

 **ENDANGERED MATERIAL
KNOWLEDGE PROGRAMME**

**FIVE YEAR ANNIVERSARY
CONFERENCE**

8th June 2023

PROGRAMME AND ABSTRACTS



DISPLAYS IN THE WEST FOYER

EMKP DIGITAL

curated by EMKP Digital Curator Paula Granados Garcia

An interactive display where visitors can learn about the use of digital technology in the EMKP, and see how EMKP grantees have combined traditional audio-visual documentation with more experimental methodologies to record material culture and knowledge. Explore our online repository, get hands-on with 3D models, and experience material knowledge up close through VR and 360 video.

ETHIOPIAN COFFEE CULTURE: BARCUMA STOOLS, SOCIALITY, AND STORYTELLING

by EMKP Project Curator Orly Orbach, and LNP Community Partnerships Manager Kayte McSweeney

Jira Choroke's EMKP project, "Documenting Endangered Traditional Handicrafts: Three Legged Stools and Coffee Culture in Jimma, Southwest Ethiopia" was the starting point for this collaboration between the EMKP and the British Museum's Department of Learning and National Programmes (LNP). Linking Jira's project with objects in the British Museum, the EMKP and LNP worked with members of the Ethiopian History Society in London to organise a traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony and storytelling session at Harar Restaurant, Vauxhall. This display includes objects and photographs from the event, demonstrating how material culture and knowledge can be used to connect with people and groups across the globe.

DOCUMENTING THE LOST PRACTICES OF KURDISH FELT AND FELT-MAKING IN THE FOOTHILLS OF THE ZAGROS MOUNTAINS

curated by EMKP Grantees Renas Babakir and Yad Deen

Changes in fashion, tastes, and industry have caused a steep decline in the historic practice of felt making among the Kurdish community of Iraq. EMKP Grantee Renas Babakir and her collaborators, Yad Deen and Shirwan Can, have been recording the endangered knowledge and skills of Salim Ali, the last known maker of Kurdish felt in this region. This display showcases some of the objects, materials, and techniques that have been collected as part of this EMKP project, as well as some of the stories and special moments they have encountered along the way.

EMKP IN VIDEO

curated and edited by EMKP Project Curator Li-Xuan Teo

A short video compilation of audio-visual materials from different EMKP projects, demonstrating the wide range of material knowledge systems documented by EMKP grantees.

PRESENTATIONS IN THE STEVENSON LECTURE THEATRE

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION: Chair Dr Lissant Bolton, Director of EMKP	
9:30am – 10:00am	Dr Harwig Fischer, Director of the British Museum Dr Arthur Dudley, Director of Cultural Programme, Arcadia
SESSION 1: EXPLORING MATERIAL KNOWLEDGE (Chair: Dr Ceri Ashley, Head, EMKP)	
10:00am – 10:30am	Wrinkles, Rips, Holes: A Study of the Tenuous Link between Generations of Paper Clothing Makers in Japan Dr. Daphne Mohajer va Pesaran Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia
10:30am – 11:00am	Perla Anugerah Ilahi: the construction of a <i>palari</i> Dr. Chiara Zazzaro and Dr. Horst Liebner University of Napoli "L'Orientale", Italy and Universitas Hasanuddin, Indonesia
11:00am – 11:30am	Documenting skills and practices of dry-stone masonry at Great Zimbabwe: Towards capturing a fading material knowledge Dr. Munyaradzi Elton Sagiya Bindura University of Science Education, Zimbabwe
11:30am – 12:00pm	A World of Many Tones: Documenting the Bora knowledge about designs and dyes Dr. Maria Luisa Lucas Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia da Universidade de São Paulo (MAE-USP), Brazil
12:00pm – 12:30pm	Apprehending Asapan: material knowledge, history and ceremony in Turkana, northern Kenya Dr. Samuel Derbyshire St. John's College, University of Oxford, England
LUNCH	
12:30pm – 1:30pm	Lunch will be served in the West Foyer.
SESSION 2: ENDANGERED ENVIRONMENTS AND FOODWAYS (Chair: Dr Ceri Ashley)	
1:30pm – 2:00pm	Endangered foodway heritage of the baobab tree: highlights of documentation work among the Mijikenda communities of Kenya Dr. Patrick Maundu National Museums of Kenya, Kenya
2:00pm – 2:30pm	Fera-i-Asi: Digitizing the Island Builders of the Lau Lagoon, Malaita, Solomon Islands Dr. Geoffrey Hobbis and Dr. Stephanie Ketterer Hobbis University of Groningen and Wageningen University, the Netherlands
2:30pm – 3:00pm	Multi-layered endangerment: the wild silks project Dr. Laurence Douny Humboldt University, Germany
3:00pm – 3:30pm	Multiple Mobilities: Investigating Changing Trajectories of People and Things in the Mongolian Altai Dr. Kristen Pearson Harvard University, the United States of America
BREAK	
3:30pm – 4:00pm	Tea break. Refreshments will be served in the West Foyer.
SESSION 3: THE FUTURE OF ENDANGERED MATERIAL KNOWLEDGE DOCUMENTATION (Chair: Dr Ceri Ashley)	
4:00pm – 4:30pm	Ensuring the vitality of material knowledge for future generations Dr. Bruna Rocha Federal University of West Para, Brazil
4:30pm – 5:00pm	Plastic, aluminium, and polyester versus pottery, wood, and stone: Dealing with "new" and "old" things in Western Ethiopia Dr. Juan Salazar Bonet and Dr. Alfredo Gonzalez-Ruibal Institute of Heritage Sciences, Spanish National Research Council (INCIPIT-CSIC), Spain

