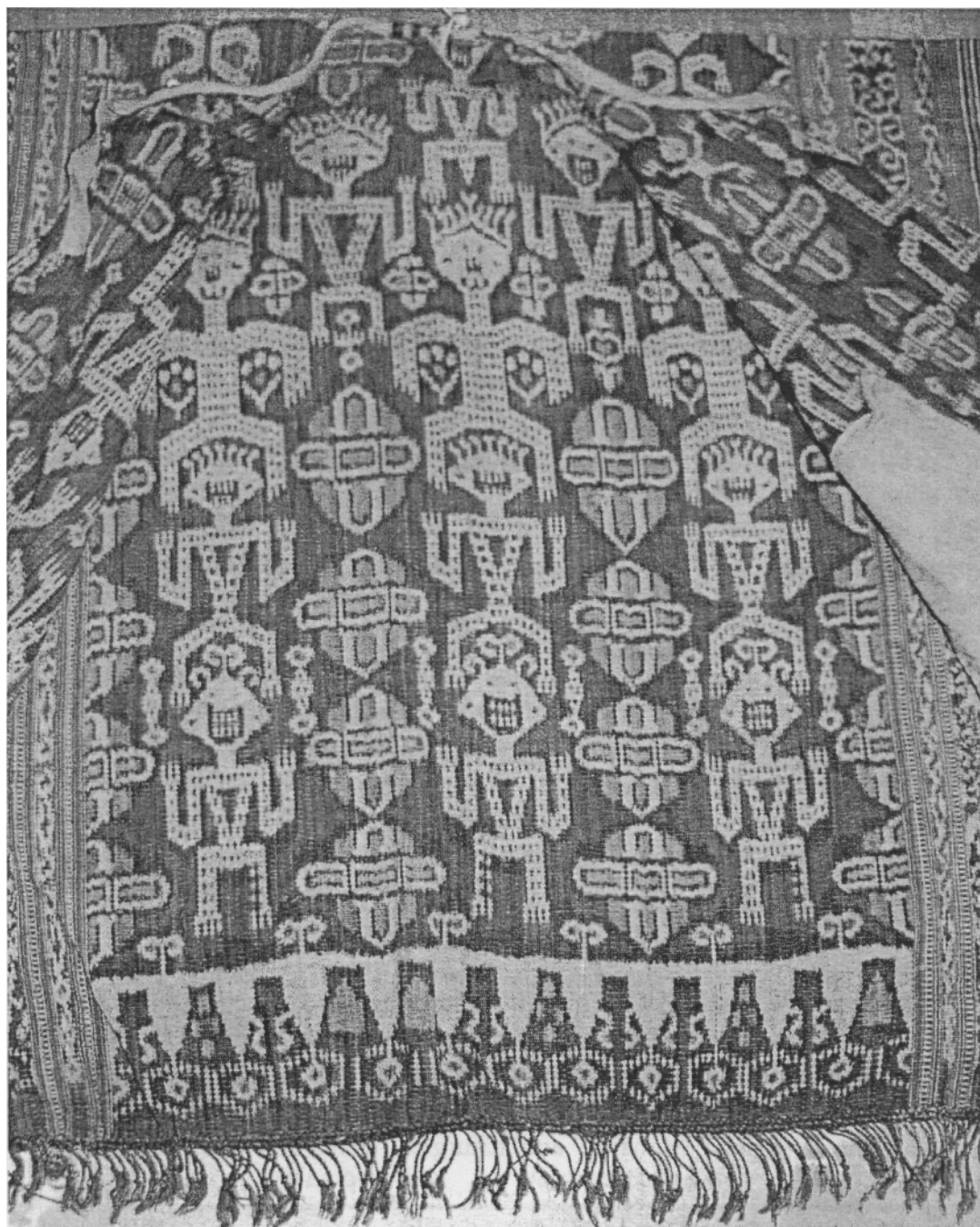


OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

Newsletter No. 28

June 2004



Warp ikat anthropomorphic figures on a jacket from Borneo in the Pitt Rivers Museum
(Accession no. 1900.62.11) See page 8.

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EDITORIAL

I have recently received a copy of the Stichting Textile Research Centre's general report for 2003. Established in 1991, the Stichting's aim is to support academic research of archaeological and anthropological textiles and dress. The most important part of its work is the building up and study of a textile and dress collection to be available for research and exhibition purposes. One of its exhibitions, *Tutankhamun's Wardrobe*, opened in Sweden in 1999, visited various centres in Europe, including Edinburgh in 2001, and so far as I know is still travelling. There was talk of it coming to Leeds in 2005: watch this space! The Director of the Centre is Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood, who, many of you will remember with enjoyment, gave a talk on *Beyond the Chador* to the O.A.T.G. in October 2002 (reported in newsletter no. 24, February 2003).

Receiving, as I do, the Centre's annual reports, I never cease to be impressed by the advances it makes from year to year, and how far it has come in only eleven years. For example, 2003 saw the launch of a new textile journal (see below, p. 27) as well as work on various proposals for digital exhibitions that can be placed on the Centre's website (<http://www.texdress.nl/>). These plans include exhibitions about face veils, as well as Omani and Sudanese dress. Staff are also busy on a large number of research and other projects, though sadly the Yemen dress project has had to be suspended by the Yemeni Government because of the risks to travelling in the region in the present climate.

Substantial additions have been made to the collections, by both purchase and gift, the latter including some veils and a girl's outfit brought back by Ruth Barnes from Qatar. Among the list of acquisitions, I was especially intrigued to see a Coptic nun's dress, in view of an article in the new journal on naked Coptic nuns! However, as a result of it and other items, the Centre's Coptic Monastic and Liturgical collection is now one of the most comprehensive outside Egypt.

The acquisitions are not only of textiles and dress, but of related items, as well as books and a parcel of historic postcards of Saudi Arabia. The Centre now has access to a flat-bed scanner and a slide scanner, and is actively looking for photographs, postcards and slides which can be scanned and added to its growing collection of illustrative material.

PROGRAMME

Wednesday 16 June at 5.45 p.m.

Blossoms of the Palm; Seeds of History - Textiles from Savu, Indonesia

Talk by Geneviève Duggan
(details already circulated)

* * *

Wednesday 20 October at 5.30 p.m.

A.G.M.

(members only)

followed (open to all) by refreshments and at 6.15 p.m.:

Bu-no-mai: The Military Dances of Bugaku

talk by Gregory Irvine, Curator of Japanese metal work at the V.& A.

Bugaku is the Japanese dance form associated with the orchestral tradition known as Gagaku and derives from forms used at the Tang court in China (608-916). The dances of Bugaku are broadly divided into three types: *Hira-mai*, a slow graceful dance with the performers wearing the dress of Heian period (794-1185) civil servants, *Hashiri-mai*, a “running” dance, and *Bu-no-mai*, a lively military dance which often requires the performer to carry a weapon. Bugaku is performed at a number of major temples and shrines in Japan as well as at the Imperial Court on special occasions.

The costumes worn by the performers of *Bu-no-mai* show significant influences from the types of armour depicted on Buddhist Guardian figures, notably the Guardians of the Four Directions (*Shi-Tenno*). The performers carry swords, spears, bows and arrows, and ritually use these weapons to “purify” the area of performance.

The talk will concentrate on the costume, weapons and symbolism of one particular performance, *Taiheiraku*, which features four dancers who symbolically fight, but the dance in fact represents a prayer for peace. The talk will be illustrated with slides and some short video clips.

* * *

Wednesday 3 November at 5.45 p.m.

“Ship Cloths” and Their Role in Community Celebrations

talk by Gillian Green
(details in the next newsletter)

* * *

All meetings will be held at the Pauling Centre, 58 Banbury Road, Oxford

Members free

Non-members £2

For further information contact one of the Programme Secretaries:
Rosemary Lee, tel. 01491 873276, e-mail: rosemary.lee@talk21.com
Fiona Sutcliffe, tel. 01491 872268, e-mail: J.V.Sutcliffe@talk21.com

BORNEO TEXTILE COLLECTIONS IN THE UK.

The island of Borneo is divided politically into Kalimantan, the larger southern part, which belongs to the Republic of Indonesia, while the northern states of Sarawak and Sabah are part of Malaysia, with the independent sultanate of Brunei forming a small enclave within Sarawak. Textile traditions vary. The Malays weave *songket* cloths, using a supplementary weft of gold or silver thread; the Kayan decorate plain weave skirts with beads, shells, buttons and sequins; and the Benuaq use *lamba* fibres for their ikat patterns. However, the most dominant textile-producing group are the Iban whose main mode of patterning cloth is warp ikat (supplementary weft techniques include *songket*, *pilih* and *sungkii*). Iban blanket-size *pua* cloths are used on all ritual occasions, while skirts and jackets are only worn on such occasions.

Not surprisingly, the textiles in European museums reflect Borneo's colonial history. Textiles produced by groups in Kalimantan, formerly Dutch Borneo, found their way into Dutch museums; whereas the ikat cloths of the Iban, who except for a small minority live in Sarawak, were mostly deposited in the U.K. English involvement began in 1839, when James Brooke, who was to become the first "White Raja", first set foot on Sarawak soil. He was succeeded by his nephew Charles Brooke in 1868, and by the son of the latter, Vyner, in 1917. The Brookes ruled Sarawak as an independent Raj, gaining formal British protection only in 1888. After the Second World War, Sarawak was administered briefly as a British Colony, gaining independence in 1963, as a State within the Federation of Malaysia.

Borneo textile collections in the U.K. were largely acquired from persons who had an active role in the history of Sarawak: from Rajahs and Ranees to administrators in upriver forts; from missionaries to medical officers and museum curators. Only a few of these persons documented the cloths they brought back to the U.K., and often the only information we have is the approximate date textiles were acquired.

The man who perhaps had the greatest influence on Borneo textile collections in Britain was Charles Hose, a civil servant in Sarawak from 1884 until his retirement in 1907. A larger than life figure (in both senses), Hose was an enthusiastic naturalist and ethnographer who published on the Kayan and Kenyan of his administrative area. While the ethnographic record of his work continues to be of value, by today's academic standards many of his theories are viewed as overly imaginative or based on inadequate data. Hose was an avid collector of ethnographic objects, including textiles, which he sold after his retirement both in Britain and Europe. Notable recipients were the Liverpool and British Museums. The latter has a sizeable Hose collection, with a dozen or so each of *pua* and skirt cloths. The largest collection assembled by Hose is in the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. However, this collection came to the museum not from Hose, but from the man who was responsible for really putting Iban textiles on the map, so to speak, Alfred C. Haddon.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Haddon was an influential figure in both anthropology and art. He first came to Sarawak in 1898 at the invitation of Charles Hose, following Haddon's second expedition to Torres Strait. While in Kuching, Haddon photographed and made sketches of some hundred Iban cloths at the Sarawak Museum. He later purchased a number of cloths from Hose and eventually donated this collection to Cambridge. It was only in 1936 that Haddon published his book on Iban textiles in collaboration with Laura Start who provided the drawings. The study's main merit is the identification of single design motifs which were originally provided by Hose. In fact, most cloths sold by Hose came complete with tags giving the names of the designs (Figure 1). It is this documentation that makes Iban cloths in U.K. collections unique.

