

ARCHAEOLOGICAL LEATHER GROUP NEWSLETTER

59 March 2024

visit the ALG website at
www.archleathgrp.org.uk



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Editor's note

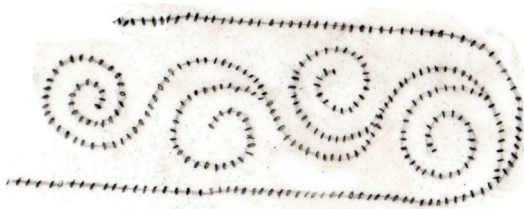
Hello to all members of the leather group, especially those who have recently joined us. We are hoping to make the ALG more widely known this year and look forward to welcoming new members who will find this a friendly group whose interests extend in many directions.

Readers of the last issue may remember its cover photo of a piece of decorated leather recovered from the Thames by mudlarker Charlie Dixon. Now further research has identified the same decoration on a shoe from the Netherlands and an article in this issue (pp. 22-25) explores the relationship between the two finds. We hear from Quita Mould about the home-made leather shoes and clothing traditionally worn by Icelandic fishermen and from Franklin Pereira about a medieval quiver and bow case on display in the Archaeological Museum in Madrid.

We continue to receive very diverse enquiries about leather items via the ALG website and a selection of those which our members have responded to are included in this issue. The 'Getting to know you' feature has been stretched way beyond its normal length this time with a very interesting, and often amusing, personal history from André Veldmeijer and a somewhat shorter (though not by much) one of my own. We make no apology for this as the idea of getting to know each other better still seems a good one.

If you would like to contribute something to the next newsletter please get in touch (contact details on the final page). Information about recent finds from excavations, wherever they may be, is always welcome as are details of new publications, conferences or exhibitions with the theme of historical leatherwork. The deadline for contributions will be the end of August, 2024.

Sue Winterbottom



Cover photo: The well preserved grain surface of a Roman tent panel from the site at Drapers' Gardens, London, showing traces of linear decoration. Photo: Sue Winterbottom

Forthcoming meetings

Online Meeting:

Markus Klek, 'Nordic Walkabout'

The 'Nordic Walkabout' was a living history experiment organized and executed by archaeo-practitioner Markus Klek in February/March, 2024. The event aimed at simulating prehistoric winter travelling conditions at the end of the last ice age.

For two weeks Markus Klek has been on a trekking tour in southern Lapland (Sweden). He was equipped solely with clothing and gear as it might have existed some 15,000 years ago, all of which he constructed himself. As a specialist in prehistoric animal skin preparation, one focus was on testing the properties of equipment made from the skins from various animal species. Clothing, footwear, bedding, storage bags and binding materials were constructed from skins using different preparation methods.

Markus will describe his travel adventures and share his experiences and conclusions in the form of a lively lecture, drawing on his extensive photo documentation of the tour. The meeting is open to all ALG members and there will be time for questions and a discussion afterwards.

It will be an evening meeting via ZOOM in the second week in April; further details and a participation link will be circulated to members once the date has been finalised.

Notice of the ALG's

2024 AGM and talk

Friday, 3rd May, 2024 from 3pm

to be held online via ZOOM

Two committee positions, that of Secretary and Meetings Coordinator (Yvette Fletcher and Angela Middleton are currently co-opted to these posts) are due for re-election at this year's **AGM**. Brief descriptions of the roles are included below and can be accessed via the ALG website. I encourage anyone interested to get in touch if they want to find out more.

Being part of the ALG committee is a great way to get more involved with the group and contribute to all its fantastic offerings.

Secretary: Together with the Chair, the Secretary compiles the agenda for ALG meetings and circulates it to those eligible to attend (with the exception of the AGM agenda which is circulated by the Chair). The Secretary records attendance at meetings and writes up the minutes. The Secretary archives all minutes made during their tenure as well as any other formal communication related to ALG activities.

The position is held by an individual for a 3-year term, serving a maximum of 2 terms in succession. The secretary may take on additional tasks as and when needed to facilitate the activities of the ALG.

Meetings Coordinator: The meetings coordinator is responsible for the organisation of events (usually 2 per year) for ALG members, including online events and in-person group visits, workshops, presentations, and conferences. All members of the committee are able and encouraged to contribute ideas regarding the nature and type of events. The coordinator reaches out to potential sites/people, manages logistics and liaises with the chair to take bookings from ALG members and circulate event information. Currently the meetings coordinator also manages the ALG Facebook page, however this is a task that could be picked up by other members of the committee.

The position can be held by an individual or shared between two people. It is held for a 3-year term, serving a maximum of 2 terms in succession.

If you are interested in nominating yourself for either position, please submit a short bio to **ALGArch1@outlook.com** by Thursday 2nd May 2024. During the AGM, each candidate's bio will be shared with members in attendance who will then be given the opportunity to vote for their preferred candidate.

The **AGM** will be followed by a talk at **3:45pm** from **Dr. André J. Veldmeijer**, Visiting Research Scholar American University in Cairo. His talk is titled:

As sure as Leather is Leather: On the Amazing Leather Treasure Trove from Abydos



Well preserved leather finds from the large deposit at Abydos (see also ALG Newsletter 58 for September 2023)

In 2022 one of the largest and most important ancient leather deposits in Egypt was found in a storage magazine in the temple of king Ramesses II (ca. 1279-1212 BC) at Abydos by the New York University Mission, directed by Prof. Sameh Iskander. This amazing assemblage of well-preserved leather, the context of which dates from the Ptolemaic to early Roman times (ca. 332 BC-100 AD), includes the remains of a large number of shoes as well as a variety of bags and objects that seems to be related to horse riding (see photos above). In 2023 and 2024 the leather was documented. The talk will give a general overview of the finds and present some first thoughts on them, as well as their significance in the wider framework of the study of archaeological leather.

An agenda and Zoom links for both the AGM and talk by André Veldmeijer will be circulated to all members ahead of the event.

Please let Angela know if you are intending to attend the AGM and talk. This will give us an idea of the numbers to expect, but is not mandatory. Thanks!

Arianne Panton, ALG Chair
Angela Middleton, Meetings Coordinator
 (contact details on final page)

ALG Meeting at Winchester February 2024

7 pairs of shoes in a shoe museum...



On the 19th of February seven pairs of shoes entered the exhibition **Shoes: Inside Out** an exhibition about the shape of our shoes over time, and how shoes were shaped by society.

The exhibition teaches us that our shoes are much more than just functional. During the 15th century, a law existed concerning the pointed toes of your shoes. Unless you were a lord or higher, you were not allowed to wear shoes with points longer than two inches. And during the reign of Louis XIV only courtiers appointed by himself could wear shoes with red heels. Your shoes gave a reflection of status, of wealth, and nowadays they still do.

I'd say that your shoes also say something about your personality. Whether you follow the trend of the day, choose a pair of shoes based on budget or taste, or as a form of rebellion. The story of a shoe is not always straight forward. However, in most cases functionality does play a key role. Modern technologies allow us to research the shoes without having to take them apart. Several X-rays have been made of shoes found in the exhibition that reveal, for instance, the presence of long zig-zag stitching on the Georgian brocade shoes with matching clogs to add stability (opposite). And the World War I trench boots had additional metal support hidden at the calf.



Georgian brocade shoes with matching clogs.

I noticed that the exhibition also functioned as a walk down memory lane. The shoes led to conversations about recognition: owning or wearing a particular pair of shoes similar to those featured in the exhibition. The shoe, there and then, became a symbol of a period of our life. 'Heelys' for instance were not as inventive as I thought they were: roughly 30 years earlier people were rolling down the street on its predecessor (below). Footwear design tends to repeat itself over time. The red heels of Louis XIV's time are seen nowadays in Christian Louboutin's red soles, worn for a high price. And this goes for many styles of shoe where the design is building on previous forms.



A forerunner of Heelys

It was very interesting to gain more insight into our daily footwear. It provided information about the tangible and intangible parts of the shoe and allowed me to step into someone else's shoes.

We saw a some tall 'pilot's shoes' in the exhibition which would go very high up and seemed impossible to sit in. Which leaves me with one question for the reader: does a pilot fly while sitting down, or does he have to stretch his legs?

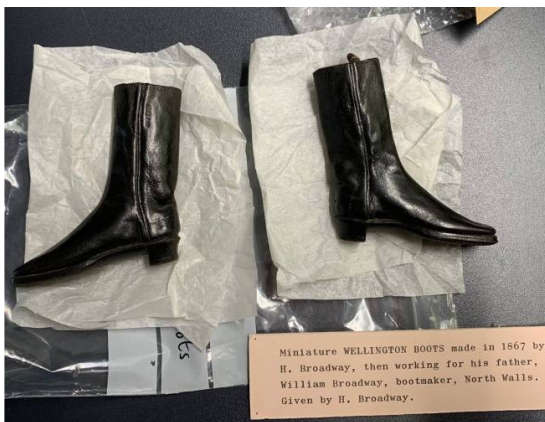
Daniëlle Stobbe



Later that same day...