ABSTRACTS

WRINKLES, RIPS, HOLES: A STUDY OF THE TENUOUS LINK BETWEEN GENERATIONS OF PAPER CLOTHING MAKERS IN JAPAN

Daphne Mohejer va Pesaran
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia

This paper presents the findings of an ethnographic study undertaken in Shiroishi, Japan, on the topic of clothing (kamiko) and fabrics (shifu) made of sheets of Japanese paper (washi). The region's tradition of making paper clothing dates back to the Edo period (1603-1868), but now is marked with holes. During a period of rapid industrialization at the turn of the 20th century, paper clothing knowledge completely died out, was revived in the 1940s, and is now again on the verge of disappearing. It's being held together by a few key community bonds and elders.

Through a combination of participant observation, interviews, and archival research, this study seeks to document the history, techniques and processes involved in the production of paper clothing in Shiroishi. The research reveals that the production of paper clothing is not only a skilled craft and cultural practice that embodies local values and beliefs, but a material practice that is oppositional to contemporary thought about clothing—where clothing (or fashion) should be durable, washable, affordable, and convenient, paper clothing is not.

The study also highlights the challenges faced by paper clothing makers in Shiroishi today. Many of the younger generation are not interested in continuing the tradition, and the older generation faces difficulties in finding apprentices (or won't take any one at all). Furthermore, the production process requires community labor and engagement, is time-consuming and uses specific materials that are becoming increasingly difficult to obtain.

Overall, this study demonstrates the importance of ethnographic research in documenting and preserving traditional practices and highlights the urgent need to take action to ensure that this valuable cultural heritage does not disappear forever.

PERLA ANUGERAH ILAHI: THE CONSTRUCTION OF A PALARI

Chiara Zazzaro and Horst Liebner
University of Napoli "L'Orientale", Italy and Universitas Hasanuddin, Indonesia

Traditional boatbuilding in the Bulukumba district of South Sulawesi, Indonesia, is becoming increasingly endangered due to decline in the supply of wood and economic demand. It is for this reason that in 2021 the British Museum funded, through the Endangered Material Knowledge Programme (EMKP), a project to create a record of the materials, techniques, rituals and terminology used in traditional boatbuilding to preserve this knowledge for future generations.

