

Title: Harari Basketry through the Eyes of Amina Ismael Sherif
Author: Ahmed Zekaria
Extracted From: Ethiopia: Traditions of Creativity (R.A Silverman ed.)

Harer is located in East-Central Ethiopia. The old walled city, known as Jugal, has a population of over 30,000. Jugal is pear-shaped and covers an area of 48 hectares. It is the home of the indigenous Harari as well as other peoples - Oromo, Somali, and Argobba. Indeed, people from virtually all parts of Ethiopia may be found in this great walled city.

Much has been written about the natural beauty of Harer. More than forty years ago John Buchholzer commented: "It doesn't matter whether you go there when the coffee bushes are in flower and the air is heavy with their strong, bitter scent, or when the ripe fruit of the orange trees glow in the sunlight, it is always lovely in Harer; there is always something blooming, always something being harvested" (1955: 101). A mountaintop view of Harer reveals a mosaic of diverse scenery (fig. 3.2). One sees great natural beauty complemented by the beauty of the human-built environment. The colors are remarkable. Outside the city walls the lush green foliage and meandering streams remind one of Persian carpets. In contrast, inside the old walls the colors and shapes change; one sees primarily whites and grays and a diverse range of geometric shapes of varying size (figs. 3.3-3.4). The hill on which the old city rests is a constantly changing organic form, shaped and reshaped by the hands of masons for over a millennium. The houses, mosques, churches, marketplaces, and narrow streets form this magnificent work of art.

Moving from a macro- to a micro view of the city reveals an abundance of aesthetic traditions that echo this beauty. The Harari house is warm and inviting and displays a sense of proportion and a mastery of a building technology perfected over the centuries. Inside the house, one is overwhelmed with the balance and color composition of the traditional display of baskets on the walls of the living room (fig. 3.5). The colorful dress of Harari women is another dimension of the beautiful aesthetic that permeates Harari life.

The primary driving force behind the development of Harari art has been the convergence of a number of major cultural traditions within the city. It is a veritable melting pot. Harer has been the center of trade and learning for a vast region of the Horn of Africa for at least one thousand years. Various crafts and art were introduced by people who came from near and far, from all directions of the compass, and who contributed their knowledge and expertise to the collective culture of Harer. This interaction and exchange has fostered the development of Harari art. Jewelry, calligraphy, bookbinding, embroidery, architecture, and basketwork are just a few traditions that enrich the aesthetic environment of Harer.

The dominant artistic influences have been associated with Islamic culture. Geometric patterns and designs are favored over figurative representation. Two traditions in which this influence is seen are calligraphy, produced by men, and basket making, which is the domain of women. Let us visit the house of Amina Ismael Sherif and consider one of these traditions in greater detail.

In Harer there is a saying, '*Sheisti geusu gutibe meheama yiet farakumel*', roughly translated, "Among three Hararis, you cannot speak ill of anyone." It implies that in Harer each person is in some way related to everyone in town. Indeed, Amina is my aunt. Amina Ismael Sherif, often called Amina Sitti ("*Sitti*" is an honorific title for a member of the Sherif family), is a daughter of

Harer, born around 1940 (fig. 3.1). Her father (and my maternal grandfather) was Ismael Sherif, and her mother was Khadija Muhammed Wubir. Amina was raised alone, her mother's only daughter. Unfortunately, Khadija lost her eyesight, and Amina, while still a young woman, shouldered the responsibility of caring for her. This contributed both directly and indirectly toward her becoming a professional basket maker, for she was forced to stay in the house to care for her mother and therefore had more time to devote to weaving baskets. Amina lost her husband in 1990. Fortunately, two of her five daughters are married. One of the married daughters and an unmarried daughter are living abroad. In 1993, two daughters, Munira and Maria, were still residing with Amina.

Amina is not an unusual Harari woman. She is a member of an afoocha (a community association), has no special role in the community, tends her house, and supports herself and her daughters by producing baskets for sale. Her daughters who live abroad occasionally send gifts to help support the household. Amina and her daughters are playing an important role in sustaining the art of basket making in Harer. Even her daughter living in Australia has not abandoned basket making - Amina sends her the necessary raw materials from Harer.

Basket making is an ancient art found in many societies throughout the world. Nevertheless, every basket tradition has its unique dimensions and not all traditions share equal weight in the realm of art appreciation. Many who have visited Harer have appreciated the beautiful baskets that the city's women have produced for centuries (see, e.g., Hecht 1992). Today, the famous baskets of Harer are one of the old walled city's major tourist attractions. Whether the baskets of Harer should be regarded as art or not is difficult to say. After all, "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," and it is up to the individual to define what is art and what is handicraft. This is not the place to deal with this complex issue, nor to criticize the West's use of a classification system that labels aesthetic objects as primitive, low and high art, or handicraft. Suffice it to say that there is great beauty in Harari baskets and they are aesthetic objects that deserve careful study.

