



ARCHAEOLOGICAL LEATHER GROUP NEWSLETTER

58 September 2023

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www.archleathgrp.org.uk



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Editor's note

Hello to all and a particular welcome to the new members who have joined the group over the last six months. Membership currently stands at 99 (the highest number ever, I believe) and will surely pass the 100 mark very soon.

At this year's AGM Arianne Panton replaced Yvette Fletcher as ALG Chair. Heartfelt thanks go to Yvette for her service as Chair since June 2016, a period during which we had to rethink our way of operating due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Yvette steered the group successfully through the necessary changes, with the result that our meetings can now be attended by many more of the international membership. Arianne introduces herself to members with a personal pen-portrait which you can read on page 10.

In this issue of the newsletter André Veldmeijer and Salima Ikram ask for your help in understanding the purpose of some mysterious leather finds from Egypt. Quita Mould reviews two reference books which are essential reading for anyone studying ancient footwear and wishing to know how it was made. Enquiries received by the ALG on a range of leather-related subjects are again reproduced here, together with the helpful replies from ALG members.

If you would like to contribute something to the next newsletter please let me know. Information about recent finds from excavations, whether in the UK or abroad, is always welcome as are details of new publications. The deadline for contributions will be the end of February, 2024.

Sue Winterbottom

The Annual General Meeting 3rd May, 2023

The meeting was held via Zoom. 21 members attended and the minutes can be read in the Members' section of the ALG website.

Elections to the Committee

Yvette Fletcher stood down after two terms as Chair. Arianne Panton was elected to replace her. The Treasurer and Editor are reappointed

annually, so long as they are willing to continue and Esther Cameron and Sue Winterbottom were reappointed to these roles respectively. Pieta Greaves stood down as Meetings Co-ordinator and this post is currently vacant. Rosie Bolton and Jana Obročniková have been re-elected as Ordinary Members of the committee.

After the business part of the meeting we were treated to two excellent presentations. Riikka Alvic, a marine archaeologist from the Finnish Heritage Agency, gave an illustrated talk on the large cargo of vegetable tanned hides recovered from a shipwreck near the island of Juktenskoben in southern Finland. A Russian coin from the ship suggested an eighteenth century date and that the hides were coming from St. Petersburg, destined perhaps for Holland, England or France. The hides were shipped in cylindrical bundles, formed from several hides rolled up together and preservation was such that identifying marks, probably merchant's marks, could be seen in places.

Owen Humphreys, Senior Finds Specialist at Museum of London Archaeology, then summarised the current state of research on leather from Roman London. While London has produced some spectacular finds, the collections from different excavations have so far tended to be studied in isolation, with no attempt to establish an overview and a consistent methodology. This is what Owen hopes to remedy. Both talks were followed by animated discussion and, for those who missed them, they can be found online in the Members' section of the ALG website under 'Videos of online meetings'.

Save our Skins! 27th June 2023, London

Conference review by Arianne Panton

The *Save our skins! Archaeological Leather – Research and Conservation* conference marked the first joint event between the Icon Archaeology Group and the Archaeological Leather Group, to discuss all things skins! The conference adopted the (ever popular) hybrid approach to attendance, with in-person attendees gathering at the Museum of London's Resource Centre. This was the first in-person event I have at-

Cover photo: Part of a leather patten strap recovered from the River Thames foreshore in London.

Photo by Charlie Dixon

tended post-pandemic, so it was great to catch up with familiar faces, meet many new ones, and engage in some thought provoking conversations throughout the day. The benefits of offering online attendance were also evident with over 100 people tuning in from across the UK, Europe, Canada and America, and actively participating in the Q&A sessions - credit here should be given to **Luisa Duarte** and **Riva Boutylkova** for managing the technical side of things with few hiccups.

There were 10 talks throughout the day and 2 shorter poster-style presentations. These were arranged into 4 sessions which were loosely organised by subject type, providing a logical progression throughout the day.

Session 1 included 3 talks focused on leather production. **Jackie Keily** started off the day in the local vicinity discussing London's medieval leather trades using archaeological and documentary evidence gathered over the past 60 years to pitch the ebb and flow of leather production and related industries through the City and beyond. Being a Londoner myself, it was great to learn more about the origin and histories behind many familiar landmarks.

The second talk took us to prehistoric Sweden where **Stella Carlson** discussed leather finds from a boat grave at Valsgarde in Uppland. Stella presented the results of analysis using the Zooarchaeology by Mass Spectrometry (ZooMS) technique on different leather objects which highlighted preferences for skins of specific species in the manufacture of certain objects.

Our final talk of this session was by **Lucy-Anne Skinner**, whose presentation focused on stola (or 'mummy braces') that have been found placed across the chest of mummies from the Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (c. 1069-664 BC). Lucy introduced us to a systematic method of species identification developed as part of her PhD which uses standardised quadrants to assess follicle hole density and provide information on breed and age of the animal. With Lucy's research this technique, alongside ZooMS, identified the prominent use of gazelle skin for these decorative items. It is an easy and cost-effective technique to obtain nuanced species information which will definitely have application in my own work, and I'm sure many others'. Both Stella's and Lucy's talks demonstrated the huge potential

for the application of ZooMS with skin materials, and its relative accessibility.

After the break, session 2 included two talks that focused on material analysis. The first one - presented by **Angela Middleton** and **Diana Davis**, on behalf of a collaborative team from Historic England and the National Museum of the Royal Navy - focused on paint remains on leather from an extremely rare example of a Barracuda aircraft. Using FTIR and XRF analysis of the paint sample (and some sharp detective work) the team were able to identify the original manufacturers of the aircraft and aid in identifying the pilot and crew on board when the plane crashed. Discussions after the talk further delved into the complex ethical considerations associated with such findings, which was particularly interesting.

Our final talk before lunch was presented by **Lu Allington-Jones** and **Ranbir Bailey** from the Natural History Museum, London, who discussed conservation considerations in the context of a museum collection which simultaneously acts as a living specimen archive. We learnt about how DNA analysis was used on taxidermy specimens to identify high and low impact techniques for the treatment of fat burn, and how this now plays a key factor in the conservation decision-making process. Ranbir, the Molecular Biology Lab Manager emphasised the need to re-test established treatments as new analytical techniques become available, a plug conservators from all specialisms could surely relate to.

After a delicious lunch, and a look at some beautiful examples of archaeological leather finds brought along by ALG member Dr Owen Humphreys from recent excavations in London, our third session continued with 3 talks focused loosely around condition and treatment assessments. The first talk by **Eliza Jacobi** discussed a collection of Roman archaeological leather from Valkenburg in the Netherlands. The collection has been largely neglected in terms of research and conservation; most of it now brittle, unrecognisable, and inaccessible for study. Eliza shared the results of a pilot project which identified a suitable method for humidification and reshaping, which has allowed for identification of some of the leather. Future efforts look promising in imparting new life into the collection and making it accessible. I look forward to following this as the project proceeds.

The second talk in this session was by **Rosa Fitt-Conway** and **Elsa Price** who discussed an ongoing project at Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery (Carlisle) to catalogue and condition survey their vast leather collection from sites along Hadrian's wall. The speakers reflected on several challenges they have faced over the project, such as inadequate storage conditions, but reported overall success in their approach to date and thankfully the realisation that most of the leather isn't in as poor a condition as originally thought! Much of the work has been carried out by a dedicated group of volunteers, which was illustrated in the sheer amount of finds the team have managed to assess within a short time frame.

