

BOOK REVIEW

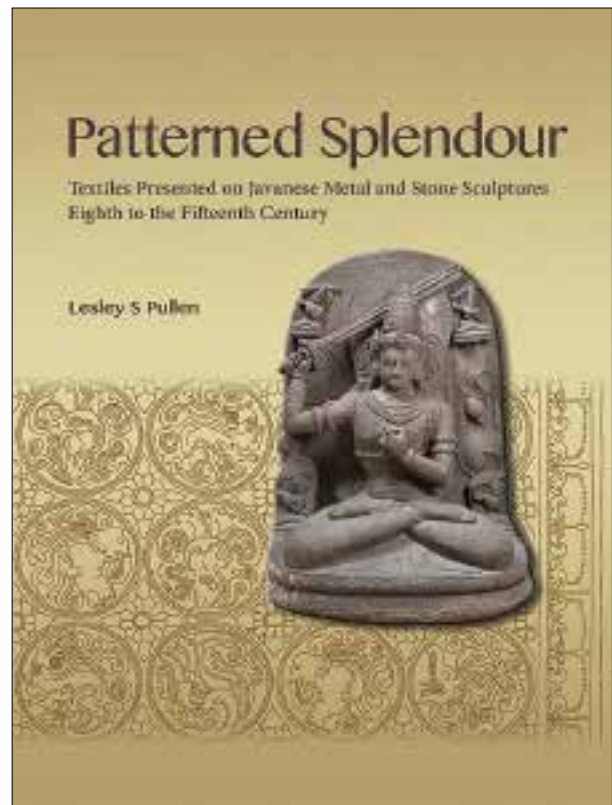
Patterned Splendour: Textiles Presented on Javanese Metal and Stone Sculpture, Eighth to Fifteenth Century

Lesley Pullen

Reviewed by Dr. James Bennett

Lesley Pullen's remarkable *Patterned Splendour* is a landmark contribution to deepening our appreciation of the rich heritage of early Javanese textile art documented in Hindu and Buddhist sculptures from the 8th to 15th century. The study is a wide-ranging survey of the varieties of designs depicted on the garments worn by gods, goddesses and deified royalty in religious images. The significance of Pullen's research is underscored by the recognition that no other visual media—whether paintings or illuminated manuscripts—illustrating textile patterns survive from the period. Moreover, there are only several contemporaneous Javanese textiles known to still exist today. Recent radiocarbon testing and research has established they were created around the 13th to early 16th century. Surprisingly, none of these examples, found in Australian, Japanese and American collections, display motifs related to the patterns appearing on the sculptures. Instead, they suggest the diversity of textile production in early Java and underline the singular importance of Pullen's study.

The publication, illustrated with numerous photographs and precise graphic renditions drawn by Yiran Huang, is a major resource for art historians, archaeologists, collectors, textile designers and any person who wishes to deepen their understanding of Javanese art. Pullen identifies five stylistic periods over the 700 year time frame and reveals how a close attention to patterns and dress styles can assist dating sculptures whose contexts of creation or provenances are lost or uncertain. Through Pullen's observant eye, we are better able to appreciate the nuances of cloth iconography. The comprehensive nature of her research is exemplified in her discussion of the sublime 13th century Prajñāparāmita statue from Candi Singosari, Malang, and its much damaged sister image found in Muara Jambi, South Sumatra. The readiness of Pullen to reference examples from neighbouring Sumatra's Srivijaya and Pannai archaeological sites inform her discussion of Javanese sculpture. It is a reminder of the unique corpus of 12th–



14th century royal ancestor statues, a number depicted wearing garments patterned in the Javanese style, preserved at Puri Penulisan, Kintamani, on Bali, which still await study.

The extent of the international networks of cultural and intellectual exchange, sometimes described as the "Sanskrit cosmopolis," which connected early Java to China, Vietnam, India, Sri Lanka and beyond, through maritime trade networks, is remarkable. It may appear far-fetched to some readers that Pullen argues for connections between Sogdian and other Central Asian textiles and Javanese designs. Yet the discovery of eastern Iranian or Uzbek glazed tile fragments at the site of the 14th century Majapahit capital in Trowulan, East Java, is evidence how far objects once travelled. Nevertheless, Pullen recognises that the diversity of these exchanges,

and the resulting artistic interactions, has made the term “influence” much over-used in Javanese studies, notably in textiles.

