

# Later prehistoric pottery from Dun Cul Bhuirg, Iona, Argyll

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## SUMMARY

*In 1980 Drs J N G Ritchie and A M Lane published an account of the excavation and a description of the finds recovered from the small fort of Dun Cul Bhuirg, Iona. Much of the pottery from the site was thought to be lost, which hampered their interpretation of the extant sherds and the relationship of the fort and associated hut sites to others in the Western Isles. Several hundred of the lost pottery sherds have now been recovered and are described here, together with a discussion of some of the more general problems relating to the later prehistoric pottery sequence in the Islands.*

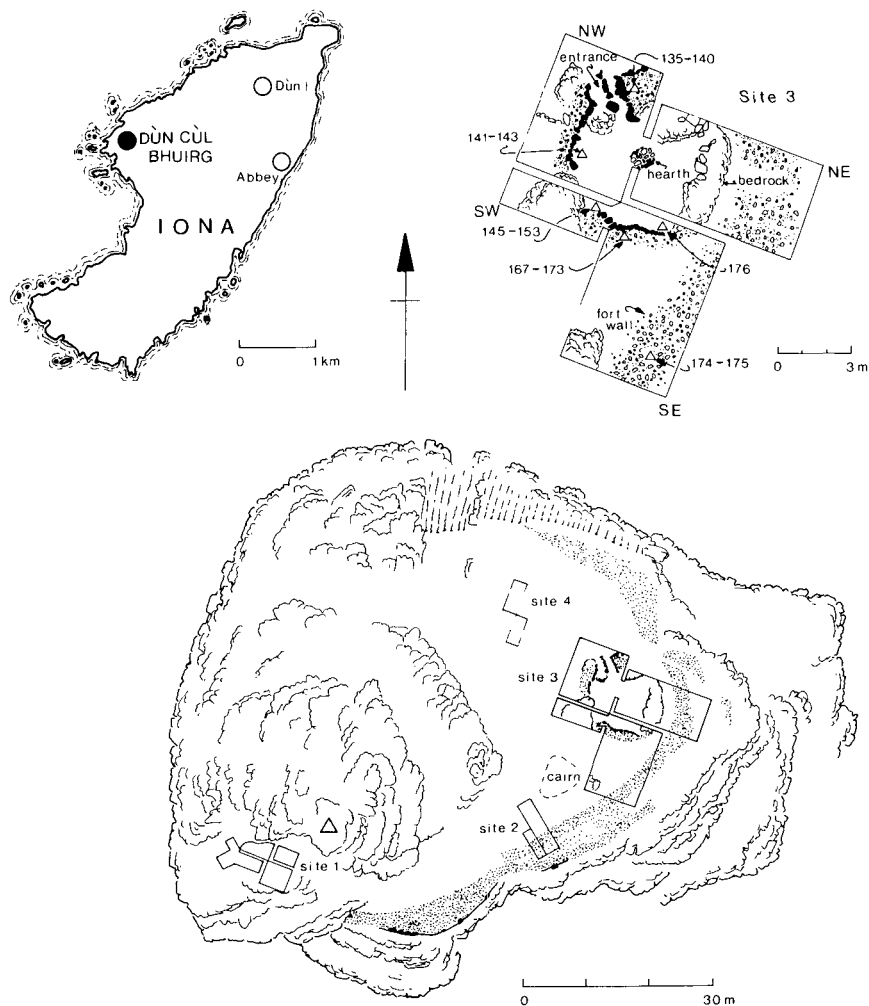
## INTRODUCTION

Dun Cul Bhuirg is one of the two prehistoric monuments on the island of Iona and is situated on the top of a steep rocky hill at a height of 51m OD facing the Atlantic ocean to the west. The summit of the hill at NGR NM 265 246 measures 45 m by 35 m and displays traces of walling on the north-east, east and south sides. It is traditionally described as a fort and though first noted in the 19th century it received little serious archaeological attention until the series of modern excavations, beginning in 1957 with work directed by A C Thomas and funded by the Russell Trust. Initial work in that year demonstrated that the summit had been loosely defended by a single rampart, and several sherds were recovered which were comparable with those recovered from Tigh Talamhanta, Barra (*Discovery Excav Scot* 1957, 11). This was followed by more substantial excavation in 1958 and 1959, during which four sites within the fort were examined to assess the defences and any settlement contained within them.

The first area chosen was a small terrace on the south-west of the rocky outcrop, the second area involved the cutting of a section through the traces of walling in the south-south-east, the third and the largest area of excavation was on a flat terrace to the east and the fourth excavation site was a small area of platform to the north. Site 2, the section through the walling, was subsequently extended in 1968 by Dr R Reece to obtain samples of bone to compare with those from the early Christian monastery. The lines of the excavations, and one modern cairn of stone and rubble removed from the wall, are still visible on the site.

