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Hornbill, Naga and Cock in Sa'dan and Toraja Woodcarving Motifs

Introduction

The impressive ancestral houses, or *tongkonan*, of the Sa'dan Toraja, with their fine wood carving, have long attracted the admiration of outsiders as well as being a source of pride to Torajans themselves. They are, indeed, one of the attractions which draw tourists to Tana Toraja, in the highlands of South Sulawesi. Apart from a few short works by Torajans, however, and brief treatments in the works of foreign researchers, relatively little has been written about the symbolism of Toraja house carvings ⁽¹⁾. In this article I should like to draw attention to the differing interpretations which surround one particularly important element of house decoration, a carved ornament in the shape of a bird, which is called *katik*. This ornament is found only on the facades of certain great houses of the highest-ranking nobility ⁽²⁾. When doing research in Tana Toraja I was puzzled by the *katik*, since not everyone appeared to agree about what kind of bird it really represents. Furthermore, the reasons why some houses have the *katik* are not immediately clear, for one may easily elicit from informants various conflicting explanations of its significance.

The *katik* is affixed to the house facade on top of a wooden buffalo-head, which has a pair of real horns attached. This buffalo-head is called *kabongo*' (or in western regions of Toraja, *tedong-tedong kayu*, which means simply «little buffalo of wood»). The bird has a greatly extended, curved neck and a prominent crest or protuberance on top of its head. An early source, Kruyt,

describes the *katik* merely as «a bird's head on a long neck»; noting the resemblance of Toraja houses to boats, he compares the *katik* to carved prow-ends (Kruyt, 1923:86). Grubauer's report of his ethnological expeditions in Sulawesi includes a photograph of a noble house with a particularly large and fine *katik* in the village of Neneng. The head of this bird, surmounting an enormously tall neck, is crowned by a knob-shaped protuberance and has a formidable beak from which hangs a long bunch of dried leaves (probably rice stalks). Like Kruyt, Grubauer describes the *katik* simply as a «representation of a bird» (Grubauer, 1923:60, photo-page 30). But nearly all other published sources describe the bird's head as being that of a hen or cock. Nooy-Palm, for example, calls the *katik* a «woodcarving representing a bird's neck with a head resembling that of a hen.» She adds, «Informants told me that the *katik* represents Lando Kolong, a mythical hen, 'She of the Elongated Neck'» (Nooy-Palm, 1979:240). Volkman describes the carving as «a long-necked cock» (Volkman, 1980:91), while Crystal, following Nooy-Palm, calls it a «stylized hen's head», and adds his interpretation that the hen and buffalo «suggest the union of right and left, female and male, life and death. The water buffalo symbolizes virility – the *katik*, the female element» (Crystal, 1985:196). Although Crystal does not elaborate on what leads him to this conclusion, I shall reexamine his idea below. But first, I look a little more closely at the use of bird motifs in the artistic traditions of some other Indonesian societies.

Bird and dragon motifs in Indonesia

The recurrence of *naga* (water serpent or dragon) and bird motifs in South-East Asian art and symbolic systems has often been noted. Scharer's exposition of Ngaju symbolism, in which the hornbill, representing the Upperworld, occurs in complementary opposition to the water-serpent or *naga* of the Underworld, provides a classic example of a theme which is pursued in numerous other Borneo societies, including the Maloh, Kayan and Kenyah (Scharer, 1963; King, 1985). There are eight or nine species of hornbill found in Borneo, though it is the Rhinoceros and Helmeted varieties which are symbolically most important. That so remarkable a bird should become the object of symbolic attention is certainly not surprising; what is, perhaps, worthy of note is the fairly high degree of similarity which exists in the symbolic associations of the hornbill among different Borneo peoples.

Among the Maloh, the Rhinoceros Hornbill is regarded as one of the manifestations of Sangyang Burong, the deity of warfare and master of the omen birds. It is equally prominent in the Iban belief system, where the deity Lang Sengalang Burong is sometimes identified with the kite and

sometimes with the Rhinoceros Hornbill (Freeman, 1960; Jensen, 1974:83n). King also notes that both dragons and hornbills serve as symbols of rank, prestige and power, especially in Borneo's more stratified societies. Ornaments and ear pendants made from the casque of the Helmeted Hornbill were a mark of aristocracy among Kayan, Kenyah and Kelabit peoples (King, 1985:131; Harrison, 1951). Both *naga* and hornbill designs are sometimes said to serve a protective function, warding off evil spirits. The *naga* is interchangeable with the dog as a symbol of the Underworld, while the hornbill in a similar fashion is sometimes linked with other birds, particularly the hawk (King, 1985:134, 138) ⁽³⁾. The linking together of *naga* and hornbill designs themselves may be used as a way of representing the unity of the cosmos: the Iban hornbill is often represented with a snake in its claws, while the Ngaju may blend elements of the two creatures to produce *nagas* with feathers, or hornbills with scales (King, 1985:134 ; Vredendregt, 1981:28). Both hornbill and *naga* designs are frequently used by Borneo peoples on coffins, as well as in textiles, items of clothing and house murals.

