

PLATE XLVII
PENDANT

*By permission of the Museum
für Völkerkunde, Munich*



PLATE XLVIII

(PLATE CXIV IN SIR AUREL STEIN'S BOOK, *SERINDIA*,
OXFORD CLARENDON PRESS, 1921)

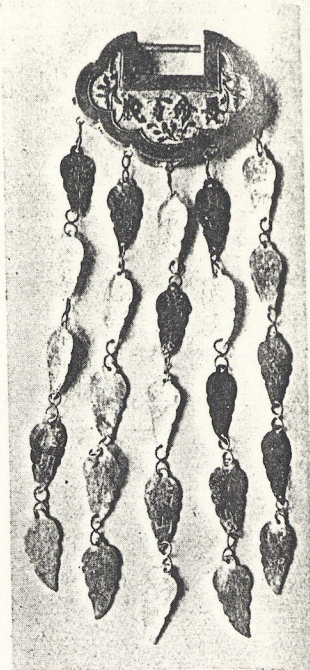


PLATE XLIX
LOCKET

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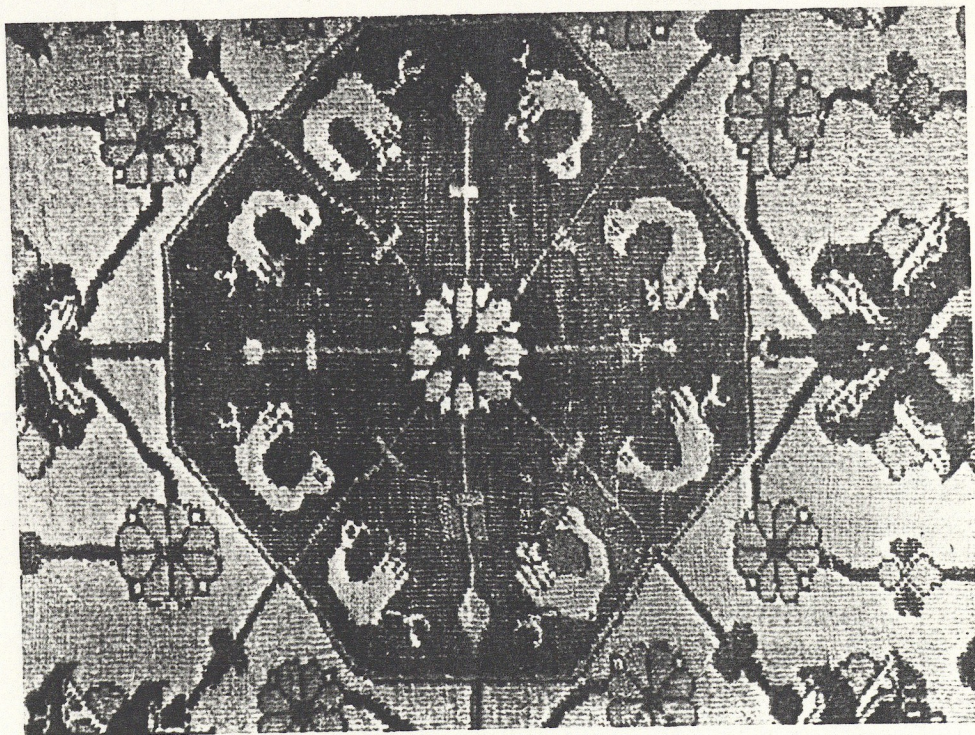


PLATE L

PERSIAN ANIMAL CARPET, 17TH CENTURY

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Vienna*

SOME PEASANT EMBROIDERIES FROM WESTERN CHINA

THE two embroideries shown on Fig. 7 and 9 were collected with a number of others in the course of an extended trip through western China in the summer of 1932. The sampler, Fig. 7, is from the town of Tungch'uan in Yünnan province, in the south-west of China; the medallion on Fig. 9 from the town of Hanchung in south-western Shensi.

This type of work, executed in indigo-dyed blue cotton thread on a strong, coarse kind of locally woven cotton cloth, seems to have flourished especially in the western provinces of Shensi, Szech'uan and Yünnan, where it is now, however, rapidly dying out. These cross-stitch embroideries have never come to the notice of Europeans, probably because they are the work of country people,¹ made for their own use, and have never found their way into trade, being considered by the people who make them and by those who trade in such things as worthless beside the more showy work in coloured silks with which we are familiar.

Though one can find work in the same material and technique in the country around Peking, and probably also in other parts of eastern China, the designs nowhere reach the elaboration and charm of the best work from these western provinces. The sampler, Fig. 7, shows a typical selection of minor design elements from this repertoire, which are briefly described in the accompanying table. It is perhaps significant that samplers like these were obtainable only in one district, where the art of cross-stitch in the old designs was still flourishing, and where there was still an obvious pride on the part of the women in their work. Such samplers do not appear to have been made as show pieces in the sense that many European samplers were made, but as models upon which the girl or woman copied motives from her neighbours, to be copied in turn into articles of use.

Cross-stitch embroidery was applied to the cotton clothing of children, to the aprons of women, the sash-ends of men and the pockets they wore across their stomachs. Examples of clothing thus embroidered are no longer met with in actual use, except occasionally in more remote districts.

By far the finest and most interesting designs appear on the embroidered borders of the bed-sheets called, in Szech'uan, *wo tan*.² These consist of three strips of plain cotton cloth, each about a foot and a half wide from selvedge to selvedge, sewed together to form a sheet, with a fourth strip, elaborately embroidered, sewed to the edge of the plain sheet and allowed to hang down over the side of the bedstead so as to be in view at all times. The embroidered strip is thus about six feet long by a foot and a half wide, the design consisting in most cases of a row of five large medallions densely embroidered in cross-stitch, about a foot in diameter, and a handsome border around three sides of the embroidered strip. Upon the medallions of these bed valances are worked designs of amazing intricacy and great beauty: they are designs, furthermore, which are often *quite different* from anything else we know in Chinese art. Their relationships seem to lie not so much within the sphere of Chinese art as outside China, with the folk-art of eastern Europe, and with motives known to us from the earlier periods of artistic tradition in western Asia and elsewhere. There are for instance striking resemblances between these bed valances with their medallion designs and the well-known silk fabrics of Sassanian Persia with similar medallions, as well as between particular motives of the Chinese embroideries and certain Sassanian motives.³

Note 1. Town dwellers seem to have participated in this art as well as peasants: I have not yet been able to determine the line of social or economic demarcation, but use the term "peasant embroidery" here for convenience to distinguish the cotton embroideries as a class from embroideries in silk. The design repertoire of the former is in any case distinguished very sharply from that of the latter, which belongs to the general fund of urban design motives already familiar in the west.

