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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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Do join us!

Volume 5 issue 1 Spring 2022

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Front cover: *The 'Indo-French' style Pondicherry Carpet from Penicuik House, believed to have been commissioned or purchased in Pondicherry and brought back from India by Edward Clerk (1824-1917). Sold at auction by Lyon and Turnbull in February 2021, now at Thames Carpets.*

ORTS NEWS

As spring begins to put in a tentative appearance and restrictions are relaxed, we are turning our thoughts to the year ahead. More members are again enjoying meetings at the University Women's Club, including Steven Cohen's excellent lecture in January. An ORTS member has generously offered to host this year's summer party in July at his country home, and we are exploring several possibilities for visits, as museums begin to firm up their protocols about numbers and arrangements behind the scenes.

A visit to see historic carpets at a stately home in Kent is planned. The news that the Burrell Collection is to re-open at the end of March, with the famous Wagner Carpet on permanent display, has prompted us to explore the possibilities of a trip to Glasgow. But our first visit this year will be to Janie Lightfoot's conservation studio in North West London on 10th May. Details of this, and other visits, will follow in the newsletter.

Fiona Kerlogue

Members of the audience gather for Steven Cohen's lecture in January. Left (left to right): Margaret Squires, Jordan Quill, Louise Nicholson and Margaret Erskine. Right: Rosemary Crill and Helen Wolfe.

ORTS LECTURE AND TALKS PROGRAMME Spring to Summer 2022

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

Wednesday, April 13th. Walter Denny: A Critical Look at the long & lively story of Anatolian carpet scholarship. 18.00 Zoom. From USA.

Wednesday, May 18th. Jacqueline Simcox: Aspects of Chinese Textiles. Title tbc. University Women's Club. 18.00 for 19.00 live. 19.00 Zoom.

Wednesday, June 15th. Susan Conway: Cataloguing the Royal Collection of HRH Princess Sirindhorn, Thailand. University Women's Club. 18.00 for 19.00 live. 19.00 Zoom.

Some Observations on Oriental Carpets in Eighteenth century English interiors

Dimity Spiller

Figure 1. King James I of England and VI of Scotland by Daniel Mytens, oil on canvas, 1621. National Portrait Gallery.

It is popularly supposed that oriental carpets fell out of fashion in 18th century England. The new must-have floor covering was the range of domestic carpeting which was increasingly available through the century, from the cheap and cheerful machine manufacture of Kidderminster/'Scotch'/Brussels carpets, more akin to haircord, to the highest quality hand knotted works at Wilton/Axminster/ Moorfields. As usual with popular supposition, a more careful inquiry shows the situation to be a little different. Interestingly it was also popularly supposed that Persian carpets went into decline in their own country in the 18th century. The recently published work of Hadi Maktabi, *The Persian Carpet, the forgotten years, 1722-1872*, reviewed in the ORTS Spring 2021 journal, dismisses this idea by dint of research and close observation.

During the 16th and 17th centuries it was a favourite pose of royalty and nobility to be painted standing beside, or even more grandly on, a carpet. To be seen with such novel and valuable objects enhances the subject's social position. Henry VIII had a huge collection and was painted on several of them. By the time of the early Stuart kings, fashion was moving towards Persian carpets, the denser knotting allowing more exotic patterning. Van Dyck seems to have been particularly fond of those with palmette borders. However, the large Turkish medallion carpets remained a firm favourite (Figure 1). The colour and bold design was relatively easy to reproduce and gave an instant hit of splendour to any sitter. Even James I, hunched and suspicious in his state chair, looks more kingly given his magnificent underpinning. During the second half of the 17th century carpets were more freely available and in paintings are seen in the role of cheerful furnishings.

A new style of portraiture, the Conversation Piece, was introduced in the 18th century (Figure 2). Here groups of sitters, from a single couple to a large gathering, give the appearance of being surprised at play in their drawing-rooms or parlours. The interior features are employed to give atmosphere, not as realistic depictions of how the subjects lived. Thus we see a range of interiors from splendid baroque grandeur to enhance the family gathering to sturdy, stone flagged rooms for a hunt breakfast. Magnificent oak or deal floorboards predominate in these interiors. Carpets, if included, are usually an island of warmth and colour beneath the table. Sometimes these are clearly European patterns. When they are oriental, the patterns are no longer

Figure 2. A group portrait, probably the Raikes family, by Gawen Hamilton. c.1730, Yale Centre for British Art, Paul Mellon collection, Newhaven, Connecticut.

easily recognisable. One of the best-known painters of this genre is Arthur Devis (1711-1787). His interiors are notably empty and should not be taken at face value, not least on account of the fact his sitters came to his studio and were not done at home (Figure 3). Both upholsterers' advertisements and household inventories show that furnishings were increasing in quantity and comfort. Little of this is reflected in Devis' work. The couple, who managed to get him to include some blue and white porcelain on the mantlepiece, must have been very serious collectors. Arthur Devis does have a very similar carpet appearing in several of his portraits; perhaps it was a studio prop?

A great champion of oriental carpets in portraits was John Zoffany, who used a variety of patterns (Figure 4). However, the fashionable ice-cream coloured palette in neoclassical interiors, as popularised by the Adam brothers from the late 1750s onwards, was at odds with the vibrancy of the oriental carpet. It is from a contemporary criticism of Zoffany's 1779 group portrait of the Sharp family that we see that the oriental carpet fell from favour in some quarters: 'there is something repulsive in the Colouring, something not to say it at all profoundly, which reminded us of a Turkey Carpet.'[1]

Figure 3 (above). Mr and Mrs Richard Bull by Arthur Devis, 1747. New York University, Institute of Fine Arts.

Figure 4 (below). John, 14th Lord Willoughby de Broke and his family, by John Zoffany, c.1766. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Figure 5. Queen Charlotte with her two eldest sons, by John Zoffany, 1764. Royal Collection © Her Majesty the Queen.

Even Zoffany was capable of using a carpet as extra atmosphere: his famous 1765 picture of Queen Charlotte and two of her children in her boudoir has a beautiful bright red wall-to-wall carpet (Figure 5). This is unlikely to be the reality, as soon after the painting was done a visitor remarked on the high quality of the parquet flooring in this room. One where we can be sure it is a true portrayal is that of Sir Laurence Dundas in his house in Arlington Street (Figure 6). Every item in the room is confirmed by the inventory, which was used to recreate the room in the dazzling 1985 Great Houses of Britain Exhibition in the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Oriental carpets were supplied by both the East India Company and the Levant Company, which, though rather on its last legs, was still trading. An advertisement would be placed in the press when a parcel of carpets had arrived. They were mostly sold at EIC headquarters in Leadenhall Street and snapped up by upholsterers, who would in turn alert potential customers to the latest offerings. The 1734 advertisement in the York Courant is typical of the fare offered: 'George Reynoldson, upholster, undertaker and sworn appraiser in Stone Gate, York, among all manner of furniture and soft furnishings, he also sells 'Turkey, Muscate, Persian and French carpets, list hair or painted floorcloths, Dutch and floor matts'.[2] At this time carpet was the word used regardless of size; a rug or rugg was part of the bedding, similar to an eiderdown.

Figure 6. Sir Laurence Dundas and his grandson, by John Zoffany, 1769-70. (Wikimedia Commons).

Other carpets seem to have come as private ventures on behalf of individual captains, such as this in the Daily Courant on 27th November, 1711:

> 'at Captain Parker's warehouse in Merchant Taylor's Hall……are exposed for sale a parcel of Turkey carpets, just arrived by the fleet from Turkey, viz. twelve fine Moschet carpets proper for Ladies Chambers or Dressing Rooms and ninety two Pike [pile] carpets, some fit to cover Drawing Rooms and Chambers, others of a small size to put under Beds and Tables, in Dining rooms and Parlours or by the Chimneys to sit on.'[3]

These were general furnishers; it seems that the first shop specifically for oriental carpets, the Oriental Carpet Emporium, opened its doors in 1792.

With the visual evidence of the continued popularity of the oriental carpets somewhat inexact we need to turn to written evidence to confirm that they had not vanished from houses, despite the fashionable enthusiasm for European patterns and production.

By the 1750s, according to the architect-designer Isaac Ware there were few parqueted floors, as fitted carpets were so much the custom. A number of paintings do show almost wall to wall carpeting, easily done with the domestic manufacture which could be woven in strips and sewn together to get the correct size. As both the cheaper producers from Kidderminster et al. as well as the top quality factories of Wilton, Axminster and Moorfields also did oriental patterns it would explain some of the scenes. However, inventories do provide confirmation that carpets of very large dimensions were available. The unpublished 1764 Inventory of the Earl of Egremont for his London house includes floor coverings which were, as one would expect of a fashionable house of this time, mainly Wiltons and Axminsters, with Kidderminster and Scotch for the less grand areas. However, 'in the Blue Paper Room next the Bedchamber is a Turkey carpet 11' x 10' and in My Lady's Bedchamber is another Turkey carpet 11' x 9'.'[4] These are minnows compared to the Persian carpets in the Houghton inventory of 1792. Amongst a good collection of oriental carpets are two, in the Saloon, both 34'6'' x 12' and in the Rose-coloured Drawing Room another of 31' x 9' 9'.[5] These are slightly against the trend as most inventories that include oriental carpets have them in the lesser rooms. Carpets for the grandest rooms, the Saloon and the Drawing Room, were more usually made by the fashionable English manufacturers.

