# VRINDAVANI VASTRA

## Figured Silks from Assam

**Rosemary Crill**

*In 16th century Assam, Sankaradeva, a charismatic Hindu holy man, initiated the use of figured silk cloths as altar covers. A small group of northeast Indian lampas weaves, of hitherto uncertain provenance, depict scenes from the lives of incarnations of the god Vishnu. These cloths have now been associated with the Assamese tradition through literary sources which suggest that some may have been part of a princely commission. The author, a curator in the Indian Department at London's Victoria & Albert Museum, offers evidence linking examples of these* Vrindavani vastra, *some recently emerged from Tibet, to Assamese Vaishnavite ritual.*

The remoter corners of northeast India, where Assam joins Burma and Tibet, have not traditionally yielded up much more in the field of textiles than simple tribal weavings or unadorned silk lengths. This material, coupled with the region's geographic isolation from better known Indian weaving centres, has led to the assumption that there has never been any complex, high quality textile production there.

But recent research has uncovered evidence that an important group of some 15 figured silk textiles – of differing quality but all strikingly beautiful – can be safely attributed to this overlooked backwater in Indian textile history. Furthermore, literary evidence linking these cloths to the Assamese religious leader Sankaradeva suggests that some of the group may have been part of a princely commission from the mid 16th century.

To trace the origin of these silks, it is first necessary to analyse the visual evidence they provide. Their iconography is obviously Vaishnavite (pertaining to the worship of Vishnu). The more elaborate examples depict several *avatars*, or incarnations, of Vishnu, and illustrate scenes from the life of his eighth *avatar* Krishna and, in some cases, the seventh *avatar* Rama, hero of the epic *Ramayana*. The complex figurative designs of silks such as (**3**) and (**5**) are reduced in some of the coarser pieces such as (**14**) and (**15**) to repeats of one or two elements, but the connection between the two types of design is undeniable.

The quality of silk, the stylization of the drawing, and the blocks of curious angular inwoven script, as yet not securely identified or translated, all point to an origin somewhere in northeast India. A Bengali weaving centre

**1. Krishna Protecting the Cowherds from the Serpent Demon Aghasura.** Bhagavata Purana *manuscript illustration, Orissa, 19th century. This painting shows the great snake with a huge head and short coiled tail, as in several of the* Vrindavani vastra *silks. Victoria & Albert Museum, London, inv.no. IS.19-1986.*

**2. Silk Lampas (right).** *Assam, 17th century. 0.82 x 2.23m (2'8" x 7'4"). The palette of this piece includes a curious pink not seen in any of the other examples of the group. Courtesy Spink & Son, London.*

**3. Silk Lampas Depicting Avatars of Vishnu and Scenes from the Lives of Krishna and Rama.**
*Barpeta, Assam, ca. 1565-1569.*
*0.81 x 2.33m (2'8" x 7'8").*
*The finest and earliest of this group, this* Vrindavani vastra *('cloth of Brindaban') can be traced back to a commission for the Prince of Cooch Behar of about 1565. Made as an altar cover for use in the worship of Vishnu in Assamese monasteries, its design shows the god's various incarnations* (avatars) *as fish, turtles, the god Krishna (seen playing his flute in the branches of a tree), as well as Vishnu's vehicle, the man-eagle Garuda, and scenes from the* Ramayana, *the epic story of Vishnu's seventh incarnation, Rama. For a technical and dye analysis of this and other textiles of the group see Spink & Son,* The Art of Textiles, *London 1989, p.164.*
*AEDTA Collection, Paris, inv.no. 3222.*

such as Bishnupur might have been a possible place of origin, but these designs are far removed from those on known Bengali silk weavings.

## THE CLOTH OF BRINDABAN

The association of these textiles with Vishnu worship is an important factor in their positive identification. A convincing link to Assam was revealed during research into Vaishnavite sects active in Bengal, when textile-related references to the religious reformer Sankaradeva were found.

The saint , who is believed to have died in 1569 having spent the last 25 years of his life at Barpeta in modern-day Assam, became a zealous Vaishnavite after a twelve-year pilgrimage to India
Barpeta became a major Vaishnavite centre during his period of residence, although his popular Vaishnavism and zealous missionary activities antagonised the traditional pundits at the royal court. He did, however, enjoy some support in royal circles and was deeply revered by Prince Chilarai, the brother of the King of nearby Cooch Behar, who built a monastery for him.

