

# ASIAN TEXTILES

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**Inside:** re-creating Aboriginal Taiwanese textiles; examining talismanic clothing; report on the AGM; reviews and events.

# Contents

<b>AGM report</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>OATG events programme</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Recovering the lost woven treasures of Taiwan's indigenous peoples</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Talismanic clothing, an Islamic tradition</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Return to Lamalera</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Textile mystery</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Reviews</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Other Asian textiles events</b>	<b>28</b>

**Front cover: a Paiwan woman's mourning wrapping cloth (collection of Chinese Textiles and Clothing, Culture Centre, Fu Jen Catholic University)**

**Back cover: Saisiyat tribal attire (collection of the Zhao-Her Taiwanese Aborigines Museum)**

## Editorial

This issue of *Asian Textiles* represents a milestone in the magazine's history, as it is the first to be printed in full colour throughout. I hope readers will agree that this is a great improvement. (The website continues to offer colour pdfs of this and all previous issues, see the enclosed slip for details.)

To celebrate this exciting development, what better than some photographs of Tsai Yushan's re-creations of aboriginal Taiwanese textiles? The rich colours and patterns of both these and the ancient originals light up the pages and make one marvel at Yushan's skill and patience.

Anyone who has seen the intricate and dazzling talismanic shirts made for Ottoman sultans in the 16th century will be interested to read about their modern successors. Paris-based researchers Alain Epelboin and Constant Hamès mounted an exhibition in 2013, showing a large number of talismanic items from modern Senegal, and their article describes some of the garments that were shown in that exhibition.

We start with a summary of the AGM. We later have a short piece by Sue Richardson about a recent visit to Indonesia, then the follow-up to the last issue's 'mystery object'. Our review section includes book reviews by Pamela Cross, and Agnes Upshall's report on her visit to the South Asian Decorative Arts and Crafts Collection in Norwich, plus an account of OATG's 'show and tell' event, which took place in January to great acclaim.

The Editor

# The AGM, 11 January 2014

A good number of enthusiastic members attended the AGM on Saturday 11 January. A summary of the minutes follows, for the information of those who were unable to attend.

- The group now has a Secretary, Judith Colegate. Many thanks to Judith for volunteering to take on this role.
- Pamela Cross, the Website Manager, urged members to check the website for information, last-minute updates and access to colour pdfs of back issues of the magazine.
- The Treasurer, Sheila Allen, explained that the group's expenditure had exceeded its income by a small amount but that the very large increase in the cost of printing and posting the magazine meant that the coming year's expenditure could greatly exceed income.
- Christine Yates, the Programme Secretary, said that she was aware that only a percentage of members could attend events in Oxford and hoped to be able to arrange events in other regions. She asked members to make suggestions and appealed for volunteers to help at meetings.
- The Magazine Editor, Jane Anson, said she was always grateful to receive contributions to the magazine and would welcome members' reviews of books read or events visited. She added that she had found an alternative printer who could produce the magazine in full colour without increasing the cost.
- Michael Messham, the Membership Secretary, said there had been a slight fall in membership, due to lapsed subscribers having been removed from the list. He encouraged members to publicise the group in order to increase the size of the membership. He has worked hard to keep records up to date but had a few email addresses which were undeliverable – would members please keep him informed of changes of address?
- Agnes Upshall, the Blogger, appealed for members to contribute comments, information and ideas. Members could also share on Facebook.
- There was a discussion about the group's finances, including the steep increase in the cost of print and postage; the Programme Secretary pointed out that the squeeze on funds meant that OATG was very restricted in what it could do in terms of events. After the discussion a member proposed that the subscription should be increased to £25 for individual membership and £35 for joint membership. This was formally proposed and seconded, and unanimously agreed. The new rates will take effect from 1 October 2014.

*Asian Textiles* is published three times a year: in February, June and October. We welcome input from members — send a review of a book you've read, or an exhibition you've seen.

**THE DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS  
MONDAY 26 MAY 2014**

Contributions should be emailed to: [jane.anson@ntlworld.com](mailto:jane.anson@ntlworld.com)

# OATG events programme

Dear Members

I am pleased to announce that OATG's founder, Ruth Barnes, has promised to come and talk about her work in the USA. Ruth left her position as Textile Curator for the Department of Eastern Art in the Ashmolean Museum to become Curator of Indo-Pacific Art at Yale University Art Gallery. We have two provisional dates for Ruth's talk and we hope that her busy schedule will allow her to visit us on one of these days, but more news nearer the time.

Our successful Show and Tell event after the AGM generated lots of enthusiasm for more opportunities to view and discuss textiles, and to this end I have applied to the Clothworkers' Centre at Blythe House, London for two group visits. The Clothworkers' Centre is part of the V&A designated for the Study and Conservation of Textiles and Fashion and I have asked for a private group viewing of Indian dress/costume in March and Export Indian dress/costume in April. I'm sure that they are inundated with requests and I am still awaiting a reply with definite dates.

In June we are very lucky to be invited by Carol Humphrey, Textile Curator at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, to view Chinese textiles from the collection.

If any member would like to host a textile viewing event in their home or other venue, please contact me to discuss arrangements. I have also received requests for workshops on Asian textile techniques and am planning a batik day to follow on from Fiona Kerlogue's talk in February. Please contact me with offers to teach a technique, or other ideas for future workshops as well as an interest in attending.

Before each event I usually send out one or two reminders by email, and each time a list is returned to me of messages that were undeliverable. Therefore, if you have not heard from me this means that I don't have your current email address. If you send me an email at the address below, verifying your address, I can rectify the problem and of course you can also let me know if you would prefer not to receive OATG emails.

Best wishes, Christine

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## March

Visit to V&A's Clothworkers' Centre at Blythe House, London. Indian dress/costume

*Date to be confirmed, please see the [website](#) and/or [blog](#) for details. Maximum 18 people for this visit; places will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.*

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## April

Visit to V&A's Clothworkers' Centre at Blythe House, London. Indian textiles/dress for export

*Date to be confirmed, please see the [website](#) and/or [blog](#) for details. Maximum 18 people for this visit; places will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.*

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## Thursday 19 June

Visit to Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Carol Humphrey, Textile Curator, will show us Chinese textiles from the collection

11am–1pm, followed by lunch in the Museum café

*Maximum 12 people for this visit due to space limitations; places will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.*

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## Saturday 21 June or Thursday 26 June

Ruth Barnes, Curator of Indo-Pacific Art at Yale University Art Gallery and a member of the Yale Council on Southeast Asia Studies

*Date to be confirmed, please see the [website](#) and/or [blog](#) for details.*

**Please note:** 6 pm start at the Pauling Centre, 58 Banbury Road, Oxford, with refreshments afterwards.

The talk will be free to members of OATG with a £2 contribution by non-members.

