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# THE SYMBOLISM OF THE CLOUD COLLAR MOTIF

SCHUYLER CAMMANN

## I

**Y**ÜN CHIEN, or “cloud collar,” is the later Chinese name for a four-lobed (more rarely eight-lobed) pattern of considerable antiquity. The name apparently arose during the Middle Ages, when the pattern was adapted to form an actual collar for decorating the upper part of robes. Figures 1 and 2 show late examples of such collars. This pattern was also painted around the necks of vases and jars in later Chinese ceramics; but we shall see that it had numerous other uses in China and elsewhere, for it was widely distributed across Asia. In recent centuries the pattern has been considered purely ornamental by the Chinese and other peoples, yet there is ample evidence to show that it originally served as a cosmic symbol.<sup>1</sup> Thus it provides a good example of the way in which a given motif may change its meaning and finally lose all significance with the decline of old traditions.

Obvious prototypes of what was to become the cloud collar motif already appear in the patterns on the backs of Chinese bronze mirrors at the close of the Chou Dynasty (fourth and third centuries B.C.). Beginning as a pattern of four leaf-like forms projecting from a central square or circle, against a background of conventionalized clouds, the device gradually evolved into four pointed lobes, or trefoils.<sup>2</sup> The fully evolved forms of the motif do not appear until the Later Han Dynasty (first century A.D.), when they were also used in the decoration of mirrors. They occur particularly on the cosmic mirrors of the so-called “TLV” variety which, as the writer has recently tried to show, were apparently intended to represent an idealized map of the universe, as the men of Han conceived it.<sup>3</sup> Figure 3 shows how the motif is commonly used to frame the projecting boss at the center of the cosmic plan, as though representing emanations from the center, source, or axis, of the greater universe. (Note that on these mirrors the principal extensions of the pattern reach out in the medial directions, rather than toward the four cardinal points, as the latter are indicated by the T's in the pattern.)

It seems probable, judging from the somewhat simpler form of this motif on some other Han mirrors, that the inner design on the mirror backs is also related to a less elaborate cruciform pattern with a prominently emphasized center, which was used at the same period to mark the middle of the lid on covered bronzes, as well as other utensils in pottery and lacquer.<sup>4</sup> If these vessels were intended to represent the universe in microcosm—as often seems indicated by their decoration—then this use of the cruciform symbol with the prominent center, at the top, would seem directly related to the later purpose of the cloud collar. That purpose, as we shall see, was to demarcate the “Sun Door” or “Gate of Heaven” in the middle of the sky, at the apex of the universe.

The ancient concept of a door or gate into heaven, situated in the center of the sky-dome, at the

<sup>1</sup> The basic significance of the cloud collar motif gradually became apparent to the writer in the course of research on Far Eastern cosmic diagrams, such as the patterns on bronze mirrors. But he is deeply grateful to Dr. Carl Schuster for introducing him to the cloud collar motif and suggesting various lines of research.

<sup>2</sup> See B. Karlgren, “Huai and Han,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, XIII, 1941, pls. 12, 30, 31

(D 27), 32 (D 28 and 29), 34 (D 35 and 37), and 37, etc.

<sup>3</sup> See S. Cammann, “The ‘TLV’ Pattern on Cosmic Mirrors of the Han Dynasty,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, LXVIII, 1948, pp. 159–167, and “Chinese Mirrors and Chinese Civilization,” *Archaeology*, II, 1949, pp. 117–118.

<sup>4</sup> See O. Sirén, *A History of Early Chinese Art: The Han Period*, London, 1930, pl. 58, and also pls. 50, 52a, and 54a.

upper end of the world-axis, is encountered in many oriental philosophies and religions.<sup>5</sup> It was even once common in Christian thinking, where it seems to have been a heritage from the classical pagan tradition which expressed it in the building of many Roman structures, notably the Pantheon. In old churches of the Near East, and even in modern churches that follow the classical models of the Renaissance, it is frequently indicated by an oculus in the dome, usually topped by a cupola which bears on its ceiling a circular painting offering a glimpse of holy figures believed to dwell in the heavenly regions above the sky.<sup>6</sup> Even the domes of mediaeval mosques have an indication of it in the form of a recess at the center of the ceiling, which was probably a survival from an earlier tradition.<sup>7</sup>

In ancient China this concept was also present. The Chinese considered the gate to be located at the pivotal point in the sky, which is marked at night by the pole star. The traditional name for the gate has been written, since Han times at least, with a character that showed the ideograph for "glory" inside the character for "gate,"<sup>8</sup> as if to indicate the glory of heaven beyond the Sky Door. This idea had a prominent place in the Chinese cosmology of the Han period (and probably earlier), which considered the earth as forming a square, over which fitted the inverted bowl of the sky. In accordance with these beliefs, they symbolized the sky by a circle, representing it in ritual by a circular piece of jade called a *pi*, pierced in the center by a round hole. This aperture is smaller in diameter than that in the familiar flat jade rings—it is this that distinguishes a *pi* from the latter—and its presence has baffled many later antiquarians. But presumably it merely served to complete the symbolism, by indicating the gate in the sky through which the Lord of Heaven could communicate with men, and through which the prayers of men could rise to him.

Figure 4 shows a Han *pi* of the simplest type. Its only decoration consists of small spiral projections, which on some examples are simplified to mere dots. In the latter case, the pattern has been known since the Sung dynasty (950-1279) as the "grain pattern." This name was given it after the old traditions had been forgotten, and it seems singularly inappropriate on an emblem of the sky. Actually both spirals and dots would seem to represent simply very conventionalized clouds. Other examples of ritual *pi* have four monster masks to mark the four quarters, and these incidentally impart the appearance of four lobes at the extremities of the pattern, suggesting the form of the later cloud collar motif.<sup>9</sup>

In the Han dynasty—and perhaps much earlier, if certain passages in the classics can be trusted—the Chinese sought to represent the cosmos architecturally in the form of a building called the *Ming T'ang*. As Chinese formal architecture, because of the limitations of its wood construction, never did develop a true dome, the concept of the dome (or canopy) of the sky had to be represented merely by a circular roof, rather than an arching one. Thus, a circular roof to represent the sky is particularly required in the specifications for constructing this special building.<sup>10</sup>

Some idea of how this may have been achieved can be gained by examining some of the so-called

<sup>5</sup> This concept was discussed in great detail by the late Dr. Coomaraswamy, in "Svayamāṭṛṇṇā: Janua Coeli," *Zalmoxis*, II, 1939, pp. 1-51. It seems to have been an integral part of a world view involving emphasis on the Four Directions and the Center, which was spread across Asia from Iran to China in the third millennium B.C. For the latter see Léopold de Saussure, "Le système cosmologique Sino-Iranien," *Journal asiatique*, CCII, 1923, pp. 235-297, and his paper in *Actes du Congrès International d'Histoire des Religions*, Paris, 1925, II, pp. 79-92.

