

ASIAN TEXTILES

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Inside: May Beattie's carpet archive; synthetic dyes in 19th-century Persian carpets; an ancient woollen skirt from Xinjiang; reviews and events.

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Front cover: a carpet fragment from the May Beattie Archive

Back cover: tapestry band with mythical creatures, from Sampula, Xinjiang

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Asian Textiles is published three times a year: in February, June and October. We welcome input from members— send a review of a book, or of an exhibition you've seen.

**THE DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS
FRIDAY 10th JANUARY 2014**

Contributions should be emailed to:
jane.anson@ntlworld.com

Editorial

This issue of *Asian Textiles* opens with a look inside the May Beattie Carpet Archive at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Researcher Suriyah Bi shares her discoveries about the complex web of documents that make up May Beattie's *magnum opus*.

Next, and still on the theme of carpets, we have Dorothy Armstrong's fascinating article about the influence of the newly discovered synthetic dyes on Persian carpets in the 19th century — a powerful tale of consumer demand driving 'traditional' design and production. Members who were present at Dorothy's talk in October will no doubt relish the chance to revisit this topic, and those who couldn't make it are sure to find it an interesting read.

Our third article moves to Xinjiang, north-western China, where Ying Yu discusses the fusion of eastern and western styles in an ancient woollen skirt decorated with tapestry bands depicting an assortment of creatures. The lively designs on this garment, once worn by a herder on horseback, attest to the creative imagination of the weaver, even at a distance of several centuries.

Our review section includes a book review by Nick Fielding, and Agnes Upshall's account of an OATG visit to see David and Sue Richardson's stunning collection of Indonesian textiles.

The Editor

Mystery object

This curious item is part of the Ashmolean Museum's collection, but almost nothing is known about it. Do you know what it is for, or where it comes from? Have you seen anything similar elsewhere? If you can shed any light on its history, please let us know, and we'll publish more information in the next issue of this magazine.



Hat - EAX.3875.a, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

OATG events programme

Dear Members,

After the last three very interesting events I am now looking forward to the next three. Jasleen Kandhari will talk to us about Kashmir shawls next month and in January we will hold a 'Show and Tell' event with Joss Graham as Master of Ceremonies, preceded by the OATG AGM. Since this event will take place on a Saturday afternoon, I hope that many more members will be able to attend. Please bring any textile you wish, I am hoping for a wide range to provide a backdrop for our AGM and to talk about afterwards. The 'Show and Tell' will be a very informal meeting within a relaxed atmosphere.

In February we are very privileged to host Fiona Kerlogue to talk to us about her recent research. Fiona has a doctorate in anthropology and her main regional area of expertise is Southeast Asia.

Christine Yates, OATG Events Coordinator

Thursday 7 November 2013

Woven Elegance: The Evolution of Kashmir Shawl Art *

JASLEEN KANDHARI

During this presentation Jasleen will explore the stylistic developments of Kashmir shawl design in India from the Mughal and Sikh eras to contemporary times.

Saturday 11 January 2013

AGM and SHOW & TELL EVENT

1.30pm members bring textiles to Pauling Centre

2 pm, **AGM, OATG members only**

2.30pm Refreshments, members & non-members, followed by:

Show & Tell

JOSS GRAHAM, Master of Ceremonies

Joss Graham opened his ethnographic textiles and works of art gallery in central London in 1980. It has since become a well known destination for collectors, travellers, interior designers and all those who have a passion for handmade fabrics from around the world.

Please bring textiles to show and talk about, e.g. a piece you love, or that has a story attached, an unknown purpose or history, just interesting, recently purchased, or any other reason.

Members arriving without a textile and non-members welcome.

Thursday 6 February 2014

Batik Research in Java *

FIONA KERLOGUE

Fiona is Deputy Keeper of Anthropology at the Horniman Museum, with responsibility for their Asian and European collections. Her research interests include the relationship between material culture and memory and the role of material heritage in society.

* **PLEASE NOTE:** evening events 6pm for a 6.15pm start at the Pauling Centre, 58 Banbury Road, Oxford, with refreshments afterwards.

The talks are free to members of OATG with a £2 contribution by non-members.

A group of people, including the speaker, may go on to a local restaurant afterwards (at our own expense), please contact us to join in. Although you do not need to book to attend our talks, it would be very helpful if you are able to email or telephone to confirm attendance.

To attend any event please contact Christine Yates, Events Coordinator, christine@fiberartgallery.com or 01865 556882

Unlocking the Beattie Archive

Suriyah Bi, Human Sciences student at Magdalen College, Oxford and Volunteer Research Assistant at the Ashmolean Museum, writes about her work, which has furthered understanding of the Beattie Archive.

Introduction

The history of carpets stretches as far back as the 4th and 5th centuries BC, since which time carpets have served as a medium for the expression of both social status and identity, and as a source of both social and economic status. They have been sent to kings as tributary offerings, have been passed from court to court as highly suitable diplomatic gifts, been amongst treasures brought back from victorious battles, and through upholding long-standing tradition, they have become cornerstones of many cultural identities. From Persian carpets with impressive hunting scenes and grand garden designs, small prayer rugs which have been carried for centuries by millions of Muslims, made to receive the imprints of believers' foreheads and knees, to large luxurious carpets and museum pieces, woven from gold and silver threads, plenty of variety is offered by carpets throughout time and place. Much has been said of their beauty and intricacy, and some exquisite pieces have been recognised as works of art in their own right, attesting to the meticulous skill of carpet weavers around the world. The artistic force of carpet weavers has enabled carpets to serve as a historic and cultural record right up to the present day, and it is the Beattie archive, like a genie in a bottle, that captures the spirit of carpet history, design and structure, from their conception to their birth, and their life from birth onwards.

Housed in the Ashmolean Museum's Department of Eastern Art, the Beattie Archive is a vast compilation of carpet knowledge collected from the 1930s to the 1970s by May Hamilton Beattie (1908–1997), a distinguished carpet scholar who was a scientist by training. The archive consists of a collection of carpets and weavings which date from the 19th to the 20th century, over 15,000 slides and analysis sheets detailing the structure of carpets she was able to access, a specialised library of more than 1400 books, detailed notes recording the results of her physical examination of carpets (many of which are no longer available for study in public and private collections throughout the world), and journals.

Since its establishment at the Ashmolean in June 2000, much of the efforts around the Beattie Archive have been concentrated on scanning slides and matching analysis sheets. A fresh approach to comprehending the archive entailed mapping the contents of the entire archive on a database. Not only does the mapping process provide a substantial understanding of the way in which May Beattie organised the archive, and thus how it is a pioneering resource for students and scholars in the field, but significant discoveries of several items have also been made. Here, you will embark on a special journey which will take you through how the Beattie archive was unlocked, revealing the treasures and secrets that lay within.

Meticulous organisation

The mapping concept was designed to produce a database of the original Beattie Archive which held records and details of its contents. The database was modelled on the five strands the different components of the archive naturally came under. Four of

these five strands had originally been divided by May Beattie. These were MBA Imags, MBA Refs, MBA Pamphs, and a collection of books. Of these, the first three strands have a series of boxes which were recorded together with the contents of each box. The books, which are currently housed in the Department of Eastern Art's study room, have also been recorded. A few boxes which did not fit into these categories were placed under a fifth strand: Miscellaneous.

The mapping process of the archive began by recording the contents of MBA Imag strand of the archive, which was made up of a series of 71 boxes and contained almost 15,000 items (the most recent count). The title of this strand is an abbreviation of 'images'. Each box was given a title based on its contents, and a number. Each box was further divided by sub-folders contained inside. For example, the 'MBA Imag 7' box called 'Persian East & Jufti' contained 17 sub-dividing envelopes. The contents of each envelope for this particular box were determined by the type of pattern found on rugs in the Eastern region of Persia which were woven from a 'Jufti' knot. Some of these divisions were floral borders, medallion designs, medallion designs paradise, animals, scrolls and arabesques, floral scroll or clouds, etc. This is an example of one box amongst the 71, which displays the level of detail and depth with which May Beattie organised the archive. This box alone contains 223 items, the majority of which include photographs and postcards with some magazine and newspaper cuttings.

