

## Identification and Documentation of Bwatiye Cultural Symbols and Materials for Textile Design Applications

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article history:</b>            Published: March 2026</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b>            Bwatiye culture            Cultural symbols            Material culture            Textile design            Indigenous knowledge            Cultural preservation            Numan            Adamawa State</p>	<p>This study explores the identification and documentation of Bwatiye cultural symbols and materials suitable for adaptation in contemporary interior textile design. The Bwatiye people, primarily residing in Numan and Lamurde Local Government Areas of Adamawa State, Nigeria, possess a rich material cultural heritage expressed through symbolic artefacts, utensils, regalia, and implements. However, modernization threatens this intangible heritage as younger generations lose connection with traditional knowledge. Employing a qualitative ethnographic approach, the study utilized purposive sampling to collect data through oral interviews, participant observation, photographic documentation, and focus group discussions with fifteen respondents comprising curators, village heads, artisans, cultural custodians, and textile designers in Numan. Primary data were sourced from the Bwatiye Traditional Council Museum and Sapwavi Antique Shop. Findings revealed twenty distinct cultural symbols and materials with significant textile design potential, including Kurme (shield), Sushope (staff of authority), Shomto (fishing implement), Dwam Bwara (three-legged pot), Darato (basket), Kusauto (siever), Kufe (spear), Bunghai (quiver), Ragei (bow), Hulbe (arrow), Kwalangye (balafon), Myedi fon Linto (elephant tusk blowers), Shiruwe (female dancing kit), Rukute (male robe), Bule (male cap), and Lokai (decorative materials). Each artefact carries specific cultural meanings—Kurme symbolizes royal authority and serves as the official Bachama logo; Sushope denotes leadership rank; Dwam Bwara represents the covenant of marriage; Shomto represents women's contribution to subsistence economy. The study documented the Bwatiye tricolor scheme of black (identity and pride), white (peace), and red (strength and courage) as foundational for textile applications. Thematic analysis revealed concerns about cultural transmission, functional significance of artefacts, embedded symbolic meanings, and urgent documentation needs. This documentation provides a systematic repository of Bwatiye material culture, establishing the empirical foundation for subsequent motif generation, design development, and production of culturally meaningful interior textiles that preserve Bwatiye identity while meeting contemporary aesthetic demands.</p>

### 1. Introduction

Culture constitutes the way of life of a people as well as heritage transmitted from one generation to another (Kashim, 2011). African cultures are renowned for their diversified traditional and cultural heritage. In Nigeria, numerous cultures exist with distinct beliefs and practices. The northern region of Nigeria comprises various tribes, each possessing unique cultural heritage and traditions. The cultural value of any ethnic group is characteristically depicted through symbols—visual representations that serve as means of identification and affirm the uniqueness of such culture (Bakare, 2022).

Symbols function as fundamental mechanisms of interaction, identification, expression, and communication. Udeani (2014) describes symbols as abstract representations of objects, noting that their use as motifs has existed since the introduction of formal education. Within traditional societies, symbols hold significance equivalent to the group itself, as they depict identity and embody collective beliefs. Okunna and Gausa (2014) affirm that symbolic operation permeates the entire spectrum of human learning, communication, and reasoning. Any society remains incomplete without communication systems that facilitate intra-group and inter-group interaction (Gausa & Legah, 2016). Voh and Aleiyideino (1985) encouraged individual societies to develop patterns and systems of communication based on traditional, cultural, historical, and philosophical norms and values.

The Bwatiye people—popularly known as Bachama—constitute an ethnic group indigenous to north-central Nigeria, specifically occupying Numan and Lamurde Local Government Areas of Adamawa State. Their cultural heritage finds expression through various art forms, crafts, festivals, and material artefacts. According to Nissen (1966), the Bwatiye claim descent from Gobir people, migrating from the Sokoto region through multiple locations before settling in their present territory. Myatafadi (1997) further traces their migration from Baghdad through Egypt, Sudan, and Chad to Sokoto, and subsequently to their current locations in Nigeria and parts of Cameroon between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. Nissen (1966) states that the Bwatiye

and the Batta people share the same bloodline, with their separation occurring due to historical circumstances involving twin brothers from the royal line.

Traditional Bwatiye material culture encompasses weaving, pottery, calabash carving, beading, fishing implements, hunting weapons, and ceremonial regalia. These artefacts incorporate symbolic motifs representing cosmological concepts, proverbs, and virtues through geometric patterns, colours, and structural forms (Adepegba, 1999). Ochigbo and Iorliam (2019) affirm that Bwatiye cultural identity manifests through highly valued craft traditions expressing cosmological concepts via symbolic design. According to Ogunduyile (2011), art constitutes the totality of all knowledge and values shared by a society. Creativity has existed since ancient times when humans utilized available environmental resources to solve problems. Human beings expressed themselves and told their stories through pictures and signs long before developing reading and writing abilities (Goodman & Goodman, 2013). Pictures on early cave dwelling walls provide evidence of the human compulsion to describe the world through both representational and symbolic images. The Bwatiye, like other ancient peoples, created and designed objects using available environmental resources, embedding beautiful designs that made artefacts unique and communicative of cultural identity.

