

## REVIEW ARTICLE

KRISTINA LINDELL

*University of Lund*

# Dayak Tales

RIDU, Robert Sulis, Ritikos JITAB, Jonas NOEB, compilers. *King Siliman and other Bidayuh Folk Tales*. Dayak Studies, Oral Literature Series, No. 1. 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak: Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, The Institute of East Asian Studies, 2001. xvi + 136 pages. Line drawings, vernacular and English text. Paper US\$/AU\$15, plus US\$/AU\$3 for postage. ISBN 983-9257-06-4.

LANGUB, Jayl, compiler. *Suket: Penan Folk Stories*. Dayak Studies, Oral Literature Series, No. 2. 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak: Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, The Institute of East Asian Studies, 2001. xii + 196 pages. Line drawings, vernacular and English text. Paper US\$/AU\$15, plus US\$/AU\$3 for postage. ISBN 983-9257-08-0.

SATHER, Clifford, compiler. *Apai Alui Becomes a Shaman and Other Iban Comic Tales*. Dayak Studies, Oral Literature Series, No. 3. 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak: Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, The Institute of East Asian Studies, 2001. xiii + 179 pages. Line drawings, vernacular and English text. Paper US\$/AU\$15, plus US\$/AU\$3 for postage. ISBN 983-9257-09-0.

**A**LARGE GROUP OF STORYTELLERS, researchers, assistants, and sponsors have every reason to be proud of the three volumes of folk tales under review. It is a great pleasure to be able to read tales of the Dayak peoples, of which foreigners know so very little. The three books are the first in the Oral Literature Series. Hopefully they will be followed by many more.

It is especially pleasing to see that the tales have been not only written down but also preserved in a permanent sound archive, making it possible to hear how they are told or sung. This is probably the best way to preserve lore because usually the tellers are none too shy of the microphone. Another way is to film the performance, but in my experience the camera and the strong lights disturb the tellers to such a degree that the telling is negatively influenced. These days the situation is somewhat improved with small, unobtrusive video cameras.

The three books are arranged in a similar way. All of them use the same picture, "Tree of Life," by the artist Tusan Padan as a cover illustration—what could be more suitable for books in this series? A Preface that contains many acknowledgements is followed by a Foreword which introduces Dayak Studies and the Dayak Oral Literature Series. Here a presentation not only of Dayak Studies but also of the Dayaks themselves would be most welcome, since the series is intended for specialists and non-specialists alike. How large is the Dayak population? How many ethnic groups go under this designation? Do their languages relate to each other? Do any of the languages have officially accepted scripts? Where do the Dayaks live? A map would certainly be of great interest here.

The series is meant not only to preserve the tales, but also to make them known to folklorists and interested readers all over the world. Therefore, they are presented both in the original language and in English. Needless to say, the texts in the original languages are as interesting and helpful to linguists as the tales are to folklorists. Everything—right down to the lists of contents and illustrations—is given in two languages.

The translators of all three books have encountered great difficulties,

not the least being that English sometimes lacks words for animals, plants, and other things that appear in the texts. The words in the original languages could have been given in an appended word list with an English translation or a short explanation. Also, the different designations or names of the main characters in the texts should have been included in such a list. It is, in fact, sometimes quite difficult to figure out exactly who is who in the tales.

The informative illustrations in Volumes 1 and 2 were drawn by Raphael Scott Abeng and Gerald Oscar Sindon, but those in Volume 3 by Gerald Oscar Sindon alone.

There are ten tales in each volume. The tales in Volume 1 were told by five tellers and those in Volume 2 by eight tellers, but all the tales in Volume 3 were told by a single teller. The tellers themselves are introduced together with their tales. The volumes demonstrate very clearly that the collection of more tales needs to be done as soon as possible, if there are any left to collect at all. Of the fourteen tellers, three are already dead. Two of the living tellers are in their fifties, while the remaining nine are between sixty and ninety years of age. As is the case in other parts of the world, it is most unlikely that people of younger generations will continue this storytelling tradition.

