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OATG events programme

Tuesday 27 November 2018
Textiles from the Arab World collected by Jenny Balfour-Paul with Abigael Flack, Collections Officer and Julia Nicholson, Curator and Joint Head of Collections, Pitt Rivers Museum.

An introduction to, and viewing of the collection, and the role of voluntary community curators in the Multaka Oxford project.

Location: Pitt Rivers Museum (Please use the South entrance, from South Parks Rd)
Time: 4 pm refreshments, 4.30 – 6 pm talks and viewing.

Saturday 8 December and Sunday 9 December 2018
***Grey Matters* - A Tapestry-weaving Workshop** led by Jennifer Gurd with volunteer tutors from Oxford Guerrilla Weavers and friends.

Limited to 10 participants. No previous experience is necessary. Probable fee £10 for OATG members per day. Some, but not all, materials will be provided. You are encouraged to book both workshop days, but they can be booked separately. If you are a complete beginner, make sure to come to the first day. Please sign up via Eventbrite to show that you are interested.

Location: Ashmolean Museum Education Centre.
Time: 10 am – 4 pm both days (there will be a break for lunch).

Saturday 2 February 2109
Annual General Meeting and Show & Tell

Location: Ashmolean Museum Education Centre.
Time: 1 pm – 4 pm.

OATG events are free for members and £3 for non-members.

For more information and/or registration please contact: oatg.events@gmail.com

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Front cover *Dolls representing a wedding couple from Aceh, Sumatra*. See book review p 20.

Embroidery and Identity

A Palestinian *thōb* from the Pitt Rivers Museum

by Abigael Flack

The Palestinian *thōb*, illustrated below, is part of a collection of textiles from across the Arabic-speaking world, which was collected and recently offered to the Pitt Rivers Museum by Dr Jenny Balfour-Paul, a prominent authority on indigo. The collection of about one hundred pieces comes from across the Middle-East and North Africa, and includes a range of textile techniques, from ikat weaving to indigo burnishing.

Palestinian Thōb *from the Jenny Balfour-Paul collection recently donated to the Pitt Rivers. Probably Ramallah, 1920s–1930s. Pitt Rivers Museum 2018.37.19.*

The *Multaka-Oxford* project, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund, is now drawing on the collection. *Multaka-Oxford* creates roles for volunteers and activities for visitors and uses museum collections as a 'meeting point' for people from a variety of backgrounds to comment on and interpret some of the objects.

The *thōb* is from central Palestine, probably Ramallah, and dates from the 1920s–1930s. It was purchased in Amman in 1974. It is made from hand-woven, undyed linen, and decorated with a vibrant red silk embroidery, distinctive of the Ramallah region. This red floss silk was most often imported from nearby Syria.

Detail from chest panel.

The dress has many of the features of traditional Palestinian costume, including the rich colour of the threads and intricate motifs which are laid out in a square chest panel (*qabbah*), around the bottom, and on the sides and the sleeves. The embroidery on the dress is all hand-stitched and is mainly in cross-stitch and couching, and has beautiful geometric, floral and foliate patterns. The weave of the linen base fabric is quite open, which facilitates using counted-thread embroidery such as cross-stitch.

A PALESTINIAN THŌB FROM THE PITT RIVERS

The motifs, and the way they are laid out, are significant in traditional Palestinian dress, and say a great deal about who made an item and where it is from. Creating embroidered dresses was, and still is, an art traditionally carried out by Palestinian women, and is passed down through families. Particular patterns are deeply tied to identity. Dresses, particularly those made in the 19th and early-20th centuries, have specific motifs which identify family, age, social status and location.

The dress features motifs such as 'feathers' and 'tall palms'

Above Detail 'feathers' from the top edge of the chest panel.

Right Detail 'tall palms' from the centre back of the dress above the bottom hem.

Along with some others from the Balfour-Paul collection, this piece was brought out for a group of traditional *Dabke* dancers who were visiting from Ramallah through the Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association. Some recalled seeing female relatives embroider or being taught embroidery by them, and some of the women performed traditional songs. There is video footage of this on the Multaka-Oxford tumblr page: https://multaka-oxford.tumblr.com/post/178174546434/over-the-summer-the-pitt-rivers-was-lucky-to-host#notes. One of the group, Refa, told us how women used to embroider near a river or lake, where the reflections from the water would maximise the light from the sun.

Members of the group also told how the embroidery would be made in sections before being sewn together. Some recalled that the chest panel could be attached in such a way that the sides were open to facilitate feeding infants.

The beauty and artistry of the dress is evident. What was also demonstrated from bringing audiences to the Balfour-Paul collection is the emotive nature of clothing and textiles, and, in terms of their culture and identity, how they are both deeply personal and universal.

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Abigael Flack is Collections Officer for the Multaka-Oxford project at the Pitt Rivers Museum, as well as being collections assistant for the Warwickshire Museum Service. She also has experience in volunteer and community engagement.

Chinese imperial court dress and insignia of rank

Ultimate power dressing!

Origins, evolution and eventual demise

by David Rosier

In writing this article, I have set myself the challenge of luring the reader into my area of interest: Chinese imperial court dress. I do not seek to present any radical new theories. My aims, as a collector and lecturer, are far simpler – to provide a glimpse into the complex world of the imperial Chinese court, and focus on the regulated dress of the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368–1911). An environment where, literally, *you were what you wore.*

My fascination with the Chinese imperial court, and its life predominately defined by mandated court costume, stems from my first visit to China in 1984. As China gradually emerged from the Mao era, it was just possible, while being escorted around Beijing, to glimpse aspects of the magnificence that typified the 2,000 years of Imperial rule.

While the grandeur of the Forbidden City gave tangible evidence of the power of the Emperors, ruling from the Dragon Throne with the Mandate of Heaven, little was generally known, outside China, about the philosophy and mechanics of imperial governance. I was increasingly intrigued as to how such a vast, and diverse, empire could be so successfully governed by an ancient philosophy, and political infrastructure, based on the writings of Confucius (551–479 BC).

This was particularly intriguing in the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) when the minority Manchu rulers presided over a vast Han Chinese population. Nearly two centuries of peace and growing prosperity were the critical factors in this remarkable achievement. The success, however, came to a traumatic end in the 1840s leading inevitably to the collapse of the dynasty, and in 1911 the demise of Imperial rule.

From the outset of the Qing Dynasty it was evident that the ancient system of mandated court dress would be fundamental to the preservation of Imperial Rule. At the core of the system were specifically designed robes, each displaying iconography, often an insignia of rank badge, that allowed visual identification of the wearer's status. These textiles were of exquisite woven silk which was then expertly embroidered at a network of imperial workshops centred on the cities of Suzhou, Nanjing and Hangzhou in the valley of the Yangtse River.

This article explores the origins and evolution of imperial insignia of rank. Some readers may be motivated to dig deeper into this aspect of China's imperial history. The recommended reading list at the end of the article is an appropriate starting point!

The origins and evolution of imperial court costume

China's court dress regulations appear to have originated during a period from the Xia (2700-1600 BC) to the Shang (1600–1046 BC) dynasties. During the subsequent Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BC), the system evolved into an instrument for rulers to create

status while still demonstrating their authority. Eventually these regulations were adopted as a code known as *The Rules by Rites*.

According to the *Book of Rites of the Zhou*, the emperor, members of the imperial family, and high-ranking officials, were required to wear robes which were specified as to their overall structure, colour and iconography.

Regulated court dress was one of the many institutions formalised after Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi (ruled 221–211 BC) unified China for the first time. Following the overthrow of the Qin Dynasty these regulations were initially retained in the Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 220) but revised by Emperor Xiaoming in AD 59.

