

# Medak River Kubu

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The Kubu tribes in Southern Sumatra achieved a certain notoriety from Van Dongen's time. Following his investigations in 1906, he asserted that one of the tribes called Kubu-Ridan (named after the small river on which they lived) completely lacked all vestiges of religion<sup>1</sup>. His research, carried out rather superficially, (information was gathered through petty officials, members of other tribes who acted as interpreters, from people frightened, brought out of the jungle etc.) could not be verified later because the particular Kubu group studied soon died out from small-pox.

Except for the above mentioned work, other comments about the Kubu were limited to their brief contacts with odd individuals, mainly officials from the Dutch colonial administration, up through 1939 when Visser mentioned nomadic Kubu in the region of Djambi<sup>2</sup>.

No ethnographic research on the Kubu has been carried out since the last war; as a result "*A Special List of the Tribes of Primitive Hunters and Food Gatherers*" published in 1958 states that presumably all Kubu have settled and become farmers or at least are in the intermediate stage between farming and nomadism.<sup>3</sup>

Considering this, I decided to visit the Kubu tribes in the course of field work I carried out in Indonesia in 1970-1971. My main point of interest was to find out whether there are still nomadic Kubu and

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1. Dongen G. J. van, Bijdrage tot de kennis van de Ridan-Koeboes. "Tijdschrift voor het Binnenlandsch Bestuur", Batavia 1906, t. 1-6, s. 225-253.

2. Visser, Enkele aantekeningen over de heidensche zwervende Koeboestammen (door de Maleiers Keoboe liar genoemd) in de onderafdeeling Seroelangoen (Djambi). "Mededeelingen der Vereeniging der Bezaghebbers in Nederlandsch-Indië" 1939 vol. LII. s. 34-38.

3. "Bulletin of the International Committee on Urgent Anthropological and Ethnological Research" Vienna 1958 No 1 s. 36.

whether they still retain basically the same culture as the Kubu from the Ridan river. I considered, of course, that 64 years elapsed since van Dongen's research and that the itinerant traders and others had influenced them.

My first effort to reach Kubu in the Musi Rawas region failed. However, I managed to find the Kubu camping out in the forests on the Medak river which in turn is a tributary of Lalan river in the Banjung Lintjir district (in the Musi Banjuasin region). Information I had before coming to Indonesia was very scanty. From Bater, of the university of Indonesia in Jakarta I obtained information about the Kubu, based upon the Dutch and German research material because Indonesians have not done any investigation in that area. Likewise the Moslem University in Palembang did not have any information on this subject.

The Social Department of the provincial administration for South Sumatra gave me scripts dealing with the primitive tribes living in the various regions of their area.<sup>4</sup> However, all this information referring to the nomadic Kubu was either second hand or else largely concerned with the so-called Kubu Kampung. These are the settled Kubu living adjacent to the Indonesian villages or on river banks for several generations.

I was told by Dr. Djufri, who is one of the co-authors of these scripts and who is one of the few who know the Kubu, that no one has actually lived among the Forest Kubu. Yet these forest people have had the best chance of retaining old cultural forms. According to these scripts the Kubu are animists, but according to other data obtained from the same Social Department they are all Moslem. As it turned out, their conversion to Islam was strange. It happened that a boat following the river on which the Kubu were settled, left behind with them as many Moslem catechisms as there were shelters in the village. These catechisms were bilingual: Arab and Indonesian. Of course they were quite useless to the Kubu who are illiterate in any language.

Remnants of these catechisms I found later in the Kubu shelters. The pages were used as wrappings to roll cigars. Naturally the Kubu have no idea that as a result of such missionary effort they have become officially Moslem.

