

Panel: Footprints in Antiquity: Foot lore in Greece and Rome

From fleet-footed Achilles to the unfortunate swollen footed Oedipus who solved the Sphinx's foot riddle, from Hermes with winged sandals to Hephaestus in his winged wheel-chair, the humble foot is perhaps the hardest working anatomical appendage, but it receives no notice until it fails to perform its functions adequately. The human foot was used to establish standard lengths of measurement. Geographers reported descriptions of the bizarre "Sciapodes," the shade-footed people whose single large foot could move with alacrity and which also served as an umbrella against the burning sun. All body parts were associated with astrological signs (the foot was governed by Pisces), and feet were of particular concern to soldiers (*pedites* in Latin) and hunters: those whose feet are "incapacitated" are especially vulnerable, as elephant hunters in India knew full well (Strabo 15.42). This panel seeks to elevate the status of the humble foot in examining various aspects of foot lore in antiquity. The individual papers in this panel will explore more fully the role of (bare) feet in religious contexts, archaeological and artistic evidence depicting feet, literary foot imagery and symbolism, and surgical and pharmaceutical treatments for foot maladies.

Audio-visual equipment: projector for power point slides; slide projector.

PAPER #1
Take Off Your Shoes and Pray a While:
Greek Religious Attitudes Towards Barefootedness

This paper will examine the religious scruples involving barefootedness as a prerequisite to entering holy ground from epigraphic, literary, and iconographic viewpoints. Removing shoes shows respect for the divine. Moslem piety requires the removal of shoes at the entrance to a mosque. Moses beside the burning bush received the divine command to remove his shoes because he was standing on “holy ground” (*Exodus* 3.5). In the *Mishna Berachot* we read of the Jewish law concerning those who approach the Temple in Jerusalem: “A man should not behave himself unseemly while opposite the Eastern Gate [of the Temple] since it faces toward the Holy of Holies. He may not enter into the Temple Mount with his staff or his sandal or his wallet, or with the dust upon his feet, nor may he make of it a short by-path; still less may he spit there” (chapter 9, 5 paragraph 2). Hindu custom also requires the removal of footwear before entering holy places (W. R. Paton, CR 16.6 [1902] 290-292). To enter a holy place with feet covered implies a lack of respect in eastern lands.

Greek piety shows similar sentiments. The Neo-Platonist Iamblichus preserves repeated Pythagorean injunctions to sacrifice and approach sanctuaries barefoot: (*Vit. Pyth.* 18.85.5 TLG). Also, repeated in the imperative: sacrifice and worship barefoot: (*Vit. Pyth.* 23.105.13 TLG). He explains that worship must occur in an orderly and modest manner, and that the pious should be free from bonds (Phil. Protr. 109.24 TLG), referring, as we have seen, to *hypodemata*, “things bound beneath,” the lack of which provides the “liberation” of barefootedness, which improves the quality of the adoration. There is abundant epigraphic evidence to show that barefoot worshippers were welcome in Greek holy places. Further, literary evidence, especially in Euripides and Callimachus, emphasizes barefootedness as a condition of ritual purity.

We shall conclude with a brief consideration of the “closeness to the “earth” which barefootedness might imply for sculpted and painted representations of the mythological characters Melampus and Erechtheus, showing the difficulty of generalizing about their iconography.

PAPER #2

Does the Presence of “Feet” in the Archaeological Record Inform Us of Their Importance?

The physical representation of “feet” within the archaeological and visual art records does not infer that the presence of this specific anatomical component points to their unusual importance. The sampling of this record, presented here, does however suggest an interest beyond the necessary inclusion of “feet” in figural depictions. This sampling includes votives from healing sanctuaries, burial context and vase painting depictions. The time frame of this sampling extends from the ninth century to the fourth century BCE. The examples come from the Greek corpus.

This discussion examines the evidence through a variety of approaches. The sculptural depictions of “feet” inform us of the developing technical abilities of the sculptors. The sculptural focus on accurate visual expressions of the foot provides a comparison and contrast to the developmental process of other anatomical components. The votive offerings of the complete leg/foot limb and single feet at healing sanctuaries indicate health issues of the ancients. A quantitative analysis of votive preferences is not possible as we would be for the most part arguing from negative evidence. However, the evidence does point to a higher numbers of these votives compared to those for eyes. Vase painting depictions provide examples of well known foot injuries or references to feet. Other examples suggest preferential choices of feet within narrative depictions which are not specified in textual references to these narratives.

