

Journal of the Oriental Rug and Textile Society





ORIENTAL RUG & TEXTILE SOCIETY

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Front cover: Cambodian textile artisan creating silk tie-dye decorated cloth (kiet). Phnom Chisor area, Takeo Province, 2011. Photo: Gillian Green.

ORTS JOURNAL SUMMER 2023

ORTS is a broad church—our members' interests range across Asia from the eastern end of Mediterranean to the furthest islands of the Japanese archipelago and beyond. The journal aims to reflect this breadth, but occasionally the contributions seem to group themselves together. In this issue, among the articles are two which focus on Cambodia, and two which look at aspects of the Arab world. The approaches of these pairs of articles are very different, however, reminding us of the various roles played by textiles in their originating communities, of influences and techniques, and of the interests of those who have collected and displayed them, whether in museums or private homes. They take us down many paths. I hope you enjoy the journey.

Fiona Kerlogue



Garden gathering, 1640-50. Attributed to Iran, possibly Isfahan. Panel of stonepaste tiles, painted and polychrome glazed. Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY. Accession number 03.9c. Rogers Fund, 1903.

The ORTS summer gathering will be on July 1st—see details on page 30.

ORTS LECTURE PROGRAMME Autumn 2023

Wednesday, September 20th. Dorothy Armstrong: 'A Modest Radical: May Beattie, the Carpets of Central Persia exhibition, and the World of Islam Festival, 1976.' University Women's Club. 18.00 for 19.00.

Wednesday, October 25th. Hadi Maktabi: 'The Persian Carpet, the Forgotten Years 1722-1872.' University Women's Club. 18.00 for 19.00.

Wednesday, November 22nd. Stefano Ionescu: 'Tuduc or not Tuduc - that is the question.' University Women's Club. 18.00 for 19.00.

Wednesday, December 13th. AGM and Show and Tell. University Women's Club. 18.00 for 19.00.

Wednesday, December 20th. Peter Lee (Singapore): 'Changing hybrid fashions in C19/20 Singapore.' 18.00 for 19.00. Via Zoom.

Geometry as a reflection of stars and zodiac signs on Konya rugs (Part 1)

Roberta Marin

Carpets belonging to the so-called Konya group are believed to have been produced by the Seljuks of Rum between the 13th and 14th century. They represent a milestone in the plethora of knotted carpets, as they are the earliest surviving specimens in the Islamic world. Some extant fragments from the early Abbasid period have been found as well, but it is not yet clear whether they were produced by Abbasid carpet makers or, more likely, were gifts for the sultans, reaching the palace from far away territories (Yeomans 2012, 110). The Abbasid fragments, albeit relevant, could not surpass the popularity and clamour aroused by the unexpected discovery, or supposedly so, of Konya carpets in three different locations, respectively in the mosque of the famous Seljuk sultan Alaeddin Kayqubad in Konya around 1905 by the Swedish scholar Fredrik Robert Martin - or by the German consul General Julius Harry Loytved-Hardegg, as some are more inclined to believe; in the Esrefoglu Mosque in Beyşehir around 1930 by the American professor Rudolf Meyer Riefstahl and finally in a rubbish heap in Fustat in 1935-36 by the Swedish art historian Carl Johan Lamm (Branning 2001-2023). The find in Fustat is particularly important because it suggests that Konya carpets were made not just for local use but also for export, although we do not have sufficient evidence to confirm that they were produced to be sold in Europe, as was the case for example with Mamluk carpets about a century later (Thompson 2012, 115). Famous travellers such as Marco Polo, Ibn Said and Ibn Battuta reported in their accounts that they had experienced the beauty and magnificence of some Anatolian and Caucasian carpets, made between the 13th and the 14th century (Curatola 1983, 39). Ibn Said and Ibn Battuta went even further, stating that these carpets were highly sought after and exported to Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Persia and as far as China and India, but there was not a word to indicate that they were also sold to Europe. It is difficult to believe that carpets of this type did not make their way to the important emporium of Venice together with other goods from Asia, so coveted by royal families and aristocrats. On the other hand, the lack of representations of these carpets on the canvases of famous late Gothic and early Renaissance artists would suggest that was the case. The first examples of Anatolian carpets in painting are in fact those with geometric and animal motifs, woven and exported to Europe from the 14th century (Mack 2002, 73).

The Seljuks of Rum, who hitherto have been considered the patrons of this group of carpets, were an important Islamic dynasty, who made relevant changes in the way architecture and artworks were conceived and decorated. They originally came from an area north of the Aral Sea and the founder was Seljūk, a leader of the Qınıq clan, one of the twenty-four clans that formed the Oghuz tribal confederation. Following a clash with the chieftain, Seljūk left the confederation, established his own kingdom and in later years converted to Islam (Ölçer 2005, 104). His descendants migrated to Persia, where they founded the empire of the Great Seljuks. A branch of the dynasty seceded and moved to Anatolia where Nicaea (Izник) was chosen as the first capital, followed by Iconium (Konya). The golden age of the Seljuks of Rum took place during the sultanate of Alaeddin Kayqubad, whose reign lasted from 1219 to 1237. He reinforced frontier fortresses and the city walls of Konya and other cities, built palaces and caravanserais and was famous as a patron of intellectuals and artists (Redford 1993, 220-22). After the death of Alaeddin Kayqubad, who was poisoned in 1237, the empire began to collapse. His successors were not as enlightened as he had been, internal wars broke out and the threat from the Mongols became more apparent. In 1258, Mongols occupied the area previously under the control of the Seljuks of Rum and power was administered by their viziers until 1308, when the Seljuk empire eventually shrank to become a province of the larger and more powerful Mongol empire. During the golden age of the empire, the Seljuks of Rum created their own artistic language and developed what came to be the court style. In the capital and major cities of Anatolia, court workshops were established and new and existing patterns were adapted to be widely used in various media and in the architectural decoration of secular and religious complexes. Of the secular buildings erected during the reign of Alaeddin Kayqubad, only a few have survived, while most of the mosques and madrasas are still in place today. Objects of daily use, stucco reliefs and

underglaze lustre tiles are decorated with the so-called Eurasian animal style, inspired by Central Asian shamanism, which includes real animals, such as lions, eagles and peacocks, and mythical creatures, such as harpies, sphinxes and dragons. They are portrayed alone or in pairs and at times in scenes of combat. Signs of the zodiac, planets and heavenly bodies were often depicted, showing the Seljuks' fascination for astrology, cosmology, mysticism and science (Yalman 2012, 171-6). Calligraphy played an important role as well and the Kufic script was often employed. In this historical, political and cultural climate, the Konya rugs were made, sharing, as expected, some common features. They were certainly large, given the dimensions of some of the existing fragments, and therefore made on vertical looms, perhaps in royal workshops, which were the only places where such big carpets could be woven. Wool was the only material employed and the colours of the dyes are still almost unchanged today. The palette is quite limited but with a range of shades of the same colours. The knots are not dense, ranging from 500 to 1000 per square decimetre and the carpets are rather crudely woven. The fields are decorated with what at first glance can be described as an endless repetition of the same geometric motifs, while the usually large borders are filled with more geometric patterns, either stars or slender elongated hook shapes, resembling Kufic scripts, enriched with the so-called 'running dog' or 'running water' motif of Caucasian origin.

