

# ASIAN TEXTILES

MAGAZINE OF THE OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

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**A much-travelled Ashmolean tapestry**

**Also in this issue: Children's clothing from Asia, carpet weaving in Kashmir and Baluchi textiles**

## CONTENTS

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>OATG Events</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Honouring a great collector</b>	<b>5-7</b>
<b>The Jameel Centre opens</b>	<b>8-9</b>
<b>The tapestry that went to China</b>	<b>10-13</b>
<b>The art of Baluchistan's embroidery</b>	<b>14-17</b>
<b>Carpet weavers of Kashmir</b>	<b>18-23</b>
<b>Reviews</b>	<b>24-27</b>
<b>Reports from meetings</b>	<b>28-29</b>
<b>Events</b>	<b>30-31</b>

### ***Asian Textiles* now available online in full colour!**

This edition of *Asian Textiles* is available on-line in full colour in a .pdf file to download, view and/or print. Access to the .pdf file is either via <http://www.oatg.org.uk/magazine.htm> whilst it is the current issue or always via the back issues page <http://www.oatg.org.uk/magazine-backissues.html> by first clicking on the cover image thumbnail.

In both cases click on the link in the title line to the issue e.g.: '**Access colour Pdf of No 48**'. Enter the **username** and **password** given below, click '**login**' and then, on the resulting page, click on the relevant link to download. The username and password is the same for all three issues in each calendar year. OATG current members, as part of their membership, are being given access to the Pdf files for *Asian Textiles* for the previous two years. Passwords for all full colour issues to date are:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Username</b>	<b>Password</b>
<b>2009</b>	at09	pdr8nx
<b>2010</b>	at10	mqonj2
<b>2011</b>	at11	jfqb47

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#### ***Asian Textiles*: who would like back numbers?**

Back numbers of *Asian Textiles* have all be digitalised and are available on-line so there is no longer a need to hold large numbers of paper copies. Felicity Wood will still hold a complete set of master copies and a few back numbers of each issue. Therefore is anyone would like copies of the following issues, they are available: **17, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 30, 31, 33 – 40 and 42 – 44**. Please contact Fiona, who will bring them to the next meeting that you specify. She can also post copies for £1 plus p&p.

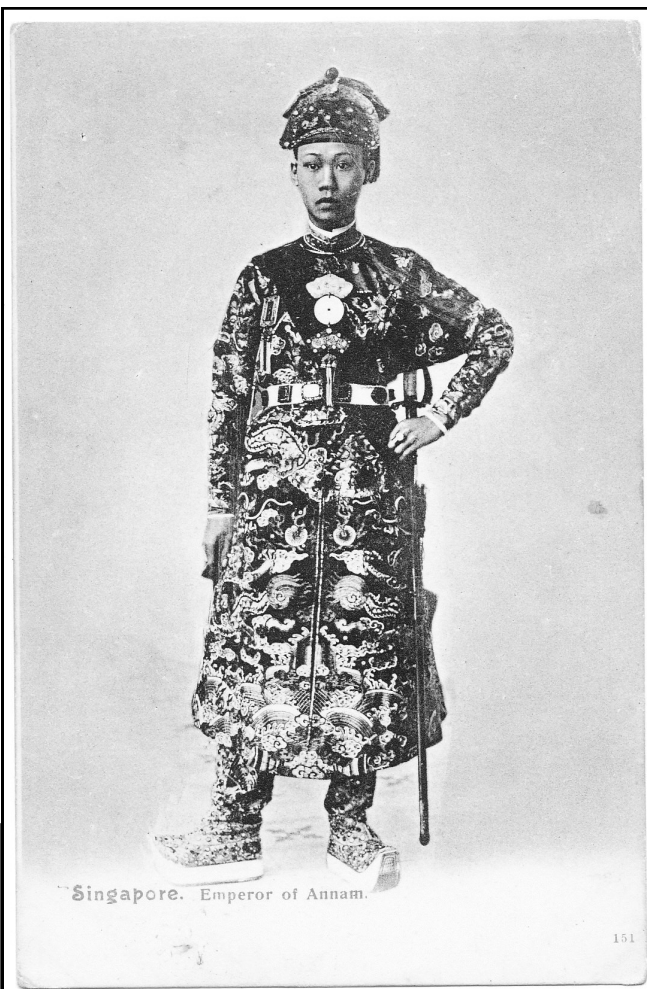
## Editorial

Once again we have a packed issue of *Asian Textiles*, including a wonderful photo-essay of carpet weaving in Kashmir by American photographer Richard Harris, another very useful and informative article by Azra Nafees on the textiles traditions of Baluchistan and - dare I say it? - a fascinating tale by yours truly on the history of a famous tapestry that hangs in the Ashmolean Museum.

Dealing with a subject as potentially diverse as textiles from Asia, it is hardly surprising that each issue of the magazine ranges so widely in its content. This issue is no exception, with discussion of textile traditions from the Indian subcontinent, China, Indonesia and Central Asia. And yet there are still areas that we have never touched. South-east Asia has not figured in the magazine for some time, nor have the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Iran, Bangladesh, Tibet and many other places. Readers with any knowledge of these regions - or anywhere else we have ignored to date—are encouraged to contact me with suggestions.

On that point, I should add that for the first time for many issues I have had more material submitted to the magazine that I have room for. Several articles have been held over until June, but please feel free to contact me and suggest possible articles. In the next issue we will have more from Susanna Reece on the V&A course on Asian textiles, plus pictures of a wonderful Tibetan felt *numnah* (saddle cloth) owned by OATG member John Sharp.

### *The Editor*



My latest postcard shows a splendid portrait of the Emperor of Annam—a French protectorate until 1945 which eventually became part of Vietnam. This may or may not be Bao Dai who was created Emperor by the French in a vain attempt to stem the influence of the Vietnamese communists. His dazzling costume appears to be influenced by Chinese designs. Does it still exist, I wonder? Note the thick soles on his boots.

# OATG EVENTS PROGRAMME

**Thursday 24 February 2011**

*Imperial Chinese Robes from the Forbidden City*

Ming Wilson, the curator, will introduce the exhibition at 12 noon. Group visits to the Gallery are also booked for 1pm and 2pm. Ming has written a very interesting blog which can be seen on the website.

If you would like to join this visit please contact Fiona Sutcliffe now. Small charge payable on the day. Let us know if you are a member of the Art Fund.

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**Wednesday 30 March at 5.45pm**

*A Survey of the Textiles and Dress of Gujarat*

Dr Eiluned Edwards

Senior Lecturer in Design and Visual Culture in the School of Art and Design, Nottingham Trent University

A brief survey of the contemporary production and use of handmade textiles and popular dress in the state of Gujarat.

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**Visit to Leeds 3-6 May, 2011**

Visits have been arranged to see the collections in Leeds and Halifax, including the Armouries, The City Museum, University of Leeds International Textile Archive, Leeds Museum Discovery Centre—where many interesting textiles collections are stored - and to Bankfield in Halifax. This visit will be limited to 12 people.

Travel by train from Oxford on 3 May and returning late afternoon on 6 May. The Novotel offers accommodation at £197 for three nights in twin-bedded rooms.

Interested members should contact Rosemary or Fiona as soon as possible.

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**Wednesday 22 June 2011 at 5.45pm**

*Indian Chintz in the Netherlands*

*Community to national identity and hearth to exhibition hall*

Lou Taylor

Professor of Dress and Textile History, School of Historical and Critical Studies, University of Brighton

*Members are encouraged to check the website [www.oatg.org.uk](http://www.oatg.org.uk) regularly for the latest news. Events are sometimes arranged at short notice as our speakers cannot always confirm their travel arrangements and availability in time for publication in Asian Textiles. We don't want you to miss out.*

Talks are held at the Pauling Centre, 58 Banbury Road, Oxford.  
Refreshments from 5.15pm. Visitors welcome (£2)

**Programme Coordinators:**

Rosemary Lee 01491 873276 [rosemarylee143@btinternet.com](mailto:rosemarylee143@btinternet.com)  
Fiona Sutcliffe 01491 872268 [j.v.sutcliffe.t21@btinternet.com](mailto:j.v.sutcliffe.t21@btinternet.com)



# Musée Guimet honours a great collector

**Aurélie Samuel, assistant curator at the Guimet Museum in Paris in charge of textiles, recently organised a wonderful exhibition of children's clothes from the collection of Krishna Riboud**

To mark the tenth anniversary of the death of Krishna Riboud, the Musée Guimet held an exhibition in homage and remembrance of this remarkable woman and exceptional collector emphasising two of her main passions: Asian textiles and children.

The great grand-niece of Nobel Prize winner Rabindranath Tagore, Krishna Roy was born in Bengal. She met Jean Riboud, who would become her husband and inseparable partner, through their mutual friend, the photographer Henri Cartier Bresson. However, it was in France that Mme Riboud began to collect ancient textiles.

Her first major pieces were Baluchari saris woven in her native Bengal. Through the years her priceless collection ultimately numbered some 4,000 pieces from the entire Asian continent, kept within the Association for the Study and Documentation of Asian Textiles (AEDTA), which she created in 1979.

A close associate of the Musée Guimet since the 1960s when she studied textiles brought from Central Asia by Paul Pelliot, she decided to bequeath her entire collection to this institution, arguing that it was essential for these works to be kept in an Art museum, capable of pursuing her own scientific approach which combined technical and historical research. She believed that the study of fabrics is essential to the understanding of civilizations that have created them. She wanted to ensure that her collection remained one of the most comprehensive in the world, was



**Krishna Riboud was born in Bengal, but married a Frenchman and eventually bequeathed her wonderful collection of textiles to the Musée Guimet**

never scattered and remained accessible to both researchers and the public.

Within this very diverse collection there was one particular segment Mme Riboud was particularly fond of: children's costumes.

The exhibition, which ran from 20 October 2010 until 24 January 2011, brought together in one place these beautiful costumes, many of which had never been shown to the public. The oldest work displayed was a small sock woven in China during the Tang dynasty (7th century). The pieces were accompanied by many other works (ceramics, photographs, prints, miniatures) in order to illustrate their use in everyday life in Asia, ancient and modern.

The strict boundary between childhood and adulthood is a transitional period quite difficult to establish firmly. This is reflected in the way Asian artists used to depict children, mostly as miniature adults, dressed in imitation of the grown-ups.