It is the first 40 boxes of this strand that hold images of the type of carpets in specific regions – from the carpet heartlands of Persia and Turkestan to China, Kashmir, Pakistan and India. The latter 31 boxes of this strand for the most part zoom out of from carpets as a focus, and extend to art in many different forms. These boxes are devoted to architecture in different continents and eras – from the lavish gardens and palaces of Moorish Spain, to splendid mosques and shrines in Persia, to the temples of Rajasthan and the legacy of the Mughal Emperors. These are followed by boxes which overflow with images devoted to ceramics, metals and glassware from various regions around the world. Other boxes hold images of textiles, clothing and types of fabrics found in the majestic carpet belt of the world, from the northern valleys of Kashmir and Tibet to the colourful markets of India. In doing so, the archive acts as a genealogical record, plotting the various close and distant relatives of carpets.

May Beattie also visited galleries all over the world to inspect the use of carpets in paintings. The western vogue for oriental carpets exposed the trade to a new audience, and she studied their antiquity and value in a form of art which was a commentator of history in its own way. The sheer abundance of paintings in the archive echoes the changing attitudes to carpets throughout history, especially in the west. From being used

9th September, 1968. This morning we went off first thing to the Hague and reached the Gemeente Museum, Stadhouderslaan 41, just after ten a.m. We soon met Miss Gallois who was extremely kind, and resuscitated us with coffee when we looked like wilting. Three rugs were exhibited but after just glancing at them we went to look over the storage pieces. Among them was a Dated Soumak Dragon 128? The last figure was uncertain – 4, 5 or 3 perhaps! The snaps will need to be examined. There was also a Kazak like rug with what looked like an Armenian inscription. There was one of the late pale prayer rugs but I did not have time to examine it but it looked poor. There was an Anatolian Coupled Column – columns only, a small piece and seemed to me to be in the sort of weave of my worn Kisghiorde. I did not take many photos as apparently all the lovely photos I took on the previous day are likely to be duds – the time gauge was on the black needle which made about one 500th of a second instead of a twentieth. This was a major catastrophe as the old mecablitz is not so strong and does not hold its charge so well.

A diary extract from a visit to Amsterdam.

Some fragments from the archive.

as furnishings to adorn the palaces of royalty and the rich, to being treated as equals to sculptures and paintings and being studied in the same way.

The archive documents the more technical aspects of carpets, as is evident in one box in particular in the latter half of this strand, entitled 'Tech Diag Tracings', 'MBA Imag 57', which consists of 23 sub-folders. From carpet care, weaving, washing and repairing, to dyeing wool, type of yarn and fabric and finishing techniques, to May Beattie's very own



structural tracings of carpet motifs, this box was an exciting turning point in the mapping process since it revealed May Beattie's passion for carpets. She was not only interested in their design or where they were produced, but she was on a mission to record everything about carpets, from their conception to their birth, and from their birth onwards.

This spirit can be seen following through into the next strand of the archive – MBA Ref docs – which contained a series of 66 boxes. Inside the boxes were a variety of items, ranging from comprehensive travel journals and diaries, articles, notes from conferences she attended, and correspondence. These items provided the images seen in the previous strand and a context and a pattern began to emerge: the boxes in both strands correlated. For instance, the previously mentioned 'MBA Imag 57' which contained images of the technical aspects of carpets had a pair in this strand: MBA Ref 4, which contains articles and documentation on how to conserve a carpet, dating a carpet, using dyes, etc. This was a significant finding as it revealed the extent to which May Beattie organised the archive. Furthermore, it is thought that during the rehousing and numbering process when the archive was first received, the correct order of the boxes was interrupted, causing boxes of the same subject in individual strands to be positioned at different numbers. This finding encouraged speculation on the existence of such a correlation for the remainder of the archive, and thus fuelling the excitement to continue the mapping process.

The next strand of the archive 'MBA Pamph', contained a vast collection of more than 400 items of literature. These related to the various forms of art, and the histories of people, cultures, empires and lands, which together confirmed the trend seen across the strands so far. This, together with the previous two strands, provided an insight to how May Beattie intended the archive to be used. The structure of an onion is a useful analogy in trying to explain the intention of the archive. Similar to the way an onion has a central bulb with multiple layers around it, the strands of May Beattie's archive are layers that provide stimulation, wonder and depth to the central focus of carpets. To pick up a box from the MBA Imag strand of a particular area which was known to produce carpets, or a particular style or pattern, and match it with her travel diaries, conference notes, the publications of other scholars in the field from the MBA ref section, and then look to the Pamph strand and the library collection (the fourth strand) of over 1400 books, for further background knowledge, provides a truly holistic view of carpet studies.

Adding a further layer and creating a physical dimension to the archive, are three boxes which are currently housed in the Department of Eastern Art's study room. These contain woven legends: the crown jewels of the archive. Like the outer layers of the onion, these outstanding historical fragments are the epitome of May Beattie's delivery of carpet studies. Since they were intended for hands-on study at the Museum, they invite the application of knowledge gained from previous strands of the archive, and thus bring to life May Beattie's teaching and learning style.

The third box contains two exquisite dresses that belonged to May Beattie. The first dress resembles a Chinese design, its tightly woven thread looped closely together, thick, heavy material, and a maroon colour with hints of pale orange and salmon pink indicate a connection with mountain areas with harsh weather. The second dress is a splash of bright colours: parrot green and cobalt blue with gold embellishments that are studded with fuschia pink embroidery. Beaming India's sunshine, its colourful palette and majestic fabric mark the dress as fit for royalty. The dress is cut in the style of a western dress rather than that of a conventional salwaar kameez or sari.

A number of boxes that were not associated with any particular strand were found, and for the purpose of recording their contents on the database, they were grouped under a new strand of the archive called 'miscellaneous'. Within these, a number of boxes did not correlate with what had been May Beattie's established pattern of archiving thus far. Images were grouped in small white envelopes placed horizontally in a cardboard box, similar to the drawer compartment of a filing cabinet. On the reverse of these images were printed labels that listed the properties of the carpets along with their price value. These factors indicated that the images had been collected relatively recently, were part of a private collection that sold carpets and were most likely compiled by a different collector. In subsequent boxes, sale brochures were found which provided some answers. It is thought that this new collection was put together by someone at Burdford Gallery, who may have given the short collection to May Beattie, to add to her vast archive.

Electrifying discoveries

Some electrifying discoveries of items were made during the mapping process. In the MBA Imag strand, a box containing an additional set of 840 slides of carpets was found. The slides were neatly preserved in 21 small boxes which contained 40 slides each, and a note with May Beattie's handwriting. The MBA Ref strand revealed two boxes, each of which contained five volumes of slide indexes. In these, May Beattie had listed the details of which analysis sheet matched which slides, invaluable documentation which will go a long way in assisting the ongoing work since the bequest of the archive. Furthermore, the travel diaries which made up a considerable proportion of the MBA Ref strand are a valuable resource, not only in matching analysis sheets to slides, but in contextualising the images from the MBA Imag strand, since they provide a commentary to the images.

Furthermore, two of May Beattie's carpet weavings were found in the Ref strand, along with her equipment such as a vintage microphone, tape recorder and camera, all of which gave a personal touch to the archive.



A colour chart found in the MBA Imag section of the archive.

An emphasis on textiles

May Beattie's incredibly meticulous way of archiving extended to other forms of art which included textiles. Viewed as close relatives of carpets, and since carpets are a type of textile, it is only natural that May Beattie incorporated the study of textiles in the archive. The source of the fabrics, whether plant, animal or synthetic, their structure and weave style in clothing use, the weaves and knots used, and the use of different motif patterns and styles in different cultures intrigued May Beattie. Like gazing at the stars on a clear night, by studying the archive, one is able to view the questions May Beattie was thinking of. How are carpets inspired by textiles and other forms of art such as ceramics and architecture? How do these aid the transmission of ideas in different people and places? At which regional points did certain styles of carpet weaving begin to erode or merge with others, and can textiles used as clothing act as markers for any changes? What do these tell us about the nature of humans?