After the section on the tellers comes an Introduction where we learn when and where the tales used to be told in the ethnic group represented in the volume. In addition, the reasons why they were told are touched upon, since they functioned not only as entertainment, but also as information on events, social norms, and values. Thus they constituted a kind of teaching material, as folk tales usually do. In the same section, the many people who cooperated in recording the tales also receive thanks for their work.

Volume 1 contains Bidayuh tales, all of them excellent and well worth reading. The story in which a supercilious, cocksure, and fast running animal and a slow yet sly one run a race seems to be told everywhere. In the Grimm Brothers' collection it is tale number 187, and the animals are a hare and a hedgehog. In Antti Aarne's type-index it is type number 275, and in 275A the animals are a hare and a tortoise. Other contestants are also listed, among them a frog and a snail. In Stith Thompson's motif-index, where references to folk literature all over the world can be found, the race is motif number K11. Wherever the tale is told it is always the slow little animal that wins the race with the help of his friends or relatives who cheat the fast runner. Is it perhaps that a story about a snobbish, fast runner who is defeated by a slow one is so self-evident and obvious that it has appeared in different parts of the world with different animals?

The story "The Mouse Deer and the Snail" is, however, so much like "The Snail and the Sambar Deer" in our collection of Kammu folk tales

(LINDELL et al. 1984, 112–13) that one wonders, if there had been contact between the Bidayuh and the Mon-Khmer peoples on the mainland. In both tales the deer brags about his swiftness and pokes fun at the slow snail. The snail challenges the braggart, and they decide to run a race. The snail then speaks with his snail friends, and they agree to hide along various sections of the race route. When the deer comes closer, each snail makes a sound so as to trick the deer into believing that his opponent is further ahead of him. The deer then exerts himself and runs even faster. Naturally the deer dies from exhaustion. His gall bladder bursts and bile runs down his legs, making the fur around the hoofs appear green. This, the teller says, explains why Sambar deer have no gall bladder and why the fur around their hoofs is of a greenish-grey color. The fate of the Bidayuh Mouse Deer is no better. The snail makes the same kind of arrangement with its friends, and the deer gets so exhausted from the run that he falls into a stream—the snails eat the dead body. In many tales from Southeast Asia the mouse deer is a trickster, but here we learn that a trickster can also be fooled if he is too haughty.

There is also another tale in this volume, “The Peacock Pheasant and the Crow Pheasant,” which may perhaps also indicate contact across the seas. In our Kammu collection we have “The Silver Pheasant and the Crow” (LINDELL et al. 1984, 68). In both stories the two birds are painting one another, and the black birds decorate their partners with the utmost care so that they become as elegant as they appear today. The Crow in the Kammu version is so impatient because he wants to go to a party that the Silver Pheasant only has time to smear him over with charcoal. Thus, crows are black to this very day. In the Bidayuh story, on the other hand, the Peacock Pheasant behaves badly and merely pours dirty water over his partner who wanted to be elegantly decorated. These two birds curse each other, and the Peacock Pheasant is therefore not allowed to enter a secondary jungle, while the Crow Pheasant may not come into the primary jungle.

Also the entertaining story “Ma’ Tarui” is reminiscent of the Kammu tale “Ñaar” in our collection (LINDELL et al. 1989, 83–86; LINDELL et al. 1978, 29–31). In both tales a young girl has a husband who misunderstands everything he sees and hears. We are not told why Ma’ Tarui is so stupid, but we hear that Ñaar bursts out of a tree as a fully-grown man. He therefore totally lacks experience and does everything wrong. There are only two episodes told about Ma’ Tarui but many about Ñaar. One of the incidents is rather similar in the two versions. The wife sends her simple-minded husband to ask for some clothes from her parents. Ñaar’s wife says that he should ask for some old clothes, and when he discovers that he has got only new, beautiful ones, he throws them into the river. Ma’ Tarui’s wife jokingly says that the material will be used to cover the bumps and holes in the

earth, and that is what Ma' Tarui does on his way home. Stupidity is not, however, the only thing the two blockheads have in common. Despite the difficulties and sorrows they cause their families, they are nevertheless loved and well-treated by their wives and in-laws.

