

ASIAN TEXTILES

MAGAZINE OF THE OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

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New textiles from Chitral in northern Pakistan

Also in this issue: textiles from Nagaland, a new acquisition by the quai Branly museum in Paris, weaving in Pakistan and much more.

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Front cover picture: ‘Niswar’ - from the ‘Gup Shup’ exhibition (see p16)

Back cover picture: Man from the Angami Naga wearing a *Sekrenyi* shawl.
Touphema Village - 2008 (Photo by Diccon Pullen).

Asian Textiles is published three times a year, with deadlines on the first Monday in February, June and October.

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS

MONDAY 5th October 2009

Contributions should be emailed or sent to the Editor

— contact details on the back page

Editorial

Pakistan is not a particularly happy place at the moment. As the government seeks to end the Taliban-inspired insurgency, hundreds of thousands of people from the Swat Valley and other parts of the North West Frontier Province have been displaced and are now living in refugee camps. However, it was heart-warming to be able to visit the country earlier this year and to see that wonderful traditional woven textiles are still being made. Pakistan has always been a treasure house for textile enthusiasts and we can only hope that peace soon returns to this troubled land.

Even more exciting were the vibrant new textiles being made by women in Chitral in the far north of the country. Despite being in a remote area and also largely confined to their homes, these women have created textiles that are both visually stunning and original. The kind of collaboration that made this possible is a model for similar societies.

In this issue we also have a wonderful article by Lesley Pullen about the Naga tribes of north-east India. Her article explains how this once complex tribal society has changed under the influence of colonialism and missionary activity. Although much has been lost, particularly in terms of the context in which particular textiles were created, a great deal still remains. Diccon Pullen's photos make that abundantly clear.

We also have a wonderful article about a new acquisition by the quai Branly museum in Paris. This is the first fruit of our highly successful visit to the museum earlier this year. Anne-Solène Rolland describes a very rare and unusual textile from the Indonesian islands made from the fibre of the banana tree. Our thanks goes to her and we hope for further collaborations in the future. *The Editor*



Yet another postcard from my collection. This Russian card, dated 1916, shows a group of Samoyed from northern Siberia. The English sender, who was on active service, has written: "Here is a sample of the aborigines of these forests. Not very attractive are they!" I beg to differ.

OATG EVENTS PROGRAMME

Wednesday June 24 2009 at 5.45pm

North Vietnamese Embroidery

-exploring a partnership with London, Limerick and Hai Duong

by Professor Michael Hitchcock, Deputy Dean at Chichester University

Prof. Hitchcock has a particular interest in rural development and cultural heritage in South East Asian countries

Wednesday July 22 2009 at 5.45pm

Karakalpak costume

Ever-changing fashions in Western Central Asia

by David and Sue Richardson

Mr and Mrs Richardson have travelled widely in Central Asia and researched the traditional culture of this little known region

Saturday, 17 October 2009 at 5.45pm

Visit to Oriental Carpets, 25 Oakthorpe Road, Oxford

Christopher Legge will introduce members to his lifetime's collection of carpets as well as showing members a selection of the wide-ranging stock of mostly Persian, Central Asian and Far Eastern carpets available at Oriental Carpets.

Numbers are limited to 15; interested members should contact either Fiona Sutcliffe or Rosemary Lee. Wine and nibbles will be served.

Wednesday November 11 2009

AGM at 5.45 followed at 6.15 by a talk by Dr Stephanie Bunn

Talks are held at the Pauling Centre, 58 Banbury Road, Oxford.

Refreshments from 5.15pm. Visitors welcome (£2)

Programme Coordinators: Rosemary Lee 01491 873276 rosemary.lee@talk21.com

Fiona Sutcliffe 01491 872268 j.v.sutcliffe@talk21.com

An offer I couldn't refuse...

Dr Ruth Barnes, our founding chairman and a stalwart of OATG, is to take up a new post at Yale. Here she explains her decision

Many of you will already know that I am leaving the Ashmolean Museum at the end of the year to take up a new post as Senior Curator at Yale University's Art Gallery. I will head the new Department of Indo-Pacific Art, endowed by Thomas Jaffe. 'Indo-Pacific' mostly means South-east Asia, so I will be returning to my original geographic region of interest and field research.

The founding collections I will be responsible for have three strong points: Indonesian textiles, ethnographic art from mainland and maritime South-east Asia, and medieval Javanese gold. Tom Jaffe is donating his ethnographic collection, which has wonderful sculpture from the Batak of Sumatra, as well as from Borneo, Eastern Indonesia, the Philippines, and Taiwan.

The textile collection comes from Robert Holmgren and Anita Spertus who are renowned collectors of Indonesian fabrics. Some years ago they sold half of their superb collection to the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra; this is the second half and is of equally high quality.

The Javanese gold was donated by Hunter Thompson. His collection was published by John Miksic in 1990, and it became a standard work of reference. It has been out of print for a long time, but there now are plans for a revised edition, to be published with the new Department's first exhibition in the Spring of 2011.

Yale University Art Gallery wanted me to take up the post much earlier, but I was not happy to leave until the Ashmolean project and my three new galleries here were complete. So I negotiated for a starting date of January 2010. I must be a glutton for punishment – can you guess what I will be thrown into immediately? A complete renovation project...

The Art Gallery is not quite as old as the Ashmolean. But it is the oldest teaching art museum in North America, founded in 1832. In many ways its collections resemble those at the Ashmolean, with a strong archaeology collection and a great Prints and Drawings department.

I will be working closely with the Department of Asian Art, whose senior curator has already informed me that there is a large collection of over 1700 textiles in his Department which awaits some attention – among them more than 1200 Iranian and Indian textiles which once belonged to the Persian scholar Arthur Upham Pope and his wife Phyllis Ackerman (not all Buyid fakes, I hope).

I will miss my colleagues and friends in Oxford, but it was impossible for me to turn down Yale's offer. Professionally there are strong reasons: it is rare to be given such an unusual chance to help shape and promote a field of study, and to be given the institutional support to do so.

The Art Gallery has concrete plans to expand the collections to make them representative of South-east Asian cultures, and to present them in a dedicated gallery. The Gallery also is keen to integrate the collections into teaching and research in the art history and anthropology faculties. Yale already has a strong academic interest in the region, and its University Library is worldwide one of the best for South-east Asian studies, with strong holdings in most fields.

There also are good personal reasons to take this leap. My husband is American and wants to return to the US when he retires. He will stay in Oxford until 2012, and we will keep our home here until then. My new post will make the transition between continents much easier.

The job comes with a generous amount of annual research time, when I will not have to be at Yale. You will probably still see plenty of me, at least for the next few years. And I will be your correspondent from New Haven, Connecticut – with New York and Boston only a short train ride away, there may be some good stories coming your way!

Celebrating a great Victorian silk pioneer

The Textile Society's conference in Macclesfield, Cheshire from 25-27 September will highlight the works of Thomas Wardle, one of the great unknown creative textile entrepreneur inventors of Victorian Britain. As William Morris' industrial partner Wardle was responsible for the unique quality and colour of the silks which went into the Arts and Crafts textiles of the era. His search for suitable silks led him to India where his technical experiments enabled the Indians to greatly increase their export of silk.

Wardle's knowledge of dye chemistry created a breakthrough in the dyeing of Indian wild tussur silk, previously imported and used in its undyed state. Wardle hand block-printed the silk and then dyed it with vegetable dyes. He commissioned Arts and Crafts artist-designers of the day to design the textiles which were sold at Liberty's and Heal's. His wife Elizabeth formed The Leek Embroidery Society using Wardle's dyed floss silk threads and printed silk grounds.

