

Waruga Ornament Symbols; Identity and Culture Representation of the Minahasa People, Indonesia

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Abstract

Cultural development in a community comes in various forms. The presence of cultural products such as songs, dances, languages, and architecture is a representation of the community that owns the culture. It also means we can see how culture plays a role in forming that cultural identity. Traces of megalithic culture that are manifested in the tradition of burying corpses in stone coffins (Waruga) are cultural products that exist in the Minahasa cultural community. Waruga, which was originally a product of megalithic culture with designs that tend to be plain without ornament, has become a cultural product that is rich in ornament (carvings). Knowledge of ornament was originally present as an individual expression of the Minahasa people. Along with the development of Minahasa culture, the ornament on the Minahasa Waruga then grew and varied. The ornamental design on the Waruga comes with symbolic patterns that represent the culture and philosophy of the Minahasa community. This article is the result of a study that inventories the forms of ornamental symbols on the Waruga in Minahasa. A qualitative research method with a cognitive ethnographic approach from James Spradley was then used in interpreting the ornamental symbols on the Minahasa Waruga. The focus of this study is to reveal the meaning of the symbols. The representation of symbols and meanings was obtained from interviews and literature studies. The existence of different interpretations was one of the challenges in this study. Thus, the meanings found in this study are not absolute but still provides spaces for other interpretation along with the process of this study.

Keywords: Symbol, Ornaments, Waruga, Representation.

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1. Introduction

Waruga (a type of stone sarcophagus, placed above ground) for the Minahasa people is a medium for burying the deceased. Burial rituals using Waruga were carried out by the Minahasa people until the early 20th century. The ornaments present on Waruga can become the cultural identity of the Minahasa people because it is unique in terms of form as well as value and meaning.

The Waruga artifact is identified as part of the megalithic culture. The results of absolute dating carried out by researchers from the Archaeological Center using the C-14 calibration (radio carbon dating) at one of the waruga artifact sites in Tatelu area, Dimembe District, North Minahasa, showed that Waruga has been used for around 2400 years (Umar, 2004).

The development of Waruga occurred mainly in the addition of carvings as ornament on the Waruga. The carvings not only function as ornaments, but they also come with meaning and messages. The meaning of each Waruga ornament is not only to describe the identity of the corpse buried in the Waruga, but also to provide a philosophical message for people who are still living in Minahasa (Bertling, 1931).

Burial rituals using Waruga were originally a tradition for all Minahasa people, but as it develops, they only apply to community groups who have respectable positions in the community, in this case the *Tona'as* (community leaders) and *Walian* (religious leaders). As a tribute to this community group, Waruga was then decorated with various ornamental carvings that functioned to beautify Waruga and as a view of the identity of the person buried in the Waruga. The ornamental variety on Waruga in its function for the community at that time also provided various philosophies that described the culture and life philosophy of the Minahasa people.

2. Method

The discussion in this article departs from the broad frame of culture, starting with exploring the cultural phenomena that develop in a society, in this case the Minahasa community, which is manifested in functional cultural products. This article focuses on Waruga. Waruga is interpreted by the term tomb which is a terminology in the human life cycle, in this case of the Minahasa community.

As a study within the scope of archaeological research, several things needed to be considered. The data in this study, especially those related to the past information of the Minahasa community, are data based on literature and oral data from people who care about Minahasa culture. Literature about the past Minahasa community comes from the writings of archaeologists and missionaries from the Netherlands and Germany. The problem is that often the literature presented is incomplete and does not clearly describe Minahasa in the past. Oral data was obtained from interviews with humanists and academics. The analysis of these data sources required data selection and interpretation.

This study was carried out in the stages of reviews. The stages began by collecting oral data in the form of interviews from various sources which were then validated with sources from existing literature. This was an initial validation which was aimed to obtain an overview and classification of forms and meanings associated with the philosophy of the Minahasa people. Next, the research object was studied using an ethnographic approach, in which both the Waruga object and its ornament were described, explained, and analyzed, in its position both as an artifact and its position in the culture of the Minahasa community. This object is described according to what was encountered in the research process.

The ethnography used in this research is the cognitive ethnography of James Spradley. This cognitive ethnography is an update of the first generation cognitive ethnography proposed by Googenough. Spradley in this second generation of cognitive ethnography defines culture as a system of knowledge obtained through the learning process of humans, which is then used to interpret the world around them and then to develop behavioral strategies in facing the world around them (Spradley, 1997).

