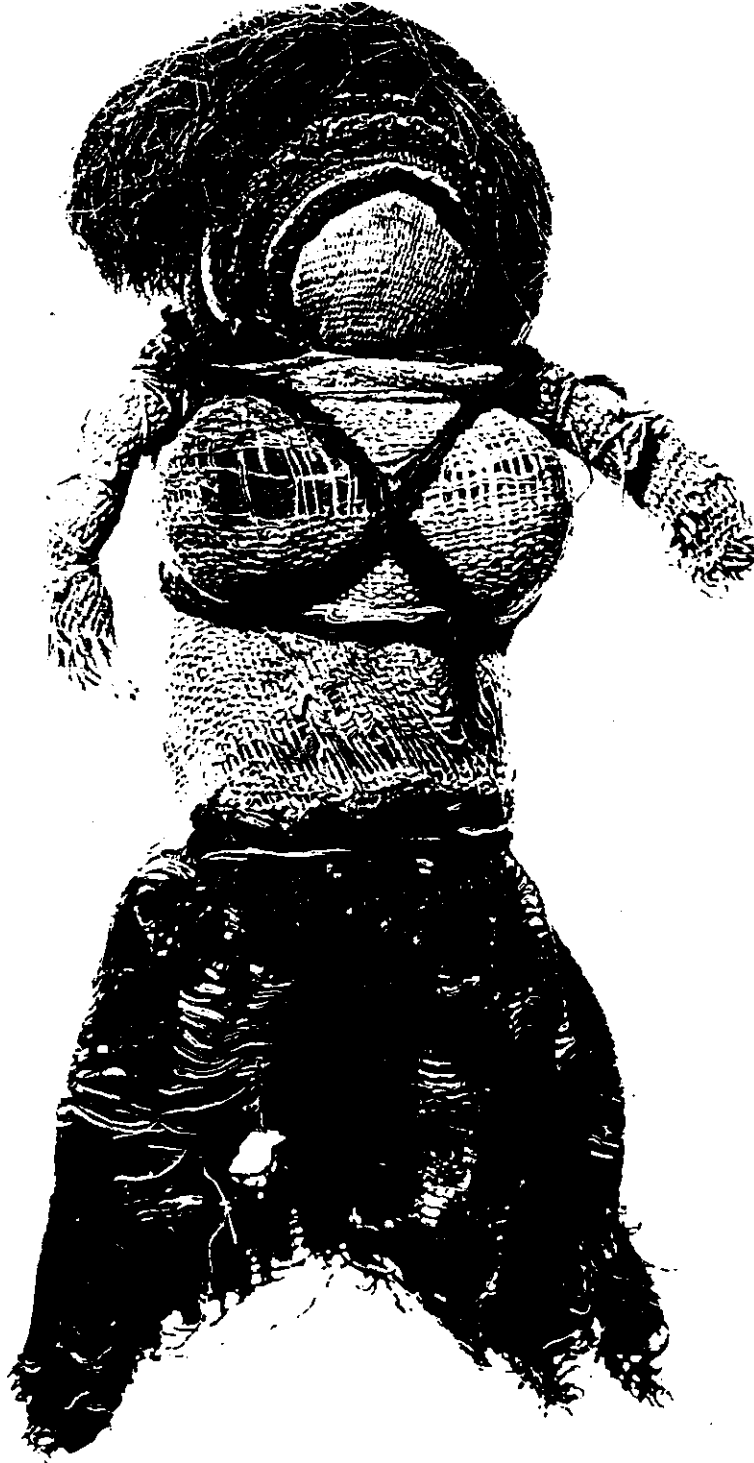


# OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

Newsletter No. 12

February 1999

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Rag doll made of scraps of undyed flax tabby and tapestry-woven decorations in purple wool on flax warps, with real hair and trimmings of dyed cloth and yarn. From the dated burial in the Hawara cemetery, second half of the 4th century A.D. Ashmolean Museum, Department of Antiquities 1888.818.

## **EGYPTIAN TEXTILES FROM LATE ANTIQUITY IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ANTIQUITIES, ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM**

In the 1880s excavations in the post-pharaonic cemeteries of Saqqara, Antinoe (Sheikh Ibada) and Akhmim, Egypt, brought to light large quantities of textiles. The new discoveries unleashed an enthusiasm for collecting these hitherto rarely-seen survivors - fragments of the clothing and domestic fabrics of Egyptians of the late Roman and Byzantine periods, noted for their employment of striking and colourful tapestry-woven decoration. The town of Akhmim, in particular, 248 miles south of Cairo and known to the Greeks and Romans as Panopolis, was famous in antiquity for its weaving; it still is an important centre of textile production.

Like many museums in the later 19th century, the Ashmolean began to collect 'Coptic' textiles, as they were generally known -- although the name, referring to the culture and language of Christian Egypt, does not reflect the true chronological and cultural range of these textiles. Nor indeed should they be seen as exclusively Egyptian in form and design - they are typical of what was being used and worn all the Mediterranean world at this time, as attested in representations of citizens of the later Roman empire wearing a rather baggy style of tunic decorated at the neck, shoulders, sleeves, and hem with bands, squares, and roundels; and their decorative repertoire draws on centuries of classical imagery. Only in Egypt, however, have they survived in quantity, thanks to the dry climate and a change in funerary practices, when the tradition of mummification and elaborate coverings was abandoned, and the dead were buried with the clothes and wrappings typical of everyday life.

