



“BASKETS OF THE WORLD”

THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PLAITED CRAFTS

Organizers:

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“Baskets of the World” the Social Significance of Plaited Crafts

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Baskets and woven mats are the oldest and most diverse plant-based crafts found around the world. The skill required in the production of these objects is often associated with factors such as people's perceptions of the environment, conceptions of the self and modes of economic interaction, social hierarchy, and division of labour. Basketry knowledge has also significant ecological ramifications, as it includes specific strategies for the sustainable management of plant resources. Moreover, the study of plaited crafts can be linked to other important themes such as the studies of plant distribution, the trade routes of human groups and the discovery, diffusion and transmission of new technologies and techniques.

Generally, references concerning basketry are few and scattered. Many publications on plaited crafts are out of print and kept in libraries or private collections that are not always accessible to the public. Often, experts in this field are working on their individual or institutional specialties without putting their work into an overall context. Taking these considerations into account, the primary objective of this exhibition has been to improve collaboration between individuals who are engaged or interested in basketry, thus promoting a lively exchange of experiences from around the world. We have invited colleagues to bring a basket or a woven craft from their regions or from the people they have worked with.

Some of the exhibited baskets come from sites of agricultural, biological and cultural diversity that are internationally recognised, and have been collected in the course of long and medium-term ethnobotanical and anthropological expeditions financed by international institutions such as the UK Economic and Social Research Council and the Wenner-Gren Foundation. On the whole, we were able to bring on display 47 items from 12 different countries and involve the use of more than 60 plant species. This catalogue includes all these contributions, and a new one from Central Italy, as well as additional introductions on basketry traditions from the following geographical

regions (Southeast Asia, Polynesia, Japan, Africa, Mediterranean countries, Eastern and Central Europe). Information related to basketry for each sub-region (Mindoro, Palawan, West/Central and East Kalimantan, Eastern Malaysia, South Central Seram, Cook Islands, Kyushu Island and Hiroshima Prefecture, Ethiopia, Marocco, Southern and Central Italy, North-eastern Portugal, Spain, Turkey and Lithuania) cover a wide range of topics:

- 1) Uses of the object and types of weave;
- 2) Scientific identification and the origin of plant-based materials;
- 3) Ways in which the skill is being transmitted;
- 4) Cosmological beliefs or worldviews related to particular decorations and motifs;
- 5) Social-environmental factors leading either to the maintenance or abandonment of traditional woven items;
- 6) Adoption of new motifs and material, etc.

Some of these topics were also discussed in the course of Panel 4 on 'reproduction and transmission of botanical knowledge and technology in basketry and plaited artefacts' co-organized by D. Novellino and R. Ellen from the University of Kent.

It needs to be pointed out that the producers of these woven crafts are men and women, often belonging to the poorest communities around the world, and yet these people are the caretakers and users of precious biodiversity. These artisans, and skilful basket makers live within complex, risky and diverse environments and they have developed a wide array of strategies for coping with the challenges of globalization and with the socio-political and ecological transformations confronting them. However, in regions such as Southeast Asia and Africa, oil companies, loggers, miners and industrial enterprises are plundering the precious and fragile environments on which such communities depend. Natural causes such as drought, typhoons, etc. are also playing a heavy tool on the livelihood of these small-scale societies. In

addition to this, because of modernization, lack of small business development history and state support, the role of traditional experts and basket weavers, as important tools for community socio-economic development, continues to be neglected.

The richness of information related to each item provides an opportunity for firsthand cross-cultural comparison between the botanical knowledge, skills and weaving techniques of different human groups. Given the degree of traditional knowledge loss, it is essential to identify appropriate mechanisms and incentives for supporting the transmission of basketry knowledge and traditional skills.

It is our hope that this exhibition will create the basis for future collaboration between institutions and individuals who are committed to support traditional knowledge systems and raise awareness on the important linkage between biological and cultural diversity. Surely, the International Conference of Ethnobotany will continue to represent a unique opportunity for discussing these issues in the future.

We are grateful to all participants for their enthusiastic collaboration which made this exhibition a very special event.



A view of the Basketry Exhibition, August 22, 2005, Istanbul (F. Ertuğ).

SOUTHEAST ASIA

An introduction to basketry in Island Southeast Asia

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Historical Perspective

Southeast Asia is the location of about one-fifth of the world's remaining tropical forest, on which at least thirty million forest-dwellers depend (De Beer, and McDermott 1996). Geographically, it encompasses Thailand, Burma, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Peninsula Malaysia as part of the mainland, and the vast archipelagos of Indonesia and the Philippines. This introduction focuses on selected regions of Island Southeast Asia.

Bellwood (1985) has suggested that Proto-Austronesians settled on Taiwan, approximately by 4000 B.C., their descendants moved into the Philippines by 3000 B.C. and migrated southward into the Indonesian archipelago by 2500 B.C.

It is plausible to speculate that, in Island Southeast Asia, baskets and plaited artefacts travelled

along the same prehistoric routes that allowed the distribution of bronze pieces. Woven items, nets, snares, bark clothes and the textiles in which Austronesian speaking peoples dressed are missing



Fig. 1 Rattan container for the betel chewing ingredients. Batak of Palawan, the Philippines.



Fig. 2 Pandan box. Tagbanuwa of Palawan, the Philippines.



Fig. 3 Wallet for the betel chewing ingredients, made of *Corypha elata* and *Lygodium* fibres. Hanunó-Mangyans of Mindoro, the Philippines.

from archaeological record. Instead, their wooded and bamboo house structures (e.g. rows of house posts) have occasionally left traces that can be discerned by discoloration in the soil (Scott 1984). More durable items such as fishnet sinkers, and spindle whorls made of both pottery and stone have survived. Spindle whorls attest to the production of thread – probably cotton – and suggest weaving (Scott 1984: 19). In the Philippines, these objects have been associated with the Iron Age that – in the region – is considered to run from the second or third century B.C. to the tenth century. In Palawan, Ming and Sung jars with prepared lime content, attest to a betel-chewing complex as far back as 2500 B.C. It is likely that this complex was associated with a vast array of bamboo containers for betel-chewing and woven wallets made of pandan and rattan (Fig. 1-3).

Weaving techniques

In Southeast Asia, basketry and weaving are generally women activities. However, in Sarawak, ‘meeting mats’ are usually woven by men on an improvised loom, using strips of tree bark and split rattan lengths. Unlike the majority of baskets and mats, this particular mat is worked vertically/horizontally rather than diagonally (Munan 1989: 41).

The most common types of weaves are all represented in Southeast Asia: 1) checkerwork; 2) wickerwork; 3) crossed weft; 4) diagonal or twilled. In the first type of weave, the warp and weft are of uniform size and pliability, and each element passes over one and under one of the other, thus forming square or rectangular checks. A variant of this weave is found in certain baskets in which the warp is crossed and the weft passes through in regular order, so as to produce hexagonal openings. In wickerwork the warp is rigid; the smaller and more flexible weft passes under one and over one of the former. In crossed weft, two sets of wefts cross each other at an angle and interlace a rigid warp. Diagonal or twilled weaving is particularly common. It occurs when two or more weft strands pass over two or more warp elements, but not the same in adjoining rows; also warp and wefts both run diagonally [see Cole’s study (1956: 58) among the Bukidnon of Mindanao].

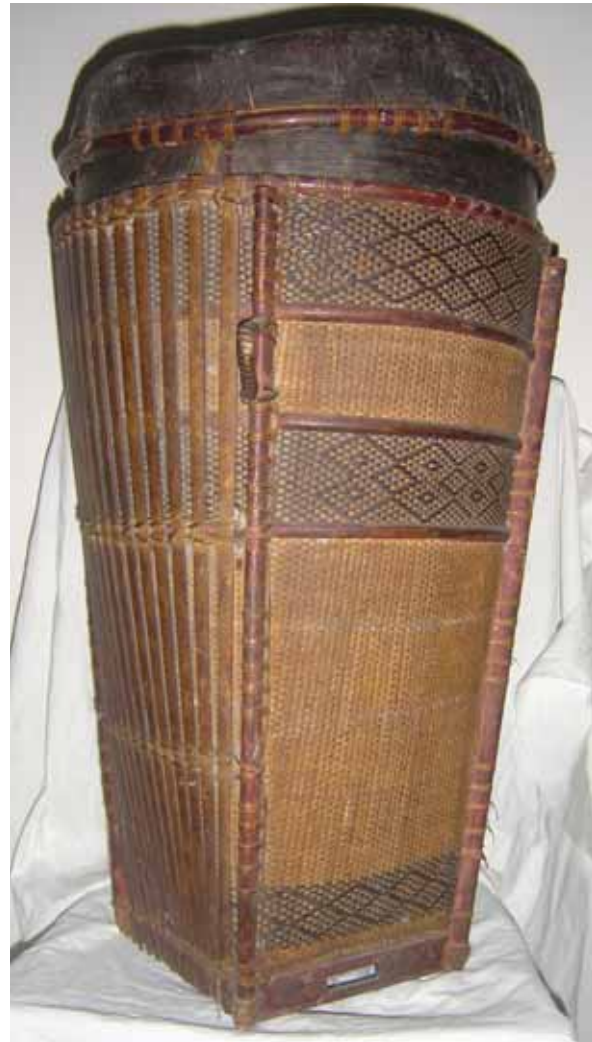


Fig. 4 The *tambok* basket.

In Sarawak, the Bidayuh *tambok* (Fig. 4) is different from the majority of diagonally woven baskets, as the weave starts on a cross and, after the turning “the sides are woven into a standing warp with thinner strands started at the base corner. Some *tambok* have vertical struts worked in, others have one or more several plaited or chained reinforced bands of fine creeper fibre around the body. The lip is finished with a rim or plaited work which takes in all the warp ends” (Munan 1989: 44).

There is great variation in baskets’ sizes and shapes, and a general distinction can be drawn between rigid and soft baskets. Rigid baskets are often strengthened at the four corners and have a base supported by crossed rods. Often, the corners are reinforced by wooden supports forming four protuberances that give stability to the basket.



Fig. 5 Dusun swiddeners from Sabah (Eastern Malaysia) Note woman in the background using the circular winnowing tray.

By and large, baskets for transporting agricultural crops tend to be rigid, while those for carrying heavy loads are more flexible and expandable. Flexibility is also a characteristic of those baskets for personal belongings such as *ambong*, made by the Penan of Borneo. *Ambong* is manufactured using two weaving techniques; the base is made of coiled fibres while the sides are plaited diagonally. It does not have a cover, and the lip is completed “with a row of woven loops through which a string is first threaded, then attached to decoratively woven carrier straps” (Munan 1989: 45). Another flexible basket is the Iban *selabit* made of rattan with loosely textured rhomboidal patterns; this is used to transport heavy loads such as heirloom jars (ibid. 43).

Another woven item widespread across the region is the winnowing tray, circular or elongated, made of split bamboo or rattan (Fig. 5, 6) and used to clear freshly pounded rice from chaff. Winnowing trays can be used also for secondary purposes, e.g. as surfaces on which seeds are dried



Fig. 6 An elongated winnowing tray from Central Vietnam.

and coconut endocarp is grated. Common in Borneo is the conical shaped sun hut (Fig. 7) made of a combination of different materials (e.g. *Nipa fruticans* leaves, split rattan, split bamboo). Because of its particular shape the area of the cone is worked by a diagonal technique dividing it into three main sections, meeting at the top (Munan 1989: 52; Sellato 1997: 231; Hose, and McDougall 1912 [1966]: 214-215).

Plant materials

A vast selection of plant material is used in the production of woven items. By and large, rattan, bamboo and pandan are the preferred sources of fibres. Rattan are semi-woody climbers representing a typical component of many forest types across the region. There are twelve recognised genera of rattan with about 600 species concentrated in Southeast Asia (Dransfield 1979) and include: *Calamus*, *Calospatha*, *Ceratolobus*, *Demonorops*, *Korthalsia*, *Myrialepis*, *Plectocomia*, *Plectocomiopsis*, *Pogonotium*, *Retispatha*. Generally, fibres for basketry are obtained from the outer shiny layer of rattan canes. However, some baskets are woven with the epidermis of the petiole and rachis (stripped of its leaflets).

Differently from rattan, bamboo is particularly abundant in seasonally dry, monsoonal forests and, often, it is found in disturbed areas. In primary evergreen rain forest, bamboos grow mainly along watercourses (De Beer and McDermott 1996: 38). The most economically important genera include *Bambusa*, *Dendrocalamus* and *Gigantochloa* (Roa et al. 1987, quoted in De Beer, and McDermott 1996: 38). Rattan, compared to



Fig. 7 An intricately woven sun-hut from West Kalimantan.



Fig. 8 A Batek Negrito woman weaving a wild pandan basket. Peninsula Malaysia.

bamboo and pandan, is more versatile. Cultural preferences in the choice of material do exist, and are not necessarily dictated by ecological factors. The Negritos of Peninsula Malaysia make use of rattan and bamboo in basketry and, often, wild pandan is a favourite material (Fig. 8).

Other substitutive lower quality material used in basketry include species of the genera *Donax* (*Donax cannaeformis*, *D. arundastrum*, etc.) and the fibrous inner cuticle of several kinds of trees, such as *Artocarpus* spp. (Skeat, and Blagden 1906: 377). The leaves of non-climbing palms are used in basketry. In Borneo, leaves of *Metroxylon sagu* are employed in the making of fans, sun hats, and food covers. Those of *Nypa fruticans* are used in the manufacture of rough mats and boxes for rice cakes (Munan 1989). In the Philippines, leaves of *Corypha elata* are also used for analogous purposes. The Hanunóo of Mindoro use *Corypha elata* fibres to weave bags (Fig. 9). The use of *Lygodium* creepers (e.g. *Lygodium splendens*, *L. japonicum*) is equally widespread; its dark fibres are interwoven with other material for decorative purposes and lashing.



Fig. 9 Hanunóo-Mangyan woman weaving baskets made of *Corypha elata*, Oriental Mindoro, the Philippines.

Often a single woven item can be made of different vegetable fibres in combination with non-plant materials (e.g. animal skin).

Symbolism and worldviews

In Southeast Asia, rice is generally accredited with personality status, and according to oral traditions, this plant originated from a human sacrifice. Basket designs that are carefully reproduced and well-executed are believed to please the 'life-force' of rice. Motifs may be received in dreams, and through other forms of contact with the spirit world. It is believed that specific motifs may activate powerful forces causing sickness and even death. Thus, special norms must be followed before introducing novices to the weaving of 'prohibited' patterns.

In Borneo, sun-huts include motifs inspired to local cosmology. Dragon imagery (the well known *aso*' motif) associated with the lower world,

is not only painted as interior decorations or on warriors' shields, but is also applied as beads on rattan baby carriers. Basketry patterns - as those on *kanowit* baskets (named after a community of the middle Rejang in Sarawak) - are characterised by naturalistic abstractions such as 'curved snakes', 'rattan leaves', 'leeches', 'bamboo shoots', 'bird's footprints', 'stars', etc. (see Munan 1989: 49). On Bornean sun-huts, similar motifs are associated with creatures of the lower and upper worlds.

The social significance of baskets has been documented across the region, although ethnographic sources are scant. Munn (1989), for instance, informs us that among some Dayak groups of Sarawak, beautifully decorated woven bags and small baskets are carried by a bride visiting her in-laws to demonstrate her skills in customary craft making. Common to many groups is the perception that the first woven basket is an important step towards adulthood.

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The Philippines (Oriental Mindoro)

The Hanunóo-Mangyan

There are approximately 7,000 to 8,000 Hanunóo-Mangyan inhabiting the Southeast portion of Mindoro Island. They are mainly devoted to swidden farming and livestock rearing (poultry, goats, pigs, but rarely cattle). Hunting, trapping and fishing are secondary activities; extensive deforestation has, in fact, depleted the island's natural resources. The Hanunóo-Mangyan have their own syllabic script and make use of *hambahan* (poetic expressions of ideas and sentiments). Parents use them to educate the children, the young men to court the young women, the wayfarers to ask for food and hospitality.