A further divergence between paintings and inventories comes with the bedside carpet (Figure 7). These were listed in many 17th century inventories, are often seen in 18th century paintings of bedroom scenes and are specifically mentioned in an advertisement in a London newspaper of 1740:

> 'just imported and to be sold at Carpenter's Hall…a large and fine parcel of Smyrna, Segiadiya [apparently a corruption of the Arabic word for a prayer carpet] and other choice Turkey carpets: consisting of a great variety of sizes and lively colours and divers curious new-fashioned patterns. Many fine carpets from 3 to 4 Yrds square and others from 6 to 7 yards long and proportional widths, extremely useful for dining-rooms and hearth and bed-side carpets of excellent patterns and fineness.' [6]

However, such a cosy item is rare in the seventeen 18th century inventories published as a tribute to John Cornforth. There is a good deal more work to be done once one can get proper library access for research. In the meantime, we are left feeling sorry for the cold toes of even the most aristocratic householders.

Figure 7. Episode VII of Scenes from Pamela by Samuel Richardson, by Joseph Highmore, 1744. Tate Gallery.

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1. Public Advertiser, 2 May, 1781. *2.* Charles Saumerez Smith, *C18 Decoration in England,* Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1993, p.133. *3.* Ibid, p.228. *4.* The Petworth House Archive (PHA) document reference, West Sussex Record Office ref. PHA 6267. Owner: Lord Egremont. *5.* Tessa Murdoch, ed. *Noble Households; C18 inventories of Great English Houses*, John Adamson, Cambridge.2006.p.192. *6.* Peter Thornton, *Authentic Décor*, *The Domestic Interior 1620-1820*, Weidenfield & Nicholson. published in paperback 1993, p.101.

Dimity Spiller

Ikat Textiles from Sarawak in National Museums Scotland's Collection

Rosanna Nicolson

'She weaves as she was taught by her mother, but in her modern world, her dreams no longer come. So, she communicates with the spirits through her chant … Her chant calls the spirits and her own creativity as she weaves her cloth, allowing this part of her culture to continue.'

(Shepherd, 2019)

Introduction

Every August the world descends on Edinburgh for the city's world-renowned International and Fringe Festivals. In 2019, master weaver Helen Manjan anak Atong from Kapit in Sarawak, East Malaysia, came to Scotland to demonstrate her weaving as part of a narrated performance, 'Sarawak: Mystical Chants of the Rainforest', at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Before a mesmerized audience, Helen unfolded, through the rhythm of her singing and weaving, the culture and spirituality that are embedded in the textiles of the indigenous Iban people. Eloquently written by Karen Shepherd, the story, performed together with a team of musicians, reflected on the continuity of traditional ikat weaving by the Iban, but also emphasised the changes of our modern world that have motivated Helen to introduce innovative developments in her weavings.

Figure 1. Master weaver Helen Manjan anak Atong, from Rumah Gare, Kapit, Sarawak, Malaysia, photographed in Kuching, 2019. Image © Jacqueline Fong, Tanoti Crafts.

It was only by chance that I attended one of Helen's performances. On stage she used her backstrap loom, which she had brought from Sarawak, to weave a *pua kumbu*, the Iban ceremonial cloth. It was a fascinating experience to see her working and to listen to the stories and singing. I grasped the opportunity and approached Helen and her team afterwards. At this moment a dialogue began that has continued over the past two years. National Museums Scotland (NMS) was founded as an industrial museum in 1854 and documenting craft processes worldwide has been an important part of our mission since. I was therefore interested in acquiring a contemporary piece to document Iban ikat weaving and the changes to this craft over the last 145 years since the first pieces entered our collection. Helen very kindly agreed to my proposal and sold to us not only a finished *pua kumbu*, but also the one she was weaving during the festival performance, partially completed and still on the loom, accompanied by a full set of weaving tools.

This acquisition is only one side of the story. After we had connected, the members of the performance team were excited to learn that NMS had a historical collection from Sarawak, and we arranged a visit to the National Museums Collection Centre for the next day, so they could see some of the objects. Although only a brief visit, it demonstrated that our collection (and other material held in UK collections) is a brilliant resource for weavers in Sarawak today as they work hard to keep their weaving traditions alive. But it was also an excellent opportunity for exchange. We did not know much about these textiles in our collection, and Helen kindly provided a wealth of information, both technical and cultural, that has greatly enhanced our understanding.

In the first part of this article, I will introduce Helen, *pua kumbu* and her weaving practice and our acquisitions in more detail. In the second part, I will talk about the historical textiles that Helen viewed and commented on during her visit and in subsequent conversations. I will demonstrate how the mutual learning that took place in a museum context made this acquisition possible for both sides, the significance of this contemporary acquisition for our historical collection, and an appreciation of knowledge exchange as a way forward.

Master weaver Helen Manjan

Helen Manjan anak Atong (b. 1958) is a master weaver originally from Rumah Gare, a longhouse situated along the bank of Sungai Kain (River of Cloth), Kapit, Sarawak (Figure 1). Weavers from the Kapit region are well-known, and Helen comes from a line of master weavers, empowered to perform specific weaving rituals. Her grandmother, Jebau anak Tuah, once received a message from her spirit guide, Kumang Wung, a spirit from the river, who told her that her family would hold this gift, the ability to weave, for seven generations. Helen was taught to weave by her mother and is the third of the foretold seven generations.

A performative account of *pua kumbu*

Pua kumbu are warp ikat cloths of extreme importance to the Iban, the largest indigenous group in Sarawak. Traditionally, they have been made from locally grown and hand spun cotton, the yarn treated with natural dyes, and woven by Iban women on a backstrap loom. The ikat cloths are used as ceremonial blankets and coverings, and for clothing such as jackets, sashes, shawls, and women's tubular skirts.

These special textiles are an essential part of lifecycle events, *gawai* festivals, and rice planting ceremonies, due to their protective properties and connection with the spirit world. In the past, they received the trophy heads taken during head-hunting (ritualised warfare). The *pua kumbu* therefore warranted their own introduction during the Edinburgh festival performance. In the words of Karen Shepherd (2019), they are

> a ritual textile once reserved for an encounter with the spiritual. The weaver once created this cloth to receive the severed heads that the warriors, the headhunters of old, brought home. The head brought *semangat*, or life spirit to the tribe. But this life spirit was strong, and it needed to be guarded against. The act of weaving gave the cloth a life force of its own to disarm the malevolence of the head.

The intricate designs and patterns on ikats are highly symbolic, and inextricably linked to Iban beliefs and the supernatural world. Themes and imagery include gods and spirits, human and animal figures, stylized plants and nature. To quote once again from the fringe show's script:

> The designs were received through dreams, a rich retelling of indigenous stories and symbols that depicted the nature around them, mythical creatures and characters from the spirit world, each with their own power and meaning. To weave without their dreams (*mimpi*) was considered a dangerous undertaking.

But Helen has had to adapt her methods of communication with the spirits as 'in her modern world, her dreams no longer come' (Shepherd, 2019). However, with her status as Induk Ngar Induk Takar (mordant bath ceremony leader) and Induk Muntang Induk Nengkebang (dream-weaver), she is one of only a few women who are empowered to perform these specific weaving rituals. As Shepherd explains, Helen continues to perform these rituals and keeps alive weaving traditions:

> So, she communicates with the spirits through her chant, just as the *lemambang* – the poet bards – once used the chant to open passages between the spirit world and our own. Her chant calls the spirits and her own creativity as she weaves her cloth, allowing this part of her culture to continue.

There is more to *pua kumbu* than just the woven patterns and motifs. They are also given a praise name, or a poetic oral verse called a *julok*. Helen provided the *julok* and commentary on the meaning of the designs in our historical collections which I will explain further below.

Contemporary weaving practice – Helen's ikats

A completed *pua kumbu* that NMS initially purchased from Helen is shown in Figure 2 overleaf. The pattern in the centre shows sparkling sunrays while the border represents the maiden's headdress. Helen finished this cloth, which was woven in silk from China, in August 2019. The choice of silk represents a change in practice, as *pua kumbu* are conventionally made from locally grown cotton. Furthermore, Helen experiments with indigo as a single colour for her weavings, instead of a combination of blue with red and

brown tones. For the dyeing she uses *tarum* (*indigofera tinctoria* leaves) that she cultivates in her garden. The blue shade is the result of a single dye bath. For the ikat process, that is tying the warp with knots to create a pattern, she uses beeswax-coated *ulap doyo* raffia strings made from the long, pleated leaves of the *lemba* plant, also known as palm grass (Figure 3). A tying frame (*tangga ubong*) in the NMS collection illustrates this step in the process as it was carried out in the early 20th century (Figure 4).

