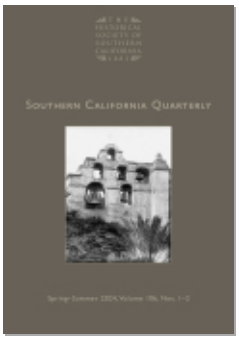
American Indian Baskets in the Mission San Gabriel Collection: Past, Present, and Future



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Southern California Quarterly, Volume 106, Numbers 1-2, Spring-Summer 2024, pp. 155-176 (Article)

Published by Historical Society of Southern California

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[172.116.46.95] Project MUSE (2025-04-11 03:29 GMT)

American Indian Baskets in the Mission San Gabriel Collection

Past, Present, and Future

By Jan Timbrook
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ABSTRACT: An examination of Mission San Gabriel's collection of Native American baskets in their historical, cultural, and conservation contexts reveals that most were not of Gabrielino origin. Rather, baskets from far distant regions predominate. There are even baskets made from 20th-century commercial hobby kits. A comparative study of four other missions' collections found a similar diversity.

KEY WORDS: baskets; Indian baskets; San Gabriel Mission basket collection; California Indian basketry; basket-making.

Introduction

As part of a team of experts who were called in to assess objects in Mission San Gabriel's collections following the disastrous fire of July 2020, I was asked to survey the Native American baskets in the mission's museum. In August 2022, I spent two days examining the baskets in the Mission San Gabriel collection to identify tribal origin, materials, weaving technique, design, and function, and to assess condition. A detailed report was compiled including all that information, photos of each, and

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recommendations for curation, needed conservation treatment, and any considerations for possible deaccession. Before describing the results of the basket study here, it is appropriate to begin with some historical background and cultural context.

California Indian Basketry in History

Throughout the American West, baskets were literally interwoven with nearly all aspects of the traditional daily life of Native peoples. This was especially true in California, where pottery was much less important than in the Southwest. With few exceptions, basketweavers were women who managed wild plants, meticulously prepared their materials, and created objects of extraordinary beauty and utility. Baskets were employed in so many diverse ways—collecting, preparing and storing food, to carry babies, as toys for children, in ceremonial and recreational activities, as hats, home furnishings, and more—truly extending from the cradle to the grave. Because most baskets remained in daily use until they wore out, relatively few have survived from the period before the arrival of the Spaniards.

Explorers, travelers, missionaries, and settlers who came to California were impressed by the skill of Indigenous weavers and enthusiastically collected many baskets as prized souvenirs, sometimes buying out every basket in villages they visited. Baskets had always been made by skilled weavers for sale and trade among Native communities, but the arrival of outsiders created a new market to which the artisans quickly adapted their work.

Life changed dramatically for Native Californians who were affected by the mission system from 1769 with the founding of San Diego de Alcalá through secularization in 1834. New residence conditions, imposition of unfamiliar tasks and schedules, substitution of Catholic for Native religious and ceremonial activities—all created a massive cultural upheaval with many long-time traditions being suppressed. Nonetheless, because the newly-imposed agricultural systems were not always able to provide sufficient food for the growing mission communities, neophytes (baptized Indians) were periodically allowed excursions to gather wild food crops like acorns and other seeds to supplement their

Figure 1. Chumash Daily Life Diorama. *Courtesy of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History.*

rations.[1] These tasks had the effect of perpetuating longstanding and highly valued cultural practices that required using many kinds of traditional utilitarian baskets: seedbeaters, burden baskets, winnowing trays, mortar hoppers, mush boilers, storage baskets, and more. Pottery made in the missions could not fully supplant basketry for these tasks, as it is less versatile and more breakable.

Even under the culturally disruptive conditions in the missions, the artistry of California Indian basket weavers was recognized and rewarded. At Mission San Buenaventura, at least three Chumash women were asked to create extraordinary, finely woven baskets that featured Spanish heraldic designs, and even to include their own names as part of the dedicatory inscriptions in Spanish. These three—Juana Basilia Sitmelelene, María Marta Zaputimeu, and María Sebastiana Suatimehue—lived at Mission San Buenaventura in the years between 1788 and 1838. Their baskets, thought to have been commissioned as gifts for high-ranking governmental authorities, are among the world's great art

1 G. B. Coombs and F. Plog, "Chumash Baptism: An Ecological Perspective," in *'Antap: California Indian Political and Economic Organization*, Lowell J. Bean and Thomas F. King, eds. Ballena Press Anthropological Papers, no. 2. (Ramona, CA: Ballena Press, 1974), 139–53; Steven W. Hackel, *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 84–88, 281–87.

