

HANDICRAFTS OF THE NOMADIC WOMEN OF SOMALIA

by

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The Democratic Republic of Somalia, Africa's easternmost country, juts out into the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, producing the sharp angle of the Horn of Africa. The climate of hot temperatures throughout the year, strong winds and sparse rainfall is reflected in the terrain, particularly in the large stretches of northern and central rangelands, which consist primarily of semi-arid and arid plateaus and plains.<sup>1</sup> It is a terrain for nomadic pastoralists, who make up about half of the population.

In this semi desert, the Somali has developed a portable house called an aqal, which is in complete harmony with its environment. The land may look barren and hostile, but it contains all the necessary material for the aqal and its contents. It is a brilliant illustration of the economic use of limited resources; an invention forced by the conditions of life and totally Somali in character. And yet, the ingenious skill that produces these crafts has been rather neglected by foreign scholars and taken for granted at home.<sup>2</sup>

The reasons for this neglect are built into the very nature of Somali society. In nomadic society, there is a particularly sharp division of labour by gender.<sup>3</sup> The women are responsible for the house and nearly everything in it from the covering of the house to the smallest milkpot within. They have little time to think of their work as 'art', as they are too busy supplying the necessities of shelter. Their craft is all part of their housework, and as any woman will know the world over, housework is never admired or appreciated on its own, but rather, only negatively noticed when it ceases to be done.

It was poetry, recitation and rhetoric, rather than handicrafts that have long been recognised as the main artistic forms in Somali nomadic life. I M Lewis wrote in Somali Culture, History and Social Institutions, "Somalis attach great importance to oratory and poetry. It is in these fields rather than in the

plastic arts which are little developed, that Somali culture's most impressive achievements are to be found. This corresponds to the nomadic bias of a people used to travelling light with few material encumbrances - but a richly compensating gift of language".<sup>4</sup> Oral poetry was committed to memory by poetry reciters and listeners in general and passed on faithfully word for word, with credit given to the poet, so that even today, the poems of the past can be collected, collated and translated into other languages. It must be remembered that poetry was largely the domain of men, though women were not entirely excluded from certain genres.<sup>5</sup> A decidedly male bias comes through in a jointly sponsored UNESCO and UNICEF report on a seminar held in April 1978 in Mogadishu on Basic Education for Nomads, "to the Nomad, poetry is the most important art and much time is spent composing new poems and reciting the age old ones that have been passed on ... Arts and Crafts among the Somali nomads centre on wood carving; camel bells, wooden spoons, forks, dishes, walking sticks etc."<sup>6</sup> Interesting that the arts and crafts of which the author Abdi Arte speaks is woodcarving, the one and only craft executed by men. There is no mention of the house and all the woven items created by the women.

Lastly, when examining the reasons why Somali crafts have been generally overlooked in the West, we must remember the extraordinary popularity and interest in the dramatic carvings and ritualistic masks found in other parts of Africa. These objects are alien to a nomadic Muslim society and play no role in Somali life. Therefore there exists a general assumption made by visitors that there is little of visual interest in Somalia. As a result, there has been little foreign excitement in the traditional Somali handicrafts created by women and equally, an indigenous population that only sees these as merely an extension of housework.

All the while, these crafts are fast disappearing. As one tours the country, one finds aqals which are covered with

canvas or plastic sheeting instead of the traditional woven grasses. In the Hargeisa market, it is possible to find rows of brightly painted large water containers for sale in the traditional haan shape, but made out of metal instead of woven fibre. Equally, the ubiquitous yellow plastic quart oil-containers can be found sitting in the baskets or saabs,<sup>7</sup> instead of the woven aagaans or milk pots for which the saabs were originally made. This evidence points to an accessibility and availability of new materials which are easy to obtain. Also, a certain amount of urban expansion and correlated urbanisation and resettlement are taking place, hence these heavy metal haans which could only be used in more permanent dwellings, situated close to a reliable water supply. Somalia is undergoing many changes very quickly and this is also reflected in the lifestyle of its nomadic population.

The aim of this paper is to try to highlight the nomadic handicrafts created by women in Somali society and focus attention on their merits. We will examine the aqal, its construction, its coverings or saari and decoration or qurxin, and then look at some of the smaller household items, the gurgur, the things that can be picked up, and some of the ceremonies that are connected with a few of these items. These handicrafts are all part of the work women have been doing for generations along with their daily chores of child rearing, cooking, herding the smaller animals, retrieving firewood, washing and cleaning, to name but a few.

### THE AQAL

The portable nomadic house which in Somali is known as an aqal is a hemispherical dome about 1½ to 2.13 metres in height, and constructed of three component parts: semi-circular shaped poles, which give it its strength and form; vertical poles which are used for reinforcement; and layers of woven mats of grass and acacia fibre, which are used for covering and decoration. All three are tied together as an intricate web to form a strong impermeable package.

The aqal is of female construction and execution. It is the gift of the mother and female side of the bride's family and each female has the responsibility of mounting and dismounting her aqal for each move, maintaining and repairing its component parts and eventually providing additional aqals for her own daughters or women folk.

The aqal takes its shape from the curved poles generically known as dhigo, which can be divided into two types depending on the thickness and function required. Qabax, the thicker dhigo are the main structural supports of the aqal and lool are the thinner dhigo that have no structural function on their own, but rather help to implement the shape and help hold the coverings tightly in place.

The qabax are obtained from the roots of the acacia tree. There are many known species of acacia growing in Somalia, but the ones most used for this purpose are the maraar, galool, bilcil and qudhac.<sup>8</sup>

To get the root, the women dig as far as their elbow in depth, to the point where they can locate several roots of the tree. They never touch the main foundation root as it is far too deep and its removal would destroy the tree itself, but they use instead the lesser roots of say twelve metres which are cut, removed and straightened out. To give these roots the curved shape of the qabax, they are warmed, without being burned, by warm ash and bent to the desired shape. This is done by attaching the roots between two poles which are firmly anchored to the ground. Using hot metal and ash, the roots are kept warm in this curved position for one week. After the week, these newly arched roots are treated with a solution of the bark of the acacia tree, called asal, which protects them against termites, and they are then bound with the twine of goat or camel leather, called jill and ready for use. Qabax should last between ten to twenty years, depending upon the type of tree and the maintenance.

The use of specific names for each qabax indicates the importance

they have for the nomad. The rear of the aqal is known as sino; the entrance or mouth of the aqal is called afgudub; the sides, geesdhis and over the top of the aqal, in the centre between the sides are dhigdhexo, which have to be very, very strong. The house is constructed in the above order. When erecting the aqal, the women start with the rear qabax, the sino. The holes for this must be dug as deep as one's mid-arm, about forty-five centimeters and salt or myrrh are put in the holes to keep away the termites. Then lots of pebbles, which are packed in, surrounding the qabax to give it added strength, are pounded with a hammer or large stone, before the sand is returned to fill the hole. The qabax must be strong enough to stand on its own and not fall; it must withstand the vigorous shaking of the women who try to test its strength. After the sino qabax is in place, the process is repeated with the entrance and the sides.

There are no exact number of qabax required. One source said seven qabax were needed for a basic aqal, another eight, others said twelve were required for a good, respectable size.<sup>9</sup> The remaining qabax are then used to form a network and strengthen the structure.

In addition to the qabax, tall vertical poles called udubs are used to support the framework of the aqal. The number of udubs may vary between seven and twelve and they too are planted firmly into the ground. The most important udub is the centre one called udub dhexaad. The others are placed near the end of the qabaxs to shore up each side, and again, against any particular weak point of the aqal. The udub is also used to partition the house.

Lastly, to complete the skeleton of the aqal, the thinner dhigos, or curved poles known as lool are used to fill out the hemispherical shape and keep the covering mats taut. Lool is made from duur, a thin reed like rod which is quite flexible when newly cut. The pieces of duur are tied together with leather string in thicknesses of three duurs to a lool

and easily shaped when moistened and bent between two rocks, into the required arc. The lools do not go into the ground; their whole purpose is to close the gaps between the poles so that the woven mats do not cave into the dome. The lools go over or under the qabax in both directions so that as one looks through the armature within the aqal, one sees small square holes between the lines of poles; the smaller the separations between the curves, the better. There are usually not less than twenty lools. The lools are then tied securely to the qabax and the udubs, and care must be taken that each component is tied firmly to the other.

All the work described could be done by two or three women, or maximum four; but to do it alone is extremely hard work.

When the frame of the aqal is thus completed, it is ready to be covered.

#### SAARI - COVERINGS

It is from the covering or saari of the aqal that the talents of the womenfolk are clearly visible for all to see. There are several kinds of weaving, which will be described below, but the saari have a double function, first, utilitarian and second, decorative.

Caws is the generic name for all grasses, but has also come to refer to the large woven mats which are used as covering for the aqal, particularly in the north; it is also known as harrar or raar, depending on the region of the country. The best grass used for this purpose is maadh. The grass is woven in packets of about six or seven centimetres thickness and twenty-five to thirty centimetres in length. These packets of grass form the vertical or 'warp' line of traditional weaving and are reinforced every ten centimetres of length with a new row of grass packets, inserted from the back so skillfully, that from the front, it gives the illusion that the mat is woven from lengths of very long grass. As each new row is introduced, a fringe or overhang of about ten centimetres is

allowed in the back, giving the reverse an appearance of layer upon layer of thatch. This endows the harrar with its ingenious feature of functioning both as decoration from within the aqal, and protective covering from without, impervious to wind, sand and rain: not unlike a thatched roof.

The weft or crosswise thread woven under and over the grass packets is made of sisal or acacia fibre. These fibres were often dyed with natural dyes and abstract designs thus produced. More recently, imported wools are replacing the naturally dyed fibres.

There are several well known names for caws design, but these tend to refer to the amount of decoration, rather than to the specific pattern. For example, an all over pattern, which covers the harrar from corner to corner is known as iskujoog, and is usually the most intricate and highly valued caws. Goo means to divide, and the name googoos refers to an overall pattern that is divided at regular intervals by bands of plain or undecorated caws. A caws with narrow horizontal strips of design, is known by the number of these strips, thus, saddexle, is the one with three bands, lixle, the one with six bands of design and toddobaale, the one with seven bands. There are never more than seven bands in this type of design. Casaha cad, the white one, is the caws left plain with no design.

In the attempt to further isolate and identify specific patterns used in weaving, the authors showed a series of slides to several women from different regions. There was general agreement on the most common patterns. For example, qardhaas, referred to designs of square or diamond shapes; sinjab, which means leaning from one side to the other, referred to patterns of zigzag lines or chevron shapes; ganuum refers to depth as may be felt when looking down a well and is translated into design as a vertical series of diamond shapes placed one on top of the next; and indho daalis, which means tiring eyes literally referred to the dazzling effect of alternating bars of black and white. The whole area of design would certainly make a fascinating future study, but one would need to systematically collect many more examples of design from all the regions of Somalia and interview many more women.

