

Scot M. Guenter : Royal, Aristocratic and Ministerial Standards
of Brunei Darussalam, Col. Plate I



Arms of Brunei



Fig. 12 a National Flag of Brunei



Fig. 1 Sultan's Personal Standard, left, and the Standard of his Queen, right

ROYAL, ARISTOCRATIC, AND MINISTERIAL STANDARDS IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM:

Legacies of *Istiadat* in a Changing Society

Scot M. Guenter

Abstract :

Brunei Darussalam is a fascinating little country that has a long important history of personal standards being used in rituals and ceremonies by royalty, aristocrats, and government officials. This paper provides background on the significance of personal standards in this culture, then translates and classifies the various personal standards recognized and in use at the time of the current sultan's enthronement in August 1968. It also speculates on the impact globalization will have on continuing and evolving flag traditions in Brunei.

INTRODUCTION

Check out <Brunei.bn> on the World Wide Web. Negara Brunei Darussalam, a tiny, wealthy sultanate embedded as two slices into Sarawak on the exotic island of Borneo, is a fascinating nation state. Offshore oil wells at Seria and Muara, and subsequent development, have made one of the smallest countries in the world also one of the richest. No taxes, free medical care, free schooling, free sport and leisure centres, subsidies for buying cars, cheap loans, pensions for everybody¹ - not a bad set-up at all, especially from the perspective of millions of others in nearby ASEAN nations struggling with the ongoing financial crises.

Brunei also persists as one of the few countries in the world where an autocratic leader, born to his station, has such sweeping comprehensive (near absolute) political power. In 1984, Brunei established complete independence from Great Britain, and since then has combined a growing commitment to Islamic fundamentalism - the sale of alcohol was banned in 1991 - with a simultaneous embracing of consumer culture aspects of post-industrial globalization. Thus, while laws against unmarried people expressing affection in public (this is called *khalwat*) persist, in Brunei one can eat fast food, shop at glitzy *haute couture* boutiques to buy high-status international goods, and gossip in chatrooms using one of the family's personal computers.

Melayu Islam Beraja, the national ideology, attempts to maintain traditional values and beliefs while allowing for the comforts and benefits of a global economy. This has been compulsory in schools since 1992, and is actively promoted by government ministries, stressing Islam, traditional Malay culture, and respect for the monarchy.² Increasingly, the national flag of Brunei has been used in civil religious exercises to help promulgate a sense of patriotism in the populace. The people, generally in my experience, seem to respond favorably, honouring their homeland. On a trip there in 1997 I noted the national flag's presence often, flying not only over government buildings, but also over schools and private homes, even in Kampong Ayer, the legendary water village adjacent to the capital city of Bandar Seri Begawan.

While the growing significance of the national banner in Brunei's civil religion deserves further study, and I see strong influences from both Great Britain and Malaysia in this process, today I wish to share with you information on an older tradition in this land where Chinese, Arab, Malay, and British Commonwealth influences have coalesced and that is the recognition and use of personal aristocratic standards.

Specifically, I wish to share with you the personal standards recognized and honoured in Brunei at the time of the present Sultan's enthronement in August 1968.

ADAT ISTIADAT

Because of the emphasis placed on Malay tradition, Brunei has a distinct government agency, answering to the Prime Minister's office, that deals with questions and issues of heraldry, court etiquette, dress, and ceremony. This is called the *adat istiadat*, and when I visited the country in 1997 I was granted an audience with Dato Haji Achmed, in charge of the *adat istiadat*, with offices in the ground floor of the Lapau, the Royal Ceremonial Hall that contains the Patarana (the Throne of Brunei). Dato Haji Achmed informed me that his offices were engaged in a massive, lengthy project of producing a huge new comprehensive guide to state protocol and ceremony. They had been engaged in it for years and for years more it would continue. (I might add - and I mean no criticism in this - that there seemed no hurry to get this work done. Bruneians are a Malay people, happy, cheerful, friendly, and with so many living well and employed by the State, there was not a sense of urgency among the staff at the *adat istiadat* as far as I could see. I feel I gained some *entr e* with them when they were talking about me in Malay in front of me, and I answered them in Malay, using humour and surprise to win them over. Their conversation, by the way, had involved strategies for effectively dealing with white people.)

Dato Haji Achmed gave me a present: a now rare copy of the souvenir book made to celebrate the current sultan's ascension to the throne. Fire ants had begun to eat away at the text, packed away in the basement of the Lapau, so I was glad to give it a less hazardous environment in my personal library. Included with the Malay text were colour prints of personal and aristocratic standards in use in Brunei in 1968, and this is the source of the imagery I share with you today.³

FLAG BACKGROUND

For good background information on the flag of Brunei that is easily accessible, see the Brunei page at the "Flags of the World" Website.⁴ It includes images of not only the National Flag, but also the Army Flag, a Naval Flag, and a Government Ensign. What it does not mention is that the origin of the colors of the national flag lies in the blending of the colours of the three most important living Bruneian aristocrats in 1906, when Brunei signed an agreement with Great Britain and accepted the first British Resident.⁵ In the old days, the Sultan delegated authority to four wazirs to help him rule Brunei. Each, like the sultan, had a personal standard of a specific colour. In 1906 only two of the four offices of wazir were currently filled, so the national colours became the combined colours of the sultan - yellow, the Pengiran Bendahara - white, and the Pengiran Pemancha - black. ⁶

