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PIECING IN TWILL TAPESTRY SHAWLS OF PERSIA AND KASHMIR

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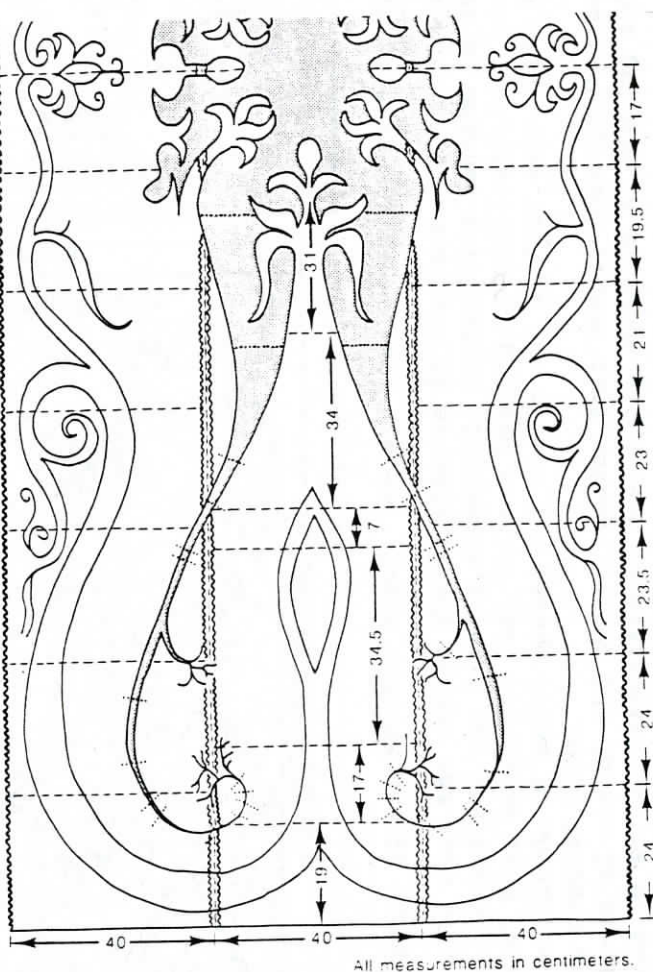
The 19th century witnessed the development of considerable piecework in the manufacture of twill tapestry shawls in both Kashmir and Persia. Modes of construction parallel so closely as to be indistinguishable. This is not surprising considering the centuries-long lively cultural intercourse between the two areas and especially their exchange of designs, weavers and textile technology. In both regions piecework was a response to pressure for faster production, the culmination of a gradual shift from atelier weaving toward a mass market.

Among construction modes, the weaving and subsequent assembly of many rectilinear shapes is to be found especially among long shawls. No. 1 shows a piecing diagram for half the field of one such long shawl. Dark wavy lines that divide the figure into thirds represent selvages. These selvaged strips are further divided by horizontal dashed lines that represent seams uniting rectangular shapes that carry the design. The gray area shows a black plain twill insert, pieced as indicated by dotted cross lines. That this mode of construction is not unique may be observed from various published photographs of other long shawls. (E.g., Irwin 1973, Pl. 39 and Yale 1975 Pl. 19, both Kashmir shawls.)

