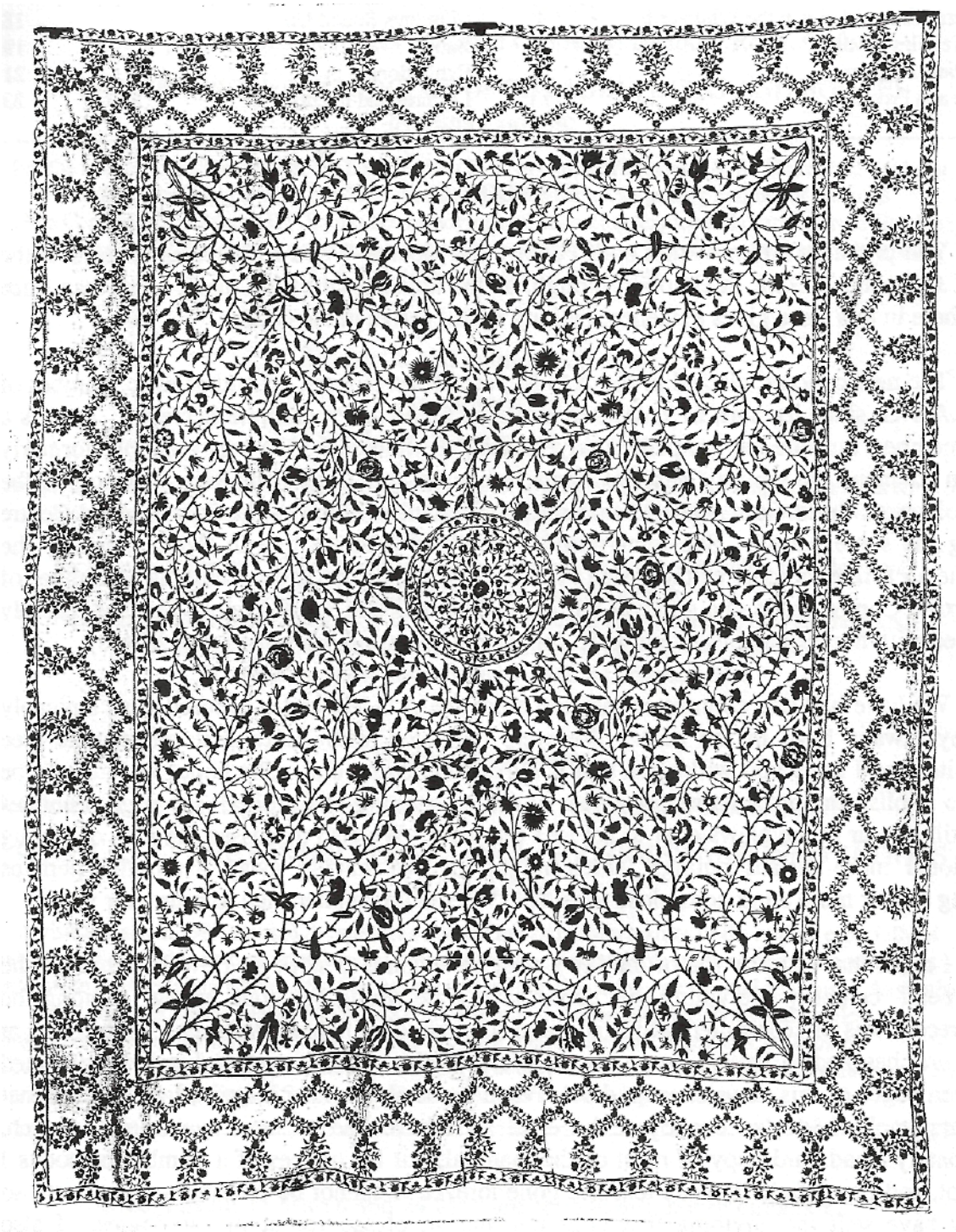
OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

Newsletter No. 15 **February 2000**



Floorspread made from two loom width of cotton, embroidered in chain stitch using coloured silks. Gujarat, India, early 18th century (Newberry Collection WAG T9024), See p. 4.

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EDITORIAL

You probably all know that both Felicity and George Wood resigned as officers of the O.A.T.G. at the A.G.M. in October, though, as the appearance of her name more than once elsewhere in this issue gives evidence, Felicity is still active in the Group.

The new officers, elected at the A.G.M., are Helen Adams, an enthusiastic member of the O.A.T.G. since its start, as Treasurer, and Ann Guild as Programme Secretary. Ann is a new member, but one we are particularly pleased to welcome. She was probably formerly known to many of you, at least by name, when as Ann Joyce she was Director of the Embroiderers' Guild from 1986-93 and on the Council of the Textile Conservation Centre during the same period. She remarried in 1993 and went to live in Sydney, where she became an active member of the Asian Arts Society of Australia, especially as a member of its Textile Committee, and a guide at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. She has recently returned with her husband to live in U.K. for several years and has settled near Witney.

We have had one committee meeting since the A.G.M., and it proceeded as amicably as they always have in the past. We were delighted with Ann's first programme (see opposite) and I hope you will agree that it looks an exciting one. She hopes in future to be able to publish the programme for a year at a time, starting in October; the page 3 notices will still appear in the Newsletter to act as a reminder. We also discussed the idea of having occasional more distant outings which might involve staying away overnight, perhaps visiting two or more attractions close together. We should be interested to hear your views.

I think that Murphy (he of the law) must have come to settle in Hewel Barn with the New Year; certainly everything that could-have gone wrong has gone wrong. Among the most recent was my computer, which suffered some unidentifiable catastrophe while I was at lunch and has had to have a new chip. Unfortunately, when I went to lunch it contained nineteen pages of this newsletter on disc. When I was able to use it again, I discovered that the catastrophe had also destroyed the disc! so I have had to start again from scratch. Fortunately I had hard copy of most of the material, but for notices of a number of books I had not, and I am afraid they are lost and gone forever. I cannot be certain that that is all, so if you have sent me anything that does not appear, please accept my apologies. I also apologize to all of you for the late arrival of this newsletter. I hope to have a new computer before the next one is due, though there is no way of guaranteeing that it will be catastrophe-proof.

PROGRAMME

Wednesday 15 March

at 5.45 p.m. at the Pitt Rivers Research Centre, 64 Banbury Road, Oxford

PLEATING SKIRT TECHNIQUES OF THE MLAO, DONG AND BOUYEI
by Gina Corrigan

For the last ten years the speaker has been leading tours to Guizhou Province, S.W. China, and has been intrigued by skirt pleating of which she has found there are a surprising number of methods. Gina Corrigan, B.Sc.Med.F.R.P.S., has been studying and collecting textiles and costume from Guizhou since the late 1980s and her collection was recently acquired by the British Museum (see her article in O.A.T.G. Newsletter no. 13, June 1999).

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Friday 28 and Saturday 29 April

OPEN HOUSE
at Sheila Paine's home at Blewbury

Sheila has again kindly extended an invitation to O. A.T.G. members to study her magnificent collection of embroidered textiles. This may be one of the last opportunities to see this extensive and varied collection before it is dispersed.
Each day will start at 9.30 a.m. and there will be different pieces to see morning and afternoon, to which Sheila will give an introductory talk.
Numbers are limited to 12 each day. Cost £22.50, which includes morning coffee and biscuits, wine at lunch-time and afternoon tea and biscuits. Bring your own sandwiches.
Bookings should be made through Ann Guild, address below

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Wednesday 24 **May**

at 5.45 p.m. at the Pauling Centre for Human Sciences, 58 Banbury Road, Oxford

TEXTILES AT THE KHMER COURT, ANGKOR ORIGINS AND INNOVATIONS
by Gill Green

A visit to Laos in 1989 aroused the speaker's interest in handwoven textiles of the region, especially of Cambodia, She found that scant attention had been paid to the contribution a study of costume and textiles could make to elucidating Khmer life. She has elicited information from a survey and analysis of Angkorian-period sculpted images and from a comparison with Indian costume forms and textiles leading to her completing in 1999 a thesis entitled *Royalty and Ritual: the Origins of Cambodian Costume and Textile Tradition,* for her Master's degree at the Australian National University .Canberra. She has travelled throughout mainland S.E Asia collecting textiles and weaving artefacts.

