

## Gallery Talk:

### More Than Meets the Eye: Arts and Culture in Indonesian Textiles

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Carol Robbins

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Carol Robbins: For those of you who go through here on a regular basis, you'll probably realize the frames are in the same place and the textiles look pretty much the same, and that's because I do try to keep the same type of textile on view and we, for budgetary reasons, like to make use of the same placement of the frame so that we don't have to build new ones or paint the walls, or take them down, it's expedient to do that.

And as Lisa indicated, some of these are new, some of them--like these two-- have not been on view for quite a long time even though they entered the collection in 1983 as part of the Steven G. Alpert collection of Indonesian Textiles. In my attempt to be briefer than I was on Monday, I won't go into great detail about collection history or culture, but I think it's worth noting that the Indonesian or Island Southeast Asia is the more politically correct term because it is not republic or country specific.

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And that nowhere is that more apparent than when we're talking about the island of Borneo. The northern part of the island is politically part of Malaysia and Brunei, and yet, the southern part is Indonesian. So most of our sculpture comes from Kalimantan, the southern part, the Indonesian part, but these two textiles actually come from the northern part which is--well, you find that people and cultures span political divisions. So it isn't always possible to be precise in terms of origin. But for the most part, the textiles that we associate with the island of Borneo--and they are one of the great textile traditions of the Indonesian archipelago--they were woven on the Malaysian side of the border between Malaysia and Indonesia and the people we know as Iban.

So these two pieces represent that textile tradition, but in the broader sense of our collection the Indonesian or Island Southeast Asian collection is one of the museum's most recent. The earliest examples entered the collection in the early 1980s and the earliest pieces were sculpture. Almost simultaneously, a young man--young then, he's still younger than I am--Steven G. Alpert, who had grown up in Chicago but

had gone to college in New Zealand and had traveled extensively in Indonesia, who fell in love with Indonesian culture, and had amassed a collection and then began to deal in the art of the area.

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He was still living in Chicago at the time that John Lunsford, who was then our curator, met him and bought some of the first acquisitions for the collection. John returned from Chicago very enthusiastic about the textiles that Steve Alpert had shown him, and it wasn't an easy thing. We despaired of being able to actually acquire Steve's textile collection, but thanks to Margaret McDermott and the Eugene McDermott Foundation, we were able to acquire the collection, which at that time was 76 textiles in 1983.

We were at that point planning the installation of the downtown building and were in the process of moving from Fair Park. We also had the wonderful opportunity to show sculpture as part of a long-term loan from the Barbier-Mueller Museum in Geneva, Switzerland and that was important because Mr. Barbier—Jean Paul Barbier—who is a friend of Margaret McDermott had been very influential in our focusing on collecting Indonesian sculpture and textiles. It was Mr. Barbier who recommended to Margaret that she look more closely at this textile collection that was right here in Dallas, because by that time Steve Alpert had moved to Dallas and the collection was here.

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And the collection numerically was small, but it spanned pretty much the archipelago. The quality was very fine and so it's from that original collection and then from additional purchases that we continue to be able to show textiles in conjunction with sculpture and metalwork; and that's what makes the installation in this area I think really special. And visitors—knowledgeable visitors, collectors, dealers continue to remark on that qualitative balance, which very few museums can do. If you follow the news such as in the *New York Times*, you may have been aware of a recent announcement that the Yale University Art Gallery has undertaken, thanks to the generosity of a generous donor Tom Jaffe, an initiative to build the most important Indo-Pacific collection in the United States.

And for those of you who may think that our previous director, Jack Lane, was mostly interested in Contemporary art, as soon as that announcement came out in the *New York Times*, I received an email from

Jack asking what effect that would have on the ranking of the Dallas Indonesian collection. And my careful response to Jack was that we have never said we wanted to have the largest collection or the most comprehensive, just one that was balanced in terms of textiles, sculpture and metalwork and one that was aesthetically superior.

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And so, I think you'll probably hear a lot more about the Yale University Museum collection. And what I said to Jack is I think that, because they have more funding than we have and they have the goal of creating a kind of virtual museum that will encompass--and they have hundreds more textiles than we do and sculpture--that I see their collection and what they do with it as being a complementary resource really rather than competition. But you will hear more about that, I'm quite sure.

