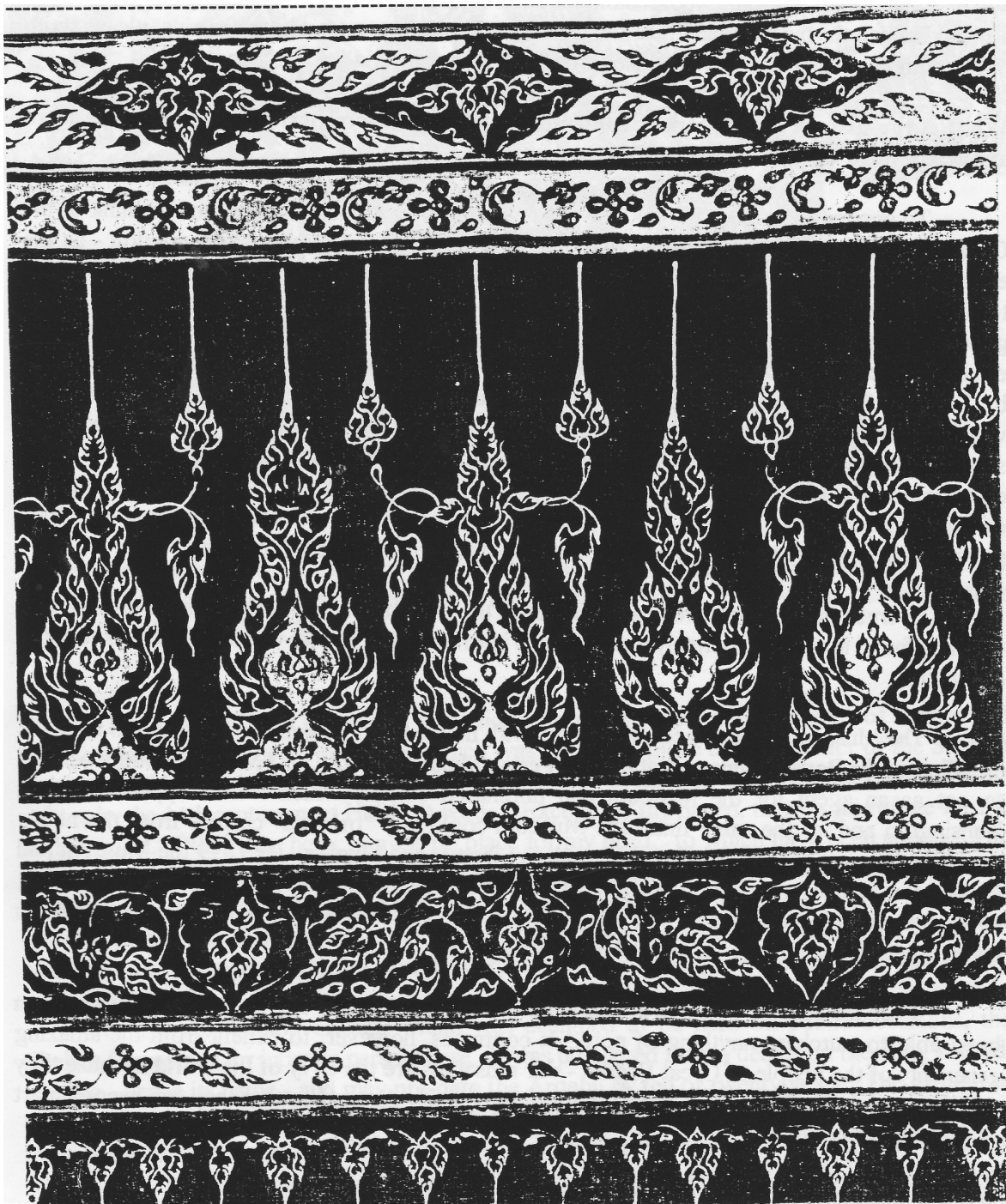


OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

Newsletter No. 11

October 1998



Detail of a *pha nung* (skirt cloth) made on the Coromandel Coast for the Thai market; resist dyed and painted cotton, 18th century, (V. & A. no IS 40-1991) illustrated in John Guy, *Woven Cargoes: Indian Textiles in the East* (see p. 18). By courtesy of the Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

ORIENTAL CARPETS IN THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

Confusion usually accompanies visitors to the collection of "oriental" carpets in the Victoria and Albert Museum: confusion about its scope, its accessibility and its purpose. Here I am addressing the most frequently asked questions, but if some uncertainty remains, please write to me with your queries and I promise to reply as promptly and fully as I can.

What is the history of the carpet collection? and were there periods when carpets were acquired more or less intensively?

To answer this we need to ask why the Museum was established. We tend to think of the Great Exhibition of 1851 - that international celebration of the Industrial Revolution - as the effective birth of what was to become the V&A. At that time textiles were of prime importance to the economy of Great Britain, but although we could mass-produce a wide range of textile goods, the designs being used were unexciting. To improve industrial design the Government had established Schools of Design, and the Museum's collections were intended to complement these by "exemplifying some right principle of construction or of ornament, or some feature of workmanship to which it appears desirable that the attention of our Students and Manufacturers should be directed" (from an 1852 policy statement). Carpets were acquired along with every other type of textile in order to demonstrate what were considered to be the correct principle of design. Consequently the V. & A.'s carpets were never part of a collection of Islamic art; they were acquired simply because they were well-designed and functional textiles.