For the final talk of this session, we re-visited the Natural History Museum, London, to look at remedial treatments used on the taxidermy collection. Through several case studies, **Efstratia Verveniou**, **Arianna Bernucci** and **Lauren Burleson** demonstrated a range of fun and innovative methods of fur replication which I look forward to playing around with in the studio. Post talk questions about the future impact on analysis of such treatments tied in nicely with themes explored by their colleagues earlier in the day.

There were two additional short presentations before the afternoon break; one by **Dr David Nicolle** on military artefacts from Damascus. His talk really brought home the extreme difficulties faced by researchers working in war zones, and the amazing effort that continues to be carried out. The other by **Scarlet Crow** discussed the conservation treatment of a leather book cover from HMS Gloucester, which was wrecked in 1682. The talk was accompanied by an illustrated poster which was read and discussed further over a cup of coffee and biscuits.

The final session of the day included two treatment-based talks. The first by **Lydia Messerschmidt** addressed a topic which I'm sure many people in the audience could relate to – the impact of previous conservation treatments on archaeological leather. Whilst negative impacts were identified, Lydia presented a successful re-treatment which greatly improved the condition and readability of the objects.

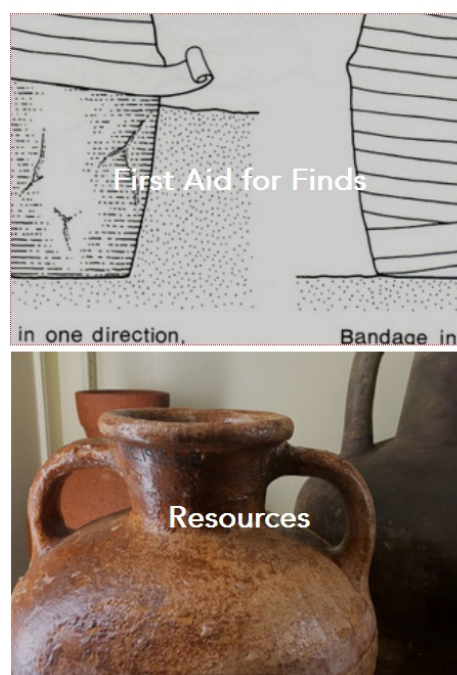
The final talk of the day came to us from North America (via video). **Melissa Allen** presented a

collaborative project on the conservation of leather shoes from a Civil War submarine, including the impressive work to lift the submarine intact and subsequent excavation of the sediment-filled interior to extract the leather and other finds. The highlight for me from this talk was the sheer scale of the project; currently spanning 23 years, with work ongoing.

Overall, I thought the day was a great success! The thing that stood out most for me was the impressive range of topics covered, which beautifully illustrated the broadness of topic – there really was something for everyone. Talks were kept to 20 minutes each, which allowed enough time to delve into the interesting parts of each topic whilst avoiding listener fatigue. The programme chairs, **Yvette Fletcher** in the morning (previous chair of the Archaeological Leather Group), and **Helen Ganiaris** in the afternoon (chair of Icon Archaeology Group), did extremely well at keeping to the programme timings, and active engagement by the audience in the Q&A sessions really added a dynamic element to the day. I hope this was the first of many more collaborative projects to come between the two groups.

Recordings of all presentations will be available on Icon's YouTube channel later in the year.

[An illustrated version of this review also appears on www.icon.org.uk]



Images: Icon Archaeology Group web page

YOUR QUESTIONS TO ALG

We have some catching up to do when it comes to reporting on enquiries received by the group. There was no room for any in the last issue and so nothing has appeared here more recently than from May 2022. Since the autumn of that year, however, we have received enquires on a whole range of subjects, most of which have had responses from our members.

Firstly, in September 2022 **Lisette Verspay** had some questions about a leather mitten which was among material she was researching. She wrote:

I have found some reference material in my own library, but not much and in some cases there are no pictures to compare. Therefore I am looking for other finds of mittens. Both late-Medieval and early

modern times. I don't have any context datings yet, so I don't know the age of the mitten.

Literature I now have (all late Medieval):

- *a find from Kampen, the Netherlands (with picture)*
- *a find published in Material culture in London in an age of transition (with picture)*
- *a find from Schleswig, Germany (with picture)*
- *a find from Konstanz, Germany (with picture)*
- *finds from Lübeck and Bremen (neither has pictures)*

Any suggestions from ALG members would be very welcome. I have attached some pictures of the mitten [see below]; also detailed pictures of the surface. It is very worn and I have trouble finding places where the hair implant is still visible. And even then, I find it hard to determine the type of leather. It is too thin and flexible to be cow, so my guess is calf or goat. Can you make any sense of it?

Thanks.

Mike Redwood replied, as to the surface images:

Looking at pictures three and four my guess would be goatskin.



Lisette's photos of the mitten and some detailed images of its surface.

Carol van Driel-Murray also responded:

Dear Lisette

In her superbly illustrated book Honderden.... Van hand tot hand: handschoenen en wanten in de Nederlanden voor 1700 (SPA, Zwolle 2015), Anne-marieke Willemsen has a chapter on mittens. Several of the 16-18th century examples look very like yours, though they do occur much earlier, if very infrequently.

I don't know if the book is still available - it's a mine of information about gloves and even though it's in Dutch, the copious illustrations make it an essential reference.

A few days later, this came from **Fred Hocker**:

Dear Lisette,

Your query about leather mitten finds reached me via my wife, Emma Hocker. I am the director of research at the Vasa Museum in Stockholm, Sweden. We have somewhere close to a hundred leather mittens similar to the one you illustrate, all found among the personal possessions of the crew of the Vasa, a Swedish warship which sank on its maiden voyage in 1628, so very well dated material. The mittens are being studied for an MA thesis by Emil Lagerquist, who may already have seen your query and answered you. If he has not, please let me know and I will put you in touch with him.

.....

In December 2022 this request for detailed advice came from **Stephen Gilmore** at Northern Archaeological Consultancy Ltd. in Belfast:

Morning all, I have just completed the excavation of an 18th century tannery (15 tanning pits surviving) in Northern Ireland, as a result of a planning condition, resulting in the recovery of samples of bark, wood chippings and several hundred pieces of archaeological leather in 14 A4 bags. These total around 10kg mostly in the form of off cuts of various sizes, possibly from shoemaking, but at least one of which is decorated. One of our issues is that the site was later badly polluted by diesel and other heavy oils. I am happy to provide photos of our excavation if they will be of use. My initial queries are:

Is there any preliminary cleaning and stabilisation that we can do with this material?

With your combined experience is major investigation of material from a tannery useful or likely to yield interesting results?

Has the potential diesel contamination compromised the usefulness of the samples?

And finally, are there one or more archaeological leather specialists working in Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland?

Any Information you could provide would be gratefully received. Thanks for your help.

Stephen received this reply from **John Nicholl**:

Hi Stephen,

I'll reply to your last question first. I am an archaeological leather specialist, based in Dublin and have previously worked with large assemblages of material from medieval and post-medieval tannery sites in Dublin. I also completed the leather report on Drumclay Crannog in Co. Fermanagh for the Dept of Communities in Northern Ireland.

In the case of one of the tanneries, located at New Street in Dublin, the site had also been badly polluted with diesel from a service station, which had been demolished. When I received the finds, they had been washed and then stored in double plastic bags.

