

## 2. A CINERARY URN CEMETERY AT EASTER CULBEUCHLY, NEAR BANFF

IN the early months of 1961 a mound of sand and gravel (Nat. Grid Ref. NJ 662613) on the farm of Easter Culbeuchly, about 2 miles south-west of Banff, was sold by the farmer and owner, Mr Alfred I. Cook, as bottoming for road reconstruction in Banff. The mound, known as Gallows Hill, was perhaps 50 yards in length and may have been about 15 feet high. It was excavated by a bulldozer and removed by lorries. During the removal operations several Cinerary Urns, possibly five in all, were found, along with a Pygmy Cup.

Of the Cinerary Urns, two were carted away with the metalling; one, represented by a few undecorated lower wall fragments, was retained by the farmer, but later taken to the National Museum of Antiquities, whence it was sent to the Anthropological Museum, Marischal College, University of Aberdeen, and two were rescued by the farmer. Professor Lockhart of Marischal College collected these, along with the incinerated bones apparently found with one of them, and they are now in the Anthropological Museum (Pl. XXXI). Pieces of the occipital and temporal skull bones could be identified, but the pieces were much too small to make any attempt at reconstruction possible. The bones were, however, those of an adult. From Mr Cook's plotting of the find spots, the urns were apparently distributed over an area some 100 yards long.

The Pygmy Cup (fig. 1) is at present still in the possession of the farmer. It is of reddish-brown fine-grained ware,  $2\frac{3}{4}$  in. outer diameter at rim by  $2\frac{5}{8}$  in. internal diameter by  $3\frac{3}{8}$  in. diameter over rib by 2 in. diameter at base. Depth is  $2\frac{3}{8}$  in. overall and  $1\frac{1}{4}$  in. inside. Two holes  $\frac{3}{8}$  in. diameter and  $\frac{7}{8}$  in. apart have been made from the bottom of the inside of the cup through the outside rib, apparently to drain the interior. The vessel is  $\frac{5}{8}$  in. thick at the rim. The only decoration is two incised lines going horizontally round the outside of the cup, one being below the rib and the other just above the base. The cup is intact, but the surface has been removed by scrubbing.

Unfortunately exact details of the find spot are lacking. Mr Cook said there were several pits about 1 foot diameter by 1 foot deep filled with black material and ash. A sample of this was taken. There was also a 'grave' about 5 feet long by 2 feet wide by 2 feet deep, bottomed with flagstones but having neither sides nor top; on the flagstones were cremated bones under a layer of stones. None of the bones was preserved; the depth was said to be a few feet, but all information is very vague.

<sup>1</sup> Piggott and Powell, *op. cit.*, figs. 6 and 12.

Mr George Cook, Ashbrook, Easter Culbeuchly, father of Mr Alfred Cook, has a large collection of rough stone axes and flints of many sorts, including leaf-shaped and tanged arrow heads. These and other stone implements are said to have been gathered by him from Easter Culbeuchly and neighbouring farms.

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Of the two surviving Cinerary Urns, No. 1 appears to be a Cordoned urn, though the upper cordon bears some resemblance to a collar. No. 2 is a Collared<sup>1</sup> urn.

The traditional typology of Cinerary Urns set out by Abercromby<sup>2</sup> in 1912 has remained the basis for all subsequent prehistorians until very recently. However, it has now

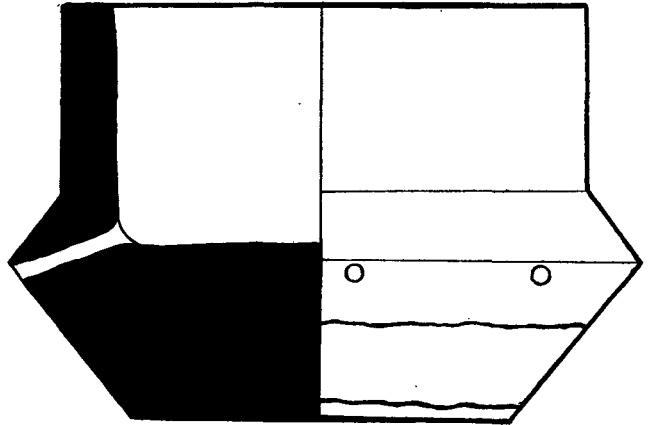


FIG. 1. Pygmy cup from Easter Culbeuchly, near Banff (1/1)