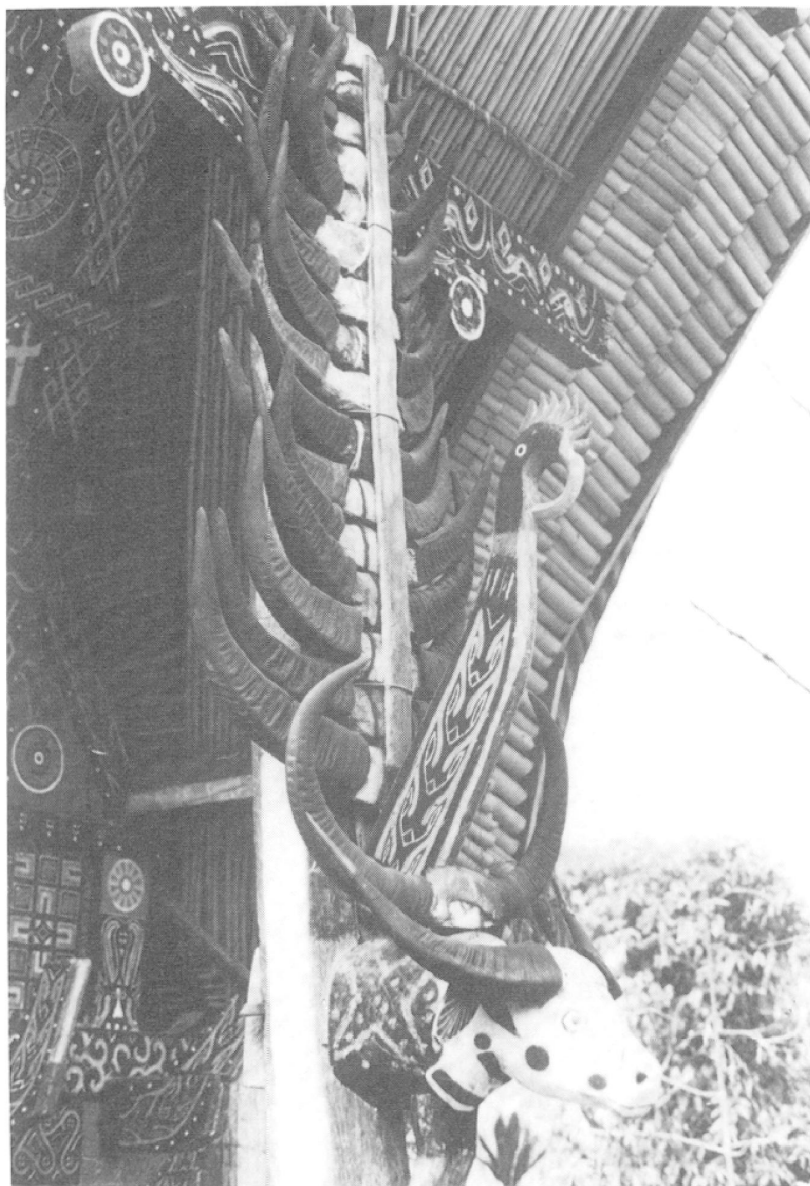
Hornbills are equally common in Sumatra (which has ten species of the bird) (King et al. 1975:216-221). Sumatran societies likewise have made frequent use of the hornbill as a symbolic motif. Schnitger mentions that the Simalungun Batak carved hornbill-headed coffins, and Bartlett notes the same practice among the Karo (Schnitger, 1939: facing Pl. XX; Bartlett, 1973:21). Bartlett draws attention to the conflation of hornbill and horse in Toba symbolism – an association which is not, unfortunately, fully explained. A dance performed at the funeral of a chief in the Toba and Kora regions was called *topeng-hoeda-hoeda* (= *koeda-koeda*), meaning «mask resembling a horse». The dancer's body was covered by a long cloth topped with a real or carved wooden head – not of a horse, but of a hornbill (Bartlett, 1973:169,177; a striking photograph of this mask may be seen in Pl.V). Horses, when introduced into Tobaland, became associated with chiefs and with ancestor worship; the hornbill too is associated with the nobility, and Bartlett suggests that «some of the ceremonial significance of the hornbill may have been taken by the horse after it was introduced». The *topeng-koeda-koeda* dance he interprets as a substitute for an earlier practice of sacrificing hohrses and slaves, or retainers, at the funeral of a chief. It seems that in the past, the slave who performed the pasquerade was afterwards killed so that he might accompany the deceased and serve him in the afterlife (Bartlett 1934 : 26; 1973 : 9-13). To complicate matters further, the horse was not only associated with the hornbill, image of the heavens, but with the lizard, which for the Toba represents the beneficent deity of the earth, Boraspati ni Tano. The first ancestors to acquire

horses centuries ago must have gained great distinction thereby, and horse and lizard together, suggests Bartlett, may be taken to represent the deified ancestors and the gods of field and house (Bartlett 1934 :23-24). Here again we find the bringing together of both Upperworld and Underworld motifs, this time through the growth of symbolic ideas around the horse.

In Nias, too, the hornbill motif recurs in several contexts. In Central Nias, upright stone pillars (*belu*), erected as monuments to rulers or in commemoration of feasts, were often crowned with a hornbill figure. Stone seats, altar-pieces, and wooden sedan chairs in which chiefs and nobles might be carried at feasts, might also be carved with a composite creature in which hornbill and animal features were combined. All three of these items were called *osa'osa* (Feldman, 1977:47-8, Schnitger, 1939 Pl.XXIX). An example of a carved altar-piece, illustrated by Feldman, combines hornbill and human features (Feldman, 1985:58). A human figure, perhaps an ancestor or «Atlas» image, is topped by a hornbill with outstretched human arms and a second bird perched on its head. Such altar-pieces had ancestor figures attached to them and used to be suspended from the roof-beams of a house.

Apart from these altar-pieces and seats, carved hornbills also appear as house-decorations. In the front room of the massive chief's house at Bawomataluo in South Nias, there are four carved hornbill heads (*gogowaya*), two on the right hand wall and two on the left. With their greatly elongated, curved necks, their close resemblance to the Toraja *katik* is particularly striking. The *lasara*, a composite monster, also features both on stone monuments, as decoration on the facade of a chief's house, and on sword handles. Stone monuments bearing both hornbill – and *lasara*-heads are illustrated by Schröder (Schröder, 1917 Vol. II, Pl. 108-109). Feldman describes the *lasara* as resembling a *naga*, though it sometimes takes the shape of a quadruped with deer's antlers, a hornbill's horn, large teeth and protruding tongue and eyes. It was associated with the ruling aristocracy, and was also regarded as serving a protective function. Here again we find the blending of elements of *naga* and hornbill, both with other animal or human features, and with each other.

