Ikat from Timor and its outer islands: insular and interwoven

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1. ANGLES OF INVESTIGATION

Ikat from Timor and its Outer Islands: Insular and Interwoven sets out to shed light on the distribution of elements in the ikat culture of Timor's and its outer islands: the former colonial entity known as the Residentie Timor en Onderhoorigheden [Residence Timor and Subordinate Territories], excluding Sumbawa, which has no early tradition of ikat weaving, but including the Southeasterly Islands, which do.[1] The focus lies on the final century of Dutch colonial rule, the period between circa 1850 and 1950, because the great majority of the textiles in well-documented collections available for research were made in this period.

The available literature on that period, while providing much valuable information as well as numerous cues for further research, proves to be incomplete in the following key areas: (a) the development of yarns over time and the distribution of the various weave types (see Ch. 2); (b) the distribution of motifs (see Ch. 3); (c) the dispersion of asymmetry, a design aspect with technical consequences, previously understudied (see Ch. 4); and (d) the impact of ikating on the weaver in terms of purpose, commitment, achievement and the presentation of self (see Ch. 5).

Three elements form the original core investigation: fundamental technical aspects such as yarn qualities and weave types, the distribution of certain prominent ikat motifs, and asymmetry. The fourth element imposed itself when during the investigation previously unrecognized instances of virtuosity[2] were encountered. The psychology underlying such florescences was studied from the long-established perspective of 'the women's war path' (ikating regarded as counterbalancing the men's headhunting ethos), but integrated in a Maussian view of prestation and counter-prestation between spouses,[3] and contemporary thinking about the role of intelligence in mate selection. As there tend to be differences between reality and perception, the study was widened to include related aspects of performance and counter-performance, specifically the females' presentation of self, and their use of ikat's rules as an instrument for handling males.

Yarn properties have generated little interest since Loebèr's article "Het weven in Nederlandsch-Indië" ["Weaving in the Dutch East Indies"] (Loebèr 1903), Jasper & Pirngadie's seminal work *De Weefkunst* [*The Art of Weaving*] (1912) and Jager Gerlings's . *Sprekende weefsels* [Speaking weavings] (1952). Knowing little about an aspect of ikat so

[1] In this investigation the study of Sumbanese ikat, with minor exceptions, is limited to a single aspect, to wit, asymmetry.

[2] The word is here used in the classic Greek/Roman sense, which contains a marked element of competition, but also in the general sense, as described in the Merriam Webster dictionary, of delivering an outstanding performance: "a virtuoso performance is one that astonishes the audience by its feats". Source Merriam Webster online, accessed 23-05-2021.

[3] "Together with Mauss Leiden anthropologists were the first to acknowledge the importance of exchange for the constitution and cohesion of societies, particularly in the field of marriage (Prager 2016:3)".

fundamental presents us with a serious lacuna. To address this, a sample of 283 ikat textiles included in the above-mentioned Reference Set was subjected to a microscopic study, which yielded over 5000 photographs at 800x or 1000x magnification, as well as unexpected conclusions.

These photographs have been subjected to visual analysis with an emphasis on regularity versus irregularity of gauge in the warp yarn. The plying (single, double, triple and quadruple) and the number and colour of the weft yarns were also noted. The insights provided by means of microscopic inspection were collated with data obtained by measuring and weighing the studied specimens hereby determining their specific weights expressed in grams per square meter. This procedure allowed us to follow closely the development of hand-spinning during the second half of the 19th and first half of the 20th century, analyse its technical consequences, and draw conclusions regarding the development of weavers' preferences over time.

Weave types similarly have thus far received little attention, possibly because, as in the case of yarn proporties, their study requires either presence during the actual weaving, or microscopic observation. Even Jasper and Pirngadie (1912), whose afore-mentioned publication was highly detailed, does not contain an inventory of different warp-weft combinations. The initial assumption was that little variety would be found in the studied area. However, a cursory exploratory inspection, carried out in order to ascertain whether this subject would be worth pursuing, did reveal a great diversity of weave patterns, both regular and irregular, more than enough to warrant further investigation.

Asymmetric design is found on ten of the islands in the region under study. Symmetric design is the norm here because it naturally flows from, in fact is practically dictated by, the way it is produced: in narrow panels which are ikated in parallel and then sewn together along their selvedges. The limited but extensive distribution of asymmetry arouses keen interest because asymmetry is not merely a design choice. It is founded in the dominant dualist cosmology, which is based on the concept of two opposed components (male-female, light-dark, metal-textile, local-foreign, etc.) making one whole (Gittinger 1979:35). It is also a fundamental technical issue, and one of the ways to achieve asymmetry invites the production of twins: two identical cloths created simultaneously.

Curiously, asymmetric design has drawn little scholarly interest. Loebèr (1903) does not mention it, nor do Jasper and Pirngadie (1912). Even Robyn Maxwell, in her reference work *Textiles of Southeast Asia: Tradition, Trade, and Transformation* (2003) does not refer to it other than in passing. Neither do Barnes and Hunt Kahlenberg and their half a dozen contributors in *Five Centuries of Indonesian Textiles* (2010). Why asymmetry was not discussed in these reference works or given scant attention is an enigma, given that it (a) is a design choice the results of which tend to be visually striking; and (b) can be achieved only by overcoming challenging technical consequences; both of which one would expect to have been observed and analysed decades ago.

In the course of this investigation an inventory was composed of the ikat regions where asymmetric design occurs, and the techniques to achieve it will be differentiated, with

examples of each type encountered in the Reference Set – including a number of examples that upend established scholarship. It was also attempted to (a) plot inter-island connections that may have contributed to their distribution and (b) discover the values or convictions which informed certain instances of asymmetry (see Ch. 4 under the heading 'Ikating as performance').

Ikat motifs are here defined as readily identifiable stand-alone design elements that present themselves as 'words' in a visual language (Gittinger 1979:41; Khan Majlis 1991a; Duggan 2013; ten Hoopen 2014), or as 'characters' in the sense of ideograms with associated connotations – which are expressly local or regional. Yet several motifs are observed across a wider region, raising thus far unanswered questions concerning the range and the probable, respectively known, causes of such correspondences. Where exactly do we observe them: just on a single island and a close neighbour, or on several that are relatively or even very far apart? In the latter case, can we postulate that such motifs are archaic, isolated survivors of a design vernacular that in the past was favoured in a wide area? Or is the similarity more likely the product of interculturality, the result of inter-island trade in the course of which ikat cloths travelled by *prahu* to other islands to be given as presents (Kuhnt-Saptodewo *et al.* 2012:108) or to be bartered for rice and, when received with favour, emulated by local weavers? Did the motifs come along with brides from other islands, which in the higher classes might embrace the lady's ikat producing slaves? Or were they copied from Indian or other foreign tradecloths such as *patola* and *basta*? Yet another question is if the iconographic connotations of such dispersed motifs are largely similar or divergent.

In a few cases an inescapable answer will present itself whereas in others the question may not be answerable with certitude because the only people who could have provided a conclusive, indisputable answer are no longer with us and their offspring have proven to be poor repositories of transmitted knowledge.[1] Still it is worth posing such questions, so as to alert other researchers to the issues at hand and provide cues enabling further study.

A number of motifs from across the region – in their diverse expressions and degrees of definition – will be juxtaposed for comparison, resulting in sets that facilitate the mapping out of correspondences. Certain motifs will be studied in detail to establish whether they have remained consistent over time or underwent substantial transformation through elaboration and the insertion of new content or through regression as a result (common in adoption) of rudimentation – two contrary processes which may run their course concurrently on different islands or in different island regions.

Display of virtuosity, once a key aspect of the traditional role played by ikat, is diminishing fast as a result of conversion to monotheism and consequent commodification.

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[1] Multiple sources, covering diverse regions, all similarly lament the loss of knowledge and a general decline, beginning as far back as the early 20th century, including Vatter (1932:222), Chalmers (1993:v), Linggi (2001:70), Schefold (2001:4), Low (2008:viii), Forshee (2001:46). See also: the Yale University Art Gallery website, URL: http://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/111138, accessed on 25-03-2017.

While there are other causes for the commodification of ikat, including economic, its chief cause is the collapse of the traditional value structures which were informed by the ancestral belief systems – and are disparaged by the religious authority of the newly assumed religion. As the result of the disintegration of the value system that supported ikating, ikat textiles have fallen into a moral vacuum. There is still a sense of respect for them, especially the *pusaka*, the heirlooms, but on many islands, even the quite remote, they are becoming a thing from the past, ever more routinely traded for an investment in the children's future.

On certain islands, royal and noble weavers' exhibition of intellectual prowess and dexterity relied on employing exceedingly exacting technical devices. These included weave types requiring an additional manipulation of the yarn on the loom, as well as creative and technically challenging ways to achieve asymmetric design. This, as mentioned above, runs counter to the 'natural' construction of ikat textiles (see Ch. 4. 'Asymmetry – in defiance of ikat's technical diktat'). While it was noted already a quarter of a century ago that "… differences in rank can be discerned not so much by specific motifs but rather by a richer and more careful ornamentation" (Khan Majlis 1984:111), not much scholarly work has been done in order to develop such discernment. This investigation aims to shed new light on sought complexity as a class marker; particularly, but not exclusively, with regard to Sumba.

A key element of practice concerns the way in which producing an ikat impacts the weaver. This assesment can be truly ascertained only by means of field interviews, ideally executed in close association with the interviewees. Unfortunately no one is alive anymore who can deliver any first hand reports, as ikat of the highest order, the most technically demanding, stopped being produced circa 1925, and by then had not yet been studied. However, certain inferences may be drawn on (a) the basis of the design's or weave type's technical exigencies; (b) its degree of artistic mastery or even virtuosity; and (c) an estimation of the required additional investments in time and energy. The latter two factors are reliable indicators of the degree of leisure, respectively the available slave labour – hence of status.

Whereas almost each and every textile from the region under study adheres to what appear to be orally and practically transmitted local canons, a minute percentage deviates, on occasion quite drastically. Clues will be sought pertaining to the reasons that motivated weavers to opt for such deviations.

1.1 STATUS QUAESTIONIS

As the below chronological survey indicates, the available literature has largely ignored the technical perspective. This is part of a general problem:

> Although a tremendous amount of new scholarship has been made available to the public, a persistent shortcoming is that the general works can devote only a few

> pages to any single tradition, while the coverage of the more specific studies is still very spotty (Hamilton, ed., 1994:12).

The existing literature does not shed light, for instance, on the way yarn developed over time, nor on the multifarious ways women in the region under study interlaced yarn with weft. We look in vain for an overview of the most widely used motifs and their distribution. Asymmetry has hardly been discussed. Most of the classics of the literature on Indonesian textiles do not mention the subject at all. None describe the various techniques weavers developed to break ikat's technical diktat of symmetry to achieve the *desideratum* of asymmetry, and no heuristic efforts have been made to achieve an understanding of weavers' motivation to expend the additional effort. Virtuosity as a phenomenon was not investigated.

The present work addresses these lacunae while building upon the solid groundwork laid in the publications referenced below. The works mentioned – all of which have made substantial contributions to the field of Indonesian textile studies – are discussed exclusively in terms of their relevance to the aims of this investigation. If it is stated that they did not address a certain issue, this is not to be understood as a value judgment, just as a factual observation regarding the presence or absence of specific information.[1]

G.P. Rouffaer introduced ikat to his circle of friends in a lecture that he gave at the occasion of an exhibition of textiles and furniture in The Hague in 1901, and published his lecture in 1902. His succinct description of the ikat technique would make an excellent primer for any student of the subject. His love for ikat is palpable whenever the subject is mentioned. In his discussion of an alternative term for ikat, *"tjoewal"* he shares his delight in the discovery that the related Malay word "*ketjoewal*" (Indon. '*kecual'*) means 'excluded' ["uitgespaard, ausgenommen"] – which fittingly describes the binary essence of the technique (Rouffaer 1902:25). Rouffaer did not address different weave types, the distribution of motifs or techniques to achieve asymmetry, but his expressed enthusiasm for ikat was infectious.

J.E. Jasper and Mas Pirngadie composed the first comprehensive overview of textile production in the Dutch East Indies entitled *Inlandsche Kunstnijverheid in Nederlandsch Indië, Deel II, De Weefkunst* (1912). This now frequently cited classic remains by far the richest early source on the present subject. The authors focus more on technical aspects than on iconography, but do not investigate yarn production or weave varieties in the area under study in any detail. The Dutch words 'asymmetrie' and 'asymmetrisch' do not occur even once.[2]

Ernst Vatter explored Flores and most of the Solor and Alor Archipelago in 1928-

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[1] It should be made explicit that virtuosity was not initially a subject of investigation, leave alone its inherent element of competition. Virtuosity became a subject of investigation only after its discovery. None of the works discussed below deal with the subject.

[2] Jasper & Pirngadie (1912) at the centenary of its publication was digitized by the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute Library; with OCR, hence made searchable.

1929 and reported his findings in *Ata Kiwan* (1932), meticulously detailing every aspect of the material culture he encountered. He repatriated an extensive collection to the Museum für Völkerkunde (currently named Weltkulturen Museum) in Frankfurt. After studying a number of these acquistions in the depots of this museum I then compared them with 42 specimens included in Group A of the Physical Database that originate from the same region and period, representing fabrics Vatter could have come across during his explorations. While describing his travels and reporting various ethnographic observations in detail, Vatter ignores the distribution of certain motifs across the region. He also paid little attention to matters concerning yarn, other than observing that women, whenever they had any spare time, picked up their spinning job (Vatter 1932:219).

Alfred Bühler in 1938-1939 published his article "Die Herstellung von Ikattüchern auf der Insel Rote", the earliest study on Roti ikat, and the earliest article (albeit very concise) specifically covering the ikat of one particular island in the region under study. Bühler does not address the distribution of motifs or asymmetry. These might have come to the fore, as, remarkably, asymmetry is only very rarely present on the *lafa*, the shawls cloths of Roti (only a single example was encountered) while it is the rule on Roti's off-shore islet Ndao. The two islands are intimately interconnected, culturally and economically, yet they both retain fundamentally individual characteristics. The discovery that our knowledge of the asymmetry on Roti and Ndao was so sparse formed a key inspiration for me to investigate asymmetry as a cultural phenomenon.

Laurens Langewis and Frits. A. Wagner's *Decorative Art in Indonesian Textiles,* (1964) is widely considered a classic in the field, a go-to work on traditional Indonesian textiles. However, the documentation it offers is in fact little more than sketchy. In his earlier *Sierkunst in Indonesië* (1949) Wagner pointed out that a few elementary motifs such as the 'spool', 'key' and 'diamond' motifs have a rather wide distribution, but only in passing and, uncharacteristically, indulged in speculations for which no rationale is proffered.[1]

Jager Gerlings in *Sprekende weefsels: Studie over het ontstaan en betekenis van weefsels van enige Indonesische eilanden* (1952) gave us the first technical study of Indonesian textiles, including subjects such as the nature of the various plant fibres used, loom construction, twining, and an analysis of one specific motif which is also encountered in this study, although only tangentially. Jager Gerlings' geographical focus, which lay more to the west, on Borneo, Sulawesi and the Sangir (Sangihe) and Talaud islands, did not even marginally overlap that of the region here under study.

