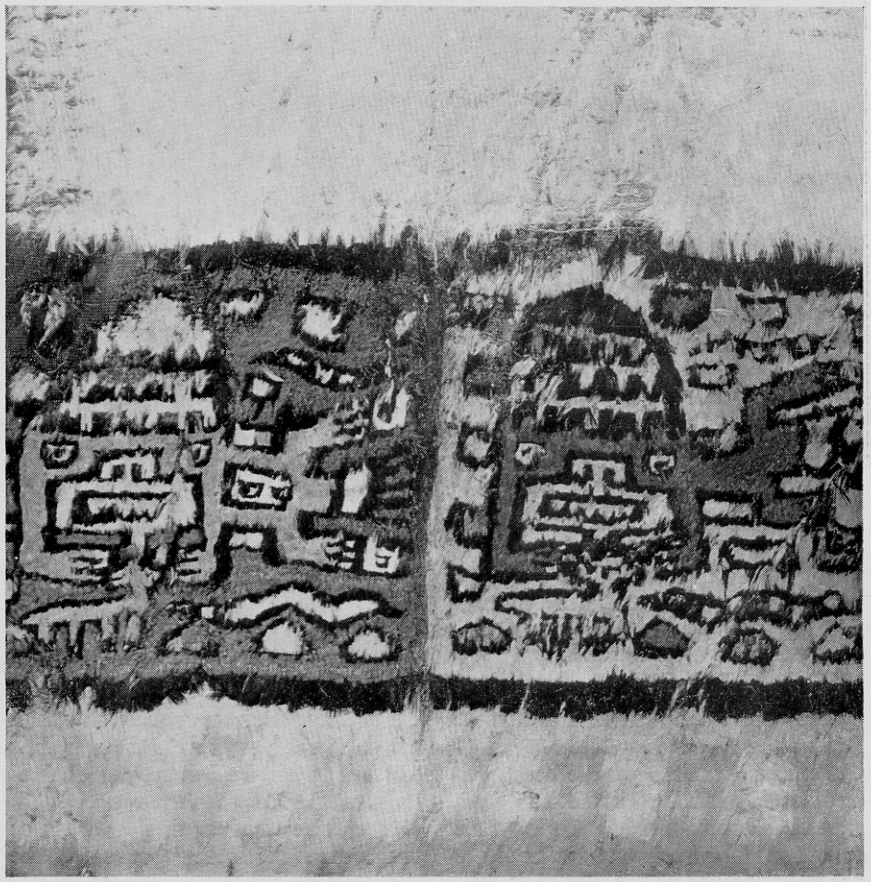
Bulletin of The Detroit Institute of Arts of the City of Detroit



