

ROMAN FOOTWEAR FROM WELLS AT WAIBLINGEN AND WALHEIM

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Mit 7 Textabbildungen

Two small boxes of leather were sent to me by Dr. D. PLANCK, Stuttgart, one from the villa rustica at Waiblingen¹, the other from the stone building no. 19 in the vicus at Walheim². Both finds are dated to Third Century. Although only five or six shoes are concerned, the leather from the two sites is interesting in that it illustrates three of the four most common techniques used to make Roman footwear. Despite the decayed and fragmentary condition of the shoe



Fig. 1 Map of sites.

* I would like to thank O. GOUBITZ (R. O. B. Amersfoort) for his assistance with the reconstruction and B. BROUWENSTIJN (IPP) for preparing the drawings.

¹ PH. FOLTZINGER/D. PLANCK/B. CÄMMERER, *Die Römer in Baden-Württemberg* (3. ed. 1986) pp. 593.

² D. PLANCK, *Arch. Ausgrab. in Bad.-Württ.* 1986 (1987) pp. 113. – D. PLANCK, *Zur Topographie des römischen Walheim*. *Ludwigsb. Geschichtsbl.* 40, 1987, 38.

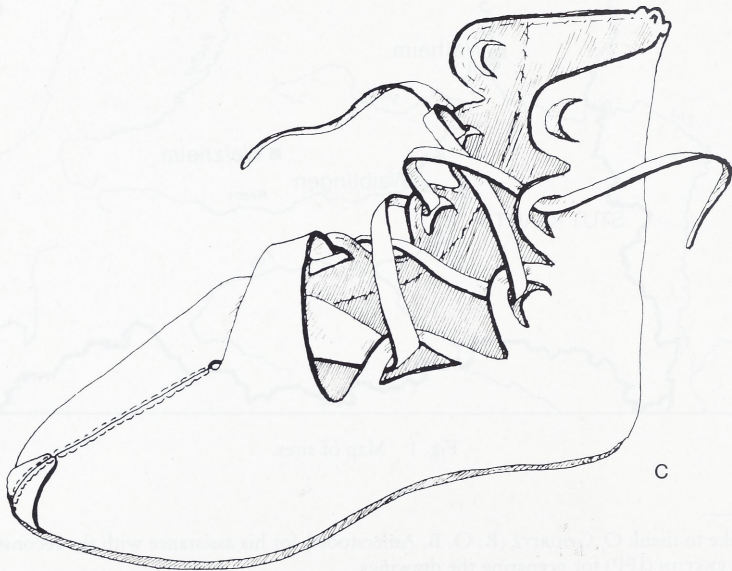
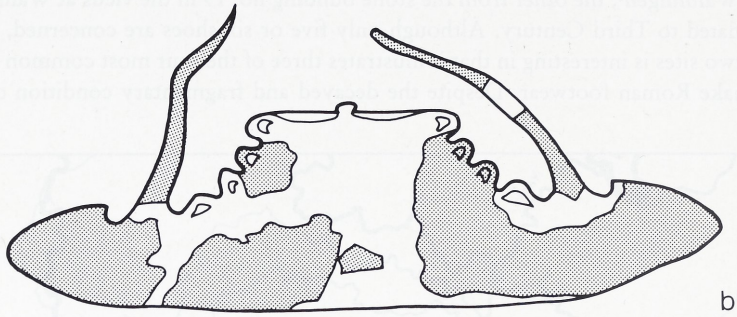
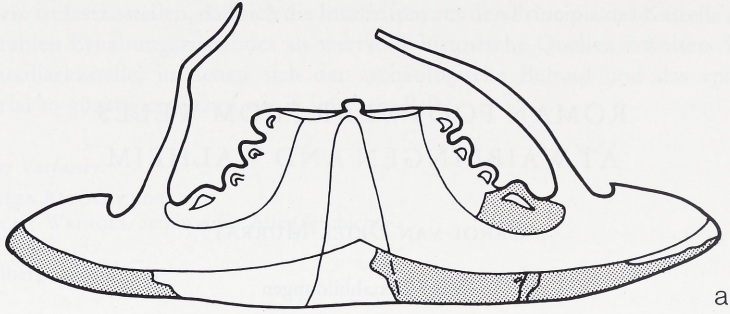


