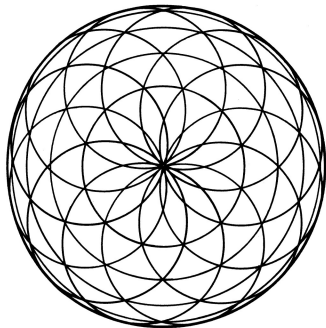


FROM DECORATIVE ARTS TO FOLK ART

Notes on the History of Popular Ornament



2 Compass-drawn ornament after a sketch from Albrecht Dürer, *Underweysung der Messung, mit dem Zirckel und richtscheyt, in Linien, Ebenen und ganzen Corporen*. Nuremberg, 1538.

“To all noble and gentle ladies, also sensitive and devoted readers! I have pondered on how praiseworthy it would be to serve others, and through a useful book earn a worthy name with well respected and clever people. So, I have made up my mind to put together diligently and with the help of skilled drawing many decorative sketches. These were made by great masters and under their guidance carefully included in my work. I therefore have no doubt that I can teach every able woman and all maidens together with their menfolk and children. This is exactly what I want to do. My work should give pleasure to all of them while they learn to draw, to sew or embroider with silks of different colours, with silver, gold or any other threads. All this I will explain, as is necessary, from the beginning, in drawings and vivid compositions. And there are indeed many kinds of ornaments, that is to say, decorations: splendid medallions, moresques and arabesques, flying birds, animals living on the land, flowers of different kinds, beautiful foliage, trees, meadows with fine herbage, vessels, wells and landscapes with figures from history and legend. Following these pretty things you will find capital letters in roman as well as French type, many other drawings and letters for the sewing on or embroidering of monograms. There, too, will be jingles. You will find in my book everything everybody likes in great detail.”

This is a free rendering of the passage opening the preface of a small Italian book, *Esemplario nuovo*, a sample-book of ornaments, dating from the year 1531, put together by a Venetian, Giovanni Antonio Tagliente. The author, a clerk and civil servant of the Republic of Venice, had made a name for himself already by practising the art of calligraphy and publishing a letter writer for the use in correspondence with officials and persons of high rank. He had also published a letter writer for lovers and other text books. With his sample-book of ornaments (from 1527 in several versions) he took up an idea which originated in Germany. The Augsburg printer, Schönsperger, had published a book of samples about 1523 which was quickly succeeded by further editions, some published in Augsburg, others at the printer's workshop in Zwickau. These small volumes created a new kind of literature which was to be of great importance

for the development and diffusion of ornaments. There appeared sample-books for the weaving of pictures, the weaving of ribbons and all kinds of embroidery. Their numbers, including new editions and foreign reprints, reached several hundred. Italy, Germany, France and the Netherlands were the countries to publish and distribute most of these books.

Precursors of the sample-books were hand-drawn sheets of samples, some made by well known artists, others by the craftsmen themselves, as model for the ornamentation of their own work. Most ornaments had their origin in the practical operations of workshops. The first sample-books contain forms of ornament which had been known since the fifteenth century. They originated in the workshops of silk embroiderers, figured damask weavers, cloth printers, illuminators and book binders (for leather tooling). Generally motifs came from Upper Italy, but were also taken over from the decorative arts of Islamic countries, diffused through a lively trade with the Orient, particularly of Venetian merchants. Special mention must be made of the *moresque* (called *groppi moreschi* by Tagliente in the preface to his book) and interlacing which was later on to be used and developed in folk art in many and varied ways.

Older motifs, too, turn up in the sample-books. An example is the tendril work with thorny pointed Gothic foliage which is often represented in early sample-books. This older ornament which had proved its use in the workshops of artisans provided the solid foundation for the inventors of sample-books, repeated by them in numerous variants and also further developed into new forms. Fresh pictorial ideas were added, and eventually also new principles of style. This led to constant, one might even say, fashionable, change of designs. In this process it is not rare to find single ornamental motifs or whole series of them moving from country to country. It is a working principle of draftsmen and makers of samples at this period, simply to copy anything they considered good, attractive and useful. Quite unconcerned, they placed these designs next to their own special work, which meant that much fashionable ornamentation was copied everywhere. Also in the use of contemporary style and the art of graphic presentation various influences mingled easily. It is often difficult

now to ascertain where one or the other ornament originated. The unlimited interchange of ornamental motifs, ways of decorative presentation and style is a characteristic of sample-books.

Not much later than the publication of books of samples for the practical requirements of textile artists, similar books for other artisans made their appearance. Samples for the goldsmith's art occupy first place for artistic merit. There are designs for every kind of shape, with samples for engraving, enamel work or cloisonné and embossed work in silver, with goldsmiths often presenting their own inventions. Closely related to sample-books are sample-sheets for belt makers and various artisans in decorative metal work, for engraving, metal chasing and brass founding.

Another group of publications offers designs for craftsmen working in wrought iron: for decorative gates, fan lights, windows, balconies and stair railings. There is also a wealth of samples published for joiners and cabinet makers. A special and large group are the so-called *Säulenbücher*, which modelled on ancient Italian textbooks on architecture, mainly convey Renaissance ideas of proportion for decorative use in panelling, the wainscoating of doors, the casing of windows as well as the making of sideboards, cabinets and other pieces of furniture. These publications whose value lies mainly in their aesthetic theories, were complemented by other books on decoration for joiners. These are again entirely devoted to ornament, providing designs for relief carving and carving in the round. There are also designs for tarsia. In addition to the sample-books, as a rule meant for the use of one craft or several related ones, there eventually appeared a great number of publications orientated towards the special needs of the times, and concentrating on one craft technique, a special set of motifs or a special field of material culture.

Even though sample-books may be considered artistic products—in fact, noted wood-cutters and copper engravers are among their contributors—they are first and foremost aids to the daily work of the craftsman. For that very reason they often contain means to ease the craftsman's task in transferring the designs to the article he is making. In the sample-

books ornaments are usually given with a network which can be employed in two different textile arts: picture-weaving and the making of stencils, pin-prick papers where the pattern is marked by points. These stencils are used for the preparation of the loom and in the actual weaving process. Their other use is for the counting of stitches in certain types of embroidery. The same kind of square network is occasionally found on samples for other crafts where they are meant to help in transferring the design to the article, true to conformation and scale.

In the publications for joiners and cabinet makers tables of proportion and scale are given next to a drawing for the very same purpose. Also, many Italian editions in particular provide hints on the use of drawing techniques. As help in daily working practice, these sample-books were distributed and used in all parts of Europe where artisan craftsmen supplied the fashionable market, which means in the large cultural centres of southern, western and Central Europe.

Seen from a historical point of view, sample-books represent a fundamental innovation. If until their appearance the actual object made by the craftsman and its decoration formed an inseparable unity, the ornament now became detached from the original article. This separation was of considerable advantage to the artist. Independent of the limitations imposed by working on a single commission and a single object, he could now freely develop his ornaments in a number of ways, creating many variants. At the same time the separation was of practical use to the craftsman making the actual article. He had the sample for the ornaments always at hand, and could apply it as and when he wanted to do so. The sample-book made the art forms of the Renaissance and its styles applicable and suitable for reproduction in a way not thought of before.

The significance of this process is shown clearly when considering the ornament's new ways of application. Until the end of the fifteenth century it was used almost exclusively with costly articles, serving high-ranking representation, articles made of precious metals, textiles and natural materials. They were meant for the exclusive use of princes, temporal and spiritual, courtiers and a patrician élite. Now orna-

ments began to be used increasingly with articles of lesser quality designed for everyday use. A broad stratum of the middle classes in the centres of European trade and craft production took over the feudal-type of ornament. There were signs of a cultural reorientation: the ornament had become popular and was used in middle class society.

On reaching these wider circles the diffusion of ornament forms and handicrafts techniques also points in another direction. The knowledge of forms and styles of ornamentation in applied art quickly reached the workshops of craftsmen's guilds. These were busy producing goods for townspeople and countryfolk alike. Many a technique and type of ornament was thus adapted to amateur work and entered the domestic scene. The first step on this road to becoming folk art is marked by works which to begin with retain the quality of status symbols, as, for example, the panelling of rooms, furniture, utensils and vessels for the use of town halls, law courts, guild offices and tap-rooms.

Only during the next stage did some forms of ornamentation find their place in people's homes, that is to say in the family. This transition of types of applied art into popular art does not happen without fundamental changes. As a rule only part of the original design is taken over: decorative part-structures, certain combinations of ornament or selected motifs. Usually they become adapted according to form and material of the article, the decorative technique employed as well as the intended use of the object being made. In this process much is shed which under the new conditions cannot be produced nor understood and may not even be desirable. Because of this, eccentric, affected, over-complicated and over-fantastic designs completely disappear. The end result of the changes is, however, far from mutilated, formless or trivial copies of the original. Folk art does change the original sensitively into new decorative structures and combinations of ornaments in a development which follows its own laws.

Historical processes become visible in the transition from the decorative arts to folk art. Objects and art forms which so far had served only the luxury use by an élite, are taken over by the general public. This in ethnological terms is an adaptation of one

culture by another. Certain strata of the population, the townspeople in the sixteenth century and then the country people took over cultural goods which so far had been the domain of their superiors. In taking over, they made the objects their own, adapted and used them for their own purpose. Related to the people's needs, the objects gain new and different values. Often this development has been seen as a negative one, looking at it as a move of cultural values to a lower level of culture. The positive side of the process should, however, be stressed. Through it, old cultural barriers, erected under a feudal system for the representation of power and domination of the upper classes, are at least partly demolished, and eventually swept away altogether. Then a wider public gradually gains access to its cultural heritage.