The second piece acquired by NMS is a work-in-progress *pua kumbu* that Helen commenced in July 2019 (Figure 5). Its title *'Bintang belulong, bulan kembung, ngias kebung, langit ngeruang. Bintang betetai, remang berintai, ngias terabai, bujang nurun nyerang*' describes the motifs, which depict clusters of stars amidst the full moon, decorating the night sky, and the stars and the clouds that decorate the warrior's shield, ready for battle. Helen weaves her *pua kumbu* in a tubular format, generally with two pieces being undertaken on the same warp, which is a traditional technique.

NMS also acquired the full set of weaving tools that Helen used during the festival performance. It includes the shuttle (*ripang*), wound with weft threads; the laze rods (*lidi*), preventing the warp threads from tangling; the beater (*belia*), a shard-shaped piece of wood to facilitate the insertion of the weft threads onto the warp strands and beat the yarns to produce fabric; and the backstrap (*tempaut*) which goes around the weaver and attaches to the breast beam (*rakup*) to maintain the tension of the warp while weaving (Figure 6). The weaving frame was made of lightweight tropical wood for use while travelling. In the longhouse there is no rigid frame, and the warp beam (*tendai*) would be set up anywhere.

Helen offered us to purchase her work-in-progress and tools in response to her and her group's visit to our Collection Centre where they could see previous attempts to document weaving processes through the acquisition of raw materials and dyes, tools and implements, looms and in-progress cloths. This

Figure 2 (above). Pua kumbu, ikat cloth, entitled "Sempuyung Matahari", August 2019. © Helen Manjan anak Atong. National Museums Scotland, acc. no V.2019.70. Figure 6 (above right). Backstrap (tempaut), jute of a gunny sack wrapped in a printed polyester fabric, used by Helen Manjan anak Atong, July-August 2019. National Museums Scotland, acc. no V.2019.71.3.

Figure 3 (above left). Raffia string, beeswax, indigo-dyed silk, porcupine quill, used by Helen Manjan anak Atong during the 2019 Edinburgh Festival Fringe performance. National Museums Scotland, acc. no V.2019.71.5-8. Figure 5 (above right). Work-in-progress on a wooden loom frame, with weaving tools, as used by Helen Manjan anak Atong during the 2019 Edinburgh Festival Fringe performance. Pua kumbu © Helen Manjan anak Atong. National Museums Scotland, acc. no V.2019.71.1-2 & 4.

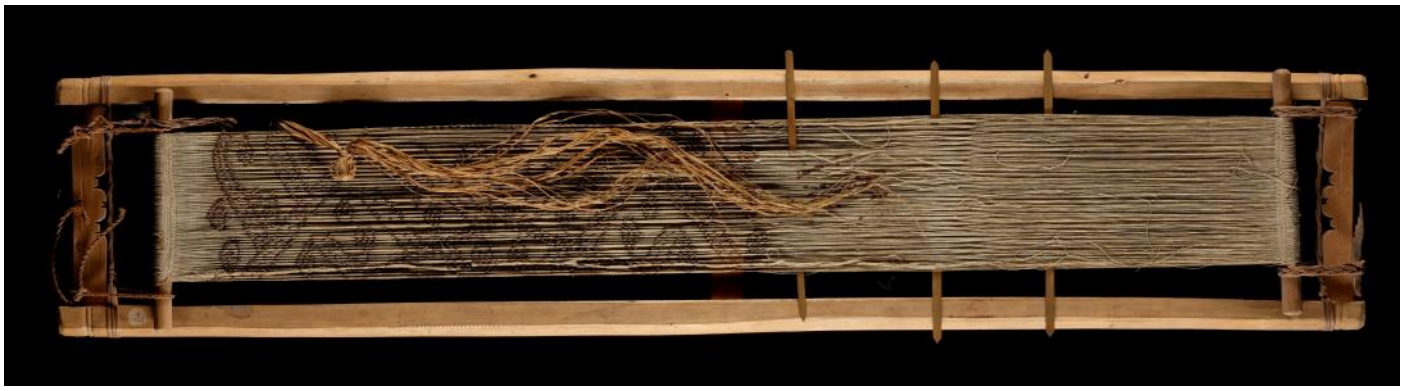

Figure 4. Tying frame with the warp threads stretched and prepared for dyeing. National Museums Scotland, John Hewitt collection, acc. no A.1909.349.

was the first time that Helen's work has been acquired by a museum, a fact of which she is very proud. She also confirmed in our email correspondence that the work-in-progress piece is not a spiritual *pua kumbu* intended for use in a ritual or ceremony and therefore can remain incomplete. Helen would sell finished *pua kumbu* weavings of this kind through Tanoti Crafts in Kuching. (H. Manjan 2022, personal communication via J. Fong, 19 January)

Historical Collection at NMS

During their visit to our Collection Centre, the Sarawak performance team was most interested in seeing objects that were related to their festival show: textiles, musical instruments, and warrior's costumes and swords. The members were from different cultural groups in Sarawak and had different interests and responses to the collection. In the following, I will discuss the textiles that Helen had the opportunity to see and comment on. Unless stated otherwise the information provided by Helen below originates from this visit (H. Manjan 2019, notes from visit, supplementary file, held in Department of World Cultures, 21 August).

The earliest examples of Iban ikat textiles in our collection – a man's jacket, a woman's skirt, and an uncut length of cloth – were donated in 1878 without further information. Helen was able to identify the motif on the skirt as a mythical fruit that only grows in the spiritual world, but which is craved by women in the early stages of pregnancy (Figure 7). We also discussed the uncut length of cloth which interestingly combines two different techniques on the warp, woven ikat and slit weave tapestry (Figure 8 overleaf). Fabrics like this would have been made into jackets, an important item of men's clothing, with the tapestry panel, or badge at the bottom of the back, as can be seen in the example in Figure 9. However, Helen suggested that this combination of weaving techniques is not practised any longer, not since her great-grandparents' lifetime.

Figure 7. Skirt cloth, by an unknown weaver, Sarawak, Malaysia, mid-19th century. National Museums Scotland, acc. no A.1878.59.18 B.

The first *pua kumbu* entered our collection in 1909 as part of an ethnographic collection assembled by John Hewitt (1880-1961), who worked as a curator at the Sarawak Museum from 1905-08. Hewitt was originally from Dronfield in Derbyshire, and NMS purchased his collection whilst he was briefly back in the UK before taking up a new post in South Africa. As a zoologist, it seems likely Hewitt's link with NMS initially came through our Natural Sciences department, as we purchased thousands of specimens from him. However, NMS appears to have the only ethnographic collection that he brought back to the UK with the exception of a few textiles at National Museums Liverpool (West 1984). It is possible that Hewitt was commissioned to collect ethnographic specimens by the Edinburgh Museum. He procured items documenting the stages of the ikat process, including the tying frame in Figure 4, a loom, tools and a variety of types of woven cloth.

Figure 8. Uncut length of ikat cloth with slit weave tapestry panel, by an unknown weaver, Sarawak, Malaysia, mid-19th century. National Museums Scotland, acc. no A.1878.59.18 C.

Although in some cases Hewitt provided technical information, he did not, or was not able to obtain explanations of the patterns of these textiles. Helen identified the *pua kumbu* in his collection as the palace, or *padong* of the God of War, Singalang Burong, who assumed the form of a brahminy kite whenever he descended from the sky realm to the land (Figure 10). This cloth is spiritually very powerful and could have been used to receive trophy heads acquired during head-hunting. It also depicts the seven omen birds who were Singalang Burong's sons-in-law; each of them is associated with a different bird. The Iban listened to these omen birds in relation to farming, war expeditions or other aspects of life.

Another, rather unusual *pua kumbu* was donated in 1959 and might be related to the political and cultural change that Sarawak experienced in the first half of the 20th century. According to Helen's comments during her visit, the *julok* of this weaving is 'Dancing wild palm trees. Travel the seas in prayer. For the hajj pilgrimage.' The 'dancing wild palm trees' stand for a ferry or bridge, while the reference to 'hajj pilgrimage' links the cloth to a Muslim context. More research is required to find further examples of ikat weavings with an Islamic subject. This cloth has uneven dimensions, and its design is mismatched as if the maker tried something new. Its muted brown colour seems also less common but was identified by Helen as a local plant dye.

In 2009, NMS was fortunate enough to receive a further *pua kumbu* woven between 1962 and 1978 (see back cover). Helen was unable to view this cloth at the time of her visit. However, the daughter of one of the leading master weavers of the Kapit region, herself a weaver, kindly provided the following information about this cloth in an email: The *julok* of the pattern translates as 'the waterfall creates sprays like fog. The cobra's nest is called Cenaga Umbang'. It is a very old pattern, woven by Iban women in Nanga Sempang, on the tributary of Sungai Kain, in Kapit division, including members of her own family. Unfortunately, their heirloom pieces were stolen, and they do not have this pattern any more in their collection. (Personal communication, via J. Fong, 1 November 2021).