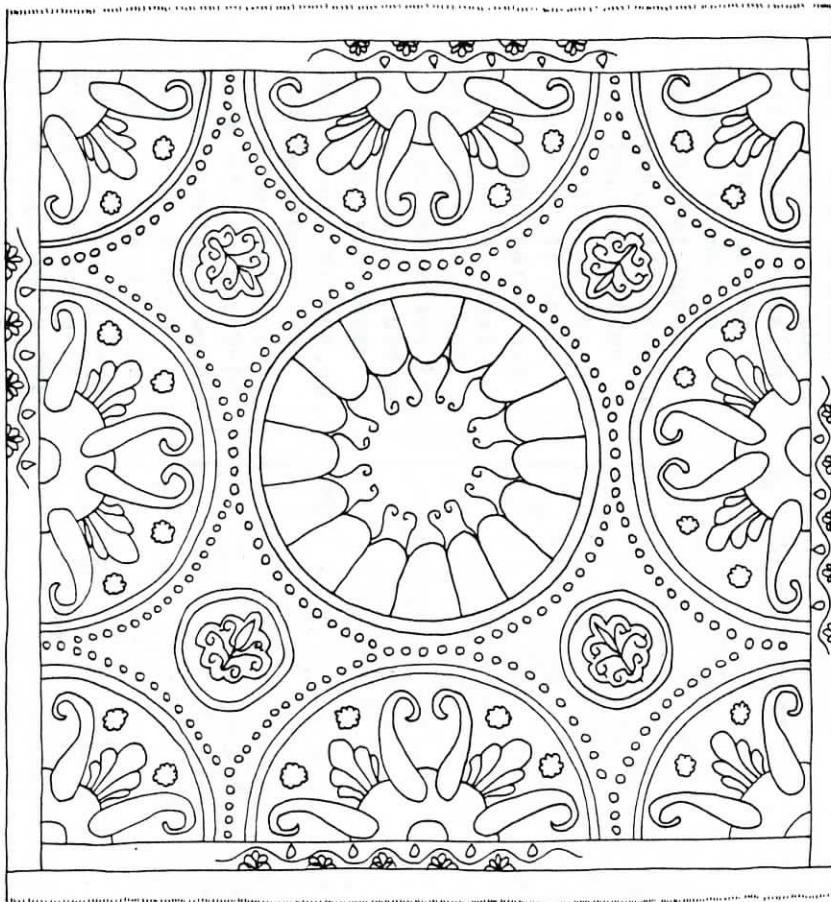
The point in dispersion of shawl weaving into many parts each woven by a single man was to allow each weaver to virtually memorize a small portion of the design so that he need not wait for nor even attend instruction by the color-calling guru, but could rapidly proceed as fast as he was able. The 40 cm selvaged width is about right for a single tapestry weaver to control efficiently.

A second mode of construction involves a more complex piecing of triangular as well as rectilinear shapes and a mixture of four standard directions in which warps might be placed; i.e. vertical, horizontal, and the two 45° diagonals. The full, half, and quarter moon parts of No. 2

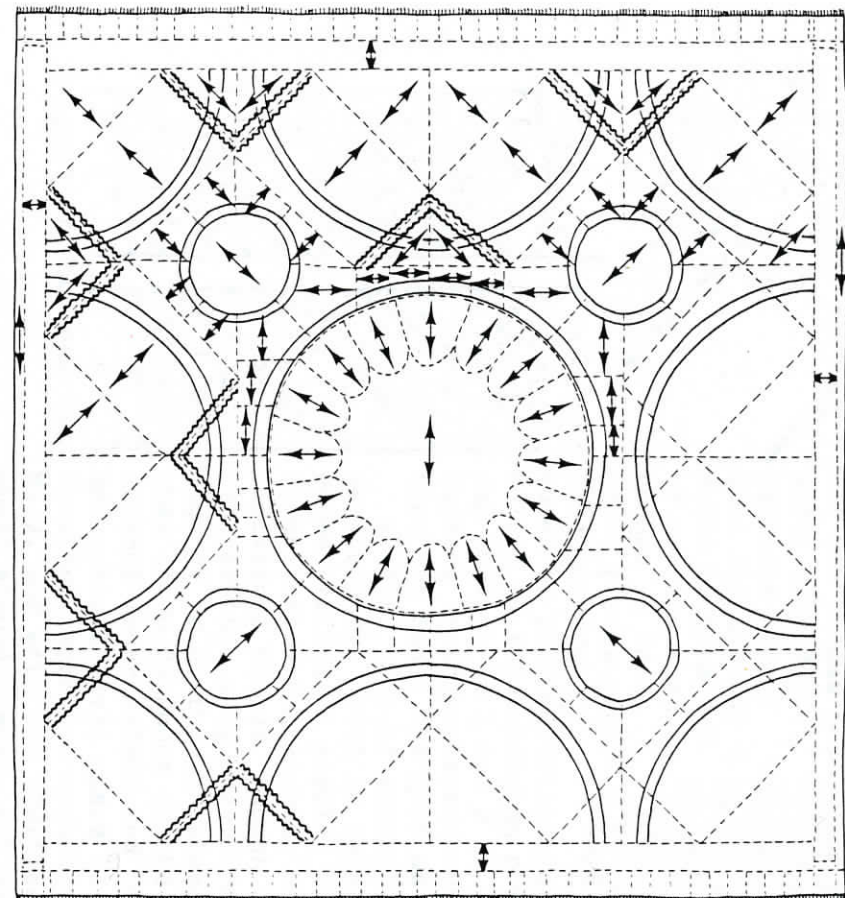
may be regarded as a development from the multi-moon square shawl. Its piecing diagram, No. 3, though not filled in completely for clarity's sake, rightfully extends



#1 Persian field piecing. UMMA 17320.



