

Braided together:

How different sandal technologies in the Salado Region show migration

Beatriz Barraclough-Tan

Background:

The most commonly found perishable found in the American Southwest are sandals, which can range from simply braided to highly complex. As an everyday use item, they can be good indicators of the educational history of the people making them. In general, skill at basketry (and by extension, sandal making) is passed from generation to generation with minimal change. This does not just extend to style, but to fiber choice and preparation as well.

Salado Style Sandals

Post 1200 CE, sandals with narrow braided elements appeared in the archaeological record of the southern southwest, after not appearing in the record at all before. That this style does not appear until after 1200 is unusual, as other styles are found in differing concentrations throughout the prehistoric period.

Discussion

Creating the Mogollon style sandals required significantly less effort and research than the basketmaker style. Constructing the single basketmaker sandal took as much time as it did to make the pair of Mogollon sandals and the cordage used for ties on both sets of sandals. In addition, the wet plant matter remaining on the Mogollon sandal actually glued the fibers together to create a more durable sole.



From Right to left: unprocessed but split yucca leaf; three stages of yucca fiber processing; two bundles of mostly cleaned fibers used for sandal weft

Conclusion

One of the strengths of human community is that we are able to pass down information and techniques with minimal distortion. This also means that when there is a shift in techniques or materials there is most likely a change in need or population. Sometimes changing technique can be a change in style, but pre industrial societies tended to have relatively stable fashion. The addition of another style of sandal, similar to two previously common styles but different from both, is evidence that there was at the very least contact between the two cultures that created them. However, given the time and effort it takes to instruct a student in craft, it is unlikely that it was a temporary contact, but one where children learning to craft would have access to teachers of both artistic traditions.

Method

I constructed quarter scale models of both Mogollon and Basketmaker style sandals to assess ease of construction and initial durability. The Mogollon style were made with quarter width and length broadleaf yucca stems, which had been soaked and lightly pounded, and yucca cordage ties. The Basketmaker style used the same yucca cordage for warps, and soaked, pounded, and scraped lightly twisted yucca fiber for the weft.



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Mogollon Sandals

- Braided or coarsely woven
- If woven, 2 or 4 warps
- Whole or minimally processed yucca leaves
- Functional with little to no decoration

Basketmaker sandals

- Finely woven or twined, or a combination thereof
- 6+ warps
- Cordage warps and fully processed yucca fiber
- Highly decorated

