Newsletter

OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

Number 38 **October 2007**

Renowned Japanese artist Nagara Yozo embroidering a lion on a frame c1910

Contents

EDITORIAL

This issue of the newsletter contains several fascinating articles on Japanese textiles. Hiroko McDermott's article on *fukusa* coverlets shows that Western buyers and collectors were intensely interested in these wonderful fabrics almost as soon as Japan began to open up to foreign trade in the second half of the nineteenth century.

She describes a golden age, when beautiful examples could be found in back-street shops at very low prices. Interestingly, she also reveals that most of the embroiderers, such as Nagara Yozo whose photograph is on the newsletter's front cover, were men.

Fiona Kerlogue, in her article about the Japanese wrapping textiles on show at the Horniman Museum, shows how they were used to indicate social status, gender and respect.

And bringing things right up to date, we have an item about Jun Tomita, a master in the art of *kasuri* — the Japanese form of *ikat* weaving. Tomita, who has lived and taught in England, weaves extraordinarily delicate fabrics of the most subtle designs and adds to their mysterious abstract qualities by painting directly onto them.

In the next issue I hope to outline my ideas on how the newsletter should go forward. For now, it only remains to thanks Phyllis Nye for her sterling work in editing it since its inception—see Ruth Barnes's appreciation on page 4.

OATG EVENTS PROGRAMME

Wednesday 24 OCTOBER 2007

AGM at 5.45 pm

Followed at 6.15pm by:

Textile, Text, and Buddhist Context in Burmese Manuscript Binding Tapes

A talk by Ralph Isaacs, Collector and researcher of Burmese textiles

Saturday 17 NOVEMBER 2007

Brighton Museum and Art Gallery at 11 am

Indigo: A Blue to Dye for. Art, craft, fashion and design featuring historical and modern artefacts

11 am. Talk by Dr Jenny Balfour-Paul in collaboration with The Costume Society. Cost £14
Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, Royal Pavilion Gardens BN1 1EE

Afternoon. A gallery talk with Jenny after which we will proceed by bus to the Hove Museum to see more indigo exhibits.

Please contact Rosemary or Fiona as soon as possible. Some car sharing may be possible.

Sunday 6 JANUARY 2008 at 2.30pm

Nick Fielding has kindly invited us to his house at Benson, South Oxon. He will show us some of
his textiles and you are also invited to bring along some interesting fabric or garment of your own
for us all to appreciate before we enjoy tea and cakes. Please let Fiona or Rosemary know by 31 December if you would like to come.

March/April 2008

After our successful visit to Manchester in 2006 we are planning to go to Liverpool where there is a good textile collection and also a renowned conservation centre as well as much more. We
would stay 2/3 nights and travel by train.

If you may be interested please contact Fiona or Rosemary now so that we can keep you informed as arrangements will have to be made before the next newsletter is published.

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

Phyllis Nye, our founding editor, retires

Phyllis was present at the very inception of OATG in 1995. At that time she had worked as a museum guide in the Ashmolean's Education Department for some years, and she had taken a special interest in the Eastern Art Department, so we knew each other quite well.

I was then preparing an exhibition of garments from Central Asia, the Robert Shaw Collection; the material had recently been rediscovered in our organic store, after many years of neglect – and this seemed indicative of the lack of attention given to the textile collections in Oxford's museums. Hardly anyone would know that between the Ashmolean and the Pitt Rivers alone, there were approximately 10,000 textiles and garments NOT on view!

I met Phyllis one day in front of the Ashmolean and started talking to her about this predicament. I was wondering if one could bring a wider awareness of these treasures, both to specialists and the general public, by starting a textile society that focussed on local collections. Phyllis took up the idea with real enthusiasm and immediate engagement: as she put on her bicycle gear, ready to cycle home to Beckley, she said: 'What an excellent idea let us meet and talk about it in more detail!' and cheerfully waved goodbye.

Action followed a few weeks later, when she and I met with Julia Nicholson from the Pitt Rivers and Felicity Wood, who was to be our first Programme Secretary. We agreed that the University's textile collections deserved to be better known. All four of us also had a particular interest in Asian and Islamic cultures, and the Department of Eastern Art was a natural first home because of my affiliation with it.

We decided on the name of our new group-to-be (Oxford Asian Textile Group – 'Society' was deemed a bit too grand), on the structure of events and how many to offer. Julia suggested the opening occasion: a Private View of an exhibition at the Pitt Rivers: *Embroideries from Islamic Journeys,* showing textiles from Sheila Paine's collection. Publicity and dissemination of information was to be through a newsletter: and that is of course where Phyllis came in and seized the day.

It is remarkable to look back on the first issues and realise how quickly she developed the Newsletter's now substantial format. As an active member of the Costume Society she already had a good network of names and addresses and knew about collections in unlikely places. Not being a shrinking violet was essential for success: she could not be shy to approach experts and museum curators to contribute to the Newsletter, and often the best people in the field were happy to write contributions. She made excellent use of her contacts, and was successful in establishing new ones. The tone of the Newsletter established a perfect balance between being informative, instructive, and entertaining.

Under Phyllis' editorship the articles reported on hidden treasures and unseen collections, both in well-know national museums and out-of-the-way locations, on technological puzzles →

→ and curiosities (do you remember the 'braid or looped-weave' debate, sparked off by the braided bands in the Shaw collection?), on exhibitions and new publications. It was not uncommon to overhear members comment: 'the best non-specialist newsletter in the textile field'!

OATG was obviously a success. Our membership soon passed the 100 mark (currently it stands at 150) with a surprising number not from Oxford or even the South of England, but from far away places, including Saudia Arabia, Australia, and the United States. To these members, the attraction was the Newsletter: only rarely would they be able to catch one of our lectures or events while visiting Oxford.

Occasionally I met one or the other of these distant members at conferences or professional visits abroad, and they inevitably praised our publication. Phyllis had found the perfect mix in putting together each issue.

The initial focus was on our collections in Oxford, and she did not lose sight of that. There always was plenty of space to inform readers of local events of interest. But these never were parochial. They concentrated, instead, on important new developments or discoveries, and our Oxford collections and research results were usually put into the wider perspective of collections elsewhere.

Personally I especially enjoyed and admired Phyllis' editorials. I am very fond of her writing style, which is concise, in impeccable English, but conveys warmth and humour – and to see that she retained this remarkable clarity even at times when her personal life was becoming very difficult was reason for great admiration. OATG will miss her guidance, but we hope that we will be able to read many more contributions from Phyllis' pen. I toast our South Coast of England correspondent!

Ruth Barnes

..... And a new editor takes over

Nick Fielding reflects on the daunting task of taking over editing the newsletter from Phyllis Nye and offers a few clues to his own interests in Asian textiles.

Like most other members of the OATG, I always assumed that the newsletter appeared three times a year, without fail, as the result of some kind of magic process. Issue after issue arrived, filled with wonderful, insightful articles, often by specialists in the field. Many of the articles are unique. No specialist journal or commercial magazine (I shall mention no names) has ever shown that much interest in documenting so systematically the wonders of Asian textiles.

Despite the minimal resources, Phyllis has done an amazing job to keep the magazine breathing for nearly 40 issues. During her time it has grown in both size and ambition and the list of previous contributors reads like a Who's Who of the world of textile specialists. In fact, that would be too narrow a category. Historians, weavers, collectors, curators — all these and many other groups have made it onto the pages.

How else would we know about so many of the amazing collections to be found across Britain, were it not for the newsletter? Looking back over previous issues one cannot help noticing that that we have covered huge areas of Asia and dealt with subjects as diverse as dyes, patterns, history, notable collections and many other subjects. →

→ A few words about myself. I have been a textile collector since the age of 18 or thereabouts. I don't know where this preoccupation came from, although I know my grandfather used to make tapestries and would often make his own clothes, including his shoes. I have no such skills, but I remember in the early 70s visiting a village sale and seeing a couple of fabrics that caught my eye. I bought them (they were about a pound each) and somehow managed to hold onto them. About 10 years ago I retrieved them from the box in which I had packed them away to have a closer look.

One of them turned out to be a Persian silk embroidery dating from around 1800, while the other was an Indian textile, probably made for the Zoroastrian community in Bombay and dating to around the middle of the 19th century. Both are now framed and on display at home.

All the years I have travelled as a journalist 1 have tried to bring back textiles from my travels. At first it was not very directed collecting, just a desire to have something beautiful and handmade as a memento of a trip. But gradually I became more interested, particularly in Central Asian textiles. There is something special about the vibrancy, colour and form of textiles from this part of the world that strikes a chord with me. I was bewitched by dress panels from the Afghan tribes and by the brilliance of the Lakai embroideries. But then I began to come across Kyrgyz embroideries, often on trips to Istanbul, which soon turned into hunting expeditions. I was not the first person, nor will I be the last, to become infatuated with this wonderful city, where so many treasures from Central Asia surface in the bazaars and markets.

Soon it became clear to me that it was the textiles of the Kyrgyz nomads that somehow pleased me more than any other. That feeling was consolidated two years ago when I was able to make my first trip to the country. Although the great era of embroidery has now passed, as in so many parts of Central Asia, there are still wonderful things to be seen there and a great collection in the National Museum in Bishkek, the capital.

So there you have it, the confessions of a textile collector. Beautiful things made for use – that, I realise, is what excites me. And, clearly from the evidence of our meetings, events and newsletter, the same can be said for many others. I hope I can sustain that excitement during my editorship of this newsletter. I will write more about the future of the newsletter at a later date, but for now I will simply say that I very much hope I can keep up the high standards set by my predecessor.

Looks easy, doesn't it? Nick Fielding fails dismally to impress a skilled Kyrgyz weaver.

Remarkable find in 2500-year old Chinese tomb

Chinese archaeologists have found textiles in a mysterious tomb dating back nearly 2,500 years. The tomb, located in eastern Jiangxi Province, is one of the oldest ever discovered in China and dates to the Eastern Zhou Dynasty which existed from 770-221 BCE.

The textiles are well preserved and feature interesting dyeing and weaving techniques. According to Wang Yarong, an archaeologist who specialises in textiles, the finds will rewrite the history of China's textile industry. "Chinese anthropologists suspect the textile industry burgeoned in distant periods of history and this is the first piece of concrete evidence to support their hypothesis," she told the Xinhua news agency.

