ASIAN TEXTILES

NEWSLETTER OF THE OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

NUMBER 39 FEBRUARY 2008

Coming Soon....The new Ashmolean Textile Gallery

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: Tribal costumes from Saudi Arabia, Ikats at the V&A, textiles of the Karakalpaks, reviews, visits and much more….

Contents

Front cover picture: Man's robe with Chinese embroidery on the outside and ikat lining. Given to Robert Shaw by Yakub Beg, ruler of Kashgar, April 1869. Ashmolean Museum EAX.3975.
Rear cover: *Dastmal-e-mohr,* Hazara, Afghanistan, c1930, see p21.

EDITORIAL

In the last issue I said I would explain some of the changes I intended to introduce to the newsletter. Readers will already be aware, from the front cover, of two of the most obvious. First, we have decided to give our esteemed organ a name. After 10 years in which the newsletter had established itself as an essential guide for those with an interest in the remarkable world of Asian textiles, what better name than the one that now adorns our masthead? It has the benefit of simplicity. It does, as they say, exactly what it says on the tin.

The second change is the use of colour on the title page. Although this has increased our production costs, I think readers will agree with me that the benefits are immediately obvious. Part of the cost has been defrayed by the adverts we have been able to carry in this and the previous issue. I would like to carry more adverts, within reason, which in the longer run could help to finance further improvements, such as a card cover and, possibly, more colour pages. It goes without saying that a magazine devoted to textiles ought to have as many colour pages as possible.

However, we may have to wait some time before that is possible. The use of colour throughout the newsletter would double our production costs and that is not presently an option.

Inside the newsletter you may also notice one or two new features. For the→

first time, in this issue we are running an item based on members' favourite textiles. David and Sue Richardson have written a fascinating article about two Karakalpak textiles. Their devotion to this group of textiles and their expertise are obvious. David and Sue have also developed an amazing website, www.karakalpak.com, which I would urge all readers to view. I hope to return to it at a later date.

The second new item is the 'website focus', which reinforces the previous point. The number of websites relating to textiles is growing all the time and many of them are now indispensible to textile devotees. This issue focuses on the www.mansoojat.com website, which presents in great detail the traditional clothing of the Arabian peninsula. This virtual museum challenges the idea that dress from that region is confined to the black *burqa.* If you know of other sites for inclusion in future issues, please let me know.

One final point on changes: we are hoping to make a grant application shortly for funding to cover a redesign of both the newsletter and the website, as well as training on the computer programs that will allow us to get the maximum impact with our limited resources.

One possible benefit from this is that we may then be able to have a 'members only' section of the website where we can put a version of the newsletter online, including all the colour illustrations that at present are just too expensive to print. This will not in any way be a substitute for the newsletter, but it will offer a short-term solution and also enable OATG members to access back issues from anywhere in the world. I will keep you informed of developments.

As for the remaining content of the present issue, I would like to draw readers' attention to the news item about the impending closure of the Textile Conservation Centre, based at the Winchester campus of Southampton University. The Institute of Conservation has called the decision "a serious assault on excellence".

We should rightly be proud of the fact that around half of all textile conservators in the world have been trained at this remarkable institution. And yet, despite millions of pounds having been raised to supply the TCC with the latest equipment and despite its unrivalled reputation around the world, Southampton has decided it should close on cost grounds.

Those of you who feel strongly about this are urged to make your feelings known by writing to Nell Hoare, director of the TCC, at nell@soton.ac.uk. There is also a petition on the Downing Street website (http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/TCCClosure/) which has already been signed by more than 3,000 people.

On a brighter note, Dr Ruth Barnes has written an article for this issue of *Asian Textiles* on the forthcoming opening of the new textile gallery at the Ashmolean Museum. Although it is not due to open until autumn 2009, planning for the new exhibition space is well underway. As readers know, there is an intimate connection between the origins of this newsletter and the Ashmolean and we should all applaud the decision by the Museum's trustees to devote so much space to textiles. For the first time we will be able to see some of the many wonderful items presently held in the museum's capacious stores.

The Editor

OATG EVENTS PROGRAMME

Tuesday 11 March – 13 March 2008

Visit to Liverpool

We will visit the World Museum and spend time at the off site store. The Textile Conservator will explain work in progress at the Conservation Centre. We will also visit other places of interest.
Bookings have been made for members registered. Others are welcome to join us but will have to make their own arrangements for travel to Liverpool and for accommodation

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Wednesday 19 March 2008 at 5.45pm

My Braid Journey takes me to Kyoto
Jennie Parry

After 22 years of developing and making Japanese braid, Jennie recently attended the First International Kumihimo Conference in Japan

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Thursday 27 March 2008

Gallery tour of the Rau Collection of Textiles at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London
11am at the Main Entrance.

Pip Rau is a leading collector of Central Asian and Afghan textiles and jewellery. This is the most important collection of this material in the UK and one of the best in the world. The collection gives a view of the extraordinary range of Central Asian Ikats made in the 19th century.
Ruby Clark, Assistant Curator in the Asian Department of the V&A, is also Curator of Central Asian Ikats and author of the accompanying catalogue.
Please contact Rosemary or Fiona by 22 March if you wish to come.

Wednesday 4 June 2008 at 5.45

Natural Dye project in the Wangden valley of Tibet
Rupert Smith

Rupert Smith has helped to revive weaving and dyeing techniques in this remote region of Tibet.

Talks are held at the Pauling Centre, 58 Banbury Road, Oxford.
Refreshments from 5.15pm.Visitors welcome (£2)
Programme Coordinators: Rosemary Lee 01491 873276 rosemary.lee@talk21.com
Fiona Sutcliffe 01491 872268 j.v.sutcliffe@talk21.com

World-renowned Textile Conservation Centre faces closure

At the end of last year, Southampton University's Council made an announcement that the world-renowned Textile Conservation Centre (TCC), which has been part of the University since June 1999, would close in late 2009.

The announcement about the TCC, based at the University's School of Art campus at Winchester, has stunned the conservation world. In its official statement, the University said that the decision had not been taken lightly:

"It follows eight years of significant investment by the University, during which time the University has paid the majority of the cost of the Centre's new purpose-built facilities on the School of Art campus, and contributed annually to meet the Centre's budget shortfall. The University has concluded, with great reluctance, that the cross-subsidy from other areas of academic endeavour can no longer be justified."

The decision to review the status of the TCC came in the wake of a major restructuring of the academic programme at the School of Art, designed to "meet increasing student demand for new courses in art and design, with a strong focus on commercial applications of art."

Ever since it moved to Southampton in 1998, the TCC has sought to raise finance to fund its work. Initially it brought £1.7m of externally-raised funding with it. In 2002 the Centre secured the then largest-ever grant awarded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council - £950,000 to establish a research centre for Textile Conservation and Textile Studies.

It has trained around half the world's 800 textile conservators since it was founded in 1975 in Hampton Court Palace. It now has a staff of 16 and 60 students.

Jerry Podany of the Getty Museum in California and president of the International Institute of Conservation, wrote to the Vice-Chancellor of Southampton, Professor Bill Wakeham, saying the decision is "widely perceived as no less than a betrayal of trust".

"We see the university's decision as damaging to the world's textile heritage, the international conservation community, and most sadly a poor repayment for the loyalty, high standards and dedication of its highly motivated staff," he wrote.

When it merged with Southampton, the TCC's own charitable foundation raised £1.7 million to help to build and equip a purpose-built centre on the campus at Winchester. However, the university's policy is that each of its faculties needs to be self-funding and make a significant contribution to the central running costs of the university, and attempts to create a business plan for the centre have failed, as have approaches to other universities. The conservation centre building is to be used for other disciplines.

Among recent conservation projects by the centre's commercial wing have been Freddie Mercury's outlandish concert costumes, early 20th-century women's movement banners, and more than 100 backcloths and scenery flats from the 1870s Normansfield Theatre, which has now been restored (*The Times*, January 10, 2007). One of the most recent has been the restoration of a rare 18th-century Jolly Roger flag, captured in battle by a Royal Navy captain in 1780.

Southampton University says it has explored the possibility of transferring the TCC to another university. However none were able to offer the kind of accommodation that would suit the TCC's very specific professional needs – and which had been paid for at Winchester by the TCC's own fundraising. The University says it is organising an international summit on conservation education this summer in order to find a possible solution.

In the meantime, protests have been pouring in to Southampton. After *The Times* ran an article in January, dozens of prominent conservators wrote in to register their protest.

Simon Cane, chair of the Institute of Conservation (Icon) commented: "Losing the Textile Conservation Centre will mean a gaping hole in the provision of specialist conservation training →

in the UK and internationally, since so few specialist centres exist. The need for textile conservation is clear – at the moment the Victoria and Albert Museum is running a high-profile exhibition called 'The Golden Age of Couture, Paris and London 1947-1957.' Princess Diana's gowns have just gone on display at Kensington Palace. The public want access to these fragile and perishable collections and unless they are stored, cared for and conserved properly, there will be nothing to see. If there are no skilled and trained conservators to do the work, public access will suffer."

Jane Eagan of the Oxford Conservation Consortium was one of many who wrote to *The Times* website: "I have worked closely with the TCC on several projects and was shocked to hear of the closure. I have found collaborating with them to be extremely useful and interesting and I will be at a loss as to where to turn in the future when other textile/book conservation projects come up."

Dr Susan Conway wrote from London: "How typical that a centre should be axed when it has helped build a picture of Britain as a 'skills-based' society throughout the world. I have advised students in Southeast Asia to take this course, and it is well known throughout the region. There are so many private and public textile collections worldwide and the importance of textiles historically is well known. Well done Southampton - an own goal if ever I saw one."