This information can easily be gleaned from a simple observation of the carpets, but is it so simple to recount their story? The answer is unequivocally no. Already the name of the group, 'Konya rugs', opens up a series of questions. Was the entire group made in the royal workshops in Konya or were the carpets made in different places in Seljuk Anatolia and then sent to the capital for the pleasure of the sultans and the wealthy members of the court? Were the carpets made in the 13th century, as most scholars believed, or, rather, in the 14th century, as more recent research seems to suggest? If we regard the 14th century as the time of production and the Seljuks of Rum as the exclusive patrons and makers, we should infer that production stopped around the early years of the century, as the Seljuks of Rum lost power in 1307. If, on the contrary, we broaden the horizon and favour one or more of the Anatolian Beyliks as potential



Figure 1. Carpet, 13th century, 240 x 320 cm. Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, Istanbul, inv.no. 685.

makers of these carpets, we could explore a wider range of possibilities, since they appeared on the political scene as early as the 11th century and maintained power, albeit limited, as overlords of the Seljuks first and the Ottomans later, until the 15th century. Beyliks were originally from Central Asia and belonged to the confederation of Oghuz tribes. They shared the same cultural background as the Seljuks, and this may also represent a potential link in the carpet-making traditions of these two groups of people. And should we consider either the 13th or the 14th century as the production period for all Konya rugs or should we conclude on the basis of the main features that some carpets were made in the 13th century and the remainder in the 14th century? I am inclined to think that Konya rugs should not be envisaged as a group but that each carpet should be studied separately or combined with a few others to form relatively small sub-groups, arranged according to the main motifs on the field and the borders.

If we start our excursus on Konya rugs from a carpet (inv. no. 685) (Figure 1) and a fragment (inv. no. 1034) (Figure 2), held today respectively at the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art in Istanbul and at the Ethnography Museum in Konya, we notice



Figure 2. Carpet fragment, 13th century, Ethnography Museum, Konya, inv. no. 1034. Photo courtesy of Seref Ozen.

that they are decorated with a lattice of eight-pointed stars, arranged in lines and woven on an intense dark blue background in the case of the carpet, and on an intense red background in the case of the fragment. Each star is horizontally connected to the next through a small band decorated with geometric motifs, while the space between each row of stars is filled with a peculiar pattern, formed by two parallel lines with protruding stylised elements: one formed by what could be described as the curved horns of a ram or a bull and the other by a straight line with two small triangular elements at the end (Figure 3). In the Islamic tradition, the use of star motifs is very common both on works of art and in architectural decoration and is interpreted as the representation of the infinity of the heavens and the perfection of the divine. What is less common, however, is the motif between the rows of stars. If we believe those curved elements to be horns, we could be looking at the representation of one of the twelve signs of the zodiac - the sign of Aries, if those horns belonged to a ram, the sign of Taurus if they belonged to a bull or an ox. If we set aside rams and bulls for a moment and reassess those curved elements as the head of addorsed dragons, we would find a possible interpretation for the lower elements enriched with triangular shapes as a stylised representation of the intertwined tails of the dragons. In addition to being frequently employed in Seljuk art, dragons, rams and bulls occupied an important place in both astrology and astronomy (Kuehn 2011, 135). All the real and fantastic animals we have encountered on the carpets so far had a talismanic and apotropaic significance. The owner of an artwork decorated with visual references to the planets in the form of zodiac signs, constellations or dragons could hope to receive some protection in his daily life, especially in terms of health and wealth. Works of art enriched with this artistic and highly symbolic repertoire were widespread from the late 12th to the 14th century, which roughly corresponds with the period when Konya carpets were produced. It goes without saying that both works of art and carpets of this kind were commissioned only by rulers and those who belonged to their closest entourage and showed their wealth and



Figure 3. Detail of 13th century carpet, Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, Istanbul, inv. no. 685.

Source: www.azerbaijanrugs.com.



Figure 4. Double-headed eagle, Western entrance portal of the Great Mosque and Hospital of Divriği, 1228-29. Photo: R. Prazeres via Creative Commons.



Figure 5. Detail of stone decoration on the façade of the Çifte Minareli Medrese, Erzurum, completed 1265.
Source: <https://www.kulturportali.gov.tr/>

The peculiar pattern that combines curved and triangular elements with straight lines, however, could also be interpreted as a stylised representation of the double-headed eagle, very popular in Seljuk art. What was previously thought to be horns could instead be seen as the beaks of an eagle and the lower triangular elements of the pattern as its tails. Double-headed eagles were used to decorate religious buildings, as can be found on the western portal of the Great Mosque and Hospital in Divriği (Figure 4) but also on palaces and city walls. As much as lions, eagles symbolize kingship and power, they bear with them some protective influence against bad luck and evil spirits. The peculiar design, however, could represent a combination of motifs and ideas, making the whole even more articulated. The curved elements could symbolize the double-headed eagle, in fact; the parallel lines could represent the tree of life - a symbol of fertility and creative forces since ancient times; and finally the protruding lines ending in the triangular shapes. The same motif can be found on the façade of the Çifte Minareli Madrasa in Erzurum (Figure 5).



Figure 6. Fragment, 1200s, Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, Istanbul, 114 x 230 cm, inv. no. 688. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

On the field of a large fragment, held today at the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art in Istanbul (inv. no. 688) (Figure 6), the main pattern recalls a highly stylised naturalistic element, more precisely a flower with petals and stems, as suggested by Agnes Geijer in her pioneering article on early rugs. She identified the naturalistic motif as a lotus flower, finding an almost exact copy on Chinese silk damask of the Yuan period (Geijer 1963, 83) (Figure 7). Although her analysis and conclusions are based on solid evidence, it is worth examining the motif from a different perspective, one which has been applied to the previous carpets and which is related to astrology and to certain extent, astronomy. The main pattern on the fragment could be a representation of the zodiac sign of Scorpio. If we look at the



Figure 7. Damask with cloud palmettes and Chinese characters. 14th century. Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY. 46.156.20 .

palmettes could in fact be interpreted as highly stylised representations of either dragons and phoenixes, most likely in combat, or of dragons and lions. Since the arrival on the scene of the Mongols and above all with the establishment of the Ilkhanid dynasty in Persia, some decorative elements typical of their tradition, such as the phoenixes, were exported to the Islamic world and became an integral part of the artistic repertoire of motifs and symbols in Islamic art. Dragons and phoenixes expressed cosmic forces and eternal life and were also connected to kingship. In Ilkhanid art dragons were often depicted with a sinuous body, paws with claws, wings and a long tail, while phoenixes were rendered with a pair of beautiful, floating wings and an equally long tail (Figure 10). On the Seljuk carpet fragments, potential dragons and phoenixes are highly stylised, but some specific parts of their bodies, such as the heads, paws, wings and tails, can be determined. Since there are no other surviving carpets decorated with this pattern, we must look at the fragment of a dragon and phoenix rug, made in Anatolia in the first part of the 15th century (inv. no. I. 4) (Figure 11). If we isolate a single element from the lattice on the Konya carpet and compare it with the pair of animals in Berlin, we would notice that the animals are arranged in a very similar way. This would once again emphasize my theory that the Konya carpets were made with the aim of exalting the power of the sovereigns and the dynasty and above all placing them under the protection of the stars and therefore the divine. As previously mentioned, this peculiar motif could also represent a lion and a dragon. Persis Berlekamp has offered a very interesting analysis on the recurrence of this motif in Islamic art and architecture, with particular attention to the Seljuk period. According to her, 'the iconographic multivalence of lions and dragons is well established. They were not just talismanic, but also potentially astrological, heraldic, mythological and hagiographic' (Berlekamp 2016, 67). If we share Professor Berlekamp's view, we can safely say that on the carpet fragments, there is a repetition of lions and dragons which would represent respectively the sign of the zodiac Leo and the usual symbol of the eclipse. Between 1219 and 1221 by order of sultan Alaeddin Kayqubad I, stone lions

decoration of the lidded bowl the *Vaso Vescovale* at the British Museum (1950,0725.1), the similarities between the portrayal of Scorpio on the carpet and that on the metalwork object are relevant and would support the hypothesis that some, if not all Konya carpets were made not only to celebrate the power and wealth of the Seljuk rulers, given their sizes, but also to offer them some sort of talismanic protection. As comparative material we can take a look at the depiction of Scorpio in the Book of the Birth of Iskandar, held today at the Wellcome Library in London (Figure 8).