Note 2. 卧单

Note 3. I have treated some of these parallels in a discussion of one of the bed valances to appear in a forthcoming book of Josef Strzygowski, *Spuren indogermanischen Glaubens in der bildenden Kunst*, pp. 185ff, with about twenty illustrations.

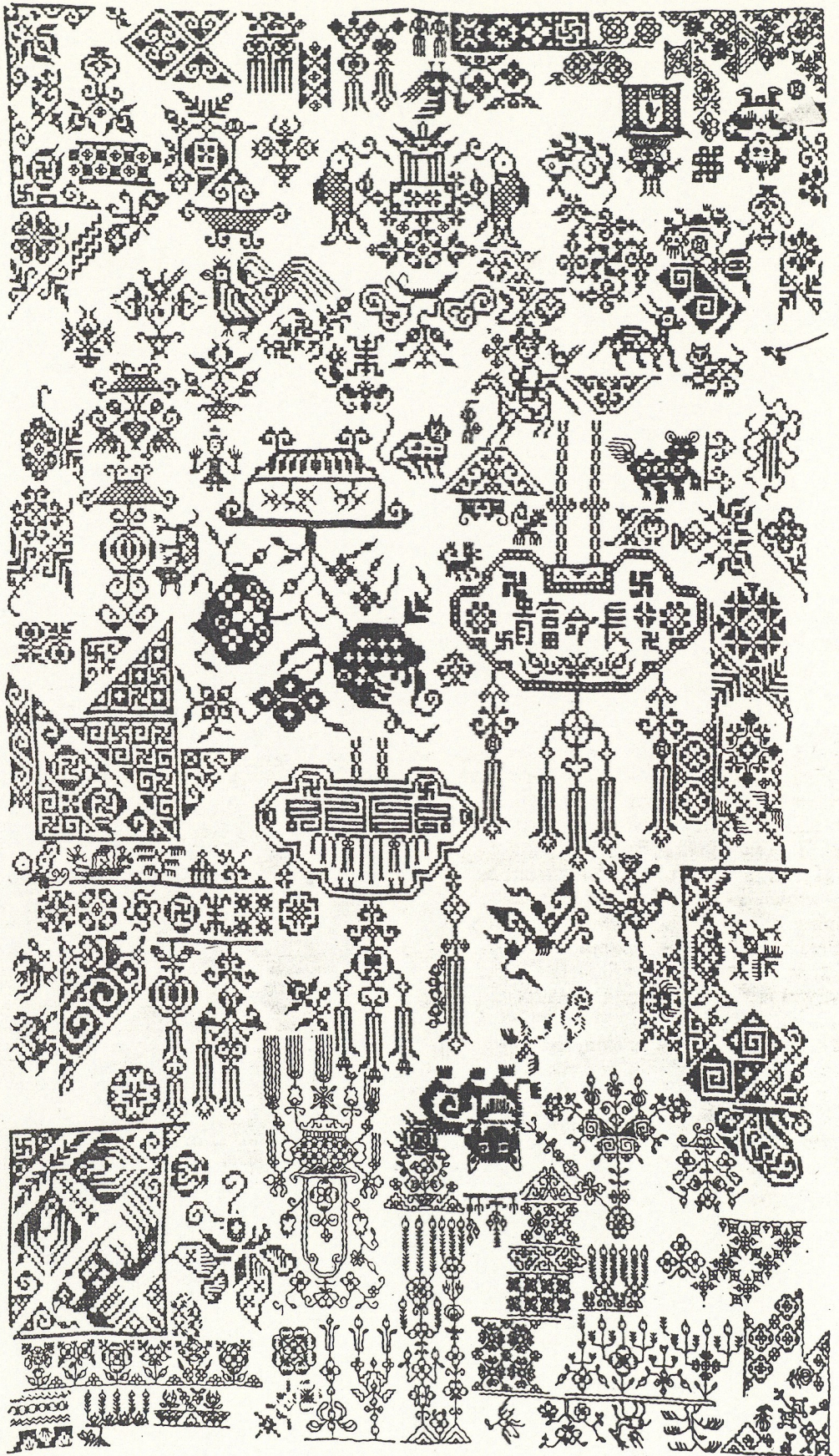


FIG. 7

CHINESE SAMPLER

SOME PEASANT EMBROIDERIES FROM WESTERN CHINA

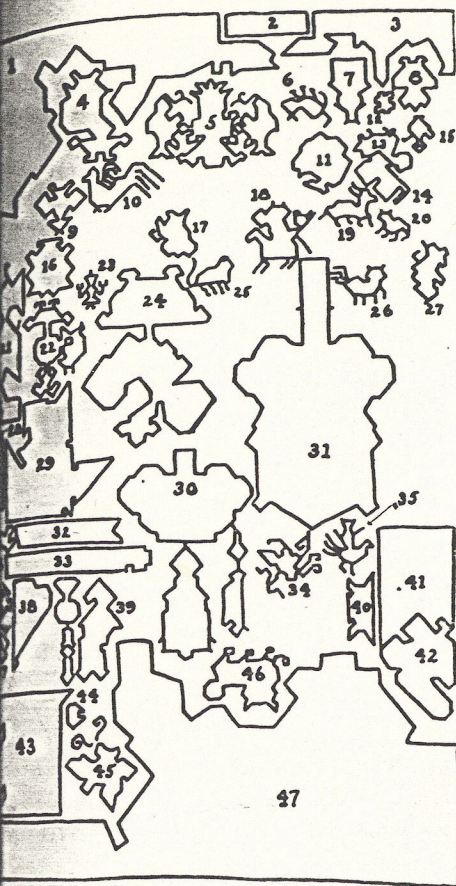


FIG. 8. KEY TO SAMPLER FIG. 7

MOTIVES OF THE CHINESE SAMPLER

FIG. 7

1. Miscellaneous borders and filling motives.
2. A variety of small geometric figures often used as a border. There are sometimes as many as ten or fifteen different figures before the repeat begins. Cf. 33.
3. Designs executed in "Holbein" stitch, appearing the same on both sides of the cloth, generally called *erh mien ti* by the Chinese, meaning "with two faces." Cf. 47.
4. Flower pot with peach tree. The Chinese peach is slightly pointed and always so represented. Cf. 24.
5. Two fish confronted opposite a central motive. This is in all probability a decorative conventionalisation of the motive of the "fish leaping through the dragon gate," the representation of a legend which appears early in Chinese literature: the motive is now extremely common. The design in its full form usually shows the fish (a carp, *li yü*) leaping at one side of the gate (the gate being explained by the Chinese as a gorge of the Yellow River called the Dragon Gate, *lung men*), and a dragon emerging from the other side. In the western Chinese designs there is often also a small child standing within the gate (cf. 7): apparently the successful passing of the Dragon Gate rapids by the fish and his metamorphosis into a dragon symbolises the successful career of the boy, specifically his successful passing of the state examinations. (Cf. the Japanese boys' festival with kites in the shape of carp). In the present case the fish are doubled (as frequently) for the sake of symmetry: the roof-lines suggest the gate: on a similar design on another embroidery the Chinese pictograph for gate, *men* 門 is inscribed within the "gate," so that there can hardly be doubt about this identification of the motive.
6. A mouse (?).
7. A small figure in a pavilion. For probable explanation see 5.

8. Figure of a boy inscribed within a circle (in other examples the boy more nearly approaches the ideal of rotundity), called *i t'uan ho ch'i*, "one ball of friendliness."

9. Flower pot; plant with two "Buddha's-Hands" (see 24) and bird.

10. Cock.

11. One of many forms of the swastika. The central part, made up of four triangles, recalls the form of swastika on certain Rhodian embroideries.

12. *P'an ch'ang*, "sacred knot," generally regarded as a Buddhist symbol of auspicious character. Compare the silver example on the chain, Plate XLVII.

13. Cat (?). Lion (?).

14. Half of a butterfly, the two angular spirals constituting a wing (cf. 42); the line following the contour of the wing is undoubtedly intended for a feeler. In front of the butterfly is a diminutive "melon" (cf. 22). The combination "butterfly and melon" represents a common rebus which expresses a wish for longevity.

15. Wine pot (?). Suggests a Tibetan form, and recalls a similar motive frequent in western Asiatic prayer rugs. The shape is not typically Chinese.

16. Flower pot, peach and birds (upside down).

