

# Journal of the Oriental Rug and Textile Society





**ORIENTAL RUG &  
TEXTILE SOCIETY**

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The Oriental Rug and Textile Society was founded in 1977 to encourage interest and enthusiasm in the carpets and textiles of the Orient, and now of the whole world. We also 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; Student under 25 years £10.

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**Do Join Us!**

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Cover image : Reverse of Albanian woman's *giubba*, Calderdale Museums Collection. 1936.118. See article on Page 7.



## Recent talks at our new venue, the University Women's Club in Mayfair



*ORTS members and their guests gathering before the first talk at the University Women's Club on 23rd January. Zara Fleming to the left of the screen. Photo: Clive Rogers.*

On 23rd January **Zara Fleming** gave the first talk to ORTS members at our new venue. A packed audience heard a fascinating talk on the ritual and everyday textiles of Bhutan. Zara explained how textiles are woven into everyday life, used as clothing, currency and gifts, but also how they signify status and are a vital component of Bhutanese festivals, dances and Buddhist rituals.

On Wednesday evening 19<sup>th</sup> February **Marcus Voigt** presented a concise and carefully detailed account comparing features of carpets from Tibet with others from the Tarim Basin, formerly East Turkestan. Tibetan rugs were

typically smaller than those from Khotan, where buildings were larger, and were used also as sleeping mats. Khotan carpets in particular tend to be more loosely woven than their smaller Tibetan counterparts. However a whole range of similarities in design, for example the triple medallion and some border designs, suggested that many were made in East Turkestan for the Tibetan market.

### ORTS events programme Summer 2020

**Wednesday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>** Lecture by Maria Wronska-Friend: 'From sarong to sari: Rabindranath Tagore's fascination with the batik of Java'.

**Wednesday, May 27<sup>th</sup>** Annual General Meeting (18.30 ) Show and Tell (19.00 )

**Tuesday, June 16<sup>th</sup>** Visit to Brighton Museum. Helen Mears will show us items from the Green collection of textiles from Burma. In addition the Museum has a significant collection of Hmong textiles and a group of embroidered Rabari garments from India. In the afternoon a special session with a curator discussing the carpets in the Royal Pavilion.

**Wednesday, June 17<sup>th</sup>** Visit to Professor Paul Benjamin's house in Lewes to view his Southwest Persian rugs and bags. He has offered us a light lunch.

The King's Hotel on the front in Brighton is reasonably priced for those who wish to combine these last two events into a 2 day trip.

**Sunday, July 5<sup>th</sup>** Summer Lunch Party. Geoffrey Saba has kindly offered us the use of his house and garden in Peckham.

## The Oriental Carpet in Portugal

*Dimity Spiller*

The excellent and informative talk for ORTS by Maria Joao Ferreira in November did cover the knotted pile carpets of Portugal, but since not everyone could attend, and as there was a great deal else to consider in her wealth of material, perhaps a recap on the subject might not go amiss.



*Vine scroll carpet, Iran 17th century, MNAA 28Tp, Lisbon.*

As visitors to Lisbon and all carpet enthusiasts know, the Gulbenkian Museum is full of the finest objects of their kind and an imperative inclusion on any itinerary. However, this collection of goodies is a recent implant to the city and gives no idea of the importance or quantity of carpets that were there in earlier days. For this the visitor has to go to the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga (MNAA). Here are displayed a number of wonderful Persian and Indian carpets, all of which show that they have been very much loved by their previous owners, by which I mean, yes, most are pretty threadbare.

To judge by surviving pieces there were almost no early Anatolian or Iberian carpets in Portugal. However, the vast amount of textual evidence, inventories, bills and wills and so forth, together with the visual evidence in paintings, confirms that there was indeed a huge number of these carpets well into the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

As late as 1537, at the wedding of the King's brother to Isabel of Braganza, a ceremony of the highest profile with fabulous textiles, the only carpets mentioned were vast Anatolian ones. I am ashamed to say that this visitor, scooting round the Cathedral Museum at Evora, failed to notice some of the prime pictorial sources.

A more unusual indication of the presence of Anatolian carpets, and distinctive to Portugal, is the native carpet production, of which Arraiolas was the centre. These carpets were not of knotted pile but embroidery, using very thick wool and needles and, according to the practitioner we saw in the museum there, absolutely exhausting. The patterns for this work are often floral or vegetal, but oriental carpet patterns were frequently reproduced. It might have been expected that there would be folkloric patterns as well, but there were none on view in the museum and the only one this visitor saw was a very large and beautiful one at the Braganza Palace at Vila Vicosa. No photography was allowed and as it was a guided tour, we were whisked on to the next room before any sketching could be done.



*St Anne, the Virgin, St Elizabeth on a large pattern Holbein, Francisco de Campos, c.1570, Evora Cathedral Museum.*



Following Vasco Da Gama's momentous voyage around the Cape of Good Hope in 1499, Portugal was the first European nation to trade extensively with the countries east of Africa. However, Persian carpets are not detectable in Portugal until nearly sixty years later. In the 1528 inventory for Queen Catherine's household only 13 carpets are noted. By the 1557 inventory this has expanded to 82, of which 12 were clearly Persian. Another, in 1558, is more detailed and describes five new arrivals, which have animals mostly on a red ground. These, and others with central medallions



*Arraiolas town square with mosaic of local carpet production.*

*Lotto pattern Arraiolas carpet, Arraiolas Carpet Museum*



and wonderfully detailed floral patterns, were very expensive and still not plentiful in Portuguese ownership.

In 1587 Shah Abbas took control in Persia. A man of great energy, he was determined to maximise Persia's share of world trade. He had trained as a weaver and knew how to both simplify production and lower the costs: with a cotton warp replacing the silken one, with fewer knots, a standardised set of borders and removing the central medallion, he was still able to offer a luxury object but at a more affordable price and one which could be woven far more quickly. The result was a surge in exports; by 1620 it was noted that 'not a ship from India does not bring at least 400 or more carpets'. It should

*Tree and animal carpet detail, Iran, late C16, MNAA 47Tp Lisbon.*



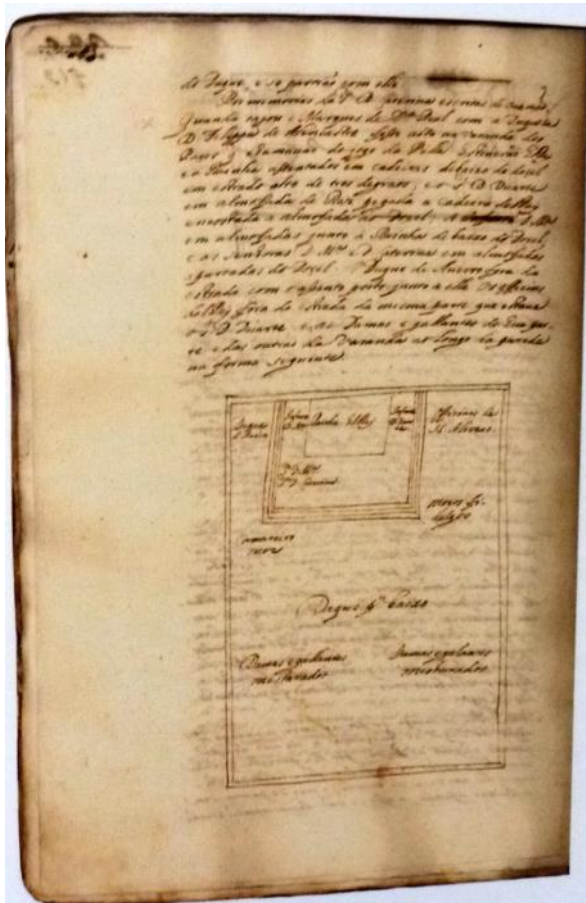


## The Oriental Carpet in Portugal

be noted that shipping accounts are no help in determining the origin of carpets, as cargos regularly went from India to Persia for sale and vice versa, so origin of lading means little.

Now no one wanted the old patterns; Indo/Persian floral was all the rage. Carpets were piled one on top of each other both on the furniture and on the floor. With such abundance everywhere, the great nobles showed their superiority by ordering carpets of enormous size. In court and religious ceremony the dais, covered with carpets, played an important part. If need be, the carpet could play this role alone. For example, when the king came to make an offering at the altar a carpet would be laid on top of those already there for him to kneel upon. At dinner, the table stood on a carpet and there were strict rules about who could stand near which corner and who could advance onto the outer border and so on, while the monarch sat squarely in the middle.

Whereas in England the fashion for oriental carpets petered out by the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, in Portugal they remained beloved. Increasingly dusty and moth-eaten, oriental carpets remained a key part of furnishings and also of ritual. William Beckford, visiting in 1797, voiced a far from lonely opinion when he wrote ‘such a fusty fashion hideous everywhere but particularly so in a clime as sultry as their own’. This isn’t entirely fair as they did substitute mats for the carpets in the summer but it does convey how most visitors found it unbearably stuffy and claustrophobic.



