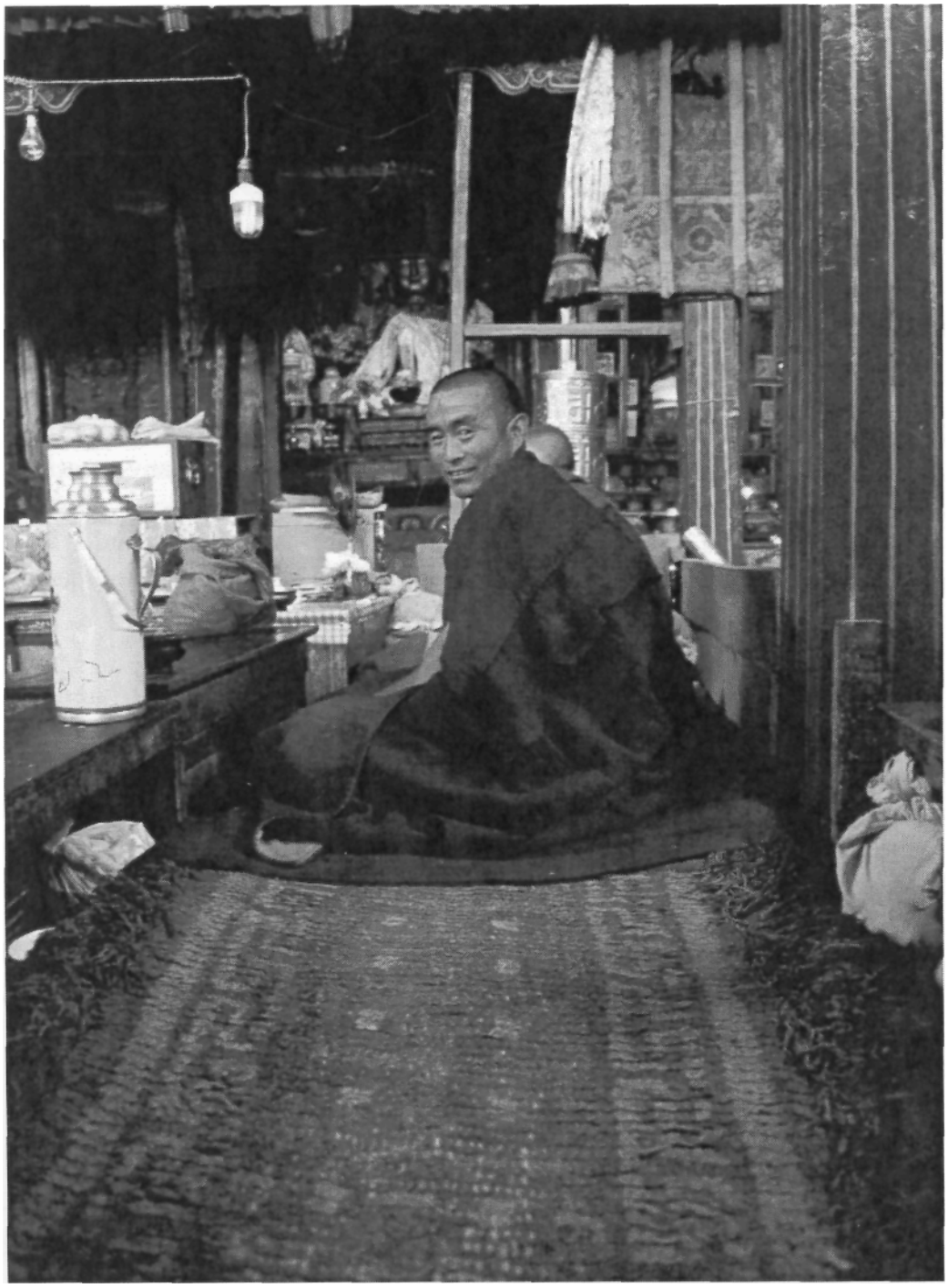
OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

Newsletter No. 36 **February 2007**



A monk sitting on a Wangden runner in Drapung Hermitage near Lhasa. This runner is around 50 or more years old and is one of a set of four that were woven especially for the assembly hall of this small monastery. (See p. 18)

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

I am delighted to be able to tell you that someone has come forward in answer to my plea for a successor. A fairly new member, Nick Fielding is now helping me out and I hope will take over the editorship with the October number.

Nick is a former Sunday Times journalist and the author of two books on terrorism. He has a keen interest in Central Asia and has travelled in the region on many occasions. His particular interest is in the embroideries of Kyrgyzstan, which he has been collecting for a number of years. He lives in south Oxfordshire not very far from Oxford. With that background – terrorism apart – I am sure you will all agree that he sounds well qualified for the job.

* * *

I have not included the current exhibition in the Japanese galleries at the British Museum among the listings below (p. 31), because it contains only two textile items, but if you should happen to find yourself in the vicinity, it is well worth the trek up to gallery 94 just to see one of them: a wonderful 19th century Ainu coat *(attus)* woven from shredded elm-bark fibre. The complex geometrical patterns, executed in cotton and silk appliqué and coloured embroidery, are unique to a particular community, and are a delight to the eye.

The patterns are concentrated close to the openings of this Ainu robe in order to prevent evil spirits from entering, a concept that should be of interest to Sheila Paine, who features on several pages in this newsletter, not least as the author of three of the books being reviewed – two of them by Nick Fielding.

But to return to the Ainu coat, elm-bark fibre garments of this kind, worn by both sexes, are still being made. Nearly all the materials used by the Ainu in their textiles and other crafts come from nature and close at hand. Not for them the mass-produced factory wear made far away in sweatshops in other parts of Asia, or out-of-season fruits and flowers flown half-way round the world in polluting planes, as are offered to the rest of us. They "are an example to us all" – as a lady recently said of and to me while I waited to wheel my bike over the road in our local shopping centre, patting me condescendingly on the back before driving off over the urban landscape in her 4 x 4!

PROGRAMME

Wednesday 21 February at 2 p.m.

TREASURED TEXTILES: CLOTH AND CLOTHING ROUND THE WORLD

Exhibition at the Pitt Rivers Museum

Gallery talk by Julia Nicholson, Joint Head of Collections

(Entrance to the Museum is through the University Museum of Natural History, Parks Road, Oxford)

Please contact Fiona as soon as possible if you wish to come and have not yet registered.

* * *

Wednesday 21 March at 5.45 p.m.*

HEROES AND MONSTERS

A study of men's costume as depicted in the folios of the
Moghul Emperor Akbar's Hamzanama.
Talk by Penelope Woolfit, textile scholar and historian

* * *

Wednesday 9 May at 5.45 p.m.*

Early 19th Century Textiles in eastern Indonesia: Collections in the Ethnographic Museum, Leiden

Talk by Ruth Barnes
Textile Curator, Ashmolean Museum and O.A.T.G. Chairman

* * *

Thursday 14 June at 11 a.m.
Another chance to visit the British Museum Textile Store
where curators will present rarely seen textiles from Siberia and some Palestinian embroidered garments that tie in with a recently published book (see review below p. 26).

In the afternoon we will visit an outstanding private collection of textiles and jewellery from S.E. Asia
Numbers limited. Book no later than 14 May

* * *

* These talks will be held at the Pauling Centre, 58 Banbury Road, Oxford.
Refreshments will be served from 5.15 p.m. Visitors welcome, £2.

For further information or to book for the visits on 21 February or 14 June, contact one of the programme co-ordinators:
Rosemary Lee, tel. 01491 873276, e-mail: rosemary.lee@talk21.com
Fiona Sutcliffe, tel. 01491 872268, e-mail: j.v.sutcliffe@talk21.com

THE REVIVAL OF SILK IKATS IN UZBEKISTAN

Uzbekistan, which stands at the mid point of the ancient Silk Road trade route between China and the Roman Empire, is a country where the legacy of the centuries-long traffic between East and West is still highly visible. It is where over the centuries, Uzbekistan's own artisans gained and developed their skills to create the much prized silk ikat fabrics, which, with their extraordinary intricate patterns and explosive use of colour, became an art form as well as a valued commercial product. The craft declined during the years of Soviet rule – until recently, when the country has seen some small revival of the skills and the reappearance of these magical silks once again. This is the story of how silk ikats came to rediscover a place in the world's markets.

