

" TRADITIONAL AFRICAN GRAPHIC DESIGN IN KENYA
(Form Content Appreciation and Communication) "

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENT FOR A MASTER'S DEGREE
IN DESIGN

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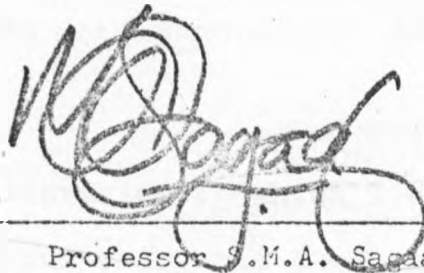
DECLARATION

I Simmaina, do hereby
declare that

This thesis is my original work and has
not been presented for a degree in any
other University.

DECLARATION OF THE SUPERVISORS

This thesis has been submitted
for examination with our approval
as University Supervisors.



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ABSTRACT

This thesis constitutes a study of an important aspect of some traditional communities in Kenya. It tries to find out how far their daily lives were affected by traditional art forms such as graphic design. For example, in their daily living, they communicated through various ways and signs and symbols must have been used. This study was motivated by the general appreciation of traditional influences in relation to some aspects of art forms, that is - communication through words, signs, symbols and graphic design. Traditionally different art forms such as graphic design, have been manifested in numerous ways according to different tribal life styles and customs. Various forms of expression have been demonstrated in the forms of, e.g. masks, decorative surfaces, symbols both geometrical and representative, pattern designs, body markings, monuments, murals, figure paintings, carvings, sculptural forms, etc.

It has been the intention of this study to try and examine the lifestyles and customs of various ethnic groups in Kenya in respect of the range of artistic expression and meaning which

existed or still exist both traditionally and as now manifested in the present era of rapid change. Such an examination can be carried out according to the following specific environmental areas of influence; (a) physical, (b) climatic, (c) occupational and (d) social and cultural. This study has tried to link the above with the following selected main groups: (a) Hamitic, (b) Nilotic, (c) Nilo-Hamites, (d) Bantu-speaking and (e) Coastal Arab influence-Swahili.

However, it has been noted that some tribal communities ought to be studied in respect of particular groups, for example, (a) Rendille, Somali-Hamitic; (b) Luo-Nilotic, (c) Kalenjin, Maasai-Nilo Hamites; (d) Kamba, Embu, Miji-Kenda, Kikuyu, Meru, Luhya-Bantu; (e) Swahili, Bajun-Coastal Coastal Arab influence.

This study has considered some design areas for specific examination. The following have been considered to be important:- (a) Form: This is the overall composition and usual element which compound to make the whole design or art form. (b) Expression: The character and personality of images. (c) Content/Meaning: The nature of content and human response in terms of meaning and beliefs arising out of the art form. (d) Material and

Techniques: This is the analysis of local materials and their influence upon different art forms and the techniques used in producing different art forms; (e) Context: The above design areas are studied in the following main contexts:

ONE: mystic, religious and secular - in essentially traditional term.

TWO: The above areas are manifested in contemporary examples - arising out of the influence of change.

However, it is necessary to look into detail some of these contextual elements of traditional art forms.

There are many research possibilities. These have been mentioned. Also some conclusions have been arrived at, and some recommendations have been made.

For a study of this nature, it was necessary to visit tribal areas to examine and experience visual forms and to get sensitised in respect of expression and meaning, through discussion with individuals and groups. Also to collect artifacts as examples for study and illustration later, as well as use for teaching aids, sketching and photography.

It is noted however, that the traditional societies of Kenya have to a very great extent abandoned their traditional life styles, art forms, dances, dresses, etc., and that any remaining authentic examples are disappearing fast. This necessitated looking for other reliable sources of knowledge. It was therefore necessary, to visit museums, libraries, archives etc., for background information, comparative studies, philosophies, basic information and illustrations.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Experiences

The ability of man to invent systems of symbolic communication (language) sets him apart from all other biological species whose communication has remained at the level of signals determined by their stage of biological development. Symbolic communication enables man to make abstract theories and hypotheses. It also gives him power to refine his memory mechanism through repetitive signs, symbols and gestures (environmental and morphological), sound systems and experiences. These provide a basis for oral tradition. Symbolic awareness seems to have been a prelude to the growth of individual and collective consciousness.

On one level, a culture can be seen as a system of values, ethos, norms and rules which regulate behaviour in a society.

On yet another level, culture can be considered as an organizing principle which enables the members of a society to tackle rationally or logically the problems of their environment¹

¹"Cultural Policy in Kenya," A Paper at I.A.S. pp.54-59.

To Make Communication Possible

Explanations about the nature of man and myths about his origin are found in all cultures, for example Adam and Eve and the disobedience in the Garden of Eden which led to their banishment and condemnation to a life of struggle for a survival on earth.

Work was a punishment for this original sin. This idea of man's original existence in a paradise is reflected in the myths about the origins of Agikuyu, Akamba, Luo, Maasai and other peoples of Kenya. Modern science and technology strain to recover the omnipotence and omniscience of a golden age, the idea of which underlay philosophical and theological thinking and dominated man's history in all cultures until the advent of modern technology.

The latter offered redemption from "disagreeable and unwelcome labour." Palaeoanthropology fostered this idea more than any other social science. Franklin and Carlyle were the first writers to speak of man as basically a tool making or tool-using animal. Bergson,² a French philosopher with a penetrating insight into organic

²Ibid., pp.60-66.

evolution also referred to this aspect. Kenya's folklore is not lacking in references to materialistic considerations and technological acquisition.³

Leakey⁴ and others - emphasize the effects of the discovery of fire on social and psychological evolution home faber as the basic human definition leaves a lot to be desired, however, since studies by Goodall⁵ on the behaviour of other primates showed that man is not the only primate who uses tools. Moreover, before using tools, man must have already developed powers of self-organization, rational direction, moral control, learning, control of excretory behaviour, the making of standard gestures and sounds which made personal communication possible and gradually formed a basis for the evolution of human culture. Besides, being a tool user, man is also,

"utensil-shopping, machine-fabricating, environment-prospecting, technologically ingenious animal," he is, " "dream haunted, ritual enacting, symbol-creating, speech-maker, institution-conserving, myth-maker, god-seeking animal, hero-worshipper, love-making, language-elaborator."⁶

These qualities had to be there before technology could evolve.

Technology developed in order to elaborate on

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Mumford, 1973.

those qualities, basic in human nature. It involved specialization (division of labour), standardization (to make communication possible), and repetitive patterns of behaviour that are very well reflected in human language. But until the advent of modern technology cultural values always had control of technological advancement. This control has been lost. It is now technology which controls culture, and has more or less done so since industrial revolution. New inventions, and ideas were thought to hold the key to the future of man. Science and technology would relieve man from the burden of work and establish his mastery over nature.

To some extent this dream has come true. Space and time are no longer barriers to communication on this planet. Science and medicine have accomplished miracles. Man has even landed on the moon.⁷

Human Resources

Kenya is well known for the discovery of pre-historic artifacts on human remains. The studies of

⁷Cultural Policy, pp.67-74.

Leakey,⁸ Soma,⁹ Cole,¹⁰ and other experts have established archaeological stages corresponding to the various climatic eras and Kenya's variety of altitudes and climate made it ideal for the preservation of fossil materials.

The old stone age (2.6 million to 60,000 years ago) is represented in several sites in northern Kenya, where the oldest human remains were found (in Lothagam, west of Lake Turkana). These remains are believed to belong to the pre-tool making period, since no tools are associated with them. The oldest tools are associated with Kobi Hora, north of Lake Turkana. The crudely fashioned choppers, chopping tools and flakes of black lava, have been dated back 2.6 million years. Sites of the same period are found in the Lake Victoria, Highland and Rift Valley regions.

Olorgesailie and Kariandusi have been excavated and honoured as national shrines and open

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

air museums.

The middle stone age (50,000 to 9,000 years B.C.) witnessed the development of the bow and arrow. Typically pottery, stone and bone technology include obsidian blades, burins, side scrappers, sinew frayers, bone harpoons and pottery. The middle stone age sites have been located only in the Lake Victoria, Rift Valley and Highland regions. Late stone age remains (10,000 to 3,000 years B.C.) have been found in Naivasha - Nakuru and the surrounding foothills. The significant development during this period is the presence of tall people with cushitic head and nasal features. The Neolithic sites (1,000 B.C. to 1,000 A.D) are also located in the Rift Valley and the Western Highlands. The significant development was the domestication of plants and animals; wooden vessels, seed beds, bones of domesticated cattle, grinding stones and pestles, polished stone axes, cremation burials are also associated with the period. During the Iron age (A.D. 200), many parts of Kenya were probably settled. Remains include iron slag, bellows, pottery, beads, and skeleton of cattle, sheep and goats. According to some archaeologists, agriculture and iron-making were introduced by Bantu-speaking people.¹¹

¹¹Ibid., p.98.

The coastal region has been in contact with Middle Eastern and Indian Ocean communities for many centuries. Islam arrived about three centuries after the birth of Mohammed. Contacts with East and West gradually produced the type represented by the present Swahili inhabitants. Arabs and western Asians brought goods from China and Persia. They were succeeded by Europeans - mainly Portuguese at first. Architectural monuments along the coast reflect African influences on the invaders and vice versa, for example the Gedi and Fort Jesus monuments. Some Eurocentric archaeologists have tried to belittle the African contribution, but evidence is increasingly forthcoming to show the pre-dominance of African motives and influences in many of these monuments.

The Family Type

The African people are very much family conscious. The extended family includes people of various generations and ages, and is very common in Africa. The older generation pass on their cultural heritage and wisdom to the younger group.

Polygamy is common in all the cultures. Its biological and social aspects affect fertility control, and it may also be related to ranking in the social organisation and position in the extended

family. Monogamy is also common in all cultural groups, however, and it is an expression of fundamental individual rights that were highly treasured in all Kenyan cultures.¹²

All cultural groups in Kenya cope with the challenges of their environment. This is ecological adaptation. Most depend on agriculture, some are nomads or depend on pastoral occupations. Rainfall is uncertain in many parts of Kenya, and has sometimes tempted farmers to rely too exclusively on livestock, but a more varied type of agriculture is probably the best guarantee against climatic and other hazards. Since independence, agriculture has, by and large, adapted this more varied pattern. Some groups have modernized quite well. Very few people now hunt for a living. Fishing is largely confined to lake and coastal areas.

All tribal communities have age sets. These sets are marked by initiation. This is when the neophyte is given new responsibilities and privileges that are considered crucial to the groups existence.

There is also alot of linguistic diffusion.

¹²Ibid.

This follows from interchanges of ideas, technology, cultural values and linguistic features best typified by the Kiswahili in pre-colonial Kenya and is now being reinforced by the mass media and a common education system.¹³

Folk socialization is brought about in many ways; including the patterns of birth rates, naming systems, differential treatment of male and female infants at birth, folklore and mythology, nutritional techniques, initiation rites and so on. These common heritages of pre-colonial societies provide a very strong basis for cultural policy, and behaviour patterns in all groups.

Gerontocracy, or the rule by elders has been common throughout Kenya. These elders in pre-colonial times had many roles (custodians of folk wisdom, judges of truth, guardians of religious values and so on), contributed greatly to their communities, and were consequently revered.

These and other behaviour patterns form part of a common heritage which effectively counteract the linguistic divisions mentioned somewhere else in this study. In other words, language differences

¹³ Ibid., p.118.

do not imply fundamental cultural dissimilarities. Pre-colonial Kenya contained some thirty-six different ethnic groups.

Without going into a detailed description it can however, be said that the basic social organization has been for all practical purposes the same.

What is held in common is more important than the differences that have been exploited by certain scholars, politicians and others and represent a source of richness which policy-makers (and the makers of cultural policy in particular) must continue to foster and develop.¹⁴

The word primitive in this study refers to those societies which are small in scale with regard to numbers, territory, and range of social contacts, and which have by comparison with more advanced societies a simple technology and economy and little specialization of social functions.

The word symbol is also used in this study and has the following meaning:

¹⁴Ibid. p.122.

Just about anything may be a symbol - a place, a gesture, a tree, a container, a mask, coloured paints, feathers, sticks, stones, water, buildings, musical instruments, pieces of cloth, animals, marks on the ground, etc. It should not be expected for the symbols to be immediately apparent to the observer, because what may be thought is, or should be, important may be quite insignificant, whereas what may not even be noticed may be a key to the understanding of the situation.

Symbols are never simple. Seldom will their 'meaning' be limited to one message. They are multivocal, i.e. have a whole range of meanings. They are storehouses of traditional lore, and they transmit messages to the participants in the ritual ceremony: but one may not receive these messages because one does not know the code: one must crack the cultural code before one can understand the messages and meanings of the symbols. And not only have they meaning in the sense that they say things but also in that they do things.

Not only are symbols storehouses of meaning but they are powerhouses of mystical energy. Perhaps because of their association with gods or ancestors they are believed to be, in ritual contexts, charged with mystical energy. They do certain things: they

may affirm certain values or may create, or re-create, ties of loyalty between the participants, or may remind them of obligations to gods and/or ancestors.

This study notes that any social situation needs to be understood in terms of the relationships existing between the persons concerned: ritual performances are social occasions, and it is necessary that people observe who does what, and why he does it rather than some other person, etc.

The study of the signs used in communication, and of the rules operating upon them and upon their users, forms the core of the study of communication. For example a pack of playing cards represents a set of signs, and the rules of the game to ensure communication and patterned behaviour among the players - or nowadays, every motorist is given a book of rules of the roads called the Highway Code, and adherence to these signs and rules is supposed to produce concerted patterned behaviour on roads.

There are endless examples of such simple sign systems. A society has a structure, definite sets of relationships between individuals, which is not formless and haphazard but organized. Hierarchies may exist and be recognized, in a family, a business, an institution, a factory, or an army-functional relationships which decide to a great extent the

patterned flow of communication. If the gulf of communication fails, the organization breaks down. In the traditional Africana aids for communication have meaning depending upon the experience. Even at our present living, we may note that it is the most infrequent words, phrases, gestures, and other signs, which arrest our attention; it is these that give strength to the links. The others can be predicted readily.

The great majority of our everyday surroundings, the sights and sounds of home and streets, we largely ignore from familiarity. This fact is also observed in the Kenya African traditional symbolism. The Western concept of graphic communication has prevailed in all the continent of Africa for obvious reasons. As a matter of fact, it has become a cliché' to refer to man as "the communication animal" - of all his functions, that of building up systems of communication of infinite variety and purpose is one of the most characteristic. Of all living creatures, he has the complex and adaptable systems of language. He is the most widely observant of his physical environment and the most responsive in his adjustment to it. He has organized ethical, political, and economic systems of varied kinds; has the greatest subtlety of expressing his feelings and emotions, sympathy,

awe, humour, hate - all the thousand facets of his personality. He is self-conscious and responsible; he has evolved spiritual aesthetic and moral sensibilities.

A man is not an isolated being in a void; he is essentially integrated into society. The various aspects of man's behaviour - his means of livelihood, his language and all forms of self-expression, his systems of economics and law, his religious ritual, all of which involve him in acts of communication - are not discrete and independent but are inherently related, as sociologists have continually stressed from the time of Adam Smith. *which is?*

The study of Traditional African art forms should be done with the mentioned points in mind. For example the tradition communities have well structured societies. They have definite sets of relationships between individuals, and groups of people. They are well organized in their life styles.

They appreciate different art forms and take pride in various artistic practices. Some of the reasons that make them appreciate different art forms have already been mentioned in this study. Among these reasons, communication is one of the major ones.

The Problem and Its Setting

Not much appreciation has been given to the traditional artifacts. However, numerous arguments have been presented to highlight the differences between various traditional communities in terms of language, values, art etc. This has tended to obscure many areas of commonness, some aspect of art forms included. It is the authors intention to, one, present the traditional artifacts as skills which merit appreciation, and two, to bring forward the many aspects of art forms that are common to many traditional communities.

There are many art forms which seem to be based on common usage, value and make. Whereas it is dangerous to draw a blanket observation on this aspect, it is observed that various types of art forms seem to be found in nearly all Kenyan traditional societies. It is the authors observation these aspects of commonness need further study. Such a study would highlight the common heritage of the traditional societies of Kenya.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine how the traditional societies used traditional art forms in communication. Such art forms included

signs, symbols, gestures, sculptures etc.

2. To examine the making of these artistic objects, who used them, the skill and technique of production, the material used etc.
3. To establish the influence of these art forms on the lives of the traditional societies.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this study is based on a traditional setting. Various forms of expression are manifested in different styles of artifacts. Artistic expression depends upon such things as material, environment, tribal ways of life and the skill of doing things. The use of signs, symbols, gestures etc., was a part of daily communication.

Scope of The Study

The scope of study of this thesis is based in the Republic of Kenya. The people who are the object of study in this thesis are the Hamitic, Nilotic, Nilo-Hamites, Bantu and Coastal Arab influence - Swahili. Specific tribal communities are studied in respect of particular groups. A case in point is the Maasai for Nilo-Hamites.

This study considered some particular aspects to be relevant to its aims and objectives. These aspects are form, content/meaning, material and contextual meaning. They are based on traditional setting and are related to specific tribal communities for instance the Luo, Maasai, Embu, etc.

Study Area

For the purpose of going into relevant details and comparisons, some areas have been given more emphasis. These are, some parts of North-Eastern Province, area around Lake Victoria, area around Mt. Kenya and the Coastal strip. The other reason is because some of the people who are the object of this study are to be found in some of these areas.

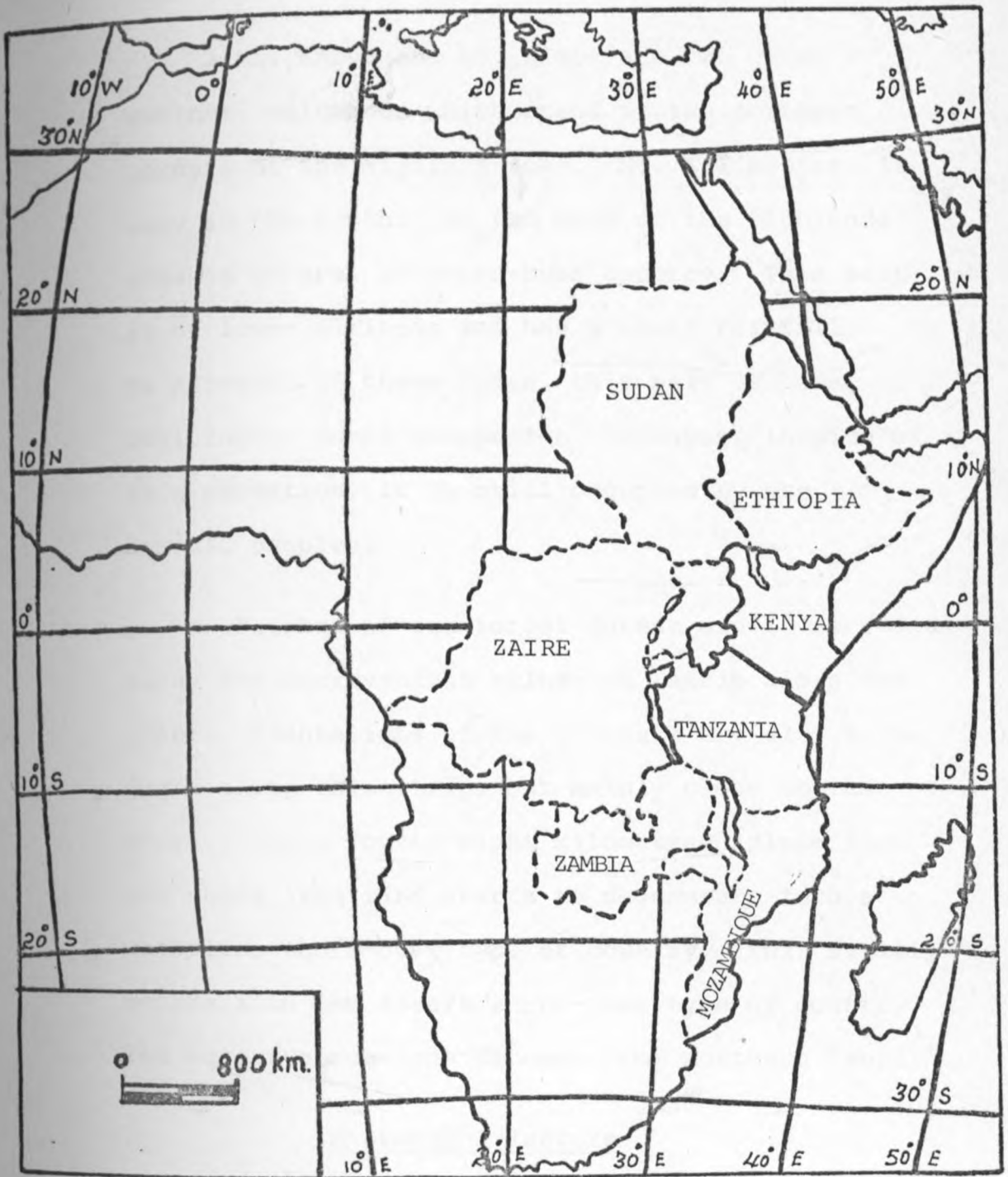
CHAPTER TWO

THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA

Location

The Republic of Kenya lies roughly between longitude 34° and 41° east. Running through Kenya, from North to South is the great Rift Valley. This feature gives Kenya a great natural beauty. Although the total area of Kenya is about 5.7 million hectares, about two thirds of the land is not arable. Conditions in this area are such that only nomadic pastoral tribes manage to eke out a living. Much of the land which is in the highland zone is over 1.8 thousand metres above the sea level and in some places rises to over 2.7 thousand metres. The highlands are found in the south-western quarter of the country. The highlands are between the two lakes, i.e. Victoria Nyanza and Turkana. It also extends eastwards beyond the country's highest mountain, Mt. Kenya - from which the country derives her name.

These highlands are mainly parkland. There are also plenty of rivers and some areas of evergreen forest. The rainfall in the highlands is between 101.6 cm. and 177.8 cm. a year.



Map 1 Location of Kenya on the African continent and position on Eastern Africa.

Mt. Kenya and Mt. Elgon are two great extinct volcanoes which stand at the northern corners of the highland zone. Mt. Kilimanjaro is away in the south. To the east of the highlands zone is an area of thorn-bush country. This belt is of lower altitude and has a lower rainfall. As a result of these facts, this belt is less inviting to human occupation. However, inspite of this condition, it is still occupied by the nomadic peoples.

Patches of equatorial forest are to be found along the fourty-eight kilometre strip along the coast. Plantations of the coconuts are also to be found along this strip, but mainly close to the shore. About forty-eight kilometres inland from the shore, the land starts to degenerate into a waterless thorn-bush type of country. This finally merges into the desert shrub-zone type of country. The desert shrub-zone extends from northern Kenya.¹

Historical Factors

Looking at the history of East Africa, this study notes three dominant factors. The first is

¹Joy Adamson, The People of Kenya, Chapter 1.

that it was isolated historically. This factor was mainly due to the lack of outlet at the northern part of the Red Sea. It was only after the construction of the Suez Canal that this particular type of isolation ceased. Before that ancient and modern people from the civilized Europe were kept away, till the nineteenth century. However, it is known that there has been much traffic visiting the coast from Arabia, India, China and Indonesia for many centuries before the advent of the Europeans. However, only the Arabs succeeded to penetrate the interior in search of slaves and ivory. The traders confined their activities to trading in various items with the coastal towns which were flourishing. The second factor was the presence of hostile tribes especially the Maasai. They helped in keeping most foreigners at the coast. Later, however, the Arabs and Swahili started to penetrate into the interior, but they did this through the route along south of Mt. Kilimanjaro, and then they would turn northwards and travel through the Rift Valley. The third factor is the great depression known as the Rift Valley. In many areas it is associated with difficult and mountaineous situations. This great rift acted as a great barrier that helped to separate many indigenous communities. Even when building the

Uganda railway, which is a fairly recent times in terms of history, the Rift Valley, particularly at Kikuyu escarpment proved a difficult task. It is also noted that the journey from the coast towards inland was through some areas that had little water and were also not inhabited. This condition constituted another factor.

The indigenous people concentrated their populations where they could easily get most of their basic and important commodities of life. For example, it is noted that, some areas reflect the practice of peasant agriculture. Elsewhere sheep, camels, cattle, donkeys and goats formed part of the cherished possessions, as was the case with the nomadic pastoral tribes. There is evidence that crops such as beans, maize, peas, eleusine, tobacco, sweet potatoes, millet, pumpkins, and bananas were grown by the indigenous people. Also at the coast, such crops as coconuts and sugar seem to have been cultivated since the first century A.D., and that is long before the advent of the Europeans.²

Ethnic Groups

It is not conveniently easy to group the

²Ibid.

different indigenous people of Kenya into clear cut and simple tribal communities. In fact it could be said that it is difficult to define what constitutes a tribe. Is it by language? Or is it by blood? Is it because of a common ancestor? etc. It is assumed in this study that a convenient way of looking at a tribe, is to base it on a number of factors. One factor is by material condition of a tribe. The other is the language. Language is important in that, it is a vehicle for both communication and co-operation in the day to day activities of any given tribe. It is useful to note that many tribes in Kenya are heterogeneous, that is to say that they have swallowed a number of other unrelated groups, in the course of their existence. For example, the Luo have assimilated many groups from the neighbouring Bantu over the years. A case in point is the Abasuba, and as such it is convenient to say that the Luo, can be defined only by language and culture and not by blood.³

Different art forms which are identified with different tribes may also help in defining what

³ Andrew Fedders and Cynthia Salvadori, "Peoples and Cultures of Kenya," Rev. Phillip Ochieng, Shedding New Light on Kenya's Ethnic Groups. NATION (Nairobi) October, 1979.

a tribe is. For example, the tools that different tribes use to procure food, are determined by each tribe's system of production. Such systems of production may be by crop agriculture, gathering, hunting or pastoralism. In short, it is noted in this study that, when defining a tribe, it is useful to take into account the following:

(i) Language; (ii) Systems of production (Economics) (iii) Material condition and (iv) Culture. As a result of this, it would become easier to appreciate and understand the different styles of living of different traditional societies of Kenya. This would help in the awareness of the traditional art forms and their functions, especially in the aspect of communication through signs, symbols, gestures etc.

This study tries to use language as a means of identifying different grouping of the traditional societies of Kenya. There are three main language groupings of the indigenous people in Kenya. These are: (i) Afro-Asiatic family; (ii) Nilo-Saharan family and (iii) Niger-Congo family.⁴

⁴"Kenya Language Groupings," Information displayed at the National Museum. (Nairobi), 1980.

Afro-Asiatic Family

They are mainly to be found along the border lands. They are Cushitic speakers. The southern Cushites of the coast Province are the Dahalo and Mukogodo (Yaaku). They are also referred to as remnant southern Cushites. The North-eastern Cushites are of two groups.⁵ Group one are the Galla. These comprise of Orma, Boran, Gabra, Korokoro, Waat, Liangulo (Sanye) and Aweera (Boni). Group two are the Somali. These are, Abdiwak, Aulihan, Mohammed Zubein, Adjuran, Degodia, Murille, Gurreh, Abdulla and Rendille.

Nilo-Saharan Family

They are sometimes referred to as the people of Nilotic speech and culture or just as Nilotic speakers. This grouping is of the eastern Sudanic branch. They could be divided into three groups. Group one (River-Lake Nilotes). There is only one representation of this group in Kenya, and these are the Luos. They are to be found in Nyanza Province. They are also known as western Nilotes. Group two (Highland Nilotes). This language grouping poses an interesting study. This is because culturally,

⁵Andrew and Cynthia, "Peoples".

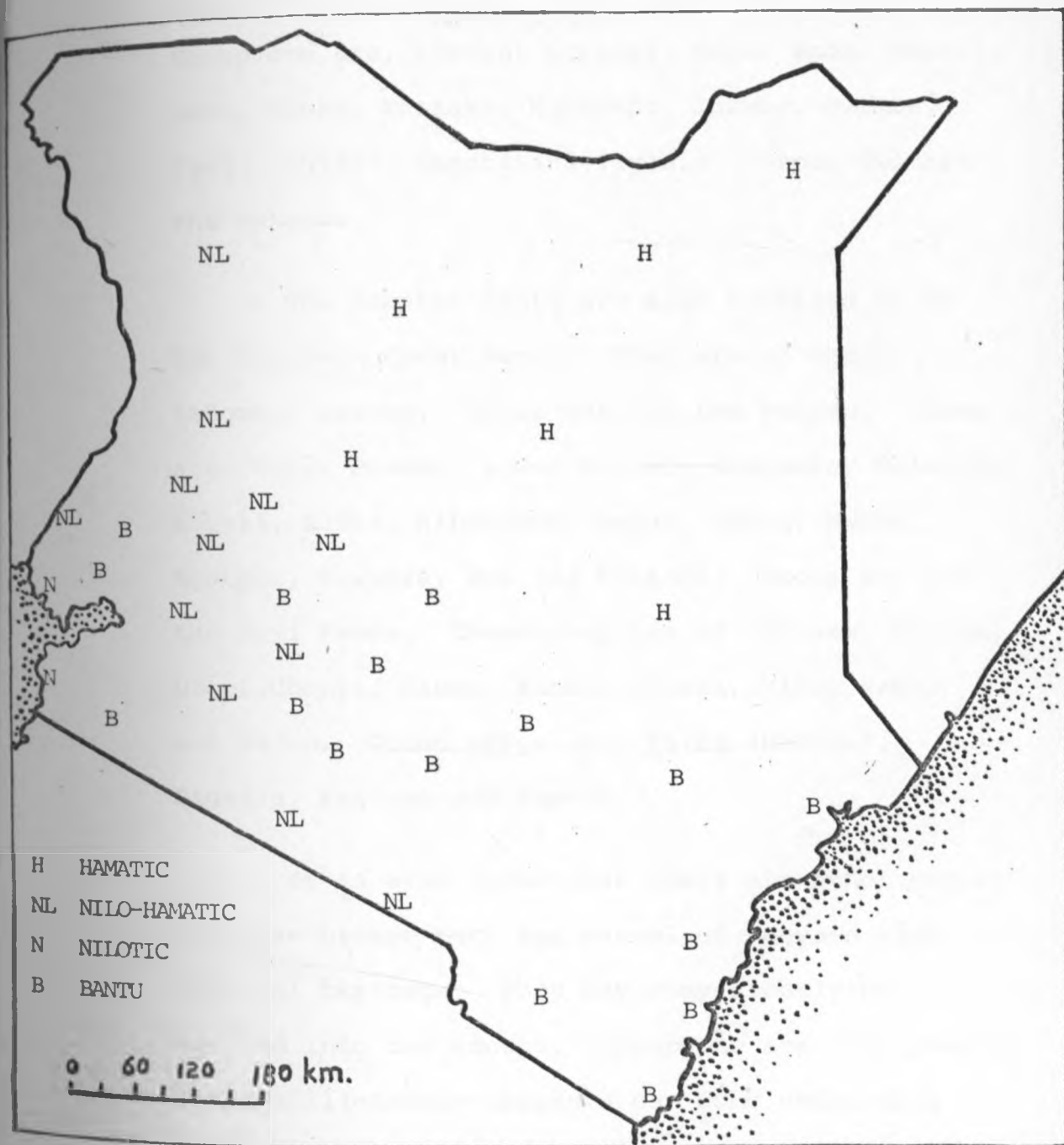
linguistically and bloodwise, they have undergone a great deal of Cushitic influence. In all these aspects however, they remain Nilotic. It is also interesting to note that, they have been referred to as Half-Hamites, Nilo-Hamites or Para-Nilotes, by many scholars. They are, Agricultural Pokot, Pastoral Pokot, Nandi, Kipsigis, Keyo, Marakwet-Endo, Tugen, Nyangori, Pok, Kony, Sebei and Okiek. The last four are commonly known as Tiriki. Group three (Plains Nilotes). These people could be subdivided into two language sub groups. Maasai sub-group is one. These are, Maasai, Samburu, El Molo and Ngurumani. The other is the Karamanjong sub-group. These are, Turkana and Teso.⁶

Niger-Congo Family

This language grouping is commonly known as Bantu speakers. The Bantu are in three clusters in Kenya, i.e. Western, Central and Coastal.

The Western Bantu are also the Interlacustrine Bantu, and are of two groups. Group one are, Logoli, Fofoyo, Abanyole, Tsotso, Tiriki, Marama, Idakho, Khayo, Gisu, Samia, Holo, Isukha, Bunyala and Kisa. Group two are, Gusii and Kuria.

⁶ "Kenya Language," National Museum.



Map 2 Distribution of main ethnic and linguistic groups in Kenya as defined in the 1962 census.

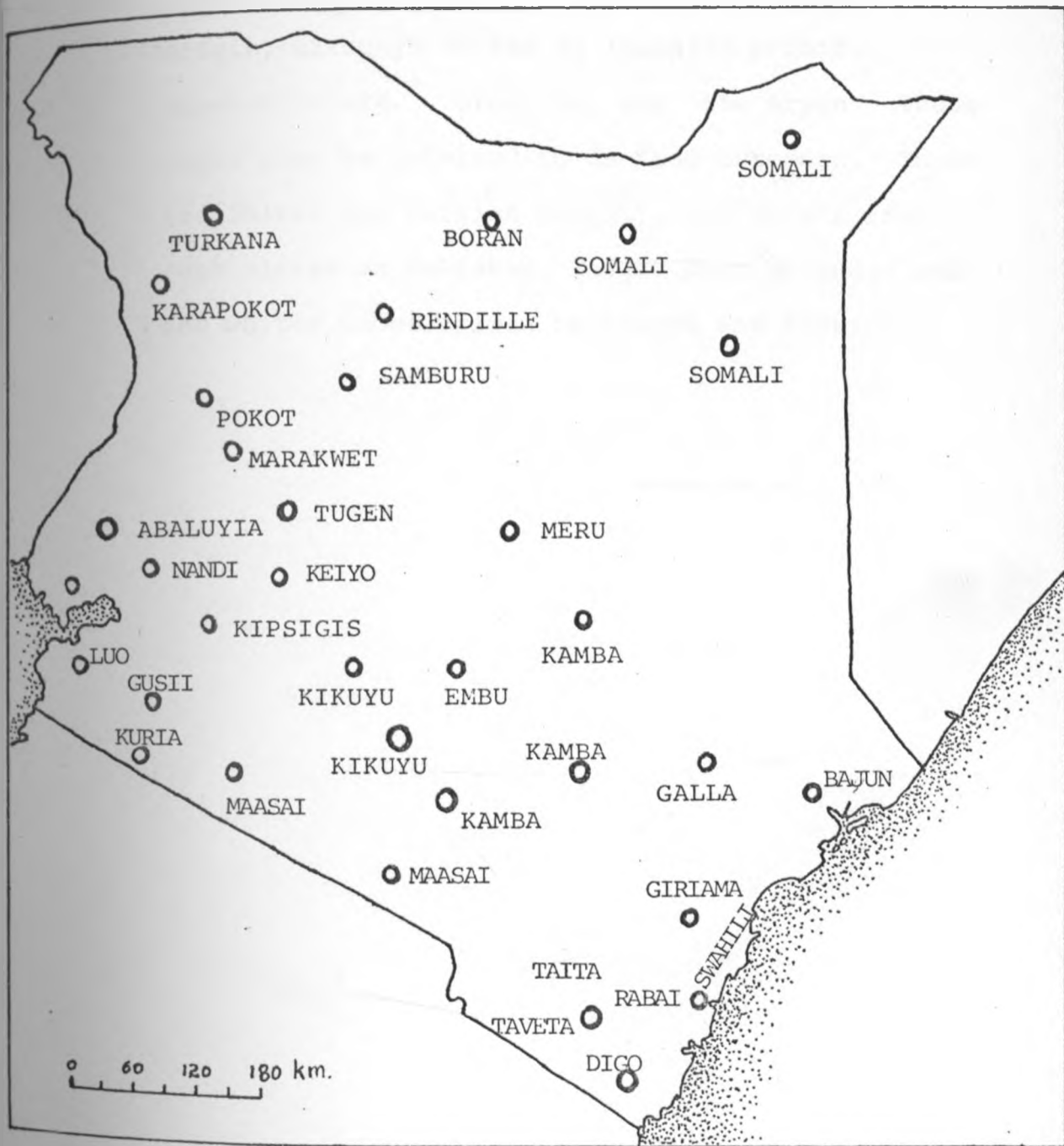
(SOURCE: Department of Geography, University of Nairobi.)

The Central Bantu are also known as the Kenya Highland Bantu. They are of two groups. Group one are, Gikuyu, Gichugu, Ndia, Embu, Mbeere, Meru, Chuka, Tharaka, Muthambi, Igembe, Mwimbe, Igoji, Mutoni, Imenti and Tigania. Group two are the Wakamba.⁷

The Coastal Bantu are also referred to as the Northern Coast Bantu. They are of three language groups. Group one are the Pokomo. These are, Upper Pokomo, Lower Pokomo, Korokoro, Malalulu, Zubaki, Ndura, Kinakombe, Gwano, Ndera, Mwina, Ngatana, Dzuunza, Bun and Kalindi. Group two are the Miji Kenda. These comprise of Giriama, Duruma, Digo, Chonyi, Kauma, Kambe, Jibana, Ribe, Rabai and Bajun. Group three are, Taita (Dabida), Sagalla, Kasigau and Taveta.

It is also noted that there are other people who have become part and parcel of Kenya's rich cultural heritage. They may conveniently be divided into two groups. Group one are the Semites. The Swahili-Arabic speakers can come under this group. In many aspects, however, the Arabs are distinct from the Waswahili. The language of the

⁷ "Kenya Language," National Museum.



Map 3 Distribution of main ethno-cultural groups in Kenya as defined in the 1969 Census.

(SOURCE: Kenya Surveys).

Waswahili, who mostly occupy the area along a narrow coastal strip, is basically African in origin, although it has an imposing Arabic superstructure.⁸ Group two are the Aryan. These could also be referred to as Indo-European. These are, Shiraz (of Persian origin), the Asians from such places as Pakistan, Bangla Desh or India and the whites whose origin is Europe and America.

⁸ Andrew and Cynthia, "Peoples".

CHAPTER THREE

THE ART OF SYMBOLS AND THE USE OF THE AVAILABLE MATERIALS

Crafts By The Ethnic Societies

For the purpose of studying the traditional African pattern, a two way approach could be useful. First, it would be appropriate to see how the artist and the craftsman choose their various materials what type of techniques they employ and also the kind of result that they are able to get after they use and mix the two. The second way is from a sociological point of view. Here, the emphasis would be to either look at the spread of pattern motifs over the traditional African societies or the communicating effect of these symbols. If the aim was to teach the modern artist something on the African design, the stress ought to be laid in the traditions that have already passed. This stress should be laid in both pattern and form.¹

¹Trowell Margret, African Design, 1960,
p.13.

Objectives for Making Crafts

Appreciation of the things of beauty by the general public motivate the craftsmen to excel in their aesthetic aims. This is because beautiful objects appeal to most people. An object may be made purely for utilitarian purposes but it is better appreciated if it is aesthetically appealing too. This is one of the reasons for making traditional crafts. The other reasons are:

- (a) Different skilled craftsmen have their own personal desires to produce beautiful things.
- (b) Whether objects are purely for aesthetic purposes or purely for utilitarian purposes, the two aims stem from the same roots.
- (c) Some crafts are produced with the aim of offering them to the unseen spiritual powers.
- (d) Some craftsmen feel and are convinced that it is a noble aim to produce objects that are useful to the community.

In the organization and production of crafts, there are a number of elementary factors that one must consider. One of them is design. By design

is meant;

- (a) Entire exercise of plotting out the shape of a product.
- (b) Any product should satisfy people from the points of view of functionalism and aesthetic appeal.
- (c) A deliberate aim of combining practical and aesthetic purposes in a product.
- (d) Some products ought to be both comfortable and efficient.²

In order to satisfy the design aspect when organizing any works of art, some tools are necessary. It is known that different techniques are employed for different works. Also different materials are used. These materials react and behave differently because they have diverse qualities. They also have their limitations and shortcomings.

A design for a piece of craft and a work of fine art have some difference. This difference is in the sphere of two areas. One is in the emphasis. What are we trying to emphasize on? The other is in the degree, where we try and determine to what extent any principle of organization has been taken.

²Ibid.

The above difference is even much less noticeable in a pre-industrial society. In a sophisticated society the difference tends to be quite conspicuous.

In a pre-industrial society life is an integrated whole. That is to say the practical and the more intangible creative urges are reasonably balanced. For example a piece of sculpture may be made for a practical purpose like for the calling of a spiritual power. This power may be expected to provide some material gains. Another example would be a calabash. It is used for various practical purposes like drawing water or storing liquid food. A calabash may also be used as a curing object by a traditional medicineman. If it is used for curing purposes, it is associated with medicine, whereby it acquires a symbolic significance.

The term 'folk art' is used in the western culture to describe the creations of peasant folk who create products for their own uses. It is not proper to designate such a term to the craftsmanship of the pre-industrial societies. It is true, however, that these societies make many objects for their own use. But they also create some objects to be used by chiefs, leaders, and

for special ceremonial purposes. Some of the objects made are food vessels, wood carvings, weaponry, pieces of textiles, decorative items and musical objects. In deed, in some ways these products could be compared with the court arts of the western world.³

Factors that Affect art Forms

Architecture is to a great extent controlled by the available building material. As a physical factor, architecture controls the growing of all forms of art. This is because it is architecture that provides scope and security to the other products of art. For example all manner of portable art forms can only be properly kept in a building. Also, as part of building itself, artistic items such as huge pieces of sculpture, works of painting, textiles, ceramics, etc. are often required.

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
LIBRARY

In pre-industrial Africa, where some communities are agricultural and others are pastoral, the influence of architecture on the arts is still visible. For example the pastoral communities do not have much encouragement to make large pieces of sculpture, ceramics or painting. The storage aspect

³Ibid., p.14

is affected by the fact that they are always on the move. This of course does not mean that they are less creative-conscious than their agricultural counterparts. Indeed they seem to have more creative consciousness than the agricultural communities. It is only that they concentrate more on the art of basketry, articles geared towards personal decorations, skills in weaving and the decoration of calabashes.

Among some sedentary communities in Africa, religious customs or social pattern of kinship have caused them to create some forms of Architecture. They have also created decorative objects. A good example of these are found in the kingdoms of western African coasts, and the people of Bushongo in the Congo. These people have good pieces of high craftsmanship.

When art history is considered, it is realized that style, taste, fashion and tradition are all linked to history. Different life styles of different historical epochs in the western world, have necessitated the production of divers styles in architecture, painting, sculpture etc. A case in point is the Romanesque architecture. It was strong and solid, depicting the social mood and phylosophy of the time. As a result of growing

TRIBAL SURGERY



Fig. 1 Tribal surgery. Kamba male.

technical knowledge, the control of materials and social conditions, the Romanesque architecture changed a lot after a number of years.

In the present days, in the Western world, the conditions are quite different from the times of Romanesque. It is now possible to control building material that could not have been controlled then. It is no longer cheaper to hire servants, indeed to have servants in the western world is a novelty. Such a condition has created completely new styles of domestic architecture and interior design that is found presently.⁴

While styles keep on changing, the urge and the need to create remains the same. A good example is what used to happen in the middle ages in Europe. During this time the ladies used to pass their time by embroidering wonderful tapestries and hangings for the walls of the various castles in which they lived.

