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ASIAN TEXTILES

MAGAZINE OF THE OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

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Inside: Meiji textiles on show at the Ashmolean; finding the family trees of textiles; the unsung heroes of batik in Java and much more.

CONTENTS

Front cover pic: *Eagle*, from the Ashmolean exhibition of Meiji textiles.

Rear cover pic: Roosters**, from the Ashmolean exhibition**
(Images copyright Kiyomizu-Sannenzaka Museum, Kyoto)

Asian Textiles is available online in full colour!

This edition of *Asian Textiles* is available online in full colour in a pdf file to download, view and/or print. Access to the pdf file is either via http://www.oatg.org.uk/magazine.htm whilst it is the current issue or always via the back issues page http://www.oatg.org.uk/magazine-backissues.html by first clicking on the cover image thumbnail.

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OATG members, as part of their membership, are entitled to access to the pdf files for *Asian Textiles* for the previous two years.

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Asian Textiles is published three times a year in February, June and October.
DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS MONDAY 10th JUNE
Contributions should be emailed or sent to the Editor

Editorial

Another very fine crop of articles for this issue of *Asian Textiles*. We start with a thought-provoking essay by Chris Buckley on how it is possible to link disparate textiles by studying their patterns and techniques and placing them within a kind of family tree. As he points out, this kind of technique has been used with some success to date and place Turkomen carpets, but Chris looks at the warp ikats woven in Southeast Asia. The technique is very powerful, although less successful with modern textiles, where we often find patterns and techniques have lost their specificity.

Jasleen Kandhari casts her expert eye over the recent exhibition of Meiji textiles at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Anyone who went along cannot fail to have been impressed by the stunning pieces on show. Without a doubt, my favourite piece was the four-part screen embroidered with cormorants.

Finally, we have a wonderful article by Greg Roberts on the batiks from the northern coast of Java—known as batik Pasisir after the region. Greg believes that these finely expressed textiles are under-appreciated and it is hard to disagree with his information-packed piece.

Finally, I hope that as many people as possible will turn out to attend the EGM scheduled for 24 April. OATG is at a crossroads and important decisions need to be taken. In my own case, I must regretfully inform you that work commitments mean that I will have to resign as editor of the magazine. I very much hope that our group will continue to function and to collate and share knowledge on the wonderful world of Asian textiles.

The Editor

A final postcard from my amusing collection produced by the Liebig Company in France. This one highlights the production of silk.

OATG EVENTS PROGRAMME

Wednesday 13 March 2013

Shawls, Maps and Fashion

Sarah Cheang
Lecturer in the History of Design at the Royal College of Art .

Sarah Cheang's talk will highlight recent work on Indian textiles in the 19th century, the development of ideas about industrial manufacture and hand weaving, and the geographies of fashion.

Wednesday 24 April 2013

Extraordinary General Meeting of OATG

To discuss two motions on the future of the Group

(See opposite page)

Talks are held at the Pauling Centre, 58 Banbury Road, Oxford.
Refreshments from 5.15pm.Visitors welcome (£2)

Programme Coordinators:
Rosemary Lee 01491 873276 rosemarylee143@btinternet.com
Fiona Sutcliffe 01491 872268 j.v.sutcliffe.t21@btinternet.com

Notice of Extraordinary General Meeting

The Oxford Asian Textile Group, founded in June 1995 has had a most successful 17 years, but the Committee feel that the time has come to assess the way forward.

Holding at least three lectures a year (often with distinguished speakers), arranging gallery visits and visits to centres of textile interest, as well as publishing a highly regarded magazine three times a year, has been busy and rewarding. However, circumstances and people change and it is no longer so easy to keep up the standard and focus on Asian textiles, nor to find people who can continue to devote time to maintaining such a programme.

Members will have read Nick Fielding's editorial in the last edition of *Asian Textiles* with the suggestion that an online blog could be the way forward and some ideas were circulated at the last AGM but, possibly, not seen by all. These included expanding our remit to include all textiles rather than just Asian textiles or to include Asian crafts and practices. Other ideas were to merge with another group or to have fewer events.

But the crux of the matter is that the committee which has already served the group for some time would like to hand over its duties, and if OATG is to survive either in its present form or in a new form, we will need new committee members.

We are therefore calling an Extraordinary General Meeting to discuss this with members. This meeting will be held at the Pauling Centre on **Wednesday 24 April 2013 at 5.45pm**.

The EGM will give members an opportunity to vote on the future of the OATG. Two motions have been proposed but if anyone else wishes to propose a further motion (with a realistic plan) this can be discussed at the meeting.

1st motion

- OATG to fold.
- Any monies to be divided between Pitt Rivers Museum and The Ashmolean as per the constitution.

2nd motion

- To continue with the current set up (lectures, visits, magazine, website).
- To include a blog with the intention of facilitating more interaction with OATG members and the wider community of textile scholars and enthusiasts. The intended result of this will be to discover a wider range of people who might contribute to our events programme and magazine.
- Expand the remit. It is generally felt that the strength of the group is the focus on Asian textiles. We can continue to build on this strength while also blurring our boundaries to include contributions that are related to Asian textiles in some way but might not sit firmly within this description. This will widen the list of possible contributors.
- Reorganisation of the committee. Amongst the committee members who want to continue we have skills that could be better used in other committee positions.
- New committee members. If this motion is voted in we will need members to step into vacant committee positions. There is a six-month deadline. If the positions are not filled by this point we will be forced to carry out the 1st motion.

Any votes by proxy to be sent to Aimée Payton at aimee.payton@ashmus.ox.ac.uk or Eastern Art, Ashmolean Museum, Beaumont Street, Oxford, OX1 2PH.

Making sense of textile family trees

In this fascinating article, Chris Buckley looks at the ways patterns in weaving skills and motifs in warp ikats from Southeast Asia can be used to work out family tree relationships between different textiles.

One aspect of "being human" is the enjoyment of patterns. We like to spot familiar forms, and we respond to rhythm and repetition, whether in music, art or decorative designs. Some think these skills are innate: they helped our ancestors to understand their environment, find food and survive. Before writing this piece I spent some time reviewing postings on Pamela Cross's textile forum (www.tribaltextiles.info) and it is remarkable how many of the postings by textile enthusiasts (my own included) relate to the discussion of connections between textiles and traditions in neighboring areas.

Puzzling out the connections between textile forms, motifs and cultures seems to be an irresistible challenge, and part of the enjoyment of the field. Professional scholars are far from immune from the delights of this pursuit: many scholarly books on Asian textiles include observations of the similarities in techniques and textile motifs between different parts of Asia.

Up to now these observations have remained largely speculative, but new techniques hold out the promise of uncovering connections in a more systematic way. In this article I hope to share some of these techniques and some of the excitement surrounding them.

The notion that human cultures share common origins is an old one. We usually attribute ideas about shared origins and "evolution" to biologists, but in fact linguists and anthropologists were on the scene first. It was realized early on that language might contain information about history. In 1836 the prominent scientist, linguist and mathematician (there were fewer barriers between disciplines in those days) Sir John Herschell wrote: "Words are to the Anthropologist what rolled pebbles are to the Geologist — battered relics of past ages often containing within them indelible records capable of intelligent interpretation".

