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Abstract:
Textile pattern books usually originate from business archives, and normally present textile samples alongside written text. Thus they form a natural subject for the theme of 'textiles and text'. This paper uses examples drawn from recent research on pattern book archives to illustrate how object-based study can be used to support or to critique related text-based study. Examples show how artefactual data analysed on visual terms can generate new information unobtainable by other means, and this information can subsequently be used to evaluate other written texts or artefactual evidence. Techniques discussed include pattern matching and stylistic sequencing.

Keywords:
archives, artefactual evidence, calico prints, Lancashire silks, matching, pattern books

Title:
Abundant images and scant text: reading textile pattern books

In the early 1850s, textile pattern books from local manufacturers were solicited for a proposed history of calico printing by the secretaries of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society. The signatories to this appeal, chemists Robert Angus Smith and Edward Schunck, wrote of such pattern books, 'These will tell to those who can read them nearly the whole history of their manufacture.' (Smith and Schunck, c.1850: 2) Such is the potential of textile pattern books: offering nearly the whole history of calico printing. But the *proviso* 'to those who can read them' speaks of a meaning accessible only to persons with specialist knowledge; and this meaning that was then available to only a few, the intervening 150 years have served to further obscure. There is undoubtedly a steep learning curve for those who would 'read' historical textile pattern books in the present day.

Typically, pattern books present a dense body of visual evidence in the form of pattern samples, sometimes with no written information at all, but more usually accompanied by text-based clues such as headings, numbering systems, and inscribed notes. As objects, they also hold rich layers of artefactual content in the form of binding styles, materials and their associated technologies. Careful and persistent study of several pattern book archives in north-west England has uncovered internal and external links between textiles and texts that suggest ways of penetrating the rich historical meaning exhorted by Smith and Schunck. This paper highlights a few examples taken from the context of textile pattern books that show how textiles and text can be read together.

An example of visual matching as an indicator of shared origin

Perhaps the most instinctual activity of the pattern book researcher is a search for visual matches. When a chronological sequence is presented by a pattern book, a pattern match can confirm dating; when the pattern book's compiler is known, a match can indicate provenance. It is also possible, since so many textile company archives have been split apart, to find large level matches between pattern books as whole entities. An illustration of such a match is that between two shipment record books, one held by Manchester Archives and the other by the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester.[1] The earlier book details the cargoes of printed chintzes and woven muslins shipped from England to India between May 1822 and August 1823.[2] Each entry is headed by the name of the ship and date of sail, followed by a list of the contents case by case, identified by their bale mark and number. Each different pattern is represented by a sample, beside which the number of pieces of cloth is written. The second book begins with the month at which the first book finishes.[3] Although the earlier book has lost its original binding, and the text block differs somewhat in size and paper stock, the entries follow the same layout and recording format. There are also pattern matches to indicate the books stem from the same source, and are consecutive volumes.

The originating company is not identified in the earlier book, but the later volume specifies a sailing from Liverpool in July 1824 carrying a consignment on account of the Bombay merchant house Ritchie Steuart & Co.[4] From 1825, the RS bale mark is used, and some of the ships are eponymously linked with the company, for example the *Thomas Ritchie* and *Mount Steuart Elphinstone*.[5] The multiple and complementary visual and textual matches found between the two pattern books allow the confident attribution of the unidentified volume to Ritchie Steuart & Co. as well.

Straightforward visual matching, simple as it seems, is labour intensive and requires both perseverance and good fortune. For example, a fabric match between one of the Ritchie Steuart chintzes and a quilt of Indian provenance in the collection of the Musée de l'Impression sur Etoffes was recently identified as a result of the chance publication of a particular image from the Manchester Archives pattern book.[6] Although precise matches such as this are a relative rarity, the rich contextual connections that they provide are still sufficient cause for the researcher to optimise chances for encountering them. Nevertheless even with matching patterns, the researcher cannot automatically conclude a straightforward commonality of origin. For instance, there is evidence that engraved copperplates were purchased and re-used by different printers. Patterns engraved for Moore Johnston and Mason of Wandsworth turn up later in the books of a Crayford printer.[7] But these could also be a few of the numerous instances of copied textile patterns that must be contended with, always leaving to identifications based on visual matching an element of doubt where these cannot be backed up by further evidence.

