

OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

Newsletter No. 7

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One of the dresses from the Arabian Peninsula being shown in the Hampshire exhibition
Palms, Pearls and Pinnacles - See below, p.18. (Photo: T.Evans, HCCMS)

ASIAN TEXTILES AT THE PITT RIVERS MUSEUM UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

The Pitt Rivers is one of the finest ethnographic museums in the world, a strength which is reflected in its Asian textile and clothing collections. Textiles from almost every Asian country are represented, including mainstream items such as Chinese robes and Indian embroidered *phulkaris*, along with a remarkable range of clothing from minority peoples and extensive collections of everyday textiles. A hallmark of the Pitt Rivers Museum is that for over a hundred years it has acquired items which were ordinary in their day but which are now extraordinary because few examples have survived. The Museum also holds examples of techniques which are now rarely produced or extinct, such as Japanese Ainu clothing made from woven elm bark. Textile-related artefacts such as looms, needle cases, spindles and lace bobbins are also well represented and were often collected as part of an integrated textile collection.

The single largest Asian textile assemblage is from the Naga peoples of North Eastern India, and comprises nearly 1000 specimens. Naga cloths and clothing fill banks of drawers in the reserve store and are like an encyclopaedia of early 20th-century Naga life. The variety of pattern, shape and technique of the Naga clothing and textiles reflect variations of use, gender, age and sub-group affiliation. Three principal donors, J.P. Mills, J.H. Hutton and Ursula Betts (Graham Bower) collected the majority of the material in Nagaland during the first half of this century. All three donors made meticulous records of the provenance and relevance of each piece, making the Pitt Rivers' Naga collection probably the largest and best documented in the world. It is worth noting that the Museum also has substantial archive and photographic collections relating to Asia; in the case of Naga material, the Archive Section holds tour diaries, correspondence and photographs from Mills and Hutton.

Other collections from the Indian sub-continent are patchy but interesting. Perhaps most notable among the Pakistani collections are the dozen or so pieces of Ilunza and Kalash costume. The Indian material includes a Manipuri dance costume collected between 1925 and 1935 and women's clothing acquired by Sir Robert Reid when he was Governor of Assam (1937-42). To complement these collections there is a Manipuri loom on display in the Museum. There are also costumes reflecting the everyday wear of different castes and regions of India, many of which were donated to the Museum by the Folk-Lore Society.

The collections from Tibet are notable for the continuous collection of material from 1884 to the present day. The records of the Museum's founding collection, given by General Pitt Rivers in 1884, refer to a "large coat of woven cloth in many colours, Tibet". Donations from Mrs H.G. Beasley in 1941 and 1945 include five silk standards on metal poles collected on the 1903 Younghusband expedition to Lhasa, along with a "yellow hat" and a teazle for homespun cloth. The *Surkhang Shapé* collection of Tibetan clothing mainly comprises clothes worn by the Chief Minister (*Shapé*) prior to his flight from the country at the time of the Chinese invasion. It is a collection of thirteen items, including a fur-trimmed full-length minister's robe of yellow silk figured with dragons, clouds, characters and symbols. A finely woven gold and silver Lama's jacket from this collection can be seen in the textile displays. In recent years the current Museum Director, Dr Schuyler Jones, has collected material from Tibet, notably a complete black hat dancer's costume.

The collections of Myanmar (Burmese) textiles are among the most extensive of any museum in the U.K. They are particularly strong in material dating from the 19th century and non-Burman ethnic groups, such as the Shan, Kachin, Chin and Karen. Items of particular note include a crimson velvet coat obtained in the Burmese war of 1824, possibly the earliest minister's coat in existence. There is also a dacoit gang flag with painted designs captured by Lt.Col. Eyre around 1887. The single most important donor of Burmese material was Richard Carnac Temple, an important figure in the colonial history and early ethnography of Burma. In addition to extensive examples of costume and textiles, his ethnographic concern for detail is reflected in technological specimens, such as a cotton cleaning machine and sack needle. It is also worth noting that both Eyre and Temple made fine collections from other parts of Asia, such as woven Afghan sashes and scarves on display in the Museum.

The Museum has an active policy of funding its students to make well-documented collections during anthropological fieldwork. A recent example is Sandra Dudley, who made a collection of Karen textiles while working in a refugee camp on the Thai-Myanmar border in 1996. Sandra had previously catalogued the existing Myanmar material at the Museum and so was in an excellent position to make informed decisions about developing the collections. In similar vein Dr Michael Hitchcock acquired material from Sumbawa, Eastern Indonesia, in the early 1980s, including textiles and textile production artefacts, such as a warping frame and loom.

Most notable of the South-East Asian textile collections are probably those from Borneo. A number of ikat textiles was donated by Charles Brooke, who was Rajah of Sarawak from 1868-1917. Other textiles were collected by Archdeacon A.F. Sharp in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Of particular importance in this latter collection is an Iban ikat textile (*pua*), a "blanket for dreaming in" with anthropomorphic designs. As with other parts of the Pitt Rivers' Asian clothing collections, there are a number of materials used in Borneo costumes which could only loosely be defined as textiles. Among these are barkcloth war jackets with appliqué fish scales or other attachments.

Most of the items from the small Korean textile collection (24 pieces) were purchased from R.T. Turley in 1896. One of the original catalogue entries for this collection describes a "Corean women's costume viz. two jackets, and man's military cloak worn by women out of doors as a disguise, lady's outer skirt, inner skirt, ditto trouser, ditto socks". Much of the women's costume is made of plain coloured muslin dyed in jewelled colours and is in fine condition. Among the men's costumes are a merchant's jacket, "a jacket of a gentleman of quality", scholar's hats and a horsehair hat. The textile production showcases include an interesting Korean loom, a hybrid between a back-strap and frame loom.

Clothing and textiles from Japan are well represented in the collections, the strongest element being material from the Ainu, who are the indigenous peoples of Hokkaido. The bold embroidered and appliqué Ainu designs reminiscent of some American North-West Coast patterns are found on long coats and robes, both of locally made elm-bark "cloth" and on imported cotton cloth. There are also several complete costumes in the collections from mainstream ethnic groups, such as a Japanese rickshaw driver's costume, including gaiters and socks, collected before 1896. The whole of the Japanese reserve collection is currently being recatalogued and repacked by Lydia Koranteng²¹, a professional conservator from Ghana

who is working as an intern at the Museum.

