

Journal of the Oriental Rug and Textile Society





ORIENTAL RUG & TEXTILE SOCIETY

ORIENTAL RUG AND TEXTILE SOCIETY of GREAT BRITAIN

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The Oriental Rug and Textile Society of Great Britain was founded in 1977 to encourage interest and enthusiasm in the carpets and textiles of Asia and now of the whole world. We aim to advance understanding of the processes involved in their creation and to promote knowledge of the traditional centres of weaving.

Members receive details of up to eleven events (lectures, visits and trips abroad) each year and three journals.

Annual membership subscriptions: Individual £30 (£42 with journals by post); Student under 25 years Free (£12 with journals by post)

For membership information please contact Dimity Spiller on 020 7937 6212

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Do join us!

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ORTS and opportunities

An interesting aspect of this last year is that it has given us the impetus to look at how we can broaden the scope of our ORTS programme. The introduction of Zoom and virtual sessions, which I think are here to stay, has meant that our events are not only attended by ORTS Members around the UK, but also involve members and their guests from Europe, the Americas and the Far East. It has made us, in our committee sessions, consider what this experience might add to our future offerings.

We are already recording talks and looking at how to present these in the future. Zoom talks can never replace our congenial gatherings with a glass of wine and a chance to meet fellow enthusiasts and to see and handle textiles together, and these will of course remain central to ORTS. But this period has shown us that there are new dimensions which we can add to the traditional pattern of activities. Particularly, I would also remind members that we still see overseas trips and visits to UK collections as a key dimension of ORTS, which goes way back to the earliest days of the Society. We hope our trip to Lewes in July to see Professor Paul Benjamin's collection of Persian rugs and bags will be the first of many more around the country, and discussions are under way with host venues. We are also doing everything we can to get overseas trips off the ground again at the earliest opportunity.

In the meantime, we still have a very active programme of events for members – with lectures as well as ORTS Members' Collections talks and Show and Tell events. Our next Members' Collection talk will be on the 21st July, given by Sheelagh Killeen, who was a costume designer for theatre, television and film for over 30 years and avidly collects exotic costume & textiles on her many travels. In September we resume formal talks and are delighted that Chloe Sayer will be speaking to the Society on Mexican textiles. In October we hope to return to the University Women's Club. And in the same month we have a talk from Louise Teague on Lakai textiles in her collections. We hope that the more informal Members' Talks will encourage more ORTS Members to contribute – please do contact me if you have any ideas for future talks in the series.

Sue Jones. ORTS Chair

ORTS EVENTS PROGRAMME Autumn 2021

Wednesday, July 21st 18.00. Member's talk: Sheelagh Killeen on her collections: Via Zoom.

Thursday, August 26th Group visit to *Epic Iran* exhibition, Victoria and Albert Museum.

Wednesday, September 22nd 18.00. Chloe Sayer on Mexican Textiles. Via Zoom.

Wednesday, October 6th 18.00. Louise and Ken Teague. Lakai textiles. Via Zoom.

Wednesday, October 20th 18.00. Eleanor Sims. Carpets and Textiles in Persian Painting 15th and early 16th Centuries. University Women's Club (tbc).

Wednesday, November 17th 18.00. Janie Lightfoot. Aspects of Textile Conservation. University Women's Club (tbc).

Wednesday, December 15th 18.00. Mamiko Markham. Japanese Textiles. University Women's Club (tbc).

Front cover: *Adelaide Verneuil de Marval dressed in Javanese style with textiles from the collection. Photo: Maurice Pillard-Verneuil. See article 'Journey of a Collection' by Gaspard de Marval, page 10.*

‘A place where eternally blossoming roses grow’: the garden in Iranian textiles

Friederike Voigt

In his monumental epic poem, the *Shahnameh*, or ‘Book of Kings’, Ferdowsi (b. 940) compared his homeland Iran with the abundance of a garden in spring, full of pomegranates, apples and quinces, and a place where eternally blossoming roses and narcissuses grow.⁽¹⁾ Gardens are a frequent topic in Iranian literature. Flowers and trees – most famously the gracefully bending cypress – have become metaphors for the beauty of the beloved. Poets devoted themselves to evoking the image and meaning of gardens in ever newer forms. In a single line, the 13th century Shirazi poet Sa’di captures elegantly the soothing atmosphere of a spring garden, its fragrances and sounds: ‘The tree is budding, and the nightingales are drunken; the world was rejuvenated, and friends sit happily together.’⁽²⁾

Gardens are also physical spaces where everyday activities happen, for leisure, hospitality and religious meetings. The 14th century Moroccan traveller Ibn Battuta describes Iran in terms of its abundance of orchards and pleasure gardens, rivers and shady trees. For him, they were visual signs of the prosperity of the villages and towns they surrounded and often feature in his accounts as his meeting places with other people. He observed that even the religious school where he stayed once had its own garden which was used to dry clothes. On another occasion, a religious scholar who hosted him and other friends in his garden also led the prayer there for his guests.⁽³⁾

European travellers marvelled in equal measure at the opulence of Iranian gardens. The German physician Engelbert Kaempfer, who visited the Safavid capital Esfahan in 1684-5 as a member of a Swedish diplomatic mission, was a great admirer of their lavish layouts, sophisticated irrigation systems and great variety of plants. He described in detail the many gardens that surrounded the main residence of the shah. They each had a specific purpose. The shah’s wives and concubines received grapes from the *Bagh-e Angurestan*, which was adjacent to the harem. Official receptions were held in the large *Bagh-e Tavileh*, or Garden of the Stables, and its pavilion, while the small *Bagh-e Khalvat* served as a place for private audiences. Among the famous royal pleasure gardens were *Bagh-e Chehel Sotun*, named after the numerous columns that supported the roof of the palace in its middle, and the *Bagh-e Bolbol*, or Garden of the Nightingales, which housed the lavishly decorated palace *Hasht Behest*, or Eight Paradises. And, last but not least, a small garden with an octagonal layout, *Bagh-e Golestan*, was, as its name describes, filled with roses.⁽⁴⁾



Figure 1. One of four scenes from a fragment of a figural silk lampas. Artist unknown. Iran, c. 1550-1570. Acc. no A.1899.139.

Given their significance in daily life, it is not surprising that gardens, flowers and trees also provided inspiration for the visual arts and crafts. I will introduce here a selection of textiles and rugs from Iran in the collection of National Museums Scotland, which share floral motifs as a common subject. The creativity of their designers and the skills of their makers contribute a visual aspect to what was written and expressed in words. These motifs are not just patterns, but they have deeper significance.

Pastime in a garden

Among the sumptuous figural silk lampas weaves, for which Safavid textile manufacture of the 16th century is renowned, are fabrics with scenes of courtly entertainment in garden settings (figures 1-4). The figures depict details of a lampas fragment that are repeated across the fabric. They show four different leisure activities: cooking, drinking wine, reading poetry and listening to music. These scenes are set in rectangular fields underneath lobed arches. Blossoming trees, with birds perching on their branches, a ground dotted with flowers, tufts of grass and stones as well as tiny clouds in the sky create the impression of a landscape.

A closer look at the figures reveals a wonderful amount of narrative detail. The two men in figure 1 are busy with the preparation of a meal. Their work and style of dress suggest that they are servants. The man in the foreground stirs food in a large pot on an open fire. Flames shoot out from underneath the pot. It must be hot as he has taken off his coat. Careful not to burn himself, he holds the lid with only two fingers. The food must nearly be ready as another man arrives with large serving plates under his arm. He has tucked the ends of his outer garment into his belt so that he can walk faster.



Figure 2. One of four scenes from a fragment of a figural silk lampas. Artist unknown. Iran, c. 1550-1570. Acc. no A.1899.139.

In figure 2, we see an elegantly dressed couple beside a tree heavy with blossoms. The woman wears a long robe and a small scarf on her head. One end of her robe is tucked into her belt and reveals the fashionable striped pattern of her trousers. From the long-necked bottle in her hand, she has filled a drinking bowl that she is passing to a man who is leaning with his arm in the forked branch of the tree. Very likely a Safavid prince, he is wearing a turban folded over a felt cap with a baton, and has a sword hanging from his belt.

Another couple rest next to a fishpond (fig. 3). The man leans casually against the branch of a tree. One leg across the other, he shows off his boots, and a dagger in his ornate belt. The woman opposite entertains him by playing the zither.

In the last scene, a couple is pictured next to a stream (fig. 4). A pomegranate tree grows at its banks and provides them with shade. The woman reads from a book she is holding in her hands. The large bottle

behind her might suggest that the man has a drinking bowl in his raised hand while he listens to her words.

We have few descriptions of the pastimes of everyday life in the 16th century, but accounts from a century later give us some more hints. Following his diplomatic mission at the capital in Esfahan, Kaempfer stayed on in Iran. In 1687, he spent several months with date palm farmers in their oasis in Larestan, escaping the relentless summer heat of the Persian Gulf. Although the farmers' lives were more basic than Shah Soleiman's banquets, Kaempfer relished their joyful activities and captured them in almost poetic language. Not wine but pure and clean drinking



Figure 3. One of four scenes from a fragment of a figural silk lampas. Artist unknown. Iran, c. 1550-1570. Acc. no A.1899.139.

water was the farmers' luxury and an abundance of dates, offered not on golden plates or in costly ceramic bowls but much more appropriately on wooden trays. Spreading out their coverings next to running water was the epitome of pleasure and delight for his hosts. At sunset actors, dancing girls or singers would arrive. Poets and storytellers would recite verses about Leila and Majnun or the deeds and battles of Rostam; a dervish might narrate the miracles of the Imam 'Ali, and the mollah read from Sa'di's *Golestan*, or 'Rose Garden', or the *Divan* of Hafez.



Figure 4. One of four scenes from a fragment of a figural silk lampas. Artist unknown. Iran, c. 1550-1570. Acc. no A.1899.139.



Figure 5. Woman's cap, brocaded, velvet lined. Design by Mu'in Musavvir; weaver unknown. Iran, probably Esfahan, c. 1650. Acc. no A.1982.720.

A fashionable headdress

The black inscription on the apricot coloured cap in figure 5, prominently placed in the empty space between the medallions, states that Mu'in Musavvir completed the drawing that was used for this fabric design, on 11th Sha'ban 1056 (21st September 1646). Mu'in was a prolific painter and draughtsman of the 17th century.⁽⁵⁾ Although he often signed and dated his painted works, textiles that bear his name are rare. Mu'in was well-known for his individual compositions that focus on one or two figures, similar to the representation of the single woman, who is braiding her hair, on the cap.