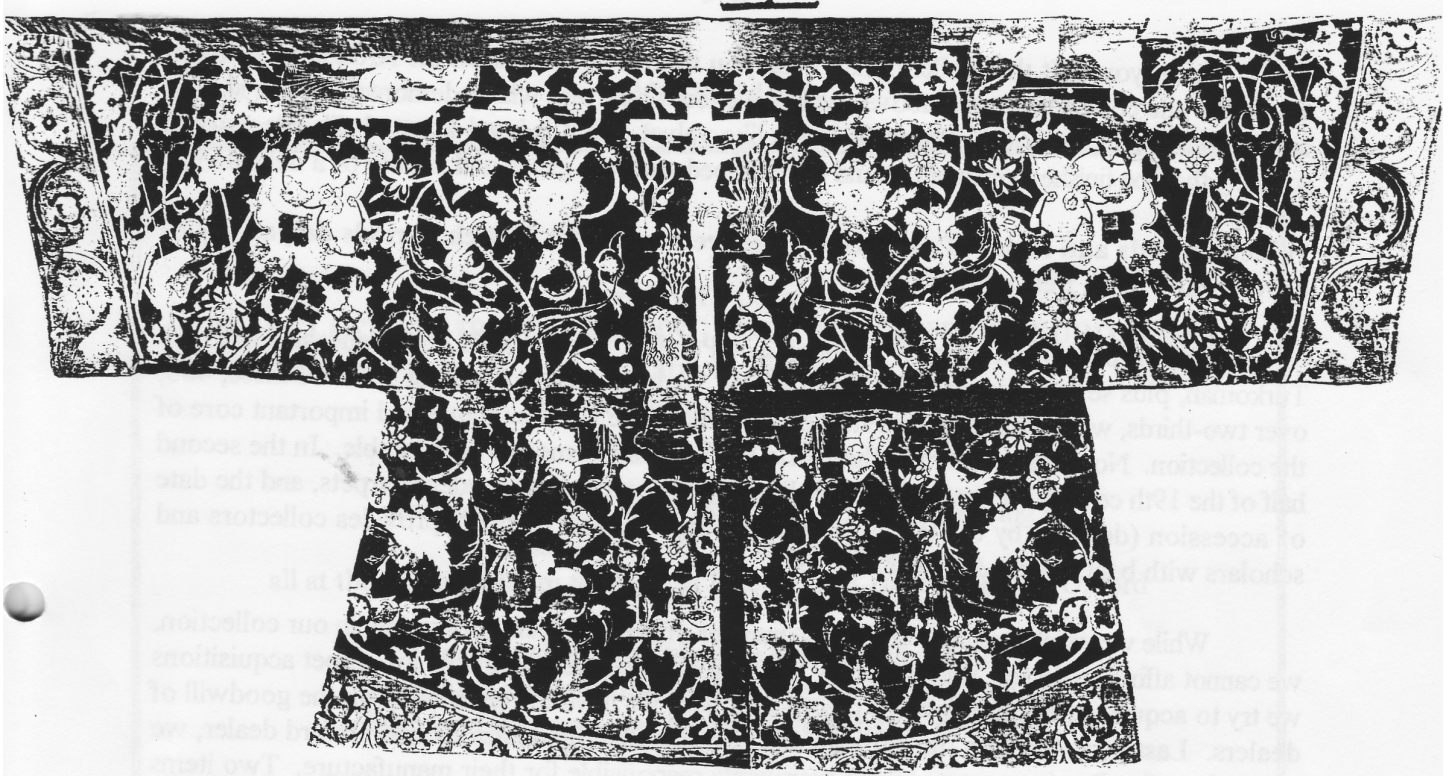
In truth, few carpets were acquired until the mid-1870s, probably because at least one could be found in every moderately prosperous Victorian home and so would be familiar to most designers.

The Museum began to acquire carpets with marked enthusiasm in 1876 for two reasons: an officer in the Royal Engineers stationed in Persia, Major (later Lt Col.) Murdoch Smith offered to act as an agent for the Museum and purchased carpets which were shipped to South Kensington and, at the same time, the Museum could buy "oriental" carpets from the newly established dealers and shops in London, such as Liberty's and Maple's. By 1899 the Museum had formed the basis of a large and fairly representative collection with 107 Persian, 45 Caucasian, 44 Turkish and 14 Turkoman carpets. Active collecting continued until the 1930s with the 1920s being especially important for small Turkoman pieces.

Since the Second World War prices have risen dramatically and the Museum has seldom been able to purchase anything of note. It continues, however, to benefit from the amazing generosity of the people of Great Britain - our museums are the envy of the world because they are often recipients of important and precious objects, freely donated so that they can become part of the nation's heritage.

What are the masterpieces of the collection?

The unquestioned masterpieces are both 16th century Persian carpets which are on display in gallery 42: the enormous Ardabil Carpet and the lesser-known but equally wonderful Chelsea



16th century knotted silk pile vestment undoubtedly made by carpet weavers. Originally it would have been semi-circular, rather like a cope in the Western Church. By courtesy of the Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Carpet. The Ardabil Carpet is one of a pair said to have been used in the complex of shrines and mosques at Ardabil in north-west Iran which was the burial place of the founder of the Safavid dynasty, Shaikh Safi al-Din. There is a dated inscription at one end with two lines from a verse written by the 14th century poet Hafiz. It reads, "Except for thy haven, there is no refuge for me in this world. Other than here, there is no place for my head." to which have been added, "The work of a servant of the Court, Maqsud of Kashan, 946" (AD 1539/40). It would have taken up to four years to weave the pair of carpets and this expenditure of labour would have been reflected in the cost; this suggests it was a royal commission. Maqsud of Kashan may, therefore, have been the designer. The other Ardabil carpet is in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Unlike the Ardabil Carpet, which was designed to be used on public occasions, the Chelsea Carpet was for intimate personal use. It was purchased from a dealer on the King's Road, Chelsea - hence its name - and may pre-date the Ardabil by ten or twenty years. The ground of the Chelsea Carpet is like a private estate with grazing and fighting animals and blossom and fruit trees - there are exquisite details such as the ripe pomegranates which have burst open to reveal their seeds. There is one unusual asymmetrical feature in the end borders: there are four curving red niches at one end and only three at the other. It is possible that these niches indicate place settings for guests who would be seated round the carpet; twenty-five people could be comfortably accommodated.

But if you visit that gallery, may I ask you to turn your back on the Ardabil and look at a knotted pile cope (illustrated above) which is exceptional and which demonstrates the skill of carpet weavers in the 16th century. It looks like velvet, but it is hand-knotted silk pile worked so finely that the finished vestment would have draped with the grace and beauty of a delicate silk

Which periods and styles of carpets are best represented? Which periods do you try to develop now with new acquisitions?

The carpet collection now includes 274 Persian, 139 Turkish, 135 Caucasian and 138 Turkoman, plus several pieces from North Africa, making a total of almost 700. Of these, 480, over two-thirds, were woven in the 19th century, and these are the unique and important core of the collection. No other museum in the world has anything remotely comparable. In the second half of the 19th century we were alone in collecting what were then modern carpets, and the date of accession (denoted by the last four digits of the Museum number) provides collectors and scholars with benchmarks for their studies.

While we would willingly add to the number of pre-20th century carpets in our collection, we cannot afford to do so. With generally less than £800 per year available for carpet acquisitions we try to acquire one contemporary piece - and here we have to rely heavily on the goodwill of dealers. Last year, through the altruism and considerable diplomacy of one Oxford dealer, we were given five Persian carpets by the merchants responsible for their manufacture. Two items on our fantasy shopping list would be a Persian carpet woven from either an American strip cartoon or from a photograph of a famous person, and a carpet woven from a complex computer-generated design so that we could demonstrate the variety of pattern sources used in commercial workshops.

How do you show your carpets? Are there specific rules of preventative conservation?