<sup>6</sup> Commonly the painting in the cupola represents Christ himself. Various examples are shown in Charles Diehl, *Manuel d'art byzantine*, Paris, 1910, figs. 220, 377, 378, 395, etc.

<sup>7</sup> See the *Survey of Persian Art*, IV, pls. 295, 296a, 372 for ceiling recesses, and *ibid.*, pls. 280, 335, and 352 for small cupolas on domes.

<sup>8</sup> See Giles, *Chinese-English Dictionary*, 2d ed., 1912, no. 436, and the *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan*, 182.1. An alternative character showed the ideograph for "hall" inside the one for "gate." The first element has been described as a phonetic, but actually it could be used descriptively also, to suggest the palace of the Lord of Heaven beyond the door in the sky.

<sup>9</sup> Examples are in the Drummond collection, American Museum of Natural History.

<sup>10</sup> See Huan-tzü, *Hsin lun*, p. 9, or the *Li chi, shêng-tê p'ien*. The *Ming T'ang* and its cosmic symbolism is ably discussed by M. Granet, in *La pensée chinoise*, Paris, 1934, pp. 358ff. The whole concept of the *Ming T'ang* meant vastly more to the ancient Chinese than was implied by A. C. Soper in "The 'Dome of Heaven' in Asia," *ART BULLETIN*, XXIX, 1947, pp. 225-248. All this was valid criticism, but expressed perhaps too bluntly.

"storage jars" recovered from Han tombs. These reproduce in clay the form of a circular structure with a round, tiled roof; and the roof invariably has a round hole in the center.<sup>11</sup> This hole seems to be there for symbolic rather than functional reasons. It is possible that the *Ming T'ang*, too, had an aperture in the center of its roof as a symbol of the gate into heaven. If not, its ceiling would probably at least have had a circular painting at its apex, representing the heavenly spirits or divine forces glimpsed through the hole in the sky; just as some of the later Buddhist temples have, at the apex of a ceiling or canopy, a circular painting showing a heavenly dragon or a celestial phoenix half-glimpsed beyond the clouds.

Another way of representing the Sky Door was by hanging a mirror face down from the center of the roof of a tomb or shrine,<sup>12</sup> so that its reflecting surface, catching the light from lamps below, would flash and gleam so as to suggest bright glory beyond the gate. This usage survived in mediaeval, North China tombs—which did have dome-shaped roofs—and in Japanese Buddhist shrines built on Chinese models of the T'ang dynasty.

The mirror hanging from the center of the ceiling of the tomb would have carried additional connotations relating to the beliefs of that time. For the mirror would have been considered as establishing an axis of light, recalling the world-axis; and thus linking the coffin with the symbolic Sky Door, it would have indicated both the way and the means of the soul's ascent.

## II

During the mediaeval period, and into modern times, it has been the custom of the Lama Buddhists of western China and Tibet to paint on the ceiling of the main temple—which is built according to a rather specific cosmic plan—a diagram called a mandala. The center of this diagram they describe as the "Sun Door," that being another metaphysical term for the gate in the sky.<sup>13</sup> Incidentally, as the writer has pointed out in a recent article, these Lama Buddhist mandalas, with their circular core inside of a square having T-shaped gates, appear to have ultimately derived from the similar pattern on the "TLV" mirrors; although the meanings of the corresponding portions were inevitably somewhat altered by changes in philosophic concepts regarding the universe.<sup>14</sup>

These mandala diagrams are commonly painted within an octagonal structure in the center of the topmost ceiling of the temple, which forms a kind of lantern roof—the nearest approximation to a dome that is possible in an angular construction.<sup>15</sup> Inasmuch as its very name indicates that the center of the ceiling mandala is intended to represent the gate into higher realms (on the floor mandalas it represents a reflection of it), it is quite revealing to find examples of Lama mandalas in which this aperture is surrounded by a cloud collar motif that frames the "Sun Door," replacing the more common eight-petalled lotus with which, at this stage, the cloud collar motif is more or less interchangeable (see Fig. 5).<sup>16</sup> In the center of this inner pattern is pictured the supreme deity of the worshiper with four smaller emanations of the same figure in its four projections. Sometimes an entire small mandala is based on this concept, as shown in Figure 6, which has simply the cloud collar and a background painted with the colors of the four directions. These abbreviated mandalas, by the way, are considered as complete in themselves, on the old symbological principle

<sup>11</sup> See B. Laufer, *Chinese Pottery of the Han Dynasty*, Leyden, 1909, pls. 9, 10, and 11; pl. 8 shows details of the roofs proper.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 313-314.

<sup>13</sup> Some occidental scholars have misunderstood this, and written of "the disc which in the mandala is the symbol of the sun" (see the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, xi, p. 46, for example). But this is a case of confusing the metaphysical sun, or Sun Door, with the physical sun.

<sup>14</sup> See S. Cammann, "Suggested Origin of the Tibetan Mandala Paintings," *Art Quarterly*, XII, 1950.

<sup>15</sup> A fine example of a mandala painted within one of these structures is on view in the Tibetan section of the Chicago Museum of Natural History.

<sup>16</sup> The fact that the cloud collar motif was sometimes interchangeable with the lotus of course does not mean that it was itself intended to suggest a lotus flower, as was stated by Professor Lessing, in *Yung-ho-kung*, I, p. 155.

that a part can stand for the whole. Thus the cloud collar motif, emphasizing the Sky Gate and the Four Directions, is considered as representing the whole universe, in miniature.<sup>17</sup>

In one of the regions where such mandalas are found, namely Mongolia, a cloud collar appliqué has long been used to decorate the tops of the circular tents, or "yurts," belonging to princes and high church dignitaries. The typical pattern is cut from darker fabric and arranged to surround the smoke hole at the top of the dome, from which it extends outward in the four directions (see Fig. 7 for an eighteenth century example).<sup>18</sup>

Given the symbolism of the rest of the tent, the explanation for this usage is not hard to find. In the course of the writer's travels in Inner Mongolia, he discovered that the whole yurt is still considered as a symbol of the universe in miniature. The floor represents the base of the universe, with the rectangular, sacred hearth in the center especially arranged to symbolize the earth and the five elements of which it is composed.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile the sharply curving sides and dome-shaped roof logically represent the covering dome of the sky. The central smoke hole of the latter is already identified with the Sun Door by the solar symbolism in the arrangement of the four, or eight, cross-bracings of the wooden framework within the hole. Thus, the cloud collar which frames the hole on the outside obviously serves primarily to set off and emphasize the gate in the sky-dome, which is represented by the roof of the tent.

This must be a very old tradition among the Mongols, as we find cloud collars decorating the domes of tents in Persian miniatures after the Mongolian conquest of that country in the thirteenth century. In modern Outer Mongolia, according to the Dilowa Hutukhtu, an exiled "Living Buddha" now residing in Baltimore, this cloth around the smoke hole has been much simplified and tends not to follow all the elaborations of the cloud collar pattern. But it is only natural to expect such a simplification after hundreds of years, during which the old traditions were gradually being forgotten.