Harrar vary in size, a typical measurement might be about four and a half metres in width by about one and three quarter metres in length, but they could be considerably larger or smaller. The work is done by a mother for her daughter, or a woman for herself, perhaps with the help of another family member. It takes at least a month to complete: sometimes much longer.



The caws is finished off by braiding the top fringe of grass and is an occasion for celebration. This ceremony of plaiting is called tidic. The young, unmarried girls are invited in the evening to finish off the harrar, which is not a very arduous task, but rather a social event. The girls sing and show off their skills and cleverness at reciting or inventing additional verses. Often one of the boys might try to disguise himself as a girl, perhaps with the aid of a female relative and to attempt to break into the female ranks and 'crash' the ceremony by joining the girls in song. If they discover him, he is ridiculed and thrown out. But if on the other hand, he is not discovered until the ceremony is over, there is shame on these girls for their lack of feminine intuition. In several of the Nomadic ceremonies, cunning, intuitiveness and quickness of mind are attributes which are rewarded with favour, and these very qualities that may mean survival for the Nomads during hard times.

A lot of work, as well as dreams go into the making of the harrar or caws. This is hinted at in one of the most famous caws songs. As in many 'work' songs, the chorus alternates with the stanzas, and the girls take it in turn to invent new verses.

Aay hooyalaayow hooyal - chorus

Cawdibele belloy baydhay  
Cawra daran ka Yaasiin  
In sharle ba sharkood moog

Chorus

Cawskanow sabool diidow  
Waqan suuqa lagu dhigin  
Yaa sameeyey lagu odhan

Chorus

Geesi geel keenaa  
Gaari samaysaa  
Googoos loogu daahaa

(the chorus is made up of sounds rather like "ee aye ee aye oh")

as found in "Old MacDonald's Farm")

Let evil abandon us  
 Let us be protected by the Yaasiin -(a Koranic verse  
 invoking protection)

Let our hearts ignore evil  
 My lovely caws rejects the poor man  
 It will never be sold  
 It is for a brave lad who brings camels  
 It is for an elegant lady.<sup>10</sup>

In the first verse, evil can be avoided by the recitation of the Yaasiin and by emptying one's mind of all evil or bad thoughts. In the second verse, the caws is personified and given the power to reject a poor man, which is in keeping with the wishes of the young girl herself. She also makes a promise to the caws, never to sell the mat, as that would be a desperate act and would signify extreme poverty. The last verse reserves the caws, and by implication the girl herself, for a brave man with lots of camels for the bride price, which would reflect well on both the girl and her gallant suitor.

Like the harrar, the kebed, is a covering for the aqal, which also has both a decorative and protective function. The kebed is made of fibres from the Acacia Bussei tree, which is known to Somalis as the galool and it is a tree of great importance and poetic significance to the Nomad.<sup>11</sup> To remove the fibres a branch is cut and stripped of its thorns and thick bark and the white fibrous tissue inside is chewed until softened and broken down into strands of individual fibres. It is known that while chewing, the women will not have dysentery. As one can imagine, it is a slow labourious procedure to get enough acacia fibre to complete the kebed, which is similar in size to the harrar.

As with the harrar or caws, the new rows of acacia fibres are introduced from the back, and an overhang of layers of fibres serves the same protective purpose. Because the material is

fibre rather than grass, the reverse appears more shaggy and springy in appearance, instead of the straw-like thatch found on the back of the caws.

Kebed designs follow some of the traditional patterns used in caws making, but there are two patterns of design reserved exclusively for the kebed; baraley and jeedalley. Baraley means the one with dots and traditionally alternates large distinct leopard dots called barshabeel with narrower, insignificant 'disordered' ones called quban. Between them are vertical line dividers called kabaal, which, like the udub, are wooden poles. The jeedalley, which means the one with the whip design, refers to very narrow horizontal strips of design alternating with bands of plain kebed. Formerly only naturally dyed fibres were used for the weft, but in recent years there has been an introduction of coloured wools here too.

The Kebed is not made by one or two women along, but is a communal effort. The making of the kebed is a festive ceremony. The owner of the kebed will start the kebed and only invite others to join her after she has completed the width she needs (which may be between three and four metres) and about a hand span of the length. She must have all her materials ready, the fibres in bundles, the colours already dyed, and enough food and drink to feed her 'army' of workers. The kebed is tied between two poles and the weaving continues on consecutive days until it is completed. It might take eight to ten women three to five days to complete. But it is a planned and organised event; one that they need to get consent for. For example, it must be arranged that it will not interfere with the packing and migration of the family. If the other women accept, they are committed to see the project through. They usually work a large part of the day, certainly afternoons, and leave their own family chores to others. The women think of kebed making as cementing the bonds of sisterhood, as perhaps men might think of war as uniting them in a brotherhood. There is much singing and laughter, which makes the work lighter.

The authors of this article have recorded two kebed songs. The first illustrates the kebed's dual use for beauty and protection.

Baranbarshaalley, buul shareeraay,  
 Ma maataan bah kuu helay,  
 (and repeat)  
 Geedba, Geedka u dheer laga garaacyeey,  
 Galool mudhay mullaax looga diiryeey,  
 (and repeat)  
 Naagaan daahaaga ridan docodalooléey,  
 Wan loo dilay dugaag gurayeey,  
 (and repeat)  
 Aqalaan jirin jiiddooy,  
 Jabtooy jawdu waarooob.  
 (and repeat these two lines and then 1st two)

You with your delighted designs\* enhance my house  
 as a cover  
 Today I have sisters to aid me  
 From the tallest tree your fibre comes  
 You are the fibre of the highest galool  
 The woman without you in her house  
 Her slaughtered animals will be eaten by the beasts  
 She tries to pull a non-existent curtain  
 Hark, Certainly the thunder is the sound of rain.

The first four lines, spoken to the kebed itself are praising its beauty, its use as a cover and even its origins from the very highest acacia tree. But we are reminded that it is accomplished with the help of a sisterhood. The last four lines tell of the dire straits a woman without such a kebed could find herself in. Without a kebed, a woman has little protection from the wild animals that would devour the family food and from the harsh weather such as thunder and rain.

The second song is from the point of view of the women helpers

Saaxil laga keenyayeey  
 Wada susuureey  
 Siyaab aqalka loo saaryeey  
 Korankor cunimaynoo karibamaynee  
 Karuur geel ma la hayaa

It is from Saaxil  
 - It is a beauty all round  
 with astonishment, a delight, we put it up on the  
 side of the house  
 We can't eat grains, they are tough  
 provide us with the sour milk of camels.

In the first three lines the women are admiring their exquisite handiwork, which astonishes the whole community with its beauty, once it is placed on the side of the aqal. Saaxil was the old name for Berbera, and its implication for the nomad, was that of an important place where exotic imports could be found. It would be like saying something came from London or Paris. In the last two lines, the women tease the owner of the kebed and complain about the food which she has provided for them.

Thus far we have discussed the ceremonies involved in the making of the individual harrars and kebeds, but it must be remembered that an aqal requires a number of these items. The smallest house called buul may have six or fewer harrars, but the largest type aqal, with two domes called labo daryaal, formerly used especially for weddings had at least twelve.

The size of the aqal is less a matter of whim or fancy, and more in direct proportion to the availability of materials for making the house. In the Haud, the area around Burao, and the northwest Nugaal district, where euphorbia bushes, acacia trees and grasses are plentiful, the aqals tend to be larger. However, west of Hargeisa, Boroma district, the highlands and the coastal areas, where these materials are scarce, the aqals are correspondingly smaller. A big house also requires good grazing to support the many burden (male) camels needed to transport it.

In the North eastern district of the country, around Bosaso, Qarbo and Bari region, where palms grow in abundance, the covering of the aqal is made primarily of caw or woven palm fronds. The colour and designs are reputed to be very beautiful and the women vie with each other for decorative effect. In this region, the kebed is not used because the galool is not found and even the harrar is rare.

There is considerable skill needed in setting up the aqal after the frame is finished. Starting with the smallest and most

decorative pieces the lammo<sup>12</sup> and hohab, then the decorative kebeds and harrars, and finally working outward to the purely utilitarian coverings, the dulsaar, those old caws and kebed which have lost their beauty but are functional against the elements. A women must use her discretion and not overload her aqal. Lastly, she must secure her package by tying these coverings to the dhigos and udubs at one end and go round the house, over the top and then to the other side of the entrance.

The harrar and kebed are the only types of coverings used for both the exterior and interior of the aqal. The other saari or coverings are for interior use only.

The alool serves primarily as a room partition and sometimes as a doorway. It keeps out the wind and keeps the aqal warm. Yet, because the weaving starts eight to ten centimetres off the ground, it allows for some ventilation. It is the only woven item which is used upright within the aqal. It is made of then vertical reeds called duur which are woven together with shreds of old clothes knotted together to form the crosswise weft string. There is no design to the alool, but depending on the shreds of clothes used, it could be very colourful. A typical size is four metres wide by two metres high.

Dermo are floor mats used for prayer, sleep or sitting. They are easily damaged and therefore not walked on with shoes. Dermo are made of palm leaves known as caw, and are woven in long strips about seven or eight centimetres high and sewn together strip by strip, depending on the length needed. They have a short life, but are made quite quickly. There are some very beautiful dermo of intricate design which are used exclusively for guests to sit on. But in towns, the dermo is of modest design, often left undecorated or with one or two coloured strands woven through.

Gogol are primarily sleeping mats used either under the dermo, if

the ground is hard, or taken off and used by the men. They are woven in a manner similar to the harrar, also of grass, but small enough to be used as a portable bed.

The hohob, also known as xig, is the only purely decorative item in the aqal and the most finely woven. It is one of the few luxuries and takes a lot of time to make. Because it is so finely woven, it is the same on the reverse and without a rough side. It is made of sisal fibres and is about the size of a kebed.

To obtain the sisal fibre, the sisal leaves are cut and pounded with the addition of a little water. They are then buried in a deep hole for seven days, after which they are removed and washed in a river or stream. The green will have rotted and will wash away, leaving the white sisal fibres, which must be dried before using.

The natural dyes were beautiful and stark, if somewhat limited. There were no yellow or blues. The Somalis have no word for blue and speak of a black sea or black sky. The most frequently used colours are red, white and black. The white was the colour of the undyed sisal, the red from the bark of the acacia or galool, and the black from a poisonous plant called dacar. To get the dye of the latter, a pile of leaves is cooked in water for twenty four hours and allowed to further seep in this solution for six hours more before the water is drained for use. It is now more common to find hohobs made with brightly coloured imported dyes.