Fig. 2 Eyelet boot reconstruction with position of surviving fragments shaded. a) Waiblingen; b) Walheim; c) reconstruction drawn by O. GOUBITZ.

uppers, sufficient remained for a reconstruction of the appearance of the shoes: interestingly, the same kind of ankle boot was present at both sites.

Together with the much larger find of footwear from Welzheim³ these finds provide us with a good idea of the sort of shoes which were worn by the people of Baden-Württemberg at that period of time (fig. 1).

Relatively small finds of leather are often difficult to interpret in isolation, but when material from several contemporary sites in the same region can be combined, individual finds and even very fragmentary material take on a new importance. By establishing the geographical distribution of particular styles of footwear, and by confirming the period in which they were most popular, scattered finds of leather allow us to form a much clearer picture of fashion as a regional and social phenomenon. Just as the footwear from the numerous sites on the Antonine Wall in Britain contributes to the characterization of a specific mid-Second Century mode of dress⁴, so the sites of Baden-Württemberg are beginning to yield a consistent picture for the late Second-early Third Century.

The leather from both sites comes from wells. As it is unlikely that anyone would deliberately throw his dirty old shoes into a well which was still in use as a source of water, the footwear was presumably amongst the rubbish used to block the well shafts at the end of their life. Since leather decays unless waterlogged, the shoes cannot have been lying around for very long, and they must therefore reflect the shoe fashions being worn locally at the very time that the wells were filled in. At Waiblingen a single pair of shoes was thrown down the well, while at Walheim, a more disparate and incomplete collection was included amongst the debris.

Nailed Shoes

The pair of shoes from Waiblingen (nos 1 and 2; fig. 3) and the sole with a reconstructable upper from Walheim (no. 4; fig. 5) are made by the typical Roman method of nailing. They resemble our modern shoes quite closely, with a sole made of several layers of leather. The upper is cut separately from thinner leather and is first joined together over the insole by sewing (bracing) before the outer sole is nailed on. Scraps of leather (*laminae*) are thonged to the insole to provide a cushion for the foot and to make the rather thick sole unit more supple (fig. 3, 1c-e). Part of this thong is still in place on sole no. 1, elsewhere it shows as a deep impression on the underside of the sole. Sure signs of this construction in incomplete soles are the paired slits down the length of the insole (fig. 3, 2). In Waiblingen several layers of thin scraps were used, but shoe no. 4 seems to have only one rather large lamina. The edges of the upper (the lasting margins) are folded round the insole, fitting against the laminae, to which they may be sewn by a few stitches (fig. 3, 1d, e). The outersole is nailed on an iron last so that the points of the nails bend back on impact, thus making them safe and at the same time firmly securing all the layers of the sole together (fig. 5d). Many attempts to reconstruct Roman footwear have failed because the clenching function of the nails was not appreciated. If nails are driven straight in they loosen and drop out quite quickly and the whole shoe falls apart: in addition, the discomfort caused by the points sticking through the shoe soles may well be imagined.

³ See forthcoming report by the author and also D. PLANCK, *Ausgrabungen im Ostkastell von Welzheim, Rems-Murr-Kreis (Baden-Württemberg)*. *Arch. Korrespondenzbl.* 9, 1979, pp. 411.

⁴ For example, A. ROBERTSON/A. SCOTT/L. KEPPIE, *Bar Hill: a Roman fort and its finds*. *Brit. Arch. Reports* 16, 1975.

