

## Indian Chintzes and Printed Cottons at the Fries Museum

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### Abstract

The Fries (Frisian) Museum, located in Leeuwarden (the Netherlands), houses about 700 items of Indian chintzes and European printed cottons.

If Frisian women used to wear the international west-European fashion, the traditional dress worn in the tiny Frisian town of Hindeloopen was different. During the 18th century, Hindeloopen women started to include Indian cotton fabrics in their traditional costumes instead of local wool and linen. The Hindeloopen chintz gowns, or *wentkes*, and the use of different ginghams for aprons and headkerchiefs created a continuing interest in these exotic textiles in Friesland.

Outside Hindeloopen, chintz was popular for women's jackets, short bodices, and especially the lining of large straw 'sunhats,' to be worn over traditional huge lace caps. Frisian babies were swaddled in chintz wraps and wore tiny chintz jackets, caps and separate sleeves. The 'Japone rok,' inspired by Japanese kimonos, was used by men as indoor clothing.

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### Introduction

The art and history of the province of Friesland are reflected in the collections housed by the Fries (Frisian) Museum. Amongst these are more than 700 clothing items and indoor textiles created from Indian chintzes and European printed cottons, using the chintz technique.

Friesland was a prosperous coastal region connected to overseas trade. In the 18th century, the Netherlands occupied a special place in Europe due to the relatively abundant use of Indian chintzes in clothing, especially in Friesland. Hand painted cotton sold 'by the metre,' was used for women's jackets and skirts, for morning gowns and men's waistcoats, for children's hats and baby jackets, palampores, quilted large and small blankets, swaddle cloths, etc.

If Frisian women generally used to wear the international west-European fashion with their own headdress, the traditional costume worn in the tiny town of Hindeloopen was unique in the province. Chintz, together with gingham—chequered cotton, also from India—became characteristic of the distinctive Hindeloopen regional costume.

### **Hindeloopen, Amsterdam and the VOC**

Located at the southwest coast of the province, the tiny town of Hindeloopen was the last of the eleven Friesland towns having city rights. Its inhabitants were oriented towards Amsterdam, as the sea around the town was too shallow for their merchant ships. In Amsterdam, the goods delivered by the VOC (*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*), the Dutch East Indian Company founded in 1602, were auctioned and put on the market.

The Baltic trade with Scandinavia, Russia and the Baltic states constituted the major focus of the Hindeloopen working men. The main flourishing period of the town lay between 1650 and 1790, when Hindeloopen owned a large fleet of over eighty ships, with Amsterdam standing as its home port, where the money was spent. The city provided exotic luxuries, like Chinese porcelain and, of course, Indian chintzes and gingham.

The Dutch East India Company appropriated most of the chintz trade and exchanged cotton from India for popular Indonesian spices or Japanese metals. The multi-coloured fabrics were occasionally took back home by VOC employees and merchants, where they were very much appreciated. Consequently, from 1664 onwards, the VOC's *Eischen van retour* (Requirements for Return) instructed their overseas representatives to buy chintz for the Dutch market.

### **Hindeloopen at the Fries Museum**

The Frisian Society for History and Culture celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1877, with a large historical exhibition at His Majesty's Palace in Leeuwarden—the first ethnological exhibition in the Netherlands. A Hindeloopen room in which life-size dolls in costumes were drinking tea received the most attention (**Fig. 1**).

Proceeds from this exhibition made it possible for the Society to purchase a building in which the Fries Museum was established in 1881. Not one, but two Hindeloopen rooms were given a place in the museum: a small one with painted box bed walls, special small bed steps, and a wooden fireplace doll dressed as a Hindeloopen woman wearing a long flowered coat; and a second one, with life-size dolls, which, since 2013, has been on display in a new museum building in the centre of Leeuwarden.

## The *wentke*

The traditional Hindeloopen women's costume included garments, which have been preserved since the 16th century. Its most striking feature was a long, close-fitting open coat, the *wentke*, which was worn on special occasions (**Fig. 2**).

Made of local wool and linen in the 17th century, women progressively started to incorporate Indian cotton fabrics in their traditional costumes during the 18th century. Since about 1700, different Indian gingham were used for aprons and neckerchiefs. The chintzes, which appeared after 1750, combined with the gingham for the neckerchief, breast cloth, and apron, made a great change in the attractiveness of their costumes. Even underwear became part of this new trend. For instance, the under vest, or *underst oerlof*, was worn beneath the *wentke* with a black corset or boning-free stays. It had chintz bands and sleeves only visible in summer, when the *wentke* was not worn (**Fig. 3**). The colourful cotton *wentkes* were only used for festive occasions during winter months, from November till February, when the men were at home.

