OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

Newsletter No. 34 **June 2006**

Sazigyo, Burmese woven text, wrapped round perspex to enable both sides of the tape to be seen. Photograph by courtesy of Brighton Museum and Art Gallery. See p. 16

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EDITORIAL

You may notice a greater density than usual in the text of this newsletter. This is because my request for articles for this special Burmese number was so successful that the resulting material would have filled more than forty pages and - in the interests of your purses and a reluctance to increase the subscription - your committee rations me to thirty-two. It has been my practice to include a blank line between paragraphs, as well as indenting the first line of each, which produces the spacious look I like, but (apart from this page) all that has had to go this time. However, I hope you will find the density is only in the appearance and not in the content!

In the circumstances, I was rather relieved that the promised review copy of Susan Conway's latest book on the Shan failed to arrive in time and that one of the contributors had to cry off at almost the last minute - although from her point of view I was very sympathetic of her reasons for having to do so. Another (non-Burman) article has had to be held over to October, when I hope also to be able to include a review of Susan's book, a number of interesting snippets have ended up in the bin, and I have been rather ruthless with the scissors on what remained. Nevertheless, I am able to offer you what I hope you will agree are three excellent major articles on Burmese textiles and pack in as many goodies as possible in the rest of the space available.

As you will see elsewhere herein, the Ashmolean has finished decanting the contents of the galleries that are now in the process of being demolished. The leader of the eastern art decanting team has been O.A.T.G. member Flora Nuttgens and it was touch and go whether she would be able to get it done before her maternity leave. Fortunately she just about managed to get the last box packed before producing twin boys, James and Frank, on April 10. She and her partner, James Hordcrn, are delighted, mother and babies are doing well, and I am sure you will all join me in sending them our congratulations and good wishes.

Please note that the address of the **O.A.T.G.** website has changed to www.oatg.org.uk

PROGRAMME

Monday 31 July - Wednesday 2 August

VISIT TO MANCHESTER AND MACCLESFIELD

Monday - 2.30 p.m. Tour of the Whitworth Museum
Tuesday - Visit to Quarry Bank Mill (National Trust)
Wednesday - Visit to Macclesfield Silk Museum
Brenda King will accompany the group for most of the trip

We will be travelling by public transport all the time and plan to leave Oxford on the 10 a.m. Virgin train arriving in Manchester at 1 p.m. Bus 147 from Piccadilly station passes near the Whitworth Museum. Details of travel for the rest of the visit can be obtained from the programme secretaries (addresses below). We will stay at the centrally placed Ancoats Travel Lodge hotel (tel. 0870 191). Please make your own reservation and inform Fiona or Rosemary if you propose to join the group. There is no limit on numbers.

* * *

Wednesday 25 October at 5.45 p.m.

Advance notice of A.G.M., to be followed by a talk:

THE SHAN OF BURMA: TEXTILES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

by Susan Conway
Research Associate of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, and formerly Adjunct Professor, Parsons New School University, New York, she has worked on the Burmese Textile Collections of Denison University.

The Shan are Tai people who live in the valleys of north-east Burma (Myanmar). their culture is based on wetland rice cultivation, Theravada Buddhism and spirit religion. In the 19th century there were distinct forms of court dress and textiles that reflected political allegiance, religious practice and economic conditions.

Details in the next newsletter

For further information and to notify your intention to join the Manchester trip, contact one of the programme secretaries:
Rosemary Lee, tel. 01491 873276, e-mail: rosemary.lee@talk21.com Fiona Sutcliffe, rel. 01491 872268 e-mail: J.V.Sutcliffe@talk21.com

SHAN COURT TEXTILES AT THE BRIGHTON MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY A Recent Donation to the World Art Collection[1]

Dress and textiles in Burma (Myanmar) have always held political associations, whether through the sumptuary laws of the Burmese court in earlier centuries or, more recently, through the standardizing of forms of "ethnic" dress by minority groups seeking greater visibility and political self-definition. In some cases the association is more explicit, as in a collection of textiles and accessories which recently entered the World Art Collection at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery through the generosity of Sao Sanda Simms.

Now living in Kingston-on-Thames, Sao Sanda is part of a small community of people based in Britain, Canada and the US, who grew up within the courts of the Shan ruling families in north-eastern Burma. Most were forced to leave Burma following a military coup in 1962 when such reminders of old elites were considered a threat to General Ne Win's plans to put the country on "The Burmese Road to Socialism". The majority of members of this community are now in their seventies and eighties and provide an important living link to Shan court traditions which, in the mid-20th century, were already undergoing transformation in the face of changing political realities. A few have returned to Burma since the late 1980s when the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (later State Peace and Development Council) ended its official position of hostility towards former Shan rulers but for some, such as Sao Sanda and her siblings, the political associations remain too sensitive to ensure their safety if they were to return from exile.

Sao Sanda's father Sao Shwe Thaike was the *saohpa* of the state of Yaunghwe. The Shan, descendants of the Tai who inhabited south China from at least the 9th century BC, are an ethnic minority population within Burma but the ethnic majority within the Shan States, an area of fertile hills and valleys in north-eastern Burma which borders China, Laos and Thailand. Historically, the region was divided into nine Shan principalities or states which were ruled by the *saohpa (sawbwa* in Burmese), the "Great Sky Lord"; a hereditary, feudal leader or prince who governed from a large palace complex, or *haw,* where they lived with their extended family and other members of the court. While the principalities were relatively autonomous inter-state conflict frequently occurred as rulers attempted to extend their influence. A complex network of tributary relations also existed to maintain the power balance with more powerful rivals, including the central Burmese, Chinese and Siamese courts.

The British annexed Burma in three stages between 1826 and 1886, when they captured the royal court at Mandalay and sent King Thibaw and his wife into exile. Until the late 19th century, the largely autonomous Shan principalities remained relatively unaffected by political change at the Burmese centre but in 1886, motivated by a perceived threat from France and a broader British ambition to open the "Golden Road to Cathay" through Shan country to Yunnan, Sir Charles Bernard, the Commissioner at Mandalay, presented his *Plans for Establishing British Influence in the Shan States during the Open Season of 1887.* This influence was thus established by means of flag marches by armed columns which followed on the heels of friendly letters to the princes and chiefs promising recognition and the protection of the Queen. Consequently agreements or treaties were signed with Shan *(saohpas,)* ... who were recognised as ruling powers in exchange for, among others, acceptance

Fig. 1 "Mahadevi [first wife] with Sawbwa of Yawnghwe, full length, Burmese sunshade". A photograph taken by James Henry Green, a British Colonial officer, in the early 1920s of Sao Shwe Thaike and Sao Nang Yi, eldest of the four sisters (see over). (WA 1471)

of British supremacy; avoidance of contacts with external powers; surrendering of forest and mineral rights; and the undertaking to administer or rule in accordance with British "standards of civic discipline"[2]

The British system of indirect rule remapped the region into thirty-seven administrative divisions, with a *saohpa* in charge of the largest. While court traditions were maintained, the authority of the *saohpas* was reduced as they had to defer to their resident British officer. In 1922 this authority was further eroded through the creation of the Federated Shan States, a bureaucratic entity which demanded fifty percent of the revenue of every Shan state and rewarded the *saohpas*, through a newly-created Federal Council of Shan Chiefs, with a role which was merely advisory.

The political career of Sao Shwe Thaike well represents the tensions between the "old" Shan court traditions and power structures and the new forms of political and social organisation being established under British rule. More poignantly it reflects the threat posed to those seeking political reform under the autocratic Burmese regime which seized the country in 1962 and maintains rule today.

In 1926 Sao Mawng, *saohpa* of the state of Yaunghwe, died without an heir. A British official was appointed to administer the state until the following year when the state's Council of Ministers named Shwe Thaike as Sao Mawng's successor. The news must have come as a great surprise to his future subjects and to Shwe Thaike himself, who was one of several nephews. It came as less of a surprise, perhaps, to British officials who received news of the nomination with swift approval, as Shwe Thaike was well known within the colonial forces as Burman Officer-in-Charge of the North East Frontier.

Thus, at the age of 33, Shwe Thaike unexpectedly came to inherit the state of Yaunghwe, an area of 1,393 square miles with an estimated population of around 125,000 inhabitant[3]. After six months of special training at Taunggyi, the Shan States capital, he left his army post and moved into the traditional-style *haw* by Inle Lake. As was customary amongst Shan rulers for whom marriage was a means of forging political alliances, Shwe Thaike, now Sao (the royal title), took a number of wives: four sisters who were the daughters of the Yaunghwe Treasury Minister (figure 1, previous page) and, later, Sao Hearn Hkam, a princess from the court of North Hsenwi who would go on to forge a political career of her own.

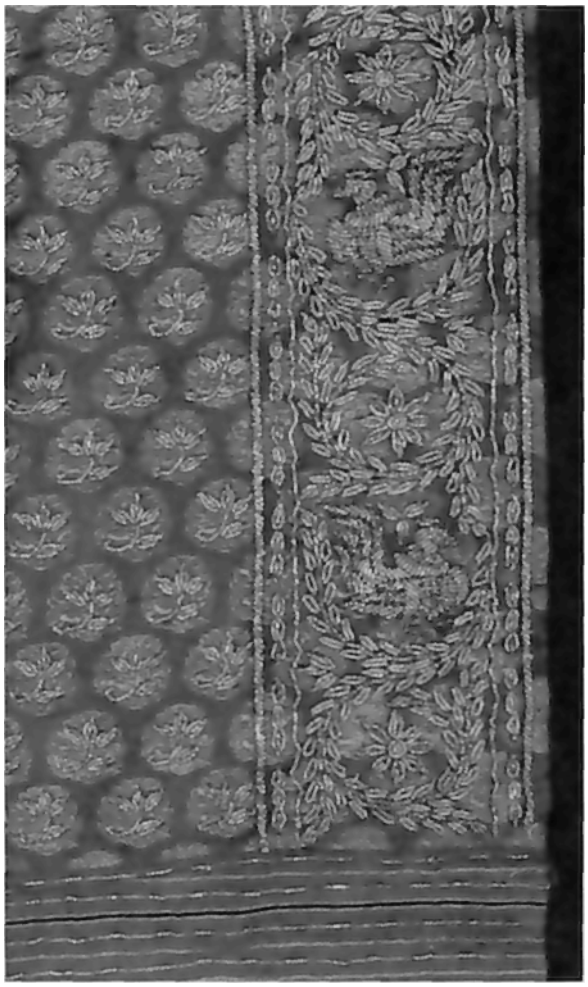

Fig. 2 Detail of a skirtcloth showing the mythical *hintha* bird,
worn by Sao Sanda Simms as a young child at her "ear-boring" ceremony
(WA 509444)

Fig. 3 Sao Sanda Simms wearing the skirtcloth featured in fig. 2
at her ear-boring ceremony, aged six or seven.
(Photograph courtesy of Sao Sanda Simms)

Sao Sanda was born at the Yaunghwe *haw* in 1928. As a child of the court, she was born into a life of privilege with the *haw's* servants, tennis courts, stables and large gardens at her disposal. Yet these advantages were balanced by the formal responsibilities of court life; official functions and ceremonies, ever-present palace guards and a prescribed – often distant – relationship with the ruler, her father. The textiles she has donated to Brighton Museum reflect aspects of court life. They include items worn by her mother, the second of the four sisters, as formal court dress: delicate ivory silk jackets, vividly coloured skirtcloths in the royal *luntaya acheik* ("hundred shuttle weave") design and intricate gold brocade shawls. They also include a child's skirtcloth elaborately decorated with gilt thread embroidery and sequins to form patterns and a strip of motifs running vertically down the opening in the form of the *hintha* bird, a mythical creature (figure 2, opposite). The skirtcloth was worn as part of ceremonial dress, with a similarly decorated jacket, shoes and hat, by Sao Sanda at her "ear-boring" ceremony, a formal occasion customary for princesses of the court (figure 3. above). The collection also includes two lighter silk skirtcloths with horizontal bands of colour, in a northern Shan style, which Sao Sanda wore as a young woman as "everyday" dress and a calf-

length tunic associated with the Taungyo, an ethnic group who reside in the area, which she was presented with on a tour with her father.

