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Religious Beliefs of the Tawi-Tawi Bajau

H. ARLO NIMMO

When Islam arrived in the Sulu Archipelago of the southern Philippines during the midfourteenth century, the preexisting religion of the islands was not totally displaced. As with all peoples who convert to a new religion, the Sulu people retained features of their indigenous belief system, and consequently the Islam practised in the islands today is a syncretism of Islam and indigenous religious beliefs and rituals. Indeed, Sulu is a mosaic of religious beliefs and practices which represent varying degrees of acculturation to Islam. Urban dwellers adhere most closely to orthodox Islam whereas those communities remote from the port towns have retained a greater share of their traditional religion. The Sulu people who have most completely retained their indigenous religion are the Bajau of the Tawi-Tawi Islands whose mobile, boat-dwelling culture has effectively separated them from their Islamic, island-dwelling neighbors. Although some of Bajau religion is uniquely their own, much of it doubtless reflects the religion found throughout the islands prior to the coming of Islam. Thus, it provides an important window to Sulu's religious past.

A good deal of anthropological research was conducted in Sulu during the 1960s and early 1970s, but few investigations concentrated on religion. The earliest scholarly study of Sulu, Najeeb M. Saleeby's *The History of Sulu*, includes a discussion of the history of Islam in Sulu as revealed in traditional Tausug genealogies.¹ More recent

This article is based on two years of field research in Tawi-Tawi Province, Republic of the Philippines, during 1963 and 1965-67, sponsored by the East West Center, Honolulu, the National Science Foundation, Washington, D.C., the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, New York, and the Carnegie Foundation, New York. The author gratefully acknowledges the support of these foundations. Data were also collected during a week-long visit to Tawi-Tawi in 1977 and a month-long visit in 1982.

1. Najeeb M. Saleeby, *The History of Sulu* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, Inc., [1908] 1963).

historical accounts of Islam in the Philippines have included Sulu in their discussions.² Peter Gowing's survey of folk Islam in the Philippines has many references to Sulu practices.³ A discussion of the religious beliefs and practices of a Sama village in Siasi is found in Ducommun⁴ while Enya Flores' anthropological study of child-rearing practices in Sibutu, another Sama community, also discusses various religious beliefs and practices.⁴ Eric Casiño has described the Islam found on Cagayan de Tawi-Tawi among the Jama Mapun, a group of Sama-speakers whose isolation evolved a distinctive variant of Sulu culture.⁵ Kemp Pallesen has described the marriage ceremonies of the Siasi Sama.⁶ Discussions of Tausug religion are found in Kiefer,⁷ Juanito Bruno,⁸ and in J. Franklin Ewing.⁹ Karen Allison published a descriptive account of the religious beliefs of the Sama of Sibutu Island and I published a popular account of the shamanism found among the Bajau of Sitangkai.¹⁰ The most extensive research on Sulu religion was done by Alain Martenot who spent almost two years studying shamanism among the Sitangkai Bajau in the mid-seventies. The results of his research have yet to be published but when they are, they should add significantly to an understanding of Bajau shamanism.

This article is a description of the religious beliefs of the boat-dwelling Bajau of the Tawi-Tawi Islands of southern Sulu. The bulk of the data was collected during 1963 and 1965-66 when the traditional culture of these people was still intact. Additional data were

2. See for example, Cesar Adib Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1973, second edition).

3. Peter G. Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos—Heritage and Horizon* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1979).

4. Dolores Ducommun, "Sisangat: A Sulu Fishing Community," *Philippine Sociological Review* 10 (3 and 4, 1967): 91-107; and Enya P. Flores, *Child Rearing Among a Moslem Group in the Sulu Archipelago* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1967).

5. Eric Casiño, "Folk Islam in the Life Cycle of the Jama Mapun" in *The Muslim Filipinos*, eds. Peter G. Gowing and Robert D. McAmis (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1974); and Eric Casiño, *The Jama Mapun* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1976).

6. Kemp Pallesen, "Reciprocity in Samal Marriage," *Sulu Studies* I (1972): 123-42.

7. Thomas Kiefer, *The Tausug* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972).

8. Juanito A. Bruno, *The Social World of the Tausug* (Manila: Centro Escolar University Research and Development Center, 1973).

9. J. Franklin Ewing, "Some Rites of Passage Among the Tausug of the Philippines," *Anthropological Quarterly* 31 (2, 1958): 33-41; "Illness, Death and Burial in the Southern Philippines with Special Reference to the Tausug," Part I, *Anthropological Quarterly* 40 (1, 1967): 13-25, and Part II, *Anthropological Quarterly* 40 (2, 1967): 45-64.

10. Karen J. Allison, *A View from the Islands: The Samal of Tawi-Tawi* (Dallas: International Museum of Culture, 1984); and H. Arlo Nimmo, "The Shamans of Sulu," *Asian and Pacific Quarterly* 7 (1, 1975): 1-9.

collected during a brief summer visit in 1977, and a month-long field trip to Tawi-Tawi in 1982. During the past twenty years considerable changes have occurred in Tawi-Tawi, largely as a result of the civil war between Muslim secessionists and the Philippine national government. The Bajau were affected by this war, and many left the area for eastern Borneo while those who remained have undergone considerable change because of the great influx of outside people into their waters.¹¹ Thus, it must be remembered that although the present tense is used throughout this discussion, it is the ethnographic present and not the contemporary present.

This article begins with a description of the physical setting and social organization of the Tawi-Tawi Bajau followed by a discussion of their origin stories, spirits, magic, and ritual leaders. A subsequent article will discuss curing ceremonies, life cycle ceremonies, and the changes Bajau religion is currently undergoing.

THE SETTING

The Bajau of the Sulu Islands are one of several groups of nomadic boat-dwellers found throughout insular Southeast Asia. Accounts by early Chinese and European travelers reveal that boat-dwellers once inhabited the waters of the Mergui Islands, Singapore, Johore, Bangka, northeast Borneo, Sulawesi, as well as the Sulu Islands. Excepting those of the Mergui Islands, all are related through linguistic ties although their exact historical relationships have yet to be untangled. In recent years, most of these people have abandoned boat-dwelling and become acculturated to land-dwelling populations. The Bajau of the Sulu Islands are one of the few groups who have retained their boat-dwelling culture.

