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Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

RETOLD: Craft Documentation – as Part of the RETOLD Project

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RETOLD is a project implemented through the Creative Europe program of the European Union, whose main purpose is the creation of standard documentation tools to be used in open-air museums. Along with creating documentation, craft documentation is an important component of the project that is the subject of this article.

In the specialized literature there have been and still are debates and attempts to define craft in a way that reconciles all points of view. We will not revisit these discussions, but we will

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reiterate that the project started from the definition given by The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), namely that the craft as an integral part of both the intangible and the tangible heritage constitutes the human activity based on the knowledge and experience accumulated along time which consists of making objects through the skilful use of tools[1]. Thus, we consider that at the centre of the craft is the craftsman who has the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to handle the tools suitable for making different objects (See Figure 1).

Presently, there is an increased awareness of the danger of the disappearance of crafts which is due to various causes, such as the aging of craftsmen, the disinterest of young people to learn a craft, the lack of searching for craft products on the market or the unfair economic appreciation of the work done, which generates the lack of financial motivation, and the lack of involvement of the authorities etc. Therefore, the importance to document the craft increases day by day. Given the fact that there are already countries that make an inventory of the crafts that have disappeared in the recent decades and of those that are on the verge of extinction today, there is a global need for proper, meticulous documentation to be carried out in a relatively short time. We are still at the stage where we can take concrete steps to document the crafts and encourage, primarily through economic means, their practice and for them to be taught on to others. Through the RETOLD project, in this general framework, in which there is no overall unitary vision that would offer a viable alternative solution used in craft documentation, we have considered it more than useful to meet this problem by proposing a general form (a digital document that records information) that would be used by those whose role is to save, collect, preserve and distribute information about crafts, primarily targeting museums or research centres.

The Craft documentation form

The craft documentation form was developed based on the vast experience accumulated over the years by the ASTRA Museum, to which was added the contribution of the other partners involved in the project. The form was designed as an easy-to-use tool, both by those who fill it in (curators, researchers or even volunteers) and by those it addressed, either specialists or the interested public. The proposed form is a simple one, yet it contains all the relevant information about crafts.

The craft documentation form was structured in six sections:

1. the documenters,

2. the craft,
3. the crafters,
4. the tools and materials,
5. the processes,
6. the products/results.

The first section is dedicated to general data related to who documents the craft and where. Thus, there is information such as: the country where the documentation is done, the name and data of the institution that organizes the documentation process, the name and role of the personnel who carries out the documentation, the context in which it is carried out, the location, and the date on which it was carried out.

The second part contains general data about the craft: the name of the craft, its type and category, a brief description of it, as well as the historical period, historical and modern geographical boundaries of the manifestation of the craft. Regarding the type of craft, we have formulated four options that can be chosen by the person completing the form, namely: traditional, when it comes to crafts that are still practiced by authentic craftsmen, historical when the craft is no longer practiced, but there are historical testimonies about its existence (practice), archaeological, when the main source is archaeological evidence, and educational, with the aim of making demonstrations for the visiting public.

As to the categories, they are the classic ones such as: processing of clay, wood, stone, glass, vegetable and animal fibres, or a new category can be added if the craft does not fit into the predefined list. The advantage of this approach is that by completing the list at a given time you will end up with a glossary of all crafts from all corners of the world.

The third section is dedicated to the craftsmen and their experience. Thus, information such as the craftsmen's general data is requested, such as name, contact details, year of birth, main occupation, the role they have in the documentation activity, as a craftsman who just does the demonstration or who does it on a daily bases, the experience that they have as a craftsman and when they started, the motivation for learning the craft, where they normally work, e.g. if they have a rural or urban workshop or in a museum, whether they also practice other crafts and if they have contacts with other craftsmen.

Information is also required on how they learned the trade, whether they were an apprentice or acquired the skill through formal training. Furthermore, information is captured on whether they experimented with the craft based on historical or archaeological sources, whether they sourced information through specialized literature, paintings, or other material. This section also allows for data to be captured on how to pass the craft on to new generations, formally or informally.