And if you follow--there is another thread to this--which has to do with the de Young Museum in San Francisco and Jack forwarded my response to him, to Harry Parker, and Harry then wrote me, "Well, what do you think about--critically, what do you think about the Indonesian sculpture that the de Young acquired from a private collection in Los Angeles?" And that led into another response. And so again, Jack saw this activity as indicating increased awareness of this collection area or this part of the world as worthy of focus and I think that's a very positive way to look at it. But that's a rambling introduction to this. In terms of this gallery, I began my docent training saying that I have--my preference would have been to juxtapose the Batak collection or the Batak area with Mentawai, the westernmost part of Indonesia, because I think stylistically, there's merit to that.

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And yet, there is another way to look at it and that is because we had in 2001, again thanks to the McDermott family, specifically the McDermott Art Fund, we acquired seven sculptures, most of which were of large scale that demanded more space and simultaneously, the Egyptian loan was returned to Boston and therefore, we were able to move South Asia across the landing here and expand into this gallery. And the commonality between Borneo and Mentawai is that they're both longhouse cultures.

Now, in Mentawai, which is that part of the gallery and is sculpture, there isn't a weaving tradition. It is in theory a simpler kind of culture, whereas when you turn to Borneo, you have sculpture, you have metalwork and you have the weaving tradition, a very distinguished weaving tradition.

And in this case, to address after quite some time the title *More Than Meets the Eye*, I chose that because when you see textiles hanging on the wall, it isn't always obvious how they were made and that's a question that is often intriguing, nor is it apparent how they were used. And so, that's sort of the focus I'll take and try to speed this up as we move along.

[00:11:18]

I try, in these two frames dedicated to Borneo, to represent their two different ways of creating pattern and that encompasses—it enables me to introduce the basic fibers used in Indonesian textiles and the most important one is cotton and the most important means of achieving pattern is ikat and probably most of you saw the *Resisting Color* show downstairs a year or so ago. The textile on the right represents the ikat process, which ikat derives from a Malay- Indonesian term that means to bind or to tie or to wrap around, and it refers to the tying and dyeing of the warp yarns which are vertically oriented here before they are put on the loom and before the weaving process begins.

It's a tedious process and even though I've seen it executed, it still to me is mind-boggling that someone can keep this in mind even if they are using an already woven textile as a guide or to copy from, so that wherever you see white or cream-colored areas in this piece, those represent areas that were wrapped, that the groups of warp yarns were wrapped with some sort of binding element that would resist the dye. And then where you see--well, probably what's the dark blue, maybe, over a red and then there is a red, so that the more colors you have, the more tying and dyeing and unwrapping and rewrapping that you would have represented. But the ikat process and the word *ikat* is a common one in English, but it's typical of various other resist dyeing processes that the English term is one that originated in Indonesia.

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Now, in terms of the imagery, we're looking at crocodilian figures. They are probably crocodiles and there are scholars who feel that the crocodile, among the Iban, had a kind of totemic significance; that there was a special relationship between human beings and crocodiles. And in this case, this is the orientation, a kind of mouth-to-mouth orientation of these figures. They don't have the long snout that you would associate with crocodiles, so maybe *crocodilian* is a more appropriate term, but they're mouth-to-mouth across this horizontal area and this, this is a casual description, Steve Alpert described this as crocodiles or lizards drinking out of the stream. And that's perhaps a poetic, perhaps—well,

we don't know because we didn't interview the weaver, but that gives you a link at least to why they would be oriented this way, a kind of mirror image. It may have been that it made it easier for the weaver to—she may have been tying the yarns as they were folded and it shortened the tying time.

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This type of textile is usually called a *pua*, p-u-a. And *pua* means woven cloth but these textiles have various ceremonial usages. They can be hung throughout the longhouse at the time of celebration, they can serve as a canopy for a newborn child, and they can cushion an offering. Wherever they are used, they have the connotation of protection. But for the woman who wove this cloth, who tied and dyed it, who had the vision of these crocodiles and then was able to execute it so well, achieve rich color, that the creation of this textile represented a way for her to achieve the kind of prestige within her community that a man achieved by taking a head through the headhunting rituals, which even though they may seem appalling to us, was ritual warfare and was done for the sake of fertility—human fertility and agricultural fertility both animals and plants.