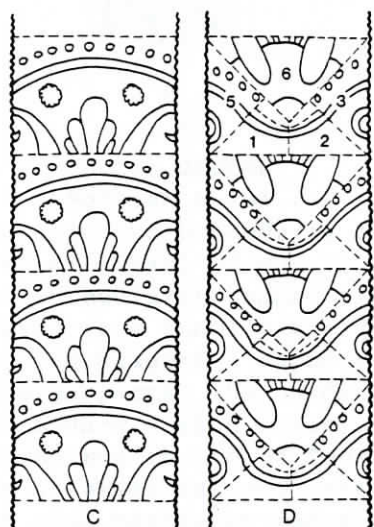
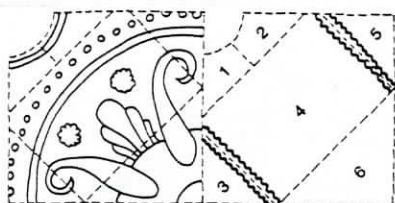
#2 Design of square Kashmir shawl. Lowie 9-2084.



#3. Piecing diagram, Kashmir shawl. Lowie 9-2084.

identically over the entire shawl. Observe in the lower right-hand section the composite squares from which the field doubtless was finally assembled. Controlling tension in lesser sections first, helped completion of a shawl that would lie flat without bulging, a difficult feat with so many bias seams. Warp directions of the multitude of small pieces all lie in one of four axes, with the exception only of the domes that line the central moon.

Analysis of one of the twelve squares that singly form quarter moons and paired yield half moons is demonstrated in No. 4. Essentials of design are shown in A, piecing and presence of selvages in B. Warps of



#4. Quarter moon weaving.

No.7. Paired elongated cari occupy the diagonals. Starting with the quarter moons, it may be observed that opposite corners, A-A' match in piecing but differ from those on the B-B' diagonal. If their selvedged parts are turned 45° so that warps are vertical, the two selvedged triangles below could be inverted and woven in the lower corners, #8. Little tabs above could be similarly treated. As for B-B' the circularly woven design A of No.9 could be used whole, halved, or quartered. Three half moons of No. 6 apparently follow this plan. The fourth (eastern)

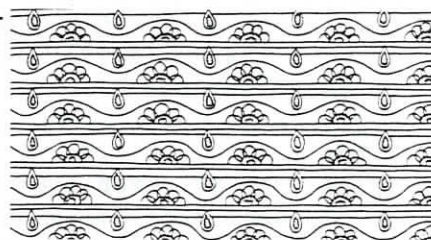
all six pieces parallel selvedges.

Multiple pieces like rectangular 4 could be obtained by weaving them in tandem as in C.