The rusty reds and burnt oranges that are iced with tribal designs typical of Baluch traditional clothing, are inherent to the carpets of that region. The intricate carpets of the Indian sub-continent can be seen extending to the intricate designs on Indian garments, and some motifs are common to the painting of henna art in the region too, further illustrating the connections May Beattie was trying to make with other forms of art. May Beattie's bequest of two dresses in the archive, one Chinese and the other Indian, speak volumes about the way she thought of carpets and textiles used as clothing. The designs of the carpets woven are a compilation of the ideas and inspirations embedded deep in the culture of people, their surroundings, the landscape, the climate and much more – tools that are at their disposal, all of which are used to express and reinforce cultural identity. Understanding the fibres and yarns used in the production of carpets provides a pioneering edge to May Beattie's approach to carpet studies, since it enabled her to determine their provenance. Knowledge such as the structure of the materials used in the weave of a carpet offers leverage in organising adequate care for the carpet which, in the case of antique pieces, would be crucial in order to preserve them.

May Beattie's personality

Forty years of passionate collecting with such great attention to detail requires persistence, patience and a greater purpose. May Beattie's professional training as a scientist laid the foundations to her scientific approach to the study of carpets, and as a result the successful compilation of her archive. Micro-pipette precision, a remarkable depth and meticulous detail enabled her to intricately weave her archive. Above all, a will to learn and advance a field of learning, a love for travel, culture and people, and a sense of satisfaction for having completed something, were qualities she was bejewelled in.

Her success in gaining access to the grand palaces of Rajasthan and requesting internal reports and details about their collection, corresponding with keepers of private and public galleries, and requesting samples of carpets in the form of slides, at a time when technology did not exist, sheds more light on May Beattie's commitment and determination. She was tenacious and charismatic in her communications, adventurous in sowing the seeds of her ambitions, and versatile in her professional attitude, which enabled her to work simultaneously on different aspects of her archive at a single time.

She immersed herself in local culture, as is evident in her photographs that document the manufacturing process of carpets. The sun-baked golden faces of carpet weavers in the countries May Beattie visited demonstrate her ability to interact with local people and become involved in the local culture. The incorporation of carpet weavers adds a unique dimension to the archive since, behind the creases and lines around their smiles and squinted eyes, we are able to see their artistic minds, catching a glimpse of the upheld traditions and cultural expressions that are brewing the ingredients for exquisite carpets. Her bequest of two dresses further advocates for her ability to indulge in the culture, kindling the flame of the true understanding of carpets, by living in what produces them.

Her travel diaries provide much detail about her trips and lead us on a trail to unfolding her personality and recognising her intentions for the use of the archive. Her diaries and notes on her interpretation of carpets, her analysis, her opinions and thoughts are all, in essence, May Beattie lending herself as a resource within her archive; something which is free of the word limit of an academic article or the agenda of a journal, and thus she continues to live even beyond her passing. So great was her dedication to the study of carpets that she, in the greatest of gestures for the field, left herself as a resource. To have constructed an image of her personality through mapping her archive is not only crucial to understanding the success of the archive, but by learning about her, we can understand her intentions for the utilisation of the archive and see that they are fulfilled.

The future

The work carried out from January to September 2013 to map the Beattie Archive has presented new understandings of how May Beattie compiled her archive, and her intentions for its potential use and role in advancing carpet studies. A showcase of a 40-year expedition, the archive is a one-stop manual for anyone interested in carpets.

The Ashmolean's Department of Eastern Art wishes to make available to students and scholars the database which holds details of the contents of the archive. There is much scope for further research and for new insights. Continuing the momentum of the archive's use is a new beginning to a journey of fulfilling May Beattie's ultimate wish: to create a facility for the study of carpets at the University of Oxford.

To access the Beattie Archive, please contact the Department of Eastern Art's study room. Subject to availability, prior booking is essential.

<http://www.ashmolean.org/departments/easternart/studycentre/>

T: +44(0)1865 288107

E: eastudycentre@ashmus.ox.ac.uk

The introduction of synthetic dyes into 19th-century Persian carpets

Dorothy Armstrong is working for an MA in the History of Design with the V&A/RCA. She recently gave a presentation about her work to OATG members.

Between 1860 and 1900, the trade in Persian carpets to the West grew explosively, so much so that it is known as the Persian Carpet Boom. By 1874, carpets were Persia's biggest export and remained so until they were overtaken by oil in the mid-1920s.¹ In this same period, from the early 1850s, synthetic dyes produced by the developing Western chemical industry became increasingly available. As a consequence, carpet weaving in Persia experienced a sharp discontinuity, both economic and technological.

A wide range of Eastern and Western agents participated in this moment of change, and in the negotiation over the use of synthetic dyes in carpets which had formerly exclusively followed the ancient tradition of natural dyeing. By the end of the 19th century, synthetic dyes had been widely accepted in dress and textiles, whilst resistance to them persisted amongst Western commentators on and consumers of oriental carpets, a resistance which continues into the present day.

The following examination of the Persian carpet boom and its dyes, and the agents and ideas involved in it, sets out to explore the sometimes unintended consequences for Persian carpets caused both by resistance to and acceptance of innovation.

Until the end of the 18th century, the only textile dye synthesised from chemicals was Prussian Blue. All other dyes were preparations of natural materials: plants, insects, shellfish.

The European textile industry welcomed synthetics. They offered stability of supply and consistency of processing, but also stimulated fashion markets, and offered a new international trading product. Consumers responded to the diversity, and markets grew. As their command of the chemistry behind dyeing increased during the 19th century, dye chemists provided new colours, artificially synthesised versions of natural dyes, and overcame quality issues such as fastness, fading and rotting.

Early synthetic dyes were often by-products of other experiments, most famously William Perkins' discovery of aniline whilst trying to synthesise iodine, but from 1860 the German chemical industry began to systematically exploit the chemical and industrial processes underlying dye synthesis.

Synthetic dyes were part of the move in the later industrial revolution into technological areas which could not readily be understood by the intelligent gentleman attending a Royal Society lecture. Charlotte Nicklas² has shown how popular literature for women domesticated the science behind synthetic dyes, helping their acceptance in dress. The discussion of synthetic dyes in oriental carpets took a different direction, and alarm at a break between a primordial craft tradition and modern technology was core to that discussion.

As synthetics entered the market for dress and furnishings, a widespread debate around their aesthetic qualities began. They were described as 'brash', 'harsh', 'ghastly', 'poisonous'. The last two are particularly interesting, suggesting that synthetics were actively dangerous.

Whilst retailers and popular literature in the West normalised this debate by stressing the importance of discriminating *between* synthetic colours in dress and textiles, the debate on oriental carpets moved in a different direction, towards discrimination *against* synthetic colours. This was part of a particular sensitivity in the West to the introduction of synthetic dyes to oriental artefacts.

It is hard to recreate the change in the 19th-century colour world. Physiological and neurological investigations in the 21st century suggest a wide variation in colour perception. Philosophers stress its instability. It is difficult for one individual to understand what another sees when looking at natural and synthetic dyes.

The eyes of Western collectors and museums, lead figures in the debate against synthetic dyes in carpets, do not seem to have reliably discriminated between the colours of natural and synthetic dyes. Scientific conservators working on museum-quality carpets find frequent misattribution of dyes, and mixtures of dyes in carpets.³

Perhaps the 19th-century viewer saw a rebalancing of colour intensity. There was simply more bright new stuff. It is from this change to a more vivid colour world, moderated by unknowable differences in colour perception between individuals, that the debate on natural versus synthetic dyes was born. The moral, political and aesthetic analyses and ideologies around dyes in Persian carpets and other craft textiles were built on this uncertain ground.

If synthetic dyes had deeply affected the colour world of the 19th century, they had also deeply affected the global textile trade. Vested Western market interests led to a significant difference between the position on synthetic dyes in textiles relative to dyes in oriental carpets.

The 19th-century West imported raw materials from its colonies and other Eastern trading partners. Finished goods from Europe in particular were then exported and increasingly replaced the home-produced goods of the East.

Synthetic dyes affected this model in a number of ways. They stimulated the export market to the East of dyed and finished textiles. At the same time they replaced natural dyes, a high-value export good of the East, with another import good from Europe, synthetic dyes. Each of these disadvantaged Eastern trade.

However, importantly for this discussion, they also created the opportunity for an increased export market from the East in luxury goods such as carpets. The weaving skills remained indigenous, but synthetic dyes offered the opportunity for increased productivity and colour range.

Turkey, a trading partner of dominant dye-makers, Germany, accepted the innovative technology and used it to rapidly increase carpet supply. The story in Persia took a different turn, with some unintended consequences.