And from Shenkar College in Israel, Professor Zvi Koren wrote: "As one who has seen the terrific research and work performed at the TCC, and who has spoken at one of their conferences, I am truly saddened at the news of the impending closure of that centre. I understand the need for any university to be financially sound, however not all components of education are commercially viable or need to be money-making enterprises. Yes, money is essential for operating such a department, and these monies should either be contributed by corporate donors and/or by the government for support of such high-level academic and cultural activities. We are all hoping that such news can be reversed."

Nick Fielding

Central Asian Ikats at the V&A from the Rau Collection

Ruby Clark, curator for the exhibition which runs until 30th March, describes what is on view and the social importance of ceremonial robes

The textiles on display in the current exhibition of ikats at the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) are on loan from the Rau Collection. Pip Rau is a leading collector of Central Asian and Afghan textiles and jewellery. Hers is the most important collection of this material in the UK and one of the best in the world. This collection gives us a view of the extraordinary range of Central Asian ikats in the nineteenth century.

During the nineteenth century the countries of Central Asia lived through a period of sustained economic and cultural revival, and the golden age of ikat making was closely bound up with this new social dynamism. Great centres across Central Asia such as Samarkand and Bukhara, in modern-day Uzbekistan, and Kabul and Kunduz in Afghanistan, became large enough, and prosperous enough, to develop whole neighbourhoods to house the dyers, weavers, binders and designers whose collaborative activity went into the making of the new fabrics. Ikats were put to two main kinds of social use. They were shaped into more or less elaborate personal costumes, or, suitably enlarged, employed as hangings within the home. Hence they became crucial indicators of social power. Richness and originality of design, especially in a person's ceremonial robes, came to be more and more a key marker of status, age and social dignity. Naturally, courts took a leading role: ikats became a preferred item of diplomatic gift-giving, with especially sumptuous and intricate examples exchanged between rulers and honoured guests.

Two things have been central to the appeal of the ikat to collectors and art-lovers: the sheer vibrancy and imaginativeness of their designs, and the way they provide us with clues to the everyday life of the great region to which they belong. They are distinctive nineteenth-century creations, full of unmistakable urban energy; but they are also the product of a culture in which the making of textiles had been, for many centuries, a treasured and highly skilled speciality. The making and trading of fine fabrics had been one of Central Asia's chief economic activities ever since the beginnings of the Silk Road. And all through the long period of Islamic dominance, crucial skills and standards of judgment were preserved. The patterns and colours of nineteenth-century ikats from Central Asia at once declare their place and time of production and reach back to an unparalleled textile tradition.

The term ikat comes from the Malay word *mengikat* meaning to tie or to bind. This refers to the tie-dyeing method which is used to give these textiles their unique vibrancy of colour and design. Ikat has now come to refer to the textiles themselves as well as the process. The making process for a warp ikat begins with carefully prepared lengths of silk thread being laid out and tied onto a patterning frame at the *abr-bandi*, or ikat binding workshop. The chosen pattern is then marked out directly onto the threads in charcoal. The pattern designer then marks out which areas are intended for which colours. The threads are then tightly bound with cotton ties and covered in wax over the areas that are intended to resist the colour of the first dye bath. The threads are then sent to the dye houses, the colour applied and the threads then returned to the binders, and the process repeated until the pattern is complete. The threads could go back and forth to many different dye houses according to the complexity of the design and the number of colours used.

Consigned to the saleroom—without the benefit of guaranteed visiting rights

After a lifetime of collecting, Sheila Paine has decided to sell her stunning collection of tribal embroideries. Here she explains why.

The psychology of collectors is unfathomable – they lose all sense of reason. Like Charles Paget Wade, owner of Snowshill Manor, who only bought the manor in the first place to house a job lot of wood panelling he had bought but had nowhere to put. Adding Japanese armour, leather fire buckets, christening robes and other irresistible objects, he ended his days living in a four-foot space round the fireplace in the stables. Then there was a Mr Jack Hampshire who gave away his collection of four hundred prams but insisted the recipient sign a document guaranteeing him the right to visit them regularly.

The moment of truth always comes – what do I do with all this stuff? When you begin you never envisage the end. I began – when my husband was killed in an air crash – by deciding that, once I'd brought all the children up, I'd devote the rest of my life to wandering around the world recording embroidery traditions before they disappeared. I hadn't actually intended to buy anything, it just happened, and I seem to have built up such a large and diverse collection that it doesn't really fit in any one museum or institution, though pinned onto my travel books it acquires a logical theme.

Without realizing how very important it would be, when I came home from my travels, I would always lay out my purchases (an event the neighbour's cat relished) and record them. By the time the smell of sweat and dust had subsided, I had sewn an inventory number inside each piece, recorded on a card index what it was, which tribe or village it came from, where I bought it, and so on. Only then would I put it away, first in the freezer for a few days, then in cupboards and drawers, throwing out teddy bears losing their stuffing, broken Meccano sets and so on. Finally it was a matter of requisitioning suitcases and large cardboard boxes.

Apart from some *ikat* items, I have collected only embroideries and not textiles in general. The basis is, of course, my travels which means that the social context of the embroideries was always important – they are backed by ethnographic notes and photographs. Then, as a lecturer in French, German and Spanish at Oxford Poly, I've always been a teacher at heart, so much of the material I have plays a didactic role. The ubiquitous Uzbek cap, the *tiboteka*, for example, intrigued me and I finished up sleeping on the floor of a capmaker's house in the Ferghana valley, my alarm set for five, to watch the whole process. Amazingly, this involved hair lacquer, boiling glue and old photographic plates of nickel. The documentation of all this is in my collection.

What, then, can I do with all this stuff? After more than ten years hammering on museum doors to no avail, the only option seems to be to send it to auction. The tragedy is that this will separate the embroideries from their context. For example, two shifts will simply be 'from northern Pakistan' with no information on their source: the tiny settlement of Bar Paro, thousands of feet up in the Himalaya in the valley of Palas, closed to outsiders. Getting there involves a day's scramble beyond where the path gives out, vertically up a slippery scree, jumping over the first stream and on to the hut of the woman who made them. Husbands will never divulge their wife's name or allow them to be photographed, but the shifts are together with - and will now lose – the photographs of their setting.

There will be two auctions, both without reserve. The first is at Christies, South Kensington, on the 11th April. Here most, but not all, of the major pieces will be. Of special interest to OATG members will be the material from Pakistan and India and from Central Asia. Most of →

my embroideries were bought in situ and, having travelled regularly to this region since the fall of the Soviet Union, I have acquired some wonderful pieces. I have also seen how over the years the quality – and quantity – of embroideries available has deteriorated. In Turkmenistan old costumes have been cut up to make bags for tourists, while the only suzanis now available in Uzbekistan are modern ones, albeit skilfully made.

Christies has chosen some Uzbek material but much less Turkmen. Afghan embroideries include some of the pieces that featured in my British Museum book *Embroidery from Afghanistan*, as their own collection was missing these important items. Among them are three minutely embroidered shirts from Kandahar of the kind still being worn by the mujahadeen when I travelled through war-torn Afghanistan. There are absolute gems from India: two fine *abas* from Kutch, a pair of magnificent coats from Kashmir, a Mochi temple hanging depicting the gopis, and gossamer *chikan kurtas* and *angarkha*. Other pieces will be sold in their Paris saleroom in October.

This does not mean that all the best will be at Christies – there will be some very precious pieces at Dreweatts in Newbury on the 22nd April, including a complete range of costume from every region of Yemen and ethnographic material from Makran. This region of Pakistan, neighbouring southern Afghanistan, is another closed territory. Here, unlike the regional variety of Yemen, the costume is always the same, even over the border into Iran. This is because the women's only access to materials for their embroideries is the threads and braids the peddlars take into remote villages. These I collected too.

Also at Dreweatts will be costume from eastern Europe. I wandered round there when it was still under Soviet rule, catching the PanAm flight to West Berlin, then the S-Bahn into the East. Coming out again was less simple. One of the things I collected was a costume from the village of Piestany in Slovakia, the blouse of which features on the cover of the new, greatly extended, edition of *Embroidered Textiles*, which Thames & Hudson is bringing out at the same time as the auctions take place.

We somehow expect always to be around but, 80 next year, with a fractured spine and unable to drive any more, I've had to accept that other people can now look after my treasures. And I won't even have, like Mr Jack Hampshire, assured visiting rights.

11th April 2008: Christies, 85 Old Brompton Road, SW7 3LD. tel: 0207 930 6074.
22nd April 2008: Dreweatts , Donnington Priory, Oxford Road, Donnington, Newbury, Berks RG14 2JE, tel: 01635 553553. Please check with the saleroom for confirmation.
23rd April: Dreweatts, Research library.

Photo courtesy Sheila Paine

Sheila Paine with mujahideen fighters during a collecting trip to Afghanistan in the 1990s

Unravelling the mysteries of the Karakalpaks

In the first of a new series, OATG members David and Sue Richardson present an essay on two of their favourite textiles

Karakalpak *shapan* from Qazaxdar'ya

Those of us who attended Nick Fielding's home in early January to see his wonderful collection of Kyrgyz textiles were each requested to bring along a textile of our own, for what the Americans embarrassingly refer to as a "show and tell" session. For us the choice was obvious. Like Nick, we too are fascinated by a visually powerful group of Turkic textiles that in our case come from the opposite, western side of Central Asia – from the Karakalpaks, who for the past two centuries have occupied the delta of the Amu Darya at the southern end of the Aral Sea.

