

A STUDY OF THE
BRONZE AGE POTTERY
OF
GREAT BRITAIN & IRELAND
AND ITS ASSOCIATED GRAVE-GOODS

BY THE
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WITH 1611 ILLUSTRATIONS OF POTTERY, 155 EXAMPLES OF GRAVE-
GOODS, AND 10 PLATES SHOWING ORNAMENTATION

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John Abercromby

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CHAPTER I

CINERARY URNS

THE cinerary vessels found in graves are divided into two classes :—

I. Cinerary urns of some size, into which the cremated remains of the dead were placed, or which were inverted over them.

II. Small pygmy vessels from 1 to 3 inches high, commonly termed ‘incense cups’. These were placed inside or outside the larger urn ; sometimes they were deposited alone, and on three or four occasions have accompanied skeleton interments. All these may be classified under seven principal types :—

- Type 1. The overhanging-rim type.
- Type 2. Pygmy vessels of various forms.
- Type 3. The Southern groups 1, 2, 3.
- Type 4. The Deverel-Rimbury groups 1, 2.
- Type 5. The Cordon type.
- Type 6. The encrusted type.
- Type 7. Enlarged food vessels.

Besides these cinerary urns there are isolated forms which cannot be ranged under any of the above headings.

As some of these types are local they will be described as they occur in the five Areas into which I have divided Great Britain and Ireland, which are as follow :—

- Area I. The country south of the Thames.
- Area II. From the Thames to the Humber.
- Area III. From the Humber to the Tweed.
- Area IV. North Britain.
- Area V. Hibernia.

TYPE 1. OVERHANGING-RIM TYPE

This ware is usually coarse and is always hand-made. The walls are thick, being made of local clay mixed with sand or broken stone. The colour of the outside varies, but is usually yellowish or drab, sometimes reddish, and seems sometimes to be covered with a pale yellowish slip. In height these urns vary from $4\frac{1}{2}$ to 21 inches.

Under type 1 I include two varieties which Dr. Thurnam kept distinct, urns with ‘overhanging rim’ and with ‘moulded rim’. Also those that come under his second type of food vessel, which have the same form as type 1, only differing in their smaller dimensions and in

being found with uncremated interments, often those of children. Typical examples of his first type are figs. 44, 103; of his second type figs. 11, 14, 20. But when a considerable number of his two types are arranged in order, it becomes evident, I think, that both are derived from a common source.

The series begins with urns that are structurally tripartite, consisting of three members—a rim, a neck, and a body. It terminates with urns that are bipartite, consisting of only a rim and a body.

The rim at first was narrow, and either vertical or inclined inwards. In process of development the rim became broader or deeper. But not everywhere, for in the south-west the rim sometimes remained narrow to the last, though the urn underwent changes in other directions. A good example of this fact can be observed in figs. 5, 5*a*, found side by side in the same Dorsetshire barrow, both of which are latish examples.

The neck consisted at first of a well-marked cavetto moulding. The tendency was to flatten and at the same time to become deeper. In the later stages of development the flattening became so complete that the neck entirely disappeared and became part and parcel of the body.

The body had the form of a truncated and inverted cone, sometimes with slightly curved sides. The junction of body and neck formed the shoulder, the diameter of which was as great or even greater than that of the rim. The tendency of the shoulder angle, which at first was sharp and well defined, was to become rounder. Its diameter lessened as its position lowered with the deepening of the neck, until ultimately these two members coalesced and the tripartite urn was transformed into a bimembral pot.

It must be observed that the urns have often received a considerable distortion, partly from imperfect firing, partly from posthumous deformation, and partly from being restored from small fragments. Hence, when seen in profile both sides are seldom the same.

That the sequence runs in the direction here proposed, and not *vice versa*, is seen by reference to the Table of Objects found with Type 1. In Area I, fig. 11 was found with merely a bronze awl; fig. 14 with a bronze knife with two rivets; fig. 18 with flint flakes and a bone needle; fig. 19 with a small bronze knife (Pl. cviii, O. 3). On the other hand, fig. 40 was found with a bronze dagger 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. long, and a bronze knife 4 in. long; fig. 44 with segmented beads of vitreous paste (O. 5); another like fig. 55 with similar beads, and another like fig. 53 with the fine bronze dagger O. 4.

