in Dr Smith's own recent excavation of the outer ditch of Windmill Hill.<sup>5</sup>

Returning to North Uist, the second incomplete pot from Trecklet (reg. no. GT.286; fig. 3C) differs from the first in being almost parallel-sided with two applied cordons on the upper part of the body decorated with transverse incisions. In the same way as the use of applied cordons on urns of the Deverel-Rimbury group was suggested by Butler and Smith as one of a series of features taken over from the southern Rinyo-Clacton pottery, there seems to be no reason against once more presupposing the northern facies of secondary Neolithic groups as also influencing the so-called 'Late Bronze Age' urn of Scotland.<sup>6</sup> The incised decoration on the pots from Trecklet certainly lies within the range of Piggott's Rinyo Ia and Ib respectively.<sup>7</sup> From the point of view of dating, the Ardeer cairn, Stevenston,

<sup>1</sup> Most recent publication with full references: *Inventaria Archaeologica: Great Britain*, 5th set (1958), GB.29.

<sup>2</sup> Griffiths, W. E., *P.P.S.*, xxvi (1960), 303-39 for evidence from the Druids' Circle and other stone circles near Penmaenmawr, finds including an enlarged Food-Vessel and a small riveted knife of Professor Atkinson's Wessex II as recently defined by him at the C.B.A. conference on Problems of the British Bronze Age: 'A Statistical Consideration of the British Bronze Age', 17th December 1960.

<sup>3</sup> *Ant. J.*, xxxv (1955), 255-7. See now Smith, I. F., *Helinium*, 1: 2 (1961), 97-114 for the full discussion.

<sup>4</sup> *U.J.A.*, 22 (1959), 33-41 and here especially Pot 2; op. cit., fig. 2. We owe this observation to Dr J. J. Butler.

<sup>5</sup> *W.A.M.*, LVII (1959), 149-62 here fig. 6:1; nor must one forget the basic flat-based splay-footed form at Rinyo, Childe, V. G., and Grant, W. G., *P.S.A.S.*, LXXIII (1938-9), 24 and fig. 5 and *ibid.*, LXXXI (1946-7), 34-39.

<sup>6</sup> Butler, J. J., and Smith, I. F., *12th Ann. Report Inst. Arch.* (1956), 43-47; May and Collins, op. cit., 36-39 where their latest type, 4, of a 'degenerating' series with two well spaced cordons is not to be confused with the form we are considering here. Compare Longworth, I. H., *P.P.S.*, xxvii (1961), 273-80, on this aspect of the origins of the collared urn tradition.

<sup>7</sup> *Neolithic Cultures of the British Isles* (1954), 328.

Ayrshire, may be added here; apart from the two segmented and one nine-rayed star beads, which indicate a date not later than 1400 B.C.,<sup>1</sup> No. 9 of the sixteen 'cinerary urns' has an incised band of debased chevrons just below a slightly in-turned rim, which could be regarded as a poor relation of either a cordoned or collared prototype<sup>2</sup>: certainly not too much weight must be placed on the 'degenerate' appearance of such vessels. One final example, if a doubtful one, is the rim of a pot from Port na Long having traces of two bands of applied cordons on it and described by Beveridge as 'harder and containing less grit than usual'.<sup>3</sup> Cordoned bands, one may remember, have been found on Early Iron Age sherds found with Covesea ware at the Dalnaglar hut circle, Perthshire!<sup>4</sup> But we will return to the question of survivals below.

#### THE OCCUPATION OF THE OUTER ISLES IN THE SECOND MILLENNIUM

However intriguing an exercise the juggling with pottery typology may be, we are so far not much advanced in putting a term to our Hebridean cist burials. It is necessary now to take a broader sweep of the pre-Roman occupation of the Outer Isles, and the west coast colonisation by chambered tomb builders may be taken as a starting point. The large cairns of combined passage and gallery grave type – Barpa Langass with its Iberian-looking supporting central pillar at the end of its passage,<sup>5</sup> Unival, Cleltraval – all represent the northern extent of the 'Clyde-Carlingford' group<sup>6</sup> and on the other hand have certain associations with the Orkney-Cromarty tombs; the local pottery such as the products of the Eilean an Tighe kilns reflects both Beacharra 'B' and its Iberian antecedents, though certain zoned grooved decorative motifs as well as slight cordons<sup>7</sup> not only recall the traditions of Rinyo but look forward to the crude designs of our supposed 'Bronze Age' vessels. The porcellanite axe fragment from Eilean an Tighe, imported from the factory site on Rathlin Island, is another throw-back to the Neolithic of the Clyde-Carlingford area.<sup>8</sup> A foreign strain is represented by a few fragmentary sherds of beaker at Barpa Langass, Cleltraval and Unival – the first being with a partial cremation, the last being of bell beaker form – as well as Geiriscllett, N. Uist, all secondary finds from chamber tombs. Here we must note the shallow pot 51 from Unival with its incised lozenges which, though of Rinyo I style, has a very 'Wessex' look about it,<sup>9</sup> nor must we forget the unique pumice axe-pendant, also from Unival, in form

<sup>1</sup> Stone, J. F. S. and Thomas, L. C., *P.P.S.*, xxii, (1956), 58-61; the Ardeer beads are List Nos. S.41-42, 48 and 57 in Beck, H. C. and Stone, *Archaeologia*, lxxxv, (1936).