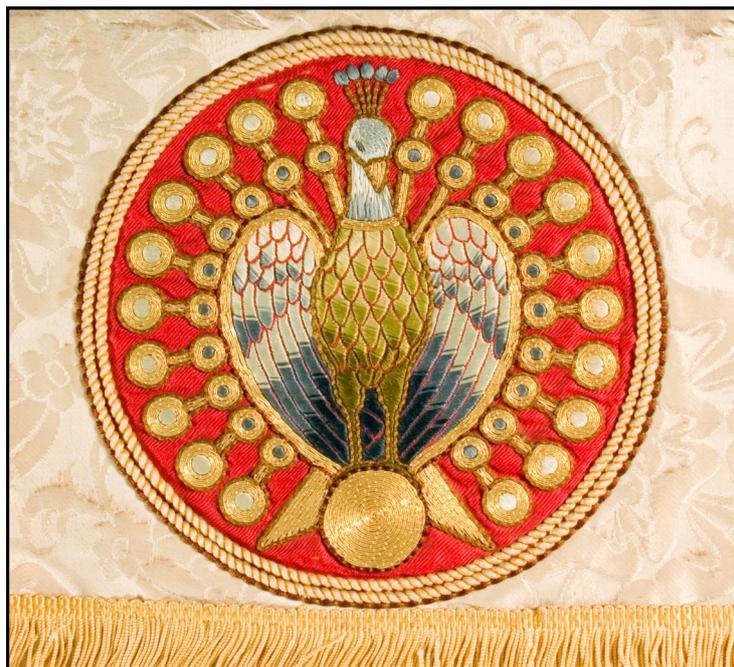
To celebrate the centenary of Wardle's death the conference will coincide with the publication of Brenda King's book *'Dye, Print, Stitch: textiles by Thomas and Elizabeth Wardle'* and a number of exhibitions at the Silk Industry Museum, Macclesfield, The Nicholson Institute, Leek, The Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester and The William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, London.

The three-day conference will take place at the Silk Heritage Centre, Macclesfield, the town where Wardle was born. The programme includes visits to Staffordshire churches where many of the ecclesiastical embroideries produced by the Leek Embroidery Society are still in regular use.

The conference features talks by two distinguished textile artists: Alice Kettle who acknowledges that some of her narrative work was influenced by the copy of the Bayeux Tapestry worked by The Leek Embroidery Society in Reading Museum; Maxine Bristow will use the themes of East and West to talk about the Japanese textile exchange with which she was involved.

Other speakers include Trish Belford who was formerly a successful designer and is now a Research Fellow at the University of Ulster and Dr Sonia Ashmore, an historian and Research Fellow at the V & A who is currently working for the Indian Diaspora project and will discuss the important Indian textiles collection at the museum.

For further information see: www.textilesociety.org.uk or ring 020 7359 7678



A Leek Embroidery Society motif of a peacock, probably for an ecclesiastical textile, embroidered in Thomas Wardle's silks and woven silk damask ground, c.1880

Textile Museum director resigns

In March the Textile Museum in Washington announced that Director Daniel Walker, who only took the post in May 2005, had resigned with immediate effect. It follows a decision last year by the Board of Trustees not to proceed with a planned expansion of the museum.

In his letter of resignation to the Board Walker wrote: "Given the economic climate, this is a difficult time for museums large and small. Therefore, the Board and I have come to a mutual agreement that this is the right moment for me to assist in the transition to a new director.

"I am eager to return to various research, writing and exhibition projects that have been set aside over the last four years. My devotion to The Textile Museum and its collection is unwavering, and I look forward to providing advice and assistance to the Museum beyond the official conclusion of my tenure."

In response, Board President Bruce P Baganz said, "The Textile Museum's Board of Trustees is grateful for Daniel Walker's leadership over the past four years. His extensive museum experience and thorough knowledge of textiles has helped to reinforce the Museum's reputation as a world leader in the study and presentation of the textile arts."

During Walker's tenure, The Textile Museum presented 16 exhibitions, including three curated by the director himself: *Seldom Seen: Director's Choice from the Museum's Collections* (February 10 – July 30, 2006), *Pieces of a Puzzle: Classical Persian Carpet Fragments* (September 1, 2006 – January 7, 2007), and *Recent Acquisitions* (6 Mar 2009 – 3 Jan 2010).

At the end of April the Textile Museum announced that Mattiebelle Gittinger, one of the foremost researchers and scholars in the field of Southeast Asian textiles, had been chosen as the 2009 recipient of the Museum's George Hewitt Myers Award.

The Myers Award, named after The Textile Museum's founder and given by Board of Trustees, recognizes an individual's lifetime achievements and exceptional contributions to the field.

Previous recipients include scholar Jon Thompson (2008); collector and philanthropist Lloyd Cotsen (2007); the late Josephine Powell, an ethnographer and photographer (2006); and textile designer and collector Jack Lenor Larsen (2005).

"Mattiebelle Gittinger is a world-renowned expert on Southeast Asian textiles," said Bruce P. Baganz. "The Textile Museum has been enriched by Ms. Gittinger's scholarship, exhibitions and curatorial guidance for more than 30 years.

"She has built the Museum's collection of Southeast Asian material into one of the finest holdings in the world," Baganz continued. "Her publications and other scholarly contributions will have a lasting impact on the study and understanding of Southeast Asian textile traditions."

Abegg-Stiftung Foundation closes for major renovation

The latest institution that feels the need to reinvent itself is the Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg near Berne, Switzerland. A notice sent out recently announces that the foundation is now closed. This affects the Museum, but also the research library in the Villa Abegg.

Over the next two years the foundation's entire exhibition space will be remodelled and brought up to date. A basement and an additional upper floor are also planned. The result will be generously proportioned new galleries and offices. The opening is planned for Spring 2011. For additional information about the foundation and its collections please visit www.abegg-stiftung.ch - or if you need a postal address and telephone number: Abegg-Stiftung, Werner-Abegg-Strasse 67, CH-3132 Riggisberg, Tel +41 (0)31 808 12 01.

Dutch launch for Batak textile book

Pamela Cross writes: “Based on 30 years of research by Sandra Niessen into the Batak and their textiles with over two decades of fieldwork and consultation of all major European and Indonesian collections of Batak textiles, her new book* is a study of the woven heritage of the Toba, Simalungun, and Karo Batak. It provides a record of more than 100 different design types, including archival and contemporary photographs showing how the textiles are woven and how they are used in Batak culture.

The most complete analysis of Batak textiles ever published, with book design by prize-winning art book designer, Marie-Cécile Noordzij-Pulles, it is a *tour de force*. This note is *not* a review of the book. During the last three years I have become too closely involved with it and its author to feel able to do that objectively and, although I have read sections of it in production and have been constantly dipping into it since receiving my published copy, at 568 pages it deserves a serious chunk of time to read it cover-to-cover which I have not yet been able to devote to it.

I collected my first Batak textile in 1996, visited Lake Toba and the Toba and Batak areas in 1997 collecting current and some older pieces and added one or two special pieces in the period to early 2006 when I was ‘virtually’ introduced to a Toba Batak family wishing to sell a family collection of *ulos*. It was whilst researching these textiles, now in my collection, and their associated family history that I was introduced to Sandra Niessen and visited the ‘Woven Worlds’ exhibit of Batak textiles that she curated at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam in the spring of 2006.

Since then Sandra has been very supportive and generous in sharing her vast knowledge of Batak textiles and customs with me and we have become regular email correspondents and close friends. I have been awaiting *Legacy in cloth* with eager anticipation. It satisfies so much of what I, as a collector, want to know: to identify my cloths; to understand their role in the culture and history of the Batak; to understand the technique of their construction in words, diagrams and photos; to see them being worn in archive photos; ... to name but a few key desires! I was honoured when Sandra asked me to speak – which turned into a presentation - at the book launch in Amster-



Sandra Niessen (author); Dr Harry Poeze (Head of KITLV Press); Mr F.X. Widiyarso, Indonesian Embassy in the Hague; Lesley Pullen, ; and Pamela Cross, OATG web manager.

dam on 15 May in the private Soeterijn theatre within the Tropenmuseum.