However, modernization poses significant threats to this intangible heritage. Youth migration to urban centres reduces contact with elders possessing symbolic knowledge (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Imported fabrics increasingly displace handwoven textiles in markets (Adepegba, 1999). Furthermore, Doki (2021) and Nyorere and Umar (2022) observe that Bwatiye cultural symbols, objects, and utensils once appreciated during wedding ceremonies and festivals are now rejected by indigenous peoples due to their "old-fashioned" appearance and the influx of modern interior-decoration products. Consequently, these symbols and materials drift toward extinction without systematic documentation or transformation into contemporary products (Ogunduyile, Adeyeye, & Oluwadamilare, 2020).

The Bwatiye tradition whereby brides brought specific utensils and textiles to their new homes has particularly diminished. A Bwatiye bride was historically expected to arrive at her matrimonial home with culturally prescribed utensils and textile materials, but contemporary brides increasingly reject these items as "olden-day" artefacts (Nyorere & Umar, 2022). Edward (1998) documented *Founo-vone*—the room decoration practice performed by Bachama women involving polishing clay walls into decorative shapes, with symbols called *Pulunle* kept in bedrooms to create aesthetic environments.

This study addresses the urgent need to document endangered Bwatiye material culture before symbolic meanings are irretrievably lost. As Nwosu (2009) warns, without documentation, significant elements of Bwatiye intangible heritage risk vanishing permanently. Simultaneously, growing global recognition of African artistic heritage creates demand for authentic cultural expressions in contemporary design contexts (Okafor, 2005). This research specifically focuses on identifying and documenting Bwatiye cultural symbols and materials suitable for adaptation in interior textile design, establishing the foundational knowledge necessary for subsequent design innovation while preserving cultural authenticity.

### 1.1 Research Objective

The specific objective addressed in this paper is:

To identify the various Bwatiye material culture that are suitable for home textile designs.

This objective forms the first phase of a larger study aimed at generating motifs, developing design concepts, and producing interior textile products that preserve Bwatiye cultural identity while meeting contemporary aesthetic demands.

### 1.2 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following question:

In what way can the Bwatiye material culture that are suitable for home textile design be identified?

### 1.3 Significance of the Study

This study holds significance for multiple stakeholders. For the Bwatiye community, it contributes to preserving cultural values, strengthening beliefs, maintaining traditions, and documenting symbols and materials for future generations. For researchers, it provides a source of information where limited literature exists on comprehensive study of Bwatiye cultural symbols, artefacts, crafts, and traditional designs. For policymakers, it offers empirical evidence on the value of incorporating indigenous cultural symbols into contemporary products, informing policies on cultural preservation, youth empowerment, and sustainable development.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework: Cultural Representation Theory

This study is underpinned by the concept of Cultural Representation, which emphasizes the use of art and symbols in expressing cultural identity. The theory supports the inclusion of indigenous motifs in design as a form of cultural continuity and resistance to homogenizing globalization pressures. Stavenhagen (1998) defines culture as "the sum total of the material and spiritual activities and products of a given social group—a coherent and self-contained system of values and symbols as well as a set of practices that a specific group reproduces over time and provides individuals with the signposts and meanings for behavior." This definition underscores the interdependence between cultural groups and individuals' ability to adapt traditional elements to contemporary circumstances.

Bascon (1969) noted that discussions of individual artistic creativity and societal artistic norms must consider the socio-cultural conditions in each society. The degree to which creative expression is allowed varies greatly across cultures, indicating that culture fundamentally determines creative possibilities. This theoretical perspective justifies the systematic identification and documentation of Bwatiye material culture as a prerequisite for culturally grounded design innovation.

### 2.2 Material Culture and Symbolic Systems

Material culture encompasses the totality of physical objects, artefacts, utensils, tools, regalia, and artworks created, used, and valued by a people—tangible expressions of their beliefs, values, history, social organization, and way of life. Egonwa (1994) asserts that in the twenty-first century, visual expression must be studied as both a reflection of culture and something possessing cultural efficacy in its own right, contributing to the production, reproduction, and mutation of culture. Material culture provides access to the past because the earliest recorded communications were pictorial, and artefacts remain central to historical reconstruction.

Symbols function as abstract representations of objects, ideas, and beliefs (Udeani, 2014). In textile design, cultural symbols manifest through motifs, patterns, colours, and structural techniques. Arthur (2001) demonstrated how Adinkra symbols of Ghana's Ashanti people convey messages of wisdom, strength, and morality through textile applications. Similarly, Bakare (2022) explored adaptation of Adire symbols for contemporary African fashion, affirming the viability of traditional symbols in modern design contexts.

### 2.3 Bwatiye Material Culture

The Bwatiye people possess diverse material culture categorized into kitchen utensils, interior design products, cultural dancing kits, fishing implements, farming tools, hunting weapons, and ceremonial regalia. Myatafadi (1997) documented that traditional crafts of Bwatiye women—including calabash carving, fishing, beading, weaving, and pottery—provide rich repositories of symbolic forms. Edward (1998) specifically described Founo-vone, the interior wall decoration practice wherein women polish clay walls into decorative relief patterns, geometric shapes, and symbolic forms called Pulunle, transforming living spaces into cultural narratives.