Sulawesi has only two species of hornbill (*Xenelopides exeratus* and *Crana-rhinus cassidix*), both unique to that island⁽⁴⁾. Although many of the population of South Sulawesi today have probably never seen one, the hornbill still occasionally appears as a symbolic element in Sulawesi societies. Hamonic describes the occurrence in Buginese creation myths and popular oral literature of the typically Indonesian theme of a bird-snake union (Hamonic, 1983:39). He also notes that the transvestite *bissu* priests make use of a musical instrument called *arumpigi* or *alosu*, which is a form of cylindrical bamboo rattle containing fragments of pottery; the body is



Ph.1 – Facade of a noble house in the district of Ulusalu, Tana Toraja, showing the wooden buffalo-head surmounted by the long-necked bird or *katik*. (Photo : R. Waterson)

shaped like a snake and the head and tail like that of a «cock or hornbill». The instruments are used in ceremonies and ritual dances. (An example may be seen in the Provincial Museum in Ujung Pandang, together with a photograph showing the instrument in use. There is no tail on this particular specimen (which I saw on a visit in 1983), but the projecting casque on top of the head identifies it unmistakably as a hornbill).

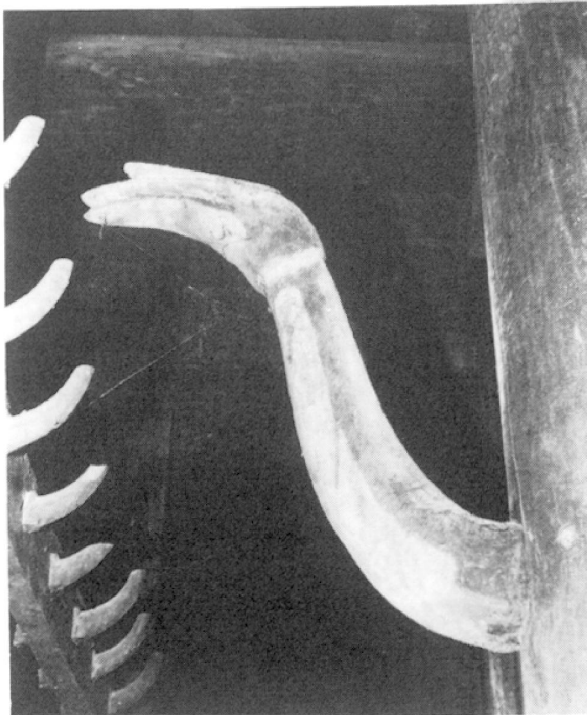
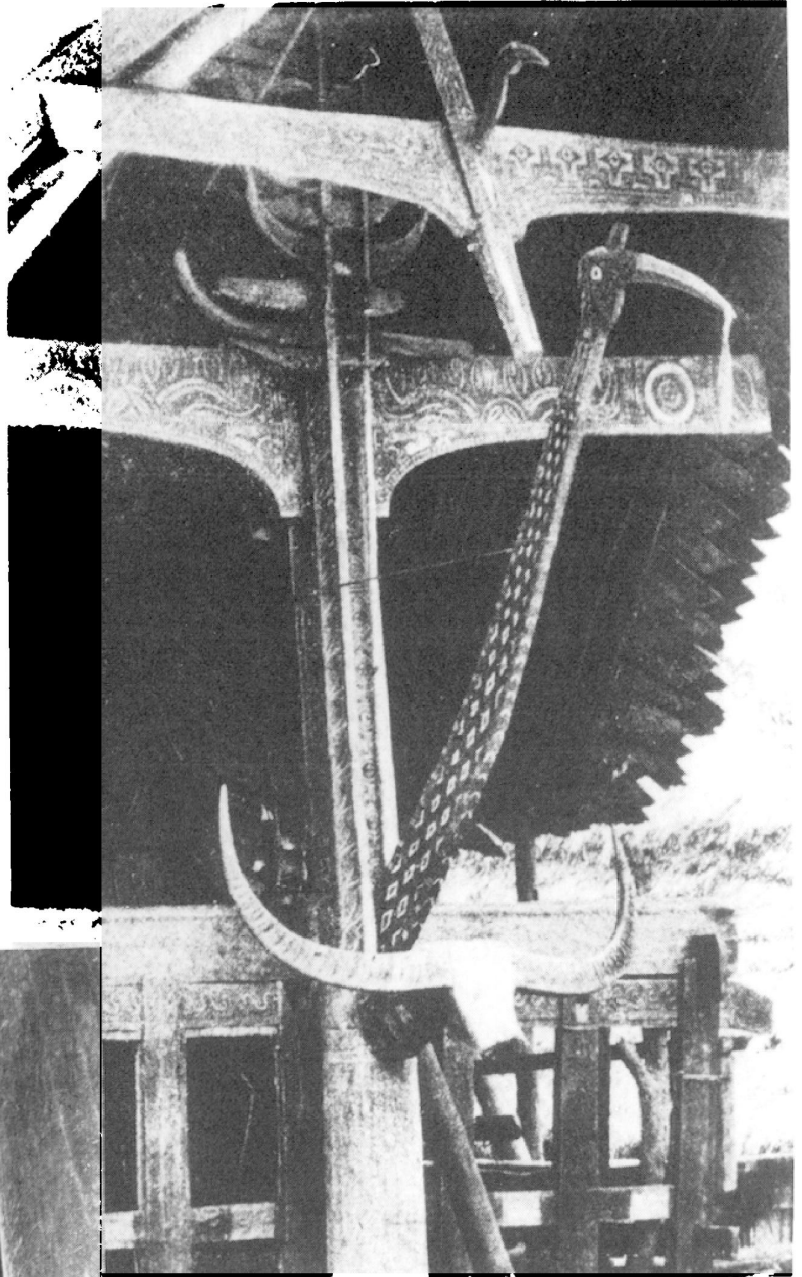
In Central and North Sulawesi the hornbill appears to be as strongly associated with high rank and warrior status as it is in Borneo. The Sarasin brothers illustrate a fine sword belonging to a chief in the Poso region of Central Sulawesi, to which a hornbill head is attached, as the sign of a distinguished head-hunter and warrior (P & F Sarasin, 1905, Vol.I:268, & Pl.VI). *Naga* symbolism, too, recurs in Central Sulawesi, where the ornamental carvings projecting from either end of the roof-ridge of important houses in the Poso area were called the «head» and «tail» of the *naga* (Adriani and Kruyt, 1912 :157). Minahassan warriors, according to Graafland, used to wear hornbill headdresses, and so did the Ifugao and Ilongot headhunters of Northern Luzon (Graafland, 1898, Vol.I:407-13; Rogers, 1985:249-251, 255-257). Not only this, but successful headhunters of both the Ifugao, and the Naga of north-eastern India, wore headdresses composed of hornbill-heads mounted between a pair of buffalo horns. These photographs provide a most striking parallel with the Toraja hornbill-*katik* combination, suggesting that we are dealing here with an ancient and widespread piece of symbolism. Significantly, Niessen has noted in a recent work on Toba Batak motifs that the buffalo is associated by the Toba with the earth and the underworld, and that in some Toba ceremonial headcloths, buffalo- and *naga*- symbolism were merged (Niessen 1985 : 220-222).***