Weaving and basketry

Hanunóo-Mangyan are skilful in both weaving and basketry. To weave fabrics (from which loin-

cloth, *ramit* skirts and jackets are made) they use belt loom. They grow cotton (*Gossypium herbaceum*) and threads are coloured with an indigo (*Indigofera suffruticosa*) dye. Often, blouses and shorts are embroidered with a cross-shaped design known as *pakudus*. The same design is also found on their woven bags (*bay'ung*). Baskets are used in the most important Hanunóo-Mangyan rites, such as those centred on rice and secondary burial. Various species of Arecaceae provide the material for basketry, rope and belt making. These include *buri* (*Corypha elata*), '*iyuk* (*Arenga pinnata*) and several Calamus species. The leaves of *Musa textilis* provide sturdy fibres for cordage. The black fibres used in weaving are obtained from a fern, locally known as *nitu'* (*Lygodium japonicum*).



Bay'ung: Soft basket for personal belongings (e.g. comb, mirror, betel chewing ingredients, amulets, medicinal plants, small knife, etc.).

Material:

Black fibers: *nitu'*, *Lygodium japonicum* (Thunb.) Swartz. (Schizeaceae).

White fibers: *buri*, *Corypha elata* Roxb. (Arecaceae).

Type of weave: Checkerwork

14 x 12 cm.



Hulun: Women's waistband.

Material:

Black fibres: *nitu'*, *Lygodium japonicum* (Thunb.) Swartz. (Schizeaceae).

Brown fibres: *tayiktik*, *Calamus ramulosus* Becc. (Arecaceae).

White fibres: *talung arábà mabiru*, *Solanum melongena* L. (Solanaceae).

Type of weave: Twilling
12 cm. (rolled)



Búunbúun: Hexagonal box used as container for small items.

Material:

Black fibres: *nitu'*, *Lygodium japonicum* (Thunb.) Swartz. (Schizeaceae).

White fibres: *huri*, *Corypha elata* Roxb. (Arecaceae).

Internal supports to confer rigidity: *kawáyan*, *Bambusa spinosa* Roxb. (Poaceae).

Type of weave: Twilling
9.5 x 3.5 cm.

Contributor: Dario Novellino, Ethnobiology Lab, Department of Anthropology, University of Kent, UK.

Location: Village of Panhulungan, Municipality of Oriental Mindoro, 1989.

The Philippines (Southern Palawan)

The Pälawan

They are the largest ethnic group in Palawan, with a population of about 10,000 individuals. The people perceive themselves as divided into two main groupings: the 'Pälawan of the uplands' and the 'Pälawan of the lowlands'. During the rainy season, caves and rock shelters function as temporary habitation sites for some of the upland groups (e.g. the Taw ät batu) and provide them with seasonal hunting grounds for catching swallows and bats. All Pälawan have a mixed mode of food procurement, mainly centred on shifting cultivation and integrated with hunting, 'subsistence' and commercial gathering.

Basketry and ritual practices

The Pälawan produce some of the finest baskets in the Philippines. There is great variation in size, shape, and types of weave. Open baskets (*bäka*), baskets with lid (*tinkäp*) and for rice storing (*gäntangan*) are strengthened at the four corners and have a base supported by crossed rods. Other baskets (*bäjung*) for rice are rather flexible and expandable. Flat winnowing trays (*nigu*) are made of *Dinochloa* sp. and *Donax cannaeformis*. A wide range of rattan species is also used in basketry such as *Calamus javensis*; *Calamus caesius*, *Calamus subinermis*, as well as bamboo (mainly *Schizostachyum* sp.). The bark of different species such as

lindägung (*Trema orientalis*), *bälinad* (*Sterculia* sp.) and *säjapuq* (*Trichospermum* sp.) provides the material for the basket straps.

Woven items feature in several ritual practices, especially those dealing with agriculture. A Pälawan legend attributes the origin of rice and cultivated plants to a human sacrifice. Each year, before planting, the people practice a number of ceremonies to call back the *kuruduwa* ('life force') of the child. For this purpose they build a ceremonial structure (*pinädungan*) in the centre of the swidden. Early in the morning, before rice planting begins, a basket full of rice seeds is placed on top of the *pinädungan* platform, and the *kuruduwa* of the child is invited to bless the seeds, and to fill them with germinating power.

Often, before burning the swidden field, it is necessary to call the attention of a powerful non-human agent, *Ämpuq ät däreäs*, the Master of the Wind. Figures representing helicopters, aeroplanes, the falcon and others, are drawn on a flat winnowing tray (*nigu*), and this is said to cause the indignation of the Master of the Wind. Thus, as a reaction, the Master of the Wind will try to blow down the woven tray on which such figures are depicted. It is said that the people will take advantage of this wind to enhance the propagation of fire in the swidden clearing.

Contributor: Dario Novellino, Ethnobiology Lab, Department of Anthropology, University of Kent, UK.

Location: The items on display have been produced by members of remote communities of upland Pälawan living in the Municipality of Rizal, and were collected in 1993. Two items (*duduq* and *tinkäp*) are the work of the Taw ät batu (*taw* refers to 'human beings' and *batu* indicates a 'stone', or an 'outcrop'). This is a subgroup of the Pälawan living in Singnapän valley. In 1998, 273 members divided in 64 families, formed their community.



Duduq: (breast-shaped basket) Container for small objects.

Material:

Body: *binsag* *Dinochloa* sp. (Poacee). Circular frame: *mägtulangän* probl. *Calamus* sp. (Arecaceae). Tying material: *sika* *Calamus caesius* Blume (Arecaceae).

Type of weave: Twilling

Decorative Pattern: Cover: *sinulindang*; Base: *rindäng rindäng*.

cover and base, 15 x 9 cm.



Bäka: Agricultural and foraging basket.

Material:

Body: *timbärangan*, *Calamus* sp. (Arecaceae).

Tying material: *sika*, *Calamus caesius* Blume (Arecaceae).

Base: *kälapi*, *Calamus merrillii* Becc. (Arecaceae).

Strap: *lindägung*, *Trema orientalis* (L.) Blume (Ulmaceae).

Type of weave: Twilling

40 x 26 cm.



Tinköp: Basket with cover used as container for domestic items.

Material:

Body: *ämagas*, probl. *Calamus* sp. or *Korthalsia* sp. (Arecaceae).

Circular frames: *tikäd manuk*, *Calamus* sp. (Arecaceae).

Base: *kälapi*, *Calamus merrillii* Becc. (Arecaceae).

Tying material: *ärurug*, *Calamus* probl. *javensis* Blume (Arecaceae).

Type of weave: Twilling

30 x 12 cm.



Ätar Ätar: Miniature basket, also used as talisman container.

Material:

gähid, *Lygodium* probl. *circinnatum* (Burm.) Sw (Schizeaceae).

Type of weave: Wrapping

5.5 x 4 cm.

The Philippines (Northern-Central Palawan)

The Batak

The Batak are believed to descend from the first wave of Australoid populations which crossed the land bridges connecting the Philippine Archipelago with the mainland of Asia, and that are generically labelled as Negritos. They are found scattered in eight different settlements in the north-central portion of Palawan. My provisional census in 2005 indicates that there are only 155 individuals with two Batak parents. The settlement of Tanabag is still predominantly composed of Batak, the others have been largely absorbed into Tagbanua (a neighbouring ethnic group) settlements and/or have a higher rate of ethnic inter-marriages.

Intermarriages and the transmission of basket weaving knowledge (BWK)

Weaving is largely the work of women. *Begias* are diagonally worked baskets: weaving begins in the centre of the base until the desired size is achieved, then the weaver turns the corner and works upwards and around. Amongst the Batak, transmission of basket weaving knowledge is also affected by the rate of interethnic marriages and by the availability of traditional master weavers. Often the old and most skilful basket weavers, because of bad sight and damaged fingernails, are no longer capable of producing complex patterns. As a result, transmission of the most elaborated designs takes place through middle age women who had learned the skill from the master weavers, during their youth. By and large, in interethnic villages, the overall complexity of the BWK curriculum is being reduced. On the other hand, skilful master weavers may include non-Batak women who have lived or have grown up in Batak

settlements. Remarkably, mixed marriages allow Batak males to overcome matrilocality rules (husband transferring to the wife's village), and thus to bring the non-Batak spouse to their own community. As a result, a common line of transmission is mother in law (Batak) to daughter in law (non-Batak).

In some communities, Batak does no longer feature as the dominant idiom. As a result, the specialised technical language of the old master weavers is replaced with more generic terminology.

Traditionally, the first basket woven by a novice was an indicator that the girl had achieved a status within the group of women, as well as a new sense of identity. Thus the capacity of producing fine baskets was a sign of competence as well as a significant step towards adulthood. Nowadays, women are no longer expected to know, remember and reproduce non-material items (e.g. myths and narratives) associated with particular artefacts. Hence, prestige and social recognition play a less important role in the maintenance of basket weaving knowledge. Evidence indicates that the transmission of certain bits of knowledge, such as the local folk-biological vocabulary and the use of rattan and bamboo (the plants from which baskets are made) has proven more resilient than lexical competence of basket terminology, motifs and types of weaves. On a few occasions, small-scale commercialization has reactivated the production of woven items, while encouraging young women to learn different patterns. However, under these conditions, basketry is often devoid of the original symbolic and functional values.

Contributor: Dario Novellino, Ethnobiology Lab, Department of Anthropology, University of Kent, UK.

Location: The items on display are the work of the Tanabag Batak. The baskets (fig1 and fig2) have been made by Lalay and Maria respectively, and were collected in the settlement of Kalakuan on June 2004. The *burubtangan* box and the *pitaka'* wallet were woven by Kaningning in 1992. She died in 2001 at the age of 43.



Begias: Basket for agricultural crops, rice and edible non-timber forest products (e.g. greens, mushrooms, tubers, shells, etc.)

Material:

Body: *lawas*, *Schizostachyum lumampao* (Blco.) Merr. (Poaceae).

Rigid frame around the basket's mouth: *bugtung*, *Calamus subinermis* H. A. Wndl. ex Becc. (Arecaceae).

Tying material: Legacci: *arurug*, *Calamus* prob. *javensis* Blume (Arecaceae).

External supports at the base: *kayawan*, *Bambusa spinosa* Roxb. (Poaceae).

Strap: *namuan*, *Artocarpus* probl. *sericarpus* Jarret (Moraceae).

Type of weave: Twilling

Decorative patterns:

Top: *Agdan it uyaw* [the stairway of the *uyaw*].

According to Batak, *uyaw* is a condition of the human 'life-force' (*kiaruwa*).

It is characterised by uncontrolled libido and may lead to the breaching of socially sanctioned norms.

Bottom: *Natagainpun* (literally: received in dream)

20 x 16 cm. (top)

20 x 17 cm. (bottom)





Burubtangan: Multi-purpose box.

Material:

Body: *lipi*, *Calamus margaritae* (Hance) Becc. var. *palawanicus* Becc. (Arecaceae).

Strap: *bagu*, *Gnetum gnemon* L. (Gnetaceae).

Type of weave: Twilling



Pitaka': Wallet-shaped container for the betel chewing ingredients.

Material:

barasan: *Pandanus* sp. (Pandanaceae).

Type of weave: Checkerwork

Borneo-Indonesia (West/Central Kalimantan)

The Ot Danum

The Ot Danum is one of the many ethnic groups inhabiting the third-largest island in the world (Borneo), and collectively known as 'Dayak'. Contemporary Borneo is politically divided into four regions: Sarawak and Sabah (Eastern Malaysia), the independent state of Brunei and Kalimantan (Indonesia). The latter occupy about two-thirds of the total land area.

The Ot Danum are located on the upper stretches of the largest rivers crossing Western/Central Kalimantan and are closely related to the Ngaju people. They envision a cosmos consisting of a central level, inhabited by humans and layered between an upper world and a lower world. The upper world is constituted by high mountains and is presided over by a deity conceptualised as a hornbill. Instead, the lower world is the realm of water-based creatures headed by a dragon/snake. Often, the Ot Danum also represent their traditional cosmology on rattan mats, etched bamboo tubes, and woven sun-huts where creatures of the lower and upper worlds are separated by other motifs such as bands of weaves and rhomboidal



shapes. Other common basket motifs include “the *lalak* snake and its eggs” and *matapunäi* (the eyes of the *punai* dove).

In different areas of Borneo, black dyes used for baskets and textiles are extracted from *Pithecellobium* sp. and *Macaranga constricta*. Rattan fruits used as a source of red dye include those of *Daemonorops draco* and *Daemonorops didymophylla*. Also the sticky sap of *Pterocarpus indicus* yield a reddish colour, as well as the leaves of *Stylocoryne* spp. Strong orange-yellow dyes are obtained from wild turmeric (*Curcuma* spp.).

Basketry and fishing

Like most Dayak groups (at the exception of the Penan and other ‘sago’ oriented groups), the Ot Danum economy and worldviews are centred on the cultivation of upland rice, and fishing also plays an important role. There is a remarkable diversification in the shape, size and uses of fish baskets and fish traps. Materials commonly used in the construction of fish traps include *Donax* spp. and several species of bamboo.

Toxic plants provide the material (fruit, bark, leaves) for stunning and catching fish. Two species are cultivated for this purpose: are *Croton tiglium* and *Derris elliptica*. In Borneo plants for fish poison also include *Euphorbia antiquorum*, *Polygonum hydropiper* and wild species of the genus *Derris*. Often toxic plants are used in combination (e.g. crushed roots of *Linostoma pauciflorum* mixed with the poultice of unripe *Diospyros* spp. fruits).

Tenget kämeruk: Fish basket

Material:

uäy anak, *Calamus* probl. *pygmaeus* Becc. (Arecaceae).

24 x 16 cm.



Derenget: Fish basket

Material:

Body: *uäy dörung*, Probl. *Calamus* sp. (Arecaceae).

Mouth frame: *uäy säkäk*, *Calamus caesius* Bl. (Arecaceae).

22 x 16 cm.



Bengut: Rice basket

Material:

uäy dörung, Probl. *Calamus* sp. and *uäy säkäk*, *Calamus caesius* Bl. (Arecaceae).

35 x 20 cm.

Contributor: Dario Novellino, Ethnobiology Lab, Department of Anthropology, University of Kent, UK.

Location: The baskets on display have been collected in 1993 in West Kalimantan, in the settlements of Baras Nabun (fig. 1) and Segulang (fig. 2) both located on the Seraway river. The third item (fig. 3) was obtained from a household camping on the Lekaway river.

Indonesia (East Kalimantan)

The Penan

Traditionally nomadic, their movements were sometimes cyclical within a broad area encompassing several watersheds either nearby or within the territories of swidden agriculturists, such as the Kenyah, with whom they traded. Although still highly mobile, today the Penan live in permanent villages composed of 25 to 75 individuals. Their subsistence economy includes the processing of wild tree palms for their starchy pith (e.g. *Eugeissona utilis* and *Arenga undulatifolia*), hunting, fishing, collecting wild plants and fruits, gardening of manioc and other vegetables, and swidden rice farming. Collecting and trading forest products such as *gaharu*, rattan, medicinal plants, and live animals continues to be an important means for generating cash income to buy manufactured goods. Their most popular game animal is the bearded pig, *Sus barbatus*.

Basketry and Knowledge Transmission

Currently twenty basket types are produced by the Penan, including some innovations. At least three are no longer made. Basket motifs are similarly dynamic. Though baskets are utilitarian, simply and quickly constructed, a number of steps and substantial knowledge is required. Knowledge is gendered due to a division of labour for some tasks for all basket types or with regard to the entire production of certain types. Transmission is primarily from mother to daughter or father to son; but non-vertical transmission occurs due to death of parents, or their lack of skill or interest. Surprisingly, non-Penan speak of the death of this tradition. In reality, the Penan handicraft economy is thriving, with most baskets being sold very quickly, but locally and at low prices. Access to larger markets limits the economy, as resources and skills are clearly not depleted nor threatened. People still see value, utilitarian and ornamental, in the creation of traditional rattan baskets, they are not yet being replaced by plastic or linen ones.