In similar vein, the Chinese textiles are strongest on examples from minority ethnic groups. With the help of the Friends of the Pitt Rivers Museum a further collection of Miao embroideries was added to the collection in recent years. There are, however, also some fine Manchu pieces, such as an embroidered woman's jacket on display. An early collection of material from hill peoples in Taiwan was made by J.C. Matheson before 1891, including woven coats, hemp cloth and a pair of rush-basketwork gauntlets worn by women for holding back their sleeves during harvest work.

In spite of its splendid textile and clothing collections, the Pitt Rivers Museum is seriously under-resourced. There is no specialist textile curator. The building currently housing the reserve textile collections and conservation studio is scheduled to be demolished later this year to make way for the new American Studies Centre for the University, and there are no firm plans for rehousing the reserve textile collections. A long-term project is being developed to create a World Textile and Clothing Study Centre for the Museum which will incorporate reserve textile collections as well as study and conservation facilities, but no substantial funds are available yet. If any member of the Oxford Asian Textile Group has serious fund-raising suggestions for such a project, please get in touch with the Museum.

I wish to thank Lorraine Rostant, Geraldine Hobson, Sandra Dudley, Ruth Barnes and Deryn O'Connor for information contributed to this article.

Julia Nicholson
Assistant Curator, Documentation
Pitt Rivers Museum



An old view of the main court at the Pitt Rivers Museum

PROGRAMME

Tuesday 8 July at 11.40 a.m.

**Visit to *Striking Tents* at the Museum of Mankind
Burlington Gardens, London W1**

Following the wonderful lecture last December by Stephanie Bunn on Central Asian felts from Kyrgyzstan, Sarah Posey, who set up the exhibition with her, has kindly agreed to give us a gallery talk and "walk-about" with questions. Meet her by Information Desk opposite the Museum's shop.

The time has been arranged to enable members to catch the first train to London on which Saver tickets are available. Some of you may like to arrange to travel together or have lunch together afterwards.

Saturday 20 September at 2 p.m.

Visit to *Textiles and the Indian Ocean Trade* at the Ashmolean Museum

Ruth Barnes will give us a gallery talk in this exhibition which she has curated (see below p.18)

Both these events are open to members only, and the numbers for the visit to the Ashmolean on 20 September are restricted to 15.

Please contact Felicity Wood if you wish to attend either or both of them, enclosing a stamped self-addressed envelope if you require a reply by post.

Address: 2 Frenchay Road, Oxford, OX2 6TG
Tel/Fax: 01865 554281
e-mail: felicity wood @ dial. pipex. com)

O.A.T.G. MEETINGS

Oriental Carpets with Christopher Legge

Seated on a crescent of rolled carpets and saddle-bags on the evening of 13 March, a dozen of us watched eagerly as one after another a treasury of carpets was spread before us. The pile in the middle grew higher.

Maybe the distant music was not quite right, but only a little stretch of the imagination would have placed us in a bazaar in Cairo, Istanbul or Isfahan. We were actually in Christopher Legge's shop in Summertown, and Christopher was taking us on a ramble through Middle Eastern carpets, with the occasional foray into China and Africa. Like all good expeditions this was not a passive sight-seeing tour, We discussed the quality, the design, and the probable origin of each object and, in one or two cases, the use, before Christopher told us all about it. An attractive evening!

Most of the thirty or so items presented were "tribal" in origin, deriving from the nomadic peoples of Turkey, Kurdistan, Iran and neighbouring areas. They were woven by the womenfolk and were mainly variants of traditional patterns and motifs. Most were in wool, on wool or cotton warps, or more rarely in silk, and dyed using natural dyes.

The majority of the carpets had borders but varied in the style of the central panel from the seemingly random to the highly organized. There was one with a fine rich blue ground covered with a scatter of fish, unknown animals, plants, people and unidentifiable objects, and another with a diagonal grid, each space being tilled with a daisy-like plant. There were evenly-spaced regular, but subtly different, motifs, and all-but-symmetrical compositions with vases of flowers. All showed the individual stamp of the maker, even when derived from a bazaar cartoon, and the variation of colour from the use of natural dyes.

Discussion of the carpets was interspersed with information on carpet cleaning, the problems of obtaining supplies, the bridal customs of the Turkoman, and dyestuffs. The later led to a hands-on comparison of synthetically and naturally dyed carpet textures, to an exposition of the effect of caustic soda ageing on the life of carpets and, inevitably, to the revival of natural dyeing through the Turkish DOBAG project.

Many of the objects shown were from Christopher's own extensive collection. These included not only carpets but also things made from carpet material: pairs of saddle-bags, large and small, complete with the bag ties, saddle rugs from China and Tibet, a kilim saddle blanket, a pair of camel's knee-pads, horse tassels, tent-pole covers, long lengths of braids for use as rope, and merchants' sample carpet pieces. Also included were two indigo-dyed cotton pieces, a strip-woven covering from Africa, and a table-cloth from southern Persia.

This most entertaining and enlightening evening ended in the workshop where, surrounded by a rainbow collection of coloured wools, Christopher demonstrated on a small upright loom the way in which a Middle Eastern tufted carpet was constructed.

David Nutt

Business and Pleasure

Some two dozen members gathered on 20 May for the momentous occasion of the Group's first business meeting. The Chair was taken by Ruth Barnes, the inspiration and initiator of the whole affair. She started the proceedings with a brief historical **resume**, telling how she had written more than two years ago to a number of people she thought might be interested, and had had such an enthusiastic response that the Group was launched. At first there were 20 and now nearly 170 members, who have enjoyed a varied programme and received six newsletters, through the assistance of Felicity Wood (Programme Secretary) and Phyllis Nye (Editor).

However, she said, the time had now come to put the organization on a more formal footing and she introduced a draft constitution drawn up by Felicity. This was discussed, amended and adopted, and copies will be sent to all members.

Finance was next discussed, and it was agreed that subscriptions should be fixed at a rate that would cover the cost of producing the newsletter and the expense of meetings, with a little over for other things which would further the aims of the Group. An individual Subscription of £10 and joint subscription (more than one person living at the same address) of £15 a year was considered enough to cover this at present. Renewal forms and bankers' orders are being sent you with this newsletter.

The constitution provides for a committee of five officers - Chairman, Treasurer, Membership Secretary, Programme Secretary and Newsletter Editor - each to serve for three years. In order that not all members should retire at the same time, Ruth, Felicity and Phyllis were confirmed in their present offices (which they have effectively held for two years already) for two years only, and George Wood (Treasurer) and Dymphna Hermans (Membership Secretary) were appointed for three. Although there is provision for officers to be re-elected for a second term, Ruth indicated that she would probably want to stand down at the end of her two years.