The main excavation and the additional 1968 material were published by Drs Ritchie and Lane (1980, 209–29) almost 25 years after the initial investigations, and in the intervening period many of the small-finds from the site were thought lost. In particular all the pottery from Site 1 and from the north-west, south-west and south-east quadrants of Site 3 was missing, as well as a number of the

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ILLUS 1 Dun Cul Bhuirg: location and site plans

more diagnostic rimsherds from a variety of the other locations. In 1981, however, a collection of several hundred sherds from an unclear provenance were presented to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland and after examination of both the pottery and the context notes contained with it, J N G Ritchie and T Cowie deduced that these were possibly the missing sherds from Dun Cul Bhuirg. Ironically, after being missing for 25 years, the presentation occurred only some few weeks before the site report was published and too late for any amendments to be made, or for a note to this effect to be included. The material has recently been examined more closely as part of a research programme being carried out in the Department of Archaeology, University of Edinburgh and has been confirmed as being the lost material from Dun Cul Bhuirg Sites 1 and 3. Unfortunately, however, it does not include any of the forementioned diagnostic rims, which largely came from Site 2 and which are still missing.

The detailed catalogue at the newly discovered pottery is on fiche 1: D6-14.

## SITE 1

Site 1, the terrace to the SW, was excavated by quadrants during 1958-9, uncovering a total area of almost 15 sq m. A possible occupation layer was exposed, with an associated area of pebble flooring, while to the N was a patch of burning against the rock face, perhaps indicating a hearth. The lack of more substantial evidence of occupation, combined with a paucity of stonework has led to this area being regarded as a campsite, which utilized the rock face to the N as a supporting side for a lean-to structure (*Discovery Excav Scot 1958*, 15). A note recovered with the pottery describes some of the sherds as coming from a possible occupation layer of dark gritty humus. This apparently lay above an area of stones which may have formed a floor level of the structure. It was previously believed that finds recovered from Site 1 had included some 40 sherds of pottery and that one had been a rim with 'dimple' decoration (Ritchie & Lane 1980, 210). Also recovered were a flint and a pebble smoother, the latter being the sole find known to be extant in 1980.

Of the small finds boxes which were found and presented to the NMAS in 1981, three contained pottery which can be ascribed to quadrants of Site 1, namely the south-west, south-east and north-west. In total 45 brown and buff coloured sherds were present and these can be confirmed as being the pottery thought to be lost, not just by the notes contained within the boxes, but also by the presence of two sherds from a vessel found in the south-east quadrant, which had an everted rim and a row of finger-tip impressed dimples in the rim angle (illus 2, no 107). These rims are not paralleled in decoration by sherds from others of the published parts of Dun Cul Bhuirg, though similarities can be noted with some of the rediscovered material from Site 3. A sherd with broadly similar decoration was recovered from the furnace of the wheelhouse at A' Cheardach Bheag, South Uist, (Fairhurst 1971, fig 7, no 1), although in addition this had an abraded carination inside the rim neck, possibly for supporting a lid. One sherd was marked by several striations (no 110) and another bore a shallow fingertip impressed groove (109). The remaining 41 sherds from the south-east quadrant contain organic inclusions and some may be from the same vessel as the two dimple-decorated rims. In addition, two rounded pieces of reddish-buff fired clay, which did not appear to have been derived from a pottery vessel, were recovered (111), one of them had a flat broad groove 12 mm across and it may be part of a mould or perhaps both are parts of an oven or furnace capping, similar to material that came from Sites 3 and 4 (Ritchie & Lane 1980, nos 26 & 55). Other artefacts included a rounded stone pebble 24 mm in diameter. This perhaps functioned as a counter of some form, other examples from the Western Isles being those from Dun Mor Vaul, Tiree (MacKie 1974, fig 12, no 83 & fig 17, no 322).

The north-west quadrant, also shown in the Site 1 sketch map (illus 1), produced a number of artefacts including eight pottery sherds and a piece of flint; all were from a level described as being 'dark soil above stones'. The largest sherd (113) is brown and reddish buff, with a rolled and everted rim, and contains many small grits. There are no immediate parallels from Dun Cul Bhuirg, or indeed from many other Hebridean sites, although there is some likeness to sherd 130 from Site 3. The remainder of the sherds were either very small or fragmentary as were the two undiagnostic sherds which came from the SW quadrant (115).