Contributor: Rajinda K. Puri, Dept. of Anthropology, University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent, UK./UNPAD Basketry Project.

Location: Penan Benalui of the village of Long Lameh Baru in Malinau Regency, East Kalimantan, 2004



Bukui tanyung: Drawstring basket, usually made by women.

Material:

One species of rattan, *lakeu linau* (*Calamus caesius* Bl.); black dye from *meni* (*Macaranga constricta* Pax & Hoffn.; Euphorbiaceae) and grey river clay.

40 x 22 cm.



Kiva kelokong: A backpack, usually made by men.

Material:

Three species of rattan: *lakeu linau* (*Calamus caesius* Bl.), *lakeu semueh* (*Calamus pogonacanthus* (Becc. ex H. Winkl.) and *lakeu seporuh* (*Korthalsia rostrata* Bl.).

60 x 27 x 24 cm.

Eastern Malaysia (Sabah)

The Dusun

The Dusun people – who inhabit large areas of the interior of Sabah, Malaysia – continue to be involved in subsistence activities such as agriculture, gathering of forest products, hunting and freshwater fishing even as they become increasingly integrated into national society and the global economy.

Basketry and socio-economic changes

Traditionally, Dusun basketry was produced mainly for functional use in daily activities as opposed to decorative, ceremonial or commercial purposes. Today the variety of basketry made has evolved according to shifting uses and needs of contemporary life. The core group of basketry makers is predominantly drawn from the older generation. Knowledge acquisition and transmission in plant collection, preparation and weaving techniques is diminishing and eroding.

Some basketry objects have been substituted by modern wares regarded to be more convenient or practical. Other basketry types have undergone a ‘makeover’, and are now made out of synthetic materials instead of plant resources. Another influence is the introduction of new types of basketry from other ethnic groups in Sabah. This adaptation and transformation in basketry is partly a result of increased accessibility to readily available goods in marketplaces of nearby towns. The collection and preparation of traditional plant materials (including bamboo, rattan, pandanus and other plants) are considered to be too time consuming. It is now harder to find good quality resources – especially rattans – in the surrounding forest as they have been diminished by land clearing, forest fires and over harvesting.

Barait

This traditional haversack still commonly used today originates from Takutan, a Dusun village in

Sabah Malaysia. It was made by one of the main basketry experts in the community – Lomudin Tadong (male, 55 years old) – and purchased in October 2004.

Barait was traditionally used by men to carry personal items during hunting trips. It is also used on daily basis when going to the fields to carry food and water. Although predominantly carried by men, women too can be seen using it.

The body, back straps and tying material of this basket are woven from rattan strips from various species of Calamus, Korthalsia and other genera of Arecaceae. The frame of the base and top can be made from either rattan or softwood. These plant materials are now being substituted with readily available synthetic materials (e.g. coloured plastic strips). This saves on the time-consuming collection and preparation of the rattan which is now harder to find in the surrounding forests

Wakid

This Dusun carrying basket, also known as *Balud*, was purchased from Takutan in October 2004. The basketry maker is Edoh Sudoi (male, 54 years old).

This widely-used basket for carrying a variety of agricultural produce and firewood. During harvesting it is used to carry padi stalks. Traditionally carried by women as men prefer to carry the bigger version of a similar basket type.

The body is made from pared down bamboo stems and tied by rattan strips. The rims are whole rattan canes, the back piece is made from a palm frond and the base is formed from the stem wood of various woody vines. The back straps are plaited from rattan strips but are now commonly replaced by synthetic materials such as rope and the base by PVC plastic.

Contributor: Rachel Chua, Global Diversity Foundation (GDF), Sabah.

Location: Sabah (Eastern Malaysia), 2004.



Barait: Haversack for hunting trips and going to the fields.

Material:

Body and cover of basket; backstraps: *lasas*, *Korthalsia hispida* Becc. (Arecaceae)

Frame around top and base; tying material: *sogoh*, *Calamus caesius* Blume (Arecaceae)

Slide for looping backstraps: *timbangan* (type of softwood)

Weave and patterns: The *barait* is woven from bottom to top with a 3 by 2 weave same as the top of the basket. This tighter weave gives it the shape whereas the middle of the body and cover is a 2 by 2 weave. The back straps are a 1 by 2 weave. It has no motifs or dyes. There are just a few people in the community now who possess these weaving skills and many of the younger generation find it easier to buy backpacks from shops.



Wakid/balud: Basket for carrying firewood, padi stalks, vegetables.

Material:

Body of basket: *wulu*, *Schizostachyum brachycladum* Karz. (Poaceae)

Rims; tying material: *sogoh*, *Calamus caesius* Blume (Arecaceae)

Backstraps: *lasas*, *Korthalsia hispida* Becc. (Arecaceae)

Backpiece: *rumbio*, *Metroxylon saga* Rotto (Arecaceae)

Base: *kalawit* (type of liana)

Weave: The *wakid* is not woven as such but involves a lengthy process of first paring, splitting and carving pieces of bamboo into a certain shape. These pieces are then tied together in the middle to form the body. An inner rim is tied to the bottom and two at the top to give the basket its shape.

Indonesia, the Moluccas (South Central Seram)

The Nuaulu

The Nuaulu are people of South Central Seram in the modern Indonesian province of Maluku (the Moluccas). In 1971 they numbered some 500 individuals, and formed approximately half of the speakers of the 'Nuaulu' language group. The population has almost doubled in the two decades since then, reaching 2000 individuals in 2003. In the nineteen-eighties, the people effectively exercised autonomy with respect to the extraction of forest resources for consumption and exchange, reinforced by customary attitudes to forest ownership. From the nineteen eighties onwards, with more pressure on land and in-migration, Nuaulu forest was eroded, though partly through Nuaulu themselves voluntarily alienating land. The nineteen-nineties increased further pressure on land and led to conflict between Nuaulu and settlers. The re-organisation of forestry law during the post-Soeharto period in theory legitimised existing Nuaulu practices, but the *de facto* pressures from both local government departments, corruption and an unregulated free market in forest extraction, are all undermining Nuaulu traditional rights.

Baskets and Initiation Ceremonies

Bamboo is the most important basketry material for Nuaulu, namely 'soft bamboos' such as *Gigantochloa atter* (*wanate tuni*), *wanate onar* (*Dendrocalamus* sp.) and *niune ikine*. Some bamboos are restricted for most clans (e.g. *tenne*), with certain exceptions (as for *Neipane-manunte*).

The *nuite* is a large shallow square basket, of which there are two types. One as just described and one in which the weaving turns at the top edge to form a double layer and a 'false foot'. The two specimens displayed here have this feature. The base involves complex plaiting and a counted twill to form diamonds; the out sides are stake and strand variation of a twill. The *nuite* is generally used for carrying and drying food, especially food used in ritual (dried sago biscuits [*sikanae*] and *maia*); thus *nui matai* (or *nuite aie*) is a large decorated ritual basket (*matai* = eye).

Nuite are particularly important in initiation ceremonies. Thus, two kinds of red and yellow basket are made in connection with female initiation by the grandmothers and older female relatives of the initiate: a *nui mamsiu kuni wekete*, literally 'a basket for carrying turmeric and coconut' and a *nui kakopae*, literally the 'hand feeding basket'. For male initiation there are also two *nuite* containing sago biscuits, *maeau* and bananas, and *maeau* sago and nut mixture for each of the initiates. The first is called *nui tuhuo*, 'bark cloth basket', which is given to each initiate's sponsor (*morite*) on the second day of the ritual. The other is called *nui mawei* and is for the initiate himself. These baskets are therefore not purely functional or decorative but are an essential constituent of the ritual and the ritual cannot be performed without them. If they are incorrectly made or have incorrect patterns then this will adversely affect the success of the ritual.

Contributor: Roy F. Ellen, Ethnobiology Lab, Dept. of Anthropology University of Kent at Canterbury, UK.

Location: South Central Seram (the Moluccas), 1970.



Nuite: Generally used for carrying and drying food.

Material:

Bamboo (probl. *Bambusa atra*) with rattan (*Calamus* probl. *rumphii*) rim; commercial red dye and yellow dye extracted from turmeric (*kunie apane*, *Curcuma aurantiaca*)

Motifs:

The motifs and combinations of motif are distinctive to particular patrilineal clans and within clans particular female basket-makers. The rows or columns of lozenge shapes are described as *are huae inate*, 'like paths of fruit'. In this case the fruit is *paku-puku nosite*, ('the bottom of a *pukene*' another kind of basket), created by Periela Sounaue-ainakahata.

38 x 38 cm.





Nuite: Generally used for carrying and drying food.

Material:

Bamboo (probl. *Bambusa atra*) with rattan (*Calamus* probl. *rumphii*) rim; commercial red dye and yellow dye extracted from turmeric (*kunie apane*, *Curcuma aurantiaca*)

Motifs:

The motifs and combinations of motif are distinctive to particular patrilineal clans and within clans particular female basket-makers. The rows or columns of lozenge shapes are described as *are huae inate*, 'like paths of fruit'. In this case the 'fruit' is *kinanahane* (a reference to the glossy swiftlet, *Collocalia esculenta*), created by Perielä Sounaue-ainakahata.

38 x 38 cm.



An introduction to basketry in Polynesia

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In Polynesia, basketry still holds an important cultural role although, compared to the past, the use of baskets in everyday life has decreased dramatically. Unlike weaving traditions from other parts of the world, basketry in the Pacific, and particularly in Polynesia, has not been thoroughly documented. The Polynesian region includes all the island states between the triangle formed by New Zealand, Hawaii and the Easter Islands of the South Pacific.

Even though each island has its own traditions and weaving styles, similarities do exist. The latter can be attributed to the long history of intense travelling, contact and exchanges between islands. For instance, the generic word for basket has similar cognates through the region: *kete* (Cook Islands and New Zealand), *kato* (Tonga), *'ato* (Samoa) and *'ete* (Tahiti). Usually, the term for basket exists as a binomial, where further specification is required. For example *kete tautai* is the term used for fish basket in the Cook Islands; *kato alu* is the term used for baskets made of *alu* fibres in Tonga, and *'ato matie* is the Samoan term to define a basket made of fresh strips from coconut leaves (Arbeit 1990).

Generally, two main categories of baskets occur through the region. The first type, made from untreated coconut leaves, are disposable baskets, mainly used for carrying food and fish. Such baskets are made by men, women and children. The second category includes baskets of the most elaborate type, usually endowed with high social value. These baskets are made of pandanus fibres and of the young midribs of coconut leaves and are generally woven by women (Arbeit 1990).

Nowadays, basketry is no longer practiced by young people, and only women around fifty years old and above can still weave the most intricate patterns. Some of the factors contributing to the drastic decline of basketry in the Pacific include changing cultural values, availability of money (generally obtained through relatives working in

the larger islands or overseas) and difficulties to obtain the raw material (Arbeit 1990).

Weaving knowledge

Weaving knowledge, like other forms of traditional knowledge, is maintained and reproduced through an existing social structure and specific modes of knowledge transmission. Novices need to accept the authority of their elder teachers and show commitment to the repetitive training processes. Nowadays, the enrolment of children in the national school provides them with little time and no social incentives to learn traditional basketry.

In New Zealand, the production of baskets and mats represents one of the most conservative areas of Maori material culture (Prendergrast 1984). In Tonga, weaving techniques and related plant knowledge employed in the production of *kato alu* are transmitted matrilineally (Hettinger, and Cox 1997). In Fiji, during the old days, young spouses had to transfer to their husbands' village, where they learned the local weaving techniques and styles (Arbeit 1990).

At the present, baskets sold in the capital island are mostly made in the outer islands. However, traditional plaited containers and the simple basket made of locally available material are no longer chosen by young women who tend to purchase the more prestigious and costly polyethylene bags (Arbeit 1990). In spite of the overall decline of basketry traditions, evidence indicates that the production of woven crafts is acquiring a new dimension. For instance, baskets are either produced for the tourist trade or as gift to friends and relatives. In both cases, only the simplest types of weave are produced and some of the tourist baskets are of an entirely new style. Overall, contemporary weavers are no longer basket users and, often, users are from different cultures (Arbeit 1990). On some occasions, old baskets kept as 'relics' in local houses, tend to deteriorate quickly because of the tropical humid climate (Arbeit 1990).

Weaving material

Coconut and pandanus are the two plants widely used in basketry across the Pacific islands, except for Hawaii and Easter Island where the former species is available but not used as a weaving material. The chilly climate of New Zealand does not allow the growth of palms and, for their baskets, Maori use two species of local 'flax' (Arbeit 1990): the so called 'coastal flax' (*Phormium tenax*) and the 'mountain flax' (*Phormium cookianum*).

Useful fibre plants are carefully managed and, in most cases, these are sustainably harvested. For instance, New Zealand weavers avoid the collection of flowering plants and only take a few leaves from each specimen (Butcher 1999). In the Cook Islands, pandanus plants were tended and pruned and the harvesting was limited to mature leaves.

In addition to pandanus and coconut, the use of secondary fibres material has also been documented. For instance, in the Cook Islands, *Hibiscus tiliaceus* is interwoven with other material to create patterns on the basket or it is used for cordage. In Fiji and French Polynesia, *Frecinetia arborea* is used to make baskets for tourists, as well fish traps. In Tonga, the ceremonial basket *kato alu* is made with the fibres of *Epipremnum pinnatum*, locally known as *alu* (Arbeit 1990), a vine native to Southeast Asia and Papua New Guinea.

The symbolic value of baskets

An assessment of local narratives and histories provide useful insights on the symbolic value of baskets. The association between baskets and womb is common to various ethnic groups, and it is related to the symbology of fertility. In east and central Arnhem, the pandanus dilly bag represents the womb, and therefore creativity (Butcher 1999).

One of the earliest accounts of the use of baskets in the Cook Islands is an ancient clan song

from Rarotonga dating back to 1670. It describes foraging in the forest for pandanus fruits in times of scarcity, using a basket (Gill 1995). The term for basket, *enua*, is the same term used for placenta. In a similar fashion, in Papua New Guinea, the word *bilum* refers both to net bags and the womb (MacKenzie 1991).

Baskets are also associated with divination. It has been noted that New Zealand Maori priests used to weave baskets in order to capture the spirits of their enemies. By chanting the spirits into the baskets they were able to channel them into dug pits and thus to kill them (Grey 1956 quoted in Bobart 1936: 97). In the Fiji Islands, the legend on the origin of mosquitoes narrates how the god Oneata brought them in a basket from Kambatta (Lee 1931 quoted in Bobart 1936: 97).

Contemporary issues

In New Zealand, beginning from 1960's, there has been a revival of Maori skills, including basketry. In Arnhem Land (Australia) weaving has experienced a resurgence (Butcher 1999), and a counter-trend is beginning to develop with the reawakening of ethnic pride and sense of identity. Increased cultural awareness, growing appreciation of traditional heritage, and efforts to prevent cultural loss are the main drivers behind cultural revival in basketry (Arbeit 1990). In some islands, in order to respond to local and foreign market demands, basketry skills are increasingly taught in schools and by women's groups and associations. Undoubtedly, in the face of new contingencies, Polynesia basketry traditions will continue to experience transformation and various degrees of loss. On the other hand, new designs and motifs are developing, and perhaps this will also foster new patterns of knowledge transmission.

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Polynesia, South Pacific (The Cook Islands)

The Cook Islands belong to Polynesia, in the South Pacific and are composed of 15 small islands. My main field site is Atiu, a small volcanic island (20 km circumference), which is surrounded by a reef. Every household has a source of income in the form of a salaried member; remittances or pensions and most households are engaging in planting taro, feeding pigs and fishing. The population consists of about 600, mainly older people and young children. In fact, the majority of the islands young workforce has emigrated to Rarotonga (the main island), as well as to New Zealand and Australia.

