

# FOOTWEAR FROM CEMETERY C AT NAQLUN. PRELIMINARY REPORT\*

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The exploration of Cemetery C at Naqlun brought the discovery of a pair of boots, a pair of ankle-shoes and a pair of sandals. All of them were found as part of adult male burials (T. 005, 007, and 010) on cemetery C (see above, reports by W. Godlewski and I. Zych in this volume). The uncovered footwear was made entirely of leather.<sup>1</sup>

BOOTS (Nd.06.493) [*Fig. 1 A, B*]

Left boot: H. 21 cm, L. 27 cm

Right boot: H. 26 cm, L. 24.2 cm

The pair was found intact on the feet of the deceased in burial T. 005. Both shoes were in a very good state of preservation; only the front half of the sole and the toe of the left boot was missing. Consequently, construction details were difficult to determine, especially since the upper is closed. Moreover, the leather that the boots were made of was considerably deformed, dry and brittle, making a study of technical aspects difficult without risking damage to the preserved substance. The boots were turn-shoes, meaning they were sewn inside out and turned over, making the seams invisible on the outside. Some idea of the structural details and stitching patterns was provided by the damaged sole of the right boot.

Each of the boots has the upper made of a single large piece of leather cut to the desired shape. The pieces are of roughly similar dimensions in both boots (right: 30 x 20 cm, left: 30 x 24 cm). The tops of the quarters were rounded off to form a semicircle when viewed from the side and V-shaped in the front and back. The uppers were wrapped around the foot and calf, and stitched to the sole. In the back the edges of the leather were not sewn together, but left open (Montembault 2000: 74-75, Class XI type B).<sup>2</sup>

The left boot is tied round with a knotted string of vegetal fibre, while the right boot has a leather strip tapering towards the ends (34.5 cm in length, 2.2 cm at maximum width) tied at the ankle in the front of the foot with a reef knot (Veldmeijer 2006: 337-366).

The soles are waisted and their heels have tapering, pointed extensions in the back, which rise up and are sewn into inverted Y-shaped cut-outs in the quarters. The only threading visible from the outside is in the back of the left boot where the sole forms a point above the heel. It appears that a leather thong was passed through four awl holes punched through the tapering

\* I am indebted to Dr. André J. Veldmeijer for his advice and remarks on this material.

1 Identifying the species of animal from which the leather was obtained requires technical analyses that were impossible to carry out under field conditions.

2 A close parallel from the Louvre collection but in a much poorer state of preservation - no. 137, provenance and dating unknown (Montembault 2000: 210-211); another possible parallel is no. 147 (Montembault 2000: 218).