We have been studying the Karakalpaks almost full time for the past seven or eight years, trying to spend a full month in the delta every year furthering our research.

Karakalpak textiles are difficult to collect. There are no proper dealers in Karakalpakstan, quality items never appear in bazaars, and the older generation is still reluctant to part with their heirlooms. Often a decision to sell is a protracted process that requires the approval of the whole family. Despite these obstacles, we have now assembled one of the largest collections of Karakalpak textiles currently in existence outside Karakalpakstan.

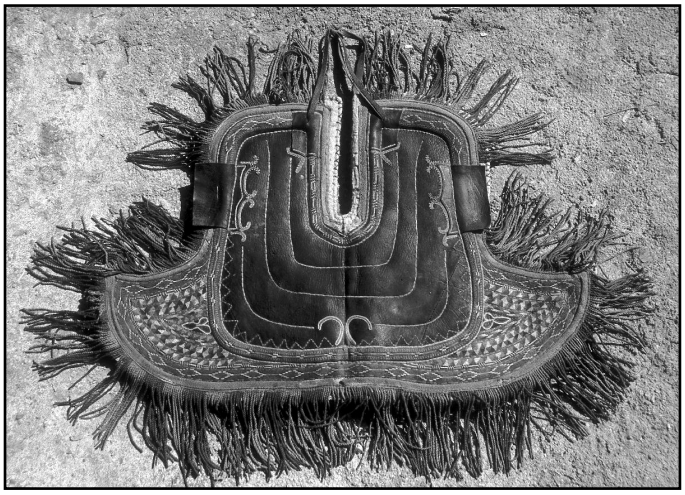
Sadly many of the textiles in Karakalpak, Uzbek and Russian museums lack any detailed provenance. In acquiring our textiles, we have taken great care to try to document their history, frequently identifying the name, village, and clan of the maker and the date and circumstances of their production. Such information has been invaluable in furthering our understanding of changing Karakalpak fashions over the years.

Sue brought along a woman's quilted *shapan* (*chapan* in Uzbek), made from polished cotton *alasha* and with over-sleeves known as *jengse,* decorated with cross- and chain-stitch embroidery. It probably dates from the 1910's or early 1920's. It illustrates how the Karakalpaks adopted the Khorezmian Uzbek craft of *alacha* making, which archaeologists have traced back to the 13th century. This particular *shapan* was once owned by a wealthy *bey* from Qazaxdar'ya named Tleumuratov who belonged to the Qoldawlı clan, part of the Qonı'rat (Kungrad) division. He had three wives, each of whom had her own yurt.

In 1929 Stalin unveiled his revolutionary policy of collectivization. Progressively during the early 1930's, the land, livestock and other possessions of private landowners and farmers throughout Karakalpakia were confiscated, and those who resisted – like Tleumuratov - were exiled and sometimes murdered. News that soviet officials were coming to arrest her husband reached Tleumuratov's youngest wife Gulbazar in 1933 when she was only 23-years old. She took the *shapan*, wrapped her newly born son in it, and fled south to Shımbay, escaping the officials and preserving the *shapan* for posterity. Meanwhile her husband was imprisoned and all of his property confiscated. Turdymurat Tleumuratov, the infant who had been wrapped in the *shapan*

by his → mother on that traumatic day, told us the story when we acquired the *shapan* from him in 2003. He was then 70-years-old.

David brought along a beautifully embroidered Karakalpak *jona*, a saddle pad that protected a horse's back from the weight of the wooden saddle. It was made in 1924 by a master in Xojeli for Ismetullaev Imalatdinov, a young Karakalpak man from the Muyten-Tele clan, also part of the Qonı'rat division, who was born in 1897 at Karateren *awıl* in the north-eastern part of the Aral delta. Only wealthy Karakalpaks could afford a horse at that time and we know that Ismetullaev's parents were well off, since they had sent him to Tashkent to train as a doctor.



Our Karakalpak *jona*, photographed in Karakalpakstan

One of the early Russian expeditions to Karakalpakia, led by Aleksandr Melkov in 1928, recorded a somewhat similar *jona* in the form of a painting. Another example appears in the Regional Studies Museum in No'kis, although it suffers from considerable wear.

Despite their background and strong Islamic leanings, Ismetullaev and his Kazakh friend Utergul Abdullaev became committed communists, joining the Komisol youth league in 1925, the year in which the Karakalpak Autonomous *Oblast* came into being as part of the Kazakh ASSR. As already mentioned, the collectivization of private farms during the early 1930's led to upheaval for families like the Imalatdinovs. To avoid confiscation they put all their valuables inside a *sandıq* and buried it in the yard. The *jona* must have also been hidden, thankfully preserving its excellent condition.

Despite his communist background, Ismetullaev was arrested as an enemy of the State during the purge of 1937, the year that his daughter Peruiza was born. He was sentenced to 12 years in a Russian *gulag* but was fortunately released after serving only two years.

There is a nice end to the story. Utergul had a son named Mukhtar. Having made several unsuccessful attempts to arrange a marriage for Mukhtar, Utergul suggested his son consider Ismetullaev's daughter, Peruiza Imalatdinova. Mukhtar liked Peruiza's photograph, so they met and eventually married.

We acquired the *jona* from Peruiza and her husband Mukhtar in 2005. We were introduced by a mutual friend and at first spent a full day with the entire family, who were surprised, having just seen us earlier that week on Karakalpak TV! They generously killed a chicken to provide us with lunch and allowed us to photograph and document some of their family possessions. It was only some weeks later that the family decided to offer the *jona* to us for sale. Unfortunately we do not have a picture of Ismetullaev – he died in 1970 having requested that all of his photos should be destroyed after his death. However, we do have some pictures of his younger friend Utergul, one of him sitting on a saddle astride a horse.

Members who want to know more about the Karakalpaks might like to visit our website, **www.karakalpak.com**, which although not yet complete, does offer a wealth of information on Karakalpak culture and history.

My mother's treasured textiles

By Phyllis Nye

Our former Editor recounts how her retirement gift prompted memories of her mother's textile collecting passion.

Musing over your generous gift of the wonderful Kashmiri shawl book on the train coming home after the AGM, I recalled the sad story of my mother's Kashmir shawl, my first encounter with Asian textiles, and thought I would like to share it with you.

An ottoman stood at the foot of my parents' bed, which as a child I was forbidden to open without the consent and presence of my mother, for it contained her small collection of treasured textiles, and I think she was afraid I might use them for dressing up if left to my own devices.

They included a magnificent Spanish shawl, a tortoiseshell comb, an embroidered net veil (probably a mantilla) and a number of smaller Spanish items inherited from her Sephardic Jewish great-grandmother, whose family had fled from north-west Spain during the persecutions of the late 18th century. There was also quite a lot of articles, mainly of *broderie anglaise*, worked by her daughter Ellen.

Ellen was the second wife of my mother's paternal grandfather and some years ago when I was doing research into my family history, I was amused to discover that they had both falsified their ages on their marriage certificate – presumably to fool each other into thinking they were younger than they were. Ellen was really in her mid forties at the time but nevertheless managed to produce two children, and during her first pregnancy she made a beautifully embroidered Victorian-style christening robe and lace-trimmed long petticoat to be worn underneath it. This was worn by both her children at their christenings, by my mother and her siblings, and by me.

Our three children, progeny of an agnostic and a Quaker, were all born in Ghana, and, to please Peter's father, given C of E baptism on our annual leave in England in July. Both our daughters, being summer babies, wore Ellen's gown, but Philip, born in December, was too big to get into it when his turn came. In the next generation our two oldest grandchildren wore it, the last time it was worn being when the younger of these was baptised by the Bishop of Bristol, so it went out on a high. Of our four other grandchildren, two were the offspring of atheists and so not christened, while, due to a dispute between their Roman Catholic father and the priest, the remaining two were already 3 and 5 before they were baptised together, so the christening robe could be said to represent the family's religious history.

Among Ellen's other contributions to the ottoman were two or three long dresses for babies which, vandal that I was, I shortened for my own daughters to wear – though taking care not to damage the *broderie anglaise.*

Ellen's husband was coachman to David Evans, silk importer and manufacturer at Crayford in Kent, a firm that still exists (and the programme co-ordinators may like to note that there is a small museum there, *The World of Silk*, and that factory tours can be arranged.) It was David Evans who introduced into Britain the tie-dyed silk *bandana* handkerchief which made his fortune and became so popular that it was soon being mass-produced in cotton in Lancashire for the working classes.

There were two or three silk specimens in my mother's collection, as well as a very fragile pink and white silk scarf or stole which presumably came from the same source.

For the rest, there was a cut-velvet man's waistcoat c1860, originally worn by my coachman ancestor; a large square hand-knitted red woollen shawl which seemed to my young eyes to be without merit and could happily have been used for dressing up, so why my mother prized it I have no idea; and ("at last" , I hear you say) two oriental items: a rather faded pair of silk shoes for a Chinese woman's bound feet and a Kashmir shawl. How my mother acquired these I do not →

know; they may also have come through the Evans connexion, or possibly that they were part of the legacy from the Spanish great-grandmother, for the only one I have ever seen similar to it was in a wonderful exhibition of Kashmir shawls I saw in the Costume Museum in Lisbon in 1990.

As a child I found this shawl the star piece of my mother's collection, rather dull and disappointing, not to be compared with the colourful embroidery on the black Spanish shawl. It was a long rectangle – at a guess, I would say nearly 1 metre wide by perhaps 3 long – mainly plain natural wool with a narrow patterned edging along the long sides and deeper borders of fairly simple flowers, in restrained colours at the ends, nothing like the riot of "paisley" pattern that the words "Kashmir shawl" conjure up in most minds. However, when I was living in London in my twenties, I consulted someone at the V&A. (don't ask me for a name, as I cannot remember it after all these years) and learnt to my surprise and delight (and even more to my mother's) that it was a rare example of an early 18th century shawl.