The author’s discussion of the Javanese kawung motif, sometimes alternatively called “cash-diaper” in English, is an important contribution to the subject. Kawung belongs to the category of geometric batik patterns known as *ceplokan*. This is a Javanese onomatopoeic word imitating the sound of something being dropped or plunked down, like an egg in a frying pan, due to the visual appearance of many *ceplokan* patterns, such as seen on the Hindu and Buddhist statues. The author highlights the ascendancy of the kawung motif that is “synonymous with Java” in sculptural depictions from the 13th century onwards. Although often attributed to Java, its origin is uncertain. A Harappan storage jar, dated 2,700–2000 BCE, in the National Museum of India, is probably the motif’s oldest surviving representation. A beautiful version of kawung, painted just like a repeat pattern on fabric, decorates the ceiling of the tomb of the scribe Neferssekheru who lived around 1295–1170 BCE in Luxor, Egypt.

The forensic nature of Pullen’s research in *Patterned Splendour* inevitably gives rise to further questions around the intended purpose in carving the garment patterns in mid-relief on the sculptures. The question as to whether these designs were painted remains unresolved until there is a scientific analysis of stone surfaces to detect evidence or otherwise of vestiges of pigments now invisible to the naked eye. Traces of painted inscriptions in red, white and black pigments have been identified at the 9th century Prambanan temple complex and white “diamond stucco” (*vajralepo*) is still evident on reliefs at Kalasan temple, Yogyakarta. This implies colours may have once been applied to sculptures, if only for details such as the eyes and lips. This still occurs today in Himalayan and other Buddhist cultures for the purpose of the consecration of an image in a ceremony known as the “eye-opening.”

The lavish attention to detail in the sculpting of many Javanese images belies the possibility that the features—including the textile patterns—may have been unseen by worshippers of the time. Modern-day Hindu and Buddhist devotees whether in Bali, Thailand, India or Tibet, customarily “dress” images in actual fabrics and other body adornments, a practice that was very likely once followed in Java. I would suggest that the relief carving of garment patterns was not always intended to realistically imitate the appearance of textiles, such as brocade (*songket*), for the benefit of devotees. Rather,

it was primarily intended to give plasticity to the living presence of the deity. Indonesian tradition recognises how the spiritual power (*sakti*) of exceptional beings is not bounded by sentient form but may pervade inanimate objects with which they are closely associated, such as textiles, especially where patterns are considered sacred. In this connection, the apparent “stiff” formality of many Javanese sculptures discussed in the study is intended also to convey *sakti* and is not an aesthetic shortcoming. The iconography of physical posture references esoteric yogic practices—familiar in the *tadasana* (mountain) yoga pose—and the opening of the body’s psychic *chakra* systems as expounded by Lord Siva in the Old Javanese text *Ganapati Tattwa* (Truth of Ganapati).

Particularly laudable in *Patterned Splendour* is the inclusion of a discussion of the provenance of sculptures referenced in the study. The author recognises the great loss of Java’s sculptural heritage due to past neglect, unauthorised removal, intentional destruction and exposure to the elements, the latter even having occurred within the time frame of her own research. A minor point which requires a response is the author’s allusion to difficulties that she experienced accessing some Indonesian collections. Over the decades that I have conducted field trips there I have always found Indonesian museum authorities exceptionally cooperative and willing to assist. As anywhere, collaboration in this field requires a respect for local cultural ownership and established collection protocols and recognition of the necessity of language fluency. Given the importance of *Patterned Splendour*, I hope that Pullen and ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute ensure the text is translated into Bahasa Indonesia as soon as possible for access by archaeologists, art historians and the young students who are becoming the future custodians of Indonesia’s extraordinary heritage.

Pullen is to be congratulated for her choice of *Mañjusri Arapacana*, surrounded by four miniature likenesses alluding to a mandala’s configuration where the deity faces the four cardinal directions, as the cover image. The magnificent sculpture was consecrated around 1268–1280 for installation at the Candi Jago temple site and is directly connected to three important rulers, Visnuvardhana, his son Krtanagara and Adityavarman. The author’s discussion of this masterpiece of Southeast Asian art, with the analysis of the garment’s splendid design, is a highlight of the publication. In the late 1970s, as a student in Indonesia, I remember being astonished by the beauty of a Dutch colonial era replica

of the sculpture that was displayed at the National Museum in Jakarta with the label marked "Current location unknown." It is now known the statue was removed in somewhat mysterious circumstances from a Berlin Museum to the former Soviet Union after 1945. The Bodhisattva of Wisdom, Mañjusri, complements Prajñā-paramita (Perfection of Wisdom) from Singosari temple which was generously repatriated to Indonesia by the Dutch government in 1978. It is to be hoped that Pullen's research on the image draws greater public attention to the statue's existence and prompts the Indonesian authorities to consider the possibilities of requesting repatriation from the State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, where Mañjusri is reportedly placed in current storage.

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