## SITE 2

It is unfortunate that of the rediscovered sherds from Site 2 none can be identified as those diagnostic rims which were not located by Ritchie and Lane. The remainder of the sherds from Site 2, which comprised the bulk of the material known to exist in 1980, and the missing rimsherd profiles, have already been considered in detail (Ritchie & Lane 1980, 212-18). However, from the notes associated with the newly found Site 3 pottery, it now seems likely that at least two of the previously attributed Site 2 sherds (63 & 64), actually belonged to the Site 3 collection of excavated material. No 63, a short, sharply everted rim, is a typical example of 'Clettraval' ware displaying three shallow finger-channelled grooves beneath the rim. Sherd 64 had a black, sooty interior and was decorated with a zigzag cordon of a type common throughout the Hebrides. Both the sherds had been placed within an envelope post-marked 1965 and labelled 'DB 3 SW'. A minimum of six years had elapsed between the end of the excavation and the time they were placed there, and so some confusion may have arisen. However, the notes associated with all the pottery rediscovered in 1981 indicate that these two sherds were more probably derived from Site 3, south-west quadrant, and the Site 2 catalogue needs to be amended accordingly.

## SITE 3

## NORTH-WEST QUADRANT

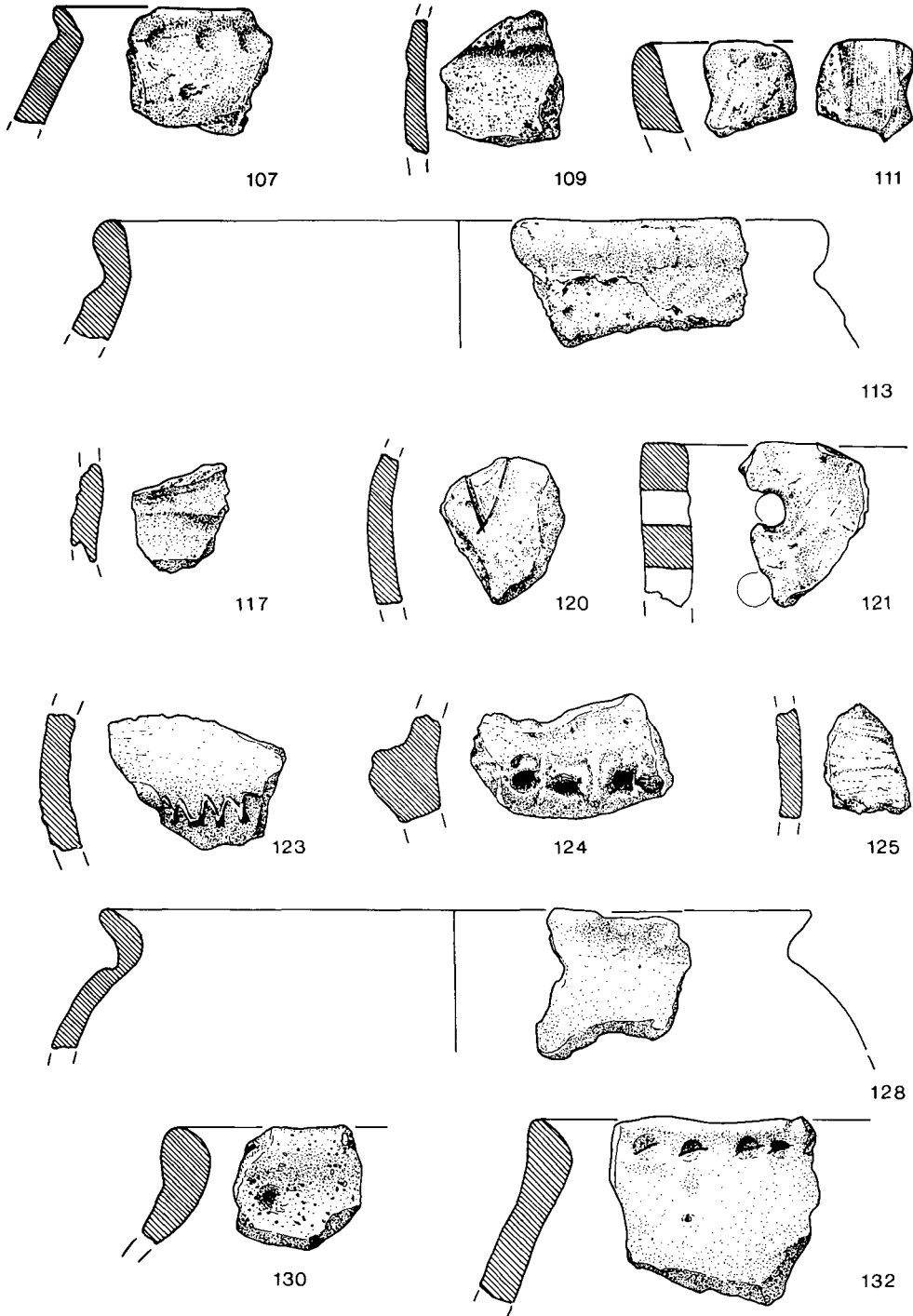
The bulk of the Dun Cul Bhuirg pottery rediscovered in 1980 comes from Site 3, north-west, south-west and south-east quadrants, thus completing the assemblage, as the material from the north-east quadrant was in existence when the site report was published. The largest number of sherds rediscovered during 1981 come from the north-west quadrant of Site 3; this seems to have contained several parts of walling as well as the entrance to the hut (illus 1). The sherds are also largely assignable to contexts within the quadrant itself, as each of the small boxes within which the sherds were packed contained brief notes of the associated layer and structural remains.