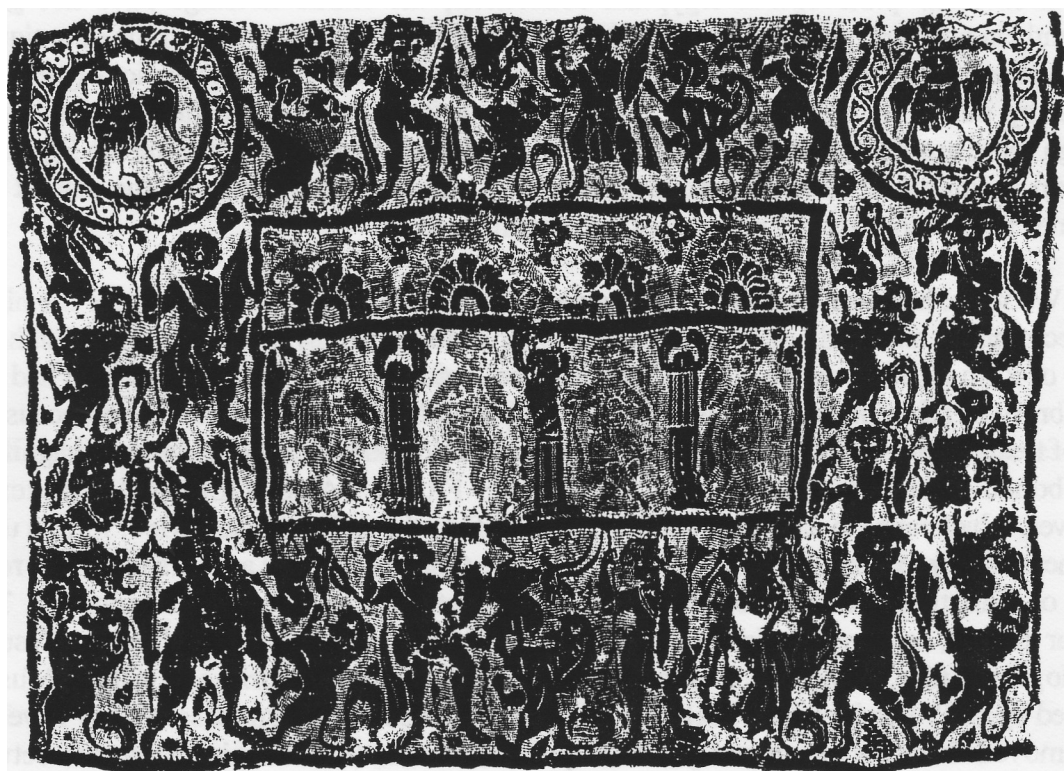
A large part of the Ashmolean's early collection is owed to the indefatigable Greville J. Chester, the former Leeds clergyman whose winter travels in Egypt in the last decades of the 19th century resulted in the acquisition of many antiquities for the Ashmolean and other British collections. Chester certainly acquired some of his textiles at Akhmim, but the name of the town was regularly attached to pieces appearing on sale in the antiquities market in Cairo, and the provenance always has to be treated with caution unless there is corroborating evidence.

Much of the early work at Akhmim and elsewhere failed to measure up to the standards of controlled excavation, with the result that we know too little of the burials from which these textiles were retrieved. Amongst excavators who were at pains to observe and record the context, the name of the founding father of Egyptian archaeology, Flinders Petrie, stands out. Even with careful excavation, however, few textiles have been recovered with good dating evidence, and we are fortunate to have in the Ashmolean one of the most significant groups of material, from the burial of a child in the late Roman cemetery at Hawara (at the mouth of the Fayum), where Petrie worked in 1888-9. In addition to the decorated remnants of no fewer than four tunics (three woollen and one linen), a rag doll (see illustration on p. 1), and a leatherwork bag' containing scraps of dyed but unspun wool with various tools, the grave goods included a coin dating to the third quarter of the 4th century AD. The find (part of which can be seen in the Roman section of the Sackler Gallery, Dynastic Egypt) is of importance for the dating of the 'interlace style' in late antique ornament - the complicated tapestry-woven patterns akin to strapwork, which may have come into use as early as the 2nd century AD (the tentative date assigned to textiles excavated at Palmyra in Syria), and survived in Egyptian weaving well beyond the Arab conquest of AD 641, growing ever more complex.

The Hawara group remains unique, and even Petrie was not beyond reproach in his methods of retrieval: as with other objects, he sometimes acquired local finds brought to the dig site but not seen in course of excavation. This is perhaps the reason why the Ashmolean has a notable group of textiles, including some virtually complete tunics, recorded as coming from Petrie's 1910 season at Memphis, although no documentation of their discovery that season has been found.

Amongst later collectors who added to the Ashmolean's holdings is the Egyptologist Percy Newberry, whose substantial contribution to the Islamic textiles was noted by Ruth Barnes in a recent *Newsletter* (no 9, February 1998). Although the group of late antique textiles is much smaller, it includes some fine pieces (see illustration below) which testify to a discerning eye.

The Ashmolean collection - something over 400 items - covers the complete range of these Egyptian textiles, the tapestry-woven decorations which were worked into tunics and cloths being especially well represented, in both the bichrome interlace style and the later exuberantly-coloured figured style, sometimes with identifiable mythological or Biblical scenes. But there are also lengths of shaggy textiles woven with weft-loop pile, pieces of the tough weft-faced patterned weaves which were probably used as furnishing fabrics (and were reversible), plain cloth, embroidery, sprang bags, and socks made in single-needle 'knitting', with a separate toe for the comfort of sandal-wearers (a brightly- striped example, child's size, can be seen in the Leeds



Tapestry-woven panel with musicians and dancers in an arcade; around them, hunters, beasts and a pair of eagles within medallions. Although decorations such as this are sometimes found ornamenting the front of late Roman tunics, this elaborate composition - woven in blue, red, green and undyed wool, on undyed wool warps, was perhaps made as a furnishing fabric. From the Newberry Collection, 4th-5th century A.D. Department of Antiquities 1941.1133

Room (Roman displays). A selection of representative items from the collection can be found on permanent display in the Griffith Gallery (Egyptian sculpture and funerary material), but in the absence of a textile gallery with a controlled environment, other items make only fleeting appearances in temporary exhibitions, the most recent being 'Textiles from Byzantine Egypt' in the winter of 1993 (see *The Ashmolean* vol. 23, Christmas 1991). This proved a good opportunity to show the fruits of recent work on the conservation and mounting of the textiles. The Department of Antiquities conservation laboratory does not have a textile conservator on its permanent staff but in the last decade we have been fortunate in having the intermittent assistance of Svetlana Taylor, who has conducted a survey of the conservation requirements of the collection, and carried out some of the most urgent work - removing distressed pieces from old-fashioned mounts where they were pressed between two sheets of glass, cleaning and flattening large items which had been scrunched-up or folded, remounting textiles for display, and setting some of the most fragile pieces in cushioned mounts with hinged covers.

As and when time and funds permit, we hope to continue with this work and also prepare a new index and photographic record to replace the old handlist which has served as a rough but inexpert guide to the collection for the last four decades. When these goals are achieved, we hope that it will be possible to use the reserve collection as a study/browsing facility: at present, we cannot offer this service, but are always happy to field specific enquiries.