A short documentary describing the daily life, activities, and rituals related to boatbuilding in the local community will be the result of the project. The project intends to use this material to promote awareness and build strategies for cultural preservation. One of the project's main research outputs was the construction of a palari following the tatta' tallu plan. The boat was named Perla Anugerah Ilahi and it is over 12m long and 3m wide. The construction was carried out by boatbuilder Harli Novianto with the help of his friends Asdar and Nurman. Palari was a type of sailing vessels, that since at least the early 19th century was mainly built in South Sulawesi and used for trading and fishing. It is similar to its predecessor the padewakang but it is considered nimbler and faster. In fact, the name palari means "runner" in the Bugis language.

DOCUMENTING SKILLS AND PRACTICES OF DRY-STONE MASONRY AT GREAT ZIMBABWE: TOWARDS CAPTURING A FADING MATERIAL KNOWLEDGE

Munyaradzi Elton Sagiya

Bindura University of Science Education, Zimbabwe

The preservation of Great Zimbabwe, a dry-stone masonry-built archaeological site located in southern Zimbabwe (20° 16' 23" S, 30° 56' 04" E) is anchored by two diametrically positioned conservation approaches; one inspired by modernist conservation practices, and the other founded on local knowledge and skills. To date, in Zimbabwe, dry-stone masonry is a skill and practice embedded in the local knowledge epistemologies. There are no formal institutions that train dry-stone masons. It is largely believed that the dry-stone masonry knowledge and skills have been inherited from the ancestral builders of the ancient dry-stone-built settlements predominately found in Zimbabwe, with some few in the neighbouring countries of Botswana, Mozambique, and South Africa. Only a few dry-stone masons are skilled in restoring these ancient structures. The knowledge and practices of dry-stone masonry have never been recorded in detail, not only in Zimbabwe but also in other southern African countries where these monumental stone buildings are also found. This paper seeks to discuss the findings of a documentation project of dry-stone masonry at Great Zimbabwe, conducted under the auspices of the British Museum's Endangered Material Knowledge Programme (EMKP). Among other objectives, this project sought to create a digital archive designed as a repository resource for the conservation, transfer and dissemination of indigenous dry-stone masonry knowledge and practices. The project provides a lasting record of indigenous dry-stone masonry knowledge and practices now rapidly disappearing.

A WORLD OF MANY TONES: DOCUMENTING THE BORA KNOWLEDGE ABOUT DESIGNS AND DYES

Maria Luisa Lucas

Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia da Universidade de São Paulo (MAE-USP), Brazil

In the past few years, in my conversations with my Bora interlocutors about designs and natural dyes, the absence of women specialists, the low frequency of certain rituals, and the lack of interest of young people have been frequent subjects. After briefly introducing the past and current situation of this Indigenous people in the Colombian Amazon, I will present the ongoing EMKP project that aims to document a wide range of knowledge related to the subject. Early reflections on an unexpected emphasis on vegetal and mineral dyes and on the difficulty in finding mythical narratives about the origin of graphic repertoires will lead us to explore other broader questions present today in my interlocutors' thoughts and public speeches (women and men included). For example: how, what, and when to document? What are the risks implicated in the process? In the future, who will be allowed to access which archives, and who decides about access? How can the circulation of such endangered knowledge be controlled, encouraging its "recovery" and "strengthening" without altering the local transmission networks too much or placing people in vulnerable positions? Such reflexivity, unprecedented for many Bora people and for me, is directly related to important and more comprehensive reorientations of documentation practices in Amazonia and elsewhere. The aim, then, is to present a collaborative work in progress, with consequences that are still unpredictable.

APPREHENDING ASAPAN: MATERIAL KNOWLEDGE, HISTORY AND CEREMONY IN TURKANA, NORTHERN KENYA

Samuel Derbyshire

St. John's College, Oxford University, England

Drawing on long-term material culture-oriented ethnographic research, this paper explores socio-economic and political change in the Turkana region of northern Kenya. Looking into histories of production, use and exchange, it considers the enduring value of a material culture lens in historical research, the use of historical object and photographic collections in situated fieldwork activities and the challenges involved in making sense of ongoing radical socio-material transformations associated with economic growth and the spread of new technologies.

