



The Art of the Shoe

Marie-Josèphe Bossan



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Introduction

The Shoe: Object of Civilization and Object of Art

Aside from noticing a shoe for its comfort or elegance, contemporaries rarely take interest in this necessary object of daily life. However, the shoe is considerable in the history of civilization and art.

In losing contact with nature, we have lost sight of the shoe's profound significance. In recapturing this contact, in particular through sports, we begin its rediscovery. Shoes for skiing, hiking, hunting, football, tennis or horseriding are carefully chosen, indispensable tools as well as revealing signs of occupation or taste.

In previous centuries, when people depended more on the climate, vegetation and condition of the soil, while most jobs involved physical labour, the shoe held an importance for everyone which today it holds for very few. We do not wear the same shoes in snow as in the tropics, in the forest as in the steppe, in the swamps as in the mountains or when working, hunting or fishing. For this reason, shoes give precious indications of habitats and modes of life.

In strongly hierarchical societies, organized by castes or orders, clothing was determinant. Princes, bourgeoisie, soldiers, clergy and servers were differentiated by what they wore. The shoe revealed, less spectacularly than the hat, but in a more demanding way, the respective brilliance of civilizations, unveiling the social classes and the subtlety of the race; a sign of recognition, just as the ring slips only onto the slenderest finger, the "glass slipper" will not fit but the most delicate of beauties.

The shoe transmits its message to us by the customs which impose and condition it. It teaches us of the deformations that were forced on the feet of Chinese women and shows us how in India, by conserving the unusual boots, the nomadic horsemen of the North attained their sovereignty over the Indian continent; we learn that ice-skates evoke the Hammans while babouches suggest the Islamic interdiction to enter holy places with covered feet.

Sometimes the shoe is symbolic, evoked in ritual or tied to a crucial moment of existence. One tells of the purpose high-heels served: to make the woman taller on her wedding night in order to remind her that it is the only moment when she will dominate her husband.

The boots of the Shaman were decorated with animal skins and bones in order to emulate the stag; as the stag, he could run in the world of spirits. We are what we wear, so if to ascend to a higher life it is necessary to ornate the head, if it becomes an issue of ease of movement, it is the feet that are suited for adornment. Athena had shoes of gold, for Hermes, it was heels. Perseus, in search of flight, went to the nymphs to find winged sandals.

Tales respond to mythology. The seven-league boots, which enlarged or shrunk to fit the ogre or Little Thumb, allowed them both to run across the universe. "You have only to make me a pair of boots," said Puss in Boots to his master, "and you will see that you are not so badly dealt as you believe."

Does the shoe therefore serve to transcend the foot, often considered as the most modest and least favored part of the human body? Occasionally, without a doubt, but not always. The barefoot is not always deprived of the sacred and, thus, can communicate this to the shoe. Those who supplicate or venerate are constantly throwing themselves at the feet of men; it is the feet of men who leave a trace on humid or dusty ground, often the only witness to their passage. A specific accessory, the shoe can sometimes serve to represent he who has worn it, who has disappeared, of whom we do not dare to retrace the traits; the most characteristic example is offered by primitive Buddhism evoking the image of its founder by a seat or by a footprint.

Made of the most diverse materials, from leather to wood, from fabric to straw, or whether plain or ornamented, the shoe, by its form and decoration, becomes an object of art. If the form is sometimes more functional than esthetic – but not always, and there will be a place to explain many aberrant forms – the design of the cloth, the broderie, the incrustations, the choice of colours, always closely reveal the artistic characteristics of their native country.

The essential interest comes from that which it is not; weapons or musical instruments are reserved for a caste or a determined social group, carpets are the products of only one or two civilizations, it does not stand up as a "sumptuous" object of the rich classes or a folkloric object of the poor. The shoe has been used from the bottom to the top of the social ladder, by all the individuals of any given group, from group to group, by the entire world.

Jean-Paul Roux,
Honorary Director of Research at the C.N.R.S.
Honorary Tenured Professor of the Islamic Arts
at the School of the Louvre

1. "Akha" sandal, dress of the Akha tribes of the Golden Triangle (box of recycled coca and jungle seed, 6 cm steel heel, leather). Trikitrixa, Paris.
2. Aviator Boots, c. 1914, France.



3. Clay model of shoe with upturned toe from an Azerbaijanian tomb, 13th-12th century BC. Bally Museum, Schönenwerd, Switzerland.
4. Iron shoe. Syria, 800 BC. Bally Museum, Schönenwerd, Switzerland.

From Antiquity up to our days

Prehistory

Prehistoric man evidently was unfamiliar with shoes: the Stone Age markings that are known to us all indicate bare feet. But the cave paintings discovered in Spain dating from the Upper Paleolithic period (around 14,000 BC) show Magdalenian man dressed in fur boots. According to the French paleontologist and prehistorian Father Breuil (1877-1961), Neolithic man covered his feet with animal skins as protection in a harsh environment. It seems that man has always instinctively covered his feet to get about, although there remains no concrete evidence of the shoes themselves. Prehistoric shoes would have been rough in design and certainly utilitarian in function. The well-preserved boots worn by Ötzi the Iceman discovered in an Alpine glacier are an excellent example. Their deerskin uppers and bearskin soles enabled him to travel long distances to trade. These materials were chosen primarily for their ability to shield the feet from severe conditions. It was only in Antiquity that the shoe would acquire an aesthetic and decorative dimension, becoming a true indicator of social status.



