

**THE EVOLUTION OF DECORATIVE
ART: AN ESSAY UPON ITS ORIGIN
AND DEVELOPMENT AS
ILLUSTRATED BY THE ART OF
MODERN RACES OF MANKIND**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649498833

The Evolution of Decorative Art: An Essay upon Its Origin and Development as Illustrated by the Art of Modern Races of Mankind by Henry Balfour

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

HENRY BALFOUR

**THE EVOLUTION OF DECORATIVE
ART: AN ESSAY UPON ITS ORIGIN
AND DEVELOPMENT AS
ILLUSTRATED BY THE ART OF
MODERN RACES OF MANKIND**

THE EVOLUTION
OF
DECORATIVE ART

*AN ESSAY UPON ITS ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT
AS ILLUSTRATED BY THE ART OF
MODERN RACES OF MANKIND*

BY

HENRY BALFOUR, M.A., F.Z.S.

CURATOR OF THE ETHNOGRAPHICAL DEPARTMENT (PITT RIVERS COLLECTION),
UNIVERSITY MUSEUM, OXFORD

NEW YORK
MACMILLAN AND CO.

1893

~~H. 2298~~
FA1053.1



Mary Osgood.

P R E F A C E

IN presenting this short and, as I am well aware, imperfect essay to the public, I feel that it is necessary to say a few words in justification of my action. Although, for a proper comprehension of the growth of Art, it is necessary that its evolution should be studied from its very simplest beginning, this aspect of the subject has hardly been touched upon by writers of so-called 'Histories of Art.' In these, frequently very excellent works, the history of art is traced back perhaps to Assyrian and Ancient Egyptian civilisations, and a few writers dwell briefly upon the characteristics of modern Savage Art. Few of them, however, offer any study of the Art of the more primitive of the living races of mankind, with a view to explaining, by a process of reasoning from the known to the unknown, the first efforts of Primæval Man to produce objects which should be pleasing to the eye, and gratify his growing æsthetic feelings.

The Art of Design must, we know, have had a continuous history, and have grown up gradually from simple beginnings, at first by easy stages, involving but slight intellectual efforts, steadily progressing until it has become an essential element in our surroundings, absorbing a vast amount of complex reasoning, the result of the accumulation and combination of simple ideas, which are the outcome of experience during countless ages.

George Harris, in his *Theory of the Arts*, published in 1869, undoubtedly sounds the key-note to this subject, without however bringing many tangible examples to bear upon his theories.

It is to General Pitt Rivers without doubt that we owe the stimulus which has of recent years led many workers to investigate the gradual development of the various Arts of mankind, and to endeavour to trace their histories back to their absolute origins. The illustration of the gradual growth of Decorative Art from simple beginnings was a part of his scheme for establishing *series* of objects with a view to tracing the stages in the evolution of all the material arts of mankind. With this object in view he accumulated

material and formed series to illustrate the origin, growth step by step, and variations of certain patterns, and these series form some of the most interesting and striking features in his collection. Amongst many others one may mention the series illustrating the 'varieties and geographical distribution of the Loop Coil;' series showing the gradual degradation of designs representing the human form and their conversion into meaningless ornament, illustrating the importance of successive copying as a factor in the evolution of patterns; those showing the derivation of patterns on gourds and pottery from the strings by which once the vessels were carried. These and others such are too well known to require description. It is much to be regretted that with the exception of valuable remarks embodied in essays upon wider subjects,¹ and a few descriptions of the development of special patterns, we have not the benefit of his

¹ 'Principles of Classification,' *Journ. Anthropological Inst.*, vol. iv. p. 293; *Report on Anthropology at the Brit. Association*, 1872, *ib.* ii. p. 350; *Catalogue of the Anthropological Collection of Colonel Lane Fox* (Gen. Pitt Rivers); 'Evolution of Culture,' *Proc. Royal Institution*, vii. pt. 6; 'Address delivered at the Dorchester School of Art,' Feb. 1884, printed in the *Dorchester County Chronicle*, Feb. 7. 1884. John Colliers's *Primer of Art* also embodies the views of General Pitt Rivers on the development of the art of design.

researches into the history of Decorative Art in a published form. Among the earlier researches into the history of patterns should be mentioned Dr. John Evans's striking series of British coins, upon which, in the course of successive reproductions the once realistic design becomes hopelessly conventional (*Proc. Royal Inst.* vii. p. 475). Since the arrival of General Pitt Rivers's Collection in Oxford, as a gift to the University, I have constantly endeavoured to collect fresh material and facts, with a view to the further development of the subject. According to the general law laid down by him, and from the evidence now accumulated, there seem to me to be deducible certain general conclusions regarding the earlier history of Art, shedding light upon the first efforts of Prehistoric man in the Art of Design and Decoration, and also explaining the gradual formation and *raison d'être* of various forms of ornament which are familiar to us. These conclusions I have endeavoured very briefly to set down in a more or less connected form in this essay. Whole chapters might easily be written upon the history and variations of single designs or patterns, but this is not my object in this little book; but rather it is to interest

if possible the 'general reader' in a subject which will repay further investigation, the material for which lies immediately at hand. It is within every one's power to advance our knowledge of the subject, and, I may add, hunting up the genealogies of well-known forms of ornament is a most attractive pursuit and can be quite exciting at times. Strict continuity is not easily obtainable, and it is impossible to take into consideration the countless indirect influences which affect the growth of an Art and help to divert it from following a straight course. We are content, when we can, to sail down the middle of the main stream, taking little heed of the many smaller tributaries, which nevertheless affect the course of the stream with their influence.

I have in the course of the following pages frequently to use the term 'Savage' as applied to the more lowly cultured races of mankind. In doing so I am merely using a commonly accepted term for want of a better. I do it under protest, as the word is very unsatisfactory whether taken in the light of its modern significance, which would ascribe 'ferocity' to many inoffensive peoples, to whose nature it is