EMKP NEWSLETTER
ENDANGERED MATERIAL KNOWLEDGE PROGRAMME
Autumn 2026 Issue 9

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EMKP 2026-2027 CALL FOR APPLICATIONS IS NOW OPEN!

After a very successful and competitive granting round, we are delighted to announce that the 2026–2027 call for applications is now open!

EMKP offers funding to document living material practices at risk of disappearing through two grant modalities: Documentation Grants and Legacy Digitisation Grants. Documentation Grants are available as either Large Grants, with a duration of two years, or Small Grants, with a duration of one year. The difference between the two types of Documentation Grants lies in the scope and complexity of the knowledge systems being documented.

Legacy Digitisation Grants are intended for projects that aim to digitise existing archives focusing on material practices that were endangered at the time of documentation or remain endangered today. These grants have a duration of one year and may be applied for alongside Documentation Grants, provided that the proposed projects focus on related material knowledge systems.

Between late October and early November, the EMKP team will host a series of webinars in different languages to support applicants providing guidance on the application process and clarifying the requirements. Click here 2026/2027 EMKP Applications Webinar Registration Form to book your place.

The EMKP call for applications closes on 1 December 2026 at midday (GMT, UTC+0). If you are interested in applying, read more in the following link: EMKP 2026/2027 call for applications, and don't forget to visit our frequently asked questions page. You can also contact us at emkp@britishmuseum.org.

Group photo. EMKP Project: Documenting the Zande slit-drum (gugu) in South Sudan (Image: doi.org/10.25420/britishmuseum.33897574).

EMKP AWARDS 27 NEW GRANTS

The EMKP 2025/2026 call for applications was the most successful to date, with project proposals focusing on a diverse range of material knowledge systems from around 80 countries. After several months of a competitive and thorough selection process, the EMKP is delighted to announce the 27 newly awarded projects.

This new cohort of EMKP projects will document highly endangered material practices worldwide, ranging from practices that shape our built environment and cultural landscapes, such as the construction of adobe-brick houses in the Andean Highlands of Argentina, the building of stone tidal weirs in the Philippines, and the canoe-carving traditions of the Ibani people in Nigeria, to the making of smaller-scale objects and processing techniques that are important expressions of people's cultural heritage.

Partially eroded stone tidal weirs in Cuyo Archipelago (Image: Ronald C. Palay and Aldrin P. Lee, 2021).

These include brass ornaments among the Konyak of Nagaland, India; pottery traditions in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands; basketry traditions among the Lou in Kenya, the Cholanaicken in Kerala, India, and the Qom; endangered foodways among nomadic Kyrgyz communities and more.

For the first time, EMKP awarded projects in Paraguay, Bolivia, Bhutan, Somalia, and Cameroon adding these to the list of countries where the programme has supported work. These projects will document a range of material practices, including

Fishermen with Scissor-nets in the Pilcomayo river (Image: Riccardo Tiddi, 2023).

hunter-gatherer material knowledge, weaving practices and scissor nets fishing in Bolivia and Paraguay. In the case of Bhutan, the traditional black mud-dyeing process known as Zhen. In Somalia, the documentation will focus on the making of traditional woven grass mats by Somali pastoral communities, while in Cameroon, the project will record the use of Gbà bark clothing among the Tikar.

Two new grants have been awarded under the Legacy Digitisation scheme. First introduced in 2023, this type of grant has seen a steady increase over the years. The first project will focus on the digitisation of 20th-century records documenting material knowledge systems of the last traditional potters in the Western Balkans. The second awarded legacy grant will focus on the recovery, safeguarding and return of audiovisual and sound collections of the Asuriní of Xingu, an Indigenous Tupi-Guarani people living in the Brazilian Amazon along the Xingu River.

Woman painting graphic designs on pottery (Image: Renato Delarole, 1980).

Click the following link to discover the newly awarded projects: 2026 Cohort of Projects.

EMKP 2026 TRAINING WEEK

In September, EMKP welcomed 24 new grantees to the British Museum for its annual training week. Our grantees travelled from across 15 different countries to gather in London and attend a series of theoretical and practical sessions focused on the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully complete an EMKP project. The sessions were delivered by the EMKP team and invited guests.

