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**Title**

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**Journal**

American Anthropology, 3(2)

**Author**

Kroeber, Alfred L.

**Publication Date**

1901

## DECORATIVE SYMBOLISM OF THE ARAPAHO<sup>1</sup>

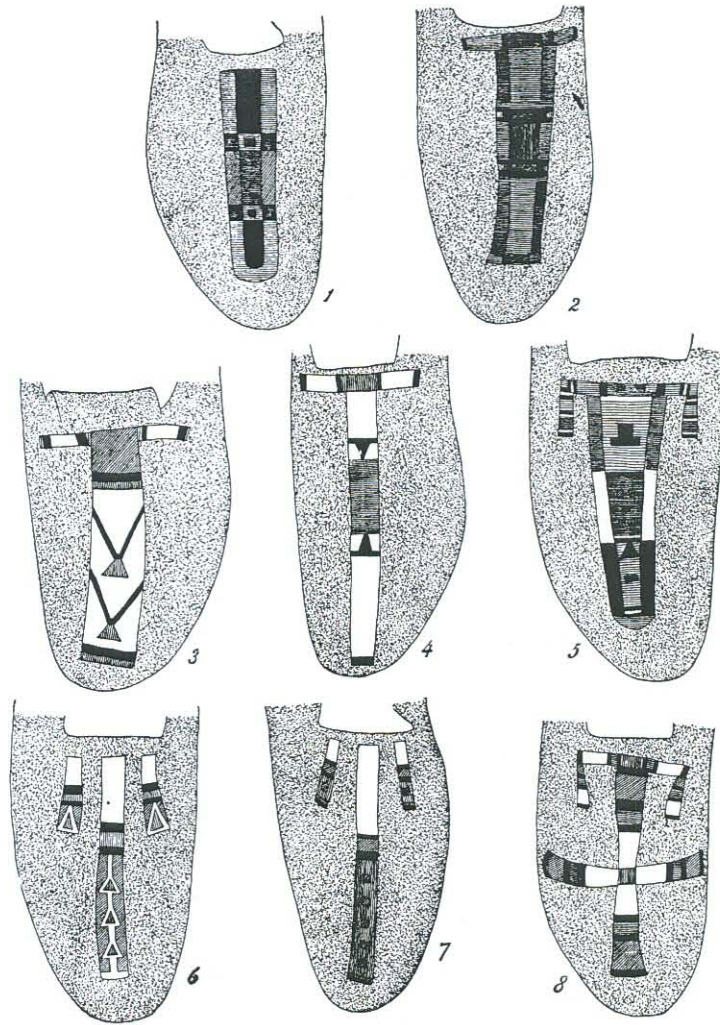
By A. L. KROEBER

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.

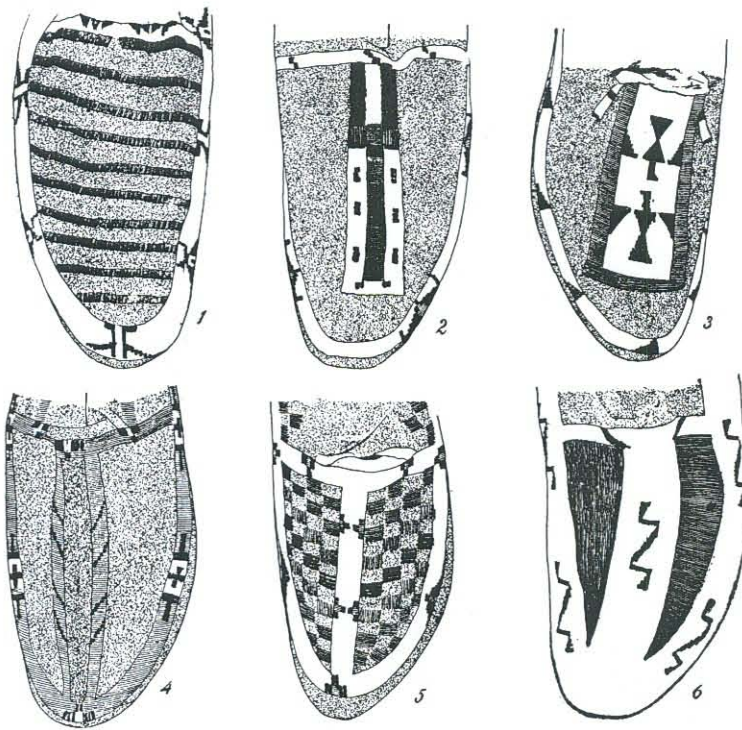
On questioning the Indians it is found that many of these decorative figures have a meaning. An equilateral triangle with the point downward may represent a heart; with its point upward, a mountain. A figure consisting of five squares or rectangles in quincunx, the four outer ones touching the central 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

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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 numerous 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 moccasin<sup>1</sup> (Pl. v, fig. 1, catalogue number  $\frac{1}{5709}$ ) is embroidered merely with a stripe from the instep to the toe. This stripe of beadwork consists of a number of bars or lengthened

<sup>1</sup> 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.

rectangles of different colors. No information was obtained as to the meaning of the design on this specimen.

Another specimen (Pl. v, fig. 2, cat. no.  $\frac{50}{883}$ ) has a similar stripe, about an inch in width, running from instep to toe, and composed of bars or small stripes of six different colors. The distribution of these colors is not like that in the last described specimen, but the pattern and the idea of color arrangement are identical. On this moccasin, however, there is one additional piece of embroidery, a narrow stripe across the instep, that is, transverse to the main stripe and touching it at its upper end. The large stripe as a whole, the smaller bars separately, and the transverse stripe all represent buffalo paths.

A third specimen (Pl. v, fig. 3, cat. no.  $\frac{50}{883}$ ) also has a stripe from instep to toe. This is white, except for a rectangular green portion in the middle. At the two ends of this green part of the stripe are two dark-blue (=black) marks, which are approximately triangular. Across the instep we again find a narrow transverse stripe. This represents a bow. The main longitudinal stripe represents a buffalo path. Its green rectangular portion is a buffalo. The black marks are arrowpoints shot into it. Small projections on these marks, which render them not really quite triangular, represent the barbs of the arrowheads.

