# CHANGING MEANINGS OF MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS IN THE UPPER BARAM, SARAWAK, MALAYSIAN BORNEO

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# ABSTRACT


## CHANGING MEANINGS OF MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS IN THE UPPER BARAM, SARAWAK, MALAYSIAN BORNEO

This thesis examines contemporary engagements with the megalithic monuments in the Upper Baram region of Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo. It proceeds from the premise that over the long term, despite being objects that originated in the past, megalithic monuments are capable of accumulating new meanings as a result of their interactions with different groups of people in different times and contexts. Through a combination of archaeological, historical and anthropological investigations, this thesis identifies the various new meanings that the megalithic monuments in the Upper Baram have acquired since they were last erected traditionally around the middle of the 20$^{th}$ century, and further, how these meanings have changed over the years. Over the last seventy years, the megalithic monuments have transformed from being the outcomes of a living tradition of commemorating important people and events to being objects associated with the past, particularly in their association with pre-Christian or traditional (now abandoned) practices, and treatment as archaeological objects. Moreover, this thesis examines the megalithic monuments' present-day significance as cultural heritage, and as objects that provide local communities − the Kelabit and the Sa'ban − with a sense of identity and belonging to the land. This thesis also shows the creation and recreation of the meanings of the megalithic monuments in the Upper Baram to be the products of historical and contemporary processes that are tied to the

political, social, economic and environmental changes that the region and its inhabitants have experienced since colonial times to the present day. This thesis concludes that the meanings of the megalithic monuments in the Upper Baram are fluid and ever-changing. As social, political and economic constructs of particular times, the meanings of the megalithic monuments should further be regarded as an ongoing process that will continue into the near and distant future, for as long as the megalithic remains continue to exist, in the physical world, as well as in the minds of people. As a study that focuses on local and contemporary interactions with the megalithic monuments, this thesis has provided an up-to-date ethnography that broadens understanding of the social significance of megalithic monuments as multivalent objects, and contributes to the wider issue of how people relate to and make meanings of objects from the past.

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines contemporary engagements with archaeological monuments and deals with the question of how people make meanings of monuments, or objects from the past in general. The monuments that are at the centre of this study are the megaliths found in the Upper Baram region of Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo. In this interior upland region, hundreds of megalithic structures of various configurations (for example, rock carvings, dolmens, stone vats, standing stones and stone mounds) have been recorded and studied, firstly by European colonial officers and explorers in the early 20th century (see Douglas 1912; Banks 1937; Schneeberger 1979), followed by Tom Harrisson (the former Curator of the Sarawak Museum) from the late 1940s to the 1970s (see Harrisson 1958b, 1958c, 1962b, 1973a, 1973b, 1974), and then by more recent archaeologists and other researchers (see Barker *et al.* 2008; Barker *et al.* 2009; Cluny and Chai 2007; Hitchner 2009a; Lloyd-Smith 2012; Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2010; Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2013; Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2017). In Sarawak, they constitute, arguably, some of the most impressive archaeological remains found in the state, and are viewed today as important objects of cultural heritage (Chin 1980). Evidently, some of these megaliths are remnants of an ancient cultural tradition, possibly dating to as far back as 2,500 years ago (Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2017). While the archaeological significance of the megaliths is only beginning to be understood (see Chapter 3), they are commonly associated with the cultural practices and oral histories of the Kelabit and other related peoples, who are known to have built megalithic structures for funerary and

commemorative purposes right up to around the middle of the 20th century, as evidenced by ethnographic observations (Harrisson 1958c).