An example of written evidence explaining the significance of artefactual evidence

The most commonly understood function of historical textile pattern books is the way they are still used today, as a means for presenting a range for sale to potential customers. In a book format the full range available from a manufacturer can easily be viewed and selections made for purchase. This type of pattern book, once known as a 'show book', is usually characterised by neat presentation, with samples cut to standard sizes and often arranged in colourway groups. Less familiar is the nineteenth

century practice in which ‘show books’ presented to the wholesale buyer may contain goods not already made and held in stock, but goods that could potentially be made if orders were forthcoming. Although considerable sums would have been invested by the manufacturer at that point in cutting printing blocks or jacquard cards to produce the pattern samples, money was not tied up in patterned stock, and there remained an opportunity to change colourings or weaving yarns as the customer desired.

A pattern book of the 1860s from an unknown Lyon silk weaver can be identified as a ‘show book’ based on artefactual evidence. [8] Neatly arranged on numerous pages are 755 samples representing nearly 250 different patterns, often in three or more colourways. These are small-figured silks intended for a middle market, rather than high-fashion novelties. Just one of the many samples happens to include parts of two patterns within the same swatch. But this small, unintentional error signals that the patterns in the book have been sampled only, rather than woven as complete pieces in a production run. Thus this pattern book illustrates the sales practice of offering customers the opportunity to select patterns ‘in the cloth,’ a practice probably originating in France. In the 1830s, it had been noted as an advantage of French over English manufacturers who sold their designs painted on paper only. A silk mercer from the flourishing Regent Street firm Howell & James[9] explained to the 1835 Select Committee on Art and Manufactures how their patterns were chosen:

> It is usual for Lyons [*sic*] manufacturers to come twice a year to England, that is, in the spring for the autumn, and the autumn for the spring, and they produce perhaps 200 or 300 patterns, not paper patterns, but silk patterns or gauze patterns, or whatever it may be, and from these patterns we make our selection; and it sometimes happens that we have so good an opinion of certain patterns, that we say, ‘Now you must withdraw that, it must be made for us only,’ and for [an order of] 20 or 30 pieces they will do that. Now the English manufacturers never give us that advantage, they think it very expensive to put to work a pattern to show us the effect of it,

> whether we shall have it or not, and we often urge them to bring us a little piece ready, to see the effect of it; sometimes we want colour, sometimes we want a little change in the disposition; but there has always been an objection to the expense incurred, and therefore we are obliged to bear the expense if we are content to order from a paper pattern.[10]

By the 1860s, English silk manufacturers were able to produce similar patterns to those in the Lyon show book. In fact, samples in the archive of Charles Hilton & Son of Leigh show similar styles and colourings,[11] although they do not reveal the company's marketing strategy in like manner. The Lyon show book demonstrates how one small piece of artefactual evidence - just one sample among over 700 - is able to indicate the original function of the book, in this case a book assembled to solicit advance orders, rather than a record of production. Not only that, it serves to illustrate the continuance of the French tradition of sales by cloth pattern described three decades earlier as one of their marketing advantages.

An example of artefactual evidence supporting questionable written evidence

In 1826, the *Manchester Guardian* reported that a petition was in preparation by a deputation of calico printers,

> the prayer of which is for the removal of the duty on printed calicoes, which at present is pressing on the trade with more severity than at any former period. On many descriptions of prints - on almost all those which are worn by the labouring classes - it adds from 60 to 100 per cent to the value of the cloth, thus inflicting a very heavy tax on those who are least able to bear it.[12]