Finds nos *116-19*, some 108 sherds and pieces of fired clay, came from below the turf and above a level of stones. Sherd *116* was the basal angle of a small, fine vessel with a black deposit on the interior, sherd *117* bore broad shallow grooves, though these may have been caused unintentionally during the processes of pottery manufacture. The nine lumps of fired clay (*118*), though larger than those pieces recovered from the north-east quadrant (Ritchie & Lane 1980, no 26), would appear to have derived from the same source, and as two bore marks of withies, one being 10 mm in diameter, the other of indeterminate size, their interpretation as a capping of some sort would seem correct. The remaining 96 pieces of pottery from this layer are all body sherds from several different vessels, and although a number exhibit clear construction breaks, their value as geographical or chronological markers is limited.

A further 43 sherds came from a dark soil layer above and outside the hut wall; the context is not precise but seems to be on the north-west side of the quadrant. Of these one was a thick, flat-topped rimsherd of a type not previously recovered from the site (*121*); it bore traces of one perforation and part of another which was oval with a minimum span of 9 mm, perhaps a means of suspension for the vessel. Three sherds preserved parts of applied cordons, one worn finger-tip impressed (*122*) and one zigzag (*123*), while the third example was of an unusual type, having a very heavy cordon crossed by vertical slashes to give a square 'box' effect (*124*). The centre of each 'box' displayed a deep impression made by a round pointed object. This sherd has few exact parallels, though some similarity might be noted with an unpublished sherd from Buaille Risary, North Uist, which had a cordon with a row of impressed dots upon it (NMA, GT 581).

Incised decoration consisting of the bottom part of a 'V' was found on sherd *120* but little of the pattern exists to identify what part of the total decoration it formed. Other sherds of a potentially similar type from the Hebrides include those from Dun Mor Vaul, Tiree (MacKie 1974, fig 12, no 68 & fig 14, no 195) and A' Cheardach Bheag, South Uist (Fairhurst 1971, fig 5, no 2). Sherd *126* had a rounded edge and may have been part of a pottery disc; another part of a disc came from an unknown context at Dun Cul Bhuirg (Ritchie & Lane 1980, no 86), whilst other examples of such objects occur at Foshigarry, North Uist (unpublished, NMA, GNA 311) and at Sollas, North Uist (unpublished, Department of Archaeology, University College, Cardiff, SB/C13/9). One sherd bore the impressions of broad, flat plant stems and the remainder of the sherds from this context, in total some 36, were from the bodies of several different vessels.

Another context, described as being soil and rubble 'down west and in north-western corner of quadrant above wall' may overlap with the previous one, as the distinction between the two is not clear. This suspicion is heightened by this new context yielding 18 sherds, of which 13 were rims or parts of rim. Most of the sherds were of everted rim type, with seven of the eight sherds of *131* being most probably flanges of everted rims, now broken off from the rest of the original vessel. Sherd *128*, though also everted, was unusual in that the flange was both very sharply turned out and downward curving, a feature not otherwise noted from this site, and indeed not common on others. A further everted rim was also unusual (*130*) in that the flange displayed a distinct swelling towards the edge to give a rounded effect. A rimsherd of a like, though not identical, nature having a more rolled rim, was recovered from Site 1 (*113*), with a better parallel coming from Dun Mor Vaul, Tiree (MacKie 1974, fig 18, no 423). Two other out-turned rim types were represented. Sherd *133* had a thin out-turned lip with traces of possible faint finger-tip dimples in the lip angle, not unlike sherds *107* and *108* from Site 1, while sherd *135* had a thick out-turned rim with a horizontal row of inclined fingernail stab marks just beneath. The one inturned rim, *129*, had two fingertip marks in a row just below the rim, though these are so faint that they are perhaps best considered as being produced during the forming of the rim, rather than as deliberate decorative features, and hence the rim form can be compared with others from A' Cheardach Bheag, South Uist (Fairhurst 1971, fig 7, nos 4 & 6).



