

A pair of Hide Shoes

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Earlier excavations of the medieval cultural layers of the cities of Oslo, Bergen and Trondheim have yielded valuable finds of the remains of footwear, as is well known. The majority of these finds date from the late Middle Ages, however, and none should with any certainty be ascribed to the period before 1200. But the 1970-72 excavations at »Mindets tomt« in Gamlebyen, Oslo, brought to light a material of shoes far richer than any previously known to Norwegian medieval research. The earliest of these specimens would seem to date from the eleventh century, the latest from the fourteenth.¹⁾ But the Norwegian material from the time preceding the eleventh century is still extremely sparse.

The Oseberg Find still forms the only Norwegian instance of shoes and remains of shoes being preserved as part of the grave furniture of a dated find.²⁾ Apart from this, Romsdal has yielded a few specimens of shoes found in bogs, probably dating from the prehistoric period, and certainly not later than the very beginning of the Middle Ages.³⁾ Now another bog find, from the interior of Trøndelag, can be added to this small group. This find which was brought to the Museum of the Royal Norwegian Society of Science and Letters in Trondheim 1953 is of great interest in several respects, not least because it would seem to be far older than any of the other shoes found in Norway to date.

From the available informations about the find, the following appears:

KARL ÅNONLI, a crofter, was cutting peat for fuel in Langmyra, a bog registered as part of the farm Melhus in the parish of Leksvik,



Fig. 1. *Langmyra, Melhus, Leksvik. The shoes were found at the spot marked with a cross. The rocky knolls (see text) in the background, near the house.*

North Trøndelag. The bog measures approximately 250 m by 100 m, the greater of these dimensions running E-W. Peat for fuel is cut in the northern part of the bog, which slopes slightly here. It was while he was working in a new part of the peat area in the north-eastern part of the bog that ÅNONLI found a pair of shoes, about 1 m below the surface and close to a large tree-stump (fig. 1).

According to ÅNONLI, both the shoes faced the same way, and they were separated by roughly the length of one shoe. One of them lay in a horizontal position, the other slanted slightly, the heel being raised. The spot where the shoes were found is only 7 m away from a small rocky knoll, which forms part of a low ridge of rock running in an E-W direction, and forming part of the edge of the bog. It thus appears that the spot where the shoes were found is not far from the edge of the bog, and in the past it must have lain right by the firm ground surrounding the bog. The shoes, as we have seen, faced the same way, away from the rocky ridge. These facts would

seem to indicate that they must have been put there by someone standing on firm ground at the edge of the bog, as it ran at the time of deposit. Both KARL ÅNONLI, who found the shoes, and JOHAN MOAN who took care of them realised that they had never seen shoes of this type before. And when we have studied the shoes more closely, we must certainly agree that this is a rare and remarkable find (fig. 2, 3,)⁴⁾.

The Leksvik shoes are made from one piece of hide, probably cow or calf. A more detailed investigation of the material shows that the hide was »raw-tanned« according to a method used in the Norwegian countryside in the past.⁵⁾ First, the hide was soaked, in order to loosen the hair. After the hair and any remains of meat had been removed, the hide was put into a river pool, and covered with birch bark. After lying here for some time, it was tanned, the tanning agents in the bark having permeated the pores of the hide. When it had been taken out of the pool, the hide underwent a primitive finishing process, which included stretching and bending, so that it would become reasonably pliable. After this the finished hide was ready for cutting and sewing. As shoes without hair were commonly used during summer, it seems likely that ours were intended for use during the warm season.⁶⁾

The design of the shoes is the simplest possible: one end of the hide was slashed, and the edges were stitched together with a thong passing through cut slits, thus forming a primitive kind of heel. The opposite end, where the tip of the shoe was to be, was notched, and the edges were trimmed so that this part of the hide could be turned up and around the foot, the edges meeting in the middle, above the instep. Here it was held together by lacing through cut loops running the length of the shoe from the tip to the opening for the ankle. The thong keeping the hide together above the instep continues through cut slits on both sides of the ankle, and it was presumably wound several times around the ankle and the lower part of the leg.

Thus we may briefly describe this type of shoe in the following way: it is made from one piece of hide, cut to provide a primitive fit. It was held around the foot by means of a long starp or thong passing through cut loops and slits from the tip of the shoe and over



Fig. 2. *The Leksvik shoes seen from the side (a) and from the front (b).*

the instep, after which it was wound several times around the ankle.

Today the shoes are approximately size 37 (English size $4\frac{1}{2}$). Even though they have shrunk a little after they were found, the

size would seem to suggest that these shoes were made for a woman.

Where, then, can we find any points of comparison for the type represented by the Leksvik shoes?

Even though most of the remains of shoes found during excavations of our medieval cities consist of soles only, and although complete shoes or boots are fairly rare among these finds, it is quite clear that footwear of the type represented by the Leksvik shoes was not in common use in the cities at that time. The details of the medieval types of shoes vary greatly, following the changing fashions, but they all have one important feature in common: they are stitched together from two main parts — sole and uppers. Only one of the medieval shoes found forms an exception to this rule — in 1918 a small shoe of thin leather, made from one piece, was found on a vacant lot at Gamlebyen in Oslo. Its heel was stitched together with a thong, and it was laced with a thong in front of the instep.⁷⁾ Sigurd Grieg assumes that this shoe is of an older type than those normally found in the medieval city sites.