The Sulu Islands are inhabited by two major ethnic groups, namely the Tausug and the Sama. In addition, Chinese and Christian Filipino minorities are found in most of the port towns. The Tausug occupy the most fertile islands of the Jolo and Siasi areas and portions of some of the southern islands, while the Sama dominate the islands of Tawi-Tawi and Sibutu, as well as numerous smaller islands throughout the archipelago. Both groups are nominal Muslims, with the degree of acculturation to orthodox Islam varying among members of each group. The Tausug have historically been the politically dominant group in the islands and to some degree still maintain that position. The Sama-

11. H. Arlo Nimmo, "Recent Population Movements in the Sulu Archipelago: Implications to Sama Culture History," *Archipel* 32(1986): 25-38.

speaking population is much more diverse than the Tausug. Members range from sophisticated Muslim hadjis, who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca, to the non-Muslim, boat-dwelling Bajau, who still spend nomadic lives in houseboats. Within the Sulu Islands, the Bajau have always been viewed as an outcast group by the land-dwelling Muslims, but in recent years many of these sea people have abandoned boat-dwelling, embraced Islam, and become incorporated into the Islamic community of Sulu. Those of Tawi-Tawi, however, are still predominantly boat-dwelling, subsistence fishermen who continue to follow their traditional life styles which for some families also include the occasional cultivation of small farms on plots of land owned by Muslim land-dwellers. The Philippine census materials for the 1960s (the period when the bulk of this data was collected) does not provide population breakdown by language or ethnic group for Tawi-Tawi, but probably more than 75 percent of the population is Sama, 20 percent is Tausug, and the remaining 5 percent, Chinese and Christian Filipino. The large number of Sama-speakers is somewhat misleading in that it connotes a cultural uniformity for the area which is not entirely the case. Although a general "Sama culture" may be attributed to Tawi-Tawi, almost each island of Sama-speakers is somewhat different from all others. Dialect differences, occupational specialization, material culture, religious beliefs, and in some cases, physical differences, tend to set off the various groups. Consequently, the Sama-speakers normally identify themselves by their islands, sometimes even by villages, rather than by "Sama," which, because of its generic nature, has little value as identification among them.

By far the most unique group of Sama-speakers is the boat-dwellers, the Bajau. Their most obvious distinctions from the land-dwelling Sama are their boat-dwelling tradition, their indigenous religion, and certain physical features related to boat-dwelling. All of these traits mark them as a lowly, outcast group in the eyes of the Muslim land-dwellers. In Tawi-Tawi, the number of Bajau approximates 1600 and represent only about four percent of the Tawi-Tawi population. Their moorages are all located in the western half of the Tawi-Tawi Islands, and, except for occasional fishing trips, they rarely leave these waters. The Tawi-Tawi Bajau are among the most conservative of all the Sulu Sama and reflect much of pre-Islamic Sama culture. Their sea-borne homes, which effectively separate them from the land-dwelling people, seem most responsible for this conservatism. It is significant in this respect that other Bajau groups in Sulu (such as the Sitangkai Bajau) who abandoned boat-dwelling to become house-dwellers have been incorporated into Islamic Sama culture. Although influenced by Sulu Islam, the Tawi-Tawi boat-dwellers are still regarded as "pagans" by

the surrounding Muslims and have, in fact, retained their traditional religion.

Lone Bajau houseboats and occasional clusters of houseboats can be seen at any time throughout the Tawi-Tawi waters. However, such small groups generally consist of Bajau on fishing trips or enroute to some other destination, and cannot be considered permanent Bajau settlements. Five sites are recognized as permanent moorages by the Bajau. These are permanent in that some houseboats are always found there, though in varying numbers. Several of these moorages have houses built on piles over the water where some of the more sedentary Bajau live full- or part-time. These five moorages surround the seas most commonly exploited by the Bajau and are usually found only a few hundred yards from land villages. Relations between the two groups are somewhat symbiotic, with the boat-people trading fish for the vegetables and fruits of the land-dwellers. With a few exceptions, no non-Bajau live in the moorages.

The population of a Bajau moorage varies greatly at different times of the month and at different seasons of the year. Several factors contribute to this population variation. Fishing cycles contribute to a great deal of Bajau movements. Depending upon the stage of the moon and the season of the year, fishing is profitable in different areas of Tawi-Tawi. Thus, during the full moon when net fishing is very productive in eastern Tawi-Tawi, most of the Bajau are found near the moorages of that area. As the moon wanes and different kinds of fishing become profitable in different parts of Tawi-Tawi, the Bajau disperse accordingly. Ceremonies contribute to much Bajau movement also. Kinsmen are expected to attend one another's ceremonies and since any Bajau's kinsmen are scattered among the five major moorages, a ceremony in one of the moorages attracts visitors from the others. Usually, ceremonies are scheduled to coincide with those times of the month when boats are in the area for fishing activities. Two small cemetery islands near the eastern moorages also account for some Bajau movements, since all Bajau are buried on these islands, and a death at any of the moorages means that an entourage of mourners must travel to one of the cemetery islands for the burial. In addition, Bajau religious beliefs demand periodic visits to the graves of deceased relatives. Some of the moorages are located away from potable water, so during dry periods when rain water is not available, Bajau from these moorages must travel to larger islands for water.

The territory of the Tawi-Tawi Bajau is difficult to limit since some Bajau have traveled almost the entire length of the Sulu Archipelago whereas others have never been outside the Tawi-Tawi area. However, most Bajau travels are limited to the vicinity of Tawi-Tawi and

the territory most commonly exploited by a Bajau generally does not exceed twenty-five miles in any direction from his home moorage.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The independent, nuclear family of a man, his wife, and their children is the basic unit of Bajau society. Although regularly associated with a larger grouping of kinsmen, the nuclear family is extremely self-sufficient. Much of its time is spent traveling or fishing away from the larger Bajau community, and, even when at rest in a moorage, the isolation provided each houseboat by the water separating it from others allows a great deal of privacy to its occupants.

A survey of Bajau households reveals two basic features. The household ideally consists of a single nuclear family, and any variation of this is either temporary or an adjustment to a fragmented nuclear family. Secondly, each broken nuclear family adds persons so that it approximates the structure of the nuclear household. Reasons for this are practical and realistic. First, the size of a Bajau houseboat limits the size of the household, since the average living area of a houseboat is only about ten feet long, five feet wide, and four feet high. Consequently, few houseboats are not large enough to accommodate more than a single nuclear family. Secondly, the division of labor within the family generally follows sexual lines. The husband is in charge of fishing, maintaining the boat, and making and repairing fish nets and other equipment. The wife is in charge of cooking, preparing cassava, gathering firewood from the beaches and edibles from the reef, and frequently assists in fishing. Both are actively involved in caring for the children. Duties often overlap, however, should either partner need assistance. Frequently, a household has an elderly parent of the husband or wife. Such old people help in whatever way they can, and if too feeble, depend upon their children for care. Although sometimes resented, they are never mistreated, partly because of Bajau values that parents should be respected and partly from a belief that very old people can curse those who mistreat them.

Much diversity is revealed in where each household, whether an independent, nuclear family or a variant form of it, prefers to moor its houseboat. By far the most dominant Bajau residence pattern may be called ambilocal, a general term which covers a number of variations. For the few nomadic Bajau it refers to their constant movements among the several moorages and fishing grounds in Tawi-Tawi. For couples who otherwise reside at a single moorage, it refers to those movements which monthly take them away from the moorage in pursuit of fish. For some couples, it is a conscious decision to spend

part of the year in the home waters of the husband and part in the home waters of the wife.

