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TEXTILES IN INDIAN OCEAN SOCIETIES

edited by Ruth Barnes

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Textiles in Indian Ocean Societies

This book concentrates on textiles as a major commodity, and primary indicator of status, wealth and identity in Indian Ocean regions. Lavishly illustrated, it represents invaluable, and entirely new research.

Textiles in Indian Ocean Societies considers the importance of trade, and the transformation of the meaning of objects as they move between different cultures. It also addresses issues of gender, ethnic and religious identity, and economic status. The book covers a broad geographic range from East Africa to South-East Asia, and references a number of disciplines such as anthropology, art history and history.

This volume is timely, as both the social sciences and historical studies have developed a new interest in material culture. Edited by a foremost expert in the subject, it will add considerably to our understanding of historical and current societies in the Indian Ocean region.

Ruth Barnes works at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford University. Her many previous publications include *Dress and Gender: making and meaning in cultural contexts* (co-editor); *The Ikat Textiles of Lamalera: a study of an eastern Indonesian weaving tradition*; *Indian Block-Printed Textiles in Egypt*; and *Weaving Patterns of Life*.

RoutledgeCurzon Indian Ocean Series

Editors: David Parkin and Ruth Barnes

University of Oxford

There is a need to understand the Indian Ocean area as a cultural complex which should be analysed beyond the geographical divisions of Africa, the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, and South-East Asia, as its coastal populations have intermingled constantly. The movement of people, goods and technology make it imperative that spatial concepts and the role of material culture be central in the study of the region by archaeologists, historians, ethnographers and anthropologists.

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Textiles in Indian Ocean Societies

Edited by Ruth Barnes



Frontispiece Block-printed and painted cotton textile from India's Coromandel Coast is kept as a family heirloom in Eastern Indonesia, along with shell and ivory bracelets; the ivory is from East African or Indian elephant tusks. Lamalera, Lembata. *Photograph:* Ruth Barnes (1982).

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Preface

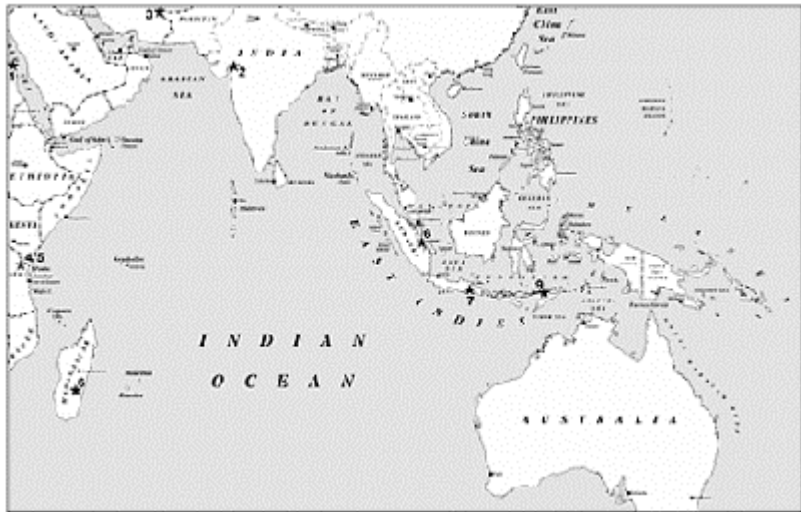
The volume presented here has its origin in a workshop entitled 'Textiles in the Indian Ocean' held at St Antony's College, Oxford, in March 1999. This meeting was the third in a series on 'The Indian Ocean: trans-regional creation of societies and cultures', convened by David Parkin and myself. Each workshop investigates a topic that seems of particular relevance to societies in the wider Indian Ocean region, from East Africa to the Persian Gulf, and from India to South-East Asia. Contributors have come from a variety of disciplines; on this occasion we had anthropologists, archaeologists, historians, and art historians present, both as speakers and as discussants.