Tagowa (2010) observed that cultural festivals such as Vunon and Kwete serve as platforms for displaying and transmitting material culture. The Kwete festival, organized under the centralized authority of the Hama Bachama (the paramount ruler), features royal processions, sword dances (Wurosunga), and cultural displays that reinforce Bwatiye identity and communal cohesion. These festivals maintain the visibility of symbolic artefacts including the Kurme (shield), Sushope (staff of authority), Myedi fon Linto (elephant tusk blowers), and various dance regalia.

However, Dati (1984) noted that while hunting and fishing festivals have declined over decades, wrestling festivals have continued to strengthen through cultural openness and demystification, paving ways for new forms of socio-cultural expression. This dynamic context presents both challenges and opportunities for preserving and reimagining material culture.

### 2.4 Cultural Symbols in Textile Design

Cultural symbols serve as visual representations of ideas, beliefs, and traditions unique to particular groups. In textile design, these symbols appear in motifs, patterns, colours, and structural techniques. Smith (2016) documented how symbolic patterns from diverse cultures have influenced global textile traditions. Gausa and Legah (2016) explored textiles and material culture of the Bambuka people, demonstrating how traditional symbols can be adapted for contemporary textile designs while maintaining cultural integrity.

The adaptation process requires careful attention to cultural authenticity. Ogunduyile (2011) emphasized that art constitutes the totality of all knowledge and values shared by a society. Therefore, transforming cultural symbols into contemporary designs must preserve essential meanings while achieving aesthetic relevance for current applications. This balance between preservation and innovation constitutes the central challenge addressed in this research.

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic research design. Ethnography has its roots in anthropology and emphasizes describing and interpreting cultural behavior (Catherine, 2009). Ethnographers immerse themselves in the lives and culture of studied groups, participating in activities while observing behaviour, taking notes, conducting interviews, analyzing, reflecting, and writing reports—a process termed fieldwork or participant observation (Creswell, 2014). Ethnographic approach was adopted because it involves methods such as observation, interviews, and practical engagement with materials, allowing exploration of cultural meanings alongside practical outcomes. Physical observation of traditional symbols, utensils, and attire of the Bwatiye people, combined with personal interviews, enabled comprehensive assessment of cultural knowledge.

### 3.2 Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised local Bwatiye chiefs, traditional heads, community stakeholders, Bwatiye traditional museum personnel, antique shop operators, textile producers, and cultural historians in Numan, Adamawa State, Nigeria. Numan was selected as the study area because it constitutes the primary location of Bwatiye people, with the town lying on the Benue River and serving as headquarters of Numan Local Government Area. The predominant ethnic group in the town is the Bwatiye (Bachama) people, renowned as unconquered warriors and known for farming and fishing.

### 3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

Numan Local Government Area was selected as the case study. Sample was drawn from the population using purposive sampling technique. Simple random sampling was also applied, ensuring each respondent in the population had equal probability of selection for the sample size. This combination of sampling techniques ensured both targeted expertise and representative perspectives.

### 3.4 Sample Size

Fifteen (15) respondents participated in the study, comprising individuals with historical and practical knowledge of Bwatiye cultural symbols and materials and their meanings. These participants—artisans, curators, and custodians associated with the Hama Bachama palace and Bwatiye culture—were selected for their ability to provide rich qualitative data through oral interviews. The sample distribution was as follows:

S/N	Respondent Category	Number of Respondents
1.	Curators	2
2.	Village heads	2
3.	Artisans/youth with art knowledge	5
4.	Focus group (cultural custodians)	4
5.	Textile designers	2
Total		15

### 3.5 Instrument of Data Collection

A structured interview guide was utilized for conducting face-to-face oral interviews with Bwatiye chiefs, traditional heads, community stakeholders, Bwatiye Traditional Council members, and cultural historians in Numan. Additionally, the researcher visited the Bachama Traditional Museum, local textile producers, and antique shops within the study area. Data were collected in both textual and non-textual forms, including photographs of Bwatiye cultural elements and symbols present on material culture artefacts at the Bwatiye Museum and Sapwavi Ventures antique shop.

The researcher and two assistants participated in data collection, with the assistants providing language interpretation where necessary. During interviews, the researcher learned that many symbols and equipment were unknown to younger generations because some artefacts could only be viewed in museums, indicating the risk of cultural knowledge extinction over time.

### 3.6 Method of Data Collection

Data were collected using both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were gathered through field survey involving face-to-face contact with respondents via oral interviews. Secondary data were generated from publications, brochures, and journals. Specific data collection methods included:

- Interviews with cultural experts and artisans: Structured oral interviews exploring knowledge of Bwatiye material culture, symbolic meanings, and traditional uses.
- Focus group discussions: Group discussions with cultural custodians, village heads, and artisans to validate individual responses and explore collective cultural knowledge.
- Photographic documentation: Systematic photography of artefacts, symbols, and materials at the Bwatiye Traditional Council Museum and Sapwavi Ventures antique shop.
- Physical observation: Direct examination and analysis of traditional symbols and textile samples.