Although you do not need to book to attend, it would be helpful if you could email or telephone to confirm attendance; please contact Christine Yates, Programme Coordinator, [christine@fiberartgallery.com](mailto:christine@fiberartgallery.com) or 01865 556882

# Recovering the lost woven treasures of Taiwan's indigenous people

**Tsai Yushan, Associate Professor in the Department of Textiles at Fu Jen Catholic University, Taiwan, describes her work in deciphering and recreating the woven fabrics of the aboriginal people of Taiwan.**

Would you like to know how the aboriginal Taiwanese wove their beautiful fabrics? By decoding their methods today, we can preserve their precious lost arts and skills. In addition, through innovations in interpretation, we can present a new face of these arts for the eyes of the world to see.

Today's indigenous peoples seldom use the back-strap loom to weave their fabrics. The appearance of their old fabrics typically bears the good qualities of simplicity, strength, rusticity and order. The patterns in their fabrics are based on stripes and diamond shapes, and the form and colour of their clothing still follow their traditions. Only the splendid costumes of the hereditary aristocratic hierarchy of the Paiwan and Rukai tribes have more luxurious decorations. These two groups use more colours and motifs, as well as different techniques.

The ramie fabrics woven by Taiwan's aboriginal people are thick. Their weaving structures are based on plain weave, twill weave, and fancy weaves combining the two. They mix different weaves, using unique brocade techniques to create the distinctive and classic fabrics of each tribe.

In earlier times, the aboriginal tribes of Taiwan



Top: Atayal men in the Wu Lai area (Taipei county). Below: The Atayal women (Nantao county) used a back-strap loom for weaving.

Both photos date from the period of Japanese colonialism, and are taken from *Heartbeats from the Taiwan Indigenous Loom* (SMC Publishing Inc).



Analysing an old Pingpu tribal flag at Taiwan National Museum (2013).

depended on demonstration and oral teaching for instruction in their weaving skills, and lacked any written or graphical record. After 1895, during the 50-year period of Japanese colonialism, they were forbidden to do any weaving. With the impact of modernisation after Taiwan's recovery, as well as the gradual disappearance of the older women who possessed weaving skills, the aboriginal tribes faced the serious problem of almost completely losing their traditional skills.

The Council of Indigenous Peoples of the Executive Yuan sponsored the Department of Textiles and Clothing at Fu Jen Catholic University for a 'Teacher Training Programme for the Aboriginal Traditional Crafts of Dyeing and Weaving', for two years from 1999 to 2001. This programme successfully trained fifteen aboriginal students to act

as 'seed teachers' to train others to revitalise their arts and crafts. One technical course on shuttle weaving in the programme uses a method involving technical notation, based on my analysis of the traditional old fabric structure, to teach students to reproduce Atayal traditional fabric using a dobby loom.

After this training programme concluded, I continued to research other tribes' traditional fabrics.

During these years I chose especially representative attire and exquisite fragments from each tribe for analysis – the Atayal, Truku, Sediq, Amis, Pingpu, Tao (Yami), Puyuma, Tsou, Saisiyat, Thao, Bunun, Rukai, Paiwan. Besides my school's collections, I used all available resources for my creative reproductions of the old aboriginal textiles: various museums and



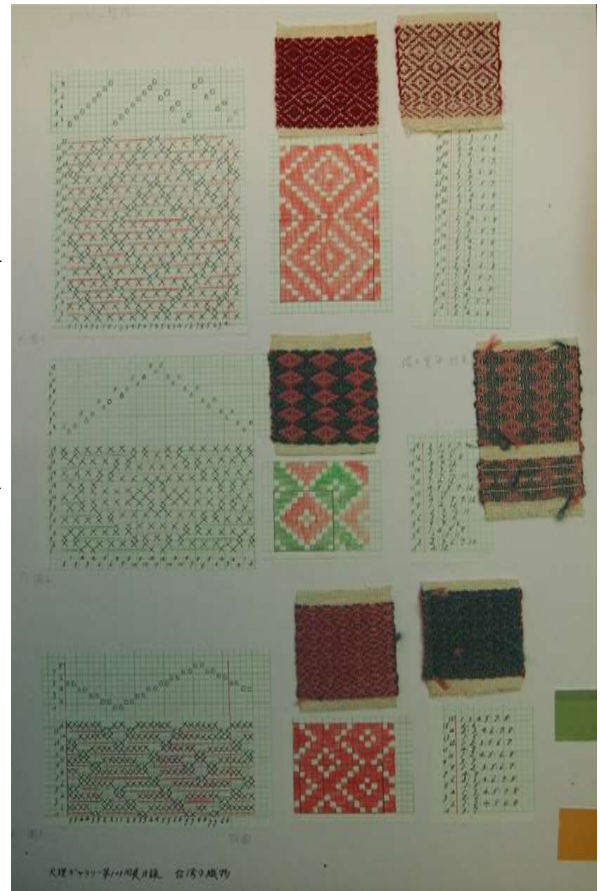
Pingpu garment (collection of Taiwan National Museum).



Old Pingpu skirt (collection of the Museum of Anthropology, Taiwan National University).

private collections, collection catalogues with photographs, and contemporary photographs of the old pieces, etc. From 2009 to 2012, I participated in a research study group on Taiwanese aboriginal clothing and culture organised by the Kobe Design University of Japan, to record the current state of the tribes' old cloth and modern weaving.

Over the years, there have been many published papers and collection catalogues concerning the clothing and culture of Taiwan's aboriginal peoples, but technical research information on the tribes' classical fabric is difficult to find. Over a period of fifteen years of research, I have decoded the structure and skills behind each of the tribes' classical weaving techniques. In this way, I can also compare the similarities and differences in the operation of the traditional back-strap loom and the general functionality of the dobby (heddle) loom, as a basis for the transformation of their skills. This study will be important for identifying differences in lost weaving techniques, in order to keep a record of the traditional and common methods of loom operation. In the process of researching test swatches, I accidentally found some new techniques for doing the weaving, and also successfully resolved a few difficult problems with the reproduction of rare and highly valuable brocades. The biggest difficulty I encountered for reproduction was the different systems of the looms: the back-strap loom is constructed with separate rods, so the aboriginal weaver can change the weave and pattern as she wants during the weaving process by picking up the warp threads with a



Research testing samples with diamond pattern.



Creative transformation work with Paiwan patterns (2012).

rod, but we cannot do that with the dobby loom, because all of the warp threads are fixed in a closed shaft harness. This limits some weaves, so it may create a serious problem for reproducing different patterns. With the accumulation of testing experience, I finally overcame this difficulty. The dobby loom allows for increasing efficiency and convenience of weaving work.

When I work in the cold archive room of the museum, I have to wear white gloves and use powerful magnifying lenses to carefully follow the needle for a detailed view of the fabric's structure and pattern. Previously, I encountered several kinds of rare weaves and some other very dense and thick old brocades. Even when I looked at these sophisticated weavings carefully with magnification, it was still difficult to distinguish the number of threads and I could not see the interweaving details clearly. When my analysis and woven test swatches are complete, I finally compare the newly made swatches with the original fabric to see if they are consistent, which is the key point in verifying whether the weaving and technique were successful. It's hard to get the same material (ramie) now, so I use the threads that I can obtain, such as linen, cotton and wool, and I refer to their original colours, but choose similar colours using my personal aesthetic feeling.