The narrative of Persian history in the 19th century is one of modernisation, and the creation of national identity by synthesising ancient Persian cultural traditions with that modernising state.

It is also a story of an increasing re-involvement in the Western-driven global economy, after almost a century of political and military turbulence. In common with other Eastern trading partners and colonies, Persia during the 19th century became an exporter of raw materials, particularly cotton and silk, and an importer of finished goods, textiles significant amongst them, with the consequent underemployment of Persian textile artisans. Its carpet industry for the first half of the 19th century was stable, meeting a domestic demand and a traditional export market in Russia and Central Asia.

However, a new Persian export market for carpets began to develop in the West. Between 1870 and 1874 exports doubled, and by the mid-1880s, carpets were Persia's biggest export. This so-called Persian Carpet Boom only ended with the depression of

the first decade of the 20th century.

The boom was driven on the demand side by the increase in middle-class disposable income in the West in the later 19th century, and by displays of carpets at international exhibitions and in the newly-established Western museums. This created an appetite for these novel products. Department stores in European and American cities offered trusted environments in which to buy them. Magazines publicised them and gave taste guidance.

On the supply side, Persia had the traditional craft skills and an underemployed textile workforce. Persian merchants had access to capital and networks. Western merchants also played a significant part. They began to convert their Persian trading profits from other goods into carpets which could be sold in Europe. This was easier than the alternative, which was to export currency or bullion via Russia. The European merchants then began to produce carpets themselves to ensure supply and quality for this valuable new market. The Anglo-Swiss firm Ziegler in Sultanabad was a pioneer, but other British, Swiss and German companies followed.

The direct links into Western markets of these European capitalists gave them a clear sense of what was likely to be commercially successful there, and they rapidly translated Western preferences into manufactured artefacts.⁴

The great thing will be to be extremely careful only to make the *best* possible carpets. M. Rogers will bring designs and orders with him from Paris.

Furthermore, they brought experience of the European model of industrialisation. They implemented this in their own manufacturies, paying craftsmen by the day rather than by the piece, weaving and dyeing within their own premises, as opposed to in the craftpersons's home or workspace, inspecting work as it progressed.

The Persian merchants recognised the commercial potential of the market and the method of manufacture, and many moved to the same model. By 1900, 30% of all carpets in Persia were woven in such manufacturies.⁵ The Shah and his administration showed themselves prepared to protect this market, and that soon came to mean protecting it from synthetic dyes.



Figure 1: Persian village or workshop carpet, c.1800, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Until the 19th century Persian carpets were less well-known in the West than the export carpets of Turkey, which travelled along ancient and well-established trading routes from Istanbul into Europe.

From 1850 Persian carpets came to the Western consumer through the International exhibitions and the new Western museums. The Persian carpets Western consumers saw were old, naturally dyed carpets. This provided the initial conditioning of taste, and defined consumer demand. (*Figure 1*)

This preference came to be underpinned by a debate in both the West and the colonial East, which by the late 19th century identified synthetic dyes with oppressive capitalism, and a break with the proper order of nature and craft.

The handmade Persian carpet fitted closely with the Arts and Crafts movement narrative about the need to rescue traditional crafts from the impact of industrialisation. William Morris, for example, regarded synthetic dyes as an expression of capitalism, poisonous to the viewer and the worker.⁶

As to the artistic value of these (natural) dyestuffs, most of which the world discovered in early times ... I must tell you, they all make in their simplest form beautiful colours, and they can be modified and toned without dirtying, as the foul blotches of the capitalist dyers cannot be. These colours in fading still remain beautiful, and never, even after long wear, pass into nothingness through the state of livid ugliness which distinguishes the commercial dyes.

The anxiety about chemical dyes was rooted in an older anxiety about dyes more generally. Sumptuary laws had for centuries attempted to control the use of certain dyes and colours, usually on the grounds of class or religion. Artisans and merchants sometimes had adverse reactions to interloper dyes before synthetics arrived, for instance the resistance by madder-using Turkish artisans to the introduction of cochineal.⁷ This was exacerbated by the new technology of synthetics.

Furthermore, in the second half of the 19th century, as the switch from natural to synthetic dyes progressed, a taste for strong colour was identified with groups perceived as intellectually and morally compromised: women, children and primitive, that is non-Western, cultures, with a consequent anxiety⁸: 'that rational traditions of Western culture were under threat from insidious non-Western sensuality'.

Against this background of ideological anxiety and vested social, political and economic interest, the Western consumer of Persian carpets faced a psychological conflict. On the one hand, the oriental carpet is a nostalgic dream of the other, and in its otherness lies its desirability.

However, it is also potentially threatening, sensuous, primitive and decadent. Strategies are required to control the threat so that the nostalgic dream can be enjoyed. One of the strategies is traditionalism, freezing the materials and techniques in time, so that they can be fully understood and controlled. Another strategy is connoisseurship, the definition of a canon of taste, which again can be understood and controlled. Resistance to the innovation of synthetic dyes in carpets supported both traditionalism and connoisseurship.

In Britain the purchase of the Ardabil carpet set the high-water mark for this taste. The carpet Morris described as the finest in the world, bought at his urgent recommendation for the South Kensington Museum in 1893, is a 16th-century Safavid court carpet using ten shades of harmoniously-faded natural dyes. The sales intermediary in Persia was Ziegler, the self-same company industrialising the production of mass-market carpets in Persia, and now also helping establish the canon of Western taste. (*Figure 2*)

Increase in supply was needed as the Persian Carpet Boom took off. The supply of old rugs was constrained, and new ones were required. To domestic weavers hoping to



Figure 2: Ardabil carpet, 1540-50, Tabriz or Kashan, Persia, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

capture part of the new market, and merchants sourcing from small-scale traditional enterprises, the synthetic dyes developed in Europe offered a solution to the constraint on one critical raw material: natural plant and insect dyes. Synthetic dyes began to be imported, often from Germany via Turkey in the 1860s.

But the demand from the West was for faded, old-looking carpets, not bright new ones. Persian merchants had from the early 19th century been washing and fading new carpets by exposure, even when using natural dyes, to meet the taste of the West. The new European merchant entrepreneurs such as Ziegler and the Persian Carpet Manufacturing Company took direct control of the critical dyeing process. They built dye works as part of their factories, using mostly natural dyes, but also synthetics which could be suitably aged and faded. They handed out the wool ready-dyed to the weavers, whether they worked at home or in the manufactory.

Persia was not so conflicted over the textile trade as nation-builders in the colonies were. The West was demanding traditional products, and so there was apparently no conflict with their own national identity. They were willing to act to protect this new market in carpets.

In 1882, the Persian government banned the import of synthetic dyes by Imperial decree, and in 1885, banned the import of thread or wool dyed with synthetic dye. Punishments were severe. We are told that dyehouses using synthetic dyes were burned down, and that a dyemaster using synthetic dyes could lose his right arm.⁹ Natural dyeing was now under the protection of both the Persian state and Western capitalism.

The historiography of synthetic dyes in Persian carpets built on these events and ideas is in two registers. Some historians see it as an expression of an economic development path, with Western and local capital introduced into craft industries leading to industrialisation and standardisation of production, albeit on a scale which permits the maintaining of a bond with traditional and regional craft values and styles.¹⁰ Some craft historians and cultural commentators see it as a critical point in the struggle between the values of traditional craft production versus those of mass production at a moment when the carpet boom in Persia was creating a pressure for volume.¹¹

Both stories are Western in origin. Both give limited insight into the production choices made by the Persian artisan.

The Shah's edict with its apparently draconian penalties did not prevent the use of synthetic dyes in Persia. There was significant trade in smuggled dyes, coming for instance from the Caucasus in barrels of petrol, and from Baghdad in bags of sugar.¹² The Persian artisans and merchants were clearly willing to take risks to get hold of the new dyes.

It is tempting to see price and ease of use as the drivers of this. Dyeing with synthetics clearly increased both the operational and economic efficiency of textile production in Western factories. We can't however accurately assess what a bottle of smuggled dye might have cost an independent weaver in Persia, or the efforts required to learn how to use it, in communities which might not be literate, or conversant with the German instructions.

