

**FOUR PHOTOS FROM THE TELOM, 1962 Robert K. Dentan**



1. This toddler's young mom, fooling around with him while lying down on her back in the cool interior of the house, puts a woven pandanus-leaf basket on his head like a hat. Like most Semai parents, she won't interfere with his playing with a sharp bush knife, except maybe to say, "Sharp! Sharp! Be afraid!" Parents do not normally interfere with children's activities. If he were to cut himself (he didn't) she would cuddle and console him.



2. Carving the butt (duul) of a bush knife (yoid). There are several specimens of Semai machetes at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

photos of machetes in Skeat and Blagden 1906 I: 39 (from Ulu Jelai, no sheath); 62 (from Ulu Sungkai, with Malay-style handle, apparently no sheath); 212 (from Sg. Be[he?]rang, 7 mis upriver from Tj. Malim, with Semai-style handle, sheath); 298 (from S. Perak, Semai style butt, with sheath); see also Williams-Hunt 1952: Pl. 15d. Sheaths were apparently a luxury at the turn of the century.

#### DESCRIPTION:

"palaa" = blade c. 28-29 cm long, c. 32 mm wide at the widest point (for a woman's machete used to collect firewood).

"putik" = the spur of the blade embedded in the handle. "langgu" = collar. For years after the Emergency in the mid 20th century, men were able to cap the butt of the machete, where the blade inserts into the handle, with used machine gun shells. "m>1" = tip of the blade

#### Raw materials:

The butt is preferentially of kuak or ku>k root (*Ternstroemia bancana*; often called by a dialect form of the Malay name, tngaar, Burkill 1936:2181). The root is hard on the outside but slun, soft, at the core for a couple of weeks after it's been exposed to the sun, before it dries and becomew cigh, hard. You can also use; (1) smpaa' (durian, *Durio zibethinus*) which is easy to get but slun, soft; (2) trntaak (*Camptosperma auriculata*), which is unlikely to split and easy to work, and, say Skeat and Blagden 1906, I:318, used to make the broad butts of blowpipe darts. The name, of Malay origin, may include *C. oxyrachis*. (3) kldaap or kladaap or kaldaap (*Nauclea* sp.) . The name, which also occurs in several varieties in Malay, seems to be of Sanskrit origin (Burkill 1936:1560-1561), and not all Semai \ recognize it. The wood is bright yellow and does not split. (4) knraad or jree' (*Ficus gibbosa*). soft, not very good, but easy to get. (5) kabu' (*Ceiba pentandra*), soft, not very good, but easy to get.

Glue for the handle came from cooking kuak = tngaar sap (*Ternstroemia bancana*). This name is a variant of the Malay word. You do the cooking outdoors, since it inhibits the hatching eggs. (For the same reason, you wouldn't cook eggs over the same fire).

Mfg: Mostly men -bahbvh (make) duul yoid. It's a hard job and there were only 4-5 men at Pangkaad settlement on the R'eis River who could make one. There in 1992, people would give MR (Malaysian Ringgit) 2-5, equivalent then to a US dollar or two, as an 'opah, fee, depending on the heart (n>>s) of the buyer. The steps went:

1. -ka'kee' r'eis kua' = look for trnstroemia root
2. -coob = dig it up (if not exposed by running water)
3. -tet = chop off a jingkal = length from tip of middle finger to tip of thumb when spread.
4. -een juk, -dee' ha-bvh duul yoid = bring home store [till] you want to make a machete handle.

5. when someone asks you, time permits, and or the planting-time bird (apparently a migratory cuckoo, the ceep bnbak>>h) calls, you bore a hole in the lump you have with a sharp piece of iron.
6. -prmoid i langgu' = put it into its collar
7. -prmoid i yoid = put the blade in
8. -hntaa' pound in the butt as indicated in the photo or pound it on the floor until the pudik is solidly inside the handle.
9. -tarah = rough-hew the shape by adzing with another machete
10. -s>>r = whittle down smooth with a rawuut (lunate knife, Malay raut) or other smaller knife.
11. make the sheath (too complex a process to go here)
12. sand the handle smooth with the thickish sturdy leaf (about 8"/20 cm long) of a "female" cook pasvuk, *Teracera scandens* according to Ong hean Chooi's collection #224 at the Universiti Malaya. The "male" (probably another species of the genus) is smaller, with less abrasive leaves. It grows in recently abandoned fields, slaanyam. When the vine gets as big as your calf (this would have to be *T. macrophylla*), it contains a significant amount of water, enough to cook with, which isn't very bkvd, puckerish. The water is good for mild coughs, diarrhea or upset stomachs. You also use the leaves, which are hairy, gsee', to smooth your blowpipe, especially the inner tube, which you want to be sleec, slippery, so that it'll slide freely in and out of the supporting outer tube. The smaller vines (cbees, offshoots) are good for tying bundles of firewood. Waar people say this vine (like several other plants) is a friend/kinsman of field rice, so that you can't chop it away when clearing a swidden. Care: One way to clean a machete is to wipe it in the wood ashes of a fire and then wipe the blade clean on the bottom of your foot.



3. Risaaw demonstrating his notion of the ideal-type Semai, showing the most ideologically salient ethnicity-markers: a blowpipe, a shamanic barkcloth headband ornamented with tumeric (*Cucurma domestica*), and with a pounded barkcloth chestband.



4. Making string by rolling strips of bark together on one's thigh (see also under Baliir Ritual).