As *saohpa*, Sao Shwe Thaike sought to manage traditional expectations alongside the changing demands of modern political life in Burma. In his public life he took a prominent role in lobbying the British government for greater Shan autonomy in the run up to independence, attending a series of round table conferences in London in the 1930s and serving as president of the brief-lived but politically significant Supreme Council of the United Hill Peoples (SCOUHP) in 1946. In his private life his commitment to reform could be seen in his insistence that his children use the respectful titles reserved for elders when addressing servants and the high priority he gave to education; Sao Sanda and other siblings studied at British universities and, unusually, one of his wives continued her education after marriage.

In 1947 Sao Shwe Thaike's ambitions for increased Shan autonomy led him, alongside other ethnic minority leaders, to sign the Panglong Agreement, a guarantee of the rights of Burma's ethnic minorities to choose their own political destiny in the proposed independent Union of Burma. The agreement was orchestrated by Aung San, an emerging nationalist leader who laid much of the groundwork for Burma's eventual independence from British rule in 1948 but whose violent assassination in July 1947 presaged the conflict and divisions which would continue to haunt the new nation. Aung San's protégé U Nu became the country's new Prime Minister and Sao Shwe Thaike its first president.

When his term as president ended, Sao Shwe Thaike's services were retained by U Nu's government as Speaker of the House of Nationalities until 1960. It was a largely formal position which left him powerless to intervene when a series of uprisings flared up across the Shan States, in part a response to an influx of Burmese soldiers who sought to rid the area of Chinese nationalist forces and conducted their campaign with scant regard to Shan inhabitants. Led by young people frustrated with the increasingly centralised and Burmese-centric form of government in the capital Rangoon, the conflicts spread in size and number throughout the Union, slowly eroding its stability.

Sao Shwe Thaike too was disturbed by the government's apparent disregard for the spirit of co-operation established at Panglong, though he chose constitutional means in finding a resolution. On release from his government post he founded a federal movement which sought constitutional reform to enable a more equitable distribution of power. U Nu, a pragmatic politician, agreed to meet leaders of the movement and, in mid-February 1962, a "federal seminar" began in Rangoon at which the ethnic minority leaders were allowed to put their case. Coming on top of the spate of violent insurgencies, the hardliners within the government and, particularly, the military viewed the federal movement as merely another form of insurgency threatening to disrupt the unity of the Union. On 2 March 1962 they made their move. Troops surrounded all the key points in the city and Ne Win seized power. U Nu, his Cabinet ministers and the leaders of the federal seminar were arrested. Sao Shwe Thaike was taken from his home at bayonet point. His youngest son was shot and killed on the night of the coup and Sao Shwe Thaike himself died in military custody shortly afterwards.

Although some of Sao Shwe Thaike's political aspirations lived on through the efforts of his family, thereafter in exile, his death meant the loss of one of Burma's most committed and persuasive endorsers of a multi-party system of government. It also marks the end of the

unique form of social and political organisation that had been the Shan court system. Sao Sanda Simm's textiles, which join a growing collection of Shan court dress and artefacts now at Brighton Museum collected by colonial officers and Shan exiles, offer a tangible link to a world – still just within living memory – already experiencing momentous and long-lasting change.

Helen Mears, Curator of World Art, The James Green Centre for World Art,
Brighton Museum & Art Gallery

1 With thanks to Sao Sanda Simms for sharing her time, knowledge and memories.

2 Chao Tzang Yawnghwe, *The Shan of Burma, Memoirs of a Shan Exile*, Singapore, Institute of South East Asian Studies, 1947, p. 47

3 Shan States and Karenni List of Chiefs and Leading Families (corrected up to 1939), Simla, Government of India Press, 1943, p. 12

Fig. 4 Commemorative bag given to James Henry Green by Sao Shwe Thaike, then President of the Union of Burma, on an official visit to Britain. (WAG000005)

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LAKHER WOMEN'S CLOTHING IN THE PITT RIVERS MUSEUM

The Lakher

In the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford University there are some textile pieces collected in an area in the extreme south of the Lushai Hills in Assam, labelled as being of Lakher origin. The Lakher tribe is one of the Chin clans from Burma. The Chins are pre-Christian settlers inhabiting the mountain chain that runs up the western side of Burma into Mizoram in northeast India. The term Chin covers a wide-ranging and diverse group of people, both geographically and ethnically. It has been possible to document almost a hundred tribes categorized as Chin in records kept during the period of British occupation from 1886 to 1937. When the British first took possession of the western border of Burma there was much confusion about the correct designation of tribal names in the area. The Bengalis, Indians and Burmese all referred to the many indigenous groups by different names. Though the Chins primarily called themselves Zo, Chin being the name given to them by the Burmans, the British adopted official designations based on their own assessment of regional distribution, which bear little correlation to the way the various Chin or Zo tribes referred to themselves.

Origin of the Chins

In his history of South East Asia, Hall states that ancestors of the Burmese were probably to be found among the Chi'ang, pastoral tribes constantly raided by the Chinese for sacrificial victims. The Burmese were part of the Chi'ang migration to northeast Tibet in the first millennium, and again when they moved south to escape the continuing raids. The Burmese then came under the influence of the T'ai kingdom of Nanchao in Yunnan. Here they learned useful skills from their overlords, including the cultivation of hills and plains. A desire for independence led them on to the plains of Upper Burma where they fanned out to cross the Irrawaddy[1]. It is believed that the first Chin settlements were at this time in the Chindwin valley. After the arrival of the Shans in 1283 however, the Chins were driven from the plains up into the Chin Hills. Lakher tradition says that they came from the north, originating in the Haka subdivision of the Chin Hills and crossing the Koladyne River to settle as a separate tribe in the southern Lushai Hills, where they have been for between 200 and 300 years[2].

Lakher Textiles

The textiles in the Pitt Rivers Museum were donated by Major J. Shakespear, who was named Assistant Political Officer of the South Lushai Hills territory in 1890[3]. In his book on the Lushai Kuki clans, J. Shakespear acknowledges the incorrect designation of tribal names by the British. He includes in his descriptions of the different groups a section on the Lakher, and gives their own name for themselves as Mara, Lakher being the name used by other tribes to refer to them[4]. Shakespear confirms that the main area of Lakher habitation is in the loop of the Koladyne River southwest of Haka, which is in the extreme south of the Lushai Hills district, and bordering on Northern Arakan.

Shakespear describes Lakher women's clothing as "several petticoats reaching almost to the ground held up by a massive brass girdle". The upper skirt is described as "an elaborately worked piece of silk"[5]. Women also wear a jacket comprising two very short sleeves joined at the back and tied loosely together in the front. In a detailed monograph of

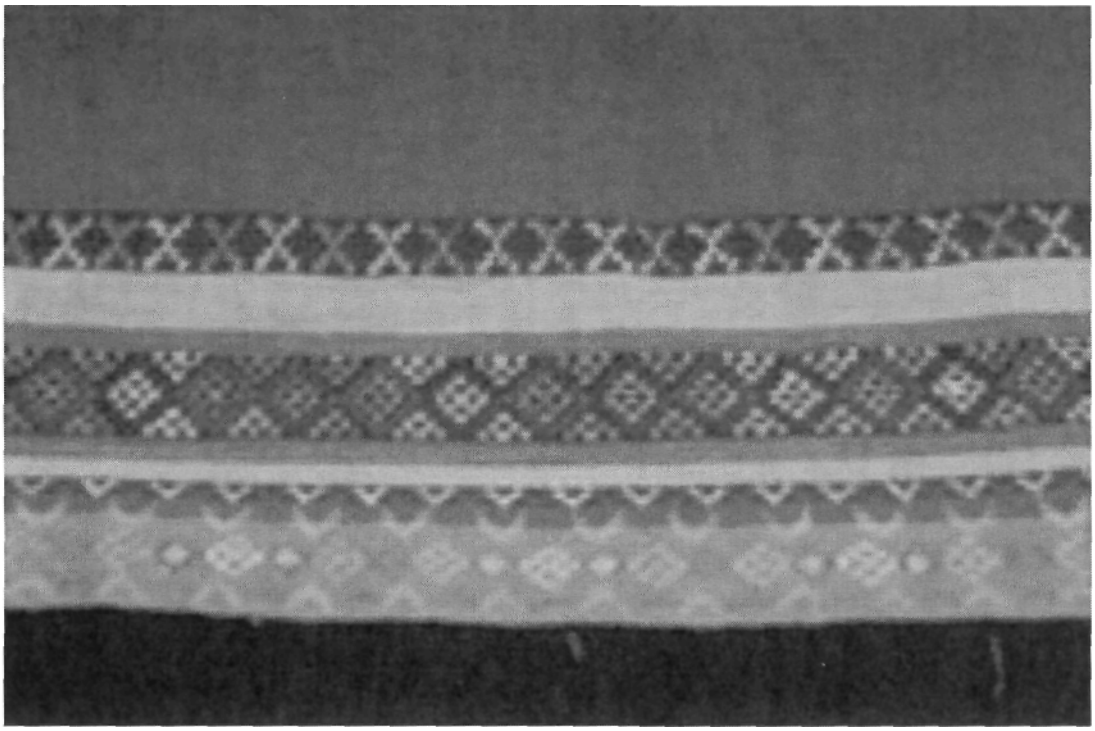

Fig. 1 Woman's underskirt (PRM 1928.69.1229)

the Lakher, N.E. Parry, who was District Officer in Assam in the 1920s, names the items worn by Lakher women. The dark blue cotton petticoat or underskirt, the lower part of which is "embroidered in silk," called a *cheunahnang* (fig. l above). The *cheunahnang* collected by J.P. Mills in 1928 is constructed from two loom widths stitched together and wrapped horizontally round the body. The majority of the underskirt is loosely woven in coarse indigo dyed cotton. A more finely woven section 394 mm wide of coloured warp stripes completes the skirt bottom, and supplementary weft designs of crosses and diamond shapes form bands of patterning around these. If it is plain blue it is called a *hnangra,* if embroidered, a *vianang.* The *vianang* in the Pitt Rivers was also collected by J.P. Mills in 1928. It is constructed from three loom widths, and wrapped round the body in the warp direction. The upper and lower widths are identical, 183 mm wide each and dyed deep indigo. There is one zigzag stripe, woven as supplementary weft in very fine over spun pale blue cotton along each outer selvage and three along the inner edges where each section joins the central width. The centre section of the overskirt is 343 mm wide and constructed from black cloth with weft strips of purple bordered by white. The supplementary weft technique has been used to insert white triangles that divide each stripe into a series of lozenges, and in the centre of each lozenge is a diamond motif, also supplementary weft, probably silk, in yellow, orange, red, pale blue and dark green. The overall effect is very geometric and eye dazzling, with pinpoints of colour against a dark background. The overskirt is long enough to cover all of the coarsely woven indigo section of the underskirt, leaving only its decorative striped panel showing at the bottom.