FEATHERWORK SHIRT (FRAGMENT) (DETAIL)
PERUVIAN, EARLY NAZCA, ABOUT A. D. 600
PURCHASED IN 1939

Vol. XIX JANUARY, 1940 No. 4

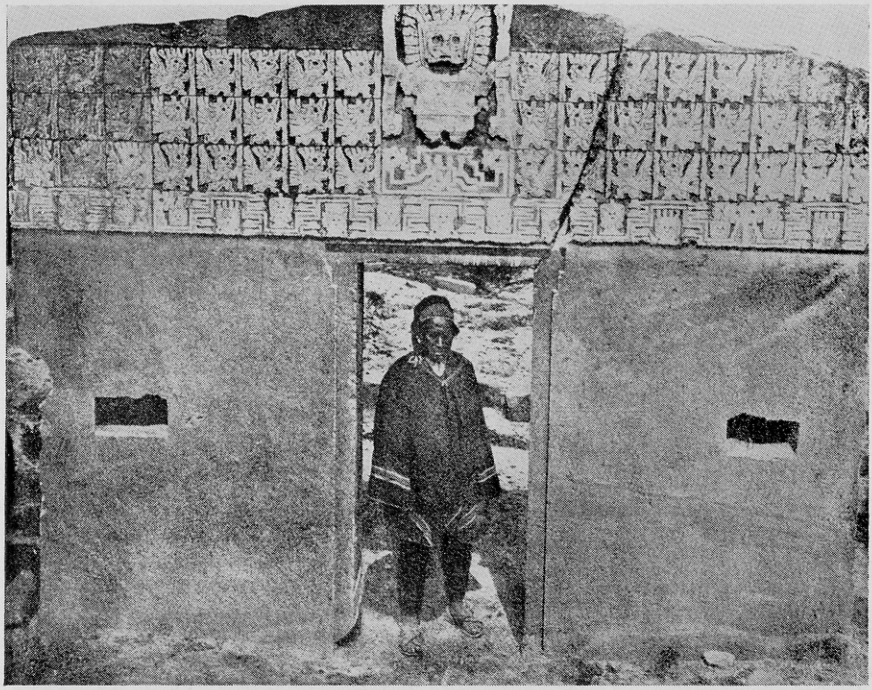


FIG. 1: MONOLITHIC GATEWAY
AT TIAHUANACO, BOLIVIA
TIAHUANACO II, A. D. 600-900

THE ELSBERG COLLECTION OF PERUVIAN TEXTILES

The Gallery of Ancient American Art has received new luster through the recent purchase of the collection of Peruvian textiles of the late Herman A. Elsberg of New York. This collection is well known to students not only because of Mr. Elsberg's generosity in permitting direct study of his treasures, but chiefly because several of the specimens have been published by Philip Ainsworth Means in his *Ancient Civilization of the Andes* (New York, 1931). In *A Study of Peruvian Textiles* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1932) Means places the Elsberg private collection on a par with the very much larger public collections of the Boston and Metropolitan Museums of Art.

The collection acquired consists of twenty-one specimens[1] covering the thousand years between approximately A. D. 400 and 1400, from Early Nazca to Late Chimu, or from the very beginning of available specimens to just before the final conquest of the coastlands by the Inca dynasty.

Concerning the general trend of historic evolution in the Andean territory which today we call Peru, but which

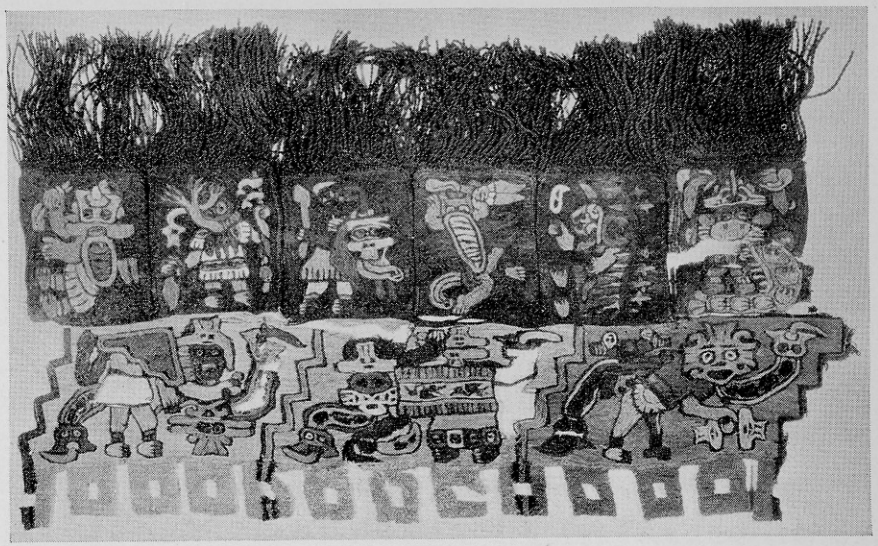


FIG. 2: EMBROIDERY (FRAGMENT)
EARLY NAZCA. A. D. 400-600
PURCHASED IN 1939

included parts of Equador in the north, of Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina in the south, we obtain information solely from two sources, folklore as recorded in the chronicles of Spanish authors during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and archaeological research. Thus we know that an archaic primitive culture of as yet unknown extent and duration was superseded, about the time when the Roman Empire was established, by a high-archaic culture which compares with that of the Middle Ages elsewhere. From the first to the sixth century of our era there flourished on the Pacific coast of South America a series of well organized states. In the north the Chimu dynasty, from their capital Chan Chan in the Moche valley, lorded it over the adjacent valleys of Chicama and Pacasmayo, while the southern shorelands were occupied by a confederation of chieftaincies centered in the Nazca and Ica valleys. These cultures and their art we call Early Chimu and Early Nazca.

In the highlands the evolution was slower. A rudimentary archaic culture, Tiahuanaco I, lingered on till through contact with the coastal cultures it gave rise, probably about A.D. 500, to a wonderful culture, Tiahuanaco II. This finest of all native American cultures evolved its own characteristic aesthetic style, preserved in the relief carvings of the famous monolithic gateway at Tiahuanaco near the southern end of Lake Titicaca (Fig. 1), and recognizable in the art of the coastal people for several hundred years. From about A. D. 500 to about A. D. 900 the entire coast appears to have been swayed by highland control.