Figure 2. Presentation basket by Juana Basilia Sitmelelene (Chumash, c. 1782–1838). *Courtesy of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History.*

treasures.[2] Most weavers remained anonymous, and surely there were more who continued to make baskets during that time.

By the mid-nineteenth century, other types of containers had come into common use and begun to replace baskets that were formerly essential for most domestic purposes. Native women adapted their skills to make baskets for sale as a source of income to support their families. Indian baskets became particularly popular as collectibles during the era of the Arts and Crafts Movement in the early twentieth century. Accordingly, a large proportion of baskets that have found their way into private collections and museums, including mission museums, show little or no evidence of actual Native use.

The Most Common Question: How Long Does it Take to Make a Basket?

Here we can take a slight detour to explain how baskets are made. Three principal basketry techniques are practiced by cultures around the world:

2 J. Timbrook, "Six Chumash Presentation Baskets," *American Indian Art* 39, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 50–57.

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Figure 3. Chumash baskets in the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. *Photo by Bill Zeldis. Courtesy of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History and Bill Zeldis.*

plaiting (the familiar over-and-under, in-and-out method many of us learned as children making potholders or placemats); twining, in which stationary elements (warp) are bound together by two or three moving elements (weft) twisted around one another; and coiling, in which a structural foundation spirals outward from the center and is enclosed and fastened to the previous row, much like sewing. Each of these three techniques can have many variations and certain versions are preferred by various cultural groups. In the Southern California mission region, both coiled and twined baskets were made, depending on the purpose for which they were intended and the plant materials used.

Each Native group preferred particular plant materials. It was not simply a matter of availability—people did not always choose plants that happened to be growing conveniently nearby. Instead, weavers engaged in specific practices that helped their preferred plants to grow more vigorously with particular growth forms that would be optimal for weaving. In different parts of California deergrass and beargrass were burned to encourage, respectively, flower stalks for coiled basket foundations and white flexible leaves for decorative overlay designs.[3]

3 Whether this was a gendered activity is almost never specified in the literature. (*continued, next page*)

It was women who would heavily prune willow, sumac, and redbud, or even cut them to the ground so new shoots would grow straight, unbranched, and flexible. They regularly dug sedge and bracken fern, which softened the soil and removed rocks and competing vegetation so that the root-like rhizomes would grow long, straight, and easy to harvest. All these methods were sustainable, designed to ensure availability of future supplies.[4]

The particular plant parts have to be harvested at the appropriate time of year for each species. Once harvested, the material may undergo preliminary preparation—splitting, peeling, trimming—before being set aside to dry for as long as several months, depending on the plant. This is important so that the material will not shrink further after the basket is woven, which would cause it to loosen and fall apart. Later, the strands or sticks may be further scraped, split, trimmed and sized uniformly, after which they can be bundled and stored indefinitely. Thus prepared, the material is soaked again to make it pliable for weaving. Collecting and preparing the plant materials is often more time-consuming than the weaving itself, and doing it carefully and thoroughly is essential to the success and functionality of the end product.

Twining was prevalent and often quite elaborate in northern California. In the south, twined baskets were made without decorative colored designs and could be either open weave or close-twined from whole or split stems of various species of juncus, tule, willow, or sumac. They ranged from simple gathering baskets, to trays for winnowing and sifting, to tar-lined or pitch-coated water bottles.

Among Native peoples in the Southern California Mission area—roughly from Lompoc to San Diego—most weavers used the same set of

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Gov. Arrillaga's proclamation issued at Santa Barbara in 1793 prohibiting Indian burning throughout missionized California specifically refers to "old women" setting fire to fields and pasturelands. J. Timbrook, J.R. Johnson, and D.D. Earle, "Vegetation Burning by the Chumash," *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 4, no. 2 (1982): 163–86, especially 170–73. Although the primary purpose of burning grasslands was to promote growth of seed food plants, basketmaking—like seed-gathering—was largely the province of women. Therefore, it might be logical to assume women were doing the burning for certain basket materials. Cultural burning was nearly extinguished before the 20th century but is undergoing a revival today. From a contemporary Native perspective see: https://ciba.org/rekindling-culture-and-fire-program/

4 M. Kat Anderson, *Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California's Natural Resources* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), especially pp. 134–44.