The Harari basket, however, is far more than a beautiful object to be purchased by tourists and studied by art historians. It is a sign of identity loaded with social and cultural meaning. The Harari basket may be studied in both a physical and a symbolic context. In her analysis of Harari basketry Hecht (1992: 11-12) offers a hierarchical list of the significance baskets hold in Harari society. Here I paraphrase the various functions she enumerates:

1. Baskets are a symbol of identity for women.
2. They are a symbol of Harari women's sphere of life. Men have nothing to do with baskets or basketwork,[1] and although baskets may be handed from mother to daughter, they are not referred to in a will.
3. They demonstrate that luxury is affordable (without being ostentatious); they reveal a refined aesthetic sensibility on the part of the owners, as evidenced by owning many delicate baskets of the same type and same decoration.
4. They have decorative value and demonstrate that the housewife knows how to properly configure baskets following Harari conventions for basket display.
5. They serve distinctive functions in social activities, in particular, in the ceremonial exchange of gifts, especially food, during life cycle festivities.

6. They are objects of daily use.

Amina was kind enough to sit down with us for several hours in May 1993 to explain the basics of basket making: how one acquires the materials that are used in fabricating baskets, the technique of dyeing the fiber, the different types of baskets, and the functional, decorative, and symbolic meaning of baskets in Harari society. She also provided some interesting insights into new trends in the local and the international basket market.

The learning process for basket making is part of the female's world.

It is a female-specific tradition in Harari society. This, of course, does not exclude men from using baskets. Indeed, there used to be a special basket called *aw moot*, "father's basket," produced for a bridegroom to be carried around with him when visiting his relatives.[2]

I find Hecht's view that baskets are exclusively the domain of women too narrow. Amina told us about an incident that occurred at a wedding she attended in Dire Dawa that demonstrates this point.[3] The wedding ceremony went well, without any hindrance. Afterward, the bridegroom, following tradition, escorted his bride from her family's home. All was fine until he learned that some important objects were missing: when they reached their new home, he discovered that his bride had not brought any basketwork with her. This omission was taken as an unforgivable offense and eventually led to the dissolution of their marriage. I have observed similar incidents in the Harari community in Addis Ababa.

It is true that men do not interfere with the process of making baskets, but it seems that the symbolic value of baskets is an important element of male identity within the context of marriage. This is a deeply ingrained tradition in Harari society that may be difficult for an outsider to appreciate. Basketry is important for both men and women. The main differences pertain to the process of production and the frequency of symbolic usage. The basket's decorative and utilitarian functions are more or less the same for both husband and wife, but it has greater significance for women within the realm of rites of passage.

Formerly, daughters, at an early age, were encouraged by their mothers to train their hands how to weave baskets. Basket making used to be a lifelong skill learned in early childhood and practiced until old age by almost all Harari women, rich or poor. Traditionally, a girl's first basket was burned to ashes, and the ashes were rubbed on the girl's hands. This custom signified a transition to a more skilled level of basket making. Even today, daughters master the basic concepts of basket making before they join the *gelach*, a society of young women of similar age who live in the same neighborhood. This occurs at around the age of nine. The *gelach* meets at the home of one of its members, which is then known as a *mooy gaar*, or "house of work."

For every girl, Amina recalls, the daily routine started early in the morning when the cock crowed. First, she made breakfast for the family. After breakfast, she swept the whole compound, including the street in front of the house (Harer used to be very clean and one could always smell the fragrance of incense coming from every house). Then it was time to go to the farm. It was common for a Harari girl to be praised by the young men she encountered on her way to the farm. Their admiration was voiced at a distance and in song. Here are examples of a few verses recorded by Duri Mohammed (1955: 17) :

Tadarat wa, harir tafatlat wa marign malasayuw talabsat wa.
Haramaya hemini dakiya kor mawardi malasayey.
Dad has yasyheranal wa; aw saba gadamu kut yetfikranal wa.

At her loom she weaves silk, a coat for her lover.
Her beauty is [like] one of the waterfowl on the lake of Haramaya.
She is a rose.
I am drunk on her love; I leap like the deer on the hills of Aw Shabo

She responded, either with friends or alone, to the love song with a gentle sweet voice, competing in the early morning with the songs of the birds.