Antiquity

The Shoe in Ancient Eastern Civilizations

From the first great civilizations flourishing in Mesopotamia and Egypt in the 4th millennium BC arose the three basic types of footwear: the shoe, the boot, and the sandal. An archeological team excavating a temple in the city of Brak (Syria) in 1938 unearthed a clay shoe with a raised toe. Dating over 3,000 years before the birth of Christ, it proves that this city shared features with the Sumerian civilization of Ur in Mesopotamia: raised-tipped shoes are depicted on Mesopotamian seals of the Akkadian era around 2600 BC. Distinguished from Syrian models by a much higher tip and embellished with a pompom, in Mesopotamia this type of shoe became the royal footwear of the king. The raised-toe form is attributable to the rugged terrain of the mountain conquerors that introduced it. After its adoption by the Akkadian kingdom, the form spread to Asia Minor where the Hittites made it a part of their national costume. It is frequently depicted in low-reliefs, such as the Yazilikaya sanctuary carvings dating to 1275 BC. Seafaring Phoenicians helped spread the pointed shoe to Cyprus, Mycenae, and Crete, where it appears on palace frescoes depicting royal games and ceremonies. Cretans are also depicted wearing raised-tipped ankle boots in the painted decorations of Rekhmire's tomb (Egypt 18th dynasty, 1580-1558 BC), indicating contact between Crete and Egypt during this era. The Mesopotamian empire of Assyria dominated the ancient east from the 9th to the 7th century BC and erected monuments whose sculptures depict the sandal and the boot. Their sandal is a simplified shoe composed of a sole and straps. Their boot is tall, covering the leg; a type of footwear associated with horsemen. From the middle of the 6th century to the end of the 4th century BC, the Persian dynasty, founded by Cyrus the Great II around 550 BC, gradually established a homogeneous culture in the ancient east. Processional bas-reliefs carved by sculptors of the Achaemenidian kings offer a documentary record of the period's costume and footwear.



In addition to images of boots, there are shoes made of supple materials and of leather shown completely covering the foot and closing at the ankle with laces. For a deeper understanding of how the shoe evolved from its origins to the present day, it is important to look at ancient civilizations in their historical context. Additionally, an analysis of the primary biblical texts will shed new light on the subject and give greater relevance to the history of the shoe.

5. Cylindrical seal and its stamp. Akkad Dynasty, Mesopotamia, around 2340-2200 BC. Height: 3.6 cm. Louvre Museum, Paris.
6. "Lion put to death by the King," low-relief from the Palace of Assurbanipal at Nineveh, 638-630 BC, British Museum, London.



Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egypt was the home of the first sandals. This form of flat shoe with straps arose in response to Egypt's climate and geography.

King Narmer's Palette from around 3100 BC reveals that a servant called a "sandal bearer" walked behind the sovereign carrying the royal sandals on his forearms, indicating the importance henceforth attached to the shoe in ceremonial garb.

Although often depicted barefoot in Egyptian wall paintings, men and women also wore sandals. Egyptian sandals were made of leather, woven straw, strips of palm or papyrus leaves or from the rushes and reeds that grew in the marshes. The Pharaoh and the socially prominent had them made of gold, though sandals were a luxury item for everyone. Tomb excavations have revealed that this object, originally strictly utilitarian, had a social function. The sandal maintained continuity of form throughout Pharaonic civilization and lasted until the Coptic era of Egyptian Christianity. When the pharaoh entered the temple, or when his

subjects celebrated the cult of the dead in funeral chapels, they removed their sandals at the sanctuary's entrance, a custom later adopted by Muslims upon entering a mosque. The ritual demonstrates the strong relationship that exists between the shoe and the sacred, a relationship that is also established by specific biblical passages, which will be discussed below. The advent in Egypt of the raised-tip sandal in the second millennium BC is probably a Hittite influence. It is the precursor of the poulaine, or piked shoe, an eccentric medieval fashion introduced to Europe from the East by the Crusades. When sandals are among the items packed for the mummy's afterlife, they are placed in chests or illustrated on horizontal bands decorating the painted interior of the wooden sarcophagi. Evidently, their role was prophylactic.

Texts from the era of the pyramids allude to and reflect the wishes of the dead "to walk in white sandals along the beautiful paths of heaven where the blessed roam."



7. Sandals maker, fresco relief. 18th Dynasty, 1567-1320 BC.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
8. Wooden sandals inlaid with gold, treasure of Tutankhamen.
18th Dynasty, Thebes. Cairo Museum, Cairo.
9. Egyptian sandal of plant fibers. Bally Museum, Schönenwerd,
Switzerland.

The Bible: The Shoe in the Old Testament

The earliest written evidence of shoes is considered to be that found in the Bible, although research remains to be done with Chinese, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian texts.

As a rule, Biblical characters wear sandals, whether they are God's chosen ones (the Hebrews), their allies, or enemies, which affirms the Near Eastern origin of this footwear type from earliest antiquity. The Old Testament rarely mentions the design and decoration of the sandal. Apart from its role as an invaluable aid to walking, which is mainly an issue concerning the lives of the Saints, the sandal plays an important symbolic role. Biblical shoe symbolism can be analyzed in its different contexts, which include the removal of shoes in holy places, the shoe in military expeditions, legal actions, and everyday rituals, as well as the shoe as an accessory of seduction when dressing a female foot.

In the most famous example of removing one's shoes in a holy place, the vision of the burning bush, God orders Moses to take off his shoes: "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground" (The Pentateuch, Exodus, III, 5).