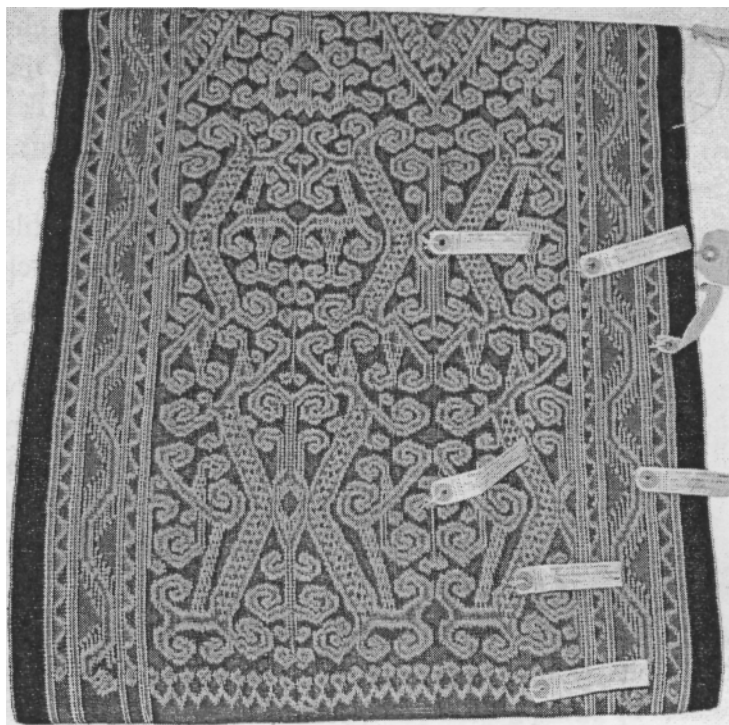


Figure 1; British Museum (Accession Number 1905-377); skirt cloth; warp ikat; deer pattern

Nonetheless, there are many data that Hose failed to record. Crucially, he did not inform us how and from whom he collected his data. There is no information on the weavers of the cloths he obtained, and rarely of the longhouses where they lived. The records in the British Museum give the place of origin of all Hose cloths as Baram District, but most likely this is based on the fact that Hose was stationed in the Baram for most of his career. We also do not know how Hose went about acquiring the large amount of cloths that he eventually sold. Did Iban bring cloths to him, or did he acquire them during travels upriver in the course of his official duties? More importantly, why were his standards of quality so poor? Iban today would consider many cloths assembled by Hose as mediocre (dye, execution of ikat, condition, and pattern). For example, almost half of the skirt cloths at Cambridge were subjected to only one dye process with an inferior brown dye, which saves the weaver the laborious second tying of the pattern. Nonetheless, the British Museum acquired three *pua*

cloths from Hose that are of great interest and superb quality, if not condition (Accession Numbers 1905-405, -414; -419). The cloths show deep morinda dye saturation; the patterns are connected to Indian trade cloth and bear archaic names, which however were not recorded by Hose (Gavin 2003:289-302).

One problem with Hose's identifications was that both he and Haddon presumed that the name of a design motif necessarily tells us what the design depicts or represents, which was to cause great confusion for the study of Iban textile patterns. Nonetheless, Haddon's meticulous documentation is admirable, and his study remains an important reference work. The textiles at Cambridge include thirteen jackets, most of them ikat; a shell jacket; and a superb *sungkit* jacket (Accession Number 1935.904) with anthropomorphic figures described in great detail in Haddon's book (1982:42-3). There are some fifty skirt cloths, some of them magnificent (for example, Accession Number 1935-900); eleven *pua* cloths, three of which are illustrated in Haddon's book. A loin cloth is also featured and described in detail (the website of the Cambridge museum can be accessed for a complete and detailed record).

While colonial officers were encouraged to collect artefacts and textiles, few took the trouble to record information about them. It is also likely that many of the cloths were gifts, which would go some way to explain the low standard of quality.

Born in Benares in 1803, James Brooke was the second son of a judge in the service of the East India Company. A bit of a renegade, he had only a few years of formal schooling at Norwich Grammar School and at the age of 16 signed on with the East India Company's army. After the death of his father he used his inheritance to buy a yacht, the *Royalist*, and set sail for Singapore in 1838. After helping quell a rebellion in Sarawak, James Brooke was proclaimed Rajah in 1841. He established forts at the mouths of rivers and invited missionaries to convert the Iban and dissuade them from headhunting and raiding. But his reluctance to allow commercial ventures in Sarawak made powerful enemies and in 1854 a Royal Commission was set up in Singapore to enquire into his suppression of piracy and he subsequently lost naval support. James was absent from Sarawak for long intervals from 1851 onwards and left the governing in the hands of his nephews. As far as I am aware James Brooke donated only one Iban textile to the Ashmolean Museum in 1854, which probably makes this the earliest, documented Iban cloth in a U.K. museum, if not worldwide. The cloth, a skirt (Accession Number 1886.1.259), was transferred to the Pitt Rivers Museum in 1886.

Born in 1829 in Somerset, Charles Brooke joined the navy at the age of twelve and took part in the actions against Iban pirates in the 1840s. In 1852 he joined his uncle and established a system of administration based on out-stations manned by European Residents. Charles took to life in Sarawak and gained a reputation among the Iban as war leader. He became Rajah in 1868. Charles genuinely admired and took a great interest in all things Iban. It is a pity that he apparently never spoke to Iban weavers to learn some basics about ikat textiles, because there is not a single cloth of superior quality in the collections he left to the Liverpool and Pitt Rivers Museums.

The Liverpool collection was assembled by Charles Brooke during his first 20 years in Sarawak (1852-72). Two of the textiles are illustrated in West's article (1984). Another Charles Brooke collection is in the Pitt Rivers Museum. The cloths were originally exhibited in the Chesterton House Museum, Cirencester, which was the English home of Charles when he was Rajah. It was donated to the Pitt Rivers in 1923 by his son Vyner. The collection contains a dozen skirts, three *pua* cloths, a jacket and three unspecified cloths. None of the designs are identified. However, there are several well-known patterns which I can identify from my field work. One skirt cloth (Figure 2) bears the *aji* pattern, one of the most common and attractive Iban skirt patterns. One *pua* cloth (Accession Number 1923.86.79) bears the most powerful of all ikat patterns of the Baleh Iban: the trophy head pattern.

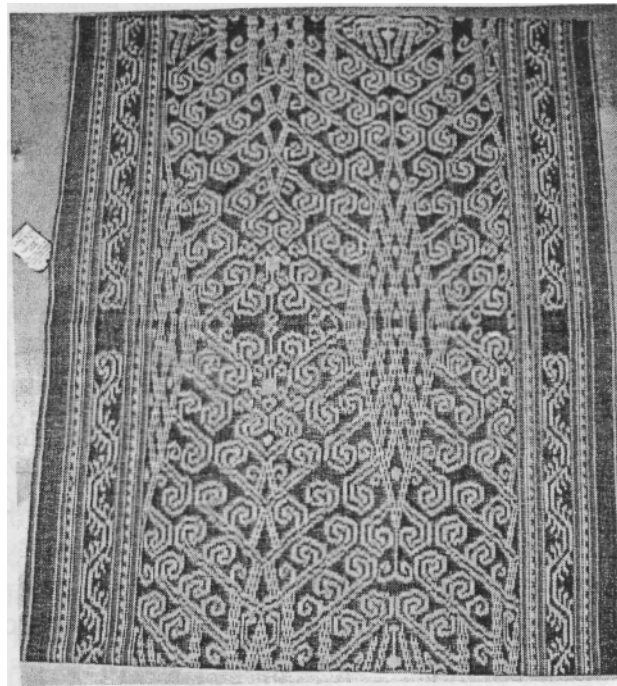


Figure 2, Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (Accession No. 1923.86.86); skirt cloth, warp ikat, *aji* pattern

John Hewitt was curator of the Sarawak Museum in Kuching for one term only (1905-8). He published papers on natural history and on Iban taboo customs during headhunting raids (1908, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*). The Liverpool Museum acquired several textiles from Hewitt in 1909, one of which, a skirt, is featured in West's article (1984:229). One cloth (Accession Number 12.3.09.35) is worth mentioning because Hewitt referred to it as *belantan*, which may be the earliest documentation of the name. *Pua belantan* are narrow cloths used to carry infants to their first ritual bath; formerly the cloths may have been used to carry trophy heads.

Malcolm MacDonald was born in Scotland in 1901, son of Britain's first Labour Prime Minister. He first visited Sarawak as Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia in 1946. In his book, *Borneo People*, published in 1956, MacDonald gave a very personal account of his involvement with Sarawak, most notably with the Iban leaders of the time: the famous Koh, Jugah and Sibat as well as the young Jinggut. On retirement, MacDonald became

Chancellor of Durham University, where his Borneo notebooks and other papers are kept today. He gave his collection of artefacts, including a dozen or so Iban textiles, to the Oriental Museum, University of Durham. According to Lewis Hill, who recently wrote a report on the collection, the textiles appear to be contemporary to the time MacDonald spent in Sarawak.

Arthur Sharp, Archdeacon of Sarawak from 1900, was one of the most significant missionaries for the Anglican Church. He left Sarawak in 1910. The Pitt Rivers Museum purchased two *pua* blankets and one skirt from Sharp in 1908. One of these (Accession Number 1908.59.15) is a very fine example of deep morinda dye saturation with designs that are particularly interesting because of their link to Indian trade cloth patterns (Gavin and Barnes 1999:90; Gavin 2003:302).

