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The Legend of the Dewadaru Tree

The Dewadaru tree is mostly found to the north of the island of Java, among the Sunda islands of Karimunjawa, in the Java Sea, bearing the coordinates of Latitude 5° 52' S, and Longitude 110° 26' E. It has a human population of approximately 20,000 people. The Dewadaru tree had been sanctified by the local inhabitants of the island for countless generations as a result of a myth perpetuated by the elders of the society. In one of the local dialects, "daru" means "blessing from heaven," while "dewa," (derived from Sanskrit) is the Indonesian term for "god." "Dewadaru" is thus interpreted as the "gift of the gods," implying that this tree genus is a tangible symbolic gift from the gods/esses to the islanders. To the local inhabitants, the Dewadaru represents the wisdom of the gods in maintaining the harmony, stability, and peacefulness of Nature. The Dewadaru is believed to be the protective guardian of the living souls on the Karimunjawa islands.

According to the legend, there was once a man living on the island of Java who was furious with his son for constant disobedience. The man, although he loved his son dearly, strove to inculcate in him a certain hard lesson. So one day he drove his son away from home with the warning that he was not to set foot on Java again.

Not willing to disobey his father again, he prepared himself for the journey. In sadness, the son left Mt. Muria where they dwelt and moved on to the open seas to the north. He sailed on a boat for many days through stormy weather and amidst huge waves, not really knowing his destination and perhaps with little will to survive. Then one day, his boat landed on the shores of a small, uninhabited island.

Meanwhile, from the peak of Mt. Muria in Java, the boy's father was secretly watching over his son clairvoyantly. But for some reason his vision was vague and unclear, and thus lost track of the whereabouts of the boy on that island. In the old Javanese language, the word "vague" is translated as kerimun. Thus the island became known as "Karimun-java."

The boy continued his journey inland bearing two wooden staffs as walking sticks to assist his journey. He retrieved these from the shore. These two short poles wounded him while his boat was capsized to shore by the sheer power of the waves. In the middle of the forest he poked the two staffs to the ground and started to rest from the tiresome journey. Miraculously, in that very instant the two staffs grew into magnificent trees. In awe of the incident, he named them "Dewadaru." In the present day, the place where he rested now stands the village of Nyamplungan.

Nowadays, although not too numerous, there is a substantial amount of Dewadaru trees growing on the islands-the descendants of the very first two. The remains of the original, fabulous Dewadaru trees may still be seen. The humps are there as if to substantiate the truth of the legend. The descendants of the magical trees grow in hill-slopes of the islands and are not easily accessible.

In proximity to the once glorious trees is a grave that until now is still being sanctified by the locals. On certain nights-such as Jumat Kliwon (a Thursday night occurring once in 35 days) of the Javanese calendar, the grave would be visited by pilgrims desiring the blessings of the spiritual adept to whom the grave belongs. The adept was known as Sunan Nyamplungan from whence the village received

its name. For centuries, the Dewadaru tree or wood is believed by the inhabitants of Karimunjawa to possess magickal powers. Tested through time, the wood is said to heal poisonous bites, and aches or illnesses in the abdominal region. Dewadaru wood is often carried as an amulet for personal protection against evil persons as well as a weapon against evil spirits. It is said that unlike other types of wood, the Dewadaru, even a small piece of it, sinks when placed in water.

Seventy-five kilometers away, as the crow flies, from the town of Jepara in Java, the Karimunjawa islands has a scary myth related to the Dewadaru. There is supposed to be a warning by the regional spirits that the sacred Dewadaru wood or tree is not to be taken out of the islands without the concession of the spiritual guardians of the area. Whosoever violates this, even by taking a small piece of the wood, incurs the wrath of Nature and calamity befalls him or her not long after. The usual mishap is the sinking or the immobility of the vessel that the person travels on to journey back to the mainland. Sometimes it could be a fatal illness after the trip. Often the person dies a tragic death in a freak "accident." At first this myth was regarded as a superstition, but several instances of this have been recorded.

In regards to the sinking of unfortunate vessels transporting the wood, some observers have noted of unusual events beforehand. Signs and warnings are given from the invisible world. Tales of these spirit communications and unheeded warnings abound. One story in particular relates of an old woman appearing to the captain of a vessel warning that the boat or ship was carrying the sacred wood and that this was taken from the region without permission and the required ceremony. Before disappearing, she warned the captain to unload the illicitly gained item. The captain did not heed her request and as a result, the vessel that he commanded en route to the Java mainland sank to the watery depths. Before the ship sailed even the villagers of the island were given omens that the vessel was doomed. Many of them heard blasting sounds on the nearby Nyamplungan hill. Careful investigations revealed nothing that could have produced those noises. It is said that to this day these sounds still occur whenever a ship or a boat is destined to plunge into Davy Jones' locker. In 1981 a mishap was prevented from occurring. There was a ship on its way to Java from the Karimunjawa islands. Somewhere in the middle of the sea its engine stalled and it became immobile. Moments later everyone on board, passengers and crew, panicked. Out of the calm sea, huge waves suddenly appeared, threatening to capsize the vessel. The captain realizing what was wrong in haste called upon the passengers to throw into the sea any Dewadaru wood that they were carrying. One person confessed that he had some of the wood in his possession. This was quickly cast into the sea with apologies to the spirit guardians of Karimunjawa. Amazingly, minutes later the waves subsided.