According to Parry ordinary skirts and petticoats are wide enough to go once round the body, though Shakespear says one and a half times. They are held up by metal belts or girdles worn around the waist. There are different kinds of belts, each with its own name, and numerous belts are worn, the number being an indication of the wealth of the wearer.

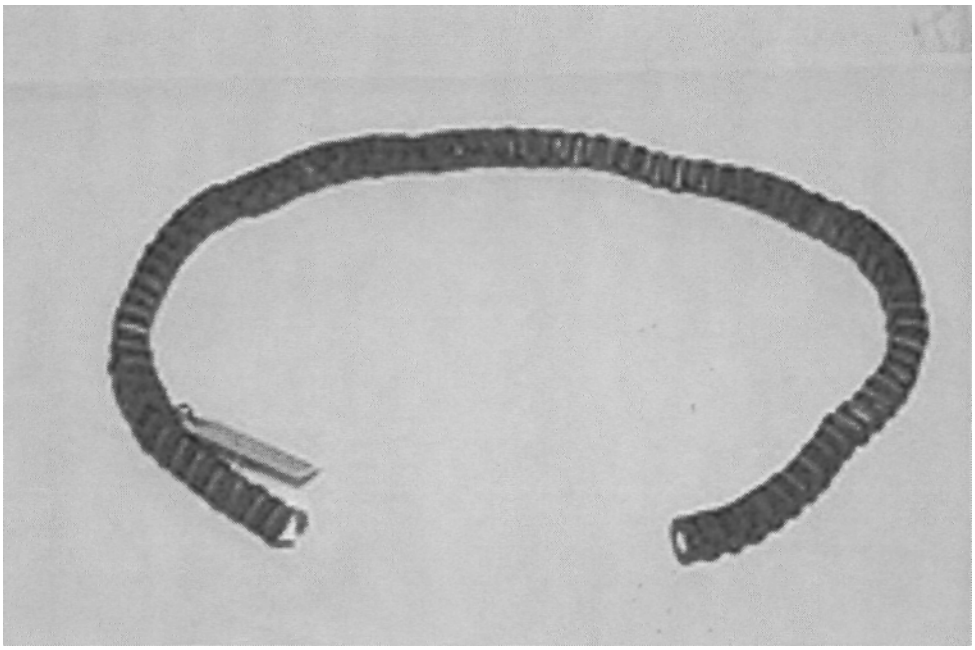

Fig. 2 Woman's girdle (PRM 1928.69.1224)

Pride is also taken in the belts being well polished, the sheen being acquired only as they are worn. The girdle in the Pitt Rivers (fig. 2, above) is a *hrakhaw,* a length of brass links made from flat pieces of metal bent into circular forms and interlocked in alternating directions, similar to a box chain. The individual links are roughly 6 mm x 12 mm and the girdle is extremely heavy. It doesn't appear to be complete however, as there is no system for fastening, unless the final links were tied or pinned together.

On the upper body women wear a small sleeveless jacket called a *kohrei,* which is open or loosely tied in front, with a gap between the bottom of the jacket and the top of the skirts. Col L.W. Shakespear collected a Lakher girl's bodice or *kohrei* in 1923 (fig. 3, opposite). This is constructed from two loom widths long enough to drape one over each shoulder, and they are joined together down the back and sides only. Openings are left for the head and arms, and the open front has two strings on either side to close it. Each width is identical, with a tripartite division of patterning in the balanced plain weave. Three decorative coloured edge and central bands with inlaid designs separate two plain bands of maroon running up the front and down the back of the jacket in the warp direction. The bottom of the jacket is distinguished by a series of narrow stripes in different coloured weft threads. An elaborate band of inlaid diamond motifs then sets off a broad weft-faced band in red, which obscures the warp design and runs horizontally around the body. After another band of the diamond patterns, at the centre point of the front and back, are four weft stripes in bright yellow, which appear to be a twill weave. This could also be achieved with a supplementary weft by allowing the inlaid thread to float over more than one ground weft with the floats aligned diagonally. It is the only garment on which this pattern appears.

Women also have a shoulder cloth for additional warmth, and Parry names seven different varieties worn by both men and women, the most common of which is the *chiaraku,* a plain white cloth with two broad black bands running through it[6].

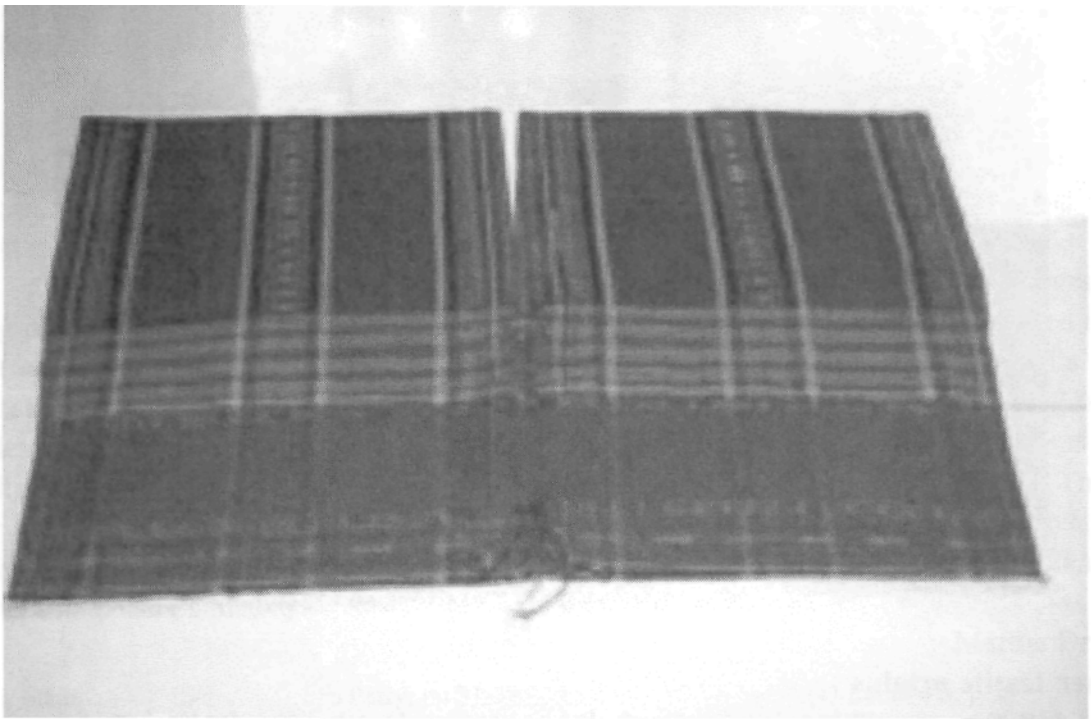

Fig. 3, Girl's bodice (PRM 1923.13.12)

Construction

Parry says that cotton is locally grown and harvested, (according to the webIndia site, the name Lakher came from their method of plucking cotton with a stick, *la* meaning "cotton" and *kher* meaning "to pluck or remove with stick"[7]), spun on a spinning wheel, then over spun on a drop spindle. Yam is left two-ply when particularly course thread is needed but over spun thread is used where it needs to be more durable. The yarn can be used undyed or white straight from spinning or dyed as skeins. What Parry refers to as dark blue is indigo-dyed. In addition a deep maroon colour probably comes from stick lac, a residue obtained from insect deposits in tree bark, which is the most widely used red dyestuff in mainland South East Asia. Mud, barks, roots and varieties of indigo also produce blue-black colours. Lakher women weave on a back strap loom attached to house uprights. An assistant warps the loom while the weaver holds the tension and inserts the lease rods and heddle. A tripartite structure is common in many clothing items, with identical side panels separated by a central insert, the widths being limited by the backstrap loom technique.

The technique that both Shakespear and Parry called embroidery, which richly ornaments most Chin textiles, looks more like a supplementary weft technique. Parry describes the process thus: "the pattern is worked in between the threads with a porcupine quill, small pieces of coloured cotton or silk being used. The single heddle loom can only be used for plain weaving; for an elaborate pattern a number of heddles is necessary to hold up alternate quantities of warp. A full sized pattern cloth takes seven to eight months to complete."[8] This concurs with Irene Emery's description of supplementary wefts being laid into the ground wefts in the regular sheds of a ground weave, which is usually a balanced plain weave. Pattern variety is possible by using floats, and discontinuous wefts make frequent colour changes between individual motifs possible[9].

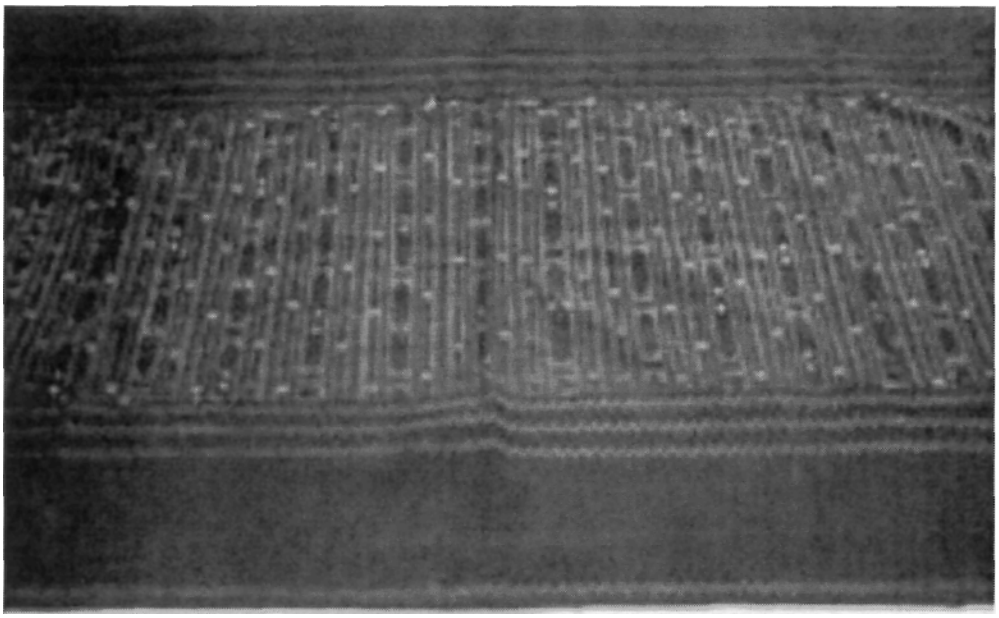

Fig. 4 Woman's overskirt (PRM 1928.69.1224)

Lakher textile origins

Influences on Chin textiles as a whole can be traced perhaps as far back as 8th century China, and to the Dongson culture, which had its source in South East Asia in the second half of the first millennium. In the 8th century BC, tribes from South East Europe left their original dwelling places migrating eastwards into southern China, and also south into Northern Indo-China. They were assimilated into the indigenous populations, and introduced a very metrical style of decorative art, which developed rapidly during the period of Dongson culture[10]. The Dongson geometrical style could well have spread further afield along the Silk Road, which passed through Burma on its route to India as early as the 1st century BC. There is evidence of Dongson influence in the textiles of other South East Asian countries. The *ragidup* cloth of Indonesia is decorated by means of a supplementary weft technique. Simple geometric motifs are placed next to each other in strict regularity in pattern bands of varying widths that run across the cloth[11].