### III

One might well ask, at this point, what connection there could be between this motif as a symbol setting off the gate at the apex of the universe and its use as a collar pattern on a robe. The answer lies in the cosmic symbolism of the robes themselves. In the Ch'ing dynasty this symbolism was quite obvious, especially on the dragon robes, where the cloud-studded upper part of the garment represented the canopy of the sky, supported on the world as indicated by the mountains and seas at the base of the robe.<sup>20</sup> But even earlier, when the actual decoration did not demonstrate this so clearly, the robe was thought to represent the all-encompassing sky.

We read, for example, in the introduction to the clothing section of the Sung Dynastic History, that the body of the individual was considered as representing the axis column of the universe, which (since the post-Han period) was thought to extend from the earth up through the Sky Door.<sup>21</sup> In that case, the covering of the body in the shape of the robe must have been considered as the enveloping canopy of the universe, namely the sky. And since the axis column was believed to penetrate through the door in the sky, then the hole at the neck of the sky-resembling robe must have been thought to represent the Sky Gate. Hence it was very appropriate that the four-lobed

<sup>17</sup> Similar small mandalas are often found based upon the eight-petaled lotus motif which more often frames the center of the mandala. In these the eight petals are considered as indicating the eight directions of space (cardinal and intermediate).

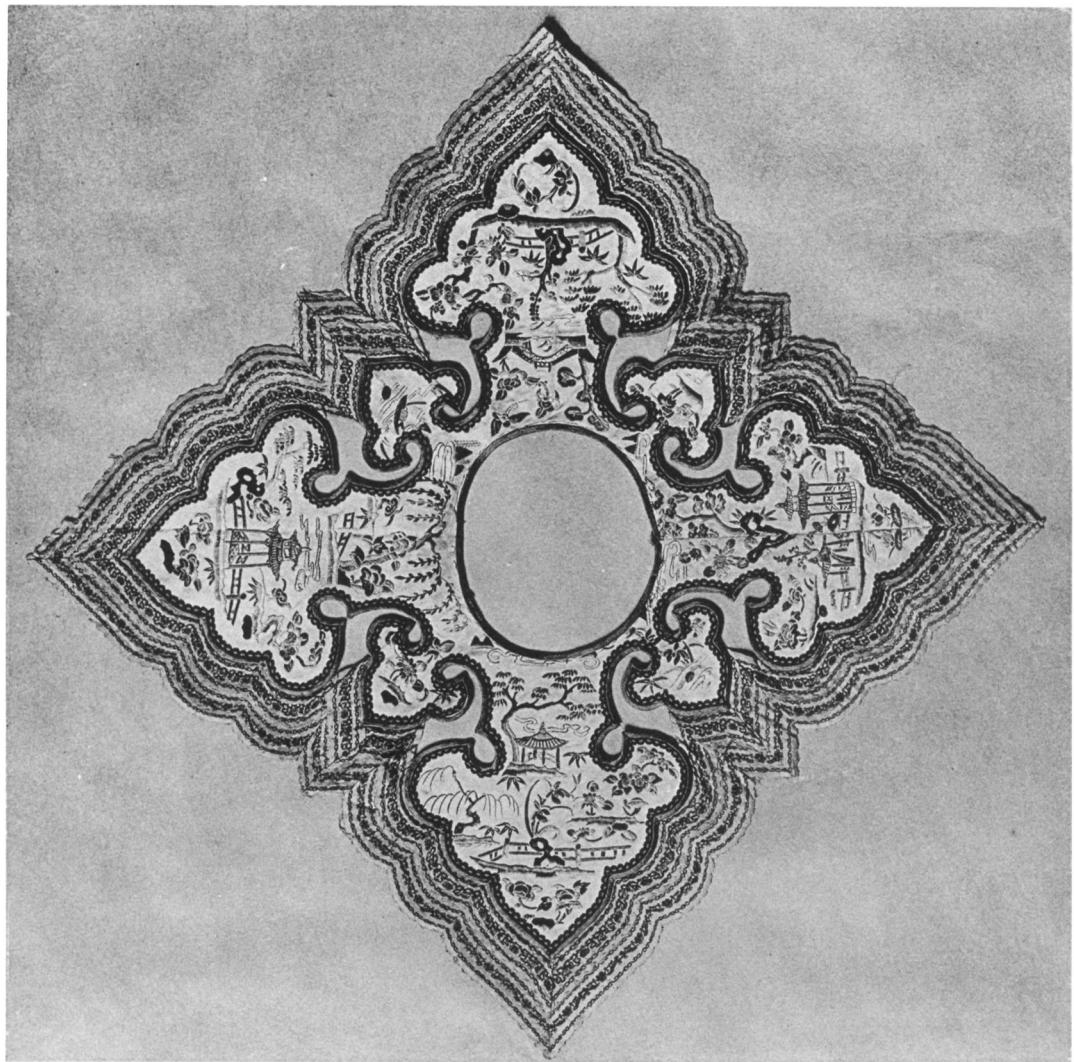
<sup>18</sup> For the purest type see the *National Geographic Magazine*, LXII, 1932, pl. XIII. Variations are shown *ibid.*, pp. 558, 563.