The next section covers the details of the materials and tools used in the craft. Considering that in most cases, multiple tools and/or installations are used, they will be entered one by one, containing information such as the name of the tool or installation, the function or functions it has, how it is used, and the way of acquisition: purchase, production, adaptation by the craftsman or inheritance. And in the case of the raw materials used, they can be entered successively with their name, how they are used and how they were obtained: by collection, directly from nature, following certain rules or by purchase.

The fifth section is dedicated to the production process itself. This section begins by asking for information on the raw materials used and the processing steps up to the point of use in the craft. The most important part of documenting a craft consists of information about the working techniques used and the sequence of work phases. To document each work stage, the techniques, materials, and tools used are described. If the produced object is decorated, a description of the techniques, the tools, but also the motifs represented are included. Other information is also requested, such as adapting the production process if the craftsman has deviated from historical or archaeological accuracy for various reasons, improving products or the process of making products, or best practices related to keeping the workshop clean and the management of losses of products or used materials.

The last section of the form is dedicated to the resulting final product. In addition to the name and description of the product, there is also information related to the use of the product, in what way and by whom, how long it can be used and whether it was made with the aim of being sold and how this is done.

This form is supplemented by photo-video documentation of the materials and tools used, showing the entire manufacturing process, presenting each stage of work, and illustrating the final product.

This form is a first proposal to which additions, improvements or changes may be made in the future as it is tested on a wider scale. However, we believe that it will be of real use in everyday activity, both from the point of view of the information contained and from the point of view of efficiency. Furthermore, the created database will have a unitary character and will be able to be used in future research.

In the context in which the world is in continuous change, in a continuous process of modernization, technology and digitization, we believe that the advantages given by this transformation must be used to the maximum. Thus, the craft documentation form, together with those related to the documentation of constructions in open-air museums, has been integrated into a digital application that is very easy to use, by both the person doing the documentation, but also by the beneficiaries, e.g. specialists or simply the public interested in this part of the cultural heritage.

We believe that such an approach is preferable to a classic one considering the advantages it offers, primarily the creation of a global database, but also the compatibility with various inexpensive device such as smartphones, tablets or laptops, the easy access to the information and its use, the mobility offered by such an alternative, the instant update with new information, and the short time to complete.

The Craft Banners

To make such information accessible, we created three panels (See Figures 2 - 4) presenting documented crafts according to the above questionnaire. This is an easy way for visitors to interact with the crafts even if they are not in the form of live demonstrations. As the space is limited, we have chosen to briefly present the relevant information to the public by choosing only a few of the questions from the documentation process. These are further supplemented with illustrative material. Thus, in addition to the name and what the presented craft represents, there is information on the importance of the craft, the materials, tools and techniques used, the presentation of the work stages, what the final products are and their use. The impact of such an approach is an immediate one that provides visitors a complex image of an object, precisely through the simplicity of presenting how it is made.

Finally, we believe that such a digital approach certainly facilitates the documentation process carried out by specialists in the field, but is also a user friendly document and an accessible tool for the public who are interested or curious about how things were done in the past.

1 Lucy Donkin, *Crafts and Conservation: Synthesis Report for ICCROM*, 2004, p. 5. (https://www.iccrom.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/iccrom_02_craftsandconservation_en.pdf)

