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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.

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Volume 4 issue 3 Autumn 2021

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Front cover: *Man's head cloth,* iket kepala*, from the collection made by Maurice and Adelaïde Verneuil de Marval in Java in 1922. See article 'Journey of a Collection. Part Two' by Gaspard de Marval, page 12.*

ORTS NEWS

The latest government guidelines, recently relaxed in relation to social gatherings, meant that this year's summer party was well attended as well as highly enjoyable. Our first face-to-face lecture in September attracted a small audience in the room and a much larger one via Zoom. We will be monitoring the numbers and costs to see how best to manage lectures in the future.

The next Annual General Meeting will be taking place via Zoom on 8th December, and will be accompanied by a Show and Tell of items from members' collections. Although it is not yet a year since the last AGM, holding the AGMs towards the end of the year will help us to plan our activities to fit in with the financial reporting year. If you would like to show something from your collection in the Show and Tell, please do get in touch.

Fiona Kerlogue

ORTS members enjoying the Summer Lunch Party in Kensington in September. Left to right: Jacqueline Simcox, Nicola Pyne, Fiona Kerlogue, Belinda Lindeck MBE, Margaret Broadbent. In the background Susan Mocatta, Claire Prince and Caroline Gordon.

ORTS LECTURE AND TALKS PROGRAMME Spring 2022

Wednesday, January 5th 19.00 UK time. Cheri Hunter: ORTS Member's Talk. 'First, please, you must have some tea': A California Collection of Central Asian Silk Road Textiles. Via Zoom.

Wednesday, January 19th Steven Cohen: Indian carpets of the Deccan and the South. University Women's Club. 18.00 for 19.00 live. 19.00 Zoom tbc.

Wednesday, February 16th 19.00 UK time. Sarah Fee: Born of the Indian Ocean: The Textile Arts of Madagascar. Via Zoom.

Wednesday, March 16th. Rosemary Crill: Aspects of Indian Embroidery. University Women's Club. 18.00 for 19.00 live. 19.00 Zoom tbc.

Discovering Albanian Kilims and Carpets

Andy Dailey with Gentjan Ballazhi

I remember clearly my discovery of Albanian kilims. Walking from the castle of Krujë in today's central Albania, I saw a very large kilim with a cornflower blue border full of zig-zag patterns. My first thought was: who on earth would buy such a bright-colored kilim? My second thought was: how fast can I get this into the back of my car? And finally: where did this kilim come from?

This first Albanian kilim purchase began the discovery of an overlooked area of kilim and carpet history and production. As my collecting and research continue, so does the production of kilims and carpets in modern-day Albania.

Figure 1. Levenxa *carpet of felted goat hair. Drenovë, Albania, c. 1910.*

As with other Balkan weavings, most kilims and carpets in the region of Albania fit into the general Western Bulgarian design and motif group. These have similar and shared patterns and motifs, of which there are a huge variety, with local variations. Featuring prominently in these weavings are the Tree of Life, flowers, vines, wreaths, birds, and animal forms, all celebrating fertility and life. There are also some reflections of local and more ancient traditions, such as the *Flokati* or *flokje* shaggy carpets that continue to be created in much of the Balkans.

It is clear that Albania's mountainous geography has had a great impact on its culture, including kilims and carpets, so that unique weavings or patterns have developed in relative isolation until recent times. The Albanian language has two main branches, but multiple sub-dialects of each branch, creating a very rich, overlapping, and confusing vocabulary when discussing anything woven. There are also loan words from Old Bulgarian, Greek, Latin, and Aromanian or Vlach, which further enrich the language. The only publication on the subject of Albanian kilims, *Qilima Shqiptare*, (*Albanian Kilims*), was published in 1961 and acknowledged at least 10 known words specifically for floor coverings and many more for blankets, bed coverings, pillows, bags, and hangings. I have selected the terms used in this article based on conversations with people from the region in which these kilims and carpets were made.

The ubiquitous mountains and valleys meant that most villages and towns had little economic connection to the outside world and so woven objects were primarily made for personal, domestic use, and therefore not for sale or export until the second half of the 20th century. Most older pieces were, and still are, made of multiple sections woven on horizontal looms, then stitched together. Vertical looms were introduced in Korçë in the south, and probably Shkodër in the north, in the late 19th century. These allowed the

production of much larger, single-panel kilims, which became more common after 1945 with the establishment of export factories. Geographical and economic isolation allowed the preservation and development of some unique weaving traditions as well.

Wool is the most common element in Albanian kilims and carpets, with goat hair being the second most common. Cotton for warp threads was only widely used after the Second World War in state-owned factories, although use of wool for warps continued in domestic production. Before the 20th century, hemp and linen warp threads were sometimes used in the very mountainous north.

Figure 2. Bichrome levenxa *with water pitchers and birds. South Albania, c. 1870.*

As chairs or tables were uncommon in Albanian houses before the modern era, kilims and carpets served a large variety of purposes: bedding, seating, room dividers, wall hangings, coverings of all types, and prayer carpets. Thicker carpets were slept on in the winter, and lighter weavings used in warmer months, as elsewhere in Ottoman Europe. Semi-nomadic herders used felted wool and goat-hair weavings to protect from damp ground and rain.

For weddings, the bride's family presented kilims and carpets to the groom's family, a tradition that continues in some areas, usually woven by the bride to celebrate her skills and worth. in the north kilims for weddings would be richly decorated, often with flowers and vegetation, symbols of fertility and abundance. Specially made kilim bags were given as presents when a baby was born.

It is impossible to review all kilims and carpets in Albania in the confines of a single journal article, but I will focus on and introduce a few special types of kilims or carpets found in the region for your appreciation.

Today's Southern Albania has traditionally been a region of great ethnic and religious mixing. The local languages have included Greek, Aromanian, Old Bulgarian, and Albanian. The region has a sizeable Muslim and Greek Orthodox population, but many are Bektashi Sufis. Near the regional capital of Korçë is the former Aromanian stronghold of Voskopojë, and the Old Bulgarian towns of Drenova and Biboshtica. A drive to Korçë reveals dozens of village and town names that are clearly Slavic, Aromanian, and Albanian-derived, emphasizing the historic mixed nature of the region. It is in this context that you find some very interesting weaving traditions and designs.

Levenxa

The *levenxa* carpet is known by multiple names in Albania, depending on the local dialect, which can vary even between adjacent towns. The *levenxa* is known also as *valensi, gune, or çerga,* with *çerga* being a word from Old Bulgarian. Primarily created by ethnic Aromanians, known as *Çobani*, or 'shepherds' in the Albanian language, practically all examples date from the 19th and first decades of the 20th century. Partially felted as a form of waterproofing, most are made of goat hair and sheep wool, or completely in wool. Rare examples use cotton, hemp, or linen for the warp.

Figure 3. Levenxa *with stylized Trees of Life and central door motif. South Albania, early 20th century.*

Bulgarian motifs, such as the stylized tree of life. Open and Closed is best described as forming a net of lines. It is consistently found in red and blue-black, with the net being formed from either colour.

The tree of life motif often holds mirrors or mihrabs, depending on the individual you ask. The mirrors are usually, but not always, pentagonal and often enclose an image. Most objects located in the mirrors are birds and water pitchers. The tree of life motif is clearly to do with longevity, health, and prosperity, with the water pitchers and birds also being symbols of welcome and plenty. Humans or deities are occasionally depicted. In the central field one example appears to depict a woman or goddess giving birth (see Figure 5). In another rare example, images of human heads with red hats were included by the weaver.

Traditional *levenxa* kilims of felted goat hair were further developed in the 20th century with the introduction of cotton and larger looms. These huge but lighter kilims in cotton and wool, were created in enormous sizes for domestic use in

Levenxa carpets are found in southeastern Albania, southwestern Northern Macedonia, and northern Greece. They are typically of three panels, although complete pieces with one or two panels are found occasionally as divan covers; panels are typically between 50 and 70 cm in width. The *levenxa* from Albania differ from those from other areas in that they are mostly in dark red and blue-black and all use natural dyes. In rare examples, one may find more than three colours. Natural wool colours of cream and chocolate are used in a few examples. Occasionally an orange-yellow, probably derived from quince leaves, is used in small motifs for butterflies or birds and water pitchers.

