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Leather footwear in Baltic zone between 9th – 15th century

Research on medieval shoemaking allowed for the identification of several structural and stylistic types of Pomeranian footwear. In the 12th – 14th century in Pomerania there were no products actually directly derived from ancient traditions. One of the most important stages of this type of production in the Early Middle Ages was the transition from single-piece footwear to complex forms with the soles and upper parts sewn together.

Along with the dynamic widespread use of multi-piece products, new sewing techniques allowing the maker to hide the stitches inside the footwear also quickly developed. It not only improved the footwear's appearance, but also it made it more impermeable to water. The typical varied nature of activities carried out within a single household does not rule out the existence of a separate shoemaking craft supplying customers. From the late 11th to the mid-12th century changes occurred that significantly influenced the further development of this branch of production. A variety of additional footwear elements of both construction and aesthetic nature quickly became popular. In the late 12th and early 13th century it had already become the norm to stitch binding on the inside of a shoe lace hole to protect it from wear and to use a heel stiffener to strengthen the back of the quarter. In the second half of the 12th – early 13th century the dominant form was footwear with a low, ankle-high quarter, fastened by a single shoelace. Mid-high products of a quarter covering the ankle and extending over it became more common. In the mid-13th century, apart from the diversity of the product range, clear signs of quality and aesthetic changes are evident. They are evidence of a larger social diversity amongst consumers. About the mid-13th century the design innovations introduced in the 12th century were consolidated, while the look and shape of individual components of footwear was changeable.

The features of shoemaking in the later stages of the Middle Ages were slender, pointed, strongly profiled soles. There are also soles composed of two or three parts as well as more multi-layered ones. In the youngest stages of the Middle Ages additional elements on the bottoms of shoes were noted: outsoles and heels. Their shape and manner of fastening is evidence that they were made deliberately during the production of new footwear and not during its repair. Essentially the same in terms of the design, the shoe uppers differed in quarter height, shape and design and complementary inserts, the manner of fastening, the width of the opening of the shoe, decoration and other minor features. Quite clearly, especially in the second half of the 13th – 14th century, there was a division between everyday or working footwear and the enhanced aesthetic value that can be associated with festive attire. At this time the number of children's shoes produced also significantly increased.

At least some part of the changes taking place in Pomeranian shoemaking in the 12th century, especially in its second half, can be associated with the adoption of Western fashion patterns. The canons of costume formed in this century survived for nearly two and a half centuries, until about the mid-14th century.

Medieval leather working was not limited to footwear. In materials from excavations it is difficult, however, to detect furriers' products and costume elements made of thin grain leather (cloaks, hoods, leggings, headdress or robes). The presence of furrier products in the case of archaeological finds is confirmed only by zoological analyses.

Products made from grain leather are mainly belts, various cases and bags, gloves, and sometimes identifiable parts of weaponry. The most evident differences between leather products from the early and the late Middle Ages are the sheaths. About the mid-13th century specimens with specific iron fittings with a long ferrule began to appear. They soon replaced traditional fittings of non-ferrous metals. The fashion for decorating the sheaths' edges by cutting geometric patterns into their lower parts became popular. The smallest stylistic variability is evident in pouches.

To the southern coast of the Baltic Sea *res novae* arrived relatively quickly, although a more noticeable boom took place in the 13th century and the first half of the 14th century. Changes perceptible in the style of Pomeranian leather products in the second half of the 13th – first half of the 14th century may result from the standards included in guild statutes, strictly regulating the scope of activities and quality of products.