After a leisurely stroll through Winchester, and a detour to briefly take in the Cathedral, we arrived at the archaeology store of Hampshire Cultural Trust, where we were welcomed by Ross Turle, Collections Access Manager.

We were given a brief overview of the store and then had the opportunity to look at leather artefacts of different periods from Winchester. The archaeological leather was excavated in the 1950s and 60s and provided a very interesting overview of past conservation treatments and how they fared over time. Very conveniently, each find's bag contained the hand-written treatment card – a poignant reminder of how things have changed. The leather consisted mainly of leatherworking off-cuts and shoes. One complete child's shoe attracted a lot of interest because of its unusual construction, with only very few known parallels. A Napoleonic hat and fire bucket were amongst the social history leather objects. The group took much delight in a pair of miniature Wellington boots made in 1867 by a shoemaker apprentice H. Broadway:



Miniature WELLINGTON BOOTS made in 1867 by H. Broadway, then working for his father, William Broadway, bootmaker, North Walls. Given by H. Broadway.

After a long and Covid-imposed hiatus, it was a pleasure to meet in person again and welcome some new faces.

Angela Middleton

Searching our Newsletters

Have you ever thought how much collective knowledge our group has put together over the last 38 years? Apart from the conference proceedings and books, there is a lot stored in the Newsletters. Thanks to the work of our great editors and contributors, the 64 issues contain many articles, reports from meetings and conferences as well as snippets of information about

leather items and numerous book reviews. If you ever feel the need to revisit the old articles and want to go after something specific, we have made it easier for you now in a new searchable spreadsheet in the Members' section of our website. You can search by name of the author, by a period or place, a particular type of object, or try your luck by a full text search. I hope you will find it useful in future and as interesting as I did to go through some of the old issues. This link will take you straight to the search box:

<https://bit.ly/3s1EYYU>

Hint: try searching for *London* or *Gloves*, for example, and you will see how it works.

Jana Obročníková

P.S. If you want to follow up some of your searches, the **collected newsletters** are no longer hosted on Bublup.com, since they began to charge for this facility. You will now find them on the ALG's Google Drive account, which is accessible from:

<https://archleathgrp.org.uk/members-2/collected-newsletters/>

In the interests of paying members of the group, please don't pass on this link to non-members; the same applies to the password to the members section of the website, where this link can also be found. If you know others who would like access to this store of knowledge, please encourage them to join the ALG for a mere £10!

Editor

Weblog: leather finds from the Hungarian Archaeological Mission in Thebes

In his recent blog, André Veldmeijer discusses the many uses of leather in ancient Egypt and how a research framework capable of dealing with large amounts of excavated material has been developed there over the last 25 years. The leather from the Hungarian mission, while often fragmentary, includes the remains of quivers and bow cases, highly decorated sandals, mummy braces, and painted skin deliberately made so thin that it has become translucent. The blog, in both Hungarian and English and with photos, can be found at:

<https://egyptologia.blogspot.com/2023/11/a-regeszeti-bor-tanulmanyozasa-studying.html>

'Shoes in History' 2024 10th International Conference

November this year sees the 10th triennial conference to be organised by the Museum of South East Moravia in Zlín, Czech Republic. The conference series was initiated by Miroslava Štýbrová, curator of the extensive shoe collection at Zlín museum, with the first event being held in 1994. Past conferences have attracted experts on the history of shoemaking and its current development from many European countries as well as the United States, Canada, Russia, Japan and the UK.

At the previous conference, in 2021, attendance both in person or online was possible for speakers and participants for the first time and the proceedings were in English. This year's conference will be the same and as usual the proceedings will be published.

No booking details are available yet on the Museum's website:

<https://www.muzeum-zlin.cz/shoes-in-history-2024>

but that is the place to look if you are interested in taking part whether virtually or in person.

Jana Obročníková

Penelope Walton-Rogers



One of our longstanding members, Penelope Walton-Rogers, died in November 2023 at the age of 73. Her passing is a sad loss to everyone interested in Anglo-Saxon studies, particularly those specialising in textile and dress.

Starting without formal qualifications in the 1970s, Penelope developed her interest in ar-

chaeology to become one of the UK's leading experts in archaeological textiles. She was a very determined and focused individual. From 1980 she ran her own business 'Textile Research' providing analyses of weaves and dyes for clients worldwide. In 2001 she established 'The Anglo-Saxon Laboratory' in York, where entire assemblages of finds, mainly from Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, could be studied. She also set up 'Pangur Press' for publishing academic work without the usual delays. She was an Honorary Visiting Fellow of the Department of Archaeology, York University, and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, London.

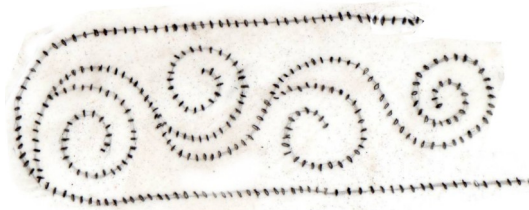
Penelope did not attend ALG meetings, and indeed it would have been unusual for anyone outside York to have met her because, being agoraphobic, she stayed close to her lodgings. Despite this drawback, modern technology enabled her to communicate with fellow academics, and her reach was wide. Penelope's legacy of work includes book chapters, specialist reports, and monographs, all of which set high standards and are frequently consulted by others in her field. Here are three examples:

Walton, P. (1989) Textiles, Cordage and Raw Fibre from 16-22 Coppergate (The Archaeology of York 17/5), London, CBA for York Archaeological Trust.

Walton Rogers, P. (1997) Textile Production at 16-22 Coppergate (The Archaeology of York 17/11), York, CBA for York Archaeological Trust.

Walton Rogers, P. (2007) Cloth and Clothing in Early Anglo-Saxon England (AD 450-700) (CBA Research Report 145), York, CBA.

Esther Cameron



Getting to know you...

André J. Veldmeijer



Visiting Research Scholar
American University in Cairo

As a child, I already had a fascination for two things: dinosaurs and ancient Egypt. I even wrote 'books' on them and contacted museums and other authors of books for permission to use their photographs and other illustrations! Unlike most children, where such fascination changes into things regarded as much more cool, such as mopeds, computer games or music, this fascination never left me. So, one would perhaps expect that a smooth path of education would bring me straightaway to university (assuming, at the time, of course that I had the intellectual capability to study...which was not yet certain, I guess). It did not: this path was a bit more wobbly and it turned out my career would always be that way.

When I was 16 I was expelled from High School and my parents, not so pleased, gave me a choice: another school or work. So I worked in a restaurant for two years, but here too my strong anti-authority sentiments and dislike of hierarchy spoiled a brilliant career as Michelin Star chef in a posh restaurant and earning loads of money (which I never desired anyway). So, back to school, where I finished the last four years of two High Schools in two years. In 1991 I went to Leiden University for the so-called "Propedeuse Archaeology," an introductory year with a wide variety of courses to make you acquainted with archaeology in general and the various areas of study particular, such as Egypt, Mesopotamia, Meso-America or Prehistoric North-West Europe. Of course I chose Archaeology of Egypt, not to be confused with 'Egyptology', which is basically a language study.

The newly developed course I joined would focus specifically on archaeology as a science. Within the curriculum there was some time left for the students to fill for themselves. You could follow any course you wanted, but it would make sense to do something that would also benefit your own study. Thus, I wanted to study dinosaurs: a bone is a bone, and since vertebrate palaeontology mainly (not exclusively!) studies bones, it would come in handy in case I wanted to become an archaeozoologist. Thus, finally,

after many phone calls and letters (!) I came in contact with Dr. John de Vos, conservator at the Natural History Museum in Leiden and the Teylers Museum in Haarlem. I was offered a pterosaur to study from the Cretaceous of Brazil (145-66 million years ago) they just acquired. However, the bones were still in their matrix, so it had to be prepared, a time-consuming process, and in the meantime I could study other pterosaurs and make my way into the amazing world of anatomy, morphology, taphonomy and taxonomy.

The project spiralled out of control, with many trips over the world to collections with comparable material. At the time, only a handful of palaeontologists were working on these flying animals contemporary to dinosaurs and suddenly John and I realised that, putting my publications together, it would make a full PhD. As an aside, I described a new species and named it after Stephen Spielberg who, as everybody knows, had made movies on both archaeology (Indiana Jones) and palaeontology (Jurassic Park). Since we just had a professor in vertebrate palaeontology at Utrecht University, I earned my degree there in 2006. It may sound funny, but the first (and last) time I entered Utrecht University was to organise the invitation to the public defence of my thesis, which we have to do to finalise our PhD in the Netherlands!

At the same time, my study in archaeology did not proceed quickly, as there were so many other things happening (among them the establishment, together with several colleagues, of the PalArch Foundation which published one of the first online scientific journals in Palaeontology and Egyptology) but especially because of the opportunity to join excavations in Egypt. Soon I realised that work as an excavator in the field was not my cup of tea. I always joke that I do not like the dirty, dusty working conditions, although you should know that working in Egyptian stores or in straw and palm leaf huts at excavation sites is no way any better. But I like to "get my teeth into" objects. To learn everything about them, how they were made and used. What they meant and how they developed, where the technology came from and how they changed over the years. I did not mind so much what kind of objects, but a strong interest and responsibility grew towards those that had received little or no attention in the field of Egyptology in the past.