Marie Jeanne Adams is best known for her 1969 *System and Meaning in East Sumba Textile Design: a Study in Traditional Indonesian Art*. This seminal study analyzes 300 early Sumbanese men's cloths in European museums (188 of which in the Netherlands) as

[1] For example, (a) human figures with upraised hands depicted on Sumbanese ikat textiles are slaves whose hands are raised in respect and (b) their accentuated ribcages indicate that nothing in their minds can remain hidden from their ruler.

well as a few small private collections. Adams may well be considered the founder of modern ikat research. She provides not just a wealth of insights into East Sumbanese culture, but also quantitative data on the occurrence of a range of motifs, but only within Sumba. Lacking is any mention of the multiple types of asymmetry on the island (see below, Section 4.2 'Sought complexity: asymmetry as proof of mastery), each with its own specific technical construction; leave alone the combination of such types of asymmetry, the highest and most rare of design complications.[1] This non-appearance of asymmetry in Adams's study is the more striking when we consider that the Reference Set used in the present study has a substantial overlap (174 out of 300) with the set she used.

Another key contribution was the article "Classic and Eccentric Elements in East Sumba Textiles: A Field Report", published by Monni Adams. It includes the following categorical statement as to symmetry on *hinggi,* Sumbanese men's cloths:

> The number of bands is always uneven and the centre row of designs spans the middle of the cloth. Above and below this centre the sequence of colour bands and designs are identical. Thus the cloth consists of mirror-image halves. [.. T]he schematic design in the centerband is *biaxial* [emphasis added, PtH]. To inventory the designs, it is sufficient to see one half of the cloth plus the full centerband (Adams 1972:4).

We read in a caption to a *hinggi* of which only little more than half was depicted:

> A mantle [note the indefinite article, PtH] consists of two lengthwise panels forming a large rectangle measuring approximately three yards in length and one-and-one half in width. Upper half (not shown) is identical to lower, except that designs are oriented in the opposite direction from the center (Adams 1973:267).

It is, however, more complicated than that: in *hinggi* following the courtly design format called *hondu kihhil* and the even higher ranking *hondu kihhil walla,* as well as two yet higher classable variations, they are not identical; nor are they in three other constructions, although in most specimens this dissimilarity is very difficult to observe, and indeed cleverly hidden.[2]

The latter cannot be stressed enough. The present author has the greatest respect for Adams, whose methodical approach informed his own, and if she (as well as all other scholars, including an earlier avatar of the present author) overlooked visual devices hidden on purpose, this should not diminish our respect for her in the least. If anything it should increase our respect for the weavers who created them.

Mattiebelle Gittinger is probably best known for her *Splendid Symbols* (1979b), the first book that brought Indonesian ikat to a wider public's attention. She provided many valuable insights, particularly regarding the value systems from which the textiles sprung.

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[1] The highest ranking of these complications [n = 4] in terms of labour invested for all to see (textbook cases of costly signalling), have no symmetry and no replication whatsoever. They require 8 times as much labour as a common *hinggi* construction.

[2] Adams depicts a field photograph of a *hinggi* with a *hondu kihhil* construction (1972: Fig. 4B) which shows the entire centre band. There is no indication that she noticed the minute differences between the top and bottom halves of this band.

Even more significant from a scholarly point of view are *Indonesian Textiles: Irene Emery Roundtable on Museum Textiles, 1979 Proceedings* (Gittinger, ed., 1980) and most particularly *To Speak with Cloth, Studies in Indonesian Textiles* (Gittinger, ed., 1989). The former publication, a tome of 440 pages in typescript, is richly illustrated and records the contributions of a large gathering of specialists, who each cover a tiny niche, including James J. Fox's article "Figure Shark and Pattern Crocodile: The Foundations of the Textile Traditions of Roti and Ndao". In view of the focus on Ndao, one would have wished to have been presented with more information on the subject of asymmetry, which is *de rigeur* for Ndaoese men's shawls. While '*Proceedings*' comprises much important material from primary sources, it also brings to mind Hamilton's cited assessent of coverage of the field as "very spotty" (Hamilton, *ibid.*), revealing numerous lacunae in the knowledge base. Inviting other scholars into to a promising, largely wide-open field, the collective work contains six articles directly relevant to the present investigation. Not one of these answer any questions pertaining the distribution of motifs across multiple islands.

Brigitte Khan Majlis in her *Indonesische Textilien, Wege zu Göttern und Ahnen* (1984) was the first to present a substantial number of Indonesian textiles; those in the museums of Nordrhein-Westfalen and the German Textile Museum (Krefeld) are the most prominent among them. While providing a valuable overview covering many islands, its focus lies on documenting these textiles, not seeking correspondences. Depicting more than 750 cloths, it remains an unparelled reference. *Gewebte Botschaften/Woven Messages* (Khan Majlis 1991aa) applies the same modus operandi to the textiles in the Roemer-Museum (Hildesheim, Germany) and the sizeable J.B. Lüth collection, the Moluccan section of which in 2017 became part of the Reference Set, allowing it to be studied anew. *The Art of Indonesian Textiles: The E. M. Bakwin Collection at the Art Institute of Chicago* (Mayer Thurman & Khan Majlis 2008) introduces yet another private collection of high standing, adding 70 well-documented pieces to the Reference Set. Not one of these three publications specifically addresses the key questions the present investigation aims to answer. However, the latter two do disclose how well-curated and scholarly described private collections can significantly expand our communal knowledge base.

Robyn Maxwell's wide-ranging yet in-depth research entitled *Textiles of Southeast Asia* (1990) was the first reference work on this subject. Paradoxically, its limitation within this particular research context is its huge span. Dealing with Southeast Asia in its entirety, it could not cover the Indonesian archipelago exhaustively. Another 'limitation' is that it is arranged not according to topography but thematically, dealing with four major foreign influences, to wit, Indian, Chinese, Islamic and European. While such influences can be noted in many of the designs used in the region under study, there are also quite a few motifs with a scattered distribution, some quite widely, which show no influence from any of the four above-mentioned spheres of culture and thus are not studied in *Textiles of Southeast Asia*. The present author wishes to underscore his great appreciation for the work of Maxwell, while also noting the curious fact that asymmetry is not dealt with as a phenomenon. The lack of attention for this it appears to be universal. Not one scholar

discusses asymmetry other than in passing. It appears to have been simply overlooked. The most important reason why it was overlooked, may well be that in many cases (although by no means always) it was *made* to be overlooked.

Beyond the Java Sea: Art of Indonesia's Outer Islands (1991) by **Paul M. Taylor and Lorraine V. Aragon**, served as a primer on the cosmology and culture of the region under study. The authors point to the wide-spread preference for odd numbers in many parts of Indonesia, which, paradoxically, is often most marked in island societies where dualism and contrasting pairs are emphasized. In the dualist concept, the whole is constituted by two elements of opposing but complementary natures.

The authors did not investigate the reason why so many ikat textiles across the region they cover are symmetric in deviation of this pervasive preference. Perhaps because the answer is obvious: symmetry's relative facility. Symmetry is the ikat technique's natural manifestation. Without additional complications and manipulations, symmetry is the result. Taylor and Aragaon did point out that "Two-dimensional textiles or surfaces are often symmetric along one axis (longitudinal or horizontal) but asymmetric along the other (*ibid.:*32)". And in their Fig. VII.39 they show an 'upper middle-class' example from Sumba in the famous Tillman contribution to the Tropenmuseum collection (TM-1772-1116) which not everyone would instantly recognize as asymmetric along the horizontal axis. The elements causing the asymmetry are small and their arrangement is intelligently subtle, but the authors do not dwell on their design-technical consequences.

Taylor & Aragon also linked a tripartite organization of a work of art, such as encountered, for instance, in the ikat of Timor and Sumba (where a tripartite construction may be simulated in ikat textiles that actually consist of two parts), to a tripartite cosmology of upper world, middle world and lower world – "which sometimes corresponded to a traditional division of human society into nobility, commoners and slaves (*ibid,* 33)". Such a societal division exists on Sumba in a pronounced form, and indeed it is here that we find the most elaborate simulations of tripartite construction. Taylor & Aragon's association of a preference for tripartite arrangements with nobility is underscored and illustrated by this investigation's findings: such simulations were encountered exclusively on textiles that on technical grounds must be classified as 'upper class'; those made at the courts of the nobility, which are asymmetric along both axes, representing a quadrupling of the standard workload.

Roy W. Hamilton (ed)'s *Gift of the Cotton Maiden* (1994), has become a classic work on the textiles, most of them ikat, of Flores. This work is truly topographical and includes excellent essays on the ikat encountered in certain regions. However, only a few cues pertain to the distribution of motifs and technical aspects within the insular region located east of Flores with which the present publication is concerned. The diverse weave types in use on the island – half a dozen, the highest number for a single insular entity in the region under study – are not differerentiated. The fact that these can now be differentiated and georeferenced is entirely attributable to Adams's 1969 call for microscopic inspection.

Miep Spée studied the ikat of Savu in *Een taal van draden, Ikat weefsels in de*

Savunese cultuur ['A language of yarns, Ikat textiles in the Savunese culture'] (1989), a concise, well-researched work which due to its author's sudden decline in health remained unpublished.[1] Spée mentions asymmetry merely as an aspect to be taken into account when assembling ikated skeins into a woven cloth so as not to make mistakes, but provides insights in the related subject of dual and tripartite design principles being honoured in parallel (a phenomenon observed by Taylor and Aragon in the wider region beyond the Java Sea). While Savunese motifs are studied in detail, no attempt is made to study correspondences with motifs on other islands in the region under study.

Geneviève Duggan explored the ikat society of Savu in *Ikats of Savu: Women Weaving History in Eastern Indonesia* (2001), and revisited this subject in the catalogue *Woven Stories, Traditional Textiles from the Regency Savu Raijua* (2013). While asymmetry is a remarkable feature of Savunese and Raijuan shawls, possibly due to editorial constrictions (circa 115 text pages for the two works combined) and its inward focus, not much attention is paid to the phenomenon beyond noting that odd numbers are "a male characteristic in the Savunese system of thoughts (Duggan 2013:14)", nor to the degree to which Savunese predilictions found fertile ground elsewhere. Ikat from Savu and Raijua possesses an extensive endemic iconography – of which Duggan provides a considerable but partial inventory – while also sharing motifs with other islands, another aspect left to others to explore.

Ruth M. Yeager and Mark I. Jacobson's *Textiles of Western Timor* (2002) is a groundbreaking monograph on this area. It provides us with a concise history of the island's western regions as well as a rich inventory of the types of motifs used. The authors mention, but without any elaborations, asymmetry as occurring in the semi-exclave named Oecusse (formerly known as Ambenu) as well as, although more rarely, in surrounding Amarasi parts of West Timor. This sound inventory of West Timorese iconography does not deal with the distribution of certain motifs beyond Timor in any depth. It does not discuss the phenomenon of pattern compression, nor any other of the several ways West-Timorese weavers developed to achieve an asymmetric result.

In *Ostindonesien im 20. Jahrhundert* (2004) **Ruth Barnes** delivers an account of Ernst and Hannah Vatter's lives and works, also presenting the 72 ikat textiles that Vatter acquired, unfortunately more than half of them merely in thumbnails, which makes it impossible to study them. With the exception of a small number of specimens, these fabrics were never exhibited. Barnes makes no attempt to analyze the distribution of motifs across the region Vatter visited. She has established herself as a key scholar of ikat research by the publication of *The Ikat Textiles of Lamalera, A Study of an Eastern Indonesian Weaving* (Barnes, 1989), although she is perhaps better known for the oft-cited article "Without Cloth We Cannot Marry: The Textiles of the Lamaholot in Transition" (1991). Her *opus*

[1] Spee's findings form a welcome addition to the limited source material regarding the ikat of Savu. To make it available to other researchers, the present author, in collaboration with Spee, converted her manuscript for digital publication and posted it on Academia and Research Gate (DOI: 10.13140/RG.2*.2.36625.04965).

magnum published in 2010 is titled *Five Centuries of Indonesian Textiles: The Mary Hunt Kahlenberg Collection*, and was co-edited with the late Mary Hunt Kahlenberg. Its articles, written by regional specialists, present a close-reading of the cloths, with a view to provide as much relevant historical and contextual information as was available at the time. Barnes's concept comprised utilising emblematic pieces from the Kahlenberg Collection in order to then discuss various aspects of the Indonesian weaving culture. This approach has left us with a valuable publication on the subject. However, due to its incidental origins, it lacks the structure to assist a student with constructing a framework for understanding of the 'ikat archipelago'. Apparently the subject of asymmetry did not sufficiently intrigue Barnes or her co-editor to further investigate it.

Marianne van Vuuren's concise but data-rich *Ikat from Tanimbar* (2009) provides us with an invaluable resource, and is literally unique in that it is the only book on the subject. It describes and shows drawings of 474 Tanimbarese motifs, in purely quantitive terms outclassing any other study on a single island. But quantity is not van Vuuren's sole strength: she contextualizes the motifs she encountered on the Tanimbar Islands by pointing to similarities with motifs found elsewhere in Southeast Asia, focussing on regions through which the Austronesian immigration passed, including the Philippines and Borneo. Van Vuuren's detailing of these correspondences, more than any other literature, sparked the present author's interest in the distribution of motifs across the region under study. Occasional occurrences of asymmetry on Tanimbar, e.g. in man-woman motifs *(ibid.*:141), are immacutely recorded but not investigated.[1].

Textiles of Timor: Island in the Woven Sea edited by **Roy W. Hamilton & Joanna Barrkman** (2014) covers West and East Timor in a well-structured manner and in rich detail. It includes numerous field photographs and examples of textiles, both early and recent. **Jill Forshee**'s contribution on the ikat of the Fataluku-speaking of East Timor is of direct relevance to this investigation, as is her contribution to *Timor: Totems e Tokens / Timor: Totems and Tokens*, a bilingual catalogue on the ikat of Timor edited by the present author (Forshee 2019). Forshee provides us with an excellent starting point for the investigation of the distribution, mostly eastward, into the Southwesterly Islands, of one particular type of motif, which is referred to as the 'pictorial strip' in the present study. Joanna Barrkman's publication entitled *The Textiles of Covalima, Timor Leste* (2014) is highly valuable as it is the only source on these textiles and includes examples of all known types. The same applies to **Rosalia E. M. Soares**'s ebook *The Textiles of Lautem, Timor-Leste* (2015). Neither of these two works link specific motifs or techniques to other islands.

[1] Van Vuuren in person provided valuable insights on minute distinctions in a motif's design that connote a male-female dyad, such as in PC 204 (see Fig. 203), by subtly disturbing the motif's symmetry. Pers. comm., 2016, 2020. Being taught the consequence of such minute distinctions stimulated the present author's interest in asymmetric design.

We can conclude from the above survey of the existing literature that multiple sources, both scholarly and intended for a general public, touch upon yarn properties and weave types as well as upon the distribution of motifs and asymmetry in the region under study, although solely tangentially or superficially. An important source, written by M.J. Adams aforementioned, who may be considered the founder of systematic research of ikat design (albeit limited to Sumba) does address asymmetry. However, as argued below (see Section 4.2 'Sought complexity: asymmetry as proof of mastery'), she arrives at a conclusion that can be questioned – and which since its publication half a century ago was left uncontradicted, respectively repeated, thus highlighting the need for a concerted effort to investigate such a crucial element of ikat design.