So their taking a head was what enabled a man to become able to marry and to achieve status within his community. An exhibition of Iban textiles at the Fowler Museum as entitled *The Women's Warpath* and that's was an aptly named exhibition because it does indicate the dual role or the role of textiles to balance with warfare among men.

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The piece in the left frame, the patterning—it's denser, it's dark, it has the same color palette of dark red, soft-white or ecru or a cream however, and a very dark blue that the piece on the right does, but the pattern is achieved by extra wefts that are inserted during the weaving process and it's usually designated as weft wrapping or *sungkit*; and the patterns are—they may appear to be purely geometric, but there's a kind of vegetal quality to them which is also characteristic of Iban textiles. Textiles that were woven using this technique were once considered more closely associated with headhunting rituals than textiles that were patterned by the ikat process.

More recent scholarship refutes that or attempts to and yet I'm not sure that that's valid because human memory is very fragile and headhunting has not been practiced in this area for decades and so it would be quite

logical, I think, that weavers being interviewed within the last 10 years or so would not have that connection to headhunting. This piece is narrower, as you can see, and pieces of this type have been described as shoulder cloths or worn in a kind of sling that women would receive the heads as the warriors returned with heads, severed heads.

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So that's just something to be aware of and I think it's an indication of how interpretation changes over time depending on what people remember. And with that, because I'm sure I'm going to run out of time, let's move into—yes?

Female: What did they used to call this [inaudible] what is that?

Carol Robbins: Good question. The red, these are both probably dyed using natural or plant dyes and the red--and this is true throughout these galleries--when it's a natural red, the most common source is a tree that's called *Morinda citrifolia* and it is apparently native to Southeast Asia, but not Indonesia. It was transported or transplanted, literally, to Indonesia and that's the source of the red. It requires a mordant to fix the dyes and the use of the mordant, or the way the plant--the bark as my understanding is this is really a bark or the root--is responsible for a fairly wide-ranging kind of palette of reds, but the Iban red is traditionally this dark reddish brown. The blue is indigo and then the white is the natural, unpigmented color of the cotton.

Female: Can you say that only the women weave these on that--?

[00:21:21]

Carol Robbins: Yes. I mean, that's something that distinguishes and I didn't go into this but in terms of what's the difference between the cultures of Island Southeast Asia and the cultures of Oceania further to the east is that somehow or other weaving and metalwork stops and both techniques came to Indonesia from mainland Southeast Asia, which is why the designation Island Southeast Asia is logical because it links Indonesia and Indonesian art to the mainland, but metalwork and textiles weaving stop about the time you get as Far East as the Island of New Guinea. And women, because they were the weavers and the dyers, had a more important role in the cultures of Island Southeast Asia than they did in the cultures of Oceania. In Oceania, women were observers of ritual but they were not participants in it, whereas, throughout Indonesia they were participants. And in part, because of this strong belief in duality in

Island Southeast Asia, the desire for harmony, the need, the necessity to balance opposites, male and female being perhaps the simplest but hot-cold--metalwork was hot, textiles were cold, men were hot and women were cold--and so you get this sense of duality throughout, and I'll talk more about that as we move along. And this is where I'll stop next.

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I'll be talking about the textiles on all the walls in this gallery but I'll start with these and since there are few of you this should work pretty well. It shouldn't be as complicated as it was for the docents on Monday.

Female: [Voice overlap] all called *puas*?

Carol Robbins: No, not all of them—the Iban textiles, *pua* is the common designation for these rectangular cloths that are—well in general, I would say they are not worn as garments. But they are used in ceremonial ways and they're rectangular, they vary in width, and that was one of the questions the docent's asked was, how consistent are these pieces in terms of size?

