

## Signs of Royalty: an Analysis of Symbols on Traditional Kings' Graves in Raja Prailiu Village

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### ABSTRACT

**Abstract:** “Signs of Royalty: An Analysis of Symbols on Traditional Kings' Graves in Raja Prailiu Village” is a semiotic study that aims to find out the symbols of the stone tomb carved on the traditional kings' graves and their meanings by using Pierce's theory. All the data gained are analyzed using the descriptive qualitative method. The instruments used in this research are observation and interview. The result of the research showed that there are twelve (12) symbols found on the kings' traditional graves, they are Manu Wulu (roaster), Njara (horse), Tau (human), Ahu (dog), Ana wuya rara (crocodile), Ruha (deer), Lamba (jewelry), Na Ana Lodo Na Ana Wullang (the sun and moon), Ana Kara Wula (turtle), Maduku Pati (coffin bearer), Maduke (animal slaughter), and Papaha Maramba (queen).

## INTRODUCTION

One of the beautiful islands in Indonesia is Sumba. It is one of the islands in eastern Indonesia. It is a part of East Nusa Tenggara province. Sumba is split into four regencies (local government regions) following re-organization in 2017. They are Southwest Sumba, West Sumba, Central Sumba, and East Sumba. East Sumba in particular is a regency that has beautiful cultures. Funeral ceremonies, wedding ceremonies, traditional dance, traditional graves, traditional house, and their beliefs (*Marapu*) are still preserved these days. It attracts the attention of many people since each ritual that they perform is unique. Traditional processions carried out in the realm of funeral rites, in particular, take a long time, and they can take months or even years.

*Raja Prailiu* is one of the kingdoms that still exists in Sumba and applied every ritual like the above. In addition, the village has many traces of ancient kingdoms that are interesting to study and analyze, one of which is the stone graves or the tomb of the kings which are carved with various symbols. The use of symbols has cultural and artistic value, it is said that the symbols represent the personality of the deceased during his life as a king of the village, and the construction of the graves themselves uses natural materials such as stones. The process of constructing the graves must be followed by traditional graves ceremonies. This village still maintains sacredness even though it has existed in the modern era

The use of symbols cannot be separated from the people of Sumba, it can be seen in wave clothes. Some symbols found are *Mahang* (lion), *Kabebak* (butterfly), *njara* (horse), *mamuli* (jewelry of Sumba), *tau* (human), *kaka* (parrots), *manu wulu* (roaster), *kurrangu* (shrimp), *ruha* (deer) and *mandu hawurung* (dragon). Meanwhile, the traditional house has three parts: the bottom, the center, and the top of the house. Reflecting natural symbols in the ethnic view the lower nature or bottom (place for *arwah*), the middle or center (place for humans), and the upper nature or over the house (the gods' place), not to mention their traditional graves which have symbolic curving like roaster (*manu wulu*), crocodile (*ana wuya rara*), turtle (*ana karawula*), deer (*ruha*), and so on.

A symbol is the cultural code factor in construction meaning. Knowing the construction of the message in the sign becomes an important aspect. This construction of meaning is the basis for the formation of ideology in a sign. As studies thought of culture, semiotics certainly looks for how culture becomes the basis of thought for the formation of meaning in a sign. Moreover, Sebeok (2001:22) states that a symbol is a sign that stands for its referent in an arbitrary conventional way. Most semioticians agree that symbolism is what sets human representation apart from that of all other species, allowing the human species to reflect upon the world separately from stimulus-response situations. According to Saussure, signs and symbols can be studied not only in language (both written and spoken forms), but also in rituals, culture, images, and art. Based on the symbol definition it can be concluded the symbol is a sign interpreted by people that used to communicate. A symbol can be understood by the community where the symbol was made.

Symbols on graves are fascinating to be analyzed. Preliminary research conducted by the writer in *Raja Prailiu* village shows that not all graves in the villages have symbols. The use of symbols on graves is only for particular people such as kings. Kings have high social status compared to ordinary people. So, the kings' graves will be made different from the graves of ordinary people. The king's grave usually has symbols, higher and larger in size while the graves of ordinary people will be made lower and smaller in size since the ordinary people have a lower social status. In Sumba, people who have lower social status are called *ata* (slaves). This writing will be focusing on finding out the symbols carved on the Kings' traditional graves and analyzing the meaning of symbols by using Pierce's Semiotics Theory.

