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**EGYPTIAN BASKETRY
FROM THE CZARTORYSKI COLLECTION**

The present article deals with Egyptian basketry specimens from the Czartoryski Foundation in the National Museum of Cracow. Once a part of Prince Władysław Czartoryski's collection of antiquities, they were mostly found and purchased in Egypt by Stefan Marusiński who links most of them directly to contemporary Akhmim identified as ancient Chemmis or Greek Panopolis¹.

Unfortunately, the verification of their provenance or dating is not simple. Marusiński does not specify the exact provenance of the specimens he purchased. The objects from the collection formed probably a part of a tomb equipment, but since nothing is known about the tombs or the necropolis of their origin, there is no other material on which their dating might be based².

Basketry is one of the crafts that began developing as early as in the Late Palaeolithic and Mesolithic³. The oldest known Egyptian basketry specimens come from the Neolithic

¹ All objects came in one transport sent by Marusiński from Luxor 9 July 1884, only the basket with the lid Cat. No. 5 was bought later on – see K. Moczulska, J. Śliwa, *Identyfikacja zabytków egipskich ze Zbiorów Czartoryskich z wykazami zakupów z lat 1884 i 1885*, Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Archeologiczne 14, Studia z Archeologii Śródziemnomorskiej 1, Kraków 1972, pp. 85–104.

² Greco-Roman tombs from El-Salamuni and rock-tombs dated for Late Dyn. VI to Early Dyn. XII from El-Hawawish from the area of Akhmim were already known at the time of the Marusiński. Many objects – part of the funerary equipment also comes from Akhmim, but their exact provenance is unknown, for example two coffins of Peniu, Custodian of Temple of Min lord of Akhmim New Kingdom (now in Hildesheim Museum), coffin of Zeho – XXVI dyn. (now in British Museum) or painted linen inscribed mummy-covering of Seuserstetes – Late Ptolemaic (now in British Museum). Even when one considers only the above-mentioned tombs and their equipment, it is impossible to date them to one period.

³ K. P. Oakley, *Man the Tool-maker*, London 1950, p. 66; J. G. D. Clark, *The Mesolithic Settlement of Northern Europe*, Cambridge 1936; i d., *Prehistoric Europe*, London 1952, Pl. II, c.

settlement of Fayum A⁴ and from Badari⁵. Due to easy access to the material and its low price, basketry was common in everyday life as well as in tomb equipment throughout all periods in the history of Egypt. Unfortunately, natural fibres used in basketry, as all organic material, are extremely perishable, and very few objects from this group have been preserved. This, however, is not the only reason why it is not possible to create their typology⁶. The analysis of shapes, kinds of twining techniques or the fibres shows that similar types are found in the basketry from the Neolithic as well as Old, Middle and New Kingdoms or even the Roman times. Furthermore, 5000-year old techniques and ornaments are still in use today, especially in Southern Egypt, in Nubia⁷. As neither the shape nor the material or technique can be decisive, it is impossible to create a typology which would enable us to establish a dating sequence.

Nevertheless, it is possible to attempt a classification of the preserved basketry. There are several publications dealing with this issue⁸, among which the most exhaustive is the one by Yvon J.-L. Gourlay who focuses on the finds made in Deir el-Medineh⁹. However, as these objects constitute a homogeneous group dating back to one period, i.e. New Kingdom, the Eighteenth–Twentieth Dynasty, Gourlay's classification does not include all the types which occur throughout the history of Egypt. Another author who deals with basketry technology and chronology is Grace M. Crowfoot who distinguishes four methods of wrapping and three chief varieties of the centre of the base¹⁰. The present article will relate to both of these classifications.

Although seemingly unattractive, basketry certainly deserves special attention. It is of particular importance in Poland, where, apart from the small Cracow collection, there is only one other basketry group in the National Museum of Warsaw¹¹. It is only by publishing more data on the research into the field that we can further our knowledge of this particular craft.

⁴ G. Caton-Thompson, E. W. Gardner, *The Desert Fayum*, London 1934, pp. 43, 44, 46, 89.

⁵ G. Brunton, G. Caton-Thompson, *The Badarian Civilisation*, London 1928, pp. 62–63.

