

## 6. A FURTHER NOTE ON THE CELTIC CARVED BOX FROM ORKNEY.

Mr J. W. Cursiter, in the first note on the box,<sup>1</sup> suggested that the tools belonged to "a wood-carver or some such workman." Mr R. B. K. Stevenson, in the second note,<sup>2</sup> said that their nature was uncertain, "yet it seems possible that they were wood-carving tools."

I do not think that the ornamentation on the box was done by a wood-carver, and offer the following reasons for suggesting that the tools are those of a leather-worker who also decorated the box.

The incised median lines, which could have been made with a blunt-edged tool, are tolerably well done; chip carving is used to give depth to the two horizontal rows of S-curves linked by the sinuous leaf-shaped forms, and also to give depth to the roundels. The obvious tool for a wood-carver to use for cutting down the outsides of the roundels would be a gouge. It seems evident to me that the roundels were formed with a narrow straight blade, giving an exceedingly clumsy finish. The rest of the carving, for which a tool with a skew blade would have been used by a carver, has again been done with a straight blade. This gives a most irregular and amateurish finish to the work. Considerable difficulty has been experienced when the tool came in contact with the cross- and also the side-grain of the wood, a defect one would not expect from a wood-carver. On the decorated end the same faults, only to a greater degree, are evident, because of the end grain. The blunt blade of a leather-worker's tool would help to explain this difficulty.

One of the handles. Stevenson's fig. 2.4, has a hole in each end. This corresponds to several of the modelling tools of the modern leather-worker's kit, which have blades at each end of the one handle for convenience in use. No tool of this type is found in a wood-carver's kit.

The wedge-shaped object, possibly of antler (fig. 2.5), with a pattern of six rectangles at one end, is surely a stamp, as used for backgrounds by the modern leather-worker. It is improbable that a stamp made from this material could be used on wood.

Finally, I suggest that the handles are too short to have been used by a carver, who needs a handle long enough to allow him to exert pressure with the heel of his hand. The worker in leather does not need this pressure, and can therefore use a shorter tool.

<sup>1</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, xx (1885-6), 47, 50.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, LXXXVI (1951-2), 187-90.

Stevenson points out that the side which has an unfinished appearance has a purely linear design and "is not incomplete in the sense of requiring more chip carving." This side shows much better craftsmanship than the other, as a blunt tool could have been used. It is quite possible that the difficulty experienced in carving the design on the side and end was the reason for adopting a purely linear design for this side. It may also be the reason for his leaving the other end entirely blank.

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