Meetings on 15 March and 24 May are open to all; non-members £2

Further information on all events from Ann Guild, Programme Secretary, The Old School, Ducklington, Witney, Oxon, OX8 7UR, Tel.01993 899033. E-mail macguild@btinternet.com

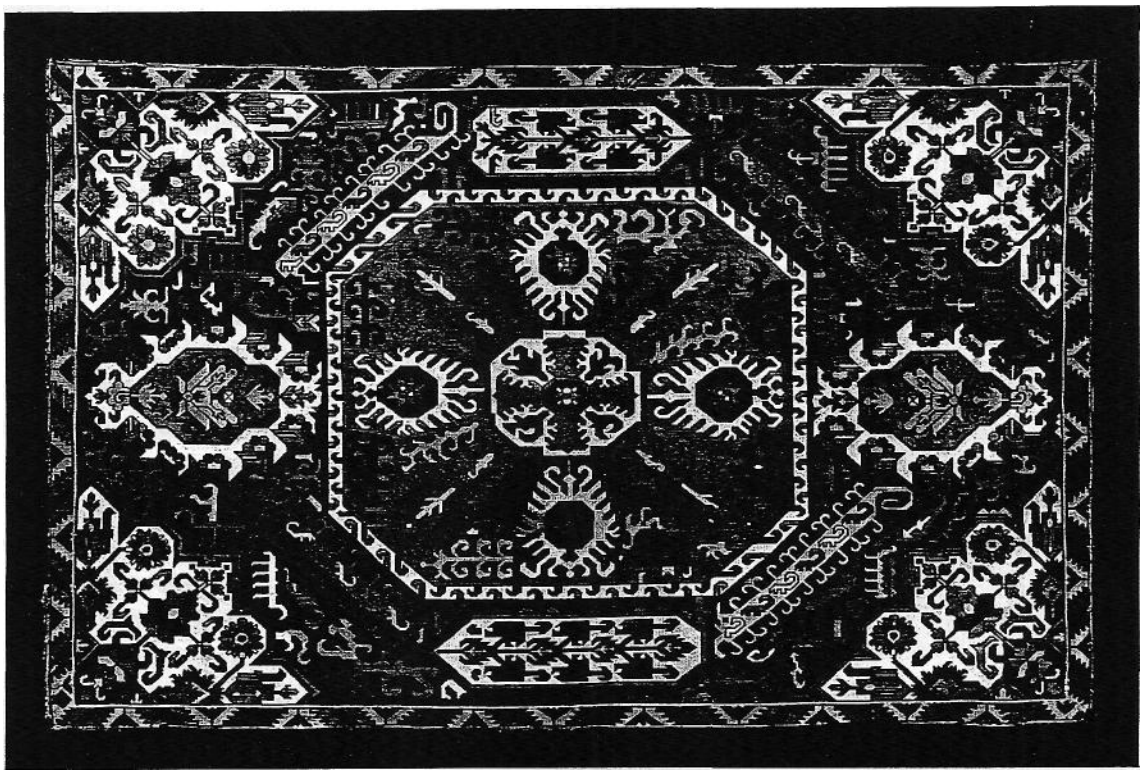
THE NEWBERRY COLLECTION OF EMBROIDERIES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AT THE WHITWORTH ART GALLERY, UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

In December 1949, The Whitworth Art Gallery accepted a gift of 324 embroideries from the late Professor Percy Newberry and his widow Essie, who waived her life interest in the collection. The embroideries are chiefly from countries bordering the Mediterranean - Algeria, Morocco, Syria, Turkey, Greece and the Balkans, but a small number are from farther east - Azerbaijan, India, Iran and Turkestan. A study of the pieces shows that they were carefully selected for their intrinsic quality and to provide a representative range of certain types of embroidery, for the Newberrys, with their background in archaeology, were well-versed in the value of typologies as a means of distinguishing different groups of artefacts. The collection also includes a small number of embroidery blocks which are said to come from Persia. They are made from wood set with strips of copper alloy sheeting and were used to print the outline of an embroidery pattern on to a ground fabric.

Mrs Newberry, who was an accomplished needlewoman, discussed some of the embroideries in two well-illustrated articles that were published in the 1930s: "Turkish Towels and their Designs", *Embroidery* IV, No.3 (June 1936), pp 51-62, and "The Embroideries of Morocco", *Embroidery* VII, no.2 (March 1939), pp 29-35. She also wrote about some of the embroideries from Egypt which are now in the Ashmolean Museum but, unfortunately, she never found an opportunity to write about any others. This is a pity, particularly as the collection includes no associated information concerning the acquisition of the embroideries. Presumably most were acquired before 1932 while the Newberrys were often residing in Cairo and travelling in the Near East, as it is apparent that Mrs Newberry was familiar with local collections in North Africa and had studied embroidery methods at first hand.

The embroideries from the Middle East fall into several categories and date from the seventeenth to the late nineteenth centuries. Labels sewn to some of them indicate that they were shown at the influential International Exhibition of Persian Art held at the Royal Academy, London, in 1931. While this part of the collection lacks the range and depth of the Near Eastern collection, it, nevertheless, provides an excellent introduction to embroiderey techniques of the region.

The most comprehensive groups are nine *suzanis* from Turkestan and nine covers from north west Persia and Azerbaijan. The *suzanis* include three featuring a star medallion within a field strewn with bouquets of flowers and a *nim-ssuzani* with a great variety of flowers - iris, paeony, pomegranate, poppy, carnation, crown imperial, rose and tulip - ascending in trails from five stems. They demonstrate not only the importance of flowers to the inhabitants of the oasis towns of Central Asia but also the Newbenys' love of plants and gardening. Indeed, after they retired to Oldbury Place, Ightham, Kent, the Newberrys used some of these spectacular hangings as furnishings in their own home. The embroideries from Azerbaijan (a region which in the past centred around Tabriz) illustrate three distinctive local techniques used for cushion covers and mats: cross-stitch (see illustration opposite), surface



Indigo, resist-dyed, cotton embroidered in cross stitch, using seven colours of silk thread, Azerbaijan/N.W. Persia, late seventeenth century. (Newberry collection, WAG T.9252)

