27 *soccus* – the laced shoe (pl. 27.2)

27.1 Introduction

If we believe his biographer Suetonius, Emperor Caligula had a liking for fancy footwear. Instead of wearing the senatorial *calceus* as he should have done, he showed himself "sometimes in Greek sandals or buskins, sometimes in bodyguard boots, at times even in female *socci*."[1] His contemporaries therefore thought him to be mad. The list of footwear goes from bad to worse. Greek sandals or buskins at the feet of a Roman emperor are only a minor offence against etiquette; wearing the same boots as your subalterns is already degrading, but putting on a woman's *soccus* as a man unmasks you—in the eyes of the Roman public—as an effeminate homosexual.

But what is a *soccus*? It is difficult to define. In modern explanations, the *soccus* has suffered from a kind of consumption. It is variously thought to be a loafer, a light and low shoe,[2] a slipper,[3] or more recently, even some type of sock.[4] Putting the cart before the horse, research has been influenced by a hypothesis put forward by Isidore of Seville (6th to 7th century CE!),[5] which contradicts the primary evidence. It also seems to have been attracted by the similarity of the Latin word *soccus* and the modern word 'sock.' The following chapter therefore starts from a fresh source analysis, which leads to results that are partially in contradiction to the *opinio communis*.

1 Suet. Cal. 52: *modo in crepidis vel coturnis, modo in speculatoria caliga, nonnumquam socco muliebri.*

2 RE 3.1 A (1927) s.v. soccus, col. 771–772 (A. Hug).

3 Becker/Göll (1882) III 229; Marquardt/Mau (1886) 595; Blümner (1911) 223; O. Lau, Schuster und Schusterhandwerk in der griechisch-römischen Literatur und Kunst, Bonn 1967, 124; N. Goldman, Roman Footwear, in: Sebesta/Bonfante (1994), 125; Knötzele (2007) 59–61.

4 Croom (2000) 113; GRD (2007) 173; Olson (2008) 57: "The soccus was a soft indoor slipper; perhaps even a true sock."

5 Isidor. 19.34.12: *socci non ligantur, sed tantum intromittuntur <pedes>* [*socci* are not tied, but the feet are only inserted into them]. The Latin text suffers from corruption or abridgment. I have supplied *pedes* for the sake of clarity.

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27.2 Terminology and appearance

The term *soccus* is a generic term that designates a certain type of closed shoe in neutral language. In high-flown literary language, the same type of shoe is sometimes called a *vinculum pedis*.[6] As to its etymology, the word *soccus* is usually connected with the Greek term συκχάς or συγχίς.[7] Evidence for these words is rare. The term συκχάς is first mentioned by Pollux (and then in later Byzantine tradition).[8] The term συγχίς (or συκχίς[9]) is mentioned in an epigram by Phanias (whose date cannot be fixed). Although the etymological link between the word *soccus* and the Greek terms seems likely, it is not a 'regular' Greek loanword and belongs to an early stratum of the Latin language almost impenetrable to us.

In contrast to this, Plautus and Cicero already use *soccus* like a genuine Latin term to translate the Greek word ἐμβάς (*embas*).[10] The (rough) equivalence of the words is beyond doubt because both designate the shoe that was typically worn in Greek comedy and Roman Palliata[11]—in Roman plays, *soccus* takes the semantic place the *embas* has in Greek comedy[12]—, and it even came to symbolize the genre as a whole.[13] The early evidence on the word *soccus* is somewhat of a riddle[14] insofar as Plautus applies the word only to the male *embas*, calling the female one a *calceolus* ('little *calceus*'). It is first in Propertius that the term *soccus* is found to refer both to the female and the male shoe.

The appearance of a *soccus* is easy to identify on the basis of the archaeological and literary sources.[15] It was less heavy and less high than a *calceus*. The etymology of the Greek word *embas* already points to this type of shoe. In contrast to a proper ὑπόδημα that you 'bind under' (ὑποδέω) your foot, the *embas* (*soccus*) is a shoe you 'step in'

6 Tib. 1.5.66 (see below); Ovid. fasti 1.410 (cf. B 1 p. 248), 2.324 (cf. B 1 p. 249).

7 Cf. Walde/Hofmann and OLD s.v.

8 Pollux identifies it as a Greek type of sandal (*crepida*, C 29), but he may be wrong.

9 As emended by Casaubonus.

10 On the *embas*, cf. A. A. Bryant, Greek Shoes in the Classical Period, HSCPh 10 (1899) 73, 81–83; RE 5.2 (1905) s.v. ἐμβάς, col. 2482–2485 (W. Amelung); K. Erbacher, Griechisches Schuhwerk, Würzburg 1914, 6–7, 45–53; L. M. Stone, Costume in Aristophanic Comedy, New York 1981, 223–229. The lemma in the LSJ needs complete reworking.