I discovered that especially organic materials, like textiles, basketry, cordage and leather, got my interest. My first excavation in Egypt was Berenike at the Red Sea coast, approximately 500km south of Hurghada. In the five years I worked there I studied, documented and published over 10,000 fragments of rope, string and other cordage remains. This included a cordage sandal and I naively thought that, unlike the other cordage remains, there would be literature enough on footwear. But there was not and thus it was necessary to organise the study of it myself. In those days, young scholars without affiliation could still apply for grants to the Netherlands Organisation of Scientific Research (NWO), which sadly is not possible anymore. I was granted a fairly big sum of money to visit collections in the UK, Germany, the US and elsewhere to study footwear as part of the newly established Ancient Egyptian Footwear Project.

Simultaneously, Prof. Willeke Wendrich, then one of the directors of the Berenike Project, asked if I had any interest in working on the leather finds. Here too, next to no research was done. As with the cordage/footwear, the challenge of pioneering archaeological research appealed to me and I enthusiastically agreed. This marked the starting point of the Ancient Egyptian Leatherwork Project. It was decided with my colleague Prof. Salima Ikram, to begin this project in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo. Unexpectedly, on the first day we stumbled upon the near-complete leather remains of a New Kingdom (ca. 1549-1069 BC) chariot. It proved to be the most important leather find from ancient Egypt to date. Not only did we have in front of us the entire leather casing of a chariot but also parts of the accompanying bow-case and nave hoops plus various elements of the harnessing - many of which are the only complete examples ever to survive. The study took nearly 10 years and resulted in a multi-authored volume including, alongside the detailed catalogue fully illustrated in colour, chapters on the identification and technology of the leather and on related texts and imagery.

The leather research has continued ever since and colleagues are more aware of the importance of the study of leather from ancient Egypt. Researching leather still is my core business and over the past 30 years the finds from a variety of sites have been studied. Most are published but some are still in the process of getting published.

The sites include the aforementioned Ptolemaic-Roman harbour site at Berenike on the Red Sea coast, the Nubian site of Qasr Ibrim between Aswan and Abu Simbel in the far south of Egypt (including Ottoman material), New Kingdom Amarna in Middle Egypt, and various New Kingdom sites in Luxor - such as the Spanish, Swiss,



The youngest of three, flanked by my big brothers Lukas, to the left and Klaas (1961-2011) to the right.



Studying Jurassic pterosaurs in the Teylers Museum, Haarlem, Netherlands in the early 1990s



Working on the finds from Fustat in the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities store.

German and Hungarian missions which focus on the excavations of tombs. In 2023 a start was made with the study of another important leather deposit: the large quantity of leather found in a temple magazine in Abydos, dating to the Ptolemaic-early Roman times (332 BC to ca. 100 AD).

Work in several museum collections continued too, including the already mentioned Egyptian Museum, the Coptic Museum and the Grand Egyptian Museum, all in Cairo. Work in the latter focussed on all the objects with leather from the tomb of Tutankhamun; a publication is due to come out anytime soon.

Besides leather, research has continued on basketry and cordage, including the amazing so-called “Rope Caves” in Mersa Gawasis (Red Sea coast), where ships were stored to sail to the land of Punt (modern-day Eritrea) in a number of caves. The ropes related to the ships were stored separately in another cave. More work was done on shipping ropes found in Wadi el Jarf, where ships and related material were stored that were used to transport building materials for the Great Pyramid in Cairo. The leather research has also spread to objects made from other materials, which include weaponry (bows, armour and the like) and sticks and staves, especially those from the tomb of Tutankhamun. This publication is in progress.

There is still a bias against the study of objects in Egyptology, particularly those made of organic materials: only four (!) scientists work (or have worked) on leather and only a handful on the basketry and cordage. There is still so much work to do and so many gaps to be filled in...it will keep us busy for many more years. As it stands now, if I stop collecting data from excavations, many more years of writing lies ahead of me to get it all published. A task I am determined to fulfil before my retirement, or anyway before I will change my temporary existence on this earth for the eternal one, when and wherever that might be.

One might wonder what happened to my work in palaeontology. Sadly, there was no time to keep up with it. Ever since I gained my PhD (surely not because of it!), the study of pterosaurs kept spiralling with many and absolutely mind-boggling finds, especially from China and Brazil. These not only supplied the Missing Link between the early, more “archaic” pterosaurs

and the more “advanced” ones, but also saw the first find of pterosaur eggs! The start of triennial international pterosaurologists’ meetings has helped attract the interest of many colleagues, with a dramatic increase in the number of palaeontologists now working on those strange animals and, of course, of the publications. Too many to keep up properly. Having said this, I am proud that the photographs we (myself and Erno Endenburg) took of collections worldwide of these fossils, are still in demand. This proved especially important after the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro burnt down, almost completely destroying the fossil collection, as well as their Egyptology collection.

In all, despite many challenges working in Egypt and as an independent scholar I love the work and especially the publishing. I put the first copy of every book on the table for a few days to jump up and down around it and be happy about it...until, at long last, I get a grip on myself and get back to the computer for the next publication....

www.leatherandshoes.nl/andre-j-veldmeijer-cv/

Recent Publication

In August last year **Jan Moens** supplied details of a new publication about leather from excavations in Bruges, which should have appeared in last September's newsletter. With apologies for that omission, the book details are:

MOENS J., POULAIN M., HUYGHE J., HILLEWAERT B. & ERVYNCK A. (2023),

Een bijzonder laatmiddeleeuws ensemble van leerresten uit een beerput langs de Spanjaardstraat in Brugge [An important late Medieval ensemble of leather finds from a cess pit on Spanjaard Street in Bruges], *Onderzoeksrapporten Agentschap Onroerend Erfgoed (OAOE) 296*, Brussels.

The full report is available online at:

<https://bit.ly/45AyCgU>

and may be freely shared with those interested.



In our last Newsletter we only got as far as May last year in looking back at questions to the ALG and how they were answered. This is due to the fact that we receive an increasing number of leather-related enquiries, both in direct emails to the Committee and via the website.

We take up the story in July 2023 when we were contacted by another River Thames 'mudlarker', **Peter Wollweber**, who wrote:

...I am a Thames mudlark and regularly pick up leather pieces from the foreshore - I wondered if I could get your advice on identifying and conserving a recent find. As you should be able to see in the attached pictures, it's a single (non-layered) piece of leather with punched slashes and 'S' motifs as further decoration, as well as some preserved thread. From what I understand of leatherworking it's not been made with modern techniques, and was found in a central area that frequently produces 16th- and 17th- century finds. I'm aware of various slashed shoe uppers from the foreshore but can't quite see how this would fit that style, as the join seems more consistent with a leather garment like a slashed jerkin.

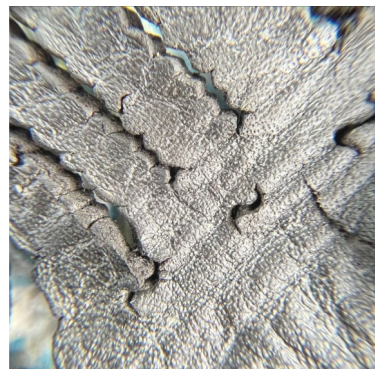
I'm extremely keen to find out anything about its potential age and function and wondered if you might have any insight on how it could be dated/identified. Dimensions are in the images but happy to provide more exact measurements if useful. Do let me know if you might be able to help, and thanks in advance!

The photos can be seen opposite.

Lisette Verspaj replied from the Netherlands:

Dear Peter,

I have seen several vamps of shoes with this kind of slashed decoration. Dating to the 17th century.



These links are to shoes from Amsterdam, but I have seen more:

<http://bit.ly/40017mY>

<https://bit.ly/46UoG2Y>

Happy mudlarking,
Lisette

.....

Later the same month, **Lisette Verspay** herself wrote with an enquiry, as follows:

Enclosed I have several pictures of what **Marquita Volken** tentatively determined as a pistol holster.

I have been searching the internet for parallels, but though I have found images of 18th century holsters (the context is an 18th century duck-decoy pond), I have not yet found any direct parallels. Most of them are asymmetrical, while this one isn't. Also many of them are open at the tip and my holster/sheath was sewn closed.

It is made of thick cowleather, double layered. The top is finished off with leather and the opening is strengthened with a ca. 3 mm thick metal rod, which I suspect will go round the opening. Several incisions at the top edge point to a belt being laced through it to secure it, though the slits do not seem to have been used. The sheath is 49 cm long, 20 cm wide at the opening and 7 cm wide at the tip.

I haven't yet cleaned the inside, because on the tapering part there is a dark residue in the dirt. First I thought that this might be gunpowder-residue, though I would expect that to be found on the leather itself and not in the dirt accumulated after it got in the ground. It is not charcoal though and is only found in that spot on the sheath. So, it is something.