Sankaradeva was also an artist, and Vaishnavite monasteries *(satra)* often had painted and decorated interiors. According to literary sources, during the 1560s Prince Chilarai asked Sankaradeva to oversee the weaving of a great silk scroll, depicting the early life of Krishna. Sankaradeva commissioned the weavers of Barpeta, under their leader Gopal, to make the great cloth, called *Vrindavani vastra* (cloth of Brindaban) after the village near Mathura in Uttar Pradesh where Krishna spent his childhood and youth.

According to Professor R. Das Gupta's translation of certain Assamese texts, cloth of Brindaban was woven "*in a large variety of coloured threads like red, white, black, yellow, green etc, ...Each scene had its caption below it and these too were loom embroidered* [sic]".[1] The similarities in this description to the silks under discussion here are immediately apparent. They correspond so closely that they must represent a direct continuation of design, and some may be part of the original *vastra* itself.

The various references agree on the design, and there is also reasonable consensus on size. The cloth is said to

**4. Silk Lampas.**
*Assam, 17th century.*
*0.82 x 2.77m*
*(2'8" x 9'3").*
*This variant on the Vaishnavite theme shows a stiffening of the original design and a somewhat cramped effect. A similar piece is in the collection of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond (inv.no. 89.4). Courtesy Spink & Son, London.*

be either "forty yards" (40m),[2] "120 cubits" (60m),[3] or "180 feet" (60m)[4] long. Its breadth, not specified, was presumably a single loom width. It is stated that twelve master weavers took one year to weave the cloth, and that it was presented to Prince Chilarai "only a little before the expiry of Sankaradeva"[5] in 1569.

At Cooch Behar, the *vastra* was housed in the Madhupur *satra*, but it disappeared at some unknown time after it was presented to Prince Chilarai, thus preventing any irrefutable identification of the cloths shown here with the original. But from the evidence we now have it seems that it made its way to Tibet, and only recently joined the stream of rare textiles coming out of Tibetan monasteries.

Apart from the second-hand descriptions of the cloth's appearance, there is direct evidence linking these textiles to Assamese Vaishnavism. Sankaradeva strongly disapproved of the use of statues in temples and, contrary to the practice of almost all other forms of Hindu worship, he forbade the veneration of images of Krishna. Instead, the focal point of the ritual in the *satra* was a manuscript of the sacred text of the *Bhagavata Purana*, the story of Krishna's life.

The manuscript was placed on an altar *(thapana)* in the main prayer hall of the *satra*, and a cloth was used to cover the altar and to wrap the text itself. Several of our group of textiles have been identified as performing precisely these functions by Assamese Hindus, including Professor Das Gupta, an authority on Assamese culture, who referred to them as *gokhain kapar* or priest's cloths.[6]

It is significant that the cloths identified in this way were of the coarser type such as (**14**) and (**15**). It is thus likely that those in use today or in the recent past represent the much simplified tail-end of the design tradition, in which the complex registers of small, finely-drawn figures have been abandoned in favour of fewer, larger-scale motifs. The design elements may also have lost their original identity. In (**14**), for example, the use of one repeating row of birds implies that the bird has lost the demonic connotations which are only apparent when it is juxtaposed with Krishna, as in (**6**) and (**12**).

## THE CHEPSTOW & NEWARK TYPES

The progression of the design from its complex, lively beginnings to its static later forms is important in dating the textiles. Most of the silks fall into one of two categories, which for convenience we will call the 'Chepstow' and 'Newark' types, after the first pieces of each type to come to light, (**8**) and (**15**) respectively.