Although there is no inscription that would tell us who this woman was, a few details of the depiction might give some insight into her circumstances. The white veil over her head was the outdoor garment for women during the Safavid period (1501-1736). She probably left the house to go to the spot where she is portrayed. However, she is not enveloped in her veil. The cloth rather rests casually on one shoulder and is draped over her legs and knees, revealing her rust-coloured ankle-length robe. If she left the house before, then she must be outside the public view again. Although we cannot see any walls, it is likely that she is now in a private garden.

Sitting on her veil on the ground, she appears immersed in doing her hair. The garden is in full bloom. An old plane tree offers her shade, and she seems to contemplate the large flowering shrub in front of her. A cloud drifts across above her head and in the foreground grow leafy bushes left and right of a *manqal*, a brazier of hexagonal shape on short feet and with finials. The brazier's interior seems to be clad with plaster and some charcoal might burn in the centre.

Set against an apricot background, the rich detail of this scene is created by using only four colours. The warm red of the woman's robe dominates the composition. It contrasts with the white of her veil and belt. Incredibly fine black lines suggest folds in the fabric of her veil and render the ruffled and pointed cuffs of her tight-fitting sleeves. A matt green is used for her stockings. This might not just be artistic license but could reflect an observation made by Adam Olearius, who visited Isfahan between 1636-7 as secretary of a diplomatic mission. He noted that women's stockings were often made from green and red velvet.⁽⁶⁾ Green is repeated in her triangular scarf that is tied at the back of her head and her sash. The combination of these warm colours helps us imagine the tranquillity of the moment that she is experiencing in the garden.



Figure 6. Detail of a woman's coat with flower pattern, silk, brocaded. Woven by Nasrollah. Iran, 1650-1700. Acc. no A.1886.433.



Figure 7. Detail of a length of cloth, cotton, block printed by Hajji Mohammad Ahmad Hoseini Agha. Iran, Esfahan, c. 1880-1887. Acc. no A.1888.348.



Figure 8. Prayer carpet, embroidered silk. Artists unknown. Iran, 1800-1850. Acc. no A.1890.388.

Floral patterns

The number of textile patterns that have been designed from flower motifs seems boundless. The detail of a 17th century woman's coat in figure 6 shows brocaded flowering plants. By changing the colours, the weaver achieved the impression of a greater variety of flowers than were actually used in the design. Repeat patterns of floral motifs continued into the 19th century and were embraced by new techniques. A plant with three flower heads and buds fills the diamond shapes of the block printed cotton in figure 7. Printed in blue and red, the outlines and details of the flowers across the fabric were traced by hand in gold. The silk prayer rug in figure 8 features a delicate design of scrolls which emerge from a stylized vase and spread symmetrically across the central field below the niche. The scrolls end in carnations, daffodils and vine leaves. Embroidered in gold and silver thread, the intricacy of this work is most visible in the texture of the two bunches of grapes.

A bed of flowers



In figurative representations at least since the 16th century (see fig. 2), women can be seen wearing tight-fitting trousers with designs of diagonal stripes. The trouser legs were usually made from a different material than the waist and meant to attract attention. This fashion continued well into the 19th century. The silk embroidered trouser panel in **figure 9** is one of the many examples that caught the interest of western travellers to Qajar Iran. Charles Euan-Smith, secretary to the commission for the delimitation of the Persian-Afghan frontier, is said to have sold a piece to the Victoria and Albert Museum which he had bought in Kakhk, a small town in Khorasan (eastern Iran) in 1871-72:

'We were also much struck with the silk embroidery for which the place used to be so famous, called *kashedah*. It is worked on common cloth in beautifully-variegated colours and designs, and in former days was almost exclusively used for ladies' trousers. [...] Struck with the beauty of the design and colouring of this work, we bought up all the pieces of new and unmade-up embroidery we could find, and no sooner was it noised abroad that we had a fancy

Figure 9. Trouser panel, cotton, silk, embroidered. Artist unknown. Iran, 1800-1860. Acc. no A.1921.1417.

A place where eternally blossoming roses grow

for such articles, [...] native after native came rushing into camp with various pairs of ‘inexpressibles’ [...] which they had ruthlessly wrested from their wives, mothers, and daughters, to sell to the ‘infidels’ who manifested such a strong fancy for these garments.’⁽⁷⁾

The trouser panels are embroidered so densely that the American consul Samuel Benjamin called them ‘carpets in miniature’.⁽⁸⁾ On this piece bushes with fully blown roses alternate with sprays of flowers in tiny vases. The slightly narrower bands are filled with rosebushes, this time shown from the side, and small trees or leafy bushes. They seem to sit in beds of minute blue-edged white flowers. Drawing again on Kaempfer’s account, his description of Shah ‘Abbas’ pleasure garden Bagh-e Hezar Jarib in Esfahan helps imagine this two-dimensional design as a spatial experience: a garden divided into square areas with walkways flanked by thick rows of plane trees. Abundant water irrigates the trees and plants that grow in the flowerbeds – aromatic herbs and cross-wise arranged fruit trees, rose bushes, jasmine and fragrant Persian willow.⁽⁹⁾

Cypress tree

Discovering the story of her Iranian family, Kamin Mohammadi (born 1969) wrote:

‘Growing up in Iran, the cypress tree was not just a familiar sight on the horizon, but also an image omnipresent in art and architecture – on tiles, on textiles, on carpets, even on the walls of Persepolis. I could think of nothing so perfect to represent the Iranian soul as the pure flexible line of the ever-bending cypress tree.’⁽¹⁰⁾

In the large fabric shown in figure 10 a cypress grows seemingly from a vase on the top of a hill. Its stylized teardrop shape is repeated in the smaller trees left and right. This wall hanging is one of the many examples that were produced of this pattern, most famously by the block printers of Esfahan in the 19th century. The cypress is often linked with Shiraz, in the southwest of Iran. One of the most beautiful gardens in this city, a major tourist attraction and UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Bagh-e Eram, or ‘Garden of Paradise’, is praised particularly for its tall cypresses.



Figure 10. Wall hanging with the motif of a cypress tree, cotton, block printed, by Hajji Mohammad Ahmad Hoseini Agha. Iran, probably Esfahan, 1880s. Acc. no A.1888.313.

A signed Mohtasham



The silk rug shown in figure 11, which has a wonderfully soft touch to it, appears in such pristine condition that it is difficult to imagine it was ever used for prayer. Dating from about the middle of the 19th century, it has a magnificent sheen and its rich colours are superbly preserved. No matter from which direction one looks at it, the light reflected on its pile creates a fascinating play of shades.

The rug is dominated by a flourishing tree. Its crown is formed by a dazzling array of multicoloured flowers and leaves – a symbol of the profusion of life. Mirrored along the axis of the tree trunk, each flower head is of a different shape or colour. Large complex peonies and lotus blossoms alternate with smaller petalled flowers. This abundance is repeated in the stemmed vases in bright turquoise. Their bouquets include full-blown roses and rosebuds, carnations, daffodils and sprays of peonies and other funnel-shaped, radial and three-petalled flower heads.

Figure 11. Prayer rug, silk, woven, by Hajji Mollah Mohammad Hasan Mohtasham. Iran, Kashan, c. 1850s. Acc. no A.1899.280.

The rug had gone nearly unnoticed since its acquisition by the museum in 1899. It is a great pleasure to be able to bring this discovery to wider attention. The *nasta'liq* inscription in the spandrels identifies the maker of the rug as Hajji Mollah Mohammad Hasan Mohtasham. While among specialists and connoisseurs Mohtasham rugs have become one of the rarest and most prized carpets from Kashan, only a few pieces are known that are signed or can be attributed to the master's workshop. This rug is the only signed example known in a public collection.

A prayer carpet similar to this one but unsigned is preserved in the collection of the Golestan Palace in Tehran. It is believed that it was a gift by Mohtasham to Nasir al-Din Shah on the occasion of his coronation in 1848. Mohtasham was one of several master weavers in Kashan, which was a centre of carpet manufacture during the Qajar period. During his active time from about the 1840s to the mid-1880s, his workshop produced for consumers in Iran, including high-ranking officials and merchants, and as this acquisition by the museum proves, his carpets were also traded internationally.⁽¹¹⁾ The signature with his name makes this rug special as it identifies it as his personal work rather than as a piece made by weavers employed in his workshop.

Tree of Life

The jacket in figure 12 by Zarir, a Tehran-based fashion designer group, brings our journey full circle. Made from cream-coloured raw cotton, the jacket surprises by a large flowering tree that fills the lower part of the triangular shaped back. The tree emerges from a small pot that symbolises the soil and water which nurture it. Its thick branches and extending orange twigs are bending under the weight of the red, blue and purple blossoms, buds and leaves they carry.

The designers of the jacket, Rana Modabber and Ghazal Torki Sharifabadi, invited women embroiderers of Kerman, in the southeast of Iran, to create the tree and the floral borders along the bottom and on the sleeves. Kerman's women embroiderers are famous for the abundance of flower motifs they create in a technique called *pateh duzi*, which is made on a woollen fabric. This jacket was part of a collection Modabber and Torki Sharifabadi made exclusively for the Edinburgh Iranian Festival in 2015. Each dress was designed to represent a different geographical region of Iran through the choices of materials and decorative techniques. *Pateh duzi* evoked for the designers the image of a flowering garden.⁽¹²⁾

Once such visits have become possible again, I would be delighted to welcome an ORTS group to see some of these wonderful textiles in Edinburgh.

Friederike Voigt is Principal Curator for the Middle Eastern, South and Southeast Asian collections at National Museums Scotland. Her area of specialism is Iranian material culture.

All images in this article are © National Museums Scotland.

Notes

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Figure 12. Embroidered jacket, Iran, Tehran and Kerman, 2014-15. Jacket © Zarir; *pateh duzi* © Unknown embroiderer of Kerman. Acc. no V.2015.13.

Journey of a collection: Maurice Pillard-Verneuil (1869-1942) and Adelaïde Verneuil-de Marval (1898-1998).

Gaspard de Marval

When in 1922 Maurice Pillard-Verneuil and his wife Adelaïde embarked in Marseilles on the 'Wilis', a Royal Rotterdam Lloyd liner, for a 7-month voyage which would take them to the Dutch East Indies and to Cambodia, it was for him the realisation of a long-held dream: to discover the fascinating countries which had been revealed to the French in the *Expositions Universelles* of 1889 and 1900. It was also to study, in situ, the textile techniques which Europe had discovered and in particular batik and ikat.