Years passed, my father died and my mother moved house twice, the last time to Old Marston where she spent the last 20 years of her life. Each move had been to smaller premises entailing reducing the amount of her furniture, and it was not until she had been some years at Marston that I realized she no longer had the ottoman and inquired what had happened to it. She replied that she had got rid of it and most of its contents, but the Kashmir shawl was "in a drawer upstairs". I am sorry I did not check at the time. After she died in 1986 I decided to let her house furnished, which entailed emptying all the storage furniture. I found the velvet waistcoat and the Chinese shoes in a drawer upstairs – I still have them as well as the christening gown and petticoat and another example of Ellen's *broderie anglaise*,– but could not find the Kashmir shawl anywhere.

At last, when I was going round all the rooms to see if anything had been left behind, I opened the airing cupboard and noticed a screwed-up brown paper package squashed behind a hot-water pipe. I opened it, and the Kashmir shawl disintegrated before my eyes. I could have wept!

Anyone looking into the history of costumes and textiles knows the difficulty of finding good pictures. Many wonderful images can be found on old postcards. This one, from Russia and dating from 1913, shows a Kirghiz family. As well as a great pile of felts along the yurt wall and a wonderful *tushkiz* with an *ikat* centre, the woman third from the right is wearing a tall *shirkule* headdress. More postcards in the next issue. (Editor)

Revealing the beauty and splendour of Arabian costume

A group of Saudi Arabian women have created the mansoojat website to celebrate the diversity of clothing in the Saudi Arabian peninsula

The Mansoojat Foundation is a UK registered charity founded by a group of Saudi women with a passionate interest in the traditional ethnic textiles and costumes of Arabia.

Its mission is to revive and preserve the traditional ethnic designs and costumes of the various regions of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; to promote and conduct academic research important for the understanding of the history and culture of the region, and to raise public awareness for the appreciation of this unique heritage. *Mansoojat* translates into English as 'textiles'.

The website – www.mansoojat.org – is called the Museum of Saudi Arabian costume online. Anyone who is unfamiliar with the history of costume in this part of the world is likely to be in for a shock.

In contrast to the familiar images we see today of women clad head-to-toe in black *burqas*, the website shows that in all the provinces of Saudi Arabia there is a vibrant tradition of embroidery and decoration, particularly (but not exclusively) in women's clothing.

Region by region, they have identified the traditional clothing, in some cases reconstructing costumes from photographs. Thus the Jahdaly tribe in the Western Hejaz region between Makkah and al-Lith on the Red Sea are known for their women's clothing made of locally dyed red and brown imported muslin. The garments are decorated with metal beads, sewn in geometric patterns on contrasting bands of appliqué. Jahdaly women seem to be the only tribal women to wear skirts and blouses. Their skirts are often lined with recycled flour sacks. Their headdresses are varied and are also decorated with metal beads.

The Bani Sa'ad occupy a fertile section South-East of Taif, their terraced fields and hill-top villages overlooked by rugged mountains.→

Costumes from the Thaqeef and Jahdaly tribes in the Hejaz region and a velvet *thobe* from Asir



Jahdaly and Rashaidah costumes and a Bani Sa'ad *thobe*

Clothing in the Taif region is usually tight-fitting and lined for warmth in the cold mountain climate. Lavish embroidery, always in vibrant colours and geometric designs, adorns hems, side panels, cuffs, back, the shin of pantaloons, and headdresses. The bodice is often left bare to allow for cascades of silver jewelry and belts.

On festive occasions, Bani Sa'ad women can wear up to seven layered items on the head. These items are mostly decorated with hand made metal beads.

The Thaqeef tribe, who live close by, wear similar dress but with details that distinguish each branch of the tribe from the others. In the example shown here (first picture, p14) the yoke and arm bands are embroidered with gold thread. The small white decorative motif above the hem is tie-dyed. The accompanying belt is made with metal beads and sea shells.

Many more examples of these beautiful and colourful garments can be found on the website, along with descriptions of the terrain and also details of men's traditional costumes. There is also an online shop where visitors can buy illustrations and a range of other items.

Mansoojat member Hamida Alireza says that the group was motivated by seeing some traditional costumes at a small exhibition she had helped put together for the French expatriate community in Jeddah. "After that exhibition we got together and formed our group and made it our mission to do our best to promote and protect this rich cultural heritage under threat of extinction", she says.

She points out that one important collection in Britain is that obtained by Lady Anne Blunt in 1878-79 when she travelled to Arabia with her husband to buy horses. The Ashmolean also holds one of the *abas* that belonged to T E Lawrence—Lawrence of Arabia. The Museum at Leiden in Holland also has an important collection, for which the Mansoojat group gave advice when they were exhibited three years ago.

"The real problem now is obtaining good examples of historic costumes before they disappear. The Mansoojat Foundation has come a long way in a short period but what scares us is the race against time. Costumes that we could easily find just seven years ago are no longer available and trying to revive a dying handicraft (mainly the embroidery) is now our challenge," says Hamida.

She adds that the Foundation will consider publishing a book at some point: "We would love to support the publication of a good, solid, informative, academic, (with many photos) book, but feel we should concentrate on the museum for now and until such a day when we have enough documented material for a book."

The Ashmolean Museum's new textile gallery: A phoenix of splendour and brilliance

Dr Ruth Barnes, curator of the new textile gallery, gives a preview of this world-class collection, due to open in November 2009.

When we started the Oxford Asian Textile Group in 1995, our initial aim was to give wider publicity to textile collections held in Oxford museums, especially in the Ashmolean and Pitt Rivers who jointly have around 10, 000 textiles in their collections, the majority of which comes from Asia and the Islamic world.

The gallery space in the two museums dedicated to their display, however, in no way reflected these riches. The only chance one had of gaining an insight into the extent of the collections was to participate in behind-the-scene study visits to the textile stores. Through OATG we expanded these opportunities, with the wonderful support and help of curators and conservation staff at both institutions.

But now plans are well under way to change this and make at least the collections in the Ashmolean Museum more accessible. I am sure you all are aware that the Museum is currently involved in a major development project; our Oxford members will have walked past the site and noticed that big things are happening behind the Cockerell building in Beaumont Street.

The Departments of Antiquities and Eastern Art, the Coin Room, and parts of Western Art have been closed since early 2006. Offices and galleries have been demolished, and most collections have been decanted from the building and are currently not accessible to the public, not even to visiting researchers.

Most of us had to move out of the Museum into temporary offices on the old Radcliffe Infirmary site. Of course this has brought much disruption and often intense stress, especially while we are planning new galleries. But the project also provides great scope for new opportunities.

Many of the galleries in the rebuilt Ashmolean will show objects familiar from previous displays. One exception is the new Textile Gallery to be located on the Lower Ground Floor, which will display collections hitherto not on public view. Funded in part by a most generous grant of £250, 000 from the Clothworkers' Foundation, the new gallery measures approximately 115m^2 (16m x 7.2m). Tall display cases along two walls, as well as a free-standing case for costume display, will show our larger textiles and garments.

As many of you know, our collections excel in historical fragments, especially from Late Antiquity, medieval Egypt, and India. To give maximum accessibility to these collections, there will be a central desk-top case with seating arrangements for comfortable close-up viewing of embroideries, complex weaves, and printed textiles. Study drawers which can be opened will give additional access to this great resource of textile history.

As the curator for the gallery, I have in mind three levels of access to the material:

1. An aesthetically striking display of textiles and garments, which will attract (and maybe surprise and seduce into further study) the visitor who has not come with a particular interest in textiles – this should be of interest even to the casual museum visitor.

2. At another level the display must satisfy the visitor with an existing interest in textiles, and here the central display of our study collections is important; the visual quality of much of this material should also attract the non-specialist, though, especially when the age of the textiles is pointed out.

3. The gallery and the collections will also facilitate in-depth study visits under the guidance

of the curator and our conservator or the Education Department; workshops that combine the gallery display with further study and practical sessions elsewhere in the Museum should be of particular interest to visitors who study textiles for pleasure or education.

Content and Themes

The gallery will be arranged by themes rather than geographically. I want the visitor to be able to make cross-cultural connections and appreciate textiles, their making and use as a fundamental part of human society.

Weaving is one of the oldest technologies, in many places predating pottery and certainly preceding metallurgy. While the function of textiles may initially have been protection against the elements, a social dimension was quickly added: fabrics were used to identify and enhance status, wealth, and ethnic or gender identity.

Textiles can be appreciated as works of art in their own right. But as is true for all objects of artistic merit, our understanding of them is enhanced if we also pay attention to their making and meaning in the appropriate historical context. The gallery's three thematic questions therefore are: a) How are textiles made? b) What is their cultural role? c) Which role have they had in cross-cultural exchange?

From fibre to fabric: how are textiles made?

Weaving technology is a complex and difficult process to communicate, but it is important to understand at least the basics of the production process. The gallery includes this didactic element, although it is presented so that the aesthetic appreciation and social role of the textiles is not overwhelmed by technical terms.

The sources of fibres and the history of their use are presented in the gallery's timeline, and their preparation is shown in an audiovisual display.→

Tapestry-woven medallion from a tunic. Egypt, early 5th century. The fragment formerly belonged to Wiiliam Morris. Ashmolean Museum AN1941.3.