Volume 2 contains ten Penan tales. Not surprisingly we find the story of the race between the fast animal and the slow animal again in "The Mouse Deer." Here the race is just the final section of a much longer tale, where the mouse deer has its usual role and tricks monkeys and crocodiles.

The first two stories in the volume have the bird name "Kangkapat" as a title. The first one of these was told in Eastern Penan and the second one in Western Penan. Linguists have every reason to be pleased about finding the same tale in two different dialects. Hopefully they can also listen to them in the sound archives.

In both tales the call "kangkapat" is a signal to all fruit-trees to bear fruit. This call is the only thing that can set off the fruit season. The call is very loud, and in the first version it disturbs a monkey's baby. The monkey catches the bird and ties a creeper around its neck. She wants to kill it, but the other monkeys interfere by saying, "What are we going to eat if there is no fruit?" The case is brought before Judge Plain Pigmy Squirrel who discusses the case and then sets the bird free. The feathers around Kangkapat's neck are still very sparse, for many feathers fell out because of the loop Mother Monkey tied around it.

In the Western Penan version it is not a monkey baby but a buleng fish baby that was frightened by the bird's loud call. The bird likes to perch on a creeper beside the river, and Mother Fish jumps up and breaks its leg. Kangkapat feels so ashamed of its broken leg that it flies across the ocean.

With no loud "kangkapat" to set off the season there is no fruit and soon all the animals began to starve. They call a meeting to find out if anyone is brave enough to fly after Kangkapat. Several animals that can fly try, but all of them fail. At last the butterfly Gang Tabau manages to cross the ocean because it can rest on the waves when it feels tired. Kangkapat does not want to return but says that she had left some eggs upon which a dove could sit. When the eggs hatch, the young birds' call tells the trees to bear fruit. All animals except the buleng fish are allowed to eat their fill. Let us hope that Kangkapat is now protected so that all the people and animals in Borneo get enough fruit!

Volume 3 differs from volumes 1 and 2 in that all the Iban comic tales it contains were told by a single teller, Mr. Henry Gerijih anak Jabo, a well-educated man who is also known as an author. All the ten tales are about a man who is variously called Apai Alui, Palui, Sali-ali, or Pak Sali. It is a bit difficult to believe that this complicated figure is one and the same person.

One suspects that this complex figure is composed of at least three different types: a shaman, a trickster/clever man, and a stupid fool. In the Introduction the compiler, Clifford Sather, elucidates the Apai Alui tradition and discusses the Iban opinion about the character. It seems that Apai Alui is, in fact, regarded as a single man. Regardless of whether he is one man or three men, all the stories about him are most entertaining and well worth reading and rereading. Everybody who has tried to tell folk tales will note that the stories about Apai Alui are most difficult to tell, but also that they are extremely well told here. If Mr. Henry Gerijih has now mastered these ten tales, how many other tales can he tell? He is surely a gold mine for folklorists.

It is not only architecture, art, and nature that deserve to be considered as world heritage, but folk tales as well. In this series we find thirty pieces of priceless literature that have been preserved in print for coming generations. Let us hope that many more will follow!

#### REFERENCES CITED

- LINDELL, Kristina, Jan-Öjvind SWAHN, and Damrong TAYANIN  
1978 *Folk Tales from Kammu II: A Story Teller's Tales*. Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, Monograph Series No. 40. London: Curzon Press.  
1984 *Folk Tales from Kammu III: Pearls of Kammu Literature*. Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, Monograph Series No. 51. London: Curzon Press.  
1989 *Folk Tales from Kammu IV: A Master Teller's Tales*. Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, Monograph Series No. 56. London: Curzon Press.