Formerly, Harari women were economically independent. The urban-based farming community of Harer devised a system of liberating women from economic dominance by their husbands. Women acquired plots of farmland as part of their bride-price from the groom's family. This plot could be as small as one or two rows of ch'at trees. This arrangement gave Harari women a good deal of economic freedom and thus provided a stable economic foundation for the marriage. Every wife and her grown daughters had to visit the farm each day.[4] It was regarded as a bank from which a woman could withdraw some bundles of ch'at for the expenses of the day. On her way home from the farm she sold the ch'at for cash. She was back home by nine o'clock in the morning.

After taking a short rest, she joined her friends at the *mooy gaar* for most of the day. The members of the *gelach* spent their early years at the *mooy gaar*, which served as a training ground for Harari girls where they learned not only basketwork but also *hala mehal*, the important lessons associated with social etiquette. Many of the lessons have been encapsulated in proverbs. For instance, here is one that admonishes latecomers: *Zikedema zibedera zetehara zibereda*, meaning "One who comes on time succeeds while one who comes late freezes."

The value placed on friendships forged in the *mooy gaar* is expressed in different couplets. Amina sung a few of them as she nostalgically recalled her youth.

Geley ded lekehey.
Sinet tetlimjinash wa.
Moy garbe beley.
Gar gebekhu girmakh hina geley.

My friend, you are my debt of love,
You are my expert in art.
In *mooy gaar* you are my friend.
In wedding you are my best maid.

The atmosphere of the *mooy gaar* was warm and secure. Each member shared her knowledge to build up a strong collective experience. The young women often sat as a group working on baskets. Each brought her *agergera* (a type of straw used like thread for weaving), *migir* (a type of sturdy grass used for the core of the coil), and *qerma* (barley stalks used for wrapping the coil) (fig. 3.6). Every girl had to have her own *wasfi*, or awl. In the center of the group they placed a small wooden bowl (today a small enamelware bowl is used) with water in it to soften the *qerma* and *agergera*. The bowl also served as a receptacle for receiving coins, a tradition known as *metarika mahallaq*. The coins were primarily collected from visitors, both male and female. Male visitors occasionally visited the *moor gaar* to observe and admire the basket making and for courting. During their visits they often commented on the quality of the baskets. The members of the *gelach* and their female

visitors exchanged ideas for new techniques and designs, as well as more general news and views about their families and life in Harer.

Amina became lost in memories of her youth when we asked her about the availability of raw materials. She recalled that all her supplies were readily available in and around Harer except for the powder used in dyeing the fiber. The farmers used to grow *agergera* to serve as a dividing line between plots of land and to impede soil erosion. The *migir* grew wild outside the farming zone, and the *qerma* was collected after the barley harvest. Today, all are imported from different places. The *qerma* comes from the nearby Hakim Mountains, the *agergera* is transported from Jijiga, 120 kilometers to the east, and the *migir* comes from Addis Ababa. There are merchants in Harer who supply these raw materials. Population pressures and ecological changes have contributed to the scarcity of raw materials. And the scarcity of raw materials has been one of the factors contributing to the atrophy of the basket making tradition. In the past, everyone could collect their own grass for free from the farm, but now the cost of a small bundle varies from season to season, ranging from 2 to 5 *birr* and is affected by fluctuations in the cost of transportation. The awls, which are used to pierce holes between the coils while weaving the basket, are produced locally by a blacksmith.

The work space should be blessed with prayers praising Allah and his Prophet, Muhammed-prayers learned at Qur'anic school while growing up.[6] Every girl had to repeat a specific prayer before starting to weave. Then the young women in the *moor gaar* could commence work on their baskets, meanwhile discussing current events and news of marriage engagements. When the group had had enough of current affairs, singing took its place. The group often sung together; sometimes two particularly good singers would exchange couplets praising Allah, his Prophet, and the *mooy gaar*. They also praised their friends in song, singing about their good qualities.

The work environment was lively, full of activities and enjoyment. Once a week, on Friday, the group bought grain with the coins they had collected in the water bowl and prepared *shuhum*, boiled grain. A straw was stuck at the center of the *shuhum*, so that everyone would learn table manners. Whoever made the straw fall over was obliged to contribute a certain amount of money to the water bowl.

The weaving of *bitt'i bitt'i*, a small flat basket, is the beginning of a long journey to acquire expertise in basket making. The first stage involves only natural, undyed grass. After mastering the weaving process, one gradually learns to manipulate *qeeha t'ey*, "red and black," a term used for dyed grass, to produce a wide range of complex patterns and designs.