Plan for royal dais at marriage of Marquis of Vila Real with D. Filipa de Lencastre, Biblioteca da Ajuda, Lisbon.

Of the three largest collections of these wonderful textiles, one is in the Ducal Palace at Vila Viçosa, about 150 km east of Lisbon, but as mentioned above, you need to be focused to get best value from a visit. The other two are held in the MNAA, Lisbon, and the Museu Nacional de Machado de Castro in the city of Coimbra. The majority of these came from two convents, the Convent of Madre de Deus, founded in 1509 by Queen Leonora, and the Convent of Santa Clara in Coimbra. In 1834 the convents were suppressed and eventually the contents came into state ownership, thus preserving them from further wear and tear. The visitor may feel that it was in the nick of time; much more footfall and several of these great works of art would have been reduced to the foundation weave.

The author’s questions about the absence of Anatolian and Iberian carpets and the dilapidation of those on show were answered, and far more beside, by the 2007 MNAA exhibition catalogue *The Oriental Carpet in Portugal*, ed. Jessica Hallett.

*Dimitry Spiller*

## Edith Durham: textile collector and champion of the Balkans

Gavin Strachan

*Unbound: Visionary Women Collecting Textiles* is an exhibition currently on display in London until 19 April 2020. It is devoted to seven textile collectors (see the end of this article for further details), one of whom is Edith Durham (1863–1944) who in the Balkans collected a wide range of textiles and other artefacts over fourteen years in the early 1900s. She called the region ‘*the land of the living past*’, and as a result of her meticulous note-taking, as well as the books she wrote, we have an extremely detailed insight of what is now all but gone.



Studio portrait of Edith Durham circa 1890.

### Early travels in the Balkans

At the time, the Balkans area was one of the most undeveloped in Europe, and the old customs and dress were unaffected by western influences. Edith Durham was travelling at a time when the politics of the region were complex and changing. ‘*It occurred to me*’ she wrote ‘*that the vexed question of Balkan politics might be solved by studying the manners and customs of each district.*’

Born in 1863, Edith Durham first went to the Balkans in 1900 at the age of 37 as a form of sabbatical from caring for her invalid mother. She went as a tourist, but was smitten by the Balkans immediately: ‘*Threading the maze of mauve islets set in that incomparably blue and dazzling sea; touching every day at ancient towns, where strange tongues were spoken, and yet stranger garments worn, I began to feel that life after all might be worth living, and the fascination of the Near East took hold of me.*’ [Durham 1920 *Twenty Years of Balkan Tangle*].

Mary Edith Durham, to give her full name, was articulate, educated and had a good eye. She spent four years at Bedford College, a higher-education institution for women which later became part of the University of London, and then studied at the Royal Academy of Arts. ‘*I went to the Balkans mainly to draw and for a change*’, she wrote in a letter in June 1943 to Beatrice Blackwood of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, another legendary woman collector.

After her first trip, Durham was so enamoured with what she had seen that she learnt Serbo-Croat. The next year ‘*Everyone was astounded, and vowed that such a thing had never been heard of as an English who knew Slav!*’ [From her diary 11 April 1902 in the Royal Anthropological Institute, London]. In 1902, consciously assembling material for her first book, *Through the Lands of the Serb*, which was published in 1904, she was asked in Pirot in Serbia what she was doing. ‘*I explained that I wished to note things characteristically Servian, such as the costumes of the peasants, the houses and so forth. ‘In short’, said a gentleman, ‘you are making geo-ethnographical studies’. This struck me as a remarkably luminous idea; I should never have thought of it myself. I said I was, and everyone was pleased.*’

There is no doubt that Durham was a redoubtable woman. Hermann Braunholtz, a curator at the British Museum from 1913–1953, wrote in his obituary of her in *Man* in 1945 that she had a ‘*remarkably vigorous, not to say virile personality*’ and that she had a ‘*pungent sense of humour.*’ She was amused by the many offers of marriage she received from Montenegrin men ‘*five offers in 20 minutes is about my highest record*’ [Durham 1904 *Through the Lands of the Serb*], but that did not prevent her being captivated by the embroidered dress worn by Albanian men in Montenegro nor stop her carefully noting: ‘*They wear tight-fitting trunk hose, made of woollen stuff, hooked up the back of the leg. It is white, with long black stripes of embroidery down the leg & at the top in the front the shirt is pulled through slashes. They are long slim chaps with dandy little moustaches & are most theatrical in effect.*’ [Letter to her mother 10 September 1900, held at Royal Anthropological Institute.]



## Edith Durham: textile collector and champion of the Balkans



Women sketched by Edith Durham in the bazaar at Elbasan, Central Albania.

Sanjak of İpek (modern day Peć). Conditions were basic. Her first book, published in 1904, *Through the Lands of the Serb*, describes the highs she experienced but also the difficulties of travel in harsh terrain, made mostly by horse in all weathers. This included traversing rivers on rudimentary rafts.

Durham bought a camera before her first trip to the Balkans, a Kodak Brownie, and apparently took it on all of her Balkan travels. About 450 of her photographs are preserved, most at the Royal Anthropological Institute in London, but some in the British Museum and the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford.

She returned to Albania in 1908, and spent eight months touring the Northern Mountains, one result of which was her book *High Albania* published in 1909. On a particular day she describes: 'Sitting on heaps of fern in dark dwellings, drinking health in Rakia,



Albania. Crossing the Drin River between Berisha and Dushmani on an inflated sheep skin raft called a rreshek. Photo: Edith Durham, 25 June 1908.

chewing sheep cheese, and firing rifles and revolvers indoors; ...we had passed a true Albanian day, duhan, rakia, puske, dashtria, (tobacco, brandy, guns and love)'. *High Albania* is still a pre-eminent guide to the folk customs, social structure, customary law, religious beliefs and traditional tales of the Albanians, especially for the highlands north of the Shkumbin River where the social organisation and the Gheg dialect differentiated the region's inhabitants from the lowlanders to the south.

Durham recorded early in her travels that 'The life of the average Albanian woman is an exceedingly hard one. That of the country folk is a ceaseless round of excessive physical toil; that of the poorer townswomen is, I am told, often spent at the loom from morning till night – labour that only ends when black fate snips her thread' [Durham 1904 *Through the Lands of the Serb*].





Albania. Slavic women from the village of Vraka north of Shkodra, with cowries in their hair. Photo: Edith Durham, 1913.

### The historical background

Simply put, Balkan history is one of war, tribal feuds, religious disagreements, and invasions. The region has been fought over for centuries and its rulers have changed from Byzantines to Venetians, Slavs, Huns, Magyars, Turks and Austrians, each bringing different religious beliefs and mores which resulted in Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and Muslims living in adjacent pockets. In Durham's time, the Ottoman Empire held large areas of the region, but uprisings by the subjugated peoples became frequent. In addition there was also strife between various ethnic communities.



The Balkans in 1913 and changes in territorial distribution.

During her time in the region she witnessed many brutalities. She wrote in 1914: 'Whole districts have been purposely depopulated, for the aim of most Balkan states is, so far as possible, to evict members of an alien race. Each month has, so far, brought fresh victims of racial ferocity.' [Durham 1914 *The Struggle for Scutari*]. In her diary entry for Thursday 22 August 1912 she recorded: 'In Vrghatiza [Vratsa in NW Bulgaria], 17 women and children were killed. Nine male children, one seven months old, was taken from his cradle and castrated. Its father was killed, mother violated and killed – sister killed.'

These experiences led to her writing: 'There are people, I believe, who still imagine that war brings forth fine qualities. To me it...showed up pitilessly all that is most base, most foul, and most bestial in human nature.' [Durham 1914 *The Struggle for Scutari*].



Edith Durham (mounted) on war relief work, North Albania, June 1913

Photo reproduced in the *Times Literary Supplement* 4 August 2000, p.13.

## Edith Durham: textile collector and champion of the Balkans

Durham's last visit to the Balkans was in 1921, but she observed that '*I don't feel as if my Albania existed any more*' [Diary May 1921]. However, on her return to England she involved herself in Balkan politics from a humanitarian standpoint, campaigning for the people with whom she had become so familiar. She wrote pieces for the daily newspapers. Her forthright nature did not endear herself to other Balkan experts, who thought her someone to avoid given her polemics on Balkan politics, and her views of what she called '*Serb vermin*'. She was an advocate of the national aspirations of Albanians while her critics looked more favourably on Yugoslav unity. She remained, however, adored by the Albanians themselves, who knew her as '*Kralica e Malësorevet*' – the Queen of the Highlanders. '*She gave us her heart and she won the ear of our mountaineers*', the exiled Albanian King Zog wrote to *The Times* on her death in 1944.