Born in Saint-Quentin, a town in Picardy famous for its textile production, Verneuil had been quickly attracted to the techniques and designs. A student of Eugène Grasset in Paris, he soon became an expert in French decorative art, Art Nouveau, and went on to play an important role through the publication of several key texts as well as a large number of articles in the review *Art et Decoration*, of which he was a co-founder and one of the most prolific contributors. In his articles, he addressed numerous aspects of textile art, whether weavings, tapestries, embroideries, lace or cushions, at the same time introducing the readers to French and European artists and makers. Verneuil mentioned the batik technique for the first time in 1897, in an article on 'the painted cloths of Isaac', the latter a reference to a Javanese manufacturer who had demonstrated the process at the Exposition Universelle of 1889. In 1902, at Turin, the first international exhibition of modern decorative art, Verneuil discovered batiks created by Dutch artists. In 1904, he went to study batik at the Colonial Institute in Harlem, and in 1905 he published an article on the subject in *Art et Decoration*. After a historical introduction, he described in detail the Javanese technique and followed this with a description of the modern batik method practised in the Netherlands by artists such as Chris Lebeau, J. Prent and W.-K. Rees.

Finally, he encouraged French artists to take up the technique. For his part, he went on not only to practise it, but to make it a not inconsiderable part of his teaching. Still in the field of textiles, Verneuil went on to found a studio of embroiderers, who worked on his designs for several years. His first interest, Japanese art, was for him a source of inspiration and a field of collection. In 1910, this interest led him to set up a sumptuous exhibition of Japanese textiles at the Musée des Arts décoratifs in Paris, which included items from the collections of the Musée des Tissus (Textile Museum) in Lyon and of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. This exhibition was followed by the publication of his work *Etoffes japonaises tissées et brochées* (Japanese Woven and Embroidered Fabrics). As for his wife, Adelaïde de Marval, who was already a painter, her future husband taught her decorative art.

In Java, armed with excellent recommendations, among which was a press card from the journal *Illustration*, the Verneuils rapidly gained access to Dutch colonial government circles and the higher echelons of Javanese society, which allowed them to study, paint and acquire interesting pieces. In April 1922 they were received in Buitenzorg (Bogor) by the Governor-General of Java, who gave them letters of introduction to the administrators of Java and Bali as well as the princely Javanese courts. Furnished with these precious keys to access, at the end of May they were able to attend the feast of Garebeg Puasa in the inner sanctum of the palace in Yogyakarta, and in June another important ceremony in the Surakarta kraton. In Surakarta too they were received in his palace by Mangku Negoro VII, an enlightened ruler, who was welcoming to European researchers and a promoter of classical Javanese culture.



Figure 1. A moment of relaxation, Hotel des Indes, Batavia. Photographer unknown.

It was principally in the Central Javanese principalities that the Verneuil family encountered batik artists and dyers and assembled photographic documentation and a collection of textiles destined for exhibition and publication. As well as the diverse pieces of batik clothing, their collection comprised all the types of *canting* (pen-like tools for applying hot wax by hand) and *cap* (printing blocks for wax) as well as examples of motifs and the traditional series detailing the stages of the batik process. They made their acquisitions from the artisans themselves as well as in the markets and the pawnbrokers, veritable caverns full of treasures and antique examples, often of princely provenance. Beyond batik, their interest was equally engaged by *tritik* (stitch-resist) and *plangi* (tie-dyed) as well as the ikats of the east of Indonesia and the *songket* (brocades) from Sumatra and Bali embellished with gold and silver thread. At the same time, they studied the *wayang* theatre and acquired more than a hundred *wayang kulit* (shadow puppets) as well as masks and musical instruments. Adelaïde translated into French a play, the *Hikayat Gareng Gandrung*, imagining that she would be able, after returning to Europe, to reveal to the public one aspect of this fascinating art.

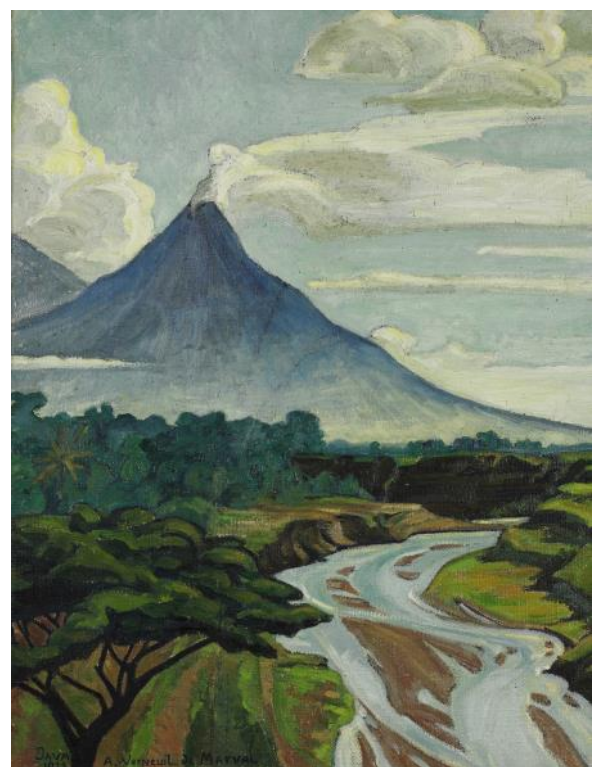


Figure 2. Maurice Pillard-Verneuil, 'Danseur du Soesoehoenan, Soerakarta', pencil and watercolour.

embroidered Chinese items of clothing and marionettes which were to serve as illustrations for a future article (never completed) on Chinese theatre, as well as a few silk ikats, some Cambodian arts and crafts and some casts of Khmer statues from the museum in Phnom Penh. Amongst this profusion, one must not forget either the hundreds of slides and photographs taken by Verneuil in the temples of Java as well as at Angkor.

At the end of September 1922, the couple returned to Switzerland with rich documentation and an important collection. As you will have understood, this rich harvest of objects and documents was to serve as the basis for an activity which would for several years be an integral part of the artistic lives of the couple. As early as November, Verneuil gave a presentation in Geneva with slides on *Le théâtre et la danse à Java* (Theatre and Dance in Java).

Figure 3. Adelaïde Verneuil de Marval, "Kali et Merapi", oil on canvas.



Their collection did not stop there, in this Indonesian world where everything delighted their artists' souls. Verneuil drew dance scenes in the palaces and painted them in water colours, as well as filling a sketchbook with superb studies of the flowers and fruits of Java, while his wife captured still life and the countryside in oil on canvas.

It was with his arms charged with basketry and traditional brass objects that the young guide who accompanied them during their travels escorted them at the end of each day to their hotel (in particular the iconic Hôtel des Indes in Batavia and Slier in Surakarta). On the other hand, a brief visit to the island of Bali, which had only recently opened to the first tourists, left few traces among their acquisitions. Only the silks stitched with gold thread which appeared later in exhibitions and a series of famous photographs by Thilly Weissenborn testified to their interest. Of course it is equally possible that these Balinese pieces were acquired in Java!

We should also mention the return voyage, with stopovers in Cambodia and Singapore, the likely place of acquisition of several

Journey of a collection

Following this in January 1923 he gave a series of presentations as well as mounting an exhibition of paintings and shadow puppets. On this occasion, the Verneuil sold an *iket* (head cloth) to the town's ethnographic museum and donated a collection of *canting*, a *cap* and a batik sarong. Next Verneuil published in *Art et Décoration* an article entitled *Le batik javanais. La technique. Le style.* (Javanese Batik. The technique. The style.). Between 1923 and 1924 he wrote a work on *La décoration des tissus dans l'archipel malais* (The decoration of textiles in the Malay archipelago) for which he assembled rich illustrations. This work did not spark the interest of the editors and remained at manuscript stage.

The year 1924 saw an article *Wajangs javanais* (Javanese wayang) appear in *Art et décoration*; an exhibition of paintings, batiks and wayangs took place in Geneva. In 1926, the *Revue des Arts Asiatiques* published *L'ikat et les tissus ikatés des Indes orientales* (Ikat and ikatted textiles in the East Indies) and in 1927, in the same journal, Verneuil presented *Interprétation de la figure humaine dans l'art javanais* (The Interpretation of the Human Figure in Javanese Art). Again in 1927, G. Vanoest, the editor, published Verneuil's important work on *L'Art à Java. Les temples de la période classique indo-javanaise* (*Art in Java. Temples from the Classic Indo-Javanese Period*), richly illustrated with more than 120 photographs by the author.

After this several years passed, and public curiosity was directed towards other artistic discoveries. The Verneuil turned their attention more and more to Europe (Carl Milles, the Swedish sculptor, and Italian fresco painters), then Switzerland and its popular art (peasant ceramics and woodcarving). The artistic life, as you know, does not bring wealth. Numerous pieces from the Indonesian collection left home over the years, following selling exhibitions of which the last important one took place in 1935, bringing together batiks, Balinese and Sumatran *songket*, *wayang*, *topeng* (masks), Chinese marionettes, *kris*, basketry, traditional toys and Japanese prints. Then, in the 1970s, some very good *wayang kulit* were used to exchange for pieces of Buddhist art, Adelaïde's new passion after she was widowed.

A choice of works from Java, Nepal, China, Tibet and Cambodia was to be given to the Museum of Ethnography in Geneva. What remained of the collection after these donations formed part of the décor of the family home and there was no risk that any of it would be lost. As for the few textiles, they had wisely remained in their cupboard, serving on rare occasions to accompany the recitations given by the mistress of the house to her visitors. After her death, they were carefully conserved, emerging only on rare occasions in an exhibition setting. And it is to them that we will turn in the next article.

Gaspard de Marval



Figure 4. Admiring a new acquisition, Hotel Slier, Surakarta. Photographer unknown.

GOOD – BETTER – BEST: Some observations on the development of Tekke Turkoman Engsis in the course of the 19th century.

Angela Seger

When we put on an exhibition a few years ago, we decided to ask the visiting public for their opinions as to which of the three Tekke *engsis* we presented was the good – better – best one. The set-up of the experiment allowed participants to find the correct answers in private, without anyone, including us, interfering. Next to the *engsis*, which we hung in random order, we put up a poster (fig.1) giving information about age and value of *engsis* A to C, with a covered label next to each rug declaring its identity (A, B or C). Some people wanted to talk to us to discuss their reasoning, others did not, but almost everyone shared their results with us (and no, we didn't keep a count). We leave it to you at this point to come to your own conclusions, if you wish. (see fig. 2,3,4 for the *engsis*). It is worth mentioning that only a small minority of participants could identify the correct order!