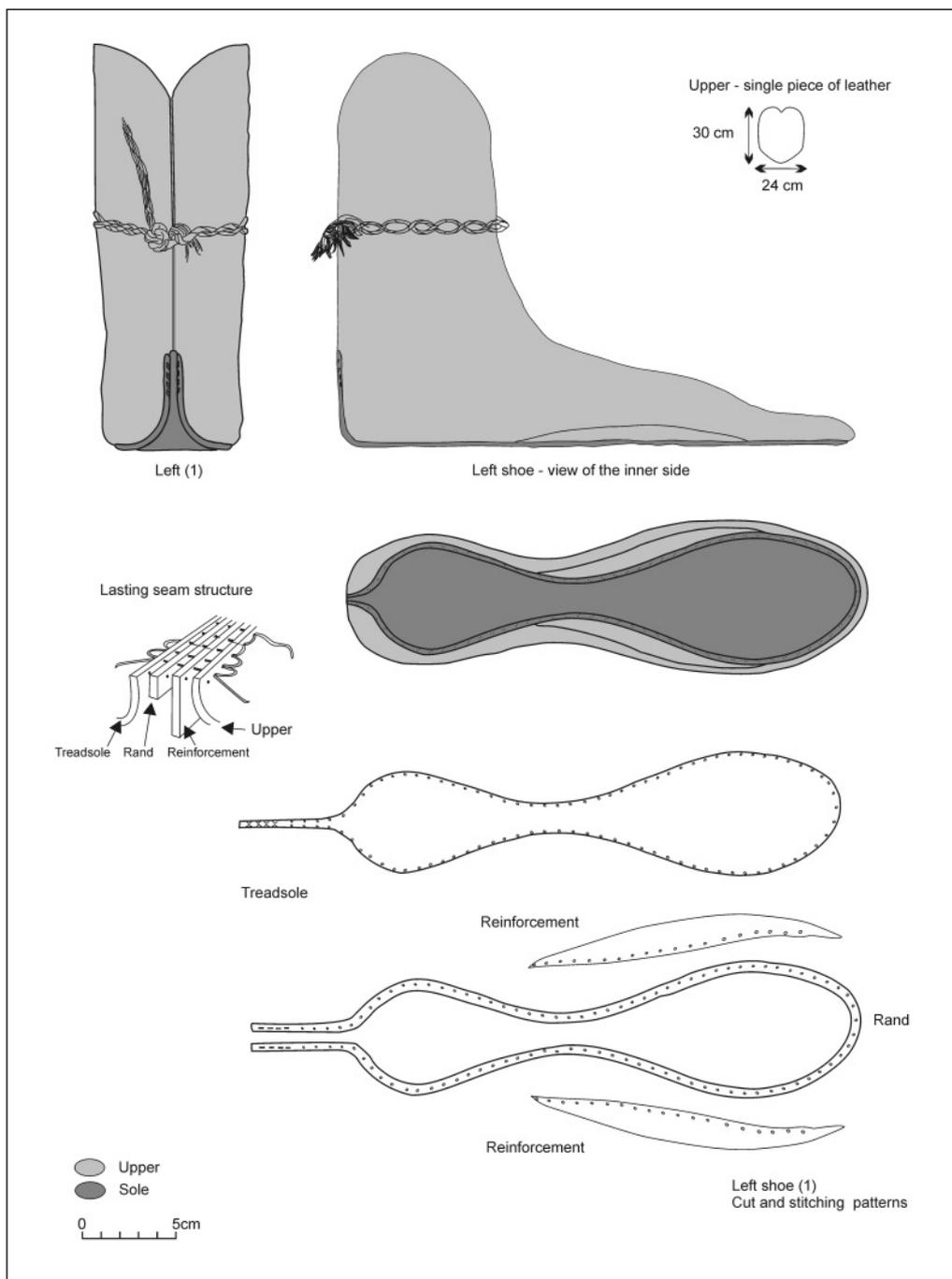


Fig. 1A. The left from a pair of boots (Nd.06.493)  
(Drawing D. Dzierzbicka)

