

Irish Book-Satchels or Budgets¹

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DR. A. T. LUCAS states that the making of Irish shoes of the early Christian period called for superlative professional skill, and adds:² 'In the Early Christian Period, therefore, it is evident that there were highly specialized leather workers whose accomplishments compared very favourably with those of their fellow craftsmen in metal although only a few decayed scraps of their handiwork survive.' This view is reinforced by a critical examination of other surviving examples of leather-work from this and even earlier times, and particularly of the three remaining specimens of Irish book-satchels or budgets (*tiaga*), namely those now associated with the Breac Moedóic reliquary³ and the Book of Armagh,⁴ and the one containing an Irish missal which belongs to Corpus Christi College, Oxford.⁵ The first and last of these I believe to date from the early Christian period; the other is somewhat later but nevertheless provides evidence of well-established skills.

THE BREAC MOEDÓIC BUDGET (PLS. IV, A-C, and V, A, B; FIG. 13)

This budget has for a considerable time held a house-shaped reliquary, but it can be fairly confidently asserted that its original purpose was to hold a valued manuscript—not merely to carry it about, but to form its habitual receptacle in which it hung, together with others of its kind, in the monastic library of its period. Although but a shadow of what it once was, sufficient evidence remains to justify the assertion that the knowledge and skill of a modern leather craftsman would be taxed to the uttermost to make even a passable reconstruction of it as it once was. This applies not only to its elaborate ornamentation but also to its design and construction. I deal with this budget first because, although its ornamentation, fine though it is, is surpassed in intricacy and execution by that of the Armagh budget, it is structurally of greater interest, being stitched together in a manner that few would care to attempt today.

As we now see the budget it is sadly broken and forced out of shape in order to accommodate an object shorter, but much thicker, than the one for which it

¹ The word 'budget' (*bouge*, *bougette*, etc.) is to be preferred to 'satchel' as probably being the older and the one almost certainly in common use (in English) around the period with which this paper is concerned; e.g. in Aelfric's 11th-century *Colloquium*. The Irish word for a book-satchel was not *polaire* (*Archaeologia*, XLIII (1871), 135) but *tiagh*; see quotations from the Calendar of Oengus in J. H. Buckley, 'Some early ornamental leather work', *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, XLV (6 ser., V, 1915), 307-9.

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² A. T. Lucas, 'Footwear in Ireland', *Co. Louth Archaeol. J.*, XIII, no. 4 (1956), 382.

³ National Museum of Ireland, Dublin.

⁴ Trinity College Library, Dublin.

⁵ MS. CCC 282 (now deposited in the Bodleian Library, Oxford).

was made: only a fragment remains of the original seams, the flap has disappeared, the sling is now about half its original length and only a small portion remains of one of the side gussets which were originally of most interesting design. It was made from oak-tanned cattle-hide shaved down to about 3 mm. ($\frac{1}{8}$ in.) in thick-

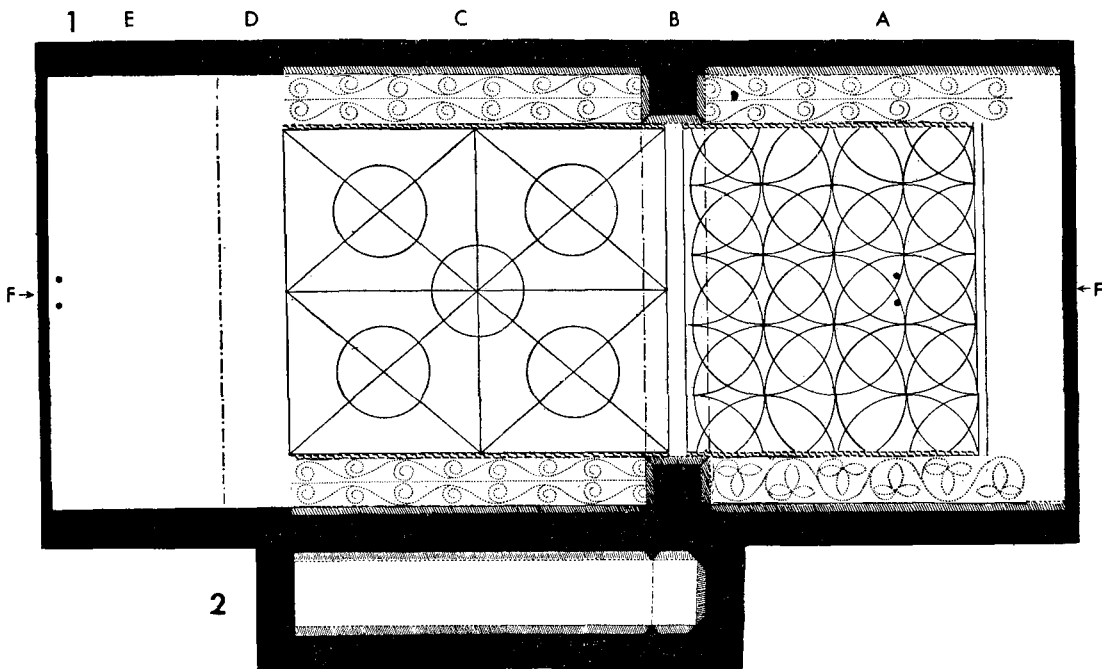


FIG. 13

THE BREAC MOEDÓIC BUDGET (pp. 70 ff.)