The costume of a child must show everyone that, prior to being an individual human being in its own right, he or she is part of



**A young child's smock or *kediyun* from Kutch in Gujarat**

a lineage, the worthy a descendant of his (or her) forebears. The child's relationship to its parents defines and gives meaning to its existence. A child must prove itself worthy of this legacy and, to reassure themselves, the adults looked for signs and omens of its future behavior, even in the actions of a newborn baby.

The child is the center of the inheritance of its ancestors, which is probably the reason why children were often dressed as mirror images of their fathers or mothers, as a future prolongation of themselves, a promise of eternity for their sires. In other words, in Asia, the costume of a child had to show, above any other consideration, that it was part of a lineage and would be able



**A portrait of the Prince of Jamnagar in Gujarat, around 1910.**

*(All photos in this article are courtesy of the Guimet Museum.)*

to perpetuate ancient traditions. Which is why, particularly in China, giving birth to a son was essential, in order for the worship of ancestors to be maintained - since a girl would eventually belong to her husband's family.

In many Asian countries, newborns are not immediately regarded as human beings, but, rather, as intermediaries between the divine and the earthly worlds, which explains why so few costumes are designed specifically for them.

Whether a child wears a ceremonial dress - as a reflection in miniature of the adult to be what it is supposed to be - or a folk costume covered in ancient traditional symbols, or a coat embellished with adornments intimately linked to religious cults, rituals of protection and various superstitions, it bears on its shoulders the weight of tradition and embodies the hope for the future of an entire society. Somehow, the more the child resembles his parents, the more worthy he or she is to succeed them.



Chinese children pictured around 1900

The heavy regalia worn by tiny Indian

princes, of velvet embroidered with threads of silver and gold-woven silk brocade aim in large part to establish their legitimacy, giving the illusion that a very young child already holds the political and military power it will someday actually wield. Similarly, the future Chinese emperors wore the imperial dragon robe from an early age to in order to be imbued with the virtues of a true Son of Heaven.

The exhibition also highlighted the role of both symbolic and religious protective clothes, such as prophylactic animal-shaped garments worn by small Chinese children to frighten evil spirits, or the Shinto ceremonial *kimonos* for the young Japanese, covered in embroidered or painted auspicious symbols. These few examples show how those materials put the child at the heart of many rituals.

Besides these two prestigious ensembles, folk costumes - garments mostly woven in common, simple and robust materials - and also fancy costumes worn at festivals, with their bright, sometimes exuberant, colors and motifs, demonstrate how, in spite of their apparent modesty, the culmination of knowledge passed from generation to generation, blending harmoniously practical and aesthetic concerns.

Children's costumes and headdresses (*nati*) from Gujarat, are, along with the *sarong* of Indonesian children in bright and vibrant colors, thanks to the technique of *batik*, a particularly moving illustration of this aspect of folk clothing. A similar feeling of strength and energy emanates from the jackets of Chinese Qing children, or from Japanese *kimonos* dyed in indigo, with their imaginative and often original décors.

Dressing styles are emanations of a certain country, a certain era, social status or age. These costumes, in accordance with the etymology of the word which meant "custom", follow strict codes, determine the status children, while perpetuating ancient traditions.

*Auréli Samuel will be speaking about Krishna Riboud and her collection of textiles at the OATG Annual General Meeting on 9th November. Details in the next issue of the magazine.*



# New storage and study rooms at the Ash

## Alessandra Cereda and Sigolène Loizeau explain the impact of the opening of the Jameel Centre for the Study of Eastern Art at the Ashmolean Museum

Since January 2011 the reserve collections of the Department of Eastern Art at the Ashmolean have been accessible to members of the public, scholars and students in the Jameel Centre for the Study of Eastern Art, a new storage and study facility made possible by the generosity of Mr Yousef Jameel, Hon. LHD. Mr Jameel's sponsorship to the Ashmolean has aimed specifically at increasing both physical and virtual access to the Eastern Art collections – thanks to him the department has developed a website devoted to Islamic and Asian art (<http://jameelcentre.ashmolean.org>) which was launched in early 2010 and is continuing to grow in content and features.

The new facilities of the Jameel Centre comprise three storage and study areas, where most of the Eastern Art collections have been installed over the course of the past year. During the renovation of the Museum, the collections were 'decanted' from galleries and stores, safely packed, and moved to an off-site facility for the duration of the building works. Since January 2010 a devoted team – formed by the Study Room Supervisors, Conservators, and Museum Assistants, and project-managed by the Eastern Art Administrator (and OATG chair) – has been bringing the objects back to the Museum, installing them in specifically-designed stores, and setting up the public study areas. This resulted in the creation of highly accessible, state-of-the-art storage and study facilities of much higher standards than ever before.

The collections have been organised largely by material, with the three different spaces housing prints and paintings, organic material (textiles, carpets, wood, ivory and bone, lacquer, and framed paintings), and inorganic material (ceramics, stone, glass, metal) respectively. The fitting out of the stores included custom-made cabinets specifically designed to house our Eastern collections. For example, the numerous scroll paintings from East Asia are now individually stored



**Members of the OATG inspect Japanese textiles in one of the newly opened study rooms in the Jameel Centre for the Study of Eastern Art.**



in trays within a honeycomb-shaped unit; the sizeable yet fragile Japanese folding screens have been installed on easy pull-out shelves; and the Tibetan *thang-ka* paintings are finally stored flat in drawers after years of hanging on clothes hangers.

The entire textile collection of the department – spanning from North Africa to China and Japan, via the Middle East, South and South East Asia – has been re-housed in the new stores. Clothing and garments are kept in purpose-built acid-free boxes, resting on shelving units. Small textiles and carpet fragments are stored in drawers, in individual acid-free paper or spider tissue sleeves, either flat or rolled on small clear polyester rollers. Larger textiles and full carpets are kept rolled on metal poles, protected by spider tissue, and then by a layer of water-proof yet breathable material (polyethylene). These different types of storage cater for the variety of needs of the collection (having to do with size, materials, and structural fragility), making it easily accessible at the same time.

The Eastern Art textile collection is viewable by appointment in the study rooms of the Jameel Centre. Almost every item is available for viewing, subject to consultation with the Museum's textile conservator on fragility and other conservation issues. Bookings for individuals are taken between Tuesday and

Friday (and first Saturday of each month) 10 am-1pm and 2-5 pm. Groups are welcome and encouraged to book on Mondays 10 am-1pm and 2-4 pm, when the study room is closed to the rest of the public. The Jameel Centre can be contacted via phone (01865-288107) or email ([eastudycentre@ashmus.ox.ac.uk](mailto:eastudycentre@ashmus.ox.ac.uk)). More information is available on the Ashmolean's website at <http://www.ashmolean.org/departments/easternart/studycentre/>.

The Jameel Centre has already hosted two viewing sessions with the OATG – before its opening, in November 2010 with Dr Mary M. Dusenbury and a small group of members who came to explore the Central Asian *ikat* coats of the Shaw collection, and in January 2011 for a viewing of Japanese textiles and garments led by the Curator of the Japanese Collections, Dr Clare Pollard. We hope that the Centre will become a useful resource for the group, and we look forward to accommodating more members' viewings (both individuals and groups) in the near future.

Dr Mary M. Dusenbury's donation of a copy of *Colors of the Oasis*

As many of the members know, Dr Mary M. Dusenbury, who came to give a lecture on Central Asian *ikats* in November 2010, has donated to the OATG the catalogue of the exhibition *Colors of the Oasis: Central Asian Ikats* (The Textile Museum, Washington D.C.). She was a contributor to the catalogue with an essay entitled 'Binding Clouds in the Twenty-First Century. Central Asian Ikat today'.

The OATG has decided to leave the book in the Jameel Centre at the Ashmolean Museum, where it is available for consultation by members who wish to do so during the normal opening hours. So, if you know in advance you will be going to consult the book, please contact the Study Room Supervisors, Alessandra and Sigolène, by phone or email to secure a spot.



**New storage drawers in the Jameel Centre mean that textiles can be stored in acid free paper, either flat, or rolled on small polyester rollers.**

# The tapestry that went to China and back

**Nick Fielding investigates the remarkable history of a French tapestry, based on a Dutch painting, that was taken to China in the 18th century and brought back to England as war loot.**

For more than 100 years it has been one of the most intriguing exhibits in the Ashmolean Museum. Now hanging in the new Chinese gallery No 38 in the refurbished museum, the fantastical Gobelin tapestry known as *Le combat d'animaux* would appear at first glance to have little to connect it to the Celestial Empire. This massive tapestry, woven in France, portrays a weird and wonderful collection of animals, many of which appear to be engaged in mortal combat.

On closer inspection, some of them at least can be identified as South American creatures. The central figures are a Brazilian tapir being set upon by a jaguar. Elsewhere, continuing the Brazilian theme, one can pick out a capybara, an alligator and a puma. But there is also a pair of dancing ostriches, a dog, a boar and various other birds and fishes that have little connection with South America.

What, you may ask, is this 14ft 6in x 13ft 8in tapestry, created around 1725, doing in the Chinese gallery? The gallery tag provides a clue. "This tapestry, believed to have been presented by the King of France to the Emperor of China, was looted from the Palace of Yuen Ming Yuen in 1861 and bore an inventory ticket of the Emperor Chi'en Lung, dated 1771."

But that is only the barest detail. Its full story takes in three continents and almost three hundred years of history. Having always been fascinated by this work, I have attempted - with the

kind assistance of the museum staff - to piece together the incredible history of this textile.

The story starts with a Dutchman. In 1626 Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen was appointed by the Dutch West India Company as Governor-General of the company's holdings in north-east Brazil and for the next seven years he attempted to record the flora and fauna of the area, as well as topographical and anthropological data, bringing a group of scientists, artists, craftsmen and cartographers with him to help complete the work.

Amongst the many results of this massive undertaking were a series of 16 'cartoons', designed to decorate a large room. These were presented to his cousin, the Elector of Brandenburg, who may have had some of them copied onto tapestries. However, it is certain the Maurits also presented a set of tapestry cartoons to Louis XIV in 1679. In 1687, by which time Maurits had died, the cartoons were passed to the Gobelin *ateliers*, who decided to use them as a basis for a new set



**Le combat d'Animaux portrays a strange mixture of Amazonian, African and European animals (Courtesy of Ashmolean Museum)**



of tapestries.