The panels are always decorated. While there are many variations, the designs fall primarily into three categories:

Stylized tree of life holding mirrors (see Figure 1)
Door or double-mirror (see Figure 3)
Open and Closed (see Figure 4)

The Open and Closed design is apparently found only in and around the modern city of Korçë, although it may have developed from Western

Figure 4. Levenxa *with 'open and closed' motif. Region of Voskopojë, Albania, c. 1910.*

Figure 5. Levenxa *with a double-mirror or door in the centre with a woman or deity giving birth, surrounded by Trees of Life and mirrors with water pitchers. Region of Drenovë, Albania, 19th century.*

Figure 6. Kilim inspired by traditional levenxa *motifs including Trees of Life, Birds of Paradise, and mirrors or mihrabs. Korçë, Albania, c. 1945.*

traditional Turkish-style *konak* houses (see Figure 6). Most continued to be made from panels stitched together, although the panels were much larger, up to a metre in width. Using a broad colour palette of natural and synthetic dyes, these were given to mosques and the newly married. Being associated with mosques, most examples date from before 1945, although a few continued to be made until the late 1960s when religion, earlier suppressed by the government, was finally outlawed. This kilim style was revived after the collapse of communism in the early 1990s and has since been produced in limited numbers for wedding gifts.

Blankets

Blankets were produced in small villages throughout the region for domestic and military use, as well as for semi-nomadic herders. In today's southern Albania, blankets were very often solid white, but examples of red, red with blue-black bands, and multicoloured pieces may be found (see Figures 7 and 8). No pictorial designs are found on blankets, unlike

Figure 7. Multi-coloured Ottoman-era blanket. Region of Gjirokastër, Albania, c. 1880.

Figure 8. Red and black Ottoman-era blanket with 'M' monogram in corner.
Region of Voskopojë, Albania, c. 1900.

Figure 9. Ottoman-era blanket in goat hair.
Region of Korçë, Albania, c. 1880.

most kilims. Goat hair was a common material used in their production, but wool was also used. Blankets were felted in cascades and waterfalls to provide a form of waterproofing.

In the 19th and early 20th century, large numbers of Albanians served in the Ottoman army throughout the Empire. Blankets needed to be easily identifiable when in a heap while being stored, washed, or transported. These pieces often have markings so that soldiers could easily identify their property and these markings include Greek letters, simple contrasting yarns on a corner, and possibly Ottoman scripts or personal, family markings (see Figure 8).

Flokje

Flokje carpets likely pre-date the Ottoman Empire and are known by many different names in the region. *Flokati, valensi, and çulla* are terms used in different areas. The term may derive from the Albanian word for hair, *flokë,* or the Aromanian or Vlach word for a tuft of wool, *floc*. These carpets are usually made of three panels with 10 cm or more of pile (see Figure 10). Felted on the reverse, they served as sleeping mats and heavy blankets in the winter. Today, they continue to be produced and are used to cover divans and other seating, as well as the floor.

Figure 10. Bichrome flokje *carpet. Region of Gjirokastër, Albania, c. 1920.*

Figure 11. Flokje *with traditional diamond patterns found in kilims in the area. Region of Korçë, Albania, c. 1930.*

Figure 12. Flokje *with complex interlocking forms. Region of Korçë, Albania, c. 1940.*

Often in solid colours, including bright orange, purple, and bright red, older examples are usually of natural wool and natural dyes. That said, some are found with designs and multicoloured (see Figures 11 and 12). It might be interesting to note that the *flokje* style of weaving was also used to create heavy cloaks for *Çobani* and other semi-nomadic herders.

Northern Albania

Northern Albania has a very different tradition of kilim and carpet production. More mountainous, it was more isolated until the 20th century. While there were small populations of Bulgarian and other Slavic-language speakers bordering today's Northern Macedonia, for the most part it was ethnically Albanian, but mixed in religious terms between Catholics and Sunni Muslims. Designs tended to be more geometric and simpler than those found in Southern Albania until the early 20th century. The double-headed eagle, a symbol of Albania as a former part of the Byzantine Empire which appeared on the flag of the great hero Skanderbeg in the 15th century, was also a prominent motif. When kilims and patterns from Bosnia, Sandjak, and Pirot in today's Serbia were introduced in the late 19th century,

Figure 13. Kilim with Western Bulgarian group design of hanging fruit and flowers. Lezhë, Albania, c. 1900.

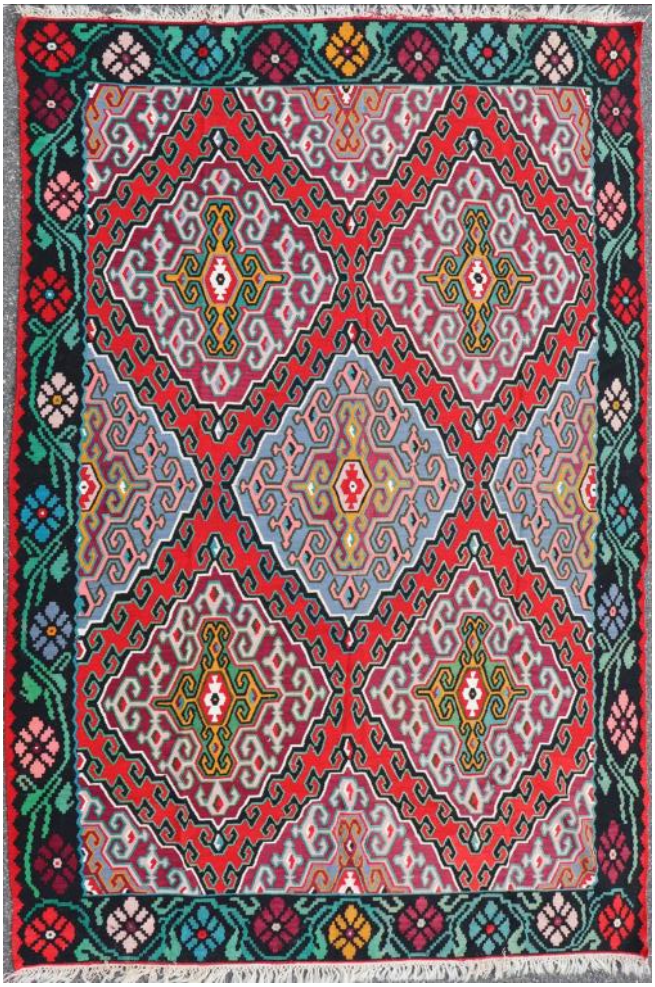


Figure 14. Kilim with 'Belgrade Key' designs inspired by Sarajevo-made kilims in the 19th century, with a floral border. Region of Shkodër, Albania, c. 1910.

larger, more floral kilims were produced, building on the tradition of Western Bulgarian motifs.

In northern Albania, a bride would traditionally weave kilims and carpets as gifts for her new family, demonstrating her skill and worth. Wealthy families might also commission or purchase a kilim in a major town in the early 20th century. Shkodër, on the border with Montenegro, was a major trading centre that helped spread imported designs and styles.

These prized kilims can be found in remarkable condition, as they were used for special occasions, such as entertaining guests, at weddings, or following the birth of a child. They were otherwise stored in elaborate and decorative cedar chests. Normally the cedar chest and its kilims and other weavings were kept in a special room set aside for guest use only. The tradition of having this type of room ready to receive guests at all times and containing the finest possessions of a family continues throughout northern Albania today.

Kukës

A special type of cotton and wool kilim has been created since at least the beginning of the 20th century in the town of Kukës. Using light colours, including pink, yellow, white, red, and green, from both natural and synthetic dyes, these kilims generally measure about 1.5 x 3.5 metres, probably designed originally to fit an entrance of a traditional house of the region. Common motifs are butterflies, double-headed eagles, pigeons, roses, and names of the weaver or owners. Some of the design elements, such as the *akstafa* borders on many pieces, emphasize the adaption of imported motifs, while double-headed eagles and pigeons are clearly locally derived. Used only for special events, including entertaining guests, pieces in excellent condition may be found.

Figure 15. Wedding kilim with double-headed eagle in the centre medallion and double-headed birds on the ends. Kukës, Albania, 1930s.

Northern carpets

Small carpets in northern Albania were multifunctional and pre-date the use of kilims to cover the floor. The carpets served as seating, sleeping mats, and occasionally, in Muslim households, as prayer carpets. Dominated by geometric and occasionally stylized flowers, the designs can be similar to the earliest Western Bulgarian designs with squares, rhombuses, and diamond shapes (see Figure 16). Generally measuring about 1 metre in width and up to 140 cm long, the pile is at least 1 cm in height and always made of two panels. Hung from one corner on the wall, often by a loop sewn into the carpet for this purpose, bright, cheerful pieces were available for guests. These continue to be made in the mountainous north of today's Albania in remote villages (see Figure 17).