The Han regulations specifically identified costume for both sacrificial rituals and official activities. The rules covered caps, robes and boots, but head-wear was the primary indication of a person's status. Official costume was further enhanced by the wearing of silk ribbons, attached to an official seal, where the size, colour and texture of the ribbon denoted a wearer's rank.

After a civil war, China was reunited in the Sui Dynasty (AD 581–618) and there was a return to empire-wide costume regulations. However, it was not until AD 605 that Emperor Yang issued an official set of Sui regulations. The Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907) saw another revision and extension of the regulations published in AD 621. These remained in place, essentially unaltered, until the fall of the dynasty.

The Song Dynasty (AD 960–1279) reunited China and immediately court dress regulations were introduced. They established a system of insignia for civil and military officials. Additionally, in AD 961, Emperor Taizhu adopted the *Three Protocol Graph*, which created a rigid system of regulated ceremonial dress. In support of the system the Protocol Department was established with a mandate to produce, and maintain, comprehensive descriptive costume regulations, supported by exact paintings of all appropriate items. Officials were appointed to police adherence and were backed by a range of harsh punishments for those who transgressed.

The Liao emperors brought no tradition of court dress, but would eventually establish regulations based on previous dynasties with Han-style robes at the core of the system. The Jurchen Jin finally established their regulations in 1142 for the Imperial family, in 1147 for officials' ceremonial clothing and in 1163 for officials undertaking normal duties.

The Mongols, who established the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), traditionally wore simple clothes associated with their nomadic lifestyle, but quickly became enthusiastic about adopting the Han style of dress, which included regulated court costumes. The robe was the predominant form of dress and was normally made of a single colour brocaded cloth (*Zhi sun*). The Yuan Dynasty period, however, saw a rise in a rich variety of fabrics, styles and patterns. The Emperor had no less than 26 forms of robe, and even the officials had in excess of 20 variations.

Yuan Dynasty costume was usually of a single coloured brocaded cloth.

The Ming Dynasty 1368–1644

China returned to Han Chinese rule when the Ming Dynasty was established in 1368. Emperor Hongwu (1368–1398) immediately abolished and replaced the Yuan dress regulations; a process that would, however, take 20 years and would not be fully codified until 1393.

Once established the regulations imposed strict rules that applied to all members of the Imperial family, both male and female, and covered:

- court dress
- sacrificial dress
- audience dress
- ordinary dress
- informal or casual dress.

Ming clothing for officials reflected earlier periods of China's history with ceremonial wear based on robes adorned with girdles, with ribbons attached, that denoted rank together with distinctive coronets. An important change was that the silk ground for 'audience' and 'ordinary' robes were dyed in the colour that now denoted the rank of the wearer.

In 1392 it was decreed that the nine ranks of both civil and military officials, and several additional court positions, should wear an over-gown (*pu fu*) on which a rank badge *(buzi)* had to be displayed. This was not a Ming innovation, as insignia of rank badges are traceable as far back as the Qin dynasty (221–206 BC). The system, however, became considerably more complex during the Ming, and subsequently, the Qing, dynasties.

Left *Ming dynasty civil official. Civil and military officials had to wear an over-gown on which a rank badge had to be displayed.*

Above *Ming dynasty civil insignia.*

The Qing Dynasty 1644–1911

The Qing Dynasty was created by the *Jurchens (*Manchus*)* who populated lands north-east of China's border. Whilst having a nomadic heritage, by the 17th century the Manchu were successful traders and farmers. In 1616 Nurchai, the founder of the Qing Dynasty, proclaimed the Latter Jin Dynasty, which was created from a confederation of Jurchen and Mongol tribes. Hong Taiji succeeded his father in 1626, and in 1635 proclaimed the creation of the Qing Dynasty. It was decided, at this

juncture, to adopt the Ming/Confucian basis of government, a move that would prove vital in the conquest of China. In June 1644 the Manchus entered Beijing, seized the Dragon Throne, and proclaimed Emperor Shunzhi the first Qing Emperor of China. It would be 268 years before the Manchu left the Forbidden City.

Manchu court dress regulations had been defined in 1638 and were immediately established in China through a range of imperial edicts. The new regulations required the adoption of a Manchu style of court robe and an adaption of Ming rules so merging the two cultural approaches.

The process of achieving domination over the Han Chinese proved challenging and took almost 16 years. This pacification may well have proved far more destructive had the Manchu not already recognised the practical, and political, benefits of adopting the Han system of government, based on the Confucian school of thought [*Ju*]. The system had served China well for nearly 1,700 years by creating a generally efficient government populated with appropriately trained administrators. Han officials who pledged their allegiance to the Manchu were therefore able to retain their status. As a result, the Empire continued to function politically, and economically, whilst rebel areas were gradually brought under imperial control.

Following the initial promulgation of Qing court dress regulations in 1652 the rules were regularly reviewed, revised, and augmented throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. The later decades of the 17th century, under the direction of Emperor Kangxi (1661–1722), saw the re-establishment of the imperial silk workshops in the Yangtse River valley with a resultant increase in silk production. Regulated court dress reached a peak of scope and complexity in 1759 following the Qianlong Emperor's project to review, revise, and expand, the rule book. The *Huang Chao Liqi Tushi* was the culmination of his efforts to ensure that the regulations appropriately reflected his Manchu culture while adhering to the Han/Confucian governmental principles. The 1759 Regulations extended to over 5,000 pages of descriptive text with more than 6,000 hand-painted illustrations.

Illustration of a dragon robe (jifu) *from the 1759 regulations* Huang Chao Liqi Tushi. *V&A Museum.*

By 1799, and Qianlong's death, imperial authority, and with it the impact of the court dress regulations, had entered a period of decline triggered by rampant government corruption and mounting pressure from western colonial powers for China to adopt a more equitable trading relationship. China in the mid-19th century would experience one its worst ethnic uprisings, the Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864), and simultaneously suffer humiliating diplomatic and/or military defeats at the hands of western powers (1842 and 1860) and Japan (1895). These traumas resulted in a declining quality of the dress produced and, eventually, abuses of the regulations, and were precursors to the eventual collapse of imperial rule in 1911.

Insignia of rank

Central to the concept of regulated court dress was a range of insignia of rank which were embroidered and/or woven badges made of silk. They identified membership of a specific hierarchy and the wearer's individual status. The concept of insignia of rank underwent significant development during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). Those of imperial status had dragon imagery while the nine ranks of the civil officials and the nine ranks of the military officials had a range of appropriate birds (for the civil officials) and creatures (military).

While the imperial clan wore a range of dragon roundels (twelve, eight or four in number) on court robes (*Chaopao*), the officials wore large trapezoid badges on a plain silk outer robe. Pairs of birds or animals that denoted a sub-division within each specific rank were unique to this period. This ended in the later part of the dynasty when only a single creature was displayed.

The Jiajing Emperor (1507–1567) was the 12th emperor of the Chinese Ming dynasty who ruled from 1521 to his death, and is here seen with a robe embellished with dragon roundels.

The Qing Dynasty saw the imposition of regulations of increasing complexity with the objective of showing status via appropriately designed insignia of rank. There was also growing freedom to embellish insignia with personal iconography.

The twelve ranks of the imperial clan wore insignia, either roundels or squares, which showed varying designs of the iconic and benevolent Chinese dragon. The creature was the personal emblem of the emperor (although not for his exclusive use) and symbolised the vital link between earth and heaven. The dragon was associated with the control of the rains that ensured an adequate harvest, and so provided food for those under its control. This made the dragon a perfect emblem for the emperor.

CHINESE IMPERIAL COURT DRESS AND INSIGNIA OF RANK

Above *The Qing dynasty imperial clan formal insignia of rank.*

Left *Prince Yu (1706–1785).* From *Worshipping the ancestors. Smithsonian 2001.*

The dragon image has evolved from nine creatures, the 'nine resemblances'. The earliest examples date back to the mid-Neolithic period (circa 4000 BC). The number of claws of the dragon, as well as the colour of the silk ground, were key indicators of noble status.

