PRINCIPLES of ORNAMENTAL ART

F. EDWARD HULME

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architecture and ornament of the Early English and Decorated periods of Gothic afford many fine examples of it, while in the Perpendicular the opposite principle has full sway, so that if we have a small fragment of a building of that late period we have the key to the whole, all the rest, panelling, Tudor roses, &c., being but repeats. Henry VII.'s Chapel and the Houses of Parliament afford conveniently accessible illustrations of this. In conclusion, several of the modifications of Renaissance art, as the *cinque-cento* and Louis Quinze work, owe a large portion of their characteristic effect to the variation that, with more or less of good taste, is dominant as a principle in their ornamental forms.

Turning now to our illustrations for further examples, we find instances of repetition as a dominant feature in Fig. 42, a Chinese fret; Fig. 59, a Greek fret; Fig. 149, an Egyptian example; Fig. 259, a design on a Chinese vase in the South Kensington Museum; Fig. 283, Greek in its origin; Fig. 295, a Chinese diaper; Fig. 320, a piece of Gothic stone-carving; Fig. 369, Byzantine ivory work; Fig. 370, a design for wood-carving; Figs. 394, 396, bands of ornament from Greek vases; Fig. 399, German Gothic metal-work; and Fig. 409, a portion of a Norman string-course. These are selected as fairly characteristic examples. Many others will be found on turning over the plates.

Repetition, modified by alternation of form, direction, and colour, may be seen in Figs. 11, 14, 16, 17, 19, 38. Repetition of form, modified by alternation of colour alone, is seen in Figs. 23, 41, 108, 241, 244, 304, 310, and 326. Repetition of form modified by alternation of direction will be found in Figs. 63, 66, 283, 353, 354, 367, 393, and 397; while repetition modified by the alternation of size alone is exemplified in Figs. 264 and 315.

Alternation, as a principle in the construction of the design, may be noticed in Fig. 37; in Figs. 131, 141; in Fig. 135, a very good Egyptian example; in Figs. 169, 195; in Fig. 299, a Greek border, wherein the alternation is both of form and colour, as it also is in Fig. 316, a very rich piece of Indian embroidery; in Figs. 300, 303, Indian examples, where the alternation is that of flower and leaf; Fig. 302, a design for a flooring tile, wherein the alternation consists of a simple form of leaf with a richer type; as may be seen, too, in Fig. 306, a portion of a Byzantine string-course; Fig. 308, a Greek treatment, the alternation of leaf and fruit; Fig. 314, the alternation of flower and bud; Fig. 309, part of the border of a plate of Hispano-Moorish manufacture, where forms of purely arbitrary character mutually enrich each other by their alternate arrangement; Fig. 352, an early form of Greek anthemion pattern; Fig. 364, a design based on the nut, wherein the foliage and fruit alternate; Fig. 376, a piece of modern wall-paper; and Figs. 398, 413, 417, Greek borderings from vases in the British Museum.

Counterchange we have already in a previous chapter dwelt upon; examples of it may be found at Figs. 3, 14, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 32, 35, 36, 90, 111, 112, 122, 129, 244, 304, 305.

The principle of variation is illustrated in Fig. 61, a Chinese fret-like pattern, and a very characteristic way amongst the Celestials of filling up any required space; Figs. 332, 335, 339, Norman examples; in Fig. 333, a piece of Indian window-piercing; in Figs. 334, 336, Italian examples; in Fig. 338, a piece of Perpendicular wood-carving, wherein it will be noticed that, in spite of the stiffness of treatment so characteristic of the period, the principle of variation has been worked out in the diversified treatment of the leaf-lobes. Fig. 337 on the same plate is a natural example, a piece of the large scabious; the variation both of form and size in the foliage will be easily recognisable. Many plants show this very well. We must not, however, linger on this point; but our readers will find both interest and profit in trying to find out for themselves natural objects wherein the leading principles

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to some great river ever advancing on its course, receiving on each side tributary streams, and incorporating them into its own volume of waters, influenced by various circumstances, here expanding into broad quiet pools, there confined by rocks and sandbanks, causing tortuous deviations. The view that many gather from mere book reading, unaccompanied by personal study, is rather, if we may be allowed to continue our figure, that of a series of lakes, some large, others small and insignificant, some abounding in features of beauty, others having but little charm, dotted about in no perceptible order or plan, and having no connection one with another.

It is convenient, for the purposes of classification, to take the central period of any aggregation of characteristic features, and to call that the development of a given style; but in reality there is no pause, style is always changing and cannot be so exactly mapped out and rigidly dated. If we take, for example, our Early English Gothic style, or, as some writers term it, the Early Pointed, we find that some of its most characteristic features are seen in the grouping of shafts, the bold conventional foliage, the deep hollow mouldings, and the dog-tooth ornament; but all these may be traced gradually issuing and changing from the preceding style, the Norman, and in their turn pass in various modifications into a period fitly termed transitional, and duly emerge from it to form what is known as Decorated or Middle Pointed Gothic.

No matter how debased a people, how remote from civilisation, and isolated from all other examples of art, we always find the instinctive desire and love for ornament. The results may appear to us exceedingly rude, quaint, barbarous, even outrageous in their ugliness, but nevertheless we cannot refuse to see in them the evidence of a desire to beautify the forms that their requirements had developed. Hence, we find clubs, spears, paddles, all carved in low relief with geometric designs or grotesque animal figures; the rude pottery, as we have seen in Fig. 237, while still soft, is dented into simple patterns, or slashed by a knife or tusk into concentric or zig-zag furrows; the reed mats, which would have been quite as serviceable for all practical purposes if of one uniform colour, are nevertheless chequered over in many-colour devices, in obedience to this great fact—the instinctive desire for the added grace; not content merely, brute-like, with the meat that perishes, but in some dim way feeling something of the Divine, of that spirit that paints the little wayside flower with loveliness, while scattering it broadcast over the earth; that, while enthroned in a majesty no eye can see, no heart conceive, tints with effulgent beauty the little earth-born beetle that glitters in the sunlight.

The influences that have resulted in our modern English decorative art may, strange as it may appear to some of our readers, be traced back for thousands of years, and only cease when we at last reach the land of the Pharaohs. Egypt has been the first parent of almost all European art, and of a great deal of that of Africa and Asia. The Egyptians greatly influenced all those who came in contact with them either in commerce or in war, and more especially, perhaps, the Jews, the Greeks, the Assyrians, and the Persians. We are unable positively to say what the architecture of Solomon's temple was like, but its description in the Bible tallies remarkably with many of the features that are characteristic of Egyptian art. On the occasion of the plunder of Thebes, Egypt's greatest city, by Cambyses, the conqueror carried away with him into Persia a large number of Egyptian artists, and their influence is everywhere yet seen in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates, at Nineveh, Babylon, and Persepolis; hence it is we find a great similarity in the elements of ornament and an almost identical mode of treatment in the forms of Assyria, Persia, and

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more especially with the harmonies of colour; the third treating of the practical values of various tints in actual design; the fourth dealing more especially with the nature, properties, and permanence of the pigments employed in artistic work. In the introduction to "The Grammar of Ornament," by Owen Jones, will be found several axioms of value, while those who care to investigate the question of the colouring of the buildings and statuary of the Assyrians, Greeks, and Romans, will find in the works of Semper, Hittorff, Penrose, and Winckelmann much that is interesting. As we have already, in our preceding remarks, urged the importance of personal study and investigation rather than tacit acquiescence in the opinions of others, so we again dwell upon its importance in the present matter, since a mere reliance on the dicta of authorities may at times have a rather perplexing effect on the mind of the student: thus, Field, for instance, says that yellow is an advancing, and purple a retiring colour, while Ruskin writes, "It is a favourite dogma among modern writers on colour that warm colours, reds and yellows, approach or express nearness, and cold colours, blue and grey, retire and express distance. So far is this from being the case, that no expression of distance in the world is so great as that of the gold and orange in the twilight sky. Colours, as such, are absolutely inexpressive respecting distance. A blue bandbox set on the same shelf with a yellow one will not look an inch further off. It is quite true that in certain objects blue is a sign of distance, but that is not because blue is a retiring colour, but because the mist in the air is blue, and therefore any warm colour which has not strength of light enough to pierce the mist is lost, or subdued, in its blue; but blue is no more on this account a retiring colour than brown is a retiring colour, because, when stones are seen through brown water, the deeper they lie the browner they look, or than yellow is a retiring colour, because, when objects are seen through a City fog, the further off they are the yellower they look. Neither blue, nor yellow, nor red, can have, as such, the smallest power of expressing either nearness or distance; they express them only under the peculiar circumstances which render them at the moment, or in that place, signs of nearness or distance. Thus vivid orange in an orange is a sign of nearness, for if you put the orange a great way off its colour will not look so bright; but vivid orange in the sky is a sign of distance, because you cannot get the colour of orange in a cloud near you; so purple in a violet or a hyacinth is a sign of nearness, because the closer you look at them the more purple you see; but purple in a mountain is a sign of distance, because a mountain close to you is not purple, but green or grey. It may, indeed, be generally assumed that a tender or pale colour will more or less express distance, and a powerful or dark colour nearness, but even this is not always so; the rosy colour of sunset on snow is pale on the snow at your feet, deep and full on the snow in the distance, and heathery hills will usually give a pale and tender purple near, and an intense and dark purple far away." Again, one writer says, "The very general use of the primaries, frequently with the addition of black and white and a little green, marks the taste of people before they become artificial, and before the true perception of colours becomes blunted; and experience abundantly proves that at first pure taste showed a preference for the primaries, and that it was only when it began to be corrupted that a superabundance of the secondaries was admitted." And again, in another place: "In all cases of polychrome ornament the three primaries should greatly predominate, and, indeed, they may be used alone with good effect; a preponderating quantity of the secondaries or tertiaries is far from agreeable." Another writer advocates the use of the primaries on small surfaces and in small quantities, balanced and supported by the secondary and tertiary colours on the larger masses; while a third, differing from both, says that, "in

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or Early Greek and the Early English Gothic are, perhaps, the best examples of the principle of simplicity (a very different thing to poverty of thought, we must remember); while the Moresque, with its elaborate interlacing, its delicate network of geometric tracery, its vivid colouring, scarlet, blue, gold, black, and profusion of ornament everywhere, is an excellent example of a style in which complexity is a dominant feature. A Doric temple is at once recognisable by its simple, massive proportions; its few ornaments, such as the triglyphs, were the memorials of real utility, representing in this case the ends of the beams in the earlier wood construction. The Romans, in adopting the order, made several modifications and to a great degree impaired its individuality. In the Greek work the columns were without pedestal or base, the end of the shaft resting directly on the paved floor. The capital was of a very simple character, a few plain fillets, a projecting ovolo moulding, very slight and delicate in its curvature, and surmounting all a plain abacus, without fillet or any other ornament. The columns, very massive in character, being sometimes only six diameters high, have considerable lightness of effect owing to the fluting. The fluting of the Greek Doric is peculiar, being composed of twenty shallow depressions, the junctions of the flutes being marked by a sharp line; whereas in the Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite orders, the flutes are twenty-four in number, and have small intervening fillets; the curves, too, are much rounder in character. Fluting may or may not be used in the preceding orders, but in the Tuscan order it is never in any case met with. The famous temples of Athens, that of Minerva, better known as the Parthenon, and that of Theseus, are fine examples of the Doric, and from their general beauty of composition and simple grace of detail are worthy of the most attentive regard. The Roman Doric is seen in the theatre of Marcellus, the only example of its use now extant. The Early English Gothic, though not so severe in treatment as the Greek order we have just referred to, affords us a very good example of like simplicity of treatment. We need not here dwell at any length upon it, as excellent examples of it are easily accessible, the cathedrals of Salisbury, Winchester, Peterborough, York, Lincoln, Beverley Minster, the abbeys of Westminster, Romsey, Netley, and many others, affording good illustrations. We may, however, briefly indicate some few of the salient points, such, for example, as the bold and simple forms of the shafts, the mouldings and windows, the delicate grace of the foliage, the simplicity and beauty of the designs for flooring-tiles and stained glass, leaving our readers to work out the clue thus afforded either by actual study of the remains, or, if these are inaccessible, by aid of the numerous excellent works that in these days may so facilitate the labours of the student, if only he be willing to avail himself of their aid. As the Early Gothic has simplicity of treatment and detail as a conspicuous feature, so in Later Gothic do we find the reverse. As illustrative of our statement we may refer to buildings so well known as Henry VII.'s Chapel at Westminster, and the Cathedral of Milan. In each of these we find a great complexity of treatment, an overloading of ornament, a want of the repose that is so agreeable a feature in earlier works, and that, as in an equally well-known building, Salisbury Cathedral, imparts a feeling of such quiet dignity to the whole. Much of the German Gothic errs greatly in this overloading of ornament. The Oriental nations, guided by what almost appears to be instinctive good taste, while delighting greatly in quaint and complex arrangements of lines and colours, do not destroy the beauty of their work by a too great prominence of these features. The metal-work and embroidery of India, the textile fabrics and MSS. of Persia, are rich in ornamental details of the greatest beauty. Many of the

