

# Chapter I: Nature

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Sunset is the hour when evil spirits of all kinds have most power. In Pêrak, children are often called indoors at this time to save them from unseen dangers. Sometimes, with the same object, a woman belonging to the house where there are young children, will chew *kuniet têrus* (an evil-smelling root), supposed to be much disliked by demons of all kinds, and spit it out at seven different points as she walks around the house.



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We now come to the spirits which are believed to attack both women and children at childbirth.

These are four in number: the Bajang, which generally takes the form of a pole-cat (*musang*) and disturbs the household by mewing like a great cat; the Langsuir, which takes the form of an owl with long claws, which sits and hoots upon the roof-tree; the Pontianak or Mati-anak, which as will be seen presently, is also a night-owl, and is supposed to be a child of the Languish, and the Pěnanggalan, which is believed to resemble a trunkless human head with the sac of the stomach attached to it, and which flies about seeking for an opportunity of sucking the blood of infants.

With the above are often associated the Polong, which is described as a diminutive but malicious species of bottle-imp, capable of madness and glammers, and the Pělěsit, which is the name given to a kind of grasshopper (or cricket?), but these latter, though often associated with the regular birth-spirits, partake also of the character of familiar spirits or bottle-imps, and are usually private property.

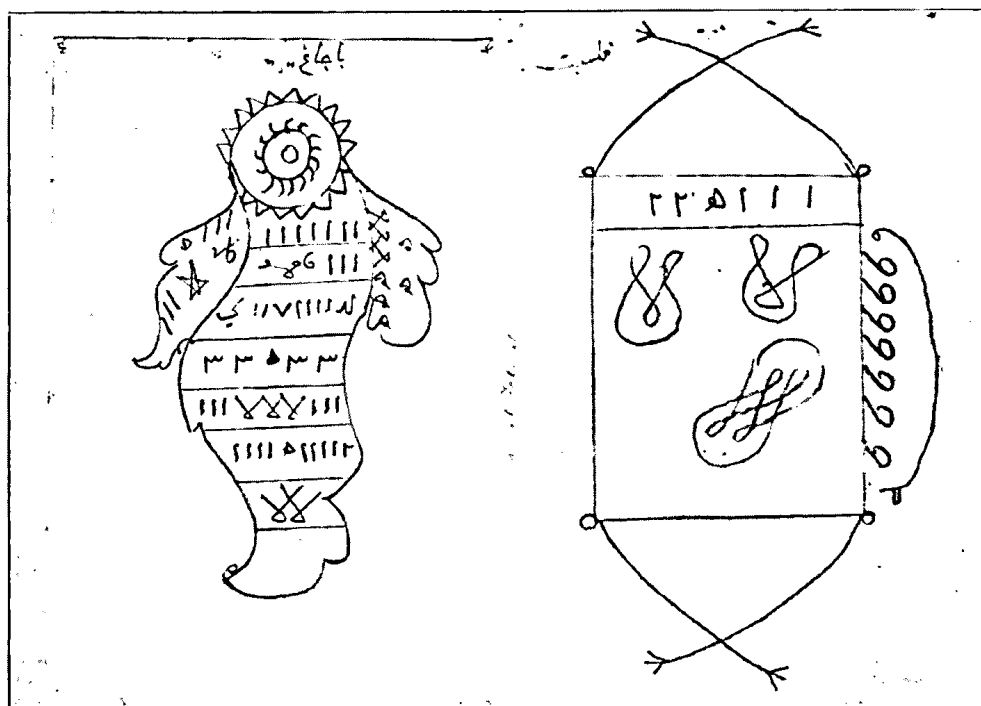


PLATE 6.—BAJANG AND PĚLĚSIT CHARMS.

Diagrams in the author's possession representing the Bajang and Pělěsit (birth-spirits).