<sup>2</sup> Mann, L. M'L., *P.S.A.S.*, xl (1905-6), 378-96 and fig. 10. <sup>3</sup> *op. cit.*, 227-8.

<sup>4</sup> Interim notes in *P.P.S.*, xxv (1959), 279-80. In surveying the Hebridean Iron Age pottery, Mrs Young not only emphasises the Neolithic elements but comments on the frequency of the applied cordon; Rivet, A. L. F., *Antiquity*, xxxvi (1962), 27.

<sup>5</sup> A survey carried out by Professor Atkinson and members of the Sollas party showed this pillar to be unsupported by any free stone blocking contrary to the impression given by the plan originally published in *R.C.A.M.(S.)*, 'The Outer Hebrides . . .' (1928), No. 224 and fig. 137 (plan), but cf. fig. 129 (photograph of interior). See also Piggott, *N.C.B.I.*, 225.

<sup>6</sup> Piggott, *op. cit.*, 224-32 and fig. 35:4 (Cleltraval); the distinctive Carlingford side of the culture has been fully studied recently by Corcoran, J. X. W. P., *P.P.S.*, xxvi (1960), 98-148; a link with the Caithness forecourt tombs is suggested, see here particularly 132-3. Professor R. de Valéra's strictures (e.g. *P.P.S.*, xxvii (1961), 240-9) do not affect the feasibility of this point.

<sup>7</sup> Scott, W. L., *P.S.A.S.*, lxxxv (1950-1), 1-37.

<sup>8</sup> Jope, E. M., *U.J.A.*, 15 (1952), 32. <sup>9</sup> *P.P.S.*, iv (1938), 336-7 and Pl. LIX.

closest to a Breton flat axe.<sup>1</sup> As to the relative chronology of beakers on the west coast they occur frequently enough in short cists, which in the Arran and Bute region, at the beginning of Sir Lindsay Scott's SW. seaway, are predominantly associated with 'Wessex' or Food-Vessel material<sup>2</sup>; his remarks as to the virtual absence of cists from the Outer Hebrides we can now see as demonstrably untrue. That the earliest cists should belong to that 'stagnant period' of the chambered tombs to which Mrs Stewart referred the few beaker sherds just listed<sup>3</sup> seems reasonable enough and a similar route of origin may be postulated with a primary coastal settlement contrasting with the inland massif sites of the majority of the tombs.<sup>4</sup> The Lochs cist (List No. 1 and p. 66 above) is here an intriguing uncertainty.

A terminal point for these new 'foreign' strains is less easy to establish, especially when one notes the continuation of the traditions of purely stone-using cultures such as the flints from the Daliburgh sands on the west side of South Uist, which include barb-and-tang arrowheads, nosed blades and thumb-nail scrapers.<sup>5</sup> From the Berie sands, Uig, Lewis, a somewhat similar hybrid industry of local stone was found in association with wheel-house pottery, stressing this conservatism.<sup>6</sup>

The variety in burial rite is likewise a notoriously uncertain chronometer and all that can be done is to indicate the obvious; crouched inhumation seems to be a beaker introduction and cremations such as those indicated at Vallay (List No. 6), Port na Long (List No. 7) and Heisker (List No. 19) invite comparison with the inurned burials of those Bronze Age groups whose pottery has been noted in our earlier discussion. Evidence of somewhat greater weight is that offered by the major finds of bronzes which have so far been reported from the Outer Isles,<sup>7</sup> though none of them are from cist burials. There are only three Bronze Age hoards, a position which contrasts with the fairly numerous finds further east, as for instance in Skye and the Loch Broom areas. Two hoards of the British Late Ewart type 'V' hilted sword, which can be shown to be not far removed in time from the first Iron Age of north Britain, are from Iochdar, South Uist and Aird, Lewis. Both were found in peat, the first consisting of two swords both reported originally to have wooden hilts and one a leather sheath, the second also having two swords, one of which has a single piece of ox-horn grip and a blade point faintly suggesting a carp's tongue outline.<sup>8</sup> The much larger hoard from a peat bog at Adabrock, Ness, Lewis, reflects in its composition more far-flung connections as well as other aspects of the *floruit* of Late Bronze Age industry on the mainland.<sup>9</sup> Apart from socketed

<sup>1</sup> Piggott, *op. cit.*, 232. <sup>2</sup> Scott, W. L., *P.P.S.*, xvii (1951), 45-49. <sup>3</sup> Crichton Mitchell, *op. cit.*, 161.

<sup>4</sup> A point which we owe to Prof. Atkinson; Miss D. M. Hunter in an unpublished thesis, 'E.B.A. inhumation burials in Britain', has suggested an evolution of the cist as a 'utility' form of burial in contrast to mounded or chambered tombs. For further comments on cist burial ritual see Corcoran, *A.N.L.*, vi:9 (1958), 213-15 and 218.