Helen's response to seeing the *pua kumbu* cloths in our collection was performative. As with her own textiles during the festival programme, she instantly connected with the historical pieces in front of her through chanting their *julok*s, sometimes repetitively. The ability to create and understand these patterns, and their significance, comes from the oral histories and skills passed down through and in weaving from generation to generation. Interestingly, on one occasion, she concluded that the *julok* was confusing and the story and its pattern might have come to the weaver in a dream: it consists of a row of crocodile motifs; involves an adulterer; an altercation; the figure dies and becomes a spiritual being; and it features a drunken mad-man. Dream-weavers like Helen express their creativity in the configurations of more standardised motifs but also weave freely according to spiritual messages.

Figure 9. Jacket of ikat cloth with slit weave tapestry panel at back, by an unknown weaver, Sarawak, Malaysia, mid-19th century. National Museums Scotland, acc. no A.1878.59.18 A.

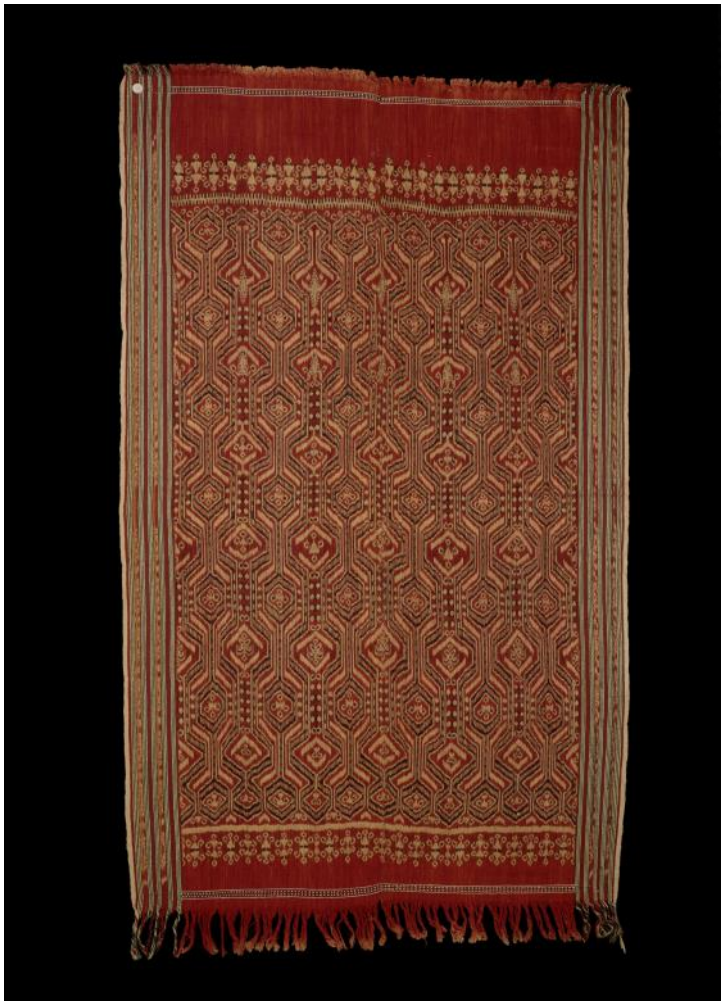

Figure 10. Pua kumbu*, ikat cloth, by an unknown weaver, Sarawak, Malaysia, 19th century. National Museums Scotland, John Hewitt collection, acc. no A.1909.354.*

Although we have a small collection, our ikat textiles span the mid-19th to 20th century and help document changes in weaving practices and traditions over time. Helen's 21st century cloth is an excellent addition that continues this story, documenting how one of the few remaining dream-weavers in Sarawak is adapting her methods of communication, designs and use of dyes, for her 'modern world' and ours too.

A Personal Conclusion

It was a huge privilege to meet Helen in August 2019. I am delighted that we seized the moment to connect over her weaving and our collection. For Helen and her team, it was a rare opportunity to access and see historical objects of their own culture outside Borneo. They appreciated the respect and care given to these objects and the textiles in our collection. Sharing their memories and knowledge about these objects was eye-opening for me. For Helen and her group, it was a discovery too as they did not know that we had this collection. There were emotional moments of close contact with items not made any longer in Sarawak but still of cultural relevance. We agreed that this opportunistic visit can only be a starting point for a much deeper engagement in the future.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to master weaver Helen Manjan anak Atong, writer Karen Shepherd (Cerava Sarawak), Jacqueline Fong (Director, Tanoti Crafts), and Friederike Voigt (Principal Curator, National Museums Scotland) who very kindly edited this paper. Without any one of them it would not have been possible.

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A Japanese wall hanging from the Meiji period (1868-1912) in the Horniman Museum

Julia Gresson, Fiona Kerlogue and Marilyn Leader

When the Horniman Museum opened its new World Gallery in spring 2018, a display exploring founder Frederick Horniman's perspectives on material culture was included, based on photographs and documents relating to his life, and more importantly a range of objects from his collections. Horniman was a founder member of the Japan Society, and it seemed appropriate to include one of several large wall hangings from Japan which featured in his original museum.

Figure 1. Embroidered wall hanging. 1200mm x . 1760mm. Horniman Museum number nn19813.

The hanging selected for the first World Gallery display was an example of Japanese embroidery (*shishū*) depicting tea pickers, probably collected by Horniman during his visit to Japan in 1895 and reflecting his involvement in the tea industry. However, for conservation reasons museums do not leave textiles on display for long periods of time, and the Museum decided recently that it was time to substitute a different hanging. The replacement, which will be mounted in the balcony area later this year, is something of a mystery (Figure 1).

The backing on which the embroidery is mounted is formed of layers of recycled *washi* paper covered in Japanese text, attached to a wooden stretcher. Onto this base layer, threads wrapped in strips of paper with metal foil attached have been laid in closely packed parallel horizontal rows and adhered to the paper to form the background. This has then been overlaid with a design worked in couched metal-wrapped threads (*koma-nui*) and applied figures, the latter worked in silk and metal threads and raised work, all stitched down through the layers. The design is a scene containing three figures with stylised clouds above them and the contours of hills below; on the hills are tufts of vegetation including iris flowers, a typical element in Japanese artistic expression, and between the figures at the centre several evenly sized circles formed of swirls. The figure in the centre at the top is standing, playing a flute. Below him to the right is a seated figure with a moustache who carries a fan. The bare-faced figure on the left appears to be pulling a sheet of fabric from a pile lying on top of a low table or footstool in Chinese lacquer style with inward curving feet.

The subject of the scene, clearly narrative, is yet to be identified, though it is likely to represent an ancient Chinese myth, a popular subject in Japan. One prominent figure in Chinese mythology is Zhongli Quan, one of the eight immortals, an alchemist whose magic fan allowed him to bring the dead back to life. Could he be the figure seated on the right? The figure at the centre seems to be a heavenly messenger, emerging from the cloths at the centre. He and the figure on the right both wear headgear indicating noble rank. The spirals are cloud dragons, a traditional Japanese pattern.

Although the hanging is relatively crude compared with much highly sophisticated work produced in Meiji Japan for the foreign market, it exhibits many of the characteristic features of Japanese embroidery. These include the evocation of dimension and texture through variations in stitch length and direction, through contrasts of lines and textures, and juxtapositions of materials of different qualities and colour.

Figure 2. Central figure with flute. Detail of embroidered wall hanging. Horniman Museum number nn19813.

The lower part of the hanging has very little texture over the ground field, with the plant motifs suggested in a linear way. These motifs are formed of double strands of silver-coloured metal/paper-wrapped threads laid on the surface and stitched down at intervals (*komadori ikkai*). The work has been done hastily and the threads are continuous, turning back on themselves at the top and bottom of the stems. It is a couchwork version of sketching. The upper part of the hanging has similarly worked evocations, probably of clouds, which could equally be smoke or water, filling the space.

The most important part of the hanging is the centre, inhabited by the three figures. This space is marked off below by a padded roll where two slopes in the landscape meet. Between these lie the collection of cloud dragons against and amongst which the figures emerge. The cloud dragons are formed of double strands of thread, each tightly packed in an outward coil (*hiraume-tamaume*) and stitched down at intervals. The smoother surfaces of these threads shine in contrast to the duller base of the background. The table and the figures appear to have been created separately and stitched down over the dragon clouds and background. The roughness of the clothing is evoked using a slightly different quality and therefore colour of metal/paper-wrapped thread. The table, in particular, stands out in a more copper-coloured material and smoother diagonal stitching. The clothing of the central figure contains more variety of this sort, and the folds of his sleeves and lower robe are emphasised with couched lines (Figure 2). He wears an overjacket, secured with a sash of a different colour and he wears a distinctive cap. In contrast, the garments of the man on the right, of two textures and colours, and particularly the boy or woman on the left in one simple tunic, are rougher in texture and less varied in colour (Figure 3). Is the maker suggesting through the stitching that they are more worldly, and that the figure emerging above the magic cloths is ethereal? But none of the fabrics suggested by this embroiderer is smooth or sumptuous; luxury could easily have been suggested using parallel stitches of silken yarns. The characters are humble, and the artist is clearly indicating rough clothing, probably hemp. Only the cloth above the table with its zig zag patterning gives any hint of sophistication, and nothing can compare with the shine of the ethereal cloud dragon discs against which they are all set.