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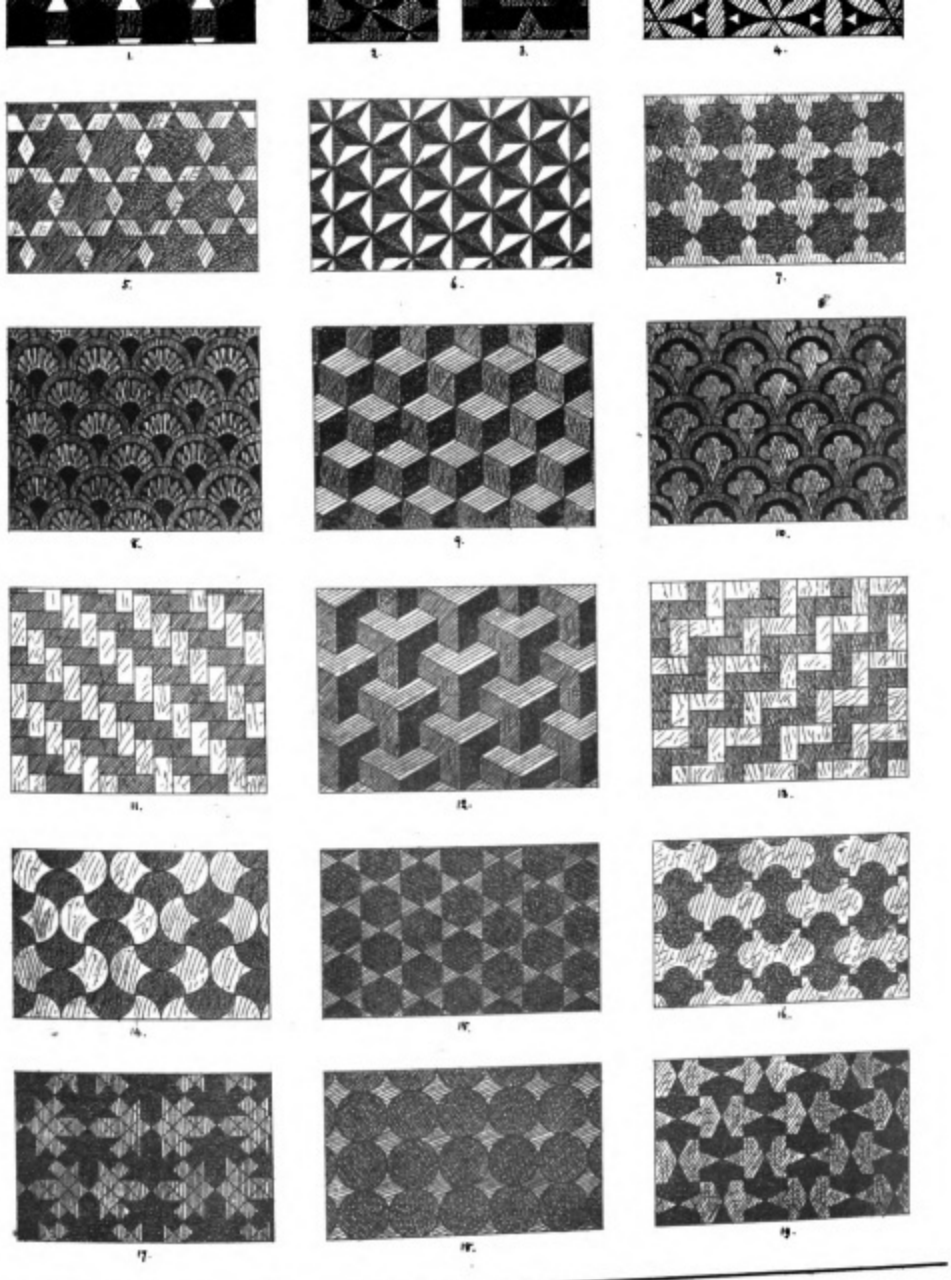

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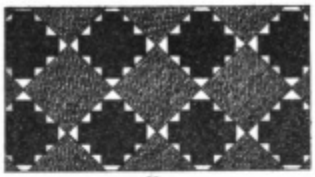
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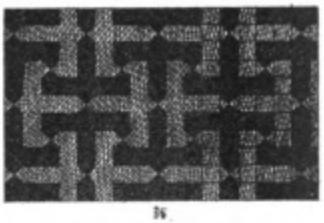
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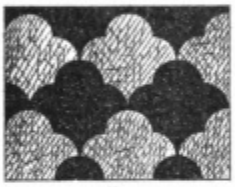
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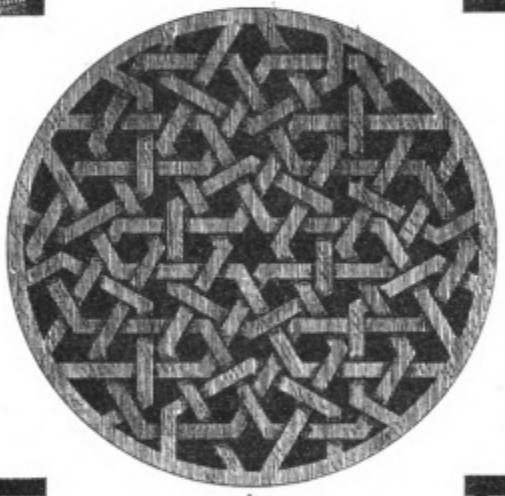
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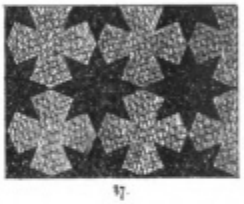
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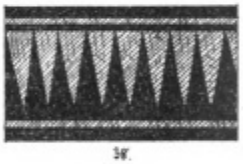
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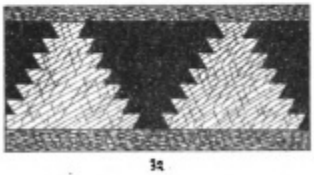
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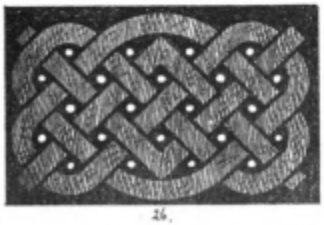
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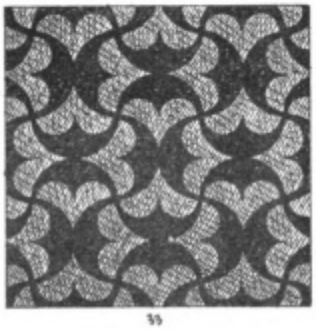
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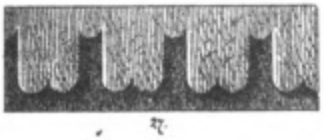
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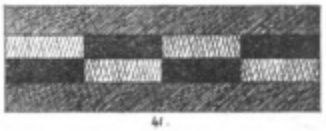
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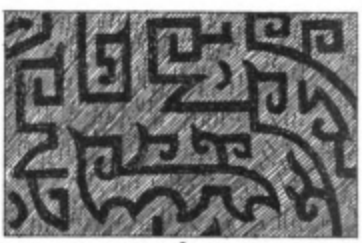
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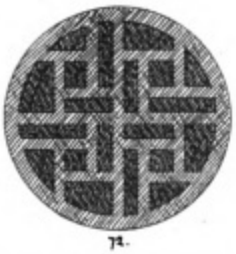
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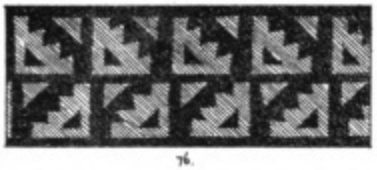
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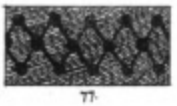
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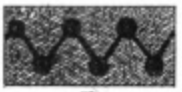
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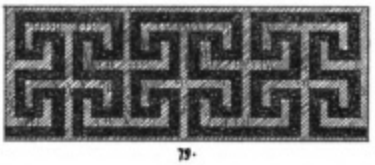
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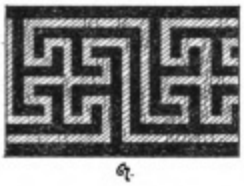
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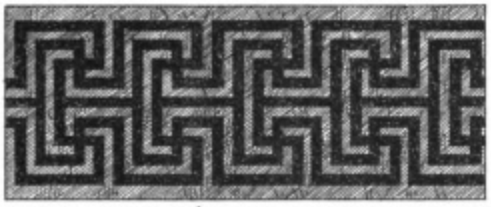
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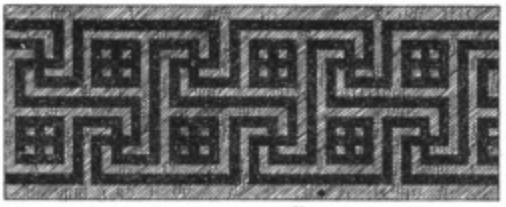
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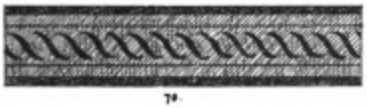
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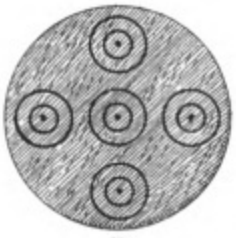
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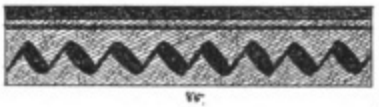
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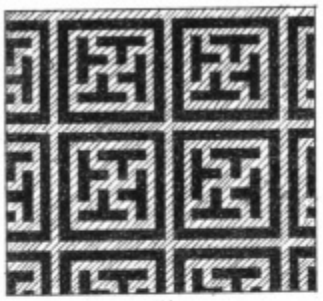

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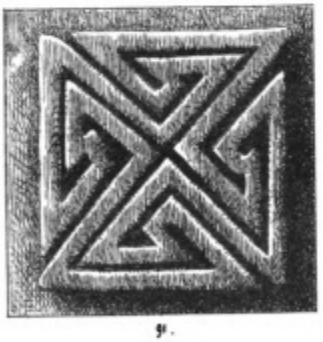

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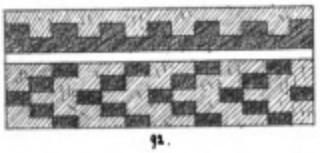

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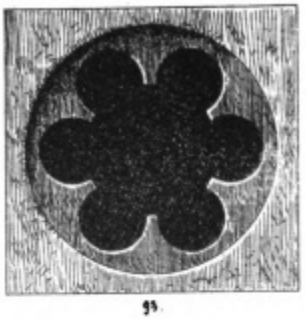