⁶ W. Wendrich, *Basketry analysis: beyond recording*, Sesto Congresso Internazionale di Egittologia, Vol. I, Torino 1992, pp. 657–659

⁷ W. S. Blackman, *Fellahin of Upper Egypt*, London 1927, pp. 155–61, 304; F. Sterns, *Some Bisharin Baskets in the Peabody Museum*, Harvard African Studies, Cambridge 1918, pp. 194–196, Pls. 1–3; G. A. Wainwright, *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte*, XXIV, 1924, pp. 108–11.

⁸ A. Lucas, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries*, London 1962, pp. 128–139, 150–153; R. J. Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology*, Vol. IV, Leiden 1956, pp. 172–182; Ch. Singer, E. J. Holmyard, A. R. Hall [ed.], *A History of Technology*, Vol. I, Oxford 1958: a/ G. M. Crowfoot, *Textiles, basketry, and mats*, pp. 413–447, b/ J. Grant, *A note on the materials of ancient textiles and baskets*, pp. 447–451, c/ K. R. Gilbert, *Rope-making*, pp. 451–455.

⁹ Yvon J.-L. Gourlay, *Les sparteries de Deir el-Médineh XVIII^e-XX^e Dynasties*, Publications de L'Institut Français D'Archéologie Orientale, Documents de Fouilles, T. XVII, Cairo 1981.

¹⁰ Crowfoot, *Textiles*, p. 416, Fig. 258.

¹¹ Basketry from National Museum, Warsaw has already been published – see K. Kołodziejczyk, *Plecionki staroegipskie w Muzeum Narodowym w Warszawie*, *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, VII, 1963, pp. 75–106.

THE CATALOGUE

I. Circular basket with conical lid

a) basket

Inv. No. XI - 492 b; provenance - Akhmim; diameter of the rim - 0.215 m, max. diameter of the body - 0.227 m on the 3/4 height, diameter of the base - 0.125 m, height - 0.192 m, diameter of the coil - 8 mm; material - reed in the coil, halfa grass in the sewing strip; technique - wrapping - type 2 (Crowfoot), center of the base - type F (Crowfoot)¹² or type A 5 (Gourlay)¹³, state of preservation - good



Basket made of undyed grass. The core consisting of a bundle of reeds is coiled spirally in the shape type 13¹⁴ - sides regular widen from a small base reaching maximum diameter on the 3/4 of the height, then again narrow to the rim. Work begins at the round, flat bottom with a rosette with radiating stitches at the centre (outer diameter of the rosette 20 mm, inner diameter of the rosette 6 mm).

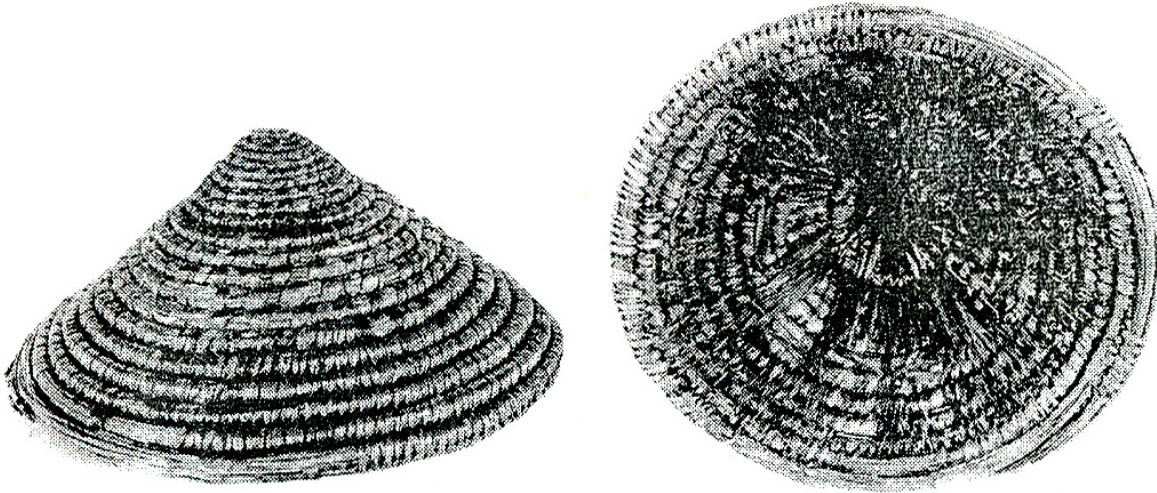
¹² Crowfoot, *Textiles*, p. 416, Fig. 258 F.

¹³ Gourlay, *Les sparteries*, Vol. I, p. 76.