17. Conventionalised character *shou*, "long life," surrounded by bats: only one and a half bats are here embroidered; the complete number would be four in this case, though the motive properly calls for five: *wu fu p'eng shou*. Bats = "joy"; the whole is a rebus for long life and happiness.

18. Small boy riding on a unicorn. Sex indicated by hair-knots (cf. 8). He holds in his hand a sprig of cassia blossoms, the equivalent of the Greek laurel, which symbolises his future rise to greatness. His mount, the unicorn, is the equivalent of our stork. Name of the motive: *ch'i lin sung tze*: "the unicorn brings a baby." (Cf. 35.)

19. Deer (?).

20. Cat (?).

21. Floral rinceaux for borders.

22. Flower pot (upside down) containing plant bearing a melon. The animal gnawing (?) as the melon may be intended for a field mouse or a squirrel. There is a popular representation of a squirrel "stealing grapes," which seems to go back to a certain class of T'ang dynasty bronze mirrors. Possibly the "melon" is here a more intelligible substitute for the grapes in a region and among a class of the population where grapes are not familiar.

23. Human figure: the upraised hands with outstretched fingers recall Sumba ikats.

24. Flower pot (upside down) containing a plant bearing a "Buddha's Hand" (an inedible but fragrant citrus fruit considered auspicious) and a peach (cf. 4), as well as a blossom probably intended for a peach blossom. Other examples of the "Buddha's-Hand," *fo shou*: 9, 37, 43, 44.

25. Cat (?).

26. Lion.

27. One of a group or set of auspicious symbols: either a reed-organ, *shêng*, or a pair of scrolls representing the art of painting. The various symbols in these sets are generally represented with fluttering ribbons.

28. Border design of S-curves alternating in direction. Also occurs in south-eastern Asia and in western Asiatic carpet design.

29. Varieties of corner ornaments. Cf. 41 and 43. The swastika is especially frequent in the corners. The design in the lower left represents a pair of peaches on a diagonal "tree."

30 and 31. Representation of lockets or amulets in the shape of a Chinese lock, to be embroidered on to the clothing of small children. They are a substitute for an actual locket of silver, such as is shown on Plate XLIX, from an original in the Náprstkov Museum, Prague. Such lockets are called *po chia so*, "hundred family locks," alluding to the supposition that the locket is paid for by contributions from a hundred (or from many) families, whose good will toward the child is thus concentrated in the amulet. In actual practice, the locket is generally given by some elderly female relative of the child. The occasion is usually a birthday, and the term during which it is to be worn is determined by drawing lots, but in no case is it worn after the fifteenth year. Poorer children sometimes wear such a locket of wood. The idea in any case is that the child's life is thus "locked" securely to his body, and the inscription engraved on the locket usually expresses a wish to this effect: "long life: happiness and honour" (31), "long life, a hundred years" (Plate XLIX). The tassels represented as hanging from the lockets in the embroidery (cf. 39) have a curious equivalent in the inscribed leaf-shaped pendants of the silver locket, Plate XLIX. A. Salmons in *Eurasia Septentrionalis Antiqua IX*, 1934, publishes an interesting leaf pendant of the T'ang dynasty. These leaf pendants remind us of a similar device very common in Scandinavian folk jewellery.