### The ethnologist

Over the ensuing years, Edith Durham documented what she considered one of the last tribal societies in Europe. She believed that a study of a material culture led to an understanding of the people that made the objects. Another of her aims was to record the traditional crafts that were disappearing. For her the region was where westerners could see their own countries as they had been. '*For folk in such lands time has almost stood still. The wanderer from the West stands awestruck amongst them, filled with vague memories of the cradle of his race, saying, "This did I do some thousands of years ago..."*' [High Albania 1909]

In 1907 she helped organise the Balkan States Exhibition, held at London's Earls Court. The exhibition helped bring Durham to the attention of the Royal Anthropological Institute, of which she became a member in 1908, and particularly of the British anthropologist Dr CG Seligman. As a result, she became a frequent contributor to the Institute's journal *Man*. She began to collect material for other members, but this acceptance by anthropologists did not prevent her declaring in 1943 in a letter to Beatrice Blackwood of the Pitt Rivers Museum, '*During the last war – in 1917 I think – Seligman got me on to the RAI Council, to my intense astonishment, and there, at intervals, I have been ever since. Looking back, I see I was silly not to get more information and help from Seligman and others, but I have felt such a painfully amateur outsider. When I first joined the Anthropol., I did not even dare ask if I might borrow library books.*' She had had no academic anthropological upbringing and obviously felt it deeply.

Durham wrote about marriage, customs, laws, medicine and deeply held beliefs. The practice of blood feud appalled her: '*In Albania, I found it believed that the soul of the slain man never rests until blood is taken for it*' [Durham 1928 *Some Tribal Origins, Laws and Customs of the Balkans*]. The target for revenge was any male of the extended family, regardless of age or innocence. Until a death was avenged, a dead man's bloody shirt was often hung outside his house to ensure his family did their duty. Revenge killings carried on for generations.

### Her collection and Balkan textiles

Although Edith Durham made collections for others, she also built a personal collection between 1900 and 1914. Well before she died, which was in 1944, she had donated to several museums including the British Museum, Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and the Pitt Rivers. However, the bulk of her textiles went to the Bankfield Museum in Halifax, Yorkshire.

It is possible that the textiles were donated to Bankfield as it had a reputation for this type of material as a result of the textile collection of its curator Henry Ling Roth, but Durham was also a friend of a fellow-painter Hilda Carline (who married Stanley Spencer) whose brother, George Carline, became curator at the Bankfield after Roth's time. So to the Bankfield in 1935 and 1936 came 135 items from Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, Dalmatia and Albania. The collection was published in 1939 in an illustrated, closely-written, 76-page catalogue titled *The Durham Collection of Garments and Embroideries from Albania and Yugoslavia* written by Laura Start of Manchester University 'with notes by M. Edith Durham FRAI'.

The Bankfield collection comprises mainly women's clothing, including everyday items as well as dress for special occasions. As well as the items themselves, Durham donated photographs and drawings relating to the pieces. June Hill, who was at the Bankfield Museum 1989–2005, and is curator of the *Unbound* exhibition currently on display in London, noted that the items '*provide a vivid record of the life and traditions of the Balkan people, during a time of unrest, and before the area was affected by Western influences*' and that '*the extensive background material greatly enhances the material itself, and puts the textiles in their social context. Without such context, specimens can easily become mere curios...*' [From *Mary Edith Durham as a Collector* by June Hill in Allcock & Young *Black Lambs & Grey Falcons* 1991]





'I have found a rough sketch of an Albanian loom made in a cottage at Lower Kastrati in 1908. It was ...done because my guide boasted that I could 'write people and write things'. Whereupon our host pointed to the loom and said 'write that'. He was much impressed with the result and asked if I were married, as a wife who could do such things was worth considering. My guide told him that women who could write would not carry firewood, nor fetch water. So he gave up on the idea. These looms were very roughly made of axe hewn wood, pegged together and could be taken to pieces and carried on the back as a bundle of sticks and set up at the next halting place.' [Letter to Mr MB Hodge, Keeper of the Bankfield Museum, from Edith Durham dated 21 June 1937.] Letter and sketch both Bankfield Museum, Calderdale.



The enormous diversity in the ethnic groups of the Balkans, the variety of religions, and the different social statuses of the villages and towns all led to there being an astonishing variety of textiles, too disparate to explore in a short article. Those who would like a scholarly view of the material should consult the 1939 catalogue by Laura Start cited above.

Items from the central and coastal areas tend to have angular patterns, while in the south the designs are more curvilinear and use gold thread. Strips of embroidery, *oshvitza*, were applied to areas of heavier wear, such as cuffs and collars (and are often now seen for sale in textile fairs on their own). Knitting was used to make elaborate footwear. Start observes: 'Throughout Albania and Yugoslavia [she is writing in 1939] both men and women wear two pairs of socks and a sandal'. The oversocks tend to be handsomely embroidered or braided.

Personally I love the colourful and complex village textiles such as the Catholic Zadrime women's leggings and socks and headdress shown on the left.

Catholic Zadrime woman's leggings and socks, 19th century, which Mary Durham records in her hand-written label, as 'not worn now' and which she bought in 1910 in Scutari, Albania. Above it is part of a Zadrime head dress collected in 1911. Both now at the Bankfield Museum.

## Edith Durham: textile collector and champion of the Balkans

Durham also collected *giubbas*, sleeveless coats with full round skirts which are heavily braided. One of these is illustrated on the front cover. She also collected *jeleks*, short sleeveless jackets usually decorated with braiding, and a *japangi*, a scarlet outer cloak for a married Roman Catholic woman of Scutari, with embroidered panels on back and shoulders as seen in Durham's painting below.



Roman Catholic married woman of Scutari, watercolour sketch by Edith Durham.

Durham usually purchased the articles that she collected. At the market at Prizren, a town mainly of ethnic Albanians but located in what is now modern Kosovo, she observed: *'The gold embroidery is not to be surpassed anywhere, the tailors' shops are a blaze of gorgeous colours and designs. Had it not been for the difficulties of transport, I should have ruined myself.'* [Durham 1909 *High Albania*]. She was on occasion also given items by those she met.

Durham was meticulous in noting the details of her acquisitions: the provenance, how they were made, and their use. She attached labels accordingly and would often accompany the objects with photographs and drawings. In her notes she partially describes the acquisition of a *jelek* in the Bankfield collection, also in the *Unbound* exhibition in London: *'In the Balkan War, 1912-13, the Montenegrins took İpek and treated the Moslem inhabitants with hideous brutality. Numbers fled with little but what they stood up in, and sold their garments to buy bread. This jelek was sold by one of these poor victims, who had been well to do.'* [Laura Start, 1939, page 52.]

### Her legacy

The material that Durham acquired during her travels in the Balkans between 1900 and 1914 was always important, but has now assumed even greater significance. During the Balkan cataclysms of the 1990s, ethnic cleansing was not limited to human beings. In 1992, the Zagreb Museums Documentation Centre reported that up to August of that year, 44 museum buildings in Croatia and 20 in occupied territory had been damaged, and the director wrote that *'Cultural objects and monuments were deliberately targeted in this war.'*

Durham made a significant contribution to our understanding of the history and traditions of the Balkans. Behind her collecting was a desire to document examples of disappearing traditional crafts and to understand the customs of the places she visited. Her collections of textiles form an important record of the traditional craft of the Balkan region, some indigenous examples of which have not survived the subsequent political turmoil in the area. In 1945 Hermann Braunholtz wrote of Durham: *'... her books are replete with the raw materials, the stuff and matter of ethnology and folklore, and are a mine of information of great value to these sciences. As an authority in her own field, she probably had no rival.'*

### Other museums with Edith Durham material

In addition to the collection at the Bankfield Museum, some Edith Durham material is in the Royal Anthropological Institute, including many manuscripts, photographs, sketches and diaries. Some sketches are of dress, many in colour. The V&A has nine textiles donated in 1921. The British Museum has 11 items, including textiles. The Pitt Rivers has a large collection, some items purchased and some donated by Durham, mainly jewellery but also cutlery, photographs, musical instruments and weapons, but no textiles. Other items are in the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and the Horniman Museum.

### Current exhibition of Edith Durham textiles

Bankfield Museum has lent 26 items from its Edith Durham collection to the exhibition *Unbound: Visionary Women Collecting Textiles*, which is devoted to seven textile collectors. This is on display until Sunday 19 April 2020 at Two Temple Place in London, close to Temple tube station. The items on loan will return to Bankfield in late April 2020 and will then be on display in the museum's Fashion Gallery from early 2021.