Dragon of the Wanli Emperor who reigned 1572–1620. The five-clawed dragon flies over waves and the earth (a three-pronged rock) pursuing a flaming pearl, representing knowledge and enlightenment.

The five-clawed *Lung* dragon, contained within a roundel, and symbolic of heaven and immortality, was reserved for the emperor, empress and the four ranks of princes and princesses. Four roundels were worn: one each on the front and back, and one on either shoulder. Other dragons, ranging from a four-clawed (*Mang)* to a two-clawed one, represented lower levels of the nobility.

Insignia for the fifth to the twelfth ranks of the nobility were displayed in a square, front and back, which were associated with the earth and mortality. Imperial dukes were the fifth to the eighth ranks, and other nobility were the ninth to the twelfth ranks. Insignia were applied to an outer robe, *gun fu*, for the emperor and *chao fu* for the nobles. The first to the fourth ranks had four roundels and the remaining ranks had two square badges.

Duke's insignia on formal surcoat for the fifth to eighth ranks. **Left** *Ming dynasty four-clawed* mang *dragon 1550–1600.* **Right** *Qing dynasty five clawed* lung *dragon 1800–1820.*

Colour played a vital role in defining rank. Imperial yellow was reserved for the emperor, empress and senior consorts. There was a spectrum of colours for men comprising deeper yellow, brown, blue, blue-black and black, and for women deeper yellow, green, turquoise and pink, which were used for the ground of the robe or insignia. The approach also applied to civil officials (mandarins) and the gentry class.

Civil officials' insignia of rank (late-Qing 1662–1911)

First	Manchurian crane
Second	Golden pheasant
Third	Peacock
Fourth	Cloud goose
Fifth	Silver pheasant
Sixth	Egret
Seventh	Mandarin duck
Eighth	Quail
Ninth	Paradise flycatcher

*First rank Manchurian crane formal surcoat (*pu fu*). Late 17th century.*

CHINESE IMPERIAL COURT DRESS AND INSIGNIA OF RANK

Government officials were organised in nine ranks according to their roles. Each rank was represented by a bird that typified the intellectual skills appropriate to that rank. The birds were usually embroidered onto square rank badges which were then applied, front and back, to a formal outer robe (*pu fu*). The badges were approximately 12 inches square, so were markedly smaller than their Ming counterparts.

Civil official's insignia 1800–1820.
Left *Second rank Golden pheasant.* **Right** *Third rank Peacock.*

The iconography was similar to the imperial insignia in that the bird perched on a rock, surrounded by sea with a sky full of clouds. However, an additional feature, was the symbol of the sun, thought to represent the emperor, as all but one of the birds and animals look to the symbol as a mark of respect.

Lastly, there were the nine ranks of military officials represented by creatures, some real and some mythical, associated with courage and strength. Mythical creatures are identified by the flames that curl around their bodies. The structure of these badges was identical to their civilian counterparts. The first rank *qilin* (a dragon, deer and bear combination) does not, however, look to the sun symbol, as the official was responsible for the protection of the emperor, and so needed to remain alert for approaching danger.

Military officials' insignia of rank (late-Qing 1662–1911)

First	Qilin
Second	Lion
Third	Leopard
Fourth	Cloud goose
Fifth	Tiger
Sixth	Panther
Seventh	Rhinoceros
Eighth	Rhinoceros
Ninth	Sea-horse

Military official's insignia first rank qilin.
*Formal surcoat (*pu fu*) 1820–1840.*

CHINESE IMPERIAL COURT DRESS AND INSIGNIA OF RANK

Wives of officials were required to wear the insignia of their husbands when appearing in public. The only design difference was the placement of the sun symbol which moved from the top-left corner to the top-right corner creating a balance and synergy of the yin and yang. The sons of officials sometimes wore smaller versions of their fathers' insignia badges when in public.

Other positions at court also wore insignia. The most important were an elite group of 50 talented civil officials known as the censors. These were the emperor's auditors and were represented by a mythical creature, a *xie chai*, a combination of a one-horned dragon and a bear.

Military officials' insignia of rank.

Left *Fourth rank tiger 1800–1820.* **Right** *Fifth rank bear 1840–1860.*

In the 19th century it became fashionable, but was not mandated, for badges to be embellished with symbols of longevity, luck, joy and wealth and/or the eight precious objects associated with Taoism, Confucianism, and with Buddhism. This led to the distinctively intense designs associated with the end of the dynasty.

Insignia for officials of the censorate Xiehe chai, *a combination of a one-horned dragon and a bear.*

Left Xiehe chai *1750.* **Right** *Unused insignia 100-day reform period 1898.*

Apart from insignia badges, defining rank impacted virtually every aspect of court dress. Of particular importance were the semi-formal robes (dragon robes or *ji fu*) that had varying numbers of dragons (nine, eight or five), and differing colours of the silk ground, a visual image of the cosmos. Additionally, the hat finials and court necklaces (*chao zhu*) used

Development of religious symbols.

Left *Imperial prince's roundel with Daoist symbols 18th century.*
Right *Non-Manchu's duke's insignia with Buddhist symbols 19th century.*

colours and materials defined, within the regulations, denoting the rank of the wearer.

Male dress accessories.

Left *Emperor's winter court hat with finial* (chao guan) *from the 1759 regulations.*

Right *Formal court necklace.*

The demise of insignia of rank

The traumatic events of the second half of the 19th century reversed the prosperity that was created in the previous century. China became liable for ever increasing amounts of compensation or indemnity payable to victorious western powers and japan, while the country remained unable, or unwilling, to modernise and develop an industrial infrastructure.

In the 1860s, China, following the conclusion of the Second Opium War (1856–1860) and the Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864), was effectively bankrupt and the government was starved of revenue. It was obvious that economies were required, as were innovative ways of raising additional court revenue. The process of regulated court costume was impacted by diminishing imperial authority and the economic depression, but ironically gave an opportunity to generate much needed additional court revenue.

The decline in imperial authority. An insignia of a wife of a fourth rank civil official. A Cloud Goose looks up to the sun symbol as a mark of respect to the emperor. However, the roundel is a shape reserved exclusively for the first four ranks of the nobility.

The decline in imperial authority is clearly seen in the insignia of rank worn by officials' wives. The roundel illustrated to the left provides clear evidence that the system was now open to abuse. The badge is for the wife of a fourth rank civil official. The bird is a Cloud Goose and looks up to the sun symbol (top right) as a mark of respect to the emperor. The issue is that the roundel is a shape reserved exclusively for the first four ranks of the nobility. Officials were required to wear their insignia in the form of a square badge and while the example shown would not have been flaunted at court, there is evidence that such abuses of the regulations were frequent in the provinces.

Further decay in imperial control may be seen in the example shown on

the right which on initial scrutiny appears to be the insignia for a ninth-rank civil official. The rank bird is a Paradise Flycatcher. Closer examination reveals that the bird does not follow the required design. Instead of two long tail feathers, with an eye on each tip, this bird has an extra feather. The objective was to fool an observer that the wearer was of a higher rank. In this case a fifth-rank civil official represented by a Silver Pheasant which possessed multiple tail feathers. There are numerous examples of officials trying to deceive observers into thinking that they were of higher rank. It suggests that the detection and punishment for such transgressions were no longer effective.

Insignia designed to deceive. Insignia for a ninth-rank civil official. The Paradise Flycatcher does not follow the required design. An extra tail feather makes it look like a Silver Pheasant for a fifth rank official.