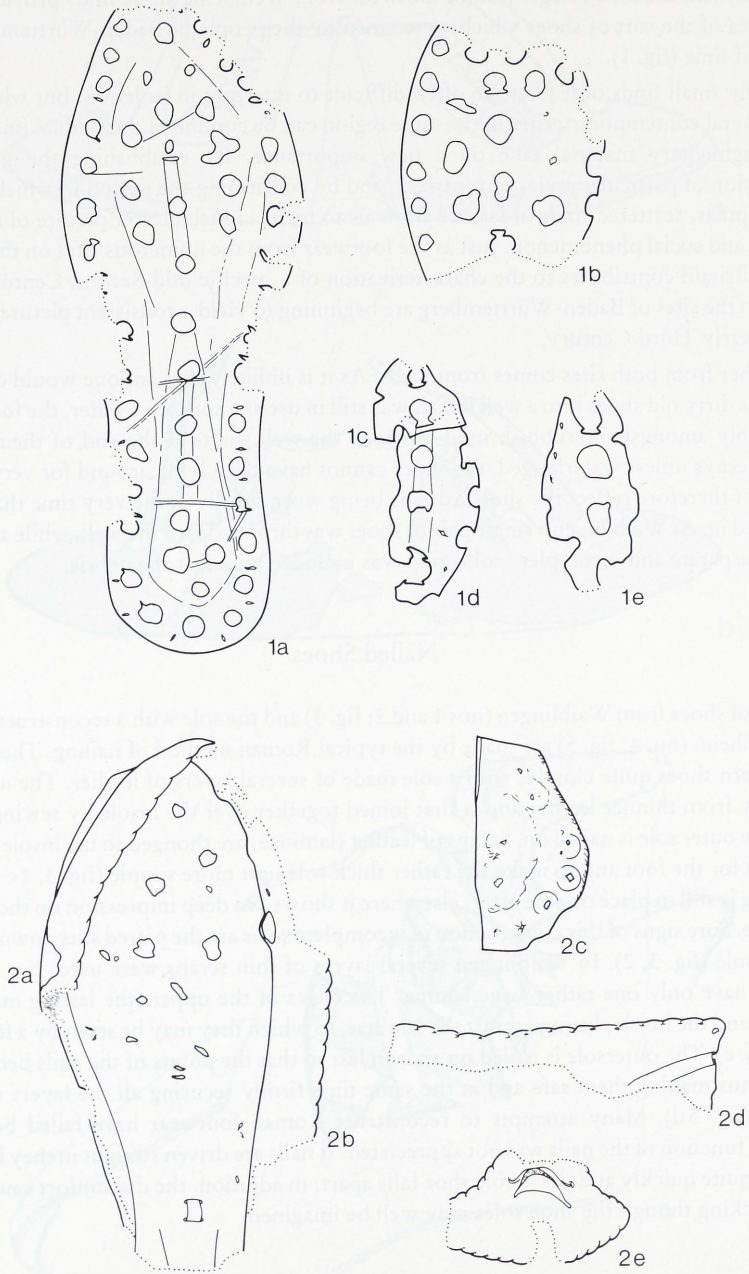


Fig. 3 Waiblingen shoes nos 1 and 2. Scale 1:3.

The uppers of both shoes can be reconstructed from the surviving decayed fragments only because they belong to a distinctive and well-known type of ankle boot (fig. 2).

The boot reaches over, or just below, the ankle and is cut together with the laces from a single piece of cow or calf skin. There is a single short seam at the front and usually four pairs of crescentic lace holes (eyelets). Linings of thin leather, usually sheep or goatskin, are sewn to the inside of the shoe behind the eyelets, at the back to keep the boot leg in shape and along the bottom to protect the upper from scuffing around the toes and the lower part of the foot (lasting margin reinforcements, fig. 3, 2b). That this area needed protection suggests that the shoes were meant to fit rather tightly around the foot. The presence of the linings, the shape of the eyelets and, above all, the arrangement of the laces, are so characteristic that shoes can be readily identified, even when only the linings and a loop reinforcement survive, as at Waiblingen (fig. 3, 2b. e).

