OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

Newsletter No. 35 **October 2006**

Sri Lankan lacemaker at work in March 2006; see p. 9 (Photo, Emily Castelli Burns)

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

All being well, I shall be in Fez on October 25, and so once again I have to apologise for my absence from the A.G.M., which marks the beginning of my twelfth year as editor of this newsletter. When I started, I asked that the editorship should be exempt from the rule in the Constitution that officers should be replaced or re-elected after three years. I did this not because I was desperate to hang on to the job, but previous experience had shown that an editor builds up a network of contacts vital to the success of a publication, and a rapport with press officers, publishers, programme makers and others that is damaged by frequent upheaval. On the other hand I have known editors cling to the office for as much as a quarter of a century, long past their sell-by date, so I said that I thought ten years was about right. When I moved to Southbourne three years ago I offered to resign, but was so flattered by the look of dismay on people's faces that I agreed to continue.

Now, however, I feel that twelve is enough and, although I still enjoy doing it, I have told your committee that I think this should be my last year. Nevertheless, I am not giving you warning to bring up some new names to be voted on at the next A.G.M. and myself bow out abruptly. The committee thinks, and I agree with them, that the handover should be a more gradual business and so they are asking for suggestions and/or volunteers to work with me over the next year or if necessary a few months longer and then take over the full responsibility for the job.

Another point affecting the newsletter will be raised at the A.G.M., and that is the effect that the latest changes by the Royal Mail will have on it. Those of you who live in this country (and we have a number of overseas members) will be aware that A4 envelopes will in future be charged at a higher rate of postage than smaller ones. What this probably means for us is that we shall have to consider either reducing the size of the newsletter or increasing the size of the subscription. As more than half of our members do not live near enough to Oxford to come to more than the occasional meeting, if that, the newsletter is all that they get for their membership, so this is an important issue for them as well as for the rest of you. I hope as many of you as possible will go to the A.G.M. to discuss these issues, and if you cannot, please send Ruth your views – her address is on the last page.

PROGRAMME

Wednesday 25 October
AGM at 5.45pm followed at 6.15 pm by a talk by Susan Conway

THE SHAN OF BURMA: TEXTILES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Susan is a Research Associate at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, and has worked extensively on Burmese textiles.

The Shan live in the valleys of north-east Burma, their culture being based on wetland rice cultivation, Thervada Buddhism and spirit religion. In the 19th century their distinct forms of court dress and textiles reflected political allegiance, religious practice and economic conditions.

* * *

Wednesday 6 December at 5.45 pm

EMBROIDERY IN AFGHANISTAN

by Sheila Paine

Recently published *Embroideries from Afghanistan* in the British Museum Fabric Folios Series. Just reprinted *The Afghan Amulet*

* * *

Saturday 16 December
Visit to the exhibition at the Willis Museum, Basingstoke

FARAWAY FESTIVAL COSTUMES

Traditional dress from South West China
(See June newsletter, no.34, p.30)

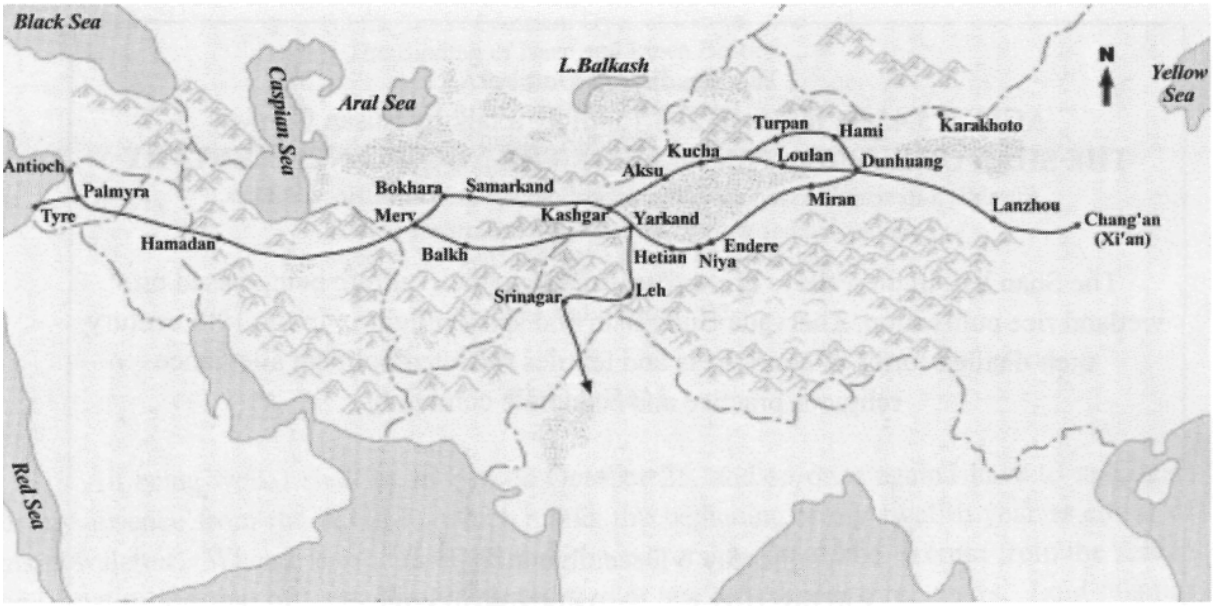
Meet at the museum at 10.30 am. Ruth Smith who is researching the textile techniques of Chinese minorities will give an introductory talk and then guide us round Gina Corrigan's fascinating collection.

* * *

Talks will be held at the Pauling Centre, 58 Banbury Road, Oxford
Refreshments from 5.15 pm. Visitors welcome (£2). No booking necessary.
Please book before 1 December for the outing to Basingstoke

For further information or to make bookings
contact one of the programme co-ordinators:

Rosemary Lee, tel. 012491 873276, e-mail: rosemary.lee@talk21.com
Fiona Sutcliffe, tel. 01491 872268 e-mail: J.V.Sutcliffe@talk21.com



Map showing the various branches of the so-called “Silk Road”

The Eastern Silk Road-China

The ancient Silk Road was a series of caravan trails stretching between Xi’an, in East Central China, to the Mediterranean Sea. It skirted the trackless Taklamakan Desert of China’s Xinjiang Province (formerly Chinese Turkestan), passed through the mountains of Central Asia (Uzbekistan and other “-stans”) and continued through modem day Iran, Iraq and Syria. A southern branch passed through Afghanistan to India. In the late 1980s Chinese archaeologists uncovered, at sites on the edges of the Taklamakan, a number of graves containing many remarkably well-preserved corpses, along with great quantities of equally well-preserved textiles buried on and with the decedents. Much of what was found at those sites has been described in detail by members of a Western expedition who studied there in the early 1990s[1,2]. Despite their age – up to 3000 years – some of the textiles looked as if they had just been woven. They also exhibited a great variety of often intricate weaves; there were even some plaids. A large amount of physical evidence suggested that the persons buried at these sites were of Central Asian origin, as are the majority of the current inhabitants of that region, namely the Turkic-speaking Uighurs.

In the summer of 2004, along with my daughter Sarah, graduate student Xian Zhang, and nearly 50 other members of a Getty Conservation Institute sponsored tour to Xinjiang, I visited the Urumqi museum where many of the mummies and textiles are kept. Several months later, we obtained small samples of some of these textiles in order to analyse the dyes in them, with the aim of identifying the plants used to dye the yarns used to weave them. The specimens we were given came from Cherchen (modern Qiemo), which was on the southern branch of the Silk Road, below the Taklamakan.

In our laboratory in Boston, Xian Zhang and I have developed new, non-destructive procedures for extracting dyes from textile fibres and have been using a new type of instrumentation – HPLC-DAD-MS – to analyse the extracts. With this method, the dye :omponents are separated by high performance liquid chromatography (HPLC), and each :omponent is characterized in terms of its colour using a diode array detector (DAD) and nolecular mass using a mass spectrometer (MS). This sort of analysis produces a kind of 'fingerprint" that is reflective of the plant (or sometimes animal) that produced the dye. Our objective is to identify the plant used to dye the Xinjiang textiles – information that is of nterest to archaeologists and ethnologists and others studying ancient peoples. Our focus has jeen on yellow dyes, which are more numerous than other colours and which are particularly amenable to our analytical techniques.

Analysis of our small number of Xinjiang samples showed the presence of two yellows that likely came from two different plants. One of these looks like weld *(Reseda luteola)* which has been used as a yellow dyestuff in Europe and parts of the Middle East for centuries. One question is, "does (or did) weld grow in the Xinjiang region of China"? Consultation of botanical resources suggests that weld does not currently grow in Xinjiang Province, whether it grew there 3000 years ago is an unanswered question at this point. Another possibility is that dyes or dyestuffs were imported along the Silk Road from Central Asia, although it must be remembered that the Tarim basin peoples who wove these fabrics predated the Silk Road (as a major trading thoroughfare) by nearly 1000 years. On the other hand, it is likely that the Silk Road followed parts of even more ancient migration routes east from Central Asia.