An examination of the finds of shoes from the medieval cities and castles in other parts of Scandinavia gives the same result: Sweden has yielded considerable finds of shoes and remains of shoes, especially from the cities of Lund, Kalmar and Uppsala, but also from other medieval cities, such as Sigtuna and Visby.⁸⁾ The material comprises a great many forms and variations reflecting the demands fashion made on footwear for different purposes: tall shoes or boots (*kjängor*), ankle-high shoes (*oskulskuar*) and several types of heavy, slipper-like low shoes, including the so-called *soccus*. Shoes and boots could be drawn tight either by means of lacing or by thongs above the instep or at the side. But they all have one feature in common — they have soles. In other words — they consist of two principal parts, soles and uppers. Footwear cut from one piece, like the Leksvik shoes, does not occur at all in the Swedish medieval material.⁹⁾ To the best of my knowledge this is true also of the Danish material, such as the comprehensive find from the castle site Boringholm near Horsens in Jutland.¹⁰⁾ As POUL NØRLUND emphasizes,¹¹⁾ the shoe with a sole is typical of the Middle Ages; shoes of the Leksvik type were not consistent with the fashions normally followed in the cities and castles of the time.

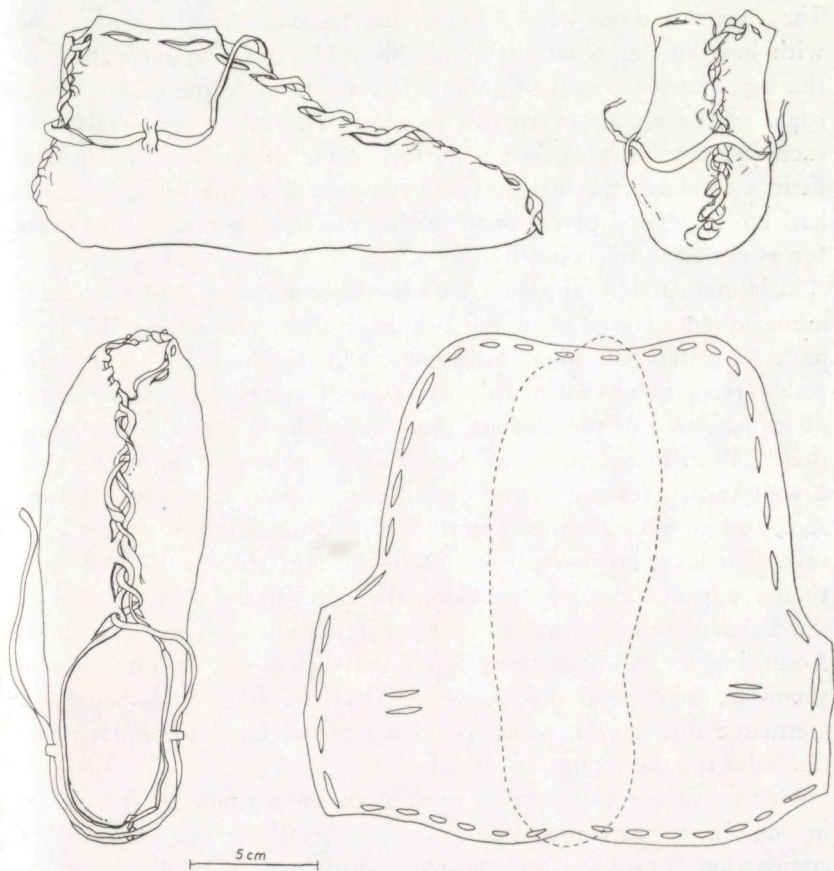


Fig. 3. *The Leksvik shoes*

But to return to Norway — are there any points of contact between the Leksvik shoes and the sparse Norwegian finds from the centuries preceding the medieval cities?

We know that the rich grave furniture buried with the Oseberg Ship included two pairs of shoes as well as the remains of several others. These shoes must, like the rest of the grave furniture, date from the middle of the ninth century.¹²⁾

The Oseberg shoes are made from the finest goatskin (karduan).

They are tall shoes with a low shaft, laced above the instep, and with long thongs wound around the ankle and the lower part of the leg. The remarkably thin sole is cut from one piece. The lower edges of the uppers is stitched to the soles, and the two halves of each upper are sewn together on top of the shoe, from the tip to a little way above the instep. There is no seam at the back, from the heel up. In several places small leather pieces were inserted, to make for as perfect a fit as possible.

It is immediately apparent that the Oseberg shoes represent a far more advanced type than the primitive shoes from Leksvik. They have separately cut soles and uppers, and the shoes are stitched together from these two main parts as well as several smaller pieces of leather. One of the Oseberg shoes has a thong intact, rather more than 1.49 m in length. These long thongs or straps (*skopvengr*) are a well-known feature of the clothing in fashion during the Viking Age, and no more detailed description is required in the present context.¹³) It may, however, be of interest to note that lacing with long thongs passing through slits along the edge of the shoe, as seen in the Leksvik shoes, must be an ancient feature of Germanic dress. According to Falk, the term describing such a slit or loop for the thong, at the edge of the shoe — *æs* (Faroese *ás*) — goes back to a Germanic form *ansio*, which is related to the Latin *ansae crepidae*, the holes for the thongs of sandals.

Nor do the very few other remains of shoes found in the soil or in bogs in Norway provide us with any really sound material for comparison. At Orten in Sandøy, Romsdal, on a peculiar, rectangular site where a Lapp hut built of turf and wooden posts had once stood, H. SAXLUND found the sole and upper of a 23 cm long, low shoe. It was low-cut, and was tied around the ankle by means of thongs passing through slits along the opening.¹⁴) This shoe is bluntly rounded at the tip, and at the back the sole ends in a pointed tongue, which corresponds to a wedge cut out of the heel of the upper. This would seem to be ancient feature. The remains of this shoe lay at the bottom of the hut, about 1.80 m down in the bog. Here we clearly have a worn-out shoe, which was discarded. Unfortunately this find did not yield any other objects, so that a secure dating is not possible.