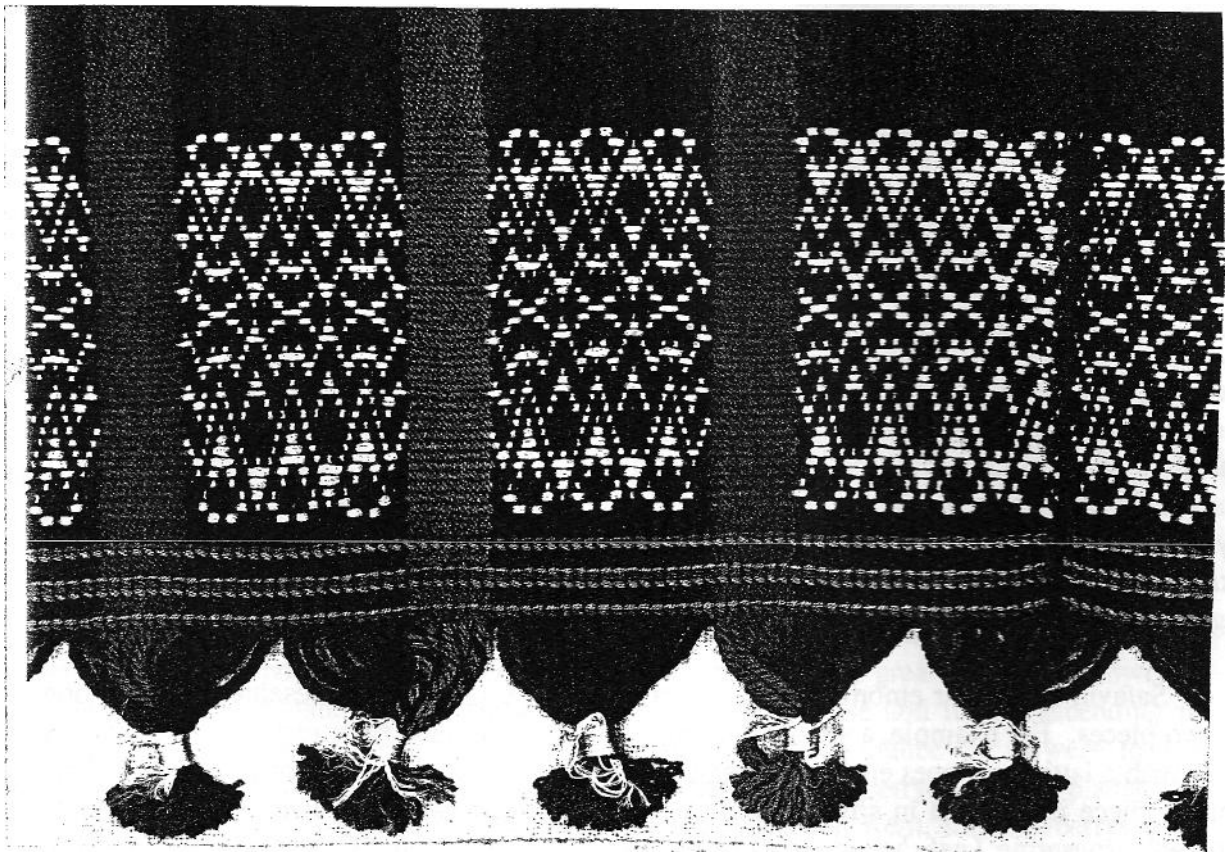
darning and surface darning on the diagonal. Embroideries in the first two techniques were worked on coarse cotton cloth, date from the late seventeenth to mid-eighteenth centuries and have designs closely related to carpets, whereas muslin was preferred for surface darning on the diagonal, which was often combined with pulled thread work and was carried out in pastel-coloured silks during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. [For an excellent discussion of similar embroideries, see Jennifer Wearden, "Azerbaijan Embroideries: a Synthesis of Contrasts", *Hali* 59 (October 1991), pp 102-111] Mrs Newberry gave farther examples of Azerbaijan embroidery to the Embroiderers' Guild and she clearly had access to a good source of supply.

Safavid and Qajar embroidery of various types are generally represented by only one or two pieces. For example, a small panel or cover (*bocha*) made from recycled fabrics has a field with a lattice of ogees enclosing single flowers, overlain with a network of circles. This courtly piece is couched in silver-thread on crimson silk satin. Two contrasting lengths of women's trousering *(nakshe)* are worked in tent stitch on cotton. On one piece the entire ground fabric is covered by popychrome embroidery, while on the other diagonal rows of embroidered palmettes are offset at regular intervals by the lightweight muslin ground. There are also two pairs of *lacis* (embroidered net) borders cut from towels or veils stitched in silk and metal thread with sewn-on fringes, one of which is edged with a band woven with

eighteen tablets. A nineteenth-century whitework cover with geometric patterning is carried out in pulled thread work and satin stitch using lightly plied silk thread and a cotton mat or cover, which was shown hi the 1931 exhibition, has a repeating, block-printed pattern of small floral sprigs and a flower scroll border embroidered in chain stitch and long-and-short stitch in blue and white silk thread.

Completing the Middle Eastern collection is just one Indian embroidery, a floorspread dating to the beginning of the eighteenth century, worked throughout in chain stitch (see cover illustration). The delicate floral design, interspersed with occasional butterflies, and a small central medallion, is a fitting complement to the other embroideries and also to the collection of Indian embroideries given to the Gallery by Thomas Wardle in 1890. In contrast to the Newberry collection, these embroideries were mainly stitched on silk as they were collected to demonstrate the products of the Indian silk industry and as examples of good contemporary design.

Frances Pritchard
Curator (Textiles, Access & Documentation)
The Whitworth Art Gallery.



Border detail of the *Lohe* cloth of the Angami Nagas (dated 1997). The cloth is black with red and green stripes running in warp along the length of both borders. The dense motif in weft is inserted only at one end of the cloth and the design of the motif (representing stylized men and head of bison) as well as the colour used depends on the choice of the weaver. (See article opposite.)

NAGA TEXTILES TO-DAY

There are more than sixteen Naga ethnic groups in Nagaland, a north-eastern Indian state bordering Myanmar (formerly Burma), with a total population of 1.1 million. Although they speak different Tibeto-Burman languages, the Nagas share what has been called a "hill-tribe culture". Some of them have common legends of migration, which are also reflected in similarities in their material culture, especially their textiles.

In the last hundred years Nagas have experienced tremendous socio-cultural changes as a direct consequence of three major events; the British annexation in the nineteenth century, the Battle of Kohima during the Second World War, and conversion of 80% of Nagas to Christianity. In the context of material culture, these changes loosened the previous restrictions. In the context of weaving, the changes paved the way for experimentation with new designs, new colour combinations and usage of different yams.

The Nagas have been known for their striking textiles that are mostly woven on "back-strap" or "body-tension" looms. In the past the Naga textiles signified the community, gender, and social status of the wearer, and there were restrictions on wearing of these shawls. For example, only those men who had shown bravery in war could wear the warrior's cloth; only the giver of a feast-of-merit, along with his wife and their sons, qualified to wear the elaborate "rich-man's" cloth. One could not wear a cloth of any other community. In the community in which designs are gender (and clan) specific, men and women could not interchange the patterns on the shawl.

Until some decades ago it was also tabooed to weave a design motif which belonged to another community. In the late 1950s, on an experimental scale at the government weaving centre, designs of different Naga communities were woven on the same piece of cloth. For this purpose women from different Naga communities would come to weave the design. Nowadays these restrictions have been done away with.

As in other neighbouring hill communities, cloth-making is in the domain of women; spinning, dyeing and weaving are exclusively undertaken by them. The contribution of men is limited to the making of the weaving instruments, although sometimes men may help women to warp the thread. Traditionally, men's contribution to the completed textile was in the form of decorations of the men's kilts and body cloth with cowrie shells and jobs' tear seeds or, as among the Ao Nagas, they painted motifs on the median white band of the warrior's cloth.

To-day weaving is an important cottage industry in Nagaland. Three types of loom are used for the purpose: back-strap or body-tension loom, fly-shuttle loom, and power loom. Back-strap looms have remained the most popular. Women find it most convenient because of its easy transportability from one location to another. It is used for weaving the fabric for shawls, sarongs, kilts, sashes, waist belts and shoulder bags. There are very few fly-shuttle looms and a negligible number of power looms, which have been installed by some weaving co-operatives for producing fabric for furnishing and low cost shawls and sarongs.

Some textile specialists have suggested that the back-strap loom permits more artistic control, therefore enabling the weaver to experiment with new motifs. Perhaps this is reflected in several new combinations of designs and colours that have come up in recent years.

Traditionally the Nagas have used home-grown cotton and nettle fibre for weaving. Cloth made of nettle fibre was (and still is) used as rough clothing that is worn while working in the fields, and also used as bedding. The weaving of cloth made from home-grown and spun cotton is on the decline and one finds the practice surviving only in the interior villages.