A more general problem in identifying dyestuffs from the analysis of dyes in ancient textiles is that there is a lack of reference standards (i.e., plant standards) for comparison. For his reason, we have invested a significant amount of time in collecting plant reference materials. Unfortunately, we were unable to find a botanist who was familiar with the plants if Xinjiang and who could provide us with samples for analysis. Since we suspected that the Tarim Basin peoples came east, originally, from Central Asia, we suspected that some of their technology may also have come from the same region and reasoned that there might be plants currently growing in Central Asia that may be the same or similar to those to dye the Xinjiang textile. Therefore we decided to approach Xinjiang along the Silk Road – but from the western end. This journey took us (my daughter and I) from Turkey to Iran and eventually to Uzbekistan.

The Western Silk Road – Uzbekistan

Modern-day Uzbekistan contains several cities (Andijian, Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara) that lay along parts of the ancient Silk Road. Through the UNESCO's Heritage Central Asia, we met a botanist in Tashkent, only about 1000 miles from where our samples were obtained, who was familiar with most of the plants of Uzbekistan – in particular those which may have been used as dyestuffs in former times. He also was able to collect some 80 specimens for us. The Uzbeks had another reason for being interested in dye analysis.

Colour in Central Asia

At various times in many parts of the world, the use of coloured textiles was restricted to those who possessed wealth and power: for example, Tyrian purple for the rulers of Rome, yellow for the emperors of China, and scarlet[3] for the nobility and powerful of Europe. Often this was due to the expense of the dyes needed to produce the colour, but frequently colour was also a designator of class or status – perhaps to remind the lower classes of their place. This was less true in Central Asia, whose peoples have a long history of producing, for household use, highly decorated and brightly coloured textiles of all sorts – clothing, carpets, saddle cloths, cradle covers, etc. The objects made had utility, but because of the otherwise rather bleak surroundings, were highly decorated so as to bring colour and design into everyday life. This was particularly true for nomads who lived in tents and moved from place to place, as carpets and other textiles could be easily rolled up and transported. But it was also true for those settled in cities. Most of this work was – and still is, in some places – done by women, who generally stayed at home and could work on carpet weaving or embroidery when time permitted.

Of special significance were the elaborate embroidered cloths called *suzanis*[4]. The larger *suzanis* typically measure around 1.5 x 2.5 m and are used as fabric coverings or wall hangings. It was traditional for girls, at an early age, to begin assembling dowries consisting largely of embroidered textiles, which would be a measure of their skill and industriousness – and thus an indicator of their suitability for marriage. Because *suzanis*, like other textiles, were utilized in households, they eventually deteriorated; and for this reason, there are few extant *suzanis* more than about 200 years old. A *suzani* is generally made by embroidering a sheet of plain cotton (sometimes silk or linen) cloth with dyed silk threads. Silk produces a lustre that other natural fibres lack.

Until about 1860, all dyes throughout the world were derived from natural sources, usually plants, but sometimes insects. In 1857, William Perkin introduced to the world the first synthetic dye, mauve. By the end of the 19th century the coal tar industry had been born and hundreds of synthetic dyes were available. Not only were synthetics easier to use, but also they often could be obtained in a range of colours and brightness that was previously unavailable. Unfortunately some of them tended to degrade the textile fibres or were not very light-fast, but that did not decrease their popularity.

The area that was to become present-day Uzbekistan came under Tsarist Russian domination in about 1875, and, after the Bolshevik revolution, it became incorporated into the USSR. Beginning in the early 1920s, it was decreed that girls and women could be better employed than by embroidery, and dowry marriage was discouraged. As a result, the production of *suzanis* and related textiles fell into decline. By the time that Uzbekistan became an independent republic in 1991, its peoples had been under Russian/Soviet domination for over 100 years. During that time, the use of natural dyes had almost entirely died out. By 1991, not only had the knowledge of how to make natural dyes (i.e., which plants to use) been largely lost, but also the supplies of inexpensive synthetic dyes had been cut off. As a result, many contemporary dyers are trying to rediscover the materials and

methods their ancestors developed over centuries. Little of this knowledge was written down. As a result, our aims in examining Central Asian plant dyestuffs became twofold:

1. To try to identify plants (or their relatives) that may have been used to dye our Xinjiang textiles, and

2. To identify plant dyestuffs, but analysing old suzanis, that had been used by dyers in Central Asia to colour yarns and threads before the advent of synthetic dyes.

Our trip to Uzbekistan was made possible by Dr. Guy Petherbridge, Director of UNESCO's Heritage Central Asia, in Tashkent. His associate, Svetlana Osipova arranged for us not only to visit and obtain samples of *suzanis* and other objects at the Museums of Applied Arts in Tashkent and Samarkand, but also to visit botanist, Dr. Ivan Maltsev, who provided us with specimens of some 80 plants that grow in Uzbekistan and are thought to have been used for dyeing at one time or other.

Samarkand, whose origins date back nearly 2800 years, is one of the oldest cities in modern-day Uzbekistan. Afrasiab, whose ruins lie on the outskirts of Samarkand, was the principal city of the Zoroastrian Sogdians before the advent of Islam. In the middle ages, the warrior Tamerlane conquered and laid waste to most of Central Asia and surrounding territories, returning much of the wealth of these regions to his capital, Samarkand, where he was buried after his death in 1405.

Samarkand and surrounding areas have a long history of the production *of suzanis,* and it is thought that some of the design elements in them date back to Sogdian times – over 1000 years. Because Samarkand is a more traditional city, we thought we might have a good chance of finding some older examples there. The Museum of Applied Arts in Samarkand has a large collection of *suzanis* and other embroidered items, though most of these are in storage. We were, however, able to get access to a storage area in a rather decrepit Tsarist-era building across town from the main museum. Although our visit was short, we were shown some supposed mid-19th century *suzanis* and were able to remove loose threads on the back of some of them for analysis. Of particular interest for our project was finding, in the same storeroom, a book containing many samples of silk and wool yarns that had been dyed with natural dyestuffs. The book was the work of a Russian chemist-engineer and was dated May, 1941, which was just a month before the Germans invaded the USSR. We also obtained samples from the book. Subsequent analysis demonstrated that all of the specimens we collected had been dyed with plant dyes, except for some reds that were dyed with the insect, cochineal. None of these dyestuffs seemed to be unique to Uzbekistan, however.

Tashkent is currently the largest city in Uzbekistan and is its capital. Tashkent is not as old as Samarkand - only about 2000 years – but it was located at a strategic point on the Silk Road and developed more as a commercial centre. At the Museum of Applied Arts in Tashkent, we also obtained thread samples, in this case from a *suzani* hanging in the main gallery and from items in the museum shop. In contrast to the Samarkand samples, these

contained mostly synthetic dyes. Thus they must have been made in the latter half of the 19th century. These results showed two things: (1) they were not as old-e.g., pre-1850 – as advertised and (2) synthetic dyes were probably introduced into the region by the end of the 19th century. Since Tashkent and surrounding areas came under Tsarist domination in about 1875, it would not be surprising that synthetic dyes came shortly after – particularly since the synthetic dyes offered a much greater variety of colours.

Epilogue

Since returning to Boston, and having analysed dozens of plant extracts and dyed thread samples from Uzbekistan – as well as some plant material obtained later from Xinjiang, China, itself - we still cannot say with confidence which plant was used to dye the textiles from Cherchen - the yellows, at least. It seems likely that madder was used for reds, but madder was used in much of the world, so its presence is not very informative.

So far we have not discovered any plant dyestuffs unique to Uzbekistan, though it is clear that the natural dyes we detected in the few 19th century *suzanis* we examined are the same as those used commonly in Central Asia, the Middle East and neighbouring areas. However, we did discover some unique plant dyestuffs in fairly common use in Iran that perhaps could have been introduced into Uzbekistan.

Richard Laursen
Professor of Chemistry, Boston University

References

1 E.W. Barber, *The Mummies of Urumqi,* Norton, New York, 1999.

2 J.P. Mallory & V.H.Mair, *The Tarim Basin Mummies,* Thames & Hudson, London, 2000.

3 A.B. Greenfield, *A Perfect Red,* Harper Collins, New York, 2005

4 C. Surnner and G. Petherbridge, *Bright Flowers: Textiles and Ceramics of Centra! Asia,* Powerhouse Publishing, Sydney, 2004.

HAVE YOU REMEMBERED YOUR SUBSCRIPTION?

Members are reminded that subscriptions were due on or before 1 October. Rates remain at £10 for individuals and £15 for two or more people living at the same address and sharing a newsletter. For those **of you who have not yet renewed,this is the last** newsletter **you will receive.** If you want to continue to enjoy it and the other benefits of membership, contact the Membership Secretary:
Joyce Seaman, 5 Park Town, Oxford, OX2 6SN,
Tel. 01865 5585558 e-mail: e-art-asst@ashmus.ox.ac.uk

THE BINDING OF ISAAC AND LINEN BEATING: TEXTILE PROCESSES AS METAPHORS

Textile study using the Rabbinical literature as a vehicle

The study of textiles in the Land of Israel during the first three centuries C.E. must cull its prime resources from the Rabbinical literature which was compiled or redacted at that time. The *realia* of material culture cited in those works, provide a previously untapped and abundant source of textile information. This article will examine just one example.