¹⁴ Gourlay, *Les sparteries*, Vol. I, p. 87, Pl. III.

b) conical lid

Inv. No. XI - 492 a; provenance - Akhmim; diameter - 0.20 m, height - 0.08 m, width of the sewing strip 2-8 mm; material - reed in the coil, halfa grass in the sewing strip; technique - wrapping - type 2 (Crowfoot)¹⁵, center of the top - type E (Crowfoot)¹⁶; state of the preservation - good, the rim of the lid has not been preserved; the last bundle has numerous traces of piercing, which suggests fastening at least one more bundle.



The core is a bundle of reeds of varying diameter. The twining begins as a simple snail (type E); the core fastened by a wrapping is then coiled spirally. Wrapping of the outer part is varied and it is closely connected with the wrapping and the ornament inside the lid. The latter can be divided into three parts: the upper part with narrow core bundles (35 mm in diameter), very closely wrapped on the outside with undyed fibres and with sewing strips of red grass. They are placed regularly and closely inside around the fastening of all 9 layers of the coil which form the upper part. The middle part with core bundles (8 mm in diameter) loosely wrapped on the outside with undyed fibres and with sewing strips of the red grass placed in groups inside; inner strips fasten all 6 rows of the coil, outer strips fasten 2-4 rows. The lower part is very closely wrapped on the outside with undyed fibres and with an irregular wrapping inside where the red grass of the wrapping fastens 2-3 rows of the coil at a time.

A lid of a similar form and pattern was found at Deir el-Medineh (No. 10.105) and is dated to New Kingdom - XVIII-XX dyn.¹⁷

This kind of a basket with a lid was used to hold food or sweet fruit. It could also contain an assortment of toiletry articles. The baskets of this type were different from the baskets used in every day life, they were probably made specially as a part of funerary equipment and had a shape dependent on the role which they played in a tomb¹⁸.

¹⁵ Crowfoot, *Textiles*, p.416, Fig. 258 B.

¹⁶ Crowfoot, *Textiles*, p. 416, Fig. 258 E.

¹⁷ Gourlay, *Les sparteries*, Vol. II, pp. 108-109.

¹⁸ B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir El Medineh 1934-1935, Deuxieme partie: la necropole de l'Est*, Le Caire 1937, p. 54.

2. Circular basket with conical lid

a) basket

Inv. No. XI 493 a; provenance - Akhmim; diameter of the rim - 0.214 m, diameter of the base - 0.08 m, height - 0.162 m; material - reed in the coil, halfa grass in the sewing strip; technique - wrapping - type 2 (Crowfoot), center of the base - type E (Crowfoot); state of preservation - very bad, the bottom is heavily destroyed, it is not connected with the rest of the body; the sides are deformed, on one side there is a big hole; the rim is hardly preserved.



The sides of the basket reach max. diameter on the rim (shape type 1 - Gourlay¹⁹). The coil of a flat round base with a snail centre is oversewn with undyed fibres. The sides of the basket were wrapped with strands of very fine halfa grass. Three types were used: red, blue-green and uncoloured. They produced a very interesting decoration pattern which can be divided into four vertical "blocks" separated from each other by vertical, 12 mm wide, uncoloured intervals. The same pattern repeats inside the "blocks": horizontal rows coming in the same order - red, undyed, blue-green and again undyed. In the middle of each row there come two stitches of the colour of the upper row.

¹⁹ Gourlay, *Les sparteries*, Vol. I, p. 85, Pl. I.

