

SOUTH SUMATRAN SHIP CLOTHS

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Textiles increasingly receive recognition as an art medium and Indonesia's varied peoples have contributed richly to the field. Sago brown and indigo batiks from Java and boldly patterned cottons from Sumba are familiar examples. There are, in addition, other types of textiles from the Indonesian islands that are familiar only to a few museum curators and cognoscenti. One of these is a group of textiles stemming from South Sumatra generally known as ship cloths.

These textiles receive their name from the predominant use of a ship motif. This ranges from small craft to huge forms that dominate the cloth. Also, there is a rich panoply of horses, elephants, carabou, fishes, turtles, birds of many species, trees that harbor gifts and human figures, houses of many styles, human forms in various costume and posture, umbrellas, banners and pennants as well as many forms which escape our labelling. Most frequently these elements are rendered in deep blues, yellows or reddish-brown colors created by natural dyes. The textiles are no longer woven today, but some examples still exist in South Sumatra and function within the ceremonial life of the people. From all aspects—their social function, their technical virtuosity and range of motifs—these textiles command attention.

The cloths exist in two major forms. One, called *palepai* or *sesai balak* [1]* is a long, narrow rectangle which may extend to 3.5 meters in length (figures 1-4). The other, termed *tampan*, is a relatively small rectangle or square that may be 40-75 centimeters on a side (figures 5-12). A few exceptions fall outside these parameters. *Tampan* are found as family heirlooms in a few households along the southwest coast of Sumatra from the vicinity of Benkulen through the area south of Krui. They exist in greater number along the two large bays on the south coast. On the other hand, *palepai* exist only in this southernmost area and, according to evidence remaining today, were made only by peoples living near Semangka and Lampong bays.

Several small cultural groups of related ethnic stock inhabit these areas. Of most importance for a study of ship cloths are the Paminggir who live on the west coast near Krui, on the upland mountain plateau of the interior south of Lake Ranau and along the south coastal strip of

*Numbers in brackets refer to the Notes on page 15.

Semangka and Lampong bays. Their major social group is the *suku*, which appears to be a patrilineal descent group. Four or more *suku* occupy a geographic area called *marga*, and the larger social grouping is also often called *marga*. *Suku* are considered weak or strong according to age, population and wealth; they also have positional designations to the right or left.

The eldest direct male descendant of the founder of the *suku* and *marga* has the title *penjimbang*. This title may also be used by the founder of a village, but this seems to be a more recent practice. The *penjimbang* and their families constitute an aristocratic class, and one of their prerogatives is the use of the long cloths.

Originally only the *penjimbang* rank had the right to use the *palepai* as a wall hanging. Formerly it may have been restricted to the rites of passage for the *penjimbang* and his oldest descendant, but today all of the children of a *penjimbang* use the cloth at times of social change. Because the *palepai* is used and inherited only in these families, the form category of the cloth alone is a symbol of the aristocratic class and the continuance of these lineages in time.

The manner in which the cloth is displayed has additional symbolic relevance. *Palepai* are hung on the right wall of the centrally located women's section of the house where the cloth serves as a backdrop for the principal of the ceremony. By custom, however, these cloths are rarely hung alone, but are flanked to the left and right by the *palepai* belonging to *suku* which exist within the social structure in a corresponding position to the left or right of the principal. Therefore, the tableau they create portrays the relative position of the principal within the total social framework.

The cloth with its ship design becomes a symbolic means of conveyance during specific parts of a ceremony. In a marriage ceremony, for example, the bride sits before the cloth of her husband-to-be after arriving in an elaborately bedecked procession. This procession has rigidly prescribed positions that may be viewed as constituting a ship form. The bride is thus transported to the marriage ceremony in a ship and finally makes the transition to her husband's *suku* as she sits before his *palepai*. The ship of the cloth acts as the bold symbol of this transcendental transfer.

For other transition periods the long cloths have a similar role. These include a ceremonial return to the bride's home three to seven days after the wedding when she is presented in her married state, a ceremony for the newborn children involving name-giving at the maternal

grandparent's home, circumcision ceremonies for boys and funeral rites. In each of these the long cloth symbolically conveys the principal to a new state of being.

Tampan operate on a similar, but much broader scale. These small cloths are not limited to a particular class or rank, but flow horizontally through the society in response to various social commitments. When they are inherited some textiles will descend to each sibling in a household. Thus, their distribution is much greater than the restricted long cloths. In some functions they closely correspond to the *palepai* for the *tampan* also act as a symbolic means of transition. Many small *tampan*, or merely one, served as the ritual seat in the transition ceremonies. This custom is still practiced in the Semangka Bay area and was probably followed in all *tampan* regions at one time.

Tampan also had, and in some areas still have, important functions as part of obligatory gifts. On certain ritually fixed occasions, such as marriage negotiations, the textiles serve as wrapping for bundles of ceremonial food which pass from the members of one *suku* to corresponding positions in another *suku*. In later exchanges there is a reciprocal flow of the cloths and food. After each of these ceremonies all of the textiles are returned to their original owner. It is not clear whether returning the cloths is a current day response to the scarcity of the cloths or whether this was always the custom. Whichever, it is clear that in this capacity the *tampan* are the visible expressions of the interlocking relationships between families and *suku* established at transition periods.