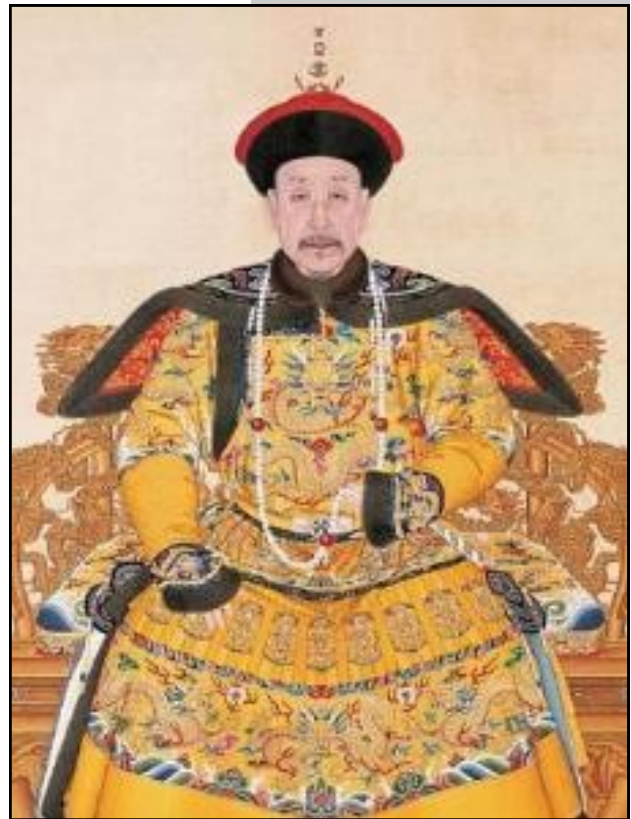
Eight individual tapestries were completed, of which *Le combat d'animaux* was No.5. Collectively they were known as *Le tenture des Indes* and between 1687 and 1725 eight sets were made; five of these sets were larger than the remaining three. They were tremendously popular and one set went to Peter the Great of Russia and another to the Grand Master's Palace at Valetta, Malta (where they can still be seen). A complete set of the smaller version is now in the Villa Medici in Rome. The rest are scattered around the world. The Ashmolean version, which is the only one in England, is thought to be one of the smaller versions, although there are some oddities about it that make even this conclusion uncertain.

How did it get to China? In the National Archives in Paris there are letters which show that the sale of a set to the Emperor of China was discussed in 1769, although there is no evidence that a decision was made to send a set as a gift, despite the museum tag. And if they were sent as a set, what happened to the remaining seven pieces?

The complete set of tapestries was extremely popular and in 1735 a modified design by the artist Francois Desportes was used to make eight more sets and they continued in production until 1941. In total around 170 pieces were made and according to the late Dr Peter Whitehead at the British Museum (Natural History), who studied the tapestries, "No other Gobelins programme enjoyed so much success and it stands as a lasting tribute to Johan Maurits and his artists in Brazil."

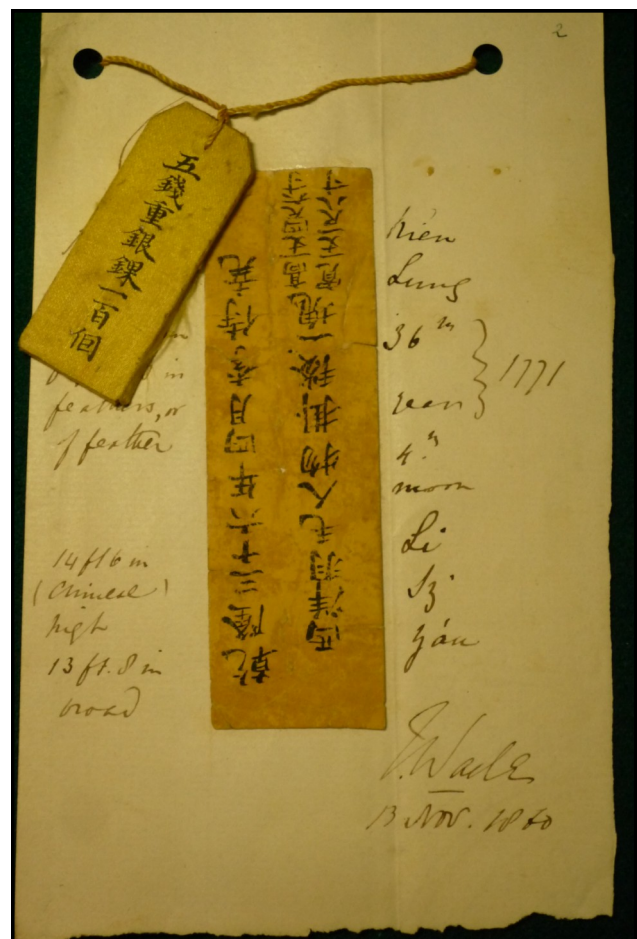
From what we know, the tapestry (or tapestries) sent to China was received in 1771 where the Emperor Chi'en Lung was ruler. The fourth emperor of the Chi'ing (or Manchu) dynasty, his 63-year reign was notable for courtly splendour, prodigious accomplishments in literature and expansion of the Chinese frontiers to the west and the south. The original accession ticket for the Emperor's collection was given to the Ashmolean along with the tapestry when it was donated in 1901. It gives a brief description and the date when it was received.

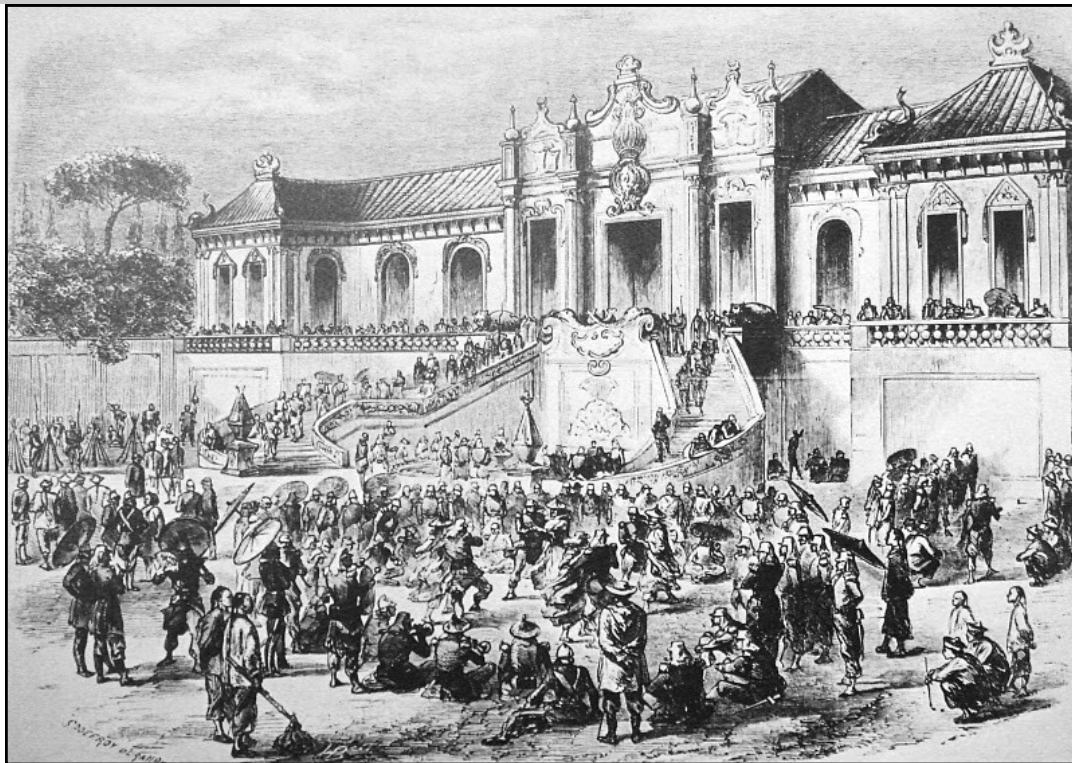
The tapestry seems to have hung in a building in the Yuan Ming Yuan – or Gardens of Perfect Brightness, a remarkable set of European-influenced buildings in the Old Summer



Above: the Emperor Ch'ien Lung

Below: the original 18thC inventory ticket from the Summer Palace in Beijing. (Courtesy of Ashmolean Museum)





**The sacking of the Summer Palace in Beijing in October 1861**

Palace in Beijing. And it was here it stayed until 1861.

Much has been written about the Opium Wars and the sacking of the Summer Palace by British and French troops in October 1861. Suffice it to say that an expeditionary force led by the Eighth Lord Elgin – son of the man who removed the Parthenon Marbles – sacked the Palace after British hostages were tortured and killed. Elgin described in his journals what happened:

“I have just returned from the Summer Palace. It is really a fine thing, like an English park--numberless buildings with handsome rooms, and filled with Chinese *curios*, and handsome clocks, bronzes, &c. But, alas! such a scene of desolation. The French General came up full of protestations. He had prevented *looting* in order that all the plunder might be divided between the armies, &c. &c. There was not a room that I saw in which half the things had not been taken away or broken to pieces. I tried to get a regiment of ours sent to guard the place, and then sell the things by auction; but it is difficult to get things done by system in such a case, so some officers are left who are to fill two or three carts with treasures which are to be sold.... Plundering and devastating a place like this is bad enough, but what is much worse is the waste and breakage. Out of 1,000,000 *l.* worth of property, I daresay 50,000 *l.* will not be realised. French soldiers were destroying in every way the most beautiful silks, breaking the jade ornaments and porcelain, &c. War is a hateful business. The more one sees of it, the more one detests it.”