Arthur B. Ward was a civil servant in Sarawak from 1899 till 1923. He was Resident in several Sarawak districts and took part in one famous punitive expedition in 1915 against rebels on the Mujong river. His widow donated five Iban textiles in 1970, also to the Pitt Rivers. The museum lists many other donors. The Ranee of Sarawak donated one Iban cloth in 1911. Professor Sir Wilfred Le Gros Clark, who was Chief Medical Officer in Sarawak from 1923-6, gave a *pua* cloth with the trophy head pattern (Accession Number 1970.17.2) in 1970. In 1969 the museum purchased a silk cloth with designs in gold thread from a Mrs Hedges, an Iban woman whose husband was the first Chief Justice in Sarawak after the Third Rajah (Vyner Brooke) handed over control to the British crown in 1946. In 1900 the museum purchased at auction several cloths (three skirts and four jackets), which had belonged to E. Bartlett, curator of the Sarawak Museum from 1893 till 1897. One jacket deserves mention as the ikat work is of the highest quality, as is the depth of dye. One of the anthropomorphic figures cradles a round object under each arm (Figure 3, above, p.1). This is very similar to a figure on a jacket in Haddon's book (1982:42-3), where the objects held in this way are identified as, literally, elephant eggs, a synonym for trophy heads (for details, see Gavin 2003:103).

Thanks to Lewis Hill and Julia Nicholson for providing information. Much of the biographical data is taken from *The encyclopaedia of Iban studies*.

Traude Gavin

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THIRTY-FIVE YEARS OF TEXTILE STUDIES IN EASTERN INDONESIA - A Personal View

My first book, which records textile weaving in an eastern Indonesian community, starts with the following sentences:

At the very beginning of this study in textiles stood a prohibition on weaving. In 1969 I accompanied my husband, who is a social anthropologist, on his fieldwork to eastern Indonesia. We had chosen to stay in Kedang, in the eastern part of Lembata, an island and an area which we had decided on almost entirely for its obscurity and for the reason that it had been largely ignored by foreign visitors. Lembata also interested me because it was known to have a developed ikat tradition. I was looking forward to two years in an isolated mountain community, [where] I was hoping to deepen my understanding and appreciation of the local version of an impressive textile art. I was bitterly disappointed, [...as there] exists a strict prohibition on weaving in the so-called old village, *leu tuan*, which is the focal point of each community. No cotton is grown in these traditional sites, either.

And yet the people of Kedang did not go naked, nor could they recall having done so in the past. Furthermore, women's sarongs of a prescribed colour (dark-blue indigo-dyed) and with ikat bands in the border were, and are, part of the required gift exchanges that occur with every marriage. They are offered by the bride's clan to the lineage of the groom, in exchange for gongs or elephant tusks, the former made in Java, the latter imported some centuries ago from India, Sri Lanka, or even East Africa. The textiles required locally, both for everyday wear and for ritual or ceremonial purposes, were traded either from the neighbouring Hé Apé region or from Kalikur, a trading village in Kedang, but established by Muslim settlers from elsewhere. He Ape is not more than 60 km to the west but inhabited by people who speak a different language. He Ape women are prolific weavers and produce outstandingly accomplished ikat textiles, among them finely worked cloths used for marriage gifts. For their own use these cloths have numerous ikat bands against a solid dark red ground; when producing marriage cloths for the Kedang market they have to change the colour to dark blue, as a red cloth is not acceptable in Kedang.

My first encounter with Indonesian textiles therefore confronted me with a set of questions that I had not anticipated. Eventually I found answers for some, but others continue to puzzle me. First of all, there was the prohibition on weaving. I discovered that absence of weaving was not uncommon in the region, although a downright restriction was not always associated with it. Eastern Indonesia's population is mainly Austronesian in language and culture, but there are some parts where non-Austronesian languages are spoken, with close affinity to western New Guinea (the Indonesian province of Papua). Textiles may be used as imported prestige objects, but in Papuan cultures they are not produced locally. An additional factor is that the former use of bark cloth is still recalled in parts of eastern Indonesia, as on Alor and Pantar, just east of Lembata, and on certain ritual occasions it may still be required. I now think that the weaving prohibition that I found in Kedang has to be seen as part of a patchwork distribution of weaving and non-weaving cultures in the wider region. The rejection of weaving in the most traditional part of the community, the "old village", comes out of the desire to keep it similar to the environment the ancestors knew, as

this is where one is closest to them. For the same reason maize, now the main staple of Kedang, may not be planted there – after all it was a relative newcomer to the region, only introduced 500 years ago from the New World!



Woman weaving a man's sarong *nofi* on a backstrap loom. She is working in the shade of a boat shed at the beach, Lamalera, Lembata, July 1979 (Photograph: R. Barnes)

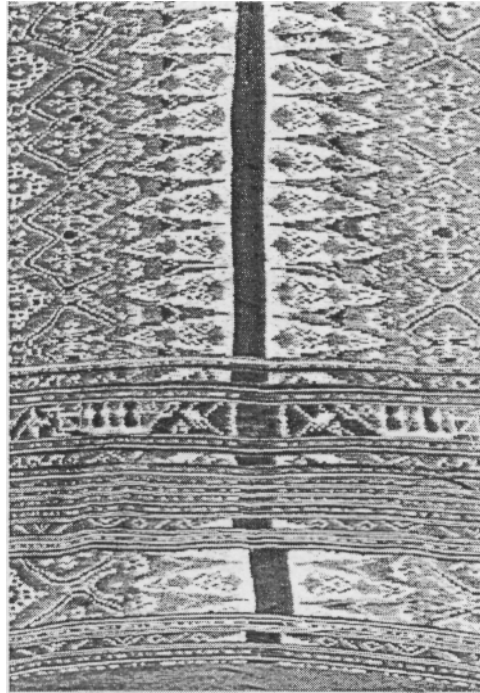
Why is Kedang ceremonial cloth dark blue (called 'black' in Kedang), while elsewhere on Lembata, and indeed the wider region, red is the preferred colour? The meaning of colour changes between cultures and may even switch within one society, depending on circumstances. Red, white, and black are the three colours of symbolic importance in the region for rituals, chants, and as ornaments – not surprisingly, as they share that role with many cultures world-wide. White and black have a fairly stable association with the spiritual and material world, respectively. Red is quite ambiguous: several eastern Indonesian languages use a version of the word *mean*, which may mean not only "red", but also "shining, golden, divine". It is the colour of blood, which can refer to fertility, but also to warfare. Witches are supposed to be identified by their red faces. While in Kedang people have chosen the "stable" black for their ceremonially important textiles, their neighbours prefer to emphasise the positive aspect of red, as a sign of fertility and hence suitable for the cloth to be exchanged at marriage.

Trade was the third theme introduced by the situation I found in Kedang thirty-five years ago. Most textiles used locally had to be produced elsewhere and were brought into the villages from outside, either from the Muslim coastal village Kalikur or from the Hé Apé region. Cloth for daily use was purchased with cash, but the value of marriage textiles was always discussed in terms of set units of unhusked rice (Indonesian *padi*). The actual purchase of these ceremonial cloths could also be accomplished though, by offering a pig or goat in exchange.

How did it come about that I did eventually have an opportunity “to deepen my understanding and appreciation of the local version of an impressive textile art” (s. quote above)? Two events contributed to this. The first one was strangely close to a mystical experience, and hence is a bit embarrassing to describe. But here it is: towards the end of our first year in Kedang we were invited to the funeral of a very old man, one of five brothers who descended from the famous village head and warrior Boli Tale. This man had not converted to either Catholicism or Islam (the two world religions represented in the province we were working in), so this was an opportunity to witness a funeral as it happened in Kedang prior to the arrival of Islam and Christian missionaries. We walked from our own hamlet Napo’ Wala, just below the “old village”, to a place called Pering Bareng, following a treacherous path that led over huge boulders and through deep ravines, in the company of our good friend Molan Bala, who was carrying a cloth to present at the funeral, as he was in a kinship category of wife-giver to the deceased. The funeral was fascinating, and we had to stay, of course, for the feast afterwards. No chance of walking back to Napo’ Wala that evening, so we accepted the invitation to stay the night. Pering Bareng is in an extremely steep and rocky location, and when we were taken to a house where palm-leaf mats had been spread out for us on the bamboo platform, we were warned not to step out of the front door during the night, as we might tumble down a long way. We slept soundly, but when the cocks started to crow and the first sign of light came through the bamboo slats of the walls, I got up and opened the front door. There was the most magic view I had ever seen: immediately below, deep down several hundred metres, the sea, shifting from blue to golden as the rising sun touched the gentle waves, and off to the left the next peninsula on Lembata, with the majestic and perfectly shaped volcano of He Ape rising out of the sea, all pink from the morning sun against a pale blue sky. But the most poignant part of the setting was a sail boat, probably Bugis from Sulawesi, travelling towards Kalikur. It was as it had been hundreds of years ago, it was eternal, but it also was immediate and personal - the pink volcano, the sailors in that little boat, no doubt with their individual concerns. At that moment it became obvious to me that I wanted to be part of this history. And it seemed (as in a flash) possible that the textiles - the major local art form - could be important documents for tracing the international connections that have been important for these seemingly remote islands.

The second event was a brief visit of one week to an unusual community on the South coast of Lembata, the village Lamalera. It was the home of the first Indonesian Catholic priest in Kedang, and he invited us to visit in July 1970. Traditionally Lamalera had no land for fields, but was a fishing community. The men went to sea in clan-owned outrigger boats and hunted large sea animals: manta ray, shark, killer whale, and – preferred above all – sperm

whale. The meat is dried and then carried into the mountain villages by the women, to be bartered for staple food: maize, rice, tubers, and seasonal fruit. The women also are expert weavers who produce the finest ikat textiles of southern Lembata. We were completely enthralled by the place, and decided to return for a longer research visit.



Detail of a woman's ceremonial sarong *kefatek nai telo*, the dark vertical stripe indicates the beginning of the ikat tying. The design is strongly influenced by Indian patola textiles. Lamalera, Lembata, 1979
(Photograph: R. Barnes)

This did not come about until 1979. In the meantime I had taken an undergraduate degree in Art History at Edinburgh University and was beginning my doctorate at Oxford, which I wanted to write on the ikat textiles of Lamalera. When we did return to eastern Indonesia, first in 1979 and then for six months in 1982, we had our two children with us, much to the delight of the villagers. They still consider Ina and Jan as 'their children' and refer to them as 'Ina Lembata' and 'Jan Keraf' (Keraf is the family name of the clan we were closely affiliated with in Lamalera). Both were given numerous sarongs and shoulder cloths with their names woven into them.

My research prospered, thanks to the support of many weaver friends. They made sure that I fully understood the making and meaning of their textiles, and they taught me when I wanted to make my own ikat cloth. Back in Oxford, the experience was transformed into a two-volume dissertation. My focus was the weaving in Lamalera, but I had to take into account the importance of trade textiles, as well. Indian double-ikat silk cloths, called *patola*, were revered as sacred heirlooms, and their patterns had a formative impact on local design. They were merged with ancient South-east Asian patterns and more recent local and European motifs, to produce unique indigenous textiles of great beauty. My 'vision' of many years ago, on the mountain slope in Kedang, had been right: the textiles were documents for wide-reaching connections.