Regrettably, because of their size, there are very few carpets on display. Some are in gallery 42, but this gallery is in sore need of large-scale and expensive re-design and development, and I must ask visitors to bear with the conditions they will find. There are other carpets around the East Stairs, which are at the end of gallery 33 by the main exhibition area. All carpets on display have been sewn onto cloth-covered backboards and then sealed into glazed frames. I realize that glass creates a barrier which frustrates many visitors, but our primary objective is to protect the carpets from air-borne pollution and from the fibre-eating carpet beetles (*Anthrenus samicus* and *Attagenus smirnovi*) which are endemic in south-east England. Closer encounters with carpets may be appropriate for serious researchers and I recommend that you phone to make an appointment either to work through a box of small unregistered carpet samples, or to study, under supervision, the 200 or so pieces which are hung on swinging arms in part of the Reference Collection in South Kensington.

To put the collection into context: by many standards it is a large one, but in addition to "oriental" carpets we have over 1000 European carpets. Together they form a minute part of the total collection of the Textile and Dress Department, which currently stands at 78,000 objects.

Jennifer Wearden
Assistant Curator, Textiles and Dress Department, Victoria and Albert

PROGRAMME

Tuesday 13 October
TRAVELLERS IN IRAN: PAINTINGS OF 17TH CENTURY EUROPEANS
by Patricia Baker
 (author of *Islamic Textiles*)

at 7p.m.
 preceded at 5.45 p.m. by the Annual General Meeting
 and at 6.30 p.m. by refreshments
 all at the Pauling Centre for Human Sciences, 58 Banbury Road, Oxford

The Annual General Meeting is for members only
 but visitors are welcome for the refreshments and lecture.
 Members free, non-members £2. No booking necessary

(If you have not renewed your subscription, you can do so here.)

Monday 7 December
CHRISTMAS SOCIAL AND MEMBERS' EXHIBITION

6.30 - 8.30 p.m.
 at the home of Felicity and George Wood, 2 Frenchay Road, Oxford
 Numbers limited to 30. Charge £7.

Further information and reply slip enclosed.

Our spring meetings will be a visit to Wendy Black's collection of felts and allied objects on Saturday 27 February, and a lecture by Sandra Dudley on *Museum Collections of Textiles from Burma* on Tuesday 9 March. These will be described more fully in the February issue of the Newsletter.

For further information or to book for events, contact Felicity Wood, 2 Frenchay Road, Oxford OX2 6TG tel/fax 01865 554281, email: felicity.wood@pipex.com

SHAWLS IN INDIA AND NORWICH: THE CONNEXION

The connexion between India and Norwich is long-standing, and was dependent on textiles, with the East India Company acting as intermediary. Norwich was a city weaving light-weight woollens, while India, Kashmir in the north in particular, was weaving wonderfully textured, warm shawls worn by men as waist-bands.

When the East India Company (E.I.C.) was formed in 1603, the main reason for its coming into being was the need of the West for spice to make the not very attractive food more palatable. To get the spices from the East, the E.I.C. needed something to sell in India to produce money to buy the spices from the Indonesian islands, and they offered among other things the beautiful, strongly-coloured, light-weight fabrics made in Norwich. At that time there was no, or little, idea of importing shawls in return; it was all to do with spices.

However, one of the perquisites of being a captain of a trading ship was that he was allowed to do a certain amount of trading on his own account, which had nothing to do with the official cargo. At first he brought back, as presents for his wife and family, some of those wonderful oblongs of fabric woven in India. They were much appreciated, and more and more were brought in, for sale rather than as presents.

By the end of the 17th century there was a brisk trade in textiles between India and Europe, but the importation of shawls was not yet in full flow. By the middle of the 18th century enough shawls had come into this country to make textile manufacturers, especially those whose normal trade was in light-weight woollens, think of copying as far as possible the Indian shawls for an appreciative public.

The early history of the efforts to copy the Indian weaves is not entirely clear; in fact, the first official knowledge that has been found so far comes from letters which passed between a Norwich manufacturer, Alderman John Harvey, and the Secretary of the Society of Arts in 1785, where Harvey says that he has been trying to find wool fine enough to weave shawls like the Indian, and though he managed to weave one and a quarter yards (137 cm) square, weighing only 3 ozs (85 gins), it was "more curious than useful".

After much experimentation it was discovered that by using a fine silk warp with a wool weft (sometimes cotton) a fabric approximating to the Indian could be woven. The next hurdle which had to be dealt with was the speed of weaving. The Indians used the tapestry-twill method, where the weft threads pass over two or three warp threads at a time, a method giving excellent results, but extremely slow. A weaver in Kashmir could probably only weave two shawls a year. This made the article extremely dear when it at last reached England, and shawls could fetch up to 200 guineas each.

By the 1790s Norwich had discovered how to weave wide fabrics as near to the Indian in softness and strength as possible, and were using this new (to them) technique for other garments as well as shawls, such as ladies' train dresses, waistcoat shapes, counterpanes and long scarves.

For further information or to book for events, contact Felicity Wood, 2 Frenchay Road, Oxford, OX2 6TG tel/fax: 01865 554281 e-mail: felicity.wood@dial.primox.com

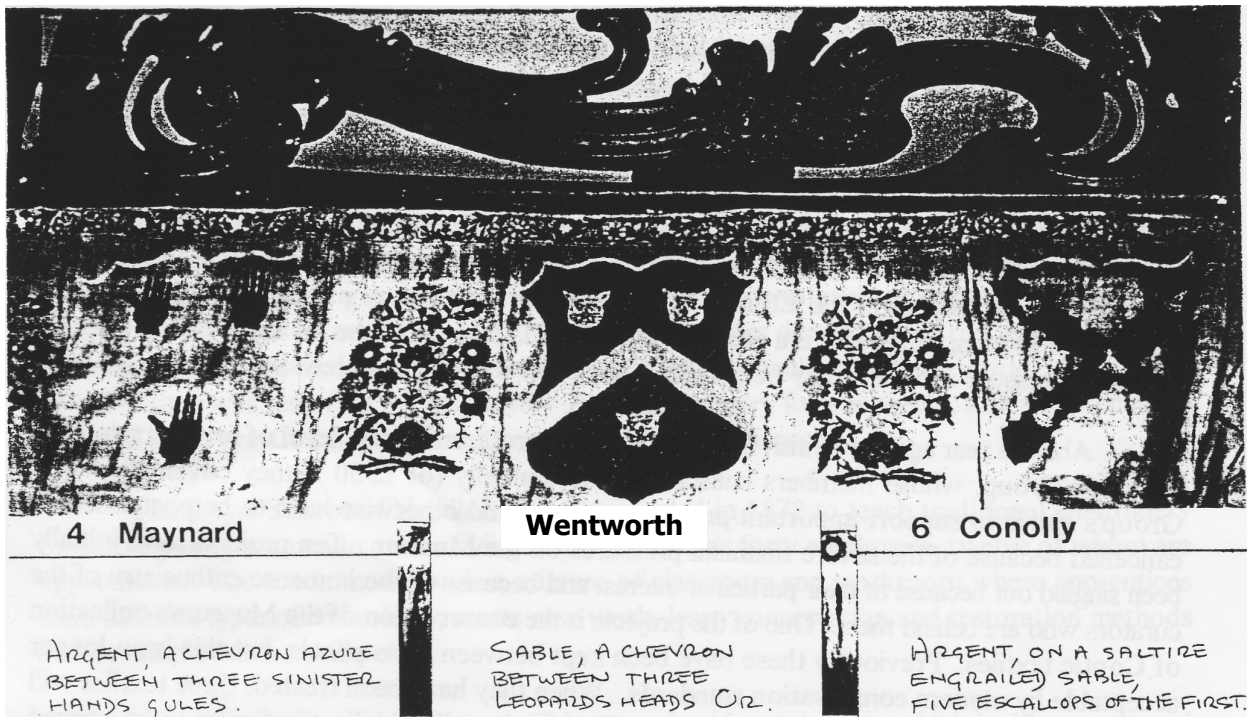
The Indian designs, frequently based on the *butah*, a Persian design (many of the Indian weavers were of Persian origin), were very popular, but at this time it was impossible in Britain to weave them into the cloth, so the patterns were stamped on to the cloth and then children filled in the figures with darning. The children must have been quick workers, as a letter written in 1803 says "they can work one a day". As far as is known, no other weaving city ever darned in designs, probably because both Edinburgh and Paisley started to weave shawls rather later than Norwich and from a different angle, though both based their designs on the popular Indian ones.