Other tannery sites at Strand St. Great, Newmarket Square and Mill Street contained multiple tanning pits, constructed from timber and containing various residues from the tanning process.

Can you tell me where your tannery was located? It could be interesting to compare the material with the Dublin finds? I attach a copy of an article I wrote on the Mill Street site for Archaeology Ireland.

My initial answer to your second question is yes, but if you could send me some photos of the finds I could give you a better response.

.....

And now we come to 2023! In January, **Susanna Harris** of Glasgow University raised the following issue:

In Bronze Age burials, dark areas of soil surrounding an inhumation are sometimes identified as possible remains of ox-hides. What is the supporting evidence for this interpretation? For example, has anyone analysed the soils for tiny traces of leather, hair or chemicals that characterise skin, such as nitrogen (although could this be distinguished from human flesh)? I'm curious to know on what basis these interpretations are made.

Angela Middleton, senior conservator for His-

toric England, forwarded a response from her colleague Simon Mays, who wrote:

The relevant section of the Whitehorse Hill report has useful information but I am guessing that it is this well-known report that prompted the enquiry.

The York Interarchive Project looked at this sort of problem. My notes from a meeting I attended with them indicate that micromorphological analysis of soil blocks from postmedieval Fewston yielded traces of leather that were identified microscopically. Amongst textile fragments in soil, pyrolysis identified leather and wool from a mass grave site at Mechelen.

Unfortunately, publications from this large and rather interesting project have been somewhat sporadic since it ended some 8 yrs ago. Some participants have themselves joined the archaeological record or else have passed on to other research topics. I can't find any project papers specifically on findings relating to traces of archaeological leather. The chief protagonists in the above 2 publications were Brendan Keely and Matthew Pickering. Both are still at York University & I assume could be quizzed about chemical/micromorphological means of identifying leather traces in grave soils.

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Then in March, **Nick Wilson** got in touch from York on the topic of hobnailed shoes/boots:

I'm currently researching for a PhD at the University of York (Romanisation of landscape) and have completed a programme of excavations on a site in North Yorkshire. I enclose a photograph of an in-situ find and also an x-ray of this object [see opposite] Those parts in the red rectangles are not in their find position. It appears to be a hobnail boot and I wonder if you have any contacts who may be able to shed light on this? I have looked at the works of van Driel-Murray and Mould but can find limited information on the significance of this type of footwear.

The find came from a secure context within a ditch fill and appeared to be a deliberate deposit from when the ditch went out of use. Pottery evidence puts a date within the second century.

Many thanks for your help.

Carol van Driel-Murray replied:

This looks very like a disintegrated Roman shoe sole, lying sole up, with the hobnails nicely cleaned and left in situ. On the photo it seems that the nails



In-situ and x-ray images of the York find.

along the outer edge of the sole are a bit larger than the rest, something that you see quite often on heavy work shoes. I can't make out enough of the outline to suggest for which foot the shoe is, but it is certainly heavily nailed, in straight lines, characteristic for the second century.

As hobnails are often not recognised in time, there is not much comparative material from rural sites - if shoes are preserved there, they tend to come from waterlogged deposits like wells or ditches. But there is a nice example from Yorkshire, from Pontefract, where the hobnails come from a stock enclosure, and in that particular case, show that the herdsmen were wearing fashionable pointed hobnailed boots. I refer to this find in an article on the leather trades in Roman Yorkshire, eds. Pete Wilson and Jennifer Price: a pdf is attached. I don't know whether this site was more fully published, but there was a newsletter with some good photos of the hobnails in situ.

Considering the way shoes get dumped all over the place (look at a modern lay-by), it's unlikely that there is any particular significance to the find, unless there are other circumstances that might suggest ritual activity. The main interest of such records of hobnails on rural sites is to highlight the spread of

Roman clothing - and the specialised technology associated with its manufacture - to the rural population. Other than hobnails we in fact have very little evidence for this process. So every instance counts!

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Kathy Hall, from the INSTAP Study Center in Crete, was next to get in touch, having been advised to contact ALG by the Leather Conservation Centre (Northampton). In March she wrote:

I am working on a blade from the Bronze Age which I think has the remains of a leather scabbard preserved in the corrosion products. It is a layer 0.4mm thick, rippling above the blade, but separated from it by a small gap. I cannot see any fine structure under the microscope.

If there is anyone who might be able to recommend any article on identifying leather preserved in copper or bronze corrosion, I would be very grateful. I have found many for leather preserved in iron corrosion products, mostly on helmets, but practically nothing for leather on bronze. I am also interested in whether this measurement of 0.4mm would be a reasonable thickness for a scabbard (it seems maybe too thin?) Very grateful for any help you can give.

Esther Cameron replied:

The thickness of your 'leather', 0.4mm, is thin for a scabbard. In British prehistory and the early medieval period, scabbard linings are generally 1mm in thickness. These have been pared down, but in some cases hair and grain pattern are preserved at the interface between the blade and 'leather' lining.

So even if the 'leather' itself is poorly preserved, some evidence may be preserved on the blade surface.

If it is important to confirm that the rippled layer is indeed hidelleather, and you cannot establish it by ordinary microscopy, I suggest sampling for scanning electron microscopy which can show presence of skin structure in cross-section if well enough preserved. If the skin is not too mineralised, you might also consider ZooMS analysis.

She later added:

Following up on my previous email, two references:

Cameron E (2003) The dagger: hilt and scabbard, 99–101, in Baker, L; Sheridan, J.A. and Cowie, T.G. An Early Bronze Age 'dagger grave' from Rameldry Farm, near Kingskettle, Fife, Proceedings of

the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland 133, 85–123.

Cameron E; Greaves P; Northover P and O'Connor S (2014) Royal Forteviot: the recovery, conservation strategy and analysis of a Bronze Age dagger from a high status cist burial in E. Hyslop; V. Gonzalez; L. Troalen, and L. Wilson (eds.) Metal 2013 Edinburgh, Scotland, ICOM-CC metal working group conference proceedings, 21–28 [Ebook]

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In late May **Charlie Dixon** sent us an unusual enquiry, together with some photos (one of which is on the cover of this issue and another below):

Hey there,

I'm Charlie, a mudlark who searches the Thames foreshore in London. Last December I found this beautiful piece of tooled leather sitting on the surface in an area that can yield finds from Roman all the way up to modern day. It must've only just eroded out of the anaerobic mud.

A fellow mudlark Alessio has been conserving it for me ever since.

I'd love to know if anyone has an idea on its age or



The piece of decorated stitched leather recovered from the Thames foreshore.
Photo: Charlie Dixon.

what it may have come from. My guess is medieval-post medieval. I've seen some quite similar floral/ foliate designs with that central boss on 16th century Siegburg stoneware pottery.

Many thanks

Almost as soon as the request had been circulated to ALG members, this enthusiastic reply came from Marquita Volken:

Dear Charlie,

The lovely leather find is not tooled but printed (blind embossed) and is from a woman's leather covered cork patten. The shape of the patten strap could be a Style 'Bruges-PC' which usually dates to the first half of the 15th century (see style Bruges-PC, p.92, technique blind embossed p.98-100 in Marquita Volken, *Archaeological Footwear II: Sandals, Pattens and Mules from Roman, Mediaeval and Modern Periods*, 2022, SPA Uitgevers, Zwolle). It is a really beautiful find!