1. Template showing cut shape of single piece of hide, 0.73×0.324 m. ($28\frac{3}{4} \times 12\frac{3}{4}$ in.), which formed front (A), base (B), back (C) and overlapping flap (E). F=lace-holes. Dot-and-dash lines indicate where leather was folded to form base and top. Shaded margins were folded under at dotted lines to form seams with side gussets (2). Base cut away on each side to accommodate lower ends of gussets, which were bent round at right angle; this device complicated the already difficult sewing, but strengthened budget at a vulnerable point. Superimposed is the basic pattern of tooled strapwork ornament. Note that design used for front is truncated at each side and folded under at base, probably indicating that it was a 'stock' design evolved for a somewhat larger object and perhaps preserved on thin vellum from which it could be traced.

2. Template for side gussets. Shaded margins folded under at dotted lines, coming face to face with companion margins on body and then sewn together from interior. Bottom of each gusset folded at right angle along dot-and-dash line, fitting into cut-away each side of base. Gussets probably ornamented, but the fragmentary remains provide no indication of this.

ness, probably stained brown or black. Apart from the sling and the two gussets it was cut in one piece measuring, overall, not less than 0.73 by 0.33 m., or $28\frac{3}{4}$ by 13 inches. The length remains somewhat uncertain owing to the difficulty of determining which of several holes carried the fastening lace, and consequently precisely what the depth of the flap (now missing) was. The internal dimensions were originally approximately 0.305 m. (12 in.) from side to side, 0.255 m. (10 in.) deep (top to base) and 0.04 m. ($1\frac{1}{2}$ in.) wide (back to front). As the dimensions of

the Breac Moedóic reliquary are 0.22 m. ($8\frac{3}{4}$ in.) by 0.185 m. ($7\frac{5}{16}$ in.) by 0.09 m. ($3\frac{9}{16}$ in.), it is clear that, whilst its length would be comfortably accommodated in the budget and the height would leave a lot to spare, the width, back to front, was too great for it even to have been forced in; only in its present much mutilated state could the budget hold the reliquary. It is therefore manifest that the association of these two objects belongs to the period of decreptitude of the budget and is possibly comparatively recent.

The face of the budget which is most familiar from published illustrations (PL. IV, B) is the back, which once continued over the open top to form a flap that came about half-way down the front, which carries, on its lower part only, an elaborate tooled design of interlacing strapwork circles. The flap was fastened with either one or two laces; it is impossible to determine which, as there are a number of small holes in the front which might have been made for laces, and in the absence of the flap there is no other guide. The lace was probably of the simple but effective type met with in some ancient Irish shoes, formed by a strip of leather bifurcated up the centre but leaving uncut a stub which provided the anchorage (FIG. 14, a); it would have been threaded through counterpart holes in the flap and tied in a bow (PLS. IV, A, V, A; FIG. 13). The flap presumably was decorated with tooled designs to correspond with the decoration on the lower part of the body; the upper part of the body, however, beneath the flap, was left plain.

All that remains of the sling is a strip about 0.69 m. ($27\frac{1}{4}$ in.) long and 0.057 m. ($2\frac{1}{4}$ in.) wide at one end, tapering to 0.048 m. ($1\frac{7}{8}$ in.) at the other; the latter was, no doubt, one of the ends which were stitched or laced to the side gussets. These gussets have disappeared except for a fragment remaining at the base (PL. IV, c). For reuse as a receptacle for the Breac Moedóic reliquary the front and back of the budget have been drawn together with crude lacing in such a way that what were once vertical side borders of ornamentation (PL. IV, B; FIG. 13) have been bent round to form pseudo-gussets, reducing the original length side to side by some 0.075 m. (3 in.).

The remaining fragment of original gusset fortunately reveals the surprising fact that the side gussets, instead of finishing where they met the ends of the base, were continued underneath for about 0.040 m. ($1\frac{1}{2}$ in.), the base being cut away to accommodate this insertion, which was beautifully sewn into place by split closing (PL. IV, c).⁶ The reason for this most unusual feature is not apparent unless it was to dispense with stitching at a rather vulnerable spot where the vertical side gussets joined the base. The same device was employed in the Corpus Christi budget, but not in that associated with the Book of Armagh. The method greatly complicated the stitching, which was already very intricate. Instead of lacing or sewing from the exterior, which would have been a relatively simple method of joining, all the edges of the body were folded back for about 0.006 m. ($\frac{1}{4}$ in.), thus avoiding raw edges, and stitched through where they meet. Such a seam is normally made with the article turned inside out, but the substance and stiffness of the leather employed on these budgets would have effectually

⁶ Stitching which went only half-way through the leather and therefore was visible only on the side from which the stitching was done.