Since then I have returned many times to the region. I have travelled in Flores, on Solor, Adonara, Alor, Pantar, and Timor. I have done research in a third community in eastern Adonara, where I encountered a cloth culture that has taken on ‘pot-latch’ proportions, with the circulation of hundreds and hundreds of textiles occurring at every wedding and funeral. And yet the local weaving is not very distinguished: most of the textiles brought on these occasions are store-bought cotton sarongs with simple madras-style warp- and weft-stripes, made in Java or India.



Lusida Dai Krofana preparing the morinda vat for dyeing red thread, Lamalera, lembata, 1982.
(Photograph: R. Barnes)

There have been many changes over the years, and fashions in design and colour palette have affected the weaving of sarongs for daily and festive wear. The ceremonial cloths are still made and used, although the quality of ikat work has certainly deteriorated. The greatest surprise I experienced in Kedang was when I returned for a brief visit in 1986 and then for a longer stay in 1998, to participate in an annual harvest ritual. On this occasion all women were wearing dark-blue hand-spun sarongs with wide ikat borders - and these were now woven in the village, due to the initiative of one woman, called Asma Pisang Ape Worena, who had developed a local version of the cloths formerly imported from Kalikur or He Ape. She had even managed to get government funding for the “development of indigenous weaving”. Still no loom was used in the “old village”, but these new “traditional” cloths were certainly produced in the large village at the beach, where the schools and village government are located.

Ruth Barnes

THE CONSERVATION OF SARI TO SARONG AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA

In July 2003 the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) presented the exhibition *Sari to Sarong; 500 years of Indian and Indonesian textile exchange*, which showcased its major collection of SE Asian textiles. Over 220 textiles were displayed showing some of the rarest and most beautiful examples of this textile tradition. The condition of the textiles, dating from the 14th century, varied extensively; some were so fragile they could not be handled without damage.

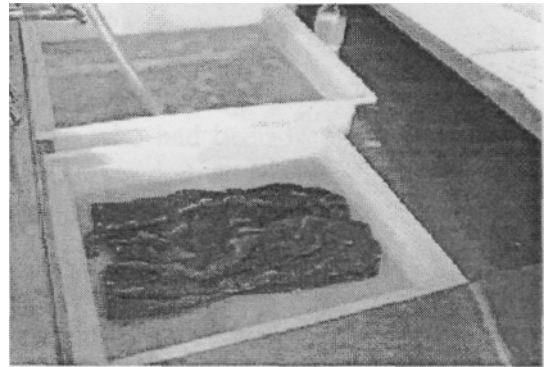
Three years were required to prepare the textiles, and the staff of two conservators swelled to a team of 6 with a large number of volunteers and assistants. This exhibition posed unique challenges for the conservation team. Australia does not have a textile tradition which extends beyond 200 years, and its isolation from other major conservation centres places a demand on staff to ensure they keep up to date with developments in the field. Prior to commencing work for the exhibition, a major literary research project was undertaken to secure all information published on the conservation of SE Asian textiles. As the results were few; it became clear that the greatest knowledge at hand lay within the extensive history of conservation of these textiles at the NGA; with over 400 treatments in the past 20 years.

As each textile has its own specific characteristics and needs, treatment began with extensive documentation. The nature of the fibres and dyes for each work were determined, as were the methods of manufacture. This was followed by a complete photographic and written record of the textile's condition.

The textile is then assessed for further cleaning. This is not a decision taken lightly and is made with consultation with the Senior Curator of Asian Art at the NGA, Robyn Maxwell. In general if the textile's condition is adversely affected due to the presence of stains or inherent factors such as cellulose degradation or starch weakening the fibres, washing is considered. During this process every fibre and dye type, inscription and thread is tested for stability. Each stain is also tested to determine the effectiveness of the treatment. If all factors prove to be favourable, washing is then undertaken.

Two methods of washing were generally employed; total submersion or 'blotter wash', both commencing with spot treatments of specific stains.

Blotter washing is employed when the textile is not stable enough for submersion in a wash bath or if the stability of dyes or inscriptions can not be clearly established. The textile is sprayed with deionised water whilst it is laid out flat on a smooth surfaced work area and then blotters are applied to the textile face to remove the water and all water soluble soils. The suction created by the blotters proves to be highly effective in removing soiling and degradation products.

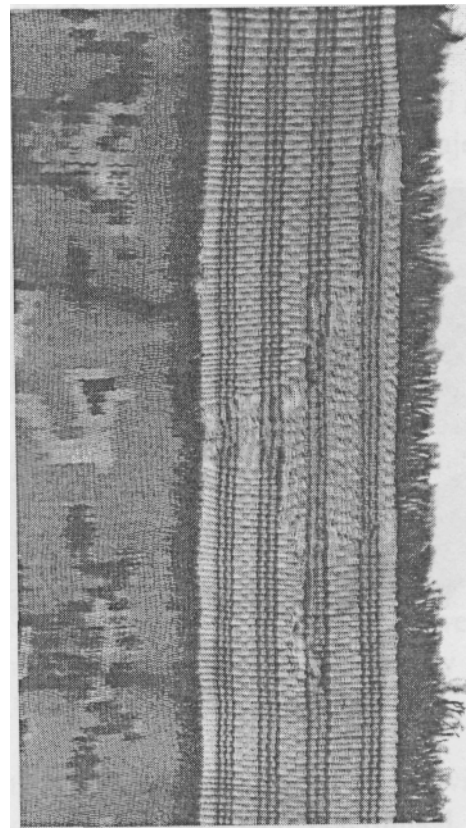
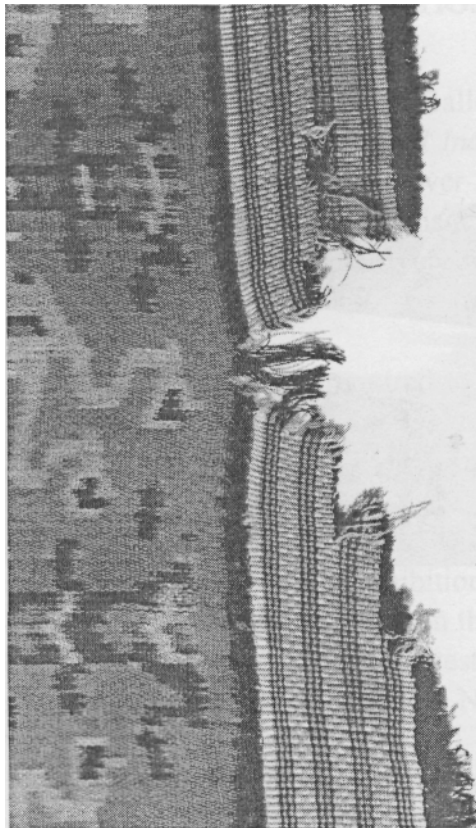


Indian textiles being cleaned by “blotter wash” (left) and submersion in washing trays (right)

Washing is undertaken in a large bath or trays, and generally begins with the textile being submersed in a 3% detergent solution (special detergents are developed for the needs of each textile). This is followed by repeated rinses to ensure all cleaning agents and soluble soils have been removed. The pH of the wash bath is closely followed at every stage of the process, as is the colour of the wash/rinse solution. This colour indicator is critical to determine the point at which degradation products cease to be removed and a point where the process can lead to the textile appearing ‘washed out’, over cleaned or stripped of its ‘natural patina’. Dry cleaning can also be employed if aqueous cleaning is not suitable, this is especially so for heavily stained textiles with metallic threads.

Once the cleaning process has been completed physical damages must be stabilised. This can be a very time consuming aspect of the treatment of a textile, one Indian textile for this exhibition requiring almost 1000 hours to restore. Patches of similar fabric are dyed to match the original textile. Both sewing and adhesive restoration is employed; the nature of the textile and the damage determines the method and types of adhesives used. Adhesives employed are fully tested for their archival properties, and to ensure their reversibility.

The time and resources allocated to prepare for this exhibition provided a unique opportunity for the textile conservation section to undertake extensive research.



Restoration of the upper band of a Sumba *hinggi*

There were several projects into suitable detergents and adhesives to be used during the treatment of textiles for *Sari to Sarong*. Two other major projects were commenced; the use of Raman Spectroscopy to identify dyes on Asian textiles, and an investigation into particulate matter removed during vacuuming, especially the initial clean to determine the information this material may possess into the textile's history. Early results from Raman testing are very positive and it appears hopeful that over time a SE Asian dye data base may be a possibility.

Sari to Sarong is currently on exhibition until 4th July 2004 at the Asian Civilizations Museum in Singapore. Although the textiles will return to the NGA for storage the quest for answers to some of the questions raised during the preparations for this exhibition will continue well into the future.

Debbie Ward

Senior Conservator – Textiles
National Gallery of Australia

TEXTILE TRACES: THE LLOYD COTSEN COLLECTION

Private View of the Exhibition

This fascinating exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum, curated by Ruth Barnes, consists of a small selection from Lloyd Cotsen's extensive collection of textile pieces ("traces" is his preferred word) and a few complementary pieces from the Museum's own collection. It is the first time that a substantial number has been on public display.

A reasonable crowd gathered for the opening despite a large number of the invitations having failed to arrive due to a postal strike, so those who had been frantically telephoning potential guests can be pleased that their efforts were rewarded. Christopher Brown, director of the Ashmolean, introduced Lloyd Cotsen who spoke about his lifelong interest in collecting and about how he had come to start collecting textiles. As an archaeologist he had learnt that a pot sherd could tell him more about the object and culture than the whole pot could. Similarly the textile fragment can give us as much insight and appreciation as the whole garment. He also told us that a curiosity for artefacts as evidence of human ingenuity and creativity has been a guiding principle for him.

In the exhibition Ruth has chosen to draw our attention to woven textiles from Western and Central Asia, the heartland of Islamic culture. Chronologically the exhibition goes from pre-Islamic times to the 18th century, the earliest items from Central Asia showing designs and techniques that continued to be influential in Eastern Islamic society. Among Cotsen's Egyptian textiles of the Fatimid and Mamluk dynasties is a fragment of a quilted cap which is complemented by a complete cap from the Ashmolean's collection. Also from Central Asia are examples of the fabled "cloths of gold" favoured by the Mongol elite around the time of their conversion to Islam. The display includes a complete headdress with an illustration to show how it would have been worn. Rich fabrics of silk and metal thread from the garments of courtiers in the Ottoman and Persian Safavid courts delight the eyes.