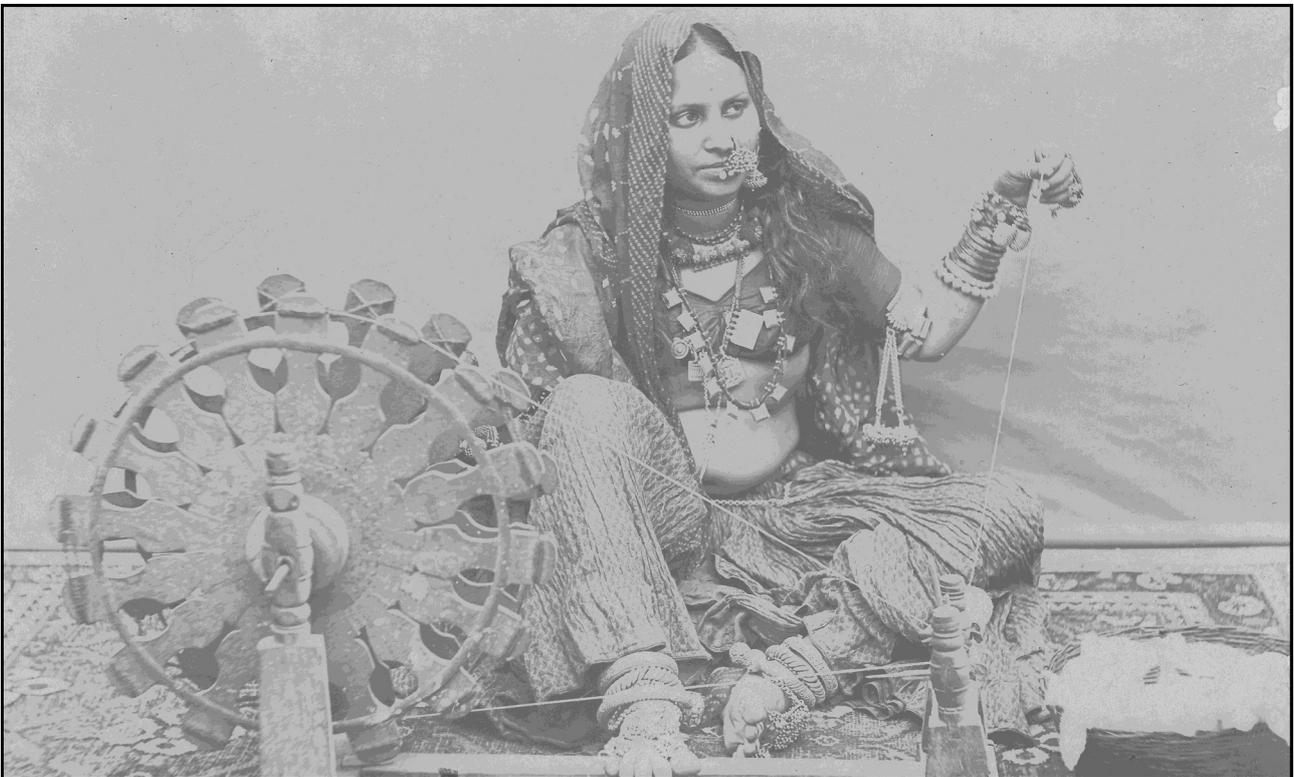
Our joint hosts, Lejo Schenk, Director of the Tropenmuseum and Dr Harry Poeze, Head of KITLV Press, Sandra and myself were all drawn onto the stage by a group of Batak dancers and each ceremonially draped in an *ulos* and thereby blessed by the act. Sandra selected a beautiful Silindung valley *ragidup* from her collection for Harry, usually only worn by a grandparent, as he had recently become a grandfather for the first time. Appreciating its significance he had a lovely proud grin on his face for the duration and Sandra later made him a gift of the cloth. I chose a very fine 100-year old *na marpisoran* from my collection woven by Ernestina boru Hutagalung in the village of Huta Harean (Silindung valley) during the first decade of the 20th century. This turned out to be the same village from which the lead dancer, Paul Hutagalung, originated!

I had the privilege of watching Leo Schenk's awed face as he leafed through the book before the ceremonies began. In his welcoming speech he paid tribute to the book as "a bible that everybody who does Indonesian textile studies in the future will have to refer to." It was Leo's belief in the book that made it possible to launch it in the Tropenmuseum.

As well as giving first copies of the book in thanks to her key supporters Sandra gave one to *Threads of Life* (www.threadsoflife.com) in appreciation of their support work for Indonesian weavers (6 November talk to OATG by William Ingram). This was received on their behalf by OATG member, Lesley Pullen. Following the ceremonies there was a very enjoyable reception in the Soeterijn Café next door to the theatre and all the books brought to the launch were sold. Books can be purchased via the KITLV website www.kitlv.nl/book/show/1262

Next Sandra wants to have the book translated into Bahasa Indonesia and to take it 'back to the villages'. "I want to present one to each weaver who helped me with my research. I want to show the weavers where they are depicted in the book and watch their faces light up. I want to thank them and honour them.... No doubt the book will stimulate more recognition from the village leaders and from their neighbours and families. Years later, I will want to see whether the book has inspired new textile designs, or the re-making of old ones." We hope Sandra will come to the UK in November to tell us about her 'back to the villages' dream."

**Legacy in cloth: Batak textiles of Indonesia* by Sandra Niessen, published by KITLV Press, Leiden, May 2009



Another postcard, this time from India. It depicts a heavily bejewelled woman who looks like a Rajasthani nomad operating a hand-turned spinning wheel. No date, but probably around 1905.

Traditional weaving looms in Pakistan

In February *Asian Textiles* editor Nick Fielding travelled to Pakistan where he came across a wonderful exhibition of traditional weaving looms at the Lok Virsa Centre in Islamabad

The Lok Virsa Museum in Islamabad (also known as the Folk Heritage Museum), which is run by the National Institute of Folk & Traditional Heritage, holds a wonderful collection of embroidered costumes, jewellery, woodwork, metalwork, block printing, ivory and bone work.

Traditional architecture facades exhibiting such skills as fresco, mirror work and marble inlay; tile, mosaic and stucco tracery are also displayed and the museum runs an active campaign aimed at preserving the living folk and traditional culture and crafts of Pakistan.

In February, the museum held an outdoor exhibition of traditional weaving in which around 30 *khaddis* (weaving looms) were on display. Entitled ‘Tana Bana—Weavers of the Human Soul’, the exhibition displayed the work of weavers from remote areas of Pakistan.

All the looms were working and artisans produced cloth for sale during the two-week period of the exhibition. ‘Tana Bana’ is Urdu for warp and weft.

Mazhar-ul-Islam, executive director of Lok Virsa, welcomed guests at the opening ceremony with these words: “Weaving is not only a craft, but a mystic tradition associated with Sufis, who used weaving as a meditation practice, as it consisted in transforming cotton and wool into cloth that provided comfort and cover to mankind against head and cold.”

He noted that the world’s earliest known cotton cloth was found at the Mojenjodaro site in Sindh and had reliably been dated to around 3000 BCE. Cotton is still extensively grown in Sindh and hand woven fabrics became a major industry during the Mughal period until it went into decline during the period of British colonial rule, when machine-made fabrics first appeared in south Asia.