The principles of constructing textiles are outlined; these cover both looping (as in crocheting and knitting) and loom weaving. Basic loom elements and weaving techniques are explained, again with the aid of audiovisual presentation. Weaving tools on display include spindles and spindle whorls from Ancient Egypt, as well as loom weights from medieval England.

The aesthetic element is introduced: by adding colour to the thread or fabric (dyeing), by developing patterning techniques used in the weave structure, or by applying additional material (e.g. embroidery), the plain textile is transformed into a decorated surface.

Specific examples of patterning techniques are pointed out in the display, e.g., Indian block-printing, tapestry weaving from Late Antiquity, and Islamic and European embroidery stitches.

The transformation of fabric into dress is also explored. Many cultures with strong textile traditions have an aversion to cutting cloth, and for dress purposes the rectangular fabric is draped around the body, as found in both India and South-east Asia.

Where garments are created by cutting and sewing, the display looks at the influences that govern shape and form: this can literally be demonstrated 'from head to toe', from Renaissance hats to the Japanese kimono and Central Asian cloth boots.

Dressing the part: the social importance of textiles

The role of textiles goes far beyond a functional purpose. Cloth serves to identify: in most cultures dress and display fabrics are used to indicate status and rank. The gallery's full-length display cases can show this most effectively, as they do full justice to the collection's prestige tunics and robes that impress by their size and bold or intricate designs.

These range from Egyptian linen garments to East Asian silk coats. Patterns, techniques, and specific fibres may be affiliated with social strata, with political or religious positions; they may also be gender-specific and age-related, or emphasise ethnic identity.

Textiles can play an important symbolic role, as they may be associated with a particular state, e.g., purity or fertility, and they are used to separate sacred from profane space. Ecclesiastical robes, bridal outfits, and religious hangings are examples for this, and they will find their place in the display.

Textiles are used as essential gifts to emphasise a close relationship between individuals or groups: this is demonstrated with *tiraz* textiles in early Islamic societies, gifts of 'robes of honour' in Central Asia, and marriage prestations of cloth offered at weddings in some South-east Asian societies – the gallery shows examples of all three.

In the past the economic importance of textile production was foremost, both in Asia and in Europe. This was certainly linked to the overall aesthetic value ascribed to high-quality fabrics. In medieval and Renaissance times the making of cloth was one of the major industries, generating substantial wealth, as is still evident in the sumptuous houses of the clothmakers' guilds that can be seen in many European cities. In 15th century Florence a skilled weaver sometimes was paid more than a painter.

Trade and Transformation: the role of textiles in cross-cultural exchange

Historically fabrics were among the most important manufactured goods to move between cultures. The ultimate fragility of textiles sometimes lets us forget that initially they are far more durable than ceramics and glass, and are of course more portable than either.

In the ancient Mediterranean world, linen and wool textiles were major commodities to move between Egypt, Greece, and Italy. Chinese silks traded along the Silk Road were much appreciated in Rome.

Their designs later had a profound effect on the arts of Persia and Byzantium, and Indian painted and printed cotton textiles were in demand in East and West alike, so much so that they became the most widely accepted currency of exchange in the medieval and early modern maritime spice trade.

The Ashmolean Museum's unique collection of medieval Indian trade textiles makes this point perfectly: made in North-west India, they were brought to Egypt as part of the Indian Ocean

maritime trade, at the same time as similar or even identical cotton textiles were traded from the ports of Gujarat to the Spice Islands of eastern Indonesia.

Textiles elsewhere in the Museum

There are other galleries where textiles will make their appearance. The Museum's tapestries, formerly on view in the Mallet Gallery, are currently being cleaned in a tapestry conservation and restoration centre in Belgium, and they will be on display in three galleries.

The Islamic Gallery will have a dedicated textile case and a specially designed carpet display. Textiles will also be shown in the Indian and Chinese displays, as well as in the Mediterranean Gallery.

An innovative feature in the Ashmolean is the Orientation Galleries which introduce each floor. They demonstrate the Museum's 'Crossing Cultures – Crossing Time' concept developed for the new display. They make connections between cultures and regions which the culturally specific galleries may not be able (or want) to pursue. I am curator for two of these: *Asian Crossroads* (400AD to 1500AD) and *West Meets East* (1500 onwards). The galleries cover the trade routes of the Silk Road and Indian Ocean, where textiles were crucial commodities 'on the move', and they will have a role to play in both displays.

We hope that out of the ashes of the old Ashmolean there will rise a phoenix of splendour and brilliance, giving a chance to display many of the previously hidden treasures of Britain's oldest public museum. The opening of the new museum galleries is planned for November 2009.

Opus Anglicanum, St. Andrew (detail). England, c. 1500, silk and metal thread embroidery. Ashmolean Museum WA1947.191.304.

Have you checked out our website recently?
www.oatg.org.uk

Burmese woven tapes with a meritorious message

Ralph Isaacs' wonderfully illustrated and entertaining talk to the OATG AGM in October introduced members to the fascinating world of Burmese *Sazigyo* – long, thin woven textile tapes used for tying sacred manuscript leaves of Theravada Buddhism into bundles.

The scriptures and their bindings were always given as donations to a monastery, usually by married couples who would commission a weaver to make the tapes and incorporate a prayer composed specially for the occasion. Often geometric and pictorial motifs were added.

Mr Isaacs explained that his interest in these unusual textiles began in 1991 at the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon, where he bought a couple of bags filled with old fabrics. After months of cleaning and sorting he learned the script and picked out the names and dates of donors.

The tapes themselves are tablet weavings, made on a tablet loom – a 1.5m plank fitted at each end with a movable block of wood. Each tape can be up to five metres long and takes around 50 hours to make. Although they are still made today, the craft of weaving lettering seems to have died out in the 1970s.

OATG members were first introduced to *sazigyo* in an article Mr Isaacs wrote for issue 36 of the newsletter, but since then he has been able to expand his knowledge of these curiosities. In January last year he returned to Burma where he met Shwebo Mi Mi Gyi, an authority on the subject and he has also been allowed to study an important private collection. This led in particular to an improved understanding of the images often found on the tapes.

He found that the Earth Goddess, Vasundhera (known in Burma as Waythindayi) who witnessed the Buddha's Enlightenment and then wrung out her long wet hair to drown the armies of the evil Mara often appears on the tapes, as a way of witnessing the deed of the donors.

As Mr Isaacs so neatly put it: "The appeal of any well-crafted object lies partly in its beauty and in its fitness for its purpose. Inscriptions can greatly enhance an important part of its appeal: the power to convey something of the way of life of the men and women who made and used it. When such an object was made and first changed hands, it formed a message between members of a cultural group with a language and much else in common. Reading and carefully interpreting this message, we can "tap into" this conversation which took place in a culture far removed from ours in place and time."

Captivating collection of Kyrgyz textiles— plus members' 'show and tell'.

Over a dozen of us, on 6th January, took up Nick Fielding's kind invitation to visit his house to see the textiles he has collected over the years. Nick has been interested in textiles since his late teens, when he bought his first two pieces at a village sale. He has many more now!

As a journalist and author Nick has travelled widely and endeavoured to buy a textile from whichever country he was visiting, "just a desire to have something beautiful and handmade as a memento of a trip". [October Newsletter]. Gradually he began to focus on Central Asian textiles and when he came across Kyrgyz embroideries, he became captivated with them.

Upon entering Nick's home it quickly became apparent that textiles aren't the only thing he collects – ceramics, books, paintings (mainly Eastern art), metal temple toys, eastern inkwells and seals – nooks and crannies held bits and pieces and much more. We were given free run of the house and every room was filled with textiles – it was eye and brain boggling! So much to look at in a short time – a day per room would have been good!

Nick is particularly fond of, and has a collection of twenty or so little embroidered handkerchief-sized cloths called *Dastmal-e-Mohr*. Beautifully stitched, the cloths are used by women of the Hazara tribe in Afghanistan. A clay tablet – a Mohr – inscribed with religious text, and usually from Karbala in Iraq, is wrapped in the cloth and is used specifically by the Shi'ite moslems, which includes the Hazara tribe. The cloths, usually made by young girls, are sometimes stitched on both sides.

We were asked to bring along a textile to show and discuss, and several stick in my mind. David and Sue Richardson brought a leather and felt saddle, and a robe that had been beetled with glass to give it a sheen (see pp9-10).

Sonia Konya showed a fascinating piece from Crete. A long piece of cloth – 12 feet or so – and 18 inches wide approx. – handspun and handwoven in cotton, linen and silk, with some supplementary weft inlay of symbolic motifs and was made as part of a bride's trousseau. Sonia had been told it was used as a table runner and would be gathered and tied centrally. She had also been told it was part of a bedspread.

On examination we could see where it had been cut and the remains of stitching showed it was one strip of a larger piece. If it was part of a bedspread it was some bed! We were intrigued and no one could shed any light on its use and so if anyone has any ideas Sonia would be delighted to hear them.

Fiona Sutcliffe brought a headpiece from Kerala which served as a pot holder. Ruth Barnes showed us a dress she had bought years ago from Lembata island, Indonesia. Two new members, Merv and Prue Curran brought along a piece of Tadjik or Surkhandarya embroidery and there was a discussion as to whether it was used as a headband or a belt.

In my mind, always, when looking at old textiles is that the person(s) making them - whether stitching on manufactured cloth or spinning the yarn for weaving (more often that not whilst looking after livestock), or weaving the cloth or rug - is that most of this work is done either whilst on the move by nomads, probably using a ground loom which will be packed and unpacked each time they move on, or in buildings or tents with no electricity, heating and having few comforts as we know them. Looking after family, livestock, fetching water, cultivating crops, and so on also need their time and energy. As a practising spinner, weaver and dyer, it makes me appreciate and marvel even more the textile I am looking at.