Some of the earliest linguistic studies to investigate origins were carried out in Asia, by Captain James Cook and his contemporaries. During his voyages across the Pacific during the late 1700s, Cook, and the linguists who accompanied him such as William Anderson, compiled lists of words and cultural traits amongst the peoples who they met and were surprised and intrigued by the similarities that they found between them.

These similarities that eventually led Cook to propose that the Polynesian and Indonesian languages (that we now call "Austronesian") were related and shared a common origin in the Malay Archipelago. He was on the right track, though today we trace the origins of the Austronesian languages further back to the Asian mainland.

Linguists have quietly been building on this work ever since Cook's day. Just as biologists compared present day species and speculated on their common ancestry, so linguists used modern languages to reconstruct vocabularies for ancient, vanished tongues. The work of the well-known linguist Robert Blust is particularly relevant to the study of Asian textiles. He used the vocabularies of present-day Austronesian languages to deduce the basic words present in proto-Austronesian, spoken some 6000 years ago [1].

These include terms for the parts of a backstrap loom, including words for a breast-beam and the sword used for beating-in the weft, suggesting that the earliest Austronesian migrants into Southeast Asia brought weaving skills with them. This is evidence that is hard to get by other means, since textiles and weaving equipment leave relatively little trace in the archaeological record.

We can deduce a "family tree" for languages or some other aspect of culture when information is passed from generation to generation. This "information" might consist of genes, language or cultural skills. Language and culture are not only passed from generation to generation, of course. We also get them from our peers, from media … and from publications like this one.

This type of cultural transmission is called "horizontal transmission", as opposed to the "vertical transmission" that happens from generation to generation. In cases where transmission is mostly vertical we expect to be able to derive a family tree. In cases where horizontal transmission is the norm the pattern is more like a net. Ideas that are spread horizontally can travel through society very rapidly (like the latest funny photo on Facebook, or a new slang expression). Many real world situations are a mixture of the two, for example some of our vocabulary we learn from our parents, some from books and media.

This means that we need to make intelligent choices about where we look for tree-like relationships. Traditional culture, such as weaving skills and motifs, are a good candidate for study because of the way in which they are passed from generation to generation. Traditional weavers use a "vocabulary" of motifs that are passed from mother to daughter in a similar way to spoken language.

The first search for tree-like relationships in the textile world was a series of studies carried out over the past decade by Collard, Shennan and Tehrani [2-4]. They looked at the motifs on Turkomen and Iranian rugs, beginning with a patiently researched database of hundreds of motifs, mainly derived from old and well-documented collections such as those in the V&A in London and the Museum of Ethnography in St Petersburg.

The study of traditional Middle-Eastern carpets is generally regarded as something of a challenge. This is partly because much material has come from east to west in undocumented form, and partly because of long-standing uncertainty about whether carpet weavers from the 19th century onwards wove designs that were true to their cultural traditions, or designs that were determined by the preferences of buyers, including buyers as far away as Europe and America. The 19th century has been described as the "first great era of globalization", and commerce in Middle Eastern rugs was a thriving and important business during this period. This trade lasted until the disruption caused by two world wars and the introduction of machine-loomed carpets during the 20th century.

Collard and co-workers were able to use their tables of motifs to deduce family trees for both

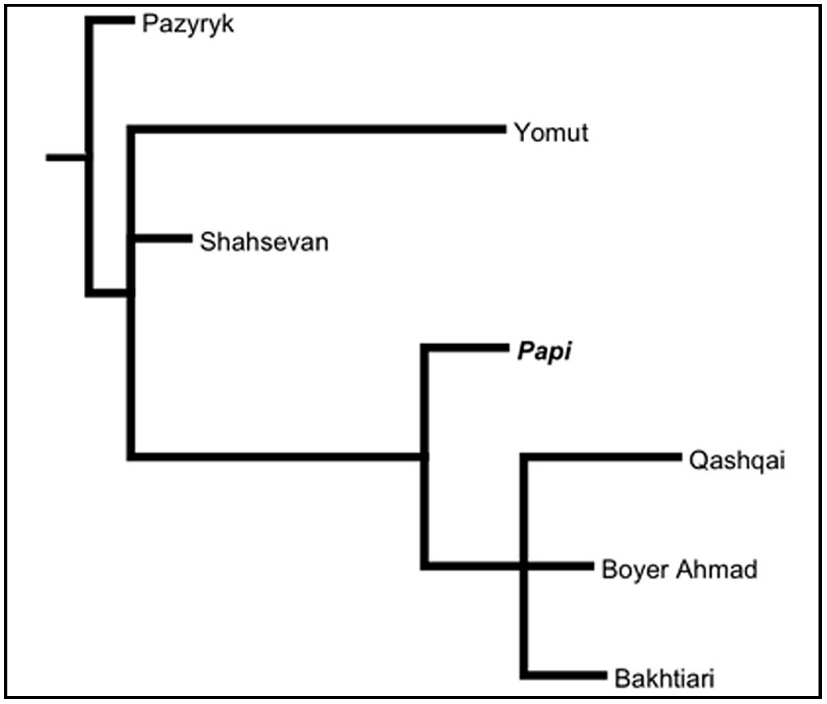

Fig 1: Family tree for Iranian carpet weaving traditions, showing the relationship of modern carpet traditions with the Pazyryk textiles (around 3rd century BC). From Reference 4.

the Turkomen and Iranian traditions (Fig.1). They did this using earlier examples of rugs with natural dyes, and later examples of rugs that used chemical dyes. They were able to show that in spite of outside influences the Turkomen and Iranian weavers largely stuck to their traditional motifs, handed down from generation to generation. Even more remarkably, these traditions persisted in the Turkomen case despite the upheavals and forced settlements that accompanied the military takeover by Tsarist Russia in 1881.

One of the implications of this is that motifs can, in many cases, be used to identify the ethnic group that wove a particular rug. This is of importance for the large number of undocumented rugs that exist in public and private collections.

Looking at Tehrani and Collard's original 2002 paper online using Google Scholar I was able to find 77 academic references to it. This makes it a well-cited paper. There are no citations