Woven reproduction of a Paiwan woman's mourning wrapper, 14 x 80 cm.

When I analyse aspects of embroidery works, the greatest difficulty I have met with, other than wear on the cloth which creates fuzziness in the pattern, is a mistake in the original embroidery pattern that will lead to a problem with the convergence of the pattern. Thus, when we reconstruct designs, we must make an effort to figure out the units of measurement of the complete design diagram and repetition of the pattern. Here I want to acknowledge my sister, Julie Tsai Xuanzhu, for her assistance with the embroidery work. Without her support, I would not have been able to finish all of these pieces of needlework.

From my research work, I have gained an in-depth understanding of the wisdom and creativity of Taiwan's aboriginal ancestors. I was sometimes astonished by their special weave structures, and wondered how they could produce such beautiful fabrics with a simple back-strap loom. Like those of other ancient peoples, the weaving and embroidery techniques of Taiwan's aboriginals are among the unique and unmatched treasures of the world, and are worthy of our attention and appreciation.

In 1997 an Atayal student brought me some old fabric and asked me how to reproduce it. Since then I have worked on the patterns of over 130 weavings and embroideries. I have



Above: Paiwan sample in progress. Below: the author weaving a Pingpu tribal pattern on a dobby loom.





Tsou and Puyuma patterns woven by the author.

worked on textiles from each tribe and have also derived innovations and interpretations for the items that I have reproduced. Analysing works is always an interesting game and challenge to me, and it's nice hearing people say that these research documents are a good way of preserving Taiwan's lost native woven treasures, treasures that are also part of the world's heritage.



### **A brief history of Taiwan**

According to an official estimate in 2009, the indigenous population stood at approximately 500,000, or 2.18% of the total population on Taiwan. The ancestors of Taiwanese aborigines spoke Austronesian languages. Some of these people later migrated from Taiwan to the islands of Southeast Asia and thence throughout the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

In the seventeenth century, Taiwan was occupied by the

An embroidery reproducing a man's chest covering from the Tsou tribe, 36 x 36 cm.

Spanish and Dutch, followed by an influx of Han Chinese from southeastern mainland China. In 1662, Zheng Cheng-Kong, a loyalist of the Ming Dynasty which lost control of mainland China in 1664, defeated the Dutch, but his forces were defeated by the Qing Dynasty in 1683. After that, parts of Taiwan became increasingly integrated into the Qing Dynasty before it ceded Taiwan to the Empire of Japan in 1895. In 1945, following the end of the Second World War, the Republic of China (ROC) became the governing polity on Taiwan.

### About the author

Tsai Yushan is currently an Associate Professor of Department of Textiles and Clothing at Fu Jen Catholic University in Taiwan, where she has worked since 1993. She is the sole author of four books, the latest of which, *Recovering Lost Woven Treasures: Translation and Transformation*, was published in 2012. In 1992 she received the prestigious Bishu Award for International Textile Design, awarded by the Fashion Foundation of Tokyo, Japan. In 1997, she won first prize for a card-weaving work in Taichung County Cultural Centre's Textile Craft Competition. She graduated from the Chinese Cultural University in Taiwan with a BA in Fine Art, and in 1983 from l'École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs (ENSAD) in Paris with an MA in Design (with highest honours). After ENSAD, she studied for two years at l'Atelier Nationale d'Art Textile (ENSCI) in Paris, and worked as a textile designer at l'Atelier de Recherche Textile (ART) in Paris for 5 years, under the direction of Professor Geneviève Dupeux.



This recently completed woven reproduction based on a Pingpu tribal skirt took the author about 3 months altogether for weaving and testing; the two pieces still need to be completed by sewing. The traditional Pingpu garment used fibres from the stem of a plant (the yellow thread in the picture); as it is hard to find this plant now, the author used cotton threads for her reproduction, but recently found a new ecological plant fibre, which she is now testing.

See page 21 for a review of the author's book *Recovering Lost Woven Treasures: Translation and Transformation*.

# Talismanic clothing, an Islamic tradition

**Islamic cultures have a long tradition of incorporating amulets into garments in order to protect their wearers. A study by Alain Epelboin and Constant Hamès shows that this tradition continues to thrive.**

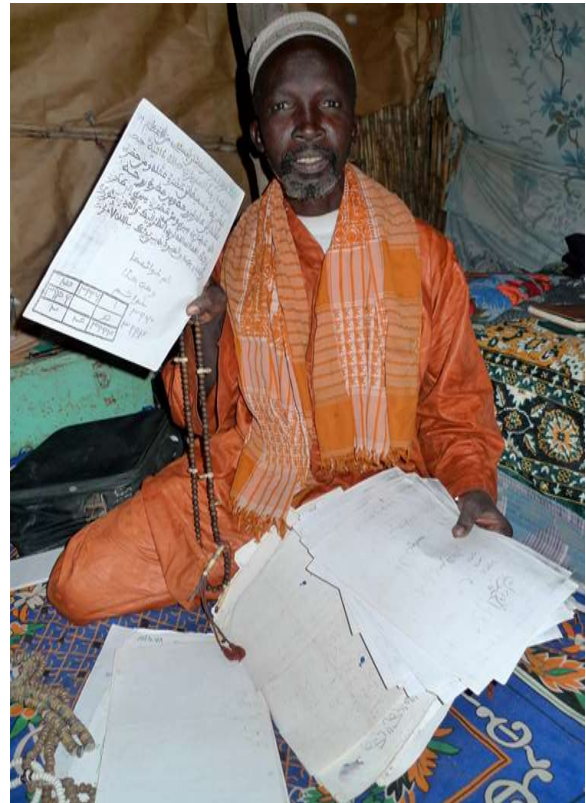
## The making and uses of talismans

Certain men in West Africa address people's personal needs by offering private consultations. One of the solutions they offer, though not the only one, is to make written talismans. These talismans originated not in Africa, but in the Islamic Arab world: the most widespread are those of al-Buni, who died in 1225.

Written paper talismans are taken to a shoemaker, who stitches them into a variety of amulets. The customer, who usually cannot read Arabic, never sees the writing, except in the case of rare garments whose writing is visible on the exterior. The needs answered by such talismans are often revealed by the texts used in them. Most fall into one of two categories: avoidance or protection from harm, and the achievement of all kinds of wishes. Muslim scholars have differing opinions on whether these practices are permitted.