The situation repeats itself when the Hebrews come upon the entrance to the Promised Land, as recorded in the Book of Joshua: "And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, 'Are You for us or for our adversaries?' So He said, 'No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.' And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, 'What does my Lord say to His servant?' Then the Commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, 'Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy'" (Joshua, 5:13-15).

The order given to Joshua is identical to that given to Moses. Shoes figure in another story from Joshua. The kings, finding themselves beyond the river Jordan, formed a coalition to fight against Joshua and Israel, but the Gibeonites wanted to ally themselves with Israel at any price. So the Gibeonites planned a ruse that would make Israel think they came from a distant land:

"And they took old sacks on their donkeys, old wineskins torn and mended, old and patched sandals on their feet, and old garments on themselves" (Joshua 9:3). Dressed in this fashion they went to find Joshua, who asked them, "Who are you, and where do you come from?" They replied, "From a very far country your servants have come... And these wineskins which we filled were new, and see, they are torn; and these our garments and our sandals have become old because of the very long journey" (Joshua, 9:5, 8, 13).

These old sandals contrast with the ones mentioned in Moses' last sermon when he says to his people: "And I have led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn out on your feet" (Deuteronomy, 29:5).

The Old Testament mentions footwear in a number of military contexts. The wars against the Philistines are the setting for the Books of Samuel. The rich iconography of the famous battle of David and Goliath, pointing to a much later date than the event itself, which took place between 1010 and 970 BC, usually shows the Philistine giant dressed in sandals and leg armor, but only the leg armor is mentioned in the Bible: "He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail,

and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. And he had bronze armor on his legs and a bronze javelin between his shoulders" (Samuel, 17:5-6).

The sandal is part of the war imagery evoked in David's exhortations to Solomon, when the king reminds his son that his servant Joab had murdered two of Israel's army commanders: "And he shed the blood of war in peacetime, and put the blood of war on his belt that was around his waist, and on his sandals that were on his feet" (Kings, 2:5). And the messianic prophet Isaiah evokes the sandal when speaking of a military threat from a distant nation: "No one will be weary or stumble among them, No one will slumber or sleep; Nor will the belt on their loins be loosed, Nor the strap of their sandals be broken; Whose arrows are sharp, And all their bows bent" (Isaiah, 5:27-28). Shoes and the lack thereof also figure prominently in Isaiah's prophesy of Egypt's defeat against Assyria, its ancient rival for domination over the Near East: "In the year that Tartan came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him, and he fought against Ashdod and took it, at the same time the Lord spoke by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, 'Go, and remove the sackcloth from your body, and take your sandals off your feet.' And he did so, walking naked and barefoot. Then the Lord said, 'Just as My servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and a wonder against Egypt and Ethiopia, so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians as prisoners and the Ethiopians as captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. Then they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation and Egypt their glory'" (Isaiah, 20:1-5).

To cast or set down one's shoe in a place symbolized occupancy. In an image reminiscent of the Pharaoh Tutankhamen trampling his enemies underfoot, Psalms 60 and 108 celebrate preparations for a military expedition against Edom: "Moab is My wash pot; Over Edom I will cast My shoe; Philistia, shout in triumph because of Me." "Through God we will do valiantly, For it is He who shall tread down our enemies" (Psalm, 60:8; 12; Psalm, 108:9:13). In the kingdom of Israel, to tag a field with one's foot or to leave one's sandal there symbolized legal ownership. The fundamental text on this tradition is in the Book of Ruth: "Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging, to confirm anything: one man took off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was a confirmation in Israel. Therefore the close relative said to Boaz, 'Buy it for yourself.' So he took off his sandal. And Boaz said to the elders and all the people, 'You are witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, from the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, I have acquired as my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brethren and from his position at the gate. You are witnesses this day'" (Ruth, 4:7-10). The sandal's legal symbolism is also evident in the Hebrew law requiring a man to marry his brother's widow if the brother left no male heir. Deuteronomy provides an explicit commentary: "But if the man does not want to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate to the elders, and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to raise up a name to his brother in Israel; he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother.' Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him. But if he stands firm and says, 'I do not want to take her,' Then his brother's wife shall come to him in the presence of the elders, remove his sandal

10. Domenico Feti. *Moses before the Burning Bush*.

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

from his foot, spit in his face, and answer and say, 'So shall it be done to the man who will not build up his brother's house.'

And his name shall be called in Israel, 'The house of him who had his sandal removed'" (Deuteronomy, 25:7-10). To walk barefoot also symbolized mourning. In one ritual, the deceased's relatives went bareheaded and barefoot with their faces partially covered by a type of scarf and ate gifts of bread from their neighbors. Ezekiel mentions the practice in reference to the mourning of the prophet: "Son of man, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes. Yet do not lament or weep or shed any tears. Groan quietly; do not mourn for the dead. Keep your turban fastened and your sandals on your feet; do not cover the lower part of your face or eat the customary food of mourners" (Ezekiel, 24:16-17).

In the 8th century BC Amos evoked the legal rights of the poor and the destitute and railed against the fairness of Israel's courts, corrupted by money. For example, Judges of Israel would issue judgments on insufficient grounds in exchange for a modest gift, a practice the prophet denounced: "I will not turn away its punishment, Because they sell the righteous for silver, And the poor for a pair of sandals" (Amos, 2:6-8).