In recent years there has been a revival of some of the weaving crafts and weavers are now producing traditional *khes*, *durrees*, *lunghis*, *khaddar*, *banarsi* silk and all kinds of cotton and linen textiles.

In addition to the exhibition, a one-day conference was held at Lok Virsa on 18 February on the topic “Weaving and problems confronting weavers”.

The seminar was attended by master artisans, textile designers from the Karachi School of Arts and the National College of Arts, textile experts and designers from Rawalpindi and Islamabad, faculty members and final year students from Fatima Jinnah Women University, craft dealers, and representatives of craft-related NGOs.

The seminar comprised of two parts; in the first part, about 25 weavers participating in the exhibition told participants about different hardships faced by them with respect to raw material and marketing of their products. Some weavers wanted workshops to help artisans in designing and innovating their products.

They also stressed the need for as many craft festivals and exhibitions with a view to promoting and projecting their craftsmanship.

In the second part, Professor Naseem Abbas, weaving experts Kauser Cheema, Saba Hussain and Mrs Lubna, together with well-known artists Kausar Jahan and Zarar Babri, encouraged the management of Lok Virsa and the government to support the growth and development of traditional arts and crafts, with special reference to weaving.

Their suggestions included provision of services of experts to the artisans for their guidance and availability of local facilities to the artisans for improvement and preservation of their crafts.

Addressing the seminar, Mazhar ul Islam from Lok Virsa, said that the museum intends to create a combination between traditional and modern weaving. Lok Virsa also wants to encourage artisans to produce handicrafts using traditional skills, patterns & themes in an innovative way to ensure continuity & sustainability of these traditional skills.

While emphasizing the importance of the art of weaving, Mr. Mazhar ul Islam said that the value of traditional artefacts has not vanished despite modern machines. Customers prefer to buy traditional woven items instead of modern ones. Lok Virsa, he said, is planning to open craft shops so that craftspeople get the opportunity to sell their products.

So many unusual weaving looms were on display that it seems appropriate to devote the next few pages to illustrating this wonderful diversity.



Posters illustrating the Tana Bana (warp and weft) exhibition at Lok Virsa in Islamabad



Killim weaving from Balochistan



Lois weaving from Tharparkar, Sindh



Lunghi weaving from Swat in northern Pakistan



Khes weaving from Nesarpur, Sindh



Woollen shawl weaving from Swat,



Lunghi weaving from Swat (close-up)



Farasi weaving, Thaparkar, Sindh



Khaddar (shawl) weaving, Charsadda, NWFP



Pelisk weaving, Chitral, Northern Territories



Khont weaving, Khuzdar, Balochistan

A unique interpretation of life in the mountain valleys of Chitral

In his second article from Pakistan, Nick Fielding looks at the '*Gup Shup*' exhibition of contemporary embroideries made by Chitrali women who are trying to preserve old traditions that are now under threat.

On 8 March, International Women's Day, Pakistan's Information Minister opened the *Gup Shup* (which is Chitrali for 'chit-chat') exhibition of 23 contemporary hand-embroidered textiles from Chitral at the National Art Gallery in Islamabad.

The artisans who produced this remarkable series of embroideries range in age between 15 and 32 years, most of whom are unmarried. A further 200 women were involved in embroidering some of the works, particularly the two pieces made entirely of embroidered buttons. All come from a traditional society where *purdah* is still strictly adhered to, and where women's opportunities for education or travel are very strictly limited.

They were brought together by Cath Braid, an Australian fashion designer who trained at the



'I want to be a pilot', by Nasreen, Mussarat and Faham



'Niswar' by Hasina and Mussarat.

Central School of Art at St Martin's in London. She has been working in Chitral for the past six years and also runs a business, Polly&Me (www.pollyandme.com) which employs over 400 women making textiles for accessories that are sold in Western boutiques.

Together with Rolla Khadduri, a Lebanese woman who has been working in Afghanistan and Pakistan for four years, Cath ran a series of self-financed workshops in Chitral that helped the women develop the ideas behind the textiles produced for the exhibition.

"I have been working with Chitrali women for a long time and was amazed from the start by their extraordinary level of embroidery skills," she says. "So far the women have been working on textiles based on my own decision briefs. But I wanted to see what would happen if the women had an opportunity to be creative. It is amazing what they create with the simples of equipment and only their immediate surroundings for inspiration."

The aim of *Gup Shup*, say the organisers, is to provide a sharp contrast to how Pakistan has been represented, particularly over the last two years. The exhibition "aims to depict the universality of women's lives everywhere". In one piece called *Prayers*, the women open up and tell us

their short-term and long-term aspirations. ‘*Niswar*’ is about a young woman who took some of her grandfather’s *niswar*—a mixture of tobacco, slaked lime, indigo, cardamom and water. She fainted and the embroidery shows her lying on the ground, with the feet of her friends surrounding her.

‘I want to be a pilot’ shows the young boy Faham, who wrote his name out for the embroiderers. It was then embroidered by the women who made the piece.

Pot Swap comes out of the tradition during Ramazan when neighbours exchange food. Children scamper from house to house with different pots, filling and refilling them with the shared food. The exuberance of occasion is reflected in the textile. Another piece, ‘*All’s well that ends well*’ describes an old story teller called Ghulam, who has realised that he is being replaced by television.

All the proceeds of the sale will go to the women themselves. In Islamabad, the prices ranged from US\$1,500 to \$3,800. At least nine out of 23 had been sold before the end of the first evening.

“I can support my children by myself, and even my husband too—now I am a supervisor, I actually earn more than him,” said Zaibunda, who, together with her family, made *Pot Swap*. “Before, my husband would consult me, but he ultimately made the decisions. I am the decision maker in this house now. And I enjoyed this whole creative process so much...it is something nobody has ever shown me before.”

The exhibition in Islamabad was supported by a generous grant from the British High Commission .



‘Pot Swap’ by Zaibunda and family

A rare textile from the Indonesian islands

Anne-Solène Rolland, Curator for the Textile Collection of the Musée du quai Branly in Paris, describes a recently acquired banana-fibre textile from the Sulawesi Archipelago

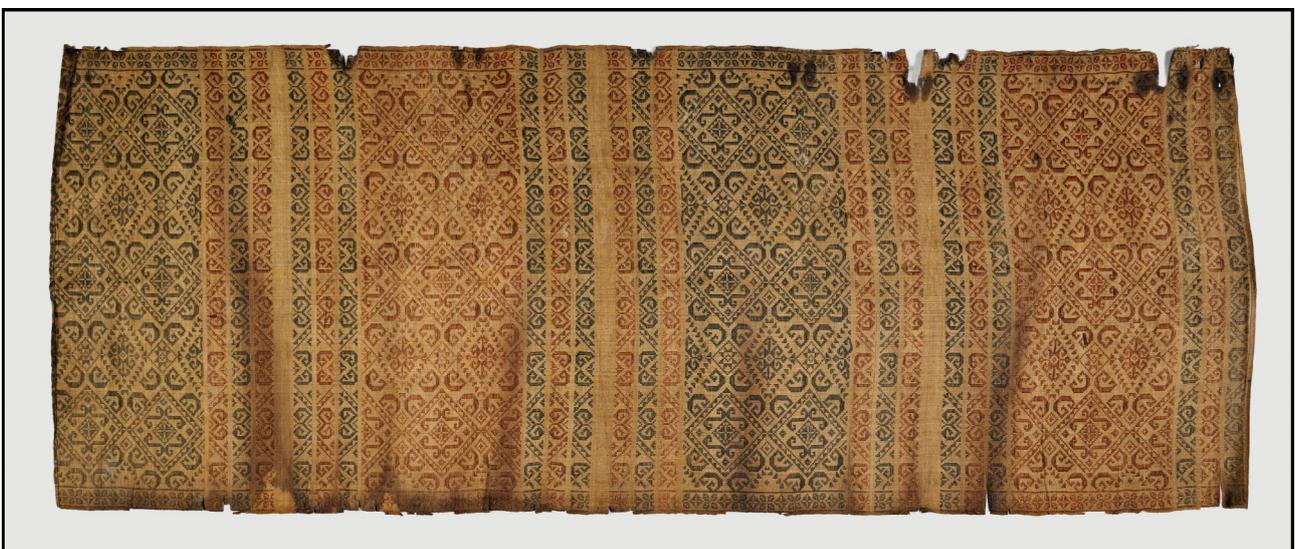
In 2008 the musée du quai Branly acquired a rare nineteenth century banana-fibre textile from the Sangihe-Talaud islands in the Sulawesi Archipelago. This textile was a significant addition to an already important collection of textiles from the four non-European continents - a small part of which the OATG group had an opportunity to see earlier this year in Paris.