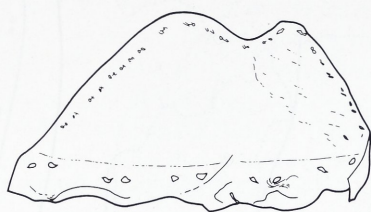


Fig. 4 Waiblingen repair/lining no. 3. Scale 1:3.

The eyelet boot is a very widespread type with actual finds as well as depictions and models attesting to its popularity throughout the Roman Empire, from Hadrian's Wall to Egypt, in town and country, for soldier and civilian, for men and women⁵. Where dating evidence is available, the shoe seems to belong to the first half of the Third Century. At Welzheim there were only a very few fragments of this type amongst the 32 more or less complete shoes, which suggests that it was not yet as popular there as it was to become later.

Sewn footwear

Sole no. 5 from Walheim (fig. 6) is sewn, not nailed, and as it is not very severely worn, it was probably worn indoors. The outer sole, a fragment of the thin insole and part of the lasting margin reinforcement remain, but there is no trace of the upper at all. Either this was made of exceptionally fine leather which has decayed, or else it may have been made of cloth, rather like a sock with sole and edge reinforcements. Such shoes would be appropriate for use in the heated room of building 19. The original length of the sole is c. 26 cm (size 39).

⁵ For the distribution of the eyelet boot see references collected in C. VAN DRIEL-MURRAY, Shoes in perspective. *Studien zu den Militärgrenzen Roms III*. Forsch. u. Ber. z. Vor- u. Frühgesch. in Bad-Württ. 20 (1986) 141. Further examples may be cited from London (see note 8), Welzheim, Chesterholm/Vindolanda and Trier.