From then on the Norwich manufacturers were on their own and not dependent on the Indian but still used many of the Indian designs adapted to the fashion of the moment, and occasionally in the early days mixing the *butah* with English emblems, coats of arms, etc., in a somewhat incongruous fashion (see illustration below). From the early 19th century, designs of increasing complexity were now woven into the cloth.

Gradually over the years the close relationship between India and Norwich lapsed, but the city has always been grateful for the inspiration from the East which helped to keep the weavers employed through some difficult times.

Pamela Clabburn

[Pamela Clabburn was formerly Keeper of Strangers' Hall Museum, Norwich, and director of the Textile Conservation Workroom for the Eastern Region of the National Trust at Blickling Hall, Norfolk. She has published a number of books, including *Shawls in Imitation of the Indian*, Shire 1985, and, as Editor, *The Norwich Shawl*, H.M.S.O., 1995



Valance of a shawl counterpane at Blickling Hall (originally the border), Norfolk. Worked for the Buckinghamshire family of Blickling, 1792.]

MUSEUMS ROUND-UP

Dr Christopher Brown, the new Director of the Ashmolean Museum, who took up his appointment on the first of June, has already made his presence felt by extending the opening hours of the Museum by an hour - 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays and 2 to 5 p.m. on Sundays, a move which I am sure all will welcome. This brings the Ashmolean into line with the national and most other museums. He is also going to make another move which I know will be widely appreciated: the portico entrance is to be reopened with a ceremony on Tuesday 27 October.

The threat of closure of the Pitt Rivers due to building work has been hanging over us for most of this year. I now understand that it is really going to happen in the spring to autumn of 1999. Some parts, if not all, of the displays are likely to close from the end of February. It is unlikely that morning group visits will be booked in after this date, though organizers may wish to contact the Museum for updated information nearer the time. The Special Exhibition (West African photographs, which are to succeed *Braving the Elements*) will be open until 10 April, the end of the Easter holidays. The Museum shop will remain open throughout the period of closure and you will be able to obtain information on the work in hand there.

Also at the Pitt Rivers, the reserve collection of textiles and clothing is currently being relocated, and there will be no access to these stores between now and next January. Researchers should contact the Documentation Section for further information.

The Balfour Building is not affected by any of these measures. In the longer term, the Museum is working on plans for a new Access Centre incorporating a proper introduction to the Museum, a Collections Management Centre, improved special exhibition facilities and facilities for educational activities.

With the aid of a gift from British Petroleum, the British Museum has recently bought Gina Corrigan's collection of more than fifty Miao costumes from south-west China, ten of which are currently on display in the Ethnography Showcase (see below p. 15). Documenting the collection is keeping Gina (who is a member of the O.A.T.G.) busy at the moment, but I hope that when the pressure is off she maybe persuaded to write it up for the Newsletter.

About a year ago the British Museum Society introduced a new level of membership: the Townley Group, whose members subscribe £400 annually (or £350 if they covenant). The Group's aim is to support important projects which would otherwise have to be postponed or cancelled because of the severe financial pressures on the Museum. Ten projects have initially been singled out because of their particular interest and because of the immense enthusiasm of the curators who are behind them. One of the projects is the conservation of the Museum's collection of Coptic textiles. Previously these have been kept between glass panels, but this is no longer acceptable by modern conservation standards. When they have been treated, these textiles will be more readily accessible in the Museum's new Clothworkers World Textile Centre to be opened in New Oxford Street next year.

Valance of a shawl counterpane at Blickling Hall (originally the border), Norfolk. Worked for the Buckinghamshire family of Blickling 1792

The Victoria and Albert Museum has acquired a stunning life-sized full-length portrait of Maharana Amar Singh II, ruler of Mewar from 1678 to 1710, which I hope will soon be on show. I have only seen a small picture of it, but the Maharana appears to be wearing a transparent muslin *jama*, patterned in orange, over other visible garments, and girdled with a splendid *patka* of blue and gold, such as maybe seen in the *Minakar* exhibition at the British Museum (see below p. 14).

Editor

REPORTS OF O.A.T.G. MEETINGS

A Day at Hampton Court The Textile Conservation Centre and the Royal School of Needlework

The Textile Conservation Centre was established in 1975 to provide postgraduate education and conservation services. Next year it will be leaving the Court's exclusive apartments to move into custom-built premises on the University of Southampton's Winchester campus. There it will be even better placed to offer the high quality education and training that it currently provides.

Several aspects of the Centre's work were on display for us. The distinction between preventative and remedial conservation means that the techniques used depend on this as well as on the intended role of the object (for example, museum display or private use). Three of the Centre's eighteen students exemplified this approach when they presented their final year projects to us. An Amli embroidered garment from northern India/Pakistan needed cleaning and seven hours stitching to remedy insect damage and dirt so that it could be displayed in a private home. An Egyptian child's tunic over a thousand years old had been made safe for museum display, and a Bolivian textile with vermin damage was re-warped. The latter two articles have future research interest, therefore none of their dirt or staining was removed.

Any work carried out needs careful research and documentation, as was shown in the upholstery department. The department has a wealth of expertise, but the complex ingredients of some of the objects mean that liaison with other experts such as furniture restorers or ceramicists may also be needed. The Conservation Services department is run as a commercial organization, serving museums as well as private clients from all around the world. At the time of our visit it was restoring a 17th century Brussels tapestry for a museum, and recent arrivals included some pre-Columbian pieces from a private collection.

