OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

Newsletter No. 27 **February 2004**

Detail of embroidered Kashmiri shawl with Farsi script, Sikh period, c.1825.
Sadler collection of Kashmiri shawls, Clothworkers' Collection, University of Leeds
(see p. 8)

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

My remarks in Last June's newsletter on what Dyfri Williams, in an article in the British Museum Magazine which plumped onto my desk soon afterwards, felicitously called "the essential connectedness of people across time and place" has led to a number of exhilarating encounters and conversations. (Dr Williams' article, incidentally, is concerned mainly with the ancient Mediterranean civilizations, but even these show influences, especially stylistic ones, from much farther east.)

My attention has also been drawn to the "green man". The picture, or more often, the carving, of a human head bursting into foliage, with trees growing out of its mouth, or seemingly embedded in a thicket, is often to be found in Christian churches - surprisingly, since it is undoubtedly a very much older, pagan figure. I have recently learnt, however, that it is more widespread than I had realized, with examples in Buddhist and Hindu sites in various parts of Asia and in Jain temples in India. I was particularly interested to learn that when the Jain temple of Qutb Minar in Delhi was converted to a Mosque during the Mughal period, though all the other sculpture was destroyed, the many green men were left untouched. I have yet to find any textile examples, so if any of you are aware of any, I should be pleased to hear of them.

But to change the subject from green men to one white woman, we have recently had news of our former programme secretary, Ann Guild, who passed her mantle on to Rosemary Lee and Fiona Sutcliffe when she and her Australian husband returned to New South Wales. She writes that they have moved into a house almost in the centre of Sydney and are beginning to feel settled. Ann has become President of the Sydney Ionian Club, an excellent club for women who have come to live in Australia or Sydney from elsewhere. She finds herself one of the youngest members and is vigorously trying to attract new, younger ones. She is also returning to volunteer guiding at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and looking forward to active participation in a textile group.

PROGRAMME

Wednesday 17 March at 2 pm

CHINESE SILK AT THE ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM

A guided visit to the Exhibition *Chinese Silk*
by Shelagh Vainker, Curator of the Exhibition

Followed by an opportunity to look behind the scenes, to enjoy some other beautiful and interesting Chinese textiles held in the reserve collection

This visit is open to members only and numbers are limited.
Please contact Fiona Sutcliffe (see below) if you would like to come.

Tuesday 8 June, 11am-1pm

LAKAI UZBEK EMBROIDERIES FROM AFGHANISTAN

A talk on the Rau collection by British Museum staff led by
Sarah Posey, Curator at the Dept. of Ethnography.

Members will then have a chance to view these spectacular textiles recently acquired with the support of the National Art Collections Fund.
The collection is held at the Museum's reserve collection store near Olympia.

After lunch members may like to visit The HALI Fair: Carpets, Textiles and Tribal Arts at the nearby Olympia National Hall.

The visit to the Rau collection is open to members only and numbers are limited There will be a small charge. Please contact Fiona Sutcliffe if you would like to come.

TEXTILES AT THE HORNIMAN MUSEUM

A visit to the new textile gallery in the Horniman Museum at Forest Hill in London is planned for the summer. Further details will be available to members later.

For further information and bookings contact:

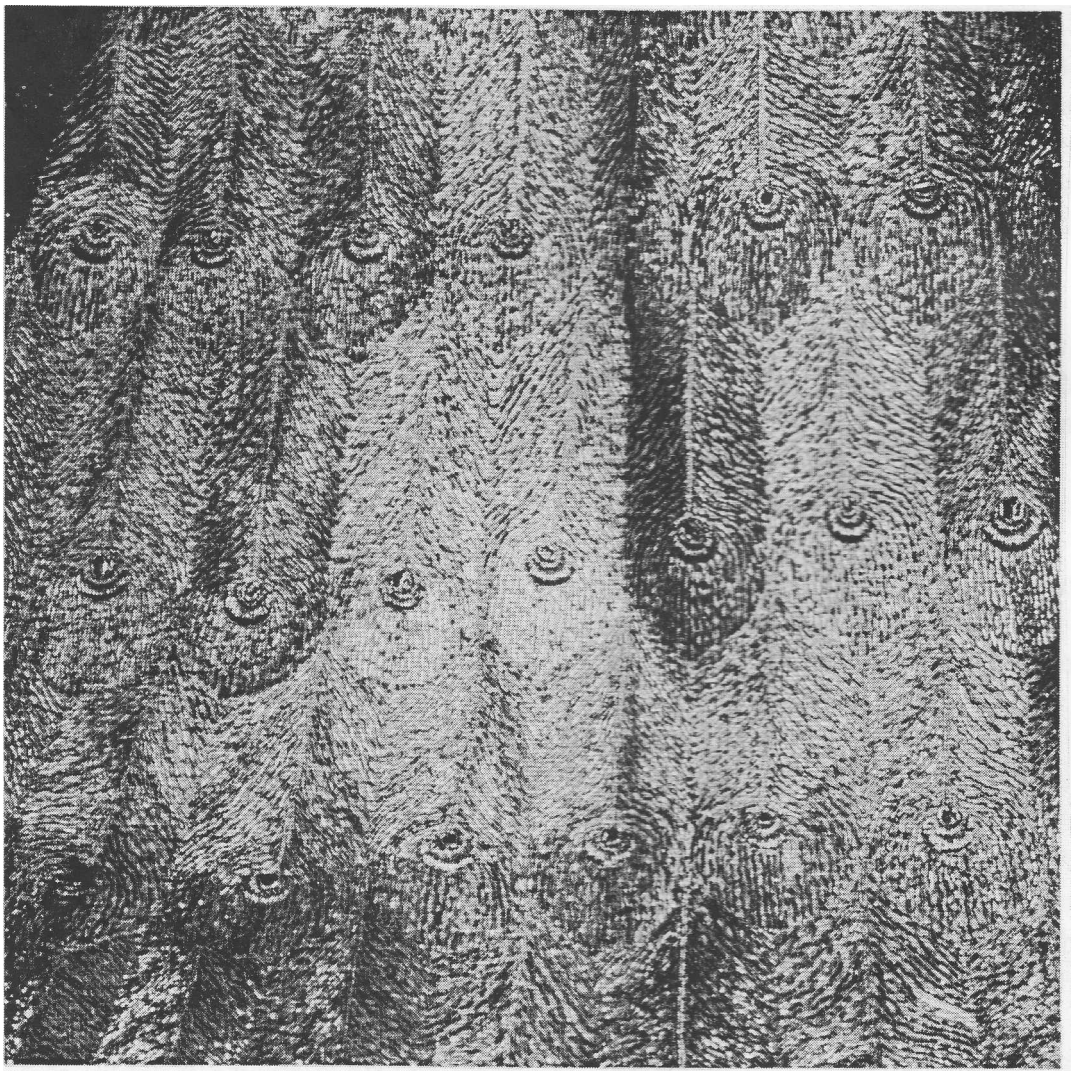
Rosemary Lee, tel. 01491 873276, e-mail: rosemary.lee@talk21.com
OR Fiona Sutcliffe, tel. 01491 872268, e-mail: J.V.Sutcliffe@talk2l.com

4

IMPORTED PEACOCKS:

ASIAN TEXTILES AND THE NATIONAL TRUST

It is said that, while close to death, Mary Victoria Leiter, Marchioness Curzon and Vicereine of India, asked her husband to "keep the feathers picture of me — that is the best." It is indeed a beautiful portrait which shows off not only Lady Curzon but also the Peacock Dress, with its gold embroidered cloth and overlapping feathers of metal thread, each one studded by an iridescent green beetle's wing, to full effect. Fortunately, both the painting and the ball gown (made for the Delhi Coronation Durbar in January 1903) can still be seen at Kedleston Hall where she once lived. While the design is Lady Curzon's and the manufacture by the exclusive Parisian house of Worth, Indian craftsmen were commissioned to weave and embroider the metallic fabric (illustrated below). It is, therefore, like so many of the "Asian" textiles to be found in National Trust properties, something of a hybrid.



Lady Curzon's peacock ball gown, accepted in lieu of inheritance tax and allocated to the National Trust in 1997
Kedleston Hall, National Trust

Founded in 1895 and incorporated by Act of Parliament in 1907 to ensure "the permanent preservation for the benefit of the nation of lands and tenements (including buildings) of beauty or historic interest", the National Trust has a very large and exceedingly mixed collection. Among these are 415 historic buildings, 164 of which are houses, 138 with museum status. Naturally, textiles form a large and important part of the contents of these houses. Beyond the items of dress and costume, the Trust owns and cares for a full range of famishing textiles including wall coverings, carpets, rugs, curtains, bed hangings, seat furniture and tents! Most of them form an integral part of the decoration that make up a room and home.

Some of these materials are Asian in origin – in truth most National Trust houses probably contain d textile either made in the east or inspired by one. Dorneywood in Buckinghamshire (where sadly only the garden is open to the public) has a tented room hung with block printed cotton of six palampores (the seventh is cut out to fit the fireplace), stamped 'Made in India', while Dunham Massey has a considerable collection of chintzes. Powis Castle, too, has several examples of chintz (including the interior of the Tent of Tipu Sultan discussed by Sara Burdett in the *O.A.T.G's* June 2001 Newsletter) as well as many items made from Indian silks and cottons. Lord Robert Clive "of India" (whose eldest son married the daughter of Lord Powis) returned to England in 1767. He brought back many treasures: chintz bed quilts and 10 pieces of `Multanny chintz'; *'soosee'* and *'taffaty';* 35 silk handkerchiefs, 10 pairs of shawls, many Kashmir Pashminas, 2 court girdles *(parkas)* of either Persian or Indian origin; Mughal style *huqqa* furnishings; an elephant saddle with *mashru* lining and a pair of Mughal style shoes. Charles Paget Wade of Snowshill Manor, who was also a great collector, lived mainly in England but amassed here a great number of Asian pieces including no fewer than twenty-six suits of Japanese Samurai armour of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. In Lancashire the Trust's Gawthorpe Hall is home to the collection of Rachel Kay-Shuttleworth which grew from its namesake's private collection into one of over 14,000 items, includes examples of needlework from Asia and worked panels and costumes from Russia, Burma, Iran, India, China and Japan which are displayed on rotation within the house.