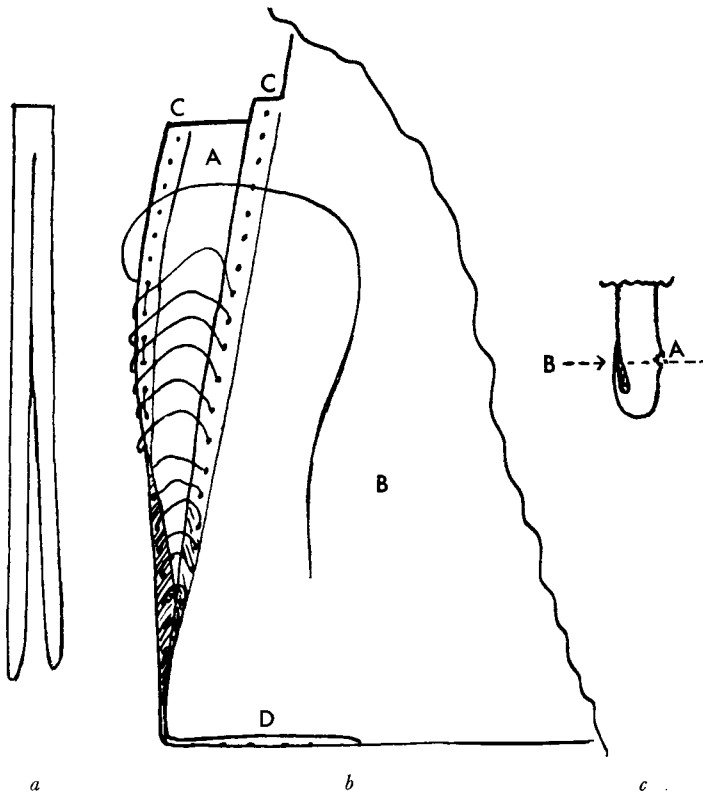


FIG. 14

SOME DETAILS OF CONSTRUCTION OF BUDGETS (pp. 72 f., 78)

a. Diagram of stubbed lace used to tie flaps of budgets to body. The laces were threaded through two holes in the body, about $\frac{3}{8}$ in. apart, the stub keeping them permanently in position. To fasten flap the lace-ends were threaded through a companion pair of holes near its edge and then tied. This device is also used on shoes of the early Christian period.

b. Sketch showing method of joining side-gusset (A) to back of budget (B), assuming it has already been sewn to front (not visible) and base (D). CC represent the two margins, skived to a bevel and bent round, face to face, so that seam is inside. As stitching progressed the interior space became too restricted for final row of stitches to be done in normal manner and so the lengthening loops were finally pulled up, one by one, until seam was closed.

c. Section through edge of scalloped flap of Corpus Christi budget showing how edge is skived to a bevel and turned under, being secured by a fine lace or sinew going through from B to channel A on front, which was then closed by tapping.

precluded turning it right way out after sewing and the seams must have been stitched from the inside. This would be a particularly difficult operation when account is taken of the resistance of the thick leather (even if, as is probable, it was damped) and the lack of space for manoeuvre. The only possible way of doing it would be not to pull the parts together at first, but to leave ever larger loops of the stitching material to be pulled tight, one by one, afterwards, and thus complete the seam so that no stitching was visible outside (FIG. 14, *b*). The stitch holes are approximately 0.005 m. ($\frac{3}{16}$ in.) apart. It is probable that

the stitching material was gut or sinew, rather than thread, but, although a small fragment of the original closed seam remains, it has not been possible to identify the material with certainty. As already stated, the crude lacing of leather thongs represents a clumsy attempt to make some secondary use of a much worn article.

The ornamentation is a *tour-de-force* with a purity and freshness in marked contrast to the fussiness of that of the Armagh budget, a fact which seems to me to indicate an early date. Each of the principal designs of the front and back panels has a geometrical basis (PL. v, A, B; FIG. 13), that of the front panel being a series of intersecting circles. Compass work was the basis of much of the ornament (particularly in metal-work) of the first Christian millennium. It is true that this was predominantly asymmetrical, but allowance must be made for a difference of outlook between workers in metals and those in leather. Both the vertical borders on the back and one on the front bear a dainty pattern of volute character, the basis of which is paralleled in an Irish bronze scabbard of La Tène character dating from the 1st century B.C. found at Lisnacrogghera (co. Antrim). The remaining front border has no parallel that I know of. It is representative of a trefoil tendril. Its intrusion into an otherwise well-balanced design is curious and probably had some special significance. It is tempting to think that it represents the shamrock (but see, further, p. 76). Separating the main panels of strapwork, both back and front, from the side borders are narrow strips of simple twist or step pattern (FIG. 13) such as are found on other examples of leather-work (including shoes) of the early Christian period. All the ornament was tooled, freehand, probably with a blunt bone or wooden scribe. The design was no doubt lightly sketched, or perhaps traced from a master copy, on thin vellum, and then tooled 'on the flat' before the seaming was done, the leather being kept damp during the not inconsiderable time the work would take. The stitching also would probably have been done whilst the leather was damp; this would render the task easier and enable the stitches eventually to be pulled so tight that they would sink into the leather, but still would not obviate the necessity of stitching from the inside as already described.

