

---

## APPENDIX 3: REPORT ON THE POTTERY WITH OBSERVATIONS ON NEOLITHIC POTTERY FROM THE WESTERN ISLES (and [table 4](#) for pottery catalogue), by *Ann MacSween*

---

### 3.1 Introduction

Consideration of the assemblage from Dunasbroc raised a number of general questions about the later Neolithic pottery of the Western Isles which this short review will address. The assemblage from Dunasbroc, being relatively small, does not help to answer any of the questions, but the recovery of Hebridean Neolithic pottery from an atypical site, and the publication of the assemblage from Northton, Harris ([Simpson et al 2006](#)) prompted this review of the current understanding of Neolithic pottery from the Western Isles. The publication of the pottery from the island settlement site of Eilean Domhnuill ([Armit 1992](#), 309) will provide much information relevant to addressing the areas of interest outlined here, but it is hoped that this review will be of use in raising some of the wider questions for debate in advance of the publication of that assemblage.

### 3.2 Composition of the assemblages

Our understanding of the Neolithic pottery from the Western Isles is hampered by a lack of well stratified material. The largest published assemblages are from the domestic sites of Northton ([Johnson 2006](#)) and Eilean an Tighe ([Lindsay Scott 1951](#)), both on the Isle of Harris; and Allt Chrisal, on Barra ([Gibson 1995](#)). Smaller assemblages have been found at the settlement sites of Bharpa Carinish, North Uist ([Armit & MacSween 1993](#)) and at Dunasbroc.

Over 2700 sherds of pottery were recovered during the excavations at Northton ([Johnson 2006](#), 40), from a charcoal-rich layer of black sandy clay interpreted as a Neolithic midden deposit. This layer contained pottery, worked stone, bone and faunal remains, as well as scatters of stones and boulders which may indicate former structures. Due to the lack of context information the material from the midden was treated as if it were from a single deposit. A sample of animal bone from the midden at Northton provided a date of 3350–2890 cal BC at 2-sigma level of confidence, although this date is helpful only in that it provides a date which attributes some of the midden material to the later Neolithic.

Johnson ([ibid](#) 63) identified four main groups of pottery – uncarinated bowls (simple bowls with open mouths; bowls with constricted necks forming a bag-shaped vessel; and bowls with simple in-turned rims to form a closed mouth); carinated bowls (bipartite

bowls with upright or constricted necks and closed mouths); multiple-ridged jars (simple bag shapes or vessels with more globular bodies) and Unstan-type bowls (wide, shallow, round-based bowls with a vertical collar, usually decorated).

At Northton, Unstan bowls constituted over 50% of the number of recognised vessel types, followed by multiple-ridged jars. How far this can be taken as representing the typical composition of a Hebridean Neolithic assemblage is questionable. Firstly, as has been noted above, no context information was available for the Neolithic levels on the site, so this assemblage could represent the combination of a number of phases of occupation even although the deposit appeared to be the same. Secondly, as Johnson ([ibid](#), 64) has pointed out, the Unstan vessels are the most easily recognised vessels and are probably over-represented.

In her discussion of the assemblage, Johnson compares the overall attributes of the assemblage with the overall attributes of the other assemblages from the Western Isles, noting, for example, that at Eilean Domhnuill, North Uist (Brown nd, quoted in Johnson [ibid](#), 67), the most common vessel types are multiple-ridged jars and uncarinated bowls, followed by Unstan-type bowls. The excavations at Bharpa Carinish, a settlement site in the south of North Uist ([Crone 1993](#)), produced over 400 sherds, representing around 100 vessels ([Armit & MacSween 1993](#)). For Bharpa Carinish, charcoal from the four excavated Neolithic hearths was dated but the lack of precision of some of the dates means that the most we can say is that they cluster in the late 4th/early 3rd millennium BC. Most of the sherds from the assemblage were too small to give any indication of vessel form but many were carinated and were interpreted as round-based carinated jars or bowls, some with incised decoration, and there is a possible fragment of an Unstan bowl. Johnson ([ibid](#) 68) notes that ‘Many of the Neolithic forms one would expect to see are missing . . .’ Whether comparing the overall composition of these assemblages is meaningful is open to debate, as in taking this approach, the assumption is that there is a ‘Hebridean Neolithic’ assemblage. From the limited amount of stratified material available, it is perhaps more likely that there is a general ceramic sequence for the Hebridean Neolithic, and that within that general sequence, variations can be expected, depending on, for example, cultural preferences, or the activities being carried out on a site.