There is clear evidence that the court was receptive to officials accelerating their careers by purchasing promotion. Historically, a civil official would sit examinations at three-yearly intervals for consideration of career advancement. By the late 19th century a growing number of officials appeared to by-pass the examination process through a 'cash-for-honours' system. With an appropriate payment, promotion could be secured as frequently as every six months. This was welcome revenue for the imperial coffers, but it would have accelerated the decay of the emperor's authority, and it also fuelled anti-Manchu sentiment.

A consequence of the purchase of promotion and the worsening economy was that officials reduced the cost of commissioning appropriate insignia. The best example of such economy was the introduction of re-useable insignia.

Left *A rank badge with a space left for applying symbols appropriate to the wearer's rank.* **Right** *Early 20th century appliqué birds lacking the quality of earlier times.*

Illustrated above is a superstructure for a rank badge where the content is prepared but a space is left for appliqué rank birds or animals appropriate to the wearer's rank,

and appliqué birds which clearly lack the quality of the 18th/early 19th centuries. The rapid decline in quality was a clear indication that no one had the resources, or inclination, to preserve a custom that had become inappropriate for the modern industrialised world of the early 20th century in which China sought to participate.

Cost saving actions, and abuses of the regulations, increased as China approached the collapse of imperial rule in 1911, when the 2,000-year-old tradition of regulated dress ended.

This brings me to the end of my potted history of regulated court dress. As a collector, the story suggests there is an unlimited range of design concepts, some legal, others no more than abuses, which means that the visual insight is never ending. Marvellous!

Reading list

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David Rosier spent 25 years in Asia as a businessman, particularly in China. He was a committee member of the Hong Kong Textile Society. With his wife he collected 500 imperial Qing Dynasty dress accessories. Since returning to the UK he has lectured on Chinese court dress and arts of the Qing dynasty in UK and abroad, and leads tours to China focussing on imperial art and culture.

Mystery object

This textile was acquired via the Asia Society in New York as a man's piece of clothing from Sumba in Indonesia, and was said to date from the 1920s. The owner is wondering if the attribution is correct, and is also happy to donate it to a suitable home. The textile is woven in a single piece and sewn into a tube, and the design is symmetrical.

Please send any answers to the editor – gavin@firthpetroleum.com – for onward transmission.

My favourite… memory

by Sheila Paine; text by Sue Morley

My favourite memory is of something I never dreamt I would see, or even imagine it would still be possible to see in my lifetime, but there she was on the Metro in Shanghai in 2011. We were both about the same age then, in our early-80s. She was in a wheelchair waiting to get off at the next station. It was her beautifully embroidered jacket that I first noticed. I was mesmerised by her clothing. It was when I looked down, I noticed that her feet were bound.

A tradition that lasted for nearly a thousand years

This ancient tradition, which lasted almost a thousand years, was so deeply ingrained in Han Chinese society that even after it was finally outlawed in 1912, women in rural areas clandestinely continued to bind their daughters' feet, clinging to the belief that it would give them a better future.

Foot-binding is thought to have originated around AD 970, during the rule of the Song Emperor Li Yu. His favourite consort Yao-niang wrapped her feet in long strips of silk cloth and performed a dance on top of a golden lotus pedestal. From that day on, foot-binding was often associated with the term 'golden lotus' and first became fashionable among upper-class court dancers.

Handmade shoes for bound feet. Golden lotus feet were around 10cm (just under four inches) or even smaller. The next size up were 'silver lotuses' and the largest, and least desirable for marriage, were 'iron lotuses'. The shoes illustrated are from Sheila Paine's collection and were bought new. The green heel flap represents a leaf.

By the 12th century it had become much more widespread among the Han Chinese, but in the mid-17th century the ruling Manchu nobility tried to ban the practice, unsuccessfully. It wasn't until 1874 that a British priest in Shanghai formed

an anti-foot-binding committee, but the practice lingered on into the 20th century. In a modernising country foot-binding then became taboo. In 1950 Chairman Mao ordered anti-foot-binding inspectors to shame publicly any bound women they found. Their bindings would be hung in windows so that people would laugh at them. The women hid away. What extraordinary times of change my lady on the Metro must had lived through, but here she was out and about in the modern city, a survivor.

The ultimate aim was a three inch foot

The ultimate aim of foot-binding was 'Three-Inch Golden Lotus Feet', which were considered both a status symbol and a sign of beauty and sex appeal. They became a prerequisite for a good marriage, and for the family honour and reputation as a child the girl had demonstrated obedience and stoicism, and thereby became less independent. She could be controlled by a husband and mother-in-law.

For the golden lotus shape the feet were made narrower and shorter. The big toes were taped tightly into a triangular point, but all the small toes had to be broken and folded under the sole. The arch was also broken and the foot pulled back straight with the leg.

The soles of the pair of shoes illustrated on the previous page. These hand-made shoes were bought by Sheila Paine and are still in her collection.

A mother or grandmother started to bind her daughter's or granddaughter's feet when the child was around four to seven years old. At this age feet are still made of pre-bone cartilage so are easily broken and moulded. To ease the extreme pain, binding was usually started during the winter months when the feet were colder and more numb.

Every two days the silk or cotton wrappings were removed for washing to avoid infection. The toenails were clipped and the tissue and bone softened ready for manipulation either in hot water or a concoction of various herbs and oils. The feet would be beaten, massaged and doused with alum before being rebound tightly.

The first year was particularly excruciating because the girls had to walk long distances so that their own weight crushed their feet into shape. Gradually the sizes of the shoes were reduced to accommodate the shrinking feet. After two years, a pair of tiny folded feet had formed but the binding continued to keep the shape, and eventually they became numb.

The last remaining factory closed only in the 1990s

Although the practice was banned so long ago, the last remaining factory making the triangular embroidered 'lily flower' shoes only closed at the end of the 1990s, and amongst my treasures I have this handmade pair. The green heel flap represents a leaf. Having seen my lady, these five-inch works of art now encapsulate a story of women's suffering for beauty, family honour, advancement and men's delight. I have heard it said that (for those lucky enough to be born with them) small feet are still considered attractive in China.

Survivors of the practice remained in Yunnan and Shandong

Unbeknown to me when I had my encounter on the Metro, a photographer of cultural practices, Jo Farrell, had been searching since 2005 for any remaining survivors of the foot-binding tradition. Like me, she believed it unlikely any were left but in fact she found fifty women.

Five of them were still completely bound, and in hiding, but most had released their bindings. Many could no longer walk and kept their disfigurement hidden. All were from impoverished villages in the provinces of Yunnan and Shandong. Most of the women she photographed and documented in her book *Living History: Bound Feet Women of China*, were between 80 and 100 years old, but the oldest was 103. I wonder if mine is amongst them?

I know of two other OATG members who have also seen such a rarity, Felicity Wood in Xi'an in 1984, and Sue Morley in a remote corner of Yunnan Province in 1993.

How many women can be left in 2018? Surely my encounter was one of the last?

Sheila Paine is a life member of OATG and is an expert on textiles and tribal societies, She is the author of numerous books including *Embroidered Textiles: A World Guide to Traditional Patterns*; *The Linen Goddess: Travels from the Red Sea to Prizren*; *The Golden Horde: Travels from the Himalaya to Karpathos*; *The Afghan Amulet: Travels from the Hindu Kush*; *Embroidery from India and Pakistan*; and *Embroidery from Afghanistan*. An exhibition of some of her photographs, and some of the items she collected, was recently held at the Pitt Rivers Museum

Sue Morley is a member of OATG and has travelled widely. She writes "I was lucky enough to know Sheila's collection and join her embroidery focussed trips to Uzbekistan and Morocco and a felting trip to Finland. Since then we've been friends."

