

A CACHE OF BASKET MAKER BASKETS FROM NEW MEXICO

By WALTER HOUGH

Head Curator, Department of Anthropology, United States National Museum

The joint expedition of the Smithsonian Institution and the Peabody Museum of Yale University worked during 1929 in a cave in Dona Ana County, N. Mex., which was thought to contain the remains of a sloth. A specimen of this animal was taken from an adjoining cave by a previous expedition of the Peabody Museum in 1928, and this has been described by Dr. R. S. Lull.¹ In neither of these caves were observed artifacts or other remains of man, but in a crevice adjoining, though not connecting with, the second cave, Norman Boss, of the United States National Museum, discovered a cache of baskets of particular interest. These are described below.

With the baskets were found a slender rod of dressed wood truncated at the ends, a fragment of gourd, and a lenticular mass of whitish clay with numerous finger impressions. Evidently the soft clay had been pressed into a vessel with concave surface, probably to stop a crack (pl. 1, fig. 1). With the baskets was a very little débris, consisting of dust containing skulls of mice and fruits and thorns of desert plants.

OVAL BOWL

The sides of this specimen have been eroded away, and at present the basket is an oval tray with upcurved ends. The construction of a basket of this shape undoubtedly presented unusual difficulties to the weaver. The oval section of 14 coils proceeded regularly, comprising the bottom field of the basket. The formation of the sides of an oval basket necessitated the insertion of numerous rods. These splicings or injunctions appear on the inner axis of the oval. The fifteenth coil is inserted about an inch to the right of the minor axis; the sixteenth an inch to the right; the seventeenth the same distance to the right; and the eighteenth the same distance to the right of the last. These four coils run around to the left and terminate in a similar way oppositely at the foot of the basket wall on the margin

¹ Lull, Richard Swann, A remarkable ground sloth. Mem. Peabody Mus., Yale Univ., vol. 3, pt. 2, 1929.

of the fourteenth coil. When these insertions were put in, the coil could run twice continuously around, when new insertions were necessary. A cross section shows 23 coils, but this appears not to be the whole number. The insertions were 12 in number, all lying in the minor axis, or to the right. The end sections of the basket required no insertions, the wall being built as if it were the process of the customary round basket.

The pattern consists of pairs of zigzags worked in black, probably devils-claw arranged axially, except the upper zigzag, which has three arms (see pl. 2, fig. 2). This pattern would be called a lightning design of the four points of the compass. The lightning elements broaden toward the rim. Diameter, $17\frac{3}{4}$ inches by $16\frac{1}{4}$ inches; height, $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches (U.S.N.M. No. 245916). This basket is an example of the devices used to work out eccentric shapes as in the Klikitat and some northern baskets described by Boas and others.² It is apparently the earliest specimen showing this technique.

LARGE BASKET BOWL

Regularly sewed, over a rather large coil. The rim coil shows at only one place, five coils having been worn away. From the caked débris on parts of the basket it is inferred that it was used for mortuary purposes. From the tenth coil arise stepped figures in black extending over 16 coils and rising three steps. On the walls of the basket are at wide intervals small sections vertical and horizontal in black, the vertical extending down from the rim. The figures are obscured by fading and can be traced only on the bottom of the basket. There are 50 coils in the basket. The material is willow, the method two rod and splint. The design appears to be in *Martynia* (devils-claw, or unicorn plant). Diameter, distorted, $19\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 16 inches; height, approximately $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches. (Pl. 3, fig. 2.)

CARRYING BASKET

Widely flaring, ovate basket in fragmentary condition. Much of the stitching has been worn away, especially where the basket came in contact with the body. Repairs of extremely crude stitching with yucca have been made, and several sections of coil have broken away on one side. The bottom of this basket is flat. The foundation coils are long-oval, and the oval shape is built up the walls to the top, giving a basket of long-ovate outline suitable for carrying a load adjusted to the back. There are no traces of design. The rods

² Haeberlin, H. K., Teit, James A., and Roberts, Helen H., under the direction of Franz Boas, Coiled basketry in British Columbia and surrounding region. 41st Ann. Rep. Bur. Amer. Ethnol., for 1919-1924, pp. 119-626, 1928.

and sewing are willow, and the splint is of yucca. No remains of the attachment of the carrying straps are to be seen on this basket. This specimen is to be compared with carrying baskets of similar shape discovered by Guernsey in Basket Maker sites in northeastern Arizona and described as Pueblo I.³ Diameter of bottom, 8 inches by 6 inches; height, 13½ inches. (Pl. 3, fig. 1.)