Like other parts of our Egyptian collections, the textile holdings have not grown significantly in post-war years: an important factor is that since the 1980s, the export of antiquities from Egypt has been prohibited, a condition that applies to objects from excavations (previously released by an agreed end-of-season division), as well as those circulating on the market. Although there are many textiles emanating from old-established collections outside Egypt, this condition is important to bear in mind - along with the fact that textiles on the market have sometimes been ruthlessly cut into pieces, to maximize profit.

We were, however, pleased to make a recent addition which was of interest for the history of the recognition and study of 'Coptic' textiles: thanks to the family of the late Marc Fitch (and the help of Ruth Bares), we were able to acquire a collection of textile fragments which had been in the library of this distinguished genealogist and philanthropist. The library? Yes, because the pieces of textile were sewn onto sheets of heavy paper which had been formed into a magnificent leather-bound volume lettered in gold, TEXTILES FROM PANOPOLIS &C. The textiles themselves, which range in date from the 4th century AD to the early Islamic period, form a useful supplement to our existing holdings (one polychrome tapestry roundel appears to have a repeat pattern of Christmas trees: a Coptic 'first!' - further art-historical study is in progress). Their particular interest, however, lies in the way they have been identified and assembled, in presumed chronological order, using the magnificent collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum (published by A. P. Kendrick in 1920-1922) as a guide. For conservation reasons, they have now been removed from the album and placed in padded mounts (like the pieces pressed between glass, they were suffering from being compacted by the bound page format), but they will be kept in their original page order, separate from the rest of the Ashmolean collection, as an episode in the collecting history of 'Coptic' textiles.

Helen Whitehouse  
Assistant Keeper responsible for the Egyptian collections  
Department of Antiquities, Ashmolean Museum

## PROGRAMME

**Saturday 27 February**

**10.30 a.m. to 3 p.m.**

**OPEN HOUSE**

**at the invitation of Wendy Black**

at her home:

Paddock House, Purton, near Watlington, Oxfordshire  
Textiles, felts and accessories from remote areas of China and Bhutan,  
including Mao costumes, yak hair and felt masks, prayer mats, etc.

Numbers limited to 20. Contribution £5

Bring your own sandwich lunch. Tea and coffee will be provided.

**Tuesday 9 March**

**at 5.45 p.m.**

**TEXTILES FROM BURMA IN MUSEUM COLLECTIONS**

**by Sandra Dudley**

at the Pauling Centre, 58 Banbury Road, Oxford

Refreshments served from 5.15 p.m. No booking necessary

Members free; visitors welcome - £2

**Saturdays 20 March and 19 June**

**10. a.m. to 4 p.m.**

**IKAT/ANDIGO AND BACKSTRAP WEAVING WORKSHOPS**

Two linked days at the Warburg Nature Reserve, Bix Bottom, Henley-on-Thames

**Date to be announced**

**IBAN TEXTILES**

**Lecture by Traude Gavin**

combined with a visit to the Pitt Rivers collection

Further information from Felicity Wood, to whom application should also be made to book for the Open House and workshops. Address: 2 Frenchay Road, Oxford, OX2 6TG; tel/fax: 01865 554281; e-mail: felicity.wood@dial.pipex.com.

## ASIAN SHOES IN THE TRADESCANT COLLECTION

Visitors to the Ashmolean interested in the arts of Asia probably make their way straight to the Eastern Art Galleries on the ground floor. If, instead, you go up the main stairs, turn right and right again, you will find yourself in the Tradescant Room. Here you can see some of the "rareties" collected by the John Tradescants, father and son, in the course of their search for new plants from all over the world. Their collection was acquired by Elias Ashmole and given by him to the University of Oxford, together with his own collections, to form the basis of the Ashmolean Museum, named after him and opened in May 1683. The cases along the left-hand side of this small room display "rareties" from Asia, including a number of shoes.

You may think that shoes are dubious textiles, but in the case of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) Chinese boots, at least, you would be mistaken. A characteristic part of court dress, these boots derive from Manchu riding-boots. The thick sole is made of layers of cotton sewn tightly together and covered by a thin layer of leather; this again is covered with a bias-cut white cotton layer. For the rest, the boots are made of black satin-woven silk lined with coarse white cotton and attached with a cotton binding to the rigid sole. Boots like these were worn with wide baggy trousers tucked into the tops and hidden by the wearer's long gown. In the winter he would also have worn quilted stockings, and these, happily, also survive and can be seen beside the boots in the Ashmolean. The feet and lining are of cotton, but the outer part of the legs are of fine silk. The wadding is a tow-like material and silk waste, quilted in vertical lines. The tops of the stockings follow the shape of the top of the boots and are slightly higher, so that the black binding and line of coloured braid just below it show as a decorative feature above the boot (see illustrations opposite).

Eight of the shoes have fabric uppers, two of them of much faded red silk. One is a child's shoe with uncomfortably upturned square toe, embroidered in silver thread with sprigs of flowers, undoubtedly oriental, but from where? The other is a man's shoe with characteristic embroidery incorporating sequins, and of a type that continued to be worn on the Indian sub-continent well into this century. The same can be said for another pair of men's shoes of faded silk over leather. Red felt has been used for the back and for rosettes appliquéd with silver star stitches to the vamp. The rest of the embroidery is done with silver thread and continues on the underside of the curved-up toe. Another elaborately decorated man's shoe has silk floral embroidery so densely covering the vamp and sides that the cream cloth on which it is stitched is completely hidden. A yellow string or braid conceals the front seam and ends in a yellow silk tassel dangling over the pointed toe. Shoes of this type were still in use in Persia in the 18th century, but were formerly more widespread.