**Table 4 Catalogue of pottery from all sites**

**Dunasbroc Trench 2**

Context	Vessel	SF	Sherd numbers	Description	Thickness (mm)	Weight (g)
Context 6	V1	169 102	1 rim & 2 body sherds	From the upper part of a Hebridean vessel with an internally bevelled rim. The rim bevel is decorated with oblique grooves 2mm wide and 2mm apart. Just below the rim on the exterior are grooves 2mm wide and 2mm apart finishing just above a slight carination. Between this and a more pronounced carination are lines arranged more obliquely, with lines arranged almost vertically below that carination. The grooved decoration is incised into a thin, smoothed, wet-hand slip. The fabric is coarse sandy clay which has fired hard and is grey with a brown exterior surface.	8 mm	89 g
			1 rim, 2 body & 1 frag (body sherds probably from this vessel)		8 mm	24 g
	V2	169	1 body sherd	The exterior surface is smoothed and decorated with incised lines (incised with a point or blade). The interior surface is smoothed and combed. The fabric is coarse sandy clay which has fired hard and is grey.	6 mm	4 g
	V3	103 53	1 rim	Rim sherds (join) with an interior bevel. The exterior surface is slipped and smoothed. The bevel is decorated with oblique grooves c3mm wide and 3mm apart. There is fine fingernail fluting on the underside of the lip. The exterior of the vessel is decorated with grooves c3mm wide and 3mm apart arranged in alternating vertical and horizontal panels. The fabric is coarse sandy clay which has fired hard and is grey with a brown interior surface. The exterior and the rim bevel are sooted.	7 mm	14 g
			1 rim		7 mm	13 g
	V4	53	1 rim & 4 frags	Rim (plain) from a straight-sided vessel. The exterior surface is smoothed. The fabric is coarse sandy clay which has fired hard and is grey with brown surfaces. Diameter 100 mm.	7 mm	30 g
	V5	53	1 rim	Rim with an overhanging flange. Probably wet-hand smoothed on the exterior. The rim is badly abraded but there are traces of decoration (oblique grooved lines) on the lip. Below the lip are oblique lines 3mm wide and 1mm apart. The fabric is coarse sandy clay which has fired hard and is grey with a brown exterior surface. Diameter 160 mm.	7 mm	22 g
	V6	8	1 rim, 2 body & 5 fragments	Rim with an interior bevel. The exterior of the bevel is slipped and smoothed/burnished. The bevel is decorated with oblique lines c3mm wide and 3mm apart. The exterior is decorated below the rim with oblique lines 4mm wide and 2–5mm apart. At one point they are fairly deep, with the slip squashed up between the grooves. 35mm below the rim is a pronounced carination and below this is no trace of decoration. The fabric is coarse clay which has fired hard and is grey with brown surfaces. Diameter 400 mm.	11 mm	139 g
	V7	1 ?	Carination and outer fragment 26 fragments and a carinated sherd (joins)	Carination and outer fragment (exterior skin only) showing that the carination was applied as a separate roll of clay. The exterior surface is smoothed (smoothing striations). The fabric is coarse clay which has fired hard and is grey with brown surfaces.	–	80 g
V8	129 42 69 11 126	2 rim & 1 body	Rim with a very wide interior bevel, decorated with grooves c3mm wide and 105mm apart. The exterior surface is burnished. The fabric is coarse sandy clay which has fired hard and is grey with brown surfaces. Diameter 360 mm.	10 mm	81 g	
		25 small frags 1 rim frag, 3 body, 13 frags (combed interior) 11 frags 1 rim frag (possibly from this vessel)			20 g 61 g 4 g 8 g	
V9	146	1 rim	Rim sherd with an interior bevel. The exterior and bevel are wet smoothed. The sherd is decorated on the bevel with oblique incised lines c2mm wide and 2mm apart. On the exterior below the rim the exterior surface is decorated with oblique lines (running in the opposite direction to those on the bevel) 1mm wide and 1mm apart. The fabric is sandy clay which has fired hard and is grey with brown surfaces. The exterior surface is sooted.	6 mm	12 g	

**Table 4 (cont.)**

Context	Vessel	SF	Sherd numbers	Description	Thickness (mm)	Weight (g)
Context 6	V10	146	1 rim (different bag) 1 body 1 exterior fragment	Flat rim with a slight lip to the exterior. Decorated with shallow grooves c2mm wide and 1mm apart obliquely across the lip. The exterior surface is smoothed and decorated with vertical lines of oval stabs c2mm long and 1mm wide. The fabric is sandy clay with c10% of angular rock fragments which has fired hard and is grey.	9 mm	6 g 5 g 1 g
	V11	145	3 rim, 1 from rim (no lip), 5 body, 1 frag	Very fragmentary remains of a vessel with an interior bevelled rim. The bevel is decorated with oblique grooves c3mm wide and c3mm apart. The exterior and interior surfaces are smoothed (smoothing striations). The fabric is coarse sandy clay which has fired hard and is grey with red/brown surfaces. A coil forming the rim joins the body at the point of inflection of the rim with the body.	7 mm	95 g
	V12	106	5 body & 3 fragments	Exterior surface smoothed. The fabric is coarse sandy clay. Grey with a brown surface.	14 mm	137 g
	V13	67	1 body & 1 fragment	Coarse sandy clay. Red.	14 mm	15 g
	V14	177	1 body	Exterior and interior surfaces burnished. Sandy clay. Grey with a brown exterior surface.	9 mm	12 g
	V15	56	1 body sherd	Exterior surface is smoothed (striations). Coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown margins.	10 mm	33 g
	V16	58	1 body sherd	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with a brown exterior surface.	8 mm	2 g
	V17	83	3 very crumbly fragments, one from the rim	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown surfaces.	10 mm	24 g
	V18	80	2 small sherds	Exterior surface smoothed. One sherd is decorated with incisions, the other with shallow grooves. Coarse sandy clay. Grey with a brown interior surface. Smoothing striations on the interior of one sherd.	5 mm	3 g
	V19	–	Sieved 1 body sherd	Shallow grooves on the exterior. Sandy clay with c10% of rock fragments. Grey.	7 mm	2 g
	V20	88	3 body sherds	Exterior surface smoothed. Coarse sandy clay. Grey with a brown exterior surface.	4 mm	5 g
	V21	88	1 body sherd	Exterior surface smoothed and there are smoothing striations in the interior. The exterior surface is decorated with incisions made with a sharp-pointed implement 1mm wide. Grey. Exterior surface sooted.	5 mm	3 g
	V22	88	2 body sherds	One sherd is from the point of inflection of the neck and the body. Coarse sandy clay. Grey. Exterior sooted.	6 mm	4 g
	V23	74	1 fragment	Sandy clay. Grey.	–	1 g
	V24	167	4 fragments	Coarse sandy clay with c10% rock fragments. Grey.	–	8 g
	V25	57	1 body sherd	The exterior surface is decorated with shallow grooves. Coarse sandy clay. Grey with a brown interior surface.	9 mm	8 g
	V26	92	1 rim sherd and body sherd	Exterior smoothed. Coarse sandy clay. Grey.	6 mm	7 g
	V27	89	1 body sherd (split)	Exterior smoothed and decorated with shallow grooves in various directions. Coarse sandy clay. Grey with a brown exterior surface.	5 mm	6 g
	V28	34	11 fragments	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown surfaces.	–	11 g
	V29	61	1 body sherd & 5 fragments	Incisions on body sherd. Coarse sandy clay. Black. Exterior sooted.	6 mm	7 g
	V30	Sieved	14 small fragments	Some fragments decorated with incisions or shallow grooves. One fragment is from the point of inflection of the neck with the body. Coarse sandy clay. Grey. Sooting. Probably from more than one vessel.	–	12 g
V31	107	9 abraded sherds/fragments	Two fragments are from the rim. Coarse sandy clay. Grey with red exterior.	8 mm	30 g	