On the first day, the grantees were welcomed by Domenico Sergi, Keeper of Africa, Oceania and the Americas at the British Museum, and Paula Granados Garcia, Head of the EMKP. Domenico and Paula gave a welcome talk on how material knowledge can be documented, preserved, and disseminated through museum collections. The talk was followed by sessions on research ethics, consent, and environmental ethics. Grantees also gave presentations on their documentation projects.

2026 EMKP grantees during the Welcome session at the British Museum (Image: Emily Tarry, 2026).

As part of the first day, the team offered a session on Experimental Ethnographies and Fieldwork Research Methods delivered by Elia Quijano, EMKP Project Curator, and EMKP grantee Maurizio Borriello which discussed the implementation of multimethod approaches and technologies to ethnographic documentation.

Day two provided more hands-on experience with different equipment and documentation techniques; while day three was all about the processing and management of data using the EMKP metadata schema. Day three also comprised two special workshops to explore different approaches to material culture documentation, one on Ethnographic Drawing and another on 3D modelling.

EMKP grantees during the Metadata session (Image: Emily Tarry, 2026).

Day four focused on fieldwork experience, with former grantee Dr Tunde Babalola gleading a session on Community Engagement with examples from his completed EMKP project. The morning sessions were followed by an entire afternoon dedicated to a group filming activity with conservators at the Organic Conservation Workshop at the British Museum.

The final day centred around the topic of project dissemination and promotion with a session on academic publishing followed by public engagement and social media, showcasing the different platforms used by EMKP to disseminate the amazing work carried out by the different projects.

The training week ended with a screening of the short films created by the grantees during their filming activity at the Organic Conservation Workshop. This discussion-led session gave everyone the opportunity to comment on the different approaches taken by each group.

As every year, the training week was a wonderful opportunity for grantees to meet and connect with one another and for us to learn from the amazing projects awarded this year. The close interaction between participants created numerous opportunities for knowledge-sharing and fruitful discussions about the ethnographic documentation of material knowledge systems. We hope these exchanges and connections will continue as the grantees begin their EMKP projects.

A CRADLE THAT CARRIES MORE THAN A CHILD

*By Gerelmaa Erdenechuluun**

Gerelmaa's EMKP project documented wooden-cradle making among Tuvan and Uriankhai communities in Bayan-Ulgii Province in western Mongolia. This high-altitude and mountainous environment is home to several ethnic communities, including Kazakh, Uriankhai and Tuva populations.

Our fieldwork focused on Ulgii city and Buyant soum. In Ulgii city, only one household, belonging to Javzan Bayar, was still using a traditional cradle that had been prepared for the birth of Javan Bayar's son approximately 35 years earlier. Another cradle in Buyant soum belonged to Bayanmunkh Tumurm. It had been made by his grandfather approximately 70 years ago and used by Bayanmunkh himself, his 13 younger siblings, and later his nine children. This cradle had been ceremonially transferred to him by his parents when he married. Today, he continues to preserve it as a family heirloom and intends to pass it on to his son.

Traditional wooden cradle preserved at Bayanmunkh Tumur ((Image: doi.org/10.25420/britishmuseum.33227511)

The main body of the cradle, known as the ikh bie, is traditionally made from pine or birch because of the strength and durability of these woods. A bow-shaped canopy is made from willow and secured with leather thongs. Traditionally, before cutting a tree from a mountain or riverbank, people make an offering and say a prayer to ask permission from nature. In some cases, instrumental music, including the morin khuur or tsuur, accompanies the ritual.

The outer cover, canopy, bedding and children's accessories such as the tata have traditionally been associated with women's work. The project documented this part of the process with Urenbayar Togmid.

Traditional wooden cradle preserved at Bayar Javzan (Image: doi.org/10.25420/britishmuseum.33227436)

A cradle, made by Bayanmunkh B. was created to protect a newborn child in a Tuvan-Uriankhai family that had previously experienced the loss of children. The family regarded the cradle as spiritually powerful and declined to participate in interviews or permit photographs or recordings. As a result, the research team did not document the object. The absence of documentation was itself evidence of the boundaries surrounding cultural knowledge. Responsible heritage research also requires recognising when knowledge, objects or practices should remain outside the archive.

Overall, the Mongolian wooden cradle is best understood as a living cultural practice. Its wooden frame embodies knowledge of trees, tools and craftsmanship, while its soft components carry skills in sewing and decoration. Its associated rituals express relationships between families, children and the natural world. Finally, its history within individual families records births, marriages, inheritance and remembrance.