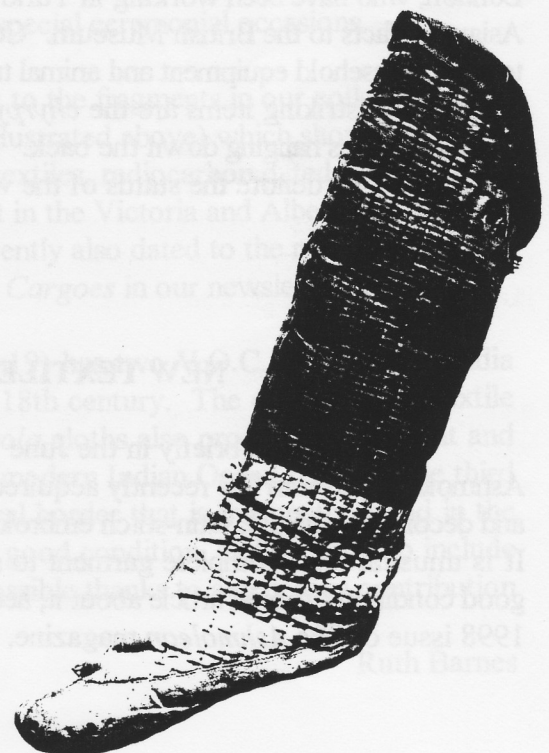
Of the remaining footwear, one is a man's ankle boot of green velvet, curiously decorated with bronze chainmail, and the rest are mules. One of these is a woman's mule originally of red velvet now faded to brown, decorated with silver-thread embroidery and sequins with a central rosette of beads, and another is a man's of black velvet, also decorated with silver embroidery and sequins. The former has a slightly upcurved toe and is thought to come from Turkey, while the latter has a square domed toe and is from China. The last pair are also a man's, of red velvet with an out-flaring square toe, and they were reputedly also made in China.

Phyllis

Nye

Below left, Chinese boot,  
and right, stocking.:  
Qing Dynasty (1644-1912)  
Tradescant Collection,  
(Department of Antiquities,  
Ashmolean Museum  
1886 Anth.Cat.144)

Right:  
The Qianlong Emperor (r.1735-95)  
wearing similar boots  
Engraved from a drawing by  
William Alexander, Draughtsman  
to Lord MacCartney's Embassy  
to China, 1792-94  
From *An Authentic Account of the  
Embassy* by Sir George Staunton, 1797  
(British Library)



## MUSEUMS ROUND-UP

The Pitt Rivers Museum has acquired, in the person of Clare Harris, a new Lecturer/Curator specializing in the material culture of Asia, particularly that of Tibet and India. Born in Wallingford and educated at Cambridge and the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, she has previously been Lecturer in Anthropology and Art at the University of East Anglia. She has done fieldwork in India, Nepal and Tibet, and has a book based on a study of Tibetan visual culture after 1959 coming out towards the end of this year.

A study morning on Asian silks was held at the Ashmolean Museum on Saturday January 23 which was attended, among others, by a number of members of the O.A.T.G.. It was held in conjunction with the exhibition of Chinese silks currently on show in the Eric North Room (see below p.16 ). The morning started with a gallery talk in the exhibition by Shelagh Vainker, Assistant Keeper responsible for Chinese Art and curator of the exhibition. We then divided into two parties who in turn took part in the other two activities, which ran concurrently. One, under the guidance of Shelagh Vainker, provided a wonderful opportunity to see at close hand and handle some of the reserve collection, including some furnishing panels that came from the same sets as some of those in the exhibition. The other group went to the Eastern Art Conservation Laboratory where Susan Stanton, the conservator responsible for textiles, showed us how they were stored and documented, and explained the criteria - from the conservation point of view - that decided which silks should be included in the exhibition. She then demonstrated the way a piece might undergo remedial treatment, using as her example the Japanese *No* robe which was the subject of her article in the O.A.T.G. newsletter no. 10 (June 1998). As "they" say, a good time was had by all.

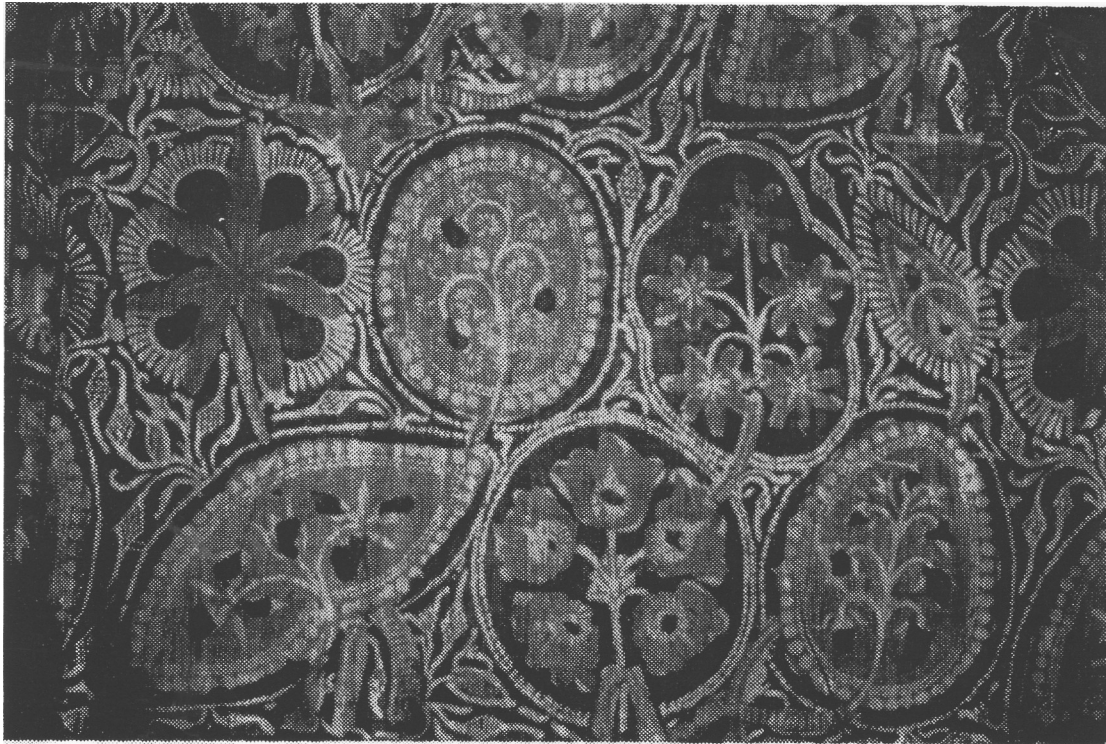
Drs St John Simpson of the British Museum and Georgina Hermann of University College, London, who have been working in Turkmenistan have generously given more than 175 Central Asian artefacts to the British Museum, Costume forms the largest part of the gift, as well as felt textiles, household equipment and animal trappings, including a felt-covered donkey halter. Some of the most striking items are the *chyrpy*, married women's mantles, worn from the head with vestigial sleeves hanging down the back. The silk fabric is embellished with embroidery, and the colours chosen denote the status of the wearer. Two of these are 20th century examples.

