

ISSN 1757-0670

ASIAN TEXTILES

MAGAZINE OF THE OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

NUMBER 63

FEBRUARY 2016



OATG events programme

Wednesday 27 April 2016, 1.30–2.30pm

**Visit to *Life and Sole – Footwear from the Islamic World*
at the British Museum with curator Fahmida Suleman and conservator Barbara Wills**

Join us for a privileged tour of this wonderful exhibition of around 25 pairs of shoes, slippers, sandals, clogs and boots from N Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, as well as Central and South Asia, that are being shown together for the first time.

Fahmida Suleman is Phyllis Bishop curator for the Modern Middle East and is responsible for the Museum's outstanding collection of ethnographic objects and textiles from the Middle East and Central Asia. She also has historic links with Oxford, having obtained her Master's and Doctorate degrees in Islamic Art and Archaeology from the University of Oxford.

Barbara Wills is Conservator of Organic Artefacts and worked on items displayed in this exhibition. Barbara works on a wide range of organic materials and specialises in the conservation of leather, basketry materials and Ancient Egyptian objects.

British Museum, Great Russell St., London.

Meet at 1.20pm inside the entrance of the John Addis Gallery of the Islamic World (Room 34). Tour to begin at 1.30pm. There will be time to visit other exhibits and even the café afterwards.

OATG members free, non-members £3. Coat check available at the Museum for £1.50 per item. The exhibition is free and continues until 15 May 2016.

Please RVSP to oatg.events@gmail.com so we have an idea of numbers attending in advance.

Contents

OATG events programme	2
Contemporary Indian block prints	3
Two silk embroideries in the Ashmolean	10
The funeral of a king	15
<i>Islamic footwear exhibition in the British Museum</i>	21
Book review: <i>The Roots of Asian Weaving</i>	23
OATG Annual General Meeting	28
Non-OATG events	30
OATG page	31

Front cover: Female *papanggan* wearing a turtle-shell headdress.
See *The funeral of a king* p 15. Photograph David and Sue Richardson.

Back cover: Wedding bedcover, 19th century. He Haiyan collection. See book review p 28.
Roots of Asian Weaving, Eric Boudot and Chris Buckley (Oxbow Books 2016).

Sustaining cultural heritage? The case of contemporary Indian block prints

by Eiluned Edwards

Introduction

This was originally planned as an article that would outline contemporary block printing in India as well as the history and economics of the craft with some discussion of the printed designs – material that has been the focus of my research for the past few years. But as I started field work with Khatri block printers in Kachchh district, Gujarat, in mid-November 2015, a protest campaign was erupting on the internet that placed the Khatri and their craft centre stage, raising issues about the ownership of cultural heritage, the role of cultural organisations, and where responsibility lies in the protection of India's craft heritage. While the subject of the article remains Indian block printing, its focus has shifted to address some of the concerns raised by the Khatri and their supporters.

Background

The Fabric of India exhibition at the V&A, which ran from October 2015 to January 2016, illuminated the astounding variety, scale of manufacture, and sheer quality of India's textile products over a time-span of 800 years. It brought to an engaged and



Maldharis (animal herders) wearing ajrakh, Banni area, Kachchh, 2010.

CONTEMPORARY INDIAN BLOCK PRINTS

responsive audience many textiles previously unseen by the public, heirlooms that are unlikely to be seen again in such great number in a single location. The exhibition offered information on the context of production and included some of the materials used by artisans – samples of key dyestuffs were also displayed, and hanks of different types of yarn were available for handling; equipment and processes were shown in short video films. The curators, Rosemary Crill and Divia Patel, have rightly been applauded for their scholarship and commitment to bringing together such an ambitious project. But in certain quarters of India, the exhibition has provoked protest – notably among the *ajrakh* printers of Kachchh [see note 1], and their supporters among Indian designers and others in the non-governmental (NGO) sector. The source of their outrage is a garment by designer Rajesh Pratap Singh. Described in the exhibition and accompanying book as ‘*ajrakh*-inspired’, the linen jacket is digitally printed with a motif that is part of the repertoire of the block printers of Kachchh district in Gujarat.

Origins?

Strictly speaking, the design is not *ajrakh* – it is derived from the so-called “Fustat fragments” (medieval Indo-Egyptian trade textiles) reclaimed by the Khatriis since the late 1990s/early 2000s as part of their tradition. Illustrations of the Fustat designs first reached Dhamadka village, Kachchh, via Delhi-based designer Jenny Housego who commissioned Ismail Khatri to reproduce the circular design of a medieval canopy. Somewhat later he was gifted copies of Ruth Barnes’ 1993 volume, *Indian Block-Printed Cotton Fragments in the Kelsey Museum, The University of Michigan* and John Guy’s *Woven Cargoes* (1998) in which some of these fragments are illustrated. Cutting his own blocks, he went on to adapt several of the medieval designs for regular production; they were successful and were taken up by other Khatriis in the village. (Their influence has continued to spread – I recently saw a screen-printed version of one of the “Fustat” prints in a warehouse in Jaipur, Rajasthan.) The design at the centre of the debate is a *jaal* (diaper) pattern with a floral motif at the intersection of the diagonals.



Modern adaptation

As used by Rajesh Pratap Singh it included a significant alteration; however, the floral motif of the original had been transformed into a skull. While he was likely referencing the gothic imagery of British designer Alexander McQueen for the Khatriis, the use of figurative imagery is *haram* (Arabic “forbidden”), besides which they say that, “for us the skull means *kabristan* (graveyard/death)” (personal communication: Abduljabbar Khatri, Dhamadka, 4.12.15). The designer had originally approached brothers Ismail and Abduljabbar Khatri to block print the modified design for him – they had declined for the reasons outlined above. Rajesh Pratap Singh subsequently had the design digitally printed on linen and it was used in his 2010 collection from which the jacket displayed in *The Fabric of India* was selected.

Figure 1 Fustat jaal printed by Sufiyan Khatri, *Ajrakhpur*, 2015.

CONTEMPORARY INDIAN BLOCK PRINTS

Aims of the exhibition

Its inclusion in the exhibition was part of the curators' ambition "to showcase of some of the most imaginative and innovative work by contemporary fashion designers... [whose] work is distinguished by their appreciation and understanding of their heritage as well as their responsiveness to international trends" [exhibition blog 26.9.15]. His work was singled out because "It combines local traditions with global aesthetics and merges hand-making skills with technology. It also touches on one of the key relationships in the production of contemporary fashion, that of the rural artisan and the urban designer..." (ibid).

Artisans' perception

The stark contrast between the intentions of the curators and the artisans' perception of the jacket is made evident in a letter sent to the V&A by Ismail Khatri, President of the Ajrakhpur Handicrafts Development Association in which he wrote, "[This] is a travesty of our tradition... because it encourages the production of a centuries-old tradition to be loosely reproduced using other media which in this case was a digital print. The danger is that this can be done without any accountability to the community that has preserved this cultural capital through the ages." [20 November 2015]. Clearly the interplay of the handmade and new technologies is not without friction, similarly the meeting point of the rural artisan and urban designer; ownership of heritage is hotly contested even within the boundaries of the subcontinent.

Responsibility

Although the focus of the Khatri's complaint has been the V&A – they draw attention to the Museum's standing and international reach, and feel that the exhibition has sanctioned a trespass on their heritage – others who have entered the online discussion have raised the issue of the responsibility of designers who reference India's textile heritage. The reproduction of designs that are still produced by hand by India's block printers with roots in specific regional cultures by cheaper, faster means has become big business. A designer can allude to 'heritage' without actually engaging in the more time-consuming (and



Figure 2 Ajrakh printed by Sufiyan Khatri featured in Péro AW 2011.

