

Basketry and Cordage

Basketry and cordage represent major types of perishable finds retrieved in this arid part of Israel. The basketry fragments on display are made of date palm leaves, a material convenient for making baskets and mats. Reconstruction of weaving or plaiting techniques is possible because of the exceptional conditions inside the caves of the Dead Sea region. The technique used is a type of plaiting that was popular during Roman times and remained in favor through the following centuries; a variant is still used in the Near East today. Basketry was probably very common, as it is to this day, in various household activities. However, in times of need, baskets and mats also served for collecting and wrapping the bones and skulls of the dead.

Cordage was made from materials indigenous to this region: palm leaves, palm fibers, and rushes. Cords had various uses as packaging and reinforcing material and as handles for baskets.

- [Basket Fragments](#)



Palm leaves First century B.C.E.-first century C.E.

11Q

Fragment A: Length 26 cm (10 1/8 in.)
Width 16.5 cm (6 1/2 in.)

Fragment B: Length 21.2 cm (8 1/4 in.)
Width 19.5 cm (7 5/8 in.)

Four courses preserved

Technique: Braid of 13 elements in
2/2 twill plaiting

Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority (77, 78)

Because of the exceptional conditions inside the caves of the Dead Sea region, several baskets and mats of plaited weave survived intact, allowing the reconstruction of weaving or plaiting techniques. The Qumran plaited basket is made of a single braid ("zefira" in Mishnaic terms) composed of several elements (qala`ot) and spiraling from base to rim. The coiled braid was not sewn together; instead, successive courses were joined around cords as the weaving progressed. In a complete basket the cords are not visible, but they form horizontal ridges and a ribbed texture. Each basket had two arched handles made of palm-fiber rope attached to the rims by passing reinforcing cords through the plaited body of the basket.

- [Cords and Ropes](#)



Palm leaves, palm fibers, and rushes. First century B.C.E.-first century C.E.

The cordage on display represents binding materials of varying thickness and use. Fragment A may have functioned as a ridge or reinforcing cord. Fragments B-D are heavier cords and may have been used in packaging or to tie bundles and waterskins. Fragment E (image not available for online exhibit) is a detached handle.

Fragment A:

Cord
Palm leaves
1Q and 2Q
Diameter 3 mm (1/8 in.)
Technique: 2-ply cable, final twist
in "S" direction (z2s)

Fragments B-D:

Ropes
Palm leaves and undetermined rushes
Diameter 7-10 mm (1/4-7/16 in.)
Technique: 3-ply cable, final twist "Z" (s3z);
one rope has an overhand knot

Fragment E:

(image not available for online exhibit)
Heavy Rope
Diameter 15-20 mm (5/8-13/16 in.)
Technique: Compound 3-ply cable,
final twist "Z" (z3s3z)

Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority (79-83)

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- [More artifacts from the Qumran Site](#)