Figure 3. Figure with fan. Detail of embroidered wall hanging. Horniman Museum number nn19813.

Figure 4. Figure on left. Detail of embroidered wall hanging. Horniman Museum number nn19813.

The faces of the three figures are what stand out most clearly (Figure 4). They are formed of laid silk threads couched in position, with the ears, nose and hat shaped with padding, and with the lips embroidered in red and the eyes in black and white. The hair of the figure on the left has been formed with a mixture of thicker cotton yarn, stitched down and with the ends, which project over the face at the fringe and over the shoulder below, indicated in lengths of finer black and blue silk threads.

It is not possible, of course, to know what attracted Horniman to this hanging. He may well have seen advertisements in guidebooks, from which he quoted copiously in his reports of his travels; there were advertisements by manufacturers of art fabrics in 'A Handbook for Travellers to Japan' published by John Murray, the fourth edition of which was published in 1894, shortly before he set off for Japan, for example (McDermott 2012, 50). Japanese manufacturers were catering for foreign customers by producing textiles for interior decoration, such as folding screens and hanging scrolls, largely as a result of participation in national and international exhibitions (Katsumi 2012, 66). The Horniman pieces are not generally of the fine quality displayed at these events, however. Far more sophisticated designs and artistry were employed in many of the embroideries brought home by western visitors in the Meiji period.

It is perhaps typical of the man to have selected a piece which seems to explore an eastern theme relating to simple people and local beliefs rather than one of the splendid displays of exquisite artistry in which exotic flowers and birds were depicted and which western visitors with a more ostentatious taste took home to adorn their houses.

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Discovering Boro - Japanese mending techniques to extend the life of fabric items and clothing

Mamiko Markham

Figure 1. Boro *kimono. Photo courtesy of Kogirekai Auction House. https://www.kogire-kai.co.jp/.*

From around the 18th to the early 20th century the use of *boro* techniques was an emotional everyday necessity for poor working-class farmers, mainly in the northeast of Japan. *Boro* textiles were very different from high-flying craftsmen's textiles and were regarded as mundane and practical, embedded in the hand-crafted narrative of the farmers' lives (Figure 1).

The word '*boro*' in Japanese can refer to 'tattered clothes or pieces of cloth', 'torn and broken things that have become useless', 'inconvenient things that have been hidden' and 'revealing faults'. The word '*boro*' may be used to say, for example, 'this is a *boro* car' or 'his *boro* has been exposed'. *Boro* is conceptually defined in this way in textile studies in western countries. *Boro* is rooted in the social culture of Japan and the sensitive mending culture of the working class, which until the early 20th century was a necessity.

In the 19th century, 80% of the population of Japan were workers. From April to October, peasants worked from early morning until sunset in the endless rice fields, cultivating rice as well as vegetables covered with mud. In the north-east region, heavy snowfalls between November and March forced them to stay indoors. They sheltered in their houses and made straw, rope, baskets, farming tools and *boro*.

Farmers' work clothes had to be strong enough to withstand hard labour and warm enough to protect them from the cold in winter. To achieve this, they patchworked over their work jackets, trousers and indoor textiles, repairing and reinforcing them to the extent that the original fabric became unrecognisable. The result is a patchwork of ingenious creations which helped them cope with some of the hardships of life and which became symbolic of the working-class living craft in the cold regions of Japan.

Figure 2. Child's sleeping mat, boro shikimono. *Cooper Hewitt collection.*

Boro items contain an exquisite gradation of shades of blue, created by sewing over and over again many cotton scraps dyed in Japanese indigo. The child's sleeping mat shown in Figure 2 would have been lovingly sewn by a mother to carry her baby on her back or in a basket, or to use as a blanket for sleeping at home. On the outer surface, stripes and checks of various sizes are sewn and arranged together in coordination with plain, faded indigo scraps of fabrics. Here, three- or single-striped scraps of fabric are sewn horizontally.

Figure 3. Striped kimono. 20th century. George Washington University collections.

Striped fabrics were originally used in the direction of the warp on kimonos for the middle-classes, such as samurai, in 19th century Japan, and were never used horizontally (Figure 3). The mother who used striped scraps of fabric for her baby's mat did not understand this. She was more interested in the richness of the scraps of striped fabric and their careful placement in the design. She may have been imagining the point of view her child would have when using the mat. The white-checked scraps of fabric are prominently placed near the centre, and the two tiny checked scraps of fabric are delicately symmetrical. Such striped and checked fabrics were envied by and charming to the working-class farmers, who until the late 19th century were forbidden by the government to wear patterned or red garments. They were forced to wear only plain, dark indigo or solid grey clothes.

Figure 4. Striped kimono. Kunisada. Woodblock print. 19th century. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The bitterly cold weather in the north-east of Japan made it difficult to grow cotton as could be done in areas such as Edo (Tokyo) and Kyoto, so farmers grew hemp or ramie, which could be grown in cold climates. They wove these fibres into garments for their daily clothes, but they were not as warm as cotton. They were never allowed to wear silk or wool. Thus, they needed to make their non heat-insulating clothes warm by quilting or patchwork. They bought discarded scraps of striped and checked cotton fabrics and old, used kimonos from peddlers coming from Edo and employed *boro* techniques to use these precious patterned scraps of fabric for keeping warm in combination with the sober cloth that the government allowed them.

Figure 5. Sample book. 1900. George Washington University collections.

In Edo, the stripes and checks used for *boro* were originally worn by the samurai, generally in the 18th and 19th centuries. At that time, striped and check-patterned kimonos were very popular in Edo. *Ukiyo-e* (woodblock) artists such as Utagawa Kunisada depicted new patterns of striped and check kimonos on posters for operatic plays in which the characters were dressed as samurai (Figure 4). These new striped and check patterns became the latest fashion. Kimono shops used swatch books to secure orders from upper-class customers (Figure 5).

The fashion for stripes and checks trickled down from the upper classes to the urban masses when the upper classes became bored with their kimonos. They sold them off to traders, who in turn sold these unwanted striped and check-patterned kimonos to the street vendors. The common people of Edo would buy them in the street markets, unpick them and then sew them back together, making a piece of cloth. These would be washed and recycled, made into kimono again, or sewn into covers for futons.

However, there were often still some torn pieces or scraps left over. These were sold to scrap dealers, whose business in Edo involved collecting the scraps, and either turning them into ash (for various purposes) or selling them to peddlers. The peddlers sold the scraps to farmers in markets northeast of Edo to be used for *boro*.

Figure 6. Patchwork boro *farmer's coat,* hanten*. 19th century. Minneapolis Institute of Art.*

For producing *boro*, farmers employed various hand-stitching methods including *sashiko,* embroidery using stitching to draw lines. This was practised by working-class women from the early 16th century onwards in many parts of the country, part of the patchwork method of *boro*.

The farmer's short coat in Figure 6 is intended to be worn for indoor rather than outdoor farm work. The large sleeves and narrow cuffs make it easy to move around and keep the wearer warm at the same time. The back of the faded Japanese indigo fabric, especially at the top of the shoulders and spine and at the bottom, where it is more vulnerable to wear and tear, is stitched in *sashiko* with plain shades of indigo scraps of fabrics to reinforce the protection of the body. *Boro* is an organic response to snowy winters and cold evenings in spring and autumn. The composition of this custom-made patchwork highlights the aesthetic of placing indigo next to brown scraps of fabric (dyed with lacquer and persimmon tannin). It is clear that this maker has joyfully and single-mindedly tried to make a nice warm coat for a member of her beloved family. It is also testimony to the small brave resistance of farmers, who were regulated by the government in terms of the clothes they wore, the houses they lived in and even the food they ate.

Figure 7. Sashiko *kimono. 1850. Metropolitan Museum of Art.*

The coat in Figure 7 is from Shonai in the north-eastern region. *Shonai sashiko* originated in the 18th century when second-hand Japanese indigo-dyed cotton kimonos, which had been difficult to obtain in the region, were brought in on merchant ships sailing along the economic artery between Osaka and Hokkaido. They were valuable and people in the Shonai area embellished them, producing kimonos with neat decorative patterns using the traditional *sashiko* method to give the kimono strength. In this way, more than 40 traditional patterns unique to the region were passed down.

The *sashiko* jacket has a cloisonné pattern, a symbol of wealth and happiness. It also features a pattern wishing for a good rice harvest. It is full of refinement and maker's fulfilment, with a clear regional emphasis as well as an evident sense of the joy of bringing new life into the second-hand kimono.

Figure 8. Fireman's short coat, hikeshi hanten*. 1850. Minneapolis Institute of Art.*

Sashiko garments were used not only in the north-east but also in the metropolis of Edo (Tokyo), where the population was about one million in the mid-18th and 19th centuries, and most of the houses were made of wood. Fires broke out frequently. The fireman's short coat, *hanten,* shown in Figure 8, is made of two or three layers of cotton stencilled with the symbol of the fireman's team and an amulet pattern. When a fire broke out, the firemen wore these sturdy *sashiko*-stitched *hanten*, but the stitching techniques employed allowed comfortable movement. The firemen attended the fire with their heads soaked with water. The wet *hanten* protected them from the dangerous sparks that could fall on them. At the sites of the fires, they used long poles to knock down buildings and fight back the fires in order to prevent them from spreading.