The generic term 'marabout' has been used since colonial times to describe various Muslim clerics in North and West Africa, and dates originally from the Almoravid era of the 10th and 11th centuries. In West Africa, the knowledge, status and religious functions of these men range from teachers in small qur'anic schools, through employees of mosques and the legal system, to the heads of religious brotherhoods. Any of these men can carry out the tasks of a marabout and may be qualified as such. In principle, the religious status of a marabout is inherited, but people from other social groups can acquire some of the necessary knowledge and establish themselves as advisers on other people's problems. Sometimes, an insufficiently learned marabout, or one who is dishonest, may cause the term to be used pejoratively. The knowledge attributed to marabouts is linked to their ability

Tunic (56 x 70 cm) made of two layers of white handwoven strips. Between the layers are folded pieces of writing; the paper hardened by being soaked in water, which may then be drunk as a cure and sprinkled on the body and around the home. (ALEP30118)



A marabout displays examples of his craft.





Tunic with hidden writing (132 x 82 cm), made of strips of dyed handwoven fabric, dotted with mirrors, strips of knotted fabric, and square amulets consisting of religious texts wrapped in leather. It is believed to have belonged to a *saltigi*, a clairvoyant healer, and resembles the garments worn by hunters. (ALEP35068)

to influence events, people and things secretly and effectively, in particular by preparing talismans.

A consultation with a marabout begins with a kind of clairvoyance, and proceeds towards an analysis of the situation, particularly prohibitions that the client has ignored, enemies, magicians, spirits, ancestors and djinns. It ends with an instruction to give alms, and the marabout offers to prepare a written talisman – either as a preventative or curative – for the client. If the client accepts this proposal, he is given an appointment for the handing over of the folded talisman, with precise rules and instructions concerning its use, particularly the situations where it must

Tunic with hidden writing (50 x 62 cm), made of strips of white handwoven cotton, partly covered with black manufactured fabric, decorated with cowries, a goat's horn wrapped in red cloth, a closed padlock, and squares and rectangles wrapped in red or black cloth, decorated with mirrors (now missing). It belonged to a wrestler. (ALEP00013)



be removed in order to avoid causing it to lose its power. The marabout gives his client specific directions to be conveyed to the shoemaker, concerning how the talisman should be worn, the number of objects, of fastenings, and any animal or other substances that should be included. The price of the consultation is usually cheap, while that of preparing the talisman varies from a few pounds to staggering sums if the client is a politician. The sum received by the shoemaker varies from one pound to some tens of pounds, depending on the social background of the client and the complexity of the task, for example the number of fastenings.

The use of an amulet is an individual thing, and its lifespan can vary. An amulet that is believed to be effective is treasured, passed on to heirs or friends, but often disappears when its owner dies. An amulet may be broken or damaged by contact with unclean items, it may lose its power when its owner changes their belief or suffers a misfortune, or it may simply be lost when its owner removes it to visit the toilet. An expensive garment with talismanic writings, worn to help its owner win a match or an election, is thrown away after a defeat – as indeed for any desired outcome that is not achieved.



Tunic front (74 x 62 cm). Sleeveless tunic with visible writing, made from a single piece of undyed cotton with a V-neck (68 cm); the back and front are joined at the sides by two fabric straps (2.5 x 8 cm). The hem around the neck has been machine-stitched with manufactured white thread, without going over the writing, which shows that it was sewn first and the writing added later. The frayed hems on the lower edges of the front and back, however, were sewn by hand using a double strand of white manufactured thread, and long stitches, *after* the writing, which the stitches overlap. The straps that secure the sides have been roughly stitched in yellow thread, which also overlaps the writing.

Forty-three square amulets, consisting of folded writing wrapped in red cloth, are attached to the tunic: 18 on the front and 25 on the back. The paper used for these is thin and strong, and has printed rules which show that it has been taken from an official record book – this goes against tradition, which demands plain, preferably white, paper. The tunic shows signs of wear, visible on the creases around the V-neck. Unusually, the front of the garment has a single block of text with the lines running vertically up and down the tunic. The writer clearly wanted to fit the whole of an average-length *sura* (chapter) of the Qur'an on to this piece: *sura XXXVI*, which has 83 verses and is not often used. (ALEP03018)

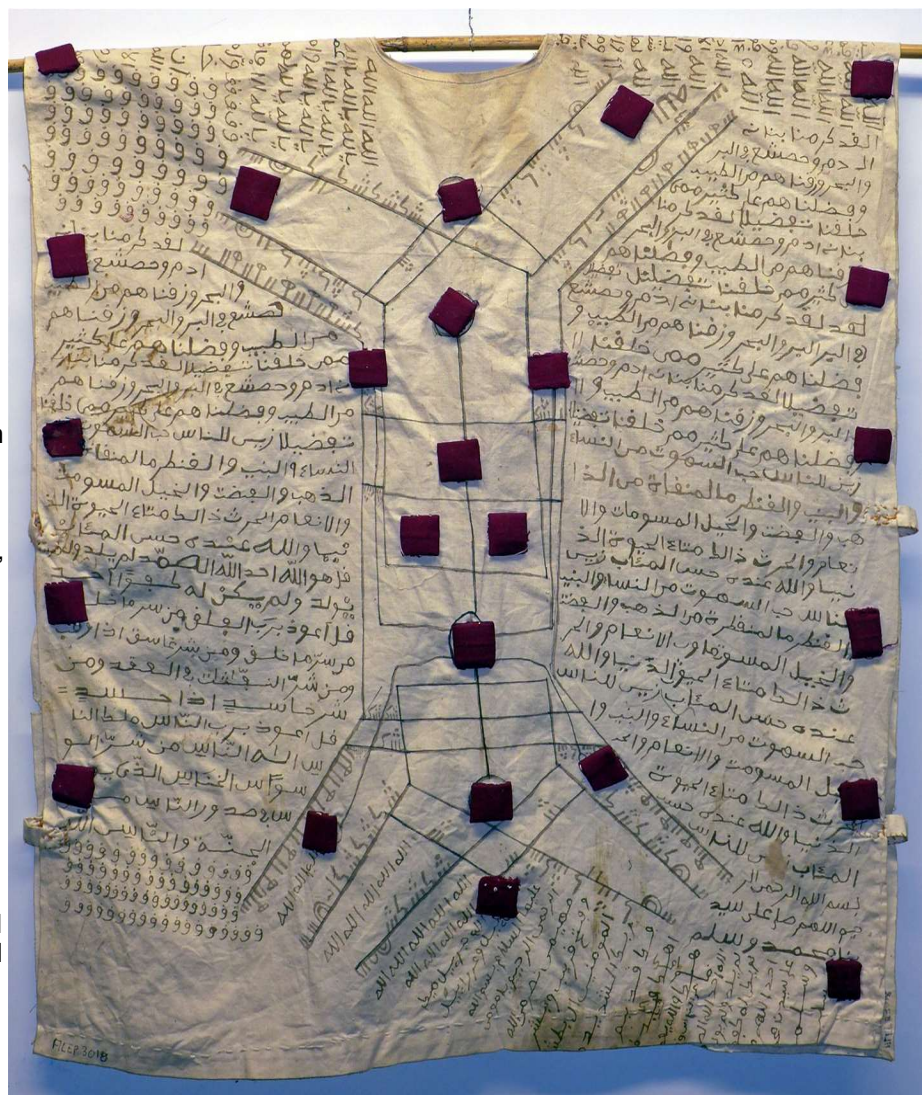


Above left: Tunic front with visible writing and grids containing 'magic squares' (60 x 73 cm). (ALEP01015)