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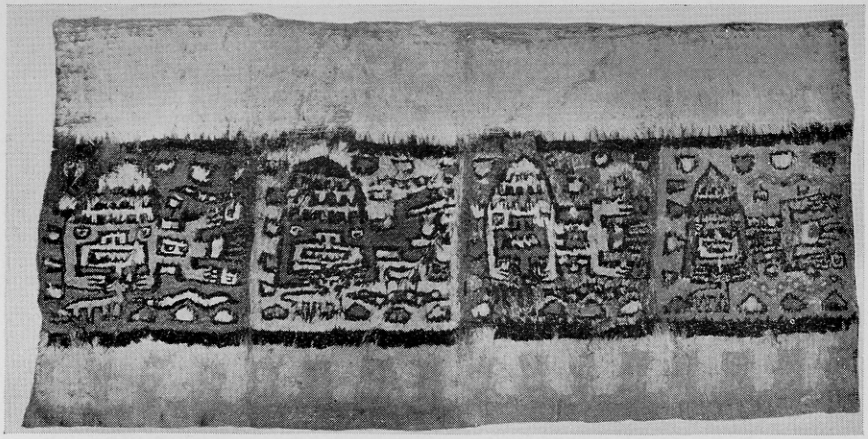


FIG. 3: FEATHERWORK SHIRT (FRAGMENT)
EARLY NAZCA ABOUT A. D. 600
PURCHASED IN 1939

For reasons unknown, though folklore hints at calamities such as hostile invasions, changes of climate, earthquakes and epidemics, in short at divine displeasure, the culture of Tiahuanaco II came to a sudden end about A. D. 900. The highland folk continued to live, for about two hundred years, in a sort of rut from which they were liberated by the Incas.

On the coast, the emancipation from Tiahuanaco control resulted in a general revival of earlier cultures and earlier arts. Again the southern chieftaincies formed a confederation which we call Late Nazca, and again in the north a dynasty arose at Chan Chan, possibly the same that had ruled hundreds of years before; we call it Late Chimu. Of the coastlands Nazca first lost its newly found independence and, conquered by the fourth Inca, Capac Yupanqui (1230-1250), became the base for further Incaic conquests along the littoral. The remaining seaboard states were conquered peaceably or by force, one by one, by the great Inca, Pachacutec (*c.* 1400-1448), who last of all, as the most brilliant jewel in his diadem, obtained the submission of the Chimu.

The ancient Peruvians were great architects. In the highlands the megalithic walls of Tiahuanaco I and the wonderful gateways of Tiahuanaco II, each carved from one immense block, preceded the sometimes curved walls of Inca temples, palaces and fortresses, with blocks cut so sharply that they fit without mortar. On the coast adobe was the chief building material, used either in the form of sun-dried bricks or like concrete. Walls of the latter type were finished with a stucco-like plaster, gaily painted or decorated in relief. The excellent clay also stimulated the potters' skill; ceramic art developed rapidly. Gold, silver, copper, and tin were worked into implements for war and peace by various technical processes such as hammering and embossing, casting and alloying. Rich color was added by inlays of turquoise, jade, and shell of many hues on metal, shell or wood; the latter was also carved for many purposes, sometimes finished with lacquer. In all these crafts the ancient

FIG. 4: BROCADE WITH TAPESTRY STRIPES (FRAGMENT)
TIAHUANACO II— LATE CHIMU, A. D. 900-1000
PURCHASED IN 1939

Peruvians were masters, but one craft they raised to its highest possible level, the textile art. Of this one may say, wihout exaggeration, that it stands unsurpassed within its limitations of material. For, of the four great textile fibers—silk and wool, linen and cotton, the Peruvians knew only wool and cotton.

The cotton was *Gossypium Peruvianum,* mostly white, sometimes brown, a color variant probably resulting from the action of boll weevils. The wool came from four animals of the camel family, indigenous to the Andean region. Of these the guanaco and llama were of slight importance as wool bearers, compared to the alpaca and vicuna. Besides wool and cotton certain other fibers were sometimes used: human hair is found, for especially glossy outlines, in woollen tapestries, or details of such textiles are woven of maguey bast, the hair of the viscacha, a species of long-tailed rabbit, the hair of the chinchilla, and even that of certain bats. At times fabrics were enriched by non-fibrous materials such as the gay plumage of birds, the glint of gold, silver, turquoise, and shell spangles. To the natural colors of wool and cotton were added dyes derived mostly from vegetable substances and made permanent by the use of mineral mordants. Animal dyes were used also, notably cochineal which gave many shades of red.