The leather used, is interesting in itself. It is made of leather imported from Russia which received a specific kind of tanning and surface treatment (source: M. Bartels, municipal archaeologist in Hoorn). This resulted in its peculiar raster-pattern (and apparently also in its smell).

My questions are:

- Is this indeed a pistol holster? And if not, what else could it be?

- If a holster, what kind of style of pistol/gun would have fitted into it. Handgun, hunting gun?

- Does anyone have other examples of this type of leather?

Thank you in advance,
Lisette



Above: enlarged view of the opening
Below: the patterned surface



The item was of interest to several ALG members who all responded within a week. First of all Ken Stuart tried a reverse image search on Google (after removing the background using a clever program at www.remove.bg/). He wrote:

..this search led me to a page listing a pair of antique (17th to 18th century) pistols for sale that included symmetric holsters similar to this item.

One of the two holsters, which are elaborately embroidered, is shown below. Ken concluded:

It's not proof that this item is a holster, but seems to support the argument that it is. All of the other reverse image matches were asymmetric, and there were about 25 in total.



One of the holsters belonging to a pair of pistols for sale online at: <https://bit.ly/3S7lsVs>

Next to comment was Hanneke van Engeldorp Gastelaars, who said:

Gaaf voorwerp! Ik heb even rondgevraagd, o.a. bij mijn zwager die verzamelaar is van oude wapens. Hij denkt dat het een geweerholster voor op een paard is. Ik ken die zelf niet maar misschien helpt het je met zoeken! Groetjes!

[English translation:

Cool object! I asked around, among others my brother-in-law who is a collector of old weapons. He thinks it's a gun holster for when on a horse. I don't know myself, but maybe it will help you with your search!]

Angela Middleton was able to help on the subject of Russian leather:

*I cannot help you with the identification of the object as such. But this type of leather was found in large quantities on the Metta Catharina shipwreck: [Metta Catharina \(shipsproject.org\)](http://MettaCatharina(shipsproject.org)) If you search the ALG Newsletter, you should also find some information there. We have reported on that in the past and once went for a visit to Mount Edgecumbe House ([The Metta Catharina Exhibition - Exhibition at Mount Edgecumbe House \(whichmuseum.co.uk\)](http://TheMettaCatharinaExhibition-ExhibitionatMountEdgecumbeHouse(whichmuseum.co.uk))), where some of the artefacts and leather from the wreck are on display.**

Regarding the staining on the inside/fleshside, it could also be grease remains. If the object was indeed a pistol holster, some of the grease/oil from caring for the pistol could have transferred onto the leather. Gunpowder is largely water soluble, so finding any residue and positively identifying it, is quite tricky. If you have access to FTIR analysis, this might be something worthwhile exploring.

*Editor's note:

The report on the group's visit to Mount Edgecumbe House is in Newsletter No. 39 for March 2014.

Joke de Ridder had a different idea altogether:

Could it be the cover of a big size caliper? The caliper that I use at home has a normal size, but the leather cover has the same symmetric shape as the one Lisette shows.

Finally, **Rosie Bolton** at the Leather Conservation Centre, Northampton, provided this information:

I recall seeing a pair of holsters from the Wallace collection which are also symmetrical and possibly very similar in shape. If I remember correctly, they are quite decorative with silk velvet and silver thread covering one face.

They were treated by the LCC in 2018. It may be worth contacting the Wallace collection about these holsters? We should have some images on file from the treatment which we may be able to share if we can get the permission.

.....

In August we heard from **Dimitra Tsampodimou** and **Ioanna Mentzini** who wrote:

We are two students of the University of West Attica's Department of Conservation of Antiquities and

Works of Art. As part of our undergraduate thesis, we have taken on the study and conservation of a naturally mummified piranha fish (below). After research, we found a remarkably similar specimen listed on an auction website from a seller in Italy, dated around 1880. We would greatly appreciate it if there's any information you could share on the topic of mummification, since there's not much available bibliography on the method. We'd also appreciate your input if you have ever treated or encountered a similar object.



In reply, **Angela Middleton** supplied this link to a downloadable pdf, which makes interesting reading even if the subject of mummified animals does not immediately grab your attention!

<https://www.icom-cc-publications-online.org/4395/One-cat-just-leads-to-another>

ALG member **Mikhail Viktorovich** was in touch in September with a tentative query:

Could you help? I am engaged in military historical reconstruction of ancient Rome and it so happened that I started trying to make leather products as close to the original as possible (if possible, I use the same materials that were in the period of antiquity). At the moment, I am interested in calcei of 2nd-3rd century AD from South Fleet, Kent (perhaps the information is not correct since it comes from Pinterest). Maybe you know where they are in an exhibition or maybe you can tell where, or whom, to contact. Images below.

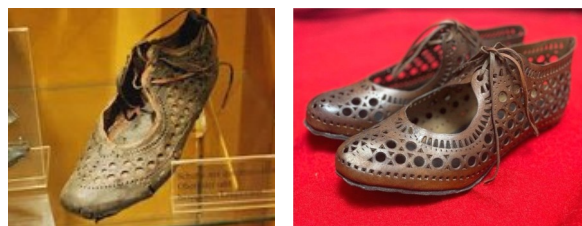


A few days later, this comprehensive reply came from **Carol van-Driel Murray**:

The pair of shoes from Southfleet, Kent, were discovered in the 18th century and are now in the British Museum. They are illustrated in several of their Roman catalogues and publications. The shoes come from the burial of a woman dated to the late 2nd/early 3rd century, and are decorated with gold embroidery and the leather is stained red. These are incredibly luxurious shoes, but plainer versions are known from Welzheim (Germany) and Egypt. The fastening method is very unusual for Roman shoes, and I was fortunate to be able to examine the Southfleet pair in the BM while I was working on the Welzheim finds in the 1980s.

At the time, Catherine Johns of the British Museum was planning a publication of the burial at Southfleet, as it also contained a lot of other rich finds, but I don't know whether this has actually appeared. Attached is the relevant part of my Welzheim publication with some construction drawings that might be useful if you try to reconstruct this type of shoe. It would be interesting to find out how practical and comfortable this fastening method is. Hope this is of some help.

Mikhail was delighted with this response and the information attached. Although he has not yet tried to reconstruct the Southfleet shoe he sent pictures of a reconstruction he has made of an woman's openwork shoe that is in the Saalburg Museum:



Saalburg shoe, left and reconstruction by Mikhail Victorovich.

Icelandic fishermen: oil-skins, sea-shoes, continuation and re-use

by Quita Mould

I have been looking at leather finds from a farm mound at Stóraborg undir Eyjafjöllum, in Rangárvalla county on the south coast of Iceland. They were recovered from rescue excavations undertaken between 1978-1990. During a work trip there my hosts Guðrún Alda Gísladóttir and Mjöll Snæsdóttir kindly took me to see the site and to visit the local museum where some of the finds are on display. While there, I was fascinated to see the skin clothing traditionally worn by Icelandic fishermen and the leather overshoes, known as sea-shoes, they wore as part of their kit.

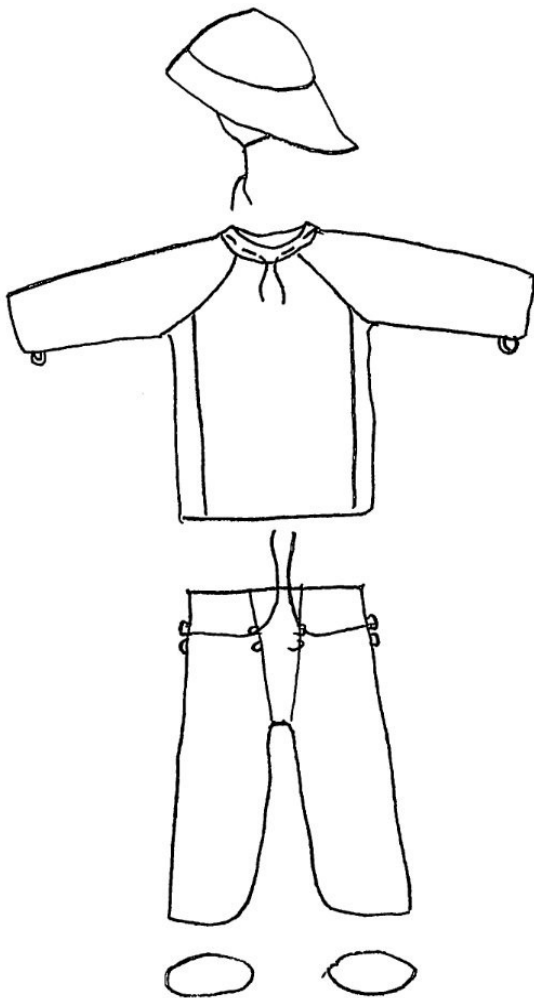


Fig. 1 Diagram of Icelandic fisherman's oil-skin clothing

Icelandic fishermen's oil-skins were made from sheepskins and comprised long wader-like trousers, long tunics/jackets similar to anoraks, and a sou'wester style hat (Fig. 1). These garments came in various individual patterns and were sewn with waterproof seams, featuring either a single-folded (U shaped) or double-folded (W shaped) bead/welt, sensibly called a 'mid-seam' (*mið-semi*), between the two seam edges (Figs. 2a and 2b). The seams were sewn with a double-thread running stitch (Fig. 3) using tallow greased, multi-ply, woollen thread. The cutting patterns and their orientation on the animal

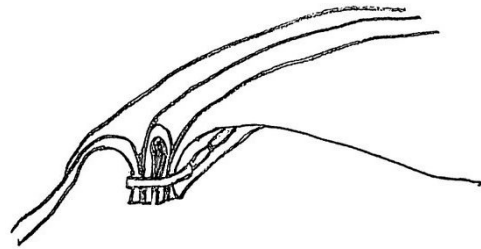


Fig. 2a Diagram of seam with folded bead in seam after Thorarensen 1985, 121, lower figure.

