

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

PERUVIAN ART

A HELP FOR STUDENTS OF DESIGN



By CHARLES W. MEAD

GUIDE LEAFLET No. 46

SECOND EDITION

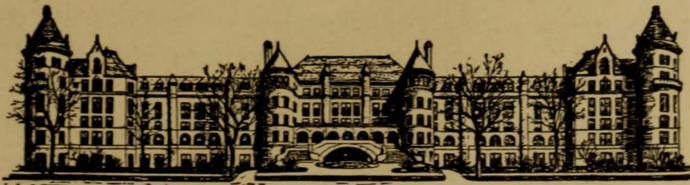


POTTERY VESSELS FROM NAZCA, PERU

PERUVIAN ART

AS SHOWN ON
TEXTILES AND POTTERY

BY
CHARLES W. MEAD



SECOND, ENLARGED EDITION

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PERUVIAN ART

A HELP FOR STUDENTS OF DESIGN

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INTRODUCTION

The Museum's collections of textiles and pottery vessels from prehistoric graves in Peru provide an opportunity for the study of primitive art that is not excelled, if, indeed, it is equaled in any other field. The great beauty of the color schemes and the wonderful number of curious conventionalized animal figures, especially in the textiles, make these exhibits particularly valuable to the student of design. That this opportunity exists and that the Museum authorities as a part of their educational system are providing all the assistance and comfort possible to visiting artists and students are fast becoming known, as shown by the fact that for quite a number of years an average of one hundred and fifty a month have availed themselves of this privilege, while during the last two years that number has been doubled.

As a large part of the students of design who make use of these textiles expect later to obtain positions in textile houses, carpet, rug, or wall paper manufactories, or to enter into some other business where designers are employed, it will interest and encourage them to know that many textile houses have lately put upon the market silks and other materials decorated with designs inspired by the figures and color schemes of the prehistoric Peruvians. Our large textile manufacturers have, year after year, sent their best artists to Paris for designs, having no idea that such a wealth of material, eminently suitable for decoration, was waiting for them in the Museum so near at hand.

During the past year a number of these textile manufacturers have visited the Museum and have become aware of the existence of these collections. Having once seen them they were by no means slow in recognizing their value and in sending their artists to copy the color schemes and create designs from the decorative figures of the ancient Peruvians. Having satisfied themselves of the commercial value of the Peruvian collections to them, they naturally began to look about for the decorative work of other primitive peoples and to-day their designers may be seen at work in many of the Museum halls.

AMERICAN MUSEUM GUIDE LEAFLETS

In a Guide Leaflet it will not be possible to go far in the peculiar art of the Peruvians, and but comparatively few of the innumerable designs can be shown. Their color schemes, which excite the wonder and admiration of artists, must be seen on the original webs, but enough designs can be reproduced to show the general character of this side of their art.

It always gives an added zest to the work when we know something about the material from which we are drawing and for this reason it will not be out of place to say a few words about the history of these cloths. They all come from prehistoric graves; many of them were found still on the mummies when the burial places were excavated. A greater part of them came from the coast region which is a desert tract except for the valleys of the small rivers rising in the cordillera and flowing into the Pacific Ocean. These valleys were very fertile and there the people lived and buried their dead in the dry nitrous sand outside. Rain is all but unknown in this region, which accounts for the wonderful state of preservation in which these webs have come down to us.

The first question that naturally suggests itself to the visitor is—How old are these things? This question cannot be definitely answered. All that can be said is that they antedate the Conquest (1532); that they belong to different epochs, and that the oldest in all probability date back several thousand years. In two papers published by the Museum, my associate, Mr. M. D. C. Crawford, has given the results of his studies in the technique of Peruvian textiles. To these anyone interested in that subject is referred.¹

It is a very common mistake to speak of such a collection of Peruvian textiles as the work of the Incas, for by far the greater part of them were made by the so-called Megalithic people who ruled the country many centuries before the rise of the Inca empire.

Four motives continually occur in Peruvian decorations: the human figure, the bird, the fish, and the puma. These were everywhere employed throughout the country in designs which varied somewhat in the different localities, showing that their arts had developed along slightly different lines.

In studying the designs more space will be given to the figures derived from the fish than to those from the other motives. The reason

¹ Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, Vol. 12, Parts 3-4.

PERUVIAN ART

for this is that the designs from the other three motives very rarely show degeneration to the extent that their identity is not apparent, while many of the fish figures have progressed so far that to recognize the motive one must be familiar with some of the stages through which it had passed in reaching its present form.