When a Bajau family arrives at one of the five moorages, it normally anchors near the houseboats of whatever kinsmen are there. Usually these kinsmen are siblings of either the wife or husband and are the main reason the family has chosen to visit the moorage. This group of married siblings who normally moor together and assist one another in work and ceremonies is second only to the nuclear family as the most important social unit in Bajau society. This group is similar to an extended family, but I have chosen to call it a family in order to convey the more ephemeral nature of its composition.

The family alliances follow no single structural pattern, although they are usually no deeper than two generations and are rarely extended collaterally beyond siblings. The unit may consist of a married couple and their several married sons, a married couple and their several married daughters, or a married couple and their several married sons and daughters. Or it may represent the adults of a single generation—several married brothers, several married sisters, or several married brothers and sisters. However, not all married siblings who reside in a moorage are necessarily members of the same alliance. For any number of reasons, such as family quarrels, social prestige, or economic factors, married siblings may choose to align themselves with the siblings of their spouses and never act together in an alliance.

Within the family alliance units, work teams are formed for certain activities. Sometimes these work teams consist of all the adult males of the family alliance unit (e.g. fishing groups), whereas at other times only two or three members may form such a group. In general, the family alliance unit provides a group of closely related, trusted persons from which work teams are formed. Similarly, the alliance unit participates in the various religious ceremonies held by members of the group.

Because of the frequent movements of the individual nuclear families, the composition of a family alliance unit is constantly changing. While in his home moorage, a man normally forms an alliance with his own siblings who may be there, but when in his wife's moorage, he is a member of a unit composed primarily of her siblings. While mooring at moorages different from those of his own or his wife's, he may form alliances with less closely related persons. When it is remembered that each nuclear household of each alliance is extremely mobile, some appreciation of the fluidity of the units may be gleaned.

Leaders of the alliance units are not chosen through formal decision, but rather emerge through innate personal qualities. Frequently,

but not always, they are among the more sedentary members of the alliance and have some skill, e.g. boat-building or fishing, as well as personal charisma. Leadership, however, is as subject to change as the composition of the unit itself, and different leaders emerge for the different activities of the unit. For example, ceremonies are led by a man or woman familiar with the proper ritual. Fishing crews are led by a man acknowledged as an expert fisherman and boat-building activities may be in the hands of still another man who is recognized as a master boat-builder.

The Bajau recognize a local group which perhaps can best be translated as localized kindred, a group of cognatic kinsmen, or more specifically, a group of related family alliance units who regularly moor together at a moorage. The Tawi-Tawi Bajau recognize about seven such groups among themselves. Obviously, these localized kindred are not closed kin groups, since every member has kin ties which extend into other groups, either in the same or in different moorages. And, except for the sedentary core of people found at each Bajau moorage, membership in the groups is constantly changing as families move in and out of the moorage. A localized kindred may constitute an entire Bajau moorage, or a moorage may harbor two or three such localized groups.

Each localized kindred recognizes a headman whose chief duties are arbitration and sometimes ritual leadership. When disputes cross localized kindred lines, as they may in moorages where several such groups are located, the headman of the leading localized kindred of the moorage arbitrates. The position of headman ideally passes from father to eldest son, but charisma is often more important in determining who holds the position. Only in extreme cases is the headman called upon to settle disputes, since most disagreements within a family alliance unit are settled by the members themselves. Consequently, disputes brought to the headman are usually those which cross family alliance units.

Besides the headman, each localized kindred has a number of other specialists who perform primarily for members, but whose services may extend beyond the group, especially if their talents have gained some renown. All localized kindreds have a herbalist, a man or woman knowledgeable in the proper use of plants for the treatment of illness. Several shamans, men and women, are found in a localized kindred. They administer primarily to kindred members, but some of the better known are sought by non-kinsmen and sometimes even non-Bajau. Each family alliance unit usually has at least one woman who acts as midwife, but, within each localized kindred several older women are recognized as expert midwives, who are consulted in the event of

difficult childbirths. Most localized kindred also have several men recognized as wood-carvers who do the carvings on new boats and grave markers. Expert boat-builders, too, are frequently called upon by members of their localized kindreds to assist in boat-building.

In each of the five Bajau moorages in Tawi-Tawi, one localized kindred is recognized as the first, or leading, kin group. In most cases, this first group is the one that originally began mooring at the place. The headman of the original group is recognized as headman of the moorage, and, although each localized kindred calls upon its own headman for problems within the group, any quarrels which cross group lines are taken to the moorage headman. And should it be necessary for the moorage to be represented to the outside world, the headman of the first localized kindred would attend.

In all localized kindreds in the moorage, three different types of households are discernible—sedentary, seminomadic, and nomadic. A nucleus of houses and boats which rarely leaves the moorage forms the stable element of the population around which the other boats are clustered. Generally, these households are composed of the immediate family of the moorage headman, married couples who are natives of the moorage, and families primarily involved in some nonfishing activity, such as boat-building. The second group, the seminomads, are usually fishermen whose residence in the mooring is determined by the phases of the moon, or others who, for various reasons are in the moorage only part-time. The third and smallest group, the nomads, usually moor at the fringes of the moorage and are seldom in any moorage for longer than a few weeks at a time. Also included in this last group are those persons passing through the moorage en route to some other destination.

The moorage may be viewed as three concentric circles, the innermost circle being the sedentary population, the second circle the seminomads, and the third the nomads. Overlaying these concentric circles are the localized kindreds. Within these localized kindred boundaries, the family alliance units may be considered as a series of smaller circles, not concentric, but overlapping one another and overlaying the three major concentric circles, since a family alliance unit often consists of sedentary persons, seminomads, and sometimes even nomads. Also, any member of an alliance unit may at some other time belong to a number of other alliance units in the moorage, conceivably in a different localized kindred. If another dimension is added to the above circles, it is possible to illustrate how the alliance units of one moorage extend to and include members of other moorages, thereby revealing the web of kinship ties which connect the five Tawi-Tawi moorages. Because of these kinship ties and frequent

movements among the different moorages, all five Tawi-Tawi Bajau moorages represent a single community.¹²

ORIGIN STORIES

As all people, the Bajau have origin stories which explain their origins and rationalize their way of life. Bajau origin stories are of three general types. There are myths which explain the origin of life, death, and natural phenomena, legends which explain how the Bajau came to live in Sulu, and legends which explain how the Bajau became boat-dwellers.

The following myth illustrates the first type of origin story:

Long ago, in the early days of the world, *Tuhan* [God] told the people they must die. Either they could die like the moon and be born again each month or they could die like the leaves of the tree, eventually being replaced by new leaves. They chose the latter, and thus people die, but their family lines are continued by descendants.

Another version claims:

In the beginning only two Bajau couples lived on earth. They were told they must die and were given a choice as to how death would be. They could die like the moon to be reborn each month, or they could die like the banana plant, the roots of which produce new life. They chose the latter, and thus people die, but have children who continue the family line.