A very important carpet is the one found at the Eshrefoglu Mosque in Beyşehir, which was divided into two fragments at a still undetermined moment in its history. One fragment is held today at The David Collection in Copenhagen (inv. no. 3/1991) (Figure 9) and the other belongs to the Keir Collection (Spuhler 2012, 41). From the fragments it appears that the original carpet was large, the field decorated with what resembles a lattice of palmettes. Re-evaluating what has been said so far about the other carpets, we could end up identifying the naturalistic patterns in a completely different way.



Figure 8. Scorpio, detail from 'The book of the birth of Iskandar', Shiraz, 1411, Wellcome Library, London, MS Persian 474.



Figure 9. Fragment of a carpet, 13th century, The David Collection, Copenhagen, 302 x 187 cm, inv. no. 3/1991. Source: www.azerbaijanrugs.com.

and dragons were also added to the inner and outer walls of Konya as decoration. The choice of representing lions and dragons on the fields of the carpets' fragments was probably made for the very same reasons.

An endless repetition of geometric shapes is evidently the main motif on the Konya rugs. What is not so clear, however, is the interpretation and inner symbolism they may be hiding. An articulate series of lines and curves alternating with lattices of stars seems to pinpoint a much more complex iconography, which draws on the cultural and artistic milieu of Seljuk Anatolia and Central Asia. In the second part of this article, the attempt to offer a new way of 'reading' this enigmatic group of carpets will continue, while the decoration on the main borders with what appears to be Kufic, or pseudo-Kufic, script, will be explored.



Figure 11. Tile with a phoenix, Iran, late 13th century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, acc. no.12.49.4.

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Figure 12 (right). Dragon and Phoenix rug, Anatolia, mid- to second half of 15th century, 90 x 172 cm, Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin, inv. no. I. 4. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

The Heritage of Cambodia's tie-dye textiles

Gillian Green

Cambodia is renowned for its handwoven textiles, particularly its silk weft *hol* (*ikat*) lengths worn as *sampot* (hip wrappers). The principal subject of this article, however, is another group of silk textiles found in Cambodia known as *kiet* in the national language, Khmer, the language of the Khmer majority ethnic group. These textiles, worn by Muslim women in Malaysia as head covers and scarves, form part of their traditional dress but not of Khmer traditional dress. They are decorated by the tie-dye methods known in the Malay language as *pelangi* (point resist tie-dye) and *tritik* (stitch resist tie-dye) on fine, machine-woven silk cloth (Ang 2022; Iwanaga 2003; Green 2003). Many commentators assert that these textiles are items of traditional Cham women's dress in Cambodia, Cham being an ethnic group of mostly Muslim descendants of the population of Champa, a group of former principalities in Vietnam. Since the 17th century successive waves of Cham refugees fleeing Vietnamese pressure resulted in their dispersion to neighbouring regions including Cambodia. But in a 1998 publication, *Busana Campa (Costumes of Champa)*, no tie-dyed textiles are in evidence amongst the hip wrappers, tunics and head cloths illustrated on the Cham models both male and female (Dharma and Taha eds.). Their absence, therefore, begs the question of the ethnicity of the wearers of these particular textiles. This article delves into the ethnic origin of Muslims resident in Cambodia, aiming to differentiate the strands of Muslim peoples in an effort to correctly assign these textiles' origin.



Figure 1. Tie resist and stitch resist. The outlines of the trucks are achieved using running stitch and pulling the cloth tight before immersing in the dyebath (*tritik*). The squarer motifs are formed by taking a point in the cloth and wrapping the cloth around it with thread before the dyebath (*pelangi*). Trucks feature in this pattern and could be the inspiration for that seen in figure 10. Pictorial textile (*kiet*) 176 x 88cm. Early 20th century. Courtesy National Museum of Cambodia Ga 6242.

The research derives its data from two collections of tie-dyed textiles, one in the Musée du Quai Branly, Paris and the other in the National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. These examples are said to date from the late 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th. In Cambodia there are a number of different words in the Khmer language for this type of textile, these being linked functionally by their decorative technique. Most common is the modern Khmer word *kiet* meaning 'tightly tied', often used in association with *con* (pronounced *chawng*) meaning 'bundled.' In Judith Jacob's dictionary *kiet* (n.) is defined as 'silk head cloth dyed by the Cham [sic] method i.e. by binding up different areas in turn so they do not take up the colour'. She defines *kiet* (v.) as 'to tighten, roll up, draw up' (1974:31). In a dictionary of Old Khmer /Sanskrit vocabulary, Saveros Pou states that the word '*gadhe*' (Skt.) means 'to tie firmly' with its modern Khmer form *kiet* meaning 'to knot very firmly several weaving threads to prevent them from taking the dye while you are dyeing other parts' (1992:134-5). Other words for this tie-dyed textile appear in the literature. Anthropologist Éveline Porée-Maspero observed, 'In Cambodia the Khmer and the Cham



Figures 2 and 3. Head cloths decorated using tie-dye *pelangi* and *tritik* methods. Early 20th century. Collection Gillian Green.

[sic] also use a system of ties made of banana strips to dye the fabric (and not the yarn-like *hol*); this is called *craboc*, which is said to recall the scales of the Naga', the Naga being a mythical serpent (1964:465). John Ang, a scholar of Malay textiles, uses the term *charabot* or *jbot* (2022, 12). In a Khmer dictionary the word *cha'ra' batch* is assigned the meaning 'to squeeze', this action applied to citrus fruits (Keesee 1996, 241). This transliteration could aptly describe the action of pulling a thread tightly around a section of silk cloth in the *pelangi* tie-dye process.

The Musée du Quai Branly, Paris collection

The Musée du Quai Branly has in its collection some 50 textiles designated 'Cham'. Many were originally donated to the Musée de l'Homme in 1970 by French anthropologist Bernard Dupaigne, who acquired most from the provinces of Kampot, in Cambodia's south, and Kompong Cham, which borders South Vietnam. They were transferred to the collection of the Musée du Quai Branly after its opening in 2006.

They can be divided into three groups according to the technique by which each was decorated. There are 8 men's hip wrappers, decorated in warp *ikat*, known as *ikat loseng* and also as *sarung popok* (Dupaigne 1980, 332). These particular hip wrappers are typical of Cham men's dress in Chau Doc and Tay Ninh,



Figures 4 and 5. Head cloths decorated by the tie-dye methods of *pelangi* and *tritik*. Early 20th century. Collection Gillian Green.

towns on the Vietnamese side of Cambodia's southeast border, and also in Ho Chi Minh City (*Busana Campa*: figs. 114,116,121). Interestingly, they are also worn by Cham men in west Kalimantan (Borneo). There are 36 silk weft *ikat* women's hip wrappers (*sampot hol* in Khmer). Cham women from this same region may wear these hip wrappers (*dhaul sarung* in Malay language and *khan mbaik dhaul* in Cham language) (*Busana Campa*: fig.120). Patterns are typical of *sampot hol* worn by Khmer women in the 20th century. Bernard Dupaigne commented that 'Cham women refugees in Cambodia had put their weaving skills to more profitable use by adopting Khmer designs and techniques and producing textiles that their Khmer neighbours could appreciate and buy' (1980, 332).

But it is the third group of 9 textiles in the Musée du Quai Branly collection patterned by the tie-dye techniques of *pelangi* and *tritik* that are of particular interest because these techniques and the textiles they create are not evidenced in the illustrations in *Busana Campa* in use by Cham peoples. These textiles have patterns of floral or geometric motifs tie-dyed on fine, commercially woven Chinese silk. Of these, 7 are head coverings or scarves. The textiles feature a common design layout of a substantial central field bounded by end panels and narrow borders down the long sides. These textiles, be they head coverings or

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Figure 6. Silk sarung with *pucuk rebung* motifs enclosed in triangles. Private collection.

scarves, have their motifs in a regular array in the central field, sometimes set in a lattice grid. The end panels feature a row of triangular *pucuk rebung* motifs ('bamboo shoots' in Malay), stylised forms with three nodes projecting from either side; or sometimes star shapes (Figures 2-5). The other two items are women's long-sleeved, calf length, tunic-style garments known in Malay as *baju*, which have all over floral and geometric motifs created in *pelangi* and *tritik* techniques.