Gavin Strachan



## Kimono: from Kyoto to Catwalk: Victoria and Albert Museum. To 21<sup>st</sup> June 2020.

On Feb 29th the V&A opened Europe's first major exhibition on kimono, the ultimate and iconic symbol of Japan. The exhibition takes us from the mid-17th century to today. 'Kimono' means 'the thing worn.'

Perhaps because it is essentially a T-shaped seamed garment - no haute couture here - it appeals to designers across the board, testimony to its intrinsically simple but bold style. Kimono are made from many kinds of fabric, from silk satin and brocade to silk crepe. They can be painted, dyed, embroidered or printed in an array of patterns, forms and colours, and decorated with landscapes, geometrics and birds, flowers, cherry & plum trees, and indigo-dyed patterns.

This exhibition shows how the outer kimono was brought back to Europe by Dutch traders in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and came to be à la mode amongst the aristocracy, as well as explaining changing styles in Japan itself. The worldwide craze for things Japanese at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century introduced 'kimonos for foreigners'. This & the last century's designers, be they European or Japanese, interpreted the kimono to their own taste & style. The informal shorter style which we know today as the happi coat, is now worn both in the bedroom and on the beach, often in bold colours & patterns, and is fun to wear!

The exhibition presents the kimono as a dynamic, constantly changing & evolving icon of fashion, from the mid-17th century right up till today, revealing the sartorial, aesthetic & social significance of the garment. Japanese, European & English designers have all used the kimono to catapult their ideas onto the catwalk with startling results.



*Outer kimono for a young woman.  
Probably Kyoto, 1800-1830.  
Image courtesy of the Joshibi Art Museum.*



*Kimono for export, probably Kyoto, Japan, 1905-1915 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.*

As one enters the exhibition, an Aladdin's cave of treasures is displayed. The first stunning kimono we see dates from 1800-1830. This *uchikake* is made of red *rinzu* patterned silk and has a design like a flowing stream of white *shibori* or tie-dyed lines within the red ground, winding their way down from the nape of the neck in a sensuous swirl to the back of the kimono from right top down to left bottom, with, in between the meanderings, clumps of embroidered purple irises with yellow tongues and sharp two-tone spears of green leaves as if they have been planted on the banks of the wandering stream—the basic colour being the white silk/satin. The white ground has been protected from the dye bath by *yuzen* or freehand rice paste resist dyeing. This example is from the Joshibi Art Museum in Kyoto.

In the next room, we discover a sumptuous blue satin kimono from the V&A's own collection, made for export to Europe in Kyoto between 1905 and 1915. A rich silk embroidered wisteria cascades from the neck down to the highish waist. Around the bottom above the plain hem it is deeply embroidered with swathes of huge white irises & long-legged stalking birds. Unlike a traditional kimono, the skirt flares out, but the fabric, neckline, sash and sleeves declare its kimono origins.

## Exhibition Reviews

In Paris, Paul Poiret in the 20's and Christian Dior in the 50's were among the designers intrigued by the kimono, & incorporated the idea into the dress of the day, sometimes in a subtle way. Paul Poiret's pistachio yellow wool mantle or robe-manteau is an exquisite but simple example of the kimono's influence, with a clever touch - using the same material the obi-sash bow is used to fasten the left side of the coat dress down from the low hip. This is also part of the V&A's own collection.



*Mantle, designed by Paul Poiret, about 1913, Paris.  
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.*

For me the most extravagantly exciting modern use of the kimono - but totally in keeping with its spirit - is in the collaboration of the singer/performer Bjork with Alexander McQueen's stylish take on the kimono. In silvery white gleaming satin, sprinkled with small mid blue & white blossom sprays, all aspects are subtly exaggerated including its shape with its high stand-away collar, dramatically lined in red. It has an intricate basket-weave obi with vertical gold stripes. Bjork teams this outfit with a double squash blossom rolled hairpiece, to stunning effect. McQueen's version makes a great iconic statement of the kimono in its own right. and Bjork enhances the look with her baiser-la-bouche Cupid's bow lips, wide Asiatic eyes and a pearlised lens on one eye! This costume dates from 1997.

The artist-designer Moriguchi Kunihiko has been designated, since 2007, a Living

*Album cover for Homogenic when Björk collaborated with designer Alexander McQueen, photographer Nick Knight. Image © Nick Knight © Alexander McQueen. Courtesy of One Little Indian Records.*

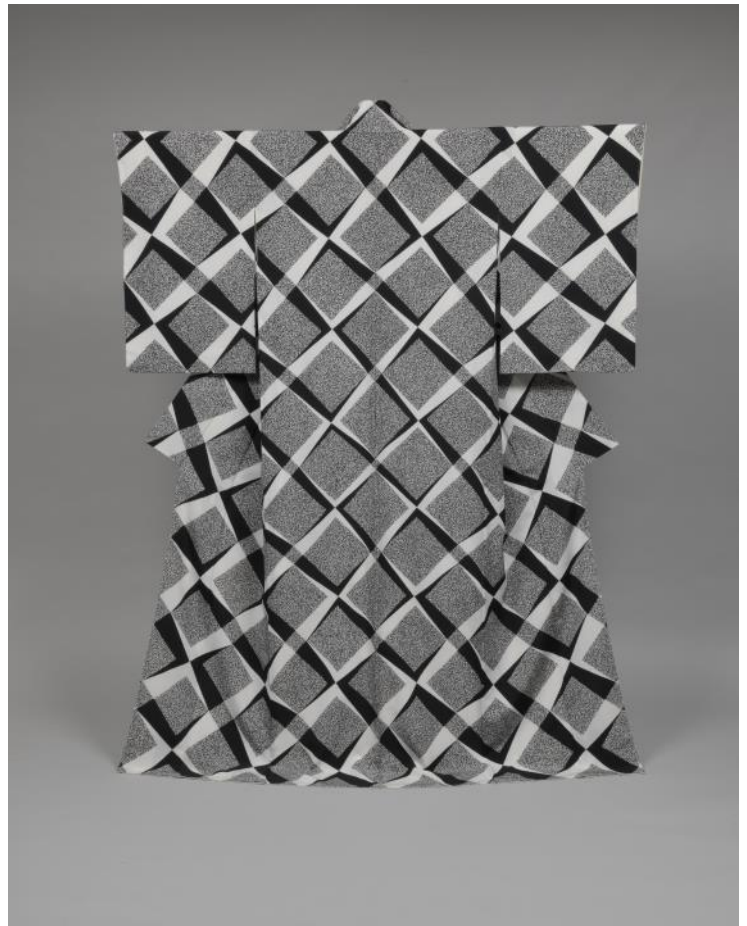




National Treasure. He specialises in black & white designs—apparently he had heard that our Queen Elizabeth I wore black & white as to her these colours symbolised power & authority. So he decided to use that restricted palette. His garments are often clever eye-deceivers. His technique is very specialised in that he makes art by creating a two-dimensional design on paper, and then imagining it as a three-dimensional garment. A key part of his process, he says, is that it's all question of balance, 'like the relationship between a musical score, & then how it sounds when someone plays it.' The kimono in the exhibition is entitled 'Beyond', a sort of Mobius band trellis in black and white on a grey rice-sprinkled texture, always moving as you look at it. It is made of crepe silk (*chirimen*). Like many other kimono in the exhibition it is part of the very fine Khalili collection.



*Christian Dior, Haute Couture Spring-Summer 2007.*  
© Getty Images.



*'Beyond', kimono for a woman, designed by Moriguchi Kunihiko, 2005, Kyoto, Japan. Image Courtesy of the Khalili collection. © Moriguchi Kunihiko.*

My final choice is the gorgeous John Galliano creation for the House of Christian Dior, called La-La-San. It is a spring/summer ensemble, a lush soft pink waisted and belted jacket with 3D white blossoms all over with a blue bird on its shoulder & a pink bird at the waist. The skirt is a wrap-over, shading from candy floss pink down to sky blue & a pinky-mauve hem. The most striking touches are the origami-folded generously wide cuffs. This lovely creation looks to have four fine layers—not unusual with kimono, which sometimes sport seven layers of fine pongee silk. It dates from Paris haute couture 2007.

There is something for everyone in this fabulous exhibition - planes and trains and skyscrapers and even a kimono with an electricity pylon on one side. On the original older kimono, much to delight in too. Make sure you visit this fantastic & culturally rich display of Japonisme, before it finishes.

Finally, a quote from the V&A's curator, Anna Jackson:

'From the sophisticated culture of 17th century Kyoto to the creativity of the contemporary catwalk, the kimono is unique in its aesthetic importance & cultural impact.'