The same type of shoe is represented in a find from a bog on the small island Tautra, near Molde, where a pair of shoes was found at a depth of 25 cm.¹⁵⁾ They, too, consisted of separate soles and uppers, stiched together with closely set stitches; the shoe was tied around the ankle by means of thongs and laces.

Both these shoes belong to a type which we may call low-cut, low shoes, a type which represents a development of the primitive type represented by the Leksvik shoes. Perhaps we should here add that our differentiation between more or less highly developed forms of footwear need not necessarily represent a corresponding difference in time. In fashion, as in so many other aspects of cultural life, primitive and highly developed forms are often found side by side.

The low-cut, low shoe, of the type represented by the Orten and Tautra finds, probably developed during the latter part of the Iron Age from the simple shoe made from one piece of hide. It was still in use early during the Middle Ages, being represented, for instance, among the earliest Swedish finds of shoes. These, which came to light at Sigtuna, date from the first half of the eleventh century. It does not seem possible to date the Orten and Tautra shoes more closely than POUL NØRLUND has done: the end of the pre-historic period or, at the very latest, the beginning of the Middle Ages.¹⁶⁾

The few Norwegian finds discussed here do not provide any possibility for relating the Leksvik shoes to a larger context. But if we turn to the considerably more comprehensive Danish material, we can with much greater clarity discern certain main lines in the development of footwear, and these also throw some light on the Leksvik find.

A predecessor of the shoes with soles, as we know them from the Viking Age and the Middle Ages, may be seen in the sandal-like shoes with plaited uppers from the great find from the Thorsbjerg Mose bog. Most of this find dates from the third century AD.¹⁷⁾ The Thorsbjerg shoes are cut from one piece of hide, and they are stitched together behind the heel. Their most characteristic feature, however, appears in the uppers, which are cut into thin straps in a way highly reminiscent of Roman sandals. It is, in fact, generally assumed that

sandals of this type, represented in several finds, are the result of impulses from the culture of Rome.¹⁸⁾

Although the Thorsbjerg shoes are not what one would normally call shoes with soles, we must nevertheless touch on this type in this connection, because certain details would seem to show that a true sole was fixed to the bottom of the shoe by means of tacks. Thus it is possible that in the North shoes with soles developed on the basis of impulses which may be traced to Roman culture, although we cannot be certain of this. After all, the idea of making the sole from a separate piece of leather seems obvious, especially as one could then replace a worn-out sole. The shoe from Borremose bog in Jutland is an example of a shoe made from several pieces of hide at an early date, but it does not have a true sole: one piece comprises the heel part of the shoe, another the tip, while a third, nicely scalloped, covered the instep. The shoe is laced on top by means of a thin thong. The Borremose shoe was found together with potsherds dating from the end of the Celtic period or the beginning of the Roman (c. 100 BC - AD 100).^{18a)} Moreover, a find as early as that from Guldhøj, which dates from the early Bronze Age, includes remains of woollen footwear which MARGRETHE HALD describes as shoes with soles.

Parallel with the development which led to shoes with true soles, we find a number of more primitive types of footwear, all of them belonging to the numerous group commonly designated hideshoes. They may be described as footwear made from one piece of hide which, after primitive cutting and stitching, is bent up around the foot, and held together with thongs passing through slits or loops around the ankle. As typical examples of hide-shoes we may mention those found in the bogs at Fræer, Daugbjerg and Rønbjerg.¹⁹⁾ There is an obvious similarity between the shoes from these bog finds, and they must all have been made in more or less the same way: one piece of hide was, after most essential cutting, bent up around the foot and formed to shape. A cut at the back, stitched together, formed the heel.

The shoes from Rønbjerg and Fræer have a fold above the foot, covered by lacing, whereas the Daugbjerg shoe is slashed at this

point. These three shoes all have a system of slits or loops along the edge through which the thong lacing the shoe around the foot passed.

It is obvious that there is a close similarity between these Danish shoes and ours from Leksvik. The main difference between them lies in the manner in which the leather is joined above the foot. But the principle underlying the construction of the shoe is, in fact, identical. On the basis of a close analysis of the textiles found together with the shoes from Fræer and Daugbjerg, MARGRETHE HALD has arrived at a pre-Roman Age date for these finds; the shoes from Rønbjerg may possibly also date from the earliest part of the Iron Age.

A hide-shoe securely dated to the final centuries of the pre-Christian Era is the well-known specimen found in a bog near Arnitlund in southern Jutland, dated by means of pollen analysis to the Celtic Iron Age.²⁰⁾ Because of its character, this shoe, which is made from one piece of hide, must certainly be assigned to the same group as those from Fræer, Daugbjerg and Rønbjerg. The »upper« of this shoe is peculiar in that it was cut into strips in a manner reminiscent of Roman sandals. However, the pollen analytical dating and the primitive character of the slashing would most definitely seem to suggest that this »upper« is an entirely independent feature, quite unconnected with the culture of Rome. These shoes were tied on to the foot by means of a thong which passed through holes in the strips and at the edge of the shoe.