To read the full version of this piece, click here.

*Principal Investigator, EMKP Project: Preserving the Past: Documenting Endangered Knowledge of Traditional Mongolian Wooden Cradles for Nomadic Infants.

REPOSITORY UPDATES

Congratulations to all the teams and local collaborators whose work and commitment makes it possible to document critically endangered material practices around the world. Below, we highlight a few examples of completed project. Click on the titles to explore the collections.

The Manufacture of Ostrich Eggshell Beads Among the El Molo Community, Kenya.
(James Munene, 2020)

The El Molo community in Kenya lives in two villages on the eastern shores of Lake Turkana. Ostrich eggshell beads have been an important element of El Molo cultural and social life for centuries. Their production and use, however, are closely related to hippo-hunting rituals and practices in the region, which are now illegal. This project provides the first in-depth documentation of ostrich eggshell bead-making in the region, and the resulting collection includes interviews, fieldnotes, and a range of multimedia records.

Breaking ostrich eggshells for making beads. (Image: doi.org/10.25420/britishmuseum.31457494).

Ceramic knowledge among the Bayot-Jola of Guinea-Bissau.
(Bruno Pastre Maximo, 2023)

The Bayot-Jola of Guinea-Bissau sustain a very special ceramic tradition dating back at least 2,000 years. The sourcing of raw materials, production, and use of ceramic objects are deeply intertwined with the group's way of life. The practice is fundamentally female-led. However, this ceramic production now takes place only sporadically. This project combined ethnographic observation, interviews, and audiovisual recording to create an insightful digital archive of this ceramic tradition.

Indonesian Boatbuilding Endangered Knowledge Project.
(Chiara Zazzaro, 2021)

The traditional Indonesian boatbuilding has changed significantly due to inclusion of modern technologies. The project documented the construction of the Perla Anugerah Ilahi, a boat approximately 11 metres long and 3 metres wide, built by master shipbuilders using orally transmitted techniques and knowledge. The team recorded information on materials, techniques, and terminology associated with this practice through interviews, photography, video, and photogrammetric surveys.

Nomadic Material Heritage: Documenting Textile and Animal Hide Crafts in Western Mongolia.
(Kristen Pearson, 2021)

This project documented textiles and animal-hide crafts among Kazakh pastoralist communities in western Mongolia. This material knowledge has been shaped by the mobile pastoralist lifestyle of people in the region, resulting in sophisticated craft traditions intimately connected to herding and hunting practices. Through interviews, participant observation, filming, and photography, the team documented crafts such as syrmaqs (felt carpets), tus kiiz (embroidered wall hangings), terme (woven bands), and animal-skin garments.

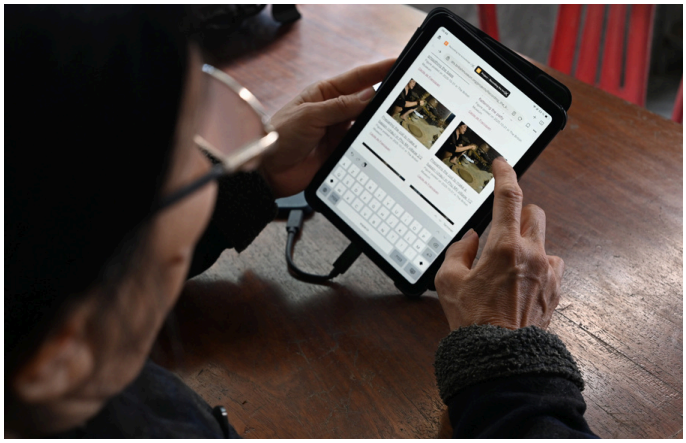
A partially set up yurt in Nogoonnuur Sum, Khara Mandai. (Image: doi.org/10.25420/britishmuseum.32016150)

Explore all the collections available through the EMKP Digital Repository.

RETURNING TO COMMUNITIES TWO YEARS LATER

By Cécile de Francquen

In January 2026, I revisited four of the eight villages documented during the EMKP project "Recording the knowledge of traditional potters from Vietnam: A historical perspective'. The aim was to share the results of the documentation, now available in the EMKP Repository, with the potters, and to observe any changes that may have occurred to this activity over the past two years.