The sandal symbolizes seduction in the Book of Judith, which recounts the occupation of a small Palestinian village called Bethulia by the armies of the Assyrian king Nebuchadnezzar: "I will cover all the land with the feet of my soldiers, to whom I will deliver them as spoils." (Judith, 2:7)

So Judith, who was a pious widow, got ready to leave town and give herself up to the enemy camp: "She chose sandals for her feet, and put on her anklets, bracelets, rings, earrings, and all her other jewelry. Thus she made herself very beautiful, to captivate the eyes of all the men who should see her." (Judith, 10:4) With her beauty the young woman aroused the passion of Holofernes, the army's leader, eventually taking advantage of his stupor after a banquet to cut off his head. In this way she diverted the attention of his armed forces, which included 120,000 infantrymen and 120,000 horsemen. In the hymn of thanksgiving sung by this biblical Joan of Arc, the victorious sandal counts among the accessories of feminine seduction: "Her sandals caught his eyes, and her beauty captivated his mind. The sword cut through his neck" (Judith, 16:9 New American Bible).

The Bible is mostly reticent concerning the aesthetics of the shoe. Ezekiel alludes to it discretely in the guilty loves of Jerusalem: "I clothed you with an embroidered dress and put leather sandals on you. I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly garments" (Ezekiel, 16:10). And if the word boot only appears once in Isaiah ("Every warrior's boot used in battle" (The Birth of the Prince of Peace, Isaiah, 9:5, New International Version), the sandal is primarily recognized as a symbol. This symbolism endures in the Muslim ritual of removing shoes before entering a mosque, a ritual that continues in the Muslim world day.





11. Sandals found in the fortress of Massada.

12. François Boucher, *Saint Peter Trying to Walk on Water*, 1766.

Saint-Louis Cathedral, Versailles.

The Shoe in the New Testament:

The Sandals of Jesus

The writings of the apostles Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John confirm the prediction John the Baptist made while baptizing people with water in Bethania, beyond the River Jordan: each evoke Jesus' shoes through the voice of the prophet: "...but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry" (Matthew, 3:11). "And he preached, saying, 'There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose'" (Mark, 1:7).

"I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose" (Luke, 3:16).

"...but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose" (John, 26-27).

This statement (repeated four times) refers to sandals that were attached to the foot with a strap. These were typical during the Roman occupation of Palestine and were worn by Jesus' contemporaries. The New Testament mentions them on numerous occasions. If we look at the story of Mathew and Luke in the calling of the seventy-two disciples, Jesus advises them to walk barefoot: "Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs... (Matthew, 10:9-10) And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet" (Matthew, 10:14) "...behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. Carry neither moneybag, knapsack, nor sandals..." (Luke, 10:3-4).

But Mark gives a different version: "He commanded them to take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bag, no bread, no copper in their money belts – but to wear sandals, and not to put on two tunics..." (Mark, 6:8-9).

Although it emphasizes asceticism, Mark's version retains the shoe as a symbol of travel, as Jean-Paul Roux explains in an article in the journal of the Institute of Calceology entitled, "The symbolism of the shoe in the religions descended from Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam." In Luke's parable of the prodigal son, the father says of his newly found son, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet" (Luke, 15:22). Only free men could enjoy sandals, as slaves did not have the right to wear shoes. Elsewhere in the New Testament, the account of Saint Peter's deliverance in the Acts of the Apostles contains a story about sandals: "That night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, 'Arise quickly!'

And his chains fell off his hands. Then the angel said to him, 'Gird yourself and tie on your sandals'; and so he did. And he said to him, 'Put on your garment and follow me'" (Acts, 12:6-8).

In the later iconography of Philippe de Champaigne's seventeenth-century painting, Christ Nailed to the Cross (Augustins Museum, Toulouse), sandals like the strapped versions evoked in the prophesy of John the Baptist are depicted carelessly strewn on the ground. Finally, if we turn to the Gospel of Saint Matthew, we read: "Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.' And Peter answered Him



and said, 'Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.' So He said, 'Come.' And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me!'" (Matthew, 14:25-30). This evangelical testimony was the subject of Boucher's eighteenth-century painting, *Saint Peter Walking on Water*, remarkable in that the apostle is shoeless, whereas Jesus is depicted in magnificent sandals based on the type worn by Roman patricians.

In conclusion, the simpler shoes (conceived for walking rather than for ceremonial use) discovered in the fortress of Massada built by Herod in the desert of the Dead Sea provide a good indication of the shoes worn by Christ and his contemporaries mentioned by the Apostles. These shoes are also more in keeping with Christ's spirit of poverty. Because of their surprisingly modern concept, their use will span the centuries, particularly in Africa, and they can be found in many third-world countries today, often reduced to a simple sole cut out from a salvaged tire with a y-shaped thong. The sandal of Jesus moreover heralds the work of certain 21st-century designers who would take inspiration from the sandal and update its appearance.

Antiquity – The Copts

Coptic civilization was a bridge between Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Direct descendants of the Pharaohs, the Copts were Egyptians that practiced Christianity. Our knowledge of their shoes comes from archaeological digs undertaken in the 19th century, in particular at Achmin.

Additional information is available from mummy textiles and sarcophagi tops from the 1st to 4th centuries AD, which usually depicted people wearing sandals, although sometimes people appear barefoot. Funeral customs changed in the 4th century when the dead were buried dressed in their most precious clothing. From that time forward, painted textiles having disappeared, steles only offer rare images that show a type of shoe with a pointed toe.

