

✓ CARL SCHUSTER:
SOME COMPARATIVE CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT
WESTERN ASIATIC CARPET DESIGNS

THE ACCOMPANYING ILLUSTRATIONS AND THE FOLLOWING REMARKS ABOUT them are intended not so much to provide the solution of an historical problem as to suggest a series of relationships which may prove stimulating to further research.

Though a great deal has been written about the knotted and tapestry-woven carpets of Western Asia, and most writers on the subject have something to say about the meanings of their designs, still much of what is offered in the way of interpretation is too largely based on individual fancy, and has too little reference to comparative criteria, to be regarded as anything but speculation. This is all the more regrettable because the carpets of Western Asia—especially those of the various popular traditions which survived into the nineteenth century in Central Asia, the Caucasus, Persia, and Anatolia—are so incredibly rich in design. There is great need for the elucidation of this design-material, but an almost total lack of understanding how to go about it. Thus a wealth of curious and significant symbolism lies unrecognized literally just under our feet.¹

There are many places at which a study of carpet design could be begun. Our point of departure is a type of small octagonal medallion, Fig. 1, which is repeated several times in the field of a nineteenth-century Caucasian carpet, Fig. 12. Surrounding a central X-shaped device we see, on the periphery of this medallion, four closely similar, if not identical, shapes alternating in color in the rhythm ABAB. We can hardly suppose that this type of medallion was invented by the knoter of this particular carpet, for it occurs again in the same context on similar carpets, and always shows the same, or closely similar, features. Fortunately we have at least two clues to the origin of this medallion, and fortunately both clues, though from different epochs and different regions, point to the same

¹ Cf. Josef Strzygowski, *Der amerasiatische Kunststrom*, *Ostasiatische Zeitschrift*, vol. 21 (n. s., vol. 11), fasc. 5, 1935, Berlin, 1936, p. 183.

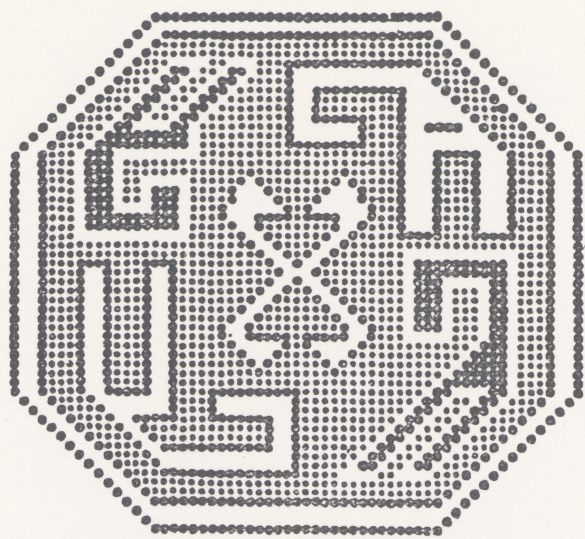


Fig. 1 Caucasian carpet medallion
Nineteenth century

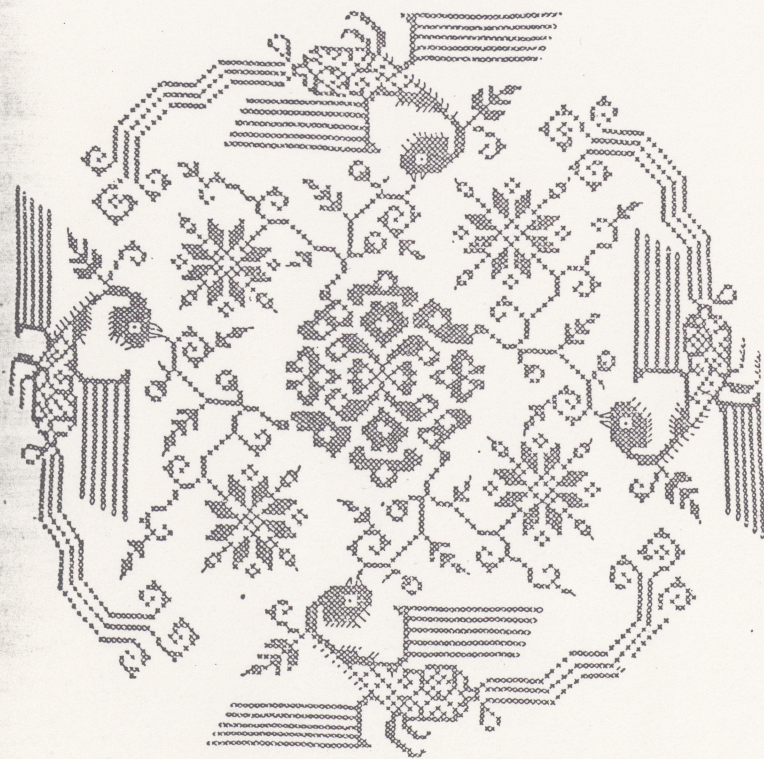


Fig. 2 Medallion of a Chinese peasant embroidery
Nineteenth century

inference about its meaning. Our first clue is provided by the design of Fig. 2, which is taken from a nineteenth-century cross-stitch embroidery from Western China.² Here we see four clearly recognizable birds flying round the periphery of a medallion, whose roughly octagonal outline is described by their bodies, their wings, and their long tail feathers. Each bird has its head reverted toward the center of the medallion and holds in its

² For these cotton embroideries from Western China the reader may be referred to my article, "A Comparative Study of Motives in Western Chinese Folk Embroideries", *Monumenta Serica*, vol. 2, Peking (the Catholic University), 1936, pp. 21—80 and 437—440. A more popular account appeared as 'Peasant Embroideries of China', in *Asia*, vol. 37, no. 1, New York, January 1937, pp. 26—31, and a preliminary account, with some comparative considerations, as an interpolation entitled „Das Vogelmotiv in der chinesischen Bauernstickerei“, in Josef Strzygowski, *Spuren indogermanischen Glaubens in der bildenden*

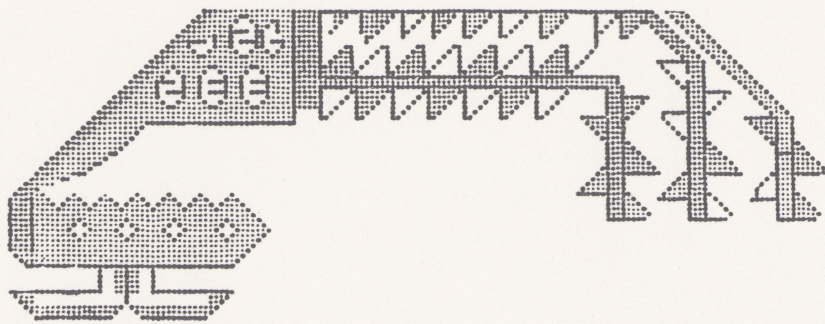


Fig. 3
Phoenix

Detail of the fifteenth-century carpet, Fig. 13

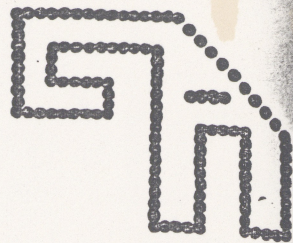


Fig. 4 Detail
of the nineteenth-century
carpet medallion, Fig. 1

beak a sprig of foliage connected with a central conventionalized flower. In the vocabulary of Chinese folk art these birds are phoenixes and the central flower is a tree-peony.³ In endless variations this type of medallion, with four phoenixes flying round a central flower, is a commonplace in the popular embroideries of Western China. This particular example of the type is especially appropriate for comparison with Fig. 1 because of the

Kunst, Heidelberg 1936, pp. 326—344. An article entitled "Some Peasant Embroideries from Western China", which appeared in *Embroidery* (Journal of the Embroiderers' Guild, London), September, 1935, pp. 87—96, is of interest in connection with the present essay in so far as it includes another parallel between a medallion in the Chinese peasant embroideries and a medallion in the knotted carpets of Western Asia (*op. cit.*, fig. 9 and pl. L, respectively), thus supplementing the arguments here set forth. Further comparisons between Western Asiatic carpet designs and Chinese peasant embroideries, as well as a number of other comparative considerations in connection with carpet designs, will appear in chapters ii to vi of my forthcoming book, *The Sunbird* (Cambridge, the Harvard-Yenching Institute and Harvard University Press).