<sup>19</sup> For the specific ways in which the five elements are sym-

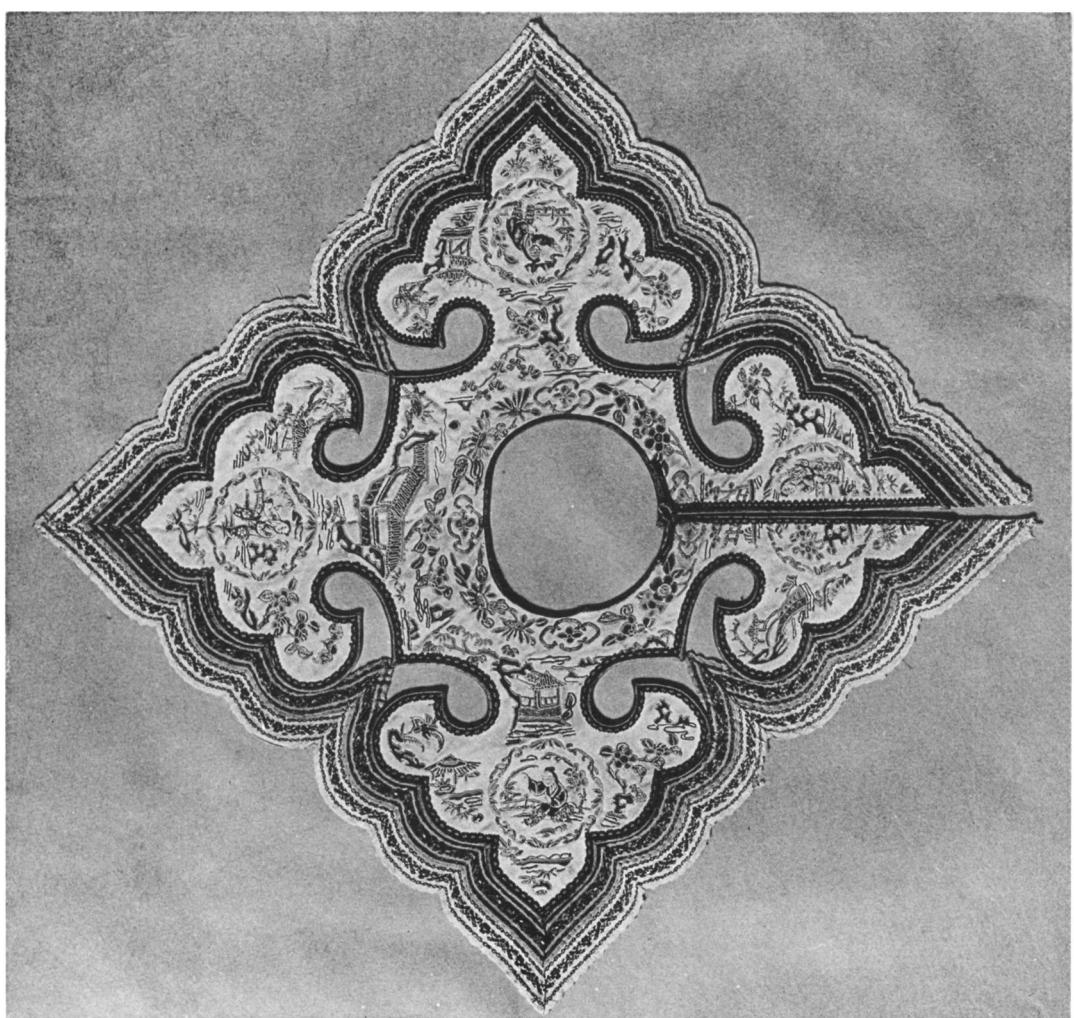
bolized in the arrangement of the Mongolian tent, see S. Cammann, *The Land of the Camel*, New York, 1951, pp. 124-125.

<sup>20</sup> See S. Cammann, "Cosmic Symbolism on the Dragon Robes of the Ch'ing Dynasty," *Art and Thought*, London, 1948, pp. 126-128, and "A Robe of the Ch'ien-lung Emperor," *Journal of the Walters Gallery*, IX, 1947, p. 13 and figs. 1 and 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Sung shih*, 151.8b.



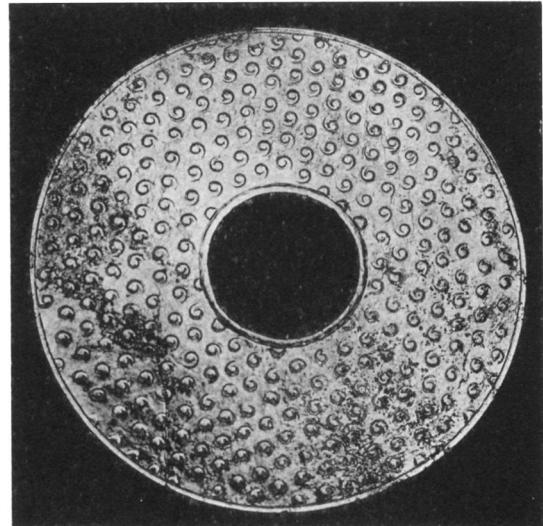
2. Chinese Cloud Collar with extra foliations. Johns Hopkins University Museum  
(photo: Reuben Goldberg)



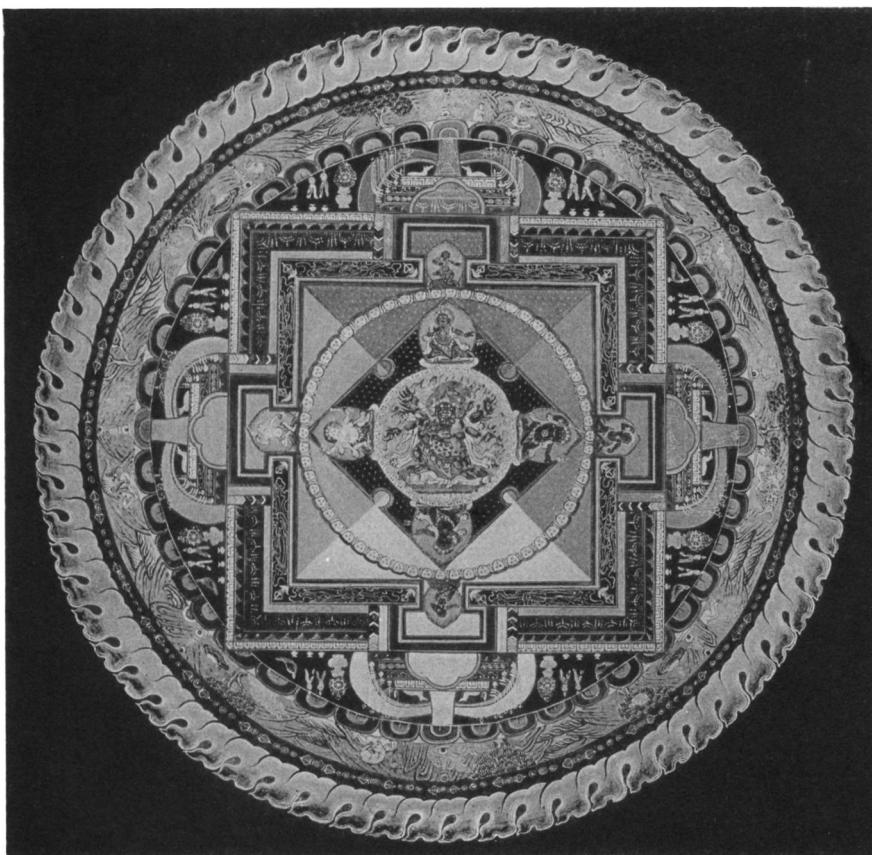
1. Simple Chinese Cloud Collar. Johns Hopkins University Museum  
(photo: Reuben Goldberg)