<sup>5</sup> Lacaille, A. D., *The Stone Age in Scotland* (1954), 298-9. <sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, *P.S.A.S.*, lxxi (1936-7), 279-96.

<sup>7</sup> In considering the finds mentioned in this section we owe much to the help of Dr J. M. Coles, now Assistant Lecturer in Prehistoric Archaeology, University of Cambridge; see here on swords his note in *P.S.A.S.*, xci (1957-8), 182-6 and now his general review of Scottish Late Bronze Age Metalwork, *P.S.A.S.*, xciii (1959-60), 16-134. For a newly recognised Ewart sword from Lyndale, Isle of Skye, see Cowen, J. D., *Ant. J.*, xli (1961), 232-3 and Pl. XLII.

<sup>8</sup> For Iochdar: Thomas, F. W. L., *P.S.A.S.*, vi (1864-6), 252-3, 271, and xiii (1878-9), 327-8, Coles, J. M., *P.S.A.S.*, xciii (1959-60), 111; for Aird: Anderson, J., *P.S.A.S.*, xxvii (1892-3), 38-41, 375, Coles, J. M., *P.S.A.S.*, xciii (1959-60), 128.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, J., *P.S.A.S.*, xlv (1910-11), 11, 27-46, and liv (1919-20), 128-9, Coles, J. M., *P.S.A.S.*, xciii (1959-60), 127.

axes, a gouge and lunate spear-head, more distant influence is to be seen in three razors, two class II bifids and the third a hybrid.<sup>1</sup> More important still are two fragments from a bronze vessel probably of Hallstatt I derivation,<sup>2</sup> to be dated after 700 B.C. The craftsman's tools included in this hoard – socketed gouge and hammer, tanged chisel – remind us of the evidence from another far-flung outpost of Late Bronze Age smithing, the finds in the 'courtyard house' village at Jarlshof, Shetland,<sup>3</sup> which contain amongst mould fragments for a gouge, socketed axes, and Ewart swords, that for a sunflower pin of the normal Irish and Scandinavian type,<sup>4</sup> although it should be pointed out that there is no need to regard the Jarlshof smith as being of Irish origin.

But it is the associated pottery which is perhaps of more immediate interest.<sup>5</sup> This, a fine well-fired ware of straight or barrel-shaped form, exhibits the flat-topped rims which have caused Hamilton to class it with the 'flat-rimmed' ware of presumed Middle Rhenish origin as published by Miss Benton from the Sculptor's Cave, Covesea,<sup>6</sup> and more recently reconsidered by Professor Hawkes and Mrs Brown in connection with the late seventh-century Heathery Burn finds. However, Professor Piggott has pointed out the dangers inherent in using such basic 'Kummerkeramik' as any indication for migration,<sup>7</sup> and indeed Hamilton himself points out similarities in form between vessels from the already mentioned Shetland cists and Jarlshof, while the simple cooking-pot from Dwelling II is no distance from our Trecklet example (q.v., p. 68). There are in fact three flat-rimmed vessels from Lewis which Dr Coles would see as evolving quite naturally from native Bronze Age bucket forms.<sup>8</sup> Indeed an illustration of such a progression may be seen in the pottery from cists and other sites in the sandhills of the Murlough peninsula which combines Windmill Hill, 'Sandhills', and Rinyo features with 'Food-Vessel' decoration and even a barrel-shaped finger-impressed flat based urn (Site 2). Flower-pot, flat based and vertical rim sherds occur on a level with the cremation cists of Site 1 – pottery which, as Collins points out, would otherwise be taken as of Iron Age date.<sup>9</sup> This however is just the sort of simple pot which is one of the types of the Secondary Neolithic cremating Ronaldsway culture of the Isle of Man, a culture again with echoes of an Iberian connection in its decorated schist plaques<sup>10</sup>; while the storage jar form, as Piggott points out, has affinities with Eilean an Tighe.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Piggott, C. M., *P.P.S.*, xii (1946), 126.

<sup>2</sup> von Merhart, G., *Festschrift R.-G.Z. Mainz*, II (1952), 3-15 – the form is his class B2b; for reconstruction, see Coles, J. M., *P.S.A.S.*, xciii (1959-60), 49, fig. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Hamilton, J. R. C., *Excavations at Jarlshof, Shetland* (1956), 18-31 and fig. 14.

<sup>4</sup> q.v. Coles, J. M., *P.S.A.S.*, xciii (1958-9), 1-9.

<sup>5</sup> op. cit., 29-31 and figs. 15-16.

<sup>6</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, LXV (1930-1), 177-216.

<sup>7</sup> Heathery Burn: *Ant. J.*, xxxvii (1957), 159-60 and fig. 6; in general Piggott in *The Problem of the Picts* (1955), 57; see also for the continental background Sprockhoff, E., *B.R.-G.K.*, 31 (1941), 1-138.