As was the case throughout Egyptian antiquity, the heel was unknown to the Copts: shoes, boots and sandals were always flat-soled. The use of full boots and ankle boots remains exceptional and reserved for men. These forms of footwear show little variety, but Coptic shoemakers demonstrated imagination in the decorative techniques they employed, using red and brown leather, leather piping curled into spirals, geometric motifs cut out of gold leather, and even sculpted leather soles.

Greece

As in Egypt, the most popular shoe in Greece was the sandal. The Homeric heroes of the Iliad and The Odyssey wear sandals with bronze soles, while the gods wear sandals made of gold. Agamemnon, legendary king of Mycenae, protected his legs with the help of leg armor fastened with silver hooks.

Sandals figure in a story about the Greek philosopher Empedocles, born around 450 BC in Agrigentum. As the story goes, Empedocles wanted people to believe he had ascended into heaven, so he dove into the opening of Mt. Etna. The volcano swallowed him, but ejected his sandals intact, in this way revealing the suicide's hoax.

Archaeological discoveries in the tombs at Vergina confirm that wealthy Macedonians during the reign of Phillip II (382 BC-336 BC) wore sandals with soles of gold or gilded silver. The Greek sandal, worn by men and women alike, had a leather or cork sole of variable thickness, differentiated right and left feet, and attached to the foot with straps. Originally simple shoes, sandals later displayed elegant complexity. Examples are found on sculptures from the period, such as the sandals worn by Diana of the Hunt (Louvre Museum, Paris). Attic vases show certain figures wearing laced boots called endromides, also known as embas when trimmed with a flap.

As for other models of Greek footwear, the pointed shoe of the Hittite variety, with which the Ionians were long familiar, never reached mainland Greece, although it was depicted by Greek vase painters who wanted to give an oriental character to their figures. Aeschylus (525 BC-456 BC) is credited with inventing the cothurne. Worn by the actors in Greek tragedies who played the roles of heroes and gods, the cothurne had an elevated cork sole that increased height at the expense of stability. This theatrical shoe adjusted equally to fit both feet, whence the expression “more versatile than a cothurne.” It is interesting to note that the cothurne, because of its height, represents the beginnings of a heel, which would remain unknown to Antiquity, but would appear later in Italy at the end of the 16th century.

One Greek custom was reserved for courtesans: the wearing of sandals embellished with precious stones. It was said that their studded soles left an unambiguous message in the sand that said, “follow me.” The rich variety of Greek footwear goes against the advice of Plato (428 BC-348 BC), who advocated walking barefoot.



13. Man's slipper, vamp decorated with motifs gilded with gold leaf.
Egypt, Coptic era. International Shoe Museum, Romans.
14. Ivory statuette of a Greek actor wearing cothurnes. Petit-Palais Museum, Paris.



15. *Diana the Huntress*, copy from the 2nd century B.C., adaptation of a Greek original from the 4th century B.C., attributed to Léo Charès, marble, The Louvre, Paris.



The Etruscans

The Etruscans probably originated in Asia Minor, appearing in Italy in what is now Tuscany at the end of the 8th century BC. Realistic paintings decorating their tombs and cemeteries (Triclinium, Tarquinia, Caere) portray gods and mortals dressed in raised-toe shoes of the Hittite variety. Strapped sandals, cut shoes, and laced boots emerged in Etruria in the 4th century BC and represent established contacts with other peoples around the Mediterranean basin.

Rome

Rome was the direct heir to Greek civilization and felt its influence in the area of footwear: Roman shoes are mainly imitations of Greek models.

In ancient Rome, shoes were indicators of social status and wealth. Some patricians wore shoes with soles of silver or solid gold, while plebeians were content to wear clogs or rustic footwear with wooden soles. Slaves lacked the right to wear shoes and walked barefoot, their feet covered in chalk or plaster. When high-ranking Roman citizens were invited to a feast, they had someone carry their sandals at the home of their host. The less fortunate had to carry their own shoes, because it was considered rude to keep ones walking shoes on. As a bed was used for dining in Rome, shoes were removed before the meal and put back on when leaving the table.

Roman shoes fall into two categories: the solea, a form of sandal, and the calceus, a closed toe shoe worn with a toga. Other types evolved with variation in colour, form, and construction. Magistrates wore strange-looking shoes with curved toes made out of black or white leather and decorated on the side with a gold or silver crescent. As in Egypt and Greece, the difference between the left and right foot was well differentiated. Shoemakers were citizens who worked in shops, rather than slaves. This is a crucial distinction in understanding the status of the shoe as an object.

In ancient Rome, the shoe began to acquire much importance in the military arena. The caliga, the Roman soldier's shoe, was a type of sandal. Strapped to the foot, it had a thick leather sole with pointed studs. It was up to the soldiers to acquire the studs; under certain circumstances, however, they were distributed free of charge as part of a ceremony called the clavarium.

It is said that as a child the Emperor Caligula was so fond of wearing the caliga he was named after the shoe, a delightful and telling anecdote. The mulleus, a closed shoe that was red in colour, differed little from the calceus. Worn by emperors, magistrates, and the children of senators, it got its name from the seashell from which bright crimson was extracted. The campagus took the form of a boot that exposed the foot. Trimmed in fur, and often decorated with pearls and precious stones, it was intended for generals to wear. A crimson version was exclusively reserved for emperors.