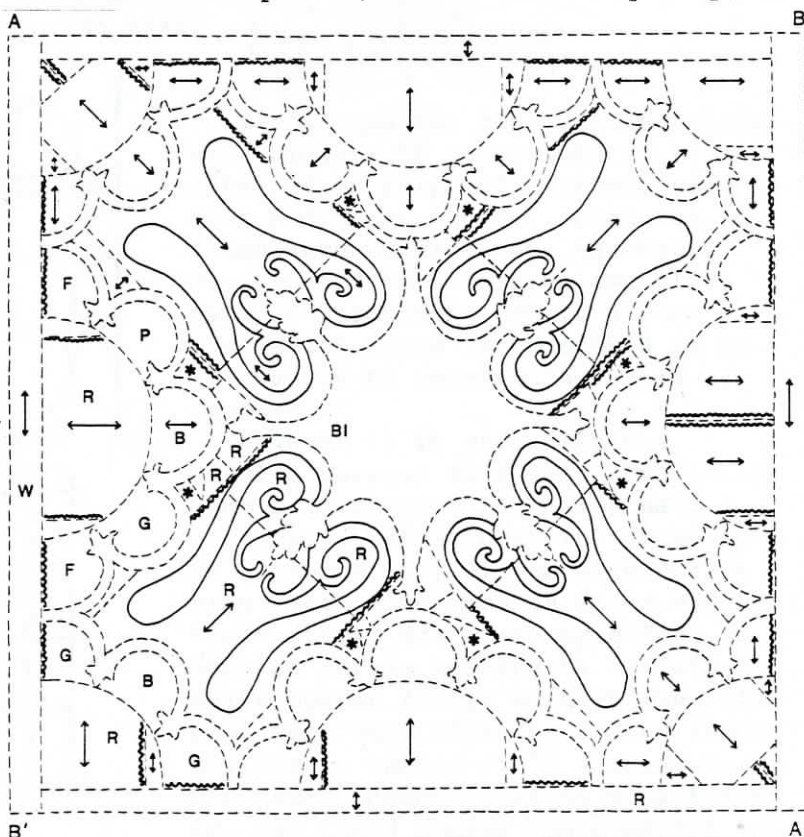
Other pieces could be economically

woven by placing triangular 6 at the top as in column D, interchanging positions of 3 and 5, and tucking in 1 and 2 at the bottom. Shawl borders could be layer-woven as shown in No.5, then cut apart and used as required.

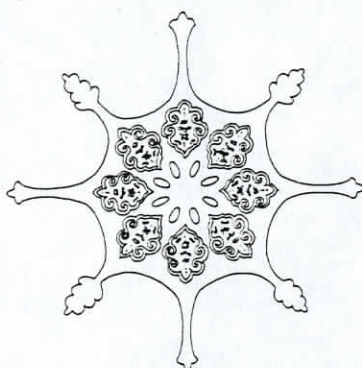
A third mode of construction likewise uses design parts woven in relatively narrow selvedged strips. In piecing the same four warp directions are observed. But final shapes of individual pieces, though uniformly distributed, exhibit many curvilinear edges. The design of No.6, though related, moves away from that of No.2. Domes of the central moon now enhance lunar halves and quarters. Their former central field space is here occupied by 8 inserted, scrolled medallions akin to the 4 of No.2, and with the addition of 8 applied, small almond pieces, all in twill tapestry,



#5 Layer-woven borders.



#6 Field piecing of Persian shawl. UMMA 17318.



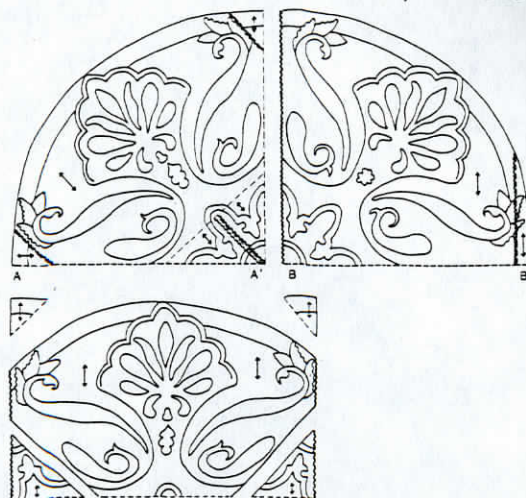
#7 Center design.

Persian shawl. mentioned in the Persian shawl of No. 6, become conspicuous procedures in the square Kashmir shawl of No. 11. A multitude of irregularly shaped pieces comprise this shawl's field. As in No. 6, the diagonals support principal design parts, the cardinal points secondary design areas, and all warps run in one of four directions. To a lesser extent, certain pieces in this basically red shawl are woven on warps of different colors. In the latter part of the 19th century it became fashionable to place accent points in shawl design that

half moon appears comprised of two quarters selvaged and woven as in B-B' of No. 8.

