

## II.

NOTICE OF THE DISCOVERY OF URNS AT THE HILL OF CULSH, NEW DEER, ABERDEENSHIRE. BY THE HON. JOHN ABERCROMBY,  
*Foreign Secretary.*

Mr Alexander Gray of New Deer, in a letter dated 25th March 1901, reports as follows :—

“ At your request I now state the circumstances of the discovery of the urns found on the farm of Standing Stones, New Deer. The farm buildings are situated about half-way down the Hill of Culsh, have a southerly exposure, and, as the name implies, there were standing stones near where the houses now stand. Pratt, in his *History of Buchan*, states that the stones were removed and used for the building of a manse for the parish minister. The field in which the urns were discovered lies about three furlongs to the south-west of the farm steading. It was added to the farm only a few years ago, having been formerly two crofts. Along the south side of the field runs the small burn of Auchriddy, which divides the Hill of Culsh from that of Turffhill. About thirty yards to the north of this stream is a ridge running east and west, about 500 yards long, with a steep incline southwards to the burn. On this ridge the urns were found.

“ Mr Littlejohn, farmer, on going over his field to ascertain whether it was in condition for sowing, discovered some bones on the surface of the soil, and on closer examination found small pieces of an urn, which he sent me to look at and give an opinion upon. I then went to the place with Mr Littlejohn, and, removing the soil, found the urn marked No. 1. It was all in fragments, apparently having been broken by the plough. The pieces were lying over bones and black earth, which we examined, and found the small piece of bronze and the flint implements enclosed. After satisfying ourselves that nothing more was to be found at this spot, we dug over the surrounding soil and discovered urn No. 2 about two feet from the first. We carefully cleared away the soil from it and found it in an inverted position in a circular cavity, cut about 5 inches deep into the subsoil. It encircled bones and black earth, but we discovered in it nothing of a metallic nature. About two yards from this one, we observed on the surface an appearance of black earth, and on removing the soil found No. 3, also in an inverted position. It is from this urn that the bones, and the soil containing bones, sent to you were found. In no case was it observed that the urn rested on a flat stone. All this happened on Saturday, March 9th.

“ On the following Monday we dug over about nine square yards, when we discovered unmistakable evidence of seven other circular cavities where urns had been placed. But with the exception of the two small pieces enclosed, no other remains of urns were found. We had resolved to abandon any further digging when we observed, near where we stood, a spot of black earth. We cleared it out, only to find the same conditions as before. But by chance Mr Littlejohn struck the edge of the subsoil with his spade, and the small urn (incense-cup) tumbled into the hole we had dug. It contained bones and black earth. I

have no doubt it had been enclosed in a large urn, placed in the cavity we had found, and had been shifted from its original position when the plough had broken up the one that enclosed it. Enclosed is some of the subsoil we found in digging, as I thought it might interest you. In the nine square yards with the remains of urns and the circular cavities found, there would have been ten urns altogether at one time on this small place.

"I may also state that within the last few years there have been found on this farm and the adjoining farms on Culsh Hill a number of stone and flint axes, anvils, and arrowheads, and a large variety of other sorts of flint implements, a good many of them having been on the ridge where the urns were discovered. When digging we picked up twenty-five pieces of flint on and about the place. Should you desire any fuller detail I shall be very pleased to give it you."