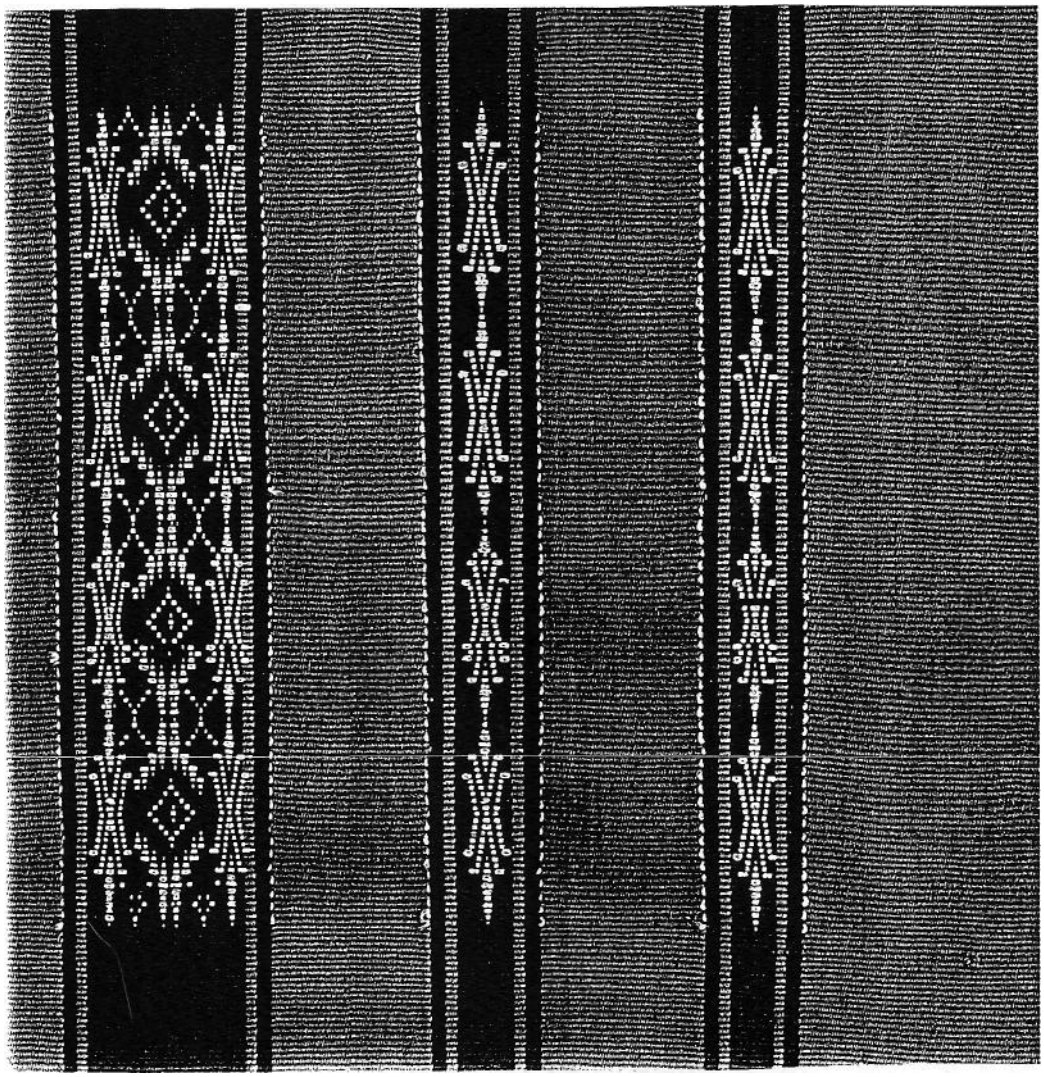
The fabric

The fabric woven on back-strap looms is thick, the thickness being achieved by a dense warp which covers the weft. The thickness of the woven fabric depends on the thickness of the yarn used. The finest cloth is made of two-ply yarn. The width of the fabric is narrow to enable the weaving of the cloth without any technical difficulty. Both the shawls and the sarongs are made of at least three separate pieces stitched along the length of the fabric. Thus the width of the finished cloth depends on the number and size of the strips of cloth that have been stitched together. The average breadth of a single piece is about 18". Men's cloth is generally made of four such strips and women's cloth could vary in width from that using a single piece to larger ones that use up to three pieces.

Although the most common pattern is of bold colour stripes of varying width, additional pattern in weft is inserted by picking the warp yarn. Most common motifs have geometric designs - zigzags formed by alternate upright and pendant triangles, lozenges and diamonds. In some textiles the weft motifs occur as floats in the body of the cloth, while in some, for example the Angami Lohe cloth (illusrated above p. 6), the weft design is woven along only one end of the cloth. The zigzag pattern is used repeatedly in men's sashes, especially those worn by the Konyak, Angami and Chakhasang Nagas. This pattern is also repeated in the men's belts that are tied over kilts and the shoulder bags. The ceremonial shawls and sarongs of some Naga communities are decorated with cowrie shells. In the past some shawls were embroidered with yellow coloured orchid stalks. Some special shawls even had their border decorated with a row of irridescent blue-green beetle wings. Some of these old shawls are not seen in Nagaland any more; however some excellent samples are in the Naga collection in the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford.

The most common colours used in weaving are red, blue, black and white. The yarn as well as, sometimes, a finished cloth was/is coloured using vegetable dyes extracted from various parts of locally available plants. Various shades of blue, ranging from black-blue to light blue are obtained from the leaves of *Strobilanthes flaccidifolius,* a plant somewhat similar to indigo. The red dye is obtained from the root of *Rubia,* The Angami Nagas use the bark of a creeper to obtain a shade of brown for the mud-coloured stripes in their white ceremonial cloth. These dyes are still used for colouring the cotton yarn, both home-manufactured or that bought from the market.

The yarn for weaving is available in the shops in the district headquarters and the townships that are close to the villages. Yarns made of cotton, wool or acrylic are used for weaving the cloth. However, the use of cotton yarn is not very popular, as the weavers complain that the thread breaks easily while weaving and the colours bleed on washing. Also as Nagaland has a cool climate throughout the year, wool is preferred over cotton. Among different types of wool, cashmilon - a blend of wool and nylon - is preferred over pure wool for its (claimed) durability and fastness of colour. It is also considered easier to work with, as the thread does not break as frequently as it does when using pure wool. The quality of the fabric depends on the thickness of the yarn used and the tightness of the weave. Fabric made of two-ply yarn - either acrylic or cashmilon - is a finer cloth compared to that made of four-ply yarn. Almost all of the men's shawls and sarongs, on the other hand, are made from cashmilon as well as acrylic yarn. Two-ply acrylic yarn is used for making women's formal sarong and shawl sets.



Detail of the central design from Lotha Naga woman's stole called *Konken pemo*, literally meaning "orange stole" (dated 1997). This single width piece is made from two-ply acrylic yarn. It is a yellow-orange coloured cloth with pale green stripes and the weft motif is of an off-white colour. The motif, called *Lumthe* is an improvised version of the older motif.

Besides the traditional patterns with traditional colour combinations, the weavers have also experimented with different colour combinations and designs - sometimes inspired by the motifs from neighbouring states as well as motifs associated with Christianity, such as church bells, holly, etc.. Some communities have even redesigned their traditional cloth by choosing a particular colour combination and improvising upon the weft motif. For example, the Lotha Naga women's cloth *(Kyong Sürum)* that was developed by the Lotha women's committee in the 1960s is an improvisation of the old cloth. The old cloth was black-blue with light blue stripes with small weft motifs. The new cloth has retained the black colour, but it has multi-coloured stripes and more elaborate and elongated weft motifs. Interestingly, in the non-traditional range of cloth though using the same traditional motifs, certain colour combinations come into vogue for a couple of years and then get replaced by others.

An interesting development has been the modified significance of certain cloths indicative of achievement by an individual. Cloths that were traditionally associated with the warrior's status or were presented only to distinguished people, are now associated with achievement in the sphere of education. For example, the Chakhasang Naga warrior cloth is now (supposedly) worn only by graduates; the Angami Nagas have recently (1997) designed a sarong - black with a yellow-orange border and green motif - which can be worn only be women graduates. It is said to be a modified version of the women's cloth (originally black with an orange border) that was presented to a distinguished person.

In the last fifteen years, some enterprising Naga women have founded weaving co-operatives in which, besides making the fabric for traditional clothing, they also make jackets, waistcoats and western-style dresses using the traditional fabric. In recent years weaving has become the most important cottage industry in Nagaland.

