

# OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

Newsletter No, 2 October 1995

## OUR INAUGURATION

The Oxford Asian Textile Group had a splendid start to its first event with a private view of the exhibition *Embroideries from Islamic Journeys* at the Pitt Rivers Museum. Fifty or more people came to the evening. After visitors had had a chance to look at the exhibition and take refreshments, Sheila Paine gave a wonderful "walk-about" introduction to her collection of embroideries on display. We saw the black dress with 647 inserts and rich embroidery which had first inspired her quest. The embroidered amulet motif on the shawl that was worn with the dress echoed the beaded amuletic triangle which hung on the front of the dress. Amulets, protection against evil, were everywhere - there was even a photograph of amulets hanging from a tree in Sind (South Pakistan). In addition to the amulet theme, there was a fascinating variety of other embroidered pieces - from boys' caps to a white shirt, finely worked in white, and the colourful cover of a Kalashnikov rifle! It is difficult to convey in words the vibrancy of this exhibition - it certainly gave the group a great feeling of enthusiasm on the occasion of its inaugural meeting.

The first General Meeting followed in the Lecture Room at 6 p.m.. Ruth Barnes addressed the meeting and said that she had been surprised by the response to the idea of setting up this group. Though news had been mostly by word of mouth, there were now about 150 people on the mailing list. She said that though there were an estimated 10,000 Asian textiles in Oxford, the collections were hardly known. She hoped that by forming this Asian Textile Group in Oxford there could be an integration of information and ideas about the Oxford collections and about Asian textiles in general.

As an example Ruth told how she discovered the history of the collection of wonderful Central Asian ikat coats recently exhibited in the Ashmolean. For many years they were hidden from view in a great chest, accessioned but never exhibited. She had found out that they had come via the former Indian Institute in Oxford, to the Ashmolean. But it was only after talking to Julia Nicholson at the Pitt Rivers that she had discovered that the coats had been the property of Robert Shaw, author of *Travels in High Tartary*. Thus followed the exhibition, *Dressing for the Great Game: The Robert Shaw Collection*, recently shown at the Ashmolean, much aided by this co-operation between museums.

Those helping to organize the group were introduced: Julia Nicholson, Felicity Wood and Marietta Bottomley. Phyllis Nye had sent her apologies. The feeling was expressed that there was so much expertise within the group that it could have a particular value in solving other mysteries associated with the collections in Oxford.

Ruth explained that the aim of the group would be to have three meetings a year open to all members, as well as study days and other events for more limited numbers for which a charge would probably have to be made. The newsletter will be issued three times a year and includes not only the Group's forthcoming programme, but also information about events and lectures in Oxford and elsewhere. It was hoped that there would be book reviews, inquiries and letters, as well as reports on research, and articles, long or short, on any subject likely to be of interest to the group. Contributions are invited.

The meeting finished with a great sense of enthusiasm for the future of the group.

Felicity Wood

### **MORE ABOUT THOSE EMBROIDERIES FROM ISLAMIC JOURNEYS**

For those of you who, like me, were unable to go to the inaugural meeting of the Group, there is another chance to hear. Sheila Paine on *Embroideries of the Afghan Amulet* when she speaks on the subject to the Friends of the Pitt Rivers Museum on Wednesday 13th December at 5 p.m.. If you are not a Friend you will still be welcome, but are asked to make a contribution towards the Friends' purchasing fund.

Two embroidery workshops will also be held in connexion with the exhibition - on Saturday 4th November 1995 and Saturday 10th February 1996. For further information and bookings, phone 01865 270931.

And, of course, the exhibition continues to run at the Pitt Rivers until 30th March 1996.

### **CHINESE TEXTILES AT THE V. & A.**

The Victoria and Albert Museum has recently acquired a unique collection of 20th century Chinese textiles. Built up by Valery Garrett, who lives in Hong Kong and is a knowledgeable writer on the rich traditions of Chinese dress, it contains superb examples of both rural and urban items, thus providing a definitive record of modern Chinese dress.

The rural collection comprises some 200 pieces. There are examples of traditional everyday clothing in hard-wearing fabrics and sombre colours, and some more unusual *Hang mao*, or cool hats, a variation of the familiar conical straw hat. These contrast dramatically with the richly coloured wedding headdress and circular beadwork collar which is worn over an austere black jacket and a dazzling multi-coloured skirt lavishly encrusted with beads and sequins.

The urban collection contains 50 pieces of clothing, many of which are similar to those worn by starlets of the Shanghai film industry in the 1930s and 40s, giving some fascinating glimpses of Western influence in the design and composition of the textiles. There are men's jackets and *cheong sam* in rich silks, and traditional wedding jackets and skirts so breath-takingly ornate that they were considered decadent and suppressed during the Cultural Revolution.

Household items and accessories are represented in both sections.

A selection of pieces from the collection will be on display in the Costume Court from 23rd November 1995 to May 1996.