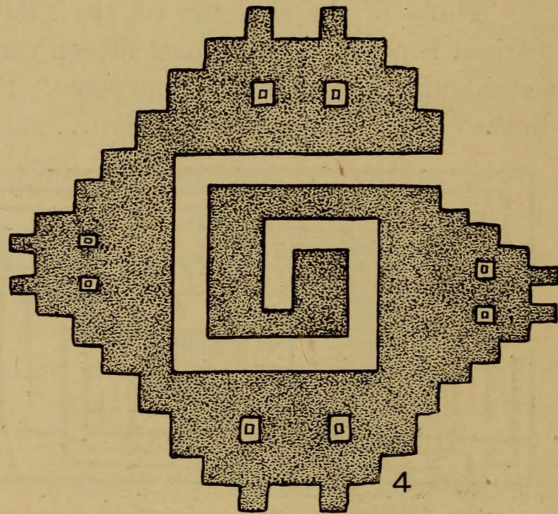
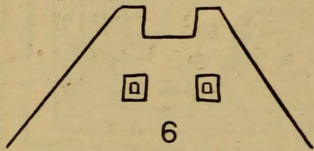
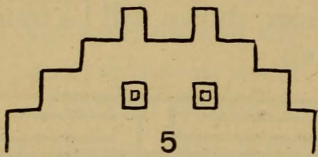
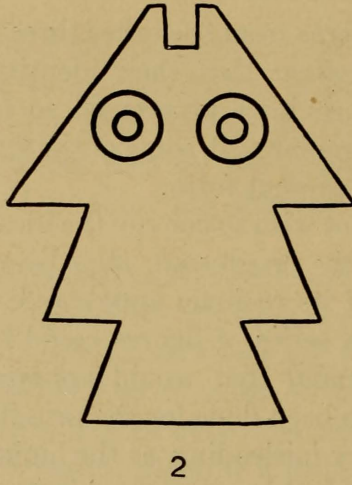
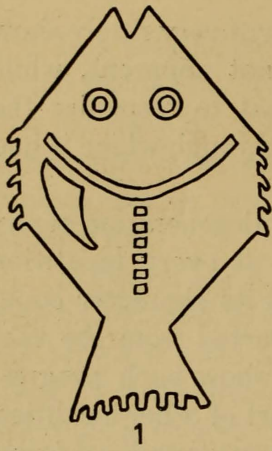
The writer does not wish to convey the idea that degeneration of any animal form constantly progressed, step by step, at every repetition losing a little more of its realistic appearance until its character could not be recognized. A series of figures could be selected from the vast number at our command that would apparently show such progression and this has often been done for the primitive art of other localities, but this method is very misleading, as the higher conventionalized forms were undoubtedly reached by mutations instead of steady progressions.

Many of the sketches on the Plates of this Leaflet were made at various times during the past fifteen years for various papers, illustrated catalogue cards, and other purposes. Every design shown will be found in the exhibition cases in the South American Hall.

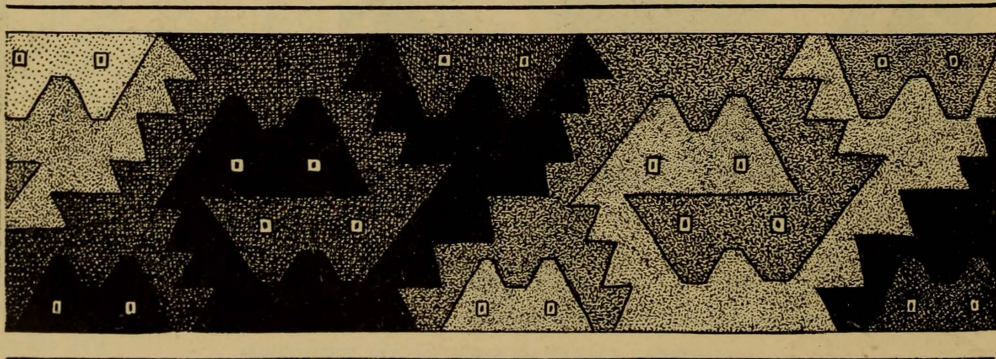


MISCELLANEOUS PERUVIAN DESIGNS

PLATE I



7



THE FISH

PERUVIAN ART

THE FISH

PLATE I

The Peruvians of the coast region worshipped the sea as one of their gods and the fish, being the natural emblem of the sea, undoubtedly accounts for the frequency with which it appears in all their arts. We find it woven, embroidered, and painted on cloth; molded, incised, and painted on pottery; and represented in various ways on their works in metal, wood, stone, and bone. I shall show some of the conventionalized figures that plainly represent fish; others that I have found, during my long experience with art students, where the fish motive is very rarely suspected, and some intermediate figures that I believe will enable the student to recognize this motive in the higher forms of Peruvian art. The first three figures on this Plate plainly represent fish, although degeneration has made considerable progress. They are shown as if seen from above, a common way of representing fish with many primitive peoples.

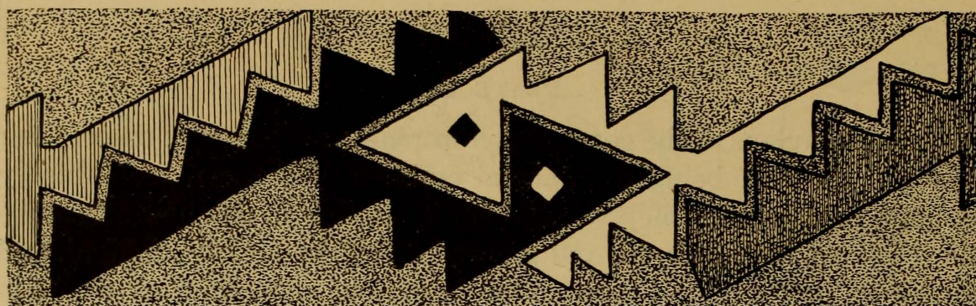
Fig. 1 is painted on a large piece of cloth which formed the outer wrapping of a mummy bundle from Surco. It is painted in black except the curved line representing the gill openings and the fins. The six small squares show the dorsal fin.

Fig. 2 is a very common form, in fact the typical Peruvian fish. If we study carefully all the forms on Plates I and II we shall find that the greater part of them are but modifications of this figure. We shall find the number of points projecting from the sides more or less, or two fish derived from this form interlocked, as shown in Fig. 7.