This persistence on the part of weavers might tell a different story, one about autonomy and creative preference. 30% of Persian carpet weaving in the period under discussion was done on the premises of the European and Persian merchant-manufacturers¹³, with a consequent reduction in the workers' autonomy, recorded by contemporary observers..

Messrs Ziegler and Company keep them (the weavers) steadily employed; but one condition is that they shall not give rein to their individual taste, but like machines they shall continually reproduce the designs which are found to meet the prevailing fashion in Europe.¹⁴

Messrs Ziegler did not allow any weaver to use, which they much preferred to do, wool of his own dyeing.¹⁵

The alternative to this reduced personal and creative autonomy was to continue independent weaving. In that less-regulated environment the likelihood of the use of synthetic dyes was higher.



Figure 3: Village carpet with synthetic dyes, Iran, early 20th century. Right and top left: underside.

The second reason for the persistence of the synthetic dyes might be creative preference. The weavers might have enjoyed the new colours, and their ease of use. Figure 3 shows the exuberance of a village weaver at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, with the original tropical purples, pinks and oranges shown on the carpet back.

The weaver might have experienced other creative freedoms through their use of the new dyes. The Turkmen tribes of the Iranian borders had a long and consistent stylistic tradition. Figure 4 shows two late 19th-century Turkmen rugs. The naturally dyed carpet on the left, rosy pink, has canonical Turkmen features: good corner resolutions, balanced borders, well-spaced guls. The synthetically-dyed one on the right, its fugitive red gone to brown, has asymmetric borders and corners. It is usual to regard both the fugitive red and the crazy borders as signs of decadent style. It is possible however to imagine an alternative, a release on the part of weavers who have worked within a strict set of conventions, the breaking of the convention on dye triggering a breaking of convention on motif.



Figure 4: left, naturally dyed Turkmen carpet, Iran, c.1870; right, artificially dyed Turkmen carpet, Iran, c.1890.

This freeing-up of the artisan contrasts with the impact of the Western preference for natural dyes in Persian carpets and of the related organisation of a substantial part of the carpet-weaving industry in Persia to ensure a conformity to Western expectations. In the late 1940s, A. Cecil Edwards, head of the Anglo-Persian Carpet Manufacturing Company, one of the original Western companies, undertook fieldwork in Persia.¹⁶

In 1948, it was my misfortune to examine the stocks of the Arak (Sultanabad) merchants. Carpet after carpet was opened for my edification: all had rose grounds and blue borders, and the field of everyone was covered by detached floral motifs ... the carpets of the Arak bazaar were all the same. They have been much the same for the last 25 years! Who is responsible for this strange monomania? The responsibility, I fear must rest squarely upon the shoulders of the importers of New York.

He is not neutral, and this makes his comments all the more telling. He sees the inheritance of the Persian export style in a very limited range of colours, albeit natural,

and a conservatism in design. He lays the blame with American importers, but the role of European entrepreneurs, taste-makers and consumers is also clear. (Figure 5)

It seems that whilst synthetic dyes seem sometimes to have invigorated Persian weavers, the requirements of traditional dye and design for the Western market seem to have led to a loss of vitality in late 19th- and early 20th-century export-style carpets. However, despite Edwards' misgivings, the market remains loyal to its original preference, and the rather battered Ziegler carpet illustrated sold for \$98,000 in 2008, and was one of the ten most expensive carpets at auction that year.

The introduction of synthetic dyes into

Persian carpets in the 19th century offers a case study in resistance to and acceptance of technological innovation. In Persia the resistance to innovation in dyes was restricted to that part of carpet production where the new Western market was at risk, the colour palette. The Persian administration was able to align itself comfortably with Western requirements, because the Persian export style did not challenge existing aesthetics. This is despite the fact that the methods of production were increasingly non-traditional, and the exploitation of the differential in labour costs between the West and Persia quite extreme.

Fundamentally, the resistance to synthetic dyes was as much Western as it was Persian, and seems to derive from a series of anxieties. One was the very sudden step from techniques and substances which were continuous back to prehistory in carpet-making, to substances and techniques associated with the most extreme version of 19th-century technology, the chemical industry. There is evidence of a concern about capitalism and its effects. There is the uncertain relationship with sensuality, expressed through colour, and the fear of social shame associated with aberrant consumer choices. Uncertainty over carpets and their dyes exemplifies the unease of that fast-changing 19th-century Western society.



Figure 5: Ziegler Mahal carpet, central Persia, c.1900, Sotheby's New York Sale Catalogue, 11 June 2008.

Consumers of textiles and dress did not appear to share these anxieties. By 1850, the industrialised production of textiles was familiar. Equally, the commitment of the European market to its own textile products led to a more supportive environment for consumers, with information and guidance from multiple sources.

It is likely also that we are talking about a different psychology of consumption to that of dress and other decorative fabrics. The Western consumer of oriental carpets was imaginatively invested in a pre-industrial oriental world. The same consumer when buying a tea-gown was invested in fashion and novelty.

Despite all this, the artisans themselves across the Middle East, be it in Turkey, where fewer legal constraints were applied, or in Persia, where the risks were much higher, were open to the commercial and creative opportunities of dye innovation. It is their voices that are most difficult to uncover amongst the historiography, but which speak clearly when we look at the objects themselves.

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The woollen skirt with tapestry band from Sampula, Xinjiang, China

Yu Ying, Curator of the Arts and Crafts Research Department, Shanghai Museum, writes about a garment found in the Tarim Basin and what it tells us about its wearer.

Recent excavations in Sampula (37°0'5"N, 80°07'12"E), Xinjiang, China have brought its textiles to our attention. These differ in style, technique and origin, as they include both woven silk brocade and embroideries from China and also woollen fabrics from the local area and Central Asia. This has given us further solid proof of the mutual influence and merging of Eastern and Western textile techniques and arts.

Let us look at the structure and measurement of a most developed Sampula tapestry band woollen skirt, dating from the 2nd century BC to the 2nd century AD. From a previous publication, we learned that the woollen skirt was around 1 metre long, which is basically the length from waist to ankle. What characterises the structure are the hem circumference and the tapestry band. First, the skirt usually measures 3 to 4 metres in width. Such a wide skirt is an important concern among pastoral people, so that the wearer can get on and off a horse easily. However, such a huge width conflicts with the waist measurement and the wearer's comfort. We think the Sampula-style woollen skirt is more developed in styling and design, because it managed this issue technically.

The Sampula residents solved the issue by combining two bias tapestry bands and pleating. Around the skirt, they used two bias tapestry bands, a wider one of 16–20 cm attached with a narrower one of 4–8 cm with lots of pleats of approximately 2 cm deep, to form the wavy edge aesthetically and proportionally. This design and technique outperform those woollen skirts from the relic site of round city, Keriya River, Xinjiang, whose hems are finished with a narrow bias tapestry band without pleats (Figure1).

In terms of aesthetic decoration, the skirts from Sampula are embellished with a tapestry band between the skirt body and the hemline, whose width ranged from 2 to 20 cm; most often we see bands 10 cm wide, with various designs. The band on the skirt body varies in

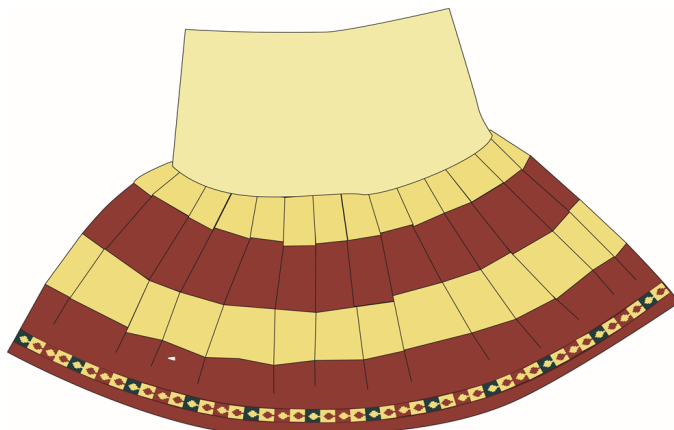


Figure 1: reconstruction sketch of the skirt from round city, Keriya River.



Figure 2: reconstruction sketch of the one-piece-band skirt from Sampula.