The two major works referred to in this article are Mishna and Midrash. Mishna, in Judaism, is the codified collection of Oral Law, legal interpretations of portions of the biblical books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Together with the Gemara, or Amoraic commentary on the Mishna, it comprises the Talmud. In Judaism, this vast compilation of the Oral Law with rabbinical elucidations, elaborations, and commentaries, is the invaluable supplement to the Scriptures or Written Laws. Next to the Scriptures the Mishna is the basic textbook of Jewish life and thought, and is traditionally considered to be an integral part of the Torah revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Converse to the Mishna, Midrash (pl. Midrashim) is a Hebrew word referring to a method of exegesis of a Biblical text. The term "Midrash" also can refer to a compilation of Midrashic teachings, in the form of exegetical or homiletical commentaries on the Tanach (The Old Testament).

The Midrash usually explains Biblical text from the ethical and devotional point of view. Although the Mishna was redacted in the year 210 C.E., and various different Midrashim in the years up to 450 C.E., both contain material originating from earlier years. But, generally speaking, here we may obtain an accurate overview of life and its material culture in those times.

The Mishna consists of 4224 paragraphs, of which almost 40% mention textile related matters. Wool and linen are each cited about 50 times, and other fibres, 13 times. Dyestuffs, textile implements and procedures, various textile artisans, and a great variety of textile products are all well represented in the 691 citations found in the Mishna.

Flax and Linen

As we will be engaged in linen for this article, I would like to offer a quick refresher course and glossary of linen terms and processes.

The plant from which this fibre is derived is *Linum Usitatisimum.* From that Latin, the French language adopted *Lin.* As opposed to that, German uses *Flachs,* and Dutch *Vlas.* English inherited both terms and uses them to differentiate between stages of process. *Flax* – from the seed and plant up to pre-spinning. *Linen* – from thread or yarn up to fabric and end products. (And thanks to Hero Granger-Taylor for that insight)

It is also necessary to disambiguate because for many years now textiles for bed, bath and table use are all called "linens", despite the fact that there may very well be no *linum usitatisimum* in them at all. And recently, the hemp fad has produced the term "hemp linen" as opposed to "flax linen".

In Hebrew, the one word which we will deal with here (for the moment disregarding several synonyms and Aramaic sister words) is *Pishtan.* This means all stages of the substance from seed to fabric. *Pishtani* is a flax-worker or a linen-worker. We will attempt to differentiate between them later on.

The production process of our fibre involves nine stages:

1. Pulling – the entire plant is pulled out of the ground, in order to obtain the maximum length fibre, as these bast fibres run the entire length of the stalk.

2. Rippling – combing out the seed pods in order to use them both for replanting and for linseed oil production.

3. Retting – fermenting the stalks either in water (river or pool) or by dew in the field, in order to decompose the pectin which glues the fibres together and is an obstacle to further processing.

4. Braking – crushing the stalks to release the fibres. The waste material bark, or "shives", will be used for fuel or chipboard.

5. Scutching – the first of several rubbing motion procedures which separate additional shives and short inferior fibres ("tow") from the long high quality ones ("line").

6. Hackling – running the fibres through a series of combs becoming finer and denser each time.

7. Spinning (and plying) – high quality "line" is wet spun and plied, whereas "tow" is usually dry spun. The machinery used today for spinning line is specially designed to accommodate the very long (80 cm.) fibres. Wet-spinning makes a significant contribution to the linen yarn's strength and appearance.

8. Weaving – at relatively high humidity, or knitting or braiding.

9. Beetling – a post loom finishing process, such as calendaring. Pounding the fabric in order to make the fibres closer, to make the fabric smoother and give sheen. Not always practised today. We will elaborate on this later.

The Binding of Isaac

Presently we will meet and analyse a Midrash (homiletical commentary on the Bible) which uses textile metaphors to convey its theological message. But first, to refresh our memories, a glance at the Biblical passage upon which we will dwell. The following is the Revised Standard Version of the English translation to the Bible, Genesis, chapter 22:

1: After these things God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I."

2: He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Mori'ah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

3: So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; and he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.
4: On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off.
5: Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the ass; I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you."
6: And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together.
7: And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"
8: Abraham said, "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.
9: When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.
10: Then Abraham put forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.
11: But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I."
12: He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."
13: And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.
14: So Abraham called the name of that place The LORD will provide; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."
15: And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven,
16: and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son,
17: I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies,
18: and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice."
19: So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beer-sheba.

The textile metaphor and the theological question

Our Midrash (Beresheit Rabba, chapter 55b) opens with a verse from Psalms, chapter 11, in order to illuminate and focus on the specific idea in the verse of our chapter – with which it will deal with: (King James' Translation)

5: The LORD trieth (Standard Translation – "tests") the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth.

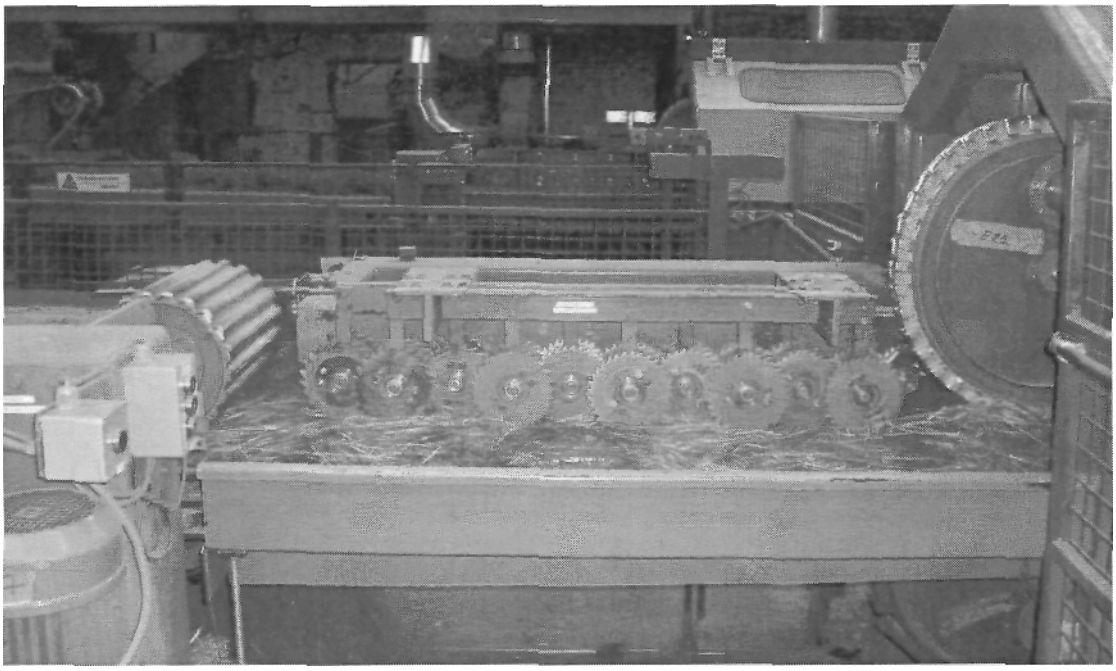
Flax braking, Flanders, 1515, from *Les Heures de la Vierge*[1]

Immediately following, the Midrash presents three different metaphors, each authored by a different sage - and each expressing an unique viewpoint on the issue.

The first metaphor is a potter striking his potware. The second a *Pishtani* (flax worker ? linen worker ?) beating his *pishtan* (flax ? linen ?) The third and last metaphor is a farmer placing a yoke on one of his three cows. We, of course, are interested in the *Pishtani.*

The theological question which concerns the sages is "Why did God test Abraham, for what reason or purpose ?". In order properly to understand an answer to that question, we must, using textile realia, carefully scrutinise and decipher the metaphor, and only afterwards address the sage's answer which is intended to be a message in a devotional point of view.

"Said Rabbi Yossi ben (son of) H_anina: This *Pishtani* when he knows that his *pishtan* is good, the more he beats it, the more it will become more enhanced and (this is a difficult word to define) oilier (?) fatter (?); but when his *pishtan* is bad, he doesn't strike it more than once and it breaks apart. Thus, The Holy One Blessed be He (God) does not test the wicked, but rather the righteous, as it is said: The LORD trieth (Standard Translation – "tests") the righteous.

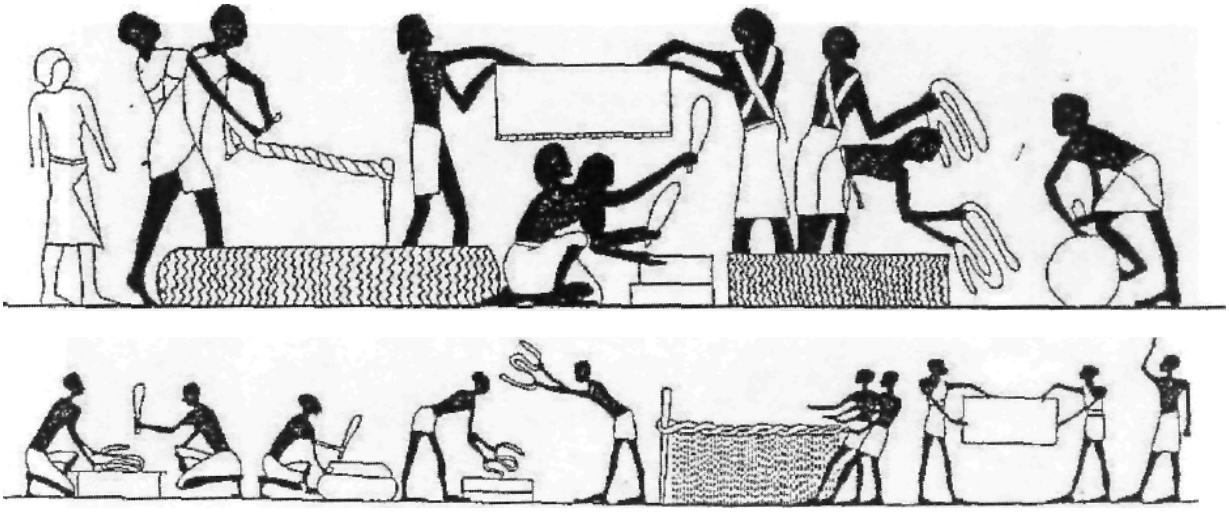


Modern flax-braking by machine, Albert Brille, N.V., Wewelgem, Belgium.