Tai decorative motifs are another possible source for early influence on the textile designs of the Lakher. The Tai are an ethnic group made up of several sub-groups who inhabit Burma, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and parts of Eastern India and Southern China. The Tai are believed to have come originally from Yunnan in Southern China and slowly, over many centuries, moved south into Burma and other countries settling along the rivers. They are identified as an ethnic group on the basis of language and culture, including the distinctive decorative patterns on their textiles[12]. In Burma the Tai are the Shan groups, who intermixed with the Zo people from an early date. In Vumson's history of the Zo people he reports that many legends, including those of the Lakher, tell of their relations with the Shans[13].

It is important to note, as Robyn Maxwell points out, that changing notions of modesty have contributed to the development of new garments and new applications of existing fabrics. Various foreign influences have gradually encouraged changes away from the traditional rectangular and cylindrical cloths, dictated by the loom, toward more structured clothing[14]. The arrival of the British in Burma, accompanied by Christian missionaries from

the United States and Europe, had a major impact on traditional indigenous dress. Among the Southern Chin the British government ordered that men's loincloths should be wider and women's skirts longer than the traditional length. Parry feels that even more responsible for making changes was the Christian mission. His only criticism of the Lakher mission, however, was that the boys in the school had to wear shorts and cut off their distinctive topknots. "It is difficult to understand why Christianity should invoke denationalisation. There is no virtue in cotton drawers or in short hair."[15]

The current political instability in Burma has also brought about radical changes. The ruling junta continues to carry out harsh programs of ethnic cleansing, which have led to the flight of hundreds of refugees daily over the Burmese borders into Thailand and India. With the loss of ethnic individuality in Burma, so too is disappearing the large and diverse group of textiles that were traditionally produced by the indigenous population. Such events only highlight the critical importance of collections like those in the Pitt Rivers Museum. There is a wry irony in the provenance of the collection under review however, as we have these precious textiles safely preserved at the Pitt Rivers only as the result of another calamitous moment in Burma's history.

Martha Brundin

1 Hall, p.136
2 Parry, p.2
3 Barjupain, p. 98
4 Shakespear, p.213
5 Shakespear, p.215
6 Parry, pp 31-39
7 Webindia 123.com/Migoram/People
8 Parry, p. 104
9 Emery, p. 141
10 Langewis, p. 13
11 Langewis, p.35
12 Conway, pp 20-22
13 Vumson, pp 35-36
14 Maxwell, p.24
15 Parry, p.20

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O.A.T.G. SUBSCRIPTIONS

This is just to remind you that subscriptions are due on or before 1 October. We have valued your membership and hope you will renew. Rates remain at £10 for individual membership or £15 for two or more people living at the same address and sharing a newsletter. Payment may be made by sterling cheque drawn on a U.K. bank, Euro cheque drawn on an E.U. bank, U.S. dollar cheque, international money order, or bank transfer to the Membership Secretary, Joyce Seaman. Better still, ask her to send you a banker's order form and save yourself the annual strain on your memory. Joyce's address is 5 Park Town, Oxford, OX2 6SN; tel. 01865 558558; e-mail: e-art-asst@ashmus.ox.ac.uk

SAZIGYO: TEXTILE TEXTS

Discovery

My fascination *with sazigyo* began in 1991 on the steps of the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon, when I bought in a curio stall several plastic bags full of a tangle of dirty cotton tapes mixed with termite-earth and candle-grease. Insects and mould must have invaded the *sadaik* manuscript chests in some derelict monastery, reducing the flimsy palm-leaf manuscripts to dust, but leaving more or less intact their tough woven *sazigyo,* manuscript binding tapes. Cleaning, sorting and cataloguing took many months of puzzlement and delight. A few had just geometric motifs, but most had long woven texts. What could these mean? With help, I learned to read bits of the texts, to pick out the names of the donors and the date of their donation. When we left Burma my wife and I gave our collection of *sazigyo* to the James Green Centre in the Brighton Museum. Several are currently on display in the World Art gallery, and all are available to researchers.

Techniques and Tools

Also available to researchers is a detailed analysis of the techniques of tablet weaving used by the Burmese women weavers, which Brighton commissioned from Peter Collingwood. This and Peter's great book are the source of all I know of the techniques of tablet weaving, and of its history. All *sazigyo* are tablet-woven, using from 28 to 52 tablets, each with four holes. Only two textile structures of the many possible are used: warp-twining and double-faced weave. The latter makes possible the two most striking features of the tapes: the text lettering and the images of beasts, birds, bells and other ritual objects. In the finest tapes both can be rendered with great delicacy. The yarn is always cotton, varying in thickness. In the coarsest tapes the yarn is of uneven thickness, which indicates hand-spun, but all the finer tapes use machine-made yarn, probably imported from Britain. The fineness of the work in the Brighton collection of tapes varies widely, from 38 to 123 warp-ends per centimetre width.

The tablet loom used for weaving *sazigyo* consists of a 1.5 metre-long plank, fitted at each end with a movable block of wood. One of these blocks incorporates a peg round which the warp ends are wound, and the other has a roller for winding up the finished part of the tape. In Mandalay in 1911 the great ethnographer Lucian Scherman, director of the Munich Museum, photographed a *sazigyo* weaver at her loom (fig. 1, opposite) and noted that weavers used 38 tablets of lacquered deerskin, and a flat beater of polished hardwood. He remarked that weavers sitting near each other exchanged gossip while weaving complex lettering! Each tape starts with a loop and ends with a cord for tying. The flat double-faced weave between loop and cord can be 3 to 6 metres long, and 11 to 30 mm wide: this space is available for text and images. Modern tablet weavers reckon that a fast worker would take at least 50 hours to complete a finely woven script tape 5 metres long.

History

Tablet weaving is known from 600 BC in Europe. Scripts woven in the past include Greek, Latin, Persian and Arabic. The double-faced technique, which permits woven lettering,

Fig 1 The loom and tools used by the *sazigyo* weaver in this photograph taken by Scherman in Mandalay in 1911 are described in detail in Scherman (1913).

may have reached Burma from India via Arakan in the 18th century. The oldest dateable *sazigyo* are over 250 years old. The Brighton collection includes a tape dateable by its text to 1874, and many with woven dates from 1892 to 1928. Several are dated 1907. The market for *sazigyo* declined in Burma as printed books replaced palm-leaf manuscripts, and the craft of weaving lettering (but not that of tablet weaving) died out in Burma in the early 1970s.

Functions

The term *sazigyo* means "cord for tying manuscript leaves into bundles". In Burma as elsewhere in South East Asia the sacred scriptures of Theravada Buddhism were written with a metal stylus on the cured leaves of the talipot palm *Corypha umbraculifera.* A single manuscript could comprise hundreds of folios about 40cms long by 10 cm wide, strung together, protected by a pair of wooden covers and stored in a cotton or silk cloth sleeve or bag *(kabalwe),* often stiffened by bamboo splints. Round the whole parcel was wound the *sazigyo,* tied by a loop at one end and a cord at the other. Every part of this 'parcel' was donated to a monastery by Burmese Buddhists, usually a married couple, eager to accumulate merit for a favourable rebirth. Donating scriptures to a monastery was a sure way to earn merit, and each manuscript commissioned from the scribe was provided with its own *sazigyo* commissioned from a specialist weaver. The long flat tape was often woven with the text of a prayer composed for the occasion, and with geometric and pictorial motifs. So the tape had two functions: as textile, it bound the manuscript securely in its cloth bag; and as text, it recorded the donors' deed of merit.

Colours and lettering

The ground colour of the earliest known *sazigyo* was brown like monks' robes. Plain red and indigo blue are common in 19th century examples. In all these "two-colour" tapes the text is in undyed natural cotton. After about 1900 imported hard thread in a huge range of

colours allowed weavers to produce tapes in six or more colours. In the finest tapes the lettering is wonderfully neat and small: the round parts can be 3 mm in diameter. In some multicoloured tapes several colours are used for the text area, letters have more than one colour, and text legibility diminishes as the palette expands.

Fig 2 (left) *Sazigyo* wound round its manuscript, showing the cord; (right) both loop and cord.

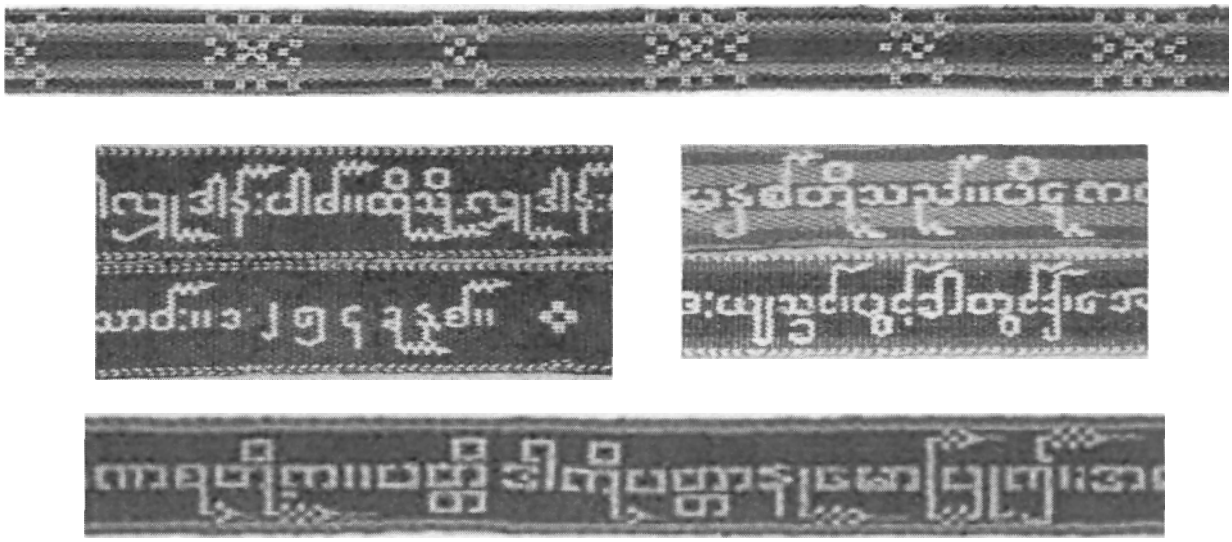

Fig 3 Top: a textless tape, with geometric motifs; (centre left) two tapes dated 1891, with bold, clear lettering in natural on red, and (right) two four-colour tapes dated 1898, with large round script; (lower) a tape only 11 mm broad, with small square lettering, natural on red, dated 1907.