**Table 4 (cont.)**

Context	Vessel	SF	Sherd numbers	Description	Thickness (mm)	Weight (g)
Context 6	V32	84	3 fragments	One fragment has shallow grooves, the other two have sharp incisions. Coarse sandy clay. Grey (2), brown (1). Probably from different vessels.		2 g
	V33	Sieved	2 body sherds (different vessels)	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with a brown exterior surface.	8 mm & 11 mm	6 g
	V34	145	1 small rim sherd (interior bevel) & a body sherd (probably different vessels)	Rim sherd has an incised line on the exterior. Coarse sandy clay. Grey with a brown exterior surface (rim); grey (body).	5 mm	3 g
	V35	Sieved	5 body, 4 frags & rim frag (different vessels)	2 of the body sherds are decorated with 2mm wide grooves. Coarse sandy clay. Grey (brown surfaces). Some sooting.	3–4 mm	15 g
	V36	103	1 body	Exterior burnished. Coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown exterior.	10 mm	11 g
	V37	103	2 body & 1 rim (all different vessels)	Larger body sherd has shallow grooves on the exterior. The rim sherd has grooves on the interior. Coarse sandy clay. Large sherd is brown with grey surfaces. Other sherds are grey with brown surfaces.	3 mm & 8 mm	7 g
	V38	84	1 body, 2 frags (prob different vessels)	Coarse sandy clay. Grey/brown	8 mm	6 g
	V39	127	8 fragments, 2 body sherds	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown surfaces. Exterior sooted.	8 mm	53 g
	V40	135	4 body sherds	Exterior burnished. Decorated with sets of oblique parallel grooves. Sandy clay. Grey with brown interior surface.	4–8 mm	21 g
	V41	135	1 body	Incisions on exterior surface. Coarse sandy clay. Grey with a brown exterior surface.	9 mm	3 g
	V42	141	1 rim fragment	Shallow incisions on rim bevel. Coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown surfaces.	–	2 g
	V43	Sieved	3 small body sherds, 9 fragments (different vessels)	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown surfaces.	4–10 mm	13 g
	V44	82	1 rim sherd	Rim with interior bevel. Parallel incised lines on bevel. Coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown surfaces.	8 mm	5 g
	V45	82	1 body	Coarse sandy clay. Grey.	7 mm	6 g
	V46	125 150 91	1 body 1 body 1 body	Parallel shallow grooves on exterior. Coarse sandy clay with organics (voids – ?seeds or shell). Grey.	6 mm	13 g 25 g 7 g
	V47	125	3 body, 12 fragments	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown exterior surface.	7 mm	39 g
	V48	60	2 body (different vessels)	One sherd has shallow grooves. Coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown surfaces.	3 mm & 7 mm	4 g
	V49	91	2 body, 1 fragment (different vessels)	One body sherd is decorated with incised lines. Grey with brown surfaces.	5 mm & 9 mm	13 g
	V50	?	3 rim sherds (2 different vessels)	Interior bevels (one with oblique shallow grooves). Coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown surfaces.	8 mm	25 g
	V51	150	1 rim bevel (grooved), body fragment, 2 fragments	Coarse clay. Rim – red, other fragments – grey.	rim 5 mm & body 4 mm	12 g
V52	52	1 rim fragment, 12 fragments, 2 body	Exterior surface has incised lines. Grey.	15 mm	18 g	
V53	132	6 body, 8 fragments (2 different vessels)	Smoothing striations on exterior. Coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown surfaces.	8–12 mm	150 g	
V54	146	2 rim (different vessels)	Angle of rim not determined. Both incised. Coarse sandy clay. One grey, the other grey with brown surfaces.	7 mm	8 g	
V55	146	3 body, 1 fragment (different vessels)	Decorated with incised lines. Coarse sandy clay. Grey	4–5 mm	13 g	
V56	90	6 body, 8 frags (different vessels)	Some decorated with incised parallel lines. Coarse sandy clay. Grey or grey with brown surfaces.	4–8 mm	44 g	