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4. *Kebudayaan Suku Anak Dalam Di Kwewedanaan Rawas (Kabupaten Musi Rawas) Palembang 1970.*

*Sedjarah Suku Anak Dalam Dan Usaha-Usaha Pembangunan Masyarakat Suku-Suku Terasing Di Daerah Banjung Lintjir (Kabupaten Musi Banjuasin). Palembang 1970.*

Regardless of these opinions (supposedly official) the Kubu themselves are considered to be a very dangerous tribe and a visit to them is presumed to be extremely perilous. At the government offices I was told that most likely I would be poisoned, or speared to death. My refusal of a military escort by the *camat* (district chief) of the Banjung Lintijir was regarded as foolhardy. However, in his office I obtained an assessment of the total number of the Kubu living in his area as about 1650 individuals of whom some 150 were said to have remained nomadic while the rest had long ago settled down on land. These data are nevertheless very inaccurate, especially when it comes to the nomads. I later estimated their number to be at least twice the official figures. Similarly, the official data were inaccurate as to the tribal organisation of the Kubu, which in some details might have concerned the settled folk but in no case the Forest Nomads.

The best information about the Forest Kubu have the inhabitants of the villages located not far from their settlements, who occasionally trade with them. They think the Forest Kubu are peaceful (although they show certain uneasiness about them), not dangerous and sometimes they do try to extend their own "care" over them. But their knowledge of the Forest Kubu is superficial and is limited to certain aspects of the material culture. The information I did obtain from the inhabitants of the village on the bank of the Lalan river about the social life and religion of these people was completely misleading. Thus the Forest Kubu, according to my informants, did not have any marital institution but they were said "to get together as animals do". Nor were they supposed to have any religion. As they expressed it—they are "*bukan agama*" (of no religion).

Thus armed with the information such as was available I arrived by boat in a small settlement of the Kubu nomads who at that time were camping out on the river Medak. With me came also Amir Burchan at the request of the authorities as a guide. He was the owner of the boat which has been to the Forest Kubu repeatedly, trading and, as he claimed, taking care of them as the head of the *marga* (subdistrict). Contrary to all warnings, I was received hospitably by the Medak Kubu. The owner of the shelter was awakened during the night and was advised that I was very tired and would like to find a place to sleep. During the following day I would explain the reason for my coming. Without a word he offered me a place to rest. The following day I became acquainted with the other members of the settlement and received permission to stay with them. After two days I sent Amir back asking him to pick me up later. Soon I was able to converse with the Kubu, who use a dialect of the Indonesian language. During the five days

I remained in the camp, before the Forest Kubu were to start on their great trek, my observations showed the Kubu in a very different light from that in which they had been initially described to me. Visits to other Kubu settlements in the area helped me form new ideas about them.

The materials I obtained here as well as among the settled Kubu showed that even the term *Kubu* is inexact. In the area of Bajung Lintjir under this name there are three groups each at a very different cultural level. One of these has retained traces of a more complex culture probably a relict of the Sriwidjaja state which existed in the IXth to XIVth centuries. The second group are the aforementioned settled Kubu (Kubu Kampung) whose present culture is a result of the nomadic base overlaid by local Indonesian cultural influence (specifically the inhabitants of Palembang) and to a lesser extent the Javanese. The third are the Forest Kubu (Kubu Hutan) or perhaps the proper Kubu (Kubu asli). The Forest Kubu live rather in their own cultural milieu but avoid contact with their neighbours as long as these do not threaten them. Kubu Medak knew other Kubu groups living on the Kandang and Mansau rivers and they knew of the settled Kubu Kampung on the Lalan river but have no contact with them. They consider these inhabitants as being socially inferior to themselves, that is the Kubu who abandoned freedom of movement which they regard as something of greatest importance.

With their Indonesian neighbours they have very rare contacts, mainly of a commercial nature. Repeated efforts by the Indonesian authorities to contact them are received even with friendly attitudes. They would gladly see more efforts to treat them for malaria which harasses them greatly but are decidedly hostile to any effort to impose any authority upon them. They claimed that they would chase away or even kill anyone who would try to follow them into the jungle considering such a person a sort of government spy. This however is not out of xenophobia. They have offered me to join them in such migration. But this only because they became convinced that I am not a representative of the authorities and therefore harmless to them; perhaps also due to the contents of my medical kit.

Kubu live from hunting and gathering. Their only weapon is *kujur*, a wooden spear with a crude hardly worked over shaft and metal point purchased from traders. With this spear they hunt all sorts of animals considered by them as edible: all non-carnivores with the exception of the monkeys, wild pigs, buffalos and snakes. The buffalos have a hide too tough to penetrate with such simple weapon and no one would risk wounding the great animal. These spears also serve as

defence against predators: the tigers in the main and the attacking crocodiles.