But we can trace the hide-shoe further back still. In some of the Danish oak-coffin burials from the early Bronze Age, remains of shoes undoubtedly related to the above have been found.²¹⁾ Best preserved are the shoes from the man's grave at Jels and the woman's shoes from the Skrydstrup grave,²²⁾ both of which tell us a great deal about the footwear of the Bronze Age. Enough is preserved of both these shoes to allow of the deduction that these were hide-shoes made from one piece of leather or hide, tied to the foot by means of lacing thongs which passed through holes at the edge.

The Jels shoe and the Skrydstrup shoe seem to have been of roughly the same type. The front of the Jels shoe was slashed into narrow strips, which had holes for the thong lacing the hide together

around the foot. At the back, a vertical seam formed the heel, exactly as in the Leksvik shoes. H. C. BROHOLM has studied these types of shoes in some detail, and he assumes that the thongs from the strips of the front of the shoe were cross-laced through the holes at the edge, the ends then being wound around the foot and tied above the instep; he allows of the possibility of an additional lacing around the ankle (cf. fig. 4).

As appears from fig. 3, there are no traces of perforated strips on the Leksvik shoes. There is, however, a row of wide slits along the entire edge of the shoe, and these would serve the same purpose as the perforated strips when the shoe was to be laced on to the foot by means of the thong. Whether the thongs of the Leksvik shoes were tied around the foot as shown in fig. 4 it is impossible to say; but the left shoe, whose thong is preserved in the slits, does not suggest such a practice.

In the present context these various methods of lacing a shoe are not, however, of great consequence. Far more important is the fact that we are able to establish that the Leksvik shoes belong to the numerous group of primitive hide-shoes which can, in the North, be traced back to the dress of the Bronze Age at the end of the second millenium BC. These must surely be said to represent the most ancient form of footwear in our part of the world.

The use of hide-shoes was not confined to the North in the distant past, being common in many parts of the Germanic region. In the northern and central parts of Germany (Sleswick-Holstein, Oldenburg, Hannover) and in Holland, some thirty to forty specimens have come to light; a few of these were found in bogs together with dead bodies, but the majority were isolated finds.²³⁾ Many of them occurred in twos, but matching pairs are, oddly enough, rare. The shoes from these finds vary greatly in the way they were laced, but every one of them was made from one piece of hide, and they were all attached to the foot by means of thongs passing through slits or perforated strips.²⁴⁾ They all date from the early Iron Age. Even though the shoe with a true sole made its appearance at an early date, as we have seen, proving to be the kind of footwar likely to be used also in the future, it seems to be beyond doubt that hide-

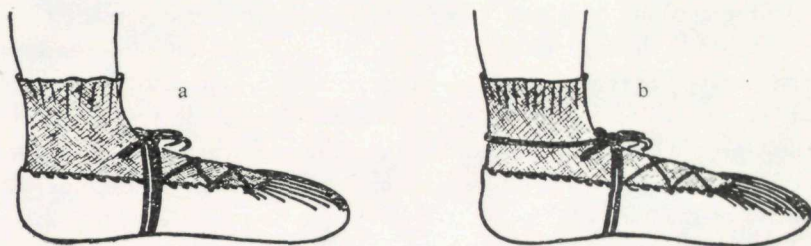


Fig. 4. P. V. GLOB's reconstruction of Bronze Age shoes.

shoes were in common use in the North throughout the entire Iron Age. Literary sources would seem to show that various forms of hide-shoes were well known also in other parts of Europe, and that this type of foot-wear was most commonly associated with the Germanic tribes.²⁵⁾

PAULUS DIACONUS relates (*Historia langobardorum*, Liber IV, 22) that the shoes of the Langobards were open on top, almost to the toe, and that they were held together around the foot by means of leather straps or hongs. And EINHART states in his biography of Charlemagne (*Vita Caroli Magni*, chap. 23) that the emperor as a rule wore Old Franconian shoes — only when he donned his imperial garb did he wear shoes of Roman type. No description of these Old Franconian shoes is given, but they may also have been hide-shoes of some kind.

Not until Carolingian days did the Roman types of shoes, with true soles, become really popular in the Germanic region.²⁷⁾ And therefore it is perhaps not so very surprising that the earliest shoe with a true sole found in the North should hail from the aristocratic milieu of the Oseberg Find, whose distinctive character is not least due to the lively contact between this milieu and the Continent. The form and details of the Oseberg shoe must have been inspired by a Roman *calceus* type, presumably the so-called *talares*, whose name implies that they enclosed the ankle (*talus*).²⁷⁾

But shoes of the Oseberg type must still have been rare even during the Viking Age. It appears from several literary sources that hide-shoes were normally considered to be the traditional, commonly used form of footwear.

In the account of Ragnarok given in Gylfaginning, we read:²⁸⁾

»The wolf devours Odin, and that is his bane. But immediately afterwards, Vidar appears and steps with one foot into the lower jaw of the wolf; on that foot he wears a shoe made from leather which people cut away from the toe and the heel when making shoes, therefore these scraps must be cast aside if one intends to come to the aid of the gods.«

This is, in fact, a very precise description of the process of making hide-shoes. Looking at the diagram of the Leksvik shoes, we can see that it is characteristic of this primitive method of cutting that notches are cut for the heel and the toe, so that the hide could be shaped to enclose the foot.

