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LABYRINTH RITUAL IN SOUTH INDIA: THRESHOLD AND TATTOO DESIGNS

BY JOHN LAYARD

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Introduction

Theoretical approach and recapitulation of Malekulan evidence

This article is the second in a series, of which the first, read before this society on the 18th of March, 1936, was called "Maze-Dances and the Ritual of the Labyrinth in Malekula." [1]

Students of social anthropology are, in this country and in America, so busily engaged in demonstrating the "functional" unity of any given culture that they are apt to ignore the processes by which its component elements came in the first place to be associated together. Thus, the structure is studied without reference to the materials out of which it is built. These materials are the stuff from which world history is made, as opposed to the parochial history of momentarily isolated peoples. Every culture is forged from many such elements, often fortuitously come together, and represents in each case an effort towards new synthesis.

One of the most powerful agents in the diffusion of early culture was the so-called megalithic civilization which spread by maritime routes over large portions of the world, forming the foundation of innumerable civilizations, afterwards overlaid and largely obscured by later influences. In this series of articles one hitherto unrecognized aspect of this archaic culture is being examined. This is the spread, as part of the complex of beliefs and practices accompanying the diffusion of megalithic civilization, of a body of mythology and ritual centering round an early conception of the labyrinth as an important accessory to the attainment of future life, and consequently of success in this world.

The origin of this enquiry lay in the complete impossibility of interpreting from local evidence alone certain art

[1] John Layard, "Maze Dances and the Ritual of the Labyrinth in Malekula," *Folk-Lore*, Vol. XLVII, June, 1936.

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forms and dance motives found in the highly developed megalithic culture existing in the Melanesian island of Malekula. Quite meaningless apart from their artistic and social aspects, in their existing setting, their true function became apparent only with the frank recognition that these practices were derived from an intensely meaningful ritual forming part of an early megalithic stratum having its origin in the mortuary practices of the ancient civilizations of the Near East, and in particular of Egypt.

In Egypt, as shown by Mrs. Deedes,[2] the labyrinth originated in the baffling defences of the royal tomb, within which rites were performed conferring the power to attain life after death, and, at a later stage, when the temple-tomb had become also the residence of the living king-god, as the equally baffling entrance to the royal palace, where the rebirth motive became associated with the royal nuptials.

In other words, the object of the labyrinth was in the first place to exclude the uninitiated from participation in the life after death, and in the second to exclude non-fertile or unlucky influences from the royal nuptials.

In Malekula, these one-time royal rites have become democratized to include the whole male population. Here, the mortuary labyrinth has been reduced to a geometric design drawn in the sand by a female Guardian Ghost. As the ghost of the dead man approaches (for men only can attain future life) she rubs out half the design. The dead man must complete the design and *walk over* it before entering the land of the dead.[3]

Similar designs are now made by the natives as games of skill. For details of the accompanying mythology, and of the morphology of the designs themselves, the reader is referred

[2] C. N. Deedes, *The Labyrinth*, edited by S. H. Hooke, London, 1935.

[3] A. Bernard Deacon, "Geometrical Drawings from Malekula and other islands of the New Hebrides," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. lxiv (Jan.-June 1934), p. 30.

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to my above-mentioned article. It is sufficient here to point out that there are two types of design which must be known :

Class A, consisting of a single continuous line, having a definite beginning and end, crossing and re-crossing itself on a previously drawn framework made of straight lines set at right-angles to one another. The framework represents the structure of the labyrinth and the continuous line the path traced by the initiate through it.

Class B, consisting of a single never-ending line enclosing a space, based on a framework of small circles or dots. The dots represent the eyes, nostrils and breasts of the Guardian Ghost and the never-ending line the outline of her body.

The two types, quite clearly distinguished in ritual, have, as art forms, become merged, producing a specialized technique, of which the essential elements are :

(i) the framework of lines set at right-angles to another, or of dots, or of both these combined, and

(ii) the continuous never-ending line which, once started, must not be discontinued till the whole of the often highly complicated design is finished.

South India

Sources. Threshold designs and tattoo patterns

If it is true that this specialized technique is in fact part of the culture-complex carried by a megalithic migration coming from the Near East *via* the Indian Ocean, it is not surprising to find similar designs turning up among the Dravidian populations of South India.

Hearing from Dr. A. C. Haddon of my work on the continuous-line designs of Malekula, Mr. F. J. Richards wrote telling me of designs from this South Indian area constructed on the same continuous-line principle, and inviting me to come and see examples which he had in his possession.

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These he has now kindly placed at my disposal for the writing of this article.

The material he showed me, which forms the basis of this article, consists of :

(*a*) Two books, printed in Madras,[4] for use by Hindus, of designs drawn in front of the thresholds of their houses by Hindu women in the Tamil country during the harvest month of Margali, or Mrigasira (mid-December to mid-January), and

(*b*) Two sample books of hand-drawn patterns of tattoo designs used in the course of business by tattooers belonging to the vagrant Korava community who ply their trade in the peninsula.

Since many of the tattoo patterns are identical with the threshold designs, I propose to deal with these two series as belonging to one and the same tradition, though I shall be careful to point out in each case to which series any given design belongs. In the matter of tattoo designs, I am further indebted to Professor T. C. Hodson for lending me his copy of the Mysore Census for 1901 [5] containing an article on tattoo designs, some of which I shall also reproduce.

Arguments based on design alone are apt to lead one into stray channels and to almost any conclusion. In my previous article on the Malekulan material, the conclusions drawn were the result of a combined study of the designs themselves, the technique by which they are accomplished, the associated ritual practices (including dances), and, above all, their mythological background. In dealing with the Indian material, I propose to follow the same course, beginning with the setting in which the designs are made and

[4] I refer to these as books A and B respectively. Book A is published by Rangasami Mudaliya and Sons, Madras, 1923. Book B bears no publisher's name.

[5] *Census of India*, 1901, vol. xxiv, Mysore, Part I, by T. Ananda Row, Bangalore, 1903.

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the technique with which they are accomplished, then making a typological study of the designs themselves, comparing them with some of the Malekulan designs, and, finally, making a brief analysis of the mythology connected with them.[6]

Threshold Designs

Since, of the two series, it is of the threshold designs that we possess most information, I propose to concentrate chiefly on these.

These designs,[7] the making of which is confined, according to my friend Mr. L. A. Cammiade, formerly of the Madras Provincial Service, to the south-eastern part of Peninsular India, that is to say the Tamil country, belong to a special class called *kolam*, a term also applied to

[6] Owing to considerations of space, the section dealing with mythology is being held over for publication at a future date. This will also include a brief reference to the associated dances.

[7] According to information kindly given by Mr. K. de B. Codrington, of the India Museum, applied house designs in India (we are not here dealing with the paintings) are of two distinct types, each with its own area of distribution :

(*a*) *Wall designs*. These are confined to Northern India, and are especially associated with the Chamar leather-working caste, who are centred upon the United Provinces, but do not intrude into the Maratha country. They are made by plastering cow-dung, normally used for flooring, on the walls. [According to information kindly given by Mrs. Frieda Hauswirth Das, whitewash and red ochre are also used.] They are associated with the all-India festival of *Dasara* which takes place in August, and the designs themselves usually represent thrones and canopied seats. These are of a type quite distinct from the threshold designs of South India, both in the materials and the technique employed and in the subjects represented.

(*b*) The *Threshold designs* of South India, about to be described.

There is also a third type, introduced in recent years from the North-west (Rajputana) and now overlapping both areas. In this type free-hand design is abandoned altogether, and tin or brass stencils are used instead. The subjects are iconographical, and are yet further removed from the threshold designs of South India than are the wall designs in the North.

Only the threshold designs are dealt with in this paper.

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certain patterns or paintings formerly depicted on the exterior walls of houses, line patterns traced on the body, and a kind of " wavy " pattern found on mortuary pottery. No examples of these last three are available. We can thus turn our attention exclusively to the threshold designs.

Ritual Setting

These, as already stated, are drawn by women only in the unlucky Tamil month of Margali, lasting from mid-December to mid-January. This is the month in which the sun, having reached the winter solstice, is said to die. It ends with " the most solemn of all feasts, at any rate in the south of India," called *Pongal*, when the sun is said to be reborn. According to Abbé Dubois " this feast is the occasion of great rejoicing; and the Hindus have two great reasons for regarding it with joy. One is because the month preceding *Pongal*, which is entirely made up of unlucky days, has just passed; the other is because the month which follows it must invariably consist of lucky days." [8]

Pundit S. M. Natesa Sastri describes Margali as " a most unhealthy month. It is the month in which all kinds of epidemics—cholera, fever, and smallpox—are supposed to occur. Accordingly, the last day of this Tamil month is observed as a feast day by the Hindus in South India in thankfulness to the higher powers that the worst month has ended." [9]

Abbé Dubois continues : " During the inauspicious month which preceded the *Pongal*, *sannyasis*, or mendicants, go from door to door about four o'clock in the morning, waking all sleepers by beating their gongs, warning them to be on their guard and to take every precaution against the evil

[8] Abbé J. A. Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, translated by H. K. Beauchamp, Oxford, 1899, p. 579.

[9] Pundit S. M. Natesa Sastri, *Hindu Feasts, Fasts and Ceremonies*, Madras, 1903, p. 18.

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influences of this unlucky period, by appeasing, by means of prayers and sacrifices, the god Siva, who presides over it. With this purpose in view, the women of the house every morning prepare a small patch about a yard square outside the door, smearing it with cow-dung, and tracing several lines upon it with rice-flour. They then place within this square several pellets of cow-dung, each adorned with a pumpkin flower. I believe these pellets are supposed to represent Vigneshwara, the god of obstacles, whom they seek to appease by offering him a bouquet." [10]

Continuous-line Technique

To this, Mr. L. A. Cammiade adds the following information: The threshold, or the road in front of the house, is first swept and sprinkled with water. The pattern is then drawn on the clean, damp surface. The materials used are slaked lime or old mortar ground to a fine powder—in fact any white material that will easily run between the fingers.[11] The lines forming the design are made by holding the material between the fingers and, by a slight movement of them, letting it fall out in a continuous line as the hand is moved in the desired directions. "I was", he tells me, "once shown how to make lines, and attempted to follow directions. I could not make a line of more than a few inches at a time and I was told that would not do, 'the line must run.'" He adds:

(1) They are drawn before sunrise.

(2) The threshold seems to be the only place where they are drawn.

[10] Abbé J. A. Dubois, *op. cit.*, pp. 579, 580.

[11] For lines drawn on the body, sandal paste is the usual medium. Thurston also mentions flour but Mr. Cammiade does not know in what part of the country this is used. H. Gnana Durai includes "flour or ground quartz, which they take between the thumb and first finger," in an article in *Man*, vol. xxix, No. 5, May, 1929, 60, in which he illustrates examples of designs from the Madras Presidency.

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(3) No attempt is made to preserve the patterns. They are trodden upon almost immediately after they have been made and are soon obliterated; the first man to tread on them being the husband.

(4) The lines are always in white.

(5) The lines may twist about indefinitely but have no angularities and no branching of any kind.

(6) The number of lines is always very limited. The ideal design is composed of a single continuous line.

(7) No additions are made to the designs except deciduous male pumpkin flowers. The flowers are supported at times by small lumps of cow-dung. The pumpkin flower is in the form of a five-pointed star, is symbolical of sacrifice, and is used for averting the evil eye.

Similarity both of Intent and of Technique with the Sand-tracings of Malekula

From the above brief introduction, and without yet even examining the figures, it is clear that we have here a series of designs which, both in essential form and in the ideas and practices connected with them, show certain marked similarities with the Malekulan designs, namely:

(*a*) They are formed of continuous lines which "twist about indefinitely" without branching of any kind, the ideal being that of a single continuous line.

(*b*) Just as the two important figures in the Malekulan series, including that called "The Path," are drawn at the entrance to the land of the dead, and must be passed through (or over) by the ghost before attaining his new home, so, in the Tamil country, these designs are drawn on the threshold of houses, and, though often complicated, are "trodden upon almost immediately after they have been made"—in fact, must be so trodden on by any person entering the house.

(*c*) Their close connexion with death is shown (1) by their use on mortuary pottery, (2) by the calamitous nature

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of the month in which they are drawn, and (3) by the fact that this month is that of the dying year and is followed by the joyful celebration of the winter solstice, when the sun enters into the sign of Capricorn and is so " reborn."

(*d*) Just as, in Malekula, the designs are drawn by a female Guardian Ghost for the benefit of men (women not being admitted to this land of the dead), so, in the Tamil country, they are drawn by women, and the first person to pass over them is usually the husband.

Comparison of South Indian and Malekulan Designs, the latter preserving the earlier Forms

I will return later to the ritual and mythological data contained in the above quotations, and propose now, as in the case of the Malekulan figures, to proceed immediately to a typological examination of the designs themselves.

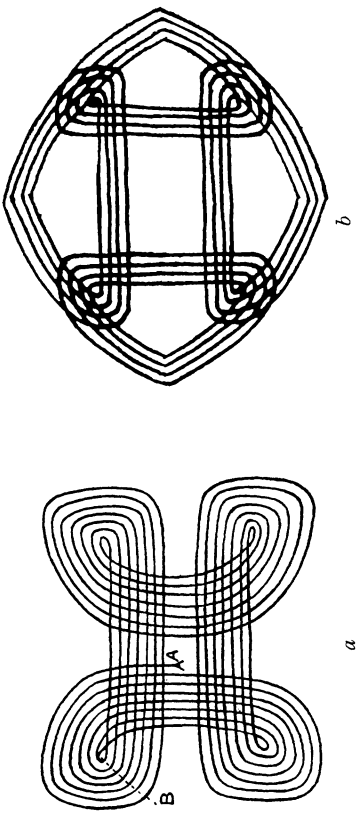
In the first place I propose to call attention to the close similarity between some of the Indian designs and some of those belonging to the Malekulan series. Fig. 1*a*, from the island of Oba, north-east of Malekula, is a technologically degraded but artistically advanced example of the parallel-linear type of maze-design which I have called Class A1.[12] In this figure the continuous line starts at the point marked *A* and ends at *B*. Compare this with the Indian tattoo-design, Fig. 1*b*, in which the same figure has become yet further technologically degraded in that it is here constructed of four sets of three triangles set one within the other.

Another close parallel is between the Malekulan design, Fig. 2*a*, and the South Indian threshold design, Fig. 2*b*. Fig. 2*a* is a degraded example of Malekulan Class A2, that of a curvilinear continuous line meandering on a linear framework, fused with the parallel-linear motive of Class A1. In this Malekulan figure it will be noticed that the lines are not drawn double, but that each side of the doubled

[12] John Layard, *op. cit.*, Figs. 2*a*, 2*b* and 3.

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line is in fact a convolution in itself, the whole figure being constructed of a single continuous line made to follow a path parallel to itself. The corresponding South Indian design imitates this in form, but is in fact constructed of three separate sets of doubled lines, and the linear framework has completely disappeared.



a *b*

FIG. 1.

SOUTH INDIA AND MALEKULA.

a, Sand-tracing from the New Hebrides island of Oba, north-east of Malekula (Deacon, Fig. 75). Formed of a single continuous line starting at **A** and ending at **B**. (Though **A** appears to be *inside* the figure, it is *outside* the scrolls, thus conforming with the principle of maze-figures that the continuous line starts outside the figure and ends inside.)

b, Tattoo pattern from South India, called "Gowri's Pedestal" (*Mysore Census*, Pl. 27). Consists of four overlapping sets of four concentric triangles.

