Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

BALI FESTIVALS G41

Bali is an island that belongs to Indonesia. Most of the country follows Islam, but in Bali over 90% of the population are Balinese Hindus. Religion is part of their daily life and is reflected in how people dress.



The men and women of Bali use dance and drama to explain their life. Stories are told of their Gods through colourful and well trained dancers.

Legong crowns



Young Balinese girls perform a dance called the legong wearing crowns like these. The headdress is made of leather and worn with frangipani flowers. When these dances are performed they impress watchers with elaborate colours and clothing.

The local princes used to pick the prettiest and best girls to take part. It is a display that needs a great deal of skill and it is a big achievement for a girl to be chosen. By the time a dancer turns 14 she is nearing retirement age.



The dance originates from different stories. One is based on a tale from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The story of King Lasem

The King of Lasem found a Princess called Rangkesari lost in the forest. He decided to take her home and lock her away. Rangkesari's brother was a Prince from a region called Daha and he threatened war unless she was released. The King decides to fight the Prince and begins marching to battle but is greeted by a bird predicting his death. In battle the King was killed and his army defeated. Rangkesari is freed by her brother.

Barong



Barong is a big, hairy, fearsome looking beast. In Balinese culture Barong is the leader of the good spirits. He is represented as a lion-like figure that protects children from the evil spirit, Rangda. She is a demon queen that eats children and leads an army of evil witches.

Villages recreate the battle between Barong and Rangda. Two men wear the Barong costume, one at the front and one at the back. Their dance with the witch is a story of the fight between bad and good, never ending.

The story of Barong

In Bali folklore the king sent his wife into exile for practising black magic. When the King died his widow rebelled against the Prince. In Balinese the word widow is Rangda so this is how the evil wife got her name. Rangda killed half the kingdom with her witches. She then tried to murder the Prince but the Hindu God, Shiva, turned the Prince into Barong. Both Barong and Rangda had equal powers and couldn't kill each other. A group of soldiers with magic knives were called by Barong to help but Rangda put them in a trance. This made the soldiers try to stab themselves. Barong re-appeared casting a spell so that the soldiers' skin was strong enough to withstand the knives. They were released from their trance as Rangda fled. To revive the men, Barong dipped his beard into water. A holy man then sprinkled the magical water over the soldiers to wake them up. Although Rangda ran away she was not killed. So the struggle between good and bad continues.



Above: A Barong dance costume

Sarong

Sarongs are popular in Africa, India and the Pacific Islands as well as Bali. In hot countries a sarong is a comfortable way of covering up. Both men and women wear it because it is very light.



There are two types of sarong. This is a single piece of material. It is worn by holding it behind their back and bringing the material in the left hand over to the right side and the right side over to the left. They then fold it down from the front so that it is secure. Another type has both ends stitched together. It is called a tubular sarong. Like a skirt, you pull it over your legs to the waist. Then the top is folded down so that it acts as a belt and stops it falling down.

The sarong in this box was designed for a woman. Men usually wear one made from cotton and woven in a checked design known as a pelicat sarong. Women, however, have a cotton sarong in a style called batik.

Batik is the art of decorating a sarong by dyeing the material. Most are now produced using a machine but the original method is still used for better quality garments. Thin wax lines are drawn with a needle. The hot wax hardens so that when the cloth is dyed the parts covered with wax do not turn the new colour. The fabric is then hung to dry before being ironed between paper towels. Doing this absorbs the wax leaving the original cloth with a spectacular dyed pattern.



Above: A canting needle doing a batik design



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Temple sash



In Bali the sash is called a selempot. It is worn around the waist when entering a temple. The Balinese wear their finest clothing to the temple. The gold and silver decorative thread makes the sash sparkle in the light. Lengths of cloth are draped, wrapped or tied around the body. In a Balinese Hindu temple the body has to be covered so the mind is concentrated on praying.



Religion in Bali is very important. Balinese Hinduism is different from the Hinduism practiced in India. It mixes together Hindu Gods with Bali stories, like that of Barong. The God is believed to rest in the temple so most villages have at least three. More than 20,000 are on the island and Beskah Temple on the Gunung Agung mountain is the supreme temple.