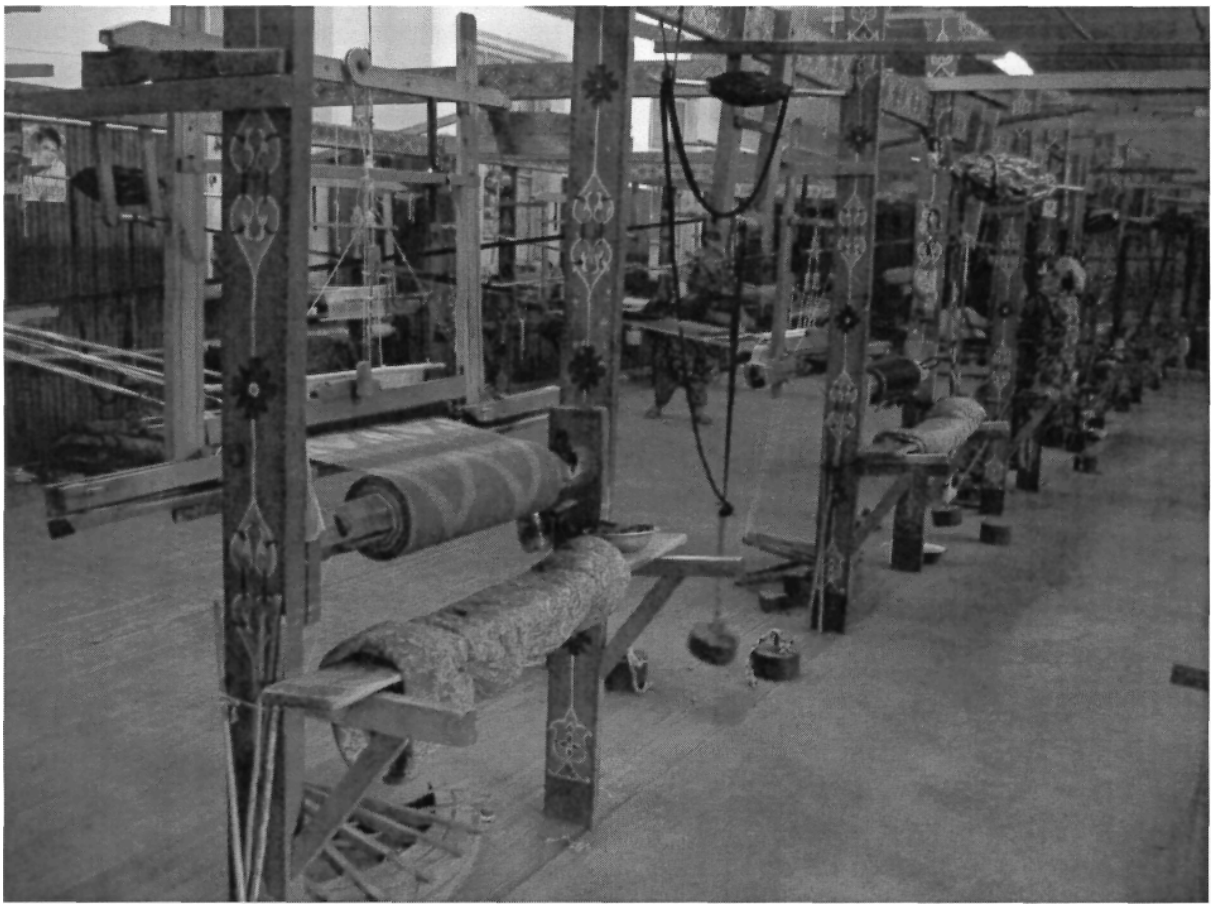
The Central Asian ikats of the late 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries are well known and documented from examples which have found their way out of Uzbekistan into museums in the West – in particular through the much travelled private collection of Guido Goldman. During the prosperous period of the 'Silk Road' the fabrics travelled across Asia into the Far East and Russia, as trade goods and gifts in the form of robes for various potentates, khans, kings and tsars. By the late 19th century these fabrics were seen as masterpieces of art and craftsmanship, symbolizing wealth and status. Ikat chapans (coats) became luxury items of high value, much in demand by the wealthy and upper classes. Rich merchants wore several layers of silk ikat coats. Soldiers who fought well in battles were rewarded with the silks.

The practice of sericulture in Uzbekistan has for centuries been at the mercy of the activities of various rulers, local despots, marauding hordes and the dictates of the Soviet Union, which took a heavy toll on all crafts and craftsmen. Workshops were collectivized into factories and the practice of traditional crafts was discouraged and often prohibited altogether. There were brief periods of craft revival during the 1930s and the 1970s, as its value was officially recognized. But by this time skills had been lost and state patronage had the effect of 'dumbing down' the original designs. Synthetic dyes were used rather than natural dyes, and the patterns were often mechanically tied and woven in a mixture of acetate and silk or all acetate. This resulted in a new form of ikat, which was much busier in design and was produced in harshly bright and garish colours. They still have a market today, though it is a diminishing one, among Uzbek women, who like to wear these colourful patterns.

Independence and the end of Soviet control brought difficulties for the country and individuals. With no experience of a free market economy, of management, marketing or competition, the designers and craftspeople struggled. Antique ikats, which families had kept for generations, were sold off, merely for subsistence, to the growing band of collectors from the West who arrived as tourism began to grow. Sadly, that meant that a large part of the ikat heritage disappeared.

But independence also gave rise to a determination to reverse the decades of neglect of Uzbekistan's artistic heritage. The belief grew that it ought to be possible to use traditional practices to create products that would have a place in the modern world. The few remaining

master craftsmen started working to revive many of the crafts, including ikat silk weaving. Such efforts have been helped by several externally funded enterprise initiatives.



Looms at the Yodgurlik Handloom Weaving Mill

The Yodgorlik Handloom Weaving Mill in Margalan in the Fergana Valley, a mill set up during the Soviet period in the 1970s, became the focus of one such project, funded and supported by the British Council in Uzbekistan. This aim was to assist in the revival of hand loomed silk production and rekindle the region's reputation for exquisite silks. The idea was originally conceived by Michael Sinel, a crafts consultant for the United Nations in Uzbekistan. He recognized that the need was for much bigger sales in new markets if both the artisans and the ikats were to survive.

As a textile designer based in the UK I was invited in 1997 by the British Council, together with the Fashion Director at the time of Marks and Spencer in the UK, to conduct design seminars for textile and fashion designers to help them orient themselves towards Western markets. On our first visit we were taken to the Yodgorlik mill, where I was quite captivated by the silks and the attempts the artisans themselves were making to keep the silks alive. Seizing the opportunity presented, Michael Sinel and I put forward our ideas. "Do you want to turn this into a project," was the response from the Director of the British Council in Uzbekistan, to which we replied with a resounding 'yes'.

From then on I travelled to Uzbekistan whenever I could, to work with Yodgorlik. The factory clearly needed not only an injection of cash, but marketing advice and help on getting the colours and quality of silk suitable to sell in new markets. Unable to keep its fifty looms active, having already lost much of its local market sales, except for a smattering of tourists, it was also struggling to find the right quality of silk. Much of Uzbekistan's own silk production was being sold to China, as the quality of China's own silk declined, leaving little for the local market, but, thankfully for local producers, quotas have now been allotted to home manufacturers.

As part of the project it was my task to encourage and demonstrate how they could learn the old skills, achieving the quality they once had had and designing in such a way as to reach and appeal to new markets. They needed to look back at the old ikats and adapt some of the ideas to generate a new tradition of patterns to appeal to a wider market, without losing the cultural heritage.

Tying the warps

Colour was a first priority. There were originally just three colours to work with – red, blue and yellow. Various combinations produced other colours, including black. But the level of tone was always the same. It was important to experiment with new colours, which would appeal to the foreign market or the tourists eager to acquire local traditional products. The use of natural dyes was revived in a small way, using locally available plants, such as pomegranate peel, madder root, onion skins and other fruits and vegetables.

Softening the colours was at first difficult. There was only one cold tap at the mill, and it was nowhere near a sink or gas. But by experimenting with a mixture of natural dyes, such as walnut and pomegranate, to soften the hard synthetics, a softer more sophisticated palette was achieved. Each day, Oybek, the specialist in dyes, would appear with several cones of newspaper containing some new dyes he had found in the market. Whatever these dyes were, they worked. Gradually the range of colours broadened and became more palatable.

But it took time. Often, despite requests for new colours, I would find on my next visit the same red, blue and yellow. I came to realize that I had not yet fully grasped the hierarchy within this community, let alone in the mill. My main contact at the mill, Davlat, who had the best eye and understanding for colour and design, always assured me that my suggestions would be carried out. But I soon found out that he himself had not been able to get the instructions through. I realized then that the workers themselves needed some tangible incentive to make the efforts required to change their habits. I did something probably no foreign women has ever done before. Calling a meeting of all the workers in the factory, I explained to them that the point of the changes was to increase sales, which would help everyone. While the response appeared stony faced, as Davlat, who had once been a teacher, carefully translated for me, the colours did begin to change thereafter and the increase in sales which followed became the visible incentive.

Dyeing the warps

Much of the work of the revival of the craft must be attributed to the artisans working in the mill, namely the designer Davlat Umarilov, who had the eye and the talent to expand ideas and run with them, Oibek a specialist in dyes and dyeing and Mahamudjon Ismoilov the master designer.

Scarves were the first products to find sales. They were easy to make and immediately accessible to tourists and foreigners who were eager to find products with a local flavour. The mark of success was when every weaver in the Fergana valley, seeing the profit to be made, started making scarves themselves. A multitude of scarves appeared at every craft fair in various colours and guises. At Yodgorlik we had to strive to stay one step ahead, with Davlat carefully translating the colours we discussed into the most delicious and magical silk scarves.

They were not all ikats. Plain coloured scarves, when well coloured, were a big seller. The ikats were later made into products for the home, cushions etc, and eventually into clothing. Though sometimes the quality varied, depending on the availability of good raw silk, and the designs did not always work well, a new trend was started.

I also worked with a larger factory, Khan Atlas, which had some 4,000 looms, apparently for producing silk ikats. But with only 200 looms at most in operation I found this mill to be a scene of almost complete devastation, a graveyard of machines, in dark, dank, cobwebbed degradation. Some of these looms have now been relocated and production started again in silk ikats, as well as cotton fabrics. Here the patterns are tied through a system of semi automation. The speed with which these silks can be produced is of course far greater than is possible by hand weaving, and with a wider width, but as yet the products are not reaching a wide enough market to ensure this factory's future.

Threading the warps

My trips to Uzbekistan every 2-3 months, followed the same pattern. Arrival in Tashkent, followed by an eight hour journey along the single road through the mountain pass that led to the Fergana Valley. The road itself seemed to be in a continual state of being built, but once the tunnels were finally completed the journey speeded up. On one such journey, Dimitrii, my colleague from the British Council, and I were taking our usual route in the old Lada driven by Sergei, when we were completely engulfed by a snow storm, which the old Lada's tyres simply could not cope with. Envisaging a frozen night stranded in the car – no one would stop so bent were they on their own problems of survival – I will never forget my relief at the sight of a grit lorry, which got the tyres gripping again.