become clear that all the various types of Cinerary Urns must, in fact, have been broadly contemporaneous. In particular, Piggott<sup>3</sup> has shown that Urnfield influence need not be invoked to explain Cinerary Urn cemeteries, as cremation cemeteries exist in our Secondary Neolithic; Glasbergen<sup>4</sup> has shown that Dutch urns, hitherto regarded as part-ancestors of the Deverel-Rimbury urns, must originate in a settlement of the Netherlands from this country, probably soon after *c.* 1500 B.C.<sup>5</sup>; and Butler,<sup>6</sup> studying razors, the only bronzes associated with Cinerary Urns and hitherto<sup>7</sup> regarded as being probably Late Bronze Age in date, has shown that they occur in early Reinecke B1 and Montelius I/II contexts on the continent. Barber,<sup>8</sup> studying the Scottish material in detail, confirmed a Middle Bronze Age and possibly earlier floruit of Cinerary Urns, though May and Collins<sup>9</sup> have rightly stressed that there is as yet no evidence to provide a closing date for their use.

<sup>1</sup> Using the term suggested by I. H. Longworth at the C.B.A. 'Problems of the Bronze Age' Conference, London, December 1960, for Overhanging-Rim urns.

<sup>2</sup> Abercromby, J., *A Study of the Bronze Age Pottery of Great Britain and Ireland* (1912), Vol. II.

<sup>3</sup> Piggott, S., *Neolithic Cultures of the British Isles* (1954), 347, 352-4.

<sup>4</sup> *Palaeohistoria*, III (1954), 89-204.

<sup>5</sup> *Univ. Lond. Inst. of Arch.*, 12th Ann. Rep. (1956), 38, footnote 31a.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, 20-26.

<sup>7</sup> *P.P.S.*, XII (1946), 121-41.

<sup>8</sup> Barber, J., *The Middle Bronze Age Cinerary Urns of Scotland* (1958), unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Edinburgh, (see *Univ. Edin. Dept. of Arch.*, 10th Ann. Rep., (1957-8), 3-4).

<sup>9</sup> *Ulster J.A.*, 3 ser. XXII (1959), 33-41.

It has recently been suggested by Piggott<sup>1</sup> that Cordoned urns, such as No. 1, may represent a different tradition from other types of Cinerary Urns, and be derivable from Lough Gur Class II ware, shown by Ó Ríordáin<sup>2</sup> to be overlapping with the Late Neolithic and contemporary with Beakers and Food Vessels. Barber too<sup>3</sup> inclines to this view, and his distribution map shows Cordoned urns to have a more western distribution: the type has its chief concentration along the coast of central Ayrshire, and there is a scatter, very thin but to the virtual exclusion of all other types, along the Argyll coast to the south-west end of the Great Glen, and then at the other end of that route, as far north as Helmsdale and east along the Laich of Moray where other types are once more found. However, they form a fairly constant minority percentage both in the North-East and the Tay and Forth areas, but Barber's impression is that in the Tay-Forth areas they are secondary to Collared urns. To my knowledge, no one has commented on the question of fabric and rim-form, and here I believe may be a vital clue: speaking admittedly only from experience of the Nairnshire, Moray and Banffshire material, one gets the impression that the colour, a kind of dirty white mortar, the texture, also like hard mortar, the uncompromisingly flat, totally unspayed rims, and the disproportionate thinness of the walls, as well as the distinctive profile with no recurve, all serve to differentiate this type of urn. I personally would like to place a total lack of decoration as another distinctive characteristic of the 'pure' Cordoned urn, though this runs into difficulty as Lough Gur Class II ware is not wholly undecorated.