## **METHOD**

In conducting this research, the writer uses the descriptive qualitative method. It was conducted in Raja Prailiu Village, East Sumba. There are many graves in Raja Prailiu Village, East Sumba. However, the writer only took several graves that contain symbols of it. As

additional information, this village has two clans, they are the *Raja Prailiu Kiku* dynasty and the *Raja Prailiu Kambata* clan. For the *Raja Prailiu Kiku* clan, *Umbu Rara Meha* is the first king, *Tamu Umbu Nai Hawurung* is the second king, and *Tamu Umbu Kapanddik* is the third king, while for *Raja Prailiu Kambata* clan, the king is *Tamu Umbu Ndjaka*.

To collect information regarding the meaning of the symbols, the writer conducted an observation by visiting the object of research and taking some photos of the graves. Next, the writer chose 3-5 informants that met the criteria proposed by Mashun (2019:142) to be interviewed. By using unstructured interviews, the writer gathered all the required data from the informants regarding their opinions, beliefs, and feelings about the symbols and also the facts in their words. The interview process was recorded to anticipate if the result of the research something forgets. The writer could listen to the recording of the interview. So, the all information in the interview section can be documented well. The data gained by interviewing the informants were used to validate the meaning behind the symbols.

To analyze the data, the writer identified and listed the symbols from the graves, classified symbols from graves, identified and classified meanings of each symbol, verified and validated the classification of symbols, as well as meanings of the symbols, and the last, described and elaborate the meaning of the symbols on traditional graves.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This research was conducted in *Raja Prailiu* village, East Sumba. There are many graves found in *Raja Prailiu* village. The total of graves that do not have a symbol is 25 graves and only 4 graves have symbols. Not all graves have symbols, Symbols can only be found on graves that belong to kings. This is because the king has the highest power in society. The symbols on the graves indicate that the person who has died is a nobleman who is entitled to be respected. So, the focus of the analysis is the four particular graves. Speaking of forms, the graves of the kings are different from those of ordinary people. Kings' graves are usually high and large. The material used must be naturally taken from nature. The size of the graves indicates the king's majesty and power, it means that the larger the graves, the greater and more powerful the king.



*Figure 1 Graves with no symbols*

The community knows that the use of symbols on the king's graves is a symbol of nobility. According to the interview, each village in East Sumba has different regulations regarding the types of symbols to be carved on their kings' graves. The number of symbols on a grave depends on the family's will, the grave's material, and its size. Ordinary people's graves usually do not have a symbol on them, lower and smaller than the king's graves.

For the Sumbanese, stone graves are not just an ordinary resting place to bury the body of the deceased, it carries great meaning to the society. The graves are clear evidence of the family and relatives' respect for their ancestors so they devote all their means to building proper and magnificent stone graves. In *Raja Prailiu Village*, the writer found 4 king's graves with symbols, they are the graves of:

### 1) King Tamu Umbu Njaka

*Tamu Umbu Njaka* is the king of the *Raja Prailiu Kambata*. He passed away and the position of the king was replaced by his son named *Tamu Umbu Remi*. There are 11 symbols that the writer found on his grave. They are *Manu Wulu* (roaster), *Njara*, *Tau*, and *Ahu* (horse, human, and dog), *Ana Wuya Rara* (crocodile), *Ruha* (deer), *Lamba* (jewelry), *Ama Lodo Na Ana Wula* (the sun and moon), *Ana Karawula* (turtle), *Tau* (human), *Maduku Pati* (coffin bearer), *Maduke* (slaughter) and *Papaha Maramba* (queen).



Figure 2 King Tamu Umbu Njaka Grave

### 2) King Umbu Rara Meha

Umbu Rara Meha is the first king of *Raja Prailiu Kiku*. The writer found 3 symbols on his grave, they are *njara*, *ahu*, and *tau* (horse, dog, and human), *papaha maramba* (queen), and *ana wuya rara* (crocodile).



Figure 3 King Umbu Rara Meha's Grave

### 3) King Tamu Umbu Ngaba Hungu Rihi Eti,

*Tamu Umbu Ngaba Hungu Rihi Eti* is the second king of *Raja Prailiu Kiku*. The writer only found 3 symbols on his grave, they are *manu wulu* (rooster), *ana kara wula* (turtle), and *ana wuya rara* (crocodile).