On other occasions the gift of a *tampan* serves as symbolic evidence of a completed state of transition. This seems to be the implication of two different customs. One of these is found among the Serawai, a small group of people living near Manna on the Sumatran west coast. In this area they tie a *tampan* and flowers to a spear which is used throughout the wedding ceremony. The groom carries this for the symbolic slaughter of the festival buffalo and then plants it in the ground behind the bride as she sits in state to be viewed by all the guests. Later, after the actual killing of the animal, the *tampan* from the spear is included in the gift of meat given by the groom to the bride's family. The *tampan*, flower and spear are a tree-of-life which is ritually destroyed by removal of the *tampan*. This cloth then serves as evidence to the bride's family of the completed transition. The Paminggir custom associated with true elopement may have a similar significance at its base. In many areas of the south a young man who elopes with a girl must leave a *tampan* in her parent's home. This is not returned today. Within the Indonesian context, textiles do not usually constitute gifts given by a groom, for within the dualistic pattern found in the archipelago, cloth appears as female goods. Therefore, the

significance of the *tampan* left behind by the man must be its symbolic value as a sign of completed transition.

Many of the other ways *tampan* functioned may be obscured by the changes which arose because of the lack of a continuing supply of these textiles. For example, because textiles serve as a principal female gift in the exchange of goods normally associated with marriage in Indonesia, it is justifiable to suppose *tampan* formed a part of the bride's dowry in South Sumatra. However, this cannot be established with certainty today. Large numbers of *tampan*-wrapped food bundles are exchanged between the bride's and the groom's families and the former's family is always expected to contribute slightly more bundles in the exchange. Today this excess is only four to six textiles—hardly a significant number when considering traditional bridal gifts. If large quantities were at one time given to the groom's family this practice is not remembered. Now the exchanges and actual giving of *tampan* tends largely to be symbolic of the interlocking relationship between two families and their respective *suku*, rather than in the realm of material wealth.

Why manufacture of these textiles ceased remains a mystery, but some series of events ended weaving in this region within the first quarter of this century. The cloths that remain in use stem from that time and are not being replaced by small squares of imported cloth which could easily fulfill the physical requirement in the services these textiles perform. It therefore seems that the ceremonial validity of the form category itself exists within the traditions surrounding these particular textiles—their history and manufacture.

Technical features

The cloths themselves are the sole evidence remaining concerning their production. They show the dominant materials are cotton and silk which were both raised and processed in South Sumatra at one time. In addition many of the long cloths have metal wrapped threads, flat foil strips and a few *tampan* show small mirrored glass disks sewn to the surface. These supplementary materials were surely imported, and some portion of the silk was also probably gained from outside the region, for silk was a trade commodity from Palembang throughout the southern area.

The designs are executed by continuous and discontinuous supplementary wefts on a plain weave foundation. As the name implies, a supplementary weft is an additional weft element inserted between two of the regular foundation wefts. Continuous supplementary wefts extend from selvage to selvage across the entire width of the cloth. The yarn floats

on the obverse or intercrosses the foundation to float on the reverse face of the cloth. The two faces, therefore, have the same pattern, but in reverse. Discontinuous supplementary wefts are limited to discrete pattern areas only and do not extend from one selvage to another. These two forms of supplementary weft occur individually or coincidentally on a single cloth in cotton, silk or metallic yarn. The plain weave foundation, however, utilizes only unbleached cotton yarns.

We can speculate about the major dyes, using information contained in old reports which make reference to the materials used in the manufacture of women's sarongs in this area. These were very probably also used for the ship cloth fibers as well. From peoples along the west coast mention is made of *sepang* (*Caesalpinia sappan*), *mengkudu* roots (*Morinda citrifolia*), and tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*) for red-brown, tumeric (*Curcuma domestica*) and tamarind for yellow, and indigo (*Indigofera* spp.) and lime to form blue [Hille 1894, p. 178]. Near Lampong Bay old reports say yarns were first soaked in a solution prepared from *njari* leaves, *bungur* bark (*Lagerstrumia floribunda*) and *djali* bark. After drying, further mixtures were applied for specific colors—a mixture of black clay and water for black, a preparation of *sepang* for red, and one of *terung* leaves (*Solanum melongena*) for yellow [Jasper 1912, p. 67]. Dyers in this southern area also used annatto (*Bixa orellana*) to obtain yellow. Yarns were boiled in a solution of scrapings of annatto and lye. After rinsing and drying, the fibers were dyed with *sepang* and alum [Buhler 1948, p. 2500].

The cloths give evidence of at least two different methods of yellow dyeing. In some textiles this dye, apparently tumeric, is extremely fugitive and in only a few seconds of handling stains the hands. Other yellow yarns do not produce this result and may have been dyed using annatto. Professor Alfred Buhler, a Swiss expert in the textiles and dyes of Indonesia, suggests the fast yellow in the ship cloths may also result from *Cudrania javanensis* used with an alum mordant (personal communication).

Evidence also indicates different types of red dyeing were practiced. The report from the west coast listed *mengkudu* which contains alizarin needed for Turkey Red dyeing. This elaborate process, known elsewhere in Indonesia, would mean the cotton yarns must be tanned, oiled, and treated with a mordant. In contrast, the ingredients mentioned by Jasper from the south coast indicate a simple mordant dye was also used to obtain the red and red-brown colors found in South Sumatran textiles. Professor Buhler also points out that the lac dye (*ambalau*), used elsewhere in Sumatra, may have been employed for the bright red in some silk yarns.

Knowledge concerning the details of indigo dyeing from this area is too brief to allow any extensive supposition. The deep shades of blue characteristic of most examples, however, suggest many repeated dippings were involved.

