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978-0-521-18345-1 - Iban or Sea Dayak Fabrics and their Patterns: A Descriptive Catalogue of the Iban Fabrics in the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology Cambridge

Alfred C. Haddon and Laura E. Start

Excerpt

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THE IBAN OR SEA DAYAKS

THE general appearance and psychical characteristics of the Iban have been well described by Hose and McDougall (I, p. 32, and measurements taken by Haddon are given in II, pp. 339, 340). They are industrious and energetic, and are great wanderers; this latter peculiarity struck the Kayans, who termed them "Ivan" (immigrant or wanderer), and this name has been adopted by large numbers of them in recent years and modified into Iban (II, p. 250). "When the Ibans became associated in piratical matters with the Malays of the coast, these latter assigned to their allies the heads of their enemies, as a sort of perquisite. This state of affairs lasted until well into the nineteenth century; and it is from their association with the Malays of the coast in their piratical expeditions that the Iban became known to Europeans as a Sea Dayak" (Hose, 1926, p. 145). The term Dayak, Dyak, etc., merely designates a non-Malayan inhabitant of Borneo and has no ethnic or tribal significance. It is probably derived from the Malay word *daya*, "inland".

The Iban can be distinguished from the other peoples of Borneo by their physical and mental traits and by many differences in culture. There appear to be two main ethnic stocks in Borneo: (1) a narrow-headed type, often termed Indonesian, but, to avoid ambiguity, the term *Nēsiōt* is preferable (Haddon, 1929, pp. 22, 119); (2) a broad-headed type, Proto-Malay (or Oceanic Mongol), which is a branch of the Pareoean or Southern Mongoloid (*l.c.* 1929, p. 32), to which stock the Iban may be assigned (cf. Haddon, 1901). Hose and McDougall (II, p. 248) regard the Iban as belonging to the same "stock from which the true Malays of Sumatra and the Peninsula were differentiated by the influence of Arab culture. A large number of the ancestors of the present Ibans were probably brought to Borneo from Sumatra less than two hundred years ago [Hose, 1926, p. 7, says, "less than three hundred years ago"]... Some two centuries ago, a number of Malay nobles were authorised by the Sultan of Brunei to govern the five rivers of

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Sarawak proper, namely, the Samarahan, the Sadong, the Batang Lupar, the Saribas, and the Klaka rivers. These Malays were pirate leaders, and they were glad to enrol large numbers of pagan fighting men among their followers. . . [they] found, no doubt, that their pagan relatives of Sumatra lent themselves more readily to this service than the less warlike Klemantans of Borneo, and therefore, as we suppose, they brought over considerable numbers of them and settled them about the mouths of these rivers". "It seems to us probable that the greater part of the ancestors of the Ibans entered Borneo in this way. But there is reason to think that some of them had settled at an earlier date in this part of Borneo and rather farther southward on the Kapuas River. . . . In most respects they closely resemble the other Iban tribes, but they are distinguished by some peculiarities of language and accent; their manners are gentler, their bearing less swaggering; they are less given to wandering" (II, p. 249).

We are not in a position to criticize the supposition that some 200 or 300 years ago Malay chiefs introduced Iban warriors from Sumatra to Sarawak, but Hose and McDougall recognize an earlier population of Iban in Borneo. It seems doubtful whether the characteristic Iban culture is so recent as Hose and McDougall seem to imply, and it would be interesting to know from what part of Sumatra "their pagan relatives" came, and if there are any traces there now of such people. We suggest that the Iban migration into Borneo may be regarded as an early wave of the movements that culminated in the Malay Empire.

Hose and McDougall (I, p. 31) state that the Iban "have spread northwards over Sarawak during the latter half of the last century, chiefly from the region of the Batang Lupar, where they are still numerous. They are still spreading northward, encroaching upon the more peaceful Klemantan tribes. They are most densely distributed in the lower reaches of the main rivers of Sarawak, especially the Batang Lupar and Saribas rivers, which are now exclusively occupied by them; but they are found also in scattered communities throughout almost all parts of Sarawak, and even in British North Borneo, and they extend from their centre in Sarawak into the adjacent regions of Dutch Borneo, which are drained by the northern tributaries of the Great Kapuas River". The different tribes or groups of Iban are distinguished by the names of the rivers along which they dwell, thus they

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are known as Batang Lupar, Saribas, Rejang, Kanowit, etc. The physical characters of the various ethnic groups in Sarawak are described by Haddon in an Appendix to Hose and McDougall's monograph.