Initially, everyone had to buy from individuals who prepared dyed *agergera* and *qerma*. Amina remembered "the good old days" when mothers used to share their dyed grass with their daughters in exchange for the service of splitting *agergera*. Both natural and artificial powdered colors are still essential components for the making of dyes. The most commonly used colors include *qeeh* (red), *wariiq* (green), *hurdi* (yellow), and *t'ey* (black). These are called *gerengi*, Harari colors, whereas pink and orange are considered tourist colors. The essential ingredients are plants, such as *hurdi inchi* (yellow spice); imported powdered dyes; water; and lemon juice. The dyeing process involves dissolving the natural plant material or the powder in boiling water and then soaking the *agergera* and *qerma* in the solution. Lemon juice is added to set the color.

Color dyeing requires special skill. It is not something any basket maker can do. Although the technique of dyeing may seem easy, it is an intricate process requiring careful timing and measurement of ingredients. Every dyer has her own way of producing dyed grass. Most of the

time the techniques are kept secret by the specialists so that they can maintain an influence on the market. Today only one house in Harer specializes in dyeing basket fiber for market. However, there still are professional basket makers, like Amina, who prefer to do their own dyeing.

Different colors are combined to form patterns and designs of varying complexity. One starts with simple designs like the *uuf horda*, the "foot-print of a bird." More complex arrangements include *qut'ur fetah* (tie and release), *finch'iq* (splash), *fershi mahallaq* (coin), *gebre merfi* (slave needle), *meqnati* (belt), *bisaat'* (rug), and *mesob* (bread table).[7] Today there are more than twenty-five designs and patterns. Some of the designs are named after building and place names, such as Muhammed Ali *gar*, a building built inside the city walls by a wealthy Indian merchant (ca. 1910), and "Bombay," named for the textile of similar design that is imported from Bombay. Many of the design names refer to animals, like the previously mentioned *uuf harda* and also *adurru iin* (the eye of a cat) and *dokhon lanka* (the trunk of an elephant), etc.

To produce these designs Amina demonstrated the painstaking steps of counting coils and interweaving *agergera* and *qerma*. She adorns the *oot*, the "good" side of the basket, with *T'ihin*, refined weaving. *T'ihin* weaving is used to produce high-quality Harari baskets. The other type of weaving, called *toh toh*, or unrefined, is mainly used for tourist baskets. The *ari*, the "bad" side (inside), is the functional side of a Harari basket; the *oot*, with its iridescent *qerma*, is decorative.

Harari basket designs usually integrate geometric patterns of triangular, rectangular, and lozenge shapes. There are also zigzag patterns that imitate wavelike movement. Some of the basket makers have integrated calligraphy in their basket designs. Amina, for instance, has used both Arabic and Amharic letters in her baskets. Most of the inscriptions are either the personal names of owners or specific Qur'anic quotations.[8] Amina told us that there is room for creativity, for introducing new designs and patterns, but that the conservative demands of the market for traditional dowry baskets do not favor innovation. Thus the collective aesthetic values of the community in Harer have discouraged individual expression and creativity.

The six basic basket shapes may be classified as follows: flat circular, flat at the center and flaring out at the edge, triangular, rectangular, conical, and hemispherical. Before her wedding, every Harari girl must prepare the following baskets: one *gufta mudaay* (hairnet container), two *it'aan mudaay* (incense container), two *bissha mudaay* (chewing gum container), four *aflala ufffa* (a conical lid), four *finjaan gaar* (a small lidded container), and six *sehna segaari* (a small plate) (plate. 2). Today some of the larger sets of baskets have been reduced to sets of two because of the high cost of baskets. Amina commented that the introduction of the modern school system, which requires a major time commitment, does not allow girls enough time to prepare the necessary items for their dowries. It used to take about a year to complete a set of dowry baskets. This situation has brought about the establishment of a new occupation: professional basket making. Today, in the city of Harer there are fewer than ten professional basket makers, who are responsible for producing almost all the dowry baskets. Each professional has her own specialty. Amina's specialty is the *aflala ufffa*. Now, a girl's family must spend a substantial sum to acquire the baskets needed for marriage. In May 1993, Amina quoted us these prices:

gufta mudaay 1,000 birr
bissha mudaay 125 Birr
it'aan mudaay 125 Birr

aflala ufffa 250 Birr

finjaan gaar 225 Birr

sehna segaari 250 Birr

This new trend has affected both the social and the symbolic significance of baskets, as well as the market for Harari baskets. Although it remains an important symbol of identity, the basket does not play the central role it used to. Nevertheless, a minimum standard is still maintained. Every bride must bring a minimal set of baskets to her marriage. The continued social import of baskets in Harer is manifest in a number of traditions. At the end of the honeymoon both the bridegroom's and the bride's relatives come together and compete in song. The bride's side mentions the quality of the baskets that the bride has made. It is therefore critical for pride's sake that every bride have some baskets.