Textiles have been a major commodity in Indian Ocean societies from early historical times onwards to the present, both as trade items and as local products. This was realised by the first Europeans when they arrived in the region around AD1500, in search of spices and aromatics and with the desire to dominate this lucrative trade. They discovered that textiles were the predominant item of exchange, taking the role of an international currency. Without a stake in the trade in textiles, one did not have access to the markets of Asia. They entered a region that was extremely cloth-conscious. Textiles were a major distributor of artistic design. They also were a means of defining a person's status and gender, a role they continue to play. Then and now the great demand for cloth can only be explained by understanding the importance of textiles in local societies. The workshop convened attempted to make a contribution to this particular issue.

In addition to papers given at the time, two articles were written especially for this volume (Steven Cohen's and my own). Not all presentations were available for publication, but we gratefully acknowledge the contributions made by Mattiebel Gittinger, John Guy, and Nandita Khadria. Their participation in the workshop was most valuable. The conveners also want to thank the British Academy for a travel grant which covered travel costs for Himanshu Ray and Nadita Khadria. The Asian Studies Centre at St Antony's College provided much appreciated hospitality, and we thank Dr Steven Tsang for the support he gave us. Gina Burrows from the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology was responsible for much of the organisation of rooms, accommodation, and travel details, and she had to solve many last-minute problems. She also took on the final preparation of the manuscript (assisted by Nadine Beckmann), including the collation of bibliographical entries, for which I am deeply grateful.

Ruth Barnes

Ashmolean Museum



Map of the Indian Ocean region

Note: Regions are numbered in relation to which chapter features them

Introduction

Ruth Barnes

Weaving is one of the oldest technologies, in many places predating pottery and certainly preceding metallurgy. The processing and manipulation of fibres for weaving purposes was developed in Asia and the Near East at some time between 7000 BC and 6000 BC, with archaeological evidence for the use of both horizontal and vertical looms dated prior to 6000 BC.¹ While the function of textiles may initially have been protection against the elements, it soon acquired a social dimension. As we can see in the elaborate forms of burial dress from Ancient Egypt, Central Asia, and North-Eastern China, textiles were used as a primary indicator of status, wealth, and ethnic or gender identity in human societies. Writers of Mediterranean antiquity already mentioned that there was considerable demand for the exotic silks of China and the fine cotton muslin of India. Textiles are fragile, though, and only survive under certain conditions; the dry climates of, for example, Egypt and Central Asia, have preserved numerous ancient fabrics. For the cultures of the Indian Ocean littoral there is little primary evidence that predates the Christian era, although small fragments of cotton fibres have been found at the Harappan site of Mohenjo Daro.²

Once historical documents can be referred to it becomes clear that textiles were a major commodity transmitted between Indian Ocean societies. Both indigenous and traded fabrics had a significant cultural role, from East Africa to Indonesia, and from Arabia to Sri Lanka. While this has been recognised in the past and is often mentioned in passing by historians of the Indian Ocean, so far no single volume has actually followed up on this particular topic, or considered the question of why textiles are given such importance. This collection of essays attempts to redress this issue and therefore considers the role of textiles in various societies with direct contact to the Indian Ocean. Before exploring some of the issues set out in this publication, though, the non-specialist in Indian Ocean studies may find it helpful to be referred to a small number of general works.

Scholars have emphasised in the past that this particular maritime environment—like the Mediterranean — is a sea that connects rather than separates different cultures. The scholarship on the subject is vast, of course, and it has involved historians of classical antiquity, India, the medieval Islamic world, and of Europe's involvement with Asia after 1500, with some excursions necessary to draw on Chinese sources, as well. For background to the history of Indian Ocean studies, Chaudhuri (1985) provides an accessible introduction. He attempts to analyse the history of Indian Ocean societies in the spirit of Fernand Braudel's *longue durée*, as the latter applied it to the Mediterranean with an emphasis on geographical and cultural spheres, rather than a historical understanding primarily determined by political and economic alliances.³ It is tempting to see the Indian Ocean in this light, and to draw out the often astonishingly close relations that have existed over vast geographical distances. But the emphasis on unity can also

