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ASIAN TEXTILES

MAGAZINE OF THE OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

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Grandmaster weavers of the Iban

Also in this issue: Textiles of Swat, Silk Road at the V&A and much more...

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Asian Textiles now available online in full colour!

This edition of *Asian Textiles* is available on-line in full colour in a Pdf file to download, view and/or print. Access to the .pdf file is either via http://www.oatg.org.uk/magazine.htm whilst it is the current issue or always via the back issues page http://www.oatg.org.uk/magazine-backissues.html by first clicking on the cover image thumbnail.

In both cases click on the link in the title line to the issue e.g.: '**Access colour Pdf of No 45**'. Enter the **username** and **password** given below, click '**login**' and then, on the resulting page, click on the relevant link to download. The username and password is the same for all three issues in each calendar year. OATG current members, as part of their membership, are being given access to the Pdf files for *Asian Textiles* for the previous two years. Passwords for all full colour issues to date are:

Year	Username	Password
2008	at08	6gicjk
2009	at09	pdr8nx
2010	at10	mqonj2

To protect the value of your membership please don't share these passwords with non-members.

Cover photograph: A *pua kumbu* woven by Vernon Kedit's great-grandmother Sendi Ketit, circa 1935, which displays the unique Stambak style. See article p14.

Rear cover: A small purse woven in the Swat Valley, northern Pakistan. See article p8.

Editorial

This edition of *Asian Textiles* contains a very special article. Vernon Kedit has written about his family's involvement in the weaving of Iban blankets in Borneo. The blankets themselves are remarkable, but what is truly amazing is to read about these exquisite textiles from the standpoint of someone who has been intimately involved in the traditions that underpin their creation. We are so used to reading articles by experts and curators, but seldom does one hear the authentic voice of people so closely connected to the textile creators themselves. I feel sure that this article will be widely read and that Vernon's determination to ensure that these traditions are preserved will bear fruit.

Also in this edition is yet another wonderful article by Azra Nafees, this time on the textile traditions of the Swat Valley in northern Pakistan. For the last few years there has been little good news coming out of Swat, but Azra's delightful article shows that both embroidered and woven textiles play a central role in that society.

In addition, we have a piece by Lesley Pullen on the UNESCO decision to award special status to the batiks of Indonesia and a very informative article by Susanna Reece on the V&A course on Asian textiles. More to come on that at a later date.

Finally, my apologies for the late appearance of this issue. A recent house move, with all the consequent chaos, is the best excuse I can come up with. However, I would urge all OATG members to think about how they can contribute to the magazine. The number of articles submitted has dropped off recently and the cupboard is mostly bare.

The Editor

My little cache of textile-related postcards is thinning a bit, but I have found a couple more for this edition of *Asian Textiles*. This one, which is undated, shows a Malay woman making songkek pieces on a handloom. See also p27.

OATG EVENTS PROGRAMME

Tuesday 21 September 2010
at the Pitt Rivers Museum at 2pm

The Pitt Rivers Museum has recently received *Wendy Black's collection of embroidered textiles from remote areas of S.W. China*. Wendy will be showing and telling us about the textiles and Julia Nicholson, Joint Head of Collections, will also talk about the collection.

Please contact Fiona or Rosemary by 16 September to book a place. Numbers will be limited to 15, and there will be a charge of £5 to be collected on the day.

Wednesday 27 October 2010
AGM at 5.45pm followed at 6.15pm by a talk

Legacy in Cloth: Batak textiles of Indonesia.

Sandra Niessen

Sandra is based in the Netherlands and is coming to Oxford to talk about her current project to take copies of the Legacy book so that Sumatran weavers can regain access to their textile heritage

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Wednesday 17 November at 5.30pm
Silk production and Ikat weaving in Central Asia -History and Contemporary production

Mary Dusenbury
Research Curator, Spencer Museum of Art
University of Kansas

Members are encouraged to view the website www.oatg.org.uk regularly for the latest news. From time to time events are arranged at short notice as our speakers cannot always confirm their travel arrangements and availability in time for publication in Asian Textiles. We don't want you to miss out.

Talks are held at the Pauling Centre, 58 Banbury Road, Oxford.
Refreshments from 5.15pm.Visitors welcome (£2)

Programme Coordinators:
Rosemary Lee 01491 873276 rosemarylee143@btinternet.com
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Asian Textiles back issues now fully searchable

I hope that OATG members enjoyed looking at the on-line colour editions of *Asian Textiles* for which the access codes were published in the last issue and that you did not find it too difficult to access them. For those of you without your own computer do try and get a young relation or friend to show you them on their computer or perhaps seek help at your local library.

In the last issue (and on the website) I made a plea for help to digitise issues 1-38 of the magazine (then known as the Newsletter). Ever since I joined OATG it has been my dream to get this excellent resource on-line. It has been a dream shared by Fiona Sutcliffe, one of our joint programme organisers and a long-time (if not founder) member of OATG. It always seemed to us to be something possible but almost out of reach!

After *Asian Textiles* 44 was distributed I was delighted to receive an email from OATG member Martin Rush volunteering to help. He asked all sorts of technical questions which really focused Fiona and I on getting down to the practicalities. All three of us believed that the project should be aimed at scanning and converting each back issue into .pdf format files since this would allow the documents to be searched as well as being downloaded and printed. It would allow the text of the magazines to be spidered by search engines such as Google and provide a real resource for researchers as well as those with more casual interest. (NB. It may take a few more weeks for Google to catch up on spidering the last few issues scanned and loaded up to the OATG website.)

We all had different scanners and software for OCR (optical character recognition) and conversion to .pdf files. Particularly for Fiona and I this was quite a serious learning curve and even for Martin there were a few challenges along the way! There were certainly times for all of us when struggling to get the software to do what *we* wanted and not what it insisted on doing felt like gladiatorial combat! The vagaries of the OCR software meant that we often had to reformat the scanned pages to resemble the original magazines and occasionally had to settle for the nearest approximation. It certainly meant close reading of the final text to pick up errors in the character recognition.

Some of the photos are of a poorer quality than we would have wished but very many of the original printed photos were of a poor quality – much to the chagrin of Phyllis Nye who was editor for all 1-38 issues.

I would just like here to pay tribute to Phyllis. Close reading of all the text (including every note of an event or detail of a book publication) has given the 'team' a huge appreciation for the work that Phyllis undertook for the Newsletter, the breadth of her contacts and just how switched on she was to a vast number of events – exhibitions, conferences and book publications - both in the UK and overseas and for which she very often had an stimulating opinion. We are so pleased that this can now reach a much wider audience.

All the back issues are now live on the web and can be reached via the back issues page http://www.oatg.org.uk/magazine-backissues.html by clicking the thumbnail of the issue to get to the summary contents page where the link is in the top line of information. Issues 1-38 are freely available. Issues 39 onwards are currently *only* available to members with the passwords (see inside front cover of this issue). We intend to keep a minimum of two years of current issues 'protected' in this way. We will release the 2008 issues (39, 40 and 41) at the beginning of 2011.

Vying for position at the top of my 'to do list' is the reworking of the OATG website to take account of the availability of all the downloadable .pdf files – both freely available and password protected – in a more streamlined way but I will try and keep the key link http://www.oatg.org.uk/magazine-backissues.html unchanged as a springboard to them.

Finally a huge 'thank you' to Fiona and Martin for all their devoted hard work on the project. We all hope that you enjoy the fruits of our labours!

Pamela Cross, OATG Website editor

Javanese Batik awarded UNESCO world heritage status

Most *Asian Textiles* readers will be familiar with the UNESCO World Heritage List which includes 890 cultural and natural heritage properties in 148 countries. However fewer readers may be aware of the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity which now includes some 166 elements in 77 countries. The original 90 elements on this UNESCO List, which was formally established in November 2008, were supplemented by a further 76 elements on 30 September 2009, including 'Indonesian Batik'.

The word batik is thought to be derived from the word '*ambatik'* which translated means 'A cloth with little dots'. The suffix '*tik'* means dot or point, '*amba*' to write.

Javanese batik is thought of as a cultural phenomenon which has no counterpart in the Western textile tradition. From the earliest times the Javanese have treated the art of decorating cloth in the batik tradition as a form of painting, a *canting* applies molten wax and colours are added by dying. The patterns produced encoded cultural and historical information which are today mostly unreadable by outsiders.

