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COCKFIGHTS

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A rare old Chinese painting representing a cockfight was recently acquired by Field Museum with a fund donated by the American Friends of China, Chicago. This painting, executed in delicate colors on an ancient, much worn-out silk, had been kept for centuries in a private collection in Japan, where it was attributed to Li An-chung, an artist of the Sung period, who lived in the twelfth century. It bears the earmarks of this period in drawing, style, and coloring.

No less than forty-six figures of men are shown dramatically grouped around the cockpit, a circular arena marked by stakes rammed into the ground and covered with cloth. Two powerful roosters in the pit are the combatants, one seeking safety in flight, while the other eagerly takes up his pursuit. Two other fighting cocks are being carried by men in their arms, and two more are being transported in large hampers toward the arena to show their prowess in the next match. The attention of the crowd, however, is not concentrated on the contest. Their heads are turned upward, watching a bird on the wing way up in the air, which has just been hit by an arrow. The arrow has been discharged by a dignified official seated on a bench opposite the cockpit, accompanied by an attendant who holds a quiver containing five arrows. Probably he

is the umpire of the game and the owner of the cowardly rooster, and as such has some reason to distract the attention of the spectators from the issue of the struggle.

Cocking is a sport of ancient date in China, being traceable to at least the sixth century B.C., and has been a favorite pastime of many emperors and of idle youths. In like manner, the sport was cultivated in ancient Cambodia, Java, Sumatra, India, Persia, Greece and Rome. In all these countries cockfights were conducted merely as a popular amusement accompanied by heavy betting. The originators of cockfights probably were the Malaysians among whom the sport has developed into a veritable passion. In the beginning it was connected in the Malayan area with religious ideas. The fighting roosters represented village and tribal communities and their chiefs, and the contest of the cocks, regarded as divine birds, was a sort of ordeal which decided the superiority of a community.

Egyptian Dice

Dice from ancient Egypt, dating back to the Greco-Roman period, are on exhibition in Hall J of the Museum. Most of them are made from bone, but some are of steatite. In size, form and arrangement of the number combinations they are almost identical with modern dice. One specimen, however, has the numbers paired in different combinations.

CHILD SACRIFICE AT KISH

BY HENRY FIELD

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During the excavations conducted by the Field Museum-Oxford University Joint Expedition at Kish, in the Babylonian levels which are attributed to the middle of the first millennium before the Christian Era, numerous pot burials containing children were unearthed. The burial jars had been placed along the walls of the more important buildings, and it seems plausible to suggest that these babies may have been sacrificed to propitiate the gods in whose honor the buildings were erected. The majority of the babies were female.

Another curious discovery was made during work in the mound which contained an important Babylonian library of sun-baked tablets in cuneiform script. Slipper-shaped coffins of baked clay were found near the walls of the buildings and beside several of the sarcophagi were the skeletons of dogs. This suggests the possibility that the favorite animal was buried beside his master to accompany his soul to the spirit world. Several small dogs were buried beside children, and these animals may have watched and guarded the primitive cradles. When a child was put to premature death as a sacrifice to the gods, the dog was also sacrificed and buried beside his playmate so that he might continue to protect him in the world beyond the grave.

Ghoul-like Animals Haunting a Death Trap 50,000 Years Ago



Mural painting restoring prehistoric scene at Rancho La Brea asphaltum pits. Presented by Ernest R. Graham and on exhibition in Hall 38. Charles R. Knight is the artist.

The above photograph shows one of the recent additions to the series of large mural paintings by Charles R. Knight, depicting prehistoric life, presented to the Museum by Ernest R. Graham. This painting represents a scene at the famous Rancho La Brea asphaltum pits near Los Angeles, which until only a few years ago continued to be a death trap for unwary animals. To the

right of the center, saber-tooth tigers are seen devouring the tar-trapped carcasses of victims of the pit, while one of them is driving away huge vultures which also seek to feed on the carrion. At the left are seen wolves of an extinct species, and in the background at the right are a number of prehistoric horses. These animals were all of the last geological period, becoming extinct

about 50,000 years ago. They were closely related to similar modern animals. This painting is one of the twenty-one now to be seen in Ernest R. Graham Hall of Historical Geology (Hall 38). When complete, the series will consist of twenty-eight paintings, and will cover most of the wall space. As far as possible the paintings are placed adjacent to fossils of animals which they represent.



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