While looking at these developments in Europe considerable differences from country to country become evident. These differences apply to the extent of styles and ornament forms transmitted and the ways of their adaptation and change. The value of

the innovations in the general application of popular décor must also be taken into account, and the timing is important. The timing of changes even in one and the same country is shown clearly in a study by the French ethnologist, Suzanne Tardieu. On the example of popular furniture she has demonstrated the appearance of artistic styles from the sixteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century (see table on p. 12). This study reveals interesting facts concerning the timing of changes. Joinery in the country and workshops supplying the rural needs were to begin with far behind the development in urban middle class areas. Renaissance décor was taken up only when a succeeding style had already developed. This means a shift of phases of some hundred and twenty years. In the styles to follow the countryside lagged well behind the towns. A distinct change took place about the mid-eighteenth century when popular furniture adopted new forms of style almost as soon as they appeared. After that there was hardly any delay. This means that the time span from the formation

The transition of styles of decorative arts into folk art as shown by dated popular furniture in France (from J. Cuisinier, *L'Art populaire en France*, p. 99).

	Renaissance	Louis XIII (Late Renaissance)	Louis XIV (Baroque)	Louis XV (Régence and Rococo)	Louis XVI (Classicism)	Empire
Formation of style in the decorative arts	1500	1620	1680	1740	1775	1805
Earliest date on popular furniture	1626	1720	1726	1740	1779	1805
Latest date on popular furniture	1768	1817	1840	1930	1903	1849
Delay in folk art compared with formation of style (in years)	120	100	50	0	0	0
Number of records examined for this table	7	15	25	187	38	3

of a style until its acceptance by folk art got less gradually and eventually disappeared altogether. The process itself is a pointer to historical events. Rural culture—and this does not mean furniture alone but all cultural manifestations—constantly drew closer to urban middle class culture, until in the end it caught up with it on the same level.

The agent for transmitting forms of style in France as elsewhere in Europe is the artisan, the "journeyman" who gained knowledge of practical work while journeying in important centres of culture exchanging work experiences in his own region and handling sample-books and sheets. He constantly acquainted himself with new forms of style and décor and eventually would put this knowledge to good use in his own rural workshop. Regional products then show the stylistic and decorative specialities brought about by the adaptation to the needs and values of a rural population. On the other hand any innovation makes for changes in the life style and set of values of country people. In that way local and regional styles in folk art may in the end be regarded as concrete witnesses to this process of change.

The time scale in France concerning general tendencies of development equally applies to other European countries even though definite dating will differ widely. The rural versus urban middle class performance shows a certain difference from country to country, as different social conditions make for a great variety of development. It is important to

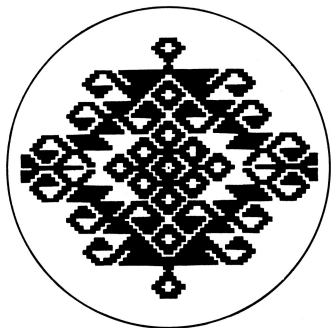
remember that extremely unfavourable conditions—bondage, for example—completely change the urban-rural interaction. Under these conditions older amateur skills with their own regionally diversified forms of ornament remain longer than in other parts of Europe.

In this respect the Balkan is a special region. Ottoman Turks almost completely isolated the countries under their rule from the rest of Europe for nearly five hundred years. Any previous developments ceased or were at least stunted. However, new trends did arrive from the East, brought by Anatolian artisans who settled in the region. Trade, too—from Constantinople to the Adriatic coast in Greek hands—imported goods with Oriental décor into the Balkan states. There side by side with indigenous ornamentation from the late Middle Ages or merging with it, Oriental motifs became firmly established. Only with the end of Ottoman rule did some new western type of ornamentation begin to be applied, this means in the styles of the late nineteenth century.

Seen as a whole, popular ornament in Europe presents a colourful kaleidoscope, consisting of many, historically separately developed and only loosely linked systems of ornaments. Their relationships, however, become clear through the history and cultural background of special dominant motifs and groups of motifs in their regional forms, their meaning and their application.

LINE, SPIRAL, ZIGZAG

Linear Ornaments



3 Motif from *kilim* ornament. Bulgaria.

Popular ornament has many ways of expression, yet they are not unlimited. Limits are set mainly by the objects to be decorated. The type of article, its shape, size and use, and even more the material it is made of and the technique employed have to be taken into consideration. More than is generally recognized, does the technical side influence the shaping of ornaments as well as their aesthetic character. Techniques developed in the making of pottery are entirely different to those employed in carving, weaving or other crafts. Often these characteristics arising from varying techniques are not fully recognized, especially when a richly designed ornament draws the attention towards the investigation of motifs and their meaning. One particular type of ornament, however, eases our understanding of the problems involved, and that is the linear ornament. It is distinguished by elementary, easily comprehensible structures. This particular chapter dealing with linear ornament may therefore serve to show up the special relations between certain forms of ornaments and the techniques employed. Examples for pottery, carving and textile crafts will be given.

For the work of the potter, the wheel, the ancient implement, originating in the Orient, is of outstanding importance, as all work shaping the article, is done on the rotating wheel. A shapeless mass of clay is transformed into a vessel in the potter's hands. Depending on how he pulls up the clay, turning it into one or the other direction, he makes pots, jugs, beakers, jars, bowls, basins, plates, in fact, any earthenware vessel required. What all of them have in common, is the even, one might almost say ideal rounding of their forms, created by the wheel's rotation. Usually the décor is only applied when the article has been air-dried and gained a certain degree of solidity. With another, obviously older process, decoration is applied immediately after shaping the article. This is actually done on the wheel whose rotation is then used to make horizontal grooves, and again the potter uses his hand. He makes the grooves with a finger, which gives them that particular width. If several are made closely together, the spaces between the grooves form a clearly marked linear pattern. At this stage of development there are other techniques of linear forms: grooves may be made with a

small stick or the stump of a comb. This technique produces several bands of lines. Lines can also be made by a rolling stamp which with slow rotation is guided round the object, making for a small frieze of tiny ornamental motifs (strokes like roman numerals, small stars and the like).

This type of linear ornament is very simple, yet a considerable aesthetic effect is obtained by it. It is often seen on medieval pottery vessels when neither colour nor glaze were known. Examples are earthenware articles from the Rhineland and Saxon-Thuringia from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, where it appears on all kinds of vessels, bulgy pots, jugs, jars and beakers. A typical example are the so-called pilgrim's flasks, circular, flat flasks which are even on the reverse side and slightly curved on the front side, with handles to be used as loops for carrier straps. Ornament here has a definite aesthetic function, namely to change the functional parts of the flask into clearly defined decorative zones, and so improves the quality of the object. Grooves, roll-shaped rings and roller-stamped friezes, also single horizontal lines mark the separate parts of the flask, the rim, neck, shoulder, spout and the base. Rotation grooves may cover one part while the other remains undecorated. Grooves may be deeper and stronger in one part, and only suggested in another. Linear decoration may alternate with whole surfaces being decorated. A relatively great variety of ornamentation is possible.

During the next period—with the arrival of new shapes of vessels—new ornamental motifs replaced the older type of decoration in the field of ceramics. Yet, the old motifs did not disappear altogether, continuing in some regions until the mid-twentieth century. A dominant décor, for example, are surface decorations of rotation grooves and comb patterns, particularly on vessels for everyday use (water and wine jugs, brandy flasks) in the Balkan countries, a wide region stretching from Bulgaria to Albania. There is similar ware in southern Italy, on Sicily and in Spain.

Surfaces covered with roller-stamp decoration and motifs of diagonal lines are known on earthenware jugs from Upper Austria. Also, the old technique of linear decoration remains in use for minor functions

such as the separating of zones of figurative ornament. More frequently it has been used for emphasizing the transition from the neck to the spout of the vessel or from the bulge to the base. This applies to earthenware as well as glazed pottery.

Another technique is involved when ornamental lines are applied to vessels by attaching or rotating small roll-shaped rings on to the object. Their function is first and foremost of a technical nature. With larger vessels made up of several parts, these rolls are applied at the joints to give the sides greater firmness. Generally they decorate the sides of large vessels. Their decorative effect is created by the roll of clay being pressed on with the tip of a finger or sometimes with a small wooden stick. This makes for a rhythmically lively line of notches. The décor is prevalent on large storing vessels of the Schwarzhafner ware made at Kroning in Lower Bavaria (water containers, vinegar jars), from Passau-Hafnerzell in Bavaria (iron-clay pots), from the Hungarian district of Bácska-Kiskun (the so-called *Hochzeitstöpfe*—wedding pots), and Moravia (pots for making plum preserve), also with large ordinary jars of unglazed earthenware from southern Italy.

A turning point in the development of ornaments is marked by the introduction of coloured glazes and engobes for the decoration of everyday pottery, which became popular. This was first limited to certain regions and then spread to the whole of Europe as a decorative feature of everyday pottery ware. At the same time a new style of ornament, characterized mainly by figurative presentation, made its appearance. Linear ornament, too, experienced a certain renaissance, even though limited to a few motifs. It also changed its aesthetic quality. If its effect in the older technique was achieved mainly by light and shade, caused by grooves, ridges, rolls, notches and deep scratches, now the use of colour produced a more picturesque result.

The spiral is an excellent example for displaying the development of the new means of expression. The spiral's movement of turning into apparent infinity makes it a fascinating ornament, forever appealing. The history of art shows that the spiral is a very ancient ornament. Most likely it originated from the imitation of natural forms, for example, certain

snail-shells and spiral-like forms of plants. The spiral is one of the most elementary forms which in some earlier cultures gained cult significance. It is the prevailing motif in the ceramics of the Danube culture, after that in the early Minoan and early Greek period of the Aegean Sea. It is found also in the cultures of the Bronze Age in North and Central Europe and in the later art of the Celts and Germanic tribes. It seems obvious to look at recent forms of the spiral in a historical context, and so relate them to earlier work. For southeastern Europe such historical con-

4 Vertical wavy lines, rows of dots and pairs of commas on flask-like salt kit. Westmorland slipware with dark green lead glazing and white slip decoration. Great Britain, about 1900.



tinuity appears evident, as during the Middle Ages a style of ceramics displaying the spiral motif was known from Byzantium and Corinth. It reached a peak in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. And in fact, in the Balkans and regions to the north of it, the spiral frequently appears on everyday potter's ware.

