



# Textile Research Centre Newsletter August 2015

Although the TRC was closed for the month of July, various interesting and exciting things continue to happen. Very important is the opening of the new exhibition on Yemeni clothing and jewellery (on 17<sup>th</sup> August), the accompanying workshop on 26<sup>th</sup> August (please register as soon as possible!), and, for the fourth time this year, the intensive textile course between 14 and 18 September, for which there are still two places available. If you are interested in participating, please contact us quickly !

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## Dressing Sheba: Glittering Garments and Jewellery from Yemen TRC, Leiden, 17 August until 17 December 2015

The image of the Queen of Sheba, dressed in exotic garments and jewellery and dancing in front of King Solomon, has fired the imagination of artists for hundreds of years. The Biblical land of Sheba, now known as the Republic of Yemen in the extreme southwest of the Arabian Peninsula, has long been described as the source of abundant trade goods, including emeralds and rubies, purple, embroideries, fine linen, coral and incense (*Book of Ezekiel 27:16*).



*Detail of embroidered neck opening of Tihama dress, Yemen. TRC collection. Photograph: Joost Kolkman*

Dutch traders in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries went to Yemen to acquire silk (*stickzijde*) and metal threads (*goudtraet*), silk textiles and much more that came from as far away as Egypt, Syria, Iran, India, China and Indonesia, to bring them back to The Netherlands for its wealthy citizens. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Yemen was still attracting trade from all over the world. Sadly, in recent days Yemen has become the scene of a bloody civil war and interference from outside.

The local geography of deserts, mountains and long coasts is one of the main reasons that Yemen developed a diverse range of textiles, clothing and accessories that reflect local cultural and economic characteristics. This diversity is reflected in the many textiles and outfits that are displayed in the new TRC exhibition. The items on display include men and women's outfits from the four corners of the country, including garments and jewellery from the Haraz, Sana'a, Tihama, Wadi Hadramaut. There are indigo dresses with chain work, dresses and pieces with intricate embroideries of many types, and locally hand woven textiles for men and women, including headgear, waistcoats and hipwraps. There are also examples of the famous eye faceveils and of the intriguing and colourful red velvet and satin bridal dresses from the Hadramaut, but also modern

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interpretations of traditional forms. Over 100 items of Yemeni textiles, dress items and accessories are on display.

Yemen has also for long been famous for its silver jewellery. Thanks to the generosity of Paul Spijker ([Toguna](#), Amersfoort), a range of silver items worn by Yemeni girls and women are in the exhibition. They were used to complement the dress outfits and to say "look at me, I am someone, but don't touch." Finally, the exhibition also focuses on the exquisitely embroidered dagger belts worn by men, which were produced for the TRC exhibition by women of the Al Buraai family in the remote Haraz Mountains, north of the capital, Sana'a.

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## **Donation/inheritance**

We have mixed feelings at the moment because, and sadly for personal reasons, we have just heard that we have been given a substantial sum of money following the death of a dear friend of the TRC. The money has to be used for the infrastructure of the TRC, so it has been decided that part of the donation will be used to replace our old computer system with a more up to date and cost-effective one.

A new computer system is something that has long been needed at the TRC because of the increased number of items in our collection. This requires an extension of our database and a suitable computer system to put everything on line so that as many people as possible can see and share the TRC collection.

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## **TRC Intensive Textile Course: still some places left !**

In 2015 and 2016, the TRC is again running its successful five-day intensive course on textiles. This year, the course will be given five times, in March, April, May, September and October. For next year, we have reserved three periods, in March, May and October. The course is being taught in English by Dr Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood, textile and dress historian and director of the TRC. The course is a mixture of theoretical and practical elements, with an emphasis on trying out the various techniques of textile production (spinning, dyeing, weaving), on holding and examining fibres, textiles and finished items, all in order to learn and understand what is happening and why various combinations take place. The aim is to make textiles less 'frightening' and allow people to look at a textile, from virtually any historical period or culture, and be able to understand it.

**Dates of the next courses: 14-18 September 2015 (only two places left), 12-16 October 2015 (only one place left), 21-25 March 2016, 16-20 May 2016, and 17-21 October 2016.** Those who want to attend the course, please contact the TRC at [info@trc-leiden.nl](mailto:info@trc-leiden.nl)

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## Wednesday Workshops

Every last Wednesday of the month, the TRC organises a workshop between ten in the morning and one in the afternoon. The meetings combine theory and practice, or, in other words: participants will watch, listen, and do. No prior knowledge or experience is required. These workshops were started in October last year and have proven to be a great success, and most of them do in fact attract more people than the maximum we can take (15). All workshops are led by various specialists in the field. Language of communication is Dutch, but English will also be used if required.

