

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Primitive Art



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Guide Leaflet No. 15

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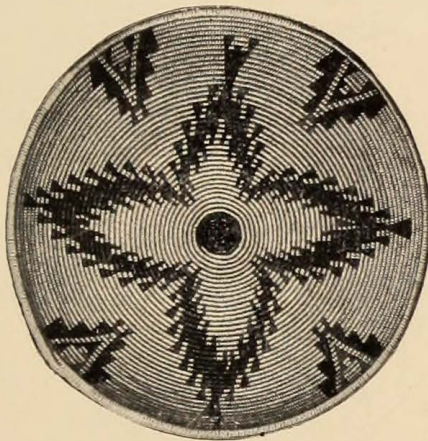
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Primitive Art.

A Guide Leaflet to Collections
in the
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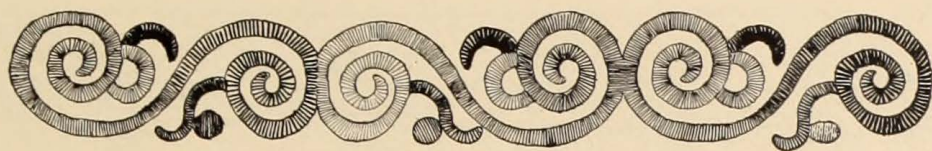


GUIDE LEAFLET No. 15.

SUPPLEMENT TO THE AMERICAN MUSEUM JOURNAL,

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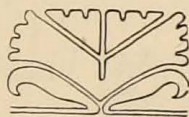
INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

A VISIT to the ethnological halls of the Museum shows that the primitive tribes whose manufactures are exhibited in the cases delight in ornamenting all the objects which are used in ordinary life, in festivals and in sacred ceremonials. Many of the ornaments may seem crude to our taste, but undoubtedly they are applied to the objects for the same purpose as that for which we apply decorative ornamentation.

Studies of the forms of primitive decoration, which have been carried on by many students, demonstrate the fact that almost everywhere decorative designs, no matter how simple their forms may be, are significant. In many cases we find animal forms and plant forms used for decorative purposes, and in these the significance is at once given by the design. In other cases the ornament consists of nothing but geometrical elements, such as straight lines, triangles and rectangles, or curves and spirals. These designs also are interpreted by primitive man as representing certain natural forms, and thus they express definite ideas.

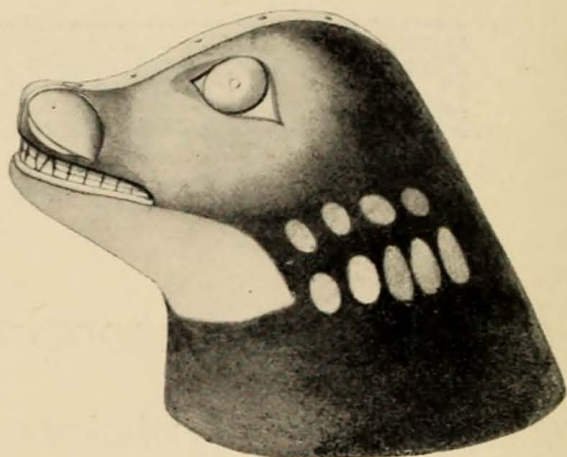
It may therefore be said that most primitive decoration is symbolic. The style of decoration by means of which ideas are expressed differs very much in various parts of the world. The groups of ideas that are expressed by ornamental designs are also different, according to the characteristic culture of each tribe.

The collections to which this Leaflet refers may be found in Halls 108, 102 and 202. Their location in the halls is marked on the accompanying plans.





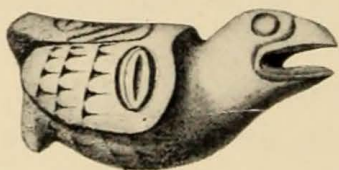
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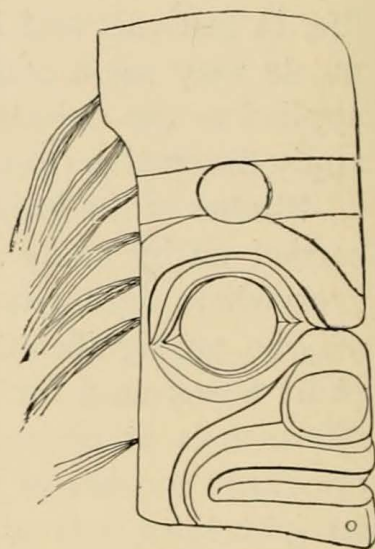
SEAL



BEAVER



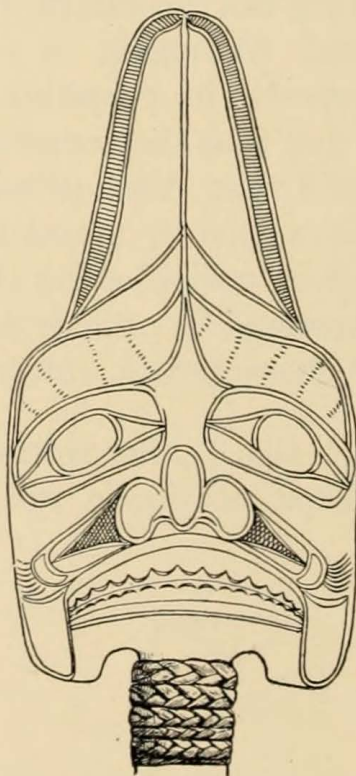
PUFFIN



KILLER-WHALE



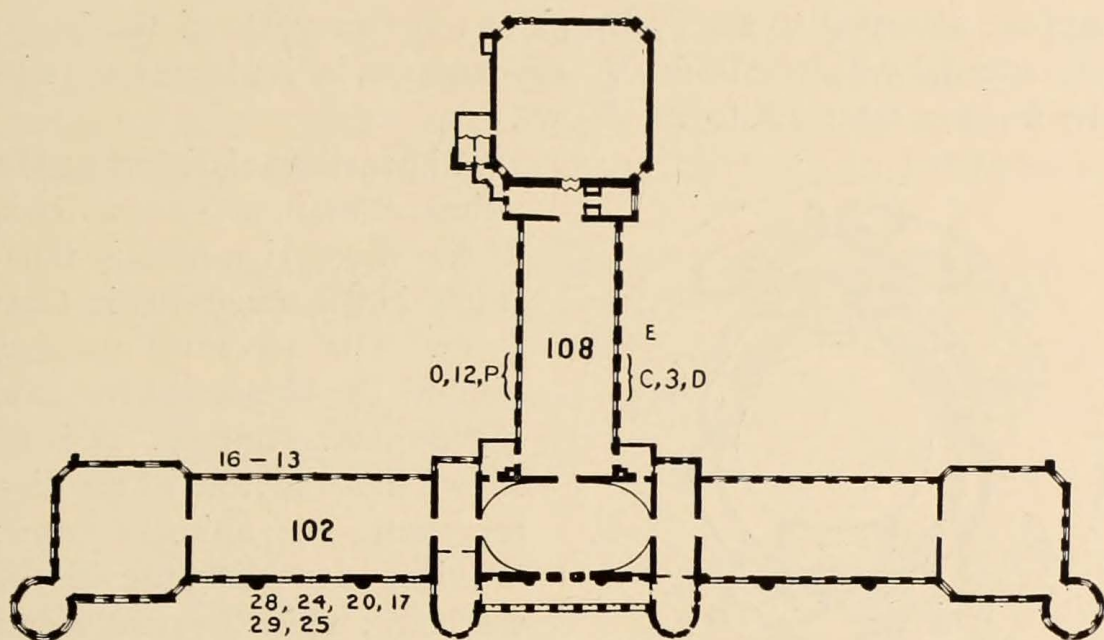
SCULPIN



DOG-FISH



SQUID



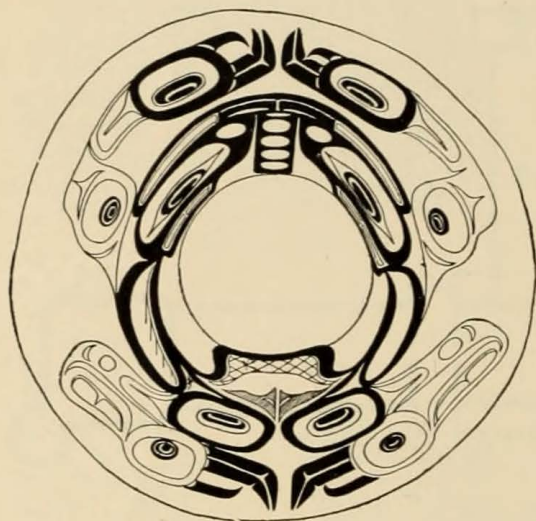
FIRST FLOOR, HALL 108.

CASES C, D AND 3.

THE COAST TRIBES OF ALASKA AND BRITISH COLUMBIA.—These tribes use throughout animal forms for purposes of decoration. Some of their masks show that they have the power of producing good realistic representations of human and animal forms (Case C 12); but more frequently the characteristic forms of the animal to be represented are exaggerated in size, as, for instance, the beak of the hawk and the incisors of the beaver.

Sometimes the characteristic feature is represented alone, and thus becomes the symbol of the animal. In Case 3 c the symbols of several animals are exhibited. The beaver, which is shown in the upper right-hand corner, is characterized by two large incisors, by a broad tail on which scales are indicated by means of hachure and sometimes by the stick which it holds in its paws. The killer-whale is symbolized by its long dorsal fin; the shark or dog-fish, by its long, pointed snout, which is represented as rising over its forehead, by its large mouth with depressed corners and many teeth and by the gill-lines which appear on its cheeks. The sculpin is symbolized by spines which rise over its mouth; the eagle, by its crooked beak; the squid, by the suckers which

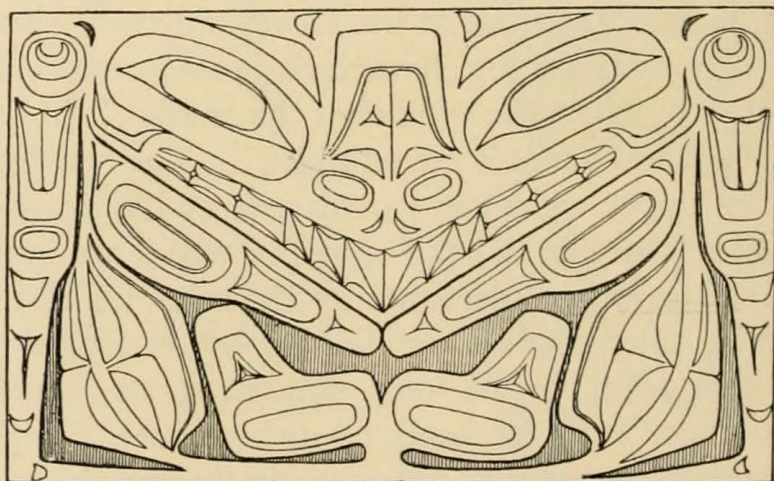
appear attached to the eyebrows or to other parts of the body; the raven, by its long beak; the sea-monster, by its large head and by flippers attached to its elbows.



The method of distorting the animal form in order to make it fit the decorative field is illustrated in the specimens in Case C 13. The decorated wooden dish in the bottom of the case represents an animal. It is so shown that the front of the dish represents the animal's head; the sides of the dish, the sides of the body; while the narrow end in the rear represents the tail.