b) lid

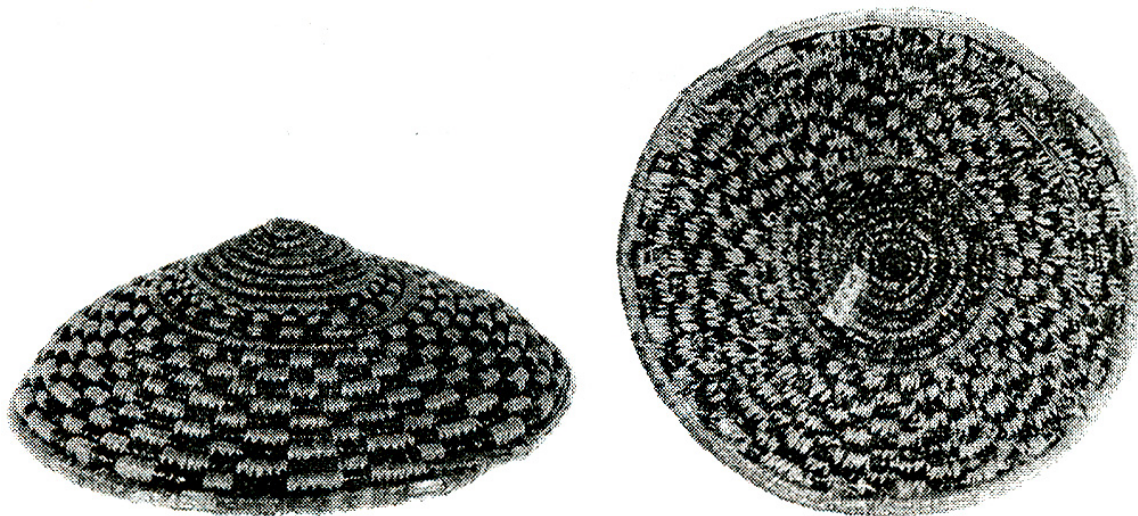
Inv. No. XI 493 b; provenance - Akhmim; diameter - 0.22 m, height - 0.09 m, diameter of the coil - 3 mm; material - reed in the coil, halfa grass in the sewing strip; technique - wrapping - type 2 (Crowfoot), center of the top - type E ? (Crowfoot); state of preservation - the top is very badly preserved.

The lid has an interesting decoration. It can be divided into three parts: the upper part (12 coils) is very closely wrapped with red strands; in the middle part (9 coils) red, blue-green and undyed threads are used which forms an irregular ornament; two coils with an overcast sewing strip of undyed grass are placed between the middle and the lower part; in the lower part the pattern from the sides of the basket is repeated. The lid sits on the rim, there is no support.

The basket could have been used as a part of funeral equipment²⁰. This shape of a basket was very popular in New Kingdom, but this mere fact still does not allow for its definite dating.

3. Lid

Inv. No. XI 520; provenance - Akhmim; diameter - 0.121 m, height - 0.039 m, diameter of the coil - 3 mm; material - reed in the coil, halfa grass in the sewing strip; technique - wrapping - type 2 (Crowfoot), center - type E (Crowfoot); state of preservation - good, only the outer coil is slightly damaged.



It is a conical lid with a rich ornament. Its decoration can be divided into three parts: the upper part is closely oversewn with red halfa grass. In the middle part blue-green and uncoloured sewing strips have been wrapped around two coils which results in a pattern of regular rectangles; a single coil oversewn with red grass has been placed between this part and the next one. The lower part is decorated with geometrical patterns rectangles of green and undyed fibres.

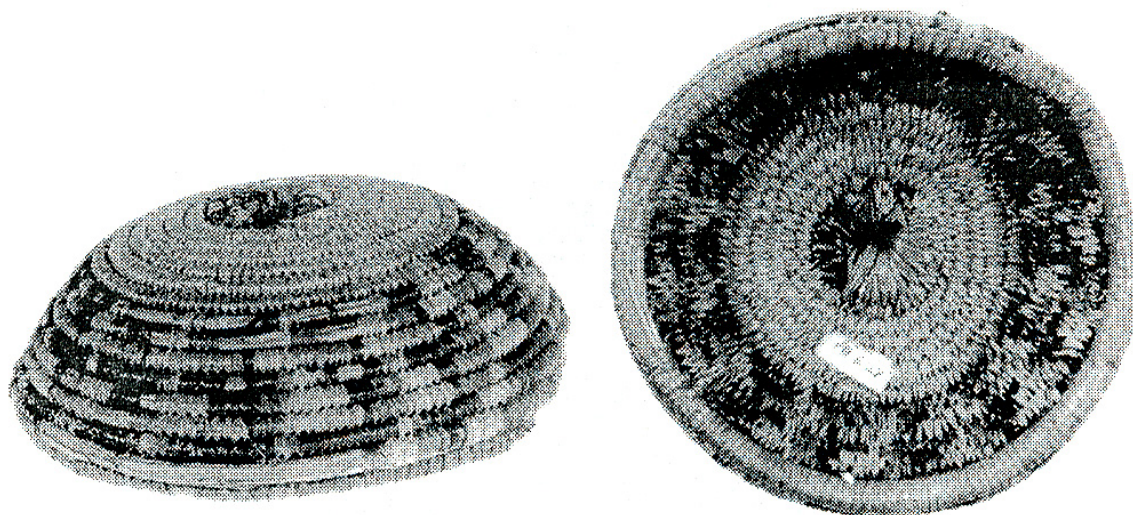
This lid most probably served as a cover of a little basket which was a luxurious container for toiletry articles or jewelry.