Another moccasin (Pl. v, fig. 4, cat. no.  $\frac{50}{1021}$ ) again has the longitudinal stripe. This represents a path, probably with implication of the path traveled by the wearer of the moccasin. The major part of this stripe is white, but portions are beaded in dark-blue (=black), red, and grayish-blue. These colors denote respectively night, day, and hazy atmosphere. On the white stripe are also two curious symbols, which are said to signify sunrise or going over a mountain. A narrow transverse stripe is found in this specimen also; but instead of being contiguous to the end of the main stripe, as on the last two moccasins, it is cut in two by it, so that it exists only in two fragments, one on each side of the large stripe. These two small bars represent insects that are desired to

be out of the path, beside it, instead of being where the moccasin will travel in the path.

Another specimen (Pl. v, fig. 5, cat. no.  $\frac{50}{410}$ ) has the main stripe down the foot slightly modified in that it tapers a little toward the toe. In arrangement of colors, this moccasin resembles closely the second one described. In all the specimens just discussed, except the last, the bars of which the main stripe consists are arranged in three groups. In this moccasin this triple division of the stripe also exists. Moreover, in the middle section of this stripe there is a green rectangle, and in contact with this a small dark-blue mark approximately triangular in shape. These two symbols are very like the representations of the buffalo and arrowpoints on the moccasin above described as symbolic of the buffalo hunt. Unfortunately it is not known whether the design on the present specimen had any meaning. So far, accordingly, this moccasin agrees closely with those previously examined. It is further like them in possessing a narrow, transverse stripe of beadwork at the instep. But a totally new feature is found in two small bars that start from the ends of the transverse stripe. They are parallel to the main central longitudinal stripe, but very much smaller.

In all the preceding specimens but one (fig. 4), the large stripe consists of three sections. In the exceptional specimen the upper third or fourth of the stripe is of one ground color, the remainder all of another ground color. Such an arrangement is also found in another specimen (Pl. v, fig. 6, cat. no.  $\frac{1}{8707}$ ). The smaller portion of the stripe is white, the longer part is blue with a pattern imposed upon it. Nothing is known of the significance of any part of this design. The two small bars are present, as in the last specimen, and repeat the markings of the large stripe in simplified form. But the transverse stripe at the instep is missing.

Still another moccasin has its stripe divided into a short upper and a long lower portion of different colors (Pl. v, fig. 7, cat. no.  $\frac{50}{382}$ ). As in the last specimen, there are two small bars



parallel to the central stripe and repeating its design, and the transverse stripe is again absent. The stripes and bars all represent buffalo paths. In certain parts of the stripes are small squares colored light blue; these represent buffalo tracks.

The last specimen of this series (Pl. v, fig. 8, cat. no.  $\frac{50}{884}$ ) has the main central stripe, the transverse stripe at the instep, and the small bars repeating the markings of the large stripe. In addition to these three decorative devices that are found in previous specimens, it possesses a fourth one that is new. The central longitudinal stripe (slightly constricted toward its middle) is bisected by a duplicate of itself running transversely. These two stripes thus form a cross. This cross represents the morning star, the variety of colors upon it denoting the variety of colors the star appears to assume. The transverse stripe at the instep represents the sky or horizon. The two small bars are said to be the twinkling of the star as it rises, in other words its rays.<sup>1</sup>

The symbolism of some of these designs is elaborate. The representation of the buffalo in his path shot by arrows from the hunter's bow is coherent and neatly compact. We do not know whether it is a commemoration of a particular event or the expression of a wish for plenty of food, but in either case it has pictographic function. In fact, it is a pictograph, except for the fact that its geometric form renders it illegible for any one but its writer. The star-moccasin is also a pictograph in an ornamental dress.<sup>2</sup>

The conventionality of the decoration seems to have reached an equally strong development. It is apparent that the large stripe from instep to toe is the fundamental motive of this style

<sup>1</sup> Some of these moccasins, it will have been noticed, are without known symbolism. This is due merely to their having been collected without inquiry being made as to the significance of their designs. Consequently, to judge from analogy, it is more probable that they do have meaning than that they really lack it.

<sup>2</sup> Even in true pictographs free from decorative limitations and therefore drawn with the greatest realistic fidelity of which the Indian is capable, the symbols for the morning-star, the horizon, and rays of light are the same as those on this moccasin—a cross, a horizontal line, and vertical or sloping lines.

of ornamentation. All the other motives are also stripes, and even of these there are only two (the transverse stripe and the two short bars), except in the one morning-star moccasin where the basal element is introduced in a new position as a fourth decorative motive.

In short, in these moccasins the tendency to realistic symbolism and the tendency to decorative conventionalism are clearly about in equilibrium. Hence we cannot fairly say that either of these tendencies is the older and original. If one concentrates his attention on the symbolism, or happens to be temperamentally more interested in it, he is very likely to see it more abundantly than the decoration, to be more impressed by it, to consider the entire present art as merely corrupted or abbreviated symbolism, and to advance as an explanation of the origin and development of these designs the theory of conventionalized realism. But if one thinks more of the decoration as such, or if one's mind runs naturally toward the ornamental and technical, he will probably notice mostly this side, regard the significations of markings as trivial and irrelevant additions that may be ignored, and finally champion the theory of expanded decoration. With the one bias we are so overwhelmingly aware of the almost pictographic coherence in the buffalo-hunt moccasin, that we believe that pictures of such topics must have given rise to the present form. With the other bias the conventionality of the pattern that possesses this buffalo-hunt significance is so impressive that we come to think that decorative motives of just such persistence as this must have been the origin of the present form. A first investigator is so struck with the enormous difference of meaning between the ordinary path-stripe moccasins and the morning-star-cross moccasin that he cannot believe they had a common source; each must have sprung from a picture, which was as different from the other as the objects represented are different. A second observer is so impressed by the fact that the morning-star moccasin with four decorative elements differs less from some of the buffalo-path

moccasins than many of these with from one to three decorative elements differ from each other, that he thinks that all these designs, however variable their superficial meanings, must have originated in one typical ornamental form.