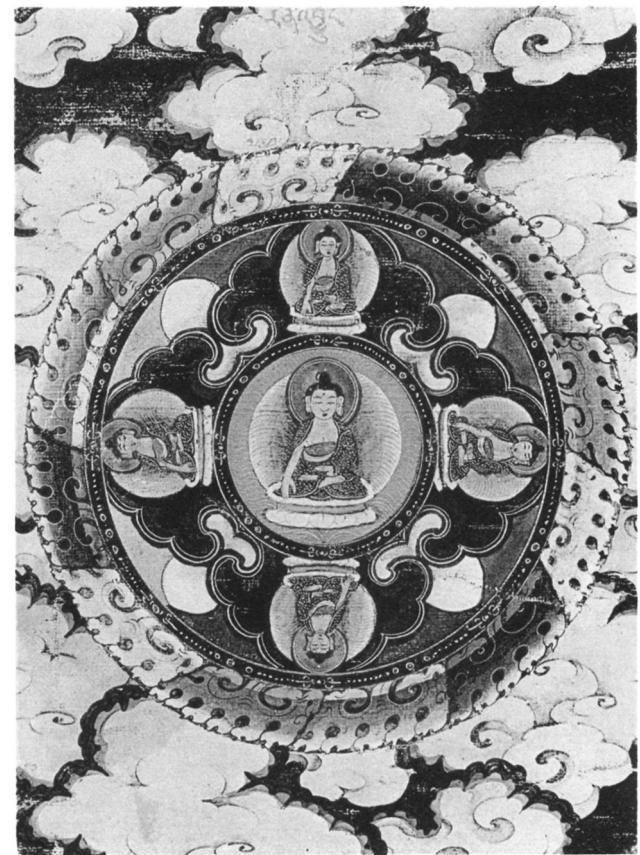
3. Han "TLV" Mirror. Writer's collection (photo: Reuben Goldberg)



4. Han jade *Pi*. American Museum of Natural History, New York City



5. Lama Mandala of Hayagriva. Chicago Museum of Natural History



6. Lama Mandala of Sakyamuni. Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, Toronto

motif used to frame the Sky Gate in other instances should form the collar of the robe, thus accentuating the cosmic meaning of the top of the garment. It is probably unnecessary to point out that by this symbolism the collar of the robe was considered as marking the division between the material part of a person, his body, and the spiritual part, his head; just as the Sky Gate was believed to separate this material universe from the realm of the spirit.

A further confirmation of the cosmic significance of the cloud collar is found in a passage in the History of the Chin dynasty (1115-1260), after the Ju-chen Tartars had wrested North China from the Sung. (Incidentally this is the first literary reference to the cloud collar by that name.) This passage quotes an edict regarding one form of imperial robe in yellow, decorated with dragon patterns and a cloud collar with the sun and moon.<sup>22</sup> The presence of the sun and moon on this type of robe shows clearly that it must have been considered as a cosmic symbol in itself, with the upper part, at least, representing the sky. Thus we can infer that the cloud collar motif was very probably considered as an integral part of the scheme, serving to complete the symbolism by emphasizing the opening at the apex of the sky.

Although this edict marks the first time that a cloud collar was mentioned by that name, as far as we know, cloud collars in the form of a sort of cape worn over the upper robe, may have been a typical feature of Tartar dress—and perhaps of Chinese costume as well<sup>23</sup>—long before this. In fact, the characteristic four lobes of the cloud collar pattern might well have been the form taken by the spreading collar which was part of the national costume of the Tartar rulers of the Liao dynasty (907-1119), which preceded the Chin in North China. This Liao collar is referred to in contemporary records as the *gu-ha*.<sup>24</sup> Later commentators of the Ch'ing dynasty assumed that the *gu-ha* must have been the same as the rather plain ceremonial collar worn by the Manchus as part of their court costume.<sup>25</sup> But this is apparently another case of reading modern customs into the past, as Ming and Ch'ing antiquarians were prone to do. For the only distinctive form of collar cape found in paintings of the Tartar dynasties contemporary with the Sung is the typical cloud collar form.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately the Chinese characters for *gu-ha* indicate that this is merely a phonetic transcription of a Tartar expression, which we can no longer decipher. So we are unable to tell whether it was a descriptive term that might provide a definite clue to the collar's meaning for its wearers in the Liao.

The mediaeval Mongols adopted the custom of wearing cloud collars even before their conquest of China from the Sung, toward the close of the thirteenth century, and its use as a costume element still persists in the religion of the modern Mongols and Tibetans. For the lama monks and priests deck themselves in large, detachable cloud collars, worn over their other robes, as a part of their ritual dress when officiating at special ceremonies or symbolic dances.<sup>27</sup> Other details of their costume on those occasions indicate that everything has cosmic significance. For example the robe proper is often a Ch'ing dragon robe, representing the universe in its pattern (as described above), and the five-leaved *chodpan* crown worn on the head depicts the Five Celestial Buddhas who reign in heaven. The lamas also use cloud collars to deck the images of their gods, which are themselves considered as cosmograms, as shown in Figure 11.<sup>28</sup>

In China proper, although the cloud collar as such died out after the fall of the Mongol dynasty—for official robes at least—the patterns around the neck of the ceremonial robes of the

<sup>22</sup> *Chin shih*, 43.11. The fact that people other than the Liao emperor were wearing such robes is shown by the fact that this edict was issued to forbid those who had been given them from wearing them in the future.

<sup>23</sup> An example is shown being worn by an official on a Chinese hand scroll in the Nelson Gallery, Kansas City, which is tentatively ascribed to the T'ang period, but is possibly later.

<sup>24</sup> See the *Shih-wu i-min lu*, 16.10.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Cf. K. Harada, *The Pageant of Chinese Painting*, Tokyo,

1936, pl. 131.

<sup>27</sup> See the *National Geographic Magazine*, LIV, 1928, pls. 4, 10, 11, 12, 14, and the plain photographs on pp. 608-609, 612. Most of these modern cloud collars have tended to lose the characteristic scalloped form of the lobes, but a good example of the traditional type is shown on p. 605.

<sup>28</sup> See S. Cammann, "A Prince of the Lama Church," *University Museum Bulletin*, XIV, 1949, p. 51, fig. 18, for a detachable silken cloud collar on a Lama image.

Ming and Ch'ing dynasties were still disposed in four lobes, as though to fit within the bounding lines of the four points of the cloud collar, even though the bounding lines themselves had disappeared.<sup>29</sup> The cloud collar itself did survive for women's robes down into the Ch'ing period, since the women's costume was essentially more conservative: sometimes woven into the robe, more often appliquéd, and sometimes detachable. But as this had become merely ornamental by the eighteenth century, with its original significance apparently forgotten, it became to all intents merely a background for trivial ornamentation, and at times even tended to lose its traditional shape. See Figure 9.

The custom of using the cloud collar motif around the necks of Chinese jars and vases, as shown in Figure 10, could have evolved as a borrowing from costume decoration; but it might just as well have developed independently when these pottery vessels were still considered in themselves as symbols of the universe in miniature. For the same pots that have the cloud collar motif at the top, frequently also have at the bottom of their decoration a lotus, such as has traditionally been used to symbolize the foundation of the universe (compare Fig. 11).<sup>30</sup> In this case, the cloud collar pattern could have served to complete the sky area at the top of the vessel, and set off the opening which would have been considered as representing the aperture in the sky.