Among the Maranao of the Southern Philippines, both dragon and bird motifs are prominent in the magnificent carving of the *torogan* or ancestral houses of the nobility. The dragon (called here *naga* or *niaga*) is represented upon the flared projecting beam-ends of the house, which, with their ornate carving, form the most prominent feature of the facade. Standing on the roof-ridge is a carved bird called *sari-manok* – which means literally, «artificial cock», though it is frequently represented with a fish in its claws and is sometimes described as a fish-eagle, hawk or kingfisher (Saber & Madale, 1975:30; Gowing, 1979:141-143) ⁽⁵⁾.

Significant here is the prominence of the «cock» motif, but also its ambiguity. The cock, indeed, is another bird of major symbolic importance in a number of island South-East Asian societies. The Maranao «cock», however, might represent a variety of other species, while the case of the Bugis rattle is of particular interest since it is actually described by Hamonic as representing a *cock or hornbill*.

It is impossible here to deal fully with all aspects of bird symbolism in

Ph.2 - Reproduction of Grubauer's photograph (1923 : photo-page 30), showing a very large and hornbill-like *katik* on the front of a Toraja house in the village of Neneng.



Ph.3 - Interior of the chief's house at Bawömataluo, Nias, showing a carved hornbill with elongated neck. (Photo : R. Waterson).

the island South-East Asian world. But from this brief review, I should like to draw attention to two points. One is that, given the frequency of hornbills and hornbill-symbolism in the archipelago, it would be surprising to find them completely absent in Toraja. The other is the frequency with which the hornbill becomes associated with other birds, such as the hawk, kite, eagle or cock (which clearly may serve as equally suitable representatives of the Upperworld), or else becomes blended with elements of *naga* symbolism to provide representations of cosmic unity. Of the symbolism of the cock or hen, I shall have more to say below; it is sufficient to note here that of all the birds mentioned so far, the fowl is unique in being domesticated; it is hardly surprising that, due to its particularly close relationship to humans, it has come to have symbolic importance of a particular kind in some South-East Asian societies. Bearing these points in mind, let us turn once again to the Toraja *katik*.

The Katik and its Significance

A number of my Toraja informants (but by no means all) maintained that the *katik* was a cock. On the other hand, some people were emphatic that this commonly-held view was mistaken, and that the *katik* really represented a mythical bird, believed to live deep in the forests. It was my impression that explanations of the bird as a fowl were more common in the south and east regions of Tana Toraja; I never, in the western area where I did most of my fieldwork, encountered the myth mentioned by Nooy-Palm about the long-necked hen Lando Kollong, nor is it mentioned by Volkman who worked in the northern Sesean region. Thus an element of regional variation may exist in this matter as in so many other aspects of Toraja culture. Although I often wondered about the mythical forest bird of which I was told, nobody seemed to know anything further about it. Finally, one informant, M.L. Rammang of Kurra, with whom I discussed the subject of house carvings at some length, stated quite clearly that the bird was not mythical, but real – a hornbill (Tor.: *alo*). (In attempting to describe it to me, he also used the word *garuda*). Hornbills, he said, used to be common in the forests lining the road which descends from Tana Toraja to Palopo on the shore of the Gulf of Bone, and in earlier days he had often seen them. That they should have become a less common sight is not surprising, since the diminishing area of forest left in this part of Sulawesi must have reduced considerably the available habitat for the bird. On further investigation, I find at least on other Torajan who shares his opinion, since K.Kadang, in his book *Ukiran Rumah Toraja (Toraja House Carvings)*, also describes the *pa'katik* motif as representing a hornbill (*paruh enggang*), adding that it «represents the greatness of the aristocracy» (Kadang 1960:71). My point

is, not that Torajans are wrong in regarding the bird as a cock, but that at least two interpretations of the *katik* are current among Torajans. Moreover, not all *katik* look the same. The crest on some *katik* makes the bird look more like a cock, but on others, the solid protuberance or knob on top of the head, the long neck and heavy beak certainly remind us more vividly of the hornbill. Aside from the already considered factor of regional variations in explanation, it seems highly possible that the hornbill representation is in fact the older, linking as it does with the indigenous traditions of so many other Indonesian societies, and that, as hornbills at the present time have become increasingly unfamiliar to Torajans, the interpretation of the bird as «cock» has come to predominate.

Nooy-Palm notes the general absence in Toraja house-carvings of «underworld» symbols, such as *nagas* and snakes (Nooy-Palm, 1979:239) – or, one might add, the lizard which appears so commonly on Batak buildings, representing the deity of the earth (Bartlett, 1973:152; Barbier, 1983:215) ⁽⁶⁾. *Nagas*, however, do appear on Toraja antique coffins (the example in the National Museum in Jakarta has already been mentioned), and Nooy-Palm also adds that in some old *tongkonan* the curved, projecting ends of the floor beams at the front of the house are carved with a design of snakes (Nooy-Palm, 1979:239 and photograph, no page number). In April 1983, I visited one village at Balusu in northeastern Tana Toraja where I found not only a barn decorated with distinctive *naga*-heads carved on the projecting beam-ends, but also a house with an unmistakably *naga*-like *katik* on its facade. The existence of these designs seems to confirm that *naga* symbolism has not completely disappeared from the Torajan scene ⁽⁷⁾.