Another myth relates how the various peoples of the world came to be:

In the beginning, only one man and one woman lived on earth. Eventually, they had two children. One child was thrown into the sea and his offspring became the Bajau. The second child was thrown onto land and his offspring became the land people. Other children born to the couple were thrown to the four cardinal directions. Their descendants populated the rest of the world.

While most Bajau would relegate these stories to the realm of lore, the legends regarding their arrival in Sulu are accepted, albeit with a characteristic grain of salt, as more plausible. The following is the most elaborate of such legends I collected.

Long ago, the Bajau lived in boats at Johore on the other side of Mecca. One day a great storm approached. To save the boats from being blown away, the headman stuck a pole into what he thought was the sea floor. He tied his boat to the pole, and the other 500 houseboats were tied to him

12. Nimmo, *The Sea People of Sulu* (San Francisco: The Chandler Press, 1972).

in single file. After the storm passed, leaving the Bajau unharmed, all the people went to sleep. Unknowingly, the headman had stuck his pole into a sleeping, giant sting ray and while the Bajau slept, the ray awakened and pulled their boats to the open sea where they were left. For one week, the Bajau drifted in the open sea, not knowing where they were. Finally, a man prayed to *Tuhan* [God] to help them in their plight. *Tuhan* sent down a *saitan* [spirit] which entered the man (the first shaman, or *djin* among the Bajau) and told him they should sail toward the east for two days. They did so and eventually reached land. Upon reaching shallow waters, they stuck a mooring pole (called *samboang*) into the reef and tied their boats to it. The place came to be called "Samboangan" ("mooring place"), or Zamboanga as it is known today, the first mooring place in Sulu. The Bajau then became the subjects of the Sultan of Sulu who gave groups of them as parts of dowries to different *datu* scattered throughout the Sulu Islands. That is how they came to be located in their present homes.

Many variants of the story are found among the Bajau. One claims Johore is located to the west of Sulawesi with no mention of Mecca, and that the Bajau simply wandered southwestward from Zamboanga and were not under the control of a sultan. Another variant claims the giant sting ray scattered them throughout the Sulu Islands. Another maintains the Bajau originally lived in Zamboanga and it was there they became attached to the sting ray which pulled them to the Sulu Islands. Still another variant claims all the Sama-speaking people of Sulu are descendants of the boat people pulled from Johore by the sting ray:

. . . In Sulu, the boats drifted throughout the archipelago and thus populated the islands of Sibutu, Simunul, Tabauwan, Tawi-Tawi, Siasi, etc. Some of these people decided to build houses. Thus, some Sama live in houses while others live in boats.

A Bajau headman in Sitangki told me a version of the Johore story and claimed he could trace his genealogy back to Johore. His direct descendants were: Pangalima Ammalawi, Pangalima Alari, Pangalima Agi, Pakasa Bata, Pakasa Ajab, Pakasa Tungbang, Pakasa Pa'og'gon, and Pakasa Unsing. The last man was a Bajau from Johore who settled in Sitangkai. The appearance of the name "Johore" in these legends probably comes from the traditions of some Muslim Filipino groups (e.g. the Tausug and the Maguindanao) which claim that the earliest Muslim leaders in the Philippines came from Johore.¹³

The following two legends, less widely known than the Johore story, represent the third type of origin story found among the Bajau, and tell how the Bajau came to be different from the land people.

13. Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, pp. 6, 25.

In ancient times, the land people and the Bajau lived as one people in the Sulu Islands. One day a great tidal wave was seen approaching the islands. To save themselves, part of the population built boats to escape to the sea while the remainder ran to the mountains. The tidal wave passed and the people who built boats continued to live on the sea to become the Bajau while the others remained on land where they are still found today.

In the old days, the Bajau were very devout Muslims like the land people. One Friday when they were praying in their mosque built over the sea, they saw a school of fish pass beneath the floor. They stopped their prayers and ran to their boats to catch the fish. Allah became angry with them for interrupting their prayers and would not let them back into the Islamic faith. Thus, they are called *Luwa'an* [a Tausug word meaning "vomit"] because they were cast out of the Muslim faith by Allah.

Few Bajau accept any of these stories literally, but the underlying theme of many of them, i.e. the Bajau are outsiders or recent arrivals to the area, would probably be acknowledged by most. Their tradition of movement makes it likely to most Bajau that their ancestors probably lived in other places before arriving in Tawi-Tawi. And it is perhaps that sense of being outsiders, or newcomers, in an alien locale which has partly influenced their view of the spirit world.

SPIRITS

The world of the Bajau is populated with innumerable supernatural beings. They are found on the sea, under the sea, on the beaches, in the trees, atop the mountains, or beneath the ground. Sometimes they are visible, but often they are not. They may talk or be silent. They can enter people, animals and inanimate objects. Often they are hideous and terrifying to view, but at other times they are beautiful and seductive. Some wander aimlessly, whereas others never leave certain islets or locales. Some enter the sleep of humans and are responsible for bad dreams and nightmares. Some fly, some swim, some walk, and some run. Some are the spirits of once living people whereas others have always existed as supernaturals. Some occasionally demand offerings of food, tobacco, or flags while others want nothing more than to be left alone. None is by nature benevolent.

No Bajau could name all the spirits that inhabit his world. They are simply too numerous. Some can list the various types of spirits and describe their unique characteristics while others only know spirits in a general sense. The more devout believers conduct small rituals to the spirits during the course of routine activities whereas others conduct rituals only when faced with crises. Some few even express disbelief in the spirits. Although little consensus exists on the specific numbers

of spirits and their unique characteristics, there is general consensus on the different types of spirits. An investigation of Bajau religious beliefs reveals five general categories of spirits. They are *saitan*, supernatural beings who never lived as humans, *ummagged*, spirits of once living people, *Tuhan*, a supreme being who rarely involves himself in human affairs, *panguah*, remains of once living people who occasionally come back to haunt the living, and a collection of ghouls, monsters and tricksters distinct from the above. Except for Tuhan, who is usually perceived as quite distinct from other spirits, these categories should not be considered exclusive of one another. Most Bajau are very casual in their use of the terms and reveal considerable variation in their definitions of them.

Saitan, a name applied to a large category of spirits, can cause illness, bad luck, or other misfortune. Most Bajau claim *saitan* were never humans and have existed since the beginning of time. One Bajau claimed, however, that the spirits of evil land-dwellers sometimes become *saitan*. The name is of obvious Islamic origin, but the belief in such spirits no doubt predates the arrival of Islam in Sulu, since similar spirits are part of the belief system of most indigenous religions of Southeast Asia. Doubtless, they were part of Sulu belief long before Islam came to the islands, and as Sulu's people were Islamized, the Islamic name was transferred to the local spirits.