³ The stereotyped designation for designs representing the phoenix and tree-peony in combination is *fēng ch'uan mu-tan*, 鳳穿牡丹, which might be rendered "the phoenix entwined with peonies", or "the phoenix passing among the peonies", or "the phoenix passing from peony to peony".

It may be said here that though we regard the four peripheral shapes of the carpet medallion as equivalent to the four birds of the Chinese embroidered medallion, it does not necessarily follow that the central X-shaped device of the carpet medallion is the equivalent of the central "peony" of the Chinese design, in the sense of a genetic relationship. This X-shaped device has probably been substituted by the carpet-knotters for whatever stood here originally, were it a peony or anything else. The central "X" thus has a different origin from the rest of the design, and does not stand in a conceptually significant relationship to the four peripheral birds. On the identity of this X-shaped motive see the first paragraph of note 5 below.



Fig. 5 Bosnian embroidery
Nineteenth century

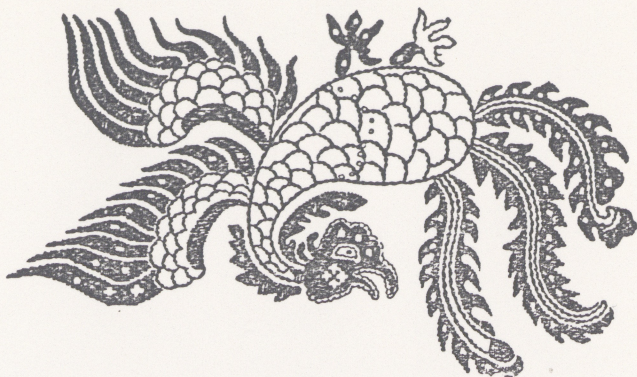


Fig. 6 Chinese embroidery
Nineteenth century

obvious resemblance of the four phoenixes, both individually and as a group, to the four peripheral shapes of the carpet medallion.

Our second clue to the identity of the four peripheral shapes of the carpet medallion, Fig. 1, lies in the design of a well-known knotted carpet from Western Asia which, dating from the fifteenth century or possibly even earlier, is undoubtedly one of the oldest knotted carpets extant. This carpet, or rather this carpet fragment, which we reproduce schematically in Fig. 13, has two octagonal medallions, each containing the representation of a highly conventionalized dragon confronting a highly conventionalized phoenix. There is no reason to doubt the Chinese inspiration of this design.⁴ As a matter of fact, not only the idea, but much in the peculiar stylization of both the phoenix and the dragon finds its parallel in Chinese decorative design, and especially in Chinese folk art, which, though less familiar to us than the refined products of Chinese professional ateliers, still thrives, or is only now dying out, in the interior of the country. In Figs. 14 and 15 we have juxtaposed one of the dragons of the fifteenth-century carpet from Western Asia with a typical dragon from the modern folk art of Western Chinese cotton embroidery. The two creatures show enough similarity in their contorted posture, the inept attachment of their clawed legs, their manes, beards(?), and other appendages, to make the supposition of kinship between them appear at least highly plausible. However this may

⁴ The combined motive of the dragon and the phoenix seems to have been brought to Western Asia by the Mongol court from China, where these creatures were familiar symbols for the heads of the imperial house. See the remarks under Fig. 13 in the list of illustrations.

be, our chief concern is with the phoenix rather than with the dragon of Fig. 13. Before speaking of Chinese analogies for this bird, it will be best for us to compare the birds of the two carpet designs, that of the fifteenth century and that of the nineteenth century, with each other.

The relationship of the phoenix in the early carpet, Fig. 13, to the peripheral shapes of the modern carpet medallion, Fig. 1, becomes obvious as soon as we compare the two isolated motives: Figs. 3 and 4. There can hardly be any doubt that the four peripheral shapes of the nineteenth-century medallion, Fig. 1, are but simplified reductions of a type of phoenix which was already current or familiar in the Western Asiatic tradition of carpet-knotting at least as early as the fifteenth century. From the comparisons already suggested, moreover, there can hardly be any doubt that the medallion of Fig. 1, taken both as a whole and in its parts, bears a close relation to medallions in the art, more particularly the modern folk art, of China. The precise historical nature of this relationship is a matter which we shall not attempt to determine.

Now it will be observed that the fifteenth-century phoenix of Fig. 3 shows a number of peculiar features, all of which are suppressed in the highly simplified birds of the nineteenth century, Fig. 1. Among these peculiarities are a bifurcated crest, a multiplication of eyes to the number of four, and tail feathers with triangular serrations, which are attached to an absurdly abbreviated body marked with oval cartouches containing symbolic signs. It is little short of amazing that we find all of these peculiarities reproduced, or at least closely reflected, in a design of the nineteenth-century from—the Balkan peninsula! In an embroidery of colored silks and metal threads from Bosnia, Fig. 5, we again see a bird with a fancy crest, multiple eyes on one side of its head, and a tail with triangular serrations representing feathers, which is attached to an absurdly abbreviated body marked by cartouches containing symbolic signs. A correspondence extending to so many details cannot be accidental.

How to account for the relationship? Without attempting an explanation in terms of centuries or precise routes and regions, we may safely assume that many a motive of oriental folk art must have found its way into Southeastern Europe with the westward expansion of Islam from the general area of Western Asia. As a matter of fact, there

is much in the folk art of the Balkans which may help us to get a clearer understanding of the carpet designs of Western Asia, and even of the nature of the relationship of these designs to those of China. If the carpet designs, Figs. 1 and 3, are derived from China, and the design of the Bosnian embroidery, Fig. 5, is in turn derived (as there is every reason to believe) from a Western Asiatic derivative of a Chinese design, we might expect to find this circumstance reflected in a progressive debasement of the motive as it passed from China through Central Asia to Southeastern Europe. But this is not so. A glance at the Bosnian design, Fig. 5, in relation to the Western Asiatic design of Fig. 3, shows that though the two designs are obviously related, the Bosnian design, despite a high degree of stylization, still displays a good deal more of naturalism than its Western Asiatic relative. Among the traits of a greater naturalism may be mentioned the occurrence of only two eyes on the side of the head instead of four, the presence of feet, and perhaps a somewhat more bird-like body and head. In order to grasp the relationship among the designs of these three areas, we must return for a moment to the other side of the Eurasiatic continent, to the consideration of another phoenix in the popular embroideries of Western China.