<sup>8</sup> In the National Museum of Antiquities: Balallan (two pots; HR.114-15) and Galson (one). The flat rim also occurs on shouldered vessels of Hawkes' First A Iron Age at Castell Odo, the only N. Wales site so far to have produced Iron Age 'A' pottery; the excavator cites Jarlshof L.B.A. II – with shouldered jars – as possibly contemporaneous, Alcock, L., *Arch. Camb.*, cix (1960), 122-7 and 135.

<sup>9</sup> Collins, A. E. P., *U.J.A.*, 15 (1952), 2-25 and 22 (1959), 5-20. The study of Irish Neolithic pottery by Case, H., *P.P.S.*, xxvii (1961), 174-233, now recognises southern flat based Rockbarton and northern Kilhoyle pots – often with cordons (figs. 23-24) – which are mainly with post-Neolithic associations.

<sup>10</sup> Piggott, *N.C.B.I.*, 350 and fig. 61:9; the most 'Iberian' plaque from these islands is without doubt the bone example from the early levels of Jarlshof: Hamilton, op. cit., 16 and fig. 8:1.

<sup>11</sup> *N.C.B.I.*, 346-31; this basic relationship of the northern island 'cultures' and the element of continuity

But the notable insularity of the Ronaldsway culture as a whole is a valuable example of just the sort of evolutionary process one might expect amongst the small communities of the north, few if any of which can have had the numerical strength to warrant anthropologically the use of the term 'culture'.

#### THE END OF PREHISTORY IN THE OUTER ISLES

In our discussion so far we have been trying to bridge the gap between two major points in the prehistory of the Outer Isles, the arrival of the chambered tomb builders and that of the refugee wheel-house dwellers. Two factors as yet unremarked appear to provide a lower limit for our second millennium material. First of all the foreign Hallstatt affinities of hoards such as Adabrock would suggest a *terminus ante quem* of *c.* 600 B.C., a date overlapping with the first Iron Age of North Britain.<sup>1</sup> Secondly there are indications in the classical authors that the Outer Isles were uninhabited in the first-second century A.D., hints supported by the sixth-century A.D. Ravenna Cosmography.<sup>2</sup> Plutarch's *De Defectu*, with its reference to deserted islands, was probably written *c.* A.D. 120 and the rarity of Roman objects of early date in the Outer Isles is in striking contrast with those of the mainland.<sup>3</sup> The apparent desertion of these regions would coincide with the deterioration of climatic conditions at the beginning of Zone VIII of the pollen zonation of Britain. Although comparatively little work has been done on pollen spectra in Scotland there is some local evidence on this point.<sup>4</sup> The Iochdar hoard was found resting on boulder clay at the base of a peat bed 10-12 feet thick while the Callanish stones have a five-foot layer of blanket bog; a similar covering lies over the Eriskay cairns.<sup>5</sup> The period of use of the short cists is certainly far from settled and it is only fair to add that short cist burial may have been practised by the Picts<sup>6</sup>; however it should be noted that our cist pottery such as it is is completely at variance with the into the Iron Age has been emphasised to us by Mr R. B. K. Stevenson; see his remarks on the pottery from the Calf of Eday in *P.S.A.S.*, LXXIII (1938-9), 182. To be added here is a 'flower pot' urn from an unlocated cist on Trevedra Common, St Just-in-Penwith, Thomas, A. C., *Proc. W.C.F.C.*, 2:5 (1960-1), 190-5 and fig. 18; there indeed seems a case for presenting this vessel as some form of secondary Neolithic ware in the SW. British equivalent of the Northern cist-using groups. But in Cornwall we have no late survivals - as yet.

<sup>1</sup> Coles, *P.S.A.S.*, xci (1957-8), 184, although in Scotland Piggott commences his First A at 350 B.C. with Jarlshof L.B.A. II, v. Rivet, *op. cit.*, 24-25 and fig. 1 - see here note 8 to p. 71 above.

<sup>2</sup> Piggott, S., and Henderson, K., *Scotland before History* (1958), 101-2, Plutarch's 'Demetrius of Tarsus, in his *De Defectu Oraculorum* 18, 419 E - following R. Flacilère's edition (1947) - who remarks on such desertion, may be identified with the Demetrius recorded (? as a tutor) at Agricola's Northern Command H.Q., York; see Clarke, J., in *Roman and Native in North Britain* (1958), 41, with references *pace* Stevens, C. E., *Antiquity*, xxxiv (1960), 311; Dessau, H., *Hermes*, XLVI (1911), 156-60, concludes that Demetrius was part of a scientific mission sent to Britain during Agricola's governorship *c.* 77-84; here see also Richmond, I. A., *Antiquity*, xiv (1940), 193-5; for useful notes on Demetrius see also Burn, A. R., *Agricola and Roman Britain* (1953), 113-15 and 132. In the Ravenna Cosmography, 'Erimon', a western island whose name has been derived from *ἐρημος* (desert) is claimed as the Long Island; Richmond and Crawford, O. G. S., *Archaeologia*, xcii (1949), 33. Lethbridge, T. C., *The Painted Men* (1934), 141-52 has some interesting comments on the confusion of Ptolemy's northern geography, a source almost certainly used by the compilers of the Cosmography.