From what evidence remains and from certain affinities with the finest of the surviving Irish shoes which Lucas says 'is one of the earliest vouched for and (which) apparently became extinct still in the Early Christian Period',⁷ it seems probable that this budget also dates from the same era, perhaps somewhere between the 7th and the 9th or 10th centuries. Of the type of shoe mentioned (FIG. 15) Lucas says '... they are astonishingly sophisticated. Despite their complex pattern they remain single-piece shoes although the writer, for one, is at a loss to understand why their makers should, apparently, have made things more difficult for themselves by keeping to the single-piece tradition by, as it were, a technical *tour-de-force* when they might have achieved the same result by building up the shoe from separate pieces, a procedure which should have presented no difficulties to tradesmen of their accomplishments'.⁷ The same might be said of the Breac Moedóic budget; the answer, no doubt, is, that it is an instance of the true craftsman revelling in his skill to make the object as perfect as possible.

⁷ Lucas, *op. cit.* in note 2, p. 367.

It is proper to add that doubts have been expressed whether the Breac Moedóic budget could possibly date back as far as the early Christian period (say A.D. 500 to 1000) on the ground that the ornament of volute character on the side borders has no parallel in Irish art of this period: in particular this objection has been raised in regard to the right-hand border of the front, which differs from the other three. Why this particular border should so differ, when the remainder

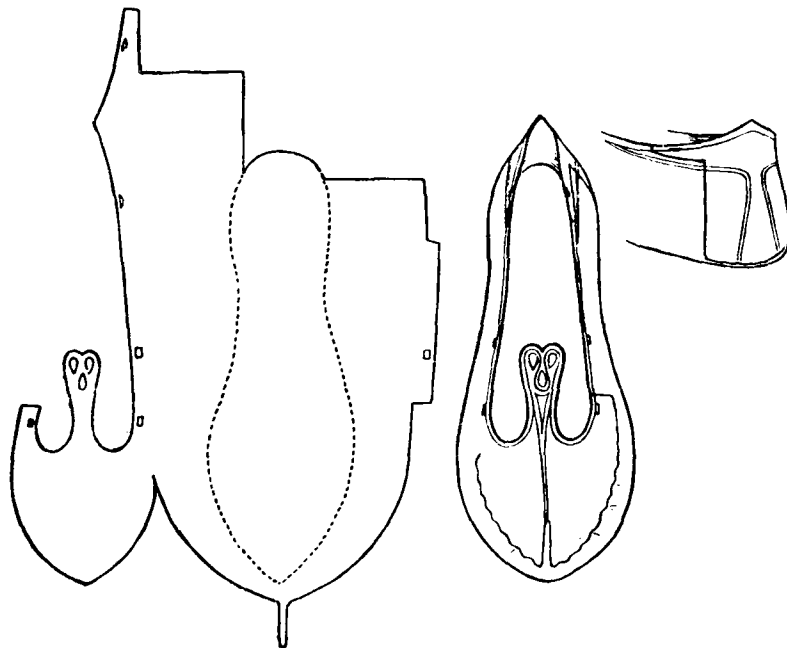


FIG. 15 (p. 74)

Sketch-plan of one-piece Irish shoe, described by Lucas as 'astonishingly sophisticated', which flourished during the early Christian period, but afterwards, apparently, became extinct. The seaming was done with great skill and some of the shoes have cut ornament of great beauty.

Courtesy of Dr. A. T. Lucas, after *Co. Louth Archaeol. Soc.*, XIII (1956), 367, fig. 3

of the ornament on the budget is of uniform character remains enigmatical. Although very little now remains to judge by, the tendril character of the other three borders is, in my view, essentially a stylized version of the vine-scroll motive which, coming originally from the Middle East,⁸ always more or less stylized, was a feature of the sculpture, wood-carving, metal-work and book decoration of the 2nd half of the 1st millennium A.D. throughout Europe. In Irish work its influence can be recognized on the beautifully-engraved bronze scabbards from Lisnacrogghera (co. Antrim),⁹ on the piece of carved bone from Dooey,¹⁰ on the stone cross at Bealin,¹¹ on the pillar stone from Mullaghmast,¹² as

⁸ A. Gardner, *English Mediaeval Sculpture* (Cambridge, 1951), ch. ii.

⁹ F. Henry, *Irish Art* (revised ed., London, 1965), pl. vi.

¹⁰ Co. Donegal. *Ibid.*, pl. xiii.

¹¹ Co. Westmeath. F. Henry, *Irish Art* (London, 1940), pl. 41, a.