As Whitney Smith has pointed out in discussing the flags associated with the late Princess Diana: "The hierarchy and majesty of vexilliferous individuals in a monarchical country are in part related precisely to the fact that they are entitled to symbols and ceremonies which others lack."⁷

As Brunei has entered the modern world in the twentieth century, the use of personal aristocratic standards has continued, aided by the function of the *adat istiadat* and the emphasis of *Melayu Islam Beraja*, but there has been a gradual transition in civil religion from personal banners to the collective identity of the people represented in their national flag. Certainly participation as an equal state in ASEAN ceremonies, such as at SEA sports games, cultivates this. From 1906 to 1959, the use of personal standards on state occasions to distinguish rank of participants continued.⁸ However, with the addition of the State Crest to the national flag in 1959, in recognition of the first written constitution, Brunei also made some changes in flag protocol. The number of flags officially recognized was reduced, abolishing the individual flags of lower level dignitaries and officials. Still, a sizeable number (considering what a small country this is) retained personal standards. These included, in order of importance: descendants of Sultans down to four generations; descendants of wazirs down to three generations; children and grandchildren of lower level officials known as *cheterias*; ministers down to the rank of *Dagong*.⁹

PERSONAL FLAGS IN BRUNEI

Here, then, are the personal standards recognized at the installation of His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah on 1 August 1968.

Figure 1.

Figure 1A is the personal flag of the Sultan at the time of his enthronement. Figure 1B is the personal flag of his highest ranking wife, his queen. Her flag is lighter yellow and lacks the black detailing on the crest and wreath evident on his. Both of these flags, by the way, have subsequently been modified: "His Highness now has a personal standard of yellow incorporating the Royal crest of two golden cats on red background at the centre of the standard."¹⁰ Today he has two wives, Her Majesty the Raja Isteri and Her Royal Highness the Pengiran Isteri; both their standards are "light yellow incorporating the Royal crest on red background at the centre of the standards."¹¹

Figure 2.

These are flags associated with the previous sultan, who had abdicated in favor of his son on 4 October 1967. Three years later to the day, the capital city, formerly known as Brunei Town, was renamed Bandar Seri Begawan in his honour. He died 7 September 1986.¹²

Figure 3.

Like the previous flags, none of the top row of personal flags pictured here is used anymore. 3A is the flag of the heir apparent prior to crowning as prince; 3B is the flag of the royal regent, 3C is the flag of the officially recognized heir apparent following his crowning. Flags 3D through 3G are still valid, however: they are, in order, the personal flags for children, then grandchildren, then great-grandchildren, then great-great-grandchildren of sultans. Incidentally, the current sultan is 29th in a line that goes back to the 14th century when Awang Alak Betatar converted to Islam and became Sultan Mohammad. Within two hundred years Brunei's empire would expand to cover Borneo and include holdings in the Philippines at its peak.

Figure 4.

The four traditional wazirs, in hierarchical order, are Pengiran Bendahara, Pengiran Digadong, Pengiran Pemancha, and Pengiran Temenggong. Each has his own colour. Figure 4 shows the white flags of the Pengiran Bendahara and his descendants. 4A is the Pengiran. 4B is his heir apparent, 4C other children. 4D is the personal flag for all grandchildren of the Pengiran Bendahara, 4E the personal flag of all great-grandchildren.

Figure 5.

The colour of the Pengiran Digadong is green. 5A is his personal flag, 5B his heir apparent, 5C other children. 5D is the personal flag for all grandchildren of the Pengiran Digadong, 5E the personal flag of all great-grandchildren.

Figure 6.

The colour of the Pengiran Pemancha is black. 6A is his personal flag, 6B his heir apparent, 6C other children. 6D is the personal flag for all grandchildren of the Pengiran Pemancha, 6E the personal flag of all great-grandchildren.

Figure 7.

The colour of the Pengiran Temenggong is red. 7A is his personal flag, 7B his heir apparent, 7C other children. 7D is the personal flag for all grandchildren of the Pengiran Temenggong, 7E the personal flag of all great-grandchildren.

Figure 8.

Beyond the royalty and aristocracy are the flags of the lower officials and government ministers. Cheterias rank below wazirs, and among cheteria there are ranks of level 4, 8, 16, and 32. 8A is the flag of the Head Cheteria, and the kris, or Malay dagger, is a powerful symbol of male strength and power. 8B is the personal flag of Cheteria 4. 8C is the personal flag of children of Cheteria 4 or children of the Head Cheteria. 8D is the personal flag of grandchildren of Cheteria 4 or grandchildren of the Head Cheteria. Based on this, I suspect that Cheteria 4 also serves as Head Cheteria and uses the Head Cheteria flag when functioning as leader or representative of the united group, but confirmation on this fine point of protocol must be addressed to the *adat istiadat*. The same system of ranking then occurs for the subsequent levels: 8E- G Cheteria 8, children, grandchildren; 8H-J Cheteria 16, children, grandchildren.