<sup>3</sup> Clarke, *op. cit.*, 69; Curle, J., *P.S.A.S.*, LXVI (1931-2), 282; Lethbridge, *op. cit.*, 150.

<sup>4</sup> In general, see Durno, S. E., *Scot. Geog. Mag.*, 72:3 (1956), 177-87; for Barra, Blackburn, K. B., *New Phytologist*, 45 (1946), 44-49.

<sup>5</sup> Lethbridge, *op. cit.*, 56; the S. Uist blanket bog of (Sub-Atlantic) Zone VIII is correlated with an increase in heather by J. W. Heslop Harrison and K. B. Blackburn, *New Phytologist*, 45 (1946), 128-9.

<sup>6</sup> F. T. Wainwright in *The Problem of the Picts* (1955), 93; this view has also been suggested to us by Mr A. C. Thomas. Again, in the Isles of Scilly crouched inhumations in short cists continue at least into the second century A.D.; Dudley, D., *Proc. W.C.F.C.*, II:5 (1960-1), 221-31.

wheel-house ware in both form and texture even though such features as the slashed band of decoration are not unknown.<sup>1</sup> The pedigree, bastard as it is, which we have suggested for our presumed Bronze Age forms would certainly fall in line with Dr Coles' locally evolved, non-Covesea, flat-rimmed ware; the wheel- and aisled round-house dwellers have links incontestably with the Iron Age of the mainland. In the islands, unlike the mainland, we cannot find justification for that gradual shading off into the new native elements which we may note at Traprain Law and other sites.<sup>2</sup>

Our arguments are of course tentative in the extreme and perhaps likely to appeal only to those who, in Professor Gombrich's phrase, 'prefer footnotes to fireworks'. The unkind critic may feel that conservatism and retardation in the Highland zone is an overworked and frequently erroneous concept, but the evidence cited here, although slight, does suggest at least a continuous tradition of short cist burial from the late stages of the Neolithic to a period chronologically equivalent with the first stages of the Iron Age of the mainland. Certainty there cannot be, until further detailed examination has been made not of one, but of several groups of short cists – for a start the remainder of the Newton cemetery. The results could well be of major importance for the later prehistory of the Outer Isles.

#### APPENDIX: THE SKELETAL REMAINS FROM THE NEWTON CIST

Owing to the dictates of local propriety a complete anatomical examination of the skeletal remains from the Newton short cist proved impossible. However, thanks to the kind offices of Dr I. W. Cornwall and the staff of the University of Cambridge Duckworth Laboratory of Physical Anthropology, reports have been provided on the skull, left femur, and vertebral column, abstracts of which are here given.

Dr Cornwall, whose comments on the general disposition of the skeleton as shown in Pl. X have been incorporated in the description of the excavation (p. 62), writes as follows:

The skull was that of a long-headed individual (length 189 mm., breadth 140 mm., cranial index 74.0), probably of female sex, judging by the slight brow-ridges, the impressions of the nuchal musculature and small mastoid processes.<sup>3</sup>

The cranial sutures were still, for the most part, open. Fusion was only just beginning externally in the region of the obelion and in the part of the coronal immediately to the left of the bregma. Though nearly obliterated, the course of the metopic suture was still traceable, near the root of the nose and close to the bregma. An age in the early twenties is suggested by these features. There were two sutural bones in the left branch of the lambdoid suture towards the lateral part of its course. This is an individual peculiarity, uncommon but not rare, which is said to run in families.

The dentition was complete and perfect,<sup>4</sup> in the sense that no trace of caries was to be seen, but some of the teeth were already deeply worn. All save the premolars and the second and third molars were showing exposed inliers of dentine and, in the first molar of the upper left side these were beginning to coalesce. It was noticeable that wear was greater throughout on the left side, perhaps owing to some habit of the individual in chewing mainly on that side. The M2's were worn almost

<sup>1</sup> Scott, W. L., *P.P.S.*, xiv (1948), 60-66 and Young, A. N., *P.S.A.S.*, LXXXVI (1952-3), 90.

<sup>2</sup> Burley (now Fowler), E., *P.S.A.S.*, LXXXIX (1955-6), 130.

<sup>3</sup> Confirmation of sexing is offered by observation of the pelvis made on the spot.

<sup>4</sup> Mr F. W. Day, B.D.S., has commented to us on the improved calcification metabolism of the teeth in comparison to many modern sets; Mr Day also confirms the approximate age estimation here given.

flat, but showed no dentine. The M<sub>3</sub>'s were fully erupted, but, as yet, scarcely worn. This last confirms the youthful age-estimate made from the sutures. The diet must have been exceedingly gritty for tooth-wear to have proceeded to such lengths at so early an age. It was perhaps due to the use of meal ground on a quern of sandstone of indifferent quality.

The left femur which proved to have been misplaced during the initial discovery of the cist in 1955, has also been commented on by Dr Cornwall who writes:

The femur was small and slightly built, without marked muscular attachment. The suture of the epiphysis of the head was still traceable locally, supporting the age-estimate above.