See <http://manybooks.net/support/j/jamese/jamese10611061010610-8.exp.html>

Another soldier, Frederick Charles Stephenson, wrote to his brother in England:

“On Saturday the 6th we marched as far as the Emperor's Summer Palace, about three miles from Peking, and such a collection of valuables as it contained I cannot describe. The rooms and halls of audience, which are floored with marble, and specially the Emperor's bedroom, were literally crammed with the most lovely knick-knacks you can conceive. Fancy having the run of Buckingham Palace and being allowed to take away any thing and everything you liked, and armed moreover with a thick stick and a deep-rooted feeling of animosity to the owner, being able to indulge in the pleasure of smashing looking-glasses and porcelain, and knocking holes through pictures. Such a scene I witnessed yesterday, and if I had not been Adjutant-General of the Army might have walked off with such an armful of valuable plunder as would have satisfied the most greedy. Large magazines full of richly ornamented robes lined with costly furs, such as ermine and sable, were ruthlessly pulled from their shelves, and those that did not please the eye, thrown aside and trampled under foot. There were other large storerooms full of fans, Mandarins' hats, and clothes of every description, others again piled up to the ceiling with rolls of silk, all embroidered, and to an incredible amount, more than you would find in the shops of five or six of the richest inhabitants of London put together. All these were plundered and pulled to pieces, floors were literally covered with fur robes, jade ornaments, porcelain, sweetmeats, and beautiful wood carvings too large to be carried away. If you and Julia could have been present, and had two large Exeter wagons at hand, you might have passed a most delightful morning, and enriched yourselves with all those





**Portrait of Lt Gen Henry Hope Crealock** (*Courtesy of National Portrait Gallery*)

beauty ful things. Unfortunately for myself, it did not do to show too much greediness, and I had no means moreover of carrying things away. A grand sale is to take place to-morrow, and I will then try and get a few things to take home."

See <http://www.ebooksread.com/authors-eng/frederick-charles-arthur-stephenson/at-home-and-on-the-battlefield-hci/page-23-at-home-and-on-the-battlefield-hci.shtml>

On 18 October 1861 the Summer Palace was set alight, as a way of punishing the Chinese emperor personally for the way he had treated his British prisoners. Today only the ruins remain.

It was during this mayhem that the Gobelin tapestry probably passed into the hands of Henry Hope Crealock, at this time military secretary to Lord Elgin with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Crealock was a career soldier, who served in the Crimea, the Indian campaigns following the 1857 Mutiny and in the Zulu wars in South Africa, before retiring in 1884 with the rank of Lieutenant General. He does not record how he obtained the tapestry, but letters in the Ashmolean archives show that he had repairs made to it at the very same factory in Paris in which it was originally made.

Crealock was an accomplished artist and his drawings of his time in India and China are recognized as valuable records. He died In 1891 at his home in Victoria Square, London, aged 60.

A final note in the Ashmolean records brings our story of the tapestry to a conclusion: "Presented by the Residuary Legatees of Lieutenant General Henry Hope Crealock, CB, CMG in 1901. Combat of Animals, one of a series known as the *Teinture des Anciennes Indes*. Woven in the workshop of Jean Jans, fils, in the Gobelins Manufactory between 1692 and 1727. It was believed to have been presented by the King of France to the Emperor of China, and was looted from the Palace of Yuen Ming Yuen in 1861 and bore an inventory ticket of the Emperor Ch'ien Lung dated 1771."

Truly an incredible story.

# The art of Baluchistan's embroidery

**In her latest article on the embroidery traditions of Pakistan, Azra Nafees examines the textile art from Pakistan's largest province with its profusion of stitches and colours**

Balochistan is the largest of Pakistan's province in terms of area and no other part of Pakistan can match the rich variety of traditional embroidery stitches created by the Baloch and Pashtun women who live in the province. The coastal belt of Makran alone boasts of more than 29 different stitches, each named after a flower, a leaf, a tree or a season.

The Brahvi and Balochi style of embroidery is famous for its complexity. The Marri and Bugti tribes, who use mostly cotton thread on cotton fabric, produce the best-known and finest examples of embroidery.

The fascination of Balochi dresses is mostly associated with the ornately embroidered loose shirts called *pashk*. This is so because each *pashk* is a piece of art that speaks of the designer's skill. A *pashk* can even take several years to complete!

Bold colours and fine stitches characterise Balochi embroidery, which enjoys worldwide fame. There are no less than 28 types of stitches applied in this art with mirrors as an integral part.

The embroidered triangular pouch on the front of a woman's shirt (*pashk*) is typical of Balochi, Brahvi and Makrani dress. A microcosm of variety in stitching, the difference of embroidery on the *pashk* identifies the tribe.

*Kechi Doch* is the best form of embroidery, while others include *Jigs* of the Marri Bugti tribe; *hurmuch* and *mosum*. Balochi *pashk* are brilliant. Silk thread on synthetic or cotton cloth is also becoming popular nowadays.

There are several types of *doch* (Balochi embroidery done on *pashk*). There's *Kapnaal doch*, *Rind doch*, *Banor-e-Ans* (Bride's Tear), *Gul-e-Kantuk*, *Badshah-e-Taj* (King's Crown), *Taidok*, *Pazep*, *Neza*, *Chandan-e-Haar*, *Gul-e-Nimash*, and so on.

Pushtun women in Balochistan wear a flared skirt (*kameez*) with embroidered panels of satin



**Baluchi women working collectively on embroidering textiles**



The ornately embroidered front of a *pashk*, the traditional loose shirt worn by most Baluchi women



stitch in silk, silver and gold thread. Sindhi influence is quite visible in mirror embroidery and other stitches where the Kirthar range of mountains separates Balochistan from Sindh.

Among the Pashtun, *gulabatun* and *khamak* stitches are famous. One can find Balochi embroidery on a vast variety of items including ladies dresses, bed sheets, cushion covers, tea cozies, tray covers, dining sets, table cloths, shawls, dupattas, Balochi caps, sari patti, jackets, belts, ladies purses, shoulder bags and many items of decorative ornamentation.

The nomadic Balochi women still produce the best work for their own family - the *pashk* with their rich embroidery down the front, and that on the sleeves. The *pashk* is a loose shirt, often reaching to the ankles, with loose sleeves and having a long pocket (*pandol*) centred on the front lower half. No buttons are used in the collar. A string exquisitely made to match its colour ties the neck-slit, called the "*tool*".

In Balochistan, "*chakkan*" is a kind of leather embroidery, which is famous for its intricate designs and most appealing colour scheme. The items on which leather embroidery is generally done include the upper part of ladies and gents shoes (*sartal*), belts, upholstery, sheath (cushion covers), ladies purses, shoulder bags, spectacle covers and a number of similar items. This art is peculiar to Lehri (Kachi district) and Turbut (Makran district).

Baloch women living in eastern Balochistan, western Balochistan, Afghanistan and the Middle East have been wearing the traditional Balochi *pashk*, *shalwaar* and *saadar/gusaan* for hundreds of years. Baloch women living in Europe, America and Africa also proudly wear their traditional dress.

The *jaamag*, *pashk*/gown is ornamented with a profusion of needle-work of various match-



The *jaamag*, or *pashk* gown is ornamented with a profusion of needle-work of various matching colours.

ing colours. Different names (*kapnaal*, *paliwaar*, etc) are given to different designs of needled-work or embroidery. Regardless of the name, colour or design of the needle-work, the pattern of the gown remains the same.

Shalwars/ trousers are very loose with embroideries over the hem. The *gusaan* - worn to cover the head, neck and chest - is also embroidered with matching colours, as with the gown. Virgins and widows usually wear black, white or simpler *jaamag* with less needle-work or simply patched with flowered ribbon, while a married women uses various colours, the favourite being red. The married old women sometimes wear black *jaamag* without embroidery. If a widow uses embroidery, it is a clear indication that she intends to re-marry.

Along with beautifully flowered dresses, trousers and head scarves, Baloch women also wear unique jewellery designs like *durr* (earrings), *haar* or *touk* (necklace), *mondrik* (rings in hands and foot fingers), *sanga* or *taal* (rings around hands), *bahoband* or *bahink* (armlets). Balochi dresses are making a very profitable market, locally from the tourist's point of view as well as in the international fashion business.

In Karachi where the largest numbers of Balochis live together, Balochi dress has a market of millions of rupees. Many non-Baloch have been earning their bread making embroidered Balochi dresses. Equally in western Balochistan many Afghan refugees make Balochi dresses to earn their livings; some of them have established huge businesses in this trade.

The Balochi *pashk*, whose magnificent mirror inset embroidery has made it a part of the ethnic chic fashion world, is the most sought after dress today.

Little mirror discs are set using closely worked silken threads. Generally, the mirror work is made on a dark background with motifs such as petals, flowers, creepers, etc. A majority of these motifs are inspired by ancient belief, daily life as well as rituals. However, they differ from region





Chakkan leather embroidery, which is used for the upper part of shoes (*sarta*), belts, upholstery, ladies purses, shoulder bags, spectacle covers and is peculiar to Lehri in Kachi district and Turbut in the Makran district.

to region and are passed down from one generation to the other over the centuries.

Until recently, long hours were devoted to create some of the best designs using embroidery and mirror work for personal use. However, things today have become a bit more organized and slightly speedier with the aim of catering to the requirements of the tourists as well.

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# The master carpet weavers of Kashmir

**American photographer Richard Harris introduces a photo-essay of his pictures of the rug weavers of Kashmir, where a single carpet can take up to two years to make.**

The Bhat family has been making both wool and silk rugs in Srinagar, Kashmir for generations. Sons are apprenticed at an early age and spend up to 25 years to gain master weaver status. The weaving studios have been in their current location for more than 300 years.

The process begins with the master weaver's imagination of pattern, which he draws on tracing paper. He then maps out the design using graph paper and color swatches as well as pictorial references to older existing carpets.

Many patterns are traditional and have a long history, dating back several hundred years. Each weaver selects his own interpretations of the designs and develops personal colour combinations and stylizations of the elements. Famous patterns include Garden and Ardibil which are familiar to collectors.

Once the design of the rug and the specifications such as knot count and overall size are determined, the yarn is sent off for dyeing in the quantity needed to complete the process. Silk rugs may have anywhere from 400 to 1200 knots per square inch, although the knot count for wool carpets is much lower.

The silk yarn is purchased from the local *bazaar* but is imported from China. Wool yarn is hand spun by women using a hand turned wheel. The dyes are generally chemically based, but the process is ancient, using a vat boiling over a gas fire and a long wooden stirring stick. Whilst the yarns are being prepared, the pattern is written out, knot by knot, line by line, in code to protect the secrecy of the design.

These patterns are written by hand on long strips of paper which are then inserted into the unwoven part of the warp for the weaver to follow.



**A young Kashmiri woman spins wool fibre on a hand turned drum. She learned to spin as a young child and her task is to keep the rugmakers supplied with yarn.**





**The rug design is worked out on graph paper using yarn samples and archived photographs of finished rugs for colour inspiration. The specifics are noted on the graph paper. Records and photographs are kept for every rug the family makes. Whilst many of the patterns are centuries old, each master rug maker provides his personal interpretation.**

The Bhats use a vertical loom. The various colors of silk which make the knots are suspended overhead within easy reach for the weaver who squats on his haunches as he weaves. Yarn is pulled down, knotted into the warp, then cut, following the pattern directions. A carpet of 5'x7' size will take approximately two years to weave.