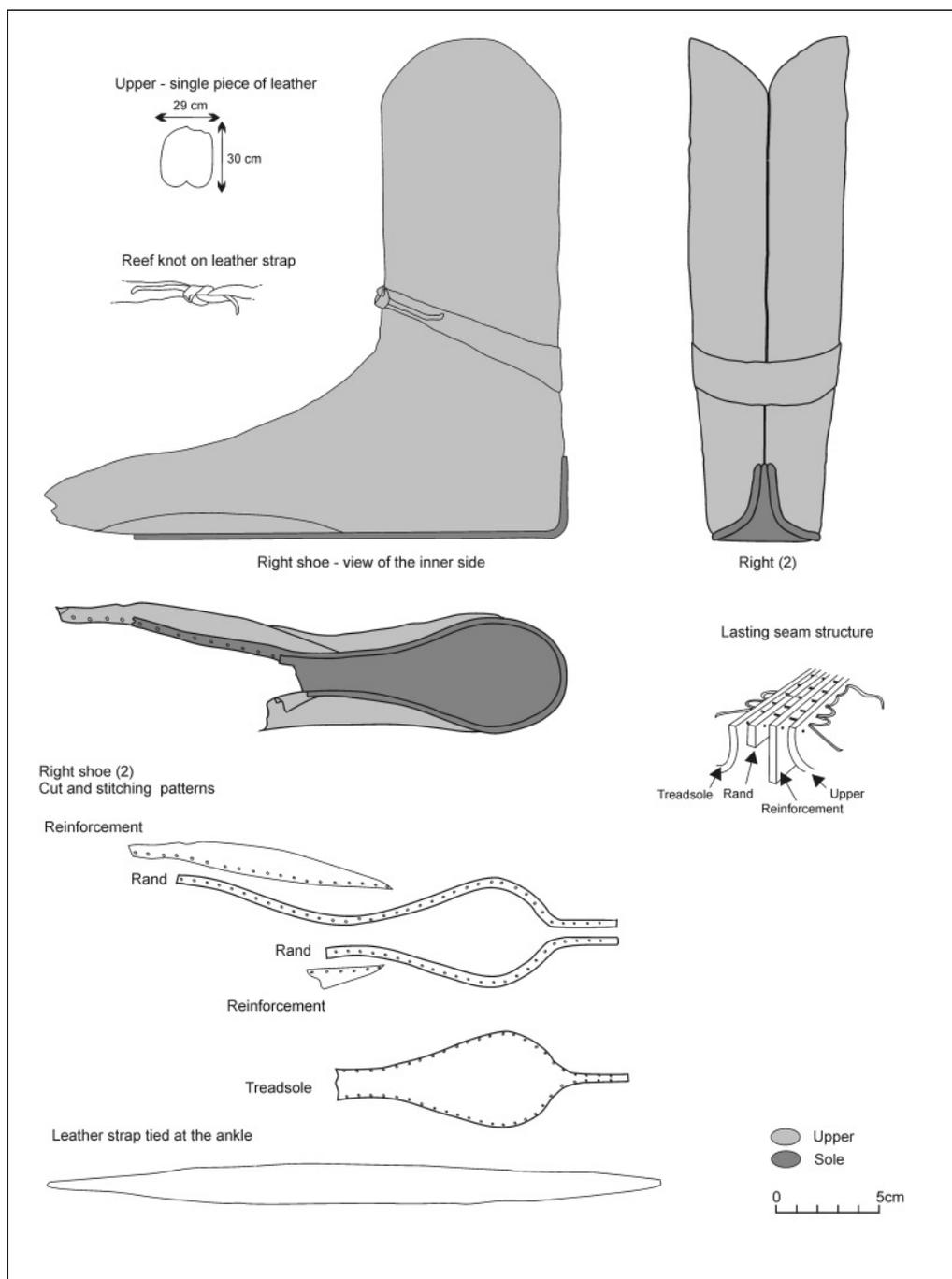


Fig. 1B. The right from a pair of boots (Nd.06.493)  
(Drawing D. Dzierzbicka)

extension of the sole, as well as through the rands and adjacent edges of the upper on both sides.

In the front on either side there are additional strips of leather (c. 12 cm long, c. 1.5 cm wide) inserted in the lasting seam at the instep. The strips were sewn in as an extra layer between the rand and the upper. There are no visible traces of threading binding them to the upper above the lasting

seam. They were made of thin leather, resembling that of the upper, and probably served as further protection of the upper in the vulnerable instep area, where stretching and bending at the lasting seam could lead to damage. They may have also served as an additional protective layer at the narrow waist of the sole.

Inside the boots there was a textile “sock” that corresponded to them in shape

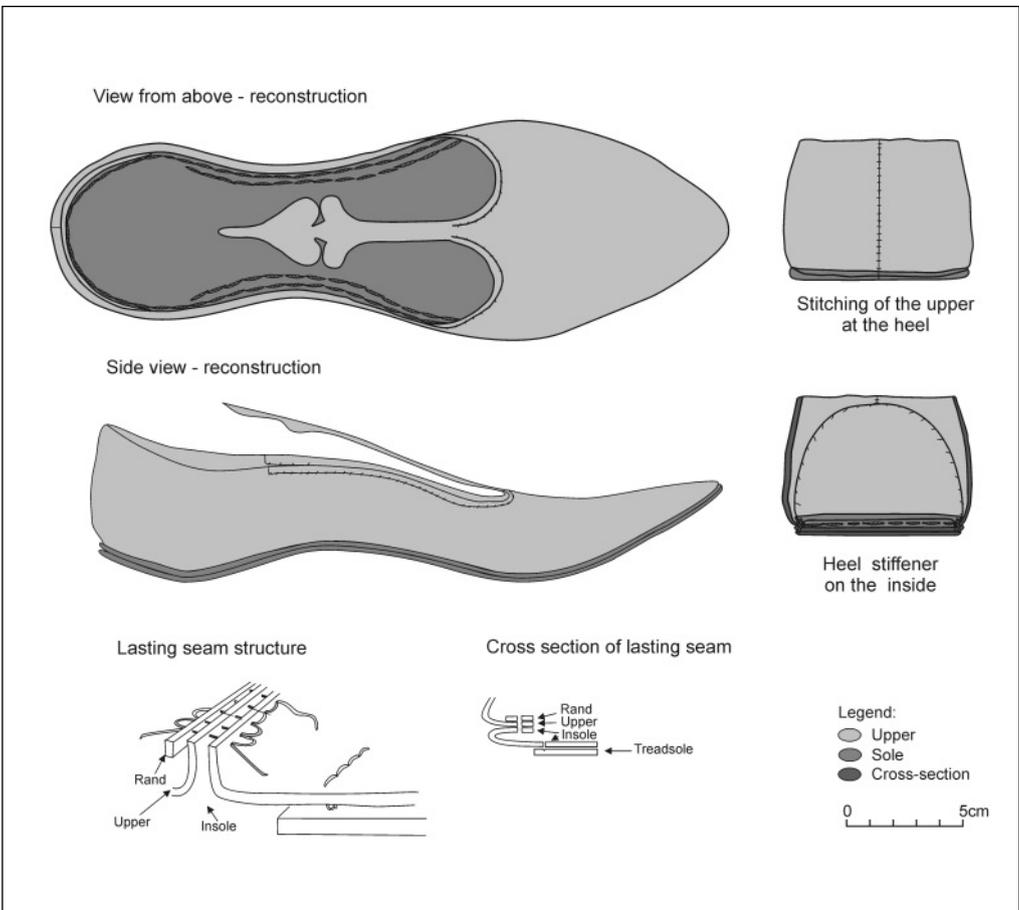


Fig. 2. *Pair of ankle-shoes (Nd.06.494)*  
(Drawing D. Dzierzbicka)