²⁰ See Cat. No. 1, note 14.

Decoration with coloured patterns became very popular in New Kingdom and continued in the Roman times. However, a basket with vertical coloured lines is already known from Badari²¹ and many baskets decorated with designs of dyed fibres from the XI²² and XII Dynasty²³ have been also found. Colours used for dyeing include red, blue-green, purple, brown, black and white. The most popular colours used in New Kingdom were red and black, in the Roman times craftsmen used mainly red and white²⁴.

4. Lid

Inv. No. XI 521; provenance - Akhmim; diameter of the rim - 0.091 m, max. diameter - 0.1 m, height - 0.037 m, diameter of the coil - 3 mm; material - reed in the coil, halfa grass in the sewing strip; technique - wrapping - type 2 (Crowfoot), center - type F (Crowfoot) or type A 6 (Gourlay); state of preservation - good.



Round lid, dome-shaped with very rich decoration. The last two coils have smaller than max. diameter. Three types of halfa grass have been used – red, blue-green and undyed. Work starts from the centre with rosette of radiating stitches made partly of red, partly of green grass. Five coils oversewn with uncoloured sewing strip are going from the rosette. There is a singular red row between this and the next part of the decoration. The lower part has a regular geometrical pattern with red, blue-green and uncoloured triangles.

The lid was probably a part of funeral equipment. The most common designs used in the Egyptian basketry until now are geometrical triangles, rectangles, etc²⁵.

²¹ Crowfoot, *Textiles*, p. 418.

²² H. E. Winlock, *Egyptian Expedition 1925-1927*, Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1928, p. 8, Fig. 7.

²³ W. M. F. Petrie, *Objects of Daily Use*, London 1927, pp. 48-49.

²⁴ Gourlay, *Les sparteries*, Vol. I, p. 88; Lucas, *Ancient Egyptian Materials*, pp. 132, 150-153.

²⁵ Lucas, *Ancient Egyptian Materials*, p. 132; Crowfoot, *Textiles*, pp. 422-423.

Decoration and colours used for dyeing fibres are still in use today and cannot be helpful in establishing the date from which the lid comes.

5. Big basket with a conical lid

a) basket

Inv. No. XI 1481 a; provenance unknown²⁶; diameter of the preserved part - ca. 0.54 m, height of the preserved part - 0.21 m, diameter of the side coil - 8 mm, diameter of the bottom coil 11-12 mm; material - reed in the coil, halfa grass in the sewing strip; technique - wrapping - type 2 (Crowfoot), center - type F (Crowfoot); state of preservation - very bad, basket preserved only in its lower part, its

bottom was torn off, only two separate pieces from the upper part exist; the basket was repaired in the 19th century, was put on linen and got metal support.