Both these explanations are thus, in the case of these moccasin-designs, not only logically possible, but they are very naturally believed and advanced as the result of certain mental predispositions. But if we try to remain free from any such inclinations of mind, and if we remember how strongly developed and intimately fused are both the tendencies, we must come to the conclusion that, because symbolism and decoration balance each other, the two theories of conventionalized realism and expanded ornament, though logically admissible, are actually untenable. Rather it seems likely, since the two tendencies are vigorous, and combined, that they are both well established, old, and long in close union; so that formerly designs on Arapaho moccasins, though perhaps ruder than now, were of the same general character, both symbolically and decoratively, as those we know.

Let us consider a second style of moccasin. Whereas in those just discussed the fundamental element of the embroidery was the longitudinal stripe, it now is a border running all around the foot just above the sole. In one particular specimen illustrated (Pl. VI, fig. 1, cat. no.  $\frac{5}{7} \frac{1}{08}$ ) there is besides this border of beadwork a series of lines of quillwork filling the large space on the front of the moccasin, but as this is embroidery of a different material and appearance, we can disregard it in the present consideration and confine our attention to the ornamentation consisting of the border. It should be added that in addition to the border there is the narrow stripe across the instep.

In a second specimen (Pl. VI, fig. 2, cat. no.  $\frac{5}{9} \frac{0}{3}$ ) there is besides the border and the transverse stripe, the large longitudinal stripe with which we have become familiar. As previously, this signifies paths.

A third specimen (Pl. VI, fig. 3, cat. no.  $\frac{5}{7} \frac{1}{20}$ ) has the border,

the large longitudinal stripe, and the two small bars at its upper end, but lacks the transverse instep-stripe. On the central stripe are two representations of birds, but there is no information as to the meaning of the design.

It is evident that in these last two moccasins there is a combination of the stripe motive with the border motive.

In another specimen (Pl. VI, fig. 4, cat. no.  $\frac{5.0}{8.5}$ ), of whose symbolism we are ignorant, the longitudinal stripe is continued farther than previously, so that it meets the border. The stripe is not solidly embroidered: its edges are beadwork, but its interior is left open and merely painted red.

In any moccasin of this design there is left a blank space on each side of the foot. This is the area enclosed by the stripe, the border, and the transverse instep-stripe. It has the shape of a pointed right-angle triangle whose hypotenuse instead of being straight is convex. These two triangular or horn-shaped areas occur in another moccasin (Pl. VI, fig. 5, cat. no.  $\frac{5.0}{3.27}$ ). The border, stripe, and transverse stripe are all white. The two enclosed areas are half covered with a checker-board design in several colors, which is said to represent buffalo-gut. This checker-board embroidery also extends around the heel.

If, now, this half-open checker-board work were replaced by solid beading, we should have a moccasin completely covered with beadwork. Such specimens occur in abundance. In one (Pl. VI, fig. 6, cat. no.  $\frac{5.0}{10.28}$ ), whose groundwork is white, the two triangular areas taken together represent buffalo horns. The buffalo trample the ground; this is represented by the coloring of the two areas. One is red, which denotes the soil, or bare earth; the other is green, which denotes vegetation or grass-covered earth.

A child's moccasin, also solidly beaded (cat. no.  $\frac{5.0}{10.32}$ ), has as usual a groundwork of white. The two triangular areas are green, and represent horse ears—a symbol of good fortune and future wealth. Between them, the central stripe, slightly modified, represents a lizard.

A last moccasin (cat. no.  $\frac{50}{1078}$ ) is solidly beaded in white. The two triangular marks are banded dark-blue and white, and represent fish.

In these last cases, in fact in most fully beaded moccasins, the decorative elements of border, stripe, transverse stripe, and triangular area are still visible in the embroidery; even though they often become identical in color and are not distinguished in the design, they are used technically.

If we follow the transition from the merely bordered moccasin to the solidly beaded one, and see the same technical or decorative features persisting in all parts of the series from the simplest to the most highly developed form, the ornamental nature of these productions is striking and their decorative origin seems probable. If we consider the realistic representation of, for instance, the buffalo horn, and the pretty symbolism of its coloring, the realistic origin of these decorations seems very hard to disbelieve. Of course there is no reason for leaping at either of these conclusions. Neither phase of this art must be ignored, but both recognized. It is necessary to be aware both of the strong ornamental tendency influenced by symbolism and the symbolic tendency modified by ornamental system.

So far as these moccasins are concerned, it accordingly seems impossible to determine with certainty how the symbolic decoration originated.

Parfleches and bags of rawhide made by the Arapaho are painted on the front with designs that cover most of the surface. The back or bottom is sometimes left blank, or may have from six to ten straight lines (or narrow stripes) painted transversely across (fig. 49). These lines on the bottom usually represent roads or rivers. All parfleches are perforated in front to allow of being fastened with thongs. Occasionally, however, a cautious person winds a rope a number of times around his bag, in order to tie it up more securely. On one parfleche seen by the writer such transverse lines were painted across the bottom. The owner and

maker declared that they represented a rope passing over the surface of the back several times for fastening the bag. She showed another parfleche in her possession which was actually thus tied.

In this case the markings may appear to be an instance of the survival, as a decoration, of an atrophied useful feature: first ropes were regularly wound around the parfleche to fasten it, then these were left off but were represented by painting. This technical-ornamental theory seems at first glance to offer the true

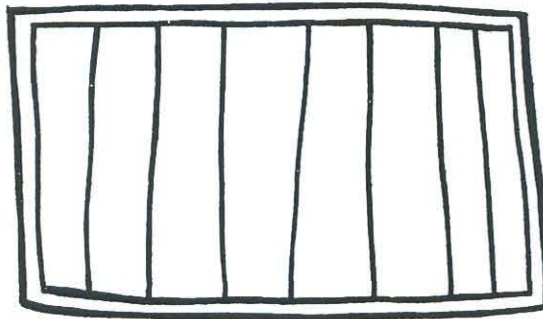


FIG. 49—Marking on Arapaho bag.

explanation of the origin of these lines on the back of all rawhide bags. But a moment's consideration shows that it is also within reason to believe the opposite: we can de-

clare that the lines originated from attempts at representing rivers or roads, but that in this case the maker of the bag was struck by the resemblance of the lines to a rope as it was occasionally used, and then gave the new signification of rope to what really were conventionalized representations of rivers or roads.