We've now moved from the island of Borneo to the southern part of the island of Sumatra. So we're moving gradually from west to east although not directly, I mean, Mentawai and Nias, on one side of this gallery we just left are the westernmost cultures in our collections and they are off the west coast of Sumatra and then, we're moving now to the southern coasts of Sumatra and then we'll move to the interior area of Sumatra, the northern part of Sumatra.

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And, in turning to the southern part of Sumatra, the Lampung area, it gives us an opportunity to address both--the standard garment for women throughout Indonesia was a tubular skirt and this is an example of the garment type but it has been unseamed. The right and the left edges were sewn together originally and the woman probably would have worn some sort of European-style blouse with it. So you'll see tubular skirts in the next gallery as well as this one, and if you remember what was shown here previously, it was another unseamed skirt.

An important iconographic element in southern Sumatran textiles is the ship.

Male: [inaudible]

Carol Robbins: It had sea creatures but there was another textile, a *tampan*, that had an elaborate maritime scene with ships and sea creatures, really weird creatures and human figures. And the literature often describes the ship as the ship of the dead. But in this area, well, throughout Indonesia really, the ship has a much broader connotation. It represents safe passage for the human spirit which is most vulnerable at times of crisis, at birth, weddings, anytime that a man achieves different role or higher role, moves to a higher level or rank within the society, and at death. So death is only one of those transitional life-changing moments.

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Usually, the ship is, well, simpler or more characteristically Indonesian, but in the case of the unseamed skirt, what you see in the way of ships are versions, or highly influenced versions, of European vessels. So paddleboats, you see human figures and European-style chairs, you see human figures riding animals and instead of the tree, which is usually the tree of life, I mean, the images that are most often paired are the ship and the sacred tree, but the tree here is more like a candelabrum, you see a camel, you see harbor lights, so this is more whimsical treatment of the imagery. And in this case, it's achieved by the application of gold-wrapped yarns to the surface of a hand-woven cloth. And in this case, the warp is oriented horizontally in the finished skirt and the stripes in the ground serve as a kind of guide or a grid for laying out the gold-wrapped fiber.

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Southern Sumatra was in a sense characteristic of what you find--there is a contrast between people who live along the coast in Indonesia and they are exposed to trade, or they are involved in it. They are influenced by the cultures with which they interact and so they tend to convert to Islam earlier whereas people who live farther in the interior, such as the Ibans on Borneo, tend to retain their traditional animus beliefs longer. This southern area of Sumatra is a kind of blend. This piece represents the coast, but there are related traditions that are farther inland that are not so heavily influenced. But it's that coastal region and living in the coasts that gives these people access to imported materials and I think that they probably acquired the gold-wrapped yarn from India. The gold could be made and it could have been made locally, but I think this was probably imported because they had ample materials to trade for it by melting down coins and then extruding the molten coins through circular openings in a metal plate, and then hammering the metal to create flat strips which were then wrapped around either cotton or silk yarn.



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So this is a labor-intensive process and people who were interviewed in southern Sumatra during the 1980s, their opinion was that the finest quality metallic yarns came from France and Japan, but they were not readily available and they were very expensive, whereas the more readily available metallic yarns came from India but they did not wear as well. And I would say, judging from our own textiles, that gold was probably a higher in quality and wore better than silver. Silver tends to wear away from the yarn very, very rapidly.

You could not have threaded a needle with gold-wrapped yarn and pulled it back and forth through the textile without abrading the metal strips. And I think that's what accounts for the process here, which is to configure the gold-wrapped yarn on the surface and then use a cotton yarn to stitch it down, which creates a kind of almost a quilted look especially if you stand to one side of this piece. And it also enables the woman, probably a woman, who created the composition to devise additional patterns, concentric diamonds, or zigzags, or something more diffuse, and then by using different colors of cotton yarns such as red for the figures in the chairs and the candelabrum, and the camel, that too can subtly alter the color of the metallic yarn.

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And the ship is also the primary element and a very unusual piece in the left frame which features a very, very simple silhouette of a canoe-like vessel. This is beadwork--the docent's asked what is the original object here and how is it supported on the dark blue square--and it's just pinned there. It would have been hanging; I do not know of a similar piece to cite as a comparison for this. This is a piece we acquired in 1990 and I've yet to see something similar. So if any of you see something similar, please let me know. It's on a kind of barkcloth support, the beads are strung on cotton fiber and then secured to the backing areas with some kind of resin.