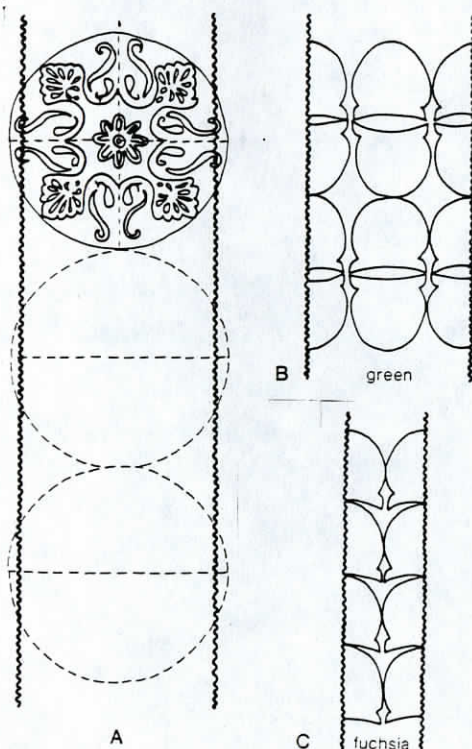
Dome warp colors in No. 6 are indicated by the initial letter of their color name; viz., fuchsia, plum, blue, green, red, white, and black. There is one green dome for each half moon and two selvaged green half domes for each quarter moon. For each shawl of this design the green domes could be woven as in B of No. 9. The fuchsia half domes, two per half moon, could be woven as in C of No. 9. The paired cari likely fared as in No. 10.

The insertions and appliques of center field

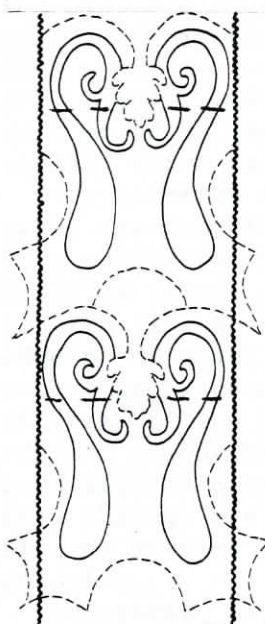


#8 Two quarter moon piecing plans. were clearer in color than could be obtained on warps of a single hue. In this red shawl, white, turquoise, and black accents have been carefully distributed to attain an engaging balance throughout. Their presence in two design areas is indicated in No. 11. Design of intervening areas is ignored.

However it is primarily the shawl's reverse side that reveals its mode of construction. Seams have a somewhat frosted look. The cause is an approximately 0.5 cm wide 'chambray' seam allowance on edges of each field piece. The chambray effect is created during weaving by use of a white cotton filler weft in the colored wool warp adjacent to the figured, highly varied field shapes. From the plain chambray ground thus formed, the field pieces could be cut out



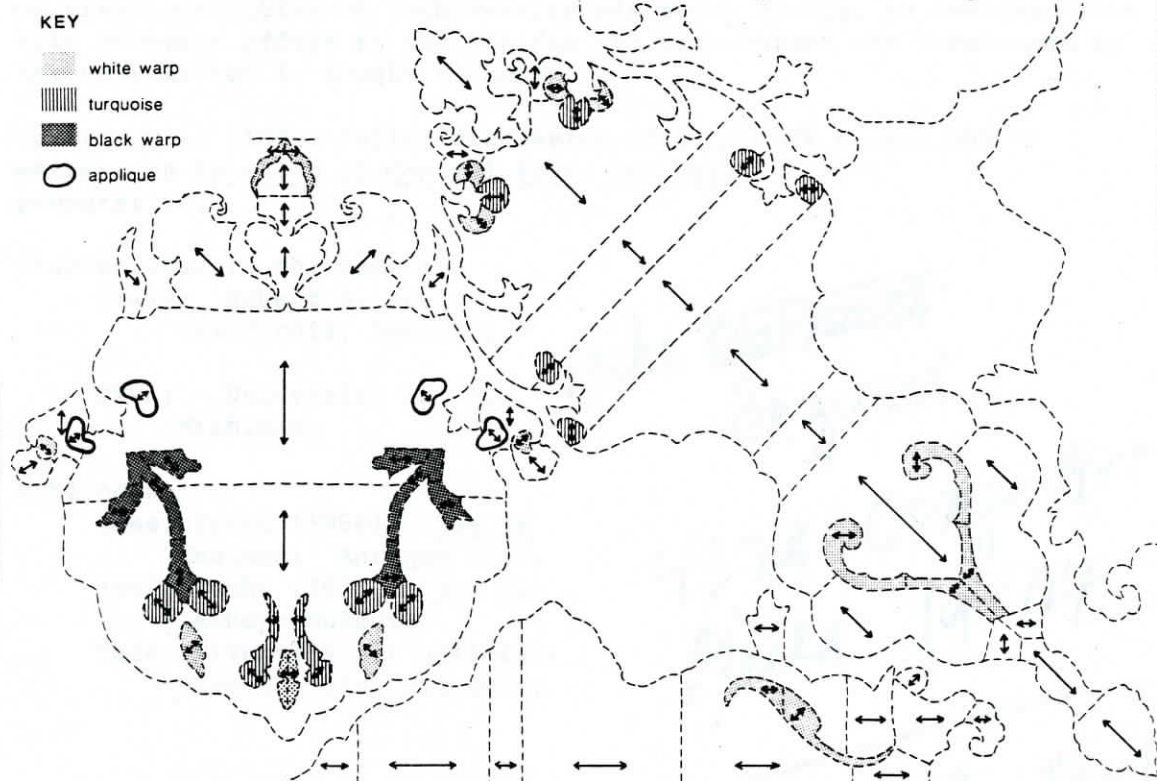
#9 Weaving plan for field parts.