These are but a few examples out of many, but are enough to show the close connexion between the Malekulan and South Indian designs, and, most important for the proper

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understanding of the problem, showing that of the two sets of designs the Malekulan figures are the more primitive in

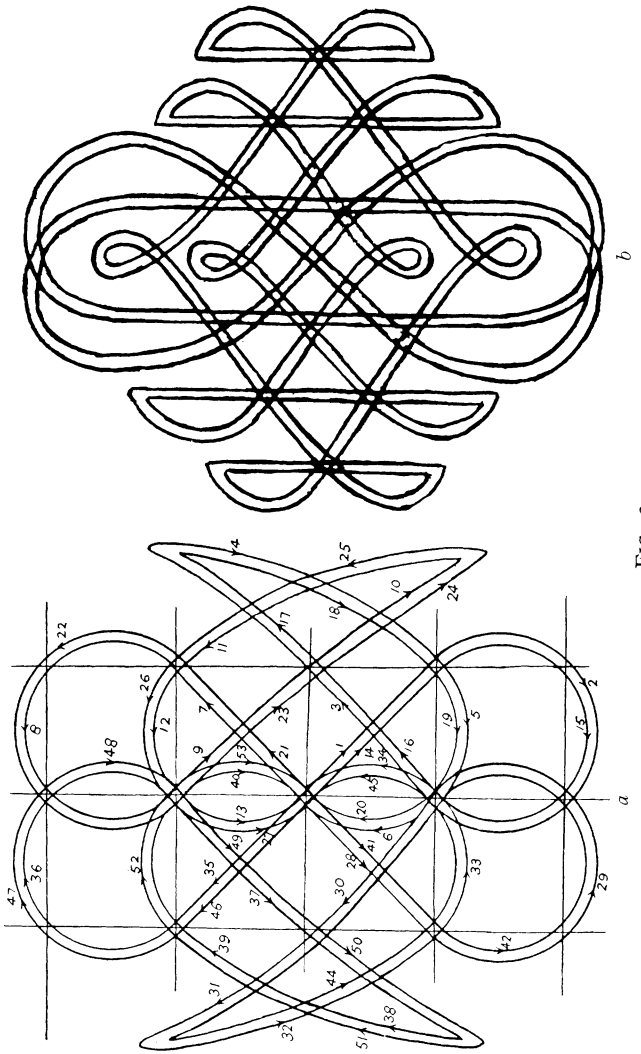


FIG. 2.

SOUTH INDIA AND MALEKULA.

a, Sand-tracing from Malekula (Deacon, Fig. 86). Single continuous line constructed in such a way as to double itself, on a linear framework. FUSED CLASS A 1, A 2.

b, Threshold design from South India, called *pavitram*, "ring" (*Kolam*, Book B, p. 14). Composed of three superimposed sets of doubled lines.

that they retain closer resemblance to the original labyrinth motive. In contrast to these, the South Indian designs have

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almost entirely lost their labyrinthine character, a technologically degraded form of which has, owing to lapse of time and other factors, come to be used as a medium for a new form of art.

The two parallels I have so far given are typical figures neither in South India nor in the Malekulan area. The great majority of South Indian threshold designs have as their basis what at first sight would appear to be a very simple motive, but one which, if we examine the Malekulan evidence, is heir to a long line of evolution. In my article on the Labyrinth in Malekula I pointed out that there were many further developments of the continuous-line motive which there was no space there to consider.[13]

It will be remembered how, when showing the evolution of designs leading up to the important Malekulan figure called " The Path," I described a special feature occurring first in Fig. 8 of the Malekulan article, " in which the continuous line, as well as sweeping from one corner of the figure to another, has, in the interior of the figure, become straightened so as to form a series of diagonals."[14] This figure leads on in one direction directly to " The Path." In another direction, however, the exterior line is omitted, resulting in the Malekulan Fig. 3*a* of the present article, constructed out of a single never-ending line based on a rectangular linear framework.

This figure, though belonging in essentials to Class A (in which the linear framework represents the structure of the labyrinth and the continuous line the track traced by the initiate through it), has been influenced by Class B representing the Guardian Ghost in that the continuous line joins up with itself and becomes thus a never-ending line. In

[13] The whole series will be graphically demonstrated in my forthcoming book, *Stone Men of Malekula*, vol. i, " Vao," to be published by Messrs. Chatto and Windus.

[14] John Layard, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

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a *b* *c*

FIG. 3.
SAND-TRACINGS FROM MALEKULA.

a, Layard, unpublished, from the islet of Atchin.
Single never-ending line on linear framework.
FUSED CLASS AB.

b, Deacon, Fig. 89 (reduced).
Single never-ending line on framework of small circles.
FUSED CLASS AB.

c, Deacon, Fig. 63 (reduced).
Called "Mouth (i.e. door) of the Lodge."
Single never-ending line on linear framework.
FUSED CLASS AB.

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Fig. 3*b* a yet further stage of fusion between the two classes has occurred in that the linear framework has been dropped altogether and its place taken by the framework consisting of small circles which represent the eyes, the nostrils, and other physical features of the Guardian Ghost herself. This figure is thus made up of a single never-ending line on a framework of dots.

It is this phase of Malekulan development which forms the basis of the great majority of South Indian threshold and tattoo designs. Before examining the more important of these I will bring before the reader one more striking parallel between the two areas. An obvious development from the Malekulan Fig. 3*a* is Fig. 3*c*, manipulated so as to represent the door of a lodge. Compare this, and Fig. 3*b* based on a framework of dots, with the South Indian threshold design, Fig. 4*a*, similarly manipulated, in the dotted framework technique of Malekulan Fig. 3*b*, to represent a " sofa," with the modern addition, still in the same technique, of " legs."

This figure is not, however, made out of a single line. An analysis of it, seen in Figs. 4*b*, 4*c*, 4*d* and 4*e*, shows that it is in fact made up of three main never-ending lines, of which Fig. 3*c* (without the " legs ") acts as a new kind of framework formed of a single never-ending line crossing itself diagonally. This feature, characteristic of all the simpler South Indian designs, I will refer to as the " diagonal framework " replacing, through the evolutionary process we have just seen, the rectangular framework of Malekula. On this, two further never-ending lines have been superimposed, corresponding to the never-ending lines of the fused Malekulan designs, while, to indicate upholstery, exterior lines have been added in a manner similar to the exterior lines which, as described in my article on the Labyrinth in Malekula,[15] formed one of the turning points in the degrada-

[15] John Layard, *op. cit.*, pp. 139, 140 and Figs. 7 and 8.

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tion of the Malekulan maze-figures into purely artistic creations.

I have taken this modern example on account of its striking nature as illustrating a process much older than

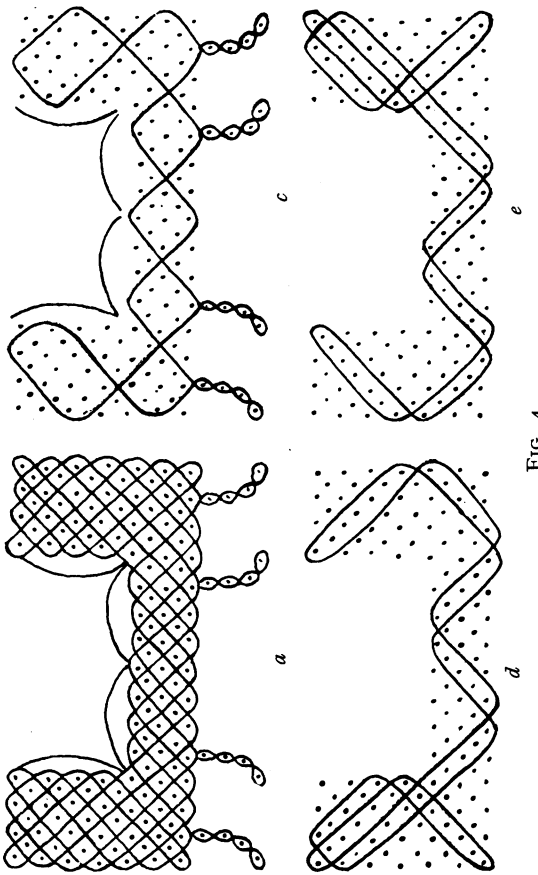


FIG. 4.

THRESHOLD DESIGN FROM SOUTH INDIA.

a, *Kolam*, Book A, No. 27. "Sofa."

b, *c*, *d* and *e* represent an analysis of this design, which is seen to be built up out of four separate lines on a framework of dots similar to the Malekulan Fig. 3*b* and manipulated in a manner similar to Malekulan Fig. 3*c*. The diagonal linear framework, with the addition of "legs," persists in *c*; *d* and *e* are two separate never-ending lines completing the main design, and *b* corresponds to the "exterior" lines of the Malekulan designs.

this very recent application. For the same holds true as a fundamental principle in the creation of the great majority of South Indian threshold and tattoo designs.

We have just seen the process by which Malekulan designs belonging in essentials to Class A (the labyrinthine

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path) have, under the influence of Class B (the outline of the Guardian Ghost), produced a simple degraded design corresponding precisely to the South Indian basic type. I will now show, in a short series, the converse process by which Male-

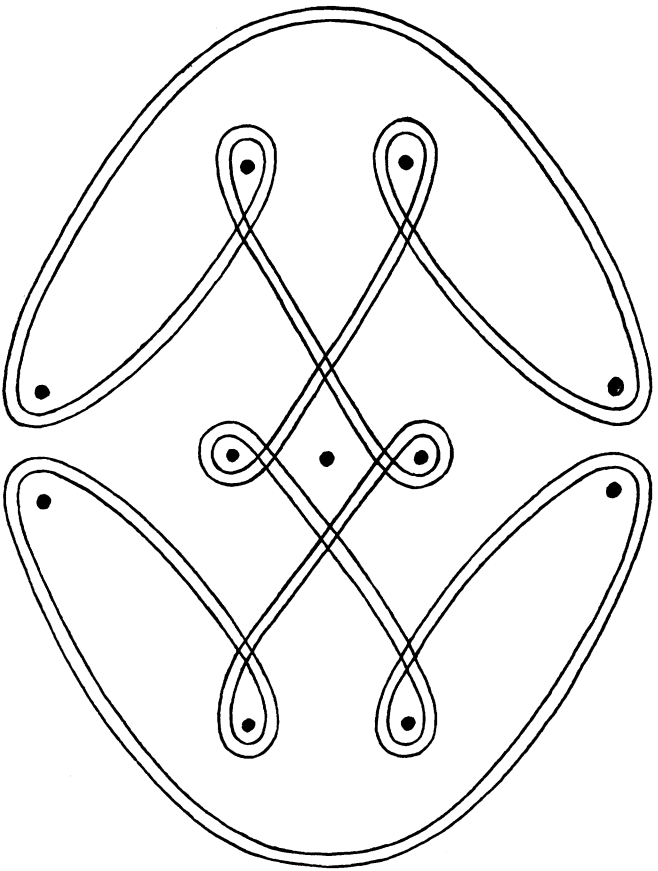


FIG. 5.

MALEKULAN SAND-TRACING.

Deacon, Fig. 57. "Stone of Ambat." Ambat is the chief culture-hero of that part of Malekula from which this figure comes. The design belongs to Class B, representing the body of the Guardian Ghost, but has been influenced by the maze-figures belonging to Class A2 in respect of the central diamond, representing the diagonal linear framework, and of the loops.

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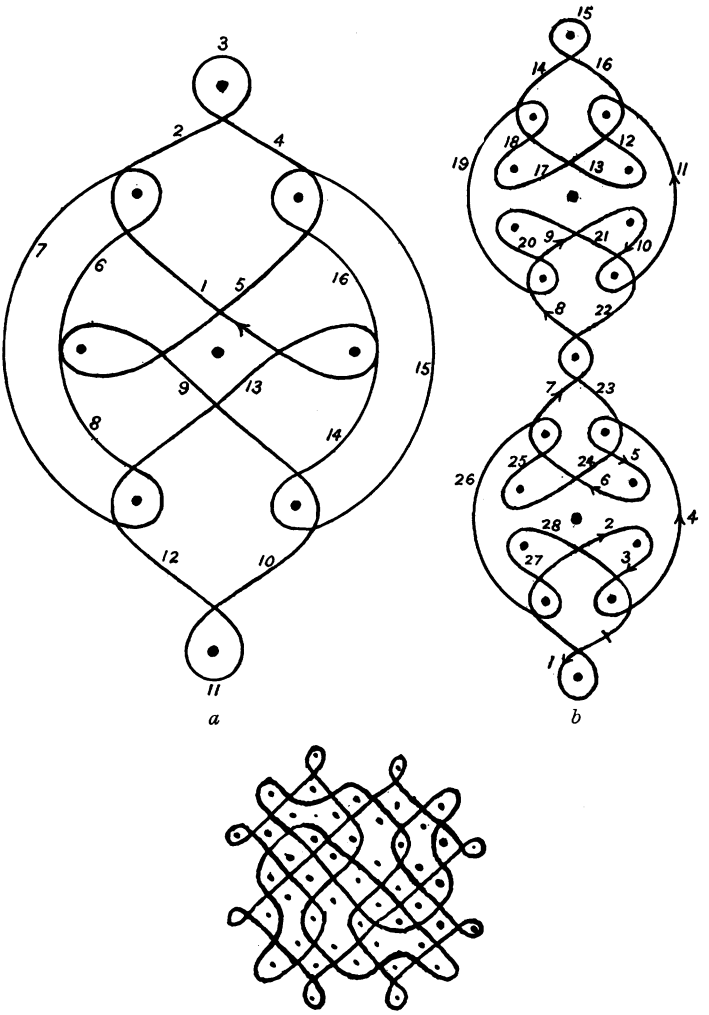


FIG. 6.

SOUTH INDIA AND MALEKULA.

a, *b*, Malekulan sand-tracings (Deacon, Figs. 42, 43), called respectively " a conch " and " two conches."

Each figure is made of a single never-ending line on a framework of dots, clearly derived from Fig. 5.

c, Threshold design from South India, called *pavitram*, " ring " (*Kolam*, Book A, No. 74). For analysis of this figure, made out of three separate never-ending lines, see Fig. 7.

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kulan designs of Class B have, under the influence of Class A, produced a similar though slightly more complicated result.

Fig. 5 belongs to the series of designs representing the Malekulan Guardian Ghost which I refer to as Class B,[16] technologically degraded through influence from Class A2 in that the never-ending line (in this case a double one) no

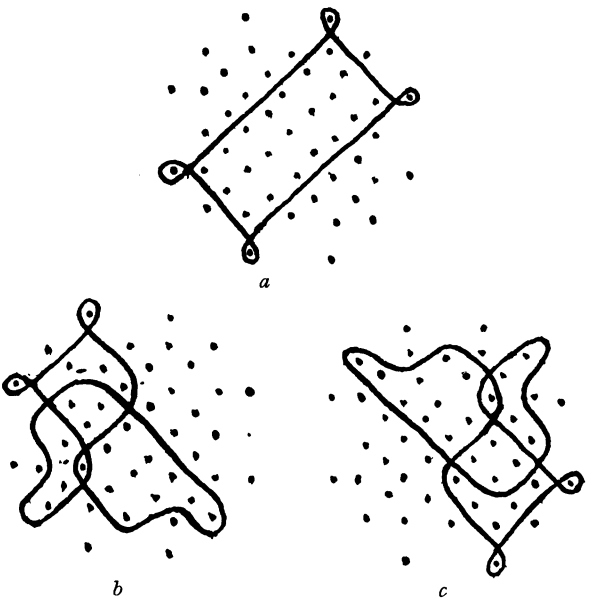


FIG. 7.

ANALYSIS OF SOUTH INDIAN THRESHOLD DESIGN ILLUSTRATED IN FIG. 6*c*.

a, The diagonal linear framework.
b and *c*, Two never-ending lines constructed on it.

longer encloses a space representing her body, but crosses itself diagonally. Figs. 6*a* and 6*b* are further degradations.