As in ancient Greece, the sandal and the slipper were mainly intended for women to wear indoors. The soccus, a type of slipper with a raised tip and identical for both feet, was apparently of Persian origin; it would become a traditional shoe in Turkey. These delicate little shoes aroused the concupiscence of the era's fetishists.



16. Attic cup with red figures, attributed to Epiktétos.
Around 500 BC. Agora Museum, Athens.
17. Attica urn with black figures, representing a shoe repairer's workshop.
Around 520-510 BC. Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Suetonius (70-128) tells how the Roman senator Lucius Vitellus, who carried under his tunic the slipper that his mistress wore on her right foot, without the slightest embarrassment, would remove the shoe in public and cover it with kisses. Red shoes had long been the privileged attribute of Roman courtesans before all women dared to wear them.

After the emperor Aurelius (212-275) wore them, red shoes became an Imperial symbol, giving birth to a tradition that was later taken up by the Papacy, and subsequently by all the courts of Europe, which wore red-heeled shoes.

We know from the writings of Juvenal (55-140) that to give a spanking with a shoe was a serious punishment commonly administered to children and slaves.

Romantic Romans put their shoes to more gallant use by inserting amorous messages between the sandal and the foot of their confidant. In this way, sandals became a drop box for love notes as advocated by Ovid (43 BC-17 AD) in *The Art of Love*.

18. Low-relief of the Trajan column, soldiers of the Roman legions (military shoes). Rome, 113 AD. Marble.

19. Colossal statue of the god Mars (shod in *campagus*). 1st century AD. Capitole Museum, Rome.



20. Funerary stele of a cobbler. Reims, Marne, faubourg Cérés, Gallo-Roman, 2nd century AD. Collection of the Saint-Rémi Museum of Reims. Photo by Robert Meulle.

21. Sliver sandal. Byzantine period. Bally Museum, Schönenwerd, Switzerland.

22. Mosaics from the churches of Saint Vital and Saint Apollinaire in Classe de Ravenna. Around 547 AD. The Emperor Justinien and his servants.

The Gallo-Romans

The Gallo-Romans wore various versions of flat shoes with rounded toes. The most popular were ordinary sandals for men and women based on Roman models.

The gallica was a closed shoe with a wooden sole and was the ancestor of the galoshes (a later overshoe with a wooden sole).

An 11th-century monument to a shoemaker confirms the existence of the shoemaker's industry and the respect these artisans enjoyed.

