

CLASSIC AND ECCENTRIC ELEMENTS IN
EAST SUMBA TEXTILES.

A FIELD REPORT

By

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The current upsurge of interest in exotic crafts is turning our attention increasingly to village arts, that is, those arts practiced far from the great industrial centers. In the field of weaving and textile decoration, the village arts of Indonesia form an important segment of those arts whose "magic" of creation lies not in complex and efficient equipment but in the intangible skills of hand and eye. Most famous are the myriad hand-drawn patterns of cotton batiks from Java and the delicate, muted designs of silks from Sumatra and Bali. Less well-known but increasingly admired are the heavier cotton cloths decorated with natural dyes from Eastern Indonesia. Among these, the colorful mantles from Sumba, a small island east of Bali, are outstanding not only for exceptionally interesting technical aspects but also as a visually exciting art.

Produced by women, only in the coastal districts of the eastern half of the island, the large rectangular cloths are worn by men throughout East Sumba on ceremonial occasions. Each cloth consists of two identical panels, forming a rectangle measuring approximately three yards in length and one and a half yards in width. Two cloths are necessary to form an outfit, one wrapped around the hips, the other draped over one shoulder.

Boldly designed and richly colored in a variety of tones of rust and blue, the mantles are decorated by a form of tie-dyeing widely known in Indonesia and termed in Indonesian, *ikat*, meaning "to bind." The "binding" refers to an important step in the formation of the designs which are dyed onto the yarn strands before weaving. I will, further on, discuss refinements of this technique based on my recent research visit to the island of Sumba. Although in the 19th century Sumba cloths were woven of home-grown handspun cotton yarn, at present only imported machine yarn is used for the men's ikatted costume. Fortunately, traditional textile design is still a thriving art on the island.

Visually, East Sumba men's cloths (*S. hinggi*) stand apart from other Indonesian textiles, which are usually embellished with small motifs of ornamental character. The *hinggi* characteristically exhibits a great variety of figurative designs, such as, trees bearing human skulls, large birds and fish, or humans standing or riding horseback. These figures are arranged in a formal system which produces a pleasing, balanced composition.

Figure 1 provides a classic example of the style. Designs typically appear as light-colored figures in horizontal rows against a background of alternating rust and purplish-brown tones, the latter a result of overdyeing rust and blue colors. Within the rows, the design units, consisting usually of confronting pairs of animals, are repeated, although the wide, main band may present two different designs in simple alternation, such as in Figure 1, a sea shrimp seen from overhead and a leafy plant. Smaller figures, some dyed rust or blue, fill the spaces in and around the major images. The first and third bands, called (*S.*) *talaba*, border, on a rust ground form a bright frame for the wide dark band, called *tau*, body, or *hai*, crest, comb. The rows above the top *talaba* are referred to simply as the middle (*la padua*) or *kundu duku*, which refers to the part "worn on the shoulder."

The number of bands is always uneven and the center row of designs spans the middle of the cloth. Above and below this center, the sequence of color bands and designs are identical. Thus the cloth consists of mirror-image halves. However, the orientation of the designs within the bands divides the surface into three broad areas: a centerfield featuring schematic designs and two flanking endfields containing identical plant and animal figures. The images in the endfields are oriented to stand upright when the cloth hangs from the center – as it does when worn on the shoulder, but the schematic design in the centerband is biaxial. It may be read equally well when viewed from top or bottom.

To inventory the designs, it is sufficient to see only one half the cloth plus the full centerband.¹ This optimum view is shown in Figure 1. Reading from the fringe, the figures are as follows: confronting sea birds, large sea shrimp (found in offshore waters) alternating with a live plant which in turn is flanked by small skull trees; confronting birds again, confronting fish, confronting floating birds and finally the center band which contains an alternating circle and dotted lozenge motif.

In East Sumba cloths, most of the major figures such as plants, roosters, cockatoos, snakes, crocodiles, deer and ponies are recognizably drawn from local surroundings. Other designs reflect conceptions specific to Sumbanese culture. The dead tree hung with human skulls (Fig. 2) represents the skull tree that was an important feature of the royal village, where it served as a sign of

victory over enemies. The stone base in which the dead tree was placed and the buffalo horns attached to the trunk at the victory feast are usually shown in realistic detail on the textiles. Another royal motif is the heraldic set of rampant lions (Fig. 3, 4th row) which derives from the coat-of-arms imprinted on the former Dutch Government's medallions, coins and other official insignia treasured by the rulers of Sumba. All these designs, because of their importance or preciousness, have become symbols of prestige. As prestigious images, they serve as metaphors for royalty.

One of the most pleasing aspects of East Sumba textiles is the effect of the colors. In fine cloths, the Sumbanese employ two basic colors, rust, which ranges from somber to brilliant, and blue in both light and dark tones. These are obtained by the use of natural dyes, widely available in Indonesia. The rust dyes derive from the bark and roots of the (S.) *kombu* tree (Ind., *mengkudu*; L., *Morinda citrifolia*); the blue, from the indigo plant. The Sumbanese first dye with the indigo (Fig. E) then with the rust color (Fig. G), producing in some areas of the cloth considerable overdyeing which results in the dark purplish or brown tone of much of the background.

Both dyes are applied in cold processing. Before the *mengkudu* solution can produce rust-red tones on cotton, the fiber must be prepared by oiling. This is done after indigo dyeing. The yarn is soaked in an oily solution made from the kernel of the (S.) *kawilu* plant (Ind. *kemiri*) which is plentiful locally. (Fig. F). To the *mengkudu* dye solution itself, the Sumbanese add the bark and leaves of the (S.) *loba* tree. This provides the alum chemically needed for brightness and thus the Sumbanese obtain the more brilliant tones of rust-red which make their cloths recognizably distinct from those of neighboring island peoples who also use *mengkudu*. To obtain *loba*, however, the coastal people must trade with the inhabitants of the interior highlands where the tree (prob. *L. Symplocos*) grows.

