

The Journey To Paradise Funerary Rites Of The Benuaq Dayak Of East Kalimantan

The Benuaq are hardly ever mentioned in the literature on the Dayak populations of Borneo and therefore remain almost unknown. From MALLINCKRODT¹ it is known that they belong to the larger Lawangan group, and SCHWANER (1854: 122) considered them as descendants of the 'orang Lahei' who were reduced by the Siang-Murung from the Pari river. However, the Benuaq are not only the largest Dayak group in the Kutai regency of East Kalimantan (the former Kutai Sultanate) but also have preserved more of their adat than any other Dayak group. Their habitat are the southern tributaries of the Mahakam, namely the Bongan, Obong, Jelau, Kelawit, Tuang, Lawa, Pahu and Nyawatan (see map) as well as the upper Teweh in Central Kalimantan. A few of the Dutch administrators mention them in passing, and WEDDIK (1849: 132-133) counts them among the true aborigines of the sultanate of Kutai. KNAPPERT (1905: 592) informs us that the Benoa and Bentian have lived in Kutai as long as they can remember and belong to one ethnic group with a common language. He also states that their customs are similar to those of the Lawangan groups he encountered on the Aju river in Tabalong district, and that some Lawangan from Tabalong were actually living on the Bongan river (*ibid.*: 619-624).

The Benuaq informants of ours count themselves as part of the Lawangan group but disclaim any origin from South or Central Kalimantan but point towards the interior of Kabupaten Pasir as their possible region of origin (the headwaters of river Telakei). On a purely geographical basis, the Benuaq themselves distinguish the following groups, a distinction I will follow here (cf. map 1):

1. Benuaq of the Bongan, kecamatan Bongan
2. Benuaq of the Ohong river and lake Jempang, kecamatan Jempang
3. Benuaq of the Kelawit, Tuang and Jelau rivers, kecamatan Muara Pahu
4. Bentian of the upper Tuang and Lawa rivers, kecamatan Bentian Besar
5. Benuaq Lawa of the lower Lawa, kecamatan Muara Lawa
6. Benuaq of the upper Pahu and Nyawatan rivers, kecamatan Damai
7. Benuaq of the Idan river, kecamatan Barong Tongkok and Damai

The population of these regions is shown in Table 1

Living on the southern upland fringe of the Mahakam basin, the Benuaq are mainly shifting cultivators and collectors of forest products. A more detailed description of the economy of the Benuaq area can be found elsewhere². Here it is important to know only that few of the Benuaq subsist alone on agriculture but, due to the

1
MALLINCKRODT, *Het Adatrecht van Borneo*,
Leiden, 1928, 2 vols.

2
ANDREAS MASSING, *Base Line Surveys Da-
mai, Muara Lawa, Barong Tongkok, TAD*,
1981.