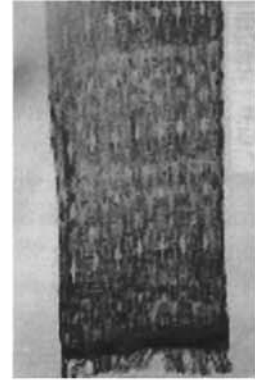


# Filipino Textiles: Conservation and Preservation



**Evelyn Elvena**, *Textile Conservator of the National Museum of the Philippines*, reports on the characteristics of Filipino textiles, weaving patterns, conservation and preservation techniques, status of ethno-archaeology and future plans of the museum for collections (including a section on actual conservation treatment carried out in the museum)

The National Museum of the Philippines has been documenting, collecting, preserving, exhibiting and fostering scholarly



Fig. 1 & 2 Handweaving Technique

study and the appreciation of art specimens with cultural and historical values. Recently, the museum was re-organised with expanded functions. One of the tasks is to preserve all museum collections, including textiles. The Ethnology Section of the Anthropology Division is responsible for the storage and exhibition of textiles while the Chemistry and Conservation Laboratory, under the same division, is concerned with the conservation and restoration activities.

## The National Museum Collection

The National Museum textile collection range from costumes, blankets, blouses, skirts, alongs, head-dress, belts, scarfs, handkerchiefs, trousers, and other accessories. The designs

and decoration are varied, depending on the regions where they were made; and the technology used varies from back-strap

loom to handloom. (Fig. 1 & 2)

The motifs, designs and symbols reflect the social level or status, culture and character of the diverse ethnic groups, as well as the visions and wisdom of the weaver. The fibres commonly used are cotton, abaca and piña, all indigenous in the Philippines. The colours most used are indigo, violet, yellow, light green, black, brown, white, red, and magenta.

The National Museum holds the first evidence of weaving technology with the discovery of the Banton cloth. These earliest known textiles associated with a burial coffin found in Banton Islands, Romblon dated 13<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century AD. It is a remnant of Ikat-abaca, and

was found in good condition. It measures 81 cm x 21 cm, and has been restored and framed.

Other examples of archaeological textiles belonging to the museum are those worn by mummies found in the Kabayan caves in Benguet, Northern Luzon, which are 700 years old. The dimensions of these textiles are 49 cm x 29 cm. Some of these pieces were analysed and conserved at the laboratory for display purposes. (Fig. 3 & 4)

Another textile is the *barong tagalog* which is the Filipino national costume, and worn during special occasions. The cloth is made from pineapple fibres, woven into tapis, handkerchiefs, camisa de chino, and adorned with embroidery and lacework. It takes approximately two to three weeks to finish a simple barong, which is a very transparent and fine piece of work.

The weavers from Mindanao employ a discontinuous supplementary weft, such as the 'tapestry weave' which is adorned with embroidery, beads, applique work, shell disks and