The Royal School of Needlework was founded in 1872 to teach traditional embroidery to enable young women to earn a living. The R.S.N. has forty employees, twelve of whom are apprentices. The accommodation is a mixture of classroom and workroom where apprentices learn different types of embroidery, create new work, learn conservation and restoration methods and develop business skills.

We were shown a very intricate Chinese embroidered dragon, which had been restored by cutting out the stitching and replacing it on a new fabric backing. An example of the new work undertaken was a series of six altar frontals for Wells Cathedral, designed by Jane Lemon and

funded through the Millennium fund. The R.S.N. also has the commission to design a new curtain for the Royal Opera House when it re-opens.

Many thanks to all the staff and students of both organizations who allowed us to see their work and gave of their time to make our visit a most enjoyable one.

Arwen Thomas

A Visit to Angela Thompson's Worldwide Collection

Nine of us met at Angela Thompson's house, having followed the computer-generated directions with varying success. After coffee and biscuits we spent the morning viewing the textiles, which had been displayed in separate rooms according to the country of origin. All exhibits were labelled, giving information on provenance, age, price and exact storage location when not being studied. Angela accompanied us around and fleshed out the labels with much more detail.

The items came from a variety of sources: her grandfather's fancy goods shop in Hanley, Staffordshire, had supplied a pair of embroidered silk curtains regularly used by her grandmother but still in good condition; her uncle had collected when a reporter in Japan in 1935-36, while Angela herself has collected both from dealers in this country and during her numerous travels abroad. The rooms covered items from Japan, China, Thailand, India, Pakistan, the Middle East, Yemen, Afghanistan and Baluchistan, and included a range of textiles from the 19th century through to the present day. They comprised complete garments, woven lengths of fabric, much fine embroidery, and other interesting items, such as the bow used to make fluffy feather bands for hats in Thailand.

After lunch we were shown information Angela had downloaded from the Internet on a Suzani exhibition by the Textile Gallery, which only sells via the Net. The information and a coloured reproduction of each item must make easier access for people who cannot travel to see the textiles themselves. Angela then showed us how she is producing a database of her collection using Paradox. This software provides no preset parameters, so much preparation is needed. Angela spent six months making lists before she set out her column headings, and is still not satisfied that she can extract all the information possible.

All in all it was a fascinating day, the banks of drawers, cupboards and the database all showing that we saw only a small part of the complete collection. The size of the group allowed a full exchange of ideas, information and access to the textiles themselves.

Julia Swift

Back-strap Weaving Workshop

On Saturday 12 September a group of seven met at the Education Barn of the Warburg Nature Reserve, a remote and beautiful spot, where Janet Phillips gave us a day's workshop on back-strap weaving.

It was a drenching wet morning - heavy warps of rain with lots of weft spray - which made progress on the M40 so slow that I arrived, oh horrors! a little late, but in time for Janet's introduction. She is a professional weaver and teacher, and had prepared clear notes for us together with equipment, yarn and braided tie cords, and Felicity Wood brought the wooden parts she had prepared at home.

Janet showed us an example of the back-strap we were about to weave (we used scarves meanwhile as back-straps), and discussed weaving structure and terminology, pointing out that we would produce a warp-faced textile, and speculating on the nature of the yarn used in central and southern America in the past, as the close proximity of the warp threads demands a strong smooth yarn.

We proceeded to wind our figure-of-eight warps (50 warps, 24" long), to tie lease strings to each side of the centre cross, to tie in notched loom rods each end, to remove the warps from the warping post and lay them on the table. So far so good except (oh more horrors!) my warp threads looked and proved to be irregular. Next, we centred threads on the rods and spaced the warps evenly, attached second rods, secured both with the tie cords and went to find a tree stump (or for us a table clamp). We tied ourselves into the loom with our scarves, created the two sheds with our lease strings, inserted the shed roll (a flat stick) into the far end and with a batten then opened the shed at the front and looped the heddle string between each warp thread and onto the heddle roll.

Several knots, adjustments and cries to Janet for help later we were ready to weave, our weft wound onto a pencil. Weaving was conducted in the silence of deep concentration, punctuated by the intermittent crash as a batten, or possibly rod, slipped out and fell to the floor. This happened, of course, if we forgot for a moment that we were part of the loom and allowed the tension on the warp to slacken.

We had until 4 o'clock to finish the weaving, detach it from the loom and wind wrap each end of the warp with coloured yarn to create a loop. I just managed to finish although I had had to undo and start again when my selvage got too loose. It was terrific to put into practice at last what I had observed, fascinated, in a Karen village on the Thai/Burmese border five years ago.

Hester Hawkes

APOLOGY FROM THE EDITOR

My embarrassed and sincere apologies go to Geeta Devi, Urmila Devi and Sushila Devi, makers of the Madhubani sari illustrated in the last issue, for making a complete nonsense of their names in the caption on p.12. Unfortunately somebody ran a spell check over the copy after it had left my hands and inadvertently replaced their names with the un-Indian alternatives it offered. I am so sorry for any distress this may have caused.

ASIAN ART IN LONDON

British links with the Far East stretch back to the early explorers who returned with exotic silks and porcelains. These previously unknown treasures have been highly prized in the West ever since, and as a result London to-day boasts more dealers in the field than any other city in the world. More than forty of them have got together to stage a programme entitled *Asian Art in London* from Tuesday 10 to Saturday 21 November.

The project has attracted support from the academic world, resulting in a programme of lectures and seminars, though not alas! on textiles. Ceramics are better served, with a three-day seminar at Sotheby's Institute under the title, *The China Circle - The Export of Chinese Porcelain Round the World*, from 11-13 November, and on the 18th and 19th there will be a study course on *Masterpieces of Ceramics* from its collection at the Percival David Foundation. The problem of authenticity in Asian art is the subject of a lecture by Doreen Stoneham to be given on the 17th at Christie's, King Street, in collaboration with the Oriental Ceramic Society.

Textiles are not, however, wholly neglected, and the Textile Gallery (Queen Street) will be staging an exhibition at Colnaghi's in Bond Street entitled *Textile Art from the Silk Road: Silk Embroideries and Brocades, 200 B. C. to A.D. 1600*, comprising up to fifty Chinese silk textiles. These will include fine Ming Dynasty Chinese silk panels, one with a red ground woven in flat gilded paper with lotuses in a spiral arabesque and another embroidered with birds and vases in multi-coloured silks on a yellow ground.

In Islington Jacqueline Simcox will also be exhibiting Chinese silks covering the same period, including an early Ming silk and gold panel embroidered with an image of Garuda, the mythical golden bird being shown in flight among fanciful clouds with two serpents clasped in its beak.