Saitan may be encountered during the day or night, but they are most commonly encountered during the night, especially the period of *bulan matai* ("dead moon") when the nights are darkest. The best way to avoid misfortune with the *saitan* is to stay away from places where they are known to dwell. Although they wander freely throughout Sulu, *saitan* tend to congregate at certain locations, such as tiny islets, unusual geological features (e.g. a strangely shaped stone or unusual hill), certain distinctive trees, and seas characterized by treacherous rip tides or strong currents. If one must visit these places, small offerings should be left for the offended *saitan*. Suitable offerings include tobacco, cigarettes, betel, bits of food, and green, white, or yellow flags.

Saitan sometimes cause illness or misfortune if their domains are disturbed, but more often they do so simply because of their nature. The vast majority of Bajau illnesses and deaths are attributed to the *saitan* and the *ummagged*, with the *saitan* probably being the most responsible. In addition to death and illness, the *saitan* may also enter a person's head to bring about mental illness or insanity. Two shipwrecks in Tawi-Tawi were attributed to *saitan*. In one case, the ship was too close to an islet inhabited by *saitan*, and in another, a *saitan* appeared in the form of a beautiful woman and lured the ship's pilot

onto a reef. Saitan bring illness to persons who express disbelief in them. If one speaks disrespectfully of the saitan, he may have a sore throat or laryngitis. Saitan have traditional tastes and do not like changes. They caused illness in one household because the dwelling was partitioned into rooms rather than retained as a one-room structure as is traditional for Sulu houses. A man painted the prow of his boat a non-traditional color and suffered consequent illness from the saitan. They do not like uncleanliness either, and one household experienced frequent illnesses caused, according to their neighbors, by saitan who disapproved of their slovenly housekeeping habits. An old woman always kept the waters around her houseboat clear of sea weeds and debris so the saitan would not be displeased. Saitan do not approve of mechanical gadgets, and several times when my tape recorder, camera, or outboard motor failed, their malfunction was attributed to the saitan.

Although it is difficult to escape saitan bent upon harm, certain protective procedures and amulets sometimes discourage them. Babies and small children are especially preyed upon by saitan. However, if boughs of citrus trees are placed upon the houseboat of a newly born child, the saitan are unlikely to harm the child. Also, a charcoal spot on a baby's forehead, as well as necklaces and bracelets on its body, will keep away saitan. If a child's head is shaven to deal with the lice and sores that occasionally bother children, a small patch of hair is always left on the fontanel to protect it from saitan. A branch of black coral wards off the saitan as does a burning lamp or a barking dog at night. If one sleeps on one's side, sleep will not be disturbed by saitan. Small flags of yellow, white, or green seem to appeal to saitan in different ways. As noted, sometimes they are left as offerings at places where saitan reside, but at other times when people want to keep saitan away, they are placed on the houseboat. One moorage with several cases of cholera placed flags on all the boats in order to drive away the saitan believed responsible for the illness. Flags are also sometimes displayed in the wake of approaching storms, especially from the south, to discourage the responsible saitan who are frequently carried by the south wind.

All living creatures have ummagged (some Bajau say even inanimate objects have them), but those most important to the Bajau are the ummagged of once living people. Many ummagged are known by their personal names since they were once friends and relatives. Just as a Bajau should always respect and treat such people properly during their lifetimes, so should they be treated after death. One should never speak disrespectfully of them (some say their names should not even be mentioned) and one should periodically share good fortune with

them. In return for proper treatment, the ummagged occasionally assist the living. On the other hand, if such respect is not given, the ummagged may bring harm to the offenders.

The Bajau disagree as to where the ummagged is located in the body of a living person, but it is generally believed to be the product of the procreation process. Some say it is located in the heart or liver while others maintain it is in the stomach. If the body is struck where the ummagged is located, it may be dislodged and cause one to become ill and possibly faint. In fact, a common explanation for fainting is the departure of the ummagged from the body. The ummagged sometimes leaves the body during sleep and dreams are the result of its adventures. Upon death, the ummagged departs from the body, lingers around the place of death for a short period, and then dwells on the cemetery island where the body is buried.

For the most part, the ummagged appear to lead relatively contented existences on the cemetery islands. Much more localized than the saitan, they only leave the islands to punish offenses or to assist shamans in curing ceremonies. In their benevolent moods, they may bring good fortune, but more typically when they involve themselves in human affairs, it is as punishments for misdeeds. Persons who die young may be jealous of the living, and their ummagged do harm out of spite. Also, ummagged may cause a sleeper to dream, or give him messages by entering his opened mouth. Since ummagged are primarily nocturnal beings, the Bajau approach the cemeteries with little apprehension during the daytime, but avoid them at night so as not to give offense to an ummagged.

If a Bajau offends an ummagged, the result is illness, misfortune, or even death. To atone for the offense, offerings are given to the ummagged. Sometimes these are made at home where the ummagged is invited to take the spiritual essence of the offering, or the offering may be taken to the cemetery. If a Bajau passes the cemetery islands, perhaps on a fishing trip, he usually stops to leave a small offering to the ummagged of a recently deceased relative. Suitable offerings are similar to those given to saitan, i.e. tobacco, food, betel, cigarettes, or flags.

Bajau traditional religion has a vague concept of a supreme being who is responsible for creating the world and its ultimate functioning. This being, called Tuhan by the Bajau, is of minor importance in the day-to-day concerns of most Bajau who have only vague and often contradictory notions of his role in human affairs. Some Bajau claim to know nothing of Tuhan, others say he is the god of the land people, while still others acknowledge him as part of their religious concern. Among the Muslim peoples of Sulu, indeed throughout Islamic Southeast Asia, Tuhan is used synonymously with Allah, but few Bajau

use the two names synonymously since they generally associate Allah with the religion of the land-dwellers. The Bajau concept of Tuhan has probably been somewhat shaped by Islamic influence, but it is also probable that the concept of a supreme deity predates Islam, since it is common to many indigenous religions of Southeast Asia.

Tuhan is always referred to as male, and his residence is usually assigned to some vague place in the sky. Some claim disbelief in Tuhan, but most feel he is the ultimate power and creator behind everything, although they know little of him beyond that. Far less important to the Bajau than either the *saitan* or *ummagged*, Tuhan is rarely the object of ritual concern. I heard of no ceremony conducted for Tuhan, nor heard of offerings made to him.

The Bajau disagree about the role of Tuhan in human affairs. Some believe he is totally removed from any concern. He created the universe, the people, and the spirits within it, and then left them alone to operate on their own. Others see a relationship between Tuhan and the *saitan*. For some, Tuhan tells the *saitan* what to do. Thus, the *saitan* harm people because of the will of Tuhan. Others do not perceive Tuhan as instructing the *saitan*, but believe that Tuhan and the *saitan* are friends. Few view Tuhan as a benevolent being. Some, in fact, hold the opposite view and maintain that since Tuhan is all-powerful, he could stop the evil deeds of the *saitan* if he chose to do so. He does not, so he must not be too kindly disposed toward people. One informant claimed Tuhan watched over humans and sent *saitan* to punish them when they misbehaved. Only one informant associated the *ummagged* with Tuhan, claiming they are sometimes his messengers. Some Bajau use Tuhan synonymously with fate. Things and events they cannot control, they attribute to Tuhan in one breath and to fate in the next.