plant materials and similar weaving techniques in their coiled baskets. These were made with a foundation of either three very slender rods of juncus rush stems (predominant among the Chumash) or a bundle of deergrass flower stalks (most common further south). The coils were bound and stitched together with sewing strands split from Indian rush (*Juncus textilis*) in natural tan to dark-orange colors or dyed black for sometimes very complex designs. White strands were peeled and split from new shoots of a woody plant locally known as sumac (*Rhus aromatica*), a relative of poison-oak. The sewing always proceeded to the right as held by the weaver. Splicing in new sewing strands, as in changing colors to create designs, involved tucking the projecting "fag end" of the new strand under the next stitch—a distinctive regional technique that is often called the "mission stitch." An exception is in Chumash baskets, which usually have the fag ends pulled close to the foundation or clipped off, leaving a tiny stub. Coiled baskets were so tightly woven that they could hold water; some were used to boil food with heated rocks immersed into the liquid contents.

So, to return to our question: How long does it take to make a basket? The short answer is, it can take years. The weaving is only the end-most, visible part of the process. There are no shortcuts. These baskets are entirely made by hand using wild-harvested, often painstakingly managed native plants. Designs are made with different-colored materials—either in their own natural colors or dyed in another lengthy process—that are woven into the basket as it progresses, not painted on or added later. Weavers do not make a pattern or diagram to follow. They carry an image of the desired design in their heads and count stitches as they calculate how to make it happen.

And, it is important to note that, with few exceptions, all of this—managing the plants, harvesting them, preparing the materials, and weaving—traditionally has been accomplished by women who were also caring for children, gathering, storing, and preparing food, and a host of other domestic responsibilities. They didn't clock in and out of dedicated weaving time. What may seem a simple craft, whether it results in humble everyday utilitarian objects or works of stunning beauty, basket making requires immense knowledge and skill. California Native weavers were and still are biologists, ecologists, horticulturists, chemists, and mathematicians. Take

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a few moments to think about the dozens of baskets that were made and used in each family prior to the establishment of the missions, the number of families in each community among the hundreds of Indigenous groups throughout California and beyond, and you gain appreciation and respect for what each historic basket is: a world in itself that represents millennia of observation, practice, building a body of knowledge, and carrying it on. Native American basketmaking remains alive and well, being carried on widely as a point of cultural pride by Native people today in the same way as their ancestors did for generations.

Baskets in the California Missions Today

As sites of Native communities for generations, many of the California missions have Native American basket collections in storage or on display, but records about them are often incomplete or nonexistent. Only rarely do these collections include baskets that were documented as having been made by Native people in the nearby area or that are known to date from the time when that particular mission was active. Because the goal of missionization was to convert the Natives to Catholicism and also to mold them into productive citizens of the Spanish empire, the padres—with few exceptions—paid little attention to documenting or collecting Native American material culture objects like baskets. In mission collections that exist today, therefore, most of the baskets appear to have been made in more recent times and by Indigenous groups far outside their local region. To those lacking training in Native American culture and California basketry, this has often led to confusion in the interpretation and display of these baskets in missions throughout California. Lacking documented provenance, however, baskets can still be identified and interpreted by comparing their shapes, designs, plant materials, and weaving techniques with those of other baskets that have known, documented origins in one Native cultural group or another.

Baskets have come into collections of the California Missions in much the same way various kinds of objects do in other museums—some are from serious collectors who have good documentation of the objects' origins, but many are given by donors who inherited objects they'd rather not keep, or have things that no longer interest them, or

Figures 4 and 5: Perfecta Encinales baskets at Mission San Antonio de Padua. *Jan Timbrook photos. Courtesy of Mission San Antonio de Padua.*

are downsizing. They are reluctant to throw things away or send them to thrift stores, but they can feel good about giving them to a respected cultural institution. To evaluate the collection of baskets at the San Gabriel Mission, the collections of four other missions were compared with San Gabriel's, providing a wider context and revealing similarly diverse assemblages.

For example, **Mission San Antonio de Padua**, near Jolon, in Salinan territory, housed eighty-four baskets when I visited in 2018: thirty-three from the Southern California Mission area, seventeen from northern California, ten from elsewhere in California, eight Southwest, two Great Basin, two Pacific Northwest, two from Mexico, six unidentified, and two non-Native. In this collection, some information has been preserved on tribal origin or previous ownership. Two rare baskets on display at Mission San Antonio are documented as the work of Perfecta Encinales (1839–1913), whose family lived in the area and wove in the Salinan style, though she herself was of Yokuts ancestry.