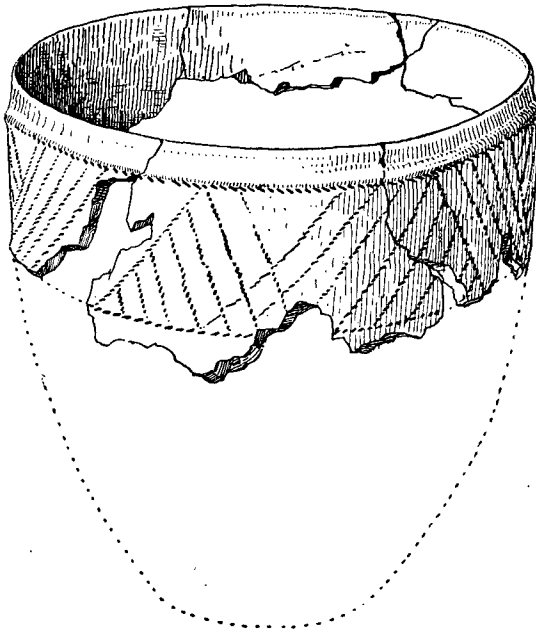


Fig. 1. Urn No. 1 found at Hill of Culsh. (‡)

When I saw the find at New Deer the three urns were in fragments. But Mr Gray told me that No. 2 was very much like an urn from Sheriff Flats in Lanarkshire, preserved in the National Museum, and marked EA 27 in the catalogue, where an illustration of it is given.

That is to say, it belonged to a cinerary urn of truncated cone type, with convex sides and with two hoop-mouldings round it. This has proved to be the case, and it is not at all surprising. For this type is commonly found in flat cemeteries with incinerated remains, as at Calais Muir, Lawpark, Kirkpark, Magdalen Bridge, and Sheriff Flats.

Since then the cinerary urns Nos. 1 and 2 have been partially restored

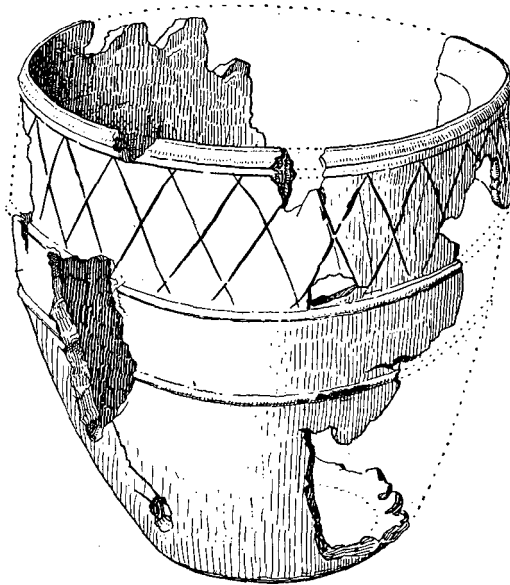


Fig. 2. Urn No. 2 found at Hill of Culsh. (4.)

at the Museum. Of No. 1 only the upper portion is left (fig. 1), having a diameter of  $10\frac{3}{4}$  inches and a depth of about 4 inches. On its upper surface the rim is flat and has no bevel on the inner side. Just below the rim is a very slight bead moulding, and below that a band of ornament, nearly four inches deep, of intersecting diagonals made with a twisted thong or cord. Just below the ornament there are signs of a horizontal moulding, so that probably this urn, like No. 2, belongs to the type with hoop-mouldings, or, as Dr Thurnam would have said,

“with a border in place of a rim.” The paste is fairly fine and of dark colour.

No. 2 (fig. 2) is of fairly fine paste with a smooth external surface, and is less dark than No. 1. The diameter at the mouth measures  $10\frac{1}{2}$  inches and its height is  $10\frac{3}{8}$  inches. The rim is bevelled on the inner side. Just below the rim is a very slight bead moulding, and below that is a border,  $3\frac{5}{8}$  inches deep, of intersecting diagonals. Immediately below is another bead moulding of greater dimensions than the upper one. Two inches lower is another similar moulding. The ornament is incised with a pointed instrument, and does not extend below the border. No. 3 is a complete wreck, of which nothing need be said.