Compare these, and Fig. 3*b*, from Malekula, with the South India threshold design, Fig. 6*c*. This is one of the really important designs in the South Indian series. At first sight this also is formed of a single continuous line. The analysis

[16] John Layard, *op. cit.*, Figs. 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21.

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of this design, seen in Fig. 7, shows, however, that, in addition to the dots, this also is composed, like Fig. 4, of :

(*a*) a simple diagonal framework,

(*b*) two meandering never-ending lines, superimposed both on the framework and on one another.

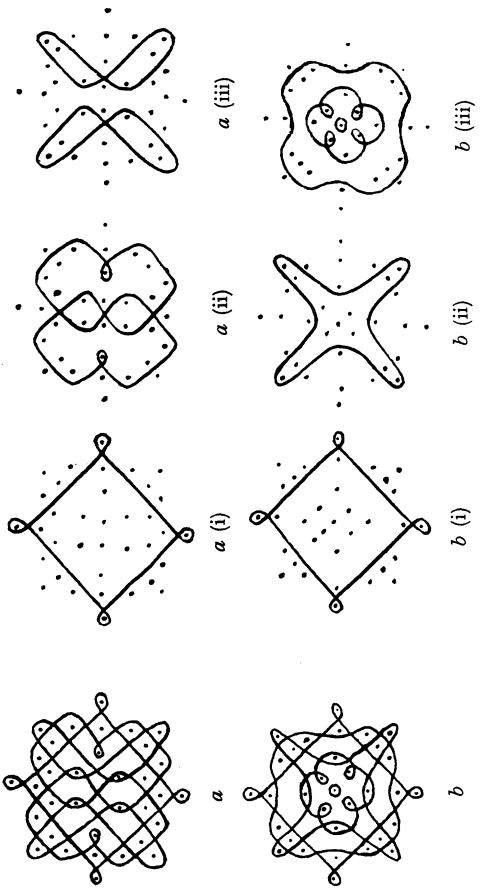


FIG. 8.
THRESHOLD DESIGNS.

a, *Kolam*, Book A, No. 95. "Ornament tied to the upper part of a woman's hands." Formed of four never-ending lines, of which *a* (i) is the diagonal linear framework and *a* (ii) and *a* (iii) the three superimposed lines.

b, *Kolam*, Book A, No. 12. "Brahma's knot." Formed of four never-ending lines, of which *b* (i) is the diagonal linear framework and *b* (ii) and *b* (iii) the three superimposed lines.

This, like most of the Malekulan designs, is thus seen to be a fused figure, in which, on the Malekulan analogy, the dots represent the eyes and other anatomical features of the Guardian Ghost, the linear framework the highly simplified

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structure of the labyrinth, and the two meandering lines the track traced by the initiate. Other examples, similarly analysed, are Figs. 8*a* and 8*b*, in each of which the dots, framework and meandering lines go to make up what at first sight appear to be quite simple designs.

Specialized Development of South Indian Designs

It will be remembered how, in Malekula, the solution of the problem lay in the examination first of the simplest and least ornate motives, which are, from the historical point of view, the most important. So also in South India it is precisely those designs which, from the decorative point of view, are the least striking that in fact form the basis for all the rest.

In Malekula the culture is still sufficiently archaic for the connexion of the designs with actual labyrinths to be, with the aid of mythological data, clearly traced. In South India the prototype, examples of which we have just seen, is already so degraded that, without the Malekulan evidence, the labyrinthine origin of the designs would not be traceable at all.

Just as the Malekulan figures have, under the impetus of local conditions, developed special characteristics and received names conforming with the complex cultural conditions of that island which are peculiarly Malekulan, so have the Tamil designs developed along lines consonant with Tamil ideas.

This Tamil development has, like that of Malekula, taken place along two main lines; the first in the direction of simplification, and the second towards ornate design, where, while still keeping its essential continuous-line character, it eventually becomes yet further contaminated with every kind of later influence.

(*a*) *Simplification. Designs formed of a single never-ending line.* Names given to the designs: *pavitram* and *Brahma-mudi*.

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Fig. 9 illustrates a number of threshold designs, each constructed out of a single never-ending line on a framework of dots.

Before proceeding further with our technological analysis I propose, as in my Malekulan article, briefly to examine the question of the names by which the designs are called. It will be remembered that, in the case of the Malekulan designs, two names were of real importance, those of "The Path" and of the "Stone of Iambi," representing the Guardian Ghost. Apart from the fact that many of the designs most closely resembling that of the Guardian Ghost (Class B) are said to represent ancestral or ghostly figures the names given to the 91 designs collected by Deacon, as well as those collected in neighbouring islands by Dr. Firth and Miss Hardcastle, not to speak of about 20 unpublished designs collected by myself,[17] were either fortuitous or else depending on manipulatory factors quite unconnected with the original labyrinthine motive.

The same is true of the South Indian threshold designs, only the simplest of which have any real connexion with the labyrinth motive from which all are sprung. Leaving aside the modernized "sofa," the "nose-jewel" and the "ornament tied to the upper part of a woman's hand," only two names have so far appeared. These are *pavitram*, signifying a "ring," and *Brahma-mudi*, meaning "Brahma's knot." These two names, and the objects they represent, for details regarding which I am indebted to Mr. F. J. Richards, are of considerable importance in our enquiry.

The word *pavitram* (modern Hindi *pavitra* or *pavitu*) means "a finger-ring of sacrificial grass or gold." Designs called by this name have already been seen in Figs. 2*b*, 6*c* and 9*b* and a further example is figured below in Fig. 12. It will be seen that not one of these, one of which is almost

[17] To be published in my forthcoming work entitled *Stone Men of Malekula* (Chatto and Windus).

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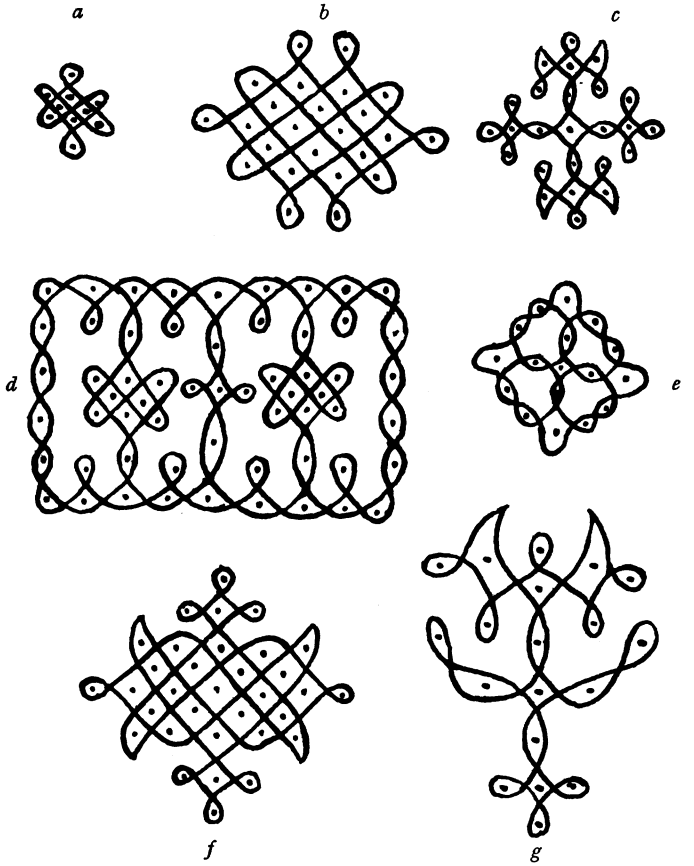


FIG. 9.

THRESHOLD DESIGNS.

Each formed of a single never-ending line on a framework of dots.

a, *Kolam*, Book A (unnamed).
b, ,, ,, ,, No. 75. *Pavitram*, "ring."
c, ,, ,, ,, (unnamed).
d, ,, ,, ,, No. 42. "Ornament tied to the upper part of a woman's hands."
e, ,, ,, ,, (unnamed).
f, ,, ,, ,, (unnamed).
g, ,, ,, ,, "Nose jewel."

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identical with the Malekulan Fig. 2*a*, in any way resembles a ring. The connexion between the ring and the design said to represent it is therefore not factual, but symbolic. In what, then, does the symbolism consist? According to information kindly supplied by Mr. C. E. A. W. Oldham the Sanskrit root for this word is *pu*, of which the two allied meanings are: (*a*) "to cleanse," a meaning doubtless pregnant with spiritual intent, referable in this case presumably to the month of sickness during which the designs are made; and (*b*) "to pacify," here referable to the god Ganesa, "Leader of Imps" and "Lord of Obstacles," both physical and spiritual, whose month this is, and whose true function will be discussed below.[18] Abbé Dubois, referring to the ring itself, says: "The object of the *pavitram* is to scare away giants, evil spirits, or devils, whose mission it is to bring disasters upon men and mar the ceremonies of the Brahmins. The very sight of the *pavitram* makes them tremble and take to flight. This powerful amulet consists of three, five, or seven stalks of *darbha* grass plaited together in the form of a ring. . . . The Brahmins can do nothing without it. It is the basis of all those pious and meritorious acts . . . which lead to everlasting felicity."[19]

Mr. Oldham gives, among the many meanings of the word, that of "a ring of kusa (darbha) grass worn on the fourth finger on certain religious occasions" and "the sacred thread worn by men of the first three castes of the Hindus." Mr. Richards adds: "This grass (*Eragrostis cynosuroides*), of course, is sacred, and there is a virtue also in the knot in which it is tied."

This brings us to the second group of basic designs, the *Brahma-mudi*, "Brahma's knot," the knot with which the ends of the three strands of the sacred cord of a Brahman are tied together in such a way that no loose end is visible and the cord becomes virtually a never-ending line. We

[18] See p. 120, note 6. [19] Abbé Dubois, *op. cit.*, pp. 152, 153.

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have already seen one design called by this name in Fig. 8*b*. Others are figured below in Figs. 13 and 14.

The principle uniting both these objects with the designs is that of the continuous looped line, represented in the case of the *pavitram* by the knotted grass ring, and in that of the *Brahma-mudi* by the knotted cord. Just as in Malekula an examination of the chief mystery-play in the labyrinthine series revealed the ogre-hero to be characterized by the immense number of coils of underground creeper tied around his loins,[20] being the Malekulan representation of what we in Europe have come to refer to as Ariadne's clue, the thread by means of which the prisoner finds his way out of the labyrinth, so I venture to suggest that in the knotted grass or cord, associated as it is with the basic elements of the South Indian threshold designs, we may most probably be in the presence of the same symbol of escape from the physical as well as from the spiritual labyrinth. If any reader is inclined to doubt the connexion between these two aspects of the problem, and the gradual shifting of values in Indian mythology and belief from the physical to the spiritual sphere, I would refer him to the final section of this paper dealing with the historical change which has occurred in the nature and function of Ganesa, in whose honour the designs are made.[21]

Speaking of the names by which the remaining designs are known, Mr. Richards says "their instrinsic value is *nil*," adding "but they do throw a light on the influences that have been brought to play by way of interpretation and adaptation." This is indeed the case, just as it is in Malekula.

[20] See my forthcoming *Stone Men of Malekula*.

[21] See Part II, *Mythology*, to be published later. The interpretation of the knotted ring and cord as representing the continuous-line motive originating in the labyrinth will appear less strange as this series of articles continues. Numerous objects having the common characteristic of a twisted line become incorporated into the labyrinthine system. Compare, in this article, the designs representing snakes, Figs. 24, 25, and p. 155. See also list on p. 156.

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But it is interesting to note, as will be seen by an examination of the examples about to be shown, that in those degraded cases the design has in most cases been manipulated so as to make it resemble in some way the object by which it is named. We thus arrive at the paradoxical but important

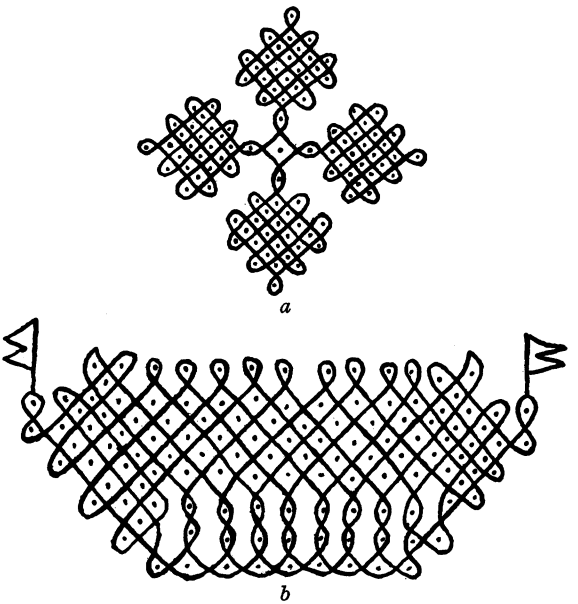


FIG. 10.
THRESHOLD DESIGNS.
Formed of a single never-ending line.
a, *Kolam*, Book A, No. 84. "Cradle."
b, ,, ,, ,, No. 5. "Rangoon steamer."

conclusion that, in the South Indian threshold designs, those which resemble the objects they are said to represent are usually degraded, while the really important designs do not.

It is not possible, for reasons of space, to reproduce all the designs figured in Mr. Richards' two books of threshold patterns. I propose, however, to reproduce as representative a selection as possible, to illustrate the main lines along which local development has taken place.

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Fig. 10*a*, called "Cradle," is, like the designs in Fig. 9, also formed of a single never-ending line. Fig. 10*b* is

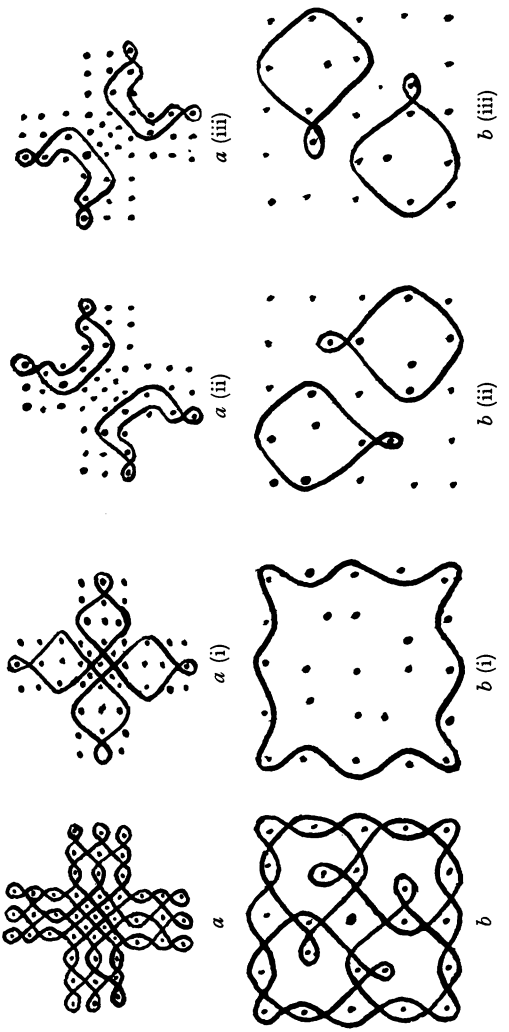


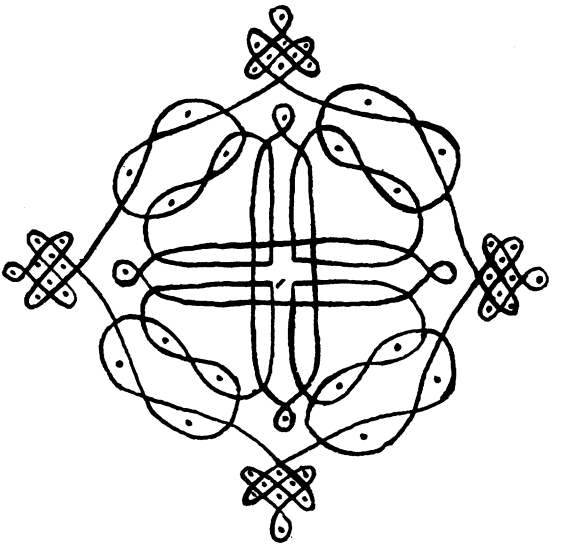
FIG. 11.
THRESHOLD DESIGNS.

a, *Kolam*, Book A (unnamed). Formed of five never-ending lines, of which *a* (i) represents the diagonal linear framework and *a* (ii) and *a* (iii) the four superimposed lines.