So here again we have two explanations (there may be still more) that are plausible, while neither can be proved conclusively. As soon as we go beyond the description of existing circumstances into the inquiry of origin, we enter the realm of uncertainty, of irrefutable doubts.

A peculiar Arapaho medicine-case shows unusual symbolism. The design painted on this is shown, spread out flat, in fig. 50 (cat. no.  $\frac{50}{889}$ ). The ornamentation, which is less geometric than in most specimens of painting, represents the acquisition of super-

natural power. Below, on the right side, is the sweat-house into which the owner and maker of the case went before beginning his fast to acquire supernatural power. This ornament also represents

a small mound in front of the sweat-house, on which a buffalo skull is lying. The fish-tail ornament just above this is the mountain on which the man fasted, and hence also represents himself. To the right of this, the crescent-topped design is "the overseer" (the sun), also called "the one that lights." The pedestal or stalk of this figure represents "information"

(supernatural power) flowing down from this being to the earth (the horizontal line). At the extreme left, the same design is a representation of himself after he had acquired information and power; and to the right of this, the fish-tail ornament now represents this very medicine-case. But the case is made of buffalo-hide, and his supernatural power consisted largely in control of the buffalo; therefore this same symbol also denotes buffalo. Below, on the left, is the sweat-house into which he went after his fast.

We have here an example of highly-developed symbolism. It might seem that when so long a story is told and so much abstract information is conveyed, the ideographic design must have arisen directly from the attempt of the artist to express his meaning, i. e., that the design is quasi-realistic in origin. But there is another medicine-case (fig. 51*a*, cat. no.  $\frac{50}{1}$ ) with similar ornamentation (about whose signification we unfortunately have no information). The resemblance of the two designs is great. One consists of an alternating arrangement of two symbols, both forked, the other of

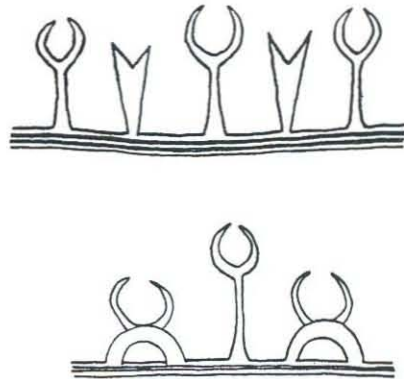


FIG. 50—Design on Arapaho medicine-case.

an alternating arrangement of these two symbols with a third, the semicircle, added. Some Arapaho say that this style of case was used by a powerful medicine-man and his followers or scholars; but

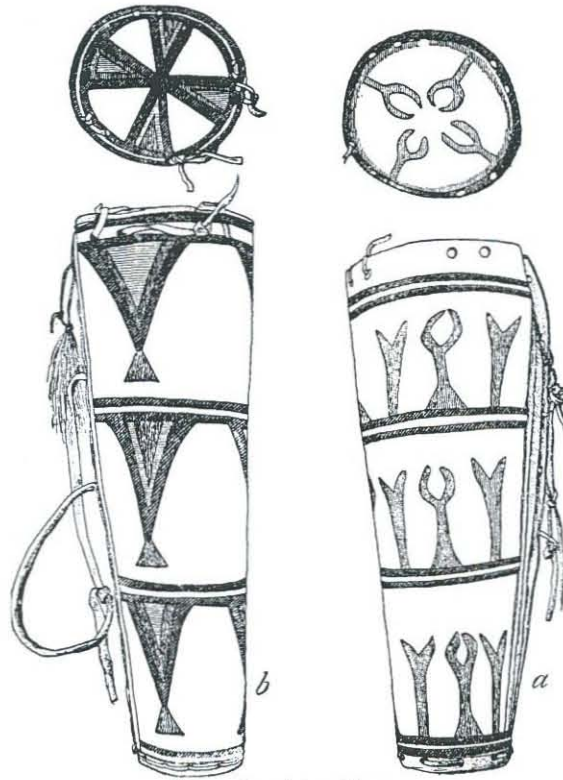


FIG. 51—Arapaho medicine-cases.

it is uncertain whether this man invented the design or used an already existing one. It is doubtful whether even the symbolism was originated by this man or was similar to an earlier current of symbolism. The most usual ornamentation on Arapaho medicine-cases is a pattern of tents (fig. 51 *b*, cat. no.  $\frac{50}{888}$ ) or a combination of triangles and

diamonds similar to that painted on parfleches.

So here again there is pictographic symbolism fused with a more or less conventional decoration, and it is impossible to say whether the symbolism or the decoration is the older and original.

Small paint-bags—buckskin pouches to hold body-paint—are in general use among the Arapaho. Some of these represent half of a double-ended fringed saddle-bag. The rest all represent small animals, such as the beaver, lizard, rat, fish, mussel, horned toad, and frog. The opening represents the animal's mouth, two



strings that serve to tie up the opening are its forelegs, a loose flap at the end may be the tail, the pouch itself is the body, and other parts are indicated, as there is need, by beadwork, strings, or attached ornaments. The resemblance to the animal represented is often detailed, but never accurate, being ideographic rather than visual, in keeping with all the symbolism of this art. It is generally impossible to recognize what species of animal is meant, and only the maker knows this.

One pouch represents both a beaver and a fish (fig. 52*a*, cat. no.  $\frac{50}{361}$ ), according to information given by its owner. When it

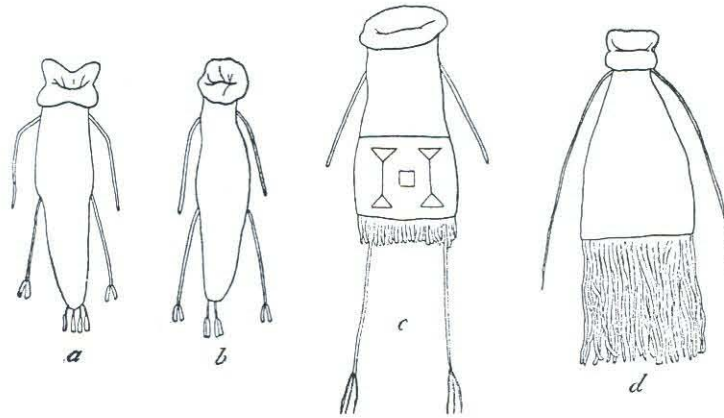


FIG. 52—Arapaho paint pouches.

is regarded as a beaver, both pairs of strings are legs, and the scallops or notches at the opening are the prominent teeth. A design in beadwork on the pouch, which represents a stream with a dam and beaver-huts, also refers to this signification. When a fish is meant to be represented, the upper pair of strings are the barbels, the lower pair the pectoral fins. The fish-signification is strengthened by a rough line of beads at the edge of the pouch, which are interpreted as fish-scales.