Crocodiles they hunt with a great iron hook, *pancin*, fastened with long rattan ropes to two trees one on each side of the river. The bait is a chunk of meat. The crocodile who swallows the bait cannot cut through the rattan line because it easily dissolves into individual fibers which get in between the teeth. When the reptile tires out, they come in their canoes and kill it off with their spears. Crocodiles are now rare in that area but valued for their meat and more for their hides which the traders covet. The value of the hide is according to its length.

Probably in the past they were familiar also with the blow gun but it got abandoned, yet is still within the memory of some elder men. The majority, however, have never even heard of such a weapon. Why the blow gun was abandoned I never discovered. But its original name *tulub* remained while Sumatran Indonesians call it *pana*.

While camping over rivers they generally catch fish on a hook and nylon line—both coming from the traders. Hooks were known for a long time but nylon lines are of recent introduction replacing slender lines of rattan. These lines are either hand-held or tied to the nearby bushes. The bait is mainly in the form of small fish chopped into pieces.

Fish are also caught with a special spear made of a bamboo shaft and an iron with a hooked point which came into use about 1960 through contact with their Indonesian neighbours. These spears they purchase from the itinerant traders. Characteristically, the fish spear point is called *mata kujurikan* by the Kubu, that is "spear's eye" while the complete spear is called by them *srampan*. Thus the Kubu name for the spear's point has been adapted from the name of a much longer known common spear. Fishing with a spear is done exclusively at night, two men making up the crew of a canoe. One sits with a paddle in the rear, the other stands at the prow attracting the fish with the light of a lamp, holding the spear in the hand to spear the fish as they come near. Such a method requires a strong light: an ordinary flame is usually too weak. Therefore lamps or lanterns from traders are in great demand. Fishing by the above mentioned method is the exclusive domain of men. Women and children on the other hand fish with the aid of baskets called *tangau* which are plaited of rattan. In this case they wait with the baskets over clear shallow water or over deeper waters stretched out on the floor of their shelters or water rafts. When fish appear they try to scoop them up with a single swipe of the basket.

The most basic source of the sustenance is however collecting in the forest. Edible plants are gathered mostly by women, but men, when not hunting or fishing, also engage in this activity. Collecting rattan fibers has become lately a very important factor in inducing cultural change among these people.

While the usual gathering activity forces constant change and transfer from one place to another according to the availability or exhaustion of food supply, the collecting of rattan on the contrary favors a longer period of residence in one place: a few months at a time on the river accessible to the itinerant rattan traders. This in turn permits the construction of more comfortable and larger shelters, and also after collection of rattan in an area allows travel to other areas by boat which in turn results in greater contacts with the other Kubu and other local groups.

During the rattan collection time hunting becomes secondary because for rattan the Kubu can purchase from the traders not only manufactured goods but also food, most especially rice.

From their campsites the Kubu go out to collect rattan between 8:00 and 10:00 in the morning and return between 3:00 and 5:00 in the afternoon. All inhabitants of the settlement collect rattan in the same areas. In the encampment remain only the sick, feeble, children and perhaps an old woman to take care of them. During the rattan collecting all workers stay close together so they can hear each other's voices. Should rain begin they immediately rush together to raise a temporary shelter for all.

Rattan lianas are covered with thick bark covered with sharp spines which must be removed. This is done with a special type of knife called *parang*. Thus debarked the lianas are sliced into chunks and piled up, separately for each family. They are then tied up in bunches numbering 100 each, occasionally smaller ones of 50 pieces. An adult man may, in a place where rattan is abundant collect up to 300 pieces in a day; a woman up to 200. However a good collection for a man is 200 or so pieces of rattan lianas. Tying up the lianas brought by different family members into single bunches called *ikat* (meaning tying up), is sometimes very complicated because the Kubu cannot add. Therefore it is necessary to untie the lianas and make new bunches counting them up. The women carry bunches of rattan on their heads and drag long lianas behind themselves to the canoes. After return to the campsite, the rattan lianas are soaked in water and are kept there secured from sinking to await the arrival of the traders.