She and her colleagues have so far uncovered more than 20 pieces of fine silk, flax and cotton cloth in 22 out of a total of 47 coffins unearthed from the tomb in Lijia village in Jing'an county. "Most of them are fine fabrics and the largest piece is 130cm long, 52cm wide and woven with complicated techniques," said Wang, who is a researcher with the textiles preservation centre at the Capital Museum in Beijing.

Infra-red examination of one piece of cotton cloth has shown it to be partly coloured in red and black. The red dye use was vermilion. Professor Zhang Xiaomei, who carried out the infra-red tests says this pre-dates our knowledge of the first use of vermilion by almost a millennium. Vermilion dyes only arrived in Europe in the 17^{lh} century although they were known in the Arab world as early as the 8th century.

The tomb, 16 metres long, 11.5m wide and three metres deep, was discovered in December 2006 and excavations were completed at the end of July. More than 200 objects were excavated, including copperware, jade, gold and handicrafts made from bamboo. The items also included a well-preserved fan 37cm long and 25cm wide. Four of the coffins contain the remains of young women, thought to have been sacrificed alongside their owner or master.

Arts and Ethnology Centre opens in Luang Prabang, Laos

The Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre is a private, non-profit institution located in a historic building in Luang Prabang, Laos, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. As an advocate for the survival and transmission of the cultural heritage of Laos and a resource for the development of the traditional arts, the Centre's primary activities are two-fold: a dynamic and insightful exhibition space organized by ethnic group, and a handicrafts store directly linked with artisan communities.

Future plans include temporary exhibits, workshops with visiting artisans, handicraft design development, and specialised tours and study trips. Attached to the Centre is Le Patio Cafe, run by L'Elephant Restaurant, serving food and drinks with a view of Phousi hill.

The Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre is the first exhibition space in Luang Prabang dedicated to the collection, preservation, interpretation, and presentation of the traditional arts and lifestyles of Laos. Luang Prabang, a provincial town of 60,000 residents, is famed for its scenic location on a peninsula between the Mekong and Nam Khan rivers, 60-plus Buddhist temples, French colonial architecture, royal Lao history, and relaxed, small-town atmosphere. →

NEWS

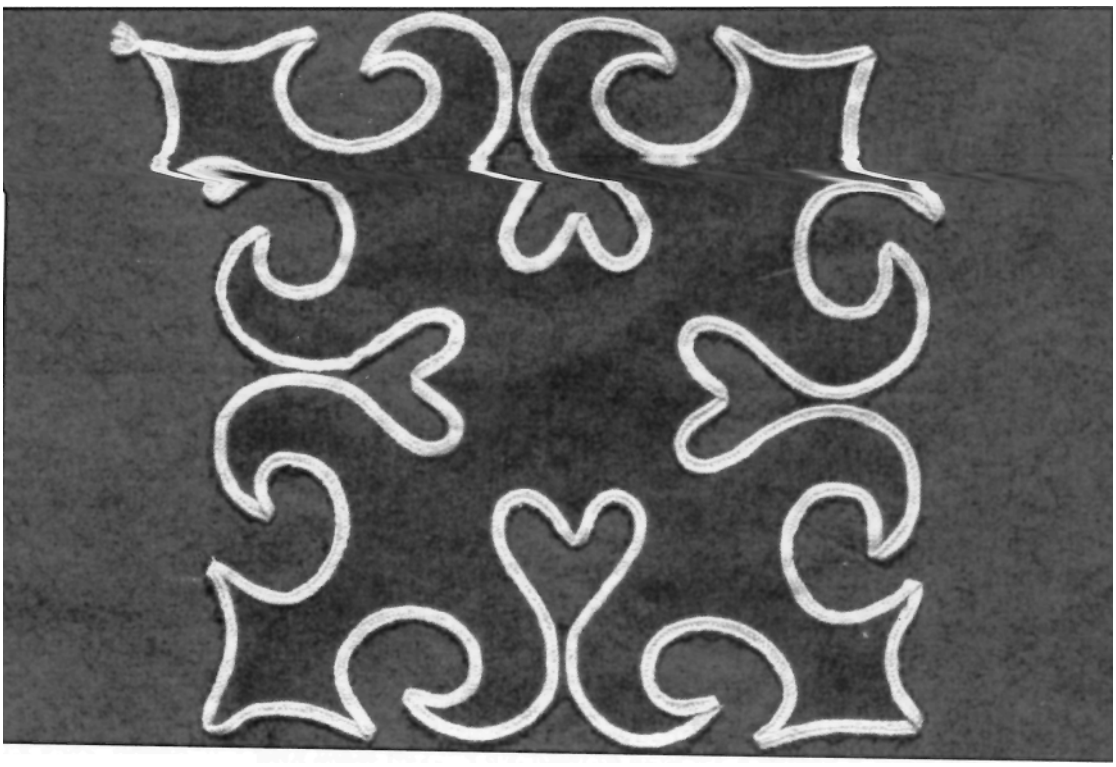
→ It is the most popular tourism destination in Laos, and the Centre will serve as an educational tool for both local residents and tourists. The Centre has a permanent exhibition focusing on different cultural aspects of seven ethnic groups, including the Akha, Hmong, Khmu, Mien Yao, Mun Yao, Tai Dam and Tai Lue groups. Longer-term plans include a small resource centre, with films/DVDs, books, photographs, and articles, which can be viewed on computers with internet research capabilities. The Centre also has a small museum shop to support village handicraft producers.

As our overall mission is educational, we also aim to raise awareness among Lao communities and youth about Laos' ethnic peoples and arts. This is done by offering free admission to any Lao citizen, inviting school groups to visit the Centre, linking with local libraries and the Children's Cultural Centre, and inviting visits by government offices, local villages, tourism businesses and guides, and craft sellers.

The centre aims to become a focus for learning and exchange on the ethnology and artisanal heritage of Laos, while promoting appreciation for the cultures and skills of Laos' peoples, stimulating investment and preservation of their crafts, and supporting their sustainable livelihood development.

The team of people setting up the Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre are dedicated, skilled and from diverse backgrounds. We have experience in textiles, curating, museum cataloguing and preservation, and tourism development. We are both Lao and foreign citizens, and while committed to the conservation of Laos' cultural and artistic heritage, believe that culture is living and evolving, thus are forward-thinking in our approach. We are open to exploring collaborations with like-minded partners.

For more information, please contact:
Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre, Ban Khamyong, Luang Prabang, Lao PDR
www.taeclaos.org; Email: information@taeclaos.org; Tel/fax: +856 71 253364



Yao motif from Laos

Jun Tomita, master of the Japanese art of kasuri (ikat) weaving

Coloured Textures: Jun Tomita and the Art of Kasuri is at Daiwa Foundation Japan House until 26 October. 9.30-5.00pm, 13-14 Cornwall Terrace, London NW1 4QP.

Around 200 people attended the opening of this exhibition in central London in September and it is well worth dropping in if you have never seen modem Japanese ikat – known in Japan as *kasuri* – weaving and dyeing techniques. Jun Tomita is a leading exponent of this traditional technique, where threads are bound together and sections are dyed before being painted. The treated thread is woven into fabric so that each piece is completely unique in texture and pattern.

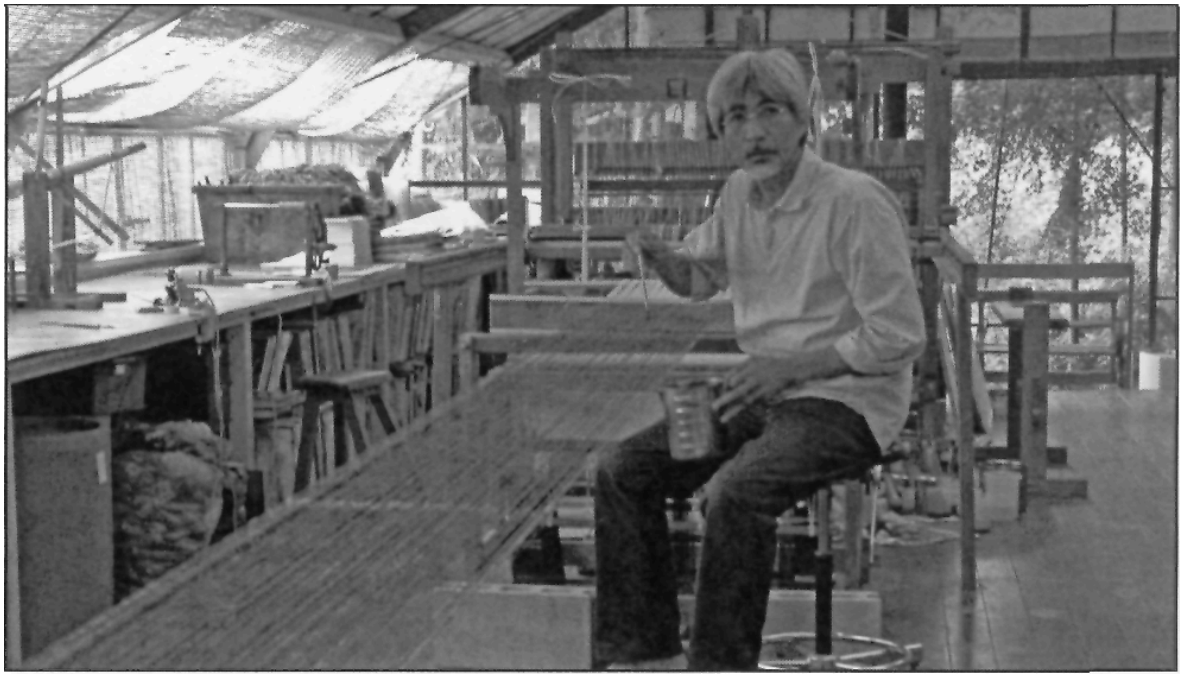
Tomita has received many international accolades for his work: Matilda McQuaid, who co-curated the highly regarded exhibition, 'Structure and Surface: Contemporary Japanese Textiles' at the Museum of Modern Art, in 2000 New York has said: 'The beauty in the work lies in the variations of tone and the soft lines that seem to emanate from each boundary of colour.'