Extreme simplicity was the chief characteristic of the loom used by the weavers of old Peru, and still used by the Indian peasants, a true handloom without pedals. The warps were stretched between two bars, one of which was fastened to a wall peg or tree, the other to a belt strapped around the waist of the weaver who could increase or slacken the tension by merely leaning back or bending forward. Rudimentary heddles were simply sticks lying across the warps, with loops fastened to them and to the

FIG. 5: TAPESTRY (FRAGMENT)
BEGINNING OF LATE CHIMU, A. D. 900-1000
PURCHASED IN 1939

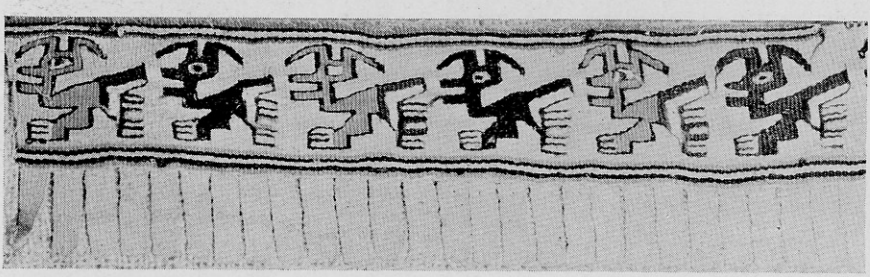
proper warp threads. By pulling the first heddlestick all the even warp threads would be raised, by pulling the second stick all the odd warps, thus forming a shed through which the wefts were passed. Often there was no heddle at all and the sheds were formed by the weaver's fingers.

We may take it for granted that, as elsewhere, plain weaves antedated the more elaborate techniques. These, especially the cotton cloths, were sometimes ornamented with patterns painted, stenciled or printed, in a variety of colors. Cloths of either cotton or wool were elaborately embroidered, generally with finest spun wool of many hues, in a variety of crewel stitches. Sometimes embroidery not merely decorates, but entirely covers the basic fabric, in a technique which needed only the omission of the wefts to become true tapestry.

To this class belongs the earliest specimen in our collection, a magnificent illustration of Early Nazca art at its height, part of a panel[2], (Fig. 2), possibly of a belt like the one worn by one of the demons pictured on it. The basic fabric of brown cotton is entirely covered with elaborate embroidery in diverse stitches, of finest vicuna wool, glossy like silk, in brilliant shades of widely contrasting colors. Yet, and this is typical of the best in Early Nazca art, the colors never clash for the artist uses a limning thread throughout, just as in his polychrome pottery he outlines the figures with a thin, contrasting line. Incredible demons stand in separate compartments, wielding war clubs. They may be connected with fertility rites for one of them holds a bulbous fruit or root, possibly a mandioca, the plant known to us for its starchy derivatives, tapioca and arrowroot, long ago one of the most important food crops of South America, and another seems to be pouring some liquid from a jug. It is beyond our imagination to give names to these strutting trolls, but three of them are somewhat anthropomorphized cat demons.

We wonder what the religion of the Early Nazca people can have been like, with a pantheon crowded with monstrous demons which luckily do not seem to have hampered their artists. For in the *pièce de résistance* of our collection we have a further illustration of this strange yet energetic art. This is the fragment of the superb featherwork shirt[3] (Fig. 3 and Cover) which Means calls "one of the two most noteworthy textiles in the whole range of ancient American art", "a super-specimen", "a truly amazing symphony of colors", "masterpieces of polychromatic harmony", "supreme example of Peruvian featherwork". Means continues: "Without question this is the