In addition to rattan occasionally forest tree pith is collected with traders in mind.

During the summer encampments rice forms the basic food of the Forest Kubu. It is purchased from the traders, cooked either completely without salt or with a very small amount of it, and eaten together with sour forest fruits or with a small amount of fish. This diet is complemented by other forest plants, with fish and roasted meat. Weak tea is their main drink. However, coffee with sugar is considered a delicacy while the Kubu sometimes buy candy for the children.

Preparing for the travel the Kubu take with them a certain supply of rice. However during the annual migration the basic diet is made up also of wild edible plants, wild honey, and wild game, while boiled water serves as a drink.

Of the game encountered in the forest the Kubu refuse to eat wild boar's meat believing that it causes headaches. Also meat of the tigers, monkeys, buffalos and snakes is not eaten. As to the meat of the malay bear I met with conflicting opinions, and I suppose it is in their menu.

Food is prepared by women twice during the day time. In the morning the leftovers from the previous day are eaten; in the afternoon, returning to their camp, they prepare the main meal. Each family gets its food supply independently. Only the old and the sick are helped by the inhabitants of the camp. The leftover food, especially of very large game, is divided among all.

While camping near the river the Kubu people frequently take a bath while the young people swim and dive. Everyday too, they scratch dirt from their bodies with large slivers chipped from bamboo trunks.

The Kubu commonly suffer from a form of itch (probable psoriasis), mainly on their hands and legs. They treat this by first heating the infected member over fire and then slowly and systematically scraping it in with wooden slivers. Since this activity takes place in the shelters the fire is always kept in a pot of clay, resembling a large, heavy pot, placed in the center of the shelter. Into this fall dried bits of skin but some remain on the mats and the house platform.

At the time I suggested that in order to avoid mutual contagion they should drop the scraped skin outside the house. I didn't know then that this is not contagious from individual to individual.

Picking lice from the head hair is a task which combines hygiene and social function. This is accomplished with a sharp bamboo sliver. Most often the spouses indulge in this mutual grooming, or the parents thus groom the children. They carefully comb through the hair with such pieces of bamboo, while the groomed person's head rests on their knees. All this is done usually during the rainy days when rattan

collection is impossible.

Their clothing is rather simple. Men wear short, white trousers and sometimes also shirts. Some of them also use sarongs made up of rectangular, cotton pieces, tied at the waist and dyed in the patterns imitating the batiks. This is the type of clothing worn generally by simple Indonesian peasants. The sarongs however, are worn mainly in the encampment. Traveling through the forest they are instead worn on the head formed as turbans. Women dress in sarongs tied over the breasts but occasionally instead they wear a cotton skirt and a light colored blouse. Many of them also own short trousers more suitable for work in the forest.

To carry the children both men and women use *slendang*. This is a cotton shawl about 3 meters long of either batik or dyed like batik. The women tie *slendang* diagonally across the upper body and right arm carrying the child at the left hip. Men on the other hand tie it tightly across their chests to prevent the children (carried on the father's back) from excessive fidgeting and shifting. Small children run about completely naked. Older youngsters wear little pants or skirts. A girl wears a blouse or brassiere only after puberty when her breasts are developed. Sometimes the women's dress is decorated with glass beads.

The Kubu nomads construct four types of living shelters called *gobuk*. The simplest kind, built during travels, are erected on a platform about 1 meter above the ground, roughly one and a half meters wide and up to two and a half meters long. Its length depends upon the distance between the two trees against which the structure is supported. Such a platform rests from the rear against two trees growing close together but in the front, if there are no trees, by two poles *lantai*, buried in the ground. This is the case when no trees are growing in a suitable position. An inclined roof raised up in front about 120 cm and at the rear about 80 cm is built on the platform. In this construction all possible natural shapes of the boughs are cleverly applied, but when these are lacking sticks are slit with a big knife. All joints are strengthened by liana bindings. The platform is strongly constructed because its frame is of thick poles. Upon it they place another layer of more slender sticks and above them mats are laid out. The roof poles upon the frame of poles are more slender than those of the platform. The roof is supported by very thin poles stuck into the edges of the main platform. The lower ends of these supporting poles are notched so as to fit into the side frame. The roof itself is made up of leaves of the plant called *serdan*. If the shelter of this type is too small for the family another is constructed usually joined to it. The shelters are, of course, without walls.

