

Basic Detail Report



Coffin (Erong)

Date

early 19th Century

Medium

Wood and pigment

Description

This early 19th century wooden incised coffin is carved to represent a buffalo, a symbol of protection, status and

wealth in Toraja culture. The coffin lid mimics the saddle shape of a Toraja house roof. Toraja homes, besides being symbols of status and wealth, are built to reflect the cosmic order of earth (the living quarters), the roof (the heavens), and below the home (the underworld). Homes are frequently covered with horns of buffalo, and coffins like the one pictured here are known to have real buffalo horns incorporated into their design in place of carved wood. The Toraja home and the buffalo endlessly intertwine in life as well as in death. Upon death, the deceased is wrapped in cloth and covered in red felt. It is then moved into the family home where it is kept until the family has enough funds to pay for a funeral. Funerals are elaborate and expensive, and the deceased is kept in the home sometimes up to several years as a family saves for this event. Until the first buffalo is slaughtered for the funeral, the deceased person is considered very sick and ill; it is the funeral ceremonies and activities that provide passage to the afterlife. During the funeral the body is removed from the family's home and carried in a procession to its final resting place. In past times bodies were placed in coffins placed in large caverns or caves. The Toraja eventually stopped using coffins for burials instead preferring to deposit the wrapped bodies into carved rock chambers.

Dimensions

a-h: 46 1/2 × 37 × 104 in., 37 lb. (118.1 × 94 × 264.2 cm, 0.017 kg)