The ‘incense cup’ (fig. 3) is a fine specimen of its class, of well levigated clay without admixture of sand or pounded stone. Its typical form is composed of two truncated cones united at their bases. By Thurnam it is classed as ‘the contracted cup’; by Mr Alfred Way as ‘the turbinated.’ It is solidly made, well burnt, and presents a yellow ochre colour with occasional red patches. It measures in height 2 inches, diameter at the mouth  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches, greatest diameter  $3\frac{3}{16}$  inches, thickness of the walls  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch, thickness of the bottom  $\frac{7}{8}$  inch. The inside of the rim is bevelled and the bevel is ornamented with a band of short diagonals, bounded by two parallel lines. Below the lower line is a band of zigzag bounded by a horizontal line, and the two bands together are bounded above and below by a line of small punctures. In this example the upper cone curves slightly outwards just before its junction with the shoulder. Its upper part is decorated with a horizontal band of intersecting diagonals, forming two rows of lozenges with an upper and lower row of half lozenges. This band is bordered above and below by two parallel horizontal lines between which is a line of small round punctures. Above this upper border and below the lower one is another line of similar pricks. Nearly the whole of the lower truncated cone is solid, and the angle between the base of the vessel and the side walls is rounded off, especially on one side, where the ornament is obliterated and a slight repair or alteration seems to have been made at

the time of its manufacture. In continuation of the lower border just described comes a band of chevron not very carefully made, bounded above and below and intersected at the angle of the chevron by a horizontal line. Below this is a very narrow plain band followed by a band of intersecting diagonals, bordered below by two lines of small punctures. All the lines are incised. On the bottom are some scores which might be taken to represent a St Andrew's cross with two additional parallel scores below the upper left arm, and three above



Fig. 3. Small urn with two perforations in the side found at Hill of Culsh. (3.)  
(Side and bottom views.)

the lower right arm. There are, as is usually the case, two small perforations with a slightly downward slant, from near the bottom of the urn to the outside.

With regard to the piece of bronze there is not much to be said. It measures  $1\frac{7}{8}$  inches long by 1 inch wide, is thin, is very slightly curved in the direction of its length, and might have formed a portion of the flat blade of a knife dagger.

Having now described the pigmy urn or 'incense cup,' I shall attempt to define its relative age in the Bronze Age, which covers several

centuries of time. Pottery, of course, can only be dated by the objects, especially those of bronze, found with it.

The Bronze Age is broadly divided into an Older and a Younger Period. To the first belong flat axes, flat dagger blades, and certain ornaments of beaten gold, generally with incised ornament. To the second belong palstaves, swords, socketed celts, socketed spears, socketed knives, and socketed chisels. These two great periods are the equivalent of the *époque morgienne* and the *époque larnaudienne* of French archæologists. In Germany and Scandinavia, where the terms Older and Younger Periods are also used, certain types of swords and socketed spears are classed as belonging to the Older Period. In this country the Older Period can be sub-divided into an earlier part, in which flat axes and flat dagger blades were in use; and into a later part, when flanged celts with or without a stopridge, and stout daggers with well-developed midrib, and sometimes two or more flutings, parallel to the cutting edge, were employed. These sub-divisions correspond to the first and second stages of the three stages into which Sir John Evans (*Anc. br. implem. of Gt. Brit.*, p. 473) divides the whole of the Bronze Age in Great Britain and Ireland. But the earlier and later part of the Older Period are again capable of sub-division. The flat daggers became thicker along the median line, and the flat celts were slightly beaten up at the edge before passing, on the one hand, into stout daggers with a decided midrib, on the other into fully-developed flanged celts. As this transition took place before the flat dagger had passed away, implements of these later forms belong to the last half of the earlier part of the Older Bronze Period. In other words, the earlier part is capable of sub-division into two stages. Similarly with the later part, it is generally possible to determine whether a bronze dagger belongs to the first or second half of it. Thus we have an Older Period of Bronze in which four parts or stages of progressive development can be observed. As the Younger Period of Bronze lies beyond our present purview, it is unnecessary to consider it any further for the present.