Linen beating - Flax beetling

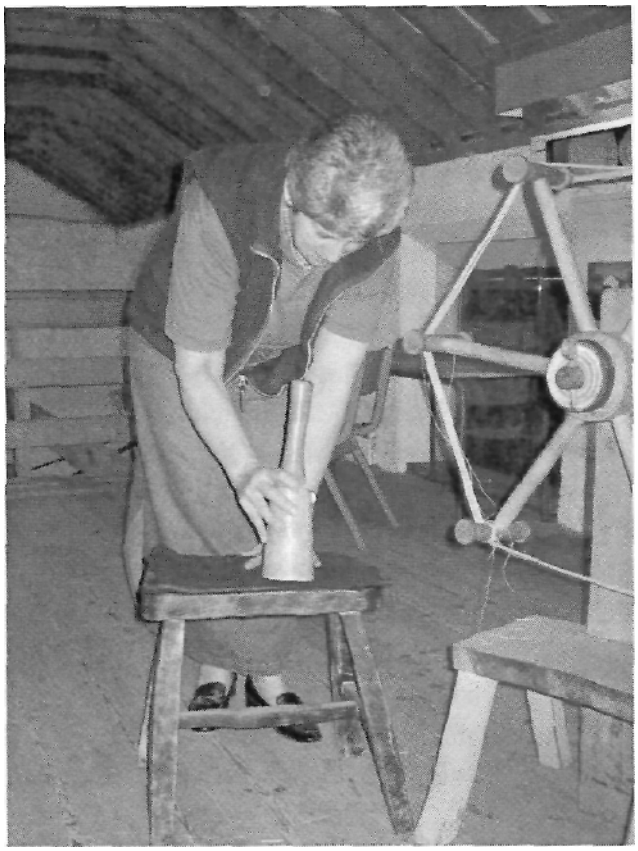
First of all, let us become acquainted with Rabbi Yossi ben H_anina, the sage who is author of our Midrash. Rabbi Yossi was a disciple of Rabbi Yoh_anan – the central Rabbinic figure in the Land of Israel during the years 250-279 C.E. Based in Tiberias, Rabbi Yoh_anan was intimately familiar with the famous linen of Beth Shean (later Scythopolis) – only 38 km. away, and an enthusiastic proponent of its quality 2. Rabbi Yossi dwelled in Tiberias at least until 260 C.E., when he moved to Caesaria, 85 km. west. During his stay in Tiberias, it would be safe to assume that he became acquainted with the flax and linen industry centred in nearby Beth Shean. There, he gained his familiarity with the various stages of flax-linen processing, and met many a *Pishtani.* It would only be natural for him to use a textile metaphor for his theological thinking. And, we are narrowing down our time period for this Midrash together with its *realia,* somewhere between 250 and 280 C.E. Now, which *Pishtani* is he referring to, a flax worker or a linen worker ? And which *pishtan* is being beaten, flax or linen ?

Pliny the Elder (23-79 C.E.), in his work *The Natural History* (Book XIX. The Nature and Cultivation of Flax, Chap. 3.—The Mode of Preparing Flax.) states, "When the outer coat is loosened, it is a sign that the (flax) stalks have been sufficiently steeped; after which they are again turned with the heads downwards, and left to dry as before in the sun: when thoroughly dried, they are beaten with a tow-mallet on a stone. When (linen is) spun into thread, it is rendered additionally supple by being soaked in water and then beaten out upon a stone; and after it is woven into a tissue, it is again beaten with heavy maces: indeed, the more roughly it is treated the better it is." According to Pliny – writing just 200 years before our metaphor was born, there are three beatings. 1) flax is beaten after retting or "braking", 2) spun linen yarn is beaten, and 3) woven linen fabric is beaten.



Linen beetling, Egypt, 11th and 12th dynasties (2133-1783 B.C.E.) [3].

1) We have found, therefore, pictorial evidence for beating flax – "braking" as far back as 1500 C.E., and Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood has proposed that wooden mallets suitable for this work have been identified from Dynastic Egypt, although the process itself is not recorded by picture. Indeed, braking flax – by machine – is practised up to this very day.



Beetling by hand, demonstrated by Mrs Beth Black, curator of the Wellbrook Beetling Mill Museum, Corkhill, Northern ireland (and descendant of the owners of the mill).

Beetling Engine at Wellbrook Beetling Mill Museum, Corkhill. Northern Ireland.

2) I have found neither pictorial nor additional literary evidence for beating the linen yarn. Perhaps it was done in Beth Shean in Rabbi Yossi's time, as it was in Pliny's.
3) Beating ("beetling") woven linen fabric is illustrated in Egypt from the Xlth and Xllth dynasties, 2133-1786 B.C.E., and continues up until the present time.

Perhaps now we may attempt to decipher the metaphors more accurately. Strong or weak flax which either becomes enhanced or breaks apart in beating, could very well be attributed to improper strains of flax, insufficient irrigation, lack of proper nutrients in the soil (the Mishna [tractate Kil'aim chapter 2, paragraph 7] gives an example of growing a small patch of flax for a "test" crop of flax to ascertain if the soil has recuperated after the depletion of vital nutrients by this very demanding crop). Another touchy matter is retting. Climate change, crop variation and water quality can all affect the final results. A master retter could very well require being a 10th generation flax man. Under-retting (even a matter of one day short) may make braking very difficult, as the pectin is not entirely decomposed, the fibres could be damaged by the extra effort used and reduced to the poor "tow" quality. Re-retting (or double-retting) could rectify the problem, but the extra work would be deterring. On the other hand, over-retting will weaken the fibres, and although easily braked, will fall apart, (the Mishna [tractate Mo'ed Katan chapter 2, paragraph 3] indicates an "halachic" [legal] permit to withdraw one's flax from the retting pool even during the intermediate days of a week-long holiday, being justified in merit of the money loss involved in over-retted flax). Evidently, we are dealing here with a *Pishtani* who is a flax worker, and his *pishtan* is flax. Nevertheless, our last and difficult-to-explain word must be accounted for ! When the flax is strong, beating enhances it and makes it... shiny. From "oily" to "shiny" would seem a short distance within this verb's connotative field. Properly hackled flax does shine and could well be described as "oily".

On the other hand, it would also definitely make sense to take the metaphor up to the the post-loom stage. The *Pishtani* is a linen worker and the *pishtan* is linen. Even more variables could cause "bad" linen to break apart now under beetling. In addition to the agricultural difficulties in the field, and the microbiological fluctuations in the retting process, the linen yarn may have been poorly spun. Under-moistening would cause the thread to be weak (the Tosephta [tractate Ketubbot chapter 5, paragraph 4], a legal code parallel to the Mishna, forbids a husband to compel his wife to spin...flax, as opposed to wool. This is because the flax is run through her mouth and moistened by saliva. Constant flax spinning may well cause her lips to be slit and give her halitosis. It is not inconceivable that a spinster might sometimes "cheat" on the moistening and dry-spin her flax.) Various deficiencies could occur during weaving. A vertical two-beam loom is in use at this Midrash's time in the Land of Israel. Linen, being a non-elastic "unforgiving" fibre, is difficult to warp at even tension, and requires sufficient humidity during weaving to ensure adequate strength whilst opening the shed. Breaks in the warp threads could be expected, and a poorly woven fabric or one with many knots in the warp may not stand up well under beetling. The opposite would be true, for a strong well-woven fabric of quality flax fibres and well wet-spun linen yarn. Here, beetling would only enhance the fabric's sheen, by closing the gaps between the threads. Perhaps – "to make it fat" means flattening the threads and making them wider, and bringing out the natural wax.

Beetling, as mentioned above, is a post loom finishing process for linen fabric. Comparable processes are fulling and felting – in wool.

"Mangling" applies great pressure on the linen fabric, and has similar objectives (see: http://fiberarts.org/design/articles/mangling.html)

Other long vegetable fibres are beaten in the manufacturing process, hard fibres such as jute and sisal, and soft fibres such as hemp and nettle. But no other fibre will obtain the sheen and exquisiteness of beetled linen. Chemical analyses performed on linen fibres – and for comparison on their closest relative, hemp – reveal that linen's comparatively lower lignin content is a key to this sheen.

Theological conclusions indicated in the *Pishtani* metaphor

Why did God test Abraham? What was the purpose? What came out of it? Rabbi Yossi ben H_anina's opinion, expressed by metaphor, is as follows. God tests ("beats") only those whom He knows that not only can stand up to the test, but even more important, will be enhanced by it. The test is a challenge which both builds and strengthens their own character as the result of performing God's will. Just as the *Pishtani* does to *his pishtan*, God does to Abraham. And not only does the one being tested become enhanced, he serves as a beacon – a shining example for all mankind.