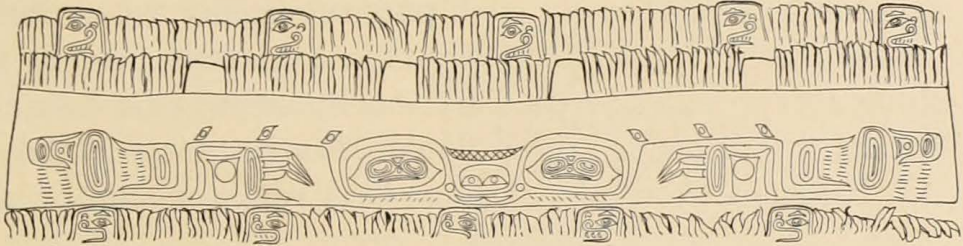
Thus it will be seen that the dish

actually represents the body of the animal hollowed out from the back. The animal forms are placed in a similar manner on painted hats, as on the one here illustrated; the whole animal being laid around the conical hat, and, as it were, being pulled over the head. In some cases the adaptations require material changes in the form of the animal. When, for instance, a fish is to be painted or carved on the front of a square box, the body of the fish must be so distorted as to fill as nearly as possible the whole decorative field. This is done by cutting the fish along its whole back from head to tail, by exaggerating the size of the head, twisting half of the body along each side of the decorative field and placing the tail so that its

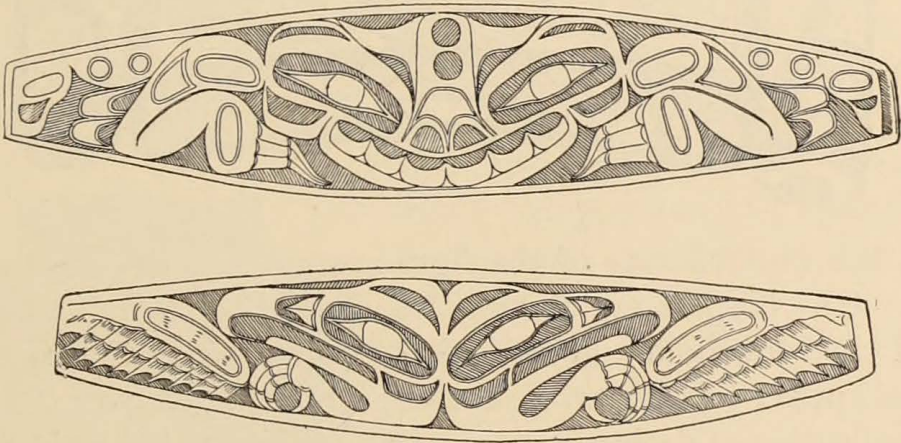


end comes just under the head. In still other cases the form of the decorative field necessitates great reduction in the size of certain

parts of the body. Thus we find in Case 3c a blanket-border representing a sea-monster. The animal is shown split in two along its back; but all its parts — except its head, the paws and the tail — are much reduced in size. The teeth are indicated by



a series of slanting lines under each eye, but the lower jaw has been omitted. The body is represented by a fine line extending from the lower outer corners of the eye, around, then along the upper margins and finally down again. The arms and the fins, which are believed to be attached to the elbows of the monster, are of very small size, while the paw is painted on a very large scale. The wide strips in the fringe represent the dorsal fins of the mon-



ster. This reduction of parts of the body has evidently given rise to the elimination of all except the characteristic symbols, whenever this was necessary. We find a similar reduction of the sea-monster design on a bracelet in Case C 13, the design of which is shown above, and the complete omission of parts of the body on another bracelet representing the eagle, of which only head, talons and wings are shown.

Sometimes, in the effort to bring the animal form into the decorative field, the animal is dissected and distorted in a most astonishing manner. This is particularly true in the case of the large ceremonial blankets woven by these tribes, in which various parts of the animal body seem to be combined in the most irregular manner, although really each part represents a definite portion of the animal represented. The blanket above Case D 3 and the explanatory model in that section illustrate this dissection. Similar distortions occur in paintings. For instance, in the copy of a painting from a house-front (Case D 3), representing the killer-



whale, the central part of the figure represents the head of the whale. The flippers are shown close to the corners of the jaws, half of the blow-hole and half of the dorsal fin in the right and left hand upper corners, while the tail is shown just over the head.

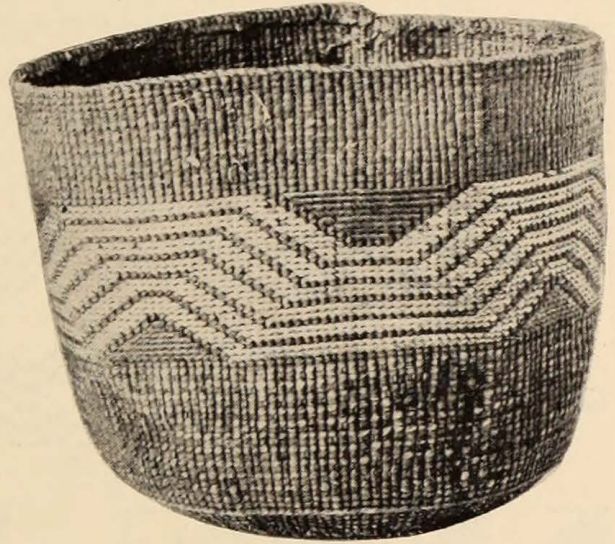
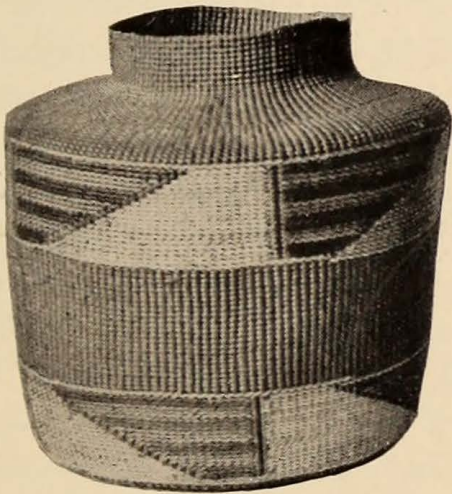
A collection of designs representing various animals, indicated by their symbols and distorted so as to fit the decorative field, is shown in the exhibition cases. The lower part of Case 3 *c* contains representations of the dog-fish or shark. Case 3 *b* contains representations of a mythical sea-monster. In Case D 1 the sea-lion, sculpin, raven, crane, frog and seal are shown. Case D 2 contains representations of the beaver, all of which are characterized by the large incisors and the tail with hachure. Case D 3 contains representations of the killer-whale, characterized by

the long dorsal fin; D 4, representations of the bear, which is characterized by its large mouth, often represented with protruding tongue, and its large paws; D 5, those of the raven; D 6, those of the thunder-bird or hawk and the eagle, the thunder-bird being characterized by the hooked beak, which turns back into the mouth.

One of the peculiar characteristics of the decorative art of the North Pacific coast is the frequent occurrence of the "eye." A form similar to an eye, consisting of an inner and an outer circle, is applied to indicate all joints, evidently to signify the socket and the head moving in the socket. Of-

ten this eye is elaborated as a whole face, which then makes the interpretation of the animal form very difficult.

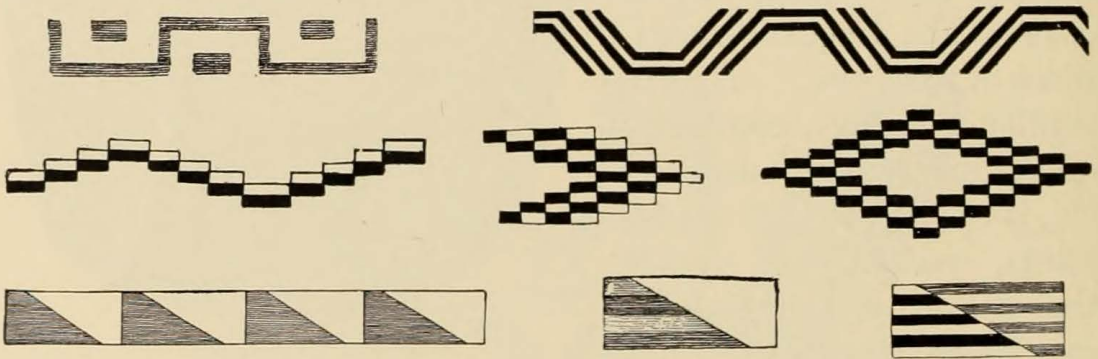
The essential features of the decorative art of the coast Indians of Alaska and British Columbia may thus be characterized as a representation of animal forms by means of distortion and omission, the decorative forms being somewhat realistic representations of parts of the body, preference being given to those parts which are symbolic of each animal.



the style of art described before. This geometrical style was probably developed in imitation of the porcupine-em-

Purely geometrical decoration is found in only one place on the North Pacific coast. It is applied to the basketry of the Tlingit Indians (Case E 3-8), who, however, in their painting and carving, use

broidery of the tribes of the interior. Most of the ornamented baskets are made of spruce-root, and are embroidered with grass. The ornaments are generally arranged in two broad parallel stripes of the same design, separated by a narrow band containing a different design. The motives consist of rectangular and triangular forms. The people interpret each motive as the representation of some realistic object. The meander pattern is interpreted as waves and as objects floating in the waves, while a similar design executed in obtuse angles is interpreted as the



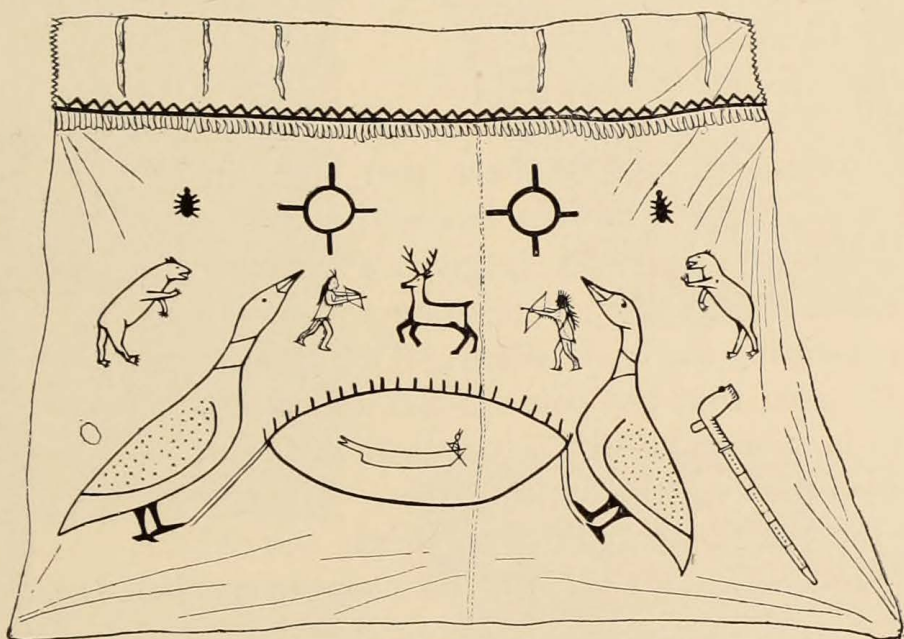
butterfly. Diagonal rows of small rectangles are interpreted as a string tied around the basket, while two such lines meeting in a point are interpreted as flying geese; and a diamond made up in a similar way represents goose-tracks. Rectangles divided diagonally into two sections are interpreted as bear's feet, one half representing the sole of the foot, while lines in the other indicate the claws. In many cases, both the design and the figure cut out of the background are given names.

It is important to note that the interpretations given to the designs on some baskets seem to be entirely disconnected. This suggests that the combination of the patterns has no distinct symbolic significance, but that the so-called "interpretations" are rather pattern-names.

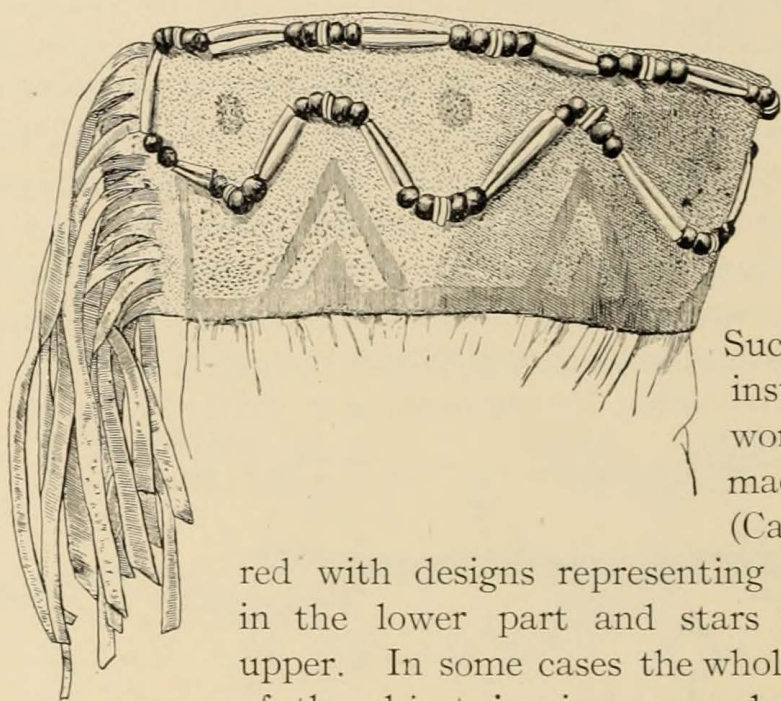


CASES O, 12 AND P

COAST TRIBES OF WASHINGTON AND TRIBES OF THE INTERIOR OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.—The general character of the decorative art of this region is entirely different from that of the coast tribes of Alaska described before. The ornamentation applied by the tribes of the interior to their garments and to objects of every-day use is throughout pictographic; that is to say, it consists of realistic representations of natural objects, which are connected, and tell a complete story. We notice, for instance, on a painted blanket



in Case 12 *f*, a number of animal and human figures. A mountain-range rising on the earth is shown above the fringe. On the upper part of the blanket, two suns are shown, outside of which are two beetles. In the center is a stag pursued by two Indians. The figures near the right and left margins are grizzly bears. On the lower part of the blanket two loons are shown. These are painted on a large scale because they are the guardian spirits of the wearer. Between them there is a lake with trees around one side, and a canoe and a man in the center. Trail-lines between the loons indicate that they belong to the lake. The owner's pipe is painted on the lower right-hand corner. The idea expressed by these figures is a prayer for success in hunting on mountain and lake. The hunters and the canoe-man represent the wearer of the blanket; the suns, beetles and loons are his guardian spirits.