Figure 3: reconstruction sketch of the one-piece-band skirt from Sampula.

size depending on the style; a one-piece band usually measures 45–55 cm (Figure 2), while a multi-piece band usually measures about 11 cm. The most common one is a five-piece band, which usually comes in a yellow and red or a red and brown pattern (Figure 3). The waistband is usually 1.3–1.5 m long and 25 cm deep. These measurements and techniques have resulted in a skirt that is perfectly suited to pastoral life on the steppe, as it fits comfortably in the upper part, while exposing the beautiful tapestry band at the lower part, plus the wide drapery of the skirt

works well for a pastoral life on horseback. So far, such a style has not been reported within China from a similar period, but as we travel in a north-westerly direction, we find skirts in a similar style from Pazyryk burials, and also crafts excavated from the Altai area are closely related to the look of the tapestry band on the Sampula woollen skirt.

The highlight of the analysis is in reference to its pattern and artwork. A band works perfectly for pattern. The weaver is free to design patterns and artwork thanks to the nature of a tapestry technique that requires no repeats in the pattern, while with the jacquard technique, weavers are more tempted to use repeats to save time and effort. Nevertheless, they prefer repeats for the rhythm they reflect. The Sampula woollen skirt is more of a two-way repeat pattern, with an occasional variation of colour or layout, however this brings a special coherence from the combination of repeat and variation.

There are five main layouts for the two-way repeat pattern: embedded, rectangular, triangle (zig-zag wave), diamond, and a combination of all these patterns. Let us take embedded patterns as an example. Embedded patterns are referred to as a special design, in which the pattern and the background can be reversed. The embedded mechanism of two similar layouts, differing from and defining each other by shades or contrast colour, reveals a unique visual effect. The most popular ones are geometric or plant patterns, e.g. the embedded cirrus cloud design (Figures 4 and 5), which is very intricate and well-balanced, or the wave design from the relic site of round city near the River Keriya. There is also a rectangular pattern of plant and animal designs which is relatively more complex, e.g. the mythical creature design (Figure 6), or a rectangular layout with an animal design in the centre and plant designs at the top and bottom edges

(Figure 7). The repeat of such designs is naturally longer, due to the rich content, and so the width of the tapestry band increases accordingly.



Figures 4 and 5: skirt tapestry fragments with cirrus cloud design from Sampula, 84LSIM02:95.



Figure 6: tapestry band showing mythical creatures, from Sampula, 84LSIM01:326.

The design is rich not only in the repeat layout, but also in the motif. To date, geometric patterns, plants, deer, camels, mythical creatures, diamond crosses and sacred animal masks have been recorded. The most popular animal motifs are deer, camels (Figure 8) and lions, which inhabit the steppe, and have been recorded in archives as



Figure 7: skirt tapestry fragment with animal mask motif from Sampula, 92LSIM3:E4.

indigenous animals from the western regions. Among these motifs, there is a collection of mythical creatures based on deer and lions, which can be distinguished as deer-headed beast, winged lion beast, dragon beast, and human-faced beast. All these mythical creatures have wings, and are embellished with coloured triangle or spiral patterns. Even though these mythical creature patterns are imaginary, they are based on real animals, and their features are still distinguishable after being translated into graphic designs.

Take the deer-headed beast, for instance, the background is set in teal, which is the most common colour in nature, from forest, marsh, lake, to steppe land, the origin of life. The deer-headed beast is basically composed of: big antlers, leonine stag, wings on the back and long tail. The antlers are designed with either 8 tines or 16 tines in a pair. The deer head is designed with protruding nose and mouth at the front, S-shaped ears at the side, a long moustache from the chin to the neck, a dark red-brown body with a coloured pattern, whose purpose in this design we think is to emphasise the masculinity and power of the beast. Since the hind thigh is always tensed, the waist is narrow, and the limbs are in a standing or walking posture, while the front legs are mostly in a crouching posture, with claws and feathers at the end, which concurs with the winged lion body in another case, we conclude that this is a lion's body. The wings are on the back, and are usually in the shape of three long plumes, with a spiral or feather-shaped pattern, or a scroll pattern embellished with triangles. Some back wings have eagle head, eyes, beak, and s-shaped feathered head, with spiral pattern geometric patterns next to it. The long, whipping tail is in the shape of a lion's tail, sometimes flame-shaped, and sometimes in a triangular shape embellished with a striped pattern. The deer-headed beast has red antlers, head, body and tail. Decorative patterns use a wider variety of colours, including white, off-white, yellow, orange, lighter red, brown, red brown, dark red-brown, grass green, light green, light teal, green. What catches our attention is that it is inspired by the lion's body, and uses red instead of the yellow of most lions. Thereafter, we concluded that the inspiration of the deer-headed beast is the red deer. Red deer are mostly red-brown in summer, with a darker shade on the back and a lighter shade on the belly. The male red deer usually has antlers with 6 to 8 tines, like those of the deer-headed beast. In conclusion, the deer-headed beast must be originated from the red deer with a lion's body. Red deer still inhabit the arid bushes, Euphrates poplar (*Populus euphratica*) (huyang) and steppe land with scattered trees. In addition, they migrate according to the season and geographic conditions. That is why it is highly possible that ancient red deer migrated along the rivers, oases and fields in Khotan. It is also very popular to have a lion's body and eagle's head on a mythical creature. However, as the deer-headed beast delivers the power of peace, the posture is neither for hunting nor for fighting. It represents peace, even it possesses superior power and it always lives in herds and migrates among mountains and steppe.

Take another example of the human-faced beast, which is the only mythical creature that has human features. Such designs always appear alternately with the design of a human hunting on horseback with a bow and arrows. There are two sets of fragments of such designs, both from Sampula; one set is kept at Khotan Museum and the other by the Abegg-Stifung fund separately. The outline of this set flows smoothly, and also shows strong colour pattern. The kept fragment is relatively complete in terms of a full pattern design. The design depicts the side view of the creature, front legs crouching, waist a bit arched, with three long plumes as wings on the back and a flame-shaped tail whipping high. The human face is also shown in a side view, with a curved eyebrow and big nose, which is more European in appearance, with four pieces coloured feature on the head, crescent-shaped ears at the back of the head, and a long moustache. The outside of the beast's body is in red, while the inside is yellow, embellished with triangle and spiral patterns. The wings are composed of two-coloured feathers in an alternating design. The other set is similar in design, with spiral pattern embellishment on the wings, the lines are a bit more rigid, but the fragment is rather small to allow us to identify the repeat. In the previous set, the human-faced beast is depicted in a hunting scene. Normally, in a hunting scene, apart from the predator and his helper, i.e. hawk or dog, all other animals should be prey. So what role does the human-faced beast play here? Is it predator or helper? From the picture, it is neither predator nor prey during the hunting, instead it is crouching and staring further away, perhaps as if it has found something. To the best of our knowledge, we assume that the human-faced beast must be the human being's helper, with a human brain, the power of a lion, and the flying ability of a bird, which may



Figure 8: skirt tapestry fragment with camel motif from Sampula.

also reflect the beliefs of human beings at that time. (Figure 8)

In conclusion, the tapestry band woollen skirt from Sampula, its style has been excavated along the oasis areas in the steppe, including the south-central road of Tianshan in Xinjiang; also in northern Pazyryk areas, which are mostly steppe along the mountains. The Sampula-style woollen skirt is suited to a pastoral lifestyle. The design of its tapestry band pattern, regardless of animal subject or graphic pattern, differs completely from those from China and is closer to those from southern Siberia. It maintains its own identity, and is a unique graphic design of animal patterns.

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Reviews

Former *Asian Textiles* editor Nick Fielding reviews a new book on Central Asian embroideries.

Russell S. Fling, *Khans, Nomads and Needlework: Suzanis and Embroideries of Central Asia*, (Self-published, available via www.silkroadsplendor.com, \$150).

In his introduction to this lavishly-illustrated book, Professor Walter Denny of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst makes the point that 'the results of collectors making the decision to publish their own collections are decidedly mixed' and notes Mr Fling's decision to approach the subject 'from the standards of a structural engineer's training'. He praises Mr Fling's open mind and 'unusual approach' and tells us that the book will 'inform and delight, instruct and entertain'.

Sadly, I have to beg to differ. Seldom have I come across a book on textiles that is so confused, eccentric and downright misinformed. Flying in the face of all acceptable research, Mr Fling has decided to reinvent categories to suit his own taste, to ignore what does not fit his idiosyncratic theories and to put on display to the world his own very limited understanding of the history and geography of Central Asia.