¹² Co. Kildare. *Ibid.*, pl. 11, d.

the basis for interlace in the Book of Durrow (St. Matthew),¹³ and elsewhere. In the kingdom of Northumbria, which had many links with Ireland, it was widely used on the Anglian crosses (which Gardner¹⁴ thinks preceded the Irish crosses and perhaps inspired them), for example at Bewcastle (c. 670), Ruthwell (c. 700), Easby (c. 680), Otley (c. 680) and Jedburgh (c. 700),¹⁵ all in a very refined form, and on many surviving fragments from other places, and also in the Lindisfarne Gospels (c. 690–720).¹⁶ The vine-scroll motive was so prevalent in this area that it must have been known and used in Ireland, but with the individual touch peculiar to the Irish artists, who were often innovators or at least adapters of notions which reached them from the east. The fourth border—the ‘odd man out’—is also a tendril form, weaving from side to side (but here single whereas the other borders have each a pair), which has burst into leaf, although, so far as can be determined, not with vine leaves. Perhaps the true form of vine leaves was unknown to the Irish artists, perhaps they preferred the leaves of a familiar trifoliate plant; perhaps we should not look beyond the fact that the decorator was attracted by the graceful curves of a climbing plant, seen, perhaps in some developed form, and by what could be done with them without holding a mirror to nature.

THE CORPUS CHRISTI BUDGET (PL. VI, A; FIG. 16)

The second surviving Irish budget is the one belonging to Corpus Christi College, Oxford, which contains a missal, written in Irish minuscule and dated by expert opinion between 1120 and 1130.¹⁷ At first it would appear that this is the manuscript for which the budget was made, but careful examination seems to make this less likely. The budget, wrecked as it is, has several features in common with, and displays the same high order of craftsmanship as, the Breac Moedóic budget. If it is correct to ascribe the latter to the early Christian period and the missal to the early years of the 12th century, the association of the Corpus Christi book and budget may be secondary, assuming the budget to be roughly contemporary with the Breac Moedóic example. Another argument points to the same conclusion: the budget is in such a state that any attempt to assess its original dimensions must necessarily be to some extent guesswork, but the indications are that the exterior dimensions were approximately 0.19 m. (7½ in.) in length, 0.14 m. (5½ in.) in depth, and 0.057 m. (2¼ in.) in width back to front. These measurements would give an internal size of approximately 0.178 m. (7 in.) by 0.133 m. (5¼ in.) by 0.057 m. (2¼ in.). Length and depth would have accommodated the present manuscript but the width is about 0.006 m. (¼ in.) too narrow. Another point to consider is that the budget tapers, being wider at the

¹³ F. Henry, *op. cit.* in note 9, pl. xxv, a.

¹⁴ A. Gardner, *loc. cit.* in note 8.

¹⁵ These dates, particularly those for Bewcastle and Ruthwell, are still in dispute, see E. Mercer, *Antiquity*, xxxviii (1964), 268 ff.

¹⁶ F. Henry, *op. cit.* in note 9, pl. civ; *id.*, *Antiquity*, xxxvii (1963), 100 ff.

¹⁷ MS. C.C.C. 282 (now deposited in the Bodleian Library, Oxford). F. Henry and G. L. Narsh-Micheli, ‘A century of Irish illumination (1071–1170)’, in *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, LXII (1961–3), 137–40.

bottom than the top by about 0·006 m. ($\frac{1}{4}$ in.). The manuscript is also wider at its back than at the front edge, since it is bound between two oak boards. These have every appearance of being contemporary with the manuscript, but they are only about two-thirds the width of the manuscript, 0·082 m. ($3\frac{1}{4}$ in.), compared

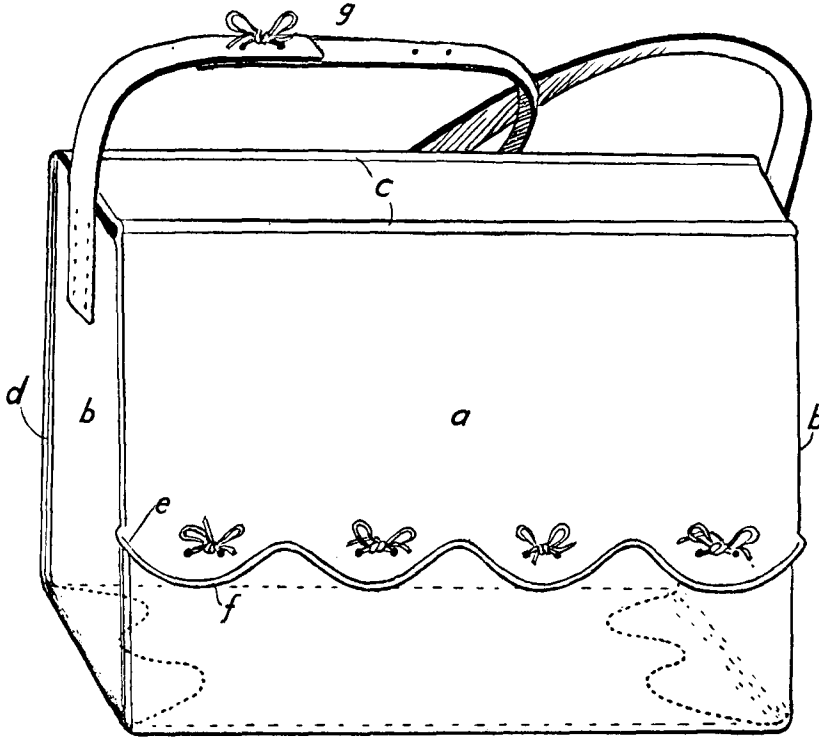


FIG. 16

THE CORPUS CHRISTI BUDGET (p. 76 ff.)