*S. Killeen Rees* (sometime costume designer for theatre, T.V. and film)

## Timor: Totems and Tokens , Museu do Oriente, Lisbon, Portugal

Mariska Adamson

While I was on a visit to Lisbon the Museu do Oriente (Oriental Museum) launched an exhibition of ikat weavings from the island of Timor in the Indonesian archipelago, mostly from the 'Pusaka Collection' of Dutchman Peter ten Hoopen. The exhibition is called 'Timor: Totems and Tokens' and runs until 15 March 2020. The displays consist of around 70 textiles from both West Timor, part of Indonesia, and East Timor, or Timor Leste, once colonised by Portugal but now a country in its own right. All the textiles were woven by hand, most dating from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, though some are older. As well as items from Peter ten Hoopen's own collection the exhibition includes some pieces from a private Swiss collection.



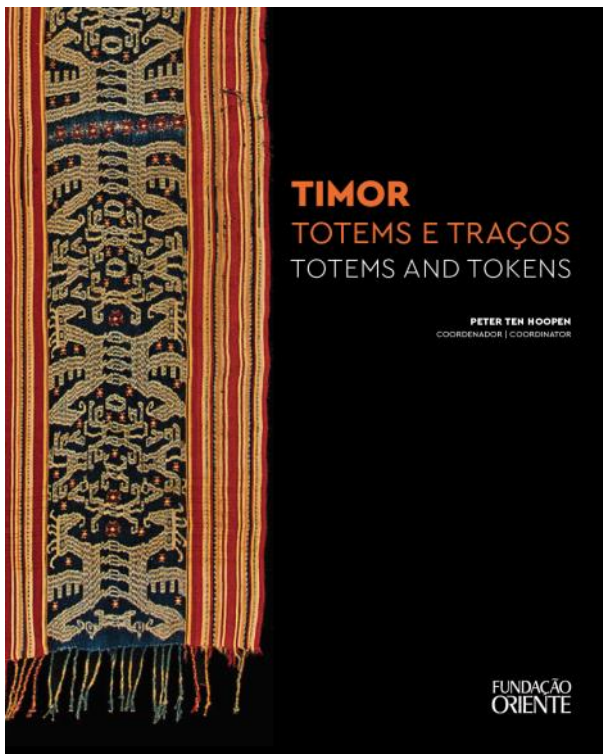
*Rare horse blanket from Covalima, Timor Leste, from the household of Tamukung (raja) Vincen Luruk. 1940-50.*

Four rare horse blankets decorated in warp ikat from the Timorese nobility were on exhibit from three different regions of Timor Leste. One showed two rows of deer and two rows of cocks, hens and a chick. The chicken is the most important animal in local life both because it is food and because it is prominent in rituals, cockfights and sacrifices. The saddle cloth or horse blanket is always striped and made of textile panels stitched together. The number of panels varies; of the four on display one had 5 panels, one 7, one 9 and one 13. The yarn was hand spun and dyed with natural dyes, and the panels had been stitched by hand.

The exhibition is well curated, the labelling clear and informative. It's amazing to me that the patterns are so symmetrical, a testimony to the skill of the weavers. The whole process of producing always took several months, in many cases more than a year. It will be a great shame if the skills involved disappear.

I took photographs of pieces I found particularly striking or beautiful and they thus inevitably reflect my personal and subjective view. I am not a connoisseur of textiles nor weaving but the exhibits are expertly described in full detail in the catalogue. For those interested in textiles and weaving, the exhibition and its accompanying catalogue are a must-see opportunity to view and learn. What makes this exhibition particularly interesting is that it brings together some 20 old ikat textiles from East Timor. These are very rare, so it is a unique chance to see so many in one exhibition.





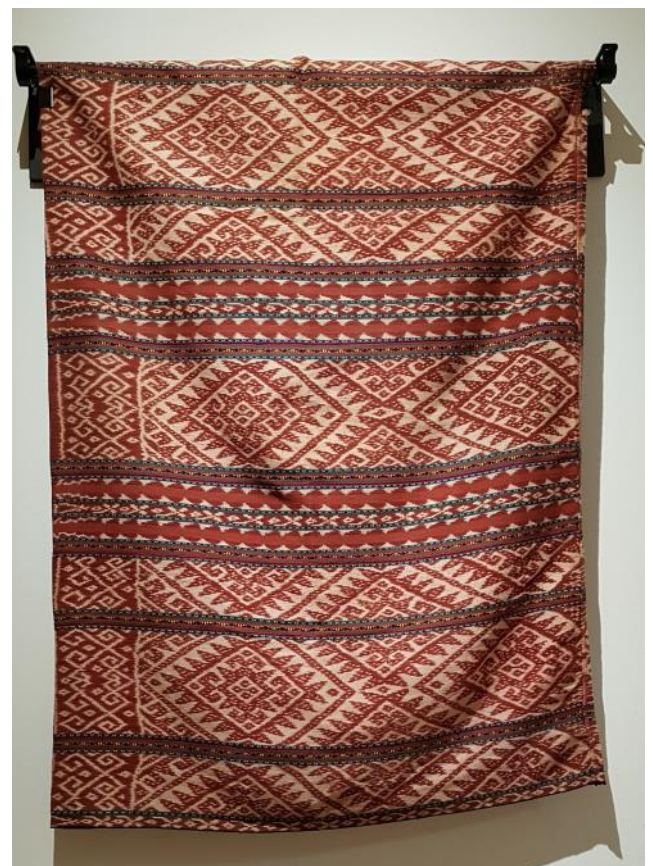
The catalogue of the exhibition, with text in Portuguese and English, has an introduction by editor Peter ten Hoopen giving a detailed description of Timor's culture and how that is reflected in the island's weavings. There are also contributions from four scholars: Jill Forshee, on textiles from the Lautem area, Pierre Dugard, on the iconography, George Breguet, on the horse blankets of the nobility, and Linda S. McIntosh on stylistic differences between the textiles on the island. The 176 page catalogue is available at the Museum for 25 Euros. It can also be ordered from Peter ten Hoopen's website: <https://ikat.us/index.php>

Peter ten Hoopen (ed). *Timor: Totems and Tokens*. Fundação Oriente. ISBN 978-972-785-115-7.

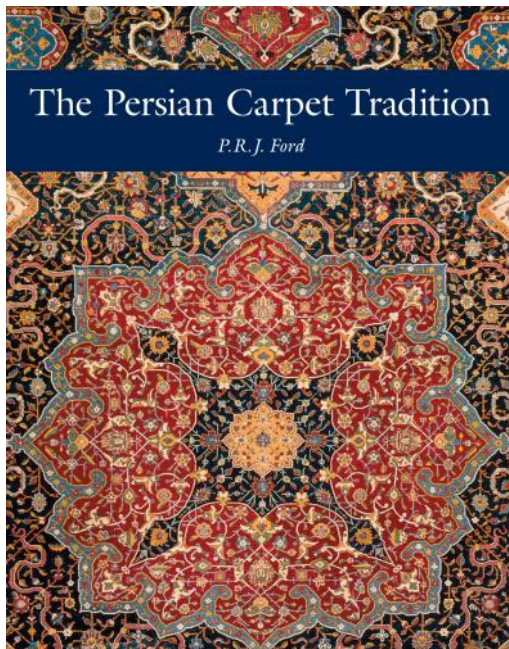
*Mariska Adamson*



*Man's wrap, mau, Pene Utara, Amanuban, West Timor.*



*Sarong, tais, Oekabiti clan, Amarasi, West Timor.*



*The Persian Carpet Tradition: Six Centuries of Design Evolution* by PRJ Ford

Published by Hali Publications Ltd, 2019

£32.50

340 pages

ISBN-10: 1898113629

ISBN-13: 978-1898113621

So that you know you can trust the author of this book it's worth beginning by drawing attention to the many years he spent working for OCM, the Oriental Carpet Manufacturers established in 1912 and producers and traders of carpets.\* Mr Ford has distilled his wealth of practical experience and years of research into this beautiful book. You will be beguiled by the glorious colour illustrations, of which there are hundreds, and you will be led carefully through Mr Ford's arguments as the text unfolds.

A 'design revolution' took place in Persia in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century and swept away a 2000-year old tradition of carpet design almost without a trace, replacing alternating patterns of abstract geometric panels with complex floral scrolls dominated by a central medallion ... This revolution represents a major event in world art history, comparable to that which occurred at the same time in Renaissance Italy (p.319).

Mr Ford looks at where, when, how and why this took place. Chapter 4 is devoted to the eleven medallion carpets which seem to be the earliest, woven between about 1470 and 1510 which he suggests were woven in a group of related workshops working directly under the control of, or at least associated with the court of a provincial Turkmen governor, probably in Shiraz. There are similarities between the carpets' cloud-collar medallions, vine-scroll ground patterns and their monumental borders and the type of decoration found on manuscripts but, the author points out, the carpet designers were not simply copying the illuminators but were *interpreting* similar source material and were 'feeling their way' with new designs of great complexity. Chapter 5 explores the development of the medallion design, the expansion of production, probably to Herat, Fars and Isfahan, the almost inevitable drop in the standard of design in some of the carpets and the refinement of detail in others. All this is carefully explained and illustrated with details. Chapter 6 focuses on the breath-taking masterpieces of the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; their designs are dissected and the problems faced by the weavers are identified, making their achievements even more remarkable.

