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Parang Lading and Klewang Sumbawa

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- Gear reviews and tests - Edged tools - Long blades -



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Description :

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Parang Lading and Klewang Sumbawa

The [Parang \(knife\)](#) is a traditional knife of [Malaysia](#) and [Indonesia](#).

Probably one of the biggest surprises I've had was finding out that a lot of people who collect swords, never use them. In fact most swords wouldn't last long against trees. I can see that with swords designed for slashing, but it's hard to believe that people never get to try out their swords to see just what they can cut. Pity! Well only one of these blades could properly be called a sword - being primarily a fighting weapon - the Sumbawa. The parang is a tool for getting through dense mixed jungle. You'll sure tire of chopping before these two reach their limits! Just make sure you read the warnings first BEFORE GOING OUT TO DO SOME CHOPPING!!!!!!

Firstly - I'm into experimenting with what can chop through mixed bush, and am not knowledgeable about weapons. For a real overview of Indonesian weapons go [here](#):

I can still remember opening the parcel which included the Parang Lading. While older people like me, often remember things from years ago better than things recent. I can remember so vividly because I get the same feeling every time I unsheath the blade! As you'll gather from my pages I'm rather a practical person, and not exactly into collecting - so seeing something like this came as quite a shock:



This of course does it more justice - but the first picture was taken after cutting through things that I wouldn't have believed that any blade would have gone through!



In actual fact, very little in the way of pictures is going to really describe one of these blades. It's like seeing a picture of some huge snake on television - quite different from having one sharing the couch with you. The damascus is somewhat different from what is usually made in the west, consisting of pamor.

Here I quote what Jean-Marc (singularity) posted on the forums:

"I asked about damascus blades and if they were for presentation or could be use, here is a part of the answer:

In reply to:

Our damascus blades are indeed using blades just like the good ol' days, NONE of them are for presentation or decoration purpose only (though some collectors might do). Every single blades are properly made (even to the "fanciest" ones) and treated with a very basic idea in mind ... someone's gonna use them somehow, someday!

BTW, 90 out of 100 antique goloks are in damascus ... which Indonesian people refer to 'besi pamor' or 'balik mipih'. And as we clearly and proudly stated in our website, the people who forge and make our blades (especially the damascus ones) are STILL of the same generation who made the same style of blade 2-3 centuries ago! Yes, we did create some new hybrid or 'fancy' looking blades to cater the collectors, but more than 80% of them are based on original and traditional concept ... "form follows function".

I also received the following on Valiant's blades damascus structure, thanks to Mr Suwandi:

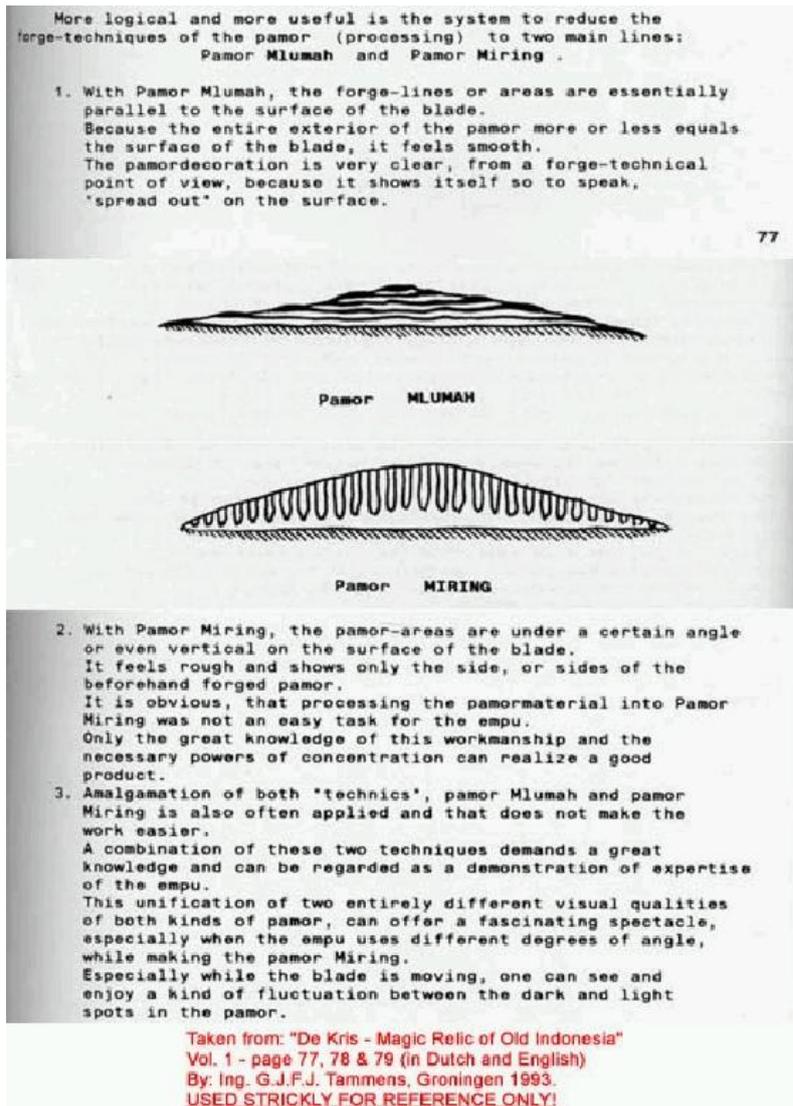
In reply to:

Our damascus blades are different from the ones you probably have known where the patterns are parallel and laid alongside the core/hard metal in the middle. In this case, the impact on the blade is absorbed by the core only. You can always see layers of steel at the spine.

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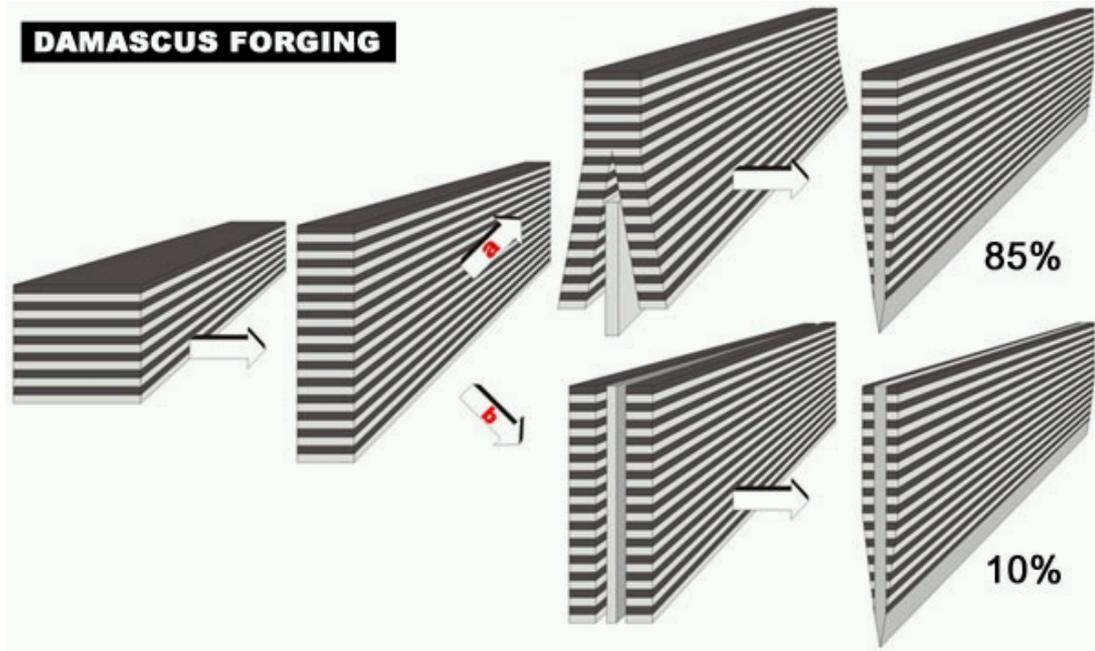
please refer to PAMOR MLUMAH. Ours are totally of different concept where the patterns created because of the forging, no core, just layers of sandwiched steel. impact is absorbed by the whole blade (layers of soft and hard steel). You seldom see any layers of steel at the spine.

