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DESCRIPTION OF A BAMBOO TUBE (*SOLEP*) FROM CENTRAL BORNEO (KALIMANTAN) DEPICTING NGAJU DAYAK RELIGIOUS ICONOGRAPHY

A. H. Klokke

I. INTRODUCTION

Sacral rites and mythical narratives and observances are depicted on rattan mats, wooden objects and bamboo tubes, which were made by the Ngaju Dayak in Central Borneo (Kalimantan Tengah), Indonesia.

The texts describing the rituals, which make use of a sacred language: *bahasa* Sangiang (S) **, are set out in detail by Hardeland (1858: 209-374), Mallinckrodt a.o., (1928: 292-346) and Schaerer (1966 II, 261-961).

The mythical narratives (*sansana*), which tell about the deeds of the gods, are related from generation to generation in the local language (*bahasa* Ngaju Dayak), mainly by women during festivities or while plaiting rattan mats. Their melodious reciting of the *sansana* in the evening, even into the small hours of the night, has the audience of those still awake in the house. These tales form part of the oral literature of the Ngaju Dayak, some of which have been published (Sundermann, 1911: 169-214; Klokke-Coster a.o., 1976: 1-121; Klokke a.o., 1988: 1-79).

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A. H. Klokke*

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Both the ritual texts and the mythical narratives give us an understanding of Ngaju Dayak religion.

In the concept of this religion the cosmos is divided into three parts: the mundane world, the upper world and the underworld. The upper world centres around the primeval mountain, which is the seat of the god known as Mahatara or Hatalla. It is a male divinity represented by the hornbill, *tingang* or *bungai* (S) and also by the lance, *lunju* or *buno* (S). His colour of identification is white.

Next to Mahatara a pantheon of other gods, living in the upper world, is known, each of them covering a field that at any time may be of vital importance for the well-being of a supplicator (Mallinckrodt, 1924: 530-1).

The primeval mountain at its foothills is surrounded by a mythical delta of rivers and lakes, which are skilfully depicted in drawings by priests (Schaerer, 1963: Plate III-VII). This is the dwelling place of the Sangiang, usually helpful spirits who mediate between god and men.

The underworld is dominated by Jata, a female god depicted as a snake, *jata*, *naga*, *ihing* or *tambon* (S). Her subjects adopt the form of a crocodile, *bajai*, when emerging into a river on earth. Her identification colour is red. Although both the god of the upper world and the goddess of the underworld are independent autonomous beings, yet in the religious concept of Ngaju Dayak religion they are presented as a unity. Priests call upon them with the

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** (S) signifies a word in Sangiang language.

invocation 'tambon haruei bungai(S)', the snake befriends the hornbill*. This illustrates the concept of dualistic monism (Schaerer, 1963: 18-9).

This divine unity is frequently depicted in cultic objects. It is seen in the sacrificial pole (*sanggaran*), which is erected at the mortuary festivities (*tiwah*) in the centre of the village (Pl. VI). This *sanggaran* shows a snake, which is horizontally situated in combination with lances and a hornbill in vertical position, thus depicting the union of the underworld and the upper world as the 'total divinity' (Schaerer, 1963: 18). The *sanggaran* shows a marked resemblance to the finial of a Hindu-Javanese processional staff, a trident with two vertical daggers (the central one is missing), supported by two horizontally situated snakes (van Lohuizen-de Leeuw, 1984: 91).

The domain of the Sangiang is portrayed as a paradise where everything is more beautiful and more perfect than on earth. The tree of life (*batang garing*) flourishes here with blossoms of gold and fruits of agatestones (*lamiang*), the juice of which is the water of life (*danum kaharingan*). Nowadays after this latter expression Ngaju Dayak religion is called 'agama kaharingan'.

The genealogy of the Sangiang begins with Tanta Olang Bulau, who lived in the primeval village called Batu Nindan Tarong in the delta of rivers and lakes at the foothills of the primeval mountain. He had 14 children, 7 sons and 7 daughters.

To six of his sons he apportioned as their residence a river, a mountain or an island, all of them outside the primeval village. The seventh son stayed behind in his ancestral village. Three of the six sons of Tanta Olang Bulau play an important role in Ngaju Dayak religion:

1. Raja Pampulau Hawon, to whom the river Jalayan was assigned. He was living there with his 14 children, 7 sons and 7 daughters. His most famous child was Rawing Tempon Telon.
2. Raja Panyarawan Katingan, who received the river Barirai as his residence. He also got 14 children, 7 sons and 7 daughters, cousins of those on the river Jalayan.
3. Garing Hatungko, to whom the river Sangkalila Bulau was allotted. He lived there with 2 sons of whom Sangumang was the most famous one. *Sansana* relating the deeds of Sangumang (Klokke-Coster a.o., 1976: 1-65) were very popular in Central Borneo, at least till 1959.

How Rawing Tempon Telon, one of the sons of Raja Pampulau Hawon, received his epithet 'Tempon Telon', is reported by Hardeland (1859: 506). Rawing, descendant from the river Jalayan, had a cousin, Kameluh Tempon Tiawon of Barirai river lineage. A powerful dreaded Sangiang chased after her wanting to force her to marry him. This mighty Sangiang was pursued and finally killed by Rawing. This was a heroic deed, which compelled widespread admiration. Telon, a prominent inhabitant of the river Jalayan was so much impressed by Rawing's courage that he declared himself Rawing's slave. Ever

* This translation is based upon the word 'ruei'(S), which means 'friend' (of either sex). Schaerer translates: 'the snake forms a unity with the hornbill', or: 'the snake, which is also the hornbill' without taking into account the meaning of the word 'ruei' (Schaerer, 1963: 18-9).