The welcome I received in the Fergana Valley was always warm. I never felt for an instant insecure. I was looked after well, staying with various families in their houses and provided with large meals of their wonderful fresh salads and "ploff", the local rice and mutton dish. In the big city of Tashkent the welcome was also warm, with many a delicious meal and vodka laced evenings at home or in the wonderful Caravan. This is a restaurant and arts and crafts gallery owned and run by Nataliya Mussina, a large personality, who has herself been a huge influence on the regeneration of crafts in Uzbekistan, particularly in the fields of ceramics and textiles.

In the heyday of the traditional silk ikat its patrons were the aristocratic and wealthy of Uzbekistan's Khanates, or city states. Now, with its revival, the artisans are looking to

Weaving the ikat

the foreigners from Europe or America who travel as tourists along the Silk Road. But ikats are seen again as a symbol of national identity. They are being sold in the local markets – as clothes for local Uzbek pop stars, performers, and for special occasions – through the fashion shows and competitions which are scattered through the Uzbek social calendar. These initiatives are all part of a greater idea to open up the ancient Silk Road – as a trade route in a new guise, selling the domestic crafts of the countries through which the route passes.

Philippa Watkins
Senior Tutor, Woven Textiles, Royal College of Art

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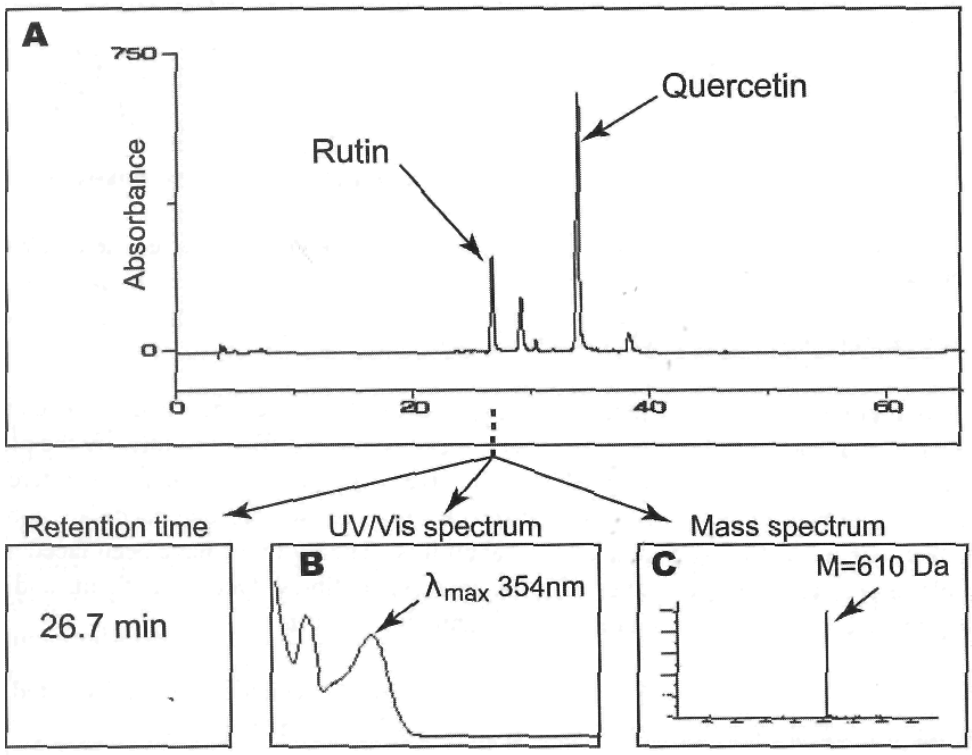
WHAT'S IN A NAME?
CREATING A DYESTUFF ANALYSIS DATABASE

The identification of dyes used to colour textiles of historical interest can provide several kinds of information. For a conservator, it can guide attempts at restoration and can distinguish between naturally dyed fibres and later restorations (or fakes) made with yarns and threads dyed with synthetics, which were introduced in about 1860. For the archaeologist, identification of the dye and of the dyestuff (plant or animal) that produced it can give clues to the resources and technologies available to the peoples who made the textiles1. As described below, such knowledge can also be useful to dyers trying to resurrect forgotten traditional methods.

About five years ago when we first became interested in natural textile dyes, my graduate student, Xian Zhang, and I conceived the idea of creating an on-line compilation of analytical data on dyestuffs that would be available to whomever was interested in such information. This idea grew out of two technological advances in the field of dye analysis: (1) the availability of new analytical instrumentation, HPLC-DAD-MS, and (2) new methods for extracting dyes from textile samples[2]. High performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC) is a technique for separating complex mixtures of organic molecules, such as dyes. The mixture of dyes is pumped through a steel column, about 2 mm in diameter by 15 cm long, containing the separating medium-usually small beads of silica coated with hydrocarbon molecules. After the separated molecules emerge from the column, their ultraviolet and visible spectral characteristics (i.e., colours) are measured as they pass through a diode array detector (DAD) and their molecular weights (masses) are determined as they pass into a mass spectrometer (MS). Instrumentation for HPLC-DAD-MS has been used for chemical analysis for several years, but at the time we began our work, it had not been used systematically for the analysis of dyes.

With HPLC-DAD-MS, it becomes possible to characterize dye molecules in terms of three unrelated criteria: elution time (the time required for each molecule to pass through the separating medium—a characteristic related to its solubility properties), UV-Visible spectrum, and molecular mass (e.g., solubility, colour and size). Since a particular dyestuff (most of which are plants) may contain up to a dozen or so dye components, one can then obtain a detailed "fingerprint" for each dyestuff, as well as detailed information about each component in the fingerprint. From such analyses, one can quickly amass an enormous amount of data. For example, a single plant dyestuff with an elution profile of 10 peaks gives at least 10 UV-Visible spectra and 10 mass spectra. That is about 2000 spectra for 100 dyestuffs. We have over 200 dyestuffs in our own collection, and that is only a fraction of those known. Figure 1 shows a "fingerprint" of an extract from silk dyed with flower buds of the pagoda tree *(Sophora japonica),* along with some of the information that can be obtained by the technique of HPLC-DAD-MS. Pagoda tree buds were commonly used in China and Japan to produce a yellow dye, which was reserved for the Emperor and his court. In fact, at various times in both the East and West, commoners were not allowed to wear any coloured clothing at all.



RT (min)	_max(nm)	MassDa)	Identity of compound
26.7	354	610	Rutin
29.1	354	594+610+624	Rutinosides of kaempferol, quercetin & isorhamnetin
30.2	354	610	Rutin isomer
33.8	372	302	Quercetin
38.2	372	286+316	Kaempferol+ isorhamnetin

Figure 1. (A) HPLC profile "fingerprint" of an extract of pagoda tree bud dyed silk; (B) UV-visible spectrum of the rutin peak; (C) a mass spectrum of the same peak. The table lists information about each peak in the profile

However, before analyzing a dye mixture, one has to remove it from the textile fibres. For many years, the conventional technique for extracting dyes was to cook the fibres with aqueous solutions of hydrochloric acid (HCl) or other strong acid. This method is effective, but it also destroys many of the dye molecules, most of which (at least in the case of yellows) are glycosides (conjugates of a sugar and a dye molecule; see Figure 2). For example, if the pagoda tree bud dyed silk referred to in Figure 1 had been extracted with HCl, all of the peaks (at least six components) to the left of quercetin would have disappeared. In fact, the resulting profile would have been indistinguishable from that derived from onionskins. To get around this problem, we devised a couple of mild extraction procedures that preserve the glycoside linkages[2]. The dye components shown in Figure 1 were obtained by mild extraction.

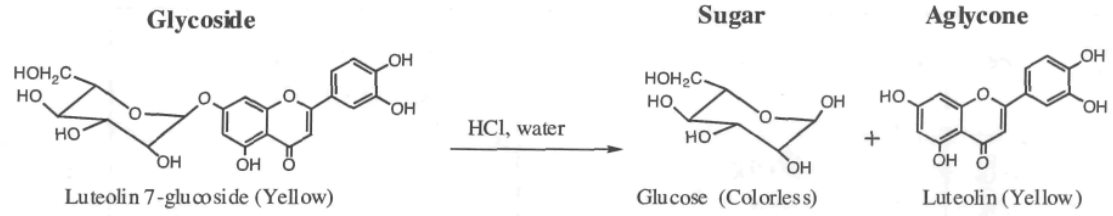


Figure 2. Cleavage of a glycoside its aglycone by acid hydrolysis. The bond linking the glucose and luteolin moieties of luteolin 7-glucoside is broken by treatment with acid (HC1).

"To make rabbit stew...first catch a rabbit." [Old French recipe]

It is relatively easy to extract dyes from a textile fibre specimen and to generate a profile such as that shown in Figure 1. However, it can be more difficult to identify the plant, or sometimes animal, species that produced the dye. To do this, one needs reference materials, i.e., samples of the dyestuffs themselves. In other words, one needs a "rabbit"; not only that, one needs to know what *kind* of rabbit it is. Therefore we have been faced with two problems: (1) analyzing the dyestuffs themselves, or fibres dyed with them, and (2) collecting and accurately identifying the plant (or animal) dyestuff.

When we started this work, we purchased dyestuffs, which are generally listed by their common (English) name, from various suppliers of dyes and pigments. Initially, this was satisactory, since certain dyestuffs (10 to 20 of them) are widely used and most vendors sell the same thing. Eventually, though, one wants to know whether the "madder" that one has purchased is Dyer's madder (*Rubia tinctorum*), or Indian madder (*Rubia cordifolia*), or one of several other types of madder; in other words, one needs to know its taxonomy *(Genus* and *species* names). There are hundreds of thousands of known living organisms, and hundreds of these have been used for dyeing textiles, fibres and other materials. Many of them have been described in excellent compendia by Schweppe[3], Cardon[4] and Bohmer[5].