distract from the diversity explicit in local political and economic histories, as well as ethnographic accounts. A balance has to be found between the two. D.S. Richards's edited volume *Islam and the Trade of Asia* was published more than thirty years ago (1970), but still is a good introduction to the issues that concern scholars working in different geographic and historical areas of the Indian Ocean. S.D. Goitein's publications (1963, 1967, 1971, 1978, 1983, 1988) on the eleventh- and twelfth-century Genizah papers from a synagogue in Old Cairo are very detailed and as a whole cannot be suggested as an introduction, but they do provide wonderfully humane insights into the life of communities connected with the western Indian Ocean. Several symposia held in the 1990s have contributed substantial publications to the study of Indian Ocean archaeology and history (Boussac and Salles 1995; Ray and Salles 1996; Ray 1999). Abu-Lughod (1989) attempts an ambitious account of the historical and economic links between the different geographic and cultural spheres of Asia, the Indian Ocean, and the Mediterranean prior to the rise of European dominance; for its extensive collection of sources alone, her book remains a key introduction.

Making textiles the focus of this volume means that it deals primarily with material culture. Our contributors come from a variety of disciplines: archaeology, anthropology, history, and art history. A few words on this interdisciplinary mixture may be useful. For many decades the study of objects was largely discredited in the social sciences, and in art history the focus was heavily weighed towards aesthetics and stylistic analysis, often with only minor attention given to social context. This meant that social historians and anthropologists on the one hand, and art historians on the other, had few interests in common. In the 1970s and early 1980s, however, a shift in attitude towards material culture occurred. I became aware of this change with the publication of Michael Baxandall's *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (1972), and the reading of Francis Haskell's *Patrons and Painters*, already published in 1963, but not available in an accessible paperback edition until 1971. Both studies had a formative influence on the art historical thinking of the time. They helped to move that discipline away from the vagueness of style analysis, which was still prominent then in Britain, towards an approach that once again made greater use of social history. This was by no means new to the subject, but represented a return to the interests of many of the founding scholars in art history, such as Erwin Panofsky, Johannes Wilde, Wilhelm Fraenger, and Aby Warburg. The field of art history, in its main stream of course an object-focused discipline, was now taking a new interest in the social role and significance of the material it studied.

In the social sciences, in particular in social anthropology, this approximately coincided with a rediscovery of the world of objects, long since out of fashion and relegated to the historical corner of the discipline and a period that had been preoccupied with evolution and migration theories. Appadurai's edited volume *The Social Life of Things* (1986) had perhaps the most striking impact, no doubt because it was published at a time when archaeologists and anthropologists were beginning to think again about the relationship between the making and using of artefacts, and the conceptual framework that this activity implies. At some time during the more than twenty years that passed between the publication of Andrew and Marilyn Strathern's *Self-Decoration in Mount Hagen* (1971) and Alfred Gell's *Wrapping in Images* (1993) it became intellectually interesting again for anthropologists to consider visual and material culture.

It is relevant for this publication that the shift also coincided with a new approach to textile studies and the investigation of textile history and production. Long dominated by either the study of technology, or the treatment of textiles as a minor part of art and economic history, the subject acquired a new 'social life' when scholars entered the field who had an interest in both art history and anthropology. In African studies, this was first apparent in Roy Sieber's exhibition catalogue *African Textiles and Decorative Arts* (1972) and Robert Thompson's *African Art in Motion* (1974), which was primarily a study of the dress of West African masquerades. For the Indian Ocean region, Bühler and Fischer's monumental study of *The Patola of Gujarat* (1979) was of foremost importance. Bühler's major interest had long been in the history, geographical distribution, and technology of resist dyeing, and he had pursued this investigation in a series of meticulous but to the non-specialist often heavy-going publications, the culmination of which was his three-volume study *Ikat Batik Plangi* (Bühler 1972). In *The Patola of Gujarat*, however, he and Fischer moved beyond technology and also investigated the social significance of a particular type of textile, the complexly patterned double-ikat silk *patola* made in North-West India. The *patola* were (and are) luxury cloths for the Indian markets, but they also have played an important international role. The publication therefore is a detailed investigation and account of local production and design, but it combines that with a look at the social role of *patola* textiles, not only in India, but once they were transmitted into a different cultural context. As Bühler had noticed when studying Indonesian ikat designs, *patola* were important as prestige textiles traded to South-East Asia in particular, and their designs had a major impact on many of the indigenous textiles (Bühler 1959). This study opened up the way for several in-depth investigations by others who took a close look at textiles and their functions in the maritime region.