Editor

## NEW TEXTILES FOR THE ASHMOLEAN

As mentioned briefly in the June 1998 newsletter, the Department of Eastern Art at the Ashmolean Museum has recently acquired an important mediaeval Islamic tunic. Made of linen and decorated with silk satin-stitch embroidery, it has been radiocarbon dated to A.D.1020 +/-35. It is unusual for a complete garment to survive from this period, and this one is in remarkably good condition. A brief article about it, accompanied a photograph, appeared in the Christmas 1998 issue of *The Ashmolean* magazine.





Indian trade textile; cotton, block-printed resist, dyed red and blue. Flowering trees and rosette border. Made in Gujarat for export, collected in Sulawesi, eastern Indonesia, 15th century. (EA1998.222)

More recently the Department has acquired three Indian textiles, collected in Indonesia, which perfectly complement its Newberry collection of Indian block-printed fragments. As most O.A.T.G. members will know from previous exhibitions and workshops, our collection is historically significant as evidence for the mediaeval Indian Ocean trade between north-western India and Egypt; the textiles were exported into the Islamic world from the 10th century onwards. The textiles are all fragments, but complete cloths of the same type have also been known in Indonesia, where they were taken to be traded for locally produced luxury goods, such as spices and sandalwood. They were kept in many communities as family or clan heirlooms, of great social and religious importance, and only displayed on special ceremonial occasions.

The three textiles provide an obvious visual link to the fragments in our collection. This is especially striking for the one numbered 1998.222, (illustrated above) which shows flowering trees that are exceptionally close to one of the Newberry textiles, radiocarbon dated to 1340 A.D. +/- 40. Another Indian cloth for the Indonesian market in the Victoria and Albert Museum has the same design, but is in less good condition; it was recently also dated to the mid-14th century (see John Guy's report on his new publication, *Woven Cargoes* in our newsletter no. 11).

One of the cloths (1998.224 - illustrated on p.19) has two V.O.C. (Dutch East India Company) stamps, which dates it to the 17th or early 18th century. The design of this textile imitates in block print the famous silk double-ikat *patola* cloths also produced in Gujarat and traded as luxury items in the late mediaeval and early modern Indian Ocean region. The third piece (1998.112) has an overall star pattern and a floral border that is frequently found in the Newberry collection as well. All three textiles are in very good condition, and we hope to include them in future exhibitions. The purchase was made possible thanks to a generous contribution from the Friends of the Ashmolean Museum.

Ruth Barnes

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

### A Request for Assistance

I am researching material for a second book on braids, focussing on braids that are obliquely interfaced, and made either with plain weave or twill structures. The first book covered braids from Japan (*kumihimo*) and sling braids from Peru.

Oblique structures can be made by any of these methods: finger manipulation, loop method, lace making, bobbin and stand (as in Miao and other cultures), bobbin and stand (as in Japanese *taka dai*), split ply twining, and by some additional methods I may have missed.

My journey so far has collected some information from these places: the Baltic states, East European Slavs, Astrakhan, Uzbekistan, Tibet, Mongolia, Urumchi, China and Thailand. *Taka dai* information from Japan is well documented.

Japanese history is of the opinion that braiding originated in China, travelling to Korea and Japan. For some time now I have been questioning this opinion, and began to look at the possibility that these skills travelled from the West to China. My meeting with Elizabeth Barber, author of *The Mummies of Urumchi*, last summer has strengthened my belief that the movement from west to east is possible.

Braids found in the tombs at Urumchi are dated 1000 B.C.. They are identical to those found in Japan that were initially made by loop method and later on the *taka dai*. The braids were made by peoples who were definitely not of Chinese origin, but were settled travellers from the west. They are also identical in structure to braids found in the Baltic States, East Slavs and Tibet.

How does all this link and connect together? It is known that the Miao people use the same device to make braids as the Mongolian nomads; variations of this device were found by Gill Thomas in Thailand. Some of these braids are the same structure as those made in Uzbekistan, being stitched together as edging on clothing. It is known that the Mongolian nomads used to sew braids together in strips, but it is not known for what purpose. The 1000 B.C. Urumchi braids are sewn together to make a fabric.

There are braids with more complex structures that connect Astrakhan, Uzbekistan and Tibet. They are two-coloured and appear to be double braids. The Astrakhan braid is worn by women as a belt. The Mongolian braids spied by Wendy Black are hanging on a saddle in a museum. The Tibetan ones that I have examined were worn by a Lama, a ministry official, and by a man of high social rank.

There are more, I am sure, possible links with the countries that border the places named. However, it is hoped that the above will give an idea of what it is I am seeking.

Ruth Barnes

If any of your readers are on a journey to some of these far-away places, I should appreciate it if they would look out for evidence of people making braids. How do they do this? What equipment, if any, do they use? What is the maker's role in society? What is the purpose of the braids? Can samples be collected or photographs taken? Other information can come in writings and photographs that appear in articles and books or items seen in museums. For armchair travellers or real, I can supply either photographs or photocopies of what to look out for.

My thanks to anyone who can help.

Yours sincerely, RODERICK  
OWEN

19 Salter Close, Oxford, OXI 4QD  
Tel/fax. 01865 722906; e-mail: takaman@globalnet.co.uk

## REPORTS OF O.A.T.G. MEETINGS

### The A.G.M. and 17th Century Travellers in Iran

Twenty-three members gathered at the Palling Centre on Tuesday 13 October last for what was technically the first Annual General Meeting of the Group, although not the first actual general meeting. There had in fact been two before, at the second of which a draft constitution had been agreed including rules for the election of officers, with the result that there were no elections this year. Consequently the business part of the meeting was happily brief, comprising little more than reports by the Chairman (Ruth Barnes), Treasurer (George Wood), Programme Secretary (Felicity Wood) and Newsletter Editor (Phyllis Nye). In the absence of Dymphna Herman, Ruth also gave the Membership Secretary's report. As Dymphna was in fact away in Holland for several months Ruth invited a volunteer to help out during her absence; Jeanne Bromfield agreed to do so, and I volunteered to take the minutes of the meeting.\*

After refreshments a number of visitors joined the party, completely filling the room, to hear Patricia Baker, the well-known authority on the history of Islamic art speak on *Travellers in Iran: Paintings of 17th Century Europeans*

She showed slides of illustrations from manuscripts of the 16th and 17th centuries depicting Guild parades of silk weavers and caftan makers with European spectators. Some engravings and drawings, e.g., an Arab archer, were fanciful, or perhaps showed desirably favourable features. The East India companies had their own artists and Dutch artists were employed by the Shah. Important evidence comes from merchants' reports, letters, journals and receipts, showing a long history of interchange and trade. Silks, velvets, caftans and carpets were needed for trading. Taxes and tributes were paid in silk. An early 18th century gift of velvet was sent to Catherine the Great.