Image courtesy of Aneeth Arora.

CONTEMPORARY INDIAN BLOCK PRINTS

therefore more expensive) activity of helping to sustain it, a strategy that ultimately undermines the market for handmade textiles and the livelihoods of artisans.

It became apparent while I was working in Kachchh in December 2015 that Rajesh Pratap Singh's digital re-interpretation of the Khatri's design was not an isolated instance. Sufiyan Khatri, a young printer based in Ajrakhpur village, brought another example to my attention. He phoned me to say that a well-known designer from Delhi was to visit his workshop the next day. His excitement was palpable; young artisans follow India's fashion weeks with interest and are delighted to see their work on the catwalk which undeniably brings them kudos. Sufiyan already works successfully with several designers, including Aneeth Arora whose label, Péro [note 2], was also featured in *The Fabric of India*, and with Hisae Ishi whose label Santulan has brought Indian block prints to a young fashion-savvy clientele in Japan. When we next spoke, Sufiyan described the encounter: "She was looking for 'innovations' and wanted to take my designs but didn't want me to do production. She was going to use digital prints for her collection. I was angry and I told her, 'I don't give you my permission.'" (Personal communication: 13.12.15).

The threat posed to handmade block prints by designer digital prints that draw on the canon of traditional designs should not be underestimated: designer goods command a premium price and their consumers do not necessarily know the source of 'heritage' digital prints, or appreciate that they are reproductions of an older, manual technology. It is a point of contention for the block printers that the handmade goods

that have inspired many designers (and not just in India) are rarely in the same price bracket as the *couture* versions. There is also a point to be considered here about the value of craft beyond its economic status.

But the reproduction of block prints (and also other handmade textiles) is not limited to digital printing, nor is it a recent issue confined only to the designer sphere: there have been roller-printed and screen-printed versions of block-print designs for many decades. They are the stock-in-trade of many production units in centres well-known for block prints such as Jaipur, Sanganer and Balotra. Indeed, there are now units in Kachchh – in Dhamadka and Khavda – where *ajrakh* is being screen printed. Although these products are aimed at a less elevated market sector than *couture*, they draw on the same cultural territory and pose the same threat to handmade products. In some respects these versions of heritage prints also represent the expansion of the Indian textile industry in the post-colonial era. Advances in textile technologies, notably the development



Figure 3 Japanese designer Hisae at work in Sufiyan's workshop, December 2014.

of synthetics, have had a considerable impact on the domestic market; the rise of polyester textiles in India in the 1970s marked a reciprocal decline in the Khatri's local market for *ajrakh*. Block-printed *ajrakh* is now beyond the means of most of the communities who constituted their local customers – chiefly cattle herders in the Banni region of northern Kachchh – for whom *ajrakh* was a key component of caste

CONTEMPORARY INDIAN BLOCK PRINTS



Figure 4 Screen printing ajrakh at Khavda.

dress. These groups have adopted cheaper, synthetic alternatives and screen-printed polycotton and polyester copies of *ajrakh* are now more widely used in Kachchh than *pukka* (“true/original”) *ajrakh*. [See picture page 3.] The determining factor for local consumers is price.

Following Indian independence in 1947, the regeneration of Indian craft was a central concern of Nehru’s government to be addressed at national and individual state levels.

In the mid-1970s Gujarat State Handicrafts and Handloom Development Corporation (GSHHDC) set about reviving block printing by instigating collaborations between rural artisans and urban designers, and a range of products was developed, aimed specifically at urban consumers, and sold through GSHHDC’s retail outlet, Gurjari. The growth of this ‘new’ market has stabilised production at the main block printing clusters in Kachchh and for leading artisans has introduced their goods to a global clientele. These products command premium rates – they are *valued* as well as *valuable*. Understandably, the Khatriis are fearful that their premium sector will be undermined by designer digital prints that draw on their traditions.

Protecting cultural heritage: G.I. Act (2003)

The Khatriis’ reaction to the V&A exhibit has brought to public attention the debate about ownership of cultural heritage – the story was covered in several Indian newspapers, including the popular *DNA* (8.12.15). From a curatorial perspective,

CONTEMPORARY INDIAN BLOCK PRINTS

Rajesh Pratap Singh's jacket does encapsulate the interplay between heritage and modern design. But does the ease and immediacy of digital printing mean that artisans such as the Khatris will ultimately be redundant, and that their repertoire of designs and products will simply provide a reference library for manufacturers to plunder, or do they have a value beyond their aesthetic merits? It would seem that the Government of India believes the latter, as indicated by the introduction of the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act. The Act was originally introduced by the Indian Government of India in 1999 and its rules were in place by 2003. It is one of six Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) instigated by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) of which India is a signatory. According to the 2003 Act,

Goods are defined as that aspect of industrial property which refer to the geographical indication referring to a country or to a place situated therein as being the country or place of origin of that product. Typically such a name conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness which is essentially attributable to the fact of its origin in that defined geographical locality, region or country (www.ipindia.nic.in).

But the registration process is longwinded and in English; many artisans speak only the vernacular and Hindi. In the case of the Khatris, their first language is Kachchhi (a language without a script) and although they also know Gujarati, few read and write English. Individuals may not apply to register goods under G.I., thus the Khatris have been obliged to form an association – the Ajrakhpur Handicrafts Development Association – many members of which remain unconvinced by the purported advantages of registration. As yet the legislation has not been tested and it remains to be seen whether or not it has teeth. When I asked among Khatris in Dhamadka in December 2015 what the procedure for pursuing a case against infraction of the G.I. Act entailed, no one knew. Some speculated that the Act was a paper exercise only, leaving them and others in the similar situation, as vulnerable to trespass on their regional heritage as they were before the Act was introduced.

Conclusion

The Fabric of India has not only reminded us of India's phenomenal textile production, and celebrated the skill, ingenuity and entrepreneurship that has sustained it, it has prompted a timely discussion about who owns regional cultural heritage, and perhaps also to whom cultural organisations are answerable. While applauding their manufactures, the exhibition has exposed the vulnerability of artisans and handmade textiles in the face of cheaper, faster technologies. The controversy over Rajesh Pratap Singh's jacket has also raised the issue of why craft matters – what is its value? The response from across India (and beyond) tends to suggest that block printing represents far more than simply a means of decorating cloth; it would seem to capture something essential about regional culture with its special value to be nurtured and sustained in the digital age.

Notes

1 *Ajrakh* is a resist- and mordant-printed cotton textile that is block printed on both sides of the cloth and was traditionally dyed with madder and indigo. The term is probably derived from *azrak*, 'blue' in Arabic. It is made by Khatris, hereditary printers and dyers in Kachchh district, Gujarat, Barmer, Rajasthan and Sindh province, Rajasthan.

2 Péro children's wear is sold in the UK through *Selvedge Drygoods* (online). Two Péro ensembles featuring block prints from Rajasthan are displayed in the *Imprints of Culture* exhibition at Bonington Gallery, Nottingham Trent University, February–March 2016; further details below.

References

- Barnes, R. (1997), *Indian Block-Printed Textiles in Egypt. The Newberry Collection in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, vols. I and II*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Guy, J. (1998), *Woven Cargoes. Indian Textiles in the East*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Sonaiya, J. *What is Ajrakh?* in *DNA (City and After Hours section)*, 8.12.2015.