Best wishes

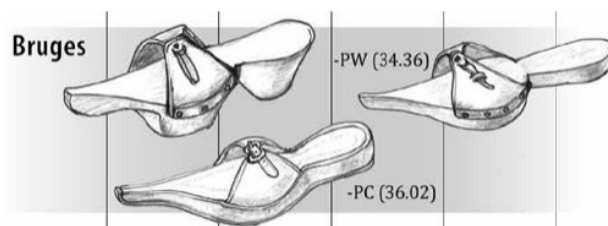
Marquita Volken

Gentle Craft Centre for Historical Leather

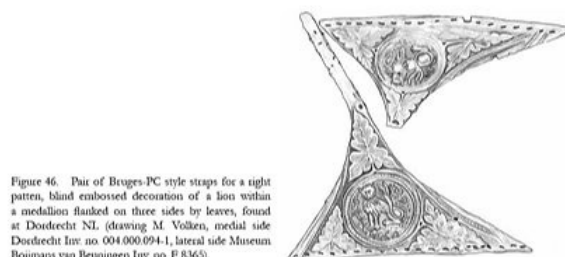
Rôtillon 10

1002 Lausanne Switzerland

An image of what a Bruges-PC patten would look like (lower example):



A similar pair of blind embossed straps for a Bruges-PC leather covered cork patten:



On three sides of the medallion, large leaves fill the corners, conforming to the triangular shape of the patten strap. The border along the opening edge has a rope twist between two fine lines. The border at the toe opening is composed of drilled dots between two lines. This pair of patten straps shows clearly that two separate wood block moulds were carved for the pattern. The lions are both

Editor's note: Unfortunately there is no room to include any more questions and answers here. Thank you for your responses to enquiries received since the end of May. They will appear in a future issue of the Newsletter.

Two recent publications

Medieval leather finds from the De Meersen site at Ypres (Flanders, Belgium):

Moens, J. & De Groote, K. (2022) *leper - De Meersen. Deel 2. De studie van het leer*, Onderzoeksrapporten agentschap Onroerend Erfgoed 248.

The 213 page research report is packed with line drawings and photos of the finds and is available as a free download at:

<https://publicaties.vlaanderen.be/view-file/52542>

Burial with only one sandal

André Veldmeijer has sent a link to a recent article describing a child burial at the Egyptian site of Amarna. The burial was unusual in that the well-preserved remains included only a *single* sandal, which was lying on the child's right femur.

Veldmeijer, A.J. (2023) 'On the presence of one sandal' in *Horizon*, Issue 23, pp.11-15

https://www.amarnaproject.com/downloadable_resources.shtml

The ICOM-CC Interim Meeting, October 2022

A report by Jana Obročníková

In October 2022 ALG members were invited by the ICOM-CC Leather and Related Materials Working Group to its 12th Interim Meeting. This was held online on 12-13 October and was well attended. The whole event was hosted in the Netherlands by The Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands.

Most of the lectures and pitches presented were about gilt leather, its treatment, restoration, how it was made and the history of the craft.

Several magnificent restoration projects were featured (from Germany and Norway), showing the enormous effort put into making these walls colourful and shiny again as they were when first made. An interesting take on the theme was a study of 19th century imitations of gilt leather walls in wallpaper, sourcing from contemporary sample books and advertisements.

A historical account on a similar theme was the presentation by Mara Nimmo & Mariabianca Paris from Italy on their archival research on the subject of damask leather. It included examples of how leather decorated in this way was used, problems the craftsmen had to deal with from neighbours complaining about the noises from their workshops and even a historical drawing of a device which was used to make the damask decoration on leather.

A pitch presented by Narguess Afzalipour was pre-recorded due to the political and security situation in Iran and presented quite a large leather bag excavated from the Chehrabad salt mine in Zanjan province. The bag was found among other organic material, including human remains, textiles, feathers and more. The bag is probably dated to c. 500 B.C. and was used for transporting the salt from the salt mine.

The two day conference brought much food for thought, and being held online allowed quite a wide spectrum of lectures from all over the world. The programme for the meeting is available online at:

<https://tinyurl.com/4npahupd>

The proceedings of the meeting are not yet online but when they are they will be well worth visiting.



Getting to know you...



Arianne Panton
ALG Chair



Arianne is Senior Conservator at the Leather Conservation Centre in Northampton, UK. In June this year she was appointed as Chairman of the ALG, taking over from Yvette Fletcher after two terms of committed service.

She writes:

“Like many fellow conservators I speak to, Conservation as a career was not originally on the cards, in fact I had never heard much about or given much thought to the profession. I did an undergraduate degree in History and Anthropology at Goldsmiths University in London, mostly through interest rather than being driven by any big career goals (although I did like the idea of ‘working in the field’ at some point, mostly because I love travelling).

I come from an art background, my grandad was an art teacher and, following in his footsteps, I completed an Art and Design foundation course after my A-Levels, and always tried to incorporate this into my other studies where possible. In the final year of my undergraduate degree, I went on a behind the scenes tour of the Pitt Riv-

ers Museum in Oxford, UK, where one of the conservators explained the treatment they were carrying out on a seal gut parka - this was my lightbulb moment! All of my interests seemed to align in this profession. Needless to say, this day marked the start of my journey into conservation.

I completed an MA in Principles of Conservation at University College London (UCL) and went to night school to shape up on my chemistry, before completing an MSc in Conservation at University College London in Qatar. I didn't know what to expect of Qatar and prior to being offered the place, had very little knowledge about the small country (this was many years before the 2022 World Cup), but I was fortunate enough to be awarded a scholarship, so embraced the opportunity with open arms. After the 2-year course, I remained in Qatar for a further 4 years working at UCL in their Conservation and Materials Science department and then on the opening of the National Museum of Qatar that took place in 2019.

During my studies and subsequent time in Qatar I became increasingly focused on the conservation of organic material, particularly in collections of social history and world cultures. On moving back to the UK in 2019 I started working for the Leather Conservation Centre (LCC), which seemed like a natural progression and I have been extremely happy here ever since. One of the things I enjoy most about working at the LCC is the vast breadth of objects that come through the studio doors. As leather is such a ubiquitous material, we are fortunate to work on a wide array of collection types, from archaeological material to contemporary fashion, and everything in between. No two days or treatments are the same, meaning there is always room for exploration and learning.

As the chairman of the ALG I hope to get to know many more of you over the next few years.

I am extremely passionate about outreach (and understand firsthand the benefit it can have), so am excited to have the opportunity to promote the interesting work of our group and its members."



Getting to know you...



Martin Moser
Long-term ALG Member



Martin writes:

"I was born in 1965, am happily married and have 2 children, beautifully grown up in the meantime. Although working full-time as a craftsman now, originally I do not come from the craft sector, but rather studied Japanese history and language at the universities of Munich and Fukuoka.

During and after my studies, I lived in Japan for a total of 6½ years, the last 4 of which I spent in Sapporo, where I worked at Hokkaido University. After our return to Germany, I then switched to the private sector and started working for an eCommerce start-up in Munich, where I held various positions over the years. During this time, I also spent 1½ years in Canada helping integrate a company we had bought there. After we sold our company to SAP in 2013, I stayed for another 6 years until finally I decided to start my own business with my long-time hobby of leatherworking and historical shoemaking in 2020.