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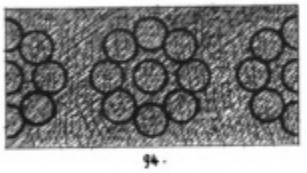

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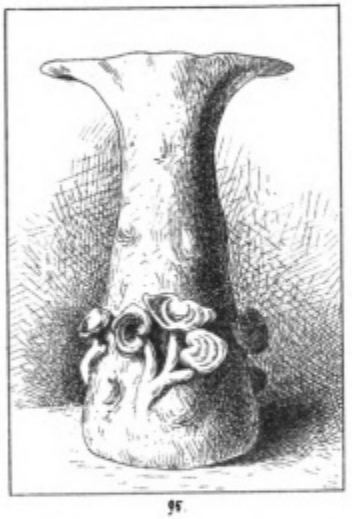

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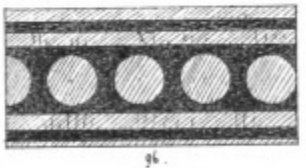

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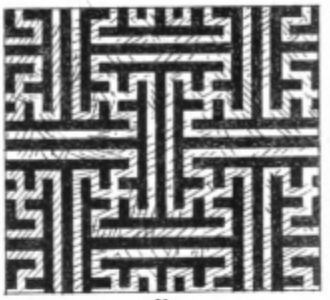

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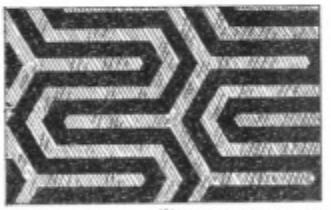

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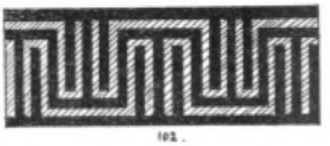

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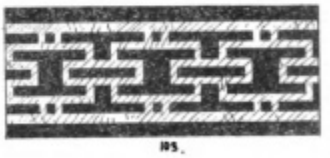

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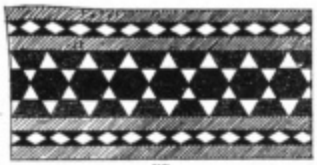

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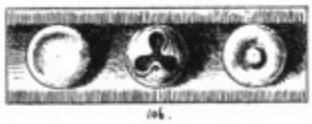

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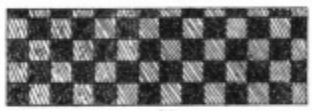

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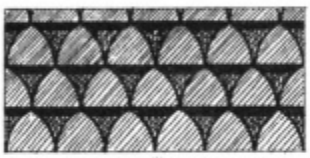

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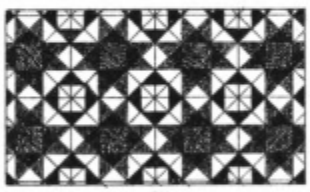

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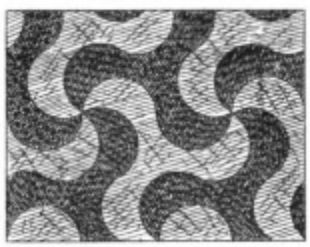

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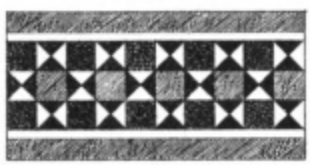

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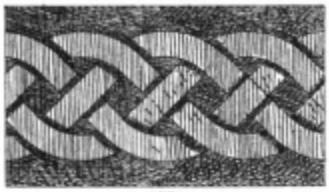

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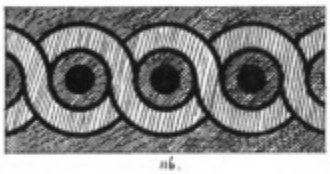

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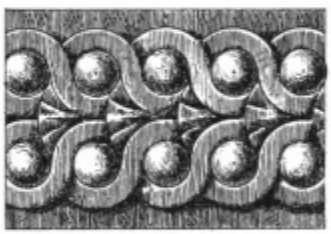

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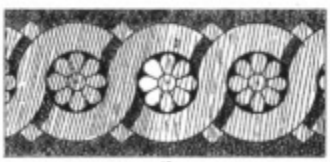

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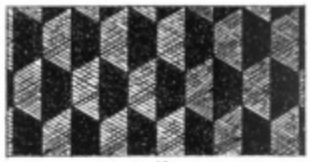

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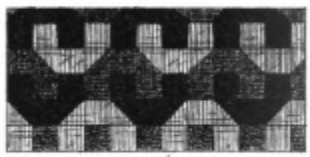

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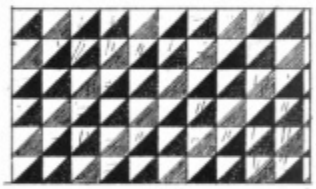

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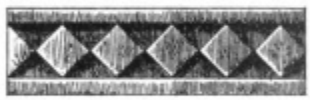

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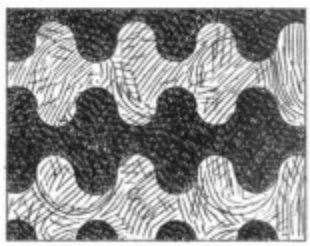

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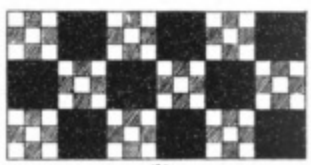

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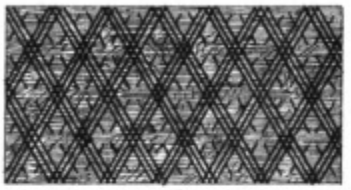

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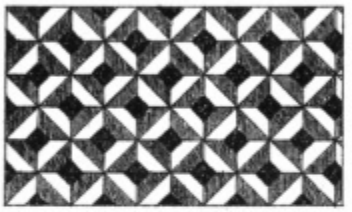

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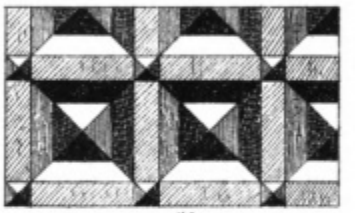

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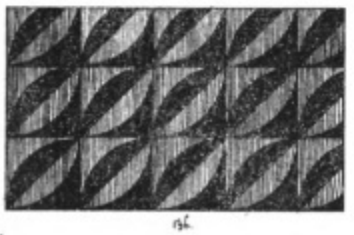

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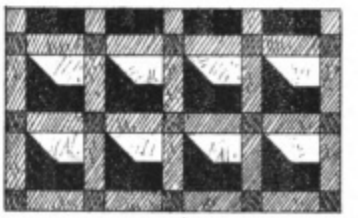

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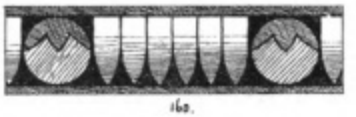
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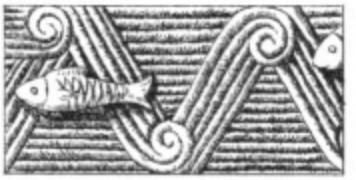
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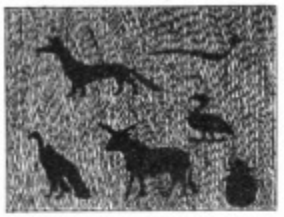

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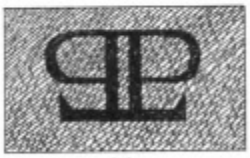

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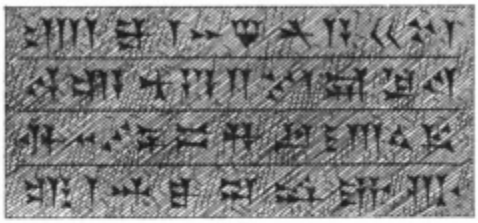

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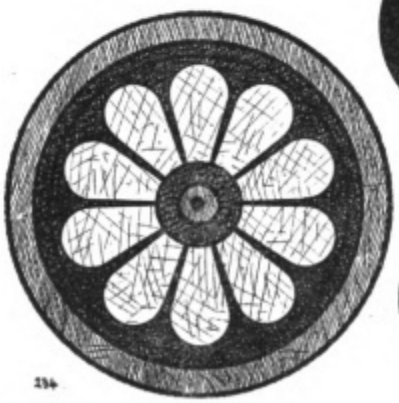

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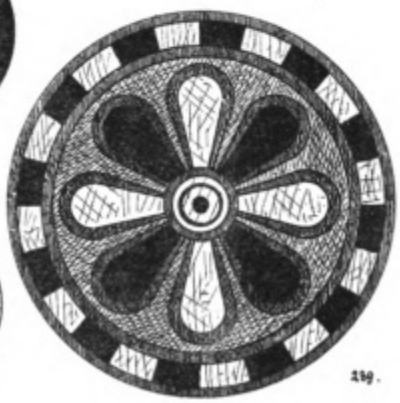

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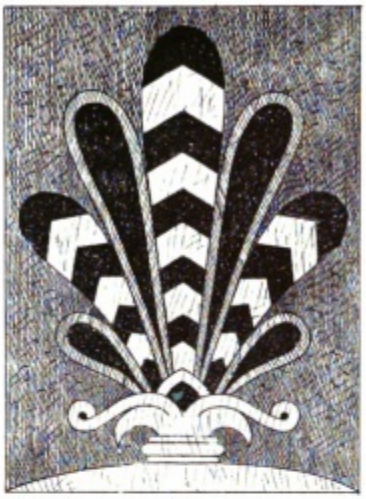

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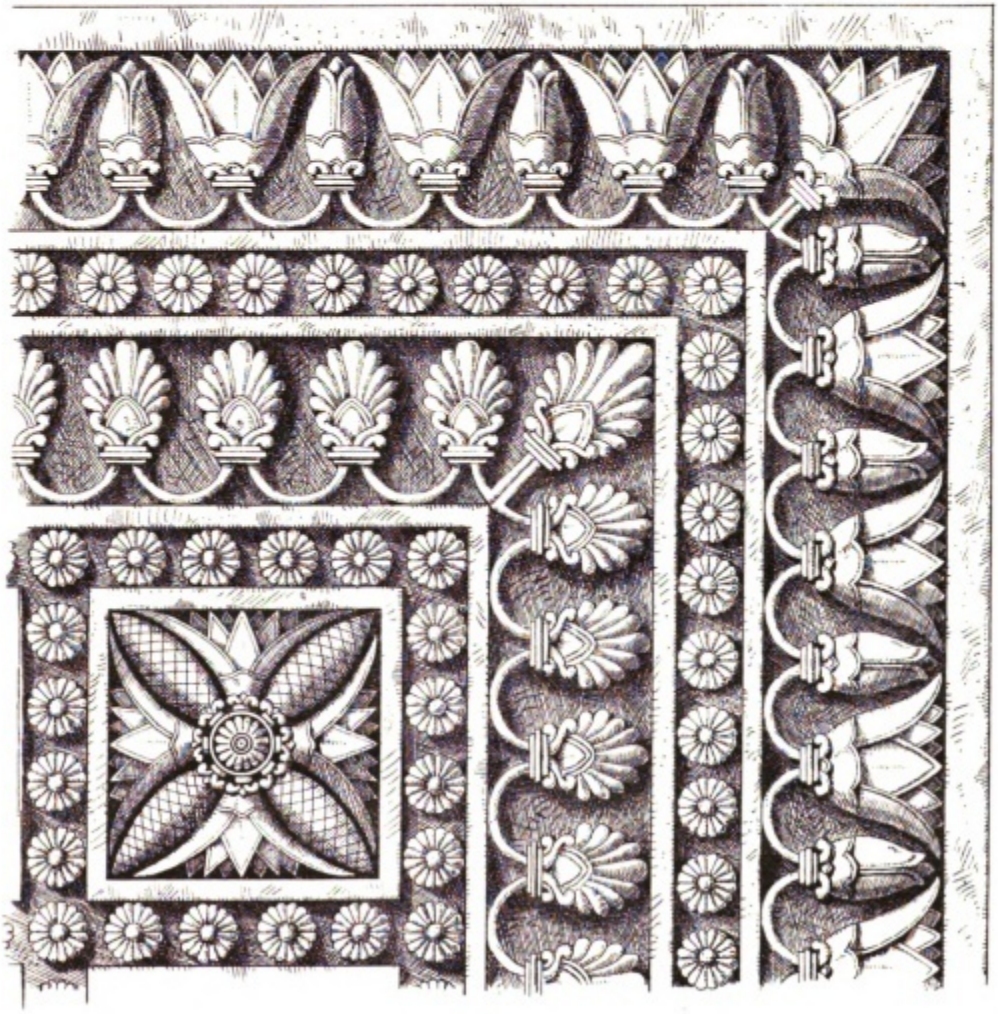

