8 Radiocarbon Dates from Glennan

by Gavin MacGregor

An initial sample of single entity *Ericaceae* charcoal from the fill of the urn (Table 1, context 004 spit 1) was sent for accelerator dating at the Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit. A date was obtained of cal AD 1260–1390 at 2 *sigma* (OxA-10), which was clearly too late for a prehistoric burial. Consequently, a second sample of single entity *Corylus* charcoal from the lowest part of the urn fill (Table 1, context 004 BS 1) was submitted for accelerator dating at the Scottish Universities Research and Reactor Centre. The date obtained was 3370–2920 cal BC at 2 *sigma* (GU-9598). The dates were calibrated on OxCal v3.5.

While care was taken to select single entity charcoal samples from the fill of the urn, both of the radiocarbon dates obtained are problematic. The first date obtained of cal AD 1260–1390 (OxA-10281) is clearly too recent. The sample dated probably represents intrusive material. The second radiocarbon date of 3370–2920 cal BC (GU-9598) would universally be considered too early for the burial tradition (Section 4.2).

While both samples may simply represent carbonised material deriving from natural fires that migrated into the boulder shelter, they may also indicate human agency in the vicinity during the Neolithic and Medieval periods. A combination of both processes may have been at work; the carbonised remains had to derive from somewhere and the water could easily have washed charcoal from natural fires in the shelter. The earliest radiocarbon date may indicate that the shelter had been used by people before insertion of a formal burial. While the later one suggests that the boulder shelter could have been reused during the Medieval period and that the activities which took place then may have been the cause of the truncation of the base of the urn.

[*Ed.*: In view of the contribution of dated urns of this type to the research question about the emergence of inurned cremation in Bronze Age Scotland, it is intended to resolve the problematic radiocarbon dating of the Glennan Enlarged Food Vessel urn (or Vase Urn) at a later time, perhaps using the new bio-apatatite dating technique pioneered at Groningen to produce a third date. Given the long process necessary for securing funding and permission for this work, it was not felt reasonable to use this matter to delay publication any further.]

Table 2 Radiocarbon dates from Glennan

Lab Code	Sample Material	Lab. Age BP	δ C13	Calibrated 1 *sigma*	Dates 2 *sigma*
OxA-10281	Ericaceae charcoal	700±33	–24.9	AD 1270–1390	AD 1260–1390
GU-9598	Corylus charcoal	4495±75	–28.1	3350–3090 BC	3370–2920 BC