In this book Mr Ford has identified around eighty surviving, almost complete carpets and fifteen important fragments and has divided them into three groups based on their medallion, ground pattern and border, giving greatest significance to the ground patterns. By doing this he has been able to chart the dissemination of the medallion design within Persia in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and changes made to it in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and he explains the appearance of similar designs in Turkey and India. Chapter 11 is devoted to cartouche or compartment carpets and the author considers whether or not the artist Bizhad played any part in their original design. Chapter 12 looks at Vase carpets, which by their design and technique form a separate category of classical Persian carpet. Chapters 13 to 15 introduce a second 'revolution' as those court-sponsored medallion designs filtered through to the carpets of Persia's towns, villages and nomads and spread north into the Caucasus and we are encouraged to recognise just how much of 20<sup>th</sup> century carpet design can be traced back to those early 16<sup>th</sup> century medallion carpets.

This book is a delight to read and I believe everyone with an interest in carpets should read it. The subject matter is serious, the author combines documentary evidence, published scholarly hypotheses and his own understanding of the process of designing and weaving carpets, with little snatches of humour, and the result is an indispensable guide to the history of the Persian carpet. There is a glossary, a map, an index, picture credits and a bibliography. There are also two charts in which the available technical details of the important eighty or so carpets are given and there are photographs showing a detailed section of the back of twenty-seven of them, with a scale so that comparisons can be made.





At every stage the reader is led along and the words and the sentence construction are clear - there is no jargon, no obfuscation and no obstacle to prevent learning and enjoyment.

The book is excellent value for money. The type face is easy to read and when figure numbers are given in the text they are printed in bold, which makes it simple to refer to the relevant illustrations. The colour reproduction is wonderful and the details are sharp and clear. It's a physically heavy volume because of the number of pages and the quality of the paper. If you know nothing about carpets, read this book and it will show you how their designs can be analysed, how they can be grouped and what conclusions can be drawn. It is an excellent survey of Persian carpet design over five centuries, bringing together what has been written by numerous scholars, questioning their conclusions, dispensing with some and concurring with others. The author proposes a new and comprehensive way to understand the evolution of the Persian carpet and even the knowledgeable reader will discover something refreshingly exciting inside its pages.

*\*Three Camels to Smyrna: Times of War and Peace in Turkey, Persia, India, Afghanistan & Nepal 1907-1986. The Story of the Oriental Carpet Manufacturers Company, Hali Publications 2008, ISBN 978-1-898113-67-6).*

*The Blumenthal Carpet, Tabriz 16th century. 464 x 1238 cm, 15'3" x 40'8" Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 41.100.113 (Blumenthal Collection)*

*Jennifer Wearden*

## ORTS tip to Georgia 7th to 23rd September 2020



*Selnaz Bayramova weaving a carpet. Photo courtesy of reWoven.*

The ORTS trip to Georgia, land of forests, lakes, mountains and valleys, is planned to take place between 7<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> September. Highlights will include a *supra*, a traditional Georgian feast, with Georgian wine of course, and a chance to learn to make *khachapuri*, Georgian cheese bread.

In Tblisi we will stay in the cobbled Old Town and visit the Georgian State Museum of Folk and Applied Arts and the National Silk Museum. There are plenty of carpet shops to browse.

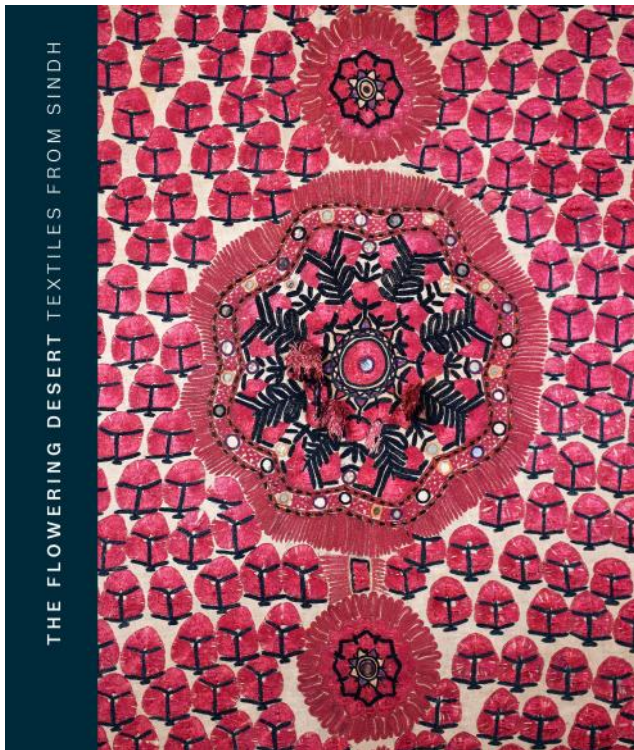
There will be a trip to Mtskheta, a UNESCO heritage site and one of the oldest cities in Georgia, and another to the castle complex of Ananuri and its wonderful 17<sup>th</sup> century churches. We will visit the river valley of Mashavera to see the important archaeological site at Dmanisi, settled since the Bronze Age.

A highlight of the tour will be a visit to the carpet weavers of Kosalar and Karachopt, villages where traditional rug production has been reinvigorated.

North of Tblisi we head to the highland region of Khevsureti where traditional Khevsur costumes are worn on festive occasions; meticulous and elaborate knitting and embroidery are still practised.

We will travel by train to Svaneti, in scenic north west Georgia, or to beautiful Tusheti in the east, depending on where we can arrange the best textile visits. On our return to Tblisi, before heading for home, there will be a chance to see an opera or ballet performance at the splendid fin-de-siècle State Opera House.

Please send expressions of interest to our tour leader Mary Spyrou, on [mary\\_spyrou@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mary_spyrou@yahoo.co.uk)



***The Flowering Desert: Textiles from Sindh***  
by Nasreen Askari and Hasan Askari

Published by Paul Hoberton Publishing, London  
and Mohatta Palace Museum, Karachi 2019

ISBN 978-1-911300-71-7

168 pages, hardback, 150 colour illustrations  
£30

As a schoolgirl in Karachi in the 1960s, Nasreen Askari took no interest in the traditional textiles of her home province of Sindh. It was not until she went to university in Jamshoro, which she has described as ‘a complete wilderness’, that she began to see costumes and textiles she had never seen before, worn by people from many of the diverse cultures in the area. This sparked an interest which became a lifelong passion, resulting in the rich and varied collection which forms the basis of this book.

The province of Sindh, in the southeast of Pakistan, is bordered on the west by Baluchistan, on the north by Punjab, on the east by Rajasthan, and on the south by Gujerat. On the north-south trade route for cotton and grain from Punjab to the great port of Karachi, Sindh has for centuries also linked Central Asia and Persia in the west with China in the east. The authors place the embroideries of Sindh in the context of these time-honoured multiple trade routes, where designs, styles and techniques of textiles were borrowed and transformed from Central to South Asia and back again. Many of the designs now associated with Gujerat or Rajasthan, they argue, have their roots in Central Asia, while it was Sindh which provided the connection between these regions.



Having sketched in the earlier history of the region, the authors go on to discuss the effect of the partition of the sub-continent in 1947 in relation to religious groups in what was to become Pakistan. Although Hindus were in a minority in pre-partition Sindh, they had a huge influence because of their dominance in trade in the commercial urban centres, especially Karachi, Hyderabad and Shikapur. As traders they were particularly open to aesthetic influences from elsewhere. They also had a long-standing appreciation of Sindhi embroidery which they monetised through trading ‘Sindhi work’ as far afield as Hong Kong, Singapore, Egypt and the Middle East. The authors believe that this is, at least in part, why the traditions of craftsmanship were preserved in the province until 1947.

The book does not claim to offer detailed explanations of how the embroidery is achieved, though one key section does focus on technical aspects of traditional Sindhi embroidery, describing and listing the names of the stitches. Here an opportunity was missed to elucidate the complicated technicalities of the needlework, especially where it is dense. Though each stitch described is accompanied by an image, most of the images are insufficiently detailed to enable the reader to see clearly how each stitch is achieved and thus how it differs from the others. What this section does help to show are the different effects produced by the various stitches. A very brief account of painted, printed and tie-dyed textiles follows.





The main costume and design elements of four of the largest groups in Sindh: the Jat, the Rabari, the Meghwar and the Baluch, are described next. Most of these and the other groups mentioned have a long history of nomadic life, often herding camel, sheep or cattle. Although there have been some changes over time, the importance of embroidered garments at life cycle ceremonies persists, along with the significance of particular motifs and designs.