#### KAYD GURGUR - STORAGE THINGS

Like the aqal and its woven mats such as kebed and harrars, storage vessels which hold the family's supply of water and milk are also made by women, from plants found in Somalia. The kayd gurgur or "storage things" are probably the most important material possessions of a nomadic family in a parched dry environment and yet, incredibly, they too are made of woven fibre.

Most of these storage vessels are made from the stem of the qabo plant, which is a cactus-like euphorbia bush with dangerously sharp five centimetres long thorns, and is found primarily in the Haud. The qabo fibres lie in the centre of the stem, surrounded by the sticky white toxic substance found in all euphorbia. To obtain the fibre, the bush is burned quickly all over with a blazing stick until it changes colour from green to brown. This destroys the thorns. It is then left for a day while the noxious sap drops to the ground. The stems are hacked open and the fibres drawn out and arranged in bundles of about fifteen strands of fibre to a bundle. These bundles are then plaited for easier storage and transportation. The qabo can be thus kept for at least a year or two, if protected from insects and pests. When using the qabo, the fibres are immersed in water to give them bend and flexibility. Mr J G S Drysdale, in War Somali Sidihi, a fortnightly publication of the Information Department of the Somaliland Protectorate, wrote, "The labour of collecting qabo fibres usually falls on the young men, but the task of weaving the fibres into milk or water vessels is left to their dextrous womenfolk"<sup>13</sup> However, some of the women interviewed more recently said they themselves were responsible for obtaining, as well as weaving, the qabo fibres.

The largest container made from qabo is the haan, which is used for fetching and the storing of water. An average haan holds between thirty and thirty four litres of water, and usually four such haans make up a full camel load, with two balanced on each side. The haan is an elongated oval in shape, with its widest girth slightly above the middle of the vessel, narrowing gently to the bottom and the top. On the top of the haan sits an inverted bowl-shaped cover or lid called an aagaan 'ka', which when properly tied on with a special leather string called lingax, makes the haan spill-proof.

The haan rests in a conical basket, especially made to protect it, called a saab. The saab is made of bent twigs which are



tied together with leather or string made from old clothes. The saab cushions the container within and also allows for easier handling. It is a means of attaching the haan securely onto the camel and also for keeping it upright in the aqal. The saab is a very useful invention; besides holding the storage container, it is sometimes hung in the aqal on its own to keep things out of the reach of children, and sometimes, to give clothes a good smell, the clothes are draped over the twigs of a large saab which is inverted over a burning incense burner. When used this way, the saab is known as a gembis.

The next container to the haan in diminishing size is the aagaan, which as a feminine noun takes the article 'ta' and should not be confused with the lid of the haan, also called aagaan, but of the masculine gender, hence taking the article 'ka'. The aagaan 'ta' is a milk vessel, used to store milk during the night, when the camels are a few kilometres away from the camp. It is very similar to the haan in shape and construction and for convenience in loading and unloading on burden camels, it too comes with its own saab. The main difference is that the aagaan 'ta' is smaller in size.

When the camels are at the camp, it is easier to use an even smaller milk container called a dhiil. On average, it holds about four to seven litres of milk, but can be considerably larger or smaller, depending on the family's needs. For example a mother carrying an ilmo, an infant under two years old, may also bring a very small dhiil for the child with her while grazing her animals. The dhiil does not need a saab, as it is not for loading on the camel. It is free standing, with a small hemispherical base which narrows into the body of the dhiil, and this base is symmetrically matched on the top of the dhiil by the base of the inverted cup-like cover called a buqul. The actual body of the dhiil widens gradually to the middle where there is a ridge called a kelli and thereafter diminishes upward until the base of the buqul. Dhiils are often decorated with leather and have leather straps by which they can be carried.

Hadhuub is the generic term for all uncovered milking vessels or drinking containers, although the difference in their function is reflected in the difference in their shape. All hadhuubs are free standing. The milking vessels are wide rimmed to catch as much milk as possible and diminish to a narrow flat base. Hadhuub geel is the vessel used when milking camels and holds about four litres, while the hadhuub adhi is a much smaller milking cup for goats' or sheep's milk and can hold about one litre. The garrog or doobi is a communal drinking bowl for camels' milk and is used exclusively by the men. These drinking vessels, resemble a sawn off dhiil or drinking cup with a base. They sit on a hollow woven semi-circular stand called sariir and like the milking vessels, widen out, but then narrow inward slightly, to accommodate the lip. The smallest size mug for individual use is called a dhiil, but is of the masculine gender and takes the article 'ka', thereby distinguished from the milk container of the same name, which takes the article 'sha'

The Hadhuubs, like the dhiils agaans and haans are woven from qabo in much the same way. The qabo fibres are first soaked in water to make them more pliable and then stripped to the required thickness of fibre. Mr Drysdale, writing about the actual weaving process, states "Eight to ten slender strips are held together (known as "idhan") and coiled in concentric circles starting at the base of the vessel. These coils are secured by one slender trip of fibre (known as "gu'un"). This single strip is woven round the "idhan" in two degrees of density. The base of the dhiil, for example, is loosely woven because it merely acts as a stand and is not expected to hold milk. But the body of the dhiil is very closely woven. It is also strengthened by additional stitches which run inter-laced patterns down the side of the vessel. The only instrument the women use is a ten cms prodding needle called muda."<sup>14</sup> Although the actual weaving is not very intricate or difficult, the real skill is in creating a symmetrical shape and one so tightly woven that it will, when treated, hold the precious

liquid it was intended for.

The sealing and sterilising of these woven fibre containers once again illustrate the enormous resourcefulness of the Somali nomadic women. When completed, each haan, aagaan, dhiil and hadhuub is treated with a solution of asal. Asal is made by boiling the pounded bits of bark from the acacia tree galool, until the solution is deep red in colour. This asal solution is then poured into the container and is tightly covered. The solution is swilled around the entire container and so shaken each morning and evening until the asal is completely absorbed. The asal gives the container a thin waterproof coating, protects it from termites and also dyes it a deep red. This curious phenomenon as to why the asal solution should help to make a vessel watertight, was thus explained by women who well knew the characteristics of the plants they were working with. "Qabo is a living thing and qabo keeps its life. When it is burnt, its water is drawn out. It is necessary to try to get it back to its first nature (original state) which is that of a holder of water. By putting a thick solution of asal in the qabo every few months, one is putting back its water."<sup>15</sup> The asal coats the fibres, leaving some red residue which fills the spaces in the weaving and the water makes the fibres expand and so tighten the weave.

Although the asal solution is used for all containers, thereafter the process of sealing those which are used for water is different from those used for milk. The insides of water containers such as haans are rubbed thoroughly with xayr or fat from the cooked meat of camel or goat, to make them completely watertight.

The milk containers such as aagaans, dhiils and hadhuubs are first swilled with curdled milk and then scrubbed with smouldering sticks of meygaag, higlo or kidi trees.<sup>16</sup> The branches of these trees when burned to a white ember, have a sterilizing effect and act to cleanse and seal the milk containers at the same time. The milk, while extinguishing the charcoals,

causes much smoke and is itself evaporated. Eventually, through the repetition of this process, the container is coated with a black shiny crust known as cul, which gives any milk kept in these pots a decidedly smokey taste. This process, known as culey, is repeated at regular intervals to cleanse and keep the vessels well sealed,

Mention should be made of the garbed and the sibraar, which are also containers for liquid, but are made from the whole skins of goats or sheep, which have been removed from the animals, as one might remove a shirt. The legs and openings are tied and sometimes decorated with glass beads or tassels. The garbed, also known as xab, is used by women to carry water from the well to the house, in places where qabo is not readily available. It was particularly used by people who had settled near a town or regular water supply, but has been largely replaced in recent years by plastic containers that can do the same job. Water kept in the garbed was pleasantly cool and the combination of the dye of the asal and the leather was credited with this phenomenon.

The sibraar is much smaller than the garbed, and is made by and used exclusively by men. What the sibraar is filled with, depends on where the men are coming from and where they are going. If they are leaving the camel camp and travelling to a distant place, the sibraar is filled with milk, or if they are coming from a well to the camel camp, it is filled with water. For a very long journey, it may be used for a mixture of milk and water called badhax, which is both nourishing and thirst quenching. Each time the sibraar is used for a different liquid, it must be cleansed thoroughly. This is done by filling with the asal solution, then turning it inside out to dry and refilling with the asal solution when it is back to its original shape.

Ghee or clarified butter is usually stored in containers of

leather made from the skin of the camel. Two names have been given for these containers, qumbe and teped. The qumbe is circular in shape and found in two sizes: the larger one holds about twenty litres of ghee, while the smaller one, about ten litres. Because it is such strenuous work, qumbe making is the job for the men, except for the lid, which is woven by the women. The camel skin is cleaned, dyed with asal and tanned. The ends are gathered up and stitched around three strong sticks that form the neck of the vessel. The sticks overlap and cross at each of the three angles, forming horns, known as geeso. These horns are tied to three poles in the ground and the qumbe is thus suspended while sand is poured into the container and pounded into a tightly packed circular form. After several days, the sand is poured out and the container is cleansed in asal solution before the ghee is stored within. It is the women's job to weave a lid of qabo and make the saab for the qumbe, so that it can be transported by camel.

The teped is a smaller container of leather and more elongated, rather than circular in shape. The skin is gathered to the neck. Twigs about eight centimetres long are placed vertically into the opening of the neck and then tied. Here too, sand is used to give the teped its shape. The teped is fitted with a woven lid of qabo, which is sometimes covered in leather, and a saab for carrying. Another type of teped is made from calabash or the dried, brittle shell of a gourd called in Somali ubo and is also used for the storage of ghee. As ubo is easily broken and only found in the Jigjiga area or imported, it is of less general use.

There exists a number of other storage containers which are not used to hold liquid, and are therefore made from other materials and treated differently from the vessels already discussed. These items are something of a non-essential refinement to nomadic life, rather than a basic necessity. For example, the abaxad is a rectangular shaped foot-locker for the storage of bedding. It consists of two sections, an upper box which fits snugly over a lower one, often with built-in pockets for jewellery. It is woven of dried fronds of palm and often covered with tanned leather decorated with designs of shells and beads and is something a woman might make for her daughter's marriage.

A gandi is a similar, though smaller box, rectangular in shape, used for tools. It may be leather covered, but is usually less elaborate.

A weynbaa is a small woven bag with long straps which women use to carry the work they wish to do, such as fibres, or their weaving, while they are out grazing their animals. It is often covered in leather and decorated with fringes or shells. The qufad is a small covered basket made of caw for the storage of needles and small things.

Perhaps the most interesting and valued storage container, created by Somali nomadic women is the xeedho, because of its symbolic and ceremonial functions. The xeedho is an hour glass shaped container of food that has come to symbolize the female; both her virginity and fecundity.