IBAN COSTUME

The Iban are extremely fond of dress and both men and women wear many ornaments as well.

The usual male attire consists of:

Sirat (*chawat* of the Malays), or waist cloth, usually of red or blue cotton cloth, sometimes having an embroidered end made of native material.

Labong, a headkerchief, which is usually richly decorated; or a cap of woven cane, both of which are often ornamented with feathers.

Takai buriet or seat mat, usually made of skin or cane matting, the edge being finished off with cloth and beads or buttons.

Kalambi or jacket, with or without sleeves, used chiefly on ceremonial occasions.

Dangdong or shawl is also sometimes worn over the shoulder.

The women wear:

Bidang or petticoat, reaching to the knees and usually made of home-made cloth elaborately decorated with warp-dyed patterns.

Bedong or woman's waist band or girdle.

Rawai or corset, made of a series of split ratan rings upon which brass rings are threaded. The ratan rings fit so tightly that it is difficult to bend the body.

Kalambi or jacket, sometimes rather longer than the men's but of the same shape.

Girdles of coins, silver and brass chain or strips of coloured cane are also worn round the waist, and *tanggok* or necklaces of beads, cane and silver coins round the throat. Heavy earrings in the distended lobe of the ears are worn by most tribes.

Some idea of the women's costume can be gathered from the frontispiece, which shows a group of four women and two children. The women are wearing skirts, *bidang*, with patterns; spider designs can be seen on the

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second from the left and shrews and spiders on the second from the right, which also shows clearly the way the garment is folded when worn. Three figures show the corset, *rawai*, and the girdles of coins round the waist outside it. Two women have bead necklaces and the two on the right wide bead collars. The jackets of the two women to the left are of imported material, but the central figure wears a *kalambi* of striped native cloth somewhat similar to Z. 2342, which is described briefly on p. 37. The tall girl, second from the right, is a Kayan who lives with an Iban family.

THE PRODUCTION OF CLOTH

The garments worn by the Iban, whether petticoats, coats, loin-cloths or shawls, as well as their blankets, are made either from bark-cloth or hand-woven cotton stuff; the latter material is usually of native manufacture.

BARK-CLOTH

The bark-cloth is the cheaper material, and garments made from it are therefore worn when working in the jungle and by those who cannot afford woven cloth. "The old blankets, curtains, waist-cloths, and coats of the Dyaks were made of bark-cloth" (*S.D.D.* p. 133).

There are several sources from which suitable material for making bark-cloth can be obtained: the *pedalai*, bread-fruit tree (*Artocarpus* sp.), and a tree of a similar type called *tekalong* provide bark which can be wrought into loin-cloths, strips of about 10 ft. in length being obtainable when the trees are mature (*Sarawak Gazette*, 1894, p. 146).

The Kayans use the inner bark of a tree which they call *tajam*, but is called *ipoh* by the Iban. According to the Catalogue of the Brooke Low Collection this appears to be identical with the *upas* tree of Java, *Antiaris toxicaria*. In the *S.D.D.* (p. 60) it is stated that "there is another species of tree called *ipoh*, a sort of bread-fruit, the bark of which is made into white blankets, *pua*". Hose and McDougall (1, p. 220) state that cloth "is made from the bark of trees of several species (principally the *Kumut*, the *ipoh*, and the wild fig)".

The process of making the bark-cloth is to peel off the bark in broad strips, soak it well in water and then hammer it out with a heavy wooden

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mallet, which is grooved in deep cross cuts on its broad surface. This hammering breaks up the tissue of the bark and makes it more pliant but also accentuates any holes or rents, which are strengthened transversely by darning lines and patterns with thread made from the fibre of pineapple leaves or imported material (fig. 1).