and length, isolating footwear from the leg and foot. The toe, of which only the left is fairly well preserved, is rounded.

The lasting seam is sewn with a saddle stitch. The edge of the upper was pierced through its entire thickness and sewn together with the edge of the treadsole, through which the thread was passed at an angle (tunnel stitch), without going through its thickness. A rand, a narrow strip of leather, was inserted between the upper and the treadsole to seal the lasting seam and protect the edge of the upper from

touching the ground. No insole or midsole was noted; perhaps they were not necessary due to the presence of a textile "sock" inside.

#### ANKLE-SHOES (Nd.06.494) [Fig. 2]

Right shoe: L. 29 cm, W. max. 9.2 cm, H. max. 6 cm

A pair of slip-on ankle shoes with a pointed toe was found as part of burial C.T.7. The right shoe was in a relatively good state of preservation, with the sole and quarters practically intact, but crushed upper on the instep and toe. Of the left shoe,

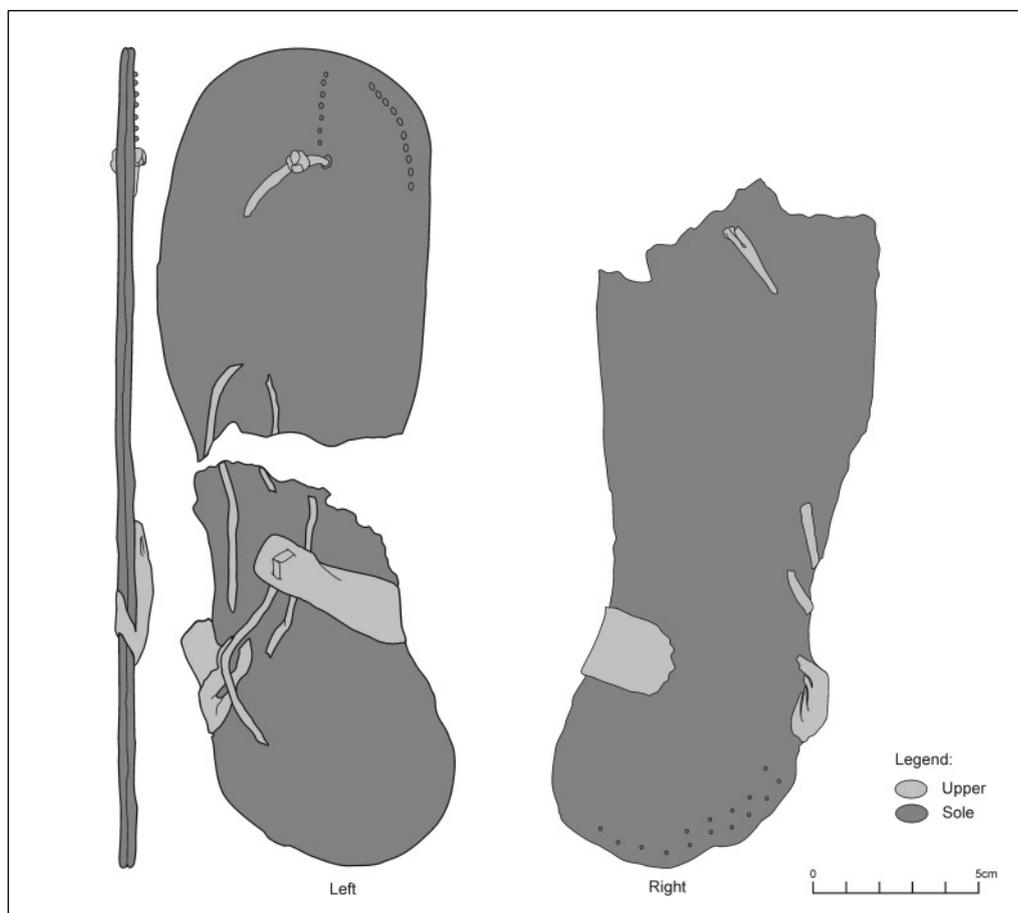


Fig. 3. Pair of sandals (Nd.06.945)  
(Drawing D. Dzierzbicka)

only the front part is preserved, thus providing information on the elements that are missing in the other shoe. The right shoe also had a long, decorative tongue, which had broken away but was found inside the shoe.