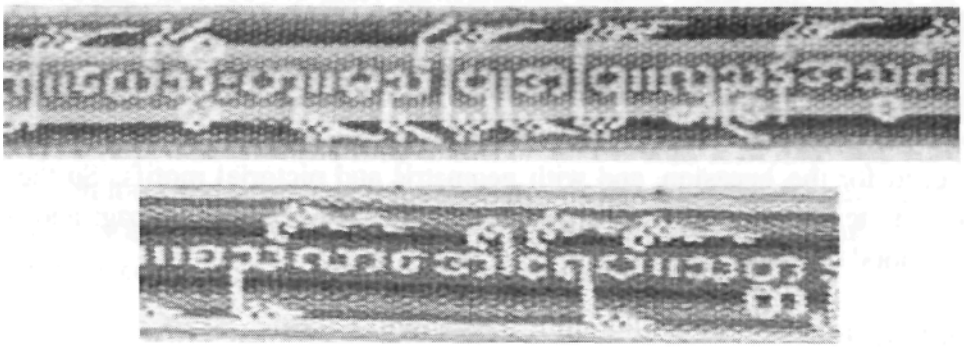

Fig 4 Two six-colour tapes from 1907, both with neat round multicoloured lettering with very elaborate ‘tops and tails’, which tends to reduce the legibility of the text.

Text messages

The language of *sazigyo* is Burmese, but most texts open with a standard invocation of auspiciousness in Pali, the language of the Theravada Buddhist scriptures. *"Zeyattu!"* "May this donation succeed!" (i.e. in earning merit for the donors). The main text that follows can be up to 5 metres long, with 80-100 4-syllable *pada* verses. These verses are sometimes counted in the text; after every 10 verses a parrot gives the running total.

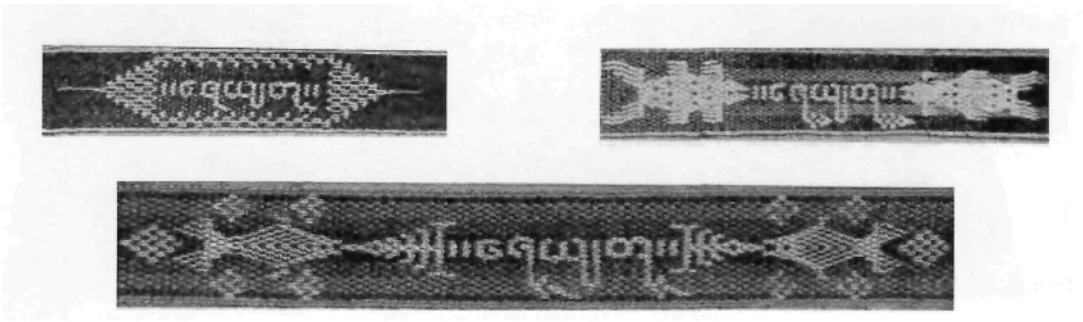

Fig 5 *"Zeyattu!"* initial invocation; in a fancy lacy cartouche (top left); between two large fishes (top right); and bracketed between fish which appear to breathe out the text (below).

The main text that follows can be up to 5 metres long, with 80-100 four-syllable *pada* verses. These verses are sometimes counted in the text: after every 10 verses a parrot gives the running total.

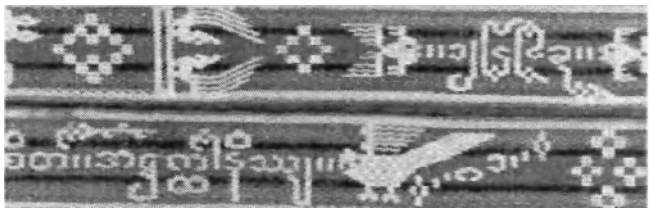

Fig 6 (upper) paired birds, Burmese date 1269 (=1907) between fishes; (lower) parrot at end of text, and under its tail the total number of verses, '81', on which the weaver will base her charge.

The verses praise the donor couple and name their close family. Then in a set phrase the donors declare that they seek Nirvana, and call on human and celestial beings to applaud their deed and to share its merit: *"Thadu, thadu!"* "Well done!". Often the date of the donation appears. The weaver may add the total verse-count, her own name and even the price she asked.

Here are two texts, chosen for flavour and brevity, given in full in English. First, a *sazigyo* donated by a couple living in Rangoon about 1910: "Businessman U Shway Do and wife Ma Aye and daughter Ma The Nu of Singapu Ward, Pazundaung, Rangoon, paid the cost of writing this gilded manuscript of the *Tipitaka* and hope to attain Nirvana; they call on human and celestial beings to approve and applaud their deed of merit by calling out *"Thadu!"* "Well done!".

The second is high-flown in style, but does not name the donors: it was probably not specially commissioned, but sold ready-woven: "Wishing to free [myself] from the one thousand five hundred kinds of ignorance, I promote the *Tipitaka*, the golden scriptures, with

reverence and generosity. May the merit thus gained free me from the four woeful states, the eight unfortunate places, the five enemies; and may I reach the happy realm of Nirvana."

Woven motifs

The terms "ornamental" or "decorative" are misleading. In Burmese art little or no ornament is devoid of religious meaning. A single tape may have dozens of apparently simple woven block-pattern, but most of these have nine elements – the ancient *navratna* or "nine gems" motif, a talisman for invoking the powerful protection of all nine planets.

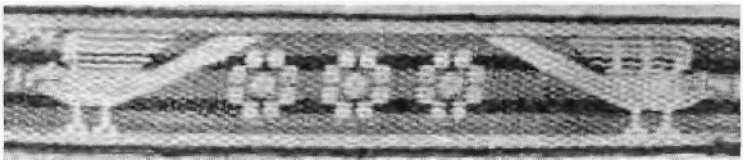

Fig 7 In a tape of 1907, pairs of parrots act as brackets at each end of a text; *navratna*, auspicious nine-gems motifs, occurring between texts.

The great charm of *sazigyo* is the range of elaborate pictorial motifs. These woven images of mythical beasts, stags, horses, elephants, frogs, and fish show the exuberant virtuosity of the weaver, but also have some religious significance, even if for a few this is still to be discovered. The *chinthe* lion and the *manuthiha* double lion-bodied sphinx are both architectural features of the approach to the pagoda platform. The stag stands for the teaching of the Buddha, since it was in the deer park at Isipatana that his first sermon was preached. The *keinara*, bird-man symbolises the marital fidelity of the donor couple, as do paired birds. Some images are the birthday beast of the donor, such as the tusked elephant (Wednesday forenoon), and the Naga serpent-dragon (Saturday).

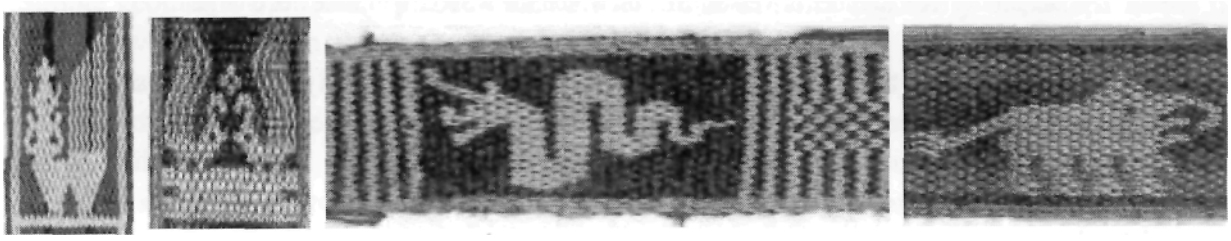

Fig 8 The *keinara* man-bird (left) and the paired birds symbolise marital fidelity. The *naga* serpent-dragon, and the tusked elephant are donors' birthday beasts, respectively of Saturday-born and those born on Wednesday forenoon. All from sazigyo woven between 1890 and 1910.

Many images depict ritual objects associated with the performance of merit-earning acts. The *sazigyo* is itself the record of a deed of merit, and its text is preceded and followed by sequences of images, which imitate the stages of the ritual performed by a devout Burmese Buddhist visiting the pagoda.

Sequence of images

The first image on the tape is often a *chinthe.* Pairs of these mythical bearded lions flank the stairway up to the pagoda platform. A single Nat on a waisted throne represents Thagya Min, king of the celestials, who is invoked at all Burmese Buddhist rituals. A *manuthiha* may appear here: these double-bodied "sphinxes" fit corners of the perimeter of a pagoda compound. A sacred fig tree appears on the tape, as on the platform, where watering it is a pious act.

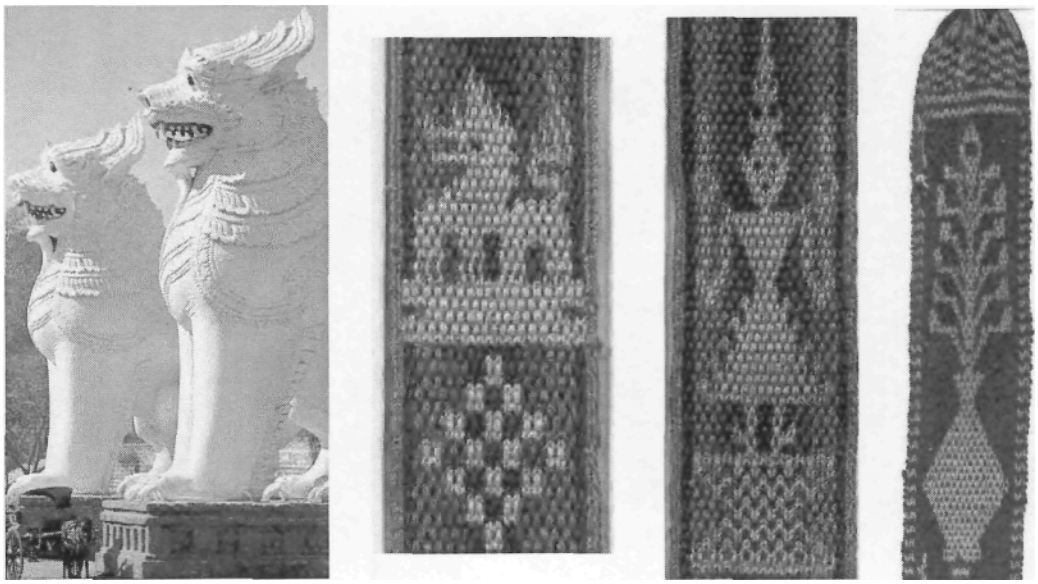

Fig 9 Tall masonry *chinthe* lions flank the steps to Burmese pagodas (left); woven *chinthes* appear before the text of the *sazigyo;* King of the Nats, Thagya Min, stands on a waisted throne *(palin);* and (right) a sacred fig-tree, which is watered by pilgrims visiting the pagoda.