**Table 4 (cont.)**

Context	Vessel	SF	Sherd numbers	Description	Thickness (mm)	Weight (g)
Context 6	V57	?	14 body sherds (c3 different vessels)	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown exterior.	5–10 mm	109 g
	V58	152	7 body sherds (different vessels)	Some sherds have incisions/grooves. Coarse sandy clay. Grey some with brown exterior. Some sooting.	5–7 mm	45 g
	V59	146	38 sherds/frags (different vessels)	A few sherds have incisions/grooves on the exterior surface. Coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown exterior. Residue on some sherds.	5–13 mm	210 g
Context 1	V60	?below bank A	3 abraded sherds, 2 from flat part of base (?different vessels)	Coarse sandy clay. Grey.	–	24 g
	V61	194	1 body	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with red interior margin. Exterior sooted.	9 mm	7 g
	V62	21	2 body	One may be a clay fragment. Other is coarse sandy clay.	–	2 g
	V63	14	5 fragments	Shallow grooves on 2 fragments. Coarse sandy clay.	–	3 g
	V64	1	3 abraded sherds/fragments	Coarse sandy clay. 2 grey, 1 red.	–	7 g
	V65	7	5 fragments (2 vessels)	Coarse sandy clay. 4 × grey, 1 × red.	–	3 g
	V66	Sieved	1 body & 4 fragments	One fragment has shallow grooves. Coarse sandy clay. Grey.	5 mm (body)	4 g
Context 2	V67	96	1 body	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with red margins.	7 mm	3 g
	V68	27	2 fragments	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with red surfaces.	–	3 g
	V69	97	1 body	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown margins.	7 mm	5 g
	V70	30	1 body	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with red exterior margin.	8 mm	19 g
	V71	Sieving	7 body (different vessels)	Coarse sandy clay and sandy clay. Grey with red margins.	5–10 mm	26 g
	V72	26	1 body	Coarse sandy clay. Grey.	7 mm	5 g
	V73	94	1 interior fragment (abraded)	Coarse sandy clay plus 10% angular fragments. Grey with red interior surface.	–	13 g
	V74	99	1 fragment	Coarse sandy clay. Grey.	–	2 g
	V75	32	1 body sherd (abraded)	Traces of lines and dots. Coarse sandy clay. Grey with red margins.	–	15 g
	V101	23	1 body & 1 fragment (different vessels).	Coarse sandy clay. Grey, one with red surfaces.	8 mm	6 g
Context 4	V76	110	1 rim & 2 body (abraded) (possibly same vessel)	One sherd has traces of impressed dot decoration. Coarse sandy clay. Grey with red exterior margin.	8 mm	16 g
	V77	111	1 rim	Everted rim. Exterior smoothed. Coarse sandy clay. Grey with red exterior margin. Exterior sooted.	7 mm	8 g
	V78	157	1 body	Coarse sandy clay. Red with grey core.	11 mm	8 g
	V79	112	3 body	Coarse sandy clay. 2 × grey with red exterior margin (same vessel), 1 × red.	6–7 mm	13 g
	V80	115	2 body (probably same vessel)	Coarse sandy clay with 10% angular fragments. Grey with red exterior margin.	8 mm	10 g
	V81	158	1 body	Coarse sandy clay. Red with grey interior margin.	10 mm	8 g
	V82	113	1 body	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with red margins. Exterior sooted.	7 mm	14 g
	V83	95	1 basal sherd from flat part of base	Coarse sandy clay and grass impressions. Grey with brown margins.	9 mm	16 g
	V84	119	1 body (broken & abraded)	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with red exterior margin.	–	8 g
	V85	121	4 body (different vessels)	1 coarse sandy clay, 3 sandy clay. 1 × buff, 1 × grey with red margins, 1 grey. Sooting.	7–9 mm	13 g
	V86	Sieving	1 rim (abraded)	Coarse sandy clay. Red with grey interior.	–	3 g

**Table 4 (cont.)**

Context	Vessel	SF	Sherd numbers	Description	Thickness (mm)	Weight (g)
Context 4	V87	188	2 body (different vessels)	1 sandy clay, 1 coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown surfaces.	6–10 mm	10 g
	V88	192	1 body	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with red exterior margin. Interior sooted.	15 mm	7 g
	V89	191	1 body	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown exterior margin.	9 mm	3 g
	V90	195	1 body (broken in 2)	Coarse sandy clay. Brown with a grey core.	8 mm	5 g
Context 8	V91	Sieved	2 body (different vessels)	Coarse sandy clay. Grey/brown.	9–10 mm	16 g
	V92	Sieved	1 body (abraded)	Sandy clay. Brown with a grey core.	11 mm	5 g
	V93	185	1 body	Possible ridged decoration. Sandy clay with c10% angular rock fragments.	6–9 mm	10 g
	V94	160	1 body (abraded) & part of a pinched neck band (Iron Age)	Body sherd is coarse sandy clay. Neck band is coarse sandy clay with 10% of angular rock fragments.	9 mm	10 g
Context 10	V95	175	2 body (different vessels)	Exterior smoothed. One sherd has a trace of where a neck band has detached. Coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown surfaces.	6 mm	10 mm
	V96	174	2 body sherds (same vessel)	Exterior decorated with shallow grooves (parallel sets). Interior smoothed (striations). Grey.	4–6 mm	14 g
	V97	173	2 body (different vessels)	Exterior burnished. Coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown surfaces.	6–8 mm	12 g
	V98	171	2 body & 1 fragment	One sherd and fragment have shallow grooves. Sandy clay. Brown. Exterior sooted.	4 mm	7g
Context 9	V99	Sieved	2 fragments	One fragment is burnished. Sandy clay. Brown.	–	2 g
	V100	180	1 body, 1 basal (flat part of base) & 1 fragment (probably same vessel)	Exterior smoothed. Fine sandy clay with 10% rock fragments.	7 mm	29 g
	V102	178	1 body & 1 fragment	Exterior smoothed/burnished. Sandy clay with c20% angular rock fragments.	11 mm	16 g
Context 21	V103	193	1 rim	Flat rim. Coarse sandy clay with 5% large quartz fragments. Grey with brown margins.	10 mm	18 g

**Stac Mor, Garabost**

Context	Vessel	SF	Sherd numbers	Description	Thickness (mm)	Weight (g)
1m	V1		Body sherd with clear finger prints in the interior	The fabric is fine sandy clay with c10% coarser quartz which has fired hard and is grey with red margins.	5 mm	11 g
	V2		Fragment	The fabric is sandy clay with c10% coarse quartz which has fired hard and is red.	–	5 g