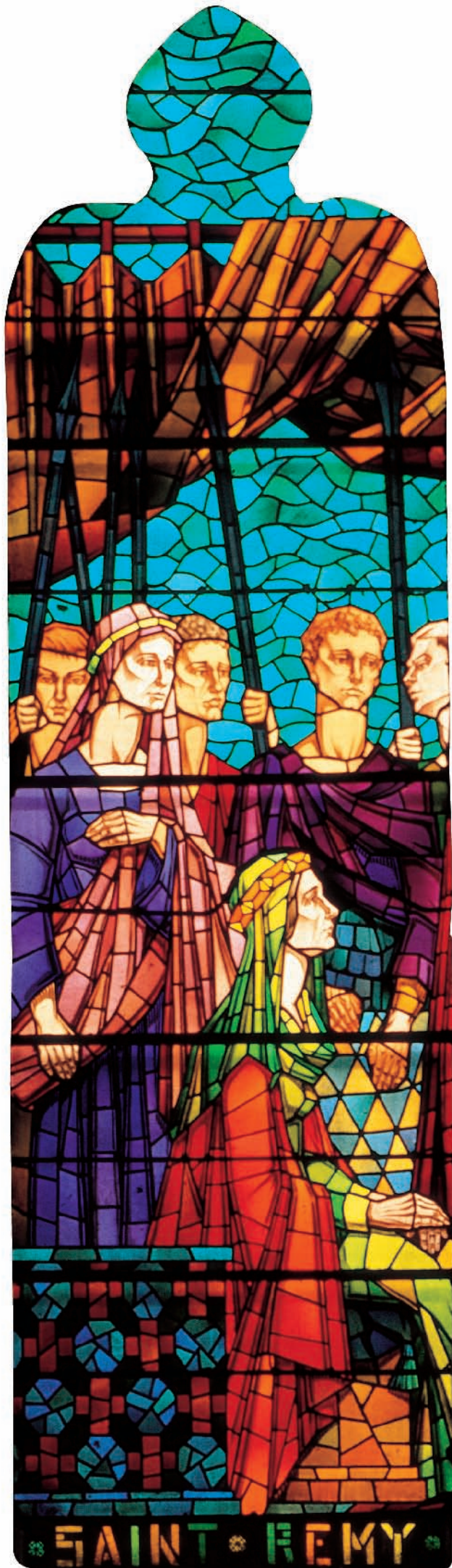


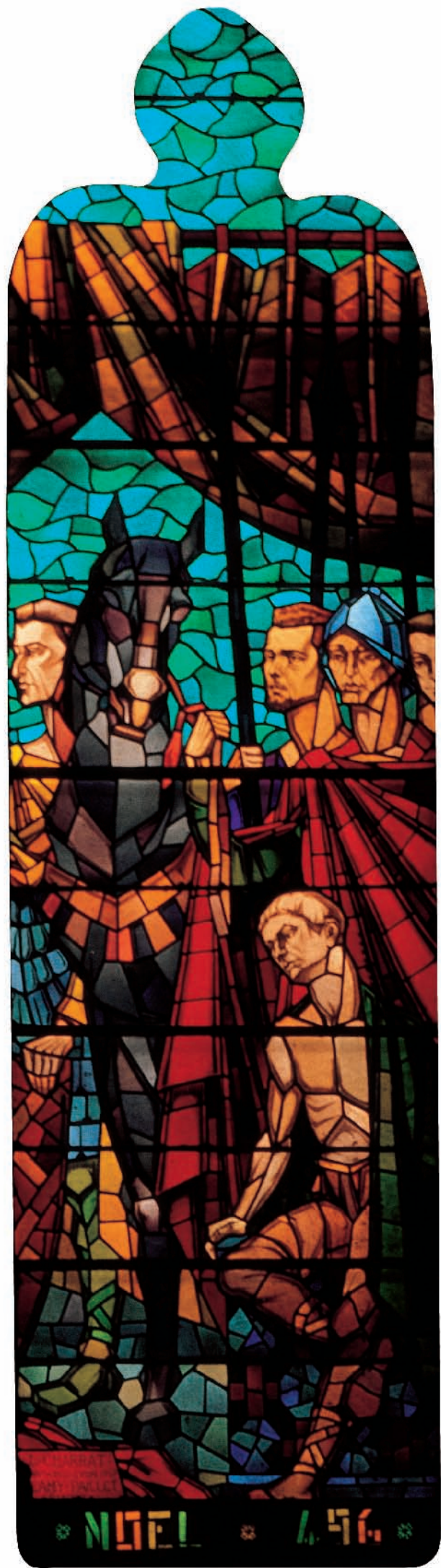
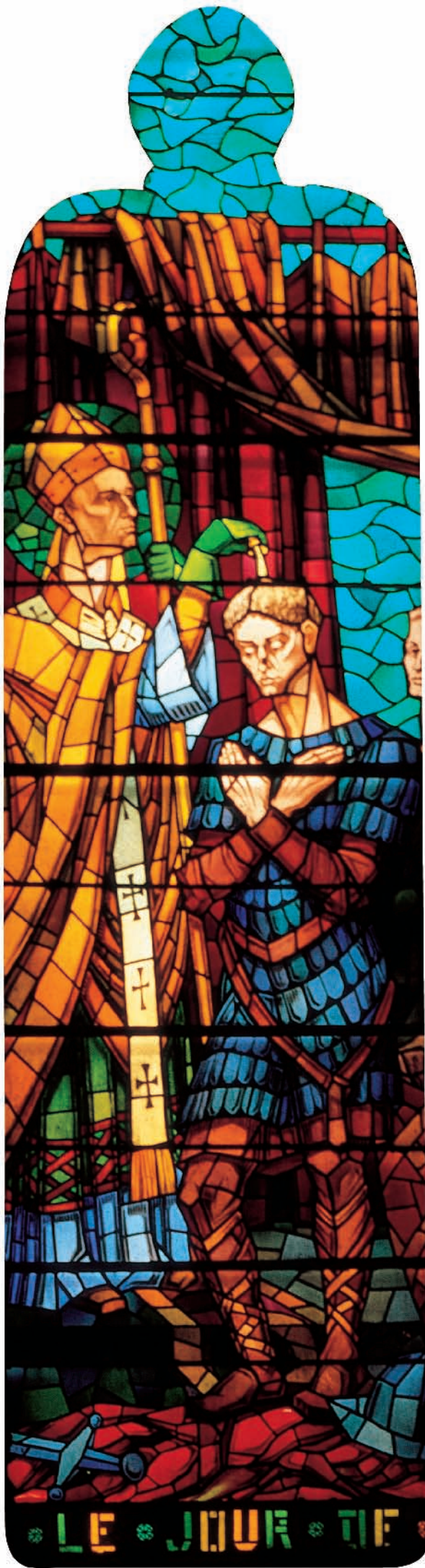
The Byzantine empire

Byzantine civilization extended from the 5th to the 15th century, producing throughout this period a wealth of crimson leather shoes trimmed in gold reminiscent of embroidered Persian-style boots, as well as the Roman *soccus* and *mulleus*.

Byzantine mules and slippers were objects of luxury and refinement initially reserved for the Emperor and his court. Crimson or gold slippers were worn in the eastern Mediterranean basin, in particular in the area around Alexandria and in the

Nile valley. Excavations at Achmin have yielded many examples that belonged to women. The arrival of Christian shoemakers in this region revived the craft of shoemaking, as Christian symbols were added to the geometric decorative tradition. A silver sandal discovered in an Egyptian tomb and now in the collection of the Bally Museum is a good example. Dating to the 6th century AD, it is embellished with the image of a dove symbolizing Christ.







The Middle Ages

As the Middle Ages dawned in the West, footwear remained under the influence of ancient Roman models. The Franks wore shoes equipped with straps that rose to mid-thigh. Only their leaders wore shoes with pointed tips.

Thanks to the extraordinary degree of preservation of certain burials, we have an idea of what Merovingian shoes looked like. The tomb discovered at Saint-Denis of Queen Arégonde, wife of King Clotaire I (497-561), has enabled us to reconstruct an image of her shoes as supple leather sandals with straps intertwining the leg. Elsewhere, gilded bronze shoe buckles decorated with stylized animals discovered in a leader's tomb at Hordaim, are proof of the attention given to shoe ornamentation during this period. Shoes were very costly during the Middle Ages, which is why they appear in wills and are among the donations made to monasteries. Costliness also explains why a fiancé would offer his future wife a pair of embroidered shoes before marriage, a lovely tradition dating to Gregory of Tours (538-594). We can get a sense of the opulence of this gift from the shoes of this era preserved in the museum of Chelles near Paris.