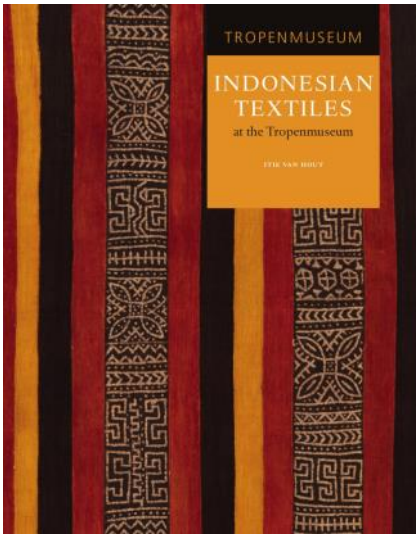
The editor would welcome *your* long or short contribution to this series of "My favourite…" place or textile or collection or book etc.

Please email contributions to gavin@firthpetroleum.com.

Indonesian Textiles at the Tropenmuseum

Indonesian Textiles at the Tropenmuseum by Itie Van Hout
Book review by Fiona Kerlogue

2017 LM Publishers - Volendam, The Netherlands
ISBN 978 946022 3907. 232 pages, 229 illustrations, most in colour.€34.50



This beautifully presented book is the sixth in a series produced by Tropenmuseum, in Amsterdam. The series includes volumes on the Museum's African, Oceanic and Islamic collections as well as one on photographs from the former Dutch East Indies. The chief author of this volume on Indonesian textiles, Itie van Hout, was for many years the curator of textiles at the Museum, and the book benefits from her wealth of knowledge and understanding, not just of the items in the collections, but also of the history of the institution, the background of the collectors, and the changing theoretical frameworks in which the collections were assembled.

Many books have been written about Indonesian textiles, mostly discussing the materials and techniques used in making them and their role in the very many differing cultural groups who inhabit the Indonesian archipelago. In recent years several volumes have appeared looking in depth at the textiles of particular groups. Some books have been produced by collectors, lavishly illustrating old, rare and intricately decorated pieces gathered from all over the islands.

This book takes a new approach, considering textiles from the islands in relation to the history and role of the museum in whose care they are kept. The first

Shoulder/hipcloth *hinggi kombu*. TM-48-50.

chapter discusses the ways in which textiles from Indonesia have been studied and collected in the past, as well as the scientific ideas and economic and political motives underlying museum practice in this area.

An important section summarises the various anthropological theories which have been employed in interpreting such textiles. The author goes on to outline the ancient roots of Indonesian culture and the waves of overseas influences, including trade, which affected the textile traditions of the many societies to different extents and in different ways. The materials and key textile techniques employed are introduced.

The origins of the Tropenmuseum collections can be traced back to the mid-19th century, when attitudes towards the peoples under European colonial rule had a strong influence on the drive to collect examples of their work. Most of the early material came from the collections of the Colonial Museum in Haarlem and the Ethnographic Museum of the Amsterdam Zoo Artis. This was eventually transferred to the new and much larger Colonial Museum in Amsterdam, whose first director was appointed in 1913. The Colonial Museum later became the Tropical Museum, or Tropenmuseum.

By the end of the 19th century, when the Museum collections were being developed in earnest, the Dutch government was celebrating a 300-year relationship with the archipelago. The role of Indonesian textiles in world fairs and the Dutch government's moves to develop craft industry in the colonies affected what was collected and preserved in the Museum's archives.

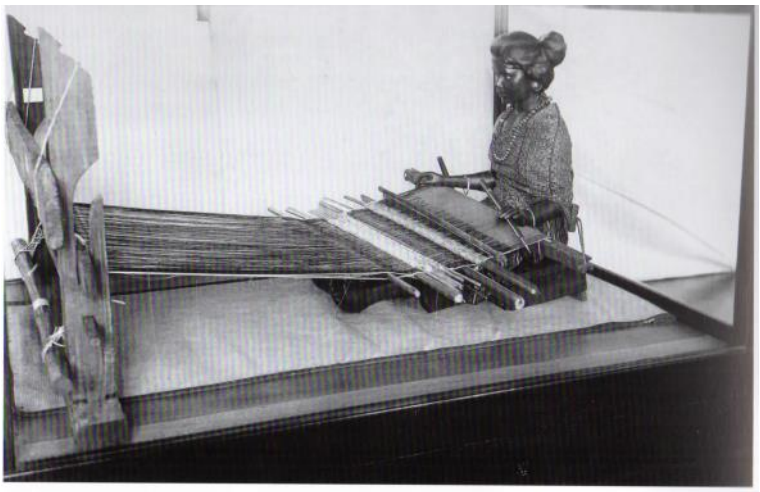
One chapter in particular explores the tangled relationship between coloniser and colonised, especially in relation to dress codes and the adoption of Indonesian techniques such as batik by Dutch textile producers and artists.

Left *Marianne Reyers dressed with clothing and jewellery [TM-789] acquired by the Tropenmuseum from Savu in 1932. It was assumed this was the correct way of wearing them, but there are inaccuracies: the cloth draped on her shoulder is a male cloth, and it is worn in the way of a western stole and not as a Suvanese shoulder cloth. Unknown photographer TM-60054843.*

Right *Part of the same acquisition [TM-789]. Cotton tubular skirt with warp ikat decoration. In the red panels, the letters RPMP are applied, those of Raja Pono. The cloth was woven by female servants of the Raja's wife, and the patterns were not allowed to be imitated – stipulated by naming the cloth* kain raja. *Cotton, before 1932. TM-789-27.*

BOOK REVIEW: INDONESIAN TEXTILES AT THE TROPENMUSEUM

In the early 20th century the collections were largely used to show visitors the lives of the people in the colonies. They were augmented over the years by examples collected during research of the artistic traditions of Indonesia, which were by then seen as being under threat. The political and social circumstances which drove further additions over the succeeding century, including those after independence which followed the Second World War, are explored and explained in some detail.



Above *Mannequin of an Aceh weaver at her loom. Unknown photographer TM-60054832. As in the photograph on the previous page, a man's cloth has erroneously been* draped over a woman's shoulders.

Below *Man's shoulder cloth*, idja seulimot, which is *worn over one or both shoulders as part of a complete outfit. Aceh, Sumatra. Cotton 98.5 x 200 cm. Before 1916. TM-45-341f.*

A chapter contributed by Sonja Wijs considers the history of the display of Indonesian textiles in the Museum and its forerunners. Archive photographs help to show how these changed over the years. One striking aspect is the use of life-sized and perhaps surprisingly life-like mannequins, some demonstrating the weaving or batik process, some showing how the textiles were worn.

Although the dress worn by each mannequin might not be accurate, the figures would have evoked the presence of real people making or wearing clothing. Generally the exhibitions attempted to suggest a unity of purpose between the Netherlands and her overseas territories, with textile production seen as part of a shared trading and manufacturing relationship.

The scope of the book is ambitious, and it covers a great deal of ground. The various chapters are generously illustrated, not just with photographs of examples from the Museum's textile collection, but also with documentary evidence from the archive which supports the book's aim to deepen understandings of the institutional context of the textile collections. Towards the end is a catalogue showing fine examples from the weaving and batik traditions of some of the main islands: Sumatra, Java, Sumba and Sulawesi.

Indonesian Textiles at the Tropenmuseum adds a fascinating dimension to the study of Indonesian textiles, providing the reader with insights not just into one of the world's most varied and technically sophisticated textile traditions, but also with food for thought on what is collected and preserved in museums, and why.

Dr Fiona Kerlogue is the former Deputy Keeper of Anthropology at the Horniman Museum in London. She is the author of *Batik: Design, Style and History* (Thames & Hudson, 2004).

What colour is a teardrop?

Exhibition review: Weaving New Worlds

by Jennifer M Gurd

Weaving New Worlds. An exhibition of contemporary tapestry by international women artists at the William Morris Gallery, London 16 June–23 September 2018. Curated by Prof. Lesley Millar.

