Textiles: function and symbolism within the social and ritual systems of Sumba, Eastern Indonesia.
This thesis focuses on the place of textiles within the traditional social and ritual systems of Sumba, Eastern Indonesia; also considered is the cosmological significance of motifs depicted in these cloths as they relate to Sumbanese rituals. Textiles are cultural condensations in woven form. As such, they provide a window into the cosmologies of the people producing them. This research examines the social uses of Sumbanese textiles and also attempts to uncover dominant ritual symbols depicted therein through utilizing Turner’s analytical framework of symbolic analysis (1967:19-47). The rituals examined for this purpose are confined to marriage and funeral ceremonies. Aspects of Sumbanese social organization were examined to identify the role of textiles in such systems. A study of marriage and funeral ceremonies elucidated the cosmological significance of the symbols employed both in these rites and in the textiles central to these rituals. It was found that textiles are powerful markers of individual and group identity. Symbolic analysis revealed mamuli to be a dominant ritual symbol of marriage, and textiles themselves to be a dominant ritual symbol of both marriage and funeral rituals. Today, traditional textiles are changing rapidly. This research reveals the pressing need for further documentation of these cultural treasures.

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