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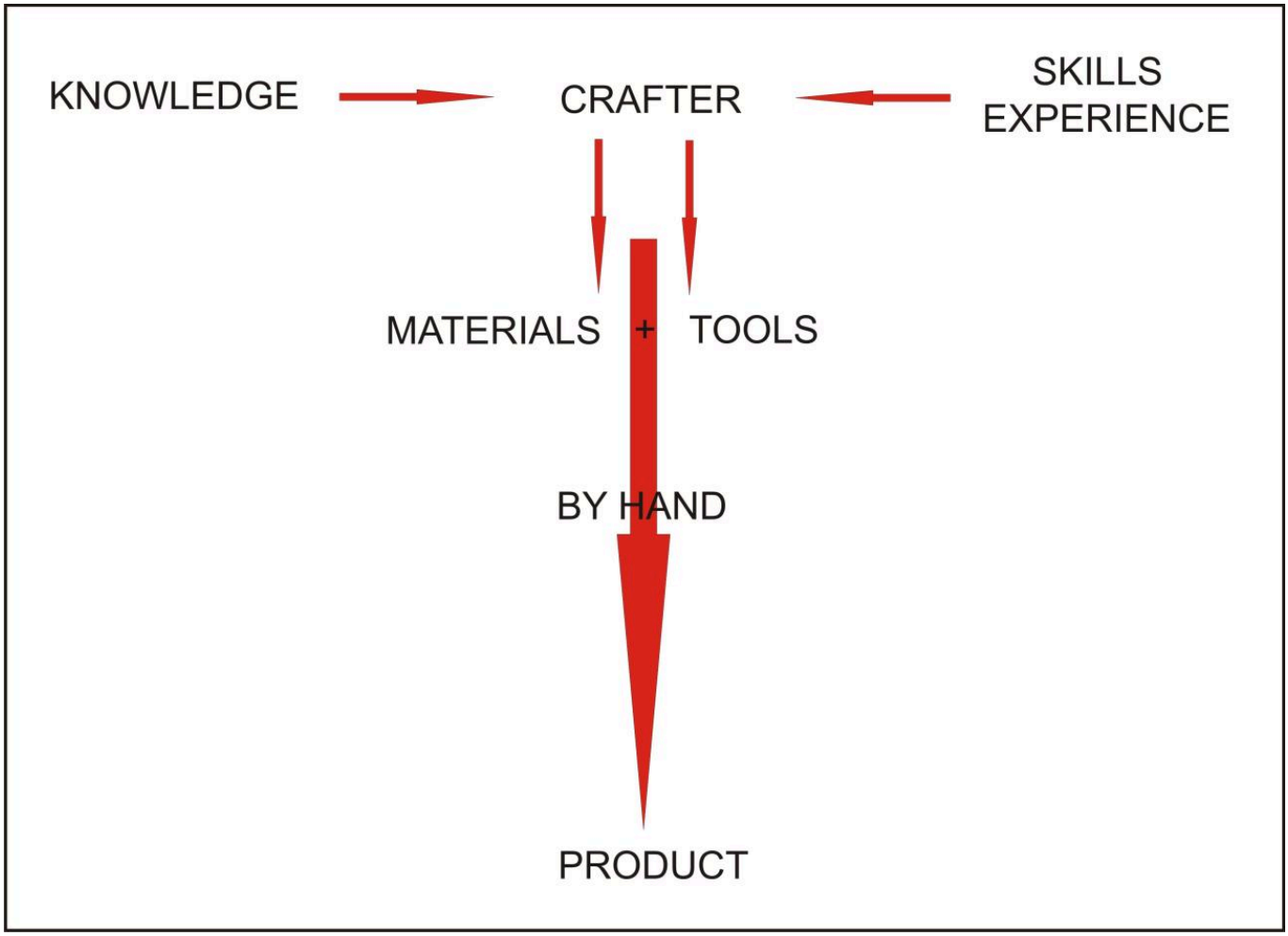


FIG 1. SCHEMATIC OVERVIEW OF THE FLOW OF A CRAFT PROCESS.

FIG 2. PRESENTING WOODWORKING IN ASTRA MUSEUM, ROMANIA

DOCUMENTING CRAFTS

Bullet vessels from the High Middle Ages are well suited for cooking on an open fire.
(Source: Stadtmuseum Berlin)

STIFTUNG STADTMUSEUM BERLIN

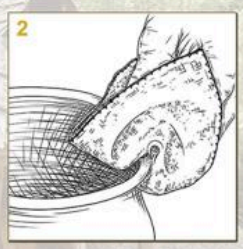
BULLET VESSELS

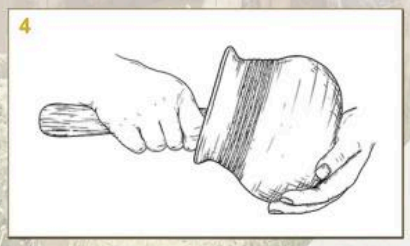
Convex shape pots, very popular in the Middle Ages, everyday pottery

WHY IS THIS CRAFT IMPORTANT?

