

Food vessel urn fragments from Dinnet, Kincardine and Deeside  
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The sherds described here were shown to one of the writers (IAGS), in 1977, by Mr Marcus Humphrey of Dinnet House, Dinnet, Aboyne, Kincardine and Deeside District. They had been given to his grandfather by an old resident of the Bogingore area of Dinnet who was believed to have rescued them from the material dispersed from the small estate museum at Meikle

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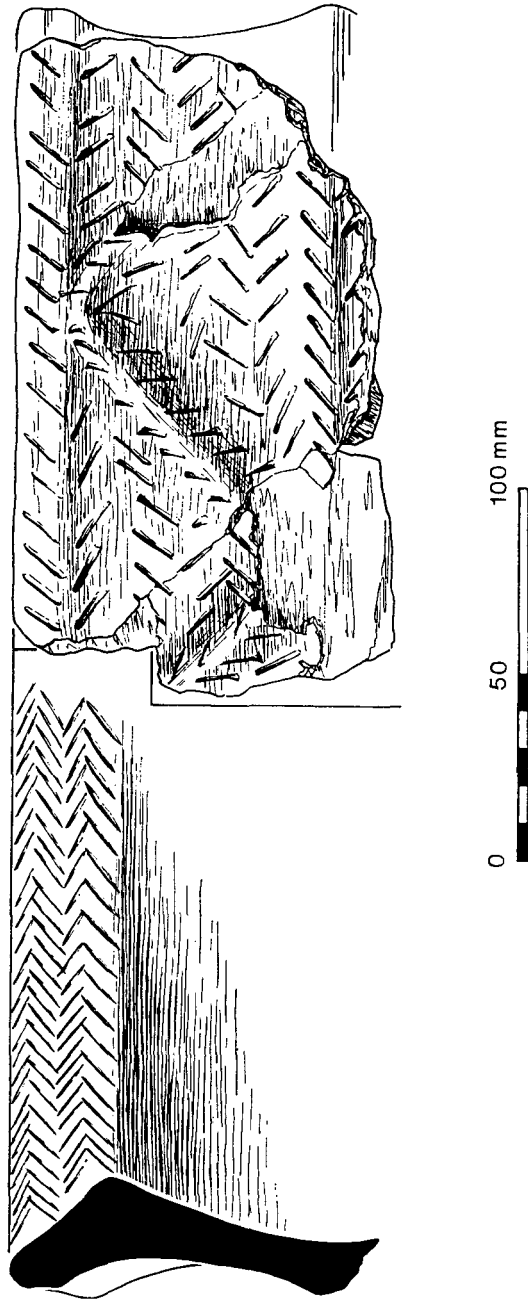


Fig 1 Food vessel urn sherds: Vessel A

Kinord (NGR NO 441988) during the 1890s. In 1977 the sherds were exhibited at the opening of the Muir of Dinnet Silver Jubilee National Nature Reserve and reported in *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland 1977* (p 40, under 'Bogingore'). Since then the sherd representing vessel B has been mislaid: the sherds from vessel A are still in Mr Humphrey's possession.

*Vessel A* is represented by three sherds which join to form a piece, 225 mm in maximum length, 105 mm in maximum height and c 15 mm thick, accounting for approximately one fifth of the rim and neck of a large, well fired food vessel urn (fig 1, from which the smallest sherd has been omitted). The urn would have had a rim diameter of 330 mm and a possible height of 350 to 400 mm. The fabric is hard and evenly fired, bonded with crushed stone grits which include some possible chert fragments. The internal surface is grey and evenly fired; the exterior is covered with a dense reddish slip which has been wet-hand finished, thus obscuring the grits. The rim has a steeply inclined internal bevel decorated with two lines of regularly incised chevrons, and a vertical external bevel. Both this, and the carination at the base of the concave neck, bear roughly incised short diagonal lines. The 70 mm high neck zone is spanned by an applied chevron cordon decorated with short incisions. The triangular zones formed by the cordon are themselves filled with irregular rows of roughly incised chevrons. Overall, the impression is of a well constructed vessel decorated rather haphazardly.

*Vessel B* is represented by one sherd, 107 mm long, 111 mm high, and c 12 mm thick, in a pale brown, slightly crumbly fabric (pl 35a-b). Small crushed stone grits protrude through the light slip. The rim bears a shallow internal bevel and is rounded externally. Both these rim surfaces are decorated with parallel horizontal lines of two-stranded, Z-twisted cord or string impressions which are smudged in places. The 70 mm high concave neck zone contains two low bosses, 28 mm and 22 mm in diameter, set diagonally to each other, the upper being the more pronounced. Crossing them are impressed vertical lines of Z-twisted, two-strand cord which span the neck zone and form part of a panelled pattern of cord impressions. The ends of the horizontal lines of this pattern are more deeply impressed. Immediately below the carination, a line of irregular chevrons is formed by a series of whipped cord maggots each 21 mm in length.