**Stac Domhnuill Chain**

Context	Vessel	SF	Sherd numbers	Description	Thickness (mm)	Weight (g)
	V1		2 sherds from the flat part of a base	The fabric is sandy clay with c10% coarser quartz which has fired hard and is grey with red margins.	10 mm	19 g
			Body sherd	The fabric is sandy clay with c10% coarse quartz fragments. It is fired hard and is grey. The exterior is smoothed and decorated with two horizontal incised bands 4mm wide (5–7mm apart) with obliquely arranged lines 3mm wide and 5–10mm apart below this and four oblique parallel grooves. The sherd is probably from a Hebridean Neolithic vessel. Thick diagonal grooving is typical of this type of vessel (cf V6 Dunasbroc).	8 mm	40 g

**Table 4 (cont.)**

**Eilean nan Luchruban**

Context	Vessel	SF	Sherd numbers	Description	Thickness (mm)	Weight (g)
	V1		Basal sherd – flat base with angled walls	Sandy clay. Grey with a buff exterior margin.	8 mm	10 g
	V2		Body sherd	Coarse sandy clay. Buff.	8 mm	9 g
	V3		Body sherd	Sandy clay. Grey with buff surfaces.	9 mm	2 g

**Dunasbroc, Ness**

Context	Vessel	SF	Sherd numbers	Description	Thickness (mm)	Weight (g)
	V1		Small plain rim sherd	Sandy clay. Grey with a brown exterior surface. Interior sooted.	6 mm	3 g
	V2		Interior fragment, broken in two	The fabric is sandy clay with 10% large fragments. Grey with brown exterior margin. Interior sooted.	–	2 g
	V3		Interior fragment	Sandy clay with c30% of large quartz fragments. Grey. Interior sooted.	–	5 g
	V4		Flat base with angled sides, and a small body sherd	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with a red exterior margin. Interior sooted.	9 mm (walls), 15 mm (base)	38 g
	V5		5 abraded body sherds (probably from 2 vessels)	Sandy clay with 20% large quartz fragments. Abraded.	8–13 mm	106 g
		5	Bag of crumbs			7 g

**Dun Arnistean**

Context	Vessel	SF	Sherd numbers	Description	Thickness (mm)	Weight (g)
	V1	22	Flat part of base (4 sherds)	Sandy clay with c10% coarser quartz. Red with buff margins. Grass impressions on exterior surface.	11 mm	55 g
	V2	16	Body sherd	Sandy clay. Buff.	5 mm	1 g
	V3	27	Top of coil junction at neck of an everted rim	Sandy clay with c10% angular quartz. Red with a grey core.	9 mm	15 g
	V4	8	Body sherd	Fine clay. Red. Exterior sooted.	4 mm	2 g
	V5	21	Part of a finger-impressed neckband	Fine sandy clay. Red.	6 mm	2 g
	V6	30	Abraded body sherd	The fabric is fine sandy clay with c10% large quartz. Grey with red margins. Interior sooted.	5 mm	4 g
	V7	1	Body sherd	Sandy clay. Red.	6 mm	4 g
	V8	13	Body sherd (abraded).	Sandy clay. Red.	–	1 g
	V9	29	Body sherd. Exterior surface smoothed	Sandy clay with c30% angular fragments. Brown exterior, grey interior.	10 mm	9 g
	V10	9	Body sherd	Fine sandy clay. Grey with a red exterior margin. Interior sooted.	7 mm	8 g
	V11	7	Body sherd and fragment. Abraded	Sandy clay with c10% coarse fragments. Grey with buff margins.	7 mm	11 g
	V12	2	Body sherd with a small section of applied zig-zag remaining. Exterior smoothed	Sandy clay. Brown. Exterior surface sooted.	7 mm	15 g

**Table 4 (cont.)**

Context	Vessel	SF	Sherd numbers	Description	Thickness (mm)	Weight (g)
	V13	14	Body sherd with an angular carination. Above the carination is a line of nail impressions.	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with buff surfaces. Both surfaces sooted.	5 mm	10 g
	V14	31	Body sherd	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with red surfaces.	10 mm	5 g
	V15	25	Body sherd (abraded)	Coarse sandy clay. Red with a black core.	–	7 g
	V16	28	2 fragments	Coarse sandy clay. Red.		2 g
	V17	3	2 body sherds (probably different vessels)	Coarse sandy clay. Brown. Exterior sooted.	5 mm	9 g
	V18	17	Sherd from the neck of a vessel – broken off along a coil junction	Sandy clay with c10% angular fragments. Grey with red surfaces.	8 mm	11 g
	V19		3 body sherds (different vessels). Possible impressed decoration below ?rim of one sherd.	Sandy clay. Red.	6–7 mm	13 g
	V20		2 body sherds (different vessels).	Coarse sandy clay. One sherd is abraded. Grey with buff exterior surface.	7 mm	7 g
	V21		Body sherd and fragment (different vessels)	Coarse sandy clay. Red.	7 mm	4 g
	Professor Murray Campbell Collection			Not catalogued individually. 2 rim sherds with long everted/flared rims. 2 sherds with finger impressions (?basal). 47 body sherds.	Most sandy. Some are finer and thinner. No decoration on the body sherds but some are ?wiped. Probably Iron Age and later.	8–10 mm
V22		46	Basal sherd (flat part of base)	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with red surfaces.	9 mm	7 g
V23		47	Body sherd	Sandy clay. Grey with red surfaces. Interior sooted.	5 mm	3 g
V24		77	Body sherd	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown surfaces. Interior sooted.	11 mm	14 g
V25		51	Lump of fired clay	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with red surfaces.	–	19 g
V26		65	Body sherd	Sandy clay. Brown.	4 mm	2 g
V27		41	Body sherd. Exterior surface wiped	Sandy clay. Grey with red surfaces. Both surfaces sooted.	6 mm	15 g
V28		50	Body fragment	Sandy clay with c10% rock fragments. Grey with red exterior surface.	–	4g
V29		43	Body sherd	Sandy clay with c10% angular fragments. Grey with a brown interior surface. Both surfaces sooted.	8 mm	13 g
V30		79	Body sherd	Coarse sandy clay. Red exterior, grey interior. Interior sooted.	10 mm	18 g
V31		35	Body sherd. Exterior smoothed	Coarse sandy clay. Red.	5 mm	1 g
V32		80	Body sherd	Fine sandy clay. Brown. Exterior sooted.	7 mm	6 g
V33		54	Body sherd	Coil junctions not smoothed on the exterior. Coarse sandy clay. Brown.	16 mm	56 g
V34		36	Rim sherd (flat rim)	Coarse sandy clay. Grey.	6 mm	7 g
V35		61	Body sherd	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with brown surfaces.	11 mm	8 g
V36		69	Body sherd	Sandy clay. Grey with brown surfaces.	8 mm	8 g