More unusually, Linda Wrigglesworth will be presenting at her gallery in Brook Street an exhibition of Korean textiles of the Yi Dynasty (1392-1910). This will be one of the first exhibitions in the West exclusively devoted to Korean costumes and textiles, and possibly one of the finest collections outside Korea. The outstanding feature of Korean textiles is their uniqueness in terms of design, use of colour and the fineness of the silk and other fabrics used. The exhibition covers a wide range of Korean costumes and textiles, including the insignia badges worn by court officials, and a stunning collection of *pojagi*. These traditional wrapping cloths, patchwork of small pieces of material, rival modern abstract art in their mastery of form and colour (see illustration on opposite page). In conjunction with the exhibition, Linda Wrigglesworth and researcher and historian Gary Dickinson will give a lecture in the gallery on the 14th on *The Relationship Between Chinese and Korean Systems of Status as seen through Rank Badges*.

Some more general collections will also include a few textile items, John Eskenazi of Bond Street, for example, will show some carpets and textiles from South-east Asia, India, Tibet and the Himalayas; Francesca Galloway (South Kensington) will show early Chinese and Indian trade textiles; and Maharukh Desai (Jermyn Street) will feature Mughal textiles from the early 17th to

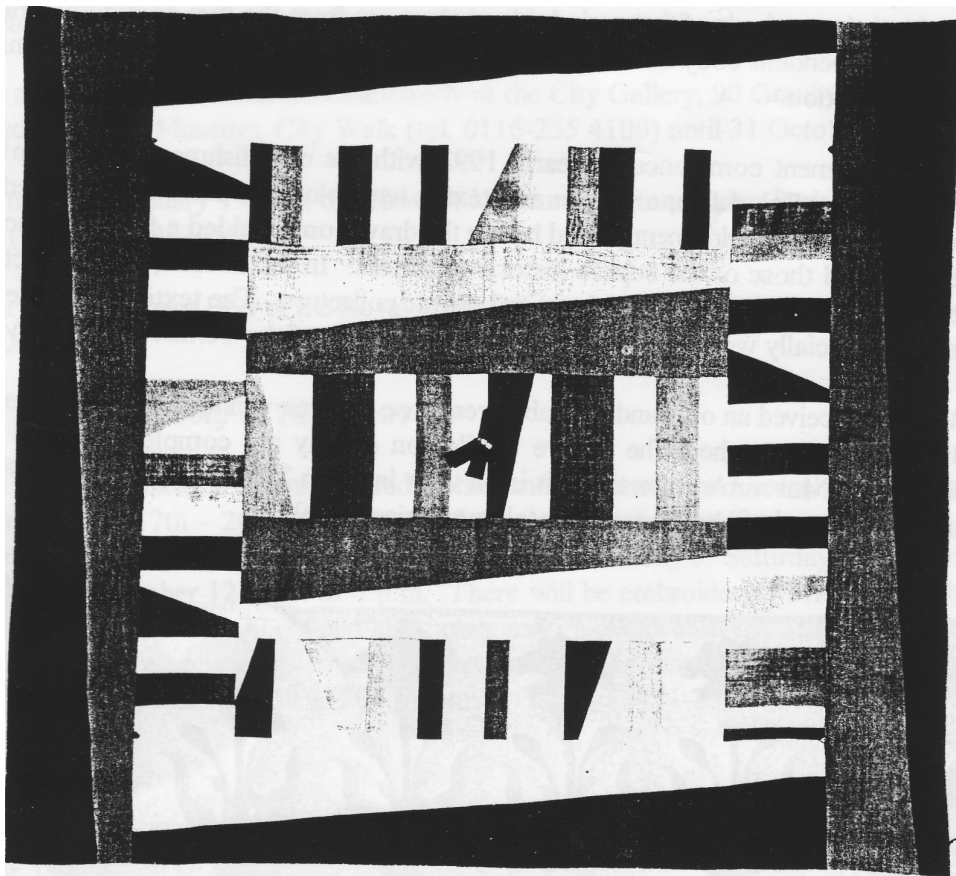
the 19th centuries, 18th century Indian costumes, as well as early 20th century Indian tribal photographs and 19th century tribal jewellery. There will also be an auction of oriental textiles at Christie's, South Kensington, on the 24th.

Participating dealers are holding three late-night openings focusing on different areas of London. On the 16th it is Mayfair, with dealers in Bond Street, Brook Street, Clifford Street, Davies Street, Dover Street, Mount Street and St George Street staging special exhibitions and displays. On the 17th it is the turn of St James', with galleries opening in Duke Street, Jermyn Street, King Street and Ryder Street. Finally on the 18th dealers in Kensington Church Street and Westbourne Grove will unveil their treasures.

A number of social events are being held in connection with *Asian Art in London*, culminating in a gala dinner at the V.& A. on Friday 20th, at which Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan will be the guest of honour.

If the project is a success, it is likely to become an annual event. For further information contact Asian Art in London, 48 Adams Row, London W1Y 5DE, Tel. 0171-409.0200, fax. 0171-499.0050,

Sue Bond Public Relations



A 19th century patchwork *pojagi* (Korean wrapping cover cloth) probably a sangpo for a dining table. Linda Wrigglesworth

EXHIBITIONS

Minakar: Spun Gold and Woven Enamel

To celebrate fifty years of India's Independence, the Textile Art Society of New Delhi offers the textile exhibition *Minakar* as a tribute to the enduring capacity of the country's traditional arts for rebirth and renewal.

The textiles displayed in *Minakar* re-create the "cloths of gold" woven for the courts of Mughal India and Safavid Iran in the 17th and 18th centuries. At a time when the art of patterned silk had reached a pinnacle of excellence in both cultures, the weavers of the imperial ateliers harnessed complex weaving techniques to capture on cloth the appearance of richly enamelled gold. Weaving polychrome patterns on glittering metallic grounds, they transformed coats, sashes, trimmings and furnishings into articles of jewellery, precious and ornamental.

The textiles in the exhibition revive the extraordinary enamelled quality of the historic cloths, but do not duplicate specific originals from either Mughal India or Safavid Iran. They are, in essence, the products of a modern hand-weaving experiment to research and distil the exacting technical and artistic standards of that period, blend elements from the two contiguous traditions, and create an independent body of work that might inspire a living Indian art to re-consider its contemporary situation.

This experiment commenced in early 1993 with the establishment in Delhi of a silk-weaving workshop by Rahul Jain, a weaver and textile technologist trained in the United States. Three years of intensive development passed before the drawlooms yielded a fabric whose texture and pattern rivalled those of the superb historic examples. In the interim, the products of the workshop were acquired by both institutional and private collectors. The textiles presented in this exhibition were specially woven for the permanent collection of the Textile Art Society.

Minakar received an outstanding public response in three venues in India before coming to the British Museum, where the twelve textiles on display are complemented by Mughal miniatures from the Museum's collection. It is on view in room 33b until 3 January 1999, and is accompanied by a gorgeously illustrated catalogue, price £12.95.