Mission Santa Barbara currently houses twenty-three baskets: seven from Southern California including three Chumash and one Cahuilla, five from Northern California, four from the Great Basin and Southwest, and seven from outside of North America, including one Yanomamo basket from tropical South America. According to a former director, a

Figure 6 (*above*), and detail, Figure 7 (*right*). Cahuilla Basket at Old Mission Santa Barbara, with label on masking tape on underside: "#4 Hagemann Coahuila [*sic*] Mission Indian 1884." *Jan Timbrook photos. Courtesy of Mission Santa Barbara collection.*

Chumash basket was among objects stolen from an exhibit in 1986 and never recovered. The two Chumash baskets now on display were transferred from Mission San Antonio in the early 1980s. The rest of the basket collection—along with archaeological artifacts, furniture, sculpture, and other mission-related material—is in storage.

Mission San Buenaventura was the home of the Chumash women who made the extraordinary so-called presentation baskets discussed above.[5] The last three active Chumash weavers in the early twentieth century—Petra Pico, Donaciana Salazar, and Candelaria Valenzuela—also lived nearby.[6] In 2019, San Buenaventura housed five Chumash bas-

5 Timbrook, "Six Chumash Presentation Baskets," 2014.

6 K. M. Brown, J. Timbrook, and D. N. Bardolph, " 'A Song of Resilience': Exploring Communities of Practice in Chumash Basket Weaving in Southern California," *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 38, no. 2 (2018): 143–62.

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Southern California baskets at Mission San Buenaventura: Figure 8 (*left*), Gabrieleño/Tongva, Figure 9 (*right*), Chumash from Camarillo family. *Jan Timbrook photos. Courtesy of Mission Basilica San Buenaventura.*

kets, one Gabrieleño/Tongva,[7] five from elsewhere in California, three Southwest, two Great Basin, two from the Seri in Northwest Mexico, and one from South America. Of nine Chumash baskets collected by the historically important Camarillo family that were loaned from St. Mary Magdalen's Church in Camarillo for an exhibition at the University of California, Santa Barbara in 1964, four are now at San Buenaventura. The other five have not been located.

Mission San Fernando currently has about seventy-five baskets on display in their on-site museum. Many exhibit labels include donors' names but information about tribal origin, and especially about materials, is not always correct. As in other mission museums I have visited, very few if any of the baskets could have been made in Native traditions

7 In the colonial era, the Indigenous peoples were labelled by the missions established in their midst. Thus, the Native peoples in the greater Los Angeles basin were referred to variously as Gabrielino/Gabrieleno/Gabrieliño/Gabrieleño. Historians over the years have chosen whichever spelling they preferred. The State of California Native American Heritage Commission, which uses the cultural terms self-reported by tribal groups, recognizes the following, under the heading of Gabrieleño: "Gabrielino/Tongva Nation of the Greater Los Angeles Basin," "Gabrieleno/Tongva San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians," and "Gabrieleño Band of Mission Indians/The Kizh Nation." For consistency in this article and the other articles in this Special Issue, we have followed the preference of our one Gabrieleño author, Yve Chavez: "Gabrieleño." https://nahc.ca.gov/cp/tribal-atlas-pages/gabrielino-tongva-nation/.

Figure 10. Part of the basket exhibit at Mission San Fernando. Left to right: Navajo, two reed-and-raffia baskets labeled as Otomi from Mexico, and a multicolored Mexican basket labeled as Pueblo. *Jan Timbrook photo. Image used with permission of Mission San Fernando.*

from the local region. Here, the largest number (nineteen) are Sherman Indian School baskets made with commercial reed and raffia, or in one case, pine needles.

Only four baskets—two of them probably Diegueño—are made with traditional Southern California native plant materials by Southern California peoples, and none can be confirmed as having originated in the greater Los Angeles area. One small bowl (figure 11) has a Chumash-like design layout but is labeled as Mexican, possibly Otomi. Perhaps this label got misplaced from a different basket. Of the other baskets at San Fernando, thirteen are from Northern California, six from Great Basin peoples, fourteen from the Southwest, eight from the Northwest Coast and Alaska, three other North America, two from Mexico or South America, and five are of unknown origin. According to San Fernando's Director of Archives, "everything is out" on display, and no baskets are in storage.

Figure 11. A small basket with a Chumash-like design, but labeled as Mexican, possibly Otomi. *Jan Timbrook photo. Image used with permission of Mission San Fernando.*

The Mission San Gabriel Basket Collection

As noted above, some of the missions have maintained some information about their baskets' original collectors or donors. For the Mission San Gabriel collection, however, accession records were not kept. The current Mission Administrator surmises that various anonymous people apparently donated these undocumented baskets over the years under the assumption that the baskets were Indian-made and therefore the mission would naturally want them.