After the cloth is woven, a yellow stain (obtained variously from local plants) is daubed on in and around the designs. This heightens the variegated effect created by the changes of color tone among the many details and small figures of the textile, altogether creating a shimmering effect admired by the Sumbanese. The soft tones of undyed areas, which are slightly yellowed in the course of dye-work, subtly contribute to the visual unity of the surface. Before these dyeing processes can begin, however, the work of forming the designs must already have been done. This is achieved through the ikat or binding technique.

The ikat technique employed to obtain the multitude of images is essentially a method of binding for reserve dyeing which may be used to decorate either the warp (the lengthwise yarn), the weft (the crosswise strands)

or, more rarely, both. On Sumba, as on most of the islands of eastern Indonesia, only the warp is ikatted.

To begin ikatting, East-Sumba style, white undyed yarn is first wound around a frame half the desired length of the mantle. (Fig. A). During the winding, the strands are separated into odd and even layers necessary for forming sheds or openings in the later weaving process. The yarn is also grouped into sets of, say, ten pairs of strands each. (Fig. B). Before tying in the designs, it is customary to superpose eight layers of yarn; that is, a total of eight sets go into each binding. (Fig. C).² Each layer represents one-half of the four identical panels needed for the costume pair (two mantles or *hinggi*).

Using the combined sets as the tying unit, the yarn is bound with dye-resistant leaf strips (from the *gewang* palm) in the shapes of the desired figures (Fig. D). The bindings prevent these areas from absorbing color during dye baths, so that finally the designs will appear as undyed areas on a darker ground.

The Sumbanese use a two-color tie-dye system. In tying, however, the craftswomen do not distinguish among the color areas by means of different binding knots because they know the patterns so well. When dyeing of the first color, blue, is complete, parts to be dyed rust are unbound in order to expose those areas to the oiling and the rust dye. If, as is customary, small design areas of medium or light blue tone are desired, the bindings for those areas must be cut away at some point in the indigo dippings and, after the desired tone of blue is obtained, those areas must be recovered with bindings in order to avoid overdyeing in subsequent rust dye-baths. After completing the rust dyeing, the remaining bindings are removed (Fig. H), revealing the designs in the original color of the yarn (except those in medium blue or rust) against a background of overdyed blue and rust.

After starching, dyed still-circular warp bundles sufficient for one panel are slipped onto the loom which is a simple, two-beam frameless type (the so-called backstrap loom). One beam is attached to two posts; the other is linked by cords to a pole or strap at the weaver's back which permits her to vary the tension of the warp as appropriate to various stages of weaving. (Fig. H). On this loom, used without a reed, the Sumbanese produce a warp-faced weave. The weft, which does not show on the surface, is dyed simply in one or both of the colors used.

Obviously all these processes the yarn passes through call for some means of keeping the strands in fixed order so that when the warp is stretched on the loom, the designs will appear clearly in good alignment. To accomplish this requires painstaking attention at several critical points. First, prior to being

set up on the tying frame, the yarn, whether handspun or imported machine work, must be stretched to reach a uniform tautness, so that in later handling, individual strands will not become longer or shorter and thus spoil the design.

On the tying frame, the women must ensure that an equal number of consecutive strands are included in each set. Once the number of warp sets required for the desired width of the mantle is obtained, a strong cross cord is knotted continuously around each set, firmly binding them in place, so that the yarn will not shift in the lengthwise direction. The firmness of this cross-cord binding is essential for later design clarity.

The final critical stage occurs after dyeing is completed and after all the leaf bindings have been cut away from the dyed warps. The warp must then be set up on a stretch frame so that “lining-up” (*pamerangu*) can take place. (Fig. I). This time-consuming task requires flattening out the bundles of starched yarn bunched by the former set-bindings, repairing broken and replacing missing strands and finally, guided by the appearance of the designs, pulling and pushing strands so that outlines of designs even up. In ikatting, because of the slight penetration of dye at the edges of the bindings, a certain blurriness of form is inevitable. Although we find this softness of the ikatted image pleasing, the Sumbanese place the highest value on precise and even outlines.

The weather influences these various processes – humidity, for example, affects raw cotton and causes changes in yarn tension, so customarily the women work in the dry season (May to December). In fact, all textile work has a seasonal schedule. If stretching and tying work is completed in the dry season, one must wait for the rains of January through March for the indigo plant to mature before the blue dye can be prepared. Following the blue dyeing, the oiling of the yarn is done in the next dry season for, during this process, the yarn requires long exposure to the hot sun. It will be toward the end of the second rainy season (April-May), then, before forays to the woods are undertaken to chop the bark and dig the fine roots of the kombu tree which will be pounded to make the rust dye solution. The next dry season provides the right conditions for setting up the loom and if all goes well the weaving of the four panels is completed before the third rainy season begins. Thus working on an intermittent and seasonal basis, the craftswoman requires two and a half years in order to complete a pair of cloths. In fact, it usually takes longer because the women like to engage in repeated dippings over more than one season in order to achieve the favored, saturated color tones.

The splendid colors and lively designs of East Sumba mantles appealed to the former Dutch administrators in Indonesia and, especially in the early part of the 20th century, they purchased hundreds of Sumba cloths as home

furnishings and for art collections. Many of these have subsequently found their way into the museums of Europe and Asia. From these generous quantities, we know the range of designs and visual types of East Sumba textiles over the span of the past 100 years.