A calculation of the individual's stature in life was made, from the maximum length of the femur (40.7 cm.), using the general reconstruction formulae of Dupertuis and Hadden,<sup>1</sup> calculated for females:

$$2.317 \times 40.7 + 61.412 = 155.7 \text{ cm.} = 5 \text{ ft. } 0\frac{1}{4} \text{ in.}$$

Re-calculated as for a male, the height would have been:

$$2.238 \times 40.7 + 69.089 = 160.2 \text{ cm.} = 5 \text{ ft. } 2 \text{ in.}$$

In either case, this was a rather short individual.

From a single bone, these estimates are unlikely to be accurate within an inch either way.<sup>2</sup>

The vertebral column with the fifth cervical missing was submitted by a member of the excavation party, Miss Fenella Melville, lately of New Hall, Cambridge, to the Duckworth Laboratory which has offered the following observations:

A slight bony growth is visible on the 4th lumbar vertebra. This is the area where bony growth occurs most frequently, and is usually associated with arthritis.

The two halves of the vertebral arch of the atlas have failed to join, but this is not an unknown occurrence.

The sacrum seems odd, as it looks lop-sided, the left side being lower than the right, with the auricular surface smaller, and a rather deep depression on the ligamentous surface. The significance of this cannot be decided on.

The vertebral column is not on the robust side but it is difficult to be definite of the sex of isolated parts of a skeleton. As to age, it is noticeable that the bodies of the vertebrae are not very worn.

It is unfortunate in view of the equivocal nature of the dating evidence we have advanced for the Hebridean cists that so far comparative anatomy has had little to offer on the subject of the human types of prehistoric Scotland. Dr J. C. Trevor has stated that for the Neolithic period Scottish skeletal remains give no satisfactory standards of comparison.<sup>3</sup> The mean measurements of the British Neolithic crania are stated by Trevor to be those of the Belas Knap, Glos., long barrow: length 194 mm., breadth 138 mm., cranial index 71.<sup>4</sup> Scottish examples are often lower and broader in the Bronze Age, though the Northern English cranial measurements quoted by Thurnam<sup>5</sup> appear to be similar but with more variations than those of the preceding period, with an index of 81; the Scottish crania are shorter. The collections of the National Museum of Antiquities give the following mean figures: length 181 mm. (as compared with 184 mm. for the English examples), breadth 150 mm., giving an index of 82.8. Read and Morant<sup>6</sup> give the measurements of a

<sup>1</sup> Dupertuis, C. W., and Hadden, J. A., *Am. J. Physical Anthropology*, 9 (1951), 15-54.

<sup>2</sup> These measurements accord with the rough length noted in the field.

<sup>3</sup> Munro Lectures delivered to the University of Edinburgh, November 1955 (unpublished).

<sup>4</sup> Bird, H., *Journal of the Anthropological Society*, III (1865), lxxv-lxxiv.

<sup>5</sup> *Archaeologia*, XLIII (1875), 543-4.

<sup>6</sup> *Biometrika*, xx v (1928), 379-88.

skull from a short cist on Berneray found in 1861 which passed into the collections of the Royal College of Surgeons, London (here List No. 3): length 189 mm., breadth 145 mm., index 75.7. Coon states that the evidence from British short cists in general is towards brachycephaly<sup>1</sup> while Morant has stated that extreme dolichocephaly seemed to have been extinct before the end of the Bronze Age, the main new type of the period being the brachycephalic group generally associated in the north with Food-Vessels.<sup>2</sup>

From the above notes it would seem that the Newton skull with a cephalic index of 74 could be related to the general British Neolithic and earliest Bronze Age type as so far defined by the anthropologists.<sup>3</sup> However, in view of the heterogeneous nature of the Scottish material as a whole, it would clearly be unwise to press this point too far. It is interesting nevertheless to note the similarity in the measurements of both the Newton and the Berneray skull mentioned above. The dangers of making deductions from such slight evidence need not be stressed and merely offer yet another argument for a full examination of the short cist cemetery apparently represented at Newton.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Apart from those whose help has been mentioned in the course of this paper, we must record our thanks to the following: Mr John Macaskill of Newton, North Uist, on whose land the cist was situated, for identifying the actual spot and readily granting permission for its excavation; our fellow excavators and students, in particular Miss Fenella Melville and Mr Roger Kistruck; the Director General and Archaeology Division, Ordnance Survey, for much of the basic information on the whereabouts of short cists in the Outer Isles; Dr John M. Coles and Professor Stuart Piggott for assistance in the sections on Bronze Age material in the Outer Isles and the Roman period respectively; Mr R. B. K. Stevenson for, as usual, not merely granting ready access to the collections of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland but offering many useful suggestions as well; Mr Robin Livens and Mr Jack Scott for offering similar facilities in Glasgow at the Hunterian Museum and the City Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove; Mr T. C. Lethbridge for information from his own first hand knowledge; and finally and most particularly we owe a major debt to our former teacher and guide at every stage of this investigation, Professor R. J. C. Atkinson.