Of the twenty-seven baskets at Mission San Gabriel, very few could have originated in the local region or during the Mission Era. A large proportion are from Southwest tribes, and some of those still have a seller's tag stapled onto them. Others are surely either "Indian School" baskets or non-Indian, made with commercial materials commonly sold as craft kits. So, unfortunately, the bulk of this collection does not reveal anything about Native life at Mission San Gabriel.

Three of the baskets were made with traditional materials and techniques by Native people in the Southern California region affected by the missions, and they do shed light on Native life in California, most likely during the nineteenth century. These baskets could have been used for traditional utilitarian purposes like food preparation.

A fourth Southern California basket (cat. no. MSG-1023), is a twined seedbeater like those made by Cahuilla people, whose homeland spans the interior desert regions from Riverside south to Anza Borrego and east to

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(*top*) Figure 12. A coiled tray, probably Gabrieleño/Tongva from the Los Angeles area now on display at the Mission San Gabriel museum. *Mission San Gabriel Historical Collection* (hereafter referred to as MSG), *1017. Photo by John Sullivan, as are other images in this article whose photographers are not identified.*
(*bottom, left*) Figure 13. A large, deep bowl, probably Fernandeño, from the Los Angeles area. *MSG-1019.*
(*bottom, right*) Figure 14. A large, deep bowl, Chumash, from the Santa Barbara-Ventura County area. *MSG-1020.*

Palm Springs.[8] It is the most interesting basket in the collection, a beautiful example of a widely important Native Californian tool that, being purely utilitarian and not decorative, is often overlooked by collectors

8 A. L. Kroeber, *Ethnography of the Cahuilla Indians,* (Berkeley: University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology 82, no. 2 (1908): Plate 3, center; C. L. Moser, *Native American Basketry of Southern California* (Riverside, CA: Riverside Museum Press, 1993), 21 (fig. 17) and 89 (no. 133).

Figure 15. A twined seedbeater, like those used by Cahuilla people of the interior desert region east of Los Angeles–San Gabriel. It is a beautiful example of an important Native Californian tool. *Jan Timbrook photo. MSG-1023.*

and seldom seen in museums. This seedbeater is one of three baskets featured in the newly renovated San Gabriel Mission museum.

Two other baskets are very good examples of "mush boilers," a type used throughout California for cooking acorn soup, a staple food consumed daily. After pulverizing dried acorns and leaching the resultant flour to remove the bitter tannic acid that makes acorns unpalatable, Native cooks added water to the acorn mix in a large, well-woven watertight basket. Heated stones were dropped in and stirred constantly until the liquid came to a boil and thickened like porridge. One example, long on exhibit at Mission San Gabriel, is from the Mono people in the Sierra foothills, the other from the Yokuts in the Central Valley.

Although missions were never established in Yokuts and Mono territory and these particular baskets were made well after the Mission Period, baskets of this type were surely used in mission-era households. Many are still being made and used by California Native people in the present day, especially to prepare food for large gatherings and special occasions.

One last California basket in the Mission San Gabriel collection is from the far northwestern corner of the state: a Yurok or Hupa twined tray (figure 18), with a diamond-hourglass pattern. In addition to having no historic connection to this mission, it is very fragile and badly damaged from mishandling in the past. Coming from a cool, rainy

(*left*) Figure 16. Mono mush boiler. *MSG-1029.*
(*right*) Figure 17. Yokuts mush-boiling basket. *MSG-1040.*

climate, it is not happy in hot, dry Los Angeles. The same is true of a very fragmentary basket from southern Alaska, probably Tlingit (MSG-1020A), Figure 19, which is literally in pieces and is too brittle for any possible restoration.

The largest number of baskets at Mission San Gabriel, fourteen, were made by Native people in the American Southwest, and some still have the seller's tag and price stapled onto them (figure 20). Twelve are Pima (Akimel O'odham) or Papago (Tohono O'odham) (figures 21–23), closely related groups in southern Arizona who were, and still are, prolific basket makers. Their work is very commonly purchased by visitors to their region.

Two more baskets are Navajo—a so-called "wedding basket" tray (figure 24, MSG-1028) and a more unusual bowl with a mono-chromatic design (figure 25, MSG-1001).