Table 4 (cont.)

Context	Vessel	SF	Sherd numbers	Description	Thickness (mm)	Weight (g)
	V37	60	Body sherd	Coarse sandy clay. Brown exterior, grey interior.	7 mm	5 g
	V38	39	1 flat rim, 2 body, 1 fragment	Rim (abraded). Fine sandy clay. Brown. Fragment. Coarse sandy clay. Brown/grey. Body. Coarse sandy clay. Red. Body. Burnished. Sandy clay. Brown with red exterior.	4 mm – 8 mm 8 mm	3 g 2 g 6 g 2 g
	V39	49	Body sherd	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with a brown exterior surface.	5 mm	2 g
	V40	33	Body sherd	Sandy clay. Grey with red surfaces.	9 mm	9 g
	V41	34	Body sherd with ?part of a wavy band adhering	Coarse sandy clay. Brown.	6 mm	7 g
	V42	42	Body sherd	Sandy clay. Buff.	6 mm	12 g
	V43	45	Body sherd, or flat part of a base	Sandy clay. Red.	9 mm	7 g
	V44	32	Body sherd	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with red surfaces.	11 mm	7 g
	V45	38	Body sherd (split).	Sandy clay. Grey with red exterior surfaces.	7 mm	6 g
	V46	68	Body fragment & small rim sherd	Body fragment. Sandy clay. Grey with a brown interior surface. Small rim sherd (flat). Fine sandy clay. Brown.	– 5 mm	4 g 1 g
	V47	52	2 body sherds (different vessels)	Fine sandy clay. Red.	7 mm	5 g
	V48	74	From the neck of a vessel.	Coarse sandy clay. Brown. Exterior sooted.	8 mm	18 g
	V49	48	Body sherd broken off at the junction with the neck. Exterior wiped	Coarse sandy clay. Grey interior, brown exterior.	14 mm	54g
	V50	64	2 abraded body sherds (different vessels)	Coarse sandy clay. Grey with a red exterior margin.	7 mm	9 g
	V51		3 abraded body sherds (different vessels) & basal sherd (flat part of base)	Body sherd. Coarse sandy clay. Red. Body sherd. Coarse sandy clay. Red. Body sherd (from join with base). Fine sandy clay. Red. Basal sherd (flat part of base). Coarse sandy clay. Grey.	12 mm 9 mm 7 mm 12 mm	6 g 17 g 4 g 13 g

Published sequences are limited to two sites, Eilean an Tighe, North Uist and Allt Chrisal, Barra.

In 1951 Lindsay Scott published the site of Eilean an Tighe, located on a tidal islet in North Uist, which he interpreted as a pottery workshop. This interpretation has been questioned on a number of occasions (eg Gibson 1995, 100). The interpretation of the stratigraphy is seldom referred to as a general model for the sequence of Neolithic pottery in the Western Isles but while the interpretation of the function of the site can be questioned, there is no reason to disregard the sequence. The sequence from Eilean an Tighe is described by Lindsay Scott as follows:

- Plain pots; pots with decoration on the rim; out-turned flat rims
- Plain vessels continued to be made but at least half of the vessels were decorated; flat rims were replaced by in-bevelled rims; flanged bowls appear

- Up to two thirds of all pots were decorated; in-bevelled rims are standard on plain vessels; out-bevelled rims have been introduced on decorated pots; two new and distinctive types appear, the ridged jar and the Unstan bowl

Lindsay Scott felt that the sequence was reliable as variations in phases across the site were recognisable from variations in soil type. The usefulness of this sequence, however, is limited by the lack of radiocarbon dates.

In his summary of the pottery from Allt Chrisal, Barra, Gibson (1995) notes that the typologically earliest vessels in the assemblage are the undecorated carinated bowls which were found throughout the levels of the excavated sections. He suggests that they form an undecorated element of the larger 'Hebridean assemblage'. Likewise, with Unstan bowls, he concludes that while comprising a small element of the assemblage in terms of number of vessels (18 vessels, c 3% of the total assemblage) they appear to

be found throughout the site's history. Taken with the evidence from Eilean an Tighe this could indicate that the assemblage from Allt Chrìsal is slightly later than that from Eilean an Tighe, or if the two sites are contemporary, that there is a great deal of variation from one site to another within the Hebridean Neolithic, with the composition of the assemblage from a site perhaps depending more on site function or cultural preference than chronology. The dates for Allt Chrìsal are  $4470 \pm 50$  BP (GU-3923);  $4700 \pm 100$  BP (GU-3467); and  $4820 \pm 60$  BP (GU-3922).