In the Chinese embroidery, Fig. 6, we see a phoenix with the same sac-like body, plumed tail, reverted head, and awkwardly appended wings and legs as we saw in the Chinese phoenixes of Fig. 2. All these features may be described as appropriate to the phoenix as it is commonly represented in Chinese folk art. In one respect, however, the bird of Fig. 6 shows a closer approximation to nature: namely in the treatment of the head. This is unmistakably characterized as the head of a domestic fowl: great attention has been paid to the accurate rendering of the typical gallinaceous beak, comb, and gular wattle. It should be said that the phoenix in the more popular type of Chinese representations is often given a head which looks like and is evidently intended for the head of a chicken. Regardless what species of bird is intended, however, the feature of this head which especially interests us is the ornamental rosette under the back of the eye. This marking is explained by the Chinese as representing the bird's *ear* (the term 'ear' may possibly refer to ear-lobe, a feature which is conspicuously developed in some breeds of domestic fowl). The explanation is plausible, for though the ear is here no doubt

decoratively exaggerated, its position is anatomically correct. Once aware of this peculiarity in the representation of the Chinese phoenix, we can understand the curious multiplication of "eyes" in the phoenix of the carpet design, Fig. 3. Undoubtedly the knotters of this carpet, or of other carpets which preceded it, had before them as a model some such representation of the Chinese phoenix as we see in Fig. 6, the ear of which was misunderstood by the carpet-knotters as an extra eye. This misunderstanding, imaginatively compounded, led to the grotesque multiplication of eyes which we see in Fig. 3. The fact that in the Balkan embroidery, Fig. 5, we have only a duplication rather than a quadruplication of eyes suggests that the Balkan embroidery goes back not to the particular motive represented in Fig. 3, but to some other Western Asiatic model which was closer to a Chinese original, a model which may well have been an embroidery rather than a knotted carpet, and one in which we may assume that the multiplication of eyes had not yet reached the extreme of exaggeration which we see in Fig. 3. In any case it is reasonably clear that both instances of multiple eyes, that of Western Asia and that of the Balkans, go back to a Chinese source, where, and only where, we find a rational explanation for this disturbing phenomenon.

We now revert to the question how it happens that we find a design in the Balkan peninsula which, though presumably derived from Western Asia, shows a number of features apparently connecting it more closely with designs in Western China. The problem is not so difficult as it might appear. There is no need to make the improbable assumption of a direct connection between China and the Balkans. The naturalism of the Balkan design as compared with its Western Asiatic relative is perhaps best explained in terms of the conception of a system of diffusion, of which Western Asia represents the center or focus (in this case a secondary focus, the original focus being in Eastern Asia), and the Balkans represent one of a hypothetical number of peripheral points. We can understand the relative debasement of motives at the center of diffusion (Figs. 3 and 4) and the preservation of a relatively original or archaic form at the periphery (Fig. 5) by reference to the image of waves set in motion at the dropping of a stone into the center of a pool. While the first waves of diffusion (carrying the most archaic forms of the design) reach the edge of the pool, a series of new waves (i. e. progressively more and

more debased designs) are generated at the center. An understanding of this simple, yet fundamental, phenomenon is of the utmost importance for the study of the designs of Western Asiatic carpets, because many of these designs—not only the particular bird motive with which we are here concerned—evidently found their way into the folk art of Southeastern Europe, and are there preserved to our day in a relatively naturalistic and recognizable form, while their prototypes in Central Asia have undergone, through the centuries, a decorative evolution which has often left them modified beyond possibility of recognition (cf. Fig. 4). It is in terms of these Southeast European designs, and indeed sometimes only in the light of these designs, that we can hope to find our way among the artistic *debris* of Western Asiatic carpet designs and to reconstruct their original forms, or at least to establish their original sense. It follows, therefore, that a search among the designs of Balkan folk art may be expected to yield materials of primary significance for the understanding of the carpet designs of Western Asia. This conclusion is based not only upon the single example of relationship here illustrated: it is possible to point to at least one other instance in which the popular textile arts of the Balkans have retained archaic forms which serve as a key to the understanding of debased or completely geometrized relatives in the carpets of Western Asia.⁵

⁵ The instance here referred to is illustrated on plate 15 of my forthcoming book, *The Sunbird*, where the designs of two tapestry-woven carpets from Bosnia (plate 15.1 and 15.2) provide the explanation for a common type of "geometric" motive as represented on a tapestry-woven and a knotted carpet from Western Asia (plate 15.3 and 15.4). The relation of these Balkan designs to their Western Asiatic relatives is clearly that between the beginning and the end of an evolutionary process. The end would be quite unintelligible without reference to the beginning, and in this case the beginning is represented only by a peripheral survival in the Balkans: there are no Chinese correlatives, such as we have here in Figs. 2 and 6, to help us. The X-shaped motive in the center of Fig. 1 in the present article is a variant of the "geometric" motive in question.

It may be asked whether China might not also be considered a peripheral area in relation to a Western Asiatic focus of diffusion. In the case of the phoenix, this seems not to have been true, for internal evidence within the designs points to the conclusion that the bird motive originated in China and was thence adapted to the design-habits of the carpet-knotters of Western Asia. The situation, however, is not necessarily always the same. It seems, indeed, that conversely to the present case, motives from Western Asia were sometimes incorporated into Chinese folk art, and that there, just as in the folk art of the Balkans, these designs tended to preserve their original quality better than in the region

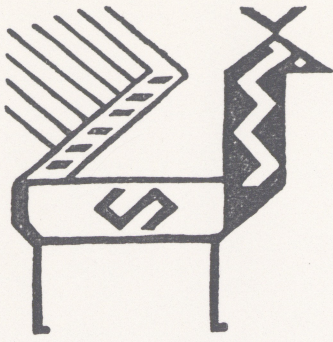


Fig. 7 Caucasus
19th century

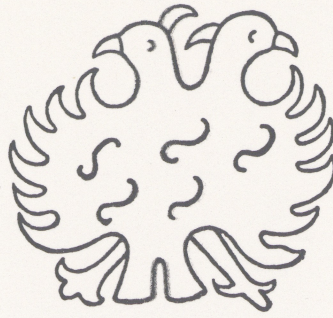


Fig. 8 Greek Islands
17th century



Fig. 9 Egypt
13th century

From these general observations we return now to the consideration of certain particular features in the bird designs of the Caucasus and the Balkans, Figs. 3 and 5. One of these features, especially, takes on significance in the light of comparison. This is the presence, on the body of each bird, of a group of round or oval cartouches containing symbolical marks. The intended character of these marks on the body of the Bosnian bird, Fig. 5, is not very easy to make out, but it may be said that they appear roughly like the



Fig. 10 Persia. 18th century

of their origin. (Example in *The Sunbird*, plate 11.1, and possibly even the border design, Fig. 11 in the present article.) This circumstance suggests that China may indeed represent another point, a Far Eastern one, on the periphery of an area of diffusion of which Western Asia was the focus. It should be kept in mind, thus, that it is entirely possible for diffusion to have taken place in opposite directions at different times, or indeed even simultaneously, with different motives, and, moreover, that borrowed motives may very well change in different ways and at different rates, rather than according to any predictable rule. This means that each instance of relationship must be studied for itself, with an eye to a wide range of possibilities. Nothing would be gained by an attempt at undue simplification. It seems advisable to call attention to these possibilities, even though they do not play a primary role in our present considerations, just in order to forestall the assumption that all relations between the folk art of China, Western Asia, and the Balkans necessarily

