

EPIC RITUAL CHANT OF THE RUNGUS MOMOGUN OF NORTHERN BORNEO

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KIAVAW - "TO HAVE AN ODOR" *

Kiavaw, lit. "to have an odor," is the epic poetry addressed to the class of spirits that are the spirits of water, the *Tamba'ig*¹. It forms a section of the major ceremony for illness and is performed in the longhouse.

The *Tamba'ig* spirits are considered to be particularly dangerous. Care must be taken not to attract them. Their name can only be mentioned under careful ritual constraints. The *Tamba'ig* detect the smell of blood, and when they do, they come and suck it so that eventually the person will die. Thus, the name, "Kiavaw," for this epic refers to the odor exuded by the blood of human beings. The *Tamba'ig*, in addition to smelling blood with ease, can also hear very keenly. If they hear someone learning the epic poem dedicated to them, and an offering of a chicken is not forthcoming, they will also become very angry and follow the offender to his house and make him sick.

The *Tamba'ig* wander about looking for their prey, but they particularly like to lurk where there is water -- in rivers, in swamps, even in the dew. However, their homes are in the ocean. Therefore, the ocean is considered to be a particularly dangerous place.

The *Tamba'ig* are Muslim, and as a result will not accept pigs in a sacrifice, only chickens. The attribution of their ethnicity mirrors the traditional world of the pagan Rungus. The Coastal Muslim were highly predatory. They were particularly prone to kidnap Rungus to sell into slavery or as human sacrifices for other ethnic groups.

The poem begins by telling of the activities of the various *Tamba'ig* -- those that lurk around the longhouse; then the ones in the yard around the longhouse; those on the paths; etc. Some of the *Tamba'ig* become birds, making their nests in the bodies of humans to cause sickness and lining their nests with the intestines of people. One *Tamba'ig* in passing by sucks the juice from a sugar cane, and the person who subsequently sucks the sugar cane is made ill from the saliva left there by that spirit. In that part of the epic poem translated here, the group of *Tamba'ig* being addressed is a race called "Bubutan." The action in this part of the poem takes place at their home in the ocean. A father is talking to his son and tells him it is time he thought of getting married. The name of the son is Mangkahis, derived from the term for a type of crab, *angkahis*, which lives on the edges of rivers. The father first suggests a girl who lives at the place of the weekly market, but the son turns down the suggestion, saying she is not suitable because her skirts are too short and her hair too sparse. Next the father suggests the girl at the boat landing. But again the son rejects her saying she has one short leg and one short arm, and he would grow old before his time if he married these girls.

The father finally suggests a girl named Morolongoi and the son agrees as he says that she is an equal match. How they are alike is explained in the translation below. The name of the maiden, "Morolongoi" literally means, "Singing Brook," and her substitute name, "Morologung," means "The Sound of Falling Water." Each character in the poem has two names, his or her standard name

and a ritual name that frequently elaborates on the character or appearance of the individual.

The poem describes the son preparing to leave with his friends to go ask for the hand of Morolongoi. They arrive at the ladder to the longhouse of Morolongoi. When the party arrives there is great excitement among the children of the longhouse, who all rush to the top of the ladder and stand staring down without saying anything. Morolongoi tells the children they are rude to stare without inviting the guests to climb up into the longhouse.

At this point we take up the translation. Morolongoi greets the guests, and turns to the young man. She offers him betel chewing supplies. She talks about how she and he are alike. Then she says that they both do not have appropriate clothing for a wedding, and they will have to find some. For the young man is found a very black jacket, a multicolored belt of the rainbow, a headcloth of lightning, a sword of lightning, and a blowpipe as long as the poles that hold up heaven. Next they look for clothing for the bride: a skirt of stinging leaves, leg brass of the tentacles of the Portuguese man-of-war, etc. There is no explanation given as to why the woman's clothing is so loathsome in comparison to the man's. However, the degree of refinement or repulsiveness of the clothing, housing, or behavior of spirits indicates in these epics the degree to which the spirits will aid or harm mankind.