So I'm assuming that, since the ship was such an important symbol in South Sumatra, that this represented an object that was hung on ceremonial occasions and may have indicated a hierarchy either within a family or within disparate groups that have some sort of relationship, I don't know, but this sort of arching, bit of rattan at the top, would have enabled it to be supported somehow, but it's pinned in foam core,

actually, that's inserted into a frame and then covered with a dark blue fabric. Then the—

Male: [Voice Overlap] on the one side?

Carol Robbins: Yes. And we did not photograph the backside, so I'm not able to, at this point, I don't remember exactly what the backside looks like.

[00:35:25]

It's an intriguing piece in terms of—

Male: [inaudible]

Carol Robbins: Right. Yeah. No, I don't think—I think it would have been hung against a wall, I don't think that the other side would have been intended to be seen. The small square in the right frame represents a type—again, this is typical of southern Sumatran textiles, a type called *tampan* that has associations with benevolence again of the word itself. The word *tampan* is used in Java and in Sumatra to designate a kind of tray which can be either brass or wood, but which is used to present offerings. And certainly, the *tampan* which can be used by members of all levels of southern Sumatran society is associated with offerings, but it has various uses all of which have the connotation of ceremony. A stack of *tampans* can serve as a cushion for the bride during one part of a wedding ceremony, a *tampan* can be tied around the rafters during the construction of a house as a kind of good luck charm, so to speak, and formally, a *tampan* could cushion the head also of a funeral bier.

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Here again, it's a series of various stylized boats and then this kind of hooks that you see, I don't know that you see them here. I don't want to make the comparison with Borneo, but the hook is definitely, as an individual element, a common motif throughout the Indonesian archipelago, but this is fairly small to answer the docent's question, are this always the same size? This is a fairly small example; the one that was in this frame previously was considerably larger. But again, you see that the boat with the scrolled prows and boat and boat and boat.

And then, moving inland, well, I'm really running out of time. Anybody who needs to leave—even with the microphone, you can leave.

Moving inland and speaking of size, if you remember what was here before, it was considerably larger textile but the Batak people, especially the Toba Batak peoples of the interior highland Sumatra, their most important hand-woven cloth, and there are a number of them which take different names according to patterns that are always easy to discern, but they are rectangular pieces that have—they're finished with fringe at the top and the bottom, they generally have a wide solid colored band along the left and the right edges and the center portion is often, at least in part, patterned with ikat yarns such as you can see a subtle kind of chevron pattern here. It's nothing elaborate but in terms of Batak textiles, the weavers, a weaver who was really experienced could—I would go so far as to say--read the designs in textiles that were more elaborately patterned than this one.

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Now, in terms of *More Than Meets the Eye*, this is a piece that was a gift of Steven Alpert fairly recently and the information he provided on it was that it was a women's ceremonial shoulder cloth. And just as the pieces from Borneo, the characteristic term is *pua*, for the Batak the characteristic term is *ulos*. But published examples that I have found more recently with this kind of chevron pattern and this coloring or palette are described in a more particular way as representing a cloth that the maternal grandparents give to their daughter's first-born child.

Now, a question that the docent's asked was how would this be used? Would it have been used as a kind of sling to carry the child? And we got really hung up on that and Margaret Anne Cullum said, "Well, how literally can we take this? Or maybe it was just used to wrap the child?" And so, that's something that I'll be pursuing; Steve Alpert suggested that I contact a Batak scholar who's in Frankfurt, Germany and see what he had to say or what he could offer about it.

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So I hope to be able to amplify the information on the label, but it's just another indication that something as simple as you can say, oh, it's a rectangle and it has a lengthwise stripes and then it has fringe across the ends, but that is an oversimplification of the wealth of usage and meaning that these textiles had among the Batak people. And at the risk of--I'd like to develop relationships between the metal objects and that piece, but I'll move on to this piece because I think John was the one who asked about --well, the ants are no longer here--and as we move into--well, this essentially the Toraja area, I'll prefer being able to show the two

types of textiles that the Toraja people on the island of Sulawesi consider sacred.