ILLUS 2 The pottery (scale 1:2)

The presence of two lines of stones crossing the wall of the hut in the north-west quadrant indicated that the entrance to the structure probably lay in this part of the Site 3. This was confirmed by a note contained in a box of sherds describing a layer in the north-east triangle of the quadrant as consisting of dark soil above and between stones to the east of the entrance. The pottery from this context totalled 120 sherds, of which one (135) proved to be the basal angle of a flat-bottomed vessel. Decorated sherds included one zigzag cordon (138) and a sherd with a single incised line flanked by two impressed dots on either side (136). This may once have formed part of a more general pattern, as for example, at Tigh Talamhanta, Barra (Young 1953, fig 8, no 87). One of two sherds, probably coming from a single vessel (137), bore the impression of a grain seed, whilst sherd 139 demonstrated a thin plain rim. The remainder of the pottery consisted of plain body sherds which appear to have derived from several different vessels.

A floor level in the north-west quadrant, which is described as being inside the face of the hut wall on the same level as the hearth, may equate with a floor level in the north-east quadrant of Site 3 which is recorded as having been associated with bones and charcoal (Ritchie & Lane 1980, 221). This layer produced two basal angle sherds (141), probably from the same globular vessel, a body sherd with vertical striations on the interior (142) and a collection of 49 undiagnostic plain wall sherds (143). Another box containing pottery, apparently recovered from a depth of 150 mm inside the dark soil of the floor level, held 19 sherds, all from the same vessel (144). The sherds have a black carbonized deposit on the interior surface and may represent one of the earliest vessels from Site 3; it is unfortunate that no matching sherds could be found to produce the vessel's rim, foot or profile.

