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NOTES ON TWO ENGRAVED HALF-SKULLS IN KAMPUNG GROGO, BAU

Robert L. Winzeler

INTRODUCTION

As do those in a number of other Bidayuh villages in the Bau area and elsewhere, the villagers of Kampung Grogo retains a small collection of tengkorak, that is human skulls taken in the past in headhunting. However, unlike those kept in other Bau villages, such as Opar, Tringgus, Gumbang, Atas, and Barieng, the skulls at Grogo include two half crania that have been finely engraved. Each half is from a cranium that has been carefully sawed into two symmetrical pieces. While skulls that have been divided in this way are not uncommon in Bidayuh collections, engraved skulls, either half or whole, are not at all common. Those in Grogo may be the only existing examples in the region. The villagers themselves say that neither of the half- skulls was carved by anyone from the villagenor from elsewhere in the area. The Bidayuh of this region, and evidently elsewhere in Sarawak, have no tradition of engraving skulls. Both half-skulls were obtained after they had been carved elsewhere but are nonetheless of interest.

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Groggo is located just off the main Bau-Lundu highway a few kilometers to the west of Bau town. The village consists of nearly one-hundred single houses (there are no longhouses), most of which sit close together on the top of a low ridge above the Tuboh River and at the base of Orad Mountain. The village has been at its present location for a long period of time, perhaps since the original dispersal of its ancestral community on Biratak Mountain around 1840. At present, only fourteen of the households are still practicing ancestral *adat* ceremonies (or *gawai*) while the remainder are Roman-Catholics.

The skulls at Groggo were originally kept in the *baruk* (variously referred to in English as the "head house", the "men's house" or the "round house") located at the highest point and center of the village. They are now located in a small cement-block shed behind the *baruk*, which presently serves as a meeting hall for all the villagers, Christian as well as *gawai*. The skulls continue to be regarded, at least by the *gawai* people in the community, as living spirits and not merely relics from the past. When I entered the small building to photograph them, the *ketuah adat* (chief of *gawai* rituals) went first and made an offering of *daun sirih* (betel) and told the skulls that they