The paper unravels insights from a two-year project funded by the Endangered Material Knowledge Programme and completed in 2022, which documented material knowledge associated with the asapan ceremony, a rite of passage comprising a critical transition to elderhood amongst the Turkana people. It explores the skills, memories and relationships that have underpinned this longstanding ceremony to draw wider inferences about change and continuity over the recent past in Turkana and the manner in which communities have negotiated a wide range of political and economic transformations.

ENDANGERED FOODWAY HERITAGE OF THE BAOBAB TREE: HIGHLIGHTS OF DOCUMENTATION WORK AMONG THE MIJIKENDA COMMUNITIES OF KENYA

Patrick Maundu

National Museums of Kenya, Kenya

The African baobab (*Adansonia digitata*) is a tree of great economic and cultural significance wherever it occurs in the continent. In Kenya, the tree is found at the south-east and coastal parts of the country. To the Mijikenda of coastal Kenya, the tree comes second to coconut palm in importance. The fruit and leaves are edible and the fruit shell and virtually every other part of the plant finds some use at household.

Since September 2021, the National Museums of Kenya with support from the British Museum has been documenting endangered foodway heritage of the baobab tree among the Mijikenda. The aim is to safeguard the knowledge for posterity. The project team is working with knowledgeable elders and custodians of the material culture in and around Mijikenda sacred forests (*kayas*) where the baobab is plentiful. The project employs a variety of participatory methods in its documentation work. The work is captured in paper, audio, still photos and video.

The project has identified about 181 baobab experts, mostly *kaya* elders from the 9 communities. These have been the sources of the knowledge. The project also mapped about 80 baobab trees of special cultural significance and about 30 cultural elements of special interest. Each *kaya* community prioritized their own cultural elements for documentation and identified experts for each element. The prioritized material knowledge falls under 10 broad themes: art of Baobab climbing, edible rodent trapping (trap making, preparation of rodents), domestic use of the baobab fruit shell, use of fruit pulp, baobab leaves as a vegetable, fiber, cultural ceremonies and rituals, baobabs of special significance (dwelling and shelter, water source, habitat for other wildlife), bee keeping (honey harvesting, bee hive hoisting) and medicinal use. About 1100 digital still photos (good quality, non-repeated photographs), and approximately 16 hours of audio-visual material have been generated. 13 of the videos have been annotated. A total of 36 participants have been captured in the metadata schema.

This work has generated new knowledge and created awareness about the value of the baobab and related indigenous knowledge. With the new knowledge, the research team has successfully contributed to baobab related conservation debates. The findings have featured in at least two news articles.

FERA-I-ASI: DIGITIZING THE ISLAND BUILDERS OF THE LAU LAGOON, MALAITA, SOLOMON ISLANDS

Geoffrey Hobbis and Stephanie Ketterer Hobbis

University of Groningen, the Netherlands and Wageningen University, the Netherlands

In the Lau Lagoon, Solomon Islands, no material practice and associated knowledge is broader than the creation and maintenance of land. For at least seven hundred years, the Lau have made land in the form of small islands, called *fera i asi* (rock in the sea), inside the eponymous lagoon on the northwest coast of Malaita Province. These ‘artificial islands,’ scattered across the lagoon, have played the backdrop to everyday and ritual life as it has met a long history of challenges, from malarial mosquitos to slavers. Today, more and more Lau are abandoning these islands, moving into coastal settlements or far away towns. Our project documents endangered Lau island building practices based on a primarily participatory approach—Lau participants lead data collection and create (most) audio-/visual materials based on their conceptual, contextual and sensorial priorities. Drawing on materials from the first six months of our EMKP project, we offer initial insights into island builders’ toolkits, when, why and how islands are built, maintained and left to decay. We explore the diversity of land-making practices, extending our lens from islands to also include walls, bridges, and buildings; and we discuss how these land-making practices are shifting given two primary sources of endangerment: changing economic practices and values as well as rising sea levels, warming oceans and climate change more broadly.