### 3.7 Method of Data Analysis

The study employed descriptive analysis through content analysis method. This approach allowed the researcher to collect textual data, transcribe interviews, and create codes for main themes and subjects. Interpreted transcriptions were used to support study objectives. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring motifs, materials, and meanings. Photographic data were catalogued and categorized according to artefact types and symbolic significance.

### 3.8 Ethical Considerations

Permission was sought from all participants before data collection. Cultural sensitivity was maintained in the use and interpretation of symbols. Proper credit was given to source communities, and all collected data were used strictly for academic and creative purposes.

### 3.9 Study Area

The research was conducted in Numan, a town and Local Government Area in Adamawa State, Nigeria. The port town lies on the Benue River, located approximately 30 miles (50km) from Yola at Latitude 9.46°N and Longitude 12.033°E, opposite the mouth of Gongola River, the principal tributary of the River Benue. Numan is connected by road with Gombe State, Taraba State, Shelling, Yola, and Ganye local governments. The predominant ethnic group is the Bwatiye (Bachama) people.





## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Identified Bwatiye Cultural Symbols and Materials

Based on Objective One—to identify various Bwatiye cultural symbols and materials suitable for textile design—the motifs were identified through oral interviews and visual observation of Bwatiye material culture. Artefacts were sourced from the traditional museum and stores where these artefacts are sold and kept, particularly the Bwatiye Traditional Council Museum and Sapwavi Ventures antique shop.

The study identified twenty distinct cultural symbols and materials with significant potential for textile design applications. Table 4.1 presents these identified artefacts along with their cultural meanings and traditional functions.

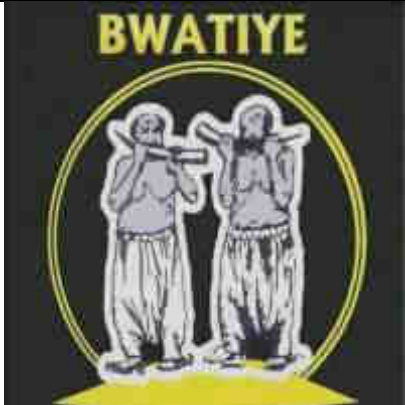



Table 4.1: Identified Bwatiye Cultural Symbols and Materials with Their Meanings

S/N	Artefact	Cultural Name	Category	Meaning and Traditional Function
1		Bwatiye Attire	Adornment	Traditional adornment worn during ceremonies; indicates status and beauty; used in female dancing kits and marriage ceremonies
2		Kope	Ceremonial Regalia	Female dancing kit; complete traditional regalia worn by Bwatiye women during cultural ceremonies, festivals, and wedding rites; includes intricately beaded accessories, wrappers, and body adornments
3		Rukute	Ceremonial Regalia	Traditional robe worn by Bwatiye men; elaborate, often embroidered garment reserved for ceremonies, festivals, and appearances by titled individuals
4		Bule	Ceremonial Regalia	Traditional cap worn by Bwatiye men, particularly elders and titled individuals, as part of ceremonial attire





RESEARCH ARTICLE


5		Kufe	Hunting/Warfare	Iron spear; symbol of Bwatiye warrior heritage, bravery, and military prowess; central to wrestling festival rituals and cultural iconography
6		Dwam Bwara	Marriage/ Domestic	Three-legged traditional clay pot; the most sacred marital artefact among the Bwatiye; signifies the covenant of marriage—it is believed that when this pot breaks, the marriage it represents is also broken
7		Kpa	Marriage/ Domestic	Calabash; dried gourd shell traditionally used as container, drinking vessel, or decorative cover; often paired with Dwam Bwara and other ceremonial utensils
8		Kurme	Authority/Royalty	Traditional shield; crafted from hide and wood; foremost symbol of authority of the Hama Bachama; serves as official emblem and cultural logo of the Bachama people; represents protection, sovereignty, and unconquered lineage

RESEARCH ARTICLE

9		Myedi fon Linto	Authority/Royalty	Elephant tusk blowers; traditional ceremonial musical instruments carved from elephant tusks; blown to announce arrival, presence, or departure of the Hama Bachama; symbol of royalty, authority, and sacred heritage
10		Darato	Kitchen Utensil	Traditional Bwatiye kitchen basket woven from local plant fibres; used for drying calabashes, storing grains, and transporting farm produce during harvest
11		Hube	Kitchen Utensil	Gourd; hollowed, dried calabash used traditionally for water storage, particularly during farming expeditions; example of Bwatiye sustainable material culture
12		Kusauto	Kitchen Utensil	Siever; kitchen utensil woven from plant fibres; essential for sifting and sieving corn flour during traditional food preparation

RESEARCH ARTICLE

13		Kwalangye	Musical Instrument	Balafon; traditional African xylophone constructed with wooden slats and gourds; sacred royal musical instrument of the Bwatiye, integral to court ceremonies and announcement of significant occasions
14		Shomto	Fishing Implement	Traditional conical fishing implement woven from plant fibres; used primarily by Bwatiye women for trapping fish in small ponds and shallow waters; represents women's contribution to subsistence economy and cultural continuity
15		Sushope	Authority/Royalty	Staff of authority; curved ornamental staff worn around the neck by the Hama Bachama, village heads, and titled men; visible insignia of rank, leadership, wisdom, and custodial responsibility
16		Lokai	Decorative Materials	Traditional Bwatiye decorative materials and artefacts; encompasses range of crafted objects used for adornment, ceremony, and cultural exhibition