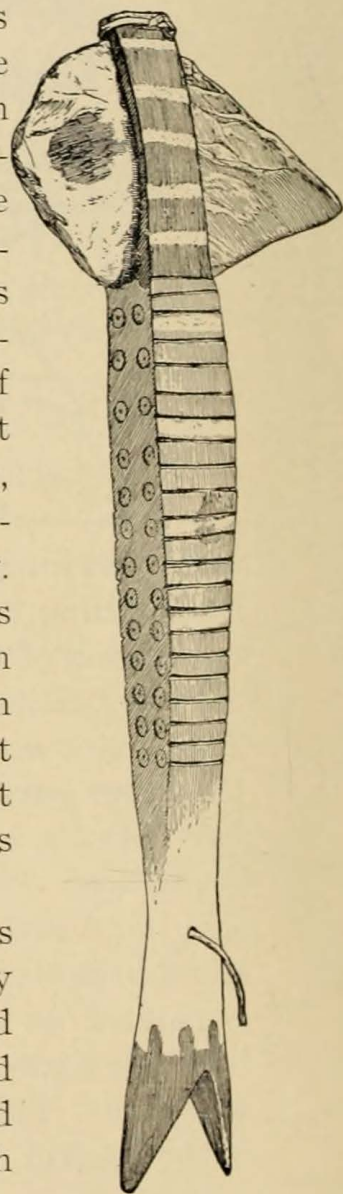
In many cases these pictographs become more geometrical in character, so that they may be called ornamental designs.

Such is the case, for instance, in a young woman's head-band made of buckskin (Case 12 d), painted

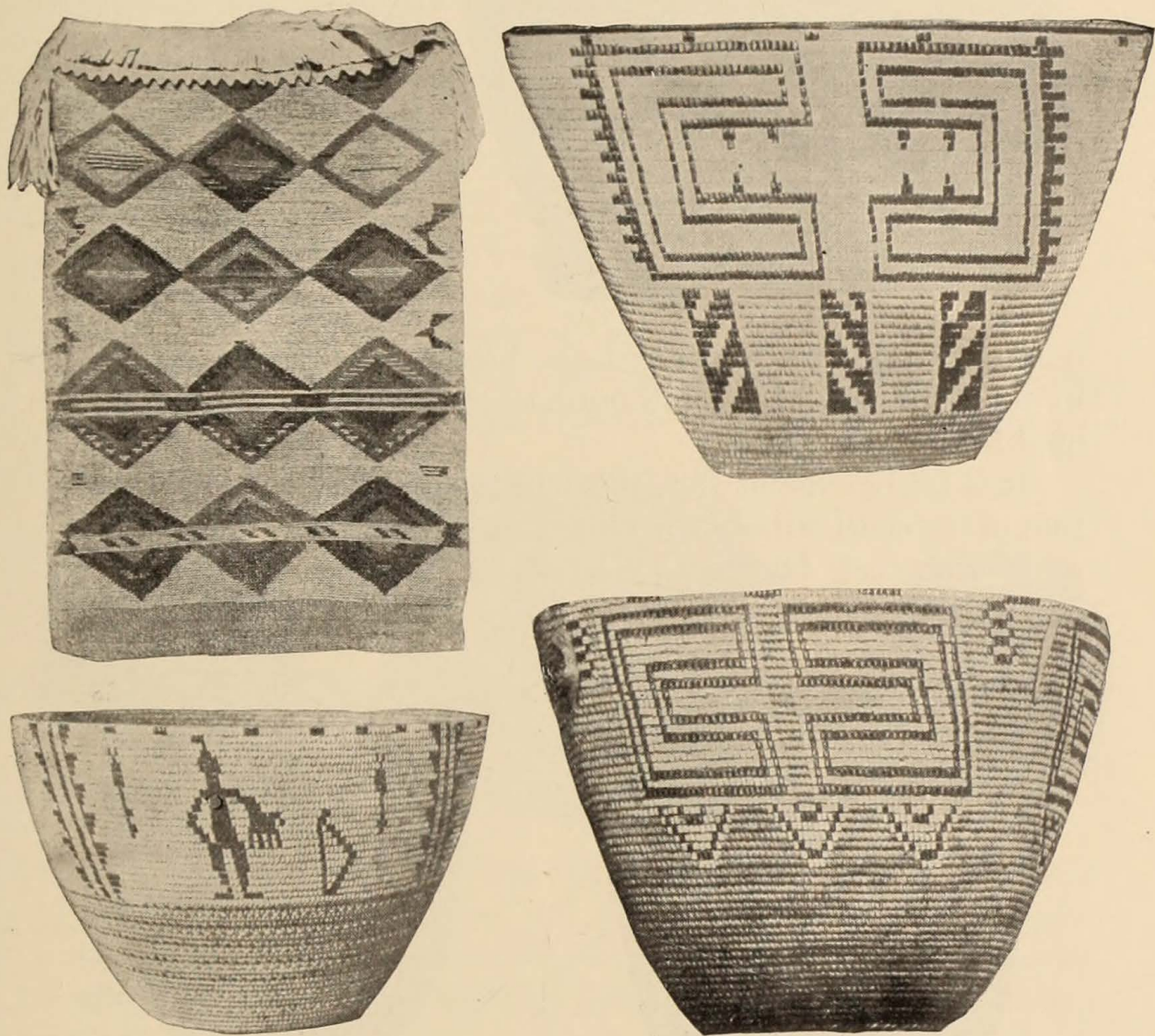
red with designs representing lodges in the lower part and stars in the upper. In some cases the whole form of the object is given a symbolic interpretation. Thus we find a stone war-axe (Case 12 e) representing the woodpecker. This design symbolizes the idea that the point of the axe is to be as powerful in piercing skulls as the beak of the woodpecker is in piercing the bark of trees. The point of the axe represents the beak of the bird; the red dot on the rounded part of the stone, its eye; the handle, its body. In the pictographic art of this tribe, certain motives have obtained a conventional meaning.

Such is the case, for instance, with the triangles on the girl's head-band mentioned before, which always represent lodges. Crosses, like those on the drinking-tubes in Case 12 d, represent the crossings of trails; parallel lines represent ditches, and a circle with four equidistant rays symbolizes the sun.

The pictographic art of these tribes tends to assume a geometrical character particularly on their woven bags and on their imbricated basketry. The merging of the pictographic and purely decorative elements may be observed very clearly in a bag (Case 12 d), on which

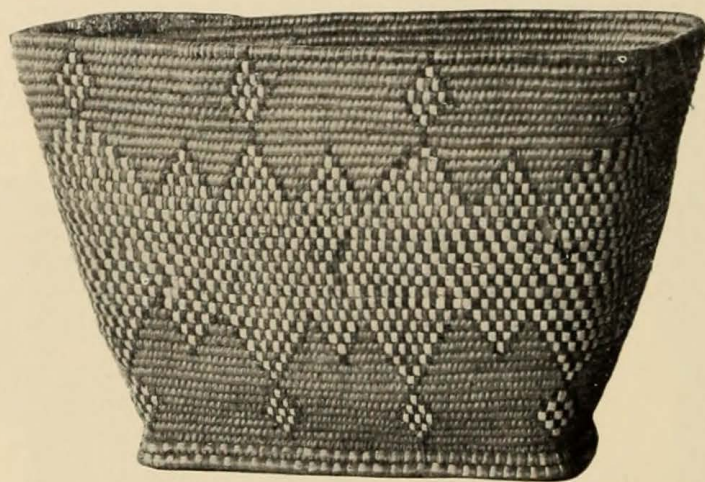


a series of diamonds represents isolated lakes, and lakes connected by streams. Near these lakes are shown ducks flying towards the water. Designs half pictographic and half geometrical may also be seen on the baskets in Case O 9, in which the figures of birds, men and dogs may be recognized. A



striking interpretation is given for two baskets in Case O 11. The peculiar rectangular forms which face each other are each interpreted as a head. In one of these, the short lines on the back represent the hair, while the two pairs in each opening represent teeth. In the other one these attachments have entirely disappeared, but the form is still interpreted as that of two heads facing each other.

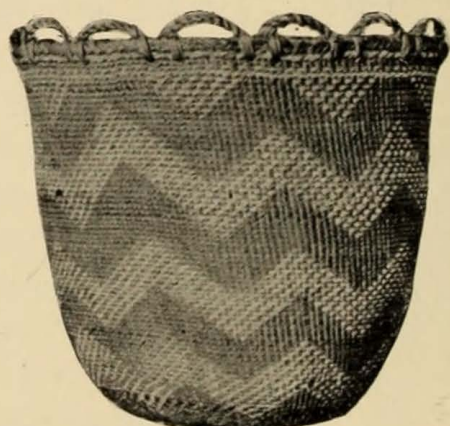
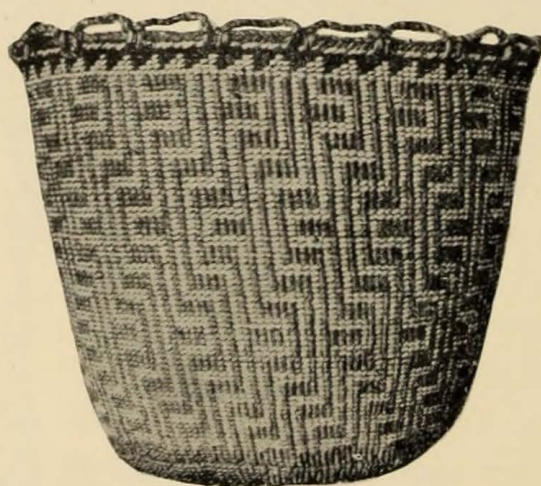
A great variety of geometrical forms may be observed in these baskets (Case P 1-3). Almost all of them are also given realistic



interpretations. One interesting basket, the design of which consists of alternating large and small diamonds, is explained as the beaver design, the large central pattern being interpreted as the body of the beaver; the small diamonds at the lower end, its

tail; the one at its upper end, the head; while the black lines forming one side of the intermediate diamond are the fore and hind legs of the animal.