In Africa, some tribes had more developed cultures than others. Through these more developed cultures, they were able to produce fine weaving, embroideries or make most delicate basketry. Although they did not have coloured silks at their

⁴Ibid., p.15

SURGICAL INSTRUMENTS

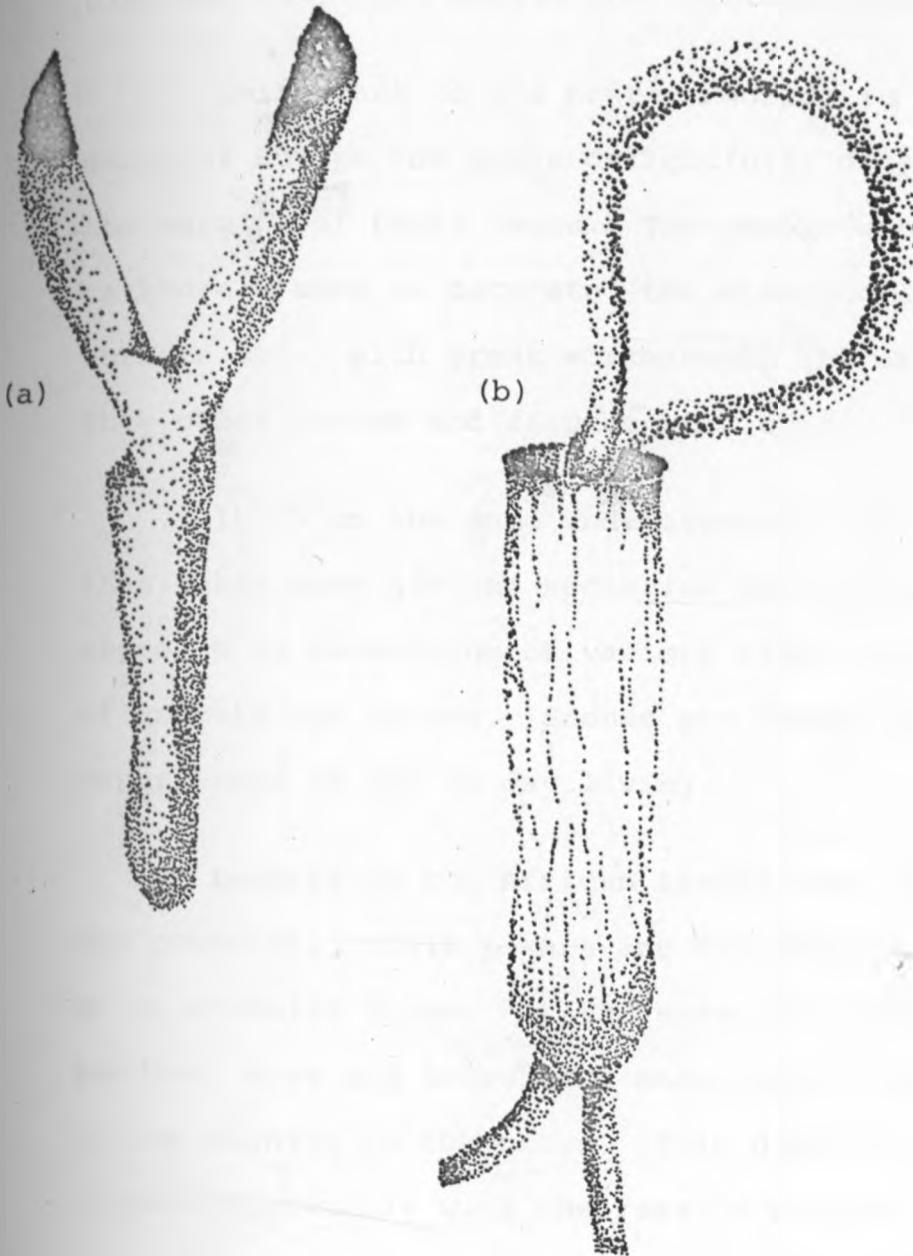


Fig. 2 Surgical instruments. (a) and (b) are snares and stick for holding Uvula.

disposal they used raffia and vegetable dyes.

Going back to the Western world, in medieval Europe the monks delightfully decorated the margins of their texts. The people who built cathedrals used to decorate the misericords, corbels etc., with great workmanship and skill. They chose scenes and figures with care.

It is on the same understanding and care that makes some African societies have the same approach in decorating of various items with motifs of animals and scenes. Scenes are chosen from the experiences of day to day living.

Leaders in the African traditional societies are powerful. Their powers are expressed by scenes or by symbolic forms. At the same time ceremonial paddles, axes and knives are made with an aim of giving dignity to the users. This dignity could compare favourably with the regalia of more technically advanced people despite the fact that the African traditional societies have fewer materials.

It is necessary to study the whole spectrum of art in Africa if her aesthetic skill is to be properly appreciated. It should be noted that there is closeness between function and aesthetic

SURGICAL INSTRUMENT

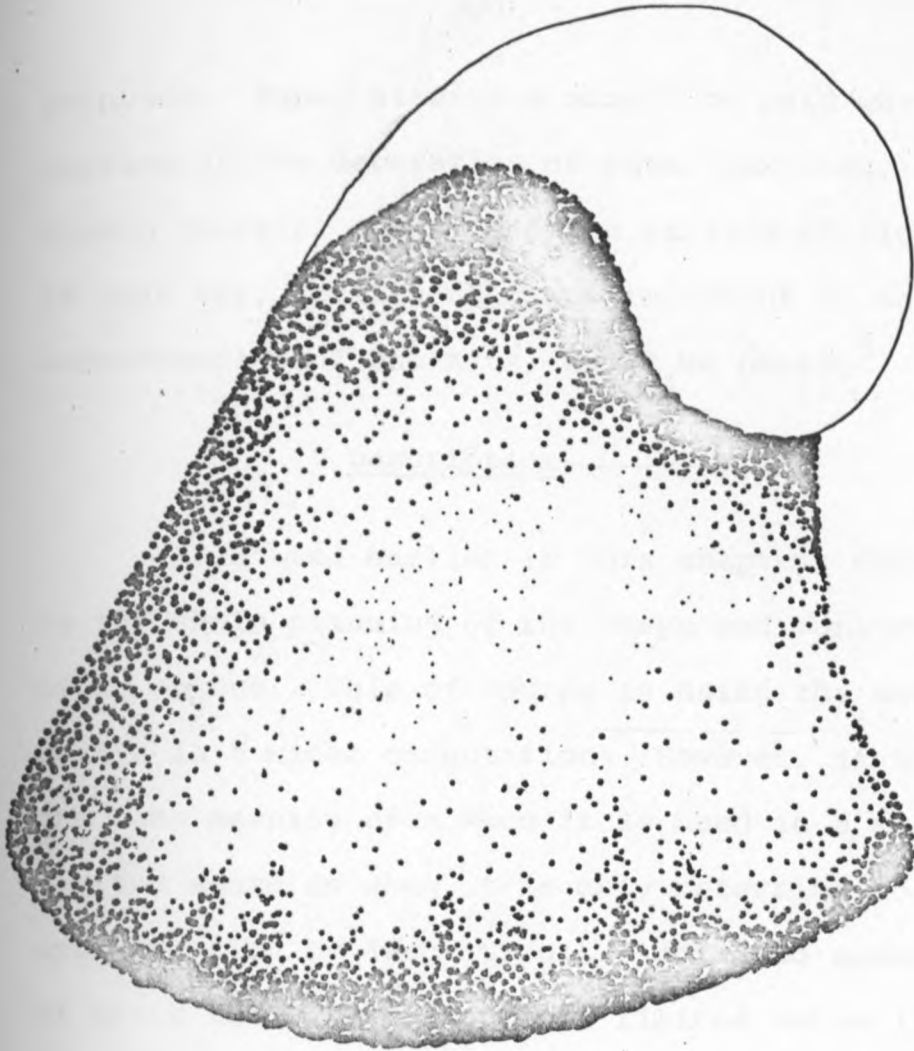


Fig. 3 Surgical Instrument. Gikuyu. Rwenji.

purposes. Equal attention should be paid when looking at the decoration of pots, textiles, wooden vessels, masks, and the carving of figures. In this way, details that are important in the understanding of the arts, would be noted.⁵

Description

As stated earlier in this chapter, design is the whole planning of the shape and construction of an object. This of course is using the word design in a wider connotation. However, it has the same meaning even when it is used in a more limited sense as when it is only referring to ornamentation or decoration. A detailed example of using the word design in a limited sense is when it is meant the decoration of an object such as cloth, pot, textiles, wall, panel, wood, stone, ceramic or basket. The motifs are repeated in a rhythmical styles,. However, if they are done in a rhythmical style, they are balanced in such a way that they make a unified whole within the decorated form. These patterns are often abstract or geometrical. At times representational forms of animals, human on floral are used provided that their use is basically intended to present them as

⁵ Ibid.

TRIBAL SURGERY



Fig. 4 Tribal Surgery. Kamba female.

decorative patterns as opposed to presenting them as primarily accurate and detailed drawings of animals, people or flowers. This kind of presentation is formalized and it is often symbolic. It is a presentation that has been used by many for the purposes of visual communication.⁶

Tackling The Problem

There are a number of different ways in which to approach the study of patterns. First there is the technological approach. In this particular type of approach the aim would be to try and study the possibilities and limitations of the materials and tools which have been used. By getting hold of the proper and relevant specimen, it would be possible to arrive at reasonably accurate decisions. This is the basic way of tackling the problem of the study of patterns.

Materials and Tools

Some materials are hard, flexible, or soft. Examples of hard materials are stone, metal, ivory or wood. These are usually carved or engraved. They also can be treated in the following manner.

⁶Ibid., p.16

TRIBAL SURGERY



Fig. 5 Tribal surgery. Luo. female.

- (a) Coated with paint as a whole or just some parts.
- (b) Other material may be inset. This is contrasting different materials such as metal or wood or enamel.
- (c) Other material may be put on the surface of the original. A case in point would be when thin sheets of metal are put on a wood surface.

Clay can be used when it is soft, semi-hard as well as hard. It may be moulded when it is soft. When it is semi-hard it may be stamped, impressed, engraved or scratched. When it is hard it may be decorated with a slip of clay of different colour, it may be burnt or painted with a coloured glaze. Clay is easily obtainable in many parts of Africa. It is also a relatively easy to prepare material as it usually requires only water to make it ready for use.

Fibres are of different qualities. They need to be treated appropriately in order to get good patterns on them. One could either weave a pattern on the basic structure. A pattern could also be printed on. Different material altogether could be applied to give pattern, or just an ornament could be applied to make pattern.

SURGICAL INSTRUMENT

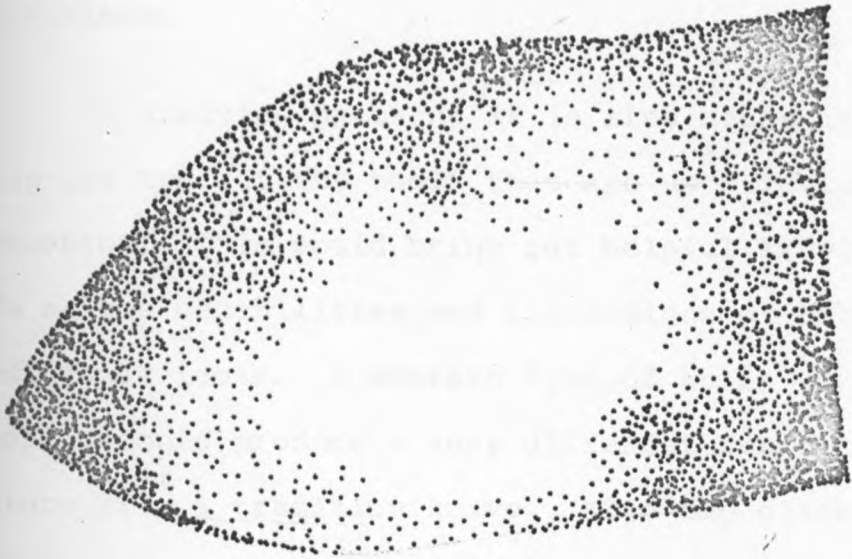


Fig. 6 Surgical instrument. Luo. Nyamarich.

Each particular type of fibre has its own scope and limitations. It is up to the designer to manipulate it properly and give it proper treatment, The types of fibres that the traditional African societies use are basically natural. However, without going into any detail, it is noted that these materials have their own natural limitations.

In studying pattern, it is also necessary to study the type of the tools that are used in their production. This would bring out helpful knowledge such as the capabilities and limitations of these traditional tools. A western type of knife for example, would produce a very different surface texture from a tradition knife. Also the slick finish of a machine gives a different effect from slight irregularity of hand block printing. These two examples indicate that the availability of different tools affects the finish of different patterns. The traditional African societies have fewer tools than their Western counterparts. However, both these two societies use their tools to produce acceptable pieces of artistic works for practical and aesthetic purposes, and they achieve these aims.

TRIBAL SURGERY

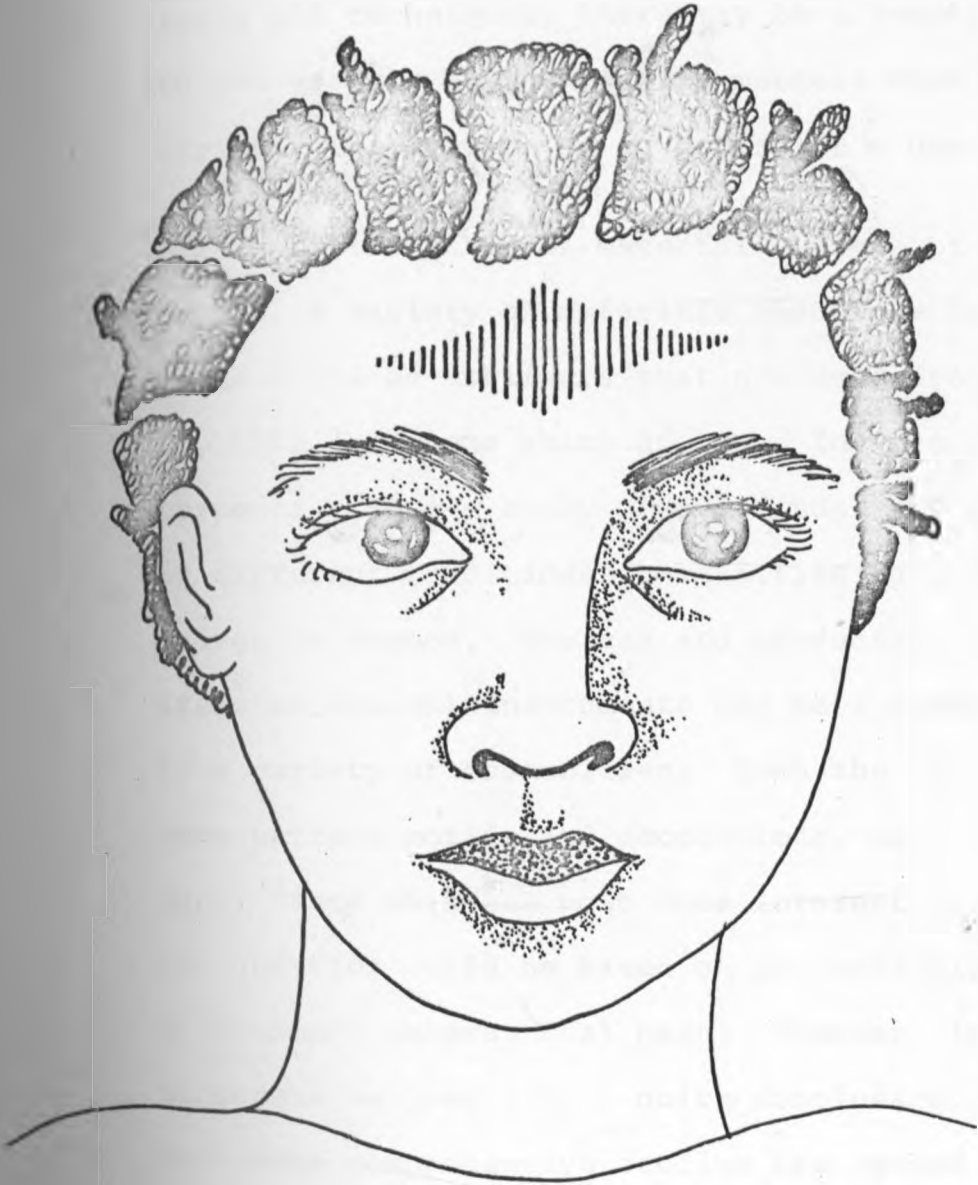


Fig. 7 Tribal surgery. Luhya female.

When consideration is given to materials, tools and techniques, there may be a temptation to get greatly concerned with matters that are not strictly the concern of an artist or a designer.

In the study of material culture of a people, a variety of materials should be looked into. These could be artifacts that are used from day to day life, or items which are used for non practical purposes. Such a study always finds that a number of different traditional communities have some things in common. The use and production of such items as musical instruments may be a common feature to a variety of communities. Even the use of some pattern motifs and decorations, may be widely used. Such pointers pose some interesting questions. One question could be based on the possibility of a common geographical past. However, it is dangerous to jump into a quick conclusion, and as such more comprehensive studies are needed in order to shed more light on this idea of commonness, which sometimes cuts across racial barriers.⁷

The whole field of stylization and symbolism is open when an attempt is made to study

⁷Ibid., p.17

SURGICAL INSTRUMENT

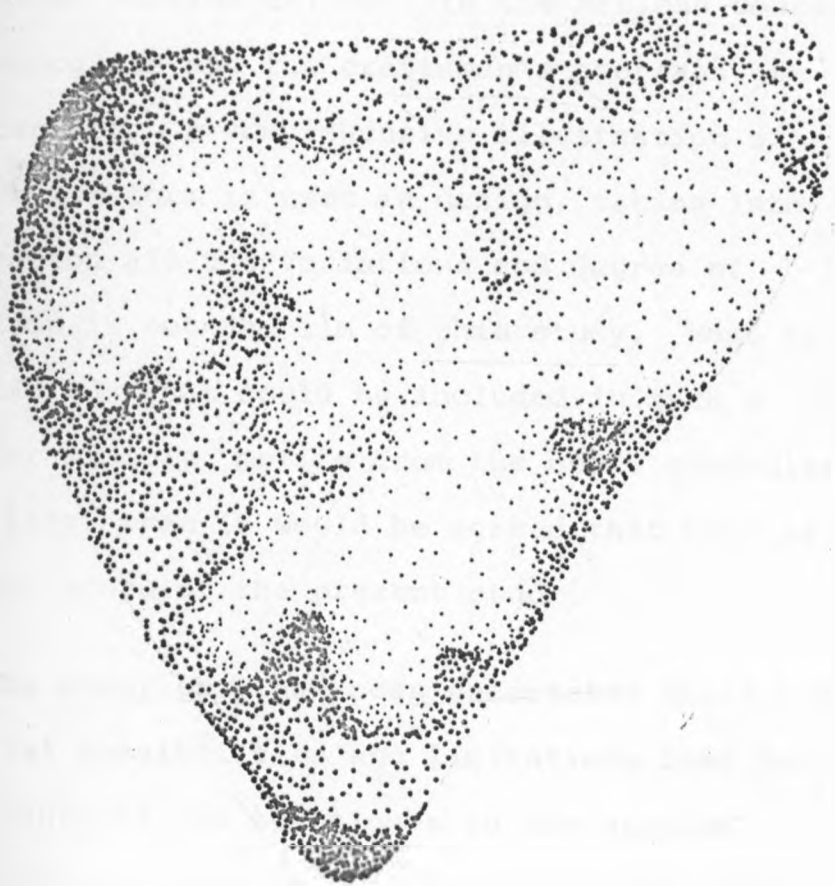


Fig. 8 Surgical instrument. Maragoli.
Eng'embe.

the similarities and differences in pattern motifs of various tribal groups. It is necessary to study the way in which representational forms, symbols and geometrical pattern are produced independent of technical considerations. In the African context, the ethnologists and the craftsman's approach are both necessary. A comprehensive illustration of how the human form is used in design, taking into consideration all the variations and degree of stylization is not the aim of this study. When it is considered what could be included in such a study, for example, motifs from the whole vocabulary of symbolism, then it would be agreed that this is beyond the scope of the present study.

The study that has been undertaken deals with fundamental possibilities and limitations that are there because of the techniques in the applied design. Also in this study, there are some forms of pattern which are of outstanding interest to the author. These have been studied in the African context in general. This has been dealt with in this chapter, as a prelude to a more specific study that is going to concentrate on the Kenyan scene. It is hoped that this approach will help in the study of the similarities and differences between the art forms from Kenya and those from other parts of Africa.

TRIBAL SURGERY



Fig. 9 Tribal surgery. Taita female.

Decoration

The art of decorating different parts of the body and objects is a popular form of artistic expression within the traditional African societies. There are a number of reasons for practicing this form of art. One reason is for the mere sake of appreciation - that is the love of seeing beautiful marks on various surfaces. The other reason is based on associating spiritual power to these decorations e.g. power to protect one from some harm.

Decorations may also be done for identification purposes. A certain traditional community may have some peculiar marks to differentiate it from the other communities.

In order to be able to appreciate the art of decorating, it is helpful to look at a number of items so as to note the richness of this art. Such items or areas may be mats, screens, basketry, beadwork, hides and leather, body paintings, calabash, wood, ivory carving and metal design.

Mat making, pattern on screen, woven textiles and fixed woven partitions essentially use the same materials. It should be noted, however, that the materials for mat making are fine.

TRIBAL SURGERY



Fig. 10 Tribal surgery. Nandi female.

They are also more pliant than the materials for partitions. Materials for matting are less fine than the materials for the textiles. It is noted that it is difficult to differentiate these crafts.

Looking closely at mat-making as a craft, three styles are noted. One is when it is wooven either with a loom or without. The other is when it may just be sewn. Lastly it is when strips of plaited palm are also used in making mats.

A study of this scope can only touch slightly on the variety of pattern to be found in Africa. Another area where pattern work is seen is on basketry. Techniques of doing this craft are varied. These techniques produce different textures on the surface of the baskets. The craft is enriched further with the introduction of different colours and materials e.g. baskets by weaving and coiling and the use of various materials and texture can produce more basketry.

Beads are used in the making of ornaments for facial, waist, head and neck. In some parts of Africa, they are used for producing patterned covers for a number of things such as masks, belts, drums, bags, robes, wrist wear, fetish objects, calabashes, baskets, pots etc. Beads are also sewn

SURGICAL INSTRUMENT



Fig. 11 Surgical instrument. Nandi. Kipos.

on the cloth with an aim of decorating the cloth.

Elsewhere the art of bead work is especially used on things held sacred. Sometimes it is to be seen on the covers of objects connected with royal regalia. Beads could also be put on the robes for leaders or even on their crowns. In such cases the design acquires a lot of symbolic significance. In order to appreciate this design, it would be necessary to know and understand both the traditions of the particular community and the symbolism that they use.

When bead craft is looked at from a superficial point of view only geometrical motifs are noted. Specific examples are the interlacing patterns, zigzags and triangles. At times, the beads are arranged with imagination, although trade beads are usually used in this case. The colours tend to be bright and strong, Many times however, especially with what is produced as modern bead-craft, the result is usually dull. This may be just dull combinations of red, dark blue and white.⁸

This is mostly as a result of commercialization and the tendency to produce articles en mass. The main aim being to sell, especially to the tourists.

⁸Ibid., p.19.

SURGICAL INSTRUMENTS

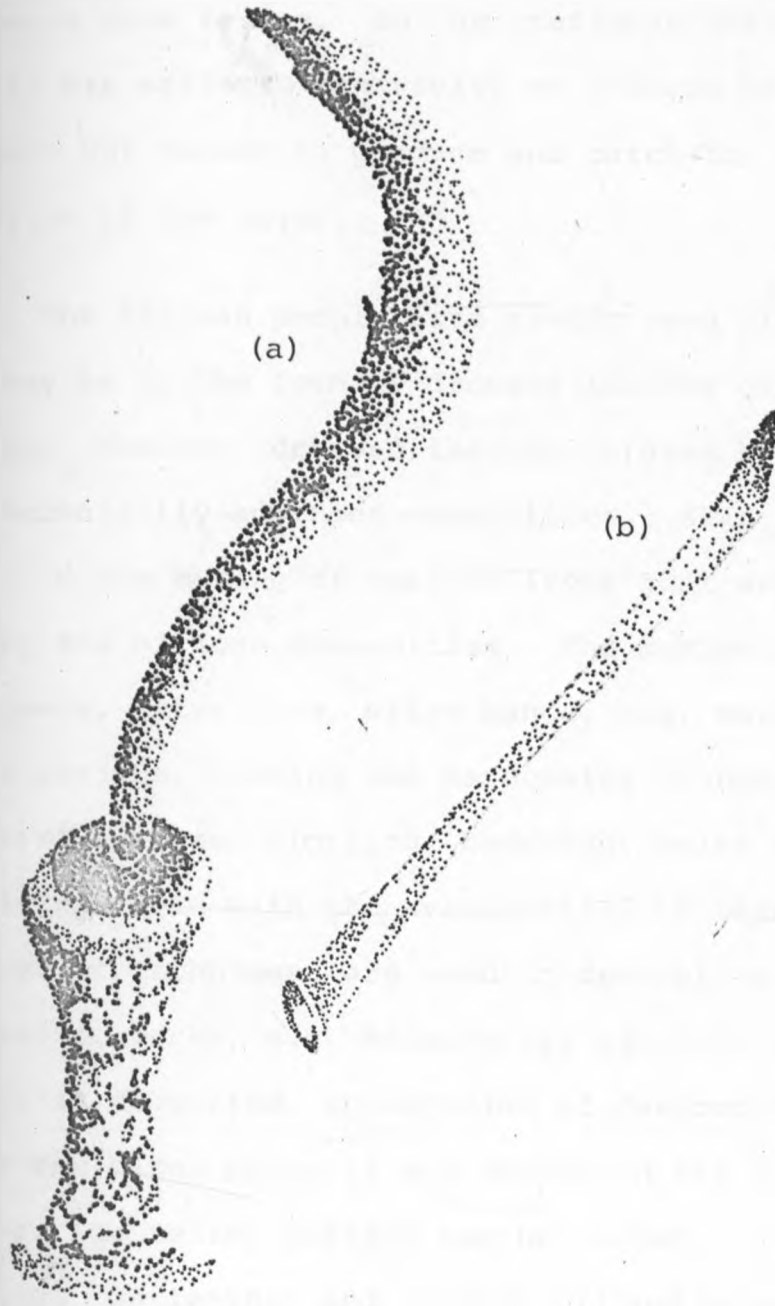


Fig. 12 Surgical instruments. (a) Nandi.
Mwat-in-det, (b) Nandi. Katet.

As such, the craftsmen tend to produce what the customers want to buy. So the craftsman does not use all his artistic creativity to produce original pieces - but rather to produce and catch the attention of the buyer.

The African people have always used skin. This may be in the form of dressed leather or rawhide. However, dressed leather is used by the more technically advanced communities. Skin is needed in the making of various items that are used by the African communities. The making of containers, water pots, wrist bands, bag, sandals, basket strings, binding and harnessing thongs, shelters, screens, clothing, beddings, belts etc., is only possible with the availability of skin. A number of techniques are used in decorating hide and leather works, e.g. shields are painted, tanned leather is decorated, application of decorations on the raw hide, patterns are shaven on the hide or leather, low relief pattern can be carved, pressings on leather and cutting off patterns and shapes.

The art of painting of designs on the face and body with sap extracted from some trees, ochre or chalk is quite common in the traditional African communities. However, such customs are disappearing

TRIBAL SURGEY



Fig. 13 Tribal surgery. Gisù female?

although they still can be found amongst some less sophisticated people. By decorating themselves their aim is to enhance natural beauty.

Women are more keen on this art than men. It is important to realise that many other people decorate body costumes, do their hairs in styles or paint prominent parts of their bodies like fingers, nails and face. This means that the art of body painting is not confined to the traditional African societies alone.

However, the African geographical climate being hot means that people can expose more parts of their bodies to the warm air. Consequently, they have more exposed parts of the body to decorate. Just as they would decorate a calabash with thoroughness, they also work on their bodies with the same spirit. Sometimes they use oil to smear the body. Some times they smear the body with colouring matter or clay.

Usually oiling and covering the body with colour are done for dance purposes. All sorts of styles of hair do are regarded as good decoration. The hair is trimmed and plaited with care. The teeth may also be filed to a point or they may be extracted altogether.

SURGICAL INSTRUMENT

Kisii instrument for graniotomy



Fig. 14

The African people in the traditional communities are rich in the art of expressive dancing. By the way they move their bodies and also by using gestures, the dancers would express the meaning of the dance. This is a form of communication. The combination of decorating the body and communicating through dancing is an efficient way of visual communication.

The most usual form of decoration is making all kinds of marks and shapes on their faces and bodies. However, some tribal communities put ornaments on the face and bodies with most delicate and intricate marks and shapes. They use vegetable sap to do this.

There are a number of reasons, apart from dances, that make them decorate their bodies. These are, members of a particular tribal community must have a tribal mark, it is employed as a way of treating and preventing diseases, the body may be cut and rubbed with medicine that is supposed to contain magical properties and most highly developed schemes of decoration are made for aesthetic purposes.

Some forms of body decorations are meant to give visual and tactile pleasure to young people in their more intimate personal relationship.

TRIBAL SURGERY



Fig. 15 Tribal Surgery. } Alur. Male and female.

These aesthetic purposes carry alot of communication ideas, symbolic associations and aid and encourage self expression.

Both abstract designs and stylized forms are cut on various parts of the body. These may be legs, stomach, cheeks, thighs, forehead, buttocks, temples, neck, chest, arms or forehead. While these parts of the body are easily visible, others may be hidden. Whatever part of the body they use, they do so with an aim. They put into use a technique that will yield good result.

Usually the body is cut with a sharp knife or razor. This is followed by rubbing vegetable matter or charcoal into the wounds. These would heal finally as raised, shiny keloids.⁹ There are some people in each tribal community who are particularly good in the art of body marks. These are sought whenever a need arises.

One of the most interesting fields in the study of pattern in Africa, is the study of decoration of calabashes. Many interesting patterns have emerged as a result of using different techniques. Looking at the subject matter that is found on the

⁹Ibid., p.21.

SURGICAL INSTRUMENT



Fig. 16

Surgical instrument. Ganda. A drawing of the knife used in the caesarean.

patterns themselves, it is noted that the idea of symbolism is used in the making of these patterns.

The process of decorating calabashes tends to be long and tedious. It requires a bit of skill and patience. First the gourd must be made ready. The gourd is taken when ripe and soaked in a stream of waterhole until the contents are completely rotten. After this process of letting it rot, it is opened and the insides are properly cleared out. Then it is put out in the sun to dry. The skin will have grown bloated and soft as the result of soaking in water. However, as the result of drying it in the sun, the skin becomes hard. This makes the gourd to be worked like wood.

Some people would cut the calabash into two vertically equal parts. Others cut it horizontally in which case the top portion would serve as a lid for the base. As a result of these different ways of cutting, different types of decoration would be applied. Considerable variety of colour may be produced by first leaving the basic natural colour of the undecorated calabash as it is, and then applying other colours on the surface. The basic colour has a warm yellow look. However, a white surface to decorate may be produced by scraping off

SURGICAL INSTRUMENT



Fig. 17 Surgical instrument. Ganda. Burning iron.

the fine layer of the outer skin. A concoction of millet leaves can give the surface a colour of beautiful old rose. The calabash may also be stained burnt sienna, red or deep purple or indigo. The decorations are done carefully and then through constant handling and hanging in a smoky hut the various colours receive a further rich appearance. They have an appearance of a sombre polish.¹⁰ Even with no decoration at all the basic colours and textures of calabashes cover a large range and some of them are very beautiful in themselves.

In the art of producing patterns on various surfaces, the traditional societies use such techniques as carved patterns, scraped patterns, scorched patterns, engraved patterns, decorated with extraneous materials or carved coconuts.

There is usually some division between decorated and plain surfaces. This division is present even in the very simple patterns. The areas are broken into bands or masses. There is a deliberate attempt to cultivate relationship between pattern designs and the form of the object. This is a conscious way of bringing in

¹⁰ Ibid.

TRIBAL SURGERY



Fig. 18 Tribal surgery. Madi male.

the element of unity in pattern work.

Some examples of the decorations on wood are, carved designs that are representational in form, carving in black and white, patterns that are just painted, patterns that are scorched and extraneous material used in decorating.

Carving of ivory is similar to that of wood. However, ivory is carved without regard to its grain. This allows for very fine detail when making patterns. Copper, brass, studs of iron or strips are used to inlay the details. These details may be suggestive shapes of, neck ornaments, styled representation of hair, tribal markings of human faces or masks and animals spots. These details are done to give the design more meaning and an attractive appearance.

There are two ways of decorating metal. One is by casting and the other one is by beating, which is the older of the two.

"Repousse" is the raising of a pattern in relief by blows with a hammer and punches from the under side. "Repousse" as a term is often used for any type of beaten metal work. Raised patterns could also be produced by beating down the background from the front with the aid of punches.

TRIBAL SURGERY



Fig. 19 Tribal surgery. Gogo male.

Chasing is the surface decoration of metal from the front. The word chasing is used as a term to describe this kind of surface decoration.

Many different textures may be obtained by using punches. These punches have some form of designs that give an impression of pattern work. Textural impressions may be obtained by producing decorations of surfaces.

By using these techniques to produce surface design, the African people's love for such crafts is satisfied.

They know how to prepare clay. Except for a simple turn-table, they do not have anything like an indigenous wheel. The firing is done on kiln. They do not use even a vitreous glaze. They also do not have great variety of shapes in pottery. The use of pots is not greatly varied either. Their chief need has been for cooking, water and beer pots. However, pots are also used for various magical, medicinal or religious purposes, such as poison, magic portion, items used for sacrifices, etc.

Throughout Africa is to be found a lot of ill-fired pottery. On these pots are to be found simple patterns. These pattern designs are scratched

TRIBAL SURGERY



Fig. 20 Tribal surgery. Makonde female.

or impressed with roulettes of wood. Plaited reed is also used. Patterns are also produced by stamps made of natural objects such as corn cobs, seeds and shells. All these are fine examples, but there is lack of a real feeling for design.

In Africa, some techniques for decorating pots are very common. One is impressing or stamping a pattern. The other is engraving or cutting a pattern with a pointed stick or a piece of iron. Both of these methods are used when the pots are leather hard i.e. before firing. In some parts of Africa, pots are coloured or furnished and moulded decoration is also used.¹¹

From the foregoing information, it is noted that there are many techniques used by the traditional societies in making patterns, for example, impressing, incising, moulding, colouring or furnishing, encasing pots and cow dung bowls etc.

Motifs in the African tradition designs could be divided into three categories.

These are, motifs based on texture, those based on the idea of representational patterns and geometrical motifs. However, it should be noted that

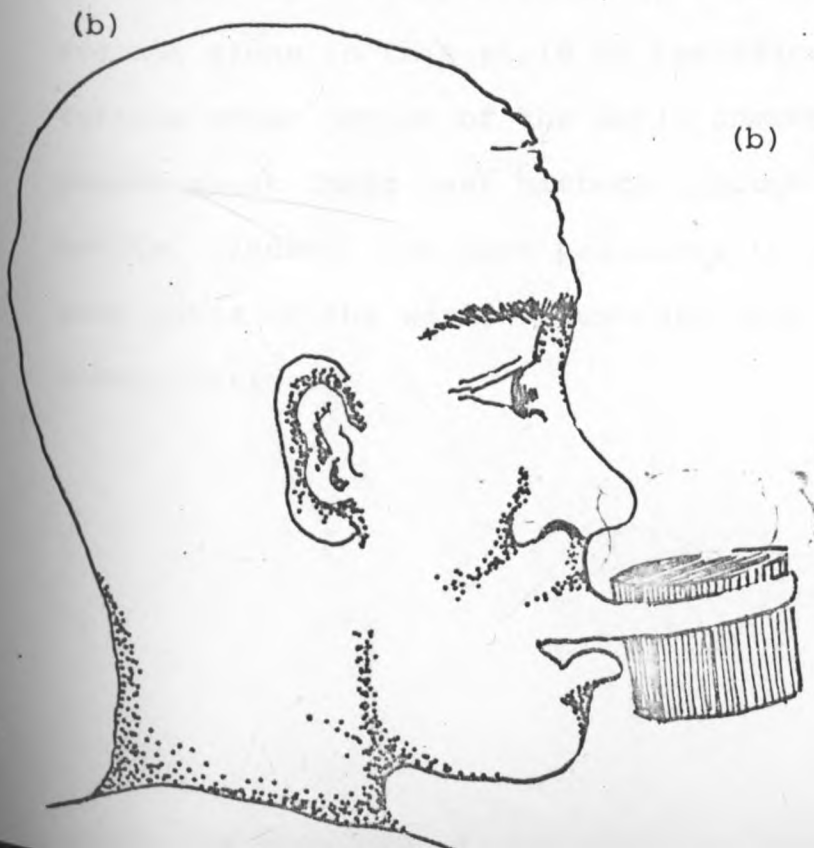
¹¹Ibid., p.19.

TRIBAL SURGERY

Fig. 21



(a) Suk lip ornament.



(b) Makonde lip plug

there are no hard and fast rules to divide patterns into these categories. The reason is because African motifs are very much based on symbolism. It is noted that texture motifs are easy to recognise as they seem to be mostly based on decorative forms. As far as representational motifs are concerned, they are quite complicated and would involve a certain amount of study in order to recognise them. It is in the representational motifs that we get the key to much of African design. Some representational motifs are based on proverbs, allegories adages and wise words. These form the backbone of the African thought. The myths and legends of the tribal past and the prestige of the reigning chief or age group are summed up in aphorisms or visual symbols. The African traditional societies use representational motifs as records of their history and experience. The African people are not alone in this style of recording events. Various other people of the world communicate to other people about their past history through representational motifs. Indeed, the cave paintings to be found in many parts of the world illustrate this form of communication.

SURGICAL INSTRUMENT



Fig. 22 Surgical instrument. Cupping horn.

plate no.1.

Made and worn by married women and worn in each earhole. It is noted that the buttons are arranged in such a way that they form simple pattern works. This feature of simplicity is to be found in many of the traditional African art forms. Local name: MWINIKAPITIK.

Plate no.2.

Round shapes have always appealed to the traditional societies. One reason perhaps is because their environment is full of natural forms; many of which are round. Such forms are to be seen in gourds, seeds, fruits etc. Many art forms, such as containers, are made of round natural forms.

Plate no.3.

The addition of a few courie shells increases attractiveness to simple and flat items. This makes the items to be even more appreciated. The two items on the bottom of this plate are a good example of this fact.

On the same plate, is another item. It is a long piece of an art form. Its shape and purpose are different from the other two.

Plate no.4.

These are used by men to collect honey. They are made of cowhide. They have such sections as top, bottom and cowhide thongs. They have shapes that are cylindrical. The one on the extreme left has some marks on its upper part.



Plate No. 1

Buttons used.



Plate No.2

Containers with woven patterns.

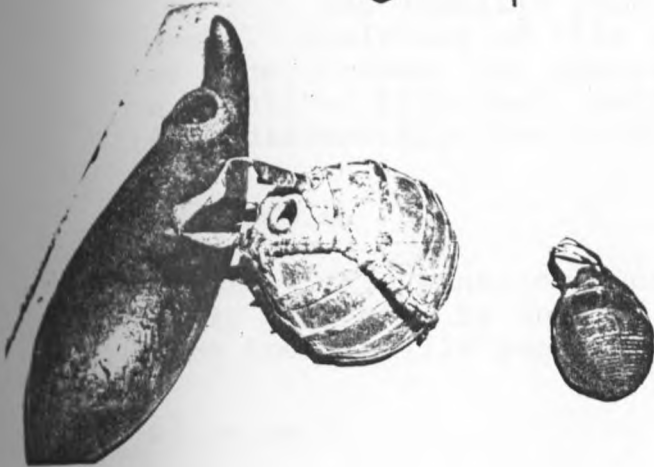


Plate No.3

Bottom left and right:
cowrie shells on skin



Plate No. 4

Built-on relief.



Plate no.5.

The Rendille way of life necessitates them to have reliable knives for cutting. They have developed some interesting shapes of knives for both domestic and pastoral uses. The designs of the knives are simple and practical.

The Rendille people are of the Hamitic group. Their way of life is different from that of other tribes, for example the Luo people. As a result of this fact, many of the art forms are done differently from tribe to tribe.

Plate no.6.

This container gourd is a natural form. It is protected by animal skin. This gourd is from the Rendille people.

Plate no.7.

Such shapes are used by old people as snuff boxes. These small containers are kept clean and shining. At times there are some ornamentation on them. Some have long strings for hanging around the neck.

Plate no.8.

On the left is a popular shape for necklaces. This shape is used by a number of the Kenyan traditional societies, for example the Tugen and the Maasai. The purpose for any particular necklace influences the overall design. This means that there are a number of different designs for such necklaces.

The other two objects on this plate are headrests produced by the Tugen people.



Plate No. 5

Note the Angles of
knives (Rendille).

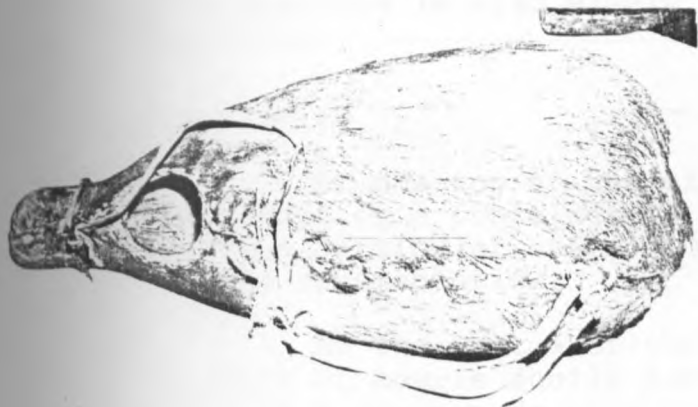


Plate No. 6

Gourd protected by
animal skin (Rendille).



Plate No. 7

Used by men.



Plate No. 8

Necklace and two
headrests (Tugen).

plate no.9.

These are necklaces that have been made in different colours of beads. Such colours are white, red, green etc. The use of coloured beads in necklaces is a widely practised phenomenon among the various traditional societies of Kenya. This practice is also widely used in other parts of Africa.

Plate no.10.

At the top of the plate is a container. This shape of a container is most likely used for some particular items. On this container there is bead ornamentation.

At the bottom of the plate is a neck ornament of cowrie shells and bead sewn onto cowhide. There is a chair made by a blacksmith. This ornament is made by women and used by them only, for coremonies when the male child is married.

Vernacular name: SEMUET.

Plate no.11.

Used by married women to hold all sharp objects like knives, axes etc. The design is Elmolo but Rendille made. Local name. SARAN.

Plate no.12.

Used by warriors for fighting and protection. Handle (Dup) is covered with cowhide. Sheath (Njoni) is of wood and cowhide. This is wrapped with red and white cloth and a black plastic belt. Local name: BIRLA.

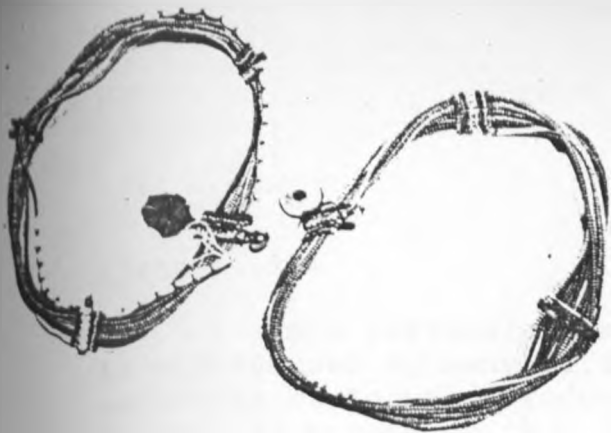


Plate No.9

Colours in white
red, green etc.

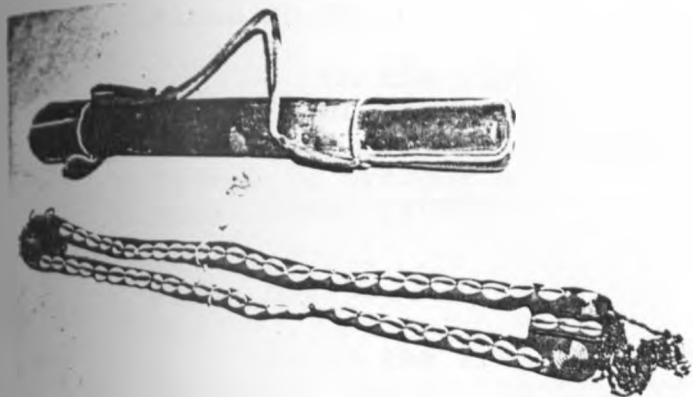


Plate No.10

Cowrie shells are
common.