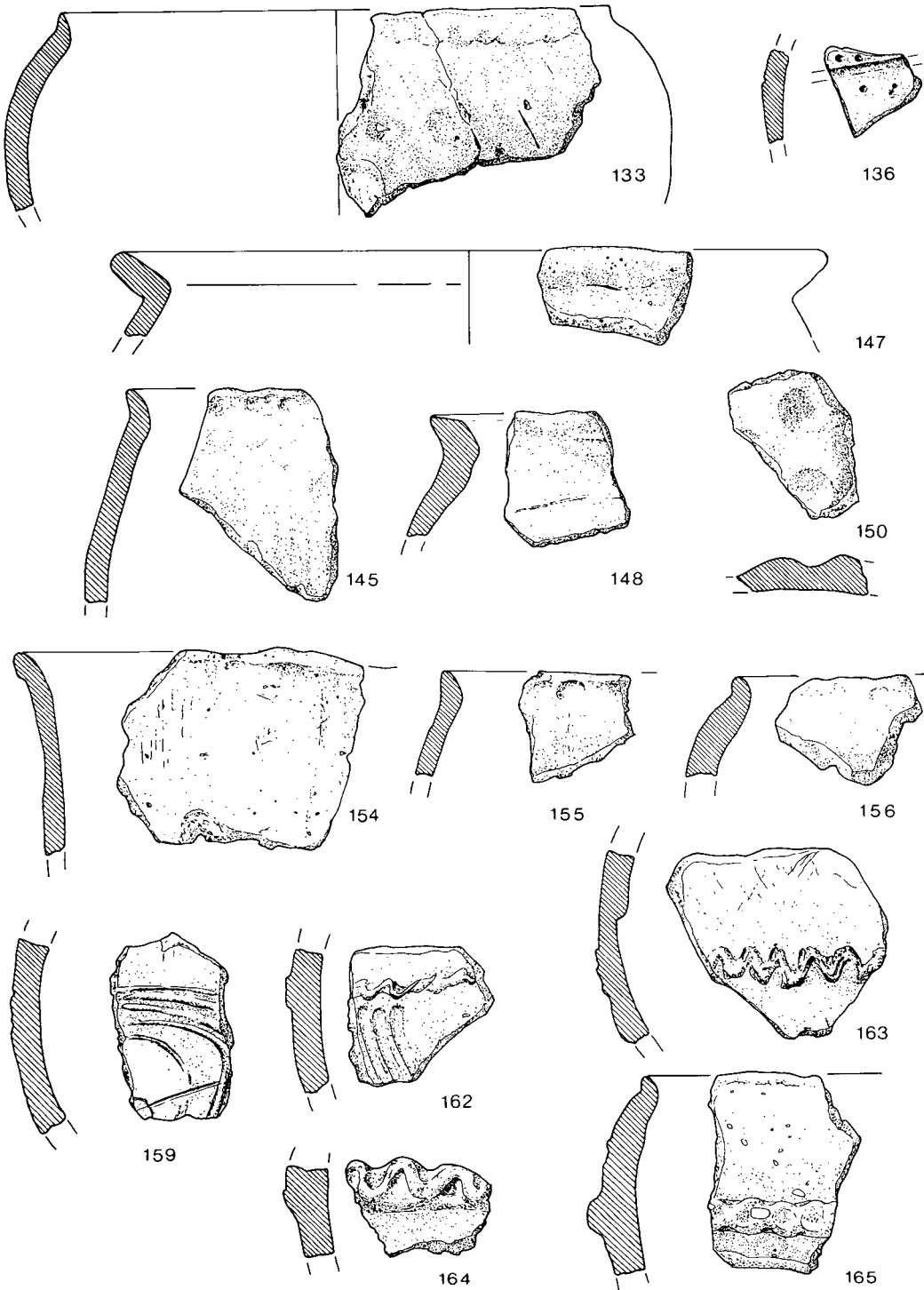
#### SOUTH-WEST QUADRANT

The south-west quadrant, the smallest of the areas excavated, produced two boxes of material. However, when opened in 1981, one of these was completely empty, whilst the other had two notes describing separate contexts from within the south-west quadrant. Thus it is not known which of the total of 53 sherds came from the rubble of the outer part of the wall, and which came from a dark soil deposit inside the hut wall face. The quadrant as a whole produced two rimsherds with a thin out-turned lip (145-46), two with an everted rim (147-148), of which 148 was very sharply everted, and one small sherd with a very crude out-turned edge (149). More notable was a domed base sherd which displayed two deep fingertip impressions in the middle of the bottom of the vessel (150). Such a feature occurs on the many sites throughout the Hebridean chain, such as Dun Mor Vaul, Tiree (MacKie 1974, fig 11, no 31), A' Cheardach Mhor, South Uist (Young & Richardson 1960, fig 6, nos 35-36) and Dun Beag, Skye (unpublished, NMAS, GA 1114, IX 20 74 and 75). The sherds from A' Cheardach Mhor, South Uist, although assigned to Phase 1 by the excavators, all unfortunately came from midden or disturbed contexts and so there must be some doubt as to their being contemporary with the primary use of the site. From Dun Mor Vaul, however, the further base with four and possibly originally five fingertip impressions was recovered from a much securer context sealed beneath the broch outer wall and pre-dating it (MacKie 1974, fig 11, no 31). A sample of bone from a midden context immediately below the sherd gave a radiocarbon date (GaK 1225) which after calibration gave a range of the mid sixth to early first centuries bc (Klein *et al* 1982). This parallel therefore is somewhat earlier than the date suggested by the other range of small finds from Dun Cul Bhuirg, particularly the glass beads (Ritchie & Lane 1980, 219) and demonstrates the difficulty of extrapolating dates for other sites from the pottery sequence alone.

In addition the south-west quadrant produced three sherds with striations on their surfaces (151) and 44 sherds from different vessels (152-53). It has also been argued above, that sherds 63-64 which were previously published as coming from Site 2 (Ritchie & Lane 1980, 222) were also from this site and quadrant.

#### SOUTH-EAST QUADRANT

The third quadrant which was excavated in 1958 overlay the south-eastern part of the hut on Site 3. This quadrant included the south circuit of the hut wall and in part also overlay the wall of the fort. The pottery which was excavated from below the 'turf and above and between stones' included eight rimsherds of varying types. Two sherds exhibited out-turned lips (155-56), one was also out-turned and flaring (154) with parallels at Dun Cuier, Barra (Young 1956, fig 9, nos 61-3) and the rest appeared to be flanges broken off from everted rims (157-58). Two other sherds (159) had irregular grooved and incised curvilinear lines, which on account of their depth could not be seen as having been randomly acquired during manufacture, but rather seemed to be deliberate decorative features, though of what larger general pattern was unclear. Sherd 160 was incised with a single line and may well have come from the same vessel. Zigzag cordons were



ILLUS 3 The pottery (scale 1:2)

found on three sherds (*162–64*) with *163* having traces of fingernail nicks in each of the up waves; it is very similar to a sherd from A' Cheardach Bheag, South Uist (Fairhurst 1971, fig 8, no 8). Number *162* also bore three faint, shallow grooves. The cordon of sherd *165* was of a straight finger-impressed type, with small grits also sticking to the surface of the vessel. The cordon could be paralleled at Dun Mor Vaul, Tisee (MacKie 1974, fig 18, no 384). An impression, possibly of a large seed, occurred on sherd *161* and the remainder of the pottery from the context consisted of four sherds, of which one was heavily grass-marked.