Many of the most dazzling examples of Asian textiles can be found in the furnishing of Trust houses. They too, like Lady Curzon's dress, often tell stories of beautiful Eastern fabrics being adapted to English needs and tastes. Some properties, such as Smallhythe, Buckling and Polesden Lacey, have fabrics in the style of imported materials. Others hint at complicated journeys of ownership. Among the carpets at Knole are three early Indian examples, possibly acquired from one of the Royal palaces by the 6th Earl of Dorset - his "perquisites" as Lord Chamberlain on the death of Queen Mary II in 1694. One is a "Portuguese" carpet made in Goa in the early seventeenth century, its four comer scenes thought to represent the assassination of Bahadur Shah, Sultan of Gujarat, while visiting the Portuguese fleet in Diu. The incredible collection of textiles at Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire also has rare early Indian textiles (including a Gujarati embroidered floor-spread of the late seventeenth/early eighteenth century and a Bengali embroidered and quilted bedcover of the late sixteenth century).

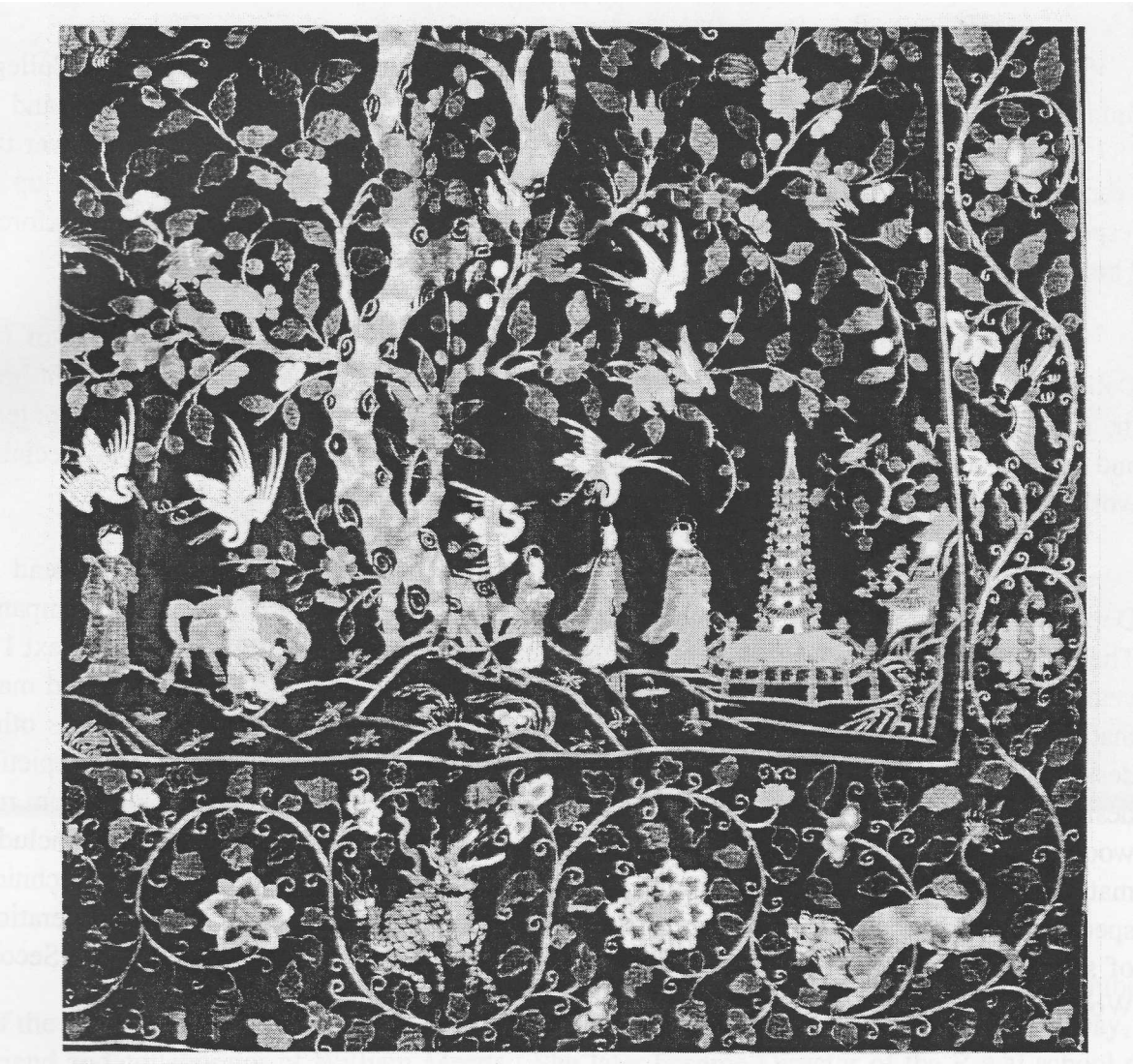
In other houses the adaptation to European taste was more extreme and several National Trust properties have state beds that make use of Chinese silk. The moulded head of Dyrham's bed (on long term loan to the Trust from the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Port Sunlight), of c. 1705, is covered with red and gold Chinese brocaded silk. Calke Abbey still has the best preserved Chinese silk hangings. Given, most probably, as a wedding present from Princess Anne (daughter of George II) to Lady Caroline Manners in 1734, it is possible the brightly coloured upholstery (which includes tightly rolled peacock feathers for the markings of tree trunk knots and butterfly wings) was made for George I in around 1715. It was never erected at Calke and both the dark blue, light weight material, much like taffeta, densely embroidered with exquisite birds (illustrated opposite), and the white, heavier, satin finish textile with its processions of figures, warriors, mandarins, dragons and gazelles, consequently, are remarkably well preserved. Finally, Erddig, near Wrexham, has a rare example of a *lit a la duchesse* with, again, Chinese coverlets and hangings. It is uncertain how the embroidered silk, in the Chinese manner of "Indian needlework", came to the house but it is thought that the owner, John Meller, may have acquired it from his neighbour Elihu Yale of Plas Grono, who, until 1699, had been in the service of the East India Company. Research also suggests that the bed was the work of John Belchier, cabinet maker, and Philip Hunt, upholsterer who, at that time, was working in London. The tester, which covers the entire length of the bed, and headboard are covered with Chinese white satin (the ground somewhat darkened to cream now) embroidered in long-and-short stitch and framed with gilt borders of carved gesso. While the interior of the tester shows a flock of birds, peacocks (embroidered, applied or mounted on carved blocks) decorate the tester's centre and comers, the top of the headboard and the comers of the quilted coverlet. The bed and textiles were conserved by the Victoria and Albert Museum in the early 1970s and returned to the State Bedroom at Erddig in 1976 where it is displayed alongside the eighteenth century hand-painted Chinese wallpaper which hangs in the room.

The owners of Kedleston, Calke, Dyrham and Erddig combined materials from Asia and employed the craftsmen of Europe to use them to decorate their homes and themselves. Others, such as Clive brought home treasures and spoils from abroad or, like Rachel Kay-Shuttleworth and Charles Wade, collected them at home. Many others simply followed the fashion for the Asian taste. Each item, however, forms part of a story not only about its manufacture, journey, owner and use but also about its part in the decoration of a home that has now become a National Trust house.

Lucinda Porten

Assistant Curator, The National Trust

WITH THANKS
to Tim Knox, Ksynia Marko, Tina Levey and Rosemary Crill.



Detail of the embroidered Chinese silk hanging adorning the state bed at Calke Abbey.

REFERENCES

Treasures From India: The Clive Collection at Powis Castle. Mildred Archer, Christopher Rowell and Robert Skelton. The Herbert Press in association with the National Trust, 1987, especially the chapter on Textiles by Veronica Murphy.

Textiles in Trust. Edited by Ksynia Marko. Proceedings of the Symposium held at Buckling Hall, Norfolk, September 1995. Archetype Publications in association with the National Trust, 1997.

Mary Curzon. Nigel Nicolson. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977.

8

THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS INTERNATIONAL TEXTILE ARCHIVE

(ULITA)

Roberts Beaumont, the then Professor of Textile Industries at the Yorkshire College founded the archive in 1892. A department of textiles had been established in 1873, and in 1875 was housed in the splendid Alfred Waterhouse Gothic Revival college, which over the years expanded, mainly designed by Waterhouse and his son. The college was set up in response to the demand from local industry for a more skilled and knowledgeable workforce. The Clothworkers Company offered support to the development.

The Department of Textile Industries was one of the founding departments of the College, which was to become the University of Leeds in 1904. The department taught both the practical and the theoretical aspects of textile manufacture, as well as design and context, and had day and evening students. Spinning, weaving and dyeing were all taught in specialist workshops, as well as in formal lectures and in design studios.

In 1892, Professor Roberts Beaumont, who had succeeded his father as Head of Department, founded the Archive, with financial assistance from the Clothworkers Company. The collections were intended as a teaching aid, but also for their own sake. Over the next 111 years they grew mightily, and now include over 300,000 items, including natural and man-made yarn samples, weaves, embroideries, tapestries and knitted samples, as well as other designed items, and a collection of more than twenty glass negatives and slides, depicting designs, and machinery used in the complex industrial process of producing textiles from raw wool to finished fabric. The Archive was initially European in emphasis, and included material from Britain, France and Italy. Pattern books (which included designs and technical specifications) formed a major component and these stimulated the design ideas of generations of students. A museum was established, which remained until the outbreak of the Second World War, and had a curator, Clara Burton, until the early 1930s.