Rahul Jain



Tulip border of a shawl, woven silk and silver-gilt thread.

Also at the British Museum:

If you are quick, some of you may still be able to catch *Miao Costumes from South West China* in the Ethnography Showcase at the top of the main stairs, which closes on 11 October.

The exhibition which follows it, *Artists and Artisans: Perspectives on Tunisian Culture*, will run from 22 October to 14 February 1999. On display will be sumptuous velvet or silk veils, jackets, tunics and waistcoats, heavily embroidered with gold and silver thread, and woollen garments with striking embroidered or woven patterns. Although not strictly Asian, the Islamic connection will make this exhibition interesting to O.A.T.G. members.

Ashmolean Museum

Chinese Silks - 13 January to 28 February 1999. There will be a morning behind the scenes studying East Asian silks in connection with this exhibition on Saturday 23 January, £12 (Friends of the Ashmolean £10). Numbers are limited to 15. To apply, or for further information, contact the Education Service at the Ashmolean Museum, tel. 01865 278015.

Handmade in India -

- continues at Leicester simultaneously at the City Gallery, 90 Granby St (tel. 0116-254 0595) and Leicester Museum, City Walk (tel. 0116-255 4100) until 31 October.

7 November - 3 January 1999 at the Hawick Museum, Wilton Lodge Park, Hawick, Scottish Borders (tel. 01450 373457)

16 January - 27 February 1999 at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Queen Street, Exeter (tel. 01392 421252)

***Suzani: The Floral Motif in Textile Art* -**

- a selling exhibition of embroidered textiles and costume from Central Asia, India and the Ottoman Empire, 17th - 20th centuries, at Joss Graham and the Turkmen Gallery, 8 & 10 Eccleston Street, London, 12 October to 21 November, Monday to Saturday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Sunday 11 October 12 noon to 6 p.m. There will be embroidery workshops with Imrana Khanum and Shilpa Patel on 17, 24 and 21 October and 7 November at the Turkmen Gallery, 2.30 - 5.30 p.m., £35 per class or £100 for all four classes, including materials (numbers limited to 15). Tel/fax (Joss Graham) 0171-730 4370, (Turkmen Gallery) 0171-730 8848.

Overseas - U.S.A.

From the Looms of India: Textiles from the Permanent Collection, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia, until 15 November.

Kashmir Shawls, Indianapolis Museum of Fine Art, Indianapolis, Indiana, until 28 March 1999.

The Four Seasons: A Celebration of Nature in Contemporary Japanese Textiles, Center for the Visual Arts, Metropolitan State College of Denver, Denver, Colorado, 22 October to 16 December.

Structure and Surface: Contemporary Japanese Textiles, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 12 November to 26 January 1999.

Switzerland

Along the Silk Route: Weavings as a Mirror of Sassanid Art, an exhibition of textiles and applied art from antiquity to the 19th century, at the Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg, until 1 November, daily from 2-5.30 p.m. (Tel. +41(0) 311808 1201)

Last Chance to See -

Braving the Elements, which finishes its run at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford on 2 January 1999.

LECTURES AND EVENTS

Friends of the Pitt Rivers Museum

Threads of Continuity and Change - Sandra Dudley (D.Phil student and Assistant Curator IT at the Museum) will talk on doing field research and collecting textiles in Thailand and Burma, at the Pauling Centre for Human Sciences, 58 Banbury Road, Oxford, on Wednesday 14 October at 6 p.m. Tea be served at 5.30 p.m. Visitors will be welcome and contributions appreciated.

Oxford Guild of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers

Textiles and the Indian Ocean Trade - by Ruth Barnes at 2 p.m. on Saturday 17 October at the Village Hall, Stanton St John. Non-members £2. Further information maybe obtained from the Secretary, Monika Brown, tel. 01865 248 869

The Textile Society

The talk by Marianne Ellis on *Mamluk Embroideries from the Newberry Collection* at the Ashmolean Museum, announced in the last issue as taking place on Saturday 10 October, has had to be postponed and will now be held on Saturday 31 October. Further information may be obtained from Freda Chapman (tel. 01248 683703).

British Museum

The evening opening on Tuesday 3 November, from 6-9 p.m., will be held in the Oriental and Prints and Drawings galleries, including the *Minakar* exhibition (see above p. to). There will be a pay bar in the galleries, book and gift shops open, and the evening will include lectures and gallery talks given by Museum curators. Entrance will be through the Montague Place entrance. British Museum Society members free, others may buy tickets at the door price £5. No booking is necessary.

Victoria and Albert Museum

Sunday 6 December - Kimono silk painting, a "drop-in" activity for families, 11 a.m. to 12.30 p.m., 1.30 to 3 and 3.30 to 5 p.m. Use the kimonos in the Japanese gallery to design your own artwork on silk.

Thursday 10 December - Gallery talk on *Indian Textiles and Their Influence in Europe, 1670-1720*, by Imogen Stewart, at 2 p.m.

For further information tel. 0171-93 8 8638

Weaving Workshops

Janet Phillips (author of *Weaver's Book of Fabric Design*), who led the O.A.T.G. back-strap weaving workshop (see above p.11), offers a series of special weaving workshop days "in the beautiful Oxfordshire countryside" in 1999 - rug weaving in February and March, various weave structures and fabrics in March-April and September-October, and more exotic techniques in November. The price will be £35 per day including the loom ready for weaving and all the yarns you will use, as well as tea and coffee as required and a ploughman's lunch. An accommodation list can be provided and pick up from Reading station can be arranged. What more can you ask?! For more details phone Janet Phillips on 01491 641727.

Courses

As well as providing fifteen-week courses for undergraduates and graduate students on the arts of Asia, the School of Oriental and African Studies, in collaboration with Christie's, lay on short courses in a number of subjects including Carpets. Further information maybe obtained from the Brunei Gallery, S.O.A.S., University of London, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London, WC1H 0XG; tel. 0171-323 6173 or 0171-637 6129; fax 0171-637 0406; e-mail: al4@soas.ac.uk

BOOKS

WOVEN CARGOES: Indian Textiles in the East

The Victoria and Albert Museum has the most comprehensive collection of Indian textiles in existence. Over the past decade, the Indian and South-east Asian Department has been strengthening its collection in one area which was under represented, the cotton and silk textiles made expressly for the Asian markets. These are the so-called "painted cottons", Gujarati and Coromandel Coast cloths with designs applied by mordant and resist dyeing, and the famous Gujarati silk *patola*, with its complex double-ikat patterns pre-dyed before weaving. These textiles formed what might be characterized as the "Eastern chintz trade" - as opposed to the better-known finely painted cottons made expressly for the West. The European chintz trade developed in response to a vogue for Chinoiserie fashion in 17th and 18th century Europe, but its origins are a century earlier in the European "Age of Discovery", which was driven by a desire for Asia's precious spices.