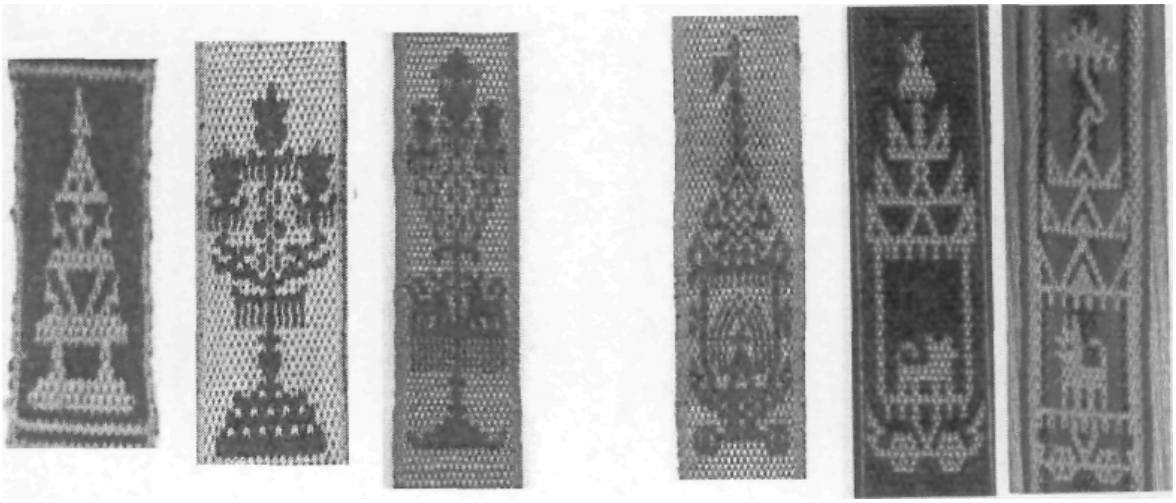

Fig 10 Left: Three *padaythabin,* tree-like stands for hanging offerings, a. three-tiered, with a conical *hti* atop; b. elaborate niched pedestal, with a three-branched stand, each branch holding a vase; and c. another elaborate stand, with a pair of lions on the first tier. All circa 1870. Right: Three model wheeled floats, which carry gifts of gold leaf up to gilders working high on the pagoda during regilding. The passengers in the vehicles, a peacock (left) and lions may represent the monetary value of the donation and generosity of the donors.

The *padaythabin,* a tree-like stand for hanging gift-offerings (see left, fig. 10, previous page) frequently appears on the *sazigyo,* to symbolise the donation. Bells and other objects are shaded by an umbrella *(hti),* or by a *pyathat* multi-tiered roof, both attributes of the Buddha and of royalty. The umbrella or *hti* is also a symbol of donation: a small white or gilt paper model *hti* is an essential component of all offerings made before the Buddha images on the pagoda platform, and the pagoda is itself crowned with an elaborate gilt metal *hti.* The peacocks and lions riding these vehicles may stand for the monetary value of the donation, and the donors' generosity. Both beasts appear on the gold and silver coins of the period.

Broadcasting the donation

The *sazigyo's* main text recording the donors' meritorious act is now followed by woven images of the set ritual which concludes the religious duty. Charity is not performed by stealth in Burma. The devout donor strikes a bell three times, to invite the spirits of the air and humans within earshot to call out *"Thadu!"* [Well done!] and share in the merit of the deed. Often he will strike the ground three times, to placate the subterranean spirits and offer them too a share in the merit. This sequence is depicted on the woven tape in a sequence of images. First comes the round bell with its crooked striker of deer-antler, then, the flat, eared gong *(kyizi)* with its hammer. Struck on the corner it spins, emitting a surging vibrato note.

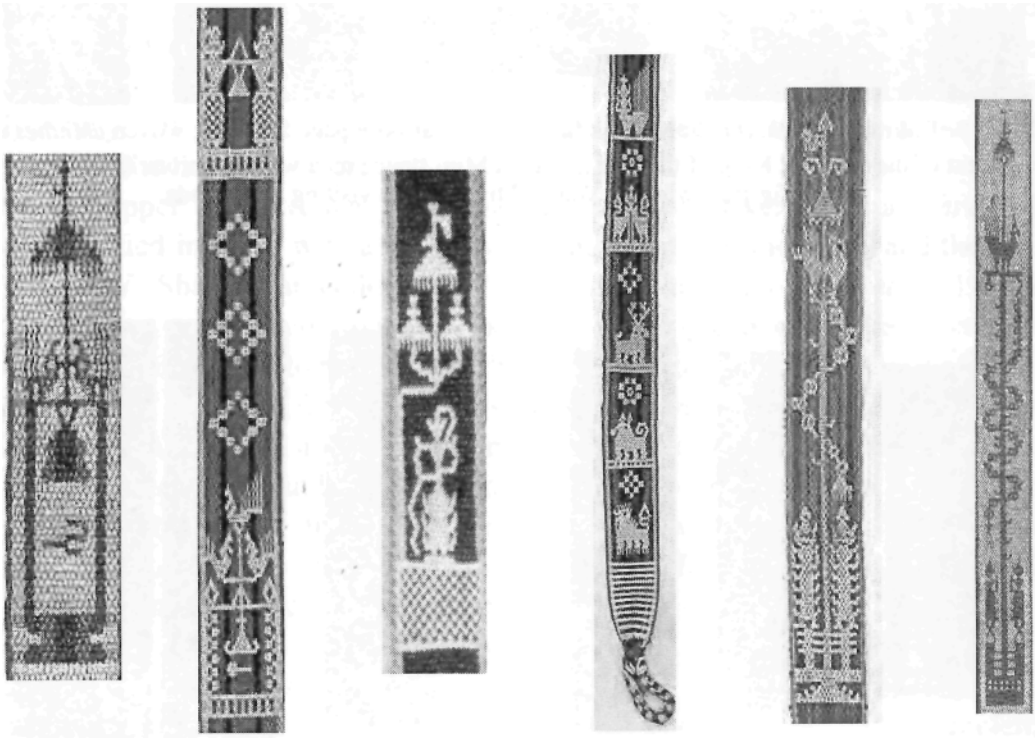

Fig 11 (abc) Bells (Left) round bell with striker beneath; paired *keinaras* on the posts, under a *hti* umbrella; (centre) round bell (upper) supported by Nats, and (lower) a flat, eared gong *(kyizi),* three birds standing for the strokes; and (right) a Nat holding a staff, three *hti* here represent three thumps on the ground. Fig. 14 (def) First and last images: (d) a tape starts with a series of auspicious beasts, *chinthe* lion, horse, stag, *manuthiha.* and *keinara;* (e,f) *dagondaing,* last image on many sazigyo; two Nats support the base; a *hti* umbrella and weather vane above, under which a *keinara* sits on a high perch, from which a long pennant floats down.

Last, a Nat figure holding a stout staff with which to thump the ground. Three birds or three *hti* umbrellas above the bells and Nat figure signify the three strokes. Finally, the last image to appear on the tape, and by far the longest (up to 20 cms), is the *dagondaing,* the tall flagpole with two Nat supporters and keinara or *hintha* bird atop; this is visible from a distance as the pilgrim approaches or leaves the pagoda.

Weavers' signatures

Weavers based their charges on the length of text, or the number of verses. A long text must have taken a week or ten days to weave, and the price asked for the work sometimes appears on the tape just after the total number of verses. A very skilful weaver may even add her name. It is wonderful to read the names of women weaver artists who worked 100 years ago.

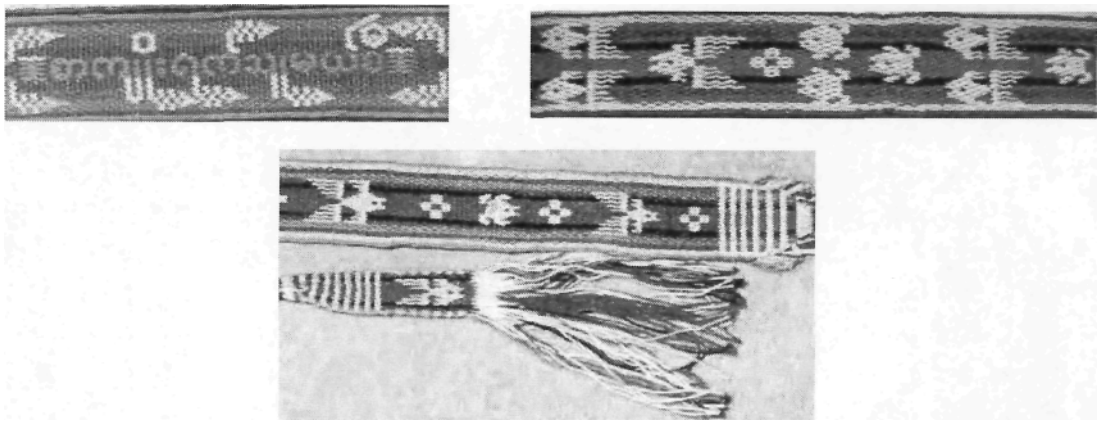

Fig 12 (top left) Signature "The weaver of this tape is Meh Si", (top right) Frogs race fish; (below) the fish wins, reappearing on a flat area after the cord and just before the tassel.

Conclusion

Sazigyo, manuscript binding tapes, are truly textile texts. Many illuminate the social and religious context in which the donors conceived their acts of merit. The finest of these tapes are technically and aesthetically superb, a monument to the skill and flair of Burmese women weavers.

Ralph Isaacs

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Elizabeth Dell & Sandra Dudley (eds) *Textiles from Burma* (London, Philip Wilson 2003) The small section on *sazigyo* by Ralph Isaacs is Ch 5.2 pp 102-113.

Linda Hendrickson's website (www.lindahendrickson.com) pictures a fine sazigyo, and lists her own tablet-weaves and instructional books for adults and children.

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Mi Mi Gyi (Shwebo Mi Mi Gyi) *Pay sa htouk cho hma taung sa mya (Collected texts of manuscript binding tapes)* (Rangoon, Sarpay Beikman 1993) In Burmese. Good black-and-white drawings of motifs, but most half-tone photos are poor.

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REPORTS OF O.A.T.G. MEETINGS

Sayma: the Kyrgyz Art of Embroidery

On 15 March the meeting-room of the Pauling Centre was transformed into a yurt as author and journalist Nick Fielding covered whiteboards, tables and windowsills with all kinds of embroidered Kyrgyz textile articles – storage bags, bowl covers, bellows holders, screens and women's headdresses dazzled the assembled Group members with what the speaker called their "boisterous and playful" designs.