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The Pěnnanggalan is a sort of monstrous vampire which delights in sucking the blood of children. The story goes that once upon a time a woman was sitting, to perform a religious penance (dudok běrtapa), in one of the large wooden vats which are used by the Malays for holding the vinegar made by drawing off the sap of the thatch-palm (měnyadap nipah). Quite unexpectedly a man came in, and finding her sitting in the vat, asked her, "What are you doing there?" To this the woman replied, "What business have you to ask?" but being very much startled she attempted to escape, and in the excitement of the moment, kicked her own chin with such force that the skin split round her neck, and her head (with the sac of the stomach depending from it) actually became separated from the trunk, and flew off to perch upon the nearest tree. Ever since then she has existed as a spirit of evil, sitting on the roof-tree whinnying (měngilai) whenever a child is born in the house, or trying to force her way up through the floor on which the child lies, in order to drink its blood.<sup>1</sup>

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1. "He (Mr. M.) said, 'Very well then, tell me about the *penanggalan* only, I should like to hear it and to write it down in English so that Europeans may know how foolish those persons are who believe in such things.' I then drew a picture representing a woman's head and neck only, with the intestines hanging down. Mr. M. caused this to be engraved on wood by a Chinese, and inserted it with the story belonging to it in a publication called the *Anglo-Chinese Gleaner*. And I said, 'Sir, listen to the account of the *penanggallan*. It was originally a woman. She used the magic arts of a devil in whom she believed, and she devoted herself to his service night and day until the period of her agreement with her teacher had expired and she was able to fly. Her head and neck were then loosened from the body, the intestines being attached to them, and hanging down in strings. The body remained where it was. Wherever the person whom it was wished to injure happened to live, thither flew the head and bowels to suck his blood, and the person whose blood was sucked was sure to die. If the blood and water which dripped from the intestines touched any person, serious illness immediately followed and his body broke out in open sores. The *penanggalan* likes to suck the blood of women in childbirth. For this reason it is customary at all houses where a birth occurs to hang up *jeruju* leaves at the doors and windows, or to place thorns wherever there is any blood, lest the *penanggalan* should come and suck it, for the *penanggalan* has, it seems, a dread of thorns in which her intestines may happen to get caught. It is said that a *penanggalan*



PLATE 7.—PĒNANGGALAN AND LANGSUIR.

Models of the Pĕnanggalan and Langsuir, the former being the head on the left.  
Note the length of the *Langsuir's* nails.

once came to a man's house in the middle of the night to suck his blood, and her intestines were caught in some thorns near the hedge, and she had to remain there until daylight, when the people saw and killed her.

“The person who has the power of becoming a *penanggalan* always keeps at her house a quantity of vinegar in a jar or vessel of some kind. The use of this is to soak the intestines in, for when they issue forth from the body they immediately swell up and cannot be put back, but after being soaked in vinegar they shrink to their former size and enter the body again. There are many people who have seen the *penanggalan* flying along with its entrails dangling down and shining at night like fire-flies.”

“Such is the story of the *penanggalan* as I have heard it from my forefathers but I do not believe it in the least. God forbid that I should.”—*Hikayat Abdulla*

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The only two spirits of this class which now remain are the Polong and the Pělēsit, and these, as I have said, partake to a great extent of the character of familiar spirits or bottle imps, and are by no means confined to a single “rôle” as the preceding ones have been.

The Polong resembles an exceedingly diminutive female figure or mannikin, being in point of size about as big as the top joint of the little finger. It will fly through the air to wherever it is told to go, but is always preceded by its pet or plaything (*pěmainan*), the Pělēsit, which, as has already been said, appears to be a species of house-cricket. Whenever the Polong wishes to enter (*di-rasoki*) a new victim, it sends the Pělēsit on before it, and as soon as the latter, “flying in a headlong fashion (*měnělěntang mějěronkong*),” has entered its victim’s body, which it usually does *tail*-foremost, and begins to chirp, the Polong follows. It is generally hidden away outside the house by its owner (*Jinjang*an), and fed with blood pricked from the finger. The description usually given of a Polong tallies curiously with the Malay definition of the soul.<sup>2</sup>