Figure 9.

Cheteria ranking continues with 9A-C representing Cheteria 32, children, grandchildren. Flags 9D- G are personal standards for various royal ministers. I translate 9D to be the Minister of Palace

Protocol. 9E translates as the Honourable Crossbar of Pikes for the Sultan - perhaps this is the Minister of the Sultan's Armaments. 9F is the Chief Herald. 9G is Minister of the Sultan's Soldiers.

Figure 10.

Flags of various political ministers. 10A is the Prime Minister, 10B a deputy Prime Minister, 10C one step below to Ministers at level 4. 10D is the personal flag for ministers at the descending ranks of 8, 16, 32. 10E and F are two lower level ministers. 10G is the personal flag of the Head Land Minister, 10H the personal flag of other land ministers.

Figure 11.

Flags of various religious officials in descending rank. 11A serves the Sultan. An Imam (11 B) is a leader of worship in a mosque service and a respected authority on Islam. A Khatib (11 C- E) is a minor official in a mosque, ranked below an Imam.

Figure 12.

We end our review of images from *Buku Rachangan Istiadat Berpusa 1 Ogos, 1968* with three flags of national significance. 12A is the national flag of Brunei, and it is presented in larger format, as the first flags of the sultan and his wife were. 12B is the Flag of the Office of Religious Activities, 12C the Army Flag.

CONCLUSION

In 1970, the rank of Premier Wazir was created, to take precedence and oversee the traditional four wazirs. The Sultan granted him a personal standard as well: "white superimposed in the centre with the State crest in light yellow. The crest is supported by 'Si Kikel,' a kris crossed by its sheath."¹³

On 10 August 1998, the Heir Apparent Prince Haji Al-Muhtadee, age 24, was proclaimed Crown Prince in an elaborate ritual.¹⁴ It would have been wonderful to see this ancient ceremony and analyze how the *istiadat* continued traditional flag usage yet inevitably introduced adaptations to accommodate the impact of late twentieth century globalization of a consumer-oriented, internet-using society. Perhaps only Bill Gates has more money than the Sultan of Brunei. Given the sultan's influence, his religious convictions, and his respect for tradition, it will be fascinating to see how the recognition and use of personal standards among royalty and aristocracy in Brunei Darussalam, the Abode of Peace, will continue or evolve in the 21st century.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

- (1) Peter Turner, Chris Taylor, and Hugh Finlay, *Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei*, 6th ed. (Hawthorn, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 1996), 556.
- (2) Turner *et al*, 557.
- (3) See *Istiadat Berpusa, Kebawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia Paduka Seri Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah: Hari Khamis 6 Haribulan Jemadit-Awal, 1388 Bersamaan 1 Haribulan Ogos, 1968*. (Bandar Seri Begawan: National Government, 1968).
- (4) See <www.flagcentre.com.au/fotw/flags/bn.html>. For a brief but clear description of both flag and crest by the Brunei government, see <www.bnmei.gov.bn/about-brunei/flag.htm>.
- (5) Mohammad Deli bin Ahmad, ed., *Brunei Darussalam In Brief*, 6th ed., (Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei: Prime Minister's Office, 1995), 18.
- (6) *Bendera dan Lagu Kebangsaan Brunei*, 10; Mohammad Deli, 18.
- (7) Whitney Smith, "Princess Diana's Flags," *Flag Bulletin* 36 (1997): 228.
- (8) *Bendera dan Lagu*, 11; Mohammad Deli, 19.
- (9) *Bendera dan Lagu*, 12; Mohammad Deli, 20.
- (10) *Bendera dan Lagu*, 12.
- (11) Mohammad Deli, 20.
- (12) Mohammad Deli, 33.
- (13) Mohammad Deli, 18.
- (14) "Crown Prince", *The Government of Brunei Darussalam Official Website*. Internet. <www.brunei.gov.bn/index.htm>.

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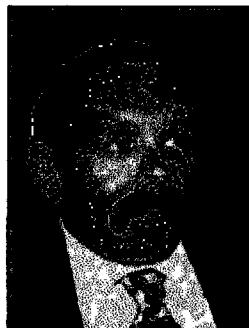
Figure Captions

ARMS OF BRUNEI

- Fig. 12a : NATIONAL FLAG
- Fig. 1: SULTAN AND HIS WIFE
- Fig. 2: FORMER SULTAN
- Fig. 3: ROYAL FAMILY
- Fig. 4: PENGIRAN BENDAHARA
- Fig. 5: PENGIRAN DIGADONG
- Fig. 6: PENGIRAN PEMANCHA
- Fig. 7: PENGIRAN TE MENGGONG
- Fig. 8: CHETERIAS
- Fig. 9: ROYAL MINISTERS
- Fig. 10: MINISTERS
- Fig. 11: RELIGIOUS OFFICIALS
- Fig. 12b,c : OTHER FLAGS OF BRUNEI