Fig. 3 is from the wrapping of a mummy bundle found in the vicinity of Lima. The lines representing gill openings are straight in this case. The characteristic projecting points from the sides are present.

Fig. 4 is a design not uncommon in tapestry from the coast region in the vicinity of Lima. It consists of four fish heads, in colors, surrounding a fret. During the many years that design students have worked from these Peruvian collections, I do not remember a single case in which the fish motive was suspected in this figure until I had made it clear by drawing the forms shown in Figs. 5 and 6. The character of such a design when it is woven in the cloth, in a variety of colors, is by no means as easily recognized as when drawn on paper in black and white.

PLATE II



THE FISH

PERUVIAN ART

Figs. 5-6. Fig. 5 is a tracing of the upper fish head in Fig. 4. Fig. 6 was made from the same tracing, but in inking it, straight lines down from the mouth were substituted for the step-form ones of Fig. 5, and this gives us exactly the same head as seen in the fish form at Fig. 2. These step-form lines, caused by the technique of weaving, often disguise a form that would be obvious if the lines were straight.

Fig. 7 shows the interlocked fish design, a form of decoration very common over most of the coast region, where it is found on borders of ponchos, belts, etc. In the poncho border from which this figure was taken the decoration is in diagonal bands, each band having two colors. The black fish shown is interlocked with one in red. The bands on either side are in different colors. A repetition of the same figure, but in different colors, arranged either in rows or, as in this illustration, in diagonal bands, is a prominent characteristic of Peruvian art. If we examine any one of these fish we find that such parts of it as can be seen when another is interlocked with it are like the typical one shown in Fig. 2.

THE FISH

PLATE II

Fig. 1 gives us another form of the interlocked fish design. We see here attached to the tail of each fish a form bounded on one side by a straight line and on the other by a zigzag forming four chevrons or points. This added figure plays quite a part in Peruvian art, as we shall see when we come to discuss their bird forms.

Fig. 2 was traced from the black fish above. If two forms like this are cut from paper, and one of them colored black, they will, on being put together, give the design shown. This form is often found and sometimes a bird head takes the place of the half of a fish head shown here. On turning back to Plate I and looking at the typical fish in Fig. 2 we find that one is but a skeleton or part of the other.

Fig. 3 is also a part of the design above, and is frequently used in decoration just as it is shown here.

Fig. 4 is an example of their work in pyrography. This design was burned into the side of a gourd bowl. The figure spoken of before: one bounded on one side by a straight line and on the other by a zigzag, forms all but the head of this highly conventionalized fish. It varies

AMERICAN MUSEUM GUIDE LEAFLETS

but little from those shown in Figs. 3 and 6, and has the triangular head of Fig. 10. Triangular heads are very common in cloth and on pottery fish forms.

Fig. 5 is another variation in the interlocked fish pattern. As the heads, tails, and crude outlines of the bodies of fish, as the Peruvians represented them, are shown, there has never been any trouble about identifying the true motive.

Figs. 6 and 7 are in relief on pottery vessels. They show again the fondness of the Peruvians for the interlocked design. In Fig. 6 each fish is the same as Fig. 3, which has an extra projecting point. The number of points in the body of a fish or bird was governed entirely by the space to be filled up by the decoration. In Fig. 7 degeneration has not progressed as far as in most of the other figures and the motive is apparent.

Figs. 8-10 are forms common on pottery vessels, sometimes painted, but oftener incised or in relief.

Fig. 11 shows the designs on a tapestry belt. It is very common on the small bags that may have been used as charms. This fish head varies but slightly from that shown in Plate I, Fig. 4, and the means shown there of identification apply equally to this form and its many variants.

Fig. 12 has been identified as the horse mackerel and is a fairly realistic representation of that fish. It is painted in several colors on a pottery vessel from Nazca.

Fig. 13 is cut from a thin sheet of silver. Twenty of these fish are fastened on a cord in the form of a necklace. It comes from Ica, but such fish strung together or with beads were common in many places in the coast region.

The forms shown in Figs. 14-16 represent the shark and are found both on cloth and on pottery vessels.

Fig. 17 is in relief on a pottery vessel from Surco. It is a very common fish form over all the coast region. The original of this sketch is 9 cm. long, and it is often seen very much larger both on cloth and pottery.

Figs. 18-19 are from Nazca pottery. Both show a parallel line of white which in the first case completely separates the body into two unequal parts. Whether this represents the median line or was only a fancy of the artist must be left to guesswork.

PERUVIAN ART

In Fig. 18 there is an idea for the design student. In the original the two parts are in different colors, with the line of white between them. This will suggest to the design student the breaking up of any of the other figures and using the parts so obtained in his work.

THE BIRD

PLATE III

Figs. 1-8 and 11 are from the coast region in the vicinity of Lima. Figs. 1-2 show the typical bird of Peruvian cloth. The heads and necks are fairly realistic. The body consists of the form mentioned in the remarks on the interlocked fish design, Plate II, Fig. 1. As was said, this consists of a figure bounded on one side by a straight line, and on the other by a zigzag which forms chevrons or points. The number of points, or length of the body, depends entirely on the space to be decorated.

Fig. 3. The head is more realistic than in the two preceding figures, but the body is represented in the same way. In the original the space between the head and the body is nearly filled by the head of a second bird, turned in the opposite direction, the two forming an interlocked bird design.