Both types are woven in a simple lampas technique: a compound weave in which, in addition to the basic main warp and ground weft, a binding warp and pat-

**5. Silk Lampas.**
*Assam, early 17th century.*
*0.83 x 1.63m*
*(2'9" x 5'4").*
*Although closely based on the design of the prototypical piece in Paris (3), this cloth has little of the former's fineness. The drawing of some elements, such as the tree in which Krishna is playing his flute, has become more elaborate, while others, especially the serpent demons and the various avatars, are considerably cruder.*
*AEDTA Collection, Paris, inv.no. 3223.*

tern weft are used to form the design. The essential feature of a lampas is that the pattern and ground are woven in two different structures, often a twill in combination with plainweave. In these silks, both the ground and the pattern are plainwoven, differing only in the use of contrasting scale or fineness of weave.

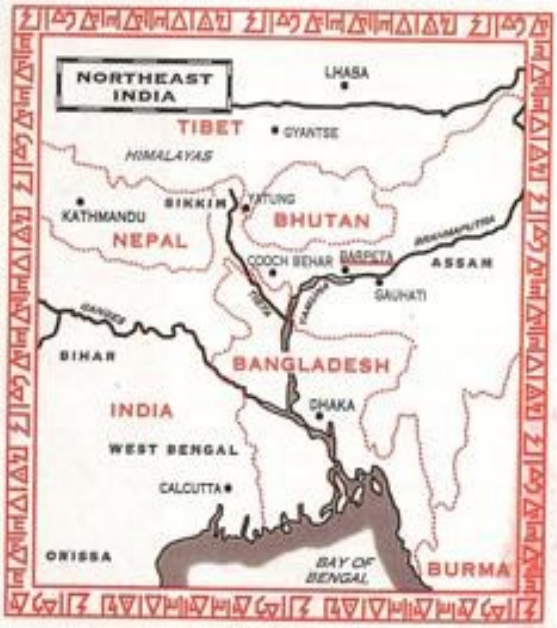
The distinction between the two types is thus essentially one of design complexity, with the 'Chepstow' type (**2-6, 8**) displaying a much more elaborate and finely-drawn range of designs based on the *avatars* of Vishnu theme. In contrast, the 'Newark' type (**10-12, 14, 15**) use a much reduced palette and very few motifs, most commonly the snake demon and the bird demon killed by Krishna, and Krishna in the branches of a tree (with or without his flute), while the *gopis* (female cow-herds) gather underneath.

The Philadelphia piece (**9**), has elements of both types. In its restricted range of design elements and its rather coarse drawing it relates more to the 'Newark' type, but some of the motifs used, in particular the pinwheel and the man-eagle Garuda, are seen only in the 'Chepstow' type.

One of these cloths (**3**), from the Association pour l'Etude et la Documentation des Textiles d'Asie (AEDTA) Collection in Paris, stands apart from the whole group, although its iconography and design clearly link it to the more refined 'Chepstow' type. Its registers of figures and scenes are generously drawn – the larger figures are twice as high as comparable ones in (**6**) and (**8**) – and the design has a vitality and humour that are missing even in the rest of the 'Chepstow' type. Some parts of the design, such as the three-headed demon, do not appear elsewhere; others, particularly the snake demon and the pair of fighting monkeys, are drawn with greater imagination and fineness than in any of the other pieces.

The whole design has the feeling of an original work, rather than one of the stiff copies that the other pieces appear to be. If any one of these textiles is the original 'cloth of Brindaban', this is the prime candidate. A date of around 1565-1569 (the time of Sankaradeva's death) is compatible with the style of drawing of the figures, which can be compared with the style of paintings of the Assamese *satriya* or monastic school, as seen in slightly later versions in (**7**) and (**13**).

The *satriya* school flourished in Assam from the 16th century onwards, growing out of the need of Sankaradeva's neo-Vaishnavite cult for illustrations to their religious texts, especially the *Bhagavata Purana*. It combined elements adopted from the Pala school of Bengal – the use of a plain red or green background – and from the western Indian tradition of manuscript illustration – the angularity of the figures and the pointed profiles, as well as the depiction of figures in a horizontal format.



**6. Temple Hanging (detail).** *Assam, mid to late 17th century. Twelve silk lampas panels, each approximately 0.80 x 1.80m (2'8" x 5'11"). Made up in Tibet, this vast hanging, over nine metres wide, was taken from a monastery near Gyantse by a member of the 1904 Younghusband Expedition. The Vaishnavite silk panels are very close in design to the lining of the Chepstow coat (8). Although it seems odd that a textile with such obviously Hindu iconography should be used in a Buddhist monastery or temple, imported objects of many types and cultures were highly prized in Tibet, and the design would have been regarded as purely decorative. The hanging has a top border of Chinese brocade. Museum of Mankind, London, inv.no. 1905 1-18.4.*

All these characteristics in turn contributed to the distinctive style of 'drawing' used in these textiles. This is hardly surprising since figured weaving had not hitherto been a feature of the Assamese tradition.

If the piece in Paris (3) can be identified as the earliest of the 'Chepstow' type, most of the others of this type can be seen, through the decline in design originality, to follow on chronologically. The only clue to dating any of these pieces on anything other than stylistic grounds comes from the man's coat (8) in the Chepstow Museum in Wales, which is lined with a splendid piece of Vaishnavite silk in perfect condition. The cut of the coat, a *banyan* or dressing-gown in oriental style, can be dated to about 1740, and it is reasonable to assume that the lining was added at the same time. The coat is lined throughout, including the sleeves, almost as if it was intended to be reversible.

A family tradition of the coat's previous owners maintains that it belonged to Thomas Cobb of Banbury, Oxfordshire, a merchant who died in 1766. A trading connection with Asia would have provided a neat provenance for the silk, but unfortunately, an examination of the records of births, marriages and deaths in Somerset House, London, showed him to be a humble worsted weaver with no connections with the East India Company or any other foreign trade. Furthermore, although the coat may date from the 1740s, there is no guarantee that the lining fabric was new when it was put to that use; stylistically it seems to date more from the mid 17th than the early 18th century.

Closest in appearance to the Chepstow coat-lining is the remarkable temple hanging in the Museum of Mankind, London (6), which like several others of both types came out of Tibet. It was acquired from a monastery in Gobshi, near Gyantse, during the Younghusband Expedition of 1904, and consists of twelve panels sewn together into an immense hanging. Like the Chepstow coat lining (8), it has a greyish-black ground rather than the red of most pieces of both types.

Another similarity between these two textiles is the use in places of large blocks of repeated text, rather than the single identifying line of script next to the main figures seen in (2-5). Examination of the blocks of inscription reveals that the texts are identical.

**. Krishna Subduing the Serpent Demon Kaliya.** hagavata Purana *manuscript illustration, Assam, 17th century. From K. Chaitanya,* Indian Miniature Painting, *New Delhi [n.d.].*

**8. Man's Coat.**
*Early 18th century Chinese silk, lined with mid 17th century Assamese silk lampas. 1.64 x 1.38m (5'5" x 4'6").*
*Banyans or dressing-gowns in oriental style were popular as informal menswear in 18th century Europe. The exterior is of Chinese silk in a European design, but the lining is of magnificent Vaishnavite silk, with a black ground rather than the red of the other pieces with a comparably complex design.*
*Chepstow Museum (Caldicot Castle), Monmouth, Wales, inv.no. C.177.0.*

It is likely that the Chepstow coat lining and at least some parts of the Museum of Mankind hanging were woven at the same time, or may be from the same length of cloth. The twelve panels of the hanging, however, are made up of pieces from at least two different textiles. One of them is densely packed with figures on a deep black ground like the Chepstow coat lining, while the other pieces are more coarsely-woven with larger figures on a paler grey ground, closer to a 'Newark' type weaving. Both types have yellow striped ends which can be seen incorporated into three of the panels.

Not all the pieces were made in Barpeta. While the more complex ones such as (**4**) were probably woven there, it is likely that other centres soon started weaving their own versions of the *vastra* for use in local prayer-halls: those of the 'Newark' type would certainly have been produced in minor workshops.

## ICONOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS

As in the AEDTA piece (**3**), the designs of both the Chepstow and Museum of Mankind textiles are based on an irregular repeat of registers showing the incarnations of Vishnu and certain events in the life of Krishna. These include, in the temple hanging, the subduing of the bird demon, Bakasura, in which the crane's beak is forced open by Krishna, and, in both textiles, the destruction of the snake demon, Kaliya, upon whose head Krishna is seen dancing in (**6**).

Other elements include Vishnu's vehicle, the man-eagle Garuda, shown with spread wings and a crown in (**6**), Krishna playing his flute in the branches of a tree while the *gopis* gather beneath, and a pinwheel motif which may represent Sudarsana, Vishnu's multi-pointed *chakra* or disc. The pinwheel is similar to that traditionally used on the quilted *kantha* embroideries of Bengal.

A feature of the Chepstow lining's iconography that is not repeated in any of the other pieces is the depiction of Vishnu's tenth *avatar*, Kalki. This is the god's name when he appears in the world at the end of the *Kaliyuga*, or age of Kali, the present age. He will be riding a horse and holding a fiery sword in his hand.

Most of the other *avatars* are shown on all the pieces of the 'Chepstow' type: Kurma the tortoise, Matsya the fish, Narasinha, the man-lion with a fearsome animal's head disembowelling the demon Hiranyakapisu across his knee, Rama with his bow, and, in some examples, Parasurama with his axe.

**9. Silk Lampas.**
*Assam, late 17th or early 18th century. 0.79 x 1.80m (2'7" x 5'11").*
*The pale green ground of this silk is not seen in any others of the group, but the relative crudity and sparseness of the design links it more closely to the dark-ground 'Newark' type cloths such as* (**11**, **14**, **15**) *than to the more elaborate earlier 'Chepstow' type pieces.*
*Philadelphia Museum of Art, inv.no. 1990-3-1.*

**12. Silk Lampas Fragment.**
*Assam, late 17th or early 18th century.*
*1.69 x 0.73m (5'3" x 2'5").*
*The design, including prominent stylized inscriptions, has become large-scale, with a reduced subject range. Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad, inv.no. 2140.*

**10. Silk Lampas Fragment.**
*Assam, late 17th or early 18th century. This fragment and its very similar companion piece (inv.no. 517) are quite crudely drawn and woven, obviously representing a significant degeneration from the original concept of the Vaishnavite silks. Pieces of this quality would have been made in small weaving centres for use in local prayer-halls. Centro Internazionale delle Arti e del Costume, Venice, inv.no. 516.*

**11. Silk Lampas Tanka Surround (left).**
*Assam, 18th century.*
*1.00 x 1.73m (3'3" x 5'8").*
*The design and colours of this Assamese silk, used to frame a Tibetan tanka, are of low quality, but it is of interest as it shows both a late interpretation of the original design and its use in the Tibetan context. Victoria & Albert Museum, London, inv.no.IM49a-1910.*

The 'Newark' type (**10-12, 14, 15**) use few of this range of motifs. All of them use the bird demon as a major feature, but only two, (**11**) and (**12**), include the snake demon and the two fighting figures motif. This pair of fighting monkeys (identifiable by their tails) is in direct line of descent from the pair on the AEDTA piece (**3**), but here they have undergone a major change and become highly stylized, especially in (**11**), losing all the humour and vitality of the early piece.

## THE TIBETAN CONNECTION

The connection of so many of these pieces with Tibet is an intriguing part of their history. It seems odd that textiles with such overtly Hindu iconography should have been desirable as decorations for Buddhist temples and as surrounds for Buddhist paintings, but this is undeniably so: most of the lengths recently on the Western market (**2-5, 9**) have come out of Tibet, almost certainly from Buddhist monasteries. The two Victoria & Albert pieces, (**11**) and (**14**), were used as tanka linings, and the Museum of Mankind hanging (**6**) is documented as coming from a Tibetan monastery.

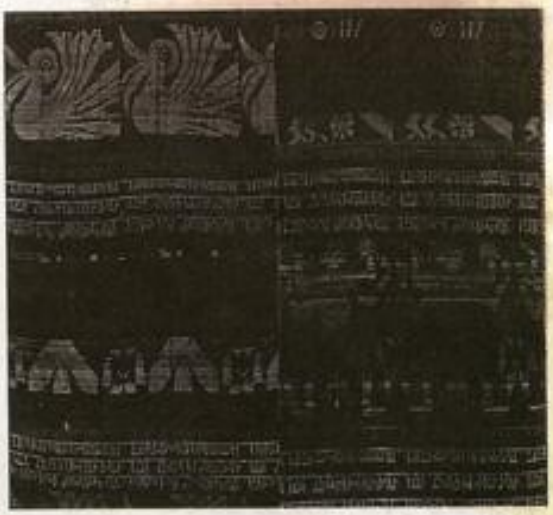
The only pieces for which a Tibetan connection is apparently lacking are the Chepstow lining (**8**), whose early history is unknown, and the Calico Museum piece in Ahmedabad (**12**), which was bought from an Indian dealer. The provenance of the two fragments in Venice (**10**) is not known.

Fine Indian textiles, including silks from Assam, have long been sought after in Bhutan and Tibet. Cooch Behar, the last known home of Sankaradeva's *vastra*, was ideally situated for trade with the Himalayan regions. The valley of the Tista river runs to the west of Cooch Behar, and continues north to Gangtok and Yatung, just inside the Tibetan border between Sikkim and Bhutan. This was an important trade route for many centuries, and Assamese merchants exchanged silk as well as rice, iron, lac, skins and horn for silver and salt from Lhasa.[7] Gyantse, where the Museum of Mankind hanging was used, is the next major town on the road north from Yatung. The use of imported tex-

**13. Krishna in the Branches of a Tree.** Bhagavata Purana *manuscript illustration, Assam, 17th century. Illustrated versions of the* Bhagavata Purana *exist in a huge variety of painting styles from all over India. The Hindu text, dealing with the life of the god Vishnu's eighth* avatar, *Krishna, played a central role in Assamese Vaishnavite religious ritual. This illustration and* (7) *bear a striking similarity to the style in which the same events are depicted in the group of silk weavings under discussion, as does a 19th century manuscript painting from Orissa* (1). *From K. Chaitanya,* Indian Miniature Painting, *New Delhi [n.d.].*

**14. Silk Lampas Tanka Lining (right).**
*Assam, late 17th or early 18th century.*
*0.74 x 1.54m (2'5" x 5'1").*
*The complex designs of the earlier silks* (2-6, 8) *have been reduced to a single element – the crane demon Bakasura – alternating with blocks of stylized script. In the absence of Krishna and the cowherds with whom it is linked in mythology, the bird has lost its demonic character and has become a simple decorative motif. Victoria & Albert Museum, London, inv.no. IS49-1967.*

**15. Silk Lampas Tanka Lining (below right).**
*Assam, late 17th or early 18th century.*
*0.62 x 0.79m (2'0" x 2'7").*
*With obvious similarities to* (14), *which was also used to back a Tibetan tanka, the design of this silk includes the figure of the god Vishnu. He is identifiable by his four arms and the attributes they hold, although except for the lotus flower these have become stylized almost beyond recognition. The silk is bordered with Indian* mashru *fabric (warp-faced silk on cotton satin-weave, usually striped).*
*Newark Museum, New Jersey, inv.no. 57.55.*



tiles – mostly Chinese brocades – for Tibetan tanka surrounds or linings was common practice.[8]

Indian textiles were also imported into Tibet for ritual or monastic use, and weavers in Varanasi had traditionally made heavy silk brocades known as *gyasar* for the Tibetan and Chinese markets. These, however, were very much in the Chinese style, using satin-weave, often in yellow silk with metal thread brocading and decorated with Chinese motifs such as the peony, as well as auspicious Buddhist symbols.

The attraction of the Assamese Vaishnavite silks seems to have been simply that they were highly coloured, elaborately patterned and available. The great diversity of objects from China and the Islamic world, as well as India, that have emerged from Tibet provides evidence that valuable imported goods with 'exotic' designs of all types were much prized in the country's wealthy religious institutions.

There can be no doubt that the original purpose of these silks was not for export to Tibet but, from the time of Sankaradeva onwards, as ritual objects in the worship of Vishnu and his *avatar* Krishna in Assam. Later versions of these cloths are still used in Hindu worship in modern Assam. Further research is needed to determine their development from the beginnings in 16th century Barpeta to the present day. ✒

*Footnotes see Appendix.*

# APPENDIX

**Footnotes, bibliographies, acknowledgements, technical analyses & supplementary illustrations.**

## THE COVER

Continued from page 6

*Saqi Bulaq Rug (detail).*
*Persian Kurdistan, 19th century.*
*1.24 x 2.13m (4'1" x 7'0").*
*The town of Mahabad is often referred to by its old name of Saqi Bulaq. It is the centre for one of the major Kurdish tribes, the Mukri, who reached the height of their power in the 16th century and who are considered to be the 'ruunster tribe' of the principal Kurdish group in the region today, the Dehbokri. It may be that some of the lovely 17th-19th century Kurdish rugs (including versions of the Chahar Bagh garden carpets), many of them based on Safavid and Mughal designs, were woven in Saqi Bulaq when it was a major urban weaving centre (although according to William Eagleton, (An Introduction to Kurdish Rugs, 1988, p.28), "no rugs have been woven in Mahabad town for many years").*

## A THAI SOLDIER'S JACKET

See pages 74-75

Footnotes

1. See Mattiebelle Gittinger, *Master Dyers to the World*, The Textile Museum, Washington 1982, pp.155-165.
2. From S. Manrique's *Travels*, cited in John Irwin & Paul Schwartz's *Studies in Indo-European Textile History*, Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad 1966, p.74.

## VRINDAVANI VASTRA

See pages 76-83

**Acknowledgments**
I am very grateful to my former colleague Veronica Murphy for introducing me to this group of textiles, and for her generosity in sharing valuable information with me. I would also like to thank John Clarke of the Victoria & Albert Museum for bringing to my notice the hanging in the Museum of Mankind,

*Silk lampas fragment (detail), Barpeta, Assam, circa 1565-1569. 0.79 x 0.91m (2'7" x 3'0"). This very worn end fragment appears to be from the same cloth as (3). Courtesy Spink & Son, London.*

*Silk lampas fragment, Assam, late 17th early 18th century. Centro Internazionale delle Arti e del Costume, Venice, inv.no. 517.*

*Silk lampas fragment (detail) depicting the avatars of Vishnu, Assam, 17th century. 0.85 x 1.26m (2'9" x 4'2"). Apparently from the same length of cloth as the lampas illustrated in (4). Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, The Glasgow Fund Purchase, inv.no. 89.4*

London; Francesca Galloway of Spink & Son, London; and Steven Cohen for the use of his photographs and for many valuable observations on structure and technique.

Footnotes

1. Translated by B. Das Gupta, and quoted in his *Art of Medieval Assam*, New Delhi 1982, p.190.
2. M. Neog, *Sankardeva and his Times*, Gauhati 1965, pp.120 & 317.
3. Das Gupta, *loc.cit.*
4. Neog, *op.cit.*, p.304.
5. Das Gupta, *loc.cit.*
6. Personal communication.
7. E.A. Gait, *A History of Assam*, quoted by Das Gupta, *loc.cit.*
8. P. Pal, 'Tibetan Religious Textiles', HALI 61, pp.106-113.

## ZEIKHUR

See pages 84-93

**Acknowledgements**
I would like to thank Richard E. Wright, Charles Grant Ellis, Walter B. Denny and Johnny Eskenazi for their help, at different times and in different ways, in providing information and insight into

aspects of the Caucasian weaving discussed in this article. My thanks too to Mary Jo Orzes of Sotheby's in New York for providing photographic facilities, and to Dr Gerhard Kilinich for allowing HALI's editors access to his comprehensive photographic archive.