This usage first becomes familiar on the Chinese ceramics of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), but it may well have developed in the Yüan or Mongol dynasty, since examples begin to appear on vases in Persia after the Mongol conquest and yet before the period of large-scale importation from Ming China.<sup>31</sup> Then in the later Ming and the Ch'ing dynasties, when cosmic symbolism was largely forgotten in the prevailing spirit of materialism, the cloud collar motif was doubtless continued on Chinese porcelains purely for decoration, as it was on the contemporary costume, merely being used to frame or finish off the upper part of the pattern. Consequently, it is not surprising to find irregularities in the number of lobes or projections on later examples. Sometimes three, five, or six were used, in place of the traditional four (or eight).<sup>32</sup> For they were no longer considered as emanations toward the four directions of space, from the gate in the dome of the sky.

#### IV

During the later mediaeval period, the use of cloud collars as a sort of cape worn over the shoulders must have been very widespread among other non-Chinese peoples as well as the Tartars of northern China and Manchuria. The idea even reached Japan, as illustrated by a fine cloud collar cape on a wooden image of the bodhisattva Manjusri, apparently dating from the late Fujiwara period.<sup>33</sup> But this is only an isolated instance, and it does not seem to have caught on there. The custom appears to have been more basic in Central Asia. We know from the Turfan murals recovered by the archaeologist Von Le Coq that they were worn by the Uighur Turks during the Middle Ages;<sup>34</sup> and Professor Salmy has published reliefs from Daghestan, in southwestern Russia, showing cloud collar capes worn by nobles of the Seljuq Turks, believed to date from the end of the eleventh century.<sup>35</sup>

The mediaeval Mongols seem to have carried the custom of wearing cloud collars with them in

<sup>29</sup> See S. Cammann, "Origin of the Court and Official Robes of the Ch'ing Dynasty," *Artibus Asiae*, XII, 1949, figs. 3 and 4.

<sup>30</sup> The lotus petals on the base are usually called by the stupid name of "false gadroons" in western writings on Chinese porcelains. Perhaps the earliest example of the use of cloud collar and lotus base on a porcelain, known to the writer, is a Korean vase, ostensibly of the Koryō period (935-1392), pictured in Andreas Eckhart, *Geschichte der koreanischen Kunst*, Leipzig, 1929, pl. 118, fig. 377.

<sup>31</sup> See text below, and reference in note 47.

<sup>32</sup> See Jean Gordon Lee, "Ming Blue and White," *Philadelphia Museum Bulletin*, XLIV, no. 2, for the three-lobed

variety; no. 13, for the six-lobed variety; and nos. 21 and 22 for other variations.

<sup>33</sup> See the *Bijitsu Kenkyū*, LV, July 1936, pls. 7 and 14. This image is one of the treasures of the Yakuōji at Fuku-shima.

<sup>34</sup> A. von Le Coq, *Chotcho*, Berlin, 1923, pls. 28 and 38.

<sup>35</sup> See Alfred Salmy, "Daghestan Sculpture," *Ars Islamica*, X, 1943, figs. 1, 2, 3. He calls them "Turkish collars," but this seems far too narrowly national a term, in view of their wide distribution in Asia and their outgrowth from a pattern which originated before there was a Turkish people.

the course of their conquests, and apparently introduced them to Persia. There they survived for centuries, long after the overthrow of the Mongol Il-Khans, as shown by many examples in miniatures of the Timurid and Safavid periods.<sup>36</sup> The Persians seldom wore them as separate capes, but generally had them woven or embroidered right into the robe.<sup>37</sup> Exceptions are shown in Figure 8.

The Mongol princes who ruled Persia and some of their successors are pictured wearing crowns with four foliate points, and even though the projections point up, rather than out, or down, they inevitably recall the form of the cloud collar. This is strikingly brought out in the miniatures which show such a crown, and a cloud collar proper, both worn by the same individual.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps the four points had some association with dominion over the four directions, but more likely the crowns were part of the same general symbolic complex as the cloud collars, and probably originally at least had the same association, emphasizing the fact that the individual who wore one represented in himself the universe in microcosm. Such crowns survived among the Western Turks, along with the collars themselves, until at least the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>39</sup>

In this connection, if the human being were considered as a smaller embodiment of the universe, it would really seem more logical in some ways that the top of his head, rather than his collar should correspond with the apex of the greater universe. And we find this idea expressed on some Persian, as well as Tartar and Mongol, caps and helmets. The top of these, in the exact center, had a cloud collar pattern of four foliate projections, with a metal spike, or a knob or a jewel, rising from the middle of the design.<sup>40</sup> This survived down to the present century on the round summer hats of the Goldi Tartars of Manchuria, and is still occasionally seen on Mongol and Tibetan hats.<sup>41</sup>

The same device of a spike or projection rising from the cruciform cloud collar motif is also found on the summits of the domes of mosques in Persia, and elsewhere in the Near East.<sup>42</sup> Since the mosques, with their round domes resting on the more or less quadrangular structures of the building proper, had obviously retained, at least in part, the symbolism of an earlier cosmology, this suggests that the pole or spire on the dome—and by association, the spike or knob on the hat—must originally have been a symbolic representation of the world axis penetrating through the apex of the sky. This is the same idea that is expressed in the spire of the Buddhist stupa.<sup>43</sup>

Whether the builders of the mosques were conscious of this, or were merely copying earlier forms, and if the symbolism was for a time intentional, how long it remained so, are questions which we cannot attempt to answer here. In any case, it is clear that even though the four-lobed design on the helmets, hats, and domes, did not have open centers like the cloud collars themselves, the projection took the place of this in fulfilling the symbolic meaning of the pattern.

The cloud collar motif on the helmets of mediaeval warriors, and on later military uniforms, as in Annam,<sup>44</sup> may well have lost their original religious significance long before, and been retained simply for magical protection. It has often been the case that a cosmic symbol has survived among those who did not believe in it, purely as a charm device for times of danger. A fine example of

<sup>36</sup> Numerous Persian cloud collars are shown in Sarre and Martin, *Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst*, Munich, 1912; Marteau and Vever, *Miniatures Persanes*, Paris, 1913; and the *Survey of Persian Art*, v. While the Seljuq Turks might possibly have brought the cloud collar to Iran in their earlier conquest, no evidence for this is preserved in Persian art.

<sup>37</sup> A sixteenth century Persian embroidered cloud collar, presumably once appliquéd on a robe, is pictured in Sarre and Martin, *op.cit.*, III, p. 206.

<sup>38</sup> See the *Survey of Persian Art*, v, pl. 850a. While crowns as such were worn in Iran from Seljuq times (*ibid.*, III, p. 2238), the clearly defined cloud collar type, with the four, regularly spaced, foliate lobes does not appear in Persian paintings until after the coming of the Mongols.

<sup>39</sup> See Marteau and Vever, *op.cit.*, II, pls. 134 and 135.

<sup>40</sup> The earliest example of this known to the writer occurs on a fresco recovered by Von Le Coq in Turkestan; see Chotcho, pl. 22.

<sup>41</sup> See Henning Haslund, *Men and Gods in Mongolia*, New York, 1935, pl. facing p. 257, right, for an example of a Lama lacquered hat with this device, such as are found in a number of American museums.