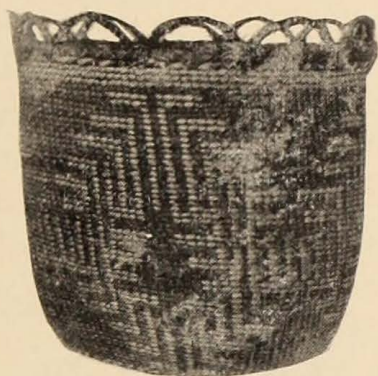
It is fairly evident that this type of basketry has influenced that of the coast tribes of Washington, who also have geometrical designs on their baskets. We find among these tribes a good many baskets imported from the interior, while their own baskets



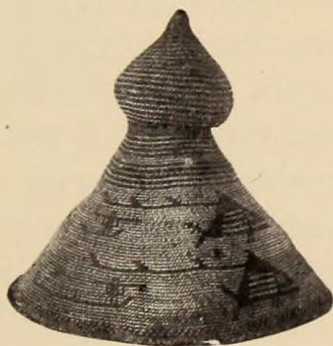
show a different type of manufacture, but somewhat similar designs. Here a meandering pattern is interpreted as ripples of water, while a design consisting of zigzags is interpreted as mountains and valleys (Case O 7). Attention is called to the peculiar designs composed of hooks (Case O 8), which will be

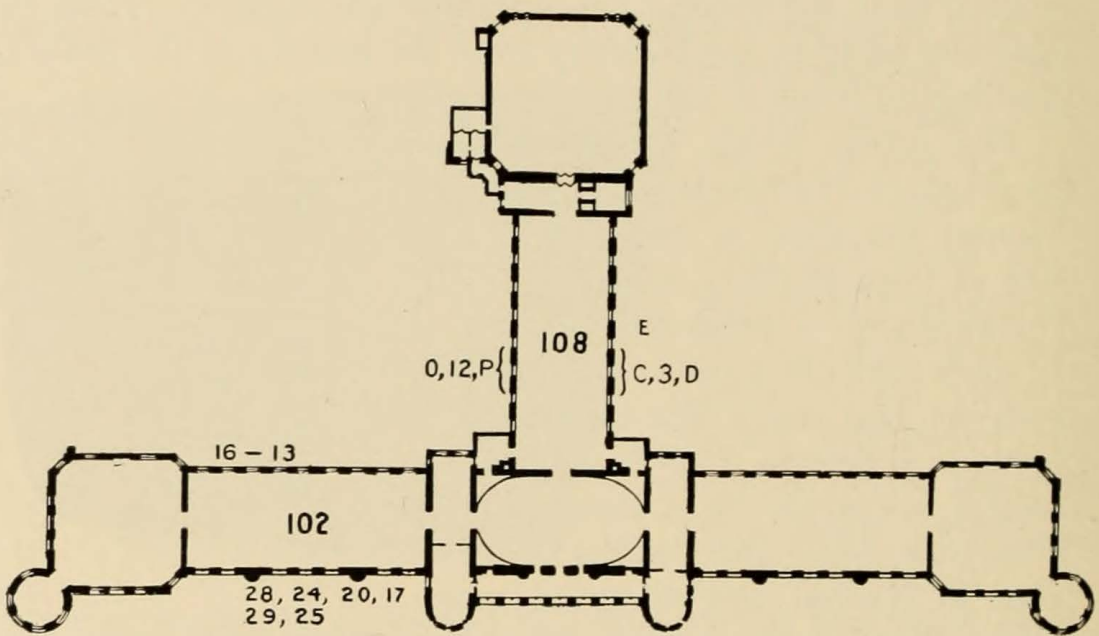
referred to in the description of Californian designs. These designs also occur in the basketry from the interior of the State of Washington (Case R 12).

The forms which we observe on the coast of Washington have also influenced the type of basketry of the tribe of Cape Flattery, a branch of the Nootka, whose culture is similar to that of the more northern coast tribes. Among them we find many fine baskets with geometrical designs (Case N 10). These baskets are made on a foundation of cedar-bark, while the designs are executed in colored and bleached grass-stems. Most of the designs resemble in character the geometric designs of the southern coast tribes. It is, however, peculiar to



this tribe, that on some of these baskets, whaling and fishing scenes, with canoes and their crew, are represented. Such scenes were also used in the ornamentation of the old type of hats that were worn in the eighteenth century, but which have gone out of use.





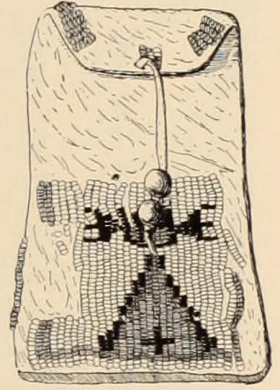
FIRST FLOOR, HALL 102.

CASES 17-29

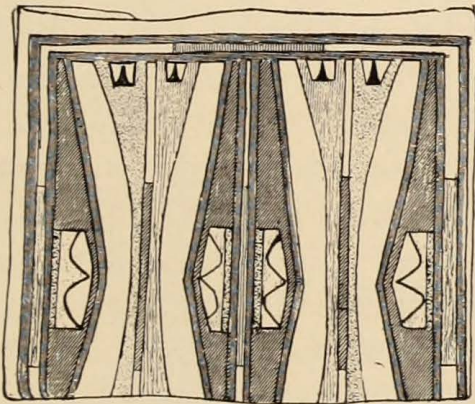
PLAINS INDIANS.—The decorative art of the Plains Indians resembles in some characteristic features that of the tribes of the interior of British Columbia, although its technique is much better and more elaborate. Its fundamental character is pictographic. In objects which serve ceremonial purposes, this character is strictly maintained. Thus we find on buffalo-hides which are records of events, and even on blankets, pictographic representations of battle-scenes, or of other events in the daily life of the Indian. On garments used in ceremonial dances, paintings occur which represent birds, sun and moon, and are similar in character to those described before.

These, however, are not, strictly speaking, decorative designs. In most cases where ornamentation is the prime object, the forms which are utilized are arranged more or less symmetrically; and with the development of symmetry we find that the occurrence of realistic forms disappears. Almost all the decorative work of the Indians of the Plains is made in bead-embroidery, and is

probably an outgrowth of the embroidery in porcupine-quills which was characteristic of the Indians before they came in contact with the whites. The forms which are the constituent elements of decorative motives are very simple and characteristic. They consist throughout of regularly arranged triangles and rectangles, mostly in brilliant and strongly contrasting colors, and often also showing sections of varying color. Sometimes the decoration is applied to the whole surface, sometimes only a particular part of the object is decorated. Much of the painting is done on rawhide, but most of the embroidery is made on soft skin. The background of the painting is usually rawhide, while the beaded designs are often set off against a background of white or colored beads.



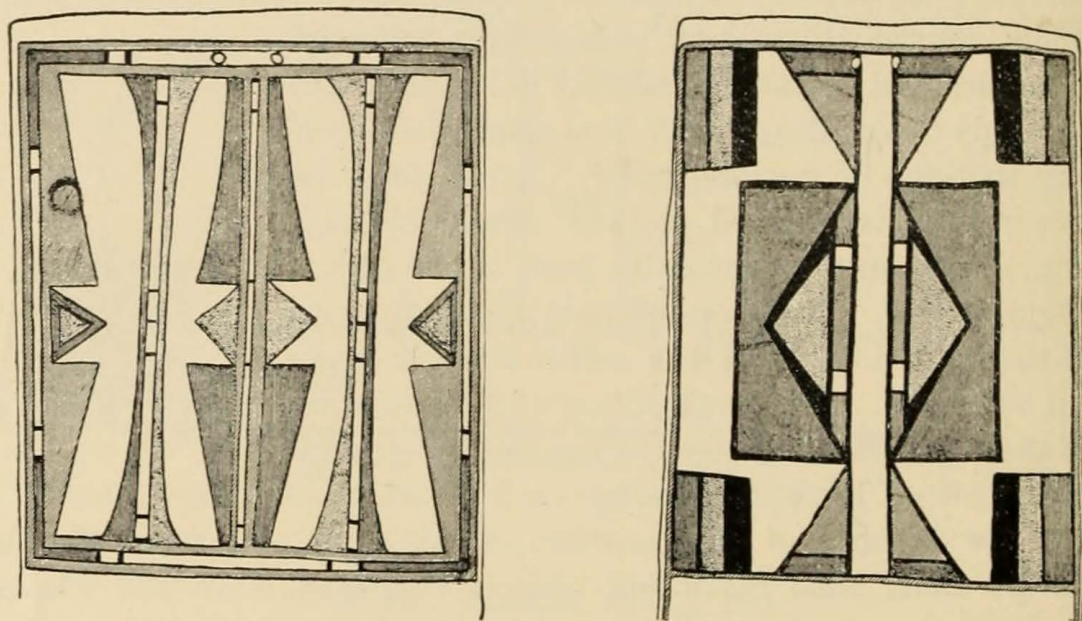
The manner of combination of triangles and rectangles is so peculiar, that decorated objects obtained from the Plains Indians can readily be distinguished from objects from any other part of the world. Although there is a certain sameness among all of them, each tribe has certain peculiarities of its own. The most characteristic form, which occurs over and over again in Indian decorative art, is the somewhat pointed triangle, either divided into halves of different color, or including another triangle of different color.



This form is generally explained as the tepee, the tent of the Plains Indians. Another form which is almost as frequent is a very obtuse triangle, often with a small rectangle in the middle. This is interpreted as a hill, while the center figure is often called a cave in the hill. We find also very often designs consisting of parallel lines,

sometimes broken up by equidistant short patterns of different color. These lines are generally interpreted as trails; and breaks in the lines, as camping-sites or other interruptions of the continuous trail.

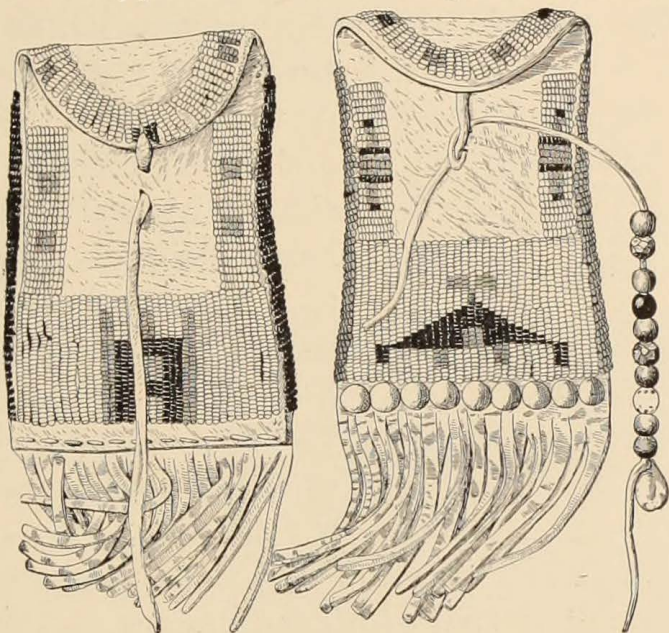
The decorative forms applied by the Indians may, on the whole, be described as a variety of combinations of the acute tent triangle and of the obtuse hill triangle with rectangles and straight



lines. Circles divided into sections occur also quite frequently. All these forms are executed in a variety of color, which is generally included in the symbolic interpretation of the design.

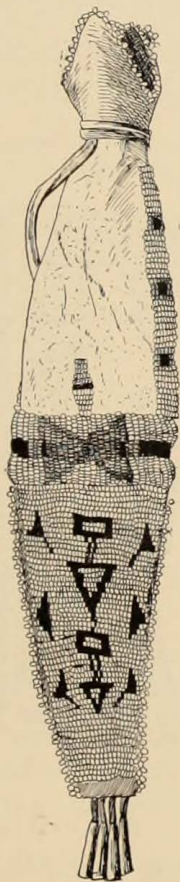
The detailed arrangement of the decorative motives shows some characteristic differences among different tribes. Thus, we find that the Arapaho (Case 20 *h*) like to arrange their patterns on hide bags in a number of parallel stripes, and that in the painted designs they put on the color in rather small areas. The Shoshone (Case 26 *e*), on the other hand, like to arrange the decorative field in such a way as to lay out a wide border which cuts out a central field. The designs in these areas are laid on in strongly contrasting colors, without leaving any white background to speak of. Similar differences may be observed in the bead-work of different tribes. Some — for instance, the Comanche (Case 26 *d*) — prefer to arrange their patterns in delicate narrow bands; while others, like the Sioux, utilize large beaded surfaces. These may be observed on moccasins, bags and pouches, on which white or colored beads form the background, from which the designs are set off. It seems, however, that some beaded and painted designs are common to all the tribes of the Great Plains.

Interpretation of Arapaho Designs.—The characteristics of Indian interpretations will best appear from a description of a few specimens. The square design near the lower edge of a small pouch (Case 20 e) is the bear's foot, generally conventionally represented by the Arapaho with only three claws. Square pink spots on the body of the design are the bare skin on the sole of the foot. The white bead-work is sand or soil. The curved band on the flap is a mountain. The leather fringe at the bottom of the



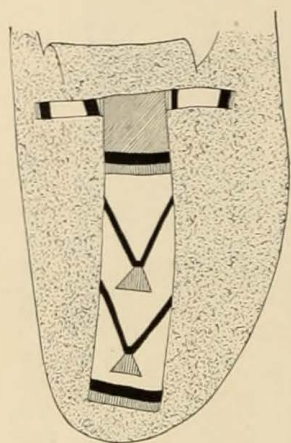
pouch represents trees.