BOWL

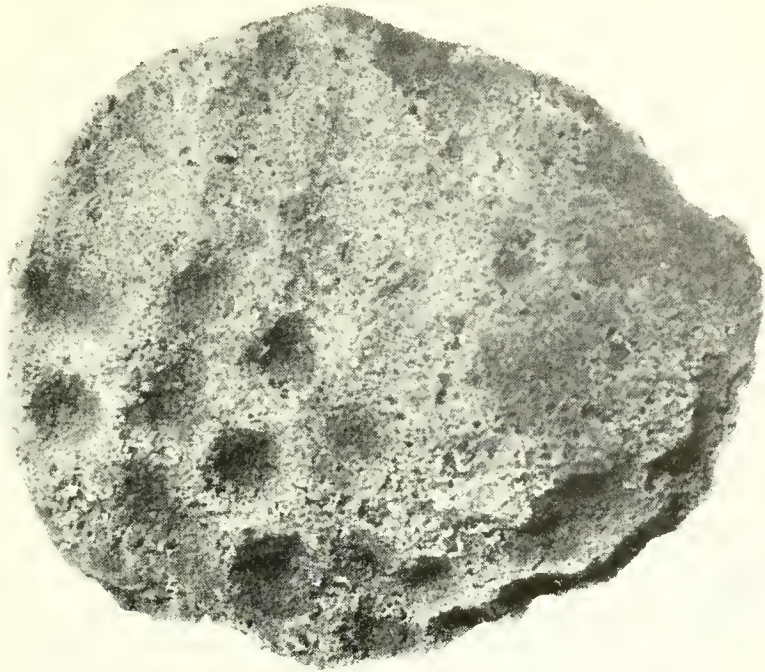
Shallow with flat bottom and rather steep sides. Sewing of narrow willow splints not closely applied, leaving interspaces on the rods. Willow, two-rod foundation, and splint after the earliest coil and sewing method. Twenty-seven coils compose the basket, and the edges are finished off by sewing in the splints. The specimen is distorted by pressure, which gives additional flatness to the bottom. Some mending shows on the bottom coils. The specimen has been taken from cave débris, some of which still adheres. Diameter, 9½ inches; height, 3½ inches. (Pl. 1, fig. 2.)

The baskets are in rather good condition of preservation, showing previous wear and repair, and but little affected by their long burial. Two of the baskets show repairs, which have been made with strips of yucca crudely sewed in, merely to hold the edges of the breaks together. Many other instances of repair with yucca are seen in Basket Maker specimens found in other localities.

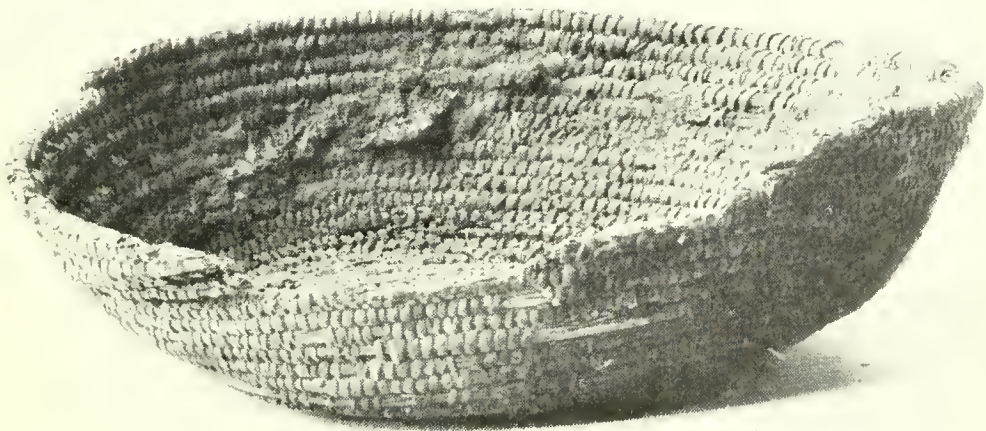
The presence of this cache of baskets in Dona Ana County furnished good data on the diffusion of Basket Maker culture. The cache has not yet been correlated with a site of these Indians in the neighborhood. There is evidence that future work will extend greatly the range of the southern Basket Makers.

³ Guernsey, Samuel J., Explorations in northeastern Arizona. Papers Peabody Mus. Amer. Archeol. Harvard Univ., vol. 12, no 1., pl. 13 (p. 95 for description), 1931.

Several baskets of this type have been found in northeastern Arizona, notably by Dr. Byron Cummings.