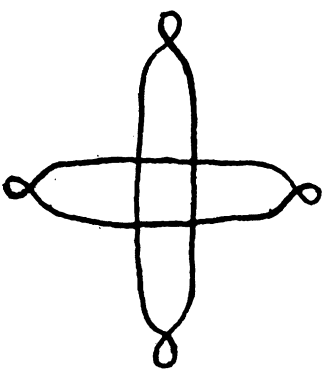
b, *Kolam*, Book A (unnamed). Formed of five never-ending lines, of which the linear framework *a* (i) is now on the periphery. *a* (ii) and *a* (iii) represent the four superimposed lines.

another single never-ending line manipulated in modern times to represent a Rangoon steamer.

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a



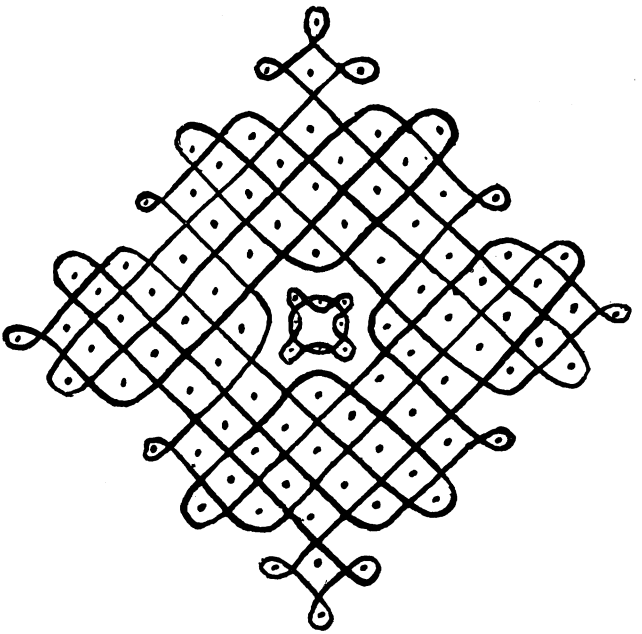
a (i)

FIG. 12.

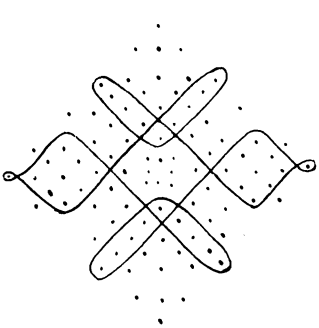
THRESHOLD DESIGN.

a, *Kolam*, Book A, No. 69. *Pavitram*, "ring." This figure is built on a linear framework formed of two never-ending lines set at right-angles to one another (*a* (i)). The rest of the figure consists of a single never-ending line.

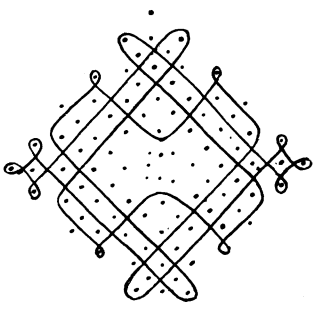
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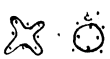
a



a (i)



a (iv)



a (ii) *a* (iii)

Analysis half-size.

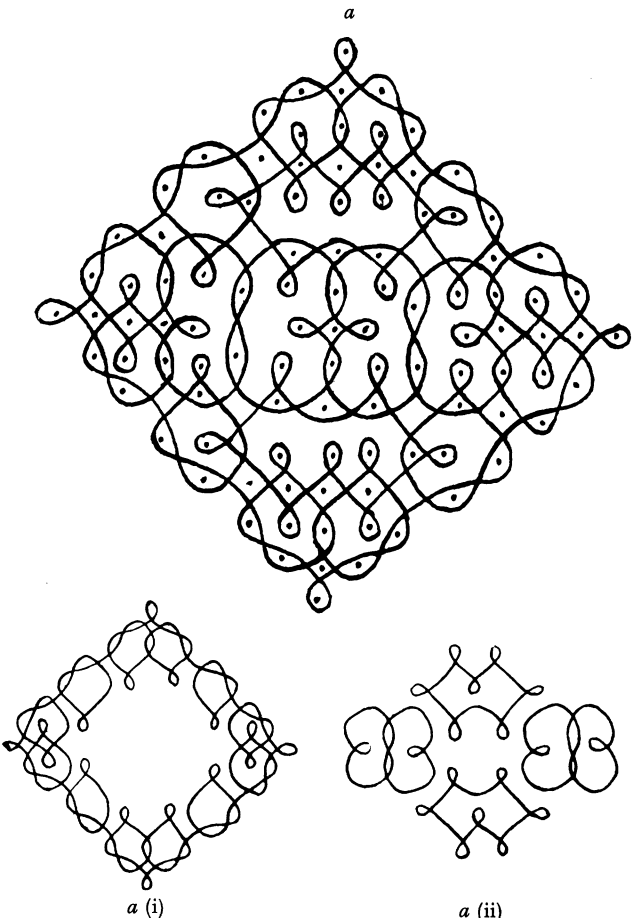
FIG. 13.

THRESHOLD DESIGN.

a, *Kolam*, Book A, No. 57. "Brahma's knot." Composed of a complicated linear framework (*a* (i)) with single superimposed never-ending line (*a* (iv)), with detached central star also composed of two lines (*a* (ii), *a* (iii)).

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(*b*) *Designs formed of a plurality of never-ending lines.* Figs. 11*a* and 11*b* represent the simpler forms of design



Analysis half-size.

FIG. 14.

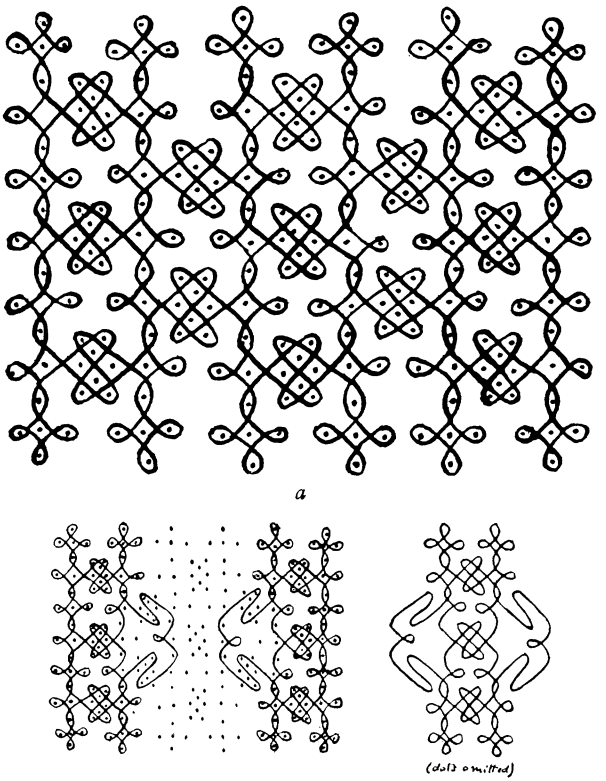
THRESHOLD DESIGN

a, *Kolam*, Book A, No. 30. "Brahma's knot." Composed of complicated peripheral never-ending line framework (*a* (i)) and four superimposed never-ending lines (*a* (ii)).

composed of a plurality of never-ending lines. In Fig. 11*a* the diagonal framework is already becoming more compli-

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cated, in a manner similar to that already seen in the design representing a " sofa " (Fig. 4). In Fig. 11*b* this framework has become peripheral and is itself waved.



a (i) *a* (ii)

Analysis half-size.

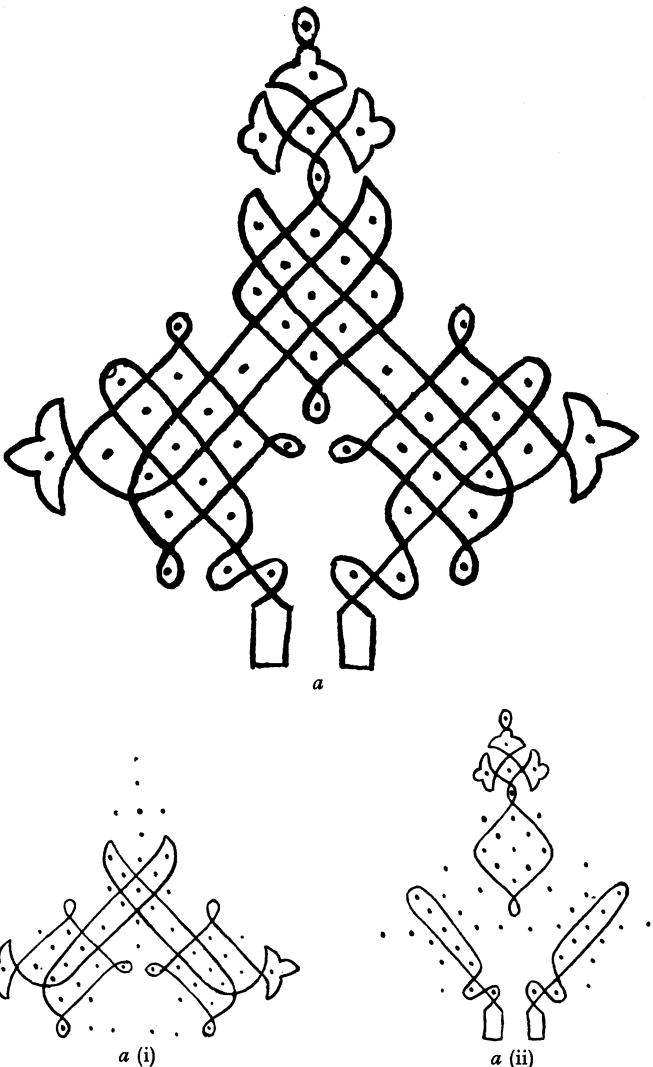
FIG. 15.

THRESHOLD DESIGN.

a, *Kolam*, Book A, No. 16. " Swinging board." Analysis shows this to be composed of three superimposed never-ending lines, the middle one (*a* (ii)) probably representing the linear framework.

Developments of both these types of divergence may be studied in the more complicated examples of threshold design illustrated in Figs. 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17. These

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Analysis half-size.

FIG. 16.

THRESHOLD DESIGN.

a, *Kolam*, Book A, No. 49. "Nose jewel" (*bulaq*). Composed of never-ending line diagonal linear framework (*a* (i)) and three superimposed never-ending lines (*a* (ii)).

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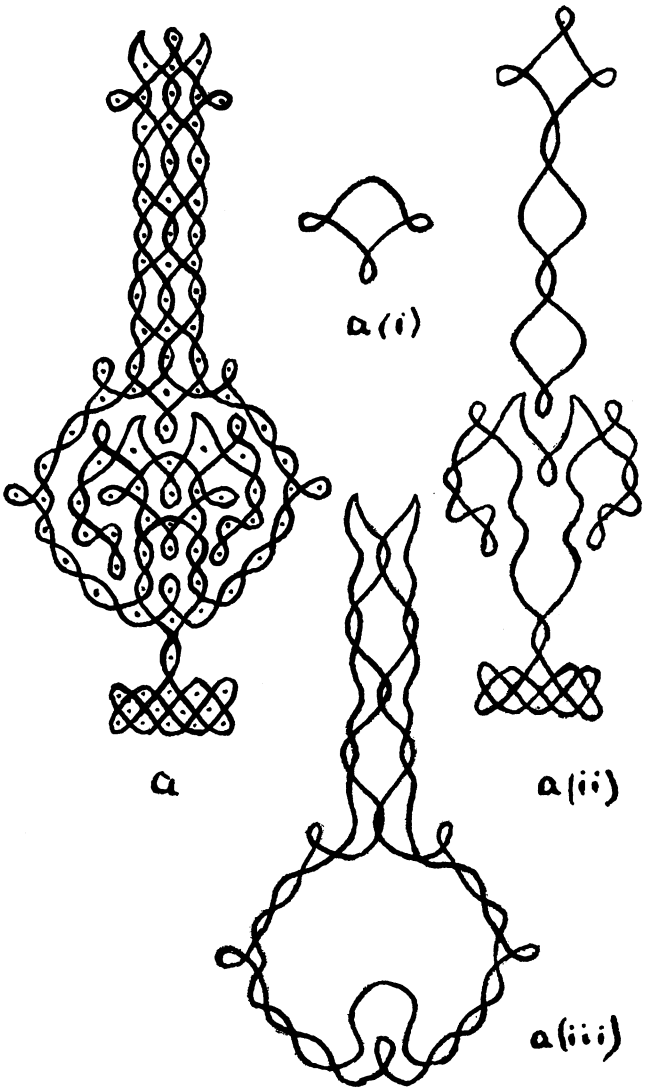


FIG. 17.

THRESHOLD DESIGN.

a, *Kolam*, Book A, No. 9. "Rosewater sprinkler."
a (i), *a* (ii), *a* (iii), Analysis into three never-ending lines (dots omitted).

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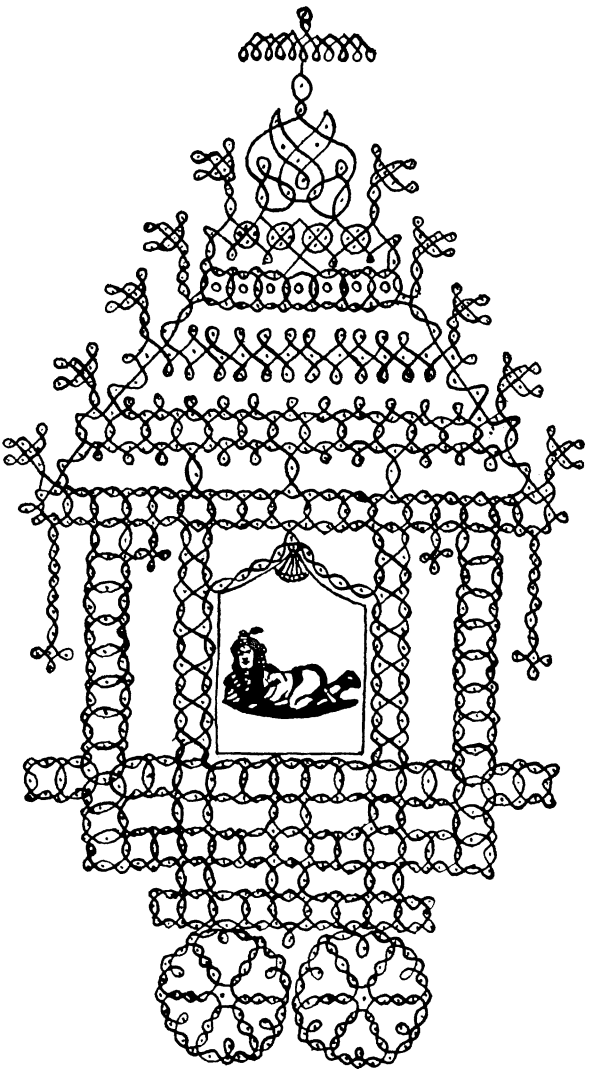


FIG. 18.