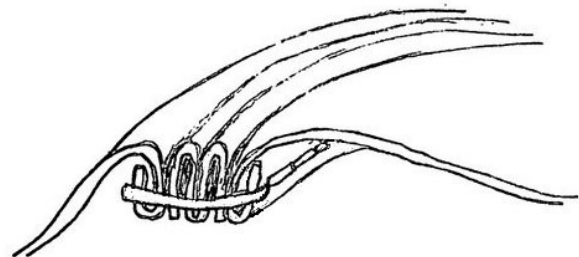


Fig. 2b Diagram of seam with double folded bead in seam after Kristjánsson 1983, 38, Fig.16

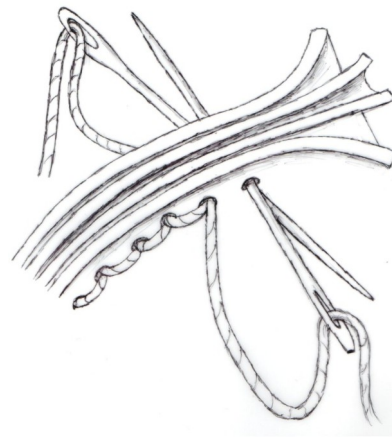


Fig. 3 Diagram of double thread running stitch after Thorarensen 1985, 117

skins, garment measurements, seam and stitch details and the tools used to make them are all illustrated in Kristjánsson 1983 and Thorarensen 1985. The method of preparing the sheepskins that they describe may have lost something in translation but seems to have involved a combination of a fat and smoke tannage with a vegetable element thrown in. The processes as described involved cleaning, stretching, 'scouring' (by which they may mean vigorous rubbing), the application of extracts of willow and birch bark - or dyeing with copper or later vitriol - drying and smearing with fish (cod) liver. A long period hanging in the smoky environment close to an open fire in the kitchen was followed by further working and stretching before a final application of fish liver and more working by hand. It was usual for the fishermen to sew and maintain their own outfits, which required occasional greasing with fish livers to keep them supple. It is thought that a well-constructed set of oil-skins would last a single fishing season (from January to May) and the wearing of them gave special rights, such that no one was allowed to lay hands on a fisherman in his oil-skins even if he had committed a crime (Kristjánsson 1983, 444).

The oil-skin trousers on display at the Skógar Museum now appeared hard, brittle and translucent and I could not get close enough to confirm the presence or absence of a grain surface. Icelandic oil-skin trousers came in different styles:

those with separate 'foot-bags' - like shoes sewn on to them (*skóbrók* 'shoe-trousers') and those with only soles (simply oval-shaped pieces) attached to the ends of the trouser legs (*ilbrók* and *sólabrók* 'sole-trousers'). When only soles were present a pair of sea-shoes (*sjóskór*) had to be worn, though some sources suggest they could be worn with trousers with the 'attached' shoes too (Thorarensen 1985, 122). These simple sea-shoes were made from a single rectangular piece of leather folded upward and gathered around the foot and tied at the ankle, left open at both the front and back to allow the water to easily enter and leave (Fig. 4). They are said to have been made of cattle or horse hide or 'foreign leathers' (Kristjánsson 1983, 443).

I examined three sets of sea-shoes at Skógar Museum. They were made of leather 3-4mm thick, apparently cattle hide, and now completely rigid. All were very large one-piece shoes open at the toe and heel (back part) with the top edge at the toe end sewn for a distance with string in large whip stitches producing a scalloped edge. The edges could be gathered around the foot by pulling the ends of the string. The rest of the top edge, running to the back of the foot was unstitched, with a pair of holes at the back for strings to tie to the ankle. One pair (labelled R993) each had the seat of the sole area covered by a large rectangular patch attached by large flat headed metal nails, though the soles were not worn through; these patches had been added to

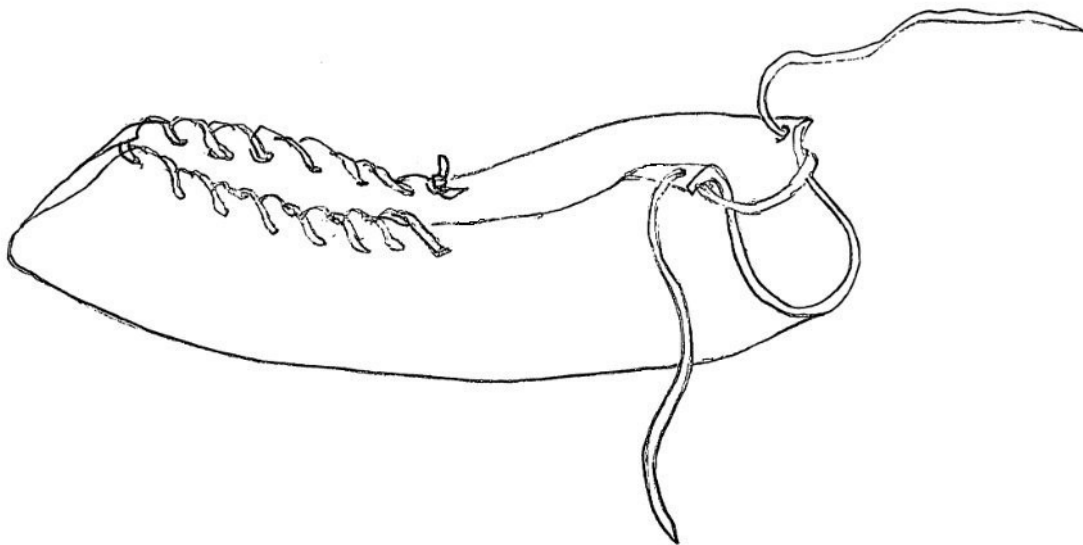


Fig. 4 Diagram of sea-shoe

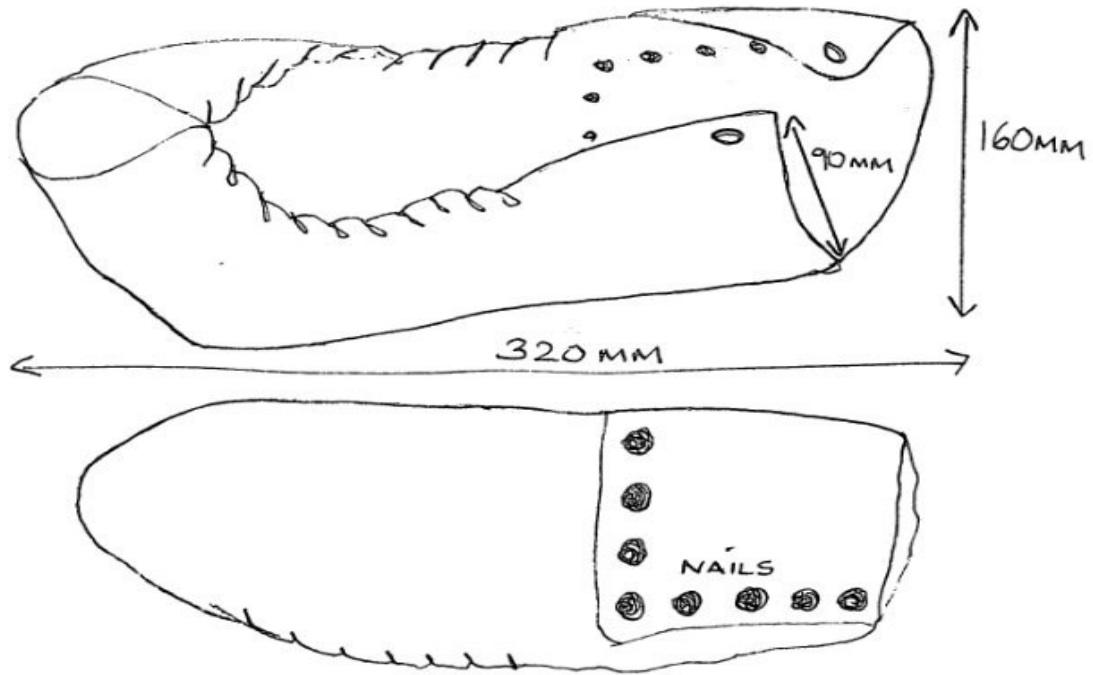


Fig. 5 Working drawing of one sea-shoe of pair R993 showing patch with nailing

reinforce, rather than to repair, the soles (Fig. 5). A second pair (labelled 15) had been made by cutting down a pair of sturdy black polished boots and had areas of double stitched seams present from the front openings and facings of the original boots. The third set of sea-shoes (labelled R8633) were not a pair: one shoe was stuffed inside the other and they clearly differed. These also had been made from re-used footwear. The larger shoe had been cut down from a tall-legged boot, while the smaller one had been made from a front-lacing boot having three large punched lace holes rather incongruously present near the top edge of one side. I believe that other slight variations to this sea-shoe design may be seen in folk museums around the coast, but the simple one piece construction with open toe and heel is consistent.

