


Dear Friends, for this edition we invited Gavin Strachan, textile expert and editor of the **Oxford Asian Textile Group's** journal, **Asian Textiles**, to share his experience on Rufus Reade's October 2023 Turkish tour. I hope you will enjoy his erudite and witty narrative. Perhaps it will inspire you to travel there!

Our great friends from **The African Fabric Shop**, explorers of the African textile world for nearly 40 years, will exhibit this April at **The Nomads Tent**. Through their workshops, website and shop, their enormous enthusiasm and thoughtful engagement with textile producers across Africa, Magie Relph and Bob Irwin offer us an exemplary model of how people should trade. Find Bob's article **The Accidental Business** on the back page.

Andrew Haughton



Turkey: historical melting pot & textile wonderland

By Gavin Strachan

Editor of *Oxford Asian Textile Group's* journal *Asian Textiles*

Rugs, Ruins and Ruminations was a fair summary of a tour led by Rufus Reade to Turkey in October last year, but was his rumination engendered by his forty years of travelling to the country or was it a nod to the 13th century mystic Rumi?

Rufus used to own The Nomads Tent, and for this trip, through the central and western parts of the country, Andrew Haughton, the current owner, also acted as a leader. While **Anatolia** is now firmly Turkish, it has variously been Hittite, Assyrian, Armenian, Roman, Byzantine, Selcuk, and Ottoman. This rich history is still evident, but the traumas of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries inevitably shape the modern country more. Not only were there savage massacres of Armenians, there was also the large movement of refugee Muslims into Turkey from what had been Ottoman-controlled countries in the Balkans all culminating in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne which saw a further half a million Muslims moving from **Greece** to **Turkey** and the simultaneous expulsion 1.5 million Christians from **Anatolia** to **Greece**.

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It was these more recent events, and the resulting cultural shocks, which made me want to go on this tour, but also advertised was a visit to **Hattusas**, capital of the **Indo-European Hittites**, and a trip to the neolithic site of **Çatalhöyük**, discovered by James Mellaart but then controversially and erroneously interpreted by him. And then of course there were the kilims, rugs, and textiles, many produced for the makers' own use and so having a particular artistic integrity.

There were many miles to cover between the starting point of **Ankara**, on to **Hattusas** in the East before swinging south and westwards to take in **Cappadocia**, including **Çatalhöyük**; followed by, resonant names all, **Konya**; **Sultanhanı**, the major carpet repair locus; **Afyon(karahisar)**; **Bursa**, the first capital of the Ottomans; **Iznik**; and finally the incredible city that is **Istanbul**. The bus journey totalled at least 1,100 miles.

The experience that Rufus has of the country meant that in addition to going to the famous sites we also went to places off the beaten track. One Afyon resident was heard to say that she had never seen a group in the city before - and becoming involved with that community going about its normal business was far more rewarding than competing with the, literally, thousands of tourists in Istanbul's **Hagia Sofia** in spite of its 1500 years of history. Before the trip Rufus had sent us a booklet he had written: part guide, and part reminiscences and distilled wisdom extolling the country's long history, and all embellished with his excellent photographs; one to keep.

As only official tour guides are allowed to lead groups in some parts of Turkey, we were fortunate to be accompanied by Istanbul-based 42-year old Deniz Coşkun who has a comprehensive knowledge of textiles and natural dyes; this May he is leading a Hali textile tour to the country. His experience of the woven arts and his impromptu expositions of Turkey's social customs were much appreciated. The country's social values are strained under the current regime, and fly in the face of founding-father Atatürk's century-old cultural reforms, such as the secularisation of the administration and rights for women, and which most Turks, and certainly the Istanbul intelligentsia, continue to revere.

