

CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

SHOES, ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS

Leather and wood

Late 17th to early 19th centuries

Nossa Senhora da Guia Church nave, Angra do Heroísmo

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Sapatos me daria elle [sapateiro], / Se vós me desseis dinheiro.
Gil Vicente, *A Farsa de Inês Pereira*.

The material between the ground and the feet – what is commonly known as shoes – has carried and still carries, *stricto sensu*, the primordial function of its origin: to protect the flexible and complex structure of human locomotion, the feet. However, from the simplicity of the sandals, because it was just handmade soles and leather straps, it was a short way to the complexity of wrapping the leg, sometimes to the thigh, implying already the know-how and experience of the shoemaker *gentle art*.

About the materials used along the years, wherever, the will would mould the tone: the *ordinary* leather would surrender to exotic woods, gold, silver, precious stones, ivory, brocade, velvet, silk and lace. Therefore and because the desires would be just limited by the size of the pockets, the shoes, too – under different names and shapes – would reveal social structures. However, if the needs had led to comfort, this one was left behind when vanity and opulence became the most important: at 12th century Europe, the sharp toecaps had grown until reaching a length of sixty centimetres; at the 16th, as the heels would not be high enough to *reach the skies*, refined platforms of wood or cork have been added – the *chapins* – more than 65 cm high; and the 19th took to a most the fragility of the *chinelos* that being so thin, like a paper sheet, could not be used than indoors.

Therefore, in the European context of an *Ancien Régime* – even in a symbolic way – that had inherited the Jewish Moses laws, it would not be surprising that walking barefoot, in any other case that for penitence or holly calling, would be faced as a severe drift from the normal social patterns. This was even the reason for the fact that Christian charity, under the form of alms – through brotherhoods or welfare – would not allow anybody to resurrect for the Final Judgment in a disadvantage situation, meaning, barefoot. In the end, at least, people would be *equal*.

These shoes remains – recovered during archaeological excavations at works done in Nossa Senhora da Guia, of the old S Francisco monastery that housed Angra do Heroísmo Museum since 1969 – are an example of an archaeological object and are part of MAH's Archaeological Collection.