What was special was that the colours had a symbolic meaning: a multi-coloured *wentke*—as it was combined with red, white and blue chequered gingham—with a red ground, was definitively not for mourning (**Fig. 4**); a bride-to-be wore a white veil and a white *wentke* with red flowers, a so called 'milk-and-blood chintz,' and different red and white gingham. When the vows were exchanged in the church, she would wear the traditional old-fashioned black wool *wentke*. Floral chintz was even worn during mourning.

We know about these colour schemes because Hendrik Lap (1824-1874), an amateur artist from Hindeloopen, painted these Hindeloopen women and girls, at the request of the Leeuwarden archivist, bookseller and publisher, Wopke Eekhoff (1809-1880). Eekhoff was a prominent member of the Fries Genootschap, the founder of the Fries Museum, for more than 40 years (**Fig. 5**).

## Seven 'stages of enlightenment'

The Hindeloopen women showed seven 'stages of enlightenment,' ranging from deep mourning till out of mourning. The most intense period of mourning lasted seven years. In the fourth enlightenment, it was customary to wear a black chintz *wentke* with white flowers. During the subsequent stage, the *wentke* would have a white background with blue flowers, like the bed cape (c. 1830) made of chintz *wentke* (c. 1750) (**Fig. 6**). But not all white-ground fabrics with blue flowers were intended for mourning. Several examples of blue flowered aprons could be found outside Hindeloopen, for instance.

Numerous remarkable black and white chintzes have been preserved, among which two coupons with an original note. The smaller one is a European block-printed cotton, with a note indicating that the fabric was meant for making sleeves (**Fig. 7**). The large piece is an Indian chintz with a note stating that the fabric was given as a present by three young

couples, as a souvenir from their trip to Groningen in 1791. It also must have been meant for making sleeves to an under vest (**Fig. 8**).

### **‘Japanese’ kimono made in India**

In 1954, an article was published about Hindeloopen *wentkes* stated that Hindeloopen women used to sew the so-called *japonse rok*—a chintz morning gown—into the *wentke* (Lubberhuizen-van Gelder 1954, 90). Maybe students in the streets wearing such a morning gown inspired Hindeloopen women who visited Amsterdam. However, such a reused morning gown is never seen in surviving *wentkes*.

The Fries Museum collection displays a morning gown (*japonse rok*), in the style of a Japanese kimono. It was made in India and painted in accordance with VOC specifications, around 1700. The Netherlands had already been introduced to the Japanese quilted silk kimono sometime earlier.

At the end of the 17th century, the silk wadding of the kimono, presented by the Emperor of Japan, was removed before its shipment so that the garment could be packed away as compactly as possible to prevent water damage. The wadding was not usually replaced later, though.

The red chintz *japonse rok* has never been wadded but still has a strong Japanese character: it is a wide model with wide sleeves. Moreover, the pattern is inspired by the well-known Japanese motif of a pine tree with prunus blossoms, which can also be seen on many Japanese and Chinese ceramics. Like a kimono, the front and back are made from a single piece of cloth. There is a complete pine tree on the back while both front panels feature loose branches with fan-shaped bunches of pine needles. A gusset—a triangular piece of fabric that is slightly shorter than the kimono—is sewn on both sides of the opening. This explains why, at the bottom, it appears as though a square has been cut out on both sides. The kimono is lined with coarser cotton with a pattern of small, scattered flowers; the gussets, with equally coarse cotton printed with an elegant Mughal carnation pattern.

### **Multi-coloured chintzes at the exhibition *Chintz: Cotton in Bloom*, 2018.**

According to the scholar Johann Hermann Knoop (Kassel, 1700- Amsterdam, 1769) women from smaller towns of Friesland particularly loved to wear multi-coloured chintzes (Knoop 1763, 465). The Fries Museum is privileged to have such multi-coloured chintzes with red, green, purple, or blue grounds in its collection. Many examples were displayed for the exhibition *Chintz: Cotton in Bloom* (Leeuwarden: Fries Museum 2017; London: Fashion and Textile Museum 2021). Some fabrics are like new, have never been washed and have not lost their shine (**Fig. 9**).