White beading on another pouch represents sand: the green beads at the edges, on account of their color, represent timber; two compressed crosses, the morning star; and squares on the flaps, rocks. The large figure near the bottom is a mountain with a tree on its summit. Below it are four small red and blue rectangles, which denote little streams flowing from a spring near the foot of the mountain. The spring is represented by a green square in the large triangle.



Paint-pouches amulets and head-ornaments are often given animal forms. The pouch illustrated here represents a lizard. The large ornament at about the middle of the bag represents a butterfly. The triangles are its wings, and the rhomboidal figure of bead-work projecting on the leather surface is its body. On the flap is the dragon-fly. The detached, somewhat triangular figures at the sides of the dragon-fly are its wings.

On an Arapaho moccasin (Case 20 *h*), a wide stripe embroidered on the instep represents the path on which the wearer travels. The two pieces of the transverse stripe, which duplicate in minia-

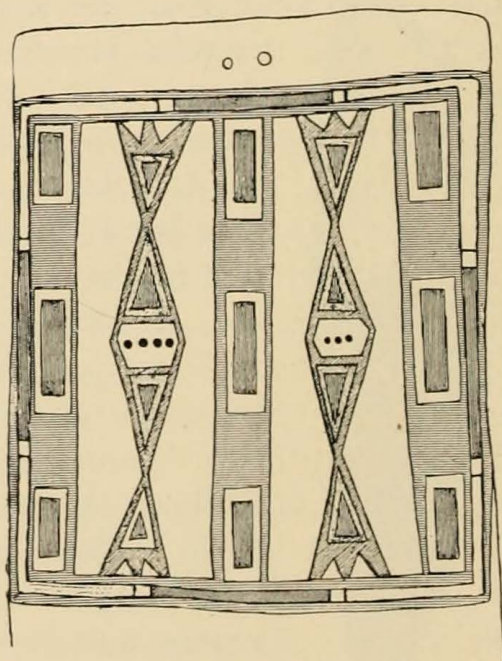


ture a part of the main stripe, are insects or worms which the wearer desires to avoid, and which, for this reason, are placed by the side of his path. The upper portion of the large stripe is light blue, which signifies, as in many other cases, haze. The red and dark-blue bands that edge the white portion of the stripe represent day and night. The winged triangle, which appears twice, signifies sunrise, and also the passage over a mountain.

The explanation of painted designs of the Arapaho is quite similar to that of beaded designs. Thus, on one hide bag (Case 19 *c*) three wide blue stripes represent rivers, both form and color being symbolic. The red rectangles in them are islands, and the white border around these is sand. The triangles are bears' feet; the red portions of the triangles represent the bare skin of the sole of the foot; the projections at the base of the triangles are the claws. The unpainted background represents the prairie; the black spots in them are coyotes. Blue lines enclosing the whole design are buffalo-paths; the white lines between them, antelope-paths; the yellow line is an elk-path; and red lines are deer-paths.

It will thus be seen that the interpretation of the designs given by the Arapaho is partly realistic, while a part of the designs express abstract ideas.

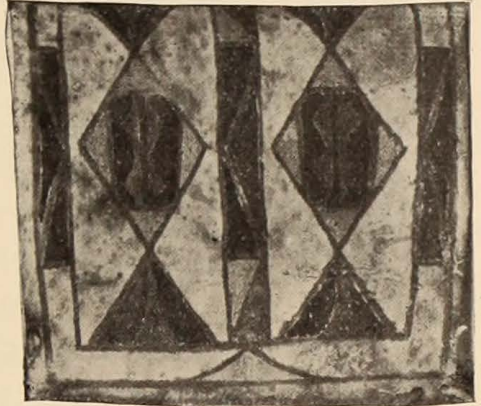
The morning star, the life symbol, the path of life and other concepts which are intimately associated with the religious ideas



of the people appear frequently in their interpretations of their designs. Purely animal forms are, comparatively speaking, rare; while geographical features,—such as mountains, valleys and rivers,—tents, parts of the body and plant designs occur very frequently.

CASE 17 c.

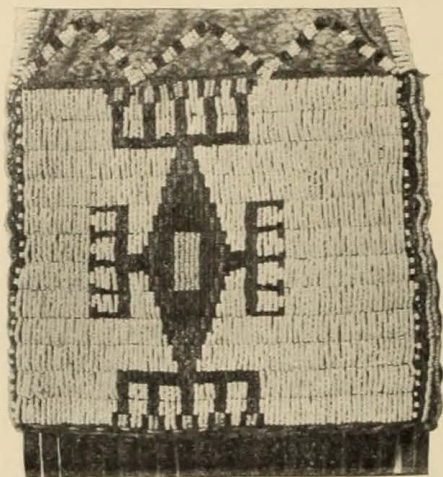
Interpretation of Blackfoot Designs.—Among the Blackfoot we find the same type of decorative designs as among the Arapaho, triangles and diamonds being the most important elements, but they are purely decorative, without symbolic significance. These geometric forms, however, have pattern-names as constituent elements of the complex designs, for example: the diamond-shaped figures are known as “spavin” patterns. The idea is, not that the design represents a “spavin,” but that it resembles this affection as it appears upon a horse’s foot.



CASES 24, 25.

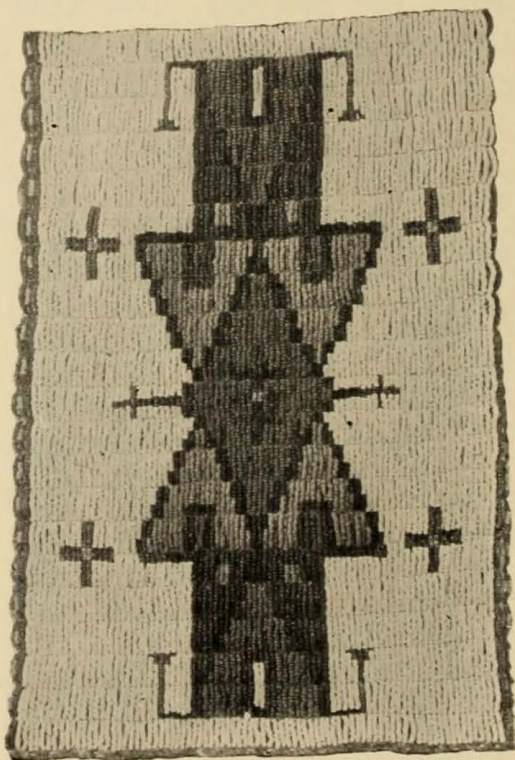
Interpretation of Sioux Designs.—The decorative art of the Siouan tribes comprises geometrical designs in bead-work, and pictographic designs in paintings. The geometric designs are both symbolic and decorative. The pictographic designs are usually symbolic. Most of the geometric designs are made by the women; the pictographic, by the men. The art of the women is especially interesting, because we find them using simple geometrical forms as design elements, for example: all triangular designs of a certain size are known as “tent” patterns; all rectangular designs are known as “bag” patterns; all small triangular designs are known as “point” patterns, or “leaf” patterns; diamond-shaped designs are known as “arrow-point” patterns. Complex geometrical designs are built up from these simple elements, and the names given above are the technical names for these designs. The complex designs are best represented in the decoration of tobacco-pouches, as illustrated in Case 25 a.

These complex designs, taken as a whole, often have special names, for example: a diamond-shaped figure with forked appendages, as shown in the adjoining illustration (Case 25a), is sometimes



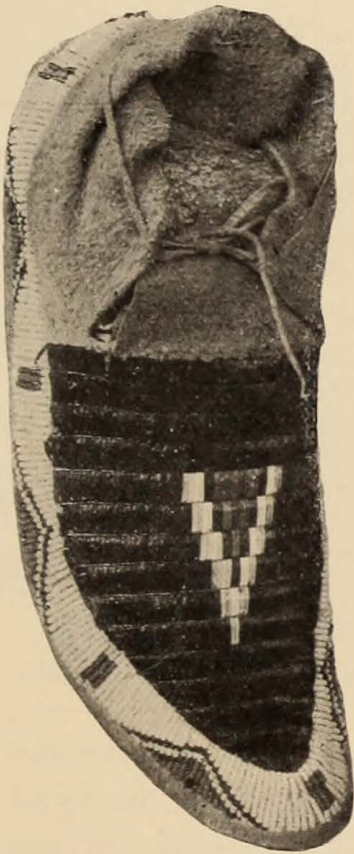
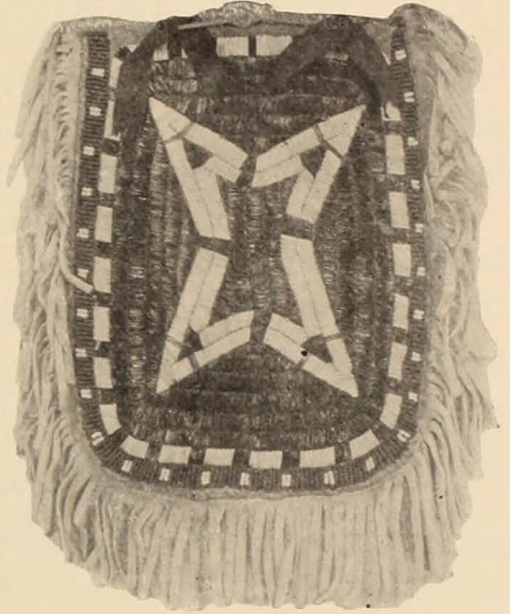
spoken of as the "turtle" design, or "turtle" pattern. So far as the makers of these designs are concerned, the name "turtle" is simply the pattern-name, and in no wise a representation of the animal specified. Thus we have a series of decorative designs in which the motive is not the representation of objects or ideas, but merely an appeal to the æsthetic sense. However, these design elements may be combined into wholes which do

represent definite objects or ideas, and so become symbolic designs; but the use of designs to represent any particular idea does not conform to any rule, it depends rather upon the fancy of the maker. A good example of this type of design is illustrated below (Case 25 a). It represents a decoration seen by the maker in a dream. It is thus a picture of the dream design. But there are certain geometrical forms which are symbolic, and are looked upon as sacred. One of the most common of these designs is that of a spider-web, which may be seen on the pouch shown on p. 25 (Case 25c). This design is looked upon as too sacred to be used for mere decorative purposes.



There is another type of design midway between the sacred symbolic one and the merely decorative one, such as the design of the turtle upon the dresses of women. This is simply a U-shaped figure placed on the breast

and the back. It appears on most of the beaded dresses, and is placed there partly for decoration, and partly because it is the prevailing style. The old women know that in former times the design of the turtle was placed on the dress as a kind of prayer to the mythical turtle, who was believed to be the guardian spirit watching over the lives of women. Now they say that the design is placed on the dress simply because "that is the way." Thus we have a design which was formerly sacred and symbolic, but is now chiefly decorative. The painted decorations upon the buffalo-robcs of men and women are of this type also.