For comparison with the embroidered tassels 30, 31 and 39, I have introduced on Plate XLVII an interesting silver

pendant in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Munich, from the Chinese-Burmese border region. Though it was collected among the Shan, it seems to represent in every respect a typically Chinese conception, and like the chateleines of Chinese design found in upper Asia, south-eastern Asia and Indonesia, is probably the survival of a form which has become obsolete in the country of its origin. It seems to me not unlikely that some such symbolic and amuletic pendants in metal were the prototypes for the tassels embroidered in western China, which sometimes attain great elaboration. At the top of this pendant is a device called a "wheel-coin" *ku lu ch'i'en* in popular parlance, a motive of considerable significance and an interesting distribution. Below this is the "sacred knot," *p'an ch'ang* (cf. 12), followed by a pair of birds confronted opposite a flower on a network with discs emphasising the junctures (sidereal diagram ?) and a variety of small pendants in the following order: melons (or gourds with blossoms ?), leaves, fishes, leaves, clouds (alternating with flowers and butterflies), leaves and buds. All the features of this metal device are of considerable interest and would no doubt reveal deeper connections and significance in the light of comparative study. The buds at the bottom are frequently represented also on the embroidered tassels in western China: they recall the pomegranate buds of amuletic significance in archaic Greek jewellery. The pendant fish have their analogue in certain western Chinese embroidery designs not reproduced here, and represent a type of metal amulet widely distributed in Asia. The devices here called "leaves" may be compared with the more naturalistic forms of Plate XLIX: these ovoid shapes with punctate ornament undoubtedly have a more significant history than appears superficially, and may not originally have been leaves at all. This Shan pendant would repay extended study: it is introduced here merely to suggest the origin of the elaborate Chinese tassels.

32. Landscape border. These occur in all sizes. The miniature ones are remarkable for the suggestive power evoked from a few threads: indeed it is this quality which raises all of the cross-stitch designs of this repertoire to the rank of art. We are not accustomed to suppose that so much vitality and humour can be packed into the humble medium of cross-stitch. (Cf. the landscape in Holbein stitch at the bottom of 47.)

33. Border of various geometric figures. (Cf. 2.)

34. Butterfly (?). The style is quite distinct from that of 14-42, and a distinction of species may be intended which I do not know about.

35. Child "arriving" on a bird (probably a phoenix). Note the cassia sprig in the child's hand. Perhaps equivalent in sense to 18.

36. This is about the smallest scale in which a bird can be suggested in cross-stitch. The maximum of suggestion with a minimum of means was the ideal of these embroiderers, and one which they frequently attained. In this respect I believe most of this work will be found superior to the same class of work (cross-stitch) in the folk-art of Europe.

37. Fruit: "Buddha's-Hand." Cf. 24.

38. Section of border rinceau. Butterfly's wing (cf. 42) confused (as frequently) with nondescript foliaceous elements.

39. Two examples of tassels. Compare the tassels on the lockets 30 and 31, as well as several examples in Holbein stitch, 47. Such embroidered tassels seem to have had metal prototypes, as I have tried to suggest by the examples on Plates XLVII and XLIX. See the discussion under 30-31.

40. Border rinceau containing a crab as filling element.

41. Corner ornament. The complete design would show a pair of fishes attached to a diagonal stem. Pendant pairs of fish are among the most interesting motives in the peasant repertoire, inviting comparison with ancient China and with regions outside China: Mesopotamia, India, Central Asia. Cf. 40.

42. Butterfly made up of two disparate halves, and representing two ways of drawing butterfly's wings. The left half is provided with the half of a melon (cf. what is said about 14); both halves have the antennæ indicated. In some cases, the latter are elaborated in harmony with the curling tendrils of the melon vine.

43. Two corner designs. The upper one shows two "Buddha's-Hands" (cf. 24) on a diagonal stalk proceeding from the corner, which is (as frequently) marked with a swastika (cf. 29). The lower design represents a phoenix in flight. In peasant design, the phoenix often looks disappointingly like a chicken or even a buzzard.

44. Another variety of "Buddha's-Hand" (cf. 24).

45. Another variety of butterfly (cf. 34).

46. Cat (?). This species seems to be very much at home throughout western China.

47. Various designs in "*ern mien ti*" (Holbein stitch), the same on both sides of the cloth. The motives are mostly self-explanatory. Especially interesting is the landscape border, upside-down, at the bottom (cf. 32). In the extreme lower left-hand corner is an example of one of the many fancy binding stitches, and attached to the hem is a knotted cotton fringe.

In the course of comparative study we get the impression that these motives are by no means recent inventions, but rather the end-products of a long and very conservative tradition. Though most of the motives must have been handed down for many generations on Chinese soil, some of them must have been introduced at early periods from outside China; other motives again show relationships so far-reaching that they cannot be understood unless we take into consideration certain motives of the bronze and stone ages from which they are descended. I wish to treat of these relationships in a more extended study later. For the present it may be of interest to explore the more immediate and tangible parallels to which one of these motives lends itself.

This medallion, Fig. 9, is composed of three zones of ornament, a central dark mass, surrounded by a zone of thin or light ornament, enclosed on the periphery by a zone of medium density. The outer zone consists of rinceaux and conventionalised flowers, fruits and butterflies, without a fixed repeat, except for four major accents in the shape of conventionalised chrysanthemums (so identified by the Chinese) on the four main axes. Inside this is a zone of rinceaux, enclosing the main and significant motive of the composition. This consists of a central hollow square containing a rosette and outlined by a fret band which passes into a swastika at each corner. From each corner of the square, diagonal lines extend outward, which upon closer examination seem to represent the stalks of four conventionalised plants, or the trunks of so many "trees." Each of these bears, near the base, a pair of *melons*, and has for its crown what is in all probability intended for a *pomegranate*, divided into two lobes. Just below this fruit the stem is interrupted by a swastika on end. Confronted opposite the stalk of this plant is a pair of birds, strongly conventionalised: the protruding brow, flat bill, long neck and short legs suggest that they are intended for *ducks*. Curious is the manner in which the birds' heads are twisted back upon themselves. Needless to say the device adds to the charm of the composition, seen as a whole, by introducing a series of spirals, but the motive of reverted heads is in itself rooted in a very old tradition which has found expression at various times and in various places in the Eurasiatic area, notably in the early "animal style" of the steppes, but also in the relatively modern designs cut out

of birch bark by inhabitants of the Amur valley.