Even when one knows what one is looking for, obtaining specimens of known dyestuffs, or of fibres that have been dyed by them, is a problem. Often the person who described the dyestuff has died, or collections have been lost/misplaced, or the plant has been mis-identified, or it grows only in some remote part of the world. The following describes, anecdotally, some of our experiences in obtaining/characterizing plant materials used or thought to have been used for dyeing purposes.

Pre-Columbian Andean dyes—A couple of years ago we obtained from Dr. Ran Boytner, an archaeologist at UCLA (Los Angeles), samples of some dyed wool (alpaca?) textiles discovered with mummies buried 800-1000 years ago in the arid mountain region of the west coast of Peru. After analyzing some of them, Xian Zhang told me, "This one looks like quercetin [a common flavonoid dye] with a sulfate group attached." I said (words to the effect), "That's nonsense. No one has ever reported flavonoid sulfates as dyes." Nevertheless, within 24 hours, after doing a computer literature search, she showed me a paper by an Argentinian investigator, Jose Luis Cabrera, who had shown that the leaves of

the plant *Flaveria haumanii* contained several flavonoid sulfates. Subsequently Dr. Cabrera sent us samples of *Flaveria haumanii;* he also told us that indigenous peoples of South America had used this plant for many years as a yellow dye source. This work is described in more detail in a forthcoming publication[6].

The mummies of Xinjiang—In the 1980s, Chinese archaeologists discovered some remarkably well-preserved mummies and large quantities of brightly coloured textiles buried in the Taklamakan desert region of Xinjiang Province[7,8]. Xian Zhang, my daughter and I saw some of these mummies, which date back to about 1000 B.C., in the Urumqi Museum in 2004[9]. Subsequently we obtained samples of some specimens from a textile expert, Irene Good (Harvard University), who had obtained them on an expedition to Xinjiang in the 1990s. Analysis showed that all of the reds were dyed with a species of madder whose dye composition was very similar to that in a sample of *Rubia tinctorum* provided to us by Dominique Cardon (Lyon, France) who collected it in Xinjiang. We also discovered that at least two types of yellow dyestuff had been used to dye particular textiles. One of these looks very much like weld *(Reseda luteola),* a dye plant once widely used in the Middle East and Europe. However, *Reseda luteola* is not listed among the plants that grow in Xinjiang. The second yellow contains a yet-unidentified component that seems to be unique: it has not been reported in the dyeing literature anywhere. We still do not know which plants were used to produce these yellows.

China Trade silks—From the late 18th through much of the 19th century, American trading ships plied the waters between the east coast of China (Canton), South America and New England. One of the products from China was silk, which was exported in a variety of forms. The Peabody-Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, was established in 1799 to collect and display objects from the China Trade, and it was from this museum that we obtained some samples of yellow-dyed silk dating back to the mid 19th century. Analysis showed the presence, in different specimens, of three distinct dye types—turmeric, pagoda tree buds and protoberberine. The latter type occurs in many plants native to China (e.g., common barberry, *Berberis vulgaris),* and usually the predominant dye component is berberine. However, the sample we analyzed contained no berberine, but rather its relative, palmatine, as the primary component. Perusal of Dominique Cardon's book4 suggested that the source might be a plant called *huangteng (Fibraurea tinctoria)* which is native to Southeast Asia and southern China, and, as it happens, used in traditional medicine in those regions. But how to get some *huangteng* to use as a reference? We asked our (non-botanist) contacts in China to see if they could get *huangteng* in a Chinese medicine store. The first sample we got seemed to be wood chips with no dye at all in it. The second, from Hunan Province, had a yellow dye, but, based on its analysis, was probably a species of *Coptis.* The third sample, from Yunnan, the southernmost province of China seemed to be real *huangteng,* though we do not know whether it is *Fibraurea tinctoria* or *Fibraurea recisa.* At least it had the expected dye content. The lesson here is that when dealing with third-party vendors—traditional medicine stores or web sites, herbal or organic medicine stores, or even suppliers of natural dyes—one can never be completely sure of what one is buying.

Dyestuffs from Uzbekistan—As related earlier in this publication[9] we visited Uzbekistan in 2005 with the hope of obtaining some plant dyestuffs to aid in the identification of the Xinjiang dyes discussed above. It turned out that the Uzbeks were interested in our work, too, because, after over 100 years of Russian/Soviet hegemony, during which time synthetic dyes supplanted natural ones, contemporary dyers had forgotten which native plants their great-grandfathers had used. This goal could not have been achieved without the help of Svetlana Osipova of Heritage Central Asia and Dr. Ivan Maltsev of the Centre for Research and Industry for Botany, both of whom are located in Tashkent. Dr. Maltsev is an expert on Uzbek flora and collected and provided botanical names for 80 specimens of plants, which we were fortunate enough to get through U.S. Customs uneventfully. We are still analyzing extracts from these plants.

The Persian dilemma—While visiting dye workshops in Iran, we were given several types of dyestuff. One of these, widely used for yellow, is called "jashir," in Persian. Though apparently unknown in other countries, this plant is used in very large quantities in Iran and contains, as we discovered on analyzing it, some unique flavonoid dye components. We were also given a botanical name for jashir, but have since learned that it is incorrect. We have not yet been able to find the correct name for jashir, as it seems that all the experts on Iranian plants are in Iran, and we have not yet succeeded in making contact with someone who can help. This is not the only example of taxonomic ambiguity. A plant called "isparak" in Turkey, Uzbekistan and probably other places, refers to *Delphinium semibarbatum* (or *Delphinium zalil* in older literature). However in Iran, "isparak" is the name used *for Reseda luteola*, which is the English, "weld," formerly the most widely used dyestuff for yellow in Europe. Ironically, *Reseda luteola* appears to have been introduced as a yellow dyestuff by the Persians, over 1000 years ago.

The foregoing indicates some of the difficulties in creating a natural dyestuff database. There are at least four kinds of problem: (1) obtaining the dyestuff, (2) identifying it in terms of its biological (Latin) name, (3) analyzing the dye components in it, and (4) processing the data in such a way that it can be published and used on-line. Our collection contains about 200 dyestuffs, most of which are for yellows. But this is just the tip of the iceberg. There are more yellows in other parts of the world, not to mention reds, browns and blacks, the latter of which have hardly been studied.

We, as chemists, can readily analyze these materials, but it would have been impossible to do what we have done so far without the help of people all over the world, many known to us only by e-mail correspondence, who have helped to collect and/or identify plant materials. In addition there are the archaeologists, textile experts and others who have helped to point us in the right direction.

Richard Laursen
Professor of Chemistry, Boston University

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9 R. Laursen, On the Trail of Ancient Dyes in Central Asia, *Oxford Asian Textile Group Newsletter*, No. 35, October, 2006, pp. 4-8.

PILE TEXTILES IN CENTRAL TIBET

Tibetan pile weavings have received a lot of attention in the last couple of decades, in particular because of the popularity of small Tibetan carpets *(khaden)* amongst collectors. Their bright colors and eclectic designs have rightly attracted admiration, and their size (most are around 3ft x 5ft) makes them the ideal collectors' object. Yet Tibetan pile textiles encompass a wider range of weave types and objects than the *khaden*, and the attention paid to this one type of textile has given us a rather selective view of the Tibetan weaving tradition, a view that I hope to broaden a little with this article.

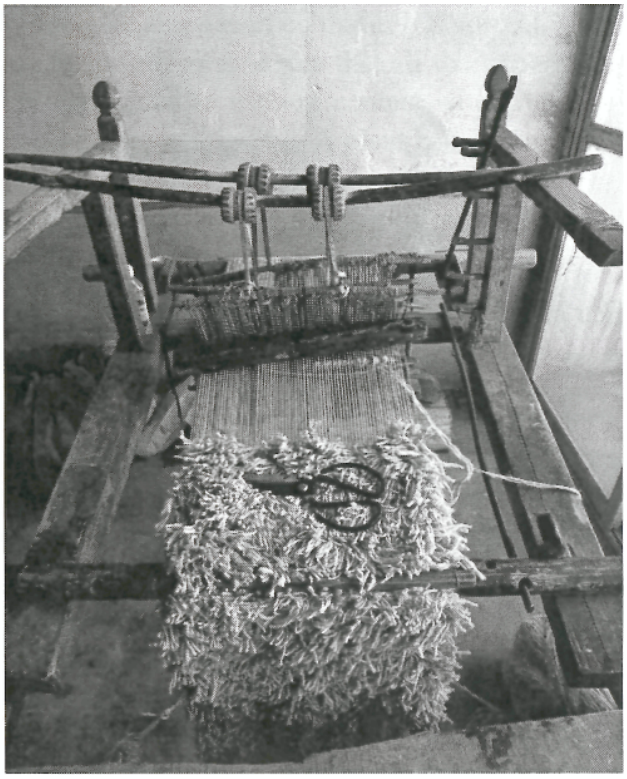
In the past several years I have been fortunate to travel regularly to Lhasa and the surrounding area, including recent trips with members of the Tibet Poverty Alleviation Fund (TPAF) in connexion with their work to revive traditional handicrafts in this area. What follows is based mainly on field research conducted in summer 2005 and 2006 with contemporary weavers involved in TPAF programmes, supplemented by observations of older textiles.

Most of us associate the term pile weaving with carpets, and specifically with textiles designed as floor coverings. Yet a visit to the villages around Lhasa and Shigatse in the central and central southern parts of Tibet reveals pile weavings of many different kinds in many different roles, including winter cloaks, sleeping bags, blankets, seat coverings, saddles and horse trappings. The *khaden* is present and mainly used as a covering for the low seats that surround most Tibetan rooms. It is used both for sitting and sleeping on and is rarely placed directly on the floor. The *khaden* are outnumbered however by other kinds of pile weavings.