Under the shelter are kept piles of firewood. At night a small fire is kept burning to protect the inhabitants from the cold and also to protect them from the mosquitoes.

More extensive and larger shelters are built for a longer residence in the same place. These are strengthened by a larger number of thicker poles because they support a much heavier platform. This platform is made up of extra strong poles set lengthwise upon the frame and these in turn are covered crosswise either with slender bamboo sticks or heavier sticks split in two. Mats are laid out upon these bamboos. The roof from one side touches the platform forming thus a sort of a wall. Occasionally on its narrower sides small extra roofs are built thus enclosing the shelter on three sides. At the open side a heavy log or pole is set. These poles have steps notched into them to make a ladder for the children, or else there might be a ladder tied with lianas.

When lacking appropriate trees nearby shelters are built entirely supported by poles. In this case they are low, only about 10 cm. above the ground. Lacking fire at night, they are rather cold and do not protect satisfactorily the people from the mosquitoes. Such shelters sometimes have a triangular protruding roof sticking outside.

Finally there is one more type of shelter, used only during the residence on a river bank. This type is built upon the rafts tied to the shore. It seems that this is not an original construction with the Forest Kubu but an imitation of the *rakjat*, the kinds of rafts on which the Kubu Kampung, and the Indonesian inhabitants of the shores of the Lalan river often live.

In all three types of the riverside shelters constructed for longer residence the roof construction is similar to that used in the forest shelters or else it is made up of evenly cut wide leaves, in two or more layers tightened together with rattan or a long bamboo strip. Thus the roof is strengthened and the rain water flows from it more easily. Probably this type of roof is patterned after the roofs on the boats of the itinerant traders. Surprised by rain while in the forest, the Kubu quickly put up small rain shelters without poles with roofing only over one side (powis-tail).

While the furniture of the shelters often differs in small details, it was basically limited due to the difficulties of transporting. As an example the entire property of a Tjutjik and his wife Sadiji, a very conservative (it was said) and childless couple was made up of:

- 1 pair of short trousers
- 1 male sarong
- 1 beaded necklace

- 2 large knives
- 2 spears
- 1 mat
- 3 plaited bags
- 1 basket
- 1 metal pot
- 7 fish lines of nylon with hooks
- 1 bundle of strong, slender thread used for fish line
- 1 tin plate
- 1 bowl
- 1 metal spoon
- 1 wooden ladle
- 3 nylon bags for supplies hanging from the roof
- 2 bamboo pipes for water
- 1 tin lamp
- 3 empty bottles
- 1 boat of planks
- 1 old, rotting dugout no longer used

Generally however the equipment of an average family is somewhat more complex. As a rule each family owns 1 to 3 light, aluminum pots, 2-3 metal cups, which with some are replaced by heavy glass, 1 or 2 spoons, 1 or 2 lamps made from empty canned food tins, 1 or 2 small wooden ladles, a bottle of kerosene, a couple of mats, (at least one for each person), at least 1 carrying basket for each woman, one (exceptionally two) spear(s) for each man as well as one cutting knife for each adult member of the family. In addition there is at least one bamboo pipe for carrying water for each adult in the family, iron fish hooks, nylon lines. All these things are stored upon a bamboo shelf called *ljat* hanging inside the shelter. Sleeping mats are spread over the platform but during the travel they are carried by women in the large carrying baskets with plaited tumelinas. The weapons are carried in the hands; the water pipes are slung over the shoulder.

There are also what we may call "luxury" items, possessions of only a few families. There are small, hard pillows which occasionally are decorated with plastic, tin or plastic plates, plastic water buckets, nylon soap box used to store tobacco, nylon bags, aluminum tea pot and gasoline lighter, large kerosene lamp for fishing (this is owned more or less by every third family), and one flashlight used for fishing for the entire group. In addition to these items which are usually taken along during their nomadic excursions, each family also has objects strictly connected with their campsites on river banks which are submerged when they desert the camp and again recovered upon their re-

turn. Here in the first instance belongs the boat: mostly of planks but sometimes a dugout. Next, there is a large heavy ceramic bowl purchased from their Indonesian neighbours. Also baskets for fishing, occasionally a fishing spear or a commercial fish net and a large hook for crocodile hunting are had by some people.