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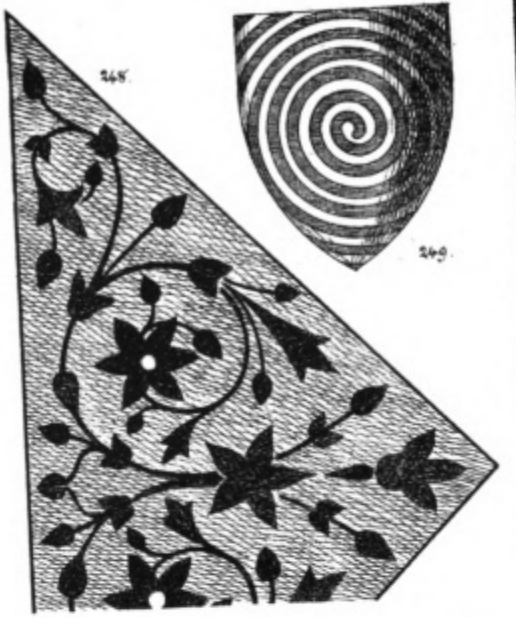

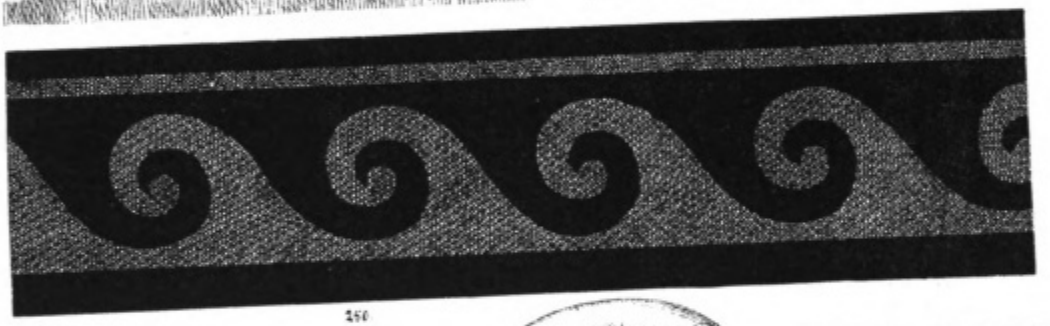

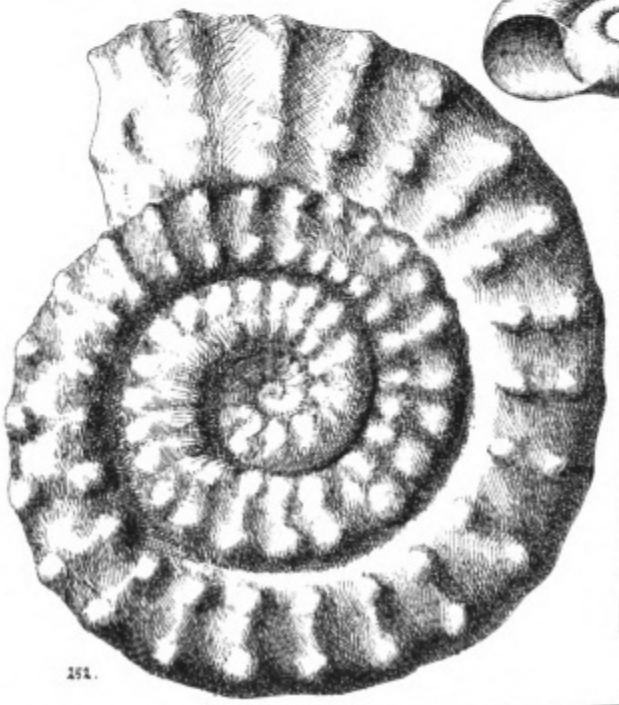

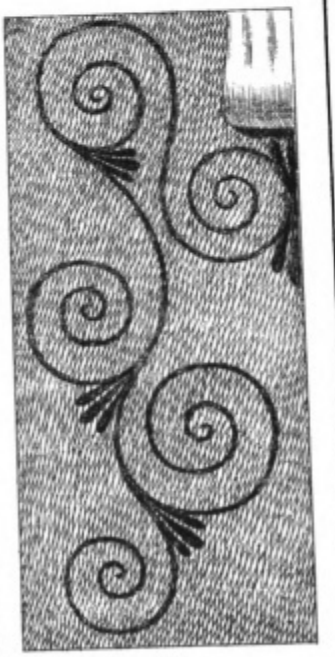

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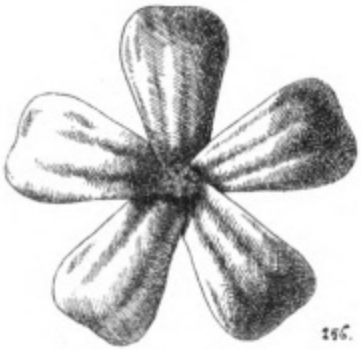

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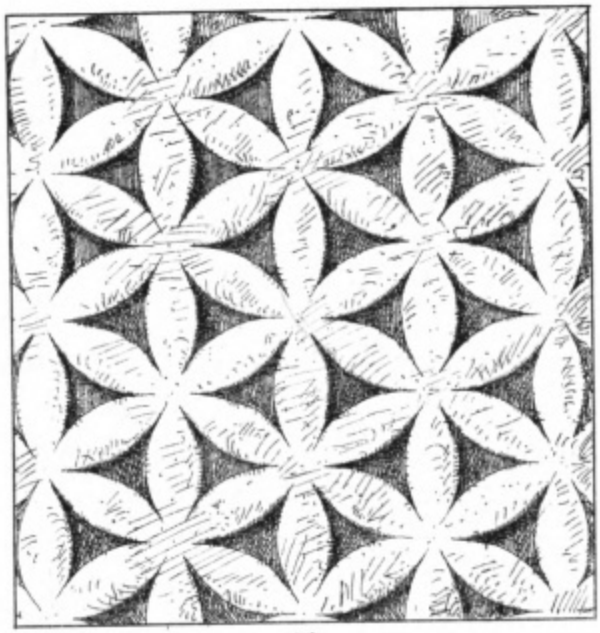

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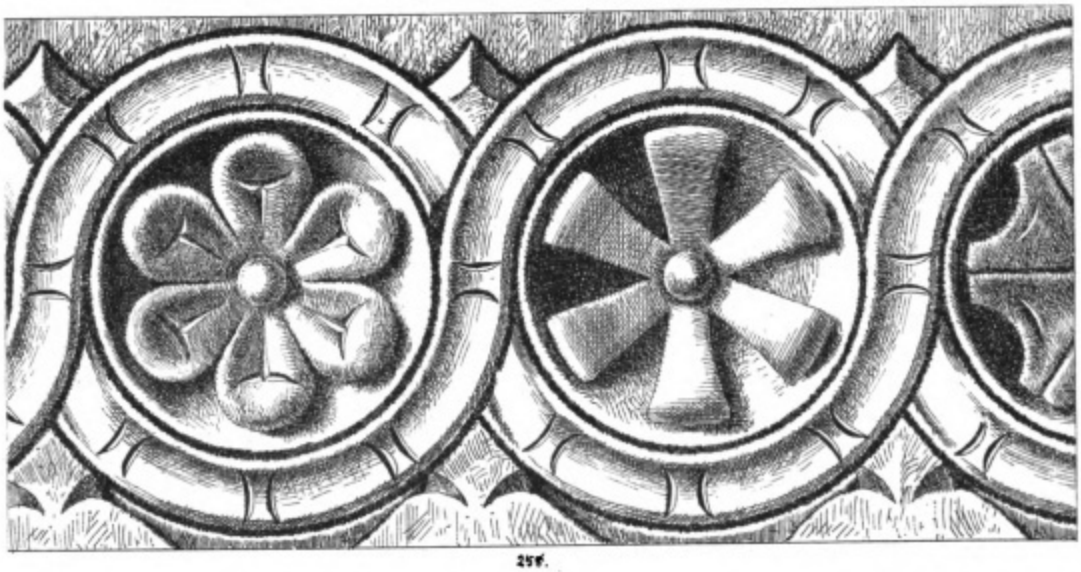

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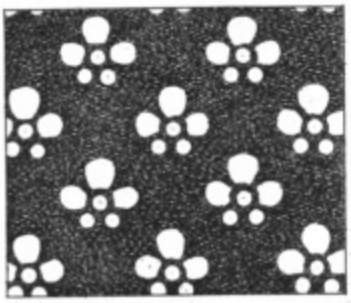

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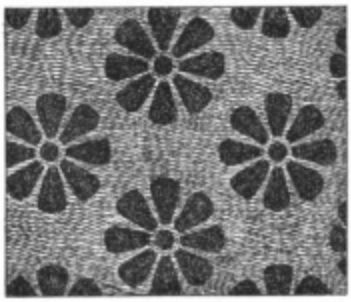

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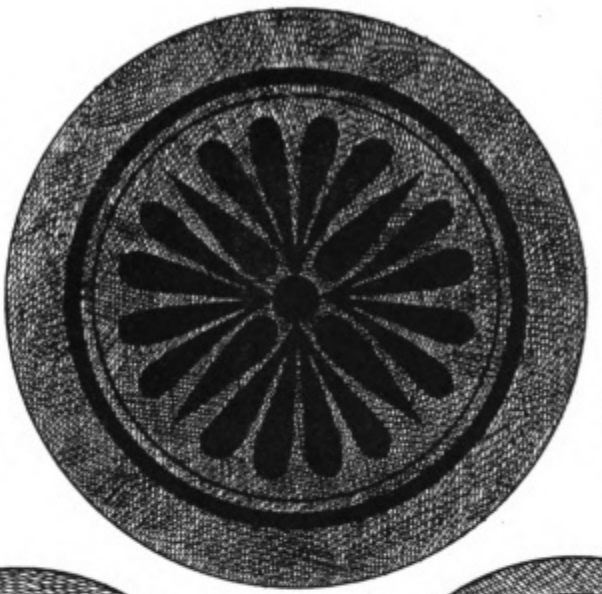

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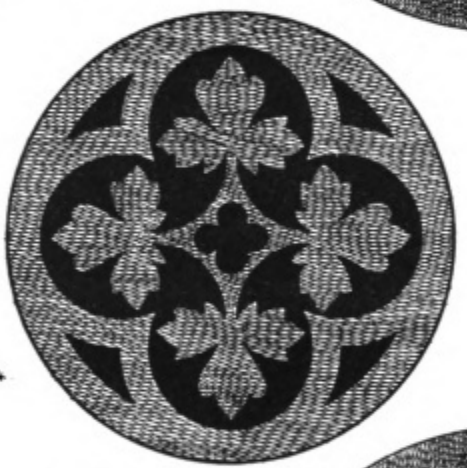