We meet a distinctive kind of hide-shoe in the ancient provisions governing the venerable ceremony for the legitimation of natural children:

»Then he must ... kill a three-year old ox and flay the skin off the right fore-foot (viz. hind-foot!) and make a shoe of this and put the shoe beside the ale-vat.«²⁹⁾

Such shoes made of the hide from the hind-feet of cattle and other animals must surely be very ancient. The bulge on the hide would form the tip of the shoe. In O.N. such shoes were called *fítskor*, and corresponding types of shoes in more recent times went under names such as *fetasko*, *fitasko*, *fete*, *fetling* and *fitjung*. At the beginning of the Middle Ages, hide-shoes ceased to form part of the normal dress worn in the cities and by the upper social strata. But plain people in the countryside must have continued to wear hide-shoes of various kinds throughout the Middle Ages; in some country districts, in fact, hide-shoes were still worn until the present day. Informants from several districts of western Norway (Hardanger, Voss, Sogn), eastern Norway (Telemark, Hallingdal, Valdres) and from Nordland mention hide-shoes.³⁰⁾

In H. J. WILLES' well-known description of Seljord,³¹⁾ dating from the latter half of the eighteenth century, we read that in winter the men of this district wore hide-shoes made from untanned hides, with the flesh side in and the fur out. They wore hose without feet, using a kind of foot-cloth instead: a peculiar parallel for the cloths

known to have formed a normal part of footwear as far back as the Bronze Age.³²⁾ As the Leksvik shoes were probably made for use in summer (see above), it is perhaps more likely that they were lined with grass, a practice which has left traces in shoes as ancient as those from the Skrydstrup grave.³³⁾ The use of grass for lining shoes was wide-spread until comparatively recently; the Lapps still line theirs with grass to this day. Most often, a special kind of grass, *Carex vesicaria*, is gathered for this purpose.³⁴⁾ In the Norwegian countryside, shoes were in the past usually lined with straw for summer wear.³⁵⁾

There must have been some form of hose above the shoes,³⁶⁾ perhaps strips of cloth wound around the legs from the ankle to the knee, the »*vindingr*« of the sagas. Or there might have been rectangular pieces of woollen cloth, such as those found at Daugbjerg, where they were wound around the leg below the knee; another possibility is a kind of hose without a foot, an example of which occurs in a Norwegian bog find of Roman Iron Age date.³⁷⁾ This corresponds to what in more recent times was known as »*leister*«.³⁸⁾

HJALMAR FALK³⁹⁾ was to the best of my knowledge the first to draw attention to M. SCHNABEL's important information about the way in which hide-shoes were made in Hardanger.⁴⁰⁾ The *fetasko* of this district were made from the »*fetar*« (the hide from the lower part of the hind-legs) of cattle or reindeer. The hide is cut off in front as far as the hooflet. The bulging hide on the part of the hind-leg between knee and heel is used for the tip of the shoe. The shoes are sewn together at both sides of the instep and at the back, so that the hooflets come at either side of the heel. *Fetasko* of reindeer hide are used with the fur on during winter; those made from the hide of cattle are mostly used without fur, and they are greased like all other leather.

But in other areas, too, hide-shoes have proved their longevity.

On the Færoes, primitive hide-shoes formed part of the everyday dress until the present day, as we gather from SVERRI DAHL's most valuable investigation.⁴¹⁾ Today this primitive kind of footwear has presumably been superseded by rubber boots everywhere. These Færoes shoes were made from the hide of oxen, seal, calves

or lambs. In THOMAS TARNOVIUS's description of 1669, quoted by DAHL, we may read:

»Naar samme huder saaledis ere barkede, da tilskære de hver deres sko og bruge ikkun en eneste saale, men samme sko sammensyes over tærne og op over hæle.« (When these hides have thus been tanned, all cut their own shoes, and they us merely one sole, but the shoe is stitched together across the toes and up along the heel.)

A more recent description (JØRGEN LANDT 1800) states about the shoes for everyday wear:

»de dannes af eet eneste stykke skind der net og tæt sammenrimpes og rynkes fra taaen og lidet op paa fodbladet; ligeledes bliver de bag hælen tæt sammenrimpede ogsaa med rynker« (They are made from one single piece of hide, which is neatly and closely sewn together and gathered from the toe a little way up on the foot; in the same way they are closely sewn together behind the heel, and gathered there too.)

From MARGRETHE HALD we know that hide-shoes of a primitive type were in use in Iceland until the present day.

These shoes consisted of one piece of hide, with slits for a thong along the edge; the hide was not cut in any way, and was put around the foot and drawn up around the ankle by means of the thong. In order to acquire the correct fit, the shoes must be cut wet and put on wet.

The traditional footwear of prehistory has, in fact, to quite a remarkable extent continued in use among the common people of many parts of Europe. Hide-shoes of primitive types, made from one piece of hide, were in use until the present day in several parts of Sweden: in the coastal districts of Nyland and Østerbotten, in Dalecarlia and on Gotland. The type of shoe used in very recent days by both Swedes and Estonians in Estonia is extremely similar to the hide-shoe of the Iron Age.⁴²⁾

Numerous bog finds in Ireland bear witness to the importance of hide-shoes in that country during the past. Until very recently, the inhabitants of the Isles of Aran, off the west coast of Ireland, used a kind of hide-shoe known as »pampooties« (fig. 5) which, according to Professor E. ESTYN EVANS, is very similar to the Leksvik