11 Aristoph. Vesp. 103, 275, 341, 447, 1157–1171; Equ. 868–870, Nub. 719, 858; Eccl. 47, 314–315, 342, 507–508, 633, 850; Plut. 847; Alexis F 32 K.-A.; Eubulus F 29 K.-A.; Menander F 106 K.-A.; Theopomp. com. F 58 K.-A.; cf. also Isaios 5.11 (with the commentary of Wyse ad loc.).

12 Plaut. Bacch. 332, Trin. 720, Cist. 698, Pers. 124, Epid. 725, Ter. Haut. 124; Cic. de or. 3.127.

13 Hor. AP 80, 90; Ovid. rem. 376; Pont. 4.16.29; Plin. NH 7.111; Quint. inst. or. 10.2.22; Mart. 8.3.13; Plin. epist. 9.7.2.

14 For a possible explanation, see below.

15 On the archaeological evidence, cf. p. 697.

(ἐμβαίνω). You would pull (*detrahere*)[16] or take it off (*demere*).[17] Research seems to have been misled by etymology and by Isidore of Seville to assume that the *embas*/*soccus* was a loafer or a slipper. However, it was not. Our sources show that lacing was typical for it. Unlike the *calceus*, which was tied by external straps, the *soccus* was fixed with the help of shoe laces. We have no evidence whatsoever for the hypothesis that it could take on the form of a loafer. Quite to the contrary, we repeatedly hear about laces of the *embas/soccus* in Greek comedy[18] and also in some Latin sources. Horace, for example, talking about the nature of early Roman comedy, says that Plautus was running over the stage without having tied his shoe (*aspice, quam non adstricto percurrat pulpita socco*).[19] Using the *soccus* as a metaphor, Horace expresses that Plautus' comedies had much energy, but looked unfinished and hastily written as to their form. Plautus was in such a hurry when he started writing that he had not found time to lace his shoes properly. In Ovid and Tibull, dandies apply much care to lacing their shoes.[20] They tie their laces tightly and see to it that the shoe tongue has an exact fit. In addition, the literary expression *vinculum pedis* ('fetter of the foot') designating the *soccus* points to the idea that its binding was an important aspect.[21]

The Latin term for the shoe tongue is *li**n**gula* (with N, small tongue),[22] in Greek (γλῶσσα).[23] The Latin word for the lace is uncertain.[24] Maybe it was called *ligula* (without N), from *ligare* (to lace), because lacing (*colligare*) is what you did with it.[25] There are two texts in favour of this assumption.[26] They have disappeared in the dictionaries, which subsume them under the references for *li**n**gula* (with N) and explain it as an orthographic variant.[27] Scribonius Largus, talking about an ancient type of black shoe polish (*melanterias*), says it was used to give black colour to the *ligulae*.[28] There is no

16 Ter. Haut. 124; Tib. 1.5.66.

17 Lucilius F 1161 M. (see n. 42 and A 8 p. 181).

18 Cf., for example, Alexis F 32 K.-A.; Menander F 106 K.-A.; Aristoph. Eccl. 508.

19 Hor. epist. 2.1.174.

20 Tib. 1.8.14; Ovid. ars 3.444.

21 See above n. 6.

22 Ovid. ars 3.444: *et brevis in rugas lingula pressa suas* [and the *lingula* that is pressed to create folds]; Mart. 2.29.7; Festus (Paulus) p. 103.21–23 L.: *lingula per deminutionem linguae dicta*; *alias a similitudine exertae, ut in calceis* [*lingula* is said as a diminutive of *lingua*, sometimes because it looks like a tongue sticking out, as in the case of shoes].

23 Platon Com. F 51 K.-A.; on further Greek terminology, cf. Pollux 7.80–81: μέρη δὲ ὑποδημάτων γλῶτται καὶ καττύματα καὶ ὕσχλοι [tongues, soles, eyelets are part of shoes].

24 It was neither *fascia* that refers to the straps of sandals nor *corrigia* that refers to the straps of the Roman *calceus*.

25 Tib. 1.8.14.

26 For the hypothesis, cf. Charisius inst. p. 132.14-15 Barwick (= GL I 104): *in calceis vero ligula a ligando* [on shoes a *ligula* from *ligare*]; Becker/Göll III (1882) 230; Lau (n. 3) 112–113.