We all took along some food for tea and all in all it was a really wonderful time – not only for seeing all the interesting and beautiful textiles but for being a relaxed and happy time where we could get to know other members better – we could do with more such occasions as this.→

On behalf of everyone who went I would like to thank Nick and his lovely wife Mandana (and Bruno the cat) for making us so welcome and giving us the run of their lovely house and access to Nick's collection of textiles.

I apologise for not giving more details of the collection, but there was so much to see in a short space of time. Hopefully Nick will allow us access another time when we could concentrate on certain textiles in the collection!

Mary Kinipple

Two *Ayak Kap* (storage bags) from Nick Fielding's collection of Krygyz textiles

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Falling in love with Indigo

Aimée Payton at the 'Indigo: Global Perspectives' conference in Brighton

Wow! What a day! This was a riveting all-day event. Every speaker had a unique and fascinating insight into different elements of the mysterious Indigo. Time and time again the speakers spoke about the moment they fell in love with Indigo. I now know when I did: at this conference.

Sadly Jenny Balfour-Paul was unable to attend. The letter she wrote to the attendees, read out by Sarah Posey, gave a glimpse of what we missed out on as a result of her absence. Tales of her experience of using Indigo found on shipwrecks and her profound knowledge of the use of Indigo as a commodity across the globe. In her place Jennifer Harris talked about how she and Balfour-Paul had curated the touring exhibition *Indigo: A Blue to Dye for* which was at Brighton Museum & Art Gallery at the time.

Harris explained that they intended to tell the Indigo story through the objects rather than text panels and photographs. They wanted to show the breadth of use and function by displaying diverse objects alongside each other. They included a fascinating model of an Indian Indigo works made in the 1800s which visually explains one method of extracting Indigo.

Next Philip John, Professor of plant biochemistry at Reading University enlightened us with his easy to follow, and very witty, lecture on the chemical make-up of Indigo. Impressively, everyone in the audience now understood the series of chemical reactions required to extract the chemical that we call Indigo from the diverse plants that can produce it. His example was woad.

This was a perfect base for us to comprehend Dominique Cardon's revelation that there →

are over 40 different plants from many different species that can produce Indigo. Cardon is a leading authority on natural dyes and her depth of knowledge of Indigo giving plants in Latin America was remarkable. She introduced us to a wide variety of methods used in that area of the globe, from the plant through to the final dyed fabric. Each region has developed unique techniques some of which differ vastly.

This theme of diversity was reiterated in Noorjehan Bilgrami's explanation of the Pakistani way of using Indigo or Neel as it is sometimes locally known. Bilgrami described the way the traditional *Ajrak* textiles are produced using Indigo and their significance in the local communities. She also explained how the use of natural Indigo in Pakistan declined with the introduction of cheap chemical Indigo. She showed us some fantastic photographs of a programme that she is working on in Pakistan to revive a disused Indigo works and was encouraging about the increasing use of natural Indigo.

We were provided with a visual treat with Hiroyuki Shindo's presentation, and a personal invitation for everyone present to visit him in his home in the mountain village of Miyama near Kyoto. He set up the Little Indigo Museum in his house, an idyllic haven of tranquillity judging by the photographs. He was also incredibly generous with his trade secrets. There was a large contingent of makers in the audience who became audibly excited as he explained exactly how he created the textiles in his installation which was part of Balfour-Paul and Harris' exhibition. His methods were so experimental yet at the same time incredibly sophisticated that he seemed to be a magician revealing the secret of his magic tricks. He also explained the traditional Japanese way of inducing the chemical changes from plant to Indigo, or *sukumo*, which is an extremely lengthy ritual overseen by a highly qualified Indigo Master.

We were then introduced to the fascinating trade of textiles in Nigeria and the use of Indigo there by John Picton from SOAS. He brought some beautiful examples in for us to examine at the end of the conference.

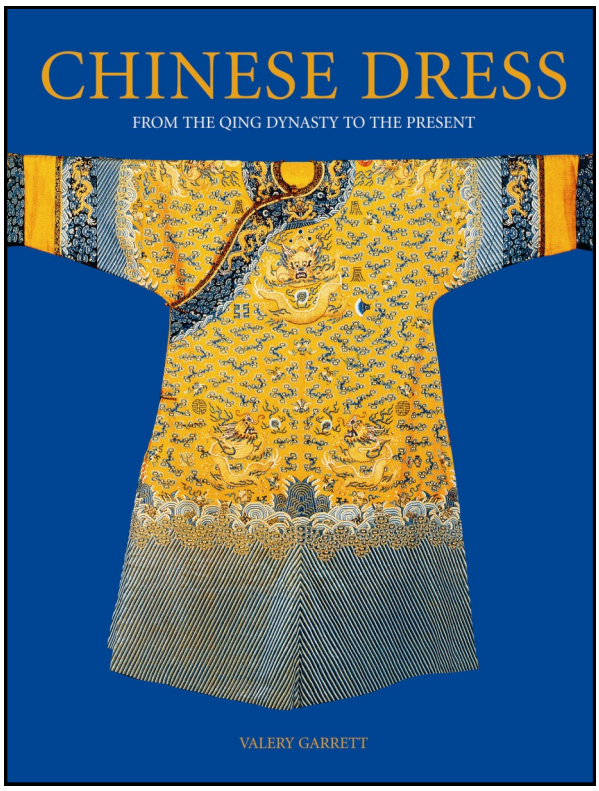
There was an accidental gap in the programme which was filled by Professor Lou Taylor, University of Brighton. With a few hours notice she talked, with her usual incredible enthusiasm, about the use of Indigo in Eastern Europe. She described how the technology had spread from the west even though there was a strong influence from nearby Islamic countries which can be seen in the patterns these cultures used.

To round the day off there was wine and networking opportunities in the exhibition. However, we all struggled to identify one "lady standing over there in a blue linen jacket" from another.

Indigo—dyed cloths from India Photo: Courtesy Jenny Balfour-Paul

A magnificent overview of Chinese clothing

Valery Garrett, *Chinese Dress, from the Qing Dynasty to the Present* Tokyo; Rutland, Vermont; Singapore: Tuttle Publishing (2007). Hardback, 240 pp, numerous colour illustrations, bibliography. ISBN-13: 978-0-8048-3663-0, ISBN-10: 0-8048-3663-9



This is an ambitious book. Garrett provides a phenomenal amount of detail about a huge range of subjects, all beautifully illustrated. Many of the sub-topics in *Chinese Dress* are covered in her previous publications and if you have read any of these some of the images and text might seem familiar. Although a lot of the same material is covered in *Chinese Clothing: An Illustrated Guide*, which was published in 1994, *Chinese Dress* has much more detail in certain areas.

The first half of the book addresses the Qing Dynasty, 1644-1911, and these four chapters cover the life of the Manchu court from Emperor to the lowest ranking mandarin and touch on the clothing of the masses. Garrett is careful not to expect too much from her readers and explains the political background and influential traditions of previous dynasties.

The regulation of Chinese clothing during the Manchu rule was strict and meticulous and Garrett stretches these chapters to capacity with the detail of it all, without unduly overwhelming the reader. For example the *chao pao*, or court robe, which was heavily embroidered with dragons, roundels, waves and symbols, is dealt with separately from the *li fu* or dragon robe, which is also heavily embroidered with dragons, roundels, waves and symbols. To the uninformed it may seem to be splitting hairs to treat these two types of robe separately but having read Garrett's clear explanation it becomes evident that they are in fact quite different both in their use and meaning.

The fifth chapter looks at the period between the end of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of Communist rule. Garrett's account of this time of rapid change in politics, ideals, influence and clothing gives an insight into how exciting it must have been for those with money living in the larger cities. She carefully gives examples of all the developments of styles and how new ways of thinking were expressed through clothing.

However, it was not long until the use of clothing as a form of expression was again taken away from the Chinese people. Garrett describes thoroughly in the final chapter how after Mao came to power in 1949 his control over people's everyday lives began to affect their clothing to a point where most people in this vast country were wearing what was in effect a uniform.

The clothing of children and of the lower classes is covered in the sixth and seventh chapters, which sit in between Garrett's analysis of clothing of 1912-1949 and her discussion of post 1949 dress. In some instances there are clear dates for when changes happened but it is sometimes unclear which customs remain today and which have been discarded. Garrett does not help her unknowledgeable readers to understand how much these traditions are integrated into the wider population.

The last section of the last chapter, *West meets East meets West*, looks at the recent history of dress in China. Garrett presents how she sees the current state of the clothing industry with some facts and figures and a glimpse into her opinion. She hints at why she thinks China has failed

to create a home grown fashion industry and the majority of young fashionable people prefer western designers, despite China being a major contributor to the manufacture of western clothing.

This is the only part of the book in which Garrett is subjective as she generally sets out to explain how things were and tends not to engage in why or what the wider social consequences were. To use an obvious example she avoids any debate about foot-binding. She states when it was thought to have started, how it developed, the techniques used by most of the non Manchu population during the Qing dynasty and how it came to an end. She is matter of fact about explaining that mothers felt that if they let their daughters' feet grow naturally then they would be denying them the opportunity to marry.

Chinese Dress is a magnificently illustrated overview of Chinese clothing since 1644. Garrett provides a wealth of facts and covers an incredible span of historic periods and social classes. As an introduction, she supplies the reader with excellent grounding for further reading.

