

OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

Newsletter No. 4

June 1996

THE FIRST YEAR

It is just a year since the first issue of this newsletter appeared and the Oxford Asian Textile Group was born, so I thought we might take a look and see how healthy the baby is.

As many of you will know, the baby was the brainchild of Ruth Barnes, research associate in the Department of Eastern Art at the Ashmolean Museum, who had been sounding out the idea among her contacts for several months. As most of these were enthusiastic, she decided to go ahead and invited four of us to an informal meeting at which a plan was worked out. It was decided to name the organization *The Oxford Asian Textile Group* and to publish a newsletter - of which I was appointed editor - three times a year. It was also decided to have at least three events a year which all members would be eligible to attend free, as well as a number of other events for which a charge might have to be made. It was further decided to launch the group with a rather special inaugural meeting in the autumn. Finally it was decided to dispense with formal rules until the group was established, and for this reason an initial subscription of £10 was agreed to cover two years' membership.

In the event, the newsletter appeared three times as planned (this is the first issue of the second year). The first, last June, briefly described the aims of the group, invited people to join, and gave notice of the inaugural meeting. It was sent to about 150 people likely to be interested, and the response was very gratifying. The second newsletter was slightly thicker and more meaty and was sent not only to paid-up members, but also to those who had expressed an intention of joining, so acting as a reminder. The third number was slightly thicker still and contained the first research report.

The inaugural meeting was held on 28 September 1995 at the Pitt Rivers Museum and was a great success. Sheila Paine, author of *The Afghan Amulet*, gave a wonderful introduction to her exhibition *Embroideries from Islamic Journeys*. There was very little formal business, just Ruth describing the wealth of Asian textiles in Oxford and how she hoped the formation of the group would make them more widely known. It was a very relaxed social occasion.

Four more events have been held since then: in December Marianne Ellis showed a small group of members some of the remarkable Fatimid and Mamluk embroideries from the Ashmolean's Newberry Collection; in January Ruth Barnes and Felicity Wood showed textiles from Indonesia and spoke about their recent travels there; in April Ruth Barnes showed some of the Indian block-printed textiles from Egypt in the Ashmolean's collection which have recently been radio-carbon dated (the subject of an article by her in the third newsletter); and in May Shelagh Vainker, Assistant Keeper responsible for Chinese Art in

the Ashmolean, lectured on 11th century Chinese textiles of the Northern Song Dynasty. All were well attended.

By the end of the first year we have 141 paid-up members, which we find really encouraging. Anyone who joins from now on will be asked to pay a subscription of £5 to cover the Group's second year, and, if the baby is still healthy, it is intended then to hold a general meeting to put the whole thing on a more formal footing.

What are our other plans for the future? The second year's programme will start with an exciting visit on 7 September (see panel, p.3). It is hoped that a second meeting may be combined with a social event in late November or early December - see next issue for details. If anyone has any particular requests, or ideas for subjects of meetings, or would like to volunteer a talk or demonstration, please let one of us know - Felicity Wood (tel. 01865 54281) is our programme secretary, or you can contact Ruth Barnes or me at the Ashmolean.

The newsletter will continue to appear three times a year too, and it is hoped to make it fatter and more informative. Again, any ideas will be welcome. As well as information about other organizations (of which the first is to be found in this issue), I hope to include reports of meetings, short descriptions of important collections, general articles, reports on research in hand, reviews and a correspondence section (one letter so far!) - so it is up to you: please write in.

Finally, though 141 members is a good number for a one-year-old group, we would still like to make it more, so please tell your friends about us. I am willing to send a copy of a newsletter to anyone potentially interested. Our first year has not been without its teething troubles, with the result that we are already on to our third membership secretary! She is Janet Partridge, c/o Department of Eastern Art, Ashmolean Museum, Beaumont St, Oxford OX1 2PH, (tel. 01865 278067, fax. 01865 278078) and she will be pleased to receive names, addresses, fields of interest and subscriptions of new members.

Phyllis Nye

TEXTILE STUDY TOUR OF INDIA

There are still places available on the Costume Society's tour to India, 28 December 1996 to 20 January 1997. The itinerary includes Delhi, Jaipur, Agra, Orissa, Hyderabad and Andhra Pradesh. The cost is £2500. For further information phone Bridget Marrow, 0171-624 5851.