There are also two Hopi coiled basket trays that I only saw briefly at the end of my visit, as they had not been included in the assessment project.

Finally, the San Gabriel collection includes three non-Native baskets made with imported rattan and raffia fiber. Basket "kits" that provided these commercially produced materials were marketed to non-Natives in the early twentieth century in connection with popular interest in handmade objects and the Arts and Crafts Movement. (See figure 26.) The works that resulted are often called "white woman baskets." Indian

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(*above*) Figure 18. This Yurok or Hupa twined tray, from the far northwest corner of California, is in the Mission San Gabriel collection. It is in fragile and damaged condition. *MSG-1039.*

(*right*) Figure 19. This fragmentary basket from southern Alaska (probably Tlingit), is in such poor condition it is beyond any possible restoration. *Jan Timbrook photo. MSG-1020A.*

Figure 20. Also in the Mission San Gabriel collection are twelve Pima and Papago baskets from southern Arizona, widely sold to tourists. Here, a Pima basket, with the price tag still attached to it. *Jan Timbrook photo. MSG-1003.*

Figures 21–25. Examples of the non-California-origin baskets from the Southwest that are in the Mission San Gabriel's collection.
(*top left*) Figure 21. Pima. *MSG-1005.*
(*top right*) Figure 22. Pima or Papago. *MSG-1026.*
(*middle*) Figure 23. Two Papago baskets. *MSG-1021.*
(*bottom left*) Figure 24. Navajo. A so-called "wedding basket" tray. *MSG-1028.*
(*bottom right*) Figure 25. A more unusual Navajo bowl with a monochromatic design. *Jan Timbrook photo. MSG-1001.*

Figure 26. A photo of a basket kit from the Navajo School of Indian Baskets, 1903. This is a photo of a very rare example of a basket kit. These are commercially processed materials that do not grow in North America. The raffia is from leaves of a palm native to Madagascar, and the "reed" (also called rattan) is from a vine-like climbing palm native to the Philippines. Presumably they were gathered by local people in those areas, nothing to do with Native Americans at all. *Courtesy of the Autry Museum, 4.C.241.*

boarding schools also used these kits, but studies have found no visible distinction between the products of the different makers.[9] Examples of such baskets have occasionally turned up in museum collections, but they are best categorized as "imitative" rather than Indigenous.

9 E. Pearlstein and B. B. Potter, "Identifying Intrusive, Non-Indigenous Basketry in Museum Collections," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 36, no. 3): 239–64.

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Figures 27, 28, 29. Three examples of "Imitative" baskets in the Mission SanGabriel collection: (*clockwise from top left*) Figure 27, MSG-1038; Figure 28, MSG-1024; and Figure 29, MSG-1022.

In Conclusion

Most of the baskets now housed at Mission San Gabriel have little or no connection to any of the old missions and cannot tell us much about Native people and their lives there. Exceptions are the three Southern California baskets and the Cahuilla seedbeater discussed above, which, although probably not as old, are like baskets that could have been used at the time. The Yokuts (figure 17) and Mono (figure 16) cooking baskets [on page 170] are from farther away, but are of a type that has long been used by Indigenous people throughout California. It would be appropriate for the San Gabriel Mission museum to retain and care for these baskets. Ideally, arrangements could be made for conservation treatment, including stabilization of damaged areas, to ensure their

preservation. The remainder of the baskets might find more suitable homes elsewhere, either with Tribal museums or individuals who will appreciate them. This collection assessment project allows Mission San Gabriel to incorporate knowledge and recommendations from many specialists to determine the best way to manage, preserve, and interpret their diverse objects for the future.[10]

Postscript: How Should We Care for Baskets?

Environmental conditions: protect baskets from:

- bright light, especially sunlight
- dust and pollutants
- insects and rodents
- extreme temperature fluctuations
- changes in humidity

Handling: make sure baskets are well supported

- Never pick up a basket by the rim or handle
- Lift it with two hands underneath
- Display basket trays flat or at a low angle, not hanging or leaning on a wall or stand

Housing:

- Do not stack baskets directly on one another
- Use acid-free materials

Why are Native American baskets important?

- They can provide windows into the lives of the first people of our country
- They show how Native peoples adapted to the changes of history
- They are part of the cultural identities of Native peoples today

10 Although seldom on public view, baskets identified as Gabrieleño/Tongva are in the collection of the Autry Museum of the American West, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, and the National Museum of the American Indian and the National Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian Institution, among others. Websites of some institutions have searchable digital catalogs.

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