Basketry, social changes and environmental transformations

This basket was given to me as a departure present from Mama Ake Mingi, a basket master-weaver, when I was leaving Atiu in May 2003. I lived in Atiu for 9 months during my doctoral fieldwork. Traditional crafts are given as gifts when people leave the island, or they are displayed during social events.



Kete

Material:

Body and straps of basket: *rau ara*, *Pandanus spurius* (Pandanaceae)

This basket has the typical design of Atiu. Usually Cook Islands baskets are flat but this one is woven around a wooden box, to give the basket an added volume. These types of baskets are taken to church on Sunday and their shape is ideal for carrying a standard size Bible. Making and carrying baskets is an exclusively female activity. Few decades ago, women and young girls were making new hats, baskets and fans every week for the Sunday service, publicly displaying their weaving skills. Nowadays, it is mainly older women that know how to weave baskets, as younger girls do not wish to endure the long training needed to become a basket weaver. As a result, they prefer imported goods to locally produced ones.

Atiuan baskets are typically woven with the dried leaves of pandanus (*Pandanus spurius*) which is called *rau ara* (literally *rau* means leaf and *ara* pandanus). The leaves are left to dry and the thorny side is removed. Then they are straightened with a knife and sliced in different sizes. The variation in colour brightness is obtained by exposing the leaves to the sun for different lengths of time. The bottom of the basket is woven first and then the sides are woven around a wooden box. The handles are added last and the basket is finished by sewing the rim with a needle and a thin piece of pandanus. Pandanus was cultivated extensively in the past until the eighties, when it was attacked by pests (mealybugs) coming, most probably, from pineapple plantations. Nowadays, in Atiu, there is a real shortage of pandanus. One family is still planting them and selling the dried leaves locally. Other women obtain their pandanus leaves from relatives in the neighbouring island of Mitiaro where this species is abundant.

Contributor: Sonia Vougioukalou, Department of Anthropology, University of Kent, UK.

Location: Atiu, The Cook Islands, 2003.

JAPAN

An introduction to basketry in Japan

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In Japan, several levels of basket making coexist. Artisan basket makers, such as Mr. Yoshida in Chofu-City, Tokyo, still provides back baskets, hip baskets, dust scoops and other traditional items from his small lean-to work space, selling them from his small wooden shop (Fig. 1 and 2). He makes strong functional items and is proud of his work, demonstrating the splitting and preparation of thin bamboo with skill and pleasure. The baskets are of moderate cost and are still in use in many households.

Alongside these, a world away in terms of preparation of the bamboo, construction methods and objects made, is a small group of master craftsmen who make items for the Tea Ceremony, baskets for the Imperial Palace and for smart

galleries in the USA or Tiffany's, New York. These masters use rare bamboos, smoked for two hundred years in a house roof or with unusual mottling. The baskets demand the finest of fine split material, ten days preparation followed by a month of long hours of work to make them. Such basket makers come from several generations of craftspeople and continue a strong and continuing tradition. The Tanabe family, from Osaka, the youngest member of which, Takeo, is in his thirties, is one such. Learning from his father Tanabe Chikuunsai 3rd, and also from Mr. Watanabe (Fig. 3), a third generation basket maker himself, he and these basket makers command the highest respect. The objects they create demand wonder and admiration. The first National Living Treasure,



Fig. 1 Mr. Yoshida shaving down his bamboo, Chofu-City, Tokyo.



Fig. 2 Mr. Yoshida's wife wearing one of his back baskets, Chofu-City, Tokyo.



Fig. 3 Mr. Watanabe, Beppu.

Shono Shounsai, is no longer alive but his son continues to make baskets of the highest quality. Recently, five new National Living Treasures have been created, one of whom is a bamboo basket maker, much to the delight of the Japanese basket makers of all kinds (Honma Kazue,

personal communication). The status of these Masters is of the very highest.

A third group, contemporary basket makers working alongside these two extremes, are more akin in status to the European art gallery exhibitors. Working with a range of materials, many gathered themselves, they are invited to exhibit regularly and attract an audience educated in the arts, meeting at intervals so having a sense of comradeship, sometimes necessary as an antidote to the silence of the workshop. The work is highly individual, each craftsman following their own lines of investigation, interior space being of paramount concern to Sekijima Hisako, plaited form to Honma Kazue and intricacies of wrapping to Takamiya Noriko.

Even in Japan where aesthetic considerations are to the forefront, contemporary work not tied to Japanese tradition of fine bamboo work for the Tea Ceremony has yet to find a ready market, although exhibited widely and to great acclaim.

Japan (Hiroshima Prefecture)

Food on the table: a basket of fern

This basket for fruit or sweets or anything else on the table, made by Kanae Mizushima, comes from the Hiroshima Prefecture, Japan, only being made traditionally in a small area around the town of Hiroshima and the off-shore island of Shikoku. The material is *Gleichenia dichotoma*, gathered between October and April but being best cut in February or March. The plants must be four to five years old. After gathering the stems are boiled in metal tanks for one and a half hours to soften them for use. The basket, and variations of it, used to be made in sufficient quantity for export to the U.S. after World War II but then fell out of production. In the last decade one man, considering it important not to lose the skills, has revived the technique, and has started teaching pensioners in Community Workshops so again there is small scale manufacture for sale locally.

The material is hard, having almost the appearance of plastic, but can be used with a particular style of base which does not demand that the material travels round tight bends. The siding is called a 'Madeira' border although it is much used elsewhere, particularly in Eastern Europe.

As I travelled round Japan meeting basket-makers it was clear that few knew of this material, the basket or its history. That made it particularly fascinating to me.



Basket for food

Material: *Gleichenia dichotoma*

Technique: Stake and strand, with a wide Madeira border.

Base diameter 20cm., top diameter 25cm., depth 10cm., diameter of foot 15cm., depth of foot 3cm.

Japan (Kyushu Island)

The Japanese Eel Trap

Mr. Hiroshima's small eel trap, made for use in the Hinokage River in a central valley of the southern island of Kyushu, Japan is a masterpiece. Apparently simple, each strip of the bamboo, *Phyllostachys bambusoides*, commonly known as *mandake*, has been cut from a carefully selected pole.

Fishing baskets rarely last more than one season and can therefore be made of softer, summer cut bamboo, prone to insect damage. Longer lasting containers must have autumn cut material and the inner soft part cut away.

The stalk must be very carefully selected on the hillside, straight with flat nodes and long segments between the nodes. The stalk just below a branch has particularly fine properties and is used for the rim which holds the basket together. The weaving strips must be very smooth. Three to four year old growth is best and only a few stems on one hillside will be suitable. Further cutting on this hillside must be delayed three to four years. 'Selecting bamboo is the most crucial step in making a good basket' (Hiroshima Kazuo, personal communication 2005)

Mr. Hiroshima had a tough apprenticeship as a basketmaker and became itinerant, as was traditional. He would visit families on a two to three

year cycle making domestic, agricultural and fishing containers as needed.

During the war he joined a town workshop and learnt new forms, later settling in the Hinokage region where people came to him with requests. He is now renowned as a true artist, his baskets having been collected by the local grocer, Nakamura Kenji, who recognised their quality. His magnificent display of all the traditional forms, in his grocery shop, attracted Louise Cort, from the Smithsonian Institution and has resulted in a fine representation in their permanent collection, while others, after exhibition at the Japanese Embassy in London, are stored at the British Museum.

The basket is a masterpiece both in the making and in the knowledge it shows of the animal's behaviour. The workmanship, from the selection and preparation of the *mandake* to the most exact and close stake and strand weaving and the binding of the rim is second to none. Fish will ignore it if the dimensions are wrong. The entry must be a suitable size, the one-way valve, of delicate shaved bamboo, must be flexible enough when wet to let an eel in but sufficiently small to prevent escape. Working to these parameters is also work of the highest order.



Fish trap. Used for catching small river fish from the river which runs through the village. The population depends on this source of protein and the traps are still used by older people.

Material: *Mandake*, *Phyllostachys bambusoides*

Technique: Stake and strand, with removable cone trap mechanism.

Contributor: Mary Butcher, Rural History Centre, University of Reading, UK.

Location: Hinokage village Kyushu Island, and Hiroshima Prefecture, Japan, 2005.

AFRICA

An introduction to basketry in Africa

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Africa is the world's second largest continent in terms of land area and population. The African continent manifests many human divergences that are profoundly mirrored by the diversity of material culture. While the continent's culturally specific variations in material cultures are too numerous to detail here, some pan-cultural similarities and challenges to the continuance of plant-based plaited and woven crafts will be examined.

Historical perspective

The traditional crafting of basketry objects from the simplest available resources serves as a testament to not only the creative impulses of humans from earliest time, but also to their ability to implement technologies which utilize whole-plant value in environments where resources are often lean. In general, a simple linear scheme of influences between African societies is difficult to draw, in large part because of differential archaeological finds. Owing to extreme climatic variations on the continent, an abundance of ancient basketry remains have been found in the more arid regions of North Africa, while in the tropical regions of West and Central Africa, humid conditions impede the preservation of basketry material, even at more recent archeological sites.

Nonetheless, correlates at least in the persistence and dispersion of creativity, technology, and function through time can be suggested. Whether considering the 8790 ± 90 years BP Mesolithic basketry remains from Libya (Cremaschi and Di Lernia 1999), the 4000 – 5000 BC Fayum Neolithic Period baskets (Gardner and Canton-Thompson 1926), or the popular modern-day exported baskets from Bolgatanga, Ghana – basketry is revealed as an elemental part of material heritage in the continent.

Plant-based materials

Since ancient times African men and women have employed a gamut of basketry techniques – including coils, twists, plaits, assemblages, twines and loops – in order to fashion basic and ceremonial objects, which ranged from sandals to carrying bags to granaries. The fundamental materials used were locally available weeds, cultivated plants, rushes, and roots (Fig. 1). Some of the simplest basketry items are quickly produced as needed and are often for single use, like the plaited food transport containers fashioned from freshly



Fig. 1 This carrying bag, made from thread-like fibers of *Ensete ventricosum* in South Omo Region, Ethiopia, combines an aesthetically pleasing form and a utilitarian purpose.

picked broad leafed plants. The most complex basketry items can require days or months of labor and are intended to last for years: such objects include ceremonial headdresses and dowry baskets often assembled from split grasses mere millimeters wide.

Traditional basketry made from renewable vegetal fibers are ecologically beneficial because they are biodegradable. In recent times, however, environmental degradation due to manmade conditions such as excessive burning, and deforestation, as well as natural crises like drought and pestilence have taken their toll on plant-based resources. Yet, in some cases, it is the increased export demand for basketry items that is straining local availability of organic materials (Cunningham and Choge 2004).

Alternative weaving materials

Reduced availability of traditional plant-based materials due to industrialization and environmental degradation only partially accounts for the increased use of non-vegetal materials in African basketry. The availability of synthetic materials, which are often imported, provides alternative mediums for the decorative surfaces of basketwork. Moreover, the purchase of brightly colored, conveniently packaged, inexpensive and durable materials such as acrylic thread, polyurethane strips, and threads of plastic-coated wires are increasingly seen as welcomed alternatives to of-



Fig. 2 A contemporary Lybian basket interlaced with textile ribbons blends traditional plant-based basketry with manufactured additions.

ten time-consuming traditional methods of collecting, dyeing and otherwise preparing organic fibers (Asante 2005; Sentence 2001).

Despite the disadvantages of non-biodegradability of recent substitutes for plant-based objects, it should be noted that the use of synthetic fibers for basketry in Africa often is the result of the recycling of a plethora of materials into alternative weaving elements. With the financial challenges of so many of the continents communities, Africans have developed need-based recycling of nearly all conceivable goods. Likewise, where vernacular arts of woven and plaited crafts are still flourishing, one finds an innovative amalgamation of vegetal materials with recycled ribbons from textiles, plastic mesh strips from grain sacks, and a variety of other materials (Fig. 2).

Functions of basketry

Basketry in Africa, as elsewhere in the world, can be both functional and decorative. Oftentimes, the greater the ornateness of the object, the less frequently it is used. Nonetheless, some basketry objects for mundane use contain patterns which are both symbolic and complex. In fact, in many cases there is a clear relationship between aesthetic preferences and socio-cultural values and ideals (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Van Damme 1996). Likewise, objects of aesthetic appreciation which serve important limited functions, such as woven instruments used by traditional healers, or plaited ceremonial headdresses are clear examples of the complex relationship



Fig. 3 A basket weaver crafts a beer sieve from *Phoenix* sp. in South Omo Region, Ethiopia.

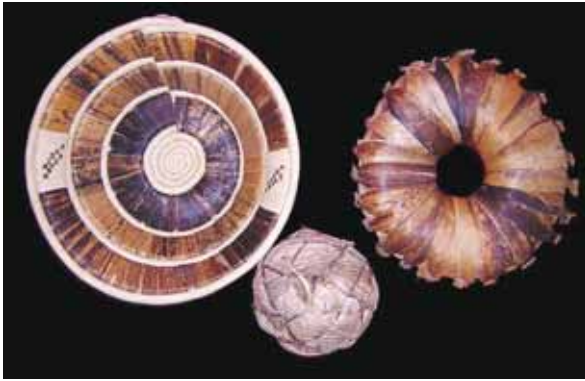


Fig. 4 In Uganda, *Musa* sp. leaves are fashioned into a variety of objects including (from left) bowls, footballs, and support stands for round-bottomed vessels.



Fig. 5 In Ethiopia, a merchant sells baskets whose patterns have been painted on with chemical dyes.

between tangible heritage (basketry object) and intangible heritage (in this case: music, and performing arts). The more common basketry plates used for serving food on mundane occasions, need not be viewed as any less reflective of a combination of tangible and intangible heritages; one's philosophical perspective, even one's view of beauty, may be echoed in the everyday objects of the home.

In addition to the more commonly known uses of objects, African basketry has some lesser known functions which include: currency (Mbum peoples, DR Congo), fertility "fan" dolls (Ghana), sling shots (Somalia), and beer sieves (Ethiopia) (Fig. 3 and 4). The diversity of these objects indicates that there is virtually no limit to the variety of items crafted by male and female artisans throughout the continent.

Dyes

Roots, leaves, fruits and vegetables, spices, and animal waste were formerly used throughout the continent in the preparation of dyestuff for basketry grasses and stems. Yet today, the loss of indigenous knowledge in grass-dyeing techniques is widespread (Asante 2005; Muhammad 2001; Sentence 2001). Moreover, a reduced availability of certain weaving fibers and vegetal matter used as dyestuff has prompted "a need in several African countries to shift from wild sourcing to on-farm cultivation" (Cunningham and Choge 2004: 215). While the export markets of the West are increasingly preferring organically dyed products from Africa, there is a reluctance by native weavers

who have long used chemical dyestuff to revert to organic methods (Fig. 5).

Modifiable meanings

A recurrent theme in studies on African basketry is that the former meanings, and ideations behind basketry patterns, terminology, and even uses are often lost to contemporary artisans (Asante 2005; Locke 1994). However, a re-interpretation of older forms, as well as the original creation of new forms is taking place. Here, the economic influence of the tourist market and external mercantile activity is a major influence on the development of novel associations, and even designs in African basketry (Locke 1994; Muhammad 2001). Unfortunately, quality of weave and precision of design are often degraded in order to accommodate market demand in output quantity.

Conclusion

While rote-copying of traditional forms is common, new pattern designs are emerging which reflect the contemporary cultural contexts of weavers. In this way, traditional basketry in various regions of the continent are proceeding with a *succession of skills*, which reflects, not so much a rejection of things old, but an embracing of things new (Fig. 6). Indeed, the adaptability and resilience of African craftspeople in the shaping of plaited and woven forms evinces the continuity of technique, and a synthesis of plant-based and synthetic elements that comprise their contemporary environments.