Especially interesting in this medallion is the peculiar dark mass made up of a number of geometric members, triangles, rhomboids and pentagons, which occupies the space adjacent to the central square on each of the primary axes. It is difficult at first to account for these elements in the design, since there is nothing like them in embroideries of this type. This much, however, it is possible to determine without the help of comparative material: that after subtracting from each composite mass the two pentagonal shapes on the axis, there remains, under the feet of each duck, a motive made up of two triangles and two rhomboids—if we extend the two triangles also into rhomboids, the resulting four rhomboids constitute half of a conventionalised *flower* of a type very common in these embroideries.

It is instructive to compare with this modern peasant embroidery the pattern of a silk fabric found by Sir Aurel Stein in Turkestan, dating from the T'ang dynasty,⁴ Plate XLVIII. The correspondence with our embroidered medallion begins with the two peripheral zones with their accents in the form of rosettes, but is most striking in the central field, with its eight ducks confronted in four pairs about the four diagonal axes (indicated in the embroidery, imaginary in the silk fabric). The centre of the composition is occupied in the T'ang piece, not by a square containing a rosette as in our peasant embroidery, but only by a rosette, greatly expanded and elaborated. Corresponding (in all probability) to the four "chrysanthemums" accenting the peripheral zone of the peasant embroidery are here four nondescript floral or foliaceous devices occupying roughly the spaces between the outspread wings of the birds, on the four primary axes of the design. The spreading wings of the ducks on the T'ang textile clearly have their analogue in the corresponding feature of the peasant embroidery. Most striking, however, is the way in which the T'ang ducks are each perched upon a *lotus* flower, like the pedestal of a Buddhist divinity, thus confirming our supposition that the geometric devices on which the ducks of the peasant embroidery stand really represent in each case a pair of flattened or truncated *flowers*.

Note 4. M. A. Stein, *Serindia*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921. Pl. CXIV (scale 1/3rd).

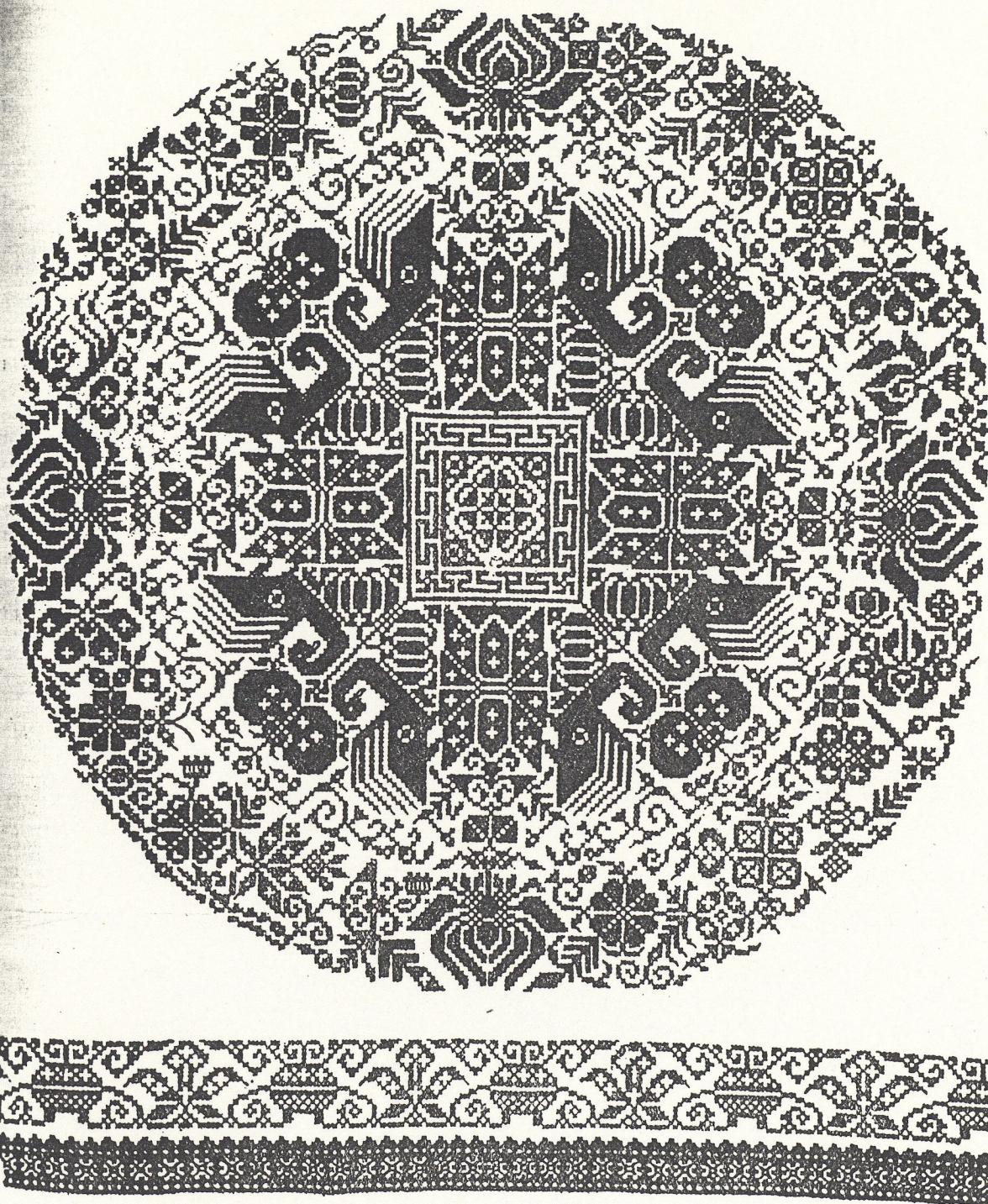


FIG. 9

CHINESE MEDALLION

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Hardly anyone will doubt that the modern peasant embroidery and the T'ang textile are related, and even very closely related, in spite of the imposing number of centuries which separates them. The only possible conclusion is that the modern peasant design must have been handed down without any appreciable change for at least a thousand years in western China.