Born in 1951 in Toyama, Japan Tomita has taught at the University College for Creative Arts in Farnham and at Kyoto College of Art. He has exhibited worldwide, notably as part of the *Structure and Surface: Contemporary Japanese Textiles* exhibition at MOMA, New York.

His work can be found in many public collections, including the Victoria and Albert Museum, the South Australian State Art Gallery, Kunstindustrimuseet I Oslo, the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, the Israel Museum, the St Louis Art Museum, and the Toyama Modern Art Museum.

"In my works," Tomita says, "I want to create a space and a time in which the observer can experience solitude – something similar to what I feel when I am before nature, where I can feel a time and space filled with peace."

Coloured Textures: Jun Tomita and the Art of Kasuri is organised by the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation in association with Katie Jones. It is supported by the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation.



Jun Tomita in his studio

VISITS

Washington's Textile Museum set for major expansio

The Textile Museum in Washington has recently announced that it will open a second site early in 2008 dedicated to exhibitions and educational activities.

Situated in the city's Penn Quarter, the new venue on 7th Street NW, will allow larger and more varied temporary exhibitions and will provide a further 23,400 square feet of exhibition space, almost doubling that which is presently available. It is located near the National Mall, between the National Gallery of Art and the Smithsonian American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery. Other museums are also located nearby.

The Museum was founded in 1925 by George Hewitt Myers who began collecting in the 1890s and started the museum with 275 rugs and another 60 related textiles. By the time he died in 1957 the museum's holdings had grown to encompass fabrics from all over the world. Today it is one of the world's foremost specialised museums and receives around 30,000 visitors each year.

Exterior of the new museum building

NEW ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATE

FROM 1st OCTOBER 2007

As we announced in the June newsletter, we have had to raise the OATG annual subscription rate

because of the increase in postal charges.

The new rates are:-

£15.00 for a single member

£20.00 for joint membership

For those paying in dollars, please make cheques out for $30.00 to Ruth Barnes – not OATG – or we can now accept payment by PayPal, but only for those with no sterling account.

Please see the note below about how this can be done.

Please may I again encourage as many of you as possible to pay by Banker's Order. You will find a form with the newsletter.

Finally, I have moved. My new address for all correspondence is:-

The Old Vicarage, Asthall, Burford, OX 18 4HW

Joyce Seaman – membership secretary

PAYMENTS FROM OVERSEAS

In order to encourage membership from those living outside the UK and to facilitate their purchase of back issues of the Newsletter, OATG has opened an account with **PayPal** so that those without a Sterling bank account can still make Sterling payments.

At the present time *only* payments from those without Sterling accounts will be accepted via PayPal and those able to do so should continue to make payments via Sterling cheque or Bankers Order.

The OATG website - www.oatg.org.uk – carries information on the **PayPal** payment on the Membership, Newsletter and Newsletter Back Issue pages.

The OATG web editor, Pamela Cross, is assisting the Treasurer and Membership Secretary with the operation of the PayPal account and questions on the account may be addressed to her via the

web@oatg.org.uk link on the website.

Ceremonial coverlets from Japan

Hiroko McDermott discovers that Japanese embroidered *fukusa* textiles traditionally used for covering gifts found many admirers in the West

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Viewing the Japanese fabrics shown at the Paris World Fair in 1878, Philippe Burty wrote an enthusiastic review of the Japanese exhibition: "The *fukusa*s – fabric squares used to wrap a lacquer box that contained a letter, frits, or presents sent to a friend by means of a servant – are the most interesting of all. The boldness of the silhouettes, the beauty of the colour contrasts, are unrivalled in any other people's art. Our friends Edmond de Goncourt and G. de Nittis have collected the finest specimens known in France and have had them framed like masterpieces of painting .... Sometimes these pieces are entirely covered with embroidery, either flat or in a relief calculated to catch and hold the light – as in the two pigeons in E. de Goncourt's collection. Sometimes they are partially painted with a brush with marvellous freedom and flow."(l)

In present Japan, the *fukusa* is rarely seen, and even more rarely used except perhaps at a tea ceremony. A piece of cloth 10 inches square or so in size, the tea-*fukusa* is tucked in between a tea

［図２］西陣織・袱紗（『明治六年澳国博覧会出品写真帖』による）

Fig.1 Display of *fukusa* and nishijin silk at the 1873 Vienna World Fair

master's *obi* and *kimono* and half hung so as to be pulled out when needed, for instance, to dust a tea scoop or a tea container.

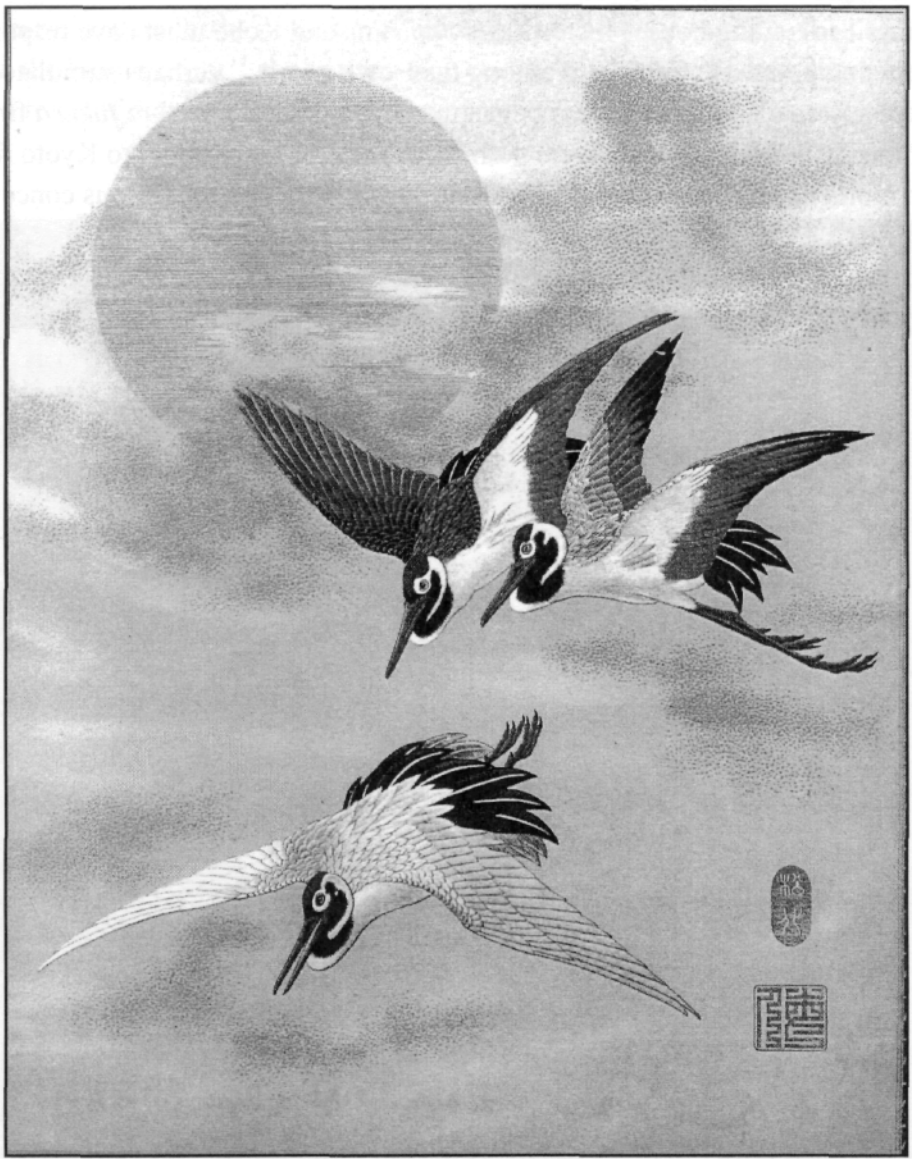
The other type called *kake-fukusa* (cover-*fokusa*) has almost disappeared from use in Japanese life. More than two decades ago, I was rather surprised to find such a *fukusa,* three-feet square with an auspicious pattern, hanging on a wall in a Japanese museum. It was the first time I had seen a *kake-fukusa,* which was labelled as a congratulatory gift cover.

This type of *fukusa* has been used in the West, I later learned, as a wall hanging, a bed cover, or even as a framed picture, as P. Burty mentioned. While recently studying late 19th century Japa-

nese textile art, I came across some sources about *fukusa.* So, this brief essay will discuss how the *fukusa* became a specimen of Japanese textile art and then a piece of interior design once it caught Westerners' eyes.

Unlike many other types of Japanese works of art and art crafts, such as porcelain or lacquer ware, textiles – be they costumes or *fukusa* – were latecomers to the catalogue of Japanese exports to the West. *The fukusa* in fact first became known to foreign buyers perhaps no earlier than in the 1860s, shortly after Japan's treaty ports were opened in 1858-59. Unfortunately, no known document confirms its use as an export item at this time.

No *fukusa* seems to have been shown in the 1867 Paris World Fair, when Japan, represented by the Tokugawa shogunate government as well as by Saga and Satsuma provinces, participated in an international exhibition for the first time. Several years after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, however, a large amount *of fukusa* seems to have been shipped for the 1873 Vienna World Fair, the first of a series of world fairs the modern Japanese government would participate in over the next 70 years (Fig 1) (2). In these early days government officials still had little knowl-



'Cranes', in S. Bing Collection, From GA Audsley, *The Ornamental Arts of Japan, 1842-45*

edge or experience of what to display at such occasions: thus, how this traditional cover cloth came to be chosen to attract the attention of the Western public is unfortunately not recorded.

But official documents do reveal that, for the Vienna Fair, the new Meiji government commissioned from Kyoto Nishijin silk firms a total of 700 *fukusa*, of three different sizes, along with 100 mini ones intended for use as pin-cushions. Whether these *fukusa* were old, already in stock, or newly made is unclear, as is how well they sold. Yet, the sales in Vienna must have been encouraging, since Japanese merchants exhibited at least 600 *fukusa* at the next world fair in Philadelphia three years later(3).