Asymmetry in ikat as it was traditionally made in the Indonesian archipelago always required additional effort, hence served as an exhibition of mastery. The early stages of this investigation provided intriguing clues – cases of unmistakable virtuosity – revealing that East Sumbanese weavers in particular were highly competitive in such exhibition. They appeared to have produced a design hierarchy differentiated by levels of complexity, which invited attempts at reconstruction of the hierarchy's classes. The main challenges were a dearth of specimens (survivors from the highest classes are very rare for a number of reasons, the use as shroud prominent among them) and a lack of sources.

Virtuosity in the arts has the social advantage that it elevates its producer above her peers. "Technology is enchanting because it is enchanted, because it is the outcome of some process of barely comprehensible virtuosity (Thomas 1998: viii)". This creation of artistic material the construction of which is hard to fathom gives the producer a degree of power over the observer, whose ability to process visual data is temporarily disabled. Gell speaks of "Captivation or fascination – the demoralization produced by the spectacle of unimaginable virtuosity – ensues from the spectator becoming trapped within the index because the index embodies agency which is essentially indecipherable (1998.71)". The word 'spellbound' provides a graphic description of the mental state of the enchanted observer, as does "captivated" (Gell 1998:29). Both describe the observer as incapacitated, unable to comprehend what caused the particular mental state. This can lead the observer to ascribe it to some superhuman, magical power of the producer.

Virtuosity has the collateral disadvantage that it is discerned, and appreciated in full, only by those with a thorough grasp of the technical exploits required to produce it. This represents a scholarly challenge. An epistemological consequence of the distribution pattern of virtuosity, shallow per definition, is that knowledge dies with the virtuosas. This has gravely affected our understanding of certain types of Indonesian ikat textiles, particularly those from East Sumba, but also those from Kodi, West Sumba. Manifestations of virtuosity remained unrecognized because recognizing them relies on an intimate knowledge of design techniques – which was no longer available.

Our past failure to recognize various degrees of complexity in ikat textiles (ranging from basic functionality to virtuosity) has also limited our understanding of the role that producing high quality ikat played in the weaver's presentation of self, a subject that has

received scant attention, and became a key component of the present study.

Creating ikat that deserved accolades like *luar biasa*, literally ‘out of the ordinary’, leave alone *istimewa*, ‘sublime’, requires not just high intelligence but also vast amounts of additional labour: thousands of additional bindings. What drove weavers to such excesses of dedication to their art? While none are alive who can provide a direct answer, it is hoped that by analyzing and contextualizing the physical proofs of patent efforts to excel, inferences can be made that bring us a new level of understanding of 19th- and early 20th-century weavers’ mindsets.

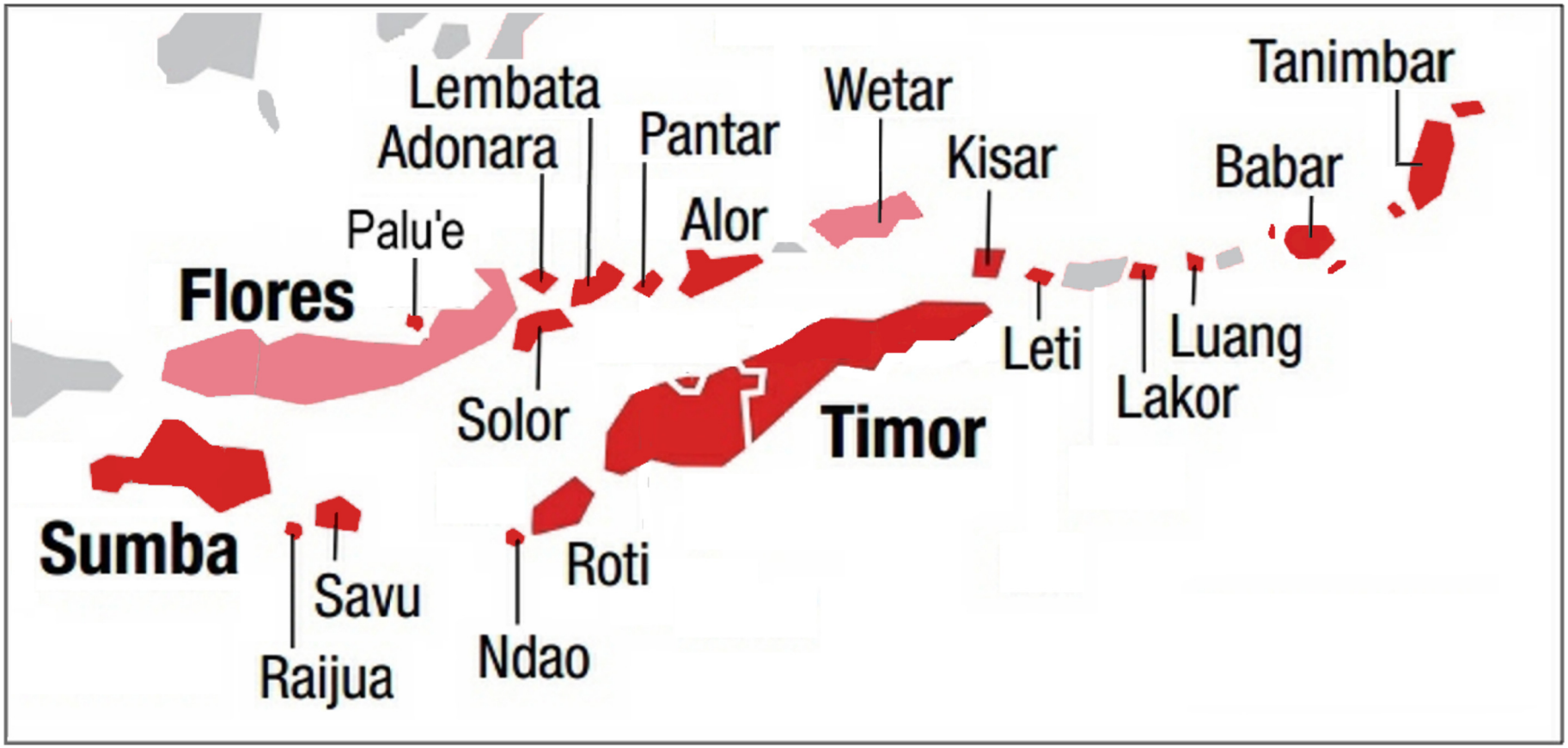

Fig. 3 Map showing the region under study. All boundaries are approximate and without political significance. The maps in this work are intentionally schematic. The focus is on the relative position of the numerous islands. Flores is rendered in a paler tonality as only a few elements of its ikat are considered. The same applies to Sumba – its ikat is investigated only with respect to the aspect of asymmetry – but major design-technical discoveries were made here. A single motif used on Bali and Nusa Penida was investigated.

1.2 THE AUSTRONESIAN IKAT TRADITION

Ikat is an ancient compression-resist dyeing technique named after the Malay root *ikat* meaning to tie or bind. The term can refer to both the process – binding off sections of yarn to prevent dye penetration – and the woven product. The impermeable bindings are tied on to selected bundles of warp, weft, or both. Ikat has been practised for centuries in many parts of the world, but reached its most expressive form in the Indonesian archipelago[1] where it is nearly as widely differentiated as the languages spoken. The chosen simile is not accidental: design styles tend to be closely associated with the languages spoken in the producing regions.

With few confirmed exceptions ikat production is limited to the speakers of Austronesian languages, commonly referred to as Austronesians, and thanks to combined linguistic and technical research (Boudot & Buckley 2015) there can be little doubt that backstrap loom weaving came from mainland Southeast Asia (now southern China) to insular Southeast Asia along with the successive waves of Austronesian immigrants who arrived between 3500 and 1500 BCE – probably direct rather than via Taiwan (*ibid.*:407) as used to be commonly assumed (e.g. Maxwell 1990:58). Weaving-related terms such as those for 'loom' and 'weaver's sword' were found in the earliest versions of Austronesian languages (*ibid.*:406). However, two groups of speakers of Papuan languages (the Fataluku-speakers in East Timor and the Oirata-speakers on Kisar) are known to also produce ikat,[2] proving the importance of Platenkamp's warning that our conceptual apparatus must not be "reduced to the idiom selected by the societies in question (1996:218)".

Ikat in the Indonesian archipelago has often been been cast as a legacy of the Vietnamese bronze-making Dongson, whose culture dominated large swaths of insular Southeast Asia between 500 and 100 BCE, bringing with it social stratification, rice cultivation and various handicrafts, including metal work (Langewis & Wagner 1964:13; de Jonge & van Dijk 1995:20). Several researchers however see indications that it may have come to the Indonesian archipelago millennia earlier, sharing a common ancestor in the

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[1] The term 'Indonesian archipelago', applied here in a politically incorrect but widely accepted sense, covers all of Indonesia plus the Malaysian states on Borneo, as well as Timor-Leste. Again, following common usage, the term 'Nusantara' is taken to refer to the same area, although in Indonesia it is limited to the territory of the Republic of Indonesia while in Malaysia it covers all the regions inhabited by people of Malay stock, including Singapore and parts of the Philippines. In conformity with most of the relevant literature (e.g. Hamilton & Barrkman, eds., 2014) the term East Timor was given preference over the politically correct Timor-Leste.

[2] The linguistic kinship between these two groups was confirmed by Schapper, Huber & van Engelenhoven (2012). A third Papuan group, the Adang in western Alor, appear to produce ikat also, but more research is needed to establish this as fact. The evidence so far is based on a single specimen of a design utterly unlike any other ikat made on Alor (see PC 166, Fig. 94), and a very similar specimen photographed in Alor's Adang territory by the present author.

neolithic cultures on the Asian mainland (Maxwell 2010:33; Barnes 1989:33).

After searching for unambiguous indicators of Dongson influence on Indonesian ikat for four decades, a search that included inspection of a subtantial number of Vietnamese bronzes in the National Museum of Vietnam in Hanoi and several *moko* in the Museum of Kalabahi[1] (the largest of which the staff insisted on rolling out the door for it to be photographed) I have come to the conclusion that such putative influence is either non-existant or negligeable. It may seem wilfully confrontational to dismiss a theory so broadly accepted as Heine-Geldern's (1937:197) premise of an archipelago-wide diffusion of Dongsonian design elements in the Indonesian archipelago, but if they block new insights, politesse or political caution should not keep us from refutation.

Fig. 4 Detail of a sarong made by a weaver of the Amarasi Oekabiti clan (West Timor) decorated with the clan's proprietary ikat pattern, instantly identifiable by its acutely angular rendering. *Source:* PC 191.

Fortunately we are not quite alone in this matter:

> Few contemporary scholars accept Heine-Geldern's diffusionist theory promulgating the dominant influence of proto-Vietnamese Dongson bronzes on Indonesian art styles (Solheim 1975; Newton 1988:12). In particular, calling simple geometric and figurative motifs, which may well have been created without direct knowledge of bronzeware from the Tonking region, Dongsonian has been criticised (Bernet Kempers 1988:304-307). [..] These recent criticisms of the diffusionist theory are leading to new theories of an

[1] This institute is now called Seribu Moko Museum and houses far fewer than 1000 specimens.

> independent Indonesian origin for certain motifs or of a common Southeast Asian artistic heritage (Taylor & Aragon 1991:67).

While a few ikat motifs do resemble Dongson motifs – such as braided lines (Heine-Geldern 1937, Fig. S, similar to those on PC 086, Figs. 193, 212), or hook and rhomb patterns like the *kaif* of Timor (see Yeager and Jacobson 2002:58), very common in Central Asia – such similarities may well be the result of other Asian influences, specifically Turkic; or of polygenesis, ideas arising in different locations in parallel, but independently. However, there is one region where Dongson influence does appear, and is very significant, to wit the Tutuala region in the extreme east of East Timor where certain ikat motifs are clear emulations (locally acknowledged as such) of rock carvings that closely resemble motifs I found on a monumental Dongson bronze drum, *situla*, in the Vietnam National Museum of History (see section 3.4.2 'The Pictorial Strip, *Rimanu*').

The same motifs were not found on Timor itself, at least not by a group researching the issue in depth (Lape *et al.* 2007). Lape was surprised to see the Hanoi *situla*, as its rendering of both the boat and the human figures is so strikingly similar to the Tutuala rock drawings.[1] This certifies one specific, topographically limited, design line of descent: a Dongson bronze of a kind that in Vietnam was declared a National Treasure, perhaps owned by a local Tutualan ruler, was imitated in rock drawings; which then inspired Tutuala weavers to create similar figurative motifs in their cloths; which in their turn served as sources of inspiration to weavers on islands further east, such as Kisar and Luang.[2]

Ikat designs tell us much about their weavers' and wearers' social status and prestige, their belief systems and traditional customs, from marriage via birth to death rituals and other rites of passage. They also often make instantly understandable proclamations about social identity, inspired by that deeply human need to belong, and to be seen to belong.

The Indonesian archipelago is largely inhabited by descendants of the Austronesians mentioned above who spilled out of China across the archipelago in waves, between 3,500 and 1,000 BCE. This Austronesian exodus was one of most far-reaching of the great prehistoric human migrations – extending all the way across the Pacific to the Marquesas and Easter Island, although the total number of colonists was small. Nautical studies on the construction and handling of Austronesian sailing vessels help to visualise the people on their long journeys through the archipelago, the men steering their craft loaded with women and offspring, chickens and other domestic animals, gardening tools and seeds and portable backstrap looms to an uncertain but beckoning future (Horridge 2006).

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[1] Peter Lape, pers. comm., 2019.

[2] This design link between bronze and ikat fittingly illustrates the theme Linda S. McIntosh explored in *Thread and Fire: Textiles and Jewellery from the Isles of Indonesia and Timor* (2019).

Fig. 5 A large outrigger canoe of a type called *lakatoi* with a crew of adults and children, photographed in East New Guinea, 1903-1904. This vessel is equipped with two-boom triangular 'crab-claw' sails, one of the earliest and most efficient sail types. Because this two-masted rig uses twin crab sails in close proximity, almost in parallel planes, it functions as a cutter rig which, thanks to the much debated but not quite fully understood 'slot-effect', can develop great powers of propulsion, particularly when close-hauled in strong winds. The 'crab claw' sail is known to be ancient, predating the lateen sail which was probably derived from it. If the Austronesians did indeed use ships like these, it should be no surprise they could explore a vast maritime space. Gelatine silver print, photographer unknown. *Source:* British Museum, N° Oc, B119.151.