Sir Robert Shirley and his brothers were the earliest known arms dealers to Iran. A famous portrait by Van Dyck, 1622, shows Sir Robert in the sumptuous robes of the Safavid Envoy to the Court of St James. This costume and the design of the cloth was analysed in detail and compared with other known paintings of the period from Berkeley Castle, Petworth and other places.

An interesting account was given of Iranian textile designs and motifs, as well as the use of gold and silver wound around a core and used as a supplementary weft yarn. Care and ritual were associated with cutting the cloth and recovery of the metal when royal wardrobes were cleaned - 80,000 kilos were reclaimed in the 19th century

Remains of pleated silk had been identified as a purse. It is now thought to be part of a Taj, a Safavid crown. Its red colour represented blood, and the twelve pleats the twelve imams.

The role of the Armenians in the silk trade, influences of Humayan in India, and orders from the King of Thailand were discussed, as well as the difficulties of working with Iranian material.

Current research was illustrated by the discovery in the 1990s of a Taj from 1511 or 1512 and a related painting appearing in a London saleroom. This has set the speaker off on what promises to be a fascinating quest, and the audience expressed the hope that she would return in two or three years time to tell us the end of the story.

Jose Allen

\*The full minutes will be circulated with the agenda for the next A.G.M.. If anybody wishes to have a copy in the meantime, please apply to the Editor (address on p. )

### **Christmas Social**

The Christmas social and members' exhibition was held at our house on Monday 7 December. George and I enjoyed the evening very much and, judging by the many lovely notes we received afterwards, I think those who came did so too. The plan was that those who wished could bring a piece to display, which was labelled with brief details and the name of the owner. All those at the party wore name labels and thus, in true party-game fashion, it was possible to match a piece to its owner if further information was required. In an informal way - I think the scheme worked well.

It was wonderful to see such an array of treasures: Alison Smith's kelim cardigan with accompanying carpet sample, Wendy Black's felt mask from Bhutan, Joyce Doyle's Uzbek boots, Julia Swift's prints of Turkish costume, Roderick Owen's samples based on some braids found in Urumchi, Due van Vessem's marbled silk crepe, Sandra Dudley's Thai skirt cloth, and many more. Janet Phillips, who ran the O.A.T.G. backstrap weaving course, came as our guest and brought the most exquisite meditation shawl (soft thick silk in pinks and browns) that she had made.

Thank you to all those who helped to make such a pleasant evening by bringing such good things to share: textiles, books, pictures, samplers and also delicious food contributions, or just by bringing yourself. It was a lovely opportunity to talk to the owners of items - somehow there is a distinct difference between that and, say, looking at something in a sale or at an exhibition. I do hope we can do something like this again some time - would anyone like to offer a venue?

Felicity Wood

### **O.A.T.G. MISCELLANY**

Angela Thompson, following on the visit to her collection last summer, has kindly made a donation of £15 to the Group's funds, for which we are most grateful.

Thanks are also due to Fiona Sutcliffe who produced the membership card being sent to you with this newsletter. She also made the maps some of you will have received from Felicity guiding you to the venue of meetings.

At the next A.G.M. (in October 1999), Felicity Wood will be stepping down from the role of programme secretary. This is therefore the time to ask you all to consider whether you would like either to take over this post or be part of a programme team. Felicity writes, "Being involved with arranging a programme has tremendous spin-offs: meeting authors of textile books you have always admired, being invited to special private views, and, in general, being part of a very exciting network." Please call her (01865 554281) or Ruth Barnes (01865 278076) if you are interested in helping with the future programme or have any nominations or programme ideas

You will notice that from now on the address labels on the envelope containing your newsletter will have the word Yes on the bottom right-hand corner if you have paid your subscription - an *aide memoire* we hope you will find useful.

Editor

### **NEW TEXTILE RESEARCH CENTRE FOR THE NETHERLANDS**

The Stitching Textile Research Centre, Leiden, with the help of the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden, and the University of Leiden, has the stated aim of supporting academic research into textiles and costume, and, in this connexion is building up a collection of Near Eastern and Iranian costume. At present the centre houses over 500 items of clothing, both traditional and modern. One of the Centre's aims is to publish a series of illustrated books about regional costumes from various Islamic countries ranging from Morocco to Afghanistan.

The project which is occupying the Centre most at present (supported by Shell) is the organization of an exhibition and production of a book on urban and regional costume in Iran. It is also intended to produce at least two books on 19th century Iranian themes: one on early photographs of Iranians and the other on Qajar dress. They will be published in Iran and will be available in Farsi and English. I hope to give a fuller account of the Centre in a later newsletter.

Editor

## EXHIBITIONS

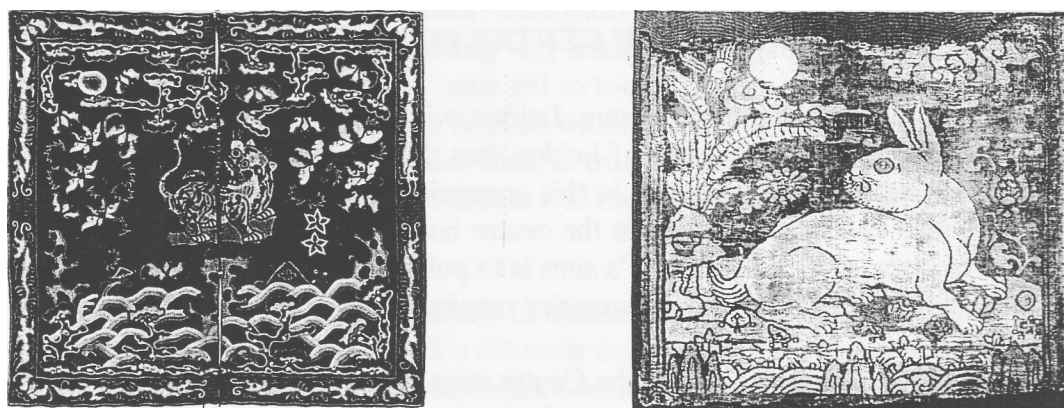
### Chinese Silks in the Ashmolean Museum

The Ashmolean Museum has a substantial collection of Chinese silk textiles, of which most date from the Qing (1644-1911) dynasty and many of which are items of costume. The present exhibition, drawn mainly but not exclusively from the Museum's holdings, is, however, devoted to panels of various types and includes earlier pieces, from the 11th to 16th centuries. The techniques are polychrome weaves, embroidery and tapestry weave.