17		Batta Women's Attire	Ceremonial Regalia	Traditional dancing attire of Batta women, demonstrating the shared cultural heritage between Bwatiye and Batta peoples as confirmed by oral traditions
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Source: Field Survey, Ndatuwa (2025)

4.2 Cultural Categories of Identified Artefacts

4.2.1 Symbols of Authority and Royalty

The Kurme (shield) emerged as the foremost symbol of Bwatiye authority. According to respondents, the Kurme serves as the official emblem and cultural logo of the Bachama people, representing protection, sovereignty, and unconquered lineage. It is crafted from hide and wood and traditionally carried by the Hama Bachama and warriors during ceremonial occasions. One cultural custodian explained: "The Kurme is not just a shield for battle—it is the symbol of our kingdom. When you see the Kurme, you know it represents the Hama Bachama and all Bwatiye people. It means we are protected and we are one."

The Sushope (staff of authority) is worn around the neck by the king, village heads, and titled men. A village head stated: "When you see a man wearing the Sushope, you know he holds authority. It is not just decoration—it speaks of his responsibility to the community. The Sushope is passed down, and each one has its own history." This insignia of rank and leadership provides rich design possibilities for textile patterns signifying dignity and wisdom.

Myedi fon Linto (elephant tusk blowers) announce the presence of the Hama Bachama. A palace assistant noted: "The sound of the elephant tusk tells everyone that the king is coming. It commands attention and respect. Only certain people are allowed to blow the Myedi fon Linto." These ceremonial instruments represent royalty, authority, and sacred heritage.

4.2.2 Marriage and Domestic Artefacts

The Dwam Bwara (three-legged pot with calabash cover) constitutes the most sacred marital artefact among the Bwatiye. A female elder explained during focus group discussion: "The Dwam Bwara is not just a pot. It represents the marriage itself. Our mothers teach us that when this pot breaks, the marriage it represents is also broken. That is why it is kept carefully in the bride's new home. The three legs represent stability—like a marriage needs three things: love, respect, and commitment. The calabash covering it represents protection—the husband covering and protecting his wife, the wife covering and protecting her home."

This belief system surrounding the Dwam Bwara was corroborated by multiple respondents, who described how brides traditionally brought specific utensils including the Dwam Bwara, Darato (basket), Kusauto (siever), and Hube (gourd) to their matrimonial homes. Plate 4.2 and 4.3 documented contemporary Bwatiye brides performing traditional rites in their kitchens during wedding ceremonies, demonstrating continuity of these practices despite modernization pressures.

The Darato (basket) is a kitchen utensil used for drying calabashes and transporting farm produce during harvest. An artisan explained: "The Darato is woven from local fibres. Every bride needed to have one. It carries the harvest from farm to home." Kusauto (siever) is essential for sifting corn flour during traditional food preparation. Hube (gourd) serves for water storage during farming expeditions. These domestic artefacts represent women's domains and contributions to household sustenance.

4.2.3 Hunting and Warfare Implements

The hunting and warfare complex includes Kufe (spear), Bunghai (arrow store/quiver), Ragei (bow), and Hulbe (arrow). A village head explained: "These weapons tell the story of our ancestors—how they protected our land and provided for their families. The Kufe is not just a spear; it represents bravery. Every young man learned to use the Ragei and Hulbe. The Bunghai held the arrows, keeping them safe and dry." These implements feature prominently in wrestling festival rituals and cultural iconography, appearing in dances such as Wurosunga (sword dance) where performers carry Kufe while displaying their skills (Tagowa, 1994).

4.2.4 Fishing Implements

The Shomto (fishing implement) represents women's contribution to subsistence economy. A female artisan described: "We women use the Shomto in small ponds when the waters recede after the rains. It is woven from local fibres—we know which plants to use, when to harvest them, how to prepare them. The Shomto traps fish that feed our families. This knowledge has been passed from mothers to daughters for generations. When I weave a Shomto, I think of my grandmother who taught me." The conical form of the Shomto offers distinctive design possibilities for textile motifs and three-dimensional interior products.

4.2.5 Musical Instruments

The Kwalangye (balafon—traditional African xylophone) constitutes part of Bwatiye royal sacred heritage. Constructed with wooden slats and gourds, it is integral to court ceremonies and announcement of significant occasions. One musician stated:

"The Kwalangye speaks our history. Its songs tell of kings, warriors, and the stories of our people. Different songs are played for different occasions—for the king's arrival, for festivals, for ceremonies. The Kwalangye is not just entertainment; it is history preserved in music."

4.2.6 Ceremonial Regalia

Shiruwe (female dancing kit), Rukute (male robe), and Bule (male cap) comprise the ceremonial attire worn during festivals and marriage rites. These incorporate intricate beadwork, embroidery, and symbolic patterns. A female dancer explained: "When I wear the Shiruwe, I am not just dancing. I am representing our women, our mothers, our grandmothers. The beads tell stories—each colour, each pattern has meaning." Plate 3.3 shows a titled man adorned with Sushope around his neck alongside his wife wearing the female cultural attire, demonstrating the visual richness of Bwatiye ceremonial dress.