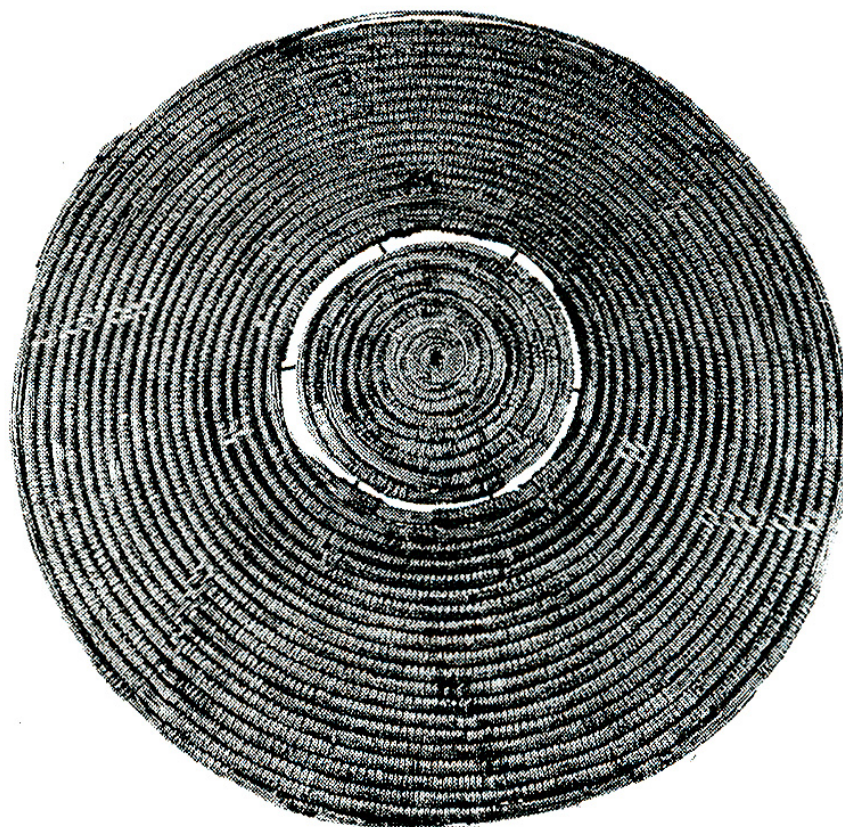


The body is built of a continuous coil with an overcast undyed sewing strip. The wrapping begins at the flat base from a big rosette. Only 15 rows from the bottom have been preserved. The sides are also only partly preserved. Pattern is introduced on the sixth row of the side - there are pairs of parallel sloping lines with regular intervals made of split feathered stitches passing over two coils.

²⁶ This object was written down in an inventory of the collection as a result of recataloguing in 1909. The basket was probably purchased in Egypt by prince Władysław Czartoryski at the time of his travel in 1890 and it was not sent with a larger group of objects but was brought separately. It was badly preserved and was immediately sent to reparation without being catalogued - K. Moczulska personal communication.

b) lid

Inv. No. XI 1481 b; provenance unknown; diameter - ca. 0.5 m, diameter of the coil - 8 mm; material - reed in the coil, halfa grass in the sewing strip; technique - wrapping - type 2 (Crowfoot); state of preservation - the lid is badly damaged, especially in its upper part, the rim is not preserved - it is difficult to ascertain its diameter.



The lid is made of undyed fibres. In its lower part (10 rows) the pattern of the basket is repeated. The middle part (4 coils) has no ornament. The upper part has a pattern made of stiches passing over two coils, but it is very difficult to ascertain its course.

Similar baskets have been found in Deir el-Medineh²⁷; they were used for carrying heavy objects. This kind of a basket is still used to store food or to carry heavy objects.

6. Net

Inv. No. XI 497; provenance - Akhmim; the size of the net is difficult to ascertain because of the state of its preservation; handle - diameter 4 mm, preserved length - 48 cm; material - flax; technique - flat knots (Gourlay)²⁸ with intersected cords; state of preservation - the net is heavily destroyed, but the knots and their arrangement are clear; the net cannot be stretched out.

²⁷ Bruyère, *Rapport*, p. 55.

²⁸ Gourlay, *Les sparteries*, Vol. I, p. 24, Fig. 31, but knot modified - issued cords intersect additionally.