Translation note: The epic poems consist of couplets, with the first line in the standard Rungus language and the second line in an esoteric, ritual lexicon. Frequently, the second line carries additional meaning amplifying the first. At other times, the words in the second line are simply ritual substitute words, repeating the meaning of the first. In this latter case, our translation will reflect this by duplicating the first line.

Interlinear Translation

Trial Translation

267. **Asi ku di kiaka**
Ara ku di kiudung
Salute my to older sibling
Greetings my to older brother²

"I salute you, my older sibling. I greet you, my elder brother."

268. **Kada ko'u po kahago**
Inkod ko'u po singgaraw
Don't you now hurry
Stop you now rushing

"Don't you now be in a hurry," said Morolongoi, Singing Brook. "Stop rushing around now."

269. **Onuvo ku po i kampil**
Alapo ku po i gansakan
Bringing my now the *kampil*,₃
Carrying my now brass box

"I am bringing now my *kampil* with its betel and tobacco," she said. "I am now getting my brass box."

270. **Kampil kud tinumbukan**
Gansakan sinurungan
Kampil my inlaid
Brass box cast

"My *kampil* has an inlaid design. It is a box cast of brass."

271. **Tinumbukan bulavan**
Sinurugan mosilo
Inlay of gold
Casting of yellow

"It is inlaid with gold, cast in yellow metal."

272. **Iti no ma kiaka⁴**
Ilo pogi kiudung
 Here now indeed older sibling
 That certainly elder brother
273. **Osodop nopo it valai**
Otuvong nopo pogun⁵
 Night fully at the dwelling
 Dark fully at the house
274. **Minudung kito rorizan**
Sumondot dot binulud
 Sit down we *rorizan*⁶
 Settled down in the room
275. **Limpupu ko nirilit**
Tundaki ko nitabid
 Shampoo plant vines entwined
 Vines tied together
276. **Obuk nga kopirolot**
Ungkui nga kopisirag
 Hair of equal quality
 Locks of similarity
277. **Unturu nga mirompok**
Olimo nga mitopong
 Fingers that equal length
 Five that are the same
278. **Lalata nga mizap**
Lobpuvon nga mitopong
 Ringworm patches of equal count
 White patches the same
279. **Kopirad ti sundu**
Kopibagal ti lodun
 Alike in godliness
 Equal in power
280. **Kamboros Morolongoi**
Kansunud Morologung
 Spoke Morolongoi
 Said Morologung
281. **Osuwab nopo i valai**
Anavau nopo i pogon
 Tomorrow fully the dwelling
 Light fully the house
- "Here is now indeed my older sibling, that one who is indeed my elder brother."
- Night has fallen on the dwelling. It is completely dark at the house.
- "We sit together in the priestess' sanctum. We settle in the *rorizan*."
- "We are entwined as vines of the shampoo plant. We are vines wrapped around each other."
- "Our hair is of the same quality. The beauty of our locks is equal."
- "Our fingers are of equal length. Our hands are of equal size."
- "We have the same number of ringworm patches on our skin. The white patches are equal."
- "We are alike in our godly qualities. We are alike in our spiritual powers."
- Thus spoke Singing Brook, so said Falling Waters.
- When tomorrow has come in the dwelling, when it is fully light in the house.

282. **Sizong kad Morolongoi⁷**
Gongo kad Morologung
 Flute note speaks Morolongoi
 Flute note speaks Morologung
283. **Asi ku di kiaka**
Ara ku di kiudung
 Salute my to older sibling
 Greetings my to elder brother
284. **Olozow kito misavo**
Ava'i kito migondu
 Inappropriate we marry
 Not fitting we wed
285. **Aso ma sulung to**
Tida i mang hampo to
 None indeed clothes we
 No truly dress clothes we
286. **Kamboros Morolongoi**
Kamsunud Morologung
 Spoke Morolongoi
 Said Morologung
287. **Monimpa i Mangkahis**
Mangampot i Mangka'ai
 Answers Mangkahis
 Replies Mangka'ai
288. **Nunu kagima sulung**
Kuran kagima hampo
 What really clothes
 How really dress clothes
289. **Monimpa Morolongoi**
Mongampot Morologung
 Answers Morolongoi
 Replies Morologung
290. **Nunu ot ihim-ihimon**
Kuran hovo-hovoron
 What is to be looked for
 How to be found
291. **Tudukan to do sulung**
Bolizan to do pakai
 To be shown us clothes
 To be bought us apparel
- With a voice like the clear note of the nose flute, with musical tones she spoke, said Singing Brook:
- "My salutations, older sibling, my greetings to elder brother."
- "To marry would not be right. It is not fitting we wed for."
- "Clothes we indeed have none. No truly fine apparel do we have."
- So spoke Morolongoi, Singing Brook; so said Morolongoi, Falling Water.
- Mangkahis, the Crab, then answers. Mangka'ai, the Crustacean, replies:
- "What really are we to wear? How are we really to dress?"
- Singing Brook answers him. Falling Waters replies to him:
- "What has to be looked for? How is it to be found?"
- "For we will be shown clothing. We will be bought apparel."