27 ThLL VII s. v. *lingula* col. 1453.39–1454.13.

28 Scrib. Largus 208: *melanterias, quae creta sutoria dicitur, qua ligulae calceolorum denigrantur* [*melanterias*, as is called the shoe polish with which the *ligulae* of *calceoli* are dyed black].

reason to see why a shoe tongue should be especially coloured in this way whereas colouring shoe laces makes perfect sense. We also know that the Romans used coloured straps to tie their shoes, so coloured laces seems quite plausible.[29] In Juvenal, someone has to rush and must 'disregard' (*dimittere*) his *ligulae* (without N).[30] This can only mean that he has no time to fasten his laces. Accordingly, we have two similar looking words with a different meaning, *lingula* (shoe tongue) and *ligula* (laces). The Latin word for the eyelet for the shoe lace was probably *ansa*.[31]

Within this general formal framework, the *embas*/*soccus* comprised a variety of types. In Greek texts, mainly in Attic comedy, we hear of several *embades* named, for example, after their origin (Spartan, Persian, and Boeotian).[32] In Latin texts, we hear only of two Greek sub-species: the *Sicyonia* (B 30) and the *phaecasia* (B 30). The *soccus*/*embas* could also have different colours. It probably often had the natural colour of the leather, but we only have evidence on the signal colours white, crimson, and yellow.[33] There were even luxury versions ornamented with gold and pearls.[34]

27.3 Social usage

The *soccus* was a normal shoe that could be worn by both women and men in public. It is not worn exclusively by women. Au contraire, all persons said to wear it in Roman comedy are men (see below). For this reason, the attribute *muliebris* (female) is added, if specifying is needed.[35] A *soccus* is not an indoor shoe, but it is worn outside the house. In comedy, it is used on stage (= outside the house). In Plautus' *Cistellaria*, a person detects the footprints of a *soccus* in the dust;[36] In Terence, a *senex* comes home, and the slaves hurry to pull his *socci* off;[37] and in Propertius, a freedwoman walks with it on the *Via Sacra* (see below).[38] However, it was less formal than the Roman *calceus*. Cicero

29 Cf. B 26 p. 526.

30 Iuven. 5.19–20: *habet Trebius propter quod rumpere somnum || debeat et ligulas dimittere* [Trebius has a reason to interrupt his sleep and to dismiss his *ligulae*].

31 Tib. 1.8.14. It is also used with sandals, cf. B 29 p. 545.

32 Boeotian *embades*: Herodot. 1.195.1; Spartan *embades*: Aristoph. Eccl. 74, 269, 345, 507–508, 542, Vesp. 1157–1158; cf. Stone (1981) 225–227; (white) female Persian *embades*: Aristoph. Eccl. 314–319, Lys. 229, Thesm. 734; cf. Pollux 7.92 and Stone (1981) 227–229.

33 White: Ovid. ars 3.271; Apul. Met. 7.8; on Greek evidence, cf. B 30 p. 552; crimson: Ps.-Verg. Ciris 169; Mart. 2.29.9; yellow: Cat. 61.9–10 (the marriage god Hymenaios, cf. B 18 p. 488).

34 Petron. 67.4 (cf. B 30 p. 553); Plin. NH 9.114, 37.17.

35 Suet. Cal. 52 (Caligula): *nonnumquam socco muliebri* (sometimes in a female *soccus*); Plin. NH 37.17.

36 Plaut. Cist. 698: *is hac iit, hac socci video vestigium in pulvere* [he went here, here I see a mark of his shoe in the dust].

37 Ter. Haut. 122–124: *domum revortor … adsido. adcurrunt servi, soccos detrahunt* [I come back home … I sit down. The slaves run up; they pull off my *socci*].

38 Prop. 2.23.21–22.

tells us that P. Rutilius Rufus, a *vir consularis* (cos. 105 BCE) wore *socci* together with a *pallium* while in exile in Greece (92 BCE).[39] He had deliberately put on this (unofficial) 'Greek' dress in public to demonstrate that he lived the life of a private person now. Cicero says no one would object to it considering the circumstances. It was not personal sloth that caused the former consul Rutilius to not wear his *calceus senatorius*. The fact that the Greek *soccus* was considered an informal private shoe by the Romans also explains why Emperor Caligula, who even wore female *socci*, was thought to be a lunatic.[40] It also accounts for the fact that we do not find the *soccus* on 'official' archaeological monuments depicting Roman *matronae*, but only on Greek-inspired statues of Muses or personified provinces (**27.2**).[41] For the Romans, the *soccus* was just too 'unofficial' for high art. It would have been like posing on your wedding photograph in sneakers. We find it, however, in private wall decorations showing everyday scenes.