I am sorry to be so harsh to Mr Fling, who is clearly a very nice chap and who has an eye for attractive textiles. But the fact he has never travelled to Central Asia is very evident. In the glossary, for example, he refers to Bishkek as 'capital city now known as Frunze in Kirghizstan'. In fact, the reverse is the case. He refers to the Altai as a mountain chain in southwest Mongolia. In fact, it is in the northwest and stretches into Siberia. The Amu Darya, he says is a river between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan; it is actually between the former and Afghanistan. Likewise the Syr Darya he says is a river in northern Uzbekistan; in fact it runs a bit through western Uzbekistan and mostly through Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. I could go on.

Then there are Mr Fling's unusual definitions. After giving a reasonable classic definition of the term 'suzani' to mean a large tapestry worked with silk yarn on cotton or silk, he then says this is too narrow and proceeds to include almost any embroidery from the region.

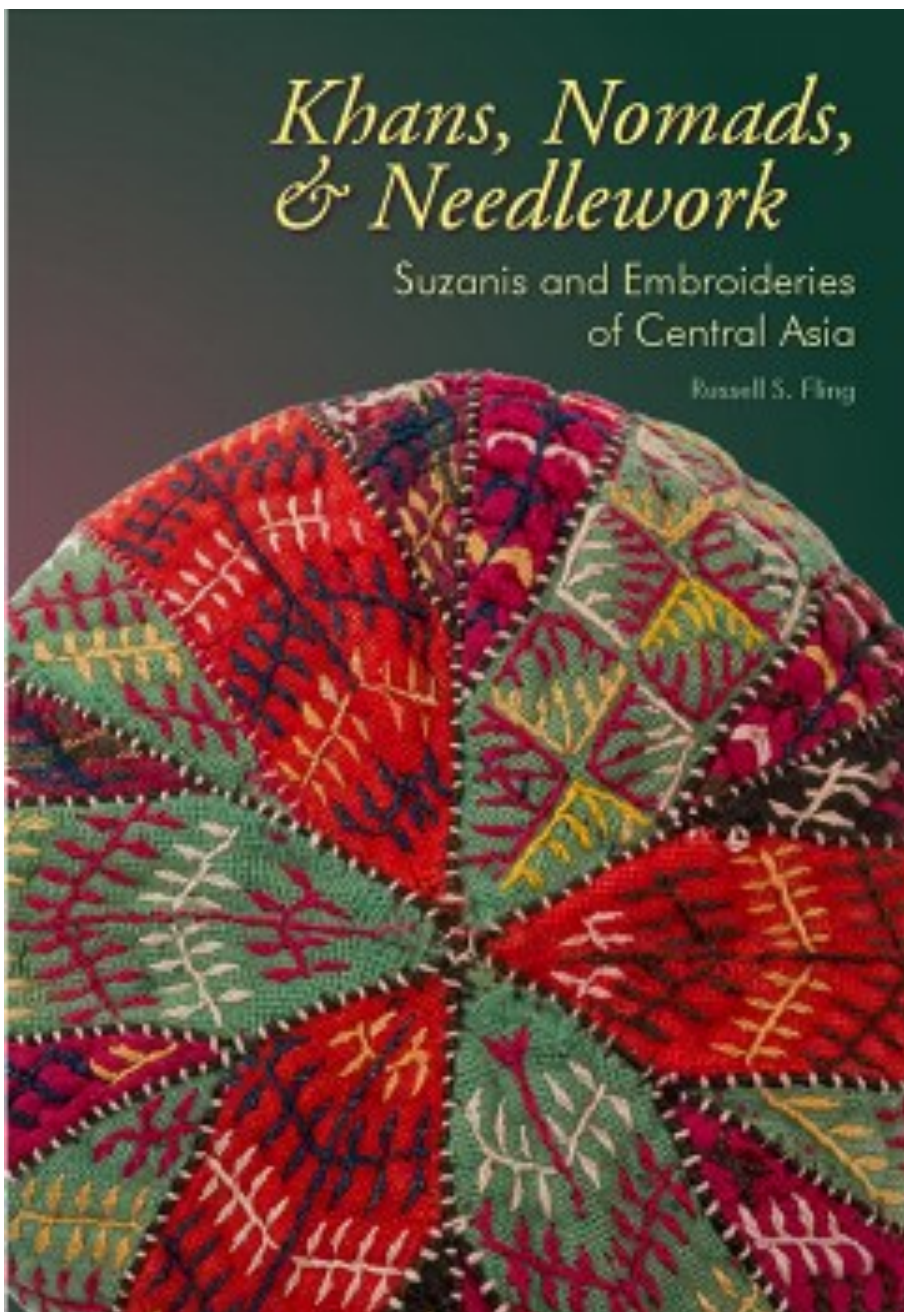
Thus Lakai textiles become suzanis, as do Kungrat embroideries and Turkmen chirpys and camel trappings. 'In this book, the term suzani will be used as it commonly is for embroideries made in Central Asia.'

Not only that, because Mr Fling also has his own definition of the geographical area that constitutes Central Asia. For him it is centred on 'present-day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan'. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Xinjiang, Afghanistan, etc., are not part of his definition, although confusingly, he scatters photos of all these countries throughout the text, often without any guiding context. Thus all specificity is lost. Everything is everything. Turks become Mongols and Mongols become Turks, as necessary. I don't

think too many Kazakhs will appreciate being referred to as Mongols, as Mr Fling does on page 161.

I will spare the reader any analysis of Mr Fling's understanding of the history of the region, but suffice it to say that it is confusing and often plain wrong. He seems to think that the deeply Islamic people of Central Asia had shamans in recent times, justifying this by reference to Buryatia and Tuva, thousands of miles to the east.

If you can ignore all that, then some of Mr Fling's textiles are interesting, although there is no mention of how any of them came into his possession. Were they all bought from dealers? If so, what is this collection, other than an assemblage of vaguely related artefacts, stripped of all social and historical context? I'm sorry, Mr Fling, I know you love these textiles, some of which are truly beautiful. But without a proper understanding of their context and origin, they have lost all their meaning.



Indonesian textiles in Nottingham

A group of OATG members had a close-up look at some marvellous textiles from Indonesia. OATG blogger Agnes Upshall describes the experience.

At the end of August, fifteen members of the OATG were very fortunate to be able to visit David and Sue Richardson at their house in Nottingham, to see their wonderful collection of Indonesian textiles.

The Richardsons had planned the day perfectly: they showed us a map of the region first of all, and we started off with eastern Indonesia in the morning, moving westwards after lunch. The vast majority of the textiles we saw was for occasional ceremonial use only, rather than everyday wear. Impressively, we saw about 150 textiles in total over the course of the day, gradually moving through different rooms of the house.

We began on volcanic Flores Island, one of the Lesser Sunda Islands, which was settled by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century (hence how the island got its name: 'flores' is Portuguese for flowers). We saw a great number of ikat-woven tube skirts (apparently every island has a different, unique word for these), that would be worn folded into two or three before being wrapped around the body. From the Nage district of central Flores, the majority of textiles that we saw had been dyed using only indigo. Some featured horse motifs, but oddly, it was on some of the cloths that had come from villages located furthest from the sea that we spotted octopus motifs in the ikat weave, and seashells stitched on as decoration. From the Ende province, on the southern coast of the island, the textiles were predominantly a deep maroon or aubergine colour, so had been dyed with morinda (a dye made from the bark of the root of the *Morinda citrifolia* plant), and the patterns tended to be more intricate and detailed.

We got through three large boxes of textiles in the first room before lunch, and ended up with an enormous pile of exotic cloths stacked on the bed. Then we took a break for a delicious lunch prepared by David and Sue: a magnificent feast of different Indonesian dishes, with curries and salads, which we ate in the garden.

After lunch, we moved on to the Batak people of Northern Sumatra. This is the most Islamic region of Indonesia, and according to the Richardsons, the land of bling! Very much unlike all the textiles we saw before lunch, which were made of cotton and so had a dull, matt finish, these tended to be made of silk and were wonderfully shiny and opulent. Although not all cloths featured songket (supplementary weft), a great many did.