In Area III, fig. 144 with flat neck and reduced shoulder is later than a glass bead. In Area IV, fig. 185*a* with similar neck and shoulder is later than a bronze dagger with midrib and fluted sides.

We find too, that with few exceptions there is little difference of form between urns of type 1 found together or near each other in the same barrow, and therefore contemporary or nearly so.

In Area I, figs. 5, 5*d*¹ are from the same barrow, but the former, which has a more angular shoulder, stood at a lower level and was deposited first. Figs. 5*a*, 5*c* are from the same barrow, but the former with a more hollow neck was deposited first.

Figs. 9, 9*a*, with a nearly similar shoulder, were both secondary interments and are in a measure contemporary.

¹ Details of these and of other interments mentioned in this section are given below.

In Area II, fig. 80 with the more hollow neck belonged to the primary interment; fig. 80*a* stood inverted at a higher level.

In Area III, fig. 105 with its angular shoulder stood with the primary interment; fig. 105*a*, of inferior form, with a secondary one. Figs. 107, 107*a* are strictly contemporary; fig. 107*b* stood very near them, but fig. 107*c*, the least well formed, lay at a higher level, at 6 ft. from the centre, and must be the latest of the four. Figs. 109, 109*a* are very similar, but the former was deposited first. Figs. 112, 112*a*, though dissimilar, are contemporary.

In Area IV, fig. 179, which is well formed, was found under a ruined cairn, at 6 ft. below the surface; fig. 179*a* lay at a higher level at some feet from the former. Figs. 185, 185*a* were found not far apart and are evidently contemporary.

Type 1 begins in Bronze Age II, when cremation was in the ascendant though inhumation was not wholly discontinued. Small urns of this type, varying in height from $4\frac{1}{2}$ to $6\frac{1}{2}$ in., are found both with cremated and uncremated burials.¹

In Volume I we found some reason to suppose that cremation in connexion with food vessels in Regions II and III was due to the influence of the original natives, whose ancestors were familiar with the practice in very early times. In the south the custom appears to be equally indigenous, for type 1 cannot be connected directly with any foreign type.

In figs. 10, 11, which begin the series in Area I, we have two vessels of moderate dimensions, $11\frac{1}{4}$ in. and $10\frac{1}{4}$ in. in height, which are structurally identical with food vessels of type 3 (concave neck) such as figs. 196, 197, 200. I regard fig. 10 as the urn that comes nearest the prototype, which was smaller, like food vessel fig. 16, $3\frac{3}{4}$ in. in height. This came from Nether Swell in Gloucestershire, and appears to be a modification of a neolithic vessel with a round base. If this view is correct, there is no break between the neolithic period and the beginning of Bronze Age II, and the new type of cinerary urn was not the result of a fresh foreign invasion.

In the earlier examples of type 1 the urn is enlarged chiefly by lengthening the body, which still retains a certain curvature, but the rim, already rather thick, becomes more accentuated, while the concave neck of the prototype remained for a long time.

¹ FIG.	HEIGHT "	UNCREMATED	FIG.	HEIGHT "	CREMATED
7 <i>a</i>	$4\frac{3}{4}$	Young person	11	6	Woman (?) with awl
32	5	Female	114 <i>a</i>	$6\frac{1}{4}$	Child
56	$3\frac{3}{4}$	Skeleton	115	$4\frac{1}{2}$	Child
57	5	Tall skeleton	113 <i>a</i>	$6\frac{1}{2}$	Young person
106	$5\frac{1}{2}$	Old woman	128	$5\frac{1}{4}$	Adult
108	$5\frac{1}{2}$	Child	159	5	Young person
127	$4\frac{3}{4}$	Skeleton			
160	6	Probably unburnt			
177	5	Skeleton			

AREA I (SOUTH OF THE THAMES). TYPE I

Multiple interments, figs. 1-9*a*.

Phase i, figs. 10-23.

Phase ii, figs. 24-43.

Phase iii, figs. 44-56.