## **NEWS ROUND-UP**

### **Rediscovered**

On October 30 Dr. Helen Whitehouse from the Ashmolean Museum's Department of Antiquities found 12 wooden textile printing blocks in a cupboard in the Museum's Egyptian Galleries. Their discovery solved a final puzzle about the Newberry Collection of Indian block-printed textiles which have recently been catalogued by Ruth Barnes. The original offer to the Museum in 1941 not only mentions the textiles, but also refers to 'examples of the stamps used in the process'. When work on the Indian textiles started in 1990, there was no trace of these blocks, and it had to be assumed that they were lost. Now thanks to Helen's intuition they can be united again with the textile collection. The blocks are carved of wood, probably 19th century and certainly Indian. They all show evidence of use.

### **Islamic Textile Conference**

As far as we know, at least four members of OATG will be attending the interdisciplinary conference on Islamic mediaeval textiles at the Abegg Stiftung in Riggisberg/Berne, Switzerland on November 10th and 11th 1995 - Ruth Barnes, Marianne Ellis, Rina Indictor and Jochen Sokoly. James Allan, Keeper of Eastern Art at the Ashmolean Museum, will also be there. Ruth Barnes is giving one paper, while Jochen Sokoly has gone into energy overdrive and will present two. Maybe one of those attending will write a short account for the next Newsletter?

### **Membership Secretary**

As many of you may know, Michaela Coulthard has moved to London to a new job, and it was no longer practical for her to continue as membership secretary. However, her replacement as Departmental Secretary in Eastern Art, Marian Anderson,

has agreed to take her place. Any questions you have about membership should be directed to her (tel. 01865 278067; fax 01865 278078)

### **RESEARCH QUERY**

Brenda King is researching the history of British collections of Asian textiles. Her aims are: first to establish what exists and where; secondly to identify how these collections have been formed; and thirdly to examine the ways in which the collections have been used. Anyone who can give her any relevant information can contact her at Orchard House, Bollington Cross, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK10 5~ EG; tel. 01625 573928; fax 01625 560338

### **LECTURES AND EVENTS**

#### **Oxford Guild of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers**

Jenny Parry will speak on *The Fascination of Japanese Braids* on Saturday November 18 at 2 p.m. in the W.I. Hall, Middleway, Summertown, Oxford. The charge to non-members is £2. For further information phone 01844 351508.

#### **British Museum**

Patricia Baker, author of the newly published *Islamic Textiles* (see below), will be giving two lectures on the subject in the British Museum Lecture Theatre at 1.15 p.m. on successive Wednesdays:

November 22 - Islamic Textiles: The Ottoman Court

November 29 - Islamic Textiles: Safavid and Qajar Iran

The talks are free. For further information phone 0171 637-7384.

#### **Victoria and Albert Museum**

The following gallery talks will be given at 2.30 p.m.:

Wednesday November 8 - Imogen Stewart on *18th Century Textiles from India and Europe*

Monday December 4 - Eileen Graham on *Islam: The Prayer Carpet, Context and Ritual*

The talks are free. For further information phone 0171 938.8500

**Our Two Events for Winter 1995/6: Please Come**

**December 2, 1995: The Newberry Embroideries  
in the Ashmolean Museum**

**January 13, 1996: An Indonesian Occasion**

**December 2, 1995:** This will be a study visit to see some of the remarkable Fatimid and Mamluk embroideries from the Ashmolean Museum's Newberry collection.

Marianne Ellis has worked with these textiles and will introduce them to us. To cover her expenses there will be a £ 5.00 charge per person, and attendance will have to be limited to ten people. Bring magnifier and pencils only for notes!

**Please book** by phoning Marian Anderson, Department of Eastern Art, Ashmolean Museum, Tel. 01865 -278067.

We will meet in the **Ashmolean Museum, Reitlinger Seminar Room at 11 a.m.**

**January 13, 1996:** Two of our members spent the summer of 1995 in Indonesia and would like to report on their experiences: Ruth Barnes and Felicity Wood will show textiles and baskets. They can also tell you about Indonesian textiles in Oxford collections.

This event is free, but unfortunately we only have the small Seminar Room available, and numbers are restricted. **Please book** by phoning Marian Anderson, as above.

We will meet in **the Ashmolean Museum, Reitlinger Seminar Room at 11 a.m.**

No reminder will be sent, so mark these events in your diary now.

## EXHIBITIONS

### **Museum of Mankind**

Most of the current exhibitions have African themes, but there is one that might interest members because of the Islamic connexion - *Display and Majesty: North African Textiles*. The exhibition reflects the ways in which North African peoples have both resisted and adapted diverse cultural influences in their textile tradition. The exhibition is now open and runs indefinitely. A book, *North African Textiles* by Chris Spring and Julie Hudson, covers the subject of both this exhibition and one of Ethiopian textiles running concurrently with it, and is available from the British Museum Press or the Museum, price £14.99. For further information phone 0171 323-8043.