Please refer to PAMOR MIRING. The negative factors (if there are some forging imperfections) are: - if the blade cracks, it will crack throughly to the other surface (you can see the other side through the crack) though it may not affect its performance at all; - if the soft steel unexpectedly becomes the outer layer of the cutting edge, it may be vulnerable. To show the difference, attached some references based on a keris structure which is quite different from our blades, but at least they would give you a better idea in what we're talking about."

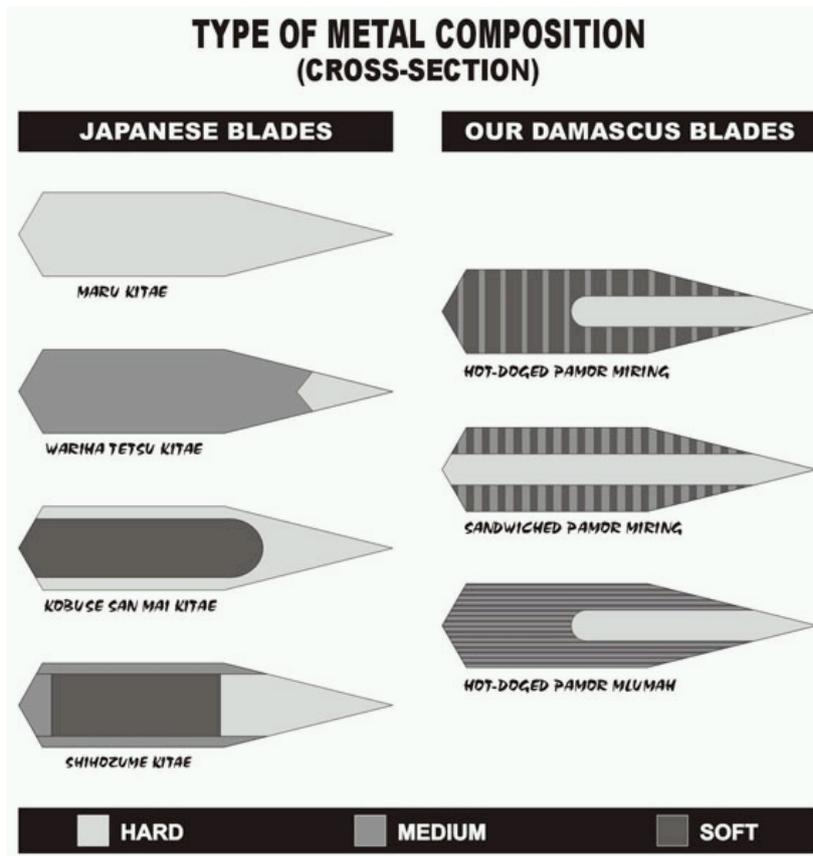


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I then received this:



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What I really wanted to know is if the blades could chop through seasoned birch effectively, and still be in one piece and sharp. The simple answer is yes! For people who want to know why their blade is not only beautiful, but very strong, well now you know! In the real world out there in the bush, the blade will soon be black with sap, and you won't be able to tell what it's made from. Then you sit by a fire by some river, the wood having been hacked out of large driftwood by the blade, and get to cleaning it. It's like watching a photographic print develop, as the patterns in the blade start to show. Quite the experience! Normally I finish up the profiles on the blades with a belt grinder, and

they rarely really need retouchup in the field, but if you want the sharpening experience of all time, then honing one of these with a ceramic, while sitting by a river and fire is some experience too. The steel has quite a feeling to it as you hone away. I don't see any way of really describing this, that would make sense. Eventually of course, the etching gets polished down, and you only see the damascus show as it catches the light. I think that I'd advise people to practise with etching solutions first on a cheaper blade like the golok, to bring out the hamon line on it. With a little experience, it's not so hard to re-etch the damascus.

Here's a close up of the end of my Sumbawa just after I got it.



Steel and blade construction are only part of the picture, though. What surprised me about the parang is the comfort of the carved handle and the balance. Nothing from pictures will come close to describing what one of these feels like in the hand - if you have some chopping experience...