I first began doing reconstructions and espe-

cially leatherwork almost 30 years ago through my involvement with a Roman Living History group, the VEX LEG VIII AVG, when I started building my own equipment. As it was still relatively difficult at that time to find good footwear, especially if you didn't have a lot of money, I also built my own caligae and subsequently also other Roman shoes. Over time, others took notice and it wasn't long before I also began making shoes to order for fellow reenactors.

Over the years, my interest in the history of footwear broadened ever more. Even though the bulk of the shoes I make are from the period of the Roman Empire, my reconstructions now cover almost everything from the Pharaonic period to the 18th century. On a side note, in recent years I have also widened my field to include reconstructions of other objects, e.g. sword scabbard fittings, Roman jet jewellery, silversmith's work, knives and much more. Although my customers include museums, exhibition organisers, heritage offices and archaeologists, the majority of my orders come from members of living history and reenactment groups, especially those who strive for a high degree of authenticity in their presentations and displays.

Particularly important to me in my work is historical research and, as far as possible, the use of contemporary techniques and materials. Accordingly, it was only a matter of time before I came across the Archaeological Leather Group and became a member. Through contact and exchange with craftsmen and professionals both in the ALG as well as with various other institutions and disciplines, I have been able to learn a lot and constantly expand and improve the field and the quality (I hope :-)) of my work. The great thing is that in a field as wide as the production, use and processing of leather through the centuries, hardly a week goes by without finding something exciting to spur on new projects!

You can find an overview of my work on my website www.resrarae.de"



The framed purse from Dordrecht: a reinterpretation and reconstruction

by Jana Obročníková

During the last two years I had several opportunities to visit Dordrecht's archaeological depository. Thanks to the patience and friendliness of Deborah Paalman I already spent about 10 working days measuring and drawing the purses and other accessories stored there. As I am interested in high medieval leather accessories, the book *Purses in Pieces* (Goubitz 2009) has always been my bible and a starting point for further research, so working with this material feels like a great privilege. I have searched for more specific technological details and working directly with the collection helps further my understanding of the whole theme. The first products of this work were published at a small historical textile conference in Hradec Králové, Czech Republic, this spring (Skalská Obročníková 2023).

The main focus of the published article is on the framed purse published previously in *Purses in Pieces* as a typical example of a **secondary-ring-framed purse** (Goubitz 2009, p.50 fig.76



Double-framed purse from the Dordrecht Museum collection after piecing the fragments together (inv. nr. 8101.004.004). Photo by Jana Skalská Obročníková.

and p. 51 fig 78). There are 4 pieces of leather under the inventory number 8101.004.004: a set of hems, two parts of a purse (mentioned by Olaf Goubitz on p.113, fig. 210) and a pleated flap. Contrary to Olaf Goubitz's interpretation, I had to conclude that these are parts of a regular **double-framed purse**. I included drawings, descriptions and interpretations of a further 2 framed purses from the collection, which were not published in Olaf Goubitz's book or other papers (or at least to my knowledge).

The full article (in the Czech language) together with the reasoning and research behind these conclusions is available on my Academia profile:

<https://tinyurl.com/4vj3j4x8>

An English translation is available on the ALG website at:

<https://tinyurl.com/25ezk984>

although you will need to go to the Czech version for the illustrations.

Based on my research I made a replica of the double-framed purse for the purpose of presenting the work to the conference. A short informal account of the reconstruction process, with illustrations, can also be found on my blog:

<https://tinyurl.com/394m9fr>

To make the replica it was necessary to reconstruct the form of the metal frame (which survives only in fragments) using contemporary il-



Replica of a double-framed purse. Photo by Jana Skalská Obročníková.

lustrations and the shape of the surviving leather components.

I am extremely thankful to Marquita Volken for her support and consultations through this process.

Goubitz, Olaf (2009) Purses in pieces: archaeological finds of late medieval and 16th-century leather purses, pouches, bags and cases in the Netherlands, Zwolle, SPA Uitgevers.

Skalská Obročníková, Jana (2023) "Měšce a taštičky přelomu středověku a novověku v archeologické sbírce Dordrechtského muzea", in Burianová, M., Posekaná, K. and Voda, P. (eds.) Seminář historie odívání Hradec Králové 2023, 134–50. Litomyšl, H.R.G.

Two Book Reviews by Quita Mould

Archaeological Footwear II: Sandals, Pattens and Mules from the Roman, Mediaeval and Modern Periods by Marquita Volken 2022. Zwolle: SPA Uitgevers. 295 pages ISBN 9789089320711 Paperback.

Archaeological Footwear: Development of shoe patterns and styles from Prehistory till the 1600's by Marquita Volken 2023. Revised second edition. London: Archetype Publications Ltd. 408 pages ISBN 978190949236 Paperback

I am reminded of a popular British saying 'you wait ages for a bus to come along and then two come along at once'. Recently, I was delighted to see the arrival of a major footwear publication, Archaeological Footwear II: Sandals, Pattens and Mules from the Roman, Mediaeval and Modern Periods by Marquita Volken. Then, hot on its heels, (see what I did there?) came the revised second edition of Archaeological Footwear: Development of shoe patterns and styles from Prehistory till the 1600's, an update to the original volume published in 2014.

To tackle these in reverse order of their publication, the revised second edition of Archaeological Footwear is just off the press (April 2023), this edition being published by Archetype Publications. We are told that the revisions are to Chapter 5, which saves those of us with the first edition frantically scouring the entire new volume attempting to pinpoint the changes. This

chapter contains all the real 'meat' of the book and new findings from a further decade's worth of research are incorporated, resulting in some significant changes. Several new styles have been added, particularly to the Roman and Early Middle Ages sections; dates for some have been adjusted, a small number of new figures inserted and more images are now in colour. Consequently, page and figure numbers differ slightly from those of the first edition but, by a shortened discussion at the end of the chapter, the differences are limited and by the start of Chapter 6 the page and figure numbers of the two editions are, miraculously, back in step. Personally, I found the expanded sections on the Early Middle Ages, which incorporate new information gained from the author's extensive work on burial finds, among the most interesting additions. Chapter 5 now greatly benefits from section headings with date ranges and sub-headings to help the reader navigate their way through the text. The new revised edition has the references removed from the text and given as footnotes.

For those not familiar with this work, it is the culmination of research undertaken for a PhD. With knowledge gained from many years spent conserving and reporting on archaeological leather the author gathered together published information on the widely varying styles of footwear found in NW Europe, dating from prehistory through to the early modern period. Though this material differed greatly in style and detail of presentation she corralled this disparate information into a series of primary cutting patterns for shoe construction. These cutting patterns illustrate how footwear was constructed from the raw material available and adaptations made through time. Related shoe styles which share basic characteristics, but may vary in cutting pattern, have then been gathered together and placed in a chronological framework using the context dating provided by the published examples identified. A catalogue of each shoe style is given, grouped by cutting pattern, with a brief description, date range and published sources. Along the way, the various shoe constructions, stitches, seams, and fastenings are described and the best ways of recording them discussed.

Archaeological Footwear II, is a companion volume dealing with the lighter footwear types not covered in the first volume such as sandals, mules and slippers, along with clogs and pattens for use in wet and muddy conditions outdoors.

In these categories, items made of wood, cork and vegetable fibres are included as well as leather and the coverage extends into the early 18th century. The earlier chapters deal with Roman sandals, bath slippers, mules and clogs, followed by chapters on pattens, mules and chopines of medieval through to the early modern period. The last quarter of the book is devoted to a series of reconstructions - giving details and photographs of how the author went about making thirteen of the shoe styles previously described. In this, Archaeological Footwear II echoes the format of Marquita Volken's Covering the Blade volume (Volken and Goubitz 2020), where reconstructions of a range of sword scabbards and knife sheaths are given.