A very similar pouch represents a lizard (fig. 52*b*, cat. no.  $\frac{50}{362}$ ). Mouth, body, legs, and tail are represented in the conventional manner by opening, pouch, strings, and attached flap.

A pouch that lacks the long flap represents a frog (fig. 52*c*, cat. no.  $\frac{5.0}{344}$ ). Two long strings indicate the frog's hind legs. A fringe at the bottom represents the grass in which it is sitting. A design in beadwork on this pouch denotes the shoulder and hip joints of the frog, and the food in its stomach.

Another pouch (fig. 52*d*, cat. no.  $\frac{5.0}{801}$ ) differs in shape from this one only in lacking the two longer strings. It represents half a saddle-bag.

The realistic tendency manifested in the animal symbolism of these pouches is undeniable. A conventional, formal, decorative tendency is evident in the close similarity between the frog-pouch and the saddle-bag pouch, and between the beaver-pouch and the lizard-pouch. Both the tendencies come to light in the pouch with the curious double signification.

Some of the Arapaho say that at the beginning of the world, when the first men, their ancestors, obtained paint, they had only the skins of small animals to use for paint-bags, and that this is the origin of the animal symbolism of the present-day paint-pouches.

It is necessary not to be misled into a belief of this origin and development on the authority of the Indians. Their authority on such a point is absolutely valueless. They believe that the time when the first men obtained paint-bags was four hundred years ago, just after the formation of the world by a solitary mythic being floating on the water, and after a female whirlwind enlarged the minute earth by circling about it. Like all American savages they are almost completely without historical sense or knowledge. Occasionally a striking event may be remembered in a distorted form for a century or two, but on the whole, whatever of actual occurrence is retained in their tales is inextricably blended with mythic and supernatural elements. We have no right to reject the greatest part of their creation myth as so absurdly impossible that it would enter no one's mind to accept it as true, and at the same time to select here and there a point that is within the limits of possibility and proclaim it as historical and reliable.

The mythic and historical elements in primitive legends are not simply mixed together so that they can be distinguished and separated, but they are both equally wonderful and equally true for the savage. No myth can be interpreted into history by mere elimination of its supernatural portions: it must be rejected in toto. Even though it may be founded on a basis of actuality—and this must often be the case—it is altogether myth. In law, and exact science, and wherever evidence is judged, an account that is in great part manifestly absurd or palpably impossible is not accepted as true after the impossibilities have been subtracted, but is disregarded as a whole. So, too, it is necessary to attach no importance to the statement of the Arapaho as to the origin of these paint-bags.

We have considered several forms of Arapaho art—various objects, various styles, and various materials and techniques. In all cases we have found a well-developed symbolism and a conventional decoration. The symbolism and the decoration exist not side by side but in each other. It has been easy to manufacture explanations of the origin of this art that are plausible theories. But as soon as we are open to recognize all possibilities, such theories are seen to arise from our opinions and methods of interpretation, and to be unsubstantiated by fact. Therefore we can describe Arapaho art, we can characterize it, and distinguish its various coexisting tendencies. We can even, to a certain extent, enter into the spirit of the people who practise it, and understand (i. e., feel) their mental workings. We cannot in fairness lay claim to knowing the cause or origin of this art, nor can we hope to ascertain its cause and origin by studying its products.

In the art of other primitive races conditions very much resemble those just discussed. Everywhere art is conventionalized, under the influence of a definite style. Practically everywhere also it is decorative. This is obviously true of such high arts as those of the Japanese and Chinese. It is true also of Greek sculpture and of Renaissance paintings: though in our modern

civilization we are in the habit of regarding the products of these arts detachedly, and enjoy them as if they were complete in themselves, yet every one is aware that the intent to decorate always accompanied the conception and execution of the classic and Italian masterpieces. Even so strenuously realistic an art as modern impressionism is unable to free itself totally from the reproach of being ornamental; for whatever the purpose of the artist, the owner of such a picture has almost certainly secured it for the purpose, ostensible at least, of decorating a vacant wall. In primitive civilizations, the combination of the imitative and decorative tendencies is of course much greater. With very few exceptions, such as in some Eskimo tribes, the realistic, representative impulse is thoroughly impressed and influenced by the highly conventional style; and in all cases this conventional style is decorative. Correspondingly, most primitive decoration, no matter how geometric or simple, has significance and thus is, visually or ideographically, realistic. This is a fact that has not become known until recently, because until lately savages were rarely questioned thoroughly.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly the main characteristic of Arapaho art, its fusion (which is more truly an undifferentiation) of the realistic and decorative tendencies, is also the characteristic of all primitive art.

In Brazil we know of tribes whose painted and incised designs, which are exceedingly simple and geometrical and usually in patterns, are all significant. Diamonds whose corners are slightly filled in are rhomboidally shaped fishes; a pattern of flat isosceles triangles stood up on end is hanging bats, and so on. There are also other representations of the same animals that are slightly more realistic. The same tribes use pots of oval shape with half a dozen variously shaped projections at the rim. The

<sup>1</sup> The scarcely suspected inherence of realistic significance in primitive ornament has been independently demonstrated from California, British Columbia, Central America, Brazil, Mississippi valley, Siberia, Indo China, Borneo, New Guinea, Australia, and Polynesia, in arts as diverse as pottery, weaving, carving, basketry, drawing, and painting.

whole vessel represents an animal, the projections being roughly modeled into head, tail, and limbs. Birds, bats, mammals, reptiles, and invertebrates are indicated by very slight modifications. A civilized person unacquainted with the mode of sight and thought of the Brazilian aborigines might very readily mistake a bird-pot for a mammal-pot, and so on.

