

Cultural Heritage of Sarawak

by Lucas Chin

Photographs by Junaidi Bolhassan

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
TO THE
PEOPLE OF SARAWAK

Cultural Heritage of Sarawak

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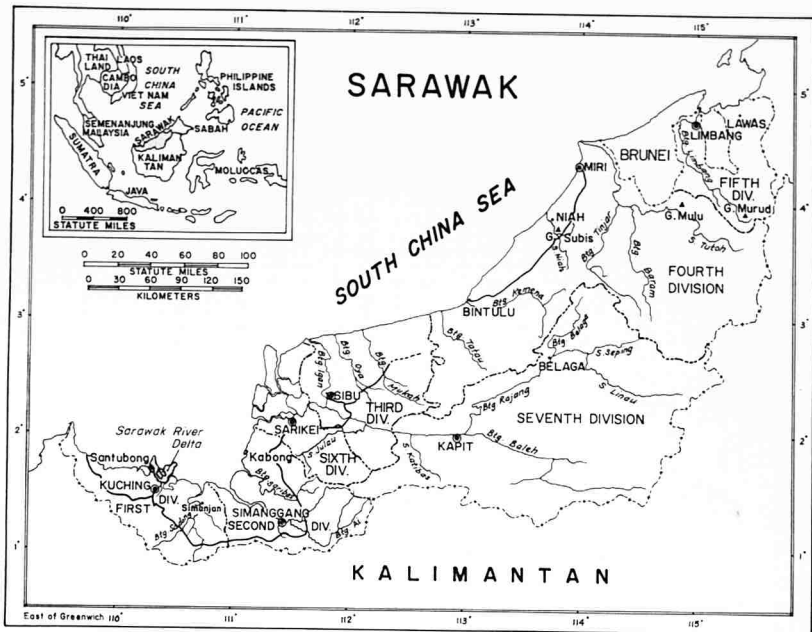
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FOREWORD

As Minister for Culture, Youth and Sports, it gives me great pleasure to write the foreword for this long overdue book on the cultural heritage of Sarawak.

I would like, first of all, to congratulate Encik Lucas Chin, Curator, Sarawak Museum, for his efforts in producing this book which has been written in the midst of a busy life. Encik Chin has been with the Museum for 24 years. Careful research and an intimate knowledge of Sarawak have enabled him to write on such interesting subjects, although some of them have only been superficially studied. I hope this book will stimulate scholars to carry out more comprehensive studies on some, if not all, of the subjects.

A wide range of subjects has been covered in this volume, from prehistoric artefacts recovered especially in the famous Niah Great Cave to the historical buildings constructed in the last quarter of the 19th century. It should, therefore, serve as a very useful introduction to students and laymen who are interested in the cultural heritage of Sarawak.

My Ministry and the Sarawak Museum, as part of their functions, carry out a series of projects such as the collection of oral traditions, legends and folklores, traditional games and plays and festivals and more recently in conjunction with the Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia, Cawangan Sarawak, will also look into the question of promoting and revitalising the traditional handicrafts of Sarawak.

CELESTINE UJANG JILAN
Minister for Culture, Youth and Sports,
SARAWAK

*Ministry of Culture, Youth & Sports,
KUCHING.*

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I would like to express my gratitude to my colleagues, Messrs. Peter Mulok Kedit, Tuton Kaboy and R. Nyandoh anak Kadir for their assistance in providing information on several subjects in this book and to Encik Junaidi bin Bolhassan, Museum Photographer, who took most of the photographs illustrated in the book. Peter Kedit, who joined the museum staff in 1973 after graduating with an M.A., is the museum's ethnologist. Tuton Kaboy, Research Assistant, has been dealing with ceramics in his many long years of service with the Sarawak Museum and has thus gained an intimate knowledge on the subject. R. Nyandoh, Museum Technical Officer, has been involved in archaeological fieldwork since he joined the museum staff more than 25 years ago.

I also wish to extend my gratitude to the Director of Public Works Department, Sarawak, for providing structural information on the declared historical buildings in Chapter Eleven and to Pengarah, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Cawangan Sarawak, for permission to make use of some text material in a booklet entitled *Handcraft in Sarawak*.

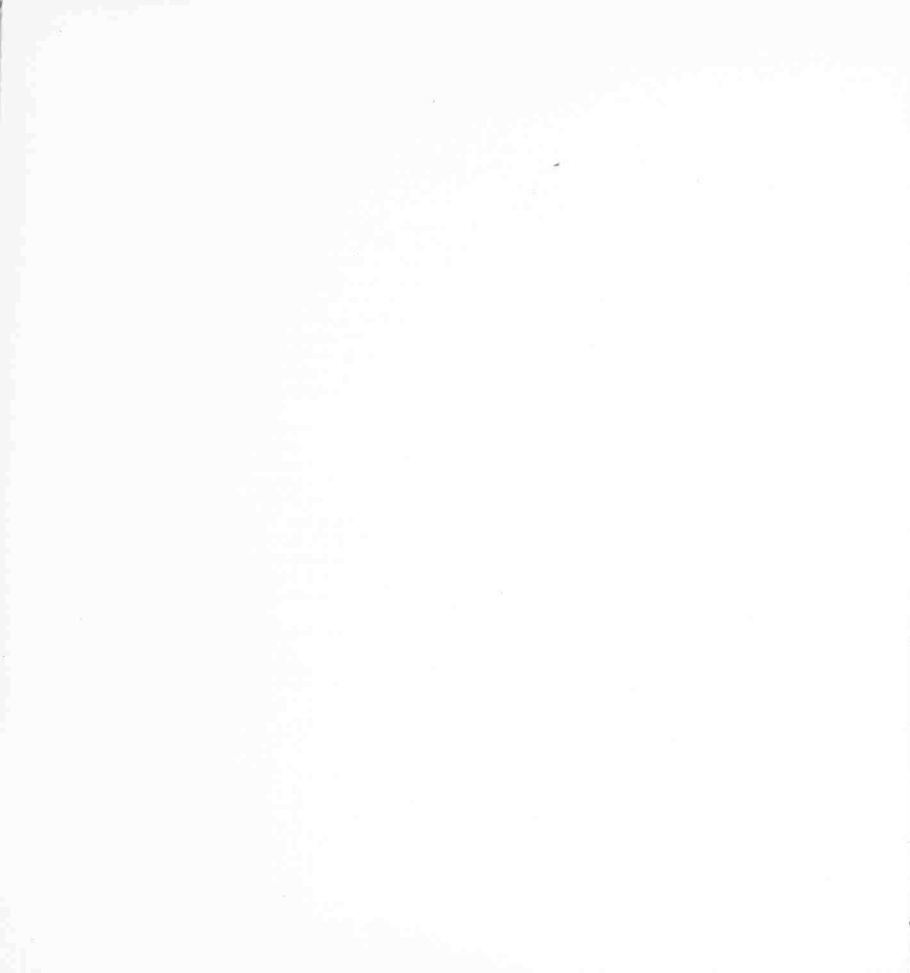
I am grateful to Datuk Abang Haji Yusuf Puteh, Professor W. Geddes, Professor W.G. Solheim II and Dr. Zainal Kling for kindly reading the draft and making several useful comments. I also wish to record my appreciation for the encouragement and moral support given by Y.B. Encik Celestine Ujang ak. Jilan, Minister for Culture, Youth & Sports, Datuk Abang and many others.

My special thanks go to Ms. Tang Yang Hiok who patiently typed the drafts and the final manuscript.

Finally, I am grateful to the State Government in financing the publication of this book.

Kuching
4th January, 1980.

LUCAS CHIN, P.B.S., P.P.B.
Curator, Sarawak Museum.



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INTRODUCTION

Although there are no majestic or magnificent monuments like Angkor Wat or Borobudur in Sarawak, the cultural achievements of the indigenous people are by no means lacking. The massive megaliths (*sanupad*) erected by the upland Kelabit in memory of their dead chiefs, the huge burial poles (*kelirieng*) carved by the Kayan/Kajang/Melanau/Punan to inter the bones of their dead aristocrats, the impressive hornbill images (*kenyalang*) elaborately carved by the lowland Iban in connection with their major Bird Festival (*Gawai Burong*) and the series of intricate sickness images (*blum*) carved by the coastal Melanau in connection with their healing ceremony, just to mention a few examples here, are outstanding, and perhaps somewhat unique in this part of the world.

Being a tropical country with three somewhat distinct geographical zones (coastal, lowland and upland), Sarawak provides a good abundance of raw materials such as stones for making tools, clay for making pottery, rocks, woods and bamboo for carving, wild fibres and cotton for making clothing and textiles, *rotlan*, reeds and palm leaves for making mats, hats and baskets. Iron ores are easily available in river beds and these are smelted to make swords (*parang*) and other weapons.

These are the basic raw materials which our craftsmen and women have been using to produce the many attractive articles for their everyday use and, as well, as for their ceremonial practices.

Most of the traditional handicrafts made by the indigenous people of Sarawak are beautifully decorated with intricate designs which can be traced back to the motifs of the Dongson Culture which originated in Annam in the 7th Century B.C. These motifs were spread to Borneo and other parts of Southeast Asia by the middle of the second millennium B.C. A number of incised pottery items with such motifs were found in the excavation at the West Mouth of the Niah Great Cave.

However, over the centuries, our craftsmen and women have adopted these basic key or spiral and the rhomb or diamond-shaped motifs in their own variations and combinations usually in the forms of crocodiles, centipedes, hornbills, dogs, spirits and other creatures as are commonly depicted in their carvings, weaving, baskets, beadworks and tattooing.

Although handicrafts are produced in quite abundance, there was no organised or full-time cottage industry in the State to meet increasing demand until recently. With the establishment of a branch of the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation in Sarawak in 1978, it is hoped that

traditional handicrafts in Sarawak will be promoted, their standard of production maintained and other handicrafts which are no longer being produced, be revitalized.

The main purpose of producing this book is to bring together as far as possible the features of the cultural material, much of which have already been separately described in scientific journals (many of which are not readily available), under one single cover as an introduction to the rich cultural heritage of Sarawak for the laymen and students. It is not intended to be an academic exercise as many of the subjects discussed in the book still require further study and research. In this respect, I must, therefore, apologise for any shortcomings or omissions which are not intentional.

In the book, I attempt to describe and interpret as far as possible the different types of cultural material that had either been developed locally by the indigenous people themselves or were introduced into the country but were usefully adopted by the indigenous people to enrich their artistic cultures. All these now form the major, if not the most important, part of our rich national cultural heritage today.

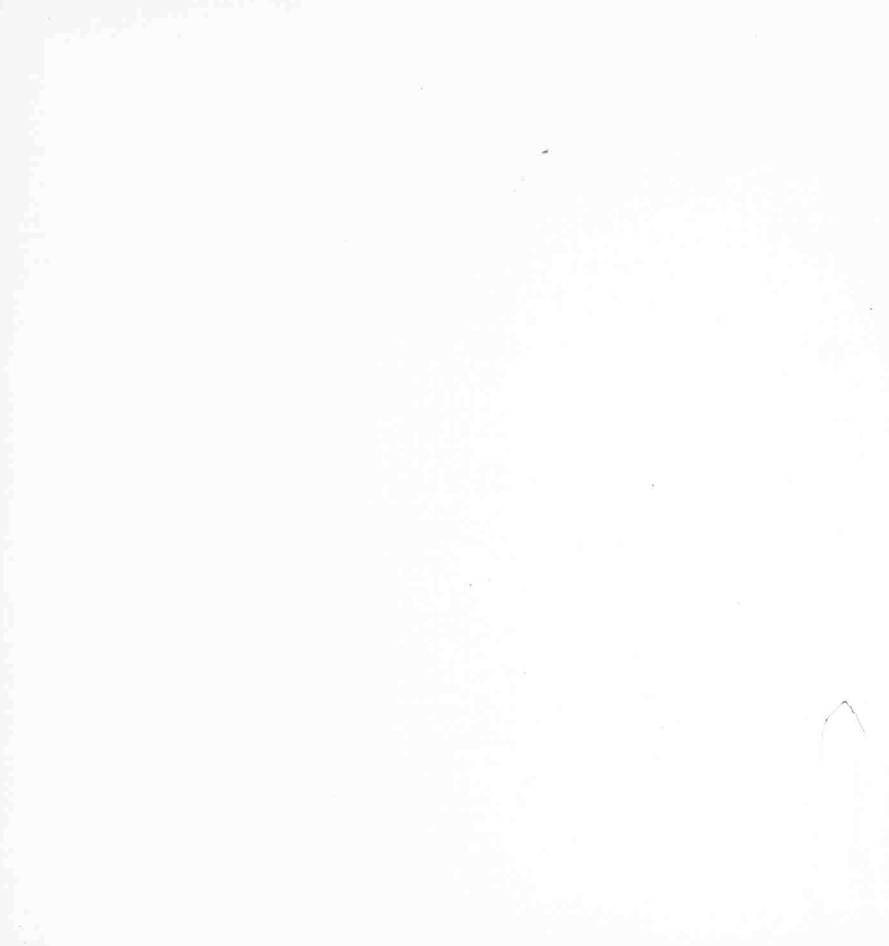
I have, however, not included the early Sarawak coins, currency notes and stamps which have been adequately described and published in the journals of the Sarawak Museum and the Malaysian Historical Society, Sarawak Branch.

Nor have I included the many colourful and elaborate ceremonies: festivals and other rituals during which beautiful and meaningful poems, chants, dirges, *pantun* and songs are involved, the rich folklore and oral traditions of our people, which also form part and parcel of our country's proud cultural heritage. Efforts are still being made to record all these by the limited manpower resources we have in the museum before they are all forgotten and lost forever as our people at present undergo the processes of change and modernisation.

Credit must be given here to Mr. Benedict Sandin, former Curator of this museum for his numerous articles and books on these subjects on the Iban; the late Bishop A.D. Galvin who studied and published many articles and a book on the subjects of the Kenyah and Kayan; Professor W. Geddes, Mr. R. Nyandoh anak Kadir and Rev. Father P. Aichner on the Bidayuh; the late Mr. George Jamuh, who was at one time Assistant Curator in the museum, Dr. Stephen Morris, Dr. I. Clayre and Mr. Tuton Kaboy on the Melanau; and finally to Ms. Carol Rubenstein for the two monumental

volumes on the "Poems of the Indigenous Peoples of Sarawak" (*Sarawak Museum Journal*, Special Monograph No. 2, Parts 1 & 2, 1973).

However, all these works only make up a small portion. Much more remains to be done. It is hoped that more local people, particularly teachers serving in outstations, will take a keener interest in these subjects by recording and writing about them.



CHAPTER ONE

THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF SARAWAK

Sarawak is the largest State within Malaysia. Covering an area of 48,250 square miles in north-west Borneo, the country is generally rugged and topographically complex with swampy plains extending along most of the coastal area, followed by a broad belt of undulating lowland intersected by many rivers which merge into the mountainous area of the interior.

Characteristic of the tropics, Sarawak has a climate with distinctively heavy rainfall: a large area receives between 120 and 160 inches of rain annually; uniformly high temperatures with a mean annual temperature of 25.6°C and high relative humidity of 70% at dawn and as high as 98% at two in the afternoon.

At present, Sarawak is administratively divided into seven divisions with Kuching as the capital in the First Division (southwest part of the state).

Rivers in Sarawak have always played a fundamental role in human activities. They provide the main lines of communication between villages and longhouses, which are mostly situated on river banks. Administrative divisions are defined by river basins. Even among some of the indigenous people, rivers define their tribal territories.

