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Ikat from Timor and its outer islands: insular and interwoven

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Citation

Hoopen, H. P. H. ten. (2021, September 1). *Ikat from Timor and its outer islands: insular and interwoven*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3209220>

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Title: Ikat from Timor and its outer islands: insular and interwoven

Issue Date: 2021-09-01

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

The pronunciation of *bahasa* Indonesia, Lamaholot, and other languages stemming from the Indonesian archipelago, most of them closely related to Malay, should be fairly intuitive to speakers of Romance and Germanic languages, but for English speakers it may require a certain degree of adjustment. The main differences pertain to the vowels:

- **a** when at the end of a word or when followed by a single consonant is pronounced as in the exclamation ‘ah!’
- **a** when followed by a two consonants or a single consonant in the last syllable is pronounced as in ‘Cannes’.
- **e** when followed by a consonant, as in ‘*endek*’, is pronounced like ‘e’ in ‘men’.
- **e** when followed by a vowel is pronounced like ‘ay’ in ‘may’. The word *méan* for instance, meaning ‘red’ in Lamaholot, is pronounced as ‘may-ahn’.
- **e** may also be practically silent, as in *kepala*, ‘head’, pronounced ‘kuh-pah-lah’.
- **i** is pronounced as it is in the word ‘Indonesia’, *i.e.* either as in ‘in’ or in ‘Asia’. It is never pronounced as in ‘I’.
- **j** is pronounced as ‘dj’, as in the English pronunciation of ‘Java’.
- **k** as the final letter of a word in many parts of the archipelago is nearly or entirely silent. Some authors replace it with a single quote, writing Kantuk as Kantu’, others drop it entirely and opt for Kantu.
- **o** when followed by two consonants or a single consonant in the last syllable, as in *pondok*, is pronounced as in ‘short’.
- **o** when at the end of a word or when followed by a single consonant is pronounced as in ‘open’.
- **u** is pronounced as in ‘guru’, never as in ‘usual’.
- **c** is pronounced as ‘tj’ in ‘challenge’. For example, ‘*cawat*’ is pronounced as ‘tjawat’.
- **v** is usually pronounced like w, so that Java sounds more like Jawa.
- **y** is always pronounced as in ‘young’, never as in ‘why’.

Note: most pre-independence Indonesian sources adhere to a spelling that the Dutch colonial administration introduced. It is phonetic for Dutch speakers, differs in several respects and needs to be considered when looking for early maps or documents.

COLOPHON

A small part of this work – circa five per cent, largely but not entirely limited to the descriptions of depicted textiles – was previously published in ten Hoopen, *Ikat Textiles of the Indonesian Archipelago* (2018) and ten Hoopen, ed., *Timor, Totems e Tokens / Totems and Tokens* (2019). Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references has been given. Beyond the respective sources, a body of literature is shared which informed the present research (a) by helping to understand the cultural context in which the textiles in the Reference Set needed to be placed so as to appreciate their social role and symbolic value, or (b) by shedding light on contemporary conditions in various island communities that impact the way traditional ikat is or is not created.

An effort was made to enrich the descriptions of the shown examples with references to comparable specimens in the literature and in museum collections, annotating their degree of similarity. Occasionally these served to undergird statements regarding motifs, origin or dating. Where possible, multiple references were given, to facilitate scholarly use of the material and to invite further research.

References to PC numbers in the text refer to catalogue numbers of the author's Pusaka Collection website, on-line at www.ikat.us. This website offers a vast store of information that could not find a place in this book, specifically the numerous close-ups and microscopic images of the yarn used, which – with rare exceptions – provide conclusive evidence of its nature, and the way warp and weft were interlaced. Furthermore, it assists in allocating each garment to a specific time period. The above website is updated frequently. Descriptions of certain cloths may thus differ from those presented in this study as the result of ongoing improvement and the expansion of the knowledge base.

Dating

Indonesian textiles are notoriously difficult to date. Although errors have almost certainly been made, the author has done his utmost to avoid them. Dating the specimens was informed by means of (a) a comparison with cognates of ascertained or probable age; (b) technical aspects such as the type of fibre; (c) the presence of hand-spun yarn versus machine-spun (determined through a microscope); (d) use of natural versus synthetic dyes; (e) stylistic aspects such as the presence or absence of borders, the number of ikated bands and palette preferences; (f) provenance data (e.g. dealer records, early private collections, Dutch attic clearances); (g) the specimen's condition correlated with its intended use, an important consideration as a ceremonial cloth that is hardly ever used can look deceptively young even after a hundred years and a workaday sarong deceptively old after just a few; (h) the presence of specific dyes such as Perkins' violet which were only in use during a few decades; (i) where indigo is the dominant tone, the presence or absence of skatol in its smell. Dates were also determined by means of consulting leading experts: authors, curators, dealers, and private collectors. Whenever a concrete year is given, say 1930, the reader is to interpret it as the midpoint of a time span from circa 1920 to circa 1940.

Attribution

On occasion, Indonesian ikat textiles are also difficult to place, either due to a lack of published cognates with a firmly established provenance or to the effects of interculturality, which may provide conflicting visual cues. Many cloths arrive in collections with an erroneous provenance e.g. Larantuka instead of Solor – its label indicating where it was acquired, not made. Fortunately, the provenance of many ikat textiles can be reliably determined on the basis of technical or stylistic aspects. Some however, especially early ones, can not. In such exceptional cases, the provenance the cloth came with was given and marked with a qualifier indicating uncertainty.

