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ORIENTAL RUG AND TEXTILE SOCIETY of GREAT BRITAIN

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

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

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Front cover: A Navajo Germantown weaving, with an eye-dazzler serrated diamond lattice design, 205cm x 167cm. Photo courtesy of Woolley and Wallis, Salisbury. See page 28 for a note on Germantown blankets.

Introducing Sue Jones, the new Chair of ORTS

My interest in rugs and textiles has always been practical. As a child in the 50s, I learnt to sew, knit, embroider and weave, taught by my mother. Helped to go to university, I studied anthropology and material cultures. As a student I spent summers working in Italy, Morocco, Corsica and Norway, buying a first rug and amber beads in the souk in Tetuan.

Sue Jones (left) with the retiring ORTS Chair, Louise Teague.

My professional work (and personal interest) has been overseas, immersed in many cultures. With an MA in Development Studies from SOAS in 1980, there was the opportunity to undertake work overseas. I joined an international planning agency and worked in Jordan, India, China and Russia and finally as one of the directors in their Hong Kong office. In the early 90s, more interested in the social dimensions of development, I took a job with the British Government's aid agency – DFID – in the Pacific, based in Fiji. From then, over a period of 20 years, I travelled and worked extensively in Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, Asia and with some work in Latin America and Eastern Europe. Not only was I looking professionally at income generation initiatives, but also spending my spare time going around shops and communities, interested in local material cultures (and building up an eclectic mix of textiles).

Over the years I have undertaken practical research on rugs and textiles. In fact, I ended rather than started my career with a PhD – as a 25-year longitudinal study – about the impact of a carpet weaving project on the lives of Bedouin women in Jordan. I lectured on that at ORTS.

By 2010, deciding to travel less and research more about carpets and textiles, I became a Visiting Research Fellow at Goldsmiths, London University studying material matters. I had just edited a special issue of *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* (Bloomsbury/ Routledge 2011), about projects in the Middle East, when I attended a SOAS History of Asian Art short course, led by Lesley Pullen. She invited me to an ORTS Summer party. Little did I know where that would lead.

Meeting Louise Teague there, I was warmly welcomed into the ORTS community. Later Louise kindly asked me to be on the committee as the Publicity Officer. I am now enjoying being the ORTS Chair but it has not been without its difficulties, coping with the pandemic. The committee has been looking at new and innovative ways to ensure a continuing programme (I will discuss this in more detail in a further issue of the Journal). As Chair, I hope members feel free to contact me with any ideas for events they have.

Dr Sue Jones
ORTS Chair

A Carpet Ride to Khiva

Chris Aslan Alexander

The scene is of a meadow – a rich tapestry of shrubs and flowers with barely room for grass to grow. I recognise dandelions with their jagged leaves and yellow flowers, and what appear to be wild strawberries. My eyes wander to a poplar tree standing tall as it juts out of the picture frame past swirls of Persian couplets. It fills the top right-hand corner of the page with beautifully detailed, individually painted leaves. Behind the tree a stream snakes across vellum, emerging from a brook nestled in the base of a rocky outcrop that sweeps above the meadow like an arid wave.

In the foreground, a turbaned black eunuch stands guard over his mistress with a perfume bottle in his hand. Maidservants sit on the grass, having laid out a platter of cool sherbets and wine in tall copper vials. One plays the nai, a kind of flute, another a tambourine. There is also a lyre player and a musician who claps and sings. Their mistress Shirin is unaware of the music, her mind on other matters. She stares transfixed at a portrait found nailed to the plane tree. The portrait is of a handsome young man. Nearby, unknown to Shirin, the artist, Shapur, remains hidden in the undergrowth, watching.

It is Shapur who has set the wheels in motion for a tragic romance as familiar today in the East as the story of Romeo and Juliet is in the West. Blessed with the ability to evoke images through both paintbrush and the spoken word, Shapur has intoxicated Husrov with his description of Shirin, a virgin princess. He has never met her but already the fires of love burn strong in his heart and he commissions Shapur to paint his portrait.

As Shirin gazes at the portrait of Husrov, she feels a stirring of passion in her bosom. The painting is so bewitching that she has fallen in love, not with a man, but with a painting.

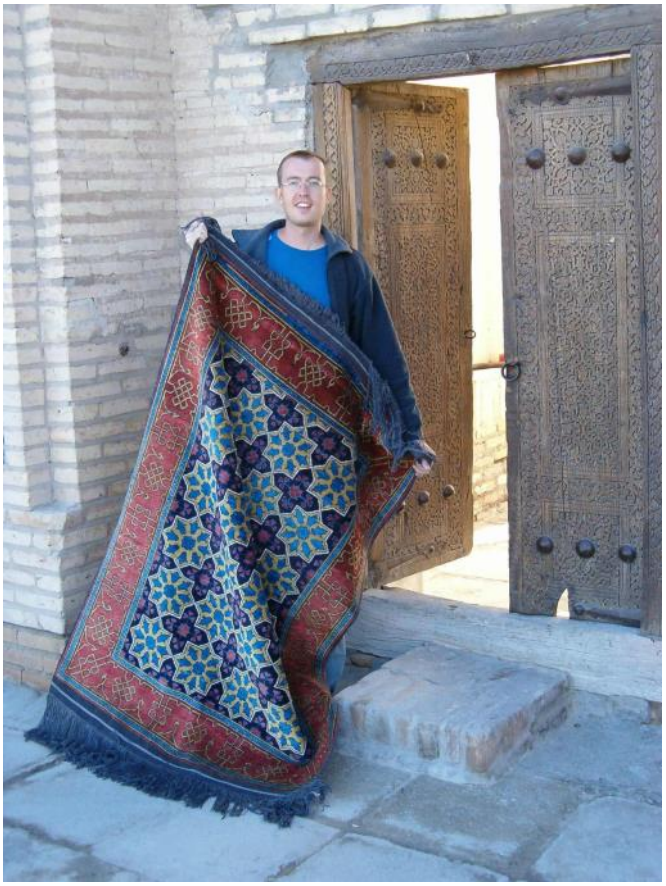
And so have I.

A miniature painting from the Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi's 'Khamsa', depicting Shirin receiving a portrait of Husrov (1494-5).

I stare transfixed at the magnificent illustration from Nizami's 'Khamsa', painted half a millennium ago. Running a magnifying glass slowly over the page, I discover more detail, hidden from the naked eye, marvelling at the images of animals and jinn hidden within the shape of the rocks. My eyes rarely stray for long, though, before returning to the carpet that Shirin sits on.

Although part of the carpet is obscured from view, enough can be seen to appreciate its stunning magnificence. The border immediately marks it out as a Timurid piece. Gold interlacing motifs derived from letters of Kufic script – now evolved into stylised motifs – adorn a rich crimson background. The central field is made up of tessellating hexagonal star-flowers. The balance of colour is masterful and yet flouts many of the conventions of colour blending in practice today. Each flower is framed in orange, containing a green centre pierced with a yellow circle, and surrounded by a blue hexagon. These hexagons are entwined in a complicated geometry of white interwoven threads on a vivid red background. They create a pleasing interlaced-knot effect and tessellate in six different directions to join up with other star-flowers.

This carpet design, caught on vellum, will soon be forgotten in real life, victim to the caprice of fashion, as Safavid arabesque medallions eclipse the repeating guls of Timurid carpets. It will be these Safavid designs that are repeated up to the 21st century in carpet workshops all over Iran and elsewhere. The Timurid carpets, by contrast, will fray and eventually be lost entirely. Almost. Their ghosts lie trapped in pages of vellum, illustrating stories of lovers, kings, wars, jinn and heroes.



The author outside the entrance to the workshop, holding a carpet woven in the 'Husrov' design. 2003.

I wonder if that will be the fate of the silk carpet workshop I started in Khiva, Uzbekistan, to revive these forgotten designs? Few projects begun there by foreigners last more than a couple of months, but it's been 19 years now. If it weren't for Covid 19, I'd be visiting Khiva as I write, having just finished one of my tours. I'd sit with Madrim, who runs the workshop now, in the corner cell of the madrassah we converted into a workshop, drinking bowls of green tea and catching up on news and gossip. Inevitably we'd reminisce about the past, and figure out how long the workshop has been running for.

The way I remember is to count back to September 11th 2001, around the time I agreed to partner with UNESCO and began commissioning looms to be built and the disused madrassah to be renovated. It was the following spring when the workshop officially opened, although weaving halted because I still hadn't managed to source many of the natural dyes we needed; I ended up having to go on a shopping expedition to Afghanistan. I found myself heading over the ironically named Bridge of Friendship into Northern Afghanistan, freshly liberated from the Taliban, to seek out indigo, madder, oak-gall and *zok* [probably the local name for alum. *Ed.*].

Natural dyes bought from the market in Afghanistan. 2003.

So, next spring we'll be celebrating 20 years since the workshop started. I'm meant to be in Uzbekistan then; I have three different tours booked, but who knows? I also wonder whether the workshop, which has survived despite the odds, will be one of many businesses that simply fail in 2020, another victim of the pandemic, cut off from the tourism on which it depends.

Living with uncertainty is one thing that starting the carpet workshop taught me. After all, I had no background in textiles, no pieces of paper to say that I was qualified to start and run a carpet workshop. What I did have, though – and this was far more helpful – was three years of living in Khiva with a local family. I could speak the local dialect fairly well and I knew cultural norms and expectations. I wasn't being paid a generous expat salary, which would have meant trying to get the workshop up and running in a matter of months before heading on to the next project. Instead, I was volunteering for a small Christian NGO from Sweden that largely focused on disability advocacy.

A Carpet Ride to Khiva

I'd come to Uzbekistan to write a guidebook about Khiva, at the behest of the Mayor, who wanted to increase tourism in a place UNESCO referred to as the most homogenous example of Islamic architecture in the world. I loved researching and writing the guidebook, but watched my colleagues with envy as their projects were life-changing for the disabled people they worked with. So, on the side, I started an income-generation project helping women who wove flatweave kilims to adapt their designs for a Western market, improve their quality, and then sell to me. I passed these on to a venture capitalist from the UK. The problem was that I was mainly working with small workshops and had no control over the weavers' wages, or their poor working conditions.