By watching Tibetan weavers at work in the villages we were able to see three distinct techniques being used to make pile weavings:

Tsuktruk

The name of this textile means planted pile, and it is the simplest and quickest type to make. As the textile is woven, rows of loops are added by the weaver, who loops them around pairs of warp threads. The length of the loops is determined by winding the yarn around one, two or three fingers depending on the length of pile needed. After a short row of loops has been added the weaver pauses to cut them with a knife or with scissors, then adds a few rows of tightly compacted weft to keep the pile loops in place. The resulting pile has no knot at the base and a tug is sufficient to pull one strand out. These textiles are called *tsutruk* when they are for general use or *tsukden* when they are made for use as seat carpets.



Left: Tibetan weaver cutting the pile loops while making a *tsuktruk* weaving.
Right: Loom with the same weaving in progress.
This particular tsuktruk is destined to be part of a sleeping bag, the pile being long and loose, suitable for the insulation on the inside of a sleeping bag.

Tsuktruk and *tsukden* are generally woven on narrow looms. When a wide textile is needed, lengths are sewn together. Carpets are usually woven in three or four strips, but blankets can be six or eight strips wide.

Drumtse

This is the classic Tibetan carpet technique, used by commercial weavers in Tibet and in Nepal, as well as by villagers weaving for their own use or local sale. A more complex pile loop is formed by passing a strand of yarn behind pairs of warp threads then around a spacer rod made of wood or metal, then back around another pair of warp threads and so on. As with the *tsuktruk* technique the weaver pauses every so often to cut the loops. This method leaves a pile loop that has an additional loop at the base that we call the knot, which makes the pile more secure than in a tsuktruk weaving.

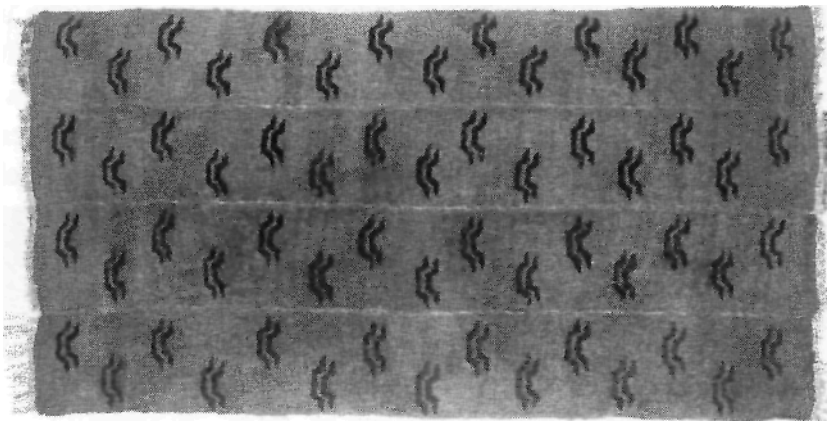
Wangden *drumtse*

This technique is similar to the classic *drumtse* technique, except that when the loops of pile are added the loom has an open shed so that only pairs of warps on the upper surface nearest to the weaver are used to fix the pile loops. This small distinction results in a carpet with a very different appearance. When the carpet is finished the lower set of warps have no pile loops around them, so only warp is visible on the back of the carpet, resulting in the rather ungainly technical name “warp faced back weaving”. Tibetans themselves call this type of weaving Wangden after a village in central southern Tibet that used to specialize in this technique.

A Tibetan carpet weaver forms a loop of pile around a wooden rod while weaving a Wangden sitting carpet. The pile loop is attached to the warp threads nearest the weaver only, permitting the weaver to use a thicker yarn than is the case with a conventional Tibetan carpet.

All three of these techniques are in use today, and skilled weavers can switch freely between them depending on what type of textile they want to make. The *tsuktruk* method is used to make heavy winter *chuba* (Tibetan cloaks) and monks cloaks. The pile traps warmth on the inside of the garment, the same way that wearing a sheepskin traps heat with the fleece facing inwards. The *tsuktruk* technique is very versatile, and different kinds of textiles can be woven with a dense or an open pile depending on how many strands of weft the weaver inserts between rows of pile. A weaving for a seating carpet might have two or three strands of weft, while a less dense weaving for a cloak or sleeping bag might include five or six rows of bulky weft between rows of pile loops.

Most households include innumerable blankets, sleeping bags and lightweight sitting carpets made using the *tsuktruk* technique, generally with plain colour rs or simple designs of stripes. They can often be seen in the markets in Lhasa and elsewhere, sold as surplus domestic production. They are rare in Western collections but far more numerous in central Tibet than *drumtse* pile weavings. Many households also wove sitting/sleeping carpets called *tsukden* using this technique. Most of these were woven on a narrow loom in three or four strips, subsequently joined together. Most are plain, but a few have simple designs. Some rugs of this type were produced with abstract tiger designs, probably as gifts for sons or relatives in the monasteries. *Tsukden* are less durable than *drumtse* so older examples in good condition are far less common than recently made pieces.



Most tsukden (sitting carpets using the planted pile technique) are plain with no design, but occasionally rugs are found with simple designs, such as this one with the stylised tiger stripe. Early 20th century.

The *drumtse* and Wangden *drumtse* techniques are used when a denser and more firmly-secured pile is needed, for example for a saddle cover or a high quality sitting carpet (See illus. p1). The *drumtse* technique is also used for small head-covers for horses *(takgyab)* and for more esoteric uses such as the yellow hats of Gelug order monks. In modern-day Lhasa motor-cycle and car seat covers woven using the drumtse technique have overtaken saddle rugs, both figuratively and literally.

This is a typical Wangden carpet, with a thick fringe and pile. The *yungdung* (swastika) motif in the centre indicates that it was used in a Buddhist temple in Tibet. Early 20th century.

In former times the Tibetan monasteries were major customers for fine weavings, and many sitting carpets were woven for monastic use, including runners of up to 10 metres in length (see illustration on p. 1). The Wangden *drumtse* technique is ideal for making sitting carpets, since the open-shed method allows very thick pile yarns to be inserted. This enables the weaver to make a carpet that has a very thick and substantial pile, ideal for keeping warm while sitting cross-legged during a lengthy ceremony in the winter months. Many older rugs made using the Wangden technique are found with patterns and colours that suggest they were used in monasteries, particularly reds and yellows, and monastic designs such as the *yungdrung* (swastika) and crossed *dorje*. A few of these carpets can still be found in their original locations in the assembly halls of Tibetan temples. Small *khaden*-sized carpets with medallion designs and a palette dominated by blue and green were also used domestically.

From 1959 onwards production of Wangden rugs declined significantly as Tibet suffered the successive shocks of invasion, Cultural Revolution and profound political change. By the mid-1990s there seem to have been only a half-dozen or so older weavers still making carpets using the Wangden method. The industry has been revived to some extent in recent years as new markets have been found for Wangden carpets, particularly amongst visitors from overseas.

Tibetan culture is unusual in that both men and women weave, in contrast to traditional weaving in most other cultures that is done mainly by women. There is a distinction however in the types of weaving traditionally done by the sexes. In central Tibet men were mainly associated with commercial weaving, whereas women mainly wove for domestic use. Most household items such as *tsuktruk* sleeping bags were and still are woven by women, but the traditional itinerant carpet weaver, who would go to a patron's home and weave carpets to commission, was usually a man. Similar differences of emphasis are also seen in other parts of Tibet: weaving for family use is mainly done by women, but weaving that has economic value and that can be the basis of a trade was dominated by men. This convention seems to be breaking down to-day: in contemporary weaving workshops in Lhasa women now outnumber men.

Despite these changes in the town, the art of Wangden carpet weaving carried out in the villages is still an exclusively male preserve. The local explanation is that items for monastic use with their unique designs should be made by male artisans, and that women who might attempt to weave such designs could suffer ill health or even death as a result of handling such powerful symbols!

In the past few years both Wangden and *tsukden* weavings have been turning up with increasing frequency in both Western collections and publications. Some of these weavings have been labelled archaic by Western dealers and collectors, and it has been suggested that the Wangden type might be a fore-runner of the *drumtse* weave. However, from watching Tibetan weavers make Wangden rugs and observing the uses to which they are put, there is no real evidence that they are more or less archaic than other Tibetan carpet weaving techniques. From a practical standpoint they are a variation of the drumtse Tibetan pile weaving

technique that is particularly suited to making a thick carpet with a low knot-density. For the weaver and for the patron it is a question of choosing the right type of weaving, based on local tradition and on the intended use.

Similarly, because of its simplicity, it is tempting to suggest that *tsuktruk* is a forerunner of other pile weaving techniques, but evidence to support this is also scarce. The modem day tsuktruk technique might equally well be a Tibetan simplification of a technique learned from elsewhere. For contemporary Tibetan weavers the *tsuktruk* technique is an efficient way of making many kinds of pile weavings, still widely used for making blankets, sleeping bags and cloaks.

The discussions surrounding the nature of Wangden and tsukden textiles raise questions that touch on the limitations inherent to the study of most traditional textiles. When confronted with a set of textiles of varying complexity we tend to say A must have come first since it is the simplest, then B and C developed from it, but there is often little or no evidence to confirm or contradict this kind of hypothesis. The original technological innovations may lie many thousands of years in the past and/or in distant locations. Both the archaeological and historical records generally offer few if any clues. On the other hand, we can learn a great deal by discussing weavings with living artisans and observing how textiles are used in everyday life. In this way weaving techniques can be understood as parts of a living repertoire, each technique with its particular strengths, handed down by tradition and kept alive as long as they remain relevant and useful to the weavers today.

The author wishes to thank the Tibet Poverty Alleviation Fund for their assistance with the research for this article.