Great distances (over 500 nautical miles per month, circa 800 km) could be covered thanks to a seafaring technology based on boats and rafts with outriggers and plaited sails, allowing sailing close-hauled, and instrument-free but effective navigational skills, many of which still survive on outlying parts of the Philippines and certain Pacific islands (Horridge 2006:143, *passim*). Horridge's nautical perspective makes us aware that during the Austronesians' wanderings, their key concern was being at sea; living on board of their vessels with families and animals, finding their way about a huge archipelago, sprawling over thousands of sea miles. As to what they could expect in terms of prevailing winds, Horridge makes an interesting comparison with the maritime conditions encountered by the Viking explorers and raiders:

> The earliest Austronesian colonists in the Pacific were in the situation of the Vikings on the coast of Norway, the Portuguese and later the English and the Dutch, faced by the prevailing south-west winds of the Atlantic. The situation creates a continual stimulus for sailors. In periods when the winds are reversed you can sail out to sea if you are confident that you will be blown back near home, or past home to islands downwind from home (Horridge in Bellwood et al. 1995:157).

If this were true, finding the sail route around the Cape of Good Hope would not have taken so long to develop. Horridge apparently did not realize that "prevailing south-west winds"

may indeed be true for northern Europe, but not at all for Portugal with its notorious northwesterly *nortada*. Until 1434, when Gil Eanes rounded it in a feat of great daring, Cape Bojador, a headland located just 2º south of Morocco, was the furthest any Portuguese sailor wished to venture, because of the risk he would never return.

The Austronesians partly replaced, partly intermingled with Melanesians who arrived from Africa some 50,000 years earlier, following the South-Asian coasts, but did not go as far southeast as those earlier settlers. As a result, parts of the area under study are still inhabited by people of the Melanesian type, e.g. the Alfurese of Seram and Halmahera. On several eastern islands such as Alor, Timor and Kisar, groups have Papuan physical traits or speak Papuan languages. The Austronesians brought various skills with them, a number of which survive to the present day. One of these ancient skills is ikat weaving on backstrap looms, which a combination of linguistic and technical studies suggest has a time depth of possibly 6000 years (Buckley 2012:14).

As a maritime environment, the Indonesian archipelago is generally well suited to navigation, marked as it is by monsoon winds (semi-annual reversal winds) that are directionally stable for months at a time, and the absence of sudden tempests. This favoured mercantile and cultural interchanges across the region and produced marked interculturality. In contrast, several seas and straits separating neighbouring islands are seasonally uncrossable or treacherous all year round, keeping their cultures more distinct than one might expect by a look at the map. Rugged landscapes produce internal diversity on several islands, Timor being a prime example, keeping geographically close communities culturally distinct.

These contradictory natural circumstances have produced a clearly interconnected culture, although marked by manifestations of striking individuality. Shared across the islands are: headhunting as a fertility ritual (Hoskins 1996b:21-23; Downs 1977:123), formalized exchanges of ‘male’ against ‘female’ goods which keep circulating for many generations, with every transfer accreting force as a *pusaka,* sacred heirloom – and warp ikat weaving, also geared largely to produce heirlooms. Several easily recognizable motifs are shared by a number of islands. Individuality is expressed in (a) motifs found on just one island and nowhere else, or just in one class; and (b) in asymmetry, a deviation with technical consequences which is encountered in several regions; and (c) other aspects of a technical nature; such as an idiosyncratic weave type, a technical signature.
Most Indonesian weavers produce warp ikat in cotton on a backstrap loom with a circular warp. While this could not be verified for all studied regions, generally the cutting of the warp after the weaving has been completed is a significant and sacral act embedded in a suitable ritual – often postponed for years till the cloth has served as bridewealth (Duggan 2014:66; Barnes 1994:16); it fundamentally changes the cloth’s material state as well as status, and is surrounded by taboos (Geirnaert 1992:92). An old weaver in Lamalera (Lembata) from whom the present author in 1981 acquired an old bridewealth cloth with its warps still uncut (PC 047) compared the cutting of the warp to turn the bridewealth into a sarong with the deflowering of the bride, the loss of intentionally maintained original state.

Fig. 6 Detail showing the uncut warp of a bridewealth sarong, *kewatek méan*, from East Flores's Birds Head Peninsula, made most likely in Ili Mandiri; else in Bama, Lewolaga, or Lobe Tobi. *Source:* PC 007. The dark maroon bands have been created by *belapit*, overdying over morinda and indigo.

This brings up the question if virginity at marriage had always been a requirement on the island, prescribed, or at least highly valued by the *adat*, or if it had been imposed on the islanders by the SVD (Societas Verbi Divini) missionaries who came to the archipelago in the 1920s (Barnes 1992:170). They built a well-appointed house, standing somewhat above the village, which helped the Dutch occupant, sent to the region in 1935, to keep himself as far apart from his parishioners as feasible. He survived on cans of beef tongue in Madeira sauce and similar foodstuffs shipped to him by his congregation, and had never partaken of the fish traded daily on the village's beach. After several hours of exploratory conversation, the present author asked the old man, dying to go into retirement, to summarize his ultimate assessment of the value of the work he had done all those decades. Nodding sadly as he let the smoke of his Dutch *bolknak* cigar encircle his head, he said that in the last decade he had been sent magazines like Reader's Digest and National Geographic, which had made him see the world differently. On the basis of their information he had to conclude that his life's work, much of which was aimed at destroying various islands' ancient traditions – and introducing new ones, surely including chastity – had been misguided.

Whether the uncut warp's association with chastity was widely spread or not, warp ikat

weavings in the uncut state were everywhere in the region under study regarded with more deference than those with their warps cut or sewn into sarongs. There is no parallel untouched state in weft ikat, which is primarily associated with silk and limited to the western areas where Hindu influence was once strong: Sumatra, Java, Bali and Lombok, plus southern Sulawesi. Warp ikat is practised anywhere east and north of these regions. However, there are several exceptions, such as the silk warp ikat of Aceh, the cotton warp ikat of the Batak on western Sumatra and the cotton weft ikat of northern Lombok's Wetu Telu believers. Bali is the only island where true double ikat is produced.

Declining social significance and its material consequences

Essentially a handicraft, in Indonesia ikat weaving developed into a unique art form that is rich in meaning. In many ways it can be said to define the archipelago more than any other material manifestation of culture, as it is more widespread than batik, wayang plays or the making of bejewelled krises. Ikat speaks more eloquently of the area's profusion of cultures and belief systems. Its significance may even be considered to supersede that of the ubiquitous ancestor sculptures. These certainly are emblematic manifestations of the culture, but their creation was more incidental – on an as needed basis – and, unlike ikat weaving, never part of daily life for the better part of an island's population. Ikat textiles were vital for the social functioning of these communities. They belonged to the people's most cherished, most sacred possessions – heirlooms passed on across the generations – and there was hardly a ceremony conceivable that did not involve them in one way or another. They were also among the most prestigious of a family's possessions:

> Whether local or imported, whether made by highly esteemed local experts or created by deified ancestors, the ownership and control of fine textiles add to the prestige and power of clan leader, aristocratic families and royal households (Maxwell 2004:115).

Ikat textiles are rarely just attire, just material. There is nearly always a spiritual dimension and in many island societies the spiritual, the shamanic, is the dominant factor, especially the relationship with fertility. "Textiles represent the capacity of women to give life" (Geirnaert 1989:457). The act of weaving itself is seen as imbued with deeper meaning.

> For Indonesians the art of weaving – the intercrossing of the warp and the weft – symbolises the structure of the cosmos: the warp yarns fastened between the ends of the loom represent the predestined elements of life; the weft passing in and out and back and forth denotes life's variables (Hunt Kahlenberg 1977:7).

Although most Indonesians are Muslim or Christian, and in many areas have been for centuries, traditional belief systems are still very much alive underneath the monotheistic veneer. Ancestors are venerated nearly everywhere, spirits feared and placated, forces of nature respected with religious fervour, totemic affiliations affirmed and made explicit. Thus, it is not at all strange to find that Indonesians of all religions considered certain types of textiles sacred, especially ikats. They held them in deep veneration and even ascribed them curative and other supernatural powers. Those only outwardly converted still do.

Perishable heritage calls out for preservation

Unfortunately, relatively few antique or even merely 'vintage' examples of this ancient art form remain. Textiles in the tropics constitute a perishable cultural heritage. The major factors for their perishment are environmental and human, the latter both local and foreign. The warm and humid atmosphere, the abundance of insects, moulds and rodents (which love to nestle in and nibble on textiles) conspire to destroy them. In the tropics, entropy is extreme. Non-durable materials rarely persist more than 200 years.[1] A centenarian tropical textile is truly old, and in the Indonesian archipelago we do not even have to go back that far in time to run into an extreme paucity of specimens. A pre-1940 Alor or Adonara ikat is nearly impossible to source, as are pre-independence ikats from East Timor. Microscopic study of antique ikat textiles shows that, few specimens excepted – perhaps because they lay stored away as *pusaka* to be preserved for future generations – with age comes degradation of the fibre. In specific cases, such as 19th- to early 20th-century examples from Tanimbar (PC 277), West Timor (PC 303) and Solor (PC 321), so many bits of fibre break away and loosely intertwine with others that we see the beginning of matting, as in felt, weakening the textile's structure.[2]

Human conduct accelerates the destruction of cloths in the Indonesian archipelago. While the fine and often fragile old cloths are venerated as heirlooms, people often do not hesitate to use them as curtains to screen off ritual space and as pennants to decorate houses and temples, nor to fly them off poles and roof beams during ceremonies, which frequently causes them to tear. The reason why people do not hesitate is that they believe this is exactly what you should do with a powerful *pusaka*: bring it to the event. A hole or a rip does not diminish the textiles' perceived immanent power nor detract from their veneration, so little care is taken, ensuring that the wear and tear is continual. Then there is the tradition, still adhered to on several islands, of taking cloths to the grave, especially those considered superior.

The survival rate of certain types of Indonesian ikat has been further reduced by foreign influence. Several types stopped being made around 1920-1930 as a result of missionary efforts to suppress the manifestation of 'pagan ways' or to improve the 'decency' of men by banning loose loincloths.[3] Other forms of suppression were more rigorous. *Adat*-related objects were destroyed on a grand scale across the Indonesian archipelago, in New Guinea and into the Pacific. On Halmahera "at baptism the converts had to bring the material remnants of their pagan religion, like amulets and ritual objects,

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[1] A few textiles survive which, usually on the basis of C-14 dating, are judged by their curators or owners to be several centuries old. But, while these may be individually significant, as a group they constitute a minute subset of the body of Indonesian textiles known from published collections.

[2] The reader is encouraged to study the microscopic photographs of the textiles mentioned on the Pusaka Collection website. URL: www.ikat.us. The PC numbers mentioned in the text correlate with the catalogue numbers of the website. Access the material via the microscope icon in the header.

[3] Hamilton (1994:113) delicately speaks of "changing standards of propriety" early in the 20th century, but it takes little guesswork to realize what caused said standards to change at that particular time, the heyday of missionary activity.

and these were burnt on a special place that was already destined to become the place for the church of this new congregation" (Aritonang & Steenbrink 2008:401). It was not enough that the material culture was broken: for proper conversion the whole belief system and notion of self had to be erased so that a new self could be created from scratch. He or she was no longer an agent setting forth the path of his or her lineage, the line of recalled ancestors with whom one feels intimately connected, and which in documented cases[1] can stretch 300 years. Instead a new person had to be created, connected to God in Heaven, born laden with guilt, hence much to expatiate. This would have to be a humble person, no longer a slayer of men or receiver of heads, but a meek disciple of Jesus, with love for fellow man a core principle.

Voluntary action in a new direction was taken as true proof of conversion: "Ideally the natives should destroy their sacred things out of their own free will, by burning them or throwing them into the sea, weighed down with stones" (Corbey & Weener 2015:3). Bonfires were typically built in church yards, where the goods would be put to the flame after a service, no doubt intense. Several pieces escaped this cultural *Endlösung,* after being handed over for 'safekeeping' to Dutch and German missionaries who then shipped them home as souvenirs of their tours of duty or as bequests to the ethnographic collections of their congregations (Aritonang & Steenbrink, eds., 2008:155), which in many cases sold them off and ploughed the proceeds back into further missionary efforts. Now and again the destruction was carried out with a bleeding heart. The missionary Pieter Middelkoop loved the Timorese artefacts, yet, as he described in a letter to his family, he still organised burnings of heathen material on Timor to allow God to make "new beginnings in the hearts of the people" (de Jonge 2006:189-190).

While the destruction of pagan artefacts was practiced across the archipelago, the region under study appears to have been disproportionately affected, possibly because on most its small and remote islands there was hardly any non-clerical western presence that might have constrained it, should it have been so inclined. Purges took place in the 1950s, also in East Timor (Niner 2003:n.p.), as late as the 1970s on Ndao[2] and – incredible as this may seem in view of the increased sense of cultural relativity and respect for traditional cultures worldwide – in the Batak lands on Sumatra as late as the 1980s and 1990s, specifically with regard to ikat (Aritonang & Steenbrink:559). Such treatment meted out to the village's ikat heirlooms did not inspire young women to take up ikating; although some, probably the best, maintained their skills. As a result of this religiously inspired expurgation, on top of the ravages of time, precious few Indonesian textiles predate the 19th century (Holmgren & Spertus 1989:22) and even pieces dating from the late 19th and early 20th century are rare.

Another factor in the decay of traditional weaving was the collateral damage of schooling. Already in the early 1900s on most islands the majority of the children, girls

[1] If pertaining to the island of Pantar (Solor & Alor Archipelago), see Hägerdahl 2010:228.
[2] James J. Fox, pers. comm., 2019.

included, went to school. On several islands, schooling had already started around 1875. So, girls simply had no time to sit at grandma's side for hours as she worked and absorb the secrets of dyeing and weaving – far less time than previous generations. Now and again they were even sent to school on other islands. These girls, as Nico de Jonge puts it plastically, were literally ripped from their culture.[1]

Yet another development that led to a decrease in ikat manufacture was a drop in the importance of ikat as a status marker, caused by the breakdown of old feudal structures, which was already observed on Timor by Salomon Müller (1857:91-92), and more recently by Roy Hamilton (1994:53). In many island regions specific ikat motifs were reserved for specific castes and classes. All these regions are currently less bound by the traditional hierarchies than they were a century ago, the result of the gradual annihilation of the nobles' power. First, the colonial rulers placed the local rajas and sultans in a visibly subordinate role, "the colonial government being the successor of feudal sovereigns" (Luiten van Zande 2010:163), which can hardly have failed to corrode the respect and submission in which they had luxuriated, as well as their status as paradigms to be emulated, an effect that tends to percolate down, affecting all classes and aspects of society. During the revolution against the Dutch colonial government, and then after independence, the government of Sukarno regarded feudalism and its comfort-addicted representatives as the root cause of Indonesia's colonial exploitation.

> Increased levels of education and the promulgation of an egalitarian ideology, considered two of the most important accomplishments of Indonesian independence since 1945, have rendered unacceptable the class divisions that were once the core of traditional social organization (Hamilton, ed., 1994:36).

With the decay of the old regime's most visible symbols came the evaporation of much of its mythology and of the *adat*, the canon of customs and traditions, which used to be intricate, demanding and, in specific regions, severe in its insistence on compliance, to the point of capital punishment for the appropriation by commoners of ikat motifs belonging to the nobility (Jasper & Pirngadie 1912:274). As a result, many elaborate regulations regarding the use of traditional motifs have fallen into disuse or been forgotten as the people are subsumed into new hierarchies – Muslim, Christian, political and economic – and spun hand to foot into new webs of dependency where the mastery of ikat weaving brings little social advantage, and may even be considered backward, *terbelakang* (Forshee 2000:20).