*Rallana, or ralli making, Bhodesar, Tharparkar, 1996.*

The major part of the book is taken up with 123 full colour plates showing a wide selection from the immensely colourful and intricately worked pieces in the authors' collection. These are arranged in groups according to object type, and include square ceremonial dowry cloths (*roomal*); women's shawls (*abochhini* for Hindu examples, *odhani* for Muslim ones); tunics and blouses (*gaj* and *kurta*); dowry bags (*bujhki*) and hats (*topi*). Other adornments for humans, such as scarves and sashes, decorative animal trappings, woven textiles (*lungi*, *khes* and *loee*) as well as patchwork quilts (*ralli*) are also illustrated. By far the largest proportion of this work is embroidered, though there are examples of handwoven patterning, tie-dyed designs, block-printing of dyes and mordants (*ajrak*) and quilting.

The key attraction of the book is, not surprisingly, the excellent photography of examples of Sindhi work. Each image is captioned with an identification of the originating ethnic group, place of origin, date and materials used. Useful captions supply additional details relating to iconography or technique or function. Thus the catalogue offers not only a visual feast but also a fascinating and authoritative reference through which to explore the repertoire of the region, so often overlooked in the literature.

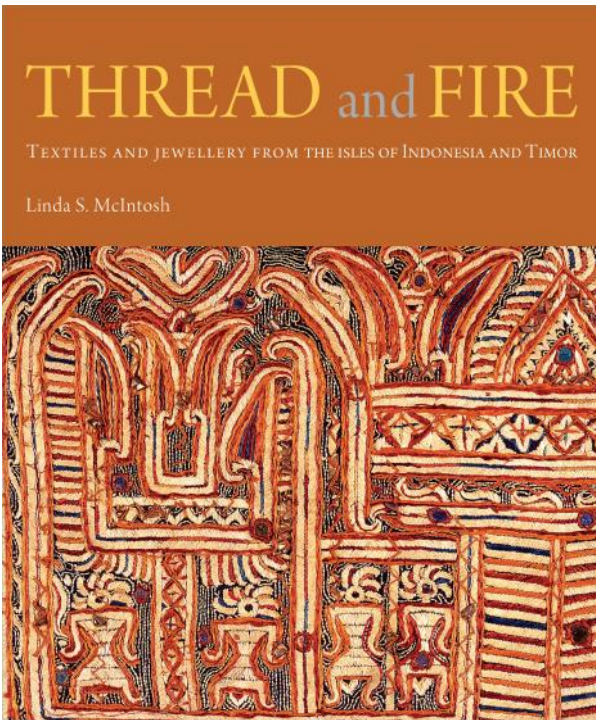
*Fiona Kerlogue*



*Facing page: Bullock adornment (akkheun), Halepota group, Sanghar, mid 20th century. Silk floss on cotton.*

*Coverlet (roomal), Maheri or Bakuch groups, Ubaoro or Rahim Yar Khan, late 19th century. Silk floss on handspun cotton.*

*Thread and Fire: Textiles and Jewellery from the Isles of Indonesia and Timor*



by **Linda S. McIntosh**

Published by **River Books, Bangkok 2020**

**ISBN 978 616 4510 35 7**

**344 pages, hardback, 265 colour illustrations**

**£40**

A new book on Indonesian textiles is always a tantalising prospect. Textiles from this vast archipelago include such a variety of techniques, are made with such skill and have been so deeply embedded in local culture that they have attracted collectors and aficionados from all over the world. Over the last forty years they have been the focus of a large number of scholars, many of them anthropologists who have lived among weavers and dyers for long periods and written in-depth studies of textile production and significance among the particular societies whose textiles they have studied. More recently an increasing number of collectors have published their

collections, often with accompanying texts by experts in their fields. This volume presents part of the textile and jewellery collections of Francisco Capelo, a Portuguese artist who has made extensive collections of art and artefacts from all over Asia.

The introduction gives a brief summary of the history of island Southeast Asia, including early kingdoms, trade and colonisation and world religions. The content continues geographically, covering the islands from west to east, from Sumatra, Java, Bali, Sumbawa, Borneo, Sulawesi and Sumba to the smaller island groups, Maluku and Timor.

The textiles illustrated here include excellent examples of good quality and condition of all the classic types. Among the illustrated examples, a number of more unusual pieces stand out. One is a silk *sarung* from Riau, made using the warp ikat technique, nowadays associated mostly with the eastern islands and the more isolated parts of Sumatra and Borneo, and nearly always in cotton rather than silk. Several funereal cloths from the Toraja highlands of Sulawesi are in Capelo's collection, as well as good examples of textiles from Sumbawa, though specialist texts do not seem to have been consulted for the commentary. One textile in the book is a *semba*, a type made in Flores in imitation of the famous *hinggi* of East Sumba, following the rapid development of the market for *hinggi* among European purchasers. This type of textile has been discussed elsewhere, but again there is no mention in this text of the background.

The book ends with a useful glossary, an index of proper names, and a bibliography, with more detailed references given in the footnotes. Sadly, the author has tended to draw for the most part on early, general sources for her comments on the textiles, and there is a lack of new research. The book would have benefitted from more careful editing, including as it does some rather strange expressions. There are also inconsistencies in spelling and some unforgivable mistakes in the names of authors in the bibliography. However, the book presents a sound introduction for readers new to this field of interest and the fine examples of textiles in the illustrations make this an attractive and interesting book.

*Fiona Kerlogue*



**Dr. Jon Thompson 23 March 1938 - 23 January 2020***Dr Jon Thompson*

Dr Jon Thompson, who died on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, was a great scholar of carpets. From 2001 to 2007, he held the position of May Beattie Fellow in Carpet Studies at the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology and the Khalili Research Centre at the University of Oxford. His many authoritative publications are widely respected throughout the carpet world. Dr Thompson taught courses on carpets and textiles of the Islamic world at Oxford University, at the British Museum and at SOAS. He received many international awards over the years in recognition of his significant contributions to the field of textile arts.

Some ORTS members record their memories below:

**Dr Jon Thompson**

I first met JT in 1975, about a year into my new career as an antique oriental carpet dealer in my small shop in Witney, Oxfordshire. We gave him coffee, and I remember his appreciation when we ground the beans in the hand mill. He outlined his interests, at that time especially Turkoman, and left his phone number.

Some weeks later I found an old Saryk main carpet in an antique shop in the Cotswolds. I was just at the stage of being able to recognize such a thing, and even though I had never actually seen one, I knew they weren't common. It was a moment a bit like his discovery of the Salor Engsi. My hand shook as I wrote the cheque for £100, with the kindly dealer saying, "you have seen it has some holes, haven't you?" Back home I shampooed my prize, and with it singing in the sunshine, I called JT's number.

That phone call was the beginning of a learning relationship which continued until I last spoke to him in November 2019. He asked four questions: first, "what knot does it have?" "Turkish." I understood that, as that was one of the characteristics I had used to identify it myself. "Good," he said, then, "what colour is it?" This puzzled me, but my answer, "red", elicited another "good". "What size it?" came next. I really wondered at that, does he want it for a particular room, perhaps? "9'6" x 8'6", and another "good". The final question was the easiest to understand and the hardest to answer. "How much is it?" I took a deep breath and said, "£2,000". Now, bear in mind the shop and house I had bought 18 months earlier had cost £6,500, so this was a huge sum. His reply, "me knees are knocking at the price, but I'll come and see it". He did, and after some discussion and negotiation, I was £1,800 better off. This was a huge boost to my business, not least because I then learnt the reasons for the questions he had asked: the oldest Saryk carpets are red, not brown-red, and they are small and square compared to the later Turkoman main carpets.

I subsequently sold him a number of other pieces over the years, and his generosity as a teacher was far more valuable than any profit I might have made. "What would you like to see today?", he would ask whenever I visited him, disappear and reappear with an armful of treasures and dispense his wisdom. He taught me a new way to look at rugs and appreciate their finer points. It was him who introduced me to the Dobag project and Harald Böhmer, which kicked off my travelling and my interest in new rugs. He was not an ageist himself, and the last time he was in our shop, he admired some of the work of Jan Kath.

## **In memoriam**

His photographic memory, coupled with his forensic powers of analysis and his ability to entertain as a speaker, enabled him to make a potentially dry subject riveting to follow. His lecture on the history of the Ardabil carpet given to ORTS is a perfect example.

Apart from his knowledge and wisdom, the thing I shall miss most is his sense of fun and wicked humour. In later life, when we telephoned each other, we pretended to be someone else, and I am sure he fooled me more often than I did him.

RIP, great man.