Once dyed, the yarns were probably stretched on a simple back tension loom. From the early reports of the looms in this region, we may also conclude the loom employed a noncontinuous or noncircular warp. In this type of loom the ends of the warp threads are firmly attached to a stick and then wrapped around one beam (the warp beam) leaving a relatively short length of thread to be secured to another beam (the breast beam) which rides in front of the weaver. The weaver works sitting on the ground and as the cloth is woven, new lengths of warp are unwrapped from the warp beam and the finished cloth is rolled up on the breast beam. This beam has cords attached to the ends that lead to a belt of sheepskin. The leather fits into the small of the weaver's back, where she can press her weight against it to maintain proper tension on the warp. During the actual weaving the greatest length of the warp is wound on one of the two beams so that the weaver does not bear the total weight of all the yarns as she tries to maintain control of the tension. This allows a textile of theoretically any length, and an example of 408 centimeters exists in the Djakarta Museum (no. 23200).

The details of the loom remain open to question. The early literature suggests there were two heddles and a flat sword to beat each new weft. Other evidence argues a reed was used to maintain even spacing of the warp thread. These elements of which we are fairly confident would allow weaving the foundation structure, but to effect the designs, additional loom elements and painstaking work were required. Some device was needed to raise a particular combination of warp to allow the insertion of the supplementary wefts. The design evolves by slightly changing the length of floats of successive supplementary wefts. However, to do this, the weaver must raise a new combination of warp threads. In this laborious manner each curve and angle of the design was created. Precisely how these combinations of warp threads were raised is not known. A device similar to the heddle could have been used. This would have required a separate stick with hoops of string for each combination of warp yarns. Or, as Miss Rita Bolland of the Tropical Institute in Amsterdam suggests, the weaver could have picked out each warp combination with a thin stick or slat. After inserting the supplementary weft, this stick could be pushed to the top of the warp where it would not interfere with further weaving. In this way a particular shed or combination of warp threads could be "stored." By saving each pattern stick in this manner, when the design was finished the weaver could begin reusing the stored pattern sticks to

create the design once again, only this time the design would appear upside down because the weaver would have to use the sticks in reverse sequence. Certain cloths which show an exact inverted repeat in the pattern certainly support Miss Boland's theory—or possibly a combination of these two different patterning devices.

The use of the discontinuous or continuous supplementary wefts, while similar, has varying effects on the design details. With the latter, only one color is used to create all of the designs affected by a single weft. More than one color may appear when this form is used, but these are successive weft bands. The added possibilities of the use of discontinuous supplementary wefts are obvious. Different colors may be used adjacent to one another to build many discrete design elements. Most *palepai* use the discontinuous supplementary weft in the major design field and continuous wefts in the lateral borders. *Tampan* may employ both means, but the small cloths which utilize discontinuous supplementary wefts seems to appear only along the south coast, in the area where *palepai* are made. Common to other areas, as well as the south, are *tampan* having a continuous supplementary weft.

What might have been a limitation in these methods of designing was used to add to the beauty and style of the textiles. Because of practical factors such as snagging, the supplementary yarn may never float free of the foundation cloths for too great a distance on either face of the cloth. Therefore, to create the bold major design elements the yarn is periodically secured or anchored by a small area of the foundation fabric, then allowed to continue floating. As a result, a small portion of the foundation shows within the major design, and by careful organization, the weaver may pattern the large form using these areas. Intricate ribbing, cross-hatching and dotting may result as an examination of the details will show in figures 7 and 9.

To a degree, the use of the supplementary wefts may have contributed to the bilateral symmetrical organization of the design composition that prevails in the majority of these textiles. Once the combination of warp threads to be raised for one half of the weft dimension is determined, repeating the count inversely for the second half is a simpler matter. This could give rise to both individual elements that are bilaterally symmetrical and to entire compositions with this arrangement. By combining this bilateral aspect with the practice of reusing the pattern sticks, identical mirror image quarters result. These technical features which could abet the symmetrical character of the *tampan* would not apply in the weaving of the long cloths. However, the same preference for bilaterally symmetrical compositions exists in the *palepai*.

The increased work and complexity of organizing the compositions on the long cloths is enormous. All of the compositions must be turned ninety degrees to be properly oriented in relation to the warp direction. In this orientation each weft extends from the top to the bottom of the composition, not from side to side as in the small cloths. Therefore the technical advantage of having bilaterally symmetrical forms and composition in the correctly oriented finished textile are lost to the weaving process. Yet the same formal elements of composition are maintained and there is no diminution in detailed execution. Indeed, the use of the discontinuous supplementary weft allowed greater enunciation of specific design elements.

There are other features, not common to all the textiles, that indicate attention to detail was highly prized. In some textiles the design borders at the warp ends may be elaborately twined or, in one example, worked in a slit tapestry method. Also, embroidery was used to embellish design details after the weaving was complete, and flat foil strips were frequently tacked to the surface of the cloths to lend glittering highlights to the contours of the major designs. These techniques serve in a minor capacity, never usurping the major patterning function of the supplementary wefts.

So few of these cloths exist in South Sumatra today that local people cannot define which textiles are more aesthetically or ritually pleasing. Other factors now far outweigh such consideration. However, the technical qualities of the cloths themselves demonstrate that labor intensive features and meticulous attention to detail were important elements of the cloths that very probably were major considerations of aesthetic and ritual worth.

Design and Composition

Initially the design elements and their arrangements awe the viewer with their variety and range. However, there are a limited number of basic compositions and, in the long cloths in particular, there are unique design features that allow separation of these textiles into four discrete classes or groups.

In one group of *palepai*, as in figure 1, a single large blue ship stretches the entire length of the cloth. The ship has a trifurcated bow and stern and commonly carries angular tree forms and an architectural structure containing people. In some examples the large blue ship may carry smaller boats with an animal and rider, flag poles or a variety of tree forms. Also unique to this type of cloth are houses with bifurcated projections from the sides of the structure. It is probable that this detail

is in imitation of similar ornamentation appearing on old-style houses still in use in the interior region. These homes have two wooden projections—similar to a bifurcated bow of a ship—set at right angles at the four corners of the house. The textile feature is, therefore, not a mere decoration, but an attempt to portray, or signify, an actual house. This building does not appear on all textiles with a single blue ship, but it never appears in any other type of ship cloth.