In America, although Sumba textiles are comparatively rare, some examples from earlier Dutch collectors have been acquired, as for example, specimens from the Kerckhoff collection at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and from the Tassilo Adam collection at the Brooklyn Museum. In view of the current improvements in communication within Indonesia, colorful East Sumba cloths are again reaching art collectors in Java and eventually will find a wider public. To understand the great variations in style and fluctuations in quality, it will be useful to survey the circumstances of production within Sumbanese society and to illustrate both classic and eccentric features among East Sumba cloths.

The most productive coastal area is the district of Kambera which surrounds the northern harbor of Waingapu. The cotton plant has always thrived on the hot coastal plains; and indigo for the blue dye and *kombu* (Ind. *mengkudu*) bark for the rust dye are plentiful. Today, and probably in former times in this area, textile work is carried on the year 'round.⁸ Other coastal areas noted for decorated textile production are the districts of Kanatang and Kapunduk to the northwest of Kambera and those of Rende, Melolo, Mangili and Waidjelo, which extend along the eastern coast to the southern sea.

In the more fertile interior, where most of the population live, ikatting is forbidden by sacred custom. Because the inhabitants place a high value on textiles and use them as ritual costume and marriage gifts, however, the decorated cloths form an important item of exchange which enables the coastal people to obtain food and other resources from the productive inland regions.

Within East Sumba, the traditional society is stratified into three main classes: royalty, freeholders and servants. The nobility congregate in fortified capital villages, usually set on a hilltop; lower-ranking people live for most of the year outside the capital in small huts near their fields of rice and corn. Coastal women of all classes can spin and many know how to bind designs into yarn. Although most women are familiar with the dye ingredients and procedures, not many actually practice the skills of blue dyeing, fewer still rust dyeing, and dye work tends to be centralized around the larger villages or capitals.

The main centers of decorated textile production are the households of

district rulers. Only high royalty commands the resources, labor and contacts with the inland needed for producing in quantity. Usually one of the ruler's wives or unmarried sisters supervises not only the work – most of which is done by servants – but she also strongly influences style and favored motifs for the area. Women from outlying villages who show talent are called in to live or to work at the capital.

From the ample royal stores of decorated textiles, the traditional ruler or king can provide dramatic costumes not only for his family and relatives but also for numerous retainers who perform in the many rituals of the capital. Often through royal largesse performers are rewarded with their costumes. The king's collections are large and varied not only because of the immediate needs and circumstances of production but also because of the importance of textiles in a widespread system of gift exchange.

In the traditional economy there are no monies and no markets. Goods, labor, services and brides are given and received as gifts and, like visits, are accompanied by an exchange of gifts. Textiles are an important element in all these exchanges. Because the king is the focus of social, economic and religious affairs – he is, for example, directly concerned in all marriage negotiations – there is in his household a constant influx and outflow of textile gifts, many from other districts. Women from the royal households are given in marriage to ruling families in other districts and take with them a retinue of household servants which include craftswomen.

In such a fluid situation, it is no surprise to find that the textiles of the entire coast share a compositional system and a common inventory of designs. However, in each district at any one period, there are certain stylistic features which are favored and in some instances differences in color tone which are due to local dye recipes. These slight differences will “tip off” a resident who may not even be able to put his finger on just why he has recognized a certain cloth as from another district.

More obvious than regional style among the textiles is what might be called class distinction. Inherently expensive objects, decorated textiles are a form of wealth and a mark of high status. Within the traditional social system there were “sumptuary laws” regarding dress, that is, rules for the different classes defining the level of quality for garments and costume details. The finer the textile, which means that, within the style, the more painstaking, time-consuming and labor-expensive effects are achieved, the higher the prestige. Textiles directly associated with the king or high nobility are not only longer and wider than average but also are characterized by special effects in the form of complex composition, privileged designs, more saturated color and ad-

ditional finishing touches. Such textiles are usually called *hinggi maramba*, (Ind. *kain radja*) or "royal wrap."

These features can be seen in Figure 4-A, a mantle from the Metropolitan Museum collection. First, excellent ikatting, clear and error-free images. The space is densely filled with designs of different size and they are elaborated with fine detail and curvilinear touches, the most difficult to execute well. Above the top talaba or bordering row, the centerfield exhibits a band of the privileged design, the *patola ratu*, one of the several centerfield designs which could only be worn by high royalty.⁴ This cloth, already old when acquired in 1930, illustrates a good feature of the natural dyes, that is, after many, many exposures to sun and washings, they fade to beautiful soft tones which some people find more attractive than the glowing splendor of freshly dyed fabrics.

In other royal cloths, the *patola ratu* design might extend throughout the centerfield, but in this example we see an eccentric feature, a white mid-section ornamented at the center seam with colored, chain-stitch embroidery. According to the Sumbanese, the white center is another sign of a "royal" cloth. Examples are rare, however, compared to the great number of textiles exhibiting the privileged schematic designs in the centerfield.

Finally, at the ends of the cloth we see the typical finishing touches, the neatly corded fringe and above it the woven band which prevents fraying. Woven on a tiny loom set up with a warp of imported yarn arranged in colored stripes, the band incorporates the warp fringe of the mantle as an invisible weft. Further enrichment and show of skill occurs in some examples which display ikatted or supplemental warp-woven designs in this narrow band. (Fig. 4-B).

The decorated textiles of East Sumba have also long played a role in an external luxury trade. Traders from other islands brought foreign luxuries such as silk textiles, fabrics from other islands (especially from the island of Flores nearby) and metal in the form of knives, spears, copper wire and gold coins. In exchange, Sumba textiles entered the export market. As early as 100 years ago when the Dutch first posted an agent at the harbor town to try to collect export duty, records list 100 Sumba cloths exported in one year.