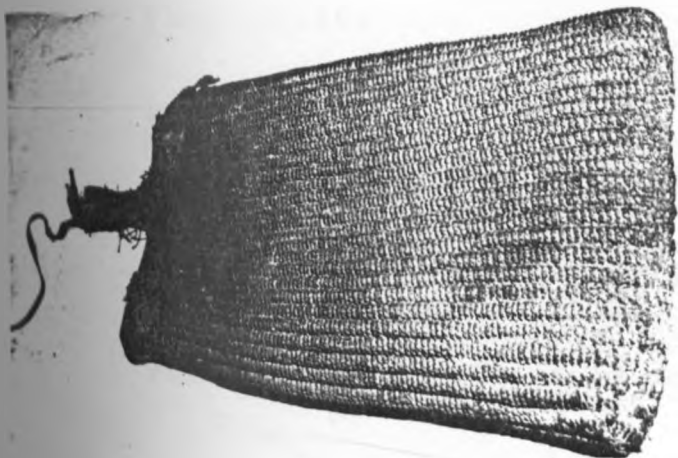


Plate No.11

Note the carpet-like
design.

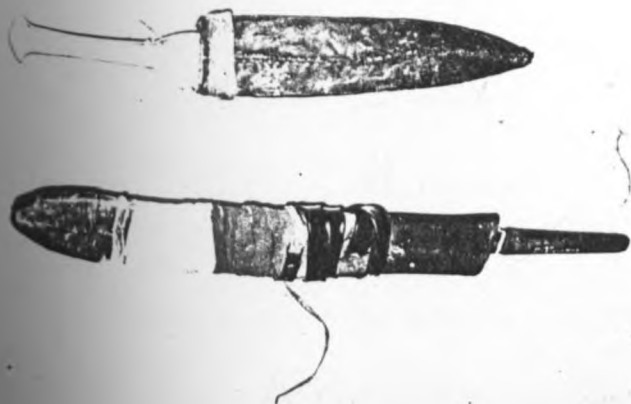


Plate No. 12

For fighting and
protection.

plate no.13.

This particular design of playing board is widely used by many different traditional societies of Kenya. Production of a good piece depends very much on the skill of the artist, and the availability of proper tools.

Plate no.14.

On the right of the plate is a wooden mortar made from OMUPEI tree. It is used to grid sim sim or groundnuts, millet, dry cassava etc. Pestal is brought up and down on grain inside mortar. Local name: EDHINUU.

plate no.15.

In the art of iron making, smelting is an important stage. On this plate is to be found a design of a traditional smelting implement. This design is simple. It is of a round form.

Plate no.16.

These are a pair of smelting objects that are the same in design just as that one in plate no.15. Again it is noted that these two items are of round forms; and are simple and practical.

The art of producing iron and some iron products is practiced by nearly all the traditional societies of Kenya. Production is done at simple industries, whose working is kept secret. The knowledge has to be passed on to only a selected few.

Plate No. 13

Playing board.

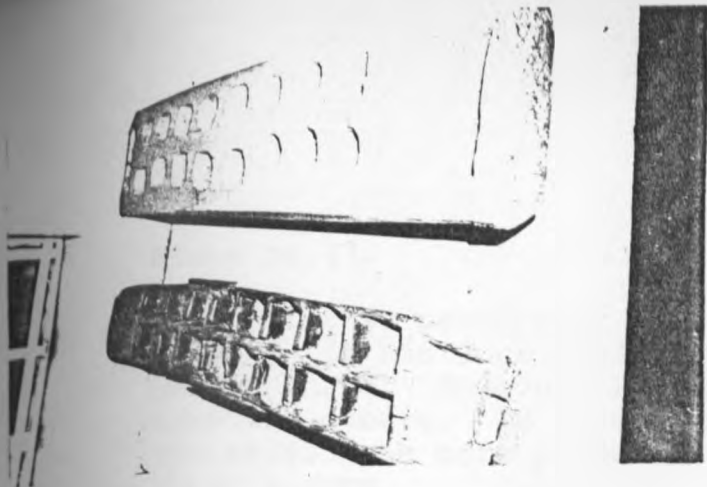


Plate No. 14

Basket and mortar.



Plate No. 15

For iron making
(Smelting).



Plate No. 16

Also for iron making
(Smelting).



Plate no.17.

This particular stool is peculiar in one aspect. It has four legs instead of the more common three. However, it has been designed just like the others. It is noted that some traditional societies take more pride in the way they make their stools.

Plate no.18.

Water carrying baskets are used by some societies. Such baskets are given some treatment to seal any openings that might make water pour out.

The shape of the basket is round and the size is not massive as to inconvenience the person who would carry it.

Plate no.19.

Bead headband made and worn by women. Yellow, red and a few white beads sewn with cow sinew thread-NUCHOV, with cowhide pacers and fastener. Local name: ATERON.

Plate no.20.

A piece of sculpture in the shape of a charm with bead pattern. This shape is suggestive of a human figure. It is serene in expression. As a form it has no bold features. Some masks from some areas in Africa have very strong features.

However, this particular shape, as a charm is both symbolic and representative. Its communicating power lies with people associating it with ideas e.g. curative, religious etc.

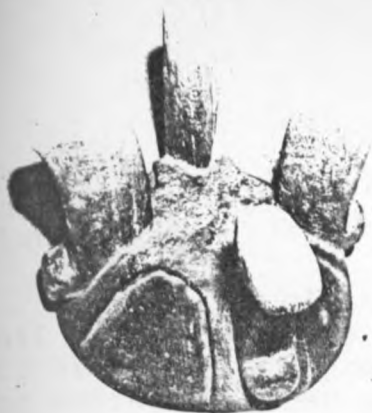


Plate No.17

Used by men for
sitting in the doorway.

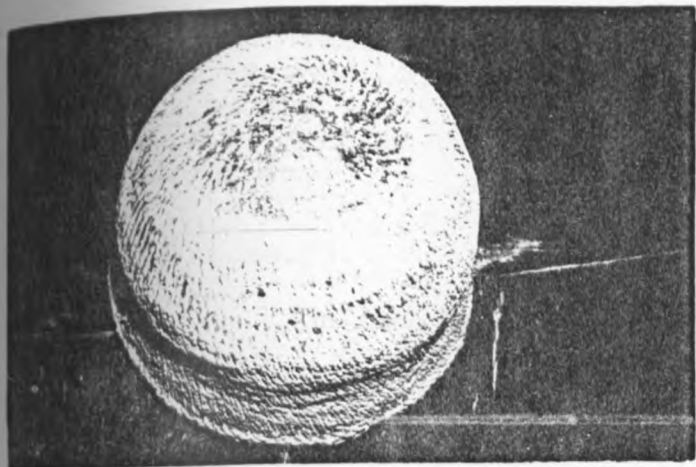


Plate No.18

Water carrying basket

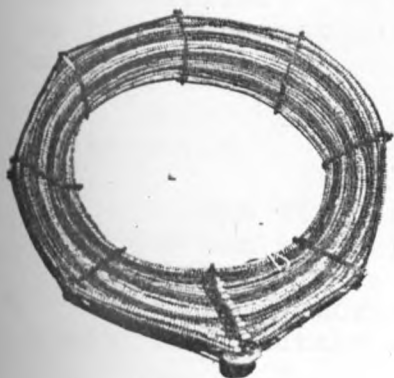


Plate No.19

Necklace



Plate No.20

A charm with bead
pattern.

plate no.21.

Wooven old type necklace of elephant tail hairs. Each is threaded with an old bead. Different animals provide many types of materials for making a number of art forms.

plate no.22.

Used by old men to play a game. It is made of wood, by carving fundis who also make rungus and honey barrels. The playing of this type of game is common to a number of traditional societies.

plate no.23.

On the left of the plate is a different shape of a headrest. It is noted that this one is slightly different from some that have been studied so far. Some care seems to have been taken to produce the smooth effect on this one.

The container on the right has a difference of shape compared with another container that was noted earlier. This difference may be attributed to the different life styles of different communities.

Plate no.24.

The stool on the left is by shape just like another stool that was noted earlier.

The headrest on the right is simple and plain. No pattern work has been done to decorate it.

There are many examples to show that a number of traditional artifacts are produced with the idea of function as the main purpose.

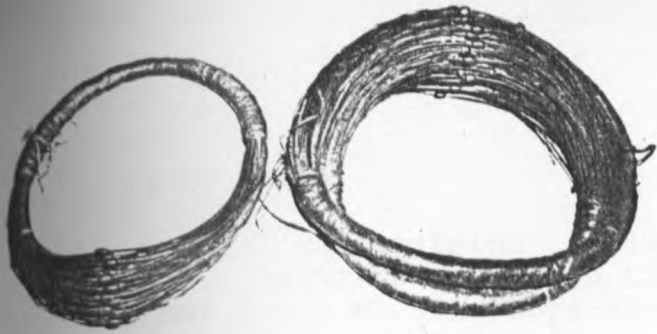


Plate No. 21

Old type necklaces.

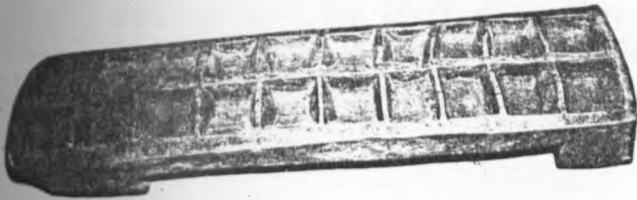


Plate No. 22

Playing patterned
board.



Plate No. 23

Headrest and storage
container.



Plate No. 24

Stool and headrest.

Plate no.25.

Circumcision seclusion mask worn by male. Initiates dance in the evening from about 3-6 p.m. The boys are smeared with black, red and white clays. Local name: INGOLORE.¹

Plate no.26.

The technique of rubbing to produce pattern work has been utilized by some traditional African societies. Such patterns tend to be attractive to look at. Here they have been used on a shield to make it attractive. This is a Luhya shield.

Plate no.27.

Monkey skin head dress made by men and worn by male dancers for dancing Kogomo. There is colour in this head dress which also contains cow skin. Also there is pattern work, found around the headress. The entire piece, as an art form, has been done with some imagination. Local name: INDEBE.

Plate no.28.

There is a deliberate attempt to produce pattern work on this skin surface. These patterns are of artistic taste. They have been produced skillfully. Some traditional societies in Kenya excel in pattern works.

¹ACC. No. 1973-17. I.A.S.

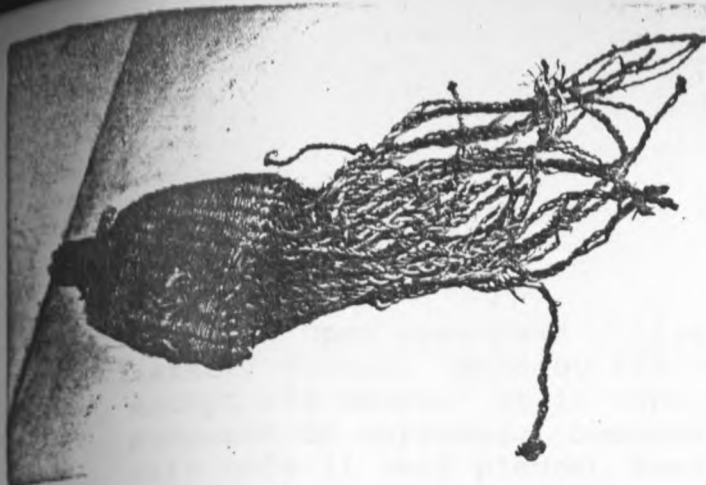


Plate No.25

Circumcision seclusion



Plate No.26

Rubbed to make Luhya
patterns.

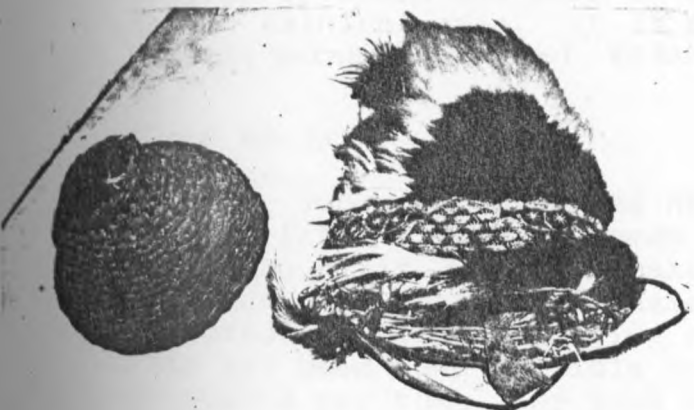


Plate No.27

Colour for a cow and
monkey skin head dress
(Luhya)

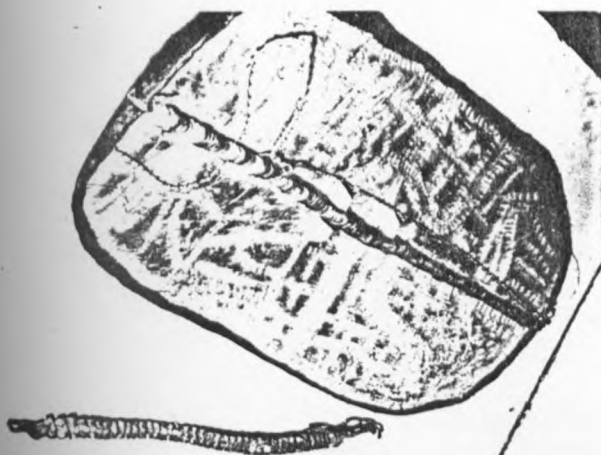


Plate No.28

impressed patterns.

plate no.29.

Open work-bead collar, strung on makonge (sisal) thread. Worn by little girls and women, except old women. It is worn purely as an ornament on ceremonial occasions. It is fringed with hela (1 cent pieces), some as old as 1924 and worn thin.

Giriama, Vernacular name: KIPOTEPOTE
or KISARA-SARA.

plate no.30.

Little girls open-work bead necklace threaded on makonge fibre (sisal), made by the women and worn purely as ornament on ceremonial occasions. Giriama, Vernacular name - KISARASA.

Plate no.31.

Necklace of fine brass chain looped backwards and forwards through sisal thread. It is worn by women and made by a Giriama craftsman in the Kaloleni area. It is for ornament only. Duruma, Vernacular name: KIRANGI.

Plate no.32.

Two open work bead necklaces threaded of makonge fibre. Made by women in the Banga area, for young girls. Mothers make for their daughters They are used purely as ornament. The bead work is worked skillfully to give a sense of soft effect This has been made possible by arranging the beads in such a way that they look like fibre. Duruma, Vernacular name: KIRANGI.



Plate No.29

Necklace of fine
brass chain.

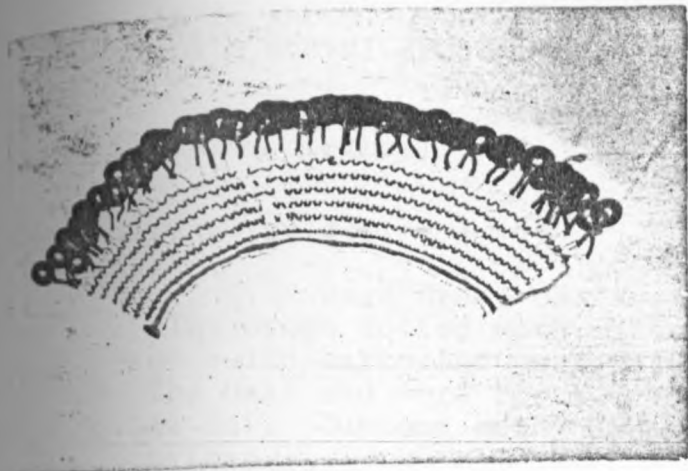


Plate No.30

Little girl's open
work.

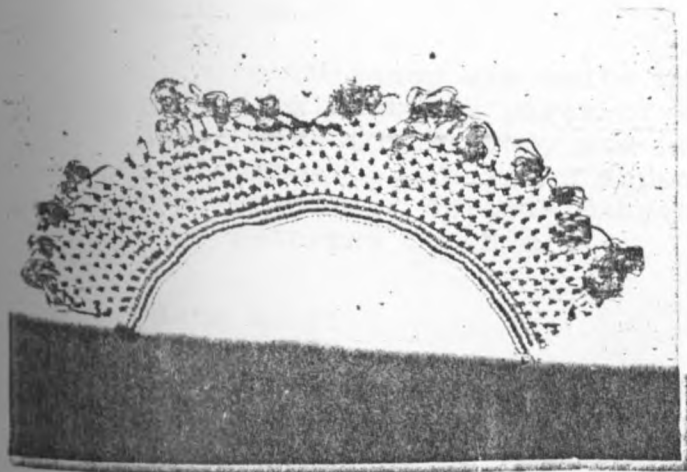


Plate No.31

Trade beads of white
orange, green, blue
and red.

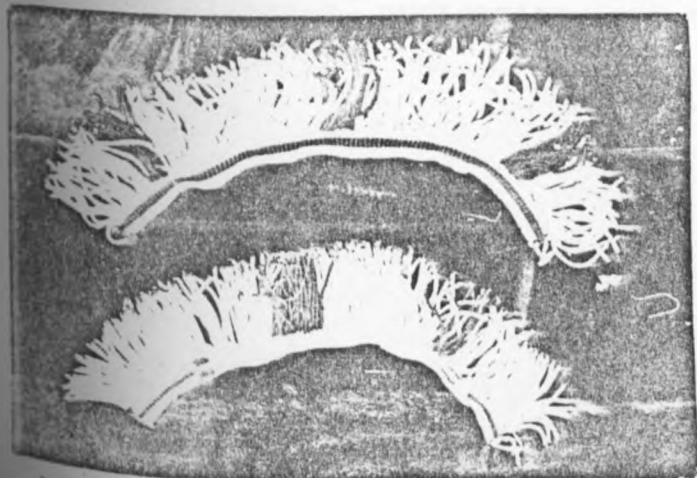


Plate No.32

Two openwork bead
necklaces.

plate no.33.

Craftwork here is not complicated at all. However, the arrangement of the components is interesting in some ways. Many of the traditional crafts are very simply done, and yet are quite interesting to look at.

This is a thorn mask. It is worn as it is shown. The body is decorated with red and white shots and stripes.

Customs among the Kauma and Kambe.
(Coastal tribes).

Plate no.34.

Head dress of Kaya priest. It is a red clay crown dotted with white shots. It is normally of solid earth and very heavy. It is woven onto the hair and worn for twelve days (have to sleep in it). Customs among Kauma and Kombe. Coastal tribes.

Plate no.35.

Vigango are quite common in some parts of Africa, notably parts of central Africa. As art and craft forms, they are both representational and symbolic. They are supposed to have protective powers against various dangers. Sometimes they have patterns on them.

Plate no.36.

A Kigango may be either small or big. This particular one is a big one and the details of patterns can be seen on it. Vigango are supposed to awaken human feelings. This is because they are associated with such ideas as prevention of diseases, protection from evil etc.

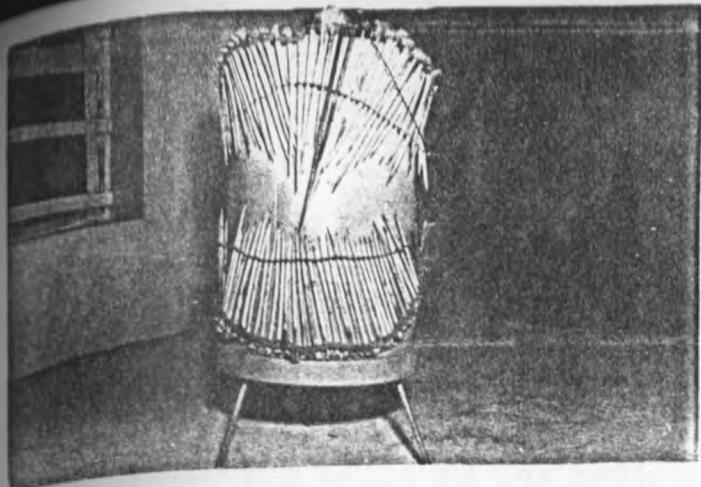


Plate No.33

Decorations by using
thorns.

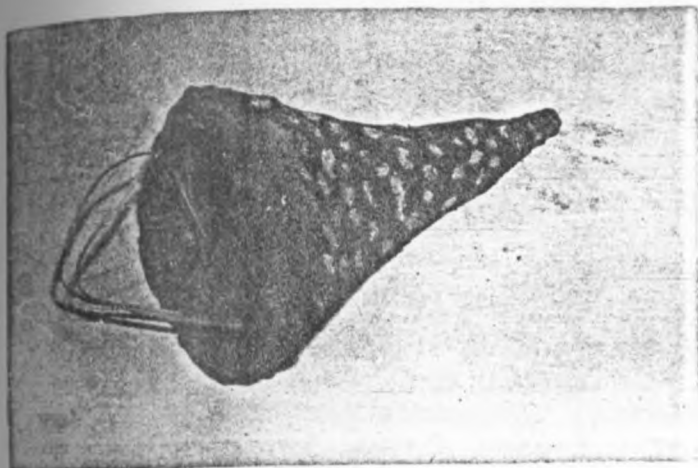


Plate No.34

Headdress of a Kaya
priest.

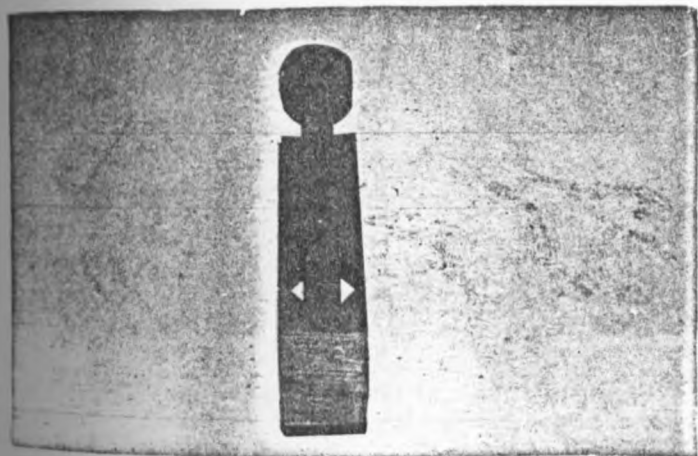


Plate No.35

A kigango (protection
against evil spirits).

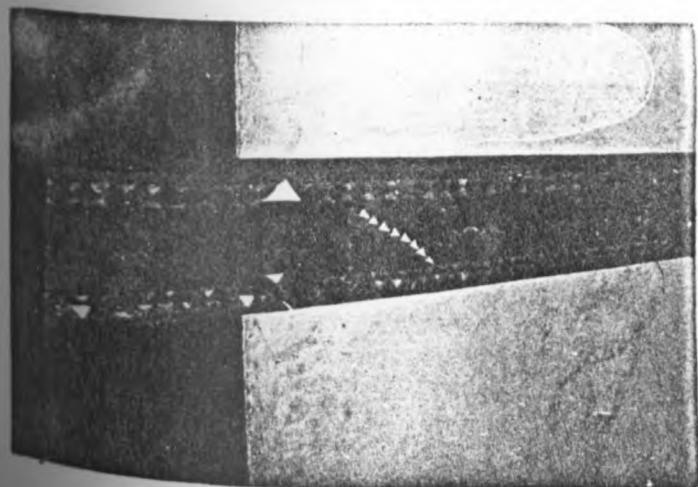


Plate No.36

A bigger kigango.

plate no.37.

Red, white and blue beads and cowries sewn on an oblong of cowskin, the whole hung on locally made chain. This chain (including the beadwork) was made by a male craftsman called NDORO who sells to the medicine man who distributes them to his patients.

If a person is ill under the ribs he or she goes to the medicine man who provides this charm and the illness will go because it is caused by bad spirit. Worn by both sexes over one shoulder and under the other arm.
Giriama, Vernacular name: KIVELI

Plate no.38.

Pattern work here apparently was done with an aim of causing pleasure. This is done by forming some attractive pattern work. The general form is of square shapes. It is obvious here that the craftsman appreciated the orderly arrangement of beads.

Plate no.39.

A Giriama witchdoctor magic Kibuyu. It has got a curved head stopper and a thick string-worked round neck. The traditional medicine men used such Kibuyus for a number of things. For example, the curing of diseases, prevention of ailments etc.

The head stopper is symbolic and it is probably meant to enhance the Kibuyu's powers. The idea of some objects having mysterious powers has always been used by traditional witchdoctors to achieve certain aims.

Plate no.40.

Triangular patterns seem to be popular with belt works. The white beads are abundantly used and seem to dominate as a colour.

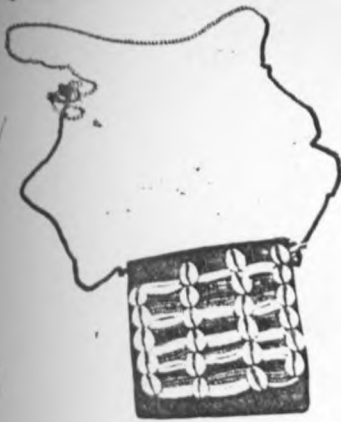


Plate No.37

Charm by a male
craftsman.

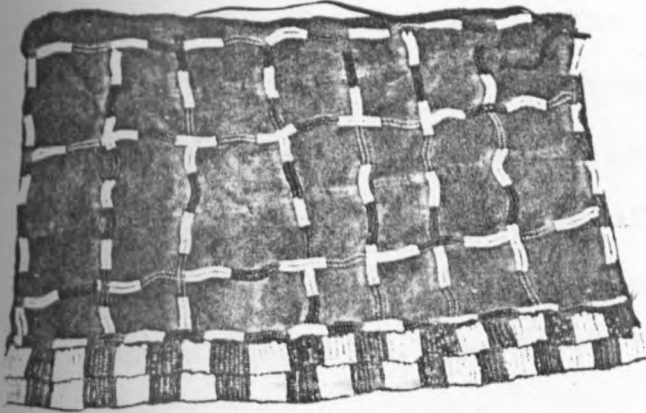


Plate No.38

Belongs to married
women.



Plate No.39

Witchdoctor's magic
kibuyu.

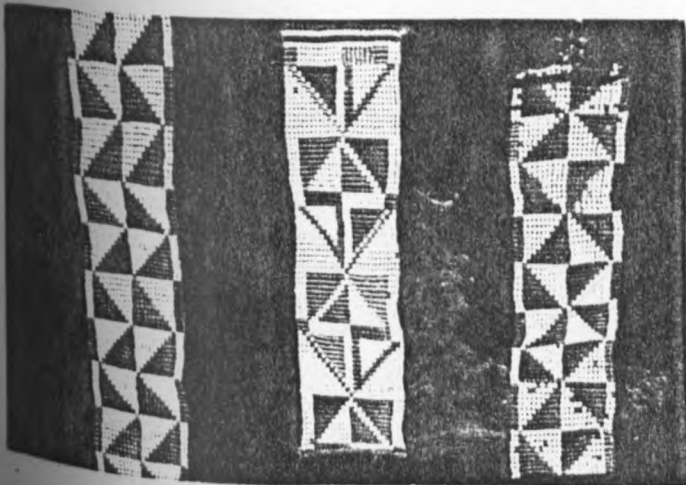


Plate No.40

Beaded waist belt.

CHAPTER FOUR

BANTU

As it has been stated earlier in this study, the Bantu in Kenya could be classified as of Western Central and the Coast. The Bantu are of Niger-Congo family. It would be an enormous task to try to do a study of all Bantu people in Kenya. The author believes that the purpose of this study will be adequately served if he just confines himself to Bantu around Mt. Kenya.

Background

Apparently the early movements of the inhabitants in the southern and eastern portions of Mt. Kenya, seem to have depended mainly on climatic and geographical conditions. It should be noted that no written records exist about these early times and the oral tradition that is to be found is scanty and vague in giving us information. The written records were first done by the first white explorers. That means that these first records are fairly recent when compared to the history of other parts of the world.¹

¹Browne, O.M., Vanishing Tribes of Kenya, p.4.

The great peak of Mt. Kenya has been the main factor to influence the development of these people. Its influence has been reliable rainfall, equable climate, richness of the soil and the existence of the forest belt. In order to properly appreciate the way of life of these people it is necessary to know the conditions in which they live. One way in which this can be done is by a constant recollection of the natural features. These features must have played a leading part in both their history and culture and these have their influence on the art forms.

A wide plain which averages 1.5 thousand metres above sea level isolates Mt. Kenya on all sides from any neighbouring heights. This great extinct volcano rises at its summit to 5.1 thousand metres above the sea level. The Nyandarua (Aberdares) lie 64 km to the west of Mt. Kenya. They are a long chain which include several peaks of over 3.6 thousand metres.

Tana River forms the channel by which all the water from the southern slopes of Mt. Kenya is drained away. This is because to the south and south-east, Mt. Kenya slopes down into the rolling plains of Tana river. This river curves around the mountain at an average distance of 64 km until it

turns towards east through the Mumoni Range. This river forms a natural boundary of central and eastern areas occupied by the Bantu of around Mt. Kenya.

Looking closely at Mt. Kenya it is noted that the slopes are abrupt and well defined nearer the summit. These slopes fade gradually into the plains of the Tana. At its lowest point the plain is only 600 metres above sea level. A great variety of climate, vegetation and scenery has come as a result of this formation. The tribes living upon the slopes of this mountain do not have very great cultural differences despite the variety of the area in terms of the physical features.

Below the snow-line there is an expanse of moor-line country, attractive in the rare intervals of sunshine, but usually enveloped in wet mists; this gradually merges into the bamboos which form a belt almost all round the mountain; these in turn give place to the dense virgin forest which covers the lower slopes until it meets the point at which human requirements have restricted it. The forest has a big influence in the development of this area. It afforded cover for the raiding parties from another side of the mountain. It is presumably responsible for the occurrence of rain, the soil

reclaimed from it is of exceptional value for agricultural purposes, it provided a safe refuge from any enemy that might attack a community living near its edges etc.

However, the forest has been cut back to a surprising extent. Originally it extended far beyond its present borders.. Today it has become very thin on the northern slopes. There are places where the cultivated land almost reaches the bamboos on the Nyandarua.² It is gratifying to note that this process has been retarded on south-east of Mt. Kenya. Here, the country below the seemingly wider forest belt is far more wooded and uncultivated. Other areas around the mountain cannot boast of this.

Traditions indicate a state which created a need for the land around the base of the mountain among people pressing upwards from the less fertile plains.

Groupings

Groupings of the inhabitants living around Mt. Kenya comprise of the following.

WEST - Kiambu, Murang'a, Nyeri, Ndia and Gichugu.

² Ibid.

NORTH - Meru, Chuka, Egoji, Mwimbi, Muthambi,
Tharaka and Tigania.

SOUTH - Embu and Mbeere.

SOUTH-EAST - Akamba of Machakos and Kitui (Akamba
are remarkably different from the above tribes).

Local Talents

Practical use of items is the most important consideration in almost every form of industry. As a result of this, such objects as pots and household utensils are practically devoid of any attempt of decoration. In need no elaborate examples of artistic efforts are to be found in tribal communities around Mt. Kenya except the Akamba. When studying the Art of Mt. Kenya area, it is important to distinguish between local talent and that learnt from neighbouring tribes, notably the Akamba.

Also when studying the African Art it is useful to note that art was used as an integral part for both daily living and educating the young in the social set up.³

³ Programme letter from Salesians of Don Bosco, a Fancy Fete, Nairobi, June 3, 1984; Introduction page.

Much of the artistic effort of the tribes around Mt. Kenya is directed towards personal adornment. There is considerable ingenuity that is shown in making items by using the bead and wire worn by both sexes. Some of these works are of considerable artistic taste.⁴

Except for such seeds and pieces of wood as may occasionally appear in necklaces, etc., all the other beads are imported. There is however, considerable skill and taste in the use of the smaller beads.

These beads are usually strung on a string. This string is then wound round the arm or leg as a bracelet or anklet. Sometimes this string of beads may be sewn on to something as a base, usually a piece of leather. Sometimes beads also serve as a means of identification for an article when they are used to work patterns on sword sheaths and belts.

Women's small skirts and aprons may be decorated with beads, although in a modified extent. Usually in this type of decoration, there is only an ornamentation of cowrie shells. These are sewn on in rows, alternating with the old-fashioned blue

⁴Browne, Vanishing, p.71.

and white beads with a shell edging. The result is usually an impressive artistic endeavour, especially if it is done with care.

Wire work is practiced as a form of art. This skill is used to produce some impressive artistic tastes. It is frequently used to ornament sticks. This is when little collars of twisted wire are bound round the neck of a club or stick. This work is generally done by the Akamba, and it may probably be considered as an introduction from them. In the same category must be placed the very neat and artistic wire work on the stools, which are often to be seen carried by old men. These are the work of the Akamba, who seem to have excelled in this style of artistic taste. However, the tribes near Mt. Kenya have been influenced to imitate some of this artistic taste.⁵

Painting on shields is an example of how copying was used to create patterns. This is carried out in striking original patterns, painted on the bare hide with ash, chalk and clay. The origin of these patterns are the Maasai. These patterns represent a species of heraldry. It is noted that the Maasai have a reputation as warriors. This leads to the copying of Maasai shield and

⁵ Ibid.

the painting with it, though the meaning hereby changes. This is understood since the other communities are interested probably in the pattern work only.

The variety of dancing shields, however, are also decorated, and in these cases the design may fairly be considered as of local origin. Usually they take the form of a light ground on which are painted wavy lines in some dark colour; in the case of the long narrow shield the pattern is a sort of dog's tooth one on either side of a central line. This particular pattern is cut in wood. Then it is picked out in black and white.

There is some suggestion of similarity between a pattern of wavy lines found in Tharaka and similar sort of pattern found in the Bushman paintings of South Africa. However, this resemblance is most probably only accidental.

There is slight attempt at decorating of walls. House walls may sometimes be given a coat of white chalk, on which are drawn circular or curly lines in dark clay. It is important to note that this example is rare and that no patterns or object seem to be held in view.

String bags as a skill are neat. Its products

are good too. This skill is done by women and they perform it well. String bags usually have various colours. The colours are worked into these bags by means of occasional strands of string which have been dyed in an extract of bark. As the bag is made by working round and round a centre, a coloured strand introduced produces a corresponding band in the finished bag. Although the patterns seem to be dictated only by fancy, or the string which happens to be available, the patterns are neat enough in a simple way.⁶ Some of the string bags are large while others are quite small. The size of the bag is determined by the purpose that is intended for it.

"Picture-gourds" are commonly made around Mt. Kenya, though probably this practice also originated from the Akamba to some extent. The exercise is not complicated. A gourd of which the skin is still not too hard to be scratched is marked with a thorn or awl with a series of lines, dots, circles and other markings, which are supposed to represent some story. The completed gourd is then carried by the owner, usually a boy, who rattles the seeds inside it, in time to a sort of chant. In this he relates his adventures, and the gourd is supposed to be the record of them; he will trace

⁶Ibid., pp.72-73.

out a series of symbols explaining what they mean as he does so. There is no ground for regarding this as any sort of pictorial writing, however, since the symbols admit of no arbitrary equivalents; two different boys, or the same boy on different occasions, will give quite dissimilar accounts of the meanings. Possibly, in some cases, the symbols may come to have a fairly definite meaning to the owner.

The above explanation is an illustration of association between ideas and symbolism. It is used to communicate social information pertaining to any human aspect. However, as is the case with other forms of traditional symbolism, this art has almost vanished completely. This is to be regretted.

There is evidence that a little wood carving is done. However, the most common forms are stools and sticks. Although the patterns are not well developed, nevertheless, they seem to satisfy their needs. It is noted that the neatness of the carving depends chiefly on the care and patience with which the work is finished off.

Much ingenuity and taste are displayed in the ornamentation of snuff boxes and horns, and they are sometimes quite neat and artistic.

A suitable length of horn may be utilised. A gourd is also frequently utilized. A piece of leather is sewn over the open end, and a plug, sometimes very neatly finished, closes the small aperture at the top, through which the snuff is poured out.

The elaborate ornamentation that sometimes goes with snuff box is an example of how the traditional societies appreciate the content/meaning through form.

The bulk of the dressing that is possessed by the tribes of around Mt. Kenya consist mainly of skins of various animals. These dressings are supplemented with string and beads which serve as both functional and ornamental.

Tattooing is not practiced in the ordinary Western sense.

The exercise of raising scars in a pattern form is known as cicatrizing. It is quite common with the Bantu of around Mt. Kenya. It is particularly so with the Mwimbi people (part of the Meru).

The exercise is fairly simple to execute. First the skin is pierced and raised with a small awl. After this, some kind of irritant is rubbed in, which results in a pattern of raised scars.

On the women's neck, these marks are often carried out fairly elaborately. However, no meaning seems to be attached to the form or pattern.

A tribal doctor may make a series of small cuts or burns on the skin of his patient by way of a counter-irritant for headache or other ailment. Widely believed in as a cure, this practice is quite common. It is distinct from the other practice whereby the aim is largely ornamental.⁷

Application of corrosive sap of a plant is another form of skin-marking. It consists in the application of corrosive sap of a plant. The cheeks seem to be the common area for this form of art, which may be painted in circles or stars. The sap blisters the skin and at first leaves bright pink lines. In a month or two hardly any trace can be detected because the bright pink lines disappear rapidly. To this practice, no special significance seems to be attached. However, it gives the people great satisfaction as it fulfills their desire for more ornamentation.⁸

Some traditional societies are inclined to file their teeth. The exercise is carried with a

⁷Ibid., p.75.

⁸Ibid.

small chisel. The experience is said to be very painful.

The people who are inclined to file their teeth are the Embu. All sections of this particular group tend to do it. The practice is usually restricted to two upper front teeth, but occasionally more will be operated on. The filed teeth are supposed to be attractive to look at. The practice is by no means universal, nor do any rules seem to govern its application. Sometimes a doctor will recommend teeth filling to be done to a particular patient. It is believed that the practice came from the Akamba people. However like all the other many artistic skills that are practised by the people of around Mt. Kenya, teeth filing is vanishing fast.⁹

The people of around Mt. Kenya have surprising variations of weapons. Looking closely at these arms, are found some curious points that need further investigations. Some arms are for offensive purposes and others like the shield are used for defence. This study wishes to mention only some weapons i.e. for offensive purposes, to serve as illustrative examples of the arms industry.

⁹ Ibid., p.76.

(a) SWORD:

Usually worn by a man going on a journey, to supplement his spear, but it is of little real use, except for slashing creepers of bushes.

(b) SPEAR:

In all cases the blade and butt are attached to the wooden shaft by wedging the latter into the sockets; no sort of cement, binding or nail is used.

(c) BOW AND ARROW:

This could be seen as kind of a missile. It is obviously a very effective "missile".

(d) SLING:

This is used mainly for throwing stones to scare birds off the grain fields.

(e) THE CLUB:

It is used extensively as an assaulting weapon. This weapon is always handy, it is very convenient to carry, and it can inflict a very serious blow.

(f) BELT:

Is made of leather. It is about 50.6 mm

broad though sometimes considerably more.

(g) KNIVES:

Can hardly be reckoned among weapons. Knives are used for every kind of purpose, and being of soft iron, they can be quickly sharpened when the job in hand requires a keen edge.

(h) THE AXE:

The people around Mt. Kenya do not seem to realise the efficiency of the axe as a weapon. Axe is used as a domestic implement. It could be a very formidable weapon and handy to use, but cases in which it is being employed as a weapon are few.

It is noted that no boomerangs or throwing-sticks exist as weapons. However, self-acting weapons exist in the form of pitfalls. These are used chiefly for trapping animals, though they were, apparently, also used as defence against raiding enemies much earlier. Earthworks and forts do not exist.

Painting for Dancing

..... The body is painted in exciting patches, stripes of white ashes and charcoal forming paint. Round the neck are worn strings of short lengths of grass and reeds strung as beads, and round the waist is worn a fringe

of reeds, black seeds and cowrie shells. A flap of catskin is worn over the private parts, and a larger piece is worn over the right buttock. A head-dress of guinea-fowl and ostrich feathers is fixed on, and a bell is strapped to the right leg; on the right arm is carried a broken gourd as wristlet. The fingers hold a little stick that is some centimetres long, with which the gourd is tapped in time to the song while in the left hand is carried the long dancing-shield of painted wood, or alternatively a lance two to three metres in length, tipped with long double streamers of string mounted with fur or grass-tufted at the ends. These lances are set up to mark the limits of the dancing ground and seem to have some effect in preventing harm resulting from the remarks made in the course of a song.....¹⁰

This illustration serves as a manifest to show that personal adornment is used for both beauty and medical purposes. It is also another way to show that the traditional African societies love the practice of decorating their bodies for various reasons. As is evident from the above illustration the materials used are mostly natural. Some of the above mentioned implements are made from plants, animals skin, bird feathers etc. The study of how and to what extent the African peoples use natural materials would produce some revealing conclusions. Such a study should be tackled in depth. The knowledge would help many to appreciate more the

¹⁰ Ibid., p.178.

traditional arts and crafts.

Instruments for music are decorated to make them more attractive. The people around Mt. Kenya possess a number of musical instruments. Forms of trumpets are very varied. The commonest is made from a horn of Greater Kudu or Bongo. The process of making them into trumpets is simple. They are merely pierced at the top of the hollow, so as to form a mouthpiece.

Hollow branches are used in making other forms of trumpets. These branches are cut down and shaped till they are of very much the same form as the horns which they presumably imitate. Some of these trumpets are carried slung by a string, much like a bugle.

There are some examples of very old wooden horns. These frequently have pieces of hide shrunk on, the remnants of various magic ceremonies in which they have been used. Considerable importance is attached to such specimens, and they are kept in the top of the warriors' huts ready to be blown when occasion requires, as an alarm. The sound of such an alarm would demand for specific reaction from other members of the community. In case of an attack from an enemy the response would be to get armed and defend the community.

Drums fulfil much the same purpose as the trumpets. Drums are simple in form. They are usually made of hollow wood, with a skin cover. They are played with the hand, by rubbing and slapping, or else with a small piece of stick.

As a rule they are about 0.6 metres in height by some 0.3 metres or 30.5 cm across. Only one end is covered. Very often the drum is merely stood up at an angle and held with one hand. However, sometimes a skin band round the middle is arranged so as to form a handle by which the performer holds the drum. Whatever the case, the user is always able to hold his drum in a stable manner.

Drums are often regarded with considerable veneration, just like the trumpets. Apparently there seems to be no particular reason why drums are held in such a veneration. They seem to play no part in any magic ceremony, except as a means for summoning participants. There is evidence that to some extent drums are used to give warning in case of attack. Drums are also used in some traditional dances and they add alot of life to these dances.

Except for the few simple appliances that have been mentioned, no other musical instruments are found on south east of Mt. Kenya tribes. For example, it has not appeared to the owner of a bow, to twang

the string for the sake of music and as such no stringed instruments seem to exist. Equally, no sort of metal tongue meant for twanging is made. This is despite the fact that there are many local smiths who are used to work in iron. One would imagine that they should have hit upon such a musical idea.

It is also evident that no metal plates or wooden bars for playing harmonicon-fashion exist, nor do the tribes seem to find any satisfaction in striking or ringing pieces of metal as musical exercises.

However, the few instruments that they possess, serve them to the full and their dances are a complete extension of their philosophies of life. As is the case with many African people, their arts, crafts and dancing are part and parcel of their daily living. As for the young, their educational process is also part of day to day activities.

Doctor's Paraphernalia

As regards white or black magic, the office of the doctor in either case does not seem to be hereditary. It seems as though the office is kept or inherited by a sort of a likely young man, who in time succeeds the doctor's magic gourds, bags, horns

and other paraphernalia. The doctor possesses an assortment of these objects, each of which has its particular purpose. Many of these pieces of craft are of symbolic, representational and associational value to both the doctor and the patient. The effective use of these crafts stems from the cultural attitudes, meaning and value with which the people view them. The fly whisk is associated with peace and reconciliation. It is noted that its fibres are distinctly soft and soothing. It is a product of a cow which provides nourishing products such as milk and meat. A cow features very prominently in tribal marriages, especially as part of dowry.

These facts further illustrate that in order to fully appreciate the traditional arts and crafts, it is essential to try and study in detail the tribal cultures. Such a study would increase knowledge as to why some things are done, how they are performed, who does them etc.