This newer type of ornamentation is distinguished, as mentioned before, by its colourful expression. For the painting slip is used. This is a fine white clay which flows easily. It is mixed with metal oxides for col-

5 Spiral pattern on a jug with spout. Val de Saône, France, 19th century.

6 Spiral and wavy line on wrought-iron grid-irons for baking maize cake on the hearth. Navarre, Spain.

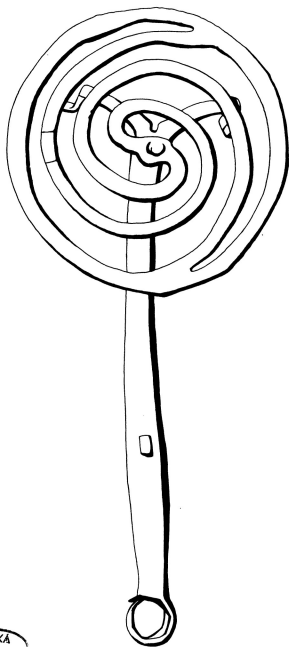
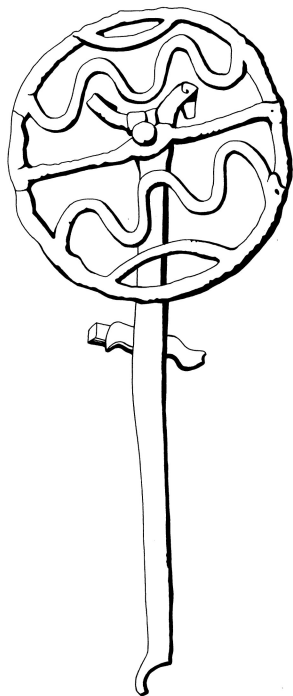


ouring. The potter applies the mixture with a spouted can. A fist-size pot may also be used, open at the top and ending in a small nozzle. The proper colours of the design, made in this way, are only brought out in the high temperatures of firing. This technique allows the potter to execute freely the movements of the spiral. Also, the wheel may be employed in the process, unless the potter chooses to use his hands freely. Both techniques are often practised on the same vessel, as, for example on the so-called *Plutzer* from the Burgenland, pot-like jars, mostly

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unglazed with a short neck and a narrow spout. They served to keep the harvesters' drinks—wine and grape juice—cool. Around the centre of the vessel, a band is applied with white slip (engobe) in the shape of a spiral, from the base upward. This is shown by the thick lower part thinning out towards the top end. On the slightly curved shoulder smaller spirals of the same colour, surrounded by vigorous dots next to strokes and zigzag lines fill the empty spaces. More frequently even the spiral forms the central motif on the base

1
Line, spiral, zig



STÁTNÍ VĚDECKÁ
KNIHOVNA BRNO

of plates and bowls for festive use (Macedonia, Bulgaria, Rumania, Tyrol). In this case the potter starts the rotating movement in the centre, carrying it with a slowly moving wheel upwards, sometimes to the very rim. The rim usually carries different ornaments. The spiral can also be applied vertically, for example, on the sides of jars (Bulgaria) or round flasks with a flattened back—a type of pilgrim's flask (Slovakia).

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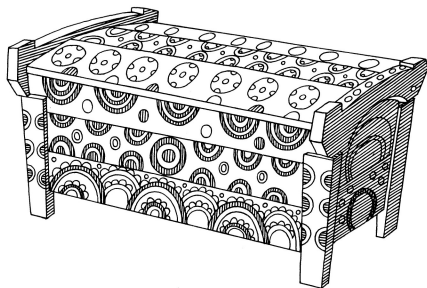
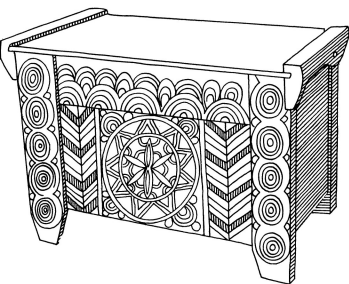
There is a second region using the spiral motif in western Europe, stretching from the Lower Rhine to the Saône. The common characteristic in these parts is the colouring. The pattern is always light (white or yellow) on a darker (reddish or reddish-brown) background. Apart from that the spiral is used in many variations. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the workshops of the Lower Rhine produced handled bowls, bowls on a base, simple bowls and basins whose broad, mostly steep sides are decorated with a carefully drawn spiral, the small centre displays a stylized flower, often a tulip. Their narrow rim shows wavy or curved lines. The three areas of ornamentation are firmly separated, with the spiral undoubtedly having the strongest effect. Small bulgy jugs with handles, made by Dutch and Friesian potters during the same period display different arrangements. A band, mostly in the centre of the bulge, separates the upper decorated part from the lower

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undecorated one. In the South of the region, in Mâconnais and Bresse sur Saône, pottery centres retained older production techniques and traditional décor up to the first decade of the twentieth century. Here the spiral remained the dominant motif, most frequently used and being executed on a large scale, which put it into prominence. The spiral is combined, particularly on large bulgy jugs and jars with panels of leaf work which may divide the sides vertically. There are also single flowers, hearts, simple scrolls, wavy bands and strokes. Sometimes the pots are decorated with mottoes. In the process motifs of many different styles are welded into a remarkable harmony.

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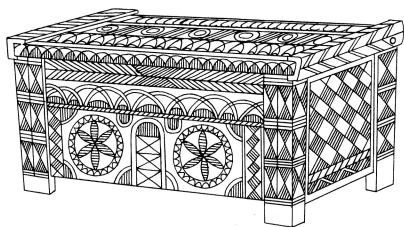
In slip-painting technique older motifs from sgraf-fito and grooving techniques have also survived, especially lines, wavy, curved and zigzag bands. There are also S-shaped designs arranged in lines and rows of dots and winding bands. The specific character of these ornaments claims attention when it is executed on larger surfaces of all kinds of pottery. In the choice of motifs and the way they are combined certain regional variations become apparent. The ornaments of the Balkan countries are examples with their use of series of many rhythmically varying motifs mainly on narrow-necked jars. This is matched by the décor of northern Rumania. There are wide zigzags and curved bands on jars and the sides of

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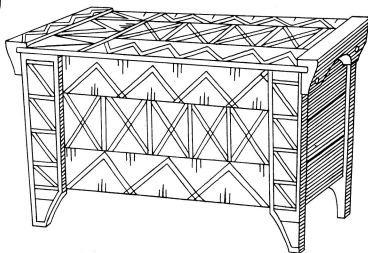
bowls and basins and also in the ceramics of the pottery centre of Kutu in southern Galicia (Ukraine).³⁰ In this case excellent pottery as to colour and ornament is produced, and sold all over the Bukovina. In northern Europe the décor of the Baltic countries with few broadly applied straight lines, curved and wavy bands and lines of dots on the sides of bowls, differs from other regions, as does that of the Netherlands with its skilfully executed curved bands, lines of S-shapes, dots and vertical strokes, sometimes single, sometimes double on small handled pots, jugs, basins and *couvres feu*. From the Netherlands tradition was carried to Britain where similar décor in the slip technique on tableware was common until the twentieth century. Very common is the application of single linear ornaments on or just below the rim of vessels, where they provide a kind of frame to figurative representations in the centre of plates and bowls, or they might give a finish to these on jugs, jars and flasks.

Wood as a raw material offers completely different ways of expression. This is not due only to the material as such being suited to special techniques, but equally to the shapes wood is being given in articles for practical use. Wood is most often used in the making of furniture. It provides the frames and casings of doors, posts, bases, head pieces, recesses, shutters and lids. All of these are made of boards, mouldings

and strips of planed wood. These, as a basis for decoration, offer smooth, usually flat surfaces. How these square surfaces are employed for decorative purposes with linear ornaments may best be seen in the illustrations. One is the ornamentation of boarded chests from Rumania which is also applied there to tables, cupboards, dressers and plate racks. This type of chest is the oldest kind of furniture for storing, known in Europe. It is a box-like container, made of four strong posts which supply in single pieces corners and feet of the chest; of four sides let into the posts, bottom and lid. They were the work of local carpenters who created them. Large boxes were used as grain chests, smaller ones for the storing of clothes and linen. The boxes and their decoration are of ancient origin. The ornamentation uses a scratching technique, executed with a nail or a pair of bow compasses, both tools of the carpenter. Front, walls and part of the lid are usually decorated by sequences of lines. These scratched lines divide the given field horizontally into two, three or four smaller spaces which are rarely even in width. Ornament is adjusted to these given fields, each containing a motif which, according to the principle of simple sequence, is repeated several times. Nearly all the motifs are evolved from elementary forms: circle and half circle, zigzag and cross signs in the shape of a saltire appear most frequently. The motifs



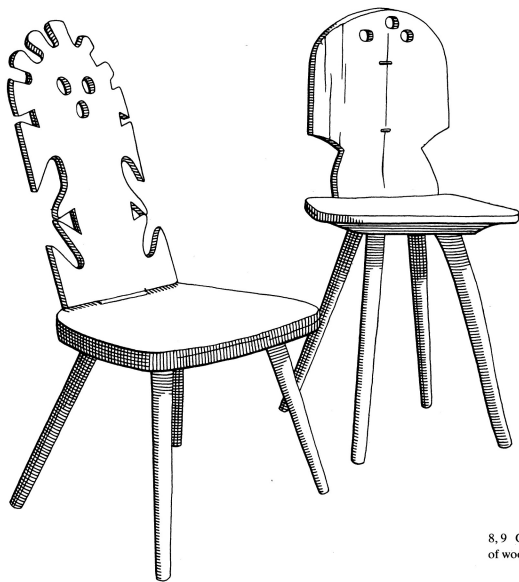
7 Zigzag line, herringbone pattern, curve, circle and six-pointed star in scratch technique on boarded chests. Rumania, 19th century.



The motifs are never drawn in single outlines but are double, treble and morefold. They may within the sequence vary in size, and may be assembled into larger combinations (two or three lines above one another), or cover the surface completely.

The effect may be varied by cross-hatching of parts of the motif or by combining several. The horizontal sequence is often emphasized by colour when the fields are later painted: red, black, brown and rarely blue. These colours are used in the North and West of Rumania while red and green appear in the South. The decoration is finished by the vertical treatment of the posts with similar motifs, running downwards. The whole combines into a lively rhythm of lines.