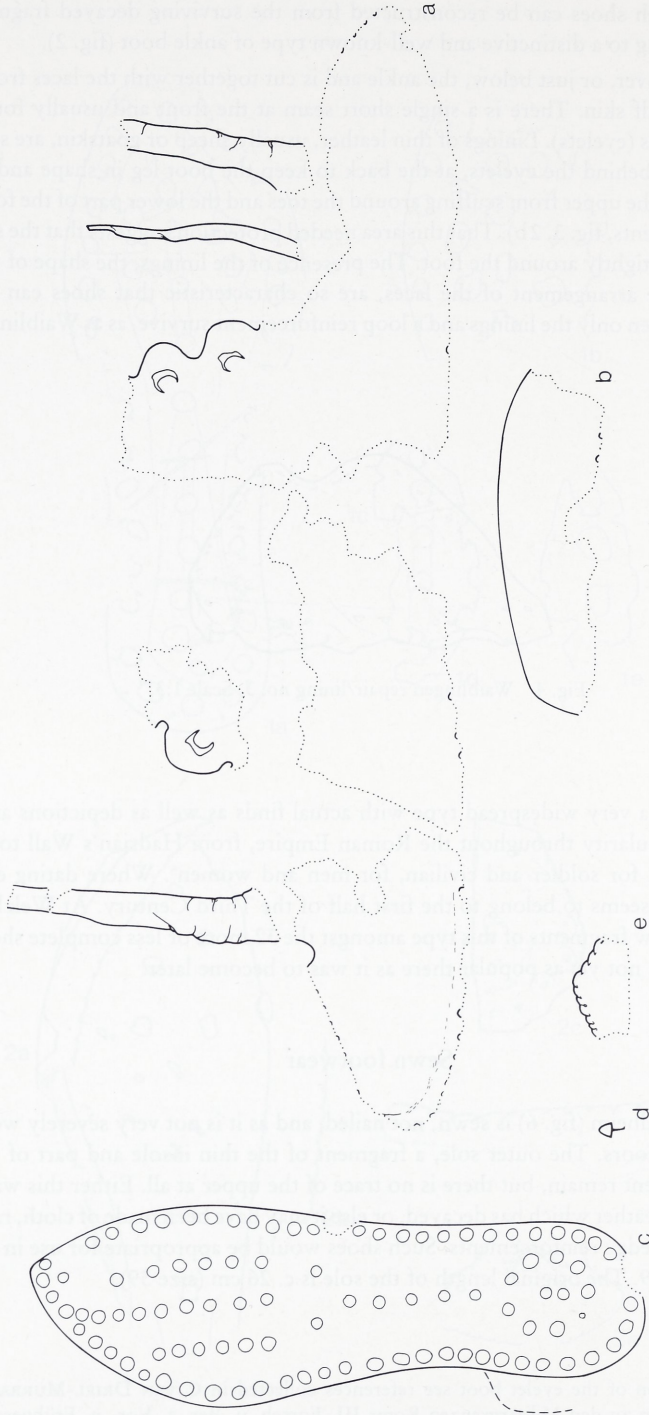


Fig. 5 Walheim shoe no. 4. a) upper; b) heel stiffener; c) sole; d) nail; e) lining. Scale 1:3.

The stitch holes along the bottom of the piece of leather no. 3 from Waiblingen (fig. 4) might indicate a similar type of shoe construction, though the coarseness of the leather and the fact that all the other leather comes from the same pair of shoes, rather suggests a repair of some sort. On the other hand, the stitching and general shape of the piece is rather reminiscent of the slippers from Welzheim and it is possible that this piece formed the lining to one of these delicate and luxurious items of dress. Even so, it is curious in this case that no more of the shoe is preserved.

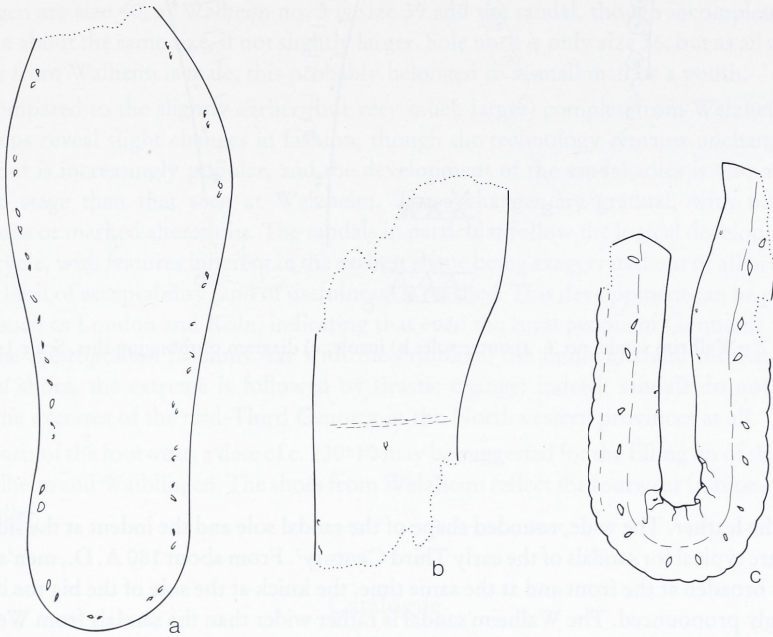


Fig. 6 Walheim sole no. 5. a) outer sole; b) insole; c) reinforcement (drawn from flesh side). Scale 1:3.

Sandals

The third type of footwear represented at Walheim is the sandal (fig. 7). This is made of two thick layers of leather which are tongued together through pre-cut slits which leave only thin scars on the outer surfaces of the sole⁶. A break in the line of the scars indicates the position of the cross strap and the tip of the strap running between the toes still remains in position at the front. The sandal is also nailed, but most nails have decayed, leaving only the impressions of the nail

⁶ A. L. BUSCH, Die r merzeitlichen Schuh- und Lederfunde der Kastelle Saalburg, Zugmantel und Kleiner Feldberg. Saalburg-Jahrb. 22, 1965, 167.