#10 Paired cari weaving plan.

retaining a narrow, neutral margin and sewn together following the dividing line between design and filler. Edges of field pieces then required no stabilizing factor other than the concomitant chambray seam allowance. Use of crudely handspun white cotton yarns for weft in the filler areas was an economical substitute for the considerably more valuable fine wool weft yarns used in the design areas and provided an even greater saving were the shawl woven of goat hair. Chambray edges follow both the curved and straight outlines of the field pieces. It is apparent that in the field some large, red-warp pieces were woven with interior chambray areas so shaped as to be readily punctured and trimmed to receive insertions of chambray-edged accent pieces woven on warps of white, turquoise, or black. In a few cases a very small interior area has been left intact and the accent piece simply applied in place. In brief, use of the chambray margin permitted incorporation of highly irregular design shapes with the necessary edge stability for permanent seams, as well as providing an important economy in weft materials.

But chambray margins were not confined to irregular shapes. The field's layer-woven wide border likewise shows chambray seam allowances, and so do layer-woven borders in certain other shawls. Moreover, a few shawls in the Koelz Collection exhibit a curious white cotton stubble outlining certain field curves, showing that an original



#11. Partial piecing diagram of one vertical and one diagonal major field design area of a Kashmir shawl. UMMA 17369.

chambray has been trimmed almost to the quick subsequent to fine whipping (1-2 mm stitches) of the seams. It is typical of straight weftwise seams, however, that the white cotton weft has been unravelled off and only wisps remain. Thus, for the most part, though chambray margins were at times commonplace and even essential for certain piecework shawls, evidence of the margins was generally reduced or eliminated.

The question as to how the piecing needlework of ordinary straight seams was done is of some interest. In the case of two selvages such as a band-woven hashia attached to a one-piece field, the two edges could be simply whipped together. Occasionally in such instance from time to time a very fine running stitch might be employed. But a cut edge needs stabilizing before joining. For this purpose a 'darn-back' procedure is common practice. Stub yarns from either warp or weft (from unravelling chambray margins?) are turned back from the edge and affixed to the back surface by careful darning. Several rows of darning stitches parallel the edge and pass over or through the stubs but only through the figure yarns of the shawl so that from the obverse side no darning is visible. The darned-back edges are then ready for whipping.

Sometimes, especially for light-weight, finely-woven pieces, raw edges are drawn together and held in place by 'needle-weaving' in which a joining thread in fine running stitch moves back and forth across the join in a high frequency zigzag. With matching thread and careful work this sort of needle-woven seam is only relatively inconspicuous. It is found often in remodelled shawls. Finally there are those seams that successfully baffle and thwart the inquiring eye.

When one considers the fine work and considerable skill expended on great quantities of 19th century piecework shawls, he realizes that this enormous effort to gear up for the mass market was foredoomed by the very market it sought to serve.

Readers will find a fuller discussion of piecework shawls and other matters in Textiles of Central Asia: the Koelz Collection, in preparation.

Shawls cited in the text are housed as follows:

Lowie: Robert H. Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley, California.

UMMA: University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

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