Amina is known for the quality of her work. With an expert eye one can distinguish her work from that of other basket makers. Her skill may be appreciated by examining the *aflala uffa* that she makes - veritable works of art (fig. 3.7, plate. 2d). Those familiar with the art of basket making will know how difficult it is to coil a conical form and will appreciate the exquisite proportions and the perfect execution of the design patterns.

The income derived from basket making is not enough to live on but it is better than it used to be. The aphorism *Merfi niki weldim alaleka*, meaning "A piece of an awl does not raise a child," instructs one not to indulge in basket making as the sole means of making a living. Producing baskets should supplement one's primary mode of subsistence; one should never rely on it as a primary source of income. Amina was forced to stay at home when she became responsible for caring for her blind mother. Her limited mobility influenced her decision to become a professional basket maker. Amina spends roughly five hours a day working on baskets. She told us that her income is barely enough to survive. It takes a lot of time to produce a *t'ihin* basket. The traditions of production have changed over the last twenty years. The impact of the last regime (i.e., the Derg) on social organization was devastating. One casualty was the *mooy gaar*. The group effort has been replaced by the individual effort.

Most of Amina's baskets are used within Harari society. She does not involve herself with tourist-oriented basketwork. The main reason she has avoided the tourist market is because there is better remuneration for commissioned dowry baskets. Only the best basket makers, like Amina, receive these commissions. The less-skilled basket makers focus most of their production on less-demanding tourist baskets. The demand for Amina's baskets is both local and international. These days, many Hararis living abroad in Europe, North America, and Australia commission their dowries. The introduction of international currencies has substantially inflated the cost of baskets.

A standard Harari house has one living room, called a *gidiir gaar*, with five raised seats (plate 3).[9] These seats signify social hierarchy. The seat immediately to the right of the entrance is called *amir nedeba*; it is the place reserved for the owner of the house or for an *alim* (a learned person). The second seat is *gidiir nedeba*; it is for the elderly. The third is *sutri nedeba*, which functions as a bed for the owner of the house. The *t'it nedeba* and the *gebtiher nedeba* are seats for ordinary people. Traditionally, almost the entire wall surface was covered with basketwork and wooden bowls. Today most *gidiir gaar* also contain enamelware hanging on the same walls, often interspersed with the more traditional baskets and wooden bowls. The different niches serve as bookshelves and cupboards.

Formerly, every Harari woman was supposed to know basket arrangement - if she did not, she could be bitterly criticized. A wife who did not possess this knowledge was considered a *busetti*, "a careless or lazy woman." Every basket has a specific place on the wall. If it is hung in the wrong spot, its symbolic meaning might be confused. One never sees a *lemat* (a large flat basket) hung from a pillar, or a *hamaat moot* (mother-in-law's basket) in the place reserved for the *ukhaat moot* (a bread basket). The presence of a *hamaat moot* in a house indicates that a son has been married, and it must be hung in a specific location to signify this important event.

The role of basketry in Harari society is threefold: utilitarian, decorative, and symbolic. Utilitarian baskets like *ukhaat moot*, *afutu*, and *sugud* are made in Oromo communities near Harer and bought in the Harer market. They are made using simple coiling techniques and are devoid of any decorative pattern. The *ukhaat moot*, the bread basket, has been replaced by inexpensive Chinese enamelware. But some women still prefer to use the basket, especially when they take bread to a house that is in mourning. The *afutu*, or sieve, is also being replaced by plastic or metal sieves. The *sugud*, a special container for grain measurement, might remain as a utilitarian basket for some time because it represents a specific unit of measure.

Harari basketry also serves a decorative role in the Harari house. This function has been affected by the recent introduction of factory-made cement. Many Harari house walls are now plastered with cement, which makes them difficult to pierce for basket hanging. Nevertheless, some of the essential dowry baskets have not lost their decorative function; they are displayed in other contexts, for instance, on tables.