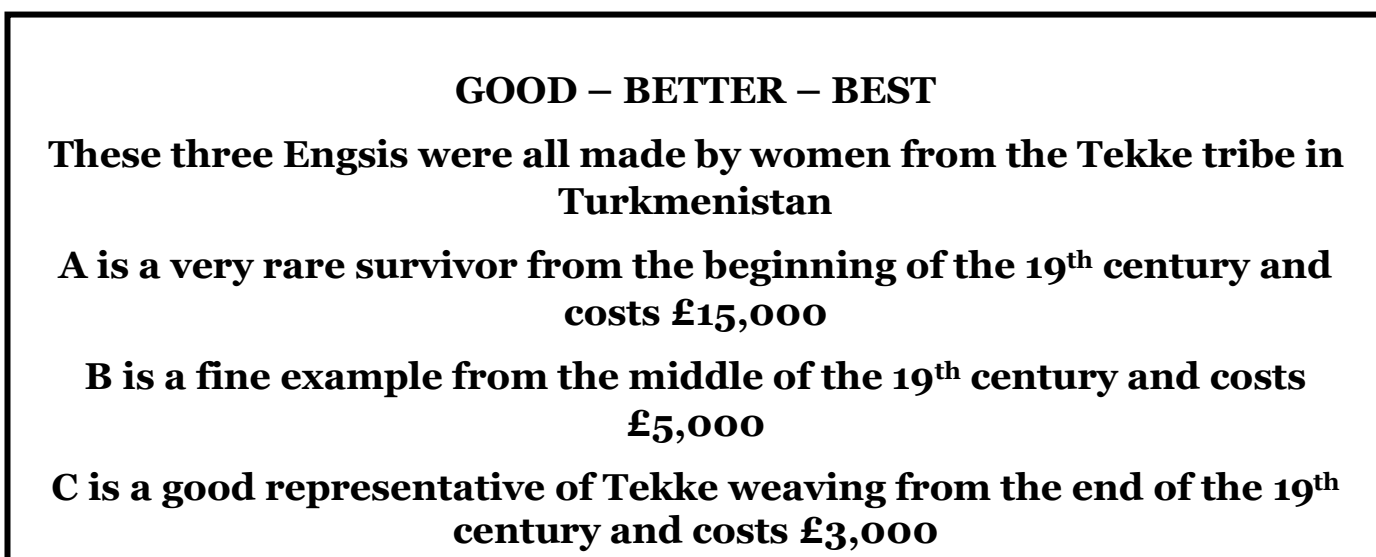


Figure 1. The poster

Engsis are piled door rugs used to cover the entrance to the yurt on the outside. They were widely used in central Asian nomadic communities, certainly on special occasions such as weddings and other festive events, and they were among the set pieces to be included in the dowry. Therefore, they were usually made of the best materials and by competent weavers, in short, they were made to impress. And they were intended to be kept within the family.

The design of *engsis* in most Turkoman tribes follows the same format, even though the focus in the following is on Tekke *engsis*: a cross shape, or *hatchli*, divides the field into four panels. These are surrounded on three sides by a sequence of borders, the innermost with a geometric design in white on red, then a main border with plants or more geometric shapes predominantly in red, and an outer border which is, again, very geometric and contains more white. The niche at the top of the field is the reason why *engsis* are often mistaken for prayer rugs, but there is no evidence that they were ever used for that purpose. At the bottom of the field is a wide border, or *elem*, usually of undyed dark wool and decorated with a star design.

Despite this general layout, and the predominant colour being a red derived from the madder root, no two *engsis* are the same. And herein lies the interest.

When you look at the three *engsis* pictured overleaf, three differences catch the eye: colour, size and design.

The colour in fig. 2 is a beautifully saturated red with slight variations, called *abrash*. It has a lighter, secondary red in the tree patterns and a nice range of three blues, which are based on indigo. The white in all three *engsis* is undyed off-white wool. The red in fig. 3 is very different, even though it, too, is derived from the madder root and features a secondary red: it is much less deep in saturation, it is darker but less



Figure 2

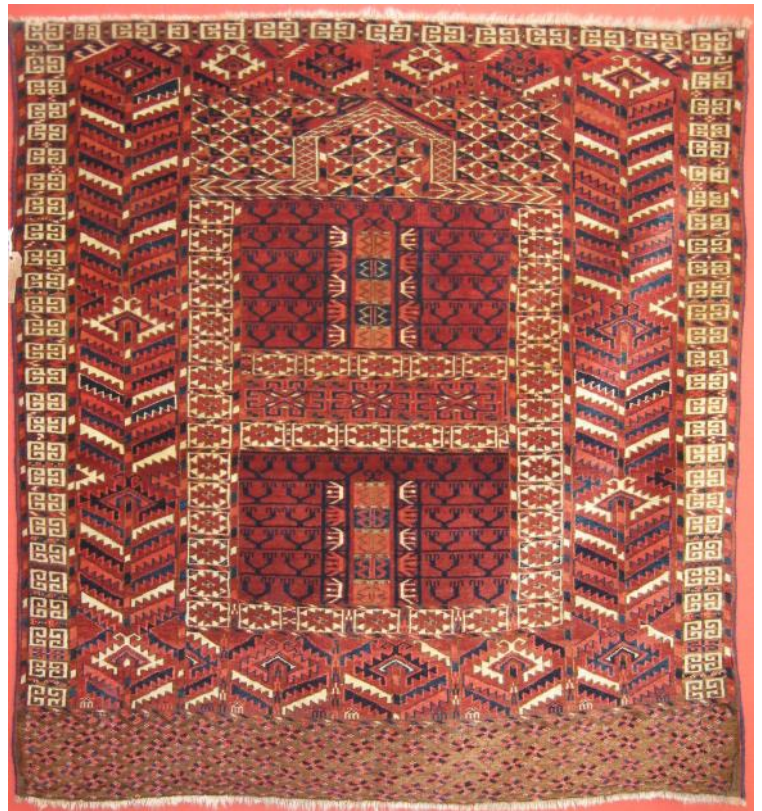


Figure 3

red, and the secondary colours are more orange. There are only two shades of blue present in this rug. Fig. 4 has the most intense, almost blueish red with a depth that is the result of a prolonged series of dye baths, possibly over a period of several months, leading to this extraordinary result. It, too, has three shades of blue.

Despite the strong similarities in design, the differences are of great importance.

Fig. 2, with a size of 158 x 122 cm, has seven rows of pairs of forked elements in the bottom half of the panels and eight in the top half. There has been a lot of debate about the origin of these elements, the most likely in our opinion being that they are derived from birds' heads. A closer look at earlier examples would support that view. The trees in the main border are very geometrical, almost like chevrons, and quite generously drawn. Two strictly geometrical smaller borders flank the main border. With the *elem* still intact, and the great quality of wool, this *engsi* is a lovely example of its type.

Fig. 3 is a considerably busier representative of the genre. It has six rows of the paired forked elements both in the bottom and the top halves of the panels. However, given the much smaller size of this *engsi* - it only measures 122 x 115 cm - the impression is of more pattern in a smaller space.

Fig. 4 has a design element the other examples do not have: the large border at the bottom marks this *engsi* out as a member of a rare subgroup of Tekke *engsis*, the so-called 'animal tree *engsi*'. Its design of stylized trees that we have seen in the border of fig. 2 has the addition of a smaller tree in each gap, flanked by two facing animals at the bottom of the border, hence the term applied to this type.

This is the simplest of the three *engsis*: the panels are formed by only five rows of the forked elements in the bottom half and seven in the top, and the rows alternate between pairs of these elements and a single element. This scarcity of patterning, coupled with the larger size - it measures 163 x 119 cm - creates a simplicity and gravitas lacking in the other *engsis*. A detail of the forked elements (fig. 5) shows the bird-like structures mentioned above; they are sometimes called ram's horns, or *kutch* (from *koç*, meaning ram). Pinner and Franses argue that the bird-like symbols are specific to animal tree *engsis* and do not occur in other Tekke *engsis* in any significant numbers (1980: 143). They call the design of the commonly found forked element a candelabra design. Indeed, our experience of Tekke *engsis* in general supports the view that the bird-like structures are not discernible. However, whether that is because most *engsis* on the market are not quite as old as the animal tree *engsi* in hand or because they are not part of that sub group cannot be



Figure 4



Figure 5

conclusively decided. We know from the development of patterns in carpets from various areas of carpet production that designs can often be traced back to zoomorphic origins. The point to make here is that the older the weaving, the simpler, or more ‘primitive’ and archaic, the design is, and the older the weaving, the closer it is to that origin.

The fact that the upright as well as the horizontal partitions depict the same curled leaf design adds to the simplicity and clarity of the piece, as does the sparsely decorated meandering main border on the sides and at the top end.

Size has been mentioned before in the context of design, and size matters when it comes to dating an *engsi*, too.

The *engsi* in fig. 3 is too small to cover the entrance to a yurt. Occasionally, smaller *engsis* had the addition of a woven strip called *germech* or *germek* to go at the bottom of the door opening. However, towards the end of the 19th and into the 20th century, these small *engsis* of almost square proportions were made in large numbers. This would suggest they were no longer made as dowry pieces to be kept in the family, as part of a proud tribal tradition, but to be sold or bartered on the market in order to provide income for declining tribal communities (see also Mackie and Thompson 1980, esp. p. 96-118). The fact that a lot less care and attention went into the dyeing process at that time is in keeping with this view.

Good – better – best: we know that a considerable number of people preferred the latest example pictured in fig. 3 to the early and very rare animal tree *engsi* (fig. 4). They saw the more muted, paler colours as a sign of age. If you want a piece of original tribal art, though, the animal tree *engsi* is the one to go for.

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Jajam: The Lost Floorcloths of Rajasthan

Suki Skidmore

What is it about? Coming together..and don't we need more of that in today's digital world?
— Avinish Mauraya, Wabisabi Project, Bagru, India

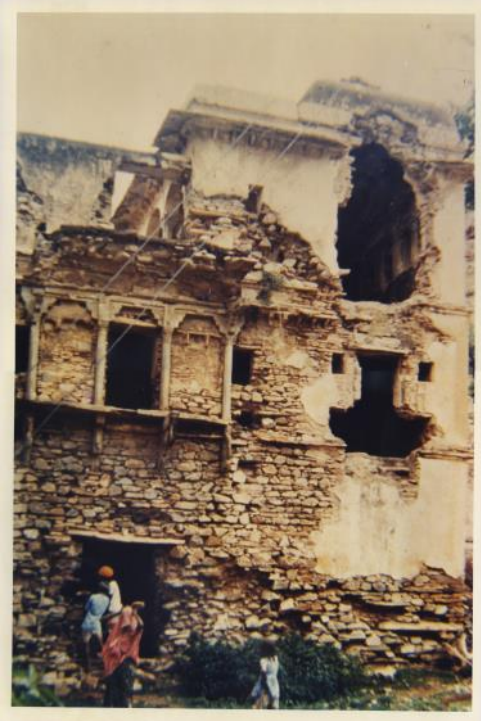


Figure 1. Facade of the Chanwar ki Palkiwalon Haveli mansion pre-restoration (1989) Photo courtesy of Anokhi Archives.