Frequently central symmetry is used in another type of composition. This provides a balanced, if more static, way of expression. The space, in this case the walls of the chest, is divided into two even parts, symmetrically related to each other. The centre vertical axle is decorated with linear ornament. Spaces on either side show the same motif or at least two motifs of a similar kind. Often a large six-pointed star is chosen, set in a double circle. Vertical ornaments decorate the opposite sides. Instead of two fields sometimes one large central field with a motif of special decorative quality is chosen. It then provides by itself the central symmetry as both sides are identical in a mirror view.



8, 9 Ornaments in open work on the backs of wooden chairs. Rumania, 19th century.

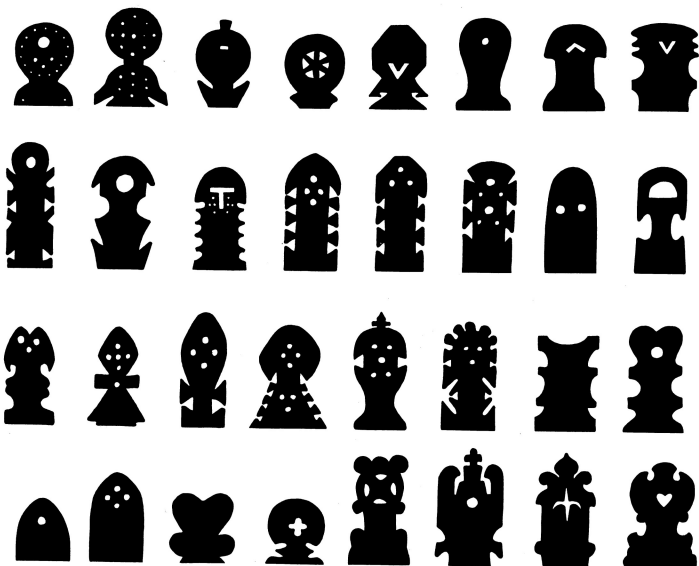
Outside Rumania scratched linear ornaments on chests are known in several European countries. A few specimens have survived in Hungary, Slovakia, southern Poland, Austria and Italy.

The backs of low wooden chairs found in Rumania, occasionally in Hungary, Slovakia and southern Poland, show ornaments of a similar technical standard. It is, though limited in execution to two very rough tools, saw and gimlet, astonishingly varied. This may be seen even in the outline of the comparatively narrow back. The back is usually divided into a head board, clearly marked by different cuts, and a lower part, decorated with several slanting or round cuts in its edges. The main emphasis of the inner space is

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on the head part, decorated with open work, made by drill holes. These are arranged in a pattern of threes, fours or fives or in circles. Allowing for the play of light and shade, this type of decoration makes for a lively effect.

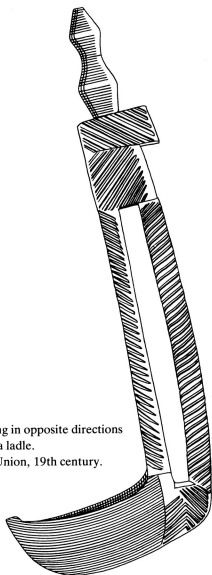
Once the decoration is used on wooden articles which were produced by cabinet makers or laymen, the carving technique changes as they employ different tools to those used by carpenters. The expression and intention of the ornament thus change, too. Curved ornaments, for example, may be found, some in chip-carving, some in half relief or in open work. This is then frequently coloured or colour is merely suggested by touches of paint on dressers, racks for



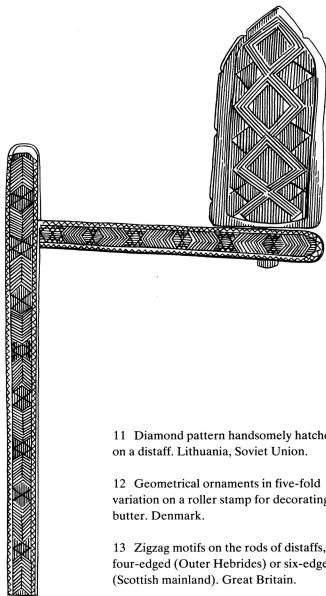
plates, spoons or towels and corner cupboards (Romania, Hungary, Poland). Curves here are arranged in horizontal sequence as a frieze, up or down, sometimes as a double row, curves downwards where the second is usually transposed by half a phase. Sometimes the pattern is made up of full circles, saltires or zigzag lines. Now and again curves and circles are used for symmetrical décor. Good examples for this type are the decorated distaffs from Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania, with decoration of curves in vertical lines.

Among the various forms of scratched decoration on boarded chests, the zigzag pattern is of special interest because of the great diversity of its techniques

and application. Apart from scratching, several methods of carving are used. One is to cut away the wood all round the pattern, so that it stands out boldly. Open work is used occasionally for zigzag patterns. In many countries this motif decorates edges or divides fields of ornaments, thus forming a kind of frame for other motifs. In this minor but not insignificant function zigzag lines are found almost everywhere in Europe. They are used in the ornamentation of utensils, the frames of mirrors and pictures, jewel boxes, even pencil-boxes for schoolchildren (Savoy). In the Alpine regions the pattern is common on articles which are made of one piece of wood as well as on coopered wooden vessels where it deco-



10 Cross hatching in opposite directions on the handle of a ladle. Udmurt, Soviet Union, 19th century.



11 Diamond pattern handsomely hatched on a distaff. Lithuania, Soviet Union.

12 Geometrical ornaments in five-fold variation on a roller stamp for decorating butter. Denmark.

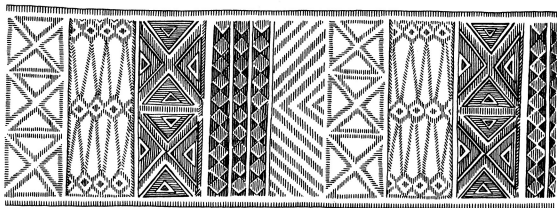
13 Zigzag motifs on the rods of distaffs, four-edged (Outer Hebrides) or six-edged (Scottish mainland). Great Britain.

rates the edges of the encircling broad bands (for example, milk tubs and other dairy implements). A special form of open work is executed on the high pyramidlike head-pieces for carrying goat bells in the Grisons of Switzerland and the Tyrol. With them zigzag lines alternate with bands of holes or curves.

Zigzag and herringbone patterns are often found on utensils with long, narrow spaces, decorating, for example, the long arms of Russian sewing implements (*shveika*) from the region of Vologda, also the hands of nutcrackers from Rumania and the hoop-like heads of distaffs from the French Auvergne. Space is even more limited when rod-like utensils or handles are to be decorated with linear ornaments. It then

becomes necessary to scale down ornaments and represent them more delicately and precisely. As the objects are three-dimensional, ornamentation has to be adjusted to have some sort of spatial effect. This task is solved by many carvers in quite a remarkable manner. The distaffs of Sardinia are a good example. These natural rods are divided into fields of roughly a span, variously showing narrow slanted cross-hatching, herringbone patterns, sets of diamonds, vertical diamond and leaf motifs as well as religious symbols. Often there is a vertical zigzag band which may also appear horizontal to subdivide fields.

In the Alpine regions and north of them distaffs are



usually angular, four-, sometimes even six-sided. This treatment is obviously given to the rod to obtain better surfaces for decoration. These angular rods are usually divided into fields for varying ornaments (for example, in Savoy). Others show no division but different ornaments in each field. An example of this treatment are the six-sided rods of Scotland. The four-sided tailor's measuring sticks (Scandinavia, Finland and the Baltic countries) often display the same motifs.

If in these applications the zigzag pattern achieves its characteristic linear effect, it changes completely when used to form a surface. This is often the case in the western Balkans, a region stretching from Bosnia and Dalmatia to Albania and Macedonia, where the technique is used mainly on distaffs and whetstone holders. With distaffs the outline of the longish board is part of the ornamental design by circular cuts and decorations of various shapes. A strict central symmetry is typical for the treatment of the board to which all ornamental cuts have to conform. The zigzag motif is used here in all its rich variations: with small points, close together or in contrast as single ornament on a larger scale. This makes for a surface effect when spaces in between are covered by close cross-hatching, small triangles or open work. Another motif puts two lines of points, one above the other when the second is transposed by half a phase, making a chain of diamonds, part of which is variously cross-hatched. In contrast to this type of ornament the carver of whetstone holders achieves a sculptured effect when he puts broad horizontal bands around the bulgy sides which are covered in linear decoration. Finally there is the *Nagelstich*, a linear ornament (called "scaled hair pin pattern" when covering the whole surface), popular in the Alpine countries, Hungary and Slovakia where it often takes the place of the zigzag band. In other regions it is used to embellish the edges of furniture. A small scorpion is employed for this attractive décor which comes to light fully when the cuts are arranged in rows of two or more running opposite to each other. This produces a strong wavy pattern crossing the surface in broad bands. Popular design in weaving is similar to that of pottery and woodwork. Linear forms are nowadays found only as reliques. The

Balkan countries are one of the few regions where popular textile design may still be found in today's products. This traditional décor is closely connected with the woven carpet which forms part of the decorative furnishings of the sitting room. In Bulgaria and Rumania the carpet was used mainly as a wall hanging. A rod (*rudā*) was placed in the room, fixed on a long, windowless wall, below the ceiling, some thirty or forty centimetres away from the wall. The corner with the bedstead was decorated with precious textiles. The rod was used originally for the drying of clothes but in the nineteenth century it became decorative as well as merely useful. Then, along it carpets were hung for decoration. Wall hangings also served to cover chests, seats and other furniture in many Balkan countries. Especially varied use of carpets was made by the Aromani of the Dobruja. There, carpets were wall hangings, bed covers, floor covers, pillow cases and carrier bags. At a time when people of the Dobruja spent the greater part of the year tending their flocks away from their home villages, woven carpets also formed the sides of tents and served as tarpaulins for carts. Different purposes required different qualities of material (rough and finely worked goat's hair or sheep's wool). Also, ways of working and design differed.

