

## Drinking Horn by Lucia de Moranza

There are a great deal of extant examples, and illustrations that show a wide variety of horns used for drinking. From a Pict on a horse in c. 900 - 950 (Museum of Scotland from Bullion Invergowrie, Angus) (Figure 1) to a beautifully carved horn dated 1598 in the National Museum of Iceland (Figure 2), the practice of using horn extends right through our time period.)

There are many examples of different horns had metal edges or tips, but my desire for a beginning project made me aim for simply carving, rather than learning metal as well. I did not seek to replicate any horn in particular, I hoped to learn how to work horn at all, and get a feel for what I thought of the medium.

I acquired a cleaned and sanded horn from Tandy Leather, and only needed to wash out dust and cobwebs to have it ready for working with. I sketched out the two bands I wished to encircle the top in pencil, with the thought that if they were

awful, it could be a shorter horn. I started with a Dremel and the engraving bit and used that for those top two lines. The Dremel carves deeply, and quickly. This showed me that it provides me the means to screw up very quickly. I did not quite puncture the horn, but there's a spot where it is very thin.



Figure 1 Pict carving c 900 - 950



Figure 2 Carved Horn 1598

After learning that the dremel is a quick way to make a mess, I decided to move to hand carving. I made a stencil of the kingdom knotwork device, and traced it onto the horn in pencil. I used a flat bladed exacto knife to cut down into the horn's layers and carefully chip away along the lines. I then decided a small chisel would probably have more

control, and got a very tiny chisel to work on the other lines. This removed smaller bits of

horn, with more control, but was much slower to work.



**Figure 3** Horn with pencil lines and exacto knife

As you can see in the final horn, one of the middle pieces of the knotwork had the chisel slip, so it's a bit wonky. I haven't yet decided what, if anything, will go in the band along the top. I may try my hand at the Dremel again, with a finer bit and a slower speed and a bit more confidence. The horn has been sanded and finished with a bit of oil and beeswax on the outside.

I'm pleased with how it turned out, considering it is my first time carving anything. Horn was odd to work with because of the thin layers that its made up of, which seemed to crack and peel more than anything, but the ultra fine chisel worked better for that than the exacto knife, although it is very slow to get anywhere. I was shocked at how sanding and polishing made everything look better, I had great despair before that point that it was going to just stay awful. I don't think any horn carvers need to fear that I am about to put them out of business, but I am glad that I tried something completely out of my

comfort zone.

Link to Pict carving in the National Museum of Scotland:

[http://www.nms.ac.uk/explore/search-our-collections/collection-item/?item\\_id=167245&search=description=%27horn%27&startfrom=17](http://www.nms.ac.uk/explore/search-our-collections/collection-item/?item_id=167245&search=description=%27horn%27&startfrom=17)

Link to 1598 drinking horn in the National Museum of Iceland:

<http://www.thjodminjasafn.is/english/permanent-exhibition/key-objects/nr/2477>