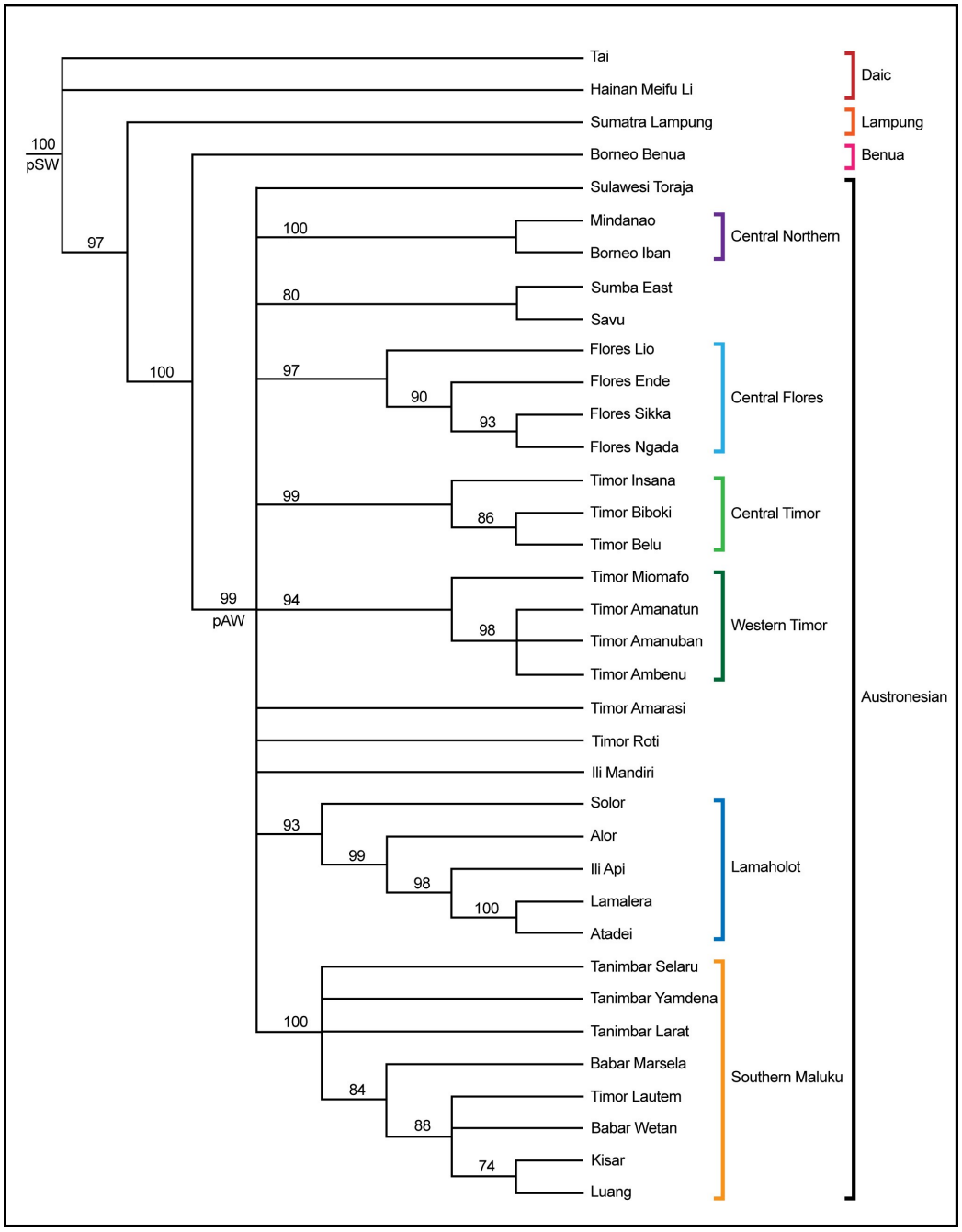

Fig 2: Family tree of warp ikat weaving traditions in Southeast Asia. The ancestral tradition for all warp ikat in this region is located at the root (pSW). This tree is a "consensus" of a number of possible trees: numbers on the tree indicate the percentage of trees that contained a particular node, and give an idea of the consistency of the result. On the right hand side is a classification of Southeast Asian weaving, based on this tree.

by textile scholars however, suggesting that the paper has had relatively little impact on this field. Why might this be?

Re-reading the original paper suggests a couple of answers. First, the paper contains a considerable amount of daunting jargon concerning "phylogenesis" and "ethnogenesis" and statistical methods. Second, in spite of the interesting conclusions from a textile scholarship perspective, it is clear that Tehrani and Collard were in pursuit of bigger game (as they saw it) than explaining the histories of Middle Eastern rugs. They saw their paper as no less than a contribution to the fundamental debate on the nature of culture and the way it is passed from generation to generation.

In fact much of the literature from the past two decades consists of debates about whether "horizontal" or "vertical" routes are the main means by which culture is transmitted (resembling the "nature versus nurture" debate in biology). Thankfully we are now reaching a point at which it is understood that both occur, to varying degrees in different situations. We can now move on and use the growing set of tools to investigate questions that interest textile scholars, such as "where do textile traditions come from", "how are they related" and "how old are they".

This brings me to my own recent contribution to this field, which is an analysis of warp ikat textiles in Southeast Asia [5]. After a number of years collecting and studying the textiles of this region I too have become intrigued by the apparent connections between them that others have noticed.

In particular I am interested why similar techniques and motifs crop up in widely separated regions such as Vietnam, Laos, Hainan island and far flung islands in the Indonesian archipelago. In this sense I am intrigued by the same questions as Captain Cook in the late 1700s, though I have rather better tools at my disposal to answer them with.

I chose warp ikat for this study because it is made using one of the simplest and most widespread of loom designs, and it is itself one of the most widespread of techniques. These facts alone suggest a long history.

Most research famously consists of "99% perspiration". In my case the "perspiration" part involved reviewing and classifying the motifs and other characteristics of more than 2000 examples of textiles in books and online collections, from 36 distinct weaving traditions. More pleasurably, it involved visiting many of the weaving traditions that I surveyed, to look for additional examples of textiles and to check the information that I got from the published sources. Many beautiful textiles had to be excluded from the study however because they lacked

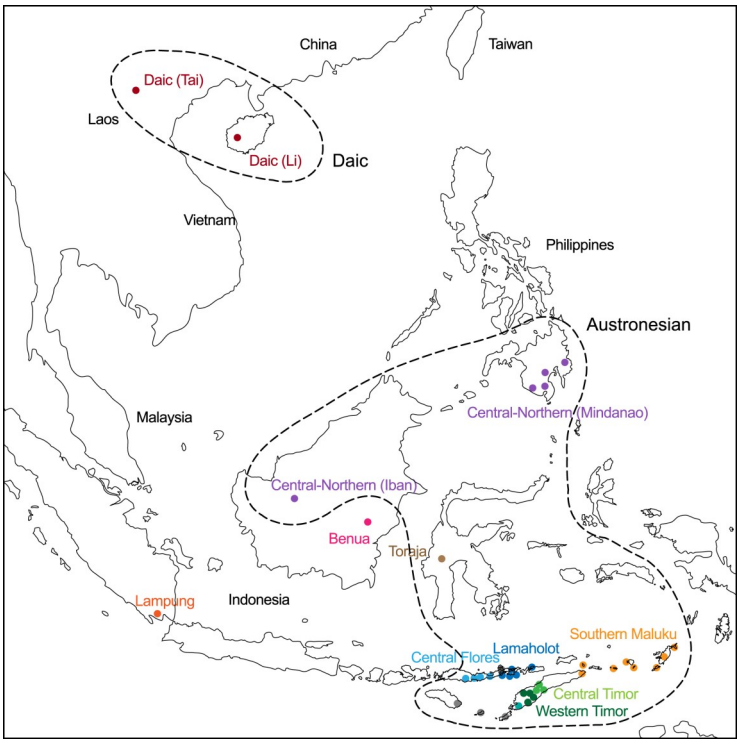

Fig 3: Locations of the weaving traditions in Fig.2

convincing provenance or did not match up with what I saw "in the field", a point I will return to at the end of this article.

After around two years of work gathering information I had a table of more than 100 characteristics shared by the 36 different weaving traditions. Each characteristic was coded as "present" (1) or "absent" (0) for each tradition. I then used a computer-based method to systematically investigate the relationships between the traditions and search for the family trees that best fit the data. This yielded the consensus tree in Fig.2, as well as a lot of statistical information.