Once complete, the carpet is taken to a finisher who will scrub the newly woven rug. When dry, wool rugs are flipped pile side down and any stray wool fibres are burned off the back using a butane torch. The next step is to trim the pile to an even depth. One method is for the trimmer to place the carpet over his thigh, rounding the carpet and causing the pile to stand up so that it may be trimmed by hand with sharp shears.

A newer method is to use a small, mechanized tool with whirling internal knives and a suction element to gather up the excess fiber. The drawback of this device is that it occasionally catches the base and cuts a hole in the carpet. When this happens, a 6" square area of knots must be removed in order to repair the base and then be re-knotted. The final step is to hand stitch the edge and apply fringe. The fringe is then evenly trimmed.

Kashmir carpets are known for their beautiful and durability. Seeing the rug-making process from start to finish, however, is quite startling. Owning a carpet which required two years of a weaver's labour is a luxury available to relatively few. The time, creativity and skill required to produce such a carpet are commodities growing ever shorter with globalized industrialization. With mechanization and education, fewer people are learning to hand weave rugs, so the craft is dying out.

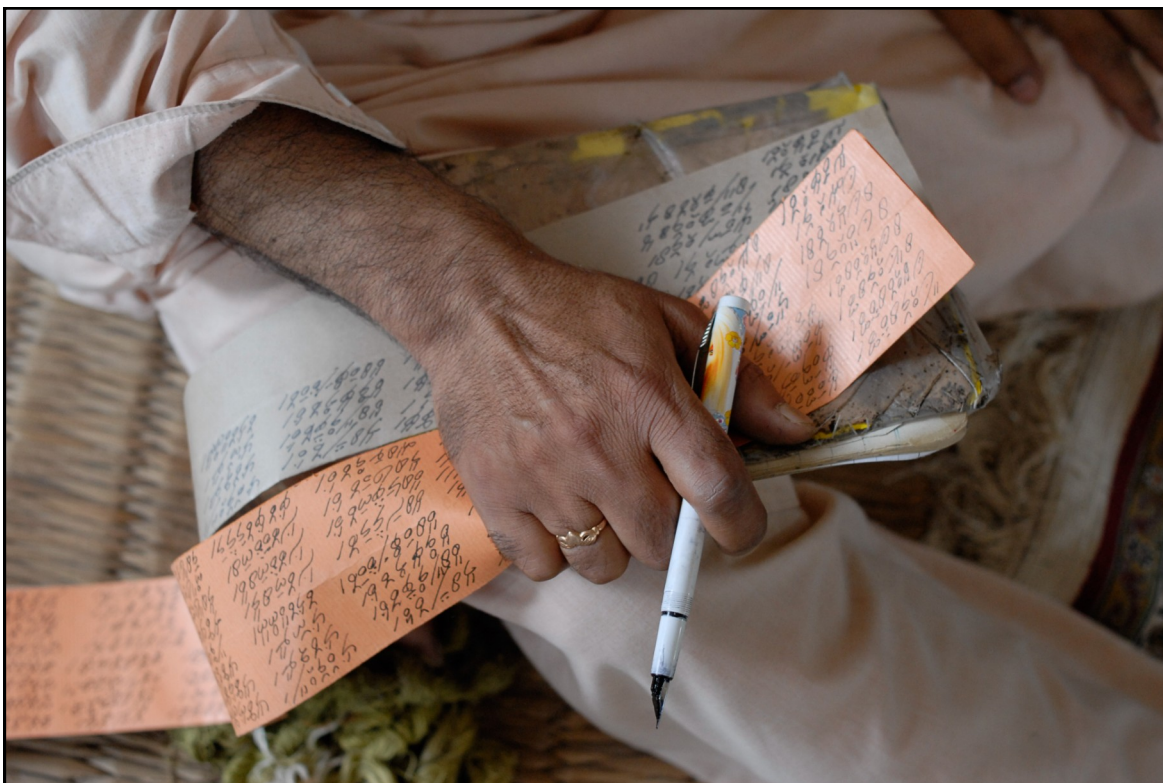
The Bhat family is typical of this trend. The adult sons of the master weaver are university educated carpet merchants, who possess extensive knowledge of the history and process of carpet making, but neither have actually 'sat at the loom'. Within a few short generations, the skills may well be lost or so rarified that carpets again become prohibitively expensive, just as they were in the past.

(See following pages for more photographs).





Yarns are compared to existing rugs for colour. Since a Kashmir carpet uses so many colours, colour consistency and shading are important aspects of the design.



The master weaver writes specific detailed pattern instructions, knot by knot, row by row so that the weaver can follow the master's plan precisely.

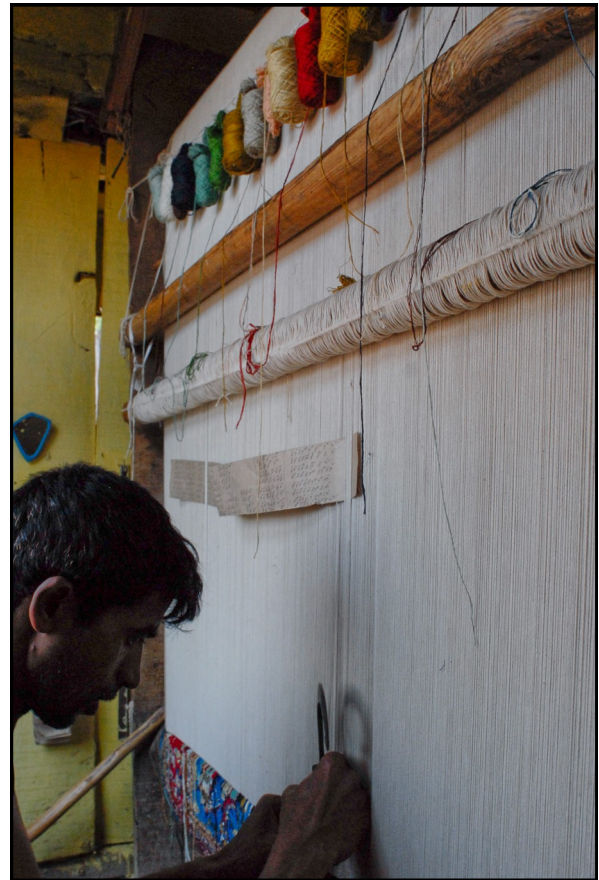




Yarn is dyed in a large metal vat, set into a concrete base, heated by a gas fire from below. Note the large wooden implement used for stirring to ensure the yarn dyes evenly. The dyes are synthetic commercial dyes, used for their reliable consistency and reproducibility. Once finished, the vat is emptied into the streets to run into the sewer system.



Using a vertical loom, the weaver squats to begin knotting at the bottom end of the carpet. IN his right hand is a toothed instrument to pack the knots and the weft closer together.



The weaver pulls colours down from a cord suspended near the top of the loom to use as needed. The written instructions are slipped between the warp threads for easy reference and are repositioned as needed.





Once completely woven, a carpet is quite 'shaggy' and requires a trim to make the pile uniform in depth. This photograph shows a carpet, rolled over the trimmer's thigh so that the pile stands up. He then trims a small section with hand shears. In this way, he will trim the entire rug, moving it over his leg and evening the pile, one section at a time.

Modern technology may also be used for trimming the pile. This electric device combines a small whirling blade with a suction system to capture the trimmed pile ends. Whilst faster and easier on the hands than the traditional shears, the danger of damage to the carpet is greater.



After trimming, the carpets are given a thorough scrubbing with a hard-edged device - much like one would use for scraping ice from one's windscreen - and soapy water. After a good rinsing, the carpets are put in the sun to dry.



Wool yarns tend to 'bloom' in the rug making process. Here, a finisher is using a propane torch to burn loose and stray fibres off the back of the carpet to give it a flat and smooth finish. This process not used on silk rugs, nor on the face of wool carpets.

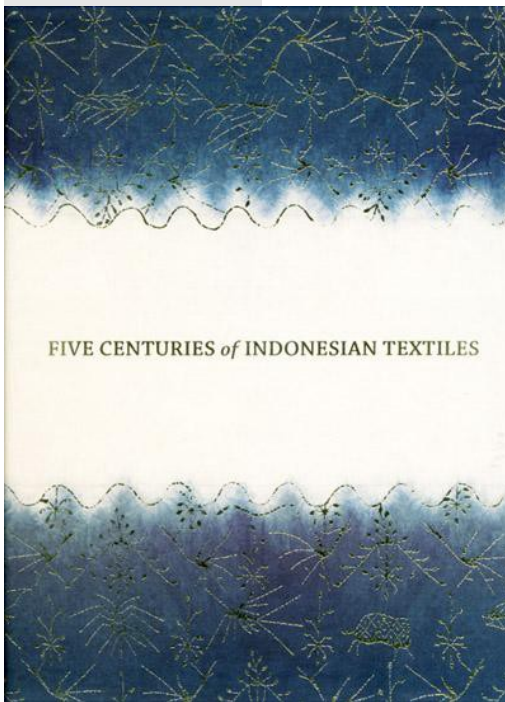


A finisher is covering the end of the carpet with a blanket stitch in preparation for adding a fringe.

Once the fringe is complete, it, too is trimmed to an even length. The carpet is now ready for use.







*Five Centuries of Indonesian Textiles: The Mary Hunt Kahlenberg Collection*, Edited by Ruth Barnes and Mary Hunt Kahlenberg, Delmonico Books, Prestel, 2010 ISBN-978-3-7913-5071-4, \$95.00.

Four hundred pages long, in oversize format and weighing in at 3.5kg, this book is a hard-to-ignore contribution to the field of Indonesian textile studies. It illustrates and describes Mary Hunt Kahlenberg's personal collection of textiles. Ms Kahlenberg began her career as a curator at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). After leaving the museum she "put aside selected textiles ... with the intention of building a collection of outstanding quality", focussing on "Lampung, the Toraja area of Sulawesi and Java, along with Maluku".

The heart of this book is a series of 101 plates of selections from Ms Kahlenberg's collection, photographed by Bruce White with outstanding clarity. The display of the items is also outstanding, with many pieces allowed to "hang", revealing shape and form, rather than flattened out. Interspersed

amongst the catalogue entries are a series of essays by 12 leading textile experts.