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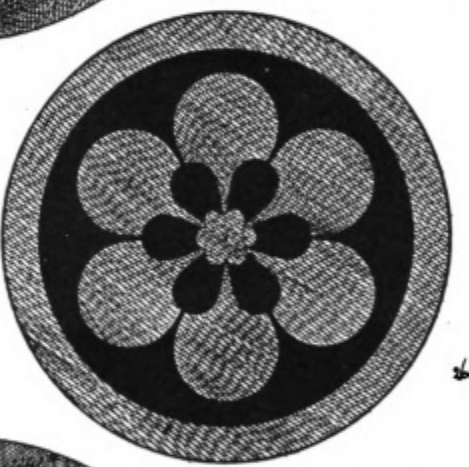

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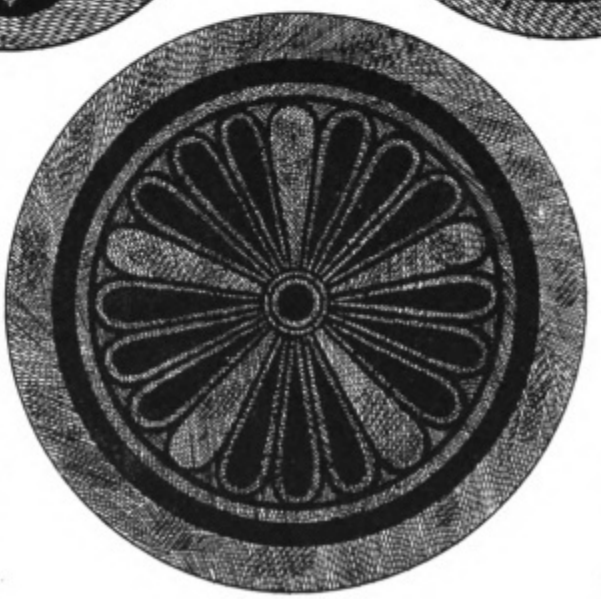

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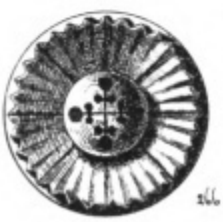

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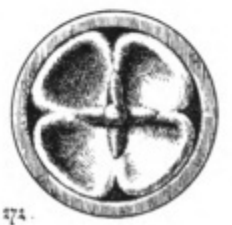

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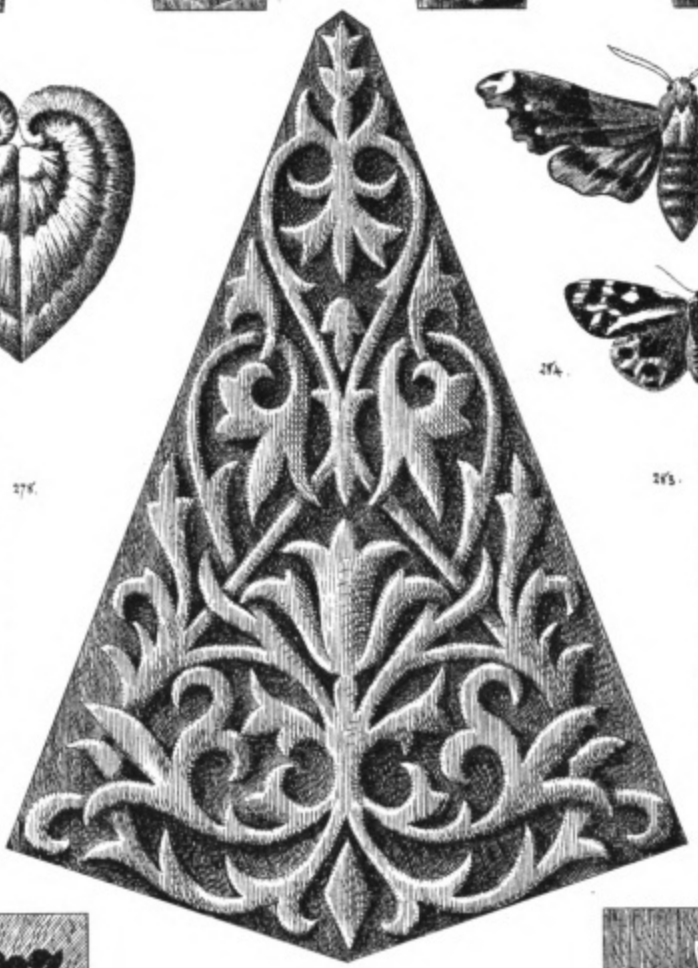
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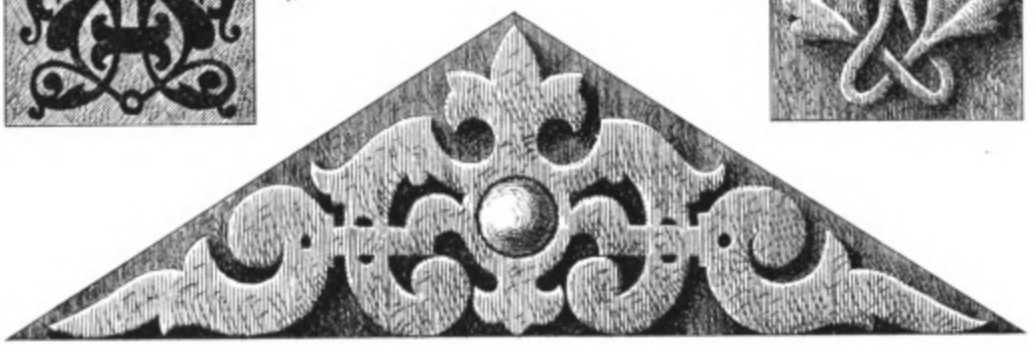
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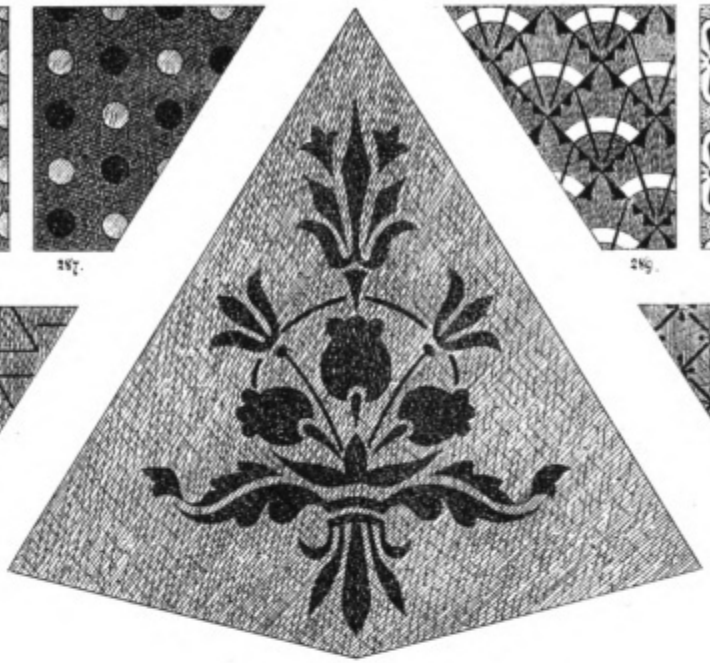

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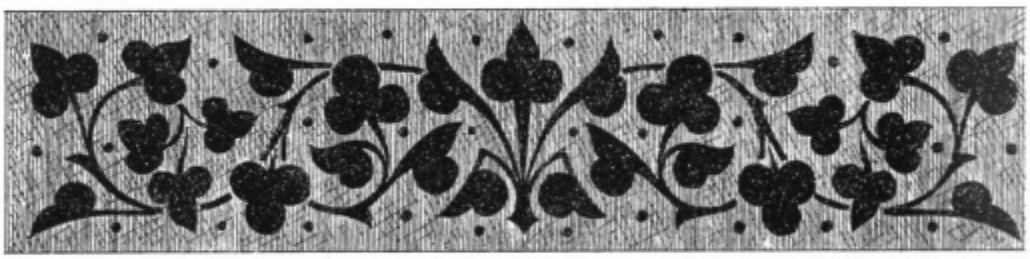

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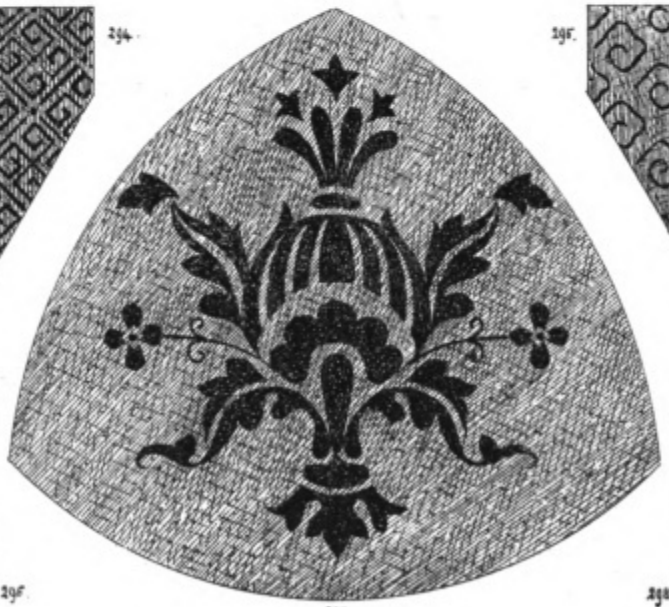

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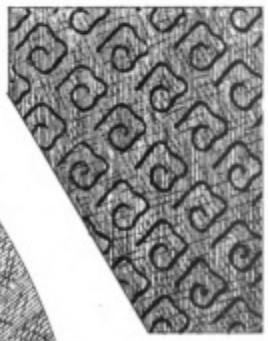

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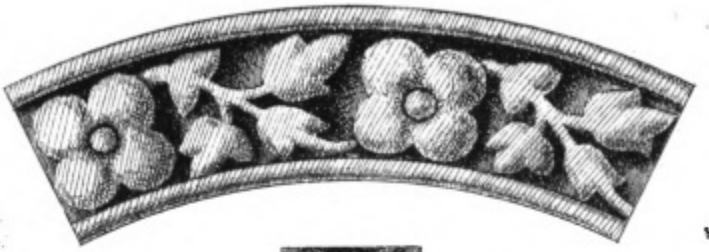