Eiluned Edwards

Eiluned Edwards is Reader in Global Cultures of Textiles and Dress at Nottingham Trent University. She has a PhD in Art History and Archaeology (Manchester University, 2000) and has been researching textiles, dress, fashion, crafts and craft development in India since 1991. *Ajrakh* and other Indian block prints have been a particular focus of her research since 2000.

She is the author of *Block Printed Textiles of India: Imprints of Culture* (Niyogi, 2015) and *Textiles and Dress of Gujarat* (V&A/Mapin, 2011), and has contributed to other publications including: *The Sustainable Fashion Handbook* (Thames and Hudson, 2012); *British Asian Style* (V&A, 2010); *The Idea of Gujarat* (Blackswan Orient, 2010); *Hair: Styling, Culture, Fashion* (Berg, 2008). She is currently collaborating with Khatri in Kachchh and Thar on a book about *ajrakh*.

All photographs taken by the author unless otherwise indicated.

Other information

The Bonington Gallery at Nottingham Trent University is hosting an exhibition of contemporary Indian block prints entitled *Imprints of Culture: Block Printed Textiles of India* (25 February–24 March 2016), curated by Eiluned Edwards. It is open to the public Monday-Friday, 09.00–17.30. *Ajrakh* printer, Abduljabbar Khatri from Dhamadka village in Kachchh district, Gujarat, and wax printer, Shakil Ahmed Khatri from Mundra village in Kachchh will be demonstrating their craft in the gallery on Saturday, 19 March – visa issues permitting – when copies of *Block Printed Textiles. Imprints of Culture* will be available to buy.

From the Ottomans to the Qajars – The Art and Design of Hairdressing Accessories



The Qajar dynasty (1786–1925) created an original style of Persian arts and crafts by incorporating Indian and Chinese ideas into the traditions of Ancient Persia. Their comb designs reveal a unique skill, expertise, way of life, poetry, and spirituality.

This is an online exhibition available 1 March–1 July 2016 with audio presentation and a slideshow of exquisitely painted and decorated hair combs. To view the exhibition:

<http://www.creative-museum.com/en/content/ottomans-qajars>

Two silk embroideries in the Ashmolean Museum

by Paul Bevan

Embroideries in the exhibition *Pure Land: Images of Immortals in Chinese Art*
1 March–2 October 2016 Gallery 11

Two early twentieth-century Chinese embroidered silk hangings are amongst the exhibits now showing at the exhibition *Pure Land: Images of Immortals in Chinese Art* at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. [Footnote 1]

The theme of the exhibition is immortality in China, with a particular focus on the Western Paradise of Amitabha Buddha as well as a look at the world of the Eight Immortals and other figures of popular Daoism who had their mythical homes beyond the boundaries of the mortal world. One silk hanging depicts the world of the Daoist immortals and the other a battle scene from Chinese mythology. Both were made by anonymous needle workers, possibly in Guangzhou or Hong Kong, in the first decades of the twentieth century.

With their bright red grounds and proliferation of auspicious motifs, these hangings are characteristic of the embroideries presented as gifts for *hongshi* “red



Figure 1 An early twentieth-century birthday hanging depicting the Eight Immortals and other popular Daoist deities.

EA 1961.71, 184 x 146 cm.
Presented by Mrs Fothergill-Cooke in 1961.

occasions” such as weddings and birthday celebrations. The larger of the two is typical of the auspicious hangings traditionally presented as birthday gifts to Chinese elders and is likely to have been given for a sixtieth birthday or other major decadal birthday celebration (fig. 1). Similar examples can be seen in other British collections, many of them with inscriptions expressing birthday felicitations, the name of the recipient, and of the giver. [Footnote 2] Both examples at the Ashmolean Museum are entirely devoid of text, making an exact date of production more difficult to determine.

ASHMOLEAN SILK EMBROIDERIES

The smaller of the two embroideries, possibly a marriage gift made as a table frontal, has tentatively been identified as a depiction of a scene from a Peking Opera version of *Nezha and the Dragon King of the Eastern Sea*, although this is by no means certain. Some details strongly point to such an interpretation, while others fit in less well with the story as it is usually known (fig. 2).



Figure 2 An underwater battle; possibly between Nezha and the Dragon King of the Eastern Sea. EA1980.56, 1920–1940, 102.5 x 93.5 cm, Hensman gift.

Below a decorative border, showing a *qilin* flanked by two opposing phoenixes, can be seen a depiction of an underwater battle between two armies. Often in Chinese symbolism a pair of phoenixes is representative of the felicitation, *Shuangfeng heming* “A Pair of Phoenixes Sing Together”, a wish for a harmonious marriage. [Footnote 3] In such cases the male and female can often be distinguished by their tail feathers, but in this case the birds appear to be almost identical. The inclusion of a young man as the central figure in the scene might allude to a wish for a powerful son, and the addition of the *qilin* in the decorative border may also reflect a conjugal theme, as this mythical creature is traditionally believed to be the bringer of sons. [Footnote 4]

At the bottom of the picture the youth leads the attack, dressed in the Peking Opera costume with face appropriately painted and wearing the pheasant-feather headdress common to many marshal rôles. Three soldiers from the young warrior’s troops, carrying gourds which emit a magical ether, strike down the Dragon King’s watery army. The Dragon King, a deliberately unattractive figure, together with his zoomorphic attendants, all dressed in court attire of the Ming dynasty, are seen here in the underwater kingdom watching the battle unfold beneath a canopied terrace.

Nezha, who is thought to be the main subject of the painting, was originally a figure in Hindu mythology and his name, as seen in Buddhist texts, is derived from the Sanskrit *Naṭa*. He features in an episode from the Ming novel *Journey to the West* and in the Peking Opera *Havoc in Heaven*, in both cases fighting against the Monkey King, Sun Wukong. [Footnote 5] Nezha’s story is also found in *Fengtian yanyi*,

ASHMOLEAN SILK EMBROIDERIES

“Investiture of the Gods”, another vernacular novel of the Ming that charts the decline of the Shang dynasty and is the basis for modern versions of the story of the boy hero. [Footnote 6] If the figure in the embroidery is in fact Nezha, it does not quite follow the standard depictions of the young hero who is more often shown as a child with his distinctive weapon the *qiankun quan* (Universe Ring). The other magic weapon in his arsenal, the *huojian qiang* (Fire-tipped Spear), does appear to be depicted here as does the *fenghuo lun* (Wind Fire-wheel) on which he is said to travel about; in this picture as a single outsized wheel rolling powerfully forward through the waves (fig. 3). Whether this is a depiction of Nezha, or of another mythical hero, as yet unidentified, will make an interesting topic for further research.



Figure 3 A young warrior charges through the waves.

There is certainly no question as to the identification of the subject matter of the larger of the two embroideries, as it belongs to a more or less fixed visual language; a lexicon of images well known in Chinese folklore and widely used in folk art and courtly representation alike.

In the top panel can be seen the three Star Gods (fig. 4): from left to right, the god of longevity, Shouxing (also known as Shoulao), in one hand he holds a staff and in the other a peach, archetypal symbol of long life. He has *shou* (long life) Chinese characters embroidered on his clothing and is recognizable by his peculiarly outsized cranium. Luxing, god of rank and emolument, holds a *ruyi* sceptre and is dressed in courtly costume with his distinctive official's hat. Fuxing, god of good fortune, is dressed as a scholar holding a scroll of painting or calligraphy. The latter examples are both typically dressed in the costume of pre-Qing dynasty China rather than the distinctive dress of the Manchu dynasty which immediately preceded the period when these embroideries were made. Trees and plants such as peach and pine (both symbolic of long life), bamboo (of integrity and steadfastness) and a selection of auspicious flowers can also be seen in this panel. At the bottom the Star Gods are echoed in symbolic form, made possible by the homophonic nature of the Chinese

language: the bats *fu* 蝠 are indicative of good fortune *fu* 福 and correspond to Fuxing; the deer *lu* 鹿 symbolizes rank and salary *lu* 禄 and stand for Luxing; and the cranes, together with the pine trees in the background, are symbols of long life. The pairs of cranes and deer carry the *lingzhi* fungus of immortality in their mouths.