<sup>42</sup> See *Survey of Persian Art*, IV, pl. 488; *ibid.*, p. 335, seems to be a prototype, with a small cupola rising from a cloud collar motif; but it is rather difficult to make out the latter, due to the angle from which the picture was taken.

<sup>43</sup> See A. K. Coomaraswamy, "The Symbolism of the Dome," *Indian Historical Quarterly*, XIV, 1938, p. 18.

<sup>44</sup> L. Cadière, "L'art à Hué," *Bulletin des amis du vieux Hué*, VI, 1919, pp. 67-68.

this is the survival of the *t'ao-t'ieh* monster mask on Chinese shields down into the Ch'ing dynasty, when this awesome symbol of deity had lost its meaning more than a thousand years before.<sup>45</sup>

As we have mentioned, Persian miniatures also show us that the cloud collar motif, and variations of it, were used to decorate the tops of tents in Western Asia after the Mongol conquest.<sup>46</sup> And the pattern occurs around the necks of Persian pottery vessels as well, even before the wave of Chinese influence engulfed Persian art in the Safavid period. For example, a painting dated 1410 shows a pair of obviously Persian vases with both the cloud collar and the lotus base, as on those from China.<sup>47</sup> The cloud collar motif was also used in centers of fifteenth century Persian plates.<sup>48</sup> These cloud collars on Persian ceramic wares frequently show an uneven number of projections, often with five or more lobes.<sup>49</sup> But one would expect such irregularities in a foreign borrowing, which would tend to lose its significance very quickly—assuming that it ever had any—especially in the case of pottery; since the continuous surface around a circular area did not place any limitation on the number of projections such as was naturally imposed on the robe collars by the bilateral symmetry of the human body.

## V

While actual cloud collars seem to have been rare in mediaeval Europe,<sup>50</sup> the motif of a cross with an open center and arms ending in trefoils, having specific associations with the Sun Gate, or Gate of Heaven, seems to have been quite well-known in the west from classical times onward. However, we find that in the earliest examples this pattern did not frame the gate, but rather was placed within it as though to designate it, or emphasize it. An early form of this, with rather rudimentary trefoils, but having the symbolic usage clearly apparent, is figured on the archaic Etruscan Tomb of the Monkey, at Chiusi (early fifth century B.C.),<sup>51</sup> and a more elaborate version of it appears on a vault in the inner narthex of the Kahrie Djami in Istanbul, dating from nearly two millenniums later; while what is apparently an earthly reflection of the Sky Gate figured with this motif is shown on a Roman floor mosaic at Trier (third century A.D.).<sup>52</sup>

Again, in Christian art there seems to be a definite relation between the cloud collar motif and certain variations of the Greek cross, which have triple foliations at the ends of the arms and a circular center, the latter either being left completely open, or bearing the figure of Christ or one of his monograms in a recessed medallion. Since the four equal arms on the Greek cross are traditionally stated to represent the four directions of space,<sup>53</sup> the symbolism of these particular Greek crosses would seem to bear a definite relation to the concept of the Gate of Heaven at the center

<sup>45</sup> See S. Cammann, "Tibetan Monster Masks," *Journal of the West China Border Research Society*, XII, 1940, pp. 9-19 for a discussion of the *t'ao-t'ieh* symbol in China and Tibet, and *ibid.*, n. 22 for reference to its use on Ch'ing dynasty shields.

<sup>46</sup> See the *Survey of Persian Art*, v, pls. 888b, 893, and 908.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, pl. 861a.

<sup>48</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art has a fine example, illustrated *ibid.*, pl. 786a.

<sup>49</sup> See *ibid.*, pls. 782a, 786b.

<sup>50</sup> A magnificent cloud collar worked in pearls is shown in a fourteenth century Serbian portrait of John Oliver, illustrated in F. Dvornik, "The Diffusion of Greek Culture, VI," *Geographical Magazine*, XIX, 1946, p. 300. Modified cloud collars are sometimes pictured in Italian paintings, as in Gentile da Fabriano's *Adoration of the Magi* in the Uffizi Gallery, reproduced in B. Degenhart, *Antonio Pisanello*, Vienna, 1941, pl. 15; but such cases may be due only to an employment of foreign elements to enhance an exotic subject. For a later European use of the cloud collar motif in its purest form, see the eighteenth century chasuble of Prince Michael Sutzu, in

the Church of the Greek Patriarchate, Istanbul, illustrated in Marcu Beza, *Byzantine Art in Roumania*, New York and London, 1940, p. 42, fig. 23.

<sup>51</sup> Compare this motif with the rudimentary cloud collar motifs on the Chinese mirrors of the same period, consisting of four leaf- or bud-shaped projections from a central square or circle (reference in note 2, above).

<sup>52</sup> These three examples are illustrated in Karl Lehmann, "The Dome of Heaven," *ART BULLETIN*, XXVII, 1945, figs. 2, 19, 20. This article, although it is a model of careful scholarship, is vitiated by Professor Lehmann's apparent failure to understand the fundamental point that, in late classical and in Early Christian thought, as in the oriental, heaven was considered as being beyond the dome, which in itself merely represented the sky, through the gate of which—or sometimes, through windows in it—glimpses of heaven might be obtained. The same comments would apply to Dr. Soper's sequel, cited in note 10.

<sup>53</sup> See W. G. Audsley, *Handbook of Christian Symbolism*, London, n.d., pp. 73-74.

of the universe, as it is depicted in the Byzantine domes.<sup>54</sup> If so, the gate is clearly framed by the total pattern, rather than having the motif placed inside it, as in the earlier western examples.

We shall not attempt to decide here whether this apparent correspondence of symbols and ideas in the Occident was intentional or merely coincidental; and if it was intended, whether the symbolism in its western form was a natural outgrowth of Early Christian symbolism—as it may well have been—or the result of oriental influences as the close similarity with the symbolism of the cloud collar in Asia might imply.

Lastly, in Europe, where as in Asia symbols of kingship probably, at least in their origin, had profound cosmic significance, one finds something like the cloud collar motif on the summit of the king's orb, which was traditionally a symbol of universal dominion. Also, some of the mediaeval crowns, consisting of a circlet with four upright trefoils,<sup>55</sup> were probably an outgrowth of the same symbol, just as they seem to have been in the East. Here, too, we shall not attempt to answer the weighty question of whether these were ultimately derived from indigenous concepts, or whether there could have been some oriental influence involved in determining these forms; or even whether they could possibly have developed in the Christian civilization of Europe and then been carried to Asia through the influence of Byzantine culture, or by the Nestorians,<sup>56</sup> or the Crusaders.<sup>57</sup>

Regardless of whether the cloud collar motif had any generic or symbolic relationship with iconographic elements in Europe, forms of it were spread widely throughout Asia for more than two thousand years, and therefore it deserves more recognition than has previously been granted it. Further study will undoubtedly throw more light on its possible origins, and the precise lines of its development and distribution;<sup>58</sup> but its meaning at various stages already seems fairly clear.