The quai Branly, the National Museum for African, American, Oceanian and Asian Arts and Cultures, has been opened to the public since June 2006(1). Its collection includes around 280,000 items from the four continents including sculptures, archaeological pieces, architectural elements, masks, paintings and every-day life objects collected from the nineteenth century up to the present (2).

Until 2006 the most important parts of these collections were kept either at the Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie (MNAAO) or at the Musée de l'Homme, the two national museums dedicated to non-European Cultures. The collections were then brought together into a brand new museum that is now one of the most important of its type in Europe.

Its purpose is to show how diverse and rich all these cultures are both through the permanent exhibition and its 3,500 objects, as well as through the many special exhibitions, conferences and symposia, through which the visitor has direct access to non-European cultures, their artworks, artefacts, ways of life and history.

The collection includes some 35,000 cloths, textiles and accessories from the four non-European continents. Textiles are obviously cultural witnesses and as such find their place in the permanent exhibition. Some 300 items are exhibited on a semi-permanent basis. Textiles and sen-



Full view of the newly acquired cloth



Cloths like this were used to divide rooms

sitive objects like feathers or skins are regularly changed to protect them from damage, particularly from light.

Textiles are on display in each geographical section of the museum(3). The Asian section has a particularly rich collection. Long showcases show cloth and textiles from China to the Middle East, though India and Central Asia. The Indonesian section includes several showcases dedicated to textiles from different islands.

The number of textiles exhibited allows the museum to illustrate the diversity of textiles from around the world. It also allows comparison between techniques, patterns and cuts in all countries and cultures. Textiles and cloth illustrating various techniques are presented, from non-woven textiles like Afghan felts or tapas to complex woven fabrics like supplementary weft-patterned Indian or South-East Asia textiles.

Very diverse materials are presented, as an example of the huge diversity of materials used around the world: from the common materials like silk and cotton or many different types of wools (from alpaca, lama, camels, sheep, etc) to less usual materials such as salmon or deer skins, porcu-

pine quills, raffia, ramie and palm-tree fibres.

One of the most interesting and unusual fibres found in the collection is the banana tree fibre, used in different areas of the world. It is, for instance, one of the typical fibres used in the Okinawa Archipelago in Southern Japan, where it is known as “*basho*” and used to make ikat-patterned kimonos. Banana-fibre is also very common in the North of Philippines, specifically on Mindanao Island among the Bagobo, Tboli, Mandaya or Maranao people, where it is known as “*abaca*”, also known in Europe as Manila Hemp(4).

The fibre is acquired from the bark around the stalks of mature wild banana trees. The pulp of the bark is removed; the remaining strand of long threads is combed and then bleached in the sun. The individual fibres acquired this way are knotted together to form continuous threads that can be woven.

People from Mindanao produce gorgeous cloth from *abaca*: jackets, trousers, head covers and shoulder cloth(5). Different decorative techniques are used on Mindanao: ikat resist dyeing, shell embroideries, bead applications. Deep red warp ikat dyeing with small figurative and geometric patterns is one of the most common decorations among the different population, and the most famous textiles from the Philippines.

Banana-fibre is still used today in other regions, like Micronesia and in the Sulawesi Archipelago, in the Sangihe-Talaud Islands located close to southern Philippines.

In the recent years, the Musée du quai Branly has acquired several *abaca* textiles from different areas of Mindanao, in order to show this specific material and important textile tradition.

As a complement to those acquisitions, the museum also acquired in 2008 this rare banana fibre textile from the Sangihe-Talaud Archipelago (Fig. 1, cat. Nr. 70.2008.58.1). Textiles from these islands are much less known than those from Philippines or other areas of the Sulawesi. Acquiring this rare textile was therefore a means to extend the covered areas and traditions in the collection.

Very little seems to be known about this kind of textile. From the material and technical points of view, this piece shows another use of banana fibre, called “*hotte*” or “*koffo*” in the Sangihe-Talaud islands. First, such textiles are no cloths but hangings: several pieces were probably sewn together and used in the houses to separate the different rooms.



A close-up showing the supplementary weft pattern

Second, the technique used to create the patterns is not common in the Philippines: here, supplementary weft creates pattern on the textile. Alternating blue and red supplementary weft threads create stylized motives on the raw ground. Robyn Maxwell sees in these textiles very ancient traditional hooks and spirals motives that were already found on the oldest known Southeast Asian textiles(6).

This type of textiles is rare, and this was a great opportunity to find one for the quai Branly. Other published pieces are to be found in the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, one of the most famous southeast Asian Textiles collections (cat. Nr. NGA 1986.1239 and NGA 2000.828, Maxwell 2001 p. 65) and in the UCLA Fowler Museum in Los Angeles - where a very similar textile shows the same patterns and colours as the one acquired by the musée du quai Branly (UCLA X2002.37.168: see Hamilton, 2008, p. 31).

Perhaps such hangings were not used or produced in the 20th century, which might explain their rareness. The ones known in collections are probably dating from late 19th or early 20th century.

As a matter of fact, banana-fibre, which is not easy to thread and weave nor soft on skin when used for cloth, was often easily replaced in the areas where it was used by the common, softer and easier cotton, as were many of the numerous traditional plant fibres around the world (see Hamilton 2008). Only a strong tradition or a recent revival might help them survive, which was obviously not the case for Sangihe-Talau textiles as it is in the Philippines or in Japan.

Showing and explaining such lost traditions is one of the objectives of museums for non-European cultures. Acquisitions of this kind help the museum fulfil this goal.

Notes

1. For more information see www.quaibrantly.fr. The collection is available online under « Scientific Documentation ». On the collections, see : Le Fur, Y. ed. 2009. *La Collection*, Paris, Musée du quai Branly et Flammarion (to be published in English soon)
2. Viatte, G. et al. 2006. *Guide* (English edition), Paris, Musée du quai Branly.
3. On the textile collection, see the catalogue of the first textile exhibition at the Musée du quai Branly, on tie-and-dye : Cousin, F. 2008. *Chemins de Couleurs : teintures et motifs du monde*, Paris, Nicolas Chaudun et Musée du quai Branly.
4. On banana-fibre and other plants-fibres, see Hamilton, R. and Milgram, B. L. (ed.) 2008, *Material Choices: Refashioning Bast and Leaf Fibers in Asia and the Pacific*, UCLA Fowler Museum, Los Angeles.
5. On this topic see Hamilton, R. 1998 (ed.), *From the Rainbow's Varied Hue: Textiles of the Southern Philippines*, UCLA Fowler Museum, Los Angeles.
6. Maxwell, R., *Textiles of Southeast Asia*, Periplus, Hong Kong, 2001.