Two wooden tools in the Museum's collection, also donated by Bernard Dupaigne, are of great interest and relevance. One is a double-sided wooden stamp (5x3x3 cm) each face being incised so as to create a raised outline of the *pucuk rebung* motif (Inventory # 71.1970.120.257). An imprint from this tool could be used as a guide for the *tritik* technique or even as an applicator for wax in the production of batik. This motif often appears enclosed within a triangular outline at the end panels on *sarung* characteristic of the Malay peninsula (Figure 6). The other tool is a one-sided wooden stamp (9.5x5.5x3.3 cm) in the shape of a raised 8-pointed star that could be used for applying dye to the star-shaped motif also frequently observed in the borders of tie-dyed textiles (Inventory # 71.1970.120.258).

National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh collection.

There are 45 *kiet* tie-dye-patterned silk textiles in the collection of the National Museum of Cambodia (Figure 7). Some have an identifying code number inked onto a small tab attached to the corner but no further accession documentation exists. They share, with the Paris examples, the characteristics of fine, machine-woven Chinese silk of similar dimensions - between 1.8 to 2 metres long and 0.9 metres wide - and patterned by *pelangi* and *tritik* techniques with the same pattern layout.



What is unique about this particular collection is that these *kiet* can be divided into two groups based on the patterns in their central field. Approximately half feature floral or abstract motifs in regular array - some with animals included. The other half feature quite unique pictorial imagery with figurative motifs representing contemporary subjects including buildings, bicycles, cars, birds and animals, trees, cremation vessels in the shape of *nak* (snake) and *pratib* (floats featured in the annual Water Festival) (Figures 8-10) (Green

Figure 7. Cabinet displaying early 20th century tie-dye textiles (*kiet*). National Museum of Cambodia collection, 2009.

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2008, 62-71). All these textiles are said to have been accessioned into the collection before 1928. This date is supported by Mohd. Azhar Bin Samin's observation in which, referring to the northern states of Malaysia, he states that

The production of blocks and metal blocks with wax was first introduced in Malaysia around the year 1920. During that time, the *Pelangi* cloth slowly had been less produced by textile manufacturers. In 1928 the block batik manufacturing has replaced the traditional resist (*teritik*/tie-dye) of the *Pelangi* cloth...After the 1930s *Pelangi* cloth is no longer widely produced because its production process is quite complex and intricate compared to the production of block batik (2012:268).

Whatever the central field pattern, the end panel patterns of both groups are selected from the same distinctive decorative motifs. Some feature a line of *pucuk rebung*, stylised bamboo shoots, or a triangular form with shallow, saw-toothed edges, perhaps a simplified form of the same *pucuk rebung* motif. Alternatively they may feature one or two lines of 4, 6 or 8 pointed stars; or a combination of these forms together with *pucuk rebung*. The stylised forms of *pucuk rebung* and stars seen on the wooden stamps in the Musée du Quai Branly collection closely resemble these end panel motifs.

Mohd. Azhar Bin Samin's study sheds a great deal of light on the historical and cultural context of tie-dyed textiles in the Malay peninsula and their relation to those of neighbouring maritime regions. He cites Rusmawati Ghazali's 1995 thesis entitled '*Tie-dye in Resist Art*' in which she states "...that the Pelangi cloth that spread in the Malay Peninsula in ancient times is likely to come from the Patani". He elaborates further noting that

This statement is based on the information contained in the research paper written [sic] by the Kedah State Museum entitled *The Old Textiles Pattern and Motive Narration* [in] which according to the local history, Sultan of Terengganu Tun Zainal Abidin had lived at the Palace of the King of Patani, before he was installed as the Sultan of Terengganu and later became Sultan Zainal Abidin I. During his reign, the king had brought together a group of people from Patani, including artisans to Terengganu to begin settlement by opening Patani Village that is located near Masjid Abidin in Kuala Terengganu where the village is still exists to this [day] (2012:265).

He cites Mohd. Zamberi A. Malek (1994), who explains that '...the wife of the Sultan Zainal Abidin I (1725-1733) was the sister of the King of Patani. This is showed [sic] that the art of textile making including Pelangi cloth in Terengganu might be started and develop during that time.'

Observations by Sir Richard Winstedt, an English colonial administrator in Malaya, with his outsider perspective, aligns with Mohd. Azhar Bin Samin's comment about 1928 being the end point of *pelangi* production, so reinforcing opinions of the declining quality of *pelangi* produced by the 1920/30s. He commented on the technique of tie dye artisans in Terengganu. 'Last and latest of the processes practised in the Peninsula is a method introduced apparently at a recent date into Singapore by Boyanese [Boyan is an Indonesian island north of Surabaya] craftsmen and thence copied by the nimble fingers of Terengganu craftsmen. Its fabrics [tie-dye] are gaudy and meretricious...' (Winstedt 1925, 67). Another observer asserted that '[In Terengganu] *kain pelangi* [tie-dye patterned *sarung*] are produced. The patterns are rather crude and resemble some of those produced by batek [sic] work on fabrics seen in Malaya' (Hill 1949, 84). These observations confirm that expertise to create these tie dye patterns clearly resided at least in the hands of Malay Muslim women of Terengganu.

Clearly the art of tie-dye was well developed in the NE Malay peninsula states around the turn of the 20th century. This expertise could well have been transferred to the west coast of neighbouring Cambodia across the Gulf of Siam. It is proposed here that this expertise was transferred to, or adopted by, an ethnic minority in Cambodia known as the *Chvea*. This is the designation of an ethnic group who are Muslims of mixed Malay-Khmer heritage who, in current times, live in communities on mainland Cambodia, particularly in Kampot province in the south, and at Prek Kdam ferry and Russey Keo, both north of Phnom Penh.



Top to bottom: Figure 8. Pictorial textile (kiet) 178 x 90 cm. Early 20th century. Shophouses, cars, bicycles, sailing vessels, birds, fish. Courtesy National Museum of Cambodia Ga 6254.

Figure 9. Pictorial textile (kiet) 194 x 89 cm. Early 20th century. Prominent line of naga-headed sailing vessels as used in cremation ceremonies. Courtesy National Museum of Cambodia Ga 6240.

Figure 10. Pictorial textile (kiet) 176 x 85 cm. Early 20th century. Prominent line of sailing vessels with naga head at each end and central structure, as used in annual Water Festival celebrations. Courtesy National Museum of Cambodia Ga 6253.

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So who are the *Chvea*? Anthropologist and linguist William Collins has undertaken a detailed study of the origins of Muslim Cambodian nationals. He writes

One type in the Muslim minority community in Cambodia, are termed the *Chvea*. This group claims Malay not Cham origins ...the Jva (as it is written in Khmer) or *Chvea* (as the word is pronounced in Khmer). These people do not speak Cham but speak Khmer. They identify themselves as “Chams” when that label is used loosely to mean “Cambodian Muslim”...The group calls itself *Chvea* although they prefer the label “Khmer Islam”... The historical record suggest that the Jva/*Chvea* Muslims had arrived in Cambodia over the centuries as traders from the Malay Peninsula or the Indonesian archipelago. ... Muslim communities of *Chvea* in Kampot [south coast town of Cambodia] probably originate in such Malay–Khmer partnerships [Malay man–Khmer woman]. These are communities on the Cambodian coast which would have been the landfall for traders sailing from Patani [southern Thailand] and Kelantan [NE Malaysia] on the opposite shore of the Gulf of Thailand (2009,77-79).