In an era rife with technological innovations, perhaps the resurgent interest in handmade arts is not surprising. Indian hand block printing, an ancient craft prized and bartered across the globe for centuries, is once again in the spotlight. Although the exact origins remain unclear, excavations in Fostat, Old Cairo, unearthed printed cloth from the 14th century, and tantalising fragments from varied archaeological sites possibly date such fabric back to antiquity, a testament to the longevity of a heritage craft that continues almost unchanged in modern times.

Yet survival has proven to be a delicate balancing act. Initially the vast network of ancient trade routes enabled the famed cloth of India to dominate the textile trade. By the late 18th century, as the Industrial Revolution ushered in power looms and mill-made fabrics, and synthetic dyes began gradually to replace natural ones, traditional methods of printing began to fade. World Wars followed by the political turbulence that led to independence in 1947 only worsened the crisis. Customers vanished, and the devastating loss of the royal patronage system ruptured the ancient mercantile and social dynamic. It was not until 1991 that India tentatively welcomed international trade again.

Once an international commodity, block printed textiles languished for several decades until the 1960s, when young westerners followed the hippie trail into northern India only to develop a mad passion for the country and its sumptuous cloth. Teaming up with the skilled block printing community, they united to resuscitate the craft, adding bold colours and reimagined patterns. Meanwhile, resourceful tailors interpreted designs for glamorous silhouettes or chopped bedspreads from the bazaar into unique shapes without wasting a shred of cloth. Given their long history as successful international tradesmen, master dyers, embroiderers and printers extraordinaire, the Indian artisan's innate flexibility and collaborative nature welcomed an infusion of fresh ideas. A revival was under way.

The founders of Anokhi, a block printing company that helped usher in this new era, realized that this heritage craft faced continual peril. Could a museum dedicated to hand printing tell the story behind this beautiful labour-intensive craft, and also provide a place for the printing community to view their work, share ideas and envision future production? Would raising awareness in India along with an international audience, foster a renewed appreciation of their skills?

Following an extensive 3-year restoration of a dilapidated 16th century *Chanwar Palkiwalon ki Haveli* mansion, the Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing opened with fanfare in 2005 (Figures 1 & 2). Generations of artisans accompanied by family members turned the opening celebration into a joyous event, full of



Figure 2. Facade and courtyard of renovated haveli, now the Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing (2006). Photo courtesy of Anokhi Archives.

goodwill, enthusiasm and possibilities. The preservation project won a UNESCO award for Cultural Conservation because the owners eschewed modern building methods, instead choosing traditional techniques to renovate the mansion — a decision befitting the museum's mission to illuminate the time-honoured craft of block printing.

A recent exhibition in 2018, *Rediscovering Jajam*, later supported by two tangential exhibitions, perhaps best demonstrates the museum's mission. An unrecognized icon was slipping away, almost gone — the block printed floorcloths called *jajam*. Before much longer, only remnants would have remained had it not been for the hard work and dedication of a young Indian couple, Kriti Gupta and Avinash Maurya of Wabisabi Project, who recognized the important cultural role of *jajam* in rural Rajasthan. The Anokhi Museum provided the perfect venue to organise an exhibition about *jajam*, a place to promote their historic significance and future potential before these stunning floorcloths succumbed to time.



Travelling to the small village of Bagru outside of Jaipur, these artistic entrepreneurs met master printer, Seduram Chhipa, who introduced them to the local textiles. Inspired by experienced elders, Gupta and Maurya's knowledge grew and talent thrived as they studied *jajam*-making in the traditional manner— beside the artisan. They understood that to ignore this ageing and fragile printing community would mean the irreplaceable loss of a collective generational knowledge, already so tenuous. Furthermore, to preserve cultural icons like *jajam*, a comprehensive understanding of traditional techniques was necessary for envisioning contemporary adaptations that might lead to the survival of the craft and its practitioners.

Figure 3. Vintage floorcloth with dense elaborate border that includes soldiers on horseback and warriors with swords, protecting the jajam as a safe space. Circa. 1990. Collection of Printer Krishan Gopal Chhipa, Srinagar, Ajmer District. Photo courtesy of Wabisabi and Anokhi Archives.

For centuries these patterned floorcloths had flourished in many regions of the northern state of Rajasthan. Embedded in the local culture, *jajam* played a significant role within each community. Exquisitely crafted, they were expensive so usually commissioned by the village or by an affluent family who graciously allowed public loans for special events. Council members frequently gathered on communally-owned floorcloths to make undisputed social or judicial decisions, while wealthier elders bought them for personal ceremonies. In rural households, *jajam* were significant symbols of honour for visiting guests as well as convenient seating for a multitude of festivals and ceremonies. As one *chhipa* elder noted:

A jajam was spread out for all social, religious and political work...it was spread out for marriages...and given as presents for temple devotees...Yes, we think jajam are special. A lot of old memories are linked with jajam. They are not so special in the present era, but in the past they had an important role.

Local architecture inspired many of the stamped patterns. Layers of dense, complicated borders frequently surrounded each cloth, sometimes loaded with one or more rows of protective figures — warriors on horseback, elephants, tigers or even seahorses to ensure that the cloth provided a safe space (see Figure 3). Bold geometric patterns filled the interior. Adding to the fun, the cross-like motif of the ancient game of *chaupad*, mentioned in the *Mahabharata*, was frequently printed in the centre, thereby adding an element of competitive fun to any social gathering. (Figure 4). While these unusual recreational textiles are no longer part of village life, occasionally an old man might be spotted on a frayed *jajam* tossing cowrie shells into the air to advance, alone, on the game board.



Figure 4. Women relax on a new jajam with chaupad game in the centre. Photo courtesy of Wabisabi.

Jajam: the lost floorcloths of Rajasthan

Not far from Bagru lies the hard-working printing community of Jahota. Here a late-career master-ji reflected upon the glory days of *jajam*. Entering the sunlit home of Purushottam Chhipa (b. 1961), the soothing beat of tap-tapping on blocks echoes from an upstairs workshop. Purushottam, as is typical, is descended from a multi-generational family of *chhipas*.

In our home printing was done long before I was born. We learned printing by just watching....My mother and father, grandmother and grandfather, all used to do printing work...for the last 4 or 5 generations. This is our ancestral work.

Today he is assisted by his son as well as women-folk who practise *multani*, a traditional method of printing outlines for stitchwork with a soluble pigment.



Figure 6. Dhobi repeatedly washes cloth then beats upon stone for rinsing. Photo courtesy of Wabisabi and Anokhi Archives.



Figure 5. Purushottam Chhipa prepares sun-bleached white cloth for printed patterns. Photo courtesy of Wabisabi.

Creating *jajam* is laborious work. A printing community is composed of 3 different groups working in tandem: *chhipas* print, *rangrez* dye and *dhobis* wash. Block carvers play an important role, but don't necessarily live amongst their community. According to Purushottam, creating a *jajam* is time-consuming and requires a skilled craftsman. Few remain. First, the thick handloomed cloth, *reza*, was washed in the river followed by *tapai*, a lengthy repetitive method of washing then sun-bleaching the fabric until attaining a bright white effect (Figure 5). The *chhipa* explained how *tapai* stopped around 1977 when the mineral-rich Badi river nearly dried up. Without water *dhobis* could neither wash the cloth nor correctly dye in water of unknown quality. (Figure 6). The environmental consequences of diminishing water sources remains a constant threat to hand block printing in northern India.



Figure 7 Printer Purushottam Chhipa dyeing cloth in a submerged copper dye pot. Photo courtesy of Wabisabi and Anokhi Archives.

While each town had preferred patterns and motifs, all *jajam* were stamped in black and red natural dye using the traditional *syahi-begar* technique. Indian craftsmen have a near mythical reputation for extracting dyes (Figure. 7). Rusty horseshoes, nails and other scrap iron were fermented with molasses and water for about 15 days then boiled with a touch of tamarind to become *syahi*, a rich black printing paste. *Begar* red was originally derived from the madder plant *rubia cordifolia*, locally known as *majeet*, and later replaced by a synthetic substitute during the late 19th century. Before printing, the *rangrez* dyer treated the entire cloth with *harda*, a powdered yellow fruit from the myrobalan

tree *teminalia chebula*. Acting as a pre-mordant, this natural source of tannic acid let subsequent dyes absorb evenly into the fibres.

Stamping colour on *jajam* required that the unique blocks contain *namda*, a felted wool integral to making dhurrie rugs and decorative floor mats. That fibre waste provided a key ingredient for *jajam* block carving. Abdul Sattar Kharadi of Bagru, last of the practitioners, demonstrated the complexity of this lost art. Once a block was prepared and a pattern chiseled into the wood, the artisan cut bits of scrap *namda* wool to soak in gum until forming a sticky consistency. He pressed the desired amount of wool into hollow areas of the block, allowing it dry and stiffen (Figure 8).



Figure 8 Carver Abdul Sattar Kharadi presses *namda* wool into the block for better absorption of dye before stamping. Photo courtesy of Wabisabi.



Figure 9. Symposium at Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing 20-21 January 2018. Photo courtesy of Anokhi Archives.

The absorption power of the wool enabled dyes to colour evenly. *Chhipas* repetitively blocked areas for desired colours with a *dabu* mud-resist paste made with a personalised recipe of earth, slaked lime, water and fine wheat paste. Printing began. Designs were finally stamped onto the cloth with a multitude of carved wooden shapes, followed by the repetitive washing cycle until completion.

Although *jajam* demonstrate the best of a block printer's skills, sadly modern society no longer gathers on communal floorcloths. Without commissions, only a handful of *chhipas* retain the skills or resolve to continue. Many artisans now rely on inexpensive chemical dyes, eschewing the complexity of *syahi-begar*. Even fewer incorporate traditional motifs. In an attempt to modernise, craftsmen began travelling to larger towns in search of orders, but without much success.