Chris Buckley

INTERNATIONAL NATURAL DYE SYMPOSIUM
Hyderabad (India), 5 to 12 November 2006

In November 2006 I attended the International Natural Dye Symposium which had been organised by the Craft Council of India, with sponsorship from UNESCO; It was held in Hyderabad, the capital of Andhra Pradesh. Several hundred delegates assembled on the evening of the 5th for the inauguration, followed by a superb dinner of Hyderabadi specialities, served in South Indian style on banana leaves. The symposium offered four days of an intense programme of lectures, with two panels each morning, and a total of 52 presentations. The formal morning sessions were followed by a buffet lunch – always excellent, especially if one kept to the local cuisine. The quality of food proved an important part of the conference, much admired by the participants! The afternoons were reserved for practical dye workshops, when master dyers from all over India, as well as some from East Asia, were showing their skills. Special excursions and evening events were put on to entertain the delegates, the most ambitious being a fashion show and dinner in the Chowmohalla Palace, former residence of the Nizam (ruler) of Hyderabad. The last two days

of the conference were to be devoted to day trips to dye- and weaving centres, but these events unfortunately had to be cancelled or were altered to such a degree that one was better off sight-seeing around Hyderabad, rather than travelling hours in a bus to get a brief glimpse of an indigo vat.

Delegates came from all five continents, and the presentations also covered natural dye projects from South America to Australia. They spoke of community developments involving traditional dyes, as well as personal artistic adventure into exploring new sources. Africa was sadly under-represented, no doubt because of the lack of funding for this relatively expensive conference. The programme for the formal sessions was very crowded, with eight or more speakers for every session. This gave very little time, usually no more than ten or fifteen minutes, to each speaker, and even less time for discussion. The result was a mixture of brief presentations, with never enough time to go into anything in depth. This was regrettable, as consequently there was very little of substance that one could take away from the formal side of the symposium. The practical dye workshops gave more insights into the contemporary practices of dyers, and this was to some degree illuminating. However, these demonstrations had to remain artificially brief to fit into the afternoon time allocated to each. They could only give a taste of the processes involved in real dye workshops.

For me the most enjoyable side of the conference was the superb display of contemporary work being done in the workshops and craft centres of India. This may seem a bit frivolous, as all of these stalls were also selling their goods, and one could do serious shopping! But it was a revelation to see, handle, and be seduced by the most sumptuous dyes, vibrant designs, and elegant weavings, all evidence of a remarkable revival of quality crafts that is currently happening in many parts of India. The most valuable aspect of the conference was meeting a diverse mixture of artists, scholars, and crafts people, which encouraged a genuine crossing of boundaries. We were grateful to the Crafts Council of India and to the UNESCO support that made this possible. Despite the slightly disappointing aspects of the symposium, it is most reassuring that there is, once again, such a strong interest in working with natural dyes. The meeting in Hyderabad certainly set a signal for this. To what degree it will be a sustainable development only time will tell, but at the moment some of Asia's top designers work with natural dyes and fibres.

Ruth Barnes

REPORTS OF MEETINGS

Faraway Festival Costumes

On Saturday 16 December a dozen or so members of O.A.T.G. gathered at the Willis Museum in Basingstoke to meet up with Gina Corrigan and Ruth Smith* and be taken around the exhibition of costumes from the Miao tribe in South West China. First Gina took us around giving a general talk through the collection and then Ruth gave a more detailed explanation of use and the stitches involved.

Although at first sight the exhibition seemed small in terms of numbers of articles displayed, it was most certainly not in the amount of information given. The content of the exhibition consisted of elaborately stitched and decorated costumes, baby carriers, shoes, hats, also silver jewellery and several cases containing items and tools used for wax resist dyeing, braid making, the cloth used for embroidering and the paper "books" that contain the embroidery threads.

As most of the stitching has to be done outside (the houses are too dark inside), the women devised methods of making small portable intricate frames from bamboo. Various embroidery stitches are used, also threads with a core – sometimes of horse hair to give a raised appearance. Older pieces had hand made braids on them. Reverse appliqué, wax resist, indigo dyeing, buttons, pleating, folded white metal and silk paper appliqué, paper cuts and stitching, folded and pleated braid, supplementary weft and much more are used to decorate the garments and baby carriers. Several hours passed as we were all transported into a different world – one so far from our own – it was a wonderful feast for the eyes, the brain, the soul and spirit.

Thanks again to the organisers of the visit and of course to Gina Corrigan and Ruth Smith – two exceptionally interesting women with a wealth of knowledge. A visit to the exhibition without them is still worthwhile – but we came away with so much more thanks to their detailed information and attention.

*Ruth Smith is the author and publisher of *Miao Embroidery from South West China, Textiles* from the Gina Corrigan Collection, ISBN 0-9528804-1-5, £13.50 which contains good photographs, explanations and marvellous detailed diagrams of stitches, folding and the many other techniques used by the Miao. [See review newsletter no. 31, June 2005. – Ed.]:

Mary Kinipple

Afghan Embroideries

At the end of 2005 Sheila Paine returned to Afghanistan which she had previously visited in 1992 just after the Soviet withdrawal. On 6 December last she gave a talk to the OATG on her travels in Afghanistan during her two visits. She travelled alone armed only with "five kilos of luggage and a bottle of vodka"!

For her trip in 1992 she was smuggled over the border wearing a burqa (a disguise used less successfully by John Simpson). She started off in Kandahar which is now the centre of the Taliban. She showed slides of the people she met and some of the textiles she saw, made all the more poignant by the difficulty of taking photographs whilst wearing a burqa, and related the ways in which people tried to make a living whilst living among the ruins of their town. An abiding image is one of a Mujahedin's wife taking refuge at Kandahar airport and stitching meticulously a shirt for her husband to wear out fighting, counting threads on cheap Japanese polyester.

Embroidered cover for a Lee Enfield rifle
(Photo by Judith Gussin reproduced by permission of Sheila Paine)

Sheila was asked to write a volume on *Embroidery from Afghanistan* for the *Fabric Folios* series of the British Museum Press (see review below p. 26), as well as to up date material for another book, so she returned in 2005. This time she was able to stay in a compound in Kabul which she had had great difficulty in reaching on her first trip.

Although advised to travel everywhere by taxi she did explore the main tourist street – Chicken Street – on foot though there were many gangs of men and boys carrying guns. The men wore Kandahar shirts and sometimes had embroidered covers for their guns. People were working on the street at every trade including money changers and dentists, and children tried to make a living by selling water.

As well as slides showing the countryside and terrain Sheila brought some wonderful examples of embroidered textiles including a purple Pashtun dress from Makran, a black and white garment from south of Nuristan and a velvet Koochi dress decorated with coins and beads. There were also embroidered bags, caps, shawls and an example of the traditional Kandahar shirt which is still worn today. She also brought a beautifully stitched cover for a Lee Enfield rifle for us to see.

The embroideries are as diverse as the different tribes which make up Afghanistan. With the exception of the Hazara, who live in the centre, most tribes spread over the border into neighbouring countries. Embroidery was banned by the Taliban as an example of frivolity, as were balloons and kites, and although circumstances are still very difficult, there are now aid agencies promoting Afghan embroidery and assisting women to set up their own businesses.

This amazing lecture by a very intrepid lady gave us a fascinating insight into a country we usually only hear bad news about, but which has a rich cultural heritage of which its embroidery is an important part.

Judith Gussin

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor and Fellow Members,

Just wanted to let you know the latest turn in my ever-widening career trajectory. I have accepted a job as Lecturer in Fashion (Contextual Studies) at LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts in Singapore and will be moving out there in early February to take up a 3-year post. It's all very exciting and slightly terrifying as well, but in a very good way!

I hope you are all very well and indeed if any of you happen to be out Singapore way in the next few years I would be delighted to see you.

Emma Dick

(emma_dick@hotrnail.com)

MUSEUMS ROUND-UP

News from Paris and Sweden

The 101 year-old Musée des Arts Decoratifs, situated in a wing of the Louvre, has, been closed for many years, but reopened last September under the new name "Les Arts Decoratifs". So far as textiles are concerned, the collection's carpets are on permanent loan to the Louvre, and some tapestries are hanging in period rooms. Unfortunately, although the collection is rich in textiles, lack of funds prevents any more being on view at present. Tel. 00 331 44 55 59 02 or www.lesartsdecoratifs.fr

The Musée des Arts de 1'Asie (Musée Cernuschi) has also been closed for extensive renovation and reopened last June with a stunning exhibition of Sasanian art, including 30 textiles which you cannot rush off to see as it finished at the end of 2006, and I have been unable to discover what is on now. Tel. 00 331 53 96 21 50.

Finally, a new museum the Musée du Quai Branly also opened last June, and has an interesting collection of textiles from Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas. Tel. 00 331 56 61 70 00

Situated on a beautiful island in central Stockholm, the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities has reopened after being closed for two years. Originally established in 1926 primarily to house the archaeological collections brought home from China by Johan Gunnar Andersson, the museum was expanded in 1959 when the National Museum's collections of art and crafts from eastern and south-eastern Asia were transferred to it. The newly reopened museum contains nearly 100,000 objects, mostly Chinese archaeological artefacts and artistic pieces, but has through purchase and generous donations managed to increase its holdings of art and artefacts from Korea, Japan, India and Southeast Asia.

Margareta Alin has been appointed director of the National Museum of World Cultures at Goteborg and took up her duties there on 1 January. With degrees in ethnology, art history and archaeology she has had a distinguished career, including being Chairman of the Swedish National Commission for UNESCO. Before taking up her new post she was director of Kulturen in Lund for thirteen years, and in that capacity received a number of recognitions and awards. It sounds as though the Museum of World Cultures is on to a good thing.