Scot M. Guenter

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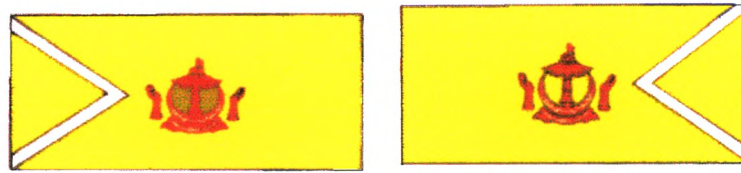


Fig. 2 ab

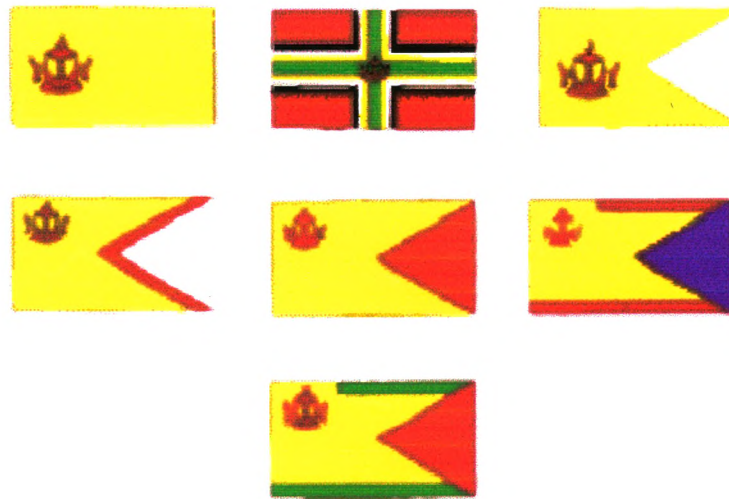


Fig. 3 abc, def, g

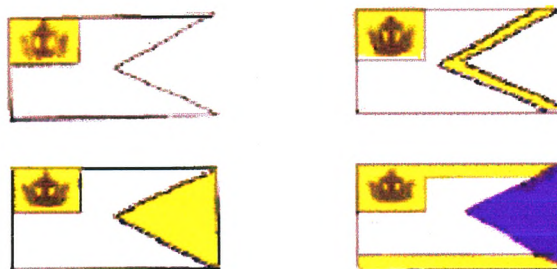


Fig. 4 a, bc, de

Scot M. Guenter : Royal, Aristocratic...Flags of .. Brunei,
Figures in Colour, Col. Pl. III