The Archive's international dimension was always implicit, not only in continental Europe, but also in the main Asian, African and American textile producing areas. The material collected reflected not only the factory tradition, but also the craft one. The beyond Europe aspect of the collection was initiated by Sir Michael Sadler, a former Vice-Chancellor, who donated a quality of outstanding Kashmiri shawls (see illustration, p.1). A retired head of Textile Industries, Professor A.F. Barker, visited China, principally Shanghai, with his son in the 1930s. While in China he collected over 200 items of Qing dynasty silk embroideries and tapestries, many in the form of wall hangings (although some of these were originally intended for clothing), and others being costumes or parts of costumes (see illustration opposite). The Qing era (1644-1912) was noted for its finely graduated social distinctions, and these embroideries and tapestries were the costumes for the rituals of the dynasty and the official enactment of the formalized life of the court and its administration. It is likely that much of this material was made in the silk-producing and embroidery centre of Suzhou in south-east China. The collection is particularly strong in material from the nineteenth century.

Qing Dynasty embroidered silk robe, with bird and flower/foliate motifs. Couched metallic thread. Early 19th century.

In 1947 the University received the Louisa Pesel bequest. Louisa Pesel was a member of the second generation of the Arts and Crafts movement, having been trained by L.F. Day, a friend and collaborator of William Morris. She later became Director of the Royal school of Needlework and Lace in Athens, where she was able to acquire much of the material in the collections. She subsequently became the first President of the Embroiders' Guild in England and Mistress of Broidery at Winchester Cathedral. The collections that she was to bequeath to Leeds principally Levantine embroideries from Turkish and Greek isles. The embroideries are finely wrought and reflect the iconography and decorative motifs of the respective cultures, although there is much commonality. In all there are over one hundred items (see illustration overleaf).

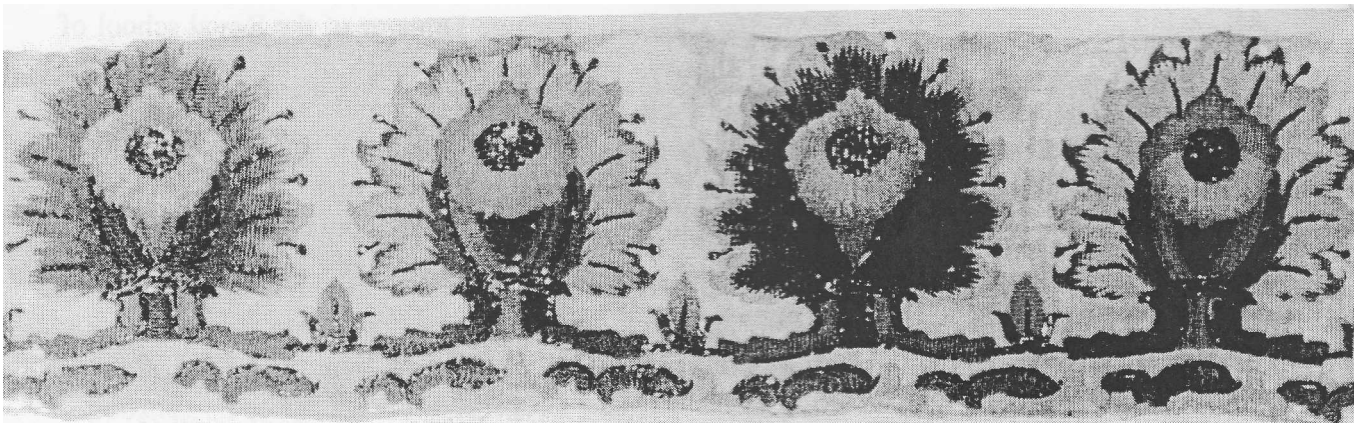
Other contributions from Latin America, Australasia and Japan followed. Also notable are 2,500-year-old mummy cloths and 13th Century Egyptian children's clothes.

With the coming of the Second World War the collections went into hibernation and were dispersed. However, in the 1980s Professor Michael Hann, the present Director or ULITA, started a programme of organizing, consolidating, cleaning and storing the collections

in appropriate conditions. He also re-started collecting, gathering many outstanding examples of Pakistani textiles in that country's North West Frontier Province. He also collected in Indonesia, acquiring beautiful examples of batik and ikat (see illustration on p. 31). The European dimension of the collection was also expanded, with significant additions of knitted material, the Tibor Reich collection (noted designer of furnishing fabrics in the post-war period) and of yarn and fabric samples of man-made material. A programme of exhibitions was started and much research was carried out.

Following this expansion and the reorganization of the collections, it was necessary to provide them with a secure home, and also to make them available to a wide public. Professor Hann was able to secure the chapel of St Wilfred, the former chapel of the Leeds Boys' Grammar School on the University's western campus, to house the collections and to create an exhibition space. Edward Barry, son of Sir Charles Barry, architect of the Houses of Parliament, designed the chapel. Like his father, Edward Barry was much influenced by A.W.N. Pugin, the great Gothic Revivalist. The style of the chapel is a Victorian revival of the mid-Gothic Decorated style, with a touch of French influence. The building soars gracefully, and has turrets at its corners, lancet windows, a rose window and ornate carving. Inside, the proportions are elegant and upward, and the lancets have quatrefoil tracery, colonettes and carved stiff leaf capitals. Much of the interior structure of the chapel is still in place, including the wall decorations and some of the stained glass, but the furniture and much of the stained glass was taken to the new Grammar School chapel in the Alwoodley district of Leeds.

The building has been restored and cleaned. A conservation Ark has been built in it, which provides optimum conditions for the storage and display of the collections in built-in cases. The Ark is embellished with soaring curved uprights and sails. There are screens and cases on the side walls to display less fragile material.



Napkin, silk on linen, with metallic yarn. Flower and cypress embroidery. Turkish, late 18th Century. Pesel Collection.

The constituent collections will be accessible in digital form to students, scholars and the interested, or where conservation permits, in reality. Images will be available on the E-Museum. There will be an annual programme of exhibitions, and an education service, as well as facilities for scholars and students. It is hoped that the centre will be open three or four days a week in term time (to be finalised), with other times by arrangement.

The first exhibition will comprise a selection of stunning Qing embroideries and tapestries. One on Pakistani textiles will follow this exhibition. Others in the pipeline include British fashion and the Mediterranean embroideries. The centre will open on 6 May.

Professor Michael Hann, Director, ULITA
P.W.G. Lawson, Curator, School of Textiles and Design

THE DIGITISATION PROJECT OF STEIN TEXTILES IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

The Stein Collection in the British Museum comprises about 300 paintings on silk, hemp and paper, 200 pieces of textiles and 1,600 three-dimensional artefacts. This material was recovered from present-day Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China by Hungarian-born British archaeologist Sir Marc Aurel Stein (1862-1942) during three expeditions undertaken in 1900-1901, 1906-1908 and 1913-1916. The material ranges in date from the Neolithic period (2nd millennium BC) to the Tang dynasty (AD 618-907), illustrating the lifestyle, burial and religious practices of several different cultures which developed across Chinese Central Asia over 1,500 years.

Most of these artefacts are very fragile and susceptible to light, and this is the reason why they cannot be exhibited on a permanent basis in the museum. However, in response to the increasing demand for accessibility from scholars and students, a digitisation project has been undertaken, thanks to the sponsorship of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation based in New York. The aim of the project is to take digital pictures of the objects and link them to data extracted from the Museum database, creating a virtual catalogue. This catalogue will be available to the public first from a computer in the Student's Room of the Department of Asia, and eventually on the British Museum/Mellon website. Phase one of the digitisation project focussed on the paintings, and was completed in Autumn 2002, while phase two will concentrate on textiles and three-dimensional artefacts. The project started in April 2003 and will run to June 2004. It is managed by Carol Michaelson, Assistant Keeper in the Department of Asia, and coordinated by Cecilia Braghin.

The textiles selected for phase two will include all those published in Volume 3 of *The Art of Central Asia* series compiled by Roderick Whitfield in 1985 and published by Kodansha, as well as in the catalogue which accompanied the homonymous exhibition *Caves of the Thousand Buddhas,* edited by Whitfield and Fatter in 1990 and published by the British Museum Press, and additional pieces that have never been published before. The entry for

each object will contain bibliographical references to these publications and to. Stein original reports.

The bulk of the textile collection was recovered by Stein at Dunhuang, originally a garrison town of the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220) when the Silk Route was first opened, and later a Buddhist pilgrimage site strategically placed at the end of a narrow corridor of land between two mountain chains connecting the western regions of the Yellow River valley of China to Central Asia. From the 4th to the 10th century AD a complex of rock-cut caves, designated as the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, was hollowed out from a cliff of gravel conglomerate facing a stream, and embellished with sculptures and paintings. The paintings and textiles in the Stein collection were recovered from cave 17, which is regarded by scholars as the library cave, because it contained thousands of manuscripts and paintings. These were deposited here over time until sometime in the early 11th century the entrance was sealed to protect these precious materials from potential invasions or persecutions. After this time the location of the cave was forgotten, until its chance re-discovery by a Daoist monk in 1900. Stein first visited the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas during his second expedition in 1907 and managed to collect thousands of artefacts, which he later shipped to London.

The textiles from Dunhuang date mostly to the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD), one of the glorious periods in Chinese history, characterised by political unity, prosperity, territorial expansion and florid commercial and cultural relations with foreign countries. The Tang rulers were great patrons of Buddhism: they promoted the construction of large cave temples and pagodas, and sponsored the production of paintings and sculptures. During the Tang dynasty, the silk and ceramic industries expanded greatly, in response to a huge demand from the domestic and export market.

At Dunhuang, undyed plain woven silk and hemp fabrics were used as the support for paintings, while finely decorated silk damasks and gauzes, strips of Chinese tapestry *ke si,* and embroidered, brocaded or printed textiles were used to border paintings, to make banners and sutra wrappers. An interesting feature of these objects is that they are often made with pieces of different fabrics stitched together. This is because silk was a very expensive material imported from eastern China, thus the local monks were making the best use of the fabrics available.