4.2.7 Decorative Materials

Lokai encompasses a range of traditional Bwatiye decorative materials and artefacts used for adornment, ceremony, and cultural exhibition. Plate 2.7 displays Lokai materials exhibited during the International Bwatiye Fiesta exhibition (2025), demonstrating the variety of decorative elements available for design inspiration. A curator noted: "Lokai includes many things—decorative objects, ceremonial items, things that make our culture beautiful. They show that Bwatiye people have always valued beauty in their surroundings."

4.3 Bwatiye Colour Symbolism

A significant finding emerging from interviews was the identification of the Bwatiye tricolor scheme with specific cultural meanings. Multiple respondents independently confirmed this colour symbolism:

Colour	Cultural Meaning
Black	Represents identity and pride—the Bwatiye as a people of dark skin, strength, and resilience
White	Represents peace, purity, harmony, and the peaceful coexistence of the Bwatiye with neighbours
Red	Represents strength, courage, bravery, and the blood of ancestors shed in defence of the land

An elder explained: "Black is who we are—we are black people, proud of our skin. White is how we live—we are peaceful people who want harmony with our neighbours. Red is what we have—strength and courage, the blood of our ancestors who defended this land." This colour symbolism provides foundational guidance for textile applications, ensuring that designs incorporating Bwatiye motifs maintain cultural authenticity through appropriate colour choices.

4.4 Thematic Analysis of Interview Responses

Thematic analysis of oral interview transcripts revealed several recurring themes relevant to Objective One:

Theme 1: Cultural Transmission and Knowledge Preservation

Respondents consistently expressed concern about intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. A curator at the Bwatiye Traditional Council Museum stated: "Many young people today do not know the names of these artefacts or what they mean. They see them in museums and think they are just old things. But these objects carry our history. If we do not document and teach, this knowledge will die with our elders."

An artisan added: "I learned about Shomto from my grandmother. She taught me which fibres to use, how to weave it, when to fish with it. My own daughter lives in the city now—she has no interest in learning. Who will continue this work? When I am gone, the knowledge of Shomto might go with me."

A village head observed: "In the past, young people sat with elders and learned. Now they have phones, televisions, other things. They do not sit and listen. The stories, the meanings, the ways of making—all of this is being lost."

These concerns align with Nwosu's (2009) warning about the risk of losing intangible heritage without documentation and Ogunduyile et al.'s (2020) observation that systematic attempts to modify and document cultural symbols remain lacking.

Theme 2: Functional Significance of Material Culture

Respondents emphasized that Bwatiye artefacts were not merely decorative but served essential functions in daily life and ceremonial contexts. A village head explained: "Everything we made had purpose. The Darato carried our harvest. The Kusauto prepared our food. The Kurme protected our people. These objects were part of how we lived. They were not just for looking at—they were for using."

A female elder added: "When a bride brought her Dwam Bwara to her new home, it was not just a pot. It was the symbol of her marriage, but it was also a pot she would use to cook for her husband. The beauty and the function were together."

This functional dimension informs textile design applications, suggesting that interior products incorporating these symbols should maintain utility alongside aesthetic appeal.

Theme 3: Symbolic Meanings Embedded in Artefacts

Each identified artefact carries specific symbolic meanings understood by cultural custodians. Regarding the Dwam Bwara, a female elder elaborated: "The three legs of the pot represent stability—like a marriage needs three things: love, respect, and commitment. The calabash covering it represents protection—the husband covering and protecting his wife, the wife covering and protecting her home. The pot itself is made from clay—earth—because marriage is grounded in the earth of our community."

Concerning the Kurme, a cultural custodian explained: "The shield is not just for deflecting arrows. It represents that we as a people cannot be conquered. Our history shows we have never been defeated in battle. The Kurme carries that story."

Understanding these embedded meanings ensures that design applications respect cultural integrity rather than merely appropriating forms without context.

#### *Theme 4: Documentation Needs*

Multiple respondents emphasized the urgency of systematic documentation. A focus group participant stated: "We have no written records of many of these things. Our knowledge is oral—stored in memories of elders. When elders pass, their knowledge passes with them. This research is important because it puts our culture in writing. Our children's children will be able to read about these things."

Another respondent noted: "The museum has the objects, but not all the meanings are written down. Some meanings are only known by certain families, certain elders. If we do not write them, they will be lost forever."

This theme validates the study's objective of creating documented repositories of Bwatiye material culture for future reference and application.

#### *Theme 5: Museumification and Visibility*

A curator observed: "Some of these artefacts can only be seen in the museum now. They are no longer used in daily life. Young people come to the museum and see them, but they do not know what they are or why they matter. The museum preserves the objects but not always the knowledge."

This finding highlights the limitation of museum preservation alone—while physical artefacts may be saved, the associated knowledge, meanings, and practices require active transmission. Transforming these symbols into contemporary interior products may help re-integrate them into daily living spaces, ensuring continued cultural relevance.

#### *4.5 Discussion of Findings*

The identification of twenty distinct Bwatiye cultural symbols and materials with textile design potential demonstrates the richness of this material culture heritage. These findings align with Myatafadi's (1997) documentation of traditional crafts among Bwatiye women, including calabash carving, beading, weaving, and pottery, which provide symbolic forms adaptable for textile motifs.