Vibha Joshi Institute of Social and Cultural
Anthropology, Oxford

CUT MY COTE

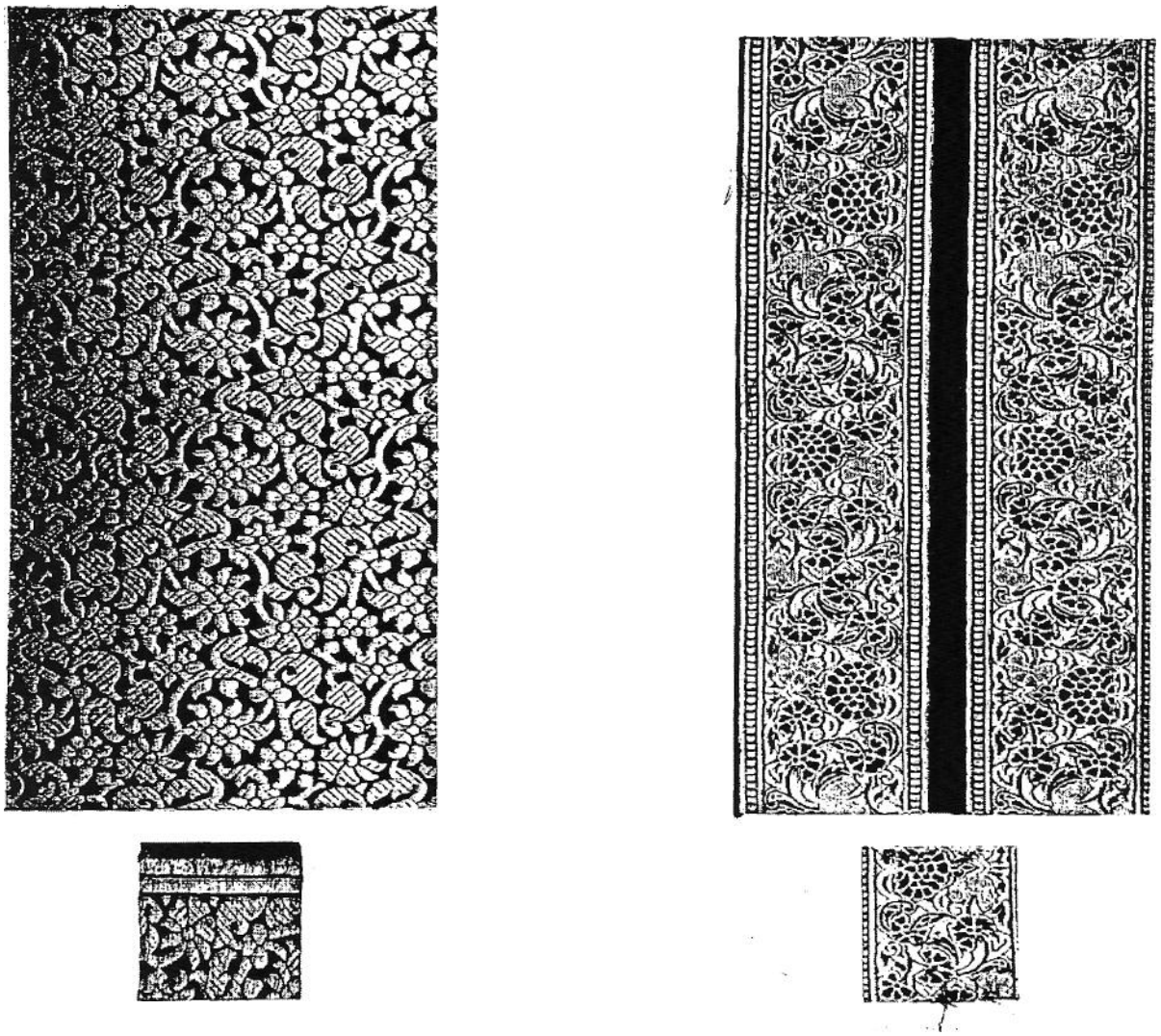
This book, published by the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, was certainly one mentioned by Penelope Woolfit in her talk *Take Two Squares* on 21 October (see p.15). There were a few copies for sale at the meeting, but they all went and Felicity was under the impression that some people who would have liked to buy a copy were disappointed. She has tracked down a source of supply and is willing to make a group order, so if you would like a copy please contact her. The cost is $7 + 7% tax + a share of the shipping.

Felicity Wood, 2 Frenchay Road, Oxford OX2 5TG, tel/fax 01865 554281, e-mail: felicity.wood@dial.pipex.com

ONE MAN'S PASSION - INDIAN TEXTILE SAMPLE BOOKS

KINCOB
BENARES
No 402 Second ....

KINCOB
BENARES



A page from the second series, 1873, illustrating two examples of kincob brocade (see below p. 12)

The second half of the nineteenth century saw an enthusiasm for the education and training of designers and manufacturers throughout Europe. The reasons for this were twofold. One was to raise standards in craftsmanship and design, and the other was to compete more effectively on the expanding world market by educating manufacturers in foreign techniques and products. This was an era of International Exhibitions and Mechanics Institutes, the forerunners of to-day's museums.

It was from within this environment that a Scots doctor named John Forbes Watson produced extraordinary sets of sample books. After graduating from Aberdeen University, Forbes Watson began his long association with India by joining the East India Company. At first he worked in India for the Medical Service, but ill health brought him back to Britain where, in 1858 he was appointed the Reporter on Products of India and the Direcor of the India Museum in London.

Although Forbes Watson was Interested in many aspects of India, such as economy, environment and health, his interest in trade and textiles has been recorded for future generations in the surviving sample books of Indian fabrics that he published in 1866 and throughout the 1870s. Two series of the *Textile Manufactures of India* were produced. The first series of eighteen volumes, published in 1866, was well funded and supplied to all the major industrial centres in Britain and some abroad. However, once it became apparent that the textile books were costly for the India Museum to produce,, and were making a loss rather than a profit, Forbes Watson found it very difficult to find support for his second series. Volumes were produced sporadically from 1873 to 1880, which included illustrations as well as textiles, but there was much less interest in these later volumes and fewer were sold.

The sample books were originally intended to be housed in Mechanics Institutes and museums so that as many people as possible would be able to resource them. It is chiefly in museums that a handful of sets survive for to-day's researchers. Deceptively dull from the exterior, once opened they provide a unique record of South Asian textiles from the end of the nineteenth century. The bindings have protected the contents of the volumes and the colours inside remain vibrant and dazzling, especially when looking at the metal thread embroidery and kincob brocades (see illustration above, p.11). The contents include many types of fabric, such as muslins, silks, satins, piece goods, turbans, woollens, cottons and garment pieces for men and women. Not only do the volumes illustrate the huge variety of textiles manufactured in India, but also information about where they were made and who wore them and how. For example, "used as scarfs by Hindoo women", "used in children's dresses" and "for petticoats of poorer class, made of English thread". Notes on methods of manufacture were also included, such as "glazed by means of a chank shell rubbed over it" and "woven in half widths with a border on one side. Two of these widths are afterwards sewn together so as to form a complete scarf with a border on each side. If imitated in this country, should be at once woven the full width of 58 inches."

To-day the National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh, hold both sets of volumes in the Archive Library, with four volumes of the second series on display in the *Within the Middle East* gallery. The Victoria and Albert Museum in London also holds complete sets, and various volumes survive in Preston, Manchester, Bradford, Huddersfield, Salford, Macclesfield, Glasgow, Dublin and Ahmedabad, India. The sample books remain as a fascinating source of evidence for nineteenth century South Asian textiles and manufacturing techniques, plus an insight into the interests of British textile manufacturers of the time.

Lyn Stevens Wall
National Museums of Scotland

TEXTILE AND PRECIOUS - A BIRTHDAY PARTY IN BASEL, SWITZERLAND

January 14, 2000 was the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Alfred Bühler, whose name is well-known to anyone who has studied textiles in depth, whether from a historical, anthropological or technical perspective. His meticulous scholarship is particularly apparent in his monumental works, *Ikat Batik Plangi* (1972) and *The Patola of Gujarat* (co-authored with Eberhard Fischer, 1979), both standard works which have substantially advanced the study of Asian textiles. He was professor of ethnology at Basel University and director of the famous Basel Ethnographic Museum (now renamed Museum der Kulturen), and it was during his time as director that this institution became one of the leading centres for textile research, with outstanding collections that attract scholars and enthusiasts from all over the world. On this anniversary he was commemorated with three exhibitions, curated by his former students Marie-Louise Nabholz-Kartaschoff, Christian Kaufmann and Annemarie Seiler-Baldinger, as well as a one-day symposium *Textile Studies To-day - what they owe to Alfred Bühler's Contributions.* I was delighted and deeply honoured to be asked to present a paper at the conference, which was to coincide with the opening of the exhibitions.