From 1850-1939 the Javanese produced some of their finest batik and when Indonesia gained Independence after World War 11, batik became the symbol of the nation. It is a cloth made to be worn and collected, imbued with complex symbolism and which functions as a visual manifestation of Javanese beliefs. Batik of Java is recognised not as a craft or manual task, but as a discipline of the most refined arts, known as '*halus'*. Batik shares this refined status with gamelan music and *wayang* shadow theatre.

The 2003 Convention states that the ICH is manifested, among others, in the following domains: Oral traditions and expressions including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; Performing arts such as The Wayang Puppet Theatre (inscribed in 2008); Social practices, rituals and festive events; Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; Traditional craftsmanship, such as The Indonesian Kris (Inscribed in 2008).

A 17-page document proposing batik was submitted to the Intergovernmental Committee for

Batik *cap* – Liem Ping Wie , Kedungwuni, North Coast Java , 2009

(All photos by the author)

Batik Day 2 October 2009, School children in Pekalongan City – Known as 'Batik City'

the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Abu Dhabi, UAE, in September last year. A brief textual description of the nominated element was: "Traditional handcrafted textile rich in intangible cultural values, passed down for generations in Java and elsewhere since early 19th Century (Ref. Siksakanda, 1517AD) more widely since mid-1980s made by applying dots and lines of hot wax to cloth using a copper pen-like instrument (*canting tulis*), or copper stamps (*canting cap*), as a resist to hand-dyeing, later removed by boiling and/or scraping, repeating the process for each colour".

Batik patterns and motifs possess deep symbolism related to social status, local community, nature, history and cultural heritage. Expectant mothers wear batik; babies are carried in batik slings and touch batik with their feet when they first touch the ground; brides, marriage couples and family members wear batik; even corpses are covered with batik: all with appropriate patterns and motifs. Traditional dress includes batik. Batiks are collected and passed down as family heirlooms, each being a work of art with its own story. Batik makers would fast and pray before making batik while meditating accompanied by traditional songs. It takes several days to make a hand-stamped batik, and at between one month and a year to complete a hand-drawn batik.

The committee selected three programmers, projects and activities that it considered reflected the principles and objectives of the Convention particularly well: "an education and training project in Indonesian Batik cultural heritage, developed in co-operation with the Pekalongan Batik Museum".

Pak Zahir Widadi is the Director of the Batik Museum in Pekalongan, (known as 'Batik City' since the 1950s.)The museum was the centre of celebrations on 2 October 2009 when Indonesia celebrated this historic event. Pak Widadi, whom I visited in August last year, told me that 'the effort to put batik on the ICH list was not about property or copyright, but about safeguarding culture in certain regions – it is about preservation." He noted that the citation is for Indonesian Batik not just Batik – Malaysia can make their own batik – they recently claimed copyrights of certain batik patterns, not batik as a cultural heritage'.

Pak Widadi also talked about the Museum's role in the ICH, "Education and training in Indonesian Batik for all levels of students from elementary to polytechnic in collaboration with the Batik Museum in Pekalongan is vital", he said. From January 2007 the batik workshop in the museum was able to support the schools batik practice and to offer an experience to visitors.

Lesley Pullen

The artisan traditions of the Swat Valley

In the third of her articles for *Asian Textiles*, Azra Nafees describes the brilliant textiles from the Swat Valley in northern Pakistan

High in the rugged mountains of Khyber-Pukhtunkhwa in Northern Pakistan lies the Vale of Swat, with the river of the same name running through it. In ancient texts, the Swat River is called *Suvastu*, meaning "good dwelling place," perhaps indicating that the land by the river was a pleasant place to live. The region drained by the Swat is referred to in later Sanskrit texts as *Uddiyana*, or "garden," reaffirming the fertile and agreeable nature of the land.

In the fertile soil of Swat, on land nestled between peaks and vales, a rich artisan tradition has flourished that reflects the intermingling of different cultures and civilizations over the millenia. Among the varied Central Asian artistic traditions, the art of the Vale of Swat is unique. The origin of embroidery has a long and time-tested history and is recorded from time immemorial. Intricately designed and embroidered clothing, decorative pieces and household items have been hallmarks of social status and signs of affluence and wealth of the family in many ancient cultures and civilizations in Central Asia.

Dress bodice with silk thread in red, olive green and magenta. Mirrors and beads have also been added to give the piece a unique and catchy look.

Hand embroidery is a traditional genre of art passed from generation to generation in diverse cultures and the art-oriented dwellers of Swat have inherited this profound tradition from the artisans of the Gandhara civilisation.

Swati Embroidery

Swati embroidery is of great significance and has won a unique status all over the world due to its innovative and creative underpinning. In the past when modern threads were not easily available, pure silver yarn was used in embroidery and the dresses designed in this fashion were very heavy and bulky. As most of the girls and ladies in Swat remain in the vicinity of their homes, so they pursue this art of embroidery as their favourite pastime.

These talented girls of Swat decorate and adorn all the dresses, shawls, blankets, bed sheets, pillow covers, table cloths, veils, head scarves, handkerchiefs and caps which become a part of their dowry after their marriage.

These exquisitely designed items are the most sought after pieces of embroidery in Swat. The golden lace embroidery of Swat has acquired a distinct recognition in the world of fashion today.

Swati Dresses

The beaded and mirrored embroidery around the necks and sleeves of the dresses and *Saadar* (shawl) with golden and silver ribbons studded with artificial gemstones and sequins are exquisite, unique and typical creations and products of the artistic embroiderers of Swat. These aesthetic and artistic handicrafts of Swat are in very high demand in the local and international market.

A woman's dress, which has been beautifully embroidered on black cotton fabric. The bodice and sleeves have been generously adorned with silk thread and valuable trade items such as seed beads, mother of pearl buttons and a zipper on the edges of sleeves and top.

Weaving Pashmina shawls

The sinfully warm and delectably fine Pashmina shawl is woven in the Swat Valley. Greatly sought after by tourists, these expensive shawls are made from the finest hair of Pashmina goats. *Pashm* is the wool of *capra hircus*, an Asian species of mountain goat. The fleece used to make these shawls grows beneath the rough outer hair.

The finest hair comes from the underbelly and is shed with the onset of summer. Pashmina shawls usually come in subtle shades of cream, beige, brown and grey, depending on the natural colour of the fleece. They may be dyed to produce brighter colours or livened up with embroidery. The silk Pashmina shawls mix the sensuous feel and beauty of pure silk with unrivalled embroidery work by the dextrous designers of the Swat valley. The sheen of silk and softness of

Pashmina reflected in Swati shawls allures and captivates the onlooker.

Embroidered Shawls

Traditions and customs rule high in Swat and its talented people have been taught how to tackle the severities of nature by using nature itself. The traditional handicrafts, especially embroidered shawls—and the seasoned artisans who produce them - are the assets of Swat and are a source of pride and popularity for all the citizens of this exotic valley. The range of unique and one-of-a-kind designs have been chosen for the reader's interest. The details of the fine stitching and patterns have also been added to portray the artisanship and dexterity of the designers.

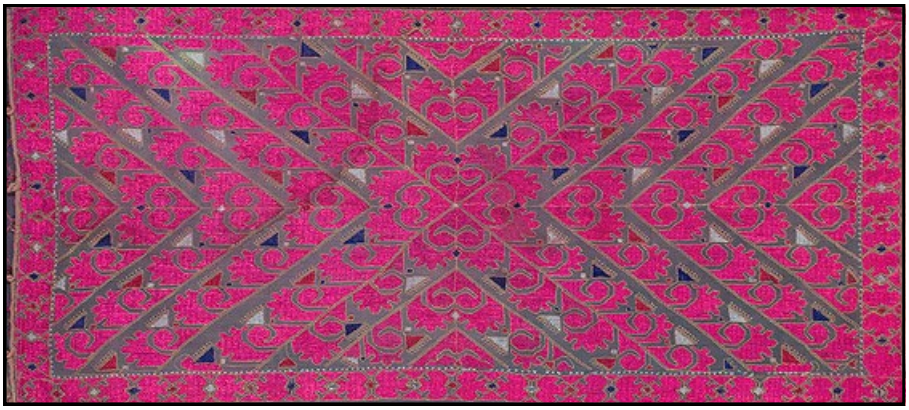
Bagh or Phulkari

In Swat, embroidery is called *bagh*, or "flower garden". Elsewhere in Pakistan it is called *phulkari*, an Urdu word derived from *phul*, meaning "flower" - and Swati decorated textiles do indeed resemble exquisite, stylized flower gardens. Although *bagh* reveals some foreign influence in the patterns, the style ultimately expresses a local aesthetic. Either the cloth is packed with ornamentation, or the space is stabilized by a centre medallion and decorated with borders. In shawls, designs are predominantly geometric and floral, repeated in an orderly fashion.