The functional categorization of artefacts into symbols of authority, marriage and domestic artefacts, hunting and warfare implements, fishing implements, musical instruments, ceremonial regalia, and decorative materials provides a systematic framework for understanding Bwatiye material culture. This categorization facilitates selection of appropriate symbols for specific textile applications—for instance, authority symbols might suit formal interior spaces while domestic artefacts might inspire kitchen textiles.

The identification of Bwatiye colour symbolism (black for identity and pride, white for peace, red for strength and courage) provides essential guidance for maintaining cultural authenticity in textile applications. Colour choices significantly impact the cultural resonance of designs incorporating traditional motifs (Smith, 2016). This tricolor scheme can serve as the foundation for colourways in textile designs, ensuring visual alignment with Bwatiye cultural identity.

The thematic analysis revealing concerns about cultural transmission and documentation needs underscores the timeliness of this research. As Ogunduyile et al. (2020) observed, cultural symbols and materials are drifting toward extinction without systematic documentation or transformation into contemporary products. The present study directly addresses this gap by creating a documented repository of Bwatiye material culture suitable for subsequent design innovation.

The finding that some artefacts can only be viewed in museums, with limited visibility to younger generations, corroborates Doki's (2021) observation about the diminishing presence of traditional utensils in contemporary Bwatiye homes. This museumification of material culture, while preserving physical artefacts, may not adequately transmit the knowledge and meanings associated with them. Therefore, transforming these symbols into contemporary interior products may help re-integrate them into daily living spaces, ensuring continued cultural relevance.

The Bwatiye tradition of brides bringing specific utensils to matrimonial homes, documented through interviews and photographic evidence of contemporary wedding rites (Plates 4.2 and 4.3), demonstrates both continuity and vulnerability. While some practices persist, the replacement of traditional utensils with modern decorative items (Nyorere & Umar, 2022) suggests that adaptation rather than mere preservation may be necessary for cultural survival. This supports the study's broader aim of reimagining Bwatiye material culture for contemporary applications while maintaining symbolic integrity.

The relationship between Bwatiye and Batta peoples, confirmed by Nissen (1966) and evidenced by shared cultural elements such as the Batta women's attire documented in Plate 2.8, suggests broader regional material culture complexes that could inform comparative studies. This interconnectedness indicates that documentation of Bwatiye material culture may contribute to understanding wider cultural patterns in the Upper Benue Valley region.

The emphasis on women's roles in producing and transmitting material culture—through Shomto weaving, Dwam Bwara traditions, Shiruwe creation, and kitchen utensil maintenance—aligns with broader patterns of women as cultural custodians in African societies. Barber (1991) noted that in many African communities, mothers taught daughters traditional skills, passing down both technique and cultural meaning. This gendered dimension of material culture production and transmission deserves attention in design applications to ensure appropriate representation and acknowledgment.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### *5.1 Conclusion*

This study successfully achieved Objective One—to identify the various Bwatiye material culture suitable for home textile designs. Through systematic ethnographic fieldwork involving oral interviews, focus group discussions, photographic

documentation, and physical observation at the Bwatiye Traditional Council Museum and Sapwavi Ventures antique shop, twenty distinct cultural symbols and materials were identified and documented.

The identified artefacts span multiple functional categories:

- Symbols of Authority and Royalty: Kurme (shield), Sushope (staff of authority), Myedi fon Linto (elephant tusk blowers)
- Marriage and Domestic Artefacts: Dwam Bwara (three-legged pot), Kpa (calabash), Darato (basket), Kusauto (siever), Hube (gourd)
- Hunting and Warfare Implements: Kufe (spear), Bung hai (quiver), Ragei (bow), Hulbe (arrow)
- Fishing Implements: Shomto (fishing implement)
- Musical Instruments: Kwalangye (balafon)
- Ceremonial Regalia: Shiruwe (female dancing kit), Rukute (male robe), Bule (male cap), Batta Women's Attire
- Decorative Materials: Lokai (decorative artefacts), Bwatiye Beads

Each artefact carries specific cultural meanings understood by cultural custodians, providing rich symbolic content for textile applications. The Kurme represents royal authority and serves as the official Bachama logo. The Sushope denotes leadership rank. The Dwam Bwara symbolizes the covenant of marriage. The Shomto represents women's contribution to subsistence economy. These embedded meanings ensure that textile designs incorporating these symbols can convey authentic cultural narratives.

The identification of Bwatiye colour symbolism—black representing identity and pride, white representing peace, and red representing strength and courage—establishes foundational parameters for culturally authentic textile design. This colour scheme can guide motif development, pattern creation, and product applications to ensure visual alignment with Bwatiye cultural identity. Thematic analysis revealed significant concerns among respondents about intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge, the functional and symbolic significance of material culture, the urgent need for systematic documentation, and the limitations of museumification without active knowledge transmission. These findings validate the study's approach and underscore the timeliness of documenting endangered Bwatiye material culture before symbolic meanings are irretrievably lost.