Figure 4 *The three Star Gods. From left to right: Shouxing, Luxing and Fuxing.*

Shouxing can be seen again, flying through the air on the back of a crane, in the company of Xiwangmu, the Queen Mother of the West, who rides upon a *luan*, a bird resembling a phoenix that, when sighted, was thought to bring peace to the world. [Footnote 7]

The Eight Immortals, a ubiquitous grouping in Chinese art, are seen in the main body of the picture looking up to the two figures flying through the air. Since the Yuan dynasty this has been one of the most popular figural groups in Chinese decorative art. Traditionally each figure carries one or more attributes by which they may be identified: Han Zhongli, also known as Zhong Liquan, holds his fan and a peach, and stands amongst auspicious clouds. To his right can be seen four other members of the group, standing upon a terrace that rises from the sea, behind which a prominent peach tree is growing. They look up in expectation towards the Queen Mother of the West who has invited them to a banquet at her peach garden in the mythical Kunlun Mountains. The immortal Li Tieguai “Iron Crutch Li” can be seen carrying his gourd, from which a magic ether emanates. [Footnote 8] Lü Dongbin, sometimes considered to be the leader of the Eight Immortals, carries a fly whisk. Cao Guojiu, as patron saint of actors, plays a pair of wooden clappers used for beating time in traditional Chinese drama. Lan Caihe, carries a flower basket; here seen as a man, Lan is just as often represented as a woman. Legend has it that the Eight Immortals crossed the sea to attend the Peach Banquet and in the boat depicted here can be seen He Xiangnu with a large lotus leaf in hand and Han Xiangzi playing on his

ASHMOLEAN SILK EMBROIDERIES

flute, perhaps with a rendition of *Tianhuayin*, a Daoist melody often attributed to him. Lastly, below them all riding on a horse, is Zhang Guolao, his musical instrument the *yugu* (fish drum) – a cylindrical bamboo tube with strings played with two crutch-shaped beaters – in his arms. He is also looking up towards his host, his hands, clasped in a welcoming salute, invisible within his voluminous sleeves. As with Shouxing above, on his clothing can be seen multiple embroidered *shou* characters; a wish for long life. On either side of the hanging, in equal rows of three, are more auspicious *shou* characters, here seen in a multitude of stylized forms. An auspicious decorative motif known as the *Baishou tu* (Hundred *Shou* Characters), these characters are written in archaic seal script and embroidered with gold thread.

This large wall hanging holds pride of place amongst a number of painted hanging scrolls, hand scrolls and ceramics in the exhibition *Pure Land: Images of Immortals in Chinese Art*, on show at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, from 1 March 2016 to 2 October 2016.

Dr Paul Bevan

Paul Bevan is a Research Associate and Teaching Fellow at the School of Oriental and African Studies and acted as Curatorial Researcher in Chinese Painting for the Ashmolean exhibition.

Bibliography

- Bartholomew**, Terese Tse: *Hidden Meanings in Chinese Art*. San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 2006
Strassberg, Richard E.: *A Chinese Bestiary*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002
Wilson, Verity: *Chinese Textiles*. London: V&A Publications, 2005
Xu Zhonglin (ed.): *Creation of the Gods*. Beijing: New World Press, 2000
Yu, Anthony C. (tr.): *Journey to the West*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012
Yuan Ke 袁珂 (ed.): *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 山海經校注 (An Annotated Classic of Mountains and Seas). Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980

Footnotes

1. EA1961.71 and EA1980.56.
2. At the Victoria and Albert Museum are: a set of twelve birthday hangings showing the 24 *Paragons of Filial Piety* (1880–1920) V&A:T.176-1961; a hanging depicting four of the Eight Immortals (1850–1880) V&A: 417-1888; and a calligraphic hanging with couched gold embroidery (1850–1900) V&A: T.214-1962. See Verity Wilson: *Chinese Textiles*. London: V&A Publications, 2005, pp. 56-59. In the collection of the Horniman Museum see “a celebratory banner [probably] for a 60th birthday”, 2012.64.
3. Terese Tse Bartholomew: *Hidden Meanings in Chinese Art*. San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 2006, p. 54.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
5. Anthony C. Yu (tr.): *Journey to the West*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012, vol. IV, chapter 83, pp. 113–126.
6. Xu Zhonglin (ed.): *Creation of the Gods [Investiture of the Gods]*. Beijing: New World Press, 2000, pp. 231–292.
7. The *luan* was also said to resemble the pheasant: “... [it] looks like a pheasant and has multi-coloured markings; it is called the *luan* bird and when sighted it brings peace to all under heaven”. Yuan Ke (ed.): *Shanhaijing jiaozhu* (An Annotated Classic of Mountains and Seas). Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980, p. 35. The Queen Mother of the West has been associated with the *luan* since the time of the Six Dynasties (c.220–589). Richard E. Strassberg: *A Chinese Bestiary*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, p. 102.
8. Such gourds are variously said to be used for holding medicine, sucking up evil vapours or vanquishing the enemy in battle. See Bartholomew, p. 61.

The Funeral of a King

by David and Sue Richardson

Guests on our *Tribal Weaving of the Lesser Sunda Islands* tour get to meet many Indonesian people wearing fabulous local costumes and often ask us if this is what they wear every day. The answer is no – just like us they keep their best costume for special occasions and ceremonies. The importance of textiles for ceremonial occasions was drummed into us during our most recent trip to the island of Sumba.

During our previous visit there in May 2015, we were honoured to be invited to the funeral of Bapak Umbu Hunga Meha, the King of Karera, an important domain in the far southeast. The King had been the head of the wealthiest and most influential noble family on the island, so this would be an exceptional event, the likes of which would not be seen again for long while.



*The deceased is placed in a seated position and wrapped in dozens of textiles.
A home in the Melolo region in May 2015.*

He had died two years ago and was to be buried along with one of his wives and his stepmother who had died in 2010 and 2011 respectively. In Sumba funerals are THE most important life-cycle event, far more so than weddings. Huge numbers of people (all of whom need to be fed and housed) attend, and there is much ritual exchanging of gifts. This is all very expensive and means that in many cases families cannot afford to bury their dead for many years.

ROYAL FUNERAL



Above Later the bodies are put into coffins, which are covered with yet more textiles.
A house in the Mauliru area in October 2013.

Below The late King's coffin, draped with local ikats.



There was only one problem. The funeral was to be held in October but nobody knew exactly when. As the months went by, the date remained uncertain – the

ROYAL FUNERAL

different factions of the King's family could not agree on the timing. At long last at the end of September a date was finally agreed – the funeral would take place in just two weeks' time! We rapidly worked out our travel plans and booked our flights.

The first day of the funeral was dedicated to welcoming the many parties of guests as they arrived at the Uma Bakul, the Great House, from across the island. This included all the other important royal families from the different Sumba domains and their entourages, as well as important politicians such as the Governor of the Province of Nusa Tenggara Timur from Kupang and the Regents of East and Central Sumba. Of course everyone used this as an opportunity to show off his or her finest outfits.



Sue Richardson chatting with the current king's youngest son.