Editor

BOOKS

The Culture and Costume of the Shan People

Susan Conway, *The Shan: Culture, Art and Crafts*, River Books, Bangkok, 2006, 28 x 22 cm, 212 pp, over 300 col. illus., ISBN 974 9863 06 2, hb, £35

I have been interested in Chin textiles from north west Burma for a long time, but until reading Susan Conway's book knew nothing about the Shan, with whom the Chin claim shared ancestry through the Tai. The Shan states are located in the north east of modern Burma or Myanmar, sharing borders with China, Laos and Thailand, although the population of this area by many ethnic groups long predates any imposed political boundaries. The inhabitants of the Shan States are. a mix of hill and valley dwellers, Buddhist princes and villagers. Helen Mears' article on Shan Court Textiles at the Brighton Museum in OATG newsletter No. 34, June 2006 is well worth rereading for some background and a synopsis of the changes that have taken place over time in the Shan States.

Conway's introductory chapters on the history of their settlement and the development of a shared culture are extremely interesting. In this book she focuses on the valley people of the Shan States, defined like the Chin as descendants of the Tai, who migrated from south China from as early as the first century AD. The Burmese and later the British used the term Shan to define all the Tai people living in the Shan States.

Powerful Shan princes ruled over principalities the size of small European countries, employing skilled artisans to build and decorate palaces and weavers, dyers and embroiderers to provide court dress and regalia for ceremonial use. The book is organized to span the components of this elaborate way of life, with chapters on male and female dress, palace design and construction and Shan arts and crafts. I was most interested in the dress and textiles and found the hierarchical nature of clothing and costume construction intriguing. "Correct" dress was observed by women when distinct ethnic groupings needed to be conveyed, indicating the accepted perceptions of the primitive nature of hill tribes as opposed to the civilised lowland societies, and dress was frequently varied to suit the circumstances of the wearer. In comparison to the cotton leggings of the hill women, the women of the Shan courts wore ankle length silk skirts and loose blouses. The Shan States were organised into political and social territorial units or *muong*, the less powerful of these paying tribute or taxes to the more dominant. In turn the dominant princes were tributary to the surrounding super powers of Burma, China and Siam. Those tributary to Burma were allocated court dress and regalia according to Burmese sumptuary law for the annual tribute ceremonies, and

theatrical costumes were stiffly embroidered with gold and silver thread and semi-precious stones.

In addition to the many colour illustrations of beautiful silks, the chapters on dress are crammed with 19th Century black and white photographs of *muong* leaders with their families and Shan princes and consorts in court dress, putting these textiles into a context that has all but disappeared. As with other ethnic minorities in Burma, the Shan have suffered under military rule. Forced relocation, cheap imports and the rising cost of raw materials have impacted the traditional way of life. As Conway concludes, a continued understanding and interest in this complex culture can hopefully help keep it alive.

Martha Brundin

Two New Fabric Folios

Sheila Paine, *Embroidery from Afghanistan*, ISBN 0 7141 2574 1
Shelagh Weir, *Embroidery from Palestine*, ISBN 0 7141 2573 3
both British Museum Press (Fabric Folio), 2006, 22.5 x 22.5 cm, 88 pp, >100 illus., ph, £10.99

The success of the British Museum's Fabric Folios series is founded on the authority of the authors. Sheila Paine has combined her professional linguistic skills with a lifetime's interest in embroidery. Her publications and exhibitions are based on field research, often carried out alone (see above p.23 and below p.29), supported by meticulous documentation. Shelagh Weir has been the Curator for Middle Eastern Ethnogeography at the British Museum. She has spent two decades field researching Palestinian costumes and embroidery, has curated exhibitions on Palestinian and Jordanian culture and is the author of various publications on Palestinian textiles.

Inside the front cover is an excellent statement of intent. Embroidery from Afghanistan is based on over thirty costumes, "embroideries for the home and yurt, domestic animals and precious possessions." Over twenty embellished ceremonial costumes "from rural Palestine in the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century" form the core of Embroidery from Palestine. Both authors place the items, selected from British Museum collections, in their cultural, geographical and historical context.

The Introduction gives a concise overview. Afghan embroidery must be considered in the context of war past, present and, undoubtedly, future. "Embroidery in Afghanistan often simply means survival," as women have become the providers for their families, says Paine. Weir has focused on embroideries from the predominantly Arab and Muslim rural villages which were distanced from the influences of Turkish and British rulers.

The organisation of the Design Portfolio is stated at the top of the page. For me, the photography is the strength of this series. There is a small image of the whole textile with concise notes on use, origin, date, fabric, stitches, techniques and dimensions. Front and back views of garments show their construction. It was pleasing that a few photographs of the textiles in their natural light context were included. Photographers' lights do alter the effect.

Of great interest, too, were the few pictures of embroiderers stitching. This social context is so often overlooked or just mentioned in passing. Close-ups of motifs, stitches, techniques and construction are extensively used, accompanied by text in a different font. It should be remembered that embroiderers find the back of stitches informative. It would be helpful if the scale of magnification were indicated on close-ups.

A more creative arrangement of illustrations was employed in Paine's book. Carefully selected coloured backgrounds are often more sympathetic to the subject matter than white. The white text on black background would have benefited from being clearer. In Weir's book, the edges of some close-up photographs of Palestinian embroidery were slightly out of focus.

I particularly appreciate the inclusion of a clear map, so often omitted from ethnic textile publications. The map neatly separates the text and the Design Portfolio and is easily accessible from both. Both books finish with a Glossary, Selected Reading and Museum accession Numbers.

Fabric Folios are of manageable proportions and reasonably priced and operate on several levels. They can be used as a design source or as a guide to identification. The series can be employed to extend a repertoire of stitches and techniques. Above all, they are a visual feasts for textile lovers.

Gwyneth Watkins

Reissues of Old Favourites:

1. Definitive Work on Indigo

Jenny Balfour-Paul, *Indigo*, Archetype, 2006, 28 x 22 cm, 260 pp, over 250 col. illus., ISBN 1904982158, hb, £35.95

This comprehensive source book on indigo, which is a republication of the 1998 British Museum volume, has been published by Archetype Publishing Ltd to coincide with a long-awaited exhibition on indigo, coming to the Whitworth Gallery, Manchester early in 2007 and afterwards on tour.

The subject is well researched and the reader feels the privilege of being taken along on Jenny's travels when she visited remote cultures which used different techniques to produce a wide variety of textiles, but all with the prestigious blue dye, indigo. Her enthusiasm over the 30 years is clear to see and many aspects of the subject are covered. The book can, and will be read at several levels. The interested reader will enjoy the well-written text, the supportive glossary and 150 illustrations. If a particular item fascinates, it is easy to follow the trail Jenny has laid through the notes within the text and use the bibliography for further study.

The first chapter explores the reasons for the universal love of indigo. Its use developed independently in centres throughout the world. Because of the capricious nature of

the dyeing process, mystics and ritual secrets about its production abound. The myths about its properties are examined and the fluctuations in the status of these from prehistory to modern days, are discussed. Similarly the way that indigo can be used with other dyes to make a rich range of yellows, reds and purples are discussed. At times it was as important and lucrative an import to the European markets as exotic spices. An in-depth chapter then explains the botanical features of the plant. Two varieties were grown, natural indigo in tropical climates and woad in temperate zones. Woad has low yield, suitable for wool, while foreign indigo has a higher yield suitable for cotton and flax.

The introduction to the historical context covers archaeological evidence of dyeing and textiles from prehistoric times, but where conditions for preservation are variable and dependent on so many factors such as climate and status of the burial, interpretation needs to be cautious. The Romans famously noted the Britons' use of woad. In the Classical Era, Hellenistic and Egyptian textiles with blue decoration were placed in the tombs of the rich. The heyday of indigo dyeing was in mediaeval times and large economies producing carpets and tapestries developed, especially in Europe. There was a colonial interest in cultivation and refining the dyeing process. As international trade developed it became apparent that tropical indigo was superior to the woad grown in temperate zones.

Synthetic indigo was developed over a 50-year period from 1856 from an accidental discovery of aniline dyes, from which shades of reds and yellows could be produced. The problem of the blue colour took longer to solve but then for some time natural and synthetic indigo production ran concurrently. The jeans industry has led to the revival of indigo's fortunes with the global take-over of workers' clothing in all parts of the world and fashion designers still maintaining a leading role. Controversy continues between supporters of synthetic and natural indigo and even now there is a resurgence of growing woad in areas such as Southern France.

Following the review of the world-wide techniques used to dye fabrics, the author explores the variety of decorative techniques used. Some of these are only practised in remote areas now. Samples can mostly be seen at Textile Fairs and in museums and galleries, so this section is particularly welcome.

The question of status has been touched on above. In tribal areas, beating or gumming the dark blue fabric to make a shiny surface indicates the importance of the occasion or the status of the wearer. The cosmetic effects of the plain dark blue fabric on African skins are well known. In the Republic of China where dark blue cotton clothes were universal until recently, indigo fabrics are now dyed and patterned, just for the peasantry. In Japan, where the old indigo clothes are prized and exported to western markets and art galleries, the fabric artists have a prestigious following.

In the final provocative chapter, the author poses questions of genetic engineering for diverse parts of the process, including coloured cottons bypassing the dyeing process! Jenny suggests that dyes and fabrics could be re-used. Ecological and social issues for the future

include: the uptake of so much land needed to grow indigo; recycling of the waste products in a safe way; working conditions for the workers; open field cultivation opposed to closed factory conditions. The land-expensive indigo plantations are competing with agricultural projects producing more food for the expanding population as the area available for growing food shrinks. What will be the final outcome in competing for resources?

This is a thoroughly commendable book. It is a little disappointing that the author did not have the opportunity to update the bibliography and develop some of the arguments in the final chapter; an addendum would have been excellent. Maybe that would be asking too much of an author who has presented her considerable research to a wide audience in such a well-written book.