In Central Australia bullroarers and other objects are decorated with incised lines. These consist of concentric circles, bands of parallel lines, concentric arcs or curves, and rows of dots or small marks. The ornamentation is not symmetrical, nor even regular; it appears random and rude. Yet in general character these decorated bullroarers resemble each other closely. It has been found that the designs are all ideographic, though the total range of significance is apparently not very wide. Similar marks may on different objects mean things as different as trees, frogs, eggs, or intestines. It is interesting to note that while this art is remarkably crude and unformed both as regular ornamentation and as an attempt to represent objects accurately, it contains a system of realistic expression as well as a system of decoration, both of which are conventionalized—or rather, the union of which is a convention.

The remarkable art of the North Pacific coast of America is certainly one of the most stylistic and conventionalized in the world, while its realistic character is sufficiently marked to give no one room to doubt its presence. Its decorative tendency is so strong that, in obedience to its demands, an animal that is being represented may be cut into parts which are then arranged as suits the requirements of the decoration and not as they are in nature. The chest of an animal may be put over its head, and the tail below; two opposite sides of an animal, which are of course invisible at the same time, will be represented, in order to meet the strong demand for symmetry. The chief decorative motive of all this art is an oblong figure whose corners are rounded and whose sides are very slightly convex, the upper

long edge generally curving the most. Almost everything that is represented is brought into this shape or some modification of it. Heads, eyes, mouths, ears, joints, tails, fins, are usually of this shape; the whole decorative field itself often is the same; and in such cases the remaining portions occupied by unenumerated parts, such as back, belly, and wings, are almost necessarily of the same shape. Eyes and faces appear everywhere—on representations of joints, of the chest, of dorsal fins, of hands, in vacant spaces—and their shape is regularly the ornamental one described. Yet with this remarkably strong decorative tendency pervading and deeply influencing every representation, all examples of decorative art from this region are recognizably realistic in intent and often in execution. There is no geometrical ornament that one might take to be meaningless. In short, on the North Pacific coast of America all decoration is realistic and all realism is decorative.

It is of course impossible to prove by selected examples such as these that all primitive art consists of the combination of representative realism and ornamental conventionalism. But that such is the fact, that this undifferentiation continues often into a higher civilization, must be obvious to any one familiar with primitive art. This fusion of two differing tendencies is not merely a frequent or widely distributed occurrence, as are a great many special ethnic phenomena, such as circumcision or doctoring by sucking or angularity of ornament, but this fusion is a rule practically without exceptions. It is universal because it is necessary. Both the representative tendency and the decorative tendency are deep rooted in the human mind, so that it must be virtually impossible to suppress them for any length of time or among any considerable number of men. At times, indeed, as in European civilization, the two tendencies become more separated: our wall-papers are chiefly ornamental, our oil paintings chiefly realistic. But a glance at the past and present races of the world shows that this condition is exceptional, just as a civilization of the

extremity of ours is exceptional. The more primitive a people is, we may say, the more intimately fused in its art will these two tendencies be, though, as there is no absolute or fixable scale of primitiveness and civilization, this rule cannot be applied to special cases but merely tends to be true. Other tendencies also are still combined with these two in a sufficiently early and rude condition of society. The symbolism of the Arapaho is as ideographic as it is realistic, and is as much a primitive method of writing as it is of artistic representation. The Australian bull-roarers referred to are, in addition to other things, very primitive maps or charts; so that they are the products of diagrammatic, graphic, visually artistic, and decorative tendencies or activities still undifferentiated—all this in addition to their still more marked religious functions. Of course it is possible for a race to over-develop one of several related tendencies at the expense of others. To a certain degree this does happen in all races, and is what makes the difference between them. But every culture must contain among its motive forces more or less of every tendency, because the tendencies are in the human mind and hence ineradicable. These many tendencies are on the whole less differentiated in more primitive conditions of society. Hence all art, and especially primitive art, contains the combination at least of representative and decorative tendencies, perhaps of others.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The differentiation here and previously spoken of as accompanying or constituting evolution in civilization is at once too important and universal a matter to be proved here in a few incidental words, and too obvious to require it. A striking example of this differentiation is found in the mythology of our more primitive forefathers, in place of which, and more or less developed from which, we have products as different as romantic novels, fundamental scientific theories, and the doctrinary beliefs of our religions. There is no intention, however, of implying here by differentiation a continuing separation. Where in a savage tribe every man, though in somewhat varying degree, is hunter, warrior, participant in government, shaman, artist, and myth-maker, a higher nation has its separate politicians, soldiers, food-producers, physicians, poets, and so on; but though the tendencies have in this transition differentiated, and have far more than formerly become specialized in individuals, yet they exist only in the culture as a whole: in this, the only true unit, i. e., the only organic entity, they are all combined. For instance, our

The invariable method of explaining the origin of an art has been to select that one of its tendencies which was the most marked or appeared so to the investigator, to imagine the products of this tendency in its most isolated and pure form, and to pronounce these the original state of the art. An observer is struck by the fact that in a certain primitive art many ornamental features coincide with technical ones that are present for practical reasons. He concludes that the technical-practical tendency which he has discovered among the decoration, is the original unmixed impulse that caused the art. Or he may become aware through inquiry or study of the fact that geometric ornament in an art has realistic significance. The realism impresses him; true, it is now modified and corrupt, but that only proves to him that originally it was pure. Ergo, this art began with representative pictures. Such has been the only method of explanation, however much the actual results in different cases differed. No other method of ascertaining or explaining the origin of a primitive art whose history we lack, is even possible.

