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“As Seen on Woodblock Prints: Banana Fiber *Bashō-fu* from Museum der Kulturen Basel”

The historical background of the Ryūkyū Kingdom textiles is very rich and complex. The geographical location of the kingdom and its trade affairs have a large influence on the development of the patterns and the weaving traditions. The kingdom had trade relationships with China, Japan and Korea as well as other nearby countries. Consequently, the kingdom engaged in cultural exchange and displayed an ability to absorb customs from surrounding cultures, resulting in the unique character of its arts and crafts. However, there are some works of art that display the interlacement of the multicultural traditions, thus, raising the issues of their origins and purpose.

One of such works of art is stored in the Museum der Kulturen Basel and will be discussed in detail during this presentation.

Bashō-fu or banana fiber garments were favored by both royalty and commoners for their airiness and the fact that the textile does not stick to skin. This characteristic is one that the banana fiber textiles shares with those made of linen, hemp, and vegetable fibers. Such garments, compared to Okinawan *bingata*, typically display simpler patterns and more reserved colors schemes. However, the cut of the fabrics and their overall style stay within the kingdom's textile traditions, which allows easy identification most of the time.

The *bashō-fu* garment that was discovered in the Museum der Kulturen Basel demonstrates a very unusual cut, length, and style for an Okinawa textile. Some of its characteristics point to the strong influence of mainland Japan and its fashions. Additionally, the color pattern of the garment is very distinctive and can be seen in numerous woodblock prints from mainland Japan. Thus, the uniqueness of this garment demonstrates the interlacing of multicultural traditions and gives birth to uncertainties of identification: for example, the questions of how to name and define such a textile.