Seeing these reminded me of the continuation of traditional skin working skills. Such a basic form of foot protection, as used in prehistory, continued to be usefully employed in the extreme conditions faced by Icelandic fishermen into recent times. The tradition of preparing sheepskins to make the oil-skins was recorded as surviving in Iceland as recently as 1940 (Kristjánsson 1983, 442), while a version of the beaded seam used to make the waterproof seams needed on such garments was used in a skin product accompanying an Early Bronze Age burial on Dartmoor (UK)

radio carbon dated to c.1730-1600 cal BC (Cameron, Harrison and Mould 2016, 148-156), and in Inuit boots made by women in the Canadian Arctic working to keep their traditional skills alive today (Oakes and Riewe 1996, 60 figure 45).

I am most grateful to Mjöll Snæsdóttir for providing me with copies of the Icelandic references given below, one thankfully with an English summary.

References:

Cameron, E, Harris, S and Mould, Q (2016) 'The textile and animal-skin object' in Jones, A.M. Preserved in the Peat. An extraordinary Bronze Age burial on Whitehorse Hill, Dartmoor, and its wider context, Oxford, Oxbow Books.

Kristjánsson, Lúðvik, (1983) Íslenskir sjávarhættir 3, Reykjavik.

Oakes, J and Riewe, R (1996) Our Boots: An Inuit Women's Art, London, Thames and Hudson.

Thorarensen, Jón (1985) Sókn (2nd edition), Reykjavik.

A quiver and bow case from the 15th century Sultanate of Granada:

Leather art, aesthetics and the mobility of ornament

by Franklin Pereira
Researcher at ARTIS Institute of Art History
University of Lisbon

The leather arts of the Iberian Peninsula are still acclaimed after many centuries and remain the subject of numerous studies and debates as to the origins of their aesthetics, their stylistic evolution and their influence up till the present day. Aside from the gilt leather of both Iberian countries and the califal and later Muslim patterns found in Portuguese carved cowhide upholstery in the late 16th to 17th century, there are several pieces deserving further study.

While visiting Spain's National Archaeological Museum in Madrid in 1997 to photograph some gothic chests, I was shown a quiver, quite outstanding and never published (Fig. 1). Like the bow case, discussed next, its decorative technique is known as *calado*: the background to the ornament (or even its internal detail) is removed and replaced with leather of another colour. American leatherworkers call this technique 'filigree' while in the UK it is known as 'cutwork' or 'openwork'. The technique is still used by southern Iberian shepherds or rural artisans to make bags and leggings; like the stitching, the background is in white leather (usually cat or dog skin). In northeastern Portugal the name *calado* is also given to a type of textile work.

The leather craftsman used goatskin of a greenish colour, on which he drew and cut out the floral decoration (Fig. 1a). The wide floral border is inscribed with an SS structure alternating with a 6-petal flower (an easy exercise with a compass to divide the circle into 6 petals). This flower sits within a medallion of a gothic arch, the background being in white leather, or parchment, as in other parts of the filigree. On the wide border the background is of thin brownish leather. The florals in the central area have red velvet as background and in the parts where it is worn you can see there is an inner whitish parchment underneath.



Fig. 1 A quiver, fully ornamented.

Photo: National Archaeological Museum, Madrid.

The green leather filigree in the border was stitched to the background, either using two lines of stitching (in the larger openwork) or just one - it's slow work, showing plenty of patience and care in a very repetitive but necessary task. The front face of the quiver has an inner covering of thin cowhide; the back face, which is not decorated, also has a thin cowhide lining with textile in between. Front and back are stitched together around the edges. As an edge binding the craftsman used white leather.

The top of the container, and both curved sections on the left side are left open (not stitched). The two protruding straps on the left side are connected by a textile string. Manuscript illuminations from the Muslim east show those two straps linking the quiver to the belt and thigh of the rider. I would suggest that,



Fig. 1a The author's drawing of one part of the *calado* ornament.

having no stitching on both left half circles, the quiver was carried horizontally or at an angle so that an arrow was easily taken out.

The stylized floral design has links to other decorative arts of al-Andalus, dating from the 10th-11th century caliphate until the sultanate of Granada in the 15th century (ivory carvings, metalwork, Quranic illumination and stucco work) and shows a continuum of aesthetics and of belonging to that culture. This centuries-old lineage also had architectural elements and wasn't confined to portable artefacts (in which leather items were included but have only rarely survived). The leaf designs help to suggest the quiver's date. To understand their stylization we need to go back a few centuries, since this style pre-dated the caliphate. In earlier times the acanthus leaf reflected the realism of the Roman period. In the Almoravid and Almohad periods of al-Andalus the acanthus turned into elements composed of curved lines and tiny circles. A key

reference is the main geometric design in the quiver's decoration: surrounded by stems and leaves arranged in an arch there is a structure of four lozenges (Fig. 1b) with some faces close to being counter-curved arches. They are a type of *sebka* - rhomboid patterns used in palace facades or mosques, as well as in tiles (Wikipedia gives further references for *sebka*). It was a common way to create harmonious decoration in tile, fresco painting and tapestry, as well as on gilt leather wall coverings of Iberian manufacture.

Book bindings and manuscript illuminations were also given repetitive patterns of this type. One must emphasise the importance of books as containers of the Revealed Word, and of their artwork as diffusers of official aesthetics - recreated and reused in many easily portable artefacts as it establishes adherence to a faith and a culture. If the wide border of the quiver, with its floral SS structure, is too common in past centuries to speculate on its significance, the use of the *sebka* and the method of representing foliage here supports an important conclusion: leather is ornamented according to the dominant culture that produced it.

Probably this was not a unique piece, just one which survives from an abundant production made for the elite of the Iberian Muslim army.



Fig. 1b The four-part *sebka* ornament which appears twice on the front of the quiver.

Collectively they would look magnificent, whether on foot or riding Andalusian horses to war on the plains *a la gineta* style.

The next piece, I can say after some research, is a bow case (Fig. 2) although the Museum has described it as another quiver (*aljaba*). A good number of illuminations of eastern Muslim origin support my conclusion, with the form of the left side of the object being significant. Several illuminations show riders with their quivers and bow cases but in one unusual painting the rider is shown from the back and one can see his quiver suspended on the right and his bow case (with a bow) on the left (Fig. 3).

The bow case is of thin cowhide with the flesh side outwards, giving it a velvety feel. The motif is repeated three times, and consists of a double counter-curved arch with reddish floral decoration within it (Fig. 2a). This has parallels in other medieval art forms.

The aesthetics and techniques which produced

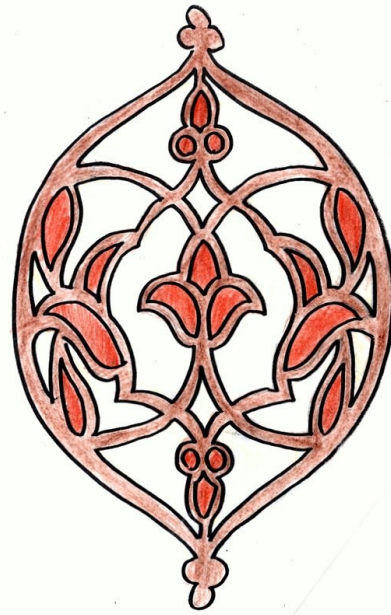


Fig 2a Author's drawing of one of the *calado* motifs on the bow case.

the bow case and quiver are part of a continuum in the south of the Iberian peninsula. There, farmers and shepherds have made leggings and shoulder bags that indicate a living heritage, away from the courtly and military environment but retained and developed in farming communities sidelined on account of their lack of means and political power. The lonely places where such archaic art continued to be produced - the southern plains and mountains - testify to a time untouched by visual pollution and influences but filled with symbolism. Symbols such as the Tree



Fig. 2 Bow case. Photo: National Archaeological Museum, Madrid.



Fig. 3 Detail of a rider seen from the back Iran, 1530-1535 (Digard 2002, 223).

of Life, celebrating Nature's growth, even if its meaning became lost over the centuries. These filigree patterns may look simplistic to us since we are very far from representing the breath of life by a symbol.

More information and many images can be seen in a longer online article on these two pieces, which is free to download:

https://issuu.com/almadan/docs/al-madanonline22_3

Reference

Digard, Jean-Pierre *et al.* (2002) *Chevaux et cavaliers arabes dans les arts d'Orient et Occident* (Exhibition catalogue), Paris, Gallimard.