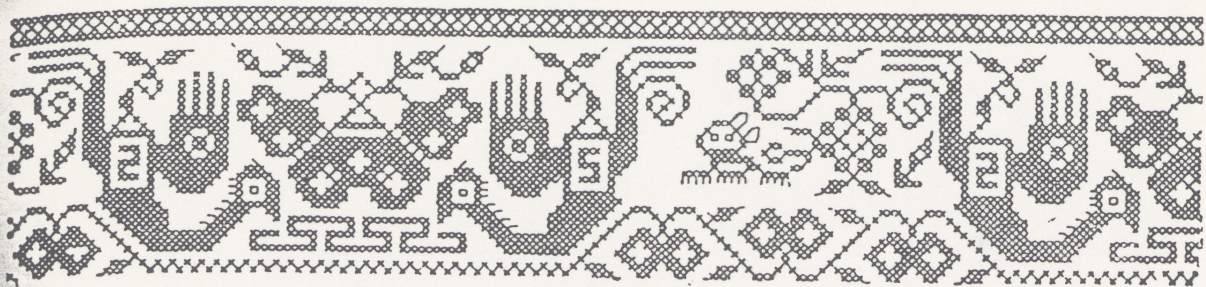


Fig. 11 Border of a cross-stitch embroidery. China, 19th century

letters H, C, and S. Of the six cartouches on the body of the fifteenth-century bird from Western Asia, Fig. 3, two are abortive, two contain marks like the letter E, and two contain marks like the letter S in reverse. Undoubtedly it is the S-curves which properly belong in these cartouches. The reason for this conclusion will appear from the next five illustrations, in which we see that the S-curve has been used as a distinctive symbolic marking on the bodies of birds in the popular arts of various regions and periods; namely in the printed fabrics of thirteenth-century Egypt (Fig. 9), in seventeenth-century embroideries from the Greek Islands (Fig. 8),⁶ in nineteenth-century-carpets from the Caucasus

follow a single pattern. It happens that the present example of a series of closely related bird-motives in three widely separated areas—China, Western Asia, and the Balkans—provides us with the means of coming to pretty definite conclusions about the Chinese origin of the type and the westward direction of its migration; but these circumstances are exceptional. Though the popular traditions of Eastern Asia will certainly provide some valuable points of reference for the understanding of the carpet designs of Western Asia, all indications suggest that it is Eastern Europe which was more especially open to influences from this quarter, and that accordingly the most numerous and most valuable clues to the understanding of Western Asiatic carpet designs will be found in the popular arts of Eastern and Northern Europe, especially in such “backward” and culturally retentive areas as the Balkans. However this may be, our primary concern, at least at the beginning of our researches, should be simply to establish the fact of relationship, rather than to attempt to determine the direction of the movement which it implies.

⁶ It may be objected that in the very embroidery from which our Fig. 8 is taken, S-curves are applied not only to birds, but to other motives as well (e.g., to a ewer and a pomegranate, or, in another similar embroidery, to a man’s cloak). Despite this indiscriminate usage there is still good reason, nevertheless, to believe that in these Greek Islands embroideries, as in other popular traditions, the association of the S-curve with birds is primary and its application to other motives is secondary. In a book on the folk art of the Aegean island of Skyros, Angelikē Chatzemichalē illustrates an embroidery in which the isolated figure of a double-headed eagle seizes two S-curves in its talons, while two more S-curves dangle from the beaks of the two heads. See *Ἀγγελικὴ Χατζημιχαήλ, Ἑλληνικὴ λαϊκὴ τέχνη, Σκόρος, Athens, 1925, fig. 145*



Fig. 12 Portion of a Kazak carpet
Caucasus, nineteenth century

(Fig. 7),⁷ in knitted work of the eighteenth century from Persia (Fig. 10), and finally, as we might expect, also in the modern peasant embroideries of Western China (Fig. 11)⁸. Many more examples of the association of S-curves with bird motives could be cited from the popular arts of other regions and periods. Yet the few examples here cited are enough to present us with a challenge. It is hardly conceivable that the S-curve could appear as a marking on the bodies of birds in so many different popular traditions unless some meaning were in-

(unfortunately too poor for reproduction). Such an example clearly points to the ophidian symbolism of the S-curve, and thus assures us that in the Greek embroideries it is the birds to which the S-curves really belong, whereas their appearance on other motives represents merely an extension of this proper and original application. See the supplementary note at the end of the article.

⁷ Besides Fig. 7, many other examples of S-curves applied to the bodies of birds or closely and specifically associated with birds can be cited from Western Asiatic carpet design. Though many of these bird-motives are stylized beyond possibility of immediate recognition, this is not true of all. (See, e.g., *The Sunbird*, fig. 35 D, and compare *ibid.*, plate 15). In the carpet designs, as in the Greek embroideries, it is true that S-curves are also used in other connections. Yet the number of instances in which they are applied specifically to bird-motives makes it highly probable that we have here a truly significant symbolic association; and this conclusion is supported by the extensive occurrence of a similar association in other, more or less closely related, artistic traditions. See the supplementary note.

⁸ I have felt some hesitation in introducing this Chinese design in the present connection, because it is the only example of the motive of a bird with an S-curve on its body which I have encountered among

herent in the motive. To establish this meaning with any degree of certainty would require a more extensive documentation than can be presented here. Still, it may be permissible to anticipate the result of a more detailed consideration of this symbolism to appear in another place,⁹ by stating that the motive of the S-curve on the body of the bird in all prob-

some hundreds of specimens of popular embroideries collected over a period of several years throughout Western China. The woman from whom I collected this specimen explained the S-curve, when asked about it, as *wan-tzŭ*, 萬字, i. e., a swastika. It is, in fact, conceivable that the S-curve here stands for one of the two arms of a swastika (or sauvastika—both forms are common in the popular embroideries of Western China), the second arm being omitted for want of space. On the other hand, there are considerations which support the belief that the presence of an S-curve on the body of the bird is not accidental in this Chinese design, but that it is historically connected with the other instances of a similar marking which we cite from other regions. Among these considerations is the fact that this is a border pattern, one of a type common in the popular embroideries of Western China, consisting of birds alternating with flowers in the intervals of a wavy line, which is undoubtedly closely related to a similar border pattern common in the knotted carpets of Western Asia (*The Sunbird*, chapter v). Another consideration is the presence in Fig. 11 of a fret, or zigzag-like motive, between the beaks of the confronted pairs of birds. In all probability this fret is to be conceived as a continuation of the S-curves on the bodies of the birds, or, conversely, each S-curve on the body of a bird may be conceived as an excerpt of the continuous fret. This fret has its symbolic counterpart in the zigzag line on the neck of the bird in the carpet design, Fig. 7. It may be said, moreover, that designs in Western Chinese cotton embroideries, like designs in all folk art, very seldom occur singly. Experience in the collection of such designs in the interior of China encourages me to believe that even a design which seems to be unique has this appearance only because of the inevitable limitation of the collector's activity, and that if one could go on collecting, other examples of the same design would turn up, proving that it is rooted in tradition and not the invention of a particular individual. For further considerations about the symbolism of the S-curve in association with bird-motives, see the supplementary note.