In the early part of the 20th century when the Dutch expanded their control over the island and established peaceful conditions, officials and tourists from ships making regular stops at Waingapu were soon attracted to the colorfully figured cloths. The 1920's and 30's saw a great expansion of exports. Many textiles entered export channels from the royal households of the several districts but the greatest center of production was in and around the port area of Waingapu. There, traders who were foreigners from other

islands, increased production by supplying cotton yarn for making Sumba cloths to both local and to resident immigrant women. Thus cloths from many sources and from all classes flowed into the markets of Djakarta and The Hague.

What was the effect on textiles of these two-and-a-half decades of popularity and of increased production? The basic structure of the traditional composition and the design inventory remained and the use of natural dyes was never lost, but imported thread gradually replaced handspun yarn, even in royal households.

The changes in quality that result are those one might expect from pressure to speed completion of cloths and also from employing immigrant women: use of larger, simpler motifs and fewer color changes and filling motifs, thus requiring less tying and less retying. In many cloths of this period, designs lack refinement of shape and the confronting figures within the bands may be strung out loosely, thereby losing subtleties of arrangement. Worse, streaking or gaps in the designs may occur resulting from careless tying and hasty lining-up. The woven bands and corded fringe disappear, saving time and pleasing buyers who wanted the textiles to hang evenly as draperies or coverlets.

However, throughout this period craftsmen produced many beautiful textiles, such as the example in the Metropolitan Museum collection (Fig. 5),⁵ presenting as the main motif a row of graceful deer. The curved, elaborated head, neck and tail relieve the severe cylindrical form of the body. In the traditional manner its horns are shown in frontal and profile views. Around the deer, many small figures of different animals in active poses and changing color create the lively, variegated effect admired by the Sumbanese. It is a fine example of an expressive feature, a display of vitality, which the Sumbanese value in all the arts.

Visitors to the port town in the twenties (as, for example, the artist, W. Nieuwenkamp, 1920, 1922, or K. Dammerman, 1926) reported the use of foreign dyes and motifs, such as bicycles or girls with umbrellas in the export cloths. No known examples of such eccentric motifs have survived, but a number of cloths dyed with foreign, commercial colors can be seen in various museum collections. These cloths give evidence of a dyeing system which, although different from the one described above, is similar to the procedures used in a few, early 20th-century cloths from the east coastal districts,⁶ which already employed dyes of foreign origin.

This system appears in a hinggi at the Metropolitan Museum, acquired in 1930 (Fig. 6). There is only one ground, a black-brown color, and there are

no color bands. More striking is that the figures are uniformly a bright yellow. To achieve this, a different sequence of dyeing is followed. Prior to tying, all the warp yarn is dyed yellow. After binding, the yellow yarn is put through only one dye process, that is, for the dark ground. Thus a two-color effect is achieved by a much simplified, one-time tying procedure which avoids any removal or retying of bindings during the dye process.

What is important to note about the use of commercial dye colors in the export period, as in those earlier textiles, is that the colors chosen are limited to yellow, orange and red. These choices suggest that the craftswomen, although using a quicker, cheaper method, aimed to achieve the warm-toned, variegated color effects of the traditionally dyed cloths.⁷

One change in the textile situation that stemmed directly from the presence of the Dutch administration was the release of privileged motifs. Probably these motifs always had circulated to some degree, especially outside the capital, away from the direct surveillance of the royal families, but, imitated with impunity under the new authorities, the designs became widely popular, especially the showpiece, the *patola ratu*, with its intricate fine lines and alternation of small color areas. Note the show of skill in a simple trade cloth, shown in Fig. 7, in which the *patola* design occupies not only the centerfield but also the main bands of the endfields.

The decades of textile plenty came to an end with World War II which destroyed the production network from workers to traders to shipping lines through to peddlars to buyers that had sustained exports. After the war and the revival of cotton planting, Sumbanese women resumed textile work in response to local needs. Today, Kambera district continues to be the main center for producing decorated textiles and these, now made of imported yarn, continue to serve as a form of wealth in the local exchange systems.⁸ From my recent visits to the districts of Kambera, Melolo, Rende and Kapunduk, it is clear that the craftswomen in the villages are using traditional tying, dyeing and weaving methods. Natural dyes are the rule among the Sumbanese.⁹

There are changes, however, and these are in the direction of continued secularization and simplification of design and subject matter. Comparing a postwar example with one from the early part of the century provides clear evidence of these differences. In the early cloth, the main figure is a woman riding a horse. (Fig. 8). She is seated sideways in the style customary for Sumbanese women. This image evokes rich, ritual connotations. A woman rides a horse as part of the royal marriage ceremony and at a royal burial, a horse is ceremonially ridden around the grave to serve as a psychopomp. In the postwar textile, collected in 1950 (Fig. 9), the horses, repeated ostentatiously on two levels, appear as natural creatures of the mundane world. Their

physical proportions conform to that of real Sumba ponies and the sole mark on each horse is an ownership brand on the flank, a practice introduced by the Dutch authorities.

Visually, the newer cloth presents less of the internal detail and background filling characteristic of the early textiles. Attention focusses on the main figures of the horses which stand out sharply against their ground. The composition is well-balanced and harmonious but it has lost subtlety. In the older cloth, many tall, narrow forms and vertical extensions, coupled with the diagonals of the centerfield, provide countervailing forces to the horizontal bands. This visual tension moves our interest all over the surface of the cloth. By contrast, the more recent designer has not only omitted the vertical elements but also has accentuated the horizontality of the figural rows, thus producing a simpler, more pedestrian composition.

Further disruption of the traditional style can be seen in a second cloth, collected on Sumba in 1952-3, which displays very large snake forms with centipede-like terminals (Fig. 10). The broader, simpler treatment of the main figures is readily apparent. At first glance, these heavy forms create a bold and striking effect but, according to the principles of the traditional style, the composition as a whole is disharmonious on several counts.