According to a short anonymous article in War Somali Sidihi published by the Information Department Somaliland Protectorate 9 April 1955, the xeedho "takes its name from the hedhosibiidi or wooden bowl in which the food (meat, ghee and dates) is packed ... which came originally from Southern Arabia".<sup>17</sup> In modern usage the xeedho refers not only to the bowl itself, which has been replaced almost entirely by imported enamel bowls, called fujaan, but also to the whole curvaceous woven container.

This container is woven from the dried fronds of the palm and is made in two sections, the base and the cover, both called sati. These join in the centre to form the belly of the container, in which the enamel food bowl sits. The two sections may mirror each other exactly, or the lower section may be more circular and the upper section more elongated: each part is joined on top and bottom to a hollow bowl-like extension or stand called sariir. Traditionally, the container is covered in fine sheepskin, saan, and decorated with cowrie shells, aleel and beads. This decoration follows certain rules; for example, the sariir, the hemispheres at the top and bottom of the container are entirely covered with cowrie shells, as are the straps which fasten the two sections together. Also there is always a band of shells about 2 1/2 cms around the

edges of both the base and the cover, where they join. The cowrie shells are stitched in a formal pattern in neat rows running horizontally or vertically, occasionally interrupted by a line of small red glass beads. The shells are not pierced but threaded through the lip of the cowrie and pulled tight and each shell is stitched on separately.

The care taken in the design of the xeedho is matched by the care and presentation of the food offered within. The dish is called mugmad and is a preparation of meat and ghee with dates and spices added for ceremonial occasions. It is very nourishing and can be kept for long periods.

To prepare the mugmad, long thin shreds of meat are put on clothes lines between two poles and allowed to dry. If the process is not completed in one day, salt is added to the uncooked meat to preserve it. When thoroughly dried, the meat is cut into narrow small lengths and deep fried in clarified butter or ghee from goat called subag. When white bubbles form, the meat is removed. The herbs, cardomon, spices, onions, garlic and salt, if the meat was left unsalted, are all fried in new butter and when drained, this fragrant ghee is added to the meat and solidifies around it. Dates and spices are crushed to form a stiff paste and four small cylinders of this date mixture are injected into the mugmad and allowed to protrude slightly above it. Finally a dome cover made of the date paste is fitted over the meat and ghee, held up by the protruding date cylinders so that it leaves a little space above the meat. This date cover is firmly sealed against the edges of the enamel bowl. So packed, the dish could stay untouched for several months.

The xeedho thus filled by the bride's mother or aunt, is an important feature of the wedding celebrations which in all, last seven days. The xeedho ceremony takes place on the

evening of the sixth day, and is a clear reference to the virginity of the bride. The xeedho is dressed in white cloth like the bride and then tied and knotted very carefully with a specially decorative string called lugcarre, which is a three-strand braid of sisal string with one of the strands of a different colour. This special knot-tying alludes to the former Somali practice of infibulation of girls ten years and younger, which ensured their virginity. It is the female relatives of the bride who are responsible for dressing and knotting the xeedho for this ceremony. The tying pattern is often the same, but each family has its own special secret knot. The lugcarre encircles the sariir several times and then drops down to the lower sariir, forming vertical lines over the bowl of the xeedho each time this is repeated. Each line preserves the lugcarre and no line seems to overlap another. Eventually a knot is made so indistinguishable, and so much a part of the overall pattern, that even for those watching it being tied, it is impossible to find the knot. The knot may even be sewn into a tuck of the white cloth. The undoing of the xeedho is a task that is set for the groom's male relatives, for it is they who will be called up that evening, one by one, to exhibit the tact, agility, grace and subtlety needed. After the xeedho is tied it will be further dressed with earrings and necklaces and finally veiled with a striped silk shawl, called subeycad, like the bride herself.

At the xeedho ceremony, the bride and groom are spectators, there to enjoy the evening's festivities. They do not participate because nothing must be allowed to disturb the harmony of their relationship, even in jest. The xeedho ceremony is really a contest between men and women, and on a second level, between the bride's side and the groom's. The female relatives of the bride have dressed the xeedho and tied it with a secret knot and it is the task of the unmarried male relatives of the groom to try to undress the xeedho and undo the knot and thus get to distribute the muqmad within. Usually a maiden aunt of the bride acts as the protector of the xeedho



and is given a long reed to beat any male who may abuse the xeedho, or treat it too roughly. There is a panel of three judges; elders chosen from both families who assign the 'punishment' for each individual young man who tries and fails to undo the xeedho. The young man may be asked a serious riddle, or more frivolously, to sing a song in the manner of Michael Jackson. He may be asked to create a poem for the occasion, answer a question of history, or even hop on one foot. If the knot is undone too quickly, for example, in less than ten tries, it reflects badly on the females of the bride's family. On the other hand, if the knot is not undone after a whole evening, the ceremony could continue the next night, but eventually the men may have to admit defeat and bear the disgrace and humiliation of such an admission. So symbolically tied is the xeedho to the bride, that if a young man should in desperation try to use a knife to cut the knot, his family may even have to pay some pardon money or xaal in the form of livestock or cash to the bride's family for this unacceptable use of force.

But usually it is all done in a playful and teasing way and eventually the xeedho is undressed and the knot undone with skill and tact and the families enjoy the evening and all the good fun attached to it. When the xeedho is unwrapped, it is the duty of the man who was successful, to remove the domed cover of date paste cleanly and in one piece with a special knife for this occasion. Afterwards, the dates and muqmad are distributed to all present including the bride and groom.

The xeedho is used on two other occasions, less ceremonially. It is used as a gift to a female relative who returns to visit her own family. If for example, a married sister returns to visit her brother, she will be given a xeedho filled with muqmad, which reflects well on her sister-in-law's abilities as a good housewife. This gift that a women gets from her own family is called dhibaad. She will bring the xeedho to her husband's

family, where a male relative of her husband will slice off the date cover in one clean swipe. The dates are usually given to the women and children and the meat with ghee is reserved for the men. It is Somali etiquette that the xeedho is eventually returned to its owner: in this instance to the sister-in-law; for the wedding ceremony, the bride's mother or aunt, with a gift within. This gift should be something of value, such as a piece of jewellery or silk, rather than food.

The xeedho is also used in the aqal to store muqmad during the jilal or dry season so that the men have additional nourishing protein during this lean time.

Those who know Somalia well, will notice that the authors have been selective about the handicrafts chosen for inclusion. A full study of the crafts of Somalia would be a much larger work. Many of the beautiful carved items such as fandhaal or wooden spoons, barkin, which are headrests, qabaal, water or salt troughs for animals and koor, camel bells, are but a few of the items crafted by the men. Exquisite jewellery and fine woven cottons are among the crafts found in the coastal towns and there are many others such as clay pottery, belonging to the settled agricultural areas, which have also been purposely excluded. Their exclusion naturally does not imply any criticism, but only a desire by the authors to focus attention on an area of study that has previously been ignored - the work of the nomadic women.

The crafts discussed in this paper were created by Somali women to suit the nomadic way of life and the limited resources of their surroundings. Their work exhibits not only masterly control of their environment, but certainly an imaginative and practical ingenuity. These works can stand aesthetically on their own, and yet, are intricately tied to the land and lifestyle of the people who produce them. The pattern of life is changing for Somalis and it would be an enormous sadness, if in years

years to come, these crafts were forgotten and relegated to an obscure past. It is the modest aim of this article to help prevent this from happening.

## FOOTNOTES

1. The notable exceptions to this broadly sketched picture are the mountainous range in the North of the country where cold weather prevails in the winter months and the 'green belt' or cultivated farm lands between the two permanently flowing rivers, the Shebelli and the Juba in the South.

2. In all fairness, mention should be made of the excellent, well illustrated and recently published book, which also served as a catalogue to a travelling exhibition of Somali crafts, Somalia in Word and Image, edited by Katheryne S Loughran, John L Loughran., John William Johnson and Said Sheikh Samatar, published by the Foundation for Cross Cultural Understanding, Washington DC, in cooperation with Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1986. This publication may at first belie the authors contention that Somali crafts have been neglected by foreign scholars, but John William Johnson reaffirms this in his "Introduction", when he writes "The study of Somali art has been neglected, as has its customary and gestural folklore". In her contribution to this book, entitled "The Artistic Heritage of Somalia" Mary Jo Arnoldi states "Among pastoral peoples the richness and variety of their oral arts overshadow their visual art production.", and quickly dismisses the aqal and its contents in two short paragraphs. The authors of this paper have chosen to focus attention on the merits of the crafts of Somali nomadic women, as found in the aqal, its coverings and contents.

On the Somali side, the authors received enormous help from the National Academy of Science and Arts, Acadeemiyada Cilmiga Iyo Fanka, and in particular three outstanding scholars, Axmed Cali Abukir, Axmed Cartan Xaange and Cabdi Daahir Afey. Cabdi Daahir Afey is a walking encyclopedia of Somali crafts and always ready to share his knowledge. Axmed Cali Abukir, most generously gave his time and expertise and also very kindly referred questions to his female relatives. Axmed Cartan Xaange is the author of a very useful book Dalkii Udgoonaa "The Land of Spices", (Muqdisho, Akadeemiyada Cilmiga Iyo Fanka, 1984), which

is devoted to various aspects of Somali culture, including the aqal and its coverings and the related work songs.

The traditional handicrafts of Somalia are on display in museums in both Mogadishu and Hargeisa and the authors had access to all the items in these collections. We are indebted to the Directors of these museums for making this possible and particularly to Ahmed Farah Warsame of the new National Museum in Mogadishu, for all his help. It is hoped that in time, these displays will be better attended and more fully explained.

3. Abdi Arte, Basic Education for Nomads, a report of a seminar held in Mogadishu 1-9 April 1978 (UNESCO/UNICEF) pp. 15-16.

"The woman makes the mobile guri (house), mounts and dismounts it, carries water and firewood, cooks food, churns milk and makes ghee. The man sits under the shade and makes decisions on where to graze, where to settle, and if and when to move from one camp to another." Another source, Mr Yusuf Hagi Adan, said "Men's work is digging wells and bringing the water from the wells to the aqal by camel, arguing and fighting with other tribes, rearing, watering and grazing camels, making fences around the camp and arranging for the security against wild animals, unfriendly people and thieves. Women's work is everything else." But the male position is defended by Margaret Laurence, The Prophet's Camel Bell (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd, 1963), p.63. "The division of labour was not as unfair as it sounded. The men protected the tribe with their spears, and led the herds to new grazing grounds, often going ahead to find the way. Men had to reserve their strength for their own demanding work."

