



Sacred textile (mawa') depicting tadpoles and water buffalo, early 20th century, Dallas Museum of Art, the Steven G. Alpert Collection of Indonesian Textiles, gift of The Eugene McDermott Foundation

On an island in the middle of an ocean, there was a group of people called the Toraja people who lived throughout a tall mountain range. Most of the Toraja men were farmers. They farmed rice that grew in shallow fields of water and in these wet fields there lived extremely poisonous snakes. The farmers were constantly ware of these dangerous animals as they guided small herds of water buffalo across the rice fields. The poisonous snakes hid in the shallow water ready to attack the water buffalo. One bite could easily kill a water buffalo.

However, there were also thousands of tadpoles that lived in the rice fields. These wonderful little creatures were so important to the farmers. The farmers were able to avoid the poisonous snakes based on how the amount of tadpoles they saw as they crossed the fields. The tadpoles protected the very important water buffalo, and in doing so also helped the Toraja people. It is for this reason that the little tadpoles are sometimes referred to as *balo* or “good luck charms.”