Figure 4 King Tamu Umbu Ngaba Hungu Rihi Eti's Grave

### 4) King Tamu Umbu Nai Kapaddik.

*Tamu Umbu Nai Kapaddik* is the third king of *Raja Prailiu Kiku*, on his grave, the writer found *manu wulu* (roaster), *ana wuya rara* (crocodile), *ana karawulang* (turtle), *ama lodo na ina wulang* (the sun and moon), and *Lamba* (jewelry).



Figure 5 King Tamu Umbu Nai Kappadik's Grave

The writer concludes that there are 12 symbols found on graves. They are: 1) *Manu wulu* (roaster), 2) *Njara* (horse), 3) *Tau* (human), 4) *Ahu* (dog), 5) *Ana wuya rara* (crocodile), 6) *Ruha* (deer), 7) *Lamba* (jewelry), 8) *Na ana lodo na ana wulang* (the sun and moon), 9) *Ana kara wula* (turtle), 10) *Maduku pati* (coffin bearer), 11) *Maduke* (animal slaughter), and 12) *Papaha maramba* (queen)

To analyze the symbols carved on the graves, the writer worked on a semiosis process and then describes each symbol to reveal its meaning. The semiosis is based on Pierce's theory of semiotics which emphasizes the trichotomy of Sign [S] concerning the relationship between Interpretant [I] and its Object [O]. A sign [S] is a Sign of physical form or anything that can be absorbed by the senses and refers to something, an object [O] is a symbol itself, and Interpretant [I] is a sign in someone's mind about the object.

### **1. *Manu Wulu (Rooster)***

In general life of Sumbanese, *Manu Wulu* (rooster) is usually used as a sacrificial animal in *Marapu*'s religious rituals. Sumbanese also believes that the blood of *manu wulu* (rooster) can predict good or bad things that will happen in the future. This kind of prediction can only be done by the elders in the village.

In particular, a rooster is an animal that always crows before sunrise and before humans wake up in the morning, so *Manu* (rooster) symbolizes awareness. Soelarto, B in his book (*Budaya Sumba*) says that for the Sumbanese, the rooster serves as a sign of the awakening of the spirit. The crowing of the rooster will wake up the spirit of the person who died in time to get ready to travel to another realm. Symbols of *manu wulu* on the king' grave also indicate the king's bravery and courage to face his people during his life. He was a leader who would protect his people and fight the enemy heroically to death. It makes the king different from others.

### **2. *Njara (horse)***

*Njara* (horse) is one of many famous casts in East Sumba. It is a multi-purpose cattle, which one of its functions is as a means of transportation. *Njara* is used for special events done in Sumba, for example, wedding and funeral ceremonies. It can also be used for entertainment like horsing races. For society, *njara* determines someone's social status, one is considered rich if he or she owns horses. In terms of marriage, the function of *njara* is as a dowry for women.

*Njara* is one of the symbols that can be found on the kings' graves. It symbolizes the king's masculinity, wealth, agility, heroism, consolation, and high social status. *Njara* is believed as a vehicle for people who have passed away. Soelarto, B in his book (*Budaya Sumba*) says that for Sumbanese, a horse is a type of animal that symbolizes the ultimate obedience, which is not limited to the world but also in the afterlife.

### **3. *Tau (human)***

*Tau* (human) symbolizes the king himself. He is the leader that people in the village respect. His territory was only in the area where he lived, but wherever he went, people would treat him with respect. The symbol of a human curved on the stone grave is also associated with the king's style and appearance whenever he visited another village or hunted. They would always use their traditional wave clothes and a machete.

### **4. *Ahu (dog)***

*Ahu* (dog) symbolizes vigilance. The dog is a guide, a keeper, and also a hunter that would follow the king when he was traveling or hunting. It was the king's faithful guardian, so in order to remember and honor the *ahu*, the figure was curved on the king's gravestone.

### **5. *Ana Wuya Rara* (Crocodile)**

*Ana wuya rara* or crocodile. In general, a crocodile is a very dangerous animal that all people are scared of, but for Sumbanese, a crocodile represents Sumba's nobility of a leader who can protect his people and not easily be provoked by any chance. Crocodile symbolizes the greatness of a king. It is also a symbol of power and leadership that is firm and rigid. However, the use of *ana wuya rara* as a symbol carved on the king's grave represents the king's personality who once led his people with great power. He was a brave, ferocious, firm, and tough leader at the same time.