3. Discussion

3.1 Definition of Ornament

There are many definitions of ornament. Guntur (2004) started the definition of "ornament" (*ragam hias*, in Indonesian) by trying to match the word with other words that have the same meaning such as "the art of decoration" (*seni dekorasi* or *seni hias*) and "ornament". These words basically have a uniform meaning, namely to make something look beautiful by decorating. Based on this definition, ornament is then defined as something designed to add to the beauty of an object or action, quality and other activities to add beauty. According to

Guntur (2004), “ornament” (*ragam hias*) is lexically divided into 3 meanings, namely 1) decoration (*dekorasi*), 2) something designed to increase the value of the beauty of an object, 3) as an act of adding beauty. Another from an etymological point of view, Soeprapto paired the word “decoration” with the word “ornament” which is taken from the Greek “*ornare*” which means “decoration or jewelry” (Pangkey, 2004). Van der Hoop defined “ornament” as something that is drawn, carved, or printed to support/improve the quality and value of an object (Pangkey, 2004). All definitions of ornament basically have something in common, that the presence of ornament is made for a final result, namely beautification. Ornament product is not only limited to the ornaments in two-dimensional shapes, but can also be three-dimensional.

3.2 Ornaments in Waruga

The decorative culture in Minahasa can be said to be undeveloped, and it may have disappeared. The only evidence that there was ever a presence of a ornamental culture in Minahasa which we can see today is in Waruga. In Waruga, the motifs are presented in the form of reliefs with carving techniques. Relief carvings can be part of, immersed in, become the background, or can also be a form that radiates, arising from a background that is seen as a relief (Pangkey, 2004).

From the results of the identification carried out on Waruga, the ornamental motifs in Waruga spread in the Minahasa region, especially those in the Sawangan and Tumatenden Airmadidi Archaeological Park complexes as the locus of this research, can be categorized into four basic motifs as follows:

- a) Anthropomorphic motifs. This is the result of carving in the form of humans which are described in full or only certain parts such as the face or head.
- b) Animal motifs. The motifs are usually in the form of snakes, birds, dogs, cows, monitor lizards, roosters, and imaginary animals.
- c) *Taru* motifs. For these motifs, many are described in the form of leaves, flowers, plant stalks, and fruits.
- d) Geometric motifs. These motifs consist of *tumpal* shapes, multiple gyres, swastikas, circles, and meanders.

The four groups of motif forms in Waruga can be visualized in natural, ornamental, figurative, or symbolic forms.

3.2.1 Anthropomorphic Motifs

This motif is basically a depiction of human activity in undergoing one of the processes in the human cycle of life. There are many interpretations of this form, such as that it is a depiction of a labor process which illustrates that one of those buried in Waruga was a “*dukun beranak*” (traditional midwife). In another interpretation, it is a depiction of gender. An interesting fact was found on a relief of a Waruga that depicts a baby's head positioned downwards as it came out of a woman's womb. It illustrates that the identity of the body buried inside is that of the village midwife. This position in the village is very respectable because apart from functioning as a midwife, she is usually the wife of the village head.

Freddy Wowor, said that the position of straddled legs is a depiction of the transformation process in Minahasa culture. This straddled legs position is called “*lumangkoyo*” which means “eternal”. The philosophy of this position eternal is “*torang ini cuma ada ba singgah di tanpa yang ndak pasti, makanya musti ba pasti akang*” (we are only living temporarily in an uncertain place, thus we have to obtain something that is certain). The common thread of these meanings is that the motif is also the personification of the identity of the Waruga owner.



Figure 1. Waruga with a motif of a human in a straddled position as the job identity of the person buried in this Waruga

If the baby's position is reversed, it gives a philosophical meaning that the process of death is the transition of life from life in the world to the life in the spirit realm. A second life concept believed by the Minahasa people is that death means leaving the world to go to heaven which is symbolized by the position of returning to the mother's womb. The mother's womb as the beginning of life becomes a medium for traveling to a new world, namely the spirit world.

Another motif is the depiction of the identity of the person buried in the waruga. Usually this is the Waruga belonging to the *Walak* (village head) or a *Tonaas*. The use of European clothing shows how strong the influence of Western culture is in the life of the Minahasa community.