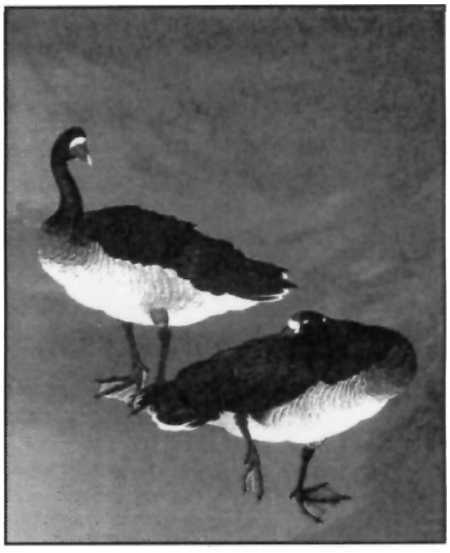
In Japan more silk firms and merchants began to notice the foreign interest in *fukusa* in the late 1870s. For instance, the house of Iida, a Kyoto silk drapery firm, received in 1876 its first visit from a foreign buyer of the Smith-Bakers Co. of Kobe, who purchased a group of *fukusa* (4). Making a surprisingly good profit from this transaction with an American company, Iida would soon hire its own needle workers to produce more *fukusa*s. This transaction took place during the very same year Japan's participation in the Philadelphia Centennial World Fair was initiating its remarkable success in the American market.

Some American trading houses located in Yokohama and Kobe must have responded quickly to the growing popularity of *fukusa* among their own people. Perhaps stimulated by the Westerners' interest, some Kyoto merchants began to show increasingly more *fukusa* from the 1877 Kyoto Exhibition. Foreign tourists were permitted, from 1872, to travel to Kyoto during the annual Kyoto Exhibitions, and what sorts of goods attracted them was the serious concern of the entire Kyoto industry.

In addition to their early interest in Japanese prints and illustrated books, some Parisians expressed excitement, in 1878, with other types of Japanese art as well, such as the textiles. A regular commentator to the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts,* Burty himself had been trained as a decorative designer at the Gobelins tapestry manufactory. "It was he" according to E.G. Holt, "who coined the word *japonisme* in 1871 to designate European art that reflected Japanese influence."

Burty not only "became a collector and connoisseur of Japanese objets d'art, but also wrote enthusiastic and instructive reviews in many French periodicals that furthered an apprecia-

A bundle of dried abalone strips (tabane noshi) and a branch of orange tree (tachibana), embroidered linen, Mid-Edo Period. 65.5cm x 65cm

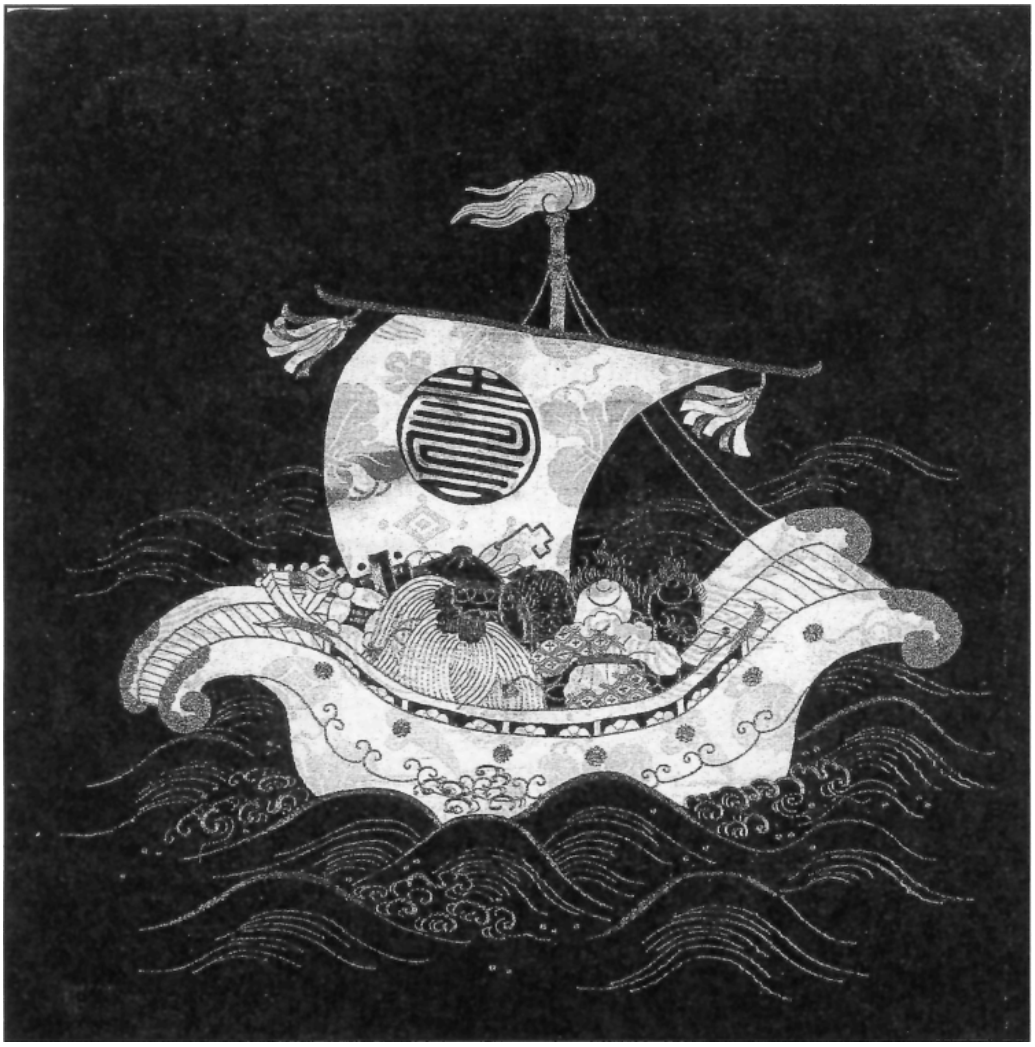


'Geese', from GA Audsley, *The Ornamental Arts of Japan (1882-85)* in S Bing Collection.

tion for Japanese art and the work of those Western painters influenced by it." His friend E. Goncour was also fascinated by the "Japanese dessin," which a Japanese painter performed with a brush at this Fair. The "japonisme" movement was about to peak.

Another Parisian dealer and collector of Japanese art, S. Bing, may have bought *fukusa* around this time, perhaps at the Fair, at the recently opened Paris branch of the trading house of Mitsui, or during his 1881 visit to Japan. Of the seven *fukusa* introduced in colour in G. A. Audsley's *The ornamental arts of Japan* (London, 1882-85), three belonged to Bing (Fig 2), while four others belonged to English collectors, such as E. Hart and W. C. Alexander. This book was one of the early major Western publications on Japanese art, and probably the first to include illustrations of *fukusa.*

During her first visit to Japan from the autumn of 1884, an American woman, Eliza R. Scidmore, became fascinated with the textile works of Kyoto, particularly its embroideries. In her book, *Jinrikisha Days in Japan* (New York and London, 1891), she wrote, "Their range of stitches, their ingenious methods and combinations, and the variety of effects attained with the needle and a few strands of coloured silk, easily place the Japanese first among all embroideries.... They can simulate the hair and fur of animals, the plumage of birds, the hard scales of fishes and dragons, the bloom of fruit, the dew on flowers, the muscles of bodies, tiny faces and hands, the patterned folds of drapery, the clear reflection of lacquer, the glaze of porcelains, and the pat-



Takarabune, *Treasure Ship.* Board-resist-dyed (itajune) and embroidered satin.

ina of bronzes in a way impossible to any but the Japanese hand and needle."(5)

Very keen about the *fukusa*, she saw some new products at the house of Nishimura, the largest silk-shop in Kyoto, wherein "curtains, *kakemono*, screens, and *fukusa* are heaped high." At the same time, she noticed that "in spite of the reputation and the artistic possibilities of the establishment, it sends out much cheap, tasteless, and inferior work to meet the demands of foreign trade, and of the tourists." For the old embroideries, she had a favourite dealer, "my uncle of Awata," who ran a dark shop for used clothing. In an apparent reference to *The Mikado*, she continued, "Gilbert and Sullivan unwittingly made his fortune, and the old dealer could not at first understand why the foreign buyers, hitherto indifferent, should suddenly crowd his dingy rooms, empty his godowns, and keep his men busy collecting a new stock."

Three years later, however, she wrote: "The stores of *fukusa*s seemed inexhaustible a few years ago, and I can remember days of delight in that ill-smelling old corner of Awata, when one out of every five *fukusa* was a treasure, while now there are hardly five good ones in a hundred of those needle pictures." Her uncle of Awata now had a large, new building, but "prices had trebled and were advancing steadily, with far less embarrassment of choice in the stock than formerly."

As Scidmore noticed, the Japanese by this time had begun to produce more various types of textile art works with further sophisticated subjects and techniques. One of the few traditional types of Japanese furniture that fit smoothly as a piece of interior decoration into Western style architectural space, the folding-screen had been known to Westerners before the Meiji Restoration. A Kyoto dealer Tanaka Rihei is said to have been the pioneer of sales of embroidery screens in Kobe in the mid-1860s. In the Philadelphia Fair, the Japanese official textile exhibition was centred on embroidery screens: six out of the nine exhibitors in the official catalogue of the Fine Arts Department displayed them.(6)

In the early Meiji era (1868-1912), the Japanese had desperately been searching for what they could manufacture for the foreign market with the materials and skills acquired from their pre-modern experience. However, once technical problems, for instance, of how to weave wider cloth than the traditional standard of 13 inches, were solved, other types of larger fabric products, such as table cloths, bed covers, window curtains or wall hangings, began to be exhibited at World Fairs, in Barcelona (1888), Paris (1889), and Chicago (1893), culminating in the 1900s, in Paris (1900), Liege (1904), St. Louis (1905), and London (1910). Textile art objects, of *yuzen*-dyed cut-velvet or embroidery, became the pride of Kyoto industry, and production would last up through the second decade of the 20th century.