These carpets consist of a strong hemp warp and a woollen weft, the thread of which is kept so thick that weaving only the weft achieves the coloured effect. The décor of stripes depends on this weaving principle. Its lively and varied application has a great popular appeal. The simplest form consists of varying two evenly broad stripes in two colours, one light, the natural colour of the wool, and one dark, mostly brown or black, of dyed wool.

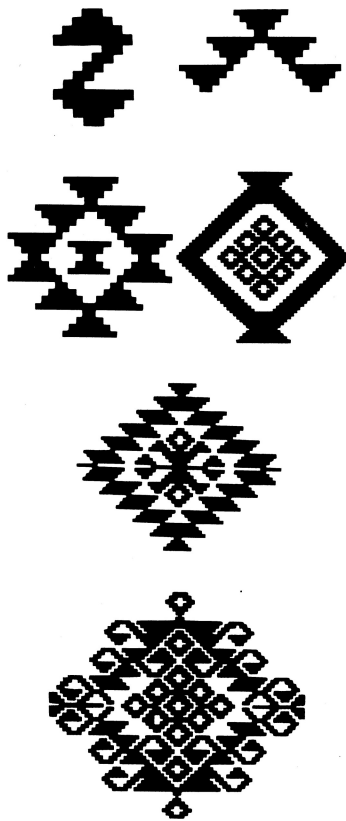
A certain rhythm is achieved when the sequence of stripes is enlarged by a third one of different width and colour. The full rhythmic scale, however, is brought out only if stripes of different width and colour are combined into definite motifs and repeated

14 Ornamental structure of the three types of woven carpets in Bulgaria. Upper row: *čerga*; central row: *kilim čerga*; lower row: *kilim*.

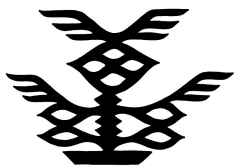
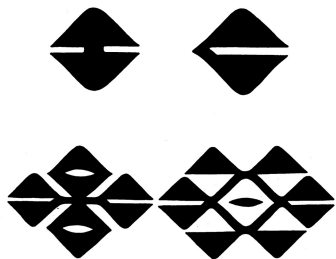
over the whole length of the woven material. They may be completely unchanged or changed in colour only. Carpets with stripe ornaments are a special type (Bulgarian *čerga*). Also, a more recent development is a type of carpet where small geometrical motifs are added to the stripes (*čerga kilimi*). Ornament and weaving technique employed with this are of Oriental origin, namely the technique of *kilim* weaving. This is based on the principle of the coloured thread of the weft being carried only as far as the colour pattern. There it stays while a thread of a different colour continues the weft. The first thread is then taken up again on the return weaving, and continued in the opposite direction and again only to the colour pattern. This technique does not allow for long vertical lines on the borders of coloured décor because the thread of the weft is interrupted at that point. This explains the remarkable acutely angled appearance of the horizontal design which is a special quality of *kilim* ornament. The basic element of this is a rectangular equilateral triangle. Simpler shapes consist of two triangles. These are connected either by their rectangular corner to form an hour-glass-like shape or by their long sides (hypotenuse), then forming a diamond shape. For technical reasons, however, they are divided in the centre. Equally three, four, six or more triangles may be combined to make up geometrical shapes.

Ornaments consisting of small horizontal or vertical rectangles or thin lines are rare. Geometrical shapes are inserted into stripes in threes or fours, set off from the stripes in lighter colour. Sometimes light basic stripes are included in the scheme of decoration. They then carry the same motif as the darker stripes, only with inverse colours. The result is a vivid positive-negative contrast. In certain variations, dark stripes are left out altogether and single motifs take their place, set into horizontal rows (this appears on some Aromanian covers).

The true *kilim* must be mentioned in this connection too, as its ornament is largely based on the same geometrical shapes, triangles and lines of divided diamonds. What distinguishes the true *kilim* from the *kilim-čerga* is its decorative structure which itself goes back to Oriental models. The main component here is a rectangular central field which at its four



15 Elements and motif structure of *kilim* ornament. Bulgaria.

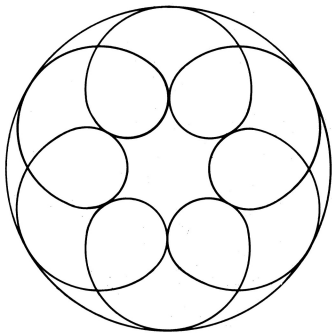


sides is surrounded by more or less wide edges. This space, well balanced in its proportions, dominates the coordination of the whole décor which is adjusted to the size and shape of this particular field. The detailed structure is decided by central symmetry which, as a rule, is adhered to in vertical and horizontal design. In that way the upper and lower edge, as well as the right and left, are the same as seen in a mirror. Here single ornamental shapes form geometrical groups, varying from region to region in design and colour. Single motifs, simple or more complicated, are symmetrical in design. One shape, the line of large diamond shapes, is of special interest as it is found all over the Balkans. It makes for a crenellated design in various colours, producing a central ornament with all other shapes adjusted to it. In many cases this design spreads over the whole field, when a firm linear symmetry creates vivid and colourful decoration in lighter and darker shades. Towards the end of the nineteenth century floral and zoomorphic representations began to turn up which in the *kilim* technique became silhouette-like figures of a strange transparency. The narrow edges bounded inside and outside by zigzag lines, are largely independent of the motifs of the inner space. They are usually decorated by small-figured geometrical motifs. As far as colour is concerned, they are, however, related to the inner space.

This typically Balkan ornament is in the northern and central regions of Europe contrasted by linear textile design, achieved mainly by different weaving techniques and textile structures. In simple linen weaving patterns of stripes are found, mostly in two colours, red and white or blue and white. Chequered patterns are met most frequently, and are achieved by warp and weft containing a definite number of white and coloured threads. If their numbers are even, a pattern of checks is the result. In it strongly coloured checks appear next to white ones, or slightly coloured ones, depending on which threads are crossed. There are many more linear patterns in weaving of which only a few can be mentioned here: special patterns in double linen weaving, the Scandinavian diamond patterns in "napping" technique and the many linear patterns popular in the ribbon weaving of the Baltic countries.

STAR AND WHORL

Compass-drawn Ornaments



16 Compass-drawn rosette for chip-carving and scratch technique.

In his book *Underweysung der Messung mit dem Zirckel und richtscheyt*, in *Linien, Ebenen und ganzen Corporen*, published in Nuremberg in 1525, Albrecht Dürer collected all the knowledge available at his time, important to artists and artisan craftsmen. In his preface he named people to whom the book should be of interest: painters, goldsmiths, sculptors, stone masons and joiners and all "who use measures". The knowledge Dürer wanted to convey to his readers was very extensive. On the one hand it included theory, as the construction of geometrical forms and the presentation in perspective of a variety of bodies, on the other the practical application of this through exact drawings and minute descriptions of the handling of a pair of compasses and the ruler. In that way his book was to benefit all artisan craftsmen. The need for this extensive practical knowledge must have been great in all countries where the decorative arts flourished, as Dürer's book was followed by a large number of similar textbooks in many languages. Their titles usually alluded to geometry and perspective.

A pair of compasses was familiar not only to the individual artisan craftsman but was an everyday tool to many an ordinary member of a guild. In the guild workshops it was in use mainly for decoration. This type of compass-drawn ornament, created by the guild workshops and spread during the wanderings of "journeymen", cannot be compared with the designs of decorative arts. It does, however, show in its first manifestations a definite style of its own, the tradition of which can be followed over three centuries. Local joiners, first of all, and then cabinet makers, employed mainly to supply the needs of the rural population, took part in this development. Others, for example, workers in metal, also used compass-drawn ornaments occasionally.

¹⁷ The simplest of geometrical shapes which over the centuries has remained popular, is the six-pointed star (Norwegian: *seksbladrose*, Danish: *roset*, Swedish: *rosett*, Dutch: *zesster*, French: *rosace*, Italian: *rosa*). With a pair of compasses a curve is drawn from the radius of the circle across the circle's centre several times, and each time from the circle's outline. After six such movements the star is finished. A well-balanced circular design results with six even lancet-like leaves and six even fields. The outline of the circle

may be emphasized more strongly by adding further curves in an opposite direction. The new fields in the circle's outline are then exactly like the six inner leaves, while there are six three-pointed remaining fields. The six-pointed star can now be made into a twelve-pointed one. For this half the radius is used—creating the simple six-pointed star in the centre—from the outline of the circle of the innermost star six further complete stars are drawn.

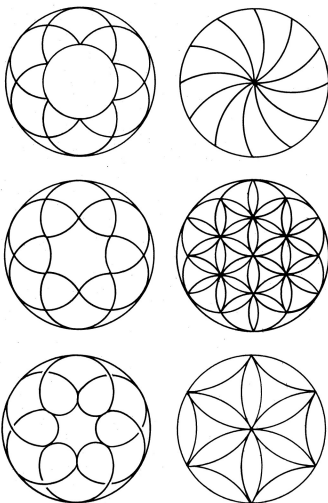
The result of this repeated use of the compasses is a network of curves which in its all over symmetry is one of the most attractive ornaments of its kind. The principle of using only half the radius is applied in the designing of all kinds of stars and rosettes. Folk art knows very many variants of this particular design, some, for example, where the lines are treated as interlaced ribbons. This makes for a special type: the three-lobed knot. The whorl belongs to the same group. It is different mainly in that it does not present a static harmony, but gives the impression of a more or less strong rotation. This whorl is drawn by starting from many points of the circle's outline, their number ranging from six to thirty-two, using the full radius, each time to the circle's centre only. This increases the apparent movement. Further forms of compass-drawn ornament will be treated in their regional importance.

