

## Turnshoes

### An Exploration of Medieval Footwear Production and Practices



PRESENTER:

Gwaiidon Duckworth-White  
UVic Department of Anthropology

#### BACKGROUND

This project aims to apply the intuitive problem solving that arises when engaging with leatherworking using the same toolset as found in the medieval period to modern scholarship.

#### METHODS

1. Produced a pair of medieval turnshoes using limited prior knowledge on leather work.
2. Created a blog to interrogate the ideas and findings from the experiential portion of the project.
3. Engaged with existing scholarship to find potential areas where ideas from this project could be applied.

#### RESULTS

- Found that scrap leather worked incredibly well in the role of a sewing palm.
  - Given the value of leather and the large volume of scrap leather in the archaeological record it may be assumed that some of it fulfilled a similar purpose as a makeshift tool.
  - Sewing palm would likely be necessary as contemporary needles were far thicker and would require more pressure to pass them through the leather.
- Found that it is possible to identify the progression of skill even over two relatively small pieces.
  - This points to potentially being able to track the progression of medieval artisans' skills over multiple similar objects.

# Leather scraps may have been used as makeshift tools in the production of leather goods during the Medieval Period.



Turnshoes and makeshift sewing palms



Take a picture to view the project blog

#### Supporting Information:

- Step by Step: How to Investigate Medieval Footwear
  - “scraps or fragments of unidentified products are completely omitted in the studies, despite the fact that the most often they create the largest assemblages.” (Kowalska 2021, 219)
  - “[The] presence (of secondary waste) proves, for example, a desire to fully use leather as a raw material which has been taken from worn-out and partially damaged products.” (Kowalska 2021, 225)
- Medieval sewing needle examples:



EARLY MEDIEVAL NEEDLE - 600 - The Portable Antiquities Scheme, United Kingdom - CC BY.



MEDIEVAL NEEDLE - 1400 - The Portable Antiquities Scheme, United Kingdom - CC BY.

Project Needles: ~1-1.6 mm thick  
Left: 2mm thick  
Bottom: 2.1mm thick

