In certain particulars the pottery now made in Korea resembles the products of past centuries, but there are many points of difference, and it therefore seems best to treat the subject in two divisions; the one dealing with the forms introduced since the Japanese invasion of 1592-1597; the other, embracing the more ancient wares of this much harassed little kingdom. A little more than twenty-five years ago, Korea was released from her long period of vassalage to Japan, and was at last recognized as an independent and sovereign nation. A few years later, Korea opened her ports to the United States, and, during 1883, numerous pieces of pottery were collected for the National Museum in Washington, the study of which has thrown a new light on the ancient ceramic industry of Korea, and has also furnished valuable information regarding the kinds of pottery which have been made there in modern times.

It is unfortunately true that the art of pottery-making in Korea has deteriorated, and, while the older forms may still serve as the basis of the modern products, the latter, from the artistic point of view, are, by no means, on an equal footing with the fine specimens of mortuary pottery obtained from ancient Korean tombs, or with the still more beautiful pieces which were probably regarded as too choice to be buried, and were thus preserved for the delight of future generations. The pottery in use in Korea, at the present time, may be divided into three classes. The first is of white, pale buff, or bluish porcelain, sometimes decorated in blue, and having a high glaze. Dishes, bowls, and bottles for table use, and wash-basins may be included under this head. Several excellent pieces are shown in Plate I. The second quality is a pale yellow ware, glazed, undecorated, and chiefly made up as bowls used by the middle class. The third kind, which is used by the poorer people, is made of dark brown, or reddish earth, glazed inside and outside. Objects of this class have no decoration excepting a wavy line produced by wiping off the glaze, which permits the lighter under-surface to show through. In Plate III. are shown some pieces of this pottery. There is a globular bowl (Jil-tang-quan) of dark red stoneware, glazed on the side which was subjected to the greatest heat. Next to it is a wine bottle of heavy glazed porcelain.
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(Sul-biung), ornamented with the dragon in blue, and, in this connection, it is important to note that the Korean potters were unable to impart to their white ware any color but blue, until the revival of color decoration, which occurred some twenty-five years ago. The objects in the lower line of this picture comprise what may be termed a Korean dinner service. They are all of a heavy porcelain covered with a patchy glaze of greenish hue.

Korea has been described as a vast graveyard, with burial mounds and monuments of varying age and archeological interest constituting one of its most prominent landscape features. In some sections of the country, cemeteries occupy fully one-fourth as much space as that which is used for agricultural purposes. Isolated graves of persons of special prominence are also not uncommon, and these are generally surrounded by groves of evergreens, arranged in the shape of a horseshoe, with a mound four or five feet high in the center. It is to these graves that we must turn for the best examples of the ancient Koreans' art in pottery. Here, from time immemorial, pottery had been placed with the bodies, in the belief that the spirits of the departed would have need of them. With the pottery are often found gilded rings of copper, bronze horse-trappings, objects of stone, including slate arrow-heads, and daggers of slate, or shale, with the handle and blade in one piece. This is the famous mortuary pottery, of which several pieces are here reproduced (Plate II.), and it may be regarded as typical of the most ancient productions of the country. There is a stone dish made of dark grey paste, and shaped like a shallow saucer, with a low foot; a wine bottle of light yellowish granular paste, with an opalescent coating showing yellow spots and dark brown pits; and another one of heavy terra cotta ware, covered with vitreous, cracked enamel of a beautiful greenish-gray tint. Near the top of the body, which is jug-shaped, there is a small spout. This bottle is an obsolete form of about the twelfth century. Such specimens as these are of equal value with real porcelain, and are of special interest, because they are suggestive of the origin of the celebrated Japanese Satsuma ware. A specimen of ancient earthenware is seen in the wine cup and stand, at the left of the picture. These pieces are rudely glazed. The cup is shaped to represent a lotus. There are also several bowls of hard, opaque paste, covered with a vitreous, green crackled glaze. The one at the right end is of fine, white, hard-paste porcelain, and is orna-
mented with the wave, or cloud, pattern on the inside. This effect is produced by scraping away the paste; the indentations being filled in with a thicker layer of glaze. This ware, by the way, came from the old potteries of Song-do, the ancient capital of Korea, and is exceedingly rare. Much of the early pottery of Korea was unglazed, while some was slightly glazed earthenware of archaic shapes. The pieces were either modeled by hand, patted into shape with an instrument for that purpose, or formed by the potter’s wheel.

Korea, it may be remembered, was the birth-place of the potter’s wheel, which, as described by a recent explorer, consists of a circular table from two to three feet in diameter, and four to six inches thick, made of heavy wood so as to aid in giving impetus to it when revolving. In general appearance it is not very unlike a modeler’s table. The wheel is operated directly by the foot, without the intervention of a treadle of any kind. The potter sits, squatting in front of the wheel, his bench on a level with it. With his left foot underneath him, he extends the right foot and strikes the side of the wheel with his bare sole, causing it to revolve.

No special principle of decoration or system of symbols peculiar to Korean art has yet been worked out fully, although there are certain art-motifs which often occur on Korean wares. Chief among these is the wave-pattern, which resembles the effect produced by overlapping the ends of feathers. The autumn leaf, floating on the stream, and the half-submerged flower also convey expressive sentiments in Korean art. Arabesque lines which break up the general decoration by means of flat fillets, or curved flutings, are among the more prominent forms of decoration. Such lines are composed of fruit, or flowers, especially the peony. The chrysanthemum design, too, is Korean, and so is the shark’s tooth, which is used chiefly on vases where the sphere-shaped surface requires a broad base and a sharp slope to a point.

In general, it may be said that a close examination of ancient Korean pottery discloses a variety of decorations, including the Swastika, the Buddhist cross, and others. It is probable that Persia and Arabia contributed to the high standard of art which was reached by the ancient inhabitants of the “Land of Morning Calm,” and, in turn, it cannot be doubted that those countries derived a certain inspiration from the artists of Korea.