The last item on the agenda was a discussion of the proposal to help sponsor Lorraine Rostant to attend the textile conservation course in Hungary (see below p.8). This was worthy of the Group's support, and it was suggested that members be invited to add something to their subscription this year for this purpose (but see over).

When the business was over, there was a short period to enjoy wine and chat, during which another ten or more non-members joined us before we reassembled to hear Deryn O'Connor give a talk on her latest travels in Guizhou Province, China, where she has been on the textile trail for many years now. It was a great pleasure to join in her enthusiasm for the subject, and we heard many interesting details about indigo dyeing and resist techniques used by minority peoples of the province. The visual presentation was especially striking: the magnificent countryside and imaginatively dressed people made a deep impression. Deryn also had brought wonderful examples from her own collection; it was a great treat to be able to look closely at the pleated skirts, braided and resist-patterned jackets, and supplementary-weave aprons, some of breathtaking fineness.

Donations to Lorraine Rostant's sponsorship need to be received by 30 June. If you do not wish to renew your subscription so early (it has to be paid by 1 October), please send your cheque directly to George Wood, 2 Frenchay Road, Oxford, OX2 6TG.

Ruth Barnes

Phyllis Nye

SPONSORSHIP FOR PITT RIVERS MUSEUM: TEXTILE CONSERVATION

As you will have read in our leading article of this Newsletter, the Pitt Rivers Museum has a superb collection of Asian ethnographic textiles, many of them very well documented. However, there are enormous problems regarding storage space and conservation of the collection. To begin to address these difficulties, the conservation laboratory wants to send Lorraine Rostant to a six-week course on textile conservation, to take place in Budapest 11 August to 19 September 1997. She will only be able to participate, though, if sponsorship can be found. It is very much in the interest of OATG to support this, as its ultimate aim is to make a splendid collection more accessible to our members.

Details for the course are as follows:

Scientific Principles of Textile Conservation: Established by ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property), in collaboration with the National Museum of Hungary. The course is supported by the Director-General of the European Commission and the Hungarian Culture Foundation (Kulturinnov).

The course is heavily subsidised and takes a maximum of 16 participants from around the world. There is no comparable short course in the UK. The total costs are £1,596, which include course fee (£316), accommodation (£665), subsistence (£380) and travel (£235). The Friends of the Pitt Rivers are being approached to fund the course fee, and a travel grant has been applied for to cover the flight.

Lorraine is a member of OATG. Before moving to the Pitt Rivers conservation laboratory, she worked in the Department of Eastern Art in the Ashmolean Museum, where she conserved the Newberry collection of Indian printed textiles and Islamic embroideries, so she already has considerable experience with, and interest in, textiles. She completed her conservation diploma at London University while at the Pitt Rivers Museum.

If you want to support her for this purpose, may we ask you to add your contribution to your membership payment? - or, if you are not renewing before 30 June to send a cheque before that date direct to the Treasurer, George Wood, address as above. We need your sponsorship if our members want to gain better access to the textiles in the Pitt Rivers Museum, and this initiative could be the beginning of a rewarding cooperation.

Ruth Barnes

**FROM CHINA TO BYZANTIUM
EARLY MIDDLE AGE SILKS FROM THE HERMITAGE IN ST PETERSBURG**

**An Exhibition at the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich
25 October 1996 to 26 January 1997**

These were finds, dating from the 8th and 9th centuries A.D., from graves at Moscevaja Balka in the north-west Caucasus, a staging point on the northern Silk Road. The local tribes grew rich from dues demanded from traders, and bought foreign cloth to add to their basic linen garments - pieces of expensive silk from east and west. In terms of distance it is not surprising that they wore elaborate designs from Byzantium, but they also obtained silks from Sogdian workshops - both areas using figurative motifs, often of animals and birds, set usually in pearl roundels of varying dimensions and woven in samite - weft-faced compound twill.

But they even used silks from much farther east. The exhibition included the head-coverings of a married woman which consisted of four separate items: a silk and linen forehead band; a silk cap, ending in a "bag" to cover her pigtail, made of Chinese twill a finely woven tabby linen shawl; and a silk band tied over her forehead over the shawl and knotted at the back of her head, also made of a small-patterned Chinese silk damask.

Other silks from China or Eastern Turkestan were found, including several pieces of thin tabby or tabby self-patterned with warp floats (often referred to as Han damask) which were then decorated with large-scale designs in two or more colours done in the clamp resist. There are comparable examples of the same period from Dunhuang in the British Museum.

Finally, fascinating finds were documents which seem to have belonged to a Chinese merchant. These consist of papers showing accounts and a Buddhist painting on silk which has an engaging drawing in one corner of a rider and the head of his horse. These seem to imply that Far Eastern silks were not only transmitted through middlemen.

The exhibition included complete garments for men and women, a man's silk helmet and several girls' caps, many weft-faced compound twill silks with very large, medium and small-scale designs, tablet-woven bands, wool tapestry and several amulet bags. They are designs in an excellent state of preservation, except that some silk pieces, now cream-coloured, were once a strong glowing red - but there are examples still in their original colour to give an idea of what others had been.

There is an expensive complete catalogue of all the finds, written in German, by Anna A. Jerusalemskaja, the curator in St Petersburg, and a very well illustrated smaller catalogue, also in German, by the same author in collaboration with Birgitt Borkopp of Munich, which is excellent value at 28DM See Publications below, p.22)

Deryn O'Connor

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

I wonder how many members live too far away easily to attend meetings? The thought of driving along five motorways on a winter's night after an O.A.T.G. meeting along five motorways on a winter's night certainly does not appeal to me.

Would it be possible for the O.A.T.G. to copy Gawthorpe Hall's idea of supplying a list of bed and breakfast accommodation? Alternatively, would local members be prepared to host a paying guest?

Yours faithfully,

GWYNETH WATKINS

Telford.

[We think this is a good idea and Felicity is compiling a list of members willing to provide hospitality as suggested. Any who think they might be willing to participate are asked to phone her on 01865.554281 to discuss it.-Ed.]

Dear Editor,

Some time ago the Textile Society visited the Ashmolean Museum to view and examine the Shaw collection of garments from Central Asia and I was excited by the way garment borders with right-angled corners were woven on to the cloth edges.

I have at last made time to try this out. If I were as deft and sharp-sighted as I used to be, I think that I could have made a reasonable job of it. As it is, I have found a way to construct a sample, but it is very clumsy, and the work took more concentration than I am now mistress of. Of course, the men who put the borders on the robes worked with inherited skills, and perhaps had simple gadgets for doing the tricky bits!