Fig. 4 is from the border of a tapestry poncho, where the decoration consists of a long line of these birds. Each figure is woven in several colors, and they are so placed that two with the same color scheme do not come together. Note the exaggerated topknot projecting over the bird's head. This device makes the whole figure nearly rectangular, and in a row of such designs little space will be left undecorated.

Fig. 5 is painted on white cloth. The heavy outline is black, the body brown, and the eye and space between the mandibles were left white.

Fig. 6. Here again the artist resorted to the same device as is shown in Fig. 4. He has used an exaggerated topknot to balance his designs and cover space.

Fig. 7. In this case the wings have been carried over the head and made to serve as quite a part of the design.

Fig. 8 shows a common bird form in textiles. It will be seen that this is very closely related to the form in Fig. 2. If we substitute the legs in this for one of the points in the body of that one, we shall have practically the same design.

PLATE III



THE BIRD

PERUVIAN ART

Fig. 9 represents a humming bird. A row of these birds is painted around a pottery vessel from Nazca. They are all sucking honey from a six-pointed flower on the upper surface of the vessel. Only a part of this flower is shown in the sketch.

Fig. 10 shows another bird on Nazca pottery. This, like the last described, is beautifully painted in colors.

Fig. 11 is a pelican that has just caught a fish. This design is a part of the woven fabric. Similar figures are also found in relief on cloth. This is done by sewing on narrow pieces of braid. The fish in the bird's mandibles is a common conventionalized form, often seen both on cloth and pottery, especially where space only admits of a small figure.

Fig. 12 shows birds from three Nazca pottery vessels. They are painted white on variously colored darker backgrounds.

Fig. 13 shows the decorations on a piece of vicuña cloth, as it is commonly called, from Pachacamac. The warp threads are cotton, crossed by a weft of vicuña wool, which completely covers them. The ground color is a deep reddish-brown with the decoration in yellow. The effect produced is extremely pleasant and artistic and has made this textile one of the favorites of art students who have many times copied it in colors. It also affords a good example of the influence of basket work on the arts of these people. The lines bounded by zigzags are plainly copied from the work of the basket maker. The birds' necks rise and depend from these basket designs.

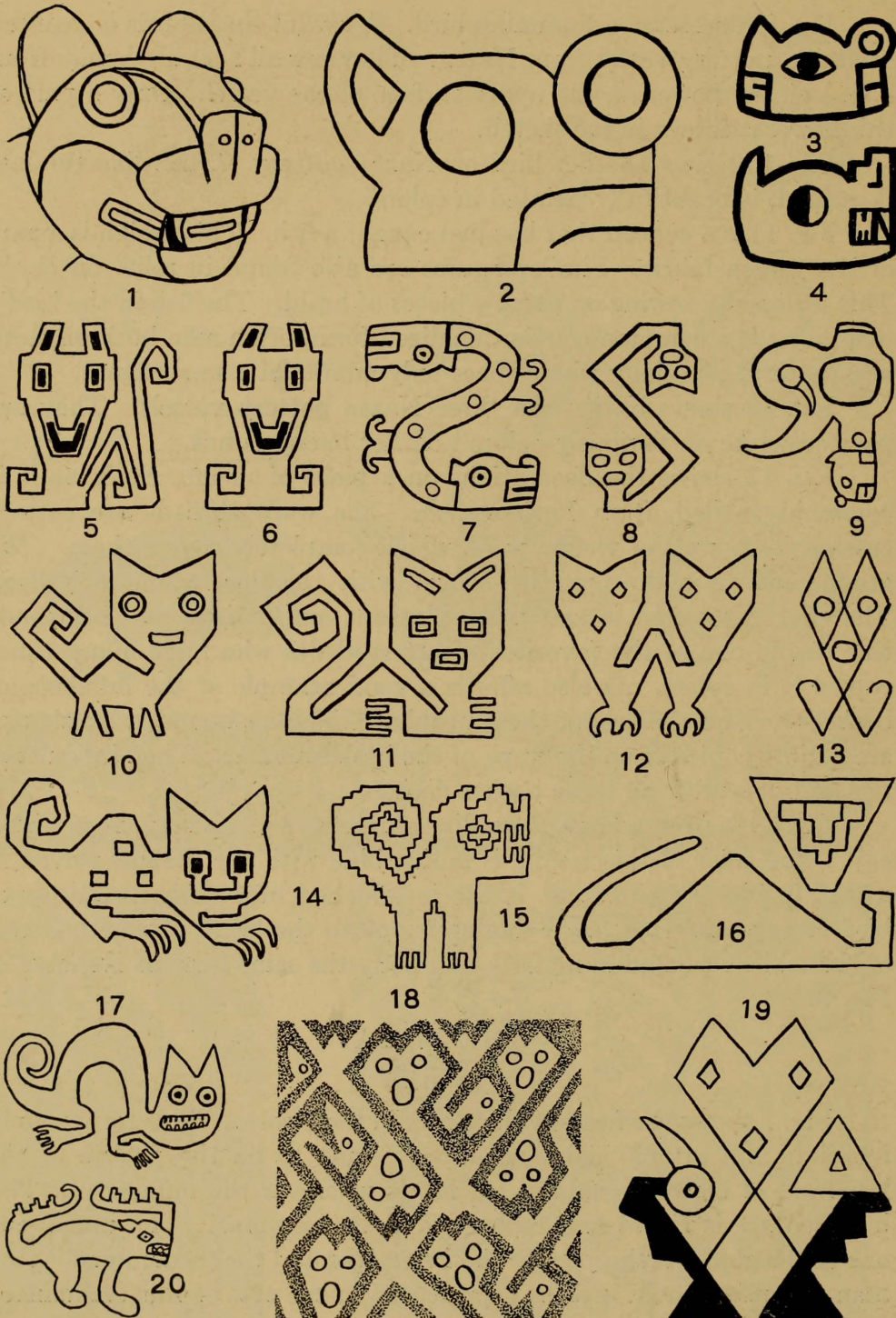
Fig. 14 is from a large shawl-like garment from Lachay, near Chancay. The color of this textile is indigo blue with the designs woven in white, in broad stripes. It is the interlocked bird design: the upper bird faces to the right, and the lower one to the left. If we study one of these birds we find in its neck and body the same form as is shown in Fig. 3.