The large palampore (bed-cover or hanging panel) with a purple ground has an interesting caption in the inventory book. The original text read: ‘Bed Sheet (chintz): a large sheet of flowered chintz, old-fashioned, on the bedstead.’ At that time, bedding was normally made of white linen. Today, however, this chintz could be used as a fashionable duvet cover.

Outside of Hindeloopen, Frisian women wore fashionable jackets with a special headdress with a huge lace cap. Additionally, they wore a large straw hat outside. Most of the surviving huge sunhats are lined with chintz (**Fig. 5**). A special sunhat was lined with printed cotton with a kind of *Chinoiserie* pattern. Around 1780, the cotton was printed by Oberkampf, at Jouy, France. A ceramist expert informed me that this is based on a Korean still life featuring vases and scrolls (**Fig. 9**).

### Dutch printed cottons

Chintz became extremely popular but was rather expensive; therefore, it is not surprising that people in Europe quickly looked for cheaper ways to create this colourful fabric with vivid patterns themselves. Lacking the skills to hand-paint the decorations, the European printers opted for printing blocks. In 1678, two Amsterdam merchants established the Netherlands' first cotton print company in Amersfoort. Unfortunately, no sampler books have survived. More cotton print works followed in rapid succession, especially in Amsterdam. These companies flourished around 1750, when they were finally able to approximate the quality of Indian chintz.

Then, the cotton printing industry moved to Switzerland, France and England, where Oberkampf, in Jouy, near Paris, and Peel, in Lancashire in particular, became the leading European companies. Instead of using the same quality cloth used for the Indian chintz, producers in the Netherlands continued to print on coarser (and less expensive) cloth imported from India. This led to the demise of the Dutch printing companies. In fact, Oberkampf was actually shocked when he visited Amsterdam in 1774. He had never suspected that the work would be so much more expensive and of such poor quality than the fabrics he produced (Riello 2013, 125-126).

Colours of Dutch printed cottons were never as bright as the ones of Indian chintzes. A special example is the fabric of a skirt, or petticoat, which must have been printed in the Netherlands. The lower part is decorated with an exotic seascape: the name 'Curacao' is displayed on the sterns of three vessels sailing in the foreground, with billowing sails, and armed with cannons. The fluttering red, white and blue flag has a monogram 'G W C', the Dutch initials of the Patented West India Company, WIC. Between the tall ships, small fishing boats float past mountainous islands with palm trees and Asian houses. The lower part is unique, while the floral motifs on the upper part are typical of late 18th century European printed cottons.

The WIC was founded in 1621 to trade in West Africa as well as North and South America. After the VOC, it stood as the second most important trading company, almost exclusively focused on the trade in African slaves to the West Indies. A closer inspection of the skirt reveals dark figures on the fishing boats and the islands. The name 'Curacao' does not refer to a specific ship, but to the destination. The WIC made Curaçao a free port in 1674. It then became the epicentre of the Dutch slave trade until 1815 (Dijkstra 2017, 16-17).

The *kroplap* (literally, 'breast cloth') was a special Dutch rural item of clothing worn under a jacket with a deep neckline. A *kroplap* consists of two parts, connected on the shoulders.

Sometimes one shoulder seam is completely loose and closed with hooks and eyes. They are mostly lined with linen, even though some of them have no lining at all.

However small, the *kroplappen* shows fragments of interesting patterns like the chintz one with red ground, and the exotic pattern on a white ground which is probably Dutch. One can understand Oberkamp's comments (**Fig. 10 & 11**).

Today, some Dutch folkloristic costumes still show something of the *kroplap*, such as the floral square in the neckline of the Volendam women's national costume or the large starched extended shoulder caps of the Spakenburg women's (De Jong 2021).

### Chintz in the informal sphere

Those who have money to spend will show it off. Early in the 18th century, some related Frisian noble families wore palampores made in India, with their coats of arms painted on them. These items were sparsely used and were probably stored in chests, and only taken out to show off with on special occasions (Hartkamp 2021, 49-68).

On the left, a palampore featuring the coat of arms of the Burmania family, with blue 'Chinese' mountains and blossoming trees on the border (**Fig. 6**). In the same style, another palampore presents the combined coat of arms of the van Welderen and Rengers families in the centre, and cornucopias with flowers in the corners. The palampore with the coat of arms of the Frisian Beucker family, hidden in between blossoming trees, birds, and butterflies, is also exceptional.