These reconstructions, involving much revising of ideas and previously held assumptions, helped the author work out how individual items of footwear were made and this insight is fed directly into the preceding chapters. In turn, seeing the processes involved in manufacture greatly increases our understanding of the archaeological leatherwork that we recover and the seams, holes and impressions seen on it. The text is enlivened by some colour images as well as the beautiful line drawings that we have come to expect. Though some production difficulties were experienced this in no way detracts from the huge amount of research and accumulated knowledge that this volume represents. Faced with some unassuming and highly fragmentary but applicable shoe parts, I put the 'system to the test'. I was surprised by being able to identify the types of footwear and the principal material of their missing soles (leather, cork or wood) from some very small, but which proved to be diagnostic, fragments of surviving strap. I had to fight to control the rather unattractive smugness produced when able to show off this skill to unsuspecting colleagues. Sadly, I fear that once Archaeological Footwear II is in wide circulation and everyone has a copy this pleasure will be denied me.

Seen together, Archaeological Footwear I and II form an ambitious and monumental piece of work which all those who work with archaeological footwear will reference. What is more, it provides a solid jumping off point for future research for which we will all be grateful.

Volken, M. and Goubitz, O. (2020) Covering the Blade. Archaeological leather sheaths and scabbards, Zwolle: SPA Uitgevers.

Puzzling Leather Objects from Temple Magazines

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Introduction

If one wanders through a stone temple somewhere in Egypt, many people do not realise that this building is only part of a much bigger complex or even the heart of a sort of mini-cosmos. Actually, temples were surrounded by working areas, magazines and living quarters for those involved in running the complex. Often, long after the temple ceased to function, people made their houses and other structures within the protective walls. Archaeologists working at such sites should of course realise that the stratigraphy sometimes is incredibly complex: the cycle of re-use results in the mixing of objects from very different periods. While this is a relatively common phenomenon in Egypt, some temple complexes have an even more complicated depositional history, such as that found in the storage magazines associated with the temple of Ramesses II (who reigned from c. 1272 to 1212 BC) in Abydos.

Abydos, close to Sohag in Middle Egypt, is one of the oldest cities of ancient Egypt and certainly one of the most important archaeological sites, including huge tombs of Egypt's first pharaohs as well as many temples from various periods of the country's long history. Several archaeological missions work in various parts of this vast historical landscape and one team, directed by Dr. Sameh Iskander (New York University) who kindly invited us to study the remains, investigates Ramesses II's temple. The main site consists of a stone temple and, historically, archaeologists have paid little attention to the areas next to it. Only some test trenches were excavated here and there by people like Sir Flinders Petrie, the 'father' of modern-day Egyptian archaeology, well over 100 years ago. Thus, the area was virtually undisturbed by earlier archaeologists and although there was some digging by the local farmers to use the fertile mudbrick as fertilizer or building material, this area remained pretty much as it had been since its abandonment in the Christian period (c. 6th century AD).



Fig. 1. Above: the partially excavated magazine in overview. Below: cross-section of the contents. Photographs by Salima Ikram.

Iskander's excavations revealed that the temple proper was flanked by a palace to the south and storage magazines and a garden to the north. This arrangement is also seen in Ramesses II's mortuary temple, the 'Temple of Millions of Years' in Luxor's West Bank. The garden area had been re-purposed in the Christian era to support more agriculture. The magazines, adjacent to this area, were emptied or were already empty, except for one. This magazine provided unexpected surprises as it was stuffed with all sorts of objects (Fig. 1): over 2000 mummified rams, mummified dogs, sheep, goat, a significant amount of pottery, some papyri inscribed in the demotic script, and a large quantity of leather items. The stratigraphy of the deposit, the mixture of objects, and the matrix indicate that the material was collected from more than one place and dumped into the magazine after its ceiling had collapsed. The deposit was made over a brief period of time - perhaps over the course of a single day. The pottery suggests Ptolemaic to early Roman times (c. 332 BC to AD 100). Be this as it

may, it does not mean that the deposit was made in Late Antiquity: it could just as well have been made in (slightly) more recent times; this, among other things, makes the identification of some objects a very exciting and interesting challenge, yet also complicated.

Mysterious Objects

A large amount of leather was found among the contents of the magazines, including many shoes, two (only!) sandals, several bags (made from complete animal skins as well as bigger bags made from sheets of leather stitched together) and a number of rather puzzling objects. It is these enigmatic objects that will be introduced here. It is hoped that ALG readers will be able to shed light on their identity and date. There are at least four, but possibly five such objects,

which are comparable in overall design, but vary in details. Below, the description of the most complete and best-preserved specimen is presented: Specialist Identification Number (SID) 095 (Fig. 2), with an occasional reference to one of the others.

Fig. 2C shows the object in its unfolded state, measuring 68cm by between 57cm and 44cm. It clearly tapers in width and is trapezoidal in shape. The body consists of two sheets (two thicknesses) of leather. On other examples a narrow strip of leather is secured down the middle by running stitch through both layers, thus dividing the body into two halves (arrow in Fig. 2B). On SID 095 the strip of leather is not present but the leather of the body has been stitched together along its middle. The objects are folded along this line, and the division sepa-