Nahum Ben-Yehuda
Dept. of Jewish History, Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel.
nahumben@zahav.net.il

1 See: "The Exquisite Linen of Beth Shean" by the author of this article, http://ulita.leeds.ac.uk/education/downloads/ArsTextrinaPapers2005-2.pdf pp 10-17

2 Reproduced with permission from Bert de Wilde, *Flax in Flanders Throughout the Centuries*, Teilt, Belgium, 1999

3 From P.E. Newberry, *Beni Hassan*, Vols 1 & 2, London, 1893, scanned with permission from Gillian Vogelsand-Eastwood, *The Production of Linen in Pharaonic Egypt*, Leiden, 1992

AFTER THE TSUNAMI: RECOVERY OF LACE-MAKING IN SRI LANKA

The February 2005 issue (No. 30) of this newsletter contained an article on the lace industry of southern Sri Lanka. When that article appeared, the country had already been hit by the disastrous tsunami of 26 December 2004. It was one of the worst hit countries in Asia by the advancement of 30 foot sea waves hitting the coastal belt of Northern, Eastern and Southern Provinces making a death toll of 30,718 and eliminating every opportunity of economic survival starting from cottage industry to industry using high technology. Whole families, including children were swept away as killer waves engulfed towns and villages destroying everything in its way. In addition nearly 103,789 people were internally displaced and most of them are still living in camps in temples and schools.

One of the notable cottage industries in Galle & Matara districts (Southern Province) is the lace industry. Famous lace manufacturers are mainly within these areas in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka. Galle district is the home of the lace makers and about 220 families are involved in the lace making industry. However, women in these areas were involved in lace work, making delicate and complicated designs with needle and thread. They produced items like tablemats, tablecloths, etc. Most of these items were sold to foreign tourists, who carried them back as souvenirs and gifts. This industry has been well integrated into the lives of the women who had taken to it with great zest and provides employment to rural folk especially women within their own villages, and the tradition continues on the basis of small enterprises making a useful contribution to the national economy.

With the tsunami striking Weligama in the Galle district, these women lost their source of income. They have lost their production facilities such as their cushions, stock of raw materials, etc. and the supply base of lace was affected to a great extent. Women by nature, live with much courage, the courage with which the distressed women have to continue their lives with the remaining few resources. However, they sought government and organisational help to rebuild their lives and families. They need a new approach if they are to survive and earn a fair income from their valuable skills in the future. The Government of Sri Lanka has launched several rehabilitation programmes with the support of local NGOs to uplift the industry in order to support and strengthen the capacity.

South Asian Partnership of Sri Lanka's (SAPSRI} response to this natural disaster took a humanitarian form in all aspects. Despite the immediate relief operations carried out, SAPSRI instigated long term rehabilitation initiatives. Assisting the people who had been

engaged in the lace industry, which had prevailed in the Southern province of Sri Lanka for generations and which was severely affected by the Tsunami, was an important step taken by SAPSRI.

The lace making women in Galle and Matara districts were immediately provided with lace making equipment and tools which were washed away by the waves. This helped them to revive their income generating activities in a small way. As the women were struggling to rebuild their lives with no markets available, no middlemen to buy their products and no one to provide them with raw material, SAPSRI succeeded in clearing a path for these women to access the international market.

As a result of long-standing partnership SAPSRI had with DanChurchAid, Denmark, markets for high quality value-added lace products opened. What is significant about this process is that the women at the grassroots level can directly export their products, without depending on middlemen. The lace makers had to produce more and more lace, while those who produce such items as table cloths, cushion covers, and table mats had to supply to the rapidly increasing demand. Gradually, as the orders from Denmark increased, the women wanted to enhance their capacities and purchase new equipment, sewing machines and raw material for which SAPSRI was able to provide loans. Having witnessed the expansion of industry more and more women have started entering the field which has created a new layer of lace producers. Due to the competition that has emerged among the lace makers, the price of lace products has ameliorated. The concentration on quality of products has also become a focal point, as the quality of exporting items is expected to be extremely high.

When the concept of international markets was brought into perspective and exporting made possible by SAPSRI, the lace makers requested capacity building and skills development programmes. Consequently, SAPSRI organized a series of workshops to enhance the knowledge of people on entrepreneurship, packaging, business planning etc. Training programmes on organizational and financial management helped these people to mobilize themselves into village/community based organizations and to develop an organizational fund of their own which will at a later stage operate as a revolving loan fund. As community leaders, the strength they have gained in working in cohesive groups became the driving force behind their success. They no longer work as isolated individuals.

Currently, training programmes are being conducted by SAPSRI to train lace makers on new designs. We believe that this would help them to deviate from their dormant and traditional designs, thereby introducing new and innovative products to the markets, so that the demand will further increase.

As a result of a regional exhibition organized by SAPSRI in Galle district, the people had the opportunity to gain exposure to new buyers. This has also been helpful in finding new markets, thereby increasing their income levels. All in all, living standards of these families have improved.

All these initiatives have empowered the lace making women. They have not only gained normality to their lives, but have also been put in a path, which leads to a plateau of success. SAPSRI's approach to work is based on understanding that the people are the most valuable resource in our programmes. Therefore, SAPSRI will continue to assist those who are ready to assist themselves and those who have the need to become self-reliant.

Taking into consideration, the policies of "Mahinda Chinthana" of the Government of Sri Lanka under "Kantha Diriya", the Sri Lanka Export Development is looking into the possibility of getting a foreign expert to establish a national level programme with the objective of upgrading the skills of the lace makers of Sri Lanka, to enhance long-term earning potential, by introducing lace redesigned for the international market. The aim is not merely to provide the craftswomen with opportunities of earning an extra income, but by introducing western styles of dresses and fashions to the local manufacturers to increase the export of lace products and tourist sales.

Indira Malwatte
Director, Product Management
Sri Lanka Export Development Board

Here [above and on p. 1] are lacemakers in Weligama, Sri Lanka, the town mentioned in your interesting piece – nothing I can add to that! This lady told me through a translator she lost her husband in the tsunami, and her stock of course. She usually has about 50 women working for her mostly from their homes, and has about 4 sitting out by the road working to attract customers of course. She pawned her jewellery to buy what she needed to start again, and Oxfam gave her £50. The bobbins are all antique – Portuguese? I bought a large rectangular table cloth of simple design for about $18 from her.

Emily Castelli Burns

THE O.A.T.G. TRIP TO MANCHESTER

On the morning of July 31st, seven eager travellers gathered on the platform of Oxford station waiting for the train that would take them to Manchester and a three day exploration of nineteenth century textile history. It was an intensive learning experience, full of pattern, colour texture – and noise. I do not mean the modem city, but the reverberation of the huge water wheel at Quarry Mill signifying in its motion the original energy of the British industrial revolution, the clatter of the spinning jenny and clanking of a jacquard loom.

Having met up with our eighth member in Manchester, and momentarily losing another, we successfully reconvened at the Whitworth Gallery for a behind-the-scenes viewing of Indian textiles collected in 1885 by Thomas Wardle, a printer and dyer, and teacher of William Morris. As explained to us by Dr Brenda King and Professor Anne Morrell, Wardle's politically inspired remit was to demonstrate to British manufacturers that the quality of yarn produced in India competed favourably with that of Japan and China. Wardle acquired the most exquisite fabrics, among which were a double ikat wedding sari from Patola, Mughal cream silk embroidery on silk-and-cotton fabric, Gujerati mirror work, luxurious kincob, and simple tussore. He believed in the excellence of Indian techniques and design, intending his collection to be a reference for future students as well as persuasive of trade within the empire.

Later that afternoon we were privileged to be shown around the exhibition *Clothing Culture: Dress in Egypt in the First Millennium A.D.* by its curator, Frances Pritchard. The great Victorian archaeologist, W.M. Flinders Petrie, had collected and documented clothing preserved in the desert dryness of Christian burials from the 3rd to the 10th century. Although many are badly decomposed, Frances has been able to reconstruct in detail the evolving techniques of weaving and dyeing. The early tunics are woven in one piece so that no cutting is needed and there is no wastage. A radical development in the 7th century initiated sewn-on sleeves and side gores, indicating a much narrower cloth. Such garments were more suited to horse-riding and were an imported Persian fashion, still worn to-day as the *djebellah* or *kanzu.*

The following day was spent at the Quarry Bank Mill, Styal, in Cheshire. This was given by the Greg family, the original builders of 1784, to the National Trust in 1939 and operated as a working mill until 1959. It has since been restored and is recognized as being one of the most complete Georgian mills in England, well worth a day's visit. We arrived and departed in a rainstorm, but the hours in between were an intense introduction to all the processes of manufacturing cotton textiles, from the growing of the boll to the life of the factory workers. Museum demonstrators card, spin and weave in a cottage setting, but then the exhibits evolve into the early factory system with its specialized mixers, carders, drawers and bobbin winders, and the more poetically named throstle spinners for strong warp and mule spinners for a finer thread. The ultimate product comes from the hands of warpers or beamers, drawers and, of course, weavers. The names of Arkwright and Crompton are celebrated, and I wished that as a child learning about the industrial revolution I had had the

opportunity to see their machines in action: the mules are hypnotic with the hundreds of bobbins spinning like dervishes while advancing and retreating in an energetic dance of creation. Then there is the dyeing and printing of the cloth – hand block-printing is demonstrated, as is the cylinder printing still used to-day. There is an explanation of steam power, which I bypassed because it was already time for lunch.