FIG. 6: TAPESTRY BORDER (FRAGMENT) (DETAIL)
BEGINNING OF LATE CHIMU, A. D. 900-1000
PURCHASED IN 1939



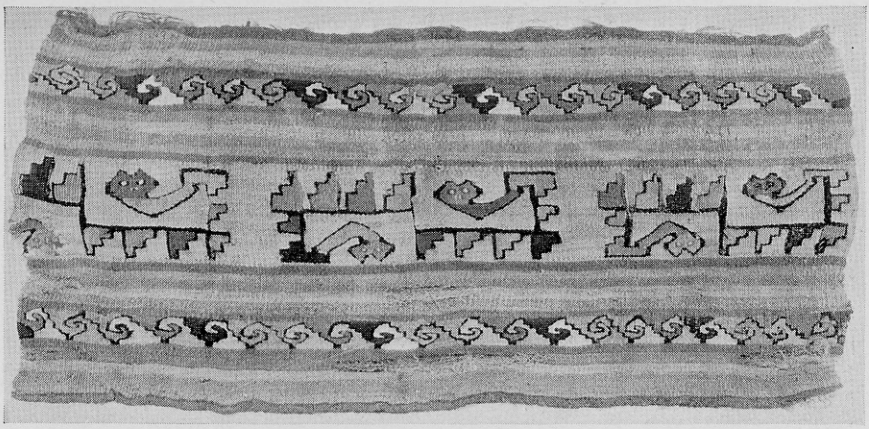


FIG. 7: TAPESTRY BAND (FRAGMENT)
TIAHUANACO II—LATE CHIMU, A. D. 900-950
PURCHASED IN 1939

finest specimen of early Peruvian featherwork known to me in any public or private collection. In North American collections—so far as I know them—it has no rivals, and even the magnificent specimens of featherwork in some of the German museums do not imperil its supremacy." No description, no reproduction can do justice to this bewilderingly beautiful fabric which looks rather like the wing of some gigantic butterfly than anything made by human hands. Four times, on panels of dark bluish purple, palest lemon yellow, bright blue, and orange, the cat demon is represented, crowned with a triple tiara, surrounded by snakes and a baby llama. Not even the legendary Shining Mantle of Roca, founder of the Inca dynasty, can have been as truly golden-hued as this shirt, with its colorful band across a yellow field and its hem line marked so delicately with a border of dentils in roseate feathers.

Featherwork remained the special glory of Peruvian textile art for more than a thousand years, to the very end of the Inca period. First the basic material, generally fine cotton cloth, was shaped to its use as tunic, mantle or headdress. A full-sized cartoon must have been provided, with the design painted in the desired colors. Feathers of many birds, from the coast and montana, were then laid on the cloth in horizontal rows. Each quill was bent and hooked over one thread; a second thread tied the feathers evenly. The first row sewed to the cloth was followed by a second, placed closely to cover the quills. The effect of the finished fabric has been well expressed by Father Bernabé Cobo who lived in Peru from 1599 to 1657: "the luster, splendor, and sheen of these fabrics of featherwork were of such rare beauty that it is impossible to make them understood, unless by showing them."

The technique of most of the fabrics of ancient Peru is that of tapestry weaving. This is perfectly suited to the belted loom without heddles because its short sheddings could be made with the fingers only, or with a short weave-dagger. The warp is generally of cotton, covered entirely by the woollen wefts which are beaten up closely with the weave-sword after

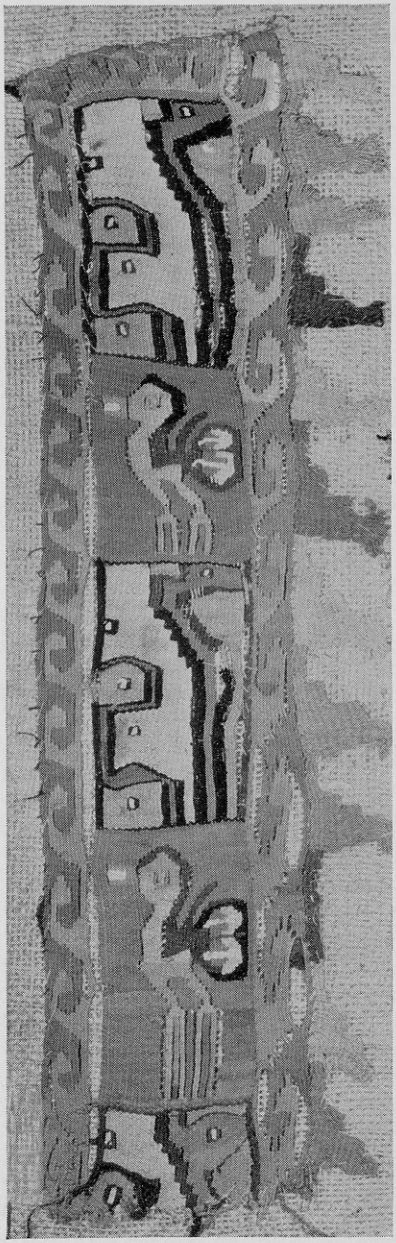


FIG. 8: TAPESTRY BORDER (FRAGMENT)
TIAHUANACO II—LATE CHIMU, A. D. 900-950
PURCHASED IN 1939

each insertion of a weft. The slits which occur whenever color areas meet vertically are either left open intentionally, as in kelims, or the two colors are interlocked, directly or with a limning thread, an extra weft.