Within the Great House the King's coffin was raised on a dais, next to the other two coffins. The walls, ceiling and coffins themselves were all draped with local textiles. As each invited group entered, dressed in their finery, they spent time mourning besides the late King's coffin and paying their respects to his family. They then proffered the gifts they had brought – livestock, textiles and jewellery. We were honoured to spend some time with the new King, Bapak Umbu Yadar, as well as his sons, daughters and advisors.

ROYAL FUNERAL



Above Two of the male papanggan, ritual attendants who accompany the coffin.

Below Recording the gifts of textiles and jewellery.



On the second day the *ratu* priests called on the spirits of the King's ancestors for assistance, and chickens were sacrificed so that their livers could be read to tell the future. More and more people were arriving. Many of them spent most of the day outside, seated under a huge awning while waiting their turn to be called into the Great House. Meanwhile the pile of textiles and other gifts continued to grow.



One of the female papanggan wearing a turtle-shell headdress.

Finally the coffins were brought outside while the politicians gave their eulogies. As the sun fell low in the sky the King's coffin was loaded onto an open truck which, just like his horses, was decorated with ikat textiles and driven in procession to the burial site. The King had already overseen the construction of his grave on the top of a nearby hill, chosen for its tranquillity. When the King's coffin arrived it was carried to the top of the hill and paraded around the grave six times, with attendants leading decorated horses and holding ceremonial red umbrellas. The King's favourite servant carried a Samurai sword, a relic from the Japanese occupation. The coffin was finally lowered into the textile-lined sarcophagus, topped by a massive stone slab and carved columns, the surrounding crowd jostling to get a view of the King's entombment.

The final day was the climax of the funeral celebrations and would end with a huge sacrifice. The most important nobles had gifted the finest and most expensive livestock they could find on the island – fourteen majestic water buffalo, several horses and a gigantic pig. At midday the slaughter began. It was not a pleasant sight to see these magnificent creatures being cut down one by one, the surrounding crowd cheering as the parang-wielding executioners severed throat after throat. After an hour it looked like a scene from a war movie, with corpses lying everywhere and the ground covered with pools of blood. To the Western mind the slaughter seemed

ROYAL FUNERAL

pointless. But this is Sumba, where status is gained not by accumulating wealth, but by destroying it.



Above The King's coffin is loaded onto a truck surrounded by the heaving crowd.

Below A magnificent water buffalo about to be sacrificed by a parang-wielding executioner.



David and Sue Richardson run an annual tour to Indonesia, which includes two days on Sumba. To learn more visit <http://www.asiantextilestudies.com/tour.html>

Islamic footwear exhibition at the British Museum

Fahmida Suleman, Curator of *Life and sole: footwear from the Islamic world* at the British Museum, explains what OATG will see on its visit to the exhibition
(see OATG Events in this issue)

Shoes often reflect a person's identity, status, profession or lifestyle. Footwear can also reveal something of a person's beliefs, customs, pastimes and traditions.

The current exhibition at the British Museum, *Life and sole: footwear from the Islamic world*, explores the stories behind more than 25 pairs of shoes, sandals, slippers, clogs, boots and related objects from North Africa, Turkey, the Middle East, Iran, Central Asia and South Asia. Dating from the 1800s to the present day, the objects attest to the richness and variety of designs, materials and manufacturing techniques from across the Islamic world.

The display also features an Ottoman shoeshine box from Syria, cobblers' tools from Afghanistan, historic photographs and postcards, and exquisite Mughal miniatures.

Footwear as status symbols

Footwear has always played a significant role in the social and cultural life of people across these regions, and by exhibiting them together in this way for the first time, visitors can explore a number of themes that include footwear as status symbols, class indicators and also as diplomatic gifts. The objects on display range from shoes for ceremonial occasions, for bathing rituals and for children, to footwear for specific vocations and extreme environments.



Embroidered slippers with silk velvet and gilded threads and spangles, India, 1800–60, As5488.a-b.

© Trustees of the British Museum.

A beautiful miniature painting in the display of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1628–58), patron of the Taj Mahal, depicts the ruler standing resplendent with his jewel-encrusted sword and dagger, a sprig of daisies and a pair of gold-embroidered velvet slippers (*mojari* or *moza*) with floral patterns to match his ornate gown. The safe-keeping of his footwear was a serious concern for the emperor. When

BM FOOTWEAR EXHIBITION

Shah Jahan went on tour, his collection of shoes was guarded by the royal *kafsh-bardar* (keeper of the shoes). Similarly appointed officials called *kafsh-ban* were responsible for looking after the footwear left by devotees outside mosques while they prayed.

Until 50 years ago it was common practice in much of rural India to walk barefoot. Rulers of the Mughal dynasty (1526–1857) had introduced a variety of footwear, but it was usually worn by the upper classes. Slippers were popular as they suited the hot climate and were easy to remove when entering a home, mosque or temple.

A pair of sparkly women's slippers (*mojari* or *khussa*) from 19th-century India, have purely decorative curling, upturned toes. Embroidered with excessive amounts of gold thread, these leather slippers signify wealth, status and high fashion. Although developed in the Mughal royal courts, this style of slipper was eventually adopted by the wealthy and has, remarkably, maintained its popularity until today as special occasion footwear for men and women.



Leather loafers with gold and silk thread embroidery, former North-West Frontier Province, Pakistan, 1900–1930s. Gift of Lady Muspratt from the collection of General Sir Sydney Muspratt, As1987,06.2.a-b. © Trustees of the British Museum.

A pair of men's leather loafers covered in intricate gold-embroidered paisley patterns from the former North-West Frontier Province show how western styles of men's footwear were adopted in the 19th century in this part of the Islamic world. Tiny stitches in green, pink, purple and blue silk threads are picked out within the gold, and the leather insoles are decorated with delicate floral motifs, as such details were also admired when shoes were removed indoors. Worn on high occasions such as religious holidays and weddings, these shoes are a fusion of eastern aesthetics with western shoe design, and attest to the impact of international trade on footwear fashions.

Dr Fahmida Suleman is Phyllis Bishop Curator for the Modern Middle East at the British Museum and Curator of *Life and sole: footwear from the Islamic world*, supported by Steven Larcombe and Sonya Leydecker, on view in Room 34 until 15 May 2016.

The Roots of Asian Weaving

Book review by Pamela Cross

The Roots of Asian Weaving: The He Haiyan collection of textiles and looms from Southwest China, by Eric Boudot & Chris Buckley, Oxbow books, Oxford, United Kingdom and Havertown, United States.

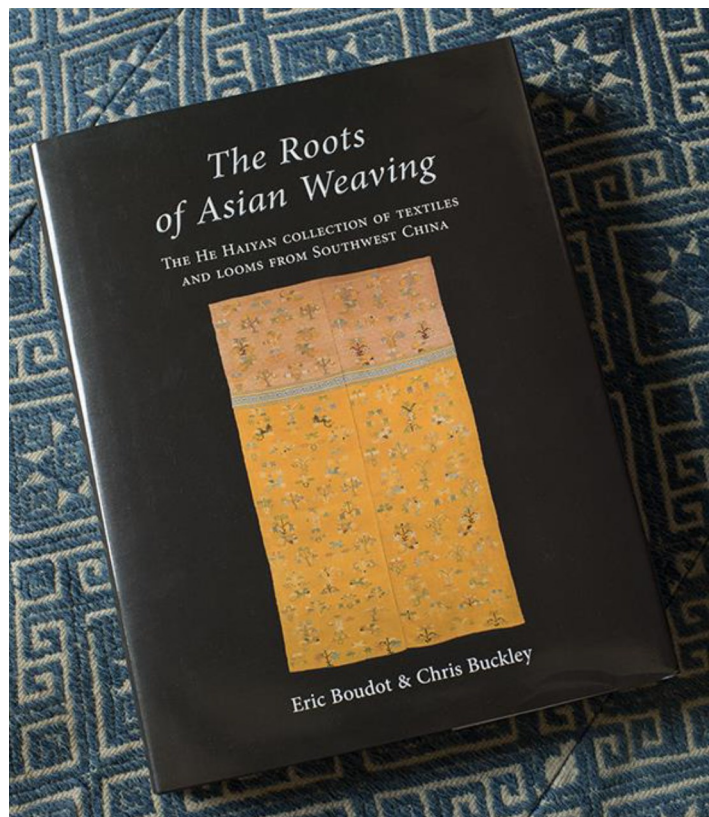
Hardcover Edition: 978-1-78570-144-3; 480 full colour pages; £60 but currently available at the publisher's website at a special price of £45.