The subject changes in each row, and within the third, the confronting pairs consist of differently posed animals, so that the total effect on the surface is one of strong lines leading in various directions. The massive snake forms and the closed character of the abstract design in the fourth row are too unlike the other forms which are characterized by small masses or linear extensions. In sum, the elements of the rows are not designed to produce a pleasing equilibrium of horizontal and vertical forces.

Among the considerable number of craftswomen at work at present, one can find better integrated examples, such as the blue mantle still being worn in Kambera (Fig. 11) which exhibits a traditionally busy, variegated surface with strong vertical accents. The snake-like forms or dragons dominating the cloth are large but the mass of the dragon's body is modified by numerous projections, such as, feet, forked tail, spikes, mane and horns. Smaller figures in medium blue, which are surrounding the dragons, provide a further, graded transition to the dark blue background, thus mediating the stark effect of figure against ground. This particular cloth was made by the personal servant of a now-deceased royal wife. In using this active, writhing style, the servant, as the Sumbanese say, "took the hand" of her mistress.

The style illustrates a special or eccentric strain in design which may appear in any one of the textile districts, that is, the use of actively convoluted

figures. Whether this is a specialized layer of old tradition or a response to 20th century conditions cannot, for lack of sufficient early evidence, be answered. However, in this instance, the particularly active pose of the dragon is probably influenced by images from Chinese porcelains or Dutch imitations of them, both of which are found in the sacred treasures of the kings of Sumba and which are indicated as sources of inspiration by some craftswomen. The theme itself is a traditional one on Sumba. As in many other regions of Indonesia, the crested or horned fantasy snake (often linked with the sea) stands for the magical power to acquire great wealth.

Blue ikat cloths are less prestigious than those exhibiting the rust dye, but elaborately decorated blue mantles are favored as costume by the kings who themselves rarely wish to don one of the rust-red cloths because it reminds them of the textile gifts and shrouds characteristic of royal burials. Part of the elaborated decoration may include, as in Fig. 12, figured panels on the lateral borders of the centerfield and the dyeing of many small designs in rust-red (*hinggi kombu kawuru*) on the blue ground.

The major motifs of the textiles appear in less structured compositions as embellishments of other costume elements in a variety of techniques, such as beaded ornaments. (Fig. 13), carved turtleshell combs for women (Fig. 14), engraved drinking bowls of coconut shell (Fig. 15) and gourd lime holders (Fig. 16a and b). Non-human motifs are tattooed indelibly in blue on the arms and legs of adult women. The inventory further appears carved in relief or in the round on beams of house-temples and on stone grave monuments which stand in the center of the villages. Finally, they are prominent among the many figurative images in poetry, songs and prayers. In sum, the textile motifs are major elements in the artistic inventory of the East Sumbanese people.

These images in artistic form are not intended to be seen in daily life; they are made for use in the ceremonial sphere. It is in this sphere that we can begin to see their meanings. In ceremonial language, the figures are usually linked to their place, the shrimp-of-the-sea, the deer-of-the-woods, the horse-on-the-slopes, the snake-of-the-forest, the crocodile-of-the-river and the birds-of-the-heavens. Depictions of objects, for example, gold headdresses, or qualities, such as the large size of the centipedes or the intricacy of privileged designs, are recognized signs of royal wealth-and-power which is considered the foundation and evidence of a good and prosperous society. Other designs clearly refer to major rituals.

These selected symbols represent the Sumbanese 'universe of concerns,' concerns which relate to their physical and social worlds. The main action the

Sumbanese take to assure the proper working of this universe and the harmonious integration of their concerns is community ritual.

In communities outside the port-town area, traditional rites are still undertaken. Some occur in long series over a period of years, such as royal marriage, royal burial, fertility or temple-building; others arise annually in the form of planting and harvest festivals. The aims are shared in common, to affect positively the Sumbanese universe of concerns: that the seasons will take their proper course, that animals of land, sea, sky and rivers will be abundant, that plants will be fruitful, that women will give birth, that children will be clever, handsome and achieve great name and prosperity, that rituals will be carried out correctly in the ancient manner, that individual men will agree on common action.

For the Sumbanese, the efficacy of ritual lies in the display of vitality it entails; essentially, this means the presence of many guests who engage in mock combat, lively dancing, singing, prayers, life-sacrifices and hearty eating. This vigorous ritual, it is believed, revitalizes the universe.

Representing major aspects of the universe of concerns on the ritual costume of leaders who are holders of power, dancers and warriors symbolically brings those aspects into active participation at the rites, thus enabling them to share in the spiritual recharging that is inherent in ritual action.¹⁰

Currently, because of the interest of the port-town authorities in stimulating economic activity in East Sumba, there is talk of increasing the production of the decorated textiles for sale to export markets and to the tourists who visit the harbor during the increasing number of ship stopovers. One favored plan is to bring a group of women together daily to work near the port town under the supervision of an East Sumbanese Christian family.

Until such plans materialize, however, the textiles are still being made by women living in traditional style in their own small villages. They or their husbands will occasionally bring the finished cloths into the port town to exchange for food or other supplies or, more rarely, for money needed to buy small necessities in the stores. The non-Sumbanese head of the local department of industries encourages production, along the lines of the traders of the twenties, by supplying cotton yarn. Like those traders, too, he leaves the decoration and structure of the cloths up to the Sumbanese. Thus the designs still arise, as the Sumbanese say, from the "liver" or heart of the craftswoman. However, these village women are not only being affected by the gradual erosion of their own highly-structured societies but they are also responding to current social pressures and fashions.

One such fashion in all districts favors increasingly the dramatic use of a white ground in the framing bands, against which the designs appear 'in the negative,' that is, in dyed tones, as for example, rust. To produce this effect, the bindings for the figural designs in the framing bands are removed before the rust dye baths, but the ties for the background are not unbound, thus they remain white throughout the dyeing process. Fig. 17 illustrates an elaborately designed example collected in 1949.