Figure 2. Human motif with European clothing style

There is also a motif which is a visualization of several ritual activities carried out related to the death ceremony in which dances are always performed, such as the *cakalele* dance as an introductory dance in the funeral procession, and a dance performed by women at the three-night ceremony. This ritual is now no longer carried out and the process of bringing the body to the grave has been replaced with an accompaniment of spiritual hymns sung by mourners (Adam, 1976).



Figure 3. The motif of a person wielding weapons of a sword and a shield

This motif is understood not only as a ritual dance activity, but also as a description of the work of the owner of this Waruga. This person in this Waruga was a *mamuís* who hunts human heads, which at that time became part of several rituals.

In certain Waruga, which usually belong to the *Tonaas* or *Walian*, this motif is often made. It is an illustration that the Waruga contained a ritual of putting several human heads as bodyguards and assistants of the person buried in the Waruga later in the spirit world (symbolized by the rotated head) (Adam, 1976).



Figure 4. Rotated human head motif

3.2.2 Animal Motifs

The depiction of animal motifs is closely related to the beliefs of the Minahasa people at that time who viewed several types of animals as messengers of God to give signs and warnings to humans.



Figure 5. Ornaments with animal motifs.

The snake is interesting to discuss because apart from having a deformed shape that is combined with plant motifs, it also has a philosophical meaning.

The snake for the Minahasa people at that time was a representation of the Minahasa mother and first woman, *Lumimuut*. Besides symbolizing the meaning of fertility, its position, which is always in the middle, shows how this snake becomes a medium for humans who die and transition to the spirit world.

The snake is also believed to be a sign of danger and bad luck. It is believed to be messengers of God who are not pleased with what humans will do.



Figure 6. Snake motif with a variety of plant shapes

The nature of the snake that propagates provides a symbol of how the snake is above and below ground. The combination with the vines known as the tombaloi plant gives the meaning of fertility to humans. In addition to giving the meaning of fertility, a snake also represents a symbol of might and strength (Pangkey, 2004; Turang, 1997). This symbol of might and strength also gives the meaning of honor to those buried in the waruga. It is not surprising that the snake motif is the most common motif found in Waruga spread in Minahasa.

Another motif that has the same meaning is the dragon motif. This motif basically carries a philosophy such as the snake; however, based on observations, this is an evidence of how Minahasa culture has been acculturating with various cultures in the world. Chinese influence is very strong in this motif. Another evidence is how Chinese porcelain products are seen as a valuable item so that the status of the deceased will be increased if the Waruga includes Chinese porcelain as provisions for the grave.

Waruga often depicts various other animals such as dogs, lizards, chickens, and birds. The motifs of animals such as dogs and chickens are pictures of the favorite animals of the deceased as provisions for the grave as

mentioned in writings about the Minahasa funeral ceremony (Pangkey, 2004).

Specifically for the bird motif, it is an illustration of the shape of the Manguni bird, which is a bird that is believed to be the messengers of God and is able to give signs and warnings to the Minahasa people. This bird is a kind of owl which later also dominates regional logos in Minahasa, including the the logo of the Evangelical Christian Church organization in Minahasa.

3.2.3 *Taru*/Floral Motifs.



Figure 7. Ornaments with plant motifs on Waruga Airmadidi.

There is a plant that symbolizes fertility hence it is often depicted in Waruga. The plant is known by the Minahasa people as *tombaloi*. A plant that has many flowers that gives the meaning of fertility and prosperity.

This plant motif has an aesthetic function in Waruga. The Minahasa people believe that by making this plant motif, the deceased buried in the Waruga is expected to have a decent life in *Kasendukana* (heaven) (Pangkey, 2004).



Figure 8. Foral motifs.

Sunflowers are also often depicted on Waruga because they are believed to represent the meaning of life as they are symbols of the sun. The light given by the sun is an illuminator for the spirits of those who died on their way to heaven. Freddy Wowor said that this motif is called *manembo* (sun) as a depiction of the light or giver of light and a guide for life. This motif is widely depicted in the Waruga belonging to the Tona'as and Walian who are figures and role models in the village (Freddy Wowor, 2018).



Figure 9. Motifs of vines

Plants that are green and spreading (renga-rengan) give the meaning "ba hidop pe hidop" (continue to live and grow) as a visualization of the Minahasa community's view that they must continue to do and seek knowledge and life.