The publisher's introduction says: "This ground-breaking book documents the weaving traditions and textiles of one of Asia's most ethnically diverse areas, placing them in a regional context. Based on more than a decade of first-hand study in the field, the authors record the traditions of Miao, Yao, Buyi, Dong, Zhuang, Maonan, Dai and Li weavers from Guizhou to Hainan Island. They describe the looms and techniques of these groups, including diagrams, descriptions and photographs of the weaving processes and woven structures. Each tradition is illustrated with outstanding examples of textiles, drawn from the He Haiyan collection in Beijing, including many 19th-century examples.

"The authors present a novel analysis of loom technology across the Asian mainland, using techniques derived from linguistics and biology. They use these to chart the evolutionary history of looms in Asia, demonstrating that all the major traditions are related in spite of their apparent diversity. The results have far-reaching implications, for example shedding light on the development of the Chinese drawloom and showing how key patterning features were derived from Tai-Kadai looms.

"The book is a visual delight as well as a resource for scholars, collectors and curators. The fieldwork in this book is a primary resource, while the looms and techniques will be essential reading for those interested in weaving and textile history, as well as contemporary weavers and designers wishing to learn how to reproduce traditional patterns and methods. The account of the development and links between weaving cultures will be a revelation for those interested in cultural evolution and the diversity of mankind."

Eric Boudot, who has lived in China since 1984, is well known as a specialist in the cultures and textiles of the ethnic minorities of Southwest China and has written several articles and books on their textiles. As it happens I bought my first



BOOK REVIEW

Miao jacket from Boudot's exhibition in London in 1990, although I have not been in touch with him in the intervening period. Co-author Chris Buckley, with a DPhil in Physical Chemistry, has lived in China since 1995. His current interest is the study of cultural diversity in Asia using quantitative techniques. *Asian Textiles* readers may remember his contributions to the magazine including his article in AT#54 Feb 2013: *Making sense of textile family trees*, which is very relevant in the context of the analysis of the origins of looms in Part III of *The Roots of Asian Weaving*. He Haiyan's collection, assembled over 20 years, provides the core of textiles and looms examined in the book. She is a successful fashion designer managing her own production facility in Beijing. She finds her inspiration in the rich variety of styles, patterns, textures and natural dyes characteristic of the ethnic groups of Southwest China.



Embroidered pattern sampler ("Laomuhua" or "muzihua") with typical baby carrier motifs of butterfly, confronting birds, flowers and wanzi (swastikas), 25 cm x 19 cm, silk on cotton. He Haiyan collection.

Roots of Asian Weaving, Eric Boudot and Chris Buckley (Oxbow Books 2016).

I come to the book as a collector for more than a quarter of a century of the textiles of Southwest China and the bordering countries of Thailand and Vietnam, to which many of the ethnic minorities of Southwest China migrated. I have become more and more fascinated by their weavings but frustrated by the lack of in-depth research on the woven tradition, particularly anything published in English. It is this personal background which has very much coloured my review of this volume. In this context I would not disagree with the publisher's somewhat hyperbolic epithet of 'ground breaking' for the book. It is a serious, well-researched and well-written volume. At a casual glance it could be referred to as a coffee-table book but it most certainly is not – although it is full of good, well-produced photos of glorious woven textiles.

So often the available books on the textiles of Southwest China are little more than a catalogue of textiles with a minimum of information on their background. This book is clearly underpinned by a substantial amount of research, both of the historical and archaeological context as well as research in the field. There is an evident desire to integrate, record, preserve and share this information. Sadly the creation of woven textiles tends to disappear earlier than that of embroidered ones, as the time taken to learn the techniques, and the mastery of the whole of the



Wedding cover from the Qiubei area of Yunnan, 162 cm x 115 cm. The central brocaded panel is made of cotton coloured with natural materials. The borders and back are said to be woven with a locally produced fibre huocao. 19th century, He Haiyan collection. *Roots of Asian Weaving*, Eric Boudot and Chris Buckley (Oxbow Books 2016).

technology, is less easily accommodated in the modern age and with the rapid economic changes that have been taking place in China since the 1980s. The authors refer to their fieldwork as being carried out with a sense of urgency, against a background of the steady loss of traditional skills and cultural knowledge. Collector He Haiyan was much motivated by the desire to gather information as well as textiles as she discovered that the traditional weaving techniques were vanishing. It was this that enabled working looms and old pattern samples to be collected along with the fine woven examples of the craft.

The book is divided into an *Introduction*; *Part I: Background*; *Part II: Field Research* covering the decorated woven traditions of Miao, Yao, Buyi, Dong, Zhuang, Maonan, Dai and Li weavers from Guizhou to Hainan Island; and *Part III: Analysis of the evolution of the Asian loom* with accompanying appendices. There is a good glossary of loom and weaving terms, a very useful bibliography and an index.

The book provides a huge amount of information which I am still trying to absorb. It is well written with considerable care taken to present content with clear text, photographs and diagrams. Whilst it is mainly focused on weaving, Part I of the book includes deep historic information on textiles in China, especially those of the non-Han ethnicities, which is relevant for those interested in the range of the textiles of the area. It certainly extends my understanding of the background of a significant proportion of my collection far more broadly than just the weaving. The book also puts readers on notice that, whilst we are constantly searching for certainties and exactitude when it comes to identifying the origins of textiles, trying to pin down the exact ethnic background of a particular piece is fraught with problems originating from antiquity to the recent past. For example the Pingdi Yao in Jianghua in Hunan call themselves Yao yet do not know the Yao language (1.8 Shifting identities: modern designations of ethnicity p.17). Similarly

BOOK REVIEW



Wedding bedcover, 140 cm x 120 cm, cotton, natural dyes, nineteenth century or earlier. Decorated with stylised 'chive' motifs. Chris Hall collection. *Roots of Asian Weaving*, Eric Boudot and Chris Buckley (Oxbow Books 2016).

couple of decades, and includes good quality photographs of numerous examples of historic textiles from the He Haiyan collection. I like the way that each textile is shown with a photograph of the complete weaving as well as two detailed photos of the front and the reverse. This gives a sense of the overall visual effect together with an appreciation of the specific weaving technique. Each example has a detailed analysis of the loom used with the weaving technique and structure of the cloth explained in both text and diagrams. Where available, photographs from remaining weavers are included with simplified drawings highlighting the loom/weaving techniques executed. Each illustration has helpful explanatory text.