We gathered in the pleasant cafe, and then in the afternoon walked over to the Apprentice House, where we were booked for a guided tour. Built in 1790, this housed 100 children, both boys and girls, who worked in the mill. Paupers brought from as far away as London were taught a trade as well as given rudimentary instruction in reading and, for the most able boys, writing and arithmetic. Discipline was said to be harsh, but a doctor watched over the children's health, and meals included fresh vegetables provided from the garden. Samuel Greg who owned the mill in the mid-nineteenth century was an employer who built cottages with cellars, private backyards and lavatories for his workforce.

Waiting in the bus shelter at Styal to return to Manchester. Left to right: Barbara Isaac, Phyllis Nye, Dymphna Hermans, Anne Brail, Rosemary Lee, Dorothy Reglar, Fiona Sutcliffe (and behind the camera Felicity Wood).

Returning to Manchester we paid a brief visit to the City Art Gallery, and in the evening enjoyed a most convivial Chinese meal exploring the huge menu under the skilled guidance of Rosemary Lee, who had spent many years in Hong Kong, and also managed to wheedle out of the proprietor a special delicacy that was not actually on the menu!

Our last excursion was to Macclesfield and the Silk Museum where we were welcomed by Annabel White, the textile conservator, and Dr Brenda King again. A recurrent theme of the three days had been the pattern books kept either to record the innumerable fabrics produced by British manufacturers or to inform them about Indian products. We had seen some at the Whitworth as well as a temporary exhibit at Quarry Bank Mill, but now at the Silk Museum we were provided with gloves and allowed to handle some of the numerous volumes in the Museum's archives. Eight Forbes Watson pattern books were made available, containing pieces from different areas of India. In 1870 Dr Watson prepared 22 identical 18 volume sets containing 700 working examples of cotton, silk and woollen textiles with each piece identified as to its wearer. These were distributed to textile centres in both India and the United Kingdom. There were other books too for us to browse through, containing

Felicity Wood, Anne Brau et al. behind the scenes at the Silk Museum. (Photo, Phyllis Nye)

thousands of locally produced fabrics as well as the pencilled designs from which they had been made.

The Silk Museum is housed in what had been the Macclesfield School of Art and Technology; it has a permanent exhibit on silk textile production as well as a temporary exhibition space. There we were able to enjoy *Silk Threads: a Journey to China* which celebrated modern life along the ancient silk road. Afterwards we visited Paradise Mills, where guide Malcolm Sherratt demonstrated the preparation, spinning and weaving of silk, including the complicated machinery of the Jacquard loom, designed in 1804.

From Macclesfield we caught our train back to Oxford exhausted, but replete and comfortable in the new knowledge and understanding acquired during a remarkably full and rich three days. We owe an enormous debt to our leaders Rosemary Lee and Fiona Sutcliffe, who had researched every aspect of our travel, setting up the appointments in museums, and generally looking after our well-being. We also owe a special vote of thanks to those curators and museum staff and their supporters who went out of their way to prepare and present material, always making us feel most welcome.

Barbara Isaac

STOP PRESS

Gallery Visit to the Pitt Rivers Museum for OATG members only, including a talk by the curator exploring the exhibition *Treasured Textiles: Cloth and Clothing from Around the World,* February 20 or 21, 2007. Details in the next newsletter

KNITTING NUMBERS; A TRIBUTE TO ALISON SMITH

Oxfordshire Museum, Woodstock, May-June 2006
Some thoughts from Fiona Sutcliffe and Rosemary Lee who presented the exhibition

Antony Smith, Alison's widower, looking at one of the exhibits
(Photo, Fiona Sutcliffe)

The cases are empty, the walls bare – one last look round and we turn out the lights. Knitting Numbers has closed It seemed no time since OATG decided that the unusual and exceptional talent of Alison Smith, an enthusiastic member who sadly died in 2004, should be brought to a wider audience. Throughout many months, with the generous co-operation of her family, we pondered on Alison's workbooks and an Aladdin's chest of completed hand knitted garments.

In this tribute to Alison our aim was to demonstrate how she had taken as a starting point a particular motif or pattern that had caught her eye and finished with a garment of great intricacy and beauty. She loved to explore pattern and colour variations and her workbooks demonstrated her experiments, culminating in final designs on graph paper. No detail of the work was overlooked, be it the dyeing of yarn to an exact shade, the challenge of fitting motifs to the shape of a garment, a complementary cuff design or an appropriate fastening or button.

Somehow we had to draw all this together. So we selected a number of garments for which we could get the actual or similar inspiration; among them the waistcoats and the Kuba wall-hangings, the colourful jacket and the Uzbek hat, the subtle cardigan and the Indonesian geringsing hanging it was based on. These we displayed alongside workbooks and other relevant material. The exhibition glowed with the colours of kilims, hangings, dresses, hats and of course Alison's handknits.

A final word from one of the visitors "Fascinating and inspirational on so many levels, not least in understanding other cultures".

HURRAH FOR VIRGIN TRAINS!

When my car was stolen five years ago I decided to live without one, and since then nearly all my journeys short or long have been made by bicycle and/or rail. This summer Virgin trains have provided a veritable transport of textile delight for me.

Early in July, one took me to the Costume Society's annual symposium at Winchester, where the Textile Conservation Centre and Hampshire Museums Service did us proud, as they did the O.A.T.G. last year. I am not going to discuss the symposium, which was on the theme of *Masculine Dress from Codpiece to Burberry*, because it had no oriental connexions, but there was one particular item that I cannot resist mentioning.

Every year the Society invites students from an institute near the symposium venue to compete for an award. This year, students of the Winchester School of Art were asked to "design a capsule collection of 'occasion wear tailoring' based on their research of men's wear". One of the students – not, I am sorry to say, the winner – produced a, to my mind, absolutely stunning evening dress and jacket. What was most remarkable was that she had herself created the material of which the dress was made. She took a soluble man-made fabric, finely machine-embroidered it all over with silk and metal threads, then put it into a bath of water to dissolve the basic fabric away, leaving the embroidery to stand alone. The effect was ethereal, and reminded me of Japanese *plique a jour* lacquer, in which the metal base is dissolved away to leave the lacquer standing alone. In both cases the effect is both beautiful and delicate.

By coincidence, another fabric made in an unusual way was one of the things that fascinated me at Eastleigh, where the train took me a fortnight later to see the *Faraway Festival Costumes* exhibition (see last newsletter p. 30) though this technique was a traditional one. So-called "silk felt" is made by putting the cocoon-making silkworms on a flat board in a dark place. Having no twig to attach themselves to, the worms are disorientated and wander all over the board, creating a mesh of silk filament in the process. When this is about 5 mm thick, it is carefully removed, dyed, and afterwards separated into several fine layers, which can be used for borders or, as they do not fray, are ideal for appliqué.

Also striking were garments of shiny cloth made by soaking indigo-dyed fabric in a concoction in which a mixture of vegetable matter has been steeped, giving the fabric both a sheen and a slightly brownish tinge. One particular outfit incorporating it was a very "with it" contemporary girl's daily costume which would not have looked amiss among the young girls in my carriage on the way home.

It was not a very big exhibition – nine complete outfits on mannequins, a number of baby carriers and smaller items, odds and ends and a case of silver dress ornaments, with explanatory panels and Gina's photographs on the walls – but every item seemed to demand long and detailed study. There was a lot of the kind of embroidery and pleating that you would expect, but I am not going to describe it all here: go and see it for yourselves. It is continuing to tour Hampshire until at least March next year (see p. 31).

When I saw that the temperature forecast for Oxford was 32°C whereas Bournemouth was only 23°C I was strongly tempted to cry off my next trip, but as I was committed to giving a gallery talk at the Ashmolean, I decided to grin and bear it. Despite the heat twelve people turned up to hear my words of wisdom on 16th and 17th century dress, and one turned out to be an enthusiast for costume and textiles and herself a designer, who occupied me for another hour. I introduced her to the print room where we drooled over Holbein and told her about the O.A.T.G., which I hope she will join , so my journey had not been in vain.

It was not so hot as I had dreaded in the Ashmolean, but I was streaming with sweat in the Pitt Rivers where I went next to see the *Treasured Textiles* exhibition, another one that I recommend, but as it is on until next April, you can choose a cooler day to see it. Its mission is to "celebrate the extraordinary inventiveness and vibrancy of patterning to be found in textiles and costumes from around the world", and it certainly does that. The exhibition is arranged according to four ways in which patterning is achieved: weave, dye resist, paint and print, and stitch, although some of the exhibits rely on more than one of these techniques for their effect. The bulk of the exhibits come from Africa, Asia and Latin America, and I found some of those that interested me most were not the Asian ones. Again I was attracted to unusual techniques, such as the Maori "twining" way of weaving, the Nigerian "stitch" resist, and the use of patchwork to decorate a Syrian Romany girl's dress.

Regrettably Virgin rather let me down on the way home, the train being *55* minutes late at Oxford, getting later and later as it went on and finally giving up the ghost at Brockenhurst, where South West Trains came to the rescue.