This pair can also be classified as turn shoes, class IV, type B, variant 3, according to Montembault's classification (2000: 67). The sole consisted of a treadsole and an insole. The saddle stitch of the lasting seam passes through three layers: from the top it is a rand, then the upper, and below it an upturned lip of the insole. Another stitch visible inside the shoe, running parallel to the lasting seam, may have served to attach the treadsole to the insole. However, since it did not penetrate the treadsole (and because of the footwear's precarious condition), it was impossible to determine exactly how it is attached without causing damage to it.

All other information was obtained by examining the better-preserved right shoe. The upper is made of a single piece of leather cut to shape and sewn together with an edge stitch in the back of the heel to form a butted seam. The heel is strengthened on the inside with a semicircular reinforcement piece – a heel stiffener, attached to the upper with a whip stitch that does not penetrate the upper, so it does not show on the outside.

The upper is trimmed at the top with an edge binding, i.e., a narrow strip attached along the instep with whip stitches (the thread of the stitches is very fine). A long (c. 10 cm), narrow, decorative tongue was found broken off from the rest of the shoe. It fits perfectly in place, so it is certain that no

pieces of it are missing. The edge binding does not continue into the tongue, and it is obscure how and where it terminated, as it crumbled away a little lower than the place where the tongue broke away, yet there are no traces of it on the tongue. It must have ended at some point at its base.

Such a large, fragile tongue of this shape is quite an unusual feature, but there are many examples of footwear with similar, but smaller tongues (Montembault 2000: 164-169, 172-173, nos 97, 98, 100, 102 and 103).<sup>3</sup> However, these are usually lined with coiled strips of leather, which make them rigid enough to remain in place. However, this one is made of thin, flexible leather that could not have remained on the instep by itself. It might have been folded back over the toe; eventually bending the leather may have weakened it, causing it to break off, but one cannot be certain. The tongue may have simply broken off in this place because it was the narrowest, most vulnerable point. In any case, the tongue was most probably not held in place in any way.

#### SANDALS (Nd.06.945) *{Fig. 3}*

L. 25 cm, W. max. 8 cm

The pair of sandals is in a very poor state of preservation. Their entire surface was covered with a hard, black, bituminous substance with adhering pebbles and sand particles. It turned out that this mass is impossible to remove without causing damage to the brittle leather. Therefore, the structural details remained largely obscured.

Both sandals are fragmentary and broken into several pieces, but it is clear that their construction is the same. As one can tell by

3 A close parallel to this tongue is part of the Petrie collection: Petrie Museum no. UC65049 (Oxyrhynchos, Coptic Period) is a broken-off ornamental tongue, cut out to a repeating spade-like pattern. It is wider than the tongue found at Naqlun (4.4 cm), but also 10 cm in length.

looking at the better-preserved left sandal, the soles measured 25 cm in length and 8 cm in maximum width. The right sandal, in turn, shows that the sole was slightly waisted at mid-length (6 cm wide).

The sole of the sandals was composed of an insole and a treadsole that were stitched together. Stubs of thread protrude from the insole, but it appears that the seam did not penetrate the treadsole. No traces of threading are visible on the treadsole, but this may be completely obscured by the dirt adhering to the bituminous substance covering the sandals. In any case, traces of threading are visible along the outer edge (a parallel, double stitch visible around the heel of the right sandal and on the inner front of the left sandal) and through the centre (a single stitch visible at the toe of the left sandal).

A leather thong passed through the front centre of the sole and was fastened in place with two knots, below and above the sole. It is only extant to a length of roughly two centimetres, but it surely continued as some sort of fastening.

On both sides of the heel there were wider strips of leather (c. 1.5 cm wide, c. 5 cm long) attached to the sole (whether to the insole, the treadsole, or in between is impossible to determine, but the specimen certainly corresponds to Montembault's type B.<sup>4</sup> Leather thongs 0.2 cm thick passed through slits made in these strips and originally may have been connected to the thongs that passed through the sole next to the big toe and tied around the ankle. Some loose fragments of thongs are still attached to the adhesive substance covering the soles of the sandals.

## REFERENCES

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<sup>4</sup> For parallels to this pair in the Louvre, see Montembault 2000: 94-105, especially nos 37, 39, 45, and 47. The closest parallels are from Antinoe and are dated to a period from AD 130 to the 12th century.