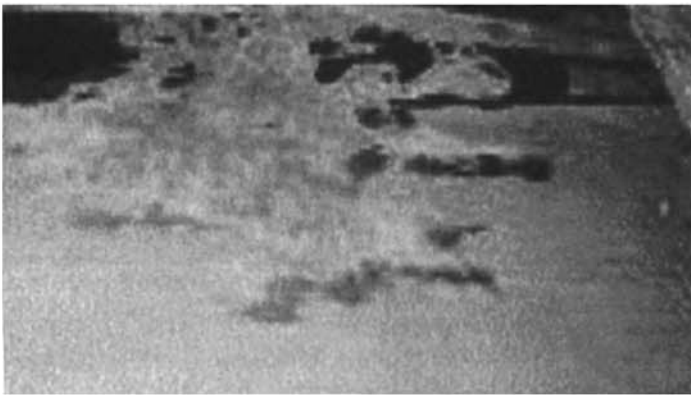


Fig. 3 Kabayan Mummy Cloth Before Conservation

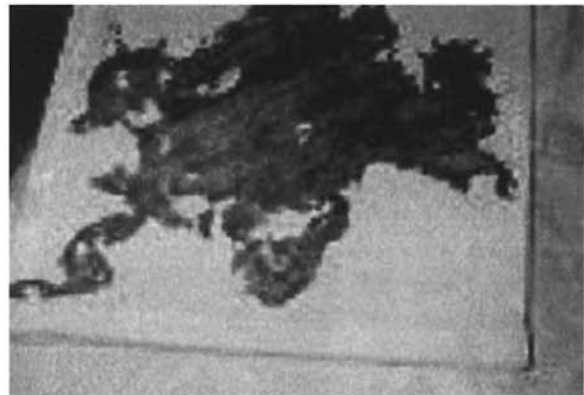


Fig. 4 Kabayan Mummy Cloth After Conservation

In Luzon, textiles are woven by a method referred to as the 'supplementary weft', and bear dark-coloured backgrounds, such as blue and black with yellow, white and red designs woven into them. (Fig. 5 & 6)

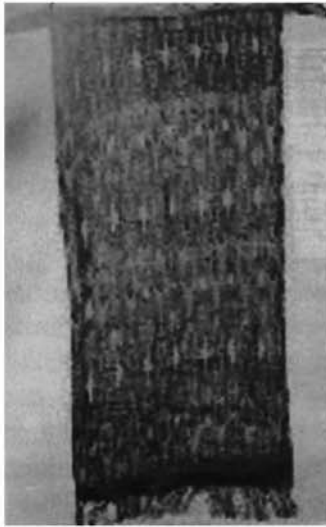


Fig. 5 Northern Luzon Textile Design



Fig. 6 Color Combination of an Ifugao Cloth

sequences. The base fabric colours are maroon, red, yellow, and blue; and the Bagobos make traditional tinalak with special narrative designs of clouds, hair bangs, butterfly, crocodile, lizard, and frog. The tinalak weaving carries certain taboo rituals, such as passing a single abaca



*Fig. 7 Wall Decor*

thread all over the body before weaving, so as to prevent illness (Fig. 7).

The Manobo, Mandaya, Bilaan, Tboli fabrics are woven using anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and geometric motifs. While the ikat of the Maranao and Maguindanao contain an 8-pointed star, the Muslims apply the images of insects, trees and flowers, and other geometric designs on theirs.

Philippine vestments are primarily found in church museums. These include saints' costumes, chasubles, the manipole, dalmatics, the mantle, belts, and capes. They are made of satin cloth, and are heavily decorated with metal, and gold threads in colours of gold, silver, violet, pink, black, blue, orange, and green. (Fig. 8 & 9)

*Fig. 9 Full view of Gold threaded cape*

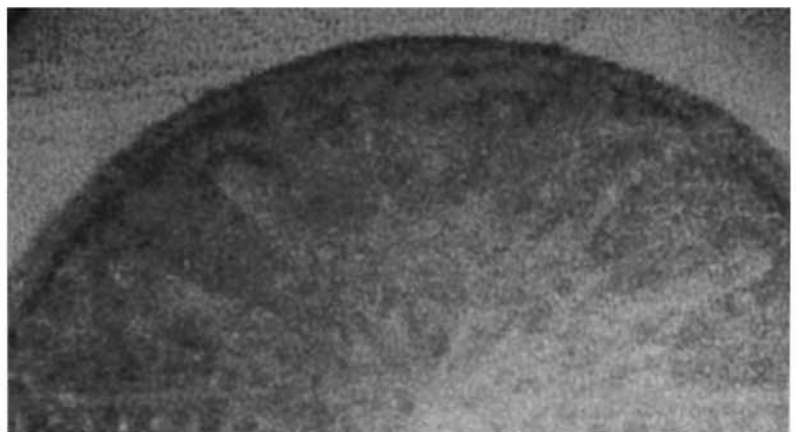
## Status of the Ethno-archaeology of Textiles and their Preservation

The National Museum have a very small collection of archaeological textiles, but all the major weaving techniques (for examples, the supplementary weft, cordage, and handloom) are represented. The present ethnographic textile collections, however, are quite large, and represent all the ethnic groups in the country.