It wasn't all magical, however. As I have already alluded, unfortunately the visit to **Hagia Sofia**, and similarly the **Basilica Cistern** in **Istanbul** as well as the **Goreme Open Air Museum** of rock-carved churches in **Cappadocia**, were victims of their success as tourist destinations. The sheer crush of visitors at all three were serious defects. While other participants will no doubt have other highlights, here are mine:

- The participants: an eclectic and sociable mix each with their own strengths and observations.
- The first morning spent in **Ankara's Museum of Anatolian Civilisations**, which had good displays explaining the layout of the 6000 BCE Çatalhöyük houses and displaying many Hittite artefacts - whose 13th century BCE giant capital site, **Hattusas**, 150 miles to the East we drove to late that afternoon.
- The **Kale Konak hotel** in **Uçhisar, Cappadocia**, which had historic cave-like but spacious rooms carved into the tuffa and friendly staff.
- Meeting German conservationist-turned-winemaker Udo Hirsch, and discussing his use of pre-phylloxera grapes which are fermented in ancient and large pottery **pithoi**, and his early ground-breaking work on kilims with Belkis Balpınar.
- **Mustafapaşa** village, formerly the Greek village **Sinasos**, and the visit to the largely deserted **Soğanlı Valley** with its rock-cut churches dating from 8th to 13th centuries.
- Muammer Sak showing us kilims in **Ürgüp, Cappadocia**.
- Paper marbling at the **Ebru** workshop, **Uçhisar**, and later in **Afyon**. These are quickly done after decades of learning the technique.
- The large caravanserai at **Sultanhanı** built in 1229 along the **Uzun Yolu** trade route from **Konya** to **Aksaray** which continues into Persia. One of the best examples of Seljuk architecture in Turkey. The added bonus was that displayed on its pillars was an exhibition of Turkish rugs.

- Actually seeing **Çatalhöyük**, the Neolithic site which altered perceptions of early Anatolian culture. An adjacent new, large and comprehensive interpretive museum had just been opened, but was so new that some of the electronic guides were not yet working. However, a lot of scholarship had informed the displays.
- **Konya** is the resting place of the much-venerated 13th century mystic, dervish, poet and Sufi leader Mevlana Celalidîn-i Rumi. In front of the tomb some visiting Pakistani air-force officers were proudly taking selfies of themselves. The city is dry, and the faces of many of the party were rather long, but natural dye expert and long-time friend of Rufus, Mehmet Ucar, took us twice to a second-floor, club with formica-top tables, where raki and beer was in ample supply as well as simple, excellent food.
- The **Konya Archaeology Museum** contains a vast third century AD high-relief sarcophagus depicting the twelve labours of Heracles. It was found by a farmer in 1958. It also had an Assyrian colonial-period step-in bath. In the basement of the adjacent **Konya Ethnography Museum**, which had examples of local textiles and socks, there was a trove of early carpet fragments including 13th and 15th centuries pieces from the **Eşrefoğlu Mosque**.
- **Afyon(karahisar)** is a charming and slightly sleepy city dominated by its castle perched on a rock high above. It has seen Hittites, Phrygians, Lydians and Achaemenid Persians, and that only takes us up to its conquest by Alexander the Great. The Erkuş brothers gave us a demonstration making felt which is used for such things as shepherds' cloaks, mattress covers and shoe insoles.
- Bustling **Bursa**, built on the side of a hill, between 1326 and 1363 was the first major capital of the Ottomans, and as a result is important in the evolution of Ottoman architecture. A hidden treat is the private **Uluumay Museum** of Ottoman Folk Costumes housed in a Seljuk building adjacent to the tomb complex of the Ottoman sultans. Its Turkish and Balkan costumes were a delight, as were the two nights spent in the **Almira Hotel**, a cut above some of our other accommodation.
- **Sille church**, still with some artefacts from that time, is echoingly empty of worshippers following the expulsion of Christians from Turkey. The street-side fruit seller must have been exultant once our party had stocked up on her autumnal produce.
- **Iznik, Nicaea** of early Christian history, is still ringed with impressive Roman walls. Famous for its tile production the craft is being resurrected for the tourist trade. In the centre of the town, the 6th century Byzantine church is, of course, now a mosque.
- In **Istanbul** splendour is on all sides cheek by jowl with rambling streets. Side by side are the **Hagia Sophia**, the **Blue Mosque**, the **Hippodrome**, and the **Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum** housed in the **palace of Pargalı Ibrahim Pasha**, the second grand vizier to Suleiman the Magnificent. The museum is a haven of quiet and has not only some early carpets but displays of later social history, such as its **Culture of the Hammam**. Off the beaten track is **Kucuk Ayasofia**, once the 6th century church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus, and the Sinan mosque of **Sokollu Mehmet Pasha**, where we could hear boys in the classrooms reciting passages from the Koran.
- Discussions with Celal Beraket, born in Skopje in Macedonia, and once a banker in London. But one Istanbul carpet-dealer friend called him a 'crazy man' - that's what happens when you do something original.
- And then there was the chai - always refreshing and welcome.