Fascinated by these heritage textiles and in hopes of resurrecting them in some way, the Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing supported research, and founder Rachel Bracken-Singh produced an award-winning film by Wabisabi. A two-day symposium also inaugurated the first exhibition (Figure 9). Uniting the printing community with design school professionals and scholars stimulated a lively and wide-

ranging discussion of *jajam* and their future potential. In particular, they brainstormed how to involve the next generation in this heritage craft. Printers arrived from a variety of towns across Rajasthan to talk and celebrate this special time together. Enthusiasm abounded —old friends reminisced, and acquaintances both old and new discussed the viability of *jajam* printing, a lively discussion that generated productive ideas. Several *chhipas* went on to print bespoke *jajam* and *chaupad* games for sale to high-end customers while others discussed how floorcloths might be translated into other products. One printer and textile artist from the UK later teamed up to create a range of fashion items for an exhibition, and re-envisioned *jajam* coats appeared with great success in the museum shop. Key to survival is the continual revitalisation of printed textiles to suit modern tastes, a well-honed talent of the Indian artisan.

It is a beginning. Discussions continue, ideas percolate. Only time will tell how block printing, or *jajam*, will fare in the contemporary marketplace. It won't be easy. With an educational mission, the Anokhi Museum continues to encourage an appreciation for handmade cloth and its skilled masters, all in hopes of a long, productive future.

*We couldn't imagine that jajam printing would start again, and we would be displayed in an exhibition We feel a sense of pride and are choked with emotion...It feels very good to be printing jajam.
We feel happy. The people are remembering the old printing.*

— Purushottam Chhipa, Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing, January 2019

Balinese cloth temple hangings from the Geoffrey Saba collection

Fiona Kerlogue



Figure 1. Hanging in the eaves of a pavilion at a temple festival in Kamasan, August 2008. Photo: Fiona Kerlogue.

It will probably never be known when Balinese artists started to paint the beautiful long narrow cloths, *ider-ider*, which hang from the eaves of their temple pavilions during festivals. The discovery in Indonesia of Indian cloths dating from the 16th to 18th centuries painted in a similar format with similar subjects — battle scenes from the Mahabharata or scenes from the Ramayana story — suggests that those produced in Bali may well have been made as substitutes for imported examples.

Handwoven cotton cloth used in 19th century Balinese hangings was mostly woven on the neighbouring island of Nusa Penida to the south, from locally grown handspun cotton. Barkcloth was also used at one time. More recently this seems to have been replaced by cloth from the island of Lombok; machine-woven imported cotton cloth from Europe is used for the paintings sold to tourists, but is considered by many Balinese as unsuitable for religious hangings.

The type of painted cloths we are concerned with here are mostly produced in the village of Kamasan, not far from the historic royal court of Semarapura in south eastern Bali. The city is better known as Klungkung, and painters in Kamasan were probably

employed in the service of the Klungkung court, working not just on cloth hangings but on the famous painted ceilings of Kerta Gosa, the royal court of justice. Today Kamasan is still a centre for this style of painting, and while paintings are produced in large numbers for tourists there is also considerable demand from families wishing to decorate their own household shrines, and paintings are also donated to village temples for festivals.

The process is a long one. First the cloth must be sized with rice paste before being dried. The surface is made smooth for the artist's pen by polishing it with a cowrie shell attached by a bamboo rod to the ceiling, which when bent helps to produce pressure on the cloth. The outlines of the design are then drawn in charcoal or pencil by the artist. They may be finalised in ink at this point before his apprentices, often family members, take on the task of colouring the figures. In finer quality paintings the outlines should be inked in by the artist after the painting, which is undertaken one colour at a time. Many painters still use the traditional colouring materials, including black from lampblack mixed with oil and white from ground pigs' bones. The brilliant red traditionally came from imported Chinese cinnabar, *kencu*. Yellow is believed to have come from cadmium, also imported from China, though ochre is also used. These pigments were mixed with a glue-like medium, *ancur*, derived from fish bones. Nowadays some artists use acrylic and other imported paints, but traditions die hard and many discerning local customers prefer the old materials.



Figure 2. Religious paintings for sale outside a temple festival in Gelgel, Bali, August 2008. Photo: Fiona Kerlogue.

Nowadays some artists use acrylic and other imported paints, but traditions die hard and many discerning local customers prefer the old materials.

The six paintings in ORTS member Geoffrey Saba's collection are a good representation of the subject matter found in Balinese *ider-ider*. The Balinese religious landscape is filled with figures divine, semi-divine, demonic and princely, mostly with some connection to Hinduism, although there are also scenes from the medieval Javanese chronicles. Figures from the Indian Ramayana and Mahabharata epics are ubiquitous, though the key players in the scenes are nearly always accompanied by their Balinese servants, who in performances would interpret the action to the audience. These figures are depicted in *wayang* style, that is they are depicted flat, like shadow puppets. Their clothing, facial features and posture, as well as their clothing, indicate their character and status. The design field is divided into scenes in which the characters talk or confront one another, as if in scenes in a play.



Figure 3. Two *ider-ider* temple hangings. Forest scene from the Ramayana (above). Battle scene from Ramayana (below). Geoffrey Saba collection.

In the Saba collection there are two paintings depicting scenes from the Ramayana, the epic in which Sita, the wife of Rama, the prince of Ayodhya, is abducted by the demon Ravana and later rescued with the help of an army of monkeys. Figure 4 shows a scene from a painting in which Rama, his brother Lakshmana and Sita are exiled to a forest following a plot hatched by Rama's stepmother. Rama's servants, Twalen and Merdah, are depicted wearing checked loincloths, Twalen's black and white, Merdah's red and white, reflecting his lesser status. In Bali black and white *poleng* cloths such as the one worn by Twalen are also wrapped around trees and statues as protective devices. The trees of the forest are



Figure 4. Twalen kneels at the front, with Rama standing behind him, then Lakshmana. At the back are Merdah with a red checked loincloth, with Sita and her maid behind him. Photo: Suleyman Saba.

depicted in this painting rather like over-sized flowers, placed in the conventional way between individuals or groups meeting one another. The scenes are divided by mountains expressed as rows of humps, here painted brown. Rama wears a diadem, while Lakshmana has his hair swept over his head, in the 'crab claw' style. Sita is accompanied by her maid, who has a darker complexion, and is without a breast cloth. The painting is shown in Figure 3 (above). On the right of the figures just described a cave

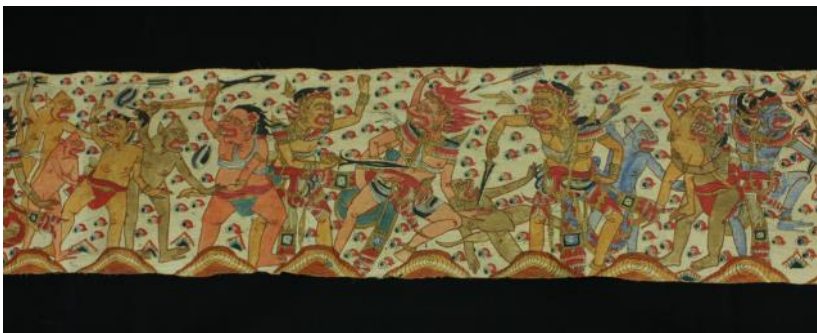


Figure 5. Painted cloth, *ider-ider*, showing a battle scene from the *Ramayana*. Saba collection. Photo: Suleyman Saba.

can be seen; the forest is the home of hermits, who dwell in caves and can be recognised by their turbans.

Towards the end of the *Ramayana* a great battle takes place between Ravana's army of demons, *raksasa*, and the army of monkeys led by Hanuman. Figure 5 shows such a battle scene, the apes moving from left to right across the painting, the *raksasa* from right to left. Some of the monkey heroes, especially

those depicted in semi-human form, have clearly identifiable characteristics. For example, Nala, the architect of the bridge to Lanka, the island where Sita is incarcerated after her capture, is identifiable by his flaming headdress and can be seen slightly to the left of the centre. Towards the right is Hanoman, the



Figure 6. Painted cloth, *ider-ider*, depicting *Arjuna Wiwaha* (Arjuna's Wedding). Geoffrey Saba collection.

white monkey general. The apes are armed with sticks and stones; the weapons flying in the other direction are spears; the demon army are also armed with daggers.

Another story frequently depicted in Balinese *ider-ider* is *Arjuna Wiwaha* (Arjuna's wedding), which relates to the story of the great war between the Pandawas and the Korawas, the *Mahabharata*. Arjuna is the hero from the Pandawa side, and in this episode his strength is tested when he is meditating in preparation for the task of killing a demon. The god Indra sends nymphs to try to distract him, but they fail and he is rewarded by being given the nymph Supraba in marriage. In the painting in Figure 6 we see Arjuna seated in meditation, wearing a turban as is appropriate when meditating. He is surrounded by seven nymphs, one of whom has rested her hand on his thigh, but he gazes fixedly ahead; to the right is a scene in which Indra, in his divine manifestation surrounded by a gold aureole, speaks with the nymphs.



Figures 7-9. Painted cloth, *ider-ider*, depicting *Arjuna Wiwaha*. Geoffrey Saba collection. Photos: Suleyman Saba.

Twalen, on the left, and Merdah, on the right, have also come to meditate, but have failed to resist the charms of two of the nymphs. The background filling design is a common one in such paintings, called *awan-awan* (clouds).

The fourth cloth (Figures 7-9) is also a depiction of part of the *Arjuna Wiwaha* story, showing on the left five of the gods with their golden aureoles passing their instructions to two kneeling nymphs with bowed heads, with behind them the other five nymphs with their arms in a conventional gesture of deference.

A frequently depicted story relates to Garuda, the vehicle of the god Vishnu (Figure 10). The story appears in the *Adipurwa*, the first book of the *Mahabharata*, and tells of how he stole the elixir of life, *amerta*, from the gods in order to rescue his mother. Garuda is often depicted in combat with the gods of the eight directions, who are trying to recapture the *amerta*, and it seems likely that this painting derives



Figure 10. Painted cloth, *ider-ider*, depicting on the left a serpent (*naga*) and battle scenes. Geoffrey Saba collection.

from such representations. Each cardinal god is associated with a specific weapon, metal, colour and so on. The god on the left, painted blue, may be Sambu, the god of the north east; the middle figure on the right may be Iswara, white, the god of the east, but the shortage of available colours means that Balinese painters generally do not attempt to include the whole range. In the depiction of Garuda himself the painter has followed convention, and shown him facing left, with his left leg raised and bent. The legs are feather-covered and the wings spread out behind him.