I used my inkle loom (made for band-weaving, and to carry a continuous circular warp). It could not be used in this way because of the corner. The problem is that, as the weaving builds up diagonally and is then turned through 90 degrees, the warps are successively more slack. Weaving requires the same tension on each warp.

I made a straight warp and tied one end to the front of my loom, threaded the tablets, four warps to each, and lashed a wide-spaced comb to the back of the loom, points up. Then I tied a weight to each group of four warps and dropped them over the back of the loom, spacing them along the comb to keep them in order. Thus each group was tensioned separately. When I had woven the diagonal build-up, I untied the warp from the front of the loom, stitched the ribbon to the edges of the cloth and tied it to the front of the loom in place of the warp, which now lay at right angles. Weaving could be carried on. It would have worked better had I attached the ribbon first.

In *IKATS - Women Silks from Central Asia*, the catalogue of the Rau Collection, colour photographs show the edgings as we saw them, and when a front is turned back, the "stitches" are visible. The introduction explains the history and use of the garments, and the ikat techniques in great detail. About the borders, "A card- or needle-woven ribbon (or piping) edged the front, sleeve edge and slit hem" is the only information.

On some garments the band is folded at the corners, not shaped. The floats that show on the wrong side seem widely spaced as though they only hold every other passage of weft. I recall no such doubts about what we saw. My samples are no help here, as I have not been able to match the materials. In some illustrations the floats are worn away. It would be interesting to look at these to see if the band had become detached.

Yours sincerely,
ENID RUSS

Merseyside

[Some of you may remember the exhibition 'Dressing for the Great Game: The Robert Shaw Collection', which was on show at the Ashmolean Museum in the spring of 1995. It presented a selection of the ikat coats referred to in the letter above. The collection continues to attract a great deal of interest for historical reasons, but the coats have also caused some speculation among braid and loop weaving enthusiasts, as the letter from Enid Russ, who is president of the Association of Guilds of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers, shows. She contacted Anne Dyer about the braids, who then inspected the coats and has sent us the following detailed comments. Enid Russ' letter was accompanied by her sample braid, actually including the very difficult turning of a corner. Congratulations to our two braid sleuths! R.B.]

LOOP WEAVES IN 19th CENTURY KASHGAR

Some of the Robert Shaw collection of Kashgar ikat coats in the Ashmolean Museum were shown some time ago to a visiting group of Textile Society members, one of whom was Russ (see letter above) who, knowing of my interest in these braids, wrote and told me that the way the tablet-woven edging was attached was odd and suggested that I look at them.

The method of construction was, as far as I could see:

1. The woven fabric was "glazed" with egg-white to make it stiff and shining;
0. It was then seamed together to make the garment and sewn, wrong sides together, to an identically sized lining, probably with running stitches about 2mm long, in a heavyish soft cotton thread;
1. The garment was turned right way out and a layer of cotton wadding put between the two fabrics. This would have needed a fairly long opening somewhere along the edge, but I could not find where because of the final edging;
2. Widely-spaced lines of running stitches held the wadding in place, showing about 1 or 2 mill on the surface, but with a centimetre or more between stitches, a speedy, almost tacking, method. What was surprising about these stitches was that the passage of the needle left very little mark in the glazed silk, suggesting that the needle was very fine indeed. I

had, the day before, been looking at an English needle of the same period, rusted into a manuscript book on loop braids, an offensive weapon about 1 mm thick. But my reference books say that fine steel needles were made in China well before this date - but what is fine? 5. A woven tape had then been made, with the weft carried on a thicker needle so that, after weaving each shed, the weft could be taken through the garment and back to the edge, ready for the next line of weaving (diagram 1). The length of thread for the weft was around 3 metres (an awkwardly long thread to manage) and a new one was joined, as needed, with a knot on the back of the garment. The thread is a very loosely twisted silk, and the knots have been rubbed a lot in wear, so I could not see what the knot was. It looked as if it could be our normal weaver's knot.

Corners were made by weaving short rows, supported by short stitches, as in diagram 2. This would require some form of individual tensioning of single or groups of threads.

The braids start at the top of the side slit on the hem, one running along the hem and up the front, round the back of the neck, and back down the other side to the other side slit; the other goes along the back of the hem. The ends have a narrow matching bind and then the threads are cut to about 1 cm and allowed to fan out. The wrist trimming has only one tassel, the beginning being covered by the end. There is also a 4 cm length sewn underarm, as a strengthener, where the seams are specially vulnerable to splitting (diagram 3).

On one garment, after finishing the weaving, the long stitches on the inside were crossed over each other and held in place with running stitches (diagram 4)

There were three garments with braids: X3982 had 15 sets of 4 threads twisted round each other (exactly as one would expect in tablet weaving) of plain pale blue, but X3987 and X3975 had patterns with borders, the first with 18 sets of threads, and the other with 16 (see charts).

This is all simple to describe. The puzzles start when you decide to try it yourself and you find there is no simple way of stretching the warp tight once you have gone round the first corner. Enid Russ sewed a loop of ribbon to the corner of the garment so that she could stretch the warp back on the loom, but her sample was small and light. A heavy padded garment would be a different matter. I would suggest that, as manpower was cheap, one or more people held the garment against the underside of the warp in such a way as to keep the warp tight while the weavers worked the edge. Rod Owen thinks they might have hung the warp with the garment hanging behind it. All guesses are equally good till someone can come up with a picture or written references to the process.

I assumed, at first sight, that the braids were of normal tablet weaving, but when I started to work out their threading and turns, I realized that the "stocking stitch" appearance was nowhere broken by the reverses in weave direction (diagram 5) which are needed to control the sequence of colours. The one-colour braid had its weft taken through the garment rather too wide, so the weaving was not as close packed as it should have been, showing clearly that the warp was in groups of 4 threads, twisted round each other, exactly like tablet weaving (diagram 6). I could believe in a 13-hole tablet that would be needed to weave the second band, but the third one had an erratic bit in the pattern, probably to make the very long pattern finish before the corner, which made a multi-holed tablet an impossible solution.