Above right: the back of the same garment. (ALEP01015)

These assorted reasons for abandonment are the basis for this collection, which includes thousands of objects acquired over 30 years from workers who sort through refuse in Dakar, Senegal. All objects recovered are given a long exposure to the wind

Tunic back (74 x 62 cm). The back of the tunic is more elaborate, but is also formed from a single piece of writing, since it consists of texts in various shapes, arranged in a circle around a central geometric figure – a pattern that we have called *kacba* but which could also be described as a *mandala* (a circle into which divinities or other powers 'descend'). Without going into great detail, these texts include the name of Allah and the letter *qaf* in successive waves, and group *qur'*anic fragments together with the three final *suras*: CXII, CXIII and CXIV, which are said to have talismanic properties. The two-dimensional central geometric figure is unusual and is an example of talismanic creativity. The two upper segments or 'arms' branch out from a 'body' which ends in two lower segments or 'legs'. This anthropomorphic design is dotted with amulets wrapped in red cloth, arranged symmetrically around a central vertical line. Finally, the 'arms' and 'legs' contain identical sets of letters and numbers. (ALEP03018)



Tunic with visible writing (80 x 56 cm).  
(ALEP35121)

and the sun, then brushed, scrubbed, smoothed and polished. Since 2000, laptops and digital cameras have made it possible to record and catalogue items on the spot. Many belts containing pieces of writing come to light; these are opened so that the written talismans hidden inside can be removed and studied, to learn about their users and their makers.

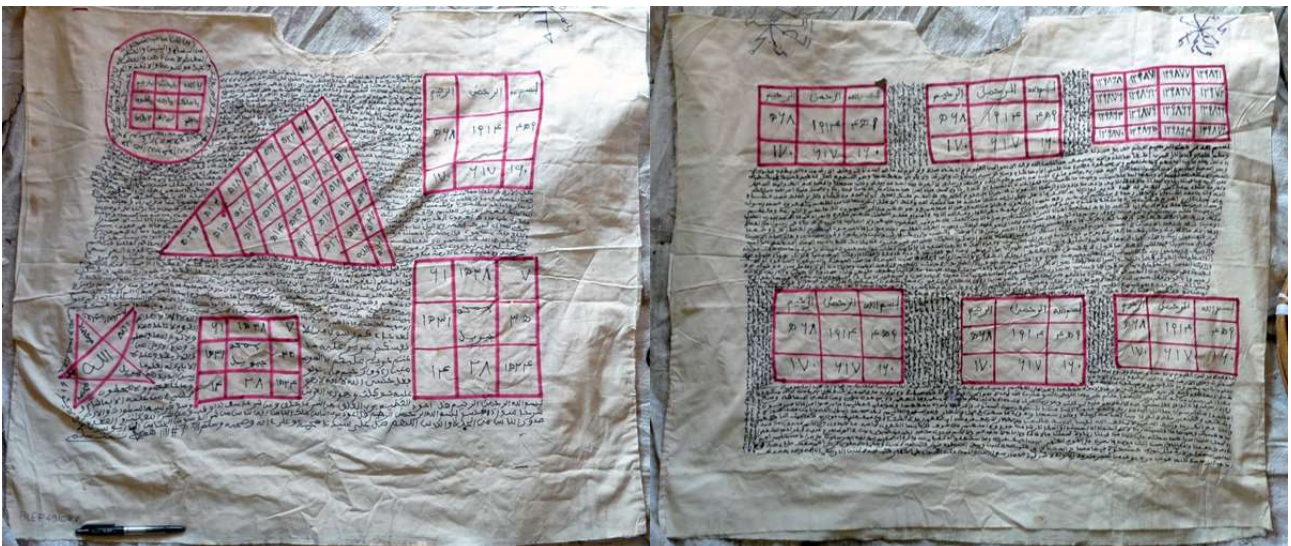
### Talismanic garments with hidden writing

Talismanic clothing is made either from manufactured cottons, or from strips of handwoven fabric stitched together, which may be dyed or not. The amulets sewn into or onto these garments consist of folded paper bearing writing in traditional or modern ink, which is wrapped in fabric or the skin of wild or domestic animals, as well as knotted cords, vegetable powders, animal horns and hair, padlocks, mirrors, cowries etc.



As with garments that have visible talismanic writing, the former owners of these very costly items were politicians, wrestlers, soldiers, entrepreneurs, traditional healers and marabouts. Depending on the owner's status and circumstances, these garments may have been stored in a suitcase out of sight, hung on a wall in a reception room,

Below left: Tunic front with visible writing (35 x 85 cm). Below right: The back of the same garment. (ALEP49108b)





Tunic front (64 x 60 cm).  
(ALEP46088)

worn secretly beneath roomy clothing or alternatively exhibited to display their owner's social rank and power.

### **Talismanic garments with visible writing**

Talismanic garments with visible writing are complete artefacts in themselves, and are held to be very effective. They are the prerogative of powerful individuals such as marabouts, politicians, wrestlers, businessmen, traffickers and men in uniform. These garments are collections of wisdom, remedies against multiple powers, created to order for a client and/or an apprentice, or inherited from a relative.

They fortify and strengthen their owner's defences against visible threats such as blows, knives and bullets, as well as invisible threats such as malicious talk, bad winds, evil deeds, man-eating sorcerers, non-human spirits... They also aim to influence other people – assuring popularity with women, young people, men, voters, work colleagues, business clients – and therefore good fortune and success in life.

The text and images used here have been translated from the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition '[Un Art Secret](#)' at the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris in 2013.

[Alain Epelboin](#) is a researcher at the CNRS, Paris.

Tunic back (64 x 60 cm).  
(ALEP46088)



# Return to Lamalera

**Sue Richardson reports on a recent visit to Indonesia.**

OATG members are probably aware that our founding chair, Ruth Barnes, did her earliest textile research in Indonesia, in the small village of Lamalera on the rugged island of Lembata. We have been to this village several times over the past few years, our most recent visit being last October in preparation for leading our tour of the Lesser Sunda Islands this May.

Over the years we have seen a lot of changes, some good, some not so good. The first time we went there the ferry from Larantuka on Flores to Lewoleba, the capital of Lembata, took five hours. This journey is now reduced to an hour and a half on the new high-speed ferry. However, instead of standing in the fresh air, admiring the beautiful scenery and passing volcanoes, you are now squashed into a sealed cabin with your ears deafened by karaoke music played at just below the pain threshold. The condition of the road across the island is also slowly improving, but it is still a bone-rattling journey.