Differences of opinion also exist as to what exactly the erection of a *katik* signifies, that is to say, what conditions must be met in order to have one. A great many noble houses have the *kabongo*' or wooden buffalo head; many fewer have the *katik*. Most commonly it is said that the *katik* symbolises the greatness of the aristocracy; one person said that it stands for nobility and bravery; another that it indicates a house where some supernatural event has taken place – a *banua kabusungan*. Still others are of the opinion that it is the *katik* itself which makes the house *kabusungan*, or gives it mystic power. But out of eight of my most relied-upon informants, from different regions of Tana Toraja, six concurred in saying that the *kabongo*' and *katik* form a pair, the former connected with the so-called «Rites of the West» and the latter with the «Rites of the East». All Toraja rituals are classified as belonging to one or other of these spheres. «Rites of the East» or of «Rising Smoke» (Aluk Rampe Matallo/Aluk Rambu Tuka') comprise all those concerned with the enhancement of fertility and prosperity among the living; mortuary rituals make up the category of «Rites of the West» or of «Descending Smoke» (Aluk Rampe Matampu'/Aluk

Rambu Solo'). Within each group, rites are arranged in a ranked series; there are rules, for example regulating how many buffaloes may be slaughtered for a certain type of funeral, and how many nights it may last, and the king of funeral one has is determined by one's rank as well as what one's family can afford. The *kabongo'* indicates that the highest of all (or, according to some, merely one of the highest) levels of funeral ceremony has been held by the house's descendants; the *katik* by contrast is proof of the holding of the greatest of all of the Rites of the East, the *ma'buu' kasalle*. For this reason, only the houses of the highest-ranking nobles, the so-called *tongkonan layuk*, may have the *katik*, since they are the only ones entitled to sponsor this great feast. Those are the houses, as my informants put it, whose «offerings are complete» (*sundun suru'*), whose «rituals are complete» (*sanda alukna*), or who have already «travelled all paths» (*sandamo lalan naola*). The *katik* is the most distinguished ornament a house can have – it is the *iring-iringanna banua*, that which makes the house above compare.

One person with whom I discussed the *katik* is Pak Kila', whose family ties are with the Sesean and Pangala' regions in north and north-west Tana Toraja. He is both highly knowledgeable about and deeply concerned with the continued survival of Torajan *aluk*, or ritual and religious belief, and has been active in promoting the status of the traditional religion. He clarified the link between the *katik* and the *ma'buu'* rite when he explained that on the grand final day of the ritual (which takes altogether a full year to perform), the *to tumbang*, a group of young noble women who are central participants in the *ma'buu'*, are borne around the ceremonial ground in litters decorated with *katik*. It is these *katik* which are subsequently attached to the house as a sign that the *ma'buu'* has been held. Since the *ma'buu'* is not performed in exactly the same way in different parts of Toraja (and in some areas is not held at all), this may not be the case in every area. An excellent picture of such a litter is, however, reproduced by Nooy-Palm (1980:163). The litter is hung with fringes of young palm leaves, and decorated with a pair of buffalo-horns as well as the long-necked bird. The bird's head is hung with sacred red *tabang* (*Cordyline terminalis*) leaves and a bunch of rice. Nooy-Palm states that the bird probably represents the «hen with the long neck» of the Upperworld, but does not say whether in fact this carving itself is later attached to the house as a sign that the rite has been held (Nooy-Palm, 1980:164). The attaching of a bunch of rice to the beak is suggestive in the light of Grubauer's photograph of a *katik* with such an ornament mentioned above. Intriguingly, too, the very structure of the litter, built of posts with cross-beams mortised through, resembles the house-foundations in miniature, while the combination of bird and buffalo-horns cannot but remind us of the buffalo-head on which the *katik*

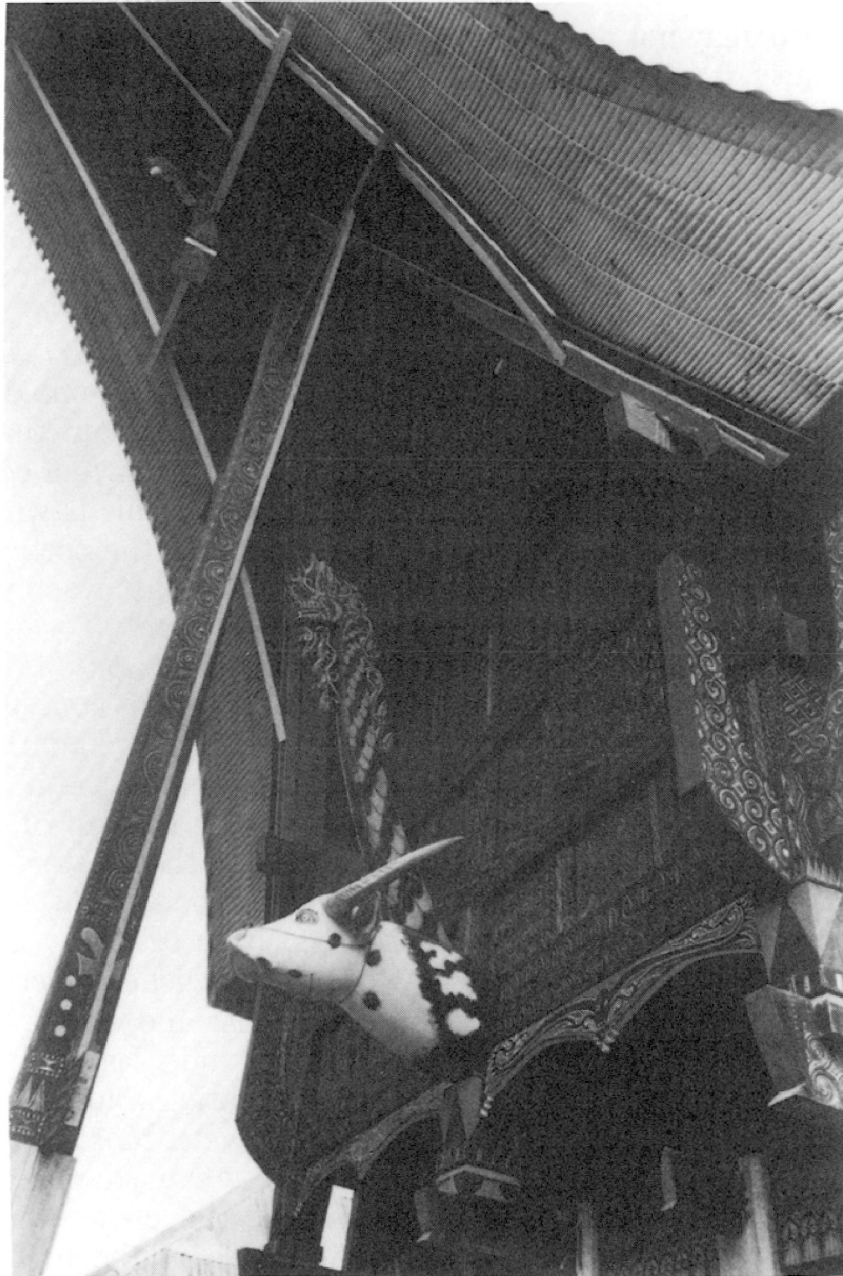
Ph.4 - Ifugao headhunter wearing a headdress composed of metal buffalo-horns surmounted by a hornbill-head, the whole bound together by a textile and decorated with feathers (Worcester 1912 : 878).