The population of Sarawak based on the latest figures (December, 1977) provided by the Statistics Department is 1,173,906 comprising of the following ethnic groups:

(i)	Malay including the Narum, Orang Miri and Tutong;	229,779	19.5%
(ii)	Melanau (Seduan, Segalang, Belium, Bintulu, Matu and Rejang);	63,057	5.3%
(iii)	Iban (Batang Ai, Balau, Melikin, Lemanak, Sebuyau, etc.)	339,748	29.0%
(iv)	Bidayuh (Lara, Singgie, Jagoi, Biatah, etc.)	105,176	9.0%
(v)	Other Indigenous Minority groups: Kenyah, Kayan, Lun Bawang, Kelabit, Punan, Penan, Kedayan, Belait, etc.)	60,758	5.2%
(vi)	Chinese	363,880	31.0%
(vii)	Others: Indian, Eurasian, Javanese, etc.	11,508	1.0%

Malay

According to the latest statistics (December, 1977), the Malay numbered 229,779 constituting 19.5% of the population in Sarawak. At present more than half of these people live in the First Division at the south-western end of the state and at the other end in the Fifth Division where they form the larger ethnic group proportionately. Although the Malay are coastal people, they can be found at all the principal inland towns, living mostly in villages along river banks. Ethnically, the Malay are a mixture of people. This is the result of their varied history, physical and religious assimilation of different people who had settled on the coast of Sarawak over the centuries. Today there are Malay who claim their descent from Java and Sumatra while there are others whose ancestors can be traced back to Brunei. Like the other Malaysians, the growth and social progress of a young Malay is marked by conventional celebrations which are landmarks in personal and family life.

The Malay are unified and guided by their religion, Islam, which has also influenced their dress, customs and art. The *Kain songket* or cloth with gold and silver threads woven by their women, is probably the most attractive piece of craftsmanship. Their men are noted for their decorative architecture.

Economically, the Malay are involved mainly in service employment and government administration while others living in rural areas are mainly fishermen and small cash croppers, growing padi, coconut and rubber.

Melanau

There were 63,057 Melanau in 1977, making up 5.3% of the population. The Melanau live in the coastal area, extending from the mouth of the Batang Rejang in the Third Division to the mouth of the Baram River in the Fourth Division and extending inland some seventy miles from the sea. Formerly when they were still pagan, they believed in a great variety of spirits and lived in longhouses. Today, the Melanau can be generally divided into three sub-groups: the pagan, the Muslim and the Christian.

Melanau are competent fishermen and boat-builders and have been traditionally associated with the production of sago. Recently some have begun to plant padi, coconut and rubber. The Melanau women are most skilful in producing a variety of stylised and colourful hats, mats and baskets while

their men folk are skilled in wood and bone carvings: sickness images and fishing fetishes (*blum* and *suk*).

Iban

Iban are by far the largest indigenous group in Sarawak, numbering 339,748 which constitutes 29% of the population. They comprise nearly one half of the total number of persons engaged in agriculture, the main part of which is hill rice cultivation and small holdings of rubber and pepper.

The Iban are found throughout the State, especially in the lowland, living mostly in longhouses along streams and river banks. According to their legends, the Iban came to Sarawak from the Kapuas River area in Kalimantan some twenty generations or about 400 years ago. A relatively large number are now Christians, although they still maintain their strong cultural identity and heritage. Their customs and languages are fairly uniform and homogenous.

Formerly, the Iban were warriors and headhunters, and much of their traditional art is connected with these activities. The woven blankets (*pua kumbu*) and skirts (*bidang*) made by their women are the best known while their men produce unique carvings of hornbill images (*kenyalang*) and burial huts (*sungkup*).

Bidayuh

The Bidayuh formerly known as the Land Dayak, form the third largest ethnic group, numbering 105,176 and constituting 9% of the population. Like the Iban, the Bidayuh originally also came from Kalimantan.

Linguistically, the Bidayuh can be divided into five main groups, the two largest being in the Upper Sadong district, and in parts of Kuching district while the others live in the Bau and Lundu districts, all in the First Division.

They are farmers, planting padi, rubber and pepper. The Bidayuh are noted for producing decorative baskets and popular bamboo carvings.

Other indigenous minority groups

Among the other minority groups are the Kenyah and Kayan, who live in the middle and upper reaches of the main rivers (Batang Rejang and Baram). These people still regard the Apo Kayan valley in Kalimantan as the land from where they came, and as the cradle of their culture.

Both the Kenyah and Kayan have an implicit belief in the supernatural. Religion, customs and much of their folklore are directly related to their rice-farming cycle. Their social structure is well defined. The wood carvings made by these two groups are most attractive while their women-folk weave very elaborate beadworks to adorn their baskets, hats and other containers.

The Kelabit, the Lun Bawang, formerly known as the Murut, the Punan and the nomadic Penan constitute about 3% of the population in the State. The Kelabit live at the headwaters of the Baram river of the Fourth Division; the Lun Bawang in the high valleys of the Lawas and Trusan rivers in the Fifth Division and the nomadic Penan are found in the remotest areas of the Fourth, Fifth and Seventh Divisions.

The Kelabit and Lun Bawang produce outstanding hornbill ivory carvings and beadworks.

Despite their nomadic life, the Penan produce the finest *rotan* baskets and sleeping mats. They are also good blacksmiths, producing the popular knife (*parang ilang*) and blowpipe (*sumpit*).

(The other smaller coastal groups are the Kedayan who live in the Fourth and Fifth Divisions; the Belait in the Fourth Division and the Sebuyau and Balau in the coastal district of the First Division. In general, these people are agriculturalists, planting padi and rubber. Recently, some have begun to plant pepper.)

CHAPTER TWO

PREHISTORIC ARTEFACTS DISCOVERED IN SARAWAK

Extensive archaeological work has been carried out in Sarawak since the staff of the Sarawak Museum first began systematic excavation in 1948. Before then, virtually no archaeological work had been attempted anywhere in Borneo. The Sarawak Museum, which was established in 1891, was the only museum in Borneo until 1964. There are now the Brunei Museum and the Sabah Museum and there has been talk of an ethnographic museum to be set up at Pontianak in Kalimantan.

Since 1948, more than 50 sites throughout Sarawak have been explored and excavated. Among the ten prehistoric sites so far located, the West Mouth in the Niah Great Cave has been most rewarding and exciting (*plate 2.1*)

The limestone formation of Gunong (Mount) Subis, located some 1,300 feet high in the sub-coastal sandstone plain in the Fourth Division, is huge and penetrated by many caves. The caves contain a rich variety of fauna, including the swiftlets which produce the edible birds' nests and bats whose droppings have been an important source of natural fertilizer.

The Niah Great Cave, where the West Mouth is located, covering an area of 27 acres within the Niah National Park of 7,756 acres, has been gazetted as a historical monument.

The West Mouth is one of the most important archaeological cave sites ever found in Southeast Asia. It is unusual and important because of the wide range of stone tools, from the chopper tools which belong to the great chopper-chopping tool development of southern and eastern Asia of the Palaeolithic period (old stone-age), to the refined polished quadrangular adzes of the Neolithic period (new stone-age), all found *in situ* (*plates 2.3 to 2.5*).

At the depth of 96 inches, fragments of a skull were found. These had been reconstructed and dated by experts to about 39,000 years old. The skull is the earliest definite representative of *Homo sapiens* so far found in Southeast Asia (*plate 2.2*).

Found in association with the many stone tools and among the huge quantity of food remains, were ornaments like beads and pendants made of shell and bone, sharpened bone tools such as needles and pointers (*plates 2.8 to 2.10*).

A substantial quantity of stone-age pottery, simple and plain of the early Neolithic period and decorative of a later date, had also been found at the

inner part of the same site. These pottery vessels: double-spouted pots, jars, bowls, etc. (plate 2.11) were primarily funeral items as they were found in association with many of the 166 graves. Several urns, used for secondary burial, some with simple cord marks and others with incised patterns and other decorations, had also been discovered here (plate 2.12).

Two of the graves were associated with bronze objects: rings, bangles and bells (plate 2.13). An intact nephrite (jade) ear-pendant was discovered at the cemetery in 1977 (plate 2.14). This ear-pendant is strikingly similar to the one (Fox's *The Tabon Caves*, Monograph of National Museum, No. 1, Manila, 1970, Fig. 37d) excavated in the Tabon Caves in the Philippines. Similar ear-pendants had also been found in association with Sahuyuh-Kalanay pottery of 600 B.C. date in present day Vietnam*.

From a series of Carbon-14 dating and also from physical comparisons with similar materials recovered from other sites in neighbouring countries in this region, a tentative summary on the history of human evolution at Niah has been drawn as follows:-

By about 40,000 years ago, there were already true men living at Niah. These early people were food gatherers and simple hunters, using very crude tools known as choppers. They probably lived in small groups and already knew the use of fire which they made by striking quartz pebbles together to produce sparks directed to resin;

By about 10,000 B.C., cave men at Niah started to produce more advanced edge-ground pebble tools with sharpened edges which were suitable for cutting. They also started to bury their dead.

By about 4,000 B.C., Niah cave men produced refined stone tools known as round axes which were highly polished.

By probably about 3,000 B.C., they began to produce plain and undecorative pottery.

By about 2,500 B.C., they started to produce more refined tools known as quad-rangular adzes, which were proportionately cut and polished. They also produced decorative pottery and carried out a rather complicated funeral ritual, first by burying the dead and later transferring the bones into large urns;

By about 150 B.C., the Bronze Age Culture spread to Borneo and was later followed by the Metal Age.

* Personal information from Professor W.G. Solheim II.

Wall-paintings, stretching some 200 feet in length have also been found in another cave, Kain Hitam or the Painted Cave, in a separate limestone outcrop nearby to the Niah Great Cave. The paintings were generally drawn in bold and thick strokes and depict an array of boats and spread-eagle dancing human figures. Also found in this cave were "death-ships", Chinese stonewares and many ancient glass beads. Carbon-14 dating on four "death-ships" gave between 0 and 780 A.D., that is, more than 1,200 years ago (*plate 2.15*).

There are other less important cave sites at Niah and at Ulu Tatau, also in the Fourth Division, where "death-ships", stone tools, wall-paintings, bronze and other metal objects, ancient glass beads and local pottery have been discovered.

Seventy-nine quadrangular adzes (*plates 2.6 and 2.7*) were found at an open site at the junction between Sungai Putai and Ulu Balleh above Kapit in association with many locally made soft pottery, several chert and two agate spear-heads, one stone bark beater, several fragments of brass ear-rings and bangles, and fragments of iron spears and knives.

Many of these tools, evidently made from small river pebbles, show signs that they had been used. The others, made of sandstone, could be the thunderbolts, esteemed by our people for a variety of mystical purposes: for protection against illnesses, invulnerability in battle, as fertilizers for crops and so on. So far, no burials have been encountered.

This site is considered important as it is the only open site so far located in Sarawak where stone tools had been found. Future fieldwork may yet yield more exciting finds.



2.1

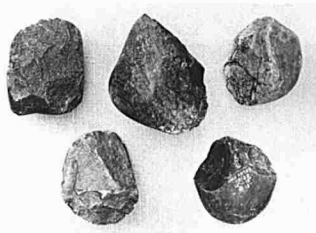


2.2

2.1. *West Mouth of Niah Great Cave (view from inside). Main Excavation Site at right corner is one of the most important archaeological cave sites found in Southeast Asia.*

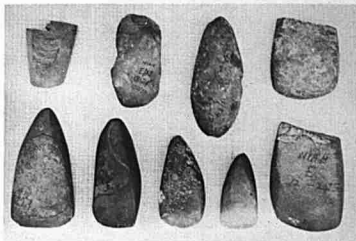
2.2. *Reconstructed Niah skull, 39,000 years old. Earliest representative of Homo sapiens so far found in Southeast Asia.*

2.3



2.3 *Chopper tools excavated at West Mouth, Niah.*

2.4



2.4 *Round axes excavated at West Mouth, Niah.*

2.5 *Quadrangular adzes excavated at West Mouth, Niah.*

2.5



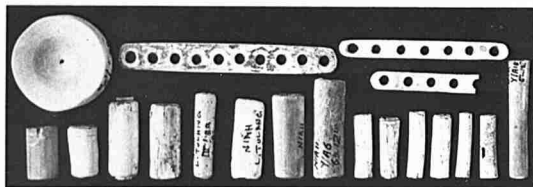
2.6 & 7 *Quadrangular adzes excavated at an open site along Sg. Putai/ Ulu Balleb.*

2.6



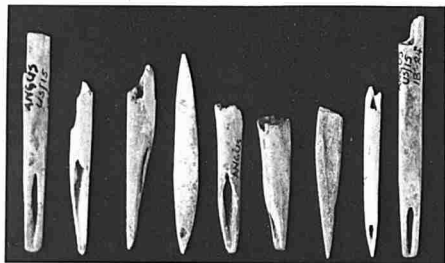
2.7





2.9

2.8 & 9. Shell and bone ornaments excavated at West Mouth, Niab in association with stone tools, food remains, etc.



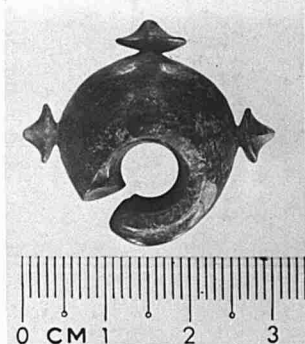
2.10

2.10. Bone pointers excavated at West Mouth, Niab in association with stone tools, food remains, etc.

2.11



2.12



2.13

2.11. Neolithic pottery excavated at the inner part of West Mouth, Niah in association with human burials.

2.12. Reconstructed urn excavated at the inner part of West Mouth, Niah.

2.14

2.13. Bronze objects discovered at the inner part of West Mouth, Niah, in association with human burials and pottery.

2.14. Jade ear-pendant discovered at the inner part of Niah in 1977.

2.15. Wall-paintings and "death-ships"
at Kain Hitam or Painted Cave,
Niah. The paintings were
generally drawn in bold and thick
strokes and depict an array of
boats and spread-eagle dancing
human figures. Carbon-14 dating
on four of the "death-ships"
gave between 0 and 780 A.D.,
that is more than 1,200 years old.

2.15



CHAPTER THREE

EXCAVATED TRADE CERAMICS AND OTHER ASSOCIATED RELICS

There is sufficient evidence to indicate that from about the 7th Century A.D. onwards, that is roughly about 1,200 years ago, traders from China, India and other neighbouring countries began to arrive in Borneo to trade, which was carried out on a barter system. These traders exchanged with the indigenous people such items as ceramic wares, metal objects and ornaments, and perhaps even silk and other textiles, in return for local products like rhinoceros horns, turtle eggs, Kingfishers' feathers, birdsnests, bezoar stones, camphor, damar and other jungle produce. Extensive excavations conducted throughout Sarawak and in Brunei since 1948 had revealed strong evidence of such trading activity.