One of the means of preserving the technology of traditional weaving was the establishment in 1992 of the award, 'Gawad ng Manlilikha ng Bayan'. This project, under the auspices of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (of the Office of the President) focuses on the importance of Philippine arts and folk crafts. The finest folk artists in the Philippines are identified and honoured, to promote the unique aspects of Philippine culture and the preservation of traditional knowledge and skills. Awarded are artists who still apply skills, native methods and indigenous materials in creating exquisite and valuable artworks which reflect the voice and vision of the country's weavers excelling in creating fabrics from indigenous materials.



*Fig. 8 Close up of Cape Design*



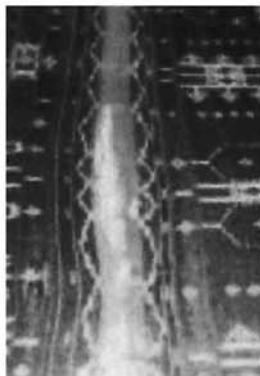
There is an immense concern in the Philippines today on the preservation of its textiles. Most curators and museum staff are aware of the importance of collection management. Some workers are sent abroad to attend training to learn new and improved preservation techniques, and seminars and workshops are conducted under the supervision of the National Museum in collaboration with the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. Participants of these activities are taught to handle the delicate materials properly, whether in storage or display case. For exhibition purposes, the museum is using new technologies for the conservation of textiles on display.

### Future Plans for the Textile Collection

The Ethnology Section of the Anthropology Division has plans relating to better safekeeping of textiles, and world-class exhibition and storage areas. The plan is to create a visible storage space as an exhibition area as well, which will allow visitors to view all the collections, while information on the materials will be retrievable from computers outside of the room. Under this system, researchers will be able to handle/study the collections but will be required to request in advance (at least 2 months) to provide the museum staff time for scheduling their work activities. Eventually, the Ethnology Section will produce a CD-ROM, and publish a catalogue of the entire textile holdings to facilitate the conservation processes, and also to enhance the museum's collections overall.

### Case Study: Conservation/Restoration of the *Isinai* Blanket

The textile is a very rare *Isinai* blanket. This was donated to the National Museum by Ambassador Ernesto M. Maceda of the Philippine Embassy in the USA. As one of the three extant



examples of the *Isinai* weaving tradition, the blanket was mailed to the Philippines in 1988. It was originally owned by Capt. Harry King who served in the Philippines during the Spanish American War.

The conservation process:

1. analysis of the dyes and fibres
2. mechanical and chemical cleaning
3. restoration

### Description

The specimen is a plainly woven *Isinai* "death" blanket. This was worn by the upper class of society in Ifugao province, northern Luzon. Two pieces of loosely woven cloth with symmetrical designs were sewn together to form the entire piece. It measures 218 cm x 155 cm and has a weave count of 52 x 26 threads per square inch. The fibres come from cotton plant, and are red, blue, and white, accentuated by diamond, stars, floral and geometrical designs. There is a difference in colour tone between the left and right sides (one side is lighter in colour than the other) (Fig. 10).

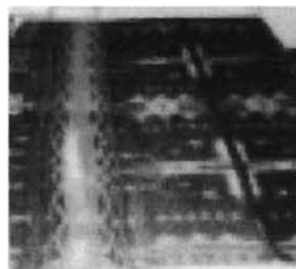


Fig. 10 *Isinai* blanket Before Conservation

### Condition

The object, which is very dusty, is generally in a stable condition except for some parts which have loose and weakened fibres due to mishandling. There are holes and entangled fibres on one end. The areas that are heavily destroyed are the red coloured fibres. (Fig. 11)

Fig. 11 Showed the deteriorated areas

## Conservation Treatment

### Materials:

Blue cotton cloth, red and blue organza filaments, tweezer, glass slides, cover slips, strainer, threads, needle, scissors, pins.