On the last day of the month I was one of the seven members on Oxford station waiting for Virgin to whisk us away to Manchester for the first ever O.A.T.G. outing lasting more than one day, as described by Barbara Isaac above. Unlike the rest of the party, however, I did not return from Macclesfield to Oxford but, feeling that as I was already half-way to Scotland I might as well go the rest of the way, allowed Virgin to carry me on to Glasgow.

Unlike Manchester/Macclesfield, the weather in Glasgow was ideal, sunny and fresh, and I thoroughly enjoyed a morning in the botanic gardens, but was rather disappointed in the expensively revamped and overcrowded Kelvingrove, where I spent the afternoon. Apart from some clothed models in tableaux, the only textiles on view were a shawl and length of fabric woven by a Japanese artist, Tadaka Momose, from wool she had been allowed to collect from Soay and Boreray sheep on St Kilda in 1989.

Next day I went to Paisley (Strathclyde Passenger Transport, not Virgin) and was very favourably impressed with the pleasant town, friendly people, 12th century abbey and, above all, museum. Needless to say, I spent most of my time in the shawl gallery and was pleased to meet in person the curator of textiles, Valerie Reilly, with whom I have been in contact for several years. You may remember that she wrote an article on *The Kashmir Connexion* for the newsletter (no. 16, June 2000).

The spacious, custom-built shawl gallery contains a permanent, explanatory display including a loom and other equipment, as well as a social history of the Paisley weaving community, with one long wall devoted to an exhibition of shawls from the Museum's own collection which is changed every few months. As the collection comprises over a thousand shawls, probably the largest collection of "imitation Indian" patterned shawls anywhere in the world, Valerie has plenty to choose from for these "themed" displays. The theme when I was there was chronological, but unfortunately a mid 18th century Kashmir shawl which I had especially wanted to see had had to be removed because of a leaky roof. Fortunately neither it nor any of the other exhibits had been damaged and the roof has been repaired, but it gives me an excuse for a return trip on one of my future visits to Scotland.

My last port of call was Edinburgh and the *Beyond the Palace Walls* exhibition at the Royal Museum (see p. 31), which I am sorry I did not hear about in time to mention in the last newsletter. Unlike Kelvingrove, it was well-stocked with textiles including a complete Ottoman tent and a section of the wall panels of another presented by the Emir of Bukhara to Tsar Alexander III in 1893.

Compared with Ottoman tents I have seen in Vienna and Istanbul and those I have read about in Krakow (see newsletter no. 20, October 2001), I found the one from the Hermitage a little disappointing, being altogether smaller and less substantial than those (according to the catalogue it "apparently belonged to a fairly low-ranking Turkish officer") but the underside of the entrance canopy was very interesting. Whereas the wall and ceiling panels have the customary formal decoration, this piece is embroidered with a free-flowing landscape incorporating palaces in walled enclosures, more comparable to manuscript miniatures.

The wall panels of the Bukhara tent are similar to Ottoman ones, but are very luxurious, being of velvet and silk decorated with silk embroidery incorporating a great deal of gold and silver thread and silk appliqué, the fabric for which was apparently imported from Russia. Exhibited within this tent are a number of garments, also from nineteenth century

Bukhara, comprising several embroidered and ikat robes, and embroidered trousers, caps, slippers, belts and purses.

Elsewhere in the exhibition there are ecclesiastical copes from Turkey and Iran, the most striking being of velvet brocade with a repeat pattern of the Persian hero Manjun surrounded by wild animals – hardly appropriate for a Christian vestment, one would have thought! There is a splendid Iranian wall hanging of red broadcloth with a nearly life-size full-length portrait in appliqué and embroidery of Tsar Alexander II, complete with an array of medals and gold epaulettes, sitting on what looks like an inlaid ivory chair. For the rest, they are mostly small items, including a much-worn prayer rug, fragments of silk imported from China and an Iranian sash with a "Paisley pattern" woven border.

After all that I am pleased to say Virgin delivered me home at the scheduled time.

Phyllis Nye

MUSEUMS ROUND-UP

The new Jameel Gallery of Islamic Art at the V.& A is most ingeniously laid out. You can imagine yourself sitting in a court in the Alhambra but where the rectangular pool would be there is the enormous Arbadil carpet Above it is a canopy of equal size, the underside of which is shiny so that you can see the reflections of those strolling around upside down in it instead of in a pool at your feet. The rest of the exhibits are in the surrounding "cloister". They include two architectural features at diagonally opposite corners, a richly carved minbar at one end and an Ottoman tiled fireplace at the other.

A generous proportion of the exhibits comprise textiles, although many in the wall cases are too high for close study and I would recommend anyone to take a pair of binoculars with them. In her article for the O.A.T.G. newsletter no. 11 (October 1998) on *Oriental Carpets in the Victoria and Albert Museum,* Jennifer Wearden asks "What are the masterpieces of the Collection? and answers the Ardabil Carpet, "the lesser-known but equally wonderful" Chelsea Carpet and an amazing knotted silk pile vestment for a priest of the Armenian church. All three are well displayed. Apart from binoculars, the other thing I would recommend is that you allow yourself plenty of time for your visit.

In the last newsletter I reported that most Glasgow museums would hitherto be closing on Mondays, but it seems that the Powers That Be had second thoughts, for a couple of months later they announced that all Glasgow Museums are to open seven days a week. They are also opening their Resource Centre (i.e., stores) for public tours daily at 2.30 p.m. Special interest tours can also be arranged for any group that requests them, tel. 0141 276 9375.

The Cecil Higgins Art Gallery is planning to amalgamate with the Bedford Museum, which is next door to it, which you might think would make it easy, but in fact "completely refurbished and revitalised buildings" are proposed, which really means a major building operation. When and for how long the Cecil Higgins will be closed has not been revealed.

The Calico Museum of Textiles and Sarabahai Foundation has launched a website, www.calicomuseum.com which, in addition to Museum galleries, includes all its publications.

Editor

BOOKS

Jenny Balfour-Paul, *Indigo,* Archetype, 2006, 22 x 28 cm, 260 pp, over 250 col. illus., ISBN 1904982158, hb, £35.

This book by the leading authority on the subject was first published in 1998, and has now been reissued to coincide with the forthcoming exhibition at the Whitworth (see p. 31). It tells the story of the world's oldest and best loved dye. Produced from plants by a process akin to alchemy, indigo has a unique chemistry that renders it compatible with all natural fibres. From the time of the Pharaohs, it made a world-wide impact as the only source of every hue of blue and of a wide range of colours in combination with other natural dyes. Its use continued even after the invention of synthetic indigo, and for environmental reasons is now making a comeback.

James Bennett, *Crescent Moon: Art and Civilization in South East Asia,* Art Gallery of South Australia, 2005, 35.6 x 22.6 cm, 304 pp, 168 col. illus., ISBN 0 7308 3030 G, hb, £40

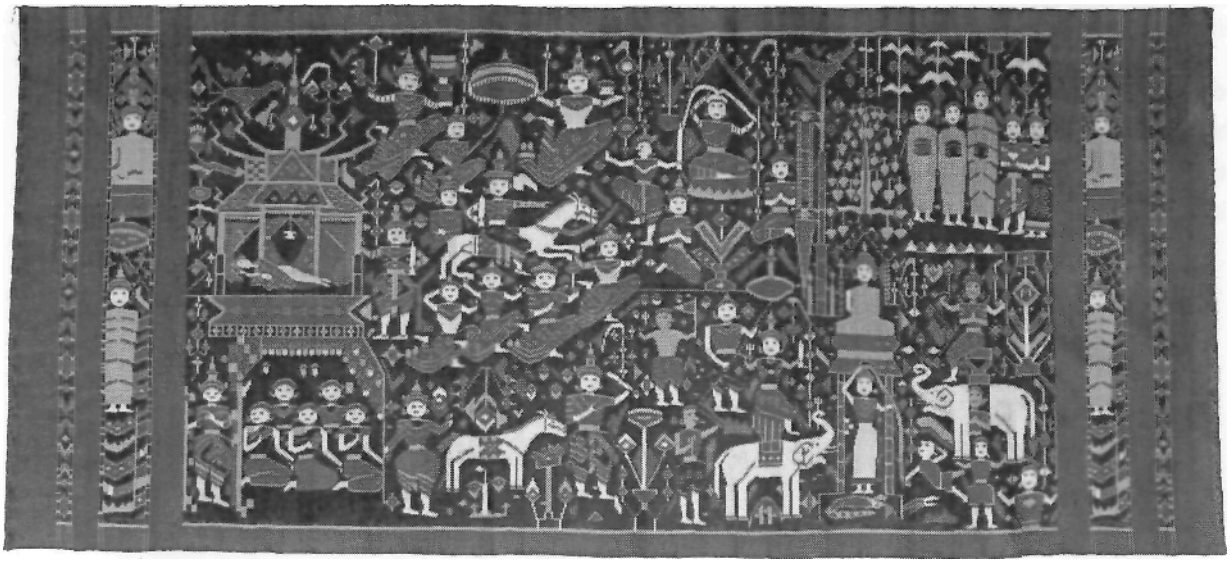
Book published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name, contains a fair number of textile examples.

Regula Schorta, ed, *Central Asian Textiles and Their Contexts in the Early Middle Ages*, Riggisberger Berichte, Band 9. Riggisberg, 2006, 31 x 23 cm, 316 pp, Numerous colour and b/w illustrations, pb.