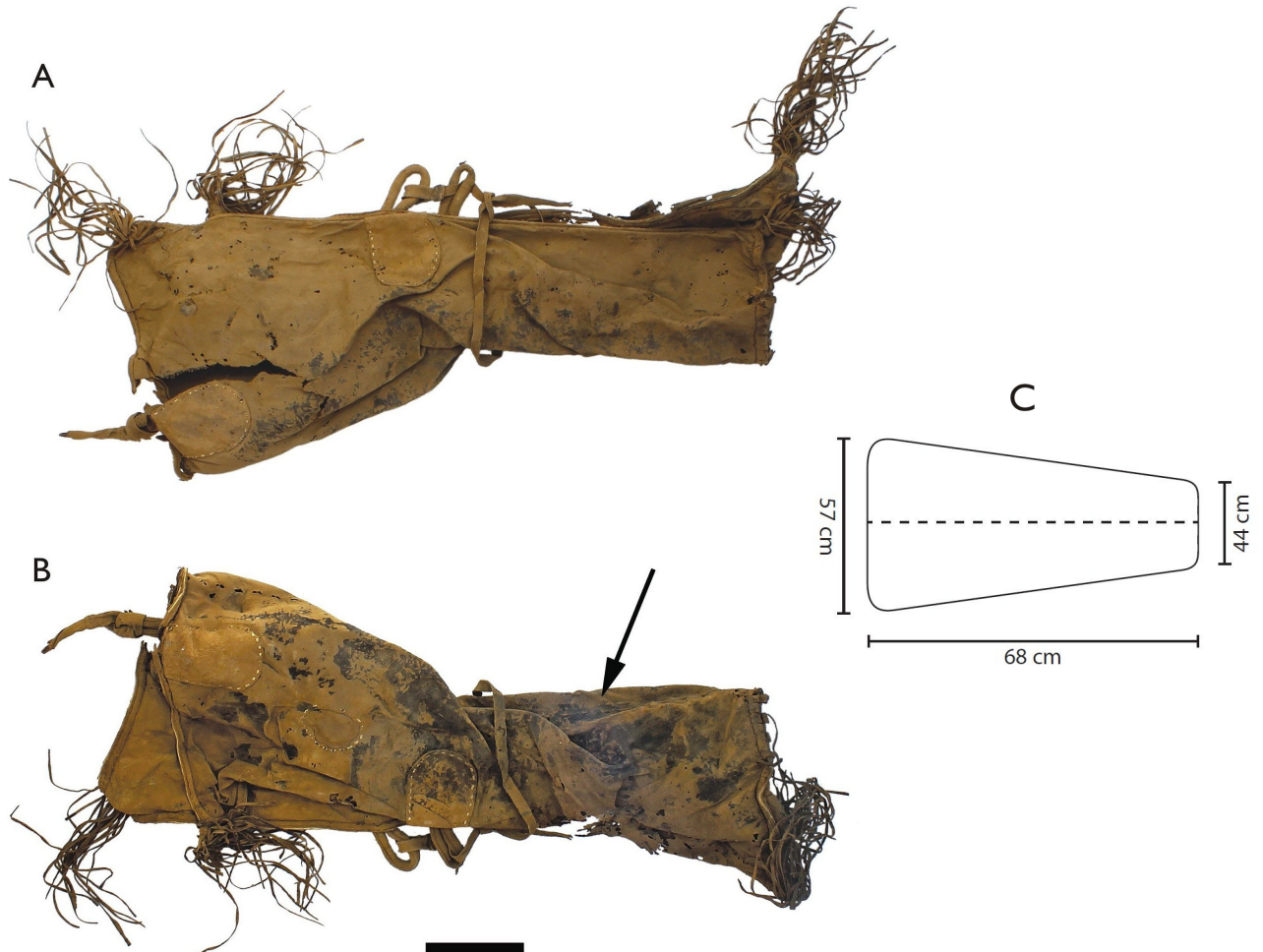


Fig. 2. Object SID 095. **A, B.** General views. The arrow points to the stitching that divides the object in two parts. Scale bar 10 cm; **C.** Diagram (not to scale) showing overall measurements. The dashed line indicates the stitching (in some cases with additional strip of leather) along which it is folded and which divides the object in two halves. Photographs/diagrams by André J. Veldmeijer/Erno Endenburg.

rates the object into two closed compartments. These compartments generally were not stuffed and in this case the object is complete and intact. However, one of the other specimens (SID 111) *had* stuffing inserted between the two outer layers that formed the body. Perhaps this was a more expensive version as it was also more elaborately decorated with appliqué and colour, as opposed to the plainer one used for the description in the present work. Where all other objects consisted of two layers of leather laid directly on top of each other, the stuffed example included a side piece, making the object much thicker. Unfortunately, the stuffing had largely disintegrated into dust within, but some complete threads could be identified, suggesting that the stuffing was of textile (discarded, worn textiles perhaps?).

The four corners in SID 095 are rounded and each of these is enhanced by a large tassel consisting of fine leather thongs (Fig 3a: A, B). The tassels are made by cutting a wide piece of leather into strips, leaving the top bit intact. The cut strip of leather is rolled up and the area just

above the thongs is tied with another strip of leather that is threaded through itself, preventing the strip from unrolling. The top of what is now a tassel is sandwiched between the seams at the corners. On one side, these corners are reinforced with leather patches cut in the shape of a slice of a pie. These running stitches are made of leather or rawhide. Both layers of leather have their own well-made edging (Fig. 3a: C, D), which consists of a folded strip of leather that is secured with running stitches and then pulled over itself. They are secured with interlocking stitching of flax thread with the inclusion of a passepoil (Fig. 3a: D). The passepoil seems to be intentionally of a different, lighter (almost white) colour. The two leather layers of the body must be combined in the edge and somehow secured, but seemingly they are not included in the second stitching. Obviously, this needs confirmation during the next study season.

The object has, at its wider end, two reinforcement patches of truncated oval shape (Fig. 3b: E), which are stitched at the edges

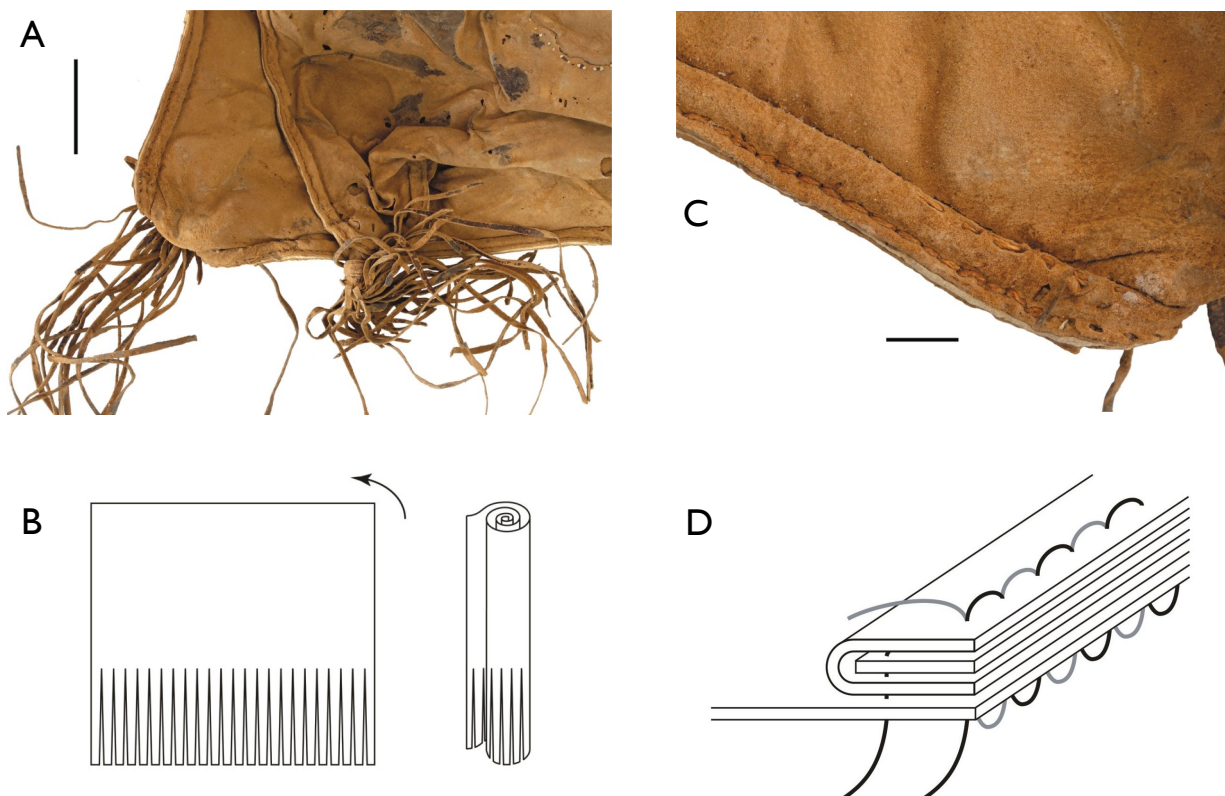


Fig. 3a. Details of SID 095. **A.** One corner with leather tassels. Scale bar 5 cm; **B.** Diagram of the construction of the tassel (not including the thong tied around); **C.** The well made edge. Scale bar 1 cm; **D.** Diagram of the edge stitching. Photographs/diagrams by André J. Veldmeijer/Erno Endenburg.