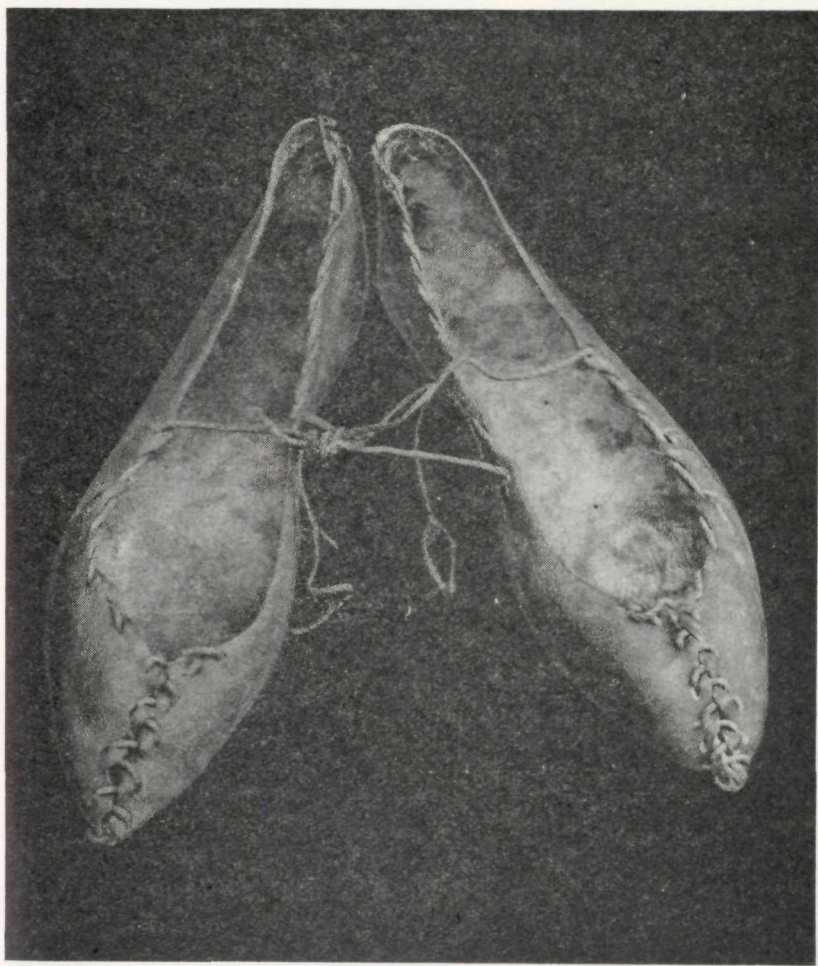


Fig. 5. Hide-shoes from Aran Isles, Ireland.

type.⁴³) The Irish term for such shoes is *bróga úr-leatheid* (lit. shoes of untanned hide).⁴⁴) The form shown here (fig. 5) is a low shoe, fairly low-cut, and made from one piece of hide. It does not appear quite clearly from the illustration whether this shoe has a seam up the heel, like the Leksvik shoes; but it is certain, in any case, that

some of these shoes do have such a seam. The system of lacing, with a lace passing through loops running from the toe up, and then through slits along the edge of the shoe, is very similar to that of the Leksvik shoes — this does not, however, necessarily imply an ancient cultural connection. A phenomenon of convergence, due to the very simple forms involved, would seem to be a more likely explanation.

Thus if we compare the archaeological material with the literary sources, we arrive at an idea of the very wide distribution of hide-shoes in both time and space. They were in common use in many parts of prehistoric Europe, and in the outposts of European culture they remained in use until the present day. But such shoes are also known from the New World — here several types of hide-shoes were used, including a Canadian-Indian type which corresponds to our »fitsko« (see above).⁴⁵⁾

Bearing in mind the distribution of the hide-shoe in Europe, in the past and more recently, it is clear that we cannot date the Leksvik shoes exclusively on the basis of their form. Although we know that hide-shoes were not *à la mode* among the better situated in the cities and among the upper classes during the Middle Ages, they remained in use, as we saw above, as part of the farmers' dress in many country districts until fairly recently. Thus we cannot date the find securely except by means of the pollen analytical investigation friendly undertaken by KARI EGEDE LARSEN.

Even if we accept only the latest possible date, we arrive at the period immediately after the sub-atlantic change of climate, and the first appearance of the fir in Trøndelag. In other words, we should be justified in dating the shoes to the earliest part of the Iron Age, in all probability to the beginning of the Celtic period.

Theoretically it is possible that the shoes should have been buried at a later date, but according to KARI EGEDE LARSEN the pollen diagram shows no evidence of any disturbance in the stratification of the turf. Thus we must be entitled to assume that the shoes were deposited on or close to the then surface of the bog. There seems to be no reason for not basing our dating on the evidence of the pollen analyses. And if we accept this evidence, then the Leksvik

find may be described as the earliest shoes found in Norway to date.

It is a well-known fact that many peoples, not least the Germanic tribes, assigned a certain role to shoes in connection with the cults of death and fertility.⁴⁶⁾ Already in prehistory, the custom of burying the deceased with shoes, sometimes with shoes specially made for the occasion, was commonly practised.⁴⁷⁾ One is tempted to agree with ALFRED WIBERG in that the practice of equipping the deceased with »*helsko*«, mentioned in the saga of Gisle Sursson (chap. 14), may be explained in this way. In this context »*helsko*« must be literally translated as »shoes for the underworld, grave shoes«,⁴⁸⁾ and the very expression used in the saga, »to tie *helsko*« may suggest that originally, at least, these shoes were hide-shoes of the simplest kind, which the living tied around the feet of the dead, in the same way as they gave him clothes and other equipment for which he would find use in the life to come.