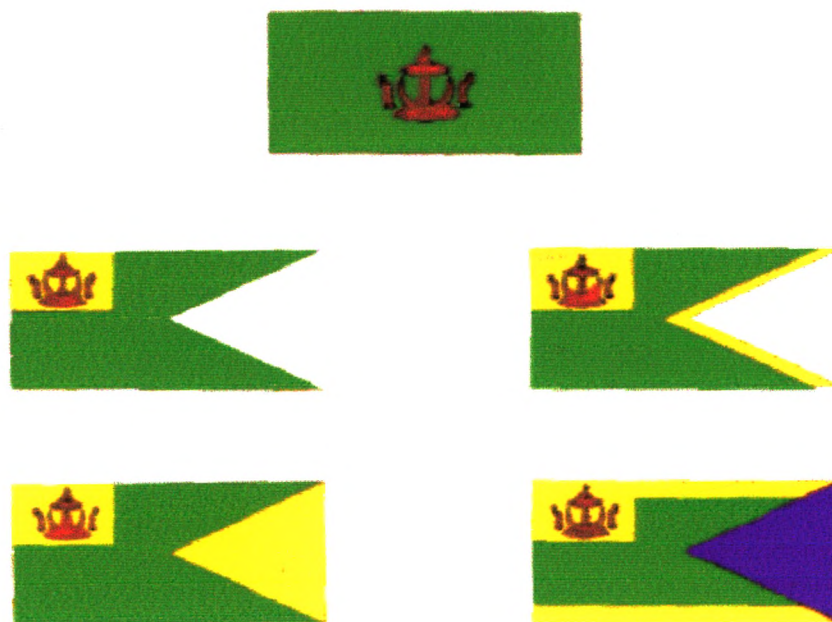


Fig. 5 a, bc, de

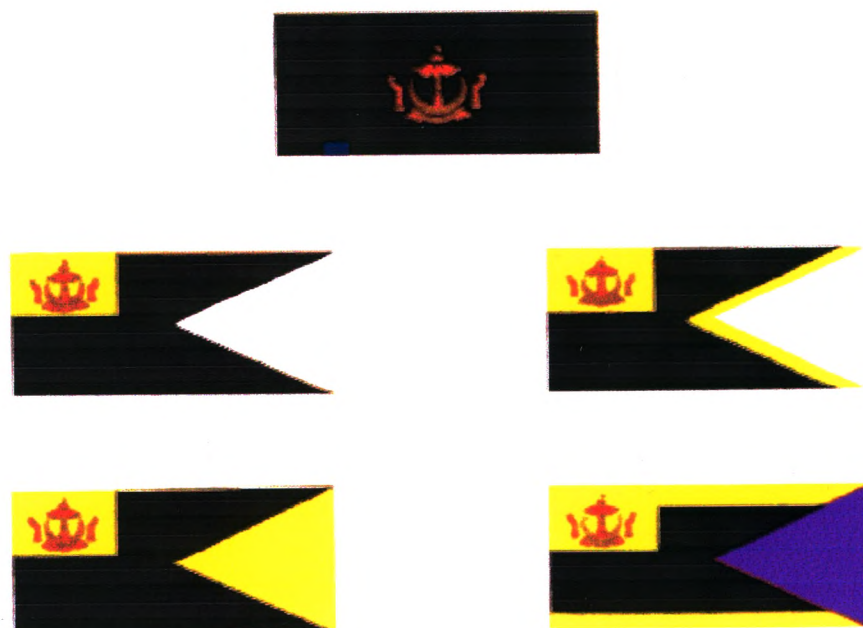


Fig. 6 a, bc, de

Scot M. Guenter : Royal, Aristocratic...Flags of .. Brunei,
Figures in Colour, Col. Pl. IV

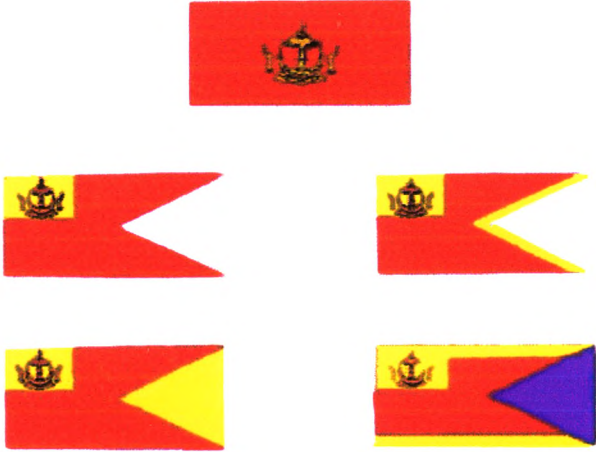


Fig. 7 a, bc, de,

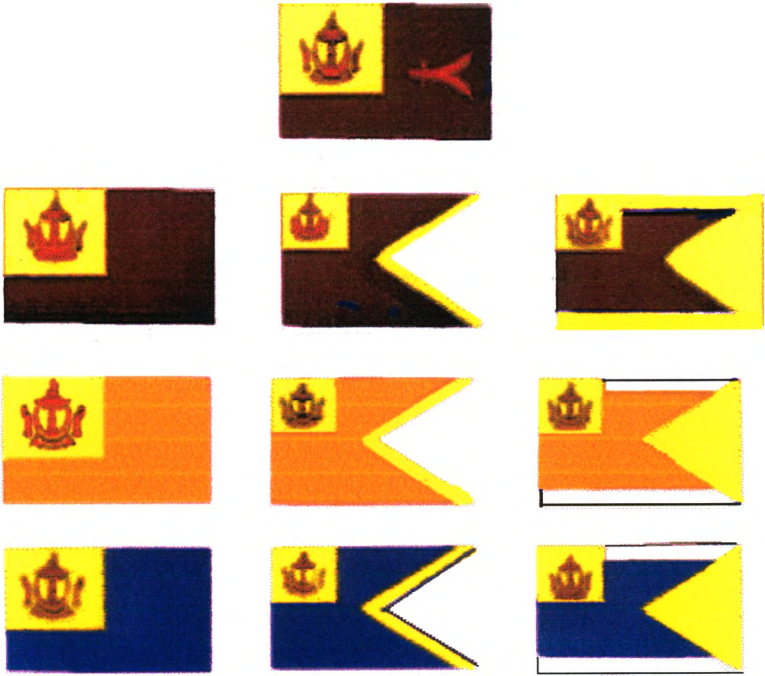


Fig. 8 a, bcd, efg, hij

Scot M. Guenter : Royal, Aristocratic...Flags of .. Brunei,
Figures in Colour, Col. Pl. V