The important new influence sweeping over the island originates from within Sumba itself in the form of textiles from the southeast district of Mangili. The cloths employ a fairly constant set of design subjects in a style of somewhat greater realism than formerly. Usually, against a plain ground, large roosters appear between framing bands of horsemen. Locally, Mangili style is considered the finest because of the use of deeply saturated colors, for bright red and rich black replace the familiar rust and purplish tones. The strong colors result from local variations in mixing dyes made from mengkudu and indigo, longer pre-dye preparation of the yarn (for brightness) and, of course, repeated dye baths. It is claimed that a good pair requires at least five years work. In placing highest value on colors, the Sumbanese are employing a traditional yardstick of judgment for the Mangili cloths. The subject matter is conservative, roosters and the horsemen, who are often shown engaged in ceremonial dancing.

However, the simplified composition, the prominence of figure against ground and the realism of portrayal point to widening departure from the masterpieces of traditional style. In general, in present-day cloths, the rich variety of the old inventory is gone. Depictions of high peaked house-temples, skeletal human figures with arms upraised or grinning skulls on dead trees are rare. Western-influenced immigrants have long derided the Sumbanese for their lack of ability to draw. Now, in an irony of taste and time, when Westerners eschew simple naturalism and welcome exotic fantasies, the Sumbanese are proud of the greater realism of the simple Mangili designs.

FOOTNOTES

¹Because the left and right panels of each cloth and the upper and lower halves are identical, one quarter of a cloth provides a technically complete repeat. However, including the centerband is needed to view properly the biaxial design at the center.

²With this number of layers, the main design will appear four times across each cloth. The folding varies in some cases, according to larger or smaller repeats.

³Some indigo paste is saved for out-of-season dye work.

⁴For illustrations of the privileged designs see in the centerfield of Fig. 5, *habaku*; Fig. 7, *patola ratu*; Fig. 8, *mata taki*, and Fig. 10, *karihu*.

⁵This textile, acquired by the Metropolitan in 1970 from a Dutch source, is attributed by the author to the period of the twenties on the basis of its stylistic similarities to other textiles of that period.

⁶See, for example, the mantle 19862 in the Museum of Ethnology, Rotterdam, collected between 1908-1912.

⁷The Leiden example, 2319.22 acquired in 1936, showing use of bright green and purple dyes is attributed to West Sumba, by the donor, G. Riekerk, a former administrator in that district, and is probably the work of immigrant Endenese in the Kodi district where they have long resided in a village, Pero, producing imitations of West Sumba cloths in commercial dyes which quickly fade.

⁸In districts which do not produce textiles, one often sees a Kambera cloth with a short fringe (see Fig. 7) which indicates that the cloth was obtained through exchange, as the fringe was already clipped when the new owner added the woven bands.

⁹Commercial dyes, red, yellow and brown, made available by Chinese merchants, are used by women from West Sumba and other immigrants in making their own style of women's skirts and scarves.

¹⁰Certain images are not usually represented in the textiles, such as rice, buffalo and pig. This absence is especially interesting because these are the essential elements of the food offering, which is the heart of the rites. Possibly the designers do not include these elements because symbols of them, as everyone is aware, are always present at the ritual site, in the form of buffalo horns, pig jaws and a sacred basket of rice seed.

NOTE: Because the upper and lower halves of the cloths are identical, all textiles are shown in 'optimum view,' that is, in one-half length plus full centerband.



Fig. 1. Men's wrap (98½" x 48¾"), white cotton dyed in blue and rust colors, *hinggi kombu*. Figurative designs obtained by tie-dyeing before weaving (warp ikat technique). Typical of style known from early 20th century. Collected on Sumba between 1908-12. Museum of Geography and Ethnology, Rotterdam, 19882.



Fig. 2. Men's wrap, *hinggi kombu*. (Detail, one-half width). In main band, large design represents skull tree with human heads; in upper and lower borders, confronting deer; in the centerfield, confronting horses and two vertically oriented rows of birds with open wings who share a single row of heads. Rotterdam, 19873, early 20th c.

Fig. 3. Single panel for men's turban or waistcloth. In main band, cocks with sharply hooked beaks are identified as cockatoos; in fourth row, rampant lions confront a shield, an adaptation of the Dutch coat-of-arms. Museum of Ethnology, Basel, IIc7585.



Fig. 4A. 'Royal' wrap, *hinggi maramba*, (108" x 49"), characterized by precise lines, fine curvilinear detail, terminal band, corded fringe, privileged *patola ratu* design (4th row) and rare white center. Metropolitan Museum, 30.87.10.



Fig. 4B. Fine *hinggi kombu* from Kambera district. Narrow band above fringe, showing dyed designs of horses, half-moons and stars, is woven in, using the fringe as weft, after the rest of the cloth is finished. It helps prevent fraying. Reading upwards, we see depictions of a lamba, which is a gold forehead ornament, preening cockatoos, tiny lizards, 'foreign fish' or dragons. Field photograph, 1970, M. Adams.



Fig. 5. Graceful deer motifs became widely popular in the twenties. Large deer connote royalty, who in former times sponsored deer hunts. In center row (at top), floral pattern alternates with heavy-line figure, *habaku*, formerly reserved for royal cloths. Metropolitan Museum, 1970.227.1.



Fig. 6. Typical of a group of Sumba hinggi decorated by simplified tie-dyeing. All designs appear in one color, yellow, against a uniform dark brown ground. Lateral striping imitates feature of royal cloths, see Fig. 12. Metropolitan Museum, 30.87.9. (Detail, one-half width).



