

Two steatite lamps

by Joanna Close-Brooks

Two steatite cup-shaped lamps have recently been brought to the National Museum for information. Both present unusual features, and the opportunity has been taken to put them on record.

The smaller lamp is now in the Public Library and Museum, Inverness. I am grateful to Mr R Milne, the Librarian and Curator, for bringing it to my attention. The lamp was found by the father of the donor at Kirkhill, west of Inverness (NGR for Kirkhill, NH 554455). No more detailed information could be obtained. The lamp (fig 3) is of steatite with a shallow bowl and a small, knob-like handle decorated with a simple, incised motif. It is 66 mm long overall,

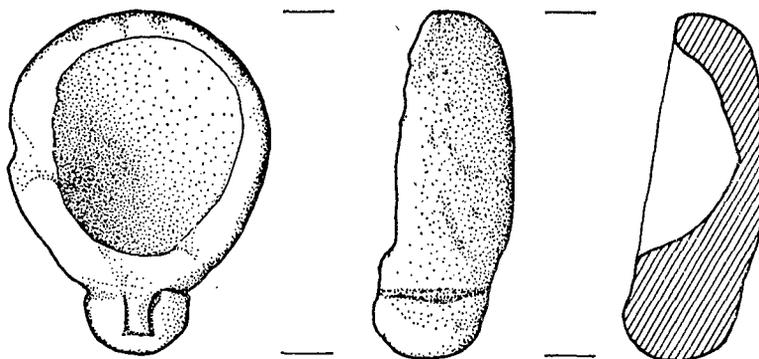


FIG 3 Steatite lamp from Kirkhill (2:3)

50 mm wide and 20 mm deep, and the rim is broken away in places. Few other handled lamps of such small size have been recorded; most lamps are over 76 mm wide, and usually larger still. Only two specimens in the Museum's collections are smaller than this, both being about 63 mm wide; one from Dun Telve Broch, Glenelg (GA 979) is neatly made with a squared handle, and the other from Bellrannoch Quarry, Broxburn, West Lothian (AQ 111) is only roughly shaped. Another small lamp is an unprovenanced example in Hawick Museum, which Mr R Scott kindly allowed me to examine. This is 63 mm overall with a knob handle and a round bowl

50 mm in diameter and 35 mm deep. It is deeper than the Kirkhill lamp and much more regularly shaped. The still smaller lamp from Kirkhill may perhaps be regarded as a toy lamp, rather than as a miniature meant for normal use. One thinks in this context of the toy querns from Jarlshof, Shetland (Hamilton 1956, 84, fig 37).

The larger lamp was found on Farleyer Moor, north of Aberfeldy, Perthshire (NN 831509), and is now (1972) in the possession of Duncan Mackintosh, Shenvail, Aberfeldy. Miss E I Clark (*DES (1971)*, 34) recorded this find and reported it to the Museum. I must thank her for information and Mr Mackintosh for permission to publish the find. This steatite lamp (fig 4) has a rounded bowl, somewhat square internally, and a rectangular handle with hourglass perforation.