Geometric Designs

Indeed, the folk art of Swat delights in orderly, grid-like alignment. In that sense, Swati textiles show predictable composition, for the desire to avoid imbalance and haphazardly-composed designs puts a premium on symmetrical placement of patterns and rows of patterns. Swati patterns are dense, tightly constructed, breaking up the surface plane as no other folk tradition does. Placement,

spacing and motifs are what make the Swati artistic tradition unique.
For example, the shawl on p13 has embroidery so dense that it completely covers the red cotton ground cloth. The pattern is composed of diamonds set in larger diamonds, stitched in white, rust, and gold silk thread. The broad borders feature cross-hatching and diamond designs that subtly reverse the colour scheme.



Mirror Work
The women of Swat traditionally carry embroidered shawls, *chaadars* and *dupattas* as part of their dowry. This work can be identified by its use of tiny mirrors with colourful threads that shape floral and figurative designs. Its shiny brilliance makes it a hot favourite with tourists.

Zardozi

Zari is gold, and *zardozi* embroidery is the glitteringly ornate, heavily encrusted gold thread work practiced in Swat. Of course, the days of using real gold and silver thread are now history. What you can get, however, is synthetic or 'tested' *zari* embroidery. The design is fed into the cloth from the reverse side using darning needles and one thread at a time, leaving a long stitch below to form the basic pattern. The embroidery is usually done with silk or satin thread, in both a vertical and horizontal pattern so that when the *phulkari* is finally ready, the play of light on its shiny surface lends it breathtaking beauty. *Zardozi* is done in satin stitch too, that gives the finished piece an alluring antique look.

Chamba

This magnificient shawl opposite has a stylized *phul* (flower) characteristic of Swati embroidery, with a large central motif surrounded by smaller ones. The juxtaposition of intense shocking pink and fuchsia colours with bold simplified floral forms makes this shawl exceptionally attractive.

The embroidery is usually accomplished from the reverse. Using silk thread, the needlework is started by outlining the designs with one running stitch, and then filling in the outline with another. The characteristic *phulkari* stitch of closely placed, parallel threads resembles a satin stitch. Since all the threads must be counted to make the outline of the design, the work, is best accomplished in daylight.

Miscellaneous Items

Other unique and indigenous creations of Swati artisanship include woollen rugs and mats, pillow cases, cushion covers, kid's waistcoats, caps and bonnets, purses, pouches and wallets, decorative waist belts, decorative hair and head bands and other dress accessories.

Pillow cases

Pillow cases are perfected in the distinctive *Phulkari* style of the Swat Valley. They exhibit elaborate geometric designs and are different on the front and back of the case. Colour scheming is done in dominant reds and pinks, with all variations of red from shocking pink to maroon as well as some orange and peach. All over silk embroidery in reds, fuchsia and green, speaks for the designer's skill and industriousness.

Cushion covers

Cushions and bolsters constitute an integral part in the traditional society of Swat where *Hujras* (special gathering places for local people) attract diverse community members after dinner to discuss local, political and international issues and progress. Usually the *Hujra* is a huge hall spread

A shawl from Swat (l) and detail (r)

with local rugs, cushions and bolsters upon which the people rest their tired and exhausted backs sipping green tea or black tea. These bolsters and cushions are an important feature of a *Hujra* and are decorated with colourful cotton or silk threads, tassels, golden lace, beads.

Kids' waistcoats

Embroidered and embellished boys waistcoats are among the most popular outfits of the Swat Valley. The intricate and artistic twisting of thread is itself seen as an embellishment by the Swati community. They often weave cotton thread into a broad band as a textured or patterned base, and then loop through buttons, beads, metallic droplets or whatever catches their fancy. Beads, shells, cowries and feathers are simple but amazingly creative means to adorn the boy's ensemble.

Caps and bonnets

Apart from other cultural influences the artisans of Swat have established their own footprints in the art of embroidery and garments. The peculiar and typical *Pakool* (a cap for boys & men) is specially woven and made from local livestock fleece and is considered an essential item of dress in the freezing winters of the valley and is revered for its immemorial tradition. These *pakools* and caps are available in several hues, shapes and shades, depending on the age and taste of the wearer. The range of Pashtun children's hats and bonnets from the Swat Valley are all done in cross-stitch and chain-stitch embroidery with beads and other adornments including coins and buttons and a zipper used at the bottom edging.

If you have some knowledge about needlework, then you'll probably agree that the inside of these hats is as interesting as the outside. Some exteriors have geometric patterns while others are more curvilinear and organic. The colours also vary widely with some sporting browns, mustards and oranges while others are much more muted. It's possible that those pale colours are the result of fading — it's not completely clear. Most designs use a type of chain stitch.

Purses, pouches, wallets and belts

Other notable pieces of Swati artisanship include Purses, pouches, wallets and waist belts for girls, which are exquisitely decorated with silk thread, beads, sequences, cowries, metal adornments and fringes.

Of Questions and Raised Eyebrows: Piercing the Feminine Veil.

Vernon Kedit is the direct descendant of an unbroken line of five *indu takar* of the Saribas of Borneo. He has had a lifelong interest in weaving and family history and is currently engaged in collecting oral traditions and compiling a photographic record of ritual textiles still in the possession of Saribas Iban families. This is his first contribution to *Asian Textiles*. He can be contacted at vernonkedit@gmail.com.

My mother Mary Magdalene Jolly, six months' pregnant with me, visiting great-grandmother Sendi at Old Stambak Longhouse. Saribas, April 1967.

"You will have a son." These very words were spoken to my mother 43 years ago by my great-grandmother, three months before I was born. In those days before the ultrasound scan, no Iban woman would dare predict the outcome of a birth unless she was an *indu takar,* literally translated, "the woman who knows how to measure." This honorific is still reserved today for only the most skilled grandmaster weavers of the Iban who are also expected to be skilled midwives, healers and readers of omens.

These outstanding women, gifted with spiritual power, are very much respected in the communities they live in. My great-grandmother was one such woman. Unfortunately, I never knew this until much later in life, long after she had passed on.

In the spring of 1988, I was a young man, reading law in London, who had very little knowledge of his culture and tradition. I was more interested in other things like renaissance music and playing the pipe organ until a make-shift antiques stall in a weekend market on Kensington High Street caught my attention. An Iban textile hung as a crude backdrop to odd bits of African objet d'art and Oriental curios on a table. I vaguely recognised it as being very similar to the type of textiles my grandmother would use to decorate the home during festivities. So I asked the gentleman manning the stall what the cloth draped behind him was and where was it from.

"This is a hand-woven cloth that the pirates of Borneo had used to wrap their trophy heads in. Do you know where Borneo is? Have you heard

A *pua kumbu* woven by great-great-grandmother Mengan Budin Gerasi, circa 1900s, displaying a rich and complex design characterised by dense and complicated coils. This innovation in design was to influence the entire Saribas and is now known as the Stambak style.

A *pua kumbu* woven by great-grandmother Sendi Ketit, circa 1935, which displays the unique Stambak style. Sendi went on to refine the technique developed by her mother Mengan Budin Gerasi

of the tribe of head-hunters of Borneo?" I told him that I was in fact from Borneo and that I was from the very tribe he was talking about, and that the cloth he was referring to is known as the *pua kumbu*, the famous hand-woven ritual blankets of the Iban. We soon struck up a conversation and thus my very first 'education' on my own culture began, courtesy of a Westerner!