Chvea artisans seem highly likely to be responsible for the making of tie-dye textiles for their own head coverings, scarves and *baju* demonstrating continuity with their forebears in Malaysia. The tie-dye textiles in the Musée du Quai Branly labelled ‘Cham’ by Dupaigne may well have been the product of these *Chvea* communities who live in Cambodia.

There remains the second group of tie-dye textiles in the National Museum of Cambodia collection, those with central panels displaying identifiable pictorial or figurative, not floral, motifs. This striking difference indicates a significant cultural chasm between the purpose of these two groups of textiles even though they are of the same size, patterning techniques and end panel motifs. This strongly suggests that they did not function as head coverings for Muslim women. If not, what could have been the reason they were prepared? And were they also made by *Chvea*?

There is a compelling series of historic cultural initiatives that could have stimulated incorporation of non-traditional textile motifs in *pelangi/kiet* prepared in Cambodia in the first two decades of the 20th century. These innovations were instigated by George Groslier, the French official who became the first director of the Cambodian School of Arts. This school had its origin in the royal court, where acknowledged skilled artisans, including women textile artisans, produced luxury artefacts of the highest quality for the exclusive use of the court.

In 1912 this group was restructured into the Royal School of Decorative Arts and objects produced by the designated masters of each craft school were specifically designed as works of art for sale. In addition palace artisans underwent a test in which they made a work of art inspired by a *self-chosen theme* (my italics). Five years later Groslier was appointed to administer this school and found that ‘contemporary artisans ...[were] able and willing to assimilate anything [new]’ (Muan 2001, 32). He also founded the ‘Corporation Cambodgiennes,’ a commercial outlet for these artisan-produced items which was soon deluged with commissions from foreign residents delighted to acquire such handcrafted artefacts. Purchasers were not only locals but also the growing number of tourists visiting the Kingdom.

It is highly likely that the contemporary images on the pictorial textiles were the outcome of the increasing opportunities for textile artisans, including *Chvea* women, to produce works not for traditional uses but to take advantage of the burgeoning market for novel handcrafted items, particularly as they were encouraged to come up with their own ideas for patterns, designs and subjects. Such developments would amply demonstrate a high level of entrepreneurship by *Chvea* Muslim women, resulting in tie-dyed pictorial textiles inspired by their own personal window into Cambodian cultural motifs and practices.

That this tie-dye tradition still persists in Takeo province, southeastern Cambodia, is evidenced by an artisan whom I met in 2011 (Figure 10 see front cover). She was creating a tie-dye textile on fine silk using both the *tritik* and *pelangi* techniques, with a prominent motif of a truck very similar to that on the Museum's antique example (Figure 1). This repetition of motifs from older published examples is by no means an unusual practice and is usually mediated by traders from Phnom Penh, the products destined for tourist markets. While this artisan's ethnicity is unknown, what is clear is that although the market and original purpose of these cloths may have changed the skills of *pelangi* and *tritik* still persist in Cambodia.

Conclusion

This study has illuminated the presence of the *Chvea*, a group of Cambodian Muslims with historical links to Malays of the Malay Peninsula. It has proposed a theory that their presence in Cambodia is revealed by focussing on the cultural and historical significance of one of their traditional textiles known as *pelangi* which are patterned by the tie-dye method. This textile uniquely differentiates *Chvea* from the Cham (also Muslims), and the Khmer of Cambodia. In the literature and in common parlance tie-dye textiles from Cambodia tend often to be attributed to 'Cham' people, but because they do not appear in an authoritative publication showing traditional Cham dress, this invites a rethink of their origin. This article proposes that this textile technique was brought to Cambodia not through any Cham links with Malay culture - the technique is well known in Malay societies - but through the *Chvea* people, who have a stronger cultural connection with Malaya as traders. It might also be that assigning these textiles to Cham people could have resulted from loose usage of the term 'Cham' to mean 'Cambodian Muslim', this resulting from the fact that Muslim Cham and *Chvea* communities often live in close association in Cambodia.

It is also proposed that the tie-dye skills of *Chvea* artisans were responsible for a unique and highly unusual group of pictorial textiles dated to around the turn of the 20th century which might have resulted from an entrepreneurial programme of production not for use by *Chvea* themselves, but for sale to tourists and local foreigners resident in Cambodia.

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The Samatoa Lotus ‘Silk’ Farm near Siem Reap, Cambodia

Sheelagh Killeen Rees



Lotus buds on display at the entrance to the Samatoa Lotus Farm. Photo: SKR.

In November 2022 twelve of us, including our local guide ‘Bob’, visited Samatoa Lotus Fabric Farm, near Siem Reap in Cambodia. The Fabric Farm is run by Awen Delaval from Brittany, who has been there for the last 20 years, producing fine fabrics for the fashion and commercial enterprise that is Samatoa Lotus Farm. It was about an hour’s drive out of Siem Reap, in our small air-conditioned coach. We had turned up the day before—a Sunday—only to find Samatoa closed. We had the right date, but not the correct day for it being open. So we set off the next morning to be welcomed this time by Awen, who was standing at the gate, ready to receive us and introduce us to his wonderful world of lotus textile production.

Some cultural facts surrounding the meaningfulness of the production. The lotus flower (the Latin name for which is ‘*nelumbo*’) is a symbol of divine perfection in many Asian cultures. In Buddhism, the lotus is associated with purity, spiritual awakening and faithfulness. The extraordinary fabric called lotus ‘silk,’ was historically used, said Awen, to

make robes for high-ranking Buddhist monks. The stamens, seeds & placentas of the lotus flower, along with parts of many other plants, are also used for the natural dyes used to colour the threads which are eventually used for weaving the cloth. Other plants for dyeing include the golden shower tree (*cassia fistula*), cashew or cachou nut (*anacardium occidentale*), annatto (*bixa orellana*), jambolan, the Java plum (*syzygium cumini*), lac, for red dye (*laccifer lacca*), the bark of the Garcinia tree (*garcinia cambogia*), the leaves of the tamarind (*tamarindus indica*), the neem tree (*azadirachta Indica*), also used for teeth cleaning in India, bougainvillea, eucalyptus, & lastly, of course, the water lily (*nymphaea*), which so closely resembles the lotus.

Created by Awen in 2003, SAMATOYA is an ‘Eco-Responsible & Fair-Trade Textile Company.’ The focus on customer satisfaction and the impeccable quality of the many products made from lotus fibre combine with sustainable and environmental social respect. At the heart of Samatoa’s practice is its reliance on its friendly workshops, in which the farmer-harvesters, the spinners, the weavers as well as the tailors and seamstresses and the partners share the same ambitions.

Projects

Samatoa has successfully developed three projects over the years. One is the Eco Textile Mill, the first to produce a unique range of exclusive natural fabrics made from the natural ‘silk’ extracted from the lotus stem fibres. Kapok is also spun here, combined with organic cotton.

Samatoa was honoured in 2012, after only seven years of existence, with the UNESCO Award of Excellence for its production of lotus silk fabrics.

The second project is a high-end clothing studio, which creates high quality garments, as well as bags and scarves woven and tailored from its exclusive fabrics. Thanks to a steady and standing training with the regular assistance of specialists in western design, the workshop shapes high



Relief showing heavenly beings, aspara, dancing above lotus flowers at Angkor. Photo: FK.



fashion clothes and accessories of the highest quality. Samathea collaborates with Eco-Fashion Designers, proposing Experts in Modelling with the best of these International Designers.

The third project, which Awen was working on while we were there, is to do with waste disposal—what the left over stems and stalks could be turned into. I will discuss this later in the article.

Arriving as we did not long after the Covid epidemic, there seemed to us to be only a few workers in evidence. As with other areas of life, the pandemic had hit Cambodia hard. For two years there were no visitors.

Awen Delaval explaining the production processes. Photo: Elizabeth Bridges.