It is clear that today's Albania has had a rich tradition of weaving which remains relatively unknown. The region's geography, ethnic composition, and history have all had a role to play in the development of local traditions, designs, use, and composition. Weaving continues throughout the country but is clearly in decline as many move to other countries in order to improve their economic situation. Hopefully we can raise awareness of kilims and carpets produced in Albania so that their role and importance in Balkan and European weaving tradition can be appreciated.

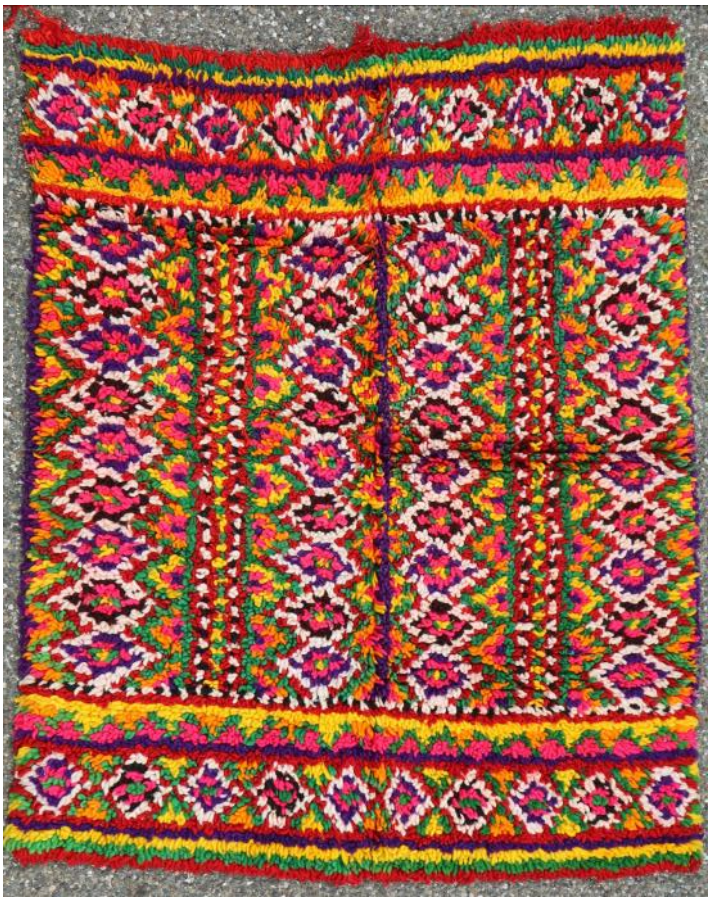


Figure 16. Sitting and sleeping carpet. Has, Albania, c. 1930.

Figure 17. Sitting and sleeping carpet. Made by Mirmoza Ballazhi, Gurrë e Madhe village in Mat Region, Albania, 1990.

Andy Dailey, based in Egypt and Albania, is the owner of www.albaniankilims.com and is an avid collector of kilims and carpets from the Balkans. **Gentjan Ballazhi** is an architect and photographer based in Albania whose family continues to weave kilims and carpets today.

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

Gaspard de Marval

But what remains today of everything that was collected in Java in 1922, recounted in my article in the last issue of this journal? Principally the photographs: of textiles, of important monuments such as Borobudur, Prambanan and the temples of Angkor in Cambodia and of scenes of Javanese daily life; also a number of quite important objects such as the 44 shadow puppets (*wayang kulit)*, the 8 rod puppets (*wayang golek)* the masks (*topeng*) 5 made of wood and 17 a rare collection of old papier maché pieces from the Panji cycle, 4 ceremonial daggers (kris), a gong and 2 drums (*rebana*). The greater part of this collection dates from the end of the 19th century. Some of the *wayang kulit* are older, others are from 1920-22, brought together for display after the performance of *Hikayat Gareng Gandrung* ('The Loves of Gareng'), the play translated by Adelaïde in Yogyakarta.

But let us not forget that the primary aim of the Verneuils' stay in Java had been the study of textiles and in particular of batik, a technique practised by Maurice Verneuil himself and part of what he taught his pupils. The collection of important batik pieces, both old and newly made, reunited in 1922, formed the main component of the exhibitions mounted by the couple. But a fair number of skirt cloths (*kain panjang)*, shoulder cloths (*selendang)* and headcloths (*iket kepala)* were not included. These were used as elegant shawls or cut up and transformed into dresses or blouses. As for the precious ceremonial skirt cloth (*dodot*) decorated in a pattern of opposing dark and light triangles (the *slobog* motif), having once graced the ritual ceremonies of a princely court it came to a prosaic end as the cover for a divan.

Figure 1. View of an exhibition of part of the collection made by Maurice and Adelaïde Verneuil de Marval in Java in 1922.

Figure 2. Man's headcloth, iket kepala, *with green central square.*

But let us not dwell on those pieces which no longer exist physically; happily their images are preserved in the photographs. Let us instead consider what remains of the batiks, around 20 pieces, some already old in the 1920s, some modern, nearly all batik *tulis*, waxed by hand. The older pieces came chiefly from the famous pawnbrokers of Java, who provided extra funds for owners depositing jewellery, items of clothing, weapons and so on. If the amount lent had not been repaid these were often put up for sale after a certain period. As for the newly-made batiks, they came from markets or specialist shops. Adelaïde took pleasure in recounting how she often surprised the sellers by wanting absolutely to acquire the *selendang* or *kain panjang* they were wearing, while the latter insisted instead on selling new pieces from their display to this curious foreigner.

In reviewing these batiks, let's start with the top of the body, with the *iket* or *kaïn kepala*, the head cloth (approx. 97 x 100 cm), an exclusively male garment, at that time tied according to the type specific to each region. The most beautiful of the four preserved examples is made from one of the fine quality cottons known today as *primissima* (see front cover). It is decorated with a classic motif usually associated with nobility, a delicate *semen* design including Garuda wings (*lar*). The delicate pale blue centre is bordered by the *cemukiran* pattern. Semen, relating to patterns dominated by leaves and tendrils, is from the word 'semi' which in Javanese means to bud, to grow. As is fitting for a piece of high quality, the indigo has retained its strength, while the brown *soga* dye, as happens after many washes, has lost some of its intensity. But the most interesting of these *iket* (Figure 2) fascinates us by the complexity of the decoration as well as its colours. Its wide batik border features various dashed lines, plant motifs in the shape of hearts and a wavy band of deep indigo enhanced with white dotted lines. The next field, which covers the surface to the edge of the central square, has been coloured by layering indigo and *soga*, resulting in a purplish. As for the central green square, it is framed by a wide border with an indigo-coloured *cemukiran* pattern on the cream cotton background. The other two ikets were bought new. One (Figure 3) is decorated with the famous *parang rusak* design surrounding a central square in the cream colour of cotton while the other, (Figure 4) coarser and of an ordinary fabric, simply has a wide batikked border in the *soga*-coloured

Figure 3. Man's headcloth, iket kepala*, with* parang rusak *design.*

Figure 4 Man's headcloth, iket kepala, with central square dyed in indigo.

frame surrounding a surface of full indigo. These differences in quality in the base material and in the work of the batikkers reflect the collectors' interest in and attraction to all production, from the most popular to the most refined, their artistic eyes tending however, as we will see later, to be drawn to ample decorations, as if scattered over the cloth.

After the head, let's tackle the shoulders and the torso, this time looking at exclusively feminine accessories. While the *selendang*, or shoulder cloth, sometimes draped over the head, is still part of traditional clothing, often as an element coordinated with the design of the skirt , the breast cloth, or *kemben*, which tightly encircles the torso, leaving the shoulders bare, only survives today in ritual clothing worn in palaces or for ceremonies such as pilgrimages to the sacred tombs of the sultans, to Imogiri for example. Since these two pieces of clothing are fairly similar in composition and size, it is often difficult to distinguish between them. What can differentiate them is the large diamond of a contrasting colour, sometimes covered with added silk, which can feature in the centre, the *tengahan,* of the kemben. These *kemben* with a central diamond are reserved for married women.

Two *kemben* from the original collection have survived. The first (Figure 5), made with a very fine cotton with a silky appearance, bears a delicate aristocratic *semen*-type decoration over its entire surface, framed by a wide border. As is inevitable, after long years of use (it probably dates back to the end of the 19th century) the *soga* in this cloth has lost all its strength to become a faint beige while the indigo has retained a good part of its intensity. If the second *kemben* (Figure 6) does not achieve such refinement by its broad treatment, it nonetheless looks impressive with its lively shades dominated by the warm tone of the characteristic Surakarta *soga* brown on an cream background. Within the wide border a *semen* design has

Figure 5. Woman's breast cloth, kemben*, decorated with a fine* semen *design.*

been drawn, the motifs emphasised with indigo lines enhanced by an inner dotted line which stands out in white. As for the very elongated rhombus in the centre (the *tengahan*), this was simply covered with wax to preserve the base colour of the fabric during immersion in the dye bath. Its surface is covered with fine indigo and *soga* brown lines resulting from cracks in the wax reserve layer.