Beating down the knots and the weft with a weaver's comb. 2004. Photo: Chris Alexander.

Then my boss was courted by UNESCO, who were keen to partner with us as they loved our integrated classroom and other pioneering projects to get children with additional needs into the mainstream education system. As she told the UNESCO director about the kilim project, he became animated and wanted to meet me. It turned out that they had already tried to open a school for silk carpet weaving and natural dye-making in Khiva, reviving 15th century carpet designs. The Khiva crafts association had sent them a gold embroiderer for training. She'd enjoyed the jolly down to Bukhara but had then returned to her gold embroidery. They'd been stuck until now. Could we partner together?

The UNESCO director came up to Khiva and the Mayor, willing to give UNESCO anything they wanted, offered us several disused madrassahs. We chose the Yacobai Hoja Madrassah built in 1873. During the Soviet era, all the madrassahs had been closed and turned into museums, hotels, libraries, and even a bar. Ours was derelict and full of photographic equipment. I needed trustworthy builders to renovate it and craftsmen to make us looms; I drew on the network of relationships that my Uzbek family had.

I also thought about the apprentices we'd need. Knowing how corrupt Uzbek society was, I wanted to employ only widows, orphans and people with disabilities, so that we'd be seen as a charitable project rather than a potentially bribable business. However, it soon became clear that we'd need some skilled weavers to get us started and that the whole town was struggling economically and with a lack of job opportunities. The first ten years of independence from the Soviet Union had been characterised by huge job losses and mass unemployment, with most men heading to Russia in search of work, and few opportunities for women other than selling vegetables in the bazaar, or selling themselves.

Trimming a finished carpet. 2016. Photo: Chris Alexander.

We started with fifteen apprentices. We were meant to receive training from an American specialist arranged by UNESCO, but he'd found more lucrative

A mosaic of tiles in a wave ('tolkin') pattern, which served as inspiration for one of the carpet designs. Photo: Chris Alexander.

work in Kabul as NGOs flooded the newly-liberated city. Instead we were taught by some local carpet weavers and dyers from Bukhara, who had already received training and had opened a silk carpet workshop in their city. Although they were happy to take home the training salary from UNESCO, they saw us as rivals and were keen to teach us as little as possible. The canny weavers learnt to ask how to do something and then do the opposite, which was usually the right way.

I returned to the UK for Christmas and stayed on, visiting the British Library, the Royal Asiatic Society, the Bodleian and Cambridge University Libraries, collecting photos of carpets from the Timurid era which we would weave to life once more. I made the most of these libraries to find out more about Timurid carpets, finding almost no scholarly work on them. This was confirmed when I contacted Professor Jon Thompson in Oxford for help and was soon being invited to do a PhD on Timurid rugs under his tutelage. I declined, having a workshop to run, but discovered that there had been some debate over whether Timurid carpets had ever actually existed, physically, given that nothing but fragments have survived from that era. Perhaps, the argument went, they were simply in the imagination of the illuminator.

Amy Briggs, in *Ars Islamica*, 1940, argues for their existence as real carpets, citing the commonalities of the carpets depicted in illuminations from completely different calligraphy workshops, and the existence today of the tiles and architecture depicted in miniatures which have survived far better than any textile heritage, suggesting that the miniaturists attempted to represent accurately whatever it was they were painting. One major difference between the illuminations of the Persian Empire and the contemporary paintings in Europe was that of receding perspective. It didn't exist in the world of Persian illuminations, which meant that carpets appeared in incredible detail as two-dimensional rectangles, providing us with everything we needed to weave them into life.

Having sold our first batch of carpets, we soon had a long stream of women who came looking for work and the workshop expanded until every cell in the madrassah was full. We even had looms set up outside during the summer months. Although I loved our Timurid designs, they were from Herati miniatures – yet Khiva had its own rich design heritage of majolica tiles, carved wooden doors, and carved stone plinths. Some of the tiles in the Khan's harem were even designed to mimic hanging carpets, so it seemed a small step to turn them back into silk.

A 'Tolkin' carpet in Majolica colours, being clipped by Sanajan (far right) and her apprentices. Next to Sanajan is one of the original fermentation dye-vats that we rescued to be reused as plant pots. 2004. Photo: Chris Alexander.

Soon we were weaving local designs as well, and we ran out of space in the workshop. I explored the possibility of starting a second workshop producing *suzani*. The word comes from the Persian, *suza,* which means 'needle', and young girls were traditionally assisted by older female relatives in embroidering an impressive trousseau of *suzani* ready for their wedding. The British Council chose to fund this second workshop and soon we had thirty or so embroiderers working there. I had barely turned thirty, and was now the largest private employer in Khiva. Tourists loved our carpets, which were competitively priced, aided by the fact that at that time silk thread was incredibly cheap.

However, the country was stagnating economically under the authoritarian rule of Islom Karimov. This culminated in popular protests in May of 2005 in Andigan, the easternmost city in Uzbekistan. The protests were brutally suppressed. Officially, over 300 people were killed by the army, although independent investigators believed that to achieve the true figure you needed to add a zero. It was the largest government massacre since Tiananmen Square. Someone needed to be blamed and it couldn't possibly be the President. Western NGOs became the chosen scapegoat.

So began a purge of all NGO workers. I was one of the first to experience it. I'd left Uzbekistan for a conference and a holiday and was in Azerbaijan when I was told that I was effectively *persona non grata.* My director, a physiotherapist, was also refused a new visa, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs agreed to grant us two-week tourist visas so that we could return, pack up, hand over our projects, and leave. They also warned us that a visa was no guarantee of entry, tapping their shoulders in the sign of the KGB. My director was lucky. I wasn't. Heartbroken, and stuck in the Tashkent transit lounge for a week, I started to write an account of the workshop and my time in Uzbekistan, called *A Carpet Ride to Khiva – Seven years on the Silk Road.* It was my way of saying goodbye to a place I'd fallen in love with and thought I'd never see again. I wasn't done with Central Asia, though.

The following year, I moved to Tajikistan and spent three years in the high Pamirs teaching yak herders how to comb their yaks for their cashmere-like down. Then I moved to Kyrgyzstan and worked in the world's largest natural walnut forest, establishing a school for woodcarving. It was during this time that I discovered that NGO workers who had also been black-listed from Uzbekistan were being granted tourist visas. So I decided to revisit Khiva, seven years after I'd left.

Tools of the trade. The young woman on the left holds a metal comb for beating, and scissors for trimming. Photo: Chris Alexander.

The workshops were still running, albeit not entirely as I would have liked. But that didn't matter, because they weren't my workshops and were never meant to be mine. I'd set them up to empower local people and that's what they were doing.

Jahongir at the dye vat, 2004. Photo: Chris Alexander.

Revisiting the workshop in Khiva in 2016. Madrim is on the right.

Until now I have gone back every year, staying on after each tour. I try to be a listening ear to Madrim as he tells me what the latest problems are. The price of silk was $5 a kilo when we started, but now it's $50, so it's harder to price the carpets competitively. It's impossible to travel to Afghanistan, but there is an Afghan trader who brings stocks of natural dyes to Khiva. The workshops struggled to find hard-working girls from Khiva, as growing tourism had led to a plethora of hotels and restaurants they could work in.

There have also been moments to celebrate. The new President has opened up the country and is trying to move away from the repressive Karimov years. Some of the original weavers who left to have children have now returned as their children have grown. It's always nice to see a few familiar faces when I return to the madrassah, a place that feels achingly familiar.

Last year, towards the end of October, everyone involved in tourism would have let out their belts by a couple of notches, feeling replete, with record numbers of tourists. By March of this year, their savings would have seen them through winter, and they'd have been gearing up for the spring tourist season. Instead, we had global lockdown. Back in April I still had a naïve optimism that my September tour might go ahead. There are no furlough schemes, so craftsmen, chefs, cleaners, receptionists, drivers, guides and everyone else involved in tourism will be wondering how they'll get through this next winter.

When I call and ask them how they're doing, the response is usually the same. "This year has been really hard, but God-willing next year we'll start again. We'll rebuild, and we'll survive. If God wills."

I'm glad I've caught some of our carpets and the story of how they came to be within the pages of my book. But I don't want that to be the end of the workshop. Like everyone else, I'm praying for a vaccine and a return of tourism, reminding myself that the Silk Road has weathered far worse storms. And hopeful for 2021.

Chris Aslan Alexander is a writer (his fiction is written under the name Chris Aslan) and leads tours to Central Asia with Steppes Travel and Wild Frontiers. He is currently based in Cambridge.

Bhavani Jamakkalam: The carpets of Tamil Nadu

Bessie Cecil

Introduction

As a land of crafts, India produces a variety of handloomed textiles that are remarkable and world-renowned. Historical evidence marks the genesis of cotton fabric; the first documented evidence of it is found in the writings of Greek historian Herodotus in 445 B.C. After his visit to India, he wrote about trees that grew woolly fleece superior to that of sheep and from which the Indian people made cloth.

Archaeological findings of cotton fibres found adhered to a vase excavated at Harappa, where the earliest known urban culture of the Indian subcontinent, dating from 2500–1700 BCE, was located, further suggest that cotton was known to India from time immemorial. The chemistry of dyeing, particularly of cotton using natural dyes, was also mastered by Indian artisans. According to the travelogue of Pliny, the Egyptians learned the art of dyeing from India. Until the discovery of synthetic dyes, India was the master dyer of the world.

Indian handwoven textiles are complex, intriguing and visually appealing with supreme tactile quality. Almost every region has its own specialities, whether in weave, dye, print, embroidery, or a combination of these techniques. India's unique natural resources of textile fibres and dyestuffs have combined with millennia of ingenuity and innovation to create an astonishing array of fabrics woven on simple handlooms.