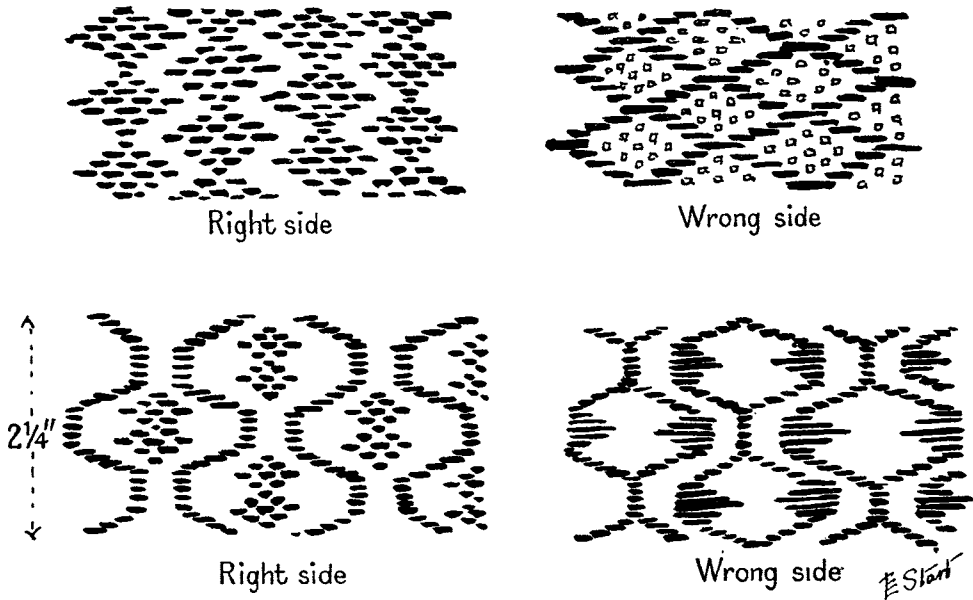


Fig. 1. Two patterns in transverse darning on a bark-cloth sleeveless jacket, open down the sides. British Museum (3425).

COTTON CLOTH

The cloths which are used for garments are usually of purely native manufacture and are entirely the work of the women, from the setting of the cotton seed to the making up of the garment when the cloth has been woven. The men make the wooden beams, battens, heddles and spools used in weaving, but otherwise take no part in the work.

In order to make our account more complete we incorporate information given by the Rev. W. Howell (1912, p. 61) which has not been recorded by other writers. He says that "separate farms or gardens (*empalai*) are set apart for growing cotton (*taya*)... After the cotton has been picked, taken

