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To Sever the Flowers

The dead are mourned by their families and the people of the same longhouse for a period of approximately three months. At the ^{end} expiring of this period, called *ulit*, a warrior or a great traveller is asked by the members of the deceased's *bilek*-family to 'open' (*ngetas*) a container in which a small number of articles belonging to the deceased were placed at the time of his or her death. These articles are kept until then in a secure place in the deceased's family room. The "opening of *ulit*", or *ngetas ulit*, is done either inside the *bilek* apartment if the deceased was a woman or on the longhouse gallery (*ruah*) if the deceased was a man.

In the latter case, before the *ulit* is opened, it must first be blessed by waving of cock above it (*biau*). This is accompanied by a brief prayer in which the opener of the *ulit* asks that it be *chelap embap*, "cool and moist", so that the members of the longhouse will afterwards enjoy good health. After this is done, the man who opens the *ulit* carries the container to the *ruai*. Here it is touched with the blood of a chicken. He then cuts the *rotan* strings that bind it, usually with a *ilang* sword [or a *langgai tingang* knife]. He then opens the container and removes the articles inside. Traditionally these were likely to include *pelaga* beads, the deceased's personal plate and a *gerunang* bell. He places these objects on a mat set out for this purpose on the gallery. Finally, he throws the fastenings and offerings from the open *tanju* platform to the ground below, together with fire and (traditionally) a gourd filled with water.

L. tinggang
= the hair
on the hilt.
= the sword
- not a
different
weapon!

After this, the man performing *ngetas ulit* returns to the *ruai*. Here the close relatives of the deceased, including women and children, come forward so that he may cut bits of their hair with the knife he used to open the *ulit* container. This is done so that they will not suffer illness or become "foolish", *mamau*.

In the Rimbas area of the lower Saribas, it is customary, as soon as *ngetas ulit* is completed, to invited a shaman to perform the *Beserara* *Bunga* rite on behalf of the deceased's *bilek*-family. In the Paku this is no longer considered mandatory. While the rite is sometimes performed at the same time, it is more often performed later, frequently in response to a family illness or repeated dreams in which the deceased is thought to visit

see Dic
Serara
man

To separate the (dead)
from the rest
in the manang garden

the living. *Beserara' Bunga* is then performed as a final rite of severance, meant to safeguard the well-being of surviving family members.

The account of the *Felisan Beserara' Bunga* recorded here describes a rite which took place on 28th October, 1977, at Rumah Garran, Tanjong, Paku. On this occasion *ngetas ulit* was performed by the late Benedict Sandin in recognition of his accomplishments as a traveller. Immediately following *ngetas ulit*, the rite of *Beserara' Bunga* was performed by Manang Enteri of Suri Baroh, Rimbass, and Manang Meramat of Nanga Deit, also Rimbass, in the presence of the deceased's relatives, surviving family members, the people of the Tanjong longhouse, and a number of guests from other communities. It continued throughout the night, ending shortly after dawn the following morning. At around midnight a meal, called *makai salau*, was prepared in the deceased's *bilek* and served to the guests on the gallery. First, however, a special offering to the dead (*pedara*) was thrown beneath the floor of the house.

no need?
in
salau
m

After the people of the longhouse finished their evening meal, around 9 p.m., Shamans Enteri and Meramat asked that offerings be made inside the deceased's family room. As soon as this was done a woman was asked to put the following objects inside a *ranjak* basket:

1. Three quids of *sireh*, areca-nut mixed with lime;
2. A small ball of undyed cotton thread;
3. The string-ribs of *lamba* palm-leaves;
4. A *batu perunsut* (stone used for scrubbing the body when bathing); and
5. Seven unbroken grains of husked, uncooked rice (*beras*).

- Curculigo sp.
("raffia" like) not "palm"
d

this meaning
not in
Dic.

Together this basket and its contents are referred to as the *dekah*. Cotton thread and *lamba*' string are articles of weaving.