A handloom is a device used to weave cloth operated using human energy alone, without electricity or other power. The function of a loom is to hold the warp threads under moderate tension to facilitate the interlacing of the weft threads. Based on their structures and techniques of working, handlooms can be categorised into vertical and body tension looms (primitive looms), pit looms, frame looms and semiautomatic looms. The precise shape, size and structure of these looms may vary, but their basic functions are the same. This article focusses on a type of textile woven on a pit loom.

The study

The author was motivated to explore *jamakkalam*, the multi-coloured bold-striped rugs of Tamil Nadu, when she happened to notice an additional motion while weaving these carpets. The journey began when Mr. G. Sugumaran, of the Indian Institute of Handloom Technology, Balaramapuram, Kerala, and Mr. P. Thennarasu, Director, Indian Institute of Handloom Technology, Salem, Tamil Nadu, explained the subject in depth. The jamakkalam of Bhavani have occasionally been mentioned in newspapers but an in-depth study of the subject is lacking, although sporadic mentions are found in a few textile-related books.

The pit loom from behind, showing the pulleys from which the sley is suspended. There are two weavers operating each loom, as the looms are very wide. Women form two thirds of the workforce. The ends of the warp yarns have been stretched back from the far end of the loom and are suspended in hanks above it.

The whole process of weaving was demonstrated and explained by the Master Weaver Mr. K.P. Thangavel and his team of weavers in Kurupanayankanpettai, Bhavani, India.

Warp yarns laid on a pit loom.

Jamakkalam

In the state of Tamil Nadu, Bhavani is known as the 'Carpet City'; it is situated at the confluence of the Kaveri and Bhavani rivers with an underground river believed by some to be the invisible mystical Sarasvati river. Originally a community of weavers called Jangamars wove the coarse carpets called *jamakkalam*, though other weavers now also make them.

Jamakkalam are woven on pit looms. Whereas frame looms have a wooden or steel structure to hold the parts of the loom in position for weaving, pit looms have no sophisticated structure to support their parts so they stand in a pit. The pit looms used for weaving *jamakkalam* are the simplest and sturdiest of all pit looms.

In a pit loom, the weaver sits in a pit dug in the ground, on a level with the weaving surface. The weaver operates two pedals with his or her legs, which frees the hands to move the shuttle across to produce the weaving pattern. The looms are made of wood with the warp yarns stretched horizontally from the warp beam at the front, under the shelter where the weavers sit to the cloth roller at the back. The warp is wound into balls instead of round the back beam because of the coarseness of the warp yarn.

Yarn-wrapped pirns and a shuttle in a basket.

The warp yarns from the warp beam are drawn through the string healds, which you can see to the far left in the image above left. These are raised and lowered by means of pulleys. The yarns drawn through the healds are threaded through the dents of the bamboo reed set in the sley, a wooden frame which moves freely back and forth and functions as a beater. The treadles operate the healds to form the shed, the gap between alternate warps through which the weft yarns will pass.

Winding the weft yarn onto a pirn.

The weft yarn is supplied across the warp by the shuttle, a hollow, boat-shaped tool made of tamarind wood. Tamarind wood is sturdy and does not chip or break. The shuttle is oiled from time to time to slide across the full width of the coarse warp yarns smoothly. The weft is wound around a piece of wood known as a pirn. The pirn has a hole bored through it so that it can be held in place by a pin fixed in the hollow of the shuttle.

To load the shuttle, a pirn full of weft thread is inserted on the pin and the loose yarn is led through the guide and drawn through an eye on the side of the shuttle. The pick, one length of weft, is laid across by passing the shuttle across the shed by hand.

Bhavani Jamakkalam: The carpets of Tamil Nadu

A flat wooden collapsible rod with pins on either side, called the temple, maintains the tension of the warp yarns and holds the woven fabric in place width-wise at the fell of the cloth (the point on a loom where yarns become cloth where the last pick of weft is beaten into the cloth). The woven fabric is wound onto the cloth-roller in front of the loom.

The temple, seen here on the left, holds the cloth in tension.

The primary function of the handloom is to create the shed, an opening formed in the warp yarns for the weft yarn to pass through, through which the weaver can insert the weft using a shuttle and then beat the weft yarns. Each loose weft yarn laid by the shuttle is pushed to the fell of the cloth, using the reed as a beater.

The chukka-pidittal *process forms a zig-zag to allow the yarn to pass over and under the warp, creating a ribbed effect.*

Jamakkalam are woven in plain weave and have a rib effect; the weft yarns conceal the warp yarns, forming ribs. The concealed warp is woven with an additional process called *chukku-pidittal* where, once the weft yarn is inserted, the weaver or weavers draw the weft yarn from the fell towards the wooden sley in which the reed sits, forming a 'V' and, then back again to form an inverted 'V', and then again, to form a zig-zag. This action increases the length of the weft by a few inches. With increased length of the weft, when beaten to the fell of the cloth the excess length of weft yarn can pass comfortably over and under the warp. Fewer ends per inch also render the warp less visible.

The warp is wound onto the roller at the front of the loom as weaving progresses. Finally the warp yarns are cut and the ends tied in tassels. The warp yarns are undyed coarser 10s count while the weft yarns of 20s count are colourfully dyed. The patterns are always variations of bold stripes.

Jamakkalam *in use at a music festival.*

Jamakkalams are sturdy and colourful; in most social functions and celebrations these floor carpets bring out the aesthetics of the Tamil culture.

Warangal in Telangana is another place where a similar weaving technique can be found.

Bhavani Jamakkalam were recognized as a Geographical Indication by the Government of India in 2005-06.

Bessie Cecil is a textile researcher with a doctorate in textile design and chemical conservation. She is currently working with the Kalakshetra Foundation, Chennai, India.

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All photos: Mr. V. R. Sai Darshan, Darshan's Dimensions, Chennai, India.

How Nepalese Textiles inspired Susi Dunsmore

Angus Williams and Caroline Ware

Mention the late Susi Dunsmore's name to the weavers in Terathum, Sankhuwasabha or Dankhuta and their faces light up with fond memories of this wonderfully creative and industrious woman who gave her time to help them to develop their creative and marketing skills.

From the mid-1980s Susi Dunsmore, a specialist in textiles, former art teacher and ORTS member, worked closely with local weaving and embroidery groups in east Nepal. Her focus was to support the women who had requested help to improve the processing of materials, design and marketing of traditional products to boost their meagre income. They brought with them their materials – cotton, nettle, wool – and their skills – spinning, weaving, knitting, embroidery and dyeing. This all started in Dhankuta, in east Nepal and led to rural areas in Sankhuwasabha and Terhathum.

Between 1983 and 1986 Susi lived in Dhankuta with her husband John, who worked for the Kosi Hill Rural Development Programme (KHARDEP), a joint Nepalese/UK programme in east Nepal. Although the main emphasis of KHARDEP was agriculture, forestry and roads, the development workers recognised the potential of assisting cottage industries and helping people to market their products more widely. The aim of KHARDEP's cottage industry programme was to 'assist the people to increase non-farm cash income without the need for capital investment and thus any consequent indebtedness for participants' (Dunsmore 1998).

The people in this area are mainly from the Limbu and Rai ethnic groups and are believed to be descendants of the ancient Kiratis, the earliest inhabitants of Nepal. They live in scattered hill farms (at about 1600 metres) around the main centres Terhathum (Limbu) and Sankhuwasabha (Rai). A small distinctive group, the Atpari Rai, live around Santang, near Dhankuta.

Susi started work through the KHARDEP programme in 1984 to assist women of Sankhuwasabha and Terhathum to apply and develop their skills – and more. After the KHARDEP programme ended in 1987, the Makalu-Barun National Park Conservation Project took over responsibility for Cottage Industry development and continued financial help.

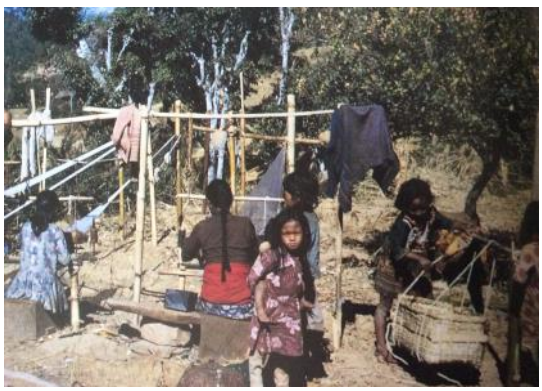
Here we describe Susi's work and inspiration with *dhaka* cloth weavers and nettle spinners and weavers.

Dhaka Cloth Weaving in the Kosi Hills Area of East Nepal

Topi hat with topi length.
Photo © S. Dunsmore.

The most remarkable feature of Nepalese cotton weaving can be seen in the variety of patterned colourful caps or 'topi', the traditional headgear for men. The caps are made from cotton strips, products of the skill and inventiveness of the Limbu and Rai women in the Kosi Hill area of Nepal. This style of intricately patterned weaving is known as 'dhaka' weaving.

At one time women used to weave all the cloth needed by their family from home-grown and handspun cotton, but with the rising population the land was increasingly needed for food crops and today little cotton is grown. Most of the yarn is now imported from India, but weaving is still a major activity in the dry season (October to March) when little field work is possible.



Traditional dhaka *cloth loom.*
Photo © S. Dunsmore.

Cloth for everyday garments is rarely woven now as fly-shuttle or power loom woven material is available cheaply in shops. Some shawls, blouse lengths and waistbands are still produced but the main item is *topi* strips made of mercerised sewing cotton with intricate patterns.

How Nepalese Textiles inspired Susi Dunsmore

All the weaving is done on traditional *dhaka* cloth looms, small double heddle treadle looms made from bamboo and wood. The weaving takes place in or near the home, sometimes in a shed but mostly outside. Often friends and relatives work in groups, sharing the bamboo posts and their looms. Weaving forms part of the domestic scene. The children are with their mother playing, watching, learning to weave or minding their younger brothers and sisters. Many girls know how to weave by the time they are ten years old.