Another box of pottery, also from 'above and between' stones, though in this instance more specifically from the north-western triangle of the south-east quadrant, contained a further 62 sherds. These included a probable everted rim flange (*167*) and three basal angle sherds (*168–70*) of which one (*170*) was from a vessel with a domed bottom. Sherd *171* had a thick zigzag cordon and was lightly grass marked, whilst the only other noteworthy sherd (*172*) had a carbonized deposit on the interior and many surface striations on the exterior. Striations were also noted on a sherd from the south-eastern part of the quadrant, in a context on top of the fort wall, as opposed to that of the hut. A total of 35 other body sherds were also recovered from this latter context. The only other pottery definitely known to have come from this quadrant consisted of six sherds (*176*) from the same vessel, all displaying a very black sooty interior and coming from a rubble layer inside the hut wall at the north end of the rectangle.

Other pottery rediscovered in 1981 might also come from Site 3, although the notes contained with the two boxes concerned are too vague for this to be stated categorically. One box containing four indeterminate sherds (*177*) has a note describing them as being 'from below wall footing on south-eastern face (loose scree and grass below 1957 cut)'. The other box is enigmatically-marked 'DB?' and holds four grass-marked sherds (*178–79*), probably from the same vessel, one of which, *178*, displays a zigzag cordon.

## DISCUSSION

In their discussion of the pottery which was known to be extant in 1980, Ritchie and Lane considered that the pottery from the four sites was homogeneous enough to be examined as one assemblage. There seems no real reason to change that view; although a few sherds of different decorative type occur amongst the rediscovered material, for example the fingertip-impressed base (*150*), the bulk of the material confirms rather than alters the impression that the assemblage could have derived from the collections recorded from other Hebridean sites. Few radiocarbon dates exist for pottery collections of this period in Western Scotland, and hence dating for many sites has in the past had to rely on parallels, both of vessel types and decoration. This situation also extends for most sites to many of the classes of associated artefacts which are found in conjunction with the pottery; the rediscovered Dun Cul Bhuirg material is no exception, and while broad guidelines may be suggested, no firm pottery chronology is either advanced or claimed. It seems particularly dubious to argue dating from pottery types from other sites, if the dates themselves are derived from yet further sites where the chronology has been deduced from a starting point of poor stratigraphy or tenuous analogy of other artefact classes. Thus while guidelines may be suggested from the pottery of other sites, as many stylistic wares have an apparently long sequence of development and usage, a chronology is not best constructed where there is a danger of the argument deriving from and ending in circularity. A few of the stylistic parallels will be examined to demonstrate this point.

Of the rimsherds which are amongst the collections of rediscovered material from Sites 1 and 3 the majority are either everted rims or are the flanges of everted rims which have been broken off from the rest of the vessel. Dating for the first appearance of this rim type in the Hebrides has in part depended on views of the existence of an intrusive south-western British influence in the islands. The everted rim, traditionally thought to occur for the first time in the Hebrides in the late first century BC and early centuries AD (Scott 1948, 64; Young 1966, 56), was shown to occur earlier by the radiocarbon date (GaK 1098) supplied for a sherd with an everted rim and a double cordon in the pre-broch, wattle hut levels at Dun Mor Vaul (MacKie 1974, 40). While the date has a fairly large standard deviation and has an additional error from being derived from a grain sample (Clark 1975, 257),



calibration at two standard deviations indicates a date range from the late eighth to the early third century BC (Klein *et al* 1982).

The danger of inferring movements and hence dating by choosing selected points of similarity in ceramic traditions has been highlighted by Alcock (1984, 15). This is confirmed by the sequence from Cletraval: it has long been taken as a site demonstrating pottery types of the first century AD (Young 1953, 103) and of producing the sequence in which early vessel types were defined (Fairhurst 1971, 92). Both these assumptions require examination. The dating for the early pottery types at Cletraval was based purely on the supposed similarity of individual decorative motifs with those of south-western Britain. This methodology has been challenged (MacKie 1971, 46; 1974, 107), as has the validity of the more general model of inferring dates from pottery, even of Roman production (Clarke 1971, 25). The other evidence from which a broad date for the Cletraval occupation might be derived consists only of half a translucent pale green glass bead of Guido's group 7 (iii) variety and dated by her to the Roman or even post-Roman period (Guido 1978, 70). It was recovered from below the level of the floor and it was suggested that it could have been derived from the upper levels (Scott 1948, 66), possibly because its later date was at variance with that which was expected for the pottery sequence. That it was intrusive is now accepted although the basis for that acceptance is really perhaps less than satisfactory. Moreover, if Scott's analogies with the south-western British ceramic traditions are treated more cautiously, given that there are problems of using such exotic objects as glass beads as a point of general principle, there is still a case, perhaps, for arguing for an absolute starting date of several centuries later for the Cletraval sequence. Clearly this has implications for the traditional pottery chronology advanced for the Hebrides.

