

9. IRON AGE POTTERY FROM SUNDAYSWELLS HILL, TORPHINS,
ABERDEENSHIRE.

Sundayswells Hill is the south-western offshoot of the Hill of Learney, which shelters the village of Torphins from the north. Learney Hill itself may be regarded as a prolongation westwards of the broad granitic mass of the Hill of Fare, which separates the Dee Valley from Midmar. After curving round the basin overlooked by Learney House, the hill divides itself into two spurs, known respectively as Chapelwell Hill and Sundayswells Hill, separated by a hollow in which the Gownie Burn descends towards the Dee. The western of these spurs, Sundayswells Hill, rises to a height of 820 feet, and falls steeply to the west into the valley of the Beltie Burn, which forms a natural avenue leading through from Deeside to Midmar.

The hill is at present much overgrown with heather, bracken, and broom. I visited it on 11th February 1946 with our Fellow, Mr James Lumsden, F.S.A.Scot., Aberdeen. Although our time was limited, it was clear that the southern and south-western slopes bear many traces of early occupation, including numerous small cairns and lines of stone settings, suggesting stock-pens, much like those surveyed so carefully by the late Sir Alexander Ogston in the neighbourhood of Loch Kinnord.¹

In our *Proceedings* for the year 1905-6² there is a notice, based on information from the late Mr James Ritchie, of a beaker of Class B recovered from the central space in a cairn on Sundayswells Hill. Reference is also made to the discovery of a cist to the north-west of the cairn, in which were found "portions of a larger urn which are also at Learney." Mr Ritchie himself published in our *Proceedings* for the year 1918-19³ an account of the cairn, in which the somewhat damaged

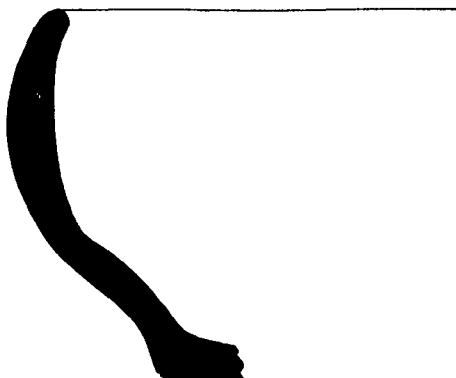


Fig. 1. Section of bowl. See Pl. XXVI.