The origin of the name 'dhaka' is obscure. Many believe that the name was given to the cloth simply because many items such as cloth or thread came to Nepal through Dhaka (formally Dacca) in Bangladesh.

***Dhaka* weaving**

Traditional *dhaka* weaving is flourishing. There are two main methods of weaving: inlaid (supplementary weft) patterning, and tapestry patterning. In addition, a variation of this type of weaving is finding a market not only in Nepal but also abroad. This market was established through the efforts of KHARDEP and the weavers of the Kosi hills.

The weavers arranged their patterns in many different ways and devised new shapes. Photo © S. Dunsmore.

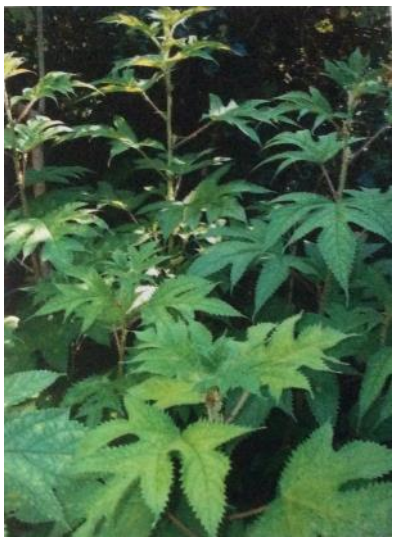
Weaving is one of the most widely practised crafts and was already a source of some income. It was decided to assist production of traditional items to see if the techniques could be adapted for a wider market. The main caveat was to make the traditional craft economically viable while maintaining their aesthetic value and avoiding the type of commercialism which can undermine talent and initiative.

A group of four weavers carried out trials on these initial proposals in their homes, adopting traditional methods and patterns but widening the range of colour and, for the first time, at Susi's suggestion, using black mercerised cotton for the warp. The weavers saw how the traditional patterns appeared in a new light and seemed to glow against the black background. Inspired, they arranged their patterns in new ways and devised new shapes.

Design development received a stimulus, enriching tradition. The weavers' enthusiasm was infectious and passed to friends and relations. Contacts were made with the fairtrade shop Mahaguthi, where Ang Diku Sherpa was working – and as Ang Diku said, the new line of *dhaka* products 'sold like hot cakes.' Susi encouraged Ang Diku to work directly with the weavers and supply their products because, as she said, KHARDEP won't be here for ever.

The development of new products followed, incorporating a wider variety of colours and designs and larger weaving widths for shawls. Additional materials were used, such as silk and pashmina for the inlay patterns, and silk with wool, and acrylic and wool for winter shawls.

These new products were so extraordinary, exquisitely woven and so beautiful that Susi Dunsmore had the bright idea to approach Liberty in London to see if they would like to order some *dhaka* products. The staff at Liberty were overawed with the work and immediately gave Susi an order. Susi was so pleased with their enthusiasm that she and Ang Diku Sherpa arranged to demonstrate how these pieces were woven to the sales staff. This knowledge greatly helped the staff and subsequent sales. Ang Diku returned to Nepal with a book full of orders for *dhaka* shawls.



Himalayan giant nettle, allo. *Photo © A Williams.*

Weaving and knitting with 'allo' – the Himalayan Giant Nettle *Girardinia diversifolia*

In Sankhuwasabha, north west of Terathum and the *dhaka* weavers, Purba Kumari Rai, a weaver from Bala, was experimenting on her loom with a mix of wool and *allo*, when she and other weavers approached KHARDEP and requested help. Susi and her team were invited to Purba's house to look into Purba's early weaving experiments.

In response to this request and in order to help develop this cottage industry, Susi studied the Himalayan giant nettle – known as *allo* in Nepal – and its processing from harvest to fibre, and spinning to weaving. Susi soon recognised the potential and beauty of *allo* fibre, and its worth as a truly sustainable crop – a plant with a fibrous root system that helps stabilise the soil and a crop that benefits from careful harvesting: in Susi's words 'an eco-fibre to combat poverty.' She documented much of this in her books *Nepalese Textiles* and *The Nettle in Nepal* (Dunsmore, 1993, 2006).

Before the fibres are ready to spin, they are teased apart and stretched between toes and around the arm for tension. As shown by Mankumari Khaling Rai. Photo © Caroline Ware.

Himalayan giant nettle is native to the Himalayan foothills, growing in forests at elevations of 1,200 to 3,500 metres. It is a perennial herb in the nettle family – *Urticaceae* – with deeply lobed and serrated leaves, thorn-like bristles and stinging hairs, and pale green flowers. It grows up to three metres tall. *Allo* has been used locally for medicine, food (the young shoots) and fibre for centuries.

Harvesting and processing the fibre

Allo harvesting takes place between November and January and is an integral part of forest management; coppicing and clearing scrub encourages regrowth. It is a social occasion as well as hard work, and Susi joined in the harvesting in the 1980s.

The thick stems are cut using a traditional Nepalese knife, *kukri,* by the men or by women using a sickle, *hasia.* The thorns are rubbed off by hand with a bundle of cloth or gloves used as protection from the nettle stings.

The outer stem (bark containing the fibres) is removed. This process involves biting into the *allo* stem and loosening the bark to about five centimetres and then stripping the bark by hand to separate it from the woody inner stem. The woody inner stem is left to break down on the forest floor or collected and used for basic rug-making.

Some fibres are processed at the campsite, but mostly the bark is bundled up into manageable rolls and carried in baskets down to the villages where it is dried and processed in large or small batches as required.

Some of the jackets were embroidered for decoration and for strengthening joins and seams. This jacket is folded over to show the embroidery at the top of the back and around the hem of the front. Photo © S. Dunsmore.

Rai ceremonial allo *cloth woven by Hira Kumari Rai. Photo © S. Dunsmore.*

How Nepalese textiles inspired Susi Dunsmore

For processing, the dried bundles are soaked in water for a few days, and then mixed with wood ash and boiled in a covered container for about three hours to soften and separate the fibres. The fibres are then rinsed in cold running water and beaten to get rid of any remaining plant matter. The rinsed fibres are stirred and coated with local micaceous clay mixed with water – a process to soften and add lustre to the fibres. They are dried over two to three days, rinsed once more and dried again.

From fibre to fabric

Hand spinning. Photo © C. Ware.

As Susi soon discovered, *allo* has been an integral part of the lives of the Kulung Rai community as far back as anyone can remember. For centuries the fibre has been used to make rope, mats, fishing nets, bags, sacks and simply-made clothing such jackets and waistcoats. These products were made in village communities largely for their own use with surplus items sold in local markets. *Allo* fibre dyed with madder and other natural dyes is also woven into special ceremonial cloth worn during certain rituals.

Allo *and wool woven cloth coat. Photo © S. Dunsmore.*

Whereas both men and women participate in the *allo* harvest, the spinning and weaving is carried out by women in the time left after they have completed their domestic and farm duties. The fibre is spun on a hand spindle – the shaft made from bamboo and the whorl made from bone or wood, often with decorative carving**.** The fibre is wrapped around the waist and secured under the arm. It may be slow compared with using a spinning wheel but most important is mobility, and hand spinning can be carried out while walking carrying firewood or children, watching livestock or sitting around chatting.

Allo *and wool woven fabrics. Photo © S. Carfrae.*

Traditionally, the weavers use a bamboo back-strap loom to weave lengths of fabric for stitching into bags or simple jackets**.** The warp is usually prepared on the ground, the distance between the sticks depending on the planned length of the weaving. This is described more fully in Susi's book (Dunsmore 2006).

From these simple, well-made items there followed, with Susi's help and the weavers' skills, a greater variety of hand-woven clothes and other items to be sold in Kathmandu and overseas.

The first workshop led by Susi was set up in Bala in 1984 at the request of the weavers. Eighteen women attended from neighbouring villages. They were introduced to equipment such as the warping mill, skein-balls and bobbin winders. They explored different methods of spinning, weaving, knitting and dyeing. As Susi describes 'the weavers worked from dawn to dusk… creating such amazing variety of *allo* products in just 11 days' (Dunsmore, 2006). Of course much of this was due to Susi's own creative energy and encouragement.

Above left: *A selection of items made from* allo *including* allo *and leather bag, lengths of* allo *and wool tweed,* allo *shawl,* allo *table mats and cushion covers. Photo © S. Dunsmore.*

Facing page: Left: Allo *and leather tote bag – one of a range of bags made and sold by the Nepal Leprosy Trust © NLT.*

During the workshop Purba Kumari Rai, who had previously started her own trials, created the first tweed -like *allo* and wool cloth on a loom traditionally used for cotton weaving. This was much admired by local visitors who recognised its potential as a fabric for warm winter clothing**.** An additional use of *allo* was created by knitting. Most of the women had some traditional wool-knitting skills but had not previously knitted with *allo* yarn. With Susi they trialled a variety of yarns and knitting patterns, resulting in soft lacy scarves, shawls and shrugs using the more finely-spun yarn, and later sweaters and knitted dresses. And, of course, the advantage of knitting, like hand spinning, is that it can be carried out while walking or sitting around socially. Further training followed, including workshops in Dhankuta at the Women's Training Centre. These covered health and literacy in addition to spinning and weaving.

Stimulated by the workshops and Susi's encouragement, the *allo* spinners, weavers and knitters continued to produce beautiful and interesting cloth from pure *allo* as well as a combination of *allo* and wool. Items included table mats and runners, curtain material, bags and knitted shawls and scarves.

This work continued and several exhibitions followed in Dhankuta and Kathmandu, and the 'Himalaya Rainbow' exhibition at the Museum of Mankind in London. These exhibitions further promoted the work of the weavers of east Nepal to a wider audience and market, as did the publication of Susi's book *The Nettle in Nepal – A cottage Industry* (1985). In the same year a nettle weavers' committee was set up with representatives from each of the main *allo*-producing areas.

