

5-29-1937

Tarah Umara Belt Weaving and Design

Department of Anthropology

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nm_anthropologist

Recommended Citation

Anthropology, Department of. "Tarah Umara Belt Weaving and Design." *New Mexico Anthropologist* 1, 6 (1937): 87-90.
https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nm_anthropologist/vol1/iss6/1

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Anthropology at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in New Mexico Anthropologist by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.

physical, from without or from within. For this reason, we know, modern so-called peoples are what they are today. And for this reason, Europe is what it is today. But here with the Jugo-slavs (southern slave) we can actually study what does happen when this process is overdone. Under natural conditions, the Jugo-Slavs, with the East meeting the West as it does, would have flourished like any of the other great groups in historical culture. But there, due to a strange centrifugal action caused by too many entering factors, their culture which commenced to flower again and again was destroyed so utterly that recovery was a continuous slow process. The sequence of injection of new elements was so rapid that instead of a slow progress of cultural digestion we actually see the removal of the entrails, the very organs which signify all phases or methods of group education. This is but one interest which the ethnologist would uncover.

That of the physical anthropological aspect: These reasons we can easily guess. Here are seen the Jugo-slavs who differ so greatly from their neighbors in stature, cranial and so forth. His origin is still unintelligible because of its puzzling mysteriousness. To say that the physical anthropologist is to solve the matter is like expecting him to know Peter's grandfather through the acquaintance with little Peter. And then we all know the simile - trying to unscramble eggs which have been scrambled - an impossibility.

Psychological and literary material: I find a week or so ago in the New York Times that courses for those interest in the southern Slavs were being evolved in an Eastern University. Even in this tourist journalistic account the report elaborated with statements which expressed amazement ~~in~~ at the western world for overlooking such a literary gold-mine.

While reading the above mentioned news paper article I recalled the words of Max Eastman, "Sorrow is a great mother of poetry". To appreciate Eastman's remark one might turn to Serbian literature. Of all the most truly spontaneous literatures that have ever existed, the Serbian holds a lofty rank.

Grim and our Gothe place the Serbian epic poems side by side with the Illiad and the Odessy, two of man's greatest works.

Now, with the above, I conclude by saying : to study the Yugo-slav is of great value and interest indeed.

E. Knezevich?

TARAH UMARA BELT WEAVING AND DESIGN

The Tarahumaras are a Mexican Indian tribe, speaking a language of the Uto-Aztecan stock, who dwell in the high Sierras and deep barrancos of the southwestern part of Chihuahua. They are a very large (between twenty and forty thousand) and primitive group whose mainstay is agriculture and some hunting. The tribe has comparatively few handicrafts, but it is famous for its weaving. Belts, mantas, blankets, ribbons and fajas are woven, but for the purpose of this article I will consider only the belts or girdles which are so skillfully and beautifully made.

The archaeological researches of Zingg have shown that in early Post-Hispanic times the art of weaving belts decorated with transversal bands was practiced. The girdles made now-a-days are all made of wool, prepared by the natives themselves from their own sheep.

When the wool is taken from the sheep it is very dirty. It is washed in some stream, beaten, dried and then carded into a fluffy mass. This fluffy material is separated and loosely twisted and rolled up. This loose material then forms the yarn that is then tightly spun into a heavy thread.

The thread is used mostly in its natural colors of white, black and a dark chestnut brown. At times, however, it is dyed. The most common dyes produce a beautiful mahogany red and a golden yellow. The red is produced by brazilwood and the yellow by "el palo amarillo" (Mora?) and by a certain yellow mosses. Dying is done by cutting up the dye wood and boiling it in a vessal of water. When the dye is of satisfactory color and consistency, the wool yarn is put in and the whole cooked for fifteen or twenty minutes at a constant temperature. This produces colors that are very fast.

The loom is a very simple horizontal one of widespread use. It seems to be identical with the one that the Pueblo Indians and the Navajo use except that it is always on a frame and never attached to the waist. It is usually about four and a half feet long and may be as much as two feet wide. The warp threads are separated by means of a shed stick and the alternate threads are picked up by a headle of looped string design.

The warps may be of any color but the weft thread is always black or brown. The design is formed by raising or "bridging" certain of the threads. It is in the center panel of the belt and is bordered by stripes of other colors. These may be white, brown, red or yellow and as a rule only three are used in bands that are four to six warp threads wide. The design area is almost always black or brown and white. Rarely is red used with white. The fringe is unique in that it is braided; this is done with four threads at a time.

The designs are very characteristic and seem to show a slight regional differentiation between the north and the south of the Tarahumara area. It may well to mention here also that is reported that they of the deep barrancas of the middle Fuerte River wear plain black belts without designs.² The main essentials of design all over the area are black and white triangles with dots within them of the opposite color (that is, on belts of black and white design), and series of zigzag lines. Bennett and Zingg worked in the central and southern Tarahumara area and they describe the designs as being formed of a running series of diamonds.³ A study of some of the available specimens shows that other examples like that are to be found. Plate 1 shows an example from Pájaral, Chihuahua of that type.

In contrast to the diamond design, large series of belts from Chihuahua City and the nearby area are found to be quite different and consistent in design. (It might be well to note here that no Tarahumaras at present live close to Chihuahua City but that these belts are often obtained from them when they come in to trade.) This design is well illustrated by Plate 2. This specimen is quite typical and the design is in dark brown and white bordered with lines of brown-red and brown, each four warp threads wide. On some very narrow belts ($1\frac{1}{2}$ " wide) the design is only different colored triangles with one or two colored lines on each side.