Literally, many thousand ceramic sherds had been recovered in the many open proto-historic sites in Sarawak since 1948. It can be briefly summarised that from 1948 to 1967, the ceramics excavated in association with other related material like ancient glass beads, coins and other relics, particularly from sites in the Sarawak River Delta in the south-western part of Sarawak, all date to the T'ang and Sung Dynasty periods, up to the 13th Century A.D. (*plates 3.1 to 3.4*). But since 1967, an abundance of new material has been excavated from other sites: Annamese monochrome wares of the 13th-14th Century A.D. date at Tebing Tinggi, Kabong, Siamese Sawankhalok wares of the 14th-15th Century A.D. at Bukit Sandong, Gedong and Chinese and Annamese blue and white wares from the 16th to the 19th Centuries A.D. date at Bukit Sandong and Muroh in Kabong (*plates 3.5 to 3.8*). All this evidence indicates that maritime trading activity continued to take place along the coast of Borneo right up into the early part of the 19th Century A.D. towards the advent of Europeans to this region.

All the excavated artefacts have formed an important source of material for study in the Sarawak Museum. They have been tentatively divided by glaze colour and clay body (texture) and classified into nine major classes as:-

1. White wares: sherds with a basically white colour, although varying from grey-white to green-white in many cases and including Ch'ing-pai, Ying-Ch'ing and "Marco Polo ware";
2. Yueh types: sherds with a thin putty-green to blue or grey-green

glaze in many instances resemble the Yueh ware described by Gompertz;

3. Celadons: sherds with a thick olive to blue-green glaze of the type usually associated with the Sung Dynasty Lung-ch'uan kilns;
4. Temmoku: sherds from bowls with a very dark brown or black glaze, often called "temmoku", and like the Chin-yao bowls from Fukien;
5. Green glazed wares: sherds with a thin bright glaze which contains lead;
6. T'zu Chou wares: sherds of the ware usually termed T'zu Chou, with decoration in dark and/or light slip under plain or green glaze;
7. Coarse stonewares: include sherds of coarse stonewares from very large jars to smaller, but still coarse jars and jugs;
8. Siamese wares: mainly sherds of Sawankhalok celadon thick plates and dishes, decorated with incised or carved decorations under the glaze and with burnt reddish brown on foot; and
9. Blue and white wares: sherds with transparent glaze of bluish tone, thick undulating slow-flow containing a haze of minute, almost invisible bubbles and the body greyish white translucent porcelain.

Each of the major classes is further divided into sub-classes in accordance with distinctive shapes, decoration, glaze, size and/or origin.

By adopting this system, we have been able to divide the massive collection of ceramic sherds into a superficially workable, intelligible, descriptive visual form as an aid to analyse ordinary field material.

Large quantities of iron slag, together with tube-like crucibles which were used in smelting iron, were also found widely distributed all over the excavation sites in the Sarawak River Delta in association with the trade ceramic items. This evidence indicates that there was an active iron-smelting industry in operation in this coastal area at that time. Because of the shortage of bronze, particularly after T'ang Dynasty, there was a demand of iron and other metals in China. At the same time, there is also evidence to indicate that gold was also being mined in the area.

The Sarawak River Delta was, therefore, an important trading centre, which was developed as early as in the 7th Century A.D. and continued on

until the 13th Century A.D. before Islam was introduced to this part of the world.

The alien traders were probably more interested in trade rather than in propagating religion as evidenced by the fact that only a few remains of religious relics have so far been found in Sarawak.

A stone monument of a shrine built on a raised platform (*plate 3.9*), was discovered at Bongkissam, one of the excavation sites located at the foot of the Santubong mountain in the Sarawak River Delta in 1967. In the sanctuary of the shrine, a silver deposit box (*plate 3.10*), complete with lid, an assortment of gold ornaments like beads, rings and others, cut in the shapes of a sitting Buddha, crescent moon, elephant, turtle and snake, a dozen semi-precious stones (*plates 3.11 to 3.13*) and a small sculpture, possibly Tara, were found. This relic had been dated to about 12th Century A.D. According to archaeologists, the practice of burying deposit boxes was a Hindu-Buddhist tradition originated in India.

Further behind Bongkissam is Bukit Maras where among the many locally made soft pottery objects, glass beads and Sung ceramics excavated, were also found one stone figure of Buddha in the Gupta tradition (*plate 3.14*), a stupa finial and a section of a sandstone tile showing incised carving of an elephant.

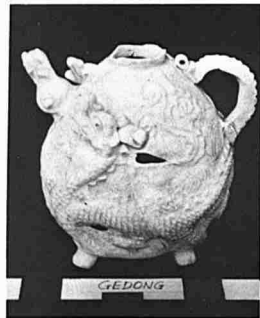
Two statues of the elephant-headed god, the Ganesa, have also been found. The first (*plate 3.15*) was found at Limbang in the Fifth Division while levelling the site for the construction of the Residency in 1921. The second piece, which was much weathered and lacked the top portion, was found at Bukit Berhala (possibly as part of the temple to Siva) in Samarahan in the First Division in 1848. Also found in the same site was a Batu Lesong (*plate 3.16*) which represents the Yoni in which stood an upright lingam which is a symbolic phallus of veneration of the Hindu Pallavas in South India. Remains of a stone bull (*plate 3.17*) were found on the muddy banks of a stream near Sempro (below Segu, 21st Mile, Penrissen Road) in the First Division in the early 1840s. Unfortunately, the head is missing and the fore and hind quarters are just discernible. It represents the guardian outside a temple of Siva.

3.1



3.3

3.2



- 3.1. Samples of White and Yueh type wares excavated at various sites in Sarauak.
- 3.2. A fine Ch'ing-pai teapot with high relief dragon motifs, excavated at Gedong.
- 3.3. Samples of celadons excavated at various sites in Sarauak.
- 3.4. Samples of coarse stonewares (from very small to large jars) excavated at various sites in Sarauak.

3.4



- 3.5. *Siamese Suvankulok celadons, excavated at Bukit Sandong.*
- 3.6. *Chinese blue and white wares excavated at Bukit Sandong.*
- 3.7. *Chinese blue and white wares excavated at Sungei Kalaka.*
- 3.8. *Chinese blue and white wares excavated at Sungei Muroh.*

3.5



3.6



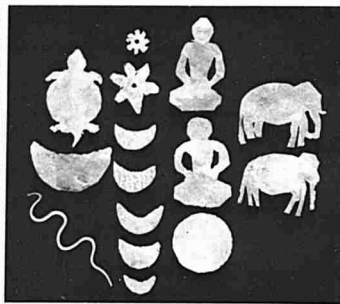
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3.8



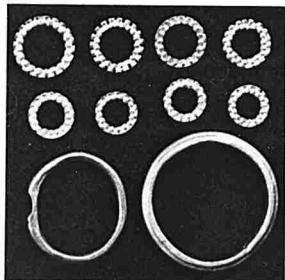
3.9



3.11



3.10



3.12



3.13

- 3.9. *Buddhist Tantric shrine found at Bongkissam in the Sarawak River Delta, First Division, Sarawak.*
- 3.10. *A ritual deposit box found in shrine at Bongkissam.*
- 3.11. *Gold objects in the shape of turtle, elephant, etc., found in shrine at Bongkissam.*
- 3.12. *Gold rings found in shrine at Bongkissam.*
- 3.13. *Semi-precious stones found in shrine at Bongkissam.*

3.14



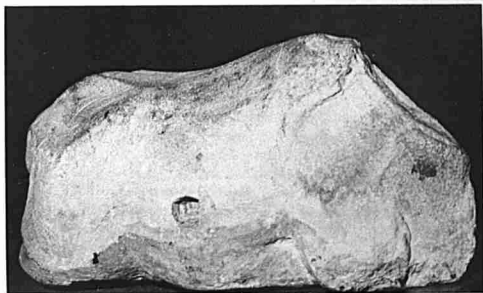
3.15



3.16



3.17



3.14. *Buddha figure in the Gupta tradition, found at Bukit Maras, Santubong.*

3.15. *The elephant-headed god, Ganesa, found at Limbang.*

3.16. *Batu Lesong found at Samarahan.*

3.17. *Stone bull (Batu Nandi) found at Segu, Penrissen Road, Kuching.*

CHAPTER FOUR

ROCK-CARVINGS AND MEGALITHS

Stone working is one of man's oldest traditional crafts. Three types of stone working have so far been found in Sarawak.

Four movable carved stone human figures were found by an Iban along the eroding bank of a small stream, about 50 miles from the sea in Ulu Awik near Saratok in the Second Division in 1928. These figures (*plate 4.2*), ranging from 2ft. 8ins. to 3ft. 1in. in height, were carved of soft soapy stone which easily cracks and breaks. The texture of the stone has red and yellowish streaks, thus giving the figures a rather handsome appearance. The faces of these figures are placid, almost smiling. They have big sweeping eyebrows and long arms and hands. They were crudely made and somewhat resemble some of the wooden figures made by other present-day ethnic groups (like the Bidayuh and the Kelabit), used to ward off evil spirits from causing sicknesses.

These carved figures are believed to have been made by the Serus, who once dominated the Kalaka district but who were later overrun by the Iban. The last Seru, Chula, died in 1954.

Some forty rock-carvings have been found on a low undulating hillock along Sungai Jaong in the Sarawak River Delta in the First Division.

Sungai Jaong is a small stream, meandering through dense *nipah* palms and mangrove swamp on the flat land with its source reaching the foot of the Santubong mountain where fresh and clear water flows down throughout the whole year. This is the only steady source of fresh water in the vicinity which was important for human settlement or as a source of fresh water supply to the earlier traders. The stream is about 15 yards wide across the mouth at high tide and can be navigated in a small rowboat for nearly one mile. The whole area was overgrown with jungle scrub, and all the sandstone boulders were covered with dense foliage for at least a thousand years before museum teams cleared the area for excavation in 1952.

The petrogllyphic rock-carvings in this delta area can be broadly summarised as larger human figures, cut in high relief, the most prominent being a half-lifesize spread-eagle figure (*plate 4.3*) with a curious "head-dress", a feature characteristic in many of the wood-carvings of the Kenyah and other related people of Borneo; smaller human and other figures cut in incised grooves and pecked out; geometrical shapes chipped out in relief, most fairly well-shaped parallelograms; and round holes chipped and gouged out of the rock.

The basic feature common to these carvings is the human figure, but with indistinct genitalia, unlike those stone figures in the Sulawasi whose sex organs are quite distinct. The arms and legs are spread-eagle like in a dancing mood. Scholars have suggested that these general expressions relate to the concept of fertility, ancestral respect or were associated with iron working, as magical beliefs were usually attached to earth mining process in the past.

Since 1952 a series of excavation have been carried out around these rock-carvings. The artefacts recovered include mainly Yueh wares, pieces of gold, usually as foil, glass beads and an abundance of iron-slag, with some of the ceramic objects encrusted with iron-slag.

Sungai Jaong is probably the pioneering iron-working site because of the Yueh wares excavated in the area. No Sung wares which were abundant at the two other delta sites, Sungai Buah and Bongkissam, were encountered on this site. Based on the available criteria, Sg. Jaong dates earlier — before and around 1000 A.D. — than the other two sites.

The last type of stone working consists of some fifty megalithic remains and rock-carvings located at the headwaters of the Baram and adjacent rivers around the mountain massif of Mt. Murud in the interior Fourth Division.

The upland megaliths include massive dolmens, menhirs, urns and relief carvings on natural boulders. A dolmen consists of three or more upright large natural stones supporting a larger roof-stone (*plate 4.4*). Menhirs are unworked and tall natural stone slabs and were usually erected in pairs with the base fixed firmly in the ground, the tallest standing up some 4 feet in height above the ground (*plate 4.5*). An urn, hollowed in a circular shape, served as a receptacle for interring the bones of a chief when stoneware jar was not available in the remote hinterland at that time. Like the menhirs, the base of the urn was firmly planted in the ground and the rest of it standing some 3½ feet high, the top 2 feet being wider and broader. The rock-carvings are either incised or engraved with humanistic or other symbolic figures. The human figures are generally represented in a fairly realistic way such as in the spread-eagle form with the typical head-dress and elongated ears (*plate 4.1*). Other carved figures include the legendary mystical dragon-like animal, or the tiger-cat with protruding large eyes, pendant ears, long neck, elongated arms, legs, toes and claws and a long curling tail, the

characteristics which are still prominently depicted in the wood-carvings and beadworks of the interior people.

The Kelabit who have inhabited this upland part of Borneo for centuries, continued to practise active megalithics until 1950 when they were converted to Christianity. All the megalithic activities were directly associated with the funeral rituals of important persons either during the actual death or during the *irau* feasts following the death.

Traditionally when a Kelabit chief died, the people would dig deep ditches or *nabang* along a footpath where a pair of menhirs would be erected on each side of the *nabang* in memory of the deceased chief. And around the vicinity of the *nabang*, a stone urn and later on, a jar, containing the bones of the deceased chief, was buried.

4.1. Carved stone figure at Pa' Bangar, Kelabit highland.



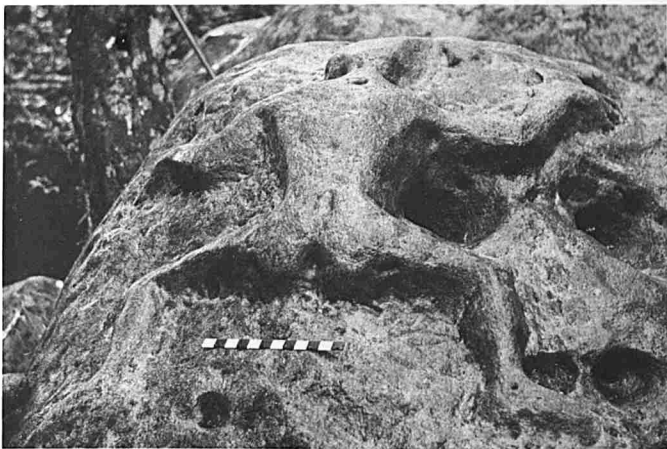
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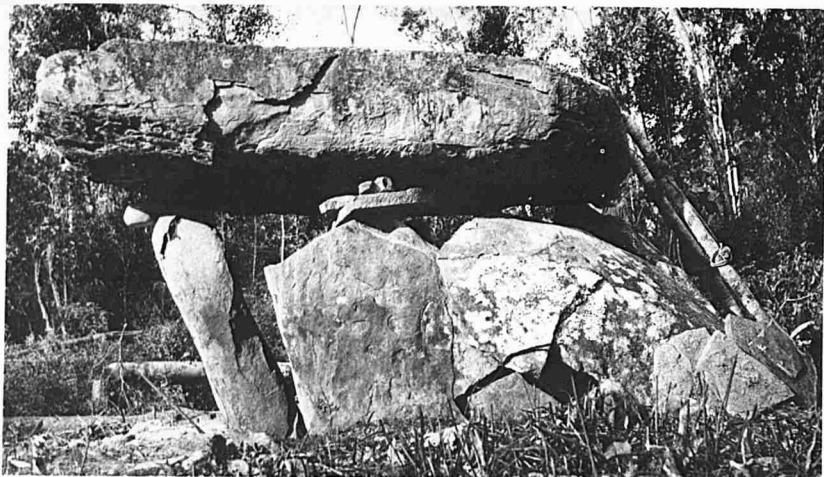
4.2

4.2. Soft stone human figures, ranging from 2' 8" to 3' 1", found at Saratok, Second Division.

4.3. Half lifesize spread-eagle human figure at Sg. Jaong, Santubong.



4.3



4.4

4.4. A Dolmen consists of three or more upright stones supporting a roof stone, Kelabit highland.

4.5. Menhirs are unworked natural stone slabs and are usually erected in pairs with the base firmly fixed in the ground, Kelabit highland.