An Illustrative Example

..... "The point to be enlightened was the loss of a white woolen scarf; this had disappeared and some suspicion attached to a dismissed house-servant. The traditional doctor was told that the scarf had disappeared, but not told of any suspected person. He brought his skin bag, which contained about half-a dozen gourds; on the side of the bag

was slung the hollow and charred shell of a small tortoise. A straw mat was brought and spread for the operation. The traditional doctor then took out his large gourd from his bag, it being ovoid in shape about 253.9 mm long. Its narrow neck was stopped with a turf of cow's tail, on which was wedged what seemed to be an old umbrella ring. In this gourd were some three hundred or more counters or beads: the great majority were black beans, but numerous other objects also appeared; several small stones, two or three pieces of wood, a bullet, a piece of amber pipe mouthpiece and other odds and ends.

The traditional doctor then took the gourd, waved it in the air, repeated the slight spitting, took out the stopper and emptied out some counters; of these he made a heap, shaking out a small handful several times; he then made two more heaps, about the same size - i.e. containing some sixty or eighty counters

..... Now to identify the man who took the scarf" he then produced a small gourd with some chalk or similar substance in it. This he tipped into his left palm; he then took up the five sticks and chalked their ends. He held up the sticks, murmured some words - in which the scarf was mentioned - waved the sticks round his head, arranged them side by side in his hand, and pressed them firmly against his forehead. There they stuck for a moment, falling down one after the other. All the five sticks were then arranged in a circle, chalked ends inwards; piles of counters were tipped out for each, and counted, the result of this was to indicate one of the two sticks which fell last as belonging to the culprit.....

In the final analysis he chose the last stick as the one belonging to the culprit and announced that the stick "belonged" to the house-servant. Hence the house-servant had taken the white

scarf away."¹¹

It is apparent from the above illustrative example that the use of art crafts and other natural objects is important if such an exercise is to succeed. Different objects are used as means of communicating and explaining certain important things that are done by the doctor.

To Effect a Cure

..... "In a suitable open spot near the hut of the sick girl the traditional doctor placed a flat stone; he then found some grass, which he cut up into small pieces with a little knife, leaving the resultant mince on the stone. He then produced from his bags two horns, apparently bush-buck horns cut down; these were stood up on end on either side of the stone. A small fire of twigs was made, and a gourd was put ready near the horns The doctor then comes with the two horns and his ceremonial wooden spoon, all marked down the centre with a chalk line. These are held by him, together with a foot of the goat, in front of her; he draws them down her body from her face, and commands the disease to go to Mt. Kenya (Kirinyaga)"¹²

The above explanation is another example where objects are used for communication purposes. It should also be noted that Mt. Kenya has always

¹¹Ibid., pp.185-188.

¹²Ibid., p.190.

influenced many activities of the traditional societies living around it.

Certain Industries and Handicrafts

The Embu people do practice certain industries and handicrafts, some of which exhibit quite a high degree of skills. This is despite the fact that these people are mainly agriculturalists and pastoralists. They have a good understanding of skins, from which nearly all their clothing is usually made.

The hide is first of all pegged out and dried. The hair is shaved off. Then the skin is rubbed down smoothly with a suitable stone. After this the skin is worked up with fat until it becomes extremely pliable.

Most of the hides are from the goats and cows. The preparation of the skins is always taken as an important craft by the Embu people.

These skins are often augmented with beads and shell work. The putting of these extras is done very neatly and tastefully. Fibre thread is used to put on these beads and shells.

Also necklaces and bracelets are made using beads. Considerable ingenuity being often shown in adapting seeds, nuts and small pieces of wood to

supplement the ordinary trade beads. The use of trade beads makes the work look more tidy and skilled.

The traditional African people around Mt. Kenya, also show some little skill in carving. Bracelets are neatly made from horn and ivory. However these are worked with very primitive tools. The result depends on the amount of extreme patience on the part of the craftsman.

Small wooden and bone snuff-boxes are common, and sometimes show quite a high degree of artistic skill. The carving of the wooden stools appears to be the most ambitious. These stools are widely used and frequently carried by the old men. These stools may be 25.3 cm or 38 cm. in height and perhaps 30.5 cm. in width. They are curved out of solid block and are usually circular and four-legged.

The designs vary considerably and are usually enhanced with patterns and shading burnt into the wood. The final result is sometimes quite artistic. Very great patience is necessary for the construction of stool especially a beautiful one. There is evidence that some skillful craftsmen had this patience.

However, even more patience is required for

the construction of the wooden mortar. This is because hollowing is necessary. A solid section of tree-trunk, some 90 cm long, is laboriously hollowed out for two-thirds of its length by means of a long handled chisel. In order to make it vase-shaped, the outside is given a waist.

The hollow bee-boxes which are suspended in the trees also show quite a degree of skill.¹³ This is even more noteworthy when it is considered the kind of tools that are available. Carving of various shapes is readily appreciated by many traditional people. This is because of its three dimensional nature. From many points of view, three dimensional works are of more practical value to the people, and appeal more to them. In a number of ways also, three dimensional objects act as pieces of sculpture.

Fibre strings are cleverly worked into various forms by women. The most common product is the bags. These are made on the same principle as a grass woven basket, and may be of almost any size from a purse to a sack. They are very strong and useful and play important part in the life of women. Some attempt at ornamentation is made. For example the fibre is stained with vegetable dyes, so as to

• ¹³Ibid., Chap. 2.

produce bands of colour. Some of these bags may be quite big and some are small. It all depends on the purpose for which the bag is intended. Some bags serve as good examples of a remarkable artistic production.

Women have another artistic industry also. They manufacture grass mats. They plait them neatly with alternating bands of colour. Grass mats are used for sleeping on. They could also be rolled round the baggage for a journey as a kind of hold-all. In this way the journey is made more convenient.

Older women practice the art of making pottery. Potting among the tribes around Mt. Kenya is not very developed. For example no kind of wheel is used. The vessels are built up into two pieces. Subsequently they are joined round the centre-line and afterwards smoothed-off with wet fingers. The firing is crude and not very successfully, no sort of glaze being attempted. The form is almost entirely restricted to gourd-shaped vessels of various sizes. These serve to hold water and occasionally food, and will stand a reasonable amount of hard wear. Very little attempt at ornamentation is made, although sometimes a criss-cross pattern runs in a line round the neck.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ibid.

Form and Content of the Akamba Carving

When the development of Akamba wood carving is considered, it is noted that it has been based on commercial value it can fetch. An analysis of the the form and content of the Akamba carving from 1914¹⁵ shows two aspect of the commercial value.¹⁶

- (a) Tradition, i.e. the African culture, heritage and environment.
- (b) Skill, i.e. handmade, non machine made.

The Akamba carvings have content that is based on tradition. This content is based on a number of subjects: These are: .

- (a) Carving representing primitivism, devil figures, fertility goddesses, abstract (or symbolism), masks.
- (b) Wilderness of the environment: wild animals.
- (c) Human figures depicting the African culture e.g. Maasai warrior, old man with a blanket

¹⁵ Bartlett Lieut: Colonel: "... African Rifles", A study in the Military History of E. Africa and Central Africa: 1880-1945: Some Important Historical dates. Alderhot Yale & Polden Ltd. 1956.

¹⁶ Sultan Somjee, "Material Culture in Ukambani," Seminar Paper No.67. 1976, pp.11-12.

sitting on a stool.

- (d) African material culture: stools, snuff containers, ornaments, combs.¹⁷

For the last half a century, the stylization of the carving has been seeing changes. However, the content has remained unchanged i.e. a hand work that is not machine made is what is being sold. This handicraftness has a false concept of non-mass production as a result of being non-machine made. For example the following are produced; household objects of the upper classes, kitchen material culture such as salad bowls, salad spoons and egg cups.

There are two kinds of productions when considering the marketing of tradition and skill.

(a) Mass production.

(b) Selective production.

There are many social structures that make up the carvers communities. These social structures are the base of handicraft production and the basis of the international trade in Akamba carvings. A market centre in Machakos district by the name Wamunyu, is a good example of such social structures.¹⁸

¹⁷"Akamba wood carving." Seminar Paper:I.A.S., p.16.

¹⁸Ibid., p.17.

The case of Wamunyu could be studied into some details so as to see how such social structures function.

The demand for carving reaching Wamunyu during the mid fifties and early 1960s was irregular. At this time the demand was on basis of commissions through contacts such as the District Commissioner. There was no link with the well established dealers. When the Christmass orders came, the demand was high. This was during the September-October period. Before the Emergency there were unsuccessful attempts to form co-operatives. However, the demands of emerging big dealers were met by the individual dealers. The same people met the demands of selective art dealers..

Originally there were four to five businessmen who started a carving workshop at Wamunyu. These employed ten to thirty carvers. These businessmen got their orders directly and through employed middlemen. Soon there were also self-employed dealers who were able to approach carvers directly. This made the organization to change the way of charging. Now, payment was made on piece work, also the rental charges for the use of the workshop was collected. However, the businessmen continued having the monopoly of supplying the raw

materials.¹⁹

Today at Wamunyu the conditions are the same except, of the four major businessmen there is only one who controls a big part of the trade. He is one of the richest men in Wamunyu. Dealing in carvings is one of the many other businesses that he handles which include transport and wholesale trade. This man originally was once a carver.²⁰

Analysis of the carvers and dealers social classes, reflect a pattern of demand for the carvings during a year. There is an irregularity in the demand for carvings. This irregularity is in terms of quantity and the type of object e.g. elephant and salad bowl.

The income of the carvers and dealers is directly affected by the nature of demand. Their income can be affected during the year and also during a period of time. This period of time can be from a month to any number of years. The reflection of this is how a good carver is locally explained.

A good carver is like a lucky carver, which is a temporary status as long as the demand for the

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

object or objects that he carves lasts. Once the demand falls so does he stop being a good carver. Thus one can hear a carver being referred to as "he used to be a good carver, but not anymore."²¹

There are four sub-groups of good carvers. By specifying them accordingly, we note the structure of social class responding to a market.

Within the good carvers there are four classes These are:

- (a) Those who earn between sh.50 and sh.500. a month.
- (b) Those who have a constant income of around sh.1000 a month.
- (c) Those who earn an average of between sh.1000 and sh.2000 a month but fluctuating during the year.
- (d) Those who maintain a constant income of sh.3000 plus a month.²²

Decrease in demand leads to diversification of skills. Stylization or content change is very small.

²¹Ibid., p.18

²²Ibid.

There is little product development or innovation based on market research. Those unable to adapt to market changes would start falling from group (d) to (c) to (b) and finally to (a). Apart from the rich businessmen of Wamunyu the good carvers enjoy an upper middle class position in the same category as the small scale craftsmen and traders, teachers, medical officer and government employees.²³

Within the wood carving industry the other people in this class are the drivers and dealers. There are also a couple of dealers whose income is higher than the best carvers. It is usually the carvers and dealers of this group that make temporary arrangements and by pass both the monopoly of a few co-operative societies.²⁴

The largest group of carvers at Wamunyu is made up of shop assistants, paid farm workers, small market place traders in food products and within the carving industry, the day and monthly carvers connected with handling, cutting and stocking wood.

People in this group earn up to sh.400 a month. They are of two sub-groups.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

- (a) Carvers and dealers on full time basis.
- (b) Carvers and dealers on part time basis;
(semi-carvers and semi-dealers).

Within the industry the group of workers who make the lowest social class according to income are those who paint, polish and clean the carving on the basis of pieces of work. They form a group with those who pack and handle once a week or a fortnight, or a month depending on the demand. Also in this group are the seasonal employees of the carvers who make half finished objects when the demand is high. Mass produced cock tail sticks, 7.6 cm animals, key rings, are examples of objects that they handle.²⁵

The case at Wamunyu is an ideal example to illustrate how a craft can change its purposes. In this case from aesthetic ideals to commercialism. This shifting of aims and objectives is bound to affect form, content and appreciation. The effect is even larger when the objects are produced en mass.

More often than not the underlying main influence is the tourist. The craftsmen tend to concentrate on the items that sell. Carvers

²⁵Ibid., pp.18-19.

therefore produce the items that are wanted by the buying tourists. This fact waters down the authenticity of the crafts in many ways. The element of copying comes in and the purity of the traditional heritage tends to be lost.

Traditional Potting in Ukambani

Although the craft is usually passed on from mother to daughter, any woman from outside the family who expresses a desire to learn the craft will be taken on as an apprentice. Women being taught the craft are expected to do menial tasks such as digging and carrying the clay and preparing it for the potter to use.

Unlike the daughters of medicine women, who must become medicine women themselves, the daughters of potters are not obligated to learn their mothers craft.

Today many of the taboos to be observed in connection with pottery making are dying out.²⁶ Traditionally it is taboc for a woman to make pots before three days have elapsed from the date on which she last had sexual intercourse, and then the

²⁶Mbula, Judith; "Penetration of Christianity into Akamba Tradition." (M.A. Thesis; University of Nairobi, 1974). Ch.1.

has to use a small stick to stop the "bad blood".

For a similar reason the place of manufacture is carefully chosen outside in a vicinity where men or young women who might be likely to have had sexual intercourse, would be unlikely to approach. If they did approach it is believed that the pots being made at that time would be no good.²⁷

It is still believed that it is unlucky for anyone of the same age group as the potter (i.e. of the same circumcision and dance group) to express admiration for the pots. Should someone in that category do so the potter will immediately ask the guilty party to say "asya ndwi kyeni" (i.e. "I do not have a bad tongue"), and to spit on the pots.

Potters also fear the sorcery of other potters. A potter, jealous of the perfect pots of another, can cause cracks to appear in the pots during firing. This she does by beating her thighs whilst at the same time jumping and turning around to face in the opposite direction.

A potter whose daughter has married and gone

²⁷Lindblom, G., Akamba: Uppsala 1920, p.436.

off with her husband to a distant part of the country is always very much afraid of having a bad firing in which a lot of her pots break because it is believed that broken pots are synonymous with tears (methoi) which are shed when the daughter's child is dying. Pots are always said to break when the child of a far-off daughter dies.²⁸

Broken pots are used for cursing. A member of the Wakamba tribe can curse another in this way by beating a broken pot with a stick made from Mutiambila or Mukulya trees. Such cursing is considered to have grave effects because pots are used to cook food which is the source of life.²⁹

Should a man eat from a new pot before a woman has done so it is considered likely that he will become impotent. He will also get excessively thirsty, become very weak in his household. Likewise men may never eat food from a pot which cracks on the fire whilst the food is cooking.³⁰

Potters are held in high esteem by the Akamba and their work is regarded as very important as it

²⁸ Ibid., p.437.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

provides the utensils in which the food of the tribe is cooked.

Potting is confined to the dry season which follows the main harvest in August, i.e. to the months of September and October.

Marks on Pottery

These marks were originally clan marks which have been handed down over many generations.³¹ The mark is handed on from the potter to her daughter, or to any woman whom she has taught. In the latter instance, or when the daughter marries into another clan, the potter retains the mark of her instructor but the spacing of the lines will be altered. See fig. a and b.

In fig. 23 a, c, e and g show the original Kamba potters' marks; b, d, f and h, are marks after alteration.

Continuous mark i indicates that the pot is to be used for uji.

A potter considers that the use of her mark, unchanged for so many generations will ensure that

³¹Ibid., pp.129-135.

KAMBA POTTERS' MARKS

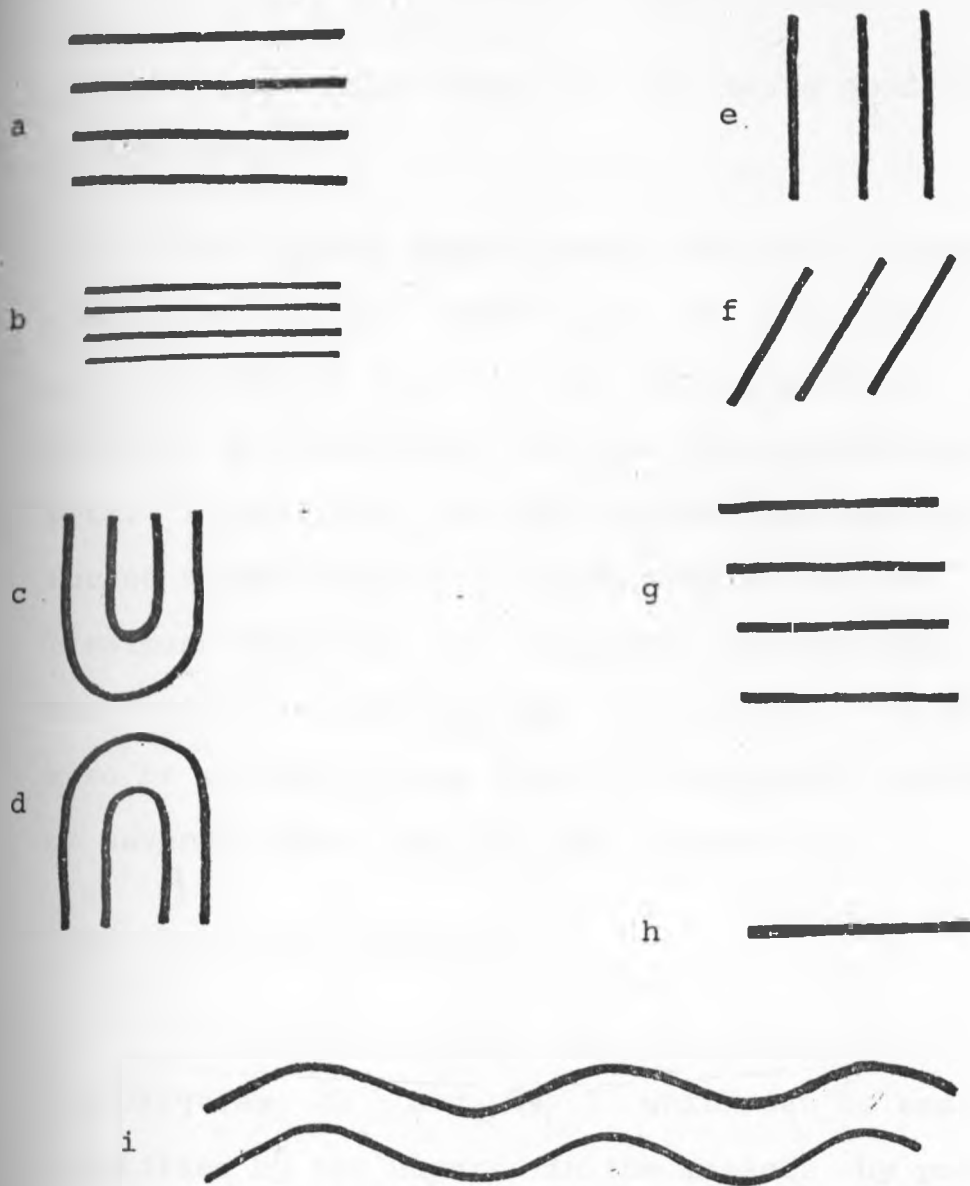


Fig. 23 a, c, e and g show the original Kamba potters' marks; b, d, f and h, are marks after the alteration of the originals. Continuous mark i indicates that the pot is to be used for uji.

her pots are always sound; it will bring good luck to her work.³²

If a potter should have a run of bad firings resulting in many cracked pots, or if her pots gain a reputation for breaking too easily, she will alter her mark in some way in the hope of producing better pots. In that case the mark is retained but may be turned upside down if it lends itself to that treatment (see fig. 23 c and d). It may have its angle altered (see fig. 23 e and f). It may also be reduced to one line if it normally consists of several lines (see fig. 23 g and h.).

Trade Mark and Decoration

The potters marks serve as trade marks (see figures 23 and 24) which can be easily identified by the buyers in the markets by people who search out the marks of those potters whose wares they have proved, by experience, to be the most durable.

Only rarely one finds decoration on Kamba pottery, and that is usually done by placing the pot, whilst still wet, into a woven basket (kiondo) and pressing the basket around it. A continuous pattern

³²Ibid., p.439.

POTTERS' PERSONAL MARKS

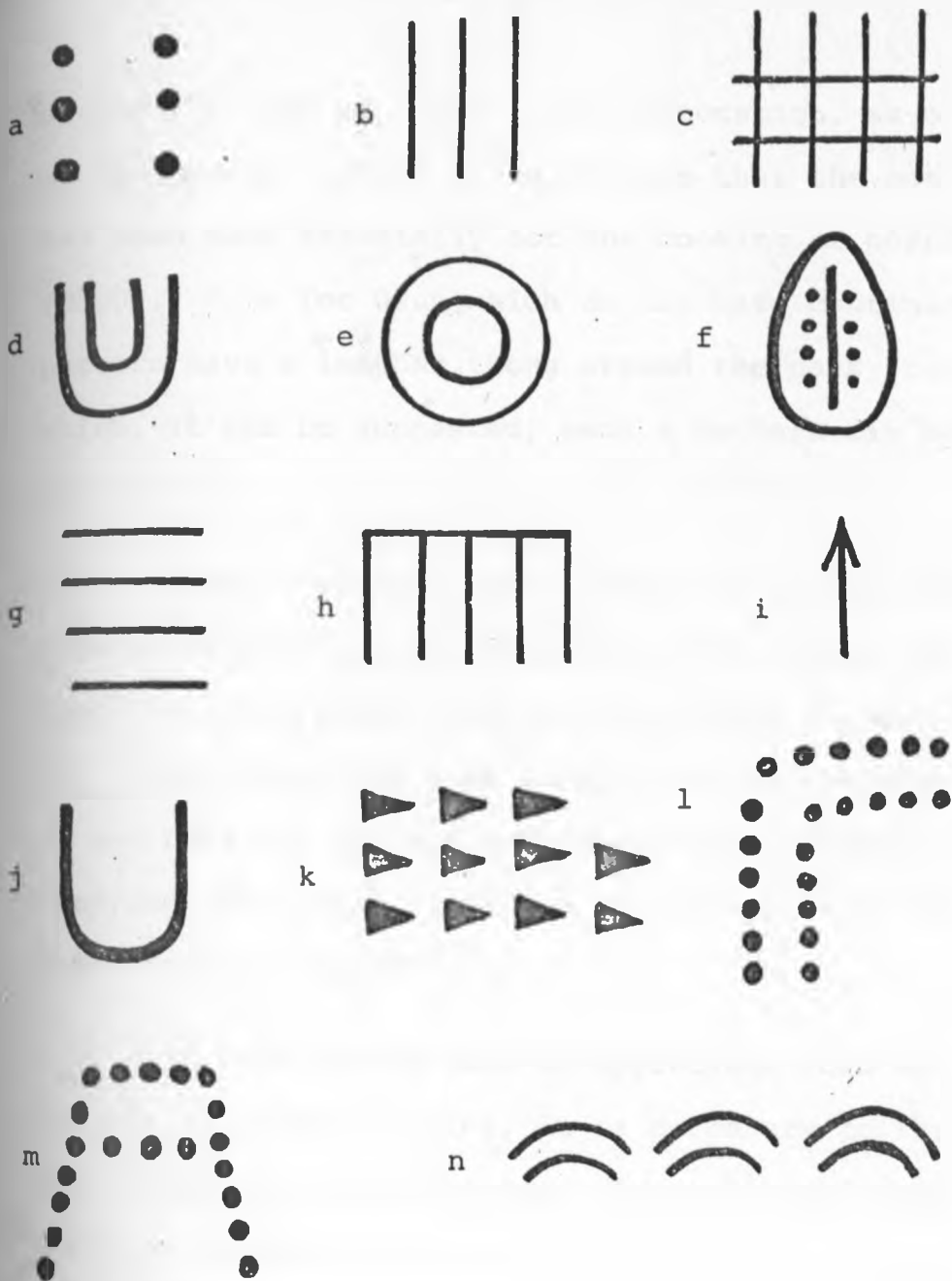


Fig. 24 Typical Kamba pottery is undecorated, but the potters (Ombi ma mbisu), incise their personal marks (Uvano sya mbisu), on the necks of the pots usually in two or four places.

around the neck of a pot is not decoration, as one might suppose, but is an indication that the pot has been made especially for the cooking of porridge (USUU). Pots for Usuu which do not have continuous pattern have a leather thong around the neck from which, it can be suggested, such a pattern can be derived.³³

Kamba tradition has it that the art of potting was discovered by a medicine woman who taught the craft to other women. There are potters in most of the Kamba clans, but some clans, such as the Ambwa, do not have any potters and daughters of potters marrying into these clans are no longer permitted to practice their craft.³⁴

In order to be able to appreciate form and content of Akamba potting, it is necessary to throw more light on the methodology of potting and some relevant Akamba tradition.

Potting (to pot: Wumbi) is exclusively in the hands of the women who are highly skilled and work with considerable rapidity. Without the use of the wheel and without even rotating the base on which growing pot is standing, they achieve outstandingly

³³Ibid., p.540.

³⁴Ibid., pp.129-135.

symmetrical results. The traditional influence, however, is such that the same conservative shape has been made for generations. No attempt has been made to create new designs or to adapt the old. To give an example, no lids are being made for pots as yet, the age-old small whole gourd still being considered adequate as a cover inspite of long contact with lid-using cultures from outside Kenya.³⁵

Kamba pottery is produced exclusively for use as cooking utensils. Water, beer and milk are all kept in gourds, and small half-gourds are used as plates. The pots are all of the same simple short-necked, round-bottomed shape based on the gourd prototype. There are never any lugs or handles.

Expression and Meaning

The majority of pots produced are of medium sizes called simply MBISU. They are used for general cooking, but a separate pot is always kept for the cooking of ugali (a very thick porridge).

A somewhat smaller pot MBISU YA USUU is used exclusively for the cooking of the traditional thin porridge USUU, whilst a small pot KAVISU KA MBOKA

³⁵Ibid., p.540.

is used for cooking vegetables.³⁶ Such small pots are not kept exclusively for the cooking of special dishes for the head of the household, as sometimes is believed. Rather the first harvest of young beans, considered a special delicacy and cooked without the usual accompanying maize, is cooked for the head of the household only in a KAVISU KA MBOKA.

Very tiny pots are used for concocting and holding medicines by medicine men and women, but such pots must be made only by an elderly potter who is past the menopause and longer indulges in sexual intercourse.³⁷

A very large pot, MBISU YA NYAMA, is used exclusively for the cooking of meat. Although very large pots are said to have been made in the past; it is most likely that these large pots were imported from the AGIKUYU.³⁸

Typical Kamba pottery is undecorated but the potters (OMBI MA MBISU) incise their personal marks,

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ S.W. & K. Routledge, With a Prehistoric People; The Akikuyu of E. Africa. (London. 1910), pp.97-102.

³⁸ Lindblom, Akamba.

UVANO SYA MBISU on the necks of the pots usually in two or four places. Examples of incisions on Fig.

Simple as they may look, these marks accomplish the desired aims.

True to the African love for three dimensional artistic productions, the Akamba utilise their artistic skills to serve their needs and also other peoples'. The production of artistic objects is part and parcel of their day to day living.

plate no.41.

There are different arrangements for pattern works. This particular item has rectangular patterns. They have a feeling of serenity. Their arrangement does not evoke excitement.

plate no.42.

Various geometrical designs have been used widely for arranging pattern works. In this waist belt, square and triangular shapes have been successfully used to produce an attractive design. Such a technique is popular with bead artists.

plate no.43.

This simple art form is used as a charm. The arrangement of the cowrie shells has been done in a simple manner. It is noted that both the shells and the other components of this art form are associated with certain ideas. As a charm, this art form is both symbolic and representational.

Plate no.44.

Ornamental aluminium discs with incised decoration made by Giriama craftsmen from the Kaloleni area. Worn by young girls for everyday and especially ceremonial wear. It is attached to a waistbelt of beads and dangle on their behinds over flat skirt. Also worn dangling from hair on the back of the head. It is cleaned with earth from river plus water.

Duruma, Vernacular name: MWERI or (MWESI).

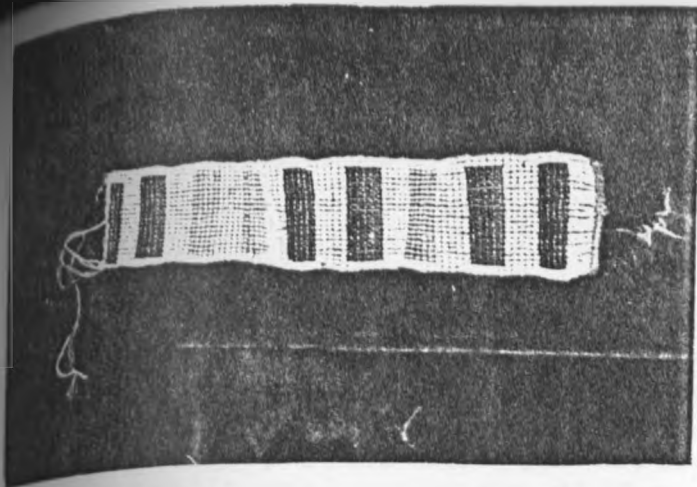


Plate No. 41

Design on waist belt

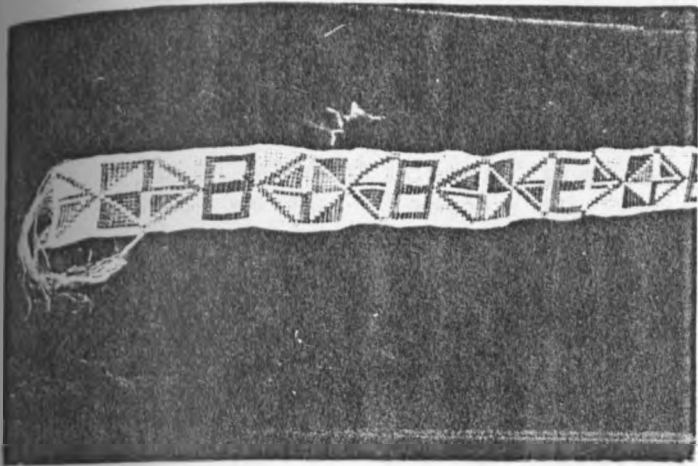


Plate No. 42

Different design on
waist belt.

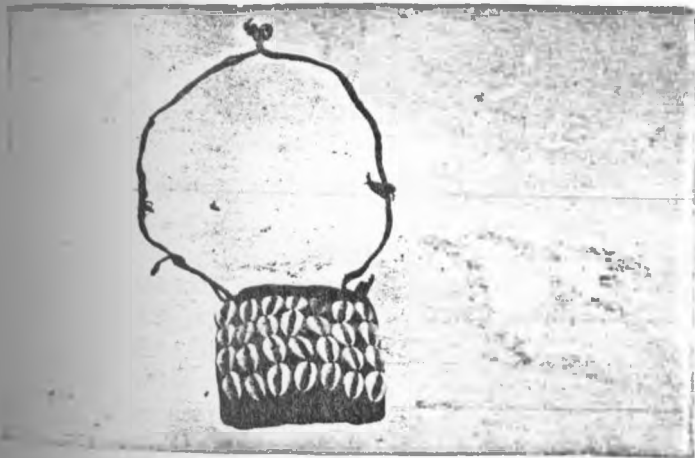


Plate No. 43

Large charm of cowhide



Plate No. 44

Ornamental aluminium
discs

plate no.45.

These necklaces are different in form from some others that were noted earlier. Necklaces are used by different groups of people. However, since the life styles of various traditional societies differ, necklaces have different meaning to different societies.

plate no.46.

The beads that are used here, are bigger in size than most of the beads that are used in many works. Despite their being bigger, they give a pleasant surface feeling i.e. softness.

Plate no.47.

This is another example of geometrical design on belt. The two belts that are at the sides of the plate, apparently have the same motif. Their overall designs are based on the technique of repetition.

The technique of repetition has been used extensively by traditional societies to produce all kinds of pattern works.

Plate no.48.

Mask of a man disguised as a woman to catch women slaves. It is used in ceremonial dance. It is noted that the mask is of serene expression. Perhaps serenity is what the artist had in mind when making it, since it was supposed to help catch women slaves.

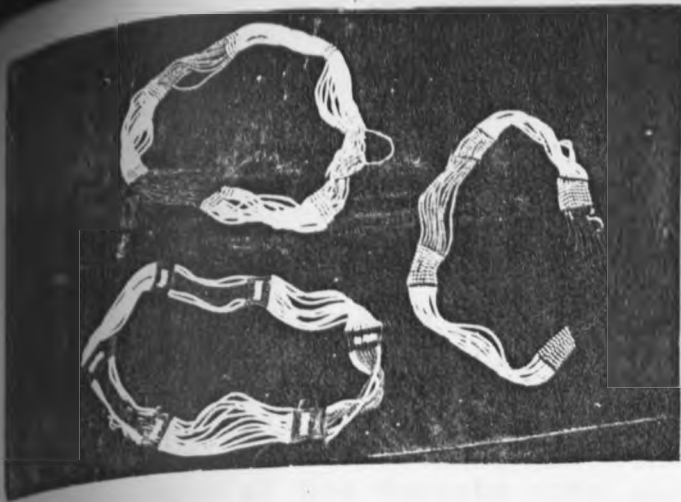


Plate No. 45

Round multi-coloured
necklaces.

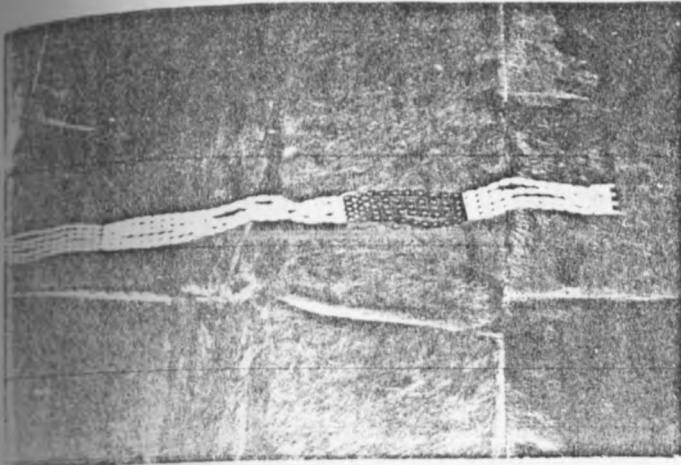


Plate No. 46

Different beadwork in
multi-colour-design.

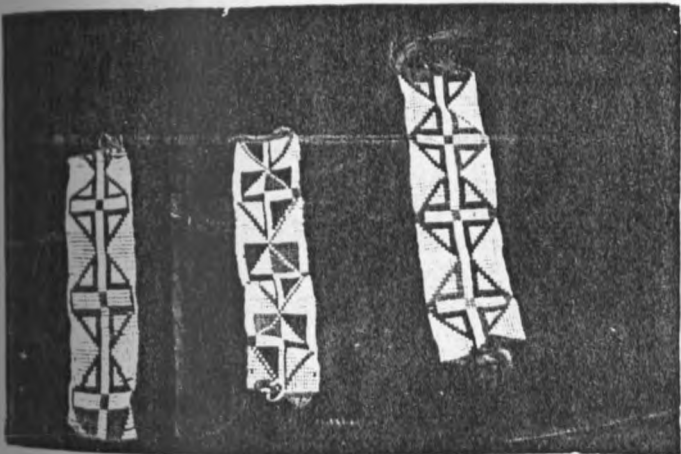


Plate No. 47

Geometrical design
on belt.



Plate No. 48

Mask of a man.

plate no.49.

Wooden dolls with rag skirts. They are just a piece of pole with a notch cut for the neck and waist. They are made by the mothers of the children who play with them and are used by children of both sexes. They are made from the wood of the Mugambo tree and as far as they can remember , such dolls have been used.
Giriama.

Plate no. 50 and 51.

Two beautifully patterned winnowing baskets, each a different design. They are made by the men from stiff bits of down palm fronds. The pattern are made with brown stripes. Shiny or matle surface is used to accentuate patterns. Used by women when winnowing and also as trays.
Giriama.

Plate no.52.

Two small ch ondos with natural ochre and black stripes. They have cowhide handle. A piece of red ochre is used for colouring the red stripes. This is obtained from Mbooni (the Mbooni Hills) and is pounded to powder, which is called MBOO. Made by women and used almost exclusively by them for carrying goods to and from market, when going visiting together in the harvest. Sometimes these are made for sale, if there is a special request to do so.
Kamba. (Kitui group), Syondo.



Plate No.49

Wooden dolls with rag
skirts



Plate No.50

Beautifully patterned
basket.

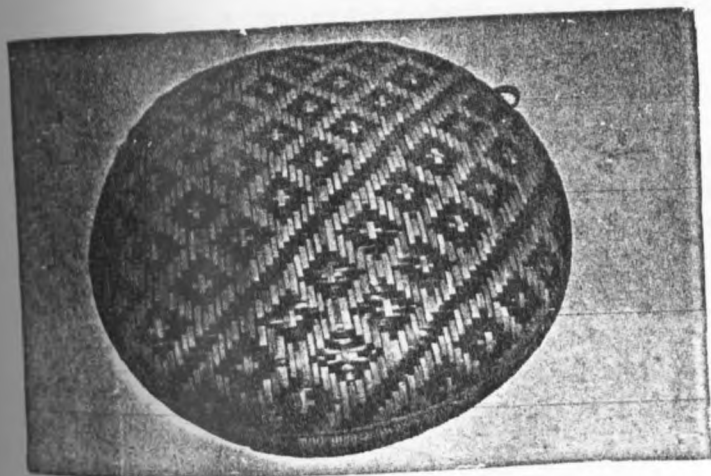


Plate No.51

Beautifully patterned
basket, but different
from above.



Plate No.52

Two small chondos
with natural ochre.

plate no.53.

Here there is a bold attempt to mix materials that are different in many ways. It is obvious that one of the reasons for doing this is for aesthetic purposes. The end result is an interesting tobacco container. Such artistic products are highly valued by the traditional societies.

Plate no.54.

Aprons are made in a number of styles, and different types of materials are used. This particular one was made by predominantly using beads. If worked in a certain way, beads have an added quality of making a kind of noise as one moves. This very much appeals to some traditional societies.

Plate no.55.

This is an open collar object that has a concentrated use of material - i.e. chains.

Plate no.56.

Anklets of brass worn by old women to protect them against evil spirits (upepo) who cause illness. If they get ill they get this charm to wear and they will not be ill again. They said it was made in Banga by a male fundi but did not know how it was made.
Duruma, Vernacular name: MUKORONGO.

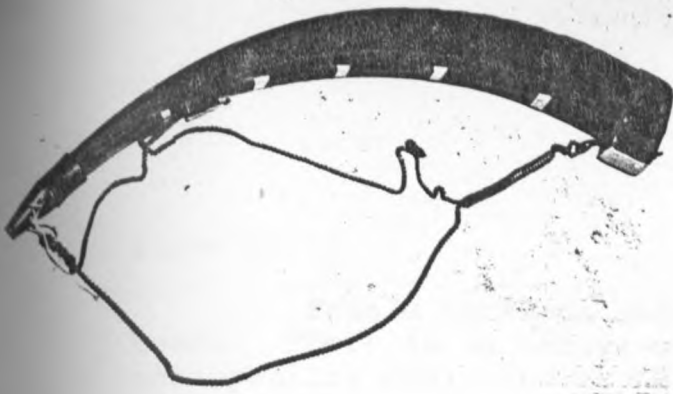


Plate No. 53

Tobacco container



Plate No.54

Beaded apron

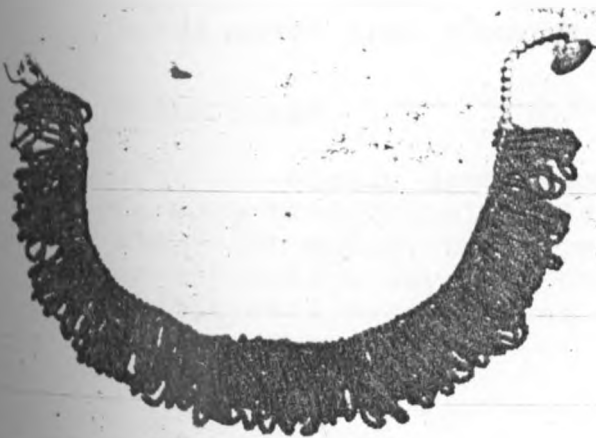


Plate No.55

Open work /
collar



Plate No.56

Anklets of brass

Plate no.57.

Female necklace made locally of imported beads. There is an ambitious attempt to introduce an appealing design here. Even the arrangement of bead work is done with some degree of creativity. The overall result is a simple and an appealing necklace. Luo name: TEKEFUNYO.

Plate no.58.

Bead necklace made locally from imported beads, worn by women round the neck and men round the neck and loins. Beads are not used in this necklace. Another type of material is used instead. This material is used in a concentrated manner. Luo name: NYAMACHE.

Plate no.59.

All the three necklaces are of the same colour. There is hardly any variation even in tonality. However, the shiny effect of the beads makes them attractive to look at.

Plate no.60.

Simple decorations are a common feature in many traditional societies. However, although simple in motif, their repetitive styles give them an attractive layout. Gourds are used by many traditional societies as materials for pattern design.



Plate No.57

Female necklace



Plate No.58

Necklace in a different
pattern.

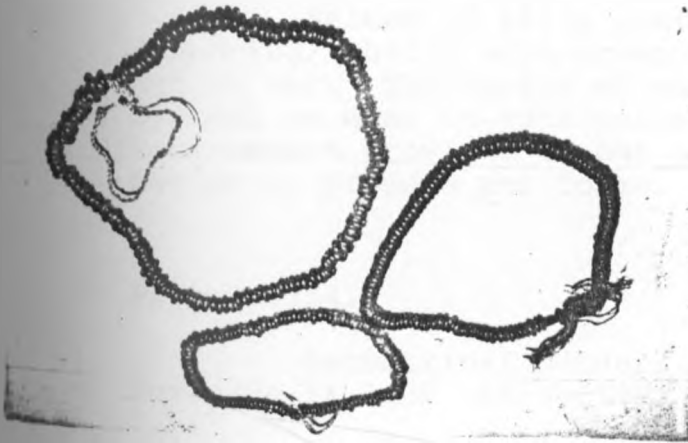


Plate No.59

Bead necklaces worn
by women.

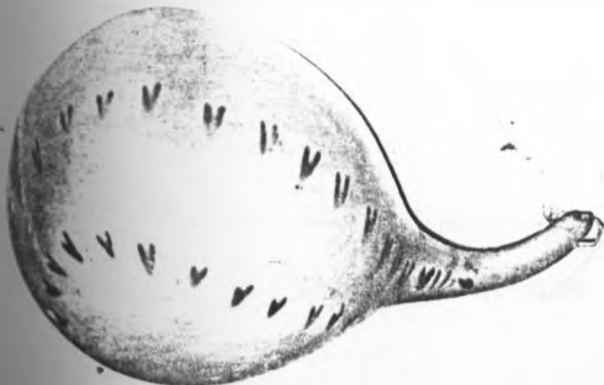


Plate No.60

Simple decoration on
half/gourd.

Plate no.61.

Oval shield - cowskin with "cowhorn" design shaved and then painted white. The motif of cowhorn is used in a symbolic form. The technique of producing it on the shield is also simple. Even the tools used would not be complicated at all.

Plate no.62.

On the left is woven pot stand made by old men from Togo grass which is cut from the river bank, used to hold the large beer pot at a drinking party. Sold in market. It is made in exchange for foodstuff.

On the right is a small basket - quail trap. Made of papyrus stalk. It is used by men in their fields. A quail is caught and put in the basket to act as a decoy to catch other quails.¹

Plate no.63.

Helmet of billy goatskin and cowrie (imported) shells with strap under chin. Used by men in war. The choice of material very much depends on what is obtainable. Local physical environment provides almost all the material needed to produce art forms. Luo name: KONDO NYUOK.

Plate no.64.

Geometrical patterns done on this snuff box made it look attractive.

¹Bracenzholz: MAN (an article)



Plate No.61

This shape is common
to both Luo and
Abaluhya.

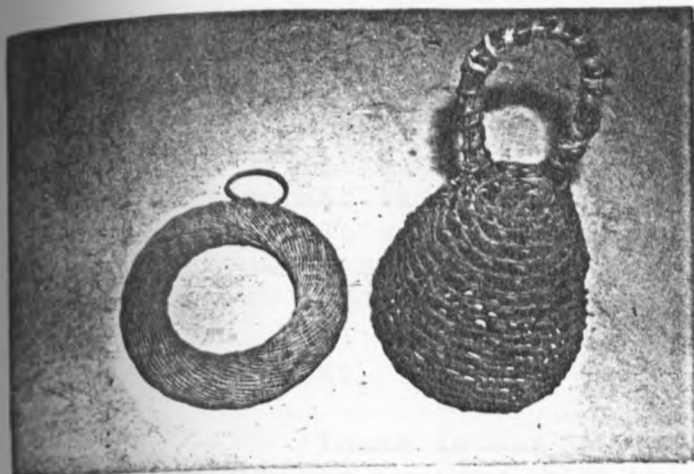


Plate No.62

Left-woven pot stand
Right small basket
quail trap.