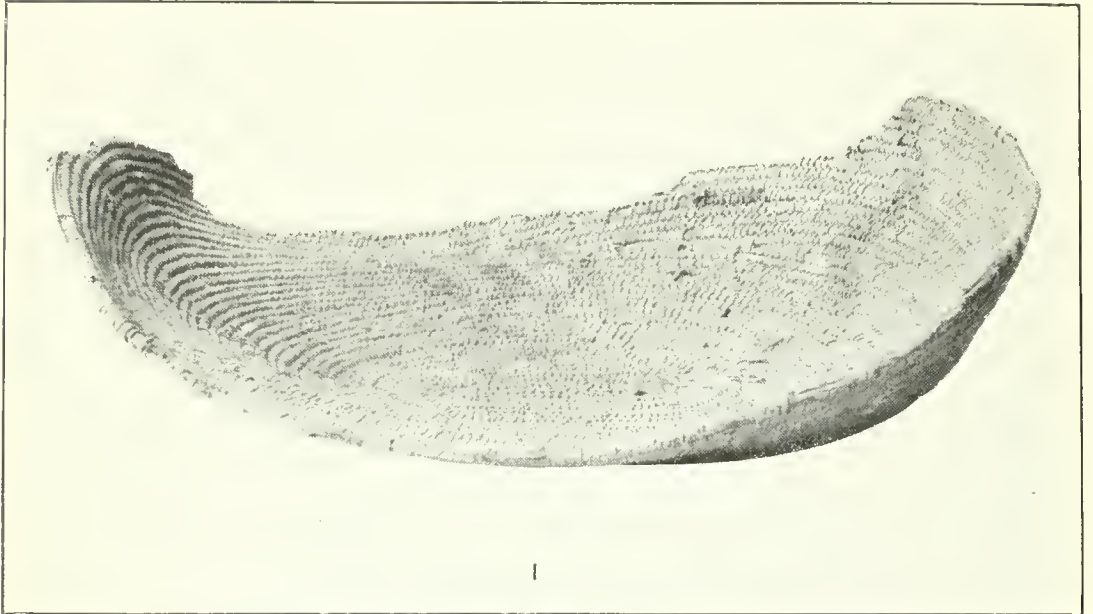


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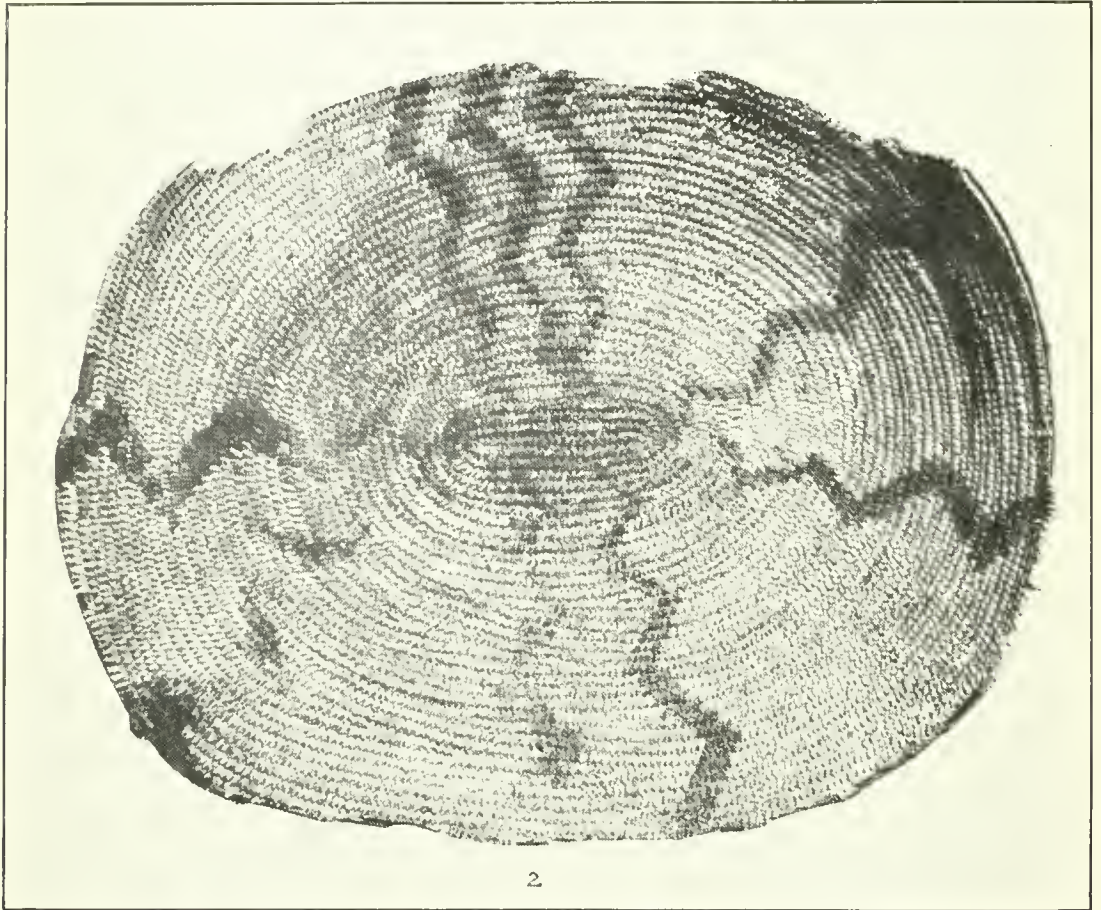