The two tombs with the largest assemblages of Neolithic pottery are Clettraval and Unival, both on North Uist. Sherds from an estimated 23 vessels were recovered from the long cairn at Clettraval, a mix of shallow and deep bowls, usually bipartite, with varying depths of collar in relation to the overall height of the vessel. A similar assemblage was recovered from the square cairn at Unival, with a few flat-based vessels, one of which was identified as Grooved Ware (both sites reported in Henshall 1972). Neither at Clettraval nor at Unival were ridged bowls or Unstan bowls included in the assemblage, although the other elements of Hebridean assemblages are represented, an observation made by Lindsay Scott in his discussion of the pottery from Eilean an Tighe. The lack of dates makes it difficult to know whether this is related to chronology (ie whether deposition of pottery within tombs had gone out of fashion before ridged bowls and Unstan bowls were in production); whether they were deliberately not chosen for inclusion in the tombs; or whether they were being produced by a group that was culturally different from those making the tombs.

Sheridan and Sharples (1992, 7) note that while Unstan bowls are found over a wide area in the Northern and Western Isles and on the northern mainland, the broader assemblages within which such bowls are found in Orkney are not replicated elsewhere. They also note that it is interesting that what have been referred to as 'flanged' bowls, present in the Orkney assemblages, appear in larger numbers in the Hebrides. The presence of only a few vessels which could be likened to Hebridean ridged bowls in the Northern Isles, and the presence of Grooved Ware at only a few sites in the Western Isles, suggest that contact between the two areas lessened in the later part of the Neolithic. Ridged vessels are not paralleled anywhere else in the Neolithic of the British Isles, perhaps indicating that in the later part of the Neolithic the Western Isles became more insular. This can be contrasted with the Northern Isles, where the abundance of Grooved Ware indicates that the Northern Isles were part of a strong communications network with other areas of mainland Britain. This is another area of enquiry which it will be interesting to come back to as more sites are excavated (it should be remembered, however, that until relatively recently, Aberdeenshire was a Grooved Ware-free area, so the characterisation of the Western Isles as a 'Grooved Ware-poor' region should be used with caution).

While the publication of the sequence from Eilean Domhnuill will be valuable in progressing our understanding of the Neolithic pottery from the Western Isles, it will be important to bear in mind that some of the attributes may relate only to Eilean Domhnuill and the temptation to adopt it as the type site for the interpretation of the pottery from the Western Isles should be resisted. In Orkney, for example, the analysis of the pottery from a number of well-stratified sites including Barnhouse (Richards 2005), Links of Noltland (Sheridan 1999) and Pool (Hunter & MacSween 1991) has not resulted in the identification of a clear sequence, in fact at least two distinct types of Grooved Ware have been identified, and there is a clear impression that while there are certain underlying traits, there is much local variation, perhaps much to do with the creativity of individual potters working within the general bounds of what was acceptable to their cultural group (see for example MacSween 1995).