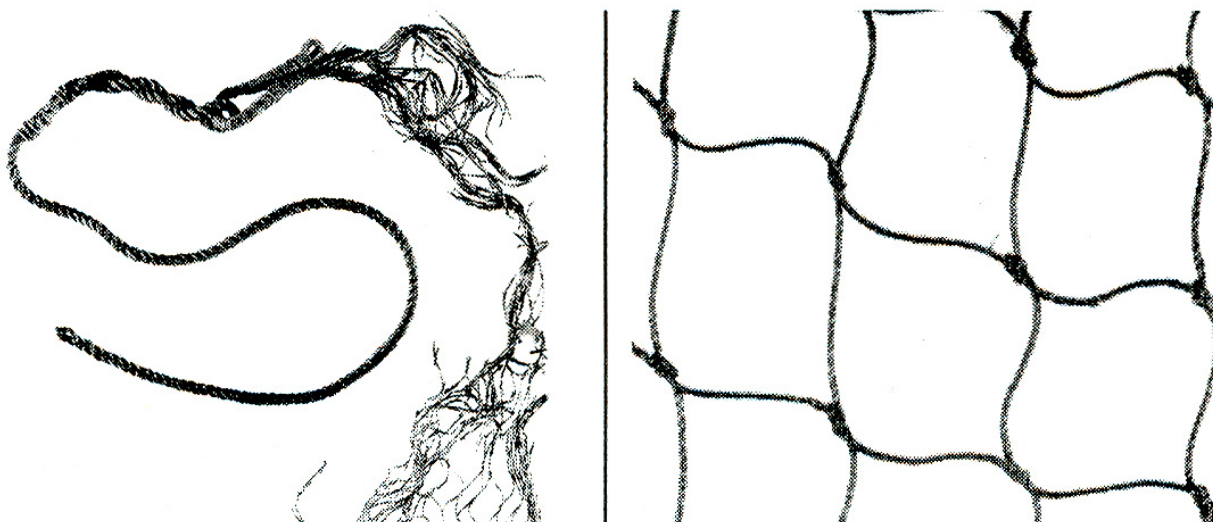


The net is made of fine flat knots. The flax rope has been made with very high precision (diameter ca. 0,6 mm). The handle is made of a separate piece of rope which forms a noose. The outer strands constitute a bundle which is formed into a closely plaited circle; the tailpiece of the net is joint with the noose of the handle.

The net was used for fishing²⁹ or for bird-catching³⁰, which is often shown on paintings and reliefs in tombs.

²⁹ Fishing with a dragnet is illustrated on a model found in the Tomb of Mehenket-ure, dated for Middle Kingdom, see Waley-el-dine Sameh, *Daily Life in Ancient Egypt*, Munich 1964, p. 25.

³⁰ Duck-catching is shown on the relief in tomb of Ptah-hotep from Sakkara dated for 5 Dynasty; also on the painting from Tomb No. 52 of Nakht from Sheikh Abdel Gurna dated for 18 Dynasty, see Waley-el-dine Sameh, *Daily Life*, p. 21.

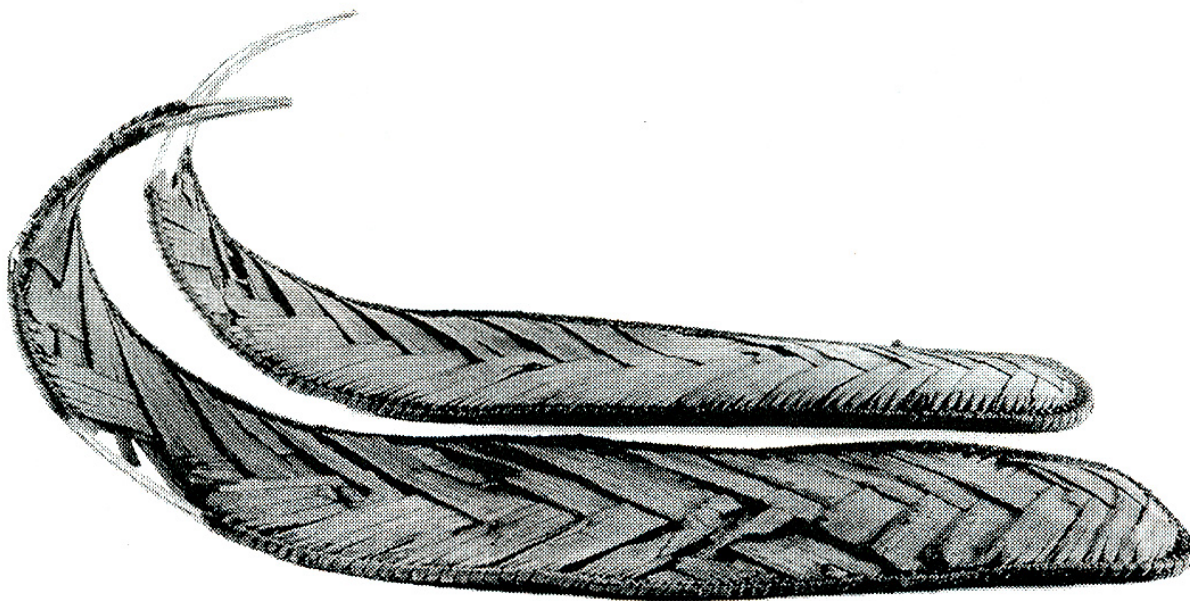


Similar nets with knots like modern examples have been found by Petrie³¹.

7. Sandals with upturned toes

a) sandal from the right leg

Inv. No. XI - 494 a; provenance - Akhmim; length - 32,5 cm, width max. - 8,6 cm, width of the leaves on the top of the sole - 1.5-1.9 cm, width of the leaves on the bottom of the sole - 1 cm, thickness - 0.5 cm around and - 1 cm close to heels; material - palm leaves, grass; technique - bottom of the sole - plain weave, single reeds, type 2 of the matting work (Crowfoot)³², top of the sole - plain in herring-bone pattern and in finishing of the edges type 2 of the coiled work (Crowfoot); state of preservation - good, only the toes in the upper part have not been preserved.