There is a Japanese loom, the Ayatakedai, that gives the same effect as tablets. Could there have been a similar type of loom in the Kashgar region? The obvious possibility would be loop manipulation, either for it all, or with tablets used for the plain bands

I have been told, I think by Peter Collingwood, that sprang braids in the Far East were sometimes woven from a long warp with each thread weighted separately (separate weightings would be needed for net working of the corners, because of the shortening of threads weighting of threads on the one edge) and hung over a bar at the far end. (Sprang is a method of "plaiting" threads in a way that, very roughly, resembles chain mesh wire-netting (diagram 7), a very old and widespread method of making trimmings and stretch fabrics. There is no weft. Whatever method was used to control the warp, it had to be so that the weaver could bring up pairs of threads of the required colour between the pairs of threads last brought above the weft, and drop these last back to join the other unwanted threads loose at the back (diagram 8). Loops on the bands would need another person to move the shed up to the point of weaving, and sew it to the garment. Often two people manipulated the loops. So we are beginning to see the need for at least four, and possibly more, people working on one garment's edging.

If these back threads were also woven, there is no clue to this on the right side, and the plain borders, with no floating threads, hide it. (These borders could be tablet woven, leaving the tricky manipulation to as few threads as possible.) There are examples of this type of weaving from Turkestan, of unknown date, with loose threads on the back. Details of this method of weaving can be found on p. 398 of Peter Collingwood's *Techniques of Tablet Weaving*.

The garments have ties at the neck, about 20 cm long. Most are of cloth, one with elaborate silver-thread tassels, but two are in loop braiding. I am working on English manuscript books of the mid-17th century on loop braids at the moment, so was intrigued to find these. They could have been plaited, but the central wide rib (diagram 9) is characteristic of loop braiding. It can also arise out of carelessly done plaiting, but my feeling is that their standards were too high to accept this flaw on all their braids.

There is no problem in working these, though they are in a quite different method of manipulating loops (by weaving loops through all the rest across the width of the braid) from that used for the edging tapes, where the loops are passed back and forth through their partners only.

X3987 is the simplest. It has 8 red threads and 6 white; 7 and 7 would be the obvious choice, but I counted under a lens and it is 6 and 8. Maybe they were short of white thread. The threading would have to be 6 loops with linked red and white threads and one loop of red. Start with all the white threads on the same side of the loops. It is worked in a standard Spanish Breadth weave, always from the same side to the other, hooking through 2 loops when moving forward and singly when moving back, with very even tension to give a zig-zag in tabby.

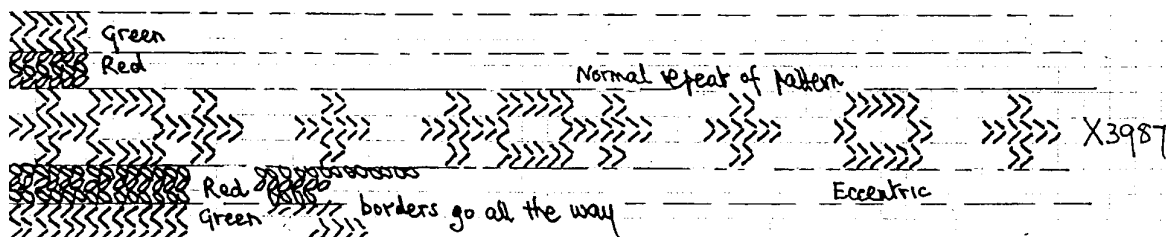
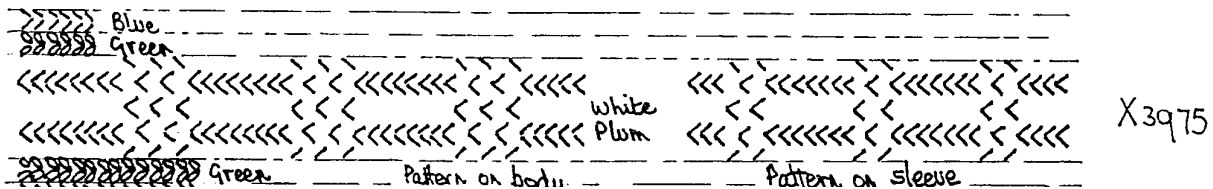
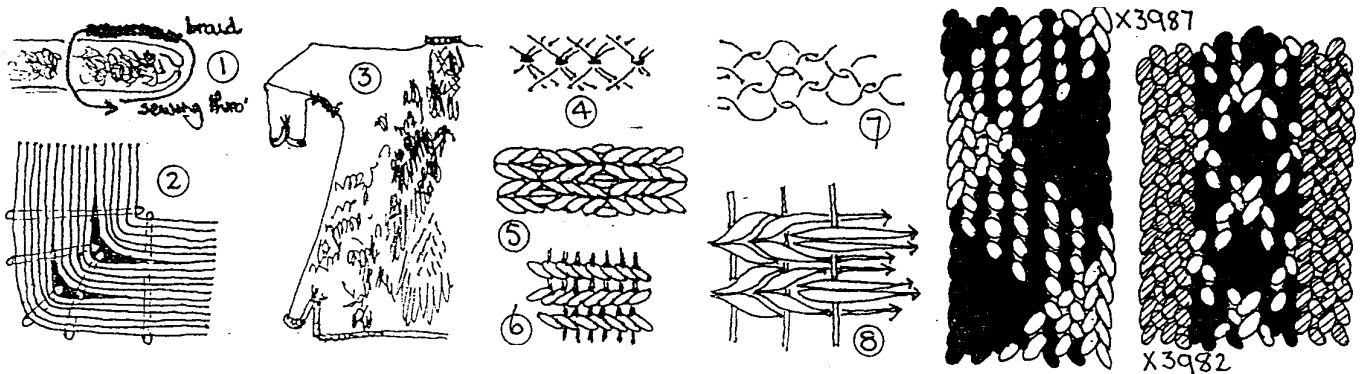
X3982 needs two people, each with 5 loops on their hands, one set of red and one set of 2 white and 3 dark red, again working a standard Spanish Breadth weave, but this time from edge to middle in single bookings. The hooking between the two people is repeated

to turn the red edge back to its own side. This gives a red border each side of a diamond middle.

Both are worked with the method that gives an open edge on one side and a hollow middle. See Noemi Speiser's *Manual of Braiding* or Anne Dyer's *Purse String Unravelled* for the method.

That two very different methods of weaving, involving loops, were being used in this area at the same time makes me wonder what other looping methods they knew. Do any readers have information?

Anne Dyer



MUSEUMS ROUND-UP

September 15 will see the opening of *Fibres, Fabrics and Fashion*, the new permanent textile gallery in the Museum of Science and Industry at Manchester. As might be expected, the dominant theme of the gallery will be the Lancashire cotton industry. The displays centre around the aspects of people and technology, and range from original working machinery, such as Arkwright's water frame and Jacquard ribbon loom, to exhibits that reflect the textile world of to-day. However Nick Dixon, the Curator, hopes to widen the scope of the displays to cover other parts of the world, and in particular is working on a section devoted to the cotton industry in India, of which I hope to be able to tell you more next time.