A second group of *palepai* has two large red ship forms dominating the textile as in figure 2. Normally, each of these major forms carries three buildings which may be crowded with animal and human forms. Flag poles, banners, small ships, birds and human figures fill the space above the buildings. In the hold of the ship may appear more human or animal forms. Medallion-like designs mark the hull and, in most examples, hooks or scrolls emerge from the bottom of the keel. A few textiles belonging to this group show a single red ship flanked by trees. In all details other than these, however, the textiles with a single red ship belong to this grouping.

The third *palepai* group has two or three parallel rows of stylized human forms as in figure 3. A detail of the design element in figure 3a reveals its ambiguous character. None of the renderings reveal the meaning of the angular headgear or the scrolls flanking the spinal column. In a common variation in this group of *palepai* a row of these stylized figures appears above and below a central band carrying small angular ships containing an animal and rider. The organization into horizontal rows and the specific human rendering define these textiles as a unique group.

The final group of long cloths has four or more discrete design panels. These *palepai*, as in figure 4, may be one continuous textile or a series of cloth panels sewn together at their selvages. The panels of a single *palepai* usually contain the same composition, although the subject of these may vary widely among the textiles in this group. Some examples show tiers of superimposed boats carrying human forms, or only angular tree forms may fill the entire panel. Another cloth has a large building containing human and animal forms set in a small red ship. There are many design elements and compositions in this group of textiles, but no factor other than the panel format is ubiquitous to them all [2].

Tampan do not lend themselves to such discrete classification. The much greater number of these small cloths involved many more weavers having a broad range in skills and variable understanding of the designs. This gave rise to many mutations in design elements and compositions which superficially suggest many unique examples. However, a survey of over three hundred of these textiles indicates that in the cloths containing

representational elements there are approximately 25 to 30 distinctly different compositions.

These *tampan* compositions range from the very simple to extremely complex. Figure 5 illustrates one of the latter which is an assemblage of many interlocking elements. A simplified sketch in figure 5a delineates the major forms. Two confronting stylized animals carry on their backs a human figure in a diamond-shaped structure. Along the base line other humans appear in hut forms. On the cloth there are many additional details. A structure with a conical roof appears to hold four figures on the extreme left and right of the cloth. Further toward the selvage appear two men, one in a boat. In the center between the animal heads is another structure with two human forms. To the left and right of this appear small animals and additional human figures.

The major forms sketched in figure 5a are the basic elements which reappear in a group of closely related *tampan*. However, imprecise rendering of elements makes it impossible to understand the composition when the cloths are viewed in isolation. In one example, the angles defining the heads and tails of the confronting animals have been omitted. In another cloth, figure 6, the animals have only three legs, the heads are omitted and only an angular neck and upright tail that extend to the top of the cloth suggest the original form. Other textiles show even more bizarre misreadings of the original forms. Only by placing all of these textiles in juxtaposition to one another and to the one intelligible composition can we read the elements they all have in common. This is true for most of the compositional groups.

In examining *tampan* in South Sumatra and grouping these examples into their proper compositional alignment more information can be gleaned concerning the small textiles. A specific *tampan* design was not the speciality or property of one family or extended family grouping. Textiles belonging to the same compositional group occur on the south coast, in the mountains of the interior and on the west coast. The groupings also show technique was not a crucial factor linked with a given composition. Either continuous or discontinuous supplementary wefts are used to execute similar compositions. Nor does a particular color remain constant for either specific details or a cloth as a whole. Red-brown, blue or yellow seem to be interchangeable.

Surveying many *tampan* also reveals consistent conventions were employed to distinguish particular forms. Some of these conventions are familiar enough that the identity is clear as in figure 7. The upraised tail feathers ending in diamond shapes as well as the clearly defined crest feathers very probably identify this as a peacock. This rendering of the

tail feathers is used in many *tampan* to distinguish this particular species from other avian design elements which abound in the cloths.

Other conventions demand more speculation. A similar bird figure repeated many times appears on *tampan* from the south coast, the interior and west coast areas. In these textiles, as in figure 8, the simple profile configuration of a bird with arched neck and tail curving over the back is elaborated with two lateral hooks or scrolls dependent from the lower part of the figure. All other features that might help identify this form are lacking in these small figures. However, in a *tampan* of another compositional group, figure 9, the lateral scrolls appear on a large figure that has greater detail. This representation includes an enlarged curved protuberance at the base of the bill which helps to identify this as a representative of the hornbill family, *Bucerotidae*. It is probable that the small bird figures with these same lateral scrolls are also hornbill birds and that the scroll convention was sufficient to establish the identify of the animal.

Certain design elements in the cloths display features which are clearly intrusive. These include occasional rendering of the human form in styles recalling the *wajang* or shadow puppet figures found on Java. Figure 10 illustrates this influence in the profile attitude of the head, frontal square shoulders, attenuated torso, bent arms and costume details—all features common to the puppets.

The greater costume elaboration of these forms in figure 10 allows a more thorough definition of the figures within the composition. Those in the upper row of the ship wear the Javanese court cloths, the *dodot*, characterized in the puppets by the low bustle. Not only the manner in which they wear the cloth, but also the *kris*—a dagger—tucked in the waistband identifies these as men. Because of the variation in costume and the absence of *kris*, the figures in the center row are of a different class or sex. Certainly one of the figures within the house identified by long hair is female, probably an unmarried girl, for after marriage women bind their hair in a knot close to the head. In the lowest row, two figures ride on horses which seem to be led by men who also wear *kris*. The riders wear the men's *dodot*, but have no weapons. This may mean that the men are dead, for *kris* are not buried with the owner, or that the unidentifiable objects in their hands are replacements for the weapon and may be symbols of rank.