In general, the decorative art of the Sioux presents three types, or perhaps stages, in the development of primitive art, — a purely decorative type, a purely symbolic type and an intermediate conventional type. The men employ the same simple and combined geometrical designs as are used by the women, but for the presentation of military ideas. Thus, the moccasin (Case 24 g) shown here represents a battle in which the wearer participated. The triangular designs around the sole (the tent pattern) represent hills; the small rectangles (the box pattern), enemies standing between the hills; the small marks upon each hill design, bullets striking. The instep of the moccasin is colored red to represent blood, and the triangular design within the red area represents an arrow. The idea

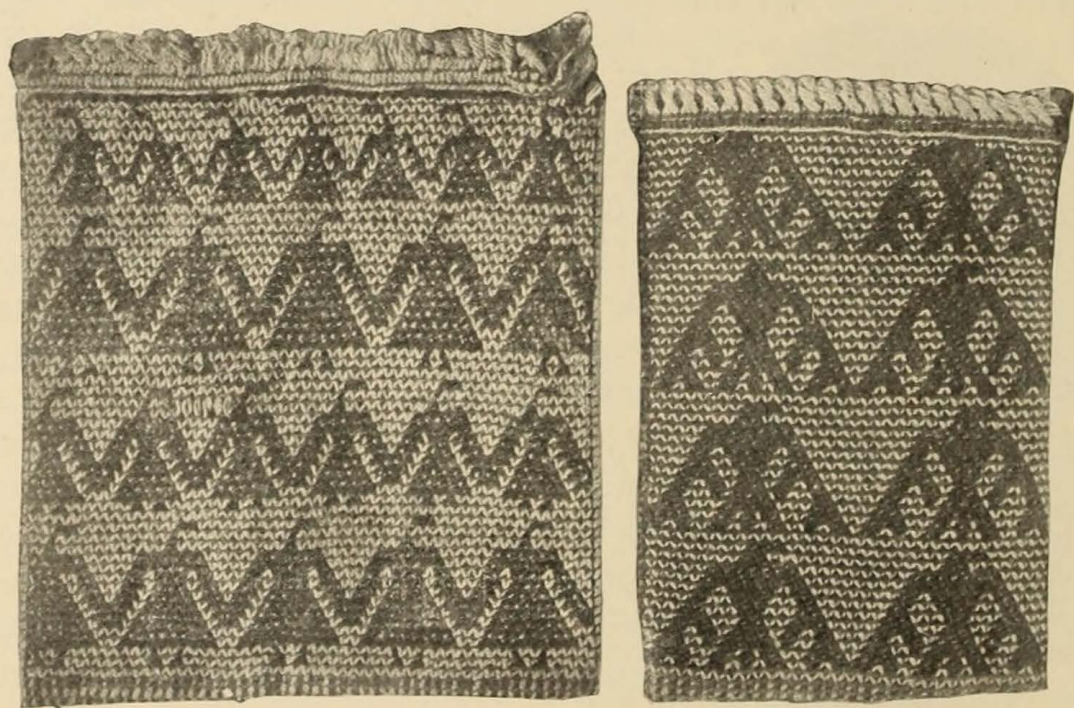
to be conveyed is, that the owner engaged in a battle in which the enemy took refuge in the hills, and that blood was shed.

Thus we have among the same people identical geometrical designs, with identical technical names, used to convey different ideas. The military symbolism of the men differs from the symbolism of the women in one respect, namely: that any one familiar with the mode of presentation can interpret the designs used by men with considerable exactness.

In a general way the interesting characteristic of Sioux art is the existence of two schools,—that of the women and that of the men,—each of which makes use of the same design elements, but to different ends.

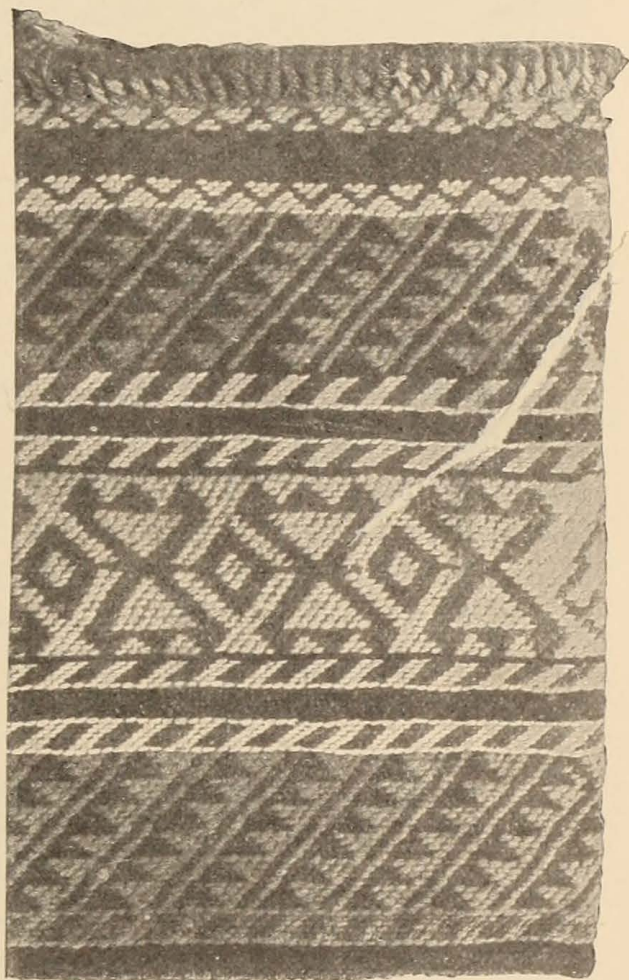
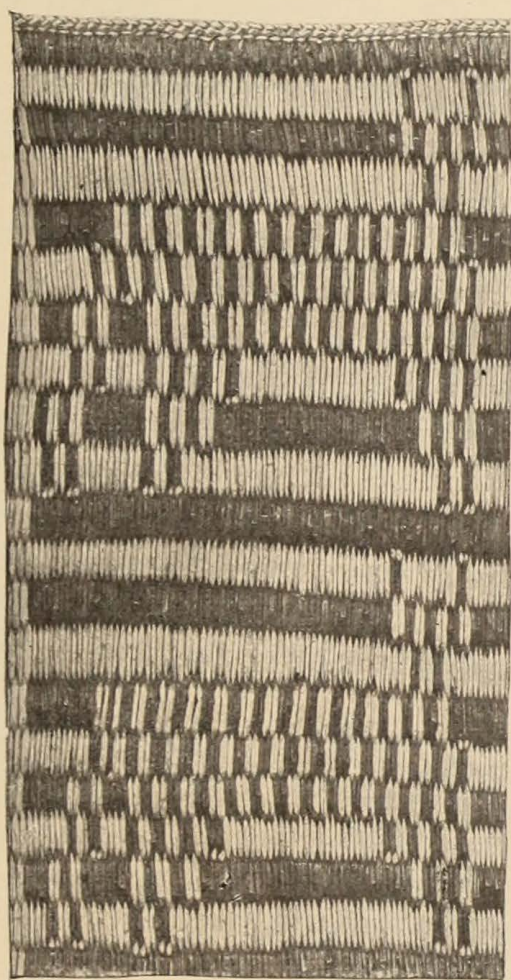
CASES 28, 29.

TRIBES OF THE EASTERN WOODLANDS.—Very little of the ancient art of the Indians of the eastern woodland area remains. Under the influence of modern patterns, the old style of porcupine-quill and bead-work has practically disappeared, and plant-



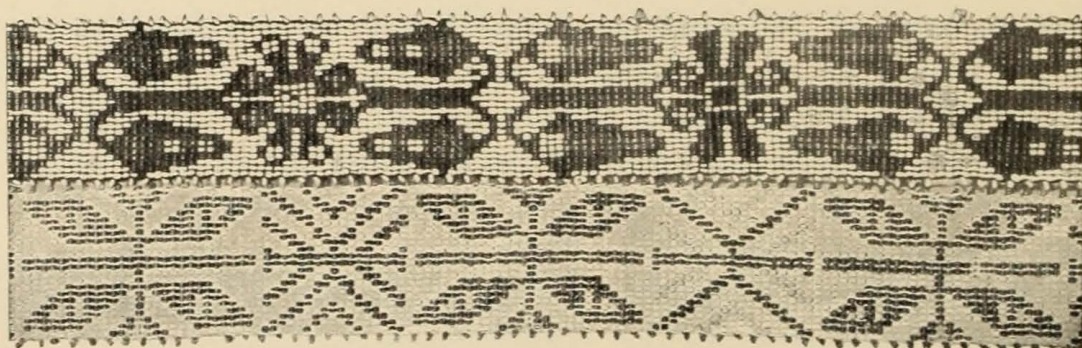
patterns have taken its place. Only on woven pouches and mats do some of the old patterns persist. These designs are partly of geometrical character; partly they consist of very stiff conventional reproductions of animal and human forms (Case 29 a). The favorite design seems to be that of a bird with spread wings,

the shape of which has also influenced the manner of representing the human form (Case 28 *e*). The geometric designs (Cases 28 *e*, 31) are mostly arranged in bands, and consist of triangles, zigzags and diamonds, which show only slight relation to those of the Indians of the Plains, while they remind us somewhat of the designs of the Indians of the State of Washington. We may perhaps recognize in some of the triangles with points under their bases the tent design so common



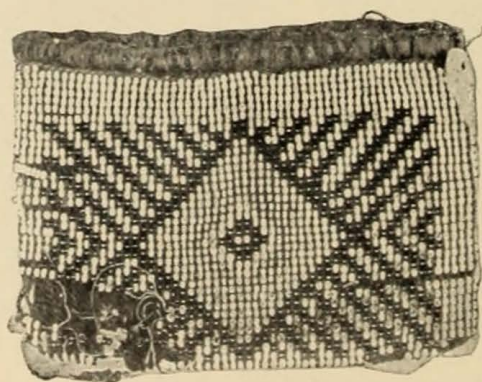
among the Plains Indians. The whole make-up, however, of the geometric forms is quite distinctive. If there ever has been any interpretation of these geometric designs, it seems to have been forgotten, and the designs are considered purely as ornamental, not as symbolic. The only striking exception is the same spider-web design that we find among the Sioux Indians, and which occurs here practically in the same form. (Case 28 *h*.)

Painted decorations are much rarer among these tribes than among those of the Great Plains. In place of the hide bags, which are so common among all the Prairie tribes, hide trunks



are used which are painted with patterns similar to those described before. Probably these hide trunks are modern forms of ancient bark boxes.

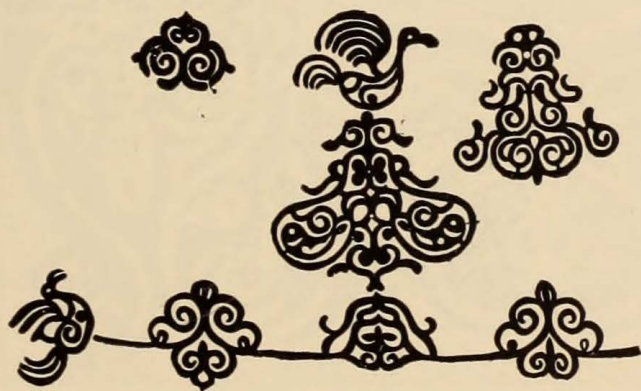
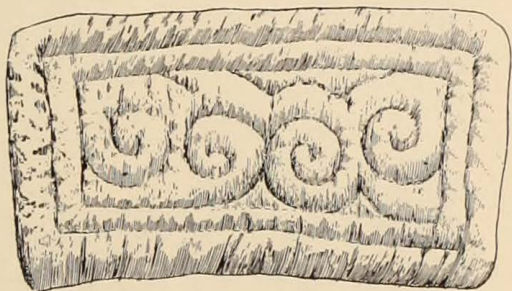
It is interesting to note that in the modern woven beadwork of these tribes the realistic flower designs which have been in vogue for a considerable period tend to assume geometrical shapes. The series of beaded belts exhibited in Case 28 *h* brings out clearly the fact that the leaves and fruits tend to assume the forms of diamonds, while the flowers tend to develop in the direction of crosses. The two beaded belts, illustrated above, show types of conventionalization of modern flower designs.





CASES 14, 16.