I also hope to be able to tell you more then about Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery's plans to open a small gallery of South Asian material. Meanwhile I include below an article about a project they are running, similar to Shireen Akbar's work in Tower Hamlets and at the V.& A, aiming to develop the traditional embroidery skills of Asian women, using the Museum as a resource.

The V.& A. is changing its displays in the Nehru gallery in August, and the rehang will include fewer textiles (to make way for a magnificent selection of 70 miniature paintings). However, this deficiency will be more than compensated for by a major exhibition, *Colours of the Indus: Costume and Textiles of Pakistan*, opening on 9 October, which will be reported more fully in the next newsletter.

More of the treasures of the V.& A. will be accessible in future under an arrangement they have made with the new Brunei Gallery at the School of Oriental and African Studies to stage a series of loan exhibitions there. The first one will be of Chinese textiles (see p. 19)

Editor

OUT OF ISOLATION IMMIGRANT ASIAN WOMEN AND EMBROIDERY

For the majority of Asian women, religious belief plays an important part in their lives. Their traditions flow from the past into the present, and reality and myth are intermingled. The meeting of the spiritual with the physical is demonstrated in a practical way, and one helps the other to create a balanced life.

Personal skills, instinct for decoration and sacred devotion have combined to produce textiles for thousands of years in India and Pakistan. Religious myths and legends were often the inspiration for the work, and these images, together with the skills, have been passed from mother to daughter for generations.

Research has shown that, since coming to Britain, Asian women tend neither to practise their skill nor to pass it down to the younger generation. With the availability of garments, embroidery no longer forms an important part of their lives as it once did. Television and videos have replaced the time spent on this traditional craft.

Women attending embroidery workshops in Birmingham have expressed their feelings about coming back to the craft in their own written stories and embroidery panels. Much of this work was featured in an exhibition in Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery last year.

It is becoming clear that a foundation of common core values keeps the groups together and finds expression in the finished work. Harmony within the group manifests itself in large-scale hangings with each member contributing a small section and sometimes working on each other's pieces. The actual process of working and the co-operation and unity within the group is as important as each individual piece of work.

Many Asian women live in isolation and have experienced loneliness in their lives. In a safe environment, within the group, problems are often shared. Embroidery becomes the vehicle which provides an outlet for expression.

The desire to embellish fabric is inherent in women, and the pleasure of working together brings back memories of the past, when life was more simple and women came together to embroider after finishing the household chores. Embroidery fulfilled a deep social need which still persists despite changing values and life-styles.

One group of women, who have become a model for others, is the Aston Hall Asian Women's Textiles Group. This project was set up in 1992 in the Museum and Art Gallery to encourage Asian women to develop their traditional embroidery skills, using the Museum as a resource. It started with a group of women from the City's Hindu, Sikh and Moslem communities meeting once a week in Aston Hall, a Jacobean mansion in the heart of Birmingham's inner city and an outpost of the Museum service. The elaborate decoration in the Hall acts as an inspiration for the women's work. They have contributed to the Nehru Gallery National Textiles project co-ordinated by the Victoria and Albert Museum, and some of their work may be seen in the Shamiana tent on view there this summer. Members of the group have visited schools and colleges to demonstrate their skill, and participated in exhibitions at venues throughout the City. Since the formation of this core group, other groups have come together to practise their craft and use Aston Hall as a focus for design.

Five years on and the project continues to grow. Workshops take place not only within the Museum but also in community and mental health settings, some of them being funded by the Department of Social Services. It has been found to be an important element in solving the problem of Asian women suffering from depression, loneliness and stress. Women who have been prescribed drugs by their doctors have come off them after participating in the workshops. A seminar, *Out of Isolation - Asian Women's Cultural Heritage as a Means of Self-Expression and Healing* was recently held, bringing together workers in both the Museum and Social services.

In this project, art is touching the lives of the women in a unique way. They are looking at our cultural heritage as a way to exploring their own, and their embroidery skills are the vehicle for bringing their experiences together.

Some of the women's comments: "I feel very fortunate to have been able to attend this textile group. I feel the group serves a much greater purpose than most people imagine: it helps the community. It can give people who have no distinct future ahead of them to set

clear short-term and long-term goals. In other words, it has given them the chance to look forward and to achieve. As well as this, the group has been able to develop both practical skills in embroidery and personal skills in communication"

Masooda Kazi
Eleanor Viegas
Community Museums Development Officer
Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

OBITUARY - SHIREEN AKBAR

Many members will have come into contact with Shireen Akbar who, since 1991, has worked as South Asian Arts Education Officer in the V. & A. She was born into a Bengali Muslim family in Calcutta, but when she was thirteen the family moved to Dakha in Bangladesh, where she studied and afterwards taught in the University. She came to England in 1968 to read English at Cambridge, and remained here. After teaching in schools and adult institutions, she was appointed by the Inner London Education Authority as a youth and community worker with Bengali girls and young women in Tower Hamlets. She was equally home in Bengali, Urdu and English.

One early project at Tower Hamlets was in embroidery, through which groups of girls created magnificent banners of the Bengali alphabet, which were displayed in the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1979. She also travelled extensively in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, collecting traditional household items which she used to inspire creative work by Asian and other children in Tower Hamlets schools. In 1988 she was again at the Whitechapel Gallery with the exhibition, *Woven Air*, in which Bangladeshi weaving, embroidery and traditional quilts were supplemented by real live working weavers from Bangladesh. At the same time she arranged a selling exhibition at Liberty's whereby the work of a women's co-operative with whom she was involved in Bangladesh was not only sold but gained them wider recognition.

At the V.& A. she continued along the same lines and encouraged women from the London Asian community to visit the museum and to seek inspiration from its treasures for their own work. Many of them had never been inside such an institution before. The last of her achievements there was the creation of the Mughal tent, on show in the Museum's Pirelli Garden this summer. The panels of the tent have been embroidered by women's groups from her own Tower Hamlets, from many other Asian communities in Britain, and from even farther afield.

Shireen Akbar died of cancer in London on 7 March, aged only 52. She was a wonderful woman, full of warmth and enthusiasm, talented and charming, and she will be sorely missed.