This inventory is supplemented by a few scanty livestock: chickens, which are kept and carried in cages, small dogs and cats. The latter are often tailless.

In the largest encampment of the Forest Kubu with which I am familiar, numbering 24 people, there were only two chickens and four dogs. Cats take care of themselves. The dogs usually do likewise but they are partly fed from leftovers which are served to them on large leaves. If a stranger is present in the camp such dogs as are considered aggressive are tied up with rattan strings.

The Forest Kubu like animals, and in addition to those already mentioned, they keep also wild captive animals. These are kept during the prolonged stay over the river but usually sold to the traders before going off on a migration. During my stay one of the girls kept a small monkey tied on a string while in another settlement a malay bear cub was kept in the cage which he systematically managed to pull apart and which constantly had to be kept in repair.

Within their own society the Forest Kubu trade by direct exchange without recourse to currency. However, in contacts with the itinerant traders there arose a necessity to set up a sort of an Ersatz currency. Dealing with these traders, Javanese or Palembangese, the Kubu resort to the standard rattan bundles each of 100 "sticks" of lianas but for smaller objects they buy a smaller bundle of 50 such. This "currency" is called *ikat* (meaning bundle, tying up), or *ikat kecil* (meaning "small bundle"). Exceptionally larger bundles of 150 rattan "sticks" are used but they have no special name.

As mentioned, an adult male can collect in the course of the day 200-300 "sticks" of rattan that is 2-3 *ikats*. During my stay among the Kubu the prices for different goods from the traders were evaluated as follows:

- 1 spear point—up to 30 *ikats*
- 1 point for fishing spear—over 5 *ikats*
- a shirt—20 *ikats*
- a dress for a small child—4 *ikats*
- 2 pieces of tobacco—3 *ikats*
- 5 packets of specially cut leaves used to roll cigarettes—1 *ikat*
- 1 small tin of "Seven Stars" ointment considered a universal cure for almost everything—4 *ikats*

The traders purchase from the Kubu not only rattan but also crocodile hides and forest tree pith.

In addition to the itinerant traders the Forest Kubu sometimes meet up with rattan collectors. These are the Indonesians from river settlements. On such occasions they also trade although on lesser scale as these people have less to offer. It is from them also that they buy the plank boats considered more practical than their own dugouts.

Trading results in some changes in the Kubu life. Certain activities become profitable. Owners of the flashlights complained to me that flashlight batteries were very expensive. On the other hand they also stated that in fishing with the spear the use of the flashlight much increased their efficacy and the total catch.

The Kubu buy only the spear points and the cutting knife blades. Knife handles and spear shafts they make themselves. The spear shaft is made of a long piece of wood about 240 cm. long. Its point is sharpened and covered with a pith called *malau*; the spear metal point is set upon it. Likewise the fishing spear shaft is prepared except that usually a long bamboo instead of wood is used. Occasionally the spear point is attached not by pith, but by metal ring. Attaching handles to the big cutting knives is somewhat more complicated. A rough block of wood serves initially as a handle. The lower end of the big blade has a long metal point which must be inserted into it. This rear point is heated up in the fire and then inserted into the wooden block by pounding it strongly against the ground. After a while the point is moved inside back and forth, taken out and heated up again. The process is repeated until the pointed end is completely inserted into the wooden block. With this finished, the rough block is thinned down and shaped up into a suitable handle with another cutting knife.

As mentioned, before going off on a long trip, part of their property is sunk together with the boats. Sarongs are wrapped up round the heads, bamboo water pipes and weapons are carried on the arms. Everything else is loaded up into the carrying baskets which are then carried by women. The carrying baskets called *prabot* are usually plaited by women but occasionally also by men. It takes 4–5 days to make such a basket.