28 3---Tarahumara
over to the area. The 28 3---Tarahumara
the are .

Tarahumara belts as a whole are the same size all over the area. In width they may vary from one and a half to four inches, but three inches is the common width. The fringe is usually about ten inches long.

Little is known about the meanings of the designs. Lumholtz has worked out the symbolism of the related Huichol Indians in the Sierra Madre Occidental, but the two groups have little in common in designs. The Huichol material shows a great many variations, while the Tarahumara work is limited to a few designs. However, on the specimen from Páral (Plate 1) is found a large cross similar to a Maltese cross except that only two of its arms taper in. This same cross is found on another specimen (Laboratory of Anthropology Collection) so it may not be just a chance design. The most striking thing about it is the great similarity of the crosses on the belts to like crosses that are marked on the tesguino jars of the same Indians. The only difference is that the crosses on the ollas have all the arms taper in, while those on the belts have only two. However, on examining the belts from the point of view of weaving technique it can be seen that it would be difficult to have so that the other arms tapered in. It could be done, but possibly required more effort than it was worth. There may be no connection at all, but the resemblance is very striking to a student of the Tarahumaras.

Bennett and Zingg state that the designs as a whole are a part of a movement that swept over the whole of Northern Mexico in Post-Hispanic times. Not enough is known about the textiles of the neighboring tribes to say that this is absolutely sure. The Yaqui and Mayo both wove belts. Moreover, Dr. Brand says that he has seen a Mayobelt that had a crossdesign⁴. The closest resemblance to the Tarahumara belt is found in an illustration of a Pima belt by Russel⁵. This has a zigzag design down the center and triangles with dots in them. Crosses are found in many forms on Huichol weaving (though not this particular type) and Lumholtz interprets them as stars, world quarters, etc.

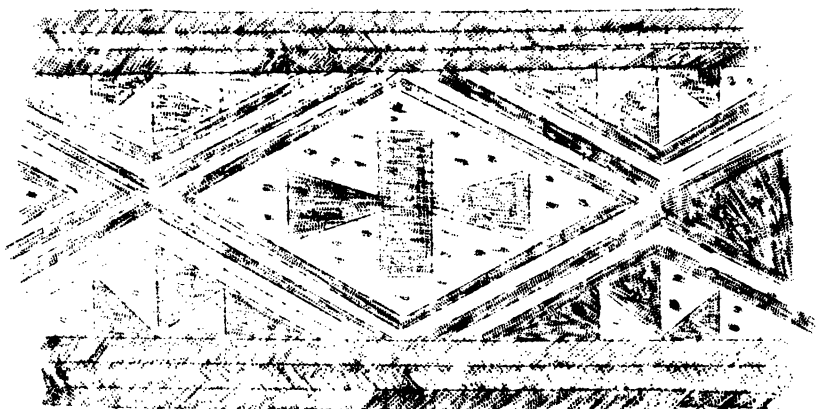
The dots in the triangles seem to be a matter of technique rather than design. It is essential to shorten the bridges, so this is done by inserting dots. Triangles would be very difficult to weave if this were not done. It is woven in cotton. This is interesting in another connection as the Tarahumaras not so long ago wove coiled baskets very much like the Pima. Possibly this is a case of cultural item movement. A comparison with the designs of the Pueblo and Navajo further north shows a very little similarity in design, but the technique is the same.

4. Personal statement..., April, 1937.

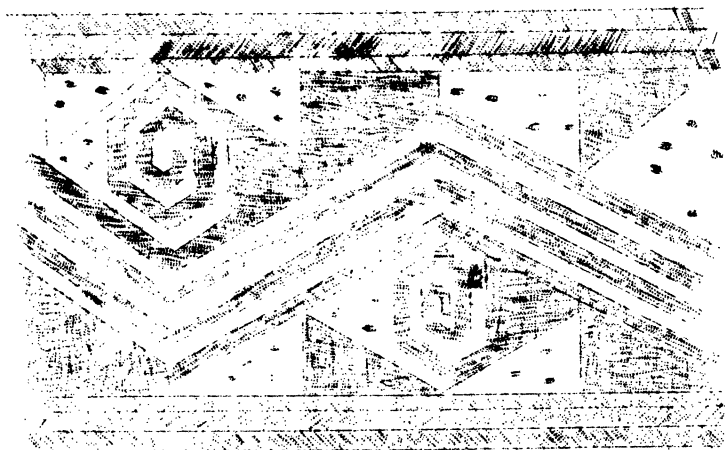
5. Pima Indians, B. A. E., 26th Report.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Basauri, Carlos--Monografia de Los Tarahumars, Mexico, 1929.
 Bennett, W. I. and Zingg, R. M.--The Tarahumara, Chicago, 1935.
 Russel, Frank, The Pima Indians, BAE Annual Report 26, Washington, 1908
 Lumholts--Symbolism of the Huichol Indians, M. A. M. N. H., Vol. III, N
 New York, 1900, part 1.



Cross Design, Parral Chihuahua



Scroll Design, Chihuahua City.

TARAHUMARA BELT DESIGNS