Sometimes tapestries are brocaded, decorated with supernumerary wefts not running from selvage to selvage, a kind of embroidery on the warp. Our collection boasts two of these rather rare specimens. One of these has diagonal bands of reciprocally interlocking frets brocaded in tiny hollow squares over a band of tapestry, but its delicate effect would be lost in a black and white reproduction. The other[4] (Fig. 4) shows the unusual combination of two fundamentally different techniques on the same warp. Three horizontal bands are brocaded with extra wefts on the basic fabric of brown cotton, which is practically invisible. The narrow outer bands show rows of conventionalized human figures standing at attention. The wide center band has, on a ground of brilliant crimson, rectangular panels of palest brown, each containing a human figure conventionalized in Tiahuanaco II style, but wearing a Late Chimu head dress. The brocaded bands are separated by tapestry stripes which use the same warps, in pairs of two threads, and it is not possible to decide whether the basic wefts were pulled out, or omitted entirely.

To the same type of conventionalization, Tiahuanaco II with Late Chimu, belongs a very attractive and colorful specimen[5] (Fig. 5), woven entirely in tapestry with slits. A god with worshippers or a warrior with captives beneath his two ceremonial staffs or war clubs is depicted on a ground woven of white cotton, which is quite unusual in itself. The perfunctory rendering of hands and feet with only four digits marks Tiahuanaco II influence, but the realistic features and the huge head

dress are typically Late Chimu. Most engagingly the artist has rendered the man's shortcomings, bandy legs and arthritically swollen elbows. Also characteristic of Late Chimu is the treatment of the vertical slits, but their presence even where not needed for clarity suggests that the specimen belongs to a period when the Late Chimu weavers had just discovered the tectonic value of slits, but had not yet learned discrimination.

Whenever we speak of Tiahuanaco II influence, we look to the great carved frieze of the monolithic gateway at Tiahuanaco, already mentioned (Fig. 1). The central figure, the creator-god Viracocha, is adored by a multitude of worshippers, men with mantles bellying like wings and creatures which are either anthropomorphized birds or men masked as birds. Figures of a similar nondescript type are found on the border of a garment[6] (Fig. 6), but in this textile they are combined with a triangle running up at the seam, filled with conventional fishes. Remarkable is the fringe of tapestry tabs, worked on the warp of the fabric. The combination of birds and fishes as well as the cheerful color scheme and the combination of limning and slits point to a coastal weaver at a time when the Chimu people were recapturing their own type of art, but had not yet thrown off the last vestiges of the highland art of Tiahuanaco.

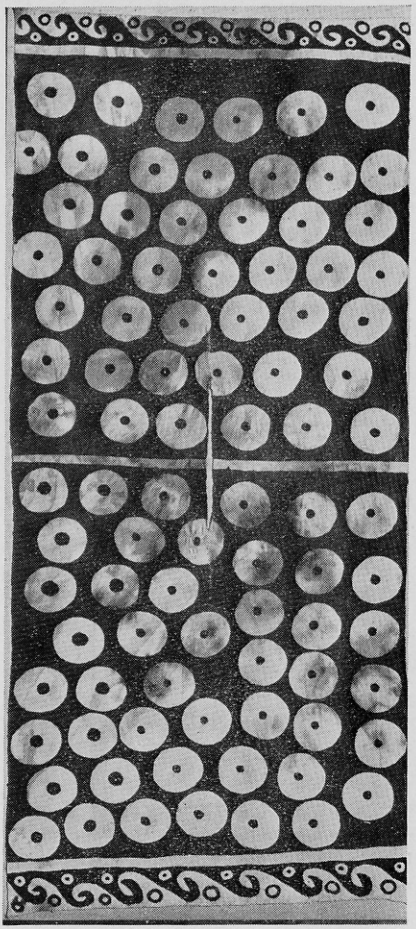


FIG. 9: PAINTED COTTON CLOTH SHIRT
EARLY CHIMU, BEFORE A. D. 500
PURCHASED IN 1939

The collection is rich in specimens of this most interesting type. We select two for their unusual design. One is a horizontal band, part of a belt or border[7] (Fig. 7). The design is arranged in three figured bands, separated and edged by rows of narrow plain stripes. The outer bands have reciprocally interlocked stepped frets with a black limning outline; the center band contains highly stylized animals of the cat family, each combined of two, with heads turned backwards. The bodies are practically omitted, the legs emphasized into stepped triangles of contrasting colors. There are no slits, all vertical lines are marked sharply by a black interlocking thread. All in all, the design illustrates well the last inchoate phase of Tiahuanaco II style, yet the choice of colors forces us to assign the fabric to a coastal weaver.

More evenly divided as to highland

and coastal contributions is the vertical band[8] (Fig. 8) on which are alternating rectangular panels containing long-legged birds facing left and llama heads facing right, bordered by reciprocally interlocked frets. The birds are fairly realistic, but the llama heads, with exaggerated long necks and packs impossibly high above their backs, are highly conventionalized. The over-long slits interfere with the solidity of the fabric which must belong to a period when kelim weaving was as yet in the experimental stage.

