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Three Recent Findings Relating to the Loop-Manipulation Braiding Technique

Since 1913, when a report on the loop-manipulation (L-M) braiding techniques practiced among Algerian nomads was first published, those that have existed in many cultural regions all over the world have been sporadically reported. (Note 1) However, no historical accounts were known until the publication in 1979 of N. Speiser's ground breaking research into 17th-century English notebooks in the libraries of the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Metropolitan Museum, and others. (Note 2) This coincides with the time when I began to suspect that L-M techniques might have been used to make the 8th c. Japanese braids stored in the imperial treasure repository of Shôsôin. Before the report of the bronze figurines, the earliest evidence bearing the use of the techniques is the 7th- to 8th-century braids of the Hôryûji and Shôsôin treasures. It is only within the last five years that the use of L-M in the 15th century in England and Spain has been confirmed. The most recent research proved that the insertions, previously taken as one of the earliest bobbin-lace products, on the 15th-c. sudary from Uppsala Cathedral were made using the L-M technique. (Note 3) The research demonstrated that L-M had also been used for lace making prior to bobbin-lace techniques. It seems that the more one looks the further back history of L-M technique goes.

The Chinese Bronze Ware

<>On her recent trip to China, Junko Watabe noticed two women figurines at the Museum of Li Family Mountain Bronze Ware shown in Fig. 1, 2 and 3. (Note 4) The two figurines are described in the book as playing a cat's cradle game. However, their posture, one woman held the palms facing towards herself and the other holding the yarn much lower from the other end, is not likely to be that of the cat's cradle game. While not much more detail can be discerned from these pictures, we should thank our luck that the photo plate has the two women in the center front. The excavated site has been determined as one from the Western Han Dynasty, 1st c. B. C. An exciting aspect of Watabe's report for me personally is that it supports the assertion I made in my latest paper, submitted early this month (March 1998), that it would not be farfetched to postulate its existence two thousand years ago in the Han dynasty.



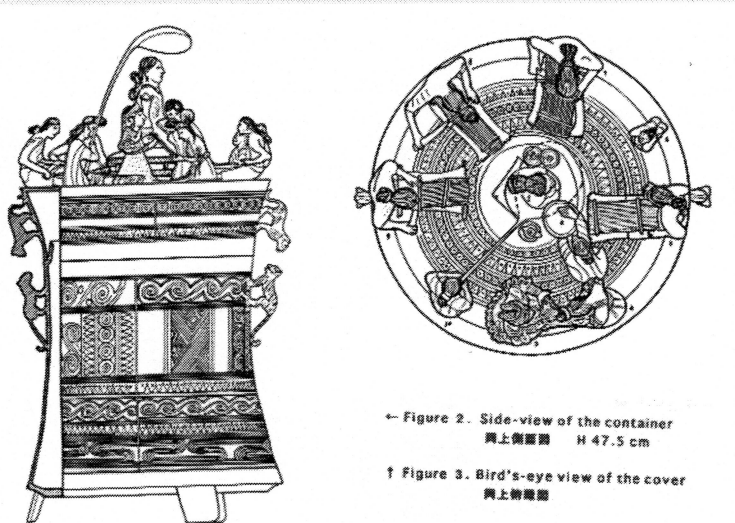
Figures 1-3 show a group of figurines on the lid of a bronze container from a 1st-century AD Chinese



Figure 1.
Figurines on the lid of a bronze container from the Li Family tomb site.
李家山古墓出土的野真器之蓋にある銅像群像

tomb. The two women in front on photo1 are most probably using the finger-held loop-manipulation (L-M) technique. This places the container as the oldest artifact found so far that

demonstrates that existence of the L-M technique.



← Figure 2. Side-view of the container
同上側面圖 H 47.5 cm

↑ Figure 3. Bird's-eye view of the cover
同上俯視圖

Yun-nan Li Family Mountain Bronze Wares - 『南寧家山青銅器』
昆明 Kun-ming: 雲南人民出版社 Yun-nan Peoples Publication Co., 1995.

Indian Gold Braider

Fig. 4 shows the practice of L-M braiding in India possibly around the time this drawing was made (1949). This add one more country in which L-M techniques are practiced in the 20th c. to those which we have already known: Algeria, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Denmark, Iceland, Japan, Morocco, Oman, Peru, Russia, Sweden, Thai to name a few.

With the palms facing each other, and hooking the loops on the index and middle fingers of both hands and on the left ring finger (5 loops altogether), the braider is tightening the braid by pushing the fell by a foot. At this point of the process, the operator finger usually is vacant and ready for the next move. If this is the case and if this drawing is accurate, the braider uses either the ring or small finger as the operator and constructs a braid on V-shaped fell.



There seems to be the Western and Eastern methods of constructing L-M braids, the former on A-shaped fell, and the latter on V-shaped fell, while both holding the

Figure 4. Goldbraided market (India) = インドの金糸織物市場
 American Fabrics = アメリカンファブリック誌 vol. 1943, no. 10.

loops with palms facing each other. I

am very much curious to learn about the method used in India which situates in the middle. Whether the man is making a braid with an orthodox pattern (a square braid, for instance) or one with an unorthodox pattern (a half-round braid) we cannot tell. I wonder if this braiding is still practiced in India.

The Two Maidens at the House "Zur Kunkel"

If the two women in the fresco painting found in a 13th c. building in Konstanz, Germany (Fig. 5) is proven to be L-M braiding, it will be the oldest proof of L-M practice in Europe found so far. Frieda Sober found a photo copy of the painting in *Romanze der Kleidung (Romance of Clothes)* by Eberhart Froubein. Although the



Figure 5. Wall painting in Konstanz, Germany.
 "Dr(in)gens son wir uns nut schamen!"
 スイスとドイツ国境のコンスタンツにある13世紀の遺物の壁絵
 Photo by M. Kinoshita ©1998

author explains in fairly definite tone that the two women are braiding, there is a suggestion that they might be processing flax. (Note 5) Also, the picture might have been altered when the fresco was restored in the past, which could have blurred some crucial details. It makes more sense, however, if the two women are braiding rather than processing flax because the five other scenes in this fresco suggest that the building belonged to a workshop that produced fancy silk satchels, etc. Any input will be appreciated.

Fig.4 & 5 have been reported from Frieda Sorber. (Note 6)