Among the embroidered pieces there is an extraordinary large panel backed on hemp cloth, representing Buddha Sakyamuni preaching in the centre, flanked by two bodhisattvas and two monks. The scene represents a famous episode from the life of the Historic Buddha, his sermon at the Vulture Peak, indicated by the rocks around the Buddha. The panel was originally folded in three parts, and this explains the heavy damage along these lines. The rest of the composition has preserved to very good condition and the vivid colours of the silk threads are staggering.

Large religious accessories also comprise an altar valance, composed of a series of triangular and pointed shaped streamers made of plain monochrome or patterned woven

clothes, hanging from a horizontal red band, and a rectangular patchwork, probably a monastic robe *kasaya*.

The group of small fragments includes many damask weaves decorated with large scrolling flowers and leaves, often the lotus and the peony, or more stylised florets arranged along diagonal axes. Printed textiles are also well represented in the collection (figure 1). They were clamp-resist dyed, a technique that was particularly popular in China and involved clamping the folded textile and dyeing it with two symmetrically carved concave blocks.

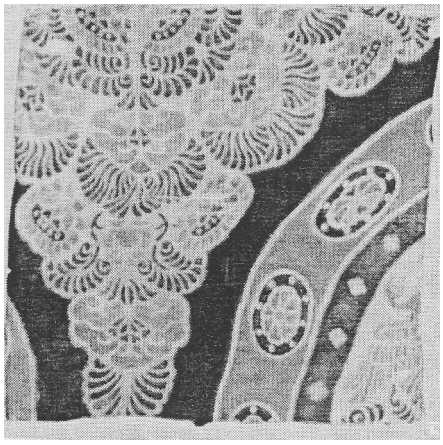


Fig. 1 Example of printed textile (MAS 877)

In the Tang period, silk was a popular good traded along the Silk Route, and decorative designs were often influenced by contacts with other societies, particularly those of ancient Persia. A typical Iranian motif borrowed from the Sasanian culture and often exploited on Chinese silks is the pearl roundel, containing pairs of confronted animals or birds holdings jewels on their beaks (figure 2).

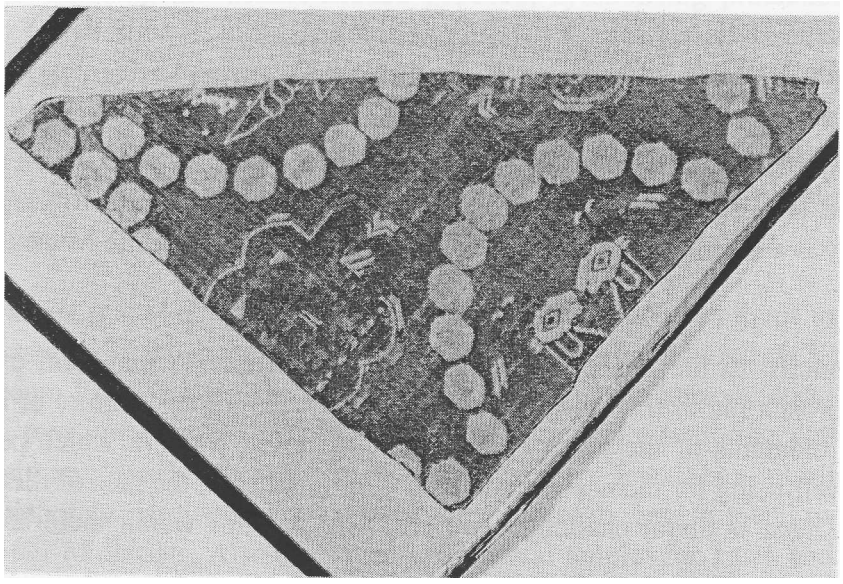


Fig. 2 Example of textile with pearl roundel (MAS 862A)

A second group of textile finds was recovered from residential areas in Loulan and Niya, two military outposts established during the Han dynasty. These finds consist of pieces of clothing or furniture such as shoes, bags and rugs, made of hemp, cotton and wool. They provide us with precious information about the daily life of the societies that lived along the Silk Route.

The high resolution of the digital photographs will allow close up views of the objects, to show minute details at double their original size. Such photography has proved to be particularly successful for textiles, as the high degree of magnification often makes it possible to ascertain the weaving structure. It is estimated that the images and catalogue entries compiled during phase two will be available to the public from the Stein monitor in the Student's Room `from Autumn 2004. Around the same time, the entries for the most outstanding pieces will also be included in the Compass Tour on the British Museum website

Finally it should be mentioned that some of these pieces, together with 50 paintings and 80 three-dimensional artefacts from the Stein collection will be on show for a special exhibition on the Silk Route, which will be held at the British Library from the 22nd of April to the 4th of September 2004.

For further information on the project please contact me at the Department of Asia on 020 7323 8866 (e-mail: cbraghin@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk), or the Student's Room on 0207 73238250.

Dr. Cecilia Braghin
Stein Project Administrator

[Some rarely-seen textiles from the Stein collection will be on loan to the forthcoming *Chinese Silk* exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum. See below p. 27.- Ed.]

LIVING AND DYING AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM

A major new gallery opened to the public at the British Museum on 1 November last year. Created out of the shell of the British Library's former North Library, the Wellcome Trust Gallery is a dramatic space for the display of material from the Museum's ethnography collections.

In contrast to the rest of the Bloomsbury galleries, the inaugural exhibition takes a thematic approach rather than displaying artefacts by geography, culture or historical period. The various elements of the gallery explore the different ways in which people around the world seek well-being for themselves and their communities in the face of illness and suffering. *Living and Dying* is about challenges we all share, but for which there are many different responses. The exhibitions's themes are illustrated with major presentations from the Pacific

Islands, North America, the Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal, and the Andes. These large-scale cases show some of the ways communities ensure well-being by engaging in relationships with other people (Pacific), animals (North America) spirits (Nicobar Islands) and the earth (Andes). Two further sections, *Life's Ordinary Dangers* and *Your Life in Their Hands,* illustrate how individuals protect things they need and those they care for, and seek help in response to sickness and trouble. The material here is drawn from across the globe and includes textiles from Asia which I discuss below.

Cradle to Grave, a textile-based art installation specially-commissioned from Susie Freeman, Liz Lee and David Critchley, explores biomedical responses to protection and treatment in the UK, in a case along the centre of the gallery. On the north wall, images and graphics illustrate some of life's difficulties in trouble, sorrow, need and sickness.

The exhibits range from ancient gold from Central and South America to contemporary collections from Tanzania. *Apocalypse, a* vast papier mache sculpture from the Mexican Day of the Dead festival, hangs from the ceiling of the gallery. The basalt Easter Island figure known as Hoa Hakananai'a is on open display as is a Haida wooden totem pole from the Northwest Coast of North America and other monumental sculptures.

The Asian textiles on display are not many, but they are fascinating. The majority feature in one element of *Life's Ordinary Dangers* which considers the protection of children from anticipated harm. It is curious how rare it is to see museum artefacts concerned with infancy on display. Here the imbalance is redressed with finely-worked garments and related objects from India, Pakistan and Central Asia.

In Sind, Pakistan, and in Gujarat, India, women embroider protective motifs and auspicious symbols of fertility, prosperity and happiness onto children's clothing and textiles. Designs including the double-headed peacock, symbolising protection, are said to ward off snakes. Lotus flowers, birds, animals and human figures are all associated with good fortune. There are two 20th century examples on display. One is a child's orange silk, short-sleeved coat - decorated with embroidery, sequins and ricrac - from the Lohana people, Sind, Pakistan. The other is a child's long-sleeved silk coat from Rajasthan or Gujarat, India. Made of lightweight red silk, it is embroidered with various symbols of prosperity, including women churning butter.

The Turkmen material, also 20th century, comes from various groups in north-eastern Iran, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. Some of these pieces were acquired with the support of the British Museum Friends from the private collection of Omar Masom, specifically for the exhibition. The two boys' over-shirts *(kirlik* or *krte)* variously featuring cotton cloth, silk thread embroidery and tassels, glass beads and attachments of metal, hair, plastic and cowries - are the most elaborate garments. They are shown with a bib, hats, a metal model of a bow and arrow and pair of anklets. Also displayed area metal amulet for a cap and the cloth and glass bead amulets which are attached to over-shirts. These may contain Qur'anic or other inscriptions.

But why the need for such intricate protection? For Turkmen nomads, the survival of boys is particularly important. As they grow older, boys inherit responsibility for the flocks of sheep on which the tribe's livelihood depends. So their mothers try to preserve their sons from snakes, scorpions, disease or accidents with special clothes and ornaments intended to keep away evil influences. In particular, they try to deflect the "evil eye" (caused by someone looking enviously at someone or their property) which is believed to threaten the life-force itself.

Young boys are given a tunic or over-shirt *(kirlik* or *krte)* to wear until they are four or five. Traditionally it is made of seven pieces of fabric provided from the families of seven different tents and sewn by three or four women who are considered fortunate in their lives. They embroider it with motifs and use colours (such as red), that symbolise life and fertility. The borders often have hook patterns representing scorpions to protect the torso. Attached to the shoulders and back are bells, beads, amulets, coins, feathers, cowries or white buttons, black-and-white cords, metal models of sharp tools and weapons (especially bows and arrows), and sometimes snakes modelled in cloth, as well as tubes or roundels containing texts or prayers from the Qur'an. Hair attachments (more usual on over-shirts from the Turkmen of Turkmenistan) are taken from older, healthy children to bring a boy strength and protect him from illness. The wearing of the over-shirts is also said to nurture the virtues of humility and good sense. An unhemmed lower edge is to ensure the boy's long life and continuity of the family line (illustrated below).

Boy's over-shirt (kirlik *or* krte), *cloth, silk thread, glass, metal, plastic, cowries. Ersari Turkmen people, Afghanistan, 20th century. (Ethno 2003 As 3.3)*

Caps and bibs also feature similar elements, all of which are intended to frighten away evil spirits, and either to catch the attention of the "evil eye" or deflect it from causing harm. Small boys may also wear anklets with bells to drive misfortune away.