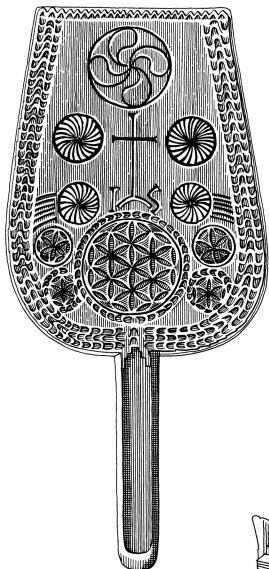
The diffusion of compass-drawn ornaments in Europe varies from place to place. It is popular in particular areas, for example, the Alpine countries and in northern Europe from the Netherlands via northern Germany to Scandinavia. It is used also in the Baltic countries and in northern Russia. Elsewhere the design appears but rarely or not at all. Special ways of form and application have developed in certain areas. The Alpine countries preserve the oldest specimens of compass-drawn ornaments on boarded chests from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, made in the Grisons by carpenters, the same men who at that period produced the carvings on beams and doors of Alpine houses. Until the nineteenth century these men continued to carve ornaments, as a carpenter's tool-box from Upper Austria from 1891 demonstrates. The front of the box is decorated by a whorl and a six-pointed star to represent the carpenter's craft. Carving on boarded chests was

usually chip-carving. With this the curves of the star are made by slanting deep cuts, and the remaining fields are cut out also. The lines remain standing as ridges on the flat surface of the wood. This technique aims at emphasizing the play of light and shade, thus stressing the aesthetic attraction of compass-drawn design. The composition for the carved sides of the chests is of ancient origin, adhering to single circles containing the ornament, one ornament on each side. On the front, and sometimes also on the rounded lid they appear in twos and threes. There is no other décor, except for the decoration on posts sometimes with vertical narrow bands of zigzag lines or similar carved motifs.

Hardly any other form of compass-drawn ornaments in carving are known earlier than the eighteenth

17 Basic forms of compass-drawn stars and rosettes for chip-carving and scratch technique.

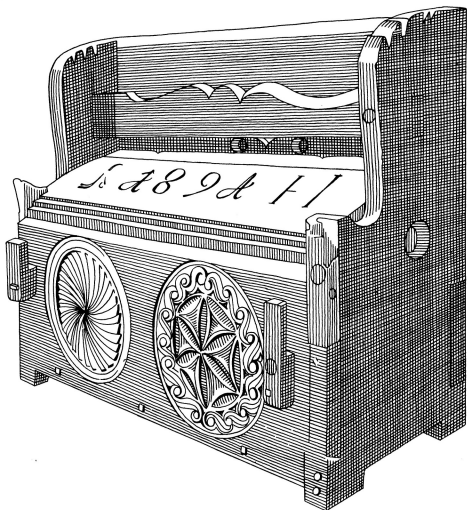




18 Double six-pointed star with the Christian cross on a laundry beater—a lover's gift. Above the cross is a *croix à virgules*, next to it whorls and six-pointed stars. The edge is decorated by three lines of hollow-chisel-cut. Upper Austria.

19 Whorl and six-pointed star with the edge motif of *Laufender Hund* on a carpenter's tool box. Upper Austria, 1891.

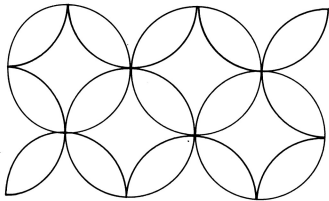
century. During the eighteenth century Alpine chip-carving flourished and achieved great popularity. Today this type of carving is used for the decoration of large and small boxes, box lids, cradles, cradle rockers and other small furniture. Utensils and vessels for kitchen and table are also decorated by carving, for example, salt containers, spoon handles, laundry
18 beaters and much more. Carving is very popular with dairymen and herdsman whose craftsmanship can be admired on milking stools, butter tubs, butter and cheese boards, chapman's straps, crescents for carrying bells and accessories for sheep bells (wooden decorated crescents). The main difference between this decorative carving and the ornamentation of
20 boarded chests lies in the all-over composition. With smaller articles this is always designed to cover the whole surface. To this purpose the surface is divided



into square or oblong fields whose size, number and arrangement depends on the object in question. Narrow bands of ornaments divide the fields. The outer edge of the decorated surface is also given an ornamental band, so to speak, a frame, as the whole decoration is seen as a pictorial presentation. The system of fields, created in that way, is fully used by the carver when he fills every one of them with a different compass-drawn ornament. It becomes obvious that it is the carver's ambition to make the whole as original and varied as possible. Thus real masterpieces of carving have been made. Side by side with compass-drawn ornament there are frequently other motifs, for example, Christian symbols, symbols of love, like hearts, the names of owners or their initials together with the year. Towards the end of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth floral motifs were added, specially the very popular "flowers-in-pot" designs. Their choice and placing depended on the type of object they were decorating and on its use.

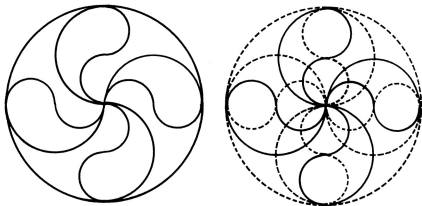
The Alpine art of carving continues westwards into southern and southeastern France (Alsace, Provence, Auvergne, Landes, Gascogne and the Pyrenees) right into the Iberian peninsula. East it continues to Hungary and Rumania, southeast to Slovenia and Croatia. Here compass-drawn ornaments are often found on distaffs.

20 Compass-drawn ornaments as surface structure which, according to the way they are looked at, form four-pointed stars or diamonds in a circle. From chip-carving work in Piedmont, Italy.



A special form of the whorl is the Basque cross (*croix basque*) found mainly in the Basque region of the western Pyrenees. Because of its shape, it is also called *croix à virgules*—the cross with commas. In fact, its four curved arms are not unlike fat commas. They form a vivid whorl, surrounded by a circle, the arms springing from the centre and end, drop-like, at the periphery. There are, too, forms with three or six arms. It was long believed that the Basque cross was an ancient, possibly even pre-Christian, symbol of ethnic tradition. However, it has been found in the region only at the end of the seventeenth century. The Alsatian ethnographer Adolf Riff proved that the composition of this special cross is based on the circle, using half or quarter radius, and that it belongs to the large group of compass-drawn ornament of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is used in the same way as other compass-drawn ornaments (on houses, furniture and household utensils). There are differences only in its artistic execution. The *croix à virgules* when used on wood, is always executed in relief, so that the thick arms stand out while the remaining parts are flat. If cut in stone (tomb stones and the stone surrounds of front doors) the ornament is treated in the same way. Apart from the Basque regions the motif is also found in southern and south-eastern France where it appears frequently in Alsace and sporadically all over Europe.

21 The Basque cross and its construction by means of the compass.



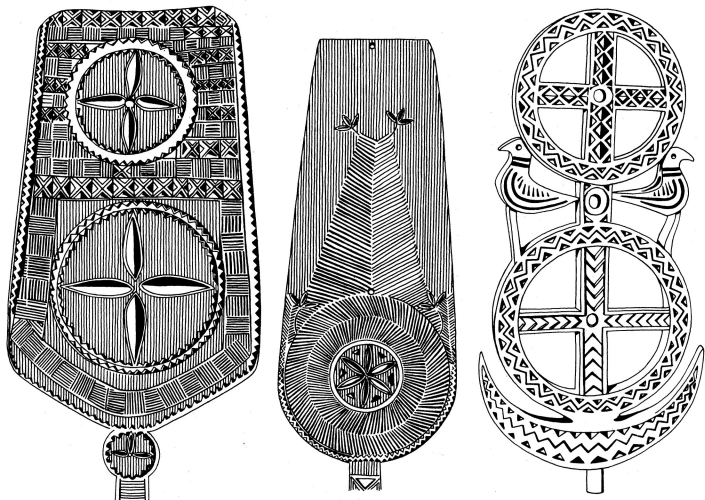
In the North of Europe the development of compass-drawn ornament is very similar to that of the Alpine area. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the six-pointed and twelve-pointed star and the whorl were carved on the front of cupboards (North Friesland) and boarded chests (here and there in several countries), always as single ornament which by itself commanded the whole space of a door, a wall or half of it. It was also seen on moulding and sides sometimes accompanied by Late Gothic motifs (linenfold or leafy tendrils). Things changed about 1700. Much small furniture and household utensils were now very richly decorated.

A scheme of composition, known for long in the Alpine regions, became more general. Fronts of articles were covered as a whole with designs, mostly subdivided into squares and oblong fields. These again were separated by ornamental bands of lines

or script (names, initials, dates or mottoes). New motifs were added to the star and whorl. There were, for example, the six-pointed rosettes—using half radius—a motif which could be varied in many ways, forming different rosettes and knots. Another motif, based on the quartering of the circle, is the four-fold “fish bladder” pattern which again may be varied in several ways. Characteristic for this type of chip-carving is that all fields are covered completely with tiny shapes of varying design.

Ethnographical research has established that this later development originated in the Netherlands, first reaching North Germany and Denmark, continuing to Norway and South Sweden. The diffusion of the method happened not by land only and through “journeymen” of the trade, but frequently through personal contacts by seafarers. There is, for example, a

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the mid-eighteenth century. The head end of this board forms a pyramid made up of six or three smaller rosettes. This is a very original design which turns up in the same form in northern Friesland and in the western part of Jutland. Otherwise it is confined to the Netherlands. In this case as in many others the design is likely to have been carried by seafarers.

If there is a certain unity in the design of compass-drawn ornament, this also is true of its application. The mangling board was a favourite object for chip-carving from the Netherlands to Scandinavia. This popularity may be explained by the fact that during the flourishing of chip-carving from the mid-eighteenth century to the early decades of the nineteenth century the board was a traditional lover's gift. It formed part of the dowry brought to the newly wedded's home, and occupied a special place there. Compass-drawn ornaments, partly in chip-carving, partly

in fretwork may be found too, on other household utensils and receptacles, all belonging to a woman's realm. Examples are laundry beaters, combs for weaving ribbon and swingle-staffs (these were still made as lover's gifts on the island of Rügen in the forties and fifties of the nineteenth century). There were also sewing and jewellery boxes and *Subenstövchen*, footwarmers consisting of a little wooden box, richly decorated, with a tin-box inside for charcoal, implements for drying woollen stockings, making cloth slippers or darning stockings. Even the heel part of wooden clogs for use on Sundays or clogs for the bride (*bruidsklomp*) of the island of Marken in the Zuider Zee were decorated in that way.