One of the most important and basic conclusions from this work is that the warp ikat

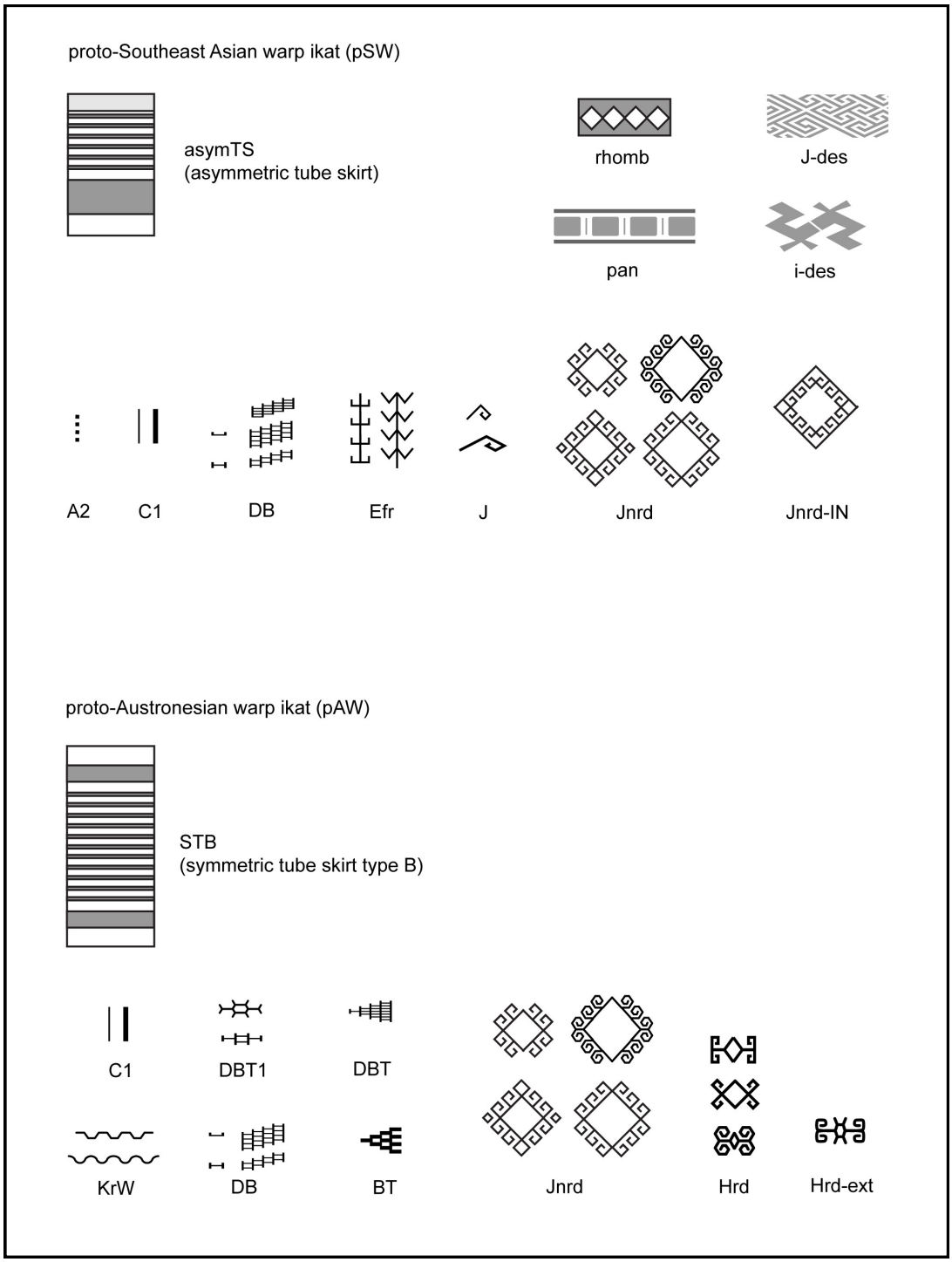

Figure 4: Characteristics (motifs and design layout features) that are ancestral for the root of the tree (pSW) and for the Austronesian weaving traditions (pAW in Fig.2)

traditions of Southeast Asia are indeed related. This question rarely troubles biologists these days, since all life on earth is assumed to be related, but in terms of human culture this is still an open question. The statistical analysis shows that there are so many characteristics shared by ikat weaving in all the locations I considered that the probability that it was invented independently in more than one place is very low.

The shape of the tree suggests a common origin on the Asian mainland, most likely during the neolithic period around 6000 (or more) years ago. It also shows a close association between Austronesian speakers and the spread of ikat weaving culture across the islands of Philippines and Indonesia, suggesting that it was this group of neolithic farmers and seafarers who were responsible for its spread over much of the region. There isn't space here to discuss the story of Austronesian languages and cultures in detail, but it is a fascinating one with deep connections to weaving culture.

I also looked closely at an idea that has been prevalent in textile literature for many years, that weaving culture and motifs originated with the late bronze age "Dong Son" culture that was based in what is now Vietnam. I was able to find little or no evidence to support this connection however, and plenty to contradict it. It seems that it is time to lay this particular notion to rest.

This brings me to the part of the research that induces a sense of awe (in me, at least). When we filter out all the many innovations that Asian weavers made over the centuries, we are left with a residue of characteristics that are shared by all or nearly all weaving traditions, no matter how far apart they may be today (Fig.4).

These characteristics are shared because they are ancestral: they were present in the original weaving tradition that gave rise to all the others. In other words, when we look at this residue we are looking backwards through time.

The results of my analysis show that the original ikat weavers used a simple backstrap loom with a continuous circular warp, without a reed, similar to looms still used in many parts of Asia. They wove cloth in narrow strips, and used it to make tubeskirts, amongst other items. The cloth was decorated with motifs that were made up of dashes and ticks, in much the same way that weavers from Hainan to Tanimbar construct motifs from dash-and-tick shapes today. The motifs they used included hook-and-rhomb shapes (Fig.5) that are recognizable in many Asian textiles. These are the characteristics that, for whatever reason, proved useful, durable or appealing enough to survive for thousands of years and hundreds of generations.

I will end this piece with an observation and a suggestion. For the longest part of human history the most important way in which knowledge has been transmitted is from an older generation to a younger one. For the first time we now have the means and the overview to understand these processes, and therefore to understand our own history better. The irony is that we are gaining this understanding precisely at the time in which culture of this type is fading away. Traditional skills and languages are being lost from the globe at an increasing pace.

Why this is happening and what can be done about it is too big a topic to be tackled here, but some of the information is captured in collections of material culture, a great deal of which is in private hands. Details matter, so if you are privileged to see a traditional craft being made, take

Figure 5: Hook motifs are shared by most Southeast Asian weaving traditions and were present in the last common ancestor of all warp ikat in the region. Since these motifs are also widespread in other kinds of weaving tradition in the region they may date back further still. From left to right: detail of a Belu sarong from Timor, detail of a Biboki sarong from Timor, detail of an Iban sarong from Kalimantan.

photographs and make notes. If you are a collector, write down what you know about the pieces you own and make a catalogue. Many photographs and collections from the last two centuries are vital source material for studies like the ones I have described here today, even if their makers were unaware of their significance at the time.