Asian textiles also feature in two further parts of the gallery. In Your Life in Their Hands, the costume of a demon dancer is shown alongside masks worn in Sri Lankan exorcism ceremonies. These ceremonies are performed by an exorcist, actors and drummers as a means to control a demon that is disrupting a person's internal balance. A crowd gathers and the patient's family joins in the dramatic and often comic spectacle. Offerings are made to Buddhist deities for protection and masked actors dance one by one in front of the patient. The mask that provokes a response indicates which demon is present. The demon is challenged and forced to accept a gift from the patient. This breaks the connection between them.

The most recently-acquired and contemporary piece, a gift from Susan and Gordon Conway, is an appliquéd silk wall-hanging *(khatwa*) from Patna, Bihar, northeast India. Made in 2002, it is mounted on the west wall of the gallery. It was made by a group of women belonging to Adithii, a non-government organisation based in Patna, which trains women in skills such as handicrafts. These skills enable extremely poor and illiterate women to earn money for themselves and freely express their social and personal concerns. Initially the women depicted scenes from village life, but gradually they began to address issues such as poverty, social injustice and the spread of AIDS. The hanging illustrates the different ways AIDS is transmitted and shows health workers distributing condoms as a practical means of prevention. A matter of life and death indeed.

Sarah Posey
Curator, Department of Ethnography
Deputy Lead Curator, Wellcome Trust Gallery

[An illustrated booklet on the gallery is available in the British Museum shop, priced £1.00. The children's garments from India and Pakistan referred to above are illustrated in the 2001 Fabric Folio volume by Sheila Paine *Embroidery from India and Pakistan* (London: The British Museum Press, reviewed in O.A.T.G. newsletter no. 19, June 2001). I would like to thank Peter Andrews for his insights into the protection of Turkmen boys.- S.P.]

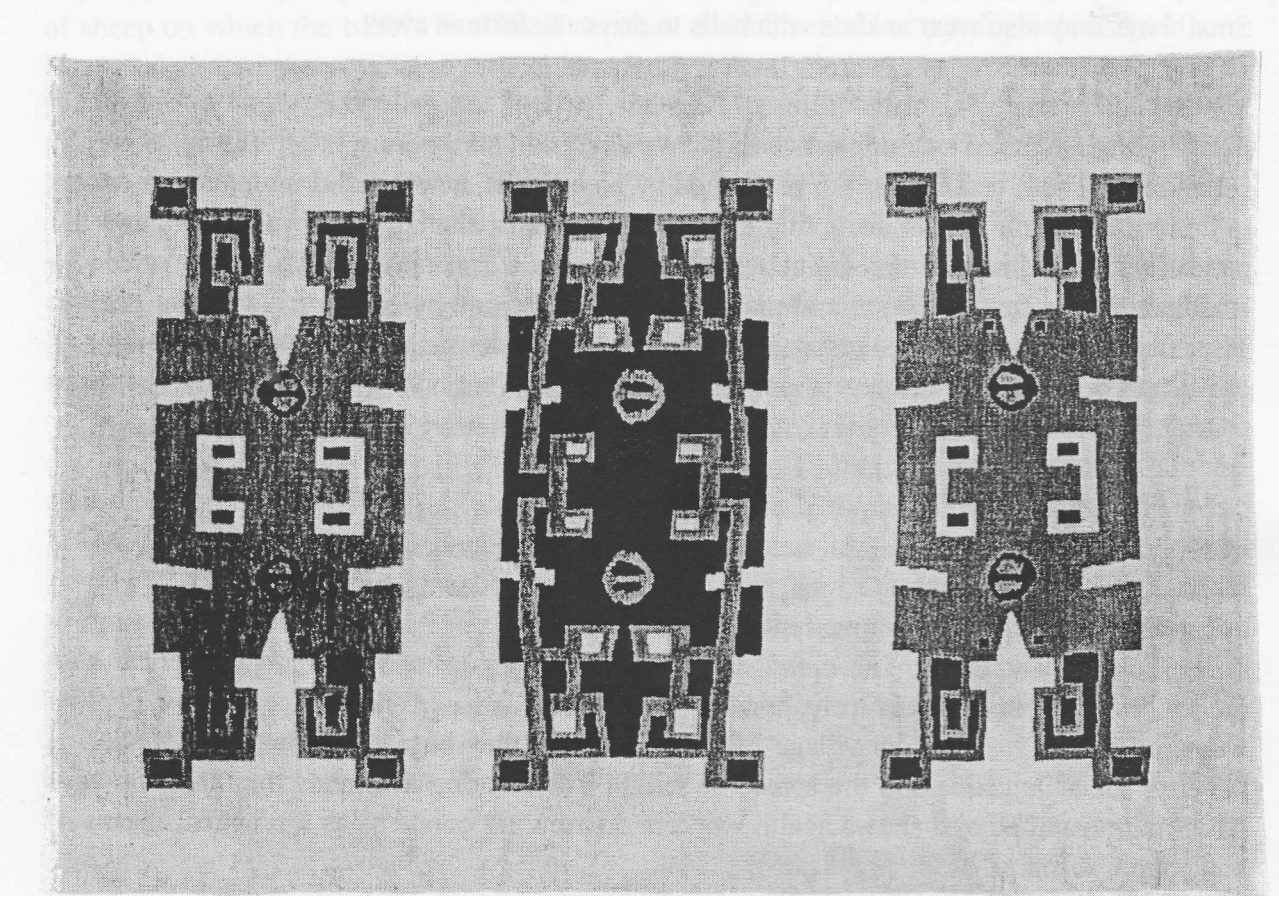
APOLOGY

In the October 2003 newsletter I gave the names of the authors of the report on the O.A.T.G. visit to the Edward Lane exhibition as Jo Rose and "Felicity" Sutcliffe. I do apologise to Fiona and to you all for this lapse.

Editor

18

ART DECO CHINESE CARPET FOR THE V.& A.



Gold/beige ground with three central green and black deco designs based on antique Chinese motifs, 5'9" x 8'4"
c.1930, probably Beijing (Peking), China

This carpet was made in China during the period between 1920 and 1940, when there was a brief flowering of inventive rug-making in Beijing, Tainjin and Shanghai

Owing to the loss of markets in Turkey, due to the First World War, carpet import and export enterprises turned to China to satisfy the needs of interior designers.

It was a time of co-operation between western firms and Chinese designers who together produced modernist patterns for chic art deco interiors. Although many of the pieces were destined for America and Europe, they were also used in the individually-designed houses of fashionable Chinese, as well as in the skyscraper hotels that came to dominate the Shanghai waterfront at this time.

This carpet was recently purchased for the Victoria and Albert Museum with funds from the Donor Friends.

Verity Wilson

SUTRA: A CONFERENCE ON THE TRADE TEXTILES OF THE INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT

Sutra, a non-government organization based in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) organized a conference on the trade textiles of the Indian sub-continent from 12-14 October 2003. It is a well-known fact that the Indian sub-continent has been clothing the rest of the world for centuries, right up to the present day. A variety of textiles, both for daily use and important occasions, have been manufactured and exported to different parts of the world from this region. These textiles have found a place in the lives of people in places as far apart as Egypt and Tibet to the islands of south-east Asia. The papers presented during the conference looked at the trade that took place from the Indian sub-continent to various parts of the world, discussed the historical context of the trade, the social arena in which the fabrics were used, and the contemporary status of the trade in areas where it continues.

The conference began with an introductory paper by Jasleen Dhamija who outlined the geography of Indian textiles. The first session looked at trade from India to other parts of Asia, namely Tibet, Sri Lanka, China, and parts of West Asia. Particularly interesting were Steven Cohen's paper on Indian painted cottons for the Sri-Lankan market, Janet Rizvi's on the trade in Kashmir shawls to the Ottoman Empire, Iran and Russia, and Nasreen Askari's on the textile trade in Sindh in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries.

This was followed by a session on trade from India to south-east Asia, mainly Indonesia. Ruth Barnes spoke on fabrics, mainly hand-painted and block-printed cottons, made in Gujarat for the Indonesian market. Mary Hunt Kahlenberg on the tradition of resist-dyed textiles made for the Javanese and Sumatran markets during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries.

The textile trade from Bengal was then examined in some detail. Ruby Ghaznavi spoke on the famed muslins of Bengal which are reputed to have emptied the coffers of Rome over two thousand years ago; Susan Bean talked on the trade and use of Bengal's textiles in nineteenth century America, and Jenny Balfour-Paul on the Bengali indigo trade. The final paper in this session, and probably the most fascinating, was that by Rex Cowan on Indian textiles and dyestuffs found in the cargo of shipwrecks. A sort of a modern day bounty hunter, Cowan talked about the Swedish East Indianman *Svecia* which was wrecked in 1740 and the large amounts of dyewood found amongst her cargo. The ship was also said to have held hundreds of tons of Indian textiles – cottons, muslins, and linen – which washed up on the shore of a small island in the Orkneys, Scotland, and can be seen at museums in Amsterdam, Sweden, and Orkney.

The final day began by looking at the trade from India and Africa with Joanne Eicher talking about Indian textiles in the Niger Delta, and Hazel Lutz on the contemporary trade in embroidered textiles from India to west Africa. This was followed by talks on the trade with Europe and America – Don Johnson looked at the textile trade with Britain during Emperor Jahangir's reign and Rosemary Crill discussed two of the earliest surviving pieces of Indian

embroidery in Britain, dating to 1601, at Hardwick Hall.