Conjectural sketch-reconstruction made from a study of the remains: note slight taper from top to base. As on Breac Moedóic budget, gussets carried round and sewn into base, which was cut away to receive them, but here ends have double scallop instead of being square.

a. Flap; of one piece with top, back and front.

b. Side gussets; dotted lines indicate how bottom ends were shaped, base being correspondingly cut away to receive them.

c. Ribs raised by modelling, probably to define width of top and cause it and flap to set evenly. Similar ribs also define base (see dotted lines).

d. Fine welt used in seam joining gussets to body.

e. A faint line still shows where shallow channel was cut along edge of flap to receive lacing that secured the neatly turned edges; after stitching the channel was hammered down so that stitching is invisible from front.

f. Rounded edge of flap formed by turning edge and lacing it from back into channel *e*. (See also FIG. 14, *c*.)

g. Sling; length could be adjusted by means of laces and pairs of holes.

with 0·12 m. ($4\frac{3}{4}$ in.), with the result that the book is about 0·016 m. ($\frac{5}{8}$ in.) thicker at the back than at the front edge. It is tempting to think that the budget was tapered to accommodate this book with its truncated boards, but the dimensions, if at all reliable, do not tally. In any event if a tapered shape was required to take a tapered book it would normally have been wider at the top, not at the

base, as otherwise the book could not be inserted. It is probable that the budget is much older than the manuscript it now contains.

The budget has seen much wear and has several times been repaired, clumsily as compared with the original workmanship, which, as will be shown, was of superb quality (PL. VI, A). But although it is now in a worse state than the Breac Moedóic budget, at least it has not suffered the indignity of being pulled out of shape and reduced in size to take an object of different type and size from the one for which it was made. Here also sufficient evidence remains to make it possible to judge, fairly accurately, its original form, dimensions and method of construction. In general style it was similar to the Breac Moedóic budget, with the whole of the body and flap cut in one piece from shaved cattle-hide, the side gussets being separate and carried underneath to the base, which was cut away to receive them, though the inset parts are not square but cut into two deep scallops (FIG. 16). The flap, the bottom edge of which is cut into four scallops, reaches about two-thirds of the way down the front, being secured by four double laces in the manner already described.

The present gussets are ancient replacements, crudely laced to the front and back, and can be ignored in the present context, as also can several rough patches. But beneath the crude replacements are remains of the original gussets, including both the scalloped ends which were turned under and sewn into the base. This seam embodied a fine welt which continued upward to the tops of the gussets. The stitching presented the same kind of difficulty as in the Breac Moedóic budget, complicated still further by the introduction of the welt, a narrow strip of thin leather.

At the bottom scalloped edge of the flap is another example of superb skill (FIGS. 14, *c*, 16, *f*). Instead of leaving a cut edge (which in this excellent hide would have been quite satisfactory) it has been skived to a fine edge and delicately turned over on to the back, being then sewn down with a very fine lace (probably sinew) which was not visible at the front, as it had been sunk into a channel cut down to about half the thickness in much the same manner as is employed in a hand-welted shoe sole. After stitching the channel was closed by tapping, leaving only a fine line visible. As the leather was barely 0.003 m. ($\frac{1}{8}$ in.) thick this involved great skill. This stitched turnover ceases where the lower edge turns round to the side edges (FIG. 16, *c*), but the fine lacing continues, unseen from the front because it goes only half-way through the leather and does not pierce the surface.

Four pieces of a sling (perhaps the original one) total about 0.89 m. (35 in.) in length. This is of hide, *c.* 0.003 m. ($\frac{1}{8}$ in.) thick, and about 0.02 m. ($\frac{1}{16}$ in.) wide at each end, tapering to 0.035 m. ($1\frac{3}{8}$ in.) at the middle. It is crudely attached, with thongs to the top (back) edge of the makeshift gussets; there is no way of determining how it was fixed originally. At one end there are matching pairs of holes by which, with a lace, the length could be altered (FIG. 16, *g*).

On the back are traces of double strapwork ornamentation in a diapered pattern with circles at the intersections, perhaps somewhat similar to that on the Breac Moedóic budget. There are also faint indications of strapwork tooling on

the flap, but not sufficient to indicate the nature of the pattern. The Corpus Christi budget possesses characteristics sufficiently close to those of the Breac Moedóic example to suggest that it may have come from the same workshop (probably a monastic one) and at much the same time.