It had dawned on me that others knew more about my culture than I, and so inspired with this epiphany was I that my summer break back in Borneo was spent rummaging through the cupboards, drawers and attics of longhouses to learn more about this strange cloth that was used to wrap decapitated heads.

Soon, I had raised questions and eyebrows amongst the longhouse folk. What was a young man like me doing asking questions about a principally feminine activity? No one took me seriously and my queries were laughed off in jest. When I persisted, they finally acquiesced and gave me just enough information that brought me to the realisation that the oldest hereditary line of grandmaster weavers (1) in the Saribas was actually found within my very own family!

The island of Borneo is carved into three parts; the northern part makes up Malaysia with Brunei tucked neatly in the middle of the two Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak. The rest of the island belongs to Indonesia. In Sarawak, the Iban are found throughout much of the state. In the southern region is a river basin called the Saribas which has a weaving tradition that sets it apart from other regions. Economic prosperity and early interaction with foreign traders meant that Saribas women could easily purchase fine commercial threads instead of working on home-grown cotton which produced coarse threads and consequently bold designs.

On these finely spun threads, Saribas weavers discovered that they could achieve finer designs when using the equally fine fibre of the *lemba* (curculigo villosa) in the ikat process. Within the Saribas, the leading family founded by its paramount chief Orang Kaya Pemancha Dana Bayang established themselves by a small creek named Stambak near the mouth of the Saribas River. The women of this family quickly excelled in this new method and developed it to a degree never before seen which soon became *de rigueur* throughout the region, and as Dr. Michael Heppell communicated to me, "One thing I do remember being told in the Paku (2) was that a major design change occurred in the Saribas and the source of that was Stambak." (3)

This family traces its ancestry to the Orang Kaya Pemancha Dana *Bayang,* the "most dreaded Saribas 'pirate', the man who commanded the marauding fleets" (4) who had threatened to put Rajah James Brooke's head in a basket. (5) Brooke later wrote, "The Orang Kaya Pomancha, of Sarebas, is now with me - the dreaded and the brave, as he is termed by the natives. He is small, plain-looking and old, with his left arm disabled, and his body scarred with spear wounds. I do not dislike the look of him, and of all the chiefs of that river I believe he is the most honest, and steers his course straight enough". (6)

The Orang Kaya Pemancha Dana *Bayang* was succeeded by his son the Orang Kaya Aji *Pati Malayu Duat Pengiran Bunsu* who was colourfully described as one of the most cruel and treacherous head-hunters of those days. (7) His daughter, Mindu, married Panglima Budin *Gerasi*, the great-grandson of Unggang *Lebor Menoa*, a rival chief from the Upper Layar. (8) This arranged marriage pacified the "smouldering dispute between two Iban families, like the feud between the Montagues and the Capulets, an important factor in local politics for years". (9)

Great grandmother Sendi and I. Kuching, Xmas 1968

Panglima Budin *Gerasi*, the head of this extended kindred, pioneered the cultivation of coffee and rubber in the Saribas. "Among the first planters [of coffee] were leading Iban families in the middle Saribas who established their gardens early in 1889 and obtained their first output in 1892. In 1895 the Resident reported: The Stambok [i.e. Stambak] gardens are being enlarged. Gergasi [the Malay version of Budin's praise-name], the head of the house there owns quite eight hundred trees and employs labour (Dyak). His paddy farm this year was made for him by Malays on wages'". (10)

"In the riverine zone at Stambak, below Betong, the headman Budin (the coffee planter of the 1890s mentioned above) planted over 4,000 seedlings [of rubber] in

Seated, from left: Grand aunt Jelia with aunt Nancy leaning against her, great-grandmother Sendi (grandmother's mother) holding Aunt Magdalene, great-grandmother Rimbu (grandfather's mother) with Aunt Alice and grandmother Inja holding father. Singapore, 1939

1909, with seed brought back from Singapore by his son Lumpoh. Another early planter, Penghulu Saang, obtained seeds from Stambak to plant at Pelandok in the Paku branch of the Saribas in 1912". (12) "The Saribas Iban 'experienced unparalleled material prosperity', enabling further investment in agriculture, business and trading, as well as the construction of 'palatial' ironwood longhouses and the celebration of elaborate *gawai* festivals on an unprecedented scale". Pringle succinctly commented that "it is no exaggeration to say that any knowledge of Saribas history in the Brooke era begins with knowledge of this family." (13)

The women of this family, in turn, were grandmaster weavers whose authority and influence in weaving was unchallenged throughout the Saribas, although very little was recorded of their achievements by writers of the time who did not yet realise the significance of Iban ritual textiles. Mengan Tuai, the wife of the Orang Kaya Pemancha Dana *Bayang* and her granddaughter Mindu (14) were both known to have been patronised by *Indu Dara Insin Temaga*, the daughter of war-god *Sengalang Burong.* Although *Indu Dara Insin Temaga* is not exclusively the goddess of weaving, mythology states that her weavings are the most beautiful and her threads as fine as silk.

Mindu's eldest daughter Mengan was named after her grandmother and brought up as an *anak umbong (15)*, where she was confined to the attic and schooled rigorously by her elderly female relatives in all the arts of weaving until the day she was given away in marriage. Mengan was to become the most well-known *indu takar* in the Saribas, superseding even the fame of her mother and grandmother before her as *tuai takar.* An *indu takar* is a woman who knows the secret measurements of mordant and dyes and conducts the ritual of soaking yarns in a pre-treatment bath. It is also the highest social status for a woman. A *tuai takar* is the lead or principal amongst the *indu takar*. Heppell further remarked that "it was probably in just such a Stambak attic that Saribas design took the fork in the road it did and started producing the rich and complex designs

Grand aunt Jelia Ipa, tying the warp threads with waxed *lemba* leaves and sorting the bundles with the porcupine quill, the exclusive mark of a master weaver. Kuching, 1993

characterised by the dense and complicated coils, which distinguish the best Saribas work." (16)

Mengan married her first cousin Ketit, the son of Budin *Gerasi*'s brother. Her eldest daughter Sendi Ketit was born in 1892. Sendi enjoyed the privileges of having attendants wait on her and did not have to attend to household chores or farming duties. Thus she devoted all her time to learning and developing the secret techniques and esoteric knowledge a woman of her status and pedigree was expected to acquire. She continued the tradition of her foremothers and left behind a textile legacy that is unsurpassed in ritual significance in the Saribas. (17)

Great-grandmother Sendi, the last grandmaster weaver of Stambak, passed away in 1974 aged eighty two when I was only seven years old. She was posthumously named *indu pandai pengelandik jari nadai pemali tau jait tau nyungkit tau anyam tau sulam tau nakar tau gaar* (clever woman with skilled fingers and no ritual restrictions who was a master of embroidery, sungkit, pilih, warp wrapping, and preparing the cotton for dyeing) (18) and accorded *sigi alas ngerang (19)* by the elders of her community at her funeral wake (20).

No one in the Saribas has since been accorded this honorific or *adat pemati*. I have no memories of her except one; my being bathed by her, when I was suffering from a fever, in a ritual bath of very cold water filled with seven types of flowers and an iron blade.

After the Japanese Occupation of Borneo (1941 to 1945) weaving became unfashionable in the Saribas. Young girls enrolled at mission schools with their brothers. Their mothers moved to the towns with their fathers to seek new job opportunities. The desire to pursue and embrace modernisation inextricably led to the disintegration of the longhouse community. Only the elderly remained, holding together what they could of the fragile fabric of their traditional existence. The values system of the Saribas Iban underwent a dramatic shift after the Second World War, and this could not have been truer of Stambak and its community which had led the vanguard of modernisation in the Saribas.

Of my family, only two women continued the art and fortunately for me, were still alive when I began my research; grand aunt Jelia Ipa who was grandfather Ivory Kedit's sister, and

grand aunt Lenguti Langi who was grandmother Inja's cousin. Both ladies were also students of great-grandmother Sendi, and had inherited her secret techniques and esoteric knowledge. So it was to these two indomitable ladies that I turned and sought to better understand the legacies of my foremothers.

It was not easy to get my grand aunts to share their knowledge of weaving and divulge secret techniques, especially not to a male member of the family. It was (and still is) radical and highly unconventional to pass on the esoteric teachings of the Iban goddesses of weaving to a man. The feminine veil of secrecy holds fast.