Such added detail exacerbates the frustration of not being able to understand the significance of the composition. There is no way to determine the meaning nor whether the source for this highly vocal rendering is ultimately Javanese or South Sumatran. This cloth is not unique in its

narrative implication for there are other *tampan* with *wajang* style figures arranged in different tableau-like settings and these, too, defy analysis.

The *tampan* illustrated in figures 5 to 10 are a small sample of the types of compositions containing representational forms occurring in the small cloths. This type of *tampan* constitutes approximately fifty percent of a sample of over three hundred of these cloths. The remaining textiles are patterned with floral or geometric designs. Figures 11 and 12 represent complex examples of these. The former features an interlocking knot design, and the latter a schematic floral pattern. There are many other textiles in this design classification which have simpler design features. For example diamond forms, interlocking hooks or scrolls, gyronny patterns and a few widely spaced bands of geometric shapes.

Rules of symmetry are the only formal design principles evident in a majority of the ship cloths. This is true for both individual design elements and compositions as a whole. With a few exceptions such as the intrusive *wajang* elements, human figures tend to be rendered frontally and are bilaterally symmetrical. Almost all architectural and plant forms are internally bilaterally symmetrical. Though most animals appear in profile they conform to the idea of symmetry because two of the figures are generally placed to confront a common object. The mirror image thus creates a bilaterally symmetrical composition. In a majority of the examples these individual elements are arranged in a symmetrical fashion no matter how the surface of the cloth is divided. When a single design field exists, as in figure 5, the elements are repeated on each side of a central vertical axis. When three horizontal zones divide a *tampan*, as in figure 7, the elements are usually placed in a symmetrical manner within the zones. Other than symmetry there are no formal features common to any great number of these cloths. Not even such details as borders are consistent in the textiles. Some *tampan*, as figures 5 and 6, are broadly framed with rows of dentates, scrolls and other border patterns that may occupy half of the cloth surface. Others, as figure 9, have virtually no elaboration at the extremities.

Considering the striking character of the ship cloths, few were collected by museums before the 1930's. Then it was mostly European interests that sought out these textiles and not American, so that very few of the cloths exist in United States collections. The most important holdings occur in the Tropical Institute in Amsterdam, the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden, the Museum voor Land- en Volkenkunde in Rotterdam, the Museum für Volkerkunde in Basel and the Jakarta Central Museum in Indonesia. In 1971 and 1972 many of the textiles appeared on the market in Jakarta and most were purchased by private individuals. Hopefully these will eventually find their way into museum collections for there

are only approximately 1,000 to 1,500 of the ship cloths in existence today, and these deserve to be preserved as evidence of a rich artistic tradition that once existed in South Sumatra.

NOTES

- [1] South Sumatrans said *palepai* referred to a ship and *sesai balak* meant "big wall."
- [2] The differences among the *palepai* groups are not arbitrary variations, but a well defined system whose parameters we can only partially discern. Elsewhere [Gittinger 1972] I have shown that the cloths of the first two groups are complementary parts of a dualistic pattern. This analysis was made possible by illustrating that the original red ship configuration was in reality the frontal rendering of a bird.



Figure 1. *Palepai* (277 cm x 54 cm). A large blue ship supports smaller boats carrying an animal and rider. A second human form appears in front of the animal. In the center of the ship are three stylized forms which may be trees. The rather sharp vertical line in the hull is the result of two different shades of blue which were used to complete the cloth. The variations in this class of *palepai* are in the forms carried within the large blue ship. Often these include a house with bifurcated projections from the walls. They all share the large blue ship with its angular trifurcated bow and stern projections. Author's collection.

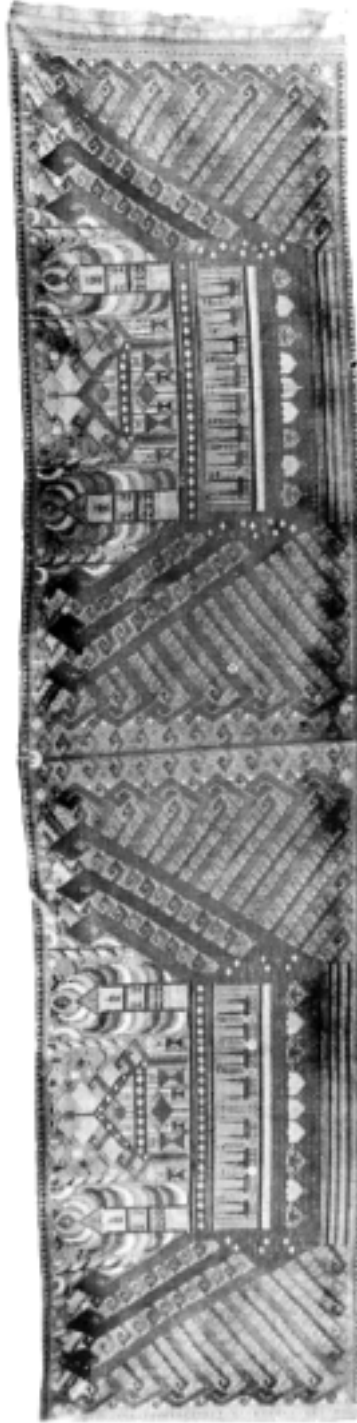


Figure 2. *Palepai* (330 cm x 72 cm). Two major red ship forms provided the matrix for similar detailed compositions. On the deck are three buildings filled with human figures while other figures hold banners between these structures. The walls and roofs are ornamented with curved, horn-like projections and the space above is filled with birds and unidentifiable forms. Within the hold of the ships appear stylized animals. The two red ships which help define this class are reduced to one in a few examples. Jakarta Central Museum, Indonesia, No. 20995.