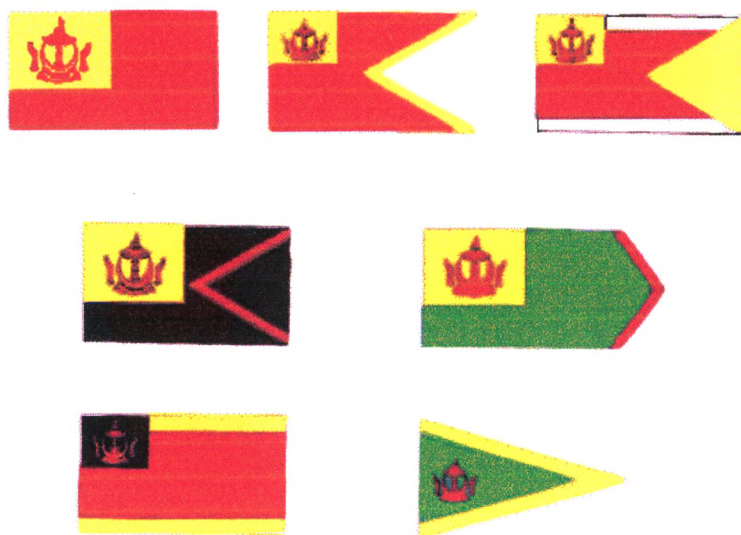


Fig. 9 abc, de, fg

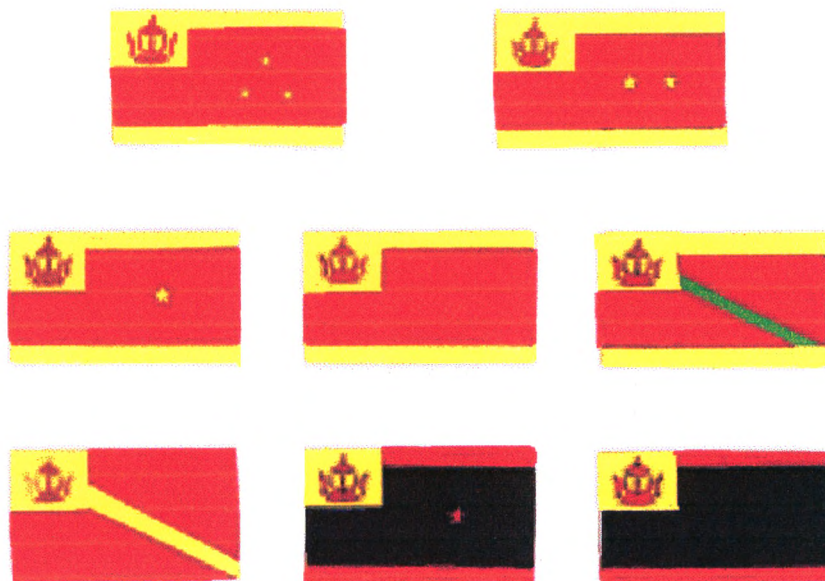


Fig. 10 ab, cde, fgh

Scot M. Guenter : Royal, Aristocratic...Flags of .. Brunei,
Figures in Colour, Col. Pl. VI



Fig. 11 ab, cde



Fig. 12 b, c



Scot Guenter receives CFA award for best presentation on Asia-Pacific flag topics, ICV 18. Meanwhile back in Zürich, ICV 15, Dr. Guenter's fellow vexillophiles - Gus Tracchia (USA), Jan Mertens (Belgium), Erwin Günther (Germany)

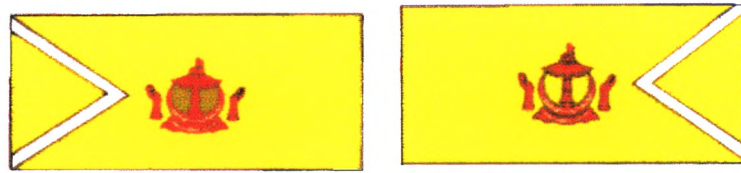


Fig. 2 ab

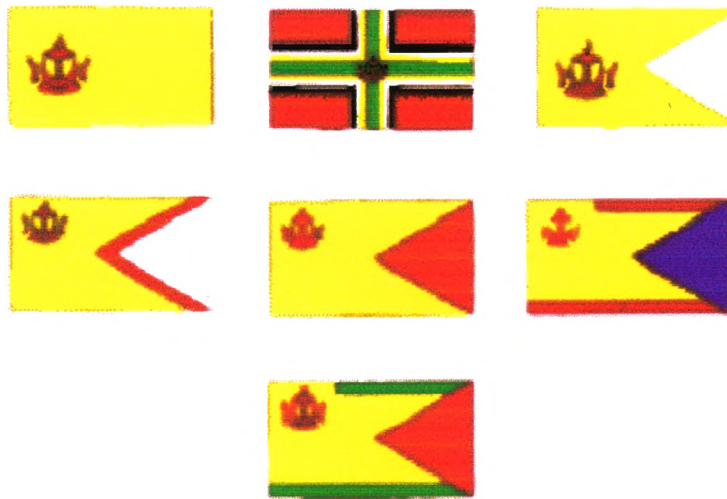


Fig. 3 abc, def, g

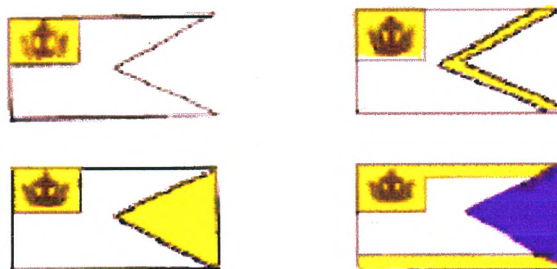


Fig. 4 a, bc, de

Scot M. Guenter : Royal, Aristocratic...Flags of .. Brunei,
Figures in Colour, Col. Pl. III