A *panggauh* is not a spirit like a *saitan* or an *ummagged*, but rather is usually described as a rotting corpse that returns to haunt the living. The chief reason a *panggauh* appears is because its body was not properly bathed before burial. Also, the *panggauh* may return to haunt people who dealt with them unfairly during their lifetimes or who failed to mourn their deaths properly. Sometimes people who were evil during their lives return to haunt survivors. One informant told me that *panggauh* are particularly fond of cooked squash and will come to eat it if it is left in the houseboat overnight.

Panggauh have been seen in many different places, but most often on land. This, say the Bajau, is because the land people are cruel and after they die, they return to continue their evil deeds. They appear in various forms and colors. Some say *panggauh* look exactly like a corpse when it is wrapped in its white shroud. Others describe them

as partially decayed bodies, with rotting flesh and terrible odors. Sometimes they appear as skeletons. One was described as looking like an octopus, while another was a black blob with holes for eyes. In addition to being seen on land, they have been encountered in houses, boats, reefs and trees. Although most commonly seen at night, they have been seen during the day.

If one sees a *panggauh*, sometimes his *ummagge* is frightened from his body and he becomes ill or faints. Most *panggauh* are content to frighten people, but death from an encounter is not unknown. Persons often have bouts of bad luck after seeing a *panggauh*.

Offerings are not made to *panggauh*. The best way to avoid them is to be sure corpses are properly bathed before burial, proper mourning is conducted at funerals, and proper treatment is extended to all people. But in spite of these precautions, one may encounter the *panggauh* of one who simply enjoys haunting the living.

According to some Bajau, one may become a *panggauh* while still alive. Such a person is called a *panggauh allum* ("live ghost," or sleep walker). If one harbors incestuous thoughts, the *ummagge* takes the body with it on its adventures during sleep.

In addition to the above supernatural beings, the Bajau believe in a host of ghouls, monsters, and tricksters who occasionally harass them. Some Bajau claim these are types of *saitan*, but most describe them as distinct from the *saitan*. Belief in some of these is widespread, whereas others tend to be localized. Probably no Bajau has heard of all the ones listed below. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather illustrative of the beings within this category.

A *mananokoban* is a hideous monster that lives in the forest. If attacked by one, a person will die within half a day.

A *galap*, usually encountered at night, is terrifying to see and causes people to die of heart attacks.

A *barbalan* looks and behaves like a normal person, but at night it sometimes takes the form of a bird, attacks people, and sucks their blood. According to the Tawi-Tawi Bajau, many *barbalan* are found among the Yakan people of Basilan Island.

A *gansuang* is a gigantic monster-like creature that tears people apart and eats them.

A *babangan* is a flaming being that appears at night. If one is touched by the flame, death is instantaneous.

A *kaliawan* is a small spirit, usually encountered in the forests, which causes people to fly, but once high in the air, they fall to their deaths.

A *bagganan* lives in the sea, drowns unsuspecting fishermen, and is frequently found in the Siasi waters.

A *manolokot* is a large monster with dark skin, no hair, and only one

leg. An encounter with such a creature will result in headaches, general illness, and probably deaths.

A *bagongan*, sometimes called *timbangon*, causes people to go insane when encountered.

Offerings are not made to these beings, nor are they important in the spiritual concerns of the Bajau. One avoids places where they are known to be, although it is not always known where they might be found. If one becomes ill as a result of an encounter, the traditional healing methods of the shaman are usually effective in curing the illness. I met only two Bajau who claimed to have encountered such beings. Most Bajau know of them only through stories they have heard of other people's encounters. Some claim disbelief in them, while most feel they probably do exist even though they have not seen them.

MAGIC

Although a few Bajau distinguish religion and magic as different realms, most view them together as ways to approach the supernatural world. Many shamans employ magical techniques in their curing ceremonies, while others maintain spirits have nothing to do with the protection or process of magic. The traditional anthropological distinction between religion and magic generally applies to the Bajau, i.e. religion is a system of beliefs and rituals directed to the appeasement of forces and beings beyond human control, whereas magic is an attempt to manipulate processes to bring about desired results, or to ward off undesirable influences through the wearing of amulets. Bajau magic is of two general types, namely *anting-anting*, the wearing of protective amulets, and *kabolan*, the recitation of spells and formulas to bring about desired ends.

By far the most common form of magic used by the Bajau is anting-anting, amulets of various sizes and materials worn on the body or kept in the house or boat. Such amulets include strangely shaped, or unusually colored, stones, shells, or pieces of wood, especially tied pieces of string worn as bracelets or necklaces, charmed earrings, bracelets or necklaces placed on infants and small children, and strips of shrouds worn as bracelets to ward off the spirits of the recently deceased. These anting-anting offer various types of protection. They protect children from the many harmful spirits which prey upon them. They assist fishermen by luring fish to their nets and hooks. They assure success in love-making; they provide protection from the bullets or blades of enemies; they give immunity to poisons and various kinds of illness, and may simply discourage spirits from approaching. The popularity of types of anting-anting seems to depend upon their ef-

fectiveness. For example, a man with a stubborn wound that would not heal tried many types of anting-anting. Finally, a shaman advised him to tie a gold ring on a black ribbon, and within days the wound healed. Soon several other members of the moorage were wearing gold rings on black ribbons to heal various sores and wounds.

The following incidents were related to me to illustrate the effectiveness of anting-anting. One man told me his anting-anting was so powerful that when he was struck twice on the head by a bladed weapon he felt nothing. A fisherman showed me scars on his body resulting from wounds inflicted while dynamiting fish. He claimed that without his anting-anting, he would have been killed by the dynamite. Another man said he was able to cause the wind to blow with his anting-anting. A young man with a special anting-anting from Borneo said that when he was attacked by a man with a stick, his magic caused the stick to turn upon his attacker. Another young woman wore a special string necklace given to her by her grandfather so young men could not seduce her. A woman carried a special stone when she went on land to collect firewood as protection against land spirits. An old man illustrated the strength of his anting-anting by striking his arm soundly with a knife with no resulting injury.

Much less widespread among the Bajau is *kabolan*, the recitation of special chants and spells to bring about desired results. This magic can be used for purposes as varied as those of anting-anting. Some spells can drive away evil spirits, assist the delivery of a baby, or improve one's luck in love, such as the following that was told to me. If one gathers sand where a woman has stepped, ties it in a white cloth, places it in one's houseboat, recites a spell over it, the woman will develop a great itching on her feet which will not be relieved until she goes to the boat where she can be easily seduced. Other spells are believed to cause the wind to blow or to cease blowing. Only one type of fishing *kabolan* is used regularly by the Bajau. Most Bajau do not employ magic in fishing and are well aware that successful fishing is the result of following time-tested procedures. In shark fishing, however, virtually all Bajau use special chants which are believed to attract the shark and offer protection to the fisherman. Not surprisingly, this type of fishing is the most dangerous of all Bajau fishing.