The urns are found sometimes inverted, sometimes upright. From the analogy of food vessels we might expect to find the earlier ones deposited upright and the later ones reversed. In Area I, I have noted the following instances:—

Phase i, Upright 2 Inverted 1.

Phase ii, „ 2 „ 3.

Phase iii, „ 1 „ 6.

These instances are not sufficiently numerous to make it certain that such a rule held good, though it is not unlikely.

MULTIPLE AND SOME SINGLE INTERMENTS¹

Figs. 1, 1*a*. H. $8\frac{1}{2}$, $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. Normanton, B. 156, Wilts. Bell-barrow, D. 102 ft.; H. 10 ft. It contained a skeleton in very shallow grave. With this were 2 gold-plated beads, an amber disc, a jet bead, a flat jet bead notched on each side, some stone beads, and the above vessels. *A. W.* 202.

Figs. 2, 2*a*. H. 6, $1\frac{3}{4}$ in. Gold Barrow, Upton, Wilts. Height not given. At a depth of 2 ft. lay a deposit of burnt human bones and ashes in a shallow hollow. About 2 ft. from this were thirteen drum-shaped beads of gold, perforated at the sides, with lids fitting on to each end—A plate of gold leaf engraved with parallel lines and chevrons, measuring $5\frac{3}{4} \times 2\frac{3}{4}$ in. (O. 1)—A conical core of lignite covered with gold leaf (O. 1*b*); the under side of the core is ornamented with the same design as that at the centre of the gold plaque (O. 2); two round boxes of gold leaf, 1 in. in diameter, with conical covers (O. 1*c*). Several large perforated plates of amber and upwards of 1,000 beads of the same material, forming part of a necklace, and fig. 2*a*.

Four years later, at the same level and within a few inches of where the gold and amber objects had been disclosed, Hoare discovered two urns, one within the other. The larger one was broken, the smaller one is fig. 2. They lay near a pile of ashes, with a small bronze knife (O. 1*a*) and a bronze awl. The primary interment after cremation was contained in a shallow grave in the floor of the barrow. *A. W.* 98, 99, pl. xi.

Figs. 3-3*b*. H. $8\frac{3}{4}$, 5 in. Clandown Barrow, Martinstown, Dorset. From this barrow came cinerary urn fig. 3, the amber cup fig. 3*a*, the lozenge-shaped plate of gold O. 2, the large jet globular object with gold bosses, perhaps the head of a staff, O. 2*b*, the bronze knife-dagger O. 2*c*, and the small vessel fig. 3*b*.

So far as I can gather from a note made by Mr. Cunnington, they were all found about 7 ft. from the top of the barrow, lying on the top of an inner cairn of stones at the centre of the barrow. The pottery and the amber cup were in fragments. The cinerary urn is very badly repaired, and the shape it has received cannot be depended upon, though no doubt it belongs to type 1.

Figs. 4, 4*a*. H. $11\frac{1}{2}$, $11\frac{1}{4}$ in. Wyke Down, B. 28, Dorset. A low circular barrow, with filled-up ditch 7 ft. wide at the top and 3.8 in. deep. D. of bar. 53 ft. Fig. 4 stood upright in a circular hole 4 ft. deep, near the centre, with a cremated interment. Fig. 4*a* was inverted over a burnt interment in a round hole $2\frac{1}{2}$ ft. deep, about 7 ft. from the inner edge of the ditch. Both are of No. 2 quality of British pottery. Flint flakes and a fragment of iron pyrites accompanied the first urn. *P. R.* iv. 172, 180.

Figs. 5-5*d*. H. 11, 6, $7\frac{1}{4}$, —, $16\frac{1}{2}$ in. Bincombe Hewish, B. 42, Dorset. D. 36 ft; H. *c.* 6 ft. At no great distance from the surface, fig. 5*d* was found inverted over calcined bones. Below this was a mass of flints, and under them figs. 5*b*, 5*c* stood upright, side by side. Near the centre was another packing of flints, which when removed disclosed figs. 5, 5*a* and two others, all inverted and filled with bones and ashes. *C. T.* 52, 53.

¹ The height of the urns when known is given in inches. The objects are reproduced on Pl. cviii-cx.