The Kahlenberg collection's particular strength is in early examples of textiles, with many pieces plausibly dating to the 19th century and earlier, and a few radiocarbon-dated pieces from as early as the 15th century. While old textiles are relatively common in studies of north Asian textiles, where drier climates and the custom of burying the dead with luxury goods has permitted their preservation, early examples of Southeast Asian textiles are extraordinarily rare and correspondingly precious. An ikat sarong from Sulawesi that dates from the 15th century is like a glimpse into a looking glass world, where things are recognizable but also subtly different.

Ms Kahlenberg introductory essay sets out her criteria for assembling the collection, highlighting that it is not intended as a comprehensive overview of Indonesian textiles, though most of the major textile producing areas are represented. Her co-editor Ruth Barnes's introductory essay describes the geographical area and scope, and some of the common themes that have emerged in Indonesian textile studies, especially regarding heirloom pieces, including formal gift-giving arrangements during marriage ceremonies, life-cycle events and community rituals. She also refers to the continuing influence of early studies and interpretations of Indonesian textiles, mainly by European authors which continue to set the tone and language of much modern writing on textiles, even though doubts have been creeping in over recent decades.

A second essay by Ruth Barnes examines some of the radiocarbon dated items in the collection. As she rightly says, this is an exciting field with considerable potential for future study. Great caution is needed in interpreting the results however, which appear as time ranges and probabilities, with the attendant danger of misinterpretation. This argues for full disclosure of radiocarbon dating reports as standard practice, rather than a single "most probable" date that may be misleading.

The opening section of the catalogue deals with textiles from southern Sumatra, particularly Lampung, an area where the Kahlenberg collection is particularly strong. Lampung is particularly associated with ceremonial tubesirts in glowing golden colors, decorated with ikat, embroidery and sequins. There are several fine examples here, but also other textiles that give a fuller picture of the diversity of this tradition, now largely vanished. There are also several examples of the well-known supplementary weft "ship cloths", including a three metre-long *palepai* that may be the finest example yet published.

A series of luxurious silk shawls from Sumatra is followed by three examples of the elegant and austere textiles of the Batak people from the lake Toba region. Sandra Niessen's captions for these link fieldwork and historical research to provide convincing identifications and context. An essay on Batik by Rens Heringa and the subsequent examples of this art from the Kahlenberg collection were an eye-opener for me. The presence of some convincingly "early" pieces of batik from Java allows some appreciation of the development of batik and the rapid changes that have occurred in style and design over the last two centuries.

A 200 year-old cloth from Java suggests that designs that are now only found on some Balinese double ikat cloths were once more widespread, while cloths from Tuban preserve what may be some of the oldest batik techniques and styles.

Design developments in the 19th and early 20th century trace social changes in Java society and the increasing influence of Islam on cloths. A different and interesting set of batik designs were produced for (and sometimes by) Straits Chinese people in Indonesia, incorporating Chinese auspicious motifs. In dealing with these motifs the author is on less certain ground than with the native Java motifs: the Chinese “*ky'lin*” (qilin) is confused with the lion dog (*shizi*). The “Stag” (actually deer) is not an ancestor figure for Chinese people but represents longevity, amongst other things. The essays *Cloths for the Ancestors* on Balinese ritual cloths by Marie-Louise Nabholz Kartaschoff and *Triangle and Tree* by Traude Gavin on Iban motifs discuss some of the changes taking place amongst scholars in the interpretation of textiles.

The essay on Balinese cloths makes the important point that when considering the function and importance of a textile, the motifs are normally secondary to the form, materials and structure of the cloth. In fact little real understanding can be gleaned about the importance of a cloth to its makers except by studying its use in context, a theme that also emerges from Sandra Niessen’s writings and captions in this volume. The most lavish cloths sometimes have the most important roles to play, but not always.

The catalogue includes several fine Balinese textiles, including examples of the famous *geringsing* double ikat. However it was a spectacular “*lamak perada*” from Bali that caught my eye, both for its beauty and its interesting history. This piece of silk was made in China for export, decorated with subtle batik in Java and then overdyed in purple and gilded in Bali, resulting in a sumptuous and multilayered effect.

Traude Gavin’s essay on Iban cloths goes to the heart of some of the problems that bedevil current textile scholarship. She shows how two labels commonly used by textile writers - *tumpal*, (meaning the row of elongated triangles at the ends of many Indonesian cloths,) and *Tree of Life* (a widely used description for pretty much any plant or tree-like motif) - are in fact constructs from early Western writings that have no evidential link to the motivations of Indonesian weavers. The *Tree of Life* description in particular is weighted down with a baggage of Western and Asian myths. Yet both descriptions persist in textile writings. The *tumpal* label is found in the captions throughout this volume, though this is admittedly a near universally accepted convention for which good alternatives are lacking.

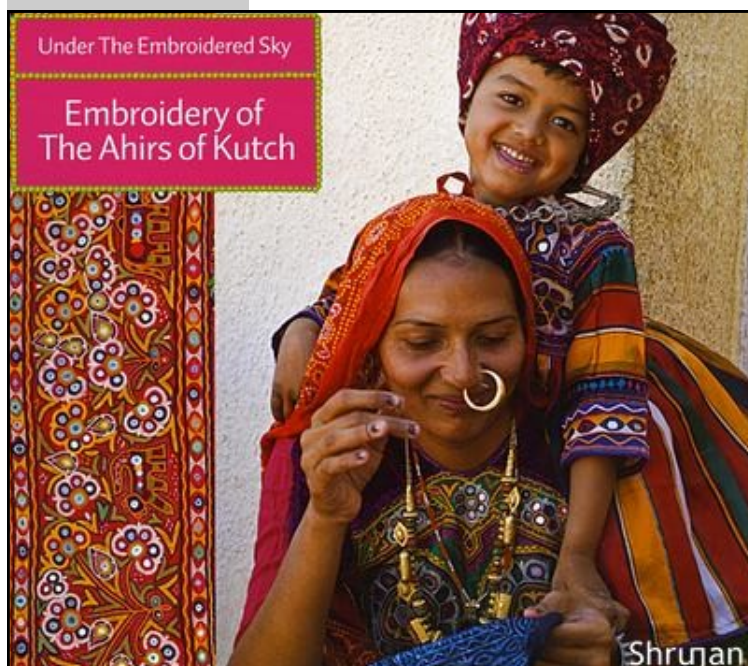
A few fine Iban *pua* follow this essay. In keeping with the theme of the collection these are exceptional examples, such as a large cloth decorated entirely using the *sungkit* (supplementary weft) technique rather than the more usual ikat. They are fascinating, though the reader looking for an introduction to this field might want to look elsewhere for more typical examples first. A group of early textiles from Sulawesi follow, some of which have been securely dated to the 15th to 17th centuries. A remarkable batik panel and a long cloth called an *mbesa tali tau betu*, an ikat tubeskirt and a supplementary warp tubeskirt all attest to textile making traditions that have been lost from Sulawesi (and in the case of the long cloth from the world of textile making in general). The ancient ikat tubeskirt suggests that the format and style still found in the Lamalera region may once have been more widespread in the Indonesian archipelago.

The final two essays by Roy Hamilton and Toos Van Dijk deal with textiles from the island archipelagos stretching from Flores to Timor and the remoter islands of the Maluku Tenggara, the latter including some regions and textiles that have received less attention. The simple, symmetrical sarongs of this region, decorated with small geometric and figural motifs interspersed with ikat bands may represent one of the earliest textile styles from the Indonesian archipelago, though these areas too have been influenced by imported cloths. Roy Hamilton’s essay discusses the place of textiles as markers for identity in the island cultures, the importance of fine distinctions in local cultures and the question of the “ownership” of a particular design. Toos Van Dijk surveys the islands making up the Maluku Tenggara and attempts a broad classification of the styles of textiles from this region.

The multi-authorship of this impressive volume is an asset. The differences in approaches of the contributors throw up some interesting questions relating to current textile scholarship, however. This is perhaps most apparent in the captions to the Lampung textiles, where several authors have contributed to the same field. This is a difficult area for researchers since little remains today of Lampung’s former weaving traditions, causing one caption writer to lament “when it comes to understanding their origins and meaning, there is confusion and frustration”, and to present correspondingly tentative interpretations.

Textile studies seem to be in the process of differentiating itself from a branch of art criticism (and rightly so), but there is no broad agreement on how to proceed or what evidential standards to apply. In this respect we can say that *Five Centuries of Indonesian Textiles* mirrors current controversies and the “state of play” of textile studies in general. In conclusion, this is an outstanding work in the field of Indonesian textile studies that will be pored over and referred to for decades to come, perhaps longer. The outstanding illustrations and revealing scholarship make it a worthwhile addition to the library of anyone with an interest in Asian textiles, whether beginner or expert.

**Chris Buckley** [www.toranatribal.com](http://www.toranatribal.com) [www.toranahouse.com](http://www.toranahouse.com)



*Under the Embroidered Sky, Embroidery of the Ahirs of Kutch*, produced by Shrujan Trust,

ISBN: 978-81-909782-0-0  
pub. 2010. Rs 3500 374pp.

Published by Shrujan Trust,  
Behind GEB sub-station,  
Bhujodi, Bhuj 370 020,  
Kutch, Gujarat, India,  
[www.shrujan.org](http://www.shrujan.org).

This is a truly wonderful large format book with excellent full colour photographs throughout, and specific to the embroidery of the Ahir community in Kutch, Gujarat. In her forward, Professor Anne Morrell stresses the place of this as an important record of both the role of embroidery within the culture, and the speed of the changes taking place, together with the vital role of the Shrujan Trust. This NGO was set up in 1968-69 by 77-year-old Chandra Shroff to foster and encourage the embroiderers to receive some income from their skills. It is the first of a set of six volumes and up to 10 sets of DVDs documenting the very diverse embroidery techniques of nine major communities in Kutch. While the book provides an overview of Ahir culture and embroidery, the DVD set gives detailed demonstrations of how to create each stitch.

*'For the Ahirs, embroidery is not just a decoration. It goes much beyond that. It is like a silent language that conveys so much of our thoughts and feelings.'*

Whilst the patterns and stitches are particular to this group, their individual style provides an identity to the maker, and reflects their status i.e. a child, single, married. The book opens with setting the scene in Kutch, the problems of doing the research, and the distinctive styles of different community groups. The researchers include many interviews with the women. Subsequent pages show the items in context, being worn or in different homes, or on the animals, as well as detailed photographs of the object, and the subtle variety in first the drawn pattern (*arrekhani*) and then the stitching by different embroiderers. Each part begins with a narrative in conversational style, and is followed by an in depth look at different aspects: the language of the Ahir embroidery; the stitches, mirrors, motifs and borders.