Our Event for Autumn 1996: Please Come**Saturday 7th September:****Visit to Sheila Paine's House**

Sheila Paine's wonderful collection of textiles was first introduced to many of us through her exhibition at the Pitt Rivers Museum last autumn and winter. She has now agreed to open her house for a visit by members of the Oxford Asian Textile Group. The location is in Blewbury, Oxfordshire, in an idyllic rural setting, and the house is packed full of treasures of beauty and interest.

Numbers are restricted to 12 for this occasion. There is a charge of £ 20.00 for the visit, which includes coffee on arrival, a glass of wine with your lunch (bring your own sandwich or snack), and tea or coffee at the end of the visit. Details of how to get to Sheila's house and when to meet there will be given to those who sign up for the event.

If you want to participate in this outing please send your name, address, telephone number, and cheque for £ 20.00 made out to OATG to: Janet Partridge, Department of Eastern Art, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford OX1 2PH. You can also put your name on the list by phoning or sending a fax: Tel. 01865 278067, Fax 01865 278078. In this case you must also send a cheque, though, to confirm your place.

THREATENED MUSEUM CLOSURE

It is with dismay that we learn of the decision by Norfolk Museums Service and Norwich City Council to close Strangers Hall Museum indefinitely. The textile and costume collection has been built up over a hundred years, mainly by donation, and contains items dating from the sixteenth century onwards. The collection of 600 shawls is particularly important, tracing the line from Indian to French, Paisley and above all Norwich shawls. The collection is an East Anglian treasure and truly one of the finest collections in the country. It is possible that it might be split up, or even sold off to provide funding for necessary fire prevention work.

In 1995 it was my pleasure to organize and lead a textile study weekend in Norwich. I had requested that members of the Textile Society might study eighteenth century embroideries. With splendid effort from Assistant Curator Cathy Terry, we studied an array of delightful pieces, including a seventeenth century coif, spot and band samplers, whitework depicting merman and mermaid, crewel work, bead work, raised work, hollie point, needlepainting and stitched maps. What a privilege! What pleasure! What learning!

Although few Asian textiles are involved, I am sure that members of O.A.T.G. with their own enthusiasm for textile study and research will appreciate a request to write to the following, stating their concern:

Bill Davidson
Chairman, Norfolk Joint Museum Service
County Hall
Martineau Lane
NORWICH
NR12DH

or The Leader
Norwich City Council
City Hall
NORWICH
Norfolk

Freda Chapman / Vice-Chairman, The
Textile Society

PRECIOUS CARGO - TRADE WINDS TO CATHAY

This is the title of an exhibition to be held from 5 July to 2 November 1997 at the National Museums of Scotland in Edinburgh, designed to coincide with the transfer of Hong Kong from British to Chinese rule. The exhibition will be devoted to the China Trade between Europe and the Far East which flourished from the 16th to the 19th centuries, mainly in goods such as tea, porcelains, lacquer furniture, a range of "exotic" novelties and, of most interest to the O.A.T.G., silks. Exhibits will be drawn from the National Museum of Scotland's collections in all departments, supplemented by loan material from public and private Scottish sources to stress the dominant Scottish contribution to this trade, and, where applicable, from other U.K. and Hong Kong sources.

The trade continues to-day though mainly in invisible services such as banking and finance, to which Scots still make a significant contribution which will also be featured in the exhibition. There will also be a publication tracing the history of this trade, illustrated with objects from the exhibition.

I am now compiling an exhibit list and an archive of documentary material to record the Scottish role in the China Trade and activities which developed from it. Scots founded the major trading company of Jardine and Matheson, continue to be involved in the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, and were active as missionaries, doctors, explorers and artists in China.