Figure 6. Woman's breast cloth, kemben*, with central* tengahan*.*

Measuring approximately 105 to 107 cm high and with a width of 230 to 270 cm, the *kain panjang* covers the body from the waist to the ankles, forming a skirt attached in various ways depending on the region and gender. The more practical version of the skirt is the sarong, a large tube formed by stitching the ends of the cloth together. While the use of the sarong is widespread throughout the Malay world and on the North Java coast, it was not, however, common in the princedoms of Central Java and therefore did not appear among the items collected by the Verneuils. There are 9 *kain panjang* left today, again either old examples (late 19th and early 20th century) or examples from the 1920s. Among these *kain panjang*, some have

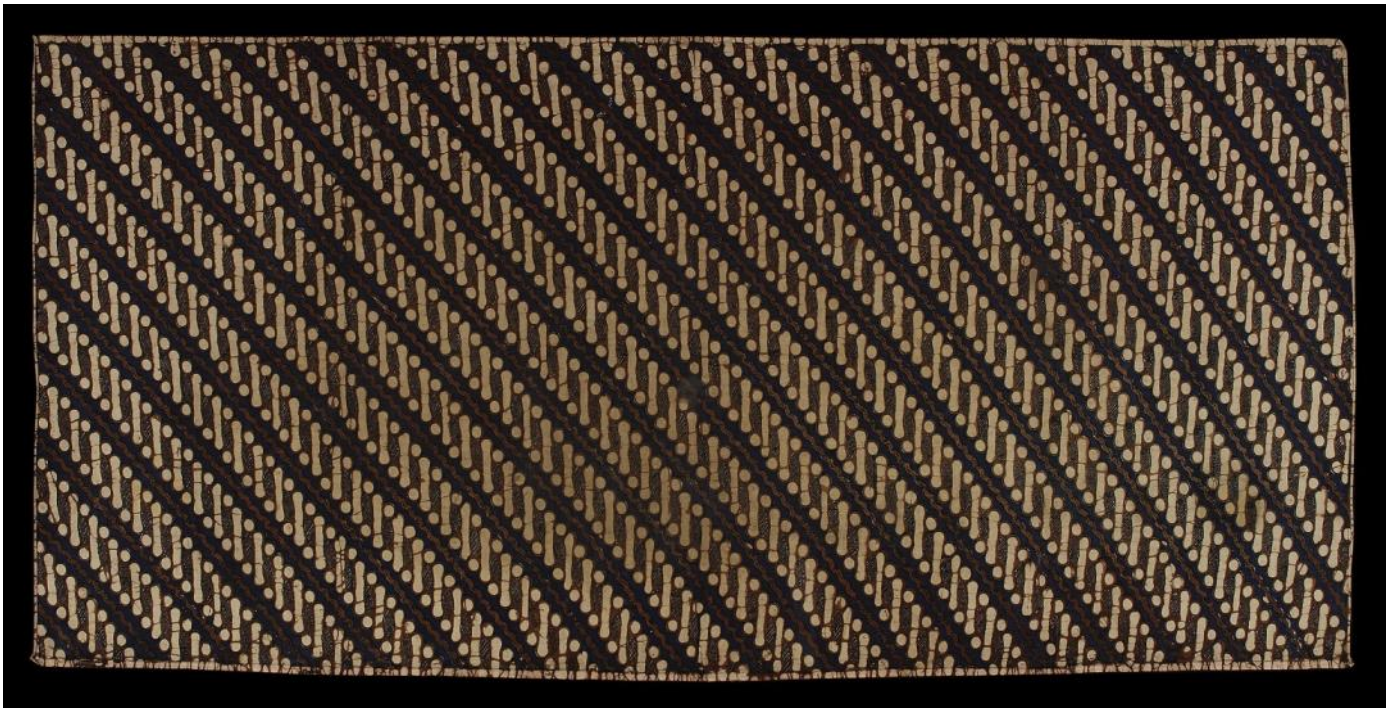


Figure 7. Unsewn skirt cloth, kain panjang*, with* parang rusak gendreh *design.*

aristocratic motifs, reserved for rulers and their relatives or for wearing at court. A *parang rusak gendreh* design in superb indigo and *soga* shades opens the series (Figure 7). It is still retains its status as a so-called 'reserved' or 'forbidden' motif, *larangan*. Adelaïde explained to her audience that wearing this was once forbidden to commoners by sumptuary laws.

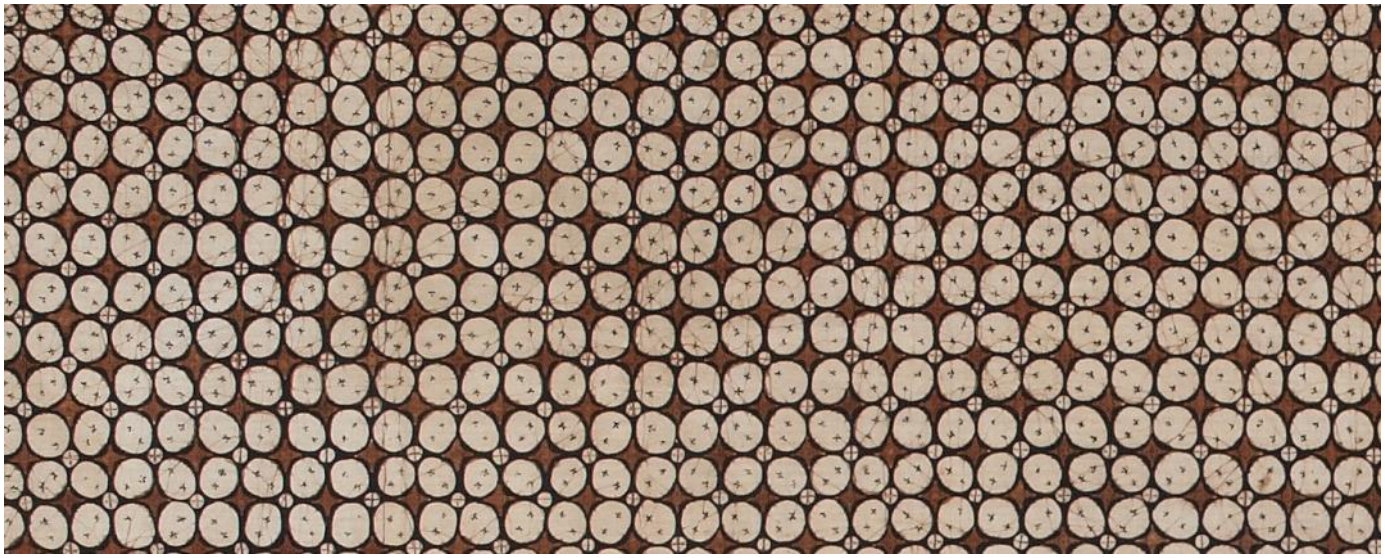


Figure 8. Detail of unsewn skirt cloth, kain panjang*, showing the classic* kawung *motif.*

Another 'reserved' motif, the *kawung*, with its ovals in groups of four around a centre, is of very ancient origin, probably Indian and is said to symbolize both the power of the sovereign and a kind of mandala, a mystical force radiates in the four directions from its central point. This *kawung* example comes from Yogyakarta **(**Figure 8).

Figure 9. Unsewn skirt cloth, kain panjang*, decorated with the* semen rante *design.*

Next comes a batik from Surakarta dominated by the blue tones of indigo and the browns of *soga* on a cream background (Figure 9). It is decorated with *semen* motifs. It is more precisely the *semen ranté* which brings together, like most *semen*, various symbolic motifs such as the mountain, tree of life, rice granary or house of ancestors and birds, peacock or Garuda, on a fine network of vegetation. All of this represents the celebration of fertility and the Javanese belief in a cosmic order. In another example, this

Figure 10. Unsewn skirt cloth, kain panjang*, with a repeated design produced using a metal stamp,* cap*, for the waxing.*

time from Yogyakarta (Figure 10), the fine, perfectly repeated design is due, exceptionally in the collection, to the use of the *cap*. Despite the absence of the batik artist's hand, replaced here by the *cap*, or copper stamp, the precision of the work in this batik is surprising, with no overlapping or poor connections between the patterns visible. Its diagonal pattern, a *garis miring*, comes from the large repertoire of *parang* designs. The design uses an almost black indigo accented with *soga* and overlaid with lightly tinted florets of pale ochre, probably the *parang kusuma* motif. The result is a *kain panjang* of great dignity that one imagines worn by a frail and worthy old lady during a ceremony. Let’s end this series with a very fine batik *tulis* from Surakarta that shows the Indian influence of the tree of life (Figure 11). On a very faintly ochre background rise vine-like plants, with leaves of an almost black indigo, finely veined with cutch or indigo dotted with white, with, here and there, clusters of flowers and fruit. This purely vegetal motif is called *lung-lungan*.