THE PUMA

PLATE IV

Fig. 1 shows the head of the puma in terra cotta. This form is only found in the art of Tiahuanaco. It seems to be the parent of the hundreds of conventionalized cat heads wherever the influence of Tiahuanaco art is found and especially at Pachacamac. The puma was one of the gods worshipped by the Peruvians and the "puma god," part man and part puma, is often represented in the arts of the Tiahuanaco or Megalithic people.

PLATE IV



THE PUMA

PERUVIAN ART

Fig. 2. The central figure on the monolithic gateway at Tiahuanaco is represented as wearing a belt with this form of puma head on either end of it. A great number of variants of this head are common to Tiahuanaco art and wherever its influence extended.

Figs. 3-4 are plainly derived from the preceding figure. Fig. 3, from Pachacamac, has the ring nose. Fig. 4, from Nazca, has a step-form nose in place of the ring. There is a close similarity in the outlines of these figures. We shall find other variations on this head in Figs. 7, 9, and 15.

Figs. 5-6. These two figures will show, to a person who has no knowledge of primitive art, one way in which animal figures degenerate. It would be very excusable if such a person did not recognize Fig. 6 as a great cat. In fact, a positive identification could not be made by anyone who had not seen the same form of the animal before the degeneration had proceeded to the extent shown here. Now, looking at Fig. 5, we recognize that it shows the same animal in a more realistic form. It is still highly conventionalized, but the presence of the humped-up back, a characteristic of the cat family, and the tail, both omitted in Fig. 6, clearly identify it. To identify many highly conventionalized representations of animals in any primitive art, one must be long associated with large collections, which are seldom to be found except in museums. Only in this way can he become familiar with the peculiar art of a primitive people. He sees the animal forms represented with considerable truth to nature, and also a long succession of figures where, as it were, the original form is gradually fading away, until the degeneration has run its full course and left little more than a geometrical figure.

Figs. 7-8. The Peruvians had a fondness for combining a number of animal heads in a design. Sometimes heads of the same animal, but often of two or more different kinds, were thus combined. Fig. 7 shows two puma heads joined by a curved band. The design is painted on a pottery vessel from Pachacamac. On account of the form of the band that connects the heads, this figure has sometimes been mistaken for a representation of a serpent, but a comparison of one of the heads with the four puma heads on the line above will show its true character. Fig. 8, on a web from Ancon, has the typical cat heads connected by an angular band.

Fig. 9 shows part of a human face engraved on a piece of a stone vessel from Tiahuanaco. One eye is represented with the facial decora-

AMERICAN MUSEUM GUIDE LEAFLETS

tion about it. The other eye is similarly decorated. The puma head below the eye plainly belongs to the same animal, as do those in Figs. 2 and 3.

Figs. 10 to 20 are from the coast region, within fifty miles of Lima.

Figs. 10-11 are very common in tapestry. Both have the raised back, a characteristic of the cat family.

Fig. 12 is another example of their fondness for joining animal forms together in a design. The two cats have the humped-up back in common.

Fig. 13 is common on cloth, pottery, gourds, and on metal objects. A comparison of this figure with that in Fig. 6 shows a great similarity in the management of the legs. Doubtless some ancestor of this design has the raised back and tail that we have seen to have been the case with the other figure.

Fig. 14 is from a piece of tapestry from Ancon. The most noticeable thing about this figure is the manner of representing the nose, eyes, and mouth. The technique of weaving seems to have been responsible for this form, as Hasluck shows the same device in a lion woven in a goat-hair carpet of the fifteenth century from Persia.¹ Certainly no one will claim contact between the prehistoric Peruvians and Persians.

Fig. 15. This design is taken from a coca bag from Pachacamac. It is in the style of Tiahuanaco.

Fig. 16 is from a long belt or sash. It is the most highly conventionalized design on this Plate, but the characteristics of the cat family, the raised back and tail, are still present.

Fig. 17 is painted on either end of a barrel-shaped vessel from Ica.

Fig. 18 was taken from a textile from Ancon. The design is made up of cat and bird heads. Their fondness for joining different animals together in a design has been spoken of before. It is not uncommon to find birds, cats, and fish in the same design.

Fig. 19 is from a gourd bowl from Marquez, near Lima. The design is burned into the side of the vessel. Pyrography was commonly used in decorating these gourds. This design shows three motives, cat, bird, and fish. There has never been any difficulty in recognizing the cat and bird, but in my experience few students see the fish motive in this

¹ *Decorative Designs of all Ages for all Purposes.* London, Paris, New York, Toronto, and Melbourne, 1808, p. 128.