⁹ *The Sunbird* (as cited above in note 2), especially chapter iv, but also *passim* in chapters i, ii, and iii

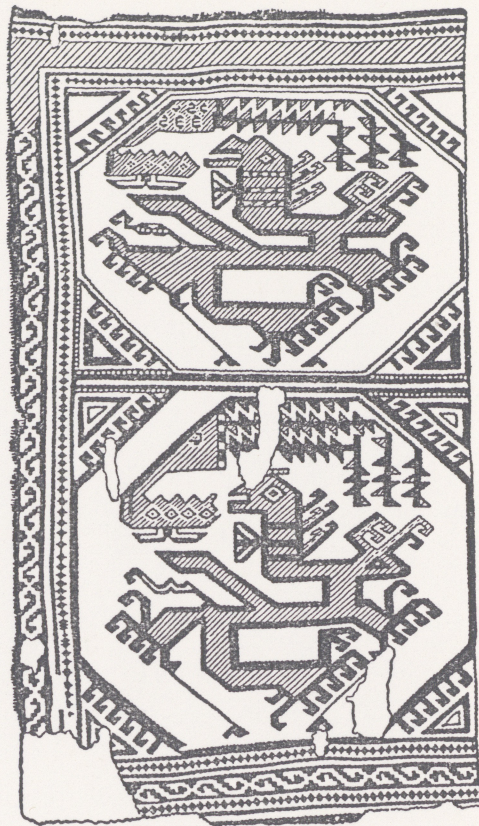


Fig. 13
Fifteenth-century carpet
from the Caucasus or Anatolia

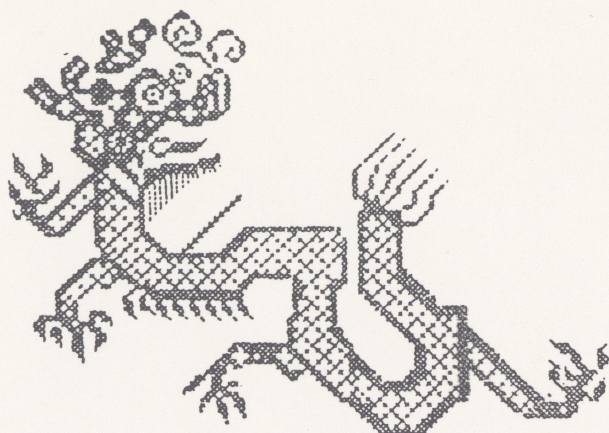


Fig. 14

Dragon of a Chinese peasant embroidery 19th century

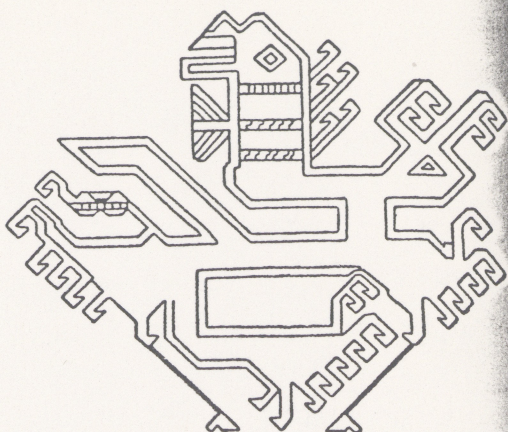


Fig. 15

Dragon of the 15th century carpet, Fig. 13

ability represents the symbolical reduction of an original *serpent*. This serpent was conceived as the antagonist or victim of the bird in a mythical struggle, representing the opposition of cosmic forces—fundamentally and primarily, perhaps, the opposition between the power of Light (as represented by the bird) and the power of Darkness (as represented by the serpent). The combination of phoenix and dragon which we see in Fig. 13 is but one embodiment, a specifically Chinese version, of this cosmic struggle. The symbolic association of bird and serpent is, in fact, so widely represented in mythology, and thence reflected in the folk art of so many peoples in different parts of the world,¹⁰ that we need hardly hesitate to interpret the motive of the S-curve on the body of the bird as a reminiscence of or an allusion to this cosmic contest—that is to say as a badge or emblem of the Sunbird's victory over the Serpent of Darkness. Needless to say, the custom of applying this marking to the body of the bird has, in most traditions, outlived all memory, or at least all conscious memory, of its original significance.

¹⁰ See Rudolf Wittkower, "Eagle and Serpent, A Study in the Migration of Symbols", *Journal of the Warburg Institute* (London), vol. 2, no. 4, April, 1939, pp. 293—325, with numerous illustrations. Though Wittkower's examples are chiefly from the historical period in the Levantine-Mediterranean-European region, he gives enough examples from exotic and primitive cultures at least to suggest the broader basis on which these occurrences rest. An exploration of the full breadth of this basis is bound to lead eventually far from the historical millennia of Europe and the Near East, into primitive cultures on other continents, and into subconscious levels of the human mind, irrespective of local traditions. See the supplementary note.

If in this study we seem to have passed too lightly from one region to another, disregarding established boundaries between academic provinces, it is just as well to emphasize that these boundaries have very little meaning in the world of popular tradition, and that the more we study folk art, the more we shall find that, just as in the realm of myth and legend, the threads of relationship extend in an intricate network in many directions, and we can hardly hope to unravel even the smallest part of the web unless we are prepared to follow the threads wherever they may lead.

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Fig. 1 Caucasian carpet medallion. Nineteenth century. Detail of Fig. 12. Ground of the medallion, blue; border of the medallion, green between red lines; central X-shaped device and two shapes at upper right and lower left, green within orange outlines; two shapes at upper left and lower right, black within orange outlines. In each of the medallions of this type in the carpet illustrated in Fig. 12 the colors vary, but in all of them the four peripheral shapes are represented in alternating colors, as here.
- Fig. 2 Medallion from a bed-valance. Cross-stitch embroidery in homespun blue cotton thread on home-woven white cotton cloth. Author's collection, no. 1932.5, from Tsingyangyi,* 青羊驛, Shensi province (in the upper Han River valley, between Hanchung and Ningkiang), China. Diameter of the design, 27 cm. For references to more detailed discussions of Western Chinese folk embroideries of this type, see note 2.
- * In the romanization of place-names, we follow the usage of the official Chinese list of post offices.
- Fig. 3 Phoenix from the fifteenth-century knotted carpet, Fig. 13. After the colored illustration in Friedrich Sarre and Hermann Trenkwald, *Altorientalische Teppiche*, Vienna, Anton Schroll, 1926, vol. 2, pl. 1. For further data, see Fig. 13 below.
- Fig. 4 Detail of the nineteenth-century carpet medallion, Fig. 1.
- Fig. 5 Design embroidered on a towel in colored silks and gold and silver threads, by Muslim women of Bosnia. After a photograph of the original in Sarajevo, Zemaljski Muzej (Bosnisch-Herzegowinisches Landesmuseum), no. 2330, kindly supplied by

Dr. Vejsil Curčić of Sarajevo (1934). The same embroidery is illustrated in color in H. Th. Bossert, *Die Volkskunst in Europa*, Berlin, Ernst Wasmuth, 1926, pl. lxxix, fig. 3.

- Fig. 6 Phoenix. Detail of a medallion on a bed-valance, representing the phoenix with peonies (see note 3). Twisted dark blue silk thread embroidered in laid stitch and stem stitch on home-woven white cotton cloth. The head and eye are outlined in colored silk threads, and an arc of eleven knots of the same silk thread spans the body of the bird. The silk is of indeterminate color, probably faded from an original red, and perhaps one other color. Author's collection, no. 1935, 212, from Tsunyi, 遵義, Kweichow province, China. Width of the bird, 14.7 cm. Though this embroidery as a whole falls within the same category of Chinese popular art as the embroideries of Figs. 2, 11, and 14, the use of silk thread for carrying out the design instead of the usual blue cotton suggests an attempt to approximate the effect of professional design and urban workmanship. The relative naturalism of the bird's head probably reflects the same urban-professional influence, but the rest of the drawing of the bird, and indeed of the whole valance, is essentially in the popular tradition.

- Fig. 7 Motive on a so-called Shirwan carpet from the Southeastern Caucasus. Nineteenth century. After R. Neugebauer and Siegfried Troll, *Handbuch der orientalischen Teppichkunde*, 14th edition, Leipzig, Hiersemann, 1930, pl. 62.

- Fig. 8 Motive from an embroidered bedspread. Colored silks on linen. Ionian Islands, seventeenth century. After A. J. B. Wace, *Mediterranean and Near Eastern Embroideries from the Collection of Mrs. F. H. Cook*, London, Halton, 1935, pl. i.