Following a recent trip to Kyrgyzstan, Nick has embarked on a mission to publicize these embroideries more widely. When researching his trip, he was struck by how little scholarship on them was accessible in English: at the British Museum, he was shown slides of Stephanie Bunn and Sarah Posey's *Striking Tents* exhibition, and had come across works by the American John Sommer. A book on the work of the "mother of Kyrgyz ethnography", Klavdiya Antipina, a Russian who spent much time in Kyrgyzstan in the mid-twentieth century, is due to be published this summer.

That embroidery and textiles are an enduring tradition in Kyrgyz culture was demonstrated by a vivid quotation from the lengthy Manas epic, not written down until the 1930s and documenting how things were done in purely nomadic times: the dowry of a young bride is described thus – "All the most precious materials there.
Where did she find them all, say where?
Rolls of this and scrolls of that,
Thin as paper, thick as a mat.
When she still was very young
Her collection she had begun."

Nowadays, not all the Kyrgyz are nomadic but in the south people continue the tradition of moving up to high pastures in the summer and living there in decorated felt yurts, just as they have done for centuries. The embroidery traditions there have taken influences and motifs from neighbouring Uzbek and Tajik tribes. In the north, the emphasis is more on felt-making and applique, and these have been influenced by Siberian practices and designs.

The speaker considered that Kyrgyz yurts are the most highly decorated in Central Asia: the colourful embroideries have more distinctive patterns and are sewn onto a greater variety of articles. He pointed out lunar and solar motifs, which pre-date Islam, and an embroidered motif which seemed to symbolise the Russian double-headed eagle. As well as slides of domestic textiles, he showed slides of horse-blankets and embroidered chamois trousers, reflecting the equestrian culture of the nomads. A few embroidered articles incorporated ikat pieces from what is now Uzbekistan. A section of slides was devoted to square storage bags (Ayak Kap), all different but immediately identifiable as from Kyrgyzstan.

Sadly, Nick's observations had led him to conclude that while felt-making is alive and well in Kyrgyzstan, the traditions of embroidery are a dying art: the pieces he showed all dated from 1890 to 1920.

Copies of a helpful *Glossary of Kyrgyz Names and Expressions for Embroideries and Fabrics* were circulated by the speaker.

Jennifer Glastonbury

Fibre-Banana Cloth

On May 24th Amanda Mayer Stinchecum gave a talk entitled *Bashôfu: Japan's Folk Craft Movement and the Creation of a New Okinawa. Bashôfu* is the name of the cloth woven from fibres of the banana plant, *Musa balbisiana,* which although not indigenous to Okinawa, grows throughout the length of the Ryûkû Islands, stretching between Kyûshû and Taiwan.

The focus of the talk was to identify *bashôfu* as a medium through which outsiders have defined and manipulated Okinawan identity since World War II. The Japan Folk Craft Movement, in particular Yanagi Sôetsu, was responsible for carrying this through by promoting *bashôfu* as the emblem of an idealized and homogeneous Okinawan culture.

Since the 16th century *bashôfu* has clothed all ranks of people of the Ryûkû Islands. Today, the cloth, either plain, patterned with stripes, checks or *ikat* in indigo or brown, is worn at religious festivals and dance or drama performances. There remain weavers throughout the islands, who make the fabric for these garments, However, as a result of Yanagi's visit in 1939, to the village of Kijoka, in the northern part of Okinawa Island, where he observed the complicated and time-consuming process of the making of this fabric, *bashôfu* has become an important part of the identity of the people of Okinawa. In 1943, Yanagi published an essay "A Tale *of Bashôfu*" which underlined the creation of beauty by anonymous craftsmen.

During World War II much of the island's material culture was destroyed. After the war, Tonomura Kichinosuke, a weaver himself and founder of the Kurashiki Folk Craft Museum took under his wing, a group of Okinawan women who had been making aeroplane parts in a converted spinning mill. He taught them the skills required to produce *bashôfu.* One of these women was Taira Toshiko, who subsequently returned to Kijoka. In 1947, inspired by Yanagi's 'Tale of *bashôfu*' and encouraged by other key members of the Japan Folk Craft Movement, she took charge of the project at Kijoka and brought the industry back to life again. A modest and shy woman, she won many awards for her work and in 2000 was designated a 'Living National Treasure' by the Japanese government. Her rolls of fabric, although not always signed, now sell for huge sums of money, chiefly to mainland Japanese buyers. This might seem far from the original idea of an anonymously produced, ordinary, inexpensive object made for daily use. However, as Amanda concluded, 'Kijoka *bashôfu*....transcends its elite status, achieving a kind of Okinawan universality by referring back to its popular origins'.

Joyce Seaman

STOP PRESS: There is to he a study day on *Islamic Art in the Middle East* at the Victoria and Albert Museum on Saturday 29 July, 10.30 a.m.–4.45 p.m. It will deal with Islamic arts in general and although there are no specific textile sessions, discussion of themes and motifs will cover textiles as well as the other decorative arts. Tel. 020 7942 2000.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Patterns and Culture Network

Dear Editor,

I write in my capacity as Director of the University of Leeds International Textiles Archive (www.leeds.ac.uk/ulita). We are about to submit a grant application to the Leverhulme Trust for funding to create an international, interdisciplinary network of institutes who are concerned with textiles and dress (particularly historic, archaeological, ethnographic and cultural aspects of both fields), their collection, documentation and display.

Our initial intention is to bring together academics, curators and museum personnel in a spirit of collaboration in order to:

Systematically identify and describe current research and scholarship across the subject areas mentioned above;

Communicate details of relevant conferences, seminars, exhibitions and other events;

Allow members of the network to explore possibilities of joint research projects, joint publications, joint or shared exhibitions, and sabbatical leave/visiting fellowships.

The network will operate under the title of the Patterns and Culture Network (to be interpreted in a wide sense). It is our further intention that membership to the network and attendance at a number of organised events will be free, and that a small budget will be available to allow members subsidised travel to meetings and events.

We feel that there may be O.A.T.G. members who belong to institutes of which ULITA is unaware, whose participation would be both valuable and beneficial in order to ensure that the proposed network will serve the needs of the textile and dress community. I should appreciate it if any such would or could extend their support for this initiative by expressing an interest in the network formation in the form of a short reply e-mail addressed to me. I should also be happy to give them more detailed information.

Michael Harm

Professor M. A. Harm,
Chair of Design Theory and Director of the University of Leeds International Textiles Archive
m.a.hann@leeds.ac.uk

MUSEUMS ROUND-UP

Last December an innovative international project was launched, the Musee sans Frontieres (MWNF), involving museums in fourteen countries around the Mediterranean and Europe. Museums in these countries have selected Islamic objects, monuments and historical sites, to form a virtual museum which explores Islamic art and sculpture. The U.K. is represented in the project by the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the National Museums of Scotland and Glasgow Museums. The other partners in the scheme are Algeria, Egypt, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey.

The MWNF is a non-governmental organization based in Brussels and aims to bring together and share these inter-relating collections, monuments and sites, making links that have never been made before. Visitors to the website (www.museumwnf.org) can explore the fascinating history and art of Islam and the special cross-cultural exhibitions that are being planned.

You may remember that in the October 2003 newsletter (no. 26), I reported the closure of the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow for a multi-million-pound makeover, just when I had discovered it possessed an important collection of Japanese textiles. "Closed for three years" they said at the time, and "optimistic" I muttered. However, their optimism was justified and it is to reopen next month with 8000 objects on display. Whether there are Japanese textiles amongst them remains to be seen, but whether or not, I hope to be able to include an article about them in a later issue.

While on the subject of Glasgow museums, I am sorry to have to report that for budget-balancing reasons, with the exception of Kelvingrove and the Museum of Modern Art, they are all closing on Mondays from now on for the foreseeable future.

Work at the Ashmolean has now reached the point where all galleries behind the Cockerell building (the part of the museum fronting on Beaumont Street) have been closed, including all the Eastern Art galleries. The space formerly occupied by them will eventually house 39 new galleries, planned to open in 2009 – let us hope the building record will be as good as Glasgow's. Meanwhile, the objects formerly on display in the galleries now being demolished are all packed and stored away except for 200 of the most important (including one of the Shaw collection of Central Asian ikat coats), which form an exhibition, open in the McAlpine Gallery for the duration, under the title *Treasures of the Ashmolean.* Special arrangements will be made for anyone needing to do so to see any of the objects in store, providing they are readily accessible.

By contrast, in London two galleries that have been closed for several months are reopening: the Near Eastern gallery at the V. & A. in August and the Japanese galleries at the British Museum in September.

The appointment of Dr Clare Pollard to the post of curator of Japanese art at the Ashmolean was reported in last October's newsletter (no. 32), and she has now taken up the post. Unfortunately my paragraph about her then contained some inaccuracies, so I am taking this opportunity of putting the record straight. Clare has had a long association with the Ashmolean, as she did her doctorate on the Meiji potter Makuzu Kozan with Oliver Impey. After finishing her thesis she worked as the Curator of the East Asian collections at the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin as I mentioned before. What I did not realize last October, however, is that she moved from there in 2004 and between then and now has been working as Curator of Japanese Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney. By coming back to England when she did, she has managed to get in two summers in a row!

From across the Atlantic come two pieces of news from the Textile Museum. First, Murad Megalli, an investment banker living in Istanbul, has generously donated a collection of 148 Central Asian ikats "of dazzling beauty and graphic eloquence" , including many coats, to the Museum. Secondly, O.A.T.G. member Marilyn Wolf, who has for some time been an active friend of the institution is one of three new Trustees recently appointed to the Board.

Editor

BOOKS

David W. & Barbara G. Fraser, *Mantles of Merit: Chin Textiles from Myanmar, India and Bangladash*, River Books, Bangkok, 2005, 25 x 22 cm, 288 pp, 650 illustrations, ISBN 974 986301 l, hb.

On March 27th 2006 Burma held the first major public event in its new capital Pyinmana, which is, notably, in the centre of the country and surrounded by jungle-covered mountains. The event marked the annual Armed Forces Day and General Shwe spoke of the need for a stronger and more efficient army as part of the seven-step plan for democracy. Since the ruling junta, now named the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), seized power in 1988 Burma, whose name was changed to Myanmar by the SPDC, has been racked by civil war, ethnic conflict and military repression. The SPDC continues to carry out harsh programmes of ethnic cleansing, which have led to the flight of hundreds of refugees daily over the Burmese borders into Thailand and India. Given the increasing and intentional isolation of Burma and the imposed travel restrictions, particularly in areas where ethnic minority villagers live, the research that has resulted in this magnificent book is to be commended. The loss of ethnic individuality in Burma is already having its effect on the traditional textiles produced by the indigenous population and it is important to document this before the knowledge is lost.

There are five major ethnic groups in Burma, of which the Burmans are now the dominant. Within these major groups there are many sub-groups or tribes, each of which traditionally maintained its own forms of identity, particularly evident in tribal dress. In this book the authors have focussed on the Chin, one of these five, with some fifty tribal sub-groups, each distinctive in its language, way of life and production of textiles. Consequently, the book has much ground to cover but David and Barbara Fraser seem to have left few stones unturned. The large and diverse amount of material has been well organized and the authors explain clearly the reasoning behind their choices of terminology. The organization of material into headed paragraphs within each of the eight chapters enables the reader to select areas of interest and level of detail in an almost encyclopaedic manner and there seem to be photographs and drawings to illustrate every point.