It is not clear what scene is represented in the sixth painting (Figure 10). On the left two warriors with the refined features of heroic figures are shown apparently in unarmed combat with a serpent, or *naga*. In creation stories in Bali there are two *naga* whose bodies are twined around one another and pulled in a tug of war by the gods and the demons, causing the elixir of life to rise from the primordial ocean of milk. This painting does not show that scene, however, and it seems that some other serpent is depicted. Our two heroes are seen again in the scene to the right in discussion with a kneeling figure apparently presenting them with a weapon, perhaps a double-headed club. The wider scene next on the right shows the same two men fending off their enemies on both sides, now armed with polearms; on the far right they appear unarmed again but seem to be vanquishing an enemy armed with the double-headed club. One problem in trying to interpret such scenes is that the narrative may run from left to right or from right to left. An artist in Kamasan might well be able to identify it but at present it is a mystery.

All of the painted hangings in this fine collection show some signs of use, and have clearly been pinned around the eaves of shrines in Bali. The minimal damage is due to the fact that these decorations are used only on special occasions, particularly on the occasion of an *odalan*, a temple festival celebrating its anniversary or founding, or during Galungan, which marks the ten days in a Balinese year when the ancestors return to earth. For the rest of the year they are packed away and stored until the next occasion.



The lower border on all six cloths consists of a row of low hills or rounded rocks, a device used to indicate an outdoor scene. This element suggests that they date at the earliest from shortly before the Second World War, when this feature first emerged. The simple patterns in the side borders also suggest a mid- to late 20th century date.

Fiona Kerlogue

Suggested reading:

Adrian Vickers. 2012. *Balinese Art: Paintings and Drawings of Bali 1800-2010*. Tuttle.

A.A.M. Djelantik. 1986. *Balinese Paintings*. OUP.

Anthony Forge. 1978. *Balinese Traditional Paintings*. Sydney: Australian Museum.

Figure 11. Hanging around the eaves of a family shrine, Kamasan. August 2008. Photo: Fiona Kerlogue.

Susi Dunsmore in Qinghai, China

Claude Delmas

On the strength of her successful innovative input into traditional Nepalese textiles, discussed in the Autumn 2020 issue of this journal, in 1998 Susi Dunsmore was asked to be the Cottage Industry Specialist to run a workshop in the South Eastern area of the province of Qinghai, China. This was sponsored by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Development and the Commission of the European Union as part of the Livestock Development project.



The area is inhabited mainly by Tibetan nomads, whose only livelihood is their herds of yaks and sheep and who spend the summers in their yurts at high altitudes. Susi agreed to run the workshop at 3000 metres rather than the suggested 5000. Poverty alleviation through the sale of woven textiles and improvements in their production were her main terms of reference. In preparation she received photographs and samples of weaving and some yak and sheep yarn from members of the local NGO. The main product was narrow weavings in yak hair in light and dark shades for use as tent panels and heavy carrying bags for the animals.

*Figure 1. Qinghai landscape with the Yellow River.
Photo: Susi Dunsmore.*

Some images showed the weavers crouching over their loom anchored in the ground. This led Susi to commission a small four shaft treadle loom such as is used by Nepalese Sherpa to be made by an English



Figure 2. Weaver bent over the ground loom as she works. Photo Susi Dunsmore.

carpenter to take with her to China. A replica was also made in Qinghai from plans she sent. She designed and, with a few helpers, wove samples of yak hair textiles which were lighter, softer, and more suitable for scarves or clothing, using some silk and the cashmere-like down from the under belly of the yak. The new treadle loom allowed for more variety of structure than just plain weave and after a while learning to warp up the loom the weavers were happy to experiment with the new textiles. They also tried a spinning wheel instead of only using a spindle.



Susi discovered they had a very intriguing device fixed to a tree for spinning or plying used by two people together, which caused quite a stir when she brought it back with her to the UK. Other activities, such as braiding and body-tension weaving of narrow bands for bag straps, knitting with the new softer yarns, felting and stitching, took place at the workshop. The cross-patterned bands that decorate men's and women's costumes had to be bought in, at some expense, so the weavers were very interested in trying Susi's method of weaving their own. However, there was too little time, so a second workshop was suggested.

It didn't happen. Retailers in London were approached who agreed to sell the new products, bags and cushions, but no textiles materialised. On her return, Susi prepared a thick booklet of notes for the weavers who had attended the workshop but to her great sadness, this never actually reached them, as she found out from Gina Corrigan who later ran a tour to the area. For one reason or another Susi was unable to persuade the powers that be to pursue the positive results of the workshop.

Claude Delmas

Figure 3. Spinning device. Photo: Susi Dunsmore.

Figure 4. Susi with members of the workshop.



Epic Iran: Victoria and Albert Museum, London. To 12 September 2021.

5,000 years of culture and civilisation is a long stretch to fit in one exhibition, even with 200 objects but this is the aim of this ambitious exhibition.

While other shows on Iran have concentrated on single periods or media this one intends to show the connectivity that runs through the whole time span. Iran is most unusual in that modifications of the same language have been spoken since around 1200BC. The use of the name 'Iran' comes a little later; it is an adaptation of Aryan, which Darius the Great claimed as his identity on his tombstone in 486BC. 'Persia' is an adaptation of the word from the name now used for the SW province of Fars; for a while 'Persia' was used to name the whole country, hence our Persian carpets etc. In 1926 Reza Shah asked the international community to adopt the name Iran, which was more inclusive. The 1930s were the heyday of Middle Eastern archaeology but Iran missed out on this and so has tended to be written off as of lesser interest than Mesopotamia. This show puts that right.

Many of our members will have visited Iran; one of the strong feelings engendered by the inhabitants is the feeling of a deep civilisation. It is apparent in the good manners of all we encounter even in a casual setting, in the grace and beauty of the population and in the exquisite cuisine.

Two things to note before I start: the labels are easily overshadowed and rendered illegible. There are large print booklets available or take a torch. The 1411 Horoscope of Iskandar Sultan, illustrated in all the big reviews, is quite small and only lit once every fifteen minutes.

The exhibition starts with the Proto-Elamites, the people who lived on the Iranian Plateau from 3,200BC. Around 1,500BC Central Asian tribes arrived, who settled into the Medes in the north and the Persians in the south. The objects in the show of this time do not include any textiles but we are greeted by a bronze figure in gloriously impractical shoes and later there is a bronze couple where she is wearing a beautifully patterned outfit. Hairstyles are clearly of importance, as you will see all through the exhibition including in a plaque from Susa, 800-700BC, which shows a woman in an elegant robe edged with rosettes in compartments, a motif we will be familiar with in carpet borders, spinning while cooking a fish supper. In the same section are two fragments from a gold belt, decorated with animals in compartments, which was found in NW Iran. The animals have a clear Scythian influence but this pattern motif will become very familiar.

During the C6th the Archaemenid dynasty took over, and Persepolis was begun. This section includes some items from the Oxus Treasure such as the tiny but stunning gold chariot. Empires rise and fall but hairstyles live on. The zenith of Big Hair comes with the Sasanians, mid 200s – mid 600s AD. Incidentally, it was the Sasanians who cracked the problem of the squinch, the placing of a dome on a square base. It is shortly after



Figure 1. Silk fragment 7th to 8th century. V&A 8579-1863.

this that we find the first textile pieces, two good sized fragments of woven silk each with an inhabited roundel. One, a design in yellow on a green background, has a *simorg*, mythical bird/animal surrounded by a pearl border, as is typical of Sasanian silks (Figure 1). Sadly, the supposedly accompanying ewer with an identical motif has not arrived. The larger piece, nearly a metre wide, has haloed peacocks in roundels, the design in earth tones on a bright red background and there is a silver plate nearby with an identical bird. The catalogue says peacock, but to me they are ducks.

Islam arrived in the mid-C7 and while the Korans were written in Arabic, the people continued to speak Persian. There is a wealth of illustrated manuscripts. Most feature textiles to some extent and all are exquisite. In the poetry section, where a recitation in Persian adds atmosphere, is the

first of two carpets. This, from the V&A's Salting bequest, has a wool pile on silk foundation and includes verses from the great poet Hafiz in the borders (Figure 2). The second carpet is from Boughton House, where it has been since the early C18. It is late C16 with a wool pile on a mixed fibre foundation, measuring 452cm x 226cm. The borders are black with the main field in dark red but the whole thing is joyously patterned with flowers and animals both in and out of cartouches. The pointed ovals in the central part have scenes of human activity, parties and hunting scenes, which echo throughout the entire show. This section features objects of a cultural high point. Two of the robes of honour, (Figures 3 & 4) now converted into liturgical garments, both from the V&A collection (what a shame about the velvet one from Stockholm, promised but not delivered) are supreme examples of sophisticated weaving. Look for the illustrations on



Figure 2. *The Salting Carpet*. V&A T.402-191.

the labels for examples of these in use. The third, a C19th Qajar piece, is a masterwork of pared down magnificence. This area also has full-size slivers of the dome from three Isfahan mosques. These immense paintings were done in 1877 and are complemented by a light show of the whole dome interior from each mosque. There are other informative displays on the building of these wonders as well as architectural details such as tiles and doors. These last are decorated with scenes similar to the Boughton carpet. It is a pity the door knockers have not survived, one for male visitors and one for female, designed to give the woman of the house warning as to whether she needed a veil before answering the door.

Then come the Qajars; you can't miss Fath Ali Shah r.1797-1834, who is more jewel than armour, gems looted from the conquest of Delhi nearly a hundred years before. As with our Queen Elizabeth I, his portraits do not give any impression of ageing throughout his long reign. The ultra-short skirt decorated with exquisite blackwork embroidery, worn by girls in the harem, reflects the close interest in European ballet dancers of Nasir al-din Shah r.1848-1896. How neat he looks in his portrait with his feet so tidily together.