I should like to take this opportunity to raise an interesting question implied by the comparison of these two motives. The fact of their relationship is surely undeniable, yet the nature of the relationship is open to, and I believe, requires interpretation. Without reflecting, we might assume that the modern peasant embroidery is simply "derived" from the T'ang design, of which it is a "degeneration" or "geometrisation." Before jumping at this conclusion, however, it will be well to inquire into the character of the T'ang design, in order to get an idea, if we can, of the background, the psychological milieu which brought it forth, and then do the same for the peasant design. With the consideration of certain general principles derived from the experience of others who work with the comparative method, we shall then be in a better position to form an idea of what is in all probability the true nature of the relationship between the two versions of this design, that of the modern peasant and that of the T'ang dynasty designer.

Anyone looking at the T'ang design can see that it is the work of a trained draughtsman, a professional designer. This fact is of the utmost significance. The man who drew this motive had enough training and skill to draw as he pleased; that is clear from the character of the drawing itself. But this is enough to put us on guard if we are at all interested in the question of the authentic original character of the design. It is the sad experience of I daresay all those who attempt to "teach art" that technical aptitude, a facility for "correct" drawing, usually varies in inverse ratio with the imagination of the pupil. It is a generally recognised and irremediable fault of most of our modern art that though it approaches the ideal of verisimilitude, it is sadly deficient in that "mysterious something" without which it cannot become art worthy of the name. "Modernists" of various schools try to supply this lacking element by sensational devices, without realising that this quality is simply the imagination which lives in every simple soul and vanishes at the touch of a rationalistic civilisation. It cannot be planted

and artificially cultivated. This circumstance is important for us, as we shall see in a moment for in the T'ang textile we have before us the typical product of a civilised milieu, of a designer's atelier, which is in striking contrast to the peasant design. The designer was undoubtedly a city dweller: it is inconceivable that he was a peasant. He was (hardly anyone would be inclined to doubt it) very likely paid for his work, and the technique chosen for the reproduction of the design, a system of block printing, puts it definitely into the class of commercial mass-production, no matter on how modest a scale. The material used for reproducing the design is silk, an indication that it was intended for use by the upper classes who could afford to pay for it. In other words we have, implied in the character of the drawing, the material and the technique, the typical cycle of supply and demand, which calls for a commercial artist, a man who is fitted by training to supply the clientele who support him and who has no further interest in the motive or its possible significance beyond the consideration in how far it is adaptable to a desired decorative effect. It is hardly taking too great a risk to infer from these circumstances that the man who produced the T'ang design could not have been its inventor: so much is implicit in the very nature of the drawing itself. Like most modern artists, he was not a creator, but merely an interpreter, and what he interpreted must have existed before him.

If now we examine the peasant embroidery from the same points of view from which we have just regarded the T'ang fabric, we shall have an interesting and instructive series of contrasts.

Anyone looking at the peasant embroidery can see that it is *not* the work of a trained draughtsman who could draw as he pleased. We know that the peasant woman who embroidered the design could not "draw as she pleased"; she was definitely limited in her powers of draughtsmanship, so much so, in fact, that she was obliged—and nothing loath—to copy, and copy very exactly and painstakingly the model at her disposal, which was simply an embroidered article produced by a person of her community in the generation before her. The significance of this fact cannot be over-estimated, for there is every reason to believe that this is precisely what happened generation after generation. This psychology, whether we call it lack of initiative

or tenacity to tradition, is the bedrock upon which the authenticity of folk tradition is founded and accounts for its almost stationary evolution, independent of the "styles" which sweep the various centres of urban art production with which the history of art has until now been chiefly concerned.

In the matter of "imagination" our peasant woman is far more richly endowed than the commercial artist of the T'ang (or any other) dynasty. This does not mean that she can necessarily give us the true explanation of the motive which she embroiders (as in most cases she cannot) but it means that the intricacies of the design, which do, as we learn by comparative study, have their origin in symbolic intention, still have a strong power of appeal to her imagination, in spite of her ignorance of their meaning, so that she loves to reproduce them, perhaps reading into them meanings of her own. Though she may not understand the reason for various features of the design, it is important for us that in any case she *retains* the design and retains it as a *whole*. She does not, like the rationalistic artist, ask what the design means, and seeing merely a complex of meaningless elements, proceed to select a part and discard as irrelevant everything which is incomprehensible to her. She receives and transmits the design as an indivisible and closely integrated unit, without question (rationalisation). She has no will, no individuality in the matter, only an inarticulate sentiment, a satisfaction in participating in the traditional artistic expression of her community. We may call hers a creative imagination, not in the sense that she individually creates the whole design, but in so far as she tacitly approves of the design as a whole, responds to its imaginative content, and does not, like the rationalistic artist, criticise and dismember it at will. By transmitting it to posterity, she contributes both to its preservation and, perhaps infinitesimally, to its evolution, just as the speakers of a language at any given epoch contribute unconsciously and collectively to its evolution by the act of speaking it, and are thus, in the final analysis, its creators.

As for the matter of a commercial incentive behind the execution of this peasant work, it is utterly out of the question. The incredulity with which the people meet a proposal of purchase is evidence enough of this, if indeed we need such evidence. If these designs had been made to order, they would have had an entirely

different character. It is perhaps more correct to say that such designs simply would never have appealed to purchasers: the attitude of present day urban Chinese to these embroideries indicates this clearly enough, if we need such indication. Since these embroideries were made by the country people exclusively for their own use, they naturally represent the taste of the country people, not that of any urban customers. This means that the tradition has not been deflected by adaptation to the requirements of a mentality with other ideals, and helps to account for the authenticity of the tradition, as well as giving us a clue to the understanding of the circumstance that these designs do not appear elsewhere in Chinese art: the rest of Chinese art is, after all, urban art, whereas the peasant art belongs to that common fund of primitive or primordial art which is practically ageless and knows no geographical limits. The fact that such embroideries are regarded by all classes of the population as obviously inferior and valueless also goes far to explain how an art, which we must assume to be centuries old, and to have been represented in the course of its history by thousands of examples, can still have descended into our times without leaving a single example of an earlier period. Like all popular or "folk" art, it was never cherished, except in the sense that as one piece was worn out another was copied from it. No effort would ever have been made to preserve examples of such intrinsically worthless art, any more than an effort is being made to-day. While the art was alive, such indifference did not matter, but in this generation, before we have become fully aware of the significance of popular art in the scheme of things, this art will vanish from existence as if it had never been. That is the way of popular or "primitive" art the world over: practised by millions in perishable materials yesterday, ignored by everybody, gone to-day, its existence denied by art historians to-morrow. That this art is not recent in origin but must have been practised for a very long time and by broad masses of the population is a conclusion that seems very far from preposterous to one who has seen the last proofs of its existence vanishing like a morning mist.