The biggest change we noticed in the village is that they now have electricity from 6pm to 6am. This has a major impact on people's lives: they can now read, listen to music, and more importantly weave in the evenings. We were keen to meet up with some of our weaver friends and were delighted to find that more and more women were doing high-quality work, all of it with natural dyes and still using handspun cotton. As we went along the road we were beckoned into the



Theodora Gelu heads the local weaving group. Despite having lost an eye two years ago she still manages to tie, dye and weave fine ikat.



Heading out to sea in a whale boat, harpoons at the ready.

houses to see beautiful hanks of cotton in various colours, cloth in different stages on the loom, and fabulous finished textiles. We were in heaven!

As well as its textiles, Lamalera's other claim to fame is its small-scale whaling industry (which was studied in great detail by Ruth's husband, Robert). The Lamaholot who live in this village do not farm. Instead, they go to sea in small wooden outriggers with a platform on the front and a rack holding bamboo poles on the side. When a whale is spotted, the harpoonist slots a harpoon into one of these poles and literally jumps on top of the whale, harpoon in hand. These traditional whale hunters are incredibly tough people and completely fearless. They trade their whale meat (and textiles) for agricultural and other produce.

The links between the textiles and the way of life are clear when you examine the motifs woven into the cloth. A common motif is the *ikan pari* or manta ray. Indeed, when we hired a whaling boat to check out weaving villages further along the coast, our boatmen tried to harpoon a passing manta ray, which saved its skin by immediately diving. Also often depicted are the *klapa*, the box in which the tools for making the whaling boat are kept, and the *gala*, the harpoon tip.

The lovely deep colours used in these textiles are achieved through a series of immersions in morinda and indigo. We saw hanks of cotton in shades ranging from the palest pink to the deepest red-brown, depending on how many times they had been immersed. Indigo is grown in the gardens but not in sufficient quantities, so more has to be bought or bartered for from other villages.

We can't wait to return in May to see the cloths these industrious ladies have produced. Luckily this time we will have the luxury of arriving by boat instead of undertaking the arduous journey overland. If you would like to join us, check the following website for more details of this trip of a lifetime.

<http://www.seatrekbali.com/cruise/tribal-weaving-of-the-lesser-sunda-islands/>

# Textile mystery

**OATG Chair Aimée Payton muses on a little-understood item from the Ashmolean Museum's store.**

Objects end up in museum collections for lots of reasons, and sometimes there is no information about their origins. This coat, hat and pair of boots form part of a tiger costume in the Eastern Art collection at the Ashmolean. The stitching is poor but the fabric is fairly robust, if a bit stained. The dyes have not faded much, apart from a little wear of the black printed pigment on the buttons.

In the last issue of *Asian Textiles*, we showed the image above and asked for suggestions about its origins. We had some interesting responses: Sybille Haynes said she had seen children's hats like this in China. Ruth Barnes also believes it is Chinese, probably from the late 19th century, and intended to be worn by a child at New Year. Minsun Hwang emailed to say that it has a similar shape to many Korean hats.

The Ashmolean also has a modern painting showing [the Monkey King and his followers](#), who appear to be wearing outfits similar to this one.

Ashmolean Eastern Art Department:

Coat - EAX.3875

Hat - EAX.3875.a

Boots - EAX.2248.



# Reviews

## OATG website manager Pamela Cross reviews Tsai Yushan's book about her work on the textiles of the aboriginal Taiwanese people.

*Recovering Lost Woven Treasures: Translation and Transformation*, self-published in 2012 by Tsai Yushan, ISBN 978-957-41-9248-9.

The textile photos in the book are of a very fine quality: the sort of photos which make you touch the page to feel the textile as you can see each thread in it! I also appreciated the old sepia photos of the different aboriginal tribes from the collection of Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines which are used in the second, major, part of the book where Yushan's brief descriptions of the textiles of each of the 14 tribes are accompanied by photos of her research pieces of the woven or embroidered textiles of each tribe.

The first part of the book has essays in English, French, Chinese and Japanese. There is an outline of Yushan's textile background and her 'journey as a weaver'. I think the essence of the book is summed up by Yushan (page 28) when she says: 'Would you like to know how the aboriginal Taiwanese wove their beautiful fabrics? By decoding their methods today, we can preserve their precious lost arts and skills. In addition, through innovations in interpretation, we can present a new face of these arts for the eyes of the world to see.'

The last section of the book is a list of illustrations and sources of materials for analysis. This is laid out tribe by tribe and has thumbnails of, I assume, all the textiles that were in the 2012 exhibition of the same name – an amazing body of incredibly fine work researched and created by Yushan. Many of the pieces are shown enlarged in the preceding tribal descriptions in the book. Information on and photos from the exhibition can be found at: <http://www.tribaltextiles.info/community...php?t=2305>.

The book is indeed 'My Journey as a Weaver', as stated on the back cover of the



book, with the focus on what Yushan refers to on page 36 as 'Stage 3: 1999–2011. Studied Taiwanese aboriginal textile-making skills and the patterns associated with different tribes.' It both presents the results of this research and stands as an amazing testimony to her very determined efforts and finely honed technical skills. I am in awe!

The book is available from the Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines <http://www.museum.org.tw> or message on line <http://www.tribaltextiles.info/community/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=2346> It retails at US\$30 with an additional air shipping cost of US\$10 to Europe/USA or US\$6 to Asia.

## Pamela Cross reviews a weighty volume on baskets from Borneo.

*Plaited Arts from the Borneo Rainforest*, edited by Bernard Sellato, published by the NIAS Press in 2012. ISBN 978-97-7694-074-4. Available on Amazon at a range of prices including delivery from about £40.

Many textile enthusiasts are also interested in baskets. Bernard Sellato has been involved with Borneo since 1973, first as a geologist and later as an anthropologist. A former director of the Institute for Research on Southeast Asia (CNRS and Université de Provence) in Marseille, France, he has written numerous books and articles on the island – including *Beyond the Green Myth*, published by NIAS Press in 2007 – and until recently was editor of the journal *Moussons: Social Science Research on Southeast Asia*.

The cover introduction states: 'The contributors to this volume are among the world's leading authorities on the arts of Borneo. These twenty scholars and artisans are from ten different nations, including Indonesia and Malaysia, and from Borneo itself: Sarawak, Sabah, and Kalimantan. Their original work is supplemented by a selection of texts written by three pioneer authors that described Borneo basketry before the Second World War.'

The volume is divided into twelve parts that cover the complex role of basketry in Borneo societies, the ethnobotanical and technical aspects of basketry, the distribution of plaited arts by region, the past and current market for Borneo's plaited arts, and style and identity. The abundantly illustrated Appendix surveys the relation between the tropical environment and the material culture.

Illustrated with more than 1,250 colour photographs, newly commissioned maps, rare historical photographs, and detailed line drawings, *Plaited Arts from the Borneo Rainforest* is an essential addition to the libraries of universities, collectors, and scholars alike.'