4. I M Lewis, Somali Culture, History and Social Institutions: an Introductory Guide to the Somali Democratic Republic, (The London School of Economics and Political Science, 1981), pp. 38-39

5. B W Andrzejewski and I M Lewis, Somali Poetry and Introduction (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1964), p.49 "Although the range of the subject matter resembles that of the gabay, most buraamburs have a lighter touch, with less stylization

and restraint in the actual recital. But the greatest difference lies in the fact that the buraambur is a poem composed by women for women - although men have been known to make interested listeners."

6. Arte, Education, p.16.

7. The plural of 'saab' in Somali is 'saabyo' not 'saabs' as found in the text of this article. In the interest of simplification, the authors have used the Somali singular form with the anglicized plural suffix 's', throughout the text. Thus, more than one aqal is referred to as aqals, more than one dhiil, as dhiils etc;; where this had been done, the plural suffix 's' will be thus underlined 'saabs'. It is important to point out here that 'caws' is not the plural of 'caw'. 'Caws' is the Somali word for grass and also is sometimes used to refer to the woven mat made of grass, while 'caw' is the Somali word for palm and is a material used to make a very different type of woven mat.

8. See glossary for botanical names for these acacias. Source P E Glover, A Provisional Checklist of British and Italian Somaliland Trees, Shrubs and Herbs, (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1947).

9. With no written sources, the authors relied heavily on interviews with women who could supply useful data on the technical side of craft making and are deeply indebted to these women for their help.

Habiba Ahmed Muhamed

Asha Ali Abukir

Faduma Ali Abukir

Dahabo Ainub Liban

Muumino Hufane

Xawo Cabdi

Yusur Cali Abdalla

11. The galool, botanically known as *Acacia Bussei*, is a tree which grows over a considerable part of Somalia, at between 2000 and 5000 feet and is happiest in the red soil of the Haud. It is a tree known to all Somalis; and features in much of their poetry. It provides them with much more than the shade of its spreading umbrella shape. Its fibres are used for the weaving of the kebed; its roots to make the qabax; its bark for the asal solution which helps to seal the woven fibre containers, to produce a deep red dye and also medicinally to cleanse. It is also used in treatment of cholera and dysentery. Its dense wood makes an excellent charcoal and thus sadly, it is becoming an endangered species in Somalia, see Glover, Check-list p.xxiv.

12. No description of the aqal and its decoration would be complete without mention of the lammo, also called jarco, which is the skin of a cow tanned until it is beautifully soft and possesses a lovely patina. The covering of the aqal should start with the lammo and it is a cherished item. It is the one covering that is entirely the work of men and therefore, not included in the main body of this article. It was a common practice in the north, to sew two or three similar skins together with decorative stitches or shells at their joins. In addition to its use as decoration, the lammo was used to provide shade for a sick person or baby transported in the centre of a loaded burden camel.

13. J G S Drysdale, "Self Sufficiency - Somali Milk and Water Vessels", in War Somali Sidihi, (Hargeisa; The Information Department Somaliland Protectorate, issue number 26, 2 January 1954), p. 3.

14. Ibid., p.4.
15. Explanation by Faduma Ali Abukir and Asha Ali Abukir
16. See Glossary for botanical names
17. Anonymous, "The Heddo", War Somali Sidihi, (Hargeisa; The Information Department Somaliland Protectorate, issue number 59, 9 April 1955), p. 4.



## GLOSSARY OF SOMALI TERMS

A note about Somali pronunciation and spelling as found in B W Andrzejewski's translation Ignorance is the Enemy of Love written by Faarax M J Cawl (London, Zed Press 1982), p.100.

"The following notes are intended to give a very rough guide to the pronunciation of the names in the text.

The letter c should simply be ignored, since it represents a sound which a foreign speaker normally cannot perceive at all, so that he will hear a name like Cali as Ali.

The nearest sound to the consonant x is the English h, pronounced with some measure of emphasis, and thus Xasan would be pronounced as Hassan.

The pronunciation values of vowel letters in Somali are much the same as those in Spanish or Italian; the doubling of these letters does not substantially change their quality but is merely a sign of length. The sequence of letters aw as in Hawd, is always pronounced to rhyme with the English word 'how'."

aagaan 'ka'	cover or lid of haan or water vessel
aagaan 'ta'	large milk storage vessel
abaxad	storage box for bedding
adhi	goats
afgudub	name of the curved pole that forms the entrance of the aqal
aleel	cowrie shells used for decoration
alool	large screen or partition made of vertical reeds woven together with string or shredded clothes
aqal	dome-shaped portable house
asal	dye and cleansing solution made from the bark of the acacia tree
badhax	mixture of half milk and half water
baraley	woven mat with square designs
barkin	wooden headrest
bilcil	Acacia Mellifera

buqul	cup-like lid or cover of the dhiil or milk pot
buraambur	a form of Somali poetry used primarily by women
buul	smallest aqal
caasha cad	woven mat with no design, the white one
caw	dried palm frond used for weaving
caws	generic term for grass, also used in North of Somalia to refer to the woven mats of grass
cul	black shiny coating of milk pot, a result of the sterilising process
culey	process of sealing and sterilising containers for milk
dacar	plant used to make a black dye
dermo	mat woven from the dried fronds of palm
dhibaad	gift a women receives from her own family
dhigdhexo	name given to the curved poles used in the construction of the aqal, which are meant to be very strong, and used over the top of the centre between the sides
dhigo	curved poles which provide shape and structure to the aqal
dhiil 'ka'	drinking vessel
dhiil 'sha'	portable milk container
doobi	communal drinking bowl used by men for camel's milk
dulsaar	old coverings which have lost their beauty
duur	long thin reeds used in making lool and alool
faandhaal	wooden spoon
fugaan	imported enamel bowl used in xeedho
gabay	the most important form of classical Somali poetry
galool	Somali name for Acacia Bussei
geel	camels

geesdhis	name given to the curved poles that form the sides of the aqal
geeso	horns
gembis	open ended basket or saab used over an incense burner to make clothes sweet smelling
gogol	sleeping mats woven of grass
googoos	caws which alternates bands of design with bands of no decoration
gurgur	things that can be be picked up
haan	large woven water container
hadhuub	generic term for all uncovered drinking or milking vessels
harrar	woven mat of grass, used as covering on the aqal
higlo	Somali for Cadaba Heterotricha or Cadaba Mirabilis, branches used for sterilising vessels
hohob	decorative woven made made of sisal
ilmo	infant or young child under two
iskujoog	woven mat in an all over pattern
jarco	another name for lammo
jeedalley	woven mat with a whip design
jilal	dry season before the 'Gu' rains
jill	twine of goat or camel leather
kayd gurgur	storage things, storage containers
kalax	ladle to take water from haan
kebed	woven mat or covering for the aqal made of acacia fibres
kelli	ridge around the centre of the dhiil or milk pot
kidi	Somali for the tree Balanites Glabra which is used for sterilising vessels in the culey process
koor	carved wooden bell worn by the lead camel

labo daryaal	two-domed aqal
lammo	beautifully tanned cow leather decoration and covering
lingax	leather string to tighten lid of haan or dhiil
lixle	woven mat with six bands or design
lool	thin curved poles or dhigo used in the construction of the aqal to give it shape
lugcarre	three-strand braid with one of the strands a different colour for decorative effect
maadh	Somali for the name of <i>Arastida</i> , the grass used to make the caws or harrar
maraar	Somali name for the <i>Acacia Nilotica</i> , the roots are used to make the thick curved poles or qabax
meygaag	Somali for <i>Terminalia Parvula</i> , whose branches are used for sterilising vessels in the culey process
muda	A ten centimetre prodding needle used in the making of woven vessels such as the haan and dhiil
muqmad	a nourishing dish of dried meat and ghee
qabaal	salt and water troughs for the animals
qabax	the thick curved poles or dhigos that give structure and strength to the aqal
qabo	Somali name for <i>Euphorbia</i> , whose fibres are used to make the woven vessels such as haans aagaans and dhiils.
qandi	storage box with cover, used for the storage of tools
garbed	large goat skin with legs and openings tied used as portable water container
garrog	communal drinking bowl used by men for camel's milk
qufad	storage box for small things such as needles
qudhac	Somali name for <i>Acacia Spirocarpa</i> , roots used for making of qabax
qumbe	ghee storage container made of camel's skin
qurxin	decoration

raar	woven mat of grass, see harrar
saab	conical basket made of twigs, woven together with twine of leather or old clothes, used to protect haans <u>u</u> and aagaans <u>u</u>
saan	sheepskin leather
saari	coverings
Saaxil	old name for the town of Berbera
saddexle	woven mat with three bands of design
sariir	hollow bowl-like extensions on top and bottom of the xeehdo, dhiil or base of garrog, which function as a stand for these vessels
sati	two sections, base and cover of the xeedho
sibraar	small goat skin, with legs and openings tied used as portable liquid container
sino	name given to the curved pole that forms the rear of the aqal
subag	ghee from goat's milk
subeycad	long striped silk material, part of the traditional wedding attire for the bride
tidic	ceremony when young girls invited to finish of a harrar, by plaiting the ends
toddobaale	woven mat with seven bands of design
ubo	dried gourd, sometimes used for storage of ghee or for abolution water before prayer
udub	tall vertical poles used in construction of the aqal
udub dhexaad	the centre and most important udub
weynbaa	small woven bag for carrying items needed by women
xaal	pardon money the family has to pay because of wrong done by one of its members
xab	another name for qarbed
xayr	fat of cooked meat - used to seal the water containers

xeedho	woven basket with bowl used for the storage of mugmud, meat and ghee
xig	see hohob - woven mat of sisal fibres
Yaasiin	Koranic verse, praying for protection

For the translation of the Somali names of flora used in the text the authors have relied on P E Glover, A Provisional Checklist of British and Italian Somaliland Trees, Shrubs and Herbs (London, The Crown Agents for the Colonies 1947)