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### Yemeni Embroidery 26<sup>th</sup> August 2015: still places left for those who are interested!



*Detail of a Jebel Haraz region dress with some of the various forms of chain stitch to be practised in the Wednesday Workshop on the 26<sup>th</sup> August (photograph by Joost Kolkman).*

This embroidery workshop links up with the [current TRC exhibition](#) on Yemeni clothing and jewellery. The workshop focuses on a particular type of chain stitch work. One dress that has been selected from the exhibition, which will be discussed in detail, comes from the Jebel Haraz region of western Yemen.

It is made of indigo dyed cotton cloth and embellished with embroidery worked in a thick cotton thread. The patterns are worked in many variations on a chain stitch, including the straight chain stitch; isolated chain stitch (straight and twisted forms); zig-zag chain stitch; spiked chain stitch and triangular pendants made of chain stitch. These stitches are, in turn, used in combination with other stitches, such as blanket stitch, Roumanian stitch and running stitch.

The participants to the workshop will be introduced to all the intricacies of this dress and its decoration, and then be encouraged to try out some of the decorative techniques and designs themselves. Prior knowledge and/or experience is not required. The workshop will be given by Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood, director TRC and curator of the exhibition. Date: 26 August 2015. Venue: TRC, Hogewoerd 164, Leiden. Time: 10.00-13.00. Fees: 25 euro, incl. coffee/tea and materials. Registration: [info@trc-leiden.nl](mailto:info@trc-leiden.nl). Maximum number of participants: fifteen.

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## Lace reference collection

Over the years the TRC has acquired numerous pieces of bobbin and needlemade lace. The need to build up a lace reference collection has been discussed on various occasions, but due to the lack of a specialist in this field, this part of the TRC collection has not had the attention it needed or deserved. However, following a visit to Brugge (Belgium) and a meeting with Anne Thijs ([t Apostelientje](#)) the situation has changed. Ms. Thijs has very kindly agreed to help make a suitable collection for the TRC and to act as our advisor. The TRC is now busy making suitable storage panels for the collection and working on a system of identification that is based on that used by the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney (<http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/pdf/research/classification.pdf>) and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (<http://www.dressandtextilespecialists.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Identifying-Handmade-lace.pdf>).

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## The TRC, Facebook and Radio Romania

At the beginning of July we were contacted by a Romanian lady who is working on an EU project proposal about the history of the decorative blouse and chemise as a symbol of Romanian women



and Romanian cultural and social history in general. When she visited the TRC, several of our Romanian blouses turned out to be of particular interest, including one blouse from c. 1900.

*Transylvanian blouse now in the TRC Collection.*

The blouse in question originates from Transylvania. It was also the first outside donation to the TRC collection, many years ago. It was bought in a Dutch flea market in the 1970s for a

*rijksdaalder*, and although very dirty it was clear to the discerning eye of the buyer that here was something special. And she was right !

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Following the visit, the blouse was mentioned by our Romanian visitor on Facebook and the next morning we were contacted by Radio Romania about the possibility of an interview over the work of the TRC and our Romanian blouse in particular! A few days later the interview took place and is going to be made into two or three smaller interviews for broadcasting in Romania!

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## **Forthcoming exhibition: Eastern European and Greek embroidery**

One result of the Romanian connection is that help has been offered in making a small Romanian collection of traditional embroidery and woven forms, some of which will be used in January 2016 for our forthcoming exhibition about Central and Eastern European, Balkan and Greek embroidery.

In addition, we have recently been offered a collection of 20<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian embroideries, which each item provenanced so we know exactly where it comes from in Hungary. This will make it an important reference collection for the TRC and others.

The cost of the basic Hungarian collection was 700 euros and, once the possibility of buying the collection was announced, within two days sufficient money came in thanks to the swift response of two supporters of the TRC. We have no doubt that the collector involved will find more items of interest for the TRC, but we can now go ahead with this part of the TRC's collection and exhibition.

And finally, we have also just been promised as a donation a late 19<sup>th</sup> century embroidered curtain from Rhodes (Greece). This will arrive at the TRC in September.

All of which indicates that there is a great interest in embroidery from this part of the world, and that the forthcoming exhibition is going to have some very intriguing items in it!

If you have any Central, Eastern, Balkan and Greek items you would like to donate to the TRC collection please do not hesitate to get in contact with the TRC at [info@trc-leiden.nl](mailto:info@trc-leiden.nl)

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## **PayPal Donation**

One way of quickly financially helping the TRC is to make over a donation via PayPal. A donation button can be found at the bottom right hand side of the TRC homepage. Just click and follow the instructions. Every little bit really helps and is greatly appreciated.

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