THRESHOLD DESIGN.

Kolam, Book B, p. 24. "The Chariot." Composed of a plurality of superimposed never-ending lines.

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definitely represent a spirit of artistic development. Other examples, however, while presenting a pleasing appearance, are technologically very degraded, the chief method of this type of degradation being the construction of a number of overlapping zigzags, circles and similar simple figures in imitation of never-ending line designs. Space forbids the

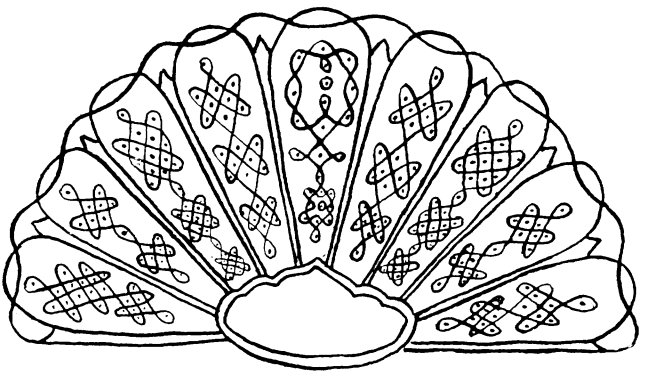


FIG. 19.

THRESHOLD DESIGN.

Kolam, Book A, No. 80. "Rangoon fan." The designs in the 1st, 2nd and 4th panels from either end are each made of a single never-ending line. Those in the 3rd from either end and in the middle are composite.

detailed illustration of these technologically uninteresting figures, but their combined effect may be studied in the apparently very elaborate but technologically quite degraded threshold design called "The Chariot" seen in Fig. 18.

Fig. 19, representing a "Rangoon fan," shows how the simpler figures may be separately combined in modern fashion.

Figs. 20*a* and 20*b* show the last stage in degradation. In Fig. 20*a* a very degraded imitation continuous line is fitted into the outside of a horse, and in Fig. 20*b* a number of overlapping squares, due probably to the influence of

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tattoo technique (see Fig. 30*g*), are similarly used to represent the hide confined within the outline of an elephant.

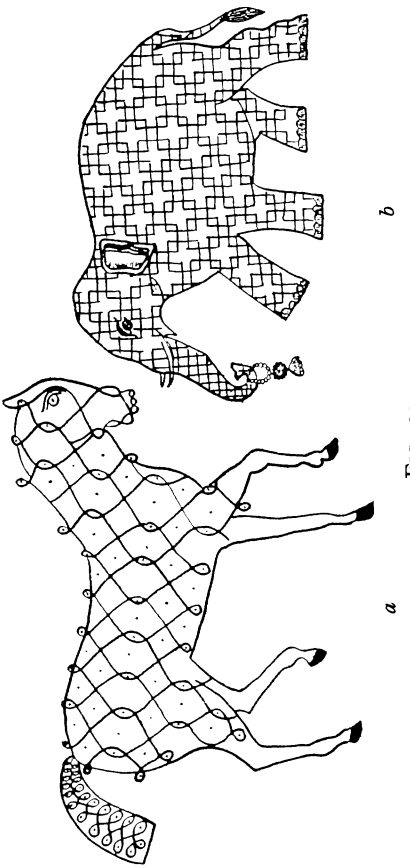


FIG. 20.
DEGRADED THRESHOLD DESIGNS.
a, *Kolam*, Book B, p. 23. "Horse."
b, *Kolam*, Book A, No. 51. "Elephant." The overlapping squares show the influence of tattooing technique. (Cf. Fig. 30.)

EXTENDED APPLICATIONS OF THE TECHNIQUE

The threshold designs so far cited exhibit no special features other than those of technique. I will now demonstrate a few applications of this technique to specialized subjects.

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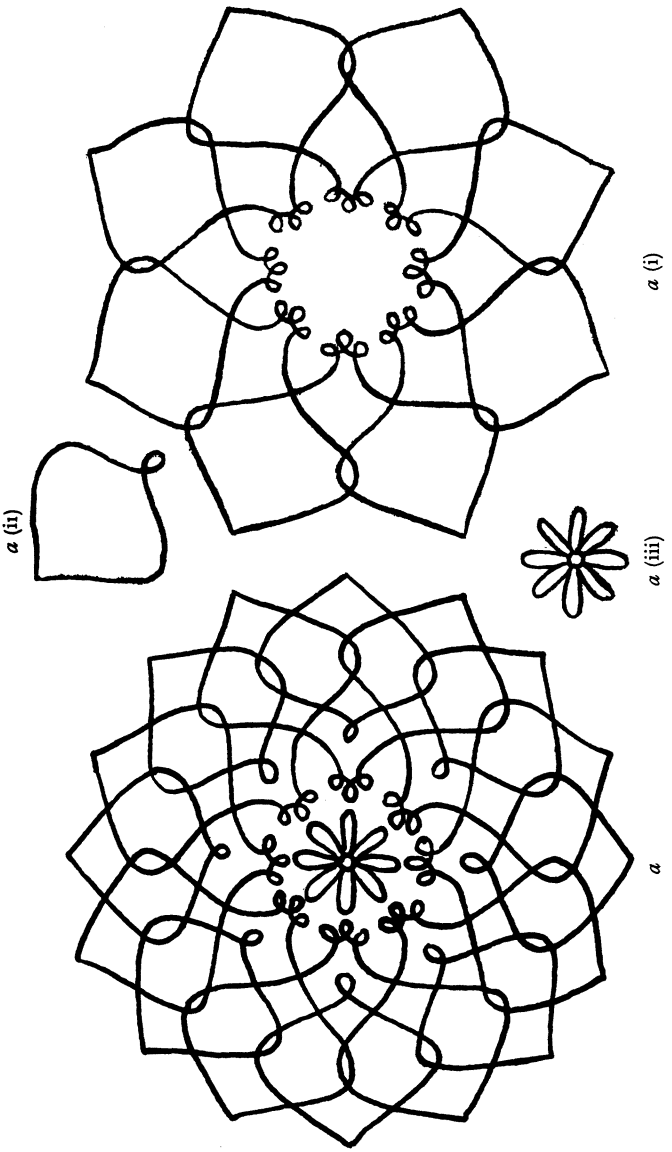


FIG. 21.
THRESHOLD DESIGN.
a, *Kolam*, Book A, No. 81. "Lotus flower." Eight alternate lobes are drawn in a single never-ending line (*a* (i)). The remaining eight lobes are separately imposed (*a* (ii)). There is a central detached eight-lobed star (*a* (iii)).

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(*a*) *Lotus designs and plates.* A large number of designs are so manipulated as to represent the lotus. Fig. 21 is one

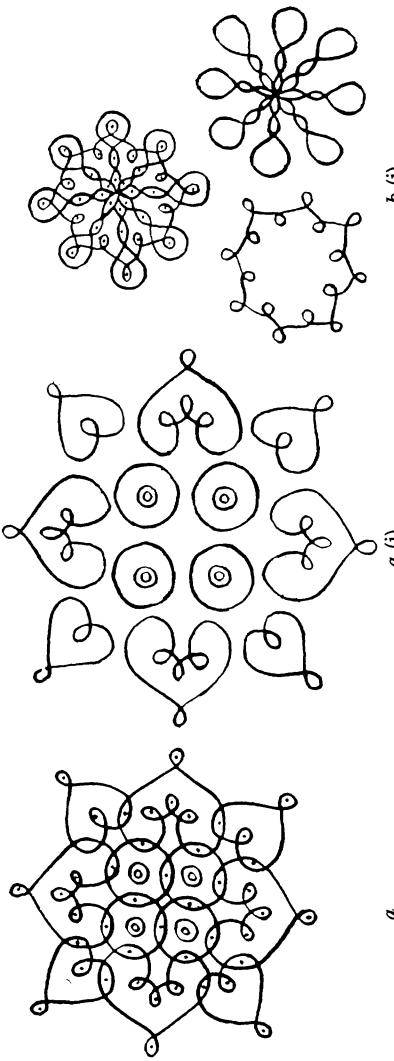


FIG. 22.
THRESHOLD DESIGNS.
a, *Kolam*, Book A, No. 64. "Lotus-like plate."
a (i), Analysis of the above (superimposed figures separated out).
b, *Kolam*, Book A, No. 15. "Camphor plate."
b (i), Analysis of the above into two never-ending lines.

of the best examples, in which eight of the sixteen lobes are made up out of a single never-ending line, while the eight

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other lobes, formed of a simple motive common in other designs, are superimposed alternately between them. In the middle is an eight-pointed star, a common feature in the more complicated designs.

Fig. 22*a* represents a more technologically degraded design called "Lotus-like plate," formed of twelve parts in addition to the four doubled circles in the middle.

The lotus being roughly circular, this type of design merges into yet others representing plates, e.g. Fig. 22*b*.

(*b*) *Swastika-like designs.* Closely connected with the lotus and its associated plates are a number of swastika-like designs, e.g. Fig. 23*a*, *pavitram*, Fig. 23*b*, "Lotus flower," and Fig. 23*c*, a swastika design, also called *pavitram*, formed of two doubled lines, each of which is doubled back upon itself at either end and so forms a single never-ending line.

(*c*) *Snakes.* We have already noticed the magical quality attaching to knotted grass (the *pavitram*) and cord (the *Brahma-mudi*), on account of their association with the labyrinthine motive and their own property of being continuous looped lines. Yet another object which has become associated with the continuous-line motive is the snake. At first sight, and without reference to the rest of the designs, it might appear that the original motive in Figs. 24 and 25 was the snake, and that these snakes had been, for decorative reasons, twined together to form a pattern. Reference to the whole series of threshold designs will show that this has not been the case. Fig. 24*a*, for instance, called "Border of a single cobra," consists of a single doubled never-ending line including in itself the square linear framework on which the Malekulan designs belonging to Class A2 are based, and the knotted effect on each side is exactly paralleled in Fig. 12. What has clearly happened is that, at some period in the development of these designs, the makers of them,

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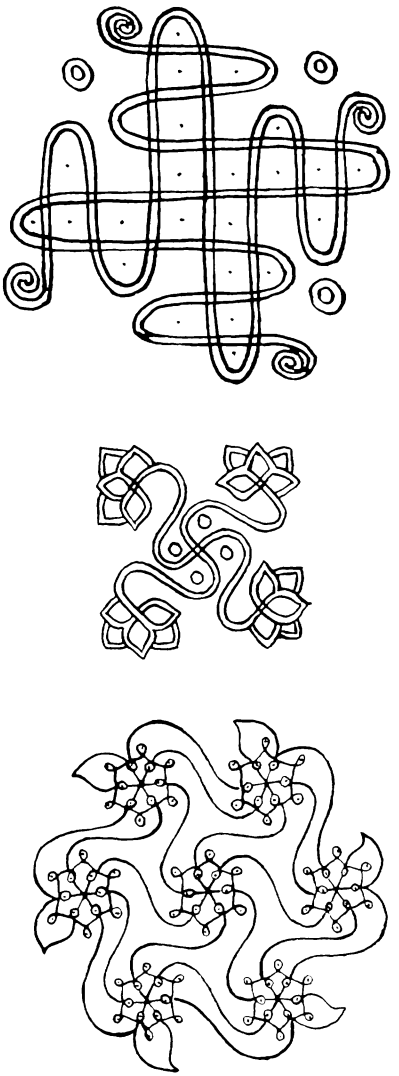


FIG. 23.
THRESHOLD DESIGNS.
Swastika-like motives.
a, *Kolam*, Book B, p. 17. *Pavitram.*
b, " " p. 19. "Lotus flower."
c, " " p. 14. *Pavitram.*

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concentrated as they were on the phenomenon of the continuous line meandering in and out of itself, were struck by the similarity of motive exhibited by the long,

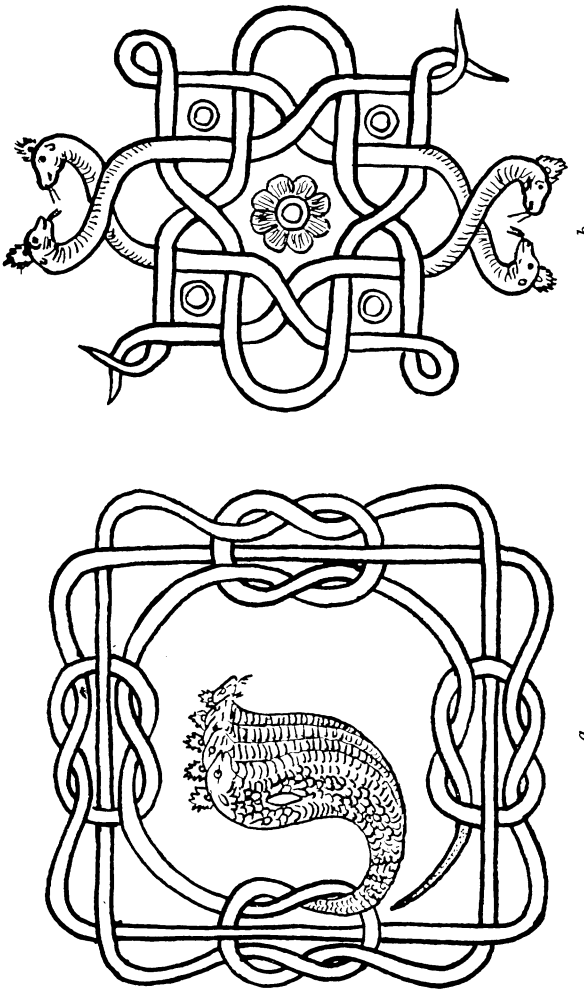


FIG. 24.
THRESHOLD DESIGNS.
Each design formed of a single never-ending doubled line interrupted to form the heads and tails of snakes.
a, *Kolam*, Book A, No. 18. "Border of a single cobra."
b, " " B, No. 45. "Four cobras."

curling body of the snake. The sacredness of the snake doubtless contributed to the identification, and all the artist did was to construct one of the standard never-ending

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double-line designs and to interrupt it at one point, making of one of the loose ends the head and of the other end the tail of the revered reptile.

Fig. 24*b*, called " Four snakes " or " The four cobras," is again a single never-ending line, interrupted at four points to allow of the insertion of the corresponding four heads and tails of the four snakes. Here also we find the familiar framework of dots in the shape of small circles, the central circle being magnified into a star.

In Fig. 25*a*, erroneously called " The eight Nagas," since in fact there are but four, we find that the four snakes in fact form the wavy peripheral framework already met with in Figs. 11*b* and 14*a* (i), interrupted at each of the four corners to form the heads and tails. The rest of the figure consists of four crossing designs of a slightly simpler type already familiar in Fig. 12*a* (i) and to be seen below in some of the tattoo designs, Figs. 28*a* (ii) and 29*a* (iii). Here also we find the familiar framework of small circles.