In an aside, our guide Bob revealed to us that he had become a road maker—hard work for one used to expounding his knowledge of Cambodian life to tourists. He had worked on roads for two years, in order to feed his growing family of four children. One had the feeling that the whole place was suffering a decline. It's not hard to understand the decline, as lotus farming is by its hand-made nature labour-intensive. This results in costly goods, and with no tourists to buy for the last two years, we represented a mere drop in the ocean in terms of visiting & buying.

Production

The lotus fibres come exclusively from the stems of the lotus flower, eventually transformed into the softest and most breathable bright fabric. Awen spoke to us all at length to describe the methods used to extract the fibres from the lotus stalks. The stems themselves only show a foot or so above the waterline, with the exotic flowers at the upper end. The rest of the very rough and tough stalks descend five to six feet or more beneath the surface of the water down to their muddied roots. They have to be harvested by the workers, their hands rubber-gloved, from boats floating in the middle of the many lotus lakes. This happens four times a day—twice in the morning & twice in the afternoon, with the growing stems cut underwater, thus leaving the big roots to support new growth. Only those plants whose stalks have reached full maturity are cut. Approximately one ton of stalks are processed in one week. The lotus fields are entirely transplanted every three years to preserve the best quality of stalks for harvesting.

After the harvest, the stems are brought to the open-air factory's weaving shed where they are cleaned to remove the hairy spines covering the length of the stalks and to take out any impurities before the spinning process. After cleaning the hairy stalks, the spinners carefully cut around the stems and break them in two, to extract the extremely fine filaments of lotus fibre. The stalks have four chambers running through their length, from which the many fine pale gold filaments are pulled out. They are cut, kept flat & taut, & released in one-to-two-foot lengths, ready to be rolled by the worker on a wettened and polished long wooden surface. Spinning is a crucial stage in the whole process, when the lotus stalk fibres are transformed into thread.

This is probably the most meticulous part of the whole process, when the women spinners put the different lengths of fine thread or waterline, with the exotic flowers at the upper end. The rest of the very rough and tough stalks descend floating in bowls as a welcome in the foyer. The scent of the lotus is faintly reminiscent of anise. Lotus oil extracted from the flowers can also be used for burning. Awen mentioned that his current project was to turn any waste into other uses. He showed us examples of his hand-made paper production, for example, all of which stems from the waste products – so there is no

The Samatoa Lotus ‘Silk’ Farm near Siem Reap, Cambodia

wastage! Awen has many plans, working with scientists, for further uses of any waste as mulch or even in fuel processing.

At Samatoa, they also sometimes mix the threads of lotus with spun kapok and organic cotton, to produce an interesting mélange of woven properties.

Some important facts. One spinner produces 250 metres of thread per day. To produce one jacket there need to be 4 metres of fabric, or 12,000 metres of thread, which means 2 months of work for the spinner. Because of the complexity this process has to be performed entirely and exclusively by hand. So this is very labour-intensive work.



Above: Fields of lotus plants at the farm near Siem Reap. Photo: LBM 1948.

Below: Cutting the lotus stems. Photo: SKR.

Finally, the threads are ready for the weaving process. The setting up of the loom takes 15 days. The twisted thread is wound around reels then transferred onto quill spindles which are set into wooden shuttles. These are then sent through the space formed on the loom between the warp yarns. The weaver switches the position of the pedals on the loom and repeats the same previous movement with the shuttle.





Above: Rolling the filaments together on a wettened and polished long wooden surface. Photo: SKR.

Below: A loom warped up and ready for weaving. Photo: SKR.

One weaver can produce one metre of fabric per day. A 50-metre bolt of fabric can be woven in the space of two months.

The material produced from lotus has remarkable properties. Uniquely it becomes when woven a soft & amazingly light and breathable fabric. It is the most ecologically sustainable material because it does not contain or involve any chemical processes or toxic properties. The manufacturing process does not require any usage of petrol, gas or electric power, nor does it use any additional water. The lotus is an efficient phytosanitary plant, which cleans the water of the lake it grows in and protects the eco-system by preserving the fishes & insects. All the processes of fabrication are entirely sustainable as the thread becomes the ecological fabric.

One important issue that Awen talked to us about was the question of lotus waste. Astonishingly there is, in fact, no waste at all from the lotus plant.



All the parts which do not enter the fabric weaving process, such as the seeds, are edible or have other uses such as being made into infusions or lotus tea. All the petals, the placenta and stamens are dehydrated in a solar dryer especially created for the purpose of making lotus tea & infusions. The seeds can be popped out of their shower-head-like green circular seed pod, and after the fine green skin has been removed to reveal the purest white nut, they are delicious and can be eaten raw or cooked. They can also of course be dried & planted, or ground to be transformed into flour, (much as the Northern Italians, did with their chestnuts during the Second World

The Samatoa Lotus ‘Silk’ Farm near Siem Reap, Cambodia

War). The flour is used for pastry making. The flowers of the lotus are of course used as scented decorations in homes, in temples and in hotels. Our hotel always had fresh lotus flowers floating in bowls as a welcome in the foyer. The scent of the lotus is faintly reminiscent of anise. Lotus oil extracted from the flowers can also be used for burning. Awen mentioned that his current project was to turn any waste into other uses. He showed us examples of his hand-made paper production, for example, all of which stems from the waste products – so there is no wastage! Awen has many plans, working with scientists, for further uses of any waste as mulch or even in fuel processing.

At the end of our tour of the small clean factory, and after imbibing the deliciously fragrant lotus tea, we all descended to the ground floor shop, wishing to support Samatoa’s renewal. Lotus silk is not cheap, but one of our group bought a very expensive pure lotus silk scarf as a present. Most of us were more modest in our purchases, but we bought all manner of lotus products, including scarves, bags and of course the flower-head lotus tea.

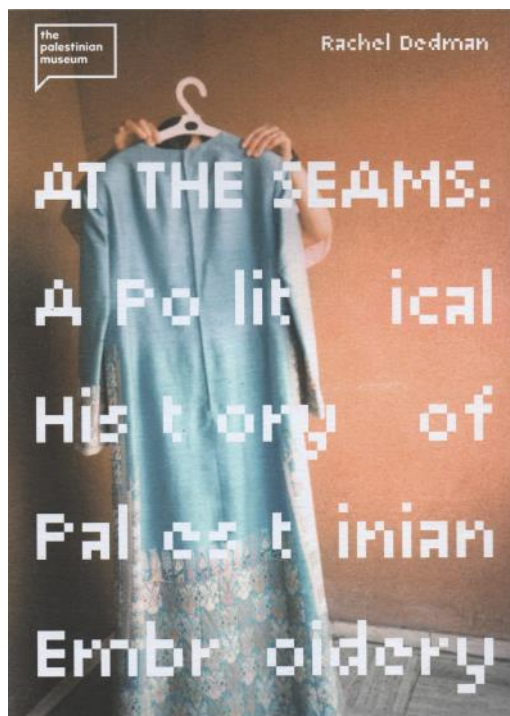
Sheelagh Killeen Rees



Left above: the ‘shower head’ seed pod. Photo: I. Kinpei. Right above: Taking lotus seeds from the pod. Photo: Tobixen.

Below: Close-up showing texture of scarf made from lotus fibre, cotton and kapok. Photo: SKR.





At the Seams: A Political History of Palestinian Embroidery

By Rachel Dedman

In English and Arabic.

The Palestinian Museum, 2016.

Paperback, 304 pages.

ISBN 978-9953-0-3641-0

In 2016, an exhibition of Palestinian embroidery, commissioned by the Palestinian Museum in Berzeit, Palestine, was mounted in Beirut, hosted by Dar el-Nimer for Arts and Culture. The exhibition was the idea of the late Leila Miqdadi Al-Qattan (1034-2015), to honour her friend Malak al-Husseini Addulrahim, a leading figure in the preservation and revival of the traditions of Palestinian embroidery. It was accompanied by a book, *At the Seams: A Political History of Palestinian Embroidery*. This volume will also accompany an exhibition to be mounted in a new manifestation under the title *Material Power: Palestinian Embroidery*, at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, from 8th July to 29th October 2023.