292. **Panangbadu murondom**
Panangsapoi musalup
 Put on a black *badu*⁸
 Put on this black jacket
- "Put on this jacket of the night. Wear this *badu* of the dark.
293. **Pononghokos buluntung**
Pononghongo simbakol
 Wear a belt rainbow
 Put on a belt rainbow
- "Put on this belt of the rainbow. Wear a belt of many colors."
294. **Ponongsigal goniton**
Ponangbidak podohon
 Put on the *sigal* of lightning⁹
 Wear the headcloth of thunderbolt
- "Put on a headcloth woven of lightning. Wear a *sigal* made of thunderbolts."
295. **Ponongbadi goniton**
Ponongkazin podohon
 Put on a sword of lightning
 Wear a blade of thunderbolts
- "Put on a sword of lightning. Put on a blade of thunderbolts."
296. **Ponongtambung misungkod**
Ponongrondong nipanggol
 Carry a blowpipe like pillar¹⁰
 Hold a blowpipe thick tree
- "Carry a blowpipe like one of the pillars supporting the sky. Hold a blowpipe thick as a post."
297. **Ilo no pakai nu**
Ilo no hampo nu
 Those now your apparel
 Those now your dress clothes
- "Those will now be your apparel. Those now will be your finery."
298. **Kamboros Morolongoi**
Kansunud Morologung
 Said Morolongoi
 Spoke Morologung
- So spoke Morolongoi, Singing Brook.
 So said Morologung, Falling Water.
299. **Sizong kadi Mangkahis**
Gongo kadi Mangka'ai
 Flute note speaks Mangkahis
 Flute note speaks Mangka'ai
- With a voice like the clear note of the nose flute, with musical tones spoke Mangkahis, the Crab:
300. **Nataru ro'un dohon**
Nalazaw nong yoku
 Keep leaves my
 Keep now as for me
- "I will keep my leaves. As for me, I will keep my leaves."
301. **Ika'u no pokibazin**
Ika'u no pokitizow
 You now ask for a spouse
 You now ask for a husband
- "You have asked for a spouse. It is you who have asked for a husband."