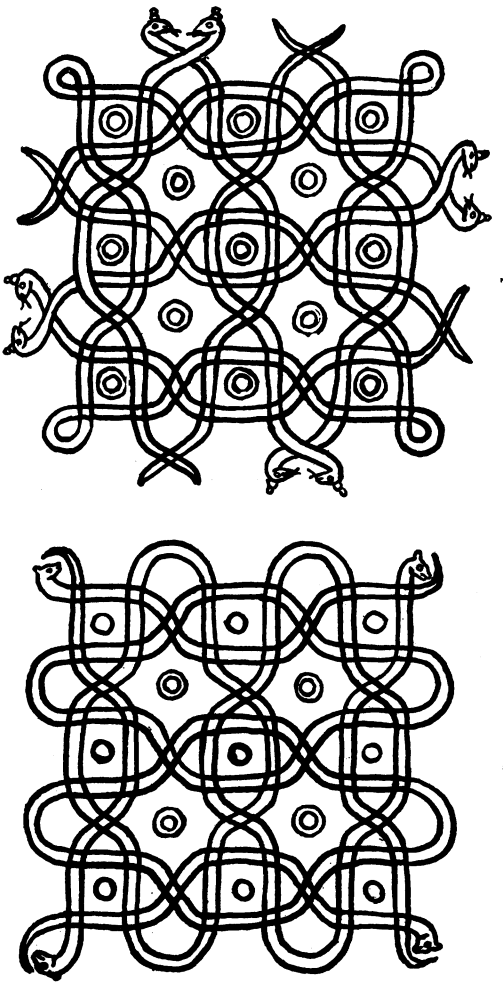
Fig. 25*b*, consisting of eight snakes, is precisely the same pattern as Fig. 25*a* except for the fact that in this case it is the wavy peripheral framework that is plain and the four crossing figures that have been interrupted at either end to form the heads and tails of the eight snakes.

A similar design is figured by Thurston [22] as being actually used in magic, a never-ending doubled line interrupted at one point to form the head and body of a snake. There are the usual dots, and a central star-like figure. " A Pulluvan, whose caste is said to be descended from the snake deity, acts as the pūjāri or officiating minister. On the day appointed, he draws a geometrical design of a snake on the floor. The animal is represented in rice flour, and the spaces

[22] Edgar Thurston, *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India*, Madras, 1906, Plate xvi; also reproduced in his *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Madras, 1909, vol. vi, facing p. 231. A cognate design is to be seen in *Ethnographic Notes* at the bottom of Plate xi.

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between the coils are filled in with burnt rice husk, turmeric powder, powdered green leaves, etc. . . . The Pulluvan plays on his earthen pot-drum. . . . Gradually the seated



a *b*

FIG. 25.
THRESHOLD DESIGNS.
Designs in which some of the never-ending doubled lines are interrupted to form the heads and tails of snakes.
a, *Kolam*, Book B, p. 21. "The eight Nagas."
b, " " A, No. 63. "Lustre plate."
Note that in *a* the four snakes (not eight as in the title) together form a peripheral framework, which is crossed by four separate plain double-line figures. In *b*, which is in other respects the same figure, it is the peripheral framework which is plain and the four crossing figures which are divided to represent eight snakes.

woman becomes possessed, and begins to quiver, while shaking her dishevelled locks. Moving backwards and forwards, she rubs away the figure of the snake with the cocoa-

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nut flowers. . . . It may be necessary to rub away the snake as many as a hundred times, in which case the ceremony is prolonged over several weeks. Each time that the snake design is destroyed, one or two men, with torches in their hands, perform a dance, keeping step to the Pulluvan's music." [23]

The nature of the rite, as well as the materials used to make the continuous-line design, both show the close connexion between this form of magic and the drawing of threshold designs. A further link is the fact that, for it, " worship is performed to Ganesa." [24] This god, in whose honour the threshold designs are also made, will prove important when we come to discuss the mythological aspect of these rites. The importance of rubbing out the design and the associated dancing recall the Malekulan evidence, as well as the fact that the South Indian threshold designs are no sooner made than they are walked on.

(*d*) *Platforms.* Another frequent motive is that of platforms, in which a castellated effect is given by stepped lines usually enclosing the main design. Fig. 26*a*, formed of a design made of seven overlapping never-ending lines enclosed in this way, is a good example, said to represent a " Marriage platform." In Fig. 26*b*, called " Place of sacrifice," a rarer type, the plan is reversed, the continuous-line design formed of seven superimposed never-ending lines, including the outer square, being on the outside and the castellation inside. This castellated effect will be met with again when we come to discuss the designs representing actual labyrinths noted below (Fig. 36 and page 174).

(*e*) *Designs representing plants.* Among the most degraded of the designs from the technological point of

[23] Thurston, *Ethnographic Notes*, pp. 290-291.

[24] Thurston, *Castes and Tribes*, vol. vi, p. 232.

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view, but nevertheless of interest for comparison with other cultures, are the representations of plants.

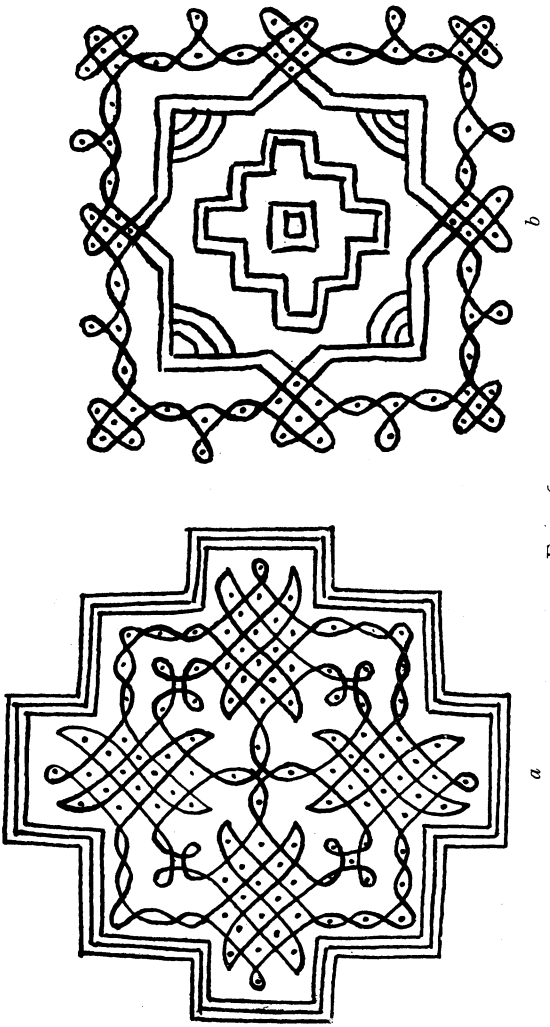


FIG. 26.
THRESHOLD DESIGNS.
a, *Kolam*, Book A, No. 28. "Marriage platform." The curvilinear portion is made up of seven superimposed never-ending lines.
b, *Kolam*, Book A, No. 22. "Place of sacrifice." Here the castellation has been transposed to the inside of the design. The outer portion, including the linear framework, is made up of six superimposed never-ending lines.

Of these, the most common represents a pineapple (Fig. 27) delineated, with the addition of leaves, in the usual line and dot convention. The pineapple is not indigenous to

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India,[25] but it is a prickly plant and, as such, would serve to ward off evil influences. The same motive is found in other areas, to be described in a future article, associated with labyrinthine folk lore and continuous-line designs.

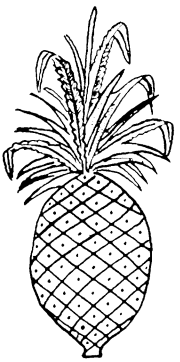


FIG. 27.
THRESHOLD DESIGN.
Plant.
Kolam, Book A, No. 25. "Pine-apple."

(*f*) *Pentacle and labyrinth* (held over for discussion below). Both these objects occur among the threshold designs, but in a class apart. They are figured and fully discussed below (Figs. 34, 36 and p. 174). It will be convenient first briefly to review the tattoo patterns.

TATTOO PATTERNS

(*a*) *Sources.* It is not my intention to enter into the question of the tattoo patterns in any great detail, since I am not acquainted with the mythology and beliefs connected with them, and without such knowledge speculation would be idle. As the majority of them clearly belong to and amplify the same series as the threshold designs, it is, however, necessary to include them in this survey.

[25] Watt, *Commercial Products of India*, p. 66. The Brazilian name of the plant, as modified by the Portuguese, has been adopted into the Indian vernaculars.

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My sources are: (*a*) the two sample books of hand-drawn patterns used by tattooers belonging to the vagrant Kuravar or Korova community,[26] now in the possession of Mr. F. J. Richards; and (*b*) the article on Tattooing in the Mysore Census of 1901, lent to me for this purpose by Professor Hodson.

The scanty information I have concerning the associations with tattooing is derived from the Mysore Census, and reveals the interesting facts that (*a*) the tattooers are always women, (*b*) the patterns are, like the threshold designs, connected with Ganesa and with averting the evil eye, (*c*) that they are regarded by some as a "passport for the forgiveness of sins and for admission to heaven," and (*d*) that the same designs are sometimes drawn on the ground.[27]

While the two series are similar in many respects, those in the collection belonging to Mr. Richards tend to resemble the threshold designs in form, though the tattoo technique seems to result in squaring many of the lines which in the threshold designs are curved. Those figured in the Mysore Census preserve the curved form, where this is comparable to the threshold designs, but include also several types not included in Mr. Richards' collection but so similar to some of the Malekulan designs that some mention must be made of them.

[26] Of these two books, the one was obtained by Mr. Richards from some Pachchai-kutti Kuravars at Âragalûr, Âttûr Tâlu, Salem District, in May, 1904; the other was obtained from some Kuravars who called themselves Pachchai-kutti Kavarais, of Palankōvil, near Elattūr Polūr Talug, North Arcot District, in April, 1916. In the legends to the figures reproduced in this article, those from the first book are designated "Âragalûr," and those from the second "Elattūr." I here reproduce translations of the names of the patterns in the Âragalûr book; no names appear in the Elattūr book. The Kuravars are a type of gipsy who wander all over this area. They are known as diviners, and rear pigs.

[27] *Mysore Census*, 1901, pp. 557-559.

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(*b*) *Never-ending line designs.* I will first illustrate a few patterns showing the essential similarity existing between the great majority of tattoo motives with the threshold designs.

Fig. 28 is a pattern similar to the Malekulan Fig. 3*b* and to the South Indian threshold designs, Figs. 4, 9*a*, 9*b* and 9*f*, 10*a* and 10*b*, and 13, based on a diagonal linear framework.

Fig. 29 is similar, though more complicated and with the addition of a castellated border.

Figs. 30*a*, 30*b* and 30*c*, from the Mysore Census, are similar to the threshold designs in Fig. 9. Fig. 30*d* shows a tendency, noticeable in Mr. Richards' collection, for the tattoo technique to introduce a certain squareness into designs otherwise similar to the threshold designs. In Fig. 30*e* this tendency is increased. In Fig. 30*f* there is a peripheral looped framework, the rest of the design being made up of overlapping squares, each of the overlapping parts being further divided into fours. Fig. 30*g* shows a yet further stage of degradation, similar to that already seen in the threshold design, Fig. 20*b*, representing an elephant, in which the pattern is entirely made of overlapping squares.

Figs. 31 and 32 show traces of the same themes incorporated into complicated patterns introducing many extraneous elements.

(*c*) *Hatched designs.* Not found in Mr. Richards' collection but prominent in the Mysore Census are a number of patterns of quite different technique and having no continuous-line motive, which I should not have included in this series were it not for some most remarkable parallels with Malekula. In Deacon's collection of Malekulan sand-tracings there are two figures drawn in the same distinctive manner and without continuous-line motive. These two designs, made of straight lines hatched on one side, were not mentioned in my previous article, but will be

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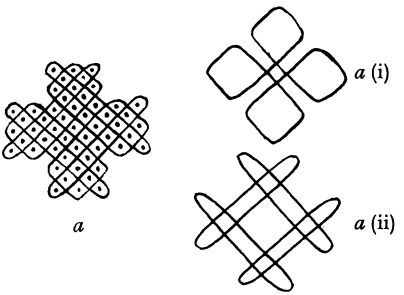
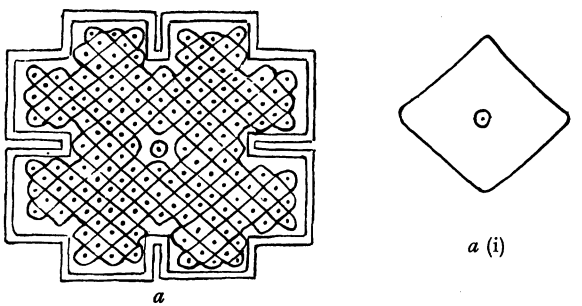


FIG. 28.
TATTOO PATTERN.

a, Elattūr, p. 2, No. 11. Analysis shows that this pattern, like many of the threshold designs, consists of a diagonal linear framework (*a* (i)) and four cross-figures (*a* (ii)).



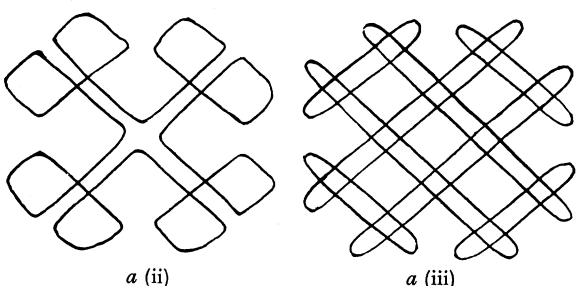


FIG. 29.
TATTOO PATTERN.

a, Elattūr, p. 2, No. 3. Analysis shows a central diagonal linear framework (*a* (i)), an extended framework (*a* (ii)) and eight separate cross-figures (*a* (iii)).

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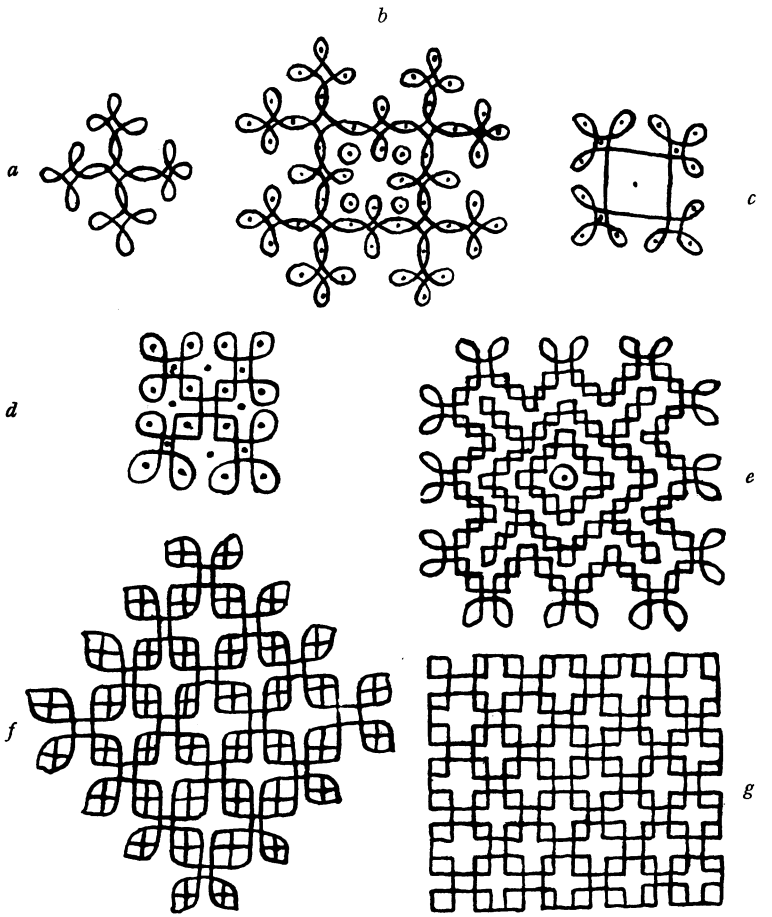


FIG. 30.

TATTOO PATTERNS.

a, *Mysore Census*, Pl. 26. Single never-ending line.
b, ,, ,, Pl. 28. "*Yelimichikoku Hache*." Two never-ending lines and four small circles.
c, ,, ,, Pl. 30. "Bunch of limes." Single never-ending line.
d, Âragalûr, p. 10, No. 32. "Bunch of limes." Single never-ending line.
e, Elattûr, p. 1, No. 1.
f, ,, p. 5, No. 7.
g, ,, p. 5, No. 8. Overlapping squares.