This method has the fundamental fault that it presupposes tendencies to have existed more unmixedly and separately at some former time than at present. In reality they must in all cases have been in the near past very much as now and in the very remote past more mixed or mutually undifferentiated. Thus we have seen that Arapaho art must some time ago have been very much as now. What it was still earlier we know even less definitely, but we cannot doubt that its spirit must have been similar. Different objects may then have been represented, other

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present-day science could not have arisen nor could it exist without modern industrialism, and this is equally dependent on science. Our literature is absolutely and intimately interwoven with our social conditions, not so much in that poets and novelists actually describe these, but in that the emotions and ideas which form the content of their writing are the typical emotions and ideas accompanying our social circumstances. In proportion with the differentiation of tendencies in evolution proceed their combination and recombination. Very analogously, a mammal is far more highly differentiated than a jellyfish, but none the less are its various organs interdependent and itself a distinct organic unity.



ornamental motives employed in other materials, but even then there certainly was the combination of ideographic symbolism with crude, heavy decoration. As we go farther backward in time, we can be sure that the details of the art were more and more different from those of its present condition. Now perhaps one of its component tendencies was relatively stronger, then another. But whatever these temporary slight fluctuations, it is certain that if we only go back far enough we must arrive at a stage where the tendencies were even more numerous and more intimately combined than now. But if one should believe that Arapaho art can be explained, for instance, by the conventionalized realism theory, the realism being original and the conventionalization subsequent, he holds the view that at some time past this Arapaho art consisted of pictorial representations. This view is logically possible, but in reality it is absurd. This art could not have had so ideally simple a development that we could still trace its original condition, if it were very old. But if it, therefore, were comparatively recent in origin, there must until a certain time have been no art among the Arapaho, while at that moment it sprang up full-blown, not as a crude undifferentiated thing, but a highly-specialized pictorial art. Such an event would be extremely remarkable, not to say marvelous, and more in need of an explanation than the phenomenon it explained. By isolating any tendency that we find in any art, we are led to imagine a purely ideal condition which not only could not have been the original state of the art, but is probably even more different from its original state than from its present known state.

In short, it is impossible to determine the origin of any art whose history we do not know.

Let us briefly consider the field of mythology. There have been numerous explanations of myths and several theories of the origin of all mythology. The principal of these theories are the following.

What may be called the physical or science theory accounts

for myths by making them the outcome of a desire to explain natural phenomena. The shapes or colors of animals, the motion of sun and moon, the existence of the stars, strange geologic formations, such phenomena are supposed to have stimulated the wonder of primitive man so much that he made myths to explain them.

The personification theory supposes that deities and other mythic characters, together with their actions,—in a word, mythology—are personifications of natural phenomena. Phœbus, Indra, Agni, are said to have originated in personifications of the sun, heaven, and fire. The solar myth theories, and others of an analogous kind, belong here.

The animistic theory says that there was originally a belief in soul, out of which arose the various systems of spirits and deities. It believes that myths originated from a state of the human mind to which all objects seemed equally endowed with human personality.

These three theories are at bottom the same.

What has been called the allegorical or ethical theory supposes myths to be allegorical inventions with a moral import. Miraculous stories of gods, men, and animals are thought to have been composed in order to teach, by illustration, ethical precepts. This view is not so much in favor now as formerly.

The historical theory makes myths the distortion of actual events. A powerful king of Crete gave rise to the mythic character of Zeus.

The etymological theory calls mythology a disease of language. Misinterpreted metaphors or false etymologies gave rise to myths. To use a familiar example, Zeus is thought to have been originally called Kronion, with the meaning "existing through all time." Later this epithet was misunderstood to mean son of Kronos, and thus gave rise to the conception of a god Kronos.<sup>1</sup>

As explanations, all these theories are untrue. But the tendencies which they recognize exist.

<sup>1</sup> This does not necessarily exhaust the number of theories.

There is undoubtedly a tendency to explain natural phenomena in myths. The Indians of British Columbia have this story: The bear and the chipmunk disputed whether there was to be darkness or light. The chipmunk triumphed, and for the first time it became light. The angry bear attacked the chipmunk and pursued it. The chipmunk escaped by tearing itself from under the claws of the bear. From this it is striped down its back. This little story, whatever its origin, clearly reflects the tendency to mythologize about such natural phenomena as day and night and the color-markings of animals. Hundreds of similar myths concerned with the spots on the moon, or the blackness of the crow, or a certain peculiar stone, or a similar fact, are known from all parts of the world.

There is also a tendency to identify mythic personages with parts of nature; Thor with thunder, for instance. And the tendency toward animism is so widespread and so deep-seated that it will be recognized without an example.

It must also be admitted that there is something of an ethical tendency in mythologies. Among primitive races ceremonial and ritual partly take the place of our later morality. And very frequently myths deal with ceremonial. The American Indians, the Jews, the Australians, and the Greeks have such myths.

The existence of a historical tendency in myths is demonstrated by the introduction of Attila into the Sigurd saga.

The etymological tendency, finally, is revealed in the following extract from a Dakota myth<sup>1</sup>: An old couple have adopted a foundling. When he grows up he is so successful in killing buffalo that he makes his parents very rich in dried meat. "Then the old man said: 'Old woman, I am glad we are well off. I will proclaim it abroad.' And so when the morning came he went up to the top of the house and sat, and said, 'I, I have abundance laid up. The fat of the big guts (*tashiyaka*) I chew.' And they say that was the origin of the meadow-lark (*tashiyakapopo*)

<sup>1</sup> Riggs, *Dakota Grammar, Texts, and Ethnography*, 1893.

It has a yellow breast, and black in the middle, which is the yellow of the morning, and they say the black stripe is made by a smooth buffalo horn worn for a necklace."—From this point the myth deals with the adventures of the boy.

It is thus clear that for every one of these theories there really exists a tendency in primitive man which influences his myths.

This multiplicity of tendencies or causative forces necessarily refutes any explanation that uses and allows only one of them. Such have been all explanations of myths. Such they must be, for when more than one tendency or cause is admitted, we can have several tentative suggestions but no longer one positive explanation. The case is analogous to that in art, and does not require detailed restatement. It may be said, in short, that all explanations of myths consist of the ignoring of all the eternal and indestructible tendencies in man with the exception of one which is isolated and elevated as the sole cause of the myth. That such explanations, however clear and impressive they are, cannot be true, is obvious.

Thus we come to the conclusion that all search for origins in anthropology can lead to nothing but false results. The tendencies of which we have spoken are at the root of all anthropological phenomena. Therefore it is these general tendencies more properly than the supposed causes of detached phenomena that should be the aim of investigation.

