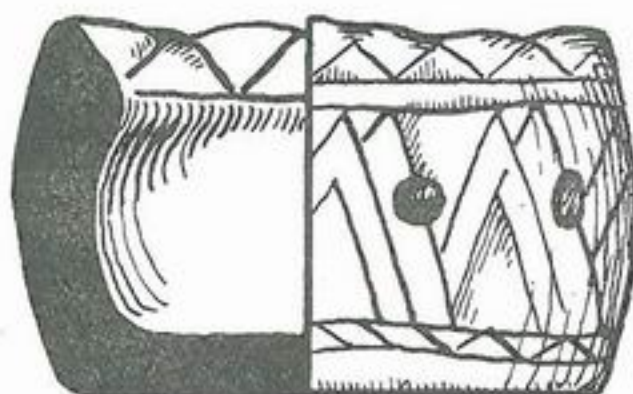


## "Incense Cup" from Tinderry, Co. Tipperary.

By S. P. O'RIORDAIN, M.A., Ph.D.

The interesting vessel shown herewith has recently been kindly presented to the National Museum of Ireland by Mr. William Roe of Ballykelly House, Roscrea.

It was found by a workman engaged on building fences for the Land Commission on the lands taken over for distribution by the Commissioners in the Townland of Tinderry. The find-spot can be obtained on the 6" Ordnance Survey Map, Co. Tipperary, Sheet 18, thus: distance in from left-hand margin, 264 mm.; distance down from top margin, 250mm.



Vessels of this class are conveniently referred to as "incense cups" (sometimes "pigmy" or "fire" cups), a name which, as has often been remarked, has little to recommend it beyond its having been in use long enough to have become a recognised term for a type of vessel which was almost certainly used in some ritual though we know nothing further of its exact purpose. <sup>(1)</sup>

The vessels are usually found with cremated burials and are in general to be assigned to late Bronze Age times, though some with inhumed burials must, because of the nature of the associated grave goods, be regarded as earlier while others may be nearly Iron Age in date.

The Tinderry cup was found at a depth of about three feet, and the workman who made the discovery was quite positive that no grave structure (such as a cist) was to be noticed and that there were no cremated bones found. In view of the circumstances attending the finding of most of the known examples of incense cups, it is to be supposed that the Tinderry find also accompanied a burial. That no trace of such was noted by the finder may be variously accounted for. Several cases have been recorded where the cup was found at some distance from the burial and again we have, as already mentioned, finds of incense cups with inhumed burials. <sup>(2)</sup> Should there have been an inhumed burial in this instance there is always the possibility of the skeleton having completely disintegrated and so no evidence recognisable by a workman would remain to indicate the nature of the interment.

The cup is 31mm. in height and 49mm. in maximum external diameter. It belongs to Abercromby's Type 2, Class 6 (biconical cups). The ornament is incised and consists of a combination of parallel lines and chevrons. As well as the outer surface of the pot, the inward-sloping bevel of the lip is decorated. The arrangement of the decoration can be seen in the figure, for which we are indebted to Miss G. Hayes. The paste from which the vessel is made is of good quality, much superior to that usually used in Bronze Age Pottery.

In this brief note no more need be said regarding the find except to remark that it comes from an area lately brought to notice by reason of the discovery in the Townlands of Cullaun and Timoney Hills (neighbouring townlands to that of Tinderry) of a remarkable group of standing stones which have not, however, yet been published.

(1). The type is discussed by Abercromby, *Bronze Age Pottery*, Vol. II., Chap. 3, 4.

(2). Cf. Abercromby, *op. cit.*, Nos. 220, 221, 252.