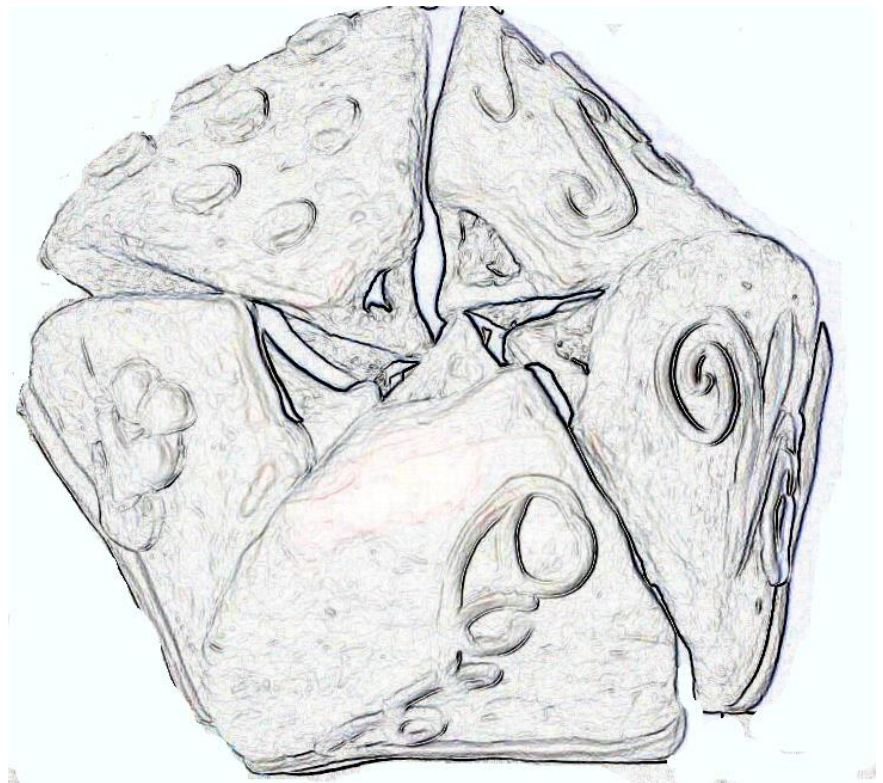


WESTERN ISLES PENTAD VESSELS

Found on a beach in North Uist, these vessels had been left exposed by a storm. Analysis suggests that they are made of imported clay. However their distinctive orange and grey colouring means that they were almost certainly fired in peat from land close to where they were found.

Each piece has been decorated with patterns similar to those found on early Neolithic ceramics; however they are thought to have been more recently constructed. The five segments fit together to form a globe like structure. Whilst the segments are similar in shape, they are each individually formed so as they only fit together in one order.



Whilst most pieces have been found intact, there is evidence on the surface of the pottery to suggest that some of the patterns have been damaged. There has been much research into the possible significance of the decoration, but the unique nature of this vessel quite unlike any other found in Western Europe together with the lack of written records of Gaelic culture makes speculation on their meaning difficult. The types of symbolism used however do demonstrate an appreciation of the complex relationship between humanity and the natural environment.



How the damaged pieces would have looked

The decoration of each piece and the way in which they fit together would indicate that their purpose was ceremonial, possibly used for some form of Celtic ritual. The vessels are hollow, and may have held oil or perfume. It has also been suggested that they could have been used as musical instruments.

The vessels were found standing in a circular formation on the beach just below the high water line. Their colourings were almost identical to that of the adjacent rock formations, and it is possible that they were intended to look like stone carvings. Their positioning relative to the sun on this easterly part of the Island may mean that they were used for worship of ancient Gods, or as a portable time piece.