It is the exhibitions that I want to bring to your attention here, as they are truly remarkable, each one successful in a different way: *TEXTIL - Technik, Design, Funktion/Textiles: a Classification* (permanent display); *Kultur an einem Faden - Maschenstoffe aus Amazonien und Neuguinea/Culture on a Thread - Meshed fabrics from Amazonia and New Guinea* (until Autumn 2000); *Textil und Kostbar/Textile and Precious - Highlights from our Collection* (until 24 April 2000).

For many years the Museum has had a display of textile classification presenting all aspects of fabric construction. The focus was on the materials, tools and techniques used to produce objects made by interlacing one or more elements in order to obtain a coherent fabric. While instructive and intellectually stimulating, these old, didactic cases were not really aesthetically inspiring. As a farewell before retiring from her position in the Museum, Annemarie Seiler-Baldinger (author of a standard work on textile classification) decided to redesign the display. In her recent absence, her colleague Marie-Louise Nabholz-Kartaschoff realized much of the actual planning of the final display, with the help of an obviously inspired technical staff. The result is a pleasure to view: a clearly laid out classification, starting from the raw materials and dyes, and taking the viewer from thread (=element) production to fabric construction and ornamentation in a precisely defined and therefore most illuminating manner. The various stages of production are illustrated by fine examples from the Museum's collection (see illustration below p.14), diagrams and photographs. The exhibit is accompanied by a four-page leaflet which is free and available in German, French and English.

The second exhibition *Culture on a Thread* can be seen as an extension of this display: it looks at a variety of objects from two distinctly different cultures (the Amazon and New Guinea), but with the shared textile technology of complex looping (meshing). Curated by Christian Kaufmann and Annemarie Seiler-Baldinger, friends and colleagues since student days in Professor Buhler's seminars, the small and intimate display area provides a

marvellous view of the ingenuity of the human mind: taking a thread and turning it into an apparently endless variety of objects, which may be practical, aesthetically enhanced, ritually important.

Jacket from Japan, Central Honshu

The third display *Textile and Precious* is simply stunning. It celebrates the Museum's textile collection (over 20,000 objects) by selecting a few outstanding pieces - from India, south-eastern Europe, south-west China, Okinawa, Indonesia (Sumba), Peru and Africa (the kingdom of Kuba). The visitor approaches the exhibit past an exquisite display of Indian silk saris, luminescent, sparkling in fine gold, and combining rich colours with a sense of transparency: it is positively painful not to be able to touch the cloth. We enter a very dark room with islands of carefully lit costume groups, each from a different cultural sphere. As the eye becomes accustomed to the darkness, it begins to pick out striking textures, colours and designs: exuberant, but delicately worked embroidered garments from south-eastern Europe; resist-dyed stencil-patterned kimonos from the Ryukyu Islands (Okinawa), woven in transparent bast fibres; next to it the display I found most striking, deeply indigo-dyed, almost black, textiles and garments from south-west China, which slowly begin to shine in the darkness as they pick up rays of light.

Almost all the textiles are dress items, which present a display problem only rarely solved to full satisfaction. To show them flat against a wall misrepresents how they are to be seen, and to dress them on to dummies inevitably looks too static. The design staff has excelled itself here. All garments are supported by invisible internal mounts and strong fishing line thread from the ceiling, which makes them look as though they were worn by invisible people - spiritual robes!

The curatorial staff of the Museum is renowned for producing exhibitions that are based on extensive field research and present material culture in a sound social context. Here, however, the curator (Marie-Louise Nabholz) has opted to abstain, for once, from detailed information in words and pictures. As she says in the accompanying leaflet, the textiles chosen are allowed "to speak for themselves … as masterpieces of textile skills from all over the world, and in memory of Alfred Bühler, founder of the textile collection and of textile research in Basel".

The Museum has published a catalogue of sixty representative pieces from its textile collection, to coincide with the redesign of the display of textile classification. Each entry is accompanied by a one-page discussion, written by the regional curator. Annemarie Seiler-Baldinger gives a brief introduction to the structure of textile classification, and there is a bibliography. The catalogue is also available in English.

Ruth Barnes

REPORTS OF O.A.T.G. MEETINGS

Take Two Squares: Ethnic Clothes Without Patterns

Trousers and tops will never seem the same again for those who heard Penelope Woolfit speak to members after the A.G.M. on 21 October. Her special interest is in the structure of clothes, and she showed us how a length of woven material can be cut and seamed to produce basic or intricately-shaped and detailed clothes - all with no wasted material.

The simplest garment is the *poncho* from South and Central America, for which two strips of material are joined, leaving a hole for the head. From Japan, the traditional *kimono* is constructed from four rectangles cut from a single length of material. The speaker had a wealth of illustrations, some with overlays to show the garment's structure and clear drawings to illustrate the way the material is cut. With the help of these aids we examined the *kaftan*, the *kameez* and clothes with more complex structures.

Diagonal cutting of cloth is frequently used to create subtle and interesting shapes. Pieces may be reversed or rotated and inset in different ways, or used as gussets for comfort and often as design features.

The second part of the evening was devoted to pants, and here the emphasis was on gussets. In the simplest form a piece of material is folded in half, the sides joined and a wedge cut to give the legs. This diamond is opened out, turned through 90° and sewn in again to give, with a little more cutting and sewing, a gussetted and comfortable pair of trousers.

The very baggy trousers often seen in old pictures of wealthy men from the Middle East are suitable for walking and horse-riding. The bagginess also enhances social prestige. For sheer impressiveness the trousers worn at the Mughal court (similar to those of the Queen

of Oudh in the V.& A.) are hard to beat, with their fullness created by numerous wedge shapes of fabric inset into each inside leg.

The speaker had brought (and was wearing) examples of clothes with interesting structures, and these were supplemented by garments brought by members. There were also some slides from the Pitt Rivers and Ashmolean museums: from the latter a thirteenth century Coptic *kameez* style garment.

Perhaps the lasting memory of a fascinatigng evening was the demonstration of sartorial origami as Penelope Woolfit folded and cut rectangles of paper to demonstrate some of the inventive structuring of trousers from round the world.

Penelope Woolfit would love to hear from anyone who comes across examples of clothes, particularly trousers, with an interesting structure. She has asked that you contact her through the Editor.

Fiona Sutcliffe

[Penelope promised to send details of books she mentioned during her talk for inclusion in this Newsletter. She did so, but I am afraid I cannot find them, and fear I may inadvertently have thrown them away when I had committed them to the disc that was later destroyed. Sorry; I will ask her again. Ed.]

Christmas Social and Exhibition

The 1999 social attracted a smaller number of people than Felicity Wood's excellent gathering the previous year. Whether this was because I am known to fewer of you than Felicity, or Woodstock seems more remote than Oxford, or simply that you intended to come but did not fill in the form right away and then forgot, I have no means of telling. The smaller number meant that when we had refreshments we were all able to sit in one room and, by playing musical chairs, talk to everyone.

Before that we had a wide variety of textiles to enjoy, with embroidery ranging from China (Rosemary Lee) to a wonderful example of English stumpwork (Jean Panter), weaving (including a fine double ikat from Felicity) and my knitting based on a split-ply camel trapping in the *Colours of the Indus* exhibition at the V.& A.. Hats featured strongly, with a display of Central Asian hats from Fiona Sutcliffe and a rare Karakalpak wedding hood from Sheila Paine, while Helen Adams brought a dress from Saudi Arabia. I, for one, would have liked more time to look at everything and hear about it.

Thank you all who came for making another most interesting and enjoyable evening.