Although I have seen several looms in use in the field – especially those of some Miao/Hmong, Dong, Buyi, Tai and Karen groups – I had little appreciation of the very complex patterning systems incorporated into certain looms in Southwest China. This proved an eye-opener for me and definitely added to my appreciation of several textiles with which I was familiar but unaware of the weaving techniques used to create them. In contrast it was also fascinating to realise that some of the most complex patterned textiles had been painstakingly woven on the simplest body-tensioned backstrap looms, with no added patterning systems, and individual warps picked with a hook or beater and discontinuous warps inserted by hand.

Part III: Analysis – Chapter 7: *The evolution of the Asian loom* and its accompanying appendices is the part of the book which I found most difficult to relate to. In this section Buckley uses techniques more usually found in biology and linguistics to build family trees to determine the evolution of Asian looms. A table was constructed from characteristics (more than 350) of 48 looms – 21 from Southwest China and 27 from the rest of Asia. Two different analytical techniques – NeighborNet

migrating Han escaping famine or war adopted Miao customs and language including their weaving techniques. In modern China ethnic minorities have been allowed some privileges denied the Han, so a change of status of an identity card indicating a non-Han ethnicity may be advantageous.

Chapter 2 of Part I gives a very interesting summary of textiles and weaving technology in ancient China based on texts and archaeology. I found fascinating the critical review of the evidence enhanced by the authors' close study of the textile techniques of minority groups today – especially where there was disagreement with other researchers based on the authors' practical understanding of the workings of looms. In Part III – *Analysis: the evolution of the Asian loom* based on two different analytical techniques there are frequent references back to this historical research.

Part II of the book is a joy as it features the field research undertaken over the past

Plot and Bayesian Phylogenetic Analysis – were applied to the data. Diagrams were then reproduced for the resulting family trees and a narrative given for the perceived evolution. Whilst I do not disagree with the analysis, I was conscious that at different stages decisions had been taken to determine characteristics and interpret the results. This introduces opinion as a basis for the numeric of 0 or 1 (present or not present) coding and opens up, for me, uncertainty based on possible disagreement over decisions. Nevertheless, the section is certainly thought-provoking and, with continuous cross-referencing to the historical and field research and ‘translated’ into pictorial diagrams, it is very much worthy of concentration and study.

A negative which I experienced on using the book at a practical level is the lack of chapter numbers and sub-sections set out across the top of each page, which would have made following cross-references in the text easier. As the book is very heavy, turning backwards and forwards searching for information would have been facilitated.

Textile examples shown in the book are mainly from the He Haiyan collection – which might be construed as somewhat limiting – although there are a few from the collection of Chris Hall and occasional examples from unattributed private collections. I am aware just from my own collection that the book is unable to cover all examples of patterned weaving from Southwest China and indeed from the individual minority groups studied. However, the physical weight of the book as published is already a challenge to handle and I feel one must be grateful for the range of textiles illustrated therein rather than be greedy for more.



Wedding bedcover, composed of three panels, 164 cm x 100 cm, cotton, natural vegetable dyes, nineteenth century. He Haiyan collection.

Roots of Asian Weaving, Eric Boudot and Chris Buckley (Oxbow Books 2016).

I have read this book from cover to cover and, although it requires considerable concentration when it comes to following the technical analysis of each woven example in Part II and the analysis in Part III, I have found it to be a tremendous guide to identifying and understanding a wide range of woven textiles produced across Southwest China. I appreciate the effort and dedication that have gone into studying and analysing these disappearing or already lost weaving techniques. I congratulate the authors on their numerous clear drawings and diagrams, all accompanied throughout by helpful explanatory text. The quality of the printing is excellent, with illustrations/figures via photos, diagrams and drawings appearing very clearly and with good colour. I know that it is a reference book to which I will be returning time and time again.

Information on the book, including a table of contents, may be accessed on the publisher's website: <http://www.oxbowbooks.com/oxbow/the-roots-of-asian-weaving.html>.

On https://www.academia.edu/16855383/The_Roots_of_Asian_Weaving a pdf of the first seven pages of the book may be downloaded. You may need to sign-up (for free) to do this.

OATG Annual General Meeting

Judith Colegate, our Secretary, reports on the OATG AGM in January

Meeting held

Saturday 30 January 2016 at the Ashmolean Museum

Present

Aimée Payton (Chairman), Sheila Allen (Treasurer), Christine Yates (Programme Co-ordinator), Julia Nicholson (Member at Large), Jane Anson (Editor *Asian Textiles*), Pamela Cross (Website Manager), Judith Colegate (Secretary), Gavin Strachan (Editor designate *Asian Textiles*), Katherine Clough (Programme Co-ordinator designate), Felicitas von Droste zu Hülshoff (Programme Co-ordinator designate). 19 members attended, including the committee.

Apologies for absence

Agnes Upshall (Blogger), Jenny and Russell Parry, Teresa Fitzherbert

The Chairman

The Chairman opened proceedings with a brief tour de horizon of the past year, including our 20th anniversary celebrations with Ruth Barnes.

She said that the group is financially stable but that it was essential that those who had still not paid the outstanding balance between the old subscription and the new should do so as soon as possible.

She thanked Jane Anson the retiring editor of *Asian Textiles* and Christine Yates the retiring Programme Co-ordinator for their extremely hard work during the past three years. Their efforts have resulted in an outstanding magazine and a most stimulating programme of events both in Oxford and elsewhere. Aimée then welcomed Gavin Strachan who will be the new editor of the magazine and Katherine Clough and Felicitas von Droste zu Hülshoff who will jointly assume the mantle of Programme Co-ordinator.

She continued by saying that we still do not have a Membership Secretary. In the absence of any volunteer we have been obliged to employ Leena Lindell to sort out the membership database. Leena has done a very thorough job and the situation is now such that a member could take on the task. Aimée announced that Leena Lindell was not the Membership Secretary, which is a non-paid committee role, but that she is a contract Database Administrator. The group cannot afford to continue paying Leena's fees.

Aimée concluded by thanking those attending for their presence and the committee for their hard work during the year. There being no matter arising from the previous year's minutes, members of the committee gave their reports.

Treasurer

Sheila reiterated the Chairman's observations about the late and/or insufficient payment of subscriptions by some members and also the matter of paying a fee to Leena for her work on the membership database. She pointed out that the more work Leena does chasing up late or insufficient payments for membership, the more we will have to pay her. As an incentive to pay the full amount, anyone paying the previous rate will only receive two magazines a year until they amend their standing order. She reported that the balance at the start of the financial year from 1 October 2014 was £2,228.85 and the balance at the end of the year, 30 September 2015 was £1,498.93

Programme Co-ordinator

Christine said how much she had enjoyed her three years and she thanked the members for their support and interest. She was confident that her successors, Katherine and Felicitas, would enjoy the job as much as she had and that they too would develop a fascinating programme.

Kathy and Felicitas said they look forward to working with us and have some ideas already. They asked if anyone knew who had suggested a trip to the Whitworth, as this was one idea they would like to discuss.

Editor *Asian Textiles*

Jane said that the magazine continued to be published three times a year. In the three years she has been editor we had been very fortunate in the range and qualities of the items received, and she was extremely grateful not only to the people who have written articles for publication and accompanied them with such good photographs, but also to the very supportive group of people who have kept their eyes and ears always on the alert for interesting subjects and willing contributors. She could never have done the job without them. She was delighted to be passing on the job of editor to the capable hands of Gavin Strachan, who, she was sure, would do a splendid job of finding articles and presenting them in an interesting light for our readers.

Gavin welcomes suggestions from members and would like to continue the balance between scholarly articles and more informal reports.

Website Manager

Pamela reported that the OATG website continued to provide internet access to all editions of its magazine *Asian Textiles* in searchable PDF format all the way back to the initial edition in 1995 of OATG's Newsletter.