The baskets are made as follows. First a square base is made of crisscrossing strips of rattan. These gently are bent to form the walls of the basket with the ends more oval in shape. Bamboo strips strengthen the sides of the basket both inside and outside and cross under the bottom of the basket. The rim of the basket is also strengthened with bamboo, and bast strips, which are sewed to the basket's walls with slender lianas.

Such a basket is 36–40 cm. in height and 35–40 in diameter. Two strong handles of lianas are fitted to the rim on both sides. To these a bast tumpline is attached.

For carrying and for the storage of small objects another type of basket used is called *sampit* which is plaited of bast. It is flat, rectangular, 20 by 25 cm. It is also covered with a rectangular plaiting of smaller strips. Those for the basket proper are about 1 cm. wide, those for the cover about 0, 4 cm. These baskets are made by women who need about 5 days to make one. The fishing basket called *tangat* is made by women within a day; it is oval in shape. The material used for it are narrow strips of split rattan except on the rim which is strengthened with heavier rattan. The stiffer elements of the basket of rattan are plaited crosswise with narrower lianas.

Women also weave the mats. These mats called *tikar* are usually double, made up of two layers sewed together. One is plaited of wide but thin bast about 1 cm. wide; the other, also of bast, has strips only about half cm. wide. Such mats measure about 105 × 190 cm., and about 10 days are required to make one. However, as this work is very much more time consuming than basket-making, I quite often found purchasing of the mats from the traders.

These commercial mats are favored because they are better made being woven of thinner material and occasionally ornamented with color strips woven into them.

The Forest Kubu move about or camp on river banks in single nuclear families or in small groups numbering 2 to 3 families. After a few months of staying together on a river bank there comes the time of migration. Then they start out as single families, and only later rejoin in the jungle and then camp together.

Nomadic groups camping out on a river bank and moving about in a definite territory form a tribe. All members of it are related. The tribe is headed by a *dzeyang*, a head man whose position is inherited from father to son or lacking such, a younger brother. The head man's authority is ill-defined. In most important matters he consults with the elder men of the tribe. His main function, it seems, is to watch the tribal tradition and law. During my stay with the Kubu Medak the headman was Somand. He was the son of Pilu and the grandson of Dullbum. Here the known tradition back into time ended.

In September 1970 the Kubu Medak lived in five river encampments which have no permanent names. The names given here have value only for general orientation, because often the same name is applied to different settlements. Frequently in discussion with them I had to characterise the place by some special feature, for example to

indicate that the encampment in question was the one in which there was a captive malay bear.

Once I made a Kubu Medak population census with the following results:

Name of Encampment	Number of shelters	families	men	women	boys	girls
Pangernian	1	2	2	1	3	4
Pemasan	6	6	6	8	5	4
Pelatar	5	7	7	7	4	8
Lubuk Buntek	1	2	2	1	2	4
Tjutjik	1	1	1	1	—	—
in the forest	2	2	2	2	probably children	4
Totals	16	20	20	20	about 40	

with the proviso that the number of children is not certain. There might be a few more.

Thus we have about 80 Kubu Medak. In addition to these it is claimed there are about 150 more belonging to the tribe Kubu Kandang and about 75 to the tribe Kubu Mensau on nearby rivers.

The Kubu family is monogamic and matrilineal. The young decide whom and when they wish to marry. Marriage is a simple matter. A young man moves over to the girl's camp (unless he already belongs to it), constructs a shelter and in the evening when all are present announces that he is taking the girl to his shelter. The fact that the girl lives in his shelter is considered a proof that marriage has been contracted. According to the information I obtained there are no marriage ceremonies at all. Divorce is unknown, but there were supposed to have been cases when a man deserted his wife. But as a result he had to leave the tribe. (However no specific instance of divorce has ever been cited to me.) My informants could not cite an instance of one man taking another man's wife, an offence according to the tribal law punished by death. Members of the tribe averred that women must be loyal to their husbands even if the latter left them. Should she become attached to another man, such a man would be killed. Of course, it is difficult to say how such cases would be dealt with in practice.

On the other hand, widows and widowers have the right to remarry. Marriages are early, soon after puberty. Marital prohibition includes uncles but marriage to mother's sisters' sons is permissible. As a rule, families have two children, the maximum number possible to maintain during nomadic phases of life. A third child may come but only after the two earlier are already half grown up. This system requires some

form of effective birth control measures, but I didn't investigate this matter.

