

A BOWL TURNER'S STOOL

I first came across a bowl turner's stool whilst visiting Ion Constantin, a bowl turner in Romania. The stool top (figs. 19 & 20) was turned, about 11" in diameter and 3"-4" thick, it was shaped like a part hemisphere with its widest point uppermost, slightly hollowed or dished to give a comfortable seat. It was decorated in the same way as pole lathe bowls with a few incised grooves. The legs were also turned about 10" long and of simple tapering form with only a few incised lines of decoration.

Recently I came across an almost identical stool (fig. 21) which I presumed must also be East European until I discovered it had been purchased from a farmhouse sale near Cross Hands, Carmarthenshire, West Wales. There were a number of traditional bowl turners working in Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire at the start of the twentieth century. Studying photographs of these turners in the archives at St Fagans I found pictures of my 'bowl turner's stool' almost identical to the two examples mentioned above. The stool is pictured at a Rural Industries Exhibition in Cardiff 1932 on the stand of a 'Landeilo turner'. Landeilo is only five miles from Cross Hands and very likely this is the source of the stool I saw, though I have yet to discover the name or more details of the Landeilo turner.

The defining feature of these stools is the thick hemispherical top which is cleft rather than sawn from the tree and then turned on every surface. It seems to me that the design is a simple result of the technology that the bowl turner is using in bowl production being transferred to stool production. The top is produced by splitting an 11" log in half, axing a little off its base and then turning it circular. This would be done from green or part dry wood so the top dries to an oval shape. It would be interesting to speculate as to whether there is a common link between the turners in West Wales and the Gypsy turners in Romania (there is a very close similarity between Welsh and Romanian gypsy baskets also) or if this is simply a result of 'convergent evolution' or the same form evolving independently simply because it works?

I have not seen evidence of this type of stool being made by English bowl turners and would be interested to hear of any other known examples.

Robin Wood



Fig 19 Romanian bowl turner on three legged stool



Fig 20 Romanian stool



Fig 21 Welsh stool from Cross Hands