While the *dekah* was being prepared inside the family-room, a man outside on the *rusi* gallery erected the shaman's *pagar api*. He stood a *chang* sapling inside a *irun* jar, which he then tied to a spear-shaft, standing blade-downward. The *chang* sapling is called the *tangga samengot*, literally "the ladder of the soul". The top of the spear-shaft is tied to a pole fastened between gallery pillars, between the edge of the *tempuan* passageway and the middle of the gallery. Once the *pagar api* was erected, the shamans came out of the deceased's family-room and Manang Enteri put the seven grains of rice (4 above) inside a small *kebak* jar placed near the *pagar api*.

NOT IN
Dic.

not in
Dic

The shamans were followed in procession by the woman who prepared the *dekok*. She carried the basket and its contents to the foot of the "fence of fire", there covering it with a *pua'kumbu'* cloth.

Beserara' Bunga means, literally, "to sever" or "divide the flowers". When the rite is performed, a special flowering plant is used with two branches. This is placed, standing upright, in front of the shaman, on the lower gallery floor, between himself and his audience. The shaman normally sits at the edge of the lower gallery and the *tempuan* passageway, with his back toward the deceased's family-room. The flowering plant and *pagar api* are in front of him, between himself and his audience who generally sit along the upper gallery (*ruai atas*) and the *panggung* (or *pantar*). The two branches are positioned so that they point in opposite directions. The branch on the "left", that is, on the *bilek* side facing the shaman, is said to point toward the Otherworld of the dead (*menaa sebayar*). The branch on the "right", that is, facing the *panggung* and the shaman's audience, is said to point toward the world of the living (*menaa orang ka idup*). The flowering plant used is ideally a "cultivated flower" (*bunga tanam*) which was grown by the family on their *padi* farm. However, if such a plant is not available, the flowering branches of a wild (*emperawan* tree may be substituted. As the shaman, later in his *pelian*, mentions the cutting of the flowers, he severs the left-hand branch that is closest to him and throws it, together with an offering, from the floor of the *tempuan* passageway to the ground below, again with fire and water. As he does so, he recites a brief prayer.

its name?

ke?

which flowers are grown here?
canna?

To return to the beginning of the rite, when the "fence of fire" is completed, an offering is prepared and placed on the gallery floor between the base of the *pagar api* and the seated guests. The *manang* and his assistant then start to sing the following chants:

Then the dead jump into the air; suspended,
They drop onto Riap-Riong hill,
The seat of a medicine box made of *enteli benang*

(em)perawan
see Dic-10

(What if not in flower?)

bark.

Then a large company of the dead assemble,
And arrive at the top of Merabong Bunga hill,
Where the Skrang bachelors raise up their spear-shafts.

5

Those who are no longer living then speak,
"Who among us has the courage,
To steal the stalk of a *nanyi rajang* flower?
Who among us has the strength of a barking deer?"
Then the husband of Indai Bilai rises up,
Chief of the Gensarai Redak Tenchang people,
And together with Raja Menggong they draw their swords,
gripping their curved handles.

10

They wish to cut off the branch of a lime tree, a sweet-smelling
belitang flower.

But they are prevented by Selampandai,
by Shaman Empong.

15

"You must not take it alone,
But let me divide it for you, and so present you
with your share.

For behold the tip of its branch is bound by a cobra, encircled by
a Coral snake."

L2. *Bukit Risp-Riong*, a hill in the *Sebayon* Otherworld. Traditionally, a shaman's medicine-box (*tupong*) was made of tree-bark (*kulit kayu*) and the bark of the *enteli* tree was particularly favored. Today most shamans favor small canvas or nylon carrying bags.

L9. *Bunga nanyi*, a variety of "cultivated flowers" (*bunga tanam*) planted in the family's rice-fields.

L10. *Nyelangking* (v.f.), from *selangking*, a variety of forest hardwood tree. Here the meaning of the line appears to derive from an analogy between human strength and that of a living hardwood, as well as from a comparison with a wild forest animal, the barking deer. Note in the preceding lines, the dead are likened, by contrast, to a *punggu*, or dead tree (L7).

L11. Indai Bilai is a goddess of the Otherworld. During the Ghost Festival, she is given special offerings so that she will not sour the rice wine being prepared for the celebration.

L14. *Bunga belitang*, again another variety of "cultivated flowers".

L19. Both highly venomous snakes.

2 small, fine,

2 prob. refers to people (of Pangyan)
or a jutek.

any name?