Plate No.63

Helmet, used by men in
war, goatskin, imported
cowrie.



Plate No.64

Snuff-box

Plate no.65.

Shield of buffalo hide used by men. The portion of the pattern work that is visible is well balanced from design organization point of view. Many of the traditional pattern designs have a good sense of balance.

Plate no.66.

Although the bold patterns are the ones that are easily visible, there is also another type of patterns. These are small in shape. They appear all over the surface of the shield. They do not seem to form into any particular designs as such. Rather, they seem to give the surface area a rough texture.

Plate no.67.

There is not much to suggest the type of the surface texture which this shield has. The pattern work is used in a limited way. It is noted that pattern layout was not the foremost aim in the craftsman's mind.

Plate no.68.

This skin has been prepared in such a way that it has become hard. This, it is noted, is what is needed if the shield is to be used for defending oneself against spears, arrows, clubs etc. Putting pattern work on the shield is a secondary matter.

Plate No.65

Design and pattern
on shield.

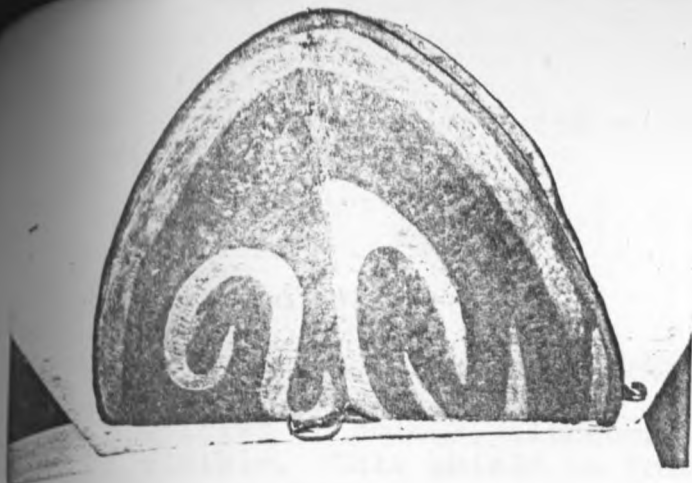


Plate No.66

Design and pattern
on shield.

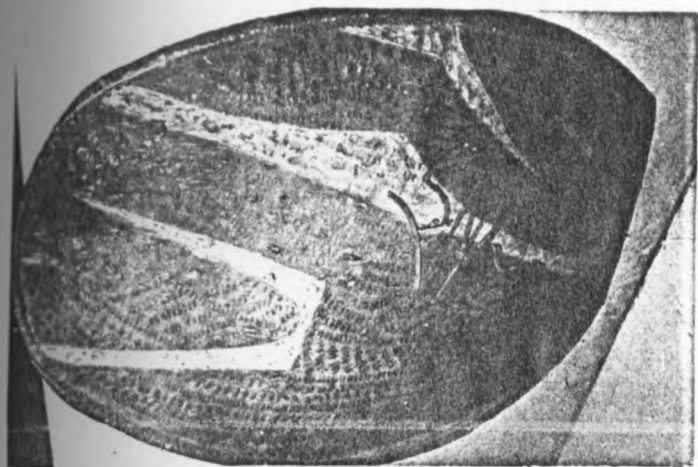


Plate No.67

Design and pattern
on shield.



Plate No.68

Design and pattern
on shield.

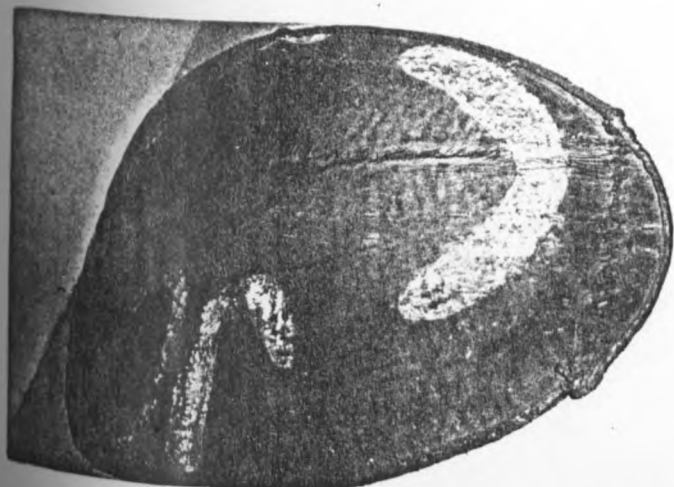


plate no.69.

The impressed marks on this shield give it a rough texture. The patterns are whitish in colour, although they are not properly visible. This shield is folded, hence its semi-circle shape.

Plate no.70.

The design outline is first shaven. Then the design is painted white. The skin of this shield, is from a cow. The shield has been treated in such a way that it has acquired toughness.

Plate no.71.

Ox-hide is a good material for making war shields of different shapes. However, oval as a shape, seems to have more appeal to many traditional societies in Kenya than the other shapes.

Plate no.72.

Just as is the case with many other shields, not much pattern work has been done on this surface. However, there is an effort here to make more marks on the shield. These marks make the shield to look like a bark of a tree. Perhaps that is what the artist was trying to copy.



Plate No. 69

Impressed marks.



Plate No. 70

Design shaved and then
painted white. -

Cow skin.

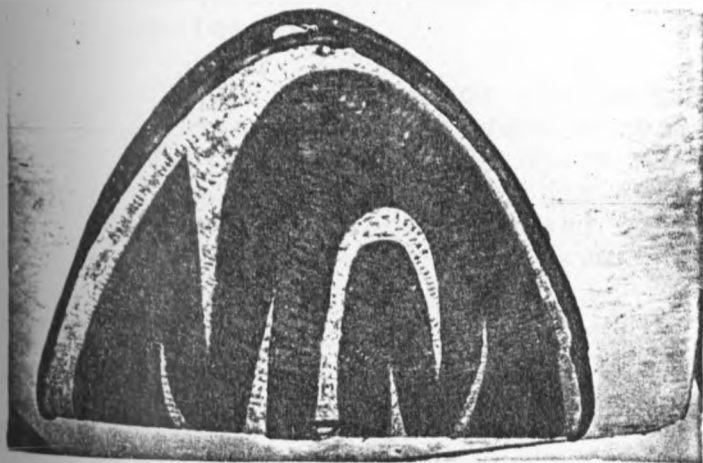


Plate No. 71

Shield used in war
by lads - ox-hide.

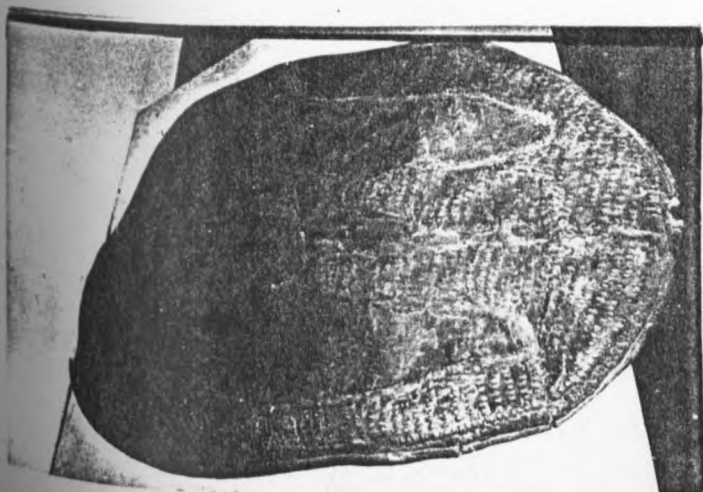


Plate No. 72

Impressed marks to
make simple designs.

Plate no.73.

Many game boards have various patterns on them. A number of game boards have been studied, and this has been found to be true. Also, the beans that are used in playing these games, are of different shapes and sizes.

Plate no.74-76.

The three shields serve as examples of the use of simple large forms as ornamentation. These biomorphic shapes have been painted white.

Each of these shields has a kind of a frame around its edge. The technique of shaving and painting is used to produce the patterns. Much of the painting stuff is got from plant sap and earth mixtures. However, these colours from nature have their own limitations. The same thing could be said of the many other materials, tools and techniques, that are used by the traditional societies.

The factor of limitation is also relevant in the modern times of high technology. The choice of the subject matter for any art form, should be done with this factor in mind. In the appreciation of form and content of the tradition art forms, we should have this factor in mind also.

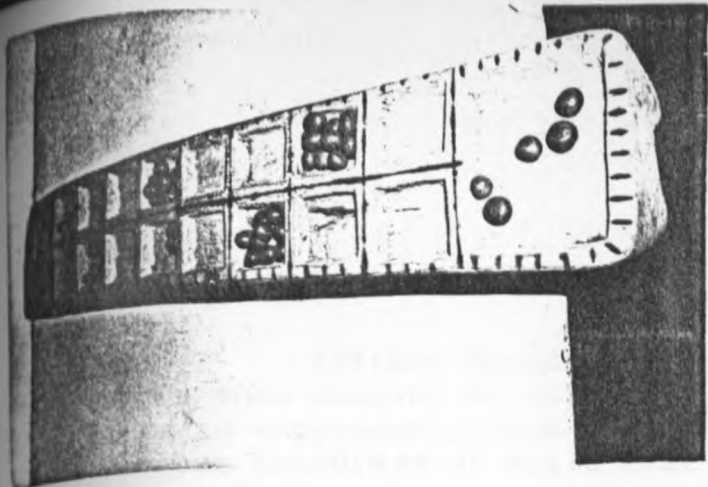


Plate No.73

A common game, made of wood and beads are collected from among seeds.

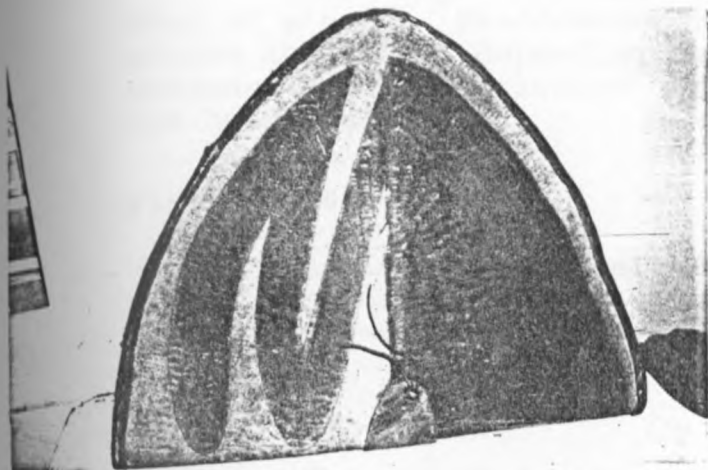


Plate No.74

Pattern on shield.

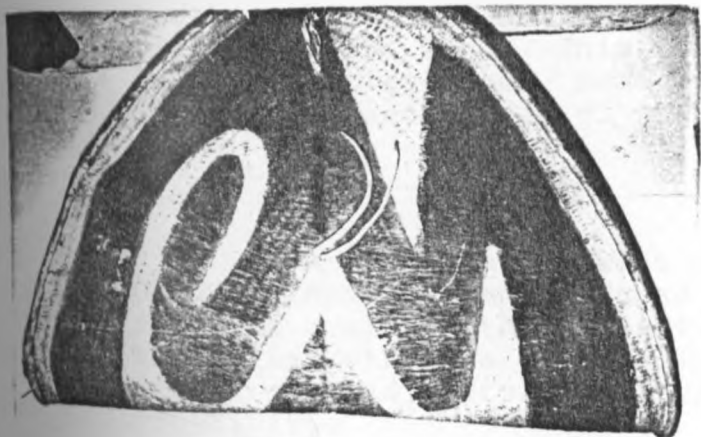


Plate No.75

Curved patterns on shield.



Plate No.76

More pattern on shield.

Plate no.77.

Feather headdress-ONGO. Worn by young men when dancing or going to war. The Ongo eagle, as an expression, forms part of the name which means headdress of eagle feathers.

The shape of these headdresses is like that of a cone. Headdresses may be of different shapes and sizes, depending on a number of reasons, e.g. a particular tribe, the purpose of the headdress etc.

Plate no.78.

Armlet worn on left fore arm. Some twenty are worn at a time. They are made of ox-hide and worn by young men. Luo name: ABONGO.

Plate no.79.

The use of feathers in making headdresses is a common feature for many traditional societies. Feathers have the added quality of being able to flutter in the wind. This fact makes headdresses look more attractive. Some birds have very attractive feathers, e.g. the ostrich.

Plate no.80.

A large basket with woven patterns - OLANDO. Made by men and used by women for carrying grain on their heads. In the modern times, basketry has been commercialised. As a result of this, little attention is given to creativity.



Plate No. 77
Headdress, worn by
sub-clan, leaders,
made of ox-hide.

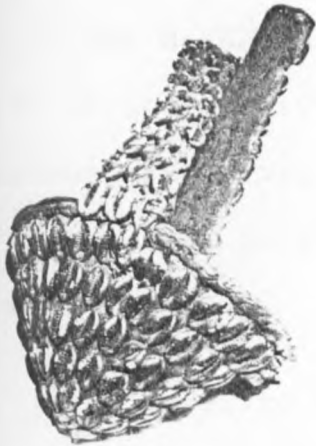


Plate No. 78
Armlets worn by young
men, made of ox-hide.



Plate No. 79
Feather headdress for
young men dancing.



Plate No. 80
Large basket with
pattern woven in brown
and white.

CHAPTER FIVE

ADOPTED AND INSPIRED DESIGNS OF THE MAASAI

Form Content Appreciation

The Maasai have been able to reflect their life of social division of responsibilities through various art forms. This has been possible because of historical development of their ornaments as art forms.¹

In order to understand the content of their ornaments, it is necessary to do some analysis of forms. This is because the Maasai ornaments are not just objects without forms. They have particular patterns of shapes and colours. It is the particularity of the forms that makes them both Maasai and traditional. They are reflections of a particular way of life of Maasai tradition in Kenya. Effort should be made in order to understand the meaning of these forms. This could be done by doing a concrete analysis of the ornaments. The application of theoretical knowledge of foreign art form may not help much in comprehending content and meaning of the

¹Galaty John, "In the Pastoral Image, the Dialectic of Maasai Identity," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago.

Maasai art forms.²

Relationship Between Bead and Colour

In total the Maasai use five types of beads and eight types of colour.³ Four hundred ornaments from the ethnographic department - Nairobi National Museum - and in the field have been analysed.⁴ But each bead has its own set of colours. A set is relationship of the shape of a bead to a range of colours. Thus a colour A of a bead B is called the AB e.g. the blue (Pus) of a circular shaped bead (Isaen) is known as Isaen Pus.

Each set is different from another in the number of colours, the types of colour and the shade of colours e.g. light blue and dark blue.

Isaen is a round bead one mm in diameter.
Tuntai is an oval shaped bead four mm in length.

²Sultan Somjee, "On Material Culture of the Nationalities and Development of National Art," Discussion Paper No.89, I.A.S.

³A.N. Tucker and Ole Mpaayei, J. Tempo, a Maasai Grammar, (Longmans Green and Company London, 1955).

⁴Somjee Sultan, "On Material Culture of the Nationalities and the Development of National Art," I.A.S. Discussion Paper No.89.

The examples below are from Kaputei Maasai.

Isaen colours are 6.

Tuntai colours are 4.

Isaen set: Red, White, Blue, Green, Orange and
Yellow.

Tuntai set: Red White White White White Yellow
Black.

Arrangement of Colours

To make an ornament the colours of a set are arranged according to five colour patterns.⁵ A colour pattern is based on a system of colour combination (e.g. blue + white + red) and colour relation i.e. a certain proportion of one colour to a certain proportion of another colour (e.g. three units of red: one unit of white).

Take the imuatat patterns of a wrist band from Purko Maasai.⁶

It is made of Isaen beads. One bead is one unit of colour.

w = white b = blue r = red g = green o = orange.

⁵D.R. Klumpp, "A Preliminary Analysis of Maasai Body Ornaments," I.A.S. Discussion Paper No.157, p. 13.

⁶Ibid. See also acc. no. U.N.1971, 681, I.D.S. Cultural Division, Ethnographic Department - Nairobi National Museum.

IMUATAT

1	w	x)
)
3	r)
)
1	b		1)
)
3	w)
)
1	r)
)
3	b		2)
)
1	w)
)
3	o)
)
1	b		3)
)
3	w)
)
1	r)
)
3	g		4)
		y)

Fig. 25

One complete imuatat pattern is from x to y.

In the above figure, we note the followings:

(a) The colour combination is in this order:
white + red + blue + white + red + blue +
white + orange + blue + white + red +
green.

(b) The colour ratio is 1:3.

If we analyse the imuatat pattern mathematically in terms of sets the explanation would be as following:

- (a) a set is a colour proportion sequence
i.e. x to y.
- (b) one complete set has 4 sub sets i.e.
1, 2, 3, 4.
- (c) No two sub sets are identical in both
colour sequence and proportions e.g.
sub set 1 and 2 have the same colours
but inverse proportions.

Rules for Colour Pattern

An ornament is made of a pattern or a combination of patterns. A pattern in an ornament can be 1 to 4, 1 to 2 or a complete one e.g. the earing imuna usually has 1/4 or 1/2 imuatat on each ear. Together the left and right earing make a 1/2 or a complete imuatat. That is why the Maasai have different colours in each ear.⁷ The balance of forms (aesthetics) that make an ornament follows the colour pattern rules.

The best example of an ornament that is based on not just a pattern but a combination of patterns is the large neck ornament (emankiki). It has 5 rings, each of a different pattern that follows each

⁷Klumpp, "A Preliminary Analysis," p.6.

other in a specific order. It is a set of 5 patterns that make this ornament.⁸ (See figure

The analyses show that the Maasai have achieved a highly developed art form. It is a national art form that has roots in the struggles of their nationality and is not a theoretical abstraction.⁹ The Maasai social divisions reflect various aspects of life among the Maasai people.¹⁰ In order to appreciate Maasai crafts properly, it would be helpful to examine results of analyses on the relationship of the Maasai ornaments to social division of their activities.

The following are some good examples:

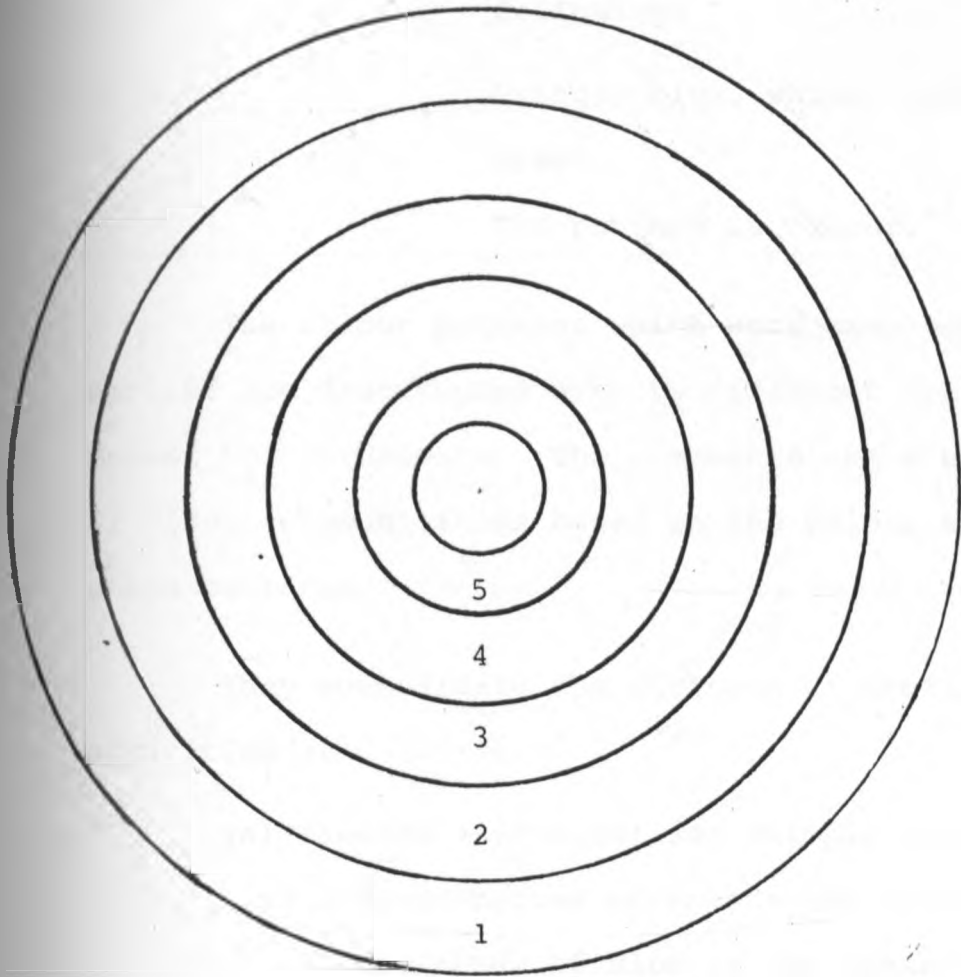
- (a) Emankiki nolkiteng: Imuatuat as explained.
- (b) Emankiki narok: A ring of blue beads.
- (c) Emankiki Sikittoi: A ring of orange beads.
- (d) Emankiki keru: A ring of alternate white and blue.

⁸ Joseph Thompson, *Through Maasailand*, (London: 1885)

⁹ Sonjee, "On Material Culture,"

¹⁰ Galaty, "In the Pastoral Image".

EMANKIKI



1. Emankiki nolkiteng. Imuatuat as explained
2. Emankiki narok. A ring of blue beads.
3. Emankiki sikitoui. A ring of orange beads.
4. Emankiki keru. Ring of alternate white and blue.
5. Enkeliai. One ring of each of the following: orange, blue, white, red and green. The pattern is sampur

Fig. 26 Pattern in the neck ornament, Emankiki.

(e) Enkeliai: One ring of each of the following:

Orange, blue, white, red and green.

The pattern is sampur.¹¹

The colour patterns which were examined earlier are distributed over to different types of Maasai body ornaments. The ornaments are a system of visual communication based on the colour and shape patterns.

They communicate the division of their activities at 3 levels.

(a) Iloshon (sections) for example the Kaputai and Keekonyokee ornaments are recognised by the shade of blue in the Isaen bead. The Kaputai use light blue (Kaputai pus). While the Keekonyokee use dark blue (Keekonyokee pus or orok). Thus the imuatat pattern of the Kaputai and Keekonyokee though same in the colour combination and ratio sequence is different in the shade of the blue.

The iloshon is also communicated by the

¹¹ Somjee, On Material Culture."

differences in the colours of the ornaments for example the Kaputai use the black and red combination of tuntai bead for certain ornaments together with white/black and yellow/black combinations while the Purko use the white/black and yellow/black but not the red/black combination for the same ornaments.

- (b) Ilporrori (age-groups) ear ornaments of a married woman are different from those of unmarried girls for example Enchoni enkiok of Siankikin (woman) and nkulalet of ntoyie (girl).
- (c) Male/female divisions of responsibilities for example the belt (enture) of Ilmoran (young man) has different colour patterns from the belt (enkitali-
enkoshoke) of the siankikin (woman).¹²

Similar art forms exist in the other Kenyan traditional nationalities.

Maasai ornaments have developed historically and are related in form to other areas of Maasai material culture. Patterns in the Maasai ornaments

¹² Klumpp, "A Preliminary Analysis." p.6-7.

and on the shields have many similarities e.g. the patterns keru and ailiang, and the use of the colours red, black and white are common in the ornaments and on the shields. Patterns on shields are also art forms that communicate the different iloshon (sections) of the Maasai.¹³

Differences in the shapes and colours of spears indicate the differences in the ilmoran age groups, again reflecting social division responsibilities. The senior warriors carry short bladed spears with black shafts and the junior warriors carry long bladed spears with red shafts. However, weapons of the past, when the particularities of the history of the Maasai were in a different historical stage, have today become more symbolic of the ilmoran institution than serving a purpose in active warfare.

Also the two dimensional patterns change with the history, for example in the past, Maasai shield designs have changed and developed reflecting the changing and developing roles of the ilmoran (warriors) age group during active warfare. The best example is from the time when Mbatian was the

¹³ Paper presented at the 19th Annual Meeting of African Studies Association, Philadelphia, October, 1980.

laibon and the leader of the Maasai during the active warfare. During that time there developed a black arc design symbolising the support for the leadership of Mbatian.

The design spread from across present Tanzania to Kenya and continued to develop even after Mbatian's death as Senten took the leadership.

Plate no.81.

Neck ornaments have been used by many traditional societies for a long time. They are used by people of all ages for various purposes. Neck ornaments are made from all sorts of materials. Various styles of decorating them have also been tried, some rendering quite attractive results.

Plate no.82.

The shape of this horn is obviously appealing to a people who use horns for various uses. For example, horns from different animals are used as utensils, snuff boxes, curing objects, musical instruments etc. Some types of animals produced horns that are very exciting in shape.

Plate no.83.

Such art forms are used for ceremonial, curative, domestic, symbolic purposes etc. These kind of art forms are made with specific materials and there are particular ways of making them.

Plate no.84.

There is an attempt here to combine a number of materials in order to produce a single art form. For example feathers, paint, wood and skin.

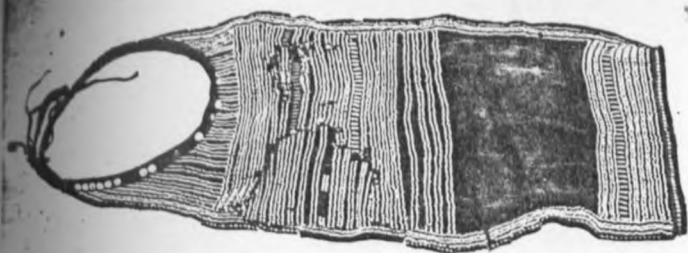


Plate No. 81
Ornamentation for
a neck.



Plate No. 82
Horn shaping.



Plate No. 83
Used by old men.



Plate No. 84
Feather and painting
on wood and skin.

Plate no.85.

Traditional societies in Kenya take keen interest in dancing. Most of the dances are conducted in such a way that the spectators could join in and participate. There are a lot of movement, activity and acting in these dances. A number of art forms are used in dances, such as this shield.

Plate no.86.

It is noted that these three bead crafts are a good example for comparing the effectiveness of motif, form and pattern.

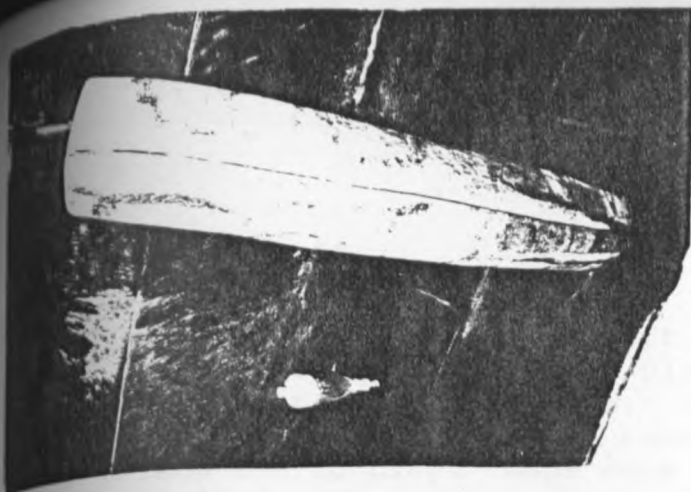
Plate no.87.

These items are made for the purposes of dancing. It is noted that there are very many art forms that are made for purely dancing purposes. Also it is noted that dances are for different purposes, people, times, occasions etc.

Plate no.88.

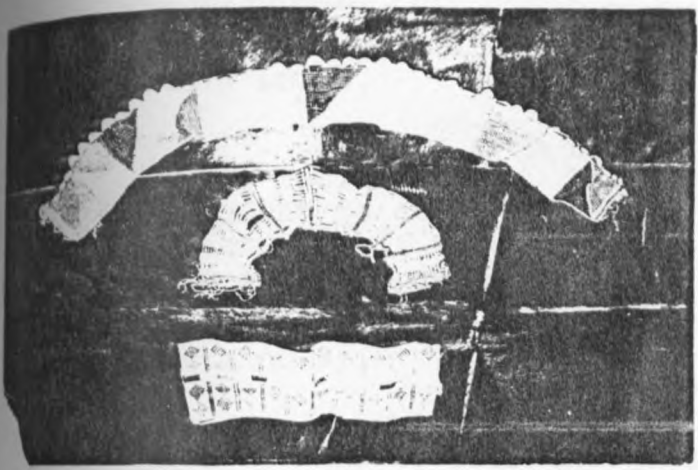
The arrangement of the colours and the use of simple shapes here, has been successfully done. Also the success of these pieces as art forms has been enhanced by the use of the technique of repeating simple motifs again and again.

Plate No.85



A dancing shield.

Plate No.86



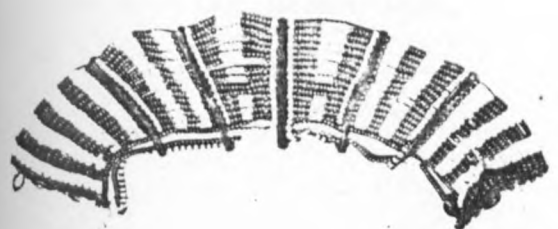
Bead work on
ornamentation.

Plate No.87



Worn for dancing.

Plate No.88



Young women's
necklaces.



Plate no.89.

On the extreme left is a blown flute, used while herding cows. Played for players' amusement and to the cows. Used mostly by older men but also younger and sometimes by women who know how to play. Made from bamboo. Both ends blocked. Vernacular name: EKERONGWE AND GICHINGOMBE.

Plate no.90.

Objects from nature are very much used by the medicine men. They are part of his equipment to cure or prevent diseases, bad luck, dangers, etc. These objects are supposed to have special power.

Plate no.91.

At the centre is an old man's stool made by himself from the wood of the muran tree. There are holes for putting in string (mbuyu thread) burnt in with metal poker. Carried on an old man's shoulder. Usually used at beer parties. Tharaka. Vernacular name: KITUMBI.

At the extreme left is a headdress cum stool with single stem splaying into four feet. Made by men. Vernacular name: ENDO.

Plate no.92.

On the lower part of the plate, is a small shield carved by old male craftsman, from MUTUU tree. Used by newly married woman to perform circumcision ceremonies - Kwanga. It has red colour of soil mixed with water. Imenti. Vernacular name: NGA.

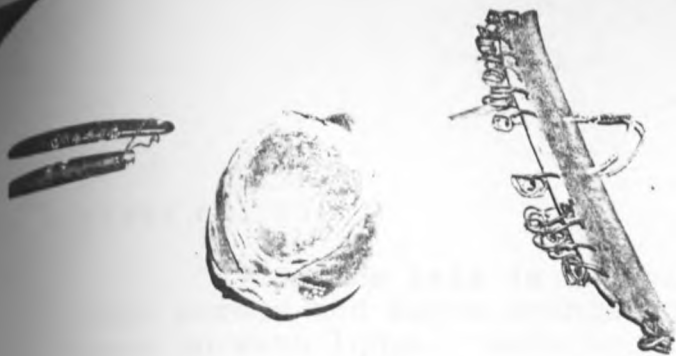


Plate No.89

Side blown flute, small
gourd and another
musical



Plate No.90

A set of medicine
man's equipment



Plate No.91

Headrest, stool and
snuff box



Plate No.92

Headrest, stool and
dancing shield.



plate no. 93.

On the left is a public apron made by women with border and three double rows of white beads sewn on with loops. Worn by women with two points at front. It is made of goatskin. MUTHAMBI. Local name MWENGU.

On the right is a beaded neck ornament which fits over head with beaded squares hanging down front and neck. Worn for dancing KITHERU. Made by an old craftsman. Made of cow hide and beads, and chain from Kamba traders. Sewn with cow sinew. Worn by married women. Made in exchange for a goat when requested by woman's husband. It is in blues, yellows with some red beads. Tigania. Vernacular name: KIMUKWE.

Plate no.94.

On the extreme left is a mbau game board made by a male craftsman from wood and axe (KATHOK). There is a gourd (KIAAU) which is used only to hold fifty nine seed playing pieces which come from a tree. Mbau is made in exchange of earth or limestone which is used by men. Tigania. Local name: KIUTHI.

Plate no.95.

On the top is a skirt made and worn by a woman. Leather from skin of one goat. Skin designs made with sisal thread. Boarder of blue, white, red beads. Worn for every day. Chuka. Vernacular name: NGATHI.

On the bottom part of the picture, is a skin skirt made at Mange. The beads around the lower part of the skirt are made by the blacksmith. It is worn by old women as a daily skirt. Chuka. Vernacular name: NGATHI.

Plate no.96.

On the left is a honey container. It is made of miranga wood and neck skin of a bull. Meru. Vernacular name. GIEMPEE.

On the right is a gourd made and used by old men to hold pombe from honey. This gourd is carried by men only and used when there is an important visitor. It is covered with skin of a bull. Muthambi. Vernacular name: MUCHEMA.

Plate No.93

Skirt and neckwear
decorated.

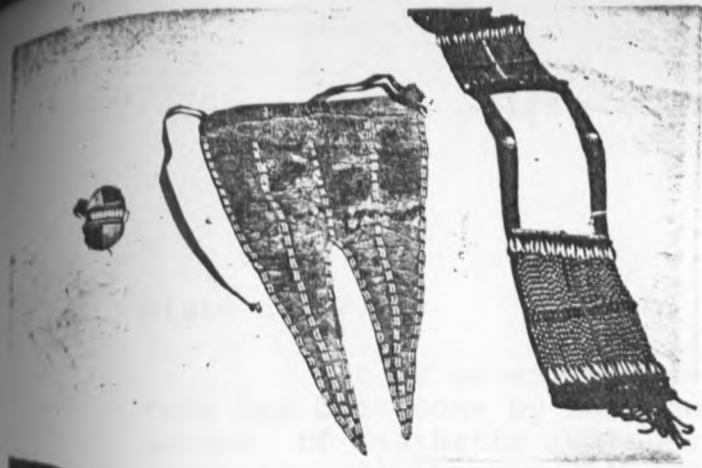


Plate No.94

Man's skirt (centre)



Plate No.95

Public apron and
earrings.



Plate No.96

Left: honey container
and, right: pombe gourd.

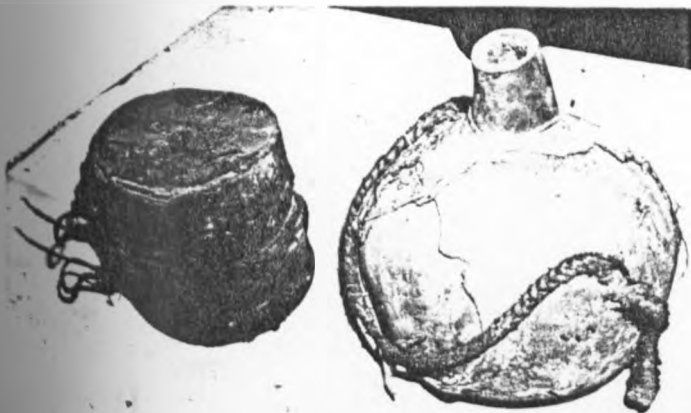


Plate no.97.

It is noted in this study that this art form had been done by someone who had a considerable amount of aesthetic awareness. For example, there is a deliberate attempt to show variety and unit. As an ornament, it resembles a modern implement - wrist watch. Further study is needed so as to ascertain whether this is a copy or an original idea.

Plate no.98.

This type of aproan is in common use particularly with the Bantu people of around Mt. Kenya. It is used by women. The two strings are used for fastening it at around the waist. This apron is made of skin, which has been prepared in such a way that it becomes soft and comfortable.

Plate nos. 99 and 100.

There are many ornaments for the neck. The four beaded neck ornaments are just an example of a well finished design. The beads and cowrie shells have been arranged in such a way that the design is attractive to look at. This art form is also well balanced in that both arrangement and organization of design area are done by using some basic principles.



Plate No. 97
Wrist Ornament.

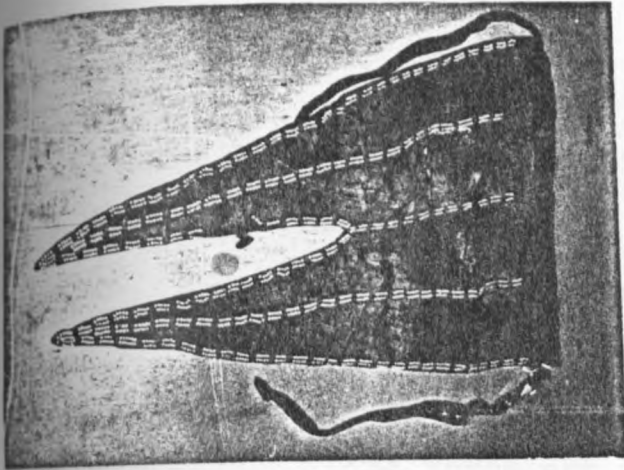


Plate No. 98
Public apron made
by women.



Plate No. 99
Beaded neck
ornaments.



Plate No. 100
Neck ornaments a
bit different
from above.



Plate no.101.

A beautiful black, red and white beaded belt. Beads bought from the shops and sewn on cowhide using sinew thread. Made by men and used by young married women. Tigania. Vernacular name: MUCWA.

Plate no.102.

Each of the pattern works on the three items here, has been done for a different purpose. One has been done for attracting attention, another one for decoration and the other one for entertainment.

The materials used are different too. The techniques employed are also different.

Plate no.103.

The three art forms have been produced by reasonably skilled people. In each item, organization has been well done. The artists have used their material economically. Also both the techniques and materials have been varied. It is also obvious that different tools must have been used in producing these art forms.

Plate no.104.

The decoration of flat surfaces is a common artistic practice with many traditional societies of Kenya. The three shields have been decorated effectively by using simple design motifs.

Plate No.101



Beautiful black and dark, blue and white beaded belt.



Plate No.102

Patterns on shield, belt and playing board.

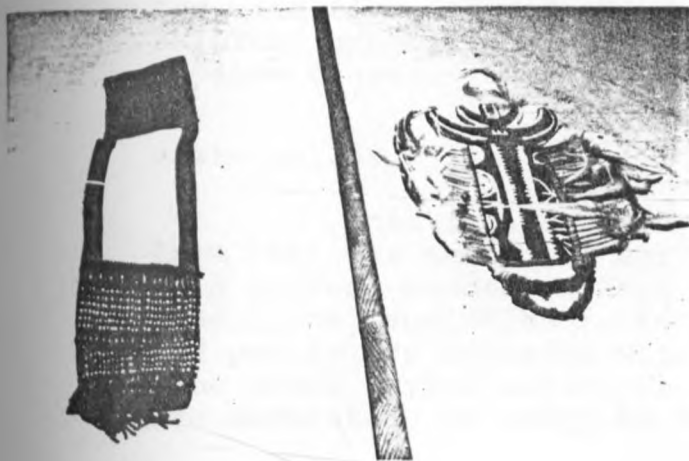


Plate No.103

Variety of, pattern on material

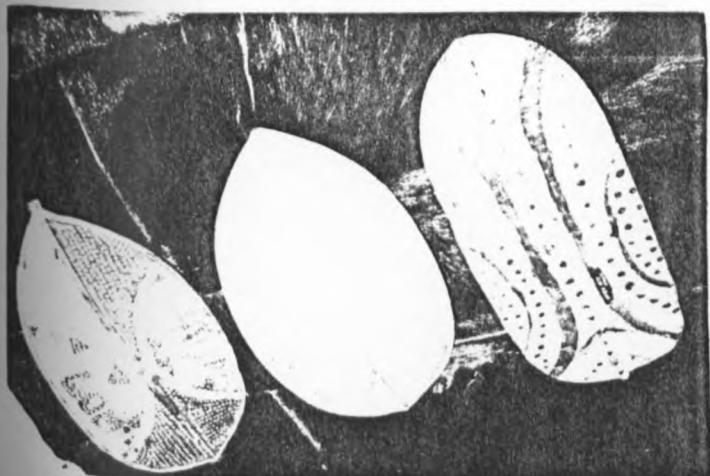


Plate No.104

Decoration on flat surface.

Plate no.105.

On the left is a woman's purse decorated with beads and cowrie shells with a long, orange cloth handle, used for holding money when they are beating drums and praying to God. Vernacular name: KONOO KA MWASE.

Plate no.106.

Both dancing and war activities have their share of art forms. These two social activities take a lot of people's time, and because of this fact a lot of tribal material culture is based on these two activities.

Plate no.107.

This is an ornament that is used for dancing. Many good examples of traditional decorative patterns are to be found in the dancing implements. In a number of traditional dances, such implements play a big role in enhancing the effectiveness of the dance. Such items as shields, spears, aprons, drums etc. are important in some dances.

Plate no.108.

This is a close-up of an earlier art form that was mentioned earlier in this study. It is a carved wooden walking stick. In some traditional societies in Kenya, walking sticks for old people are regarded with some respect. In some other tribal societies, these walking sticks are decorated in order to make them attractive.



Plate No.105

Woman leather bag
with a small gourd.

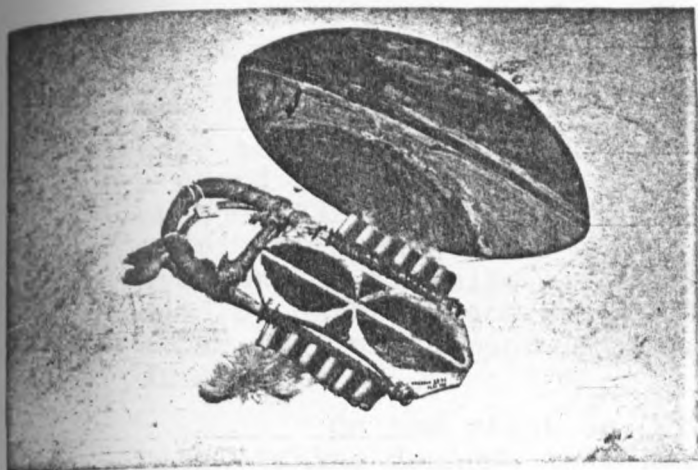


Plate No. 106

Shield and a dancing
ornament.

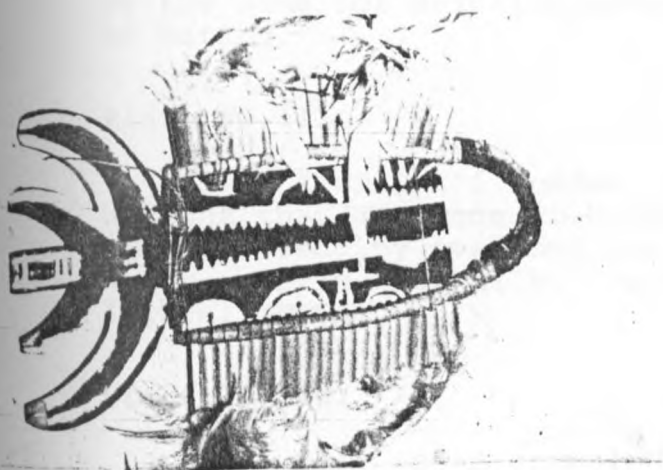


Plate No.107

Ornament used for
dancing.



Plate No.108

Carved wooden walking
stick.

plate no.109.

There are two types of decorations here. One has to be produced by putting marks on the surface of gourds. The other is by beadwork. The combination of these two, make these gourds look attractive.

Plate no.110.

On the left is a gourd with cowhide used as handle, and has a small stopper made from a gourd top. The gourd is decorated with white, orange, dark blue, green, blue and red beads on fibre threads. On top of the gourd are the drawings of tortoise, snake and hens. Made and used by both men and women to carry drinking water and porridge on safari. Vernacular name: GITETE.

On the right is half a gourd decorated with etching designs that have been cross-hatched. Made at Ngomeni by men and old women and used by the same for drinking water, porridge, alcohol or eating.

Plate no.111.

A group of beaded gourds of various designs that are made at NGOMENI by men and women and are used, by everyone for holding and carrying water, porridge or milk. Vernacular name: GITETE (plural ITETE).

