

# **Cloth money on Celebes**

by  
Albertus C. Kruyt

translated by  
David Mead

2010

**Sulang Language Data and Working Papers:  
Translations from the Dutch, no. 1**



Sulawesi Language Alliance  
<http://sulang.org/>

## LANGUAGES

Subject language : Bugis (Luwu), Balantak, Mori Bawah, Pamona,  
Saluan, Wolio  
Language of materials : English

## DESCRIPTION

Before people of central, eastern and southeastern Sulawesi knew a money economy, they used particular cloths as a means of payment. Owing to their diminished use and scarcity, however, these cloths become viewed as magic-working objects or as relics associated with the ancestors.

## SOURCE

Kruyt, Alb. C. 1933. Lapjesgeld op Celebes. *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 73:172-183. Original pagination is indicated by enclosing the page number in brackets, e.g. [p. 172].

## VERSION HISTORY

Version 1 [12 October 2010]

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[p. 172]

## Cloth Money on Celebes <sup>1</sup>

by

Dr. Alb. C. Kruyt

In the Museum at Batavia there is a fine collection of so-called cloth money, originating from the island of Buton (Butung). The former president of the Java Bank, Mr. G. Vissering, gives the following description in his work, *Muntwezen en Circulatie-banken in Nederlandsch-Indië* (page 273):

“These cloths, the size of an elongated envelope, usual letter format, and which are folded in two, were woven in various colors for the Sultan, the Rajah-Rajah and the Regent, likewise for the chief ministers and ministers, and were given in payment by each of these persons at the markets. These cloths were later surrendered by the populace as payment for taxes, head money, and for other purposes. There was thus brought into circulation a kind of privilege of mintage for the leading dignitaries.”

Besides Mr. Vissering, Dr. J. Elbert reported about cloth money in his work *Die Sunda Expedition* (volume I, pp. 185–186). He also gives the name which these cloths have on Buton, namely *kampua*, a word which is also found in *kapurui*, which according to Elbert means “unbound headcloth of the king.”<sup>2</sup>

According to Elbert, these cotton cloths, which served the purpose of banknotes, were made on particular handlooms. Each dignitary of high position placed his particular mark on the cloths which he introduced, [p. 173] concerning which distinguishing marks Elbert informs us at length. The writer also proposes to relate how people on Buton should have come to use this cloth money as a means of payment. According to him, this use owes its origin to the considerable opium smoking, palm-wine drinking, and the people’s giving over of themselves to excessive sensual pleasure and idleness which occurred on the island, whereby ruler and commoner were weakened, and the financial resources of the land became exhausted.

This cloth money has, however, also played a considerable role outside of Buton. I will give an overview of that which has come to light concerning it up until now.

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<sup>1</sup> [translator’s note: I am indebted to René van den Berg for his comments on an earlier version of this paper, which led to many improvements.]

<sup>2</sup> [footnote 1, page 172] The etymology of this word is uncertain. *Kampurui* is the usual word for headcloth; it is very questionable whether this has anything to do with *kampua*.

Until the Dutch Indies Government went and intensively took a hand in the Celebes at the beginning of this century, the inhabitants of a large portion of central and eastern Celebes attached considerable worth to fabrics which, in our eyes, is not very valuable. These skirts or sarongs are called *kolokompa* by the East Toraja; among the To Mori they are named *sawu ngkere*; in East Celebes *motombing*.

The examples which I have seen of the fabric are nearly all of the same workmanship; the sizes differ. The majority of which I saw had passed into decrepitude, and had large holes. Of an example which I have in my possession, the warp threads are 80 cm long; they are strung out over a breadth of 35 cm. The loom on which this was made was thus very small. The white warp threads were often alternated with indigo-colored threads; in my example each time two threads. The number of white threads between two pair of indigo threads varies (6, 10, 6, 2, 2, 10, 10, 6, 10, 11, 2, 2, 10, 10, 7, 10, 10, 2, 2, 10, 10, 6, 10, 10, 2; the regularly occurring numbers 2, 6, 10 makes one think that 7 was miscounted for 6, and 11 for 10).

The entire work is shoddy in all respects. The threads had been carelessly spun, so that they are very unequal in thickness, from knitting yarn to sewing thread. The weft was not always introduced in the correct way; nothing was done to bring the threads closer together, so that they lie far apart, and the fabric exhibits much similarity with that [p. 174] on which interior decorators hang wallpaper. Over a length of 17 cm of the warp, no woof threads were introduced. If the warp threads were cut through in the middle, the fabric would form a shawl 63 cm long with fringes on each side of 8.5 cm.