The current year's editions of the magazines and those of the two previous full years are only available via password access to fully paid-up members. 2013 issues have recently become freely available.

The OATG events programme, as supplied to the Web Manager, is also available online.

The Web Manager also supports the Treasurer and the Membership Secretary by operating OATG's PayPal account for international members without a £ sterling bank account. Around 13 members used the facility to pay during the past year.

The website provides contact form links for digitally contacting the Membership Secretary, Programme Co-ordinator and Web Manager. These have security features attached to try and minimise spam and other computer risks.

The OATG website links via drop-down menus to the excellent OATG blog run separately by Agnes Upshall. Occasionally the OATG website as well as the blog carries urgent last-minute information on the Events Stop Press Page.

Blog

In her absence Agnes sent a report. In this she said that the OATG blog is thriving and that the last year was the best one yet. She related the following interesting facts about the blog last year:

- The blog had almost 4000 views in total in 2015 (compared with 2500 in 2014).
- The most popular blog post in 2015 was the report from David and Sue Richardson about the dismissal of the Director of the Savitsky Museum in Uzbekistan, with 112 views. (This is twice as many views as the most popular post of 2014, which received 54 views).
- She posted 60 new posts in 2015 compared with 48 in 2014 and 39 in 2013.
- The majority of the blog visitors are based in UK, the US and India (last year the three main countries were the UK, the US and Thailand).
- The biggest source of traffic to the blog is now Facebook, followed by the OATG website (last year these were reversed).

For this she thanked the blog's regular visitors and sharers, and Sue Richardson particularly, for sharing so many of her blog posts on Facebook.

Agnes suggested that members might sign up to follow the blog if they have not already done so. This will ensure that notification is received of every new posting. She also requested that if any other OATG members could occasionally share posts on Facebook that they have found interesting it would be a great help in getting word out about the blog and thus increasing visitors.

Looking to the future Agnes felt that based on constantly growing success the year 2016 will be busier and better still. This will only happen if members continue to use it by keeping visiting, sharing posts, keep telling friends. She said that she was very happy to receive comments and welcomed suggestions about things that would be of interest to members and could be included on the blog.

Membership Voting

At this point the Chairman invited the members to vote on the appointment of replacements for Jane Anson as Editor of *Asian Textiles* and Christine Yates as Programme Co-ordinator. Gavin Strachan was unanimously elected as Editor of *Asian Textiles* and Felicitas von Droste zu Hülshoff and Katherine Clough were similarly elected unanimously to take Christine's place as Programme Co-ordinators.

Conclusion of meeting

There being no other business Aimée invited all present to take some refreshment. There then followed another very successful "Show and Tell" session.

Show and Tell. A report on the Show and Tell session will appear in the next edition of *Asian Textiles*.

WORLD IKAT TEXTILES...ties that bind exhibition at The Brunei Gallery, SOAS, London

15 April–25 June 2016: see next page for details



Li textile worker (Hainan)



Detail of Sumba ikat

Non-OATG events and exhibitions

Special offer on the 2016 Textile Tour of the Lesser Sunda Islands

This May, David and Sue Richardson will be leading their third textile tour of the Lesser Sunda Islands of Indonesia aboard a traditional schooner. This is a fantastic trip, sailing from island to island, visiting small weaving villages, including the whaling village of Lembata, made famous by our founder Ruth Barnes.

If you have always wanted to go on this tour but were not sure about sharing a cabin with a stranger, this special offer is for you. A limited number of places are now available for solo travellers, guaranteeing them sole use of a double cabin with NO supplement. The supplement is usually 75% (USD 4,871) so this is a HUGE saving. For textile enthusiasts, this is the trip of a lifetime. For more information see: <http://www.asiantextilestudies.com/tour.html>

Changing ikat textile exhibition and symposium at SOAS April–June 2016

The World Crafts Council is holding an exhibition with related events at The Brunei Gallery, SOAS, London. The exhibition *WORLD IKAT TEXTILES...ties that bind* is on between 15 April and 25 June 2016, and is curated by Edric Ong and Manjari Nirula. The exhibition celebrates the legacy of ikat and has live demonstrations by weavers, a Symposium, film screenings, and a book display.

From 14 April the Focal Lobby display is on mud-mee ikat textiles of Thailand, on 13 May the Focal Lobby display changes to Indian ikats, and on 9 June to Central Asian ikats. Symposium: Sat 14 & Sun 15 May. More information at www.soas.ac.uk/gallery/

From the Ottomans to the Qajars – The Art and Design of Hairdressing Accessories

Exhibition: 1 March–1 July 2016

The Qajar dynasty (1786–1925) created an original style of Persian arts and crafts by incorporating Indian and Chinese ideas into the traditions of Ancient Persia. Their comb designs reveal a unique skill, expertise, way of life, poetry, and spirituality.

This is an online exhibition, with audio presentation and a slideshow of exquisitely painted and decorated hair combs. To view the exhibition, visit the online-based Creative Museum.
<http://www.creative-museum.com/en/content/ottomans-qajars>

Krishna in the Garden of Assam – The Cultural Context of an Indian Textile

Exhibition: 21 January–15 August 2016

The Vrindavani Vastra was produced in Assam in north-eastern India in the late 17th century. Made of woven silk and figured with scenes from the life of Hindu god Krishna when he lived in the forest of Vrindavan, it was made for the Krishna cult which developed following the ministry of the Assamese saint Shankaradeva (d.1568).

Over nine metres long, following its use in Assam it had a second history in Tibet, where it was found by Perceval Landon during the Younghusband Expedition of 1903–4. Landon, a friend of Rudyard Kipling, was *The Times* correspondent on the expedition, and he gave the textile to the British Museum in 1905.

http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/exhibitions/Krishna_in_the_garden_of_Assam.aspx

OATG COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chair: Aimée Payton, Department of Eastern Art, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, OX1 2PH. Tel. 01865 278067. Email: aimee.payton@ashmus.ox.ac.uk

Hon. Treasurer: Sheila Allen. Email: nick_allen98@hotmail.com

Secretary: Judith Colegate. Email: courtlandshill@googlemail.com

Programme Coordinators: Katherine Clough and Felicitas von Droste zu Hülshoff
Email: oatg.events@gmail.com

Blogger: Agnes Upshall. Email: agnesupshall@gmail.com

Asian Textiles Editor: Gavin Strachan. Email: gavin@firthpetroleum.com

Website Manager: Pamela Cross. Email: pac@tribaltextiles.info

Member at Large: Julia Nicholson. Email: julia.nicholson@pmr.ox.ac.uk

For membership enquiries contact Database Administrator – Leena Lindell. Email: leena.j.lindell@gmail.com

MEMBERSHIP OF OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP (includes three issues of *Asian Textiles* magazine)

The rate is £25 for single membership and £35 for joint membership. Most members pay by standing order. The Treasurer is Sheila Allen and she would be grateful if you could check that your standing order is up to date.

Cheques made out to OATG can be sent to her at 19 Southmoor Road, Oxford, OX2 6RF.

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*. We do hope you would like to continue your membership of OATG.

If you have any queries, please contact Sheila Allen, OATG Treasurer, 19 Southmoor Road, Oxford, OX2 6RF. Email: nick_allen98@hotmail.com

Password details for 2016 editions of *Asian Textiles* on the OATG website

Issue Nos	Date	username	password
63, 64, 65	2016	at16	m58yes

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

THE DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS WEDNESDAY 1 JUNE 2016

Contributions should be emailed to: gavin@firthpetroleum.com

