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### SEPING SECONDARY BURIAL: Past Practices and Present Day Significance

Abdul Rashid Abdullah and Jayl Langub

#### INTRODUCTION

In the past the Seping people, a minority group living in three longhouses along the Belaga River, practised what is commonly known as secondary burial, akin to that practised by their Kajang neighbours, the Kejaman, Sekapan, Lahanan, and Punan Ba. Treatment of the dead differed depending on rank and status of the dead. Commoners were buried in the ground in the community cemetery, but upon the death of a high status person, the coffin of the deceased was placed in a specially built hut at a distance from the longhouse for a year or so. The bones were then cleaned and stored in a jar, placed on top of a burial pole the Seping called *salong* (see Figs.1, 2 and 3). Although the practice of secondary burial was discouraged during the later part of Brooke rule, among the Seping it continued into the early part of the 20th century. Today the practice is to bury the deceased in the ground in a community cemetery. Accounts of this practice are available in the literature for groups such as the Berawan (Metcalf, 1982), Melanau (Brodie, 1955; Jamuh, 1949; Morris, 1997), Kejaman (Thomas, 1971), Punan Bah (Nicolaisen, 1984 & 2003), Kelabit (Harrison, 1962), and Lun Bawang/Lun Dayeh (Ricketts, 1894), but none for the Seping. There are individual Seping who are knowledgeable about the practice. This article is a preliminary account of the Seping practice of secondary burial from interviews with two Seping individuals. It also locates the positions of various burial poles within the Seping territory (see Map 1). Today, burial poles located along the Belaga River are used by groups as markers of their territorial domain.

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by

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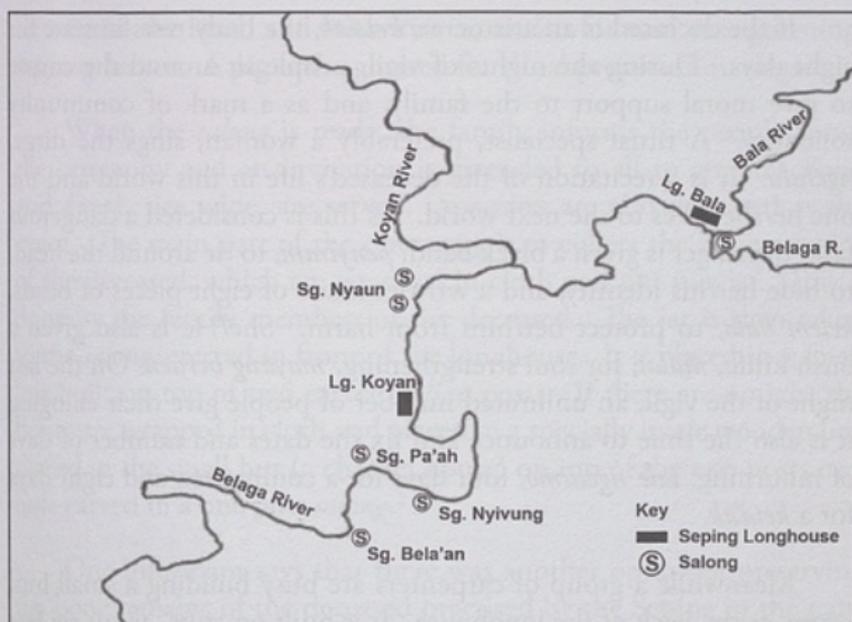
**Fig. 1:** *Salong* at Long Bala, slightly upriver from the Seping longhouse of Long Bala. (Photo: Jayl Langub)



**Fig. 3:** Base of a *salong* at Sg. Nyaun, upriver from the Seping longhouse of Long Koyan. (Photo: Abdul Rashid Abdullah)



**Fig. 2:** *Salong* at Long Bela'an downriver from the Seping longhouse of Long Koyan. (Photo: Kelvin Egay)



Map 1: Sketch map showing locations of *salong* that we visited in one field trip in 2009.

### Burial Practice in the Past

When death occurs, the gong is beaten in a special rhythm, and upon hearing this, the people leave their work to see the deceased. The deceased is bathed, then taken to the longhouse gallery and placed on a prepared low platform called *selarong*, with *sarong* hung around the structure as decoration.

If the deceased is a commoner, his/her body rests in state for four days. On the last night of vigil, the corpse is placed into the coffin and buried the next day in the community cemetery, some distance from the longhouse. There is no secondary burial for commoners, lest a supernatural punishment, *parit*, descends upon the family of the deceased.