No one did more towards establishing the field than Mattiebel Gittinger. Her publications *Splendid Symbols: textiles and tradition in Indonesia* (1979), *Master Dyers to the World* (1982), and *Textiles and the Tai Experience in South-East Asia* (Gittinger and Lefferts 1992) are evidence for the emergence of a scholarly discipline. They present three distinctly different aspects of Asian textiles in a scholarly manner: they introduce two South-East Asian traditions, as well as the cross-cultural significance of Indian textiles. Her work inspired a new research generation. The development of scholarship is perhaps most evident in the three symposia on Indonesian textiles, held at six-yearly intervals in Washington (1979), Cologne (1985), and Basel (1991). The proceedings record how over twelve years a new field evolved for the South-East Asian region, remarkable for its interdisciplinary nature, with anthropologists, historians, and art historians representing their subjects and finding it fruitful to expand their views through the medium of textiles.⁴ The progression of the field showed that 'the most compelling entry for any critical discussion of [dress and textiles] is through particular, fine-grained ethnographic... studies', to quote Nancy Lindisfarne-Tapper and Bruce Ingham from their introduction to *Languages of Dress in the Middle East* (1997). In the last decade, textiles and dress have been the focus of such detailed studies, many of them in edited volumes that look at specific topics, such as gender, status, personal and social power, and ethnic identity.⁵

Textiles and mobility

Why are textiles a particularly interesting subject of investigation for the Indian Ocean region? When discussing textiles in this maritime environment, it is their mobility that is particularly striking, as both Bühler and Gittinger demonstrated. Cloth is relatively light and highly portable – and, initially at least, not at all fragile – unlike ceramics and glass. Textiles have been a major trade item in the area, and the cloths of India have played a leading role in this. From the time of antiquity into the middle ages, the lightness of Indian cotton and the quality of Indian dyes were unique. This is taken up by the first two contributors to the volume. Himanshu Ray discusses the historical evidence for textile trade and its economic significance in India and societies around the Indian Ocean; in her survey she makes use of significant new dating of actual textiles surviving. She also examines the evidence for trade mechanisms, such as the role of the textile merchants as distinct from the producer. For the Indian market, as well as the international trade in Indian cloth, it is quite certain that the weaver or textile printer had no influence beyond the production. The distribution of cloth was turned over to the merchant. In the evidence available to her regarding the international trade, Himanshu Ray has found that dealers in cloth are not mentioned separately. Textiles were shipped as part of a group of staple commodities. John Peter Wild and Felicity Wild present primary archaeological evidence that complements this historical discussion. The fifth-century-AD cotton fragments discovered at Berenike, a harbour site on the Egyptian side of the Red Sea, are the earliest patterned textiles of definitely Indian origin so far recovered from an archaeological context, and they therefore are of foremost significance as evidence for the mobility of textile material. This short, but important paper therefore is given the honour of initiating the volume. The first-century-AD *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (Casson 1989) already refers to the trade in cotton fabrics from Gujarat, South-East India, and Bengal, but up to now we have not seen any of the actual textiles surviving from the Near-Eastern pre-Islamic period.⁶