Phyllis Nye

EXHIBITIONS

Textiles and the Indian Ocean Trade

A selection from the Department of Eastern Art's outstanding Newberry collection of mediaeval Indian block-printed textiles traded to Egypt will be shown at the Ashmolean Museum from 22 July to 28 September. The collection contains more than 1200 textiles, mostly block-printed and dyed in rich shades of blue and red. Fabrics of this kind were produced for the export trade to all parts of the Indian Ocean. The textile trade was part of a network that encompassed an entire world system, merchants from various ethnic and religious backgrounds being involved. When Europeans became active within the Indian Ocean trade in the early 16th century, they found a highly developed commercial network already in existence. The exhibition will coincide with the publication by O.U.P. of Ruth Barnes' Catalogue of the Newberry collection, *Indian Block-Printed Textiles in Egypt*. A related workshop will be offered on 29 July (see below).

The Golden Horde

An exhibition of embroideries collected by Sheila Paine on her latest journeys in search of an amulet, as described in her new book, *The Golden Horde: Travels from the Himalaya to Karpathos*, will be on show at the Oxfordshire County Museum, Woodstock, from 20 June to 31 August. Included in the exhibition are men's, women's and children's clothes from the remote Himalayan valley of Palas, from Turkmenistan, the Ukraine and Karpathos, women's headdresses from Russia, caps in embroidery and felt from China and Kyrgyzstan, and vibrant embroideries from Uzbekistan. The embroideries are complemented by a selection of amulets, making a richly varied, dazzling display. Sheila Paine will be giving a talk in the exhibition on 25 June (see below p.). For further information contact Carol Anderson, Senior Museums Officer, phone 01993 811456, fax 01993 813239.

Palms, Pearls and Pinnacles: Traditional Women's Dress of the Arabian Peninsula

Revealed for the first time in Hampshire, a superb collection of brilliantly diverse traditional dress which dispels the idea that only black is worn by women of the Arabian Peninsula, will be shown at Eastleigh Museum from 25 July to 2 September. Gorgeously embroidered and highly sophisticated in design, regional styles evolved through the influence of climate, life-style and the pilgrimages along the ancient spice and incense routes to the Islamic Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina. The exhibition provides a very special opportunity to see some of the world's most beautiful and lesser-known costume. After Eastleigh it will be on view at the Andover Museum, 19 September to 21 October, and Westbury Manor Museum, 31 October to 1 December, and thereafter at Alton, Havant, Basingstoke and Christchurch, for which we hope to publish dates in a later issue. For further information contact Carol Littlefair, Exhibitions Officer, HCCMS, phone 01962 846334, fax 01962 869836.

Islamic Festival Exhibitions in Glasgow

Open Sesame - has just opened at the City Museum and Art Gallery, and will run until 10 April 1998. This exhibition of Moslem art and culture is organized around the idea of a stylized Moslem city contrasting with the idea of Moslem paradise, and included the well-known Wagner Garden Carpet from North India in the paradise display. There are many other important Asian textiles, such as the specially embroidered commemorative cloth, made in Hyderabad-Sindh for the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1888, a Suzani door-

hanging, a Palestinian tent hanging, and several of the Burrell Collection's best Turkish prayer rugs. Costume includes a Palestinian woman's dowry robe, wedding jacket and hat, an Afghan shepherd's coat, and other menswear from Jordan, the Persian Gulf and Malaysia.

At the St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art, *The Veil in Islam - Myth and Reality* explores the issues of why Moslem women have worn or wear the veil, and how the veil has been misunderstood in the West. This exhibition will run from 8 August to 31 January 1998, and will incorporate a specially made video on the topic of *The Veil in Glasgow*, which will be available for hire after the exhibition closes.

For further information on these exhibitions and related events, please contact Ulrike al-Khamis, Curator of Islamic Art, The Burrell Collection, 2060 Pollokshaws Road, Glasgow, G43 1AT, .tel. 0141 649 7151.

Other Exhibitions in the U.K.

Kilims at Kew - Exhibition at the Dennis Woodman Gallery, 105 North Road, Kew, Surrey, 10-23 June. For further information phone 0181 878 8182.

Chinese Textiles from the Addis Bequest: A Loan Exhibition from the Victoria and Albert Museum - at the Brunei Gallery, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London, 16 June - 29 August. The textiles range from bolts of silk for robes to rustic indigo-dyed cottons. For further information phone 0171 323 6036.

Shamiana: The Mughal Tent - in the V. & A.'s Pirelli Garden, 29 June - 14 September. Spectacularly inspired by decorative arts of the Mughal and Rajput traditions in the Museum's Nehru Gallery, under the guidance of Shireen Akbar (whose sad death is noted in this issue), each of the tent's panels has been individually designed and hand made by groups of women from South Asian communities all over the world.

Arts of Korea - at the British Museum from 11 July, will present an overview of Korean art and archaeology from the Neolithic period to the 19th century and will include loans from the National Museum of Korea, the British Library, and several private collections. The exhibition is intended as a forerunner of the new permanent Korean Gallery, founded by the Korea Foundation, which is due to open in 2000.

Focus on India - an exhibition at the Embroiderers' Guild, Hampton Court Palace, 11-29 August. Traditional Indian textiles will be seen beside the work of contemporary embroiderers inspired by the tradition and culture of India. There are a number of related events (see below). For further information phone Gale Williams, Events Co-ordinator, tel. 0181 943 1229.

Dazzle and Dare: Japanese Kimono in Taisho Style - a display in the Costume Court at the V. & A., 18 September - 22 February 1998, will show how the traditional kimono were patterned with bold and energetic motifs in keeping with the free spirit of the Taisho period (1912-26)

Exhibitions Overseas

Vannatu; Art of the Pacific - at the Museum der Kulturen, Basel, Switzerland, now until 10 August. Further information from tel. 41 61 266 56 04, fax. 41 61 266 56 05

Entlang der Seidenstrasse - Gewebe als Spiegel Sasanidischer Kunst (Along the Silk Road - Textiles as mirrors of Sasanian Art) - at the Abegg-Stiftung Riggisberg (near Bern, Switzerland), now until 1 November. Further information from tel. 31 808 1201, fax 31 808 1200.

