



SHOES FROM MAGHREB

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Until now the culture of footwear in the region of Maghreb (Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria) has not attracted any great attention of researchers. Not a single monograph has been published on this subject to date. Some authors of works about North African clothing only slightly mention the footwear in this part of the world.

From the cultural point of view, Maghreb is a homogenous region where footwear is concerned. Footwear here is affected by three different styles: Arabic, Berber and Ottoman Turkish.

We will find similar types of footwear in all these regions and they only differ in decoration. The most common type of footwear is shoes described in Arabic as *rihia* or in Berber as *ikurbin*. These are shoes with a symmetrical insole, mostly a rounded tip and low heel. They are most often made from leather. This footwear is worn as slippers and the back part is worn down underfoot with no fitted heel.

Rihia shoes vary in their appearance. The basic ones have no raised heel and tip. The second type of *rihia* shoes come with a raised tip, which tend to be beak-shaped and extended. The third have stiffened and distinctly high heels. These kinds of shoes have several Berber descriptions which distinguish this footwear into further sub-categories depending on the decoration and region where this footwear is worn such as in the Middle Atlas region where *taberbacht* are worn, while *riekhit* are worn in the area around Marrakech (see table no. 1.).

The second most popular type of footwear is represented by shoes described as *bechmak*. Just as the *rihia*, they have the symmetrical insole, leather sole and very low or no heel. This footwear also comes in several variations. The slippers can have a pointed or slightly angular tip. The category of slippers include ladies embroidered, mostly velvet slippers with a low heel. This footwear is worn particularly in big cities. These slippers point to a mixture of European and North African influence. They are decorated with embroidered stylised flowers.

There is another popular type of footwear in Maghreb: clogs described as *gab-gab*. In their simplest shape, they consist of clogs with only about a 2 to 3 cm high sole, which is tied to the foot by a leather strap across the instep. Luxury clogs have a carved sole inlaid with mother-of-pearl. This sole tends to be as high as 10 cm. A strip of leather or fabric

richly embroidered with yellow thread and decorated with tiny coloured cotton tassels ties the sole to the foot.

Berbers living in the mountains wear high boots described as *neklad* or *loqchni*. This footwear has a leather sole without a heel and is tied to the foot by laces and straps. Another type of high footwear is leather riding boots which are often decorated with tie-dying or embroidery.

In some areas of Maghreb (such as the Atlas region), sandals are worn made only from several leather straps which attach the flat leather sole to the foot. Sometimes the sandal is only tied by two laces which pass from an opening in the sole that are placed between the big and second toe along the instep and are attached by a strap, which is wound round the ankle. Elsewhere, a complicated system of interlacing around the foot is involved, then attached by a special lace and tied to the foot.

Footwear from Maghreb in the Collections of the Náprstek Museum

Various types of *rihia* and *bechmak* slippers are deposited in the collections of the Náprstek Museum. Most of the footwear is made of leather and decorated with embroidery.

"There is a collection of leather shoes from Morocco the top part of which is made of coloured marocain (brown, red-brown), sometimes even a decorated, pressed and gild geometric pattern. The collection also includes leather shoes, decorated with rich embroidery (geometric and floral patterns) of cotton coloured threads. The Morocco collection also contains the only fabric (cotton, white) shoes with leather sole. Most shoes have flat soles, without a heel. Some shoes of this type, but not decorated, come from Algeria and Tunisia. Single examples of footwear were acquired mostly in the 1920s and 1930s. An exception is a gift made in 1957 from the Moroccan government." (Josef Kandert, Footwear from Africa in the Collections of the Ethnographic Department of the Náprstek Museum. In: Footwear in History '97. Collection of Materials from the Second International Conference on 29 September–1st October 1997, Zlín 1998, p. 101).

A completely separate collection consists of Tuareg footwear. Several sandals and one pair of high riding boots are found in the collections of the Náprstek Museum.

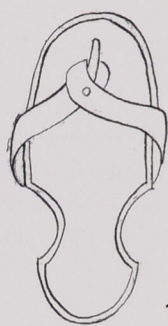
Each type of Tuareg sandals has its own description. The *tagellayras* sandals are made of leather and are very simple. The sole is tied to the foot by straps. The *imerkaden* sandals are made by women in Ahaggar from goat skin. The coloured sandals are called *iratimem* or also *takelmi* (in Hausa).