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Coming to terms with modernity

In this essay, Lesley Pullen writes about the history and customs of the Naga tribes of north-eastern India and explains how the significance they attach to textiles has also been changed by modern life.

The Indian state of Nagaland is situated in Northeast India up against the Myanmar border. The Naga Hills, as it was originally known, had been ceded as part of greater Assam from Burma to British administered India in 1826 following the First Anglo-Burmese War. The first British military expeditions into the Naga Hills were in 1832, but it was only in the 1880s that part of this territory was brought under British control. Following Indian Independence in 1947, it was not until 1963, after an armed struggle for political autonomy, that the state of Nagaland was inaugurated as the 16th state of India.

The Naga districts are in the Patkai Range of hills that run north to south along India's eastern border with Myanmar, with peaks rising from 600m to 1,800m. The highest point is in Tensang, which reaches 3,800m. Closely huddled together, the hills are dissected by deep valleys with fast flowing rivers. A good description of the region can be found in Christian von Furer



Konyak Naga villager – Mon District - 2008

Haimendorf's monograph 'The Naked Naga'.

The tropical jungle was inhabited by tigers, leopards, deer, boar, snakes. The many species of birds included the hornbill which was hunted for the magic value of its tail feathers. Haimendorf noted also that the hills were full of wild flowers, the indigo plant and the grass called 'Job's tears'.

Before 1963, early travellers would spend days walking along tracks through the forests made by the Naga, drinking water from bamboo pipe containers just as they do today, with their porters carrying their goods in hand-woven baskets on their backs, just as they do today.

New roads may have been built along some of the old tracks, but mostly the Naga use their paths to reach their fields. Today the Naga carry ancient guns where once they carried spears. A villager has to hand in to a store his five old spent cartridges before purchasing five new

ones.

During the relative peace that followed Nagaland's inclusion in India, central government funds flowed into the region, leading to sudden and remarkable material progress, with the construction of institutions and infrastructure, and with new amenities and facilities. This development has had a profound impact on traditional Naga culture.

Identity is the most important factor to consider when referring to the Nagas. (The term 'Naga' was not previously known to the Naga tribes. When the British took control of greater Assam in 1826, they had to deal with raiding Naga tribes who took heads and disturbed the order of local life. At this time the plains Assamese referred to the hill Nagas as *noga* - the "naked people of the hills". The British then adopted this indigenous term into the word 'Naga'. The Naga tribes were not even aware that the British were referring to them collectively as 'Naga'. This did not mean that they were not related to one another, but each village is completely separate.) Naga allegiance is to clan, village and tribe and then to Nagaland and India.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, Naga identity took a new direction when the British gave the various Naga tribes 'names' based on the common appearance of their textiles and ornaments. The Baptist missionaries continued this approach to 'naming' the tribes. For the Naga themselves this was a foreign precept, as they then seemed to lose their own clan identity. As Christianity became more prevalent, they considered themselves neither clan headhunters nor true Christians. Since 2000, when Nagaland was opened up to the outside world with the first Hornbill Festival, the Naga themselves have begun to evolve a new identity and a sense of what it means to be 'Naga' in the early 21st century.

J P Mills and J H Hutton were British deputy commissioners in the 1920s and 1930s and travelled extensively in the Naga Hills. They both learnt local languages and passed long periods living with the Nagas, during which time they came to understand their traditions.

Even though the Naga converted to Christianity from the late 19th century onwards, they still hold on to their strong animist past with its head-hunting tradition and still choose to dress in all their finery at festival time. However, with the arrival of Christianity, social implications have changed. With the loss of head-hunting, and the 'Feast of Merit' status, the restrictions governing which textiles can be worn and when have melted away.

The Naga are made up of sixteen main groups, clans and sub-tribes. They are a Tai people who are part of the Tibeto-Burman language group. The term 'tribe' is used here to describe the Naga as a separate ethnic group that occupies a recognised territory, and that is united by a system of kinship and a social organisation with a similar language, tradition and customs.

The pre-missionary Naga culture was generally termed 'primitive' by western anthropologists. They looked at their culture of headhunting, the manner in which villagers dressed and their animist ways and concluded that the Naga tribes were primitive people. However Haimendorf in his monograph 'Naked Nagas' saw the Konyak as a well developed society: 'They may have been naked, but that did not make them a primitive people'. By comparison with the caste system prevalent in India, the Naga were free to do what they chose and to marry whom they wished (except the daughters of the Ang - the village head/chief)

Haimendorf describes a festival that was held in the Un-Administered area of the Kalyo Kengyus, meaning the 'stone-house people and now known as the Khamniungan, up in the Patkai Range close to the Burmese border. The Khamniungan were the core group of a much larger linguistic division that extended from Nagaland to the banks for the Chindwin River.

He spoke of much singing and dancing, not vigorous dancing but more side stepping and chanting continuously for hours, with the arms mostly in the air. Full ceremonial dress would be worn for such ceremonies but never when on a 'raid' - "these are treasured for the glories of the dance". The men would wear conical helmets of red and yellow plaited cane, tufted with red goats hair topped with two white hornbill feathers striped black.

Warriors who had captured heads adorn their helmets with shining *mithun* horns, holding these in place with chin straps set with tiger claws. Cowry shells are sewn on most of the indigo



Konyak Naga – Traditional Houses - Longwa Village – Myanmar Border -

blue cloths in a series of circles and sometimes with anthropomorphic figures, all to signify that the person had taken a head. This mantle is worn across the upper body to form a sort of body armour. The cloth was probably made from a nettle fibre which was very strong. They would have worn small aprons reaching from belt to knee. This broad belt made from bark fibre is set with white seeds, known as Job's tears, which supports a wood sheath/box at the back which takes the long *dao* when not in use.

Cowry shells traded in from Bengal were highly prized and the value was great due to the difficulty in access – Angami traders became very savvy in bringing in the goods and trading with the rest of the Naga groups.

In 1936-7 Haimendorf spent nine months living in Wakching village with the Upper Konyak Naga. He found them to be the most different and unusual of all the groups in the Administered Area. In 1972 he returned to Wakching and made some very interesting observations. By this stage almost all the Konyak were Christians, having converted not because they became believers but because they thought they would gain from the fruits of modernisation. Even today the Upper Konyak are still viewed as remaining somewhat outside the mainstream of Naga culture and resistant to any overt modernisation.

The subject of headhunting always raises many questions, especially as to when the practice died out. Whilst it was officially outlawed in 1850, headhunting was practised amongst the majority of Konyak, Yimchangers, Khiamnungams and other groups in the Tuensang district until the 1940s.

Headhunting is a complex activity, full of meaning, prowess, merit and strength from taking a head, although all these ideals have long since gone. The basis of headhunting is the belief that it is the seat *par-excellence* of life's essence. By taking the head the warrior is able to control this essence which is placed on a sacred stone in the centre of the village. The *dao* and the spear were the main form of weapon, and even now the *dao* is still carried by all Naga when out in the fields. When headhunting was abolished it became safe for the Naga to travel from village to vil-

lage, consequently disease spread more easily and many more Naga died than during the head-hunting times.

After 40 years of British Administration, headhunting ritual dances were performed, but as not enough of the male dancers were actually head hunters, the ritual lacked emotion. Haimendorf found it rather disturbing to see the Konyak spend hours dancing a ritual dance just for the sake of it!

The *mithun* is a unique bovine species, thought of as a 'noble'. Today the *mithun* is seen everywhere in the carvings on village gates, house panels, church doors, and the *mithun* still appears within almost every form of newly made carving. The animal is a national symbol for the Naga. Now other means to display wealth have replaced the mithun sacrifice, for example expensive marriages and Christian feasts.

