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Author(s): Carl Schuster

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ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

China.

With Plate O.

Schuster.

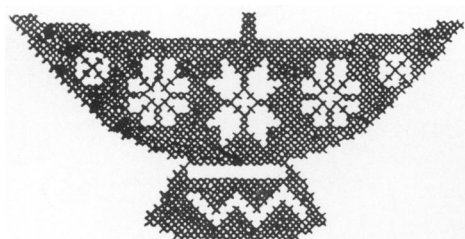
A PREHISTORIC SYMBOL IN MODERN CHINESE FOLK ART. *By Carl Schuster, Peiping, China.*

270 The M- and W-marks which occur so frequently on archaic Greek pottery and in predynastic Egyptian art have been interpreted by Herbert Kühn (in the appendix to Carl Hentze 'Mythes et Symboles lunaires,' Antwerp, 1932, pp. 245 ff.) as signs for water and, by extension, for fertility. Kühn attaches this interpretation also to the zigzag ('Winkelband') which occurs conspicuously on the neolithic banded pottery of Central Europe (Walternienburg-Bernburger-Kultur, Rössener Typus (Plate O, 11): the same zigzag ornament seems to have been taken over by artisans of the bronze age and the Halsatt period). Kühn observes: "That these markings occur on vessels certainly cannot be due to chance, since vessels were made for the express purpose of containing fluids—water or milk—and it would be natural for people to have decorated them with the spell for 'water,' in the desire to have them always full." In Greek and Egyptian representative art it is the motives with which the M- and W-marks are associated that give the clue to their meanings in the case of vessels decorated with nothing but this geometric device, according to Kühn, it is the vessel itself which supplies the significant context.

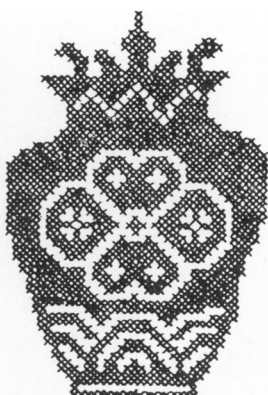
Though many in our rationalistic and unimaginative society are apt to discredit the symbolic interpretation of motives in primitive applied design, it seems that we may be in danger of scientific error by failing to make due allowance for the strong, yet often elusive, tendency of less highly civilized peoples to express themselves in terms of symbols. That Kühn is essentially right in his interpretation of the zigzag or wavy line so widespread in prehistoric and protohistoric pottery design seems to me curiously confirmed by the occurrence of an exactly similar decorative device in the modern folk designs of western China. One of the favourite and most frequent motives of this western Chinese design repertory is that of a vessel (bowl, pot, or vase) with a plant growing in it; the shapes of the vessels and the species of the plants are of course various, but mythologically all the plants may be reasonably regarded as variants of that widespread type, the 'Tree of Life.' One may also suppose that the vessels from which these plants are represented as growing are conceived as containers of the fluid element essential for their growth.

A glance at a group of such vessels, Plate O, 1-8, selected from western Chinese folk-embroideries, will suffice to show the persistence of the zigzag decoration upon them. Of course there are examples of vessel designs in this folk art which do not show the zigzag, but it is far more significant that there are so many which do, and, furthermore, that the zigzag as a decorative motive is hardly found applied to other uses in this class of work.

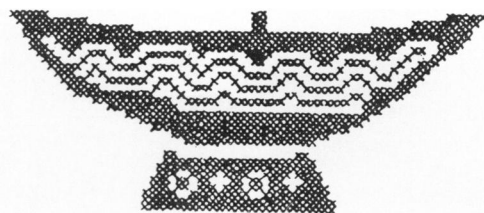
The zigzag as a mark on vessels from which plants grow occurs not only in these embroideries, but appears, from other forms of art-expression in this region, to be well-established in the popular artistic consciousness of the western provinces. Thus, for example, a zigzag marking, in several