Image rendering

The aim was to always show the cloths as naturally as possible. When the textile can be physically juxtaposed to the on-screen rendering, the colour settings of the image editing software may be adjusted to closely approximate the original. That is what in our digital age we may call natural. When the specimen is not

around, 'natural' acquires another meaning. It then means 'as the image processor expects it to look' – in this case on the basis of four decades of experience handling and studying such textiles. What we perceive as 'natural' is what corresponds with our memory of similar things seen earlier, hence is ineludibly subjective and personal. Unfortunately, entirely scientific photography, with controlled artificial lighting and all camera settings by the book, rarely does textiles justice.

A major problem with attempts at truthful rendering of textiles, is that they look wholly different under diverse light conditions. In professional environments it is common practice to photograph under bright light. This allows a tiny diaphragm and high shutter speed and gives a crystal clear rendering of the textiles, technically unimpeachable. But many ikat textiles look better in dim lighting, where they gain saturation. Early cloths often look particularly beautiful outside at dusk, but that is not when they can be photographed, as the low sun's long shadows make their surface look ribbed and rough. When they are taken indoors, into a room with distributed, indirect lighting, the perceived colour saturation shoots up and the whole appearance of the cloth gains warmth – but much of the contrast is lost, and with it many small motifs, which drift off into obscurity. So every photograph of a textile (particularly early textiles with advanced fibre degradation) represents a compromise: an image that was subjectively experienced as the best representation of its nature.

Because their surfaces are not hard, but consist of millions of intertwined fibres, light reflects off textiles in another way than it does off a wooden or bronze sculpture. Particularly when they are old, and the cotton fibres have started to split, ikat textiles obtain a soft patina, which the lighting in photographic laboratories usually fails to bring out. This patina changes with the light. In bright light there is marked reflection off the cotton fibre's waxy outer layer, called cuticle, which, after it has been harvested and dried, becomes hard and glossy. Its reflection of bright light lays a gauze of glare over the cloths which reduces the perceived colour saturation. At night, in moderate light, there is no such gauze overlaying the cloth and the colours show themselves in their full depth. Some cotton textiles in very low light gain markedly in contrast. PC 290 (Fig. 198), for instance, in bright light is clearly readable, but has little magic. However, in near darkness its myriad white motifs light up like a starscape. How can one show these different personae of a cloth in a single photograph?

To show textiles as naturally as possible, according to the present author, who published two inventions in the field of technical photography while in highschool, natural light is the first requirement. No other light source has a spectrum quite like the sun's, which is continuous across its whole range. While the colour temperatures of flashlight and the latest photographic lamps are in the same range as the vertical sun's 5000-6000° K, their spectrum is not identical. Flash light does not produce a radiation continuum but has closely spaced peaks and dips caused by minerals and gases in the lamps – which during a test phase ten years ago proved to be a greater problem than expected. An overpresence of a particular tint may be corrected by reduction, but however clever one may be with image editing software, one cannot add in segments of spectrum that were not there to begin with.

Group A of the Physical Database was photographed in RAW using a Nikon D90 with a Nikkor f 1:4 12-24 mm lens, and processed in TIF format. Several cloths in Group C of the Physical Database were photographed with the same equipment, their details with a Samsung 16 Mp phone camera – often yielding results that high end SLR cameras have trouble to match. Several also were downloaded or copied from museum websites; many of these were available only in low resolution – the high resolution TIF files from the Yale University Art Gallery forming an exemplary exception. Others were professionally photographed by the documentation departments of museums or by private collectors, and graciously made available for this work. When recently done these were typically in high resolution, the Museum der Kulturen in Basel setting a worthy standard for Europe. Cloths photographed in the early 21st century, with first generation digital cameras in 640x480 resolution, nearly all had image-technical defects, such as a colour cast, distorted perspective, extremely low saturation or low contrast, which required correction. As the studied motifs typically constituted only a tiny segment of the cloths under consideration, cropping out a minute section of the original reduced the resolution even further. A substantial number of textiles was photographed during museum depot visits, often under lighting conditions that were far from ideal, with a handheld camera, and

required extreme cropping to pick out a small detail, the need for which was not foreseen at the time.

As a result of these factors, image processing was required for most of the textiles outside Group A and Group C of the Physical Database. Even the latter occasionally required minor corrections, e.g. in the white balance. For illustrations of replication, warp transformation was used to achieve the straight lines needed to demonstrate the basic ikated motif and its repeats. This was the only correction felt to be unnatural, as practically all ikat cloths display slight variations in their warp packing which create meandering rather than perfectly parallel lines, but straightening in these cases seemed an acceptable sacrifice for the sake of analysis, the value of insight trumping that of natural rendering.

Naming convention regarding Dutch collections

The three major Dutch collections of Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde in Leiden and Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam in 2017 were brought together under the management of the newly created Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen in Leiden. However, it was considered useful from a scholarly point of view to occasionally refer to the original collections, because a number of the cloths shown may have been described in earlier literature. The two letters preceding the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen's accession numbers reflect their origin: TM stands for Tropenmuseum, RV for Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde, WM for Wereldmuseum.

Cover photo: Detail of a men's wrap from Tombra village on the isle of Leti (South Moluccas), field-acquired in 1911. The main ikated band has clearly rendered *keu* motifs, discussed in Section 3.4.8. *Source:* PC 248 (see Fig. 172).

Cover design: Karsten Wentink, Sidestone Press.

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