Plate no.112.

This is an example of another attempt to create beauty on simple everyday traditional containers. The patterns on these gourds are basically done in straight lines. These patterns have been arranged in such a way that there is a good sense of balance of different shapes and lines.

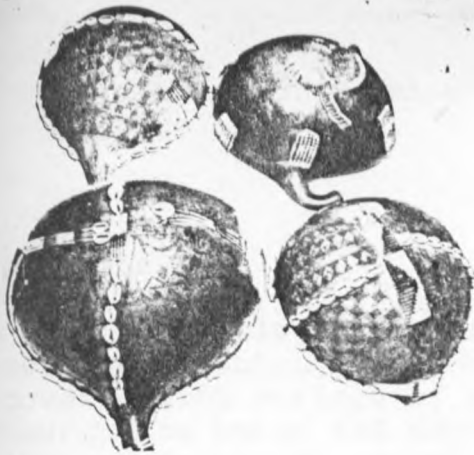


Plate No. 109
Gourds decorated.

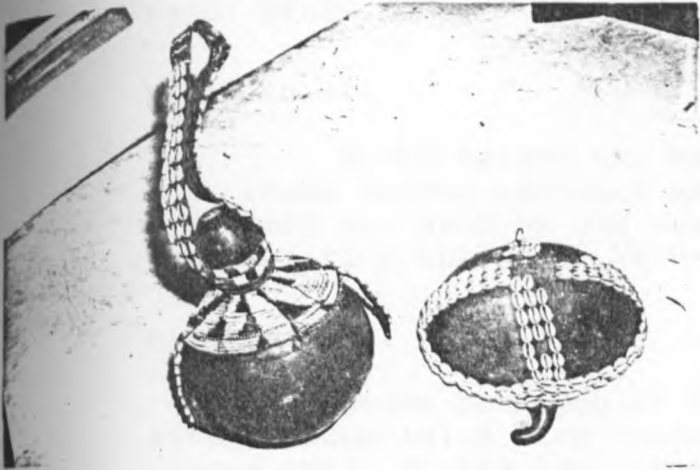


Plate No. 110
The patterns
changed.



Plate No. 111
Beaded gourds.

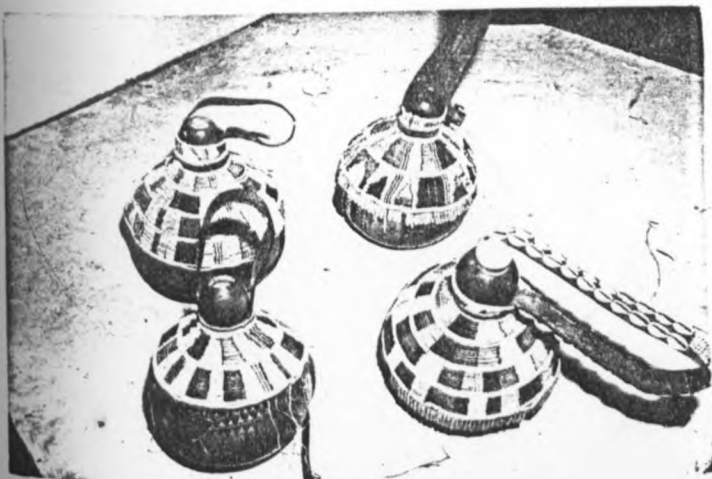


Plate No. 112
Decoration of white,
green, orange, red,
yellow and blue.

Plate no.113.

Girls front apron of khaki material sewn on an oblong of wood. The material is covered with strings of red and white, blue and turquoise beads and edged with white buttons above a fringe of copper chain and cut pieces. Worn by girls ready for marriage. Vernacular name: NZESE.

Plate no.114.

Round beaded and metal-wired necklace and round beaded necklace made at Ngomeni by old women and used by old women and by those who have rich husbands. Vernacular name: IMARI.

Plate no.115.

Woven bead public apron. Made by girls after circumcision from trade beads, thread, and copper chain at the hem. Worn by girls after circumcision and old women too. They are worn everyday underneath all other clothes and only shown to husbands and boy friends. Designs are called Kisyi. Vernacular name: NZEZE.

Plate no.116.

It is noted that there is an attempt to decorate a traditional basket using beads. In addition to beads, some pieces of shell have also been used. It is also noted that a lot of strings have been used to enhance the beauty of the basket.



Plate No.113

Note the square patterns.

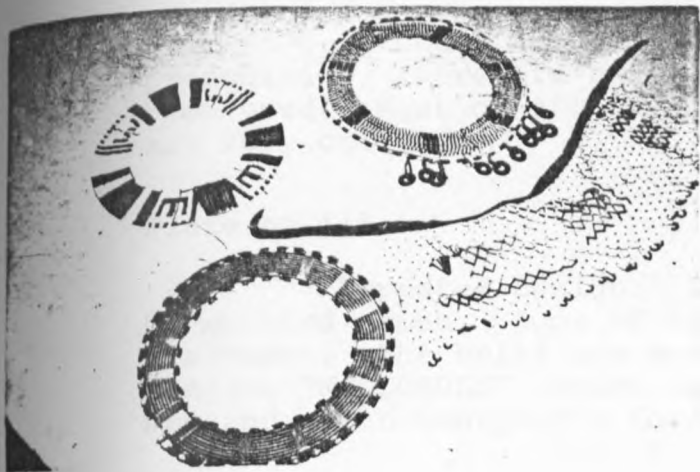


Plate No.114

Round beaded.

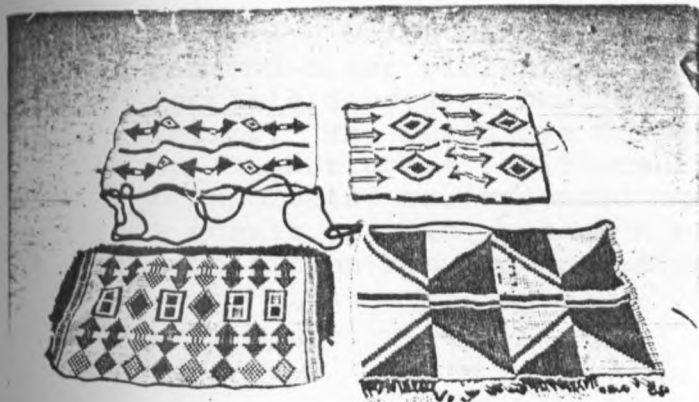


Plate No.115

Note the Rectangular & Triangular patterns.



Plate No.116

Mostly in red and white beads

Plate no.117 and 118.

These art forms are of simple shapes - squares and rectangles. These shapes are decorated in simple motifs. Some of these motifs are of square and rectangular shapes. This means that there is close relationship between the overall form and the pattern works.

Although the white colour seems to predominate, there are other colours that have been used. Most of the traditional bead works are very colourful.

Plate no.119.

Repeated design. These belts are made by married women. Some of these women are craftsmen. The belts are worn by young women dancing "NGULUGULU" which is danced by young men and women everyday - Local name: MUCHONDO

Plate no.120.

Waist belts made by women and worn by men and older girls for dances (especially young people's dances). Design in blue, green and yellow. The beads are coiled around cotton cloth on blanket cores. Different motifs that have been created are repeated again and again, and as a result of this, a harmonious and a varied composition has been achieved.

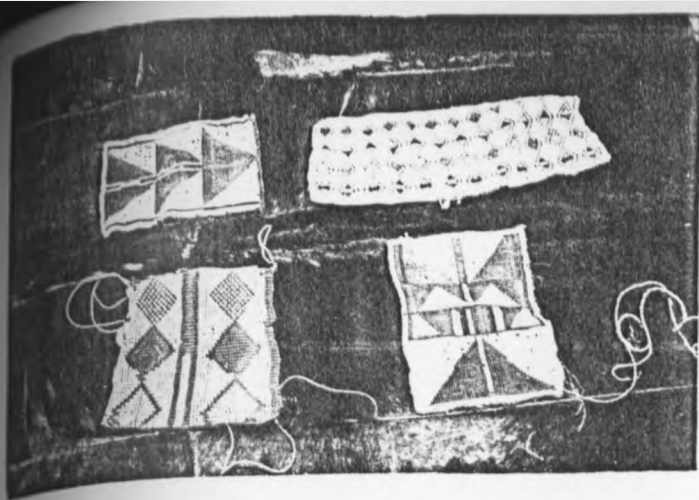


Plate No.117

Thread is made from
fibre.

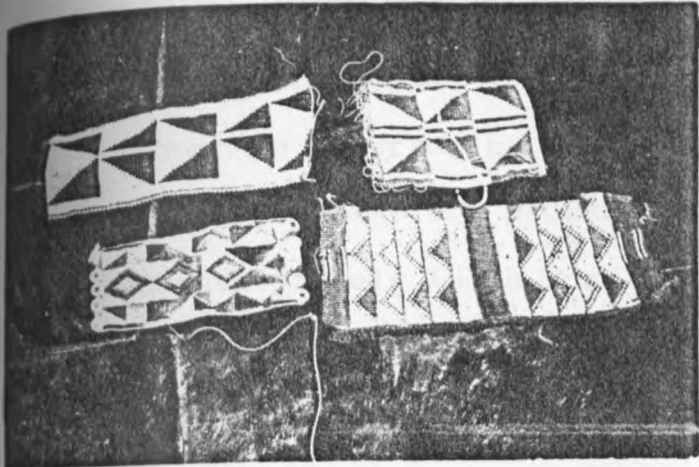


Plate No.118

Note thread as
above.

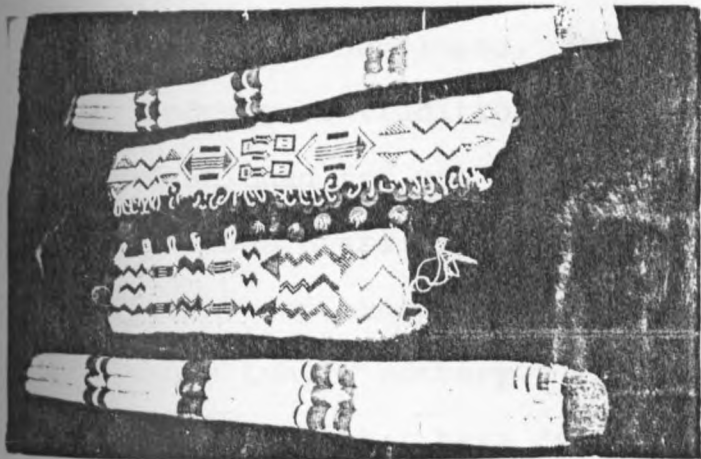


Plate No.119

Repeated design.

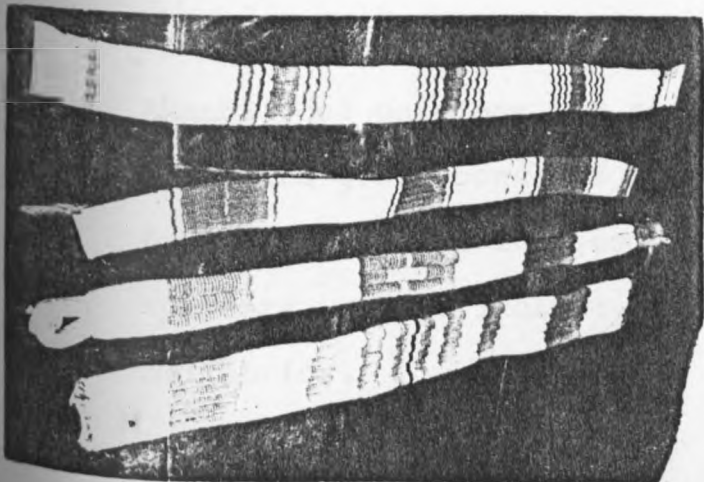


Plate No.120

Belts of red, white
and green.

CHAPTER SIX

EXAMPLES OF AREAS OF INFLUENCE

Commercial and Symbolic Factors

Commercial arts and crafts include works commonly referred to as "tourist art" and whose primary motive for production is commercial gain. Quantitatively these form the bulk of art produced in Kenya to-day.

These art forms could perhaps be grouped into apparent categories, determined by sources from which they have developed. The first group consists of redesigned traditional artifacts, which are now fashioned for use in the modern sector. These include Maasai beadwork, various forms of basket work, for example the Gikuyu and Kamba ciondos, and some Luhya pottery. In the second group are novel art forms that have developed locally in recent years. In many cases there may be records showing when and where they were first made. These consist of Akamba wood carvings and some forms of jewellery. The third group consists of foreign art forms that have incorporated indigenous aspects in their contents. These include batik work and hand-printing on fabrics.

Commercial arts and crafts in Kenya have generally been disdained as unimportant; maybe their rapid growth has attributed greatly to the amplification of this belief. It is however, true that they may not equal traditional art in aesthetic value, but their importance is nonetheless undisputed.

According to the Kenya government's estimates more than 30,000 people are involved in their production.¹ They further support the much needed balance of payments. On the other hand they significantly present to the outside world an ethnic image, an aspect that must be upheld and projected as part of the all important boundary defining system. Now these two factors, the commercial and the symbolic, are considerably important yet conflicting and no solution that takes only one level into consideration can solve the problem.

The tourist and the foreign market are the most significant and steady patrons of these art forms. Their influence on the outcome of these works is thus

¹D.O.Oludhe, "Kenya Handprinted Fabrics: Traditional Elements," Seminar Paper No.144, I.A.S. August 1980.

expected. Indeed, there is a tendency for some works to depict pre-supposed aesthetic values. Therefore aspects of style or content may prove offensive to the consumer and yet maybe honest creations are quickly removed. The result is the danger of the craftsman losing control of his product and when this happens the art is no longer indigenous. Of equally great repercussion is that, Kenyans may perhaps begin to identify with aesthetic value that tend not to represent their feelings and thoughts.

There is therefore a need to re-evaluate these artistic products and further attempt to understand the situation that craftsmen find themselves in.

Although the problem seems to have been realized, little has been done towards coming up with some positive solutions. The Kenya External Trade Authority (Training Section) in conjunction with the Ministry of Culture and Social Services, the International Labour Organization and other related bodies, has in the past held seminars and workshops for various crafts and craftsmen with the view amongst others, to improve on the quality of these articles. Their interest in this respect has largely resulted in the fostering of pre-supposed aesthetic values in their attempts to make these articles

economically viable for foreign markets.²

To sufficiently understand the problem of gauging traditional elements in hand-made crafts in Kenya, it is important to visualize the relationship that exists between the products of the two apparent periods of art history in Kenya. These are (a) the traditional phase and (b) the modern or non-traditional phase. The attempt here is primarily concerned with the latter and thus seeks to bring to light prevailing relationships in today's artistic developments with that of its past. Art like any other aspect of human enterprise should be able to reflect traces of developments from its past. And this is the basis of true and honest creations. A knowledge of the past is vital, for this should be the fundamental foundation from which meaningful creativity should germinate.

For the purposes of this study, it is appropriate to define traditional and modern art. Traditional art implies art forms belonging to the past indigenous culture. And these may have developed naturally to present day, with or within the old cultural framework. While modern art implies novel art forms which have developed in recent years, and for the most part alien to the old indigenous culture.

² Ibid., p.2.

The Craft of Printing

For the most part, the craft of printing on fabric is foreign to East Africa, although there is evidence that some form of wood block printing has existed on the Swahili coast of Kenya and on the off shore island of Zanzibar, where printed cotton gowns or Kangas were produced. The printing blocks could incorporate more than one motif per block.

The blocks appear to have been manufactured locally some time around the beginning of this century and have designs cut into the wood. Sometimes bits of pins were added.

".. Jean Brown is quoted by John Picton to believe that the idea of printing was probably not indigenous but copied from Indian prototype."³

Throughout the world crafts are more and more being replaced by machine made articles; hand printing is no exception. In very few and isolated areas is this craft still carried out; areas of significance include India and Iran.⁴

Designs

Design is the most significant, for it is the

³Ibid., p.3.

⁴Ibid.

backbone and the primary concern of the artcraft. The sources of inspiration are said to be Arab and African patterns, also African flora and fauna. Design has been taken to mean, the arrangement of elements such as line, colour, shape, etc. to form a composition. The following categories of designs were observed:

- (a) Adopted traditional Kenyan designs.
- (b) Individual designers' creations,
inspired by traditional African designs
and
- (c) Figurative designs.

Adopted Traditional Kenyan Designs

These are characterized by their similarity to traditional patterns and decorations on traditional Kenyan artifacts; such as the Akamba stool, Lamu wooden door ways, Boni combs, shields and calabashes; these are typical of the workshop's earlier designs. Further examination of the designs and their traditional counterparts shows the modern tending to depict a more machine like finish. Perhaps this could be attributed to the use of different materials and also methods of production. Thus the outcome of design on cloth using dyes and screen printing should naturally give a different effect from that of

hammering coiled wire into wood (as in the case of Akamba stools)⁵. Basically these designs are faithful copies of those on traditional artifacts.

Inspiration To Create Individual Designs

One interesting aspect on the development of most commercial arts and crafts in Kenya, is the West and Central African influence. This influence is significant in jewellery, carvings (for example, Akamba carvers, new carving West African items, such as the Akamba dolls and masks),⁶ weaving, and designs on handprinted fabrics. May be due to the fact that West and Central African art has been better received by and exposed to a wider audience throughout the world, there may be a tendency to view the art forms from this region as being synonymous with African art. Now that in Kenya the current works are mainly commercial, to attract consumers (who in many cases have only been exposed to West and Central African art thus asserting itself as being African) they have naturally had to incorporate aspects of art from that region.⁷

⁵Ibid., p.5

⁶Carving workshops at Wamunyu (Machakos), Gikomba (Nairobi) and Mombasa.

⁷Oludhe, "Kenya Handprinted", p.6.

On the design discussed here, more emphasis has been placed on traditional Kenyan works as opposed to those from other regions of Africa. These designs fall into two observed levels: (a) Adopted and (b) Inspired designs. For this particular context the study of the former is of major concern.

It is difficult to pin-point exactly, what constitutes the "Kenyaness" or "Africanness" in these modern designs, since this generally depends on an individual's interpretation and justification of what he perceives as being unique. Therefore the overriding effect is dependent on the subjective interpretation on designers, more so those who have consciously involved this. To come to a synthesis of what could be traditionally Kenya, it would be helpful to study the art of other cultures. It would also be helpful to study patterns on traditional Kenyan artifacts and further seek the views of designers and interested persons. It is possible to draw out some generalities on what could be related to traditional Kenyan art. It is necessary to deal with the following elements of design in order to draw out these generalities.⁸

⁸Ibid.

(a) line, (b) shape (form), (c) colour and (d) space.

Line

Line in two dimensional work is used to describe, articulate and outline a specific form. The draughtsman can utilize this by various devices such as varying the thickness of line in order to suggest recession, projection and interpolation of plane. Without reference to form therefore, line possesses a rhythmic vitality.

To analyse line in pattern and decoration on traditional artifacts, the study of incised calabashes, decorated stools, wooden combs with incised patterns and painted shields is quite necessary. The study of these items, shows that line has commonly been used to describe the form. This has meant that line is bold and distinct. On the modern works there is significant similarity.

Shape (form)

These two terms, shape and form, are generally used inter-changeably. Form is the structural element in a work of art or the means whereby an artist's vision is projected. Furthermore form and content are actually inseparable, save in theory. In modern art, particularly abstract art, the intention is to present the maximum amount of form

with the minimum amount of content.

Inferences drawn on both traditional patterns and decorations and the modern designs, show that shapes are generally geometric and simple, comprising of squares, triangles and rectangles. On the traditional artifacts, they tend towards freeform, although freeforms are rare, save when used in a more figurative decoration.⁹

Colour

In its widest sense, colour could perhaps be defined as an aspect of visual experience which remains when the spatial and temporal aspects are not considered.

This definition does not take into account the symbolism in colour, although an aspect of considerable importance in traditional practices of art. The main reason why this is not considered, is that in modern designs little or no attention is paid to it. Colour is thus discussed as being used for its own sake.

Traditional Kenyan artifacts examined in respect to colour included beadwork as in jewellery

⁹ Ibid., p.7.

and other artifacts decorated with beads, such as calabashes and garments. Others were those decorated with pigment e.g. shields. The widest array of colour is found on the beadwork; these show a lot of liberty in the use of colour on any given item. On the other hand, colour on painted items is more restricted to shades of browns to red, black and white. These colours are commonly described as earth colours.

Colour is used restrictively. There is evidence confirming the use of colour in this way. For example they limit their colours to two, and at most and rarely three. (This includes the background colour which in most cases is white). The motifs are commonly of the colour ranging from black to dark tones of blue; and at times strong shades, brown, and green are used either on motifs or as background colours.

Space

Space is considered as the background on which motifs are printed or the negative areas on an ornamented surface. A study of space should take into account the inter-relationships of both the positive and negative areas (i.e. the shape and space). Further, space can only be discussed adequately when some reference is made to its use in the arts of other

cultures. This is to enable one to perceive clearly the unique relationship that may exist in the use of space on modern and traditional designs. Many types of decorated surfaces have been taken into account in studying form and content of traditional Kenyan designs. These include those that are painted, engraved, decorated with extraneous materials, scorched, carved and impressed. It has been observed that, for the most part, surface decoration on traditional artifacts is minimal and when they are ornamented, one notes large negative areas.

A comparison of the traditional and modern designs shows one thing in common; the use of large areas of both space and shapes. However, modern designs do not tend to depict the free use of space, a characteristic that typifies decoration on surfaces of traditional artifacts.

Representational or figurative designs and motifs, although rare have existed in the traditional Kenyan art. The most notable item which has been decorated is the calabash; this is largely due to the quality of this material, since the smooth and plain surface and the ease with which it can be worked, makes it naturally the most obvious choice.

The Akamba present the best examples of

fugitive design. Lindblom,¹⁰ who carried out investigations of these designs, points out that the sources of ornamental designs is from nature and mainly from the animal world. Those depicted are largely lizards, serpents and tortoise. Comparatively less are the mammals, which are almost always wild animals such as the elephant, zebra, giraffe and antelopes. Domesticated animals, fish and birds are generally absent, while the lower animals represented include milipedes and centipedes. In addition to animals, household objects and tools, the sun and the moon are also depicted. He observed that animals are stylized and often appear in profile.¹¹

Almost all figurative patterns and motifs in most African societies originally had a symbolic or allegorical meaning. Thus the preoccupation of the craftsmen was to record a pictorial statement of an idea, rather than decorate the work. Since some of these statements may have been confined to a few examples, in the course of time these have been completely forgotten. It is however, partly the

¹⁰Gerhard Lindblom, The Akamba in British East Africa, pp.357-358.

¹¹Ibid.

intention of this study to investigate the meaning contained in the content; and to examine the visual appearance.

Figurative designs on modern works include adopted designs from traditional sources, like those on artifacts and even cave paintings. Also the basic form of traditional artifacts such as stools, combs, drums, and shields has often been incorporated into the modern designs. Besides these, figurative designs include scenes from every day contemporary life. Examples of these designs are those of a Kikuyu woman drawing water and a woman working on pottery. In addition many other designs depict Kenyan flora and fauna. This last case has carefully been examined as it gives a close parallel to those from traditional sources. Animals depicted are elephants, lions and antelopes. Moreover these are stylized and generally appearing in profile, aspects that characterize most of their traditional counterparts. Nonetheless, it may be wrong to assume that this is wholly an influence from tradition, because these characteristics are also shown in other unrelated designs, and may thus just be a convenient way of presenting such figures.

Materials

Generally the materials used in the production of fabrics are not indigenous. And so far little effort has been made in integrating some local material e.g. dyes. Perhaps since printing is largely a foreign craft, little need has been realised in using materials that are not conventional. Moreover to adequately integrate local materials, experimentation will be required.¹²

The only note-worthy material that can be said to be traditional, is barkcloth. This is a type of cloth that is not textile in the strictest sense of the word, since it is not of woven, knitted or crocheted fibre. It has, however, performed a comparable function, and is widely used in parts of East Africa. The best known centre is Uganda, amongst the Baganda. It is said that barkcloth is commonly used in areas where weaving has not been traditionally practiced.¹³

The other textiles consist of locally manufactured poplins, tetron (polyester/cotton),

¹²John Picton and J. Mack, African Textiles, Looms, Weaving and Design, p.28.

¹³Ibid.

cotton/linen and hessian. The weaving performed is generally plain weft over deft. On the other hand the dyes are imported and consist of mainly chemical reactive dyes and also pigment dyes. The latter are used on barkcloth and other wall hangings. Also imported are the block cuts and cut-films.

Function of the Products

Clothing is the most significant function to which the products of hand printed fabrics are put. The workshops also produce finished garments. But by far the majority of the fabrics purchased are prepared for various functions by individual consumers. A wide range of other finished products are made within the workshop; these include, wall hangings, lamp shades, shopping bags, oven gloves, table cloths and cushion covers. These articles have found their use in the modern sector.

Observation

The problem now facing indigenous Kenyan arts and crafts is one that has been realized and at times even over-emphasized. But no attempts towards solutions have yet been made. This study does not pretend to come up with any solution to this particular problem, rather it attempts to investigate with the view of drawing more insight. Thus, knowing

very well that the two aspects, the symbolic and the commercial, must be dealt with as a whole to come up with any meaningful solution, it has emphasized the symbolic at the expense of the commercial.

Throughout the world questions are being raised about indigenous arts and crafts and one common problem is that of the art forms dying out. For example handprinting of fabrics is no longer carried out in cultures where it may have held an important place; the reason generally given is that of mechanization of labour.

In Kenya, this particular problem does not significantly face us now, at least it is not the overriding problem. The only way that production may cease in the foreseeable future, is when tourists cease to patronize the products.

Although the growth of this art form could be said to be more from without than within, it is the researcher's contention that any particular style in design has no special boundary to people in a particular culture and may be universal both in appreciation and to some extent in production.¹⁴

¹⁴ Oludhe, "Kenya Handprinted," p.12.

One of the objectives of this study is to attempt to point out what may generally be considered as traditional, more so in the Kenyan context. It is realized that there is no specific and clear cut distinction. Thus at times one has to make reference to the arts and crafts in other cultures to tip the balance.

The aspects investigated are the techniques and method of production, materials, the functions of the products and the designs. The latter in this case e.g. (handprinting on fabric) is the most significant, while the other three proved that little of traditional elements had been incorporated. However, the designs showed some very close parallel to Kenyan patterns and decorations in the use of the following elements of design: colour, line, form and space.

Plate no.121.

All the items on this plate have been decorated in one way or the other. Such common materials as beads, shells etc. have been used in the process of forming simple patterns. However, there does not seem to be a lot of pattern work.

Plate no.122.

The predominant decorating materials here are the cowrie shells and buttons. These have been sewn on leather and the end results are simple art forms.

Plate no.123.

The use of bottle tops to create attractive art forms has been exciting to the traditional societies. Other simple materials have also been used. It is also noted that many western artists and designers have used discarded items to create some highly valued pieces of art.

Plate no.124.

Here there is an interesting combination of materials. This combination is of beads and hardseeds. They have been used in such a way that attractive pieces of necklaces have been produced.



Plate No.121

Simple patterns.

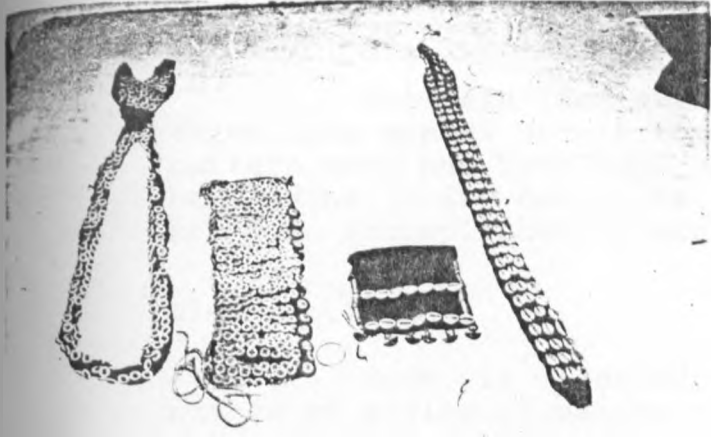


Plate No.122

Button on leather.

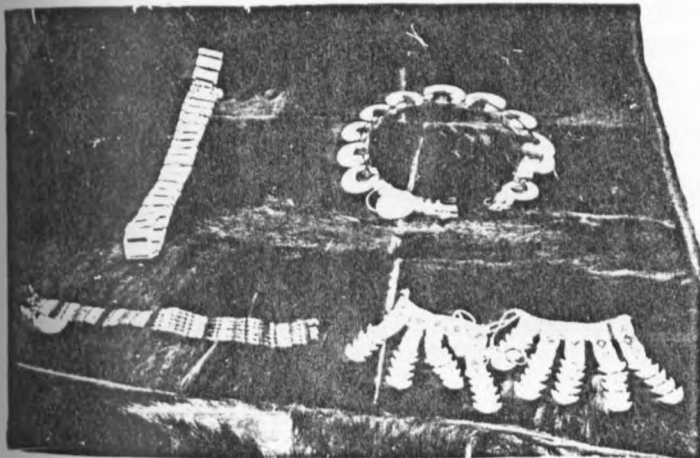


Plate No.123

Bottle tops and other
simple materials



Plate No.124

Mixture of beads and
hard seeds.

Plate no.125.

Coil bead belt in red and white with a few blue beads. Beads are strung on MUAMBA (Baobab) thread. Made and worn by women to attract men. Worn for WATHI dances. Local name: MUSYONDO.

Plate no.126.

The main idea here is to compare the three long pieces of art forms, and see how pattern work has been done on each. Each has been done in its own style. Some artistic aim has been accomplished in each of these pieces.

Plate no.127.

Here, it is noted that there are a number of styles of making round shapes. Round shapes are favourite with traditional societies. Round shapes are used for necklaces, bangles, dancing instruments etc. Even such items as drums, beehives, stools, baskets, curved bowls, etc. are essentially of round forms.

Plate no.128.

On the bottom right, is an example of a leather cowhide armband with tiny aluminium belts attached to make it ring. Such armbands are worn by older unmarried girls and young married women for dancing. Kamba. Vernacular name: TULABWA TWA MOKO.

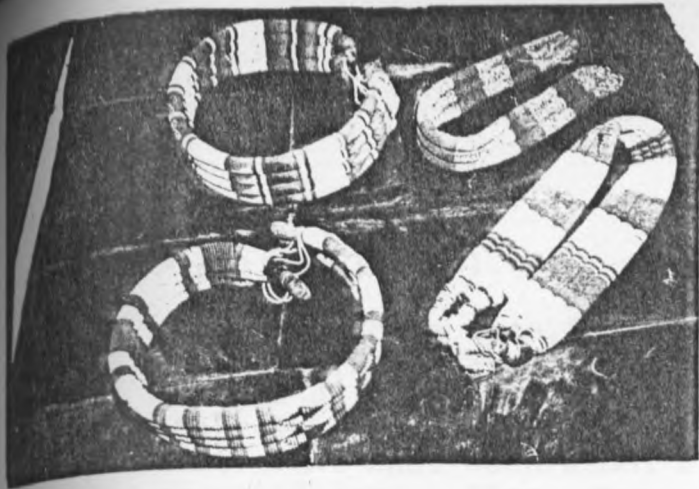


Plate No.125

Waist belts made
and worn by women.

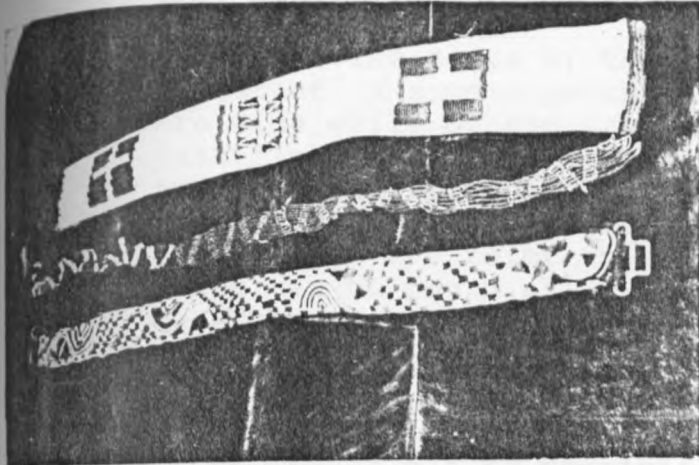


Plate No.126

Bottom: coil and
belt.

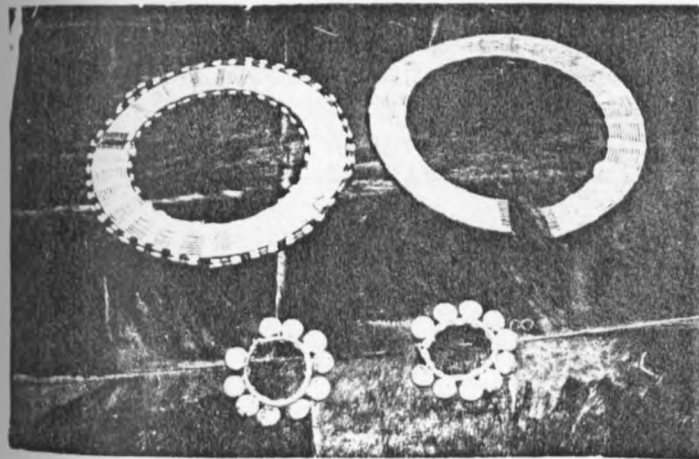


Plate No.127

Round shapes are
favourite with
traditional African



Plate No.128

Patterned to produce
sound during dancing.

Plate nos.129-131.

These stools present a variety of designs. Each particular stool has something that is different from the other. For example, their legs have been carved in various ways. That means that each stool has its own peculiar shape of legs. Also, there is an attempt to do some pattern work on some legs.

The seats of the stools are also different in some aspects. Some of the seats are wide while others are narrow. Others are just flat. All these facts indicate that the traditional African furniture design is done by creative minds. There are numerous other traditional art forms that testify to this fact. These can be found all over the entire continent of Africa.

Plate no. 132.

As can be testified by many traditional art forms, triangular patterns are used widely. These particular type of patterns seem to have been accepted as effective means of expression and decoration. The reason behind this fact needs further study. The study would help to explain why such shapes appear in many of the pattern works of traditional societies in Kenya.

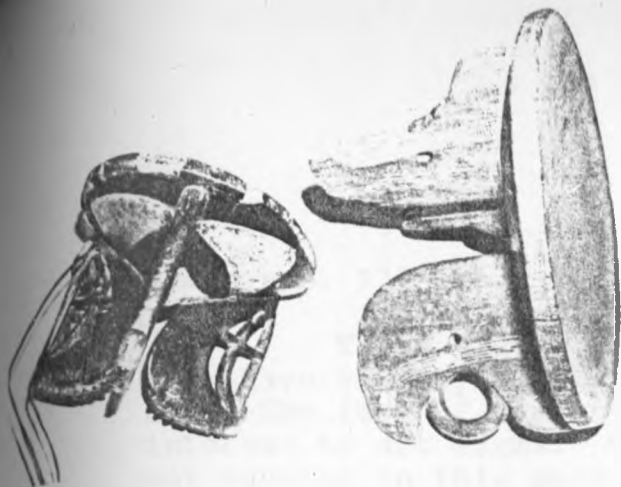


Plate No.129

Kamba stools
decorated.



Plate No.130

Without decorations.



Plate No.131

Old man's stool.

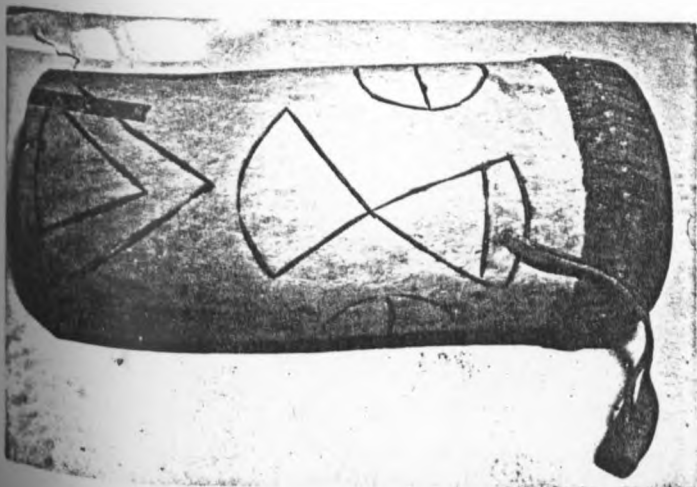


Plate No.132

Geometrical design
patterns.

Plate nos. 133-135.

These plates have pattern designs that have variety of form, line, arrangement etc. The idea of variety is crucial in rendering interest to art forms. Traditional crafts are not wanting in this particular aspect of the arts.

As can be seen from the various objects on these plates there is an attempt to create unity in various art forms. Also the idea of variety has been used to create more interest.

It is obvious that the artists who made these objects were skilled and creative. However, in order to appreciate traditions art forms more, we need to study and know more about how the traditional societies live. This means to know more about their culture.

Plate no.136.

These two stools serve as a further manifestation of the variations to be found within the stool craft, The production of good stools, just like in other crafts, depends on the skill of the artist. The ability to create ornamentation on the stools is part of this skill.



Plate No.133

Arm ornaments

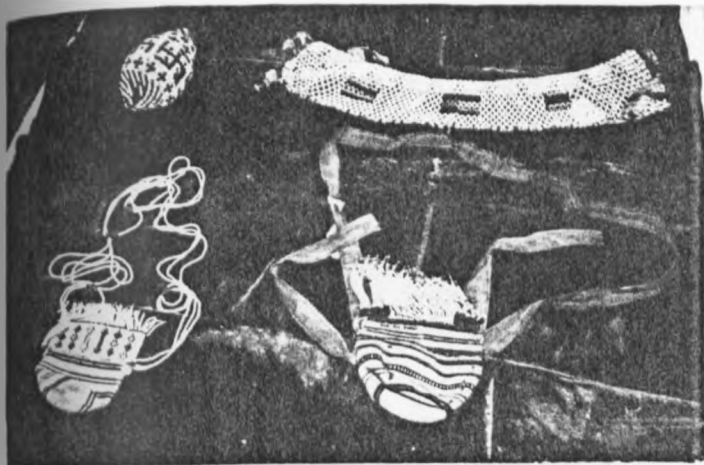


Plate No.134

Women's purse
decorated.

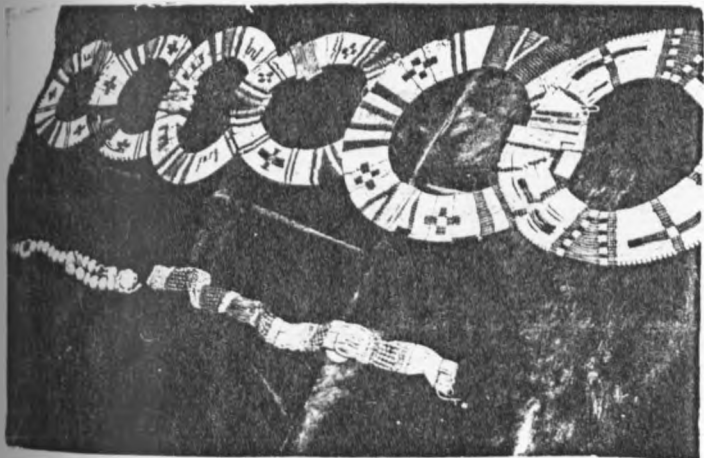


Plate No.135

Neck-wear decorated
in multi-colour.

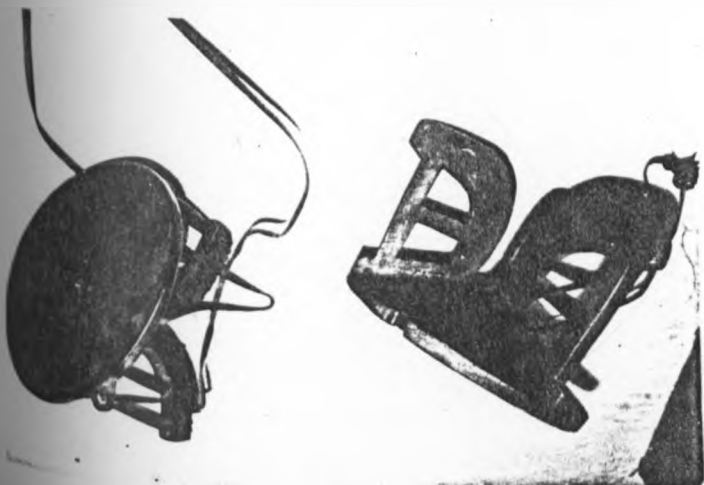


Plate No.136

Old man's stools.

Plate nos. 137 and 138.

War implements are a necessary possession for the traditional societies. Some of these implements are for defence, while others are for attack. Both of these types of implements are decorated at times. The decorations are in pattern form e.g., triangular, circular and semi-circular patterns etc. It is also noted that various colours are used e.g. white, red etc.

Plate no.139.

On the extreme left is a rocking stool . probably also used as headrest on one end and stool on the other. It is used by men. It is from Kapenguria area. Used by the SUK (Pokot)

In the centre is a large long calabash that has been decorated. The top is stitched round and the lid is in a calabash which lifts into the big one. Made by the women and used by them. Maasai. (IL Keekonyokie).

Plate no.140.

As both an art form and a decorated object, this piece of work portrays good craftsmanship. Although there does not seem to be much colour variation, the ones that have been used still make this piece of art form an interesting work.

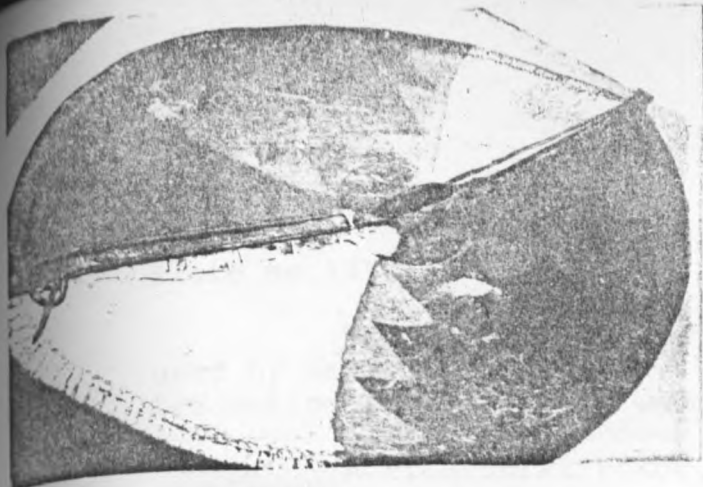


Plate No.137

Triangular patterns

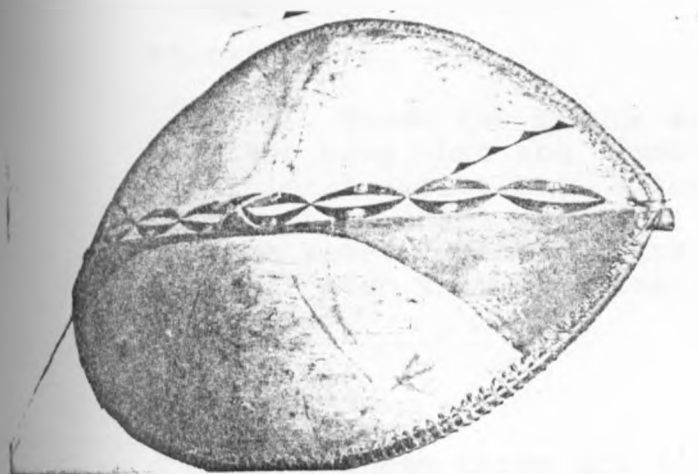


Plate No.138

Semi circular
patterns.

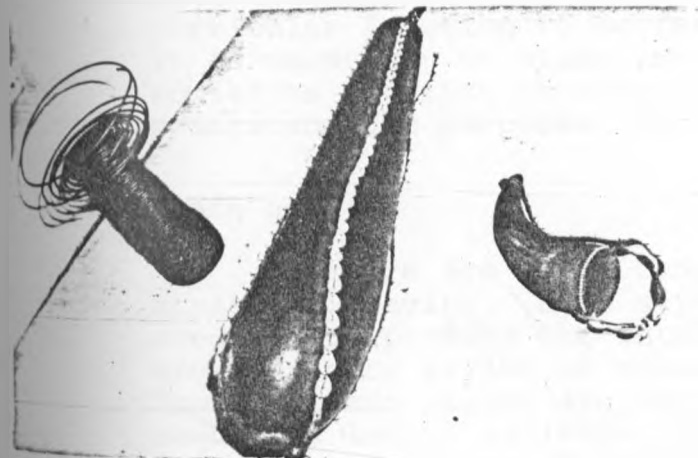


Plate No.139

Left: old,man's stool
centre: decorated
calabash, Right: small
horn.