The cloud collar motif from its earliest occurrences was used primarily as part of a larger symbol, the cosmic diagram, on which it designated the central focal point. In this usage it either marked, or framed within its open center, the Sky Gate at the apex of the heavens (or its reflection below). When used as a frame, the opening was sometimes filled with the picture of a divinity, or the symbol of one—as on the Lama mandalas, but more often it was merely left open, as in the collars proper; although sometimes, when used as a capping device, the center held a projection, which apparently indicated the top of the universal axis penetrating through the Gate. However, in addition to forming part of a larger symbol, the cloud collar was also used alone as an independent device; in which case, like the pre-Christian cross, it seems to have represented the universe with the four directions of space, and therefore had associated connotations of the magic power which derived from universal dominion. In fact, in the Orient, the magical elements gradually won out over the spiritual ones, and like so many other once-profound symbols, the cloud collar form degenerated completely. After being used as a more or less meaningless magical charm it passed into mere ornamentation. And in this instance the descent was especially far, because the latest examples did not even have the status of independent designs, but were merely used as backgrounds or enclosures for other decorative elements, usually of the most trivial nature.

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<sup>54</sup> The cosmic symbolism of these seems particularly apparent when the four foliate ends of these Greek (or Latin) crosses bear the symbols of the Four Evangelists, as these symbols were apparently originally used to designate the Four Directions. For the use of these on the four sides of a representation of the Sky Gate, see the illustration of the vault of a Styrian church in Lehmann, "The Dome of Heaven," fig. 52.

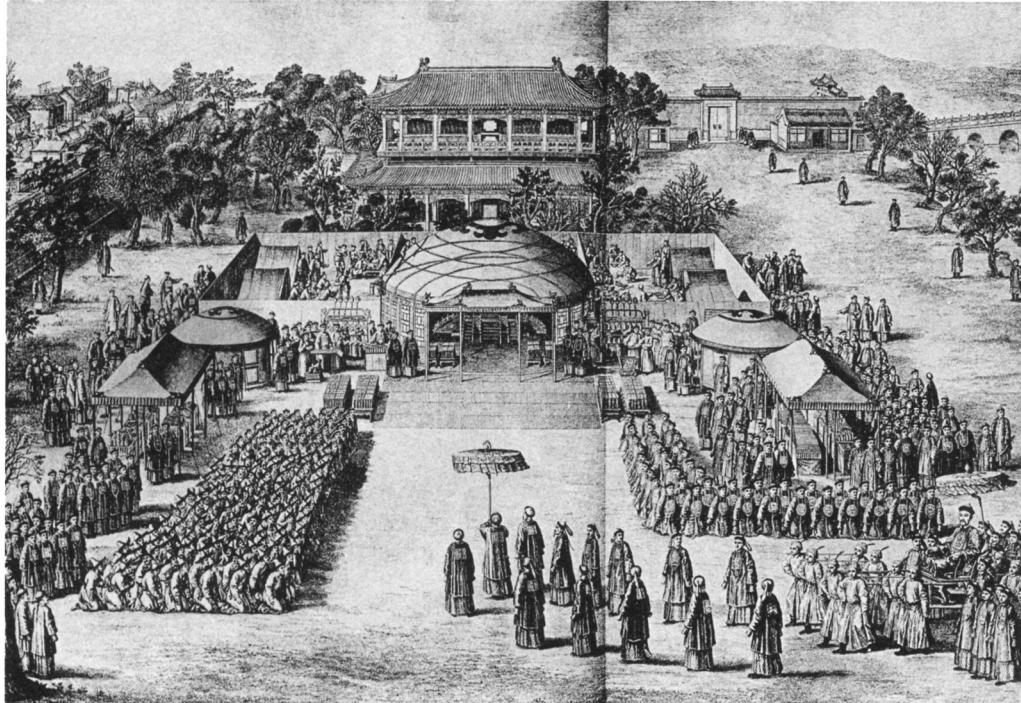
<sup>55</sup> See the early crowns of England since William the Conqueror, as described and pictured in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., VII, pp. 517-518.

<sup>56</sup> The so-called "Nestorian crosses" found in eastern Asia were almost certainly cosmic diagrams intimately related to the traditions behind the cloud collar motif; but there is still some question as to whether they were actually Nestorian.

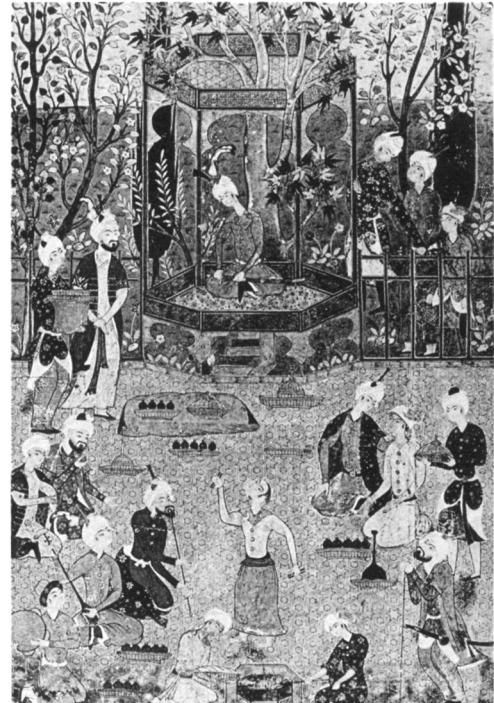
<sup>57</sup> William Goetz, in *Survey of Persian Art*, III, p. 2238,

states flatly that the European crowns of the late Romanesque and Gothic periods were derived from the Iranian, but in view of the fact that the symbolic elements behind them were already present in western civilization, this question cannot yet be so neatly disposed of.

<sup>58</sup> An eminently logical and well-reasoned theory that the cloud collar motif originated in a four-bird symbol is being presented by Carl Schuster in a forthcoming article for the *Far Eastern Quarterly*. But the present writer feels that the motif in question more likely evolved from more than one line of development, and that it probably sprang from the gradual fusion of two distinct symbols, one being Dr. Schuster's four-bird device and the other a cruciform symbol apparently derived from plant forms. However, the problem of its ultimate origin need not concern us here.



7. Ceremonial Yurts of the Manchu Emperor of China in 1760. Engraving by a French Missionary,  
C. N. Cochin



8. Persian painting showing Cloud Collars, from a *Khamsah* dated 1584. University Museum, Philadelphia (photo: Reuben Goldberg)



9. Ch'ing portrait (detail) showing Chinese lady  
wearing late form of Cloud Collar. Doolittle  
collection, New Haven



10. Ch'ing vase showing  
broken-down Cloud Collar.  
University Museum, Philadel-  
phia (photo: Reuben Gold-  
berg)

11. Lama image of Sakyamuni Buddha, showing Cloud Collar and lotus base.  
Newark Museum