The contrast between the T'ang design and ours in point of material is especially instructive. The silk upon which the T'ang design is executed, though in itself perishable, is of a relatively precious nature which would have induced people

to cherish and preserve it (as textiles of the same period have been preserved in an Imperial storehouse, the Shosoin in Japan, and then in the wrappings of holy relics in occidental churches, or copied in contemporary frescoes of central and western Asia—Qyzil, Bam-i-yan, Ani). But it is quite unthinkable that such peasant embroideries as ours, if they existed in those days, as I see no reason to doubt, would ever have been either preserved or copied in imperishable materials, as the silk textiles were.

The technique in which our modern design is executed is perhaps also not without influence on the question of the authenticity of the design itself. The peasant woman, copying stitch for stitch, composing her design by molecules, would not have been tempted to introduce variations, nor would her ancestors before her have been tempted. On the other hand, the technique by which the T'ang design was produced must be regarded as a relatively easy one: the actual amount of time consumed in dashing off a quadrant of the T'ang design to be sent to the woodblock cutter for completion must, in any case, have been but a fraction of the time devoted to the execution of the modern cross-stitch design by a patient housewife. To the peasant woman, the execution of such a design is a real labour of love, in the course of which she becomes thoroughly familiar with the design and the better capable of transmitting it to others; whereas the T'ang designer, dominated by the psychology of commerce, is primarily concerned with "saving time" or "saving labour" (to the detriment of his soul), and we can readily understand how willingly he would substitute meaningless blobs and curlicues for more intricate details to "get his effect," thus impairing the authenticity of the design. I would see evidence of such summary treatment, for instance, in the rich masses of "T'ang cabbage" filling the spandrels outside the medallion repeats (spandrels in the peasant embroideries usually contain diagonal "trees of life" with confronted creatures, or other significant motives) and the nondescript devices between the wings of the ducks, not improbably also in the mechanically repeated ovals in the peripheral band (though here the question of influence from Sassanian textiles would have to be considered, the flowers in each oval take us back to our peasant design for their explanation; it seems to me unlikely that the modern flowers blossomed from these petalled ovals, but likely rather that the latter are a perfunctory and

unimaginative rendering of original flowers). The very choice of technique for the T'ang design may be said to be determined more or less directly by two considerations: ease of execution and ease of multiplication. Such considerations can hardly be said to have played a rôle with the peasant woman: her art is work, it is a part of her life.

By examining and contrasting these two objects from various points of view I have tried to show how, by reflecting a little on the qualities inherent in these two undocumented objects themselves, instead of brusquely assigning to each a *date*, as if that were the beginning and end of their significance as objects of art, we may be able to get a hold of factors which will be of help in establishing their relative places in the evolution of the design in question, regardless of dating. I suggested above that the producer of the T'ang design cannot have been the creator of the motive. I felt compelled rather to infer from the quality of the drawing, from the material chosen, and from the technique employed, that he was merely the interpreter of the design, and that the design he interpreted must therefore have existed before him. After these considerations it may no longer seem paradoxical when I propose that the modern embroidery actually represents a more original form of the design than that preserved to us in the T'ang textile, which, though earlier in actual date, is really secondary and derivative from a prototype which must have been close to the design of the modern embroidery, but which is lost to us for the reasons suggested above.

Students of comparative mythology, comparative linguistics and folk-lore, in fact of all sciences dealing with creations of the human spirit throughout the ages ("Geisteswissenschaften," or as we might say, the human sciences as opposed to the natural sciences) have again and again, each in his field, been forced to the conclusion that motives or patterns, whether mythological or linguistic—and I should like to add, artistic—are likely to be preserved in a more original form by living tradition among simple people than we encounter them in the forms in which they were recorded a thousand or several thousand years ago in media which happen to be preserved to us—literature in the first cases, imperishable or precious materials in the latter. In other words it is by no means primarily the chronological factor which determines the stage of evolution of any given pattern, but the psycho-

logical one. We can learn far more of significance from a comparison of these psychological factors than we can from a mathematical comparison of dates. The naïve assumption that the first recorded evidence we have of a motive necessarily represents the first occurrence of that motive, and that later occurrences of the motive must be descended directly from the earliest one which happens to be preserved to us, is a fallacy which again and again will lead us into difficulties: these difficulties generally appear when we learn to apply the comparative method to the given data. I have tried to show how in one typical case, from the very start, the evidence inherent in the character of the recorded motive is all against such an assumption. In the light of the evolutionary conception of this typical problem in one branch of art history, that of decorative design, we can see how the mere assignation of dates without further critique may be misleading. If we assume, as we now generally do, that historical dating is the only criterion of development in art history, we are in constant danger of doing violence to facts. Contrary to expectation, early occurrences of a motive are quite likely to be secondary and derivative in form, because of psychological factors implied in the act of recording. The best corrective in all such cases is the application of the comparative method, wherever we are fortunate enough to have comparative material. The broader we are able to establish the organic basis of comparison, the better.