If you have any sources of information about China and Hong Kong, either through direct family connexions or through friends, neighbours and professional contacts, I should much like to hear from you. Artefacts, correspondence, photographs and personal souvenirs are all of interest. Although the exhibition is primarily concerned with the Scottish aspect of this trade, please do not think that if you are not a Scot I do not want to hear from you: if you feel you have something to contribute please get in touch anyway. You can contact me at the Royal Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh, EH1 1JF, tel. (direct line) 0131-247 4275), fax. 0131-220 4819 or Email [jjj\(at\)nms.ac.uk](mailto:jjj(at)nms.ac.uk)

Jennifer Scarce Exhibition
Project Director

SUMMER SCHOOLS

The Oxford Summer School of Arts and Crafts -

- will be held at Milham Ford School (off Marston Road, Oxford) from 22-27 July 1996 and will offer a number of courses of potential interest to textile enthusiasts. These include *Willow Basketmaking* with Mary Butcher, *Creative Textiles* with Dawn Clarke, *Hexagonal Plaiting* with Polly Pollock, *Computer Design for Textiles* with Maggie Grey, *Decorated Surfaces* with Jo Dixon, *Twined Textiles* with Linda Mowat, *Creative Embroidery* with Sue Ragley and *Cords, Ropes, Tassels and Knots* with Anne Norman. Tuition costs £25 per day (10% concession for students and senior citizens). For further information contact Richard Speed (Summer School Director), Gable End, Hatford, nr Faringdon, Oxon, SN7 8JF, tel. 01367 710593.

The Herbal Summer School -

- to be held at the Geffrye Museum, London from 22-26 July 1996 includes one day of potential interest to O.A.T.G. members: *I'm Blue for You*, on Friday 26 July deals with the use of indigo and other herbal dyes in North Africa and the Middle East, with a lecture by Penelope Ody and workshop by Diane Sullock. Tuition costs £35 per day, including lunch, V.A.T., and materials. For further information contact the Geffrye Museum, Kingsland Road, London, E2 SEA, tel. 0171-739 9893, fax. 0171-729 5647.

NEWS FROM THE V.& A.

Indian and South-East Asian Collection

During 1996 the Museum's reserve collections of Indian and South-East Asian sculpture and decorative arts (some 20,000 objects) are being rehoused in new facilities. The Indian and South-East Asian Department regrets that as a result it will be temporarily suspending its opinions and appointments service for the rest of this year. The service will recommence on Tuesday 7 January 1997. This temporary inconvenience will make it possible to make the whole of the Indian and South-East Asian reserve collection accessible.

William Morris

A major exhibition celebrating the life and work of this influential designer, artist, poet and radical thinker, is now running and will continue until 1 September 1996. An accompanying book, *William Morris*, edited by Linda Parry, curator of the exhibition has been published, price £29.95 hardback and £19.95 paperback (available at the V.& A. only). A number of events has been organized in association with the exhibition, including a three-day conference, 21-23 June, courses, lectures and gallery talks. For further information contact the Education Department at the Museum on tel. 0171-938 8638.

A Glimpse of Guatemala

Though Guatemala is not part of Asia, members may be interest in this small exhibition that runs in gallery 95 until 18 August. The Maudslay Bequest of 19th century textiles from that country, comprises 15 pieces which are the oldest surviving non-archaeological Guatemalan textiles.

Public Lectures at 2.30 p.m.

Thursday 27 June - *Islamic Motifs and William Morris*, gallery talk by Eileen Graham.
 Monday 8 July - *William Morris Textiles*, slide lecture by Linda Parry Wednesday
 24 July - *Depictions of Dress in Chinese Art*, gallery talk by Andrew Bolton. Monday 16
 September - *The Use of Colour in Korean Textiles*, gallery talk by Beth McKillop.

EXHIBITIONS

Living Colour: Clothes and Textiles from the Indian Sub-Continent - 6 July 1996 to 23 January 1997 at the Gallery of English Costume, Platt Hall, Rusholme, Manchester, tel. 0161-224 5217.

Textiles from the Museum's own collection and the Whitworth Art Gallery are supplemented by contemporary textiles and clothing from museums and private collections in the north-west.

Traditional Textiles from the Global Village - 15 June to 22 September at the Shipley Art Gallery, Prince Consort Road, Gateshead, NE8 4JB, tel. 0191-477 1495.

The exhibition comprises dyed and woven fabrics from Africa and Asia, applique and embroidery from India and South America, and quilting from Britain. There is a programme of associated events throughout the duration of the exhibition; send S.A.E. for details.

The Kimono Inspiration: Art and Art-to-Wear in America - until 1 September at the Textile Museum, Washington, D.C.