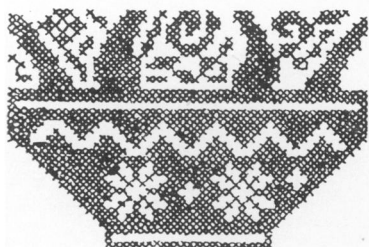
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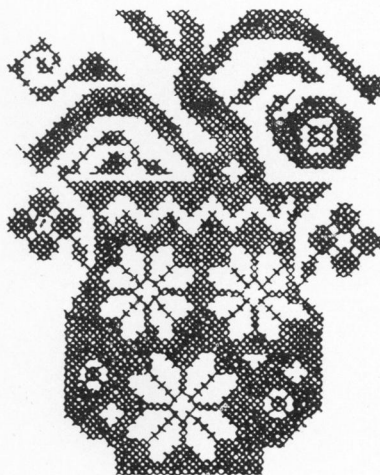
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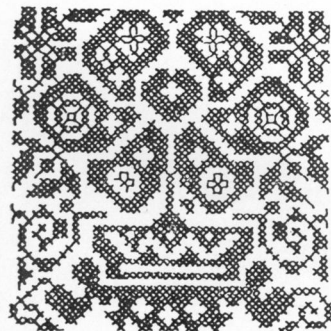
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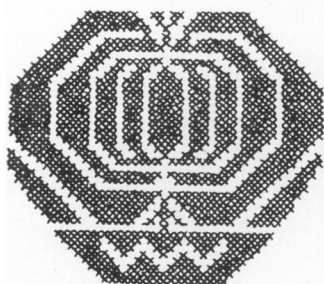
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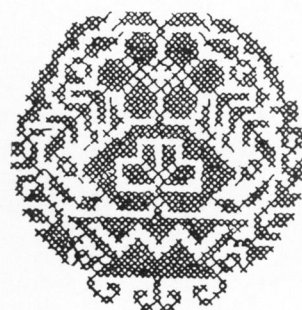
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9.



10.



11.

A PREHISTORIC SYMBOL IN CHINESE FOLK ART

1-8. DESIGNS FOR CHINESE EMBROIDERIES.

9. MODERN RICKSHAW SEAT-COVER, CH'UNGKING.

10. CHINESE EMBROIDERY DESIGN.

11. ZIGZAG ORNAMENT ON EUROPEAN NEOLITHIC POTTERY: HELENENDORF.

parallel lines, occurs on the vessel represented in the stone carving on a wayside shrine, Fig. 12. Another application of this symbolic device which shows what a commonplace it has become in the



FIG. 12. ZIGZAG ORNAMENT ON CARVED REPRESENTATION OF A FLOWER-VASE.

far west of China is its application in blue tape to the seat covers of hundreds of rickshaws in the Szech'uan city of Ch'ungking. Thus in Plate O, 9, we see the folk motive of the vessel with the tree of life reduced to a sort of shorthand or pictogram; the plant is suggested by four curving blades, and the vessel by a simple trapezoid. In spite of these drastic simplifications, it is significant that the zigzag motive is, on these seat covers, invariably retained as an essential feature of the design; indeed it seems to have become an earmark by which the vessel is identified as such.

As for the embroidery designs, Plate O, 1-8: the vase, Fig. 1, betrays 'urban' influence in its elegant shape. It represents a tendency of this folk art, in rare cases, to borrow motives from that type of decorative design which may be regarded as the product of a specially trained professional class of artisans, as opposed to the

untutored handiwork of the women. In keeping with the urban or professional character of the vase of Fig. 1, the embroiderer has decorated the bottom of the vessel with a sort of scale pattern, which is a stereotype in Chinese professional design for 'water.' On the other hand, on the neck of the same vase the embroiderer has applied the more popular and strongly geometric symbol of the zigzag. By such juxtaposition it seems that the designer expresses as clearly as possible in terms of design her conception of the significance of the zigzag line as a water symbol: we have, so to speak, a brief text in two languages, that of the upper classes and that of the people.

Again in Figs. 2 and 3, taken from two adjoining and in every respect similar medallions from the same piece of embroidery, we have on the crescentic vessel in one case the zigzag, in the other a more naturalistic rendering of fluid ripples, in so far as this is possible in the technique of cross-stitch. Here, again, the two designs are apparently regarded as equivalent, and we can infer from the known (or relatively decipherable) value of the more naturalistic motive the proper reading of the less naturalistic one, the zigzag.

Plate O, 10 is perhaps of special interest because of the distinctly crescentic shape of the rim of the vessel to which the zigzag is applied. Kühn in the above mentioned passage stresses the popular association, moon-water.