However, the *soccus* was also worn (in whatever quality) by all kinds of women in public life, although we only get an occasional glimpse of it (like of the female feet). Our evidence is mostly about *puellae* and women who have a less austere character than the stereotyped Roman *matrona*. In Lucilius, a woman talks of her *Sicyonia* (a type of *soccus*);[42] in Lucretius, these shoes likewise feature on female feet at an elegant dinner.[43] In Imperial times, literature shows us that it was fashionable with the *puellae* of the demi-monde. Propertius, the first to apply the term *soccus* to a female shoe, describes a young woman roaming about in *socci* in the city centre of Rome. Unlike a Roman *matrona*, she is neither carried in a litter nor surrounded by servants.

Prop. 2.23.13–16
contra, reiecto quae libera vadit amictu,
custodum et nullo saepta timore, placet,
cui saepe immundo Sacra conteritur Via socco,
nec sinit esse moram, si quis adire velit.

In contrast, I like the woman who walks freely with her cloak thrown back and without being surrounded by deterring guards, who often walks on the Via Sacra with unclean *socci* and does not hesitate when someone wants to approach her.

39 Cic. Pro Rab. Postum. 27: *ille P. Rutilius, qui documentum fuit hominibus nostris virtutis, antiquitatis, prudentiae, consularis homo soccos habuit et pallium; nec vero id homini quisquam sed tempori adsignandum putavit* [that famous P. Rutilius, who was an example of virtue, ancient wisdom, and prudence to our people, wore *socci* and a *pallium* as a consular, and no one thought to blame the man, but everyone attributed it to the situation].

40 Plin. NH 37.17: *qui super cetera muliebria soccos induebat e margaritis* [Caligula, who, among other women's things, used to wear *socci* made of pearls].

41 Cf. p. 697.

42 On the shoe, cf. C 30; Lucilius F 1161 M. (= 1263 Christ./Garb.): *et pedibus laeva Sicyonia demit honesta* [and she is pulling off the pretty Sikyonian shoes from her feet with her left hand], cf. A 8 p. 181

43 Lucr. 4.1125: *et pulchra in pedibus Sicyonia rident* [and beautiful Sikyonian shoes laugh at their feet]; cf. A 11 p. 211.

Propertius' poem is inspired by Horace's satire 1.2, which is about 'open-minded' freedwomen and Roman *matronae*. The section at hand shows that the *soccus* was part of everyday urban Roman life and was worn by freedwomen, in this case by a prostitute. She is walking alone on the *Via sacra* to attract clients. Her walking on dirty streets is the reason why her *socci* are dirty (those of a *matrona* should and would not get sullied). Her social status is not high, but she is neither a slave nor does she work in a brothel. She is just average. She shares her civil status with the elegant mistresses of Roman Love Elegy, who are, however, more successful financially and have climbed up the social ladder. These mistresses did not publish their services on Roman streets, and their *socci* will not have been dirty. In Augustan Love Elegy, the neutral word *soccus* is not mentioned elsewhere. Perhaps the term was regarded as somewhat low for literature and that is why Propertius used it with an average prostitute. And yet the *soccus* is present with the elegant mistresses as well. In an erotic submission dream, Tibullus imagines how he is removing—like a slave—the *vincla pedum* from the white feet of his mistress Delia at a dinner to which he has accompanied her.[44] Ovid's shoes of white leather may have been *socci* as well.[45] Later on, we find expensive female *socci* with Caligula;[46] in Petronius, Fortunata wears *phaecasiae* (a *soccus*-type, B 30);[47] and Pliny tells us that female luxury *socculi* with peals were very fashionable at his time.[48] It is difficult to look beyond the literary stereotype, but we may conclude that the female *soccus* was quite popular in Roman society from at least the first century BCE onward. The expensive *socci muliebres* suggest that we should also include Roman upper-class women into the group of *soccus*-wearers. In summary, a *soccus* was worn by all kinds of women. It was less formal than a *calceus*, but probably it was more commonly used.