The third role of Harari baskets involves their symbolic significance in rites of passage. Here also the new wave of cultural change has affected the importance of these baskets. Each decorated Harari basket used to play a pivotal role in important social events like the birth of a child or a marriage, but now traditional rituals associated with these events are giving way to modern ones and this has had an impact on the production of most types of baskets. The only basket that continues to maintain a special social significance is the *hamaat moot*, or mother-in-law basket. Every mother-in-law still expects this basket from her daughter-in-law. In the past, the daughter-in-law would make this piece during the first year of marriage, but now professional basket makers have started producing this beautiful basket. Mothers-in-law still carry bread for social events in the *hamaat moot*, denoting that they are on good terms with their daughters-in-law.

The future of Harari baskets is uncertain. Amina is now primarily producing the baskets required for the dowry, and some of her friends specialize in *hamaat moot*, but no one has taken responsibility for the larger baskets such as the *lemat* (a flat basket), *waskembaay* (a conical basketry lid), and *le'ay mooreja* (a basketry plate used as a cover for another basket). They certainly will soon disappear. Nevertheless, there is reason to hope that the tradition of Harari basket making will be sustained by the next generation. Amina's daughter Munira Ahmed is an excellent example of this hope (fig. 3.6). When we worked with Amina in 1993, Munira was seventeen, and already she was a skilled basket maker and adept at making all of the baskets that form a bride's dowry. Perhaps young women like Munira will sustain this magnificent tradition.

-- = --

Acknowledgements:

At the top of my acknowledgment list I must mention Amina Ismael Sherif, who willingly provided much information about Harari basketry.

Next on the list comes Fatuma Ibrahim Getu, who filled in the gaps.

Amatulah Ibrahim (Fatuma's mother) and Munira Ahmed (Amina's youngest daughter) also contributed by providing their knowledge of basketry from two perspectives, that of an old woman and that of a young girl.

And finally, I thank the Harari historian Abdulmuhamin Abdunasir for sharing with me his unpublished manuscript, an important document that sheds light on the historical songs and sayings concerning baskets.

Notes for: Chapter 3. Harari Basketry through the Eyes of Amina Ismael Sherif

1. My own research has revealed that Hecht may be overstating this quality of exclusivity; this issue is discussed at greater length below.
2. The symbolic value of this cone-shaped basket has been forgotten and its utilitarian purpose is unknown. We can suggest a couple of possibilities. It may represent a pre-Islamic phallic symbol, like the wooden *kelecha* (a symbol of authority) of the Oromo. Or perhaps, in an Islamic context, it could represent the minaret of a mosque.
3. Dire Dawa, a large city with close historical ties to Harer, is located 55 kilometers northwest of Harer.
4. Daughters, until marriage (i.e., until they acquire their own land), work on their mother's land.
5. In 1993 a birr was equivalent to US\$.20.
6. Most girls used to attend Qur'anic schools until they reached the age of puberty. Today this traditional mode of education has been replaced by state-sponsored schools that include Islamic education through the eighth grade.
7. Hecht 1992 provides color illustrations of some of these patterns.
8. E.g., *mashala* (praise to God), *nafatahana* (we have opened up to you).
9. See the detailed diagram of a Harari *gidiir gaar* that is reproduced in Hecht 1992: 21, Fig. 3. I originally drew this diagram for Hecht. It accurately identifies the key features of the living room, with the exception of various sitting areas. Information about these areas is given in the present essay.

References cited in the text:

Buchholzer, J.; “The Land of Burnt Faces” Translated by M. Michael London, Arthur Baker

Hecht, Elisabeth-Dorothea, “Basketwork of Harar” African Study Monographs, Supplement # 18
p. 1-39

Mohammed, Duri, “The Mugads of Harar”, Bulletin of the Ethnology Society #4,
p.15-19



Figure 3.1 Amina Ismael Sherif weaving a basket.



Fig. 3.2 View of the city of Harer from the South.