Probably the highlight of the conference was the exhibition of trade textiles from the collection of Profile and Shilpa Shah organized at the Birla Academy of Art and Culture. Known as the *Tapi Collection,* named after the river Tapi that flows through the town of Surat in Gujarat, the collection includes more than 2,000 Indian pieces that comprise exquisite *pichwais, jamewar* shawls, *jamdanis, patolas, chintzes* and *patkas*. Perhaps the most interesting part of their collection is the textiles India traded with Europe and maritime communities in south-east Asia. The collection is documented in the book *Trade, Temple and Court: Indian Textiles from the Tapi Collection,* co-authored by Rosemary Crill, Ruth Barnes and Steven Cohen (see newsletter no. 24, February 2003)

The conference demonstrated that from the ancient world to the global markets of the 21st century India continues to clothe the world.

Monisha Ahmed

REPORTS OF OA.T.G. MEETINGS

Analysing the Social Fabric

Following the A.G.M. on 9 October last, Dr Eiluned Edwards, Research Fellow in Dress and Textiles at De Montfort University, Leicester, spoke on the changing patterns of production, use and exchange of embroidered textiles in Gujarat. Over the last ten years she has visited Gujarat many times and had returned from her last trip only two days before our meeting. Her wonderful slides and descriptions of women's lives there gave us a fascinating insight into a changing world.

The Robari, who were the subject of Eiluned's talk, are migrant pastoralists who live in the Kachchh district of Gujarat in north-west India. Their embroidered textiles were traditionally made for domestic use and particularly as wedding gifts or as part of a dowry. An embroidered dowry was an essential part of the property transfer at marriage, and Robari girls worked on their trousseaux for many years. The ability to produce well designed and finely executed embroidery was highly valued in a wife. An extensive dowry was expected, consisting of blouses, veils, quilts, bags and animal trappings, all finely embroidered. The quilts, animal trappings and bags were mainly decorated with appliqué, whereas cloths and household textiles were densely embroidered. Dowry textiles were laden with auspicious motifs executed in bold colours and framed by borders of white and yellow chain-stitch. Seams and edges were given particular attention as cut cloth is considered vulnerable to malign influences. Tassels, cowrie shells and beads attached to hems and seams provided further protection, and various good luck symbols, such as a scorpion (!), were included in the embroidery.

This is all changing, and, in some sub-groups, embroidery is now discouraged because of the time taken to produce it and because it is considered old-fashioned. Flamboyantly decorated textiles are still a feature of Robari culture however. Synthetic fabrics are used, embellished with metallic braids, tinsel and mirror work.

Ten years ago, beautiful old dowry pieces were being sold fora pittance. To-day there is an ambivalent attitude towards embroidery; its value is appreciated, however, and a succession of dealers visit the villages looking for things to sell to shops and emporia in tourist areas or overseas. Non-Governmental Organizations have stepped in with income-generating schemes to encourage women to embroider collectively by hand or machine. The first of these schemes involved women embroidering saris and was such a success that to-day 6000 women from twenty different castes are working on different collective textile projects. Whole communities benefit from the money these women earn. Commercial embroidery, though, has none of the qualities that compelled generations of women to invest countless hours in stitching their trousseaux. Traditional Robari dress is vanishing and, with it, part of their heritage.

Ann Doyle

Textiles and Dragon-Snakes: Tracing the Ernst Vatter Collection

A wet and chilly November evening was considerably brightened by an absolutely enthralling talk by Ruth Barnes about her experiences and researches in Indonesia and how they related to the Vatter Collection in Frankfurt. She wove together a fascinating tale of adventure and detection, academic research and human contacts.

Ernst Vatter had been curator of the Frankfurt Ethnographic Museum since 1913 when he and his young wife, Hanna, travelled in Indonesia in 1928-29. Forty years later, Ruth and her husband set out to spend 1969-71 in the same islands, taking with them a copy of Ernst Vatter's book. They lived in a palm-thatched hut in the village of Lamalera on the island of Lembata, a community where the men fished for whales and the women wove textiles. Life was certainly not always comfortable, and Ruth wondered how hard Hanna had found the rigours of the rainy season.

The Frankfurt collection was extremely comprehensive and aimed to be representative of any given location. Vatter was interested in all aspects of the way of life of the people, recorded in his photographs, and in the function and production of the objects he collected, their social meaning and their mundane or ceremonial use. His meticulously detailed documentation increased enormously the value of the collection that Ruth was able to study. One item was a beaded hair-ornament with tassels, which included frayed bits of silk cloth which, on close examination, Ruth discovered were from a type of double ikat that comes from Gujarat in India. This fabric used to be traded by the seafaring islanders and was treasured, becoming sacred to the clan, only to be brought out for feasts. Even when worn out, it was so precious that little scraps were kept and had been worked into this headdress.

Ruth showed the Vatters' photographs and her own slides of the islands and artefacts, among them ikat weaving from western Lembata, and from the east, carved wood and incised patterns on coconut shells, including the "dragon-snake" - the *nags, a* guardian figure found throughout South--East Asia. Despite the fact that the islands are now predominantly Catholic, the dragon-snake is still to be found on roofs and, in one case, outside a mosque.

In 1934 Ernst Vatter wrote a book about dragon-snakes but after that little was heard of him, so Ruth was curious to discover what had happened. After lengthy inquiries, she found that he had retired from the Museum in 1937 and in 1939 the family had emigrated to Chile. Further detective work revealed that his young second wife, who had accompanied him to Indonesia, was Jewish and hence his enforced retirement. In Chile he no longer did any academic work died aged only 59.

Ruth's persistence was rewarded when she eventually found Hanna Vatter, now living in Freiburg. They were able to meet and struck up a close friendship. Fifty years after their expedition it must have been a great joy to Hanna to find that her husband's work was not forgotten. In 1995 Ruth took Hanna's diary and photographs to Lembata and met people who remembered or were related to those in the pictures. Hanna had been particularly devoted to a lively 9-year old orphan girl and still kept her photo beside her, so one can imagine her delight when Ruth showed her pictures of the girl's son and grandchildren. For Ruth, too, these meetings added a very moving human dimension to her research and serious academic work, and the story of both aspects gave us all a highly enjoyable evening.

Hilary Stenning

GOOD NEWS FROM THE BRITISH MUSEUM

I understand that arrangements are being made for the British Museum to acquire Sheila Paine's magnificent textile collection - which many of us have had the privilege of seeing either in her home or at loan exhibitions. Sheila has promised to write more about it for the October newsletter. She will be the second O.A.T.G. member whose collection has found a permanent home there, Gina Corrigan's Miao costumes having been acquired by the Museum in 1998 (see her article in newsletter no. 13, June 1999).

There are other moves afoot. One you may have already inferred from the programme page. The Ethnographic Department's textile collections have been moved to Blythe House, West Kensington (where the V.& A. also store some of their textiles). The site also has the benefit of a study room.

The Department is also developing a library and study facility at Bloomsbury which it hopes will be ready to open this summer. Watch this space!

Editor

B O O K S

Monisha Ahmed wins Book Award

Members of the O.A.T.G. will be delighted to learn that one of their number has won the R.L. Shep Book Award, presented annually by the Textile Society of America to the English language publication judged the best book of the previous year in the area of ethnic textile studies. The main criteria for the prize-winning book are "high quality research and scholarship, presented in an accessible, engaging manner".

Monisha's book, entitled *Living Fabric: Weaving Among the Nomads of Ladakh Himalaya* (Orchid Press, Bangkok, Thailand, 2002, ISBN 974 8304 77 9) was given a brief pre-publication notice in the O.A.T.G. newsletter no. 18, p. 18, and many of you will have enjoyed hearing her talk on the same subject, under the title of *Weaving from the Womb* in September 2001.

The book was based on Monisha's doctoral thesis of 1999 and several years of field research among the nomads of eastern Ladakh. Thirteen books were considered by the three-woman award committee under the chairmanship of Suzanne Baizerman. In making the award, which is worth $750, the committee stated: *"Living Fabric* presents the culmination of intensive field research in the Himalayas among the nomadic pastoralists of Ladakh. The author supplies rich details about the social context of the craft and about every aspect of fiber preparation and weaving. At the same time, she documents the waning of the weaving tradition. The result is a comprehensive view of a subject that has had little exposure. Clearly written text and numerous photographs give the book a broad appeal."

Congratulations, Monisha.

Although now living in Bombay, she is still researching in Ladakh, where she spends much time, especially during the summer months. The focus of her interest continues to be the textile arts of the western Himalayas, as well as trade in fabrics and fibres in the region.

Nominations are now being sought for the 2003 R.L. Shep Book Award, and are open to English language books (including bi- or multi- lingual publications in which all essential information appears in English) in the field of ethnic textile studies. "Ethnic" is defined as non-industrial textiles of Asia, Africa, Oceania and native and Latin America as well as identifiable cultural groups in Europe and North America. The closing date for nominations is I March, and further information may be obtained from Lotus Stack, 1stack@artsmia.org

Editor

24

Burmese Textiles

Ed. Elizabeth Dell and Sandra Dudley, *Textiles from Burma: Featuring the James Henry Green Collection,* 2003, Philip Wilson in association with the James Green Centre for World Art, Brighton, ISBN 0 85677 569 5

South East Asian textiles have a woven beauty and intricacy that captivates and intrigues many of us. With the ease of travel today or whilst living in places with a rich textile history, we are able to collect, record, photograph, and study woven items.

Burma, a land rich in resources has a complex society. Its cultural and trade relationships with India span over 2000 years and textile traditions have been greatly influenced by neighbouring South East Asian countries.

Textiles from Burma, a recent publication, focuses on the Green Collection and its use by the Brighton Museum to form a basis for the study and development of textiles from Burma. A range of essays on Green, his study of anthropology and textile collecting, and of textiles in an historical, social, cultural, local, and wider context, written by academics, independent researchers and scholars, form the main text of the work.

In the early part of the 20th century, James Henry Green served with the Indian Army in Northern Burma. Here, his work brought him into contact with some of the 120 different groups of people who inhabit the country. His photographs and documents interpret and capture aspects of their lives, textiles and weaving traditions.