3.2.4 Geometric Motifs



Figure 10. Rectangular motifs

These motifs are basically found in almost all artifacts, especially those from the megalithic era. The function of this motif is not only to beautify (aesthetically) but also to give meaning to social-religious communication (Pangkey, 2004, Sukendar, 1987).



Figure 11. Triangular geometric motifs

For the triangle motif, it is a symbol of the mountain as the place where the ancestors reside. The top of the triangle facing up and down illustrates the belief in the existence of two worlds, namely the world above and the world below (Pangkey, 2004).



Figure 12. Motifs of circles and curves

Megalithic culture is rich in geometric motifs such as continuous rhombus, S gyre, and curved lines. Sukendar identified these motifs only as ornamental motifs that functioned to add to the value of beauty as can be found in megalithic sites in Nias, West Timor, and Sumba (Sukendar, 1987).

This is because the specification of geometric motifs on the Waruga ornaments in Minahasa. All the geometric ornamental motifs found in Waruga mostly represent the beliefs of the Minahasa people, both related to life in this world and in life after death in *Kasendukan*. The geometric motifs on Waruga are interpreted by Freddy Wowor as the development of the basic philosophy of the Minahasa people which consists of a dot (*suru/kasuruan*) which refers to the Almighty as the center of everything, a circle (*kayombaan*) which is understood to be a dot that expands and is interpreted as universe, and vertical lines (*katooran*) which are interpreted as human beings. These geometric shapes can be found at the Watu Pinabetengan site.

Because of the richness in philosophical meaning, it can be considered that even though some of these ornaments are products of acculturation with other cultures, they are still the typical ornaments of the Minahasa people, because they basically describe the beliefs and views of the Minahasa people living at that time.

4. Conclusions

The symbols on the Waruga ornament are not actually ornament related to death. They are rather a depiction of the views and philosophy of the Minahasa people towards life. Waruga, which functions as a tomb, is only one of the media used to transfer this philosophy that basically describes how the Minahasa people view life and death. The process of transition from the life in the human world to the world of spirits as a place of eternal life that takes place in the event of death makes Waruga the right medium to transfer this view.

The visual patterns and the meanings contained in each Waruga ornament contain messages about life, both on earth and in heaven as the ultimate goal of a life. It is clear that every ritual and ceremony performed in connection with the event of death is an attempt to bring the deceased's spirit to enjoy a second life in a peaceful place, namely in heaven (*kasendukan*). It is not surprising that almost all references interpret the Waruga ornaments with the meaning of prayer such as prosperity, fertility, strength, wisdom, and glory.

In the context of an art product, the symbols that appear in Waruga are personal expressions that represent the logic of the maker's imagination. This can be understood as a form of human expression, especially the Minahasa people, in art. The various forms, sometimes realistic and also often abstract, are in line with what Cassirer said that art is not a finished reality, but is a way towards an objective view of objects and the surrounding environment (Sachari, 2007). The reality that appears in the ornament on Waruga is actually images of objects and the environment, including as a form of expression of personal existence.

Waruga is a cultural art object that is part of the life and beliefs of the Minahasa people in the past. It serves as a medium for burial of bodies that are attached to various rituals and ceremonies. As a cultural artifact, Waruga carries symbols of philosophy and life guidelines for the Minahasa people, which are reflected in the ornaments on the Waruga. In addition to aesthetic purposes, the ornamental carvings on Waruga are depiction of the Minahasa community's belief in eternal life after death. As an eternity, various efforts are made to obtain that eternity.

Waruga becomes a memorial monument for people who are still alive to be able to give the best in their lives as illustrated by the ornaments. It is a tribute to the hard work and life guidelines of the deceased so that it is hoped

that it can have a good influence on those who are still alive. The living are taught to be able to respect the good values of the deceased by trying to equip the dead so that their second lives can be passed peacefully and accepted by God.

Ethnography was used to describe the two objects from a cultural point of view, in this case the Minahasa culture. The description in the ethnographic framework provides space to understand both objects for both the researchers and the readers. At this stage, what is avoided is an absolute claim to a fact that is found. The researcher's position in this study is to accommodate all information by conveying it clearly and openly. Information obtained from both literature and other sources is presented as is so that it enriches the research process rich in data and information.

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Informant

Fredy Wowor (47 years old), academician and Minahasa cultural practitioner