The earlier pieces are two examples of tapestry weave, one from between the 10th and 12th centuries and the other a Ming dynasty fragment depicting stylized clouds and probably originally part of the background of a large furnishing panel. These are complemented by later examples of the technique in the form of a single boldly-coloured chair cover, and a pair of gold-ground chair covers with bird and flower decoration within a vermilion border. The other early pieces are a pair of satin brocade festival badges woven with hares gazing at the moon. These are on loan from the collection of the Association pour l'Etude et la Documentation des Textiles d'Asie in Paris, and are a particularly welcome addition to the exhibition as the hare is the zodiac animal for the Chinese new year commencing this month. Festival badges are precursors of the mandarin squares that became so well known in the West in the 19th century, along with dragon robes; the exhibition includes a military rank badge embroidered in Peking knot with a tiger (the outgoing year's zodiac animal), and another loan, a pair of civil badges of the first order.

Other embroideries are a fine set of hangings with flowers and birds, two table frontals with popular motifs, and four pairs of sleeve bands. Two cut velvet panels (one Sino-Tibetan) represent a technique much less common in China, while three polychrome weaves with dragons are more typical. Two of these (one on loan from a private collection) are woven in gold on bright yellow, and were wrappers for books in the Qing Imperial Library.

Shelagh Vainker



Left: Mandarin square of 4th rank military official, silk embroidered in Peking knot, 19th century, 3001 cm (E.A. 1978.405, given by Alice Bonet'). Right: Festival badge depicting a hare gazing at the moon, brocaded silk-satin, late Yuan or early Ming Dynasty, 14th or 15th century, 28.5x31.5 cm (On loan from the collection of the A.E.D.T.A., Paris)

### **Chinese Silks -**

- continues in the Eric North Room at the Ashmolean Museum until 28 February. There will be a gallery talk in the exhibition on Friday February at 1. 15 p.m. (Tel 01865 278015)

### **Handmade in India -**

- continues at the Royal Albert Museum, Exeter, until 27 February (tel. 01392 265 858)

and 13 March - 9 May at the Bankfield Museum, Akroyd Park, Boothtown Road, Halifax, Yorkshire (tel. 01422 354 823)

### **Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms**

At the Victoria and Albert Museum, 25 March to 25 July. The exhibition, which focuses on the courtly arts of Ranjit Singh, the first Sikh maharaja of the Punjab, and his successors, will cover a wide range of arts, including metalwork, ivory and furniture. The textile element will include woven silks, *phulkaris* and cotton cloths embroidered with floss silk "flower work".

Events connected with the exhibition include a lecture by Susan Stronge, curator of the exhibition, at 7.15 p.m., during the evening opening (6.30-9.30 p.m.) on Wednesday 24 March; the exhibition will be open as well as the Asian art galleries and the Costume Court, and there will be free gallery talks. Surjeet Hussain will demonstrate *phulkari* embroidery techniques from 2-5 p.m. on Saturday & Sunday 27 & 28 March and Saturday & Sunday 17 & 18 April. There will also be family activities in the Nehru Gallery related to the exhibition, including the art of turban tying, repeated at various times on Friday 2 to Monday 5, Saturday 10, Sunday 11, Saturday 17 and Sunday 18 April; one-hour drop-in sessions on *phulkari* embroidery and other textiles at 11 a.m. and 1 & 3 p.m. on Tuesday & Wednesday 6 & 7 April; and one-and-a-half-hour sessions on colourful cushions at 11 a.m., 1.30 & 3.30 p.m. on Thursday & Friday 8 & 9 April. (Tel. 0171-938 8638)

### **The Natural World in Oriental Art**

At the Museum of East Asian Art, Bath, until 7 March. The exhibition looks at the influence of the natural environment on Chinese and other Asian cultures, including the use of natural symbolism in textiles, especially rank badges or "mandarin squares". (Tel. 01225 464640)

### **Threads of Imagination**

Central Asian and Chinese Silks from the 12th to the 19th Century will be shown at Spinks, King Street, St James, London, from 15 February to 12 March. (Tel. 0171-930 7888)

## Overseas

*Threads of Light. Chinese Embroidery from Suzhou and the Photographs of Glenn Ketchum* will be on show at the U.C.L.A. Fowler Museum of Cultural History, Los Angeles from 21 March to 5 September. It comprises 30 works of art representing the pinnacle of contemporary Chinese embroidery from the Suzhou Embroidery Research Centre. Among them are thirteen large-scale embroideries based on the landscape photographs of Robert Glenn Ketchum. A lavishly illustrated approximately 150 pp publication will accompany the exhibition. (Tel. 310-825 4288)

## Last Chance to See -

*From the Looms of India: Textiles from the Permanent Collection* has been extended to 28 February at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia.

*Kashmir Shawls* finishes at the Indianapolis Museum of Fine Arts, Indianapolis, Indiana on 28 March.

## LECTURES AND EVENTS

### Ashmolean Museum

Gallery talk, *East Meets West: Textiles and Trade Routes*, Friday 4 June at 1. 15 p.m. (tel. 01865 178015)

### Oxfordshire Museum

A public lecture and exhibition, *Tribal Rugs: Treasures of the Black Tent*, will be given by Brian MacDonald, F.R.G.S., in the New Gallery, on 19 May at 7.30 p.m. Admission by ticket in aid of the Friends' campaign to raise funds in support of the Museum's education programme, obtainable in advance from the Oxfordshire Museum, Fletcher's House, Park Street, Woodstock, OX20 1SN, tel. 01993 811456.

### Victoria and Albert Museum

Demonstration of traditional carpet weaving by Noreen Roberts in the Islamic Gallery, 2-5 p.m. on Saturday 13 February.

Gallery talks *Exploring Pattern in Eastern and Western Art* by Rebecca Merry on Tuesday 23 February and *The Queen of Oudh* by Linda Hillyer on Monday 1 March, both at 2 p.m.

For further information on both events, tel. 0171-928 8638.