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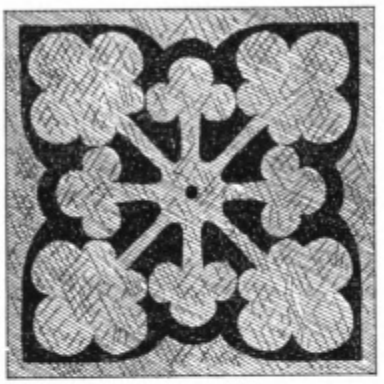
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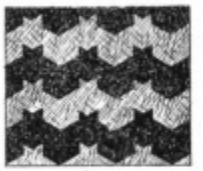
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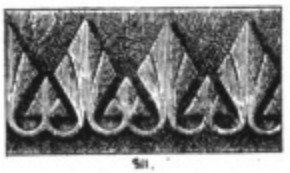
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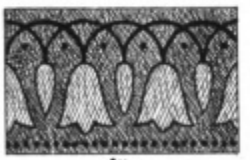
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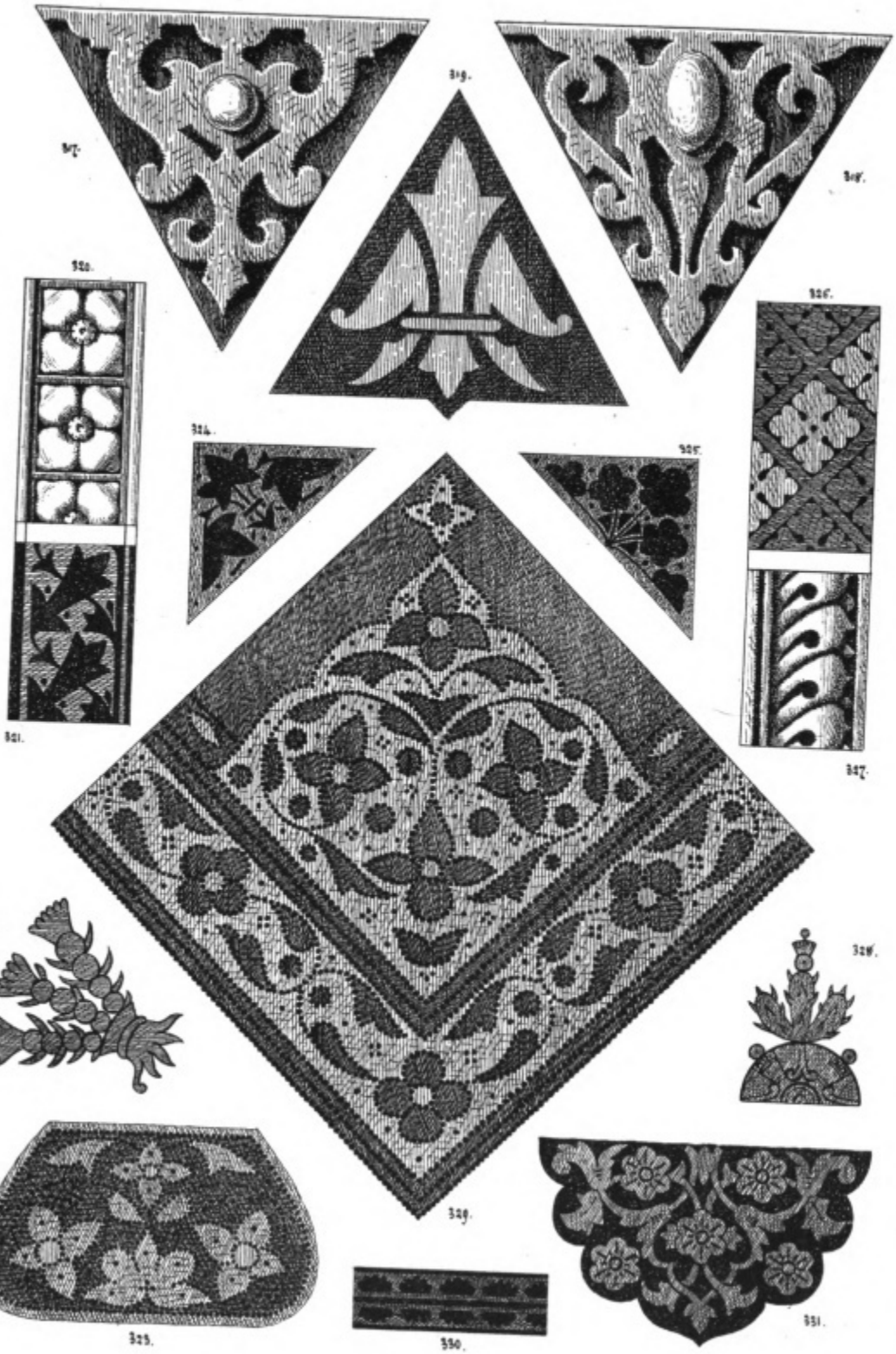

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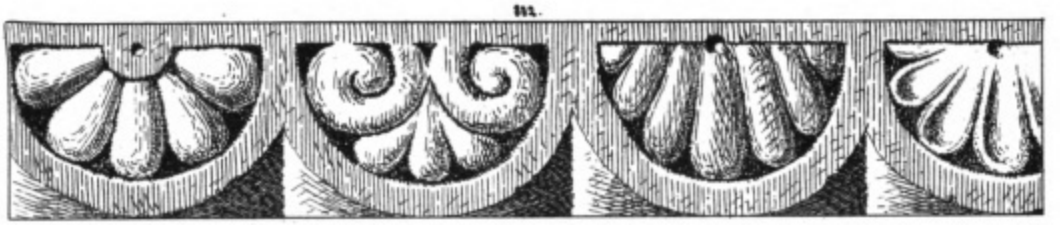

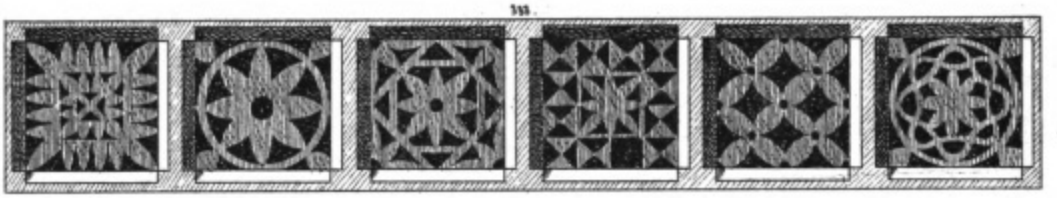

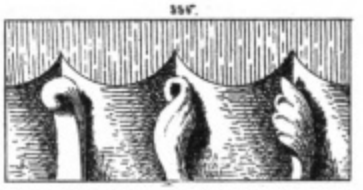

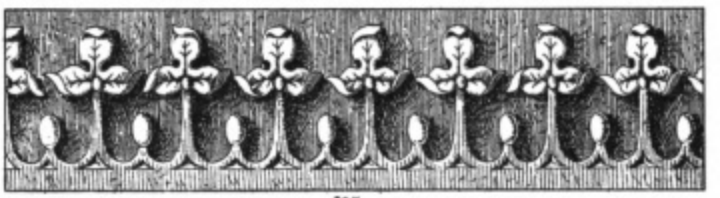

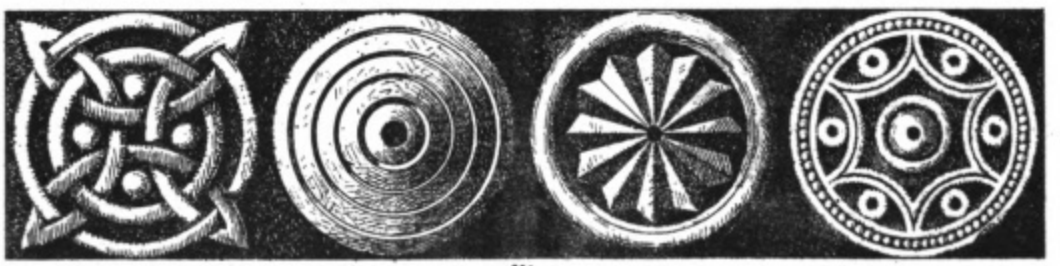

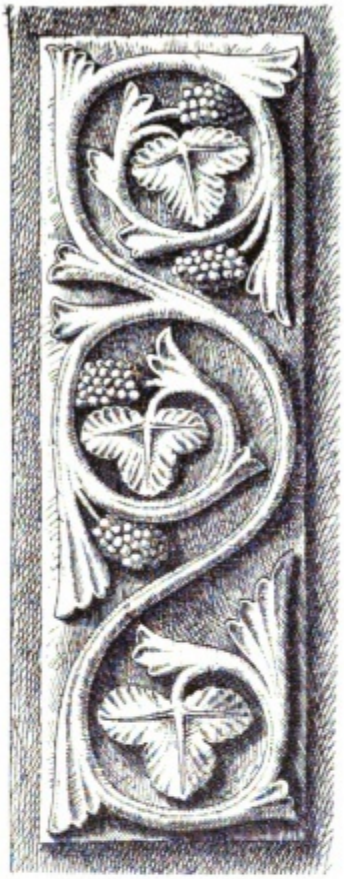

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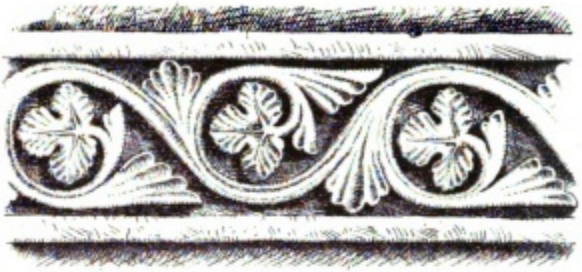

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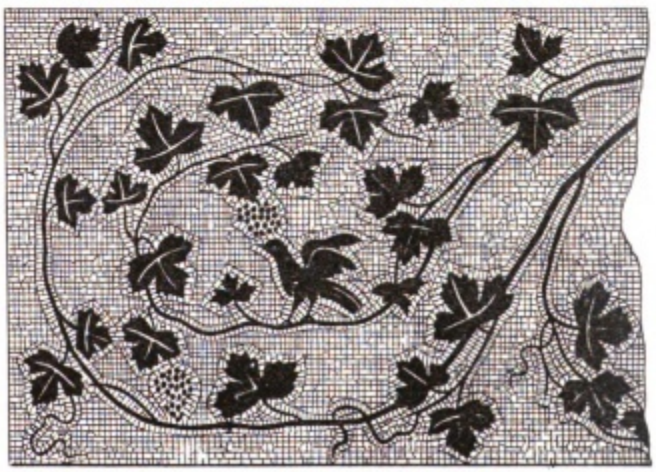

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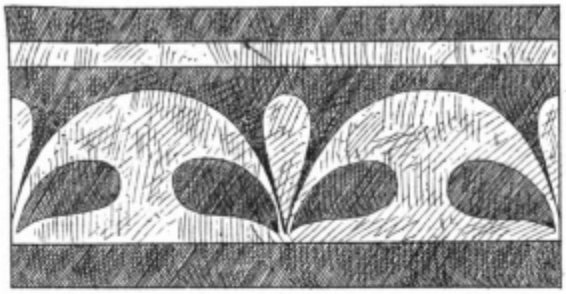

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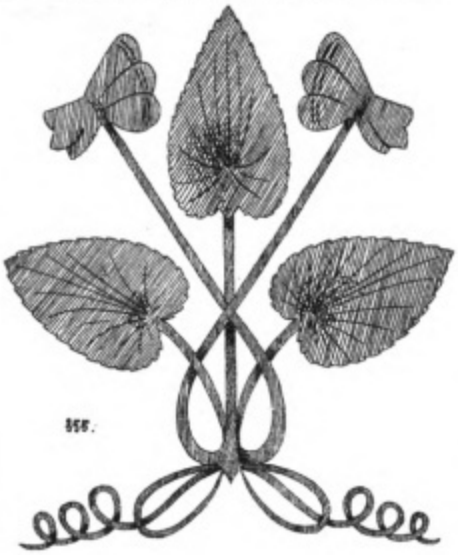

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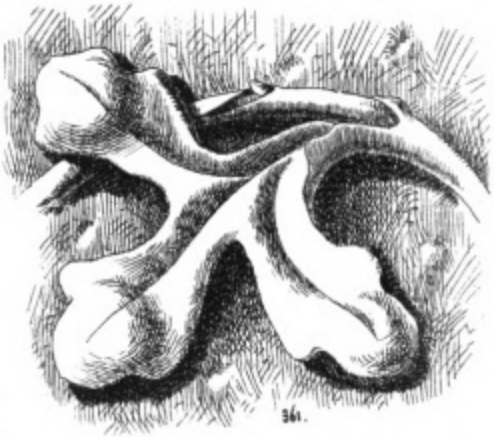

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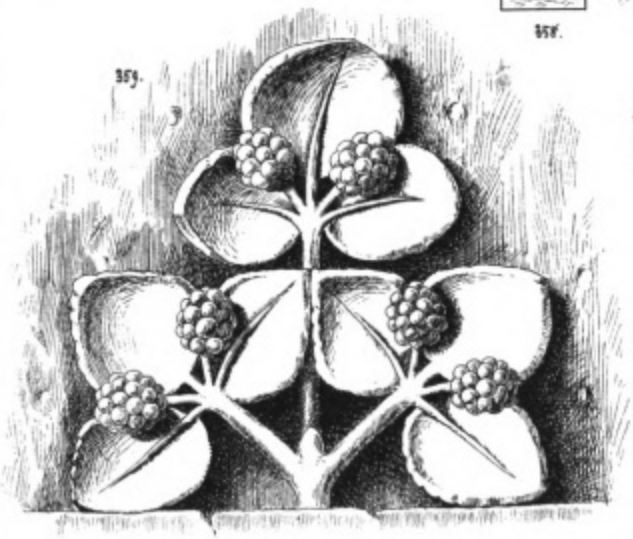