And, we have a recent acquisition of the type called *mawa'*, but it presented installation problems and so, in looking for a piece that was stylistically compatible, I turned to this shoulder cloth which was actually made on the northern coast of the island of Java, so that—it is from Toraja, but visually, it's compatible and it enables us to represent a different resist dye technique which is batik. And if you look closely, there's considerable detail in the areas along the bottom and the top, which you can't see, and the sides, which consists mainly of dots and a kind of spontaneous application of dots.

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And wherever there's a white dot, that's an indication that a melted wax was applied to the woven cloth and therefore resisted the dye when it was immersed in the dye. And the indigenous description of this village batik is that the pattern represents the claws or the hen scratching of the claws of a chicken, which is a casual description of it but it's also very apt. The solid color dark blue area in the center may have been influenced by batiks from central Java, the court traditions where such areas such as this were often appliquéd with silk fabric and bright colors.

Then turning to Sulawesi itself and to Toraja textiles, the other type of sacred textile used by the Toraja people who live in the mountainous interior of Sulawesi is the *sarita*, long, very long and you'll see that both of these are rolled because each of them exceeds our ceiling height here. And this had various ceremonial functions, one of which was to serve as banners to announce a funeral. The Toraja culture is probably the most elaborate--the most elaborate public ceremony among the Toraja is the funeral and of course our *tau-tau*, the little person, the funerary figure that represents an image of an elite deceased person, is another work of art that is associated with the funeral.

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And, the funeral can take place decades after the death of this elite person because the family needs time to save the money to buy the buffalos and the pigs that are sacrificed to feed the people who are invited to come to the funeral, to build what amounts to a virtual village for the guests to stay in at the time of the funeral, and put all of this—it's a tremendous performance--together. So that is one link, one purpose, that the *sarita* serves. It can also serve in other ceremonial contexts, it

can be configured as a turban-like headdress for the funerary figure, it can also, for the feast of merit, or thanksgiving feast, it can be tied to link the house to a tree that is planted on that occasion to celebrate the event.

[00:47:05]

In terms of the imagery, notice that each of these pieces has a vertical line down the center that separates the textile into two halves. A scholar, Eric Crystal, who was formerly at the University of California at Berkeley, wrote an article on our Toraja textiles back in the '80s after he had spoken here and had seen them firsthand and then took images of them on a later trip that he made to Sulawesi. So the information that I rely on in interpreting our Toraja textiles, the stamped and painted ones comes mostly from Eric's fieldwork. But he found that wherever you see this vertical line, it generally indicates a stream, an irrigation canal. The Toraja tend to talk about death as a crossing over and the two *saritas* that we showed in the previous rotation showed a more literal interpretation of two human figures who were actually stepping across what was a more literal version of a stream.

Here, you do see, I guess, the most prominent motif, at least, and the one on the left is a water buffalo accompanied by very stylized human figures and the water buffalo is treated, the body and profile, and then the head is turned so that you see the ears and the horns and get the full effect of that, so the water buffalo being the most prestigious animal in Toraja culture.

Then, I'm going to shortchange because I think we definitely are, we're almost to four o'clock, but I'll just call your attention to the Toraja ikat patterned piece on the platform with the standing human figure and the water buffalo because this is a superb example of Toraja ikat.

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It, too, has the same color palette that you saw in the pieces from Borneo and yet, it's totally different. And that's just an indication--same dyes in terms of the sources of the color but this dark brownish red, what appears to be black but probably represents blue and red being over-dyed. There's this combination of or interlocking of geometric forms, the prominence of crosses which symbolize abundance. So the textiles among the Toraja do seem in many cases to represent, again, there's this sense of protection and benevolence, and moving or the aspiration for abundance and prosperity both human and agricultural.

Then let's move, make one last stop, if you can stay, over in Sumba.

Male: Once again, congratulations to the fringe [inaudible].