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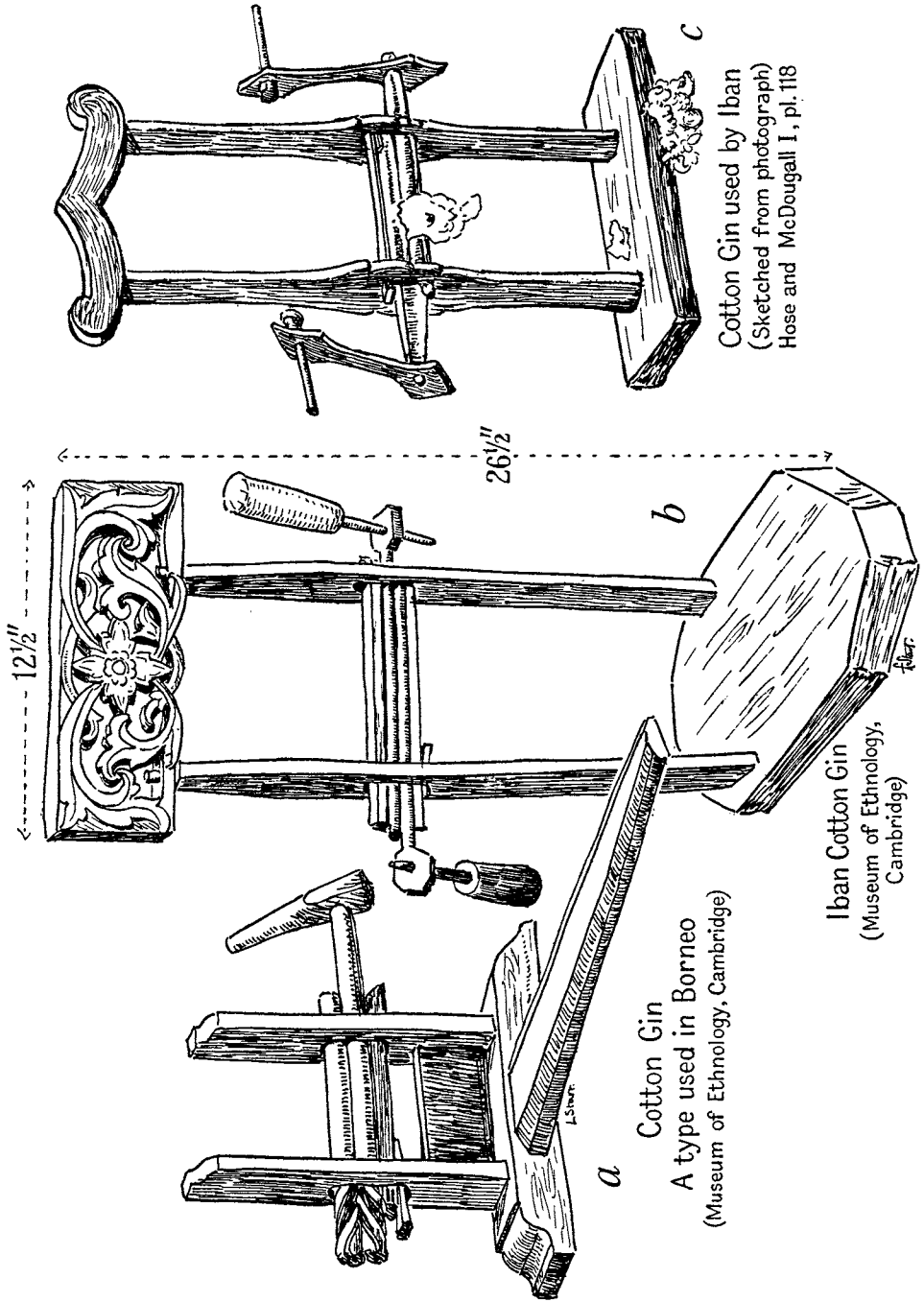


Fig. 2. Types of cotton gin, *peringgi*, used by the Iban: *a*, *Kilangan kabu-kabu* (Malay), Skeat collection, 336; *b*, Haddon collection, Z. 2352.

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out of its skin and dried, it is passed through a cotton gin (*pemigi*) in order to get rid of its seeds” and fragments of husk.

The gin consists of two small wooden rollers which revolve in opposite directions, each with a crank-like handle, fixed into the two upright supports of a frame (fig. 2). Extra strips of wood are generally fixed above and below