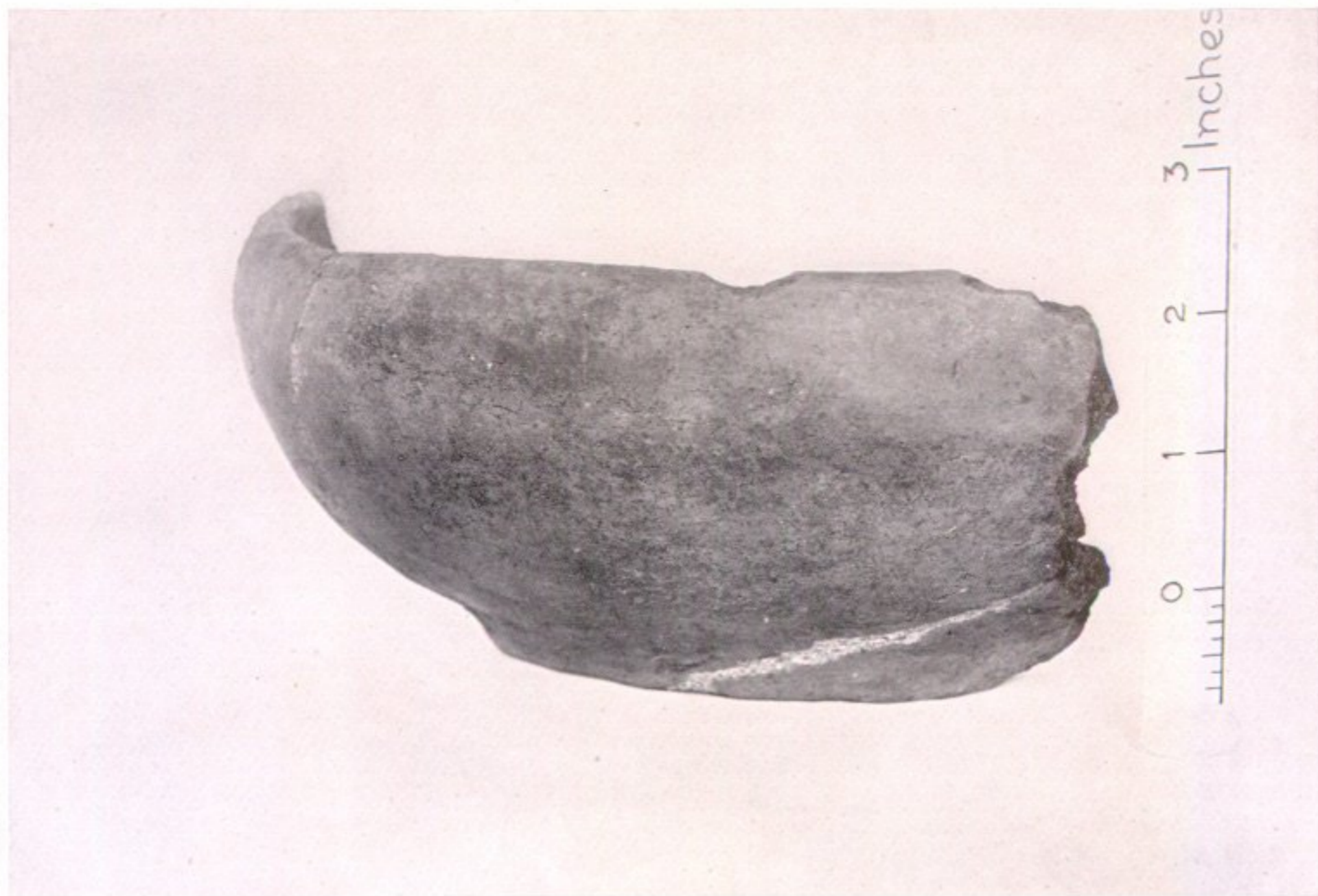
beaker was found by the late Colonel Francis Innes of Learney. The central hollow, 9 feet in diameter, surrounded by flat stones on average about 3 feet high, was compared to hollow-centred cairns within circles with a recumbent stone. Mr Ritchie makes no mention of the cist, irrelevant to his immediate subject. As it appeared that the second urn has never been published, I asked Sir Thomas Innes of Learney, F.S.A.Scot., Lord Lyon King of Arms, whether it still existed, and he kindly brought both urns into King's College, Aberdeen, for me to inspect, together with a photograph of the cist (Pl. XXVII, 1), which would seem to have been of the usual Early Bronze Age type.

The vessel is unfortunately imperfect, but it is totally unlike any British pottery of Neolithic or Bronze Age types. The fragments which have been pieced together (see photographs, Pl. XXVI, and section, fig. 1) make up a considerable part, amounting to about one-third of the circumference, of a wide shallow bowl or dish, the over-all diameter of which was about $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches and the height $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The vessel has a flat and slightly splayed-out base or footstand, bulging sides, and an inverted rim, the actual lip being rounded so as to form a flattish curve. The thickness of the sides, at the middle of the bulge, is about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch; in the base so far as this is preserved, the thickness increases to $\frac{2}{3}$ of an inch. The material

¹ See his *Prehistoric Antiquities of Cromar* (Third Spalding Club).

² Vol. xl. pp. 312-313.

³ Vol. liii. pp. 74-75.



Fragment of Bowl from Sundayswells Hill.

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is a hard, smooth, light rusty brown or mud-coloured clay, with a black core. It is very well mixed and free from grit, but shows numerous small specks of mica. The clay has been thoroughly fired, and the surface is remarkably uniform in colour, both outside and inside.

It seems to me that the affinities of this remarkable vessel must lie with the wide shallow bowls found on Hallstatt sites in Central or Western Europe, marked by a flat base often splayed or footed, sides bulging out in a broad swinging curve, and often an in-turned lip.¹ In Britain, bowls for example from All Canning's Cross and Scarborough usually are bent out at the lip again or just have straight sloping sides; we might conjecture, however, that our Aberdeenshire bowl represents a degenerated or "ultimate Hallstatt" version of such bowls.²