In particular, we saw a couple of special cloths designed to be used as gifts on significant occasions, such as weddings or births, known as 'ulos ragidup'. Woven in three sections, the warp threads change from white to red or purple and back to white again during the weaving process. This is quite a tricky and time-consuming process, as it involves tying in new warp sections mid-weave, and often these days it is entirely avoided by simply stitching together three separate cloths with different-coloured warp threads.

Next, we saw textiles from the mountainous Minangkabau region of Western Sumatra, in which people live among high-up rice plains. In a lot of these cloths, gold supplementary weft covers them almost entirely, so that the base cloth is nearly invisible. If seen from the right angle, the gold glows in the light and looks almost white – at this point we had to start moving in rotation around the table in order to see the textiles to their best effect.

We finished the day with a huge, magnificent ritual 'palepai' ship cloth from Lampung, in Southwest Sumatra; very long, and around two feet wide, with a huge design of a ship that filled the cloth. Ships are a common motif in Lampung textiles, and are thought to represent the journey of the dead to the afterlife.

These are only a handful of the many things we saw that afternoon, and I have only skimmed the surface of all the destinations that we visited in our textile tour of Indonesia, but all in all, it was a wonderful day out in every respect. Thank you David and Sue!



Some of the other participants sent in their comments on the trip:

It was such an enjoyable day out. I came home feeling elated by all we had seen and by the beautiful surroundings. I was particularly struck by the contrast between the subtle colours of the village weavings and the flamboyance of the cloth of gold. Two different worlds, each lovely in its way.

Helen Adams

It was a jaw-dropping day: close encounters with such a vast collection of stunning textiles, the opportunity to touch, to see the reverse, to hear of their place in culture. On my return I delved into my books, a great reminder of the day, but no substitute for seeing the actual objects, though the practical technical information in some has proved enlightening.

Jenny Parry

It was tremendously generous of David and Sue to show us so many of their Indonesian textile treasures. The theme of eastern ikats and western songkets worked very well. The maps helped us to pinpoint geographical locations and the photographs showed how the pieces were (and are) worn. Not only the textiles but also the delicious lunch, a wonderful opportunity to talk to other OATG members at leisure.

Felicity Wood

The selection of textiles shown by David and Sue was fascinating, but what brought these objects to life were the stories of their acquisition, visits to villages, etc. Sue and David's home seemed a very apt setting in which to see the collection. A rich day out.

Eiluned Edwards

Other Asian textiles events

To 29 November 2013

Phoenixes and Dragons — an exhibition of Chinese costume from the Qing collection

The Qing Collection in ULITA comprises over 200 19th- and early-20th-century Chinese embroideries and tapestries. This exhibition includes several examples of dragon robes and female jackets, skirts and ornate collars. The complete collection of costumes is being exhibited together for the first time. Due to their fragility, this exhibition may be a rare opportunity to view several of the garments, including a women's jacket couched with metallic thread and a tapestry-woven bride's robe.

This exhibition complements the celebration of 50 years of the Department of East Asian Studies, which culminates in a series of events in late October.

For more information, visit the website of the [University of Leeds International Textile Archive](#) (ULITA), Leeds.

To 5 January 2014

Interwoven Globe — the worldwide textile trade 1500-1800

Trade textiles functioned as the primary objects that engendered ideas of what was desirable and fashionable in dress and household decoration across cultures. They served as status symbols for their owners, advertising the wearer's sophistication and knowledge of the wider world. Highly accessible, these popular cloths influenced the material culture of the locations where they were marketed and produced, resulting in a common visual language of design recognizable around the world.

To 6 January 2014

Fifty years of collecting Islamic art

In 1963 the Metropolitan Museum's Department of Islamic Art was established as a separate entity. Since then, the collection has grown through gifts, bequests, and purchases. The works of art in this exhibition are grouped by decade to highlight the trends and broadening focus in collecting Islamic art at the Met. From ceramics, glass and metalwork to carpets and contemporary art, this exhibition celebrates the half-century anniversary of the department and its collections.

For more information, visit the website of the [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#), New York.

February 2014

MARG Magazine is launching its special issue, 'Colours of Nature: Dyes from the Indian Subcontinent', in Kolkata, India, in mid-February, 2014. This is based on SUTRA's RAKSHA event of February 2010, when VRIKSHA focused on natural dyes and on the exciting rediscovery, in Kolkata's Botanical Survey of India, of unique long-lost 19th-century volumes of naturally dyed cloth and fibre samples by master dyer Thomas Wardle, and a rare set of textile samples compiled by John Forbes Watson. For this noteworthy launch SUTRA is planning events that include talks, exhibitions, natural dye and weaving demonstrations and sales of naturally-dyed and handcrafted products.

For more information, visit the SUTRA website: www.sutratextilestudies.com

May 2014**Tribal weavings of the Lesser Sunda Islands**

OATG members will recall that our founder, Dr Ruth Barnes, conducted her early textile research among the Lamaholot people on Lembata, part of the Lesser Sunda Islands which stretch eastwards from Bali to New Guinea. The region encompasses an amazing variety of Austronesian cultures which, despite their differences, all share a common tradition of weaving cloth on simple back-tension looms using locally grown cotton. The majority of their textiles are decorated with warp ikat using natural indigo and morinda.

David and Sue Richardson will lead an exciting tour through these islands next May, specifically designed for lovers of Indonesian textiles. Travelling across this isolated, rugged region is normally a tough logistical nightmare, however the participants of this tour will cruise effortlessly from island to island aboard the beautiful *Ombak Putih*, a traditional Buginese schooner. With an Indonesian crew of sixteen, she is fitted with all the latest navigation and safety equipment and for most of the time sails under power. She has twelve air-conditioned en-suite cabins and passengers dine communally on deck.

This is going to be a fun trip with a small group of like-minded passengers, getting to see all aspects of ikat production across a wide cross-section of the region – the itinerary encompasses Flores, Lembata, Alor, West Timor, Rote, Savu, and Sumba. Collectors will have many opportunities to purchase fabulous textiles from local weavers. Sailing through spectacular volcanic scenery there will also be plenty of time to relax, swim, snorkel, sunbathe, and beachcomb. This is a fantastic, adventurous way to travel, providing memories that passengers will treasure for the rest of their lives.

For further details visit <http://www.seatrekbali.com/browse-trips/ombak-putih-itineraries/item/269>

A local weaver on the Lerek peninsula of Lembata Island with one of her ikats.



OATG COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chair: Aimée Payton, Department of Eastern Art, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, OX1 2PH. Tel 01865 278067. Email: aimee.payton@ashmus.ox.ac.uk

Hon. Treasurer: Sheila Allen. Email: nick_allen98@hotmail.com

Membership Secretary: Michael Messham (temporary), 141 Kingston Road, Oxford OX2 6RP. michaelmessham123@btinternet.com

Blogger: Agnes Upshall. Email: agnesupshall@gmail.com

Programme Coordinator: Christine Yates. Tel 01865 556882.
Email: christine@fiberartgallery.com

Asian Textiles Editor: Jane Anson. Email: jane.anson@ntlworld.com

Website Manager: Pamela Cross, 2 Link Road, Tyler Hill, Canterbury, Kent. Tel 01227 457562. Email: pac@tribaltextiles.info

Member at Large: Julia Nicholson. Email: julia.nicholson@pmr.ox.ac.uk

MEMBERSHIP OF OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

(includes three issues of *Asian Textiles*)

Membership subscriptions were due for renewal on 1st October 2013.

OATG membership runs from 1st October to 30th September every year, and subscriptions for the year 2013–14 are now due. Membership costs £15 for individuals, or £20 for a joint subscription. If you pay by cheque, please make the cheque out to OATG, and write your name clearly on the back. If you haven't already renewed your membership for this year, then we look forward to receiving your subscription soon, at the address below.

Alternatively, if you would like to set up a banker's order, that would be a tremendous help to us as it cuts down on admin. You can download a form from the website, and send it to your bank.

We depend on your subscriptions in order to keep our programme of lectures and trips running, as well as for the publication and postage of *Asian Textiles* magazine. We do hope you would like to continue your membership of OATG.

Any queries, please contact:

Membership Secretary,
141 Kingston Road, Oxford, OX2 6RP
Email: michaelmessham123@btinternet.com