The penultimate section concerns the work of the Shrujan Trust in ensuring continuity, a sustainable livelihood for the craftswomen through the high quality of work, and the immense determination to overcome the affects of major disasters of drought and the tragic earthquake in 2001. The work has changed and developed since 1969. It has created the need for a commercial enterprise; the need for changes and adaptations in colour, and the emergence of new designs using various motifs for the contemporary market.

The high quality of the embroidery, together with good finishing and construction is bringing this work to new appreciative customers. It has been vital to include the makers with this whole process.

And what of today, with the new fabrics and fibres? The women and young girls discuss their responses to these, and it is encouraging that they enjoy them whilst also still stitching. Parmaben's pragmatic opinion is that embroidery will survive as long as the girls and women can earn a living from it and it will flourish whilst organisations like Shrujan ensure that they remain self-sufficient. The glossary is very useful and contains many of the local words that are not found in other books.

I visited the area in 1989/90 and again in 1994/5 and went to Dhanetti to see the Embroidery School. Here I met Parmaben who had embroidered all her life until her sight deteriorated, so she was marking out the motifs to be embroidered. The fabric was stretched over a wide brass dish, and she drew freehand with a Biro refill. All her borders joined up perfectly, all the motifs were placed evenly, whatever size of the garment. She knew it all intimately. I am so thrilled to see her featured in this book and to read her opinions.

I have quite a large collection of embroidery from Kutch, and have spent a lot of time studying the stitches, so I welcome the detailed photographs and the information about when the items are used. Such



anthropological context is often difficult to research, even when visiting the actual locality. It is often very hard for people from outside to understand the use of different imagery, and it is all too easy to impose our opinions. Indeed, Saruyaben, one of the embroidery teachers, says that she is often asked why certain motifs are used. She says that they have been used for generations, there is no written record, and we should accept what is there at face value. *'Instead look at our embroidery. Embrace what you can see. Learn the rules. That in itself is a fascinating area'*. She refers to the craftswomen as 'caretakers' of their traditions.

I shall continue to refer to this book. It deepens my understanding and joy in the many pieces in my collection, and I shall always look afresh at this rhythmic, skilled and colourful embroidery. I congratulate all concerned with this publication. It is a most valuable book.

**Jennie Parry**

Sumru Belger Krody (Ed), *Colors of the Oasis: Central Asian Ikats*, The Textile Museum, Washington DC, ISBN978-0-87405-034-9, \$55 pbk; \$110 hbk. 304pp.

*Colors of the Oasis* features a selection from the 185 high-calibre Central Asian *ikats* given to The Textile Museum by Istanbul collector Murad Megalli in 2005. None of these textiles has ever been seen in public before. The stunning textiles in the catalogue include coats for men and women, women's dresses and pants, as well as cradle covers, hangings and fragments.

Murad moved to Istanbul in 1987, where was very influenced by Josephine Powell, an ethnologist and photographer who dedicated her life to pre-

serving the nomadic cultural and weaving traditions of Anatolia. Initially he was interested in Anatolian kilims, but was soon transfixed by *ikats*. In 2005, having amassed a large collection, he had to decide what to do with them in order that they could be brought to a wider audience.

Finally he decided on the Textile Museum in Washington, which accepted the gift and put forward a plan for studying and preserving the collection. Very sadly, he was killed in an aircraft crash on 4 February this year.

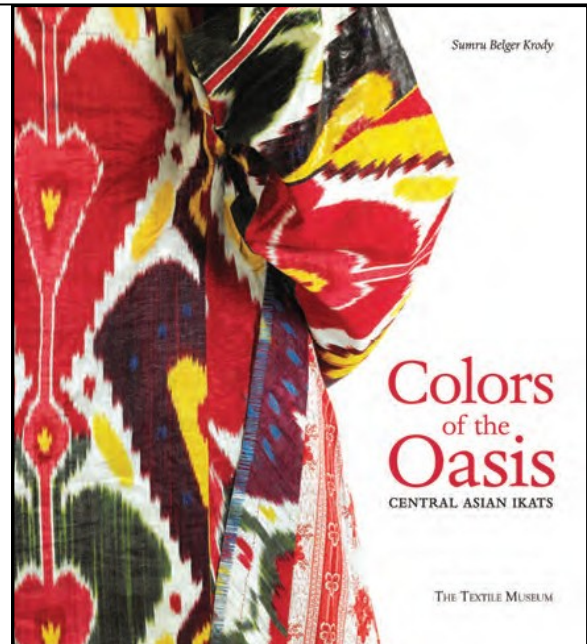
*Colors of the Oasis* explores the artistic, social, and economic aspects of Central Asian *ikat* production and the role these textiles played in the nineteenth-century in those layers of upper-middle-class urban society living in the oasis towns of what is now Uzbekistan. It also looks into the contemporary revival of *ikat* production in Uzbekistan and its historic influences.

The word *ikat* derives from the Malay word *mengikat*, meaning to tie or to bind. It is a textile-patterning technique in which parts of the warp and/or weft yarns are protected so that these areas resist dye when immersed in a dye-bath. The process of resisting and dyeing must be repeated for each colour before weaving can begin. It is a very complex process that requires careful planning.

As a technique it exists throughout the Indian subcontinent, in parts of south-east Asia and in Malaysia and Indonesia. However, it reaches its zenith in the Central Asian oasis towns, and particularly in Samarkand and Bokhara.

As well as the wonderful plates, this book contains a series of essays by experts in the field including: *Abr Fabrics of Uzbekistan* by Sayera Makhkamova; *The Many Lives of Ikat* by Kate Fitz Gibbon; *Central Asian Ikats: Origins and Sources of Design* by Andrew Hale; *Oasis Style* by Sumru Belger Krody; *The Russian Connection: Printed-cotton Export Cloth* by Susan Meller; *Binding Clouds in the Twenty-First Century: Central Asian Ikat Today* by Mary M. Dusenbury; and *Central Asian Ikats in the Silahtar Treasury at the Topkapi Palace Museum* by Feza Çakmut.

**Nick Fielding**



## The revival of Ikat production in Central Asia

OATG Meeting. Guest speaker: Dr Mary M. Dusenbury, 17 November 2010.

A packed audience filled the Pauling Centre lecture-room on 17 November for an illustrated talk by Dr Mary M. Dusenbury, Research Curator at the Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas. She gave us a broad-sweep pictorial history and geography of Central Asian *ikats* before taking us on a modern traveller's journey to witness the flourishing of old *ikat* techniques now taking place under the watchful eyes of a new generation of designers, weavers and dyers.

Oasis towns such as Merv, Samarkand, Bukhara and Kashgar had been important trading posts as early as the eighth century and the silk routes were an important element in their growth and prosperity. Although the exact origins of *ikat* textiles are not known, it is thought that their "explosion" in the late 18th and early 19th centuries was the result of a wave of immigrant artisans coming into Bukhara and Samarkand and also further east to the Fergana Valley.

*Ikats* were originally woven for rulers in high office, but by the late 19th century, *ikat* coats were worn by town-dwellers, nomads and even schoolboys, as can be seen in photos taken by Sergei Prokudin-Gorskii between 1909-1915. The photos of youths and older men give us a feeling for how the robes were actually worn - the outside robe was often of striped *ikat* cloth lined with a floral Russian cotton print, and several robes might be worn one on top of the other. (see <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/prok/>)

Slides of robes and pieces from the Megalli collection at the Textiles Museum in Washington showed the splendours of colour and pattern which characterize the *ikats*- riotously bold patterns in pink, yellow and green depicting, for example, ram's horns and stylized plant motifs.

Records show that cloth and carpets figured importantly in the gifts sent by Central Asian emirs to Emperor Nicholas II - these included lengths of Bukhara *ikat* velvet, *adras* silk, Astrakhan furs and horse-cloths embroidered in gold. Some of these survive in St Petersburg.

Dr Dusenbury spoke of the likely historical connections between weavers in the Fergana Valley and Kashgar, and the fact that *ikats* are still regarded in both places as part of their people's cultural identity.

Turning to more recent developments in *ikat* production, she drew on research undertaken during two study trips to the region in 2007 and 2008. During Soviet collectivization in the 1930s, the Russians had repressed independent craftspeople but some, miraculously, carried on their work quietly at night. As men were conscripted, their daughters would take up traditional male crafts, so many weavers now are female, whereas in the past they were all male.

These traditional skills were needed when in 1972 the Soviet government established the Yodgurlik factory in the Fergana Valley. Two master weavers there helped revive velvet *ikat* production in the next two decades, the velvets having completely disappeared. Novel designs for conventional *ikat* cloths were introduced- including one of the Kremlin!! Some of the work at Yodgurlik is still done by hand and some semi-industrially. From 1991 *ikat* weaving was revived at the family and cooperative level, thanks to support from the British Council and UNESCO among others, who helped particularly in marketing.

Illustrating contemporary *ikat* production in Fergana, Dr Dusenbury stressed the role of the three main (male) master weavers who manage the exceptionally complex process, involving over 30 stages, to produce *ikat* cloths. One weaving centre, in the village of Namangan, provides work for 200 local households. The older men have the patterns in their heads, while the younger ones have paper patterns to guide them.

Bringing the *ikat* story right up to date, Dr Dusenbury told us that she had seen lurex *ikats* in the market at Margilan, and then when she returned to the USA, she found faux *ikat* blouses in her local Walmart store!

The talk showed the enduring appeal of *ikat* textiles and told a heartening tale of the conser-

vation and revival of the exceptional skills needed to produce them.

After the talk Dr Dusenbury kindly donated a copy of the book *Colours of the Oasis: Central Asian Ikats*, by Sumru Belger Krody (The Textile Museum, Washington, 2010) to the OATG, to be kept in the study room at the Ashmolean. Her chapter in the book covers the same ground as her talk and gives a detailed and well-illustrated exposition of the *ikat* production process.

(As a footnote: a few lucky OATG members accompanied Dr Dusenbury to a viewing of some *ikat* robes from the Ashmolean's Shaw Collection on 12 November. These robes are unique in that, unlike other *ikat* garments, their provenance is known. The dating of *ikats* generally is otherwise problematic.)