Suggested Reading

Aside from the works I mentioned, Alex Mesoudi's book *Cultural Evolution: How Darwinian Theory Can Explain Human Culture and Synthesize the Social Sciences* (University of Chicago, 2011), makes a good and readable introduction to the field. I also recommend Peter Bellwood's book *The Prehistory of the Indo-Malaysian Archipelago* (ANU, revised edition 2005), which can be found online at http://epress.anu.edu.au/titles/prehistory-of-the-indo-malaysian-archipelago.

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5. Buckley CD (2012) Investigating Cultural Evolution Using Phylogenetic Analysis: The Origins and Descent of the Southeast Asian Tradition of Warp Ikat Weaving. *PLoS ONE* 7(12): e52064. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0052064. A discussion thread has also been started on the forum http://www.tribaltextiles.info/community/viewtopic.php?t=2358

Textiles as cultural ambassadors from Meiji Japan

Asian Textiles historian and lecturer Jasleen Kandhari reviews the magnificent *Threads of Silk and Gold: Ornamental textiles from Meiji Japan*, shown recently at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.

"From the thickest of satins, plain or decorated with designs in brocade, to the most gossamer-like gauzes, every combination of silk and gold thread has been carried to perfection," Sir Rutherford Alcock, Art & Industries of Japan, 1878.

A quotation that surely befitted the stunning Japanese textile art forms on display from November 2012 to January 2013 at the Ashmolean Museum entitled, *Threads of Silk & Gold: Ornamental textiles from Meiji Japan*! This exhibition consisted of exquisite embroideries, resist-dyed silks, cut and dyed velvet panels, tapestries and appliqués in the format of large wall hangings and folding screens to small panels and western style picture frames, from the new collection of the Kiyomizu Sannenzaka Museum in Kyoto, together with some fine pieces from the Ashmolean's own collection and other private collections.

The textiles in this exhibition were produced in Japan during the Meiji period, from the late 19th to the early 20th century. In the mid-1800s Japan was forced to open its doors to the outside

Cranes—

world by the Western nations after more than 200 years of national isolation during the Edo period. This reopening of Japan led to a fascination in the West for all things Japanese, a phenomenon known as *Japonisme*. By the late 19th century Japanese prints and decorative arts like ceramics, metalwork, lacquerware and ornamental textiles became so fashionable in the west that no western home that was with the times was without its precious silk screens and panels from Japan.

However, although many Japanese woodblock prints, ceramics and metalwork from this period have survived, due to the fragility and delicacy of these textiles, not many remain in good condition. Therefore this is a segment of art and textile history which has been overlooked and it was a treat to see such examples in this exhibition that have not been displayed outside Japan before.

Originally these types of textiles were displayed at international exhibitions and World Fairs and were presented as diplomatic gifts from the Japanese imperial household and government. From the 1870s art textiles became an important part of Japan's export trade to the west to cater for the new tastes.

They are incredibly fine in quality and technical skill, producing a painterly effect or 'paintings in silk thread'. Upon close inspection, the textiles reveal themselves to be the work of the needle and not of the brush, with millions of stitches. For commercial and political reasons, designs tended to serve as visual manifestations of Japanese national identity in association with the Japanese style or Nihonga painters with their depictions of natural, historical and mythological scenes.

The exhibition was displayed in two galleries, the first on materials and techniques and the second on the reception of Japanese textiles in the west. Embroidered, woven and dyed textiles filled the first room. Of all the Japanese textile arts, it was the art of needlework which impressed the foreigners during the Meiji period. Embroiderers during this period used traditional techniques but within new formats suited for the Western market in the large-scale hangings, curtains, framed panels and folding screens.

Eagle © *Kiyomizu-Sannenzaka Museum, Kyoto*

Cormorant © *Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford*

For instance, the embroidered panel of ducks by a river bank in silk thread looks deceptively simple, yet demonstrates a sophisticated use of long and short stitch to achieve a subtle colour blending. This blending is particularly striking in the fine patterns on the feathers of the ducks' necks. The grass on the river bank is depicted with overlapping stitches applied at different angles, cleverly capturing a sense of gentle movement. The effect of flowing water is achieved with threads of different thicknesses, colours and degrees of twist couched down in parallel lines.

This technique is good for illustrating translucency, as the feet of the duck in the foreground are shown as a simple but effective lattice of thread. It is interesting to note that the palette of golden browns against a black background is reminiscent of Japanese lacquer ware like *suzuri bako* or writing cases, since they are illustrated in a similar manner.

Throughout the embroidery section, a sense of naturalism in these 'painted textiles' has been achieved through the use of long and short stitch in the depiction of petals, leaves, bark and feathers. The pair of embroidered panels of doves and other birds and flowers illustrate this well. Cotton wadding and layers of stitches have been built up to give depth to the flower petals and bodies of the birds whilst the use of thick, glossy, flat silk layered over the wadding expresses the velvety texture of the cherry blossoms, iris petals and the bodies of the birds.

Rows of tiny stitches have been added to give definition to the edges of the feathers, whilst a knot stitch has been used in the centre of the flowers with held thread applied for the veins on the leaves. Very long straight stitches have been laid in parallel lines, with some couching for the metal lantern and for the water. The shimmer of the silk gives the impression of clear morning sunlight over the water.

The panel of a Japanese lady reading by orange light makes effective use of minimal stitch work and a deliberately restricted colour palette of oranges and browns. Tiny satin stitches are executed in fine thread, with subtle changes in stitch direction and colour to create this effect of light and shade whilst threads of different thickness are used to allow more of the background to show through in certain areas.

Although the source of this design is not known, it could have been inspired by the work of the oil painter, Yamamoto Hosui who produced paintings exploring the effects of light and shadow on female figures set within the Japanese interior at night time.

Dyeing techniques using rice-paste resist with stencils became a popular way of patterning fabrics in Japan in the 16th century. Around 1700, the *yuzen* silk dyeing technique was developed whereby paste was applied onto the silk through a funnel and the dye was applied with a brush to create more pictorial designs. Around 1880, the Kyoto textile producer Nishimura Sozaemon used his knowledge of *yuzen* dyeing techniques to apply to velvet or *yuzen birodo*.

The Roosters on display illustrate the skilfully cut velvet on this panel; whereas the velvet has been cut over most of the birds, tiny areas like the wattle of the combs and the central veins of the feathers, have been left uncut. Likewise, the *yuzen birodo* cut-velvet panel of the popular Japanese tourist destination, Mount Fuji, realistically reproduces the photographic image of the mountain with the pine tree executed in cut velvet whilst Mount Fuji is left uncut in order to increase the effect of distance and perspective.

Weaving was the oldest technique used to create patterned textiles for the elite in Japan with the *nishiki* silk brocades being the most admired product in the west during the Meiji period. One type of *nishiki* was the tapestry weave or *tsuzure-ori*. A laborious, time-consuming process, it took 30 weavers three years working ten hours a day to complete nine tapestry panels. They were made by the Kawashima Textile company, which was commissioned by the Japanese government in

Reading lady © *Kiyomizu-Sannenzaka Museum, Kyoto*

1908 to produce a tapestry to donate to the 'Japanese Room' in the Hague Peace Palace in the Netherlands. The tapestry represents an idyllic, peaceful world by its depiction of a variety of Japanese birds and flowers in spring and early summer. This Peace Palace contained national products of several countries to highlight the growing international peace movement at the end of the 19th century.