Shortly before 1900, the imperial household and government ministries began to use such expensive and gorgeous textile art objects as special presentation gifts, for instance, to Queen Victoria and the Russian Empress. When the German emperor's brother, Prince Alfred Wilhelm Heinrich, made his third visit to Japan in 1899, an art exhibition was organized, exclusively for him at the request of the Imperial Court, to display both new and old objects at the Kyoto Imperial Museum: the Museum virtually functioned as a sales floor. Among the 200-odd textile and other objects shown him most were for sale, and they included about fifty *fukusa* costing from 4.5 to 45 yen a piece. The Prince was thought to be an art lover, but what he actually purchased is not recorded.(7)

Whereas such silk houses of Nishimura and Iida were energetically leading production of such expensive and gorgeous textile works of art, the *fukusa* seems to have become even more a souvenir item for tourists. In the third edition (1898) of his *Things Japanese*, a popular guide book to Japanese life and culture, Basil H. Chamberlain had an entry on "embroidery" revised and

updated (8): "the embroidery and brocade and painted silks of more modem days possess exquisite beauty.... Pity only, that the embroiderers tend more and more to drop patterns of dragons and phoenixes, ...and actually elect to work from photographs instead," because "the globe-trotters prefer these less aesthetic pieces with a real jinrikisha or a real street lamp-post."

Recommending "all who can to visit the Kyoto embroidery and velvet-shops, and to take plenty of money in their purse," he concluded, "there may be two opinions about Japanese paintings; there can be only one about Japanese embroidery."

In the beginning of the 1900s, the English photographer Herbert G. Ponting was fascinated not only by Mt. Fuji but also by some artists and their works, and photographed several famous artists at work both in Kyoto and Tokyo, such as Namikawa Yasuyuki and Kaneda Kenjiro (9). Ponting had the rare opportunity to observe and to photograph the 27 year-old Nagara Yozo, "regarded as the foremost exponent of the art of needlework in Japan," (see front cover picture of Yozo embroidering a lion's head.) The embroidery panel, Ponting wrote in his book *In Lotus-Land Japan* (London, 1910), "when complete, would have some millions of stitches in it, and that the price – 50 pounds – was not out of the way, seeing that in no other land could it be made at all." He also noticed that, "The Kyoto embroiderers are practically all men. Very few women are employed, except for the coarser work."

By the early 1900s, the *fukusa* seems to have been overshadowed by other types of Japanese textile production. Nevertheless, foreign demand for *fukusa* seems to have lasted. Attractive, but less costly *fukusa* continued to be manufactured for the overseas market. The *fukusa* I saw hanging in a Japanese museum two decades ago was actually such a cotton, not silk, product printed with a folk-art pattern.

Footnotes

1. Philippe Burty, "Le Japon ancien et le Japon moderne," *L'Art* 14 (1878): 241-44. For the English translation and all the other information on Burty in this essay, see E. G. Holt, *The Expanding World of Art* (New Haven, c. 1988), pp. 22-43.
2. Tsunoyama Yukihiro, *Study of Vienna World Fair* (Osaka, 2000), pp. 404-408.
3. *Catalogues of Meiji Japan's Exhibitions of Art Works in the World's Fairs* (Tokyo, 1977), pp. 213-4
4. *One hundred years of the Takashimaya* (Kyoto, 1941), p. 15.
5. *op. cit.* pp. 267-71.
6. *International Exhibition, 1876, Official Catalogue of the Japanese Sections* (Philadelphia, 1876)
7. *Kyoto Fine Arts Society's Journal*, no. 86 (1899.08), pp. 22-28.
8. *op. cit.* pp. 127-8.
9. *op. cit.* pp. 49-50. Ponting was in and out of Japan in 1901-1905, and his photos taken in Japan were first published in *Japanese Studies* (Tokyo, 1906).

The Art of Gift Covering—How the *fukusa* was used

The gift is placed on a tray or in a box (either of them is usually lacquered, and often specially made for the occasion), and the *fukusa* is placed over the gift on the tray, or over the box (just like a coffin is covered by a cloth or a flag!). The receiver of the gift is expected to return the *fukusa* to the sender after having the pleasure of seeing this cover cloth which is selected, or even specially made, for the receiver and for the occasion.

If the receiver wishes to send some gift in return, not only to return the *fukusa*, the *fukusa* is turned over and placed over the return gift with its lining side facing up. Thus, the *fukusa* is always made with a lining, and the lining often has some design as well. And the *fukusa* is never placed under the gift tray or box, unlike *the furoshiki* wrapping cloth, which is of a single layer of cloth.

Japanese wrapping textiles at the Horniman Museum

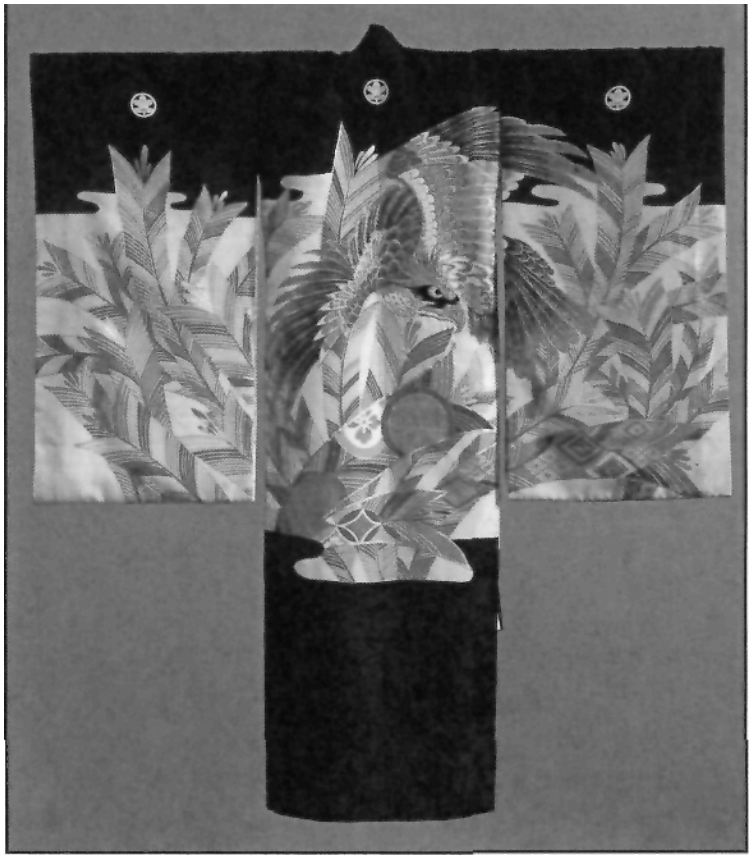
This exhibition, focussing on textiles and costume, is the culmination of a year-long project to explore the Horniman Museum's Japanese collections, during which two curators from Japanese museums helped to catalogue much of the Museum's Japanese collection.

The theme is the use of textiles and dress to wrap the body and to wrap gifts, and how these 'wrappings' are used to express ideas about gender, status and respect.

The centrepiece is a wedding couple, the bride wrapped in a multi-layered costume with a brocaded silk outer robe, or *uchikake*, and wearing a *tsunokakushi,* or 'horn-hider', the headdress said to conceal her metaphorical 'horns' from her husband until after the wedding. Sections on the dolls used in the Boys' Festival and the Girls' Festival, which indicate the costumes worn by samurai and courtiers in the past, flank the wedding couple.

Two child's kimonos, used to wrap a baby on its first presentation to the guardian deity at a Shinto shrine, reflect different ideas of gender, the boy's decorated with symbols of falconry, the girl's a pink concoction of flowers and *temari*, toy balls wrapped in silk threads, a collection of which is also on display.

Garments from various levels of nineteenth century Japanese society reveal rank and status, from a fisherman's robe decorated in *tsutsugaki* technique with motifs to celebrate a successful catch to a silk townswoman's kimono first exhibited at the 1910 Anglo-Japanese exhibition at Shepherd's Bush.



Boy's *kimono,* hawk design.
Image © Heinz Schneebeli

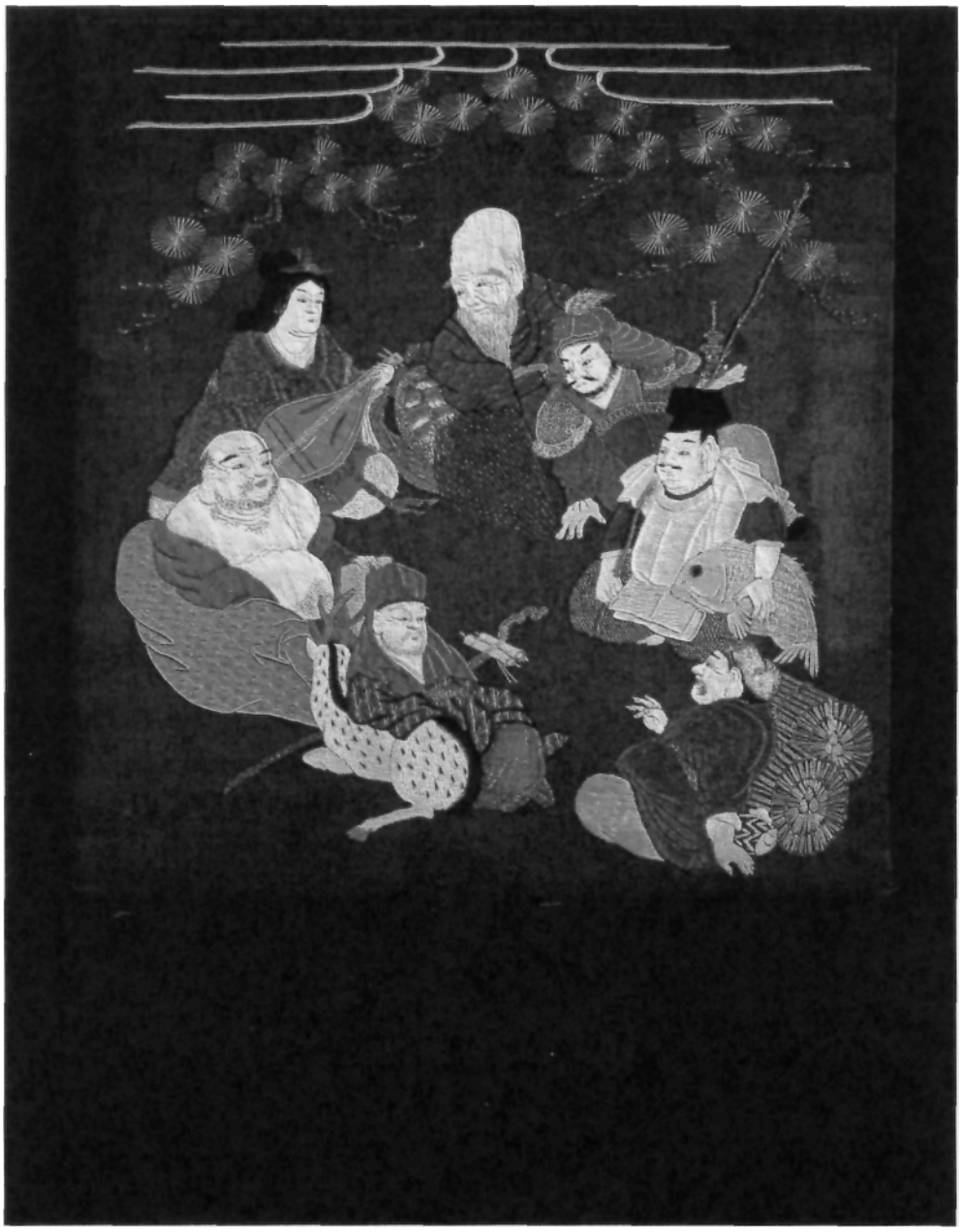
The costumes worn by actors are represented by a range of masks, including Nô, Kyôgen and Bugaku examples, as well as a horse's parade mask. A selection of *netsuke,* the toggles used to secure items such as tobacco pipes which were worn hanging from a man's belt, are also on display.