Ruth's claim in her excellent accompanying leaflet that the fragments emphasise the transient nature of weaving but they also invite an intimate inspection and attention to detail is clearly demonstrated in this exhibition.

Sheila Allen

REPORTS OF O.A.T.G. MEETINGS

Linen Should Never be Cut

Although "the essence of linen is drudgery . . .", Sheila Paine's talk on 11 February was anything but – and completely wonderful. The bumpy ride of the slide projector not only played to this reviewer's mnemonic gymnastics of note-taking in the pitch dark, but mimicked the roads that Sheila travelled and the vehicles she travelled in. Yet the slides and the speaker transcended technology in splashes of colour, symbols and textures: Goddess on the Road, leaving iconographic and compassionate traces. The slide show was followed by

the book signing, the display of amazing garments, notices of special events, lectures, sources, and time to chat.

Sheila was having a strange day (following a positive meeting with the British Museum concerning her collection – see last newsletter), but Felicity saved our part of the day by remedying a “padlocked projector” situation – and yet, this only heightened the erudite and sparkling talk which followed. The goddess motif, a fertility symbol, especially when the arms are raised (dancing, worship, supplication) was contrasted with the lowered armed stances symbolic of pregnancy and holding. And then the goddess morphed from a Cycladic figure to a geometric cult object with a triangular base, point in the air (not to be confused with female body parts). The triangular objects made of textile, wood, metal or leather might have enclosed supposed suras from the Koran, cardboard, or even salt from the Silk Road through north Uzbekistan. Pieces hanging from them came in threes, but this was not a three-legged goddess. Nonetheless, as the zodiacal sign of Aries, the symbol is associated with seasonal rebirth in spring.

That such images (antedating 2000 B.C.) remain *an cowant*, reflect, in Sheila’s words, “the great regard for the environment and ecology embodied, for example, by the Bishnoy people, the original tree huggers”. Although she did stress that it was “uncertain whether the woman knows that she is embroidering a goddess”! Moving on to very remote Himalayan regions typically forbidden to outsiders, Sheila nevertheless managed to photograph women’s shifts, embroidered both with plant-like and goddess images. The people of the Swat valley in northern Pakistan produced extremely stylised goddess images in brilliant pink. Other striking colour references included bright green (spring) beads hung from stuffed triangular textile embroidered amulets of northern Uzbekistan, and related figures embroidered in red thread on white fabric as the costume for older women. In Kabul these goddess figures worked in wool also served even to protect the cattle from the evil eye. From colour to texture to function, we learned next that Samarkand brides continued to wear their ikat and gold-worked wedding clothes for some time after the occasion. Let’s show them off; let’s embody and celebrate a continuing marriage! Further extensions, both geographical and iconographic, saw warp-dyed (ikat) fertility symbols take on a tulip form in central Asia.

Sheila’s focus (cf. Paine 1990) on embroidery is evident. Careful to preface her Turkmenistan market slides of highly coloured thread for embroidered clothing with the reminder of co-existent human rights problems, Sheila’s dizzying tour proceeded. On the borders of the Caspian Sea, goddess figures appear on earrings and on hair pendants used to protect against the “seductive and dangerous” qualities of a woman’s hair; bells are also an option. (Hair also connects us with the air (spiritual world) and can be used in black magic if let astray.) The Ethiopian (Christian) goddess embroidery fascinated the audience. The evolution from triangle to cross displayed beautifully in large embroideries on the front and back of women’s robes showed how the cross replaces the goddess. The men themselves also formed a cross in the photos she took of them at work in their pit looms. In fact in Sudan (Nubia) the men make the clothes and the veiled women wear amazing masks.

But the distinctly feminine theme was highlighted again with images from first Tunisia and then Crete. The voyage of discovery saw fish symbols embroidered alongside the goddess in Tunisia; the transition between sea and earth appeared in the goddess spreading her legs as a mermaid in Crete. (Such a generosity of material for one lecture.) In Albania the apex of the triangle was decorated with four diamonds when the goddess was embroidered on the sleeve. And in Kosovo her motif was discovered on a scarf. Similar images, worked in Holbein stitch, may be found in Finland, while in Russia she was stitched on ritual towels, which were then hung from birch trees.

The book, *The Linen Goddess* reminds us that the triangle also symbolized rain and milk in 6th millennium B.C. Europe. It was good to have it available afterwards, lyrical writing of treasures seen and yet to see: “. . .the bits of filigree stuffed into the amulets of Karpathos as magical elements able to avert the evil eye, I never managed to see” (p. 23).

Jennifer Gurd

References:

- Paine, S. (2003) *The Linen Goddess: Travels from the Red Sea to Prizen*, Pallas Athene, London.
 Paine, S. (1990) *Embroidered Textiles: traditional Patterns from Five Continents*, T. &H., London.

Chinese Silks on Exhibition and Behind the Scenes in the Ashmolean

Some members of the O.A.T.G. made an interesting visit on 17 March to the Chinese silk exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum. The curator, Shelagh Vainker, introduced us to the concept that a study of Chinese silk would reflect the history of China, its culture, economy, agriculture and religious life. The examples of Chinese silk on display ranged from temple and ceremonial sources to furnishings and clothing, and came from the collections of the Ashmolean itself, the Stein Collection at the British Museum, and the private collection of Chris Hall.

The exhibition, in the Sullivan Gallery, begins with a group of banners from the 8th century onwards; one of the earliest was formed from dyed woven pieces of silk, and another has an abstract design of cloud symbols (illustrated in the last newsletter). There is a panel of velvet squares in dark dyed silk with Buddhist motifs woven throughout, and a hanging of velvet shows the technique of voiding to create a design of lotus and lotus scrolls. A book wrapper of gold silk from the Qing period is displayed, and two fine woven silk presentation scrolls of intricate floral motifs.

Deer, magic fungus and peaches are emblems of long life and good fortune, and are used in a brightly coloured example of *kesi* tapestry weaving in silk with gold wrapped thread, and further uses of such symbols are reflected in four large embroidered panels in subtler colours.

In the lower section of the gallery there is a display of seat covers, and a richly

embroidered robe on which the dragon image dominates. A nineteenth century panel depicts horses with delicately painted cloudy backgrounds, and a woven silk panel uses roundels of symbols and Tibetan script; And there are two unusual panels made from finely split, silk wrapped, bamboo.

In the lower cabinets are some fragments of early silk pieces from the Stein textile finds at Dunhung, from the Tang dynasty, and a memorable altar valance, made from an accumulation of pointed streamers, of plain dyed silks, embroidered fragments, brocades (some knotted, some with tiny tied stuffed fabric figures), set below a band of triangles.

It is a fascinating collection, which encompasses many aspects of Chinese history.

We then moved to the Eastern Art print room where Shelagh had kindly arranged for us to see a further five pieces, illustrating some very fine techniques of embroidery. The visit ended with Rosemary Lee thanking Shelagh for a most satisfying and absorbing afternoon.

Margaret Butler

[A review by Deryn O'Connor of Shelagh Vainker's book, *Chinese Silk: a Cultural History* can be seen below, p. 23]

O.A.T.G. SUBSCRIPTIONS

This is just to remind you that subscriptions are due on or before 1 October. We have valued your membership and hope you will renew. Rates remain at £10 for individual membership or £15 for two or more people living at the same address and sharing a newsletter. Payment may be made by sterling cheque drawn on a U.K. bank (ask your bank about this if you live abroad), by U.S. dollar cheque, by international money order, or by bank transfer.

We realize that for those of you who find it difficult to attend meetings and activities membership may not be a priority, but it does include receiving the newsletter three times a year. Subscription rates have not risen in the nine years of the Group's existence, whereas the newsletter has increased in size from 8 to 32 pages, and we hope you agree that this represents good value for money.

If you do not wish your membership to lapse, please send your subscription to the Membership Secretary, Joyce Seaman, or, better still, ask her to send you a banker's order form and save yourself the annual strain on your memory. Address: 5 Park Town, Oxford, OX2 6SN; tel. 01865 558558; e-mail: e-art-asst@ashmus.ox.ac.uk

Your Committee

MUSEUMS ROUND-UP

Sadly the Nottinghamshire Museums Service has closed down the excellent little museum of costume and textiles in Nottingham. I understand, however, that the collection has not been dispersed and that exhibitions from it will be held from time to time in other museums in the City.

On the other hand, new museums seem to be springing up all over the world. For example, the only museum in the West to be devoted entirely to Himalayan art is due to open in the autumn in New York. To be known as the Rubin Museum of Art, it will contain the more than 1700 paintings, sculptures and textiles collected over twenty-five years by its founders, Shelley and Donald Rubin. The former Barney's department store in the Chelsea district of lower Manhattan has been acquired and Richard Blinder who designed the original building has been retained to convert it into a suitable building for a museum housing 2,300 sq. m. of gallery space. It is intended to arrange the permanent displays thematically, and there will also be room for temporary exhibitions.

Another new museum, the Mori Art Museum (MAM) opened last October on the fifty-second and fifty-third floors of the spectacular new Mori Tower in Tokyo. Its Director is David Elliott, whom many of you will remember when he was Director of MOMA (now renamed Modern Art Oxford). He is the first non-Japanese to be appointed director of a Japanese museum. With 2,900 square metres of floor space, MAM is one of the largest contemporary art museums in Asia. David says he hopes that it "will shine out like a beacon from one of the city's tallest buildings, focusing not only on contemporary art but also on photography, film, design, media, art, fashion and architecture".

Meanwhile in Bangkok, a two-storey building has been constructed in the grounds of the Jim Thompson House and Museum. Known as the Jim Thompson Center for Textiles and the Arts, it is designed to house rotating textile and cultural exhibitions, for which leading art historians and academics are being invited to be guest curators. Unfortunately news of the first exhibition did not reach me until after the February newsletter had gone out, which is a pity since the curator was Susan Conway. Called *Power Dressing: Lanna Shan Siam 19th Century Court Dress*, it ran from December 2003 and closed last month. The new exhibition deals with drinking rather than dressing!

The Textile Museum in Washington, D.C., has developed two of its galleries as *The Textile Learning Center*. In one, the *Activity Gallery*, visitors can look, touch and try a variety of hands-on activities, including spinning wool, weaving, and learning about natural dyes, as well as explore textiles and their relationship to tradition, economy, environment and life-style. In the *Collection Gallery*, they can see the wealth and diversity of the Museum's collections through rotating exhibitions.