<sup>1</sup> *Races of Europe* (1939), 160-1.

<sup>2</sup> *Biometrika*, xviii (1926), 56-98.

<sup>3</sup> See here an interesting paper based on Yorkshire material: Brothwell, D. R., *Advancement of Science*, 64 (March 1960), 311-22; his correlations with the Danish Late Neolithic wrongly presume, however, this period to have preceded the British Early Bronze Age. On the other hand comparisons of features other than the cephalic index show the Scottish short cist crania to have a distinct individuality. Brothwell also comments on osteo-arthritis (p. 317-18), a subject which is also discussed by him in a general essay on the palaeopathology of Early British man; *J.R.A.I.*, 91:2 (July-December 1961), 339-41; see the report on the Newton skeleton's vertebral column, p. 74 above.

## SHORT CISTS IN THE OUTER ISLES

	Locality	Grave Type	No.	Description and Remarks
1	LEWIS Lochs	inhumation in short cist	1	P.S.A.S., LXII (1927-8), 25 contained 'two small fragments of an urn . . . with the well-known toothed stamp of the early Bronze Age'
2	HARRIS *Berneray, S. of Maol Bhan	inhumation in cist	1	ONB, OS '1858' 'stone coffin containing human remains'
3	*Berneray, N. of Ru Carrau	inhumation in cists	?	ONB 'Near the southern extremity of Berneray . . . there has been found from time to time a number of stone coffins containing human remains'
4	NORTH UIST Boreray, Traigh na Luibe	inhumation in short cist	1	RCAM 276 at base of sand mound; long side of cist 2'6", short side somewhat less
5	Vallay, Tota Dunaig	short cist	1	B measured 5'6" x 3' at depth of 2'; 'close outside the East edge was found a finely polished stone axe' (ill. opp. p. 268)
6	Vallay, Sithean an Altair	inhumation and cremation in short cists	13	B contained in sand mound 30' x 18' x 5': (i) in the centre: cremation between two upright slabs, an unburnt skull (ii) W. of centre: a cist of four slabs, 3' x 2'3", with fragments of burnt bone (iii) E. of centre: a cist 4' long containing cremated bone (iv) N. of centre: five empty cists, two being 3' long a cist 2 yds. from centre feature made of five slabs each 2' long containing cremated bone and 'a single white pebble' (v) S. of centre: two cists 2'9" x 1'6", one containing 'a calcined oyster shell' a cist 2' x 1'5" a cist 2'6" long, containing cremated bone and 'a quartzite pebble'