Aimée Payton

A celebration of South-east Asian techniques and traditions

Thompson, Angela. *Textiles of South-East Asia*. Ramsbury, Marlborough: The Crowood Press Ltd. (2007). Hardback, 224 pp, numerous colour illustrations, glossary, bibliography, index. ISBN 978-1-86126962-1. £25.00

This generously illustrated book introduces some of the textile traditions of South-east Asia, one of the world's great regions for producing and treasuring exceptional fabrics. The author credits the in-depth studies other researchers have carried out on particular communities and cultures in the wider region, and her own publication relies on their findings, especially when trying to set the making and meaning of textiles into a particular historical and social context. The book is a celebration of the variety of techniques and styles of weaving and textile decoration found in South-east Asia.

It summarises the region's historical background and discusses some cultural core beliefs and their articulation in textile design. The most interesting part of the publication, to this reviewer, is the survey of different techniques found throughout South-east Asia, especially the embroideries and appliqué techniques, many of which have been poorly documented so far. These are especially well developed among the hill tribes and minorities of northern Mainland South-east Asia and South-east China, and the book documents many techniques and particular styles with good photographs.

A particular joy is the space dedicated to accessories of textiles: beads, braids, bells and tassels are all documented with loving attention to detail. This is the real contribution the book makes to textile studies in a wider sense, as these additions have often been neglected.

My major criticism is that the publication claims to be about textiles of South-east Asia. It really is about textiles of mainland South-east Asia, and there its contribution is to the coverage of minority and hill tribe textiles. Maritime South-east Asia – Indonesia and the Philippines – is not adequately represented. It would have been better to leave out the island cultures. Anyone familiar with their textiles will not find anything new here, and will be irritated by many minor inaccuracies and glaring omissions.

The bibliography is short and quite general, as is of course appropriate for a survey publication. There are some surprising omissions, though, of regional surveys that have become classics. Not to guide the reader to Mattiebelle Gittinger's *Splendid Symbols* or her seminal work on Tai textiles (*Textile and the Tai Experience*, co-authored with L. Lefferts), and not to include Robyn Maxwell's *Textiles of Southeast Asia – Tradition, Trade and Transformation* is regrettable.

But where it comes to introducing new and exciting textiles, garments, and accessories from northern and north-eastern South-east Asia and the culturally related Chinese minorities, the book has much to offer.

Ruth Barnes

The E M Bakwin Collection of Indonesian & Malaysian Textiles

Brigitte Khan Majlis, *The Art of Indonesian Textiles, The E. M. Bakwin Collection at the Art Institute of Chicago*, published by the Art Institute of Chicago as volume 33, number 2 of *Museum Studies* and distributed by Yale University Press, New Haven, 2007, ISBN 978-0-300-11946-6.

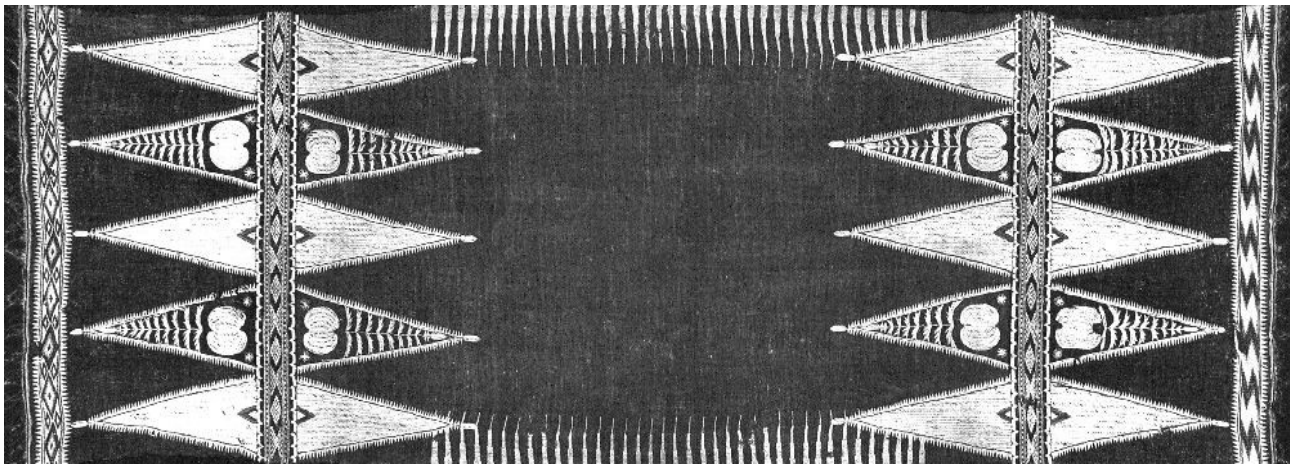
This relatively short and inexpensive paperback (£9.99) illustrates almost seventy very fine examples from a collection of Indonesian textiles donated to the Art Institute of Chicago in 2002 by the wealthy Chicago banker, Edward M. "Pete" Bakwin.

The textiles were all collected on behalf of Mr Bakwin during the 1990's by Patti Seery, an American expatriate who has spent several decades exploring the islands of Indonesia and now organises tours on her own locally built *pinisi*.

The textiles shown demonstrate the enormous variety of weavings from across the Indonesian archipelago, encompassing ikat, plangi, twining, supplementary weft or warp, songket, batik, embroidery, and beadwork. They range geographically from Sumatra in the west, to Kalimantan and Sulawesi in the north, and Flores, Solor and Lembata in the east. The illustrations also include an ikat from the Republic of East Timor, *pua kumbu* from Malaysian Sarawak, and *patolas* from Gujarat.

The book is written by Brigitte Khan Majlis, a curator in the textile department at the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum of Ethnography, Cologne, Germany, who has previously written several books on Indonesian textiles in German in addition to contributing more specific essays to various compendiums and symposiums.

Some 80 per cent of the content is devoted to cataloguing the textiles, with about one page allocated to an image and description of each item. Before this however, Ms Majlis opens her



The early 20th century *kain bidak* from the Pasemah or North Lampung areas of South Sumatra

book with a short chapter on Indonesian cultural traits and the historical influence of India, China and Islam on Indonesian textile designs. This is followed by a very brief review of the various textile techniques employed in the production of Indonesian textiles.

Those with a serious interest in Indonesian textiles will want to add this title to their library. The textiles showcased are each a very high quality example of their type – presumably the best that money could have bought in the 1990's. We were particularly impressed by some of the weavings collected from the Lampung region of South Sumatra – notably two very dramatic ceremonial skirts or *tapis* and a *kain bidak* or man's skirt cloth with a striking *tumpal* design woven →

in supplementary weft using silvered and gilt threads. Not surprisingly, the latter was chosen to illustrate the front cover of the book.

Three other spectacular textiles appear at the end of the catalogue, originating from the Rongkong people of Sulawesi. One is a festival banner or *roto*, made by the tie-dye technique of plangi using just a length of machine-spun cotton. The others are a pair of ceremonial funeral cloths, known as a *mbesa tali tau batu*, literally a "head cloth of the stone man".

These cloths are described by Ms Majlis as "the most fascinating textile creations of Indonesia". They are long cotton turbans composed of a sequence of decorative panels, mostly displaying bold geometric and hook-like red and white or red, black, and white patterns, executed in discontinuous supplementary weft and sometimes containing sections of open work. At the funeral, the turban was either wrapped around the head of the deceased or worn by the closest male relative.

We do not recommend this book to those seeking a general introduction to Indonesian textiles. It contains insufficient detail. Instead, we recommend Warming and Gaworski's *The World of Indonesian Textiles* or John Gillow's *Traditional Indonesian Textiles*, both available second-hand for less than £10.

David and Sue Richardson

Lakai and Kungrat—the great Central Asian embroiderers

Kate Fitz Gibbon and Andrew Hale, *Uzbek Embroidery in the Nomadic Tradition: The Jack A and Aviva Robinson Collection at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts*, Art Media Resources, Chicago, 2007, ISBN 1-58886-094-9; ISBN 978-1-58886-094-1, $59.95

Thirty years ago, almost nothing was known of the Lakai and Kungrat tribes of Central Asia, except material gleaned from a few intrepid nineteenth century travellers and ideologically suspect Soviet ethnographers. Since then, the sheer beauty and exuberance of their embroideries has gradually come into focus and we are now beginning to understand and appreciate their social and cultural importance.

In Britain, the decision in 2002 by the British Museum to purchase Pip Rau's astonishing collection of 50 Lakai embroideries brought these great textiles to a wider British public. Now, this groundbreaking book, based on the donation of 97 superb textiles to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts by the Robinsons, has done something similar in America.

The Robinsons have built up a remarkable collection, ranging from Lakai *uuk kap* (shield shaped) *ilgich* to the more typical square forms, the triangular *seygusha* used for adorning folded bedding and the many other smaller items—all of them adorned with the patterns and motifs that mark them out as originating from the southern Uzbekistan, northern Afghanistan region.

Fitz Gibbon and Hale, whose names now grace many excellent works on Central Asian textiles (see p30), have done a great service in disentangling the complex history of these two nomadic tribes and showing how despite the political buffeting they have received over the last century, it has been their textile culture that has provided them with an identity.

As you would expect from such a publication, the book is well illustrated with colour plates that bring home the power of this group of textiles, whose motifs and structure harken back to a shamanistic past in regions much further to the north and east of their present location.

Essays by Irina Bogoslovskaya and Frieda Sorber illustrate the techniques used by the Lakai and Kungrat to create their remarkable textiles. They are traditions which stretch back into antiquity. Particularly important to the Lakai is the use of chain stitch, which has been found in textiles recovered from Pazryrk burials from the 5-6th centuries BCE.

This is perhaps the best book to date on the Lakai and Kungrat and it is unlikely to be surpassed for some time to come.