A pattern notebook assembled at Birkacre printworks and dating from the mid-1820s confirms the claims of the calico printers.[13] This notebook holds some 40 costings for printed cottons. Some are arranged in pairs that differ in one or two features, so that

the relative cost of such features can be compared. The duty is shown at the head of each column with the sum below, so that the proportion of the value added by the duty is easy to calculate. The duty averages around 44 per cent of the total costs, or an addition of 79 per cent on the value of the cloth - exactly in the middle of the range submitted by the calico printers to parliament. This evidence is particularly pertinent because the figures were recorded during a period of agitation for repeal of the taxation when manufacturers' public claims could have been exaggerated for political effect.[14] In the printer's notebook, where a breakdown of printing charges, dyeing charges and colouring matters is set out alongside actual pattern samples, there is little opportunity to massage the figures. In fact, the addition of two shillings for 'wear and tear' (W&T) actually reduces the cost effect of the duty, and might have been left off if it was the intention to exaggerate. The pattern book evidence can be seen as a reliable confirmation of the newspaper account.

An example of artefactual evidence casting doubt on historical interpretation

James Thomson was considered by his contemporaries as the leading calico printer in the north-west region during most of the first half of the nineteenth century. Thomson vigorously promoted printed textile design not only from the perspective of copyright protection and design education, but in the furtherance of quality hand-block printing to realise his best designs. Because Thomson expanded his use of hand-block printing at a time when the technique was generally in decline, the historian Agusti Nieto-Galan accused Thomson of 'aesthetic Luddism' in his attitude toward design. Evoking the machine-breakers of the early nineteenth century, the term Luddism is applied here to anyone opposed to the introduction of new technology. Nieto-Galan writes:

> Thomson's 'Luddism' was more 'refined.' He proclaimed the priority of artistic designs over the constraints imposed by mechanization. …Thomson did not use only aesthetic arguments in the defence of quality printed cloth; he also mentioned rates of employment [that is, average output per employee], a factor which a Luddite would also consider important. In general he aimed to show that quality printed goods were a better strategy in terms of both labour and markets. (Nieto-Galan, 2001: 159 & 161)

Nieto-Galan's assumption is that the triumph of mechanised mass-production was inevitable. However, it is odd that Thomson should be accused of Luddism by a modern writer, when he was praised by his contemporaries for being 'the first to encourage any mechanical or chemical improvement in calico printing, …at once trying what it was worth. This speculative tendency, whilst costing money, gave him immense advantages, and to this cause may be ascribed his success…' (Anon. 1850: 66) So, it is fortunate that a pattern book survives from Thomson's printworks[15] that can shed further light on his managerial legacy.[16] This is a notebook of 1853 that compares costings for printing related styles of work. These are styles that combine machine printing with hand-block work on wool *delaines*, thus from the start showing no nostalgic clinging to tradition. Analysis of several costings shows that labour and colouring matter for adding one further hand-blocked colour to a *delaine* pattern could amount to an increase of 12 to 20 per cent on the total costs of printing. By contrast, another sample shows that use of a tobying sieve to hand-block three colours at once reduced the added cost to only seven per cent. Thus the pattern book provides evidence not only for the care that managers of the firm took to understand expenses, but their awareness of the technological means for making savings without depreciating the design qualities of their work.

While it is true that Thomson pursued the high-end home trade entailing labour intensive hand-block printing, registered designs show the company did not neglect more widely saleable roller-printed work. The Thomson costings notebook reveals that the firm did not shrink from using new technology to increase the efficiency of traditional techniques even while endeavouring to maintain quality production. Nieto-Galan's charge of Luddism cannot be upheld.

Artefactual evidence of a stylistic sequence posing a new line of research

Charles Hilton & Son was a silk manufacturing firm with its weaving mill in the Lancashire town of Leigh. Founded as a partnership in 1837, Charles Hilton continued the firm on his own from 1844, until joined by his son in 1869. Typical of Lancashire silk manufacturers, the bulk of Hilton's business was in plain silks, and in simple striped and checked patterns. Such silks were probably the mainstay of the British home market, and would have found much use in the day dresses of middle-class women. Lacking the strong visual appeal of expensive figured silks, this type of production generally has been neglected by the historian.