As for the possibility of getting an expression of opinion on the significance of the zigzag line from the people who made the embroideries, it is unfortunately out of the question, for those people have been gone for a least two generations, and the explanations which one gets nowadays can hardly be described as enlightening, except in so far as they reveal the appalling speed and thoroughness of the psychological revolution caused by the penetration of foreign and 'modern' materials and ideas into remote corners of the interior. It would seem only reasonable to expect, however, that the people who 60 or 80 years ago embroidered these designs must have had a pretty clear idea of their intention when they applied the zigzag design (or, rather, in most cases, voided it) on their embroidered representations of pots and vases.

Implied in this comparison of a modern folk design with early archaeological remains is the fundamental question: unbroken transmission

or independent invention? On the one hand it might seem that so simple a device as the representation of water by a wavy or zigzag line and its application to vessels could be independently invented very easily, and it is notoriously difficult to prove either the proposition or its contrary. I personally should be strongly inclined, however, on principle, to believe in the greater probability of an unbroken cultural transmission as the explanation of this modern Chinese design, though I must leave it to others to judge

of the historical possibilities implied in the case.

Note 1.—The writer is at present engaged in collecting examples of folk design in western China in the form chiefly of cross-stitch embroidery. These designs often show a marked divergence from the rest of Chinese art and evidence of early foreign influence. During 1936 or 1937, essays discussing various features of these embroideries are to appear in *Asia, Monumenta Serica*, Strzygowski's *Spuren indogermanischen Glaubens in der bildenden Kunst*, and elsewhere. A comparative discussion of our motive was published in *Embroidery*, September, 1935.

Earthy.

THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF A GBANDE TOWN, LIBERIA. By E. Dora Earthy; Abstract of a paper read at the British Association, Blackpool Meeting, 1936.

271 The Gbande tribe of Liberia occupies the area falling approximately within the parallels of 8° and $8\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ North Latitude, and the meridians of 10° and $10\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ West Longitude. The neighbouring tribes are the Kisi to the North, the Mende and Mandingo to the West, the Buzi or Toma to the East, and the Gola to the South.

The Gbande are governed by a paramount chief, whose kingdom is divided into sections under the rule of clan chiefs, each with a number of sub-clan and town chiefs under him.

The land is fertile. Cotton, rice, and palm-oil are produced in abundance. Iron for currency bars, which are known popularly in Sierra Leone as 'Kisi pennies,' is said to be procured from French Guinea.

The religion of the Gbande is a mixture of paganism, totemism, and a very superstitious form of Mohammedanism. There are a few Christians.

Marriage.—Bride-wealth (*nyahai ganga koli*) is paid in iron-bar currency in instalments, which sometimes take a life-time to complete. A concrete evidence in currency of the bridegroom's good intentions enables the bride to live at her husband's home. If nothing is paid for the woman, the man must settle in his wife's village and work for her parents or near relatives. The symbol of the former kind of marriage is one currency bar, which is placed on the bride's head by the bridegroom during the marriage rite, with the words:—"This is my wife," when he has just handed over the first instalment of bride-wealth he has brought with him to the bride's father.

A younger brother usually inherits the chief's wives except two or three which the dying chief

may bequeath to this brother's son, if he has one.

Death and Burial.—People are buried in the Gitiwaiah or centre of the town in which they live, and large stones and sacrificial offerings are placed on the graves. A chief has an open hut erected over his grave. Nothing that is placed in this hut is ever stolen. A chieftainess will be buried in a clay extension of the wall of an important descendant's hut. Young children are buried in the bush near the town.

Relationships.—The chief terms of relationship among the Gbande are *kege* (father); *nde* (mother); *kawaa* (grandfather); *mamaa* (grand-mother); *kege pombo* (brother); *nuko* (brother-in-law); *nwului* (son); *mamalui* (daughter); *nyahai* (wife); *ngihiyenge* (husband); *ndege* (mother's sister); *ndia* (father's sister's son, if older than the person speaking); *niabe* (father's sister's son if younger than speaker); *tinna* (father's sister's daughter). These terms are extended to include distant relationships.

In order to avoid being personal I have given Old Testament names to the inhabitants of the town which I am about to describe, and which I call Nimrodlahun, the home of Nimrod the Hunter. The python is the chief totem of this town, and associated totems are kola nuts and small freshwater fishes resembling shrimps. I was told that "the whole body will be sick if the people eat their totems."

The sacred 'lightning' medicine is found in this town, as most probably in all the others. The doctrine and discipline relating to lightning, according to Frobenius, is West Asiatic in origin, surviving especially in the Atlantic culture of