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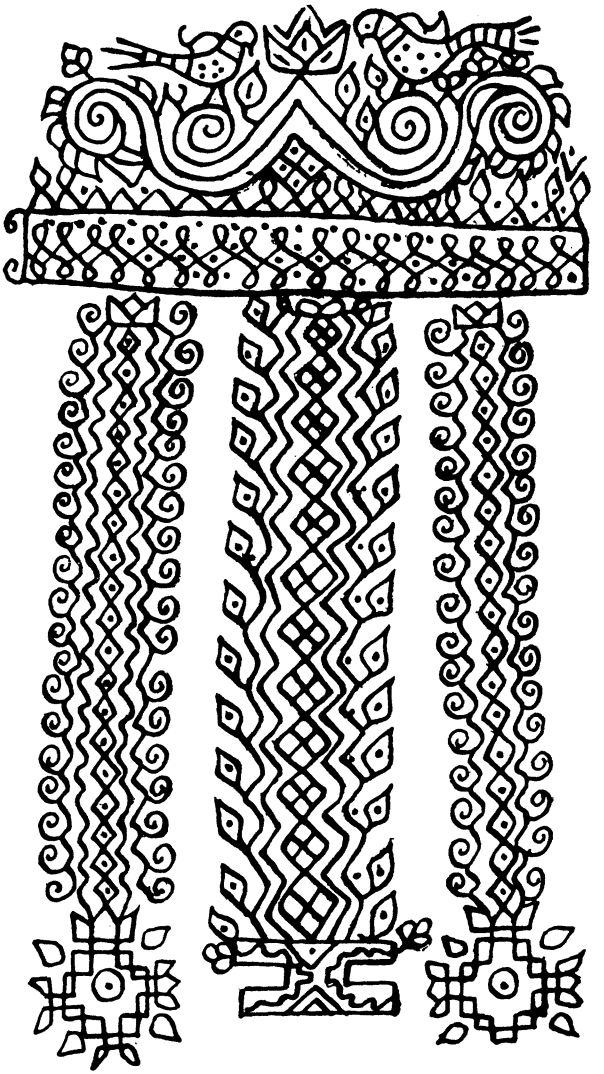


FIG. 31.

TATTOO PATTERN.

Âragalûr, p. 12, Nos. 14, 15, 16. Note the continuous-line designs below the pediment and at the base of the right and left-hand columns.

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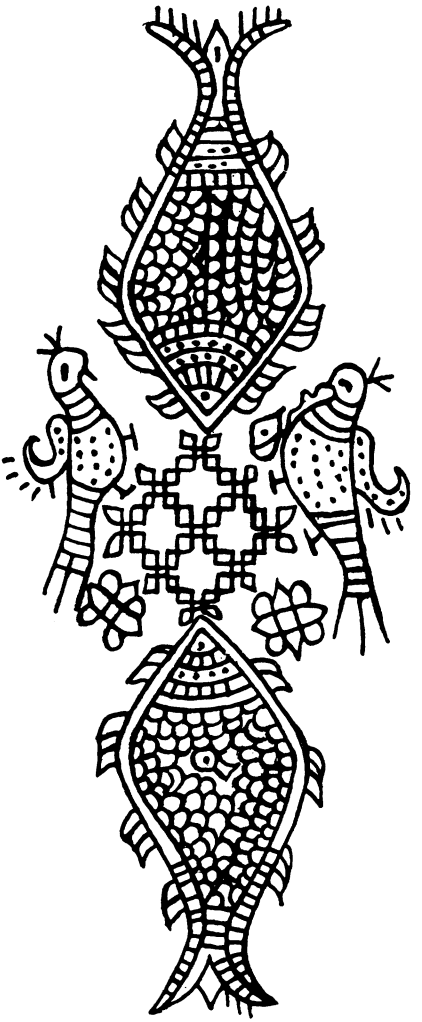


FIG. 32.

TATTOO PATTERN.

Âragalûr, p. 18, No. 23, called "Parrot-fish." Note the central designs, formed of three superimposed squared never-ending lines.

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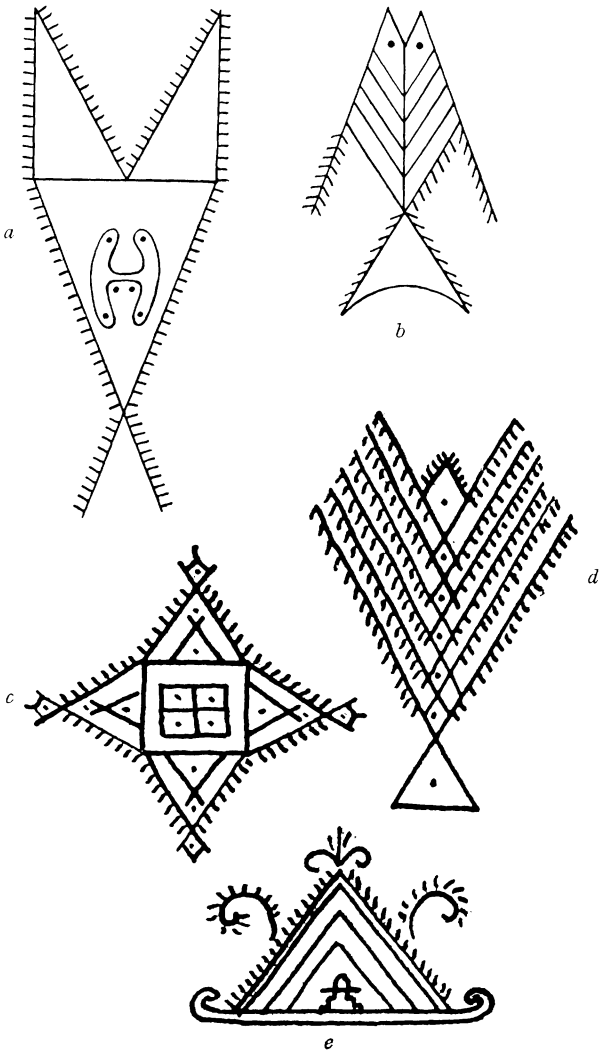


FIG. 33.

HATCHED DESIGNS (SOUTH INDIA AND MALEKULA).

Malekulan sand-tracings :

a, Deacon, Fig. 31. "Flying fish." Note the central figure representing the body of the Guardian Ghost.
b, Deacon, Fig. 30. "A fish."

South Indian tattoo patterns :

c, *Mysore Census*, Pl. 29. "Seat of the goddess Gowrie."
d, ,, ,, ,, "Honne Tree."
e, ,, ,, ,, "Siva's temple."

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referred to in my forthcoming book as Class C. They are not properly sand-tracings at all, being simply copies in the sand of designs normally painted on the body. Malekulans, being dark-skinned, do not tattoo, but paint instead.[28] It is therefore the more remarkable that the South Indian parallels should be found among tattoo patterns and not among threshold designs. In Fig. 33 the two Malekulan designs are compared with some of the tattoo patterns from South India. Though both the Malekulan designs are said to represent fishes, we have already seen that the names given to the designs have very little significance, and it is to be noted that in the middle of Fig. 33*a* there should be found a small representation of the design representing the Guardian Ghost (Class B). Malekulan Fig. 33*b* is very like South Indian tattoo pattern Fig. 33*d*, and if we compare this pattern with Fig. 33*c*, said to represent the "Seat of the goddess Gowrie," and with a number of others which there is no space here to reproduce, we find that all these hatched designs appear to have their origin in Fig. 33*e*, "Siva's temple." The Guardian Ghost within the Malekulan figure is now explained, as it could never have been explained by an examination of the Malekulan figures alone, and the connexion between Malekula and India is thus brought a step nearer.

Other Forms of Threshold and Tattoo Designs

(*a*) *Designs composed of straight lines, unhatched, including pentacles.*

A yet further type of South Indian tattoo pattern is the geometric type consisting of superimposed figures, each consisting of straight lines enclosing a space. Fig. 34*a* is

[28] Similar hatched designs are tattooed on the body by the natives of Tanna, in the southern New Hebrides.

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made up of two superimposed triangles and an hour-glass shaped figure. This is paralleled among the Malekulan

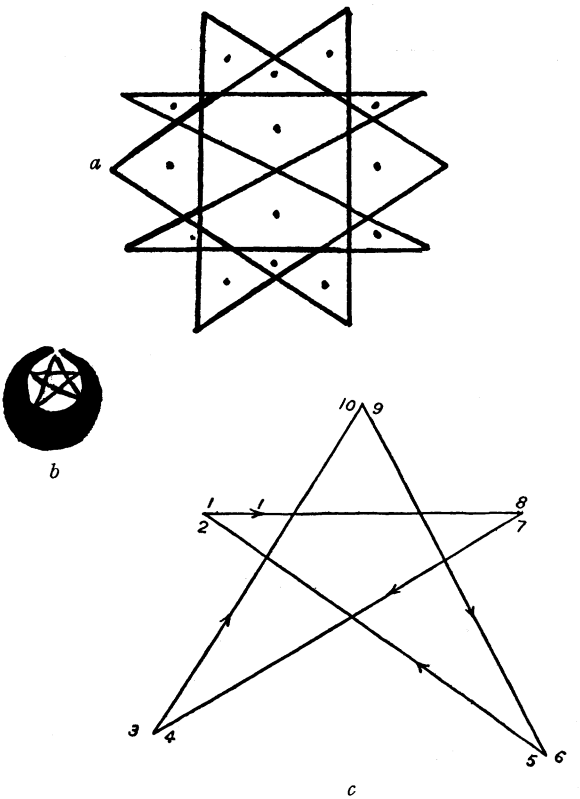


FIG. 34.

STRAIGHT-LINE DESIGNS (SOUTH INDIA AND MALEKULA).

a, South Indian tattoo pattern, called *Muttina Arati* (*Mysore Census*, Pl. 32). Formed of two superimposed triangles and an hourglass-shaped figure.

b, South Indian threshold design in the form of a pentacle within the moon's disk (*Kolam*, Book A (unnamed)). Note that the pentacle is a never-ending line.

c, Malekulan sand-tracing called "The Pleiades" (Deacon, Fig. 40).

sand-tracings by the figure of a pentacle (Fig. 34*c*), itself a never-ending line enclosing a space, which is also to be seen

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painted both on the human body and on ancestor-images and other ritual objects, including the giant mask which represents the body of the Guardian Ghost.[29] This figure is said to represent the Pleiades, and it can hardly be a coin-

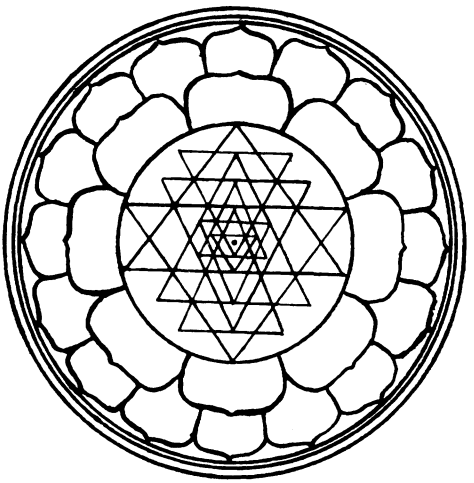


FIG. 35.
CHAKRAM.

Magical design known as *Sri-chakram*. In the centre, where the dot is, Parvati, consort of Siva and mother of Ganesa, is said to take her seat.
The goddess is protected by a maze-like design consisting of nine superimposed triangles, four of which are upright and five inverted. Round these is the familiar lotus design, and round this again a triple magic ring.
(From the cover of a book on magical usage, in the Malayalam language, published by the Panchangam Press, Kunnamkulam, Cochin State, Madras Presidency, 1932, kindly lent to me by Mr. A. Aiyappan.)
The design is used in tantric Sakti worship. A simpler form of the same design is to be seen in Ananta Krishna Iyer's *Cochin Tribes and Castes*, Vol. I, p. 317.

cidence that the only such figure found among the South Indian threshold designs (Fig. 34*b*) is placed inside another heavenly body, the moon. The pentacle is also represented in the five-petalled pumpkin flowers placed in the centre of each threshold design in honour of the god Ganesa.

[29] See my forthcoming work on the Malekulan islet of Atchin.

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It is worth while comparing these with the magical *Sri-chakram* designs, one of which is shown in Fig. 35. This is the " wheel," in the centre of which, represented by the dot, Parvati, consort of Siva and mother of Ganesa, is said to take her seat. Round her is a maze-like design composed of nine superimposed triangles, four of which are upright and five inverted. Round these is the familiar lotus design, and round this again a triple magic ring. It is clear that the maze-like central figure belongs to the same series as the threshold and tattoo designs illustrated above, and there can be little doubt that this part of the figure, in addition to its other obvious associations, has its origin in the labyrinth protecting the body of the goddess.

Typological degradation, followed by the evolution of new art-forms.

We are now nearing the end of the typological part of our enquiry. It will be remembered how, in my article on " Maze-Dances and the Ritual of the Labyrinth in Malekula," the interpretation of the sand-tracings and dance motives as being in fact maze-designs was based on the evidence of a large number of continuous-line figures, only two of which bore any resemblance whatever to the modern conception of a labyrinth. Nevertheless, the associated mythology, interpreted as being the distant echo of once factual performances,[30] led to the conclusion that the entire series was in fact derived from two prototypes, representing (*a*) the path traced by the initiate through the labyrinth, and (*b*) the figure of the Guardian Ghost herself. These conclusions were rendered possible only by means of an exact process of historical comparison, without which it would have been impossible to elucidate or even to approach

[30] For a brief exposition of the principle governing this method of myth interpretation, see John Layard, " Maze-Dances and the Ritual of the Labyrinth in Malekula," *Folk-Lore*, Vol. XLVII, June, 1936, pp. 127-128.

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an understanding of this feature of Malekulan culture, and have in fact provided the key to the meaning of the whole megalithic civilization of that remote region. The conclusion there drawn was that the original character of the labyrinth was far from being of stereotyped form, such as we now know it, but consisted of turning and twisting ways which actually depended for their efficacy on the fact that they were always different, and that the way through could therefore never be learned except by those who held the key.

With the partial loss by the Malekulans themselves of the knowledge of what their own mythology actually meant, the sand-tracings became less and less like the two prototypes, and the continuous-line motive, together with the linear framework representing the structure of the labyrinth and the never-ending line and dots representing the body of the Guardian Ghost, became simply the technique out of which pure art-forms were constructed.

We have now seen that in South India the same thing has happened; the threshold and tattoo designs there have as their present-day starting point a technique considerably more degraded than those of Malekula, where, owing to comparative isolation, the two prototypes, now lost in South India, are still preserved.

The argument leading to this conclusion was founded on the dual basis of typology and of mythology, combined with the belief that the latter, however fantastic the mind of man may make it, is always based on physical happenings that once actually occurred.

(*b*) *Representations of conventionalized labyrinths of Knossos design.*

If proof of these conclusions were still needed, it will be found to be provided by a yet further type of South Indian threshold and tattoo design. When writing my first article on the Labyrinth in Malekula, I was quite unaware that any

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actual labyrinths, as we now understand the word, existed east of the Mediterranean basin. For this reason when Mr.