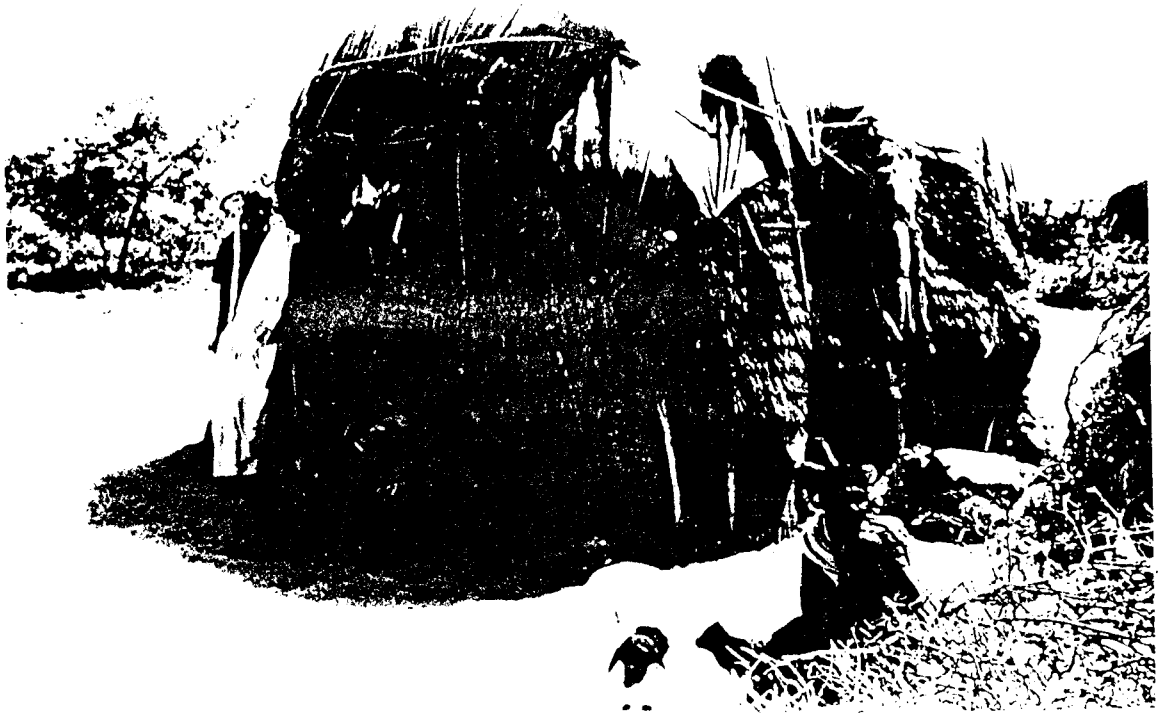


Photo 1 - An aqal near Hargeisa

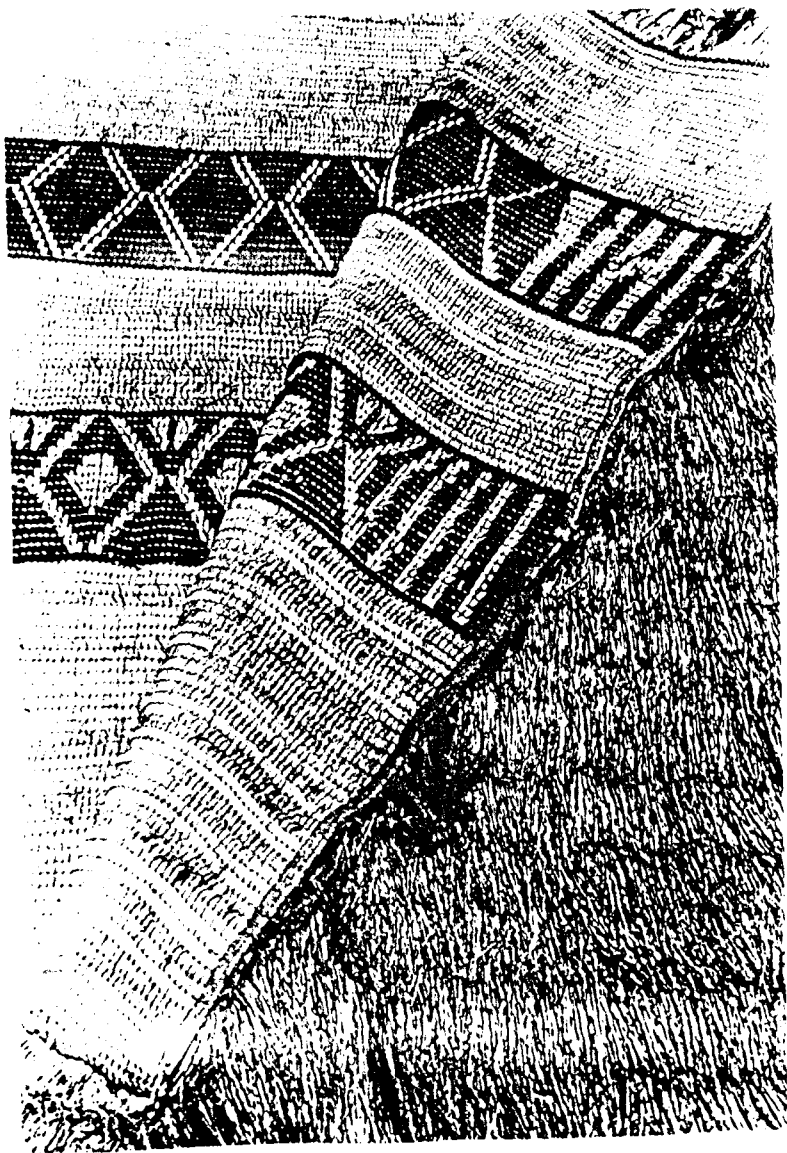


Photo 2 - An example of caws, harrar or raar

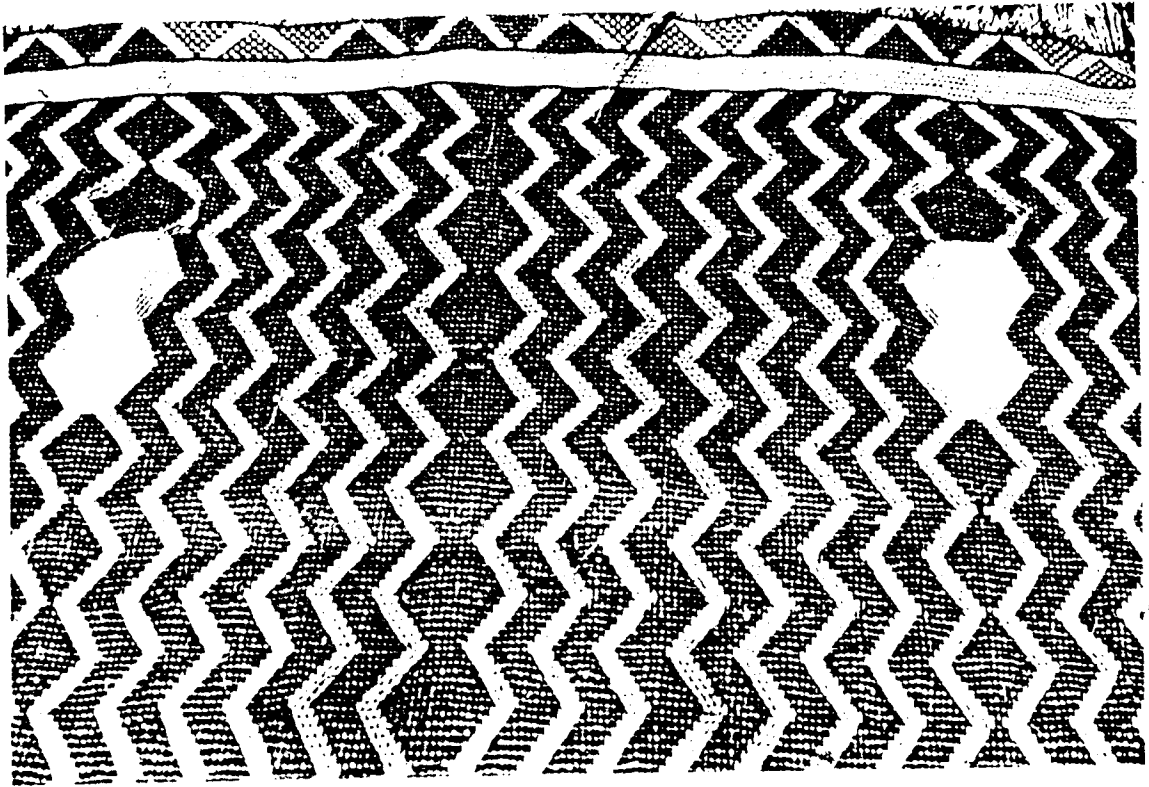


Photo 3 - Harrar detail - example of an Iskujoog

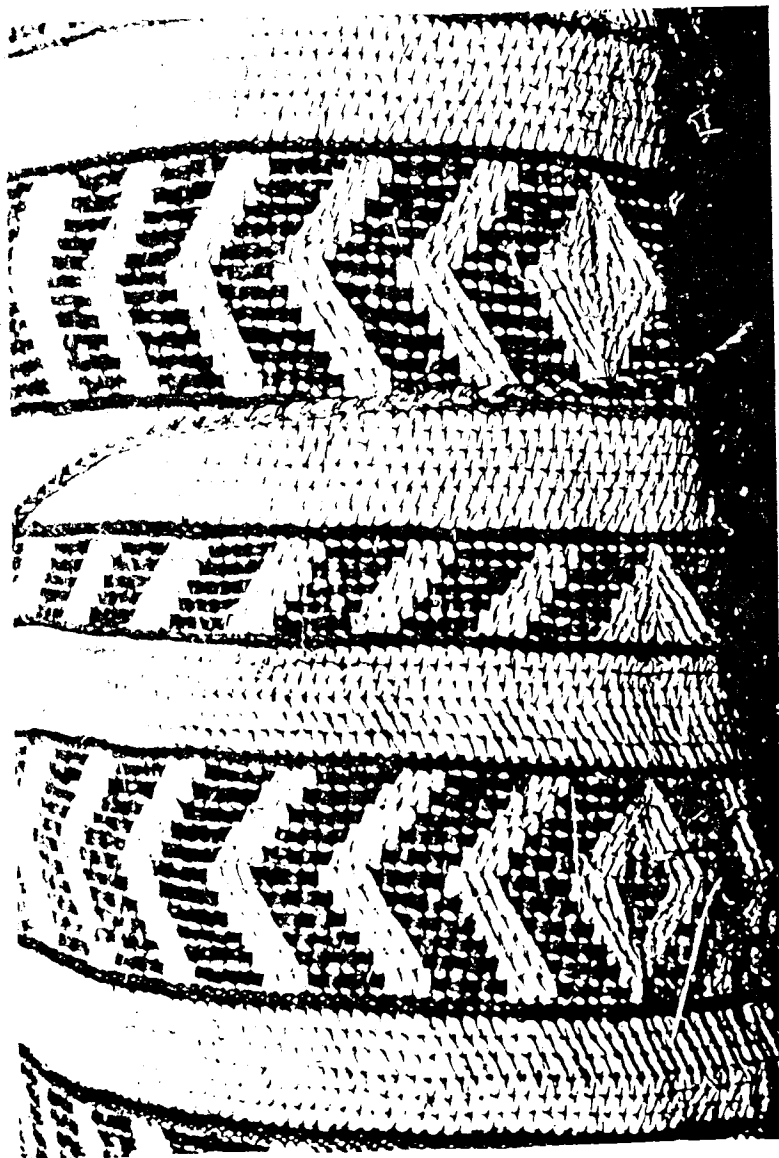


Photo 4 - Harrar rolled for storage or transportation - googoo