The decoration of this Collared urn is a very common motif, occurring from the south of England northwards.<sup>4</sup> Smith<sup>5</sup> showed that it was possible to derive this type of urn from Fengate Secondary Neolithic ware. This thesis was expanded by her and Longworth at the C.B.A. Conference in London in December 1960,<sup>6</sup> and a definitive account by Longworth of the English material has recently appeared.<sup>7</sup> Here the main Collared urn tradition is seen to start in the Mortlake/Early Fengate phase. The possibility of population shift is briefly dealt with, but this problem becomes acute when the Scottish material is considered, for there is virtually no evidence for even a general Peterborough ware background.<sup>8</sup> From the general impression gained from the study of the North-East, any intrusive elements must reach the area before the middle of the fifteenth century B.C.

The urns from Easter Culbeuchly bring the total of certain Cinerary Urn finds in the area of the lower Deveron valley lying in Banffshire, from the region about Turriff down to the town of Banff, to 16, from eight sites, and there are in addition not only several from the Aberdeenshire part of the valley but several old reports, particularly for the parish of Forglan in Banffshire, of finds of what almost certainly must have been Cinerary Urn burials.

Though no one particular type seems to predominate, the suggestion that there may have been some sort of settlement of the area by incomers using Cinerary Urns which could be postulated purely on the basis of distribution maps gains credence from the fact that the whole region, including the portion in Aberdeenshire, has yielded only eight Beakers and

<sup>1</sup> *Ant. J.*, xxxv (1955), 237.

<sup>2</sup> *P.R.I.A.*, (C) lvi (1953-4), 297-452.

<sup>3</sup> Barber, J., *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> Abercromby, J., *op. cit.*, *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, I. F., *The Decorative Art of Neolithic Ceramics in South-East England and its Relations* (1956), unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 153-69.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, I. F. and Longworth, I. H., 'The Neolithic Continuum as shown by Bronze Age Ceramics', C.B.A. 'Problems of the Bronze Age' Conference, London, December 1960.

<sup>7</sup> *P.P.S.*, xxvii (1961), 263-306.

<sup>8</sup> cf. *ibid.*, fig. 9 and Childe, V. G., *Scotland before the Scots* (1946), 67, fig. 15.

one Food Vessel.<sup>1</sup> This Food Vessel is the most northerly example of a small class of vessel which has a distribution as far south as Lincolnshire and which seems to have its centre in the Yorkshire-Lincolnshire area, and one of the Cinerary Urns from Banffshire, an Enlarged Food Vessel, has skeuomorphic groove stops recalling Yorkshire types.

Barber rightly stresses the extremely close typological relationship that exists between Enlarged Food Vessels and Encrusted Urns: he may very well be right when he says that both are blown up versions of the Yorkshire Food Vessels, and this too would imply some sort of movement from the area of the last named. Again, in the North-East, Cinerary Urns are markedly more common in the area with the densest concentration of Beakers, and one can hardly derive Cinerary Urns from Beakers. Here, much more would have to be known about the Neolithic occupation in the North-East. Food Vessels, on the other hand, have a very marked concentration on the southern periphery of this area, in the Mearns, but are rare in the North-East.<sup>2</sup>

The Pygmy Cup is the first known to have been found in Nairnshire, Moray or Banffshire, though an unprovenanced biconical example does exist in Banff Museum. The shape is not closely paralleled either among examples in the National Museum of Antiquities or among those illustrated by Abercromby. The pair of holes is a very common feature of such cups, double pairs and even more also being known. In many cases, though not in all, these holes appear to have been made, as here, in order to drain the cup, but the ritual significance of this is not clear.