**Fig. 6**

A group of hearing impaired students receive vocational training in basketry from an association of professional weavers in Harar, Ethiopia.

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Africa (Ethiopia)

The Harari

Harar, located in the eastern highlands of Ethiopia, has traditionally been a mercantile city, and the homeland of the Harari ethnic group. There are just over 22,000 members of the Harari ethnic group in all of Ethiopia, with 9,098 living in the city of Harar. Today in the 60 hectares of the old city that is encompassed by a sixteenth century wall, ethnic Harari are less than half of the population.

Basketry tradition

Harari baskets (*ge mot*, lit. “basket of the city” in the Harari language) are shaped as bowls, plates and lidded containers that have traditionally been a part of the ceremonial and everyday activities of the Harari ethnic group and which have an elevated status in the material culture of this group. Harari baskets are crafted by women and have a reputation locally, and nationally as the most

complex and well known of Ethiopian basketry traditions. Likewise, they have a high monetary value; the most complex Harari baskets can cost US \$100 per basket – nearly one-eighth of the per capita GDP (PPP) in 2004. These baskets are used for ceremonial presentations, as dowry gifts, and to supplement income. Previously, baskets were hung in Harari homes in areas particularly designated for each style.

The skill of weaving the complex dowry baskets has become limited in recent years and elder professional weavers from local craft guilds are pressed to meet the demand. Resultantly, the Harari Regional Bureau of Culture has designated traditional Harari baskets as “precious” and rare cultural heritage whose export is strictly regulated. These new regulations are indicative of the local awareness of the increased rarity of traditional baskets.



Maxazu mot: Basket used to cover plates of food and for wall decoration.

Material:

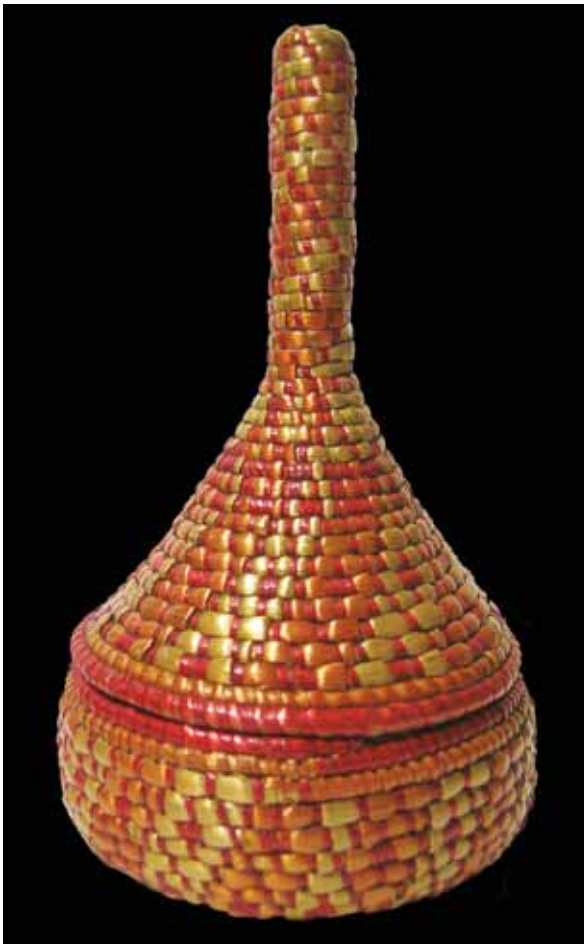
Inner coils: *migir*, *Pennisetum schimperi* A. Rich. (Poaceae)

Outer surface of coils: *agargara*, *Eleusine jaegeri* Pilg. (Poaceae) and *qarma*, stem of *Hordeum vulgare* (Poaceae)

18 x 33 cm.

Contributor and artist: Belle Asante, Kyoto University, Japan

Location: Harar, Ethiopia



Etan mudai: Dowry basket for storage of incense. Also used for wall decoration.

Material:

Inner coils: *migir*, *Pennisetum schimperi* A. Rich. (Poaceae)

Outer surface of coils: *agargara*, Eleusine jaegeri Pilg. (Poaceae) and *qarma*, stem of *Hordeum vulgare* (Poaceae)

14 x 9 cm.



Contributor and artist: Belle Asante, Kyoto University, Japan

Location: Harar, Ethiopia

Africa (Morocco)



Tbeg/ Tbouga (plural): Bowls for food (e.g. bread, fruit), ornament and winnowing (for example, grains and whole spices); traditionally used to prepare couscous (ground semolina wheat or barley rolled into 'grains'). Moroccan Arabic (Sid Zouine), Morocco.

Material:

Inside 'filling': **diss**, *Scirpus maritimus* or *S. holoschoenus* (Cyperaceae) stems, sometimes mixed with **ssmâr 'ghanmi'**, *Juncus maritimus*, *J. acutus* or *J. bufonius* (Juncaceae) stems.

Outer 'wrap': **ssmâr 'ghanmi'**, *Juncus maritimus*, *J. acutus* or *J. bufonius* (Juncaceae) stems, or **doum**, *Chamaerops humilis* (Arecaceae) young leaves or plastic.

Variable in size: top 32 cm.; middle 21 x 32 cm.; bottom 25 cm.

Juncus fibres dyed with henna (*Lawsonia inermis*) and **harmala** (*Peganum harmala*).



Large *tbeg*: Used to prepare couscous ‘grains’, to mix dried fruits and nuts. Wrapped with *doum* and green palm leaves and blue plastic.

44 cm.



Traditional ‘*tbiqa*’ form used for bread storage.

Material:

Inside ‘filling’: *diss*, *Scirpus maritimus* or *S. holoschoenus* (Cyperaceae) stems, sometimes mixed with *ssmâr ‘ghanmi’*, *Juncus maritimus*, *J. acutus* or *J. bufonius* (Juncaceae) stems; Outer ‘wrap’: *ssmâr ‘ghanmi’*, *Juncus maritimus*, *J. acutus* or *J. bufonius* (Juncaceae) stems.

Variable in size: Conical cover 28 x 30 cm.; bowl 10 x 31 cm.; overall height 33 cm.



Modified ‘*tbiqa*’ used as a functional or ornamental basket.

Material:

Inside ‘filling’: *diss*, *Scirpus maritimus* or *S. holoschoenus* (Cyperaceae) stems, sometimes mixed with *ssmâr ‘ghanmi’*, *Juncus maritimus*, *J. acutus* or *J. bufonius* (Juncaceae) stems;

Outer ‘wrap’: *ssmâr ‘ghanmi’*, *Juncus maritimus*, *J. acutus* or *J. bufonius* (Juncaceae) stems.

18 x 24 cm.



Tbigat (singular, **tbiga**): Round pad used to place under hot dishes to protect the table from heat. Moroccan Arabic (Douar El Marja) – Morocco.

Material:

Inside ‘filling’: **diss**, *Scirpus maritimus* or *S. holoschoenus* (Cyperaceae) stems, sometimes mixed with **ssmâr ‘ghanmi**, *Juncus maritimus*, *J. acutus* or *J. bufonius* (Juncaceae) stems.

Outer ‘wrap’: **doum**, *Chamaerops humilis* (Arecaceae), young leaves, sometimes dyed.

Variable in size, 19 – 21 cm.

Top: unfinished **tbiga**

Bottom: finished **tbiga**



Tarazat (singular, **taraza**): Palm hat used especially by farmers and other rural dwellers. Moroccan Arabic (Douar L’Kaid) – Morocco

Material:

doum, *Chamaerops humilis* (Arecaceae), young leaves.

15 x 34 x 30 cm.

MEDITERRANEAN

An introduction to basketry in the Mediterranean

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Region, climate and vegetation

The region being considered in this short introduction extends along the north of the Mediterranean from Portugal to Greece, and includes those parts of each country in reasonable proximity to this sea. The characteristic climate has hot dry summers with precipitation mainly in autumn and winter. At sea level, where rainfall is low, this leads to semi-arid conditions and originally evergreen forest with broadleaved and coniferous species. There was probably always a prominent layer of bushes and small trees below, now further encouraged by a long history of degradation by fire, axe, or browsing livestock. In places, soil erosion has reduced the tree species still further and tussocky grassland occurs. Where the higher ground is exposed to westerly winds as in the east Pyrenees, maritime and Julian Alps, Apennines and inland from the Dalmatian and Ionian coasts, then the extra rainfall supports deciduous trees including sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*). Nevertheless, there are some areas in river valleys and estuaries, and indeed the north Italian plain, which are well-watered throughout the year and support typical marshland species and intensive cropping when drained.

History of settlement and basketry

Cereal cultivation and the herding of livestock spread agriculture westward through Neolithic travellers from Turkey some 8,000 years ago. The resultant settled communities would have produced a wider range of basketry items than their Paleolithic hunter-gatherer ancestors. They began clearing the vegetation to permit cropping and grazing. Productivity slowly increased, allowing a proportion of the population to live in towns and cities and to engage in trade. The need for many

types of containers would encourage the emergence of specialized craftsmen. Basketmaking had already reached high standards in Greek, Etruscan and Roman cities, and there are written accounts of willow (*Salix* spp.) cultivation which supplemented the gathering from wild plants of this, and many other, species.

The decline of these civilizations, following invasions from all directions, arrested or even reversed the trend towards urban living. Feudal societies then emerged whose duration varied greatly through the region. Only when they broke up did this trend become re-established – as early as 1100 AD in northern Italy, but several centuries later in Spain and Portugal. The mediaeval craft guilds, and the workshops which succeeded them, provided the huge range of items needed by the growing proportion of people divorced from the land; people now devoid both of the skills, and the materials, with which to weave their own containers.

The numbers of professional makers thus followed the local pace of urbanisation and industrialisation, and reached their maxima around 1900 when railway systems had facilitated long-distance trade. The 20th century saw the decline of these numbers, partly due to competition from lower paid workers in Eastern Europe and the Far East, and partly from new packaging materials and bulk transport which have largely replaced baskets. Today, where they survive at all, Mediterranean basket weavers provide craft products for the remaining rural poor, or for tourists. There is much less evidence to date for the emergence of two trends now seen in north-west Europe. There, basketry has become a leisure activity for many who appreciate working with natural materials. In addition, a market is developing for decorative articles made by professionals for the house or

garden, using traditional skills but often new materials. Perhaps most parts of the Mediterranean countries are still too close to their rural past for their citizens to be spending their new affluence and leisure on such objects or activities.

The makers

While this brief historical summary has highlighted the rise and fall of professional basket makers over the past 10,000 years, the vast majority of baskets have always been made by the small-scale farmers who predominated in these countries.

The techniques developed early. Spiral basketry patterns are imprinted on Neolithic pottery fragments. Woven walls survive from 5,000 years ago and radial weaving from the Bronze Age (3,000 years). These skills would have been widespread in most rural families, and the necessary tools were few and simple. Collection of plant materials and weaving would have been done in slack times, often in winter, to provide replacements for articles which had worn out. Those with more skill, interest, or time might make extra for sale or barter.

As demand for baskets grew, so individuals based in town or country specialised in the craft for at least part of the year. Some travelled and worked or sold their output away from home leaving the farm duties to their families. Where city guilds emerged, formal hierarchies were recognized with apprentices, journeymen and masters. But basket making remained a lowly calling, perhaps because of the low value of the materials, of the capital involved in workshops and tools, and of the products. As a result, written records are very short and the actual articles have not survived to tell their tales.

At the height of the demand, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, large numbers of workers were employed producing similar items either in central workshops or in their own homes though the processes remained almost entirely manual. Women might help to prepare and weave the finer materials, but thicker rods or those made from trees, were usually handled by men. The gypsy community has for centuries practiced basketry throughout the region, and at times the craft has been thought a suitable occupation for those handicapped visually or otherwise.

The plant materials

Makers have naturally used whatever local plant material could be processed into the necessary form: pliable rods or strips of sufficient length.

One of the most widespread has been one-year-old willow stem originally from wild plants but, over time, selected clones were cultivated. The best rods require adequate moisture for growth. The desirable qualities vary according to the work being done, but length, straightness, uniform thickness, lack of branching, strength, and elasticity are all important. For coarse work, or when used under water, the bark may be left on. For finer work it is stripped when bud growth emerges in spring, or by first boiling at any time. Where the rods are too thick for weaving, they may be split into two, three, or four and these skeins planed to a flatter profile by removing the inner pith. Similar rods may be taken from hazel, sweet chestnut, ash (*Fraxinus* sp.), dogwood (*Cornus* sp.), or other species. Some creepers (*Clematis*) or climbers (*Humulus*, *Vitis*) have been used.

Much finer stems are characteristic of cereal straw, usually wheat (*Triticum*) or rye (*Secale*), or other grasses and sedges. These are too weak to weave individual stems into robust baskets but, by taking thin bundles and binding the circumference



Fig. 1 Arm basket, cane siding on brown willow frame, Megalopolis, Greece.



Fig. 2
Coiled straw basket for sowing grain Zagreb, Croatia.

with a skein of tougher material, like skined willow or blackberry (*Rubus*), a continuous rope-like structure can be made.

Wetland species used for basketry include the reed (*Phragmites australis*), reedmace (*Typha angustifolium*) freshwater rush (*Schoenoplectus scirpus*), the pointed rush (*Juncus acutus*), and the exotic reed (*Arundo donax*) known throughout the Mediterranean as ‘cane’ (Fig. 1).

Where forest trees have survived, these may be coppiced every few years. Small diameter stems (e.g. hazel) may be split and used as half-round weavers in heavy baskets or fence panels. Wood of larger diameter may first be split across the growth rings into four or more lengths and then split along one or more annual rings to provide splint weavers. In some areas, like Slovenia, the basket base may be a solid plank of beech (*Fagus*) or elm (*Ulmus*) into which the stakes are inserted before the weavers form the sides.

No attempt has been made here to compile an exhaustive list of all the plant species which may have been used in Mediterranean basketry through the ages.

The objects

The basket forms used by makers to assist people in their daily lives, or to provide for specialist activities, are often remarkably similar throughout the region. No doubt these arose from contacts during travels. But, in other cases, the specific

need would have been local or the available materials would have suggested something different, so that there is also a rich variety of objects between localities.

Articles may be classified by usage. The largest group contains items used in the house or by people in their household activities. These range from house components (wall panels) and furnishings (chairs, mats) to clothes (sandals), cleaning (laundry), food and drink gathering, preparation and storage to child care and recreation. A second category pertains to agriculture (see Fig. 2), and in some places a third group was used in boats and fishing. Marketing employed many baskets in transport of produce and then its display to customers. A final group includes items used in other industries.

Several weaving techniques were employed depending upon the plant material and the weavers’ skills. Coiling involves twisting a continuous rope length into a spiral and sewing successive rows to each other, usually with the same skein which is binding the individual stems into the rope. Bundles of thin stems may be plaited into multi-way braids which are then cut and sewn into containers.

Thicker rods or wood splints are utilised by weaving one set (weft or weavers) across another, usually thicker set (warp or stakes). Many professionals would start by weaving a more or less flat base, upending the stakes and weaving the sides,

and finally weaving the ends of the stakes into a border and adding one or more handles. This is termed stake and strand. Homemade baskets were more often built from a frame, usually starting with two hoops set at right angles, placing the ends of shaped ribs where the hoops intersect, and weaving across these ribs from each side, until the bottom weavers meet in the centre.

Many basketry items were similar throughout Europe but a few products or systems were special to this region or have been well researched.

Vallabrègues

This village, between Avignon and Arles in southern France, is where a tributary enters the Rhône. The alluvial plain with several islands provides good growing conditions for willow. A brotherhood of basket makers traces back to 1247. There were never more than 2,000 inhabitants, yet some 250 were employed in the industry in the last quarter of the 19th century. A special feature was that around half the population, men, women, and children, went to live in simple shelters among the willow beds from November to early May to har-

vest and strip the rods. Weaving took place in the village during the rest of the year. Almost all their output was round or oval willow baskets though some had cane siding. They were destined for the nearby fruit and vegetable industries (every one with its special size), others for fishing boats or eel and shellfish transport, pharmaceutical products, for carrying ships' ballast, and for carrying cylindrical cheeses or plants in pots. Another range contained glass bottles for wine, oil and acids (Galtier 1980). Although the industry ceased by 1951, an annual festival is held in August to celebrate the past traditions.