27.4 History

The history of the *embas*/*soccus*-type of shoe is difficult to write. It is rather putting together bits and pieces of the evidence—starting with the Greek *embas*—and trying to explain the oddities in the transmission of the term *soccus*. In Attic comedy, the *embas* (which is equivalent to the Latin *soccus*) is mentioned very often, designating

44 Tib. 1.5.65–66: *pauper ad occultos furtim deducet amicos* || *vinclaque de niveo detrahet ipse pede* [a poor lover will stealthily lead you to secret friends and will even pull your shoes off your snow-white feet]. It is the situation we found in Terence (see above) just turned on its head. A freeborn male Roman citizen is imagined as serving a (former) slave girl. On slaves taking off their masters' shoes, cf. Plaut. Truc. 367, 479; Hor. 2.8.77; Sen. contr. 9.2.25; Sen. dial. 5.18.4; Mart. 3.50.3.

45 Ovid.ars 3.271.

46 Suet. Cal. 52; Plin. NH 37.17.

47 Petron. 67.4.

48 Pliny NH 9.114.

both female and male closed shoes.[49] In Roman *Palliata*, the term *soccus* is used to translate the Greek term. However, there is a surprising fact: It is only applied to the male *embas*, but not to the female one. The female *embas* is mentioned only rarely, and it is always called *calceolus*. Plautus wrote a play called *Calceolus*,[50] perhaps a kind of Latin *Cinderella*; we also find comical *calceolarii* in the catalogue of dress merchants in the Plautus' *Aulularia* (A 5).[51] In both cases, the term *calceolus* (small shoe) must designate an *embas*/*soccus*-type, as it does in Cicero, who tells us of the *calceoli repandi* of the goddess Sospita,[52] and in Scribonius Largus.[53] The fact that the term *soccus* for the female shoe is missing in Latin comedy may be incidental. However, it is strange that it does not appear in the long catalogue in Plautus' *Aulularia*, in which every possible Latin dress term is exploited for comic effect. Apart from *calceolarii*, the catalogue contains comical *sedentarii sutores*, obscure *diabathrarii*, *solearii*, but no '*socciarii*.' Since the female *embas*-type of shoe was well known in the Graeco-Roman world, it seems that the absence of the female *soccus* from early Roman literature could rather have something to do with the usage of the term.

Let us first recall the origins of the *soccus* and its terminology. It is usually thought to be a Greek type of shoe, and this may well be true as to how it was used in the ancient world. However, the word *soccus* is not a 'regular' Greek loanword. Even if we connect it with the Greek word συκχάς,[54] there remains the fact that Roman authors used it to translate the Greek word *embas*. They thus used it like a word of their own tongue to refer to a foreign dress item.[55] Usually, they did this kind of replacement if the foreign item was (roughly) equivalent to one they knew themselves. We may hence assume that there was a type of shoe (called *soccus*) known in Italy that was similar to the Greek shoe called *embas*, and that the *soccus* was an old element of Italian culture preceding the expansion of the Roman Empire in the third century BCE. Since the word *soccus* has no detectable Latin etymology, we can further assume that the *soccus* originally was not part of Roman, but of Italian culture.

But why did the Romans not use the word *soccus* for the female *embas*? The easiest solution is that the term originally only designated a male type of shoe. With the spreading of Greek-inspired fashion in the first century BCE, the term *soccus* then gathered strength. Perhaps it was also upgraded as to the register of language. For this reason, it became generalized, and it afterwards designated both the female and the

49 On female *embades*, cf., for example, Aristoph. Eccl. 314–319 (a man cannot find his shoes and takes those of his wife); Lys. 229; Thesm. 734;

50 Macrob. sat. 3.18.9.

51 Plaut. Aul. 512–513: *calceolarii, sedentarii sutores, diabath<r>arii*,

52 Cic. nat. deor. 1.82.

53 Scrib. Largus 208.

54 See above p. 532.

55 Much like how they employed the terms *tunica* (= *chiton*), *pallium* (= *himation*), and *reticulum* (= *kekryphalos*); see also the introduction to part B pp. 228–229.

male closed shoe with laces, as we first see in Propertius. As with other articles of daily use, the literary and archaeological evidence is very slim. For these articles of clothing are just too normal to attract artistic attention. However, we can feel quite confident that the female *soccus* was a normal part of Roman culture for many centuries. In the Edict of Diocletian (301 CE), we still find specified prices for luxury *socci*, *socci purpurei*, *phoenicei*, and *albi* and for *socci viriles* (for men) and *socci muliebres* (for women).[56] The edict thus makes up somewhat for what we lack in our earlier literary sources.

56 Edict. Dioclet. 9.17–21.