### ***The Samurai Undressed***

An exhibition under this title has been mounted by the Braid Society, which illustrates the cultural and historical perspective of *kumihimo* (Japanese traditional braids), particularly in the development of Samurai clothing. It brings together for the first time a range of exhibits of *kumihimo* from the 8th to the 20th centuries and will be accompanied by demonstrations on a variety of *kumihimo* equipment. The exhibition can be seen at the Knitting and Stitching Show, to be held at:

The Royal Dublin Showground, Dublin, November 9-12, Thursday and Friday 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., Saturday and Sunday 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Exhibition Halls, Harrogate, Thursday November 23 to Sunday November 26  
9.30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

For further information about the exhibition or the Braid Society, contact Jacqui Carey, 75 Slade Close, Ottery St Mary, Devon, EX11 1SY, tel. 01404 813486. For information about the Show in general, contact Creative Exhibitions Ltd, 34 Lewisham Park, London, SE13 6QZ, tel. 0181 690-8888

### **ROYAL MUSEUM OF SCOTLAND, Chambers Street, Edinburgh.**

*Power and Gold*, a magnificent exhibition of 250 gold ornaments and 20 textiles from Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, is on show until November 10. The collection comes from the Barbier-Mueller Museum in Geneva. Absolutely not to be missed if you are in Edinburgh! An excellent catalogue by Susan Rogers accompanies the exhibition.

## PUBLICATIONS

Benjamin, Betsy Sterling: *The World of Rozome: Wax-Resist Textiles of Japan*, Kodansha International, Tokyo (1995), 224 pp (ISBN 4-7700-1774-X). The first work on this form of dying to appear in any language.

Otavsky, Karel and Muhammad Abbas Muhammad Salim: *Mittelalterliche Textilien I: Agypten, Persien und Nordafrika*. Riggisberg/Bern: Abegg-Stiftung (1995). sFr. 280 (ISBN 3-905014-06-8)

A beautifully produced book well worth the high price, it is a comprehensive study of the relevant collections in the Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg near Berne, Switzerland.

### Four Publications by OATG members:

Two are published by the Association pour l'Etude et la Documentation des Textiles d'Asie (A.E.D.T.A.) and can be ordered directly from them, 60 bis avenue de Breteuil, 75007 Paris, France. Unfortunately, they do not accept Euro cheques, and payment has to be in French francs. Prices do not include postage.

Okada, Amina: *The floral motif in Mughal fabrics*. Paris: A.E.D.T.A. (1995). FF 375. ISBN 2-908864-07-X

Excellent detailed photographs, virtually of facsimile quality. Catalogue description and technical analysis on the reverse, with text in French and English. The large folder format with loose sheets will make this difficult to accommodate on most bookshelves.

Zetterstrom: *Textile terminology: Chinese, English, French, Swedish*. Paris: A.E.D.T.A. (1995). FF 180. ISBN 91-630-3223-6

The Chinese text is written in collaboration with Professor Xu Guohua, Vice-Director of Nantong Textile Museum. Terminology of preindustrial textiles, fibres, tools, and resist-dyeing. 383 Chinese terms. International definitions and multi-lingual cross references are very important to textile researchers.

Baker, Patricia: *Islamic Textiles*. London: British Museum Press. £ 30. ISBN 0-7141-2522-9  
The latest in the series on textiles published by the British Museum Press, and of the same quality standard as most of these volumes, well illustrated,

Muthesius, Anna: *Studies in Byzantine and Islamic Silk Weaving*. London: Pindar Press. £ 150. ISBN 0-907132-93-6.

The volume brings together the most important publications by Anna Muthesius. She is a leading specialist on Byzantine silks and their relationship to Islamic textiles. Many of the papers are at present otherwise not available. Although the high price of this publication

puts it out of reach for most of us, you may want to know of its existence so that you can look for it in a library copy.

### **LAST CHANCE TO SEE -**

The following exhibitions, mentioned in the last Newsletter, close as shown

At the Museum of Mankind - *The Ainu of Japan* on Decembere 10

At the Victoria and Albert Museum -  
*Japanese Fukosa* next month  
*Fabulous Fans* in Janaury.

**The deadline for the next issue of this Newsletter is February 10, 1996. Contributions should be sent to Phyllis Nye, Hewel Barn, Common Road, Beckley, Oxon OX3 9UR (tel./fax 01865-351607)**

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**Please check whether you have paid your membership fee of £ 10.00. Your name on the envelope should have an \*asterix if you have done so.**

### **Membership in the Oxford Asian Textile Group**

Please fill out and return with your payment to:  
Marian Anderson, Department of Eastern Art, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford OX1 2PH

Name:

Address:

Telephone/Fax:

Area of Interest: