

An exhibition of the Kashmir Shawl Collection, and its association with Sir Michael Sadler

13th September 2011 to 30th March 2012

Panel text

Introduction

Sir Michael Ernest Sadler (1861-1943) was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leeds from 1911 – 1923. Although known as a collector of contemporary European art, Sadler also procured examples of Asian and African decorative art, including Indian textiles. His gifts to the institution led to a University Art Gallery, and established a collection of Kashmiri shawls at the Clothworkers' Museum of Textiles.

To mark the Centenary of Sadler's appointment at the University, this exhibition aims to highlight the recently documented Kashmir Shawl Collection (previously known as the Sadler Shawl Collection) and consider the connections between the collection and the collector.

Sir Michael Sadler (1861-1943)

Born in Barnsley, Michael Sadler was educated at Rugby School. After attending the lectures of John Ruskin whilst studying the Classics at Oxford University, Sadler became an enthusiastic collector and early supporter of modern art. Even before coming to Leeds he had purchased works by Cezanne, Kandinsky and Gauguin.

Sadler was a great advocate of the study of arts within the University during his Vice-Chancellorship. He exhibited pictures from his personal collection around the University for the benefit of staff and students. These works formed the core of the gift he made to the University when he left in 1923 to serve as Master of University College, Oxford.

Sir Michael is in sympathy with the extreme modern developments and modern ideals in all the Arts, just what is needed in such an institution as Leeds University which is helping to develop and mould the artistic feelings of the coming generations of designers.

Journal of the Leeds University Textile Association. July 1920 Vol. 1 No. 1 pg 3

Sadler and Textiles

In 1915 Sadler cited the intellectual activity of the scientific research carried out in the Department of Textile Industries as a response to the needs of the textile industries, and as one of the major strengths in the University during the years prior to the First World War.

The experience of war brought a realisation of the importance of scientific research. It was during this period that Sadler supported the establishment of a textiles research association, heralding the Department's move from craft-based teaching to a concentration on new technology, both in chemistry and manufacturing. This institution eventually developed into the Wool Industries Research Association, whose early achievements included producing unshrinkable yarns and wool research for military requirements.

In 1923 Sadler was given the Freedom of the Company of Clothworkers.

In 1916 Sadler spoke of this 'new era' of research at the Conference of Textile Manufacturers in Wakefield:

The Textile Industries, I am assured by those who know, promise a rich field for research. The glutinous material which composes the fibre of wool is one of the substances which is attracting the notice of a new school of chemists. ...

Some wool has a kink in it. Other wools are straight. From the first you make elastic materials; from the second, the more beautifully lustrous. But who at his pleasure can get the kink out or put it in?...

The subject is fascinating and pregnant with profit. To study it is reward in itself for the scientist. To arrive at a solution of it may secure millions for the trade.

Leeds University Library Special Collections MS 1314 PA/375 "Educational Service to the Textile Trades" 28 July 1916.

Sadler in India

In February 1917 Sadler was invited to chair a British Commission to look into the affairs of Calcutta University, and through this the state of Indian Education. It was hoped that solutions in the field of education would lead to improvement of the political climate in India (Gandhi was campaigning for independence and the end of the British Raj).

Sadler sailed to India in October 1917; the crossing took 21 days at the height of the U-Boat war. The recommendations of the commission greatly influenced the Government of India's policy for university education, and in recognition Sadler was awarded a Knight Commander of the Order of the Star of India. As the Committee took several years to collate their findings, he did not return to Leeds until May 1919.

In his biography Sadler's son describes how India did not diminish his 'outbreaks of artistic enthusiasm ... not only ready to see the world in terms of painting, but eagerly plunging into the acquisition of oriental art of several kinds.'

Sadleir, M. *Michael Ernest Sadler 1861-1943 : a memoir by his son.* 1949. pgs 284-5.

A friendship on the boat with the archaeologist, traveller and collector Sir Aurel Stein no doubt fired Sadler's imagination. A letter home written during the voyage describes Stein's advice on where and when to buy Eastern carpets and mandarin robes. Once in Calcutta, Sadler visited galleries of Asian art, later purchasing a number of Chinese textiles, including a robe.