Wrapping cloths, *furoshiki,* and gift-covering cloths, *fukusa,* appear in a section introducing some of the techniques used in Japanese textiles, including embroidery, *kasuri,* stencilling *(yuzen* and *bingata)* and *shibori.* A video showing *shibori* experts at work completes the exhibition.

An exhibition catalogue, *Wrapping Japan,* is available from the Museum shop for £6 or by mail order from shop@museum.ac.uk.

The exhibition Wrapping Japan runs until 27 April 2008.

Horniman Museum and Gardens, 100 London Road, Forest Hill, London, SE23 3PQ . Tel: 0208 699 1872.



Fukusa embroidered with the Seven Gods of Happiness. Image © Heinz Schneebeli

Cataloguing the Iranian Qajar textile collection at the V&A

In 1869 the South Kensington Museum had only one Iranian textile in its collection. Now its successor, the V&A, has a world-historic collection of more than 650 items. Cataloguing it is already turning up some interesting information, writes Jennifer Wearden.

I am grateful to the Editor of the OATG Newsletter for encouraging me to write a short account of a cataloguing project currently taking place in the V&A Museum in London.

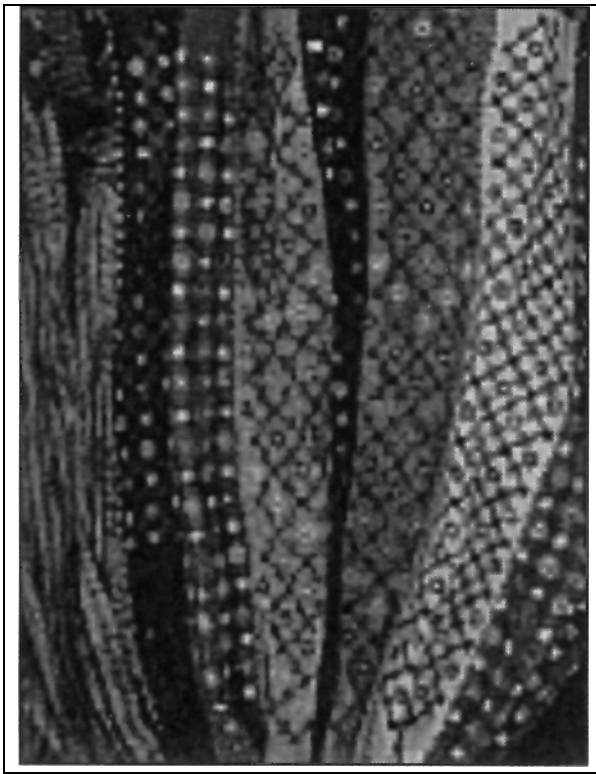
It began almost a year ago with the aim of cataloguing the Museum's collection of woven, printed and embroidered Iranian textiles from the Qajar period [1796-1925] and it is supported by a grant from the Iran Heritage Foundation which covers the expenses of the two volunteer cataloguers, Dr Patricia L Baker and myself.

Dr Baker is an independent researcher specialising in the dress, textiles and glass of the Islamic Middle East and is the author *of Islamic Textiles* (British Museum Press, 1995) and *Islam & the Religious Arts* (Continuum, 2004). I was Senior Curator (Textiles) in the Department of Furniture, Textiles & Fashion in the Victoria & Albert Museum until recently and our work is supervised by the Asian Department.

There are about 650 textiles, excluding carpets, ranging in size from tiny fragments to complete hangings and covers measuring 2 x 3 m. There are woven silks, woven woollen fabrics, printed cottons, ikats, metal thread embroidery, whitework, Resht panels, *nakshe* embroidery and combinations of quilting and embroidery.

The items include covers, hangings, dress fabrics, shawls, caps, talismanic textiles, gun holsters and other hunting equipment, wrestler's breeches and fashionable garments.

We are cataloguing each piece in terms of a physical description and condition and attach-



Left: Embroidered legging for women's trousers, Zoroastrian community, Iran.

Above: Printed cotton

ing one or more digital images (for record purposes only) to each entry. In this way the collection will be more easily accessible to researchers and more specific information, such as a note of comparative pieces, can be added at a later date.

As I write, we have catalogued and photographed over 450 textiles, so we have some way to go before we complete the project.

In 1869 the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria & Albert Museum) noted that out of 116 textiles of Near and Middle Eastern manufacture, only one was classified as Iranian. The collection grew steadily in the following years primarily through the work of Robert Murdoch Smith who acted as an agent for the Museum and it was with his assistance that the Qajar Shah Nasiral-Din gave a number of superb textiles and carpets to the Museum in 1877.

The vast majority of the 650-plus textiles in the collection were acquired in the last quarter of the 19th century and size and range of it suggest that the V&A has one of the largest collections of Qajar textiles in the world. We hope our work will draw attention to this important and relatively unpublished section of the V&A's collection.

Most museums in the West have acquired examples of Qajar textiles, but the majority remains unpublished. There are four fairly recent publications on the subject: *Pfauen, Bluten Und Zypressen: Persische Textilien Der Qajar-Zeit* by Nabholz-Kartaschoff and Langer, Zurich 2005, published to accompany a museum exhibition; *An Introduction to Qajar Era Dress* by Vogelsang-Eastwood and van Doom, Rotterdam 2002, based on three collections in Leiden; *Persian Printed Cottons,* by Wearden, London 1989, illustrating pieces from the V&A; *Persische Seiden* by Neumann and Mirza, Leipzig 1988, Safavid and Qajar woven textiles from East German collections.

It seems there is increasing interest in 19th century Iranian cultural history and so the time is right to describe and publicise this large textile resource in London.

It is too early to draw conclusions from our examination of the collection but we have been impressed by the quantity of metal thread used in many of the woven textiles. Most of this has worn away and it leaves no trace on the front of the fabric, but a close inspection on the back often reveals evidence of silver and silver-gilt strip wound around a silk core to make it flexible. This simple discovery has two potential consequences:

- If many or most Qajar silks were woven with large qualities of metal thread, we need to re-assess their aesthetic qualities and imagine their simple floral patterns shimmering against a background of silver or gold.
- Given the quantities of metal thread used, and considering the economic difficulties experienced several times in 19th century Iran, it might be possible to suggests dates when these rich textiles could have been made.

Through the Asian Department we are developing proposals for a publication and for a conference on Qajar textiles. Needless to say, both are heavily dependent on outside funding and, therefore, may not appear in the near future.

The book would illustrate many of the V&A's textiles and would include essays giving an economic and social overview of textiles crafts in Iran, the function of textiles and the influence of Iranian textile design on 19th century British designers.

It is the latter theme we wish to develop for the conference: many British designers stated that their work was being inspired and influenced by 'Persian' design, but how accurate was their understanding of those principles?

The conference will explore three themes: the textile industry in Iran in the 19th century and the history and impact of British imports; the Iranian textiles known in Britain in the 19th century from exports and from international exhibitions; British understanding of 'Persian' patterns – fact and fiction.

If we can make it happen, it should be of interest to many people and will encourage cross-cultural debate and open avenues for further investigation.

We will keep you up to date.

VISITS AND MEETINGS

Visit to the British Museum Store and to the Bhutanese and Indonesian collection of Lesley Pullen

On Saturday 15 June the members who attended had a double treat. First, at the British Museum Store they were welcomed by Helen Wolfe who had gone to a lot of trouble to set out for us both textiles from Siberia and a representative selection of the 900 pieces of Palestinian costume they have in store.

The Siberian costume was mostly fur with bead embroidery and felt appliqué, boots, bags, a delightful small fur shirt or parka for a child from Yakutsk, an apron with amulets which included a row of metal rings about two inches in diameter and a most interesting linen shirt for a woman, with wool embroidery, beads and pewter from Salekhard, acquired by Sire Henry Hoyle Howarth in 1898. For those who wish to learn more, the library at the BM's Centre for Anthropology is recommended.

The Palestinian costumes had been carefully selected by Helen Wolfe to show the styles and techniques from a wide range of villages. Most of the garments dated from the late 19th to early 20th centuries and each village had its own style. A good deal of work was done by young girls preparing squares and strips to be incorporated later into garments for their trousseaus.

The handwoven fabric was good for cross stitch, often done in silk floss from Syria, later using DMC. In the north, it was mainly cross stitch, but in the south other stitches such as satin stitch were used and some couched work.

The coats were worn with trousers and some of the wedding dresses had an opening from

Detail from a Siberian costume at the British Museum

Indonesian ikat from Lesley Pullen's collection

the hem to waist and a white undergarment would be worn. The colours of the fabrics were either a natural white or dark indigo - the darker, the more expensive. Husbands would sometimes buy expensive professional embroidered pieces to give to their brides. Good items of embroidery would be transferred to new garments when the original wore out.