Figure 11. Unsewn skirt cloth, kain panjang*, with an unusual and elegantly drawn design of grape vines.*

The four batiks that close the series are of a different spirit, coming from workshops not attached to the court or suppliers of city customers, and located near Bantul, between Yogyakarta and the Indian Ocean to the south. These are village batiks or *batik desa* also called *batik kasar*, or coarse batik, for which a *canting* (the pen-like tool used for drawing on the hot wax) with a wide opening is used, thus speeding up the work. These batiks are nevertheless interesting because they are rarely collected and almost impossible to find today. Such pieces used by villagers would normally have been thrown away when they were worn out. They are characterised by freedom in the use of relatively large patterns, boldly sprayed across the cloth. We are therefore far from the court batiks created by batik artists in an almost meditative state of deep concentration. As it should be for Central Java, only indigo and *soga*, which have more or less lasted here, form the decoration. The first of these batiks (Figure 12) deploys its purely vegetal patterns on a background of *geringsing* patterns, round scales with a central dot, a pattern of very ancient origin which would have been seen as a protection against bad influences and disease. Two other batiks are decorated with large *soga* plant motifs on a deep indigo background (Figure 13, 15). Treated on a large scale, the

Figure 12. Unsewn skirt cloth, kain panjang*, which would have been made outside the court context.*

Figure 13. Unsewn skirt cloth, kain panjang*, in* soga *brown and cream against a dark blue-black background.*

decoration of these popular batiks must have seduced our collectors, themselves versed in the decorative arts and who in 1925 published together a collection of abstract patterns under the name "Kaleidoscope".

The last batik in the collection (Figure 16) is surprising with its dark tone resulting from numerous indigo and *soga* baths. Large plant motifs outlined with blue bands enhanced with a white dotted line intermingle with large indigo ribbons with white dots. The whole unfolds on an indigo background strewn with *soga* scrolls and a few contrasting flowers.

I will skim over the *lokcan* batik silk scarves produced in Juana and Rembang on the North Java Coast (Figure 14). Their acquisition was especially aimed at an easy sale within the framework of the exhibitions and they indeed made many elegant ladies happy. But the few copies that remain are too marginal for the interest of the collection. Let's also forget the large batiked piece documenting 24 traditional patterns as well as the series of batik processes on small cotton swatches, examples appearing in almost all collections and still made for batik enthusiasts today.

Figure 14 (left). Adelaïde modelling a lokcan *batik silk scarf.*

Figure 15 (below). Unsewn skirt cloth, kain panjang*, on an indigo background.*

Figure 16. Unsewn skirt cloth, kain panjang*, on an indigo background.*

Four particular textiles using other reserve techniques - *tritik* and *plangi* - will close this presentation. First we have two *kemben* (Figures 17-18) (45 x 180 cm.) which are examples of the so-called *kain kembangan* or 'flower cloths'. For married women only, these indigo-dyed *kemben* are flanked on the long sides by a purple border edged on the inside by a line of white dots resulting from the cloth having been tightly stitched with thread. The centre is decorated with an elongated green diamond also bordered by a line, this time wavy. These *kain kembangan* use the *tritik* technique but the central part, of a different colour, is protected during the dyeing by pieces of banana leaf. We thus obtain a textile of great simplicity of decoration but very beautiful in the contrasts of colours and the somewhat fuzzy lines which animate them. This type of textile plays a role in ritual, and is often associated with offerings, whether at stages in the life cycle, the building of a house or ceremonies related to the Queen of the South Sea, Nyai Roro Kidul, protector of the rulers of Mataram. The third piece, also a *kemben* (Figure 19) (43 x 188 cm), is also decorated using the *tritik* technique in two shades of *soga*. It is surrounded on all sides by a double line and

Figure 17. Woman's breast cloth, kain kembangan, *decorated using the* tritik *technique and resist using a banana leaf.*

Figure 18. Woman's breast cloth, kain kembangan, *decorated using the* tritik *technique and resist using a banana leaf.*

Figure 19. Woman's breast cloth, kain kembangan, *decorated using the* tritik *technique and two shades of* soga.

a wavy line which stand out clearly. The centre is occupied by an elongated rhombus enclosed by a meander and strewn, like the surrounding area, with a fine pattern of stars produced by tying the cloth. The central diamond, of *soga* lighter than the rest of the cloth, was certainly reserved during production with a banana leaf, to protect it from another bath of darker *soga*. The last piece in the collection (Figure 20) is a very large *selendang* (84 x 262 cm), or is it a *gedogan*, the very long and wide scarf used to carry children or other loads? Its background is dark indigo, almost black. Two techniques were used to decorate it. *Tritik* was used for a border composed at the outer edge of a line of small patterns in the shape of hearts or arrowheads, complemented, after a 3 cm band, by a wavy line composed of palmettes. Within these patterns one can still see the needle holes through which the tightly drawn thread passed which created the resist. The rest of the surface is decorated with a multitude of patterns in the form of ovals or diamonds with an indigo centre executed by the *plangi* (tie-dye) method which stand out against the plain indigo background in pale yellow, purplish or simply in white circles. This shows that after tying the parts to be preserved or reserved with protective ligatures, the top of the protuberances thus created received a touch of contrasting colour. Note that the techniques outlined above, especially *plangi*, can be found in other parts of Indonesia. But in Central Java, unlike *batik tulis*, *plangi* and *tritik* were techniques employed by men.

We have thus taken a tour of what remains from the collection assembled by the Verneuil de Marval family on a 1922 study trip . These textiles, often looked at and commented on by Adelaïde in her old age, awakened in her a poignant nostalgia and testify to her passion for the beauties of Java.

Gaspard de Marval

Figure 20. Selendang *or* gedogan *decorated in* plangi *and* tritik *techniques.*

All photographs of textiles and of archive photographs in this article are by SPECTRALS, Caroline Smyrliadis & Sébastien Bridot, photo studio, Switzerland.

Historic world textile collection at Leeds University Library

Jill Winder

In the autumn of 2019 the historic textile archive of the University of Leeds, previously known as ULITA, joined Leeds University Library's Special Collections and Galleries, thus beginning a new chapter in its distinguished existence, as the International Textile Collection (ITC).

The origins of this textile collection began in the late nineteenth century. In 1880 the Department of Textile Industries and Dyeing of the Yorkshire College, later to become the University of Leeds, was established. Its professors began by collecting early European fabric samples. Contemporary textiles were also acquired and compiled into pattern books and folios, to use as teaching resources for students of woven textile design.

Image from album of photographs of The Textile Industries Dyeing and Art Departments of the University of Leeds showing he Textile Museum, c.1904. LUA/ DEP/007/2010.661. https://explore.library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections-explore/681930.

In 1892 a teaching museum was created. This was named the Clothworkers' Museum to acknowledge the ongoing support of the Clothworkers' Company (one of the Livery Companies of the City of London). The development of the museum was recorded both regularly and enthusiastically in the department's annual reports, which have subsequently been useful in tracing the origins of many donated pieces. Increasing in size by the late 1920s, the collection was often referred to as the best of its type after the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

Unfortunately, by the 1960s the textiles were stored as a research collection within the Textile Department library. They were largely forgotten until Michael Hann, Professor of Design Theory, started consolidating the various sub-collections and recording what was held. In 2004 funding enabled the University of Leeds International Textiles Archive (ULITA) to be created in the chapel of the old Leeds Grammar School, where public exhibitions were then held for many years. The collection joined the Library not long before the pandemic struck. Recent months have involved transferring the data and digital images to the Special Collections catalogue, where it is hoped to reach a much greater audience.

The collection is made up of several distinct sub-collections of world textiles, dating from ancient Egyptian to the present day, with the greater part covering the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when academics were collecting for teaching. Alongside the textiles, there are various related objects, documents, ephemera and manuscripts.