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Getting to know you...

Sue Winterbottom
ALG Newsletter Editor



My career in archaeology began in 1976 when, after a short and not particularly successful stint as a teacher, I took to the outdoors as an itinerant digger – firstly with Nene Valley Research at Peterborough, then with York Archaeological Trust and eventually with Carlisle Archaeological Unit. At both York and Carlisle I had the excitement of recovering whole, well-preserved objects from waterlogged deposits, something unknown on the dry sites I had worked on in holidays. To be fair, we did find complete skeletons - and the occasional lead coffin - while working on the Poundbury Camp Roman cemetery dig during the 1976 summer heatwave.

On the Coppergate site at York I got used to an abundance of wood and leather finds. When I moved on to the excavations at Annetwell Street, Carlisle in 1981, I was soon once again among deep deposits rich in organic materials with outstanding levels of preservation. Earlier excavations by the late Dorothy Charlesworth had discovered the south gate and rampart of the 1st century Roman timber fort, from which came significant quantities of leatherwork which had already been conserved but not studied in detail. We were soon filling bags and then large boxes with more wet leather: tent panels, saddlery, shield covers, shoes and offcuts. There were also tent pegs and poles and a large rectangular timber with a circular 'head' covered in slashing cuts, optimistically interpreted as a target for sword practice.

Post-excavation recording of the wood and leather finds was done in-house and the leather finds were somewhat arbitrarily divided into shoe and non-shoe categories, the latter falling to me, while at the same time I was tasked with recording all the structural timber. Many months spent examining, drawing and cataloguing the still wet leather followed, during which I was in regular contact with Carol van-Driel Murray who was then studying similar material from the excavations at Vindolanda. We identified and classified new seam and hem types and considerably advanced our joint understanding of the construction and appearance of the tents used by 1st-2nd century Roman soldiers. This was when I first heard about the ALG and became a member. In 1995 Carlisle hosted a meeting of the group, which features in Newsletter No.1 (2nd series). A publication of leather and other organics from the nearby Castle St. site appeared in 1991 but, despite its significance and the abundance of finds of all kinds, the Annetwell Street report remains unpublished, to the frustration of the numerous specialists around the country who contributed to it.

In breaks from Carlisle I spent 6 months supervising a medieval period excavation in Trondheim (Norway) most of which had been destroyed by the insertion of two later barrel-lined tanning pits. Two summers were spent digging at the Gormaz Castle site in Spain, an awe-inspiring walled fortress from the period of Islamic occupation which dominates the skyline south of Burgo de Osma in the province of Soria. Back home again I spent a period with Phil Cracknell

in the drawing office, illustrating finds of many different materials for various Carlisle reports. In 1990 I was invited to travel to Egypt to record and subsequently publish leather finds from the on-going excavations at the Roman quarrying site of *Mons Claudianus* in the eastern desert: another unforgettable experience!

Project funding dried up at Carlisle and I was made redundant in 1997. A change of career followed, first as a volunteer and then as a staff member at a day centre for adults with moderate and severe learning difficulties. In 2000 my father died suddenly and I moved to Greater Manchester to live with my mother who was not well enough to manage on her own. Whilst there I agreed with Quita Mould that we could both work from home on leather finds from the new 'Millennium Excavations' in Carlisle (some trenches on the site of a pedestrian subway linking Carlisle Castle and the Museum). Remarkably, the site delivered two substantially complete

leather covers from Roman cavalry saddles. Close study of these led to a change in our understanding of their form and how they fitted onto the saddle (see ALG Newsletter 24, for September 2006).

In 2005 I took over from Esther Cameron as editor of the ALG Newsletter and set up the group's first website – a very homespun affair, hosted on my computer, which nevertheless survived until 2022. Since 2006 I have lived in Stoke-on-Trent and spend much of my time helping to organise and lead local urban walking groups. I am rarely faced now with excavated leather finds but I very much enjoy the direct contact, via the Newsletter, with others who continue to make these discoveries. As a result of collaboration with Jana Obročnicková the website is now entirely online and in WordPress format, which means that it can continue to be worked on by others when my own involvement ends.

A note to members from the Treasurer

A big thank you to everyone for paying this year's subscriptions promptly, it really does make my task easier. If you have forgotten, please take this as a gentle reminder that subs are due. If you would like to leave the ALG, you only have to drop me an email to get your details removed from our records.

On the right you will find my report on the group's finances for the past year.

Esther Cameron

ARCHAEOLOGICAL LEATHER GROUP		
Treasurer's Report for the Year Ending 31 st December 2023		
Income and Expenditure Account		
Income		£
Subscriptions 2023	38 @ £10	380.00
	38 @ £12	456.00
	1 paid £12.97	12.97
	1 paid £11.83	11.83
	2 paid £9.74	19.48
	2 paid £9.00	18.00
	1 paid £8.76	8.76
Subscriptions in advance 2024	1 @ £10	10.00
	1 paid £9.88	9.88
Donation	1 x £5	<u>5.00</u>
		931.92
Expenditure		
ALG/ICON speaker's travel		140.82
ALG Newsletter costs		63.99
Paypal charges		29.04
Website charges		32.88
Zoom subscription		<u>143.88</u>
		410.61
Surplus for year 2023		521.31
Balance		
Balance on 31 st December 2022		7,073.31
Surplus for year 2023		<u>521.31</u>
Balance on 31 st December 2023		7,594.62
Closing cash balance		7,594.62
Less subscriptions in advance for 2024		<u>19.88</u>
Total assets on 31 st December 2023		7,574.74

A medieval patten strap from the Thames

by C. Dixon, D. Paalman, J. Skalská Obročníková and M. Volken

On the Thames foreshore at the end of December 2022 mudlarker Charlie Dixon spotted a leather fragment, richly decorated, laying on the stones (Fig. 1). It must have only recently become dislodged from the anaerobic Thames mud that had protected it for centuries. Luckily, he met another mudlarker that day who knew how to conserve the leather. But what was the object part of? Charlie sent photos to the Archaeological leather Group and a request for identification. The general response was that it was likely to be a strap for a woman's leather-covered cork patten. The shape of the patten strap shows it most likely belonged to a style Bruges-PC, popular during the late 14th to mid 15th century (Volken 2022, 95), (Fig. 2). The find and its identification were reported in ALG Newsletter No. 58, for September 2023 and a photo appeared on the cover of that issue. Further research has been done on the object and we can now say more about it.

The patten strap is made from a triangular piece of cow leather, measuring ca. 4.5 x 6.8 cm, and decorated on the grain side with a blind embossed design from a wood mould. (Fig. 3) The



Fig. 1 The patten strap as found on the Thames foreshore by Charlie Dixon. (Photo by C. Dixon)

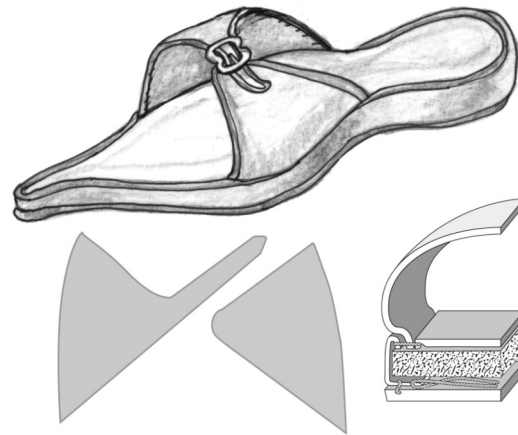


Fig. 2 The 'Bruges' style leather-covered cork patten, the patten strap shapes and the construction profile. (Drawing M. Volken)

decoration is crisp and clean, showing no signs of wear, so the cork patten was presumably thrown away or lost when new. The depth of the carving on the wood mould reached to 2.5 mm, visible by the relief on the leather fragment. The decoration consists of a triangle filled with three leaves, one in each corner of the triangle and a central boss. One side of the triangle shows a curved line, the other two sides are straight lines. Visible on the two straight sides of the triangle is a band containing an acanthus scroll. The details of the wood mould are very clear and even a possible crack in the wood mould is visible as a raised line crossing the curved border and onto the lower leaf. The blind embossed decoration extends beyond the patten strap shape and shows the decoration was not designed for the size of the patten strap, rather being intended to fit the shape of a larger piece.