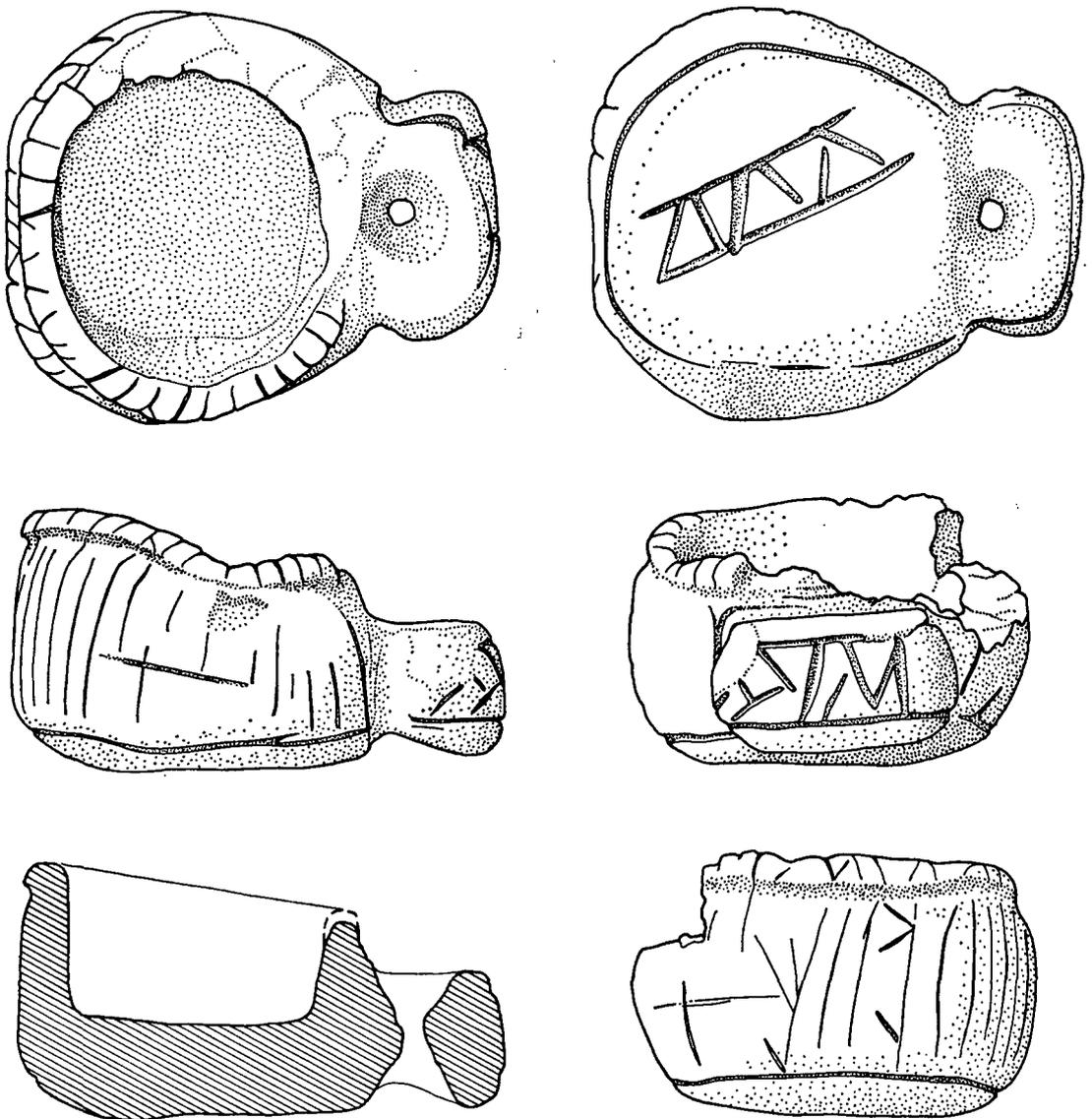


FIG 4 Steatite lamp from Farleyer Moor, near Aberfeldy (2:3)

It is 96 mm long overall and 76 mm wide. Much of one side of the bowl is missing, and there are holes and scars over most of the outer surface. The incised patterns on the base and handles are boldly incised and well preserved, but those round the walls of the bowl were more lightly drawn and are now worn and difficult to see. Inside the bowl are vertical marks made with a narrow bladed tool, the blade width being about 2.5 mm. Most of the bowl surfaces are rounded, but the top of the handle is cut off flat as if sawn. The decoration incised on the base seems to be unique. Probably this was a trial attempt at the pattern, but possibly the lamp was occasionally suspended by the handle when not in use, so that the basal pattern showed.

Stone cup-shaped lamps were discussed most recently by Steer (1956, 243–6) who cast doubts on their interpretation as lamps. However, such use was re-affirmed by Stevenson (1966, 28 and note 67), who pointed out that a large proportion showed signs of burning. While neither of the two examples discussed here shows signs of burning, use as lamps is still the most likely interpretation of their function.

Mr D V Clarke has drawn my attention to a record of another lamp found on the farm of Kinrara, near Aviemore, Inverness-shire before 1856, and presented to the then Chichester Museum (*Sussex Archaeol Coll*, 8 (1856), 287–8). This lamp cannot now be traced. It is described as 'A small one-handed bowl formed of a material like steatite; . . . a corded ornament, rudely cut, runs thrice round the bowl. Diameter $3\frac{1}{2}$ in height $2\frac{1}{2}$ in.' This lamp, like the two above, conforms to the general distribution pattern as shown on Steer's map (1956, 244).

REFERENCES

- Hamilton, J R C 1956 *Excavations at Jarlshof, Shetland*. Edinburgh.
 Steer, K A 1956 'The Early Iron Age homestead at West Plean', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 89 (1955–6), 227–51.
 Stevenson, R B K 1966 'Metal-work and some other Objects in Scotland and their Cultural Affinities', in Rivet, A L F (ed), *The Iron Age in Northern Britain*, Edinburgh, 17–44.