With such a *hanten,* a fireman would wear trousers (*momohiki*), also made with durable stitching. The *momohiki* were similarly designed to be easy to move around in, with extra fabric at the back from the hips to the knees, and ties at the front below the waist. The thighs, knees and ankles of the trousers, which need considerable movement, were deliberately constructed with elastic *sashiko* stitching. In this way the *sashiko* stitched fabric became more flexible; if parts of the fabric burned, small pieces of fabric and *sashiko* stitching were added.

The *hanten* coat was reversible, and decorated on the inside with bold and heroic pictures, such as a dragon descending from heaven, symbolizing the protection of God (Figure 10). The firemen who had played their part in putting out the fire would walk about as heroes, showing off the inner decoration of their *hanten*, to the admiration of the townspeople.

Figure 9. Print showing the inside of a fireman's coat. 1860. Rijksmuseum.

Conclusion

Boro collections in Japan and around the world represent the diversity of techniques and designs applied by their makers and the patience, joy and artistry hidden beneath the surface. They include not merely the patchwork of the north-east region's working-class farmers, Shonai *sashiko* and Edo's fireman's *sashiko*-embroidered short coats, but also embroidery on Aomori's Kogin and Hokkaido's Ainu nettle-fibre garments. The garments, woven from various plant fibres, reveal the richness of local and regional hand-stitching and mending cultures. Many of these garments are now fragile and urgently need conservation treatment to prevent further damage and to ensure their safe handling. Unfortunately, however, the materials used, especially for example, sewing thread, often 19th-century Japanese futon cotton thread, are no longer produced in Japan today. Sewing methods are also very personal, and the numbers of inheritors in the north-east region are decreasing rapidly, creating a precarious situation and issues which are difficult to solve. Today, as more *boro* collections are available online, it is hoped that textile enthusiasts and researchers from all over the world will get together to address these conservation concerns.

Mamiko Markham is an ORTS member. Her PhD research is on 'Japonisme and the Silver Studio Katagami stencil collection of the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture'.

Growing up with Carpets

Sofia Javadi

Growing up with antique rug dealers as parents handed me the opportunity of an immediate introduction to this exquisite art form. Visitors to our shop were often mystified by 'moving carpets' from beneath which a child emerged. Carpets were my playground and though I was then indifferent to how special these rugs were, I believe that I was subconsciously forming a connection with them. Now in my mid twenties, there's nothing that evokes a sense of comfort in me more than the musty scent of a pile of old rugs.

Figure 1. The author as a toddler on a rare antique Khotan rug that went on to be exhibited at the Hali Fair.

Another key feature of my childhood was travelling, as any antiques dealer from the pre-online auction era would understand. Weekends and school holidays consisted of frequent road trips across the UK, viewing as many auction houses as we could. I applaud my parents for their ability to keep me and my little brother entertained during those long journeys. They were so triumphant, in fact, that one of my earliest words was 'Cattlecod' - an attempt to request the auction catalogue! I even dabbled in our weaving department, commissioning my favourite Crayola butterfly drawing to be woven into a rug.

It's no surprise that I grew up eager to be involved in the family business. Thames Carpets was founded in 1956 by Joseph Bernadout. The collage pictured below displays a collection of historical souvenirs of the business. I'm not sure who the people in the photograph are but I've been told that the man sitting at the table is possibly the then Shah of Iran. He was known to be passionate about encouraging the art of carpet weaving. Even without this assumption, it tells us that the business originates from a notable carpet shop based in the Middle East.

Figure 2 (above right). The butterfly drawing rug.

Figure 3 (below). A collage relating to the business in earlier times.

Figure 4. Exploring an antique rug fair with Mum.

My father worked in a carpet weaving factory from a young age in Northern Iran. He came to England in the 1980s to study mathematics at university, but was pleasantly surprised to discover the country's appreciation for oriental carpets. With his rug weaving expertise and an unwavering passion for the art, he left university and embarked on a career in hand woven rugs and textiles.

It seems the 1980s was heaven for the rug industry. My dad has an endless collection of entertaining stories from his adventures. The characters were an eccentric cast of dealers and collectors. I recently had the pleasure of meeting one of his old friends, who is the owner of a well established rug business in New York. He told me a great story of how my dad once bid on a rug at an auction for £22,000 with only £50 to his name. He was confident it was a masterpiece! Fortunately this dealer called him and offered to buy it at £2000 more than he had paid and to collect the rug himself. A serendipitous ending to a brave move.

I love the stories of the epic country house sales that lasted several days, selling all sorts of antiquities, with bidders competing on hundreds of items without hesitation. My father actually joked to the auctioneer of one of these auctions many years later remarking ‘that auction cost me my marriage’ to which the auctioneer replied ‘me too’.

In 1980 my Dad formed a specialist team of repairers in Lincolnshire that worked with many prestigious clients. Thames Carpets contacted the team, needing someone who could reweave the signature on a rug that their repairer had accidentally removed. They went on to work together regularly and when Joseph Bernadout's sons retired my dad was delighted to be given the opportunity to purchase Thames Carpets. In 2001 we moved to Henley-on-Thames, the home of the business.

Figure 5 (above). Dad and me in his repair workshop.

Figure 6 (below). Cutting from a 1996 newspaper article celebrating the 40th anniversary of Thames Carpets.

16 Henley Standard, June 21st, 1996 Editorial: Tel. (01491) 572178 Fax (0149

Carpet shop weaves its way to anniversary

A Henley carpet shop will celebrate 40 years in business with an open day tomorrow (Saturday).

Thames Carpets, of Reading Road, specialises in the restoration, repair, cleaning and sale of oriental and antique carpets.

At the open day, visitors will be able to watch carpet-weaving in action and see traditional repair techniques, as well as looking at an array of oriental carpets.

A family business, the company was founded 40 years ago by Joseph Benardout and is now run by his son, David Benardout, and son-in-law, Cecil Aigin.

Previous jobs include restoring the carpets of Windsor Castle after the fire two years ago, cleaning the carpet at Westminster Abbey for a royal wedding, and much work for the National Trust.

Those who bring in their own rugs will receive free appraisals and valuations. Thames Carpets will be open from 10 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. tomorrow.

Bahran Babreh uses traditional methods to weave this rug.

Figure 7 (above). Our shop in Henley-on-Thames, 2005.

Figure 8 (below). Comparison between a Sewan Kazak reproduction (left) and an antique Sewan Kazak (right).

The experience I've gained at Thames Carpets has been invaluable. The expertise within the business and the trust of clients has enabled me to work with exceptional people who have been greatly inspiring and supportive. I've handled items that I only dreamed of working with so early into my career and discovered that nothing educates you more than hands-on experience. Whether it's inspecting a rug for restoration or examining a new item of stock, being able to see and touch the rug teaches you things you simply cannot learn from a photograph. It exposes you to the subtle differences in the quality of materials.

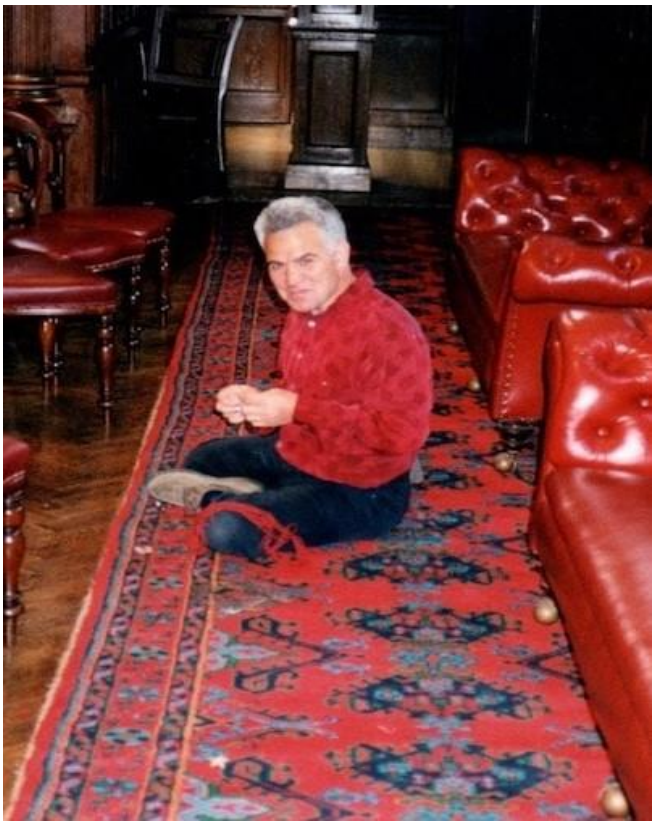
One of the most beneficial lessons I've learnt so far is the importance of being able to identify the quality of colours. The best way to understand this is to compare them. In Figure 8 the rug on the right is an antique Sewan Kazak. Even from a photograph we're able to see the impressiveness of its colours in comparison to the contemporary reproduction on the left. One of my favourite styles of antique carpets are Oushaks. They provide an excellent example of how top quality natural dyes can be both soft yet vibrant, such as the one in Figure 10 (facing page).