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1. CLAY WITH FINGER IMPRESSIONS (P. 1); 2. COILED BOWL (P. 3)

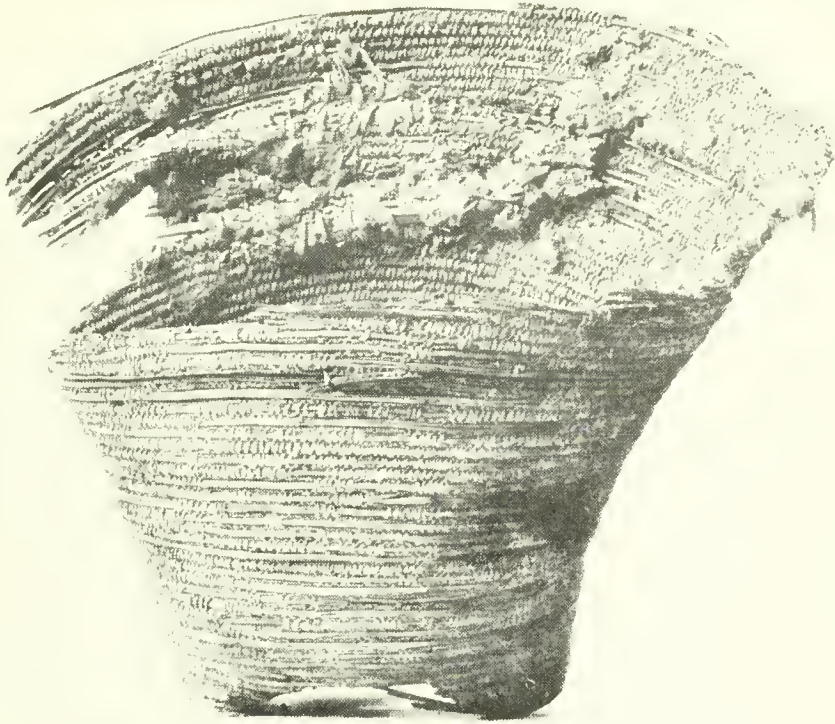


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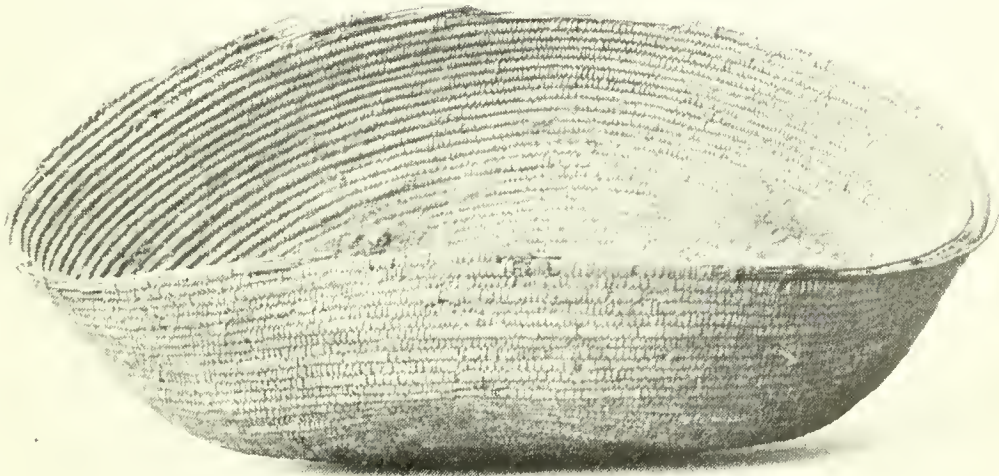


2

1, OVAL BOWL (SIDE VIEW); 2, DECORATIVE DESIGN ON OVAL BOWL (P. 1)



1



2

1, CARRYING BASKET; 2, LARGE COILED BOWL (P. 2)