Some of the earliest textiles acquired were fragments of European furnishing and dress fabrics from the 16th to 19th centuries, including figured velvets, damasks, and jacquard woven silks. In the early 20th century, a collection of Egyptian mummy cloths and a number of items of children's clothing were donated. Japanese textiles, Kashmiri shawls and shawl samples followed. In the mid-20th century, Professor Aldred Barker's Chinese Qing Dynasty textiles were added to the collection (Barker was head of department, an expert on wool, and a great traveller). These donations, many amassed by academics, established an international focus for the collection.

Han woman's jacket. 148x89.5cm. ITC 33. https://explore.library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections-explore/664933.

The personal Mediterranean embroidery collection, teaching samples and archive of the Bradford-born educator Louisa Frances Pesel were bequeathed in the late 1940s. It is now one of the most popular sub-collections, particularly amongst embroiderers. In the second half of the century, two related collections of fibres (manmade and natural) were donated, and in recent years notable additions have included Indian, Indonesian, Pakistani and West African textiles, strengthening the holdings of printed and resist fabrics.

Recent years

From 2017 to 2019 a concerted effort was made to number all uncatalogued items. During this period remarkable items dating from the time of the original Clothworkers' Museum were discovered amongst unopened boxes. These included South American textiles, some of which can be linked to Professor Barker's travels in Peru in the 1920s, for which a cinefilm was made at the time (now digitised and on YouTube — search 'Professor Barker Peruvian research film, 1926').

Apart from around 900 pattern books of British and French origin, Asian textiles continue to be the most prevalent, with the largest sub-collections originating from India and China. Standout artefacts in the collection include an embroidered Han woman's jacket, couched with gold and silver metallic threads and displaying images of a variety of birds and plant motifs; a collection of small embroidered Chinese accessories including fan covers, purses, spectacle cases, collars, hats and ear covers; a group of Egyptian children's garments from the Mamluk period; a number of Tibetan thangkas, and several early Kashmiri shawls showing the development of the boteh motif.

More than two thirds of the 6000-plus items have now been entered on the public catalogue, with over half the collection photographed. The collection can be searched via the International Textile Collection subject page https://library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections/collection/2576/international_textile_collection or by limiting a general Special Collections search to textile records from http://library.leeds.ac.uk/info/1500/special_collections. Searches can then be limited by place or date range.

During 2021 the Special Collections Research Centre was extended to include group study areas and refurbished to improve the space for users. Items from the International Textile Collection will soon be reservable through the catalogue and appointments can be made to consult them on site. Textile exhibitions will also be incorporated into future public programmes of events.

`Jill Winder

Jill Winder is Associate Curator (Decorative Art and Artefacts), Leeds University Library. Jill recently returned to Special Collections and Galleries, Leeds University Library, after being Curator of the University of Leeds International Textile Archive for eleven years. She is now responsible for museum objects, including textiles and coins. Email j.r.winder@leeds.ac.uk.

Baghs — Abstract Gardens

Mary Spyrou

'Baghs — Abstract Gardens' is an exhibition of *phulkaris* and *baghs* from the Karun Thakar collection which recently showed in the Brunei and Foyle Galleries at SOAS, London.

Thakar has been collecting art since his childhood, including antique textiles from Asia and Africa, Gandhara stone carvings, icons and crosses from Ethiopia and 1980s Ghanaian film posters, to name but a few of his diverse collections and wide areas of interest.

The collection on display was a unique opportunity to view close up the beautifully embroidered textiles. Once deeply rooted in the heritage of Punjab and its many districts, these pieces dating from the 19th and early 20th centuries were made before the partition of India.

Partition occurred in 1947 when India was divided into two independent states, India and Pakistan, (with East Pakistan becoming Bangladesh in 1971), forcing millions of people to leave their homes and seek refuge in a new state; accounts state that up to 2 million people died in the violence. This rupturing of a society and mass displacement of people also had an impact on the crafts of the region, including the making and the loss of numerous *phulkaris* and *baghs*, precious heirlooms left in homes across the region.

This upheaval was experienced by Karun Thakar's family and was instrumental in Thakar starting his collection. He describes how his aunty Banarso, who had married only about a year before Partition, had fled the family home in Lahore with his mother, who was just 13 at the time, to Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh. Wrapped in three small pieces of *phulkari* embroideries cut from large pieces were items of jewellery, hidden on her person. Hoping they would be able to return back home, the family left their house keys with their Muslim neighbours, but sadly were never to return. Banarso had these pieces made whole, by a skilled *rafu gar*, a term for craftspeople who darn, mend and stitch textiles. Thirty-five years later Banarso gave this precious piece to Thakar which set him on a new journey, to collect and preserve examples of these lost textiles. On many trips to India since the 1980s Thakar has amassed a wonderful collection which he enjoys sharing with members of the public, academics, collectors and dealers to expand knowledge and understanding of these important textiles. Recently a scholarship has been made available by Thakar through the Victoria and Albert Museum, to support research.

Figure 1. Bridal veil bagh*, made for a bride to wear on her wedding day.*

Baghs—Abstract Gardens

Stepping into the gallery I was immediately captivated by Thakar's stunning collection of large rectangular pieces of beautifully embroidered textiles adorning the walls of the galleries. As someone who hand embroiders, it was evident to me that many months, if not years of work were involved in the embroidering of a single piece, clearly labour intensive, a labour of love.

The word phulkari translates from the word *phul* meaning flower, and *kari* meaning craft or work, thus 'flower craft' or 'flower work', and *bagh* meaning garden. The distinction between the two is that phulkaris are embroidered textiles with areas of ground cloth showing while *baghs* have almost the entire ground cloth embroidered.

Figure 2. Example showing darning stitch on front and back faces of the cloth.

The characteristic stitch used to embroider *phulkaris* and *baghs* is a darning stitch, used as a decorative stitch and worked in soft silk floss, an untwisted thread known as *pat* or *heer*. The floss silk threads reflected the light and gave a vibrancy and lustrous appearance to the textiles, almost shimmering under the gallery lights. In the pieces on display a number of other stitches could be identified – stem stitch, herringbone stitch, cross stitch, double running stitch, back stitch and satin stitch. Small buttonhole stitches were occasionally used to edge the long end of some of the textiles.

Darning stitch is worked from the back of the cloth. An example in a glass case gave the viewer an opportunity to see the embroidered cloth from both the front and back, with the minute stitches on the back, and the long and short stitches on the front of the cloth (Figure 2).

Phulkari embroidery is traditionally worked on a handwoven plain cotton cloth known as *khaddar*, made from a hand spun cotton which was grown throughout Punjab. Woven on a hand loom, the finished cloth was dyed by specialist dyers or at home, using natural dyes. The roots of the madder plant were widely used, giving the cloth a deep earth red colour in a variety of shades of brown, rust and red. Although less common, black and indigo were also used, and there were some fine examples in the exhibition (Figure 3). For the first time, I saw *phulkari* embroidered on a white ground. These *thirma baghs* had a certain gracefulness and are quite rare. They were used for elder women and widows, or perhaps purely chosen for a particular aesthetic (Figure 4)**.**

The narrow widths of *khaddar* were either stitched together or embroidered before being joined, stitched lengthwise to make the required width of the finished cloth. Two to 4 loom widths were used.

Long and short parallel darning stitches follow the warp and weft of the cloth, creating striking geometric patterns in blocks of one or more colours. Hand dyed threads of gold, pinks, purples, reds, greens and cream threads which vary in colour and shades, create a wonderful luminous quality of light and shade to the textiles. Especially radiant were the *baghs* embroidered in a single colour of golds and pinks. The *baghs* embroidered with golden coloured threads evoked memories of travelling in Punjab, and seeing fields of golden wheat and mustard, in this rich agricultural state.

Figure 3. End field of a pulkhari *worked on a ground which has been dyed in indigo. East Punjab. 19th century,*

Figure 4. Rare thirma bagh *worked on a white ground, probably intended for an older woman or widow.*

Phulkaris and *baghs* are traditionally embroidered with a great variety of designs. On display were examples embroidered with geometric and repeating patterns of concentric lozenge and chevron shapes (see Figure 5), architectural forms, stylised floral motifs, animals, birds and figures, jewellery items, domestic objects and pictorial scenes of village life.

The making of *baghs* and *phulkaris* was part of a deep-rooted domestic tradition; they were made in villages and towns across the region. Some were commissioned too, by wealthier families. They are a powerful expression of women's skills and creativity, and inextricably linked with a Punjabi woman's identity.