The collection and presentation of such comparative material is a much larger task than I can enter upon here, but it may suffice if I merely suggest the lines along which such a comparison would operate. I should like to call attention especially to the presence on the peasant embroidery of the central square and the four radial "trees," and the absence of these features on the T'ang textile. In all probability these features were not *added* in the modern embroidery, but were *subtracted* by the T'ang designer. The motive of pairs of creatures confronted opposite "trees" on the radii of a medallion is one of a group of conceptually related motives deeply rooted in mythology and very widely distributed, which have as their main feature animals or anthropomorphic deities grouped in pairs with reference to trees radiating from the centre: not infrequently the radial trees are associated with a procession of animals or birds in a rotary arrangement about the

periphery of the medallion. Both schemes occur frequently in these peasant embroideries, but they are by no means confined to the folk art of China. Such motives are already well established by the time western Asia emerges into historical record. Our collection of examples would have to include not only such "early" specimens from western Asia, but many examples from the living folk art of various regions on the Eurasian continent, from Indonesia (Batak magicians' books), Melanesia (certain kapkaps), even such far-flung artistic provinces as those of ancient Mexico (Codex Fejervary) and the South-west of the United States (modern Hopi Indian "sand paintings"), to touch upon only a few high spots. From the latter examples it appears with especial clarity that the four "trees" are an indispensable element in such medallions, and that in the final analysis the whole scheme is an attempt at a representation of the world or cosmos, in which the trees symbolise the four cardinal directions, and the heraldic animals their guardians. Similarly it would probably develop out of comparative study that the central square of our embroidery, with swastikas at its corners, is also an expression of the same symbolism. (There are suggestions in the relatively late Buddhistic art of Central Asia—Bāzāklik—a Jain ayāgapatam published by Coomaraswamy, a late Roman shield from Dura Europos in Syria). I shall not attempt to pursue the matter further. I merely wish to suggest that by broadening our comparative survey, both chronologically and geographically, we shall soon get an insight into the essential character of the motive in question and be better able to judge what is original and what is derived: at the same time we shall awake from the hypnosis of dates.

In any case I hope I have at least suggested, if not here conclusively proved, that the design of the modern Chinese peasant embroidery is by no means a recent and meaningless invention, but that it springs from a significant symbolism, and that at a comparatively recent stage of its history (in the T'ang dynasty), this symbolism was disregarded and violated by an individual in the pursuit of a decorative effect. Examples of such a process could be multiplied, not only from this Chinese province, but wherever an urban or civilised, rationalistic mentality has exploited the popular tradition.

On Plate L I have added a comparative example in the central medallion of a Persian carpet of

about the seventeenth century.⁵ The central medallions of such carpets, like the medallions of the Chinese peasant embroideries, are very apt to contain motives of a cosmographic character, even in cases where the rest of the carpet has been treated with great freedom by the professional court designers. In this case the central motive seems to be specifically related to that of our Chinese embroidery. The eight aquatic (?) birds are confronted around the diagonal axes, and it is perhaps not without significance that their heads are reverted in the same way as those of the ducks of the embroidery: for this is probably an archaic feature, since it has survived independently in two distinct art-provinces. Here again the four radial "trees" (?) are retained, sending their branches beyond the limits of the medallion into the field of the carpet, as well as the shorter stems on the primary

axes, though without clear evidence of a floral intention. The central rosette is, so to speak, the axis of the cosmos as well as of the carpet. In certain essential respects the carpet medallion thus appears to be closer to our modern peasant design than either of these are to the T'ang motive, a fact which goes far to confirm our impression that the latter, though earlier in date, does not represent the original form of the motive, and that we are closer to the original form in the two modern survivals, since they are both likely to have diverged from a common original.

CARL SCHUSTER.

Note 5. The photograph of this detail was kindly taken by the K.K. Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie in Vienna. The carpet as a whole is illustrated in F. Sarre and H. Trenkwald, *Alt-Orientalische Teppiche*, Vienna, 1926, vol. I, Pl. 11, with the caption: "Persian Animal Carpet, seventeenth century."

SOME STITCHES USED IN CHINESE EMBROIDERY

NOT very many varieties of stitches are found in Chinese embroideries, the principal ones being couching (both metal thread and silk), laid work, satin stitch, Petit Point, cross stitch, French knot and the Chinese, or Pekinese knot, and Pekinese stitch. Also, a little back stitch or its equivalent.

On Fig. 10, Diagram 1, is seen a beautiful pattern worked in what appears at first sight to be double-running, or back stitch, but which, on examination of the back, is neither of these. The pattern at the back is not continuous, stitch-spaces being left between each worked stitch, giving a disjointed appearance. Cross stitch is used to emphasise the edges of the narrow border; and the lower hem is finished off with geometric buttonholing. The original, a lappet, in the possession of Dr. Sybil Welsh, is worked in cream silk on a dark indigo cloth.

The two patterns on the right-hand top corner, Diagrams 2 and 2A, are very handsome all-over designs. Diagram 2, worked diagonally, can be seen on an Imperial silk robe in bands of diaper patterning. It is known as Bishamon hexagons. (Bishamon is a Japanese god of Wealth.) This robe, of about the eighteenth or nineteenth century, is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, No. 1608, 1901.

The other motif, taken from a General's costume in the same museum (No. 562, 1907)

comes from North China. It is nineteenth century. The background of both patterns is gold, and the design picked out in heavy black lines.

Diagrams 3, 4, 5 and 6 show patterns used in laid-work. More designs have been evolved, but these serve to show the ingenuity displayed in working the simple flowered garments on which this type of work is frequently used. Diagram 3 is worked in blue with red centres over a white ground; Diagram 5, pale green-blue couched with a yellow centre over a pale pink ground requires thought in the working; while Diagram 6 illustrates a laid-work pattern of single strands of gold thread couched where they intersect, and crosses worked in the intervening spaces. It is interesting, in passing, to notice the similarity of these patterns to some of those produced by Mrs. Foster in her Wessex Stitchery panels. (See June, 1934, number of EMBROIDERY.)

Diagram 7 shows an interesting treatment for feathers on birds; the structural lines are in green satin stitch, while the centre "fans" are veined with white surrounded first with pale coral coloured silk, then with fawn, all worked in slightly encroaching satin stitch. Other treatments of feathers include long narrow scale patterns; broad flat ones worked scale by scale in rows of gold thread (used double) and couched with self-coloured silk, the outline being two thick strands of couched gold thread; while