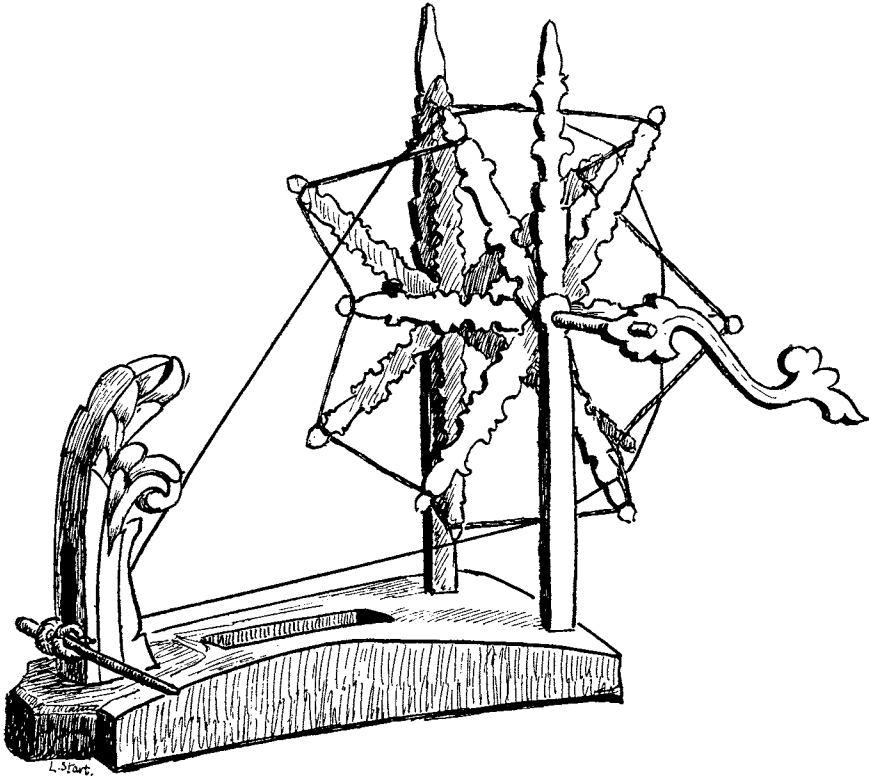


Fig. 3. An Iban spinning wheel, *gasing*. Museum of Ethnology, Cambridge, Haddon collection, Z. 2355.

the rollers to ensure sufficient pressure, and these are tightened by wedges. A similar form of gin is used throughout Indonesia and the Malay peninsula. The yarn is then spun from the mass of fibre.

The simple spinning wheel, *gasing*, is turned by the right hand, the fibre being twisted with the left hand (so Hose and McDougall say, 1, p. 221, but their pl. 119, owing to the method of reproduction, shows the reverse

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action. Gomes (1911), pl. p. 128, gives the same photograph in the correct position). The wheel, which has a shaft passing through two uprights at one end of the stand, consists of two elements, each composed of three flat wooden spokes which cross at their centres and are so arranged that one set alternates with the other (fig. 3). A strong thread is carried across alternately from the ends of the spokes of one element to those on the other, forming a zigzag which is the periphery of the driving wheel. At the other end of the stand there is a support on which the spindle is mounted horizontally; in the one here illustrated it passes through two rings attached to the support and so can rotate freely. The two rings are placed on either side of a long vertical hole near the base of the support through which the endless belt of cord, which goes round the driving wheel, passes to the spindle. The rotation of the spindle supplies the necessary twist to the drawn-out fibre. The process is intermittent, since each length or stretch of yarn has to be wound on to the spindle before another length is spun. When the spindle is full the thread is wound off into a ball or on to a separate piece of wood (pl. xxiv, *a*, *b*).

A more elaborate method, similar to that used in Java, is described by Howell, who says that after ginning, the cotton is threshed out on a mat with a cotton-beater (*pemalu taya*), the women using both hands for the work; this is done only very early in the morning. The cotton is threshed to form a flat mass, *lapis*, averaging 2 to 3 ft. square and some 2 in. in thickness. In the evening the *lapis* is folded and placed on the thigh to be cut into very thin pieces, which are put into a basket. The following morning the pieces are put on a mat and are again threshed till the *lapis* are reduced to the thickness of a sheet of thick paper. Later the *lapis* is to be *diluli*, that is, to be rolled up into the thickness of a finger so as to be ready for spinning. A *luli* is a pointed stick from 6 in. to 1 ft. long and no thicker than a little finger. After the *lapis* is rolled round the *luli* twice or thrice, it is cut off and placed in a basket. The cotton thus rolled is also called *luli*. The *luli* are then attached to a spinning wheel (*gasing*) and spun into a thread one by one.

We hesitate to criticize any statement by the Rev. W. Howell, but he seems to be describing the Javanese method of preparing and spinning the cotton (cf. Loebèr, 1903, pl. II, 3, 4, which show the thrashing and the *luli*,

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but not the rolling, in Java). No other accounts or illustrations give any indication of the Iban employing this method. We have consulted a cotton spinner of great experience, who says that the continual thrashing of the cotton and the cutting up into *luli* would break and weaken the fibres, which would be detrimental to making a good thread in spinning and would not produce yarn of the quality used in the Iban cloths.