### Chemicals:

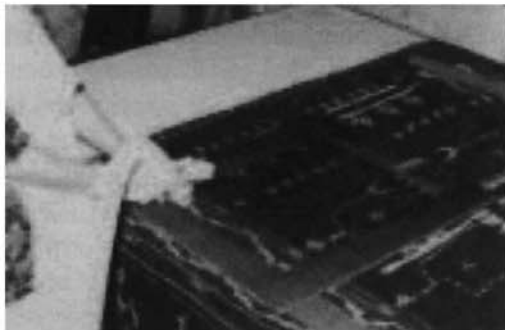
Varsol, thymol crystals

### Equipment:

Polarising microscope, fumigation chamber, pick glass, table lamp, vacuum cleaner.

### Actual Treatment:

The specimen was first fumigated in a fumigation chamber using thymol crystals as fumigant to kill insects. Then it was laid flat on a table and photo-documented. The fibres were identified under the polarising microscope. Dyes were analysed using the cotton swab method. The fibre strength was taken using the hand method, and the dust was removed by vacuum cleaner. (Fig. 12)



*Fig. 12 Mechanical Cleaning using vacuum cleaner*

The nozzle was wrapped with screen wire to avoid suctioning the fibres. Then it was chemically washed with varsol, supported by screen wire to lessen the pressure of the water. Drying was done in open air. The red-coloured stripes which have loose fibres were supported and handsewn, using the red organza filaments and applying the couching techniques to a pre-wash cotton cloth

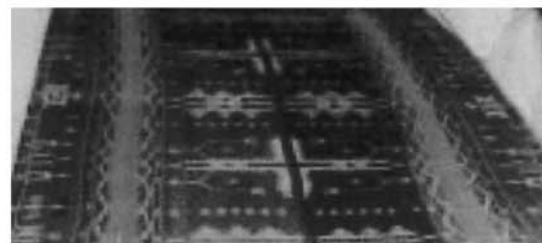
(Fig. 13). To ensure that the whole blanket is safe and stable, it was sewn to a blue-coloured cotton cloth. All the four edges were secured in place with blue threads using the hem stitch (Fig. 14). It was again photo-documented to observe the restored areas (Fig. 15). After assessing the stability of the blanket, it was vacuum-cleaned and wrapped in acid-free paper.



*Fig. 13 Aligning of Fibres*



*Fig. 14 Isinai Blanket sewn to a support*



*Fig. 15 The Blanket After Conservation*

### Care and Handling of Textiles:

1. All textiles must be placed away from direct sunlight, and if possible in exhibition galleries that limit their light exposure to an illumination amounting to greater than 50 lux.
2. Keep display areas, storage, and work-rooms free from dust and dirt.
3. Inspect regularly the entire textile collection to discover any signs of insect attack or damage by micro-organisms.
4. To avoid rust, never use pins or staple wires in storing or exhibiting them.
5. Carry textiles fully supported on trays and trolleys.
6. All foldings must be kept to a minimum, as far as possible. Folds should be padded with layers of acid-free tissue paper.
7. Handle textiles with a clean hand or use white gloves.

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Evelyn T. Elvena is a textile coordinator of the National Museum of the Philippines, who has been very much involved in textile conservation efforts, including training conservation staff and museum volunteers from other institutions. She participated in and contributed this paper during the 2000 Bangkok Seminar on Ethno-archaeology of Southeast Asian Textiles.

### Handprints found

A team of archaeologists said (29-6-01) that they had uncovered 11 new caves with more than 500 prehistoric handprints, paintings and other rock art in the Indonesian province of Kalimantan on Borneo. The discovery of 375 handprints in one cave was "one of the most important finds" of the expedition, said Frenchman Luc-Henri Fage, one of the mission's leaders who presented their findings at a news conference in Singapore. – AFP