Fig. 7. Intricate *patola ratu* design (in two main bands and in centerfield) is a local modification of patterns on Indian silk *patola* cloths, which were essential possessions of Sumbanese royalty. Metropolitan Museum, 30.87.8. (Detail, one-half width).



Fig. 8. Early 20th c. acquisition. Woman on horseback, shown seated sideways in riding style customary for Sumbanese women. The many vertical accents provide a pleasing counterbalance to the horizontal banding. Centerfield design, *mata taki*, said to imitate patterns from imported silk cloths (Indian *bandhani*, tie-dye). Rotterdam, 19863.



Fig. 9. Postwar cloth made in the Kambera district, collected on Sumba in 1949. Main design depicts horses with modern brand mark on their flanks. Horizontally-oriented arrangement of all figures strengthens the banded effect. Basel, IIC8706.



Fig. 10. Large design combines snake and centipede features. Fourth row presents blunt version of the dotted *karihu* design, a former royal pattern. Collected on Sumba, 1952-3. Rotterdam. 45267.



Fig. 11. Ikat mantle dyed in two shades of blue on white, *hinggi kawuru*. Fantasy creatures and lively style create dramatic effect. Although lacking prestigious rust-red color, the complex conception of composite dragon and swirling, curvilinear style indicate high status of cloth. Field photograph, Kambera district, 1970, M. Adams.



Fig. 12. Men's wrap. This style of coloring, a dark blue ground on which the rust-red color appears only in small designs, *hinggi kombu kawuru*, was favored in early cloths from the east coastal districts. The addition of lateral stripes in the center section, formerly a compositional feature of royal cloths, is no longer practiced. Collected on Sumba, 1918-21. Rotterdam, 25322.



Fig. 13. Beaded ornament worn at royal burial. Male figure. Such figures, some of which are female, emphasizing hands, feet, head and vital organs, represent human-kind. Purchased on Sumba, 1910. Rotterdam, 24723.

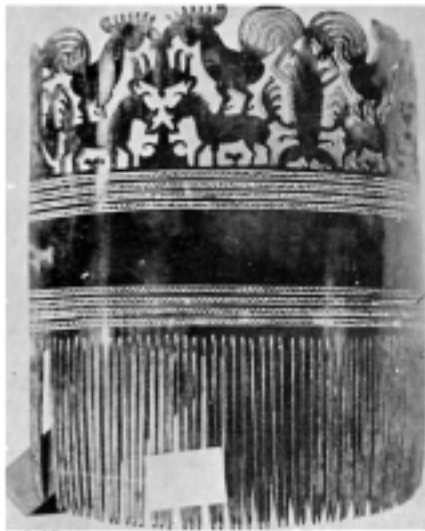


Fig. 14. Turtleshell comb for women worn on ceremonial occasions. H. 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Large roosters stand on backs of horses, flanking a central shrimp. Objects of ritual use share design inventory of textiles. Basel, IIc10384.



Fig. 15. Coconut shell drinking bowl used by dignitaries at ritual meals. Blackened and polished. Engraved designs filled with white lime powder. Fantasy animal combines head of horse with Sumbanese version of body and symbols (sword and bunch of arrows) of the lion from the royal Dutch coat-of-arms. Basel, IIC9746.



Fig. 16a,b. Engraved gourds for holding lime powder. A bit of lime added to the chew of betel nut increases the pleasant reaction. Always a ceremony, betel chewing forms an important part of the symbolism in all rites. Left, dragon in active pose. Lime-filled incising on dark ground. H. 2¼". Right, designs of double-headed bird, bird-on-pole, deer and snake appear in black (carbon) on light gourd. H. 2½". Basel, IIC9263 and IIC9317.



Fig. 17. For the framing bands, white backgrounds in which figures appear in color are increasingly popular. That the large crested snakes in this example are also dyed rust is an eccentric feature. Basel, IIc8705, collected on Sumba in 1949 by Prof. Alfred Buehler.

TEXT FOR ILLUSTRATIONS OF IKAT WORK

Field photographs by M. ADAMS

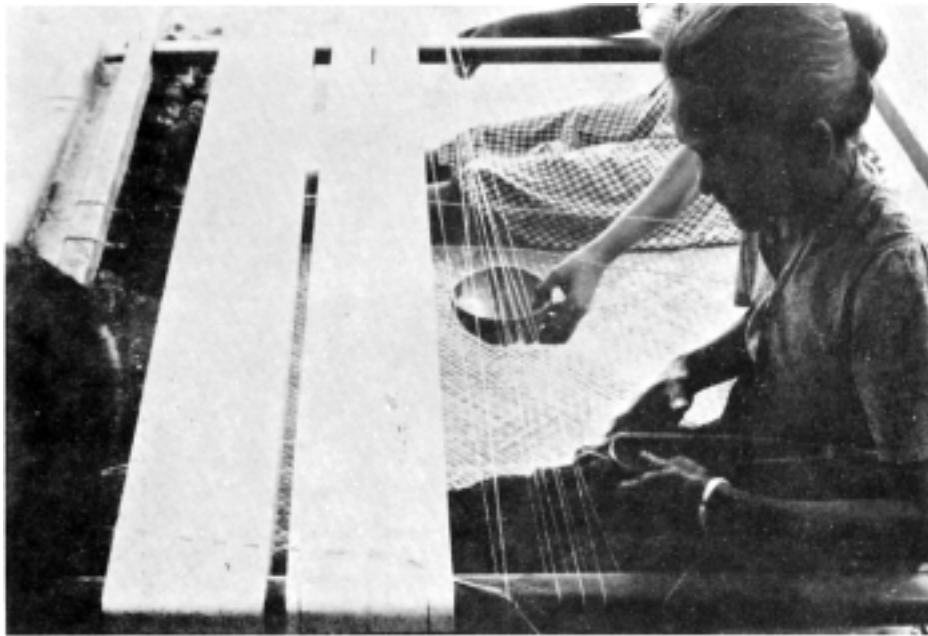


Fig. A. Setting up warp on tying frame.