Margaret Scholey-Hill

2. Two Textile Travel Books by Sheila Paine

Sheila Paine, *The Afghan Amulet* (first published by Michael Joseph, 1994), 2006, 285 pp.
ISBN 10:1 84511 243 1 and 13: 978 1 84511 243 1
ibid. *The Golden Horde* (first published by Michael Joseph, 1997), 2006, 309 pp.
ISBN 10: 1 84511 244 X and 13: 978 184511 244 8
reissued by Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2006, 20 x 13 cm, both with 18 col. illus., 8 maps, and several text figs.

First published in 1994 and 1997 respectively, these two books have quickly become classics, combining great travel writing with Sheila Payne's extraordinary knowledge and passion for embroidery. Her quest for the origins of a mysterious amulet found in a remote valley in northern Pakistan first takes her south through war-torn Afghanistan, into Baluchistan and across Iran and Turkey into Bulgaria.

The second book sees her travelling north to the fabled city of Kashgar, on to Urumchi and then through the great Steppes of Central Asia and southern Russia, with many a diversion on the way as she attempts to trace the lost origins of the amulet.

Both journeys, undertaken by a woman, mostly alone, in lands where this is almost unheard of, reap a rich reward in encounters with remarkable people and their fabrics. Such is the tragedy of Afghanistan that despite travelling there for the first time in 1992, when the country was embroiled in a succession of vicious mini-civil wars, on her return 13 years later, Mrs Payne almost pines for the earlier days, before modernity had begun to raise its ugly head. In 2005 her amulet, worn both as a protection and as a sign of her interests, goes largely unremarked.

And yet something positive did come from this later journey that put into perspective much of the amazing material she found and documented in these two books. "I was later to wonder why I concentrated on the triangle when, glaringly, donkeys and horses almost

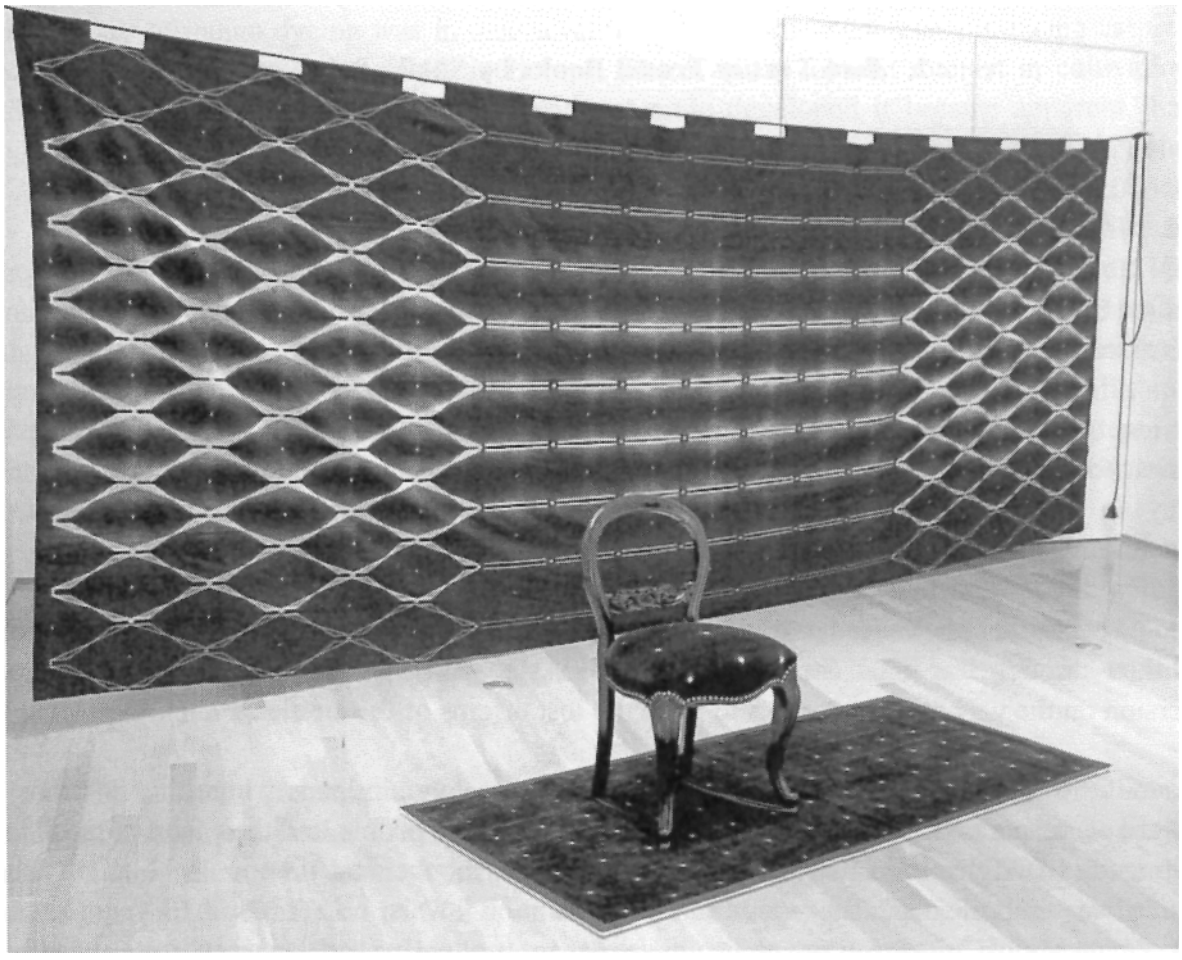
everywhere wore red pompoms and blue beads, and the hand of Fatima or a claw and cowrie shell hung round many a child's neck".

It was the realisation that amulets in all their varied forms played a central part in the spiritual life of peoples all over the world and that they were a worthy subject for study in their own right. That in turn gave rise to another book, *Amulets: A World of Secret Powers, Charms and Magic* (Thames & Hudson, 2004), which owes its origin to these two wonderful predecessors.

Nicholas Fielding

EXHIBITIONS

Indigo: A Blue to Dye For



Installation comprising large wall banner (approx. 7 x 3 m), a chair and a small carpet all executed in indigo *shibori* by Shihoko Fukumoto

Indigo, the oldest and most universal of dyes, is the subject of this exhibition which can be seen at the Whitworth Art Gallery until April and afterwards on tour. It spans indigo's rich history from linen and wool burial cloths from Roman Egypt to 16th-18th

century domestic textiles and clothing dyed in India and imported to Europe by the East India Companies. The later historical journey of indigo is traced through the rediscovery of discharge techniques by William Morris for his chintzes, and its part in the Arts and Crafts movement of the 18760s-80s and the manufacturing of synthetic indigo in the late 19th century.

In addition to historical textiles, the exhibition features the work of many contemporary craftspeople from the U.K., Japan, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, West Africa and South America, illustrating the survival – and adaptation to contemporary fashions – of indigo, and includes work specially commissioned for the show.

The process of indigo dyeing is explored through a display that examines the alchemical process of working with indigo, and includes dye blocks and dye balls, botanical drawings, and videos of cloth being dyed in various parts of the world. Exhibits include the oldest surviving indigo recipe, in the form of a tablet from ancient Babylon, and examples of indigo-dyed cloth with ritualistic or talismanic meanings.

The story has a contemporary resonance with us through the use of indigo in the manufacture of denim, used for the most commonly worn fashion items in the world to-day. As well as showing a very early pair of jeans, highlights from the story of blue denim include original garments, advertising material and movie stills from the Levi Strauss archive, together with examples of denim as used in both high and high-street fashion.

In the “blue art” section, the work of Japanese and European artists is on display.

Jenny Balfour-Paul (whose Indigo has been reissued to coincide with the exhibition and is reviewed above, p.27) has been a consultant in the preparation of the exhibition, which has been curated by Jennifer Harris of the Whitworth.

The exhibition will run at:

The Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester (tel. 0161 275 7450), until 15 April Plymouth City Art Gallery and Museum (tel. 01752 304774), 19 May - 1 September Brighton Museum and Art Gallery (tel. 01273 292841) 29 September - 6 January ‘08

Other Exhibitions in the U.K.

Welcome to China – at the Museum of East Asian Art, Bath, until 15 April. Illustrating the traditional and contemporary aspects of Chinese culture, and investigating themes such as living, eating, clothing, learning and travelling, the historical and modem artefacts on show demonstrate elements of cultural consistency and change. Tel. 01225 464640

Influences – at New Walk Art Gallery and Museum, Leicester, 3 March - 1 April. Indian artist and textile specialist Munni Srivastava introduced a group of established textile artists to the history and techniques of Indian embroidery. This exhibition is the outcome. Tel. 0116 255 4100

Overseas Exhibitions

Two exhibitions at the Textile Museum, Washington D.C., tel. 001 (202) 667 0441:

Red – an exhibition exploring the complex meanings and uses of the colour red in textiles across time and place, 2 February - 8 July

Architectural Textiles: Tent Bands of Central Asia – highlights the woven tent bands used on yurts, 30 March - 19 August.

SYMPOSIUM

The Fourth Biennial International Felt Symposium for felt artists, designers and enthusiasts will be held in Bishkek and around Lake Issyk-Kul, 18-31 July. The theme of the symposium will be *The Use of Ornamental Motifs in Traditional and Modern Felts.* There will be an associated exhibition on *Ornaments in Felting* at the Museum of Fine Arts in Bishkek, and workshops on felting will be held in the Naryn area and in villages on the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul. There will be visits to the mountainous town of Naryn, the Jety-Oguz gorge, the International Yurt Camp and historic sites around the lake, as well as participation in the Central Asian Festival of intercultural Dialogue, 27-30 July. Tel. 00 996 312 620385

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