One of the first tasks in cataloguing the Hilton & Son archive[17] was to put the surviving pattern books into chronological order. The category 'checks and stripes' was the largest of three strands of patterned silk production pursued by Hilton, and 30 pattern books survive that cover the period from 1847 to 1875, practically year by year, often season by season. In the close and repeated observation of the patterns required to return the books to date order, it became apparent that striped patterns were always attuned to checks in technique and colouration, and that together checks

and stripes followed their own stylistic sequence conforming to dress fashions. The Hilton pattern books not only document this sequence in detail, but if the fashions they describe are as general as those found in figured silks, they could be used to date other check and stripe patterns found on surviving silk dresses in museum collections.

This paper does not allow space to run through the full sequence, but the decade of the 1850s will be used to illustrate chartable pattern features. The Hilton books begin with autumn 1847 when bold tartans woven in shot colours were predominant. Textural contrast was also apparent, created by 'raised bar' effects using an extra weft. Such raised textures became more prominent during the next couple years, and in spring 1849, a form of extra-warp patterning known as 'stitch' patterns came into use. In autumn 1851, shaded colours were used in the warps to soften transitions, and this seems to signal a temporary change in taste. But by autumn 1852, 'stitch' patterns became the prominent feature along with contrasting banding in the ground. From 1853 to 1855, finely barred grounds were much used, often alternating four wefts of one shade and four wefts of another. The overall colour effect was more unitary than previously, continued in 1856 by small-scale checks relieved mainly by textural bar effects. The year 1857 sees the introduction of plain square checks, including larger squares, but these were displaced from favour the following season, and commencing in 1858 fashion pursued broad, banded effects, whether formed by the extra-weft technique, or 'rib and plain,' an alternation of warp-based ribs with plain weave. Fine two-and-two barring was added to vary the ground in 1859, and by 1860 grounds gained a feeling of additional complexity with small spots and printed warps. The fine detailing continued, but in 1861 two novel features were introduced, the spaced bar, that is an interrupted bar effect, and also bright yellow highlights paralleling the bars.

This sequence of patterns shows how distinctive and changeable the simple stripe and check patterns can be. It is in keeping with the logic of fashion that less expensive silks used for day dresses, and thus more often worn in one season than expensive flowered silks, would be discarded in the favour of something new in the next season by all who could afford to do so.

The Hilton pattern books suggest a new line of research, charting check and stripe patterns against the photographic evidence and alongside surviving Victorian dresses, in order to test and refine the stylistic sequence. As a single example, a photographic portrait of around 1854 showing Thereza Mary Dillwyn Llewelyn, a relative of the photographer Fox Talbot, shows a silk very much in keeping with the Hilton pattern books with the fine barred grounds of the mid-1850s.

Conclusions

Textile pattern books present an interesting hybrid of textiles and text within the spectrum of documentary evidence on offer to textile historians. It has been noted that pattern matching is an important methodology for establishing the wider context of pattern book evidence, but not free from problems of interpretation due to the transfer of pattern matrices from company to company, and to widespread copying of designs. Applying internal evidence to the interpretation of a pattern book places the historian on firmer ground, especially where this is supported by written historical evidence, as in the case of French silk manufacturers selling patterns ‘in the cloth.’ On the other hand, pattern books themselves can provide crucial support for written evidence in

cases where political bias is inherent in published texts, as has been seen with the calico printers' campaign for repeal of duty in the 1820s. Finally, reading of the artefactual evidence in pattern books can be used to question the interpretations made by contemporary historians, as in the case of James Thomson's support for new technology. Or the artefactual evidence can be analysed on visual terms for its stylistic values as with the Hilton check and stripe patterns. Here, the stylistic analysis must be validated by comparison with other forms of visual or artefactual evidence before it can be applied as a dating parameter. I hope that this range of examples drawn from the specialist subject area of textile pattern books has served to demonstrate that object-based study is not simply an instrument to give added depth to information available through study of texts, but rather a source of new information unobtainable by other means - information that can be explored on its own visual or artefactual terms - and can subsequently be used to evaluate either written texts or other artefactual evidence.