Carol Robbins: To Jerry Henderson, I didn't credit—I didn't credit Jerry, but—who's traveling in Italy, I think, or maybe she's about to return and I think she—for someone who initially said she would not do fringe, I think Jerry has done an admirable job with the fringe.

[00:51:14]

But for this final stop, this is—both of these textiles come from the small island of Sumba, which was in eastern Indonesia. It is just under 200 miles across, so it's quite small. You will read or hear about the dramatic difference culturally and geographically between East Sumba and West Sumba; and as you fly, if you fly into the usual point, the town of Waingapu in East Sumba, as you fly over the western part of the island--you can see this from the air--that the western half is mountainous. It has high rainfall, it's green, it's more prosperous, but its textile tradition is almost monochromatic. And the large rectangle in the left frame is from the western half of the island of Sumba and this is as colorful as western Sumba textiles get.

The eastern half, which is dry and mostly flat, is the source of the colorful ikat pattern textiles for which Sumba is most famous. Now, the tubular skirt in the right frame doesn't have the ikat patterning, but its bright color palette is characteristic. So in terms of the function though, I like to show a rectangular piece again with fringed ends. Some might wonder if these are all used in the same way.

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But this especially as you move east across the Indonesian islands, the rectangular garment with fringe across each end is the standard garment for men who adhere to traditional dress and these textiles are worn in pairs, one draped around the hips and one as a shoulder cloth, worn according to local custom. Now, the piece on the left is larger than the normal garment that men wear and the scholars who have written about this particular kind of West Sumbanese textiles say that these overly large pieces with this kind of patterning are worn only by the most elite among Sumbanese men, but the textile also has other functions, and I think those other functions explain the unusually large size. It is used as a shroud and it's the use as a shroud that is probably a link to the

patterning on it, which may appear to be totally random and imprecise but the configuration of little dashes or rectangles are said to refer to the patterning of the python, which is, in Sumbanese thought, that because the python and other snakes shed their skins, there's an association between the python and rebirth, which is important in terms of a textile that would be used as a shroud.

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The only representative or figural—it's not figural because it's an object--but a representative or a representational object is—there are two rows not very precisely executed on this piece that represent an omega-shaped gold ear ornament which is represented by two examples in the dark blue case on the blue wall. And, that is the type that is generally called *mamuli* and was used—originally, it may actually have been attached to the ear, but as you'll notice in the lower photograph here, there are men wearing examples of that kind of gold ornament that are probably attached by safety pins or something as equally inelegant to their western style shirts.

Another use for those type of textiles is as a kind of ritual screen or shield to separate the audience from hot objects, objects that are too hot for the audience to be exposed to such as certain heirloom gold objects, so there are photographs of textiles with this kind of patterning just being held up to mark or indicate an area or keep people away from an area. The tubular skirt, the most prominent image is that of the skull tree, which was formally erected in the plaza of Sumbanese villages and the bark was stripped away, it was supported by stones, there was the deliberate attempt to keep--it wasn't a living tree that would sprout shoots and continue to grow, it was deliberately stripped of the bark to use to suspend or support the heads that were, again, considered necessary for fertility, both human fertility and agricultural fertility.

[00:57:49]

There are also a deer and a fish, little serpents and another kind of skull tree, and the comparison I like to make visually here is to look closely at the turtleshell comb and realize that this central motif on the upper portion of the comb is also a skull tree, a kind of skull tree. Then flanking it but facing outward are—there's a small version of a pony, and Sumba was famous for the quality of its ponies, and an even smaller pony shown in profile on each side, and on the back of this very small pony is an exceedingly large cock. The chicken and the cock are another important--they are an important iconographic element. But then as you move

around to the side, you'll see that there are human figures seated and offering food to the animals. So there's the sense of, again, I have run out of time in terms of treating the importance of duality balancing male and female, and hot and cold, dry and wet, all those things that enable life to exist in a harmonious way.

[00:59:28]

But the feeding and the reciprocity between humans and animals, and humans and their ancestors seems apparent in this bringing together of creatures who almost seem to be emerging from the skull tree, which is getting back – it's a reference to the importance of sacrifice for the sake of continuing life. And I appreciate you're having stayed beyond the time.

Carol Robbins: You're most welcome.