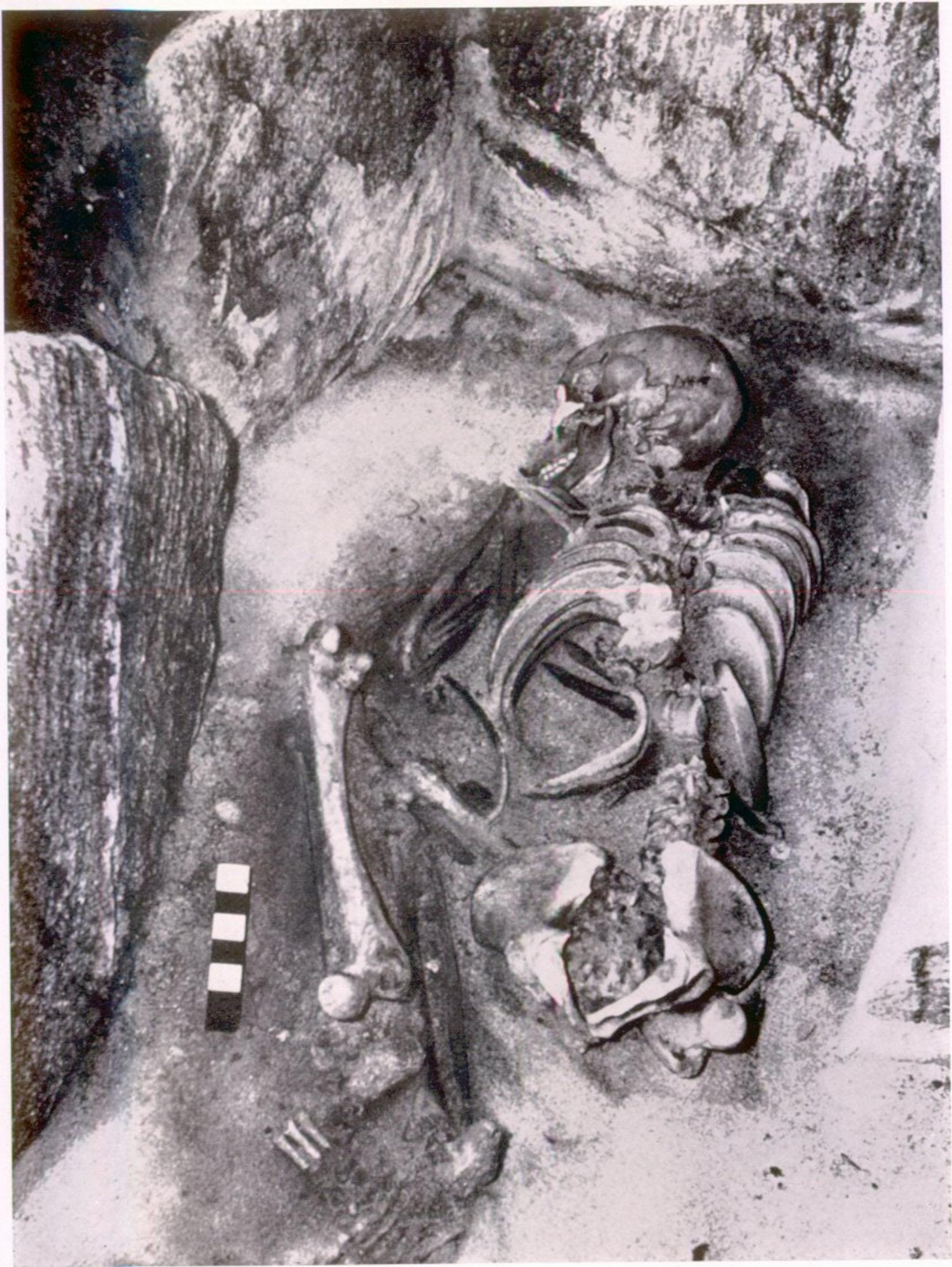
7	Port na Long, Rudha na Traghad	cremation in short cists	?	B several 'reported from time to time'; a cist c. 2' long found by Beveridge 'upon the sandy slope', containing 'an inverted urn of coarse pottery, six inches in height, and with a diameter widening from 4½ to 5¼ inches . . . this vessel still held some dark viscous matter, probably indicating a cremated burial; and upon its flat base . . . is crudely incised an ornamental design. Close to the urn lay a small circular flat stone which would exactly fit the inverted mouth.'
8	*Port na Long, Faodhail a' Chaolais	massive cist	1	B on tidal beach 'four regular blocks' forming 'a massive rectangular erection'
9	*Dun an Stiùir, NW. of	inhumation in cist	1	ONB, OS '1840' 'stone cist containing human remains. It was formed of flat slabs from 2 to 3' in length'
10	*Newton, W. of	inhumation in cists	3	ONB, OS '1845' 'In a field 13 chains in a S.W. direction from Newton . . . Stone Cists . . . formed of flat slabs and contained Human remains'
11	Newton	crouched inhumation in short cist	1	(present paper)
12	Beinn Bhreac, SE. of	short cist	1	B 3'7" x 2', formed of five upright slabs and originally covered by cairn, outside diameter 10'
13	*Clachan Iosal	cist	1	B 'on a small hillock'
14	*Portain	cist	1	B 'At the east base of a cliff, amidst many fallen rocks, is one slab . . . sup- ported by other stones which seem to have been artificially placed . . . upon the covering slab . . . are four cup-marks, three of them in a row near its edge, the other being smaller and out of line'
15	*Loch Veiragavat, island in	cists	2	B 'ruined'
16	*Lochmaddy	cists	?	JVSM several reported (1957) on edge of town

## SHORT CISTS IN THE OUTER ISLES—continued

	Locality	Grave Type	No.	Description and Remarks
17	Tighary	inhumation in short cist	1	JVSM contained 'a skull so vast that when placed on (the finder's) own head it covered his shoulders'
18	*Heisker, Ceann Ear	inhumation in cist cists	1 6	B 'writer found a cist containing human bones' B 'a group of six upon the . . . island'
19	Heisker	? cremation in short cist	1	MM 'There was a Stone-Chest lately discovered here, having an earthen Pitcher in it which was full of Bones, and as soon as touched they turned to Dust'
20	SOUTH UIST Calvay Island	short cist	1	RCAM 400 4' x 3'9"; 'one slab forms one side while the other is composed of two single slabs set on edge'
21	*Pollachar	crouched inhumation in cists	?	RCAM 402 'stone-lined graves . . . from time to time exposed after heavy storms'
22	Sithean Bhuirgh, Borve	cist	1	RCAM 357 'seven large blocks of stone' on summit of 30' high hillock at extreme SW. tip of island; one stone, 5' x 1'10" x 1'2", set on edge, a second, 5'1" x 4'10" x 10", 'may possibly be the cover stone'

## REFERENCES:

- \* cists not certainly 'short'  
 B Beveridge, Erskine, *North Uist, Its Archaeology and Topography* (1911)  
 JVSM Megaw, J. V. S., *Folk-Lore*, LXVIII (1957), 483-8  
 MM Martin Martin, *A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh, 1703)  
 ONB Object Name Books, Ordnance Survey; compiled for Hebrides c. 1870-5  
 OS Ordnance Survey 6" Maps  
 RCAM *Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments (Scotland)*, 'The Outer Hebrides . . .' (1928)



Newton, North Uist. Crouched burial in short cist  
(scale of inches)

MEGAW AND SIMPSON: A SHORT CIST BURIAL ON NORTH UIST.