Weaving workshop at the Allo Cloth Production Club centre. Ram Kumari Rai, trained by Purba Kumari Rai, is now a trainer, seen here at a workshop held in 2012. Photo © ACPC.

It soon became apparent that a nettle weaving centre was needed – a place for washing and finishing products for sale, and for training new weavers. The centre was built in the village of Sisuwatar near the river, an ideal place close to a water supply and with space to work. The materials for the Centre were funded by the British Embassy, with the local community contributing to the building work. The German Embassy paid for the development of a special mangle which was made in Nepal specifically to use for the *allo* cloth finishing process. The building provided space for workshop and equipment, storage, office and meeting space and was completed and ready for training workshops in 1988.

Work at the weaving centre led to the formation of the Allo Cloth Production Club (ACPC), which aims to coordinate support and training in weaving and finishing techniques for women's weaver groups in the surrounding villages. The Club was officially registered in 1989.

Waistcoat made by Kalpenna Rai and sold in her shop in Siswua. Photo © C. Ware

How Nepalese textiles inspired Susi Dunsmore

Dilli Kumari Rai (wearing a nettle shawl) in her store in Khadbari. Photo © Caroline Ware.

ACPC continues to provide services including training new weavers by the more experienced weavers**.** The woven cloth is usually sold in rolls, for example to the Nepal Leprosy Trust, whose members make quality bags, wallets and purses using *allo* and leather. Other fabric may be exported for furnishing or upholstery material and much is kept for local use for making caps, bags, jackets and waistcoats. The Club is run by a committee, with a full-time paid worker, Laxmi Rai. Individual weavers and knitters are paid for their work by the Club, whose full-time worker then sells on behalf of ACPC, avoiding the middle man, to shops and markets in Khadbari (the capital of Sankhuwasabha), Kathmandu and overseas.

In addition, several of the women who attended early workshops, and who later migrated from the hill villages to Khadbari, have had the confidence to set up their own independent shops**.**

After leaving Nepal, Susi continued supporting the *dhaka* weavers and the ACPC by promoting their work and increasing marketing opportunities through sales at Liberty's, at Guild and other craft fairs, and at museum events. Susi wrote *Nepalese Textiles* (1993) and examples of textiles from Nepal are kept at museums including the British Museum, the Horniman Museum, and the Economic Botany collection at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Susi encouraged links between the weavers in Sankhuwasabha and the London Guild of Spinners, Weavers and Dyers, including a competition to explore new designs using *allo*. This was followed by a workshop in Kathmandu in 2004, where further *allo* products were designed, created and exhibited. Susi also established a link with the Royal College of Art with funding for graduate scholarships to Nepal to work with *dhaka* and *allo* weavers and an embroidery group in Santang.

Susi Dunsmore with Ang Diku Sherpa at the allo *workshop in Kathmandu, 2003. Photo © Roger Hardwick.*

In 2004 Susi set up the **John Dunsmore Nepal Textile Trust** in memory of her husband John, who had died of cancer in 2000. The Trust's overall aim is to help reduce poverty in remote areas of east Nepal by enabling women to continue developing and using traditional textile skills to generate sustainable income. Support, promotion and marketing assistance are given where needed. The Trust also contributes funds in emergencies, such as the recent earthquake, when a donation was made to assist women whose homes had been damaged.

With Susi's death in 2017, the Trust – now the **Dunsmore Nepal Textile Trust** – continues the work in memory of Susi and in support of a creative and talented cottage industry.

Speaking of John and Susi, Madu Tumbahamphe, a skilled *dhaka* weaver, gave a fitting tribute: '*John helped bring water to us* (the villagers)*, Susi helped to introduce the cottage industries, and through her work, and our continuing work, Susi still lives on'.*

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More information on *allo* products, the people who create them and on extracting, spinning, weaving and knitting the *allo* fibres can be found in *The Nettle in Nepal* by Susi Dunsmore, a booklet published by the Dunsmore Nepal Textile Trust. Price £6.00 plus postage, from 13 Eliot Place, London SE3 0QL UK. roger2543@aol.com. All proceeds from the sale of the booklets will support weavers and knitters in Nepal.

Weaving reproduction carpets for Standen House, West Sussex

Pat Clark

Historic houses in England often contain valuable old rugs and carpets. A problem arises when the carpets become worn or damaged – in such cases the original carpet may be taken off display and placed in safe conditions for storage. In such circumstances custodians such as the National Trust have increasingly recognised the advantages of having replacements made. One enterprise which specialises in the copying of old, antique, and historic rugs and carpets is The Rug & Carpet Studio in Sudbury, Suffolk, who are often approached to copy or recreate old carpets that have become fragile, been destroyed, or have been subjected to considerable amounts of traffic. This is particularly common in historic properties that are open to the public, such as Standen House in West Sussex. In this article I discuss the project to reproduce a pair of runners there, which were formerly in the billiard room.

Modern technology means that it is now possible to recreate an original carpet design. A key element in this case is a Nepalese software program called 'Galaincha' (meaning 'rug' in Nepalese) produced specifically for the rug industry to improve the ability of carpet designers to produce more detailed rugs and carpets. It is used predominantly to create contemporary styles of carpet, but we felt there was a place in the market to use the software for copying traditional designs. Initially, we started commissioning smaller traditional Persian designs and samples to learn the design and manufacturing side of the business; once confident in the software and product, we started to make reproductions.

The carpets are designed and woven in Kathmandu in Nepal. Though Nepalese people have been weaving for many generations, the history of commercial rug and carpet manufacturing in Nepal changed significantly in 1959 after China invaded Tibet. Thousands of Tibetan refugees fled to Nepal and began weaving in refugee camps. This slowly grew and by the mid 1970s rugs were being woven and exported to Europe. The Tibetan people in turn taught the Nepalese to weave. By the 1980s finer Tibetan and Nepalese rugs were being woven with the modern designs which had become more popular with the European market.

The Rug and Carpet Studio's carpets are produced under licence for the GoodWeave label, which means that no children, forced or bonded labour are used in the making of the rugs. GoodWeave also supports programmes that educate children and ensure decent work for adults.

Replacement runners for the Billiard Room in Standen House

Detail of Ushak runner in the billiard room at Standen House, showing damage. Photo © National Trust.

Standen House, an Arts and Crafts home in West Sussex, was built in the 1890s by the Beale family. In 1972 it was taken over by the National Trust. While the house is famous for its William Morris interiors, it contains a number of other features of interest. In the billiard room were two carpet runners, woven in the Turkish region of Ushak around 1900, which had deteriorated through years of constant use. They were particularly fragile where they had been cut and joined to fit around the billiard tables. The decision was made to lift the old Ushak runners and retire them to archive storage, and the Rug and Carpet Studio were commissioned to produce reproductions to take their place.

Computer-generated designs were produced from detailed photographs and drawings of the existing runners. Extensive research was carried out and cross-referenced to allow the incorporation of subtle design changes, whilst maintaining the character of the original piece. Detailed colour referencing took place using an extensive wool tuft box.

Weaving reproduction carpets

Once the design artwork and colours had been finalised, samples of the runners were made. In this instance two samples were produced in the '60 knot' quality which closely matched the knot count of the existing runners. One sample was made using New Zealand wool and the other using Tibetan wool.

As one can imagine, wool from New Zealand sheep is fine, soft, and consistent in texture (the sheep have lived a comfortable 'soft existence' therefore producing extremely soft wool). On the other hand, Tibetan sheep have a much harder life at a much higher altitude. The wool they produce is thicker and wirier in texture, with a much greater lanolin content (the natural oil in the fleece).

New Zealand wool also produces a flat, even texture which absorbs the dye at a consistent rate, producing a true and regular tone of colour throughout the rug. The Tibetan wool, in contrast, produces a more textured effect but with less consistency. The dye is absorbed into the wool at slightly different rates, depending upon the texture of the spun wool and the varying quantity of lanolin in the wool.

It was decided that the Tibetan wool, with its varying tones in the sample, best represented the original quality and abrashed (meaning colour change) finish of the existing old runners. The inconsistency of the finished sample was the most desirable effect and matched the similar inconsistency of the existing runners.

To make the runners as close a match as possible to the original, a study was made of the binding of the side cords. A contrasting 2 ply mix of colour was used and interwoven into the main body of the rug and reproductions made of the side cord.

The computerised artwork and the formulae for the wool and dye quality were sent to colleagues in Nepal where the rugs and runners were to be made. From the formulae built into the design program, it is possible to know exactly how much wool to order for each rug or runner, how much is needed for each colour and the quantity of dye required.

The dye workshop is in the suburbs of Kathmandu. Careful measuring of dye powder was carried out by the master dyer on some very sensitive scales to carefully match the colours to the sample. After the powder had been added to the dye bath of hot water, the wool was plunged into the bath and left to absorb the colour. To give the consistency required, the dyes are chemically-based aniline dyes, carefully developed to resemble the old natural dyes. Chemical or synthetic dyes were introduced into handmade rug-making over 100 years ago.

The master dyer at work in the outskirts of Kathmandu.

The weaving took place in what appears from the outside to be a rather smart private house in the quiet suburbs of Kathmandu. The ground floor of the building is used as workshop space; several looms are set up by large open windows with views of the garden and mountains beyond.

The weavers all live on site either in rooms upstairs or in small cottages in the garden. The owner of the house and looms provides all his weavers with a home and pays for all health and education expenses of their children. They get paid a fair wage on a piecework basis which also recognises the skill level of the weaver. The weavers are expected to work a reasonable number of hours per month but they are masters of their own time and can work as few or as many hours they wish during the week to fit in with personal commitments.

Weaving the Standen House runners.