Footnotes

1. Both journeys took place in 1820. See Le Chevalier Gamba, *Voyages dans la Russie Méridionale*, Paris 1826, Vol.II, p.191, and Don Juan Halen, *Narrative*, London 1827, Vol.II, p.278, and the subsequent references to these accounts in *The R.E. Wright Research Report*, Glen Echo, Maryland, Vol.VIII, no.5 (Sept. 1990) and Vol.IX, no.5 (July 1991) respectively.
2. Latif Kerimov, *Azerbaijanskii Kover*, Vols.I & II, Baku 1961. Kerimov's classification is reproduced in English translation in HALI 3/1 (1990), pp.27-30.
3. The narrow dimensions of an ivory ground rug in the Bernheimer Collection, Munich (see Ulrich Schürmann, *Caucasian Rugs*, Ishgaard 1974, pl.114 and HALI 1/3 (1978), p.300) may be evidence that Zeikhur looms were never wide. Looms width limitations would have had profound effects on how weavers interpreted complex designs.
4. Herbert Cozon, *Oriental Carpets: How They Are Made and Conveyed to Europe*, Unwin, London 1883, p.53. For an account of Cozon's book see John Mills, 'Baku and Back, 1883', HALI 25 (1984), pp.26-29.
5. Schürmann, *op.cit.*, pp.298 & 300, makes no distinction and uses the latter term.
6. The Bernheimer rug (see note 3 above) is quite coarsely woven and has cotton wefts. It has four tones of red.
7. Author's collection. See Anthony N. Landreau: *Yuruk, The Nomadic Weaving Tradition of the Middle East*, Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh 1978, pl.45 (illustrated upside down). An example of the related blue-ground kilims can be seen in Joseph V. McMullan & Donald O. Reichert's catalogue, *The George Walter Vincent Smith and Belle Townley Smith collection of Islamic Rugs*, Springfield, Massachusetts 1976, no.25, tentatively attributed to Turkey, but with the resemblance to certain Caucasian rugs and thus a possible Caucasian attribution noted in McMullan's caption. McMullan also notes the relationship of the diamond forms to those seen in Lori and Qashqa'i weaving.
8. See Dora Heinz, 'Orientalismus und die österreichische Teppichindustrie des 19. Jahrhunderts', in *Festschrift für Peter Wilhelm Meister*, Hamburg 1975, pp.217-218.
9. A more detailed description of the evolution of the Zeikhur cross design appears in Raoul Tschebull, 'Methods of Dating Caucasian Village and Nomad Rugs', HALI 2/3 (1979), pp.218-221.
10. For one of the best illustrations of the source of this design, see James D. Burns, *The Caucasus, Traditions in Weaving*, Seattle 1987, jacket and pl.49; also HALI 55 (1991), p.112. Note that the major design elements in the embroidery are interconnected, as they tend to be in the related rugs.
11. Burns, *op.cit.*, pl.66; Murray L. Eiland, *Oriental Rugs from Pacific Collections*, San Francisco 1990, pl.224. These two examples are quite similar in field design; both use two palmette forms normally seen in the 'Bijov' design as additional motifs (see below). This type of borrowing reinforces the idea that both 'Alpan' and 'Bijov' designs originated in the same weaving area.
12. Sotheby's New York, 3 December 1988, lot 69 (b/w catalogue illustration only).
13. For example, see a) [Michael Franses and Ian Bennett], *Il Tappeto Orientale dal XV al XVIII Secolo*, Eskenazi, Milan 1981, pl.20, also HALI 2/1 (1979), p.74; b) Martin Volkmann, *Old Eastern Carpets*, Munich 1985, pl.58, also Eberhart Herrmann, *Seltene Orientteppiche III*, Munich 1981, no.50. There is also a brown-ground 'transitional' piece which was sold at Christie's East, New York, 22 January 1991, lot 43, see HALI 56, p.173.
14. See, for example, [Franses and Bennett], *op.cit.*, pl.20, pp.41, 58 (description and footnotes). A detailed study of the 'Shield' carpet group by Michael Franses and Robert Pinner appears in HALI 1/1 (1978), pp.4-22.
15. Eskenazi advertisement, HALI 3/1 (1980), p.33, dated 1202 AH (1785 AD); Lefevre & Partners, London, 14 July 1978, lot 26, dated 1267 AH (1851 AD); Sotheby's New York, 5 December 1988, lot 77, dated 1298 AH (1881 AD). The rug dated 1879 bears an indecipherable inscription.
16. Ian Bennett, *Oriental Rugs: Volume I, Caucasian*, Woodbridge 1981, pl.398. With its large number of colour plates, Ian Bennett's book is an excellent source of information on all Caucasian rugs. All the major Zeikhur designs are illustrated. ❖

*Caucasian carpet (detail), possibly Kuba region, 19th century or earlier. 1.17 x 4.27m (3'10" x 14'0"). This worn brown-ground rug is clearly related to both the east Caucasian ivory-ground sillimi cluster and Bijov design rugs from the Zeikhur region. Christie's New York, 22 January 1991, lot 43. See note 13.*