The edge of the patten strap with the curved line is damaged and the original front border is missing. The breakage extends from the sole/upper margin to the top where the attachment would have been. Because the top part is missing it is not possible to determine if the strap continued as a narrow band or if it was the area where the buckle was fixed. The back edge and flesh side of the strap shows fine whip stitches that would have held a narrow, folded edge binding band and the lining to the decorated strap piece. The whip stitch holes enter through the plain cut edge and come out on the flesh side but there are no imprints of a thread, showing it did have a lining as well as a small edge binding. Along the lower edge of the strap is the

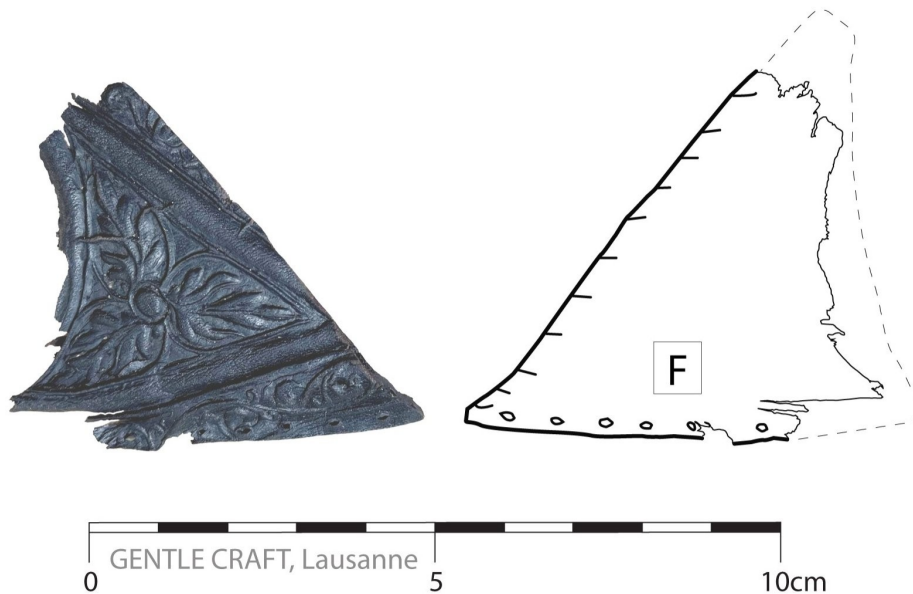


Fig. 3 The London patten strap: decorated grain side and drawing of the flesh side. (Photo by C. Dixon, drawing M. Volken)

sole/upper margin showing the stitch holes typical for a leather-covered cork patten. The strap's sole/upper margin was included in the seam holding the insole, the strap and the cork covering together (Fig. 2, lower right corner).

The beautiful decoration inspired Charlie to study it some more and he noticed that the design on the patten strap matched that on the toe part of a leather-covered cork patten insole from Dordrecht NL (Volken 2022, 112, Fig. 51). But how close was the design on the London patten strap to the Dordrecht insole? Were they the same size? Could the two pieces have been made using the same mould? The London strap was obviously made with a deep relief wood mould and from thick leather - but could the Dordrecht insole have been made from the same wood mould and its thin leather merely compressed, giving the appearance of having been made with a metal mould? The only way to find out would be to make a close comparison of both items. Charlie prepared a photograph of the strap with a scale for size, plus many other close-up views, and sent them to Marquita Volken.

At Dordrecht, Deborah Paalman provided access and information about the patten insole (Inv. No. 9701.639.003). It was found during the excavations at the Statenplein site in a context dated to the 14th and 15th centuries. Because the insole has a rip through the middle section it has

been restored and mounted on a cradle for safe storage. It was not included in the short report about some of the finds from the Statenplein site at Dordrecht, only as a poorly made line drawing in the general book about archaeological finds of pattens. (Dorst 2014 and Volken 2022, cited above).

New photographs were taken and detailed observations of the insole were made by Jana Skaliská Obročniková, who happened to be studying the purses at Dordrecht in August 2023. Initial observations of the insole for a left patten showed it was made from thin (ca 1.0-1.2 mm) calf leather and the blind pressed decoration was most likely made with an engraved metal mould. The grain surface of the insole is quite worn and missing in many places, but the middle, near the ripped part, is the best preserved (Fig. 4). The engraved lines are fine but shallow, with very low relief on the leaves and scrolls. The background (the top level of the mould) of the centre medallion and triangular sections with decorative scrolls and leaves is exceptionally smooth and dark. The overall appearance of the blind embossed relief is that it was made with a metal mould. The new photographs also revealed details in the design of the large medallion at the centre showing the image to be an escutcheon containing an eagle with outstretched wings.

The observations of the Dordrecht insole show it was embossed with a low relief metal mould



while the London patten was clearly made using a deeply carved wood mould, yet the decorative designs are identical. Using to-scale photographs of the London patten and the Dordrecht insole, the designs were compared by overlay: the designs and scale at first glance are identical in size, given a small margin for distortion from the angle used to take the photographs (Fig. 5). By matching up the curved sides of both examples, the London strap fits neatly over the triangle at the toe of the Dordrecht insole. The visible lines on the Dordrecht insole are completed by those on the London strap. This shows that the original drawing or pattern for the moulds was identical, and both were for a left insole. The difference in techniques for making the moulds reveals small differences between the metal mould and the wood mould. Overall the metal mould for the Dordrecht insole is very shallow with low relief: the leaves and scrolls in particular lack multiple levels. The London strap has multiple levels on the leaves, including centre veins that rise proud. These levels are created with each pass of the chisels used to scoop out the wood to make the mould. The harder and thinner metal base for an engraved, or even cast, mould is less amenable to multiple level relief. The metal mould is more exact due to the types of burins and engravers (small chisel tools) used

Fig. 4 Close-up of the Dordrecht leather patten insole, middle section: Inv. No 9701.639.003. (Photo by J. Skalská Obročníková)

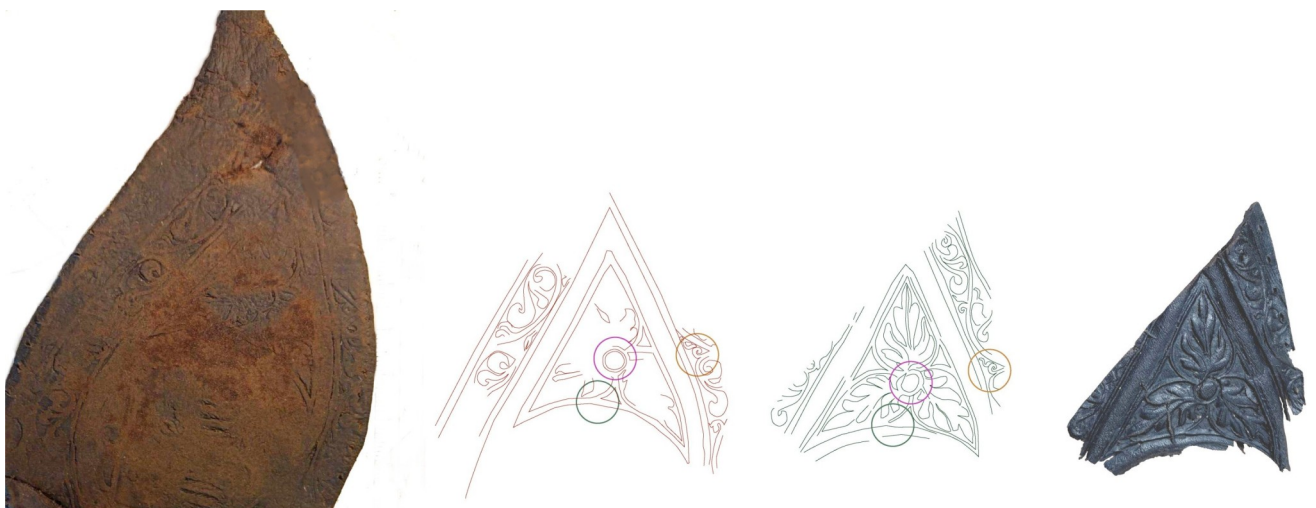


Fig. 5 Comparison of the Dordrecht insole and the London strap, circles indicate the differences in the patterns. (Photos by J. Skalská Obročníková and C. Dixon, drawings by M.Volken)

and the resistant substrate: making a level of detail not possible with wood chisels and the relatively softer and more friable wood substrate. Notably, the boss at the centre of the triangle on the Dordrecht insole is perfectly circular while the boss on the London strap is oval with an incomplete ring around. A second difference is on the right side of the triangle, the small curlicue is rendered differently on the London strap than on the Dordrecht insole. A third difference is the triangular frame between the leaves along the curved section; on the Dordrecht insole the triangle is complete but on the London strap one side does not meet up with the curved border.

The research journey from a small leather patten strap found on the Thames foreshore started with a simple inquiry to the Archaeological Leather Group and led to an international coalition of collaborators from England, The Netherlands, the Czech Republic and Switzerland. The results show the use of different techniques for producing blind embossed decorations from a single original pattern. The crack in the wood mould visible on the London strap may be a clue to the development of metal engraved moulds. Embossing a large surface like an insole would require a mould substrate strong enough to withstand the pressure of a press and obviously wood was not strong enough. The question of where the leather pieces originated remains a subject of future research. The Netherlands appears to have been the source of most decorated leather pattens, but could there equally have been a production centre in Belgium or even London? A recent discovery of a decorated insole for a patten for the left foot at Bruges shares the same decorations as an example in the British Museum collection (Moens *et al.* 2023, 18, Fig. 9; BM 1856,0701.1690). The decoration on both of these patten insoles has the same spatial organisation as the Dordrecht insole and has the triangle with three leaves around a central boss like the London patten strap.

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