Lastly we picture a magnificent specimen, a complete shirt of heavy, somewhat irregularly woven, painted cotton cloth[9] (Fig. 9). The decoration, simple yet elegant, consists of irregularly distributed open-centered disks, spared out from the all-over painting in dark brown pigment. The hem is adorned with an interlocked fret on which smaller disks appear in reverse; the shoulders are outlined with plain stripes. We agree with Means that "it is difficult to date a specimen so indeterminate in design as this" and we know all too well that there exists no single textile specimen that can be positively identified as belonging to Early Chimu, yet, basing our conviction on the representation of similarly decorated garments on many pottery figurines[10], we venture to disagree with Means and, tentatively, give the specimen to Early Chimu (Before A. D. 500).

Several specimens belong to the last creative period in Peruvian textile art, the Late Chimu. There are panels with straight rows of birds or fishes, as well as a complete survey of the type of pattern so characteristic of the period, diagonally interlocked frets, birds or fishes. The colors, clear and gay, help us to reconstruct in our mind's eye the painted stucco walls of Chan Chan, where we find similar patterns on a much larger scale.

Mr. Elsberg was ever interested in our textile department from its inception in 1927 to the time of his death, and repeatedly contributed to its growth with gifts from his own collections. Mr. Elsberg was that rarest of combinations, a scholar of international renown, a collector of unerring taste in many fields of textile art, and a designer and weaver himself. Three fabrics of his own design are in our collection and we are happy to add to these his own beautiful collection of Peruvian textiles. *Ave atque vale.*

ADELE COULIN WEIBEL

1 Accession Numbers: 39.636-656. The collection includes one embroidery, one featherwork, one painted cloth, two brocades, sixteen tapestries. For other Peruvian textiles in the Museum collection, see *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts,* Vols. VIII (1926-27), pp. 67-72; XIII (1931-32), 99-100, 102, XVI (1936-37), 13-14, with numerous illustrations.

2 Accession Number: 39.636. Height: *c.* 7 inches; Width: 12 inches. P. A. Means, *Ancient Civilizations of the Andes,* New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931, p. 518, fig. 209.

3 Accession Number: 39.637. Height: 18 inches; Width: 36 inches. Means, *op. cit.,* pp. 105 and 510; frontispiece in color.

4 Accession Number: 39.639. Height: 14¾ inches; Width: 12 inches. Means, *op. cit.,* p. 517, fig. 208.

5 Accession Number: 39.647. Height: 8¼ inches; Width: 5½ inches. Means, *op. cit.,* p. 498, fig. 185.

6 Accession Number: 39.646. Height (maximum): 13 inches; Width: 21½ inches. Means, *op. cit.,* p. 497, fig. 183.

7 Accession Number: 39.644. Height: 7 inches; Width: 15 inches.

8 Accession Number: 39.643. Height: 20½ inches; Width: 6 inches. Means, *op. cit.,* p. 496, fig. 181.

9 Accession Number: 39.638. Height: 68 inches; Width: 36 inches. Means, *op. cit.,* p. 506, fig. 194.

10 Such as the one in the Collection Bolivar-Plock, illustrated in Max Schmidt, *Kunst und Kultur von Peru,* Berlin, Propylaeen-Verlag, 1929, pl. 146, fig. 4.

MUSEUM NOTES

The New Year was inaugurated by the rehanging of several galleries in the Museum. These rearrangements have permitted a new grouping and presentation of works of art in the later European and American schools. The two large galleries flanking the main entrance of the Museum present the most significant changes. In one gallery, that adjoining the other galleries of the European schools, have been grouped the paintings of the Baroque period of the seventeenth century in Italy, Spain, France, and Flanders. The individual lighting of the pictures in an otherwise darkened room and the large size of the gallery, suited to the scale of Baroque art, make this new presentation particularly impressive and satisfactory. In the other large gallery, formerly devoted only to American paintings of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, are now hung the colorful Impressionists and Post-Impressionists of Europe and the related works of the American school, thus destroying the artificial boundaries which would separate American art from its European tradition and replacing them by the more suitable relationship of style. These changes have permitted or necessitated the rehanging of other galleries. The late fifteenth and early sixteenth century artists of North Italy outside of Venice are now shown to advantage in one gallery. In another, a sympathetic setting has been given to Bruegel and related artists of Flanders and Holland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Visitors to the Museum will enjoy seeing familiar masterpieces in these new and better locations.