302. **Aso po pakai nu**
Tida po ma hampo nu
None yet clothes your
No yet indeed apparel your
303. **Nga tudukan to pakai**
Bolizan to hampo
Then show us apparel
Bought us dress clothes
304. **Panangtapi tohopoi**
Pononggonob tohipu
Put on a skirt of nettle tree
Wear a skirt of stinging leaves
305. **Ohopoi indahaton**
Ohipu inlubokon
The nettle tree of the sea
Stinging leaves of the bay
306. **Pononglungkaki bolung**
Ponongbolingkus dubol
Wear leg brass Portuguese man-
of-War.¹¹
Put on leg brass stinging jellyfish
307. **Bolung do indahaton**
Dubol do inlubokon
Portuguese man-of-war of the sea
Stinging jellyfish of the bay
308. **Pononggading dolimusan**¹²
Ponongvaru dobodung
Put on armlets the spiny fish
Wear armbands of spiny fish
309. **Ponongongsungoi dot angkalamai**
Ponongmurandoi dot inggipan-gipan
Put on wristlets of centipedes
Wear wristbands of earwigs
310. **Angkalamai inda'aton**
Inggipan-gipan inlubokon
Centipedes from the sea
Earwigs from the bay
311. **Kamboros di Mangkahis**
Kansunud di Mangka'ai
Words of Mangkahis
Spoken by Mangka'ai
- "But you have nothing to wear. Indeed you do not have any apparel."
- "So show us your apparel, the dress clothes you have bought. "
- "Put on a skirt from the nettle tree. Wear a skirt of stinging leaves."
- "From the nettle tree by the sea, stinging leaves from the bay."
- "Wear leg brass made from the tentacles of the Portuguese man-of-war. Bend around your leg the tentacles of the stinging jellyfish."
- "The Portuguese man-of-war of the sea, the stinging jellyfish from the bay."
- "Put on armlets from the poison spines of the catfish. Wear armbands from the spines of fish."
- "Put on wristlets of centipedes. Wear wristbands of earwigs."
- "Centipedes from the sea, earwigs from the bay."
- These were the words of Mangkahis. This was spoken by Mangka'ai.

312. **Asi ku di kibazin**
Ara ku di kitizow
Salutations my for have a spouse
Greetings my for have a wife

"I salute you, my spouse. I greet you, my wife."

Editors Note: The epic continues for 1247 couplets. The two spirits marry. But then they divorce because they discover that they have lost their sense of smell. They can no longer smell blood and find human beings.

NOTES

* The source for this text was the Rungus priestess Magazas who was from the village of Pamuda'an. It was recorded 1986 in the Rungus village of Guomon by George and Laura Appell. The translation was done with the help of Hamzah Malajun, Minobidong Solumban, Majintin Sovoli, and Sovoli Mabok, all from the village of Guomon or the nearby Inukiran.

- ¹ The derivation of the word, *Tamba'ig* is not yet quite clear. It probably is related to the word for water, *va'ig*. /' indicates a glottal stop.
- ² The term "brother" and "sibling" here is used as a form of address indicating respect between the two, but also indicating that they are of the same generation. It does not indicate any kin relationship.
- ³ *Kampil* is the generic name given to a variety of small brass boxes that every man and woman owns and in which they keep their areca nut (*Areca catechu*), their betel vine leaf (*Piper betle*), their lime, and their tobacco for chewing and smoking. All visitors are offered this on arrival to indicate respect.
- ⁴ *Po* and *no* are difficult to translate into English. *Po* indicates the onset of an action. *No* indicates the completion of an action. In some instances they both can be translated by "now," with the state of action indicated by form of English verb used.
- ⁵ *Pogun* is the word used in everyday language to indicate a deserted housing structure. Here it is the substitute word for house or dwelling.
- ⁶ *Rorizan* is a special room built over the sleeping portion of the longhouse where a spirit medium or priestess spends her days learning the epic poetry and weaving the ritual clothing. We have alternated between "spirit medium" and "priestess" to refer to the female religious specialist. The former indicates the ability to go into trance, while the latter indicates the ability to recite the epic poems and poetic narratives.
- ⁷ *Sizong* is what the first clear note of the nose flute is called. In the epic poetry it indicates the opening up of conversation by an individual with a pleasing, refined voice.
- ⁸ A *badu* is a man's ceremonial jacket, woven of native cotton spun by hand and dyed black with indigo. The patterns on the jacket appear in white and represent mythological creatures and spirits.

- ⁹ A *sigal* is a man's headcloth. They are worn by all men and were traditionally woven by the Rungus but now are purchased from various Coastal Muslim ethnic groups, each of which has their own identifying weaving style.
- ¹⁰ *Misungkod* is translated here as "pillar." It refers to the *sungkod*, those pillars that hold up the sky.
- ¹¹ Leg brass: The Rungus women wear coils of heavy gauge brass wire wound around their legs from their ankles to their knees. And when they walk they sound like a bag of coins being shaken. They also wear a variety of bracelets and armbands from shells, brass wire, and wood.
- ¹² A *dolimusan* refers to a species of catfish. It has spines in the lateral fins that can cause severe wounding because of the poison.

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