The Chopping and the Warnings...

I'm quite aware that any adult can go into a store and buy the largest chainsaw there. Lots of us are still happily walking around with all of our parts despite this: some aren't. These blades could be far more dangerous than a chainsaw because they don't appear as dangerous. The Klewang Sumbawa is a straight edged blade and so is less capable of achieving the draw cut. It's also an extremely heavy blade for its type, and you have to be fairly strong to manage it. If it hits any part of you, then you have something that band-aids are not going to fix. The parang is VERY likely to achieve a drawing cut, sail through stuff you think no blade could ever get through - without slowing - and then you will have major problems if any body parts are in its path. The biggest problem with this blade is if it's the first one that you try chopping with. You'll make some trial chops and all will go well, and you'll think that you know its capability. When by accident, you find yourself making a drawing cut, you'll find that you had no idea of its capability! I started with a golok and from experience made sure that there was always a substantial stop (a log or tree) between the blade path and me. I learned the hard way that without such a stop I would have been injured. Now that I know what I think is the capability of the blade - I keep a stop that is a factor of three times that between me and the blade path. Where this is not possible, I'm very careful of deflections, and where I'm cutting. Simply put, the parang is very tip heavy, more liable to deflections that you will not be able to stop, and is capable of cuts that you will not believe even after you've made them. I realize that lots of people are using parangs in daily life - but they grew up with them! I would figure the \$40 for a golok and time spent learning would beat walking around the rest of my life with a false leg if at all. These are not some sorry dreamed up blades of low capability, they are the real thing. If I use a parang to

clear trail, I often wear chainsaw pants and protective gear.

Having said all of that, of course I'm eventually going to be getting the parang Langgi Tinggang! I'm not telling people to avoid the blades, simply that like all deadly things they demand some respect. Given my experience with the relatively light parang lading, I'd expect quite a learning curve with the heavier parang - and I'm quite strong! The advantage of the parang over other blades is that for a relatively light single handed blade - it's incredibly efficient. One might be able to clear trail with a machete, but when you come up against clumps of alder saplings it's slow going. The tip heavy parang clears everything in its path. The reason I carry one instead of a two handed brusher is that the latter doesn't do well on light springy vegetation, and is a two handed tool. I'm usually carrying a long handled axe which I use as an additional guard by holding the head and planting the end of the handle on the ground. It works well for me is all I can say.

The Klewang Sumbawa:





I chose the handle design on the right wanting a slightly larger grip

I got this one simply for its weight, so that I could see how a heavy golok would handle. I also wanted to learn what effect having a straight blade would make. For sure I could have asked Wandi, but I wanted to learn myself - and he was very anxious to make sure that I knew what I was getting since these were made up on special order and are much heavier than usual. While a straight blade of this length, weight profile can be used with drawing cuts, if you are not successful, then too much vibration comes back through the handle. It's an incredible learning tool though, for someone who likes to use cutting tools, and of course I take it out all the time, even knowing that something else might work better... The only problem with blade forums is that people regularly come along who believe that their special blade will chop anything. Usually that blade is a straight edged design - like this one. By having what is probably the ultimate in straight edged cutters (and it is with the profile and length), I can stay grounded in reality. For sure this blade is capable of some staggering performance - but from what I know now, that would pale before something properly designed for wood and of the same weight and edge profile.

Closeups of the Sumbawa handle.



[image]

The handle on the Parang Lading looks as if it could never be comfortable due to the carving. The big surprise is that it's remarkably comfortable and secure for me, and the carving contributes to this.





[</p]

The one thing that has really surprised me with both the Parang Lading and the Sumbawa is the overall makeup. The handles work so well for me, and the blade weight - that I can't believe that they weren't custom made for me. They

most certainly weren't - Wandu told me that he had a few of the heavy Sumbawa made up on special order - and that the traditional version was the shorter and lighter one. Whoever came up with the design weight and balance must have been someone like me - and I thought I was the only model! One of the "concerns" I had when ordering the blade was the amount of ornamentation at the end of the handle. Like all of these blades though, it's traditional, and serves a very definite purpose in actual use. When you hit a tree without the sabering cut, and get vibration, the handle does seem to dampen it. It also provides a very secure grip which is equally important - especially since any proper cuts - even those which take down the tree in one swipe - often lead to a very loud cracking sound. You want a very secure grip when hearing that unexpectedly for the first time! It's as loud as when you (hopefully safely) springboard a small leaning tree, and it splits to the top.