PERUVIAN ART

figure until their attention is called to other designs where practically the same form of fish is shown, but under conditions that make its true nature more apparent. See Figs. 1-3 on Plate II.

Fig. 20 is found both on cloth and pottery, in the coast region.

MAN AND MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS

PLATE V

Fig. 1 is from tapestry from Surco.

Fig. 2 was taken from a long cotton belt from Chancay.

Fig. 3 shows a woven tapestry design from Pachacamac. It is in the Tiahuanaco style and probably represents the puma god. Their fondness for combining different animal figures has been spoken of. Note near the bottom, to the right, the bird head and neck, and to the left of it a puma head with its ring nose. Compare this head with those on Plate IV, Figs. 2, 3, 4, and 9.

Fig. 4. This conventionalized human figure is common in many parts of Peru. The head occupies the center of the design, and the arms and legs have degenerated into scrolls.

Figs. 5-6 are painted on Nazca pottery.

Fig. 7. In this design the man's headdress, arms, and legs have turned into frets.

Figs. 8-9 are from painted decorations on Nazca pottery. Fig. 8 shows a face very common on vessels from that locality, especially on the tall, cylindrical ones.

Fig. 10 shows a human head with feather headdress. This form of representing feathers is common all over the coast region. It is painted on a pottery vessel from Pachacamac.

Fig. 11, also from Pachacamac pottery, needs no comment.

Fig. 12 is woven in a web from Ancon. It shows a headdress of two feathers and has the ear represented in a curious way that seems to be peculiar to Peruvian art. We find this same ear in animal figures. See the puma head at the lower part of Fig. 3 on this Plate. Dr. Arthur Baessler has commented at some length on this subject, and styles this figure "a misdrawn ear."¹

¹ Ancient Peruvian Art, Ed. A. H. Keane. Description of Plates 136-139. New York, 1902-1903.

PLATE V



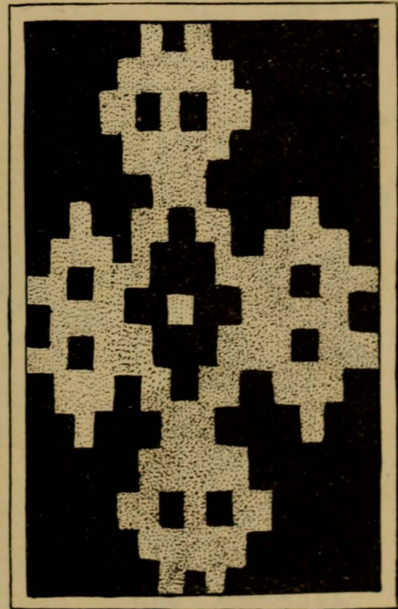
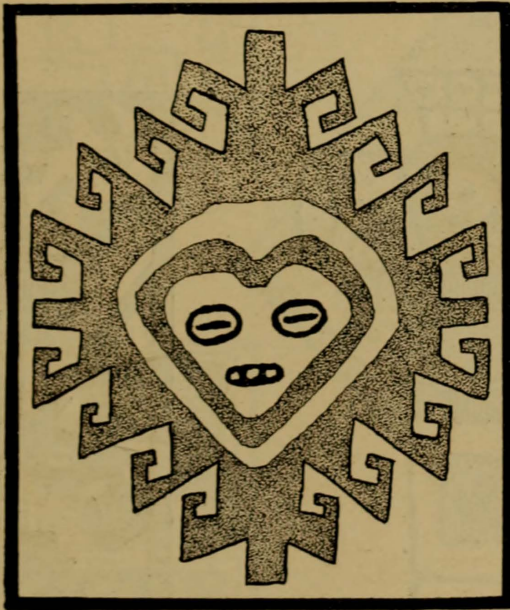
MAN AND MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS

PERUVIAN ART

Figs. 13-14 show faces painted on Nazca pottery.