The sampling of the archaeological record points to the importance of healthy feet, the cultural emphasis on the proper depiction of feet, and their part in important narratives. The complete picture of how precious the foot was to the ancients can only be surmised from the material evidence. However, in conjunction with ancillary research, the value of a good pair of feet should suggest to us their importance in the lives of the ancients.

PAPER #3

Unhappy Feet: the trials of Sophocles' Philoctetes and Oedipus

The feet with the longest-running and most glorious pedigree in ancient literature are the swift ones of Achilles, which make a crucial contribution to his final victory over Hector in *Iliad* 22, but arguably more interesting for their symbolic significance are the less efficient and doubtless much uglier pedal extremities of Oedipus and Philoctetes. This paper will discuss references to feet in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and Oedipus plays. The *Philoctetes* abounds in feet, both specifically, in the importance to the plot of its hero's diseased limb and also in more generalised word-play (e.g. 91, 838, 1260). Sophocles focuses graphically on its hero's wounded foot and the literal and metaphorical pain it causes him: because of the smell of the infection and the agonised yells he emits during its attacks, he has been abandoned on Lemnos, where he ekes out an isolated existence in a pre-civilised state. Because of his foot, he cannot run like Achilles, the supreme example of heroic man, or even walk, but can only crawl. When the pain comes upon him, his power of human speech gives way to inarticulate cries. In fact, his foot has forced him into the condition of a vulnerable baby: the word used by Odysseus for the act of casting Philoctetes out onto Lemnos is *ektithemi* (5), a verb also used for the exposure of infants. The multiplicity of foot references in *Philoctetes* contrasts with their sparsity in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, which seems at first glance surprising, given the supposed etymology of Oedipus' name, his famous fate as a baby and the play's often-discussed abundance in word-play and imagery, especially surrounding sight. I will argue that this difference between the two plays is a result of the different requirements of their plots. The whole reason for Philoctetes' embittered exile on Lemnos is his diseased foot. However, this affliction is curable, and, as his play draws to an end, it becomes clear that he will be able to heal his foot and also, perhaps, his relationship with the Greek army. By contrast, Oedipus' feet are unalterably damaged and he has been quite literally marked from birth. However, Sophocles cannot draw too much attention to what might seem to be a very obvious mark of his true identity, because the action of the play can only work if no one in Thebes recognises who he really is. Thus Sophocles diminishes all emphasis on matters of the feet, and concentrates instead on symbolism and word-play around images of sight, looking forward to the blind figure that Oedipus will become at the end of the play, rather than the figure with deformed feet that he is at its start.

PAPER #4

These feet weren't made for walking: Ancient treatments of foot complaints

With 26 bones, 33 joints, and over 100 muscles, tendons, and ligaments and a delicately balanced system of nerves in each foot, the human foot is a mechanical marvel. No less than we, Greek physicians were vitally concerned with what could so easily go wrong, and medical treatises covering anatomical, pharmaceutical, and physiognomic questions were organized *a capite ad calcem*, beginning with the head and methodically working down the body to the feet.

Treatments for podiatric complaints were both pharmaceutical and surgical. Greek physicians were interested in anatomy and hence studied the bones and joints of the feet. Philagrius of Epeiron, whose *Remedies for Gouty Conditions* survives in excerpts, refined surgical procedures to correct damaged ligaments and tendons in the leg, especially those providing articulation of the tibia and bones of the ankle. Celsus, Galen, and other medical chroniclers reported numerous recipes for plasters to treat sore feet and spice-infused botanical ointments to alleviate gout and reduce swelling in either the hands or feet. Some remedies were considered multivalent, employed to treat gout, arthritis, and joint complaints. Theodoretos' complex vegetal antidote was recommended for ten medical conditions (headache, chest pain, liver and spleen ailments, long diseases, melancholia, dropsy, kidney and lung complaints, and gout). Interestingly, feet seemed to be of particular concern to the Christian clergy including Doarios the bishop and Clement of Alexandria who commended the beneficial effects of ointments for the feet. Agapetos developed two 15-ingredient gout-remedies; Iacobos Psukhrestos is significant for employing the autumn crocus, source of *colchicine*, the fundamental drug of modern gout-therapy.

This paper will explore more fully podiatric ailments and their surgical and pharmaceutical treatment in antiquity, as well the perceived efficacy of prescribed remedies.