In March 1918 he wrote of investing in items of *Chinese origin* and a collection of Persian and Cashmir textiles, *mostly very old embroideries*. Further items (jewellery, silver and brass) were coveted, but not purchased due to lack of finances. Possibly in reaction to this disappointment, he later purchased a collection of Indian textiles described as *irreplaceable and very rare*. It is suggested these were brought for profit, but for some reason were never sold, remaining in chests for many years.

Sadler was also instrumental in appointing Professor Aldred Barker to the Chair of the Department of Textile Industries in 1914. Barker travelled to Kashmir himself in 1931, invited by the Minister of the Maharajah to survey the sheep-breeding and wool-growing industries.

The Collection

The collection of shawls and shawl fragments began with two unspecified donations by Sadler in 1918-19 and 1922-23, recorded in the Department of Textile Industries annual reports to the Clothworkers' Company.

The 1918-19 gift was listed as *Indian and Paisley Shawls*, while the 1922-23 donation was *A valuable collection of Indian Shawls and other Textiles, given by Sir Michael Sadler*.

Sadler also bequeathed several Asian artefacts to the Victoria and Albert Museum, including a Kashmir shawl.

The Collection today is made up of 36 shawls and 220 shawl fragments. A further collection of mounted fragments was discovered recently. It is thought that between 14 and 23 shawls constitute the original Sadler donation.

Kashmir Shawls

Kashmir Shawls appeared first around the fifteenth century, with the Persian word '*shal*' meaning a woven fabric. With the conquering Mughal emperors arriving in the Kashmir Valley of Northern India, during the late- sixteenth century, came a resurgence of the craft amongst artisans. Shawls were made as cloths for male attire and as symbolic gifts, being sent as royal presents to foreign courts.

From the late-eighteenth century European traders, military and travellers brought the shawls home as presents.

Fanny, William must not forget my shawl if he goes to the East Indies; and I shall give him a commission for anything else that is worth having. I wish he may go to the East Indies, that I may have my shawl. I think I will have two shawls, Fanny.

Lady Bertram, *Mansfield Park* (1814) chpt 31.

During the eighteenth and early- nineteenth centuries the shawls were manufactured for an expanding European market ignorant of, and distantly removed from, the hardships suffered by shawl weavers struggling to support their families in the Vale of Kashmir.

As demand outstripped supply, European copies began to be produced, with British demand being met by producers in Paisley, Edinburgh and Norwich. This was largely on a cottage industry basis, at least until the use of Jacquard looms in the mid-nineteenth century.

With a change in the fashion, along with cheap imitations, the loss of trading during the Franco-Prussian war, and a decimating Indian famine of 1877, the final blow was delivered, and the shawls of Kashmir passed quietly into the domain of legend.

Construction

The raw material:

Kashmir's geographical position on trade routes from Turkestan and Tibet gave it almost exclusive access to raw materials.

The raw material used in the production of the finer shawls came from the silky fleece of the Tibetan mountain goat (*Capra hircus*). In the raw state the fibre was known as *pashm*, and in the processed state as *pashmina*.

Shawls woven from the finest fibres gave rise to stories of the so-called *ring shawls* which were so fine that they could be drawn through a wedding ring.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, supplies of the fleece were not enough to meet demand and this led to the adulteration of the raw material with other coarser wools.

Techniques of patterning:

Patterning on shawls was generally achieved through either weaving or embroidery.

During the nineteenth century the term *kani* was used to refer to the particular technique of pattern weaving used in Kashmir shawl manufacture. Motifs were formed by the manipulation of small wooden spools (or *tojis*) holding different coloured weft threads. Each spool was inserted between warp threads only when its respective thread colour was required in the formation of motifs. As a result weft threads did not run across the full width of the fabric. Western historians refer to the technique as *interlocking twill tapestry*.

A further feature of the technique is that the pattern is visible on both sides of the shawl fabric, but on the reverse side fine ridges, outlining each pattern shape, and criss-crosses of weft from the spools can be discerned.