> As with many other marginal collectivities positioned in the frontier spaces of modern nation-states and marked by these states as backward and traditional, the price of a sense of belonging to the present order is often a forgetfulness of one's past (Spyer 2000:199[2]).

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[1] Nico de Jonge, pers. comm., 2017.
[2] In reference to the Aru islands located just east of the present study area.

Meaning beyond ostentation

Ikat is not unique to the Indonesian archipelago, or even to Southeast Asia. It has been, and in certain cases still is, used in many parts of the globe, including Guatemala, France, Israel (where the earliest fragments of ikat have been found, dating from around 700 CE), Yemen, Uzbekistan, India, Southeast Asia, China, Japan and even Patagonia where it is used for Mapuche chiefs' robes (Baginski *et al.* 1997). However, nowhere else except in Gujarat (northwest India) and Andhra Pradesh (east central India), was ikat developed to the same level of technical refinement as in the Indonesian archipelago, and nowhere else was it similarly endowed with such meaning. This latter aspect truly sets Nusantaran ikat apart, and affords it a singularly important place in the culture of Southeast Asia.

Whereas in many parts of Southeast Asia ikat textiles mainly served as decoration – often with a prominent aspect of ostentation on account of the technically demanding, time-consuming and therefore costly process – on most islands of the Indonesian archipelago ikat textiles carried an importance far beyond decoration and proof of wealth. They gave off numerous signals, fully intelligible only to members of the community who produced them (Gittinger 1979:41). The weaving constituted a body of symbolic language, a collection of circa 50 local vernaculars that spoke of a wide variety of the aspects of daily life: respect for ancestors; totem plants and animals; belief in an afterlife, and the need to guide or protect the dead on their way to it; dreams and visions of the spirit world; a sense of belonging to one particular clan; a manifestation of purity and godliness.

Indonesian ikat textiles spoke of status as well, be it royal or noble descent, or the ability and maturity of the weaver, and Jasper and Pirngadie felt that they could generically be described as 'luxury cloths' ["luxe-doeken"] (1912:4). However, in contrast to several other Southeast Asian regions, in all but a few Indonesian communities status was expressed, not by the use of costly materials such as silk and gold thread, but by the use of specific restricted motifs – such as those of the Ngada on Flores (Hamilton, ed., 1994:43) reserved for couples who had held lavish feasts – and the display of technical mastery. The chief criteria taken into account when according a weaver status were: the ability to make fine yet strong hand-spun yarn, dyeing with deep colour saturation and the weaving of intricate patterns with correct alignment.

A high degree of individuality

The variety of ikat across the archipelago is remarkable: over 50 weaving regions have a recognisably characteristic style, changeable over time but generally consistent regarding basics such as field division, colour of the weft or a preference for symmetry versus asymmetry. The textile designs of two neighbouring islands, separated by a sea strait not 1 mile wide, can be so far apart that no one except an expert versed in the vernacular of traditional motifs and their building blocks would think of placing them in each other's vicinity. Even on the same island there can be surprising diversity. Lack of communication and isolation lie at the root of this high degree of individuality. As a result of the often

mountainous and jungle-clad terrain, travel on the islands used to be difficult, and on many it remains a challenge, which inevitably accentuates diversity.

During Dutch colonial rule, cultural distinctions became more marked as the overlords manipulated local rulers by means of shifting alliances. This reinforced the need for a clearly expressed identity. On the other hand, there are multiple instances of motifs shared by two or more islands at a great distance from one another. These can point to intensive bridal or mercantile exchanges between these specific islands, or, where no evidence of such exchanges exists, to the former existence of a set of archaic motifs that once had a wide distribution across the archipelago, then lost out to other motifs – everywhere except on these few islands. Eight such cases of visual correspondence are here investigated.

Oddly, a number of patterns that most unite weavers across the archipelago are wholly extraneous to the region, having been borrowed from glitzy Indian double ikat *patola* (sing. *patolu*) which the Dutch East India Company (VOC) acquired in predominantly in Gujarat and distributed to its preferred local chieftains. These were venerated for their technical mastery, which obviously surpassed that of mere mortals, ascribed immanent supernatural and protective powers, and widely emulated.[1]

Proudly engaging with technical challenges

Fortunately, many people in the Indonesian archipelago are blessed with a strong aesthetic sensibility that informs their artistic production. Ikat weavings often contain a mesmerising beauty that transcends regional and national boundaries. The appeal of Indonesian ikat textiles derives from several different technical and stylistic aspects. They were made, and sometimes still are made, with only natural dyes – vegetable and occasionally mineral. This gives them a soft, warm tonality and a deeply human character that gladdens the heart.[2]

Then there is the appealing simplicity of the colour scheme, which is largely limited to

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[1] Most widely emulated were *patola* with the *jilamprang* motif, Bühler & Fischer's Type 11d (1979: Plate VIII), which in its place of origin is called Chabdi Bhat or 'basket pattern'. Highly regarded, but less frequently emulated, were the rare *patola* showing elephants (see PC 063), held as heirlooms by important local rulers. In the Solor & Alor Archipelago where they appear to have been more common than elsewhere, they are known as *ketipa gaja*. Scholars keep identifying other *patola* types that influenced ikat motifs in the region under study, such as the Timorese *bok'fa* and *bibk'sa* patterns studied by Barrkman (2009). This investigation *en passant* showed up Vohra Gaji Bhat in East Sumba, Bühler & Fischer's Type 23 (1979: Plates 40-45; see also PC 351, Fig. 252). During this investigation it became evident from specimens found on Alor, Pantar and Ternate, that *patola* with the Pan Bhat or 'betel leaf' patterning, Bühler & Fischer's Type 1 (1979: Plate I) were also distributed in the eastern Indonesian archipelago – perhaps before the more widely emulated *jilamprang* type. The Pan Bhat pattern was mainly used by Hindu and Jain Mahajans, trading casts with political influence, likely to have been involved in overseas trade.

[2] This emotional aspect influences the selections curators and collectors make, thus tainting the Reference Set with a subliminal subjectivity. Very few chemical dyes seeped into Group A of the Physical Database. They were allowed in only where truly unavoidable (e.g. Timor, Bali, Sumatra, Bugis, Leti) or where they served as time markers, as in the case of mauvine and fuchsine. These early synthetic dyes were used in 'deluxe' pinstripes which allow us to date an ikat between 1875 and 1925 with a fair degree of confidence.

Fig. 7 An early 20th-century Timorese men's wrap from Amanuban. The cloth displays a great fluidity of drawing and proudly disregards the technical challenge of drawing in unidirectional strokes. *Source:* PC 112. Ex-collection Rita and René Wassing.

shades of indigo, morinda red and the ecru of undyed cotton, with the occasional addition of accents in yellow, green or other colours. In the late 19th century, weavers in certain regions began adding bands or pinstripes in brightly coloured commercial thread, but 95 per cent of all earlier Indonesian ikat was made using only two natural dyestuffs, indigo and morinda red – Indian mulberry, which in Indonesia is called by several local names including *kusumba*, *mengkudu* and *engkudu*.

The difficulty of creating patterns in ikat forced weavers to reduce forms to their most basic shape, in a way similar to creating a drawing with pixels, often quite elongated, actually a series of bars or 'strokes'. This does not invite the inclusion of arabesques and other curvilinear shapes. To the contrary, it stimulates the development of motifs that are the epitomy of simplicity, stark and powerful. In several regions, weavers show deft handling of, when not a proud disregard for, such technical challenges, and paint on their canvases with astonishing fluidity.

The characteristic shimmering of patterns, a by-product of the challenges posed by the ikat technique, is caused by what are actually faults. These imperfections in the alignment of the yarns are due to (a) differences in tension or degrees of shrinkage; (b) the slight seepage of dye into areas where it was not supposed to go, which is caused by the capillary movement of liquids along the yarns' fibre; and (c) human errors made when manipulating the yarns as they are mounted on the loom after being dyed. All these tiny flaws in the adjustment of the yarns give ikat cloths – not just Indonesian but ikat made anywhere in the world – a curiously uncertain presence, as if they are both real and a mirage.

Another technical challenge presented by the warp ikat technique is that the warp, running in a straight line on the tying frame, once it is interlaced with weft during the weaving

process, is forced into a slalom, snaking over and under the weft – and effectively shrinks (see Fig. 8). In order to achieve the desired motif, this 'warp shrinkage' needs to be compensated for by the weaver. This is done by extending the width of her bindings, a procedure that requires either precise calculation or a finely honed intuition so that circles do not become ellipses and figurative motifs do not look compressed. Clearly, for many motifs minor compression might not be an issue. If a weaver were to draw a crocodile, for instance, it might not matter greatly to her if it came out a little short, but if she were to draw a circular head, like those we find on antique Kisarese sarongs (e.g. Fig. 95), she probably would not want it to come out looking squashed.

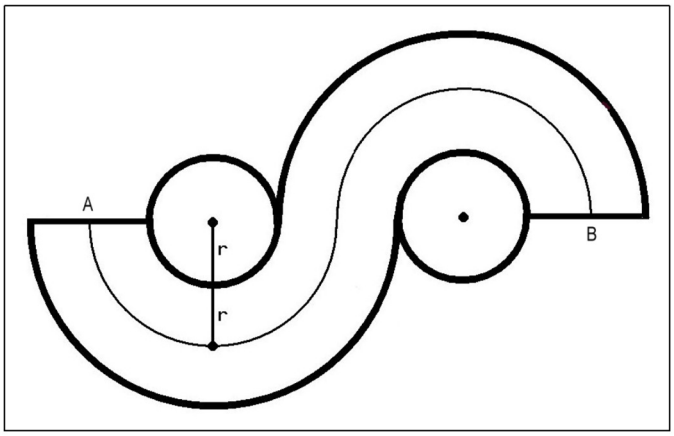

Fig. 8 The warp effectively shrinks during the weaving as it is interlaced with the weft. In the illustrated extreme example, the length of the trajectory A to B under and over two warp threads ($4\pi r$) is a factor 3.14 (π) greater than the length needed to traverse their diameters ($4r$) in a straight line. Warp shrinkage is most pronounced – approaching the illustrated example – when the weft is firmly beaten in. In most cases the shrinkage is less pronounced, but, bar uncommonly loose weaving, always considerable.

Warp shrinkage is relatively modest where the warp is interlaced with double, triple or even quadruple weft that was not beaten in forcefully, and most pronounced where the weft is single and thick and firmly beaten in, and the strokes are short (e.g. PC 003 and PC 013, Fig. 27). Because a calculation of the warp's trajectory cannot be based simply on the weft's circumference, but needs to trace the warp's core, which lies at a distance of half its diameter from the weft's perimeter, in the most extreme cases, the length of warp required for its path over or under a weft thread is a factor 3.14 (π) greater than the length needed to traverse its diameter in a straight line. While such extreme cases are probably merely theoretical, it is obvious that the warp shrinkage will often be quite substantial.

Warp shrinkage is particularly in evidence (a) in tightly woven ikat where motifs are rendered in stippling, as we encounter, for instance, in the Ili Mandiri region of Flores and on the isle of Palu'e (see Fig. 211); (b) in Timorese ikat where negative space is turned pale blue or peach by short dashes of indigo respectively morinda (see Fig. 180); or (c) wherever drawing is done on very fine lines (see PC 272, Figs. 14, 261). An outstandingly clear demarcation between the dye and the cotton's natural ecru is observed in two other microscopic photos shown in Fig. 20; to wit, the one of PC 185 (the main motifs of which are perfectly circular *jilamprang*), and that of PC 351 (see Fig. 252), a high class East Sumbanese men's wrap which exhibits the weaver's acute control of warp shrinkage.

The epiphany which, roughly five years before the onset of this investigation, brought an understanding of the 'warp shrinkage' phenomenon served as an ignition spark: it

alerted the present author to the fact that the literature largely ignores such fundamental technical aspects – aspects with critical design consequences which further elevate the esteem that we should accord ikat producing women, because they highlight the mental capacity required to not just create complex designs, but also execute them with precision. All the below examples, photographed in 1000 x magnification, show a sampling area of just 3 x 4 mm.

Fig. 9 Example of a circa 1930 ikat from Amanuban (West Timor) with thick single weft firmly beaten in. *Source:* PC 335.

Fig. 10 Extremely loose weaving in a sarong from Yamdena (Tanimbar Archipelago) of the type *tais sikatim* – the most common type, once ubiquitous but now rare – which probably dates from the 1940s or earlier. Here, even with the relatively thick weft (probably used to bulk up the cloth), yarn shrinkage is minimal. *Source:* PC 079.

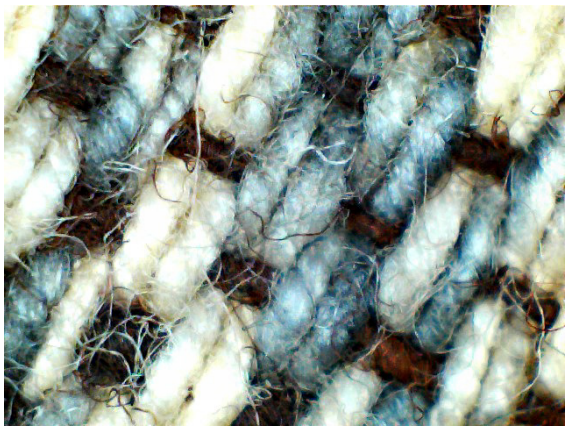

Fig. 11 This 1920-1940 example from Romang (South Moluccas) shows the weaver's precise warp shrinkage control. Nearly all the colour transitions from blue to white are effected precisely on the weft. *Source:* PC 271 (see also Fig. 70).

Fig. 12 Another example of fine shrinkage control, encountered in a 19th-century *kain kebat* from the Ketungau river region (Kalimantan) with uncommonly intricate patterning, created by ikating on a 6-yarn *kayu'*, skein, divided over three yarn groups all drawn in 2-yarn strokes. This example from outside the region under study is illustrative of the abilities of early weavers to keep dye seepage to a minimum and create clear colour transitions. *Source:* PC 300.

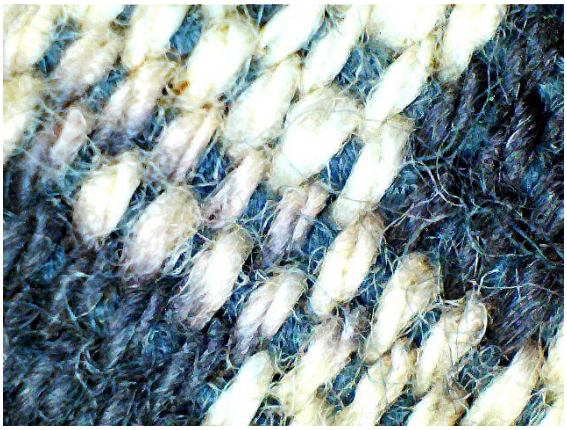

Fig. 13 Tight, accurate ikat on a *lawar*, sarong, from Luang (Sermata Islands, South Moluccas), with colour transitions precisely on the weft. This level of control over the warp shrinkage (the 'loss' of length as the warp is made to snake over and under the weft during weaving) is exemplary. In all probability it results from Luang's weavers' unparalleled experience. On no other island in the region under study was ikat produced in volume for export to other islands. *Source:* PC 280.

