
4 The Glennan Urn *by Gavin MacGregor*

Fifteen major sherds of prehistoric pottery were recovered from excavations at Glennan. Each sherd or group of sherds recovered was examined to produce a basic catalogue and to distinguish between sherds from potentially different vessels. Fabric analysis was undertaken only at a macroscopic level. Any observations must, therefore, be considered provisional unless or until confirmed by microscopic analysis. Conservation of the urn was undertaken at AOC Archaeology in Edinburgh and involved consolidation and joining of the major sherds (AOC 2000).

The total weight of pottery, including sherds, fragments and crumbs, is 1374.4 g. About 30% of a single pottery vessel is represented by the upper part of the body, which was preserved *in-situ* prior to excavation by GUARD. Up to 90 mm in depth of the profile is present and 95% of the rim. The remaining lower portion of the vessel was not preserved and had been destroyed at some point in the past.

4.1 The Vessel (Illus 6)

The vessel had an external diameter of 260 mm at the mouth. The rim is rounded, expanded on the exterior, with an internal bevel and is *c* 21 mm wide at the point the bevel returns to the wall. There are two cordons on the upper body of the vessel, each *c* 15 mm wide and 15 mm apart. The cordons have been pinched out from the top of the building ring. The wall thickness varies between 13 mm and 15 mm.

The exterior of the vessel is decorated with horizontal rows of impressed decoration, with up to seven of these present. The upper five rows of decoration

consist of cord twisted 'maggot'. Each 'maggot' slopes diagonally, is *c* 10 mm in length and *c* 3 mm wide. Together they form a herringbone motif. The 'maggot' decoration on the second and fourth row differs in as much as a blunt ended tool has been used to press the cord in deeper, creating a 'cross-maggot' motif. The decoration below the second cordon is stabbed with what may be a hollow bone tool. Two rows are represented on the surviving portion of the body.

The vessel has a coarse friable clay fabric with frequent inclusions protruding through the interior surface. The exterior has been carefully finished, as only occasional inclusions protrude. The inner surface is a light grey to buff while the exterior is predominantly buff with small patches of orange. The vessel is handmade (ring construction is visible in several sherds) and has probably been fired in an open bonfire.

Basic macroscopic analysis of the sherds indicates that the vessel has inclusions of grey angular to sub-angular igneous rock. The inclusions are moderately well sorted, have a frequency of *c* 25% and are up to 13 mm in length.

The surviving portion of the vessel shows no clear evidence of use, there being no visible residues or encrustations present on its surfaces. The surfaces themselves show little or no sign of abrasion relating to potential use.

4.2 Stylistic Affinities

The Glennan urn falls within the tradition of Enlarged Food Vessel urns (cf Cowie 1978, 20–24).



Illus 6 Glennan boulder-shelter: the urn

Until recently, the Enlarged Food Vessel urn tradition was poorly dated but a currency in the first half of the second millennium BC was suggested (*ibid.*). Now, results from the National Museums of Scotland *Dating Cremated Bones Project* demonstrate that such vessels were definitely in use around (or just before) 2000BC (Sheridan 2003, 203–06). Some writers (Sheridan 2003, 217 [note 1]) prefer the term ‘Vase Urns’ for these vessels.

The distribution of Enlarged Food Vessels from Scotland focuses towards the east, with few examples from the west coast (cf. Sheridan 2003, fig 13.3). The geographically closest examples of Enlarged Food Vessel urns are from Glenvoidean, Bute (Marshall and Taylor 1977, 24–25) and Glen Cloy, Arran (Soc Antiq Scot 1865, 83). The Glennan urn thus adds to the small corpus of known vessels from the west coast of Scotland and extends their distribution further north.