Tapestry is art of the textile. Unlike the monumentally juicy and vibrant Kitaj tapestry at the British Library, the works in this exhibition were woven by the designers themselves. They explore the potential intrinsic in weft-faced, hand-controlled weaving. Hatching, for example, has a rich history of algebraic patterns and terms [cf. Galice, 1990]. Subtle, rendered effects reflect light at angles which enhance visual interest. Threads, such as silk, wool, linen, and mercerised cotton, reflect incidental light with their sheen. Explored and celebrated here in tapestry are not only the illustrative qualities, but the sculptural ones too.

Asian textiles, which this journal usually covers, have long historical and cultural roots. Contemporary tapestry benefits from being a relative newcomer.

Curator's comments

Question: How do the chosen Japanese pieces reflect the emerging trend in Asian tapestry weaving as a contemporary art form?

Answer: Hmmm – I wouldn't quite put it as strongly as a 'trend'. There is certainly an interest, particularly with young weavers, but it is quite small in Japan and mainly centred round the amazingly charismatic Professor of Textiles at Kyoto City University of Arts – Yasuko Fujino, who has championed the art form for many years.

Although having said that, neither of the two artists in this exhibition did study with Prof Fujino. Miyuki Tatsumi has worked alongside her, but Kanae Tsutsumi trained at Kyoto Seika University with another great textile artist: Machiko Agano, who, as anyone who has visited many of my exhibitions will know, is absolutely concerned with spatial intervention and not with flat tapestry. And I think that the 3D qualities of Tsutsumi's work reflect a different underpinning to that of other Japanese tapestry artists. Also Reiko Sudo at Tokyo Zokei and Yuka Kawai at Tokyo Tama Art University have inspired one or two tapestry weavers.

Why is there interest in Japan? Apart from Prof Fujino's passion for the art form, it is the narrative possibility. All who I have talked to love telling stories through their work. And of course, reflecting nature in the work. The art form is also unusual in Japan and the young artists feel able to make it their own. And their energy and excitement in and for the art form is a total delight.

I must also add as a postscript that my Japanese mentor and dear friend, Harumi Isobe, was also a wonderful tapestry weaver. She was not able to learn the techniques in Japan in the 1960s, so came to Scandinavia to study, and translated what she learnt into the most beautiful and totally Japanese tapestries, which were loved by all who encountered them. I feel she laid the foundation for what we now admire today.

[email correspondence with Lesley Millar 22 August 2018].

One Japanese tapestry, Miyuki Tatsumi's *Reflections on the Other Side* (2013) (see Fig 1 immediately overleaf) shows masterful subtlety. An ambiguous tonal design is worked on a grand scale in two open pieces, kimono style. Multiple wefts in bundle blends per half pass (i.e. a single row of weft yarns woven on the horizontal) give

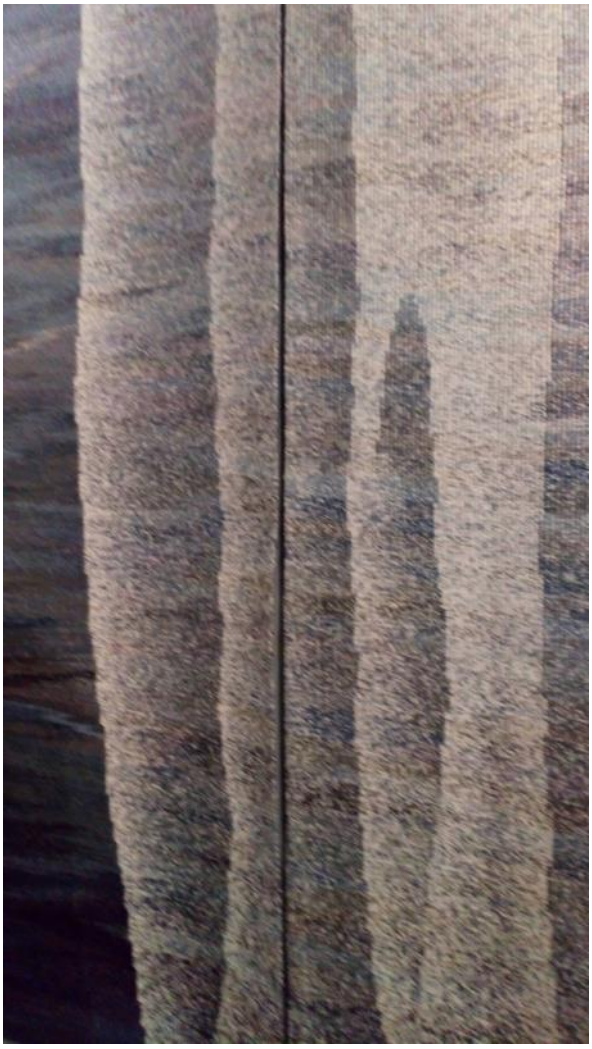


Fig 1 *Tatsumi: Reflections on the Other Side.*

markedly different effects when viewed at different distances, and also in different reproductive media (such as the textile itself and in a photograph). It will muffle the sound in any large architectural space.

The viewer doesn't know where she is when she is looking at it! But that is the metaphorical point along life's journey. Every revisit to this piece is different: light changes and so too our viewing filters. The piece beckons, but it isn't really a place – or a sense of what 'place' might be. Nor does it suggest what we should ask of it. It is Buddhist in nature, a minimalist landscape: strangely alive, yet modest in presence.

How does it resonate with the other tapestries on display? It's about vision. With what clarity do we really see things? And then there's a question about eternity.

The work is woven straight up in ramie (from Chinese Nettlestalks *Boehmeria nivea)*, silk, and cotton, at a set of about four (warp ends per inch). It is approximately 6 x 9 feet, double warped, with small areas of single weave indentations in variations of blue, grey, lilac, and off-white (ecru).

A very long foreground is broken by a tiny, hazy, darker-built skyline which fades out (to sea) towards the right -hand third. The sky is at first cloudy, then lifts. "I long for the opposite shore and want to go there. However someone on the opposite shore may long for this shore. The opposite shore looks far away but is close by, and it looks close by but is far away" she writes in the online catalogue notes [see references]. The tapestry hangs flush with the wall, unframed, and on hidden Velcro-covered battens.

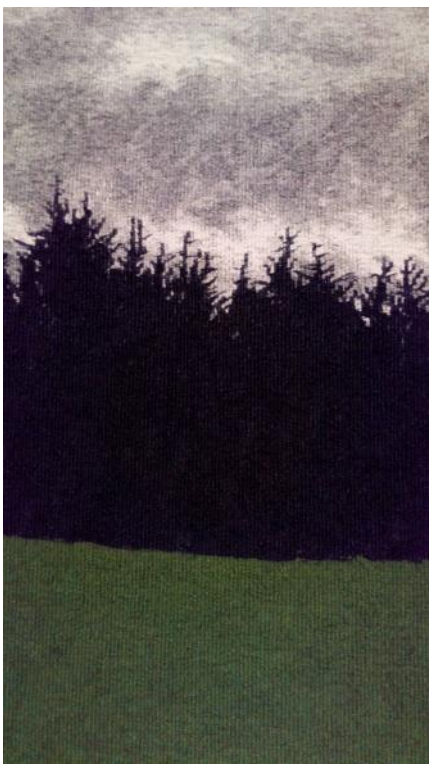


Fig. 2 *Brennan: Forest with New Green.* **Fig 3** *Gizzi: Cupid hangs on to the earth.*

There are glimpses of other dimensions: a vertical cohesive strip where the mist parts where we enter the floating city, a world of illusions: it's a profoundly meditative piece.