However, the gods must have intervened because a year after my initial spurt of research, my grand aunts finally relented, embraced me into their confidence and taught me everything they could remember, even to recite long verses that were pregnant with metaphors. They educated me on how to speak in riddles, camouflage patterns in designs, recognise flaws and hide meaning in the mundane.

Grand aunt Jelia schooled me in the subtle differences between the Paku and the Layar *kebat* (21) techniques and adopted me into her *bilik* (22) at Pelandok in the Paku where I stayed for two summers to understudy her. Grand aunt Lenguti immersed me in the deeper understanding of the refined Stambak style and spent years dictating long lines of genealogies, pantheon and family anecdotes from Stambak. I followed them into the forest to pick herbs and dig for roots. I helped stretch threads on the loom, and was reprimanded for not tying the *lemba* tight enough around the warp bundles. I saw how dyes changed colour in an instant with just a drop of chalk or lime added. They reminisced about the weaving rituals held on the *tanju* (23) of Stambak and the days when women from as far as the Krian (24) would come to Stambak to marvel at the works of great-grandmother Sendi and her mother Mengan, and buy designs from them (25).

A pua kumbu woven by grand aunt Jelia Ipa, circa 1939. Notice the white selvedges which can only be used by master weavers who have completed their first cycle of weaving. Pelandok, Saribas,

And I wrote down their stories. I also wrote down the techniques, measurements, calculations and dye recipes they passed on to me. I also had the good fortune to accompany Dr. Hanne Christensen, then a researcher in Borneo, to Nanga Sumpa, Batang Ai to study and compare their weaving tradition with that of the Saribas. To my surprise, the women at Nanga Sumpa were well acquainted with the names of Mengan and Sendi, and were very happy to host me, a direct descendant of these famous weavers.

Grand aunt Jelia taught me the single most important lesson every Iban weaver learns: the very act of weaving is a spiritual journey to be travelled with great care. Grand aunt Lenguti taught me the secret language of the *pua kumbu*: every motif, no matter how insignificant, tells a story. When grand aunt Lenguti passed away on the 13th of October, 1996, her *adat pemati* was *sigi alas* (26). Grand Jelia aunt passed away on the 22nd of December 2000, and her *adat pemati* was also *sigi alas*.

Left: Grand aunt Lenguti Langi, admiring her final *pua kumbu*, woven in 1949. Notice the white selvedges which can only be used by master weavers who have completed their first cycle of weaving. Miri, 1990.

Below: Grand aunt Lenguti and I, surrounded by her *pua kumbu*. Miri, 1990.

In 1992, Director of the National Art Gallery of Malaysia, Puan Wairah Marzuki, invited me to give a talk on Iban textiles at an exhibition of the Gallery in Kuala Lumpur. In 1993, I was invited by Dr. Hanne Christensen (27) to give a series of talks on Saribas Iban textiles at the University of Aahus and the University of Copenhagen, respectively. This was made possible by a grant from DANIDA which funded Dr. Christensen's research. In 1994, I contributed a chapter on Iban textiles, *Sacred Blanket of the Iban of Sarawak*, in Dato' Haji Sulaiman Othman's *The Crafts of Malaysia*, (pp. 151-59, Singapore: Editions Didier Millet.)

And then in 1995, I moved from Borneo to Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, to climb the corporate ladder and pursue a career in the fast and furious lanes of the 21st century. In 2000, I started my own business in the music industry and allowed my research on Iban ritual textiles to take a back-seat. It was all very well living in the city until last year when another epiphany took place; this time more personal and arresting in nature.

After 15 years in the bustling metropolis of Kuala Lumpur as an executive producer in the Malaysian music industry, the voices of my forefathers and foremothers began to call to me again, and in January 2010, I finally re-located back to Borneo, and returned home to Stambak. Retired from the ultra-modern and profit-driven corporate world, I have resumed the research of my legacy.

My seminal essay on Saribas ritual textiles from the indigenous Iban perspective, *Restoring Panggau Libau: A Reassessment of Engkeramba in Saribas Iban Ritual Textiles*, was recently published in the Borneo Research Bulletin Volume 40, 2009. There is still much to research and record. Although I never sat at the foot of great-grandmother Sendi to inherit her secrets first-hand, her voice spoke compellingly through my grand aunts, reverberating through the ages within the stories they told. It is now my duty to tell these stories to the next generation, preserve them permanently and share them with the world.

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Footnotes

(1) Orang Kaya Pemancha Dana Bayang X **Mengan Tuai** (f) = Orang Kaya Aji Pangeran Bunsu X **Dimah** (f) = **Mindu** (f) X Panglima Budin Gerasi = **Mengan** (f) X Tuai Ketit = **Sendi** (f) X Gelau = Inja (f) X Ivory Kedit = Albert Rumpang X Mary Magdalene (f) = The author. (f) indicates the female gender and bold indicates a grandmaster weaver.

(2) A tributary of the Saribas.

(3) Michael Heppell, personal communication.

(4) Pringle 1970:56

(5) Pringle 1970:72-74

(6) Journal entry, 12th December 1845, in *Mundy, Borneo and Celebes*, II 78

(7) "Saji [Anglicised version of Aji's name] gallantly attacked, and met the fate he so richly deserved. "Saji's name and acts have been in my ears for years past," wrote the Tuan Muda [Charles Brooke, the nephew of James Brooke, who was to succeed his uncle as the Second Rajah]. "Many a bloody deed had been perpetrated, and he always had boasted that the White Men's powder and

shot would take no effect on his body." So fell one of the most cruel and treacherous head-hunters of those days." Baring-Gould & Bampfylde 1909:180

(8) Part of the Saribas riverine system.

(9) Pringle 1970:108

(10) Cramb 2007:178

(11) Cramb 2007:183

(12) Cramb 2007:184

(13) Pringle 1970:57

(14) Family oral history recounts how Mindu Orang Kaya Aji, on her death-bed, had commanded her eldest daughter Mengan Budin Gerasi to *muntas* (operate) her middle finger to remove the charms in the form of stones embedded in her flesh which *Indu Dara Insin Temaga* had given her, and to keep them within the family as 'inheritance'.

(15) Secluded child who lives in a *meligai* (beautiful apartment) in the *sadau* (attic or upper room), often the eldest daughter of a chief, and attended by slaves taken in wars and their descendants. An *anak umbong's* feet are not allowed to touch the ground and she does not leave her *meligai* until the day of her marriage.

(16) Michael Heppell 2005:93.

(17) These *pua kumbu* are the heirlooms of the family, currently held in keeping by the author's father (*tuai bilik* or elder of the family room). Information about the textiles was transmitted from Sendi herself to her daughter Inja who then transmitted the information to her children. Sendi had also spoken of her textiles individually with her grandchildren, explaining in detail to each one of them the significance and ritual meaning of their 'inherited' property of *pua kumbu* respectively. The author further interviewed other female relatives who were also master weavers and contemporaries and students of Sendi – Jelia Ipa (sister to Ivory Kedit who married Sendi's daughter Inja) and Lenguti Langi (Sendi's niece who was later adopted by Langi, brother to Sendi's mother) to verify the oral information which is now being documented for future generations of the family of Budin Gerasi.

(18) The highest rank for a woman within the Saribas prestige system where men and women are accorded ranks at their deaths, based on the two-fold requisites of accomplishments and ancestry.

(19) *Sigi alas ngerang* is the unit equivalent that indicates that the person was a master weaver who knew the secrets of the *takar* and *gaar* rituals. Families descended from Budin Gerasi adhere to '*adat Unggang Lebor Menoa*' which is a unique prestige system that differentiates them from other families of the Saribas.

(20) Posthumous honour is given to all Saribas Iban on the final night of the wake before burial.

(21) The Iban word for ikat.

(22) A room of a family unit in the longhouse.

(23) Open verandah of a longhouse.

(24) A whole day's worth of paddle by sampan.

(25) Original designs are 'patented' by the weaver and can be 'licensed' through ritual means.

(26) The unit equivalent that indicates that the person was a master weaver.

(27) Author of *Ethnobotany of the Iban & the Kelabit*, a joint publication of Forest Department Sarawak, NEPCon, Denmark and University of Aahus, Denmark, 2002.