In order to be effective, both anting-anting and *kabolan* must be purchased. The more powerful the magic, the higher its purchase price. One man paid ₱100 (a great sum for a Bajau) for his anting-anting, whereas another man bought his for ₱3, two pounds of rice, a glass float from a fishing net, and some incense. Various precautions are taken to insure the success of the magic. One man claimed his anting-anting for fishing was ineffective if someone was sleeping in the boat.

Another said the power of his anting-anting would be lost if he urinated or defecated while wearing it. A young mother claimed the magical necklace worn by her baby would be weakened if submerged in water.

Although anting-anting and kabolan are used by the Bajau for self-protection, they can also be used for malevolent ends. The Bajau consistently claimed sorcerers were not found among them, but such individuals were common among the land dwellers, a reflection of their view of the land people. Certain villages and islands (especially Sibutu Island) are well known to the Bajau for their sorcerers who use magic to bring about illness, misfortune, or even death. Usually such sorcery involves the recitation of chants, but sometimes objects are treated and left in the presence of the unwary victims. Occasionally the land people direct their sorcery toward the Bajau, as illustrated in the following cases. A Bajau man sold a boat to a land-dwelling Sama who refused to pay for the boat on the agreed-upon date. Upon returning home from trying to collect the money, the Bajau suffered dizziness and nausea. He decided the man was using kabolan to make him ill, so he went to a Bajau shaman who knew a kabolan which would provide protection from the spell. Another Bajau told me that the severe infection on his foot was caused by the sorcery of a land-dweller who disliked him.

As noted, Bajau magic is not a realm of ritual and belief separate from religion. Magical amulets and chants are often used in the context of ceremonies directed toward spirits; less often, religious ritual is used to assist magic. Anything that offers protection from a potentially dangerous world appeals to the Bajau, and consequently, magic has wide appeal.

THE DJIN

Central to Bajau religion is the *djin*, or shaman. The *djin*, who may be male or female, is able to communicate with spirits to discover causes of illness or misfortune. In addition, he or she officiates at all rites of passage to see that the spirits are properly invoked and appeased.

Although all Bajau *djin* share certain views of the spirit world and ritual behavior, each is nonetheless somewhat distinctive. One becomes a *djin* in various ways. More often than not, a *djin's* father or mother was also a *djin*, and much of his or her abilities were learned from the parent. Frequently, several children of one family are *djin*. But becoming a *djin* is not strictly a matter of inheritance. The children of some powerful *djin* never become *djin*, whereas some persons become *djin* whose parents were never *djin*.

One of the most powerful djin in Tawi-Tawi, a woman in her middle sixties, inherited her djin abilities when her grandmother died. Upon the grandmother's death, the *saitan* with whom she regularly communicated began communicating with the granddaughter. She had already been taught some rituals by her grandmother and the *saitan* taught her more. At the time I knew the djin, her daughter was assisting her in ceremonies, and she claimed that upon her death the daughter would inherit her powers. A powerful male djin told me he was never interested in becoming a djin until his father died. One night while he was sleeping, his father's spirits came to him and told him he should become a djin. Shortly thereafter, he became ill, the *saitan* began visiting him, and he became a djin. Another man became seriously ill and while his father, a djin, was treating him, the *saitan* told him he should teach his son the djin skills when he recovered. The father did so and the son eventually became a djin. Another djin also said he became a djin as the result of a serious illness. At three years of age, he became critically ill. The *saitan* causing his illness said they would leave his body only if the parents (who were not djin) promised that the child would become a djin when he reached adulthood. The parents promised that would be done, and the child was allowed to recover. When he reached his early twenties, the *saitan* again came to him and he has been a djin ever since. Most typically, then, the *saitan* decide who shall become a djin, and quite often the *saitan* select the children of djin after their deaths. Some djin have a special *saitan* who stays with them throughout their lives and is their contact with the spirit world. Frequently, these personal *saitan* are also called "djin."¹⁴ Other djin told me that the individual has no choice, but is selected by Tuhan who then sends the *saitan* to communicate with him.

When illness is brought to a djin for treatment, he must first determine which spirits are causing the illness before he can approach them to bring about a cure. There are almost as many ways for discovering this information as there are djin, since each has a method somewhat uniquely his own, although commonality runs throughout the various means. One djin used the following diagnosis. When a person came to him for treatment, he first determined if he could assist the patient by placing a sewing needle lightly in a white bowl of water. If the needle sank to the bottom, it meant the case was beyond his powers. On the other hand, if the needle floated, it signified he could deal with the illness. To discover the cause of the illness, the djin then

14. Such personal *saitan* are an important part of the curing practices of the Sitangkai Bajau. They are frequently named and apparently have been in families for generations. In general, the Sitangkai Bajau have a much more elaborate cult of shamanism than that found in Tawi-Tawi (Nimmo, "The Shamans of Sulu").

placed a small stick in the same bowl of water. He stirred the water with his finger and allowed it to become stationary. If the stick settled in a position pointing in the general direction of the cemetery island, the djin knew an ancestral spirit of the patient was causing the illness. But if the stick pointed toward islets known to be inhabited by saitan, then these spirits were responsible for the illness. Next, the djin questioned the patient carefully about his illness and any behavior that might have offended the spirits. Usually the patient, his family, or the djin could think of something that might have caused offense to a spirit.

In order to treat the illnesses brought to him, the djin needs cooperation from the responsible spirits. He must communicate with them to discover why they are causing the illness and how it may be eliminated. This can be done in various ways. Virtually all djin begin ceremonies by burning incense, the smoke of which is believed to attract spirits if accompanied with prayer incantations. Some djin sprinkle perfume over the ill person and/or themselves in order to attract the spirits. Green, white and yellow are favorite colors of the saitan, and consequently, clothes of these colors are sometimes worn by the djin as well as the patient. Small flags of the same colors are sometimes placed in appropriate places to attract the spirits. Several djin, male and female, told me their long hair attracts the saitan, and if they cut it they will lose their powers. Because some saitan are attracted to dancing, the djin sometimes dances until possessed by the saitan who then reveals the remedy for the illness. One djin told me that when she wants to contact the saitan, she puts on her djin clothes and calls to them in the Tausug language. If they do not appear, she calls in Malay, and if they still do not appear, she calls in Sama. When the saitan appears, she sends him to discover the cause of illness. She said it was like sending a letter, only faster. One djin never wore Western-style trousers, because the saitan would not come to him if he did. Some claim the saitan like cleanliness and if their boats or houses are not kept immaculate, the spirits will not appear. Special chants attract some saitan, and it is only through such chants that the djin can communicate with them. Some saitan are very traditional and will not come to djin who live in houses with partitions. Other saitan will not visit houses at all. Therefore, the djin must conduct his ceremonies in a houseboat even though he may be a house-dweller. One djin built a special room onto his house where he kept the various paraphernalia he used in curing. When he wanted to communicate with the saitan, he sat in the room until they spoke to him.