Before the weaving process the cotton warp threads were evenly tied to the framework of the vertical looms. The tension of these warps needed to be even and regular to produce a flat and strong finish to the runners. Printed artwork of the design was given to the weaver and from this artwork individual knots of wool were tied to the warp threads, exactly reproducing the colour and position of every knot. During the knotting process the wool was wrapped around a metal rod which helped to control the tension and pile height. At the end of each horizontal row the rod was cut off the loom and the pile tuft revealed.

Once the runners had been made, they were cut off the looms for finishing and washing. During this process, the sides were bound, and the rugs washed with water to remove any loose dye. The wool was brushed to bring the shine and lustre to the surface.

From the initial enquiry to the final artwork, the process took seven months to complete and involved many hours of detailed design comparisons and subtle artwork alterations. The weaving process took an additional five months.

Pat Clark, Design Consultant

rugandcarpetstudio.co.uk

The reproduction runners in situ in the billiard room at Standen House.

Mediterranean Threads: 18th and 19th century Greek Embroideries

an exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, until 28 Feb 2021

Gavin Strachan

Mediterranean Threads: 18th and 19th century Greek Embroideries in the Ashmolean's gallery 29, which is used for smaller temporary exhibitions, is a display of some of the museum's own collection. The pieces were collected at the beginning of the 20th century and accessioned between 1960 and 1978. The exhibition remains on show until 28 February 2021 and is certainly worth a visit, especially if you also look at the Ashmolean's textiles on permanent display in various parts of the museum, and in particular the magnificent 18th century Dodecanese bed tent panels, in the nearby gallery 31. This is pictured on the back cover of this journal. Much of the exhibition is also viewable via a coronavirus-beating virtual show at https://www.ashmolean.org/event/mediterranean-threads.

Map showing the positions of the Cyclades, Sporades and Dodecanese island groups, and Crete.

Curated by Dr Francesca Leoni of the Ashmolean, the exhibition focuses on the domestic and economic circumstances behind the textiles on show, as well as looking at the cultures that influenced them. The early collectors of Greek embroidery were mostly British diplomats and archaeologists who worked in the country at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. They knew that they were collecting Greek work, but they were very aware of the influence that both the Ottoman and Venetian Empires had on the textiles they were buying. A section in the exhibition is given over to a few objects that demonstrate these influences.

Cushion cover. Crete 17th–18th century. Linen, cotton and silk. Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford. EA2004.6. Starting life as the hem of a dress, it has subsequently been altered into a cushion cover by the addition of three bands of embroidery with matching motifs. The piece has eight different stitch techniques including the Cretan feather stitch. Reflecting the influence of Venice, the design is described as an Italian-style combination of flora, fauna and fantastic beasts.

Most of the textiles on display are from the Greek islands, which over the past 1,000 years were under Byzantine, Venetian and Ottoman rule; other entities such as the Knights of St John also held sway in some parts, while Genoese, Catalan and Mamluk merchants traded throughout the area. These have made their mark in the decorative motifs as well as the techniques used in Greek textiles, which results in the most striking feature of Greek embroideries – which is their diversity: the decoration and techniques usually vary considerably from island to island.

Do not expect a surfeit of embroideries in this exhibition. The limited space in the gallery means that there are only 11 Greek textiles on display, but there is also an Iznik tile, a Venetian engraving and three Egyptian pieces which are there to show some of the influences from outside the region. The Iznik piece, for instance, shows that repeating botanical friezes on some of the textiles reinterpret the floral scrolls found on Turkish tiles. Flowers, such as tulips and carnations, traditionally associated with Turkey, particularly enrich Cretan embroideries.

Geometric patterns and stylised abstract friezes prevail in textiles from the Cyclades and the Dodecanese, while in the Sporades, Crete and parts of mainland Greece fuller floral and figurative motifs are more typical. A base cloth of linen with a pattern made from silk stitches is the norm in the region, although cotton/linen combinations for the base and stitches in wool are also found right across Greece reflecting local tastes and access to raw materials. While the display panels in the exhibition give some indication of the methods employed by the artisans who made them, for an embroidery exhibition, unfortunately, there is a lack of information about the technical side of the exhibits – such as on the dyes and stitches used.

Part of a bed cover. Probably Ioannina in north-western Greece, 17th to 18th century, Linen and silk, EA1978.104.

The Ashmolean embroideries were collected by the Oxford academic and archaeologist Sir John Myres and by one of his students. Other scholars associated with the British School of Athens included archaeologists AJB Wace (later Deputy Keeper in the Department of Textiles at the V&A) and RM Dawkins, who between them collected over 1,200 pieces during their time in Greece between 1902 and 1923. Much of this collection is now in Liverpool Museums and he V&A, and in 1914 provided the exhibits in London's Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibition *Old Embroideries of the Greek Islands and Turkey*.

Bed valance fragment. Northern Sporades, Greece 18th century. Linen and silk. Bequeathed by Lady Myres in 1960. Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, EA1960.153. The piece has the playfulness and rich palette typical of embroideries from the Northern Sporades. Traces of stitching along the upper edge suggest that the original panel was attached to another to produce a textile wide enough for a bed valance. As looms were of a limited size, larger furnishings are usually made up of several loom-widths joined together.

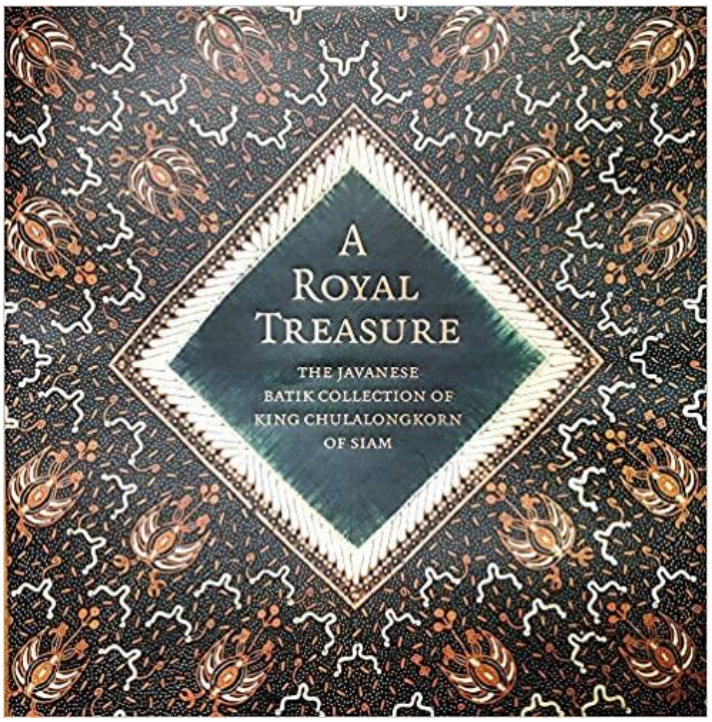
Mediterranean Threads

Writing about their reasons for collecting textiles, Wace and Dawkins made it clear that in addition to the aesthetic value was the 'ethnological interest of their technique and of the development of their patterns'. This anthropological significance, and the interest in needlework coming from the Arts and Crafts Movement, played a pivotal role in the collecting of Greek embroidery and the survival of pieces in the wake of industrially-produced clothing in the late 19th century. Many textiles were sold to visitors and explorers and in due course came to several British museums.

Greek embroidery has had admirers for centuries. In 1498 plague hit Rhodes, then prospering under the Knights of St John. The contemporary local poet Emmanuel Georgillas Limenitis wrote the lengthy *The Plague of Rhodes,* Το Θανατικό της Ρόδου, which has the following lines:

And who knows how to tell us of all their arts
and of the beautiful things their little hands made,
Patterned and broad leaf work, sewn with skill and craft
on fine linen, all types of designs set in order,
Which they enriched with silver and gold,
with all the arts of the Muses like good painters.
Bed tents, cushions, curtains and kerchiefs,
worked with quinces, roses, vine tendrils and grapes,
Flowers, pomegranates and myrtle, flowers of every kind.
They embroidered them with feeling, with happiness and song.
I tell you, if any had been there to look carefully
at the handicraft they worked on, they would have praised it.

Gavin Strachan



Royal Treasure: The Javanese Batik Collection of King Chulalongkorn of Siam **edited by Dale Gluckman et al.**

Published by River Books, 2019

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In 1871 the 18-year-old King Chulalongkorn of Thailand set sail from Bangkok for an official visit to Batavia (modern Jakarta), the capital of the Dutch East Indies. It was to be the first of three visits, the later ones taking place in 1896 and 1901. On each visit the King acquired batiks. In 2007 the collection was rediscovered, and this lavishly illustrated book, produced as an adjunct to the wonderful exhibition held in the Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles in October 2018, is the result.

The details of the King's three journeys were well documented, not least in His Majesty's diaries. These reveal the extent of his interest in the batik technique as well as the patterns, colours and quality of the cloths themselves. Contemporary photographs of the royal tour add further invaluable insights into the context. Another key source is a list in the Thai National Archives which suggests that the King bought batiks in Garut, including some made in Pekalongan and Tasikmalaya. On the second visit the royal party visited the workshop of Wilhelmina van Lawick van Pabst in Yogyakarta, where 41 pieces were acquired.

Later the King visited a workshop owned by the crown prince of the Mangkunegoro court in Surakarta, where he bought and ordered more examples. On his third visit a batik seller from Pekalongan was summoned to the royal party's hotel in Bandung; nine batiks from the workshop of Mrs J. Jans were probably purchased on this occasion. Later the king recorded seeing a batik demonstration in Tasikmalaya, and the purchase of another example in nearby Manonjaya. He visited both Surakarta and Yogyakarta, calling in at the van Lawick van Pabst workshop for a second time, a visit described by Prince Damrong. Taken together, the collection and associated documentation provide an unparalleled source for the understanding and interpretation of batik from the late 19th century.