### **Friends of the Pitt Rivers Museum -**

- are holding a Book Bonanza in the Balfour Building, 60 Banbury Road, Oxford, on Saturday 22 May in aid of the Museum's education fund. Please come and buy and/or if you have any books you wish to dispose of, please leave them at 64 Banbury Road (8.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.) or the Balfour Building (1 -4.30 p.m) after Easter and before 19 May in a bag clearly labelled "Balfour Book Bonanza". General interest books and paperbacks will be especially welcome. For further information contact Felicity Wood (address above, p. 5)

### **Antique Textile Fair**

21 March 10 am. to 5 p.m. at the Armitage Centre, Firs Athletic Ground, Moseley Road, Fallowfield, Manchester (A.A. signposted).

Available for purchase will be all aspects of European and Ethnic textiles, ranging from period costume, historic needlework, linen and lace, Oriental rugs and carpets, books, ephemera and much more. A textile valuation service and conservation advice will be available, and a full programme of lectures and demonstrations has been arranged. For further information contact Freda Chapman, The Textile Society, tel. 01428 683703.

### **Batik Course**

A practical course on *Batik and Paste Resist Techniques* with Karen Mears is to be held at the Horniman Museum on Tuesday evenings, 2, 9, 16 & 23 March from 7-9 p.m.; £30 for the four sessions, including materials. Students will be able to work from the Museum's handling collections and study techniques from Africa and India.

### **New York**

In association with the *Arts of the Pacific Show*, to be held at the 26th Street Armoury at Lexington Avenue, 24-28 March, there will be a Textile Day on Saturday 27 with lectures on Korean rank badges, Tibetan textiles, Japanese textiles and the idea of Mingei, Japonism in fashion, and 17th to 20th century Chinese export textiles. Tel. 301-924 5002.

### **South-West China Textiles Tour**

Gina Corrigan is leading a 22-day tour to see the embroidered, hand-woven textiles and costumes of the Miao and Dong minorities in South-West China, 28 September to 19 October 1999, price £2,400. For further information or booking form, contact her at Hoe Barn, Hoe Lane, Bognor Regis, West Sussex, PO22 8NS, tel. 01243 582178; fax. 01242 587239.

## BOOKS

Baumstark, Reinhold (ed.), *Rom and Byzanz, Schatzkammerschück aus bayerischen Sammlungen*, Munich: Bayerisches Nationalmuseum and Hiner Verlag. 1998, 302 pp, numerous colour plates, full catalogue, ISBN 3-7774-8200-5, DM 48.00 (order directly from the Museum)

A large catalogue that accompanied a recent exhibition in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich, the publication reproduces and discusses in detail the Byzantine collections found in Bavarian church treasuries. Many of these are spectacular textiles, often very well preserved. The author responsible for the textile catalogue entries is Birgitt Borkopp, who was partly also responsible for an important exhibition and publication of mainly Chinese silk cloths found in Russia, which we reorted on in a previous newsletter.

Blehaut, Jean-François, *Iban Baskets*, Kuching, Sarawak: Sarawak Literary Society. 1998, 235 pp, 407 figs. (colour photographs and line drawings), ISBN 983-9115-03-0, £ 30.00 soft cover, f 40.00 hardback.

A magnificent new publication covering all aspects of Than basketry, including material for construction, dyes used, shapes and weaves, a discussion of patterns, and different functions. The book is beautifully illustrated, including fine line drawings and numerous detail photographs. The Iban of Borneo are well known for their ornate designs, found on textiles, basketry, and incised or carved into bamboo and wood, and this publication does full justice to one of these art forms. If you are interested in a copy but cannot place an order through your bookshop, contact Ruth Barnes; she knows the author and can forward your request for a copy.

Boland, Rita, et al, *A Loom from Bhutan*, Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute Bulletin 339. 1995, 36 pp, map, 10 figs (colour and black-and-white), 10 drawings, ISBN 90-6832-827-1

Although published four years ago, this small book has only just come to our attention. Rita Boland was formerly curator at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, and she has a special interest in weaving and loom techniques. Her meticulous scholarship and knowledge of all matters technical make the publication especially important for all who have an interest in, or need to know about, the workings of a loom. Here she presents a backstrap loom that is specifically used in Bhutan.

Riboud, K., et al, *Samit and Lampas: Motifs indien - Indian Motifs*, A.E.D.T.A./Calico Museum, Paris, 1998, 214 pp, 75 col. & 2 b/w illus., numerous line drawings, text in French and English, 32x24 cm, I.S.B.N. 2 908864 09 6

The bulk of this book is given over to illustrations, descriptions and technical analyses of 16th and 17th century silks in the two museums. They are sandwiched between scholarly articles on the history, technology and geographical distribution of the two techniques, as well as motifs, dyes and weave structures.

Vollmer, J.E., et al, *Chinese Costume and Accessories, 17th to 20th Centuries*, A.E.D.T.A., 1999, 98 pp, 31 col. & 18 b/w illus., 42 cm, text in English and French, ISBN 2 908864 10 X, limited edition of 1,000 copies, 450FF + postage.

This volume introduces a selection of Qing (1644-1911) and some related Ming (1368-1644) costumes in the A.E.D.T.A. collection. Imperial court garments and the celebratory clothing worn for private occasions within Han Chinese and Manchu elite are featured. The

wardrobe of the Tibetan aristocracy who adapted Chinese costumes and fabrics provides a notable parallel use, documenting this luxurious influence abroad. John Vollmer's introductory essay relates the origin and historical context of the costumes. Each illustrated piece is set in its typology with particular attention to the meaning of the decorative designs, and there is a detailed presentation of technical analyses by Alexandra Lorquin.

This folio is a companion volume to *The Floral Motif in Mughal Fabrics* (1995) and *Chinese Buddhist Silks* (1996), already published by A.E.D.T.A. .

N.B. The Oriental booksellers, Han-Shan Tang Books, include in their latest list (no. 89) an eight-page section on textile books. Copies may be obtained from them at Unit 3, Ashburton Centre, 276 Corns Road, London, S.W.15 3AY, tel. 0181-788 4464; fax. 0181-780 1565; e-mail: [hst@hanshan.com](mailto:hst@hanshan.com)



Indian trade textile; cotton, block-printed mordant, dyed red and black. Linked medallions in imitation of *patola* designs. Made in Gujarat for export, collected in Sulawesi, eastern Indonesia. Late 17th/18th century. Warp 278 cm, weft 85 c.m. (Ashmolean Museum, EA1998.224) See above p.9.

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**DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE - MONDAY 7 JUNE 1999**

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