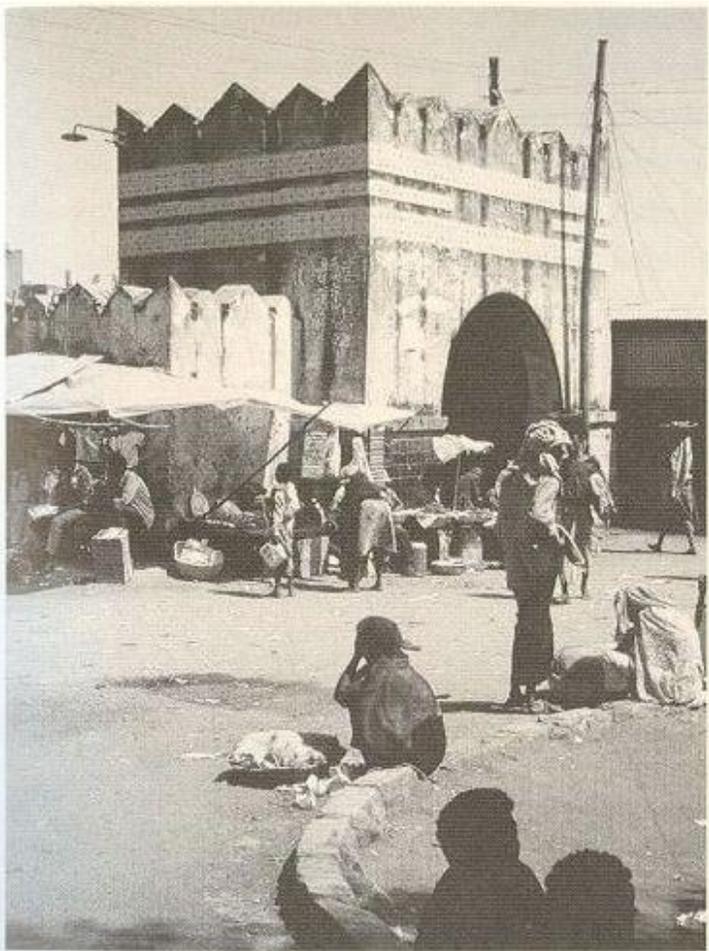


Fig. 3.3 One of the 5 gates to the old walled city of Jugal, commonly known as Harer.

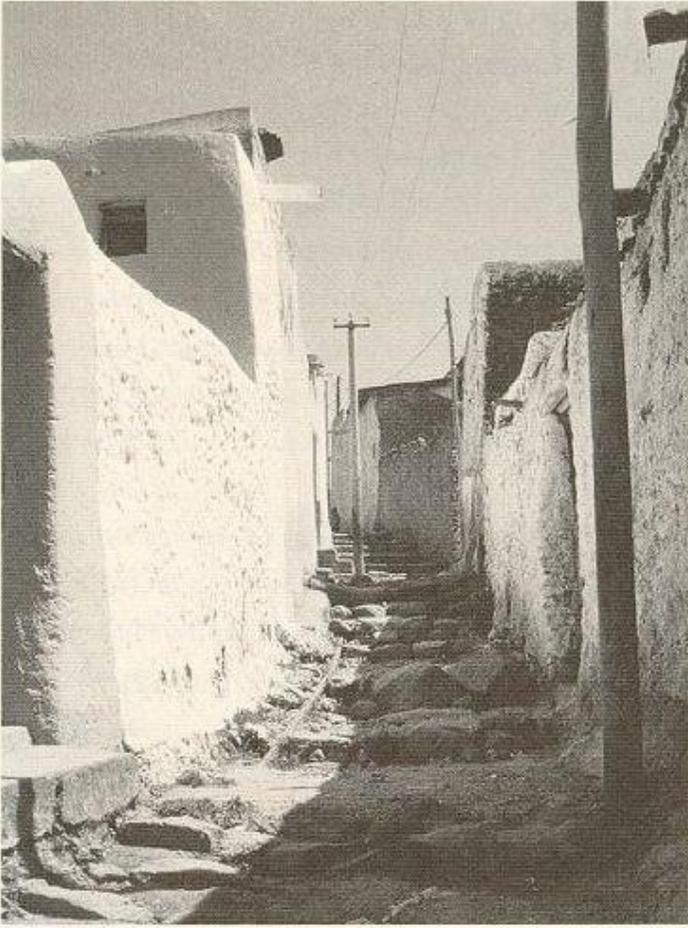


Fig. 3.4 Typical street inside the walls of the old city



Fig. 3.5 The gidiir gaar, or living room, of a well-to-do Harari family.



Fig. 3.6 Amina and her youngest daughter, Munira Ahmed. Weaving baskets. Note the various grasses on the floor in front of the women.



Fig. 3.7 Close-up of Amina beginning to weave an aflala uffa.