A contribution from Sandra Niessen explores the background of the van Lawick van Pabst family, who had moved to Yogyakarta in the 1860s. The head of the family, C. N. H. van Lawick van Pabst, died in 1878. His widow Wilhelmina, who was of Chinese parentage, was 58 when he died, and her eldest daughter, also Wilhelmina, was 22. There were five more dependent children, and it is not surprising that the family went into a number of businesses, including the production of very high quality batik. It seems that Wilhelmina the younger gradually took over the business. Samples were commissioned from the van Lawick van Pabst batik workshop for display at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900. After that exhibition closed they were shipped to Amsterdam for display in the 1901 Indies Exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum. The collection of batik made by His Majesty King Chulalongkorn of examples from this important workshop, otherwise largely forgotten, is of particular significance.

Among the batik pieces collected from the van Lawick van Pabst workshop were eight examples showing designs reserved only for members of the royal family, each accompanied by a note giving the name of the pattern and explaining who could wear it. Possibly His Majesty had expressed interest in the meanings of the patterns worn in the Yogyakarta court. Although the notes had become separated from the pattern examples, Judi Achjadi, who contributed much of the book's text, was able to reconcile samples and labels, and the results are published here.

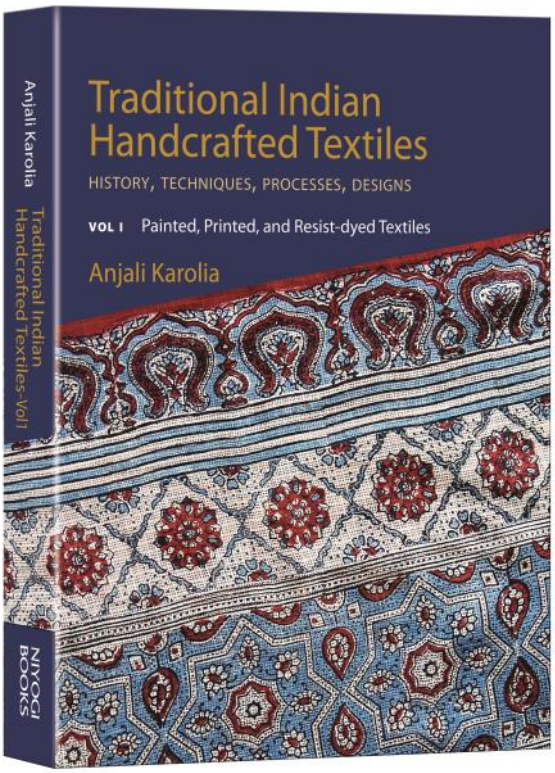
Two further key patterns, '*tambal miring*' and '*parang rusak'* are analysed in the book. This is followed by an explanation of the technique of batik as practised in the late 19th century.

The bulk of the book, however, consists of annotated illustrations of items in the collection, including highlighted examples and a catalogue of the 300 or so pieces now preserved in the Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles in Bangkok. The detailed illustrations of examples from the royal cities of Yogyakarta and Surakarta will be of considerable interest to batik lovers, accompanied as they are by design names and further background. Aficionados may find the examples from less well-known and less widely collected centres of even more interest. Among these are Batavia (now Jakarta), an important batik production centre in the late 19th and early 20th century, though rarely represented in publications or collections in the west; Garut, Cipedes and Tasikmalaya in West Java; and Banyumas in Central Java.

The care and attention taken in the production of this fine volume is visible on every page. There is excellent photography and meticulous editing throughout. For anyone with an interest in batik this book is essential reading, providing insights and information for readers at all levels, from those just starting to explore the subject to scholars or collectors who have a firm grounding already. The book is a delight.

Fiona Kerlogue

Sample of the proscribed royal pattern 'huk*', with an explanatory note indicating the name of the pattern and who could wear it. This group of samples provides unique insights into* 'larangan*' (proscribed) batik patterns.*



Traditional Indian Handcrafted Textiles. History, Techniques, Processes, Designs. Vol I Painted, Printed, and Resist-dyed Textiles; Vol II Woven Textiles, by Anjali Karolia.

Published by Niyogi Books, New Delhi, 2019.

Hardback, 664 pages, (2 vols in slipcase), 1020 photographs, 54 illustrations

ISBN 978-93-85285-48-6

Throughout her long career as a university lecturer in Baroda, Dr Anjali Karolia has taught courses on many aspects of textiles and dress, but she felt frustrated by the lack of a single reference book to which she could direct her students for an overview of India's textiles and how they are made. She therefore set out to provide what she calls a 'student-friendly text-book' on India's textile processes, and in this she has largely succeeded. Whether or not it can appeal to a wider audience is debatable.

This is definitely not a coffee-table book, nor does it aim to be. It is not about historic textiles or textile history: its focus is on the materials, techniques and processes of textiles being made in India today, as well as on their motifs and terminology. It is profusely illustrated, with several images on almost every page, but this does not make it a thing of beauty. The illustrations are often field shots of textile-making in its many forms, many taken by the author herself or by research students. These are inevitably of varying quality: some are excellent, others less so. The same applies to the illustrations of the actual textiles (which, it must be said, are often garish and unattractive) – these are also mainly taken by the author and other non-professional photographers, but are nevertheless mostly informative and useful. There are also useful maps, diagrams of the parts of various looms and many details of textile motifs. A small number of images of historic textiles are included, but these are very much subsidiary to the book's main theme of documenting contemporary practices.

In a crowded field of literature on Indian textiles, the unique aspect of this book is the wealth of information on tools, dyes, processes, techniques and terminology which has been obtained through first-hand observation and by interviewing textile craftspeople. This is the content that makes the book worthwhile. From the lists of sources given at the end of each sub-section, it appears that the majority of the documentation was done by staff and students of the Department of Clothing and Textiles at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda in Gujarat. In her acknowledgements, Dr Karolia gives credit to these researchers 'who magnanimously and wholeheartedly allowed and permitted me to compile and include their research material and photographs for this book' and it is these documentation projects, often by MA students, that provide the backbone of the book. While it is obviously a good thing that the information gathered for these projects is published here rather than lying ignored in university archives, a little more clarity on who actually did the fieldwork and took the photos for each textile type would have been welcome.

The daunting task of interpreting a huge amount of information has on the whole been adeptly managed. The book is in two volumes, the first on painted, printed and resist-dyed textiles and the second on woven textiles. The first volume deals successively with pigment-painted, mordant-painted, block-printed, yarn-resist (ikat) and fabric-resist (tie-dyed) textiles, with geographical sub-sections within each type. In contrast, the second volume is arranged geographically rather than by type of weave: this format was no doubt chosen as most Indian woven textiles are associated with specific towns or regions, but I think this approach is a mistake. The geographical arrangement leads to repetition in describing weaving techniques, which could have been avoided if the second volume had followed the same format as the first and had been arranged by technique: for example, techniques such as brocade-weaving, tapestry-weaving, extra-

weft (*jamdani*) weaving, satin-weave (*mashru*) and backstrap-weaving could have had their own sections, with regional variations of each weave discussed within each section. This approach could have pointed up interesting comparisons between similar techniques carried out in different regions, such as extra-weft brocading in Gujarat and Bengal, or tapestry-weaving in Central India and Kashmir. As it is, readers are left to make any such connections or comparisons for themselves.

Both volumes open with wide-ranging introductions to their subject matter and the chapters start with an overview of the history of each technique (in volume I) or of the weaving of each region (in volume II). While these introductions are conceived as forerunners to the main discussion of the contemporary situation for each type or region, they have clearly been compiled from many different sources with varying degrees of reliability: consequently the historical sections contain inaccuracies both large and small. It is incorrect for example, to suggest that the silk-weaving of Kanchipuram grew out of the *tussar* and *muga* woven silks of the North-east (I, p.15); the Industrial Revolution in Britain did not start in the mid-19th century (I, p.16); *mashru* does not mean 'cleverly woven' in Persian (II, p.235); *kinkhab* of Banaras has not 'found pointed mention in foreign accounts since the 16th and 17th centuries' (II, p.117): while foreigners did mention weaving in Banaras (Varanasi), only a single foreigner, Niccolo Manucci writing in 1660, mentions the existence of metal-thread weaving there before 1804. There are no footnotes in the book, which means that debatable remarks or excessively broad generalisations cannot be explored or followed up.

270 Traditional Indian Handcrafted Textiles

Bandha Process

Yarn preparation

The raw material, cotton and silk (mulberry) yarns, purchased in the hank form, are straightened and made free from knots and then wound on *latais* (pegged frames). For tussar silk, tussar cocoons are purchased and yarns are reeled and spun from the cocoons. While tussar yarns are reeled and spun by ladies in their homes, warping and weaving is done by men.

Next, the yarns to be patterned are stretched on *karma or* a frame. *Uphurna,* that is grouping and subgrouping frames, with upright sticks or frame with separating cords are used for weft preparation. *Jantur*, a peg warping frame is used for warp preparation or sometimes it is carried out in open with separating poles.

The pattern or design to be obtained on the warp or weft yarn is sketched and painted on a paper by the designer, and transferred to the stretched yarn with the help of charcoal powder or *geru*. A paper design is referred and the designs are transferred onto the warp or weft by tying. Tying of the yarns is done with cotton waxed threads. The thread is tightly wound round the subgroup yarns with one simple knot at the end, so that later it can be untied easily. The *kiya* leaf is used for tying bigger portions. This is wrapped round the portion, and tied at the ends with cotton threads. Tying is followed from lighter colour to darker colour of a design. This whole process is known as *bandhakam*.

Raw mulberry and Tussar silk yarns

Ladies reeling wild silk cocoons on their thighs

Preparation of two-ply silk yarn

'Jantur' warping frame with warp yarns

Volume I contains several in-depth and informative discussions of specific textile processes: especially well done are the sections on the Rajasthani *phad*, the *Mata ni pachedi* of Ahmedabad and the *kalamkari* printing and painting of Machilipatnam and Srikalahasti. But many other significant types are given very scant coverage and are not even illustrated with a relevant image, such as the painted textiles of Sikkinaikkenpet, the *patachitra* of Odisha, Rajasthani *pichhwai* and Jain *patas* of Gujarat. Presumably this patchy coverage reflects the range of student documentation projects already carried out and available for use in the book: it is unfortunate that new field research could not have been carried out to fill in these gaps.