### 3.3 Evidence from the sites

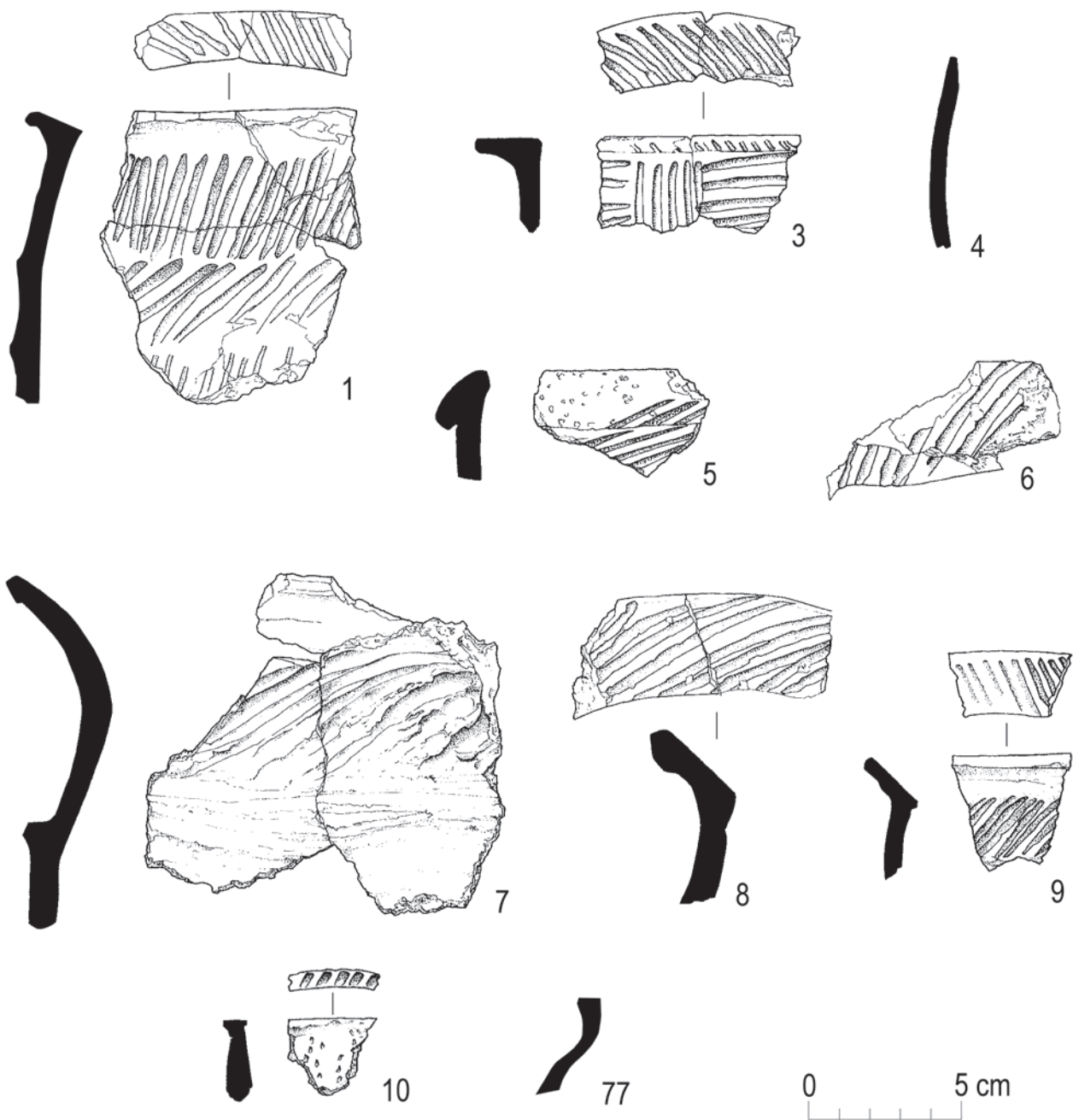
#### 3.3.1 Dunasbroc

The assemblage from Dunasbroc comprises *c* 480 sherds and fragments. The assemblage includes the rim and upper portion of several Hebridean vessels dating to the Neolithic. The characteristic features of assemblages of Hebridean incised wares are a round-based, 'baggy' profile, out-turned rims, the horizontal division of the vessels either by carinations or incised lines, and decoration which comprises either incisions or wider grooves into the surface of the vessel. The multi-carinated wares are a localised Hebridean style, the largest published assemblage being that from Eilean an Tighe (Lindsay Scott 1951). Their association with Unstan Ware pots on some sites such as Allt Chrìsal, Barra (Gibson 1995, 100–115) and Eilean Domhnuill, Loch Olabat, North Uist (Armit 1987) suggests that they were in use before 3500 BC (Gibson 2002, 77) but as yet there is no secure dating framework for this type of pottery.

While the majority of fragments and sherds in the assemblage can be attributed to the Neolithic from their fabrics and the presence of grooved decoration on many sherds, there are a few sherds which are Iron Age in character.

#### *Hebridean incised wares (illus 66)*

The Neolithic pottery from the site is very fragile and fragmented but enough survives of a few vessels (all from Context 6) to allow the profile of the upper portion of the vessel to be established. The best example is V1 (Vessel 1), which has an out-turned rim with an interior bevel. Below the rim on the exterior are three horizontal zones, delineated by carinations. The rim bevel is decorated with oblique, parallel grooves, and the zones are also decorated with parallel grooves, arranged in opposing directions. This was the most



*Illus 66 Hebridean incised wares from Dunasbroc Vessels 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 & 77*

.common form of decoration noted at Allt Chrisal, Barra (Gibson 1995, 104), and is also a decorative scheme in the Eilean an Tighe assemblage (Lindsay Scott 1951, 21, fig 8, 1.1). A variation in the layout of the decoration is noted on V3, where there is similar decoration on the rim bevel, but the decoration below the rim comprises alternating panels of horizontal and vertical grooves (unfortunately only the portion of the body just below the rim survives. Nicking along the exterior edge of the rim as on V3 is a feature also noted at other sites, eg Allt Chrisal (Gibson 1995, fig 4.32, no. 73).

Not all vessels have decoration covering the whole vessel – V11 has a decorated rim but the exterior of

the body is smoothed, while V8 has a wide out-turned rim, again decorated with parallel grooves, and the exterior of the vessel is undecorated but burnished. In the case of V6 the decoration appears to be restricted to the portion of the vessel above the carination (cf Eilean an Tighe, Lindsay Scott 1951, 22, fig 9, 2.3).

Hebridean assemblages usually include a variety of styles (cf the assemblage from Allt Chrisal, Barra; Gibson 1995, figs 4.32–34). In the case of Dunasbroc a flanged rim (also with grooved decoration – V5), is included, and there is a flat-rimmed vessel with grooved lines on the rim and impressed dot decoration on the exterior (V10). There is also a plain, straight-sided vessel from the same context (V4).

The fabrics are generally coarse, sandy clays with little evidence that temper was being added. The vessels are coil-constructed, and V7 (an outer fragment) provides evidence that the carinations were, at least in some cases, added as a roll of clay smoothed onto the surface of the vessel.

#### Iron Age

As was noted (above) a few diagnostic sherds from Dunasbroc are of Iron Age date. These would include the everted rim (V77) from Context 4, the pinched neckband fragment (V94) from Context 19, and a sherd (V95) from Context 10 with the mark of a (now detached) neckband.

#### 3.3.2 Stac Mor, Garabost

One sherd and one fragment of undiagnostic pottery.

#### 3.3.3 Stac Domhnuill Chaim

One sherd of Hebridean incised ware ([illus 5](#)) and one sherd probably late prehistoric or later.

#### 3.3.4 Eilean nan Luchruban

One basal sherd and two body sherds, probably late prehistoric or later.

#### 3.3.5 Dunasbroc, Ness

One rim sherd, 8 body sherds and a flat base with angled sites. Probably late prehistoric or later.

#### 3.3.6 Dun Arnistean

The assemblage from Dun Arnistean comprises *c* 70 sherds and a bag of unstratified material collected by Professor Murray Campbell. The majority of sherds are undiagnostic body sherds, but the assemblage includes a number of basal sherds from flat-based vessels (V1, V22, V51); sherds from vessels with an everted rim (V3, V18, V48, V49); a fragment of a finger-impressed neckband (V5); a body sherd with a small amount of applied zig-zag decoration (V12) and a second possible one (V41); and a body sherd with an angular carination with traces of decoration above (V13).

The Professor Murray Campbell collection was not recorded in detail, but two flaring rims are included in the assemblage. Also included in the collection are a number of fine sherds.

There is nothing in the assemblage to indicate a date earlier than the Iron Age. Finger-impressed bands and applied wavy decoration are common forms in 'middle' Iron Age, from the mid first century BC ([Campbell 2002](#), 141) with the flaring rims dating slightly later, from the fourth to sixth centuries AD ([ibid](#), 142).