The Naga are traditional subsistence farmers with each group and family member possessing their own acreage. Some groups practice *jhum*, or slash and burn, whilst others practice terrace cultivation alongside *jhum*. The cycle between clearing the land and releasing it back to the wild is some six to seven years. Different stages in the agricultural cycle are celebrated by various festivals.

Nature provided the droplet-shaped pearly white 'Job's tear' grass seed as a ready-made bead which was widely popular with the Naga. They were used to decorate the kilts of the men, waistbands, aprons and arm cuffs. Today this grass no longer appears to be grown and these seeds are difficult to find. Nature also provided the yellow stems of the wild orchid, used extensively for weaving into helmets, arm and leg bands as a contrast to the red basket work. This embellishment was undertaken by the warriors themselves and was the insignia of a successful warrior.

Ironically 'Job's tears' were originally used to replace cowry shells traded up from the coast as these shells were considered overly expensive. In due course when access from the coast became easier, and the Job's tears became rarer and more expensive, the cowry shells were used once again. Now the natural cowry shell is being replaced by an inexpensive plastic facsimile.

The first American Baptist conversion was in 1847 in Assam and by 1872 the Reverend E.W. Clark had moved into the Angami region of the Naga Hills. From that time onwards the missionaries converted many Naga warriors. The Naga began to adopt Christian names, and soon many became priests themselves. Many early conversions were undertaken for convenience and for political reasons, not in true faith.

Despite these changes to their social structure, the strong identity of their animist head-hunting past is still very much in evidence in the social life of the Naga. Haimendorf believed it would have been better if the missionaries let the Naga adopt their Christian ways to blend in with their own traditions, and not wipe the traditions out completely. Today American Baptists constitute 80% of the population, with Roman Catholics making up another 15%.

To understand the material culture of the Naga it is necessary to understand the social system which is based on a clan system. It is their position within the clan that establishes an individual's self identity. Within this system the bachelor's house or *morung*, is one of the most important social institutions. In the villages the *morung* is much stronger than in the towns. Boys aged 9 to 18 stay within the *morung* to learn the ways of the warrior, his duties and responsibilities, and his education. Head-hunting in the pre-Christian days gave each *morung* good fortune and kept the occupants safe from illness. After Christianity the decline in the power of each *morung* was most crucial to the Naga.

The Konyak Naga are governed by the "Great Ang" and the "Small Ang", their leaders or chiefs, whose powers were extensive. After his return visit to the Konyak in 1972 Haimendorf presented a paper to the Royal Society for Asian Affairs in London on 'Recent Developments'. He noted that now the Ang did not hold the great power any more which had passed to those who hold positions in government service, always Christians. These men were very aware that they had been persuaded and encouraged to abandon many aspects of Naga culture. For example dress, ornaments, men's house and girls dorm, feasts of merit, (ceremonial status gaining feasts) seasonal festivals, consumption of rice beer (national drink) and artistic expressions – wood carving, dancing

and traditional music. He felt the spread of Christianity had undermined many old social traditions and institutions.

A Konyak girl would wear brass ear ornaments until she was married and a very tiny piece of cloth as a skirt. Haimendorf remarked a number of times in his book as to the size of the girl's skirts! She would also have blackened teeth - considered a mark of beauty. The young girls adorned themselves with beads and belts; the more, the higher rank, as they would probably be Ang's daughters. The girls would only dress like this for a festival and then the jewellery would be put away in the house roof.

To be able to 'dress' for one of these ceremonies created much excitement. Haimendorf talks often as to how the women loved to dress up and perform a dance on the platform in front of one of the main clan houses. The more important the family the more jewellery the girls are able to wear and the better the textiles. In the modern Christian world this status has largely disappeared and a women's beads are really only worn at annual festivals and celebrations such as the Hornbill Festival.

The women weave skirts and shawls on a backstrap loom, their textiles have a simple sophistication in design and colour combination, mostly using reds and blues. Old cloth from 80 to 100 years ago would have been woven with nettle fibre or handspun cotton and probably using natural dyes. These types of cloth have completely disappeared.

Konyak men combine many objects and create their own individual designs using glass beads, cowry shells, animal teeth and tusk ear ornaments, brass bells, seeds, bone, hair and fibre and animal skulls. Haimendorf noted that the Konyak men were known for their long and very different hair styles. Today some of the Konyak men still wear their hair in the traditional manner, with it is tied around a plastic comb or a piece of wood.

The Angami Naga was one of the first tribes to be converted to Christianity, yet there are still some very strong traditions visible in their villages and *khels* or ward (inside each village). These are marked by a boundary and walled in with a village gate called *kharu*. Carved in high relief, these doors are no longer being made due to the expense and time and rituals it once took. The crossed 'house horns' appear on the gables of the houses and traditionally they would indicate status, which was gained through 'feasts of merit', the highest symbols of glory and prestige.



Konyak Naga – Women weaving – near Shangyu Village – Mon District -

Such 'feasts' are no longer practiced but the identity of the Angami is bound up with the crossed horns which appears on almost every house roof and which are woven into many of the men's shawls. The Angami Sekrenyi shawl was originally made to be worn at the Sekrenyi festival in February, but today it is very much an identity of the Angami people and can be seen worn in an everyday setting.

For the Ao Naga the *tsunkotepesu* shawl is the most representative cloth and gives them a true identity. The painting of the white wax panel done by the men and which has abstract symbols of animals, represents the wealth and success in war for the headhunter.

From birth to death, ornaments marked the stages of a Naga's life. Important rites of passage were accompanied by the wearing of ornaments. Ornaments belonging to a man, especially the Ang who has taken one or many heads, are numerous. Over the last 100 years these have become highly collectable. Feasts of merit were also an important occasion for the warrior to win the right to wear a certain number of cloths and ornaments. Many parts of the body were decorated with tattoos as the Naga traditionally wore almost no clothing. The body became a blank slate upon which ornaments were added to enhance, adorn and project the person's status as a headhunter and position of importance in the tribe. The Konyak Naga have the most extensive facial tattoos and even today there are still many old men in the villages with elaborate face tattoos.

For the Naga, contact with the markets and changes in the social structures of the people and clans have led to a significant change in the art of weaving during the last 40 to 50 years. Restrictions have been relaxed to allow new motifs and representations of everyday objects to be added to textiles. Designs from different tribes are woven side by side resulting in a loss in the clarity of identity and meaning. In the past a textile was woven and worn by a specific person for a specific occasion, all of which would indicate the individual's status and value within the group.

A Naga textile design is made up of a combination of stripes and bands of colours, squares, and angular and geometric designs, with zigzags formed by upright pendant triangles, lozenges and diamonds. The designs do not include any curves, floral or figurative motifs, except when a series of cowry shells are added to a warrior's shawl to create individual circles.

The annual Hornbill Festival is held at Kisama, a dedicated heritage village outside the state capital of Kohima, during the first week of December. All the 16 Naga tribes gather together during this week to present their own rich cultural heritage to each other, to domestic visitors from Assam and the other states of India, and to the few overseas visitors. They hope to communicate through performance the uniqueness of their individual tribal cultures to the outside world. The tribes act and dance in their traditional costumes, some of which have been passed down and some newly produced, often whilst playing instruments and chanting.

For example the Angami and Konyak women perform weaving and spinning dances. They wear new skirts which are generally worn longer than the older styles, but the designs and concepts remain the same. The costumes and ornaments worn at the Hornbill Festival have given the Naga an opportunity to maintain their individual identity, even if these traditional costumes are mostly newly made, this tradition continues despite the prevalence of Christianity. The threads used to weave the traditional cloths have changed, consequently the cloth looks and feels different. The ladies no longer wear very short skirts but a longer tube skirt or sarong *mekhala*, whilst the man's shawl remains the same and provides the Naga with their strongest form of identity.