This exhibition traces the transformation of this quintessentially Japanese garment from its ethnic origins through to its role in the contemporary American Art-to-Wear Movement, in which clothing is a means of artistic expression. A book under the same title by Rebecca Stevens et al is available from the Museum, \$55.00 hardback, \$34.95 paperback.

For further information, contact the Museum at 2320 S.Street, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20008 U.S.A., Tel. (202) 667-0441.

TEXTILES OF THE LOWER MEKONG

A seminar on this subject was held on 24 February 1996 at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney under the auspices of the Asian Arts Society of Australia (see below).

The enormous interest in this area was evidenced in the full house that assembled for the seminar. There were seven speakers, all of whom had either lived, worked, or travelled in the area, and the meeting was accompanied by a small exhibition of relevant textiles.

The lectures ranged widely, covering an overview of the larger Mekong area and the difficulties in classifying textiles within the huge range of majority and minority groups, and looked at the problems concerned in establishing a textile workshop in Laos. One lecturer redefined the late 19th and early 20th century archeological evidence of textile production in the Lower Mekong; another contemplated the present difficulties experienced by textile producers in Cambodia; and a third examined aspects of Buddhist banners.

Anne Baker

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

While I was living in Singapore between 1989 and 1994 I joined the Friends of the National Museum there. I attended many lectures and joined study groups and seminars on South-East Asian culture. Apart from an interest in textiles, I have also developed a fascination with glass beads - their uses in trade as well as adorning the body. I believe Peter Francis, an American, has written a book on the subject and that there is a Museum

of Beads In the U.S.A..

I wonder if any O.A.T.G. member knows of any society or group in this country that has an interest in beads. I am not so interested in the craft side as with the history of their manufacture and development as a trade item. I believe there used to be many factories in this country making a wide variety of beads for trade abroad. I should be very grateful for any information on the subject, or details of someone else I could contact.

Yours sincerely,
Janice Thompson

3 Broadmark Way, Rustington, West Sussex, BN16 2EY

PUBLICATIONS

Without Names: Palestinian Costumes, Palestinian Costume Archive, Canberra, 1995, 24pp, 18 b/w & 22 col. illus., \$A20.00 (available through the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney).

Produced to accompany a touring exhibition, this book explores the development of a late 20th century Antipodean style of Palestinian dress and embroidery.

Martin, Richard, and Harold Koda, *Orientalism: Visions of the East in Western Dress*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1995, 96pp, 35 b/w & 61 col. illus, ISBN 0 8109 9490 2, \$19.95, paperback.

Lavishly illustrated, this book (which was produced to accompany an exhibition of the same name) discusses influences on western dress from the 18th century onwards of artefacts and ideas imported from China, India, the Near and Middle East, Japan, and South-East Asia.

Scarce, Jennifer, *Domestic Culture in the Middle East: An Exploration of the Household Interior*, National Museums of Scotland, July 1996, 23x18cm, 112pp, 50 colour & 40 b/w illus., ISBN 07007 0460 4. £12.99 (£9.99 in the Museum shop)

The author, who is Curator of Eastern cultures at the National Museums of Scotland, examines the distinctive character of domestic spaces and activities in the Middle East. She explores all aspects of domestic interiors, from textiles and furnishings to dress and decoration. The predominance of woven textiles in the domestic context provides an underlying theme, and the characteristics and influences of Middle Eastern textile design and craftsmanship are discussed. The illustrations are largely drawn from the N.M.S. collections.

Swadling, Pamela, *Plumes from Paradise. Trade cycles in outer Southeast Asia and their impact on New Guinea, and nearby islands until 1920*. Boroko: Papua New Guinea National Museum. ISBN 9980-85-103-1. Published in association with Robert Brown and Associates (Qld) Ltd, PO Box 1299 Cooparoo DC, Queensland 4151, Australia.

This book relates directly to textiles only in the sense that birds of paradise from eastern Indonesia and New Guinea were highly fashionable dress ornaments in the early 20th century, but it is a fascinating and thorough study of contacts and trading relationships in maritime South-East Asia, where textiles from India, China, and later from Europe have been

a primary currency of exchange. The trade in birds of paradise plumes is linked with the trade in spices, textiles, and metal objects.