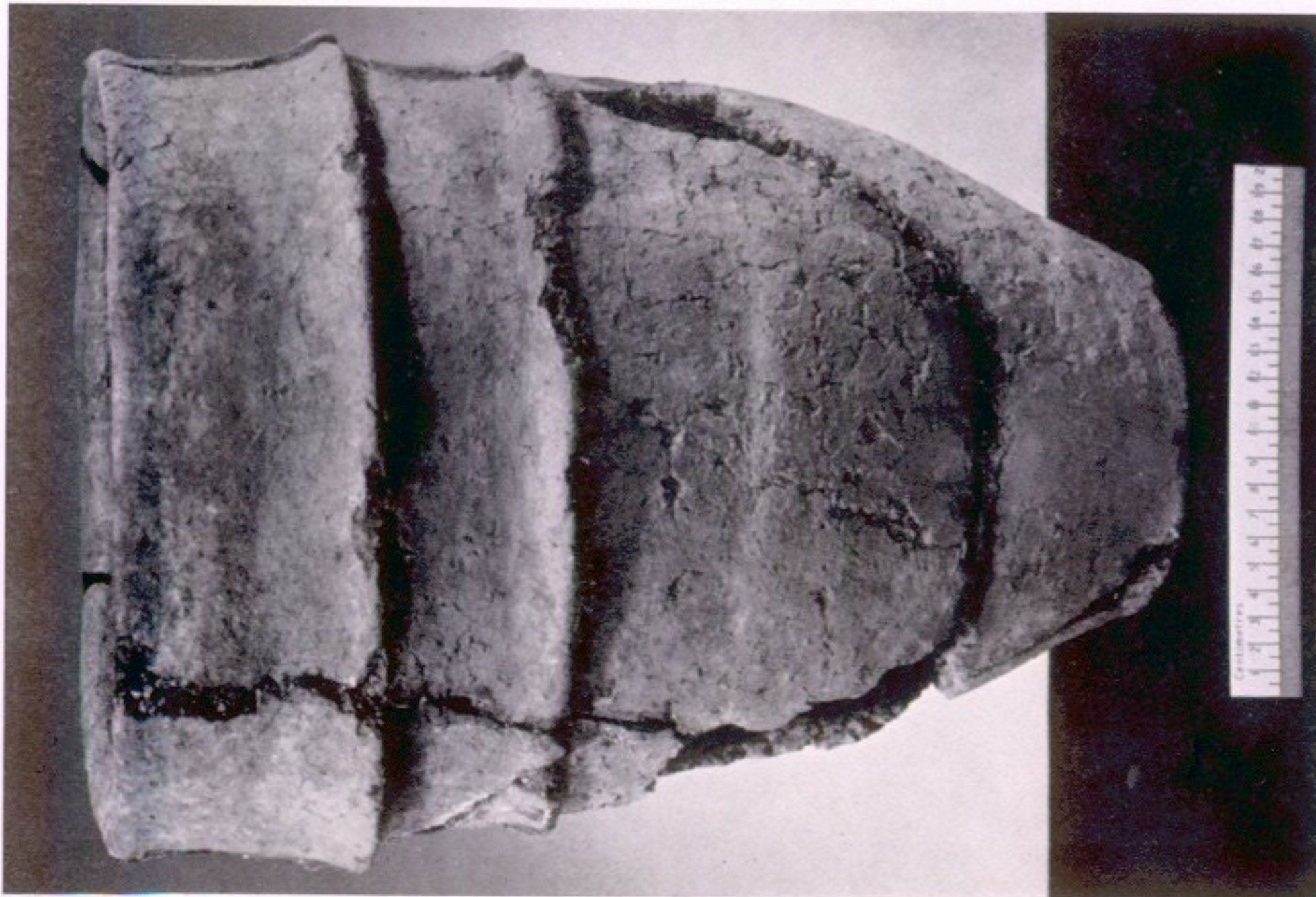
Gallows Hill lay about 150 yards south of Easter Culbeuchly, and is so named from the tradition that it was in medieval times a place of public execution.<sup>3</sup> About 50 yards north of the farm a mound (NJ 662615) was removed a few years before 1836<sup>4</sup> and found to contain 'several vases of baked earth, placed on a sort of stone bench supported by blocks of stone - some of these were in an inverted position, others had a flat stone on the top, and the whole enclosed in a tumulus'. There is little doubt that this too was a Cinerary Urn cemetery, its setting unfortunately destroyed, like the site under discussion, before adequate observations could be made. The use of a gravel mound for such cemeteries is entirely typical, and there is reason to suppose that such sites were deliberately chosen.

Thanks are due to Messrs Cook and Professor Lockhart for kindly furnishing information on the site, and to the latter for the examination of the bones, reconstruction of the urns, and allowing the reproduction of Pl. XXXI, Nos. 1 and 2. I am very grateful to Dr Isobel Smith, F.S.A., for permission to quote from her unpublished thesis. Thanks are also due to the Archaeology Division of the Ordnance Survey for access to their files and maps.

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