

Peacock, J. 2005. Shoes. The Complete Sourcebook. – London, Thames & Hudson.

Book review by A.J. Veldmeijer



Occasionally, books are published which are easy to discuss, even after having read only the first few pages. 'Shoes. The Complete Sourcebook' is such a book. As archaeologist of Egypt, I work with leather, basketry and cordage and focus on studying footwear. Therefore, this review is based mainly on the small part that deals with the ancient Egyptian footwear.

Having studied well over 1000 pieces of footwear in all major Egyptological collections all over the world, one of the first things that struck me when opening the book is the fact that the various types of footwear are assigned specific groups or functions. The majority of material housed in the collections were obtained in the 19th century and lack provenance and date, let alone indications of its owner. One example is the sandal referred to as priest's sandal (p. 10 [no. 7], 25). This type of sandal is rather common but there is no indication that this type of sandals were only worn by priests, if indeed there was any type of sandal at all specific to a certain group of people. The bleaching of the vegetable fibres is absolute nonsense and I have no clue how the author obtained this information (the book has no references and there is no information on how the author came to his conclusion). The processing of raw material for basketry has been well documented (for example Wendrich, 1999) and does not include bleaching. Furthermore, the strips of vegetable material are not woven but plaited.

Another example is the so-called workmen's sandals (p. 9 [no. 2], 25), consisting of a wooden sole and straps, made of vegetable material, which are fastened to pegs in the sole. If the author had done any research, he would have known that these are tomb sandals, *i.e.* sandals especially made for putting into the tomb with the deceased, in order to provide him with necessary footwear in the after life. The fact that the strap complex is not secured in any way (the straps are inserted into a slit in the top of the pegs and the pegs themselves are only inserted in holes in the sole) was not a problem, as magic and spells would ensure that the owner had properly functioning footwear. This sandal, for me, is clear evidence the author did not undertake much research.

I could continue in this way, as there is hardly any accurate information on ancient Egyptian footwear, but I will refrain from it: I think I have already made my point. If you want to know more on ancient Egyptian (or Mesopotamian) footwear I can only say: do not buy this book.

Peacock, J. 2005. Shoes. The Complete Sourcebook. – London, Thames & Hudson. 168 pp. ISBN 0-500-51212-4. Price £24.95 (hardback). Distributed by Nilsson & Lamm (www.nilsson-lamm.nl).

Cited literature

Wendrich, W.Z. 1999. The World According to Basketry. – Leiden, Centre of Non-Western Studies.