Potter in PM looking through the EMKP online database (Image:Cécile de Francquen, 2026)

In the village of Thanh Ha (Quang Nam province), an important tourist attraction, we focused on the workshop of Nguyễn Thị Thuỷ (NTT) and her family during our documentation work in 2023, as it was one of only three households still producing pottery using a potter's wheel. In 2026, there were no changes at NTT's workshop. However, one of the households had abandoned this traditional practice. Objects sold to tourists are now mostly made using modelling or moulding techniques introduced to the village around a decade ago, with some items imported from other pottery villages.

In 2023, villagers were trained to use the potter's wheel through classes organised by the village people's committee. However, none of the ten students went on to produce domestic pottery or adopt the potter's wheel technique. This is mostly because despite the high demand for cooking wares in the local market, the craft is considered too physically demanding, tiring and dirty, while occupations linked to tourism are seen as more attractive in terms of both status and income.

Similarly, in the Mnong** village of Yang Tao (Dak Lak province), the craft survives but no new potters have joined the group, despite being offered training. In Phu My (Binh Dinh province) , five workshops are active with no apparent change. During this visit we documented a secondary activity associated with pottery production that had been overlooked during our previous fieldwork: salt refining.

Finally, in the village of Que An (Quang Nam Province), only one potter remains. Since 2023, she has reduced her pottery production due to health issues. Pottery was already a secondary source of income for her household, so the family increased its farming and livestock production to compensate for the loss of income.

Regardless of the intensity of pottery production in each village, the craft has generally stagnated or declined over the past two years, with no new potters entering the profession despite training taking place in several villages. It seems that the survival of traditional pottery in Vietnam depends less on technical transmission itself than on the economic viability of the craft within changing local contexts.

Clay pots filled with unrefined salt before being put in the klin in PM (Image: Cécile de Francquen, 2026)

To read the full version of this piece, click here.

*Principal Investigator, EMKP project: Recording the knowledge of traditional potters from Vietnam: A historical perspective.

**Mnong is an ethnic minority group in Vietnam.

NEWS BITES

Publications

Elia Quijano, EMKP Project Curator, and Paula Granados, Head of EMKP, recently contributed to the Museum Ethnographers Group Blog with the post "Preserving Knowledge through Digital Documentation, Collaborative Work and Open Access: The Endangered Material Knowledge Programme (EMKP)." The post provides an overview of EMKP's development since its inception in 2018, with particular emphasis on the Digital Repository, and type of records it contains.

Drone photo of raft transporting coconut husks. (Image: https://doi.org/10.25420/britishmuseum.24785985)

Former EMKP grantee Andrea Yankowski published the paper 'Revitalising and representing the endangered intangible cultural heritage of traditional salt making (asin tibuok) in Bohol, Philippines' in the International Journal of Intangible Heritage. The paper builds on research undertaken as part of Andrea's completed EMKP project, 'Documenting the construction of a traditional kamalig (salt workshop) and the making of asin tibuok (native salt) in the Philippines'.

EMKP grantee Patrick Nunn and collaborators Tricia King and Roselyn Kumar published the article 'Contextualising future climate-forced community relocations on islands: the long history of water-related settlement mobility in Ra Province, Fiji' in the journal Human Ecology. The article draws on research from the EMKP project 'Traditions of Artificial Island Constructions in the Western Pacific Islands'.

Artificial island (Bikini) off the south coast of Pohnpei Island, Pohnpei State, FSM. (Image: Patrick Nunn, 2024)

Conferences

The Head of EMKP, Paula Granados Garcia, and former EMKP grantee Renas Babakir presented at the Making the Museum Conference, organised by the Pitt Rivers Museum at the University of Oxford. The conference focused on the presence and absence of makers' voices, skills, and knowledge within museum contexts. Paula and Renas gave a presentation as part of the first panel titled 'Recentring the Knowledge Holders' Voice and Lived Experience in the Museum Ecosystem'.

Renas Babakir presenting at the Making the Museum Conference (Image: Elia Quijano, 2026)

Stakeholder Consultation

Paula Granados attended a stakeholder consultation meeting and the public relaunch of the Culture in Crisis Programme now hosted by the British Council. The programme aims to support communities around the world in mitigating cultural loss resulting from the impacts of climate change, conflict, criminal acts, and other factors.