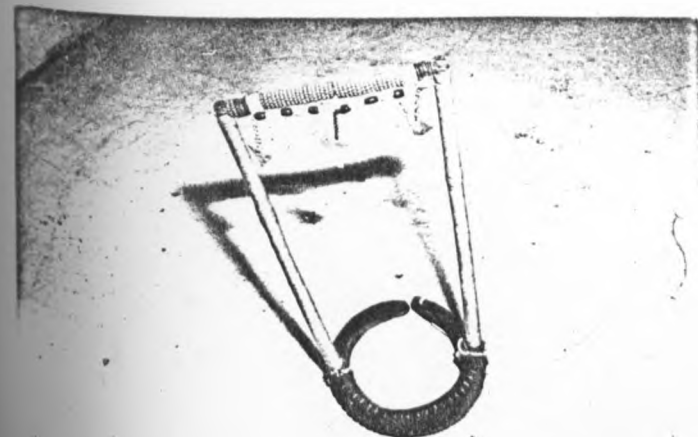


Plate No.140

Craftsmen's pride

Plate no.141.

Three headrests cum stools made and used by men. The material that is usually used for making such items is wood.

Agricultural Pokot. Vernacular name:
NACHAR.

Plate no.142.

These two shields are different in shape from the ones that are commonly used by many traditional societies. Although they may look different in shape from the others, their purposes are the same. These two are as tough as the others. Also they have been made from the same materials.

Plate no.143.

These three art forms look quite different in terms of shape and organization. It is noted that each one of them has its own particular function to perform. This means that it is necessary to study how the traditional societies function in order to be able to understand the purposes for their art forms.

Plate no.144.

Here are three examples of simple styles of weaving. Each style is quite adequate to produce the intended item. There are many more styles of making woven items. Some of these styles are very intricate and require a lot of patience and skill. For example some forms of basketry require days of careful work in order to finish them properly.



Plate No. 141

Left and centre: wooden headrests.

Right: Rocking stool.

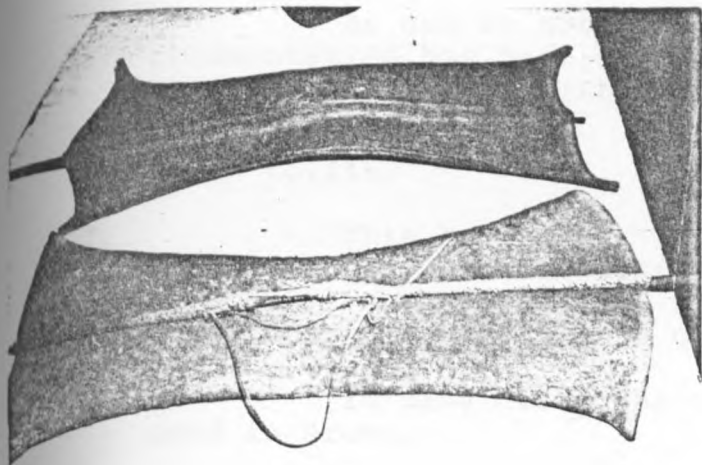


Plate No. 142

Shields.

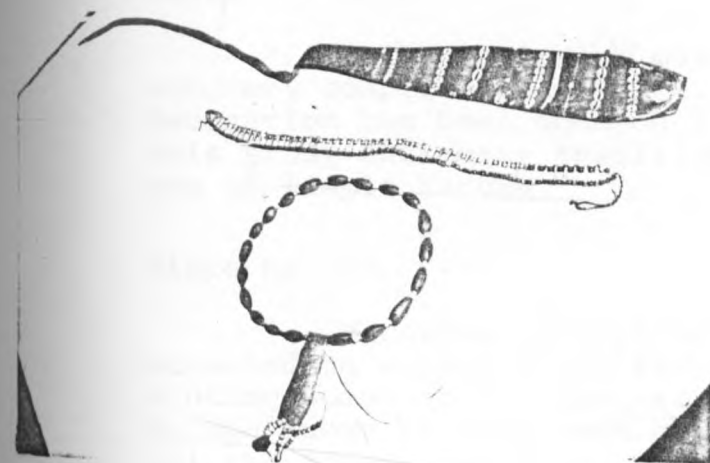


Plate No. 143

Decorations on neck ornaments.

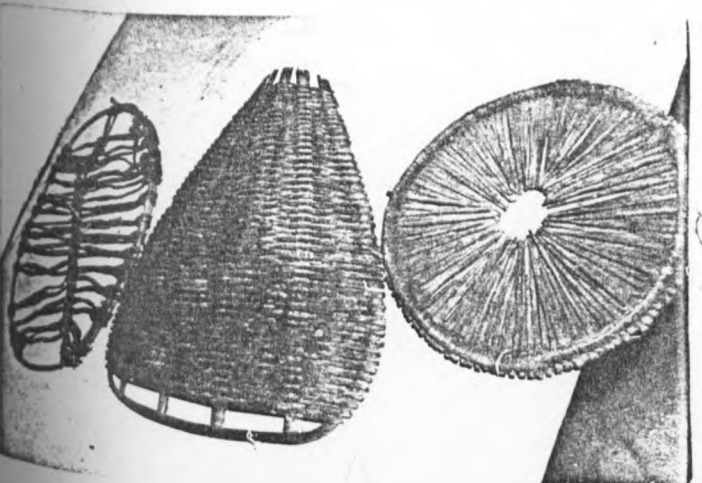


Plate No. 144

Woven designs.

Plate no.145.

Skin is a most commonly used material for dressing purposes. There are a number of reasons as to why this is so. It is easily available, its preparation is easy, it lasts long enough etc.

As can be noted from this plate, some ornamentation has been done on this skin in order to make it look more attractive.

Plate no.146,

This headdress is used by the famous Maasai people. The colouring of this headdress is done in such a way that it blends very well with other decorated parts of the body.

In many cases the colouring that is used is brown.

Plate no. 147.

This particular music instrument is not very complicated in make. Also, hardly any decoration has been done on it. It is noted in this study that many traditional music instruments are of simple nature.

Plate no.148.

Hardwood pattern carved by men and attached to wooden block with nails. Used for rinting women cotton kangas. Owner said that no one knows to make such objects any more. All the fundis had died.

Swahili and Arab. Vernacular name:
MATABA LEISO. From Lamu Island.

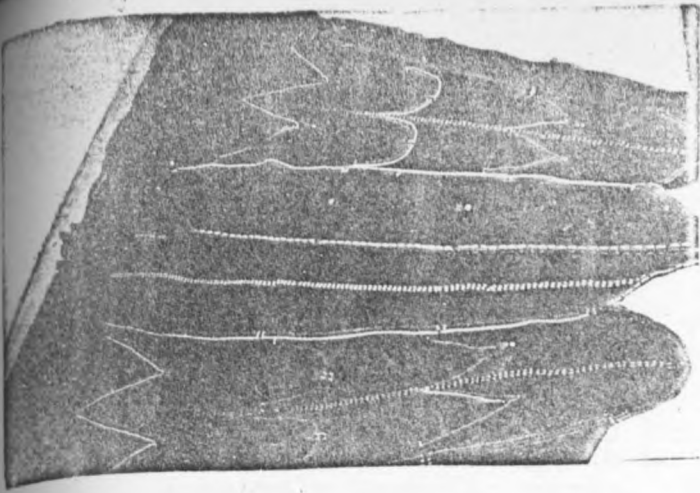


Plate No. 145
Decoration on skin
(clothing).

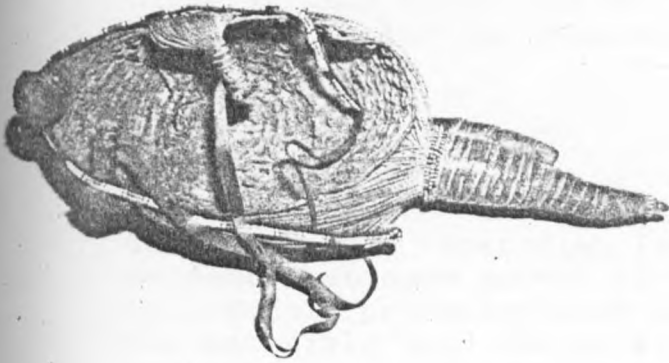


Plate No. 146
Famous Maasai
headdress.

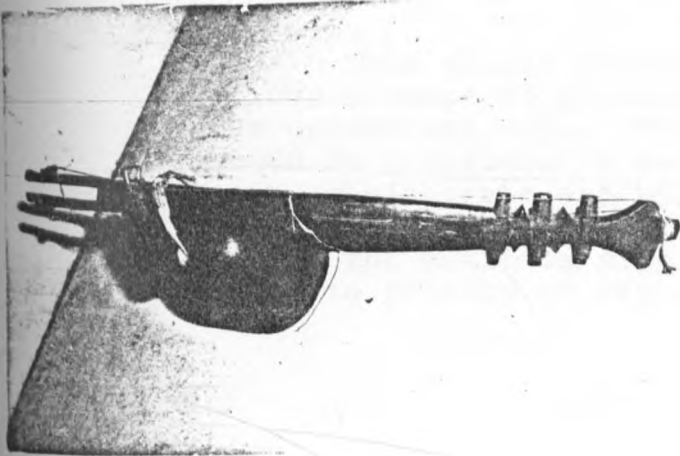


Plate No. 147
Musical instrument.

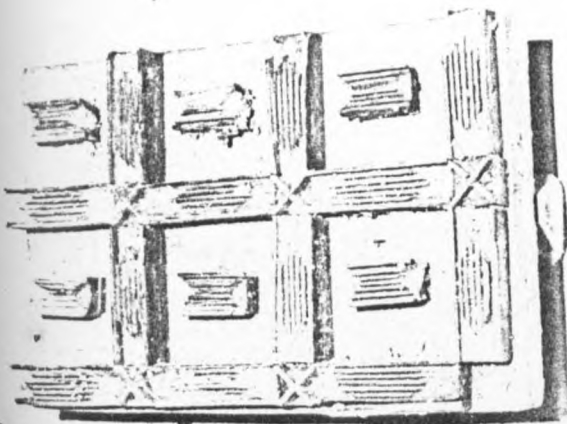


Plate No. 148
Hardwood patterns.

Plate no. 149 and 150.

Simple marks are visible on two items on plate no 149. These simple marks are for decorative purposes.

However, plate no 150 has some seemingly symbolic marks. These marks are of familiar ideas to many people. These ideas are based on alphabets and arithmetic. It is not clear in this study whether these marks are used with particular meanings in mind, or just accidentally.

Plate no.151.

Fishing basket made and used by men. This is popped over fish in the shores. It is evident that some amount of skill has been utilized in producing such an item. Although the materials used are of simple nature, it is clear that an experienced hand had been at work. Elmolo. Vernacular name: OCHOM.

Plate no.152.

This shield portrays a rather ambitious attempt to produce some patterns on the entire art form. The patterns have been arranged in a systematic manner. They have been done in an elaborate and bold manner.

The motif is simple and it is repeated in order to produce an attractive design.

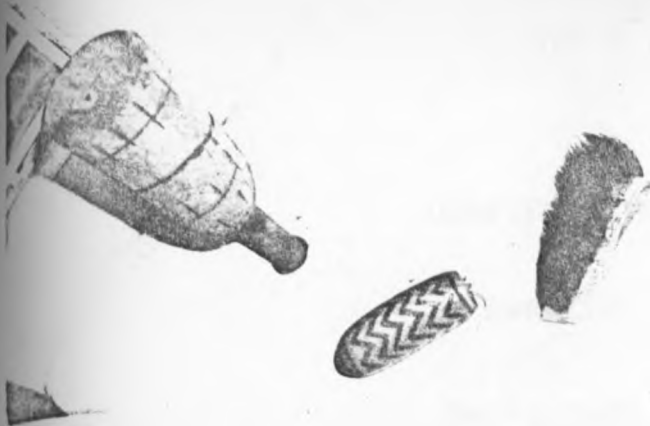


Plate No.149

Designs on different shapes.

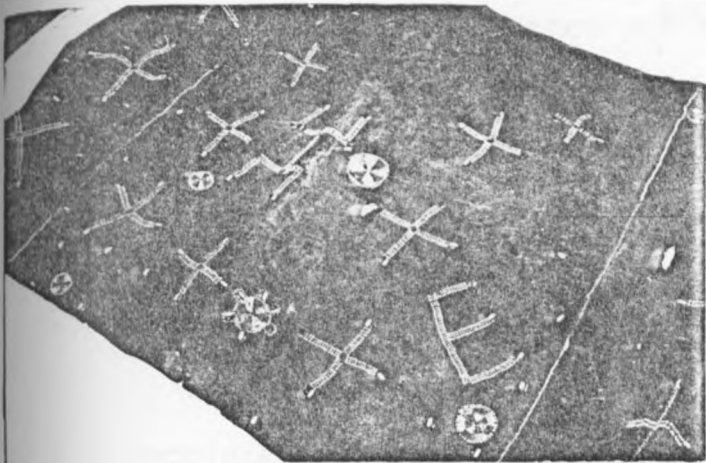


Plate No.150

Decoration on skin (clothing).

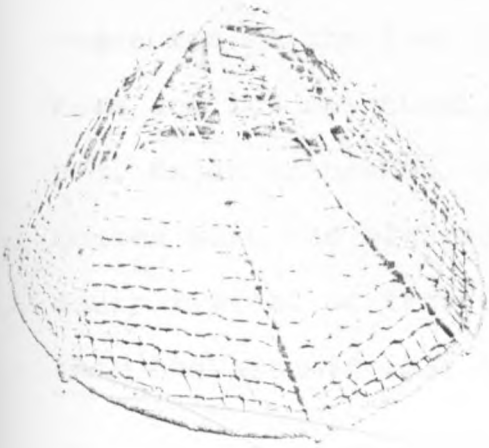


Plate No.151

Woven basket.

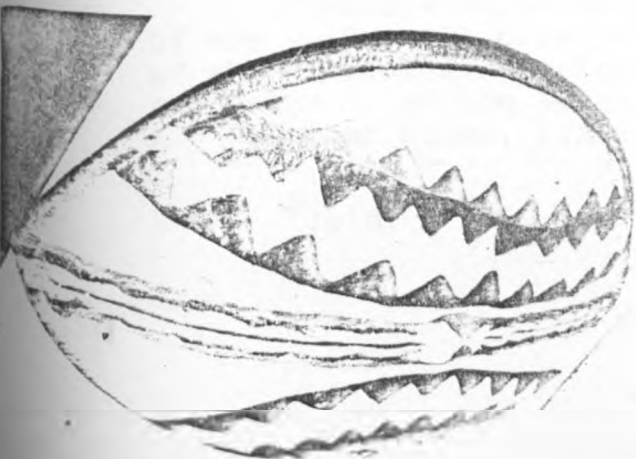


Plate No.152

Elaborate designs on shield.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SWAHILI

Background

Southal¹ pointed out about Swahili culture that although no categorical definition of Swahili culture can be wholly satisfactory, its cardinal attributes are the Swahili language, the religion of Islam, Islamic law and urban living.²

For many years the Swahili people have produced remarkable arts and crafts. They have a rich material culture. Observers have sometimes commented on the fact that, in places like Shella, Faza and its neighbour Tundwa, some Swahili people, e.g. Bajun tribesmen, are still living in stone houses with the elaborate plasterwork and carved doors typical of 18th century town dwellings; and they had assumed that these must have been taken over

¹"Analysing Structurally the territorial variation of the Swahili consciousness from the aspect of the historical development and the territorial expansion of the Swahili culture,"
A seminar Paper, I.A.S.

²Ibid.

after their former 'Arab' neighbours moved out. As it can be proven, such people are more often the descendants of those who originally built the stone houses, and especially in Faza and Tundwa they would tell one so. There are likewise many craftsmen who will deny that the work of themselves and their predecessors is in any sense 'Arab'. Some of the best silversmiths in Pate have long come from the war-Ozil clan who are often plausibly identified as 18th century immigrants to the town from among the Tana River people now known as Pokomo. The best furniture makers and many other skilled craftsmen have always come from Siyu, a town unique in Swahili history in that it has never had an Arab or Arabising elite. It was ruled in the 19th century by Famau Sheikhs, before that by dynarchy of the Famau and the war-Katwa (a mysterious group who to this day refuse to eat fish, and who have been variously identified as descendants of 18th century immigrants from among the Galla, Somali and Segeju). And their assertion that neither they nor their work is 'Arab' is supported, in many cases, by overwhelming physiognomic and aesthetic evidence.³

³James De Vere Allen, Town and Country in Swahili Culture, (Nairobi), p.307.

Swahili Monuments

The Swahili coast stretches historically speaking from Warsheikh, a little north of Mogadishu in Somalia, southwards to just beyond the Tanzania/Mozambique border. There are relatively few Swahili speakers remaining north of the Kenya-Somali border to day, although a dialect of Swahili is still spoken in Barawa, and the monuments of the region, especially those of the Banadir coast immediately north of the border, testify to a time when Swahili settlements were more widespread. But from the Kenya Somalia border southwards is solid Swahili country, and is indeed the area traditionally known as Swahilini the locative form of the word, implying "Swahili heartland" and even perhaps "place of origin of the Swahili language and culture." Most nineteenth century sources⁴ agree that Swahilini stretched from the Benadir coast as far south as Malindi. Some claimed - according to Sacleux,⁵ a French scholar living in nineteenth century Zanzibar - that it stretched right down to Pangani in northern Tanzania. In any

⁴J.S.Kirkman, Men and Monuments of the East African coast (London, 1964).

⁵Ibid.

case all agreed that it centred on the Lamu region, and especially the islands of the Bajun archipelago and the mainland adjacent to them. This area is still more richly - endowed with stone built ruins and monuments than any other part of the coast (with the possible exception of a smaller area around Kilwa in southern Tanzania, where there is a comparable concentration).⁶

Age

The time-span of these sites is impressive. They include the oldest so far discovered on the East African coast, Manda town on an island of the same name, which was already very wealthy by 900 A.D., as well as others representative of every century up to the nineteenth century. The golden age of the Swahili world is generally recognised to have been the fourteenth, fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, but in the northern section of it there was something of a renaissance in the late seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A great many fine monuments remain from both periods. They reflect a continuity of style and building technique which lasted right up to modern times, and the conservative villagers of Pate still build in exactly the same tradition.

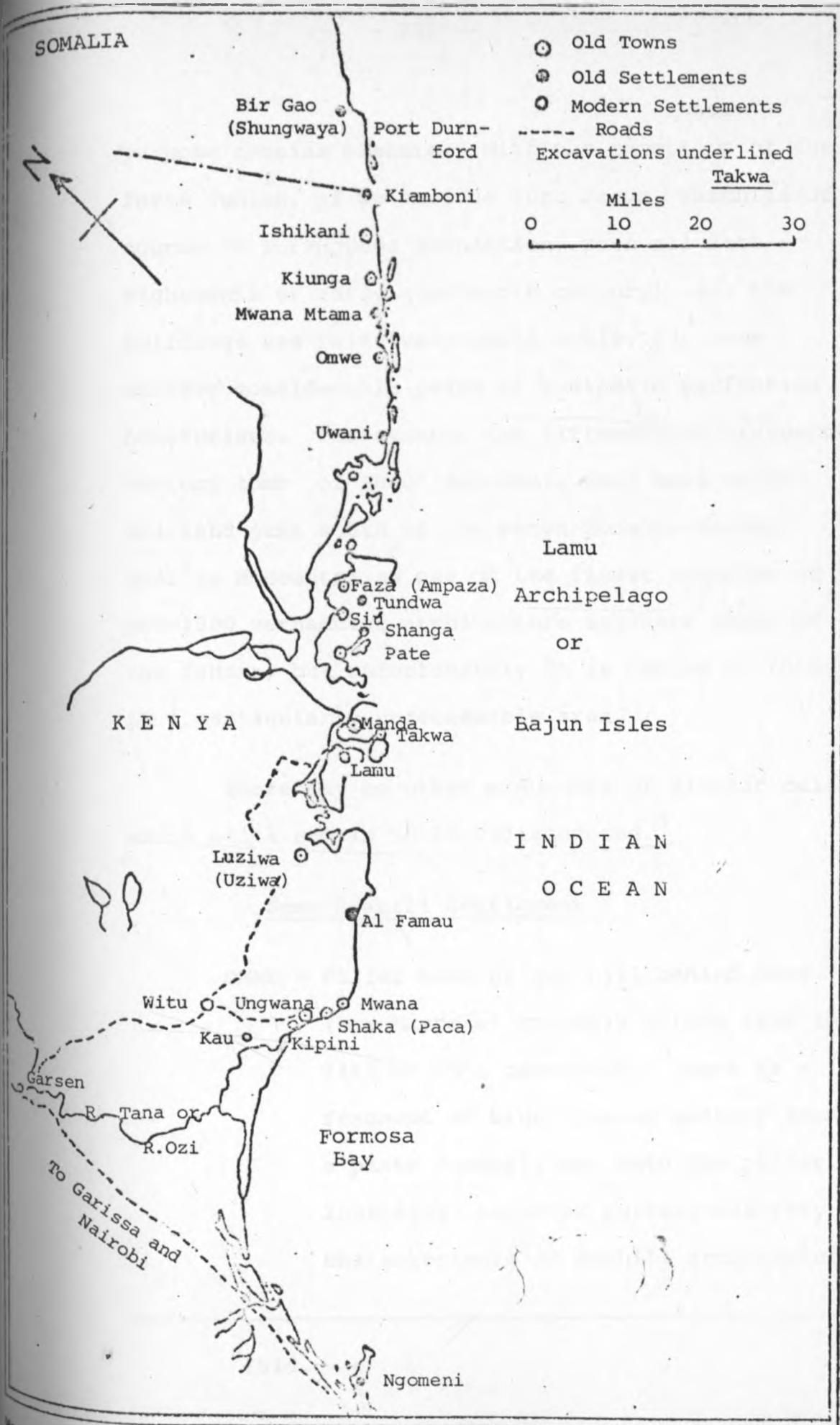
⁶Ibid.

The materials are coral stone occasionally roughly squared, but generally used as rag - and line mortar, made from burned coral; and the designs of houses, tombs and mosques and their basic features change, before about 1850, only minimally and in a gradual way; cultural diffusionists have spent many words discussing where the various outstanding features of Swahili "must have been" imported from. They might have done better to study the steady and usually spontaneous evolution of Swahili architectural styles within the Swahili world itself. Certainly the importance of overseas influences upon these styles has frequently been exaggerated.⁷

Architecture and Design

Swahili stone buildings can usually be classified under one of the three headings: houses, mosques, and tombs. There are also a few forts (including, in Lamu region, Siyu and Lamu forts) and occasionally, a palace. Husuni Kubwa on the island of Kilwa Kisiwani is the best known of these. There are also a few buildings, like the Mbarak Pillar in Mombasa and the comparable small tower in the centre of Tundwa village of Pate Island, whose

⁷Ibid.



Map 4. Historical sites of the Kenya coast (northern sector)

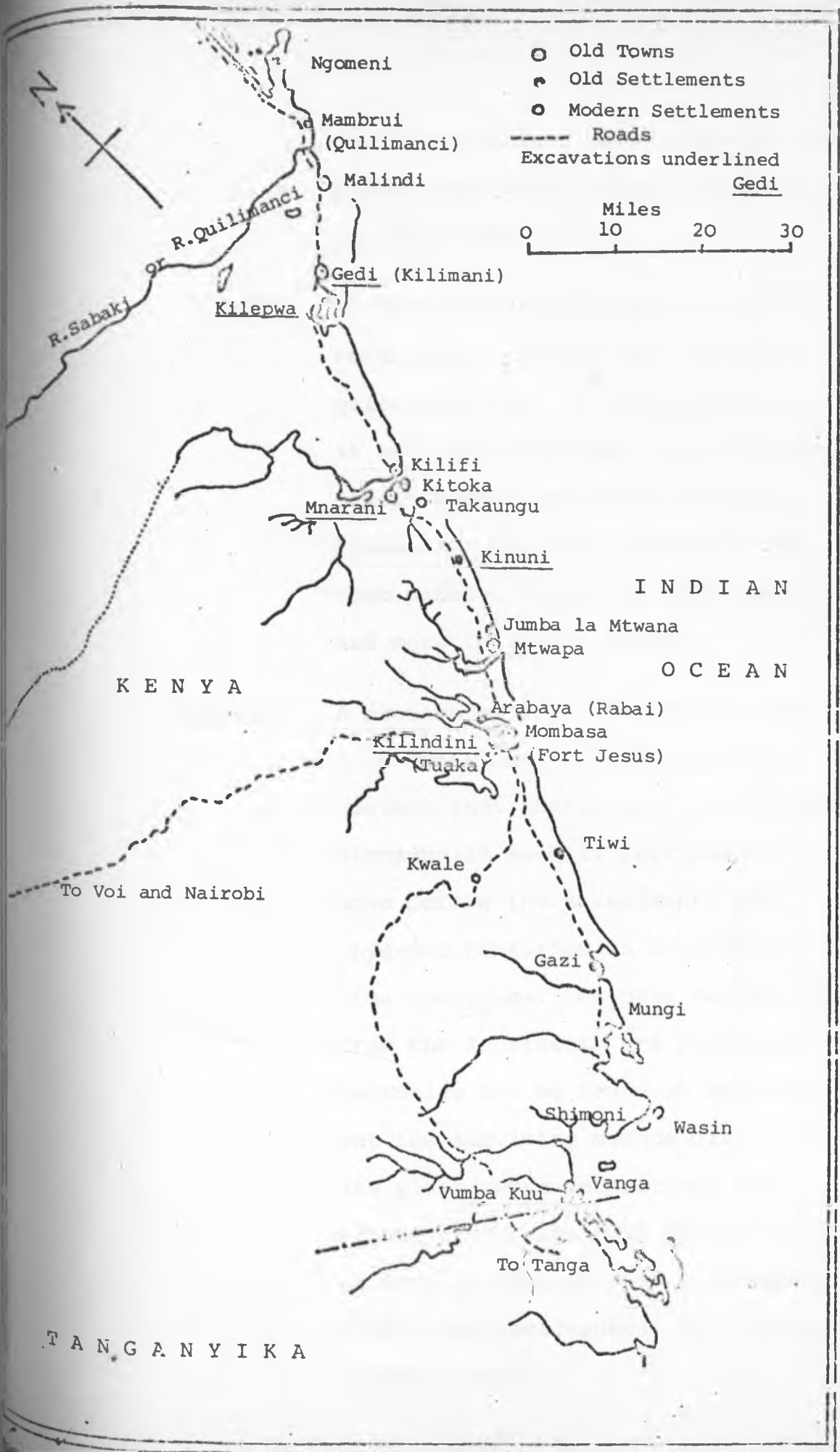
purpose remains obscure. With the exception of the forts (which, if we exclude Fort Jesus, which is of course of Portuguese foundation, were all late eighteenth or early nineteenth century), all the buildings are relatively small scale, but some achieve considerable peaks of aesthetic perfection nonetheless. For example the fifteenth or sixteenth century tomb of Shee Buruhani, near Omwe on the mainland just south of the Kenya-Somalia border, must be accounted as one of the finest examples of pre-1900 vernacular architecture anywhere south of the Sahara, but unfortunately it is buried in forest in a particularly unaccessible area.

There may be other monuments of similar calibre which still remain to be rediscovered.⁸

Some Swahili Settlement

OMWE - Pillar tomb on the hill behind Omwe (now Mambore) probably dating from the 14th or 15th centuries. There is a fragment of blue Iranian pottery from a plate formerly set into the pillar. Insetting imported pottery was very characteristic of Swahili architecture

⁸ Ibid.

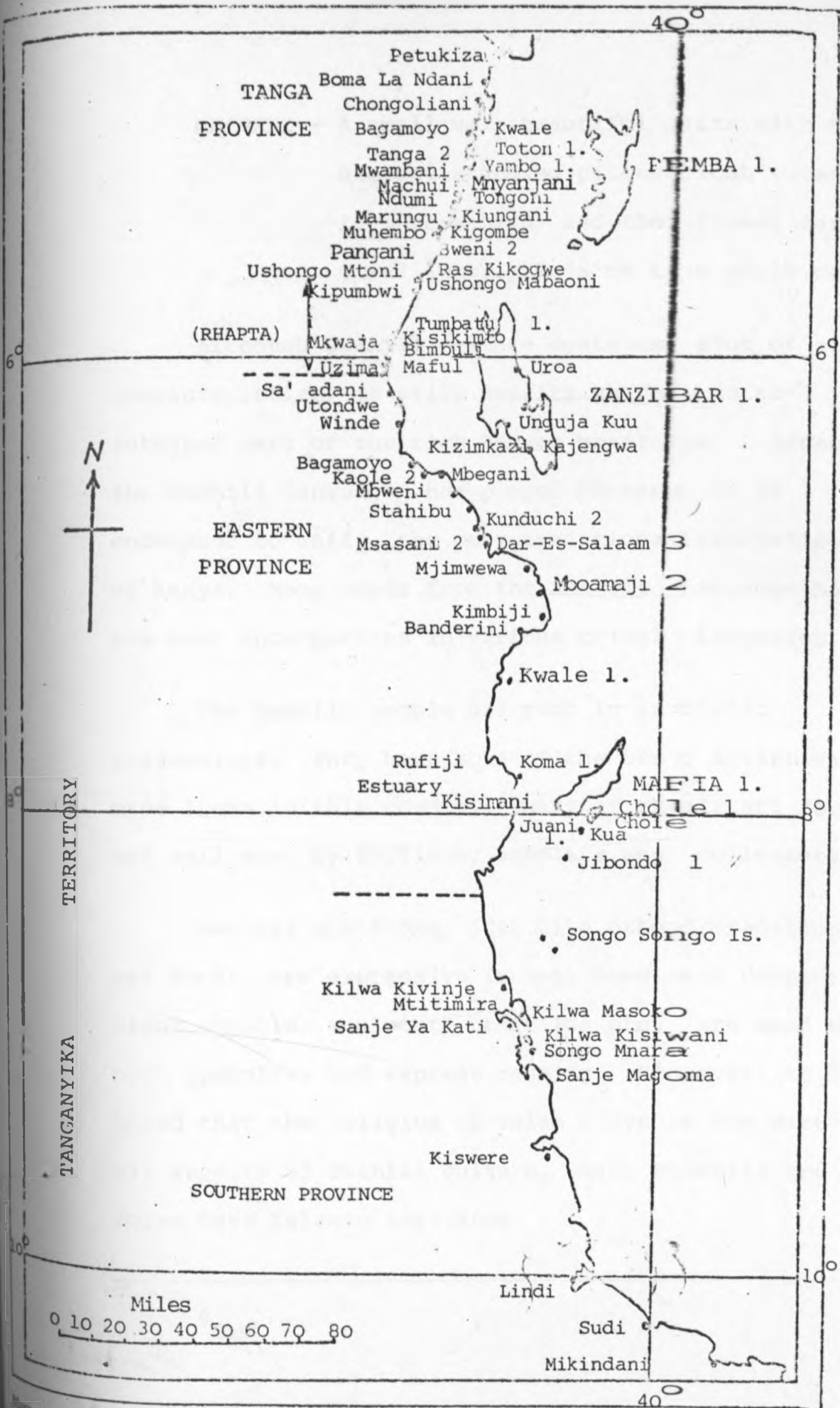


5 Historical sites of the Kenya coast (southern sector)

in all centuries: unfortunately most pieces have been looted, or broken in the attempt.

DONDO - An important settlement during the Portuguese period, now waterless and quite deserted. It is interesting as it has the only tombs with decorated panels known apart from those at Ishakani. At Dondo, however, the tomb panels, appear to be geometrical and more typically Islamic.

MGANGANI - A problem site at the head of Mida Creek near Gedi. It is generally assumed that there were no substantial stone-built Swahili settlements in this area during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on account of the Orma invasions. Chinese celadon which were from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries can be found at Mgangani, but the surviving mosque qibla, with its plasterwork decorations and ribbed archdesign, is characteristic of late seventeenth and eighteenth century mosques, especially in the Benadir region.



Historical sites of the Tanganyika coast

MNARANI - A small very beautiful site with the highest standing pillar tomb (over 10 metres high) and the finest carved coral inscriptions on the whole coast.⁹

Although Swahili culture contains a lot of alien characteristics, it still has its share as an integral part of the rich Kenyan heritage. Indeed the Swahili language has played its part in an endeavour to unify the many traditional societies of Kenya. Many words from the Swahili language have now been incorporated in various tribal languages.

The Swahili people are rich in artistic possessions. They have some of the best artistically made items in this country. Many of their art forms are well sort by tourists, scholars and collectors.

Swahili art forms, just like other traditional art forms, are expressive in both form and content. Signs, symbols, sculpture, textiles etc. are used to both symbolize and express meaning. However, it is noted that the religion of Islam plays a key part in all aspects of Swahili culture. Many Swahili art forms have Islamic influence.

⁹ Ibid.

The influences of traditional life styles upon each other are manifested in the current artistic products in Kenya. Although there is an emphasis on commercialisation of these products, they still manifest the ever present urge by people to create beautiful art forms.

Plate no.153.

Three belts, the main belt a narrow (13 mm) leather strip covered with dark blue beads except for two patches of red, white, red and white beads. The back widens out to an oblong with two triangles above. One triangle is half red. A narrow blue line divides it from the other half which is white, the second triangle is half blue with a narrow red line dividing it from the other half which is white. The triangles are edged with fine covered aluminium and copper wire. In the centre of belt vertical lines of beadwork in following order seem general - orange, blue, white, red, green, white, red, blue, white, orange, repeat; Same again. In the oblong are horizontal lines of bead and zip fastener edged on one side with three single lines of orange, red and white, and on the other edged on one side with three single lines of orange, red and white, and on the other with white, orange and green beads. Made by the young girls for the boys. These are worn by the Iaioni taking part in the ceremony of catching the bullock by its horn when the Olopoposi-Olkiteng is chosen. Maasai (Il Keekonyokie). Vernacular name: NGENE OLELEM.

Plate no.154.

The arrangement of the patterns here is very much on the same lines as is the case of those ones in plate no.153.

Plate no.155.

Basketry food cover made by men and used by everybody. This one is used by a Maasai family living at Kampi ya Samaki with the Njemps. They said that they had copied it from the Shankilla (Ethiopia) tribe. If not used as a food cover is used as decoration. Made of banana fibre dyed with commercial dyes. Maasai/Shankilla.

Plate no.156.

There is variation of decoration on this hide (skin clothing).



Plate No. 153

Note the diversity of patterns.

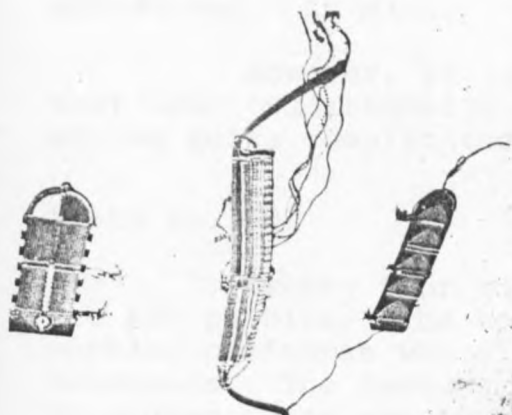


Plate No. 154

Patterns different from above.



Plate No. 155

Basketry food cover.

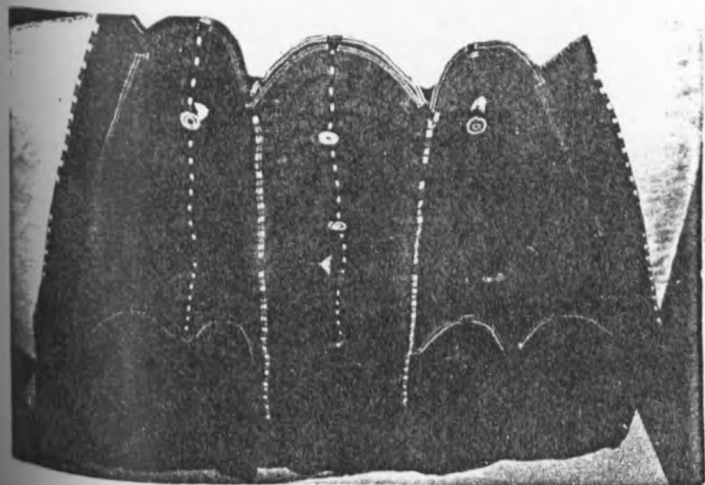


Plate No. 156

Decoratïon on hide (skin clothing).

Plate no.157 and 159.

Here are four types of simple masks. They all have feathers as part of their structures. There is very little attempt to do any decorations on them. This makes them look like natural objects. As masks they are very simply made in deed. Perhaps this is what the artist had in mind.

However, it is noted in this study that some traditional societies are used to making quite complicated masks.

Plate no.158.

Twenty four holed board. In the bag are the pebbles. The board is made by a wood working craftsman who also makes stools, not headrests. The Samburu moran and elders play this game three men to a side. They place two pebbles in each hole. The player picks up the two pebbles in the first hole, drops one each in the next two holes, then misses a hole, picks up the contents of the next hole, each time he runs out of pebbles, he misses a hole before picking up the pebbles in the following hole. Samburu (near Maralal). Vernacular name: NDOTOL and LORSI.

Plate no.160.

This particular piece of an old art form suggests that some of the traditional art forms deteriorate easily, when they are not cared for properly.

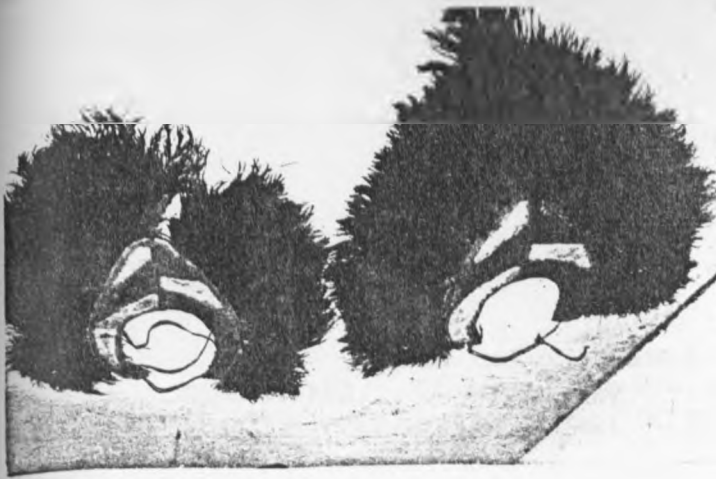


Plate No.157

Chalk designs on
masks.

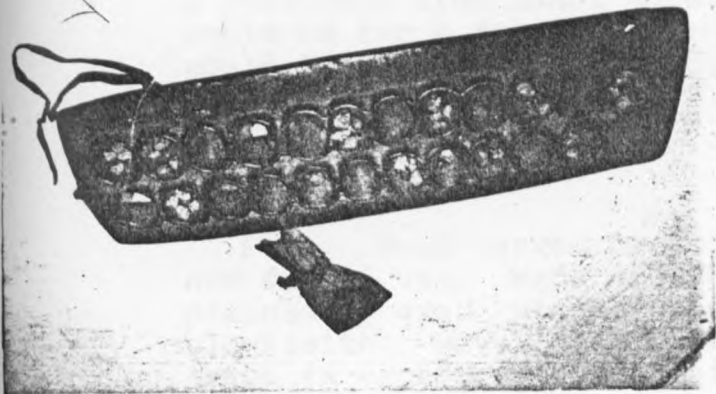


Plate No.158

Holed board ban
plus pebbles.

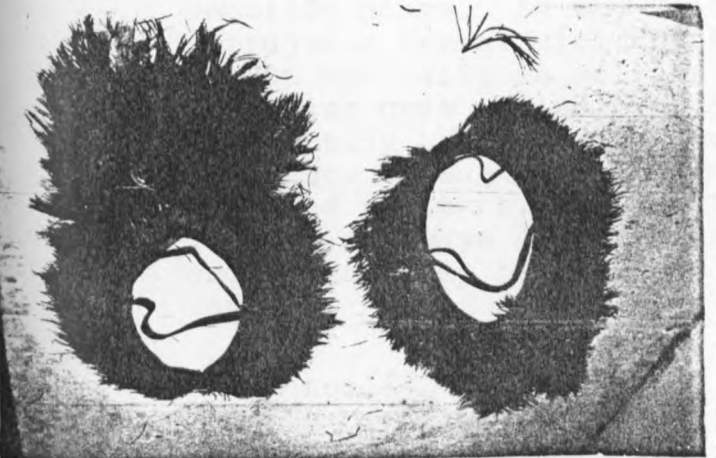


Plate No.159

Feathers on masks.

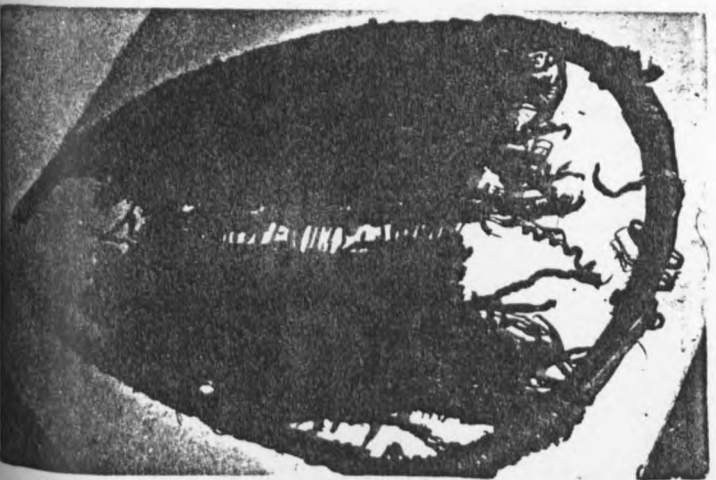


Plate No.160

An old woven
implement.

Plate no.161.

Made before Vasco da Gama. This is quite old. It was made by a craftsman of MUKURE wood - vernacular name: KITI YA KARAS.

Plate no.162.

Carved wooden boards for beds made by a craftsman from MSAJI wood. A large board would be for a full size bed, and a smaller board would be for a child's bed. Swahili, Vernacular name: BECERA.

Plate no.163.

Wood carved by Bajun artist for his own family use. Made of MSATI wood-cut and plained by axe. Design put on with chisel from blacksmith. Never sold to Bajun but sold to Arabs in exchange for utensils or silver. Every village or island was taught to carve by different foreigners from Portugal or India and are used to beautify homes. In the Bajun land most of the Portuguese houses with thick walls are decorated inside the walls as well as the doors and frames. The Bajun have copied everything new, to use them to beautify their homes. Even their language is a mixture of Swahili, Arabic and Portuguese due to these visitors. They write Arabic and Koran. They have always been confused in their customs and to-day they have adopted mostly to Swahili ways.

Plate no.164.

Woven beaded belts. Are of similar design. They are a type to those worn by Pokomo and Tana River and may be from Pokomo living in Pate Island. The others are typical Bajun designs made and worn by women under their clothes "to show only to their husbands privately at night" to make them look more beautiful.



Plate No. 161
Made before Vasco
da Gama.



Plate No. 162
Carved wooden
boards for beds
Becera (Swahili).

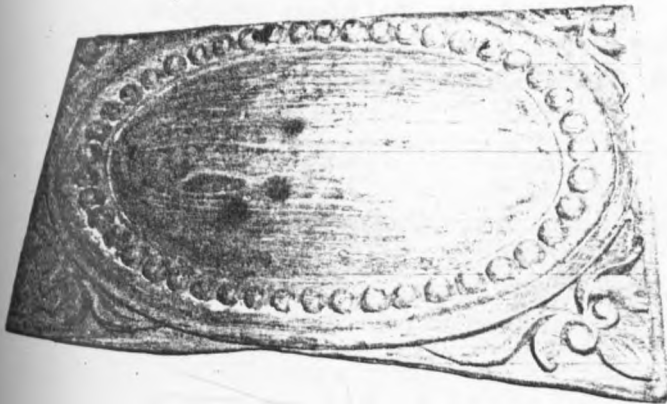


Plate No. 163
Carved by Bajun
Artist for his own
family use.