It is possible that in pagan days, people thought that such shoes were necessary for the journey which many thought must be undertaken after death. But even if this is so — and it can hardly be proved — the shoes are in no way more important than any of the other equipment required by the deceased. (HELGE ROSÉN, who has undertaken a detailed study of the wealth of material available on this subject, has arrived at the conclusion that the shoes form a natural part of the complete equipment required for life in the next world.)⁵²⁾ It does not seem likely that death rites and burial cult attached particular significance to shoes, and that there should have been special ideas associated with shoes, of a kind to provide a reasonable explanation for the deposit of the Leksvik shoes. According to the reports of how they were found, there can be no doubt that the shoes were deposited alone, and that they did not accompany a dead body which had been put down in the bog for some reason or other.

We know that popular belief had a multitude of customs connected with feet and shoes as the site of magic powers, some of them promoting vital, life-giving forces, others concerned with protection against evil spirits.⁴⁹⁾ Could it be possible that the shoes were deposited in the bog as a sacrifice to supernatural powers?

A group of northern German and Dutch finds consists of shoes deposited in bogs. There are about twenty such finds, from Sleswick-Holstein, Oldenburg and Holland: all these shoes are made from one piece of hide,⁵⁰⁾ and they are all what we term hide-shoes. All of them are extremely worn, and most of them could hardly have been used any more at the time they were discarded. In her publication of these finds, J. MESTORF suggests that these shoes might represent sacrifices to supernatural powers. But the material so far submitted in proof of a common practice of shoe sacrifice, widespread among the Germanic tribes, is not convincing.⁵¹⁾

Is the explanation for the deposit of the Leksvik shoes not more likely to be purely practical?

I base this view on one particular feature which HJALMAR FALK mentions in connection with the shoes of the saga period.⁵²⁾ These shoes were made of raw-tanned hide, treated by the method which we described above. As long as the hide remains pliable, such shoes are useful and comfortable, for indoor as well as for outdoor wear. But they would easily become hard and uncomfortable when drying after having been wet through. FALK gives several saga quotations mentioning this fact. Most interesting, perhaps, is the fact that this property of hide-shoes gave rise to the saying: *skorpnar skór at fœti* (shoes shrivelling on the feet), which was applied to a person who got into serious difficulties.

If such a »shrivelled« shoe was to become wearable again, it had to be softened, and then greased again. It seems not unlikely that the shoes were put into water for softening as part of this process. In this connection it is worth noting that the Lapps put their hide-shoes into water for softening when they have not been in use for a long time and the hide has become hard.⁵³⁾

POSTSCRIPT

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NOTES

1) Sigurd Grieg Middelalderske byfunn fra Bergen og Oslo. Oslo 1933 pp. 214 f. During the excavations at Borgund, which took place shortly before the Leksvik shoes, some shoes with true soles, from the ancient market, were found. They probably date from the 11th or 12th century. (Asbjørn E. Herteig. Kaupangen Borgund kommer for dagen. Ab. 1953 p. 14). Erik Schia discusses the recently discovered shoes from Gamlebyen in De arkologiske utgravninger i Gamlebyen, Oslo. Feltet »Mindets tomt«. Oslo 1979 pp. 121-201.

2) Osebergfundet. B. II pp. 207 f.

3) Anathon Bjørn. Nogen myrfund fra Trøndelagen, pp. 9 f. (D.K.N.V.S. Skr. 1920 nr. 4).

Cf. Poul Nørlund. Klædedragt i oldtid og middelalder p. 59. (Nordisk kultur, Dragt, Sthl. 1941).

4) The inventory no. of the shoes is T. 17400. Present length 25 cm, greatest present width across the sole 9 cm.

5) For valuable information about the hide used in the Leksvik shoes, and about primitive methods of tanning as such, my thanks are due to Olaf Hansen, Trondheim.

6) Hjalmar Falk. Altwestnordische Kleiderkunde. Kria. 1919. p. 134.

7) Sigurd Grieg op. cit. p. 215 fig. 174. According to Gerhard Fischer, another hide shoe was found during the excavations at Garmlebyen. (Verbal information).

8) Ernfrid Jäfvert. Skor och skomakerteknikk under medeltiden. (Fornv. 1937 p. 32).

9) Ernfrid Jäfvert op. cit. p. 35.

10) Poul Nørlund op. cit. pp. 58-9.

11) Poul Nørlund. op. cit. p. 57.

12) Osebergfundet B. II Oslo 1928 pp. 207 f.

13) Hjalmar Falk. Litt om sagatidens sko. (Mål og Minne 1917 p. 53).

14) H. Saxlund. Ortengammen m.m. (Meddelelser om fund, gjorte i Åkerø i yttre Romsdalen 1908). (D.K.N.V.S. Skr. 1909 nr. 6). Later discussed by Anathon Bjørn. Nogen myrfund fra Trøndelagen (D.K.N.V.S. Skr. 1920 nr. 4 p. 11).

15) Bjørn op. cit. p. 9, cf. K. Rygh. Oldsagsamlingens tilvekst 1907 (D.K.N.V.S. Skr. 1907 nr. 9 p. 15).

K. Lossius (D.K.N.V.S. Skr. 1888-90 p. 256) discusses a find of shoes from a bog at Vesta, Bud in Romsdal; these are, however, now lost.

16) Poul Nørlund op. cit. p. 59.

17) Johs. Brøndsted. Danmarks oldtid III Kbh. 1940 p. 205.

See also Engelhardt. Thorsbjerg Mosefund Kbh. 1863 p. 19 P 1.3.

18) Margrethe Hald. Olddanske tekstiler. Kbh. 1950 p. 335. The sandal type also occurs in e.g. the Hannoverian bog finds from the Roman Age and the Migration Age.