Fig. 14 An object lesson in how to draw a fine line across the weft: detail of a circa 1935 upper-class *lawar,* sarong, from Luang (Sermata Islands, South Moluccas) with the most precise rendering of any specimen encountered in the region under study. The line-width is circa 1.5 mm. Examples with similar line-widths and equivalent high contrast were encountered in just a few island regions, Insana (West Timor) prominent among them. While Insana ikat can be equally tightly rendered, the patterning is typically more repetitive, and does not match the creativity of this Luangese example, graced by fluidly drawn human figures. *Source:* PC 272 (see also Fig. 261).

1.3 THE FIELD OF STUDY

Fig. 15 A satellite photograph of Timor and its neighbouring islands. All the named islands produce or produced ikat. The image, NASA A2002179.0205.250m, cropped and with added identification of the islands, is roughly north-aligned. Just out of frame are Sumba, located south of western Flores and northwest of Savu, and the Tanimbar Islands in the far east, beyond the Sermata Islands.

The term 'Timor and its Outer Islands' as used in the present publication covers all the named islands on the above map plus Sumba (but only with regard to asymmetry) and the Southeasterly Islands, as specified below. To the Dutch and Portuguese colonial powers Timor was important mostly on account of its strategic position as the 'key' to the eastern part of the archipelago, a base from which both the spice-rich central and northern Moluccas and the trade routes to New Guinea and Australia could be conveniently controlled (Müller 1857:84-85). The island was fought over bitterly by the Netherlands and Portugal, which ended by dividing the island between them, with a definitive border treaty signed only in 1904. Once its sandalwood forests had been depleted both powers neglected its non-political affairs to such an extent that Henri Zondervan spoke of it as "the stepchild of Insulinde" (Zondervan 1988:80). Even Sumba, with its cavalry-supplying horse breeders and active slave trade but less dominant position, did not come close to rivalling Timor's strategic significance, and the same applied to all the other neighbouring islands except Flores. They had little worth for the colonial powers and often, while nominally under their control were left alone for long periods, as Kisar was abandoned by the Dutch from 1819 onwards for 99 years. On Timor itself only small strips of land close to the coast were actively administered, the interior left to be ruled as before by warlike regional nobles, and largely unexplored (Müller 1857:85).

In the present work 'Timor's outer islands' comprise:

- **Flores's Bird's Head Peninsula**, which rather looks like a scorpion's tail and

comprises the Bama, Ili Mandiri and Lobe Tobi ikat regions. These form the most westerly part of the Lamaholot cultural continuum which also encompasses the western part of the Solor & Alor Archipelago.

- **Solor & Alor Archipelago**, comprising Solor, Adonara, Lembata, Pantar, Marica, Ternate, Buaya and Alor, and predominantly populated by Lamaholot and Alurung speaking peoples who, particularly in the eastern part, on Pantar and Alor, live among speakers of Papuan languages.
- **Wetar**. Here ikat was stamped out in the mid-19th century by Kisarese nobles who accused the Wetarese of stealing their patterns (Jasper & Pirngadie 1912:274), but one antique ikat fit for royalty was found on the island in the 1980s by the field collector and trader Verra Darwiko.
- **Kisar**, which has three distinct populaces and three distinct styles: pictorial, formal and archaic. The best examples of all three types are visually appealing and beautifully made. The adoption of commercial yarns with chemical red dyes was observed already in cloths collected by Baron van Hoëvell in 1887-1888 (Kuhnt-Saptodewo 2012:98, Fig. 106).
- **Romang**, formerly also known as Roma. The one ikat sarong found on the island, again by Verra Darwiko in the 1970s, is in the same pictorial style as found on Kisar and Luang.
- **Leti Islands**, comprising Leti, Moa and Lakor, all three of them tiny. Notwithstanding their diminutive size, Leti and Lakor – with only ten, respectively eight villages – created their own quite distinct styles. No Moa ikat was encountered.
- **Babar Islands**, comprising Babar, Wetan, Masela, Daweloor and Dawera. Ikat textiles from Babar are recognizable if not by their patterning, then by their unique tonality, created with semi-fermented indigo. Adoption of commercial yarns with chemical red dyes was observed already in examples collected by Baron van Hoëvell in 1887-1888 (Kuhnt-Saptodewo 2012: 99, Fig. 107), but the antique specimens studied here were made with natural dyes only.
- **Sermata Islands**, comprising Sermata and Luang, tiny and largely infertile islands, each with their own recognizable style or styles. Luang is a long-established exporter of ikat, with women weaving ‘on spec’ for sale by their sea-roving husbands as well as on commission for ladies on other islands.
- **Savu** and its offshore islet Raijua (both variously spelled, e.g. Sabu and Rai Jua) have very similar ikat cultures, although with marked distinctions or exclusive manifestations. Both used to be traditional in their ikat work, with a clearly established canon and allowed exceptions. In colonial days Savu was Christianized early and became a prime source of colonial administrative personnel for other islands. Raijua long remained a closed, deeply traditional society with little foreign influence.
- **Roti and Ndao**. The latter is more than just an offshore crumb of the former. The cultures are intertwined, but the people are of different stock, and use fundamentally different design concepts: symmetry versus asymmetry. Ndao is run by its women, the

men being itinerant goldsmiths.

- **Timor**. As the island's ikat is reasonably well covered,[1] our discourse will be limited to those motifs and forms of asymmetry found not just on Timor, but also on its neighbouring islands.
- **Sumba**, but only with respect to its use of asymmetry, as its largely figurative design has little beyond manifestations of *patola*-influence in common with the rest of the region under study.

The region under study constitutes a model 'field of anthropological study' *sensu* J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong, who defined the concept as

> certain areas of the earth's surface with a population whose culture appears to be sufficiently homogeneous and unique to form a separate object of ethnological study, and which at the same time apparently reveals sufficient local shades of differences to make internal comparative research worth while (1977:167).

The applicability of the term "sufficiently homogeneous" in the context of the ikat culture needs to be weighed. Whereas most of the ikat in the region under study is made by speakers of Austronesian languages, there are also groups of non-Austronesian peoples who produce ikat; most of these are found on Timor, but there is also one on Kisar, and possibly one on Alor. In our assessment we should recognize that the non-Austronesian speakers in the eastern archipelago may have different historical backgrounds than the Austronesian speakers, but that inclusion of these non-Austronesian speakers is "essential for the development of general anthropological theory (Platenkamp 1996:213)". We observe this on several islands in the region under study: groups may speak fundamentally different languages, and be mutually unintelligible[2], yet share many aspects of culture, the same 'cultural space'.

Most of the ikat producers in the region under study share cosmological concepts, traditions and design elements, and have been exposed to like influences of imported trade goods over the centuries, yet the textiles they produce show a high degree of individuality: even on the same island regional styles may differ so greatly that one would not expect them to have been made in close proximity – Timor itself offering a richly detailed illustration of this diversity. On the other hand, manifestations of homogeneity abound. Several motifs are widely shared across the region (typically with a scattered distribution), and there is a broad, though not universal, tendency to strive for asymmetry on ceremonial cloths, particularly those worn by men.

In the area under study only warp ikat is used, so in the descriptions of individual cloths the ikat technique used is mentioned only where a secondary decoration technique is

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[1] Mostly recently in P. ten Hoopen, ed., 2019.

[2] E.g. on Alor, where in 1981 on a market in Welai, on the southern shore of the Bay of Kalabahi, the present author witnessed a sales transaction around a handful of areca nuts that was patently conducted via an interpreter – who through his curt, business-like manner appeared to be plying his trade.

used in addition. An occasional venture had to be made farther afield to illustrate an aspect of practice that is more marked in regions outside the area under study and can therefore help us understand the fundamentals of its social role or "formal peculiarities that cannot be satisfactorily explained in a given local context alone and whose motivation may be more clearly comprehensible when they are examined in related cultures (Schefold 1994:806)".

Another reason for excursions outside the area under study might be to highlight the vast geographic scope of the archipelago's interculturality by showing how adoption of a certain motif or preference for a specific type of weave can span or jump over hundreds, even thousands, of sea miles. An old Kisar *selendang* in the Tropenmuseum collection for instance (see Fig. 137) carries a *mamuli* motif, a type of a vulva-shaped ear ornament widely used in the archipelago – from the Toba Batak of western Sumatra up to the Babar and Tanimbar archipelagos in the far east – but is very rarely used in ikat, bar Sumba where it is common and generally taken to represent the female reproductive organ (Granucci 2005:84[1]) as well as female reproductive powers (Twikromo 2008:46). This long-distance appearance of a single *mamuli* on a Kisar ikat was instrumental in firming a long held but previously unfounded notion about the significance of another widely distributed design element. Another example is the *keu* motif, the occurrence of which cannot be mapped comprehensively while excluding Kalimantan.

In other words, we may wish to strictly delineate the boundaries of the terrain, but part of the subject matter may on occasion force us to go beyond intended topical limitations. We even have to make an occasional foray into other techniques to follow motifs to the extremes of their distribution areas, for example in the case of the 'pictorial style' with human figures, which requires also studying a *cawat* from Tanimbar decorated in what appears to be supplementary weft.

1.4 FOCUS ON OLDER SPECIMENS

Most specimens in the Reference Set were made between 1850 and 1950. For those in museum collections their age was a given, for those in the Physical Database, it was the result of a triage favouring earlier examples. Why does greater age represent an advantage for our investigation? The answer depends on our perspective. The local answer would be that early textiles are highly respected on account of their longevity, a reflection of the high ranking given in the Austronesian cosmology to anything close to the source, as opposed to anything recent or immediate: "The valency and transitivity of the asymmetric relationships between the elements in an order of precedence thus rests upon a greater concern for the

[1] Granucci here mentions that "the form surely predates the coming of metal, but it is not seen in the Lesser Sundas in other media", a categorical statement that a qualifier should have limited to Granucci's own observations.

beginning of time; that is, for the 'source' or 'origin' of society and life in a sacred ancestral past (Reuter 2009:15)".

In Hoskins's words: "In the traditional ceremonial system, the authority of objects came from their priority in time (1997:124)". This preference on cosmological grounds is reinforced by practical considerations: antiques, by the very fact of their survival, demonstrate their immanent power – and they do this with cumulative effect. If an object, particularly one made of delicate material such as an ikat textile, can survive many years of tropical weather, fires, vermin infestations and other common depradations of life in the tropics, it must be something of extraordinary power and becomes a *pusaka*, the embodiment of supernatural power. In the Indonesian archipelago this is a wide-spread notion.

From a curator's perspective the answer would be that earlier specimens allow us a deeper glance into history; they transport us to a more distant past. We handle specimens from a time when producing them required not just technical ability and creativity, but also great spiritual strength and sustained willpower; textiles that the weavers had invested with their souls, and that had great importance for themselves and their community.

Pre-war, ideally early 20th-century or older specimens show us how things were made 'back then', when they were more important to the women who produced them. In those days commercial concerns in most regions were secondary or manifested themselves solely in bridal exchange negotiations, and creating ikat was still a core aspect of the culture. This was certainly the case for the higher classes, where women could spare the time to spend months if not years producing a single cloth, and their standing in society partly depended on the quality of their work.

This was a time when the vast majority of ikat textiles were made with an internal motivation[1], often in exhausting battles with the spirits, on whom the weaver relied for visions and other forms of inspiration (Sather 2006:99), and with her own technical limitations (Alpert 2018:13), which she needed to overcome to produce a piece her peers would prize as exceptional. Making an intricate, graceful and flawless ikat, was a major undertaking; in terms of both knowledge absorption and focused application over an extended period of time. Ikat at that time had a vital role in the producing society, and to a

[1] With the exception of (a) low-quality textiles traded on the local markets of many ikat regions, usually in the regional style; and (b) the products of a few commercially active communities, such as the infertile islets of Luang and Ndao, the two most articulate examples of commercial priority encountered in the studied region. On Luang many ikat textiles were executed in the island's own style, with no particular customer n mind, but others incorporated design elements from the ordering culture, which is why it can be impossible to determine with certainty if a sarong (e.g. PC 278) was made on Sermata, or on Luang for Sermata. The present author suggests that in such cases the attribution should go to the locus of practice, which typically also dictates the design. (See section 3.3 'Whose pattern is it anyway?') On Ndao today most ikat weaving is done for Roti, in Rotinese style, quite different from that of Ndao. *In concreto,* the Ndaoese weaver produces men's wraps that are symmetric, rather than asymmetric, such as her own culture prescribes. Such working against the grain – not just externally motivated but also in contravention of the weaver's conviction of what is right – is a key characteristic of commercial ikat production in Indonesia today, which over the long term is likely to prove a major factor in its further decline.

degree even was constitutive, governed as its patterns were by sets of descent, class and clan related rules which collectively constituted its structure, its social skeleton. On Savu, for instance, where ikat textiles were required at all ceremonies and affinal exchanges, it helped women to shape the group-identities of the Lesser Stalk and Greater Stalk moieties (Spée 1983:19), respectively Lesser Blossom and Greater Blossom moities (Fox 1977a:98; Duggan 2001:28).[1] They established marriage rules as clear-cut as the designs permitted to be woven within each group (although these rules were occasionally relaxed), established agreed exceptions, and defined on which occasions designs from the other moiety were allowed to be worn (*ibid.,* 2001:9).

It also was a time when ikat as a practice still had powerful agency: it had great impact in the producing community, great impact on the weaver's standing in society, and great impact on her husband when he wore one of her masterpieces to a ceremonial gathering. Ikat cloths were made for in-context use, more specifically use in ceremonies and other formal gatherings, and in exchanges (Geirnaert 1992:xxii) and helped to forge enduring bonds of affiliation and interdependence. More recent ikats as often as not made for use out-of-context, by people who do not form part of the weaver's inner social circle, and not in exchanges but in commercial transactions.

This contextual differentation, this shift from the spiritual, emotional and moral to the transactional – this commodification – makes a crucial distinction. It inspired the striving to assemble a set of examples that highlight the variety of ikat design in the region under study, and also show the interculturality of regional styles that merge as a result of migration, be it a preferential move or flight. The latter happened for instance in Malaka. Around 1912, groups from the Suai and Covalima regions in East Timor fled across the border to *desa* Kaletek in Malaka (Yeager & Jacobson 2002:211), taking style elements of the old country along with them, while also letting themselves be inspired by the local style, producing beautiful syncretisation (see PC 137).

Fig. 16 Reactivity *in statu nascendi*: a weaver in Tutuala (East Timor), studying an early 20th-century ikat from her own region, depicted in Hamilton (2012). Photograph by Jill Forshee.