Contains the papers from the Colloquium held in 1999 which broadened and expanded the subject of Central Asian and Silk road textiles. Various researches have brought about new perspectives on textile art of the early Middle Ages from Sogdia, the Tarim Basin, Tibet and Central Asia, and China. This richly-illustrated volume is complemented by reports of new findings in China, some here presented for the first time.

EXHIBITIONS

Khmer Silks at the Horniman Museum



The Horniman Museum's current textile exhibition, Khmer Silks, focuses on textiles and textile use in Cambodia. Material from the reserve collections has been supplemented by items collected more recently, illustrating materials and techniques as well as the role of textiles in contemporary Cambodian society. The exhibition will be on show until the end of next March.

The main cases show two central features of Cambodian life: Buddhism and marriage. For the section on Buddhism, the display of textiles and costume is complemented by photographs of a monk's ordination ceremony, exploring the symbolic significance of the monk's casting off of material things (exemplified by his fine silk hip cloth) and adopting a life of simplicity (exemplified by the simple cotton robes which he puts on). In addition, a silk ikat wall hanging, or *pidan*, showing scenes from the life of the Buddha is also on display, commissioned from a weaver in Takeo province for the exhibition, and is illustrated above.

The section on marriage includes contemporary wedding garments for a bride and groom, and explores the use of threads and costume elements in symbolising the union. There is also a dramatic dance costume in velvet and gold thread couchwork, obtained in Cambodia from the Phnom Penh municipal dance company. The costume is for Prince Rama, the main character in the Ramayana. Alongside this exhibit is a mask for the dancer performing the role of Hanuman, the monkey.

The production of silk is explained in a short video, and samples are displayed showing stages in the manufacture of silk thread and of silk ikat. Examples of skirts with brocaded hems, in colours representing the seven days of the week, are shown, as well as a crochet sash such as is worn by women on the upper body on ceremonial occasions. The kromah, the traditional cotton scarf worn by men and women in Cambodia, is also featured.

There are associated items relating to other aspects of Cambodian material culture, including a silver wedding areca nut set, examples of local ceramics and carved wooden pieces of textile equipment.

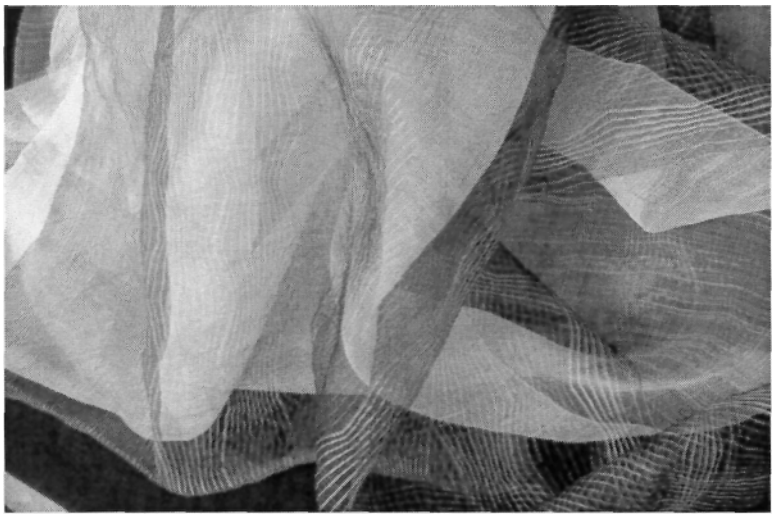
The exhibition follows a period of fieldwork by the curator in Cambodia in 2004, and the aim is to present Khmer textiles in context, in so far as this is possible in a small space. There is a study table with books, and a display of photographs of a childcare project in Takeo province, to give a sense of place and of people in which to locate the material in the rest of the exhibition.

Fiona Kerlogue

Detail from the *pidan* illustrated on the previous page, showing Prince Siddartha (the future Buddha) leaving his palace secretly by night, four immortals carrying his horse by their hooves so that they shall not be heard.

Other Exhibitions in the U.K. –

On Gossamer Wings: Okinawan Silk Textiles by Michiko Uehara - at the Daiwa Foundation, Japan House, 13/14 Cornwall Terrace, London, NW1, until 26 October. Michiko Uehara works exclusively in silk and other natural fibres and uses natural dyes, many produced in her own garden in Okinawa. Using very thin hand-spun threads she creates incredibly fine and translucent fabrics that are yet supple and strong, in what she calls dragonfly-wing weave. One piece is several metres long but weighs only 5 grams. Tel. 020 7486 4348



One of Michiko Uehara's textiles

**Silk Threads: A Journey to China* - at the Silk Museum, Macclesfield, until 31 October. Contemporary and historic costume and textiles, local sound pictures and art installation from lands along the Silk Route. Tel. 01625 612045

****Beyond the Palace Walls: Islamic Art from the State Hermitage Museum*** - at the Royal Museum, Edinburgh, until 5 November. An ornately embroidered Ottoman campaign tent forms the centrepiece of the exhibition, with the other exhibits, which include textiles and costume, radiating out from it. Many of the objects have not been seen outside Russia before. Guided tours daily, and many other associated events. Tel. 0131 247 4422

Faraway Festival Costumes – Costumes and photographs of the minority peoples of Ghizou Province, S.W. China, from Gina Corrigan's collection (see last newsletter, p. 30) will be shown at the Willis Museum, Basingstoke, 11 November - 22 December (Tel. 01256 465902) and the Red House Museum, Christchurch, 13 January – 17 March 2007 (Tel. 01202 482860).

Indigo – at the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, from 20 January to 15 April 2007. A major exhibition of art, craft, fashion and design, featuring historical and contemporary indigo-dyed artefacts from around the world. The universality of indigo is explored through an outstanding range of textiles and clothing from China, Japan, Thailand, Nigeria, Senegal, India, Indonesia, Europe and the Middle East. Techniques include hand-drawn batiks, stencilled designs, wax resist, printing, ikat, tie-dye, shibori and sashiko, and the historical span ranges from the Roman Empire to the present, with some pieces especially commissioned for the show. (More in the next newsletter.) Tel. 0161 275 7450

* Regrettably information on these exhibitions was not received in time for inclusion in the last newsletter, but you should be able to get to them before they close if you hurry. Ed.

– and Overseas

A Passage to India - This exhibition of Indian handicrafts at the Museum of Cultures, Helsinki, until 4 February next year includes "silk saris, gold brocades, festive camel blankets, cloths printed with vegetable dye and gauzy Kashmir shawls". Tel. 00 358 9 40 501

Last Chance to See ...

Woven Gold: Metal Threads in Textile Art – Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisburg, Switzerland, ends on 12 November. Tel. 0041 31 808 1201

LECTURES AND EVENTS

Cavorting with Carpets – Thai Textile Society visit to the home of David Lyman for lunch and to view his collection of over 300 Persian and Chinese carpets, Saturday 28 October, 11 a.m. – 3 p.m., proceeds to fund Thai Textile Society activities. Tel. (0066) 02 658 1802 or 084101 4293

Asian Art in London, 2–10 November – not so many textiles this year, though Christies, South Kensington (tel. 0207 930 6074) are holding a sale of Chinese and Japanese Costume and Textiles. Participating dealers are Francesca Galloway (tel. 0207 930 8717), Jacqueline Simcox (tel. 0207 359 8939), and Linda Wrigglesworth (tel. 0207 930 1311). Susan Conway is talking on *The Shan: Princes and Palaces* at 6.45 p.m. on 9 November at Asia House (tel. 0207 307 5454). Further information from Asian Art in London – tel. 0207 499 2215, e-mail: info@asianartinlondon.com www.asianartinlondon.com

The Ice Man Cometh – Study day on ancient textiles at Dorset County Museum, Dorchester, Saturday 4 November, 10.30a.m. – 4.30 p.m. A morning of illustrated lectures on the beginnings of textile manufacture 19,000 years ago in the Middle East, the similarities in technique from Bronze Age Europe to present day South America, and archaeological finds of textiles in Denmark, the Alps and Orkney. The afternoon will be devoted to the reconstruction of ancient textiles. Tutors Jacqui Wood, textile archaeologist, and Joe Hobbs, costume designer for the BBC drama documentary on Otzi (the body found in the Alps). Tel. 01305 262735

The Textile Society of Hong Kong is holding its fourth annual textile bazaar at the Fronge Club on 11 November, 10.30 a.m. – 5 p.m.

* * *

WHO'S WHO

The names and addresses of the programme co-ordinators can be found on p.3 above and of the membership secretary on p.8, while the Editor's name and address is, as always, below.
There are two other officers:

Chair - Ruth Barnes, Department of Eastern Art, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, OX1 2PH
tel. 01865 278076, e-mail: ruth.barnes@ashmus.ox.ac.uk

Hon. Treasurer - Helen Adams, 58 Kingston Road, Oxford, OX2 6RH
tel. 01865 559869, e-mail: helen252525@hotmail.com

* * *

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

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE – MONDAY 6 FEBRUARY 2007

Contributions should be sent to the Editor:
Phyllis Nye, 15 Stourwood Road, Southbourne, Bournemouth, BH6 3QP
Tel. 01202 269092 e-mail: phyllis@nyes.org.uk

Printed by the Oxford Print Centre, 36 Holywell Street, Oxford, OX1 3SB. Tel. 01865 240409