This sets the scene for a festival of different greys on grey-green walls. Brown-grey in Reilly's crashed vehicle, woven in blends of natural undyed yarns, sits opposite. To the left is Sara Brennan's gem of a landscape in three stripes, Fig 2, *Forest with New Green* (2017) with a raincloud Scottish grey sky. This is woven sideways at about 8 e.p.i. in linens, cottolins, and wools (cf. Penney *et al*, 2011).

Amanda Gizzi uses a darker, slate-grey outline technique, reminiscent of leaded stained glass, in a piece named *Cupid hangs on to the earth* (2015), Fig 3, made with linen, cotton, and wool, it is woven upright, but eccentrically and cleverly, like Coptic weave, on what looks to be a very fine cotton warp. Christine Sawyer's grey in *Out of the Blue* (2012) is made from worsted wool and cotton and is approximately five feet wide by four feet high. It too is woven upright, at about 5–6 e.p.i., and ranges from ecru to black.

Pat Taylor's grey *Sky Trails* (2018), Fig 4, is an optical illusion where weft bundles of white are successively polluted with additions of fine black threads and the proportion of white is simultaneously decreased. Her surface is fractured with lurex. Caron Penney's 2017 piece is an alchemical grey made of wool and gold gilt. Graded steps reference crossroads as the warp and weft cross, as in life.

Halsoy's *Wounds*, (Lebanon, 2014, wool and cotton) is, unsurprisingly, nothing but greys: "woven .. to heal the holes in a wall of Beit Beirut, once one of the city's most beautiful buildings", she writes. Barbara Heller's greys (Canada, 2016/17, linen, wool and cotton) define a middle ground in a photorealist Syrian ruin with a little healing pink.

Fig 4 *Taylor: Sky Trails.*

Fig 5 *Soroka: Cromarty.*

Grey is an ambiguous term. Soroka employs, in the darkest grey on black, some very fancy three-dimensional surface knots in *Cromarty*, Fig 5, (Scotland, 1999, linen, wool, cotton). This far-flung part of the Scottish mainland is a little sanctuary of weaverly delight. The tapestry mirrors succulent forests with "red going green, and green going red" in a unique and superbly iconic piece from an undisputed master (cf. Soroka, J., 2011).

Manga-style, Grey Wolf prepares to have a go at Blue Bird in Norwegian Tonje Hoydahl Sorli's *Brittle, Little and the Brutal Truth* (2017, wool, cotton, and still tensioned on the metal frame). It is an undyed, lustrous, natural grey, which is perhaps spælsau wool.

Jilly Edwards casts her magic spell with *New World,* Fig 6, (2017, UK, wool, cotton, linen, rayon) where yellow offers grey an optimistic prognosis (cf. Edwards, 2016).

Well, what does grey do? In fabric does it help us digest the image, or create a tonal mediator between hues? Or does it give the eye a palate cleanser amidst such a rich display? None of the viewers I interrogated were consistent. One pointed to a pale green that she saw as grey.

Fig 6 *Edwards: New World.*

Fig 7 *Baxter: Hallaig I.*

Joan Baxter uses grey sparingly in *Hallaig I, ready for lift off*, Fig 7, (Scotland, 2009, wool, linen, silk, flax). The sky is *so* blue. Grey is an occasional shadow, or a buffer in a light tone contrast in weft bundle blends (where groups of different yarns are held together on the bobbin and woven on the weft as a single yarn). Here it is like a little pencil mark, or graphite shading. This tapestry is very special. No reproduction will ever do it justice.

As for other pieces, each one of Pat Taylor's works is a technical lesson, and Caron Penney's has rhythm in flawless motion; back to that 'crossing over' resonance of the Buddhist metaphor.

This is slow, careful work, all of it.

Perhaps it is a small irony that grey is the ideal photographic light: it is of the shadow, but it also hides the shadows.

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Dr Jen Gurd is a guerrilla weaver and neuropsychologist. She is a committee member of OATG.

Finnish *Ryijy*

by Gavin Strachan

I have become increasingly fascinated by European textiles, particularly Balkan and Scandinavian items. They not only have lots of style, they also display their national identities and have compelling colours. Recently I bought an interesting Finnish *ryijy* which has made me investigate these particular weavings more thoroughly. I thought it worth sharing what I have discovered, so far, with the readers of this journal.

Historically, *Ryijys* are long-tufted and used for bedding. *Ryijy* (or *rya* in Swedish) means 'thick cloth' or 'shaggy'. Originally they were a form of paillasse. As a result, many *ryijy* are double-sided for extra thickness. They have the outward appearance of a gabbeh or rug, but they were not designed to go on the floor.

The *ryijy* tradition is thought to date back to the Viking era, but their exact origin is unknown. Did they appear spontaneously as practical objects, or did Viking traders introduce the idea from what they saw in Asia?

Detail from the double-sided Finnish ryijy *I recently bought. Probably originally used as a paillasse and later as a wall-hanging, both as is usual. What is now the front is shaggy with characteristic blue, green and red knots, and the obverse, with later hanging hooks, is also shaggy and mostly natural wool. Perhaps central south west Finland, circa 1820.*

The eastern influence on Scandinavian textiles

The *ryijy's* structure is similar to a Turkish carpet, albeit with only ten percent of the knots and a longer pile. They are woven with a form of the Ghiordes (Turkish) knot.

My undergraduate degree was in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, so forgive me for the next bit. The idea that Vikings were pillagers is mostly incorrect. They were traders. The Norse used the river Volga to the Caspian, and the Dnieper to the Black Sea, for migration to and trading with the East. The Volga route is accessed from the Gulf of Finland, up the River Neva to Lake Ladoga, and thence by smaller rivers and portaged stretches to the Volga itself. When they reached the Caspian, the onward route was by sail to the southern shores to meet the Silk Road. The Dnieper route begins up the Western Dvina River in the mid-Baltic, and via a portage to the Dnieper, reaches Kiev, the Black Sea and Constantinople.

As early as 839 Swedish emissaries are known to have visited Byzantium, and the Viking Rurik dynasty annexed Kiev in 882 to serve as the capital of the Kievan Rus. There is archaeological evidence that Vikings reached Baghdad, and Scandinavians served as Byzantine mercenaries. In the late 10th century the Varangian Guard, the bodyguard of the Byzantine Emperors, was primarily manned by Scandinavians.

FINNISH *RYIJY*

We know that in the early 9th to 10th centuries, Islamic silk textiles were introduced to Scandinavia by Viking merchants. Many archaeological finds in Scandinavia include silk and are believed to be Persian in origin. Knotted pile carpets came too: a Turkish carpet found in the Church at Marby, near Jämtland, in Northern Sweden is carbon-dated to 1300–1420.

Indigenous production of *ryijys* required wool, and there is archaeological evidence of organised textile production in Scandinavia dating back to the early-Iron Age. Wool was an important domestic product for the Vikings, producing not only clothing for the Nordic climate, but also for sails. Experimental archaeology has demonstrated that Viking ships required large amounts of wool.

Reconstruction by Elisabet Jansson of an early Swedish rya *blanket . Only natural colours were used and the pile was originally placed face down.*

Later Asian influences informed Scandinavian textiles in the late 18th and 19th centuries as a result of Nordic sailors and traders bringing textiles back to the west.

Whatever the origin of *ryijys*, there is no doubt that the Scandinavians produced textiles influenced by Asian designs and techniques.

Ryijys in the Middle Ages

One form of *Ryijys* were woven as cloaks and were particularly used on open-sea voyages, and used into modern times. Woven wool does not stiffen in salt water as animal hides do. Older Finnish boat *ryijys* are now rare. Dr Sopanen, who has a large collection of ryijys, and published a book based on his collection in 2008, has a boat ryijy dated 1814.