Ph.5 - Naga headhunter wearing a headdress of mithan-horns surmounted by two hornbill heads (Fürer-Haimendorf 1946 : fig. 85).

sits on the house facade. Whether or not the actual bird-head on the litter is later always transformed into the *katik*, as Kila' claims, the close association of *ideas* about *katik* and *ma'bu'a* at least is confirmed by this photograph. The connection with litters is of particular interest in view of the fact that the carrying of members of the nobility in litters is a feature of «feasts of merit» in some other South-East Asian societies (the example of «hornbill»-headed litters in Nias has already been referred to). In other parts of Toraja, it seems that different mementoes of the *ma'bu'a* are chosen to remain attached to the house: Volkman writes that on Sesean, a fringe of palm leaves, referred to as its «skirt», remains tied around the house, and a sandalwood tree is planted at the eastern edge of the yard (Volkman, 1985:58). She too mentions that the holding of the *ma'bu'a* is what embues the house which sponsors it with supernatural power, making it *kabusungan*.

As we have seen, there are some regional, as well as personal, differences in the interpretations given to the *katik* and *kabongo*'. If we accept the view which links them with the Rites of the East and West, then we may see this pair of symbols as a particularly powerful representation of the Toraja nobility as controllers of wealth and possessors of ritual power. For it is through the performance of rituals that status is acquired, maintained, and made visible in Toraja society. The identification between the house and the group of kin who own it is manifested in the addition of ornaments to the building which testify to the holding of particular rituals. (The *ma'bu'a* rite actually involves an entire ritual community of several villages (the *bu'a*'), and its benefits, in the form of enhanced fertility of crops, animals and human beings, are supposed to affect everybody; but it has to be sponsored and led by the chief noble house of the *bu'a*'). The rite involves major expense and is only held at very long intervals. The above explanation of the *katik*, then, also helps to make sense of the perceivable fact that houses having only the *kabongo*' are more numerous than those possessing both ornaments. Elsewhere I have suggested that there is an especially close association of women with the Rites of the East, those rites whose aim is the general enhancement of fertility and prosperity, while men are more conspicuously involved in the competitive expenditure of funerals, the Rites of the West (Waterson, 1984). If this analysis is accepted, then Crystal is in a sense correct in his inference that the *katik* somehow symbolizes the «female», and the buffalo-head the «male» element (Crystal, 1985:196). Association with the *ma'bu'a* certainly makes sense of the repeated insistence that the *katik* is the finest of all ornaments, for indeed the *ma'bu'a* is the most magnificent and powerful of all Toraja rituals, and there is no achievement more noble, in the traditional Toraja world view, than the holding of it.

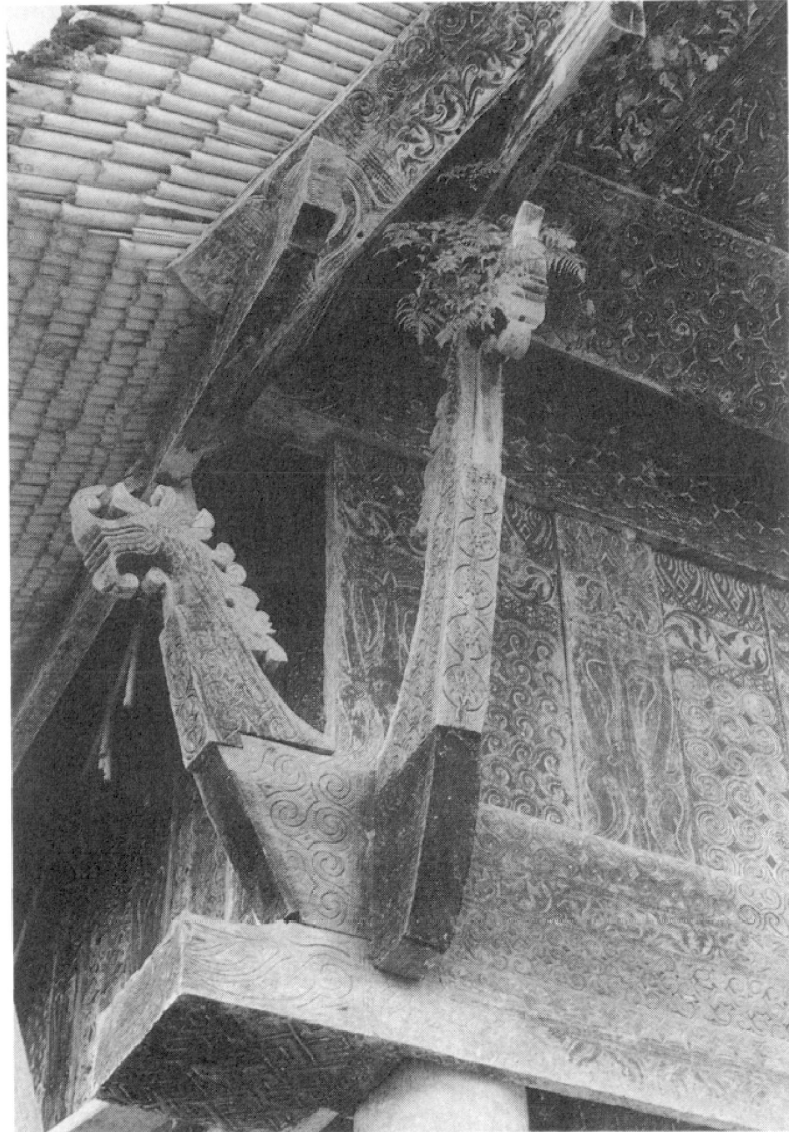


Ph.6 – *Naga-like katik* on the facade of a house at Balusu, Tana Toraja. (Photo : R. Waterson).