Fig. 3b. **E.** Reinforcement patch at one of the loops. The loop handle is visible on the left of the photograph. Scale bar 5 cm; **F.** Detail of the loop. Scale bar 5 cm; **G.** Comparable loops with reinforcement patches are inserted on the long sides of the object. Scale bar 5 cm; **H.** At the narrower end (cf. Fig. 2, A), two sets of loops with a drawstring running through them occupy part of the edge. Scale bar 5 cm; Photographs/diagrams by André J. Veldmeijer/Erno Endenburg.

with running stitches in rawhide. These patches are positioned one on either side of the body (in the folded state seen in Fig. 2) and also inside. Comparable patches are seen at the long edges too, again on the recto and verso. Thus, there are eight patches in total. Such patches are absent only at the narrow, tapering end, as will be discussed below. At the wider end the patches reinforce the attachment of a handle (Fig 3b: E) that, in folded state of the body of the object, would keep it closed and indeed might have

been used as handle proper.

This handle (Fig. 3b: E, F) consists of a loop, which is made of a lengthwise folded strip of leather with the edges stitched close together with interconnecting running stitches of fine flax thread. It has a core, but it is not clear of what material, though probably it is leather. Both ends are sandwiched between the two layers of leather forming the body of the object. A strip of leather is attached to this loop, but it is not en-

tirely clear how. The leather is crudely folded lengthwise and is secured by a strip of leather wrapped around it and threaded through itself (Fig. 3b: F). Comparable loops are added to the long edges (Fig. 3b: G), and are positioned about 10cm closer to the wider end (cf. Fig. 2) than the narrower end, possibly suggesting that at that end the object (or rather its intended contents) was heavier. To one of these loops is attached a strip of leather, which is pulled through the other loop, wound around the folded body of the object and knotted into a half knot as it returns to the loops (cf. Fig. 2). Probably this narrow strip of leather was meant to keep the object in its folded state, but it is not clear if this was done to store the object properly or whether it had a function in the object's use. The edge at the object's narrow end differs, since half of its length is replaced by a series of loops. These are made by simply folding two strips of leather lengthwise and cutting transverse slits in each (Fig 3b: H). The edges opposite the fold are sewn to the edges of the body's two layers. A drawstring is pulled zigzag-wise through the loops on one side and into those on the other, thus connecting them and allowing the opening to be tightened or loosened.

Although the description focuses on the object in its unfolded state, all of the objects are folded in a comparable way: along the stitching through the middle of the object from the wider to the tapering end (Fig. 2). Though this might indicate a standard storage procedure, it is perhaps more likely that the objects were used in the folded shape.

It is clear that the object was much used, judging by the fact that much of the grain surface has almost entirely worn away and, at least in this case, on all sides. The object has not yet been unfolded, so the extent of wear on the inner side is not entirely documented; wear on the other, less well-preserved, examples also still needs documenting. The wear is such that the follicle pattern could no longer be observed, making it difficult to identify the animal from which the leather is derived. The thickness of the leather of this particular piece, as well as its size, suggests that it was made of cowhide. A repair patch on the outside (and there may be more on the inside of the folded object, which could not be observed in its current state) suggest it was important to keep it in serviceable condition.

Identification

The fairly detailed description of the object was deemed necessary in order to allow the reader to think about a possible function with all the details of its construction to hand. Currently, there is no clue as to what these objects could have been used for. To the best of the authors' knowledge, there are no parallels known from Egypt.

The objects are all very well made and with more or less decoration (beside the tassels, another one has decoratively cut reinforcement patches). Moreover, the construction, type of skin, double layering and strong seams, suggest that they needed to be strong for whatever purpose they had. Our initial thought was that they are some sort of hassock or saddle but there are several arguments which makes us less convinced about this idea. First, one would expect stuffing rather than just two relatively thin sheets of leather. Second, though the asymmetry of the overall shape might still be usable, there is no reason to make them thus, and cloth donkey saddles are, to the best of our knowledge, roughly square and fairly thick. The bigger loops at the long sides and the wider end could have been used to tie the saddle with a rope or string around the belly and neck of the animal (though the reinforcements of these loops do not really explain such a function) but why the different edge with multiple loops and drawstring at the tapering end? A function as a saddle does not explain this different construction. A saddle from mid-1st millennium BC from Northwest China (Wertman, 2023) does have some features in common but it is symmetrical about both axes, has stuffing, and its overall shape is different.

The context of the Abydos finds suggests a date varying from Ptolemaic to (early) Roman, but here too we cannot wholly ignore, for the time being, the possibility that the dump was deposited in the magazine at a much later date, possibly gathering leather (and other objects) of earlier date from various places. The deposit even includes leather from a leatherworking site, as evidenced by offcuts, cut off uppers stored for repairs and pieces of hide folded for storage. The research is complicated by the fact that still so little research has been carried out on leather finds in Egypt, especially from the later periods (Late Period to Roman times), for a number of reasons.

Thus, we are open to every suggestion as to what these objects could be, where they might have come from, and when they were made. Abydos and its environs were part of a trade network and also, as an important urban centre, it would have hosted people from all over the ancient world (cf. the so-called Persian people in Elephantine with their own, very distinct, footwear, see Kuckertz, 2006; Veldmeijer, 2016: 23-28, 102-138). Therefore, the possibilities for their place of origin may extend to the realms of the people of Asia Minor, the Ottomans, the Touareg tribes, as well as more southerly-living ethnic groups and the various Bedouin tribes. Even a Western origin might be possible.

One suggestion, which shows an open mind as to the identification of these objects, relates to Ottoman weaponry. In Ottoman times, weapon belts were common. These leather belts could be very large and were made in such a way that they were very strong and able to hold many pieces of weaponry, not just one. But those in old photographs are rather different from the folded objects presented here: they are slightly smaller and also rectangular, with straps to tie them around the back. Moreover, usually they have more 'slots' for weapons, such as daggers and swords, created by extra leather layers/folds. Thus, this possibility was discarded. The (perhaps misleading) gun-shape of the folded object, might suggest that they were carriers for guns. Ottoman guns could be huge - especially those that were elaborately decorated and seemingly more a status object than a gun actively used on the battle field - and rather heavy, probably too heavy even for their leather weapon belts.

If our enigmatic objects were being used to carry guns, it might explain why the loops on the long edges are placed some 10cm closer to the wider end than to the narrow one - suggesting perhaps that the contents here, i.e. the stock of the gun, were heavier. They could have been worn diagonally on the back, with the narrower part pointing down. Pulling the drawstring through the small loops at the tapering end would have closed the opening, preventing the gun from dropping out. The problem is: Ottomans are shown with belts, but gun-carriers are *not* shown and one wonders if such an object ever existed. Usually, the guns are simply slung over their shoulders and museums are more eager to show beautiful guns than any such

leather objects. Hopefully, if they ever existed, they have been stored by museums in appropriate conditions to survive and be studied.

Although there seems no doubt that the objects were carriers or containers of some sort, their precise function still eludes us although the idea that these were saddles of some sort for horse or donkey, or perhaps even camel, still seems the most plausible option. Our future research will focus not only on archaeological finds, if these exist, from the wider region, but also on ethnographic parallels from museums, private collections and old photographs, of African, Middle Eastern, and Mediterranean origin. In the meantime, any suggestions at all would be most welcome and do not hesitate to contact us with them!

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