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Endnotes:
[1] It was Tina Fenwick Smith who first alerted me to the possibility of this match.
[2] Manchester Archives; M/75/ Design Department 3. Warehouseman's shipment record for Ritchie Steuart & Co., Bombay, 1822-23.
[3] Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester, MS 0488. Warehouseman's shipment record for Ritchie Steuart & Co., Bombay, 1823-27.
[4] Ritchie Steuart & Co. began trading in Bombay by 1817, and had connections with warehousing firms in Manchester and London through their head company James Finlay & Co. of Glasgow. See Finlay & Co., 1951. The archives of James Finlay & Co. are held by Glasgow University Archive Services; GB 0248 UGD 091.
[5] The convincing match between the two pattern books is further supported by the inclusion of later sailings of some of the same ships in the second volume: the *Bombay Merchant*, the *Theodosia*, and the *Dorothy*.
[6] Letter from Jacqueline Jacqué, 14 November 2005. Musée de l'Impression sur Etoffes; 956-37-1. Quilted 'prayer rug'.
[7] G.P. & J. Baker Archives; Inv. 61: Plate patterns. Downing Collection at Manchester Metropolitan University; Moore Johnstone & Mason pattern book, 1825-31.
[8] Aldham Robarts Learning Resource Centre, Liverpool John Moores University; 746/FAB. Lyon show book, c.1867-70. See Sykas, 2005: 142.
[9] George Augustus Sala recalled Howell and James as 'flourishing as silk mercers and jewellers' around 1836 to 1837. See Sala, 1894.
[10] Evidence of John Howell, a partner in Howell & James, 3 Aug 1835, para.415. See House of Commons, 1836: 30.
[11] Wigan Heritage Service; B78/508. Charles Hilton figured weave pattern book, 1863-70.
[12] *The Times* 8 August 1826, 'Memorial for the removal of the duty on printed calicoes', 3. Extracted from the *Manchester Guardian*.
[13] Bolton Museums, Art Gallery and Aquarium; A.1-1967. John Mellor notebook, 1824-27.
[14] For an account of the 1826 to 1830 campaign concerning the print duty, see Hurst, 1948: 7-10.
[15] Manchester Archives; BR f667.2/ T4. James Thomson, Brothers & Sons pricing book, 1853. For an account of how close this book came to destruction, see Sykas, 2005: 136-7.
[16] James Thomson died in 1850, and his firm was then run by his sons and nephews. Thomson's strength of character was such, even directing operations from his deathbed, that it is probable his successors ran the firm along similar lines in the few years the firm remained viable after his death. See Anon. 1850: 65-6.
[17] Wigan Heritage Service; B78/ L441-L548 and additional numbers. Charles Hilton & Son Archive.

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Brief biography:
Philip Sykas pursued an active career as a textile conservator and a costume curator before beginning a research degree at Manchester Metropolitan University in 1995. Since completing a doctoral thesis on calico printers' pattern books in 2000, he has continued to focus on the history of calico printing in England. Through analysing visual evidence from manufacturers' pattern books alongside contemporaneously written texts, a richly illustrated documentary history is emerging from the research. This is demonstrated in *Secret Life of Textiles: six pattern book archives in north-west England*, a 2005 publication disseminating the results of two years of research in regional archives.

Figure Caption and acknowledgements
Figure 1. Page from Ritchie Steuart & Co. shipment record.
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Figure 2. Sample from the Lyon 'show book'. By permission of Special Collections and Archives, Aldham Robarts Centre, Liverpool John Moores University

Figure 3. Page from the Birkacre notebook showing costings including duty. Image Copyright Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council

Figure 4. Page from James Thomson, Brothers & Sons pattern book. Manchester Archives and Local Studies: BR f 667.2 T4. Copyright: Coats plc

Figure 5. Check patterns from the 1850s from Charles Hilton.
Wigan Heritage Service: The History Shop

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