Traditions and the Present

The footwear sold in shoe shops or in markets in most cities fully complies with contemporary world fashion trends. Although there was an absence of a heel in traditional North African ladies footwear, today's the ladies shoes sold include ones with high heels. However, the European and American shoemaking companies who offer their products on the Maghreb market are well aware of the local tradition. In 2004, for example, the Baťa company offered a collection of slippers strongly influenced by local tradition in their embroidery and selection of colours.

Arabic footwear has become highly popular among Europeans in the summer of 2005 when some shoemaking companies offered ladies footwear called "Aladin slippers", this was such footwear resembling the *rihia* type, but it was richly decorated with embroidery and sown-on sequins.

Foot wear types



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1.—4. slippers,

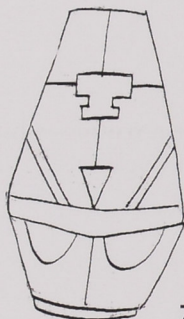
1. slippers with two stripes (*nala*), fixed between the big and second toe,
2. slippers with a pointed tip,
3. slippers with an angular tip
4. slippers resembling European designs



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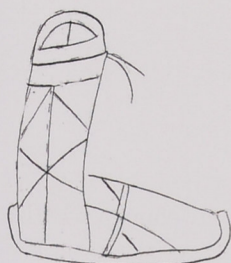


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5.—8. shoes of the rihia



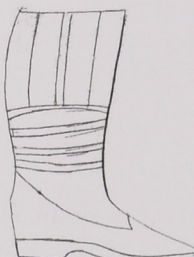
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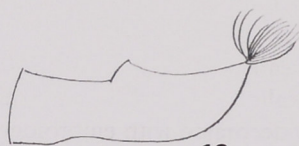
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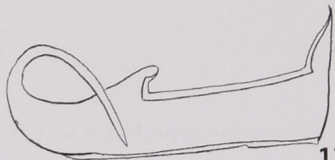
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9.—11. high boots,

9. high *loqchini* boots worn in the Atlas Mountains,
10. high Berber *neklad* boots,
11. high leather boots decorated with tie-dying

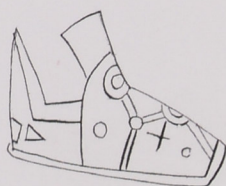


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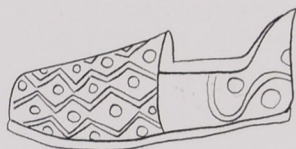
12.—13. shoes with a raised to beak-shaped tip



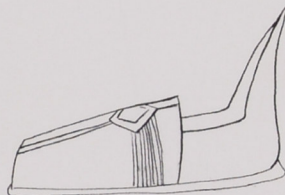
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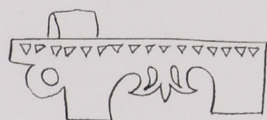
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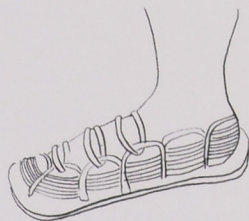
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- 14.—19. Shoes with a raised heel**
 14. decorated shoes from the Dadés Valley region,
 15. *taberbacht* type shoes,
 16. *tameskhert* type shoes,
 17. *ikourbin* type shoes,
 18. *riekhit* type shoes,
 19. shoes made from fabric with a leather sole and stiffening on the heel

- 20.—21. *qouageb* (*gab-gab*) type clogs**

- 22. strap footwear**



1. Cothurnus type slippers inlaid with mother-of-pearl, Tunisia. Photograph by J. Jiroušková.



2. Shoes with a beak-shaped tip, Tunisia. Photograph by J. Jiroušková.



3. High riding boots, Morocco. Photograph by J. Vaněk.



4. Tuareg slippers decorated with a cut pattern, Tunisia. Photograph by J. Jiroušková.



5. Ladies embroidered shoes, Tunisia.
Photograph by J. Vaněk.



6. Footwear of modern-day Tunisian women does not differ in any way to European. Photograph by J. Jiroušková.



7. Clogs are part of household footwear of city women, Morocco. Illustration by Jean Basancenot.



8. Berber men from the Atlas region wearing high boots called *ijekjad*, Morocco. Illustration by Jean Basancenot.