The garments were mostly coats or dresses, but there were two short-sleeved jackets, showing signs of Turkish influence. Some shawls, two headdresses and a child's bonnet were included. Since the creation of Israel some villages no longer exist, but some work is still done in Lebanon and in the refugee camps. We were very grateful to Helen and her helpers.

The second part of the day was a privileged visit to Lesley Pullen in her home, to see her wonderful collection of textiles from Bhutan and Indonesia. Lesley started with three pieces from Bhutan. Having no resources of their own, the Bhutanese obtained cotton from India and silk from China. The large pieces made with supplementary weft and woven face up went three times around the body and were held with five-inch pins and a belt. A shawl went over the shoulder. Lesley also showed us a smaller woollen piece which was used as a raincoat.

She then displayed a map of Indonesia and after showing us a lovely Patola piece from India she went on to explain the design influences on Indonesian work. She took us island by island, explaining the individual styles and techniques. This fascinating journey provided us with a vast amount of information and a visual feast.

Picking up from the Patola, we commenced with Lesley pointing out that double *ikat* weaving is only done in three places – India, Japan and Bali. From Sumatra she showed us an Indian wood block piece in imitation *of ikat* from Jambi. *Sarongs, jemben* (breast cloths), *selendang* (shoulder sash), *hinggi* (mens' hip cloth), *tampan,* (square ritual cloths), two with ship patterns. Both warp and weft *ikats*, supplementary metal wefts and work from back-strap looms were also shown. It was a captivating assortment of textiles. In short, it was a dazzling display of dedicated collecting and research and we were all enriched by the visit and extremely grateful to our host.

Anne Thomas

VISITS

Mary Kinipple's collection of Tibetan textiles

Eleven of us gathered at Mary Kinipple's cottage on the Ridgeway on Saturday 18 August to view her collection of Tibetan textiles, Our hostess describes herself as a weaver, but she is much more than that: she has a small flock of sheep whose wool she spins herself and dyes with the product of plants grown in her garden.

Mary has made four extended visits to Tibet, the most recent being last year, and she clearly has an affinity with the Tibetan people. As about half the group had also visited Tibet, they were able to add much informed input to the discussion, making it an altogether memorable occasion.

Tibet, as we could see from the excellent map she had on display, is a much bigger country than I had realized, and Mary's travels have been mostly confined to the south and west of the country, the most populous part; even so, she has covered about 2000 km in all.

She opened the proceedings by giving a talk, lavishly illustrated by colour slides, which showed not only spinning, weaving and dyeing being practised, but the finished products in use in a context of home, celebratory situations and the wide open spaces, shown in stunning photographs.

Most hand-weaving is done on narrow looms, producing a cloth about 30 cm wide or even less, and although wool is the most common fibre, some ramie is also used for lighter weight fabrics, while tents are invariably made of yak hair, which can also be used for rugs and saddlecloths.

The yak is a very useful animal, providing as well, transport, milk and meat, and the huge whisk of hair at the end of its tail is a prominent decorative feature, especially on horse trappings. Pile textiles are used a lot not only for carpets but for bedding and clothes, the pile being on the inside for greater warmth. You will recall that Chris Buckley wrote an article on Tibetan pile

Mary with her Tibetan hosts on one of many trips to investigate weaving techniques

Tibetan weaver at home

textiles for newsletter no. 36 (February 2007), and if you look again at the illustration on the front page of that newsletter, you will find that almost the most prominent artefact is a vacuum flask, (not a traditional Tibetan item!) and I was struck by the ubiquity of this article in Mary's slides too.

We had taken our own packed lunches, but Mary provided the drinks, offering us tea, coffee, juice, or pure water from her well, which most of us chose, and it was delicious. At the same time we moved around during the break and enjoyed networking.

Many Tibetan objects, especially textile ones, were in evidence all over Mary's house, but she had laid out more in two bedrooms for us to see in the afternoon. The first thing to welcome us at the top of the stairs was a splendid *thanka*, which Michael said had been taken to a temple and specially blessed for them. A variety of small objects were arranged on the beds – bags, carrying cloths, book covers, blankets, a Wangden meditation rug (see Chris Buckley's article) and large quantities of horse trappings, including the triangular amulet worn on the animal's forehead with yak's tail plumes and bells everywhere. There was also a typical four-shaft loom, a charkha spinning wheel and other equipment on display.

We eleven felt really privileged to be allowed to see Mary's collection and to benefit from her insights into the culture of this wonderful people.

Phyllis Nye

REVIEWS

Japan's 'Living National Treasures' at the British Museum

Crafting Beauty in Modem Japan, catalogue for the exhibition at the British Museum (until 21 October 2007).'British Museum Press, 2007 (paperback), £25. ISBN-13 978-0-7141-2448-3 or 10-0-7141-2448-6. Edited by Nicole Rousmaniere.

This catalogue is best understood as showing exemplars of the refined and traditional "art craft" that is recognized by the Japanese Government each year in its awards to holders of "important intangible cultural properties," better known to most of us as "Living National Treasures." The chapter on textiles features the work of 25 textile artists, many of whom have been designated "*ningen kokuhô."* Additional chapters cover ceramics, lacquer, metal, wood and bamboo and "other" craft media.

The predominant aesthetic here is one of restraint and high technical virtuosity to the point that one wonders how such exquisite work could have been created by the human hand. Colours are on the quiet side, virtually all of the 33 textiles shown in 27 colour plates use the kimono as its form, and traditional techniques are pushed to new boundaries.

Kitamura Takeshi, for example, amazingly recreates "*ra*", the figured silk gauze of the 8th century. Matsubara Yoshichi uses indigo, stencils and multiple dye baths to create a playful, gradated design, shown on the back cover, reminiscent of musical records or CDs.

For this visitor to the actual exhibition, however, it seemed curious that so many of the "modern" craft were made decades ago. And in perusing the book's artist biographies, one noted that none of the artists were born after 1954, two were born in the 1890s (now deceased), and two father-son practitioners were included, hinting at a disappearing traditionalism.

Then all dawned clear upon reading the show's subtitle: "Celebrating 50 Years of the Japan Traditional Art Crafts Exhibition." This is not a sampling of contemporary craft in all its robust variety, but highlights of the annual shows of the Japan Art Crafts Association (Nihon Kôgei-kai), which began its exhibitions in 1954.

The exhibitions began after a law was enacted in 1950 by the Japanese Government to ensure the survival of traditional art forms. In the psychologically fragile postwar period, against a background of poverty, a terrible fire at Horyuji Temple in 1949 and the U.S. Occupation, laws were passed that recognized and protected specific artistic techniques.

The first law required that a technique be in danger of disappearing, but later amendments permitted designation for artistic value, importance in craft history and regional tradition.

It's a bit disappointing that the catalogue text does not do justice to the truly unbelievable labour and devotion that went into each textile. In this regard, Rupert Faulkner's *Japanese Studio Crafts: Tradition and the Avante-Garde* is a fine companion since his descriptions of several processes correspond exactly.

One also can consult the Association's website which contains excellent photographs and descriptions in English of textile history and technique: http://www.nihon-kogeikai.com/TEBIKI-E/2.html.

Joyce Seaman

Recording the textile techniques of China's national minorities

Minority Textile Techniques, Costumes from South-West China, Ruth Smith (ed), Available from Gina Corrigan, Hoe Barn, Hoe Lane, Flansham, Bognor Regis, Sussex PO22 8NS, £17.00 plus £3.50 p+p.

This is the second book devoted to textiles from the Gina Corrigan Collection and is a companion to the previous book, *Miao Embroidery from South West-China,* by Ruth Smith and published by Occidor in 2005.

There are eight contributors to this book, all but one of whom have visited Guizhou Province in South-West China. I myself have travelled with Gina Corrigan on several occasions and this book, with its superb photographs and discussions of textile techniques, brings back many happy memories.

Although there is a large section entitled 'Costume Gallery', which gives a flavour of some of the many different Minority costumes that Gina has photographed over the last ten years, most of the book consists of s study of textile techniques. Each chapter has been written by different specialists.

Unlike many similar publications, this book contains a comprehensive map of Guizhou Province showing the location of the various minority groups whose costumes are discussed in later chapters. In the preface Ruth Smith makes clear that the main reason for this second book is because many of the minority textile techniques are in danger of dying out, as they are no longer being passed on to the next generation. Today, for example, many minority girls go to school and have different priorities. Hand-made fabrics are being replaced by factory-made cloth and often only simple embroidery is being practiced.

All the processes involved in the making of these costumes are then explored in detail and fully illustrated with outstanding colour photographs taken by Gina.

This book covers the festival dress of several minority groups and the processes involved in making them. Separate chapters deal with the preparation of textile materials, dyeing processes, spinning and weaving, methods of skirt pleating, resists and the tools that are used. Baby carriers are also discussed, with sections on how several of them are cut and constructed, with a separate section on how they were traditionally embroidered.

The large section on embroidery includes different methods for transferring designs to the materials, the making of gimp thread for embroidery and methods for making edges and borders. There are several well illustrated pages showing various stitches used by minority groups.

The case studies section brings together the techniques already discussed previously and draws attention to the superb craftsmanship achieved by these minority women. In the final chapter, on tradition, changes and trends, Gina explains how the rapidly expanding Chinese economy has led to the breakdown of the minority groups' traditional way of life.

It is so good that all these costumes have been collected and have been studied so meticulously and that this knowledge, thanks to both these books, is now available to all interested textile – and non-specialist – enthusiasts.

Wendy Black

REVIEWS

Holding up the house – Central Asia's 'greatest works of art'

Richard Isaacson, *Architectural Textiles: Tent Bands of Central Asia*, The Textile Museum, Washington DC, 2007, ISBN 978-0-87405-032-S.

As Daniel Walker, director of the Textile Museum, says in the introduction to this fascinating publication, "it is in fact difficult to imagine a narrower, more specialised topic, than Central Asian tent bands and one might logically ask if all the fuss (and time and expense) is justified". Mr Walker need not have worried, because Richard Isaacson's book is a *tour de force.*

These long, narrow bands – some of them up to 50 feet long and nine inches wide – have only recently achieved any public prominence. No doubt curators could always find an excuse for not showing textiles that took up so much space and whose patterns my often have appeared in other pile weavings. But thankfully Isaacson has established once and for all the centrality of the tent band within central Asian nomadic culture.