Sir John Evans supposes that bronze may have been introduced into

Britain some 1400–1200 years B.C., and that the Older Period may have lasted some 400 years. So the time with which we are at present dealing may, roughly speaking, be included between 1400 and 1000 B.C., or, if you prefer the lower estimate, between 1200 and 800 B.C. It is much to be regretted that between the two probable dates of the introduction of bronze a difference of no less than two hundred years exists. But as archæology is a progressive science and still young, ever seeking to attain greater precision and to narrow down the periods during which particular types prevailed, there is every reason to hope that, when the number of finds has increased in all parts of Europe, Asia, and Egypt, this hiatus of two hundred years will nearly disappear. But for the present we must accept it.

Before proceeding further it may be well, perhaps, to co-relate these dates, such as they are, with events that were passing in other parts of the world. If we take the higher estimate, 1400–1000 B.C., then the first half of the Earlier Bronze Period coincides with the civilization of the nineteenth dynasty in Egypt, with Rameses II. and other mighty Egyptian kings. And the whole period synchronises with the time of the Judges and of King David in Jewish history. It is also partly synchronous with the most flourishing period of Mycenæ, which Professor Flinders Petrie dates from about 1300–1100 B.C. If we accept the lower estimate, 1200–800 B.C., the Older Bronze Period must have begun during the Mycenæan epoch, and ended just about the beginning of the second Hallstadt period, when iron was beginning to spread over central Europe, though this metal did not reach our shores till some 400 years later.

The type-form to which the New Deer ‘incense-cup’ belongs is, as we have seen, composed of two truncated cones united at their bases. Of the same type, though slightly differing in detail, are two pigmy urns, one from Gilchorn, near Arbroath, the other from Bolton, Lancashire, both of which were associated more or less closely with bronze daggers. In the New Deer example the walls of the upper cone are flat, but curve slightly outwards before meeting the shoulder. In the

two other examples the corresponding walls are slightly convex, and in both the shoulder is lower, thus giving a greater development to the upper half of the urn as compared with the lower half.

At Gilchorn two large cinerary urns of overhanging rim type were also found in the same cairn ; how far apart is not stated, but both were secondary interments. With one was the 'incense-cup' just mentioned, and a small, irregular, oval bead of whitish glass. In the earth below the other was a tanged knife-dagger, 3 inches long. About the centre of the cairn was a pit 6 feet by 3 feet by 3 feet deep, at the bottom of which were fragments of two bronze daggers. One of these was fully  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches long with a decided midrib and two small flutings along each side. The other fragments made a blade  $5\frac{1}{4}$  inches long, fully  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch thick, with a rounded midrib.<sup>1</sup> It is evident that the tanged knife-dagger cannot be earlier than these blades, but we may fairly assume that all three are in a broad sense of the word contemporary. And from the close resemblance between the cinerary urns we may safely assume that they, too, are contemporary. The Gilchorn pigmy urn, found with the first of these, is therefore of the same period as the tanged knife-dagger found with the other cinerary urn.

The 'incense-cup' from Bolton was found with a bronze dagger. It measures  $4\frac{3}{8}$  inches long by  $1\frac{3}{8}$  inches wide, and the point has been bent back. Though not described, mention is made that the blade is thin, and from the illustration it seems provided with a well-defined and prominent midrib.<sup>2</sup> We can hardly be far wrong in ascribing all four blades to the same period.

It now remains to define the period. Owing to the well-developed midribs and the fluting on one of the daggers, it is clear that by definition they belong to the second half of the Older Period. Then taking into consideration the thinness of the Bolton blade, and the fact that none of these blades have nearly reached the culminating point of excellence attained by many other daggers that have been found in

<sup>1</sup> *P. S. A. S.*, xxv. pp. 447-460.

<sup>2</sup> *Archæol. Cambr.*, New Series, iv. p. 159.



Great Britain, we may place these four blades, the three pigmy urns, the two cinerary urns with overhanging rim, and cinerary urns with two hoop mouldings like No. 1, as well as the glass bead, in the third stage of the Older Bronze Period, and rather towards the end of it.