Villanova di Bagna Cavallo

This Italian village, south of the Po delta and northwest of Ravenna, was once in a marshy area. The inhabitants harvested the reeds, rushes, sedges and small trees, and produced a wide range of woven items. These activities had ceased by the 1970s, but the Centre of Marshland Ethnography displays the traditional products and aims to keep the old crafts alive through documentation, courses and festivals (Bagnari 2000).



Fig. 3
Fine rush bowl by
Maria Raimonda
Pinna, San Vero
Milis, Sardinia.

Fine rush work

Narrow stemmed rushes (*Juncus* spp.) grew in wet places throughout the region. Since Roman times they have been used to make dainty cheese moulds into which fresh curd was pressed to drain and begin maturation. Most cheese was traditionally made from sheep's milk and flocks were frequently on the move in a system of transhumance. Shepherds would gather the rushes and weave the cylindrical baskets to local designs (Cecere 1998). Upon turnout, the cheese carried the impression of the basket on its surface. Today plastic moulds are made to give a similar pattern.

In Sardinia these same materials and weaving techniques have been beautifully refined to create a range of shallow bowls for the 21st century (Fig. 3).

Traps for fish and crustacea

For those used to the substantial crab and lobster pots made of stout willow rods in north-western Europe, the Mediterranean counterparts look very different. Conical or cylindrical in shape with inversions at one or both ends, they have side stakes of thin rush stems set at 40 degrees to the vertical in both directions. Where these cross they are secured with twine (originally a two-ply string of twisted rush leaves), and encircled by a continuous spiral of split cane, finer or coarser according to the target species (Kuoni 1981).

Cane (*Arundo donax*)

This tall grass, introduced from the Orient, with a stem like bamboo, has become a characteristic feature of coastal and waste ground. Split and planed into fairly flat-profile lengths, it has been widely used for side weaving often with brown willow rods forming the base, side stakes and border. In Argos, south of Corinth in Greece, a substantial industry produced a variety of cylindrical baskets each with a defining number and width of willow bands up the sides for use by different professions (Efthymiou-Chatzilacou 1979) (Fig. 1).

Straw work

Slovenian and Croatian makers still produce many different items in coiled straw work for sale to

local people in their town markets because of their softness (egg baskets), insulation (dough baskets and beehives), and tightness of weave (grain, meal or seed baskets) (Bogataj 1999) (Fig. 2).

Coiled platters and shallow bowls

Sardinia and Cyprus are noted for these coiled baskets where the core may be straw or sedge and the wrapping material local or imported palm leaf (raffia -dyed to produce patterns). In Sardinia, the dried and split stems of asphodel (*Asphodelus microcarpus*) are used. This lily is widespread on the island, flowering at Easter and shrinking back to its underground bulb in the hot summer.

Esparto work

Along the southern coastal strip of Spain and in the Ebro valley in Aragon, the wiry grass (*Stipa tenuissima*) colonized the eroded hillsides. The linear leaves are initially flat, but roll up into very thin rods (1-2 mm. diameter, some 55 cm. in length) when dry. Small bundles are plaited to produce lengths of multi-way braids, often by women working communally in the streets. These strips are sewn up into baskets, usually by men, though large-scale production ceased around 1975. Typical products included a simple braid wrapped



Fig. 4 Snail basket, Andalusia, Spain, Esparto Grass



Fig. 5
Donkey pannier for carrying water jars, Andalusia, Spain, Esparto Grass.

around a cylindrical cheese, lidded containers for purging snails (before they can be eaten) (Fig. 4), and panniers for carrying ceramic water containers on each side of a donkey (Fig. 5). Other weaving techniques were sometimes employed: gypsies treated the individual leaves like tiny rods and used the stake and strand method – a very time-consuming process (Kuoni 1981).

This brief review has only been able to illustrate a few of the ways in which Mediterranean people have utilised their plant resources to make basketry items down the centuries. The low status of the craft, its practitioners, and products has unfortunately carried over to its academic study, so that few countries have their traditions well documented.

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Central Italy (Maranola)

The place and the people

The medieval village of Maranola belongs to the Municipality of Formia, in the southernmost area of Latina province. It is located at the feet of the Aurunci Mountains, an area endowed with over 1900 botanical species. The vegetation of the southern slopes is characterized by Mediterranean scrub with a diverse range of broom, myrtle, pistachio, erica species and aromatic plants. The northern side is colonized by arboreal species such as turkey oak, the black hornbeam, oriental hornbeam, ash, etc. At higher altitudes beech woodlands are intermitted with pasture grassland. From time immemorial, the population of Maranola has relied on a rural economy mainly devoted to subsistence farming, stock-raising and minor trade of non-timber forest products. The production of wood charcoal was flourishing around the mid of the 18th century, involving 70% of the local population. It started to decline around the end of the 19th century, and disappeared completely by the 1930s.

The cultivation, processing and loom weaving of flax (*Linum usitatissimum* L.) faded away by the end of 1800, followed by the abandonment of commercial harvesting of *Ampelodesmos mauritanicus* (Poir) T.Durand et Sch. and dried leaves of *murtella* (*Myrtus communis* L.) by late 1950s. The production of olives and olive oil still plays an important role in the local economy.

Basketry tradition and the use of fibre plants

The traditional weaving industry of Maranola has relied on both wooden and herbaceous material. The oval shaped *cuf'nella* basket is particularly suited for mushrooms, the medium-size round-shaped *panaro* is commonly used for olives, sweet chestnuts, walnuts, figs and other fruits; the small-size *panaro* is an ideal container for eggs. *Cestrella* is a table basket for bread and fruit, and it has no handle. In the old days, large size bread-baskets (*cuf'no p' lu pane*) could contain up to 16 loafs or more. All households possessed a large-size laundry basket (*cuf'no p' la culata*).

Cylindrical reed-baskets (*fuscelle*) were used as cheese moulds into which fresh curd was pressed to drain and begin maturation. A pointed item (e.g. a porcupine quill) was used for finishing the *trezza* (literally plait) framing the basket mouth. At least ten different species are employed in the making of local baskets (*panaro*, *cuf'nella*, *cuf'no* and *cestrella*). The most commonly used plants include: elm (*Ulmus campestris* L.), willow (*Salix purpurea* L.), olive (*Olea europaea* L.), poplar (*Populus alba* L.), cane (*Arundo donax* L.), followed by pomegranate (*Punica granatum* L.), *sanguinella* (*Cornus sanguinale* L.) and myrtle (*Myrtus communis* L.). The latter two species are secondary materials. Locally made ropes of *Agave Americana* L. fibres were much appreciated for their durability and strength, and were produced for domestic purposes up to the early fifties. While basket making is a male domain, the making of *ampelodesmos* crafts is a woman prerogative and these fibres were utilised to make different types of ropes and a plait (*trezza*) that was rolled circularly around demijohns to prevent them from breaking. *Stramma* specialists made their skill (e.g. coating demijohns) available to fellow villagers, in exchange for food (olive oil, vine, legumes, etc.). *Iettola* (a wider 'plait' made of 6/7 sets of pounded leaves) was used to weave a large flexible container (*sporta*) that was tied on the back of mules and donkeys. More pieces of *iettola* were joined together to produce rough carpets, and flat rectangular trays (*spaselle*) used by fishmongers to display their merchandize. In the old days, fish was also sold in containers made of *ampelodesmos*.

Occasionally, in neighbouring communities, *ampelodesmos* fibres are still used to produce multi-purposes items for the local tourist industry. The most promising artist in the area is Giovanni Morra from the village of Santi Cosma e Damiano. Giovanni gets his inspiration from objects of daily use (e.g. glass and table-napkins holders, clay and ceramic carafes, etc). Some of his *stramma* items are decorated with dried leaves, flowers, berries and aromatic plants of the Mediterranean shrub.



Domenico Minchella (74) making *panaro*



Panaro: multipurpose basket used for olives, sweet chestnuts, walnuts, figs, etc. Small-size *panaro* can be used as a container for eggs.

Material:

Body: *Avrive*, *Olea europaea* L. (Oleaceae)

Base and handle: *Vesca*, *Salix purpurea* L. (Salicaceae); *Ulmo*, *Ulmus campestris* L. (Ulmaceae)



Cuf'nella: Basket for mushrooms, agricultural crops, etc.

Material:

Base, mouth, handle and the middle of the body: *Vesca*, *Salix purpurea* L. (Salicaceae); *Ulmo*, *Ulmus campestris* L. (Ulmaceae)

Body: *Canna*, *Arundo donax* L. (Poaceae)



Cestrella: Table handless basket for bread and fruit.

Material:

Base and portions of the body: *Avrive*, *Olea europaea* L. (Oleaceae); *Vesca*, *Salix purpurea* L. (Salicaceae); *Ulmo*, *Ulmus campestris* L. (Ulmaceae)

Remaining portion of the body:

Canna, *Arundo donax* L. (Poaceae)



Domenico Minchella weaving *fuscella*. Note the porcupine quill on his ear. This will be used for finishing the plait (*trezza*) of the basket's mouth.



Fuscella: Cylindrical baskets used to make cheese moulds into which fresh curd is pressed to drain and begin maturation.

Material:

Iunco, *Juncus acutus* L. ssp. *acutus* (Juncaceae)

Crafts made of *Ampelodesmos mauritanicus* (Poir) T. Durand et Sch.

(*Stramma*)

Young artist Giovanni Morra showing a selection of *ampelodesmos*-based craft afor the tourist market.



Multipurpose open baskets and a sunhat.





A woven 'plait' known as *iettola* was used to make large containers that were tied on the back of mules and donkeys. On the right: a broom, a plait (*trezza*) for coating demijohns and a small rope (*funincieglio*).



Livia Forte (73), the *ampelodesmos* master-weaver in Maranola with a wide range of woven items: a broom, a handbag, and two baskets with handles (forefront). Two demijohns coated with 'plait', *trezza* (background).

Salento (Apulia), Southern Italy

Salento is referred as the 'Gateway of the Mediterranean' due to its position as Italy's easternmost province. Located in the centre of the Mediterranean, and stretching into the Adriatic Sea, it has always enjoyed a strategic position in the wide network of commercial and cultural exchanges. Since time immemorial, Salentine history and culture have been deeply influenced through contacts with the Balkan peninsula and the Aegean islands. The ancient presence of the Greeks, Byzantines, Arabs, Romans and Spaniards is profoundly rooted in the local culture, and many festivities and traditions are the living evidence of close ties with the orient.

In Salento (as well as in other Italian regions) the generic term for identifying different types of woven crafts is *intrecciati*. Basket weaving requires sophisticated skills and, in many ways, it is a genuine work of art. Plaiting is very similar to embroidery and uses the same stitches: cross, stars, netting. Decoration is a game of symmetry and balance: stars on the bottom recall those on the cover, the plait on the handle that on the rim.

Olive bark and blackberry twigs are collected, then smoothed and softened by lengthy soaking in water, after which the weaving can begin. Other basketry material, such as *Arundo donax* (giant reed) is harvested near marshes. *Phragmites australis* canes are used as shade-shelters, especially during summer. Until a few years ago, the same material was used for house roofing. *Typha latifolia* leaves, locally known as *erva de tajù*, is still employed to make the seat of traditional chairs. Moreover, local wood carvers employ at least 10 plant species for boat building and various fishing tools. The most widespread handicrafts are baskets for fruits, olives, bread and fish (*panare*), and those used for drying figs, peppers and tomatoes (*cannizzi*). Baskets for dairy products (*fische*) deserve special attention. *Fische* are both containers and filters for *ricotta* cheese, that needs to be drained after cooking. They are still used by traditional cheese makers but, nowadays, such baskets have been largely substituted with plastic containers. However, in the village of Acquarica del Capo, the production of *fische* has survived and the related weaving knowledge, although in decline, is still being transmitted.



***Fische*:** Baskets used as containers for *ricotta* cheese.

Material:

Body: *Juncus maritimus* Lam.
(Juncaceae)

***Panari*:** Baskets used as containers for fruits as figs and prickly pears

Material:

Body: *Arundo donax* L.
(Gramineae)
Base and handle: *Olea europaea* L. var. *sylvestris*
Hoffm. et Link



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Location: South Salento (Apulia).

Northeastern Portugal (Trás-os-Montes)

For decades, the mountainous Portuguese north-eastern region of Trás-os-Montes featured amongst the main rye and wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.) producing areas in the country. During the last decades, the region has experienced agriculture abandonment, population ageing and increasing migration to urban centres. The local population still engages in farming integrated with other subsistence strategies, including the gathering of forest products and livestock raising. Agricultural production is diversified, with cereals, potatoes, chestnuts, fruits and vegetables representing the most important crops. The latter are mainly used for domestic consumption, but are also exchanged and sold.

The *cesta* basket is very common, and may have different sizes (never exceeding the 40 cm.

diameter), various motifs and shapes (circular or oval bases) and it is made of willow (*Salix atrocinerea* Brot or *S. salviifolia* Brot.) branches. Twigs are harvested in middle spring, prepared during summer (sometimes decorticated) and stored until they are weaved. *Cesta* baskets are employed in daily farming work, and can be used as containers for potatoes, vegetables, fruits, legumes, flowers and eggs.

Another type of local basket is called *escrinho* and its made of rye, wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.) stems, and sometimes of barley (*Hordeum vulgare* L.). *Escrinhos* are employed to preserve cereals, baked bread or bread dough. Shapes and sizes may vary according to their specific functions. Today, the necessary skill to make *escrinho* is only possessed by a few local experts.



Escrinho: Basket for storing cereals or bread

Material:

Body, base and cover: Rye straw, *Secale cereale* L. (Poaceae), plaited with strips from the epidermis of *Rubus ulmifolius* Shott. (Rosaceae) shoots.

Contributor: Ana Maria Carvalho, Centro de Investigação de Montanha, Escola Superior Agrária de Bragança, Portugal.



Escrelho expert, 87 years old,
Bragança, Trás-os-Montes,
September 2004.



Cesta: These baskets can be used as containers for potatoes, vegetables, fruits, legumes, flowers and eggs.

Material:

Body, base and external frame: *vergas*, *Salix atrocinerea* Brot. (Salicaceae)

Handle: *asa*, *Salix atrocinerea* Brot. (Salicaceae).

Spain (Huelva Province)

Basketry was a common activity in every town of Huelva province. Nowadays, it is fast disappearing because of the high labour investment required in basket making and the low economic return. Moreover, the continuity of this tradition is further constrained by the introduction of plastic goods that have replaced traditional plant-based items.

The town of Sanlúcar de Guadiana is the main centre for the production of cane basketry, while Niebla is famous for its palm (*Chamaerops humilis*) basketry. Nevertheless, in many villages of the province, one can still meet elders who engage in the manufacture of olive, cane and wicker baskets. Plant-based materials such as canes, rush (*Typha* spp.), reed (*Juncus* spp., *Scirpus* spp.), wicker (*Salix* spp.), olive (*Olea europaea*), palm (*Chamaerops humilis*) and *torvisca* (*Daphne gnidium*) are used to make different types of crafts (baskets, chairs, strings, mats for drying figs, carpets, carafes, handbags, sewing cases, brushes for white-washing, hats, trays, cots, fishing nets, etc.) as well as for roofing.

Baskets of olive twigs are still produced in the area and are used for the collection of chestnuts and olives. Other types of baskets are used for gathering mushrooms.