The Meiji period also saw the introduction of the mechanised Jacquard looms from Europe, enabling a faster rate of weaving production. The tapestry on display entitled *One Hundred Flowers and One Hundred Birds in Late Spring and Early Summer,* with a group of peacocks standing in front of a group of flowering paulownia, cherry and magnolia trees and flowering peonies in the foreground, is identical to one of these large silk tapestries.

Oshi-e was another form of popular ornamental textile in the west during the Meiji period and was made by pasting small pieces of fabric onto the background over silk and paper padding to create relief designs. The panel illustrating a warrior on horseback and five attendants pausing under a cherry tree in full bloom is a fine example of the this technique, made by a craftsman named Seppō.

The second gallery explored the reception of Japanese textiles in the west with a range of large-scale wall hangings and furnishings used in the homes of westerners. This was the time when, as previously mentioned, *Japonisme* became fashionable.

The Japanese love of nature was noted in the west as shown by the depiction of everyday birds, insects, plants and fish. This concept of harmony was welcomed as a contrast to the harsh industrialisation taking place in the west, hence scenes of birds, flowers and landscapes were the most common subjects of textiles made for the foreign market, with the minute illustration of feathers, petals and leaves appealing to the Victorian appreciation of technical skill.

A number of fine embroidered hangings of peacocks with flowering plants in silk and metallic threads illustrates this in a realistic manner. The rendition of the peacock feathers is particularly detailed with the composition of the tail in a complex layering of stitches. Long stitches of gold thread are couched over a foundation of flat silk for the eyes of the tail feathers, while the twisted threads used for the outer sections of the feathers combine gold thread with the silk. Stitches of very fine gold thread highlight the edges of the neck and crest feathers whilst the eyes are couched on spirals of thread, with a tiny knot stitch around the eyes.

A fine piece donated to the Ashmolean museum in 1958 (by Sir Herbert Ingram who visited Japan on his honeymoon in 1908) illustrates five Japanese cranes standing on rocks and grass among cycads and white wisteria. Cranes were popular symbols of longevity and auspicious occasions like weddings, and hence, the ideal symbol for a newly-married couple.

The hanging is embroidered in long and short stitch, couching stitch and knot stitch. The range of textures is achieved through the use of threads of various thicknesses and varying degrees of twist so that the glossy feathers are stitched with flat silk, whereas the rougher bark and rocks are worked in a combination of loosely and tightly twisted threads and clusters of knot stitches create moss and lichen texture on the rocks.

The direction of the stitches reflects the natural growth patterns of feathers and the scaly nature of the cranes' legs and feet, while the bodies of the birds are built up over layers of stitches. The effect of the water surface is achieved by couching down the long fine silk threads and using thicker threads to form the pattern of ripples. The four panels were designed to compose one large piece by strategically placing extra-long inflorescences of the wisteria along the joins.

The final exhibit was a glorious embroidered four-fold screen illustrating a peacock in all its glory accompanied by a peahen, made for an international exhibition probably by the leading Kyoto silk manufacturer, Nishimura Sozaemon. A spectacular design, what with the realistic gold fanned feathers set off against the dark background, fine needlework and frieze of peacock feathers on the base of the lacquer frame, it serves as a perfect example of the use of Japanese textiles as cultural ambassadors during the Meiji period.

Unsung heroes of Javanese batik

Ian Reed and Greg Roberts are passionate enthusiasts and collectors of batik from the north coast of Java, known as *batik Pasisir*. Here Greg Roberts echoes the rallying call of the late batik maestro Pak Iwan Tirta, for greater recognition to be given to the crucial role of the *pengobeng* (batikkers or waxers) in the making of batik and to the significance of the filler motifs, *isen-isen* and *tanahan*. The rewards of visiting batik workshops and experiencing the batik-making process first hand are also highlighted. The article is not intended to be an historical survey of *batik Pasisir* and doesn't attempt to define and trace its origins or its anthropological aspects.

Our collection of *batik Pasisir* is a small but growing one. We developed a preference for *batik Pasisir* because of its boldness in both design and colour. Also, because it reflects the adoption of cross-cultural influences following the trade exchanges amongst the Chinese, Indian, Arabs, Dutch and the English in Java.

The collection's strengths lie with the artworks from Lasem and Pekalongan. From the outset we were seduced by the batiks from Lasem. It was the richness of the famous red dye, *mengkudu*, combined with a beautiful ivory background that appealed to our eyes and our hearts. As for the batiks from Pekalongan, it was their range of colours and extraordinary fine workmanship, incorporating *isen-isen* and *tanahan* motifs.

While today textiles are no longer made or used as they once were, there are numerous workshops operating along the north coast of Java, the Pasisir. Many of these workshops are producing exquisite cloths with superb levels of technical skills, richness of colour, clarity, and intricacy of patterning and design. They also possess an overall sense of harmony and balance - the key criteria I use to assess the quality of batik. I believe strongly that these workshops, the batik artists, the entrepreneurs and the batikkers all need greater recognition and promotion in order to maintain and grow Java's rich batik textile tradition.

In 2010, we drove east from Jakarta visiting the key workshops of the Pasisir with detours into Jogjakarta and Surakarta (Solo). Details can be found on our blog of Tuesday 17 January, 2012 - *The Batik Road: Travel Recommendations for Java* http:// www.northcoastjavanesebatik.com).

The rewards of spending time in batik workshops, many of which have now been operating for generations, are numerous. A greater understanding, appreciation and personal admiration of both batik and its makers are the rewards. Depending on its size and the number of workers, each workshop has a similar physical layout that is determined by the particular process being undertaken.

The first and cleanest space is devoted to the drawing and tracing of the pencil guidelines onto the cloth. This is a role for men. The subsequent waxing of the cloth is undertaken by female batikkers.

In the wet areas, the heavy work of dyeing is undertaken by men (*kuli medel)* as is the scraping and removal of the wax *(nglorod)* in vats of boiling water. Here also, the *cap* or copper stamp work is performed by the stamping worker *(tukang cap)* who is always a man.

The batikkers possess extraordinary *canting* skills. With agile hands, a highly developed eye, breathing control and immense patience, the batikkers are able to produce a myriad of lines, dots and shapes by the application of flowing hot wax onto a cloth that is supported by a bamboo frame (*gawangan*). Within every workshop, cloths are in various stages of waxing with each stage

One of the largest batik workshops in Indonesia is Batik Danar Hadi in Solo, owned and operated by Santosa Doellah and his wife, Danarsih Hadipriyono.

requiring batikkers with different levels of skill. The most skilled batikkers are chosen to apply the first wax outlines (*ngengren*) onto the cloth, as this will largely determine the quality of the finished batik.

Like an ink painter's brush, the *canting* is intrinsically suited for linear expression. *Batik Pasisir* sorts movement and harmony through these lines. The highly skilled batikker with a single movement of the *canting*, can translate the outline of the desired motifs into movement, conceiving it simultaneously as a single gesture of life. This approach is less concerned about representing given appearances accurately and more a response to the spirit of living things – butterflies, birds, flowers, tulips, roses, carnations, cornflowers, lilies, and so on.

