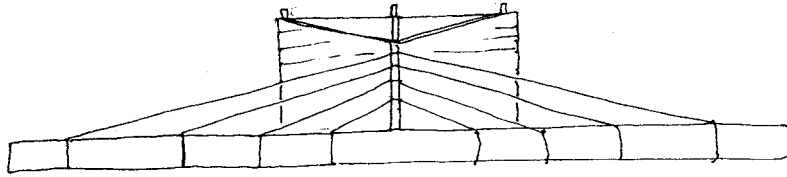
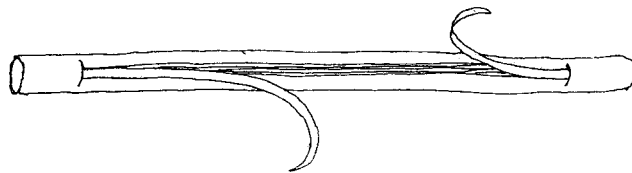


Building a Ngombi

Except for a hardwood bridge the whole ngombi, strings and all, can be made from what the Baka refer to as "bamboo" but which is in fact a species of rafia palm.



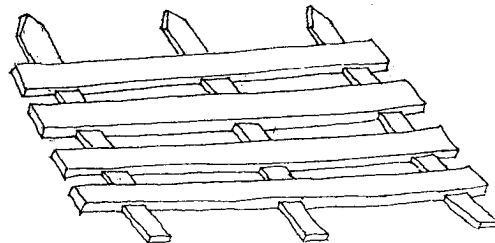
1. A suitable length of the palm stem is cut (about 2 metres).
2. The narrowest edge is heated in the fire along its entire length.
3. The heated edge is beaten with a stick.
4. A thin strip of the outer skin (1-2 cm) is peeled away from the middle to near each end where it is cut, care taken not to cut into the fibres inside:



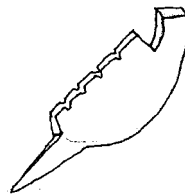
5. Thick fibres can now be seen. Four of these are loosened from the stem and carefully cleaned of all pith. they are still attached at each end to the stem:



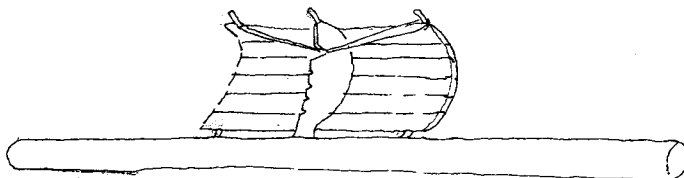
6. Another length of the rafia palm stem is now split into strips like short planks about 30 cm long. the inside of this plant is soft and fibrous but with the consistency of balsa wood, the outer skin is hard like bamboo. Two long, flat, pointed sticks are cut from the outer skin and the softer planks are skewered together onto them:



7. A bridge is cut from a piece of hardwood. this is stuck into the palm stem half-way along its length.

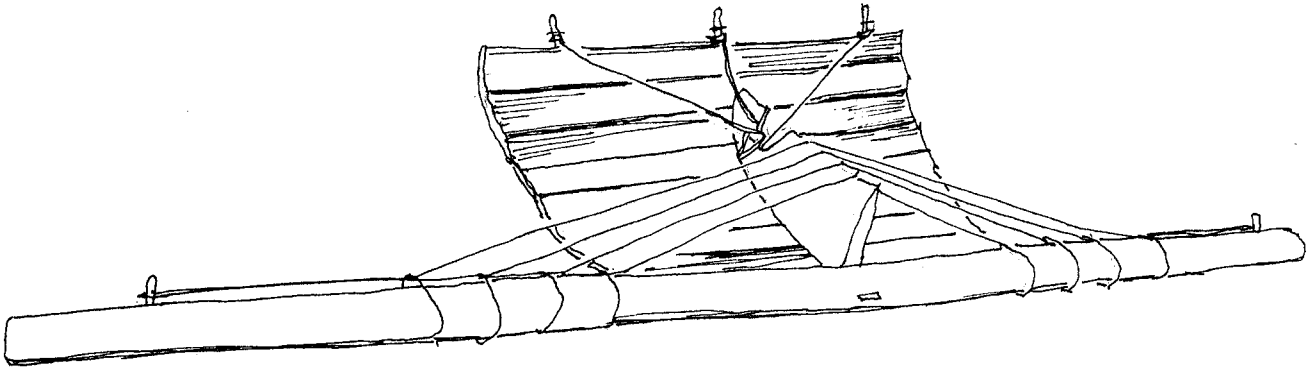


8. The planks made in (6) are also attached. They are bent around the bridge made in (7) and tied in place using bark string. A third sharpened piece of hard skin helps hold it in place



building a ngombi (continued)

9. The strings are now placed in the notches cut in the bridge and tuned by tying bark string around them which can be slid up and down the stem.



10. The ngombi is left to dry and is then ready to play. If a string breaks then a new fibre is separated

11. Often now the strings of the ngombi are made from unravelled cable (also used by the Baka to make hunting snares). They are attached to a small hardwood peg at each end of the ngombi (as above). These strings last much longer than the traditional fibre strings.

12. To make the ngombi louder it is often placed on an upturned cooking pot.



Sound files and Realaudio files of the ngombi can be found at www.baka.co.uk. Several recordings are on "Heart of the Forest - music of the Baka Forest People" (HNCD1378) also available from the website.