Compass-drawn ornaments do not play the same important part in the decoration of larger furniture, rather do they form part of a wider system of or-

22 Cross, six-pointed star, twelve-pointed star, whorl rosette in chip-carving and open work on a distaff. The main motif is always surrounded by a nimbus. On older objects this is executed in bands of hatching, later ones show zigzag bands. Very frequently the motif is duplicated. Lithuania, Soviet Union, 19th century.

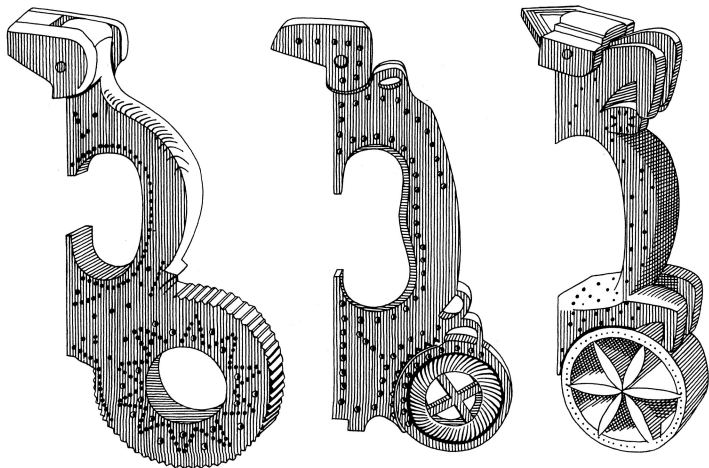


naments (for example in the Münsterland of Oldenburg in North Germany). A late flourishing of the six-pointed star—between 1790 and 1860—took place in Hesse (Germany). There it was used particularly on the back of the so-called bride's chair, a very important piece of the dowry. It was worked mostly in fretwork and flat cut. Here the six-pointed star is often combined with a heart, a floral motif, a pair of birds and others having a certain symbolic character concerning the wedding and marriage to follow.

This ornament achieved such popularity in the home that it appeared occasionally also in other materials, for example on bed-warmers made of brass when, alternating with floral motifs, were executed in open work or stamping. The same decoration appears somewhat strange when used on pottery terrines and plates in Friesland, where it is also displayed on flower-pots for hanging up, vases, small foot stoves, various ornamental stands executed in open work.

Ornaments are fundamentally different in the Baltic countries and northern Russia. The scheme of square fields common in Central and northern Europe, is unknown here. There are, however, many and different ways of ornamentation. Examples of distaff leaves from the nineteenth century show originality of design. The leaves for fixing a bushel of flax are usually part of a rod which is either put into the distaff or, if spinning is still done with a whorl, ends in a knee-shaped piece. The leaf cut from soft wood is basically a square which, as a rule, is conically reduced towards its upper end. This space is usually decorated with a larger circle on its base and a smaller one on its narrow or pointed top end. Sometimes there may be three motifs of varying size. The remaining space is filled with simple hatching, opposing each other in different slants. There are also chessboard-like fields, narrowly hatched ones, zigzag bands, stars or—only more recently—floral motifs. At times cer-

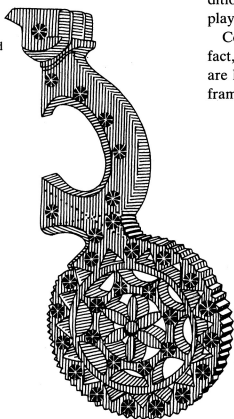
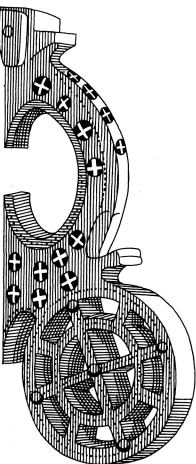
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tain fields remain undecorated. Special forms were developed in Lithuania when motifs were often executed in fretwork, connected only by wider or narrower bridges.

Of all the various motifs the six-pointed star is the most popular. There is also a four-pointed star, a twelve-pointed one, the whorl and the simple, straight-lined cross, a religious symbol. A detail of these decorations, worth mentioning, is that all motifs are nearly always surrounded by a round ornament.

23 Six-pointed star and sun motifs in chip-carving and open work on the handles of coopered beer jugs. The staves are decorated with poker work. Estonia, Soviet Union, 19th century.



This may take the form of a zigzag line, sometimes a double one, or narrow hatching, slightly slanting towards the centre of the circle. This leads to an impression of rotation. The same hatching and then in the opposite direction is often repeated around the circle. These bands of ornaments are not mere boundaries of the circle. Rather does their execution show the relation to the centre star or whorl. This applies not to their composition only but equally to their contents. It is easy to recognize in these borders—especially in a double-dented line or a double line of hatching—a nimbus. Soviet scholars have interpreted this as a sun symbol, pointing to the folklore tradition of older mythological concepts where the sun played an important part.

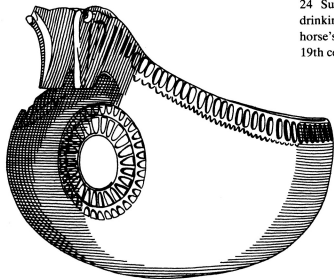
Compass-drawn ornaments with nimbus are, in fact, most frequently met in eastern Europe. There are laundry beaters, mangling boards, embroidery frames, towel holders, lids of matchwood boxes,



strong-boxes, candlesticks, salt containers, jugs, beer mugs, ladles and horse harness. A telling example of how a limited region may produce a variety of ornament from a single traditional motif is provided by western Estonia. There, for ceremonial drinking of beer at a wedding and other special occasions a decorated bride's mug (Estonian *pruutkann*) or a wedding mug (*pulmakann*) was used. This was a present to the bride by the master of ceremonies who handed it round the guests for a first draught. The vessel was a wooden jug with lid whose walls were decorated with a variety of geometrical ornaments in poker work. The handle

was carved and occasionally decorated on its top by one or two horses' heads. Below there was always a compass-drawn ornament. Our illustrations present a few examples from the Ethnographical Museum at Tartu, which has collected some 2,700 examples of this remarkable folk art.

Another ancient symbol is frequently combined with the single or double six-pointed star: the circle surrounded by a nimbus. This, as mentioned before, is usually interpreted as a sun symbol, and is found on powder-horns, surrounded by dots and small circles, itself in a central position (Hungary, Balkans).

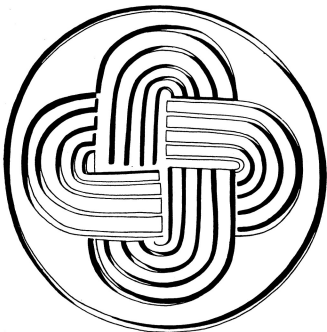


24 Sun with double nimbus on the side of a drinking vessel. The handle consists of two horse's heads. Mordvinen, Soviet Union, 19th century.

25 Single and comb grooves on an unglazed water jug. Almería, Spain.

THE MAGIC KNOT

Interlacing and Knot Ornaments



82 Knot made up of two single loops. Chip-carving from the side of a chest. Grisons, Switzerland.

In November 1872 chance brought to light an important example of medieval handicraft. After a flood tide fishermen from Hiddensee, a small island in the Baltic Sea, close to the island of Rügen, picked up some pieces of gold jewellery on the west coast. Apart from a pinned clasp and a gold circlet there were other pieces which belonged, it was thought, to a larger necklace. Two years later, after another tide, more pieces of this necklace were found, making it possible to restore nearly the whole chain. Meantime age and origin of it were a puzzle, as on this particular stretch of the coast nothing was known of an older settlement. Only through comparing the chain's style with the ornaments of other objects from the Baltic area, was it possible to determine the origin of the jewellery. It appeared that the objects belonged to the late tenth century and that they were made in a goldsmith's workshop in the region of Jellinge in Jutland. The value of the jewellery points to its having belonged to a prince. It is still not known how the objects reached Hiddensee.

The find is now among the special treasures of the Kulturhistorisches Museum at Stralsund in the German Democratic Republic, an important example of late Nordic interlacing. Ten larger links of the chain are preserved, displaying the technique employed. The pieces are known as *Kreuzhängestücke*, as the Christian cross forms their main motif. The tube for carrying the thread inside is made in the shape of a bird's head, holding a cross in its beak. The shapes are made in relief with a mould driven into the thin metal. The cross itself is barely recognizable as interlaced ribbons are placed over it. Only close inspection allows to recognize the intricate design. There are three separate loops, formed of gold threads, five next to each other. One loop is designed vertically, the other horizontally, thus making them into the sign of the cross. A third one is plaited into the two at three points, that is on the left, the lower and the right arm of the cross. In this way the cross and the interlaced knot are brought into relation to each other.

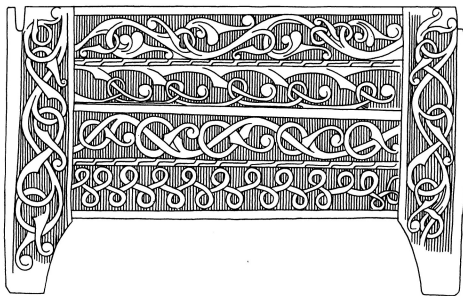
This type of ornament, either as a single piece (the Hiddensee example) or surface-filling décor or as small ornamental band, was widely spread all over Europe from about 400—1200. It is met with in the

whole of Scandinavia, in Jutland, Iceland, Ireland, the whole of Britain, also in southern, western and Central Europe. Developments varied greatly in different regions. All, however, are related in their application. At the time interlacing was almost entirely limited to cult objects used for religious purposes. Well known among these are the sculptured stones of Gotland and in mainland Sweden, the imposing funerary crosses from Ireland and baptismal fonts in Britain. Then there are the magnificent examples of mosaics in the basilicas of northern Italy. In western and Central Europe Romanesque churches have interlaced knots and bands as decoration on portals, leaves of doors, baptismal fonts, parapets, choir enclosures, lintels and the capitals of columns. These ornaments appear also on objects for ritual use, reliquaries, chalices and croziers. Connected with these objects are illuminations in breviaries and other religious manuscripts.