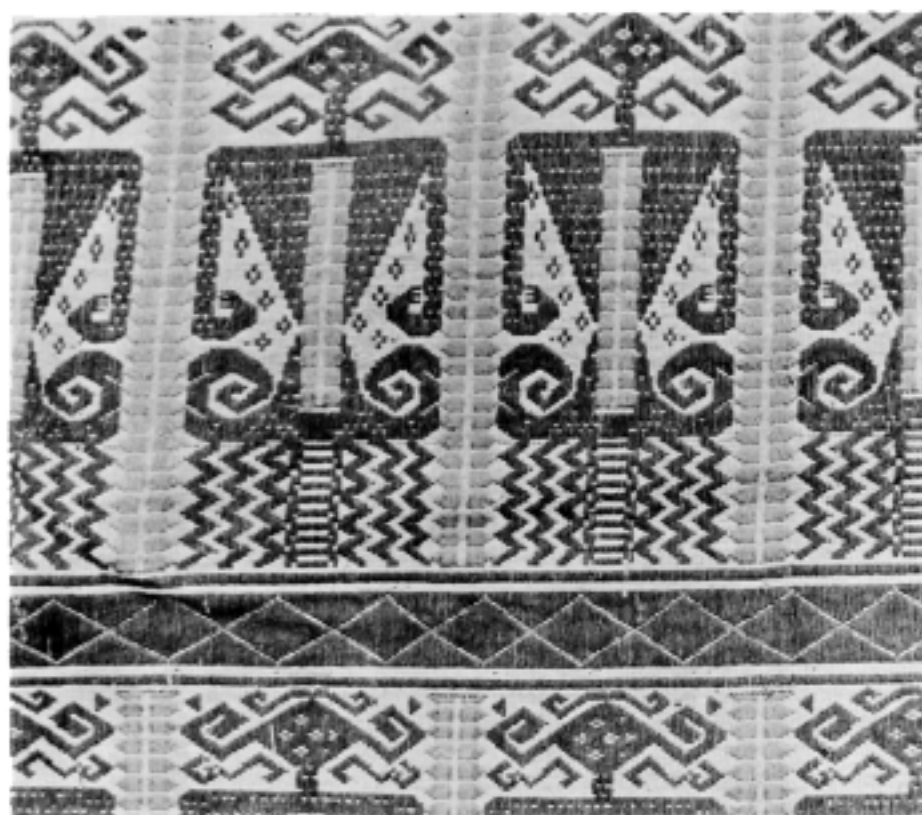
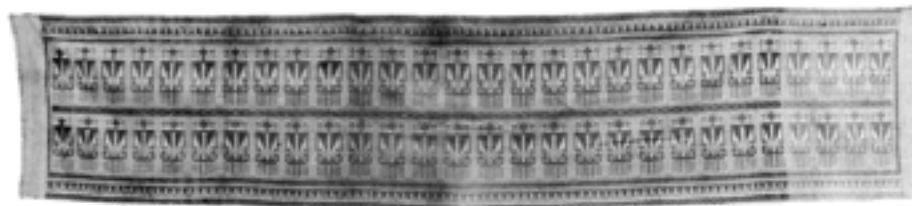


Figure 3 and 3a. *Palepai* (301 cm x 63.5 cm). Variations exist of this type of cloth but all are related by the use of rows of these particular stylized human forms. This textile utilizes only two rows but other examples may have a central third row of human figures or small boats carrying an animal and rider. Jakarta Central Museum, Indonesia, No. 20994.



Figure 4. *Palepai* (277 cm x 60 cm). In this exceptionally well crafted textile four panels each carry a similar design. This is a small red ship carrying a tree having broad angular limbs. Different elements flank the base of the trees. In one case these are horses each carrying two figures. The second panel has elephant figures in the flanking position while two of the panels show human figures near the base of the tree. These panels exist on a common warp but are zoned into panel segments by the use of narrow vertical tree forms. Originally all the major contours of the large design elements were outlined with metal strips tacked to the surface of the cloth. Now only a few remaining pieces add glittering highlights to the cloth. Cloths of this classification all have the panel format though their designs may vary widely from the example given. Author's collection.



Figure 5

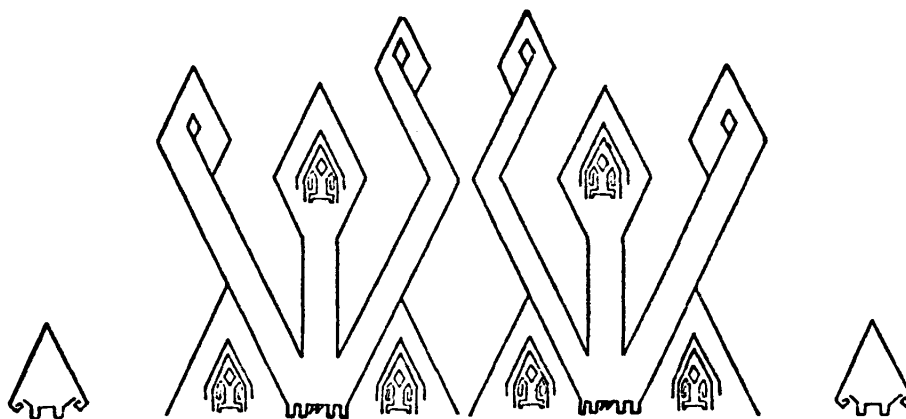


Figure 5a

Figure 5 and 5a. *Tampan* (62 cm x 62 cm). This extremely intricate composition permits the accurate reading of many textile designs which are related but executed with insufficient skill or understanding of the design. The sketch in figure 5a delineates the major features of the cloth which are two confronting animals carrying human figures and other human forms in conical huts on the base line. This cloth was collected by 1886 and is one of the oldest in Western collections. Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden, No. 575-19.