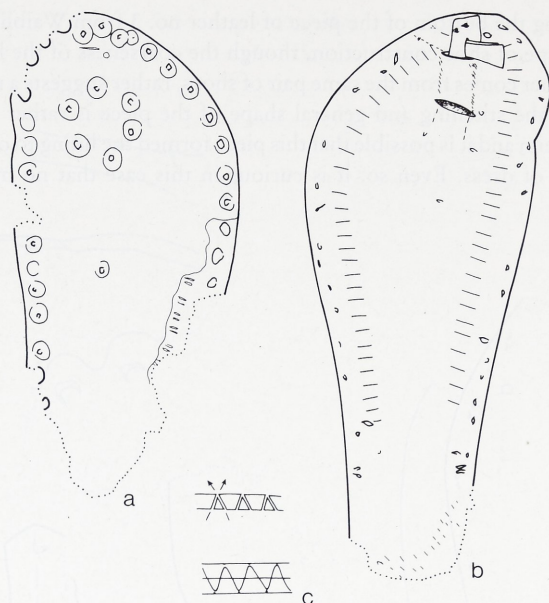


Fig. 7 Walheim sandal no. 6. a) outer sole; b) insole; c) diagram of thonging slits. Scale 1:3.

heads in the leather. The wide, rounded shape of the sandal sole and the indent at the side of the toe joint are typical for sandals of the early Third Century⁷. From about 180 A. D., men's sandals gradually broaden at the front and at the same time, the knick at the side of the big toe becomes increasingly pronounced. The Walheim sandal is rather wider than the sandals from Welzheim, which suggests that the Welzheim shoes should be dated earlier in the century. In turn, the Walheim sandal has not yet reached the extremely wide, almost triangular shape which is fashionable from around the 240's onwards⁸. In view of the sandal's shape, a date of c. 230 would be reasonable for all the shoes from Walheim.

This exaggerated shoe fashion – rather reminiscent of the *Kuhmaul* shoes of the 16th Century *Landsknecht* – is a typically masculine aberration. Women seem to have preferred very narrow, elongated sandals with a rounded toe. At Welzheim the two types occur together, the broad soles in the larger sizes, the narrow soles in the smaller sizes.

⁷ VAN DRIEL-MURRAY, Shoes⁵. – BUSCH, Schuh- und Lederfunde⁶ Taf. 6. 7. 32. 33.

⁸ P. MACCONNORAN, Footwear, in: L. MILLAR/J. SCHOFIELD/M. RHODES, The Roman quay at St. Magnus House, London. London & Middlesex Arch. Soc. Special Paper 8 (1986) pp. 222.

Carbatinae

The fourth type of footwear which commonly occurs in Roman sites is the so-called carbatina. This is a convenient (though inaccurate) term used by archaeologists to describe shoes made of a single oval of leather which is bound under the foot. The type is very frequent at the Saalburg and Zugmantel⁹. At Welzheim it forms some 40 % of the entire collection. It is therefore surprising that none occur here, although this may be due to the smallness of the two finds.

All the shoes probably belonged to adult men. At Welzheim the most common men's sizes are 39–40 (though sizes up to 43 also occur), while women usually have sizes 34–36. The shoes from Waiblingen are size 40, at Walheim no. 3 is size 39 and the sandal, though incomplete, would have been about the same size, if not slightly larger. Sole no. 4 is only size 36, but as all the other footwear from Walheim is male, this probably belonged to a small man or a youth.

When compared to the slightly earlier (but very much larger) complex from Welzheim, these two groups reveal slight changes in fashion, though the technology remains unchanged. The eyelet boot is increasingly popular, and the development of the sandal soles is also at a more advanced stage than that seen at Welzheim. These changes are gradual, with no sudden innovations or marked alterations. The sandals in particular follow the logical development of a fashion cycle, with features inherent in the earliest shape being exaggerated out of all proportion until the limit of acceptability (and of usefulness) is reached. This development can be paralleled in cities such as London and Köln, indicating that even the rural people of Germania Superior shared the metropolitan fashions. As with the crinoline, the mini-skirt and the Renaissance *Kubmaul* shoes, the extreme is followed by drastic change: indeed, sandals do not seem to survive the excesses of the mid-Third Century in the Northwestern provinces at all.