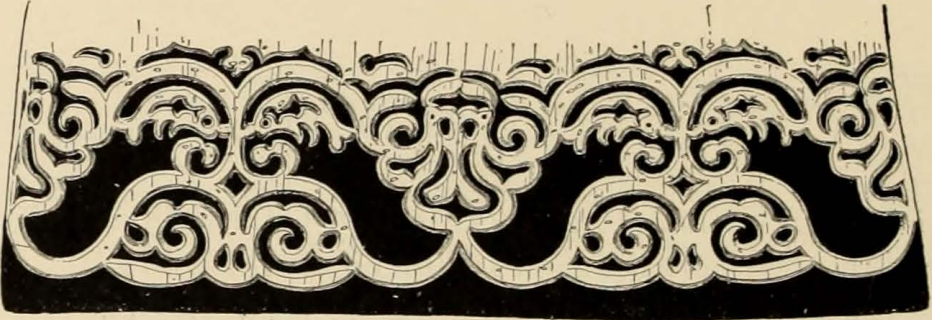
TRIBES OF THE AMUR RIVER.—The Gold, who inhabit the Upper Amur River, belong to Tungus stock, while the Gilyak of the Lower Amur River and of the Island of Saghalin form an independent group. The decorative art of these two tribes is almost identical. The fundamental forms are geometrical designs, consisting almost exclusively of spirals and of other curves,—a style of decoration widely spread in other parts of the Old World. In this particular region its occurrence is undoubtedly due to the influence of Chinese decorative art. The spiral ornaments are used in carving, in designs cut out of birch-bark and in embroidery. They are also applied in etched and inlaid ornaments on iron spears (Case 16 *a*). The most characteristic feature in



the elaboration of this motive is its combination with bird and fish designs. The cock particularly is a favorite pattern, and appears in combination with the spiral. On a fish-skin garment of the Gold may be seen a series of designs, at the top of

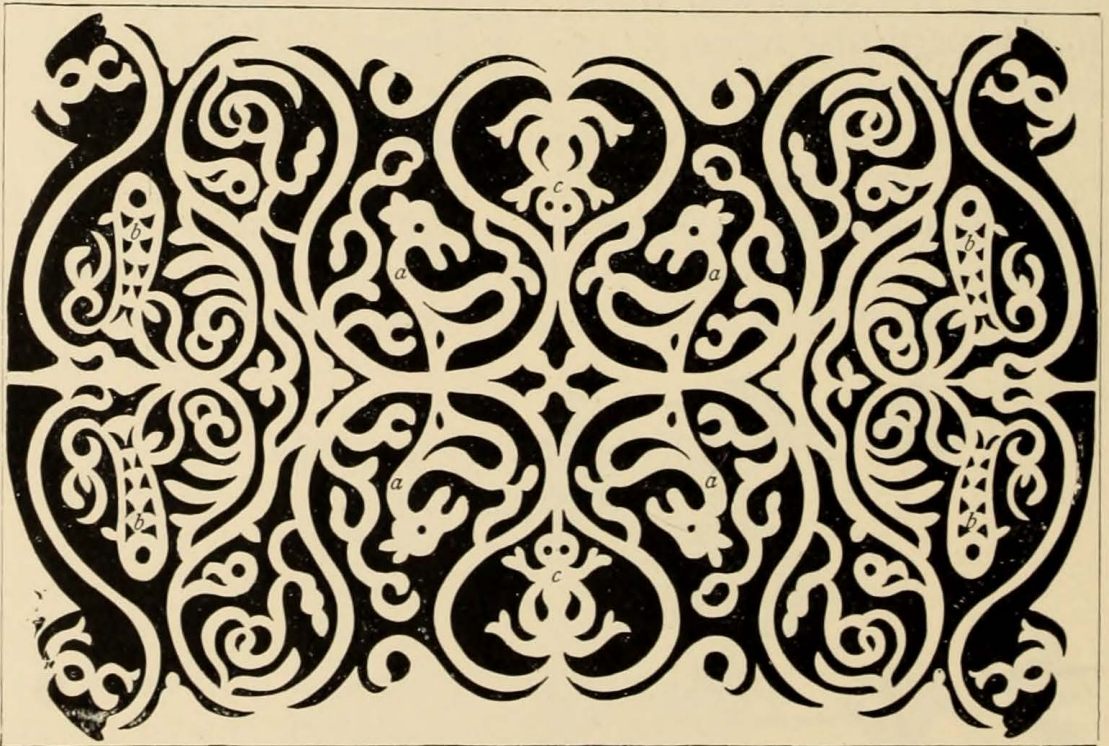
which is shown a crowing cock; other cocks are placed at the end of a horizontal band. On a birch-bark basket (Case 16 *e*) the same combination of designs appears very clearly, the curved ornament enclosing quite a number of cocks and fishes. Other

animals are not found as often as the two here named; but in a number of patterns exhibited in the turning-frame on the north wall of the hall, combinations of a variety of animals may be



found. In one of these, illustrated below, are represented four musk-deer (*a*), two frogs (*c*) and a number of fish (*b*).

While many of these forms are fairly realistic, in other cases the animal form is so highly conventionalized that it can be recog-



nized only because it is known to the natives as a symbol of the particular animal. Thus the spirals in a birch-bark basket (Case 16 *e*) are explained as two cocks which stand back to back; the point marked *a*, in the illustration beyond, being the beak of

the cock, while the oval (*c*) is an object which it is supposed to hold. This object is found in a great many representations of the cock, and may be said to be one of its prime characteristics. The tail of the cock has the form of a fish, and is shown at the point *b*. The center of the second set of spirals (*g*) has the form of a fish, which is always symbolized by a small circle attached to an elongated body.

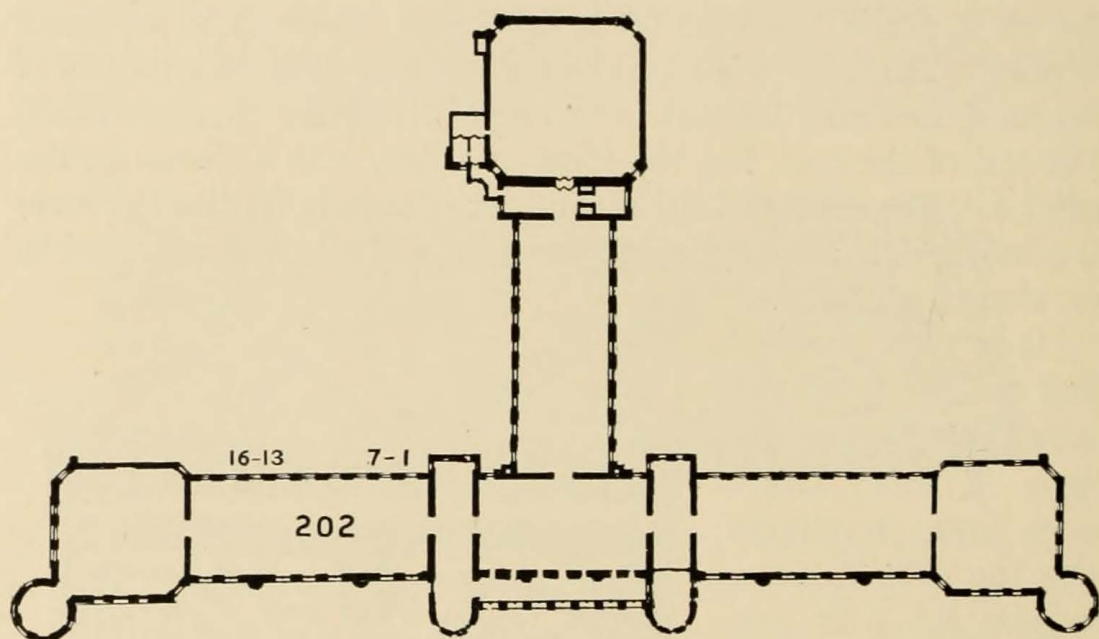
It is very peculiar that practically all the spirals and curved designs of these tribes have been developed into the cock motive, because the cock was not known to the tribes of the Amur River until quite recently. The use of this motive, and particularly also the frequent occurrence of the round object which is in its beak, indicates



that this motive is of foreign origin. It is evidently the same as the cock in China which holds the sun in its beak.

It is interesting to note that, among this tribe also, the form and ornamentation of objects used in religious ceremonies are much more realistic than purely decorative motives. Thus we find the coat of a shaman (Case 14 *c*), on which is painted a mythological representation of the world-tree, representing the conception of the world that is current among the tribe.

Going back through Hall 102, the visitor passes the Eskimo collections, and attention is called to the fact that very few implements and objects made by the Eskimo are decorated, except their clothing, which bears designs of dark and white caribou-skin.



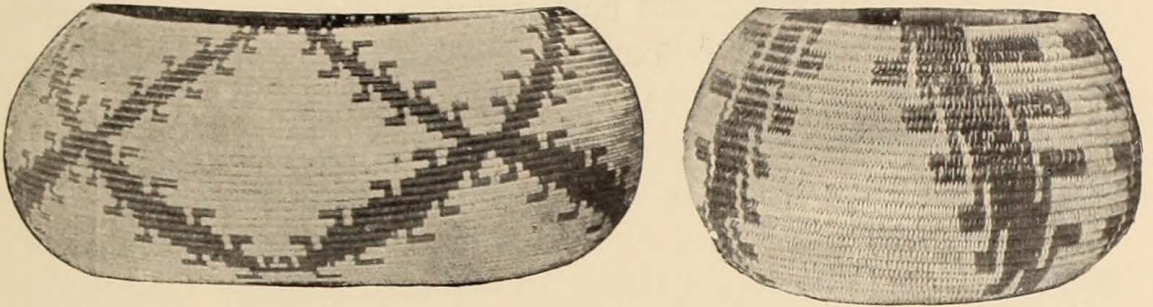
SECOND FLOOR, HALL 202.

On the second floor are found collections from California and Mexico which illustrate some of the characteristics of the decorative art of these regions.

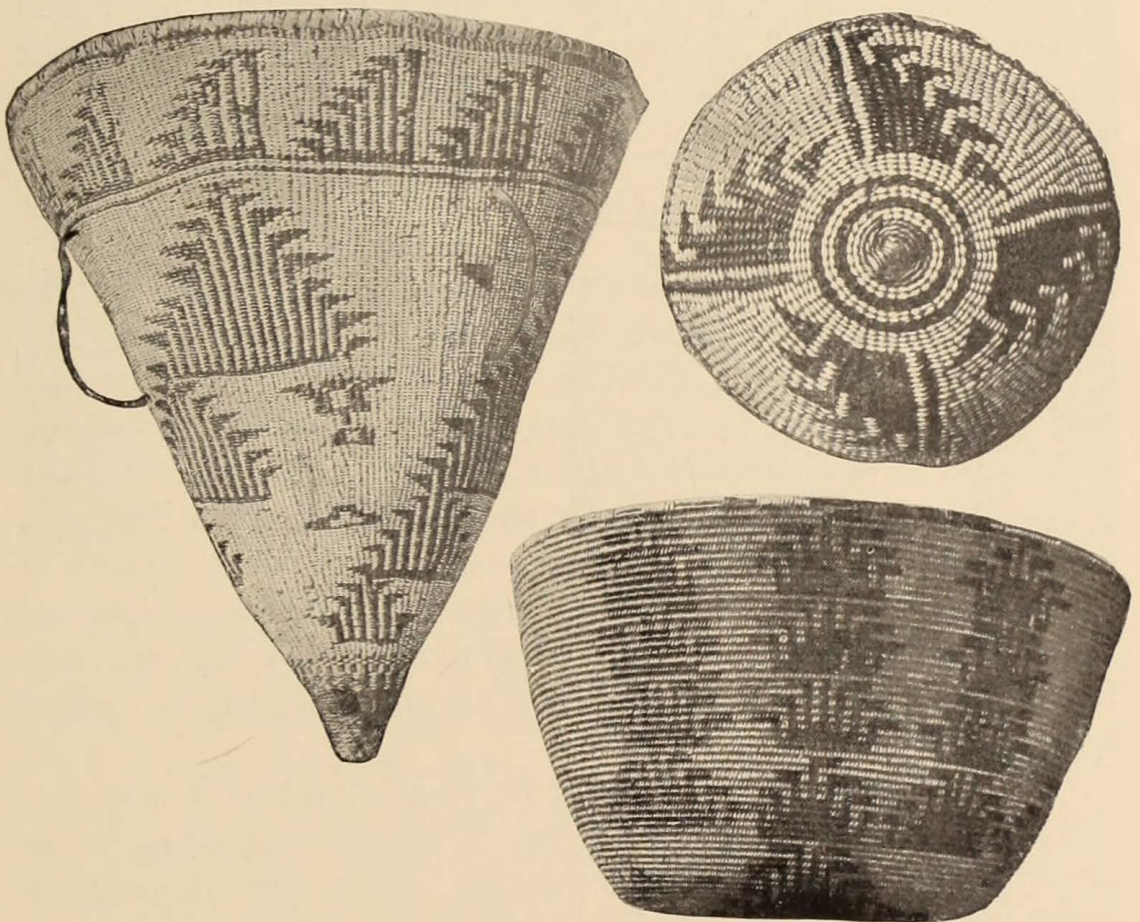
CASES 1-6.