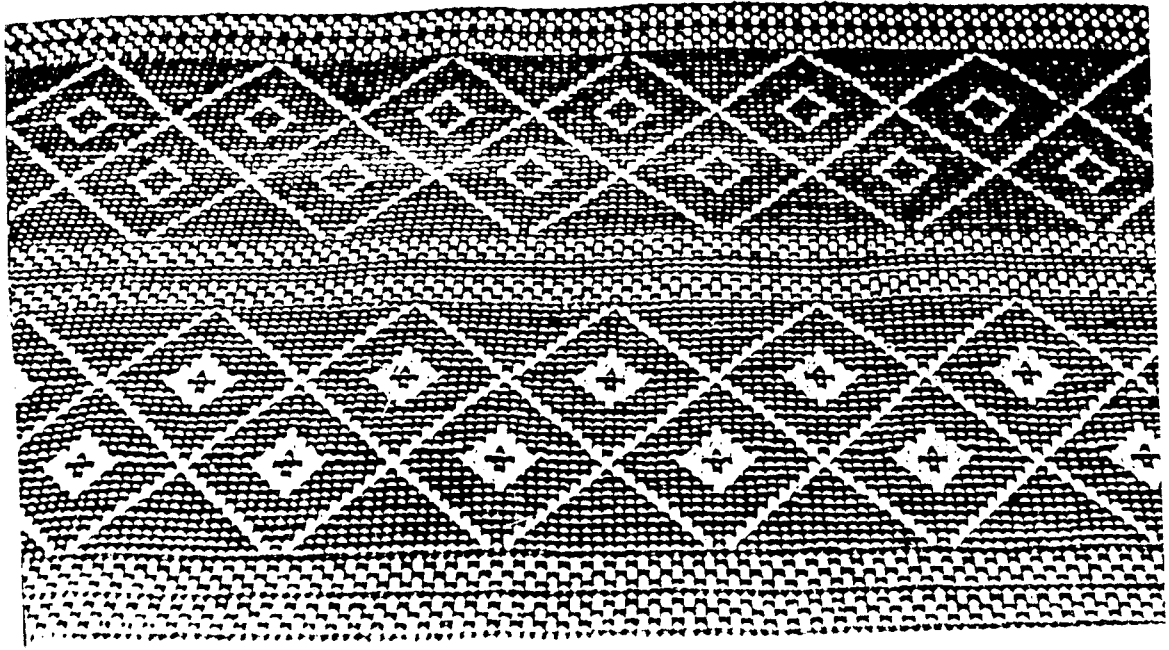


Photo 5 - Harrar - design Iskujooh - Qardhaas

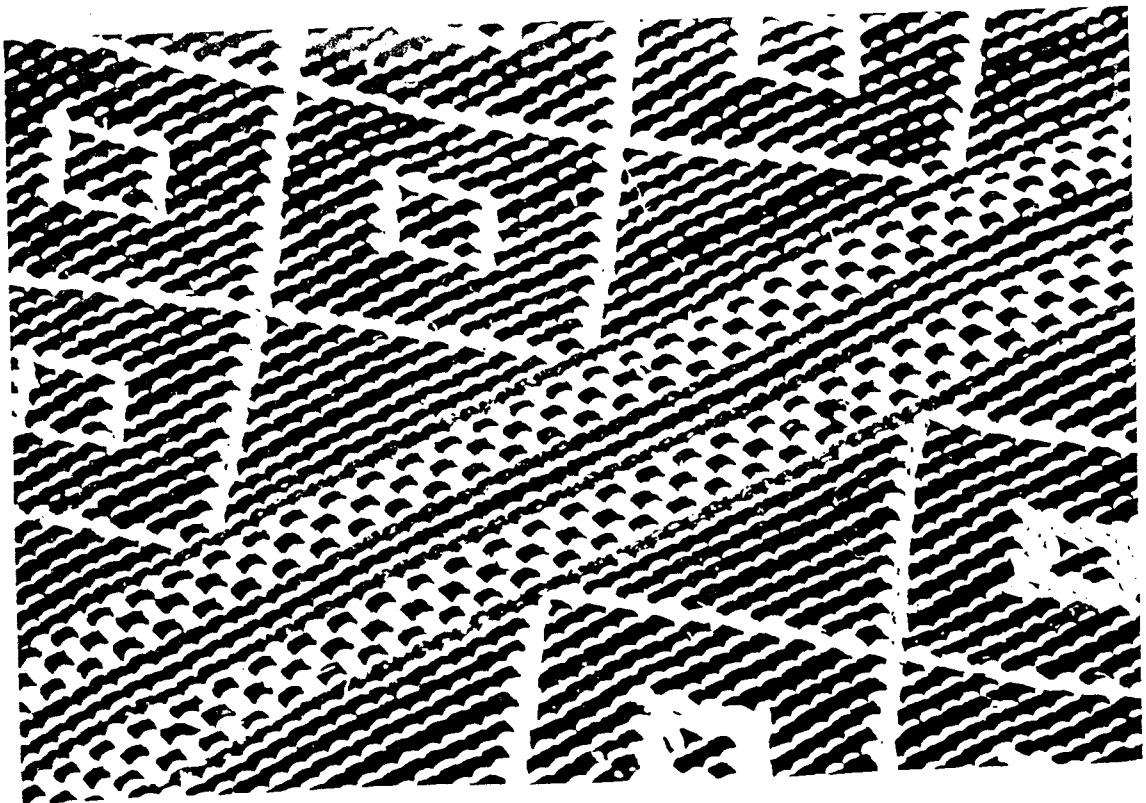


Photo 6 - Detail of above Harrar



Photo 7 - An example of a kebed - design Jeedalley

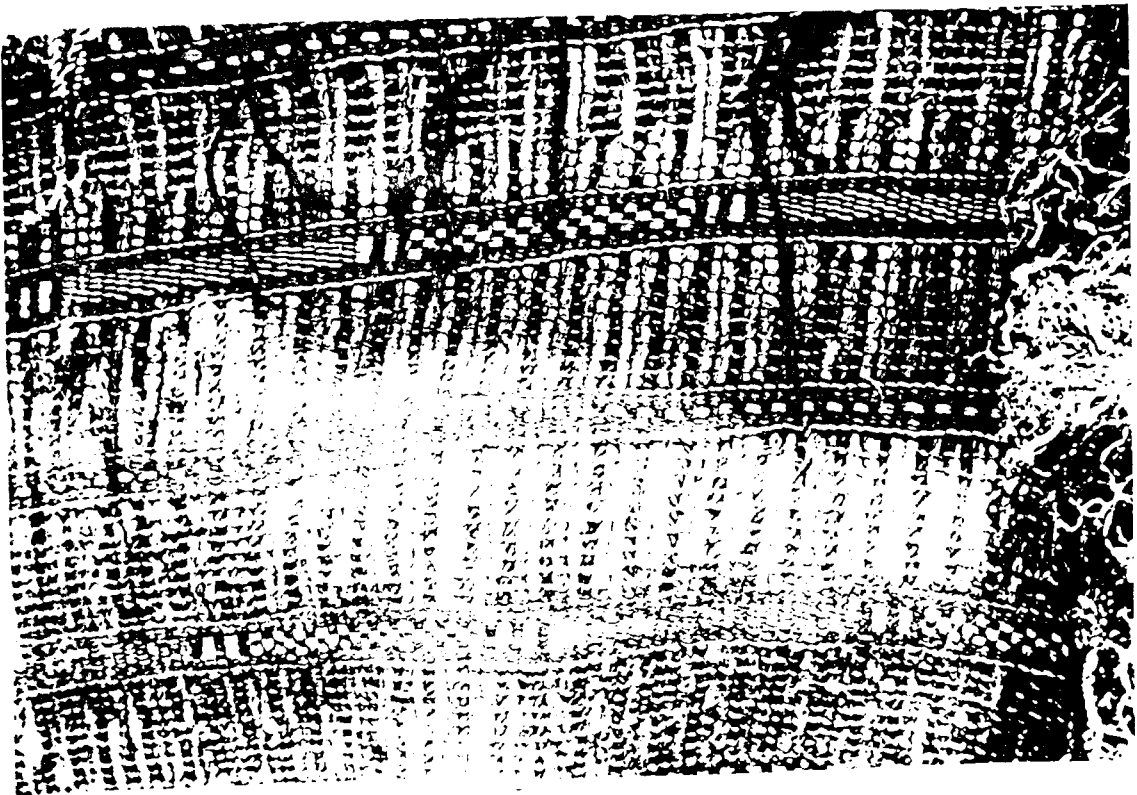


Photo 8 - Detail of above kebed

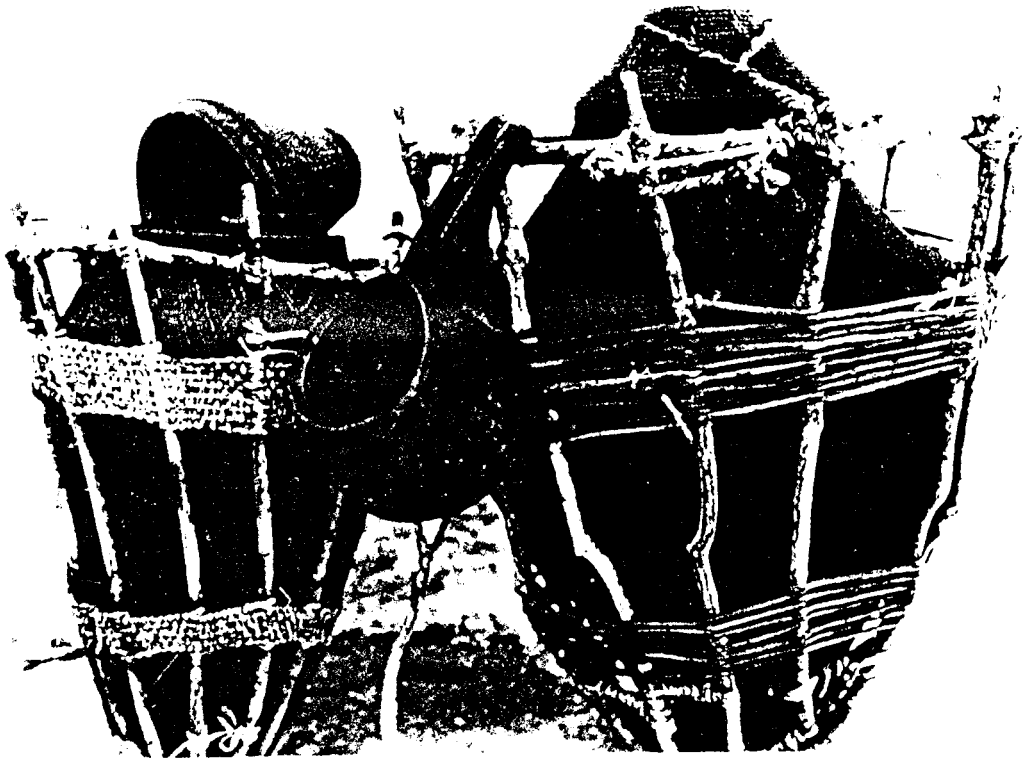


Photo 9 - Aagaan in saab and haan in saab with kalax