“When the shuttle-pin [this is an impossible term. The Iban use a spool and not a shuttle in weaving. Howell is referring to the spindle] (*mata gasing* or ‘eye of the spinning-wheel’) is full up the thread is stretched in the *koali* or cotton-stretcher. It is then taken out and dipped in rice gruel (*kanji*) for some little time—this is called the process of *nyikat*; after being well saturated it is taken out and stretched lengthways in the *ruai* [the verandah or long reception room of the house] by means of two bamboos. After this it is combed with a cocconut husk in order to smooth it and to take off any rice grains that are sticking to it; it remains thus until quite dry, when it is rolled up into a ball or balls; this last process being called *nabu*. The thread is now ready for the further processes of dyeing and weaving” (Howell, p. 62).

According to Howell (but no one else records it), the thread is unrolled from the ball and “stretched in the loom to ascertain the length and breadth of the cloth to be woven; this process is called *mungga*. This being ascertained the thread is carefully taken out of the loom as it is, and fixed to the *tangga ubong* or ‘the ladder of the thread’”.

The tying frame, according to Hose and McDougall (I, p. 221), is usually about 6 ft. [183 cm.] long and 20 in. [5.08 cm.] wide. That in the British Museum (96.3.17) is 5 ft. 7 in. long and 9½ in. wide; it is figured by Loebèr, 1903, pl. III, fig. 4. Our specimen (pl. xxvi, A) has a total length of 8 ft. and is 1 ft. 4 in. wide; the cross bars for the longer warp threads are 4 ft. 7 in. apart, the others are 7 in. shorter. Cross bars are fixed to the frame the distance apart required for the length of the cloth to be woven and the yarn goes round them from end to end.

If the cloth is to be plain, the web is set up in the loom, but if a self-coloured cloth is required, such as the dark blue worn by widows, the yarn is dyed before it is set up in the loom; there are, however, cases where a patterned cloth has been re-dipped in a blue dye.

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The following technique is employed for the production of the pattern-dyed cloths which have a rep or poplin weave, that is, the warps form the surface of the cloth.

The patterns are produced by a resist method, the parts of the web to be reserved from any dye being tied with a dried strip of a fibrous leaf known as *lemba*. This fibre is stripped from the underside of a broad-leaved plant with yellow flowers (*Curculigo latifolia*) which grows in great abundance on old cultivated fields near houses.

As the continuous warp is wrapped right round the cross bars there is an upper and a lower web; the threads from both are tied together and so a repeat of the pattern is obtained. A skein of the *lemba* fibre can be seen attached to one of the lower cross bars in pl. xxvi, A.

As will be evident from the elaborate designs shown in the *bidang* and *kalambi* cloths illustrated later, quite a small number of warps may be tied together, six or eight, and the distance tied up may be very short. The work is often highly skilled and the women usually work from memory without the aid of any pattern, although the Rev. A. Horsburgh (1858, p. 43) says "the Balaus women sketch out the design on the extended web", see Gomes (1911, p. 52). A portion of the tied-up warp is shown in pl. xxvi, B.

When all the parts intended to be left undyed are tied up, the looped ends of the warp are also tied tightly, although already held securely by the numerous wrappings. The web is then immersed in the dye bath, which is most probably of a brown colour from *pinang* (*Areca catechu*) or of a richer red brown from the mangrove. After soaking in the dye for the required length of time, which may be a few hours or several days, according to the depth of colour needed, the web is stretched out to dry in a shady place. When dry the fibre is cut and stripped off and the design then appears in the natural colour of the cotton, on a dark-brown background.

Several dyeings sometimes take place so as to produce a number of shades and colours.

The yarns for the self-coloured stripes in the borders are dyed separately, and when all are dry the web is set up in the loom with these specially dyed yarns arranged to form warp stripes.

The following description of the technique of warp tie-dyeing is taken from Howell (1912): The first process of *kebat* [or *ikat*, "tying"] is to retain the