The book is a heavy, hardback volume and might almost be dismissed as a 'coffee table' book but, although it has many seductive photos – both modern and some very interesting old black and white photos – the content of 534 large pages is very informative and has brought alive for me my small collection of Borneo plaited art.

My attention was drawn to the wonderful plaited mats of Borneo as OATG member Susan Stem had a lovely one on her website <http://www.tribaltrappings.com/TIO116.php>, then Mark Johnson showed a collection of 15 mats on his site [http://www.markajohnson.com/special\\_exhib.html](http://www.markajohnson.com/special_exhib.html) (and information on this book, for which I am very grateful). I find the mats visually stunning! As they are of a size that would not enable them to be displayed in my 1938 bungalow, I felt that the book was the nearest I could get to enjoying them! It is packed with information including photos of baskets, baby carriers and hats as well as the wonderful mats. It covers plaited art across the ethnic groups of Borneo. I have been amazed by the breadth of the content and would recommend it to anyone interested in the culture (and 'art') of Borneo.



## OATG blogger Agnes Upshall visits an unusual collection of South Asian arts and crafts.

While in Norwich recently I enjoyed a visit to the South Asian Decorative Arts and Crafts Collection (SADACC), which is housed in an old roller-skating rink built in 1876. An impressive building in the city centre, with a stunning wooden ceiling and a gallery around the first floor, this building has a varied history, having also served as a Vaudeville theatre. It now houses the SADACC collection and Country and Eastern, a shop selling all kinds of imported homewares from around Asia.

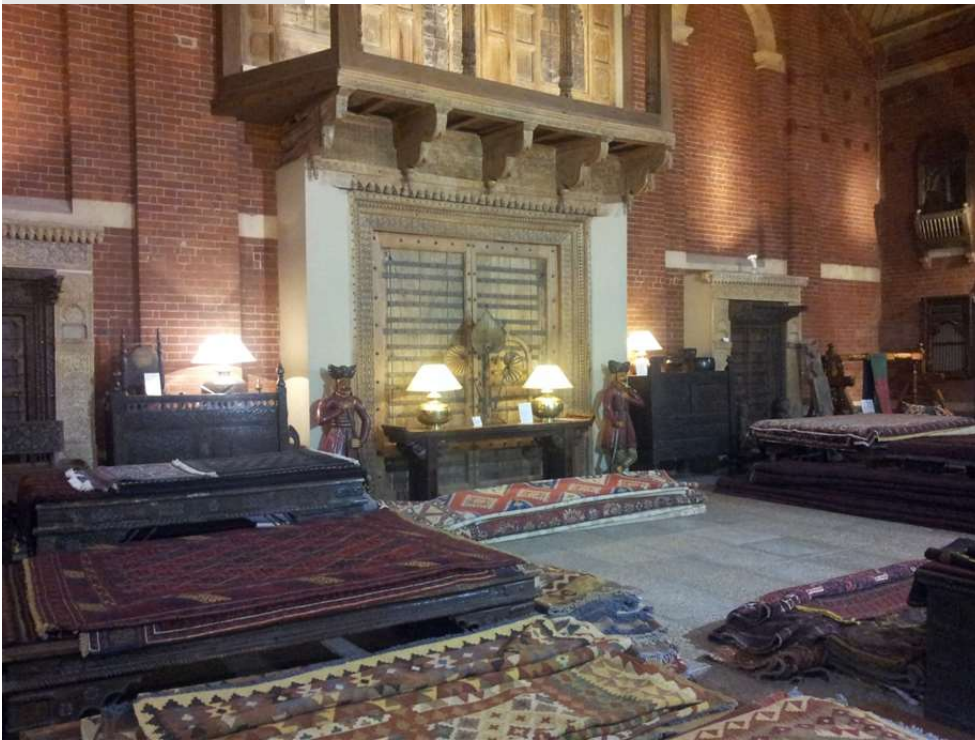
View over the collection from the first-floor gallery. Some of the larger objects in the museum's collection are permanently displayed on top of the ground-floor cases.



The collection was begun in the 1970s and comprises roughly 4000 objects – including textiles, paintings, prints, metalwork and ethnographic items – and it is still growing. Acquisitions are mainly sourced from auction houses around the UK, and objects for the shop are imported direct from countries ranging from Turkey to east of Java.

There is an eclectic range of things on display inside the old rink gallery, with everything from rugs, bedlinen and garments to cupboards, chests, statues and entire doors and gates. In such an Aladdin's cave of treasures, the only difficulty is that it's sometimes hard to tell what is museum and what is shop!

You can see a selection of the objects in the collection from the comfort of your own home on the [SADACC website](#), including (on the textiles side) a wonderful variety of decorated horse, buffalo and camel trappings, an embroidered game board from India and beadwork baskets, to name just a few. Alternatively, if you're able to visit the museum in person, the permanent collection includes some interesting large objects such as embroidered Central Asian garments, ikat coats and Indian and Bangladeshi kanthas. The museum mounts small temporary exhibitions that change around every



Some of the rugs for sale, in front of a huge gate from Gujarat, India.

three months, so there's always something new to see. When I visited, there was an exhibition on the arts and crafts of Burma and Northern Thailand.

Since 2012, the SADACC Trust has been affiliated with the Sainsbury Institute for Art (SIfA) at the University of East Anglia (UEA). Together, the two organisations are working to establish a South Asian Study Centre and Museum. More immediately, they are jointly organising a conference planned to take place at the UEA from 30 April to 2 May 2014 on 'The Future of South Asian Collections: UK and South Asia perspectives', which aims to promote collaboration and exchanges between professionals working with collections of South Asian arts and crafts, nationally and internationally.

A display case in the exhibition 'The Arts & Crafts of Burma and Northern Thailand'.





A nineteenth-century cotton *pichvai* from Rajasthan, north-western India.

I recommend a visit if you're around Norwich. The collection is open to the public from Monday to Saturday, 9:30am–5pm, and talks are often held in the gallery.

Contact the SADACC Trust to find out about events and talks:

The Old Skating Rink Gallery  
34–36 Bethel Street  
Norwich

<http://www.southasiandecorativeartsandcrafts.co.uk/>

## **OATG's Show and Tell event took place in January. Agnes Upshall reports on an interesting afternoon.**

The OATG's first-ever show and tell session was hosted by Joss Graham and went exceedingly well. We saw so many textiles that I couldn't possibly share them all with you here, so what follows is just a small selection of what people brought on the day. Joss brought some order to the variety by grouping the offerings geographically, so we were able to to experience a round-Asia textile tour.

Pamela Cross brought a beautiful batik shoulder cloth from Indonesia, featuring warp wrapping and beads, and woven by a woman named Ernestina, who was born in 1893. Pamela initially found out about the cloth when she offered to help the family to sell some textiles, but soon found herself drawn into the story of its origins and maker, and ended up buying it herself! It's wonderful that Pamela is fortunate to know so much about where this textile comes from.