**Jennifer Glastonbury**

## The nuts and bolts of creating a museum collection

OATG museum visit. Guest speaker Julia Nicholson

Members of OATG met in the Pitt Rivers Museum to hear Julia Nicholson, Joint Head of Collections, speak on how a collection of embroidered textiles from SW China were accepted by the museum and accessioned into the museum database. All of these textiles came from a known provenance and had been well documented by Wendy Black, the collector.

I wonder how many collectors have sat with museum curators around their kitchen table in the depths of winter and considered the merits of a collection. No longer were the labels hand written on cardboard tags, becoming almost artifacts in themselves but were now a computer generated label sewn into each piece, listing its unique number, provenance and ethnic group.

The last step before the artifacts left Wendy's home was perhaps one of the more time consuming items in the whole process. Each textile was individually wrapped in tissue paper and then in plastic, before being taken to the museum to be put in the freezer for a week. Finally free of any insect which might cause an infestation in storage, Wendy's hoard became an official collection in the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford.

A legacy from a dear aunt, and a yearning to do something she had never dreamt of was how Wendy recounted her story. Travelling to South West China not long after it became more accessible to tourists opened her eyes to the many minority groups living in that region. Travelling simply, sometimes on foot, and staying in villages she saw a very marginal part of China, inhospitable to many, yet rich in ethnic varieties. One of the largest groups and the most widely diverse that she met was the Miao.

Like many of us she became captivated by the people and the cultural items which set them apart. Geometric appliqué patterns in white, yellow and gold, applied to outer garments for adults and also for baby carriers was one of the distinctive decorations laid out on the table.

Like many other material possessions, textile patterns are more than decorations. They are symbols that express various local identities for the people who wear them. Most of the textiles in the collection were clothing and I had the feeling that they were utilitarian, clothing made to be used.

Wendy mentioned that all her items had been purchased in villages from the ethnic group they happened to be visiting on that occasion. There was some discussion with members of the group of the trend to provide tourists with the type of textile that the entrepreneurs feel the tourist wants or should have, rather than "real" textiles. This in itself is a subject worth investigation – has it become a market economy?

**Jane Lee**



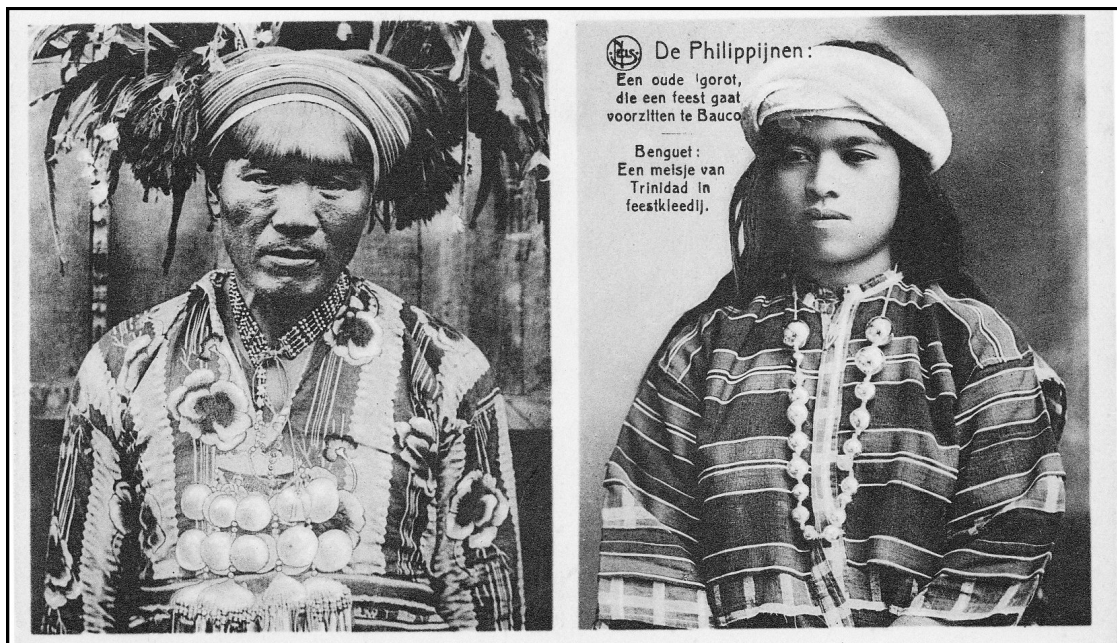
- Event **Imperial Chinese Robes from the Forbidden City**  
 Place UK, London, Victoria and Albert Museum  
 Date, time 7 December 2010 – 27 February 2011  
 Notes three centuries of beautiful and historic royal robes worn by the emperors and empresses of the Qing Dynasty, the last ruling dynasty of China (1644-1911). All objects in exhibition are from the Palace Museum, Beijing.  
[www.vam.ac.uk/things-to-do/blogs/imperial-chinese-robres-va](http://www.vam.ac.uk/things-to-do/blogs/imperial-chinese-robres-va)
- Event **A Catalogue of World Textiles**  
 Place UK, Leeds, University of Leeds International Textiles Archive (ULITA)  
 Date, time 17 December 2010 - end May 2011 Tuesdays-Fridays 09.30-16.30 (except for University closed days)  
 Notes Celebrating the culmination of a major documentation and conservation project. Collections documented as part of the project: the Egyptian textiles, Japanese textiles and stencils, the Kashmiri shawl collection, the Louisa Pesel collection of Mediterranean embroidery, Pakistani textiles, Sample pattern books and the Fibre collection.  
<http://ulita.leeds.ac.uk/wiki/mediawiki-1.10.1/index.php/Events>
- Event **Colors of the Oasis; Central Asia Ikats**  
 Place USA, Washington DC , The Textile Museum  
 Date, time 16 October 2010-13 March 2011  
 Notes [http://www.textilemuseum.org/exhibitions/current/Colors\\_of\\_the\\_Oasis.html](http://www.textilemuseum.org/exhibitions/current/Colors_of_the_Oasis.html)
- Event **Rugs and Ritual in Tibetan Buddhism**  
 Place USA, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art  
 Date, time October 7, 2010–June 26, 2011, Florence and Herbert Irving Galleries for the Arts of South and Southeast Asia, 3rd floor  
 Notes Thirty works dedicated to the enactment of Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism, focusing on Tibetan tantric rugs as the seats of power employed by practitioners of esoteric Buddhism, form this installation.  
[http://www.metmuseum.org/special/se\\_event.asp?OccurrenceId={8553DF5D-9C4B-4AF4-B016-EE653B334D0F}](http://www.metmuseum.org/special/se_event.asp?OccurrenceId={8553DF5D-9C4B-4AF4-B016-EE653B334D0F})
- Event **London Antique Rug and Textile Fair (LARTA)**  
 Place UK, London, 63 Penfold Street, London NW8  
 Date, time 31 March – 3 April 2011  
 Notes LARTA will coincide with KARMA ( 1-4 April ) and Bonhams auction “Oriental and European Rugs & Carpets” ( 5 April ) so there will be several reasons for ruggies to visit London in this period.  
<http://www.larta.net/>
- Event **Passion for Perfection: Islamic art from the Khalili Collections**  
 Place Netherlands, Amsterdam, De Nieuwe Kerk  
 Date, time 11 December 2010 to 17 April 2011

*Asian Textiles* is published three times a year in  
 February, June and October.

**DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS  
 MONDAY 6th June 2011**

Contributions should be emailed or sent to the Editor

- Notes Passion for Perfection will include some 500 objects from the collection of Professor Nasser D. Khalili. From 11 December 2010 to 17 April 2011, De Nieuwe Kerk will glitter with richly illuminated Qur'ans and manuscripts, paintings, gold, jewels, textiles, ceramics, glassware, lacquerware, metalwork, and wood carvings.  
<http://www.nieuwekerk.nl/en/>
- Event **Weaving Heritage: Textile Masterpieces from the Burke Collection**  
Place USA, Seattle, Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture  
Date, time October 2, 2010 –February 27, 2011  
Notes Weaving Heritage is the first major exhibition of the Burke Museum's international textile collection. Over 130 of the most beautifully designed and culturally significant textile masterpieces from the Americas, Asia, and the Pacific Islands will be on exhibit.  
<http://www.washington.edu/burkemuseum/weaving/>
- Event **Patterns of Life. The Art of Tibetan Carpets**  
Place USA, New York, Rubin Museum of Art  
Date, time April 8, 2011 - August 22, 2011  
Notes Carpets are an important decorative art in the Tibetan tradition, serving aesthetic and practical purposes in the monastic and domestic spheres. This exhibition will present the variety of styles, motifs, and functions of carpets and illuminate everyday life in Tibet. Much of the imagery used in Tibetan decorative arts, such as auspicious symbols, geometric patterns, and real and mythical animals, is also found in Tibetan fine art. This shared visual language will be explored through complementary paintings and sculptures from the museum's collection.  
<http://www.rmanyc.org/nav/exhibitions/view/955>
- Event **Beauty Born of Use: Natural Rainwear from China and Japan**  
Place Canada, Toronto, Textile museum of Canada  
Date, time Oct 18, 2010 - May 1, 2011  
Notes <http://www.textilemuseum.ca/apps/index.cfm?page=exhibition.detail&exhId=321>



Another (Dutch) postcard from my collection, showing Igorot and Benguet tribespeople in traditional festival clothing. Does anyone know anything about these costumes?

## OATG OFFICERS

**Chairman:** Aimée Payton, Dept of Eastern Art, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, OX1 2PH  
Tel 01865 278067. email: aimee.payton@ashmus.ox.ac.uk.

**Hon. Treasurer:** Helen Adams, 58 Kingston Road, Oxford OX2 6RH. Tel 01865 559869.  
email: helen252525@hotmail.com

**Membership Secretary:** Felicity Wood, 93 Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6HL  
Tel: 01865 554281; email: felicityswood@gmail.com .

**Programme Coordinators:** Rosemary Lee and Fiona Sutcliffe,  
Tel 01491 873276 or 01491 872268.  
email: rosemarylee143@btinternet.com; j.v.sutcliffe.t21@btinternet.com

**Asian Textiles Editor:** Nick Fielding, Morters, Church Road, Blewbury, Oxon OX11 9PY.  
Tel 0788 050 5684. email: nicholas.fielding@btinternet.com

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