Figure 6. *Tampan* (65 cm x 53 cm). This composition derives from a source similar to that in figure 5. Now the animals have three small feet, only the bend of the neck remains and the tail and neck lines extend to the top of the cloth. By comparing many related textiles it is possible to understand the composition of these drastically altered forms. Tropical Institute, Amsterdam, No. 2125-21.



Figure 7. *Tampun* (65 cm x 70 cm). The birds that confront one another in the small boats are peacocks which may be identified by their circular-tipped tail feathers. Tropical Institute, Amsterdam, No. 2125-47.



Figure 8. *Tampan*. Parallel rows of blue bird figures pattern the surface of this cloth. The characteristic lateral hooks on this form may indicate the bird is the same genus as in figure 9. Author's photograph from Padang Ratu near Semangka Bay.

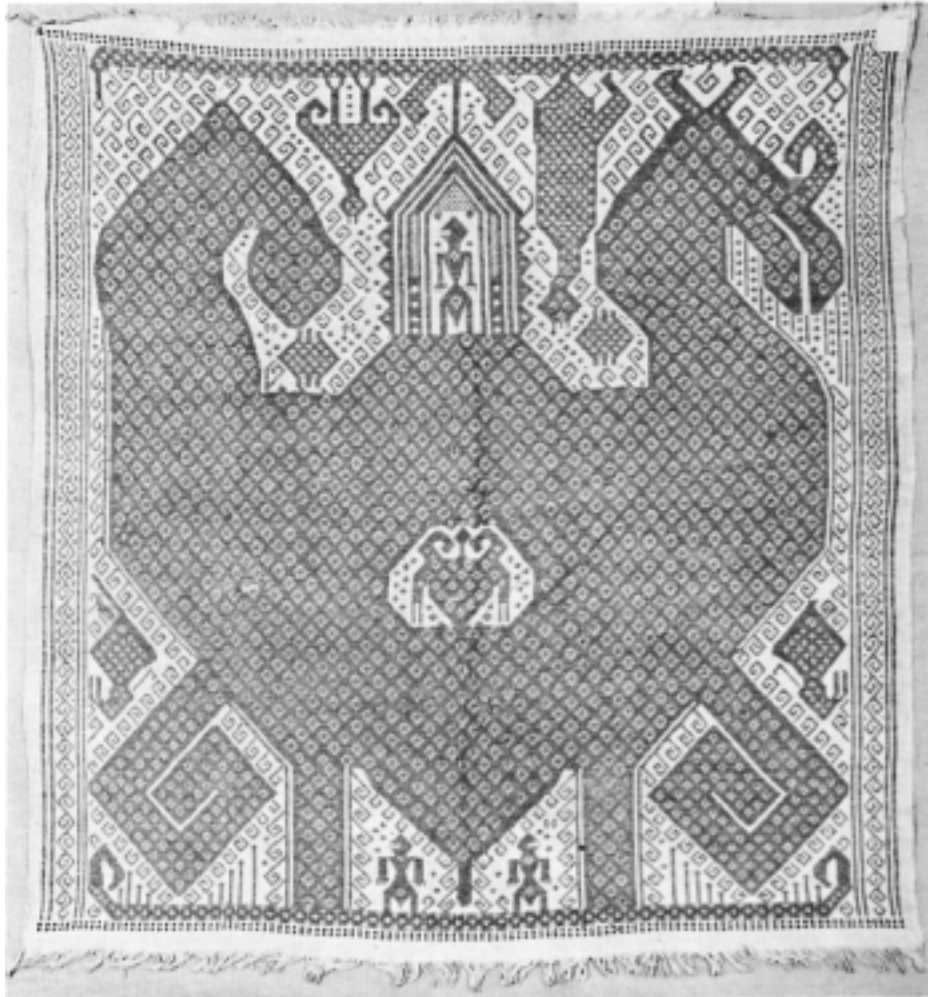


Figure 9. *Tampan* (73 cm x 67 cm). The large reddish-brown bird which dominates this textile is very probably a member of the hornbill family, *Bucerotidae*. This is suggested by the enlarged curved protuberance at the base of the bill which is common to this genus. Museum voor Land-en Volkenkunde, Rotterdam, No. 41452.

