

Basic Detail Report



Robe (Babban Riga)

Date

mid 20th Century

Primary Maker

Hausa

Medium

Cotton and silk

Description

This robe, vernacularly referred to as a babban riga, is a distinctive example of the traditional hand-woven and embroidered tunic worn by members of the Hausa male aristocracy of Kano Emirate in northern Nigeria. The babban riga is often worn over embroidered trousers and long-sleeved shirts; in addition the ensemble may be outfitted with a unique type of turban (rawani) and a long hooded cloak (alkyabba). Though used as everyday wear a babban riga may be reserved for public events of religious or political occasion. This particular tan woven robe is comprised of cotton panels stitched together and incorporates light-brown silk embroidery of geometric patterns sewn at the center front and back of the neck opening. The pattern featured on the front left is of a common motif referred to as aska biyu, or “two knives.” The aska biyu is identified by the paired elongated triangles that point downward on front of the gown. Another motif repeatedly present on babban rigas, is the spiral form found on the front right and center back of this particular robe. According to some researchers, the knives forms—along with the spirals—are eastern features and indicates the cultural influence from Arab world associated with the diffusion of Islam into northern Nigeria. Besides the assertion of the wearer’s wealth, robes of this stature project the wearer’s high social status, religious piety and political authority. Just by wearing babban riga the member of the aristocracy conveys messages of his link with powerful groups in society. In some instances, members wear several robes at a time, by layering them on top of each other, to further add to the prestige and entitlement.

Dimensions

52 × 99 1/2 in. (132.1 × 252.7 cm)