18a) S. Westergaard Nielsen. Vesthimmerlands Museum i året 1947-1948 (Aarbøger udg. af Hist. Samf. for Aalborg Amt B XV pp. 202 f.).

- 19) Margrethe Hald op. cit. p. 333 figs. 385-387.
- 20) H. C. Broholm and Margrethe Hald. Skrydstrupfundet Kbh. 1939 pp. 86 f.
- 21) Margrethe Hald. Fod-sko eller haand-sko (Fra Nationalmuseets arbejds-mark 1953 pp. 30 f., with bibliographical references concerning the various finds).
- 22) H. C. Broholm and Margrethe Hald op. cit. pp. 88 f.
- 23) J. Mestorf. Moorschuhe (44. Bericht d. Schlesw.-Holst. Mus. Vaterl. Altert. Kiel 1907 p. 51), cf. B. Girke. Tracht d. Germanen Mannus-bibl. 24 pp. 82 f).
- 24) Girke op. cit. Taf. 50, Taf. 51 a, b.
- 25) Girke op. cit. has collected a number of literary sources concerning the history of the shoe. I have made use of some of these in the present article.
Regarding some recent finds of hide shoes, see Schia op. cit. p. 175.
- 26) Girke op. cit. p. 87.
- 27) Girke op. cit. p. 75.
- 28) Snorre Sturlason. Edda. Edit. by Anne Holstmark p. 88.
- 29) Gulatingslovi transl. by Knut Robberstad. Chapt. 2. Um ættleiding p. 80.
- 30) Hjalmar Falk. Litt om sagatidens sko (Mål og Minne 1917) p. 54.
- 31) H. J. Wille. Beskrivelse over Sillejords præstegæld 1786 p. 223.
- 32) Poul Nørlund op. cit. pp. 17 f.
- 33) Margrethe Hald. Fra bar fod til strømpe. Kbh. 1953 pp. 10 f.
- 34) Ernst Manker. De svenska fjällapparna. Sth. 1947 p. 168, with a description of how *suoine*, shoe-grass, is gathered and treated.
- 35) Kristoffer Visted. Vor gamle bondekultur. Kra. p. 94.
- 36) Margrethe Hald. Fra bar fod til strømpe pp. 14 f., gives a survey of the various types of leg and foot-wear.
- 37) H. Dedekam. Et tekstilfund i myr fra romersk jernalder. (Stav. Mus. Årsh. 1921-24 p. 16). This find comes from Tune, Jæren.
- 38) Kristoffer Visted and Hilmar Stigum. Vor gamle bondekultur. Oslo 1952 2. p. 195.
- 39) Hjalmar Falk. Litt om sagatidens sko p. 55.
- 40) Marcus Schnabel. Hardangermålet (D.K.N.-V.S. Skr. Ny samling 1 1784 p. 317.
- 41) Sverri Dahl. »Føroyskur Fótúni«. (Varðanum 29 årg. nr. 1 1951).
- 42) Sigfrid Svensson. Traditioner i nordisk bondebrækt (Nordisk Kultur. Drakt. Sthl. 1941) p. 144.
- 43) Letter dtd. 2. Nov. 1954 to the author. Cf. idem Irish heritage. Dundalk 1949 p. 123.
- 44) Information received from the Director of the National Museum, Dublin, Dr. A. T. Lucas. Earlier literature has some examples of such shoes, known as *cuaran* (pl. *cuarain*).
- 45) Margrethe Hald. Fod-sko eller haand-sko p. 30.
- 46) Helge Rosén. Om dödsrike och dödsbruk i fornnordisk religion. Lund 1918 pp. 128 f.
- 47) Rosén op. cit. pp. 130 f. See also Georg Wilke. Die Religion der Indo-germanen. Lpz. 1923 pp. 67 f.

- 48) Albert Wiberg. »At festa skip«. (Fornv. 1937 p. 101).
49) Helge Rosén op. cit. pp. 140 f. has collected a great number of examples.
50) J. Mestorf. 44. Bericht d. Schlesw.-Holst. Museums vaterländischer Altertümer. Kiel 1901 pp. 51 f. The number of such shoes found alone has since increased.
51) Rosén op. cit.
52) Hjalmar Falk. Litt om sagatidens sko p. 53.
53) Personal information from Professor Th. Vogt Trondheim.

ÚRTAK

Í 1953 skar bóndin Karl Anonli torv í norsku bygdini Leksvik. Hann kom tá fram á einar húðaskógvar umleið 1 m undir svörinum. Hesin fundurin gav høvi til eina gjølla kanning av fótúna.

Í miðöldini var vanligi fótúnin skógvar við sóla og yvirleðri. Høvundurin ger samanberingar og vísir á hvussu vanligt hetta hevur verið. Samstundis hava bygdafolk vanliga nýtt húðaskógvar, seymaðar úr einum skøði við tveingjum. Hetta hevur verið vanligt nógvastaðni í Europa, m. a. í Føroyum. Skógvarnir við sóla og yvirleðri eru av rómverskum uppruna og árin, meðan húðaskógvarnir eru av eldri germanskum uppruna. Húðaskógvarnir frá Leksvik kundu verið yngri, men pollengreiningar sýna at talan er um ein elligamlan fund frá tíðliga í jarnöldini ella frá tí keltisku tíðini. Tað er sostatt talan um eitt tað elsta skófund í Noreg.

Høvundurin ger sær eisini sínar hugsanir um hvussu skógvarnir eru komnir í mýrulendi: Er talan um trúarligar orsøkir ella eru teir bert settir á blot? Hesum kemur hann ikki nærri.