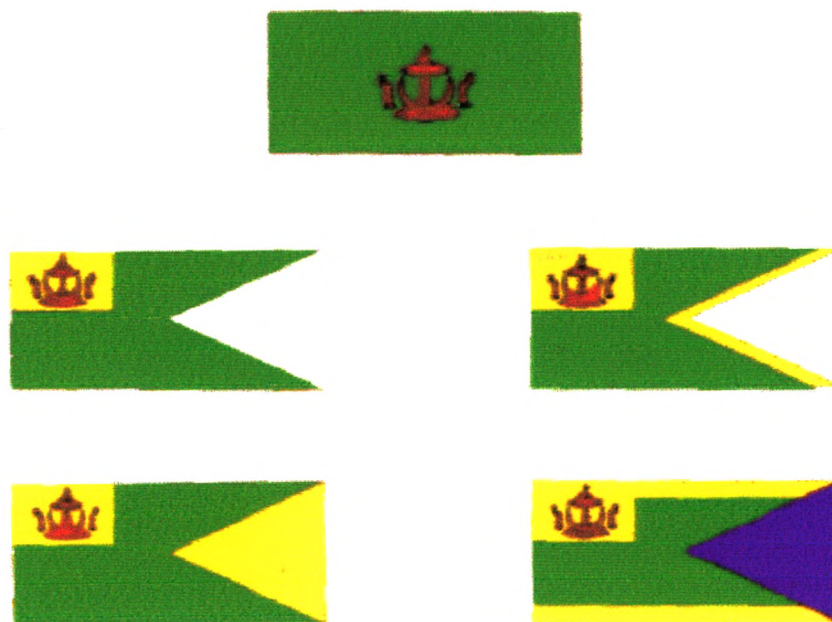


Fig. 5 a, bc, de

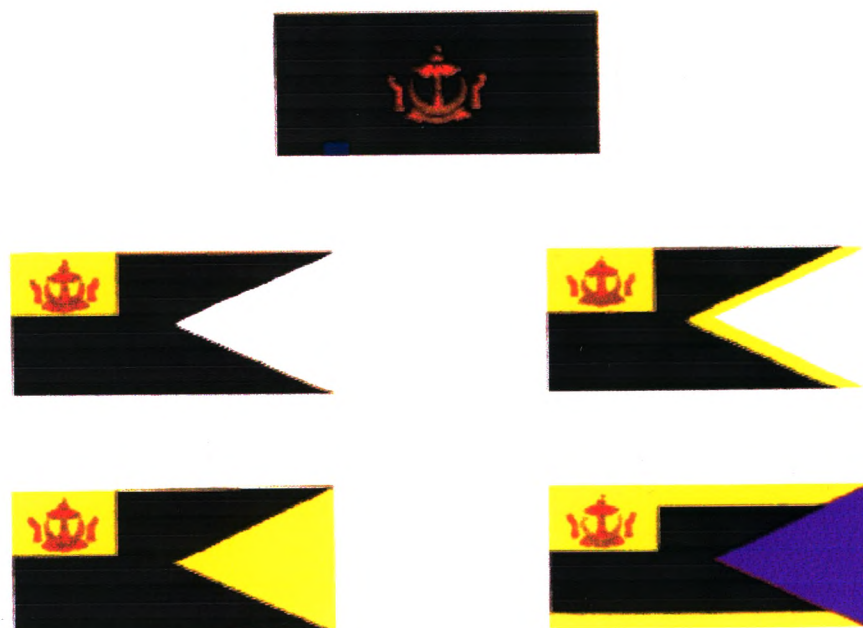


Fig. 6 a, bc, de

Scot M. Guenter : Royal, Aristocratic...Flags of .. Brunei,
Figures in Colour, Col. Pl. IV