The C20 has been turbulent for Iran and this is reflected in the final section. Although the exhibition is large, do keep a little energy for the final room, which has some interesting political art. A piece that echoed the manuscripts and

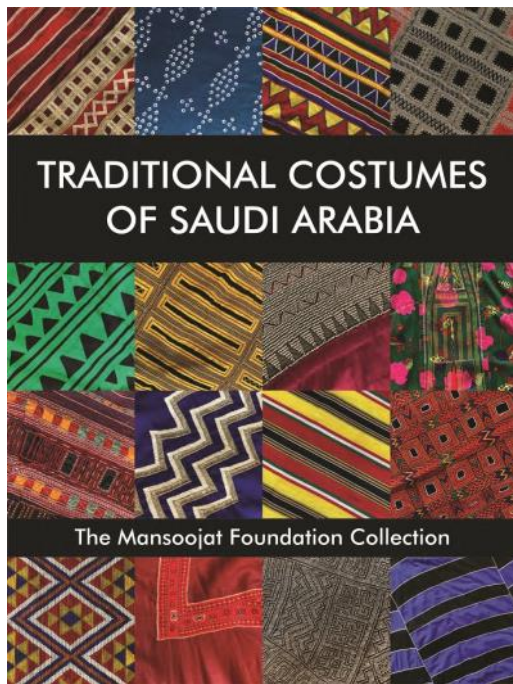


Figures 3 and 4. Left: *Silk sakkos*, 1650-1700. V&A 576-1907. Right: *Silk lampas vestment*, 14th century. V&A 8361-1863.

love of poetry that has been running throughout the exhibition but now made savage by repression is the *hanged* series. The artist has written out eight lines of poetry on copper sheets, cut out each letter and then threaded all the letters from each line to create a vertical physical shape. All eight strings hang from a shelf in a disturbing manner. A fitting finish, I felt, to an exhibition of great beauty and elegance but where the hand of a powerful leader is omnipresent.

More optimistically, I hope that you will see another thread that runs through this whole show; the sense of amiability and willingness to have a good time, no matter what the circumstances. From the Luristan man/jug offering us a drink, the characters we see riding along on the C12 pottery who are clearly telling good jokes, the elegant youths in the Safavid tiles and textiles enjoying their wine, women and song to today when even the roundabouts get pressed into use as picnic grounds at the weekends, there is so much good humour. So, I hope that though exhausted from the sheer size of this magnificent exhibition there is still a bounce in your stride from having kept company with so much beauty, craftsmanship and joy.

Dimity Spiller



***Traditional Costumes of Saudi Arabia:
The Mansoojat Foundation Collection***
by Hamida Alireza and Richard Wilding

Published by ACC Art Books, Suffolk 2021

ISBN 978-1-78884-040-8

320 pages, hardback, 402 colour and 71 black & white illustrations

£55

After fourteen years of research, collection and documentation of Saudi Arabian dress, the Mansoojat Foundation has put together this colourful and informative book. The UK based charity was founded by Saudi Arabian women in order to share their interest in Saudi Arabian costumes and to promote academic research on this widely overlooked subject. The foundation holds about 1,400 items of clothing and accessories. These costumes combined with intensive research, field trips and consultation with academics and local experts build the basis for this book which pays homage to the Saudi Arabian textile and cultural heritage.

The book is the result of the collaboration between several writers who specialise in the history, culture and traditions of different geographic regions within Saudi Arabia. Among the authors are Laila Abdul-Ghaffar Feda, who is Associate Professor of Clothing and Textiles at the Princess Nora bint Abdulrahman University in Riyadh, and Ali Ibrahim Mohammed Maghawi, a writer and researcher on cultural heritage of southern Saudi Arabia. Other contributors are Soraya Altorki, Abdul Aziz bin Mansi Sa'id al-'Omari, Abdallah Thabit, Laila Bint Saleh Al-Bassam, Amany Albahar, Maha Bitn Said al-Yazidi and Adnan Abdulbadie Al-Yafi. They are established academics, experts in local heritage and culture, or museum specialists. The book was edited by members of the Mansoojat Foundation. Such members include Lamya E. Alghalib, who is responsible for maintaining and cataloguing the costumes, Hamida Alireza, a founding member of the charity and curator, and Richard Wilding, a trustee of the foundation and London-based curator, photographer and filmmaker.



Figure 1. Jubbah (overcoat), Al Bahah region.
Copyright © Mansoojat, Photo: Richard Wilding

Following a brief introduction to the history of the region and its clothing, the book is organised by geographical locations and tribes. The depth in which the regions are covered is dependent upon the scope of the collection. The book begins by describing the Thaqeef Tribe living in the moderate climate around Taif and their garments of red, black and blue cotton. Then it spans over various regions and costumes such as the vividly embroidered garments of the Bani Sa'ad tribe and the woollen outer cloaks (*'abayah bidi*) of the mountainous area around Al Bahah (Figure 1). The gold embroidered Indian garments (*musarraḥ thobe*) from Al Hassa in Eastern Arabia and the overcoats (*jubbah*) from the Lady Anne Blunt collection made from brocaded Indian silk and worn in Hail, northern Arabia, depict international style influences. Finally, the book describes the history and costumes of the western region of Hijaz with its major cities Al Madinah, Jiddah, and Makkah. Women's dress in this section is exemplified by richly decorated wedding celebration outfits while men's dress is distinguished between social groups, outerwear, underwear, headcovers and footwear.

The descriptions of the costumes, accompanied by lively photographs and a glossary of terms, give a comprehensive image of the diversity of dress styles. For example, one can see the many variations of the most commonly worn 'long-sleeved ankle-length garments for men, women and



Figure 2. Interior walls showing freehand painting, *qatt*, completed by the women of 'Asir. Photo: Richard Wilding.

children' (*thobe*). They are distinguished according to cut, pattern and material as well as age, gender and tribal community. Within the Thaqeef Tribe, unmarried girls wear a dark blue, black or red garment (*mubaqar thobe*) while women of child-bearing age wear a square-shaped loose dress (*musaddah thobe*). The dress can be worn in different styles including the garments with attached train (*mihathal thobe*) of the Jahdaly Tribe or the wide-sleeved garments with inserted darts on the sides (*maharid thobe*) of the Sulaym Tribe.



The key attraction of the book is undoubtedly the brilliant photography of the costumes. It shows the immense diversity of colours, materials and patterns which are prevalent in Saudi Arabia. Comparing photographs of the architecture and landscape of the country, the book visualises the interrelationship between geography, culture and dress (Figures 2 and 3). Though the introduction features a nineteenth-century map of Saudi Arabia, the book would have benefited from a more recent map marking the regions, cities and settlement areas of different tribes more clearly. This would have made the localisation of the costumes easier. While the book addresses the history of various cities and tribes, it does not show how and if the style of the costumes changed over time. This is probably due to the fact that the collected costumes mainly date from the twentieth century.

Overall, the book is an invaluable asset for anyone interested in Saudi Arabian and Middle Eastern dress. It describes and illustrates the great variety and beauty of traditional dress and accessories of the region. It enhances knowledge about Saudi Arabian costumes and inspires the reader with intricate details, bold patterns and colourful designs.

Ruth Egger

Figure 3. Woman's thobe, 'Asir region. Copyright © Mansoojat, Photo: Richard Wilding



From the ORTS archive

The ORTS trips to Central Iran in 2015 and Northern Iran in 2017 included both men and women of course, the latter encumbered with headscarves. In this photograph from the earlier trip the men lined up to be photographed on a visit to a carpet warehouse: Left to right: Abbas Rahimi, Gavin Strachan, Christopher Legge, Ken Teague, Chris Tsielepi and the late Neville Kingston.

SALE

Professor Richard Rose, a long-standing member of ORTS, recently offered items from his collection of rugs and textiles at auction. Some pieces remain unsold and are available directly from Professor Rose at the minimum estimate price, post and commission free. Details can be seen on <https://bid.tennants.co.uk/m/view-auctions/catalog/id/1020> (see lots 300-331) and <https://bid.tennants.co.uk/m/view-auctions/catalog/id/995> (lots 275-316).

ORTS members interested in any items should contact him at prof_r_rose@yahoo.co.uk and members may see them, and many more objects, at his home near Loch Lomond.

SALE

Louise Teague, our former ORTS Chair, has travelled widely collecting rugs and textiles along the way. She is now selling items from her personal collection. She has pieces from Turkey, Iran, Caucasus, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tibet, The Himalayas, Minority and Hill tribes in China, Laos, N. Vietnam, India, Bhutan, Tibet, maybe more.

Louise welcomes members of ORTS and their friends to an Open House on Saturday, September 11th, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Come and have a nice time. We welcome you with refreshments and a light lunch. RSVP and all enquiries to louise.p.teague@gmail.com

News from University Women's Club Construction work at South Audley Square



It was the later disgraced Minister of Transport, Ernest Marples, who in the 1950s authorised demolition at South Audley Square to make way for a car park - subsequently managed by NCP.

In 2020 that car park was itself swept away in favour of a development complex of 8/9 storeys of 30 luxury flats, gyms etc. all faced out in a gaunt Neo-Classical style (regrettably, in this writer's opinion, resembling The Ministry of Defence building) by John Caudwell, better known for founding Phones4u, the mobile telephone retailer.

Had Covid not occurred members would have had to endure horrendously noisy piling work on site last year well into the evenings. Mercifully that initial preparation work was scheduled to have been completed in May 2021 to allow construction. Providing we can all return to 'normal' in September 2021, members should by then have escaped disturbance from adjacent construction work during evening lectures.

Clive Rogers

TALKS

Details for all Zoom talks are currently sent to members in advance by email.

Talks are normally held at the University Women's Club, which is behind the Dorchester Hotel in London. We do hope that they can resume there soon.

Buses 13, 16, and 36 go from Victoria Station to Park Lane. Bus 38 goes to Piccadilly, Hard Rock Café bus stop. Nearest tube stations: 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 complimentary nibbles and a pay bar.

Non-members are welcome to attend lectures for £7 a single lecture, students £5. Lectures are free for members.

ORTS COMMITTEE

Chairperson	Sue Jones	waveindjones1@gmail.com
Treasurer	Elizabeth Bridges	elizabethbridges84@gmail.com
Membership Secretary	Dimity Spiller	membership.orts@gmail.com
Programme Organiser	Clive Rogers	stroud@orient-rug.com
Journal Editor	Fiona Kerlogue	editor.orts@gmail.com
Members' talks	Geoffrey Saba	geoffreysaba@gmail.com
Social Media	Mamiko Markham	mamiko.markham@gmail.com
Website	Fiona Kerlogue	editor.orts@gmail.com

Louise Teague	louise.p.teague@gmail.com
Penny Berkut	pennyberkut@outlook.com
Margaret Broadbent	magsbroadbent@btinternet.com

With thanks to Pia Rainey for managing the E-news

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

Deadline for content for autumn issue October 1st 2021

Back cover: Printer Ramswaroop Chhipa proudly displays his father's national-award-winning jajam, circa 2017. Collection of Ramswaroop Chhipa, Jairanpura, Jaipur District. Photo courtesy of Wabisabi. See article by Suki Skidmore on page 16.