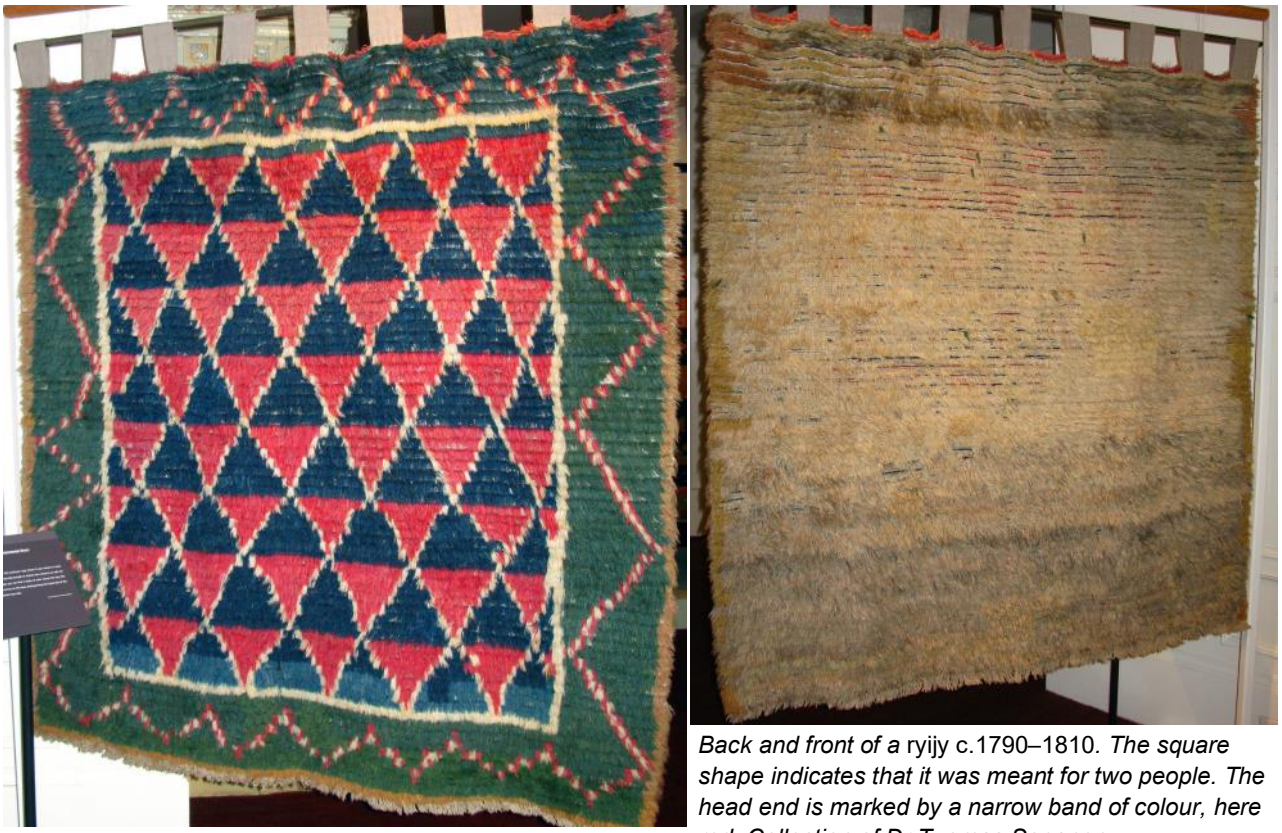
Ryijys were particularly used for bedding. Finnish ethnographer U.T. Sirelius published a detailed study of them in 1926. He demonstrates they were used in such a fashion by both the wealthy and the servant class from the 1400s. Woven articles identifiable as *ryijys* are mentioned in documents dating from the middle of the 15th century.

In the 16th century, *ryijys* were mainly made in natural colours only. These simpler *ryijys* were originally used pile side down, but the weave on the side that was visible on the bed showed through, and was at times further decorated with coloured wefts. In the 17th century quilted coverlets, rather than *ryijys*, became fashionable with the gentry, and their use by the upper classes died out, but *ryijys* were still used by the less wealthy.

Ryijy *with clumsily woven initials and date (1822). Suur-Savon Museum, Mikkeli, Finland.*

Later on, vegetable dyes of yellow, red, green, and blue were introduced and designs became more intricate. When *ryijys* were used as bedding, a narrow band was often woven at the head end. In the 1800s, when *ryijys* served more ceremonial and decorative functions, the tradition of the narrow band persisted.

Ryijys became popular as wedding textiles. In the 18th century, a *ryijy* was often used as part of a wedding ceremony and was then displayed on a wall in the couple's home. This gentle use may explain why many *ryijys* from the late 18th and early 19th centuries remain in good condition (apart from moth damage). The imagery became more complex and appropriate symbols such as brides and birds of happiness appeared (see back cover photograph of a wedding *ryijy* dated 1782). *Ryijys* commonly included initials and the year of the event commemorated, so many *ryijy* of the 18th and 19th centuries bear dates. This facilitates estimating the age of those that are not so dated.



Back and front of a ryijy c.1790–1810. *The square shape indicates that it was meant for two people. The head end is marked by a narrow band of colour, here red. Collection of Dr Tuomas Sopanen.*

Ryijys are known to come from throughout Finland. The quality and decoration of older *ryijys* are said to vary depending on social class. The upper classes tended to use professional weavers capable of producing shading and images with sharper details. Folk *ryijys* are simpler and more naive, with broad borders, one colour within each object, and frequently have clumsy lettering and numbers, perhaps because the weavers were largely illiterate. *Ryijy* weavers obtained commissions to weave *ryijys* for special occasions, but difficulty in moving long distances meant that different regions had designs specific for particular events, and colours were dictated by the availability of local natural dyes. Designs were often geometric shapes, flowers, human figures, animals and birds. One popular wedding subject was a tree of life for family heritage.

FINNISH *RYIJY*

The warps are often made of linen or hemp. Each knot is composed of three strands of wool, which tends to give *ryijys* a vibrant look as a result of the different shades of colour used and the way that light reflects from the texture of the wool.

A wedding ryijy *from around 1800, featuring a tree of life, one of the more popular wedding symbols. Collection of Dr Tuomas Sopanen.*

Ryijys in the 19th century

Sleeping on *ryijys* by the lower classes ceased about the 1820s. For the rest of the century they were more commonly used as daytime bed covers, and in the late 1800s were put on the walls, mirroring the earlier hanging of wedding *ryijys*. Earlier pieces often have lustrous wool and dyed with plant-based dyes. In the later 1800s, newly-available aniline dyes were used, but over time these were less colour-fast. Also in the late 1800s, many *ryijy* weavers used cross stitch or embroidery motifs from Germany and Sweden resulting in a certain loss of creativity.

20th century *ryijys*

Two events helped popularise *ryijys* in the early 20th century. A large exhibition of *ryijys* was held in Helsinki in 1918. Eight years later, Sirelius produced his scholarly study. He was the 'Intendant' of the National Museum in Helsinki, Professor of 'Finno-Ugric Ethics' at the University of Helsinki, and for a brief period President of the Finnish Museum of Contemporary Art. As a result, educated Finns learnt about the cultural and historical importance of *ryijy*, and by the 1930s almost all Finns wanted to own one. For those not lucky enough to possess a traditional one, kits were sold which included a woven backing, a design, and wool to tie the knots.

There is renewed interest in *ryijy* in Finland today. Young couples are commissioning wedding *ryijys*, and contemporary artists, such as weavers Laila Karttunen and Kirsti Ilvessalo, and painter Akseli Gallen-Kallela, are interpreting the form in new ways.

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Asian Textiles is published three times a year.
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Wedding ryijy *dated 1782 from Keuruu in Central SW Finland made of vegetable-dyed wool and linen warps. There are traditional motifs of a husband and wife, plants, and birds. 152.5 cm x 207 cm. Gallen-Kallelan Museum, Finland.* *See article page 27.*