Written by curator Rachel Dedman and translated by Mohammed Abdallah, it is by no means a glossy coffee table book, nor is it a sumptuous display of a private collection aimed to enchant the casual reader. The text is printed on matt paper, the introductory section interspersed with black and white archive images of bridal couples, of women stitching at an Arab women's union in Ramallah, of refugees at an emergency camp in Jordan, of an anti-Zionist demonstration in 1920. There are full colour images of dresses hung against a grey ground, with detail shots of draped textiles evoking the work of the embroiderers, within Palestine and outside it, in exile. The effect is to suggest fact, not fiction; history, not timelessness.

The thoughtful opening text also challenges our expectations of a textile publication, the emphasis being not on the fine craftsmanship, though fine craftsmanship there certainly is, but on the connection between fabric and material, between dress and wearer, between life and form. Some parts of this section are crafted like a poem, or a meditation on the garments: 'mosaic, imperfect, intimate.'

In the main body of the book the author places the embroideries of Palestinian women in their historical and cultural context. A lack of detailed written descriptions of their lives before 1949 means that she has had to draw on memories and stories told by Palestinian women and gleaned through her own fieldwork and that of the scholars whose work she has drawn on. Among them is the prolific collector of embroidery Widad Kavar, whose knowledge of this field is second to none. The testimony of the women reveals Palestinian embroideries to have been markers of identity, wealth, status, village or locality. They carry a sense of tradition, but this, like the women's lives, has been subject to change.

The author describes the characteristics of the work from different areas, manifested in the styles, cuts, motifs and fabric as well as the types of stitches used, but always within the context of change. Motifs spread from generation to generation and from place to place, with embroiderers taking inspiration from archaeological remains and architecture, rugs sold in the market, military uniforms and Christian vestments. Clothes decorated in elaborate ways were predominantly worn in the countryside and played a central role in weddings and other ceremonies. Girls embroidered items in their own trousseau, while both the groom's family and the bride's family contributed to it. Embroidery was an ubiquitous social practice 'woven into the fabric of quotidien existence'.

Book review

Palestine was under Ottoman rule from the fifteenth century, losing control in 1917. Towards the end of the Ottoman period the growth in industrial employment and agricultural developments had led to changes in women's work. Some of the continuity of patterns and knowledge of motifs was interrupted; increasing wealth in the middle and upper classes was accompanied by changes in taste, including an increase in western influence in dress, especially in urban areas.

As in many traditional textile practices, the availability of aniline dyes, widely adopted after the First World War, largely replaced the use of natural dyestuffs. Developments in motor transport in the 1920s

meant that villagers could travel further than just to their local market to seek materials or to sell their work. For special occasions, dresses decorated in embroidery centres such as Bethlehem were sought after in many other areas. In the 1930s there were increased imports of cloth, and the spread of the sewing machine also changed working practices. The desire for change and innovation was widespread during the 1930s and 1940s.

In 1948 the Nakba, or 'catastrophe' in Arabic, when the British Mandate came to an end, the Jewish state of Israel was declared, and war broke out between Jews and Arabs, resulted in huge numbers of Palestinians being displaced. The book does address the violent history of this period, and the devastating effect on the lives of survivors, but manages to balance recognition of the tragedy with a steady perspective. The focus here is on the notion of change: the effect of the traumatic events on the production and use of embroidery in the context of exile, loss and rural stability was part of a continuum of rupture. Embroidery, which had been bound up with home, livelihood and land, was already undergoing changes. Now these accelerated and took other directions.

There are 224 pages in English followed by a central section of colour images of items in the displays. The Arabic section begins at the opposite end of the book, meeting the English section in the middle. We are deep into another culture, but the book remains accessible and fascinating. Highly recommended.

Jellayeh from Hebron, 1900-1915, from the collection of Dar Al-Tifel Al-Arabi Museum for Palestinian Heritage. © The Palestine Museum, Birzeit, Palestine.





Skirt panel on a wooden frame in Juchitán, Oaxaca. The embroiderer combines machine-stitched geometric patterning with hand-stitched floral motifs. Photo: Chloë Sayer.

Textile Arts of Mexico

Chloë Sayer

Few countries in the world offer such a rich and varied cultural heritage as Mexico. Contemporary Mexican textiles owe their vitality to the fusion of craft skills that followed the Spanish conquest. Today the descendants of ancient civilisations combine Indigenous and European techniques. In the state of Oaxaca, where 15 Indigenous languages are spoken, textiles remain an essential part of life. The backstrap loom serves, as it has for centuries, to create fine cloth with a range of design motifs and textures.

The Zapotec, with over 410,000 speakers, form the largest language-group in Oaxaca. In many communities, traditional garments are patterned on the loom with supplementary weft threads. In the Zapotec village of Santo Tomás Jalieza, however, textiles are warp-patterned. The weavers of Jalieza once supplied local women with cotton waist-sashes to secure their heavy wrap-around skirts. When these skirts lost popularity in the 1970s, weavers switched to making bags, belts, table-runners and place-mats. Every day, three generations of the Navarro family gather in their patio and tether their backstrap looms to a shared post. Predetermined warps 'float' over and under groups of weft threads to form birds, animals, *danzantes* (dancers with feathered headdresses) and other raised designs. Crispina Navarro Gómez has won numerous awards for the intricacy of her work. Born in 1963, she describes herself as a miniaturist in cloth: 'Weavers in Jalieza buy ready-spun cotton thread. Many years ago, for a time, this thread became scarce. The cost escalated, and I started working on a smaller scale to save money. Then, because I enjoyed the challenge, I carried on.'

In Santo Tomás Jalieza, as in most other communities, backstrap weaving has traditionally been the preserve of women. In the Zapotec weaving town of Teotitlán del Valle, however, most weavers are male. When Spanish settlers introduced sheep in the mid-16th century, wool became the dominant fibre. While men learned to use free-standing European treadle looms, women focused on carding and spinning.

Textile Arts of Mexico

Today, these gender roles still predominate in the family workshops where tapestry-patterned runners, wall-hangings and rugs are made. While some carry stylised flower, animal or bird motifs, others echo Zapotec designs borrowed from the archaeological sites of Mitla and Monte Albán, or replicate the paintings of European artists such as Klee, Picasso or Escher. Navajo-inspired designs are popular. So, too, are Catholic saints and religious symbols, lifelike portraits of historical figures, and realistic landscapes.

Pedro Mendoza Gutiérrez is a master weaver. Born in 1975, he learned his skills from his parents. 'My ancestors, like most people in Teotitlán, spent six months weaving and six months growing maize, beans and chickpeas the feed the family. I started weaving when I was eight. By the age of ten, I could elaborate my own designs.' Many of Pedro's interlocking geometric motifs are inspired by antique *sarapes*. He also takes pride in using local dyes. Mexican indigo gives Pedro a variety of blue-black tones. Yellow is derived from lichen or rock moss. Depending on the type of mordant used, cochineal provides over 25 shades ranging from brilliant crimson to reddish-black. *Huizache* seedpods from local evergreen trees give a black pigment. For Pedro, it's important to feel that he is upholding tradition while at the same time giving free reign to his imagination.

The Zapotec who live on the Isthmus of Oaxaca specialise in embroidery. Ever since the 19th century, the flamboyant gala ensembles of Tehuana women have symbolized Mexico's national identity. In the 1930s and 1940s, Tehuana dress was favoured by Frida Kahlo and other influential women, eager to proclaim their allegiance to Mexican values and popular traditions. Today Tehuana clothing remains a source of local pride during lavish religious festivals. Although some women embroider their own fiesta costumes, others prefer to hire them or to buy the elements from specialist vendors. The finest ensembles, however, are commissioned from virtuoso embroiderers, both male and female. Cloth panels are stretched on a wooden frame, and hand-stitched with vibrantly coloured floral motifs. An alternative style features areas of complex geometric patterning. Formed by densely packed lines of chainstitch, configured in different designs, this work is done on ancient and by-now-irreplaceable sewing machines. Ceremonial dress, although costly, is an essential expression of religious devotion.