Alison Smith

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Thank you for your invitation to respond to Patsy Yardley's letter (O.A.T.G. Newsletter no. 14, October 1999) concerning a point I made in my February 1999 talk on textiles from Burma.

I should first set out what it was that I suggested in my talk. Although I was interpreted as saying that I considered the term "dress" to demean the importance of textiles, what I actually meant to draw attention to was that I think too much is made of the academic distinction between "dress" and "textiles" as subjects of study. It is true that I went on to say that to talk only about "dress" demeans the significance not only of the textile itself (i.e. the textile of which the dress may be made) but also of the cultural importance of its production. But I added that it is also true that to talk only about "textiles" risks belittling the importance of the use of those textiles, often (although not of course always) in dress. I contextualized this by explaining that my talk would focus mostly on textiles used in dress (rather than, say, prayer flags) and on the parts of dress that are textiles (rather than, say, ornaments).

My point was aimed primarily at those approaching textiles/dress from a broadly academic perspective, and came out of various conversations I had had with anthropologists in particular. Some of these commentators had criticised academic studies of "textiles" for presenting studies of pattern, material and technique without the cultural and historical contextualizations that studies of "dress" provide. Examples of such contextualized dress studies include Emma Tarlo's recent work in India *(Clothing Matters*, Hurst & Co., 1996), Susan Conway's *Thai Textiles* (British Museum Press, 1992), the varied material in Ruth Barnes' and Joanne Eicher's edited volume *Dress and Gender* (Berg 1992) and Joanne Eicher's further edited work Dress *and Ethnicity (Berg* 1995).

The comment made in my talk was intended both to agree with the critics of some "textile" studies and also to demonstrate that their criticism could in itself go too far in the other direction. That is, those who criticise "textile" studies for too drily focussing on material, technique and pattern alone, while they may have a point, themselves sometimes risk demeaning the importance of these apparently dry aspects of "textile" study. Such "dry" matters as material, technique and pattern are important not only in their own right, but are also just as valid a part of the wider contexts (social, cultural, economic) of the subject of study, be it "dress" or "textiles".

I certainly did not intend to suggest simply that I viewed the concept of "dress" (rather than "textiles"") as demeaning the status of embroidery (c.f. Patsy Yardley's letter) or, for that matter, any other textile technique (embroidery itself is an unusual decorative technique in Burma in comparison to dyeing and supplementary weft patterning). And I agree completely with her comment that "to consider embroidery as just an isolated treasured category in itself is … too purist". Rather, I was making a semantic point about the way in which "dress" and "textiles", as objects of academic study, are too often seen as polarised, distinct ways of

viewing what is (usually) in reality the same thing. Apart from anything else, it seems to me sad that advocates of studies of "dress" see studies of "textiles" as dry and uncontextualized and yet often underplay in their own work the significance of textiles *per se*. But to me it also seems sad that "textile" advocates often underplay in their work the importance of the sort of wider contexts on which in-depth "dress" studies focus. It was at this double misfortune that I was aiming. Nonetheless, there are good studies out there which bring in aspects of both approaches, the works referred to above being some of those which spring most immediately to mind.

Yours faithfully,

SANDRA DUDLEY

MUSEUMS ROUND-UP

At last! The Pitt Rivers Museum will re-open on 25 March, an event that will be welcomed by all who have an affection for that unique institution. At a time when most museums are rushing for high-tech glamour, the Pitt Rivers stands for what real museums are all about: object-rich displays and the pleasures of discovery. You need not approach the reopened Museum with trepidation: little has been altered - except for the opening hours which will now include Sundays from 2 - 4.30 p.m. giving more time to enjoy the goodies.

Not content to sit back and rest on their laurels, however, the Director and staff are already looking forward to more building, this time on the "green shed" site tucked away behind the Museum. The University has given permission for the site to be redeveloped provided that it is done in conjunction with the Museum's neighbours, the University Museum of Natural History. It is planned to use the new building for a visitor centre, a larger shop and improved temporary exhibition space, as well as restoring the conservation department to the central fold.

The Eastern Art department of the Ashmolean Museum has recently acquired a Japanese folding screen decorated with four large panels of embroidery. The panels depict a night scene of cormorant fishing, dramatically lit by flaming braziers. The screen is similar in construction to one illustrated in the catalogue of Japanese Modern Fine Arts displayed at The Japan-British Exhibition held in London in 1910. It bears a plaque stating that it was made by the Iida Company. Some conservation work will have to be carried out on the screen before it can be displayed.

The St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow has acquired a textile of quite a different type: the City's Sikh community has given it a banner made to commemorate last year's celebration of *Vaisakhi 300*, the 300th anniversary of the founding of the *Khalsa*, the military Sikh brotherhood, on 13 April 1699. The gift was received at a civic reception on 9 December and is now on show in the Museum.

Meanwhile on the other side of the Atlantic the Textile Museum in Washington, D.C., is celebrating a more modest anniversary: its 75th birthday. It was founded in 1925 by George Hewitt Myers. A businessman with many interests, Mr Myers travelled extensively in Europe and the Middle East and started collecting rugs and other textiles in 1915, believing that to study textiles was to learn about the world.

In the 75 years of its existence, his foundation has grown from a small museum open by appointment only to an internationally recognized collection of over 16,000 textiles, open seven days a week and attracting over 30,000 visitors a year. The celebrations will start with Winter Festival Day on 26 February, at which all kinds of activities will be on offer to people of all ages, and will continue with a series of monthly programmes throughout the year. There will also be three special exhibitions, two of which are of Asian textiles, one of Ottoman embroideries (see Exhibitions, p.22 below), to be followed in August by *Tribal Traditions: Village and Nomadic Weaving of Anatolia,* and later an exhibition of textiles of the Chavin Culture of Peru.

Editor

BOOKS

WORLD TEXTILES: A Visual Guide to Traditional Techniques, John Gillow & Bryan Sentance, Thames and Hudson, 1999, £28 hardback.

This very well illustrated book provides a complete overview of textile techniques - something which has been lacking in the past. Despite the existence of many wonderful specialist textile books, histories of world textiles, guides to textile terms, etc, there does not seem to have been an illustrated guide to basic techniques. When we look at textiles, either the real thing or in illustration, they are not just things of beauty but they are things constructed by man - they reflect his culture, his ingenuity, his technology. Here then is our reference, when we look at a textile and wonder *how* it is made.

The book is divided into the following sections: materials, non-loom techniques, loom-woven textiles, painted and printed textiles, dyes, sewing, embroidery and embellishments. Each section is represented by an icon which acts as a thumb index - for instance, loom-woven textiles are represented by a picture of African strip cloth. I particularly enjoyed the tassels, fringes, shells, beads, feathers, metal thread, sequins and so on of the embellishment section. In the non-loom techniques, I was very pleased to see not just knitting, crochet and lace, but also sprang, split-ply braid and twining. Every page is rich with coloured photographs, both of whole garments and of details. There are also archive photographs showing costumes and techniques. Diagrams and line drawings are included to explain methods (how to tie yarns for warp ikat for instance) or terms such as weft inlay.

The book includes a good list for further reading under the headings of geographical regions, materials, techniques and history. There is also a glossary and an extensive list of collections world-wide.

I think this book provides a wonderful means of consolidating what we know and stimulating us to learn more of what we do not know. It gives a truly wide view both in the world sense and also hi its definition of textiles.

Felicity Wood

RAPT IN COLOUR:Korean Textiles and Costumes of the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910), Sydney, 1998,108pp, over 60 col. illus., 31x23 cm, pb. £16.95

Essays by authors from Korea, U.S.A. and Australia introduce the history and traditions of Korean dress and wrapping cloths from the 18th to 20th centuries and explore the social and cultural environment hi which wrapping cloths were made and used.

Felt lace mantle by Alexander Pilin, Izhevsk, Russia, 1996 (See *New Directions in Felt*,

EXHIBITIONS

New Directions in Felt

Felt is often associated in people's minds with yurts in Mongolia and rugs in Turkey and Iran. These functional objects produced by highly skilled craftspeople are still made today and are admired by feltmakers everywhere. However, the creation of felt worldwide has become much more experimental in its design and use of fibre and its uses are more diverse, as the exhibitions in Kendal this spring will reflect.