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2. “The origin of the Polong is this:—The blood of a murdered man must be taken and placed in a bottle (*buli-buli*, a bottle having a spherical or wide body and a long narrow neck). Then prayers are said over it, and something or other is read, I don’t know what, but it has to be learnt. After seven days of this worship, according to some people, or after twice seven days according to others, a sound is heard in the bottle like the chirping of young birds. The operator then cuts his finger and inserts it into the bottle and the Polong sucks it. The person who thus supports the Polong is called his father, or, if it happens to be a woman, she is his mother. Every day the parent feeds it with his (or her) blood. The object of doing this and the advantage to be gained from it are these:—if he entertains a feeling of anger against any one he orders the Polong to go and afflict him, that is to say, to cause him pain or sickness; or if a third person is at enmity with another he goes in secret to the person who keeps the Polong, and gives him a sum of money to send the Polong to attack the person against whom he bears ill-will. This is the use of it. The person who is tormented by the Polong, whether a virgin, or a married woman, or a man, cries out and loses consciousness of what he (or she) is doing, and tears and throws off his (or her) clothing, biting and striking the people near, blind and deaf to everything, and does all sorts of other things. Wise men are called in to prescribe remedies; some come and chant formulas over the head of the patient, others

The last of these spirits, the Pělěsit (or house-cricket?), which is the Polong's "plaything" or pet, flies to and for (*rasok sini, rasok sana*) till it finds the body which its mistress has ordered it to enter, harm only being done when it enters tail-foremost, as it generally does. It is occasionally caught and kept in a bottle by Malay women, who feed it either on parched or saffron-stained rice, or on blood drawn from the tip of the fourth finger which they prick for the purpose, and who, when they wish to get rid of it, bury it in the ground. When a sick person is affected by a Pělěsit (one of the signs of which is to rave about cats)<sup>3</sup> the medicine-man comes and addresses the Pělěsit (or Polong?), which has taken up its residence in the patient's body, with the words: "Who is your mother?" To this question the Pělěsit replies, speaking with the patient's voice, but in a high falsetto key, and giving the name of the person who sent it, whereupon prompt measures are taken to compel the owner to recall it.

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pinch his thumb and apply medicines to it. When the remedy is successful the sick person cries out, 'Let me go, I want to go home.' The doctor replies, 'I will not let you go if you do not make known who it is that has sent you here, and why you have come, and who are your father and mother.' Sometimes he (the Polong in the patient) confesses, and says 'Let me go, my father is such-a-one and lives at such-and-such a *kampong*, and my mother is so-and-so. As soon as the people know the name of the person who has contrived the attack and the reason, they let him go, and the sick person at once recovers his consciousness, but he is left weak and feeble. When a Polong attacks a person and will confess nothing, the person who is attacked shrieks and yells in anger, and after a day or two he dies. After death blood pours forth bubbling (*ber-kopak-kopak*) from the mouth, and the whole body is blue with bruises."—*Hikayat Abdulla*

3. Měrepet kata kuching.



# Appendix

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## Charm for laying a Penanggalan

Kur, ayam puteh,  
Kur, ayam hitam,  
Chatok-lah prut Manjang yang terjelajela itu,  
Chatok-lah hati, jantung, limpa Manjang itu,  
Dengan berkat, d.s.b.

## Charm for laying (lit. neutralizing) a Polong

Hei Si Tinjak, Si Tertib,  
Ular dan lipan berkělămëntang!  
Terbato' terber'sin,  
Berkat aku mĕnangkal polong dengan bajang hantu sakalian.  
Asal-'kau di tanah kang,  
Asal-'kau di tanaha dĕngkang,  
Pulang 'kau ka tanah dengkang,  
Datang 'kau menelentang,  
Pulang angkau meniarap,  
Pulang-lah angkau kapada jinjang angkau,  
Hei, Dato' Ulan, Dato' Puteh,  
Tĕtap-lah angkau kapada tempat angkau,  
Kapada hulu ayer paya berlĕndang  
Berkat, d.s.b.

## Charm for killing a Polong (apparently addressed to the Pelesit)

Ha, aku tahu asal 'kau mula menjadi,  
Si Ruchau nama 'kau mula menjadi,  
Datang menelentang, pulang 'kau menelangkop,  
Terlangkop jinjang guru-'kau,  
Dengan berkat la-ilaha, d.s.b.

## Charm for laying a Pelesit

Aku tahu asal 'kau menjadi;  
Minyak niyor hijau asal 'kau menjadi.  
Kalau ta' undor deri sini,  
Kena salang mak angkau,  
'Ku sula melentang mak 'kau!