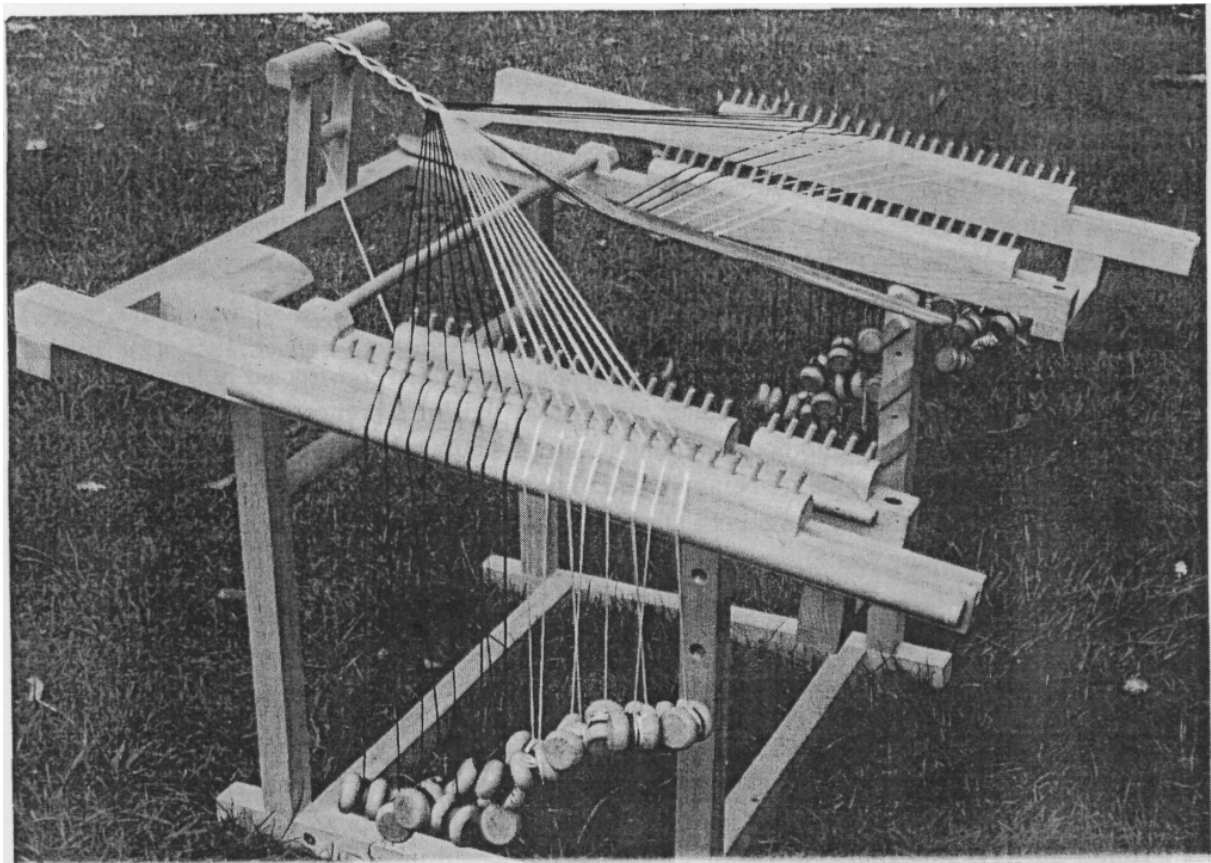
Editor

BOOKS AND PUBLICATIONS

Takadai: Japanese Braid Making

Rodrick Owen, *Making Kumihimo Japanese Interlaced Braids*, Guild of Master Craftsman Publications Ltd, 2004, 276 x 210mm, 176 pages, 160 colour photographs, 60 illustrations, 70 charts, hb, ISBN 1 86108 312 2, £16.95

Over the last twenty years many people have seen Kumihimo braids made on the Marudai, the round stool with warps of many strands of fine yarns attached to weighted wooden bobbins round the outside and a counterweight in the middle. Few, other than the addicted, will know of the existence of the other Japanese braiding equipment, the Kakudai, Ayatakedai, Karakumidai or Takadai. There has been a mystery and air of great secrecy surrounding this whole field of work. Some people have struggled with the very few books in Japanese, so all will be delighted that this beautiful book has finally been published and written in English specialising on the Takadai.



Takadai, set up with a single braid. Photo: Jennie Parry
(For information only; not in Rodrick Owen's book)

This is a substantial comprehensive book, visually attractive, in full colour, with a good balance of inspiration and step-by-step instructions, suitable for beginners and devotees. It opens flat (too many books these days are only glued together and refuse this), each section has its own logo and colour and footer on every page, so it is easy to use. Having the Gallery of finished work at the front of the book is a good introduction and inspiration, showing a range of applications and gives a relevance to learning the techniques. A short chapter on the history of interlaced braids is followed by details of the actual equipment and accessories needed. The reader is then taken through every stage of setting up and different ways of finishing, to making a full range of interesting single braids of plain weave, twill, repp, textures and shapes, and later double braids. Clear text and diagrams give thorough sound knowledge for the student to grow in confidence and acquire the skills of designing and making wonderful braids. Key information is in bold print, supported by photographs or diagrams. A good range of double braid patterns, with the necessary teaching information follows, and the final section deals with the difficult area of the pick up braids that have individual counter-change motifs. The process of designing, preparing all the complex mixture of hand moves and bobbin exchanges is meticulously explained, indeed a generous and useful tool for the experienced braider. The appendix of graphs, hand moves and patterns to photocopy for personal use will be most useful, as are the Bibliography and Suppliers list.

Whilst I like the house style in general – a colour photo of the actual braid, with a colour layout for the order of setting up the bobbins, and hand-moves clearly numbered – I find the change of font size disconcerting (where there are many more moves to complete the sequence). This is noticeable when followed on the adjacent page with a larger size. Within the chapter on pick up braids, the diagrams of the hand moves are very small and cramped. Fortunately there is a bigger version in the appendix.

As a great enthusiast of the Takadai, (I have been exploring it for some 13 years now) I am truly delighted that we now have such an excellent book in English, to study from, to use for reference and to inspire. I feel sure it will further the interest and potential for creative development of this most versatile and ingenious equipment.

Jennie Parry

[N.B. A booklet of accurate plans for making a Takadai is now available price approx. £10, from Rodrick Owen, email: rodrick.braid@virgin.net]

Chinese Textiles

Shelagh Vainker, *Chinese Silk: A Cultural History*, British Museum Press, 2004, hb., 26 x 25 cm, 224pp, 130 col. & 10 b/w illus., ISBN 0 7141 1479 0, £29.95

This book covers an enormous span of time. The earliest illustration in Chapter I is of silkworms carved from green jade, dated 1050-900 B.C., and the next one is of oracle bones inscribed with an ideogram for silk from the Shang dynasty as early as 13th to 11th century B.C.. The last but one illustration in the book is a realistic pictorial embroidery on silk, c.

1970, of a female soldier with short cropped hair carrying a rifle and wearing a body belt of ammunition and a bright red apron, facing the ocean to protect the motherland. The last illustration, c. 1995, is of an installation by a contemporary artist of what look like real mulberry leaves half munched through by silkworms resting on the surface of an open page of an English Chinese dictionary.

The book is subtitled *A Cultural History* and deals with the place of silk in the changing social and political scene over the centuries. The author is a Chinese scholar and she refers mainly to written Chinese sources, literary and historical. Thus for the general reader silk is a way into Chinese history – because silk has from earliest times been a marker for the powers that be, each dynasty placing its own value on this extraordinary fibre, exploiting it to underpin its own power and prestige. From earliest times rulers established their own workshops producing silks for court consumption and notably for diplomatic gifts. When production became more widespread, silk was accumulated by the state from taxation.

Apart from written sources, the author refers to and illustrates early important textile finds, in particular those from Mashan in Jiangling, Hubei province, dating from the Eastern Zhou dynasty, 4th to 3rd century B.C.. (A few of these textiles came to England in the exhibition at the British Museum, *Mysteries of Ancient China*, 1996.) Another important tomb find discussed is that of Lady Dai at Changsha, Hunan province, of the Han dynasty, mid 2nd century B.C.. The textiles found in the caves at Dunhuang in Gansu province by Sir Aurel Stein are given a prominent position in the book. They give a picture of many different kinds of textiles dating from the first century B.C. (Han dynasty) to the 8th to 9th century A.D. (Tang dynasty). A major part of this collection is in the British Museum.

One of the chapters I have found most helpful is Chapter IV. Entitled *Literati tapestries and gold brocades: silk in Song China and the border dynasties*, it covers the period after the Tang dynasty, from 906 to 1318. In the introduction the author had made clear that for many periods covered in the following chapters, “China was not a single state politically or ethnically, so that much of the discussion deals with silk in China rather than with silk that is necessarily Chinese”. The “elucidation of some of these regional distinctions is indeed one of the aims of the book”.

The border dynasties referred to in Chapter IV are the Liao, Xixia and the Jin, who were followed by the Yuan. These dynasties bring different tastes to silk products, a major emphasis in the repertory being the use of gold thread – which Shelagh Vainker explains is made differently by the northerners, who apply gold to animal-derived materials, in contrast to the method of the mainstream Chinese style in which gold is applied to paper. In this chapter there are mouth-watering descriptions of clothes and textiles found in tombs. For example, in the Jin period a tomb group found in Acheng in Heilongjiang province includes that of the double burial of the king and his wife. They were clothed in altogether more than thirty garments and “the coffin was draped with a silk cover woven in gold with roundels enclosing dragons against a ground of scrolling foliage, and lined in silk with a small gold repeat design of mandarin ducks, a symbol of marital happiness”.

Under the Song dynasty there was a significant development of the tapestry technique using silk thread (unlike the European use of wool) and known by the term *kesi*. These *kesi* pieces were used mainly for mounts for handscrolls or were the equivalent of paintings. Another technique mentioned, needle-looping, was an innovation under the Yuan dynasty. This is not illustrated in the book.

The last sentences in this chapter read, “The Yuan [1279-1368] may be regarded as a pivotal era in the sources for understanding the history of silk in China. Thereafter, many more pieces survive as functional and decorative items than as precious goods stored away in tombs and crypts. The clothes and furnishings that must have formed so vivid a part of daily life in many circles cease to be preserved in the more hidden realms of texts and treasure houses.”

There are 132 coloured illustrations in the book, three black and white and two maps. Some illustrations cover the whole page, and some even span two pages. As well as textiles, often depicted with an enlarged detail, there are objects in other media, such as lacquer, ceramics and bronze, which give interesting parallels of visual design. For example, there is a painted wood Bodhisattva from the Ashmolean showing clearly the textile design on his garment.