Working with our weaving and repair department has taught me the importance of using high quality materials for every element of the carpet. When dead wool is used for the pile it appears dull and lifeless, it's also brittle and not durable. If poor quality silk is used it has an extremely short lifespan and the pile will wear down to the foundation quickly. Though less visible, the warp and weft are just as vital for longevity. For example, the beautiful arts and crafts carpets by William Morris, though masterpieces, are now beginning to crack and come apart as the jute foundation rots over time. We consider all of these factors when making our own carpets and have the ability to handle every stage of the manufacturing process from design to weaving. We are currently in the process of designing a contemporary collection to cater for our clients desiring a more modern look. These carpets will be extremely durable and made from natural fibres. It's an exciting project and a great opportunity for creativity and collaboration.

Figure 9. Antique Oushak rug, currently in stock at Thames Carpets.

Last summer I joined the carpet cleaning side of the business to better understand its process. It was a highly positive experience. I got to spend sunny days immersed in our workshop's meditative rural surroundings, plus I had the excuse of not needing to attend the gym all summer - one of my favourite and strangely attainable excuses… Most importantly, it alerted me to the lesser quality of artificial fibres; for example viscose. In the cleaning industry viscose is considered a high risk material. The fibres used to make viscose undergo a highly aggressive chemical process in order to make them soft and shiny. This makes them extremely fragile and unpredictable when it comes to cleaning. As a result, many viscose rugs are simply thrown away. These materials are not biodegradable and only add to the problem of waste material.

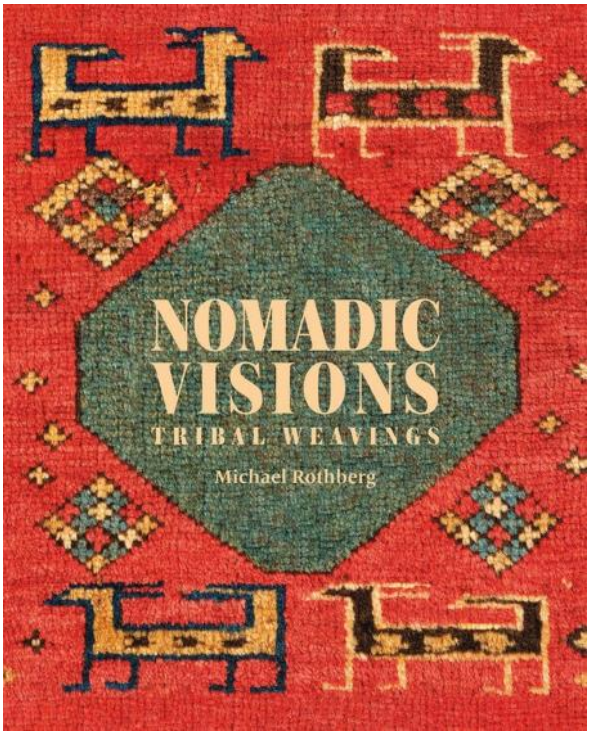
Figure 10. Dad on a carpet he wove as a replacement for the damaged originals at Stafford County Hall, 1994.



The beauty of antique carpets is that they are made to be lived with and enjoyed for generations. If properly cared for, they can last several lifetimes (see front cover image). Unfortunately there are a large number of poor quality rugs flooding the contemporary rug market, at outrageous and misleading prices. I endeavour to inform people of the importance of considering the quality of the rugs they're buying, not only for aesthetic purposes, but for the economic and environmental benefits.

It's clear to see that our love for antique carpets has not dwindled and rightly so. It's a rare delight to find something that is artistic, of exceptional quality and functional, not to mention the amount of history they carry with them, whether it's a villager's rug that was woven intermittently throughout a lifetime, resulting in an incongruous design and shape, or a piece commissioned for royalty. I often wonder what these rugs have seen, every footstep leaving a mark of the person gone by. I believe that they do so much more than their original purpose of providing warmth, comfort and decoration — that they have a more divine purpose, which they so humbly achieve. It's this which makes my clients so often refer to them as 'part of the family' and this, I absolutely agree with.

Sofia Javadi is an ORTS member.



Nomadic Visions. Tribal Weavings from Persia and the Caucasus.

By Michael Rothberg

Hali Publications & The Near Eastern Art Research Center, 2021.

Hardback. 431 pages, 250 colour and 20 black &white illustrations.

£75 (available online for under £50).

ISBN 13 978-1898113829.

I am always suspicious of books based on private collections; quite often they are vanity projects which don't tell you much other than the taste and interest of the collector. However, this book on piled bags is about as far away from that kind of publication as one can imagine.

It is divided into three chapters:

1. Context
2. Transcaucasia & North Persia and
3. South & East Persia

Chapter 1 sets out to paint a background in terms of historical movements of people in Iran and Transcaucasia, which explains to the reader why certain groups of people that produced these artefacts were living where they were. It also includes aspects of design and symbolism without overinvesting into the latter.

The main body of the book, chapters 2 and 3, is divided into ten sections, some of which are tribal and some of which are geographical, the reason being that in an area such as Transcaucasia and North Persia, there was a melting pot of different peoples – all living in the same area, sometimes in close proximity, influencing each other but still producing slightly different bags whilst retaining their own weaving identity.

The author has avoided the temptation to make guesses about the geographical or tribal origin of some pieces where he is not certain, which is very much to be applauded – it is never a bad thing to say 'I don't know'. This cautious approach extends to dating – the author hardly ever gives a date, preferring phrases like 'this very old set'.

Bag face. North-Central Azerbaijan, Sarab vicinity, Shahsevan (?) 69 x 69 cm.

Double saddle bag, khorjin*. Qashqa'i. 53 x 99 cm.*

When a dealer or serious collector looks at a weaving, one of the first things they do is turn it over and look at the back, where a wealth of information is to be found about materials used, colours and the skill of the weaver. Women used to teach their daughters to weave in the way they were taught, and the technique thus learned was something that stayed with them for the rest of their lives; irrespective of the pattern a weaver chose, her work always carried with it that signature which did not change. So whilst I appreciate that in a book of this volume – and it is a heavy tome – it might have been difficult to include pictures of the backs of these bags without spoiling the look of the book, I would have personally loved to have seen them.

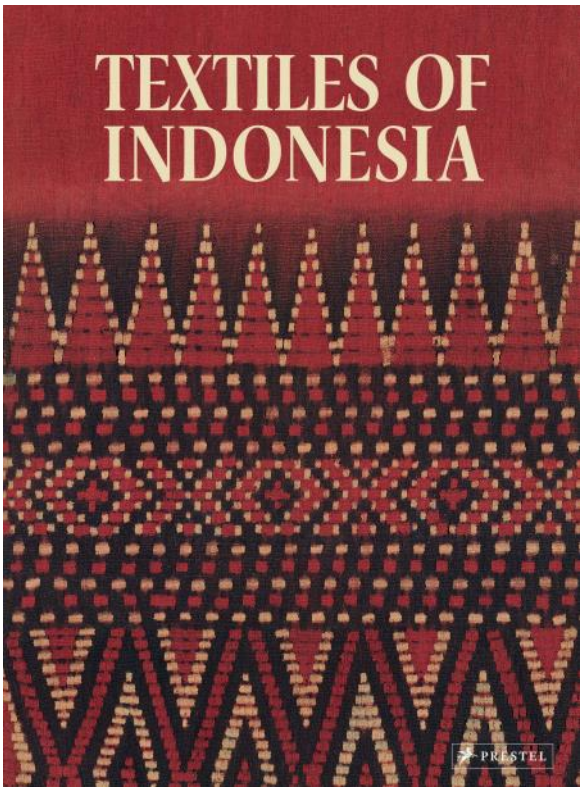
There is almost nothing I would take issue with in this book, except the assertion that it was quicker to make soumak rather than piled bags. In fact, when I used to talk to Dobag weavers in Turkey, they always stressed that making jijims was a much more complicated process requiring an extra degree of concentration to produce the pattern, and they all found weaving pile carpets much easier and faster.

In the case of the Quchan Kurds, most of their bags are certainly either soumak or kelim bags with supplementary decorations, but that is nothing to do with the time it took to make them. Rather, it is a question of tradition. They did also produce piled bags, only one of which is included in the book. It would appear at times that the author affords soumak bags a superiority or predominance, often referring to them as weavings providing templates for piled bags, a view that I cannot share.

The only other slight reservation I have relates to the production side of this book. On occasion the author talks about the "sweet colour" of a piece, and with my own experience of these types of weavings, I can quite understand what he means. However, I don't always see that in the colour of the reproductions.

Altogether, I am impressed with this book and consider it a worthy contribution to rug scholarship and a welcome addition to our library.