Wright, Richard E., and John T. Wertime, *Caucasian Carpets and Covers: The Weaving Culture*, London 1995, 184pp, 132 illus. (90 in colour) & 7 coloured maps, 35x25cm, £44. The first book to offer a comprehensive view of 19th and 20th century knotted pile rugs and flat-woven textiles from Caucasia in the light of recent research.

OTHER SOCIETIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

The Asian Arts Society of Australia -

- has an energetic textile study group which meets about twice a month (except May) and holds a yearly seminar. The one on Textiles of the Lower Mekong reported above was the second, and a third, concerned with a different region of Asia, is planned for the middle of 1997. Any member of the O.A.T.G. visiting Australia would be welcome at their meetings. The Textile Study Group Convenor is Anne Baker, 138 Lugarno Parade, Lugarno, New South Wales, 2210, tel. 2-533 2346.

The Costume Society -

- as well as promoting the study of costume, helps to preserve significant examples of historic and contemporary dress. For example, members contributed recently to the acquisition of Margaret Layton's early 17th century embroidered jacket by the V.& A.. The Society publishes an annual journal, *Costume*, and occasional publications of relevance to the Society's aims. Visits, lectures, study days and overseas visits (see above, p.2) are arranged for members, and there is an annual symposium held in a different part of the country each year. Membership is open to all on payment of a subscription, the categories being ordinary, student, institutional and library. Further information and a membership form may be obtained from the Membership Secretary, Pat Poppy, 21 Oak Road, Woolston, Southampton, SO19 9BQ.

The Early Knitting History Group -

- is an international group, loosely structured, but strongly motivated, with a professional interest in the emergence, evolution and techniques of knitting throughout the world, before 1600 A.D.. Since the group's inception in 1993, contacts have been consolidated with the U.S.A. and a number of European countries. In Britain three annual seminars have been held in the spring, and one is being planned for next spring, while a meeting on machine knitting is provisionally arranged for 23 October of this year. The EKHG is sponsored by the Pasold Research Fund, and if you would like to be put on the mailing list, please send details of your particular interests to the Fund at the Department of History, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT. For further information, contact the E.K.H.G. co-ordinator, Montse Stanley, Knitting Reference Library, P.O. Box 471, Cambridge, CB5 8XF (see below).

The Knitting Reference Library -

- had a very small beginning: an old postcard illustrating a knitter. This set Montse Stanley on a systematic search for printed material referring to knitting, equipment and knitting samples. The resulting collection still has many gaps, but it is now large enough to be a useful reference tool for researchers, and the gaps are being filled all the time. The collection has been built around two main areas: British domestic hand-knitting from the 19th century to the 1950s, and Spanish hand and machine-knitting from the 19th century to the present. Because needlework books and magazines cover several textile crafts, the collection somewhat extends into other areas, such as netting, macrame and crochet. Lack of space prevents personal visits to the library, but mail inquiries are dealt with quickly, thoroughly and enthusiastically. Montse Stanley, Knitting Reference Library, P.O. Box 471, Cambridge, CB5 8XF.

The Rug Restorers' Association -

- brings together individuals dedicated to excellence in the craft of restoration, provides professional support to its members in the maintenance of the highest standards, gives information to members of the public, dealers, museums and historic houses inquiring about restorers suitable to their needs, and will advise on whether restoration or conservation is preferable. The Association welcomes inquiries from anyone who needs the services and professional advice of restorers, or who is interested in becoming a member. For further information contact either the Chairman (tel. 01935 816479) or the Vice-Chairman (tel. 01423 865414).

Textile Society of America -

- provides a forum for the exchange and dissemination of information about the historic, cultural, socio-economic, artistic and technical aspects of textiles. It publishes a newsletter three times a year (just like us!) and an annual bibliography newsletter. It also holds a biennial symposium whose proceedings are published within six months. The 1996 Symposium is on the theme *Sacred and Ceremonial Textiles* and will be held at the Art Institute of Chicago, 19-21 September. Further information may be obtained from the Textile Society of America, 4401 San Andreas Avenue, Los Angeles, CA, 90065-4134, U.S.A..

DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE - 20 OCTOBER 1996

Please send contributions to
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