This documentation provides the essential empirical foundation for subsequent phases of the larger study—generating motifs, developing design concepts, and producing interior textile products that preserve Bwatiye cultural identity while meeting contemporary aesthetic demands. The identified symbols and materials offer rich visual vocabulary for textile designers seeking to create culturally meaningful interior products. By documenting these artefacts and their meanings, this study contributes to preserving Bwatiye intangible heritage while creating opportunities for its creative reimagining in contemporary contexts.

### 5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Systematic Documentation of Material Culture: Government agencies, cultural institutions, and academic researchers should prioritize systematic documentation of Bwatiye and other Nigerian ethnic groups' material culture before knowledge held by elders is irretrievably lost. This documentation should include photographic records, oral histories explaining symbolic meanings, and technical descriptions of traditional production methods. The documentation should be digitized and made accessible to researchers, designers, and community members.
- Establishment of Cultural Repositories: The Bwatiye Traditional Council Museum should be strengthened with adequate funding, professional staffing, and modern preservation facilities to maintain its collection of cultural artefacts. Similar museums should be established or enhanced in other communities to serve as repositories of material heritage. These repositories should include interpretive materials explaining symbolic meanings and cultural contexts.
- Integration of Cultural Education in School Curricula: Bwatiye cultural symbols and their meanings should be incorporated into primary and secondary school curricula in Adamawa State, ensuring younger generations learn about their heritage. This education should include hands-on experiences with traditional crafts where possible, connecting students with practicing artisans.
- Support for Traditional Artisans: Government and non-governmental organizations should provide support—including training, materials, and market access—to traditional Bwatiye artisans practicing crafts such as weaving, pottery, calabash carving, beadwork, and implement making. This support would help sustain traditional skills while enabling economic empowerment and intergenerational transmission.
- Collaboration Between Designers and Cultural Experts: Textile designers seeking to incorporate Bwatiye cultural symbols should collaborate with cultural custodians to ensure authentic representation and respect for symbolic meanings. Such collaboration should include appropriate acknowledgment and benefit-sharing with source communities. Designers should seek cultural education before undertaking such projects.
- Creation of a Bwatiye Cultural Symbol Registry: A formal registry documenting Bwatiye cultural symbols, their meanings, appropriate usage guidelines, and authorized representations should be established to protect against misappropriation and ensure cultural integrity in commercial applications. This registry could be maintained by the Bwatiye Traditional Council in collaboration with academic institutions.
- Development of Culturally Appropriate Design Guidelines: Guidelines should be developed for designers incorporating Bwatiye symbols into contemporary products, specifying which symbols are appropriate for different applications, colour usage based on traditional symbolism, and protocols for acknowledging cultural sources.
- Community-Based Cultural Preservation Initiatives: The Bwatiye community should be supported in developing community-based cultural preservation initiatives, including documentation projects, oral history recording, apprenticeship programs connecting elders with youth, and cultural festivals that showcase material culture.

- **Research Funding for Cultural Documentation:** Government and academic institutions should allocate dedicated funding for cultural documentation research, recognizing the urgency of preserving intangible heritage before elder knowledge holders pass away.
- **Integration of Traditional Symbols in Public Spaces:** Public buildings, government offices, and community spaces in Bwatiye areas should incorporate traditional symbols in their design, increasing visibility and normalizing cultural expression in contemporary contexts.

### 5.3 Suggestions for Further Studies

Future research can investigate:

- **Comparative Studies:** Comparative documentation of material culture among related ethnic groups (such as Batta, Jirai hill people, and other Bwatiye subgroups) to identify shared symbols, distinctive variations, and historical relationships.
- **Technical Documentation:** Detailed technical documentation of traditional production techniques for Bwatiye crafts, including fibre preparation for Shomto weaving, clay preparation and firing for Dwam Bwara pottery, beadwork methods for Shiruwe, and woodworking techniques for Kurme and Sushope.
- **Semiotic Analysis:** In-depth semiotic analysis of Bwatiye symbolic systems to understand deeper cosmological, philosophical, and spiritual meanings embedded in material culture patterns and forms.
- **Youth Perceptions:** Investigation of Bwatiye youth perceptions of traditional material culture, factors influencing their engagement (or disengagement) with heritage practices, and strategies for increasing youth interest in cultural preservation.
- **Gender Dimensions:** Exploration of gender dimensions in Bwatiye material culture production, transmission, and use, including women's roles as cultural custodians and the representation of gender in symbolic systems.
- **Oral History Documentation:** Comprehensive oral history documentation with elder knowledge holders, creating audio and video records of cultural knowledge for archival preservation and future research.
- **Commercial Viability Assessment:** Assessment of commercial viability and market demand for textile products incorporating Bwatiye cultural symbols, including consumer preferences, willingness to pay for culturally authentic designs, and potential for economic empowerment through cultural industries.
- **Digital Preservation:** Exploration of digital technologies for preserving and presenting Bwatiye material culture, including 3D scanning of artefacts, virtual museums, and interactive educational resources.
- **Festival Documentation:** Detailed documentation of cultural festivals (Vunon, Kwete) as contexts for material culture display and transmission, including changing practices and contemporary adaptations.
- **Material Analysis:** Scientific analysis of traditional materials used in Bwatiye artefacts, including fibre identification, dye analysis, and characterization of construction techniques.

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