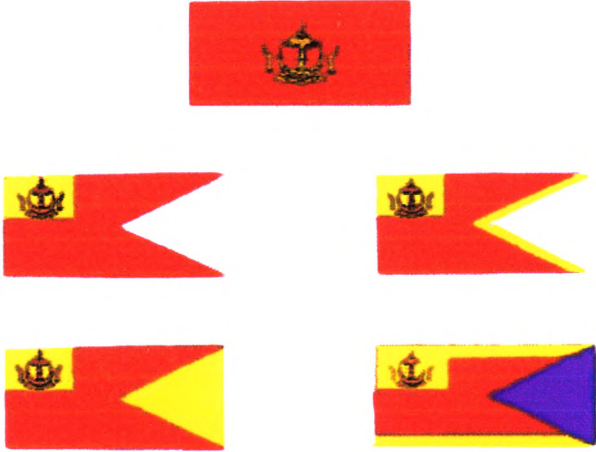


Fig. 7 a, bc, de,

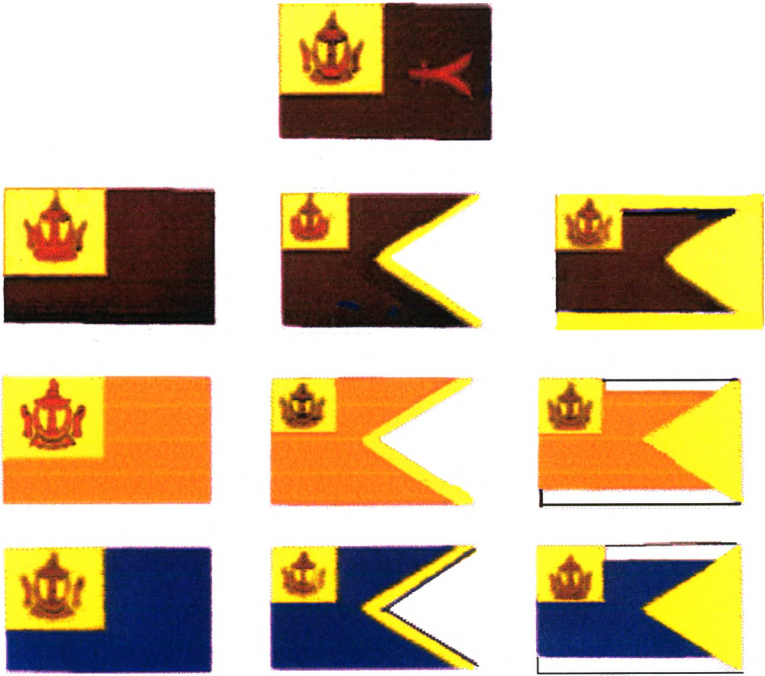


Fig. 8 a, bcd, efg, hij

Scot M. Guenter : Royal, Aristocratic...Flags of .. Brunei,
Figures in Colour, Col. Pl. V

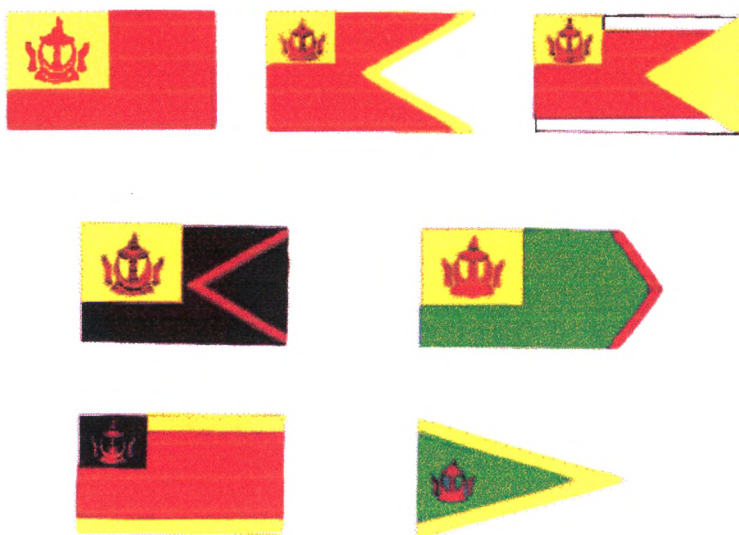


Fig. 9 abc, de, fg

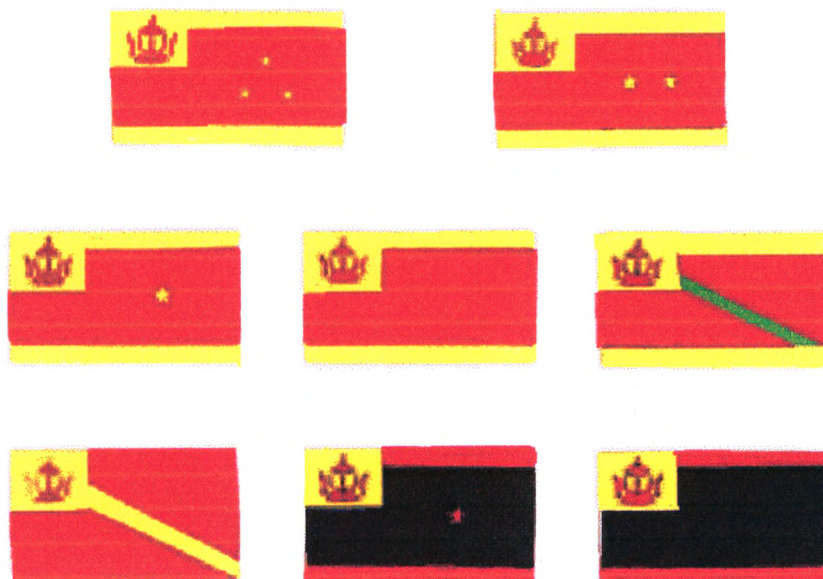


Fig. 10 ab, cde, fgh

Scot M. Guenter : Royal, Aristocratic...Flags of .. Brunei,
Figures in Colour, Col. Pl. VI

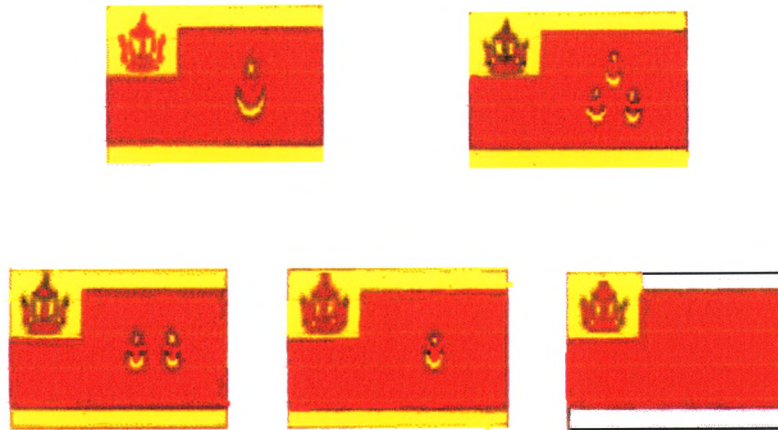


Fig. 11 ab, cde



Fig. 12 b, c



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