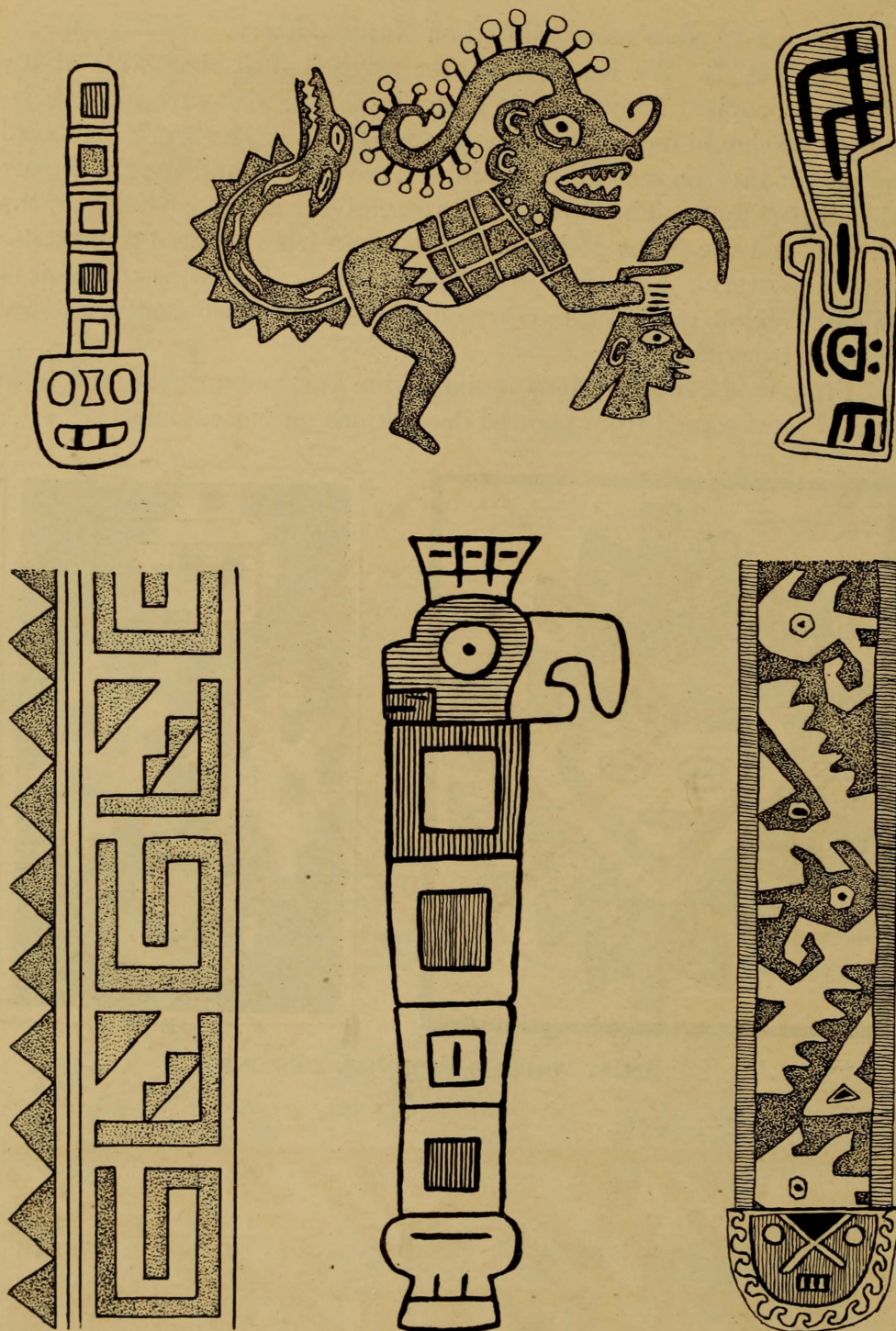
Figs. 15-17. We have here three mythological characters of the pre-Incan people. They occur in many localities, with such local variations as we should naturally expect them to show. The first is part bird and part man; the second, part fish and part man; and the third, part cat and part man. They are known respectively as the condor god, the fish god, and the puma god. They are taken from painted representations on pottery. Fig. 15 is from Pachacamac. Fig. 16 is common in the coast region, and is often represented as chasing two men in a balsa. Fig. 17 is from Nazca.

Figs. 18-24 show various designs from the human head and form which I have copied from painted decorations on Nazca pottery.



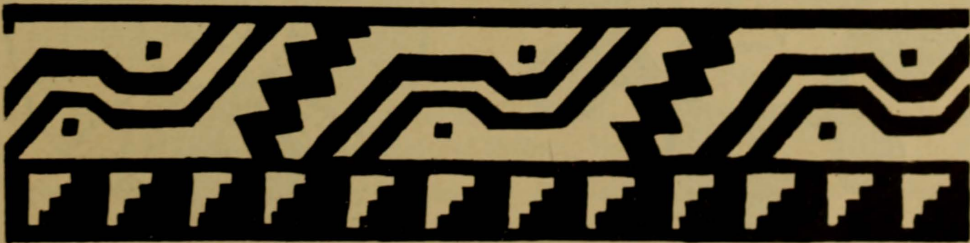
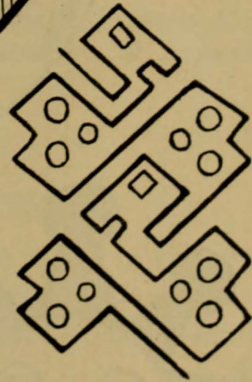
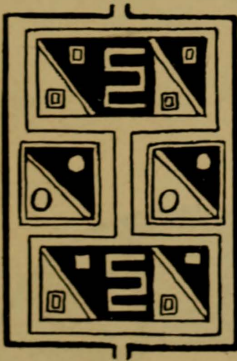
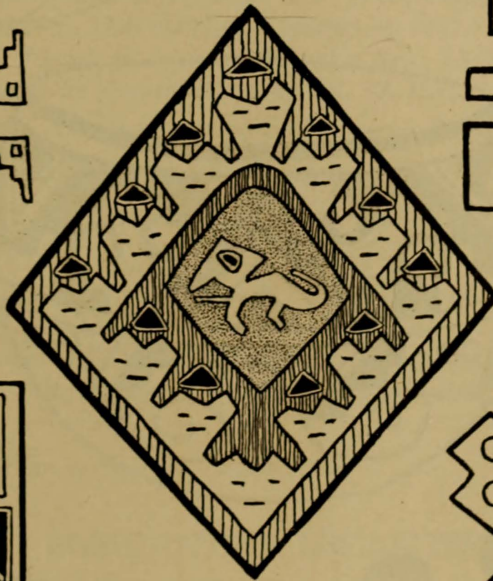
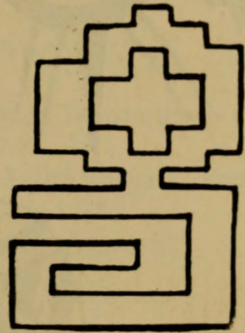
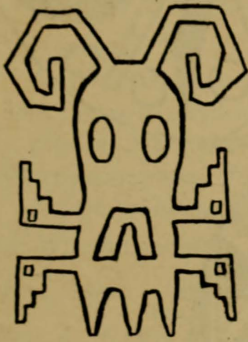
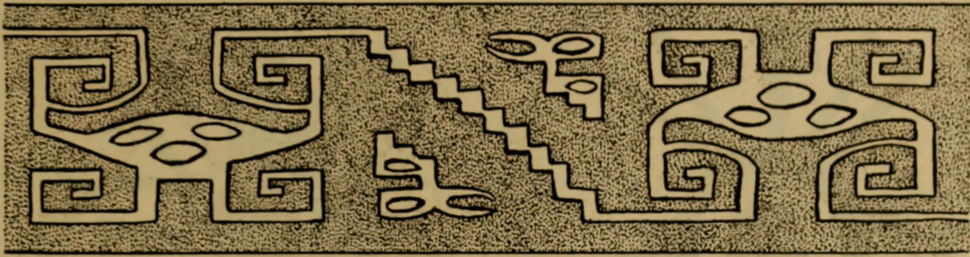
MISCELLANEOUS PERUVIAN DESIGNS