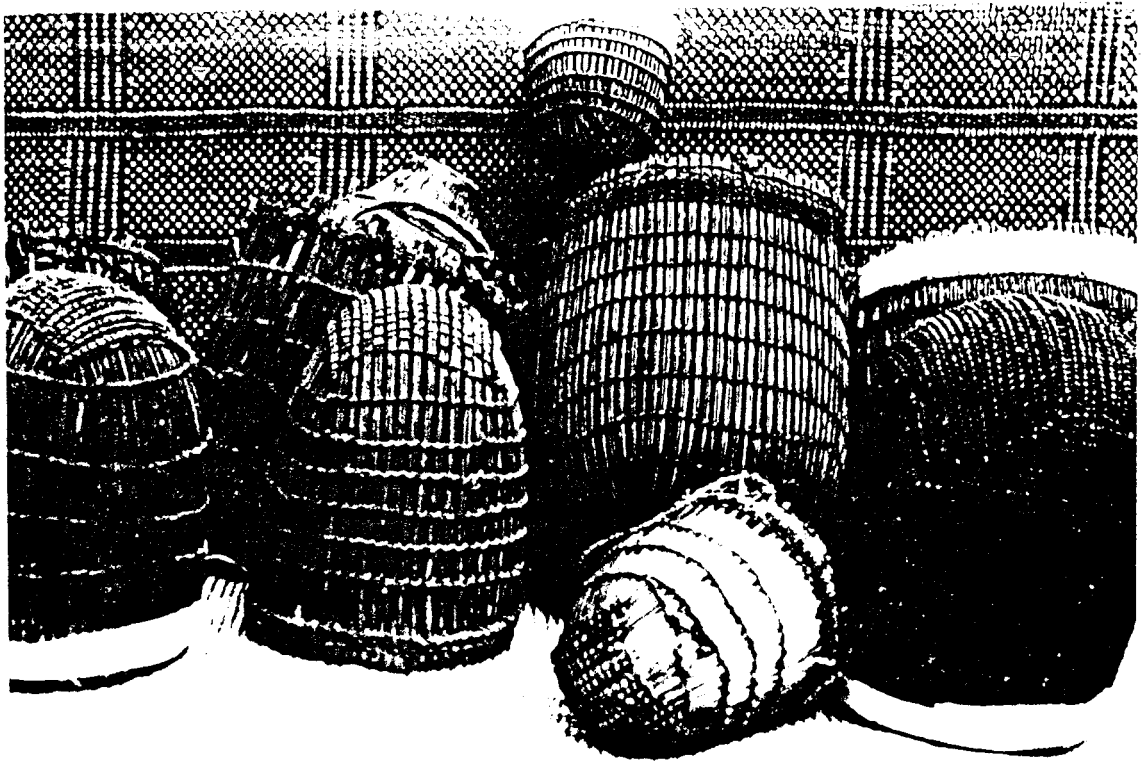


Photo 10 - Various size saab



Photo 11 - Dhiil

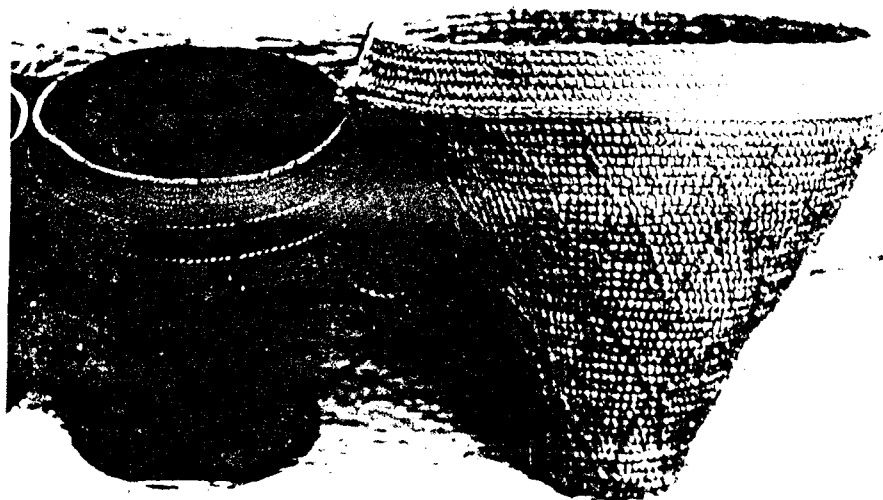


Photo 12 - Dhiil and garog

Photo 13 - An example of  
Abaxad

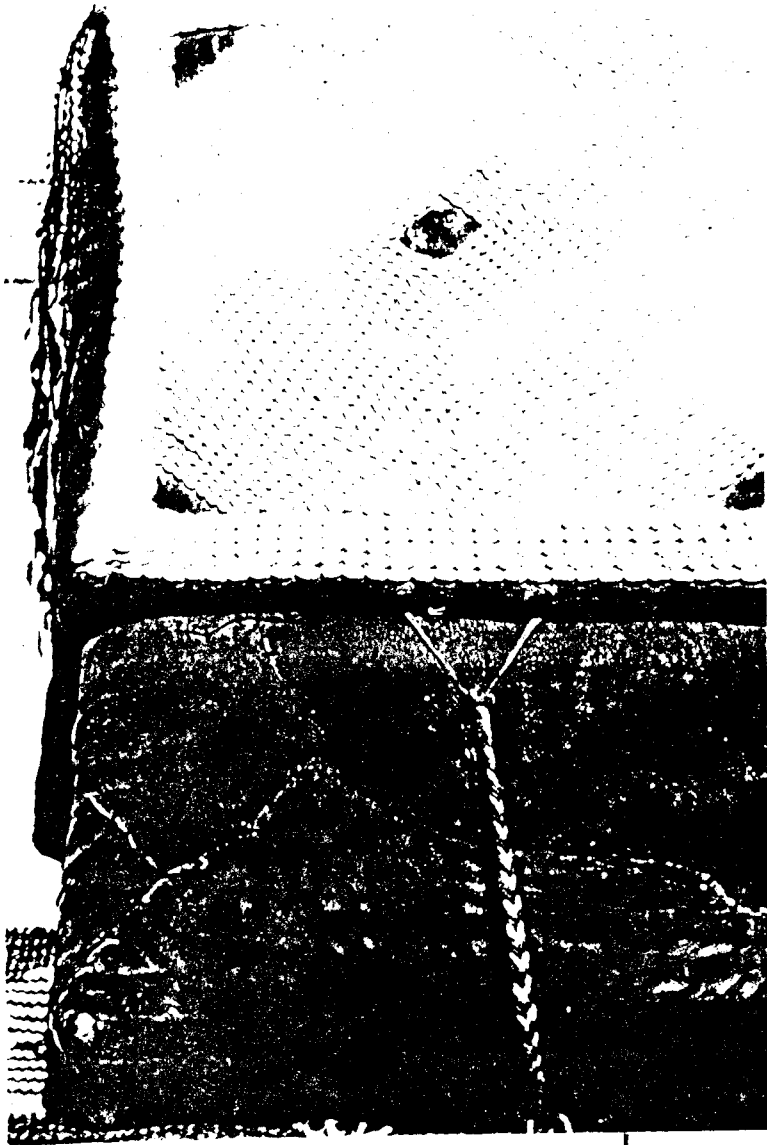


Photo 14 - An example of  
Xeedho

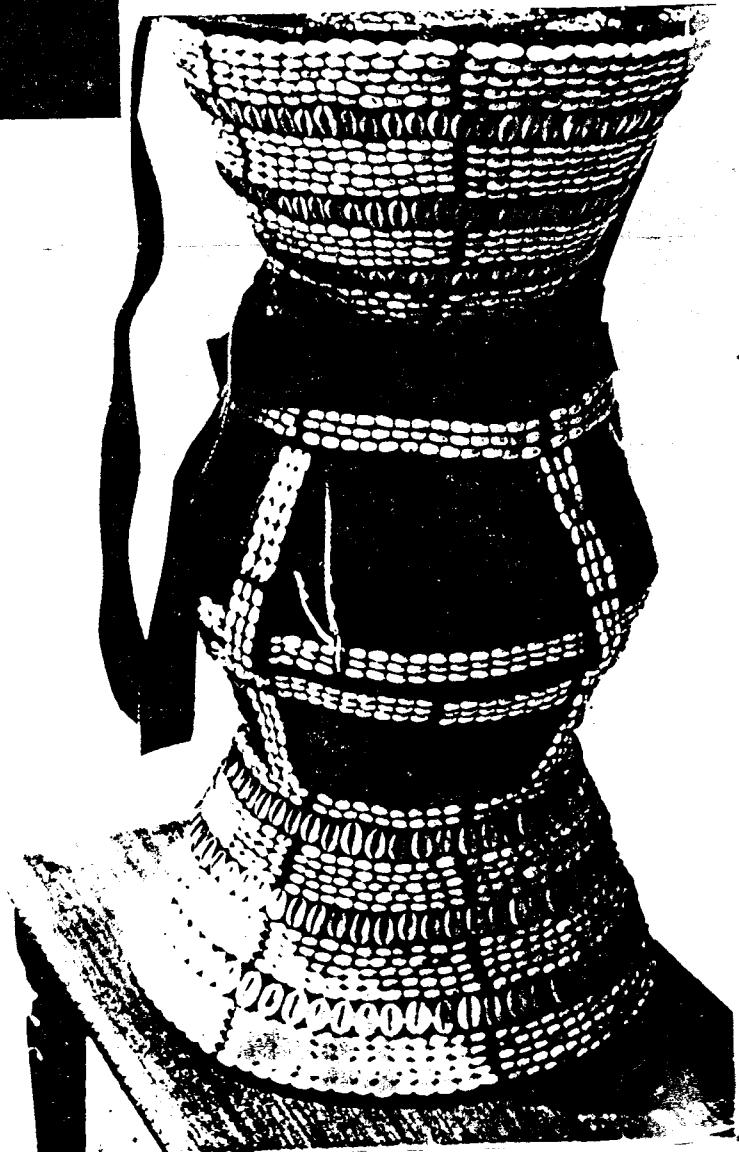




Photo 15 - Simulated Xeedho ceremony