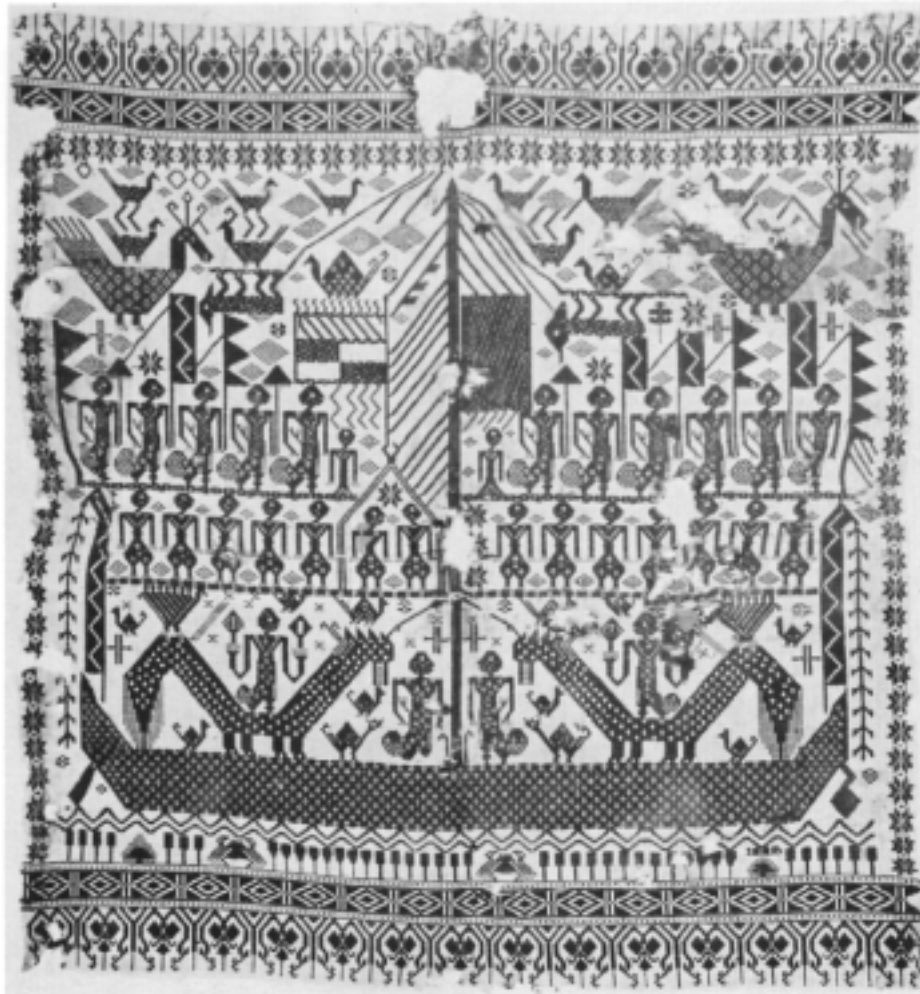


Figure 10. *Tampan* (80 cm x 74 cm). Though pocked with holes, the intricacy of the composition of this *tampan* is still apparent. The human figures are rendered in a manner similar to the Javanese puppets suggesting the adaption of forms from that neighboring island. The figures on the ship deck and those in the upper row may be identified as men because they wear the men's *dodot*, the Javanese court dress, and have *kris* at their waist. The composition is worked in a finely spun brown thread. Tropical Institute, Amsterdam, No. 2125-25.

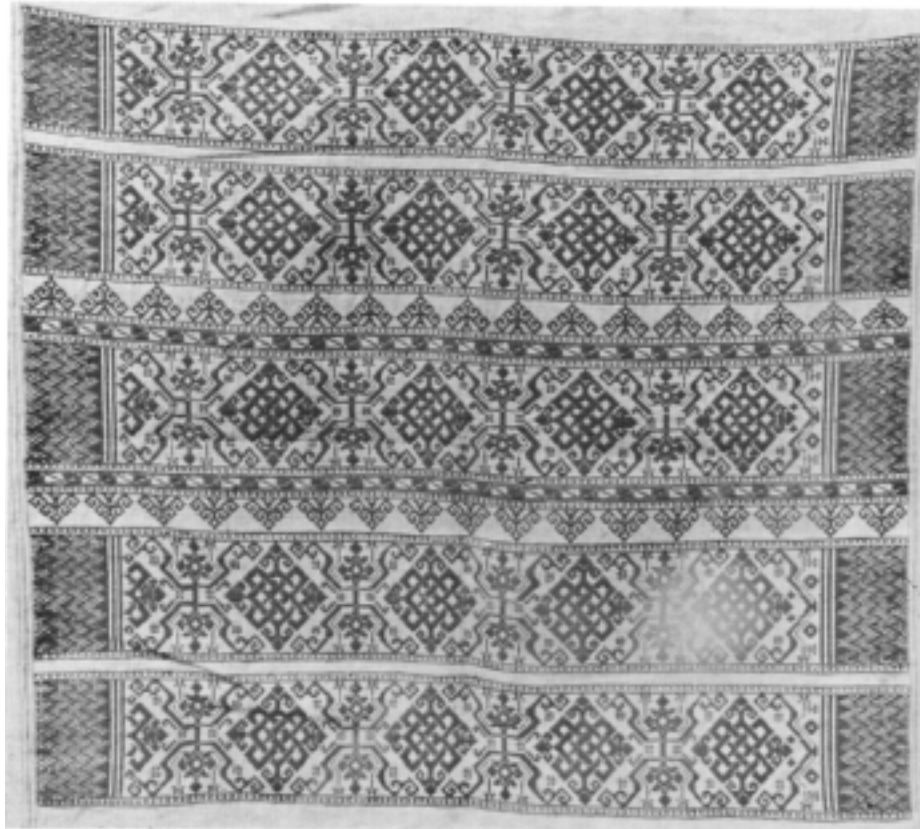


Figure 11. *Tampun* (73.5 cm x 70 cm). This design of interlocking knots is a very unusual pattern which has been executed with supreme skill. This motif also occurs on metal work in Sumatra and may have been copied from that medium. Jakarta Central Museum, Indonesia, No. 26362.



Figure 12. *Tampun* (63 cm x 60 cm). Stylized floral forms are used to pattern the textile surface. The use of a repeated design and the continuous supplementary weft make the reverse face of the textile as acceptable as the obverse face. Tropical Institute, Amsterdam, No. 1334-11.

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