

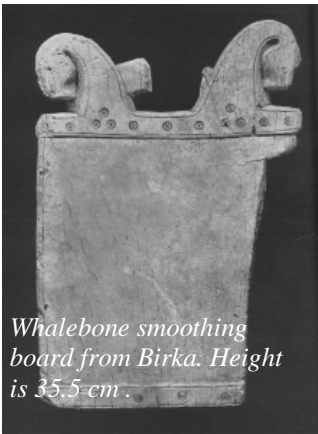
Whalebone smoothing board from Norway.  
Height is 34.5 cm

## Smoothing Board and Slick Stone

By Baroness Kaleeb the Green Eyed

I am interested in early Anglo-Saxon textile tools. To further my collection of tools I have acquired an iron and made an ironing board, more commonly called a slick stone and smoothing board. I have tested the tools at Pennsic during a class on Anglo-Saxon Ring Pouches. The students and I had fun.

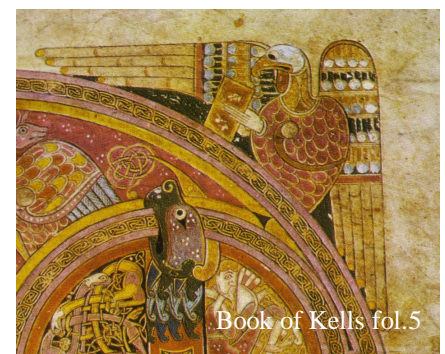
The iron is my simplest tool. It is a rock. I think the rock is sandstone, from a riverbed. I liked the color. I tested a number of rocks, until I found two that fit my hand nicely. I wanted a slick stone that was not too heavy and would nestle in the palm of my hand, with my fingers out of harms way. I do not heat my stone when I use it, as that is not necessary. I also use a gentle smoothing motion with my hand and not a pounding motion.



Whalebone smoothing board from Birka. Height is 35.5 cm.

A rock was probably the precursor to the glass smoothing stone, which is sometimes found in Anglo-Viking or Viking graves. It is much easier to say a glass smoother was used in textile production than a rock. Because when you find a rock it is just that, unless other textile tools are found nearby. (That would be a rare and precious find.) In the archeological records of Mawgan Porth (a settlement of the late Saxon period on the Cornish Coast) there is a brief mention of beach stones and pebbles "In size all are convenient to the hand and could have served as rubbers, grinders or smoothers, and been used for softening or working leather, or pressing and smoothing cloth." (Bruce-Mitford, p. 80) "Smoothing could also have been done with tools of bone or stone, but these are difficult to distinguish in archaeological finds..." (Andersson, p.127) That is the information which guided the selection of my slick stone.

I had slightly more information on my smoothing board but not a lot. "The use of a number of finely ornamented plaques of Whalebone, occasionally found in wealthy women's graves is less obvious. It has been suggested that they were used as smoothing boards, but in only one instance has a plaque been found together with a glass smoother." (Graham-Campbell, p.122.) This snippet told me that more than one board was found, further research has turned up a number of 40 smoothing boards. Most of the boards are from Viking sites or Anglo-Viking sites. 2 different women in Norway were buried with the smoothing boards pictured above. Both are whale bone and beautifully carved. Archeologists think that the board is for smoothing linen, but it might be for pleating linen. It appears to have a spot to hang it on the wall, followed by a decorative area and then the working surface. I made my smoothing board to about the same proportions. The original is about 14 inches in length. My board has a nice spot to put your hand for carrying, as I intend to lug it to events rather than hang it in the laundry room. I have tried both an oak and a pine board for ironing. There does not seem to be much difference in workability of the board. I was briefly concerned that using a rock on a soft wood would create an uneven surface, but that does not seem to be the case. I chose pine, as it is much easier to carve. At this point I have chosen not to put a finish on my smoothing board. My animal design is inspired from the Book of Kells. I am rather fond of birds and have done a number of different projects with them. I like the non-realistic look of the animals in the Book of Kells.



Book of Kells fol.5

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