Indian cotton textiles probably remained a major export article for close to two thousand years. There is a hiatus of several hundred years between the Berenike fragments and the next sequence of securely dated archaeological Indian textiles from Near-Eastern sources, but textual references of their trade to Baghdad during the ninth century suggest a continuity (Stillman 1986:737). The earliest substantial group of Indian textiles survived in Egypt, where they were traded to from parts of North-West India from the tenth century onwards.⁷ The Indian block-printed textiles were the original high-status fabrics in East Africa as late as the nineteenth century, and the *kanga* cloths discussed by David Parkin derived from them. Women in Zanzibar wear sarong-like cotton wrappers which are printed with homilies or witty statements; they are worn to express the wearer's emotional state and may comment on relationships with her husband and others in her household or immediate environment. The sayings can be used to communicate intimate feelings between a wife and her husband or lover, but they may also be used outside the house to invite other women, possibly rivals, to participate in competitive riddling, and can be used to provoke. The *kanga* sayings are not generally a statement on a woman's social position, and they are not worn primarily to emphasise her participation in the wider community. They contrast in this respect from the *kofia* caps discussed by Zulfikar Hirji in the second paper that offers material from Zanzibar. He

presents a finely detailed description and analysis of the making of the caps, their designs and marketing, and their meaning in a local context. These caps are made in Zanzibar and worn by Zanzibari males. However, they also are signs of an important international connection, worn by people going on the *hajj* to Mecca, and linking men with the origin of Zanzibar's ruling class in Oman. The *kofia* is both a local product and a link with the wider context of western Indian Ocean Islamic communities, especially those with close family ties in southern Arabia. Both the *kofia* cap and the *kanga* cloth are worn as a personal message, but while the man's cap is a statement about the wearer's standing in the community and may be used to emphasise geographically far-reaching connections, the woman's cloth, with its specific sayings, is intended as a message about her inner self, either temporary or long-term. It is interesting to note that the *kanga* apparently had its origin in imported Indian block-printed cotton cloth that was once a marker of high status, as well as an indicator of wide-ranging maritime contacts, but now has evolved into a local form of 'text on textiles'.

Exotic textiles and local practices

There is no doubt that patterned textiles have historically been a significant transmitter of design. Their portability, however, can also bring about misunderstanding about their origin. Here Steven Cohen's discussion of the so-called Portuguese carpets provides revealing information. These knotted carpets with seemingly exotic designs have been the subject of considerable discussion among scholars, both regarding their technical construction and their motifs, which combine certain conventional designs, typical for Iranian carpets of the seventeenth century, with figural representations that have their source in European imagery, and their origin of production. One might think they were made to suit European taste, as they are dated to a time when the Portuguese presence in the Persian Gulf was still prominent. But as Cohen shows, this is not likely to have been the case. Instead their representations of maritime scenes, with ships and the occasional mermaid or merman, were probably made for local use but using European illustrations as models, without always fully understanding the narrative meaning of the prototype, which would support the view that they were produced at some distance inland from the international setting of the Persian Gulf. A further argument about these carpets has concerned their provenance, with the debate mostly favouring an Iranian source, but the possibility of an Indian, specifically Gujarati, production being proposed by one of the most eminent carpet scholars. Steven Cohen addresses this issue and follows the history of argument, and then establishes that the carpets' likely place of origin was Khorasan in North-Eastern Iran. This is argued primarily on technical grounds; a careful study of technology can indeed reveal much about the place of origin of an object, which is particularly true for textiles produced in a complex technique. Although Cohen asserts that few people now believe the 'Portuguese' carpets to be of Indian origin, he sets out to explain why they indeed never could have been made in India: neither the technique of knotting nor the ply used for the warp match that of any carpet known to have come from a Gujarati workshop.