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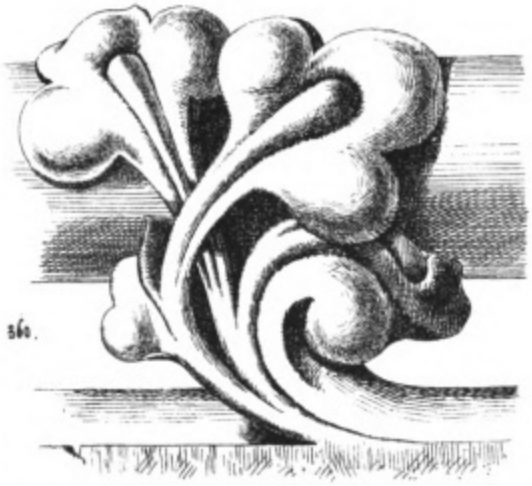

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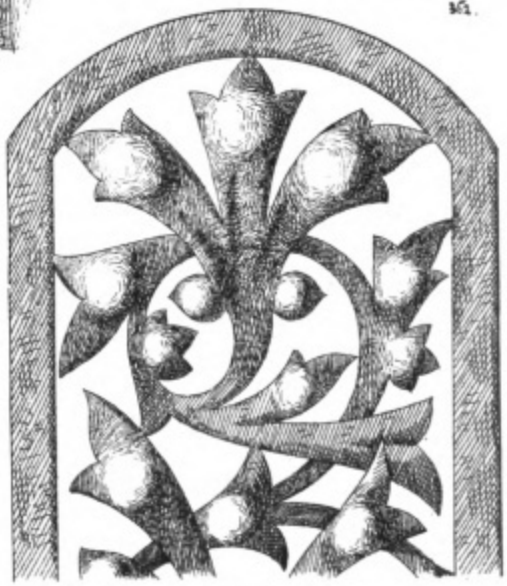

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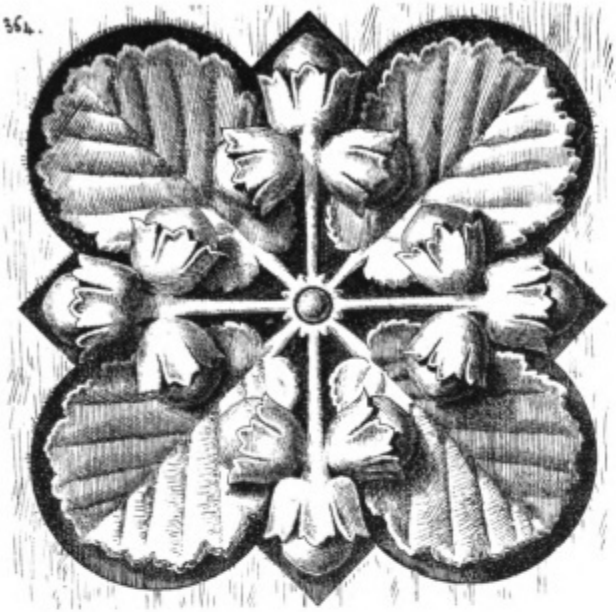

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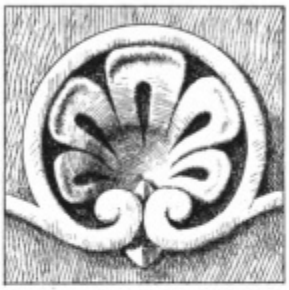

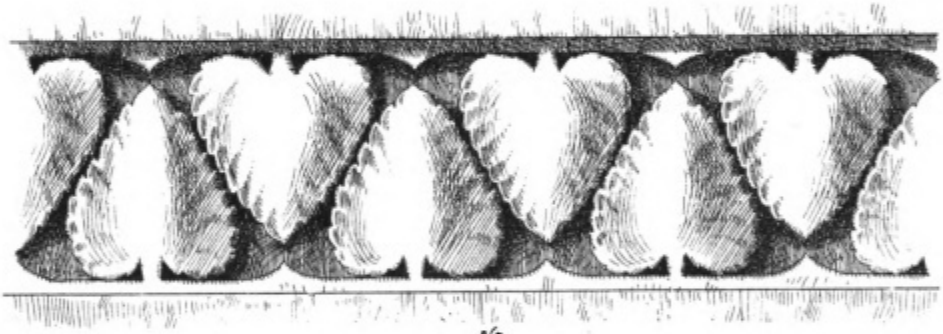

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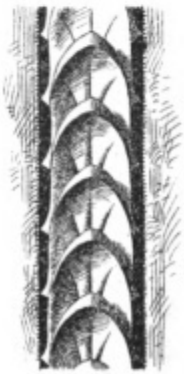

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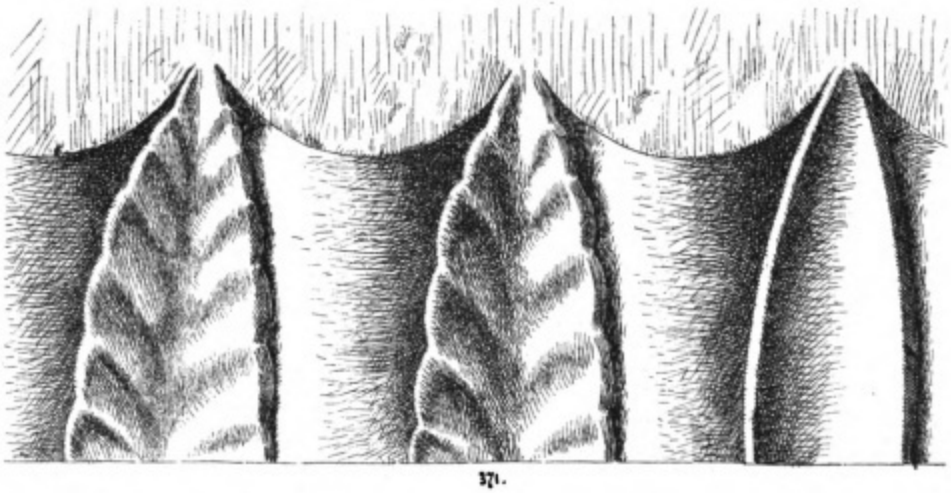

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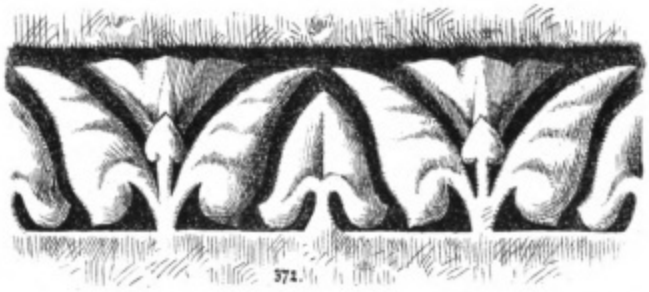

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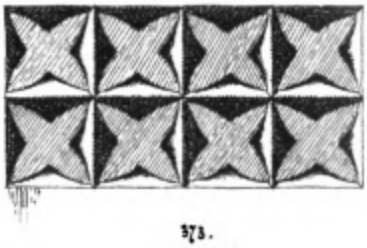

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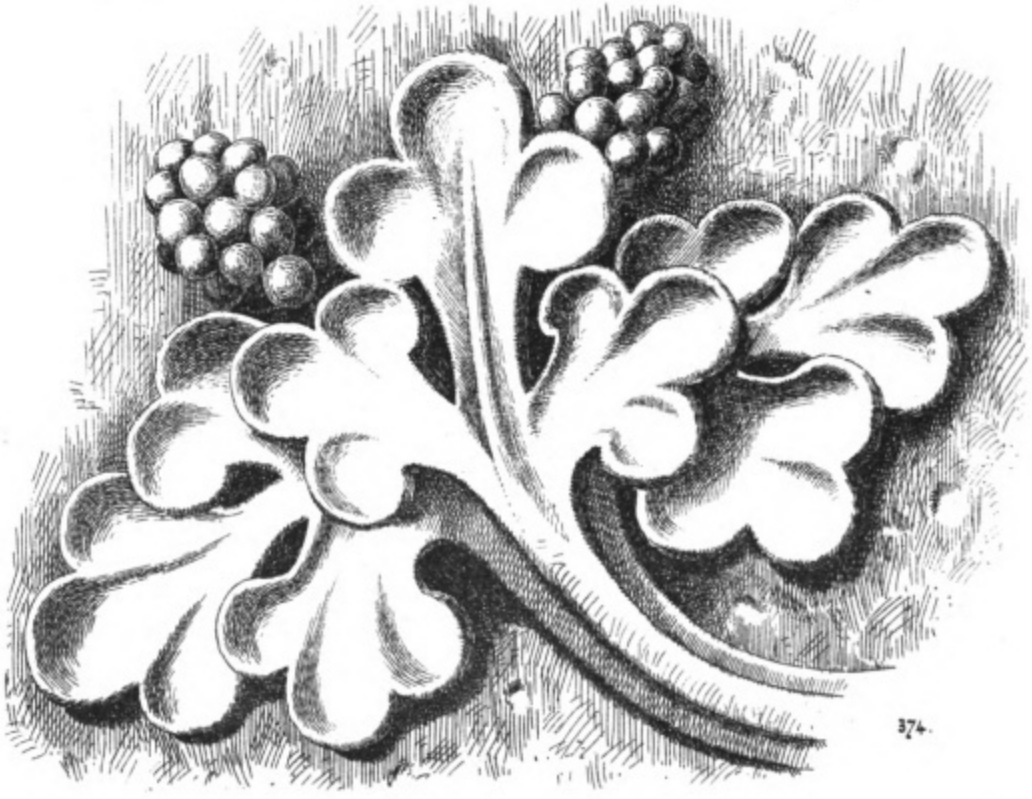

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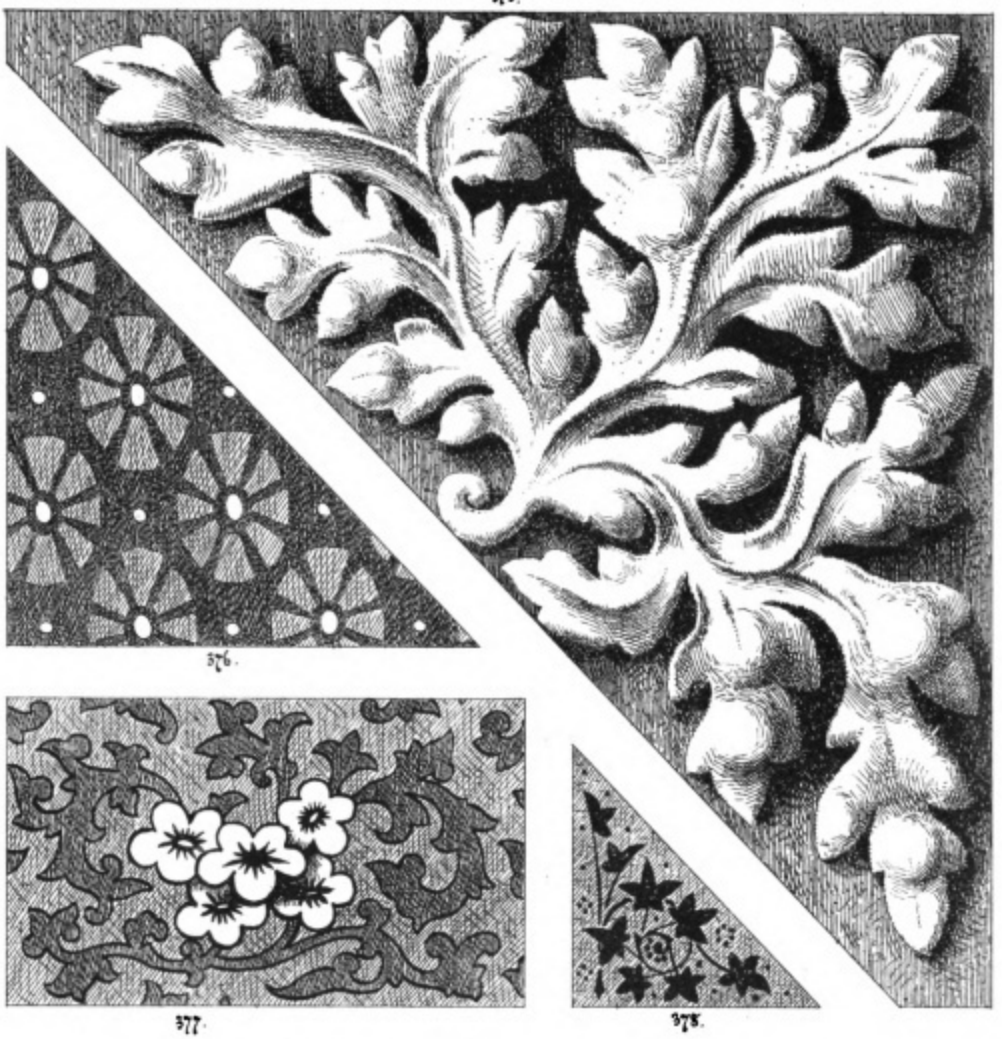