[1] Spée: "Fox translates 'hubi' as blossom. Kana as flower bunch, cob. According to Mrs Bireloedji [wife of the island's Bupati, Regent, PtH] hubi is a curved stalk which carries a fruit, as in the case of lontar, bananas or stalk of pinang. It is also a numeral classifier for something growing in clusters [as do communities, PtH]. Walker gave just the latter meaning (he hubi wo mu'u = 1 cluster of bananas) (Spee 1983, endnote 12 [translation PtH])". Both the authority of the informant and the role of *hubi* as a numeral classifier are powerful arguments to accept Spée's term rather than the one introduced by Fox and Duggan. In an earlier work the present author translated Spée's Dutch term *stengel* as 'stem' (2018:299), but upon reflection 'stalk' is considered the better rendition because it perfectly fits the phylogenetic tree of Savu's society, which shows us two *hubi* that are both subdivided into clusters of *wiki,* like stalks bearing fruit.

Effects of commodification and reactivity

When we study ikat cloths that were recently made, perhaps in a spirit of revival, managed by a QUANGO or NGO such as Threads of Life, Yayasan Tafean Pah or Timor Aid, we already have to account for potent effects of reactivity: weavers producing what they think will sell, or producing what they think will please – not the gods or the ancestors, but the instigators of the revival. This is the collateral effect of the introduction of marketing concepts and its attendant values in a traditional environment marked by values such as pride, sense of belonging, blood bonds and clan affiliation. The effect was noted early on by Jill Forshee in East Sumba, to the point of borrowing best-selling 'primitive' motifs from other islands.

> [P]eople in Eastern Sumba are increasingly knowledgeable about outsiders' notions of the 'tribal' or the 'primitive' and indeed, many of them have seen themselves depicted in Western museum literature in such terms. Through their frequent and ongoing interactions with foreigners, some villagers in Sumba possess catalogues from Western museums and galleries, which feature arts from so-called 'tribal' or 'primitive' regions of the world. Inspired by these now globally popular images, people currently include motifs in their fabrics for sale to outsiders that more closely resemble those from other Indonesian islands or even regions of Oceania or Africa than they do conventional Sumbanese designs (Adams & Forshee 1999:45).

Adoption of motifs from abroad can readily be rejected as pollution of the culture of an affected region, but such rejection should not take place without reflection on the population's material needs. There is no reason to idealize the past, which for many of the islanders was as rough as it still is nowadays or even rougher, with grinding poverty and lack of medical care keeping many in a state of bare subsistence. There is nothing inherently wrong with weavers switching to designs from elsewhere that sell better – although if it were done by Gucci or Dior, it would be widely denounced as cultural appropriation – but such a change, if not well documented, may obscure our vision of the history of ikat weaving, and make a study of a region's cultural history more complicated. If weavers feel it incumbent on them, as is happening today, to start using motifs from other islands or other weaving regions, by definition that is the new culture. Culture is not a static phenomenon. On the other hand, these days changes are going so fast that if we want to study the history of a particular material culture, in several areas already we need to take a step back in time.

Fig. 17 Juxtaposition showing the appropriation of an Iban motif by a Sumbanese weaver. Left: a detail of an early 20th-century Iban *pua kumbu* with a traditional headhunting motif (ten Hoopen 2018:271). *Source:* PC 001. Right: a detail of a Sumbanese *hinggi,* circa 1975. *Source:* Helga Conrad collection. Note the similarity of the pointed head, headdress, ear pendants, and the slope of the arms. The Iban and the Sumbanese share a headhunting culture, but until the 1970s such graphic depictions on *hinggi* were not *usance*. They were patently chosen for the purpose of marketing, to increase the visual impact. Foreign buyers like the exotic, *the nec plus ultra* of which is headhunting.

Ikat textiles as a local vernacular

The textiles studied were all produced in an era when most were intended for the weaver's own immediate circle. For her husband, her own and her brother's daughters, for herself – either to wear or as an heirloom to be transferred to future generations – and for future female in-laws to whom it would be transferred as bride-wealth, the better ikated the more valuable. Khan Majlis, whose classic work on the Collection J.B. Lüth and that of the Hildesheim Römer Museum, *Gewebte Botschaften/Woven Messages* (1991), first documented hundreds of old examples in a single work, suggested that in some respects ikat in most of the Indonesian archipelago is like a language. This concept inspired *Linguagens Tecidas/Woven Languages* (ten Hoopen 2014), a tribute to Khan Majlis. We read on ikat textiles from Savu: "Aesthetics is not the main purpose of those weavings as their primary function is to carry a message. They have a heraldic significance" (Duggan 2001:77). The same author wrote a catalogue with *Woven Stories* for its primary title (2013). The motifs on a high class Kisar sarong may be similarly cast, "comparable to the European coat-of-arms" (Wentholt 2014:184). Spée's title *Een taal van draden* translates as 'A language of yarns".

Ikat textiles were rich in meaning for those in the region of production, but with few exceptions did not travel well; this because their dimensions, field lay-out, motifs, and colour palette spoke a uniquely local vernacular: a language of belonging, pride in descent and place of origin, and a whole range of other emotive aspects. The language metaphor has some value for a heuristic approach, but the risks of misinterpretation go well beyond the potential pitfall of ethnocentricity, because it appears that even the true primary sources, the weavers, have in the past led ethnographers to record erroneous interpretations. Some may have done so because they simply did not know, but were eager to please (Jager Gerlings 1952:107). Not knowing the meaning of a motif, they may have made one up to see the

interviewer jot it down happily. Others would provide wrong information because giving out correct information on an extremely powerful design would have been offensive. “The weaver, when asked to name the design, presented a subterfuge name [not the name of a great mythological hero, but instead the enemy he has slain] out of respect for the power of the design.” (Heppell 2015:n.p.). Ignorance can be inveterate, as motifs are not necessarily referred to by name in colloquial conversation. On Palu’e “[m]otif names are only mentioned when mother and daughter, or kin and neighbours, work together, or if a senior weaver tells them how and which motifs should be included (Danerek & Danerek 2020)”.

Going by the existing literature many weavers in the region under study have clearly been very helpful to those who came to record their practice and ideas, but reluctance to share core knowledge has been observed by fieldworkers across the archipelago.[1] Sharing core knowledge, for instance, would have been to allow fieldworkers to join in dye production, working alongside a master-dyer being the only way to transfer this complex and secret knowledge, but no record of such participatory teaching was encountered.

In this context it should be kept in mind that not just dye recipes but also the meaning of motifs in many regions was secret knowledge, transferred only from grandmother to mother to daughter, or strictly within a clan, and to divulge it to outsiders was an act of treason. In certain regions appropriating a higher class’s or another clan’s motifs was a mortal sin (Forge 1979:278). In the mid-19th century when the women on Wetar began copying Kisarese motifs, the Kisarese women reportedly, on multiple occasions, got their men to gear up, sail over to Wetar and pound it into them. This bloody lashing-out made the Wetarese women promise to never ikat again (Jasper & Pirngadie 1912:8). Ikat patterns were worth fighting over, they meant something. They had immanent power, and the Kisarese community wanted this power exclusively, kept out of use by strangers.

The depth and true impact of this reluctance to share knowledge on our level of understanding are possibly underestimated as a result of deliberate obfuscation. Sumbanese cloths of the very highest rank, for instance, excel in so far undiscovered visual trickery. One of the more wide-spread motifs we will study appears to have an ‘original’ meaning – perhaps remembered in some, and forgotten in other regions – that was masked by mutating its shape so as to preclude immediate recognition (see Section 3.4.5). It is possible that by the early 20th century this masking was already so ancient and engrained that no weaver even thought about it as a ploy, seeing it as just an established motif from the clan’s or the village’s repertoire – while still being aware of its root associations. Another aspect to consider is that “artefacts and their imagery retain and accumulate new meaning over the course of history, and each interpretation has validity and may even return at some point to an original meaning (Danerek & Danerek 2020:119)”.

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[1] Barnes, for instance, during her fieldwork on the island of Lembata felt the women were totally open with her. Having “no reason to believe that the Lamalera women are guarding secrets which they did not want to reveal”, she qualified this viewpoint by stating that the actual weaving procedure is transmitted from mother to daughter by means of practice, “rather than something openly discussed” (1989:32).

Identifying and recording traces of the visual languages spoken across parts of the region under study, be they contiguous or scattered, is an important part of the purpose of the present investigation.

Envisaging ikat's future trajectory

In the preceding passages Indonesian ikats are spoken of largely in the past tense. Does this imply that ikat textiles are no longer made? There is no unambiguous answer. Yes, ikat is still being created on several islands. On certain islands production may even be greater than ever. Still, there is good reason to refer to it in the past tense; more as part of the cultural history of Indonesia than as a present cultural accomplishment, or at best as artisanry with traditional roots and an unknown future trajectory.

While ikat is still being produced, it is no longer, or to a much lesser degree, informed by the ideas and belief systems that inspired it in the past, making it such an emblematic and impressive manifestation of culture. Many of the younger women no longer command the range of traditional motifs and, if they do, they may not know what they stand for, or have only the vaguest of notions. Nowadays when weavers in the Moluccas are asked the name of a motif, nine times out of ten they simply say '*bunga*', flower, because the original

Fig. 18 How long will the social media culture and traditional culture co-exist? Even the *daha*, young unmarried women of the arch-conservative Bali Aga community of Tenganan on Bali – gathered here for a sacred sorority ceremony, dressed in *geringsing* finery – have communication devices glued to their hands. Photograph by Luciana Ferrero, 2017.

name has been lost (van Vuuren 2009:119; Danerek & Danerek 2020:123).

Whereas Indonesian ikat used to hold a wealth of meaning, now the meaning is leeching out, or reduced to a single aspect of its former role. On the island of Babar and Yamdena in the Tanimbars, ikat used to be a functional aspect of daily life, while nowadays any old ikat, even a sarong originally made for work in the fields, becomes a *pusaka*, representative of links to ancestors.[1] On nearly every island, ikat is passing from being lived to being collected. The focus has shifted from local to international appreciation (Wronska-Friend 2015:37). One might say that as a cultural phenomenon ikat is succumbing to modern economic imperatives, but such composed wording fails to convey the calamitous rapidity of its decline: from millennia of being ubiquitous and vital to the community, to practically gone in two generations. Also fading is the pride in becoming a master weaver. To many in the younger generation, ikat stands for the past; a past that is often regarded with reservation or even disapproval due to conversions to Islam or Christianity; a past that becomes increasingly irrelevant in island societies that slowly but surely are opening up to global influences.

A parallel loss is noted in the techniques. The use of natural dyes used to be prescribed in most island communities, certainly for cloths intended for bridal exchanges and use in *upacara*, ceremonies, part of the canon of traditions called *adat*. But many weavers no longer want to spend days, weeks, months or even years preparing natural dyes, and prefer to buy cans of chemical dyes and be done with it. The use of hand-spun yarns, with their slight unevenness that makes them feel gentle to the touch, was already on its way out half a century ago, and is now practised only in a few isolated pockets where commercial yarns are at times hard to get, such as the East Timorese semi-exclave of Oecusse; where *adat* is particularly well established, such as the Bali Aga village of Tenganan on Bali; or where aid organisations are urging weavers to revive traditional weaving.

These changes and their impact on the societal role of women have been detailed previously (ten Hoopen 2018:547-555). In the present context, it suffices to be aware that we are studying an art form that is dying out rapidly, or turning into a ghost of its former being. To preempt the arguments put forward by governmental and non-governmental organisations involved in the revival of ikat: yes, ikat is still being produced, and in certain regions perhaps even more than a few decades ago as a result of these organisations' introduction of marketing, but in most places where ikat survives, it does so merely in a material sense, as a technique for textile decoration, while the number of regions where it retains its former role as a vital element of the culture is declining sharply. This is not even a new development. As early as the late 1920s, Vatter (1932:222) observed that "With the old women, the ikat technology also gradually dies, and that is how it goes with all cultural heritage [*Kulturgut*], which survives only in the old generation." It is of great importance therefore that we try to preserve outstanding examples of this art form, and record what we

[1] Nico de Jonge, pers. comm., 2017.

know of its significance to the best of our ability. This is a significant project involving the acquisition, preservation and scholarship, which requires the commitment of many.

1.5 THE REFERENCE SET

The Reference Set, geographically dispersed, consists of (a) cloths that can be physically inspected, which comprises specimens privately owned by the author and those in museum and private collections to which access could be obtained, collectively referred to as the 'Physical Database'; and (b) specimens available in the literature or online, the 'Virtual Database'. The Physical Database is an assemblage of three constituent groups, identified as A, B and C. The Virtual Database comprises two groups, A and B.

Physical Database Group A

The original core of the Physical Database, here referred to as Group A, consists of 252 ikat cloths privately owned by the present author that originate from the area under study, to wit, the Flores's Bird's Head Peninsula (4), the Solor & Alor Archipelago (38), Timor (75), Savu and Raijua (28), Roti and Ndao (17), the Moluccas (51) and Sumba (39). The latter will be investigated solely with respect to asymmetry. Many are described in *Ikat Textiles of the Indonesian Archipelago* (ten Hoopen 2018). Thanks to their permanent availability these cloths can be investigated to a high level of detail, which is not always possible for other parts of the Reference Set.

Group A was acquired with the view to build a collection covering the entire archipelago with emblematic stylistic and technical examples, so that it could serve as a material body of reference. They originated from a great variety of sources, including their weavers or immediate family, established Indonesian and foreign dealers, scouts on remote islands, auction houses in all parts of the world, and fellow collectors from Japan to Bolivia. A substantial number came from old Dutch and German collections formed before the end of the colonial period. Among them were several masterpieces that collectors' heirs had disposed of in the course of attic cleaning along with sundry household items.

As knowledge about ikat textiles from the region under study improved over time, it became clear that scholarly collecting is a meritocracy: on multiple occasions an interesting specimen could be added to the Group A solely because it was recognized for what it was, rather than what the offering party claimed it to be. An ikat textile from Adonara presented as one from Lembata creates confusion in the minds of other potential suitors that can keep them from committing to it. Several ikat textiles were added to the Reference Set which at the moment of acquisition could not be placed, with the sole intent to find out what they represented. This brought surprising rewards. One such specimen gave the impetus to scholarly work in collaboration with weavers on a tiny island to rescue a style from oblivion.

The ethics of collecting heirlooms in for instance Indonesia continue to be discussed.

My opinions were summarized in the above-mentioned publication, to wit in the chapter on the impact of collecting' (*ibid.*:562-565). It highlights the care for the specimens' materiality and documentation that foreign acquirers tend to lavish on the lending country's cultural heritage. The present author, also in his role as collector, sees himself as an actor in cultural heritage care; through his exhibitions and publications and particularly by maintaining the Pusaka Collection website, which offers scholars a unique and detailed overview of ikat from across the Indonesian archipelago. Everything is shared, for anyone who is interested – hence it is also a free academic resource for all Indonesians who care about their own culture. It is no value statement, just statement of fact, that nearly all scholarly literature on Indonesian textiles is written by foreigners and mostly based on studies of physical collections cared for by foreigners, private and public.

An aspect earlier not given enough emphasis is that the objects being traded often had already lost most or at least some of their original cultural significance as a result of conversion to monotheism. They might still serve as family relics, but turned out to have become less important than, in order of frequency: (a) education of a family member, and (b) building an extension to the house. Transactions of the latter type were merely transactional, and based on going market rates – which, particularly in the case of rarities with few sales precedents, have a large bandwidth. Transactions of the first type were seen as beautifully balanced: while I received a part of the sellers' past, I gave them an investment in their future through supporting their children's development. In one case an early *adat* textile from Suai-Loro (East Timor) which turned out to be important for this study (PC 327, see Fig. 194), changed owners because money was needed to restore the noble family's *adat* house (the roof of which had caved in), which seemed perfectly equitable.