At Düppel, we found a lot of pots called "Kugeltöpfe" in German, literally "bullet vessels" in English. We have been making and using such pots again already since the mid 1970's. That way, we learned a lot about these pots, and now we can show everybody how to make and use them!
(Source: Förderverein Museumsdorf Düppel)

MATERIALS, TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES





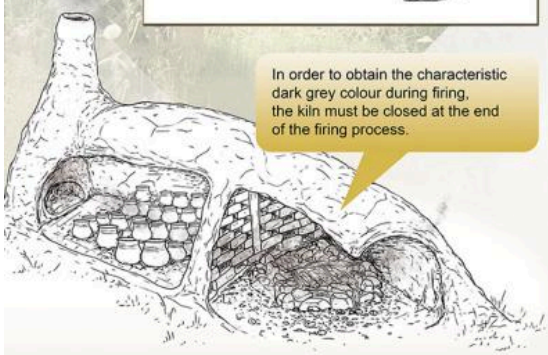
You start with getting sandy clay.

#1. When still wet, you continue by smoothing and thinning the pot with even pressure from bottom to top.
Hint: use a little piece of damp cloth!

#2. Next step is shaping the rim. You need to turn it over and then pull it outwards.

#3. As decoration, we carve grooves all around the top part of the pot. The upper part of the vessel is then left to dry until it is leather-hard, the lower part must remain moist. You then enlarge the neck of the vessel by pressing the edge of a pebble against the inside wall.

#4. Now the pot must be rounded, especially the bottom. You can drive out the clay using your hand, a wooden spoon or even a pebble. Just apply a little force by pressing and tapping.



In order to obtain the characteristic dark grey colour during firing, the kiln must be closed at the end of the firing process.

PRODUCTS AND THEIR USE

By far the most of these pots are used for cooking and for storage. Our houses have a fireplace on floor level. Such a round pot works perfectly if you place it in the mix of glowing embers and ashes.

(Source: Archäologische Illustrationen, Cornelia Golze)

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FIG 3. PRESENTING POTTERY IN STIFTUNG STADTMUSEUM BERLIN, GERMANY

DOCUMENTING CRAFTS

STEINZEITPARK DITHMARSCHEN

The flint knapping workshop in the Mesolithic Settlement in the Stone Age Park.

FLINT KNAPPING

Production of a wide range of different tools and weapons in Stone Age Times.

WHY IS THIS CRAFT IMPORTANT?

The use of flint stone as an important and widespread material for different purposes in the past means that we have a greater number of preserved and excavated artifacts today. In fact, the incredible number of stone artifacts led to the naming of an entire period as the *Stone Age*.

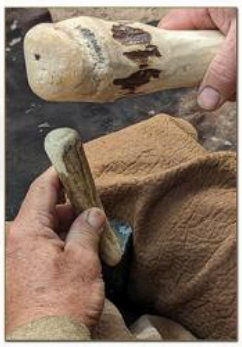
In our museum some original flint tools are exhibited in the permanent exhibition.

MATERIALS, TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

Flint is a sedimentary rock consisting of microscopic, nearly undetectable crystals of the mineral quartz (SiO_2). It can be formed and worked on with (harder) stone, with bone, antler and wood.

There are different methods to work with flint. Above, "opening" the stone using "hard percussion" by hitting it with another stone.

Above, retouching the flint blade with a small antler point.
Right, preparing fine blades from a stone core with an antler point and hammer ("soft percussion").



PRODUCTS AND THEIR USE

Many tools were made from flint. Hunters and gatherers made blades, knives, cleavers, arrowheads, scrapers, and drills. They also made "composite tools" using very many small flint pieces. Early farmers also used flint for daggers, axes, and sickles. Here are some examples (Right), which we use widely in our educational work and programs and Albersdorf (Left).

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FIG 4. PRESENTING FLINT KNAPPING IN STEINZEITPARK DITHMARSCHEN, GERMANY