Plate 1

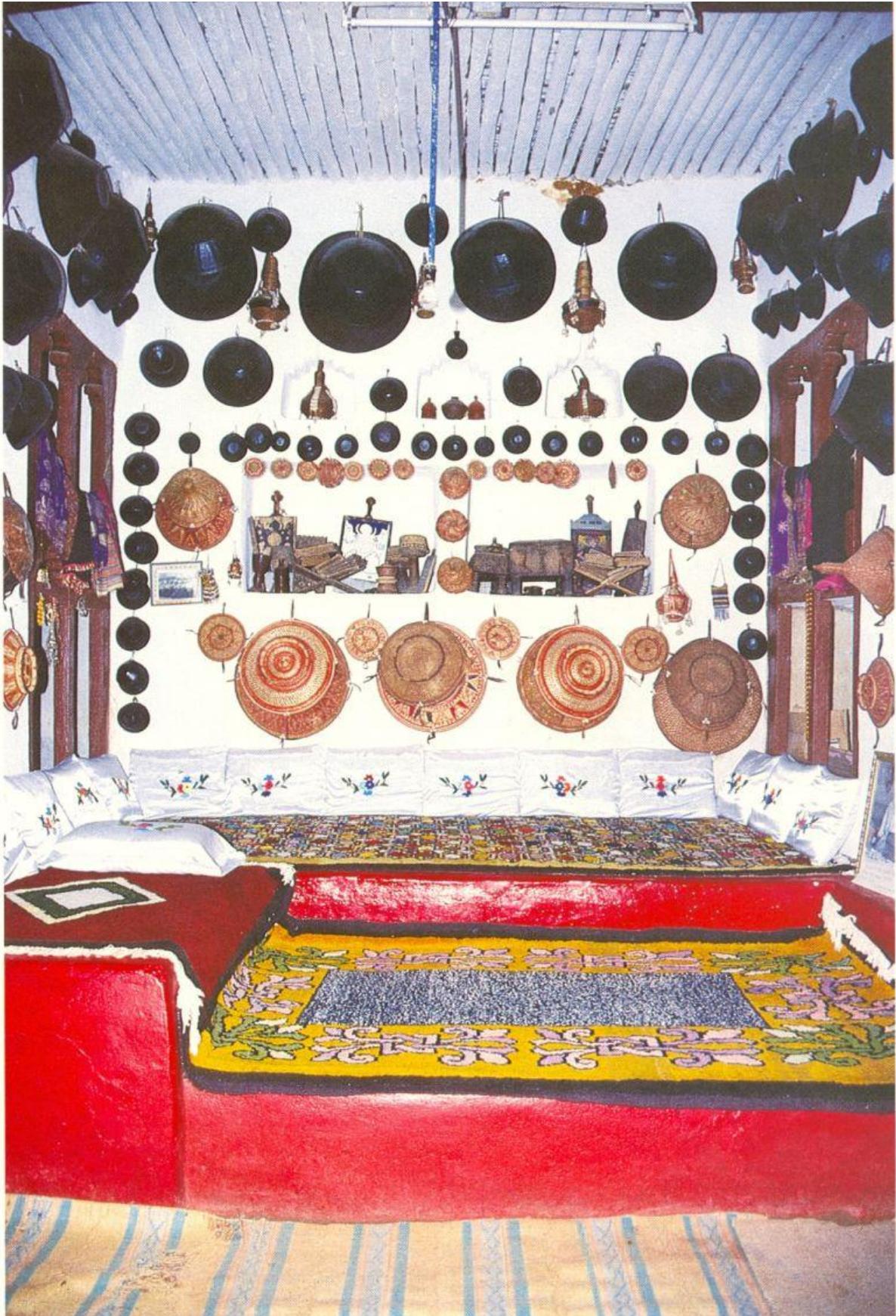
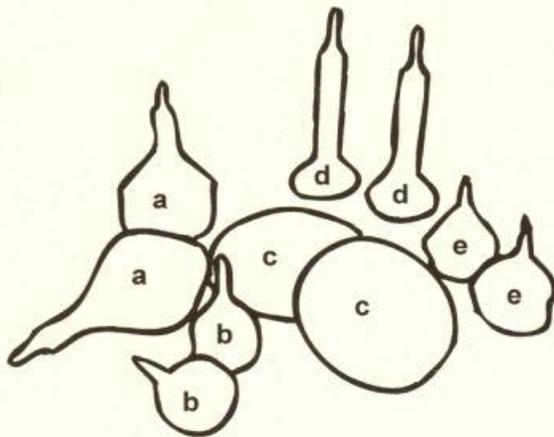


Plate 2



Pl. 2 Various types of baskets produced by Amina and her daughters Munira and Samiyya in 1993: (a) *finjaan gaar*, (b) *it'aan mudaay*, (c) *sehna segaari*, (d) *affala uffa*, (e) *bissha mudaay*.



Pl. 3 (Opposite page) *Gidiir gaar* in the home of a former *qadi* (judge) of Harer. This house and its contents are now preserved as part of the City Museum of Harer.