On the basis of the footwear, a date of c. 230±10 may be suggested for the filling up of the wells at both Walheim and Waiblingen. The shoes from Welzheim reflect the footwear fashions of 10–20 years earlier.

Catalogue

Waiblingen

Bildstöckle 1967. R 69.949.18 Brunnen 2

1) and 2) Pair of nailed soles, one of which is more or less intact, while the other is entirely disintegrated. A large number of leather fragments in the find come from the flaked surfaces of this sole and its laminae. Most of the grain side of the outer sole has decayed entirely, leaving only some circles of leather apparently preserved by contact with the iron of the nail heads, though no iron now remains. A repair wedge of scrap leather with nail impressions (fig. 3, 2c) suggests that the outer edge of the left sole had worn through at the heel. The bottom unit consists of an insole (fig. 3, 1b) with laminae thonged to it (fig. 3, 1c–e) and an outer sole. The impressions of two laminae, the thong and the lasting margins braced over them are clearly visible on the inner, flesh, surface of the outer sole no. 1. All that remains of the upper are the lasting margins (fig. 3, 2a) with a reinforcement of goatskin sewn to them with whip stitch (fig. 3, 2b, d) and the goatskin lining of an eyelet (fig. 3, 2e).

3) Triangle of coarse, flabby goatskin, which makes use of the skin edge for its bottom edge (fig. 4). The poor quality of the leather suggests a repair, but as there is no trace of nailing, the piece is unlikely to belong to the previous pair of shoes. The piece was tacked to a backing (no thread impressions on the flesh side), and the wide spaced tacking along the bottom would match the tunnel stitch on a sole such as no. 5.

⁹ e. g. BUSCH, Schuh- und Lederfunde⁶ Taf. 1–5.

Walheim

Building 19, well. Inv. nos 3117, 3132, 3133

4) (3133) Decayed eyelet boot. Upper scuffed and worn, entirely delaminated but reconstructable: pieces are suggestively arranged in fig. 5 on the basis of wear patterns, creases and skin character. Numerous small flakes in the find number also belong. The upper is cut from a single piece of calf (?) skin, sewn at the toe, with integrally cut laces and two of the crescentic lace holes remaining. As no flesh side remains, there is no indication of linings, though something similar to Waiblingen nos 2b. d. e (fig. 3) are to be expected. The nailed bottom unit is 1.1 cm thick with large laminae, the remains of lasting margins and their reinforcements are visible between the soles and a fragment of the cow hide heel stiffener (fig. 5b) also remains. The bottom unit is still nailed together, with conical headed, rather unworn nails. For the right foot.

Various fragments which probably belong to the laces, as well as a scrap of the goatskin lining of this shoe occur in inv. no. 3132.

5) (3117+3133) Sewn shoe, outer sole with paired stitching around the edge and impressions of lasting margins and bracing on the flesh side (fig. 6). Lasting margin reinforcement of paper thin goatskin remains, tacked to the sole, and whipped to the inside of the upper. Several thin flakes of leather may belong to either the reinforcement or to the disintegrated upper itself. A fragment of the insole remains, again of paper thin leather, with only a few stitch holes: it is more like an inlay sole and may have been glued. The impressions of the twine used in bracing are visible through the insole, again emphasising the light construction. For the left foot.

6) (3132) Sandal sole of two layers of leather thonged and nailed together, with the end of the toe strap remaining in the slits at the front and an impression under the insole indicating the position of the instep strap (fig. 7). A thin strip of leather inserted into the end of the toe strap prevents it being pulled out. Only faint scars of the thonging slits are visible on the outer surfaces of the sole, except where the outer sole has been damaged, revealing the paired slits inside. A light score on the flesh side of the insole acts as a guide for the positioning of the slits. Insole extremely worn. For the left foot.