The utilisation of the *kani* technique therefore ensured that the patterning thread became an integral component of the fabric structure.

In the case of an embroidered (or *amli*) shawl, however, needlework was applied independently of the ground structure.

The two patterning techniques were occasionally employed together in the manufacture of a shawl.

Motifs

The importance of the Kashmir shawl in European textile history is confirmed by its stimulus for far-reaching developments in European textile design. This is centred on one of the most familiar motifs ever to be applied as ornamentation on textile products: a cone-like device known as the *boteh* or *Paisley motif*.

It seems that Kashmir's association with shawls began during Mughal times (1586-1753), when the emphasis in the decorative arts was on realistic imitation, possibly from illustrations in European herbal books. Early forms of the *boteh* appear as naturalistic representations of fragile flowering plants which were depicted in a formal repeating manner along the edges of plain woollen clothes.

In the wake of the Afghani invasion of 1753, this restraint in design and composition was relaxed and the boteh began to evolve towards the cone shape which became typical during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. With increased European influence, during the Sikh period (1819-1846) and the subsequent Dogra period (1846-1877), progressively abstract elongated forms in complex compositions emerged. The term *Paisley* was adopted around the 1840s, when the Scottish town became a major centre of shawl manufacture.

The boteh is also associated with the '*tree of life*' symbol derived from the date palm, used for both food and fibre. The pine form signified fertility and abundance. Other possible origins include the Egyptian lotus bud and the Persian sacred flame.

The Fashion for Shawls

While only those with means could afford a true Kashmir, most women would have had at least one Jacquard woven shawl. The *Paisley* shawl became the universal bridal present.

The fashion for the shawl mirrored the changing fashion of nineteenth century European female dress shape. Early fashions were for long stole-shaped shawls with bordered ends to be worn with simple white high-wasted dresses.

By the 1830s the skirts were getting wider with tunics and sleeves more detailed. In the mid-nineteenth century the crinoline became fashionable, and larger square *Paisley* shawls (often folded on the angle) were worn instead of coats. All over patterning worked well with the expanse of shawl on display.

The emergence of the bustle in the last decades of the century brought the decline of the fashion, as it hid the back detailing of the skirt.

Her dress was very plain: a close straw bonnet of the best material and shape, trimmed with white ribbon; a dark silk gown, without any trimming or flounce; a large Indian shawl, which hung about her in long heavy folds, and which she wore as an empress wears her drapery.

Description of Margaret Hale, '*North and South*' (1855) chpt 7

By the early years of the nineteenth century traders were having an important influence on the Kashmir shawl, with request for goods of quality and designs conforming to Western markets. Around this time the European manufacturers, most notably those from Edinburgh, Glasgow and Paisley, quickly copied and developed the shawl designs, with the Jacquard woven *Paisley shawl* (and its printed copies) reaching the height of popularity by the 1850s.

Victorian taste for fantasy and highly ornate decoration, coupled with new vibrant dye techniques, resulted in bold and striking designs taking the boteh motif towards abstraction.

Shawl Fragments

Over 200 shawl fragments form a significant part of the Collection. These have been attributed to the Sadler donation, and were described in 1934 as

*A remarkable series of Kashmir Shawl patterns**, and, in a 1936 description of the textiles museum as *a large collection of specimens of embroideries for Indian shawls, dating from A.D. 1800.*

The patterns on the fragments have been developed in the weave, or by the use of surface embroidery; some fragments employ both techniques.

Embroidered or needleworked 'amli', shawls became more popular in the early-nineteenth century after Western traders commissioned them to escape government duties on woven goods.

*Journal of Textile Science, vol. 4 no.4

The Boteh Motif in other Collections

The boteh or *Paisley* motif appears in other collections in ULITA, on both Indian and European textiles. These include a twentieth-century collection of Indian costume and textiles, the embroidery collection of Louisa Pesel, Indian printing blocks and European pattern books.

Early interest in the motif within the Department can be seen by its inclusion in original design lectures, represented by images found in an index of glass slides.

