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## **Moroccan children playing and making toys with natural material**

Children use the natural elements and natural material from their environment for their play and toy making activities. These items can be grouped as follows:

- The natural elements: water, wind, fire, earth
- Material of mineral origin: sand, clay, paint, stones, pebbles...
- Material of vegetal origin: cactus, flowers, palm or reed leaves, reed, sticks and summer squash, potatoes...
- Material of animal origin: bones, horns, snail shells, hair, skin, intestines, dung...
- Material of human origin: hair, one's own or other children's bodies.

This short article can only offer an impression of how Moroccan children use natural material (photos from the author). Many more examples are found in my books and publications on Saharan and North African children's play, games and toys that are partially available on <http://www.sanatoyplay.org>

Playing in and with water, with fire and wind gives Moroccan children a lot of opportunities for enjoying themselves. Kites, parachutes and windmills are most often made by boys (photo 1).

Mud, clayish earth and if available real clay are much favoured by Moroccan children to model all kinds of toys. The Pre-Saharan girl of photo 2 made several utensils, hand mills for



wheat or oil, bread ovens, etc. With the same material boys do sometimes make utensils but more often animals, cars, figurines, or a mobile phone (e.g. with pebbles as keyboard and a piece of tin with some text as screen).

Stones and pebbles become multiple purpose toys. They are used as disks to toss up, to throw them on a line or in a little pit. A very common use of stones by girls as well as boys is to delimit pretend houses. In such houses girls from the Central Moroccan town Midelt use water, clay, flowers and herbs, little branches and reed. Yet, they also use much waste material (photo 3).



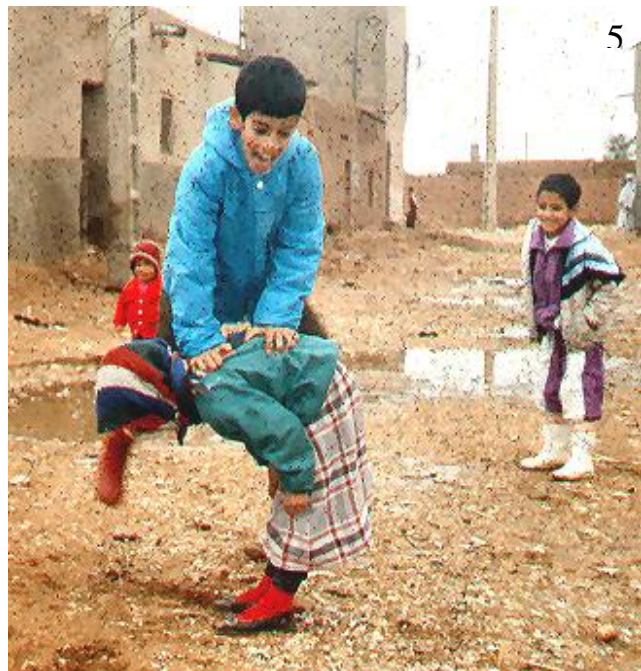
Leaves, especially palm and reed leaves, serve to create different kinds of toys, such as little windmills, animals, cars. In the oases of Meski and Tineghir in Central Morocco, the boys use palm leaves to make dromedaries, mules, gazelles and scorpions and possibly sell them to tourists. Sound-making toys, such as whistles, flutes or drums can also be made with natural material. A cup-shaped flower might become a whistle but young leaves from reed are more commonly used. A piece of paper easily serves the same purpose. Vegetables, like summer squash and



potatoes, can be used to create toys as boys from the little mountain village Aït Ighemour in Central Morocco did. There I found an exceptional 1m high male doll with a big summer squash on top of a vertical branch (photo 4). In the summer squash the boy cuts incisions for the eyebrows and little holes for the eyes, nose and mouth. This doll wears a white hooded upper garment that in other situations is worn by a boy. Another boy of this village made a mule and its driver with the same vegetables.

The intestines of a goat or a sheep might become an exciting toy for young children as among the children from the region of Midelt. In the same region little girls as well as boys played with the intestine of a sheep especially during the Aïd el Kebir, the feast of the sacrifice of sheep. A very thin part of an intestine is well cleaned and closed at one side. Then it is inflated, closed with elastic and given to the little ones as a balloon.

If one looks at the human body as a self-evident means for playing, ones own body and the body of others become major toys for babies and infants. But even at a more advanced age the human body is more than once a resourceful instrument for playing (photo 5).



The above-mentioned examples of toys made by children with natural material offer just a glimpse of what these children experience and learn about materials, techniques and structures. This creation of toys and the playing with them also offer children the possibility to develop their senses, to gain experience by trying them out, to learn from each other and to enjoy being creative. Yet, it is not the finished toy itself that is the most important but the play activities in which these self-made toys are used.