At Dudung Alie Syahbana workshop in Pekalongan, experienced batikkers are applying wax prior to the last dye process

Line and contour are vehicles of the experienced batikker's memory, especially with the first waxing. This is also the result of the experienced batikkers repeating the first waxing of one design many times, when intended for serial production. Like the ink painter, the batikker only has one opportunity to apply the wax outlines to the cloth because the medium does not allow for a "second chance". With fine *batik tulis* the same lines are also repeated on the reverse side of the cloth, and so on, for each new waxing. Each step of the process requires batikkers with a particular skill, so the cloth passes through the hands of several batikkers, each having varying levels of proficiency.

The practice of signing *batik tulis* became fashionable among the Indo-Europeans in Pekalongan, during the 1860s. A signature indicated the origin of the workshop and emphasised the quality and originality of the artwork. The new styles, decorative innovations and customs were soon adopted by the Peranakan Chinese entrepreneurs who began to sign their batiks in the 1920s.

The practice of signing batik with the workshop's name continues today and as a result, little is known about the individual batikkers whose role is crucial to the making of each cloth. Perhaps in the future when a workshop profiles its work the name of the key batikker will also be noted, as is the case with fashion houses where not only the owner receives recognition but also the head designer.

Pak Iwan Tirta writes, "*The batikkers are the unsung heroes about who little has been written. Most of the literature about batik deals with the techniques of making it, the entrepreneurs engaged in trading it, or the aristocracy who wears it."(1)*

Batik from the Pasisir was and still is, famous for the finest and most technically intricate examples of the process and for its exquisite use of colours. Central to the achievement of these qualities is the incorporation of *isen-isen* and *tanahan* motifs. *Isen-isen* are the tiny motifs used to fill in within the outlines of the key motifs while the tiny *tanahan* motifs fill in the spaces outside the main motifs, on the background. It is the *isen-isen* and *tanahan* motifs that distinguish Indonesian batik from that of other countries, where they are not used.

Isen-isen and *tanahan* are not contrasting motifs, but rather have much in common. Depending on the region, the same motif may be used as *isen-isen* or *tanahan*. In each region the batikkers consider their own version of *isen-isen* and *tanahan* motifs a condition for what is regarded a superior work.

With the emergence of *batik Belanda* in the 1840s *isen-isen* and *tanahan* motifs were employed to enhance the main motif. This enabled the creation of not just the illusion of a colour change, but also the introduction of actual shades of a colour, by intensifying or dispersing the *isen -isen* dots. Also the illusion of depth and form is achieved by the use of dots that from a distance appear like fine lines. To serve this purpose, filler motifs that were once of uniform size and distribution were now dispersed at random, sometimes in sparse spacing, and others more concentrated, and they varied in size.

Pak Iwan Tirta writes, "*In my opinion, it is the isen-isen and tanahan motifs which add to the beauty and mystery of Indonesian batiks. By breaking and dividing space delineated by the lines of the main motif, the isen-isen provide the subtle shading of colours and softening of lines that make true Indonesian batiks a play of light and shade."(2)*

It is time to enjoy the beauty of five cloths from our collection all of which highlight the variety of *isen-isen* and *tanahan* motifs (dotting, lines, cross-hatching, the veins of leaves, tiny flowers, leaves, tiny curling leaves, and so on), and the role they play in heightening each work's aesthetic experience. This showcases the dedication and skills of the unsung women batikkers.

Batik 1 is a *kain panjang* cloth with the red bird motif. It is a beautiful work filled with energy and movement. It was made in Lasem and has a *bang-bangan* colour scheme (all red motifs on an ivory background), made early in the 20th century. Its two end fields contain short and long triangles (*tumpal*) and 'toy blocks' (*mainan*), on a 'snow flake' decorated red field. The two larger rectangles behind the triangles (*papan*) are each filled with three small red birds in flight interspersed with two stylised lotus. The body of the cloth (*badan*), incorporates horizon-

tally arranged larger red birds in flight set against a background of red flora forms, *tanahan*, all set upon a rich ivory coloured ground.

The batik's designer and batikker demonstrate an understanding of spatial effect through the irregular placement of the large red bird shapes across the surface of the cloth, amplified by the energy-rich flora *tanahan*. The birds are in flight and the whole pictorial surface is alive. There appears to be nothing routine or simplistic in this wonderful batik. The forms capture a sense of restless vitality while maintaining an overall sense of harmony. The *canting* enables the experienced batikker to achieve great fluidity of line and shape that matches the subject perfectly. This is because by their very nature, the forms themselves are fluid and organic.

Batik two, a *kain panjang*, is an excellent example of the style, *jawa hokokai pagi-sore*, produced in Pekalongan. The style emerged in response to the aesthetic preferences of Japanese clients during the 1943–1945 occupation of Java. The filler motifs are extremely detailed, complex and delicate. The work is executed in a remarkable range of colours including shades of orange, pink, mauve, green, turquoise and yellow.

Peranakan Chinese batik-makers were the first to use the new aniline dyes which became available in the late 19th century. They were now able to obtain the bright colour combinations that had always been a key characteristic of the Chinese silk textile tradition.

Typical of a *jawa hokokai* batik, this cloth is divided diagonally into two parts distinguished, not by colour, but by background motif. The butterflies flutter above a stylised *kawong* motif and the lotus floats upon a *parang* motif. Both motifs had once been restricted to the royal courts. The work's composition, known as *pagi-sore* ('morning and afternoon'), enables the skirt to be worn in two ways, each time featuring a different design.

On first sight, it is the colours, the

Batik 1. Lasem, early 20th century skirt cloth, kain panjang. Cotton, natural dyes, batik tulis

bold structure, the composition and the key motifs of the butterflies and lotus that attract. On closer observation it is the skill of the batikkers who have utilised every available part of the cloth, both within and outside the motifs, with very fine and detailed *isen-isen* and *tanahan.* Within a flower or a leaf it is the *isen-isen* that creates the illusion of colour change. It is the *isen-isen* that also creates shades of colour by intensifying or dispersing the fine dots. This use of myriad dots, *isen-isen*, enhances the impact of the main motifs.

Batik 2: Pekalongan, 1943-1945, Skirt cloth *kain panjang pagi-sore*. Cotton, synthetic dyes; batik tulis

The *canting* work of the batikkers waxing the *jawa hokokai* cloth is extremely fine and very technically elaborate. The women batikkers employed to execute the patterns were trained in the intricate and precise application of wax, and an extraordinary delicate stippling and dotting technique was used, especially with some of the wonderful ornate floral designs.(3)

Batik 3: Pekalongan, 1950, Oey Djien Nio (Jane Hendromartono; Java, 1924–86)
Skirt cloth *kain panjang pagi-sore,* Cotton, synthetic dyes; *batik tulis*

Oey Djien Nio (1924-1986), was a third-generation batik-maker in Pekalongan. She signed her earlier works with her husband's name, Liem Siek Hien, and after 1965 she used her new Indonesian family name, Hendromartono, adopted by her husband. Subsequently, she combined this with the name people used to address her by i.e. Jane. This work circa 1950, has in addition to her signature the name, Kudus, a town further east of Pekalongan. This indicates that while she lived and worked in Pekalongan, the batik was executed in the Kudus style. The pattern of Kudus

batik can be extremely complex, as can be seen in this work.

Batik 3 also has a *pagi-sore* structure but while the two halves in the *jawa hokokai* batik have differently patterned backgrounds, this work has an overall light brown pattern highlighted by small white dots and multicoloured flower petals.