The eastern trade in Indian textiles began even earlier, in response to this same insatiable international demand for spices. The antiquity of this trade, which extended from the Red Sea to south China, is archaeologically confirmed by the recent radiocarbon-14 dating of a fragment of Gujarati cotton discovered at Fustat (Old Cairo) and now in the Ashmolean Museum, dated to around the 10th century. The earliest Indian textile recovered from South-east Asia, in the Victoria and Albert Museum, has a radiocarbon-14 date of the mid-14th century.

In a new book devoted to the V. & A. collection, *Woven Cargoes, Indian Textiles in the East*, I tell the story of India's textile trade to South-east Asia and Japan. It is an account of a trade which was well established long before the arrival of European merchant-adventurers and their trading companies (the English East India Company and the Dutch equivalent, the VOC). Vast quantities of cloth were traded for the cloves, nutmeg and mace of the Moluccas, famously known by the 16th century as the Spiceries or Spice Islands of eastern Indonesia. The sheer scale of this commerce was staggering: at the height of this trade in the mid-18th century, the Dutch storehouse in Batavia (modern Jakarta) held up to a million items of Indian cloth in stock.

The chintzes and silks made for the South-east Asian markets were richly varied, both in designs and quality. The designs were expressly tailored to satisfy varying taste and dress etiquette throughout Asia. The markets responded in very different ways: in Thailand the king of Siam and his ministers closely controlled the trade in Indian textiles, establishing a hierarchy of designs to be worn by different ranks of courtiers. The designs were expressly Thai in taste, and produced by the highly skilled cloth painters and dyers of the Coromandel Coast (cover illustration). In the Malay world, taste was partly shaped by the strong presence of Islam and a predilection for gold embellished cloths. The Japanese were renowned for their fascination with the "exotic" and proved a particularly difficult market to satisfy because of their ceaseless demand for novelty.

The ways in which these textiles were adapted to local customs and uses form a fascinating part of this story. Some are spectacular in scale, large figurative banner cloths designed expressly to serve as display items on ceremonial occasions. Others were for personal attire, and catered for the full social spectrum, from the sultans of Java to villagers in the outer

islands, where Gujarati *silk patola*, preserved as heirloom objects, form part of ceremonial dress to this day.

Most of the Indian cloths from South-east Asia are of designs (and often dimensions) unfamiliar from our knowledge of traditional Indian textiles. Some display designs known from other Indian arts, such as temple architecture of the late medieval period; others reflected the express taste of the consumer, as seen with those commissioned for the Thai market. It was customary to assume that cloths would not survive in the tropics for more than a century or two, but a growing suspicion that these cloths were substantially older than traditionally assumed prompted a radical re-evaluation. A number of the V.& A.'s textiles were dated by accelerated radiocarbon-14 analysis at the Research Laboratory for Archaeology at Oxford and the results were startling. Two cloths were dated to the mid- to late 14th century, others to the 15th and 16th centuries. Before this we had to rely on the occasional appearance of a European trading company stamp on a cloth, indicating a 17th or 18th century date range. At last we had the evidence that among the Indian textiles surviving from South-east Asia were examples at least 300 years older than we dared assume, as seen in the large banner cloth (over 15' in length) painted with scenes of a wooded landscape, dated to the mid-14th century, which has a direct parallel in a fragment of similar date from Egypt in the Ashmolean's Newberry collection. A selection of these acquisitions may be seen at the V. & A.'s Nehru Gallery (room 41).

John Guy, *Woven Cargoes. Indian Textiles in the East*, Thames and Hudson, 192pp, 241 illus, 145 in colour, ISBN 0 500 018634, October 1998, £29.95

John Guy

And the other books:

Jenny Balfour-Paul, *Indigo*, 150 colour & 50 b/w illus., ISBN 0 7141 1776 5, British Museum Press, October 1998, hb, £28.50

Members who heard Jenny Balfour-Paul speak on indigo to the O.A.T.G. in May - and, indeed, those who did not - will welcome the publication of this book. It results from over 15 years' research, and is the first book to cover in detail all aspects of the subject: historical, agricultural and botanical, chemical and technological, commercial and economic, indigo's various uses in textiles and art, and its many sociological, medicinal, folkloric and other connotations. It is superbly illustrated with textiles from around the world and the author's own field photographs.

Members living in the U.K. may obtain 10% discount and postage and packing free on orders placed before 31 December, but must place their orders direct with: The Marketing Executive, British Museum Press, 46 Bloomsbury Street, London, WC1B 3QQ, tel. 0171-323 1234, fax. 0171-436 7315. Please indicate that you are a member of the O.A.T.G.

Rosemary Crill, *Indian Ikat Textiles*, 192 pp, 100 col & 25 b/w illus, ISBN 185177 242 1, V.& A., 1998, £35.

Looking in depth at textiles woven in the ikat technique, this book is based on the V.& A.'s unrivalled collection of ikats from all over India, many of which date from the mid-19th century and represents aspects of weaving and dyeing that no longer survive in their places of origin. Pieces range from sumptuous satin-weave *mashros* of Sind and double ikat *patola* from

Gujarat to simple cotton saris from Orissa and Tamil Nadu, and subtly coloured rumals from Andhra Pradesh Beautifully designed and authoritatively written this book provides the essential introduction to a highly influential textile art form.

Georgia Museum of Art, *From Desert to Oasis: Arts of the People of Central Asia*, 114pp, illus, 30X23 cm, pb., Athens, 1998, £20.

Published in connexion with an exhibition predominantly featuring Central Asian textiles and weaving; felt Julkhirs; Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Arab rugs; ikats and Turkmen jewellery.

Riggisberger Berichte, vol. 6, *Along the Silk Route: Early Mediaeval Art Between Persia and China*, ISBN 3 9005014 114, Abegg-Stiftung, 1998 SFr85 + p.7 p.

This publication introduces selected works from the Abegg-Stiftung collection, including newly discovered 7th and 9th century silks.

Naomi Szeto, *Dress in Hong Kong: A Century of Change and Customs*, 112 pp, colour illus., pb., Hong Kong 1995, £10.

Catalogue of an exhibition at the Hong Kong Museum of History, showing the styles and changes in dress from the mid-19th century to the 1970s. Well illustrated in colour, plus some interesting early b/w photographs. Text in English and Chinese.

REMINDER - SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE NOW DUE

The O.A.T.G. Newsletter is published three times a year with deadlines on the first Monday in February, June and October.

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE - MONDAY 1 FEBRUARY 1999

Contributions should be sent to the Editor:
Phyllis Nye, Hewel Barn, Common Road, BECKLEY, Oxon, OX3 9UR, U.K.
Tel/fax 01865 351607