

**DECORATIVE
SYMBOLISM OF THE
ARAPAHO, PP. 308-336**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649234240

Decorative Symbolism of the Arapaho, pp. 308-336 by A. L. Kroeber

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

A. L. KROEBER

**DECORATIVE
SYMBOLISM OF THE
ARAPAHO, PP. 308-336**

5211.415

DECORATIVE SYMBOLISM OF THE
ARAPAHO

BY

A. L. KROEBER

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty
of Philosophy, Columbia University

(From the American Anthropologist (N. S.), Vol. 3, April-June, 1901)

NEW YORK
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

1901

DECORATIVE SYMBOLISM OF THE ARAPAHO

BY

A. L. KROEBER

US 10303.150
5311.31.5

Columbia Univ.

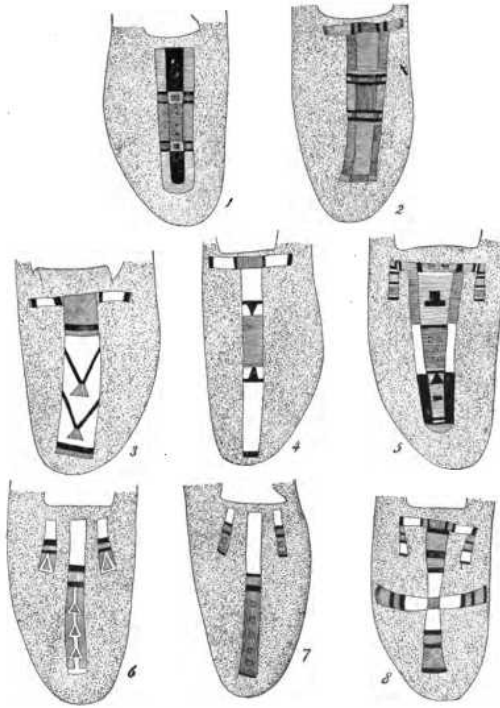
DECORATIVE SYMBOLISM OF THE ARAPAHO¹

By A. L. KROEBER

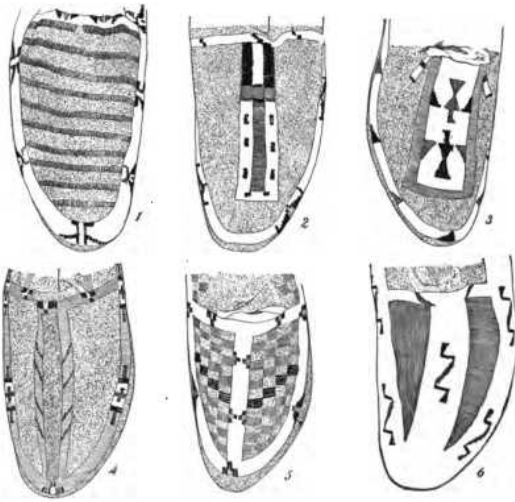
The Arapaho, a tribe of Plains Indians belonging to the Algonquian stock, practise a form of art very similar in material, technique, and appearance to that of the other Plains tribes, of whom the Sioux are the best known. This art is in appearance almost altogether unrealistic, unpictorial, purely decorative. For the greater part it consists now of beadwork, which has nearly supplanted the older style of embroidery in porcupine quills, plant fibers, and perhaps beads of aboriginal manufacture. The other products of this art are objects of skin or hide which are painted with geometrical designs. On the whole the decorative, geometric character of Arapaho art is very marked. Almost all the lines are straight. The figures in embroidery are lines, bands, rectangles, rhombi, isosceles and rectangular triangles, figures composed of combinations of these, and circles. The designs painted on hide are composed of triangles and rectangles in different forms and combinations.

On questioning the Indians it is found that many of these decorative figures have a meaning. An equilateral triangle with the point downward may represent a heart; with its point upward, a mountain. A figure consisting of five squares or rectangles in quincunx, the four outer ones touching the central one at the corners, is a representation of a turtle. A long stripe crossed by two short ones is a dragon-fly. A row of small squares at intervals represents tracks. Crosses and diamonds often signify stars. All this is in beadwork. In painted designs a flat isosceles triangle

¹Published by permission of the Trustees of the American Museum of Natural History.



ORNAMENTATION ON ARAPAHO MOCCASINS



ORNAMENTATION ON ARAPAHO MOCCASINS

often represents a hill; an acute isosceles triangle, a tent. Many other objects are similarly represented.

An ornamental feature is the symmetrical duplication of most designs. Bags, pouches, skins, moccasins, cases, and other objects are ornamented by being treated as a decorative field within which the designs are symmetrically doubled, or even more numerously repeated. Thus a moccasin, if decorated with the symbol of a mountain on the outer side of the heel, has the same symbol also on the opposite inner side of the heel. Another purely ornamental feature of this art is repetition of a single figure to form a pattern. A stripe is often the representation of a path. This symbol is sometimes used singly, standing alone; sometimes it occurs double, owing to the tendency just mentioned, toward symmetry; and sometimes it is found in a pattern that may be described as a many-colored, drawn-out (i.e., rectangular, not square) checker-board, in which each rectangle or short stripe, whatever its color, still represents a path.

This strongly-marked decorative character of Arapaho art, however, is accompanied by a realistic tendency of such development as at first acquaintance would not be suspected by a civilized person. Several figures connected in meaning may be put upon one object and thus produce something approximating a picture containing composition. When as many as ten or a dozen symbols having reference to each other are combined, a story can almost be told by them. In this way the stiff embroideries on a moccasin or the geometric paintings on a bag may represent the hunting of buffalo, the acquisition of supernatural power by a shaman, a landscape or map, a dream, personal experiences, or a myth.

Arapaho art thus is at the same time imitative or significant, and decorative. Can the origin of this art be determined?

Since Arapaho art consists of the intimate fusion of symbolism and decoration, two theories as to its origin are possible. Either of its two elements may be the original. The Indians may have

begun with realism, drawing or working lifelike forms in their art; then, however, the obstacles inherent in the material asserted themselves, or the well-established tendency toward symmetry and repetition into a pattern came out, or perhaps other causes were influential, until the early imitative representations became abbreviated into the conventional decorations that have been described. Or it is possible that the Indians began with mere ornaments. Perhaps even these were not originally ornaments but peculiarities of construction of purely useful articles, which technical peculiarities were later considered beautifying and developed into pure ornaments. At any rate, whatever their own origin, decorations may in the past have existed *per se*; later, some conventional ornament may have accidentally suggested a natural object, whereupon it was modified to resemble this object more closely; the same process occurred with other ornaments; until finally a whole system of symbolism was added to the older system of decoration. The first of these theories is that original pictures were conventionalized into decorative symbolism; the other theory is that original ornament was expanded into symbolic decoration. These are the logically possible explanations of the origin of Arapaho art because we recognize in it two factors, the realistic-symbolic and the decorative-technical.

Let us see if either of these theories can be rendered through the evidence of fact actually certain or at least probable.

One of the most frequent embroidered designs on Arapaho moccasins consists, in its simplest form, of a stripe or band which runs from the instep to the toe. This decorative motive takes varied forms, of more or less elaborateness. The following are a number of moccasins with this type of ornament.

One moccasin¹ (Pl. v, fig. 1, catalogue number 8707) is embroidered merely with a stripe from the instep to the toe. This stripe of beadwork consists of a number of bars or lengthened

¹ The Arapaho objects described in the course of this article are in the American Museum of Natural History. Their catalogue numbers are given in parentheses.