India's weaving traditions, discussed in Vol II, have yet to be analysed on a similar scale to the printing and dyeing techniques explored in Vol I. Although Rahul Jain has led the way in documenting several specific types of woven textile, especially in his in-depth monographs for the Calico Museum, there is still no reliable single volume or set of volumes dedicated to India's woven textiles. Volume II of Dr Karolia's book attempts an overview of Indian weaving which is of interest as it brings the subject up to date, giving us a snapshot of current weaving practices in a wide range of centres. While the book does not cover historic weaves (there is no mention of anything made on a draw-loom, for example), it is interesting to read about the present-day products of, for example, Santipur in West Bengal or Chanderi in Madhya Pradesh, and to compare them with the 19th century examples in museum collections, or with those collected from the same places by John Forbes Watson for his *Textile Manufactures of India* in 1866.

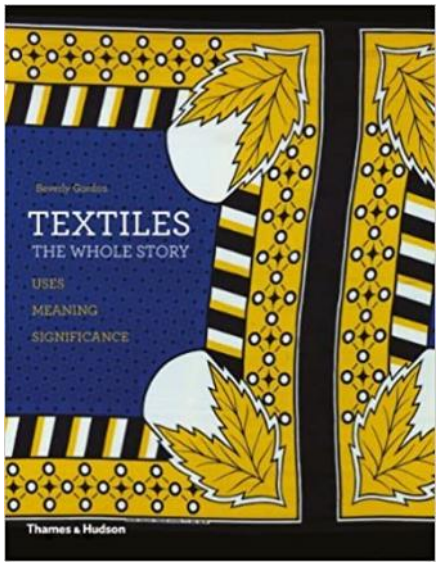
There is a lot of useful information to be found in Volume II when individual weaving types are discussed, especially the smaller, local weaving traditions like the woollen *tangaliya* weaving of the Bharwad community in Gujarat, the Kota *dooriya* cottons of Rajasthan, the padded *sujani* quilts of Bharuch, the cotton Dhaniakali saris of West Bengal and the colourful Narayanpet saris made in Telangana but worn in Maharashtra. There are also many illuminating small details like the descriptions of different finishing techniques, such as that applied to a Tangail sari to give it a 'papery' feel (II, p.152). However, and perhaps inevitably when dealing with a huge mass of information, there are many contentious statements and inaccuracies about Indian weaving lurking in Volume II. To give a few examples, the term 'brocading' is used loosely and sometimes incorrectly to mean any textiles woven with gold and silver; the question of whether or not Paithani-style tapestry-weaving was ever done in Chanderi is not convincingly argued and is furthermore confused with Asavali weaving (II, p.96-7), a term which is loosely used to refer to a type of floral meander border rather than a type of weave; *tanchoi* saris are discussed under Banaras (II, 129-30) but they come from Gujarat, where they are not mentioned. The twill-tapestry weave used for Kashmir shawls is called 'one of the most complicated techniques' (II, p.259), but it is not complicated at all compared with complex weaves or velvet.

Clearly there is a lot to take issue with in this book but I warmed to it as I learned to skip the general introductions and head straight to the individual textile types. I would suggest to Dr Karolia's students (and anyone else who buys the book) that they do the same, as the informative step-by-step descriptions of textile techniques are this book's genuine contributions to the subject.

Rosemary Crill

Germantown weavings

The cover image shows a Navajo weaving, one of a group of six offered for sale at auction at Woolley and Wallis, Salisbury, on 22nd September 2020. This example and two of the others in the sale, are 'Germantown' weavings, so-called because they employ woollen yarns acquired from Germantown, a suburb of Philadelphia. Germantown wool was machine-spun and apart from the very early years was coloured with aniline dyes. It was introduced to Navajo weaving around 1880 and although expensive it remained popular into the first decade of the 20th century. This was partly because its use removed the need to spend long periods of time spinning, and partly because of the bright colours, which weavers found attractive. The diamond design is strongly associated with Germantown blankets. Like most Navajo weavings the warp was put on the loom in a continuous figure of eight and the weaving fills the entire warp; but Germantown rugs often have an added fringe, as this rare example does.



Textiles, The Whole Story: uses, meanings, significance by Beverly Gordon

Published by Thames and Hudson, 2013

Paperback, 304 pages

ISBN-13 : 978-0500291139

ISBN-10 : 0500291136

One wonders whether a book with such a challenging title and sub-titles can possibly live up to them in 304 pages. Certainly Beverly Gordon has the right credentials to write such a book. Now Professor Emerita in the Design Studies Department of the University of Wisconsin Madison, she is also a spinner and weaver and has a PhD in textile history. However she herself admits 'I could *never* include every aspect of this vast subject.'

The book is organised into six thematic chapters whose sub-titles reveal more about the contents than the titles themselves. For example 'The Ties that Bind' has the sub-heading 'The social meanings of textiles'. I will therefore use the sub-titles in this review.

The opening chapter, 'Textiles in human consciousness' takes us from birth to death and from the beginnings of the universe via pre-history to the present day.

Gordon introduces the reader to Daina Taimina's infinitely enlargeable crocheted model of hyperbolic space and reminds us of the twisted strands of DNA.

The chapter on 'Money, trade, status, and control' includes sumptuary laws, feather garments from the Andes, kente cloth and the slave trade's relationship with cotton.

'Expressing meaning, messages, and beauty' looks at samplers, motifs in ikats from Borneo and expression in contemporary textile art.

Gordon's final chapter is 'The sacred, spiritual, and healing significance of cloth'. In it she explores the therapeutic value of producing and using textiles and the almost universal use of religious garments and trappings such as the *kiswah* covering the Kaa'ba in Mecca.

A major strength of the book is the plethora of relevant photographs, a number of them full page such as an astronaut floating in space and a fifteenth century fresco of the three fates. These are as wide ranging as the text itself. The enormous task of finding and selecting the images seems to be the work of the author herself with limited assistance as no picture editor is credited. Text, layout and images are wonderfully integrated and the book designer, Karolina Prymaka, deserves greater recognition than the tiny typeface mention on the copyright page.

Textiles, The Whole Story is an ambitious work and contains very many more examples of the central importance of textiles throughout history than those referred to here. Perhaps it tries to cram in the whole of Gordon's lifetime's love and study of textiles resulting occasionally in snippets of information that one might like expanded. However there are extensive footnotes and a bibliography for those who wish to find out more. The thematic organisation of the book crosses continents and centuries and helps to convey the important message of the universality of human experience and how textiles form a fundamental part of that.

Roger Hardwick

ORTS Privacy Policy – a reminder

In order to comply with GDPR regulations we have recently had to update the ORTS Privacy Policy. Thank you to the many members who have indicated that they are happy with it. The Privacy Policy can be seen on the new membership form on the ORTS website. Anyone who has not yet sent their agreement may do so by sending the statement from the ORTS website to Dimity Spiller, our membership secretary, on membership.orts@gmail. com.

A ‘thank you’ to Margaret Broadbent

Margaret came two venues ago to the Swedenborg Hall, and gave a splendid lecture on the collection of animal regalia she and her mother had collected in Asia and the Middle East. Her mother, Moira Broadbent, had written the catalogue for the exhibition ‘Cavalcade of Animal Regalia’, in 1985. We begged Margaret to join ORTS, and were rewarded by her membership, currently of twelve years.

Margaret at a party in a private home on the 2015 ORTS trip to Iran. Photo: Louise Teague.

Margaret volunteered to be membership secretary eight years ago, and undertook the mammoth task of creating an Excel database of all the details of our members, guided by Jim Humphries. At each lecture she sat opposite the entrance to St James’ Conference Rooms and accosted all entrants with a charming and welcoming smile, aided by our previous membership secretary, Penny Berkut.

Margaret managed the cash from guests, members new and old, and the donations for nibbles and drinks. She then had to walk home in the dark with a bag of money in SE London, hampered by her health. She frequently resorted to paying herself for a taxi from Piccadilly. She gave our programme and a membership form to guests at lectures. We gained about 12 new members last year in this way. When new members attended for the first time, she brought them over to me and introduced them, so it was possible to greet them at future events.

Margaret’s love for Iran resulted in her dairy of the second ORTS Trip to Iran being printed for members as our first Bonus Journal.

I have been privileged to enjoy the pleasure of working with Margaret Broadbent, the most conscientious membership secretary you could hope for.

Louise Teague

ORTS EVENTS PROGRAMME Autumn and Winter 2020/2021

Wednesday, October 21st Anthony Hazledine in discussion with Clive Rogers: A brief survey of the weavings of the Navajo, via Zoom.

Monday, November 16th Stefano Ionescu: The Column Motif in Ottoman Court Prayer Rugs and Beyond, via Zoom.

Wednesday, December 16th Jennifer Wearden: The South Kensington Museum Collection of Carpets, via Zoom. We hope that some will be able to gather at the University Women’s Club to view.

Thursday, January 20th 2021 Chris Aslan: A Carpet Ride to Khiva. Live or via Zoom if necessary.

Wednesday, February 24th 2021 Film ‘People of the Wind’ on Bakhtiari migration, presented by Antony Wynn.

TALKS

Details for 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

Deadline for spring issue February 1st 2021

Back cover: 18th century bed tent entrance panels, Dodecanese, Greece, on permanent display in the Ashmolean's gallery 31. Linen and silk. EA 1978.101. © Ashmolean, University of Oxford. In the Dodecanese, houses typically consisted of a single, rectangular room divided into a day area and sleeping quarters. A bell-shaped tent (*sperven*) was used for privacy and acted as a colourful focal point. The decoration and fineness of the bed tent, and the other soft furnishings, reflected the women's talent and taste as much as the family's wealth. A complete bed tent dating from the 17th to 18th centuries, also of linen and silk, is at the Benaki Museum in Athens.