In the past only successful Chang warriors could wear the cloth with the 'warriors warpath' design. This cloth is now an identity marker of the Chang community, and is used by all members of the tribe.

Young Nagas told me if they travelled to India and were asked where they came from they would say they are Ao or Konyak Naga which is part of India. The average Indian might then remark that he must be a headhunter! This is still the perceived wisdom of all who know little of the Naga. Yet I felt that the head-hunting glory days were now long past and the Naga did not particularly like to be considered in this way. Certainly head-hunting motifs appear on all things carved, but almost as symbols alone with no meaning. What is important to the Naga is their tribe, clan and village and then the group, then they were Naga and finally Indian.

Many of the material art objects that were collected during the period of intense anthropological interest in the first half of the 20th century are now in museums and private collections in the west. Much of this material came together in two museum exhibitions in Switzerland in 2008.

The Zurich exhibition called '*Naga - Beads and Ashes*' at the Ethnographic Museum was curated by Michael Oppitz, Thomas Kaiser, Alban von Stockhausen and Marion Wettstein, which opened in August 2008 and its accompanying publication '*Naga Identities*' brought to life again the Naga culture of the 19th century and the headhunting days. It recognised that the ancient warrior had been defeated and that the weaver had remained successful, but they also showed the present identity and continuity of many of the traditions, of weaving and jewellery and the cloths worn at the annual Hornbill festival.

The exhibition in Basel at the *Museum der Kulturen* curated by Richard Kunz and Vibha Joshi was called '*Naga: A Forgotten Mountain Region Rediscovered*'. Here they mixed the textiles and ornaments together in a very different type of display that were superbly documented. Both exhibitions showed how many of the warriors objects made for the last generations have no place in the society of today's youth.

There should be a promising future for Naga culture, the textile tradition should prosper and be sustained into the future, maintaining an ongoing identity for these Christian people. However the Naga appear to be caught somewhat between a desire for some greater degree of political independence from India, whilst also recognizing their near complete economic dependence on their powerful parent. Therefore the Naga find themselves in a constant and restless search for some new identity. This identity needs to provide space both for their established ancient traditions and for their more recently adopted Christian faith.

We can only hope that the Naga will continue to believe in their individual clan, village and tribe and to be identified by their unique and striking textiles.



Chang men at the Hornbill Festival 2008

(All images by Diccon Pullen)

A glimpse into the luxurious life of a Persian king

Sheila R. Canby, *Shah 'Abbas and the Treasures of Imperial Iran*, The British Museum Press, London, 2009, ISBN 978-0-7141-2455-1, 96 pages, 67 full colour illustrations.

This small book is a visual feast. Beautifully illustrated, Sheila Canby gives a glimpse into the luxury which surrounded Shah 'Abbas during his reign from 1587 until his death in 1629. Not only that. Canby provides a concise but useful overview of Shah 'Abbas's rule and his influence on his country. *Shah 'Abbas and the Treasures of Imperial Iran* accompanied the exhibition *Shah 'Abbas: The Making of Iran* which ran from 19th February to 14th June 2009 at the British Museum.

The book, like the exhibition, covers a wide range of objects, of which textiles and carpets form a small part. Canby writes about Shah 'Abbas's influence on the visual arts and how his desire to stamp a new aesthetic identity on Iran went hand in hand with his struggle to regain power over his country. At the time Shah 'Abbas came to power, aged 16, Iran was under threat from its neighbours. In such a small amount of text Canby does well to explain the history of the Safavid dynasty and the consequences of the rule of Shah 'Abbas's predecessors.

This is clearly an introductory book as there is so much that Canby hints towards but cannot expand on. For example she mentions the silk trade briefly when explaining one of the ways in which Shah 'Abbas raised finances to pay for his grandiose building projects, several of which are illustrated. Her few sentences hint at the elaborate network of trade connected with the Iranian silk industry and at the role played in it by the Armenians living in Isfahan. This tantalisingly interesting story remains untold unfortunately.

There are photographs of only three carpets and two other textiles. The late 16th/early 17th century prayer rug is remarkably vibrant. The gold and silver threads stand out gloriously, and its stunning conditions became evident when looking closely at it in the exhibition.

The other two carpets are more faded and the photographs do not show the metal threads at all. In fact it was difficult to imagine how sumptuous these carpets would have been when standing in front of them. One had to squat down and look across the surface of the carpets to catch a glimmer of the gold and silver, which now tarnished would have once been spectacular.

This brought to mind some experiments that one of my colleagues at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, Jenny Tiramani, carried out. She looked at the effect of candle light on garments made with metal thread, which would have been worn in England by Shah 'Abbas's contemporaries. I wanted to imagine how these frankly now shabby looking carpets would have looked glistening underfoot. I am sure it would have been magical.

Shah 'Abbas, as Canby explains, gave these carpets along with other precious objects to various shrines in Iran which meant that important and beautiful ceramic, metalwork and textiles were able to be seen by anyone, not just the elite. Now imagine the impact of seeing these carpets glowing in the lamp light for the lower classes in Iran.

The idea of just how gorgeous these carpets and textiles were is lost by just looking at the objects themselves. Canby has included numerous illustrations depicting people, from anonymous begging dervishes to scenes of daily life to portraits of Shah 'Abbas entertaining foreign dignitaries. The importance of sumptuous fabric and carpets is clearly evident in these images. The time spent on rendering such fine detail is surely an indication of the cultural value of rich textiles. Even in our shabby carpet the craftsmanship is exquisite.

The clothing depicted not only shows the love of beautiful Iranian textiles it also reveals influences from further afield. Canby describes Shah 'Abbas's desire to build relationships with European leaders and that Isfahan was described as "half the world" as there were so many foreigners living there at the time. Many of the illustrations are accompanied by captions stating a

European influence on the clothing, especially hats it would seem.

This fusion of cultures through the medium of fashion worked the other way as well. The stunning portrait of Sir Robert Sherley, Shah 'Abbas's military advisor and ambassador from 1598 to 1627, shows Sherley in a wonderful outfit with sumptuous Iranian fabrics, including a turban. He does retain some European elements in his outfit, such as his perfect white collar and cuffs and the open sleeves of his coat that reveal his doublet beneath.

As you can see this book has been an inspiration for me to think about connections that are not explicitly evident in Canby's text. The density and variety of images enable the reader to see these textiles and carpets in a different context, alongside other objects of the time, revealing more about their cultural importance than a book solely about them could do.

Aimée Payton

Burmese objects from the Denison Museum

Alexandra Green (ed.) *Eclectic Collecting. Art from Burma in the Denison Museum*. Singapore: NUS Press (2008). 237 pp. Numerous colour ills, 2 maps, glossary, bibliography. Hardcover. ISBN 978-9971-69-404-3

The large collection of Burmese art and artefacts at Denison University in Granville, Ohio has been known to Burma specialists for some time, but this publication finally makes it available to a wider audience.

The collection has more than 1500 objects, mainly textiles, but also lacquer ware, manuscripts, wood carvings, and metal items. It ranges in date from the early 1st millennium AD to the 20th century. Denison University was affiliated with the Baptist Church from its beginnings. The collection's foundation is therefore closely linked with the American Baptist missionaries who went to Burma in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

It is indeed eclectic, as the title implies, as it is mainly made up of memorabilia brought back by these missionaries, teachers, and medical workers. But the range of textiles in the collection is very wide, and therefore is of great interest.

Alexandra Green as editor has managed to bring together a very good choice of experts in the field. Susan Conway, Sandra Dudley, Barbara and David Fraser, Sylvia Fraser-Lu, and Mandy Sadan are all known for their contributions to South-east Asian textile history and the study of Burmese art. The book is generously illustrated and well produced.

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