Last Chance to See -

Glimpses of Kyoto Life - Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, closes September

Jewish Carpets - Jewish Museum, Camden Town, London, closes 14 September

Gossamer Threads and Golden Dragons - Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena, California, closes 29 June

2000 Years of the Silk Route – Museum of Ethnology, Rotterdam, closes 10 August.

LECTURES AND EVENTS

Study days on the theme *The Magic of Textiles* are being held at Missenden Abbey, and you may just get this in time to catch the one on Indian textiles on 24 May. The next, on 14 June includes an exhibition and lectures on Javanese batik. Further information can be obtained from the Abbey, tel. 01494 890296

The overall themes for the Embroiderers' Guild in 1997 are *Silk Routes* and *Focus on India*, which means that they are laying on a number of events of interest to us. Briefly they are: a study day on *Japanese Silk Embroidery* on 7 June; participation sessions of henna painting, dressing in saris, music and dancing in the *Focus on India* exhibition on Mondays 11 and 18 June; a lecture, *Colour, Design and Symbolism in Japanese Embroidery*, by Shuji Tamura, 25 June, 3.30 p.m.; *Shishi -Reflections of India*, Independence Day lecture by Anne Morrell, 15 August. There are also a number of gallery talks in the *Focus on India* exhibition. Further information can be obtained from the Embroiderers Guild, Apt 412, Hampton Court Palace, Surrey, KT8 9AU, Tel. 0181 943 1229.

A colloquy on Chinese Textiles is to be held at the Percival David Foundation on 16-18 June, to coincide with the exhibition of textiles from the Addis Bequest at the Brunei Gallery (see above p.19). This colloquy, which is being organized jointly by the Foundation and the V. & A., will address the subject of secular Chinese textiles. International scholars will present papers on a wide range of related topics. The main emphasis will be on post-

Tang textiles, but some important early material will also be discussed. Speakers will also present research on Chinese textiles exported to the West and those preserved elsewhere in East Asia. For further information and registration form, contact Elizabeth Jackson, Museum Administrator, Percival David Foundation, 53 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PD.

Sheila Paine will give an illustrated lecture at the Oxfordshire Museum, Woodstock, on 25 June, 7-9 p.m., and visitors will be able to enjoy a glass of wine and view her exhibition, *The Golden Horde*. Tickets, priced £3.50 are obtainable in advance from the Museum (cheques payable to the Stonesfield Mosaic Embroidery Appeal). The proceeds will be donated to the appeal launched by the Friends of the Museum for the purchase of the Stonesfield Mosaic Embroidery. Further information can be obtained from Carol Anderson at the Oxfordshire Museum, tel. 01993 811456.

A conference under the heading *Empire, Design and Identity*, dealing with Imperial Britain's relationship with its Empire and beyond, is to be held at the V. & A. on 21 and 22 June. The main topics are architecture, furniture and ceramics, but much of the morning of the second day is given over to Textiles.

There are also to be two study days on Asian carpets at the Victoria and Albert Museum, one on *Processes in Making* on Saturday 12 July, and one on *Their Use and Origins* on Saturday 2 August. Further information on both these events can be obtained from the Education Service at the Museum, tel. 0171 938 8638.

An *Indian Textiles Workshop* will be held at the Ashmolean Museum on Tuesday 29 July, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. In conjunction with the special exhibition of Indian block-printed textiles, Ruth Barnes will lead a session in the gallery. Participants will then work with Mrs Gwen Hartley, textile artist and teacher, to create their own block-printed fabric, using the exhibition as inspiration. Materials will be supplied. £25 including morning coffee and afternoon tea + £5 for materials. For further information, phone the Ashmolean Education Service on 01865 278015.

The V. & A.'s evening opening on 24 September will feature the Japanese, Chinese, Korean and Costume galleries, including the *Dazzle and Dare* exhibition. The museum will be open from 6.30 to 9.30, and at 7.14 Anna Jackson will lecture on 19th century Japanese dress and textiles. The usual charge is made for admission to the Museum, but the lecture costs £4 and it is advisable to book in advance, from the Box Office, tel. 0171 938 8407.

The Embroiderers' Guild's *Silk Routes* programme includes some tours - in England, Tuscany and Denmark - but above all, a visit to India from 19 January to 3 February 1998. Starting from Bombay the route goes via Bhuj, Dhamadka, Rajkot, Ahmedabad, Ujaipur and Agra to Delhi, visiting on the way specialist embroiderers and teachers, a block-printer, bead workshop, museums, mosques, bazaars and palaces. Further information can be obtained from the Embroiderers' Guild, tel. 0181 943 1229.

PUBLICATIONS

Abegg-Stiftung Riggisberg: *Islamische Textilkunst des Mittelalters: Aktuelle Probleme*.

Riggisberger Berichte 5. Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung (1997), 219 pp, 125 b&w ills. ISBN 3-905014-10-6. Swiss Fr. 70.00 + postage.

An important new publication for anyone interested in Islamic textiles and the current state of scholarship on the topic. The focus of the contributions is in particular on Fatimid textiles, on their social function, inscriptions, and technique. The papers are the result of a symposium at the Abegg Foundation in 1995; two OATG members (Ruth Barnes and Jochen Sokoly) have written contributions.

Flury-Lemberg, Mechthild: *Textile Conservation and Research*. Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung (1988), 536pp, 1001 ills (376 in colour). Available in German and English. ISBN 3-90501402-5. Swiss Fr. 245 + postage.

Although obviously expensive, this publication is an essential reference work and a must for anyone who has conservation requirements for textiles. It is written by the former conservator at the Abegg-Stiftung, one of the most outstanding centres for textile research. Descriptions are clearly written and are enhanced by extensive illustrations, many of them in colour. The publication is of the usual high standard that has become a hallmark of all Abegg-Foundation projects. Although first published almost ten years ago, as far as we know it has only recently become available in English. If you order a copy, make sure that you state which language you want it in.

The two following publications introduce important silk finds from the northern silk route. Most of the textiles are Chinese, but there are also textiles from elsewhere. The short (and inexpensive) publication was produced to coincide with an important exhibition last winter (s. Deryn O'Connor's review, p. 9); the rather more hefty publication presents a full descriptive, technical and historical analysis of the entire collection. All finds are now in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg.

Ierusalimskaja, Anna A.: *Die Grdher der Mosjevcja Balka. Friihmittelalterliche Funde an der Nordkaukasischen Seidenstrasse*. Munich: Editio Maris (1996), 343 pp, 88 colour and b&w plates. ISBN 3-925801-22-7. DM 349.00.

Ierusalimskaja, Anna A. and Birgitt Borkopp: *Von China nach Byzanz. Friihmittelalterliche Seiden cars der Staatlichen Ermitage Sankt Petersburg*. Munich: Bayrisches Nationalmuseum and Staatliche Ermitage (1996), 108 pp, colour and b&w ills. ISBN 3-925058-33-8. DM 28.00.

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE - 6 OCTOBER 1997

Please send contributions to
Phyllis Nye, Hewel Barn, Common Road, Beckley, Oxon, OX3 9UR
Tel/Fax 01865 351607