Warp strands are being wound around tying frame and at the same time being separated into odd and even layers needed for later weaving. The number of strands depends on the desired width of the panels. Crosswise leaf strip marks off sets of ten pairs of strands which will form the basic unit for subsequent tying-in of the designs. Craftswoman, Babang Ata Ende; Village, La Kalu, Kambera district, 1969.



Fig. B. Installing crossbinding.

Craftswoman firmly knots crosscord around each set (of ten paired strands) in order to prevent yarn from shifting in lengthwise direction.



Fig. C. Combining layers for one pair of mantles.

The craftswoman superposes several layers of yarn to form a tying surface on which she can, subsequently, with each single binding produce identical designs on each layer. The usual width of the tying surface is half a panel; in which case, four layers form one cloth and eight layers provide one costume pair.



Fig. D. Binding with dye-resistant leaf strips.

Tying-in the designs is almost completed. The craftswomen always work at a 45-degree angle to the direction of the designs. Here not only the white area of the designs but also the bands to become rust-red are covered with bindings to protect them during the first dye baths which are indigo.



Fig. E. Blue dyeing.

After tying in all the designs, the craftswoman soaks the bound yarn in pots of indigo-blue dye solution. Many dippings and dryings are needed to produce the desired, saturated color-tones. Craftswoman, Rambu Dupu; Village, Uma Bara, Melolo district, 1968.



Fig. F. Oiling the yarn.

After blue dyeing is completed, the bindings on parts to become red are cut off and the warp is oiled by soaking it in a solution of, mainly, crushed *kemiri* nuts. This oiling is essential to obtain a rust color on cotton using the mengkudu dye-wood. Craftswoman, Konda Ngguna; Village, Parai Wora, Kambera district, 1968.



Fig. G. Rust dyeing.

The roots and bark of the mengkudu tree are crushed with leaves and bark of the *loba* tree and soaked in water, thus providing a rust-red dye solution for the bound warp. From three to five dip-and-dry sequences will produce rich tones. Village, La Marada, Kambera district, 1968.



Fig. H. Removing the leaf bindings.

After dyeing is completed, the remaining leaf bindings are cut off, revealing the designs on the as-yet-unwoven yarn. Here, the ruler's mother and his small daughter who were working on a blue headband are joined for the picture by two royal wives. Village, Rambangaru, Kapunduk district, 1969.

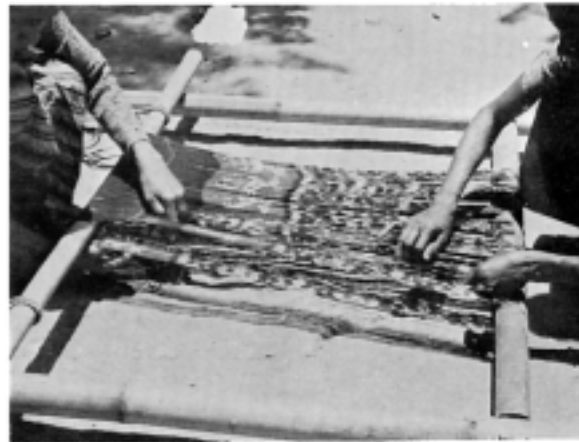


Fig. I. Lining-up dyed warp yarn.

Preparatory to weaving, the dyed warp strands are starched and then painstakingly separated and lined-up so that design outlines will be clear. Craftswoman, Rambu Windi and Babang; Village, La Pajeti, Kambara district, 1968.



Fig. J. Weaving one panel on a frameless, two-beam loom.

The weaver depresses the roller and lifts the heddle in order to form an opening or shed between the odd and even strands of the yarn, into which she will insert the weft spool to form the weave. She will beat in the weft with the sword now lying near the body-beam of the loom. Craftswoman, Ana Hida; Village, La Pajeti, Kambera district, 1967.

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ORIGINS OF CHINTZ: by John Irwin & Katherine B. Brett. (London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1970).

Nowadays, when the swift currents of international trade carry Coca Cola and sophisticated weaponry eastward, and transistor radios and automobiles westward, it is exciting to look back on the slow and laborious traffic that transported the ancient crafts of the East to Europe in past centuries. Then, the articles of trade were the subtle and delicate porcelains and silks from China, scented with the redolent spices of the Southeastern Islands, and the brilliant unfading chintzes of India.

In 1970, that bountiful year for lovers of decorated cottons (painted, printed and embroidered) we were treated to three comprehensive and extraordinarily beautiful exhibitions of Indian chintzes made for the Western market. These were held in Toronto at the Royal Ontario Museum in New York at the Cooper Hewitt Museum and in London at the Victoria and Albert Museum. The curators at the Royal Ontario Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum, Mrs. Katherine B. Brett and John Irwin in the "Origins of Chintz" and Alice Beer in "Trade Goods" have compiled two brilliant catalogues, which are not only a permanent record of the exhibitions, but of the investigations and research that inspired them. Not since the impressive pioneering work on "Calico Painting & Printing in the East Indies" published by G. P. Baker in 1921, has so much new information been available on the intricacies of manufacture, the subtle interchanges of design, and the complicated series of trade exchanges that brought these treasures to a Europe expanding the frontiers of its knowledge through travel and adventure.

It would be hard for us today to overestimate the impact of these products of the East on the Western imagination, but the textiles remain now fully catalogued and illustrated to inspire the designer and collector. (Alas for the collector, though, this material is practically non-existent on the market today.)

—Cora Ginsburg