These tendencies, being inherent in mind,<sup>1</sup> are everlasting. On

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<sup>1</sup> The tendencies spoken of throughout this essay must be understood to be the tendencies of social man. They are those tendencies which exist in individuals being parts of a culture, not in isolated individuals as such. There are psychological causes or mental conditions—generally considered physiological—which might also be called tendencies. Such are the tendency to fatigue, the tendency to form habits, the tendency toward imitation by suggestion, and others. These exist nearly identically in all men, whatever their degree of civilization; they seem even to occur with little modification in animals. It is evident that these physiological tendencies are totally independent of cultures. Our knowledge concerning them is due to a psychological study of individual men. On the other hand those tendencies which alone are referred to above are determinable only from a historical study of social groups. The manifestations of these tendencies are activities such as mythology, writing, ceremonials decorative art, castes, commerce, and language.

the other hand they are constantly changing and developing, and varying in their differentiations and combinations. The phenomena of activity have changed as these tendencies and their relations to one another have become modified. Therefore the products of mind (the phenomena studied by anthropologists) are, like mind itself, beginningless (for us). They have no origin. All arts and all institutions are as old as man. Every word is as old as speech. The history of every myth is at least as long as the history of mankind. Of course no myth was ever alike from one generation to the next; no decorative style has ever remained unaltered. But no myth, no artistic convention, nor any other thing human, ever sprang up from nothing. It always grew from something previous that was similar. These principles are obvious, but they are ignored and implicitly denied in every search for an origin.

Every explanation of an origin in anthropology is based on three processes of thought which are unobjectionable logically but are contrary to evolutionary principles and the countless body of facts that support these principles. First is the assumption, implied in the word *origin*, that before the beginning of the phenomenon explained, itself and its cause were absent; second is the belief that a suddenly arising cause singly produced the phenomenon; and the third is the idea that this cause as suddenly and completely ceased as it had before sprung up, and that its product has remained, unaffected by other causes, unaltered but for wear and tear, to the present day. These three thought-processes are present in every explanation of the cause or origin of a human phenomenon, whether the explainer himself be conscious or unconscious of them. Generally, indeed, the origin is not stated unhesitatingly and clearly enough for these three steps of thought to be visible in all their baldness. Often, perhaps, the investigator advancing a theory of origin would himself deny these processes to exist in his reasoning. Nevertheless, every determination of an origin, whether origin means the beginning of

a phenomenon or its cause, must imply the existence of, first, a previous different state, secondly, a change produced by an external (non-inherent) cause, and, thirdly, the state that is being investigated.

This three-step process of reasoning is not in itself wrong. When it is declared either that steam in a particular case was, or in general can be, produced from water by heat, this method of thought is employed. The early state is the water, the altering cause the heat, and the present state the steam. In all the physical sciences thinking in this manner is not only permissible but necessary and is constantly done. It is when these thought-processes are used in anthropology<sup>1</sup> that their results become absurd. When we say that the origin of decoration is technique, or that the origin of marriage is promiscuity, or that the origin of the Polynesian Maui is personification of the sun, or that the origin of an alphabet is pictorial art, or that the beginning or cause of anything in human culture is a certain other thing—we assert or imply a distinct and separate antecedent condition and an isolated, definitely limited efficient cause. That such a condition and such a cause really existed we have shown in the consideration of primitive art to be so highly improbable as to make the belief in their reality absurd; and it must be obvious that in all other cases within the scope of anthropology the three suppositions made in every explanation of origin where direct historical knowledge is lacking, possess the same degree of improbability.<sup>2</sup>

If, then, the specific causes or beginnings of specific phenomena

<sup>1</sup> By the term anthropology there are meant here not those portions of the science which are clearly anatomical and physiological (i. e., resting upon mechanical science and included in it), but those domains generally covered by the titles ethnology, archeology, and history.

<sup>2</sup> If it is true that origins cannot be determined, the supposed origins of words, namely roots, must be imaginary. Whoever gives adherence to the currently accepted theory that language began with roots, deliberately or unconsciously commits himself to these beliefs: That previous to the making of roots, language in the proper sense, as something articulate and definite, was wanting. That with the roots, language began to be, essentially as it is now. That after the formation of the roots no new ones ever arose, but language remained unchanged except for mod-

are a delusion in anthropology and may not be sought, what can be the subject of investigation? The tendencies that have been referred to so much? Like words and styles and myths and ideas and industrial processes and institutions, all of which are their products, tendencies are both eternally living and everlastingly changing. They flow into one another; they transform themselves; they are indistinguishably combined where they coexist. So, if our view is wide enough, we cannot properly determine and separate and name and classify tendencies. They really exist only in the whole unity of living activity as parts in the endless organism. This great unity is the true study for the student of man. In it, as parts of it, cultures and civilization-movements, tendencies and individual phenomena, are comprehensible. In it we know their interrelations. Only by understanding its totality can we really understand its smaller parts, those productions that have always a predecessor but never a beginning.

The fundamental error of the common anthropological method of investigating origins is that it isolates phenomena and seeks isolated specific causes for them. In reality, ethnic phenomena do not exist separately: they have their being only in a culture. Much less can the causative forces of the human mind, the activities or tendencies, be truly isolated. Every distinction of them is not only arbitrary but untrue. Both phenomena and

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ifications of its roots or their combinations into new words and inflectional forms. The improbability of such a process having ever taken place must be clear to any one who believes that never-dying, ever-changing, interrelated tendencies have unceasingly and unitedly been operative in man. The belief in roots as the sources of languages is totally unevolutionary: it is contrary to the axiom that nothing living ever comes but from what is similar and that all change is gradual development and not a process of finished creation. The weakness of the theory of roots is most palpable in the absurdity of the various explanations that are frequently given of the origin of the primary roots. It is true that there is something that may be called roots. In every language there are groups of words similar in sound and related in meaning. The ideal, non-existent centers of these groups of words can well be named roots, and they must be recognized and used in philology. But roots that once existed as such, and gave rise to languages of words in which they can still be seen,—such there never were

causes can be properly apperceived only in the degree that we know their relations to the rest of the great unity that is called life. The more this is known and understood as a whole, the more do we comprehend its parts. This, the whole of life, is the only profitable subject of study for anthropology.