Two Meru girls. Photograph by James Henry Green, c. 1926
Royal Pavilion, Libraries and Museums no. 1034

The book draws on Green's black and white photographic collection and sets these against colourful close-ups of finely detailed weavings and village scenes that successfully capture the past and present. His photographs illustrate the way different groups wore lengths of fabric woven on backstrap looms.

A fascinating essay by Sandra Dudley, entitled *Whose textiles and whose meanings?* comments on past methods of using textiles and dress to help identify ethnic identity and raises many interesting questions.

The book is superbly illustrated with old and new photographs, many of which show intricate weaving details. Essays give a brief overview of the textiles produced by the Akha, Burman, Chin, Kachin, Karenic, Naga and Shan State people and also set Burman court textiles, textile texts, and woven items of displaced Karenni refugees in Thailand in a local context.

The wider issues of collecting, research, and commissioning are dealt with in the final section of the book. In 2002, The Green Centre commissioned and documented seventeen wedding outfits from Kachin State (as described by Lisa Maddigan in newsletter no. 23, October 2002). These form an important link through the weavers and researchers for the future. Nationally however, The *New Light of Myanmar* newspaper exhorts people to "Uplift national prestige, integrity and to preserve and safeguard cultural heritage and national character". The final essay by Mandy Sadan, makes searching comments on the influences of political instability that have over time, caused ethnic groups to seek the unity and identity encouraged by the Government through traditional textiles/dress.

The book is well researched and provides a valuable and beautifully illustrated contribution on Burmese Textiles for textile enthusiasts and scholars. An introductory chapter on the complex history of Burma would have helped to create a broader understanding of the country.

Enjoyment of some essays is lessened by the academic style of writing, which creates a distance between the reader and subject. The extensive notes, Bibliography and Museum Appendix are, however, an invaluable resource for further study and viewing of Burmese Textiles.

Weaving as a cottage industry plays an important part in the economy and life of many families. Books outlining the rich textile heritage of South East Asia, not only give pleasure to many of us but encourage, educate and give status to all the weavers who continue with their intricate tradition.

Gloria Dudley-Owen

Textiles that Changed the World -

- is the title of a new series edited by Ruth Barnes and Linda Welters (University of Rhode Island). It will focus on historical, social and cultural issues and chronicle the impact of individual types of textiles, fibres and dyes throughout the ages. Topics to be investigated are: origins, cultural importance, function throughout history, impact worldwide, transformations. Each volume will be handsomely illustrated, and the aim is to appeal to a wide audience across disciplines. Possible subjects include: linen, silk, wool, cotton, rayon, polyester, velvet, chintz, madder, indigo, lace. If you would like to submit a proposal, or know of someone who may be interested, please contact Kathryn Early at Berg Publishers, 150 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1JJ, tel.01865 145104, fax. 01865 791165, e-mail: kearle@berg1.demon.co.uk

Ruth Barnes

New Books - Short Notices

ed. Marianne Aav, *Marimekko,* Yale, 2003, 286 pp, 300 col. & 85 bw illus., f35

Comprehensive study of the work of the Japanese fashion designer.

Mukulika Banerjee and Daniel Miller, *The Sari,* Berg, 2003, ISBN 1 85973 732 3, 288 pp, 215 col. illus., £24.99

Those of you who enjoyed Pinal Martian Syal and Ashwini Vaidya-Gupte's survey of the sari in the last newsletter may be tempted to explore the subject further in this lavishly illustrated volume, which seeks to show why the sari continues to flourish when most of the world has adopted western dress.

ed. Helen Bradley Foster and Donald Clay Johnson, *Wedding dress Across Cultures,* Berg, 2003, 256 pp, 40 illus, Hb. ISBN 85973 742 0, £50, pb. ISBN 1 85973 747 1, £16.99

Although the traditional white dress dominates western and large parts of former colonial wedding ceremonies, marriage rituals vary significantly throughout the world. This book examines the evolution and ritual functions of wedding attire within the context of particular cultures, questions the relationship between contemporary wedding dress and traditional values, and discusses the changes international migrations have had upon the wedding clothes of various ethnic groups.

ed. Sandra Niessen, Ann Marie Leshkowich and Carla Jones, *Re-Orienting Fashion: The Globalization of Asian Dress,* Berg, 2003, 244 pp, hb. ISBN 1 85973 534 7, £47, pb. ISBN 1 85973 539 8, £15.99

Focussing especially on east, south and south-east Asia, this book covers designers, retailers, consumers and governments.

Ernst J. Grube: *Keshte. Central Asian Embroideries. The Marshall and Marilyn R. Wolf Collection.* London: Robert Marcuson Publishing Service (2003). Introduction 11 pp, 43 catalogue entries, colour illus., appendix and bibl. xv pp. US $ 45 or £ 28. ISBN 0-9728533-0-

This publication contributes considerably to our understanding of the large embroidered hangings usually referred to as *suzani* and made in various parts of Central Asia; here they are referred to by the localised term *keshte,* translated as 'patterned needlework'. The book is beautifully produced, with sumptuous colour illustrations, including some very high quality detail photographs. Forty-three textiles are presented, each with an extensive text entry that includes a detailed stylistic analysis. The technical details, identified by Arlene Cooper, are presented in the appendix.

TWO EXHIBITIONS AT THE ASHMOLEAN

Chinese Silk

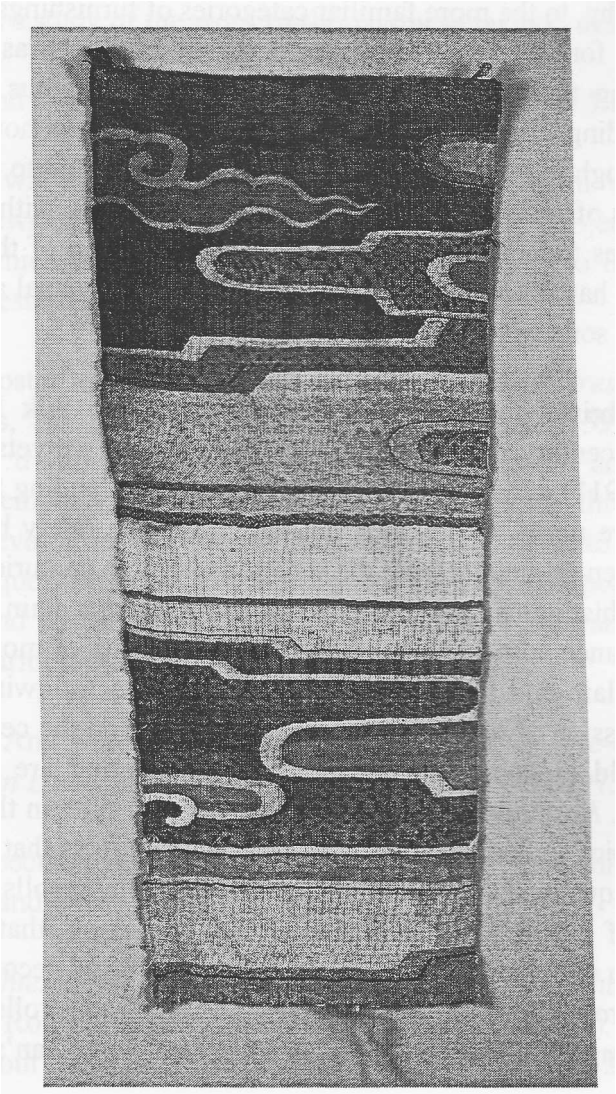
Chinese Silk coincides with the publication by British Museum Press of *Chinese Silk: a Cultural History* and as such will aim to display the diverse functions of silk in China, from Buddhist ceremonial pieces and presentation silks, through book wrappings and reproductions of paintings and calligraphy, to the more familiar categories of furnishings and costume. Silk in historical China not only formed a part of private domestic life, but was also visible in many public contexts, including theatrical performance as well as religious processions and the decoration of public buildings. Its production took place in small rural households as well as in grand mansions, and though in many periods silk attire was restricted to a powerful, moneyed elite there were also eras of general prosperity during which it was within the grasp of many ordinary people. Silk thus touched the lives of a great proportion of the population, yet its fragility means that little has survived, and its contribution to the visual and material world of historical China has been somewhat overlooked.

This exhibition brings together early textiles from the Silk Road, tapestries and brocades from the 12th century onwards, and embroideries and velvets of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. The British Museum is lending Stein Collection silks from Dunhuang that have never before been on loan, and have rarely been exhibited. These include polychrome woven fragments from the second to seventh centuries and two large Tang dynasty (618-906) Buddhist items: one banner comprising various plain and polychrome silk, and a complete altar valance, almost three metres wide, made up of more than a dozen types of gauze, embroidery, plain and figured silks. In the centuries following the Tang dynasty, north China saw a succession of non-Chinese dynasties alongside the central rule of the Song (960-1279), and the gold brocades and tapestries of that period are represented by some smaller, very fine pieces. *Kesi* tapestry weave became a major type in the Ming dynasty, and a large bold hanging depicting deer in a landscape shows the effects that could be achieved by the technique; the technique is also used for a pair of calligraphy scrolls of the late nineteenth century. Another pair of scrolls from the same private collection, that of Chris Hall, show how silk could be woven with bamboo to create a different type of decorative hanging, in this case with ornament appropriate to the four seasons. The bamboo scrolls are from an original set of eight; further examples of domestic textiles from the Ashmolean's own collection are a

set of four panels embroidered with flowers, trees and rocks, and some chair and table covers woven with *kesi* and painted ornament against a gold ground bordered in scarlet. Gold thread appears extensively on two dragon-decorated silks with probable imperial connections: a frontal with a large dragon head in gold-wrapped couched thread, and a yellow book wrapper woven with a paired dragon roundel and flowers in gold thread. Possibly imperial presentation pieces from two Oxfordshire private collections complement both the Ming Buddhist silks from the Chris Hall collection, and the later palace pieces from the Museum. The exhibition will be held in the Sullivan Gallery; however, close by in the main gallery will be an additional display of silks, including a colourful twentieth-century festive hanging and a selection of dress accessories.