4.5

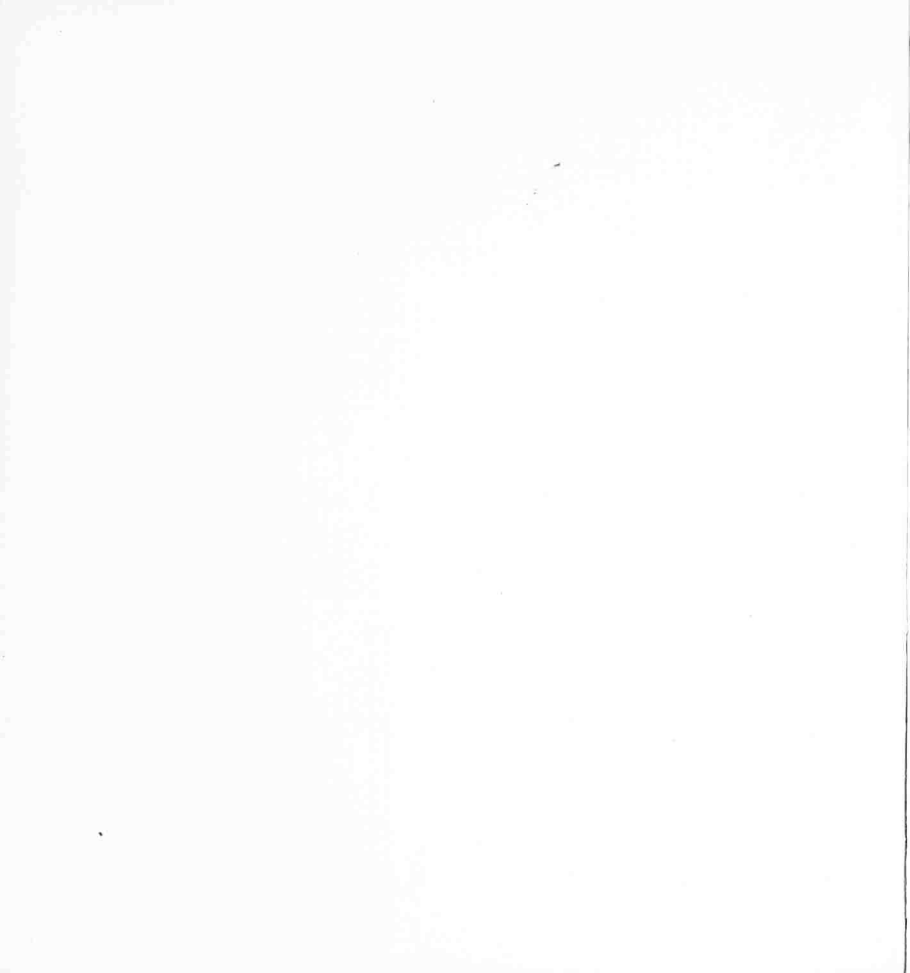
4.6 & 7. *Rock-carvings near Long
Semadob, and in the Upper
Trusan River, Fifth Division.*

4.6



4.7





CHAPTER FIVE

CERAMICS AND THEIR USES

The Sarawak Museum has, over the years, built up a fairly extensive collection of ceramic wares which were acquired from the indigenous people. The collection includes White and Yueh type wares, Celadons, Temmoku and Siamese wares, blue and white wares, Polychromes, Japanese and European wares and finally a large variety of Martaban jars (*plates 5.1 to 5.17*).

Ceramic objects, ancient glass beads and brass objects such as *sireh* boxes, gongs and cannons have been found among every ethnic group including the Kelabit who live in the upland, 4,000 feet above sea level in central Borneo.

These objects have, throughout the generations, been zealously treasured and guarded by the indigenous people as heirlooms (*pesaka*) and valuables and handed down from one generation to the next. They form the traditional symbols of status and wealth and are appropriately and proudly displayed or worn (as in the case of beads) in longhouses. These objects form an integral part of the culture of the indigenous people and are closely linked with their customs and about their beliefs of the spiritual world.

Each individual jar has its own value, the rarest being the most treasured. The common jars are those brown dragon jars known as Martaban stone-ware and the rarest are the olive glazed type known as "Dusun" jars of the 15th-17th Centuries. Large Swatow and Japanese plates from 17th-19th Centuries and Siamese Sawankhalok celadon jarlets of the 14th-15th Century have been commonly found with the interior longhouse people. The finer and older Chinese celadon wares are found among the Melanau people living along the coast.

Apart from being utilitarian objects such as for storing rice grains, for brewing rice wine (*borak* or *tuak*) and as containers for medicines and ointments, ceramic objects have also been used by the indigenous people of Sarawak for ceremonial purposes as in the Melanau wedding and healing ceremonies, the Kelabit head rites and the Iban Bird Festival (*Gawai Burong*) as well as bride wealth, as fines for offences and as gravegoods. Examples are discussed below.

Ulou berian was the traditional Melanau "Head of bride wealth" given by the bridegroom's father to the bride's father before the wedding. Payment depended on the social rank of the bride. The *ulou berian* of an upper class bride was a blue and white plate with a Chinese character underneath it, a gold bracelet which wound round the wrist nine times and a *kris*, all

placed in a round wooden box which was wrapped up in a cloth (Plate 5.18).

An oil called *nyo tejak*, made of coconut, was rubbed on the forehead, elbows and knees of the young couple on the first three nights after the marriage ceremony. The oil was kept in a small celadon jarlet called *selepak timun*, with a celadon bowl called *sube timun* above and three other celadon bowls called *makok timun* below it and finally a blue and white plate called *meluku* underneath all of them (Plate 5.20).

Three nights after the marriage ceremony, the bride went to visit her father-in-law's house. She was met at the landing stage by the people of the house, who carried a brass box, and tied a string of ancient and valuable blue beads round her wrist. The number of beads reflected the social standing of the bride. On entering the house, water was poured on her right foot from a special old (brittle) jar called *kanan seni jijug*, which was placed near the door on a celadon plate called *melingun timun*. Then she touched the jar with her toe and stepped into her husband's house for the first time.

Traditionally, the Kelabit had a special use for ceramic objects in association with the now extinct head rites. Certain types of pot were hung up with the enemies' heads so as to obtain some of the powerful qualities of the heads. Wooden or antler stoppers were carved and inserted to seal such pots and preserve their "spirits". Such a pot could equal a head just as an old jar could equal a human life and could be exchanged for a slave or sacrificial victim.

Another group of ceramic objects associated with the Kelabit head-rite is the K'ang-hsi polychrome vessels in the form of duck, crayfish and crane-bird (Plate 5.23). These were used in making libations to the enemies' heads and then in passing rice-wine (*borak*) round among aristocrats. Until recently, these vessels were so valuable and "sacred" that outsiders might not be permitted to handle them.

Gawi Kenyalang is one of the principal feasts celebrated by the Iban in honour of their God, *Sengalang Burong*. In this feast, a tall carved pole is erected at the open verandah (*tanju*) of the longhouse and the heads of enemies are hung from it. A wooden statue carved in the form of a rhinoceros hornbill is placed on top of the pole and ceramic plates with offerings of food are placed round the foot of it (Plate 5.19).

Ceramic objects also form an important part of gravegoods replacing locally made earthenware pottery as in previous practice, and are common

items excavated in burial sites throughout Sarawak. Traditionally, when a Melanau died, the body was first laid out in the house. After it had been dressed, a blue and white plate was put under the head, and smaller ceramic plates under the feet and hands. Some brass objects were also placed near the body. A string of ancient blue glass beads was then tied round the wrist of the dead body (*plate 5.21*). After a few days, the body was taken out of the house and kept outside for at least a year. Then the bones were collected and placed inside a large jar. An assortment of plates, jarlets, bowls and beads was then buried as gravegoods with the jar containing the bones.

- 5.1. Covered cylindrical box and ewer, early white wares of late T'ang Dynasty. Museum Cat. Nos. 232/271 and 59/50.
- 5.2. Plate with incised floral designs, S'ang Dynasty and a lobed bowl of very early white ware, T'ang Dynasty. Museum Cat. Nos. 67/116 and 65/253.
- 5.3. Yueh type wares, 11th-12th century. Museum Cat. Nos. 59/17, 232/549, 67/131 and 67/115.

5.1



5.2



5.3





5.6

5.4. Lung Chuan Celadon wares,
11th-14th centuries. Museum
Cat. Nos. 65/88, 65/82, 62/45,
67/128, 65/95, 4762 and 827.

5.5. Lung Chuan vase, 16th-17th
century. Height: 35 cm.
Museum Cat. No. 1006.

5.6. Lung Chuan Celadon plate,
14th-15th century. Height: 7.5
cm. Museum Cat. No. 2022.

5.5

5.7. *Rare Ming plate and Kendi, 17th century. Museum Cat. Nos. 841 and 61/101. Ceramics were sometimes decorated with brass or silver additions to cover up a damage, strengthen a weak rim or spout, or simply for decoration.*

5.8. *Blue and white wares of early Ming dynasty, 15th-16th century. Museum Cat. Nos. 61/99, 63/558, 62/109 and 234/568.*

5.9. *Left: Large blue and white plate, Late Ming. Museum Cat. No. 62/113. Height: 7.5". Right: Large blue and white plate, Ch'ing dynasty. Museum Cat. No. 63/32. Height: 6.8".*



5.7

5.8



5.9



5.10. Some examples of Siamese wares:
brown glazed, painted and celadon,
14th-15th century.

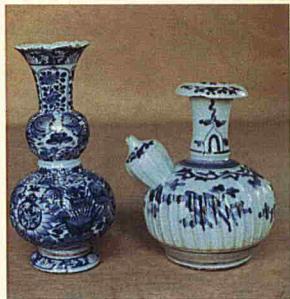
5.11. Left: Large Chinese lidded jar,
18th century. Museum Cat. No.
1992. Height: 43.5".
Right: Large blue and white jar,
late Ming. Museum Cat. No.
62/112. Height: 33.3".

5.12. Blue and white Japanese
Kakiyemon kendi of 17th-18th
century and double gourd blue
and white vase of 18th-19th
century. Height: 20.1 cm. and
25.8 cm. Museum Cat. Nos.
74/103 and 76/179.

5.10



5.11



5.12



5.13. Blue and white K'ang-hsi jars, 17th-18th century. Height: 96 cm. and 48.6 cm. Museum Cat. Nos. 234/553 and 173/786.

5.14. Japanese Emory jars, 18th-19th century. Height: 59.1 cm. and 49.5 cm. Museum Cat. Nos. 72/80 and 75/21.

5.13

5.14





5.15

5.15. Japanese Satsuma jar, 18th-19th century. Height: 111.3 cm. Museum Cat. No. 74/42.

5.16. Dark brown glazed dragon jar, 18th century. Height: 61.7 cm. Museum Cat. No. 75/108.



5.16



5.17. A very rare Fa-hua or "Fa fa" vase of gourd bladder shape with long global neck, covered with dark ambergine enameled glaze with design of figurines of the Eight Immortals standing on clouds and decorated with turquoise, olive and black glaze. Ming Dynasty. Height: 61.9 cm. Museum Cat. No. 5947.

5.18

5.18. Melanau 'Ullou berian' bride wealth, consisting of a blue and white plate, a gold bracelet and a kris, all placed in a specially made wooden box.

5.19. Plates of offerings made to the Iban Hornbill (Kenyalang) ritual.

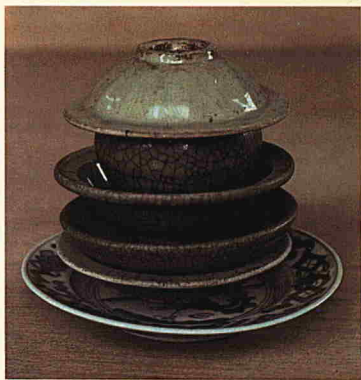
5.20. Ceramics associated with Melanau marriage ceremony.

5.21. Ceramics, brassware and old beads used by Melanau in funeral ritual.

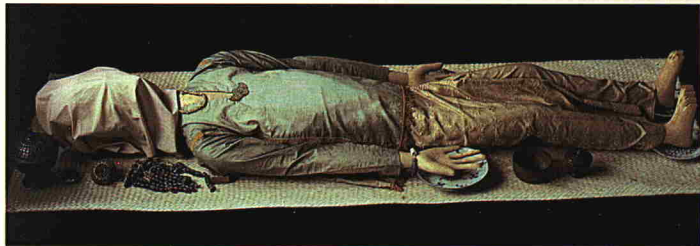
5.19



5.20

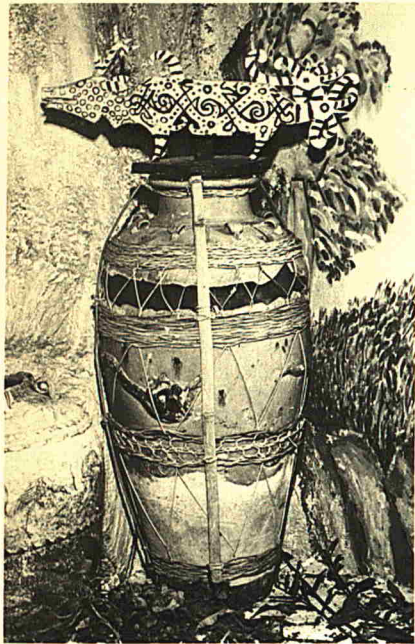


5.21



5.22. Jars used in Kelabit secondary burial.

5.23. K'ang-hsi ceramic vessels (crayfish, duck and cranebirds) of 17th-18th century, associated with Kelabit head rite.



CHAPTER SIX

BRASS ARTEFACTS AND THEIR USES

Brass working is quite an old craft in this part of Borneo. It dates back to at least several hundred years and continued to persist in Brunei until the beginning of this century.

It is, however, difficult to say for certain from where Bornean craftsmen had learned this craft. Borneo has had trading contacts with China, India and several Middle East countries for centuries and it is quite possible that the motifs which are characteristic in brass-work in this area could have been influenced by this trade link. The dragon motif which is very prominent on many kettles and cannons is of Chinese origin while the other intricate designs are reminiscent of Indian or Persian metal work.

Brass which is a mixture of copper and zinc, has always been preferred as it is cheaper and easier to work, instead of the other harder alloy, bronze.

Among the brass articles, the cannons are the most treasured because of their obvious function. The introduction of cannons and the knowledge of gun-powder making must have had an important role in the general socio-political development in this region, especially when piracy was prevalent in the South China Sea during that time. Those who could own cannons, had a great advantage over those who merely relied on the blow-pipe, spear and sword. People in small and isolated villages lived in constant fear of the pirates whose ships were well equipped with cannons. The poor villagers once captured, would be taken as slaves and their valuables and properties plundered.

Western historians visiting Southeast Asia in the 16th Century recorded the use of cannons by the indigenous people (Pigfetta's account on Brunei). The Brunei Royal Annals also mention that many large cannons were cast in Brunei especially after the two Spanish attacks on the sultanate in 1578 and 1580. Cannons were strategically placed at the most advantageous points at the fort or along the river bank to defend against any possible enemy attack.

Bornean cannon-makers could possibly have copied the style of some imported cannons, but generally they produced their own varieties of cannons as well. Some were adorned with intricate relief designs moulded on the sides while others were in the form of crocodiles with the crocodiles' open mouths serving as the muzzles (*plates 6.1 to 6.3*).