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Zusammenfassung

Mehrere Schuhfunde aus zwei Brunnen aus einer Villa rustica bei Waiblingen und aus dem Steingebäude Nr. 19 des Vicus von Walheim (Abb. 1) werden vorgestellt. Beide Brunnen wurden in der ersten Hälfte des 3. Jahrhunderts zugefüllt. Da Leder leicht verrottet und alte Schuhe üblicherweise nicht in Brunnen geworfen werden, solange diese noch benutzt werden, müßten die beschriebenen Stücke bis kurz vor dem Zeitpunkt der Brunnenverfüllung in Gebrauch gewesen sein.

Obwohl nur Reste von fünf oder sechs Schuhen vorliegen, können drei Typen von Männer-schuhen unterschieden werden.

Am besten erhalten ist ein Paar kräftiger, geschlossener Schuhe mit genagelter Sohle aus Waiblingen (Abb. 3). Fragmente einer Sohle aus Walheim (Abb. 5) sind dem gleichen Typ zuzuweisen. Die Form ähnelt stark noch heute gebräuchlichen Schuhen. Die mehrlagige Sohle ist zusätzlich durch kleinere Lederstücke gepolstert. Das randlich verstärkte feinere Oberleder ist einschließlich der Riemen und Ösen aus einem Stück geschnitten. Weitere Polsterungen durch sehr feines Leder, meist von Schaf oder Ziege, lassen vermuten, daß dieser Schuh sehr fest am Fuß sitzen sollte. Die charakteristische Machart des Oberteiles erlaubt, selbst sehr kleine Fragmente zu identifizieren. Der Schuhtyp ist von verschiedenen Fundplätzen aus dem

gesamten römischen Reich bekannt. Er wurde gleichermaßen von Frauen und Männern, Soldaten und Zivilisten getragen.

Ein anderer Typ liegt aus Walheim vor (Abb. 6). Als Material für das vergangene Oberteil auf der genähten Sohle mit randlichen Verstärkungen wird außergewöhnlich feines Leder oder Stoff in Form einer Socke vermutet. Deshalb und auch wegen der geringen Abnutzung der Sohle könnte es sich vielleicht um einen Hausschuh handeln. Der Typ ähnelt andererseits sehr feinen Schuhen von Welzheim.

Eindeutig als Sandale mit genagelter Sohle und Zehenriemen ist ein weiteres Stück aus Walheim zu deuten (Abb. 7). Diese nur von Männern getragene Schuhform wurde seit dem Ende des 2. Jahrhunderts mit einer immer breiteren Sohle ausgestattet und erhielt einen zunehmend deutlicher abgesetzten Bereich für die große Zehe. In der Mitte des 3. Jahrhunderts scheint dieser Schuhtyp plötzlich aus der Mode gekommen zu sein. Da das Stück von Walheim noch nicht die späte Extremform aufweist, könnte es um 230 n. Chr. getragen worden sein.

Schuhe zählen zu den am häufigsten erhaltenen Resten der Bekleidung. An ihnen lassen sich daher am ehesten Modeerscheinungen sowie regionale und soziale Unterschiede während der römischen Zeit studieren. Gerade der Vergleich der hier vorgestellten Stücke mit den umfangreichen, etwas älteren Funden aus dem benachbarten Welzheim läßt einen gewissen Formwandel erkennen. So ist zum Beispiel die Veränderung der Sohlenform der Sandale deutlich erkennbar. Bemerkenswert ist darüber hinaus das seltenere Vorkommen des geschlossenen Schuhs in Welzheim und das Fehlen der dort so häufigen „Carbatinae“ (gebundener Schuh aus einem Stück Leder) in den – allerdings sehr kleinen – Serien von Walheim und Waiblingen. Wir können hieraus das Auslaufen der einen Schuhform und das Auftreten einer neuen im ersten Drittel des 3. Jahrhunderts ablesen.

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