The most important *phulkari* embroideries were the *baghs* made for auspicious occasions – births and marriages, and an important part of a Punjabi bride's trousseau. The pieces reflected her status, seen in the number and quality made. They also expressed visually her and her family's

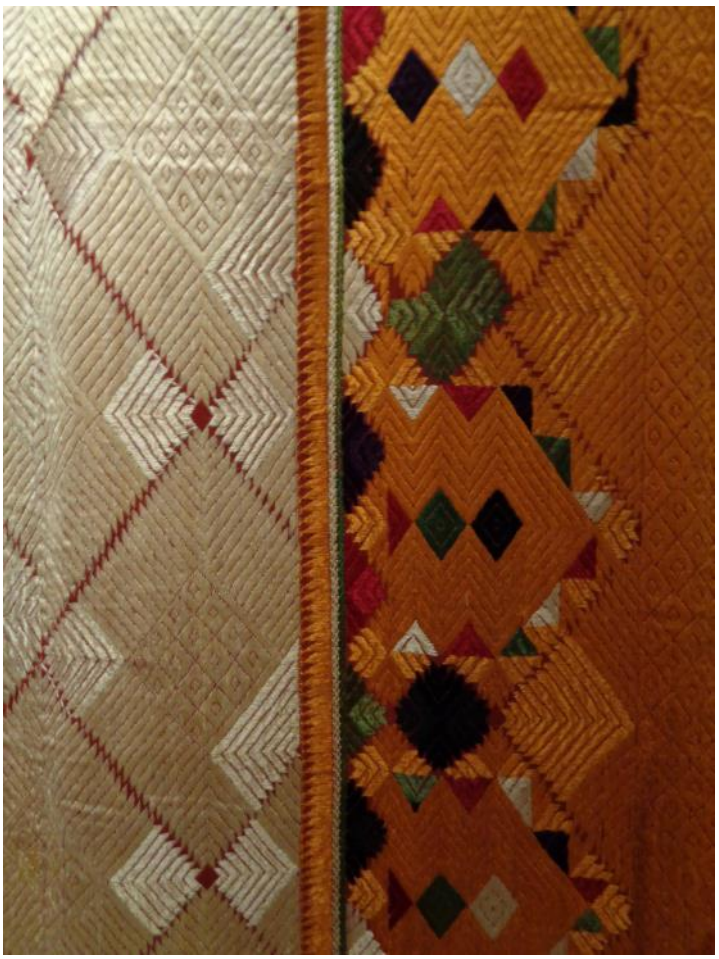


Figure 5. Detail of chand *'moon'* bagh. *Punjab. Early 20th century.*

Figure 6. A group of bridal veil baghs *on display. These would have been kept as heirlooms and passed down the generations.*

embroidery skills, made by female members, her grandmother, mother and aunts. Girls would learn to embroider from a young age. These treasured heirlooms would have been handed down from one generation to the next.

Baghs and *phulkaris* were made by Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims, as shawls, veils, wrappers, hangings and covers; for important events and as offerings to the temple. There are many varieties, each with a distinct name and use.

The most important *phulkari* embroidery was the bridal veil, a *bagh* started at her birth by the bride's grandmother and gifted at her marriage (Figure 6). These *baghs* are largely embroidered in golden threads of concentric lozenge patterns.

Another important marriage *bagh* is a *Vari da Bagh*. These were usually made by a grandmother on the birth of a grandson and would be gifted to his bride on her wedding day by her in-laws, on entering their house, now her new home. On display were many fine examples – including a *satranga* (seven), embroidered in seven colours. A lozenge shape, embroidered with black thread and called a *nazar butti* (*nazar* meaning eye), is an intentionally stitched imperfection, believed to ward away the evil eye, giving the textile talismanic properties (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Detail of satranga *showing* nazar butti *lozenge*.

Full of activity were the *Sainchi phulkaris*, worked on blue or undyed ground cloths, depicting pictorial scenes of village and

Figure 8. Sainchi phulkari *depicting scenes of village life.*

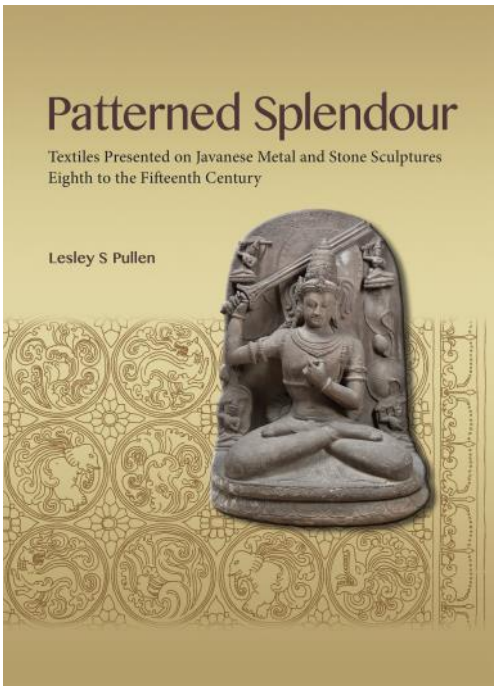
rural life. These were very engaging and full of life with imagery of people carrying water pots on their heads, animals pulling carts, scenes of ploughing, trains full of passengers, numerous birds and peacocks, women's jewellery items, hair braids and combs and even acrobats, part of visiting circus acts (Figure 8). A snake crawls along in a zigzag manner in one piece, embroidered possibly in the belief that it would afford protection to the wearer. In another a motif of a *chaupar,* a traditional embroidered cross-shaped board game, is stitched randomly. The patterns and motifs would have been drawn first, outlined in stem and back stitch, then filled with darning stitches.

Darshan Dwar 'gateway to the divine' *phulkaris* are distinct with their patterns of architectural features – arches, pillars and gates – with figures in between and geometric shapes. It is striking how the darning stitches are worked on the architectural features creating a lattice-like effect. These *phulkaris* were traditionally offered to the temple as votive offerings, as a prayer for a wish to be granted or when a wish had been granted (Figure 9).

The exhibition was more than a collection of beautifully embroidered textiles. They communicate a bigger story, having survived a traumatic history, and as symbols of deeply held beliefs, traditions and customs, rooted in a region and reflecting a landscape and its nature, with each stitch made with love and purpose, an expression of women coming together, making and sharing their skills and stories.

Mary Spyrou

Figure 9. Darshan Dwar *'gateway to the divine'* phulkari*, which would have been made to offer to a temple.*



Patterned Splendour: Textiles Presented on Javanese Metal and Stone Sculptures – Eighth to the Fifteenth Century

by Lesley S. Pullen

Published by ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore, 2021
ISBN 9789814881845
308 pages

No travel to the fabled island of Java can be complete without visiting at least one of the incredible Hindu and Buddhist monuments built between the eighth and fifteenth centuries. Of the hundreds of these intricately carved stone ruins--standing testaments to the wealth and sophistication of their original patrons—few still have in place all the statuary that once inhabited the inner sanctums and various niches of these architectural wonders. Those figurative carvings are now scattered around the world in museums and private collections. *Patterned Splendour* catalogues many of these works – only, however, those figures depicted with patterned clothing. Fashion, an art form that marries artistry, technology, communication, and practicality, becomes an important marker of place and identity when found recorded in more permanent materials. The motifs on some of this clothing presents intriguing evidence of luxury textiles during these periods and another opportunity to help with dating and identification. This is not the first effort to compile a record of the depicted designs —Indonesian student theses on this topic may be found in local university archives—yet this *is* the most extensive cataloguing of these historical patterns, with the inclusion of sculptures found outside of Indonesia (Bangkok, Leiden, St. Petersburg, Calcutta, Santa Barbara, etc.).

Among the most valuable aspects of Pullen's book are the most excellent illustrations made by Yiran Huang from the Royal College of Art. Huang's detailed sketches are also compiled at the end of each chapter, creating a handy compendium of the patterns found and sorted into each period/region. Historians of early Indonesia have much evidence of the essential importance that specialized textiles held in the region from literary sources and historical records. The best evidence of all is surely in the plentiful artistic depictions of the elaborate fashions worn by the deities and elite patrons of the day immortalized in metal and stone statuary. These sculptures (free standing, frontally staged, and/or reliefs) speak to the luxury trade in textiles, the high value of such cloth, and the cosmopolitan tastes of the elites who commissioned such artwork. The sophistication of carving and casting techniques by the artisans cannot be questioned. Pullen's book adds to the growing awareness of how worldly the Javanese (and a few other western Indonesian ethnic groups) were—mixing with people, ideas, and things from far away in every direction a sailing ship could reach.