The strapped or banded shoe continued into the Carolingian period, although the woman's model became more embellished. As for the wooden-soled galle or galoche, it too remained in use.

From this time forward, soldiers protected their legs with leather or metal leggings called *bamberges*. In the 9th-century, a shoe called the *heuse* made out of supple leather extending high on the leg announced the arrival of the boot.

We know from the monk of the Saint Gall monastery that emperor Charlemagne wore simple boots with straps intertwining the legs, although for ceremonies he wore laced boots decorated with precious stones. But frequent contact between France and Italy helped develop a taste for regalia and increasingly the shoe became an object of great luxury.

At the same time, religious councils were ordering clerics to wear liturgical shoes while performing mass. Called sandals, these holy shoes were of cloth and completely covered the cleric's foot. Pope Adrian I (772-795) instituted the ritual of kissing feet. When some clergy members deemed this rite undignified, a compromise was established. Henceforth, the papal mule would be embroidered with a cross. Kissing this cross was no longer a sign of servitude, but one of homage to Christ's representative on earth. Regarding shoemaking, the French word *cordouanier* (which became *cordonnier* or shoemaker) was adopted in the 11th century and signified someone who worked with Cordoba leather and by extension, all kinds of leather. As in Antiquity, shoes were patterned separately for the right and left foot. Shoes made out of Cordoba leather were reserved for the aristocracy, whereas those made by *çavetiers*, or cobblers (shoe repairmen) were more crudely fashioned. The wearing of shoes began to expand in the 11th-century. The most common medieval type was an open shoe secured by a strap fitted with a buckle or button.

Other types included *estivaux*, a summer ankle boot of supple, lightweight leather that appeared in the second half of the 11th century; *chausses* with soles, a type of cloth boot reinforced with leather soles worn with patters (supplemental wooden under soles) for outdoor use; and *heuses*, supple boots in a variety of forms originally reserved for gentlemen, but which became common under the reign of Philippe Auguste (1165-1223). In the early 12th century, shoes became longer. Called *pigaches*, these shoes were forerunners of the *poulaine* style a knight named Robert le Cornu is credited with introducing.

The Crusaders brought the exaggerated style with its inordinately long tip back from the East. It is based on the raised-toe model of Syrian, Akkadian, and Hittite culture, and reflects the vertical aesthetic of gothic Europe. When people of modest means imitated this eccentric fashion initially reserved for the aristocracy, the authorities responded by regulating the length of the shoe's points according to social rank: ½ foot for commoners, 1 foot for the bourgeois, 1 and ½ feet for knights, 2 feet for nobles, and 2 and ½ feet for princes, who had to hold the tips of their shoes up with gold or silver chains attached to their knees in order to walk. The shoe length hierarchy led to the French expression "vivre sur un grand pied," (to live on a large foot), denoting the worldly status represented by shoe length.

The *poulaine* was made of leather, velvet, or brocade. The uppers could sport cutouts in the form of gothic church windows, although obscene images were sometimes used. A small round bell or an ornament in the shape of a bird beak often dangled from the tip of the shoe. There was even a military *poulaine* to go with a soldier's amour. Interestingly, during the battle of Sempach between the Swiss confederates and the Austrians in 1386, knights had to cut off the points of their *poulaines* because they interfered with combat.

Worn throughout Europe by men and women alike, as well as by certain clerics, the *poulaine* was condemned by bishops, excommunicated by religious councils, and forbidden by kings. But its immoral status only made the *poulaine* more seductive, and it was all the rage in the Burgundian court. Indeed, the *poulaine* would only disappear in the early 16th century, after a four century run.

Flat-soled shoes lasted the entire medieval period, but a heel was beginning to emerge as evidenced in Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Couple*. The protective wooden patters, depicted carelessly strewn on the floor in the left of the painting, exhibit an incline: the rear heel is higher than the front support.

Shoes were scarce and costly items in the middle ages, so protective wooden soles were used for going out in muddy backstreets. But the under soles made the shoes too noisy: it was strictly forbidden to wear them in church.

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23. Stained-glass window of the baptism of Clovis by Saint-Rémy (496).
Sanctuary of Saint Bonaventure, Lyon 2nd, by L. Charat and
Mrs. Lamy-Paillet in 1964.
Photo by J. Bonnet, Imp. Beaulieu Lyon.
24. *Saint Mark Healing Aniane the Cobbler*, detail from a mosaic.
13th century. Saint Mark Basilica, Venice.





25. Poulaine. Bally Museum, Schönenwerd, Switzerland.
26. Liturgical shoe of plain embroidered samite. Spain, 12th century.
Silk and gold thread. Historical Museum of Fabrics of Lyon, Lyon.
27. Poulaine style shoe. Bally Museum, Schönenwerd, Switzerland.
28. Martin de Braga. *Caton in the Company of Scipion and Lelius, Standing before Him*. Third quarter of the 15th century.
The Hermitage Museum, Saint-Petersburg.



29. Jan van Eyck. *The Arnolfini Portrait*, 1434.

Oil on panel. 83.8 x 57.2 cm. National Gallery, London.

30. *Philippe VI de Valois Receives Tribute from His Vassal Edward III of England*, detail of an illumination from the *Chronicles of Jehan Froissart*. 15th century.

National Library of Paris, Paris.