A book for the aspiring braider and student of Chinese braids

Jacqui Carey, *Chinese Braid Embroidery*, Carey Company, Ottery St Mary, Devon, 2007, ISBN 0 9523225 6 0.£15.95.

This is the third book that I have seen in the last couple of years which studies the techniques used to create Chinese, and particularly Chinese minority, textiles. (*Minority Textile Techniques, Costumes from South-West China* Ruth Smith (ed) and Smith, Ruth: *Miao Embroidery from South West China: Textiles from The Gina Corrigan Collection* reviewed in Newsletters 38 and 31 respectively).

Jacqui Carey is a maker, teacher, author and researcher of braids, especially *Kumihimo*. This book is intended as a snapshot of the technique of Chinese braid embroidery, aiming to provide insights into its history and development, as well as a look at the situation today.

The author considers materials and equipment, ranging from the made-for-purpose to household alternatives. Step-by-step instructions are designed to give a clear guide to making the braids and the stitching methods used to apply them to textiles.

As a non-braid maker I nevertheless found the section on 'how-to' interesting if only because it gave me a much deeper appreciation of the skills involved in my own textile collection and sharpened my eyes when examining them. I cannot, however, comment on how well this section would enable someone to create the braids themselves (although I did sit lifting imaginary bobbins for the first few braids!). I found the section on the application of braids in embroidery of particular interest.

There are good detail photos of braids applied in Miao and Dong costume shown with diagrams illustrating the stitching scheme for applying the braid and photos of newly made braid being used to show the application methods and styles.

As a collector and student of Chinese minority textiles I particularly appreciated the numerous colour photos throughout the book of braid on old and current textiles, traditional braiding equipment and of braid being made and applied in China and its borders today.

All the 'how-to' was constantly illustrated by new and old textiles from China with applied braid. The author has closely studied textiles in private collections as well as undertaking a →

This detail from Fig 109 (Dong baby carrier), shows three S-shaped motifs that have been made with braid JC14. The triangular coiling is described on page 122. Photo courtesy Martin Conlan.

research trip to southwest China with Gina Corrigan. Although the historical section features Han embroidery most of the current work is that of the minorities – mainly Miao in Guizhou, where there are still active braiders today.

The book is aimed at a variety of audiences: the aspiring braider, the embroiderer, the student of Chinese textiles, the research and the collector. Often 'how to' books fall between several stools as they try to cover the breadth of the topic but not in sufficient depth for the varied audience. As someone who is particularly interested in the techniques behind the textiles I collect and research I found the volume illuminating.

I might have felt somewhat disappointed if my special interest was Chinese imperial costume or more mainstream Han textiles although there are some Han examples in the first part of the 'Evolution and Change' section which is the main review of the historical background of braid in China.

As it happens, I am especially interested in Chinese minority textiles which is the major focus of the examples in the book as it is here that the braiding technique is still alive so for me the book was particularly on target.

Pamela Cross

Book cover detail from an old Miao jacket sleeve panel covered in dense braid embroidery, giving it a rich sculpted appearance. Different braid structures and patterns have been applied using various methods. The main body of the dragon motif is built up from overlaid loops with a border of

Inside out—Russian trade cloths in Central Asia

Susan Meller, *Russian Textiles: Printed Cloths for the Bazaars of Central Asia*, Abrams, New York, 2007. ISBN-13 978-0 8109-9381-5, ISBN-10 0-8109-9381-3, £25.95.

As a collector of Central Asian textiles, I have always been intrigued by the sometimes strange backing cloths that are often found attached to old embroideries. Gaudy stripes, large-patterned flowers and a wide variety of paisley seem to predominate. It was thus an interest in the hand-embroidered pieces that brought me into contact with these mysterious cloths.

For Susan Meller, who has written the bulk of this fascinating book, the process occurred in reverse. Exposed from childhood to printed textiles through a family-run business in New York City, she became a fabric designer and worked in the textile industry for more than 30 years.

Later she began to collect old printed fabrics from around the world and started a business in her home city called The Design Library, which now holds more than five million pieces of fabric and original textile paintings. And amongst this collection it was the Russian printed fabrics that really entranced her and formed the core of her own collection.

Her first book, *Textile Designs: Two Hundred Years of European and American Patterns for Printed Fabrics*, published in the early 1990s, allowed her to put the traditional part of fabric printing into the context of industrialisation in the modern world. But gradually, she began to form the idea of writing something more specific to the way in which these predominantly Russian textiles were sold and used in the bazaars of Central Asia, often as backing cloths and linings.

The result is a truly groundbreaking study. Aided by essays from Kate Fitz Gibbon, Annie Carlano and Robert Kushner and sumptuously illustrated with photographs by Don Tuttle, the book is an essential aid to the serious collector of Central Asian textiles. There are also wonderful archive photographs, particularly those by S M Prokudin-Gorskii, taken in the first few years of the twentieth century.

These photographs, taken using three separate primary colour plates for each shot, are remarkable for their beauty and artistry and for the shock they deliver by bringing colour to images our eyes have taught us to think could only ever appear in black and white.

Kate Fitz Gibbons' essay highlights the ceremonial aspect of cloth in Central Asia. The use of trade cloths as linings to silk robes satisfied the customary prohibition against ostentatious luxury as only the cotton touched the skin. Women, who traditionally sewed in social groups, would divide up newly-bought fabrics to be made into dowry items, children's clothes or hangings.

Annie Carlano's essay notes the predominance of Turkey Red colour in the imported Russian trade cloths and she provides an interesting history of its development. She also sheds light on the textile industry in the Russian city of Ivanovo, whence many of these trade cloths originate. Many of the textile designers working there were trained at the Central Stroganov School of Technical Design, begun in 1860 and modelled on England's state-sponsored industrial arts curricula and later strongly influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement.

By the beginning of the twentieth century Constructivist designs were making all the running, later to be supplanted by the Supremacists and then the whole gamut of Revolutionary art. Although not generally successful with the Russian public, particular patterns, such as *The Turkestan-Siberia Railroad*, were popular in the Central Asian market.

For the collector and archivist, this book will prove invaluable as an aid to dating nomadic textiles, a notoriously difficult business.

As for Susan Meller, she cheerfully admits that she exhibits an Uzbek ikat robe inside out on the wall of her living room in order to show off its trade cloth innards. This is a woman with a deep, deep devotion to printed cloth.

Nick Fielding

Green Evolution: Wall-mounted Tableaux by Kazuhito Takadoi is organised by the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation in association with the Hannah Peschar Sculpture Garden. It is supported by the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation and Japan Airlines.

The exhibition will be open from 10 January 2008 until 6 March 2008, 9.30am-5.00pm, at Daiwa Foundation Japan House, 13/14 Cornwall Terrace, London NW1 4QP. Late openings until 8.00pm are 22 January and 7 February. Admission is free.

Womens International Festival and for **Fairtrade Fortnight**: 'Journeys of Colours' – an exhibition of naturally dyed textiles (fairtrade producers), 6 March, the Mackenna Room, Christ Church, Oxford, £1.50 incl. tea.

Blue at Washington, April 4 - September 18, Textile Museum, Washington DC.
The exhibition features blue textiles ranging from Greco-Roman and pre-Columbian tunic fragments to installations by internationally renowned artists. Hiroyuki Shindo, a Japanese artist who grows and processes his own indigo to produce innovatively patterned textiles, as well as Maria Eugenia Davila and Eduardo Portillo, who raise silkworms and dye threads with natural dyes in Venezuela, highlight the ways that artists around the world are embracing this ancient dye to create works that speak to their own experience.
BLUE is curated by Lee Talbot, Assistant Curator, Eastern Hemisphere Collections, and Mattiebelle Gittinger, Research Associate, Southeast Asian Textiles.

Thai Textile Society Lecture by Gillian Green: Scenes in Silk: Visualizing Cambodian Culture a Century Ago. Friday, 19 February 2008, 10:30 a.m. Fourth Floor, The Siam Society, 131 Asoke Rd, Sukhumvit 21; BTS - Asoke; MRT- Sukhumvit
Ms Green will discuss the unique antique, resist-dyed textiles currently in the National Museum of Cambodia collection. Referred to as *kiet* in Khmer, these silk textiles are patterned by the technique more commonly know as *plangi.* The motifs represent a stunning visualization of events surrounding the end of the rainy season celebrations in Phnom Penh in the early 20th century. Despite research that now reveals the identity of the motifs, the context in which they were made and by whom is quite unexpected.
Copies of Ms. Green's new book, *Pictorial Cambodian Textiles*, published at the end of 2007, will be on sale at the lecture. Ms Green, an Honorary Associate in the Art History Department at the University of Sydney, is also the author of *Traditional Cambodian Textiles* (2003).

Siam Society Lecture: H.M. Queen Sirikit's Textile Institute Project, by Professor Smitthi Siribhadra. Thursday, February 28, 7:30 pm at The Siam Society, 131 Asoke Rd, Sukhumvit 21; BTS - Asoke; MRT- Sukhumvit.
Professor Siribhadra will outline plants to build a textile institute that will serve as the regional centre for textile research and restoration with a fully equipped modern laboratory. The collection will also expand from local textiles to the royal collection dating back to King Rama I - never before been seen in public. This royal collection will include selections from Her Majesty's personal wardrobe and jewellery. For more information, please telephone Khun Arunsri at (02) 661 6470-7, fax (02) 258 3491, or e-mail info@siam-society.org.
Admission is free to members of the Siam society, members' spouses and children, and all students showing valid student I.D. cards. Non-Members are requested to make a donation of 200 baht.

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