On the same embroidery, S-curves occur on the wings of single-headed birds seen in side view, but also on motives other than birds. See note 6.

- Fig. 9 Stamped design on a linen curtain. Egypt, thirteenth century. After Ernst Kühnel, *Islamische Stoffe aus ägyptischen Gräbern*, Berlin, Ernst Wasmuth, 1927, pl. 49, no. 1043.

- Fig. 10 Portion of a knitted sock. Silk, with outlines of chain-stitch embroidery in gilt thread. The ground is black, the diagonal latticework olive green, the birds alternately white and apricot, the S-curves within the latticework and the small squares at the intersections of the lattice also alternately white and apricot. (Colors

evidently somewhat faded). Persia, late eighteenth century. After the original, N. Y., Metropolitan Museum of Art, no. 28.155. The portion illustrated is 9.5 cm. wide.

Fig. 11 Portion of a border for a sleeve-band or a dress. Cross-stitch embroidery in home-spun blue cotton thread on home-woven white cotton cloth. Author's collection, no. 1935, 194, from Tungki, 東溪, Szechwan province, China (near the Kweichow border, on what is now the main highway between Chungking and Kweiyang). Width of the illustrated section, 38.5 cm. See note 8.

Fig. 12 Portion of a Caucasian Kazak carpet. After the original in the possession of Frau Louise Brodsky, Vienna (1934). A similar carpet, but without the medallions which primarily interest us, is published by Julius Orendi, *Das Gesamtwissen über antike und neue Teppiche des Orients*, Vienna, 1930, fig. 736, with the caption, „Gendsche-teppich . . . Kaukasus um 1820“. I myself have seen other specimens of the same type which do have the octagonal medallions.

It may be added that not only the small octagonal medallions of this carpet, but probably also the larger medallions with hooked protuberances, above and below the pair of octagonal medallions, owe their inspiration to China. Though an adequate presentation of evidence in support of this view is not possible here, it may be stated that the dark figures occupying the peripheral zone of each of these large medallions almost certainly represent the debased remnants of four dragons, arranged in two confronted pairs, with their tails extending into the hooked protuberances at the top and bottom of the medallion, and with a “jewel” of contention between each pair—a thoroughly Chinese motive. The centipede-like figure occupying the central opening of the medallion is almost certainly derived from a heraldic, double-headed bird. This identification, again, is based upon a series of comparisons which cannot be adequately presented here. For a preliminary hint of these considerations, the reader is referred to figs. 280 and 288 of “Das Vogelmotiv in der chinesischen Bauernstickerei”, as cited above in note 2, and, for a fuller exposition, to the whole of chapter iv in my forthcoming book, *The Sunbird*, where the motive of the medallion with a central “Sunbird” surrounded by peripheral pairs of dragons is followed through a number of representations

in various popular traditions. The large medallions of this Caucasian carpet undoubtedly represent but one variant of this widespread type.

Fig. 13 Carpet fragment. Probably from Eastern Anatolia or the Caucasus. First half of the fifteenth century or earlier. This famous carpet, formerly preserved in the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum in Berlin, has been published repeatedly. The best color reproduction is that of Friedrich Sarre and Hermann Trenkwald, *Altorientalische Teppiche*, Vienna, Anton Schroll, 1926, vol. 2, pl. 1, where fourteen references to other publications of this carpet are given. To these references may be added one to a subsequent publication by Kurt Erdmann, "Orientalische Tierteppiche auf Bildern des XIV. und XV. Jahrhunderts", *Jahrbuch der kgl. preuß. Kunstsammlungen*, vol. 50, 1929, fig. 29 and p. 291.

Incidentally, many of the authors in these works refer to the combination of the dragon and the phoenix in this carpet as the "crest" or "coat of arms" of the Ming dynasty. F. R. Martin, *A History of Oriental Carpets before 1800*, Vienna, 1908, p. 112, is undoubtedly right in objecting to this designation, but it has nevertheless been perpetuated by subsequent writers. Mr. Schuyler Cammann has stated the matter to me in the following terms: "The Chinese, unlike the Japanese with their *mon*, never had any conception of family crests, even for the royal family, although the dragon and phoenix in the Ming dynasty, as earlier, were restricted to the imperial house, and thus might be called imperial symbols. The dragon and phoenix became popular in Persian art during the Mongol dynasty, and books of the period like the *Shahnameh* often show dragon and phoenix, in Chinese style, hovering in the sky". It may be added that a well-known Persian miniature of the early fourteenth century depicts one of the first Mongol emperors (Genghis Khan or his son, the Khakan Ögödaï) seated with his wife on a throne which is covered by a cloth decorated with dragons and phoenixes. See E. Blochet, *Les peintures des manuscrits orientaux de la Bibliothèque nationale*, Paris, 1914—1920, pl. xiii (Rashid Ad-Din, *Histoire des Mongols*; *Ms. supp. persan* 1113, fol. 126 v^o), and F. R. Martin, *The Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia, India, and Turkey, from the 8th to the 18th Century*, London, Quaritch, 1912, pl. 43, left.

- Fig. 14 Detail from a Chinese popular embroidery. Cross-stitch in homespun white cotton thread on home-woven blue cotton cloth. Author's collection, no. 1932.40, from Tungchwan, 東川 (Hweitseh, 會澤), Yünnan province, China. Width of the dragon, 16.8 cm. This motive is from a medallion representing the popular theme of "the dragon leaping through the dragon gate and turning into a fish".
- Fig. 15 Detail of the fifteenth-century carpet, Fig. 13.
- Fig. 16 Painted pottery vessel collected from a cemetery in the Chicama Valley near Trujillo, Peru. Early Chimú or Mochica ware, tentatively dated 500—1000 after Christ. After the original, London, British Museum, no. 1909. 12—18. 142.
- Fig. 17. Section of a fragment of light brown cotton cloth with brocaded pattern in crimson wool. Width of illustrated section, 5.2 cm. Size of whole fragment, 7.7×19 cm. Peru. Late Chimú period, tentatively dated 1100—1400 after Christ. After the original, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, no. 31. 708.
- Fig. 18 Details of the painted decoration on a clay vessel from Trujillo district, in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin. Early Chimú or Mochica ware, tentatively dated 500—1000 after Christ. After Walter Lehmann, *The Art of Old Peru*, New York, Weyhe, 1924, fig. 8.
- Fig. 19 Embroidered motive on a large shroud from Paracas, Southern Peru. Tentatively dated from 1 to 500 after Christ. Width of the illustrated motive, 28.2 cm. After the original, Munich, Museum für Völkerkunde, no. 33-27-1. (Another fragment of the same cloth in Berlin, Museum für Völkerkunde).