³¹ W. M. F. Petrie, *Kahun, Gurob and Hawara*, London 1890, p. 28; id., *Tools and Weapons*, London 1917, p. 53.

³² Crowfoot, *Textiles*, p. 417, Fig. 260 E.

b) sandal from the left leg

Inv. No. XI - 494 b; provenance - Akhmim; length - 33.5 cm, width max. - 9.3 cm, width close to the heel - 7.9 cm, width of the leaves on the top of the sole - 1.4-2.2 cm, width of the leaves on the bottom of the sole - 1.4-1.7 cm, thickness - 0.5 cm around and - 1 cm close to heels; material - palm leaves, halfa grass; technique - sole - plain weave, single reeds, type 2 of the matting work (Crowfoot)³³, top of the sole - plain in herring-bone pattern and in finishing of the edges type 2 of the coiled work (Crowfoot); state of preservation - good, only the upper part of the toe has not been preserved, on the left side a small part of the sole is missing.



Both sandals have been made very carefully. Their edges are finished with double rows and near the toes there is a singular row of grass. A fragment of the loop passing over the instep is preserved in the holes. The bottom of the sole is made by plain weave, the top of the sole is plain with a herring-bone pattern. The right sandal is made more carefully than the left one.

Sandals with upturned toes seem to be an innovation of the Ramesside Period, one of the earliest pairs being from the toilet box of Tutu, wife of Any³⁴. A model of gold of the same design from a funerary deposit of Sheshank II of XXII dynasty was recovered from tomb III at Tanis³⁵. Sandals from the Ägyptisches Museum in Berlin have a

³³ Crowfoot, *Textiles*, p. 417, Fig. 260 E.

³⁴ H. Baker, *Furniture in the Ancient World, Origins and Evolution, 3100-475 B.C.*, London 1966.

³⁵ *Tanis. L'or des pharaons*, Paris 1987, pp. 220-221, Pl. 70.

similar form and plaining of the bottom of the sole (No. 6931). They are dated back to the Late New Kingdom but their provenance is unknown³⁶.

8. Marking cord

Inv. No. XI - 515; provenance - Akhmim; length of the stick - 28.1 cm, max. diameter of the stick - 2.1 cm, diameter of the cord - 0.5 cm; material - cord - flax, stick - wood; technique - twisting the yarns, then forming the yarns into strands, than strands into a cord; state of preservation - good.

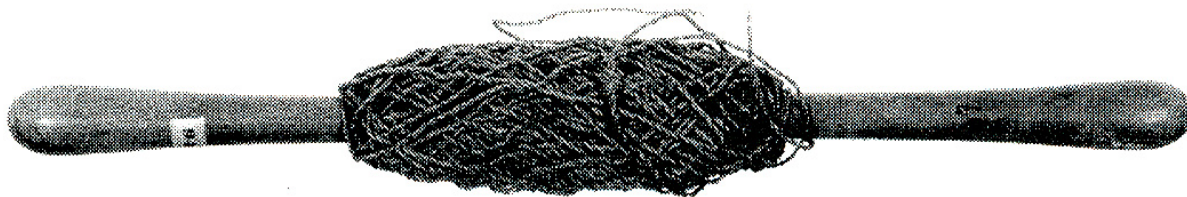


The implement consists of two parts: a stick and a cord. The wooden stick is formed to a shape narrower in the middle and wider on the ends. The cord is twisted in the middle of the stock.

Similar tools were used for marking out plots of ground or building sites. There is a similar cord in the Cairo Museum, but its provenance and date is uncertain³⁷.

9. Marking cord

Inv. No. XI - 947; provenance - unknown³⁸; length of the stick - 31.6 cm, max. diameter of the stick - 2 cm, min. diameter of the stick - 1.4 cm, diameter of the cord - 0.5 cm; material - cord - flax, stick - wood; technique - twisting the yarns, then forming the yarns into strands, than strands into cord; state of preservation - good.



The object is similar to the above one, Cat. No. 8.

³⁶ Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: *Egypt's Golden Age: The Art of Living in the New Kingdom, 1558-1085 B.C., Catalogue of the Exhibition*, Boston (Mass.) 1982, pp. 133-139.

³⁷ Waley-el-dine Sameh, *Daily Life*, p. 50.

³⁸ This marking cord was brought by Prince Władysław Czartoryski from his travel to Egypt in 1890.