PLATE VI



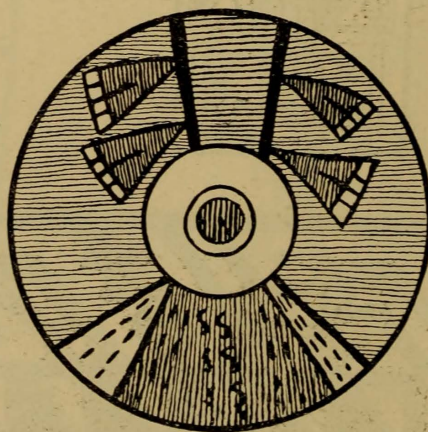
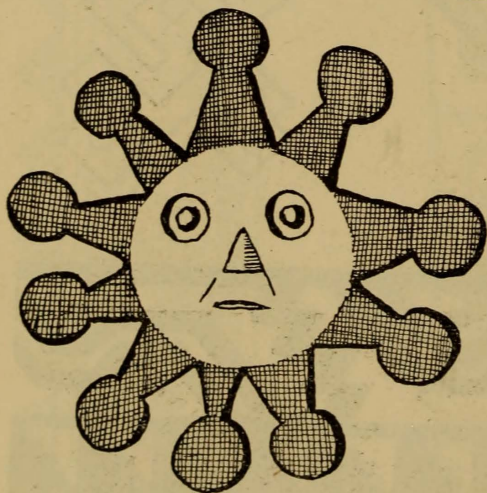
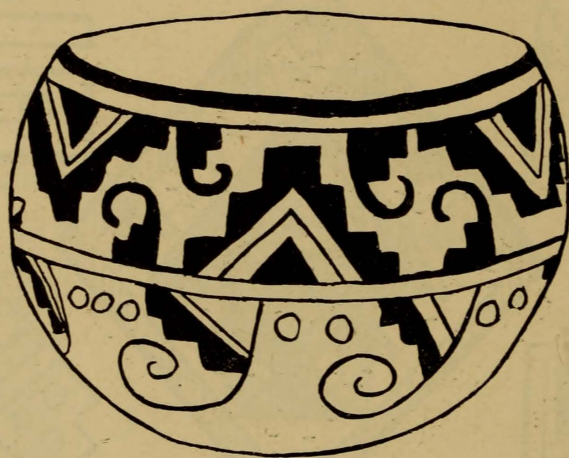
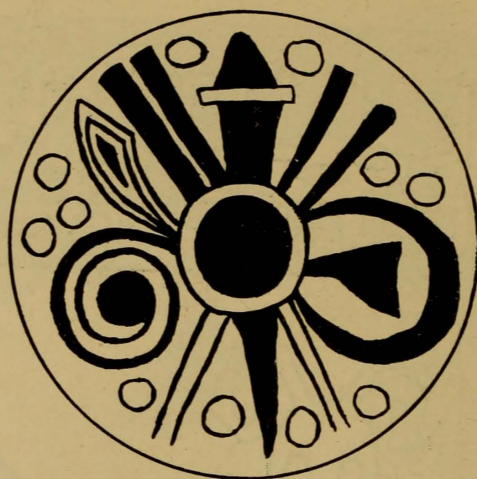
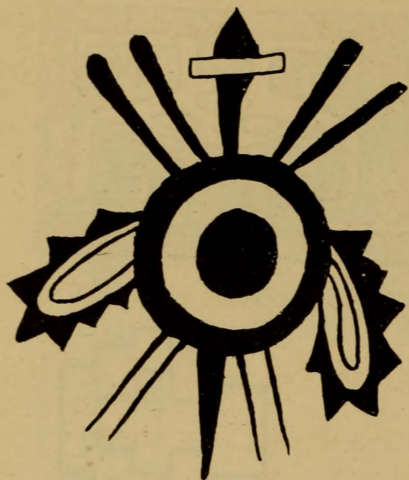
MISCELLANEOUS PERUVIAN DESIGNS

PLATE VII



MISCELLANEOUS PERUVIAN DESIGNS

PLATE VIII



MISCELLANEOUS PERUVIAN DESIGNS

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