Exhibiting the Collection

The first gift of shawls donated by Sadler was probably put on permanent exhibition in the Museum in 1920-21:

It is not surprising in view of the deep interest which Sir Michael Sadler takes in Art that his influence should be felt in the Textile Industries Department of the University over which he presides. On returning from India Sir Michael added to the Museum Collection of Patterns several beautiful specimens of Indian Design and Colouring, and now is helping to organise an extensive display of old Eastern fabrics in the Museum during the month of May.

Journal of the Leeds University Textile Association. July 1920 Vol. 1 No. 1 pg 3

Following the 1923 gift, the collection was described thus,

The outstanding exhibit is a collection of Indian Shawls from Kashmir and the Punjab, woven and embroidered in coloured wools; their period being from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. It is the only exhibit of its kind in the North of England and the Midlands.

Typescript description of museum, January 1936 (Central Records Office)

After the war, little reference can be found regarding the shawl collection, until the Clothworkers' Company exhibition of 1970, which included one shawl.

In 1989 a major exhibition, and catalogue, of Sadler's collections was organised by the University Gallery. At that time fourteen shawls were exhibited. This was during a period of rediscovering the collection, and planning a future home for all the textile collections.

Documentation and Identification

Since 2008, a project funded by the Clothworkers' Company has documented the major collections at ULITA, with particular emphasis on making as many items as possible available to view online. This includes the Shawl Collection.

Research is still continuing to enhance documentation, both in relation to identifying the origins and periods of the shawls, and improving knowledge of Sadler's association with them.

Of the 36 shawls in the collection, three are linked to other donors, and 23 have mid-twentieth century catalogue cards. Of these, a total of four shawls, as yet unidentified, could be donations referenced in a 1934 annual report to the Clothworkers' Company:

Two Cashmere woven shawls of the 17th Century (very well preserved) from a Mrs Francis of Bath, and *Two Indian shawls from Kashmir (very fine specimens)* from Miss Jackson of Sussex.

Colour Chemistry Collection

In 2009 the Department of Chemistry gave ULITA ten boxes of mounted textile samples dating from the 1930s. The majority of this collection presented modern materials and dying experiments, but two boxes contained twenty four mounts of multiple Kashmir samples.

It was discovered that labels and text found on some of these samples were identical to those found on several of the fragments already held in the collection (and thought to come from Sadler).

It is possible that the two collections were at one time together, and as the Departments of Textiles and Colour Chemistry (each with their own research museum) became less associated with one another, the fragments became separated. It may be that they are all part of the Sadler gifts.

Created by J Winder & M A Hann

University of Leeds International Textiles Archive

Further reading:

Sadleir, M (1949) Michael Ernest Sadler (Sir Michael Sadler K.C.S.I.) 1861-1943 : a memoir by his son. London : Constable

Michael Earnest Sadler (1861-1943)

1861	Born in Barnsley
1871-75	Schooling in Hampshire
1875-1880	Rugby School
1880-1884	Studied Classics at Trinity College, Oxford
1885-1894	Secretary to the Oxford University Extension Delegacy Steward of the Christ Church Involved in conference on secondary schooling
1894-1903	Director of Special Inquiries and Reports, Education Department, Whitehall (reporting on education in Europe, the US and the British Empire)
1903-1911	Professor of the History and Administration of Education, Manchester University
1911-1923	Vice-Chancellor, University of Leeds Moved to Buckingham House, Headingley Appointed Professor Aldred Barker to the Chair of the Department of Textile Industries
1915	Supported establishment of Textiles Research Association (later the Wool Industries Research Association).
1917-1919	Chair of British Commission looking into affairs of Calcutta University, India
1918-1919	Donated Shawls to the Clothworkers' Textiles Museum
1922-1923	Donated Shawls to the Clothworkers' Textiles Museum
1923	Presented art collection to University
1923-1934	Master of the University College, Oxford
1934-43	Retirement
1949	Publication of biography by his son Michael Sadleir
1989	University Gallery exhibition and catalogue publication