Christopher Legge



Textiles of Indonesia: The Thomas Murray Collection

Published by Prestel, 2021.
Hardback, 556 pages, 380 colour plates, with many additional colour details, historic photographs, maps and drawings.
£75.00 (available online for just under £50).
ISBN 978-3-7913-8765-9.

This large and significantly heavy – approximately 4 kilos – book may be considered on several levels: as a historic record of textile production across the Indonesian archipelago; as a reference guide to these textiles; as a collector's trophy record; as a sale catalogue; as a coffee table volume; and much more. Having read it from cover to cover my overwhelming reaction by the end was one of wonder at the huge range of incredible textile weavings achieved by the residents of the islands, created with great skill using the most basic of technologies deeply rooted in the historic cultures of the inhabitants. The printing quality is first class, particularly the reproduction of the colour images. There are many detail shots of the textiles which allow sight down almost to the thread level. The colours of the reproduced, largely natural dyes glow softly.

The volume is well ordered with clear island and textile type headings. There is an initial map of the whole region, then maps of each island or island group covered at the beginning of sections. The information on each plate is given in a standard format, all of which aids reference backwards and forwards from the figure and item references given in the text. As well as giving ethnic group and geographic origin, material, size, technique, estimated age, including 14C radiocarbon dating if known, each entry lists where a textile has been exhibited or included in a publication.

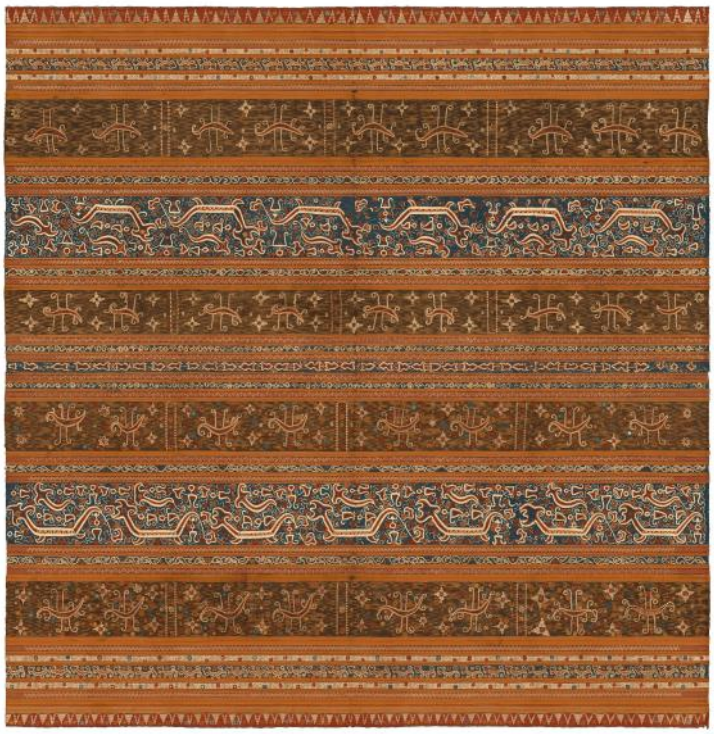
The explanatory text varies by island and sometimes within an island. It is from a range of contributors, largely friends of Murray, most of whom are academic and/or museum experts in the textiles of the Indonesian archipelago, often with specific expertise on a particular island. There is also some limited text contribution from Murray himself. A useful summary at the back of the book gives the background of each contributor and very much reads as a who's who of experts in textiles of the archipelago: Lorraine V. Aragon, Joanna Barrkman, Christopher Buckley, Kristal Hale, Valerie Hector, Janet Alison Hoskins, Itie van Hout, Esuko Iwanaga, Fiona Kerlogue, Eric Kjellgren, Brigitte Khan Majlis, Robyn Maxwell and Sandra Sardjono. In the text accompanying the plates the 'expert' contributions are generally summaries and not consistent in style. It is not always clear who has written various parts of the text. Although there are fairly concise sections with the authors' names below there are considerable areas of text with no attribution. There is an extensive bibliography provided by the expert contributors and the notes to each section bear close examination to tease out more detail.

Historic black and white contextual photos where they appear are very welcome although, aside from a very limited number of images within some contributors' text, they are not linked to the textile plates. I found it rather frustrating in the areas where I knew more that the text did not take me further; indeed I was left asking why a specific ethnic group name or location had not been given. It has the 'feel' of a catalogue of a museum database and not a research collection. The scope is huge therefore the detail is slim. This is due in part, of course, to lack of space – the book is already far too big and unwieldy. It also relates to the fact that the collection was largely put together from textiles which had left their places of

origin either via runners in the field or because the textiles had come from other collections. Murray says in his introduction that his initial collecting had focused on acquiring textiles in the best condition but then he came to realise that often meant they were later pieces and he had missed important earlier items. He therefore sought to remedy this by acquiring items from long held private collections in the west. Thus the textiles included in the book are overwhelmingly historic rather than contemporary, with little sense of where traditions may still survive. There is considerable emphasis on the possible age of each piece, with a large number radiocarbon dated (^{14}C). Murray is known for the investment that he has made in radiocarbon dating his textiles and this volume surely brings together the largest assemblage of textiles where this has been carried out. Appendix 4a gives a detailed description of the ^{14}C dating method which, by virtue of its variation ranges, can generally only provide a broad indication of age. This is followed by 4b, giving the detailed ^{14}C probability information for each piece so dated. Perhaps the book should be called 'Historic textiles of Indonesia' as it is very much an overview of old textiles of the region.

Very many of the textiles feature strongly delineated motifs and there is a temptation to identify what the motifs represent, a lizard, young shoots of bamboo or a decapitated head, for example, and then to go further to say what deeper meaning they signify. This can be dangerous territory, especially as many weavers in the region today have lost their knowledge of old meanings due to an overlay of monotheistic religions or the pressures of modernisation; or they may be reluctant to share any knowledge with outsiders. Murray admits to a fascination with the meaning of motifs: 'I am spellbound by the significance the motifs might hold. Can these elements be decoded, perhaps revealing the wisdom of the ancients?' He even risks writing a section on 'A Sungkit Pictorial Vocabulary' of Ibanic textiles of Borneo – surely one of the most hotly contested and vicious areas of academe. Elsewhere some contributors hazard guesses at what different motifs may represent.

The book's geography is closely related to Murray's personal interest and therefore somewhat idiosyncratic. Although the title is 'Textiles of Indonesia' none is presented from either Java or Bali, although individual contributors include references to textiles from Bali in their comments. Textiles from Borneo are not limited to those from Kalimantan, the Indonesian part of Borneo, but ignore modern national boundaries. It would seem that Murray is not inspired by the batik of Indonesia but is greatly attracted to woven textiles, especially with ikat or beadwork. In his introduction he states that his focus is very much on early textiles from cultures in the great islands of Sumatra, Borneo and Sulawesi or the very small and remote islands far removed from outside influences.



Whilst it is easy to pick on omissions and certain limitations of the volume there is no doubt it is beautifully produced and pays homage to the amazing breadth and quality of the textiles which the linked but disparate cultures across the islands have produced. It is a privilege to see so many fine examples assembled together.

Pamela Cross

Woman's ceremonial skirt, tapis*, unstitched.*
Abung people, Lampung interior.

Cotton, silk, metallic-wrapped threads, mirrors; embroidery, warp ikat, appliqué.

Late 17th to 19th century.

Ex collection David and Shirley Rowen.

119 x 119 cm.

The London Antique Rug and Textile Art Fair

This year's LARTA Fair, held at Battersea Park from 25th to 30th January, involved 17 dealers displaying a range of fabulous rugs and textiles. Notable among them was Alberto Levi from Milan (below left, with Christopher Legge), whose stall, showing magnificent Art Deco examples from his wide-ranging collection, stood out on the mezzanine. His *saf* with seven double niches and 17th century needlework picture also caught the eye. Another first time LARTA exhibitor was Ian Shaw of Glasgow, with a fine selection of African textiles. It was fascinating to see a carpet restorer at work, from Ebi Shafagh's London carpet restoration studio. Among the many other exhibitors were Anas Al Akhoann of The Oriental Rug Gallery in Haslemere (bottom of page on the left), and of course, Aaron Nejad (below right, with Gavin Strachan and Fiona Kerlogue), who organises the Fair so beautifully each year.

TALKS

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

Talks are held at the University Women's Club, which is behind the Dorchester Hotel in London, transmitted simultaneously via Zoom, and recorded.

Buses 13, 16, and 36 go from Victoria Station to Park Lane. Bus 38 goes to Piccadilly. Both stop at the Hard Rock Café bus stop. The nearest tube stations are Green Park and Hyde Park Corner. Doors open at 6 pm. Please sign your names at reception, and go upstairs to the elegant first floor drawing room, where there will be a pay bar.

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

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With thanks to Pia Rainey for managing the monthly newsletters

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

The deadline for content for the summer issue is June 1st 2022.

Back cover: Pua kumbu, *ikat cloth, by unknown weaver, Sarawak, Malaysia, c. 1975. National Museums Scotland, acc. no V.2009.14. See article by Rosanna Nicolson beginning on page 8.*