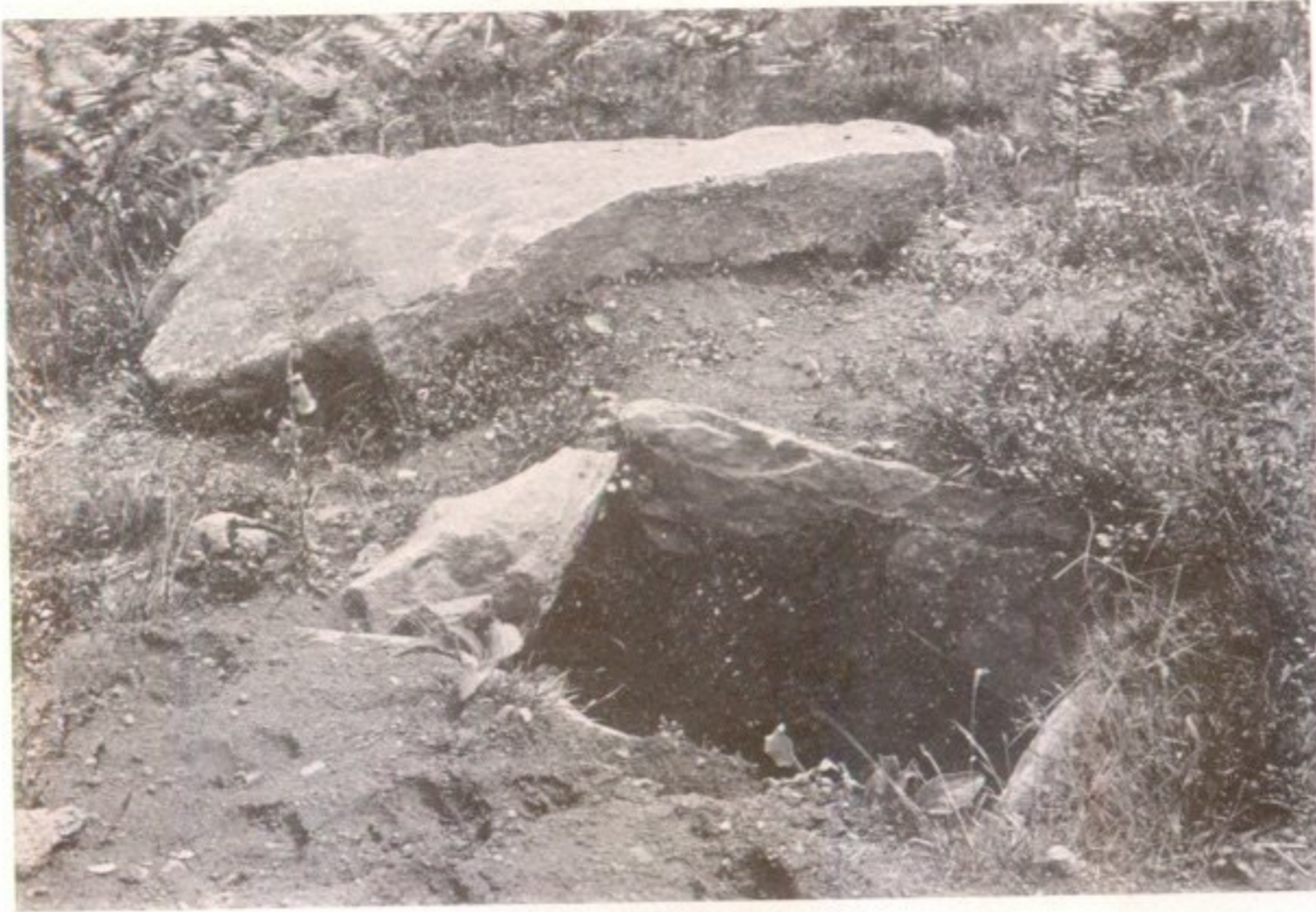
From Central Europe the Hallstatt Culture spread westwards by the Rhine valley and the Netherlands and so across the narrow seas to Britain. It is noteworthy that the Sundayswells bowl is quite different from the barrel or bucket-shaped pots which have been recovered from Old Keig, Loanhead of Daviot, and Foulerton in Aberdeenshire, as well as other sites in the north of Scotland. The latter type of vessel is thought to have reached us from Ireland, where similar "ultimate Hallstatt" ware is found. Our Sundayswells vessel from its shape, finer texture despite thickness, and very even firing seems rather to point to direct overseas contact with the continent. In that case it would afford a curious parallel to the far older B-beaker also found on the same hill—since it is agreed that such beakers are an importation from the Rhineland and Northern Holland.

So little is known of Early Iron Age burials in Scotland that it cannot be asserted that the cist is not contemporary with the vessel found in it.