MULTILAYERED ENDANGERMENT: THE WILD SILKS PROJECT

Laurence Douny

Humboldt University, Germany

During the challenging times of COVID-19, and in the context of political instability across the Sahel, our co-constructed documentation project on wild silk production was conducted with the outstanding participation of textile producers in the Safané area of Burkina Faso. In addition to the detailed presentation of textile production processes, our project also emphasises the complex relationships between insects, the materials they produce and the fibre that women transform into culturally and historically significant fabrics – fabrics which play a crucial role in the material identity of the Marka-Dafing people. Looking first at the spinning of the materials by animals and the collection of wild silk nests in the forests and savannahs by humans, before going on to consider the cultural production of wild silk textiles, this paper will present the project’s results featuring in the EMKP repository as well as some of the public representations of our venture. By applying a multispecies approach, the paper will highlight Marka-Dafing’s endangered heritage of techniques and material knowledges, while also pointing to the wider issue of their endangered ecosystems.



MULTIPLE MOBILITIES: INVESTIGATING CHANGING TRAJECTORIES OF PEOPLE AND THINGS IN THE MONGOLIAN ALTAI

Kristen Pearson

Harvard University, the United States of America

There is no escaping the theme of 'mobility' in the study of Inner Asia. Seasonal residential mobility tied to the needs of grazing animals is certainly a distinctive feature of past and present societies in the region. Archaeologists in particular have focused their attention on the social, political, and economic affordances of mobile pastoralism as a subsistence strategy. This research has been fruitful; archaeologists working in Inner Asia have challenged paradigmatic understanding about the role of sedentism in social complexity. However, a scholarly focus on seasonal residential mobility may actually have obscured other practices of mobility that are no less consequential for nomadic societies. Our project's focus on organic material culture sheds light on forms of mobility of both people and objects that have been underexplored in comparison to the mobility of the patrilineal nomadic camp group (ail/auyl). By tracing the movements of objects and the transmission of material knowledge, we highlight short- and long-range mobility practices carried out alongside pastoralist mobility that have shaped the material record of contemporary Western Mongolia, such as dowry gifting, gravesite visitation, participation in cooperative labour, and emigration. This paper will discuss these and other preliminary findings from our EMKP project "Nomadic Material Heritage: Documenting Textile and Animal Hide Crafts in Western Mongolia". It will also address the experience of conducting ethnographic fieldwork in a spatially extensive social and material landscape, in which mobility is a method as much as a topic of research.

ENSURING THE VITALITY OF MATERIAL KNOWLEDGE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Bruna Rocha

Federal University of West Pará, Brazil

This paper will reflect upon the EMKP's current remit and guidelines to applicants and grantees to then explore ways in which the program's transformative potential and legacy can be amplified. Despite being open access, the online database may not necessarily be easy to reach and then to navigate by indigenous peoples and local communities who are involved in the projects funded by the program. Considering most EMKP projects are undertaken in (post- or neo-) colonial contexts that are often characterized by local institutional fragilities, deep inequalities and the encroachment of industrial civilization, this presentation will propose paths to build on the program's strengths to further its positive impacts on the ground, where projects are being carried out. At a time of climate crisis that directly impacts many of these communities, collaborative strategies to recognise and sustain traditional knowledge may in fact contribute to local resilience and to strategies of resistance against territorial encroachment and environmental degradation.



PLASTIC, ALUMINIUM, AND POLYESTER VERSUS POTTERY, WOOD, AND STONE. DEALING WITH “NEW” AND “OLD” THINGS IN WESTERN ETHIOPIA.

Juan Salazar Bonet and Alfredo Gonzalez-Ruibal

Institute of Heritage Sciences, Spanish National Research Council (INCIPIT-CSIC), Spain

Since the second half of the XIX century, industrial products have transformed human relationship with materiality at a global scale. However, the borderland between Sudan and Ethiopia maintained local typologies of objects, technologies, and know-hows until two decades ago, when the region entered an unprecedented rhythm of change. This represents today both an opportunity and a challenge for local communities. Among others, several small groups - Hamaj, Ganza, Seze, Opo and Chabu - have recently incorporated mass-produced goods to their previous material knowledge. From village plan designs to body decoration or food preparation, all spheres of life, both individual and collective, seem to be changing.