Thirty-one international feltmakers will be showing their work at the Abbot Hall Gallery and two will be at the Brewery Arts Centre from 21 March to 1 May, The Abbot Hall exhibition commemorates Mary Burkett's ground-breaking exhibition in 1979, *The Art of the Feltmaker,* which stimulated the enthusiasm we in the International Feltmakers' Association feel to-day.

A glance at the makers' descriptions of their work suggests that this year's *New Directions* will be a challenging exhibition. One maker invites us to reconsider everyday objects by creating a teacup and saucer in grey felt, one uses roofing felt and copper in her work, while another coats the felt in photo-sensitive paint to record the shadows of piano hammers. There will also be hats, shawls and wall-hangings to delight the viewer. One exhibitor describes her work as "Felt with magic", but overall the collection will not be just pretty.

During the final week-end of the Kendal exhibition the I.F.A. is holding a conference in Ambleside at which Mary Burkett, O.B.E., and Jeanette Appleton will speak. (Contact Patricia Greaves, 10 Welwyn Avenue, Ainsdale, Southport, Merseyside, PR8 3BE, for lecture details.)

Gill Farlam

New Directions - Art of the Feltmaker will be on show at the Abbot Hall Gallery, Kendal, Cumbria (tel.01539 722464), 21 March to 1 May. It will later visit the Orleans House Gallery, Twickenham (tel.0181-892 0221), 7 July to 17 September, and the Bankfield Museum, Halifax, Yorkshire (Tel.014222 354823), 24 March to 20 May 2001.

Other Exhibitions

Old for New Textiles

In collaboration with the Oxford Gallery and Southern Arts, the Ashmolean Museum has commissioned works from three contemporary textile artists, Dawn Dupree, Karina Thompson and Carole Waller, who have used the Museum collections (including one in Eastern Art) to inspire their work, and these works will be on display in the Ashmolean Cafe from Tuesday 29 February to Sunday 12 March. See also Events p,23.(TeL 01865 278000)

Transformations: the Art of Recycling

The re-opening exhibition at the Pitt Rivers Museum, 25 March 2000 to Autumn 2001, may or may not contain much textile material, but should be worth visiting, since the Museum has one of the world's most extensive and inventive collections of recycled objects. This material will be complemented by the work of contemporary British craft makers. A second exhibition, *The Sound of Recycling*, at the Balfour Building, comprising musical instruments made of recycled material is unlikely to contain any textiles, but sounds fun. For information on both exhibitions, phone 01854 270927.

Iranian Tribal Textiles

Contextualized with historical pieces and photographs of the region, this exhibition looks at a range of closely worked and colourful textiles produced for everyday living and to mark special occasions. Ranging from decorative rugs for mules to clothing and jewellery, this is the first public showing of a private collection. At the Ruskin Gallery, Sheffield, 18 March to 6 June. (Tel. 0114-203 9416)

Overseas

Flowers of Silk and Gold: Four Centuries of Ottoman Embroidery -

- at the Textile Museum, Washington, D.C., 18 February to 30 July, will feature over fifty embroidered textiles dating from the 17th to 20th centuries, many of which have never before been exhibited or published. Metallic threads, sequins and precious stones enhance some of the embroideries, which are predominantly decorated with floral motifs. (Tel. 202-667-0441)

Cover fragment, 17th Century (Textile Museum 1994.27.4)

Last Chance to See -

Central Asian Embroideries at the Whitworth Art Gallery finishes on 1 May. (Tel. 0161-275 7542)

Fashioning Mao at the V.& A. finishes on 23 April. (Tel. 020-7942 2197)

Woven Symbols: Chinese Garments and Textiles at Seattle Asian Art Museum finishes on 2 April

LECTURES AND EVENTS

Thursday 2 March & following three Thursdays, 7.30 - 9.30 p.m. - ***Batik and Paste Resist for All***, Horniman Museum course for all levels with Karen Mears, including textile techniques from Africa and India, at the Kirkdale Centre, 84 Kirkdale, Sydenham, London, SE26 4BH, tel. 020-8690 2109; fee for course £30. For information phone Community Education on 020-8699 1872 extn 129.

Saturday 4 March, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. - ***Old for New Textiles*** study day in connexion with the exhibition of the same name (see above p.21) at the Ashmolean Museum. The artists, Dawn Dupree, Karina Thompson and Carole Waller will describe their creative processes and techniques, and the contemporary textiles will be placed in their historic context by Ashmolean curators. £18 (£15 for Friends of the Ashmolean) covers lectures, tours, seminar, coffee and tea. To book and for further information, tel. 01865 278015.

Friday 10 March at 1 p.m. - ***Materials in Indian Crafts***, and
Friday 17 March at 1 p.m. - ***The Depiction of Indian Crafts***, gallery talks by Anne Peerless at the V.& A. (Tel.020 7 942 2197)

Sundays 2 & 9 April, 2-5 p.m. - **Handling Session in the Nehru Gallery, V.& A.**, of *kathputli* puppets from Rajasthan to find out how they were made and used. (Tel. 020 7 942 2197)

Friday 14 to Sunday 16 April - **The sixth biennial conference of the Association of Guilds of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers**, will be held at Westminster College, Harcourt Hill, Oxford. Among the speakers will be Ruth Barnes talking on *Textiles from Mediaeval Asia in the Ashmolean Museum., Oxford*, at 9.30 a.m. on Sunday. Individual lectures must be booked in advance, cost £8 (£7 to members). To book, or for further information, contact Elizabeth Cook, Old Village School, 24 High Street, Cuddesdon, Oxford, OX9 9HJ, enclosing S.A.E..

Saturday 15 April - **Central Asian Textiles Study Day**, the last in a series of five study days entitled *Cultures of Central Asia: History, Traditions and Arts of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan* at the British Museum. Speakers will

survey the stunning costume and domestic textiles of the region, covering both nomadic and urban traditions, as well as contemporary developments. [Hie only other remaining day of the series will be on Saturday 11 March on *Nomad Traditions and Symbols of Identity*^ Fee: £25 (£20 concessions) per day. For further information and booking details contact the British Museum Education Department, tel. 020 7323 8511/8854.

Sundays 4 & 11 June, 2-5 p.m. - **Handling session of Indian block-printed textiles** and carved wooden blocks used to produce them; Mary Spyrou explains the processes involved. In the Nehru Gallery, V.& A. (teL 020 7942 2197)

Wednesday 14 June, 6 p.m. - ***Hill Tribe Textiles of South Western China***, a talk by John Gillow to the Friends of the Pitt Rivers Museum at the Pitt Rivers Research Building, 64 Banbury Road, Oxford; tea will be served between 5.30 and 5.50 p.m.. Non-members £2. (Tel. 01869 249565)

Saturday 17 June, 2 p.m. - ***Textiles, Jewellery and Garments from Laos and Thailand***, talk by Dorothy Reglar to the Oxford Guild of Weavers and Dyers, at Stamen St John Village Hall, Oxfordshire. Further information from Thelma Robinson, 01908 505289.

Friday 29 & Saturday 30 September - ***Critical Writing About Textiles***, a conference organized by North West Textiles Forum at the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester. The conference will draw on current theories, issues and practices in the crafts and in textiles, and will be organized around the three themes, Critical Writing in the Public Arena, Developing Practice, and Articulating Regional Identity/ies. For further information or to submit a paper, visit http://www.madasafish.com/-textiles or contact Gaby Porter, 14 Brixton Avenue, Manchester, M20 1JF, tel. 0161 283 7453, e-mail gaby@yoyo.u-net.com

Gina Corrigan is leading the following **special interest tours to China** in September and October: 27 September to 17 October - Minority Textiles, Landscapes and Photographs of South-West China; 16 October to 4 November - Shanghai and Suzhou with an Embroidery Workshop + Miao Villages Textiles and Workshops in Guizhou. Further details from Gina at Hoe Barn, Hoe Lane, Bognor Regis, Sussex, PO22 8NS, tel. 01243 582178, fax. 01243 587239.

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