THE BUDGET OF THE BOOK OF ARMAGH (PLS. VI, B, VII, A, B)

This splendid example of leather craftsmanship, the only complete surviving book-budget, is a treasured possession of Trinity College Library, Dublin. It now contains the Book of Armagh (*Novum Testamentum, Vitae SS. Patricii et Martini, Confessio S. Patricii*, etc.) of c. 807, but would seem to have been designed originally for a larger manuscript.¹⁸ It is made of black-stained cattle-hide shaved to approximately 0·003 m. ($\frac{1}{8}$ in.) thickness and, excepting the sling or hanging-strap, consists of a single piece of leather cut without regard for economy. The external dimensions are approximately 0·32 m. ($12\frac{1}{2}$ in.) long, 0·27 m. ($10\frac{1}{2}$ in.) deep and 0·057 m. ($2\frac{1}{4}$ in.) wide (back to front), with a flap 0·195 m. ($7\frac{7}{8}$ in.) deep. The original internal measurements would probably have accommodated a book of about 0·305 m. (12 in.) by 0·255 m. (10 in.) by 0·040 m. ($1\frac{1}{2}$ in.). The Book of Armagh measures, without its modern binding, 0·19 m. ($7\frac{1}{2}$ in.) by 0·125 m. ($5\frac{1}{2}$ in.) by 0·040 m. ($1\frac{1}{2}$ in.).

The ends or gussets are formed from panels integral with the back, bent forward at right angles and sewn to the front and to the base, a method of construction far simpler than that used in the Breac Moedóic and Corpus Christi budgets but still calling for considerable skill. The stitching or 'closing' is done with fine thongs, whether of hide or (perhaps more likely) gut it is difficult to say. The edges of the leather were neatly turned inward at the seams, so that no raw edges are visible outside. At the bottom of the flap, within 0·003 m. ($\frac{1}{8}$ in.) of the edge, are four pairs of small holes (PL. VI, B) approximately 0·009 m. ($\frac{3}{8}$ in.) apart, with equivalent holes in the body beneath. Through these were threaded the stubbed laces already described, which were apparently common to all the budgets here dealt with. About 0·065 m. ($2\frac{1}{2}$ in.) from the left-hand end of the flap there is a single, smaller hole, also having its counterpart in the body, the purpose of which is not evident.

Subsequently, perhaps in late medieval times, this simple method of fastening was replaced by one which was certainly secure but clumsy in itself and badly fitted, with a total disregard for aesthetics. It is quite unorthodox and as several parts are missing, the way in which it worked can only be surmised. Fitted on the flap (PL. VI, B) is a brass lock of which the plate measures about 0·073 m. ($2\frac{7}{8}$ in.) by 0·063 m. ($2\frac{1}{2}$ in.); from this the 'box' holding the mechanism is raised by hammering and above are the remains of a hinged hasp. Roughly level with the top of the lock are eight slots, four on each side of the lock, once fitted with brass escutcheons of which only one remains. Through these protruded brass half-rings (four remain) which were riveted to the body beneath the flap. Through these,

¹⁸ See *Treasures of Trinity College, Dublin*, being the catalogue of an exhibition held in Burlington House, London, 1961, p. 29 f., nos. 82 (Book of Armagh) and 83 (budget).

no doubt, passed a metal rod which, in some way, was prevented from moving laterally when the hasp was engaged with the lock. The strap or sling of leather, slightly thicker than that of the body of the budget is probably an old replacement and was probably laced to the tops of the side gussets.

The budget is remarkably well preserved, especially in its elaborate and intricate ornamentation. The whole surface is covered with hand-tooled free-hand designs which must have been modelled 'on the flat', that is before the budget was sewn up, the leather being damped and worked over a yielding ground such as wet sand or clay, which would give play to the natural plasticity of the water-softened hide and make possible an appreciable depth of relief. The modelling was possibly done with wood or bone tools. The technique is familiar to students of medieval leather-work, in particular that known as *cuir bouilli*,¹⁹ but nothing comparable with this budget, that is made of hide unsupported by any kind of backing, is known to have survived, and very little of any kind from the relatively early date to which I ascribe this object. For some reason the degree of relief is much greater on the flap than elsewhere. The large piece of hide (approximately 0·94 m. (37 in.) in length) may have been more pliant at one end than at the other, or it may be that greater pressure was applied in tooling in order that the ornament on this, the most conspicuous part of the budget, should stand out in bolder relief.

The designs comprise elaborate interlace and knotwork with circular areas formed by frames of interlace, sometimes linked together (as on the front, below the flap), in some of which are intricate knotwork patterns, in others zoomorphic subjects (PL. VII, A). Two of the nine circular areas on the back have features of special interest (PL. VII, B). Reading from left to right, no. 1, bottom row, has a device that bears some resemblance to a gothic N, and no. 3, second row, has, above the mythical beast, an apparent S; if my dating is correct these devices can have no such significance, since the letters they appear to resemble belong to a later period. Underneath the flap is an interlace pattern similar to that on the flap. The hand tooling must have taken a considerable time to execute, the leather being kept in a suitably damp, plastic condition throughout the process.