Apart from being used in fighting and in defence, cannons were also used for other purposes. For instance, they were used to decorate boats in order

to show the importance of the boat owner or were prominently displayed in longhouses or villages to show the wealth and status of the owner. Cannons were also used for signalling and warning. In the olden days when land communications were difficult, cannons were fired to convey messages from one village to another, about a birth, a death, a festival, an enemy's attack or to drive away evil spirits and epidemics.

Among the Muslims, cannons were used to mark the beginning and the end of the fasting month, Ramadan. Among the non-Muslims, cannons were fired as a salute of the visit of an important person to the longhouse and also served as part of the marriage dowry and as fines in offences.

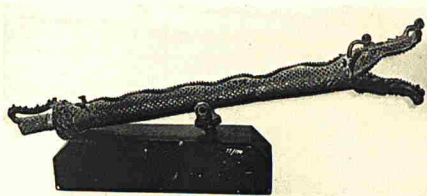
Bornean craftsmen also produced other functional brass articles for their everyday use. These include kettles, gongs, trays and lidded containers for the *sireh* leaves, betel nuts and lime, all of which are chewed together (plate 6.11). Although many of the kettles and gongs were made of bronze, many of the large kettles and gongs were also made of brass as well, patterned after the bronze versions. The kettles vary from small plain and undecorated ones to the larger ones, some elaborately adorned with relief motifs of dragon and other surface designs while others with intricate incised floral designs (plates 6.8 to 6.10). These kettles were used to serve drinking water, especially the bigger ones during a wedding or any other major festival.

Popularly seen in longhouses and villages are gongs, from the single large gong, the *tauwak*, to the set of small gongs, the *engkerumong* which are arranged on a horizontal rack (plates 6.4 to 6.6). Many of the larger gongs are elaborately adorned with dragons and other relief motifs while the smaller ones are generally plain and undecorated. These gongs are rhythmically beaten to provide the background music in the traditional dancing in the longhouse.

All these brass articles, like the ceramic objects, are highly treasured as heirlooms and bride wealth and form part of the traditional symbols of wealth and status of the owners.



6.1



6.2



6.3

- 6.1. Very rare cannon with its muzzle in the form of a crocodile. The whole barrel is ornamented with floral designs in panels. On top at the rear of the barrel is adorned with a dog and a small crocodile in between the touch-hole. Length: 152.5 cm. Museum Cat. No. 78/141.
- 6.2. Rare cannon in the form of a crocodile with the crocodile's open mouth serving as the muzzle. Length: 101.3 cm. Museum Cat. No. 77/194.
- 6.3. Common cannons decorated with floral designs. Length: 96.3 cm. and 83.7 cm. Museum Cat. Nos. 1485B and 70/19.



6.4

6.4. A brass gong elaborately decorated with raised dragon and floral motifs. Museum Cat. No. 1268. Width: 50.5 cm.



6.5

6.5. A rare brass gong with two bosses and raised dragon and floral motifs. Museum Cat. No. 71/104. Width: 38.8/10 cm.

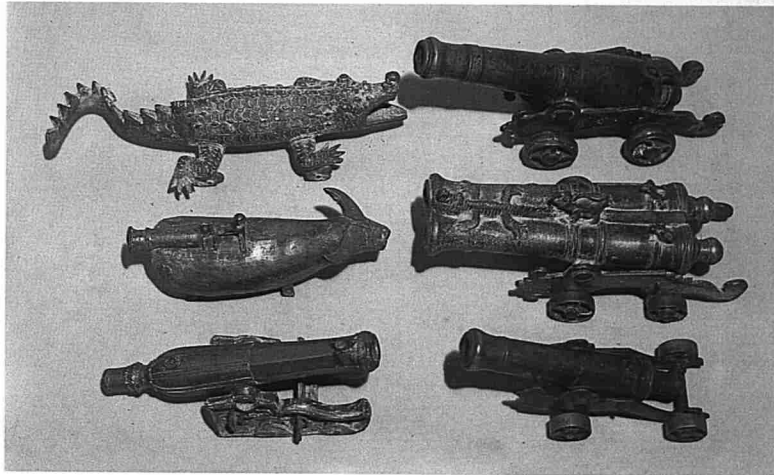
6.6. A set of small gongs (Engkeru-mong) set on a horizontal rack. Museum Cat. Nos. 77/191a-b, width from 17.1 cm. to 18.5 cm.



6.6

- 6.7 An assortment of miniature brass cannons, some in the form of crocodile and buffalo. Museum Cat. Nos. 77/188, Length: 31 cm.; 77/187, Length: 21 cm.; 77/189, Length: 21.3 cm.; 69/495, Length: 24.9 cm.; 73/145, Length: 23.2 cm., and 69/49, Length: 18.1 cm.

6.7





6.8

6.8. A rare brass kettle decorated with moulded animals. Museum Cat. No. 77/192. Height: 23 cm.

6.9. A brass kettle decorated with dragons, fish, lion and other animal and floral designs. Museum Cat. No. 73/174. Height: 15 7/8", Diameter: 11 3/4".

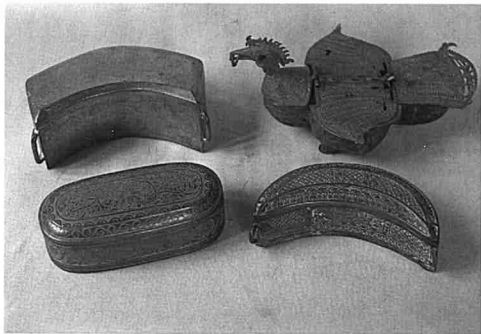
6.10. A brass kettle decorated with intricate incised designs. Museum Cat. No. 73/176. Height: 40.1 cm.



6.9

6.10

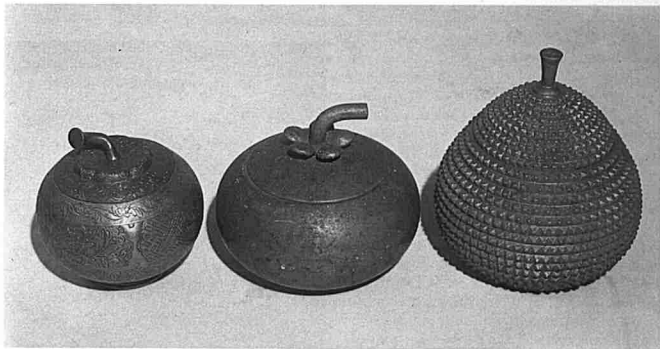




6.11

- 6.11. Brass sireh boxes of different shapes. Museum Cat. Nos. 77/186, 4684, 77/207 and 73/154.
- 6.12. Brass jewellery boxes in the form of fruits. Museum Cat. Nos. 68/38, 7297 and 68/312.

6.12



6.13



6.13. Brass jar decorated with incised designs. Museum Cat. No. 77/193. Height: 62.5 cm.

6.14



6.15

6.14. Brass container decorated with dragon and floral motifs. Museum Cat. No. 74/280. Height: 43.5 cm.

6.15. A brass tray. Museum Cat. No. 76/57. Width: 39.5 cm.



CHAPTER SEVEN

BEADS: THEIR VALUES AND USES

The many colourful beads which had been used by the indigenous people of Borneo can be broadly divided into two major groups.

Of most interest are the many colourful ancient or old beads, made of either glass, cornelian and onyx and which are commonly found in the possession of the indigenous people on the mainland as well as the islands of Southeast Asia. Ancient beads, mostly monochromes, had also been recovered in excavation sites in association with Chinese ceramics dating back to the Sung Dynasty or earlier.

There are still uncertainties about the origin of these ancient beads found in this region. Many scholars have suggested that they were brought here from Egypt, Greece and other Middle East countries, India and China as early as in pre-Christian times. Sir Roland Bradell (1947) in his series of papers on Malaysian history, suggested that some of these beads found in this region were brought by the Sabeian traders in pre-Christian times. H.C. Beck (1930) examined a Sarawak bead necklace and paralleled six of the ornate beads with Greek and early Roman specimens and equated those glassy beads which are esteemed by the Kelabit and Bidayuh with Indian specimens. One scholar has even suggested that many of the beads found in this region were made in this region from an imported raw material which contained a high proportion of melted-down glass scrap originated in some Middle East countries.

Be it as it may, beads are highly mobile objects and have been traded into the hinterland of Borneo. Like ceramic and brass objects, beads form part of the traditional symbols of social status and wealth amongst the indigenous people. They are heirlooms handed down from one generation to the next, from mother to daughter. In the old days, beads were one of the principle forms of currency. Beads are also used as bride wealth and serve as grave-goods among the aristocrats.

There is a great variety of beads. Some aristocratic women have remarkable knowledge of beads and are able to identify sixty or more different types.

The value of beads varies amongst the different ethnic groups. The Kelabit who live in the interior and the Bidayuh living in the southwest corner of Borneo, regard the one coloured bluish glass or stone beads as most valuable. The Kelabit particularly place more value on the one coloured pale blue beads which are either glassy, stone (mostly cornelian), or 'bone' (orange to dark brown). The most valued are the largish pale greenish-blue

to dark blue glassy beads (see *plate 7.1* of a Kelabit wearing the beads). The average size of these blue beads runs a little below $\frac{1}{2}$ " long and $\frac{1}{4}$ " in end diameter, the ends usually cut off flat and the hole considerable as it needs to admit the native made thread, made of stripped pineapple. These beads are usually slightly wider in the centre, sloping away regularly on all sides to the end; but are sometimes evenly tabular though occasionally with grooves and ridges.

These glassy beads are usually worn as necklaces, by men and women. The smaller and more valuable are worn as wristlets. One can easily determine the social standing of an aristocratic woman by the number and quality of beads she wears round her neck, wrist and on her jacket or skirt. Heavy cornelian beads are threaded into skull-caps. The Kelabit seldom part with their beads except in times of starvation or to settle an inheritance dispute.

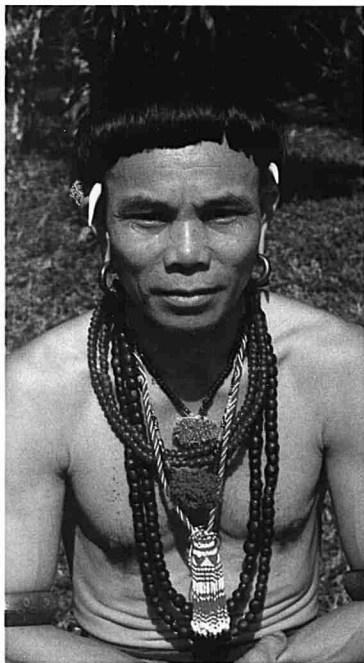
The Bidayuh value the rounded pale blue glassy beads which are threaded into necklaces together with teeth and claws of honey bear, wild boar, ant-eater, and waist girdles (*plate 7.2*). These necklaces are worn by the witchdoctors and priests during ceremonies and as well as charms. The coastal Melanau also associate the glassy blue beads as bride wealth as well as gravegoods.

The Kayan and Kenyah place more value on ornate and decorative beads particularly those known to them as *lukut*, which are divided into three classes. A particular bead known as *lukut sekala* (second one on the left at bottom line in *plate 7.3*) was until recently worth an adult male slave. These beads are threaded into necklaces and are also used as bride wealth.

The other group consists of bright tiny colourful monochrome beads of European manufacture. These beads are generally threaded to form a wide variety of designs to decorate women's head-bands or to adorn the tops of sunhats, from the small Melanau *matu terindak* to the large Kayan/Kenyah *sa'ong* sunhats. These beads are also sewn to decorate baby cradles, baskets, tobacco and *sireb* boxes and handbags as well as war coats and jackets (*plates 7.4 to 7.10*).

7.1. A couple wearing many valuable old beads. The tiny beads decorating the lady's jacket are fairly old. The Kelabit place the highest value on the large pale greenish blue to dark blue glassy beads as illustrated in the photograph below (two necklaces worn by the man and one by the lady).

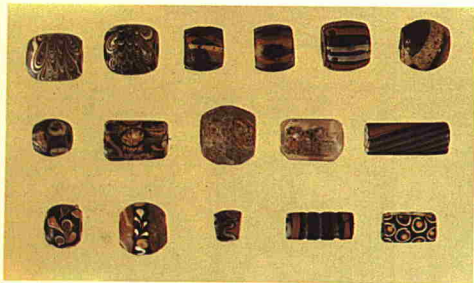
7.1



7.2



7.2 Bidayuh bead necklaces, threaded with teeth of honey bear and wild boar and a waist girdle. The Bidayuh place more value on the pale blue glassy beads in the middle necklace.



7.3 Rare and expensive decorative ancient beads (lukut).

7.3



7.4 & 5. *Iban* jackets decorated with beads. Museum Cat. Nos. 348 & 349.

7.4



7.5

7.6



7.7



7.6 & 7. Coloured beads used to decorate headbands and sunbats. Museum Cat. Nos. 2171, 1836, 74/20 and 67/51.



7.8

7.8. Kenyah ingan baskets and baby cradle decorated with coloured beads. Museum Cat. Nos. 77/204, 22021 and 77/205; height: 49 cm., 35 cm., and 50 cm.



7.9

7.9. *Kenyah bamboo tobacco containers, decorated with coloured beads. Museum Cat. Nos. 65/367 and 65/366.*

7.10. *Kenyah sireh boxes decorated with coloured beads. Museum Cat. Nos. 77/207 and 813.*



7.10

CHAPTER EIGHT

COSTUMES, JEWELLERIES AND ORNAMENTS

Before imported woven cloth became available, the indigenous people of Sarawak produced their own clothing. Clothing was not only necessary for their daily use, but a special type of clothing was required for ceremonies such as during the traditional ritual associated with head-hunting and during the mourning of a dead chief.

Bark-cloth can be made from the bark of several species of tree, the *ipoh* or *tajam* (*Antiaris toxicaria*), the bread-fruit (*Artocarpus*) and the wild fig.

The process of making the bark-cloth is to strip off the inner layer of the bark, soak it well in water and then hammer it with a heavy wooden beater until it becomes soft and pliant. As the fibres of the bark generally run in one direction, the cloth is liable to split apart. Stitching with thread made of fibres of pineapple leaf, is therefore, necessary.

Pieces of finished bark-cloth can be sewn together to make simple garments like jackets, coats and loincloths (*plates 8.1 to 8.3*). Decoration of simple patterns are embroidered onto them or are simply painted with the desired vegetable dye.

Only the Iban and Malay in Sarawak practise the craft of weaving today.

The Iban weave blankets (*pua kumbu*), skirts (*bidang*), jackets (*kelambi* or *baju burong*) and other small garments from cotton obtained from cultivated shrubs on a simple loom (*plates 8.4, 8.6 to 8.9*). The Malay use a more complex loom and weave a special silk cloth, usually with designs in silver and gold threads, for use on special occasions such as weddings.

Iban used two different methods of weaving and decorating their textiles, the most popular being the *ikat* or tie-dyeing method. The other is a floating weft method called *pileh*, which is used much less often. The *ikat* method is commonly used for blankets and skirts, but seldom for the sashes and loincloths. It is actually more of a decorating or dyeing method than a weave.

The patterns used in all the weaving are based on the motifs as seen in the many other Sarawak decorative arts, and involve combinations and elaborations of the rhomb and key motifs discussed earlier. Thus many forms are created to produce a surprisingly wide variety of designs, varying from quite naturalistic, within the limits of the crossed threads, to designs so abstracted and decorated that no one, except the weaver herself, has any idea what they really represent. The designs have also been passed down for

so many generations and altered slightly in the process that two weavers may disagree over the meaning of a given design.