Meandering along the Silk Road

Last autumn OATG member Susannah Reece joined a ten-week course on Asian Textiles, organised by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Here are her impressions.

An offer to journey along the Silk Road should always be accepted, in my opinion, even if it's a virtual one: the chance to attend the V&A's short course on Asian Textiles was not to be missed. Despite an awesomely busy Autumn work schedule I headed down to London every Tuesday for ten weeks between October and December 2009. It became a matter of pride to get to each of the sessions and I felt a real sense of personal achievement at having succeeded.

Over the course we travelled along the Silk Road from Turkey and Central Asia to South-East Asia and Japan via the vehicle of guest lecturers and the V& A's textile collections. Although there was sometimes a bit more of the former than the latter, it was a fascinating opportunity to learn more about the history, origins and production techniques of these wonderful textiles.

Week by week the course meandered through the countries of the old silk route, moving around to fit in no doubt with others' equally busy schedules. To keep a sense of the overall geography I will concentrate on India in this first of three articles, turning next time to Turkey, Iran, and Central Asia and finally to China, Japan and South-East Asia.

The course began with an introduction to the context and background for the V&A's then current Maharajas' exhibition. Indian textiles form the cornerstone of the V&A's collection, with particular strength in the mid-nineteenth century, especially the 1840s to 1870s. The Maharajas were a political force in India for over two centuries, from 1707 to the achievement of independence in 1947.

Sometimes seen as a decadent and opulent elite, the desirable objects on show in the exhibition were discussed in their context, unpacking the stereotype and showing the contradictions of Royal Spectacle, Kingship, Shifting Power, the Raj and Princely India. The wealth of the maharajas was used both to build up their political power and to improve the quality of life for their poorer subjects.

Public aspects of Kingship were demonstrated through Power, Splendour and Display and textiles were used in this context: as ceremonial cloths and banner hangings, for example in the Canopy of a Durbar procession, and as clothes. There are insights too into the lives of well-to-do "enclosed" women – the hangings of a palanquin, for instance, or other objects of material culture such as a set of dumbbells!

Behind the opulence of the objects owned by the Princes in the 1920s and 1930s – a Louis Vuitton travelling case and a Cartier necklace, for example – were political intrigues on all sides. Even a 1927 Rolls Royce Phantom has to be seen in the context of a non-British import ban. The Maharaja of the State of Mewar had a fleet of these cars, which were seen as "the ultimate symbols of modernity and indicators of status" and such patronage was key to the success of firms like Rolls Royce.

In the Indian Study Room Rosemary Crill showed us some of the items not chosen for display in the full exhibition. Furnishings included a circular Hookah mat with a matching cover for the pipe, constructed of fine red glass and beetle wing. A blue and gold mat had very heavy gold thread and glass bead embroidery. A nineteenth century saddle mat and matching floor mat also had heavy gold embroidery and silk and cotton made with a satin weave. Among the clothes, a silver sari and cotton wrap with gold silk were used for royal wear, as was a silk wrap-around from

Gujarat. Children's clothes included blue and red Ikat trousers and a cape with a hood made of woven cotton with gold tassels. A long coat from Lucknow had elaborate embroidery with gold-wrapped thread. Another, simpler cotton coat had an appliquéd back and a high sheen, which was achieved by a tight weave and then bashing the cloth with mallets.

A woollen Kashmiri coat was in the Central Asian "dressing-gown" style and had stylised rather than human decorative figures. This is illustrative of the movement of styles and influences along the 'Silk Road', in reality a plethora of overland routes between Asia, Africa, the Gulf and Europe.

For two sessions Eiluned Edwards spoke engagingly about the trade in Indian textiles: the global trade in Indian textiles from antiquity to the eighteenth century and the local trade in textiles from Western India during the twentieth century and mostly from independence (1947) onwards.

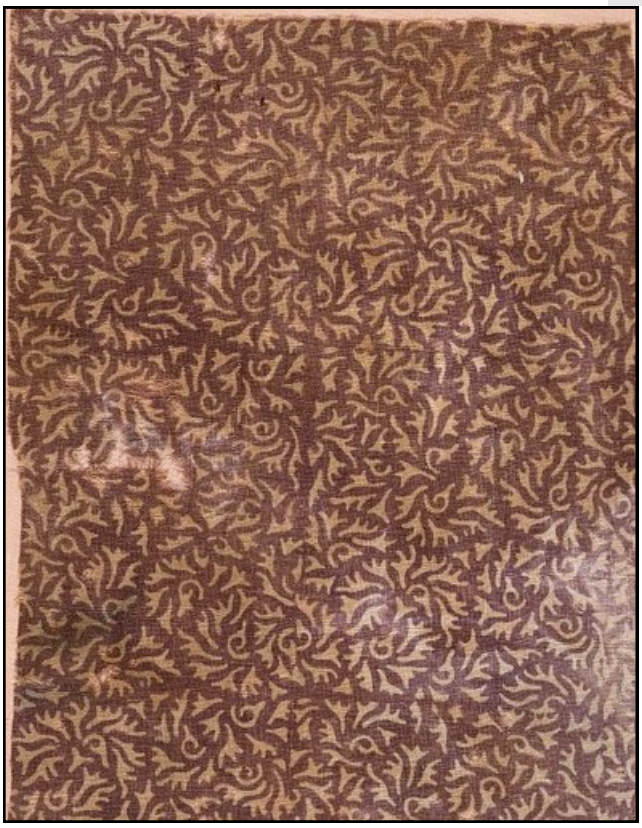
Between 2500 and 1750 BCE the Indus Valley (covering Rajasthan, Gujarat, Punjab and Sind) was the first urban sub-culture in the sub-continent. These were sophisticated, organised urban settlements that were part of a coastal trade route. Persian Gulf seals reveal a maritime trade with West Asia and show that the "Silk Route" was not only about overland travel.

Textile traditions date back even further: an impression of woven fabric was found in a grave site in Baluchistan going back to 3500 BCE. Cotton is indigenous to the area and needles, spindles and cotton-dyed madder have been found at Mohenjo-daro in Sind, giving evidence of developed techniques such as mordant dyeing. A male statue of a deity or priest c. 2000 BCE is draped in a cloth with a trefoil pattern that is still in modern use.

Fragments of resist-dyed, block printed cotton Indian textiles have been found in Egypt at sites in Fustat and Quseiral-Qadim and dating from the first century and there is evidence of a maritime trade in Indian textiles from Cairo to Sulawesi between the 9th and 17th centuries. Ruth Barnes, founder of the Oxford Asian Textile Group, is of course famous for her work on the Fustat fragments, which have been shown to have a Western Indian provenance.

In South-East Asia there is also evidence of Indian merchants from the first century. John Guy, author of Woven Cargoes (see Bibliography) argues that the main reason for the spread of Islam there is Indian converts who traded there in the Middle Ages. Indonesian spices, such as nut-

This cloth was produced in Gujarat, western India, but was collected in the Toraja area of central Sulawesi. Here, cloths like this one served as banner hangings and stage-set backdrops for ceremonies, especially harvest festivals and celebrations of rites of passage. (V&A Museum)



Textile Fragment. Block printed resist and mordant dyed cotton, Gujarat, Western India found at Fustat (Old Cairo) Egypt, possibly 14th century. (V&A Museum)

meg, mace and cloves (the latterly highly sought after and often a motif in textiles) were traded for textiles. A double Ikat patolu has been found in Central Java and there are ceremonial cloths from Toraja, central Sulawesi that have large similarities with Egyptian textiles found at Fustat.

With the arrival of the East India Company India became a vast exporter to Europe. The English East India Company was in Surat from 1608. Spices were the first draw and Europeans (first the Portuguese, then the English and then the Dutch) brought textiles to trade for them. Then came the Indian cotton boom between the 1660s and 1680s.

Embroideries and plain cloths in red and blue from Gujarat, and painted cottons (chintz) from the Coromandel coast were traded overland across the Deccan. Chintz in particular were used for co-ordinated hangings and bed-coverings: the V&A has both the Ashburnham set and the Garrick bed.