Physical Database Group B

A group of circa 200 ikat cloths from the region under study, visually inspected and partly photographed in the course of visits to the depots of (a) the formerly named Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, (b) the Museum der Kulturen in Basel, (c) the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne and (d) the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt, as well as to private collections, notably those formed by Georges Breguet (Switzerland) and Krzysztof Musial (Spain).

Physical Database Group C

A group of ikat textiles in the vast collection (circa 2500 specimens) of the Indonesian dealer and collector Kinga Lauren, added to the Physical Database midway into the investigation, which on the basis of photographs produced on request could be studied in great detail. Most closely studied was a subset (circa 250 specimens) of Sumbanese men's wraps.

Virtual Database Group A
Circa 500 specimens documented in the specialized literature, and on museum and university websites, e.g. those of the Yale University Art Gallery, the National Gallery of Australia, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the British Museum, and many others. Keenly sought after were specimens that might widen the known area of distribution of certain motifs, confirm the outlines of an established style, or add a new variation to the knowledge base. An especially valuable resource is the online collection of old ikat textiles kept at the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen (Leiden), a newly created entity that integrates the original Tropenmuseum, Museum Volkenkunde and Wereldmuseum collections. It has recently also brought the collection of the defunct Nusantara Museum online. These collections are among the richest in the world with regard to the studied area, and with respect to certain regions, such as Sumba and the southern Moluccas, unequalled.

Virtual Database Group B
A digital archive, comprising photographs from a great variety of sources that was built up over the years. To date more than 2500 examples from the region under study have been documented, most with multiple images.

The following aspects will be studied:

1. **Physical state**
   Dimensions are taken and state of the cloths inspected, down to the level of macro- and micro-photography in order to analyse qualities of the hand-spun yarn and differentiate weave types per region.
2. **Structural features**
   Analysis is made of the cloths' component panels to establish if asymmetric design was used; if so, how it was technically achieved, and whether it was done openly or hidden.
3. **Iconography**
   Comparisons are made of motifs on ikat from different islands or island regions to map their distribution and find indications as to their significance.
4. **Cultural roles**
   An inventory is made of the role ikat textiles play or played in the region under study, particularly in the lives of the women who made them. This includes heuristic efforts *re* their motives in the context of a fiercely competitive society, where they were all competing with other women, but also collectively with men as a group, the most assertive of which typically enjoyed the highest esteem.
5. **Scholarly context**
   Hundreds of references facilitate a comparison of items in the Reference Set with similar specimens in the literature and in online university and museum collections.

The inspection of the Physical Database has comprised:

1. **Measuring** the textiles' dimensions (limited to Group A) and recording both the number of constituent panels and the number of layers of material when laid flat (one layer for wraps and opened tubeskirts, two layers for unopened tubeskirts), permitting a calculation of the specific weight of the woven material.
2. **Weighing** (limited to Group A), which, when matched up with the textiles' dimensions allows a calculation of specific weight in g/m^2, hence gives an indication of the gauge, *i.e.* the fineness, respectively coarseness of the yarn. Note that specific weight does not give us an absolute value for yarn gauge, just an indication, because a more compact weave produces a higher weight per m^2 than a looser weave with the same yarn. However, as most ikat from the region under study has warp-faced weave (*i.e.* a type of weave where the weft is beaten in firmly), the specific weight is significant in the great majority of examples.
3. **Analysis of design** with particular attention to asymmetry. Attention was paid not just to patterning, but also, and often particularly, to construction: how was the asymmetry realized? Several techniques to achieve it were differentiated, none described before.
4. **Macro-photography** to study motifs up-close and facilitate comparison with motifs on other textiles from the same region and motifs on ikat textiles from other regions. The set of macro photographs taken from groups A and B was augmented by occasionally requesting contacts abroad to photograph specific parts of their textiles in close-up.
5. **Microscopic photography** was undertaken of a substantial sample (n = 283) of specimens from the entire archipelago, a type of research called for by Marie Jeanne Adams (1969:71) – a call which, bar perhaps a few incidental instances, has so far remained unanswered. Most specimens were photographed multiple times, in all yielding thousands of images.

The material sources of information were enriched through:

1. **Comparison with similar textiles in the literature.** The investigation encompassed searches for similar textiles in the Virtual Database defined above, that might widen the known area of distribution, confirm the outlines of an established style, or add a new variation to the knowledge base.
2. **Querying primary sources.** Further crucial data were obtained by querying the region-specific experts Toos van Dijk, Pierre Dugard, Jill Forshee, James J. Fox, Michael Heppell, Nico de Jonge, Vernon Kedit, John Kreifeldt, Linda S. McIntosh, Leontine Visser, Marianne van Vuuren and Emilie Wellfelt, as well as local informants who have never published but can provide salient information, such as the names of certain types of cloths, dye ingredients, and motifs and methods not found in scholarly sources.
3. **Field reconnaissance.** More insights were acquired during field reconnaissance which consisted of five months of travel to ten of the Lesser Sunda Islands in 1981. While on Solor, Adonara, Pantar and Alor, little ikat weaving was observed; on Flores, Lembata

and Sumba, querying active weavers yielded much relevant information, not least on the names of patterns and intended usage. Although these data collecting activities did not constitute systematic fieldwork proper in a technical, ethnological sense, my aim has nevertheless consistently been to carefully document each and every interesting ikat textile that came on my path – documentation being the most visible manifestation of my deep love for the ikat tradition, and the people that made them, lived with them. During my 1974 treks through the rain forests of Colombia[1] searching for traditionally living Baudó and other *indios* and *indigenes* who had retreated high up the rivers, as far away as they could from the whites and *libres* (descendants of freed slaves), I was experiencing first-hand the sense of loss that suffuses Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* (1957), a copy of which I carried in my backpack in hopes – dashed after much plodding through the rainforest – that it might help me understand the people I would encounter. Instead I should have hoped that the author's disappointments would help me deal with my own. In Geertz's reading: "Once the traveller found civilizations radically different from his own awaiting him at the end of his journey. Now he finds impoverished imitations of his own, set off here and there by the relics of a discarded past ([1973] 2000:370). During my exploration of eastern Nusa Tenggara I relived that experience, becoming acutely aware that that I was looking at relics, and that this was all there was. As I soon realised that information is even more perishable than heirloom textiles, collecting and documentation became intertwined as in a helix: nothing is more effective in making one want to acquire ikat textiles than knowing what it takes to make them, physically and mentally. And nothing makes one want to study ikat textiles more than handling them, feeling them, inspecting them under a microscope.

4. **Querying dealers.** A rich source of information was tapped during a year of residence on Bali and multiple subsequent visits: the knowledge store of the leading dealers in antique textiles – some of whom with lasting legacies thanks to the accuracy of their information – about their pieces' origins, motifs, and technical aspects. While it would be easy to ridicule the concept of seeing dealer visits as fieldwork, a case could be built that it does qualify as such, because it was undertaken rigorously, notebook in hand, repeatedly over extended periods, and in an atmosphere of serious commitment. Typically, a dealer was asked to show each and every ikat in his store, leaving not a single cabinet or drawer untouched, even if this meant repeated visits over several days.

   Valuable information surfaced when dealers were queried about their price differentiation. Why were they asking 'x' dollars for one cloth and twice or thrice or five times as much for another piece from the same region? This shone light on subtle distinctions of quality and helped to recognize differences of rarity, which proved that specific styles (in fact fashions), were then already on the verge of extinction, directly placing them high on the target list for acquisition. Most of these dealers had been

[1] Accompanied by the later historian of the Dutch East Indies, Ewald Vanvugt (1985, 2015).

plying their trade for decades, seen and handled thousands of pieces, and built up a wealth of information – much of which could not easily be duplicated by questioning weavers, if only because by then so much local knowledge had already been lost.

A sceptic might question the value of information supplied by dealers, as such information can negatively or positively affect one or multiple dimensions of the perception of the cloth's status, and hence its commercial value. This is why in the months after an acquisition such information was exhaustively checked against the literature and the opinion of other scholars, be they curators, authors, other collectors, or all of the above. Only occasionally did dealer information require material correction, overly generous dating being the most recurrent issue, but even this was rare – as far as could be ascertained.[1] Most dealers were probably aware that overdating is the surest way to destroy a reputation. While the odd amateur was found to peddle nonsense regarding age and origin, it appears that the established Indonesian and foreign dealers all liked these textiles too much to spend half a day lying about them. They typically relished sharing what they knew, and, more importantly, loved being taken seriously.

The emptying field – and alternative resources

The greatest impediment to investigation of ikat textiles from the region under study, is that with every passing decade they matter less in the lives of the people, conversion to Islam or Christianity being a weighty factor. They are still valued, but ever less as conveyors of symbolic content, and progressively as mere commodities, tradeable goods – with fading links (occasionally marketable) to a past in which they had more meaning. As a result, less information is held about them locally. Except for the high end, where new ikat is dealt as art, the market does not care about origin or who were involved in its manufacture. If this was true in the late 1970s and 1980s when the first steps were taken that led to these investigations, it is true now with a vengeance. Many younger women no longer command the range of traditional motifs and, if they do may have only the vaguest of notions of what they stand for, or consider the very question irrelevant (Forge 1979:279).

Nowadays when weavers in the Moluccas are asked the name of a motif, most often they simply say *bunga*, 'flower' (van Vuuren 2009:119), which suggests that the term has become generic. However, the traditional context often survives: ikat is still being used as bridewealth in many regions, although its importance now may be diminished to that of a requisite object without which a ceremony cannot be properly conducted. On the Tanimbar Islands for example, while "cloth is an important valuable in marriage exchanges" (McKinnon 1989:33), quality criteria appear to have lapsed, at least on the largest island,

[1] Dating Indonesian textiles is fraught with pitfalls, particularly when there are few published cognates, and can rarely be done with precision. Typically, a margin of error of several decades needs to be taken into account. See Colophon, section 'Dating'.

Yamdena, where any ikat will do, because its significance has become merely symbolic."[1] As a result, styles disappear – some previously documented; others, the unknown unknowns, perhaps not. On many islands it would currently be pointless to go around asking the names and meanings of motifs or the reasons for doing things the way they are done, as so few elderly weavers survive. [2]

If a great variety of traditional styles identifying different social groups constitutes cultural wealth, any expiry of a distinct style is a serious loss. The only knowledge we have today is what has been published and what resides in the heads of the primary sources still alive – which includes two categories that have largely been ignored in academia, to wit the dealers abovementioned, and collectors, another largely untapped source of knowledge. Collectors typically are serious, passionate, and well-read, and have spent considerable time in the terrain. Some, such as Granucci (2005), Breguet (2006) and Kreifeldt (2016) publish. In the past decade, via social media and email, collectors have formed globe-spanning networks of information exchange that are intertwined with those of dealers and runners – who these days may equally well work out of the Bay Area, a store in Ubud (Bali), a remote island like Alor, or a jungle town forteen hours from Sintang (Kalimantan) with nothing but a smartphone and deep local connections.

The present author has obtained numerous minor but significant facts (e.g. names of patterns, dye ingredients), through these informal networks. In the course of this investigation a striking discovery of hidden levels of complexity was made, not with the help of a weaver, but with that of a Sumbanese dealer, adamant that even today's oldest weavers are unaware of the existence of the degrees of complexity that have been have been encountered in this investigation. In the examples found, we can see the most clever and time-consuming complications (typically hidden) starting to expire circa 1925; the youngest examples may be dateable to about 1940. It is truly fortuitous that the cloths speak

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[1] M. van Vuuren, pers. comm., 2017. If there appears to be a discrepancy between observations by van Vuuren and McKinnon, these may be due to topography. Van Vuuren worked mostly on the largest island of the group, Yamdena, while visiting smaller islands occasionally. McKinnon was focused on the far smaller Fordata, Larat and Sera (McKinnon 1989:42). These may well have retained time-honoured traditions longer than Yamdena, which is more developed and open to forces fostering commodification.

[2] Exceptions may be encountered on remote islets such as Ternate in the Solor & Alor Archipelago (see Peni & McIntosh, 2020). Also, there are various ikat weaving collectives, most of them government- or NGO-supported, where knowledge about patterns and techniques is preserved, albeit in a predominantly marketing oriented context, meaning that external forces (market demands) decide which of these survive. An early victim appears to be the traditional sarong style of the Baun (West Timor), which has a restrained appearance (see Yeager and Jacobson 2002: Plate 10; PC 206) and is being displaced by the bold and angular style of the Oekabiti clan (*ibid.:* Plates 8, 9; PC 191 in Fig. 2). *Source:* Photographs made by Linda McIntosh in Kelompok Tenun Ikat Kai 'Ene, a new Baun weaving collective in 2019. As McIntosh suggests, the design switch may have been initiated by the young Raja of Amarasi, Bapak Yesaya Robert Maurits Koro, at whose court she observed sarongs in Oekabiti design only, not a single one in the time-honoured Baun style (Linda McIntosh, pers. comm., 2019). An ancient expression of the people's culture is dying out, by all appearances because the market prefers bold over subtle. This implies that any future researcher wishing to acquaint herself with the Baun will have to mentally wipe away the flashy stratum of Oekabiti design which is overlaying the Baun heritage as in an overpainted canvas, and restore a sense of the people's former public persona.

about their own construction so eloquently, allowing us to reconstruct the culture that produced them, because there are no people around who could have spoken for them, and explained their intricacies to the world.

Collectors as a group are immensely well-informed, and immensely undervalued. Curators on the whole are not unsympathetic to collectors and occasionally buy from them, and at auction they are competitors, but in one important sense they are on equal footing as both have access to material. Scholars often are not in a position to collect their own reference sets, and tend to disapprove of collecting by private individuals. But such private reference sets are of great academic value, certainly in these connected days. If we need information on the field division of sarongs from, for instance, the islet Ndao, in general we get the answer quicker, with greater precision, and better illustrated, via the global collectors network then via a mailshot to the world's leading museums and universities. Moreover, collectors with a scholarly bent can sometimes unlock knowledge about aspects of the material culture under study that academicians were never taught to pay attention to.

From a weaver's perspective: during this period of demise – which we may file as 'the end of the golden age of ikat' – designs became progressively less challenging. This is not a matter of opinion or local lore but, as this investigation shows, demonstrable fact. The sense of loss is not limited to the scholarly realm, but also felt in the field. Knowledge about complex designs and special techniques died out along with the last generation of high class dyers, leaving behind on their islands just a fading cognizance that greater textiles were made in the past:

> There is extensive talk of loss (ilangu) among Sumbanese villagers, of "cloth like that in the past" (hemba hama la mandai) (Forshee 2001:46).

In summary, as a result of multiple factors, economic need prime among them, women descended from textile artists with patent pleasure in their creations to mere textile producers. It could be argued, therefore, that any report on ikat in the period under study that is not suffused by a sense of loss, would be unscientific.