The exhibition runs at the Ashmolean Museum from 9 March - 27 June.

Shelagh Vainker



Textile Traces: The Lloyd Cotsen Collection

This exhibition, which can be seen at the Ashmolean Museum from 31 March to 13 June, will show a selection of Near Eastern and Central Asian textiles from the collection of Lloyd Cotsen, an American collector who has brought together one of the most important groups of historical textiles in private hands. His current collection is mainly made up of small pieces, often in a fragmentary condition: they are traces of textile art, rather than monumental examples. The fragments emphasise the transient nature of weaving. The selection presented comes from Western and Central Asia, with examples from pre-Islamic times to the 18th century, and geographically extending from Egypt to Western China.

For your diary: the exhibition will be celebrated with a private view on 21 April, when Mr. Lloyd Cotsen will be present; all OATG members will receive an invitation to the event.

Ruth Barnes

OTHER EXHIBITIONS

In the U.K.

Through the Surface - The touring exhibition initiated by the Surrey Institute of Art and Design, which was featured in the last newsletter, continues at the James Hockey and Foyer Gallery, Farnham, and Hove Museum and Art Gallery, until 20 March, with a site-specific installation at Fabrics, Brighton, and then moves to the Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts at Norwich, April to June. For exact dates and other information, tel. 01603 593199 or592467

Braids and Beyond: A Broad Look at Narrow Wares - From military braids to mouse traps, antique to modem and handmade to industrial: how centuries of skill have turned a piece of string into a work of art. Until 27 March at Newarke Houses Museum, Leicester

3 Apr- 3 June at The Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle

3 July - 4 September at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Leicester
For further information contact J. Rawdon Smith, tel. 01733 312649 or *J.* Carey, tel. 01404 813486

Mirror, Bead and Thread - The Kanchen Malde collection of Gujarati textiles will be on view at Durham University Oriental Museum, Elvet Hill, Durham, until 24 March. Tel. 0191 374 2214

Experience the Colours of Asia - at the Bagshaw Museum, Batley, Yorkshire, until 6 June - celebrates the traditions and culture of South Asia and the ways in which they have enriched life in Britain. Many of the exhibits, which include textiles, have not been seen in public before. A highlight of the display is a collection of wedding costumes made for the *The Bride Wore Red* project organized by the Kirklees Museum Service. The outfits were purchased after extensive research and consultation with local south Asian communities, and were launched last October in a spectacular fashion show at Batley Town Hall, of which a video may be seen in the exhibition. For further information, including details of related events and workshops, tel. 01294 326155.

Puppet Worlds - from the Horniman Museum (see newsletter no. 25, June 2003, p.24) has recently transferred to the Liverpool Museum, where it can be seen until 30 August. Tel. 0151 478 4322.

Overseas

Draped in Dragons: Chinese Court Costume - *at* the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, until 2 May. This exhibition, primarily drawn from the Museum's own collection, also contains key loans from private collections, and uses examples of court dress, furniture, portraits, accessories and historic photos to explore the role and evolution of costume within China's court and society, providing a fascinating portrait of Imperial court life during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911).

Draped Wrapped and Folded - an exhibition exploring the complexities of untailored clothing worldwide through the lens of its simplest form, the rectangle - at the Textile Museum, Washington D.C., until 6 June. Tel. 001 202 667-0441.

Luxury Textiles East and West - celebrating 50 years of the Museum's textiles and costume department with a display of 75 items from around the world dating from the 14th to the 20th century, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California, until 15 August.

Sari to Sarong: 500 Years of Indian and Indonesian Textiles - This major exhibition from the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, where it was shown last year, will be seen at the Asian Civilizations Museum, Empress Place, Singapore, for three months from 1 April. For details see website, www.nhb.gov.sg/ACM/acm.

Fiberart International - 18th Biennial exhibition at the Society of Contemporary Craft, the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, Pennsylvania, 3 April - 15 August. The exhibition will present a broad range of innovative contemporary art in fibre by established and emerging artists from around the world, chosen by a distinguished panel of artists and curators. Related exhibitions will run concurrently at a number of galleries in and around Pittsburgh. For further information visit www.fiberartintemational.com

Last Chance to See -

Afghanistan - the exhibition at the Museum of Ethnology, Vienna, has been extended until 29 February. Tel. 0043 1 534 30-0

Indigo - *at* the Gold Museum, Ballarat, Victoria, Australia ends 29 February.

LECTURES AND EVENTS

Flatwoven Rugs and Textiles from the Caucasus - Rug and textile appreciation morning led by Robert Nooter at the Textile Museum, Washington, D.C., Saturday 28 February, 10.30 a.m.. Tel. 001 (202) 667-0441 or e-mail reception@textilemuseum.org

The Story of Silk - Sunday 29 February at 2 p.m., guided tour at the Royal Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh . Tel. 0131 247 4422

Antique Textile Fair, the Textile Society's annual event will be held on Sunday 7 March, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., at the Armitage Centre, Moseley Road, Fallowfield, Manchester, M14 6BE. Further information from www.textilesociety.org.uk

Oriental Rug and Textile Group in Scotland meetings:

Wednesday 10 March - Dr Janet Starkey, University of Durham, on *Symbolism in Persian Carpets,* at Daniel Stewart's College, Queensferry Road, Edinburgh, at 7 p.m.

Tuesday 20 April - hands on session at the Royal Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh, 6.30 - 8 p.m.

Wednesday 12 May - *More Hidden Textiles of Edinburgh,* an afternoon tour at St Mary's Palmerston Place; textile restoration work and Donaldson's College; and the new Dovecot Studios.

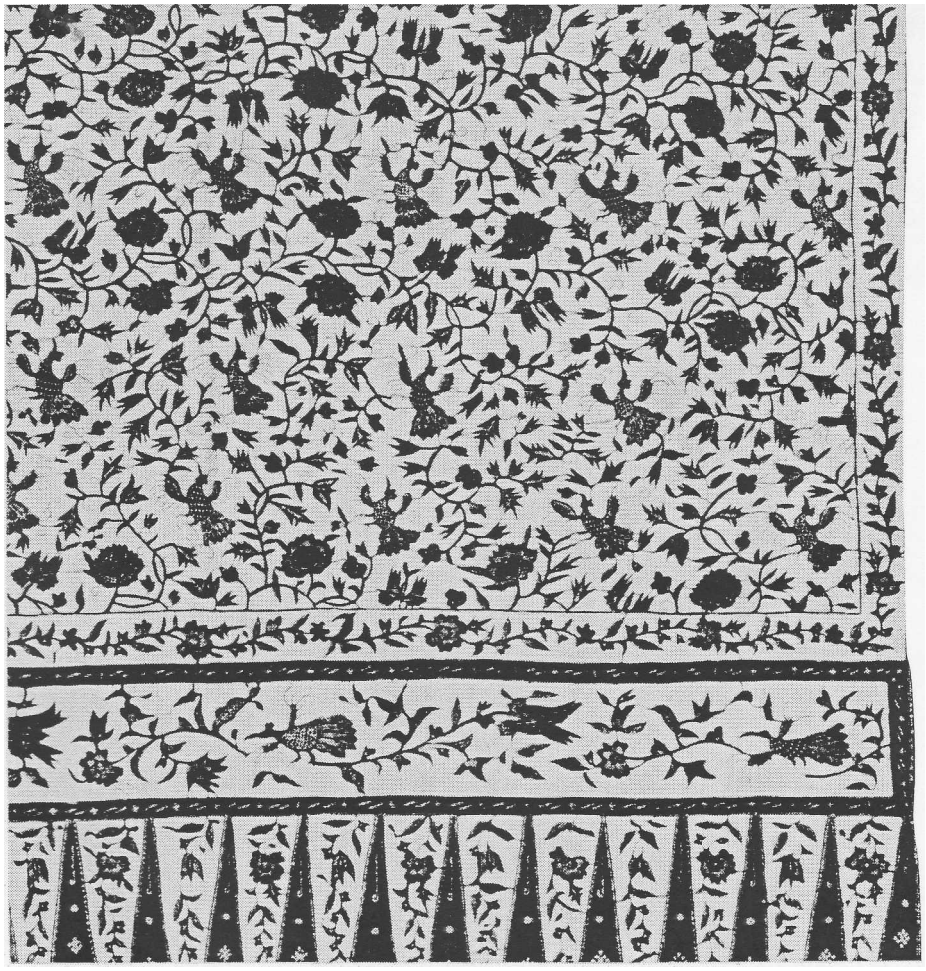
Further information from Margaret Campbell, 0131 443 3687 or mjmc@macunlimited.net

Textiles of the Asian Sub-continent - Thursday 18 and Sunday 28 March at 2 p.m., handling sessions at the Royal Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh, free but booking essential, places limited. Tel. 0131 247 4422.

International Asian Art Fair - 26-31 March at the Armory, Park Avenue, New York. No details available.

Japanese Banners - 3 May, 1-4 p.m. at Piece Hall Gallery, Halifax. Special May Day event to celebrate the start of Museums Month. Make miniature banners using simple block-printing techniques and help create a larger banner that will be displayed in the Gallery throughout the month. Tel. 01422 358300.

Textiles from Travels - Saturday and Sunday 19 & 20 June, weekend event of the Friends of the Pitt Rivers Museum with visits to Sheila Paine's collection at Blewbury and the Pitt Rivers textile store. For information about membership of the Friends tel. 01865 430 733 and of their events 01865 284 390



Hand crafted Javanese batik purchased in Cirebon in the early 1990s. ULITA collection. (see above p.10)

The O.A.T.G. newsletter is published three times a year
with deadlines on the first Monday in February, June and October

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE - MONDAY 7 JUNE

Contributions should be send to the Editor:
Phyllis Nye, 15 Stourwood Road, Southbourne, Bournemouth, BH6 3QP
Tel/fax. 01202 269092 e-mail: phyllis@nyes.org.uk