### **6. *Ruha* (Deer)**

*Ruha* (deer) is one of the beautiful animals that live on Sumba Island. But now it is not found. It is a target for the king when goes hunting in the forest and it is believed that the symbol represents the pride of the people in the village when they finished their hunting and get the target. On the other hand, deer symbolizes greatness, supremacy, and wisdom. Deer antlers symbolize the wisdom of the leaders who pay attention to the lives of the people they lead. Deer can easily escape from hunters; this symbolizes the courage of the leader to act and the leader's wisdom in solving his people's problems. By carving the symbol of *ruha* (deer) on the king's grave, it means that the king was a great and wise leader.

### **7. *Lamba* (Jewelry)**

Jewelry was a very valuable object and was only owned by certain people, it was a symbol of one's social status. The symbol of *Lamba* on graves means that a king was a person who had a high social status in the village.

### **8. *Na ana Lodu Na ana Wulang* (Sun and Moon)**

*Ana lodu* and *Ana Wulang* (the sun and the moon) is the titles given to the nobels and kings. Just as the position of the sun and the moon is very important for the earth, so is the position of these nobles for the people. Therefore, the use of the symbol on graves refers to the position of the king. Moreover, during ceremonial discussions, the king's family is never referred by their names; one common reference for the family is as sons of the sun and daughters of the moon.

### **9. *Ana Kara Wula* (Turtle)**

A long time ago, people usually took the tortoiseshell and made it as a comb to be used by women. Not everyone could use this type of accessory, only the royal ladies who has a high social status. Queen also wore a crown made from tortoiseshell. *Ana Kara Wula* (turtle) for Sumbanese, represents gentle and polite leadership. It symbolizes the king's glory and subtlety. A king is considered a figure who can decide and wisely solve the problems of his people. In



addition, the tortoiseshell which is considered smooth is identified as the king's heart that is polite and gentle. So, the symbol of *Ana Kara Wula* (turtle) on the king's grave means that the king was a gentle and polite leader.

#### **10. Maduku Pati (coffin bearer)**

*Maduku pati or coffin bearer* is a group of people (usually men) whose job is to carry the king's body into the grave. Before the burial, the king's body would be kept and protected by the *papangga*. *Papangga* is slaves who serve the king and who come from the family of the descendants' guarder. *Papangga* carried out the task of maintaining the king's corpse for before the day of burial. They will be served as a king during life with clothing, food, and escort. When the gong musical instrument was sounded in the morning and evening, each sound of the gong causes the *papangga* to lose awareness. If the king is happy to dance, the *papangga* will dance exactly following the late style.

When the day that has been determined by the family to bury the king, the *maduku pati* and several *papangga* would carry the king's body together into the graves with a horseman and *Siri Pinang* bearer (*Siri Pinang* is a traditional food for Sumba people). These groups of people would surround the king's grave four times round.

#### **11. Maduke (slaughterer)**

*Maduke (slaughterer)* is a group of people whose job is to slaughter some animal that people from other villages bring. It is a habit that people must bring an animal for the owner of an event voluntarily. The process of the king's funeral is always done by slaughtering three buffaloes and two horses next to the king's grave. The slaughter of the animals carved on the king's grave symbolizes the purification of the king's sins during his lifetime.

#### **12. Papaha Maramba (Queen)**

*Papaha Maramba* (queen) is symbolized by a woman who rode a horse. She was the king's wife, she led the *Papangga* (women) to sing a folk song and surround the king's grave in *Payi* (traditional ceremony). The queen would sing the folk song at night while riding the horse, while the *papangga* women would use sheathed clothes that indicated they were mourning. So, before burying the king, the *papaha maramba* would surround the king's grave with *papangga* women seven times which aims to take the king to heaven.

## **CONCLUSION**

Gravestones have important meaning and carry a social function that binds the dignity of the Sumbanese. The existence of the gravestones reflects identity, kinship, power, and social organization. Based on the research in Raja Prailiu Village, there are 12 symbols found on the king's graves. The 12 symbols are *Manu Wulu* (roaster), *Njara* (horse), *Tau* (human), *Ahu*



(dog), *Ana wuya rara* (crocodile), *Ruha* (deer), *Lamba* (jewelry), *Na Ana Lodo Na Ana Wullang* (the sun and moon), *Ana Kara Wula* (turtle), *Maduku Pati* (coffin bearer), *Maduke* (animal slaughter), and *Papaha Maramba* (queen).

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