Most importantly I did learn a lot: from the enormous **Hittite site of Hattusas**, whose gates were reminiscent of the much later **Lion Gate at Mycenae**, to a much better understanding of the interaction between **Anatolia** and the **Ottoman Balkans**.

Rufus Reade and Andrew Haughton are taking a trip to **Eastern Turkey and Georgia** starting in mid-September this year followed by a week's optional extension into **Armenia**.



Deniz Coşkun & Andrew Haughton in Ürgüp, Cappadocia.



Andrew Haughton and Gavin Strachan looking over the main Çatalhöyük site.



Afyon Shepherds' cloaks & mattress covers



13th century Seljuk caravanserai at Sultanhanı.



Muammer Sak showing kilims in Ürgüp, Cappadocia.

The Accidental Business



How the founders of *The African Fabric Shop* and *World Textile Day*, Magie Relph and Bob Irwin, found their calling. **Text by Bob Irwin.**

Flash back... 1980s: Magie Relph and Bob Irwin are bush bashing across Africa, leading overland camping expeditions in an old army truck. In a market in Lusaka, Magie gets bitten by the African fabric bug. She buys her first African wax prints, scrounges scraps from tailors and kills time on borders by hand-stitching her first patchwork quilt.

Jump cut... 1990s: Married in Nairobi, now in London. Magie and Bob try growing up, grafting a living in petrochem and travel, respectively. But they miss Africa.

Then, the accident... Quilt artist and author Janice Gunner convinces Magie to bring her battered suitcase to their quilt group. Inside, Magie's quilt-making offcuts - scraps of African wax prints collected on her travels. Utter chaos erupts, as everyone wants to buy Magie's scraps. **The African Fabric Shop** is born... a truly accidental business.

Dissolve to turn of the century: New Year 2000. Now in Meltham, West Yorkshire, Bob builds africanfabric.co.uk, version 1.0. First online sale... quilt artist Margaret Ramsay buys one of everything. Since then... Magie and Bob have spent up to three months per year back on the road in Africa. They've explored 34 of Africa's 54 countries - researching, documenting and buying African textiles. The artisan makers and itinerant traders they work with are more than just suppliers - they're friends.

Of course, all that travel means somebody has to steer the shop back home. Enter Jenny Hall... Since 2018, her talent, ideas and enthusiasm have inspired **The African Fabric Shop's** diverse and creative customers around the world.

So, how's that for an **accidental business**?

“ But it's not just the about the textiles. It's the people we meet, work with and learn from. It's their knowledge and their stories that we hope to pass on to you - along with their textiles! ”

Magie Relph

African Wax Print: A Textile Journey

Magie's textile journey started with the fabric that more than any other simply says, 'Africa.' That's the fabric that got her hooked, launched **The African Fabric Shop** and inspired many of Magie's art quilt creations.

So...

- What exactly is African wax print?
- Where does it come from?
- Where does it sit in the context of Africa's diverse textile traditions?

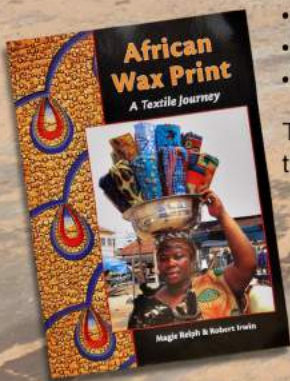
To find out, take a literary journey with Magie Relph and Bob Irwin, from the origins of wax print to the markets of West Africa and beyond.

“Fascinating!” says John Gillow, textiles collector and author of **African Textiles: Colour and Creativity Across a Continent**. “Magie and Bob's book is a major step forward in telling the tale of African wax prints.”

80 pages with over 100 colour photographs. Only £8. Visit:

africanfabric.co.uk/packs-kits-etc/books/c/african-wax-print-textile-journey

Image: Fuel stop en route Nouakchott



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