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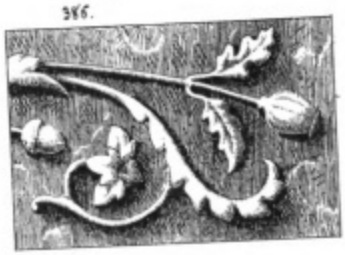

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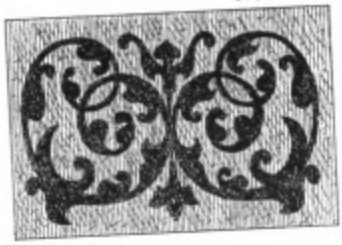

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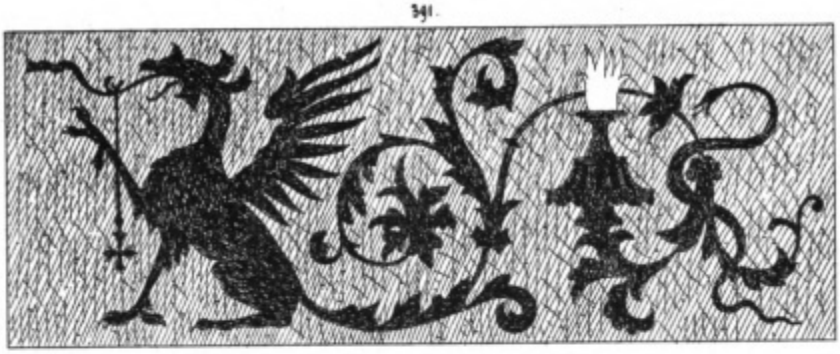

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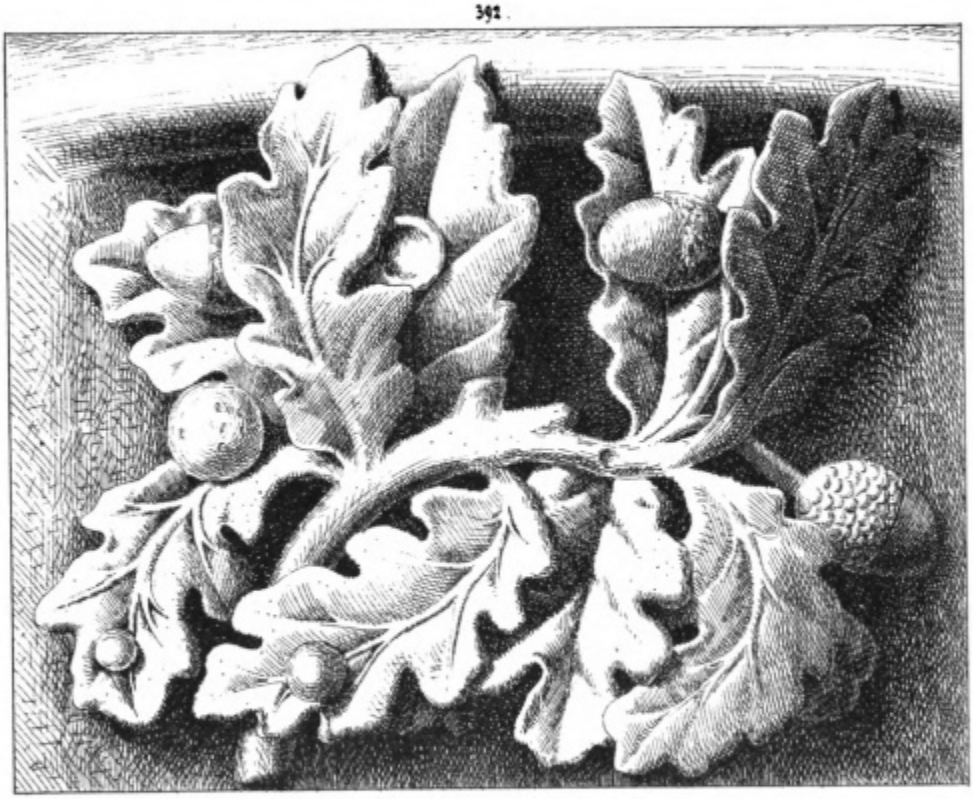

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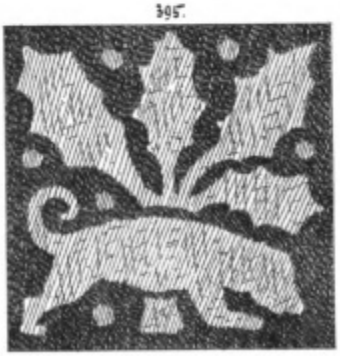

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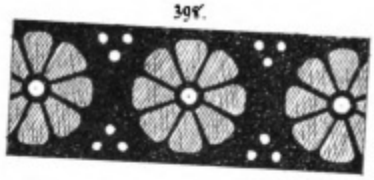

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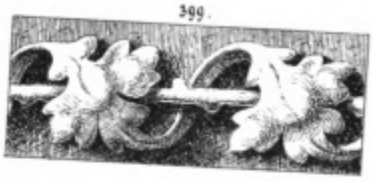

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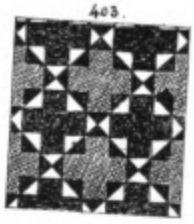

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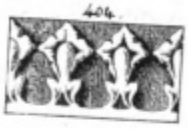

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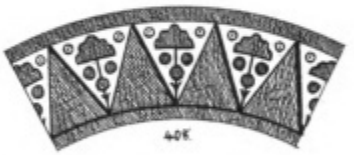

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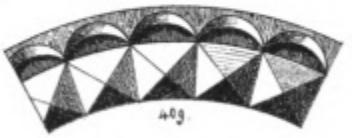

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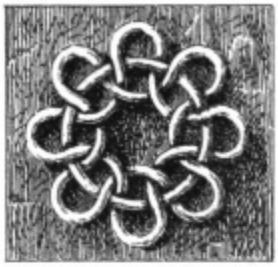

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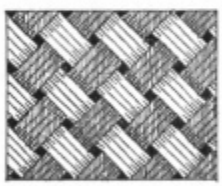

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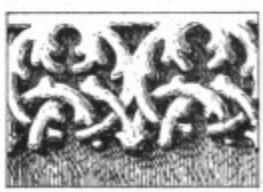

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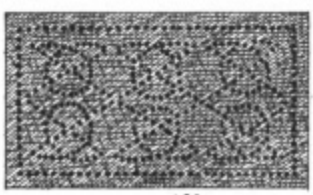
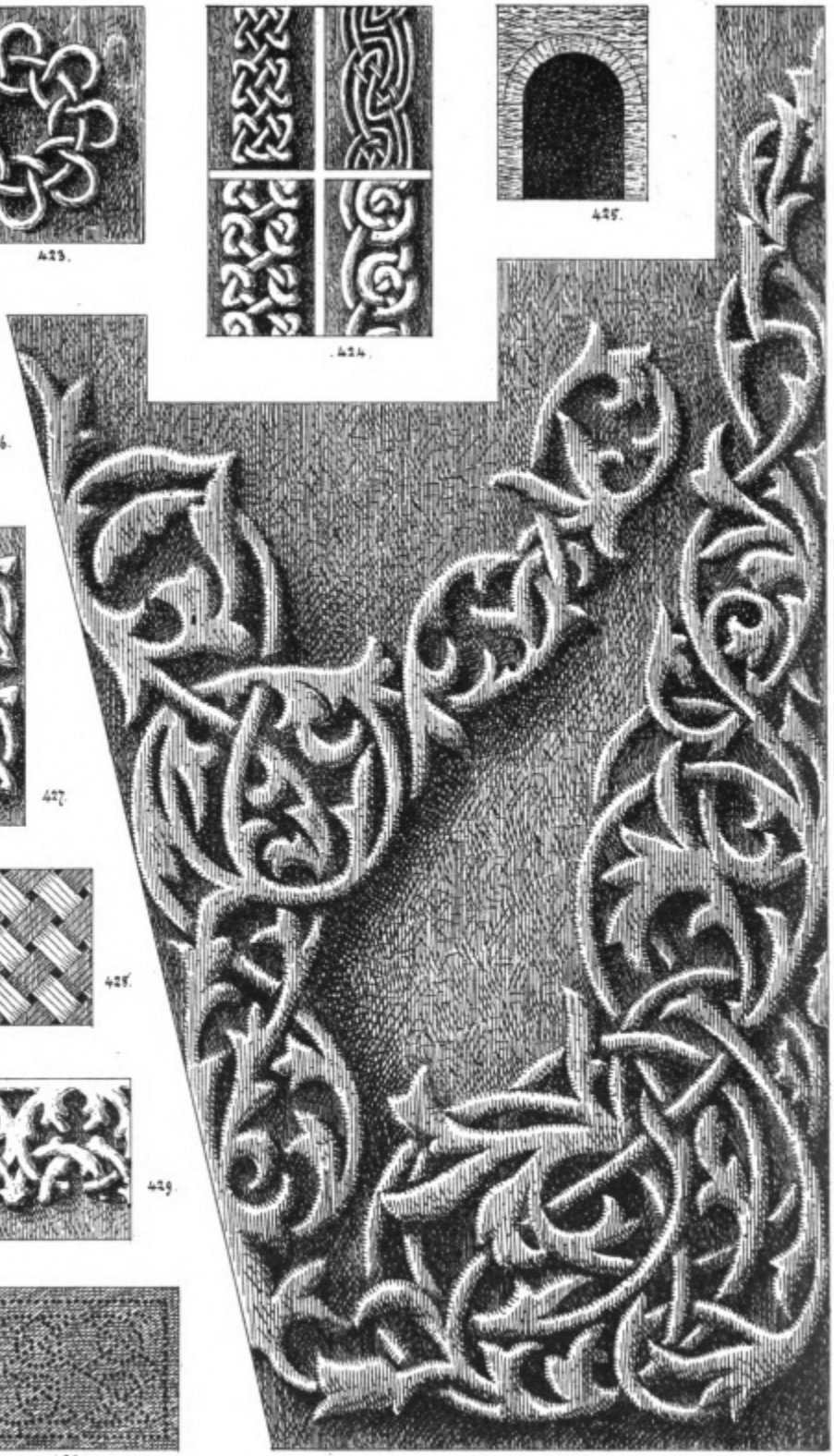


430.



431.

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wils
Folio 729.5 H87
Hulme, F. Edward (Frederick Edward), 184
Principles of ornamental art.
3 1951 001 591 173 G

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