The clarity of the textile illustrations, however, varies considerably. A Liao dynasty robe from the Cleveland Museum of Art in the U.S.A. is shown in a photograph of the whole garment and beside it is a full page detail. One can clearly see the embroidery design and the monochrome background fabric. Sadly, on the other hand, some of the illustrations from the Stein collection in the British Museum of silk from the caves at Dumnhuang are not of a high enough standard. When I first received the book I leafed through it to see the illustrations. When I reached page 93 I could not make out what I was looking at. I went to the kitchen to wash my spectacles – to no effect. Friends have agreed the photograph (No. 56) is simply out of focus. In this instance there is an accessible comparison. The same photograph can be found on p. 115 of the British Museum publication, *Caves of the Thousand Buddhas* (Roger Whitfield and Anne Fairer, 1990). What in that publication is clearly an embroidery has been blown up in the new book to a senseless blur*. Other comparisons between the two books are also very disappointing. The altar valence, no. 55 (which is in the current Ashmolean exhibition), is murky, and so is no. 70. Comparing no. 49 in the Vainker book with no. 104 in the earlier volume, one notices that the image has been enlarged to the extent of being blurred throughout, and a light leaf shape in the right-hand piece, clearly visible in the earlier book, is quite unrecognizable. On the other hand, nos. 40 and 52 in Shelagh Vainker’s book are very clear and do not exist in the 1990 publication. Perhaps the reason is that the latter are new digital photographs, done for the great digitization project on the Stein collection, and the ones that are unclear are blown up from old photographs.

After reading this book I am led afresh to ponder on the extraordinary phenomenon that is silk fibre. It is made by a humble caterpillar, *Bombys mori*, who is happiest when it feeds on the leaves of a particular mulberry tree. Already sometime in the second millennium

B.C. in China there were individuals who noticed and cherished its qualities and possibilities – the main factor being that its cocoon can be unwound to give a continuous fine filament of a strong, lustrous and insulating nature. The filament from one cocoon can be up to one mile long (16.000 metres). In the introduction, Shelagh Vainker describes reeling, the term used for unwinding the silk fibre from the cocoon. This is such a different concept to the preparation of natural fibres we are used to in the west, which, like wool and cotton, have to be spun from short lengths. (Bast fibres, such as linen and hemp, are spun in the west, but hemp and ramie are spliced in China.) It is unfortunate that in a series of six watercolours illustrated of the processes of silk production in 1800-50 in Guanzhou, the caption reads “spinning silk” when it clearly depicts what is described as “reeling” in the text.

Deryn O’Connor

[The patchwork illustrated in this and the preceding picture can be seen, together with a number of other things relevant to this book in *The Silk Road* exhibition at the British Library, see below p. 30]

M. A. Harm, *Dragons, Unicorns and Phoenixes: Origin and Continuity of Technique and Motif*, University Gallery Leeds and ULITA, 2004, pb, 21x14 cm, 40 pp, 9 col. illus, 1 map, ISBN 1 874331 32 4, £5 (Published in association with the exhibition of the same name, see below p.30)

This monograph packs into no more than forty lucid pages a history of Chinese textiles from neolithic times to 1912, although not all periods are given equal weight. The author’s declared object is to trace the origins of the techniques, motifs and patterns used in Qing dynasty (1644-1912) textiles, and he finds these origins in the earliest periods. Three chapters are devoted to these, up to the Tang (618-906). Subsequent history is briefly encompassed in two pages on the Silk Route. These link the early times to the Qing (1644-1912), which occupies the rest of the book, with chapters on manufacture, techniques and motifs. I am impressed by the amount of digestible and well-organized information the author has managed to compress in such a small space, making the book a useful springboard for further exploration.

Phyllis Nye

New Books (not seen)

Gillian Green, *Traditional Textiles of Cambodia: Cultural Threads and Material Heritage*, Thames & Hudson, 2004, hb, 25 x 22 cm, 320 pp, over 400 col. illus., ISBN 9 748 225399

The historical framework of Cambodian costume and textiles, tracing their evolution from the Angkor period to the present. Well illustrated with pictures not only of the textiles, but also of the weavers and weaving processes.

Nancy Arthur Hoskins, *The Coptic Tapestry Albums and the Archaeologist of Antinoz*. Skein in association with the University of Washington Press, pb., 224 pp, 144 col. illus., directions for six replica weaving projects included, ISBN 0 295 98374 4, US\$55.

An unusually wide range of Egyptian Coptic textile fragments is identified, with detailed data given for each piece. The author’s descriptions of weaving techniques create a useful glossary of technical terms.

Jane Puranananda, Ed., *Through the Threads of Time: Southeast Asian Textiles*, River Books, Bangkok, 2004, pb, 27.4 x 21.7 cm, 181 pp, 220 col. illus., ISBN 9 748 22576 3, £30

Based on papers given at a symposium held in Bangkok by the James H.W. Thompson Foundation, a collection of well-illustrated essays on textile art in present-day Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.

Robert Schmid and Fritz Trupp, *Tribal Asia: Ceremonials, Rituals and Dress*, Thames and Hudson, 2004, pb., 32x24 cm, 320 pp, 295 col. & 14 b/w illus., ISBN 0 500 542856, £39.95

Photographic documentation over fifteen years of the indigenous tribes of all parts of the continent. Lives lived in harmony with nature enable them to survive despite encroaching civilization and destruction of their natural environment. Rituals, ceremonies and festivals are explained and the amazing variety of clothing and other personal adornment well illustrated.

John E. Vollmer, *Silks for Thrones and Altars: Chinese Costumes and Textiles*, Myrna Myers, Paris, 2003, 152 pp, numerous col. illus., ISBN 2 9518836 1 7, \$65

Primarily a sales catalogue for the Paris-based American dealers Myrna and Sam Myers, this book covers the historical importance of sericulture, clothing and textile furnishings for the nobility, silk textiles as emblems of hierarchy, influences from Central Asia, the place of silks in trade and diplomacy, and silks for temples and altars.

Yang Shaorong, *Chinese Clothing: Costumes, Adornments and Culture*, Long River Press, San Francisco, 2004, hb, 19x13 cm, 78 pp, , fully illustrated, mostly in colour, illustrated endpapers. ISBN 1 592 6 019 8, \$12.95

A review of Chinese clothing from pre-history to the present day, from functional yet ingenious work clothes to the most elaborate and intricately detailed ceremonial robes.

New Textile Journal

The Stichting Textile Research Centre at Leiden has launched a journal, *KM'at*, for the study of dress and textiles in the Islamic world.

The first issue featured subjects as varied as naked monks and nuns from within the Coptic community, a Jewish wedding dress in a private collection, veiling in classical and Qajar Persian literature, Palestinian embroidered dresses, and the political use of clothing within Afghan and Central Asian traditions. The provisional contents for the next issue include items on the Yemeni trade in textiles, Turkish influence on Magreb dress, and oriental dress in European feasts. There will also be bibliographical features.

Any aspect of the subject will be considered for inclusion, including anthropological, archaeological, economic, literary, political, religious, social, and technical aspects, as well as articles about specific garments of particular interest. Anyone who has a suitable article, or who is interested in writing for future issues should contact Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood at the Stichting (e-mail: textile@rmv.nl) or Linda Hannsen at the Wereldmuseum, Rotterdam (e-mail: l.hannsen@depotwereldmuseum.rotterdam.nl). Subscription inquiries should be addressed to P.Peeters (e-mail: Paul@peeters-leuven.be).

Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood

Orientations, Special Textile Number

The May 2004 number of *Orientations* concentrates on textiles, with special emphasis on the Abegg-Stiftung, an independent textile museum, research institute and conservation centre at Riggisburg, near Bern, Switzerland, whose main field of interest is Central Asia up to the 13th century and its place in East-West relations.

Two of the articles deal with an archaeological textile in the collection that comes from Yuli country in eastern Xinjiang, one from the technical aspect, the other – which particularly interests me – on the motifs, their significance and where they came from. Another related article is from two Chinese archaeologists who have excavated similar textiles from a cemetery in the area, dating probably from the 3rd to 4th century A.D.

There are two articles on conservation, one a general one on the care of historic textiles and costumes, the other on the documentation and conservation of a Liao dynasty Chinese cap. Another is a detective story telling how a cloth-of-gold textile, which was acquired as two groups of fragments at different times and from different sources, was reconstructed. There is also an article by an independent researcher on the radiocarbon dating of textiles, and finally an interview with the president of the board of trustees of the Abegg-Stiftung.

Copies of the magazine may be obtained for £8.50 (including p. & p.) from *Orientations*, 17th Floor, 200 Lockhart Road, Hong Kong, e-mail: omag@netvigator.com

Phyllis Nye

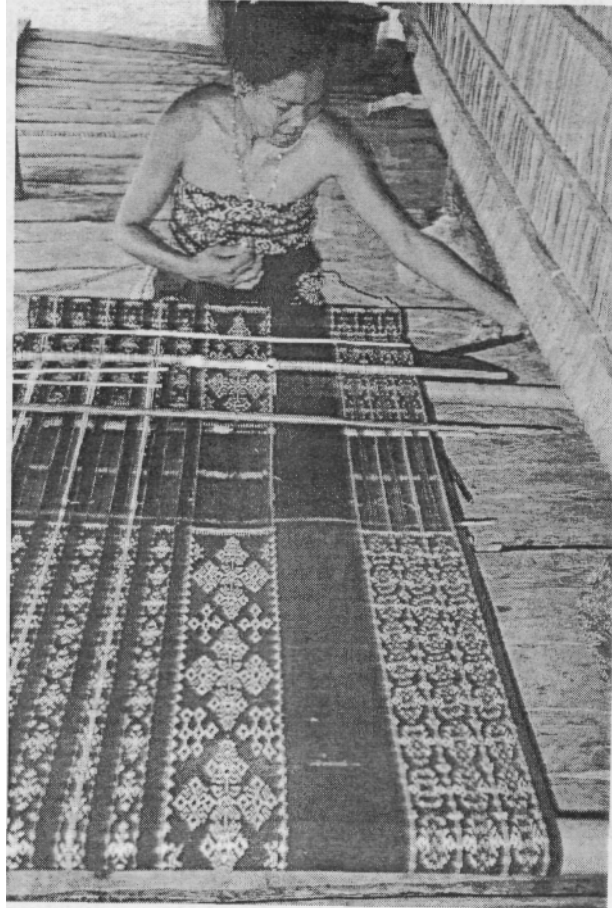
EXHIBITIONS

Woven Blossoms: Textiles from Savu, Indonesia

An exhibition of textiles and other items from the island of Savu in eastern Indonesia opened at the Horniman Museum on May 28th. This is the first in a series of exhibitions of textiles to be mounted in the Horniman's new textile gallery, funded by a grant from the Designation Challenge Fund. Most of the Museum's textile holdings have been photographed and inventoried and their storage upgraded as part of the same project.