Naturally such a cloth is completely unsuitable for any practical use. The only meaning it had among the East Toraja was as a magic-working object. According to the use which people made of it, the *kolokompa* carried various names. One of them was *alisi ndoko* 'bottom of the clothesbasket.' The Poso Toraja, you see, stored their possessions—for the most part consisting of cotton goods—in baskets with lids made from the leaf sheaths of sago palm. If someone was rich in *kolokompa*, he laid them at the bottom of the basket. This fabric 'called' cotton, so that, one trusted, one's basket should always be filled with cotton things.

We can explain this use of the *kolokompa* when we hear old To Mori assure us that this fabric was the first which their forebears had seen of cotton material.

The *kolokompa* played a still earlier role as a part of the bride price. It was the *pu'u*, the principle part of the bride price, upon which all the rest which belonged with it was laid. In this function the cloth carried the name *saenggo rapu*, which can be translated as 'that with which the hearth is entirely moved.' After all, with the giving of the bride price—of which the *kolokompa* was the principle piece—the young man moved from the hearth of his parents to that of his in-laws. Up until the coming of the Government in Central Celebes, a *kolokompa* had to be included with the bride price in Pu'u mboto, a district to the south of Lake Poso.

Formerly there must have been many more of these things, but seeing as how no new ones were being supplied, the number in existence shrank more and more, until finally

few remained. These were [p. 175] borrowed from each other when a son had to be married outside of the family. What was hereby intended by the cloth, people were not able to recall; the only definite conception people had was that it could not go well in the marriage, if there was not such a *kolokompa* with the bride price.

These cloths had the same meaning in Luwu. The previously mentioned Mr. Vissering nicely describes the scene of an experience which he had in connection herewith in Palopo. He had come to Palopo on his trip through the Indies to research the money situation in the various parts of the Archipelago. When in one of the gatherings which was held with the prominent people he showed cloth money from Buton, “the dignified seriousness of the gathering, which was conducted with oriental decorum, was suddenly disturbed; the look of the women from the retinue of the Ruler of Luwu thereupon became very keen; the Governor was literally begged to part with one or more of the cloths. When we asked what the meaning of the cloths was, there arose a tittering; apparently people would not fully enlighten us concerning them. Indeed it was told us that before a marriage the bridegroom must bring a similar cloth in procession to his bride, so that he would thereby be in a position to invoke the mood of his bride during the marriage. According to reports, there was only one cloth, which was in the possession of an old man, and which was rented out at a high price to bridegrooms. The groom, however, always had to return it back again. We had the strong impression that there was also a particular sexual meaning attached to the cloth, but the people declined to enlighten us further. Later on Buton this was confirmed to us, that the possession of such a cloth afforded the holder complete power over every woman in the place, but that the cloths no longer existed on Buton.” The sexual meaning, which Mr. Vissering conjectured that this use had, it does not have.

We must thus assume that in former times when these money cloths were still being supplied, there were always a number of [p. 176] *kolokompa* with the bride price. When there were no longer enough, they were replaced by regular cotton cloths, which were obtained by tearing a larger cloth into small pieces. This is thus the origin of the practice which we encounter up to the present among the East Toraja of adding to the bride price a number of cotton cloths of a few span square, a use which initially surprised me, and for which people could never give me an explanation (*De Bare'e-Sprekende Toradjas*, volume II, page 24).

We thus have here the *kolokompa* as a means of payment in the past. It borrows its magical meaning only from its antiquity and its scarcity, and from there that the price of such a cloth in Central Celebes runs up to a buffalo. But one therefore also did not give up his ownership, since the benefit which he understood to emanate from it was to him still much more valuable.