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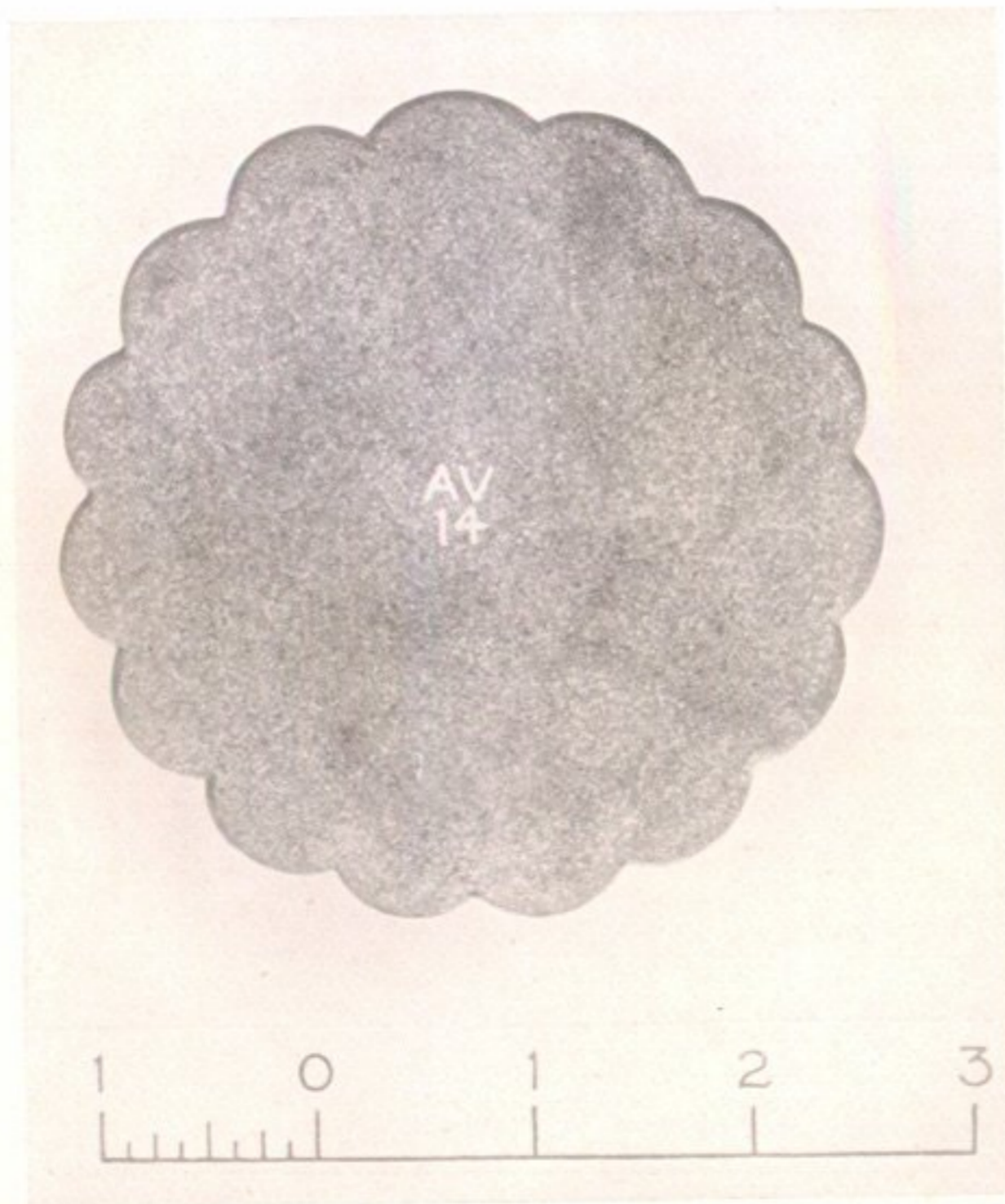
¹ See Ebert, *Reallexicon der Vorgeschichte*: from the Lower Rhineland, vol. viii, plate 158, No. 9, and plate 161, e; also from Kreuzlingen, Switzerland, vol. vii, plate 80, Nos. 2, 3, 10; from Koberstadt, S.W. Germany, vol. viii, plate 86, Nos. 10, 19, 20; from Württemberg, *Encycl. Brit.*, 14th ed., vol. ii. p. 255, No. 4; and from France (Jogasses), *Revue Archæologique*, ser. v., vol. xxvi. p. 136, fig. 22, Nos. 49, 82.

² For Scarborough see *Archæologia*, vol. lxxvii. p. 190, fig. 32; for a fine sharply in-turned bowl from West Harling see *Archæol. Journ.*, vol. xci. p. 26, and plate III, 1.



1. Cist on Sundayswells Hill, Torphins, Aberdeenshire.

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2. Palette from head of Glen Muick (see Donations to Museum, No. 14).

DONATION TO MUSEUM.

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