The Armagh budget is, in my opinion, later than the Breac Moedóic and Corpus Christi examples. The structure is less refined and the ornamentation more sophisticated, lacking the elegant simplicity of the earlier examples. The interlace and knotwork are intricate and somewhat debased, and whilst during the 7th and 8th centuries 'all sorts of plant, bird and animal forms were treated as the elements of an interlace pattern',²⁰ the zoomorphs here are derivatives of the Scandinavian 'Jellinge' beasts, which Talbot Rice says first appeared in the middle of the 9th century, reaching Britain soon after, 'though usually they were modified by Irish influence on the way'.²¹ The Armagh budget zoomorphs have the typical

¹⁹ *Cuir bouilli*: leather modelled into shape (over formers, in moulds, by hand with fillings of wet sand or clay, etc.) whilst in a plastic state after soaking in cold water, and afterwards 'set' hard by application of heat. Shields, armour, helmets, sheaths, drinking-cups, flasks, bottles, and small containers of many kinds are among the host of extant objects made by this process, which is still employed.

²⁰ D. Talbot Rice, *English Art, 871-1100* (Oxford, 1952), p. 124.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-6.

double outline of the 'Jellinge' style, the heads are similar, but the bodies are less lanky and the characteristic spiral legs have been replaced by more natural forms: here, perhaps, is an example of Irish modification. In my view an 11th- or 12th-century date seems a reasonable conjecture.

* * * * *

The dating of these budgets is indeed a difficult problem and my friend Etienne Rynne considers that all the examples dealt with come from a much later period than any of the dates here proposed. Irish work may differ from all other, but I can only judge these budgets in the context of the general corpus of European leather-work of which, in the aggregate, a considerable quantity survives from the 13th century onward, but only very little from earlier periods. I have so far found nothing in any way comparable with the three surviving Irish book-budgets. That satchels or budgets were widely used for carrying books (if not, as in Ireland, for storing them) is known from illustrations and sculptures, but in so far as it is possible to glean from these any details, they appear to be of very simple construction, entirely lacking the skilful design and superb workmanship which distinguish these Irish examples, and, so far as we know, devoid of surface ornamentation. To me these budgets, whatever their actual age, are exemplars of the very high standard of artistry and skill which the Irish leather-workers unquestionably attained during the early Christian period.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PLATES IV-VII

PLATE IV. THE BREAC MOEDÓIC BUDGET (pp. 70 ff.)

A. Front view. Over undecorated part came flap (now missing) which was continuation of back. Left-hand border missing and only a little of right-hand one remains; both were bent round to form pseudo-gussets, thus shortening original length of budget. Only part of sling remains. At top of ornamented part of front, in centre, are four holes. Two, probably the lower ones, carried a stubbed lace and there was probably another pair at each end. The other holes are inexplicable and probably not original.

B. Back view. At left, part of side border with volute pattern and small stepped pattern separating border from main panel of double strapwork. At right, border bent round to form a pseudo-gusset, probably when budget adapted to take shrine.

C. Bottom view. A centre 'rib' separates the back and front panels of strapwork. At left, remains of side gusset, the lower end of which was bent round and sewn into base, cut away to receive it. At right, no remains of gusset, but cut-away gap in base visible. Note how side borders have been bent round to form pseudo-gussets.

Phh.: National Museum of Ireland, by courtesy

PLATE V. THE BREAC MOEDÓIC BUDGET (pp. 70 ff.)

'Mock-up' of budget (A, front; B, back) showing how side gussets are bent round to fit into spaces cut out for them in base. Only the geometrical basis of the ornament is shown; note how the large panels on both front and back continue on to the base, perhaps because these complex panels were prepared originally for a budget of different size and stencilled on this one from a master copy. The long rectangular space on base between ends of panels represents a raised rib perhaps intended to stiffen base. The single tie utilizes pairs of holes in flap and body. The dotted lines on left-hand gusset suggest position of shoulder-straps, sewn or laced to it.

PLATE VI

A. THE CORPUS CHRISTI BUDGET (pp. 76 ff.)

Much mutilated; later attempts to render it useful are very crude in comparison with what remains of the original workmanship. Both end gussets missing (except for small portions where they joined base) and replaced by pieces of thin, poor-quality leather perfunctorily attached to back, front and base, with clumsy lacing. Parts of sling remain, in a similar condition. Parts of flap missing, but three original scallops remain with traces of lace-holes. Yet sufficient of original material and workmanship exists to show its form and quality. See FIG. 16 for conjectural reconstruction.

B. THE BUDGET OF THE BOOK OF ARMAGH (pp. 79 ff.)

Front view with flap in position, showing late medieval lock, part of its hasp and eight slots (originally escutcheoned) through which brass loops riveted to body protruded (see PL. VI, A). These loops probably carried a metal bar secured in some way to lock. Note four pairs of holes on bottom edge of flap, through which original stubbed laces were tied.

Phh.: A, Oxford University Press, by courtesy of the President and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Oxford
B, The Green Studio Ltd., Dublin, by courtesy of the Board of Trinity College, Dublin

PLATE VII. THE BUDGET OF THE BOOK OF ARMAGH (pp. 79 ff.)

A. Front view with flap lifted, showing three remaining brass loops riveted to front of budget, and protruding through slots in flap (see PL. V, B). Note four pairs of holes by which original stubbed laces were secured.

B. Back view showing intricate tooled ornament. The apparent letter forms (p. 80) are in right-hand medallion, centre line, and left-hand medallion, bottom line.

Phh.: The Green Studio Ltd., Dublin, by courtesy of the Board of Trinity College, Dublin