The uses of *pua kumbu* are numerous and are of great significance in the traditional life of the Iban. They were used in ceremonies: birth, marriage, funeral, healing, as well as in farming rituals. As soon as the child is cleaned after being delivered, he or she is laid upon a *pua kumbu*. During the first ceremonial bath in the river (*ngemandi ka anak*), the baby is wrapped and covered with a *pua kumbu* and taken to the river. During the wedding ceremony, *pua kumbu* are used to adorn the room (*bilek*) where the marriage ceremony is held; the couple to be married sit on gong and under a *pua kumbu* canopy to receive the blessing of their elderly folk. *Pua kumbu* also forms part of the dowry. When a relative has died, *pua kumbu* are hung up as curtains to shelter the body of the dead relative. *Pua kumbu* are also used to veil structures (*pandong*) containing charms and offerings in farming rituals. In the olden days, *pua kumbu* were used to receive heads from a party returning from a successful war expedition.

Many of the jackets are further decorated with monochrome beads in a variety of designs and some shirts are similarly decorated with flattened cowrie shells, silver coins and brass bells.

The Malay weave a very ornate cloth very similar to the gold threaded *kain songket* of Kelantan and Indonesia. Like the Iban textiles, it is reserved for ceremonial use. But unlike the various shapes and sizes of Iban cloth, the *songket* cloth is made in one size, a two-and-half yard *sarong* or skirt length (plates 8.10 & 8.11). It is woven on a large and rather complex loom which has numerous instruments for raising and lowering various sets of threads to create the intricate patterns in the cloth.

Kain berturus and the more elaborate *kain songket* are still woven in Kuching and in the Mukah areas. It takes a weaver at least one month, working nearly full-time to finish one *kain berturus*, and much longer for the more elaborate patterns. Most of the weaving is done by older women.

In addition to the decorative costumes and beads already discussed in Chapter Seven, the people of Sarawak also possess a wide variety of other ornaments which are either made of gold, silver and other precious metals. All these form an important part of the ceremonial attire of the indigenous people of Sarawak.

Although gold has long been mined in Sarawak, gold ornaments are expensive and therefore comparatively rare and precious, being beyond the reach of the majority of our people. They include chains of necklaces, bangles, bracelets, rings, pendants and pins, most common being a set of three pins (*keronsang*), linked by a chain, and used as buttons on the tight-fitting *kebaya* blouse.

Silver ornaments, being cheaper, have thus been more popular among the people, more so as ornaments rather than as a form of wealth.

The Maloh are the best known silver-smiths. They traditionally made many silver articles, from the popular girdles which consist of several bands of *rotan* upon which many tiny silver rings are threaded to more elaborate silver belts. The girdles are worn by maidens during longhouse festivals. The silver belts are either worn as belts or across the chest and over the shoulders. Silver bracelets, ear-rings, brooches, and head-dress are also commonly worn as part of ceremonial attire. The majority of the silver ornaments made by the Maloh are decorated with low relief or incised floral designs (*plates 8.12 to 8.14*).

The Maloh are also skilful in brasswork, producing corsets, ear-rings, rings, etc.

The inland people like the Kenyah, Kayan, Kelabit and Punan of Borneo favour the wearing of rather large and heavy ear-rings, which are quite unusual in design. Many of these people still continue the practice of stretching their ear-lobes until they reach shoulder length. This is considered a feature of beauty. Young children have their ears pierced when they are still very small. The ear-lobes are gradually stretched by adding more and more ear-rings, either made of brass or lead. Many of the ear-rings are simple and undecorated, but some are decorated with intricate designs or are in simple form of a dragon's head at each end of the loop (*plates 8.15 to 8.17*).

Another artistic feature of personal ornaments is tattooing which is practised by the Kayan, Kenyah and Iban. Different tattoo designs are produced and certain types are considered appropriate for certain parts of the body (*plate 8.18*). For instance, a circular design is for the shoulder, chest or the outer side of the wrist while a more elaborate and often larger design such as a dog, scorpion or dragon, is reserved for the inner and outer surfaces of the thigh. Among the Iban, one distinctive design is meant for the man's throat.

The reasons for tattooing are many and obscure. In the olden days, when the hand of a man was tattooed, it meant that he was particularly brave in war or that he had actually taken some heads. Today, men are tattooed primarily to commemorate journeys undertaken or simply because tattooing is considered decorative in itself.

Among the Kayan, both men and women are tattooed; the women more elaborate. The Kenyah and Kelabit women are also tattooed. In the olden days, the Kenyah and Kayan aristocratic women had elaborate designs tattooed on their arms from the fingers to the elbow and on their legs from below the knee to the upper thigh to symbolise their status. Some Iban women are also tattooed but not as heavy as the men. The bodies of some Iban men may be almost covered with tattooing designs.



8.1, 2 & 3 Kenyah sleeveless jackets and loincloth, made of bark.
Museum Cat. Nos. 77/181,
77/182 and 77/183.



8.4. *Iban back-strap loom.*

8.5. *Malay handloom.*



8.4

8.5

8.6 & 7. *Iban woven jackets with long sleeves (kelambi baju). Museum Cat. Nos. 77/185 and 1442.*



8.8. *Iban woven blanket (pua kumbu). Museum Cat. No. 71/221.*

8.9. *Iban woven skirt (bidang). Museum Cat. No. 233.*

8.8



8.7



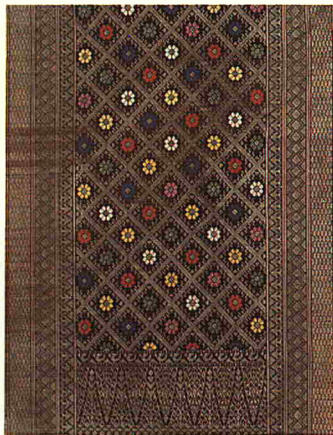
8.9



8.10 & 11. Malay kain songket, embroidered with gold and silver threads. Museum Cat. Nos. 76/120 and 77/184.



8.10



8.11



8.12

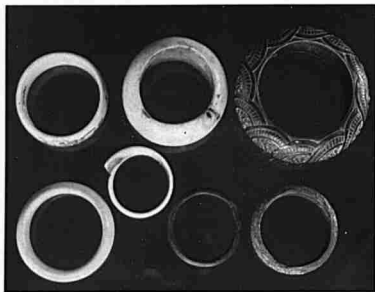
8.12 & 13. Iban ladies adorned with silver ornaments as part of their traditional costume.

8.14. Iban men in warrior's attire.

8.13



8.14



8.15. A variety of armlets, made of brass and shell

8.16. A variety of ear-rings and pendants, made of brass and lead.

8.17. A Penan wearing a pair of heavy ear-rings.

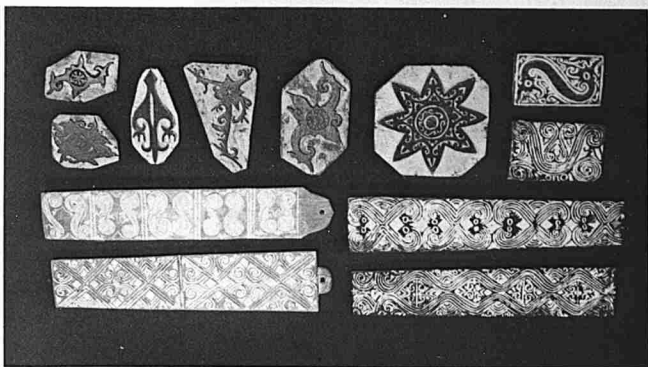
8.15



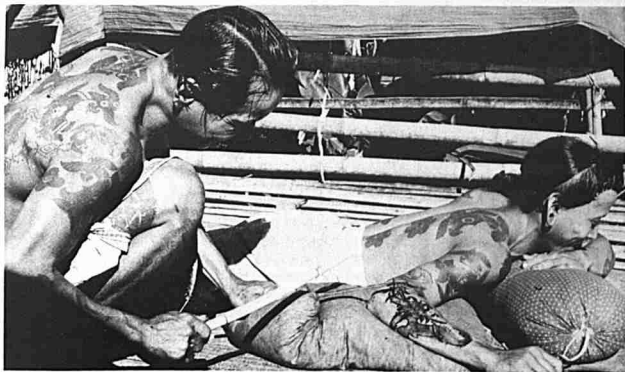
8.16



8.17



8.18. A variety of tattoo designs.



8.19

8.19. An Iban man is being tattooed. The outline of the tattooing design is first applied onto the part of the body before the needle is slowly employed to penetrate the design onto the surface permanently.

CHAPTER NINE

BASKETS, MATS & HATS AND THEIR USES

The country's rich natural resources: the stem of the climbing *rotlan*, the leaves of the swamp *nipab* and the *pandanus* palms, and the *bemban* reed, can be easily made into many types of useful items such as baskets, mats and hats which are needed by the indigenous people in their everyday use and, as well as in their ceremonial rituals. The majority of the people are involved in agriculture. But as their farms are usually some distances away from their villages and longhouses, baskets and other form of containers are, therefore, necessary to transport the crops back to their villages.

There is a variety of baskets which are required for planting, for harvesting, for storing and for winnowing the padi, besides those required for collecting bamboo shoots and edible ferns, for fishing and for keeping personal belongings. Activities connected with their agriculture cycle have religious significance and for these, special types of baskets are made.

Likewise too, a wide range of hats and mats is also made. As farmers who spend most of their time in the open, and whose hands are required in felling trees and undergrowth, in planting, weeding and harvesting and in paddling and carrying, it is, therefore, most logical to wear a suitable hat to protect themselves against the beating rays of the hot sun and the heavy rain while they are engaged in such activities.

Different types of mats are also required not only for sleeping, but also for drying padi in the sun, for catching the winnowed rice and as well as for their festivals and ceremonial rituals connected with their farming activity.

Decorating is done by plaiting onto the objects with strips which have been dyed in the different colours. Many patterns of designs can be achieved in this way. However, the common designs are geometrical, often based on the rhomb shapes and the key and spiral motifs. If a particular basket is made for an agricultural purpose, motifs of the padi shoots or fern tops are decorated. And if it is for a particular ceremonial function, a religious symbol of an omen bird, for instance, is applied.

In general, it is still easy to identify baskets and other plaited items by the designs and techniques as being made by a particular ethnic group. But there are certain plaited items, for instance, the Penan *ajat* basket, which has been adopted and produced by the Kayan and Kenyah as well. This process of adoption and assimilation in all cultural spheres has been going on over the centuries and is one of the most interesting ways in which the indigenous people of Sarawak have enriched their artistic culture.

Rottan is the most widely used of the plaiting material. It is split into strips and the inner surface of the strip is then carefully but skilfully smoothed by a knife. *Rottan*, whether in whole or split, can be used to make a variety of items, from chairs to sleeping mats and baskets. The large *tikar lampit* made by the Kayan/Kenyah/Kelabit, which is used for sleeping and sitting upon, is made of stout strips of *rottan*, laid parallel to one another and held together by strings threaded through the strips at right angles at intervals (plate 9.1). When not in use, it can be rolled up. These mats can be made in sizes up to six feet in width and twenty feet in length. They last for years provided they are kept dry. A particular mat seat (*tikar burit*) made by the Punan, Kayan, Kenyah and some Iban, about 18" by 10", rectangular in shape and sharply pointed at one end, is also made of split *rottan* (plate 9.2). Those required for ceremonies are often decorated with beads, cowrie shells, feathers and skin. This mat is worn by fastening it to the back of a belt by the pointed end. It is thus hung in a convenient position to sit on when no other mats are available, especially in the jungle. Coarse baskets made of unsplit *rottan* are used for transporting heavier loads, for instance, pigs from the farm to the market.

The nomadic Penan are well known for producing the finest *rottan* sleeping mats (*mak*) and baskets which are closely plaited, soft and pliable (plates 9.3 to 9.5). These are decorated in a cream or light brown colour with dark brown or black designs of hornbill, spider and floral motifs. The most famous Penan basket (*ajat*) made of finely split *rottan*, is a cylindrical back pack basket with two shoulder straps.

The *ingan* basket, cylindrical in shape, supported by a set of four vertical sticks on the sides serving as legs, slightly flared at the top and made of wide strips of *rottan*, used for carrying and for storage, is a typical Kayan basket (plate 9.6). This type of basket is used for carrying goods for long distances and can also be used for storing padi or other personal belongings in the longhouse.

The Bidayuh make a variety of baskets of different sizes, the most popular is the *tambok* (plate 9.7) which is, again cylindrical in shape and supported by four vertical sticks like the Kayan *ingan*. The Bidayuh carry their jungle produce to the market in this type of basket on their back, with a bark-cloth head strap over the forehead. Unlike the baskets made by the other ethnic groups, the Bidayuh produce their *tambok* baskets by plaiting

with vertical and horizontal strips of *rotan*, instead of with the diagonal ones as practised by the other groups. Another type of basket known as *chantonng* made by the Bidayuh is worth mentioning (*plate 9.8*). It is finely plaited and superimposed with bark or skin and covered with a drum-like cover. Shaped like the Kayan *ingan*, it is used for storing personal belongings. Formerly when headhunting was prevalent, new heads were stored in this type of basket and hung up in the headhouse.

The coastal Melanau produce a wide range of baskets from the popularly known round topped Rejang basket to the modern purses and handbags, decorated with a combination of traditional designs in natural, black and red colours. These baskets are either made of thinly split *rotan* strips or strips of *bemban*.

Among the outstanding baskets made by the Iban are the seed baskets (*raga*). They are small, about 10'' high, with a wide band of wood around the top, and a four-cornered bottom, but with no stick supports. They are very finely plaited and often decorated with significant symbols depicting the ritual of padi farming. These baskets are worn over one's shoulder or fastened at the waist so that the padi seeds can be conveniently taken out for planting (*plate 9.13*).

The Kelabit produce a variety of baskets for carrying and storing padi. These usually large baskets, cylindrical in shape like a cone and supported by a number of vertical sticks on the side, are generally decorated with horizontal bands of designs related to padi growing (*plate 9.15*).

A great variety of hats is made by the people of Sarawak to protect themselves from the hot sun and rain. Hats are preferred by the rural people whose hands are occupied in the field, in paddling or in carrying. The coastal Melanau are noted for producing a series of stylised hats, commonly known as *terindak* (*plates 9.9 to 9.10*). They are large, somewhat conical in shape, made mostly of the swamp *nipah* leaves and decorated with long bamboo strips or *nipah* veins, radiating from the top centre of the hat and decorated with dyes in black and red. The rim of the hat is strengthened by *rotan* strips which are sewn on. This sort of hat involves mostly applied work rather than plaiting. Smaller versions of the *terindak* hat are made by the Matu Melanau. These are usually not more than 12'' in circumference and conical in shape. The inner layer of the hat is plaited with strips of sago bark and the outer layer plaited with strips of *bemban* or bamboo and

decorated with designs plaited with silver or other metallic threads.

The outstanding hat amongst the Kayan and Kenyah is the large *sa'ong* sunhat (plate 7.7). It is made of layers of palm leaves which are overlapped and then sewn together. The edges of the hat are bent down and then secured by a *rotan* strip to keep the hat in shape. It is usually decorated with tufts of coloured cloth and the top is adorned with a beaded motif. Another popular type of sun wear of these two groups is the skull-cap (*lavung kirap*), plaited with tiny strips of split *rotan* or processed reed with two horizontal projections on both ends. It is often decorated with a number of bands of *rotan* fringes, a few rows of beads and hornbill feathers sticking out from the top (plate 9.2).