The symbolism of the cock in house-carving motifs

If the *katik* may not necessarily represent a cock, other motifs in house carving clearly do, and these motifs evoke a wide range of mental associations for Torajans. To conclude, then, I should like to examine some of these associations. Near the base of the house walls may often be seen a design of cock's feathers called *pa'bulu londong*. This pattern is sometimes said to represent the boldness and bravery of the house's warrior descendants, though others stress the fact that chickens are important because they are used as offerings to the deities. In the uppermost triangle of the facade two cocks face each other, standing on a pair of sunbursts (*barre allo*). These cocks, like the former motif, are explained by many to be emblems of high rank or of the bravery of warriors. Some people point out that traditionally, only those of the highest rank had the right to have a cockfight as part of their funeral celebrations, and they say that this is why the cock is represented on the front of the house. Others say the cock represents traditional law (one way of settling disputes in the past was by means of a cockfight), while the sun on which he stands represents Toraja itself. An old poetic name for Toraja territory is *tondok lepongan bulan, tana matarik allo*, which means «village of the circle of the moon, land of the circle of the sun». But most significantly, the cock features prominently in Toraja myths as an agent of transformations, and the cock on the house facade is frequently identified as the companion of Tulang Didi' or of Lapandek, the protagonists of two such well-known myths. In these stories, the protagonist (male or female according to the version being told) is murdered by a jealous parent or siblings, but is brought back to life by the crowing of the cock. The cock also has the power to fulfill wishes by crowing, and thus creates for his human companion a new house and village deep in the forest, full of people, animals and wealth of all kinds. Later they both go up into the sky, where the cock becomes a constellation whose yearly appearance marks the beginning of the agricultural cycle. Most obviously, the association of the cock with the sun, reflects the everyday experience of the transformation from night to day : when the cock crows, the sun rises. The «heavenly» motifs of sun and bird appropriately fill the uppermost part of the facade, while those lower down, drawn largely from plant and animal life, have more humble earthly associations.

The cock, then, is closely associated in Toraja ideas with the regeneration of life and with the agricultural cycle. But interestingly, the bird appears again as mediator in the context of mortuary rites. At high-level funerals (*dipandan*; those which are split into two separate stages) a cock is always carried in the funeral procession by which the body is brought to the funeral ground. This procession is called *ma'palao*. The cock must be of the



Ph.7 – *Naga*-heads carved on a rice-barn at Balusu. (Photo : R. Waterson).

colour called *bakka'*, white with red and brown patches. After the corpse has been carried up into the tall tower called *lakkean*, the cock is tied on to the roof of the tower, and it stays there until the body has been taken to the rock-cut grave which is its final resting-place. Formerly, after the burial, the temporary structures which housed the guests on the funeral ground used to be set on fire, and the cock was probably burned, but at some point, more compassionately, the custom was changed and the bird was simply released. It might be taken by anyone who could catch it, or alternatively, it was taken by the *to mebalun*, the officiant whose task it was to wrap the corpse. This position of «priest of the left» or of death ritual was hereditary within a particular family of slaves (or in some areas, virtual outcasts). I was told by an old priest, To Minaa Uto' of Tombang, Ulu-salu, that the cock served a particular purpose. As it was released it was to fly upwards (*mettia' langan*), and in so doing would carry all the rest of the funeral sacrifices with it to Puya, the land of the dead. According to traditional Toraja belief, the pigs and buffaloes sacrificed at a funeral accompany the deceased for his use in the afterlife, which is conceived to be a cold and fire-less version of life on earth. Subsequently, with the help of further rituals held for them by their descendants, the dead may pass beyond Puya and become deified, uniting with the stars and the heavens and returning to the earth as rain, causing the crops to flourish. It appears, according to Uto's account, that this outcome is in a sense looked forward to in the funeral procession itself, for he told me that each element of the procession was equivalent to a particular constellation, and its winding progress through the rice-fields could be compared to the movement of these constellations across the sky. The sequence is shown below :

Constellations ⁽⁸⁾ * *Elements of Funeral Procession*

1. Tanda Buni * Buffaloes with decorated horns.
2. Tanda Tombi * Flags (*tombi* or *laa*), whose number indicates the number of buffaloes to be sacrificed, and hence the rank of the funeral.
3. Bunga' * The mourners (*to memali*) and widow/er (*to balu*).
4. Sadang * The *Tau-tau*, an effigy of the deceased.
5. Ma'dika * The dead person (*to mate*).
6. Lemba * Family members carrying betel nut, cigarettes, coffee and cakes with which guests are greeted.
7. Manuk * The cock (*manuk*) which is put on top of the funeral tower.

Thus the cock, in the sphere of death as of life, is seen as an agent of transformation, ensuring the transfer of the dead person's wealth into the afterlife, just as in myth the cock restored life and brought wealth to his

murdered companion. Intimately associated with humans, the cock is nonetheless a creature of the air, and in myth returns altogether to the sky and becomes a constellation. It is thus fittingly selected as the crowning motif of the house facade.