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE

ON THE MOTIVE OF THE BIRD WITH S-CURVES

The motive of the S-curve as we see it applied to the bodies of birds in Figs. 7—11 calls for a few further remarks. If, as it seems, the custom of applying this marking to the body of the bird has outlived all memory of its significance, it may be difficult to understand how it happens to persist in so many different traditions. Precisely this phenomenon, the persistence of symbolic designs after all memory of their meaning has lapsed, is characteristic of popular tradition. We can hardly understand this phenomenon

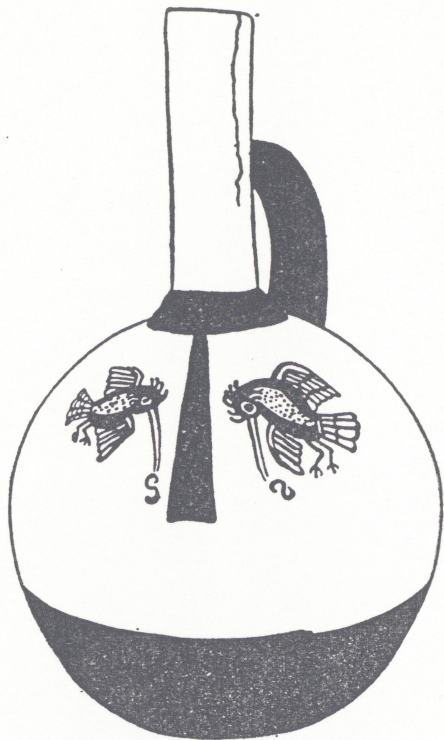


Fig. 16 Painted pottery vessel
Peru. Early Chimu period



Fig. 17 Woven design. Peru
Late Chimu period

unless we assume that the forgotten meaning somehow lingers below the level of the conscious mind, from where it may, upon occasion, be recalled into consciousness. The Greek design cited in note 6, in which a double-headed bird is represented as grasping a pair of S-curves in its claws and another pair of S-curves in the beaks of its two heads, in a way suggesting that the S-curves were conceived as snakes, represents such a resurgence into consciousness of the latent original sense of the symbol. The recognition of the S-curve as a snake could have been prompted by the familiarity of the designer with some naturalistic representation of the conflict of the bird and the serpent; for such representations have occurred, as Wittkower's illustrations suggest, in different arts at various times throughout the general area of European and Near Eastern culture. But such an assumption hardly explains every occurrence of the conventionalized motive. It is hardly likely that the designer of each of the five motives illustrated in Figs. 7 to 11 had before him a naturalistic model, or indeed that all these people were aware that there was any connection between the motive of the bird with an S-curve and the idea of a bird with a snake. To such people, we may be sure, the motive was simply a traditional design, which they inherited and transmitted without much conscious reflection about its meaning. Though the meaning of the symbol might, upon occasion, occur to the mind of some individual designer, it is reasonably clear that the motive of the bird with the S-curve was transmitted from one people to another.

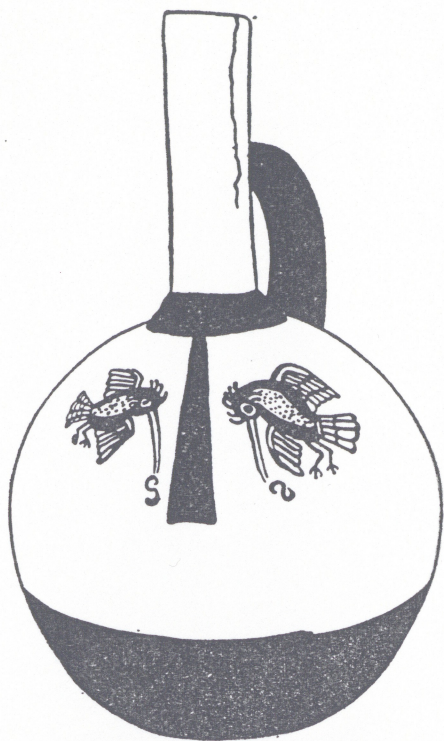


Fig. 16 Painted pottery vessel
Peru. Early Chimú period



Fig. 17 Woven design. Peru
Late Chimú period

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other, for the most part, without any conscious recognition of its meaning.

If this explanation seems plausible for the five European and Asiatic examples of the motive illustrated in Figs. 7—11, it is startling to find that the same motive of the bird with S-curves occurs also in the native arts of Pre-Columbian America. Figs. 16 and 17 illustrate two examples from the ceramic and textile arts, respectively, of Peru. The similarity between two such designs as those of Fig. 17 and Fig. 10 is so striking that it seems unlikely, at first glance, that they could have been conceived independently of each other, without the existence of a relationship of some sort between the traditions in which they occur. Yet, when we become a little more familiar with the habits of Peruvian artistic expression, we find that in Peru, just as in Europe and in Asia, the symbolic motive of the bird with S-curves was conceived within the ambiance of a tradition familiar with the image of a bird with snakes (or sometimes fishes) as its prey. That the theme of this opposition or conflict sometimes came to expression in the more naturalistic phases of Peruvian art we see from designs like those of Figs. 18 and 19. The latter, showing a heraldic double-headed eagle seizing a pair of snakes in its talons, might be regarded as prototypic for the more highly stylized textile design of Fig. 17 and for the painted pottery design of Fig. 16. It is not difficult to conceive a transition

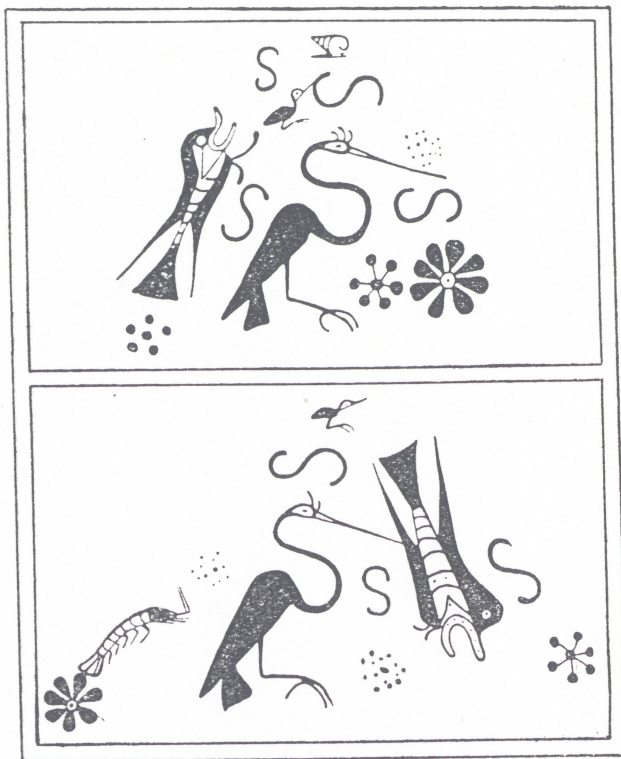


Fig. 18 Designs painted on a pottery vessel
Peru. Early Chimú period



Fig. 19 Embroidered design
Paracas, Southern Peru

from such naturalistic snakes to symbolic S-curves in an art like that of ancient Peru, which always hovered on the borderline between naturalism and convention. In the pottery designs, Fig. 18, we see crane-like birds surrounded by aquatic fauna including, besides a marine shell and a shrimp, two large fish. Scattered among these aquatic creatures are a number of S-curves. The association is so close as to give the impression that the S-curves were conceived as equivalent to the fishes in the sense of being an alternative prey of the birds. At the top, in fact, we see a smaller bird actually holding an S-curve in the tip of its beak, an arrangement which strongly suggests that the designer thought of the S-curve as a snake. The occurrence of the symbolic S-curve in such close conjunction with naturalistic fishes and other aquatic creatures indicates that this designer, who was certainly capable of drawing naturalistic snakes if he had wanted to, was trying to convey his understanding of a familiar convention by placing it in association with naturalistic motives which give a clue to its meaning. The psychological position of this Peruvian designer is similar to that of the Greek artist mentioned in note 6. Both were attempting to elevate the symbol out of unconscious obscurity: these artists represent, each in his time and place, the emergence of the rational principle of interpretation. Short of actual writing, the device of juxtaposition, as we see it used in Fig. 18, is as near as we can get to the definition of a symbol. In the designs of Figs. 16 and 17 on the one hand, and of Figs. 18 and 19 on the other, we have, thus, essentially the same situation that we observed in the more familiar folk art of Europe and Asia: namely, the coexistence of the symbol with its naturalistic prototype, from which it is separated by an uncertain line of demarcation, easily crossed in either direction.