Pullen has organized her catalogue into six chapters, sandwiched between her preface and epilogue. She introduces the topic of patterned textiles at the start and spends some time discussing Javanese textile traditions in the second chapter. Chapter three focuses on the dominant kingdoms of Central and Early East Java that were active between the eighth and eleventh centuries. Chapter four takes the reader to the east Java kingdoms of Kediri and Singhasari, of which Pullen is particularly fond. Majapahit, the subsequent kingdom in east Java, ends the catalogue in the fifteenth century and Pullen's concluding chapter wraps up her ideas about dating via patterning types. In addition, the book includes several helpful appendices: of particular value are a list of museums where these sculptures can be found and a glossary of textile terms, which could have been extended to add even more value for the reader who is new to this topic.

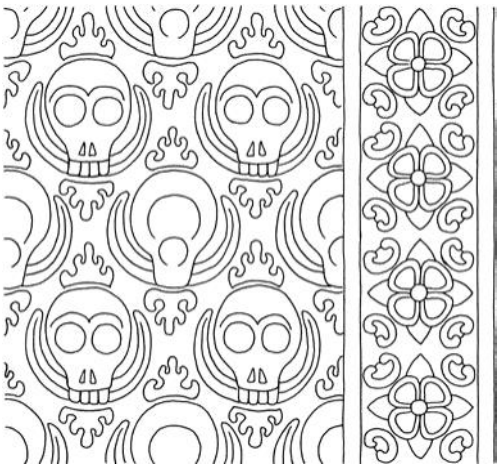
This book was not written for a reader without extensive knowledge of early Indonesia, textile arts, and Asian art history. It does add fine sourcing to the scholarship of these areas although there are certainly some issues with this volume that would hopefully be corrected if reprinted. The publisher is guilty of not using a knowledgeable editor to catch the many typographical errors that distract a close reader. The first map in the book is problematic as it attempts to condense eight centuries at once, so that the renowned ninth-century sites of Loro Jonggrang (aka Prambanan) and the Borobudur look to be situated in the much later kingdom of Singhasari. Sadly, some ethnocentrism occasionally seeps into the text, such as labeling religious practices in Java as a 'cult' or using the term 'in the Indian manner' as if this was a monolith of artistic modeling that Indonesians slavishly copied. Other scholars have shown that the Indic artisans often

crafted their exports to please the tastes of international customers. Some inaccurate descriptors jar (calling diamonds 'triangles', beads 'pearls', or calling flowers by Western terms like 'daisy' or 'fleur de lis'). There are other slips such as claiming a figure has the soles of the feet meeting when clearly the photo shows another pose and identifying cuttlefish as octopi. There is also sometimes a reliance on Indic terms where indigenous words exist. A few photos are absent so that the reader cannot verify what the author is discussing. There are a few errors of fact: Pullen claims that the Sunda Strait was not used prior to the Europeans finding their way to the islands, for example. And the conjecture that a well-documented pattern type (*kawung*) was not taken from a cross-section of the *kawung* fruit, but instead was an overlapping of round Chinese coins needed some strong argument to convince the reader of such a wild leap.

Detail of figure of Agastya, 9th-10th century CE. BPCB. Prambanan. Inv. No. BG 1314.

In a couple of instances it seems as if Pullen doesn't trust her visual analyses and instead inserts another scholar's statement that doesn't bolster her own. Perhaps this is the weakest part of the book; the author does not seem to have convinced herself that she can set up a typology of style to accurately date and place the sculptures. Perhaps it would have been helpful to add a few more style analyses: pattern directional repeats: horizontal, vertical, or diagonal? What about scale of pattern to depictions of clothing types? Framing borders and alternate motifs could also be explored. A comparison of clothing patterning with the panels of textiles carved into the *candi* architecture in Central Java might also reveal new findings. One cannot ignore the deep traditions of using textiles to delineate space for important life events and to wrap humans and heirlooms that might inform this typology. How to explain the sudden appearance of tailored, fitted bodices in the 1200s and 1300s? What about stone and metal types? How do those sort out in a chronology?

This book, despite my criticisms, is good value for scholars and art aficionados of this historical region and textile arts in general. In addition, there are subtle admissions of some of the problems within the Indonesian system of museums and antiquities. Not allowing scholars access, not properly caring for work and disastrous archival conditions have been ongoing problems. Often Indonesian curators complain that their hands are tied despite having up-to-date training in best curatorial practices. Hopefully more light shone on these issues will help. Best of all, *Patterned Splendour* takes us on a curious tour of west Indonesian figurative sculptures, wearing brilliant fashions for the ages.



Stylised kala *heads on a textile carved on a Singhasari period Ganesha.*

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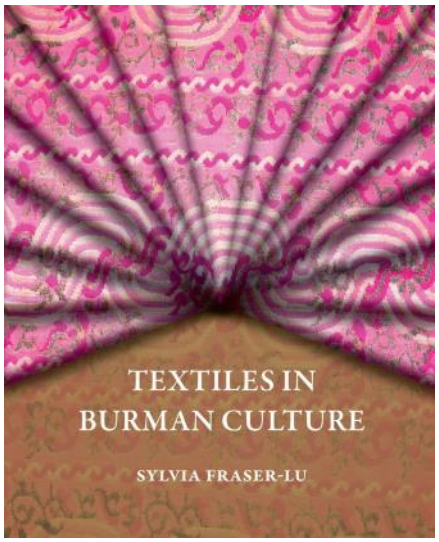
Book Review



Textiles in Burman Culture
by Sylvia Fraser-Lu

Published by Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai, Thailand 2021
ISBN 978-616-215-163-7
368 pages, hardback, 293 colour and 30 black and white photographs, 5 maps, 29 figures

The population of Burma, otherwise Myanmar, is very mixed in ethnic terms, including Kachin, Karen, Mon, Shan, Chin and Naga minorities, many of whose textile traditions have featured in publications over the years. This volume, however, focuses on the Burman majority, who make up nearly 70% of the population, but whose textiles have attracted far less attention.

The author, Sylvia Fraser-Lu, spent many years in Southeast Asia, during which time she studied the arts and crafts of the country in depth. Her seminal *Handwoven Textiles of Southeast Asia* (1988) included a chapter on Burmese textiles as did her later extensive study *Burmese Crafts: Past and Present* (1994). Here she builds on those accounts, both broadening the scope and deepening the content.

The book begins with a survey of Burma's long history, from the earliest settlements, through ancient kingdoms, foreign incursions, colonial rule and independence up to the present day. The evolution of costume is then mapped onto this structure, using archaeological evidence, wall paintings, travellers' accounts and statuary, with early photographs and other evidence bringing the story up to the 21st century. An account follows of textiles in daily life, especially the role of weaving, providing a framework within which to interpret the cultural importance of cloth in Burma.

Fraser-Lu's extensive research into materials — from the cultivation and processing of cotton and silk in Burma to the production and use of a range of vegetal dyes — is revealed in the next chapter, complemented by a detailed account of looms and their uses. This is amply illustrated with photographs and diagrams and also introduces and explores the woven patterns. The *acheik* design, woven in tapestry technique (*lun-taya*), now strongly associated with Burman identity, merits an entire chapter of its own.

Textiles play an important role in Buddhism in Burma, from the presentation by the laity of monks' robes to the donation of woven wrappers and intricately patterned tablet-woven braid bindings for securing and protecting religious manuscripts. Fraser-Lu also gives an account of the all-night weaving competition held at Kha-tein, the annual festival when the community presents the monastery with the monks' daily needs, an iconic feature of the Burmese year.

Until the 19th century, long-standing trading relations with India and China influenced the costume of the Burmese court, especially in the characteristic metal thread embroidery. Similar techniques are employed in *kalaga*, sumptuous embroidered hangings which appeared as backdrops in formal photographs of well-to-do families from that time. Such hangings were also used as partitions and for ceremonial animal trappings. A number of illustrated examples are accompanied by a detailed commentary, and the production process made clear using text and image. Today the technique is used in producing items for sale to tourists.

Fraser-Lu includes useful and detailed sections on some of the weaving centres in the Burman heartland in upper Myanmar, essential guides for those planning a visit. She also considers textiles made outside this area. These include textiles made by the Shan, the Mon, and in Rakhine state. The focus, though, is on textiles made for the Burman market, and there is no discussion of minority textiles as such.

For anyone interested in textiles from Burma, in particular those made and used by the Burmans, this is an essential text from the foremost authority in the subject. Highly recommended.

Fiona Kerlogue

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.

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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

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Back cover: Woman's shawl or head cover, Vari da Bagh, satranga *pattern. Photo by Mary Spyrou. See review article by Mary Spyrou beginning on page 23.*