The meaning of the *kolokompa* as a relic of the fathers also comes out strongly in Mori. Here the cloth is named *sawu ngkere*.<sup>3</sup> That it had formerly served as a means of payment

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<sup>3</sup> [translator's note: from *sawu* 'fabric, piece goods, whole cloth' + *kere* 'desire, need.']

is conspicuous, to be traced back in the same way as happens with the bride price of the Bare'e speakers. In the report of the trip which I made with Dr. Adriani to Mori in 1899, I wrote thereof the following: "Continuing to speak, Marundu (the then ruler of Mori) told us that an old ordinance of the rulers of Petasia is that with the imposition of fines, each buffalo is replaced by a piece of cotton an arm's length long and a span broad. We fine each other readily, he said, and when we do that, it is with 100 buffaloes at a single time; but when it comes time to pay, each buffalo is replaced by a piece of cotton. Anyone who does not know that this is our custom runs into it. Thus I remember a chief of the Tolage came imposing a fine on a *kabosenya*<sup>4</sup> of Pada (a district belonging to the Mori kingdom) on account of a case of adultery, which had taken place in his country. After much discussion, the fine amounted to twenty-five buffaloes, but the Pada chief asked if he might pay in 'carabaos of Petasia.' Not knowing what this [p. 177] meant, the Lage head agreed, assuming that carabaos were carabaos. But he was startlingly surprised when he received twenty-five cotton cloths. Initially he would not acquiesce to this, but when the Pada chief referred the matter to me, he let it go." (Dr. N. Adriani and Alb. C. Kruyt, "Van Posso naar Mori," *Mededeelingen van wege het Nederlandsche Zendelinggenootschap*, volume 44, 1900, pages 181–182).

Later it occurred to us that these words of the Mori ruler were a good part exaggeration, and that with each fine also things of real value were given. Without doubt we see herein the old cloth money, and that it is quite possible that when these represented an actual value, the fine was satisfied with these alone. From there arose the high numbers with the fines. We can make this out from a custom which existed in Mori up until the coming of the Government: When someone had run up a high fine, and he was in the position to give a *sawu ngkere* to the one who imposed the fine, his debt was therewith removed. An old man at Tinompo, named Mbatono, told me that he had witnessed a leader of the *bonto* rank fined for stealing women. He had to pay five buffalo. The one owing the debt gave the offended a *sawu ngkere*, and with this the offended party was satisfied.

Upon the coming of the Government, there remained but few of these cloths in Mori. Only a few prominent people still had them, and these were thriftily preserved. When from advanced age one lost a thread, the thread had to be knotted to it. Whether these cloths were able to 'summon' cotton goods, such as we have heard among the Poso Toraja people, the Mori did not know. People kept them as 'emblems of dignity,' because it was only members of the *mokole*, *bonto* and *karua* ranks, thus the nobility, who could be in possession of them.

For that matter, such a cloth only did service in its capacity as a relic, as a connection link with the forefathers. When someone from one of the above-mentioned ranks [p. 178] died, a plate with rice was placed next to the body, and this was covered with a *sawu ngkere*. When the funeral meal had come to an end, the plate was removed and the cloth put away.

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<sup>4</sup> [translator's note: Pamona *kabosenya* 'headman, chief.']

Further the *sawu ngkere* also did service with the *mowurake*. This was a sacrificial ceremony, which among the Poso Toraja is named *mompakawurake* or *momparilangka*. Hereupon young girls were brought into connection with the spirits, which were probably nothing other than ancestors. For that, the girls were shut up in a small room, the *langka* ‘rest bench,’ an imitation of the spirit residence. In the small room was placed a copper plate with betel nut for the spirits, and this must be covered with a *sawu ngkere*.

Finally the cloth in Mori did service with the yearly forge celebration at the smithy, which had the aim of strengthening the villagers with the power of iron. The pigs which were offered on this occasion had to be killed with a machete, the handle of which was wrapped with a *sawu ngkere*. Thus it can also be traced in Mori, how the cloth money had developed from a means of payment into a relic.

There is a region in the eastern peninsula of Celebes where the cloth spoken of here held its position as a means of payment up until the coming of the Government, but then also only for paying off fines, thus with payments in connection with the adat.<sup>5</sup> If a person bought something or other from someone, the cloths were not accepted, unless on the contrary a person had need of them in order to pay a fine, or people wanted to have them in stock. The region to which I refer is the land of the To Loinang. There the cloth money is called *motombing*.