Basketry knowledge and techniques

Olive branches are cut around the end of autumn (October, November), to produce rods that are flexible and not too soft (*cruecas*). The branches are cleared from buds and leaves, and then grouped according to size. The preparation technique consists in a first phase, when branches are kept to dry for a few days. Instead, in the second phase, the material is stored in a dark place, until the time it is ready for use (generally, after a

period of at least one month). According to local basket-weavers, after this treatment, rods should be *ajuncias* (neither too green or too yellow). Before the work begins, twigs should be soaked in water, so that they can bend without breaking. The base of the basket is made of cork material; some baskets are also decorated through the insertion of quince branches.

The cork base has 12 holes through which the vertical rods are inserted. They are kept firm by leaving the 'knots' on the outer layer of the base. These 'knots' are the portions through which twigs are joined to the main trunk. Rods are fixed in pairs that are called *estambres*. Then, horizontal rods (*varas de ensetao*) are weaved around the basket and entwined with vertical rods, in an alternate way. The plaited mouth frame consists of entwined *estambres* that are added while the weaving proceeds. Before weaving the frame of the basket's mouth, 16 rods are introduced to make the handle, these are twisted together in pairs of eight. The basket is finished by cutting the exceeding portions of the rods with a knife.

Other baskets for mushrooms are characterized by a loose weave that allows the dispersal of spores. *Salix atrocinera* or other *Salix* species are used for the making of such baskets. Rods are usually collected during the non-vegetative period (autumn and winter). *Salix* twigs are cut and the leaf buds are peeled. They are left to dry for one month in summer and for a longer period during winter. The *salix* rods need to be soaked in water before being used. Rods are green, but they acquire a brown dark or reddish colour after a few months.

The weaving starts at the base, by crossing two sets of four rods. These rods are intertwined with others to form the sides of the basket. Then, each

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Location: The place of origin of the first basket on the next page is Cortelazor; this village lies in the Natural Park Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche, in the province of Huelva. It was woven by Feliciano Pérez, a 68 years old man, and donated to us on May 2004. The second basket comes from Cortegana, located in the same Natural Park. The maker, Pablo Cortés, is in his mid fifties.

rod is cut longitudinally, so that it can be inserted more easily in the structure of the basket. The making of this oblique cut is called *corte de orejamula*. Vertical rods are intertwined with horizontal ones to make the basket's body. Once the body of the basket is finished, eight rods are added

to make the handle. When the body is finished, the weaving of the basket's mouth begins through the insertion of four vertical rods that are woven in pairs and more rods are added. The handle is completed by intertwining two sets of six rods from each opposite side of the handle.



Cesta: Basket for chestnuts and olives.

Material:

Body and handle: *olivo*, *Olea europaea* L. (Oleaceae)

Base: *corcho*, *Quercus suber* L. (Fagaceae)



Cesta: Basket for mushrooms.

Material:

Body and handle: *mimbre*, *Salix atrocinerea* Brot. and *Salix* spp. (Salicaceae)

Turkey

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Turkey covers a total land area of 780,600 km², and contains three different climates: Mediterranean, Continental and Oceanic. The combination of these climates and its location between two continents (Europe and Asia) allows the growth of a complex vegetation, which includes Euro-Siberian, Irano-Turanian and Mediterranean components (Akman and Ketenoglu 1996). The flora of Turkey contains over 10.000 infrageneric taxa, of which 34.5 % are endemic (Davis 1965-1988; Güner et al. 2000:619). This high endemism, is both the result and cause of continuous human interactions through time. The human factor probably made a fundamental impact on this diversity. In Anatolia earliest inhabitants changed their hunter, gatherer mode of subsistence, become settled and accomplished the “Neolithic Revolution” about 12.000 years ago.



Fig. 1 Various baskets for selling vegetable and fruits in Kastamonu market (Fusun Ertug).

Archaeological evidence in Anatolia indicates a long tradition in plaiting crafts, at least from 7500 BC. For example two distinct techniques attested at the Neolithic Çatalhöyük settlement were coiling and plaiting, in addition to widely spaced twining or pierced matting (Wendrich 2005:333). The continuity of these techniques and materials are visible in ethnographical samples of these crafts.

Anatolian baskets and containers consist of various sizes and shapes according to their diverse uses: e.g. for gathering vegetables and fruit, transporting agricultural products to the market (Fig. 1), for storing dry legumes, bread, eggs and other food, for holding seeds and fruit during the processing of oil (Fig. 2), for carrying dung from the stables to the fields, etc. Other woven crafts were used as traps to catch fish, octopus and lobsters; as well as for making cages for partridges or plaited as bee hives and then covered with clay. Woven containers are called with various names in each province, and according to their different shape and size: *sepet* and *sele* are frequently used terms. *Sepet* is derived from *sapad* in Farsi, and *sele* is derived from the Arabic *salla*, but is also used in Farsi with reference to baskets (Eren 1999:360-361). Some baskets are also called *hey* (the long, narrow bottomed types), *küfe* or *çuvalya* (the large types), *şelek*, *çöte*, *gidik*, *çit* and *zembil* (market basket with two handles). Names are also given according to their functions, such as *kaşıklık* (spoon container), *çarşı sepeti* (market basket) or *yumurta sepeti* (egg basket).

The most common trees that are used for basketry are willow (*Salix* spp.), chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), and hazelnut (*Corylus* spp.). Weaving material is also obtained from ‘cane’ (*Arundo donax*), reed and rushes (e.g. *Typha*, *Juncus* spp.), as well as the chaste tree (*Vitex agnus-castus*).

Among the 90 plant species which are recorded in Turkey; 38 species are used in basket and container plaiting; 13 species for mat weaving; 14



Fig. 2 A container of *Juncus inflexus*, which is used during the linseed oil production in Central Anatolia, Demirci-Aksaray (F. Ertuğ).

species for string, rope and cordage; 39 species are for brooms; and 5 species used for amulet plaiting, while at least 23 of these species have multiple uses (see Ertuğ in this volume, 297-306).

Generally mats (*hasır*) were used in Anatolia as floor coverings and for the constructions of the ceilings of mud-roofed houses. *Thypha*, *Phragmites* and *Juncus* are the most commonly used species. The soft mats (*Thypha* spp. and softer rushes) are preferred as floor coverings and used in tents, rooms, outdoors, or in the mosques to pray (see Catalogue p. 683) while *Phragmites* are used in the ceilings and for thatching. Basketry techniques are also employed for the making of other daily objects such as chair-seats, bee-hives, reed-screens, fences, hats, and cages.

Tools and weaving techniques

In most cases, the raw material (pliable rods, rushes, reeds, grasses, etc.) is locally available,



Fig. 3 The awl (*şiş*) and the bottom of a coiled basket, Sultansazlığı, Develi-Kayseri (F. Ertuğ).

and women are the master-weavers. By and large, tools and instruments used in the making of baskets, mats, sandals, bags, hats, containers and cordage are few and simple, and their construction does not require highly specialised skill. Twigs and reeds are cut either with sickles or jack-knives; rods, first marked with a knife, are then divided into splits using a small wooden tool. Thicker tree branches are split with sharp iron tools and, for commercial production a simple trimming and planing bench is used. Coiling technique require the use of an awl used to make holes and stitches (Fig. 3).

Generally basket production starts from the bottom, and a free hand weaving with stakes is applied. In some cases the baskets are produced from the mouth to the bottom or around a mould. In the case of mats, simple horizontal looms are used for the production of mats made of soft rushes. Conversely, looms are not necessary for reed mats. The production of cordage, ropes, hats and brooms require very basic tools (Fig. 4).

Ideal timing for cutting the plant material and processing changes for each material. Usually young tree twigs (e.g. *Salix*, *Corylus*) are harvested between late fall and spring, when the plants' biological activity is at its minimum (Gürnanın 1961). Yet, craftsmen may prefer different harvesting times and schedules. For example, according to a craftsman in Rize, willows can also be cut in April and August, and should wait throughout winter for the endurance (Karabaşa 1998:87). Also, reeds and rushes, such as *Typha* and *Phragmites* are cut between November and February, when their leaves are dried. They can be plaited at any time, by softening with water before the weaving.

Centres and craftspeople

Although baskets and mats occur frequently in rural settlements, some areas have stronger basketry and mat traditions. They range from West to East: Edirne (Enez, Biga, Meriç), İstanbul (Süleymaniye), Kocaeli (Kandıra, Karamürsel), Sakarya (Abalı, Geyve, Tarakçı, Sapanca-Kestanelik, Pamukova), Zonguldak (Amasra- especially corn leaves plaiting, Çaycuma); Kastamonu; Ordu (Ünye-Göbü, Göbüncü) and Rize (Pazar, Çayeli) in Northern Anatolia; Çanakkale (Evrşe,



Fig. 4 A woman is twisting the leaves of *Typha angustifolia* (*kındıra*) to produce rope, Sultansazlığı, Develi-Kayseri (F. Ertuğ).



Fig. 5 A master-weaver using coiling technique to produce a new basket, Sultansazlığı, Develi-Kayseri (F. Ertuğ).

Ayvacık-Küçükkuyu); Bursa (Mustafakemalpaşa-Büyükorhan-Durhasan), İzmir (Karaburun) and Denizli (Sarayköy, Uyanık) in Western Anatolia; Isparta (Yalvaç), and Çorum (İskilip) in Central Anatolia, Antalya (Doğrugöz-Akşehir) and Mersin (Tece) in South Anatolia are known centres of current basket making.

Mat making is also well known in areas near lakes such as Manyas (Balıkesir), Sarıgöl (Manisa), Belevi (Tire- İzmir), Beyşehir (Yeşildağ-Konya), Ladik (Samsun), Adrasan (Kumluca-Antalya), Eber (Bolvadin-Afyon) or marshy areas such as Sultansazlığı (Sindelhöyük, Ovaçiftliği, Develi-Kayseri), Çitgöl (Simav-Kütahya), Elemen-dik and Sultansuyu (Yakınca-Yeşilyurt-Malatya). In some of these centers, where mats are commercially produced (e.g. Akhisar in Aksaray), *Phragmites australis* is brought from other areas by the merchants for plaiting reed mats (*tavan hasırı* or *boyra hasırı*), specifically which are then used in the construction of ceilings of mud-brick houses. In the towns of Akhisar and Sağlık, hundreds of families are involved in mat making, while women are plaiting mats, men are responsible for trimming, splitting, and processing the reeds, and

also for the marketing of the finished products. Similarly in Sultansazlığı area of Kayseri, the commercialization of plaited crafts has led to the creation of new products with some old techniques, such as coiling (Fig. 5 and 6), in order to respond to tourists' demands and modern preferences. However, decorative mat and screen making are disappearing.

In addition to local craftspeople, gypsies are known as good basket and broom makers in many parts of Turkey (Fig.7). While gypsies' production is generally market oriented, the local Turkish villagers make baskets mainly for domestic use (except in a few craft centres mentioned above). According to a study conducted in 1958, a questionnaire about plaited crafts had been sent to 580 towns of Anatolia. The results indicated that 225 municipalities had such crafts and craftsmen within their towns (Gürtanın 1961). If this questionnaire would be used today for the same areas, it would probably show a significant drop in basketry production and number of craftsmen.

The reduced number of craftsmen and the centres of mat plaiting and basketry can be interpreted as the natural outcome of industrialisation,



Fig. 6 The master-weaver and his selection of woven crafts made of *Typha angustifolia* (*kındıra*), Sultansazlığı, Develi-Kayseri (F. Ertuğ).

and up to a point it is reasonable, because the products created by these crafts people have lost their necessity in our daily lives. On the other hand academic interest on the social significance of basketry, weaving techniques materials and uses should be much higher. Such studies are not only essential to discover more about these crafts and their social roles, but it is also a necessity for the protection of local species and their natural habitats. As these craftspeople work so closely



Fig. 7 A gypsy basketmaker from early 20th century Istanbul, painted by Warwick Goble (Van Millingen 1908).

with nature, they observe and notice the results of the changes in land use, climatic changes, and pollution (Sentance 2001: 15). In addition, these crafts people are able to create sustainable solutions for some local development projects, and these projects may bring extra income to women and the disabled. Instead of using non-biodegradable materials such as plastic, we may restart to use baskets, pouches, containers, and furniture from renewable materials.

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Turkey (Aksaray)



Ot Sele: Container for storing *bulgur* (cracked wheat) and beans.

Material:

Body: *hasır otu*, *Typha laxmanii* Lepechin (Typhaceae)

Decoration: Cloth of various colors.

Use and size: Variable. Between 15-25 cm. to 1 m in diameter. The larger ones are used as containers for round flat bread (*yufka*), and the smaller size ones are used to store *bulgur*, beans, eggs, fruit. Women from a few villages in the Aksaray district of Central Anatolia still know how to make them, and sell them to other villages. However its traditional use (storing things) has been subject to change. Metal hoops of bushel measures (*şinik*) were used to form the medium size containers, as the one above. These containers are ideal for storing food, since they allow the air to pass through.

Left: 100 x 70 cm.; right: 50 x 28-30 cm.

Contributor: Z. Füsün Ertuğ, Anthropology Department, Yeditepe University, Istanbul.

Location: Kızılkaya Village, Aksaray in 1995 and was produced in the seventies.

Turkey (Buldan - Denizli)



Nasif Boynikar (72) is one of the last masters in the area who knows how to make baskets. His sons did not learn his craft.



çarşı sepeti: These baskets were important in Western Anatolia for collecting fruits, especially grapes. In the last 15-20 years, these have been replaced with plastic containers.

Material:

Bottom, body and handle: *hayıt*, *Vitex agnus-castus* L. (Verbenaceae)

Decoration: Beads of various colors, especially blue beads against evil eye.

35 x 20 cm.

Contributor: Z. Füsün Ertuğ, Anthropology Department, Yeditepe University, Istanbul.

Location: Doğanköy village, Buldan-Denizli, 2004.

Turkey (Bodrum - Muğla)



Girit sepeti (Cretan basket): Basket for carrying eggs, gathering herbs.

Material:

Bottom: *sarmaşık*, *Clematis cirrhosa* L. (Ranunculaceae) and *delice/zeytin keli*, *Olea europea* L. var. *sylvestris* (Miller) Lehr. (Oleaceae)

Handle: *delice/zeytin keli*, *Olea europea* L. var. *sylvestris* (Miller) Lehr. (Oleaceae)

Body: *kargı*, *Arundo donax* L. (Poaceae)

25 x 20 cm.



Ekmek sepeti: Basket for serving bread to the table.

Material:

Bottom: *sarmaşık*, *Clematis cirrhosa* L. (Ranunculaceae) and *delice/zeytin keli*, *Olea europea* L. var. *sylvestris* (Miller) Lehr. (Oleaceae)

Body: *kargı*, *Arundo donax* L. (Poaceae)

12 x 20 cm.

Contributor: Z. Füsün Ertuğ, Anthropology Department, Yeditepe University, Istanbul.

Location: Turgutreis, Bodrum, Muğla, 2000.

Turkey (Aydın)



Nişan sepeti (Engagement basket): Basket for carrying engagement gifts.

Material:

Body, handle and base: *hayıt*, *Vitex agnus-castus* L. (Verbenaceae)

Frames, rims, and tying material: *kargı*, *Arundo donax* L. (Poaceae)



Cutting process of *hayıt* (*Vitex agnus-castus* L.) by a wooden tool called *yargeç*.



Kaşıklık: Basket for spoon and fork.

Material:

Body, handle, and base: *söğüt*, *Salix* sp. L. (Salicaceae)

Frames, rims, and tying material: *kargı*, *Arundo donax* L. (Poaceae)

20-25 x 15 cm.

Contributor: Mesut Kırmacı, Zahide Şahin, and Serhat Manav, Biology Department, Adnan Menderes University, Aydın.

Location: Aydın, Turkey, 2005.



Base of the basket, crossed vitex branches as initial base

Küfe: Gathering and marketing basket. These baskets are especially used for carrying olive and vegetables from the fields to the market.

Material:

Body: *kavak*, *Populus tremula* L. (Salicaceae), *hayıt*, *Vitex agnus-castus* L. (Verbenaceae) (Lighter parts are peeled and sliced *V. agnus-castus*).