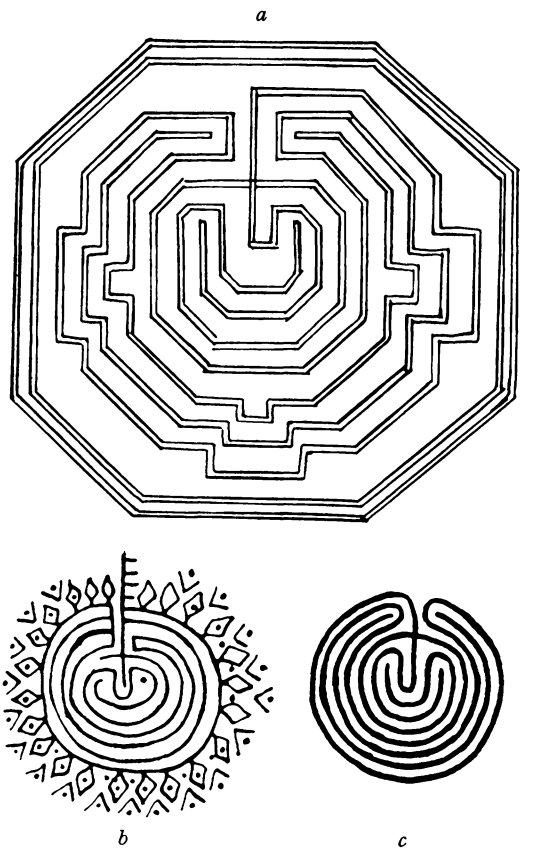


FIG. 36.

THRESHOLD AND TATTOO DESIGNS IN THE CONVENTION OF THE CRETAN LABYRINTH.

a, Threshold design, *Kolam*, Book B, p. 8. "The Fort."
b, Tattoo pattern, Âragalûr, p. 9, No. 33. "Fort."
c, Conventionalized Cretan labyrinth design appearing on the coins of Knossos (for comparison).

Richards first showed me some of the South Indian designs, it was with some trepidation and fear of disbelief that I

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rather cautiously announced that, if these were in fact related to the Malekulan designs, they had their origin in labyrinths. To my surprise, instead of displaying the incredulity I might have expected, Mr. Richards unrolled his sheaf of drawings and, without hesitation, showed me two, one a threshold design and the other a tattoo pattern, which turned out to be not only true labyrinths in the modern sense, but actually of the precise stereotyped pattern familiar to all students of archaeology from the coins of Knossos.

These two designs are reproduced in Fig. 36, together with a drawing of the late Cretan design represented on the coins. Of these, the tattoo design, Fig. 36*b*, is seen to be a slightly bungled delineation of the circular form of the Cretan labyrinth. The threshold design, Fig. 36*a*, resembles more closely the equally familiar squared form of the same design, with the addition of castellations recalling those of the Marriage and Sacrificial Platforms illustrated in Figs. 26*a* and 26*b*.

One of the interesting features of these representations of the Cretan labyrinth is that they are both called " Fort," recalling what has already been said, both in this article and in that on the Labyrinth in Malekula, about the defensive nature of such structures. If further evidence is needed on that score, I would refer the reader to Mrs. Deedes' [31] writings and to Mr. W. F. J. Knight's brilliant article on the labyrinthine Walls of Troy,[32] which were at once a military and a magical defence.

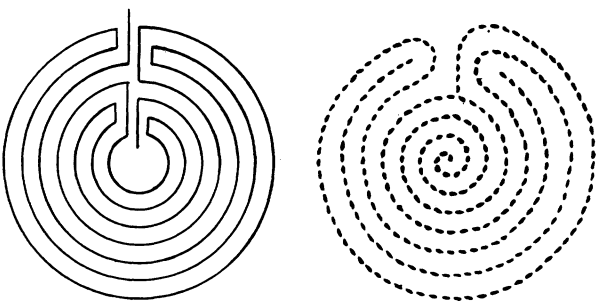
[31] C. N. Deedes, *op. cit.*

[32] W. F. J. Knight, " Maze Symbolism and the Trojan Game," *Antiquity*, vol. vi, 1932. The theme here stated has been elaborated in his recently published book *Cumaean Gates* (Oxford, 1936), in which, starting from the Malekulan evidence, Mr. Knight sets out to explain the hitherto not understood opening of the Sixth Aeneid, and proceeds to a comparison with many accounts of the Journey of the Dead, both classical and as at present conceived by many living peoples.

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Stone Labyrinths existing in the Same Area

Evidence of labyrinths in South India is not, however, confined to the threshold and tattoo designs. Mr. Richards also called my attention to the existence, in this same area, of labyrinths carved on the stone walls in front of houses among the Kota of the Nilgiris. One such, reproduced in Fig. 37*a*, is recorded by Breeks [33] as having been seen by



a *b*

Fig. 37.

Stone Labyrinths.

a, Labyrinth incised on a house wall in a Kota village. The labyrinth is called *Kótē*, " Fort," and is used for a game, " the problem being to get into the centre " (reproduced from J. W. Breeks' *Primitive Tribes and Monuments of the Nilagiris*). The design is the same as that of the Cretan labyrinth, inversed, that is to say the incised lines represent, not the structure of the labyrinth such as is seen on the coins, but the track followed by the person penetrating it.

b, Spiral boulder labyrinth constructed of small stones near the site of the ruined city of Kundani, in Hosur Taluq, Salem District, Madras Presidency. (From a sketch made by Mr. F. J. Richards.)

him incised on a stone wall in front of a Kota house. This labyrinth turns out, on examination, to be again of precisely the same design as that on the coins of Knossos, inversed, that is to say that the incised lines represent, not the structure of the labyrinth such as is seen on the coins, but

[33] J. W. Breeks, *An Account of the Primitive Tribes and Monuments of the Nilagiris*, London, India Museum, 1873, pp. 41 and 124.

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the track followed by the person penetrating it. These lines are carved to serve a game of skill, " the problem being to get into the centre," and, like the threshold labyrinth design, are called *kote*, meaning " Fort." The carving of labyrinths on upright stones is found also in other megalithic areas, even as far away as the maritime coast of northern Europe. Matthews figures a similar carving on a Danish cross, exactly reproducing the Knossan design.[34]

Most striking of all, however, is the existence, recorded by Mr. Richards, of an actual labyrinth constructed of small stones near the ruined city of Kundani, in Hosur Taluq, Salem District, in the Madras Presidency, near the Baire Gauni tank, on the hill south of Devar-Kundani. Fig. 37*b* is a reconstruction made by the writer from Mr. Richards' drawing of this structure. Apart from the entrance, which is similar to that of the Cretan labyrinth, the labyrinth is in the form of a spiral. Mr. Richards writes: " The spaces between the lines were about two feet wide. The spirals were laid out with beautiful regularity. Near by were a large number of *Pandava gudi*, temples of the Pandavas, the heroes of the Mahabharata, a name commonly given all over South India to megalithic remains." It is not my function here, nor would there be space, to enter into the details of South Indian racial and cultural history, and I will content myself with pointing out the megalithic associations of the site. Labyrinths constructed of small stones in precisely the same way are found in other megalithic areas, notably at Wisby in Gothland and on Wier Island in the Gulf of Finland.[35] The Wisby labyrinth is again of the same conventionalized pattern as that seen on the coins of Knossos, with one extra turn, while that on Wier Island is similar to the South Indian labyrinth here figured in that it also, as it approaches the centre, becomes a spiral.

[34] W. H. Matthews, *Mazes and Labyrinths*, London, 1922, Fig. 128.

[35] W. H. Matthews, *op. cit.*, Figs. 124, 126.

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The use of loose stones in this connexion is a very definite technique, and I propose both here and in the future to refer to such works as "boulder labyrinths." Yet another such boulder labyrinth, which I propose to figure in another article, exists in our own Isles of Scilly, and is also of the exact pattern seen on the coins of Knossos.

Mr. Richards says that there is no evidence of the antiquity or otherwise of the South Indian labyrinth here figured, adding: "It might have been made quite recently." This is quite possible. The threshold designs are made and rubbed out every year, a fact in no way disproving the antiquity of the tradition that prompts them. The Scilly labyrinth is said locally to have been constructed in the year 1726 by a lighthouse-keeper from London. But its position, like that of the Kundani labyrinth, in a district covered with megalithic remains, as well as the nature of the surrounding objects, points to the conclusion that all the lighthouse-keeper can have done was to renew a pre-existing structure. The very fragility of such structures is evidence itself of their uninterrupted use, since, if not used, the stones would easily become displaced and the monument in time disappear.

The presence in South India of these labyrinths of Knossos design raises an important issue. This pattern was a comparatively late conventionalization of the general labyrinth motive, evolved after the labyrinth had lost its power as a real barrier against uninitiates and had degenerated into a symbol of state, a symbol that everyone knew and which was therefore no longer a mystery. It is not present in Malekula, and its appearance among the South Indian threshold and tattoo designs is sporadic, nor is it possible to trace locally any clear line of typological evolution connecting them with the rest of the series which we have examined. It is clear, then, that the labyrinths of Knossos design found in South India represent a more recent cultural

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influence, starting in the Mediterranean and following the same lines of diffusion as the older labyrinth culture but not extending so far east. The important thing for us to notice is that it did indeed follow the old lines, and that the presence of these formalized labyrinths among the threshold and tattoo designs not only affords striking proof of my original interpretation of the continuous-line designs both of Malekula and of South India as being in fact derived from an older form of labyrinth, but shows also the pertinacity with which this labyrinth motive has persisted in megalithic culture throughout a long period of time.

Note on the Meanings of the Word *Kolam*

It will not be out of place to bring this examination of labyrinth motives in Southern India to a close with a brief note on the meanings of the word *kolam*, by which the Southern Indian threshold designs are known. I am indebted to Mr. L. A. Cammiade for the following additional meanings of this word, of which he says the chief are: "line, current, watercourse, snake, ornament, figure, mask, display, bird, areca nut, loofah, and the planet Saturn."

At first sight there is but little obvious connexion between this apparently odd assortment of meanings. We have, however, already seen how the "snake" comes to be associated with these designs. If we remember the principle of the continuously moving line on which the conception of the labyrinth motive is built, "line," "current" and "watercourse" are all clearly seen to fit in with this motive. "Ornament" and "figure" presumably refer to individual designs. With the ritual uses of "areca nut" and of the "loofah" I am not sufficiently familiar to say why these objects should be included. Saturn, however, is probably included as being a wandering planet, and we have

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already seen the connexion with the threshold designs of both the Pleiades and the moon.

"Mask" and "display" are presumably included as representing the mythological dance and dramatic aspect of the labyrinth motive, corresponding to the Malekulan maze-dances and labyrinth plays and to the sand-tracings belonging to Class B representing the Guardian Ghost.

The inclusion of "bird" is of peculiar interest. It will be remembered that in the Malekulan maze-dances the dancers who thread the labyrinth are painted to represent hawks, in accordance with the belief that the entire megalithic rite with which they are connected is watched over by the hawk, with which all those performing the chief sacrifice become identified. The function of the hawk is twofold. In the first place it is the strongest bird, and soars the highest into the sky, thus typifying the striving upward which is part of the spiritual essence of the rite. In the second place, and it is here that its labyrinthine function becomes clear, it swoops and swirls in never-ending curves, thus typifying the looped labyrinthine course. Nor is this aspect of bird symbolism confined to Malekula. There is a very marked similarity in many respects between the megalithic culture of Malekula and that of the Naga tribes of Assam. In answer to an enquiry respecting the possibility of labyrinth dances among the Nagas, Mr. J. H. Hutton writes: "There are certainly labyrinth figures in their dances, in which a long line of dancers coils up spirally, uncoils again, splits into two which coil up together in a tight spiral, and reverse and uncoil again."[36] He adds: "I know of no parallel to the individual dancers who thread the labyrinth." These Naga dances resemble in this respect the corresponding spiral movement in Malekula, which is an encircling motive in which no solo dancers take part. Of special interest to us here, however, is his statement

[36] Cf. John Layard, *op. cit.*, p. 155 and Fig. 22.

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that "the Kachha[37] Naga tribes have a number of imitation dances descriptive of the migration of birds, of fighting buffaloes, circling swallows, or even elephants treading cautiously on boggy ground." It would be rash, with so little evidence, to state categorically that these are in fact labyrinth dances. We have, however, seen how in the case of Southern India many objects displaying a tendency to movement in a continuous line have become incorporated as labyrinth symbols. It will be noticed that it is not simply birds as such that are represented, but definitely birds in motion, either "migrating" or "circling," and it is possible that we have here, as also in the Malekulan parallels, an explanation of the inclusion of birds among the many meanings of the word *kolam* in Southern India. It is not quite so easy to explain the dance descriptive of "buffaloes fighting," unless this may be taken as corresponding with the mock battle that is an essential feature of the Malekulan dances, representing the attempt to enter the labyrinthine sanctuary by force.[38] The "elephants treading cautiously on boggy ground," however, suggest strongly the treading of an obstructed path, which is the key motive of labyrinth symbolism.

Numerous motives, apparently differing widely from one another, but all displaying the same characteristic of tortuous or obstructed continuous-line movement having their origin in the tracing of the labyrinthine path, are met with in many parts of the world, all centering around the racial memory of the structure and use of labyrinths which played such an important part in megalithic ritual. Others will appear both in my forthcoming book and in the course of future articles. It will perhaps be of some use to students if I here list those which have so far appeared in the two articles of this series that have now been published in this journal.

[37] Sometimes spelt Kacha. These dances are performed in particular by the Nruongmai group of this tribe.

[38] John Layard, *op. cit.*, pp. 159, 166, 167 and Figs. 25, 26.

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List of Continuous-line Labyrinth Motives

(References: M=Maze-Dances and the Ritual of the Labyrinth in Malekula, *Folk-Lore*, Vol. XLVII, June, 1936; I=the present article.)

Ancient East

Path trod by the initiate through the labyrinth (M, p. 129).

Malekula

Continuous-line motive in sand-tracings representing labyrinths (M, whole article), most notably "The Path," drawn by the Guardian Ghost (M, p. 126 ff.).

Path trod by the ghost of the dead man through the completed sand-tracing called "The Path" (M, p. 140).

Path traced by dancers representing hawks (i.e. initiates) through ranks of dancers representing the structure of the labyrinth (Atchin). (M, p. 149 ff.)

Path traced by dancers representing the drama of the royal nuptials through ranks of dancers also representing the structure of the labyrinth (Seniang). (M, p. 161 ff.)

Spiral dance (Atchin). (M, p. 155.)

Pentacle, called "The Pleiades" (I, p. 169).

Southern India

A kind of "wavy" pattern drawn on mortuary pottery (I, p. 12 i).

Continuous-line motive in threshold and tattoo designs (I, p. 118 ff).

Path trod by the husband over the designs (I, p. 122 ff).

Snakes (I, p. 153 ff).

Pentacle (associated with the moon). (I, p. 169.)

Line (I, p. 178).

Current (I, p. 178).

Watercourse (I, p. 178).

Bird (in flight). (I, pp. 179-180).

The planet Saturn (I, p. 178).

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Nagas (?)

Spiral dance (I, p. 179).
Dance descriptive of the migration of birds (I, p. 180).
,, ,, ,, circling swallow (I, p. 180).
,, ,, ,, elephants treading cautiously on boggy ground (I, p. 180).

Note on Mythology

I said at the outset of this article that I did not consider the study of labyrinth designs complete unless accompanied by an investigation of the associated mythology. Conditions of space forbid the inclusion of this investigation in the present issue, but I hope to publish it shortly.

Where to see the Designs

The complete set of threshold and tattoo designs collected by Mr. Richards, many of which there has been no space to refer to in this paper, have been left by him in charge of Mr. K. de B. Codrington, of the India Museum, who has kindly consented to hold them at the disposal of any who may wish to consult them.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my great debt to Mr. F. J. Richards for much information regarding the designs contained in this paper, and at the same time to exonerate him from any responsibility regarding the theoretical considerations, which are entirely my own.

I have also to thank the Council of the Royal Anthropological Institute for kind permission to reproduce Figs. 1*a*, 2*a*, 3*b* (reduced), 3*c* (reduced), 5, 6*a*, 6*b*, 33*a*, 33*b* and 34*c*.

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