9.1



9.3



9.2



9.4



9.1. *Tikar lampit*, made by the Kayan, Kenyah and Kelabit.

9.2. *Tikar burit* (sitting mat).

9.3. *Penan sleeping mat*, elaborately decorated with hornbill and other designs in dyed black colour against natural colour of the split rotan.

9.4. An old Penan lady making a sleeping mat.

9.5. *Penan baskets (ajat), which are made of finely split rattan and decorated with hornbill designs in dyed black.*

9.6. *Kayaningan basket*

9.7. *Bidayub tambok basket, popularly used in carrying jungle produce to the market.*

9.8. *Bidayub chantong basket made with finely plaited split rattan with a drum-like cover, used to keep personal belongings.*

9.5



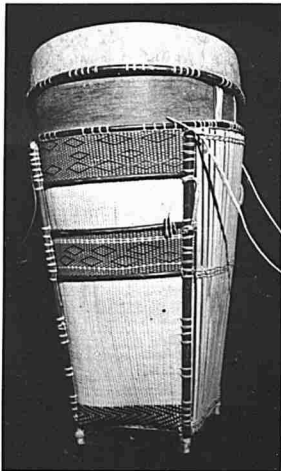
9.7



9.6

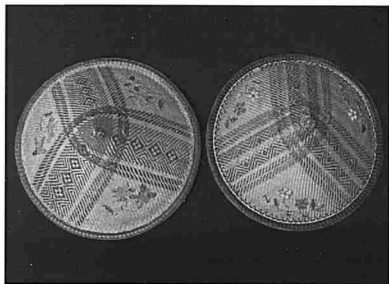


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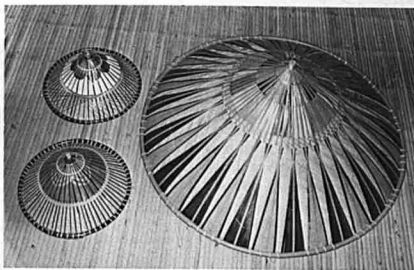


9.9& 10. A series of Melanau *terindak* hats, made mostly of nipah leaves and decorated with dyes in black and red or in plaited designs with silver or other metallic thread.

9.9



9.10



9.11



9.12

9.11&12. A wide range of baskets from the popular round topped basket (above) to handbags, made either of thinly split rattan or bemban strips and brilliantly decorated with the combination of traditional designs in black and red colours.

9.13



9.14



9.13. Baskets made by the Iban. The one in the middle is a seed basket (*raga*), finely plaited and decorated with significant symbols depicting the ritual *padi* farming.

9.14. Sets of finely plaited small round baskets (*garong*) used in offering rice wine (*tuak*) to the warriors during the festival of the dead (*Gawai Antu*) of the Iban.

9.15. *Kelabit* carrying baskets, the one in the shape of a cone, is decorated with bands of designs related to *padi* growing.

9.15



CHAPTER TEN

WOOD-CARVINGS

The Kenyah, Kayan, Kajang, Punan and other related minority groups are the most skilled and decorative carvers in Sarawak, producing a wide variety of beautiful wood-carvings from huge burial structures to small ear-pendants made of hornbill ivory (*plate 10.18*). They are also well-known in building strong and solid longhouses and longboats.

It was the traditional practice of these colourful people to construct elaborate wooden structures to inter the remains of their chiefs.

There are two types of structure, the *kelirieng* (burial pole) and the *salong* (burial hut). A *kelirieng* is made of a huge hardwood tree trunk, carved from top to bottom, with niches up its sides for the bodies of slaves and followers and hollowed at the top for the jar containing the bones of the chief. A heavy stone slab is then surmounted on top of the pole. Some of the *kelirieng* measure more than six or more feet in diameter and as tall as 32 feet above the ground (*plate 10.1*). It must have been a formidable task to produce such a monument as it incurred heavy liabilities. The owner had to be wealthy enough to feed the many carpenters and carvers and other labourers, including slaves during the long period from the time the selected tree was felled, brought to the site where it was to be erected, the elaborate carving made and finally the pole erected and the huge and heavy stone-slab installed.

A *salong* is a burial hut supported by one or as many as four tall posts. Bones of members of an aristocratic family are placed in jars and then interred in the chamber of the hut, which is elaborately decorated with spiral appendages or painted with the same motifs (*plate 10.2*).

The oldest existing *kelirieng* has been reported to be about 200 years old. Older ones have deteriorated.

Three burial poles have so far been brought down to Kuching for display. The latest one, in double trunks, is the most beautiful of them all. It was brought down from Long Segaham above Belaga in the Seventh Division in 1972 after risking all the dangerous rapids along the Batang Rejang. It has now been re-erected at the new Kuching Municipal Council Park (former Reservoir), about half a mile away from the museum grounds.

A number of *kelirieng* and *salong* still in fairly good condition can be found in the Belaga district in the Seventh Division and in the Tatau and Tinjar districts of the Fourth Division.

The Kenyah traditional wooden masks, elaborately carved with big protruding eyes, used in their harvest ceremony, have always intrigued many admirers (plate 10.3). Individual figures of human, semi-gods, demons and other animal forms are also elaborately carved (plates 10.5 to 10.8). The most common form in these people's carving is the *aso'* motif, the dragon-like dog with long snout, curling fangs and sets of long horns. *Aso'* figures are either carved singly, or as legs for tables, as bottle stoppers, war canoe bowpieces and as ear-rings.

Relief carvings adorning eating utensils like dishes, bowls, and spoons and other household furniture like stools and even doors have also been done. Walking sticks and musical instruments like the well-known guitar, the *sape* and the nose flute, are also elaborately carved (plates 10.4, 10.9, 10.10 to 10.15).

The Kenyah/Kayan ceremonial *parang ilang* is another piece of beautiful carving (plate 10.17). The hilt is intricately carved and adorned with tufts of human hair, often those of an enemy. The sheath, made of two slips of wood, is also equally well carved and further decorated with beads and animals' teeth. The blade itself is often elaborately decorated with scroll designs along the posterior border and inlaid with brass. Before iron was imported, the indigenous people smelted the iron ore found in river beds.

The most popular Iban carving is the hornbill, a stylised interpretation of a striking Borneo bird which holds an honoured place in Iban folklore (plate 10.21). The *Burong Kenyalang*, or hornbill is the messenger of the most sacred of all birds, *Sengalang Burong*, the Brahminy Kite, the ancestors of the Iban. A special festival, the *Gawai Burong* or *Gawai Kenyalang*, is often held in honour of *Sengalang Burong* and his messenger. At this festival, the carved hornbill images are displayed and are generally paraded up and down the verandah (*tanju*) of the longhouses, adorned with jewellery and offerings of food and afterwards placed on top of the poles.

The Iban also carve and decorate their burial huts (*sungkup*), especially made during the *Gawai Antu* (festival of the dead) which is held once in every 10 to 15 years (plate 10.20). They also carve trap charms (*tuntun peti*), which are of hard wood and are usually small in size, about 2½ feet in length. The top part of the wood is carved in a squatting human figure with its elbows resting on the knees and the chin on the palms. These trap charms are stuck in appropriate places and they are supposed to attract games.

The Melanau carve a variety of sickness images, miniature coffins and burial posts, guardian figures and paddles. All these are still popularly produced as are the fishing fetishes, carved of bones and antlers' horns (plates 10.22 to 10.23).

Melanau traditionally had an elaborate system of ceremonies for curing all kinds of illnesses which are presided over by a spirit doctor, or *dukun* who would attempt to drive or coax the evil spirits out of the victim's body. The more serious the illness, the more complicated the ceremony. However, if all these failed the *bayob* spirit medium would perform the *berayun* ceremony, assisted by carved sickness images.

Sickness images would be quickly carved, usually from soft wood. They took the form of the spirit suspected of causing the illness. The *dukun* used the image to extract the spirit causing the illness from the victim's body, after which the image was set adrift in the river or hidden in the jungle.

The Bidayuh traditionally produced wooden humanistic images (plate 10.8) which frequently represented good spirits and were placed at the junctions of footpaths leading to their longhouses and farms. For certain ceremonies other figures were made to represent bad spirits which were then destroyed or floated away downstream at the end of the ceremony. They also produced other carved objects such as ceremonial shields, special sticks for measuring pigs and containers for the lime used in the betel chewing. The Bidayuh continue to produce such objects together with new adaptations such as bamboo pencil holders, ceremonial shields, smoking pipes, etc. (plates 10.24 to 10.25).

The Malay are noted for their architecture. The windows, rails, banisters (*pagar*) and the roof fascia board which form the front facade of the house are decoratively carved. Several old houses with this sort of decoration can still be seen in the kampung around Kuching (plates 10.26 & 10.27).

The Malay also traditionally carved and decorated their ceremonial bridal chamber, *panggo* (plate 10.28) and grave-markers, *nisan*.



10.1. A double-trunk burial pole (kelrieng) from Lang Segabam, Ulu Belaga and now re-erected at Kuching Municipal Council Park, Kuching.

10.1

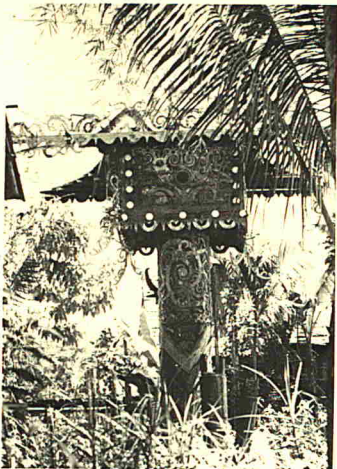
10.2. A Pnanan tomb hut (salong) at Tatan, Fourth Division

10.3



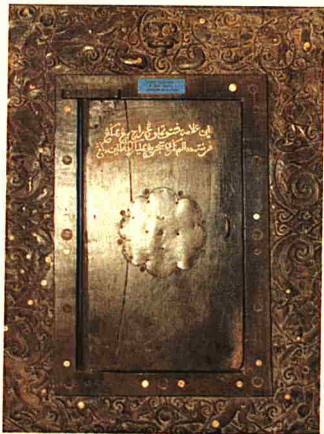
10.3. Masks used in Kenyah fertility rites. Museum Cat. Nos. 63/439 and 63/440.

10.4. Kenyah door carved in anthropomorphic figures. Width: 174 cm. Museum Cat. No. 77/198



10.2

10.4





10.5



10.6

10.5. *Kenyah wood-carving in the form of dragon-like dog figure with a leopard. Museum Cat. No. 77/195. Height: 101.0 cm.*

10.6. *Berawan carved wooden figures (mother and children). Museum Cat. No. 77/196. Height: 118.5 cm.*

10.8

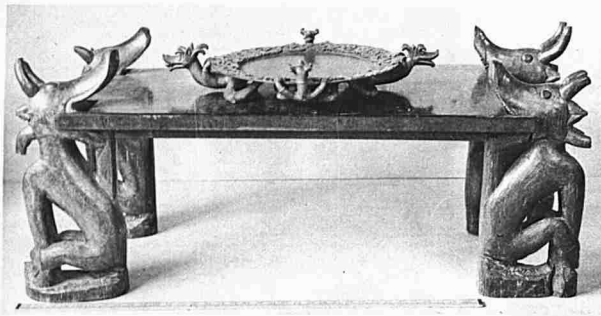
10.7. *Carved human figure of an old Baketan's house post. Museum Cat. No. 77/201. Length: 120 cm.*

10.8. *Bidayuh wood-carvings (tigundo). Museum Cat. Nos. 1107 and 1108.*



10.7





10.9

10.9. Carved wooden table, the legs in the form of dragon-like dog figure. Museum Cat. No. 77/197. Height: 52 cm.

10.10



10.10. Berauan carved wooden spoons and scoops, Museum Cat. Nos. 60/115, 60/220, 60/221, 42, 77/202a and b.

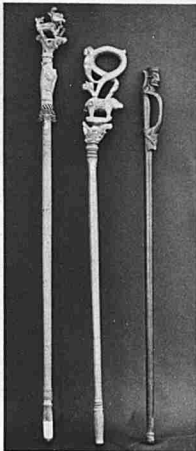
10.11. Berauan carved wooden bowls and dishes. Museum Cat. Nos. 2519, 63/16, 63/15, 59/75, 59/74 and 1921.



10.11



10.12



10.13



10.15

10.12. *Kenyah wood-carving. Museum Cat. No. 64/371. Height: 39.5 cm.*

10.13. *Left: Kayan ornate walking stick painted with carved top and bead skirting. Museum Cat. No. 66/236. Length: 3' 7½". Middle: Kayan ornate walking stick with figures of a male and snake standing on a pig. Museum Cat. No. 66/234. Length: 3' 4". Right: Walking stick from Marudi, Baram. Museum Cat. No. 976. Length: 3' 6".*

10.14. *Sape musical instrument, decorated with dragon-like head. Length: 152 cm. Museum Cat. No. 66/256.*

10.15. *An Assortment of mouth and nose flutes.*

10.14



10.16

- 10.16. *Kenyah* small knife bone handles which are carved with incised patterns. Museum Cat. Nos. 180a, b and d.



- 10.17. *Kenyah/Kayan* parang ilang (swords) decorated with carved bones. Museum Cat. Nos. 66/216, 54/13 and 76/34.

- 10.18. *Kelabit/Kayan* ear pendants and plugs, made of Helmeted Hornbill's ivory.

- 10.19. *Kelabit* ivory armlets and bone hair pins. Museum Cat. Nos. 1917a and b (armlets), width: 8.1 cm. and 8.3 cm., 4590 and 77/200 (hair pins) length: 25.9 cm. and 20.3 cm.

10.17



10.19





10.20. Iban carved burial hut (sungkup).

10.21. Iban carved wooden hornbill image used in Gawai Kenyalang ritual. Museum Cat. No. C76-216

10.20



10.21

10.22



10.23

10.24



10.22. Melanau carved sickness images (blam). Museum Cat. Nos. 77/203a, 77/203b, 77/203c, 77/203d and 64/86.

10.23. Melanau carved bone fishing fetishes (suk). Museum Cat. Nos. 70/193, 70/273, 70/201, 70/205, 70/197, 77/108B.

10.24 & 25. Bidayuh bamboo carvings: smoking pipes (serubok), tobacco, lime, food and coin saving containers, pencil holder, etc.