Chloë Sayer will lead a tour to Mexico in 2024 (10-27 May) for Indus Experiences. The tour will visit artist families and museums in the states of Mexico, Puebla and Oaxaca. The trip will end with spectacular celebrations during la Vela Sandunga in Tehuantepec. **For more information and the full itinerary, see <https://www.indus experiences.co.uk/tours/textiles-arts-crafts-of-mexico/>**



Above: Tapestry-woven wool rug made by Pedro Mendoza Gutiérrez in Teotitlán del Valle, Oaxaca. Photo: Chloë Sayer.

Nour Hage: *Kheit* (28 April - 16 July 2023), Leighton House, London



Nour Hage: *Kheit* (28 April - 16 July 2023), on display in the historic Drawing Room at Leighton House, is an exhibition and event series in collaboration with The Arab British Centre. Meaning ‘thread’ in Arabic, *Kheit* presents three artworks created in response to the tiles in the Arab Hall and staircase hall. An award-winning textile artist, Nour has also researched the museum’s collection of antique textiles, featuring Syrian clothing, Ottoman hangings and runners, and Iranian carpets. During Leighton’s lifetime textiles, in particular from the Middle East and North Africa, were a prominent decorative feature in his house, and over the last two years the museum has acquired and displayed significant pieces to recreate the original interiors.

Kheit is a celebration of the skill and the artistry of textiles. Leighton himself loved and appreciated textiles, which he collected and displayed throughout his home.

The artworks

Drawing inspiration from the mosaic frieze designed by Walter Crane (1845-1915) for the Arab Hall, Nour has created *Her Rays* and *Sukun*, representing the sun and the moon through colour and texture. In *Her Rays*, golden brown silk and cotton braids hang down

suggesting the sun’s rays. In contrast in *Sukun*, the moon’s cool serenity and calm is reflected in pale grey and purple tones. This piece was woven on a circular loom in a technique crafted by the artist and is surrounded by braids. In West Asian culture, braids are believed to lock in the evil eye and bad energy.

The colours of the pieces were informed by some verses found in a calligraphic tile panel on the staircase at Leighton House, attributed to Sheikh Muhammad Jamal ud-Din al-Makki al Amili, a fourteenth century poet from Jezzine, the artist’s hometown in Lebanon. Nour dyed the fabrics using sumac berries gathered from Jezzine, to obtain the darker brown hues for *Her Rays*. She then further soaked the fabrics in an iron bath, made from rusty nails found in the artist’s new home in Dubai, to achieve the cool greyish purple tones for *Sukun*.

Also on display is *Our Garden*, co-produced with eight local residents, invited to participate in a series of workshops to create embroidered symbols which had a personal significance for them. Stitched together, the resulting piece is presented as a talismanic object, imbued with each participant’s intentions.

Our Garden evokes a Palestinian tradition where women from one family or community embroider and stitch together a wedding trousseau which the bride keeps her entire life, carrying memories and her matrilineal lineage with her. The technique used for *Our Garden* mirrors traditional Turkish towels, typically embroidered by women using silk thread, gold wire or flat gold strips to create different textures. An example of a Turkish towel from the museum’s collection is on display in the exhibition room.

Kheit is accompanied by a short film and a wider programme of events exploring textiles and the threads connecting Britain and the Arab world, from the 19th century to today.

Kheit has been funded by the Barakat Trust’s Hands on Islamic Art grant, made possible by the National Heritage Lottery Fund.

ORTS LUNCH PARTY & OTHER ACTIVITIES

The summer is almost upon us, and with it the annual July summer lunch party, this year to be held at Louise and Ken Teague's house in South London. For those who haven't experienced an ORTS party, it is an event not to be missed. Bring a dish to share, or contribute financially instead—please let the hosts know in advance. As well as festive fare there is the auction in aid of ORTS funds—do bring textiles and rugs, books or other items for our illustrious auctioneer to bring down his gavel upon. All members and guests are welcome—just contact Louise for details. louise.p.teague@gmail.com

Later in July there is a visit to Boughton House in Northamptonshire and then in August a trip to Cambridge to see the Palestinian costume exhibition at Kettle's Yard, followed by a private visit to see some of the Gayer-Anderson collection of saddle rugs held at the Fitzwilliam Museum. Details in the newsletter—or ask Dimity!



Left: Robert Grenville Gayer-Anderson, whose collection of saddle rugs is in the Fitzwilliam Museum, in 'Arab dress' in Egypt in the 1930s. Gayer-Anderson trained in medicine before joining the army and was seconded to the Egyptian Army as *bimbashi* (major) in 1907.

By 1920, he was 'Oriental liaison' to the British residency, entertaining important Arab guests passing through Cairo, dressed in khaki during the day and 'as a magnificent Arab' at night.

He collected all sorts of rare items in Egypt, many now in museums, including the Gayer-Anderson Pasha Museum of Oriental Arts and Crafts in Cairo.

Image from *Gayer-Anderson: The Life and Afterlife of the Irish Pasha* by Louise Foxcroft (AUC Press).

Visit to Poland September 2023

In conjunction with ORTS member Joanna Wasilewska, director of the Asia & Pacific Museum in Warsaw, a trip to Poland has been arranged beginning with two days in Warsaw, where we will enjoy curator-led and behind-the-scenes tours to, among other venues, the Copper-Roofed Palace, also known as the Tin Palace, to see the off-view Sahakian carpet collection.

We will then travel by train for a two-day visit to Krakow, for curator-led tours including to the spectacular Turkish tents in Wawel Castle (below). We are hoping to confirm soon an excursion to Zakopane in the Tatra mountains to see the Kulcyck collection of 19th century carpets. There will also be free time for sightseeing. The tour will end in Krakow.

There are restrictions on numbers for behind-the-scenes visits and only a couple of spaces left. For details of the itinerary or to book a place, please contact Dimity.



TALKS

Live talks are held at the University Women's Club, 2 Audley Square, London W1K 1DB, which is a two-minute walk from the Dorchester Hotel in Mayfair.

Numerous buses stop near the Dorchester Hotel, including Buses 13, 16, and 36, which go from Victoria Station to Park Lane and Bus 38, which goes to Piccadilly and stops at the Hard Rock Café bus stop. The nearest tube stations are Green Park and Hyde Park Corner.

Doors open at 6 pm. Please sign your names at reception, and go upstairs to the elegant first floor drawing room, where there will be a pay bar.

Members' guests are welcome to attend lectures for £7 a single lecture, students £5. Please contact Dimity to apply for guest attendance.

Lectures are free for members.

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With thanks to Pia Rainey for managing the monthly newsletters

The ORTS journal is published three times a year. Contributions are welcomed from members and non-members. Please send ideas for articles and proposals for book or exhibition reviews to Dr Fiona Kerlogue on editor.orts@gmail.com.

The deadline for content for the next issue is September 1st 2023.

Back cover: Abdel Rahman Al-Muzayen, '29th November', published by the League of Arab States, 1984, reproduction courtesy of the Palestine Poster Project Archives (PPPA) and Abdel Rahman Al-Muzayen. See book review on page 25 and details of August 8th exhibition visit in the newsletter.

29 نوفمبر اليوم العالمي للتضامن مع الشعب الفلسطيني

PEOPLE OF PALESTINE

29 NOVEMBRE

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY DAY WITH THE PEOPLE

JOURNÉE INTERNATIONALE DE SOLIDARITÉ AVEC LE PEUPLE



29th NOVEMBER

PALESTINIAN

THE LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES



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