Indian cottons were brighter and easier to launder than English woollens and linens. The use of calico, another term for these cottons, marked the move into fashion from furnishings. Complex mordant-dyeing techniques were used with vegetable dyes. Originally local designs were used but later on European samples were sent leading to a variety of fusion techniques. An example is the techniques used to make Kalamkari, or temple-cloths, where dyes are painted onto cloth after a freehand-drawn design. Trade embroideries were made by professional men in Gujarat using chain stitch techniques and a hybrid cultural style developed.

With the introduction of mechanised cotton mills in the 1860s, Gujarat province became known as the "Manchester of the East" but was then flooded by cheap Lancashire cotton until Gandhi's campaign in the 1920s. Gujarat has been a global centre for textiles since the 1950s, however with an emphasis on synthetics, such as polyester. This has been influential on the fashion and furnishings industry in India, through two companies in particular: Garden Vareli and Harmony Furnishings.

However, there is a much older tradition of hand-made textiles in the area, particularly in dyeing and printing. Here there are strong cultural ties between Gujarat, Rajasthan and Sind, although these have been eroded with the creation of artificial boundaries following independence and effectively severed since the 1960s.

A dyeing tradition had flourished in the Indus valley between 2500 and 1500 BCE. Textiles

A large painted cotton (kalamkari) cloth designed for hanging in Hindu temples during religious festivals. This cloth depicts the Subrahmanya temple at Tirupparankunram, Madurai. This is denoted by the temple gate-tower (gopura) in the lower register, flanked by a temple car (ratha), awaiting decoration in the next annual temple festival. These cloths are both decorative and instructional, recounting great events from the epic literature of Hinduism for the benefit of the devotees who would have an opportunity to enjoy and study them whilst waiting for their turn to see the icon of the god ('take darshana') in the temple sanctuary. (V&A Museum)

were printed with engraved wooden blocks with Ahmedabad and Kachchh (Kutch) the main centres for block-printing. A tie-dye tradition also developed in Gujarat with a centre in Kachchh. The techniques were used for caste dress production, with block-printed turbans and heavy woollen shawls for men and coarse, heavy woollen skirts for women. Small repeat patterns in block-printing were used as skirts by cattle herders. Darker colours were used by older, mostly Muslim, communities.

V&A number Circ. 817-1912 is an extremely finely worked twentieth century dress made by a Muslim woman from Kachchh. The embroidered front panel was worked on a piece of tie-dyed silk of a pattern different from the main part of the dress, and sewn on after the dress had been made up. Lengths of silk satin were also made for bridal tunics, with hand-embroidery.

Tie-dyed woollen cloths were made from coarse local wool and embellished with moon-mirror work. Cord was dipped in soot to mark lines and the fabric bitten to get a good tie. Geometric patterns were used for both veil cloths and everyday use and there were caste rules about woollen veil cloths and when they had to be worn as they are a traditional symbol of purity.

In the 1970s the State Development Corporation employed designers to modernise styles and compete with the predominance of synthetic fabrics. Today, the hand-made tradition has been preserved, with increasing use of natural dyes which had fallen into disuse.

Indigo and madder are both used although local cultivation has declined and indigo is imported from South India and madder from Kolkata. Local yellow dyes are also used: onion, turmeric and pomegranate. There is a 10 to 14 stage process, with up to 16 stages to produce green. A resist made of lime and gum arabic is used, with an alum mordant mixed with millet flour into a

paste for red areas. Both silk and cotton fabrics are produced and sun-drying is used to develop colour. More complex designs are made using Ajrakh, a block-printed cotton textile traditionally dyed with indigo and madder.

This is made in three provinces: Kachchh in Gujarat, Jaisalmer and Barmer in Rajasthan and Sind in Pakistan. There are subtle distinctions between the various communities. These are highly prestigious and expensive textiles, resist-dyed and block-printed on both sides.

These hand-made techniques give high status to the practitioners, although there are issues of effluent from the textile industry and its effects on people using the river in Ahmedabad. The fashion house Garden Vareli has sponsored TAPI, a collection of Textiles and Art of the People of India, with the aim of housing a collection permanently in Mumbai.

An exhibition was mounted in 2005. Hand-produced textiles have now attracted international attention and this has led to changes in production, for example yardages instead of pieces and different colours such as yellow and green. Green ajrakh has been developed by one family in Kachchh; this involves over-dyeing the standard ajrakh with yellow to produce a rich green hue. Young Indian designers have worked with artisans to preserve these handcraft industries, creating employment for local women; although dyeing and printing are male dominated, embroidery is mostly female.

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This German postcard from around 1918 shows a Central Asian woman wearing what looks like a *paranja* and an old man—possibly Tajik—wearing a padded *chapan*.

A grand welcome to the Ashmolean textile gallery

...and a farewell to our former chairman, Dr Ruth Barnes

Visit to the Textiles Gallery at the Asmolean Museum, 9 December 2009.

Living only 20 odd miles from Oxford, I ought to be better acquainted with the Ashmolean Museum. But so often one's visits are short because they tie in with other events or one just gravitates to one's favourites like the Renaissance paintings or the treasures collected by the Tradescants. Until Ruth Barnes came to buy some of my Indian clothes I was unaware of the textiles in the museum which I remember as being somewhere in the far and high parts of the museum and more of a study area than an exhibition area.

So it is exciting to be able to start from the café into an area that gives an introduction to the making and embellishing of textiles shown with some wonderful world-wide examples. As one climbs the far staircase into the Asian crossroads one sees further examples dating from the earliest times shown alongside pottery, glass and carving of the period but which is still to be found in the same regions today.

When Ruth first came to me she bought a dress made of a hand-blocked and vegetable-dyed cotton from Gujerat in India and she was later able to show me in the museum textile fragments of a similar pattern that had reached Egypt and Indonesia and been carbon dated to the 12th century. In Newsletter 25 there is an article about the Khatris family with whom I deal. Ruth met with one of the family at a conference in Hyderabad when she was wearing one of their *ajrak* print*s*. It is the continuity of such crafts that is so fascinating,

Past, present and future members of the Oxford Asian Textile Group owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to our founder, Ruth Barnes. Through the group we have learnt, enjoyed and shared so much about textiles particularly in their social context. Her enthusiasm and willingness to give us insights into some of the treasures in the Ashmolean, and her wisdom, research skills and invaluable connections have, over the years, contributed immensely to the success and growth of the group. In Issue 39 (Feb 2008) Ruth outlined her plans for the new Textiles gallery at the

Dr Ruth Barnes in the new gallery receiving a farewell gift from members of the OATG

Ashmolean Museum—now brought to fruition. In the major task of the installation of three galleries featuring textiles, Ruth was greatly helped by Aimée Payton OATG's Chairman. In Issue 43 (June 2009) Ruth wrote about her new post at the Yale University Art Gallery.

As a small token of our gratitude she was presented at this meeting, in her 'own' gallery, with Bodleian-bound copies of all 44 issues of the newsletter, recently renamed *Asian Textiles*. Shipping constraints had forced an early gift to Ruth but Felicity Wood had cleverly constructed a facsimile parcel containing photos of the two volumes, and Ruth opened the present gamely expressing her surprise and genuine delight in the gift.

We all wish Ruth well in her new challenge but we are sure she will return to visit from time to time. Meanwhile *Asian Textiles* and the website are developing fast and our programme of visits continues to interest and stimulate members. **Denny Andrews**

Researching Stories and Dance in Bali

OATG meeting, 10 February 2010. Guest speaker: Dr Fiona Kerlogue, Deputy Keeper of Anthropology at the Horniman Museum.

Dr Kerlogue began with some facts about the Horniman Museum. Frederick Horniman, a tea merchant, started collecting in the 1860s. He built his museum in South London and gave it to the people of London in 1901. Its aim was to encourage Londoners to understand and appreciate our world and the peoples in it. The collections include anthropology, Natural History and Musical Instruments.

Of particular interest is the collection of black and white photographs and some film taken by Beryl de Zoete and Walter Spies in Bali in the 1930s. The photographs were for their seminal book *Dance and Drama in Bali*, published in 1938 and now available in paperback. The photographs came to the museum on her death in the 1960s.

Dr Kerlogue first explained how Professor Mark Hobart of SOAS brought a visiting Balinese dance professor, I Wayan Dibia, to the museum, who, seeing an early Balinese photo, recognised his father dancing in it.