10.25





10.27

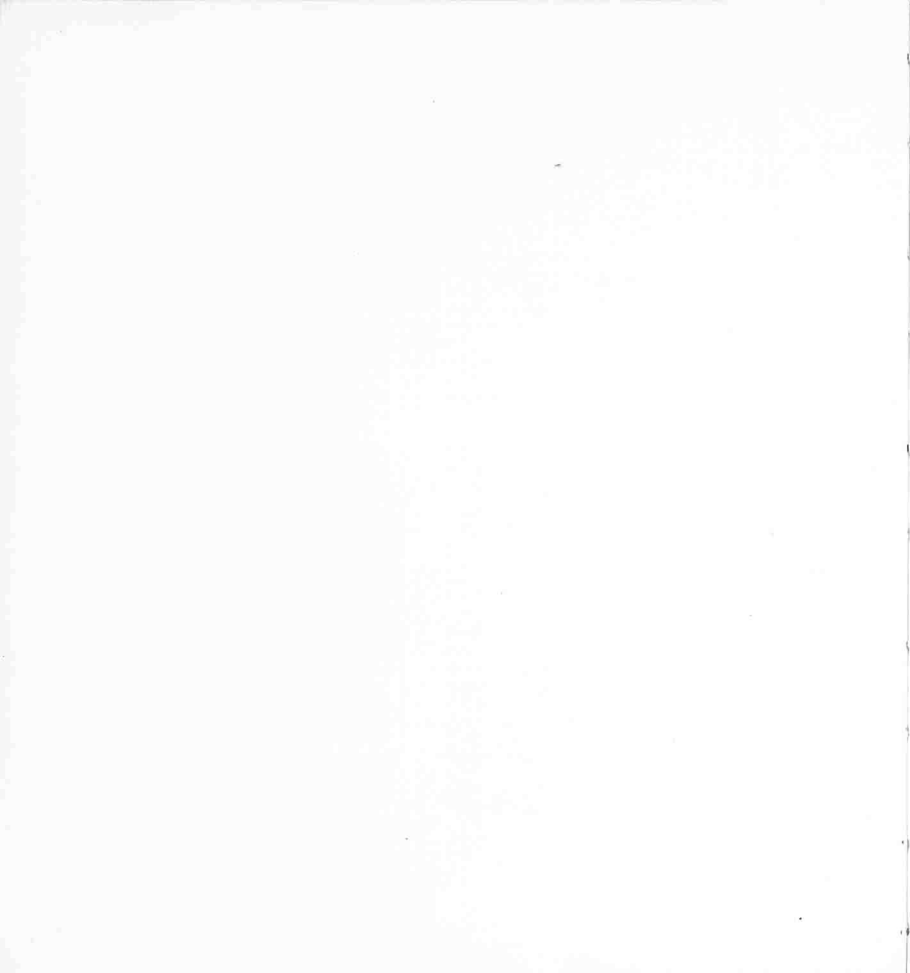
10.26 & 27. *An old Malay house at
Kampung Masjid, Kuching,
decorated with carved roof
fascia boards.*

10.28. *Malay decorative wedding
chamber (panggo).*

10.26



10.28



CHAPTER ELEVEN

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS

Many buildings, either because of their unusual architecture or historical or religious significance attached thereto, can be especially seen in and around the Capital, Kuching. These include public buildings (occupied by Government departments), temples, mosques and private houses.

Ten public buildings throughout the State have so far been gazetted as historical monuments since 1971. All these buildings are government properties and are, therefore, maintained by the Public Works Department. However, no major repairs or renovations may be carried out to any of these declared monuments without first consulting the Curator, who is the Controller of Antiquities and Historical Monuments.

More buildings or other historical structures will be declared from time to time, for instance, Oil Well No. 1 at Canada Hill, Miri, which was put in operation in 1910. Negotiations have been made with the owners to protect and preserve temples, mosques and private houses.

The following are public buildings which have been declared historical monuments:

1. The Istana in Kuching (built in 1870).
2. The Court House in Kuching (built in 1874).
3. Fort Margherita in Kuching (built in 1879).
4. The Square Tower in Kuching (built in 1879).
5. The Sarawak Museum (built in 1891).
6. The Kuching General Post Office (built in 1931).
7. Fort Alice at Simanggang (built in 1864).
8. Fort Lily at Betong (built in 1855).
9. Fort Sylvia at Kapit (built in 1880).
10. Fort Hose at Marudi (built in 1901).

Istana, Kuching, built in 1870 (*plate 11.1*)

The Istana was originally built in the form of three bungalows, supported by square brick pillars some twenty feet above the ground. The low spreading roof gave shade to the interior. The largest bungalow stands in the centre and contains the reception room, dining and drawing rooms while the smaller bungalows, each contains two large bedrooms. The Istana has undergone various alterations and renovations since it was first built.

As the official residence of the Head of State, the Istana has throughout the years served as the venue for many official functions. Apart from its ceremonial role, it occupies a significant place in the history of Sarawak.

The Court House, Kuching, built in 1874 (plate 11.5)

This building is perhaps one of the most magnificent buildings in Sarawak. It has a simple form and plain colonial type appearance with massive tapering brick pillars supporting the wide verandah which provides an ideal shade for an equatorial country. The main entrance is by a broad flight of steps leading to the square-like portico with four twin columns at each corner and a single column in between, on the side. The small balcony in the front is perhaps an influence from the Romanticism period with ornamented carved railings. The use of big massive columns was probably an influence from Roman Court Houses.

From the inception of this building up to 1973, all Council Negeri Meetings, commencing with the fifth in 1878, had been held there. It has been the scene of many historic occasions.

The Clock Tower was added in 1883 and the Charles Brooke Memorial in 1924.

Fort Margherita, Kuching, built in 1879 (plate 11.2)

The design of this fortress was based on the late English Renaissance fortresses and castles.

The intention of erecting the fort in this form was as a defensive edifice of outstanding attraction and something to enhance the beauty of the town. The position of the fort had been carefully chosen to command the long straight stretch of river approaching the town, this being the most advantageous point from which to defend the town from possible attack. But, by 1879, Sarawak was already passing through peaceful times and the Fort was never put to the use for which it had been originally intended.

It was later used as a prisoners' cell until a new one was established at an executive yard, near the rifle range, about a mile away.

Right up to the Second World War, there was a look-out and the sentry who used to pace the ramparts all day and night used to call out "All's

well" on the the stroke of every hour from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. This call used to be taken up by the sentry at the Istana, then the sentry at the Old Clock of Government Offices across the river and finally by the sentry at the Treasury. It used to carry a long way in the stillness of the night. There was a good reason for these calls of course — to make sure that the sentries were not asleep.

Fort Margherita has flown four different flags under four different administrations. First, the Brookes' Sarawak Flag, then the Rising Sun under the Japanese, then the Union Jack under the British, and now our own Sarawak Flag following the country's attainment of independence.

It is now converted into the Police Museum.

The Square Tower, Kuching, built in 1879 (plate 11.6)

The fortress resembles the late English Renaissance fortresses and towers.

It was built for the detention of prisoners and later used as a fort and dancing hall during the Brooke era.

It is square in plan with a quasi-circular octagonal tower at one end which clearly shows the influence of ancient English spires. The walls are of massive brickwork which is rendered throughout, the ground floor is of timber boarding. Windows are of timber louvres and have semi-circular arches and the parapet walls are pierced to allow for gun emplacement. Aesthetically, the fort is serene looking and has practically no ornamentation.

The Sarawak Museum, Kuching, built in 1891 (plate 11.3)

The building was especially built to permanently house and display local natives' arts and crafts and collections of local animals as mainly encouraged by the famous naturalist, Alfred Wallace who was then collecting specimens in the country.

Since its inception, the building has undergone several renovations and alterations. It is rectangular, 44' × 160' with walls and pillars of bricks and roof of belian and concrete. It has a European architecture imposing edifice in Queen Anne style (Victorian period). The galleries are lighted by dormer windows in the roof which thus allows a great area of wall space.

During the Japanese Occupation, the museum was put under the direction of a sympathetic Japanese Officer. As a result, the museum suffered very little damage and remarkably little looting.

The General Post Office, Kuching, built in 1931 (*plate 11.4*)

Being the only building to employ the use of corinthian columns in the facade treatment, this building stands majestically in the centre of Kuching. Careful attention was given to the facade treatment with semi-circular arches and ornamented column capitals and friezes, but the rear of the building is simple and austere. Deep parapet walls of plain design hide the pitched roof. A colonnaded portico serves as a corridor.

The building is magnificent in appearance and is massive in scale.

Fort Alice, Simanggang, built in 1864 (*plate 11.7*)

Besides serving as a fort, this building has been the Officers' Quarters, the Government Offices, Court House and the Police Station.

Built on a small hill rising from a river bank, it was in good position for a fort in those days as it commands a long stretch of river on either side. It was built entirely of belian timber.

This is the only fort of its kind as it is square in shape with a small tower at each inland corner. Its peculiar features are an open courtyard in the centre, a type of draw-bridge or steps, which could be drawn up in case of attack and a spike iron fence running round the outside.

The purpose of building this fort in its strategic position at Skrang was to prevent the powerful Skrang Dayaks from passing down-river to the sea to engage in their piratical attacks on coastal shipping and also on head-hunting expeditions against their weaker neighbours, the Balau and Sebuyau Dayaks of the lower Batang Lupar.

There was an old tradition which was observed for a hundred years until 1964. This was the evening call at eight o'clock by the policeman:

The Call (in Iban)

*Ob Ha! Ob Ha! Ob Ha!
Jam diatu pukol lapan,
Tangga udab di-tarit,
Pintu udab di-tambit,
Orang ari ulu,
Orang ari ili,
Nadai tabu niki kubu agi.*

Translation

*Ob Ha! Ob Ha! Ob Ha!
The time is now eight o'clock,
The steps have been drawn up,
The door is closed,
People from up-river,
People from down-river,
Are not allowed to come up to the fort anymore.*

Fort Lily, Betong, built in 1855 (plate 11.10)

This fort was built entirely of belian timber as a token when Betong was surrendered and handed over to the Rajah by the Sultan of Brunei. Later, it was used as a fortress to defend against attacks by the Iban from Sadok.

The building was first built with *nipah* roof and was later replaced with *belian* timber. The Malay who resided at Muara Padeh later established a *kampong* near the fortress in order to guard it.

This building has been occupied by the Government Offices.

Fort Sylvia, Kapit, built in 1880 (plate 11.8)

This fort was entirely built of belian timber with thick walling to withstand attacks, on the true left bank of the mighty Batang Rejang, about one mile above Sg. Kapit.

The purpose of establishing the fort was to control the warlike activities of the Iban against the weaker and smaller ethnic groups: the Ukit and the Bukitan living in the Upper Batang Rejang and the Balleh.

The fort has served as a fountain of the government's administration in this remote area and has been occupied by the various government departments which provide services to the people.

Fort Hose, Marudi, built in 1901 (plate 11.9)

Fort Hose, like an old type of bungalow was built on Bukit Kubu, Marudi, originally as a fort.

It has been used by Government Offices.

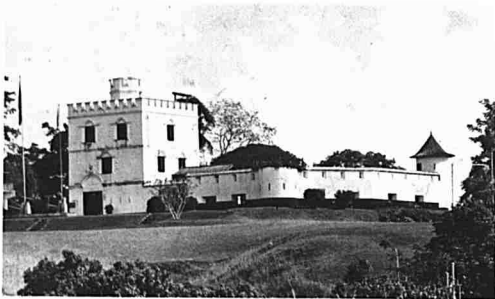
11.1 *The Istana at Kuching, built in 1870.*

11.2 *Fort Margherita at Kuching, built in 1879.*

11.1



11.2



11.3 *The Sarawak Museum, Kuching, built in 1891.*

11.4 *The Kuching General Post Office, built in 1931.*



11.3



11.4



11.5. *The Court House in Kuching,
built in 1874.*

11.6. *The Square Tower in Kuching,
built in 1879.*

11.7. *Fort Alice at Simanggang, built in
1864.*

11.5

11.6



11.7

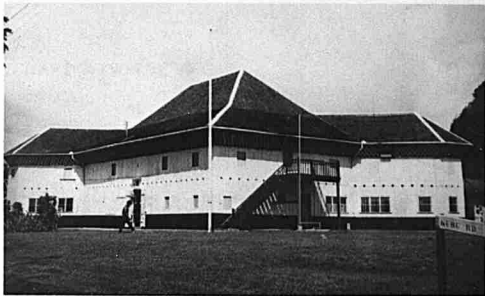


11.8. *Fort Sylvia at Kapit, built in 1880.*

11.9. *Fort Hose at Marudi, built in 1901.*

11.10. *Fort Lily at Betong, built in 1855.*

11.8



11.9



11.10



CHAPTER TWELVE

PRESERVATION AND TRADE IN CULTURAL OBJECTS

Readers would by now have obtained a fairly general idea of the various types of cultural material or objects that were either produced by the indigenous people themselves or had been introduced into the country.

The Sarawak Museum which was primarily established to preserve the heritage of our people, has acquired and accumulated a very extensive representation of these cultural material since its inception in 1891. With the exception of the massive megaliths, the immovable rock-carvings and the historical buildings described in chapters four and eleven respectively, all the cultural objects illustrated in this book and many many more are safely housed in the Sarawak Museum, either on display or in the study reference collection. A conservation laboratory has recently been established to treat and preserve cultural artefacts, especially those made of organic material, that have been accumulated in the museum.

The Sarawak Museum can proudly claim to hold the largest and most extensive collection of Bornean ethnographic, archaeological, historical and natural history materials in the world. Also included in the museum are the State Archives which contain many important historical records, some dating back to 1870 and the Reference Library holding some 9,000 volumes, among them many rare reference books. All these materials accumulated in the museum are important sources for researchers and scholars.

The Sarawak Museum is a multi-functional agency. It is a research institution engaged in the fields of anthropology, archaeology, natural history and history. It serves the integral needs of our developing nation, in education, cultural expression, and socio-cultural understanding of our multi-racial society by our visual expression in exhibitions and publications.

Many cultural objects had also been taken out of the country. Since 1841 and before Malaysia was formed in 1962, foreign expeditions were permitted to collect in the country. Some serving expatriate officers also collected for themselves and when they left the country, they took their collections along with them, while there were a few others who were actually collecting for other museums. During Confrontation from 1962 to 1966, Commonwealth Security personnel had also bought up many items as they were in closer contact with the interior people. In more recent times, American Peace Corps volunteers serving in the State, also collected many objects, especially ethnographic material like old weapons and bead

necklaces. Some unscrupulous local art dealers even would go to the extent of sending out cultural objects on the pretext of declaring them as contemporary handicrafts or pottery and thus avoiding customs inspection.

In recent years, some local businessmen, bankers, lawyers, doctors and several Government officers have begun to take an interest in collecting, especially ceramic and brass objects. Some of these amateur collectors have no doubt acquired some good pieces but there are others who have paid a lot of money for pieces which are either new reproduction of rare pieces or common pieces.

There is a fairly good market for cultural objects. As a result, prices of them, particularly ceramic and brass objects have, therefore, spiralled sky high. For example, a common blue and white 19th century small jar which is being sold for as much as M\$600.00 could have been easily acquired for less than M\$50.00 some ten years ago. Similarly, a common plain brass cannon, about 2½' long, is being sold for M\$700.00.

There is now a general tendency that young people nowadays no longer place much value on cultural objects, many of which had been kept as heirlooms in their families for generations. These objects are being readily sold and the cash quickly used to buy either an outboard engine, a sewing machine, a transistor radio set or even a motor bike.

Although an Antiquities Ordinance with adequate provisions was introduced in Sarawak as early as in 1954, enforcement of the law has, unfortunately, not been very satisfactory. Every effort is now being made to control the illegal looting and trafficking of cultural objects. The Customs authority has repeatedly assured the museum of its full co-operation in checking the illegal export of cultural objects and would confiscate any being taken out without an export permit issued by the Curator.

There are a dozen or more shops all over the State dealing in ceramic, brass or other cultural objects, prices of which vary from shop to shop. Tourists are advised to check with the museum authority whether a certain cultural object is permitted to be taken out of the country before entering into any negotiation.

The Museum is most anxious to buy up pieces which are rare and which are considered desirable to be retained for the scientific completeness of the Sarawak Museum or for the purpose of illustrating the history, arts and crafts of Sarawak. The museum authority would, however, issue export permits for common cultural objects to be taken out of the country.

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