As has been said, the cloths were given in payment of imposed fines; in the first place, with robbery. First it was dictated that the thief restore what had been stolen, and then as a fine some *motombing*; with stealing of things of little value, two cloths, with things of greater value, four cloths; for climbing into a rice barn eight cloths were demanded; for affronting a chief, eight cloths, etc. [p. 179]

The adat character of the *motombing* among the To Loinang also came out with marital affairs. When a young man had his eye on a girl, and he had gotten her consent and that of her parents, the first thing he gave them was a *motombing*. Then no other man could make an attempt to win the girl for himself. And when the official engagement present was brought over, there again had to be such a cloth with it. When on the wedding day the bridegroom was brought to the house of his prospective in-laws, then the entrance to the bride was obstructed, and he was allowed in only after paying some *motombing*. To important guests a copper box with areca nuts was offered. The person took the nuts out of it, laying a *motombing* in their place, and thus gave the box back.

For the To Loinang, who themselves do not know weaving, we know how they obtained their cloth money. These people acknowledge as their lord the sengaji of Kintom, a vassal of the Sultan of Banggai. At certain times people went to pay their respects to this lord. People brought along gifts for him, and as return gift the delegation received a number of *motombing*. In this way the supply of this customary means of payment was replenished.

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<sup>5</sup> [translator’s note: Malay *adat* ‘custom, customary law, tradition.’]

Presumably the regional head, the *daka'nyo*, distributed the *motombing* among his subjects. The price of such a cloth was fixed at ten *supa* of pestled rice. Such a *supa* (Malay *cupak*, the name points to foreign influence) was a bamboo tube of a certain girth and length. In later times when pieces of very inferior unbleached cotton (*balasu*) were imported by the burgeoning trade, pieces which went for one rix-dollar, the price of the *motombing* appears to have dropped; at any rate, one could then get fifteen *motombing* for one piece of *balasu* (for some other remarks, compare my article "De To Loinang van den Oostarm van Celebes," *Bijdragen van het Koninklijk Instituut*, volume 86, 1930, pp. 358, 362, 449, 453).

If we go further east, then we find the *motombing* again among the Mian Balantak. But here the cloths are [p. 180] entirely missing the character of a means of payment. Also the cloths here are from the same district from which the To Loinang get theirs, namely Luwuk, less than 20 km distance from the above-mentioned Kintom. But the Mian Balantak did not get these from their lord, because he did not live in Luwuk; rather they came more directly in connection with the royal house of Banggai. The Mian Balantak bought the *motombing* at Luwuk for the same price as that for which the To Loinang traded them amongst each other, namely ten measures (*usoki*) of pestled rice.

The Mian Balantak were also accustomed to including a *motombing* with the bride price; but otherwise it only served as a representative of the person. People believed that every person had a *palolo* 'shadow spirit.' For our aims, it is only necessary to know that people conceived of these *palolo* in very narrow connection with the owner, thus something akin to our immaterial 'I'. Now the keeper or representative of the *palolo* is a *motombing*. This must therefore always be kept shut away. If someone went on a trip, he did not take his *motombing* with him, but laid it on one of the offering plates on which people are accustomed to placing betel nut for this immaterial I. On top of the cloth was placed a copper betel box with chewing ingredients; and so everything remained standing until the owner had returned home.

In some parts of this land, the face of a dead person was rubbed down with his *motombing*; the cloth was afterwards hung up as the representative of the deceased with the clothes and cotton which lay displayed in the death house, and which supposedly were taken along by the deceased to the land of souls. Finally the *motombing* of the one gone away was carefully put away. However, it is not momentous if such a cloth is burned; if it is the cloth of a still-living person, then he acquires a new one for himself.

The *motombing* also plays a role in the *mansambongi*, a ceremony which one performs if one goes on a hunt. The hunter then goes into the bush with a plate; there he sets the plate on the ground, laying a small bamboo slat [p. 181] on it, on which on the one end has been carved a face in profile, named *ata*, which in most of the languages of North Sulawesi means 'slave,' and he covers this with his *motombing*. Then he addresses the forest spirits, and requests them to give him much game. Thereupon he then offers the



spirits the cloth as ‘clothing.’ We know regarding the so-called cloth tree,<sup>6</sup> that with the ‘clothing’ the offerer offers himself. It thus also emerges how much a person sees a representative of himself in the *motombing*. After addressing the spirits, the owner buries the bamboo slat and takes the *motombing* home with him.

