



Why Leather?

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This pioneering volume brings together specialists from contemporary craft and industry and from archaeology to examine both the material properties and the cultural dimensions of leather. The common occurrence of animal skin products through time, whether vegetable tanned leather, parchment, vellum, fat-cured skins or rawhide attest to its enduring versatility, utility and desirability. Typically grouped together as 'leather', the versatility of these materials is remarkable: they can be soft and supple like a textile, firm and rigid like a basket, or hard and watertight like a pot or gourd. This volume challenges a simple utilitarian or functional approach to leather; in a world of technological and material choices, leather is appropriated according to its suitability on many levels. In addressing the question Why leather? authors of this volume present new perspectives on the material and cultural dimensions of leather. Their wide-ranging research includes the microscopic examination of skin structure and its influence on behaviour, experiments on medieval cuir bouilli armour, the guild secrets behind the leather components of nineteenth-century industrial machinery, new research on ancient Egyptian chariot leather, the relationship between wine and wineskins, and the making of contemporary leather wall covering.

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