The relative dating for parts of the pottery sequence also requires examination. At Tigh Talamhanta, Barra, the main habitation was believed to have undergone two major phases of occupation with the second being delineated by rebuilding and strengthening a part of the outer wall (Young 1953, 86). Parts of a large everted rim vessel with an applied zigzag neck cordon were recovered from the lowest levels of Bay 6, yet joining rimsherds of the same vessel were recovered from the rebuild wall of Phase 2. It is possible that these sherds were lying about on the site and were reincorporated in the Phase 2 wall in the rebuilding process, but the friable nature of much of the pottery and the fact that the sherds can be seen to join militates against this: another deduction could be that the body sherds of the vessel were deposited in Bay 6 of Phase 1 shortly before or during the rebuilding. If this is the case then the fact that the sherds were recovered from the lowest levels of that bay indicates that either the Phase 1 occupation was extremely short, or more probably that regular sweeping took place suggesting that the earlier parts of the pottery sequence are less likely to be represented in the recovered material. Such a conclusion casts doubts on the wisdom of baldly applying statistical analyses to the numbers of recorded sherds from excavated contexts.

This can be highlighted by a brief investigation of some of the conclusions derived from the Cletraval sequence. For example, Scott asserted that at Cletraval incised decoration was used throughout Stages 1 and 2 but that it probably did not survive beyond Stage 2 (Scott 1948, 120). The pottery recovered from the lower levels represented Stages 1 and 2 of the site's occupation, the middle levels represented part of Stages 1 and 2 but were mixed with higher phases and the upper levels contained the pottery of Stages 3 and 4 habitation. In the lower levels incised decoration comprised 10% of the 81 vessels represented, in the middle levels 32% of the 37 vessels and in the upper levels almost 5% of the 22 vessels, ie in the latter case just one incised sherd was present (Scott 1948, pl IX, no 23). In the collections of the National Museum of Antiquities, however, there is a sherd from another incised vessel from the upper levels (Scott 1948, pl IX, no 9); if this is included the proportion of incised vessels for that context would be 9% of 23 vessels. The relative proportions for incised decoration in the lower and upper levels can thus be seen to be nearly the same. This again

both highlights the problem of the sample size and negates the assertion that incision died out after Stage 2. If one wanted to pursue the logic underlying Scott's table it could be argued that incision was flourishing almost as much at the end of the site's use as it was at the beginning!

It might be deduced from the above examples that with so much uncertainty as regards both the attempts to define a sequence of decorative and stylistic types and to attribute a chronology to them, that the dating of sites by the pottery alone is currently a hazardous undertaking. At A' Cheardach Bheag, South Uist, for example, owing to the lack of sherds displaying decoration of the type found by Scott and Young at other sites, the excavator was forced to conclude that perhaps the site was not one of the earliest of the Hebridean wheelhouses (Fairhurst 1971, 92-5). Apart from the iron ploughshare for which a Romano-British date was suggested, there is one other recovered artefact to which a tentative date may now be ascribed. This was the worked bone pommel from Bay 5 of wheelhouse 2 (Fairhurst 1971, 100, fig 10.1). It is of fairly small size, although on the basis of Irish examples (Rynne 1983, 192) this would not preclude its use with a sword or a large dagger-like form. It was admitted that it was difficult to date the swords and their associated pommels on other than typological grounds, but that the type seemed to develop in the non-Roman 'Celtic fringes' of the British Isles during the early Roman occupation, i.e. the second/third centuries AD (*ibid*, 193). Both the ploughshare and the sword pommel were recovered from the smaller and later of the two wheelhouses at the site (Fairhurst 1971, 86) and so despite the conclusions reached on the basis of the pottery, there may be no real reason to date the primary occupation of the main wheelhouse of A' Cheardach Bheag as being later than that of other Hebridean sites.

With these examples in mind it seems foolhardy to attempt to ascribe a more precise date to the occupation sites at Dun Cul Bhuirg on the basis of the rediscovered pottery material alone. Thus for dating one is forced to fall back on the interpretation of the two yellow glass beads of Class 8 and the single bead of Class 14 type, previously fully discussed by Ritchie and Lane (1980, 219); they advanced a date between 100 BC and 300 AD for the pottery from the sites. The Western Isles pottery sequence is clearly more complex than has been generally recognized; this may in part be due to the modern perception of the islands as being *the* Western Isles, *the* Hebrides. The islands are outwardly capable of a more close geographical definition than are areas of the mainland and they also contain a range of decorative and stylistic types not found in quantity elsewhere. However, this does not mean that it can be assumed that pottery throughout all the islands follows a single pattern of evolutionary development. To search for a single pottery sequence based on chronological criteria without regard to function and ignoring the possibility of local variations changing through time is a misguided approach.

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