Conclusion

In looking at a few unusual motifs of Toraja house carving, I have been concerned to trace possible thematic ties with other Indonesian societies. As in other rank-conscious societies of the archipelago, the Torajan nobility appear to have appropriated the hornbill to themselves as a symbol of high status, and this symbolism is strengthened by its association with the highest-ranking of all the Rituals of the East. Its common association with the upperworld and the deities also makes the bird an appropriate symbol in the context of this rite. Some blending of hornbill and *naga* may also occur in Toraja, as may be seen in the case of the *naga*-like *katik* illustrated here. Evidence of hornbill and *naga* symbolism, residual as in fact it appears to be, is nonetheless of interest given the widespread recurrence of these motifs in other Indonesian societies, which share ancient historical and cultural links with the Toraja. By contrast, motifs representing a cock (or hen), although certainly common in other societies of the archipelago, are of particular interest in Toraja because of the wide range of specifically Torajan referents which they have developed. The cock occupies a significant place in myth and religious belief, and this may be counted a major reason for its popularity as an artistic motif.

There is considerable flexibility in the way bird symbolism is used. In other societies of the archipelago, we come across numerous examples of one bird becoming blended with or transformed into another, or even of bird-, animal- and human figures being mixed or substituted one for another, like the hornbill/horse of the Batak or the hornbill/human figures of Nias, or the hornbill/*naga* of Ngaju symbolism. Birds also move between worlds, acting as mediators between the earthly and heavenly realms. They serve as the messengers of the deities, or – in the form of sacrifices – the conveyors of messages from human beings to the deities. They accompany the souls of the dead into the afterlife – even, in the case of the Toraja cock, ensuring the transfer of the deceased person's valuables into the beyond as well. Any number of birds, potentially, might serve as mediators with the Upperworld, and thus we find, not infrequently, different bird species being used to represent the same thing. I have shown here how different interpretations of a single symbolic element may co-exist, and I speculate that the idea of the *katik* as a hornbill is actually in the process of being displaced by an interpretation of the bird as a cock or hen.

Environmental changes may well have contributed to this shift. The observance of wild birds which is an important part of life in (for example) the forest environment of Borneo has, we might guess, declined in importance in the more intensively agricultural and long deforested landscape of Toraja. Thus, although hornbills are indigenous to Sulawesi, most Torajans are no longer familiar with the bird. Further evidence of change (both social and environmental) can in fact be found in the disappearance of the custom of observing omen birds (strongly reminiscent of Borneo societies), which Kruyt recorded in the 1920s (Kruyt 1923-24 : 265-269). Bird calls and flight patterns were observed particularly by headhunters starting on an expedition. Birds of prey were important in this context. Interestingly, Nooy-Palm notes, following Kruyt, that the hornbill was not particularly associated with headhunting here as it is in other Indonesian societies including Borneo ones; the sight of a hornbill was considered merely to presage a drought (Nooy-Palm 1979 : 214).

In the same way, the example of the *katik* shows particular symbols or art motifs may be subject to continual reinterpretation, and may thus endure as part of a cultural repertoire even as their meanings undergo subtle changes over time.

NOTES

1. I conducted fieldwork in Tana Toraja in 1978-9 with the aid of a grant from the then Social Science Research Council of the U.K. I returned there in 1982-3 with the help of a British Academy South-East Asian Fellowship and a Cambridge University Evans Fellowship. I am deeply grateful to these bodies for their support. I express my thanks also to the Indonesian Institute of Sciences, LIPI, for granting their permission to carry out the research.

For works by Torajan authors on the subject of house carvings see Kadang (1960), Pakan (1973) and Tangdilintin (1976). Works by non-Torajans which touch on the subject of the *tongkonan* and its carvings include Walchren (1916), Kruyt (1923-24), Grubauer (1923), Nooy-Palm (1979), Volkman (1985) and Crystal (1985). I deal more generally with the topic of house carvings in a forthcoming article.

2. This at least was the rule in the past. With increasing social mobility, some families of humble ancestry have today built themselves grander houses than would formerly have been allowed them, using new wealth gained by emigrant family members working in other parts of the archipelago. I attended one inaugural ceremony in 1978 for a house built by a family of ex-slaves in the Buntao'area (east of Rantepao). Although the house departed in several respects from the traditional style, it was covered in carving and had a large *katik* on the front. Prominent members of the local nobility stayed away from this ceremony, which in their view contravened the *adat*.
3. King also notes the complementary opposition, in Java, of the Hindu *garuda* and *naga* motifs (King, 1985 :136n).
4. Wallace, 1869 :210; Encyclopedie van Nederlansch-Indie (Vol.3) 1919 :19.

5. It is perhaps worth noting at this point that in many Indonesian languages today, and also in reconstructions of proto-Austronesian, the word *manuk* is used to mean both «chicken, fowl, cock» and also to denote «birds» in general (Wurm and Wilson, 1975 :85). The Maranao use *manuk* for «cock», and the etymologically related *papanuk* for «birds»; the Sa'dan Toraja, like the Batak, also use *manuk* for fowls, and double the word when referring to «birds» (*manuk-manuk*). Where birds in general appear as symbolic motifs, they are often envisaged as the protective companions of the soul on its journey to the after-life (see for example Bartlett (1934 :22 and Pl. IX-XIV) on the Batak).
6. There is, on the other hand, no shortage of motifs depicting plants and animals associated with water. There is an association in the Toraja system of ideas between water sources and the Underworld. Most noble houses have as their founders a pair of mythical ancestors, a man who descended from the sky and a woman who rose out of a pool. But concepts about the Underworld are generally rather vague. «Water» motifs in house carving seem rather to have to do with the idea of fertility.
7. A single informant, Pak Uliia Salu Rapa of Nanggala, speculated that the *katik* might represent a *naga*, and compared its long curved neck to the carved prow-ends of boats which he had seen in other parts of South-East Asia.
8. Few Toraja today have detailed knowledge of traditional astronomical ideas, and it is difficult to identify many of these constellations. Lemba is Orion's Belt, while Bunga' is named as the Pleiades by Veen. The procession of constellations across the sky in the course of the year is called *pa'taunan*, and the position of the stars indicates the proper time for the performance of various yearly tasks, particularly those to do with the agricultural cycle. Their positions may also be observed when choosing favourable or unfavourable days for the performance of ceremonies etc.

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