Woven Blossoms will put on display much of the material from Savu collected for the Museum in recent years by Genevieve Duggan, a French anthropologist who has been undertaking research on the island for more than a decade. As well as her academic research, Genevieve has been helping the islanders by finding funding from overseas donors for equipment for the local school and also by helping to find markets for their traditional textiles. She has emphasised the importance of retaining traditional materials such as locally grown

cotton and natural dyes, so that the quality of the weaving does not deteriorate in the face of commercial pressures. Her work on the island is encouraging the islanders to value their textile traditions, so that while the museum collection preserves actual examples of the weaving, she hopes that her intervention will help to sustain weaving itself.



Savunese weaver at work. This loom and the part-woven textile on it were collected for the Horniman and are on display in the current exhibition.

All the textiles in the exhibition have been made in the traditional way and using traditional patterns. This is important, because the patterns are associated with particular families and their histories. Particular patterns, made using the ikat technique, can only be worn by people of certain lines of descent, traced in this instance down the female line. According to legend, everyone on the island is descended from two sisters, who lived some forty generations ago, and who quarrelled over their weaving. To settle the quarrel, materials were divided between them. The older sister took the largest number of areca nuts, creating the 'Greater Blossom' descent group; the younger sister had only what was left and her descendants belong to the 'Lesser Blossom' group. However, the older sister, in taking her share of the indigo dye vat first, left her sister with the lower part, which contained the greatest concentration of dye. Her textiles were characterised by a rich, midnight blue. Since

that time, descendants of each sister have been required to use the patterns and colour shades set down by their female ancestors.

As well as the textiles themselves, the exhibition displays examples of the equipment employed at each stage of the process, with photographs to illustrate their use. In addition, Genevieve Duggan has taken photographs to illustrate other aspects of life on the island. One of these is the importance of the lontar palm, which forms the basis for the traditional economy. All parts of the palm are used, including the wood, the leaves and especially the sap, which provides a sweet syrup used as a staple food. A number of items made of lontar palm are also displayed in the exhibition. The photographs also bring to life ritual aspects of Savunese culture, including cockfighting and the sending away of sickness and other bad influences in tiny boats made of lontar palm leaves.

In the second half of August two weavers from Savu will be resident at the Museum, demonstrating some of the textile production processes in the gallery space.

Woven Blossoms runs until February 2005. There is no exhibition catalogue, but those interested are encouraged to read Genevieve's article in the current edition of Hali magazine – or go to her talk to the O.A.T.G. on 16 June (see above p. 3). For associated events, see *Lectures and Events* below, p. 32.

Fiona Kerlogue Curator of Asian Collections,
Horniman Museum

Other Exhibitions in the U.K.

Heaven on Earth: Art from Islamic Lands - Art from the State Hermitage Museum and the Khalili Collection at the Hermitage Rooms, Somerset House, The Strand, London until 22 August Tel. 0870 906 3704

The Silk Road: Trade, Travel, War and Faith – at the British Library until 12 September, includes manuscripts, paintings, artefacts and textiles from the Stein collections in the British Library and the British Museum, but also many other wonderful objects from museums in China, Japan, Germany and France, it also shows how international collaboration on conservation and digitisation is now making these collections freely accessible to all. There will be a complementary display of Silk Road photographs in the entrance hall from 18 June. Tel. 02074127332

Dragons, Unicorns and Phoenixes – at ULITA (University of Leeds International Textile Archive), St Wilfred's Chapel on the Western Campus of the University of Leeds, until 26 November, an exhibition of the finest of the University's collection of Qing dynasty (1644-1912) silks, most of them from the 19th century. They include courtly and official costumes, decorated with dragons, symbols and patterns, either in embroidery or one *kesi*. There are both male and female ceremonial costumes, as well as panels and part costumes. (Tel. 0113 343 3919 (For nook published in association with the exhibition, see above p.26.)

Threads of Progress – also at ULITA (see immediately above) until 26 November, an exhibition on the history of the Archive, tel. 0113 343 3919

Through the Surface – moves to Halifax, Yorkshire, where it will be on display at the Bankfield Museum and the Piece Hall Art Gallery, 26 June to 30 August. Tel. 01422 358300 or 352334

The Forbidden City – British Museum, 22 September to January 2005. Tel. 020 7323 8000

Encounters: the Meeting of Asia and Europe, 1500-1800 – Beginning with the European discovery of the sea route to the Indies, this exhibition at the V.& A., 23 September to 5 December, is designed to catch the spirit of this age of discovery, encounter and exchange, through almost 200 exquisite objects, *Encounters* will reveal the captivating stories and personalities of the period it explores, and how East and West perceived and represented each other and how the appeal of the exotic shaped both cultures. An international conference will be held in association with the exhibition, see below, p.32. Tel. 020 7942 2000

Braids and Beyond: A Broad Look at Narrow Wares – From military braids to mousetraps, antique to modern and handmade to industrial: how centuries of skill have turned a piece of string into a work of art. 3 July to 4 September at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter. Tel. J.Carey, tel. 01404 813 486

Fantastic Fashions – a selection of Japanese woodblock prints exploring “city chic” during the Edo period (1615-1868) at the V.& A (Japan, room 45) until 19 September. Tel. 020 7942 2000

Recent Acquisitions 1992-2002: A decade of Collecting Textiles – Some of the Museum’s finest acquisitions during the period using a variety of materials and textiles to show examples of new developments in textile design and production, at the V.& A. until 3 January 2005. Tel. 020 7942 2000

Different by Design: Clothes Across Continents – A display at the V.& A. of inspirational clothes from Asia, Africa and Europe, highlighting creativity, craftsmanship and beauty. Tel. 020 7942 2000

Exhibitions Overseas

Fabric of the Nation – over 15,000 patchwork pieces assembled into 60 panels are on view in the main gallery of the HDB Hub, Toa Payoh Central, Singapore, until 31 July. The pieces were the response to a project conceived by the Government and the media to get people from all walks of life, all races, languages and religions, to express in stitchery their reactions to the various crises Singapore has had to face in recent years.

Celestial Silks: Chinese Religious and Court Textiles – More than 70 important costumes and hangings including some from the 5th and 6th centuries never seen in public before, at the VisAsia Gallery, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 31 July to 10 October.

Four at the Textile Museum, Washington, D.C., Tel. 202 667 0441:

Timeless Connexions: Exploring Tapestry Weave – exhibits illustrating structures, materials, designs and the cultures that use tapestry weave from, among others, India, Turkey and China, until 1 August.

Plain Weave – An exhibition exploring the wide range of effects possible with this basic universal weave, with examples from Peru to Japan; 2 July - 2 January 2005.

Floral Perspectives in Carpet Design – the spiritual, cultural and artistic aspects as rendered in the designs of 17th - 19th century Indian, Chinese, Central Asian, Persian and Turkish carpets; 26 August - 6 February 2005.

A Garden of Shawls: The Buta and its Seeds – including spectacular variations on what is known in this country as Paisley pattern and its history in both Asian and Western shawls; 1 October - 6 March 2005.

Last Chance to See ...

Sari to Sarong at the Asian Civilizations Museum, Singapore, ends 4 July

Puppet Worlds at the Liverpool Museum ends 30 August

Fiberart International at the Pittsburgh Centre for the Arts, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., ends 15 August

Luxury Textiles East and West at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California, U.S.A., ends 15 August.

Lectures and Events

Woven Blossoms - Associated events:

Indonesian Batik – a course of instruction with artist Diana Okene taking inspiration from the *Woven Blossoms* exhibition. Five sessions on Saturdays, 2-4 p.m., starting 12 June, at the Horniman Museum. £50 (or £10 per session), including materials. Tel. 020 8699 1872

Weaving Blossoms – The Savu weavers visiting the Horniman Museum will be running three free workshops for adults, on August 16th, 17th and 18th from 2 to 3 in the afternoon, with a maximum of 10 participants in each workshop. In each of the three workshops, participants will be able to learn the traditional processes for the preparation of cotton for spinning, how to spin cotton with a drop spindle, and how to weave on a back strap loom. There will also be an opportunity to use the ikat frame. This part of the project has been generously funded by a number of donors, including the Indonesian Embassy, the British Council in Jakarta, the Regional Government of Eastern Indonesia, a local foundation Yayasan Hawu Miha Ngara, and Visiting Arts. For details please contact the Community Education department at the Museum on 0208 699 1872.

Indonesian Batik in its Social Context – Saturday 2 October, a talk by Fiona Kerlogue to members of The Textile Society on the occasion of their visit to the *Woven Blossoms* exhibition. £5 for members, £6 for non-members. Information from and bookings to Freda Chapman, Bryony, Gasden Lane. Witley, Godalming, Surrey, GU8 5RJ, Tel. 01428 683703.

Other events:

Silk Symposium – will be held by the Asian Arts Society of Australia at the Art Gallery, New South Wales on 31 July in connexion with the *Celestial Silks* exhibition (see above p. 31) which opens there on the same day. Speakers will include Zhao Feng, Deputy Director of the National Silk Museum, Hangzhou, China. For further information e-mail cairem@ng.nsw.gov.au

Appropriation, Acculturation, Transformation – is the theme of the Ninth Biennial Symposium of the Textile Society of America, to be held from 6 to 9 October at the Marriott Hotel, Oakland, California. Papers and discussions will cover the many ways in which textile traditions have been transformed throughout history by outside influences as varied as trade, colonization, war and technology, focussing especially on the area of the Pacific Rim. Further information from the website <http://textilesociety.org>

Encounters: the meeting of Asia and Europe. 1500-1800 – An international conference complementing the exhibition of the same name, will be held at the Victoria and Albert Museum on Friday and Saturday, 12-13 November. It will develop themes from the exhibition, examining different aspects of the encounter between Asia and Europe in the early modern period. Day 1, *Perception and Reality*, looks at how the meeting engendered visions of Asia and Europe in the imagination of the other, and day 2, *Interactions and Exchanges*, provides new perspectives on the cultural and material dialogue between East and West. Dr Amin Jaffer and Anna Jackson, curators of the exhibition, will chair the meeting and Anna will talk on exotic textiles and dress in Momoyama and Edo period Japan on the second day. The cost is £92, or £50 for a single day. Tel. 020 7942 2209.

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DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE – MONDAY 4 OCTOBER

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