Many djin communicate with spirits during a trance, some are visited by spirits during their sleep, and some are able to communicate by

performing proper rituals. For many, however, a trance is the most critical part of communication and is usually brought on through dance or chant. With or without the fast accompaniment of drums and/or gongs, the djin dances until the spirit possesses him, at which time he falls into a trance during which the spirit delivers answers to questions he has posed. Some djin chant special chants in a language only they know until they go into a trance to communicate with the spirit world. Some lie quietly while in a trance whereas others shake convulsively. Many babble in the language of the saitan which can only be understood by the djin himself or another djin who translates for the audience. Some djin write messages on paper or white cloth in a script which only they know. They then go into a trance, and upon awakening are able to interpret the writing, the message from the saitan. Some have notebooks of such writing, passed on to them by other djin, which they interpret after going into a trance.

Djin describe the trance experience differently. Some say it is totally devoid of physical feeling, since their spirits have left their bodies to visit the spirit realm. Others claim the experience is painful as the saitan enters their bodies. One man explained the sensation of a trance as a cool wind blowing over his body, while another said the entrance of the saitan was like a gentle touch on the arm. The djin do not consume any kind of intoxicant or hallucinogen to bring about a trance. However, one type of djin drinks sea water prior to communication with saitan. Called *duata* and most commonly a woman, this djin communicates with sea saitan who demand the sea water. The communication occurs while the sea water is in the *duata's* stomach, following which it is vomited.

Most djin do not charge for their services since their clientele are usually relatives. Many believe their abilities are gifts from the spirits or Tuhan, and it is their responsibility to help those who are ill. They are, however, almost always given gifts for their services. The most famous djin are sought by nonrelated persons and sometimes even non-Bajau. For such services, it is understood that payment will be given. One djin told me he was paid three to five pesos for minor ceremonies. Another djin, an old woman, received ₱24, seven gantas of rice, a bag of young coconuts, some items of clothing, dishes and candles for an elaborate curing ceremony she conducted for a land-dwelling Sama family.

Each family alliance group usually has at least one djin among its members, and more typically several. Ages of djin vary. The youngest I saw was a man in his mid-twenties while the oldest was probably in his early seventies. Generally, the older djin have greater status and are sought more frequently. I observed no status differences between

males and females. Individual abilities determine status rather than sex. Among the Tawi-Tawi Bajau, the *djin* work individually, only occasionally assisting one another at large ceremonies. Virtually no *djin* are full-time practitioners. Most practice their profession when need dictates, while the rest of their lives are indistinguishable from other Bajau. Although I did no psychological testing, my impression is that the Bajau *djin* are not psychological deviants or social misfits as such persons have sometimes been described for other cultures. Indeed, I would say the Bajau situation is the reverse. Most *djin* hold positions of leadership in other arenas of Bajau life and are among the most respected members of the community.

The *djin*'s powers are usually limited to their lifetime, and consequently *djin* are treated like anyone else when they die. Exceptions are those who were especially powerful during their lives whose spirits are considered very temperamental and must be dealt with in the most cautious of ways. Sometimes the body of such a powerful *djin* is buried by itself, as opposed to the communal graves in which Bajau traditionally bury their dead. The body may even be buried away from the main cemetery. I knew of two such isolated graves in Tawi-Tawi. Both were a short distance from the main cemetery and covered with small coral pieces. Small green and white flags as well as receptacles for offerings were placed in the crevices of the coral. Each had an elaborately carved grave marker and a canopy of white cloth, stretched over four poles, to shield it from the sun. Such graves are visited periodically to seek the assistance of the spirit of the deceased *djin*.

Few Bajau totally discount the powers of the *djin*, although intensity of belief varies. Some firmly believe the powers of the *djin* and would never question their abilities, although acknowledging some are more powerful than others. Other Bajau, especially the younger ones more familiar with Western medicine, openly doubt the abilities of the *djin* and seek their assistance only when family pressures cause them to do so. I encountered one man, very traditional in all other respects, who told me all *djin* were charlatans and their curing successes were sheer coincidence. His views, however, were exceptional. Most Bajau agree that the *djin* are necessary for conducting proper ceremonies to combat certain ailments, but if the *djin*'s powers do not work, they are amenable to other treatments, as the *djin* themselves usually are.

I M A M

The title of *imam*, obviously borrowed from Islam, is used rather indiscriminately among the Bajau to refer to anyone who conducts

certain rituals for the life cycle ceremonies, such as weddings and incisions. Consequently, djin are sometimes called imam. In the late 1960s, only three Bajau men knew Arabic chants and were regarded as imam, and were not considered djin. They were brothers who learned the chants from their father who in turn had learned them from a land-dwelling Sama. None claimed to be a djin and all perceived their duties as quite different from the djin. According to them, the djin treat illness through contacts with the saitan, whereas they cannot contact the saitan, but rather know Arabic chants that make certain ceremonies effective. One of them claimed that the Arabic chants pleased Tuhan, but for the most part Tuhan was not an important ingredient in their ceremonies. The chants themselves have magical powers which assure success.

Sometimes the imam use a copy of the *Koran* for chanting; more often they do not. The chants are memorized and can be recited without the aid of the *Koran*. The imam do not know the meaning of the chants and cannot translate or even pronounce any specific word in the *Koran*. One imam did not even have a copy of the *Koran*. They claimed the *Koran* was a sacred book, but their copies were old and ragged and given no special treatment. The same chants were used for all ceremonies they conducted, namely ceremonies of marriage, curing, and burial. The imam were only part of the ceremonies and were always assisted by djin. It must be emphasized, however, that for most of the Tawi-Tawi Bajau, the imam as a person knowledgeable in Islamic chants plays little or no role in their lives. The three imam officiated only for their own kin groups, and unrelated persons did not seek them for their ceremonies.

S U M M A R Y

This article has discussed the physical environment, social organization and religious beliefs of the Tawi-Tawi Bajau. This small population of boat-dwellers in the southern Sulu Islands has retained much of its indigenous religion and magical beliefs although influences from the religion of the surrounding Muslim peoples are evident. The Bajau have various origin stories which explain the beginnings of human life and how they arrived in Tawi-Tawi. Many spirits populate their spirit world and are believed responsible for the illnesses and misfortunes which occasionally visit them. Ritual leaders, djin, are able to communicate with these spirits and are called upon to propitiate them during curing and life cycle ceremonies. These ceremonies will be discussed in a later issue of *Philippine Studies*.