CALIFORNIA INDIANS.—The decorative art of the California Indians, more particularly that of the Indians of southern California, is almost entirely confined to basketry. Their baskets are mostly round, rather rarely oblong, many of them quite shallow: consequently we find a tendency to arrange the decorative designs in radial groups or in spirals. The designs themselves are rarely realistic, but consist always of more or less intricate geometrical designs. The similarity of these designs on various baskets is quite striking. Their interpretations, however, differ considerably. A collection illustrating the similarity of design and the diversity of their meaning has been assembled in Case 2 *a, b*. There we find on one basket a design representing a squirrel's foot. A similar design on another basket represents mountains and pine-cones; on still another, the bear's foot; and on a fourth the owl's claw.

In the same case are shown a number of baskets illustrating one of the most common ornamental motives found in California,



the so-called "quail-tip," a design consisting of a slender line with a small heavy hook standing off from the end at right angles. This design was described before as found on baskets from the State of



Washington (Case R 12 in Hall 108), and it seems probable that it has spread along the Pacific coast from tribe to tribe. This

seems the more likely, since it is found in entirely different weaves, according to the district in which it occurs. While it is found on many Californian weaves, it is applied in the State of Washington on the peculiar imbricated basketry the characteristic designs of which are illustrated by baskets of the Thompson and Lillooet Indians (see p. 15 and Cases O and P, Hall 108).

The interpretations given to designs by the Californian Indians vary greatly. The designs often represent plants, while some represent fish-teeth, snakes, worms, millepedes, butterflies, etc. Designs symbolic of larger animals are absent. One of the most frequently occurring designs on Californian, and perhaps on all basketry, is the feather and arrow-point design (Cases 2, 3). Realistic designs are found only in the extreme southern part of California and in the adjoining portions of Arizona.

In northern California the interpretation of designs seems to be almost absent. The patterns of this district are called "striped," "zigzag," etc., terms which are evidently names, not interpretations (Case 6 f).

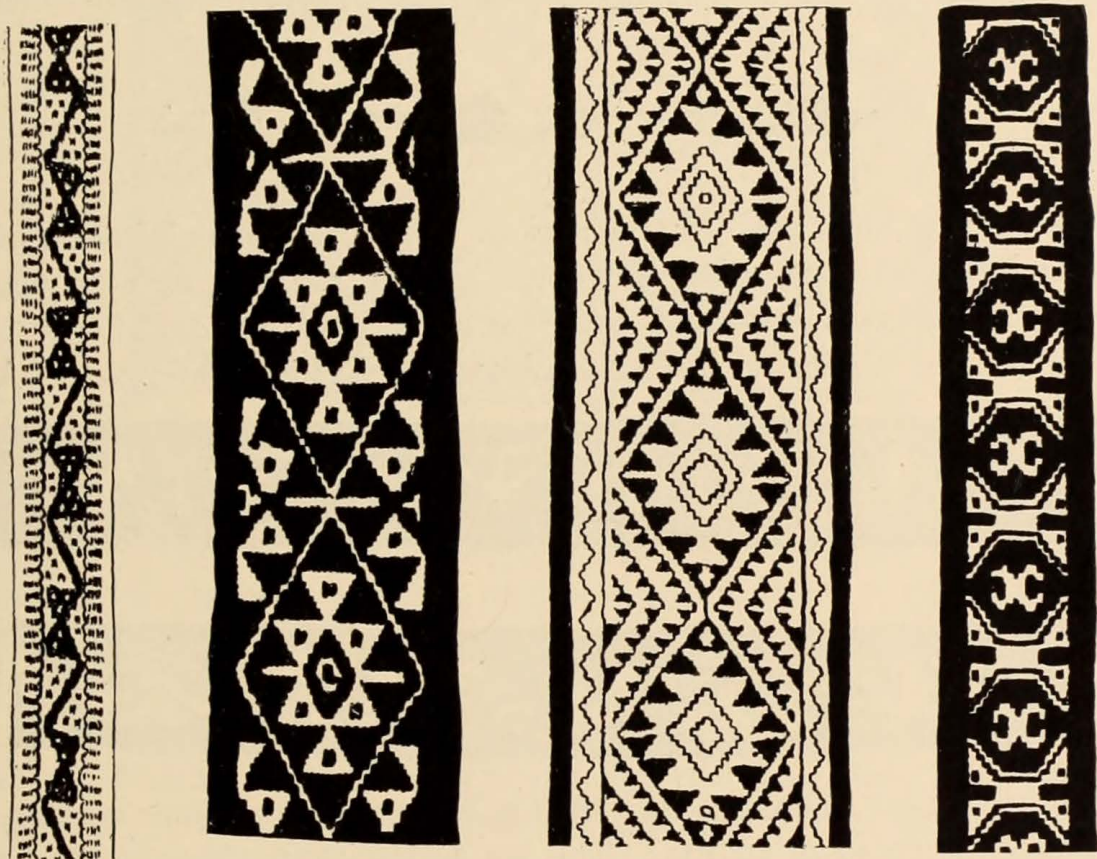
CASE 15.

HUICHOL INDIANS, MEXICO.—The decorative art of the modern tribes of Mexico has evidently been much influenced by Spanish art. The most elaborate decorative work of the present period is done in textiles, particularly in weaving and in embroidery, while modern pottery designs are of a crude character. The designs found in various regions of Mexico and of Central America, and also those of South America, consist to a great extent of geometrical elements, but also of somewhat angular representations of birds, mammals and men, all more or less conventionalized. The color combinations differ also considerably in various regions.

One of the designs found most frequently on textile work is a series of triangles which are similar in their arrangement to the arrow design on Californian basketry. This type of design is found on the belts of the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico and Arizona as well as in Mexico. A comparison with ancient Mexican designs, in so far as they have been preserved on ancient Mexi-

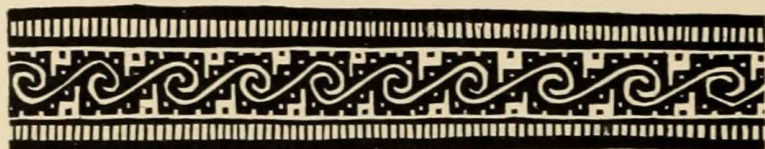
can codices, or as they may be recognized on the garments of ancient sculptured figures, shows that these types of weaving did not exist before the advent of the Spaniards and the introduction of European fabrics.

For this reason it is interesting to note that by some tribes the designs are at present given interpretations quite analogous to those found among the Prairie Indians and among other primitive tribes. A collection of belts, ribbons and pouches from the Huichol



tribe of western Mexico (Case 15), illustrates this point. The zigzag triangle, described by the Californian Indians as the arrow design, is called here the "double water-gourd" design. The Indians compare the hourglass figure, which originates from a combination of two triangles, to the double gourd, which has two thick ends and a constriction in the middle. The X-shaped form, also quite common, is interpreted as a brush made of loose fibres tied together in the middle or at one end. A series of scrolls is an element which occurs very frequently in their weav-

ing. It is called the "bridle," because Mexican bridles have on either side of the bit a figure resembling one of these scrolls.



It is also interpreted as the linking of hands. The decorative element shown in the figure below is interpreted as the steel for striking fire. It is considered as an ornamental elaboration of

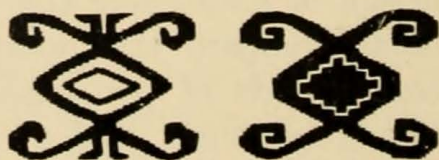
the form shown in the figure below is interpreted as the steel for striking fire. It is considered as an ornamental elaboration of



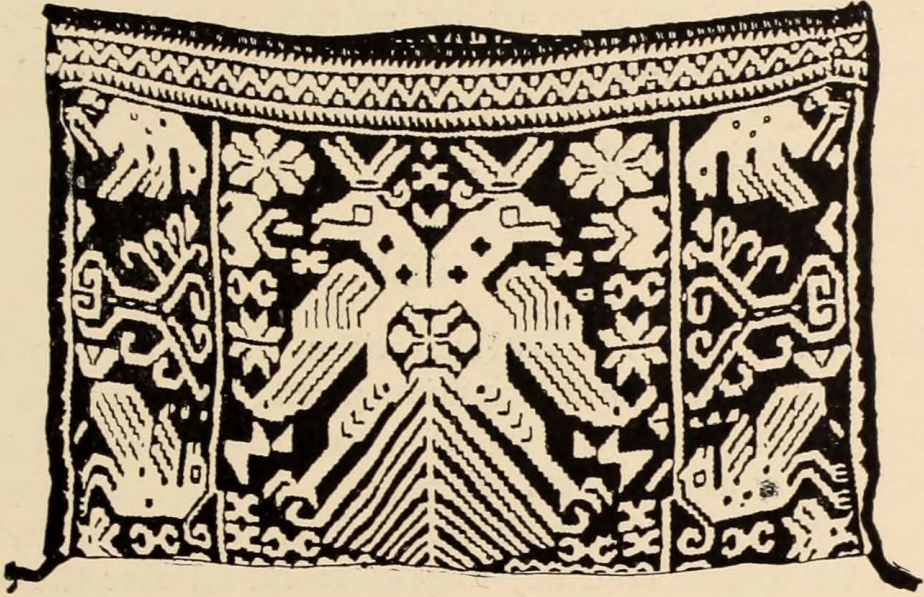
the form of steel used in this region. The arbitrary character of the interpretations given by these people may be seen in the elaboration of this design, which is sometimes developed into a continuous band, and is then explained as a vine and flowers. A



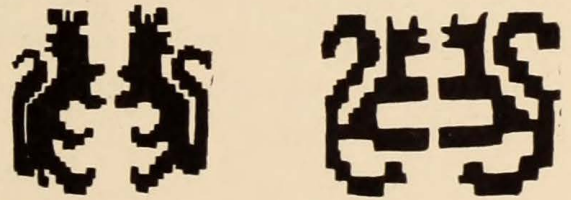
very frequent element of decoration is shown below, and is interpreted as roots of plants. The transition from these forms to more realistic ones is very gradual. The simple geometrical forms are combined into plant designs, and, in their most symmetrical arrangement, to flower designs. To these are added sometimes realistic representations of double-headed birds, of mountain-lions and of other animals. Long narrow ribbons covered with designs of this character are generally described as serpents, the design indicating the marks on the serpent's back.



A comparison of the decorative designs exhibited in Case 15 with the designs on ceremonial objects which will be found in Cases 13 and 14, shows a marked difference between the two styles. The execution of the purely ornamental objects is careful,—the



designs are regular in outline, and the conventionalism in interpretation and in form is strong. The decoration on sacrificial objects, on the other hand, is, on the whole, crude; it is throughout pictographic in character. The crudeness of these designs is partly due to lack of skill in the use of the brush and of the carving-tool, and in the application of bead-work by means of wax,—an art which is undoubtedly a survival of the ancient turquoise mosaics. All carved and painted designs of the Huichol Indians seem to be crude, and many of the embroidered designs on sacrificial objects are also poorly executed; but this may be partly due to their temporary character. A few of them, however, are carefully woven; but their designs are pictographic, not geometrical. The interpretation of the conventional decorative designs of the Huichol is, on the whole, in line with the ideas expressed on their ceremonial objects. Their constant thought is the need of rain for their crops; and the water-



gourd, the flowers, the vines and serpents are all considered as symbols of rain or of the vegetation produced by rain.

In this respect the interpretation of the geometrical designs given by the Huichol resembles very much that given by the Pueblo Indians of the arid Southwest. Some of the favorite motives of their decorative art are interpreted in the same manner, terraced triangles with lines descending from them being always interpreted as rain-clouds and falling rain; while zigzag lines represent lightning.

SUMMARY.

The description of these collections shows that in many remote parts of the world primitive people interpret the ornamental designs which they use for decorating objects of everyday use as representations of realistic ideas. Investigations among other peoples, from whom the Museum has no collections, show that the same tendency may be found all over the world. In some cases it has been found possible to bring together a series of decorative motives which show at one end an almost realistic representation of a certain object, while at the other end of the series may be seen a purely conventional form. From this observation the conclusion has been drawn, that, on the whole, geometrical ornaments originated from realistic forms by gradual transformation.

On the other hand, we have seen that in many cases the same form was transferred from one tribe to another by borrowing, as, for instance, among the Indians of the Plains; and that different interpretations were given to the same forms by different tribes. This seems to indicate that the interpretation may also be adapted to the design, or, as we may say, that, according to the favorite concepts of the people, an idea has been "read into" the design.

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