

## Material culture in Alor

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The Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, Sweden, is in possess of a collection of material culture from Alor, gathered in the late 1930-ies by the well known anthropologist Cora du Bois.

The items<sup>1</sup> range from basic kitchenware and personal outfits (clothes, hair decorations etc) to ritual objects, including *moko* bronze drums and wood carvings of guardian spirits, statues of war victims and items related to slavery and slave trade.

Most items are obtained in Atimelang, where du Bois spent three years doing research for her book *The people of Alor*. At the time of du Bois' stay the villagers were not yet Christians, thus the items of religious content which are represented in the museum collection, are not likely to be found in the village today.

From the correspondence between the museum director, Dr Walter Kaudern, and Cora Du Bois, it is clear that he wanted a representative collection which reflects everyday life. As a whole, du Bois has succeeded in presenting an essence of material culture, showing varieties as well as reoccurring themes.

When du Bois returned to the States in 1939, the idea was for her to finish a manuscript on material culture in Alor, which was to be published in the museum series *Ethnological Studies*. World War II and the sudden death Dr Kaudern put an end to those plans.

As a consequence, the only documentation of the Alor collection in Gothenburg is a list of all items which du Bois sent to Sweden, including local names, but in general no further information.

In autumn 2006 I made some initial documentation of the Du Bois Alor-collection at the museum. In summer 2007 I will bring photographs, drawings and descriptions of all items to Atimelang. Hopefully the villagers can contribute with their knowledge. (Some of the old people in Atimelang still remember Cora du Bois). My main aim is to gather information regarding the collection. The question of continuity will, I think, be a natural follow-up – what is still in use? What is not, and why?

At the workshop in Kupang, I could present photographs of chosen items, comments made by du Bois on material culture, and fresh material gathered from informants in Atimelang - together with my own reflections. Hopefully participants in the workshop can add to the knowledge and understanding of the material presented.

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<sup>1</sup> The Du Bois collection has many similarities with a collection made by Ernst Vatter in 1929. The latter has recently (2004) been published in a beautiful book by Ruth Barnes: *Ostindonesian im 20. Jahrhundert: Auf den Spuren der Sammlung Ernst Vatter*, Museum der Weltkulturen, Frankfurt am Main.