It does take a lot of strength to wield these blades, and one might want to do some practise with something safer than the blade itself.

From Neal Stephenson's "Snowcrash" - a delight of a book for anyone into swords, science fiction - or both..

"Hiro is in his 20-by-30 at the U-Stor-It. He is spending a little time in Reality, as per the suggestion of his partner. The door is open so that ocean breezes and jet exhaust can blow through. All the furniture — the futons, the cargo pallet, the experimental cinderblock furniture — has been pushed up against the walls. He is holding a one-meter-long piece of heavy rebar with tape wrapped around one end to make a handle. The rebar approximates a katana, but it is very much heavier. He calls it the redneck katana."

And yes I do know that a katana is used two handed.. But - that is the best illustration of how to get some practise. Using something that will only break your leg rather than remove it - might be a good method...

As to why someone in a sci-fi book would have a sword:

"The Deliverator never pulled that gun in anger, or in fear. He pulled it once in Gila Highlands. Some punks in Gila Highlands, a fancy Burbclave, wanted themselves a delivery, and they didn't want to pay for it. Thought they would impress the Deliverator with a baseball bat. The Deliverator took out his gun, centered its laser doohickey on that poised Louisville Slugger, fired it. The recoil was immense, as though the weapon had blown up in his hand. The middle third of the baseball bat turned into a column of burning sawdust accelerating in all directions like a bursting star. Punk ended up holding this bat handle with milky smoke pouring out the end. Stupid look on his face. Didn't get nothing but trouble from the Deliverator.

Since then the Deliverator has kept the gun in the glove compartment and relied, instead, on a matched set of samurai swords, which have always been his weapon of choice anyhow. The punks in Gila Highlands weren't afraid of the gun, so the Deliverator was forced to use it. But swords need no demonstrations."

Like fine blades, I find Neal Stephenson novels very thought provoking and enjoyable! It's strange to think that there really are sword carrying geeks around, and that I might be classified as one!

Conclusions:

Most of the large Valiant blades are made in both regular steel and damascus. So if you want to try the design of one of these traditional blades for a very good price, you are certainly able to do so. The regular steel blades are zone hardened, so with a little work you can bring out the hamon, and have a blade that will keep you intrigued for years.

That's so even if you never use the blade for much chopping. With all the warnings on the page, you certainly don't need any more - so I'd just say that if you get one of the damascus blades, you'll likely soon have many more to enjoy and keep it company. That's so because this is a different construction of damascus and something very different from what most of us have seen. It's also of a price that means that you can go out and work with it, reprofile or sharpen it, re-etch it. What we have here are blades that are very different from most that we have experience with. Some of course won't like them at all, but others like me who believed that blades are just to be used, might find their beliefs changing with regards to the importance of looks of blades. I would suspect that those who prefer more modern looking blades might be requesting some grinding work on them after seeing the potential of a large convex edge profile.

There are online articles on the [Valiant site](#). I believe that a little research is needed to find the blade that best matches the intended purpose. Some blades are designed more for cutting masses of light material, some for chopping, and some of course are traditional designs for removing heads or fighting.

Hopefully I've begun to provide a little insight, as well as given people something to keep them away from the television for a while. The fact is, though, that everything about these blades is complex - from their looks to their use. It would good to go to [Jean-Marc's site](#) to get more information, as well as see what is written on the forum posts. Jean-Marc's posts and his article on testing the blades against a banana tree should keep a person occupied for hours.

I'm truly indebted to Jean-Marc for his encouragement to try these blades, and for his incredible perceptions on why they work so well and can mean so much to us!

Please read this [safety warning](#) if you intend to use big blades.

Post-scriptum :Original article at [OldJimbo's site](#).