This ornament gains special meaning when on all these objects it becomes related to the symbols of the Christian church, put close to them and of equal importance. At times the ornaments appear to surround Christian symbols, setting them apart from the external world, and at other times may even take their place. It is thought that interlaced knots in many cases held a definite place in the Christian iconography of Romanesque art. Perhaps—and this becomes

obvious from the place ornament had on a certain article—the atropic function of the ornament played a main part.

When ornaments from religious-feudal art entered the realms of folk art in later periods, it was not just their aesthetic quality which made them popular. Their one-time magic use equally decided their function in their new and profane use. If something served a cult in a magic way, it was bound to be effective elsewhere also. This idea must have played an important part in the transition of ornaments from one sphere to another. However, out of the wealth of motifs available, only a small number were actually taken over. These were mainly simply constructed forms. One of these, the simplest of all, is the knot. It is formed of two loops tied crosswise, and turns up in Europe as early as the fourth century in the mosaics of Aquileja and frequently appears in Romanesque churches in southern, western and Central Europe. The motif is found later in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries on boarded chests in the Grisons of Switzerland. Here it is always set in a circle and used together with compass-drawn ornaments. An attractive variant of the simple knot is achieved by threading a third loop into the cross and thus creating a closer texture. This design also appears in the mosaics of Aquileja. In the folk art of Iceland a mangling board displays the motif in low relief in a



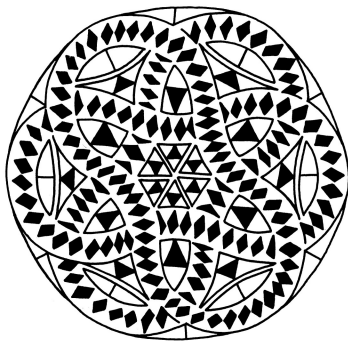
83 Nordic interlacing on a boarded chest. Västergötland, Sweden.

broad horizontal border. This example reveals the wide diffusion of the motif.

Other forms of interlacing exist particularly in Scandinavia and Iceland. There it persisted until the mid-eighteenth century on chests, cupboards, boxes, bed-
 heads (Iceland), mangling boards, drinking vessels
 and horse's harness. There are even examples in
 textile folk art. Surface-filling motifs occur on
 utensils with suitable fields for carving. Single motifs
 are popular on smaller utensils (the carved handles
 of spoons and the like). The motif of plaited ribbons
 has virtually not changed since Viking days. They are
 plaited from two or three single strands. What has
 changed considerably is their significance. If they
 were once part of the mythological iconography of
 sculptured stones, they have in recent folk art become
 ornaments for decorating the borders of an article
 or the means for dividing larger surfaces when the
 main motifs often belong to different periods of style.
 A typical example is the broad ribbon, consisting of
 two strands interwoven like rope-maker's work. A
 special feature of this is that the two strands join at
 each end. In fact, there is only one strand going back-
 ward and forward.

The earliest witness to this form of ornament is a sculptured stone from Gotland, dating from around 500 where it appears on three sides of a mythological presentation. In modern times the decoration is found on Swedish cupboards, dressers and mangling boards as well as on Finnish armchairs. From Scandinavia the motif was brought to neighbouring North Germany, probably by journeymen furniture carvers. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it turns up there on chests, cupboards and room panelling in the form of vertical and horizontal framing bands.

Another motif, called *Wellenauge* or *Laufender Hund*, shows a certain similarity to the two-strand interlaced ornament. It consists of a dense pattern of single pointed waves—in one direction—one above the other, forming small circles in the centre. This motif is an independent type, also concerning its regional distribution. It is particularly widespread in the Alpine regions where it appears on beams at the front of houses and the ceilings of rooms, on cupboards and working utensils. It is executed in flat cut carving, usually painted in two colours. Now and again it is



84 "Magic knot" in two forms: endless knot and knot of three single loops. Simplified presentation of chip-carving on clogs. The Netherlands.

found in Central Europe (Slovakia, Hungary and the regions of the Lower Rhine).

76 A quite different form of interlacing exists in Islamic decorative arts, different in its features by the mere reason of its origin. It is met in textiles, leather and metal work, all of which reached Europe via Venice in the Orient trade during the fifteenth century. Between 1520 and 1550, when books of models and sample-books began to appear, Oriental ornament gained a definite place in them. The book of samples for embroidery by the Italian Giovanni Antonio Tagliente, published in Venice in 1527, mentioned before, is the first to reproduce motifs of interlacing in large numbers. They were soon copied in German sample-books (Heinrich Steyner, Peter Quentel, Egenolff) as well as in other countries, becoming an accepted part of this kind of publication. Almost at the same time interlacing appeared in the sample-books for calligraphers. Again, Tagliente, the versatile artist, is the first to introduce this ornament in his book on calligraphy of 1531. In all later books of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries interlace ornament became the main feature of decorative writing.

The difference between this ornament and the earlier Romanesque-European type with simple structures is mainly its more intricate play within tendrill work. Narrow bands, representing leafy tendrils in the limits of a frieze or a border for square fields of single motifs, may form intricate entwined patterns elsewhere, dissolving easily into other shapes. The playful versatility of this particular ornament allowing for infinite variations, is perhaps its outstanding quality, not forgetting its actual meaning. If the older interlacing is characterized by its close relation to religious ceremony, the later type does not have this connection at all. It is, like all Renaissance decoration, profane art. The origin of the second type did play an important part in its diffusion, as it became quickly part and parcel of Venetian decorative arts which conquered the whole of Europe. In time the Oriental origin of this ornament was quite forgotten.

By the time the new motifs reached folk art, the versatility of their application was once more confirmed. Interlacing then became independent of the tendrils in textile design and the flourishes of callig-

raphy, finding its own new uses. In detail, as always, application was to be decided by the object to be decorated, also by the material and technique. Switzerland with its neighbouring regions of Austrian Vorarlberg as well as southeastern France are areas where interlacing is common, particularly in flat cut, on highly decorative dressers (Vorarlberg, eighteenth century), as fretwork on the wooden tops of stoves (the Grisons, sixteenth century), also frequently as 74 chip-carving on the front of chests and cupboards (Switzerland) and on small utensils for house and farm, for example, the butter moulds of Savoy (eighteenth and nineteenth century). Also, the backs of wooden chairs from Baden in Germany, Alsace and Tyrol apply the ornament in fretwork and relief carving (eighteenth century) in the shape of the endless knot.

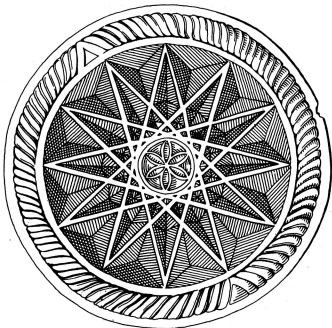
Certain forms of interlacing develop a great wealth of variations when given a particular meaning. The English "true love-knot" makes a good example. This is an endless knot of a broader ribbon which in several loops makes a perfect symmetrical ornament. Its special feature is its close relationship to script, as the ribbon carries a rhymed text about the virtues of true love. This begins in most cases with the words: "True love is a precious pleasure", words that have given the knot its name. Obviously the whole design is meant to be an analogy: as knot and text know neither beginning nor end, neither will our love. Sometimes the loops are designed to form hearts, emphasizing in pictorial language the tender union of two hearts. The knot obtains a special function through its application as a decoration of articles which young people exchange on 14th February, as Valentines. From the seventeenth century onwards the knot makes its appearance on hand-written and hand-painted love letters. There are also printed knots on sheets of paper and on silk, generally displaying the same interlaced motifs as on the hand-written sheets.

79 In the nineteenth century pottery, too, took up the trend for Valentines, producing display plates, jugs and cups with the love-knot set like a medallion in the centre of a circle or oval shape. This may be surrounded by allegorical figures, garlands of flowers and banderoles.

The "magic knot" in the folk art of the Netherlands has different connotations. Called *toverknoop* or *Turkse knoop*, it is an endless knot drawn with a pair of compasses, with five large curves. Sometimes a knot of three interlaced loops, also compass-drawn, is given the same name. Compared to the one described, it has six curves. Both forms are set in a circle which determines the size of the design. The motif is part of the large group of compass-drawn ornaments, and usually appears with them. The "magic knot" was thought to be endowed with magic powers. When it appears on the toe piece or heel of bridal clogs, often combined with entwined hearts, it stands for good luck. It appears to have the same meaning on lover's gifts. Examples for this are the fine chip-carving on mangling boards and the fretwork on foot-warmers. Both types of knots are known outside the Netherlands, almost anywhere in the North of Europe where compass-drawn ornaments are common in carving. Everywhere there are signs that the "magic knot" was believed to possess atropaic powers. This is par-

ticularly so with objects which, according to ethnological research, were as a rule put under the protection of magic symbols. An example of this is the wooden salt container kept near the hearth (Oldenburg in Germany and elsewhere). It is often doubtful whether the knot was used on other objects merely as decoration or whether other considerations may have played a part. A remarkable example is a Friesian boarded chest of 1830 where the "magic knot" closely surrounds the keyhole. Was it put there to protect the chest and its lock?

Another magic sign is the pentacle and its variations. These are star-like shapes, drawn all in one. The acutely-angled line begins and ends at the same point. Most frequently the form is a five-pointed star, hence often called the pentagram. But there are also forms with eight or twelve points, frequently set in a circle made up of rope design, zigzag or double lines. In folk art the pentacle is always used in an atropaic function (baby's cradle, bed-boards, salt containers and others).



85 Twelve-pointed star of pentacle type, drawn in one stroke, with a small six-pointed star in the centre, the whole surrounded by rope ornament. Chip-carving on the ceiling beam of a room. Upper Austria, 1793.