There are always two sides to a coin. The above myth also has a different aspect: if by any chance the Dewadaru wood finds its way outside of the Karimunjawa islands, the wood would double its potency and act as a powerful catalyst to awaken the dormant occult faculties within its possessor or user. The energy of the wood itself is a potent amulet against all forms of black magick and it also wards off negative entities, as mentioned previously. Dewadaru is also worn as protective amulets against the jettatore, the evil eye. From the metaphysical viewpoint, the dryads or spirits of the trees are especially empowered and their power or virtues are occultly inherent within the wood. The energy of the Dewadaru wood has a beneficent influence upon the psychosomatic system of man. The village shamans say that the Dewadaru is an exclusive gift to the people on the island, one reason why the spiritual guardians of the region do not permit the wood to be exported unless with special concession.

There are numerous strange stories related to the magickal Dewadaru tree or its wood. To the local inhabitants these are no longer a matter of belief but knowledge and conviction gained from day to day experience. Being sacred, the Dewadaru is used only for devotional and protective purposes. One hardly finds the villagers using this wood for the fashioning of furniture or as a building material; and

only the courageous would use it in their spiritual activities. The trees are not too numerous on the islands nowadays and therefore they are forcefully preserved. The Dewadaru is esteemed highly for their traditional and cultural value, and regarded as the totem guardians of the island. Because the occult power of the Dewadaru is well known, many disrespectful outsiders plunder the wood seeking to possess and misuse the power within it for egoic purposes. But it is also believed that Sunan Nyamplungan, the guardian of the island, or his proxy, plays a role in protecting the place from pilferers. Some say that the Adept sometimes appear as a gigantic bat to those who carry-out their negative intentions.

In 1992, the faculty of biology of the University of Gajah Mada conducted some research on the Dewadaru and the report of their analysis states that this tree is quite rare and not easily propagated. There are two strains to be found in the Karimunjawa islands: the first strain is Dewadaru *Baccaurea Sumatrana* from the Euphorbiaceae family. The second, *Fagraea Elliptica* from the Loganiaceae family.

The Dewadaru is supposed to be found solely in the Karimunjawa islands. Although almost unheard of, there is at least one Dewadaru tree to be found in Java in the area of Mt. Kawi in the region of Malang, East Java. Strangely enough, those living in this area sanctify the leaves rather than the wood.

Mt. Kawi is well-known for its pilgrimage site for those seeking wealth. The tree grows nearby a grave of someone who was known as Eyang Jugo, a metaphysical practitioner of royal descent. It is said that those sitting underneath the Dewadaru tree and is fortunate enough to have a leave or two fall on their heads out of their own accord, then this is a sign that great financial blessings or wealth will be bestowed upon them. It is thus not surprising to find people sitting or even spending the night 'neath the shade of the tree hoping to catch a leaf-fall. People come from all over Java hoping to transform their fate with a simple sitting. However, even with strong winds, seldom does a leaf detach itself from the branches with the hope and expectation of the sitters. Many return to their normal lives in disappointment. At times those standing quite a distance from the tree are often blessed with a falling leaf, often blown by a non-existing wind. There are tales of those who disbelieved in the sacredness of the tree and mockingly place a leaf upon their own heads. The result was that on their way home from the mountain they encountered tragic mishaps.

The origin of the Dewadaru tree at this particular site of pilgrimage has a similar tale as the one of Karimunjawa. Both were the result of the insertions of walking staffs into the grounds. According to the legend, Eyang Jugo once journeyed with a companion to his close friend R.M. Imam Soejono, who lived on Mt. Kawi. Along the way he rested in a shady area. It was there that he received intuitively from the spirit planes that his life was drawing to a close. He advised his travel companion that where he died, it was there that he was to be buried. Further along the way Eyang Jugo suddenly stabbed the ground with his staff and expired. The staff filled with the power of Eyang Jugo, suddenly grew into a tree. The Chinese people living in the precincts of Eyang Jugo's gravesite called the tree "Shian Toho," and this was translated into Javanese as "Dewadaru,"

As mentioned above, the Dewadaru wood is often carried as an amulet. Those able to acquire a rosary fashioned from it for spiritual or devotional purposes is indeed fortunate, for it is rare that anyone is given the permission to secure this wood from the islands and to tap into its inherent magickal virtues.