5. An Encrusted Urn from Aberlemno, Angus.

Towards the beginning of March 1943, Mr Stewart A. Smith of Blackden, near Aberlemno, was ploughing up Melgund Muir when the ploughshare struck the capstone of a small cist. Appreciating the importance of find, Mr Smith informed the Rev. Nelson, Minister of Aberlemno, who reported the discovery to our Fellow, Mr J. S. Richardson, Inspector of Ancient Monuments. At his request I repaired to Aberlemno on behalf of the Director of the National Museum and helped Mr Smith to uncover the cist and remove the urn contained in it.

The site of the discovery (O.S. Map, Angus, Sheet XXXIII, S.E.) is a particularly sandy patch on a very low gravel ridge, one of several scarcely perceptible elevations that traverse Melgund Muir. The urn was set in a hole about 4 feet in diameter and some 3 feet deep, the filling of which, according to Mr Smith, was perceptibly looser and easier to dig than the surrounding gravel. At the bottom of this excavation stood the urn, mouth downwards, reposing on the stone slab that had covered it, under which was a layer of fine sand. The covering slab, roughly pentagonal, was 3½ inches thick and measured about 1 foot 6 inches by 1 foot 2 inches across, thus fitting neatly over the urn's mouth (Pl. XXIX, 1).

The vessel was protected by a cist of slabs, built apparently after the urn was set in place rather in the manner of a house of cards. The substructure of the cist was an irregular pentagon formed of five principal slabs, A, B, C, D and E, with an additional supporting slab F outside E. Of these slabs only the two on the western side, A, measuring 1 foot 9 inches in height by 1 foot 4 inches in width, and B (2 feet 3 inches by 1 foot) reached to the top of the urn, and both were sloping inwards as if they had been leaning against the walls of the urn's conical base though they were actually supported by one another and by the remaining slabs. These were smaller in area, though relatively thicker, and

only 1 foot to 1 foot 3 inches in height. Between them and the urn or its cover-slab three smaller blocks, G, H and I, had been inserted (Pl. XXVIII, 2–3). On these primary uprights stood three small thin slabs, measuring about 8 by 6 inches across, leaning against one another and the edges of the taller uprights, A and B, so as to enclose the urn completely. The whole erection was covered by a thin flat slab measuring some 8 inches square (Pl. XXVIII, 1).

Grass roots and earth had penetrated through the chinks of the cist till the space between the slabs and the urn was filled with fine sandy soil. The pressure of the slabs had cracked the walls of the urn and the base had collapsed. Parts were found in the soil that had accumulated in the vessel's interior on the cover-slab, for grass roots and soil had percolated through the cracks till a deposit of about 4 inches of dark soil mixed with fragments of burnt bone had accumulated inside the urn. This deposit was taken out in small handfuls through the breach in the vessel's walls and carefully sifted in the fingers. No artifacts and no pieces of charcoal were included in the deposit and the burnt bones, though quite hard, were very small and fragmentary.

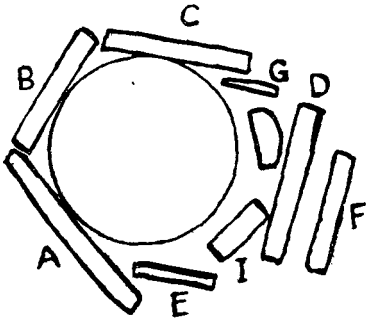

Fig. 1. Basal slabs of the cist.

From the small pieces submitted to him, Professor Brash was able to identify minute fragments of skull including the edge of the left parietal with a short length of the sagittal suture, pieces of ribs, tibia, and radius. Only one imperfect articulation was found and no parts of femurs, mandible, nor teeth. From the unknit condition of the sutures it could be inferred that the bones belonged to a juvenile subject, say under 21 years of age. On the other hand the fragments of limb bones are so stout as to exclude a child under say 15.

The urn, of the encrusted type, is made of a reddish-brown clay, and measures $14\frac{3}{4}$ inches in height as it now stands; the base is awanting. In external diameter across the mouth it measures $11\frac{7}{8}$ inches, and at its widest part 16 inches. The lip is bevelled downwards towards the inside for $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches and is decorated with pit-like depressions, its outer edge being ornamented with a herring-bone pattern. A space of 4 inches between the brim and the shoulder—the neck—is occupied by an encrusted wavy or chevron border, having a circular boss set between each of the rounded angles. Over all is a pitted decoration, the lines of which follow the outlines of the chevrons. On the shoulder is a shallow groove measuring $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in breadth. Below the groove a line of pits completely encircles the urn and irregular lines of the same nature descend to the base.

The urn is of special interest as providing additional support to Sir Cyril Fox's theory of the derivation of the Encrusted Urn from the Food Vessel—at least in so far as that theory applies to the shape of these vessels.[1] For the vestigial shoulder groove must be regarded as a reminiscence of the deeper grooves so characteristic of Food Vessels. Indeed our urn would in form be the closest to the assumed prototype and therefore the oldest typologically of published encrusted urns save perhaps that from Skene, Aberdeenshire.[2] On the other hand Fox's theory of the origin of encrusted ornamentation receives no support from this new example. It is true that the combination of chevrons and rosettes is presented as early in Fox's scheme, which is now justified in so

[1] *Ant. J.*, vol. vii. (1927), pp. 121 f.

[2] *Ant. J.*, vol. vii. pl. lxii. 2; it exhibits not only a shoulder groove but vestigial stop-ridges too.

far as the Aberlemno urn, being formally early, should be early stylistically too. But, as here presented, the curvilinear chevrons show no approximation to the simple straight bar across the hollow neck of the Food Vessel from which Fox derives them nor do the rosettes look the least like vestigial lugs; on the contrary both elements appear already integrated into a consistent pattern. Now this pattern was already familiar on the pottery of Skara Brae and Rinyo which at the same time employed the decorative technique distinctive of Encrusted Urns; the pit ornament might be derived equally from the B and C wares of Skara Brae or from Food Vessel ornament. In other words, the urn strikingly illustrates the fusion of two traditions—the Food Vessel shape and the Skara Brae technique and design. While ceramic evidence for the Skara Brae culture is still outstanding in Strathmore, the number of carved stone balls from that area and from Aberdeenshire is significant since such constitute a trait of the Skara Brae culture. And of course Angus has long been recognised as a centre of the Food Vessel culture.

The Society is indebted to Mr S. A. Smith not only for notifying the discovery and assisting in its conservation, but also for presenting the handsome urn to the National Museum.

V. Gordon Childe.