Base, handle, rims, and tying material: *hayıt*, *Vitex agnus-castus* L. (Verbenaceae)

80-90 x 45-60 cm.



Turkey (Mardin)



Zembil: Such baskets are traditionally used for carrying grapes, fruits and vegetables from vineyards and orchards, for preserving meat, meals and milk products, as well as for catching fishes, for gathering small stones, etc. The basket experts are known in the region as “*Zembilci*, *Zembilkar* or *Zembilfiro*”.

Material:

Body, mouth, and base: *hos* or *hus*:
Salix viminalis L. (Salicaceae)

21 x 52 cm.

Contributor: Hasan Akan, Biology Department, Harran University, Osmanbey Campus, Şanlıurfa, Turkey.

Location: This item was collected in Çaldere Village, Midyat, Mardin, SE Anatolia. These baskets have been made by Mehmet Akyüz and Nuriye Akyüz, and were collected in August 2004.

Turkey (Anatolia)



Namazlık: Praying reed-mats

There is very little information about these mats in the literature. Two similar examples are found in a catalogue (The Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 1990: 111-112) with no relevant information except that “they have the Anatolian *kilim* and basketry patterns”. In the seventeenth century, an Ottoman traveller, Evliya Çelebi (1611-1682) reported that in the Manyas Lake area (Balıkesir, NW Turkey), people were weaving decorated praying mats and chairs from the reeds growing near the Lake (Baytop 2003:46).

Material:

Not identified. Macroscopic analysis carried out by the Jordell Laboratory (Kew) has revealed that the material used is from the Poaceae family.

Left: 120 x 50 cm.; right: 145 x 68 cm.

Literature Cited:

Baytop, A. 2003. Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi'ndeki Türkiye Bitkileri. Pages 35-58 in F. Günergün ed., Türkiye'de Botanik Tarihi Araştırmaları, İstanbul.

The Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco. 1990. The Caroline and H. McCoy Jones Collection on Anatolian Kilims, Halı Publications, San Francisco.

Contributor: Josephine Powell, American photographer-ethnographer and researcher on Anatolian textiles, İstanbul, Turkey.

Location: Specific region unknown.

EASTERN AND CENTRAL EUROPE

An introduction to basketry in Eastern and Central Europe

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In recent times, during nineteenth century industrialisation and since, basket-making has had an importance in the national economies of many countries; being the seventh largest industry in Poland in the 1980s, and almost as important in Romania, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia, and many of the former Yugoslav states. Most of this large-scale production was based on the easy growth of willow, *Salix* varieties, which had been planted over large areas of land beside the great rivers of these countries from the 1880s to the late 1980s. All along the length of the Visla River in Poland and the Tisza in Hungary there were extensive areas of *Salix konopianka* and *Salix americana*. Cutting, drying, harvesting and weaving these materials was extremely important for local inhabitants. In the Rudnik district, in southeast Poland, in 1991, there were 400-500 basket-makers working at home on their small-holdings or in their kitchens, each completing an eight hour day, six days a week, at the rate of one log basket an hour, and perhaps twenty bread baskets a day. Once monthly the production would be loaded on to a horse-drawn cart and brought in to the 'factory', a central depot run by an exporter, who would load the brought baskets into containers on trains which ran, on a designated line, direct to the Baltic port of Gdansk for onward travel to Germany, Denmark and the USA. Three long trains left Rudnik every week.

This pattern of living had begun in the 1880s when a local landlord, concerned for the poverty of his tenants, imported a basket-maker from Austria to teach and provide a money economy. The *Salix americana*, imported from the USA, suited the Polish soil and provided good material for finer domestic ware. The *S. konopianka* was a local, native variety suitable for coarse agricultural baskets. Much of the *Salix americana* was buffed, a process of boiling cut willow in bundles and then peeling it. This winter process results in

a rod of rusty red, the tannins in the bark acting as a natural dye.

Many of the basket forms made in such factories by men and women, and there were many over Poland, Hungary and Romania, have become thought of as traditional: the *garbus*, or hunch-back basket, with its raised sides, for shopping in Poland, the use of open crossed-weaving for flower baskets in Hungary. Most belong to a hundred-year-old tradition which has changed again since the end of communist regimes.

In 1991 the large offices of the willow factories were quiet, desks empty of papers, no telephone available (calls from Rudnik to Warsaw had to be booked in advance), and the telex largely silent. The two factories I visited and all the others up and down the Visla River have closed, being unable to raise the capital needed to buy their land from the state. Many of the willow beds have been left uncut, an essential annual event for the production of basket-making rods, and the fungal disease, which had so weakened the *Salix americana*, has had a major effect.

Basket-making on an industrial, though much smaller scale, continues as entrepreneurial individual makers have persisted in their trade, now making to sell by the roadside en route for the German border, and by selling to the few exporters which remain. These exporters, too, work as individuals, maintaining their former European connections but free of the state organisations such as Cepelia and Coopexim. It is a harder, less reliable life than simply having everything bought by a local wholesaler, but is an adaptation to capitalist systems. This broad pattern of change is to be seen across many of the former communist states, although Hungary continues to export to Austria from state-run concerns.

Other materials indigenous to the rural regions are vital for such baskets as punnets, used in fruit and vegetable growing and for transport to markets

in distant conurbations. Species of pine and spruce were felled, split radially into quarters or eighths and then cleft into growth ring segments, which were planed and became flexible wide laths when soaked. Much of this material was used for quick, check-weave boxes with lids or handles, the top rim being stitched on with pine root or more recently with plastic packing tape or merely stapled. These baskets were made mostly by women and teenage children at home, although the material was prepared by men. One family, in southern Poland, working in the tiny space on the turn of their external staircase, raised their family on income from this production. Many of these baskets went to markets as non-returnable containers, thus ensuring future income, but the first plastic raspberry punnets arrived in Warsaw in 1991, thus spelling an end to the century or more of production.

Alongside this large-scale activity in each area of each country, were a range of specialist basket-makers working either entirely for their own family use or for a very local area, often bartering with friends and neighbours. The materials used were local, cut wild and processed by the basket-maker, sufficient being gathered for one year's production at the appropriate season.

In the village of Oroshasa, on the Hungarian plain, Janos Hanis makes coiled baskets using the leaves of *Typha angustifolia*, which are found in the local ditches and ponds. Leaves are cut in July and August, cutters wading in water to get maximum length, and are then spread to dry out completely before being used. A brief watering and then covering with a wet cloth to allow them to mellow is all that is necessary before starting work. Working in one room of his three-roomed house he made baskets to order, with a small stock for passers-by. The traditional included oval and round baskets with tight fitting lids for bread and cakes (Fig. 1); flowerpot shaped baskets for raising bread dough; an elegant vase-like bulbous form for the storage of dried plums; and smaller decorative objects, bells and Christmas decorations made by his wife. The curators from the Toy Museum in Kecskemet, Nagy Maria and Vidak Istran, had ordered some of these for the Museum, enabling the purchase of four or five items, now at The British Museum, London as part of their permanent collection. This tradition is in jeopardy, no younger members of the Janos family having been taught this fine technique.

In North East Hungary, near the Slovak border, is a settlement of Roma, at Szendrolad, established in 1956 on the edict of the government. A village without paved road, telephone, piped water apart from standpipes in the streets in 1993, subsistence living depended on owning a small livestock, a pig, some hens and growing fruit and vegetables. One extended family specialise in using an *Acer* species, called by them 'black maple', for splitting and using for round frame baskets of extremely high quality (Fig. 2). The tree being scarce now locally, the three brothers walked for three days through the forest to the nearest source, felled a tree of 10-15 cm. diameter, roasted it on smouldering embers *in situ* overnight, and cleaved it while the sap was still warm into segments and then these into growth rings. Blisters on their fingers testified to the heat of the wood. These laths were carried home and further split, using a knife blade to start the process, then pulling the two sections apart with the hands, the opposing pressure coming from the knees either side of each lath. Several cleavings resulted in superb flexible material which could be used at once to attach as carefully shaped warps to the thick, dry hoop of wild briar that had been prepared some time earlier. The weaving on this warp was completed so as to provide handles and made a dense deep bowl, about 60 cm. diameter, used by the family as a multi-purpose carrier for babies, washing, apples, potatoes; and the smaller size (about 30 cm. diameter) for eggs, bread, domestic objects. These baskets, made only when needed for the family, either as container or for barter, were exchanged in the village for jam and bacon, each size having



Fig. 1 Janos Hanis completing a lid, Oroshasa, Hungary.



Fig. 2 One of the Karoly brothers from North East Hungary splitting maple.

a precise rate of exchange (Fig. 3). Material production and processing is about three days work for the three brothers, the hoop material has to be gathered, formed and dried, and the making of one larger basket takes a further two days. They are valuable commodities, but transmission is in danger. The sons of the family can make but prefer not to, the material is scarce and now protected under environmental legislation, and cheap plastic artefacts from production lines are entering the market place. The arrival of colourful plastic packing tape also threatens the tradition. Weaving a maple back basket even partially with this enhances the exchange rate and will, as it becomes more available, replace the laths completely.

A similar pattern can be seen in central Poland.



Fig. 3 A finished maple frame basket, Hungary.

Stanislaw Kumanrowicz, a smallholder with a small livestock in the yard plus a horse for ploughing the rye and potato fields, makes baskets for his family needs from the local juniper and pine root. The baskets are built on frames of juniper, one circular hoop forming the rim, a second the handle. The material is gathered in the extensive surrounding forest in the late winter. The hoops are formed and left to set, the ribs being split in two and formed as the basket is being woven. Weaving is with pine root, gathered where they run parallel to, but just under the surface, below a thick leaf-litter and moss layer. Two or three roots only are taken from each tree to prevent wind rock. Processing the roots is time-consuming, each having to be halved and the bark scraped off before being coiled into rings for long-term storage. Making the basket involves assembling the two hoops, and soaking the pine root for 15 – 30 minutes in warm water and then spending three or four days weaving meticulously to obtain regularity of form and tightest possible surface. Five hours was spent, after apparent completion, on filling in tiny spaces, as the basket, once soaked so the roots swell, is used to carry water for the animals, as well as for general storage, peeling potatoes into and holding things in the house. The two sons have each made two or three baskets, but declare they will not make more so the baskets are the last of their kind unless non-vertical transmission to an eager, younger artisan, with an eye to gallery or other specialised markets, should spend time leaving the details of production. But recent environmental legislation here also prevents the gathering of roots and stems. Kumanrowicz in 1991, could have bought a plastic bucket, recently to be found for the first time in the local town, for a few Zloty, but when asked replied that he had five days but no spare money.

These specific examples of industrial and specialist production give a flavour of the situation across the region. Industrial scale production, often at the instigation of late nineteenth century landowners, sits alongside the specialist. Previous centuries would have seen these latter, using whatever material came to hand, working alone, methods of plant gathering and processing, as well as weaving, all being completed by the same individual. Vertical transmission, usually from father to son, would have ensured continuing production. The store of the Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw

has examples from the same region of central Poland, some identical in style but over one hundred years older. The pine root coiled jugs and bowls to be seen there in large numbers have now been replaced and are no longer made at all.

The Baltic States, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, appear to have a different pattern of production and transmission, having not developed such large-scale and widespread industrial production and having had an almost complete break with the local traditions in the early part of the twentieth century. Lithuania still has an industry based on willow production, much of it centred round the making of highly decorative items such as split willow flowers and decorations for the home. Made with great skill, they are paraded at basket festivals such as that in September in Lichtenfels, southern Germany, where they attract a lot of attention. Although bulk production, there is room for innovation in this market. Many basket-makers work as individuals, using *Salix* varieties, which can be bought by the bundle from still existing commercial growers. One such basket-maker continues to make standard domestic items such as shoppers and bread baskets but has real difficulty finding local sales as cheaper imports from further east have arrived. Another, an innovator, making handbags with leather lids, small delightful ship hangings and tiny toys, has adventurously driven to Denmark on her own to gain sales at large and busy basket-making gatherings but in spite of this has had to turn to sewing wedding dresses for much of the year.

In Latvia a movement to preserve traditions in basket-making and continue the craft began in Riga in 1973 with the setting up, by passionate individuals, of Craft Guilds. Members relearned the skills involved in preparation of the materials, methods of workshop management and weaving systems. Local gathering in and around Riga as well as in the areas of the allotment gardens owned by most in the surrounding countryside, involved the collection of short, wild *Salix* varieties, pine roots and birch bark. Many of the baskets made by these Guilds were and continue to be highly decorative. Items include traditional boxes of birch bark and coiled root, finely stitched and intricately patterned; platters for fine foods of the finest coiling; delicate frame baskets woven with fine split willow skeins; and coiled jewellery baskets with fitted lids using the knot known as

'Chinese'. No one knows how this coiling stitch arrived in Latvia in 1973 but it is now seen as traditional and is common to all three Baltic States. These traditions of the 1970s are preserved through a series of competitions and exhibitions, only very skilled, non-innovatory work being accepted. Master status is only conferred after acceptance at three such exhibitions. Present at the judging of the most important of these in 1994, it was clear that any novel stitch or pattern was rejected in order to ensure continuity. A fine coiled willow platter with innovatory wheat sheaf design was rejected as was a coiled pot with a stitch unique to the maker. Judging was severe, though heated discussion in Guild meetings debated the need for a new category for experiment in the exhibition schedule. This debate is well known to artist basket-makers in the UK.

In Riga the traditional split pine log and animal feed carriers, the plethora of other agricultural baskets to be seen in the Ethnographic Museum store, have been lost completely pre 1973. There is no need for these products, farming families have turned to other containers, and transmission is lost. Even those fish traps, which would have been used by so many families to catch eels and other fish as essential food, are no longer constructed.

It seems clear that continuity of traditional forms is impossible to maintain in a rapidly changing Eastern and Central Europe. That selection of materials prime in the making of a good basket is being lost. The opening up to new markets, the greater range of imports, both baskets and other containers, has seriously reduced the need for local production. With this loss goes widespread, loss of knowledge of the suitability, harvesting, processing and preparation of a range of plant materials, many gathered wild, some formerly grown on an industrial scale. Remaining knowledge is held by recently formed Guild members or by committed individuals who seek to teach as widely as possible, in schools, to environmental groups and to other enthusiasts. Adoption of the new for decorative items, art works, and garden structures and decorative fencing is seen as a way forward. Support for traditional knowledge systems has largely disappeared but is being replaced with knowledge of artefacts which may well prove to be the core of a new tradition.

Lithuania (Sargeliai)

In this region, roots and twigs of fir can be harvested all year around, as long as there is no ground frost. Only surface roots (at a depth of about 10 cm., diameter up to 1,5 cm., length up to 10 m) are used. Depending on the size of the basket, larger roots are split up with a knife. Prepared roots are rolled and may be stored for years. They must be soaked before being used.

Different materials are used for the making of this basket: *Prunus padus* L., *Corylus avellana* L., strings from *Salix spp.*

Generally, baskets for apples, mushrooms, and potatoes are of larger size (30-70 cm.), and are still found in rural villages throughout Lithuania. Nowadays, traditional baskets are rarely made and plastic buckets are used as substitutes.



Krepšelis: Basket for berries.

Material:

Two main frames: *eglės šakos*, *Picea abies* (L.) H. Karst (Pinaceae)

Strings: *eglės šaknys*, *Picea abies* (L.) H. Karst (Pinaceae)

Internal frames on the bottom: *eglės šakelės*, sticks of *Picea abies* (L.) H. Karst (Pinaceae)

20 x 15 cm.

Contributor: Daiva Šeškauskaitė, Kaunas College of Forestry and Environmental Engineering, Lithuania.

Location: Sargeliai (village of 10 farmsteads), 1993. This basket is the work of Justas Šeškauskas, he started to weave baskets at the age of 8-10, while herding cows in the forest.



Some views of the Basketry Exhibition, August 21-26, 2005, Istanbul (F. Ertuğ).