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MIHING FESTIVITIES DEPICTED ON A RATTAN MAT WITH EXPLANATIONS OF THE NGAJU DAYAK PLAITRESS IN MARAPIT (UPPER KAPUAS) KALIMANTAN - NGAJU DAYAK ICONOGRAPHY RELATIONAL TO ORAL EPICS

Arnoud H. Klokke

INTRODUCTION

Concepts and symbols of the Kaharingan religion of the Ngaju Dayak (Central Kalimantan) are found in the artistic expressions of local artisans on rattan-plaited mats and bamboo tubes. The pictures can only be fully understood if attention is paid to the oral epics relating Ngaju Dayak mythology.

The mat presented here (Plate I) was plaited in 1951 by Mirentje Bahoei in Marapit when she was in her forties. She was famous for her religiously inspired plaiting: at least two of her mats found their way to museums in Europe (Leiden, Basel). According to local villagers she only plaited the religious depictions when she had fallen into a trance. Famous plaitresses were known to become prepared for their craft by being given magic potions, *karohai hajawet* (Mallinckrodt, 1924: 572). Her explanations (below in italics), verbatim noted down in 1951 by the author, were given while she was singing in a whispering voice (*karungut*). The language used consists of Ngaju Dayak, priest language (Bahasa Sangiang) and some Indonesian words. Considering the person she was, it does not come as a surprise that some of her explanations deviate from what is known in the literature.

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The depictions on the mat centre round the *mihing* (lower part) and the festivities and persons taking part in them (upper and

central part). Before giving the words of the plaitress the English text of one of the myths of origin of the *mihing* will be given to familiarize the reader with the concept of the *mihing*. The Ngaju Dayak text is to be found elsewhere (Klokke 1994, I: 96-102).

The story of the origin of the *mihing* (*Sarita tamparaan mihing*)¹

1. Once upon a time there was a man whose name was Buwak. He lived in Telok Pundum on the river Kahayan. One day he was cutting tubers of *kujang* to be used for pig feed. While he was cutting them, he recited in Sangiang language: 'Every day I am worn out in my bones, only fit to be taken away by the vessel of the hornbill. All day long I have been weakened in my tendons, only fit to be worked up into a slice of snake meat'.

2. By chance Rawing Tempon Telon heard these words. He came down from the Upper World intending to take Buwak with him. Rawing Tempon Telon said to him: 'I want to take you with me to my village on the river Jalayan in order to test our skill and courage'. Buwak had no say in the matter and prepared himself. He took his blowpipe and his quiver with arrows and followed Rawing Tempon Telon ascending to the Upper World. When they had arrived at the village on the river Jalayan, both he and Rawing Tempon Telon were hunting a hornbill watching the *lunok* tree. Rawing Tempon Telon with his blowpipe hit quite a few pigeons and many other birds. But Buwak used his blowpipe and hit a real hornbill. When he was hunting other birds he used a bamboo cane shooting with clay balls. Rawing Tempon Telon said: 'I can't compete against this man'.

3. The next day both of them were on the lookout for a snake. Rawing Tempon Telon speared a big fish. Buwak said: 'I had rather go down into the river to catch fish with a rattan basket'. Then Buwak went into the water, shaking the roots of trees standing on the outside bank of the river and got hold of a lot of the same fishes, filling up his basket. Rawing Tempon Telon was astounded and he never again dared take Buwak anywhere.