Plate No. 164
Woven beaded belts
(Bajun)

Plate no.165.

On the left is a carved wooden table with detachable legs and ivory inlay design on top. Made by a craftsman on MSAJI wood. Collector says that craftsmen were trained to do inlay work by the Chinese. Vernacular name: MEZA.

On the right is a stool leg. There are four stages in the making of a stool leg.

- (a) Rough piece of wood with bark still on.
- (b) Cut to shape using one axe and a small hand saw.
- (c) Grooves made by rubbing a piece of leather back and forth.
- (d) Painted red, black and yellow. The dash bit of wood is the centre called KACHA.

This kind of stool leg is made by a craftsman of MBABAZI wood. Bajun Vernacular name: MACHENDELEO.

Plate no.166.

On the left and right are two carved wooden paddles used to put designs in bread. Made by a craftsman from MSAJI wood. Bajun Vernacular name: CHAPAZA NAUM.

Plate no.167.

Two carved wood drawers covers made by a craftsman of MSAJI wood. Used as a sliding lid to cover small compartments in a large box. The top of the box has a simple design.

Plate no.168.

Two carved wooden lockers for a door made by a craftsman from wood. Each craftsman has his own distinctive design.

Bajun. Vernacular name: VIBAU VYA MLANGO.



Plate No.165

Left: carved wooden
table. Right: a stool
leg.

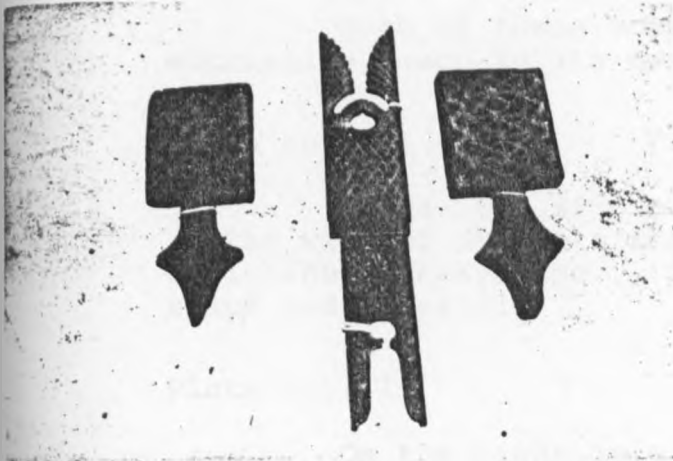


Plate No.166

Left: carved wooden
paddles. Centre: carved
wooden drawers.

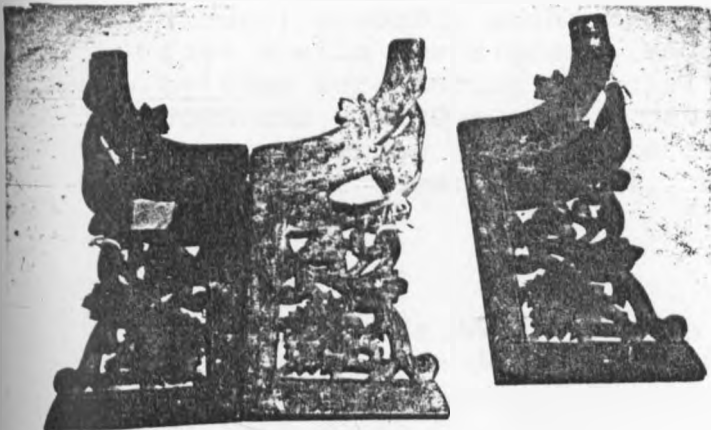


Plate No.167

Inlay design on top



Plate No.168

Carved wooden lockers.

Plate no.169.

There is an interesting choice of patterns on both of these two art forms. The one on left has triangular patterns, but the right one has a variety of them. Although these are of various shapes and sizes, they are also well balanced.

Both of these compositions are attractive, each in its own particular way.

Plate no.170.

These two simple shapes are typical of the kind of utensils that the traditional societies in Kenya use. They are natural in shape and material.

Plate no.171.

On the right is a necklace of green, red and blue beads threaded on wire with sisal fibre stitches. Four flattened corus shells (iruro) probably exchanged with Kamba traders - five shells for a goat. Made by women and worn by them for dancing especially MWINJIRO, NGOEN-JORE and GITIRO (wedding dance) dances - even men may borrow necklace to dance. Mbeere.
Vernacular name: KIMANJA.

Plate no.172.

It is noted in this study that some war implements are decorated. Such items are shields and sheaths. This means that making pattern works on items, is not confined to only a few particular aspects of life.

This artistic practice is to be found on items for dances, religion, marriage, domestic, war, subsistence etc.

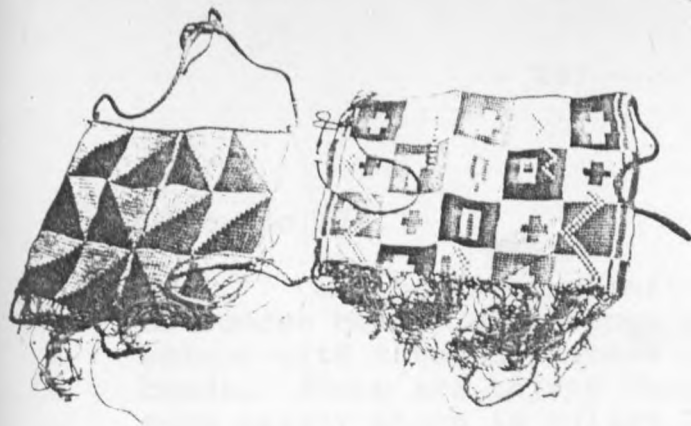


Plate No.169

Red, white and blue
beaded front aprons.

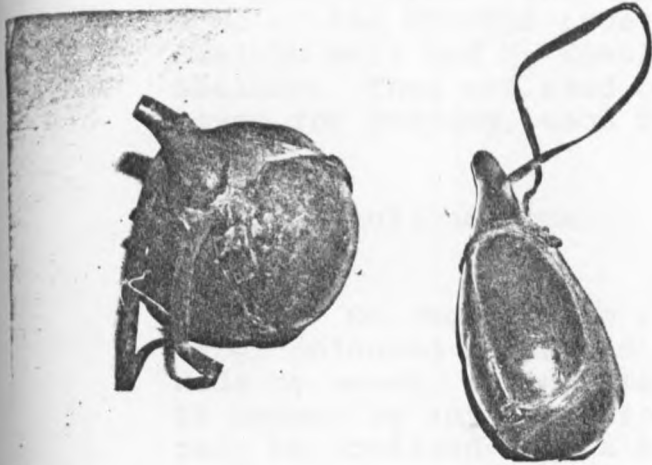


Plate No.170

Gourds with beautiful
mends.

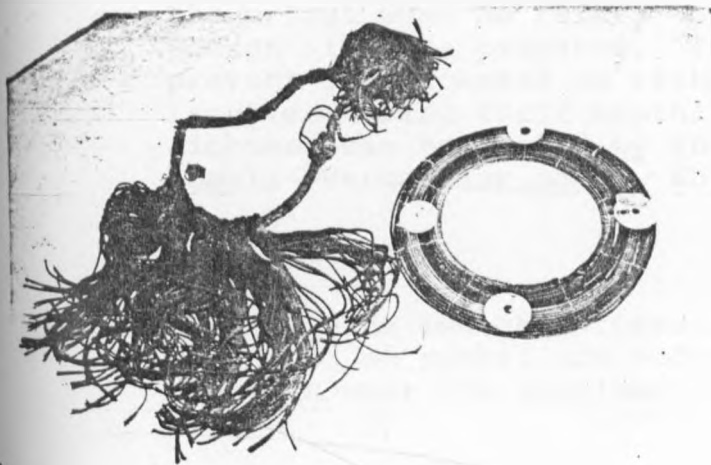


Plate No.171

Kikuyu neck-wear

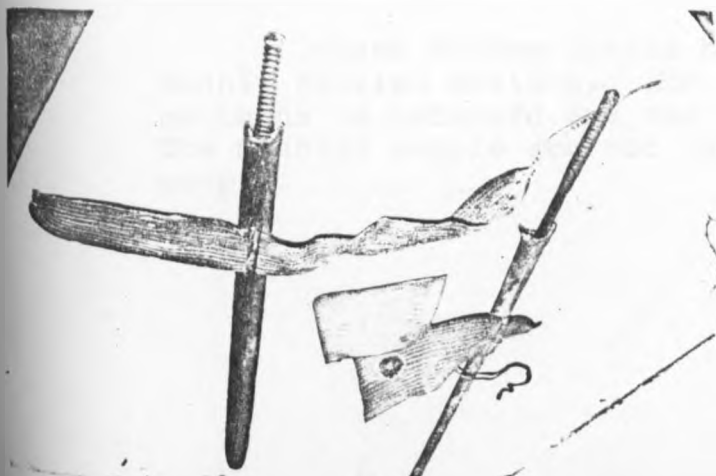


Plate No.172

Kikuyu sword in
sheath.

Plate no.173.

On the extreme left is a long string of wooden beads, dark brown and light brown in colour with three different shaped marker beads. There are thirty three beads between each marker which is called REP. They are made of any wood but these are made from the wood of the AFGUBU tree- the dark beads, and of the wood of the GOYGELE tree. They are made by Sheikhs only and by special craftsmen among the Sheikhs. They are used by everybody of both sexes for praying, each bead for a different prayer.

Aulihan Somali. Vernacular name.

TUSBA.

On the extreme right is a necklace of large coloured beads and an attached charm. Made by women, the charms made from horse skin. It cannot be any other sort of skin. It can only be obtained from a Mohammedan shop. Inside the skin is placed a letter from the Sheikh. The sick person has his sickness diagnosed by the priest when he refers to the Koran and the pocken is then prepared. The charm is to prevent any sickness to either sex, even women's troubles during their monthly periods. Any sickness can be healed by the priest.
Somali Vernacular name: KUL

Plate no.174.

The two art forms, one on left and the other one on right, are body ornaments. They are worn over the shoulder by the Boran people.

Plate no.175 and 176.

These wooden boards have been done by highly skilled artists. The arrangement of patterns is balanced and the finish is good. The Swahili people are not lacking in skilled people.

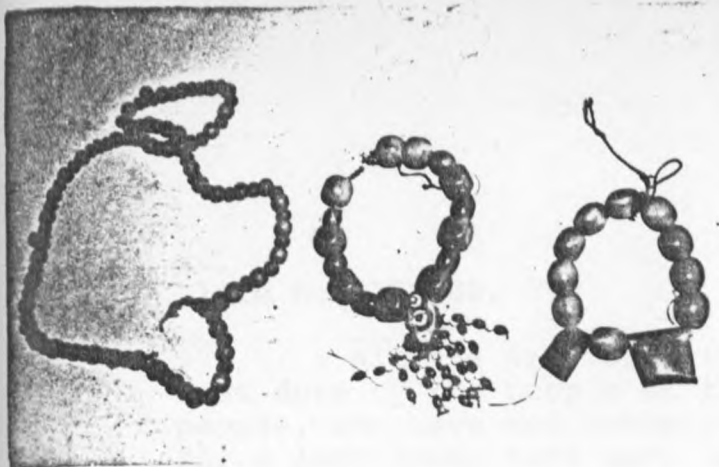


Plate No.173

Left: string of wooden beads. Centre: Somali necklace. Right: necklace of large coloured beads.

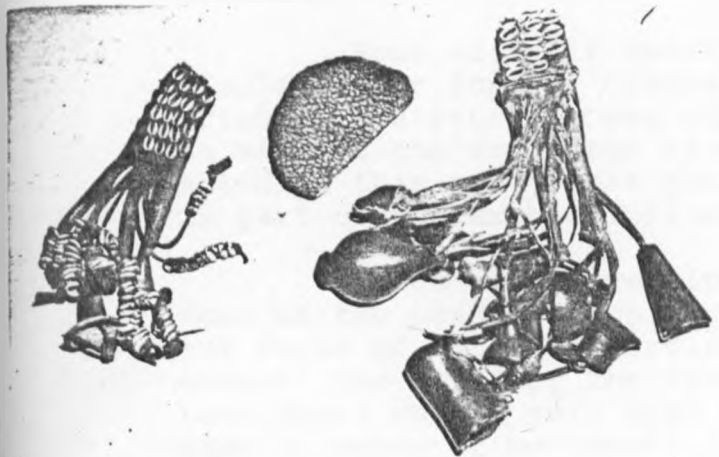


Plate No.174

Left: worn over shoulder (Boran)
Right: also worn over shoulder.

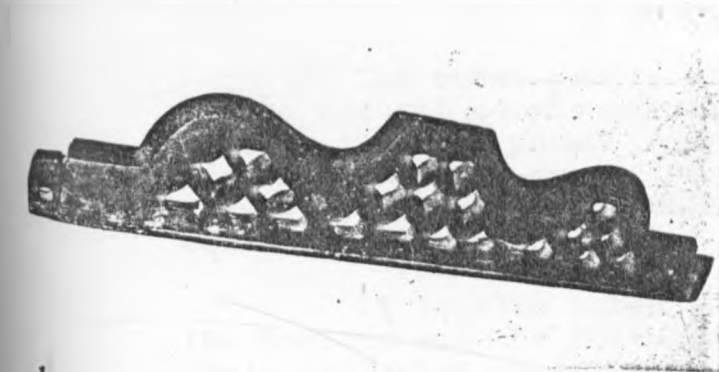


Plate No.175

Wooden boards for beds (Swahili)



Plate No.176

Carved before Vasco da Gama.

Plate no.177-180.

All the art forms in these plates have been done by the people of the coast. These people, who have had contact with foreigners for a long time, have many decorative art forms. Among these are combs, belts, beds, chairs, and clothing.

Some of their decorations are just simple linear forms. Others may be in relief, printed, sculptural forms etc. Arabic influence in many of the art forms is evident. It is noted in this study that the religion of Islam is part of the Arabic influence.

It is also noted in this study that some of the coastal people have produced some art forms of very high artistic standard. For example the skill of the craftsmen who did the Lamu doors was of very high degree. There are also a number of monuments along the coast that are quite artistic in taste.

Arabic influence is also evidently seen in the way the coastal people prefer and wear their clothes. Among these clothes are, Kanzu, Kanga, Joha and Buibui.

The other people who have had influence on the coastal people are the Persians. Evidence of this is to be noted in the Swahili language. Some of the words are of Persian origin. The Persian words found in the Swahili language consist of oceanic terms.

It is also noted in this study that, the Indians and the Portuguese have also had their influence on coastal people in one way or another.

However, Swahili language is no doubt one of Bantu languages, grammatically having many Bantu vocabularies in agricultural, pastoral, kinship terms, natural phenomenon, body terms, etc.

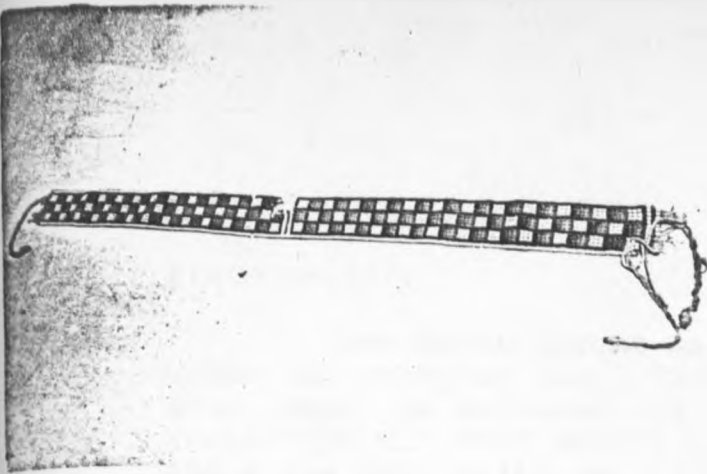


Plate No.177

Bajun beaded belt.

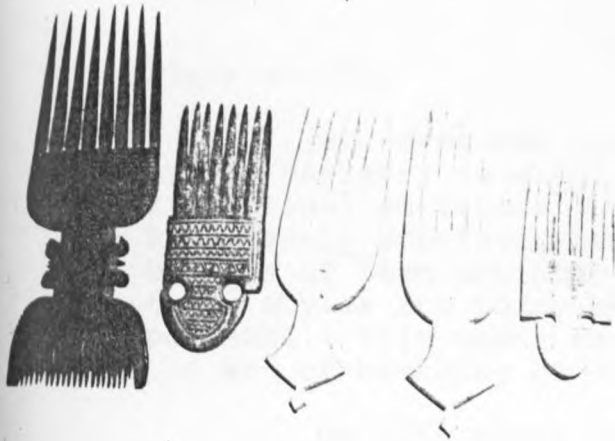


Plate No.178

Swahili combs.

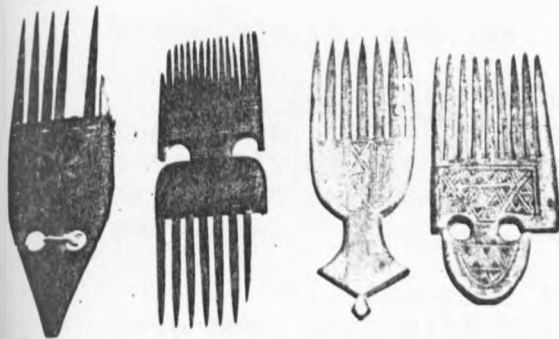


Plate No.179

More Swahili combs.

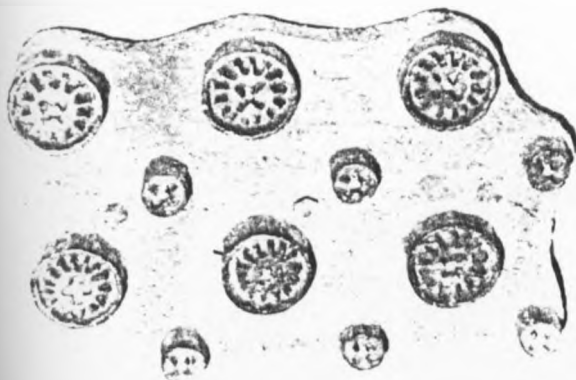


Plate No.180

Design common to
Swahili and Bajun.

Plate no.181.

Two front aprons made and worn by women for everyday use. This is made of goat skin, which is softened and then cut into forked apron. Sewn mostly with white beads and a few red, white and yellow beads. Gikuyu Vernacular name: MWENGU (plural is MIENGU).

Plate no.182.

All over the continent of Africa, the art of basketry is widely practised by the traditional societies. Some of these societies have fairly sophisticated styles of producing baskets of high artistic standards. Some of these styles are today used to produce baskets en mass. This means that in many parts of Kenya the art of basketry has been commercialized.

On this plate is an example of a simple technique that has been used successfully to produce a balanced and a well proportioned basket.

Plate nos.183 and 184.

The Bantu of around Mt. Kenya, like all the other traditional societies in Kenya, make a variety of war implements. The shield is an important implement for both attack and defence purposes.

All the four shields on these plates have been made with the aim of producing tough and reliable implements. The pattern works on them are secondary in importance.

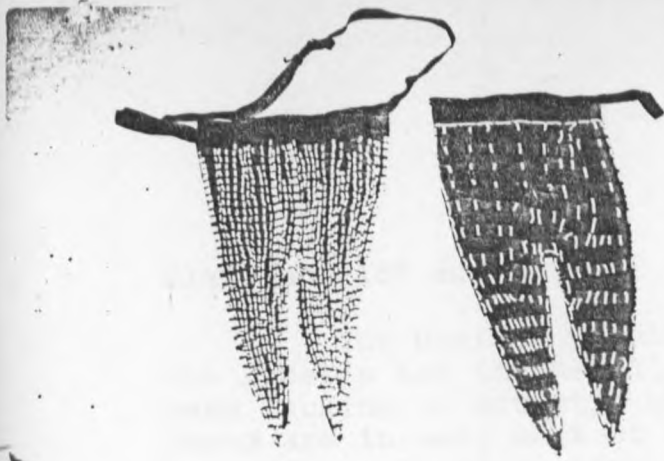


Plate No. 181

Front aprons worn by
women (mwengu) Kikuyu.

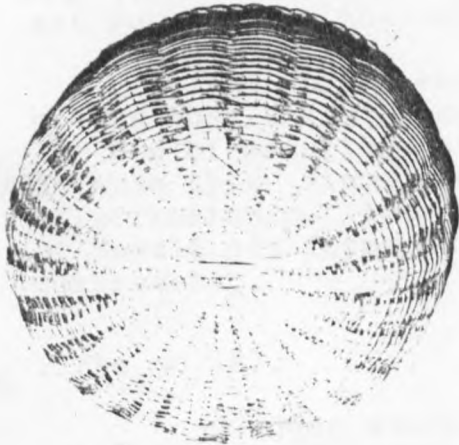


Plate No. 182

Basket.

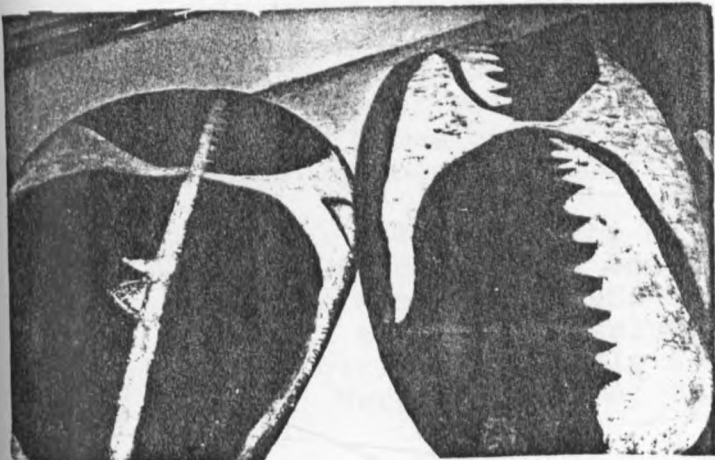


Plate No. 183

Decorations on Kikuyu
shield.

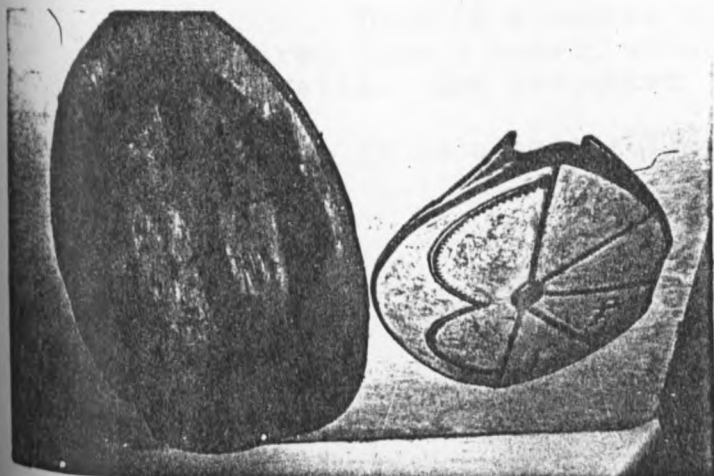


Plate No. 184

Left: Kikuyu shield.

Plate nos.185 and 186.

The Hamitic people of Kenya, of which the Somalis and the Rendille belong, have not been lacking in artistic skills. Their art forms are in many ways of high artistic standards. Just like any other group, their art forms are influenced by their life style. This means that a pastoral tribe would produce slightly different art forms, from that of an agricultural tribe.

The Somali shields and knives on these plates show that the craftsman was skillful in the use of materials and techniques. This is because these items are of a commendable standard of workmanship. There are numerous more examples, of Somali art forms that show the same good workmanship.

Plate no.187.

Swagger stick made of leather (like a kiboko) made of stiff rhino hide, the top part decorated with strips of red and white dyed goat skin woven in and out. The top knob is of scrap metal. Made by the men and used by young men (DALINYAR) to swagger around when looking for girls. Never sold in the market but only locally in their homes by exchanging with goats. Somali. Vernacular name: JADAN.

Third from top on this plate is a carved swagger stick made by unmarried young men (DALINYAR) from the wood of the KOH tree. Used by the DALINYAR to make themselves look more attractive to the girls. Generally never sold at all. Somali Vernacular name: ULL (plural is ULLA).

Plate no.188.

This is a centre of a small mat. It was acquired from a Somali woman. She was a duka owner in Maralal. She presented it to the museum.

It is a skillfully worked out piece of art.

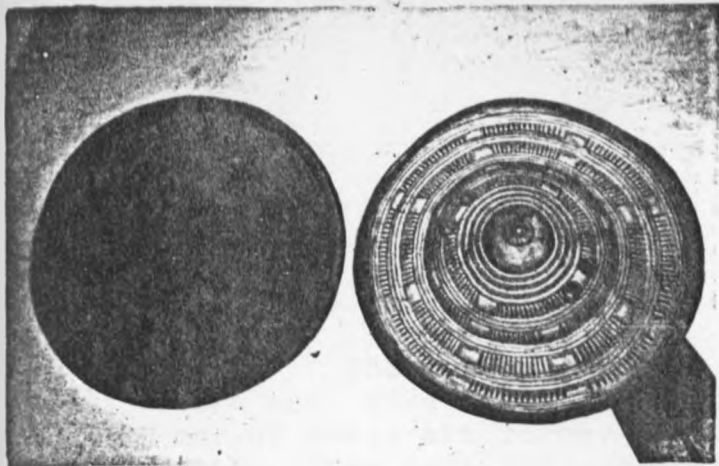


Plate No.185

Somali shields.



Plate No.186

Somali knives.

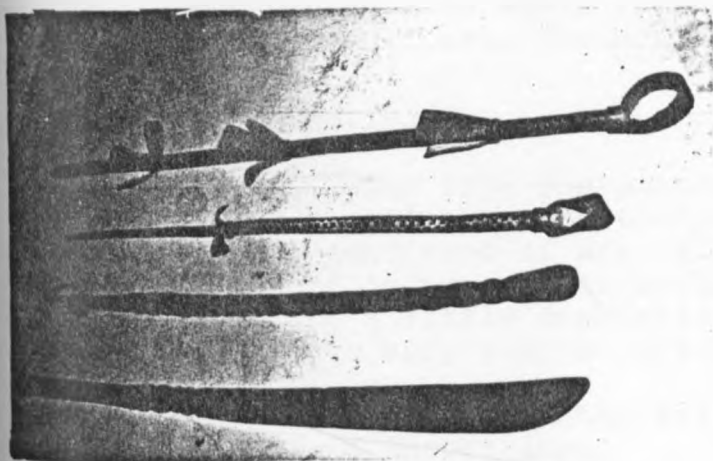


Plate No.187

Top: Design on stick
2nd: swagger stick
3rd: carved swagger
stick.

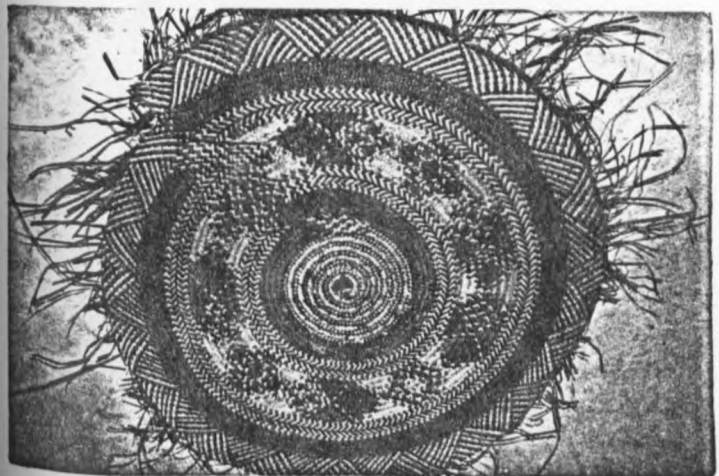


Plate No.188

Somali mat.

Plate nos.189 and 190.

These two plates have got art forms that are made of different materials. In each one of these art forms, there is some pattern work. This fact indicates that patterns are done on a wide range of items. To be found here in these two plates are such items as bed legs, wooden sticks etc. Most of these belong to the coastal people.

Plate no.191.

Two wooden pots with lids carved by men. Each has two handles through which string is threaded. Carved with incised decoration. Carved mainly from the MALMAL tree but also carved from the DAMOJA tree. Chopped using axe and adze called MASAR and KORIMA. The string which goes through the handles is called HARING and is obtained from fibre of the KHARARI tree. Used mostly by women to keep fresh milk in for their children. Never sold in the market but can sell to their friends around the village Somali (Aulihan). Vernacular name: SURMA.

Plate no.192.

The love for pattern works is to be found in all the traditional societies in the entire continent of Africa. Examples of this love are to be seen in both those societies that are a little sophisticated as well as those that have very simple cultures.

In this plate, are some more examples of Somali decorations.



Plate No.189

Left and centre: curved
wooden sticks.

Right: bed legs.

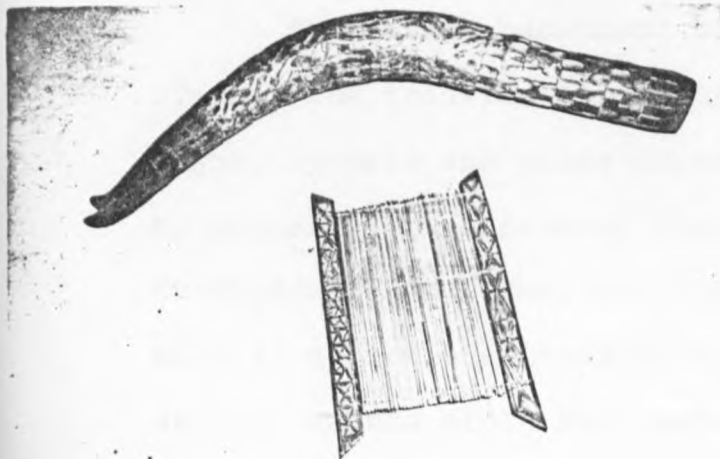


Plate No.190

Bajun instrument used
by women (bottom).

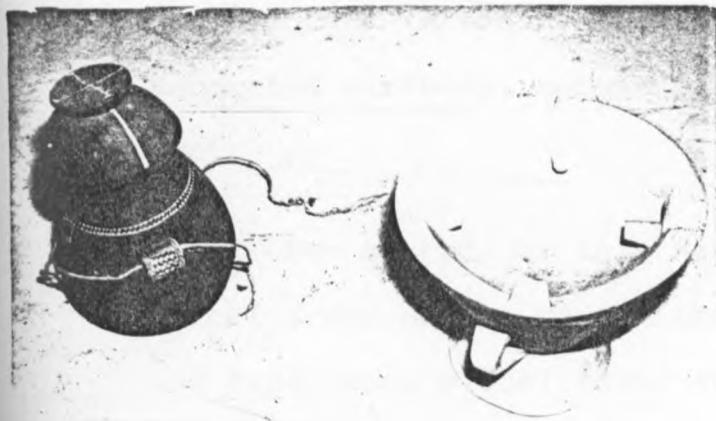


Plate No.191

Both curved with
incised decoration.

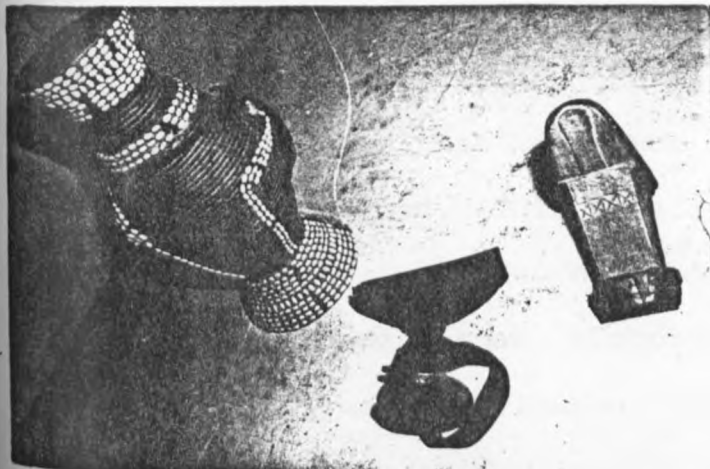


Plate No.192

Somali decorations.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

This study has tried to find out how the daily lives of the traditional societies were affected by signs, symbols and other forms of communication. By properly understanding the various African traditional art forms, the new generations would be able to appreciate traditional way of life, artistic skills, values etc. For instance it would be noted that various forms of expressions have been demonstrated in the forms of such objects as decorated surfaces, geometrical shapes, patterns etc.

For a study of this nature, a number of tribal areas had to be visited in order to examine and experience visual forms and to sensitise oneself in the respect of expression and meaning, through discussion with individuals and groups.

This study notes that many if not most of the artifacts that have been studied here are no longer produced. This also applies to the traditional life styles i.e. they have been abandoned. This therefore means that, although in most instances this study has used continuous tense in the English

language, and thus giving the impression that the traditional ways are still being practiced even at present, the opposite is usually the case.

A study of African pattern can be approached in several different ways. For example the approach of the sociologist is different from that of art critic. However, African design to-day will be rooted in the past tradition, which had much, both in pattern and in form to teach the modern artist.

Tradition, fashion, taste and style are all linked to background, as it is once realised when art history is taken into consideration. Styles change but the urge is the same. Different materials such as stone, metal, clay, fibres etc., are used in the making of different art forms. Among these art forms are, pattern on mats and screens, ornamental basketry, beadwork and decoration of hides and leather.

Some tribes ornament their faces and bodies with the most delicate and intricate patterns painted with vegetable sap, but the most usual form of decoration is making marks. In other forms of decorations, different techniques are used. Also it should be noted that African designs have different motifs.

In representational form, proverbs, allegories, adages and wise words form a back cloth to African thought, and both the myths and legends of the tribal past and the prestige of the reigning chief or age group as summed up in aphorisms or visual symbols. It is this which gives us the key to much of African design.¹

In dealing with the art of the tribes around Mt. Kenya, it is most necessary to distinguish between local talent and that learnt from neighbouring tribes, notably the Akamba. Personal adornment is the chief field for the exhibition of most taste, the bead and wire ornaments worn by both sexes showing considerable ingenuity and having sometimes quite neat and pleasing effects. Some attention has been attracted by the so-called "picture-gourds" to be found among all tribes around Mt. Kenya. Other forms of artistic practice are wood carving, snuff boxes, dress, tattoing, cicatrizing, skin marking, teeth filling, sword, belt, knives, the axe, the club, bow and arrow etc. The people also decorate themselves for dancing, and such items as trumpets,

¹Margret Trowell, African Design, (Faber and Faber, 1960), p.23.

horns, drums etc., are also decorated for purposes of dancing.

The women are clever at working up fibre string into various forms, particularly bags. These are made on the same principle as a grass woven basket, and may be of almost any size from a purse to a sack. Some attempt at ornamentation is made, the fibre being stained with vegetable dyes so as to produce bands of colour.

The development of Akamba wood carving has always had the sales value at the centre. An analysis of the form and content of the Akamba carving from 1914 shows two aspects of the sales value. These are tradition and skill. However, the base of handicraft production and the basis of the international trade in Akamba carving are the many social structures of the carvers communities. An analysis of the carvers and dealers social classes can reflect a pattern of demand for the carvings during any length of feasible time, for instance, a year. The demand for carving is irregular in terms of quantity and the type of object e.g. elephant and salad bowl. Decrease in demand leads to diversification of skills.

The art of traditional potting in Ukambani is usually passed on from mother to daughter. Any woman from outside the family who expresses a desire

to learn the craft will be taken on as an apprentice. To-day many of the taboos to be observed in connection with pottery making are dying out. Potting is confined to the dry season which follows the main harvest in August, i.e. to the months of September and October. The potters marks serve as trademarks which can be easily identified by the buyers in the markets who search out the marks of those potters whose wares they have proved, by experience, to be the most durable. Kamba tradition has it that the art of potting was discovered by a medicine woman who taught the craft to other women. Potting is exclusively in the hands of the women who are highly skilled and work with considerable rapidity. Kamba pottery is produced exclusively for use as cooking utensils.

Ornaments of the Maasai have developed historically as art forms reflecting the Maasai way of life through social division of responsibilities. Without concrete and scientific analysis of the ornaments, we cannot understand the meaning of the forms. We may apply theoretical knowledge of foreign art forms which may not help much in comprehending content and meaning. Maasai ornaments have developed historically and are related in form to other areas of Maasai material culture. Patterns in the Maasai ornaments and on the shields have many similarities,

for example the patterns keri and ailiang and the use of the colours red, black and white are common in the ornaments and on the shields. Differences in the shapes and colours of spears have in the past indicated the differences in the ilmoran age groups, this reflecting social division responsibilities.

Commercial arts and crafts include those works commonly referred to as 'tourist art', and whose primary motive for production is economic gain. Quantitatively these form the bulk of art produced in Kenya to-day. These include Maasai beadwork, various forms of basket work, some Luhya pottery and novel art forms that have developed locally in recent years. There are also some artistic productions which consist of foreign art forms that have incorporated indigenous aspects in their content. These include batik work and hand-printing on fabrics. These art forms employ many people who are involved in their production. On the other hand they significantly present to the outside world an ethnic image. The influence of tourists on these art forms is obvious. Craftsmen tend to produce what the tourists like. The result is the danger of the craftsman losing control of his product and when this happens the art is no longer indigenous. Although the problems seems to have been realized, little has been done towards coming up with some positive solutions.

For the most part, the craft of printing on fabric is foreign to East Africa, although there is evidence that some form of wood block printing has existed on the Swahili Coast of Kenya and on the off shore island of Zanzibar, where printed cotton gowns or Kangas were produced.

As far as the printing is concerned, the following categories of designs are observed, (a) adopted traditional Kenyan designs (b) individual designers' creations, inspired by traditional African designs and (c) figurative designs. Generally the materials used in the production of fabrics are not indigenous and so far little effort has been made in integrating some local material e.g. traditional dyes. To adequately integrate local material experimentation will be required. The only noteworthy material that can be said to be traditional is bark-cloth. It is said that barkcloth is commonly used in areas where weaving has not been traditionally practiced. However, some particular styles in design have no special boundary to people in a particular culture and may be universal both in appreciation and to some extent in production.

For many years the Swahili people have produced remarkable arts and crafts. They have a rich material culture. The best furniture markers

and many other skilled craftsmen have always come from Siyu, a town unique in Swahili history in that it has never had an Arab or Arabising elite. The golden age of the Swahili world is generally recognized to have been the fourteenth, fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. A great many fine monuments remain as a testimony of this period. They reflect a style and building technique that is commendable as far as artistic consideration is concerned. Some good examples are to be found in some old Swahili settlements.

Appraisal of Study Methodology

This study has been based largely on the records and information found at the Institute of African Studies, of the University of Nairobi. The author has also been a keen observer of traditional dances performed during some public holidays. Visits to some of the centres that collect and store tradition items have been very helpful in the study of art forms. The author's personal and professional knowledge of the study area, his experience in the teaching service and having keen interest in Kenya's traditional heritage have provided him with an intimate knowledge of the study area. During his teaching services at Kigari Teachers College Embu, Kamwenja Teachers College Nyeri, and the University

of Nairobi, he participated in either collecting or writing about various traditional African artifacts. Such experiences have been most helpful in his endeavour to substantiate his opinions on the various issues raised in the study, and to analyze the hypothesis of the study. It is the writer's opinion that the diversified sources of material, as shown in the bibliography, have helped in increasing the details and the accuracy of his professional observations.

Conclusion

This study has sought answers to the following:

1. How far the daily lives of the traditional societies in Kenya were affected by traditional art forms, designs and patterns.
2. How their lives were motivated by the use of signs, symbols and other symbolic forms.
3. What was the extent of their general appreciation of form and content of different art forms.

The main hypothesis of this study is that the practice of making art and craft items by the

traditional societies in Kenya has been manifested in numerous ways according to different tribal life styles and customs. Various forms of expression have been demonstrated in the forms of e.g. masks, decorations, geometrical and representative symbols, murals, figurative drawings, body markings etc.

According to the findings of the study, the following are the conclusions:

1. In a 'primitive' or pre-industrial society life is an integrated whole and the difference, then, between a work of fine art and a design for a craft is not absolute but is rather one of emphasis on degree.
2. It could be argued that styles of producing arts and crafts by different nationalities may change, but the urge is the same. Most societies in the world love beautifully produced pieces of art.
3. Many traditional societies in Kenya have a number of common techniques of making various crafts.
4. Complete appreciation of the traditional African art forms would depend upon proper knowledge, and understanding of tribal

life styles, philosophy, values etc. Also, one's attitude towards the tribal ways of doing things would either hinder or enhance one's appreciation of their art forms.

5. In dealing with art around any traditional area it is most necessary to distinguish between local talent and that learnt from neighbouring tribes.
6. Many traditional art forms have roots in the attempts to solve various problems that have confronted the traditional communities.
7. Quantitatively commercial arts and crafts form the bulk of art forms produced in Kenya to-day. It is however, true that they may not equal traditional art in aesthetic value, but their importance is nonetheless undisputed.
8. Almost all figurative patterns and motifs in most African societies originally had a symbolic or allegorical meaning. Thus the pre-occupation of the craftsmen was to record a pictorial statement of an idea, rather than decorate the work.

9. The Swahili have assimilated a lot of foreign ways of producing art forms.
10. The forests around Mt. Kenya have featured prominently in many of folk tales told by the local people. Various art forms have been produced based on these tales.
11. The availability of good clay in the Ukambani environment is partly responsible for the development of potting skill in this area.
12. The Maasai style of living is to a certain extent responsible to their ability to produce the kind of beadwork they use.
13. It could be argued or interpreted that due to lack of scientific explanation of things, tribal societies reverted to supernatural solutions of problems.
14. Beliefs and cultural aspects such as diseases, misfortunes, disasters etc., were interpreted to have been influenced by supernatural powers.

In view of the above conclusions, it is recommended that in teaching design, art and related disciplines, the concept of traditional African design should not be literally compared with Western

perspective. The way the traditional African societies used their materials and tools needs a different understanding. This is because their motivation for producing art forms was rooted in their own life styles.

Summary of The Conclusions

Raw materials such as clay, wood, sand, tools etc., were available in all traditional communities in Kenya. These determined the availability of art forms. The shapes of traditional art forms depended greatly on discretion, imagination and the skills of the craftsman. The changes of traditional artifacts depended on the human environmental changes. These were the changes of outlook in society's socio-economic and cultural aspects as a whole. Craftsmen modify or innovate to suit current change and demand.

Environmental factors found in Kenya, physical and human contributed greatly to the total fulfillment of the Kenyan traditional art forms. The traditional societies valued this fulfillment.

Areas of Further Study

1. Similar studies are needed to determine what was the tribal spirit of the traditional societies in Kenya. This would help to

explain how and what really kept them together as one group. It may also help to explain what brought the differences. Also, it would be useful to investigate what part different art forms played in such experiences.

2. Similar studies are needed in an attempt to study and analyse traditional African materials dyes, tools etc. This knowledge would be useful in an endeavour to determine whether these could be adopted for use in the present-day economy. On the same understanding, similar studies could be done on the African traditional textiles, weaving, musical instruments, body paintings etc.
3. A study to clarify apparent similarities and differences in pattern motifs of different traditional groups in Kenya. This would assist in arriving at 'popular' design motifs that could be used in producing useful items such as pieces of textiles.
4. The art of pottery has been a good example of a 'living' practical craft, that has been used through the years by traditional

societies to meet various social needs. A detailed study of this craft would reveal a number of techniques and different materials that were used. Such information would assist in determining whether small scale potting industries could be set.

5. The nature of 'mass production artists' in different parts of Kenya needs further examination. Such artists produce sizable numbers of commercial art forms. Kisii stone carvers, Akamba carvers, Kikuyu ciondo makers, Maasai beadmakers etc, are illustrative examples of mass production artists. The relevance in doing some studies about them is mainly in respect to improving their economic lot, and that of the country as a whole. For example, studies of working condition of these people, their subsistence living status or otherwise, would contribute to understanding their trade with a view to improving it.
6. There is a wide field of choice of research areas in the attempt to see how some of the traditional graphic symbols could be integrated in our western type

of modern communication in Kenya. Some specific cases would be signs and symbols in public places, road signs, local government emblems, commercial and trade marks, school badges, etc.

CHAPTER NINE

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