Still on an Indonesian theme, one of our newest members, Nelly Andon, brought a warp ikat cloth from Sumatra, which had been woven by her grandmother. She told us that it had been intended for her when she got married, but she loved this cloth so much that she persuaded her mother to give it to her while she was still a teenager!

Heading north, Marion Maule brought a cornucopia of things Japanese, all around the theme of the new year. There was a small girl's kimono decorated with cranes; some temari balls, made using threads leftover from kimono-making; a tenugui depicting all the positions in sumo wrestling; various furoshiki and some fans from the first tea ceremony of the year.

Personally, my favourite textile of the day, although sadly I don't have a photo of it, was Prudence Curran's Central Asian hairpiece, a very long, fairly narrow item designed for a girl to wear on the back of her head to cover her long, plaited hair. It was embroidered on the front, lined with Russian printed cotton on the back, and the edges were bound with green ikat fabric. There were tassels on the end, which would swing as the wearer moved.



Pamela models her Indonesian shoulder cloth.



Nelly's Sumatran warp ikat.

Many thanks to Joss for hosting the event, Christine for organising it, everyone who brought a textile to show, and anyone who came along just to spectate! And thanks to Sue Richardson, for allowing me to use her photos here. I think everyone would agree that the day was a wild success, and something we would all enjoy doing again in the future.



Marion with the tenugui depicting sumo wrestlers.

# Other Asian textiles events

**17 January—15 March 2014, New York**

## **Exhibition: The Trajectory**

Christine Martens, researcher and teacher on Central Asian textiles, is showing an exhibition at the Spence School Gallery, New York, focusing on the trajectory from the studio to Central Asia. Included will be contemporary weaving and Central Asian textiles.

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**February 2014, Kolkata**

MARG Magazine is launching its special issue, 'Colours of Nature: Dyes from the Indian Subcontinent', in Kolkata, India. This is based on the exciting rediscovery, in Kolkata's Botanical Survey of India, of unique long-lost 19th-century volumes of naturally dyed cloth and fibre samples by master dyer Thomas Wardle, and a rare set of textile samples compiled by John Forbes Watson. SUTRA is planning talks, exhibitions, dyeing and weaving demonstrations and sales of handcrafted products. Details can be found on the website: [www.sutratextilestudies.com](http://www.sutratextilestudies.com)

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**1 March—5 September 2014, Amsterdam**

## **Expedition Silk Road, Treasures from the Hermitage**

For some 1,700 years, the Silk Road was the world's largest trade network. Caravans crossed deserts and mountains to carry goods from East to West and West to East. The first archaeological digs were carried out in the late 19th century, mainly by Russian expeditions. Many treasures were found beneath the sands: murals, silver, gold, painted silk, sculptures and jewellery, all of high artistic quality and bearing witness to astonishing interactions between cultures and religions. What the Silk Route revealed to Russian scholars is now waiting to be discovered in Amsterdam, with more than 250 treasures from the Hermitage. See the website [http://www.hermitage.nl/en/tentoonstellingen/expedition\\_silk\\_road/inleiding.htm](http://www.hermitage.nl/en/tentoonstellingen/expedition_silk_road/inleiding.htm) for details.

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**Until 8 September 2014, Boston**

## **Fired Earth, Woven Bamboo**

A celebration of contemporary Japanese art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, USA. More than 60 dramatic ceramics and baskets from the Snider Collection are complemented by contemporary Japanese quilts and fabric screens. For more information, visit the museum's website: <http://www.mfa.org/exhibitions/fired-earth-woven-bamboo>

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Don't forget to look at [OATG's blog](#) for news and information about exhibitions and events:

<http://oxfordasiantextilegroup.wordpress.com/>

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**[www.tentmakersofcairo.com](http://www.tentmakersofcairo.com)**

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**18.30**

*Visitors are always welcome but are asked to make a £2 contribution towards costs*  
*Refreshments served from 18.00*

***Asian Textiles* reader Hywel Coleman comments on an article in issue no. 56, October 2013.**

I enjoyed reading Agnes Upshall's enthusiastic review of the OATG's visit to see the collection of Indonesian textiles belonging to David and Sue Richardson (*Asian Textiles* 56, pages 27–28). I hope no offence will be taken, though, if I point out a few misunderstandings that seem to have crept into the piece.

The most surprising comments concern the Batak textiles of North Sumatra. It is stated that 'This is the most Islamic region of Indonesia and ... the land of bling!' While a few of the Batak *marga* (clans) – such as the Lubis – are indeed Muslim, the vast majority of Batak people are Christian and there is no way that North Sumatra could be thought of as 'the most Islamic region' in Indonesia. I suspect that there is confusion here between the province of Aceh (populated by the devoutly Muslim Acehnese) and the neighbouring province of North Sumatra (where the mainly Christian Bataks live).

It is also difficult to see how Batak textiles – for the most part rather sombre and dark – can be characterised as 'bling'. The 'silk, shiny and opulent' cloths described in the article are certainly not from North Sumatra and have no connection with the Batak people.

The next paragraph describes how the Batak *ulos ragidup* textiles are woven in three sections, but that as this is 'a tricky and time-consuming process ... often these days it is entirely avoided by simply stitching together three separate cloths.' This is probably an over-simplification of what is, admittedly, an extremely complex feature of these Batak textiles. Sandra Niessen, who has devoted her life to the study of Batak textiles (see *Asian Textiles* 43, 2009), explains that the difference between the cloths with 'sewn-in' end fields and those with 'woven-in' end-fields is almost certainly one of provenance, not a matter of weavers these days wishing to save time and energy: the 'sewn-in' cloths come from Uluan whilst the 'woven-in' ones are from other areas of Toba (Niessen, 1985, *Motifs of Life in Toba Batak Texts and Textiles*, page 170).

The last two points may seem to be nitpicking, but they seem strange to an Indonesian reader: the 'Nage district of central Flores' is actually the district of Nagekeo and 'the Ende province' is only a district (*kabupaten*) in the province (*provinsi*) of Nusa Tenggara Timur.

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## MEMBERSHIP OF OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

(includes three issues of *Asian Textiles* magazine)

**Membership subscriptions were due for renewal on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2013.**

OATG membership runs from 1<sup>st</sup> October to 30<sup>th</sup> September, and subscriptions for the year 2013–14 are now due. Membership costs £15 for individuals, or £20 for a joint subscription. If you pay by cheque, please make the cheque out to OATG, and write your name clearly on the back. If you haven't already renewed your membership for this year, we look forward to receiving your subscription soon, at the address below.

Alternatively, you could set up a banker's order, which is a great help to us as it cuts down on admin. You can download a form from the website and send it to your bank.

We depend on your subscriptions in order to keep our programme of lectures running, as well as for the printing and postage of *Asian Textiles* magazine. We do hope you would like to continue your membership of OATG.

Any queries, please contact:

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