For a book of this length and scope the bibliography seems fairly short. This is not surprising when you consider that the Chin have no written history. The authors begin by giving a concise introduction to the background history and culture of the Chin, where they explain this problem and give a thorough breakdown of the source material that has been available to them. They have used historical sources to determine their own division of the Chin tribes and textiles that the book covers, dividing them into four geographical areas based on their textile traditions.

The title *Mantles of Merit* can be explained by G.H. Luce, now widely regarded as the foremost European scholar on Burma, who wrote during his 1954 tour of the Chin Hills, “Chin blankets are not just clothes. They are visible moral or physical qualities, registering attainment and achievement”. The authors chose the term mantle to imply something that enfolds or enwraps, and thus refers to the near total absence of tailoring in Chin textiles. The simplicity of garment forms is countered by the incredible variations in the textiles themselves. The authors’ deconstruction of textile structures, covering loom types and

warping methods to woven structures and patterning techniques, is extremely complex. Detailed diagrams accompany all examples, which is advantageous because some of the written explanations are so complex as to require multiple readings and a dissection of the diagrams to fully comprehend the processes, even for an experienced weaver. However, the clear organization of the content and the meticulous depth of detail, along with the inclusion of over 600 excellent photographs and illustrations, make this book an essential reference work for specialists and non-specialists alike.

Martha Brundin

New Books not Seen

The Textile Museum Thesaurus, a compilation which has taken some years and used the expertise of a large number of specialists, including our own Ruth Barnes, was described in process in newsletters nos. 20 (October 2001), pp 8-9, and 21 (February 2002) p. 25. It has now appeared, price $5, and is available at the Museum's shop (tel. (+1) 202 667 0441, ext. 29) or online: www.textilemuseumshop.org

Lee Kyung Ja, Hong Na Young & Chang Sook Hwan (translated into English by Shin Joo Young), *Traditional Korean Costume,* Kent, 2005, 21.5 x 20.5 cm, 335 pp, 200 col. illus & 600 b/w drawings, ISBN 1905246048, hb, $95.

The first book of its kind to appear in English, this volume contains commentary and illustrations of garments, ornaments and footwear dating back to the Shoson Dynasty (1392-1910), including specific measurements and methods of production.

Sappho Marchal (translated from the French by Merrily Hansen), *Khmer Costumes and Ornaments of the Devatas of Angkor Wat,* Orchid Books, Bangkok, 20.5 x 15.2 cm, 128 pp, 44 b/w plates & numerous drawings, ISBN 974 52405 75, pb, $16.95

Frances Pritchard, *Clothing Culture: Dress in Egypt in the First Millennium A.D.,* University of Manchester Press, June 2006, 30 x 24.4 cm, 160 pp, 195 illus., ISBN 0-903261-57-X, £25.

An in-depth study of the Whitworth Art Gallery's acclaimed collection of clothing from post-Pharaonic Egypt, most of which was excavated between 1888 and 1923. The evolution of the shape and cut of garments is traced from the late 3rd to the 10th Century, as well as weaving and sewing techniques and the style, decoration and colours of the clothes.

Onume Sunao, *Masterpieces of Japanese Dress from the Bunka Gakuen Costume Museum,* Bunka Gakuen Costume Museum, Tokyo, 2005, 30 x 23 cm, 199 pp, 70 col, illus., ISBN ? , pb. $65

The collection comprises modem court costumes perpetuating historical traditions, late Edo period townspeople's kosode, Edo period military dress and No robes.

EXHIBITIONS

Faraway Festival Costumes of the Minorities of Ghizou Province, South West China

Dong woman dyeing cotton cloth in an indigo vat, one of Gina Corrigan's photographs in the exhibition

Hampshire County Council Museums and Archives Service is pleased to have the opportunity of showing some of Gina Corrigan's collection of costumes from the Chinese Minorities of Guizhou Province, never publicly displayed before, at three venues this year (see over). This exhibition showcases visually spectacular embroidered and decorated festival costumes, and highlights traditional textile skills, of some of China's poorest minority people, from the Guizhou province of South West China. Methods of weaving, indigo dyeing, wax resist, and the complexities of the skirt pleating and garment construction are featured, as well as a fabulous variety of embroidery techniques.

Not only does the collection of costumes belong to Gina Corrigan, the stunning photographs that accompany the exhibition were taken by her; they illustrate the geography of the terrain, the often laborious physical nature of the techniques employed, and the way the costumes looked on their original owners and makers. The photographs in themselves, as well as the costumes, are an absolute feast for the eye! In fact, Gina's photographs were to be the original focus of the exhibition, but the initial idea very quickly expanded – in discussions with Gina – to include "a few costumes" and as soon as she started laying them out for us to see they stole the limelight and now constitute the main body of the exhibits, changing it from a two dimensional, to a fully three dimensional exhibition.

China is actually home to 56 official ethnic groups. Yet the Han make up 92% of China's vast population and it is Han culture which most of the world recognises as Chinese. However, a further 55 minority peoples constitute the rounded picture of Chinese culture. Every group is defined by its own language; each has its own recognised territory, with historical and mythological links, and distinctive customs, which of course include dress. The exhibition highlights several of these groups from Guizhou, giving an insight into the amazing variety of techniques and the skills required to make such garments. The use of colour and design is often theatrical; the skills of spinning, weaving, dyeing, wax-resist and pleating employed and clearly passed down through the generations are remarkable, and the range of embroidery skills and combination of different techniques within one item, make these costumes especially interesting.

The costumes and accessories will be variously mounted on mannequins and suspended from wall mounts, or displayed in showcases. There are jackets, baby carriers, shoes, leg wrappings, skirts, aprons, headwear and jewellery. Gina's team, with Ruth Smith (independent researcher, Chairman of the South East West Region of the Embroiderers' Guild, and author of a book on Miao embroideries from Gina's collection) started to explore the textile techniques specifically of the Dong, Bouyei, Yi, Shui and other minorities in July 2005, and are nearing completion, so we have some wonderful descriptions of the textiles to accompany the displays. In addition, Gina's detailed geographical and technical text, and fabulous photographs, have been imaginatively presented on display panels by Nikki Johnson of the Recreation and Heritage design team.

The exhibition is to be shown initially at;

Eastleigh Museum, (tel. 023 8064 3026) 8 July-19 August
Aldershot Museum, 26 August-14 October
Willis Museum, Basingstoke, (tel. 01256 467294) 1 November-Christmas

The exhibition is designed to tour beyond Hampshire – interest has already been expressed from Horsham Museum, and we hope it may catch the eye of the Pitt Rivers and Brighton & Hove, our partners in the South East Hub. Tel. 01962 286700

Alison Carter
Senior Keeper of Art and Design, Hampshire Museums Service
Tel. 01962 286700 e-mail: alison.carter@hants.gov.uk www.hants.gov/museum/exhibitions

Other Exhibitions in U.K.

Appliqué – An Exhibition at Joss Graham Oriental Textiles (10 Eccleston Street. London) until 15 July, including Jain ceiling canopies, contemporary bed covers from Rajahsthan, Central Asian tent hangings, cushion covers and Khatwa narrative textiles from Bihar. For workshop see below p. 32. Tel. 020 7730 4370

Clothing Culture: Dress in Egypt in the First Millennium A.D. – Stunning and colourful garments preserved in the dry desert of Egypt form the core of this exhibition at the Whitworth Art Gallery until 10 September. They reveal changes in style in children's and adult's clothes over 600 years, the survival of woven-to-shape clothes in the Near East and their continued influence on design. A lavishly illustrated book by curator Frances Pritchard accompanies the exhibition (see above, p. 29). Tel. 0161-275 7450

Khmer Silks - Buddhist textiles from Cambodia showing the symbolic role they play in ceremonial and religious life and celebrating a revival of old silk-weaving traditions in the country. This exhibition at the Horniman Museum until 25 February 2007 includes a specially commissioned *pidan* depicting scenes from the life of the Buddha. Tel. 020 8699 1872

Overseas Exhibitions

Designing the Modern Utopia: Soviet Textiles from the Lloyd Cotsen Collection – at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass., 26 July to 21 January 2007. Picturing a unique Soviet experiment in social and sartorial engineering, this exhibition features textiles and drawings from 1927-33 when costume design was used to help turn the wearer into a "Soviet person". More than a hundred items from the Collection are supplemented by information about the political, artistic and technological context in which they were produced.

Saudi Arabian Women's Dress – at the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden, late October to the end of January 2007. A small exhibition by the Stitching Textile Research Centre of urban and nomadic outfits, showing how cut, materials, colour and range of decoration are used to indicate the wearer's social and tribal affiliations. The display also shows how in the east of the country the long-standing Indian Ocean trade has given women access to materials produced in Iran and India, while in the west the annual influx of millions of pilgrims to Mecca has influenced dress, especially in the Hijaz and Asir regions. Many of the exhibits are from the collection acquired last year from O.A.T.G. member Josephine Kane (see newsletter no. 30, February 2005).

CONFERENCES, LECTURES AND OTHER EVENTS

Events at the Textile Museum, Washington, D.C. – Lunchtime talks: *Southeast Asian Textiles* by Mattiebelle Gittinger, 22 June, 12 noon; *Islamic Textiles,* Sumru Belger Krody, 6 July, 12 noon; Rug and Textile Appreciation Morning: *Oriental Rugs from S. W. Iran,* David Zahipour, 24 June, 10.30 a.m.
Tel. +44 (202) 667-0441

Appliqué: Techniques and Traditions – All day workshop and accompanying gallery talk in connexion with the *Appliqué* exhibition at Joss Graham's gallery (see above p. 31), Saturday 1 July. Tel. 020 7730 4370

Textiles and Text – A reminder that a conference under this title, focussing on the links between archival and object-based research is to be held at the Textile Conservation Centre, Winchester, 11-13 July. Papers will cover a wide geographical remit and a broad chronological span. Tel. (conference secretary) 02380 597100

Clothing in the Near East up to A.D. 1600 – Early Textiles Study Group's 11th Biennial Conference at Ashbourne Hall and the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, 8-10 September. Further details may be obtained from Frances Pritchard at the Whitworth Art Gallery, e-mail: frances.pritchard@manchester.ac.uk

The Knitting and Stitching Show – at the N.E.C., Birmingham, 14-17 September; Alexandra Palace, London, 12-15 October; R.D.S., Dublin, 2-5 November; International Halls, Harrogate, 23-26 November. For more information visit www.twistedthread.com

Textile Narratives and Conversations – The tenth biennial symposium of the Textile Society of America will be held at the Harbourfront Centre, Toronto, Canada, 11-14 October (http://textilesociety.org/symposia).

New Directions in Persian Carpet Studies – 20-22 October at the Textile Museum, Washington, D.C. Drawing on an exhibition of Persian carpet fragments, the symposium will focus on the history and current state of Persian carpet studies and will consider new and original work of potential interest. For more detailed information, visit www.textilemuseum.org

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