The tent band itself was designed with both structural and decorative goals in mind. Structural in that it effectively braces the circular walls of the yurt and helps to tension the roof. And decorative in that they form a frieze that adds to the beauty of the yurt, particularly for special occasions such as weddings. All the central Asian nomadic groups – with the single exception of the Mongols, who use rope – make these decorative bands and over the centuries they have developed their own distinct identity. So much so that the author argues that the white-ground bands of the Turkomens "can rise to the highest level of technical and artistic achievement and are amongst the greatest works of art left by the Central Asian nomadic cultures". High praise indeed!

Isaacson notes that tent bands are made using a number of different techniques–flatweave, embroidery, full pile and also mixed technique of both pile and flatweave. In the mixed technique bands a special knot is used, different to that used on carpets. It is tied on a warp structure made with two levels, thus doubling the usual number of warps in a given width. This gives it much greater strength.

Although it is still possible to find tent bands, many of them were exported to Russia and Europe and were then cut up to provide furnishings and upholstery. Sometimes they would be cut up by the nomads themselves, the strips sewn together and used as floor coverings.

The Textile Museum has solved one vital problem in producing a book on tent bands: how to illustrate the text. No matter how wonderful they are, the dimensions mean that to get an illustration of a textile 50ft by 9inches onto a page risks ending up with a series of thin ribbons where all detail is lost. Alternatively, close-ups are likely to leave the reader thinking that there is little difference between the bands and, say, a carpet. The problem has been solved by producing a book which allows most of the illustrations to be opened up across three pages. It is a very neat solution and these super-wide illustrations are unique in my experience.

As you would expect from the Textile Museum and from the author, there is plenty of explanation and some wonderful ethnographic photographs and background detail on techniques. Different weavings, the use of embroidery and even the dynamics of yurt construction are all explained in incisive detail. The book is in fact a catalogue for an exhibition at the Museum in Washington and my only regret is that I was not able to make the trip.

Nick Fielding

A classic work on natural dyes

Dominique Cardon, *'Natural9 Dyes, Sources, Tradition, Technology and Science,'* Trans. B999y Caroline Higgit, Architype Publications, 2007, ISBN-10:1-904982-00-X, ISBN-13:978-l-904982-00-3.

Whew! Weighing in at just under two kilos, this is not a book to be taken lightly, nor with 778 pages, is it book to be read straight off from cover to cover. Having said that, it is a book which is difficult to put down. Although dense with facts, it is fluently written and without a hint of being a translation. Start almost anywhere, except the appendix on chemical structures, may-be, and you will soon be engrossed in the history and usage of dyestuffs. Designed primarily as an encyclopaedia for the serious student, for the rest of us it provides an entry into the fascinating world of dyeing with natural materials.

Dominique Cardon is enthusiastic about the subtlety of colour which natural dyestuffs can give because of their complex chemistry compared to man-made colorants. She traces the importance of natural dye sources in the past, the only sources available before the discovery of 'chemical' dyes in the early 1800s, and looks into their possible future.

The Foreword sets out the book's scope and intension. It is to gather 'together the currently available knowledge on the dyestuffs obtainable from some 300 plants and 30 animals.. .from all parts of the world...' and discuss 'this information from both an interdisciplinary scientific and technical viewpoint.' It does not aim to be all inclusive as it 'presents a small proportion of the immense wealth of colorants nature has to offer.'

After the introductions, the text is divided into three parts: 'The Art of Dyeing'; 'Dye-plants'; and 'Dyeing Animals', followed by an appendix concerned with the chemical structure of dyestuffs and by notes, references and indexes. The whole is fully illustrated although many of the pictures are a little small.

The 'Art of Dyeing' provides an explanation of the various methods of dyeing which have developed over the years and around the world, and discusses the use of mordants.

The major part of the book is devoted to dye-plants. This is organised in sections covering specific colours and their basic dye chemicals, with a section on lichens and fungi. The final part covers purple-giving molluscs and red dye scale insects.

In general the book is well designed and friendly to use. The contents pages give a brief account of what each section covers but, unfortunately, the indexes list only dye sources.

This lack of a general index is the only major criticism of the book. To get at information from any direction other than the dye-stuff itself is rather hit-and-miss. I tested this by trying to find out how the black designs on Senoufo painted cloth were produced since this was a technique new to me until I visited the Pitt Rivers Museum *'Treasured Textiles'* Exhibition. The information **is** there but it was only a chance dipping into the *'Flavoids, but not Yellow'* section and noticing a picture that I found this out. This lack is a great pity since it is relatively easy to compile an index in this computerized age. May-be the next edition will have one.

To sum up. This is a classic book providing a vast amount of information about natural dye-stuffs and, although it may be aimed mainly at the serious student of dyeing, it is also one of those delightful books which seduces the reader, sidetracks him and fills his head with fascinating information.

David Nutt

REVIEWS

Scholarly study of bast and leaf fibres

Hamilton, Roy W. and B. Lynne Milgram (eds) *Material choices. Refashioning bast and leaf fibres in Asia and the Pacific.* Los Angeles: Fowler Museum at UCLA (2007). 188 pp., colour ills., maps, index, bibl. ISBN 978-0-9748-7298-8

This edited volume was recently published to accompany an exhibition on bast and leaf fibres at the Fowler Museum at UCLA in Los Angeles. But it is far more than an exhibition catalogue and will have a – hopefully long – life of its own. It brings together eight in-depth scholarly essays, as well as a survey for Asia and the Pacific by Roy Hamilton, and it covers bast and leaf fibres from East and South-east Asia, as well as a case study from Micronesia.

The role of bast fibres in textile history has been eclipsed by the story of silk, wool, flax, and cotton, and it is often relegated to a footnote. This publication therefore is an important contribution both to the study of Asian textiles and to textile history more generally. The book is lavishly illustrated and annotated with notes, index, and a thorough bibliography.

In the past the Fowler Museum has excelled in textile publications of the highest scholarly quality, and this publication is a fine addition to the Museum's Textile series. The book's co-editor Roy Hamilton has been the driving force behind many of these superb publications, and he should be congratulated on this latest production.

Ruth Barnes

Indian printed textiles from Rajasthan

Ronald, Emma *Balotra. The complex language of print.* Jaipur: The Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing (2007). 76 pp.. colour ills., glossary, bibl**.** ISBN 978-81-903922-1-1

The Anokhi Foundation, based in Jaipur, Rajasthan (India), has long been supporting Indian textile crafts, through its quality commercial outlets in India and elsewhere. It now has helped to set up a Museum of textile hand printing, based at the Anokhi Haveli in Amber, near Jaipur (www.anokhimuseum.com).

This small, but very attractive book is one of the Museum's first publications. It introduces the printed cotton textiles made in Balotra, a small market town in Marwar province of Rajasthan. and used by a variety of ethnic communities in the vicinity.

Distinct patterns and ways of dressing are introduced in a concise and readable manner, and the beautiful photographs amply illustrate their use. Most attractively, the book even includes fabric samples of the actual prints, which brings the material close to the reader.

The association of specific patterns with particular ethnic groups is explored, as well as the inspiration for designs found in the immediate environment. The way of constructing some of the garments is also illustrated. The final part of the book demonstrates the sequence of production, from cloth preparation to printing and dyeing, as practised in one workshop of printers, the Chhippa Khan family of Balotra.

Events in UK and abroad

Knitting and Stitching Show at the R.D.S. Dublin, 1-4 November; Harrogate International Centre, 22-25 November; 10 am–5.30 p.m. (5 pm on Sun.)
Over 300 exhibitors and 100 workshops, plus galleries of work from leading international textile artists and groups. Includes an exhibition of more than 50 items of Miao costume from Gina Corrigan's collection, www.twistedthread.com

Volkmann Treffen 2007, 26-27 October, Berlin School of Carpet Studies, Berlin. Series of lectures and exhibitions, including Dr Volkmar Engerlem speaking on the Holbein Carpets in the Berlin Museum for Islamic Art, Dr Eleanor Sims on Pictures of Carpets in Classical Iranian Pictures and Michael Franses on Kurt Erdmann and Early Ushak Carpets. Includes a guided tour of the Holbein Carpets Exhibition. Details from Christian Erber, +4989 7673 6360; erber@erber-statik.de or www.volkmantreffen.de

The Textile Museum in Washington has launched an **online exhibition** devoted to classical Khorasan Carpets at www.textilemuseum.org/pieces/index.html

Dragons of Silk, Flowers of Gold: Textile Treasures of the Chinese Liao Dynasty 907-1125, Abegg-Stiftung, Werner Abegg-Strasse 67, Riggisberg, Switzerland. Until 11 November 2007. www.abegg-stiftung.ch

Masterpieces of Embroidery from the Indian subcontinent: Court, Folk, Tribal and Contemporary
For the 10th anniversary of Asian Art in London, Joss Graham Gallery is showing exceptional embroideries from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, encompassing many traditions from the dowry textiles of the Punjab and the Thar Desert to the court art of the Pahari Hills; from the domestic quilts of Bihar, Bengal and Sind to the nomadic accoutrements of the Banjara and Rabari. Joss Graham Oriental Textiles, 10 Eccleston St, London SW1W 9LT Tel/Fax: 020 7730 4370; email: jossgrahamgallery@btopenworld.com

Textile Society of Hong Kong events:

20 October: *TSHK 6th Annual Textile Bazaar*, 10:30am to 5:00pm, The Fringe Club, 2 Lower Albert Road, Central. No entrance fee. Textiles from various Asian countries, from ancient to modern, folk to court. Textile-related books and supplies. Weaving demonstrations. For info contact: 9194 663; info@textilesocietyofhk.org; www.textilesocietyofhk.org

24 October: *Class on Textured Threads and Beadwork - Dragonfly*
2:30 pm - 5:00, The Helena May, 35 Garden Rd, Central Members $300, non-members $350
(light refreshments and all materials included). Register with Shelagh at sabyron@hkucc.hku.hk

Do you know someone who would like to join OATG and receive the newsletter?
Photocopy the membership details on page 11 and ask them to join!

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Have you checked out our website recently?

www.oatg.org.uk

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DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS MONDAY 4TH FEBRUARY 2008

Contributions should be sent to Nick Fielding at the address above

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