All this led to the proposal that an exhibition be mounted of Balinese stories and dance and associated artefacts. This is now planned to open in March 2011 for nine months. There will be demonstrations, workshops and food. A gamelan orchestra is being sought.

The first part of the talk involved screening a selection of the 1930s photos, most of dances in progress. Dr Kerlogue then showed some colour photos she had taken during fieldwork in preparation for the exhibition. These included a procession of masks from a well where they had been blessed; a very talented young boy dancing the *baris*; a life-size bull effigy, used as a coffin in Balinese cremations (an example has been obtained for the exhibition); a *topeng* masked dancer offering blessings; a gamelan orchestra; two mask makers (the museum has commissioned masks from both); an amazing tall headdress in gold; a double ikat skirt cloth, part of one of the costumes which will be on display; *baris* dancers with floor strewn with offerings (again, a costume was obtained from one of the dancers).

Dr Kerlogue described other items already in the museum's collections which are being researched for the exhibition, including a ceremonial axe from the 1920s, several paintings, including one depicting scenes of the underworld; paintings in black and white from Batuan village; a very long temple banner showing scenes from the Ramayana. There will also be some unusual Balinese embroideries at the exhibition.

In my opinion this was a complex, but fascinating insight into another culture. Old Fred Horniman would be pleased that his intentions are being so well carried out.

John Sharp

The Newberry Collection of Eastern and Middle Eastern Embroideries

OATG meeting, 10 March 2010. Guest speaker: Francis Pritchard, Curator of Textiles, The Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester.

Opened in 1889 and named after its industrialist and philanthropist founder, the museum was originally the Whitworth Institute. It was the first gallery in a garden in the UK. Its purpose was to inspire the local textile designers, its declared objective was "to secure a source of perpetual gratification for the people of Manchester".

Textiles were at the heart of Manchester life, so many of the 50,000 objects in the collections relate to works on paper and textiles including many contemporary works. In 1958 stewardship of the gallery passed to Manchester University and soon after the gallery spaces were redesigned in open plan style influenced by Scandinavian Modernist ideas.

Percy Newberry was born in Islington in 1869. He was a botanist and artist. He joined the Egyptian Exploration Fund and over his career became a noted Egyptologist, holding chairs at both Liverpool and Cairo Universities. He was also a Fellow of Kings, London. He was a friend of Petrie and part of the team that worked on the tomb of Tutankhamun.

His wife Essie was a prominent member of the Embroiderers' Guild and wrote for its journal. In Egypt she was charged with the responsibility of repairing the damaged linen pall found in Tutankhamun's tomb. It was patterned with gilded bronze marguerites.

Frances Pritchard was revisiting OATG and some present remembered her previous talk. This time she gave us a 'Powerpoint' presentation of images of items chosen from the collection, including black and white 1925 photographs of Professor Newberry and his wife.

A map of Morocco was shown locating the various urban centres where strong local styles are evident. One slide was reproduced from a Paris 2003 French book on Moroccan embroidery by Isabelle Denamur showing girls, possibly as young as 7 or 8 learning the craft. The instructor was paid by the amount of yarn used, so the work is very close and dense.

An old photograph from Fez, Morocco, shows an interior with columns, arches and tiles and next to it an embroidery using the same strong geometric patterning on heavy cotton, dark blue blanket stitch, double-sided. Another photo was of a wedding party in Chechaouen, Morocco in about 1900. The interior shot shows very long wall hangings in use, stretched over and dividing the arches. The same wall hangings are illustrated in close-up.

The slides showed us 28 examples of flat embroideries ie not items of clothing. The Whitworth has a website and a few of these pieces are illustrated there, but not all in one place. You will have to search for Newberry or Morocco, etc.

Over 2,000 pieces were also left to the Ashmolean by Newberry, many of which are fragments. Some of them are on the Ashmolean website. My own opinion is that if technique and materials interest you, the Oxford fragments are informative; but if you want to see artefacts in vibrant colours, then go to Manchester.

Questions from the floor led to a discussion of mirror veils (*tensifa*). Were they for modesty, to shield the bride or for security? Or perhaps the old idea of the soul being stolen was still prevalent. **John Sharp**

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Contributions should be emailed or sent to the Editor

The Wardles— a great Victorian couple

Brenda M King, *Dye, Print, Stitch: Textiles by Thomas and Elizabeth Wardle*, 2009, ISBN 978-1-870926-00-3.

It is just over 100 years since Thomas Wardle (1831-1909) died and Brenda King's book about him and his wife Elizabeth is a fitting tribute. And what a remarkable couple they were. Thomas—besides being a dyer par excellence—was a designer, entrepreneur, educator, musician, composer, associate of the Arts and Crafts Movement, geologist and sportman. His wife became Superintendent of the prestigious Leek Embroidery Society.

Thomas had incredible energy, much of which was devoted to understanding the traditional dyes and silk-making of the Indian sub-continent. He helped to revive the dyeing techniques in England and was able to produce yarns in rich colours that did not fade. William Morris was a frequent visitor to his dyeworks in Leek, north Staffordshire. Later Wardle became the major supplier of dyed and printed silks to Liberty.

Dyed and printed Indian silks became a mainstay for both businesses and attracted a great deal of public attention. A series of 'Mysore Silks', for example, were produced for Liberty's Art Fabrics range. Hand-woven in India, the soft silks were hand-block printed in Leek. Patterns had names evocative of India and the Far East and many of them show Indian influences, such as Moultan May Flower—a complex pattern that required four wood blocks to print. Other patterns were based on originals from Persia and Central Asia.

One pattern, known as both *Bengal* and *Indian Diaper*, was probably printed off original Indian woodblocks which were obtained by Dr Forbes Watson of the Indian Museum. Copies survive in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Brenda King makes the point that some English ecclesiastical furnishings—such as altar frontals, vestments and pulpit falls—were covered in textiles inspired by patterns that originated in India.

This book contains a huge amount of information about a man and wife who represent the archetypal Victorian business couple. Industrious, inventive, liberal-minded and inspired. Quite a combination.

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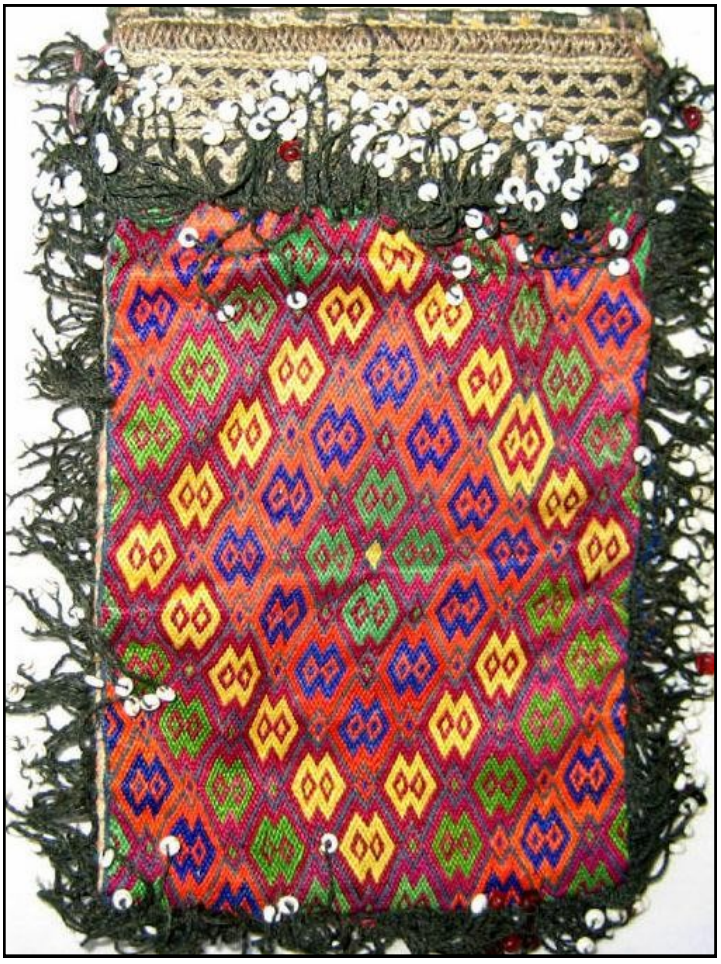

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