It is this close study of technology that must not be ignored when making historical connections. But an understanding of technology alone does not always provide

meaningful answers to anthropologists if it is not complemented by detailed ethnographic research. This is argued by Sarah Fee in her discussion of Malagasy textiles. The large island of Madagascar has a cultural history that has been affected by virtually all parts of the wider Indian Ocean. The Malagasy language is Austronesian, with the closest linguistic connection found in southern Borneo; apparently the settling of the island occurred by Indonesians at some time in the first millennium AD. Furthermore, loom technology and metal-working tools are closely connected to South-East Asia, as well, which indicates the movement of crafts people. There are even linguistic connections between Malagasy tools and their Indonesian counterparts. But these settlers also brought many influences from East Africa, so they seem to have moved to Madagascar from the continent's coast. Arabic culture had a major impact as well, as did contact with India. Yet the question of overseas origins now is only of limited importance to the people of Madagascar. Weaving can be a vital economic activity for women in the communities discussed by Fee, and it is connected to their sense of procreative power. But beyond such general associations that may have resonance in the interpretation of cloth in South-East Asia and elsewhere in Indian Ocean communities, the meaning of textiles is often not fixed. It can change from one occasion to the other; Sarah Fee makes a careful distinction and presents specific ethnographic situations.

Appropriation and assimilation

All three contributions discussing textiles from Indonesia elaborate on the Indian connection, although this is always combined with an emphasis on the indigenous response. The contact with India is only a facet in a locally more complex picture, regardless of whether this is assessed from a ninth-century Central Javanese perspective (Totton), from Jambi in south-eastern Sumatra in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Kerlogue), or from the eastern Indonesian view of the present (Barnes). As Mary-Louise Totton demonstrates for the use and representation of textiles at the Central Javanese temple complex at Prambanan, textile patterns that have their origin in distant cultures, in India and China, have been assimilated and may be represented in stone relief sculpture that adorns the most sacred ceremonial temple space. These designs indicate international connections and a cosmopolitan taste, but the integration into the Javanese temple's innermost chamber points to a complete assimilation into a religious system that is strongly indigenous in its interpretation of divinity, royalty, and ritual offerings, even when it makes use of South Asian cosmology and East Asian design.

For the textiles of Jambi in southern Sumatra, Fiona Kerlogue establishes first and foremost a relationship to, and distinction from, the batik production of Java. Many Jambi batik textiles, especially those with elaborate calligraphic inscriptions, were formerly given a North Javanese origin, as it was believed that virtually no Indonesian batik was produced outside of Java. Kerlogue has shown here and in other publications that this view has to be reassessed. It is still somewhat uncertain when batik was first developed in Jambi, and whether it was in fact originally an entirely Javanese introduction. An independent relationship with India, and possibly the observation of South Indian resist dye techniques, may also have been a contributing factor in developing the skill in southern Sumatra. A third factor addressed by Kerlogue is the strong local identification

with the internationalism of Islam, and the influence the *hajj* has had historically on local taste and the spread of non-indigenous techniques and materials. The use of metal thread embroidery and supplementary weft, for which the gold or silver thread was originally imported from India, the appreciation of foreign patterns and their adoption into local textile designs, and the proud display of these outside influences on prestige cloth, all emphasise, in Kerlogue's words, that 'in Jambi, the textiles refer as much to the world beyond as to features within Jambi society'.

The last chapter presents ethnographic research from Kedang in eastern Indonesia. It records the recent innovation of two types of cloth in an area formerly affected by a prohibition on weaving, and hence entirely dependent on the import of textiles, especially those needed for ceremonial purposes and therefore of high local status. The change from external to local production of prestigious cloth was largely brought about through the efforts of one individual, a woman who herself is a prolific weaver. In doing so, she tried to be sympathetic to Kedang's past, and she developed a new man's cloth which she considered appropriate for the taste of the community's ancestors. But she also initiated the local production of a woman's ceremonial cloth that was formerly made outside the region, decorated in a complex technique that has long been appreciated locally, but was foreign to Kedang.

Conclusion

All contributions in this volume emphasise that textiles play an important role in defining the person within the community. Textiles are intimately associated with the human body, and their presentation helps establish the status, the cultural affiliation, and the spiritual or emotional state of the self. Making the textile, weaving, sewing, adorning it in a distinctive manner, often is gender-specific and may become closely linked with perceptions of gender. It also may be seen as a creative activity in which a person's sense of innovation is called for. This is a strong element in the making of a *kofia* in Zanzibar, and it is certainly in evidence in Kedang, where the initiative of one person has transformed the weaving of cloth in her community and has had an impact on the performance of an annual ritual.