There are two exceptions to the matrilocal rule of residence. A widower who comes from another band, upon his wife's death, usually returns to his own people taking his children with him. Also the tribe's headman who takes a girl from another tribe as his wife does not leave his people. In such a case his wife goes to live with him among his group.

The shelters have open walls. So when a young couple moves in they build their own somewhat on the side. The elder couples have sex relations at night discreetly covering themselves with mats.

The woman gives birth to children without any aid. Her husband cuts the umbilical cord. The Kubu claimed that premarital sex was unknown to them. During my stay I didn't observe any young women with children born out of wedlock. The newborn child receives only one name. Paucity of individuals in the group does not require any complicated identification nomenclature. Names are not inherited from the ancestors. The choice of the name is a free prerogative of the parents. Children are brought up with great laxity. During my stay I had not observed a single case of a child being punished by an older person. The children are early drawn into the adult activities of helping parents in household chores and in gathering. Small children are carried through the jungle either on mother's hip or more often on father's back. Elder children already collect rattan or edible plants on their own. Old people are cared for by the entire tribe. Food is shared with them but when the long trek through the forest is too difficult for them a solid shelter is built on posts over the river in which the old can await the return of the tribe.

It is said that when a member of the tribe becomes gravely ill during the migration they interrupt the trek and remain on the spot until he either recovers or dies. The dead are buried in the ground wrapped up in mats. In the grave they leave a small amount of food, tobacco, and if it is a man also his spear, while, if a woman, her carrying basket and betel nuts for chewing. The graves are not marked. When finished they stand over it silently for a moment and depart.

According to the Forest Kubu beliefs every person has a soul called *roh*. After death the *roh* remains in touch with the living. Therefore it is necessary to call the souls of their dead, to pray to them, to make food offerings. When these offerings are made they pray "In hiding we eat before the spirits of our ancestors who had departed. We offer rice!" It seems to me that this ancestor cult embraces spirits of all the dead as a whole and not the specific souls of particular persons.

These matters however, were very difficult to clarify. In any event the Forest Kubu worship not only their ancestors' spirits but also a higher spirit which they also call *Roh* or occasionally *Roh Hutan* meaning "Spirit of the Forest". This Spirit of the Forest is a benevolent being and to him go the souls of the "good" dead. But the souls of the "bad" people go to *Ado*, a bad spirit. This last being is found only in the forest or near the river. He has no camp and they never call him. They fear him, because he causes illness.

It is significant that their most important spirit is called "Forest Spirit" because the word "Forest" to the Kubu is symbolic of Good. When they wished to say that I was good man they called me "*Tuan Hutan*." But the word *Tuan* did not have the Indonesian meaning of a "Master" but was regarded as my own name. The difference between various kinds of *roh* they explained thus: there are many small *roh* of individual persons but there is only one "Great" *Roh*.

According to the available information, they have no religious observances beyond those already mentioned: offerings of prayers, food, colorful flowers or strongly fragrant plants. It is said that when offering food they light a small, bees-wax candle which they make for the occasion. The ancestor spirit is said to be present as long as the candle is lit. Melting away of the wax shows that he slowly eats the offering. I must state nevertheless that I have not been present at this ritual and am merely repeating what I had been told by the informants.

During my stay I saw very little evidence for development of art among these people. There are neither dances nor musical instruments, carvings or any plastic arts. Their only artistic effort I observed was in singing, sad melancholy tones or short verses—typical of the malay *pantuns*. In this short report it will be seen that the Kubu from the material viewpoint represent a very simple culture. Their spiritual life is expressed also with great simplicity but contrary to the reports, they certainly do have some rudiments of religion. Considering the nature of their life—hunting and gathering—we may expect that they will prove to the future investigators who are equipped for such study, to be real experts in the life of the jungle and perhaps replete with mythology and stories concerning animal and plant life. The people at their developmental level usually are such. We may assume also that the Kubu Medak do not differ qualitatively in their culture from the Kubu Ridan and that van Dongen's studies underestimated the latter.