If now we ask whether the American designs, Figs. 16 and 17, could have been conceived independently of their European and Asiatic counterparts, the question is thrown back to another level, that of the conception underlying the symbol. At this level our answer is apt to be different than if we had in view only the symbolic designs themselves; for it seems that the *idea* of the conflict between the bird and the serpent is so widespread that it may be called universal (see note 10). If there is nothing exclusively local about the conception as such, it seems hardly necessary to assume a genetic connection, in the sense of an historical relationship, between the American examples of the motive of the bird

with S-curves and corresponding motives in the folk art of Europe and Asia. Presumably both were derived in the same way from the image of a bird preying upon a snake. In venturing this judgment, I do not wish to exclude all possibility of cultural contact across the Pacific: indeed, in another place I hope to have occasion to present certain artistic parallels which, in my opinion, can hardly be explained in this way, but which rather compel the inference of actual contact between the continents.

The occurrence of the motive of the bird with the S-curve in Pre-Columbian America, as well as in the folk art of Europe and Asia, presents a characteristic problem. If we regard the Peruvian designs of Figs. 16 and 17 as having come into existence in the New World without any direct inspiration from the Old, then why should we not regard each of the Old-World examples of the motive as having arisen independently of all the others? Though this question cannot be answered with finality, still it seems capable of a fairly reasonable solution. The principles of diffusion and independent invention are not necessarily always mutually exclusive. One principle may apply in one case and another in another. Whereas it seems likely that the American designs, because of their roots in an apparently universal mythology, were, so to speak, "independently invented" without reference to similar designs in Europe and Asia, it is equally likely, in my opinion, that the various European and Asiatic examples of our motive were not "invented independently" of each other, but were drawn from a common fund of artistic symbolism which was current throughout Eurasia over a long period of time. For in Europe and Asia we are dealing with motives which, if they are not actually from contiguous areas, represent cultures or phases of cultures which are not very far removed, geographically and historically, from each other—at least not so far as America from Asia. It seems very unlikely that the motive of the bird with the S-curve would have been separately and independently derived from the underlying and conceptually significant image of the bird and the snake by five different acts of symbolical reduction in the Caucasus of the nineteenth century, in the Greek Islands of the seventeenth century, in thirteenth-century Egypt, eighteenth-century Persia, and nineteenth-century China. It would appear far more reasonable to assume a lateral transmission, by cultural contact, of the finished symbol from one of these traditions to another, rather than five separate acts of deri-

vation. The reason for this assumption lies simply in the greater relative proximity of the five Eurasiatic regions to each other, and in the far greater likelihood of cultural contact among such regions than between them and the New World. Our choice between the alternative explanations of cultural diffusion and independent invention depends not upon any mystical dedication to one principle rather than the other, but upon our judgment of factors which vary in each particular case. Needless to say, such variable factors may be differently interpreted by various persons, and judgment may change in the light of increased knowledge. Our purpose in bringing South American parallels into alignment with a group of designs from Eurasiatic folk art is not so much to attempt a definitive answer to the question of cultural contact between the Old World and the New — a question of vast complexity which will not be quickly and easily solved to everyone's satisfaction — as to emphasize the possibility of varying interpretations according to varying circumstances, and to provide a perspective from which the mutual relation of our Eurasiatic designs will appear closer and more significant than if we contemplated them without reference to corresponding designs in other parts of the world.

All these considerations imply certain questions of a psychological order. It is not easy to comprehend the ubiquity of symbolic designs, their strange capacity for survival, and what seems to be their potentiality for being conceived anew by various individuals in different parts of the world. These qualities can hardly be understood without some attempt to penetrate the elusive working of the human mind itself. Perhaps we shall have to admit the principle of a common denominator of human experience, in the form of a substratum of ideal images which remain latent but emotionally charged in every mind, and which are capable of being stimulated, to the accompaniment of an emotional discharge, by the apprehension of certain "keys" which unlock these emotional reserves by evoking the impressions associated with the original experience. Such keys are the symbols, or symbolic designs. If we accept the idea of latent archetypal images, then instead of speaking of "independent invention", we may think in terms of the activation of such latent images. This conception makes it easier to understand how a symbolic motive may be produced out of the unconscious mind at any time and in any place, but it also makes it possible to understand how such a design, once produced, is apt

to be copied and transmitted. For such motives as readily arise out of the unconscious mind of any particular individual are, *ipso facto*, the very motives which are bound to appeal to the unconscious predispositions of other individuals, and are thus likely to be seized upon more readily and repeated with greater interest and satisfaction than other motives. It is for this reason, evidently, that symbolic motives are especially assured of perpetuation by unbroken transmission, both vertically within a particular culture, and laterally from one culture to another, while the same principle would account also for the independent materialization of such motives in the absence of cultural contact.

Just what constitutes the specific "appeal" of symbolic motives is not always easy to say. Yet in the case of the motive of the bird with the S-curve we are not entirely without resources for an answer. It seems very likely that in the image of the conflict between bird and snake we have the outward reflection of a universal struggle within human nature itself. The image of the bird and the snake, by evoking a powerful but undefined memory of emotional experience in the individual, presents itself as an acceptable dramatization of obscure inner conflicts, with an implicit victory of the higher over the lower principle of human feeling and behavior. For this reason, however vague it may appear to the rational mind, the motive of the bird and snake was assured ready acceptance in every popular tradition to which it happened to find its way. Why it is precisely the symbolically reduced form of the motive that travelled so far and spread so widely may be explained by a number of circumstances; but the determining one is probably — not so much, as is often wrongly stressed, an ineptitude for naturalistic representation (cf. Fig. 18) — as the circumstance that the resources of energy in the unconscious mind are most readily touched by images that are less concrete and more suggestive than naturalistic representations. (Such representations, being but a facsimile of nature, say only what they seem to say, and imply nothing). If our inquiries among the people who transmit the symbolic designs bring forth unsatisfactory replies, which show that they are not aware of, i. e., that they have, as a social group, "forgotten" any meaning which the designs had originally, we can only understand the perpetuation of such designs by the assumption that their meaning, though it may indeed be lost to the conscious or rational mind, still remains as an emotional force in the unconscious.

If we find that such symbolical designs persist especially among less highly civilized peoples, or among the less highly cultivated strata of the more advanced peoples, this can only mean that the simpler peoples, whether they be savages or peasants, to the extent that they lack a higher cultivation of their rational functions, are more sensitive in their unconscious perceptions than the highly civilized peoples. The latter, in contrast to the simpler peoples, strain, rather, toward a direct conscious perception of reality through naturalistic representation. It is evidently for this reason that designs of a symbolical nature, appealing to the individual more largely through the unconscious mind, are especially favored by simpler people and are commonly found among them, whereas, conversely, they tend to be ignored by the sophisticated. Though civilized man has made great gains in the achievement of naturalistic representation, these gains have not been made without corresponding losses in the emotional depth of the art which he produces and appreciates. The fact that "modern" artists are turning for inspiration to the anonymous works of primitive peoples is the best evidence that we are at last becoming aware of these losses. If we wish to understand the sources of this emotional appeal by penetrating the meaning of traditional symbolic designs, it must be said that we shall hardly make much progress by exploring the conscious minds of savages and peasants. Our only hope is to make a comparative study, on the broadest possible geographical basis, of the outward forms of such designs, while at the same time we strive to deepen our understanding of the working of the human mind itself.