## DISCUSSION

The vessels represented by these sherds belong to the class of cinerary urns conventionally described as encrusted urns (Abercromby 1912, 'Type 6'), although for reasons discussed elsewhere, these, and the so-called enlarged food vessels (*ibid*, 'Type 7'), may be conveniently grouped under the general head of food vessel urns (ApSimon 1972, 66, fn 8; Cowie 1978, *passim*).

The extant formal features of both vessels – their everted, internally bevelled, rims; their concave necks giving way to well marked carinations – are characteristic of such urns. Although the somewhat upright external edge of the rim of vessel A is uncommon the overall form of the rim is well within the usual range. It is unclear whether the fracture of vessel A has occurred at a point within a shoulder groove or below the shoulder, but in both vessels the lower body would taper typically from the shoulder to a proportionately narrow base. Applied relief decoration on food vessel urns is used, almost without exception, to decorate the upper part of the external surface of the vessels on which it occurs. The most common relief motif is the chevron, usually applied to the neck zone, and commonly consisting of applied rolls of clay forming a band with rounded cross-section as in the case of vessel A. The triangular spaces formed by the relief decoration are usually filled with incised, or corded, decoration arranged in chevron (or 'herring bone') patterns. In all these respects, therefore, vessel A, represented by the extant sherds, conforms with observed normal practice. Although there are variations in detail, comparison

may be made with vessels from Udney (NMAE EA 121; *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 24 (1889-90), 446; Cowie 1978, 108, Abn 10) and Leuchar Brae, Skene (Marischal College; Reid 1927, 517-18; Cowie 1978, 106, Abn 7), both in Aberdeenshire, and, geographically more distant, with an imperfectly provenanced urn fragment from Berwickshire (NMAE EA 185; *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 55 (1920-21), 21; Cowie 1978, 114, Ber 2).

Applied knobs and bosses occur on a small number of extant food vessel urns, either on their own, eg Mawmill, Kinross (NMAE EA 246; Cowie 1975; 1978, 125, Kin 2) or integrated with applied chevron ornament, eg Uddingston, Lanarkshire (NMAE EA 109; Duncan 1885, 337-40; ApSimon 1972, 143-5; Cowie 1978, 128, Lnk 5): unlike vessel B, however, in none of these cases are the applied bosses covered by decoration. Indeed, the use of linear twisted cord to form panelling is itself an uncommon feature on food vessel urns, tending to occur only as a sporadic motif, on urns from a wide geographical area, eg Hoprig, Berwickshire (NMAE EA 565; Hardy, 1889, 131; Cowie 1978, 115, Ber 5). On collared urns, however, panelling is a recurrent, often principal, decorative component (eg Morrison 1968, cat nos 7, 39, 79). The association of whipped cord maggot and twisted cord impressions is a further feature of vessel B which is uncommon among food vessel urns. On the basis of typical decorative schemes, it may be suggested that the maggot impressions formed a band of decoration just below the shoulder rather than an all-over pattern on the body, but in view of the fragmentary condition of the vessel, this is uncertain.

In summary, therefore, vessel B is the more atypical of the two pots represented by these sherds, but there is no obvious reason to doubt a local provenance nor to suspect that they derive from different sites. The individual elements of vessel form and decoration can be paralleled in the food vessel urn series, even if only as sporadic occurrences. The probable location of the findspot of these vessels on the upper Dee (see subsequent section) does extend the distribution of food vessel urns (Cowie 1978, fig 36) but this must be seen in conjunction with the imperfect records of many unidentified 'urns' found along the Dee. With this factor in mind, and in view of the relatively small numbers of extant food vessel urns and the absence of domestic assemblages, the discovery of apparently 'atypical' vessels should occasion little surprise.

#### POSSIBLE PROVENANCE

While no direct evidence survives to connect these two food vessel urns with any particular site, study of the records of urn finds in upper Deeside (held in the Grampian Regional Council Sites and Monuments Record) suggests one possible provenance. In 1828, at Newton of Tillycairn (NGR NO 46129726), 1.5 km SE of Dinnet House, a tumulus was trenched and 'several urns containing calcined bones' were found (*New Statistical Account*, 12 (1843), 1060). One of the urns was perfectly preserved, and it was said 'the gentleman into whose possession it has fallen has either lately presented it, or intends to present it, to the Museum of Marischal College' (Aberdeen) (*ibid*). No mention of an urn from this site can be traced in the catalogues of the Marischal College or King's College museums, nor in Anderson and Black's list of objects in Aberdeen (1888), nor is there any trace of such an urn in the present Marischal College collection (James Kenworthy, pers comm). Unless the urn was lost shortly after it went to Marischal (and from the *Statistical Account* it is by no means certain that it ever went), there is a strong possibility that it (and the other fragments?) remained in the parish, quite conceivably at the Meikle Kinord museum which was only 2.5 km NW of Newton of Tillycairn. In the absence of firm records of provenances for the contents of that museum, this must remain conjectural, and the attribution of the sherds published here rest uncertain.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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a Food vessel urn sherd: Vessel B (scale in millimetres)



b Food vessel urn sherd: Vessel B interior (scale in millimetres)



c Peebles Castle Hill: aerial view of Peebles from the W with Castle Hill at the confluence of the Eddleston Water and the River Tweed