* * *

During the special exhibition of the etchings of Rembrandt, generously lent by Mr. Lessing J. Rosenwald of Philadelphia, from February 4 through March 3, Isabel Weadock, Curator of Prints, will present gallery talks on Thursday evenings, February 8, 15, 22, and 29, at 8:30, and an illustrated lecture, *Rembrandt as a Graphic Artist,* on Tuesday evening, February 13, at 8:30, in the lecture hall of the Museum. Admission to the exhibition and these special events is free.

* * *

A *Calendar of Events* giving advance information on the exhibitions, lectures, gallery talks, and other activities of the Detroit Institute of Arts may be obtained at the Museum or will be mailed on request.

CALENDAR FOR JANUARY

EXHIBITIONS

Dec. 15 through Jan. 28: Annual Exhibition for Michigan Artists.

Jan. 5 through Feb. 10: Early Italian Prints.

Feb. 1 through Mar. 3: The Etchings of Rembrandt from the Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection.

Feb. 15 through Mar. 31: Recent Print Accessions: Gifts and Purchases.

Alger House, Jan. 6 through Feb. 11: Loan Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by Augustus John.

Alger House, Feb. 16 through Mar. 31: Paintings by Horatio Shaw, Michigan pupil of Thomas Eakins.

TUESDAY EVENING LECTURES

Given by the museum staff in coöperation with the Archaeological Society of Detroit and the Detroit Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, Tuesday evenings at 8:30 in the lecture hall of the Art Institute.

Jan. 9: *Mediaeval Italian Painting,* by Francis W. Robinson.
Jan. 16: *American Mural Painting Today,* by John D. Morse.
Jan. 23: *Architecture and the City Plan,* by William E. Kapp.
Jan. 30: *The Art and Archaeology of Peru,* by Wendell Bennett, University of Wisconsin.
Feb. 6: *Bernini and the Roman Baroque,* by Timon H. Fokker, Netherlands Institute of Art History, Rome.
Feb. 13: *Rembrandt as a Graphic Artist,* by Isabel Weadock.

GALLERY TALKS BY THE CURATORS

In January, Friday afternoons at 3:00 in the galleries, where chairs are provided. In February, Thursday afternoons at 3:00.

Jan. 5: *The Painting and Pottery of the Near East,* by Adèle Coulin Weibel.
Jan. 12: *The Venetian Renaissance,* by Perry T. Rathbone.
Jan. 19: *The Making of Prints I: Woodcuts,* by Isabel Weadock.
Jan. 26: *The Rubens Gallery,* by E. P. Richardson.
Feb. 1: *Mediaeval Italian Painting,* by Francis W. Robinson.
Feb. 8: *The New Collection of Peruvian Textiles,* by Adèle Coulin Weibel.

GREAT PERIODS OF ART

A series of lectures on the history of art as represented in the collections, given in the galleries by the museum instructors during January on Friday evenings at 8:00, and Saturday and Sunday afternoons at 2:30; during February on Friday evenings at 8:00 and Saturday afternoons at 2:30. Chairs are provided.

Jan. 5, 6, and 7: *The Art of the Gothic Cathedrals.*
Jan. 12, 13, and 14: *The First Oil Paintings.*
Jan. 19, 20, and 21: *The Florence of Leonardo da Vinci.*
Jan. 26, 27, and 28: *Raphael and His Contemporaries.*
Feb. 2 and 3: *Titian and the High Renaissance.*
Feb. 9 and 10: *The Baroque Style in Europe.*

AN APPROACH TO ART

A new series of popular illustrated lectures by the museum instructors serving as an introduction to the arts, given in the lecture hall of the Museum on Sunday afternoons at 2:30.

Feb. 4: *What to Look For in Painting,* by John D. Morse.
Feb. 11: *What to Look For in Sculpture,* by John D. Morse.

GUIDANCE AT ALGER HOUSE

The Curator of Alger House, Perry T. Rathbone, will conduct groups of visitors, without charge, through the collections of Alger House during regular hours of admission, provided an appointment has been arranged in advance by letter or by telephoning TUxedo 2-3888.

HOURS OF ADMISSION

The Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Avenue at Kirby, is open free daily except Mondays and Christmas Day. Visiting hours are: Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, 1 to 5 and 7 to 10; Wednesday, 1 to 5; Saturday, 9 to 5; Sunday, 2 to 6. The Russell A. Alger House, 32 Lake Shore Road, Grosse Pointe, is open free daily except Mondays from 1 to 5. Telephones: Detroit Institute of Arts, COlumbia 0360; Alger House, TUxedo 2-3888; World Adventure Series, TEmple 2-7676.