But as was said earlier, textiles also have moved between Indian Ocean cultures for centuries, and a single type of cloth may be shared by many in the region. Yemeni men wear their *futaq*, a sarong-type garment usually made in Indonesia but sold in the local *souk*. Inexpensive, machine-woven Indian madras-type cloths are still exported to Indonesia; they are common for daily wear, but may also become part of local exchange ceremonies.⁸ The *kanga* cloths of Zanzibar are inspired ultimately by Indian block-printed textiles, and the *kofia* can be bought in the market in Muscat, Oman. The transferability of textiles brings up a final, and possibly most interesting, aspect. As they move between cultures, they can take on new meanings.

We do not know the exact origin of the Indian resist-dyed textiles discussed by John Peter and Felicity Wild, but they probably came from North-Western India. Block-printed textiles made in Gujarat for export survive from the tenth century onwards, at least. Thousands of fragments are known from medieval Egypt, where they were used as garments and for furnishings. The same material, when traded to eastern Indonesia as part

of the spice trade, was eventually removed from the secular realm and became part of the sacred, as heirloom textiles and (in some cases) as gifts to be exchanged to establish or confirm a relationship between lineages, or between the ruler and the ruled. Furthermore, the patterns of cloth may take on a new, locally-significant meaning. This is touched upon by Totton in her discussion of designs adopted at Prambanan, and it may be an issue that is especially relevant to South-East Asia's response to Indian Ocean contacts. I have encountered it in my own field work in eastern Indonesia. As is known from the earliest Portuguese sources writing about the area at the beginning of the sixteenth century, *patola* silk textiles were a desired prestige item. In the village of Lamalera on the island of Lembata these cloths have become clan heirloom cloths of considerable metaphoric and ritual significance, and as such are considered inalienable. Their designs, in turn, have influenced local patterns (Barnes 1989). The Indian-inspired motifs are given local names that clearly have no relation to the prototype, but are meaningful in the local community. In the most striking example a floral border frequently found on *patola* (Fig. 9.1, this volume) is copied into the Lamalera repertoire. The *patola* prototype represents a flowering bush; the Lamalera interpretation refers to the design as *ata dikā*, which translates as 'human being'. It is specifically associated with one lineage, which descends from the oldest son of the village founder. The Lamalera interpretation is an elaboration of a pattern found generally in the area, which shows stick figures represented in vertical rows, often interpreted to represent ancestor figures and used as a reference to genealogy and descent. In other words, an outside design is assimilated and given a new meaning, quite distinct from the original representation, but significant in the new context.

To some degree all contributors present evidence for this local reaction to foreign objects and images. They give a picture of great diversity, because in each case the response to the world of the Indian Ocean is specific and differs from one location to the next. If there is any unity in this diversity, it is in the comfortable integration of international contacts with local concepts. How this relationship was initiated and continued to work, often remains unclear. We have detailed (and often brutal) accounts for the time of the European entry on the stage of the Indian Ocean. But relatively well-organised contacts preceded the European arrival by at least a millennium, and these no doubt required merchants' accommodation, currency and trade agreements, as well as travel arrangements. It is usually no longer possible to discern the nature of early historical interaction between small-scale communities and internationally oriented states. We do know, though, that it must have taken considerable courage, navigational skill, and economic effort to travel over such vast expanses of maritime space, and required sound local contacts to gain access to the indigenous products pursued. Textiles often provided the key and were the widely recognised currency.

Notes

- 1 See Kuhn (1988), Barber (1991), and Debaine-Francfort and Idriss (2001) for evidence of early weaving and the archaeological survival of textiles in the Old World.
- 2 The earliest date to the third millennium BC, and evidence for mordant dyeing on cotton, goes back to a fragment that was radiocarbon dated 1760 BC \pm 115 (Marshall 1931:32–33; Lal 1962:213–214).