Visually, the common background holds together the overall composition of the randomly placed motifs of birds, flowers, butterflies, and so on. Both these white dots and flower petals are *tanahan.* The batikkers have utilised extremely fine *isen-isen* as fillers inside the outlines of the key motifs: bunches of delicately coloured flowers, foliage, butterflies, and a family of birds involved in their daily activities, including the raising of their three chicks.

This detail of a Oey Djien Nio batik highlights creative and skilful use of *isen-isen* and *tanahan* motifs and the hand-painting (*colet*) of the heads of the birds.

The variations in the filler motifs are staggering, ranging from tiny dots used to give form to the flower petals to the extremely delicate and beautiful representation of the birds' feathers, especially their wings. For the emerging batik artists reading this article, note the soft water colour effect used on the heads of the birds - the batikker has most likely hand painted these areas by first encircling the shape of the head with wax-resist, followed by hand-colouring. This is a process known as *colet*.

The bloom-like forms of the bird’s nest are a visual treat and I can only wish to have such dotted about my garden! Reinforcing the parenthood theme, colour has been used symbolically - turquoise-blue and candy-pink are the colours of happiness.

I return now to where I began, praising the work of contemporary north coast batik artists. One such artist is Sapuan, "Soft One", who is from a village outside Pekalongan. He was born in 1964 and has been producing awe-inspiring work since 2005.

We were truly overwhelmed with Sapuan's work from the moment we first stepped into his workshop.

The outlines of his work are meticulously drawn in an even and smooth fashion. These outlines embody a visibly felt life-energy and are singularly capable of conjuring an imagined

poetic vision of living nature, a subject close to his heart. Filling in these outlined shapes of leaves and flowers with thousands of the finest dots and lines in the form of *isen-isen* and *tanahan*, the resulting three dimensional forms now express his observation of direct experience of the visible world. Just hold your gaze on the inward folding of the leaf tips of the exotic red orchids, which celebrates his keen observation.

Sapuan is opening up dynamic new avenues of technique, subject and style while also embracing the best of the past batik masters. He was raised by his family, his mother a batikker

Above: Batik 4: Pekalongan, 2010. Sapuan, "Soft One". Skirt cloth kain sarung, Cotton, synthetic dyes, *batik tulis*.

Right: detail, showing curling orchid leaves.

from Cirebon and his father a weaver, to always reach for perfection, now so clearly evidenced in his work.

Every aspect of this *sarung* with its horizontal orientation is created with great sensitivity and extremely fine canting work. This is visible in the outer borders across the top and bottom edges, the *seret*; on the inner bow borders beautifully adorned with small orchid flowers and leaves filled with *isen-isen* placed on a ground of a fine *tanahan* motif; followed by the key motifs that make up the body of the *sarung*, the *badan*. The *badan* consists of fish, orchids, rice grains, bees and foliage with leaf tips rendered so superbly as to suggest the catching of the sun's light hanging from the top bow border.

All the forms are further highlighted by a background filled with the smallest of graduated white dots, from bottom to top. Sapuan's special *kepala* with its plant-like *tumpal* (triangles), interspersed with an orchid flower placed centrally upon a horizontal form shaped like new tree-fern shoots completes this exquisite *sarung*.

Sapuan's use of thousands of tiny dots, the finest I have ever seen made by canting, may have come as the result of the influence of Merchant (*Sudagaran*) batik on his work. Merchant batik made its appearance in the 1960s, when profuse white dotting was introduced by batik makers in Laweyan, Solo, and then used to great effect by other batik makers in the years to follow.

Well, the rallying call is out! My appreciation of *isen-isen* and *tanahan* is totally encapsulated in the following batik work that will speak volumes. They almost absorb the subject matter of this batik. The batik maker is Ibu Millar Sungkar of *Rumah Batik dia – dio.* While Ibu Millar's retail outlet is in Yogyakarta, her batik is made in Pekalongan. Her work is exceptional in both its creativity and its workmanship. A visit to her shop in Yogyakarta is a must.

Her hand-woven silk *sarung* tells the story of Yogyakarta's famous war hero, Diponegono, a Javanese prince. He fought the Dutch colonials in the Java War of 1825–1830. It is him on horse-back.

Batik 5: Pekalongan, 2010
Millar Sungkar, Rumah Batik dia-dio
Skirt cloth kain panjang (detail). Handwoven skill, synthetic dyes: batik tulis

NOTES

1) Tirta, Iwan. *Batik: A Play of Light and Shades,* Jakarta, Gaya Favorit Press, 1996, p106.
2) ibid, p53.
3) Maxwell, Robyn J. *Textiles of South East Asia: Tradition, Trade and Transformation,* Singapore, Periplus Editions, p265.

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Culture and craftsmanship in mediaeval Egypt

Buried Textile Treasures: Discoveries from Medieval Egypt
24 October 2012 with Jacqueline Hyman

The Mamluks were the military elite in Egypt from1250–1577. Originally soldier slaves from the Ottoman Empire, they became the rulers, and for them clothes were very important as they reflected social status, wealth and religion. The children's tunics analysed were from graves of this period. Christians were buried in their clothes but graves were often raided and the clothes cut up for sale.

Archaeological interest in Egypt was strong in the late 19th century and in 1889 Flinders Petrie began a major survey of the country's archaeology. Among those who worked with him were the Newberrys, who collected and made notes about the many textile fragments and the rare complete garments that were found. In 1941 most of the fragments were donated to the Ashmolean museum, but some pieces collected by Essie Newberry, who was particularly interested in embroidery, were given to Leeds University for research purposes.

Thus it was that in 2008 a box containing six children's tunics and two hats was opened, and, while the garments were more or less complete, they were in poor condition. The detailed analysis of these clothes and their preparation for conservation and display formed the basis of Jacqueline Hyman's research degree at Leeds University. As a professional freelance textile conservator for many years this was a rare opportunity.

Her careful examination of each garment highlighted the care and precision of the stitching and the embroidery. She showed us the range of different fabrics and wadding that was used. Only one strand of wool and some blond human hair was found in a section of wadding, the main fabrics were linen, silk and some cotton, with beautiful indigo dyed silk for embroidery. Weaving methods too included a simple tabby weave but also patterns that required a more elaborate loom where a supplementary weft could be incorporated.

The high resolution images obtained by optical microscopy and a scanning electron microscope revealed the detail of fabric structure, the precision of the stitching as well as the evidence of gold coating on some fibres. They also revealed the extensive damage caused by moths and bugs and body fluids as well as actual cocoons and bits of the medieval insects themselves.

In addition to the tunics, the collection included two caps. One of them had several padded triangles joined to form the top of the hat and then attached to a band with a different quilted design to fit round the head of the child. The outer layer of blue silk was lined with linen enclosing not only wadding with the usual cocoons, plant material and dirt, but also some paper with writing or an inscription as yet undeciphered.

In addition to researching the structure, fashion and textile details of the garments the analysis contributed to the conservation of the garments. Very careful humidification and delicate cleaning allowed the tunics to be gently shaped, their appearance improved and further deterioration arrested. The hats, however, required humidification by suspension in a jelly bag contraption to help bring them back to a recognisable hat shape.

The collection will eventually be on display at Leeds University and, thanks to Jacqueline Hyman's skilled and imaginative work, the garments now reveal much more about the culture as well as the craftsmanship of medieval Egypt.

Fiona Sutcliffe

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