From the data brought together here certain conclusions are to be drawn. The cloth money was given out by rulers, who were of foreign origin, and originally they came from Java. It is very well possible, indeed probable, that this means of payment was in use at the courts of Goa, Bone and Luwu (and other kingdoms). In South Celebes it fell into disuse ages ago by the trade which developed there, whereby this means of exchange lost all value. Only on Buton was it able to endure longer, because this small kingdom formed a separate entity with its own economy, which was little influenced by the world traffic in which it did not take part.

Through the courts the cloth money was also known among the tribes who were subjects of these rulers. The Poso region and Mori must have received this means of payment from Luwu, and indeed each along a separate path, as the influence of Luwu on these two lands had taken different directions. Hereby the cloths carried a separate name in the two lands. For people such as the Toraja and the Mori, up until recently the magical side of the things played a greater role than the practical. These cloths had originated from the lords of these lands, the descendants of ones who had come down from the heavens (*manurung*), and with these cloths the benefit, which emanated from these godlike people, was spread among ordinary mortals. [p. 182] In Luwu, which had been separated the longest from the Bugis state, the remembrance of the use of these cloths remained preserved. That people there call it *belanja Butung* ‘Butonese money’ is not required to be interpreted as an indication that Luwu should have become acquainted with this usage through Buton. According to two elderly members of the Hadat, with whom I spoke in 1920 in Palopo, in olden times Buton brought tax (tribute) to Palopo. A part thereof consisted of cloth money. Buton must still have continued with this, even after the use of cloth money had ceased to exist. If people in Luwu only knew of this custom through Buton, it would not be possible to explain the tenacious power with which the cloth money has maintained itself as a relic, as a magical component of the bride price.

In East Celebes people became acquainted with the use of cloth money from Buton and Banggai, where just as on Buton not only was the ruler allowed to produce them but also the chiefs subordinate to him. When Banggai itself had already stopped with it, the *sengaji*’s of Kintom and Luwuk carried on with its productive use, to their great benefit. But in Balantak, where through their direct traffic with Banggai people became acquainted with the worthlessness of these cloths, they retained only their magical meaning.

In Loinang, through their closed-off society and exclusive relationship with Kintom, the practical value of the cloths continued in adat affairs.

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<sup>6</sup> [translator’s note: Dutch *lapjesboom*, but what is meant by this remains unclear to me.]

Perhaps also the fact that cloth money was of cotton and had been woven served to enhance its magical meaning among the mountain folk. Nowhere among the four mentioned peoples of Central and East Celebes had weaving found an entrance. It has taken quite some time for people to begin using cotton as clothing material. When I came to Poso in 1892, the use of bark cloth as clothing material still predominated in these parts, even though at that time cotton was already being imported by shiploads, and was exchanged by the Toraja against forest products. While cotton was little used for [p. 183] clothing, it was at times squandered for religious and magical purposes. Thus went ten blocks<sup>7</sup> of cotton in the grave. People collected cotton as a money investment, which returned no interest. This became especially clear with the importation of blocks of very inferior unbleached cotton, which everywhere in Central Celebes carried the name of *balasu* or *balacu*. This cotton was nothing to be used; one could make out of it only flimsy mosquito curtains and sails which had a short existence. However, for mosquito curtains people preferred patching bark cloth, because the *balacu* was see-through; and sailing was not practiced. There were rich people, who kept hundreds of blocks of *balacu* in their rice barns with no other aim than that with which the To Loinang gathered up their cloth money. There were only fines to be paid with it. All other goods were taxed in blocks of *balacu*. And the value of a block of *balacu*, which a rix-dollar showed to be, was in proportion not much higher than that of the cloth money among the To Loinang, owing to the quick rise in prosperity through the trade in forest products which arose after the suppression of piracy in these lands (thus after 1870).

Coins in this time had little value, because people did not know a money economy; only copper money was valued, because it could be melted and cast into armbands, ankle rings, and various useful objects. People knew the value of cotton, even though it was little used, and therefore this could become a means of payment.

Before the newer trade brought cotton into the land, people already had the cotton fabrics which had been imported by the Company. These so-called *bana* were also nearly exclusively used for magical purposes with sacrificial ceremonies, with the bride price of important persons, and with funerals. The value of all this cotton was thus taken over into the non-material sphere, and in this manner we can understand how money cloths, which for us from a practical viewpoint are entirely worthless, had a significant meaning to the inhabitants of Celebes in former days.

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<sup>7</sup> [translator's note: Dutch *blokken*, translated in this paragraph as 'blocks,' but perhaps to be understood as 'bolts.']

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