*Christopher Legge*

## **Memories of Jon Thompson**

I first met Jon when he was a Senior Registrar in Endocrinology at a leading London Hospital. I was a GP at the time and timidly asked him if I could refer patients to him. 'Only if they are difficult and interesting enough,' is how I remember his answer. Despite this seeming arrogance, he has only been kind, helpful and generous to me and the Oriental Rug and Textile Society - ORTS.

Apparently before I was involved with ORTS, he had given us a talk, and for payment wanted a lifetime subscription to ORTS. The people then missed a trick, refusing this. Robert Pinner, John Mills, and later Michael Franses (who also wanted lifetime membership but was refused, so paid for 10 years at a very reduced rate) were all members, but sadly never Jon.

I went to a lecture at Christies, obscurely on the funding of an Oxford College's Islamic Art Studies, which could have been like the reading of a telephone directory, except for the speaker's melodious voice, which one could listen to for ever. What a skill. I saw Jon in the audience, and his wife Barbara, who had been a nurse (best sort of wife really), so I sat next to Jon. He leaned towards me and said 'Barbara says I should give you a lecture.' I said, 'We could not afford you.' He said, 'I would not charge you.' I obviously then said that would be very kind. He subsequently gave the most brilliant lecture, created in a kind of 3D moving journey through the mausoleum at Ardabil. He reconstructed why there were two carpets and showed the archaeological reasons for their shape and size. We were walked on the screen through that historic building. We had 65 people that evening, the maximum so far for our growing society.

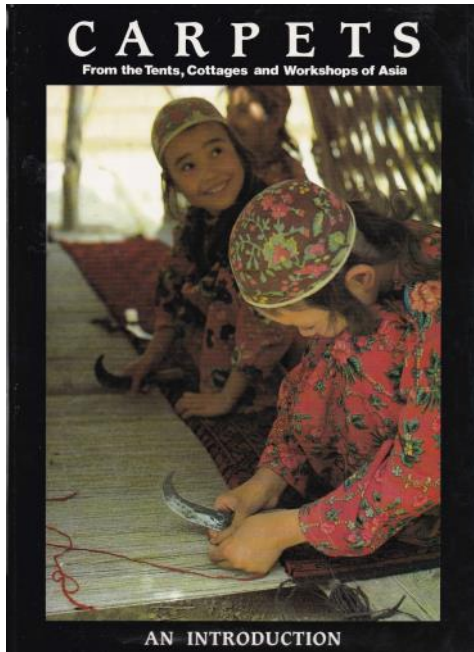
Jon was hugely kind and helpful advising how to cope with the staff coffee breaks at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, as we had nothing but obstruction in trying to get access to see carpets which had actually been delivered to the museum by ORTS' esteemed Clive Rogers, from the generous collector, Simon Crossly.

I attended a short lecture by Jon on Turkoman Rugs at Asia House. A man in the audience collapsed, so the Turkoman rug collector Neville Kingston and I put him on a rug, and carried him out. Jon was very courteous about the interruption, which ruined his impeccable timing.

It was also a joy to watch Jon's last public lecture at HALI's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Symposium in June 2019. Here he was still innovating, studying, and thinking, It was about the deep understanding of colour, that instructed the juxtaposition of pigments in the designs using naturally dyed wool by weavers of the past.

Jon invited my husband Ken and I to dinner; the invitation was to discuss the Turk-Armenian Question. We had a lovely meal, which I have never forgotten, of chicken and mushrooms. The real reason for the





invitation was that he had been offered a collection of musical instruments from Turkmenistan, which he hoped the Horniman Museum would buy. After discussing self-publishing, which he skilfully did for his book 'Carpets from the Tents, Cottages and Workshops of Asia', and then the fact that Ken needed a photo of a Turkoman woman resplendent in her jewellery for his book, Jon fished around and gave Ken a perfect photo.

We were able to return the favour. We bumped into Jon at Asia House, where we were looking at a splendid exhibition of photos of Tibet. He said he still needed a photo of a Gejia woman in her traditional costume for the book he was writing 'Timbuktu to Tibet: Exotic rugs and textiles from New York Collections' for the Haji Baba club. We had happened to visit a Gejia village in Guizhou, SW China in 2006, so were also able to give him a photo of their water mill in the river below the village, as well as a woman in the full costume she had proudly put on for us.

The last time we saw him was outside the cinema in Chelsea, where a film of Gurdjieff's sacred dances was being shown. He told us that his wife Barbara was very ill, and he was now totally committed to caring for her. I still admire the sweet nature of Barbara.

Farewell to a superb doctor, scholar of oriental weaving, and a dear person.

*Louise Teague*

### **Some memories of Dr Jon Thompson**

In 1980 Jon invited Ed Stott to Barnsbury to look at and discuss rugs. It came in a roundabout way from others interested in rugs. It was the first time Ed met with Jon and he came home full of enthusiasm and respect for a man who so generously shared both his knowledge and collection of Oriental textiles, something I am sure we have all experienced and share. Jon's presentation on the Ardabil carpet back in 2012 comes to mind.

Visiting his home to see rugs, carpets and the beautiful plaster work that adorned his home was always a treat, and so Jon and Barbara became our friends. Jon's support first for Ed's Oriental rug book shop was invaluable and then further for me when Ed was ill. How can you evaluate or describe a man who can support so wide and varied human interests as well as give time to another's individual being? He was an authority on rugs, but he was also aware of one's human state, offering conversation other than an academic treatise. He would call just to see how things were, and explain medical stuff to me. Jon asked me to help with his daughter's wedding dress and so for a few months a series of visits to Barnsbury for fittings became a regular highlight.

The last time we met was May 2019 when he visited and had lunch. Jon was frail and accompanied by a caregiver companion, but his mind was as sharp as ever. He was working on yet more projects and so some more of Ed's books found their way into his library. Jon was a generous man in so many ways but for me he leaves a deep impression of his humanity. It is my good fortune to have known him.

*Maggie Stott*

### Forthcoming events of interest to ORTS members

4th April to 20th September 2020 **Exhibition:** Mediterranean Threads: 18th- and 19th- Century Greek Embroideries. Gallery 29, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Curator's tour 5th May. (<https://www.ashmolean.org/event/mediterranean-threads>)

Until 19th April 2020 **Exhibition:** Unbound: Visionary Women Collecting Textiles. 2 Temple Place, London. (<https://twotempleplace.org/exhibitions/unbound/>)

20<sup>th</sup> to 25th April 2020 **Exhibition:** Textile and Animal Trappings of India and Central Asia – A Flowering in Arid Land. 10 am to 4.45 pm. Birdwood House Totnes TQ9 5SG. ([www.birdwoodhouse.org.uk](http://www.birdwoodhouse.org.uk))

Until 26th April 2020 **Exhibition:** A Sense of Place and Time – An exhibition of textile art set within the history of textiles. Milton Keynes Museum.

Until 10 May 2020 **Exhibition:** Sahel: Art and Empires on the Shores of the Sahara. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1000 Fifth Avenue, New York.

Until 21<sup>st</sup> June 2020 **Exhibition:** Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

11th June 2020 **Workshop:** Public Textiles and Dress in Museums and Historic Houses. University of Wolverhampton, UK. (<https://retailhistory.wordpress.com/2020/01/07/public/>)

3rd to 5th September 2020 **The Selvedge World Fair** - A Celebration Of Cloth, Culture & Creativity. Mary Ward House, London, UK.

### Tribute to Philomène Verlaan: Retiring Text Editor of the ORTS Journal

When our beloved Ed Stott became ill, Philomène generously took over editing the then ORTS Newsletter. She was so successful in obtaining articles that it grew from a few pages to over 20. Gems about his experiences in Iran from Antony Wynne; long, erudite articles with copious delightful photos from Geoffrey Saba, and a host of other offerings came pouring in to charm and interest us each term, until we realised that we actually had a Journal. Philomène's professional skill in text editing meant the grammar and spelling were impeccable. We will always be grateful to her that when not 'on ship' saving our seas, or lecturing in Hawaii in winter to escape our weather, this exotic, ballet dancing lawyer also gave her time to us.

*Louise Teague*



*Philomène Verlaan in full swing in her role as displayer of textiles offered for auction at the ORTS party. Summer 2018.*



## TALKS

Talks are held at the University Women's Club, which is behind the Dorchester Hotel.

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 for £7 a single lecture, students £5. Lectures are free for members. **Membership** of one year for up to 11 events is £30.

## ORTS COMMITTEE

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

**Deadline for summer issue June 1st 2020**



Detail from folio 2a of Nizami's *Khamseh*, 1494, double-page frontispiece attributed to Mirak Nakkah. British Library Or.6810. See book review by Jennifer Wearden of 'The Persian Carpet Tradition: Six Centuries of Design Evolution' by PRJ Ford on page 18.