Large palampores were turned into colourful quilted blankets while small pieces were used for pillowcases. A loose T-shaped gown, also called a *banyan* or *cambay*—a name derived from the Indian port of Khambhat—was a garment reserved for the informal sphere. It was lined with European-printed cotton. Women wore an open informal robe or *contouche*: a *robe volante* or sack dress, of printed linen with floral motifs, painted and dyed using the chintz technique. The fabric was probably printed in England. The name *contouche* is said to be derived from the Polish *kontusz*, a long male garment with hanging sleeves, girded with a sash, traditionally worn by the nobility in Eastern Europe (Biedrońska-Słota 2018) (**Fig. 6**). Cotton sold 'by the metre' was used for children's blankets and swaddle cloths for babies, baby jackets, caps, separate sleeves, mittens, and mitts.

The red and blue colours were particularly resistant to washing (**Fig. 12**). It is precisely these 18th Century small chintz baby clothes that have been preserved in large numbers. In the collection of the Fries Museum, there are about 115 pairs of separate sleeves and even more tiny caps. It is clear that even the smallest piece of chintz had value. They are too small for a modern-day baby head, but they show a wealth of colours and floral motifs.

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Fig. 1

Hindeloopen room,  
J. Bosmans.  
Historical Exhibition of Friesland, 1877.

Fries Museum Leeuwarden, P01226.

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Fig. 2

Hindeloopen *wentke*,  
Indian chintz with large floral bouquets.  
About 1785.

Fries Museum Leeuwarden T1946-003VIII.



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Fig. 3

Hindeloopen under vest or *underst oerlof* with  
chintz bands and sleeves.

Fries Museum Leeuwarden, T1956-213,  
permanent loan Ottema-Kingma Foundation.



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Fig. 4

Back: Palampore T01181D;  
Left: Chintz jacket T1957-431 and gingham apron  
with chintz border T0740;  
Centre: Red jacket T01145 and petticoat T09137;  
Right: Green jacket T01835 and petticoat T09619.

Fries Museum Leeuwarden,  
exhibition *Chintz Cotton in Bloom*, 2018.



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Fig. 5

Left: Frisian traditional costume, ca. 1780, blue Indian chintz jacket TT1979-026; Indian chintz petticoat, border with scenes of hunters and fruit trees, imported by the United East Indian Company, T02944.

Right: Chintz lining for sunhat, T1957-81.

Fries Museum Leeuwarden,  
Exhibition *Chintz cotton in bloom*, 2018.





Fig. 6

Left and right: Palampores with Frisian coats of arms, India Coromandel Coast, 1725-1730, T1964-025, T1964-026.

On loan Stichting Hora Siccama van de Harkstede Fonds;  
Centre: 1730-1740, T1990-030. On loan from Beucker Andreae family.

Centre: Red quilted blanket, Indian chintz 1725-1750, T1957-08.

Left: Japone rok, or cambay, T1957-434.

Right: Contouche T1957-450.

Fries Museum, permanent loan Ottema-Kingma Foundation.



Fig. 7

Coupon block-printed cotton for mourning, Hindeloopen ca. 1790.

Fries Museum Leeuwarden, T1957-691, permanent loan Ottema-Kingma Foundation.



Fig. 8

Coupon Indian painted chintz for mourning, Hindeloopen ca. 1790.

Fries Museum Leeuwarden, T1957-690, permanent loan Ottema-Kingma Foundation.



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**Fig. 9**

Frisian sunhat with European printed cotton lining, fabric c. 1780, Oberkampf, Jouy, France.

Fries Museum Leeuwarden T1957-371, permanent loan Ottema-Kingma Foundation.



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**Fig. 10**

Short under bodice or *krolap*, fabric 1725-1750, Indian chintz.

Fries Museum Leeuwarden T1957-492, permanent loan Ottema-Kingma Foundation.



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**Fig. 11**

Short under bodice or *krolap*, European, probably Dutch printed cotton, 1750-1800.

Fries Museum Leeuwarden T11079, permanent loan Ottema-Kingma Foundation.



Fig. 12

Centre: Baby jacket with matching mittens (top right), Indian Chintz, 1725-1750, T1952-055 & T1952-056A+B several baby caps and pairs of separate sleeves;  
Bottom left: extended mitaines, closing at the back, so-called 'bear claws', T07429A.

Collection Fries Museum Leeuwarden