The term 'megalith' is derived from the Greek words *mega* (meaning 'large') and *lithos* (meaning 'stone'), and it has traditionally been used in the fields of archaeology and prehistory to refer to large constructions made usually from undressed stone. Megalithic constructions occur in various forms. Referring to Western European megaliths, Daniel (1958:15) distinguishes three separate classes of prehistoric megalithic monuments: the chamber tomb, the single standing stone, and the grouped standing stones. Besides the chamber tomb and the standing stone (also known as the dolmen and the menhir, respectively), Joussaume (1988) mentions the cairn (a mound made of piled stones) and the rock-cut tomb as two more megalithic categories. Additionally, megalithic temples, such as those found in Malta (see Grima 2002), have also been considered as another category of megalithic construction, albeit a more limited one (see Daniel 1980). While the European megaliths are arguably better known internationally, megalithic structures are also found in various architectural complexities (in the aforementioned and other forms), in many other areas throughout the world, including Asia (Joussaume 1988; Kim 1982).

As archaeological objects, megaliths have their origins in the past, and are associated with the remains of the activities of past peoples and cultures. Globally, megalithic monuments have been and continue to be important sites and subjects of the archaeological inquiry that employs various approaches. Adams (2007: 1) outlines several reasons why this is so:

> 1) they have occurred in many parts of the world both historically and prehistorically (e.g., Africa, Southeast Asia, South America, India, Polynesia, Europe); 2) they are often associated with the emergence of complex societies; 3) they require a very large investment of time, [labour], and resources, typically representing the single largest undertaking in the societies in which they are built; and 4) they are impressive works that stimulate public and professional curiosity as to why they were erected.

The various studies conducted on megaliths over the years have shed light on their origins and significance. In Europe, where the term 'megalith' was first coined in the 19th century and where pioneering studies of megaliths were initiated (see summary of early studies of megaliths in Daniel [1980]), megaliths are usually associated with the Neolithic and Bronze Ages (Daniel 1958; Renfrew 1983). Nevertheless, in the different regions of the world where megaliths are found, they have also been associated with a range of different time periods. For example, in Asia, while megaliths in India, Taiwan, Korea and Japan are generally associated with the prehistoric (Neolithic and Metal Age) periods (see Kim 1982), in Borneo, as previously mentioned, megalithic practices are known to have continued until the middle of the 20th century. Moreover, in certain communities in West Sumba (Indonesia) and Northeast India, megalithic practices are ongoing, and thus have contributed to recent ethnoarchaeological studies on megalith making (see Adams 2019; Wunderlich *et al.* 2021).

Megaliths worldwide are associated with a range of different uses. Besides functioning as tombs or burial places (Joussaume 1988), megaliths have also been seen as territorial markers linked to control over resources (Chapman 1981; Madsen 1982); as gathering or ceremonial places (Scarre 2001); as sacred places (Bradley 1998;

Hodder 1990; Tilley 2004; Thomas 1993); and as expressions of power (Fleming 1973; Sherratt 1995; Nelson 1999). Furthermore, they are linked to broader ideas concerning the spread of farming (Sherratt 1990), and the development of complex societies (Renfrew 1973, 1976, 1983).

The traditional archaeological approach, however, has tended to focus primarily on the origins and the original (past) uses of megaliths. In other words, megaliths are usually of interest to archaeologists primarily for the insights that they can offer regarding the past societies and cultures that created and used them. The traditional archaeological approach is no doubt useful in shedding light on the origins, original functions and past significance of megalithic sites. Indeed, research on megaliths in recent times has continued to enrich the debates on and understandings of the origins of megaliths and the spread of megalithic culture (see for example, Gillings *et al.* 2019; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2021; Schulz Paulson 2019). Such is also the case in Borneo, where research on megaliths has increased since 2000, leading to better understanding of the megaliths' antiquity and development (see Barker *et al*. 2008; Barker *et al*. 2009; Lloyd-Smith 2012; Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2010; Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2013; Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2017) (see Chapter 3 for a summary of the results of these research).

However, considering the potential long-term interactions between people and megalithic sites, the traditional archaeological approach seems rather myopic, as it inevitably consigns the megaliths to the past and sidelines the importance that they might have in the present. Because of their material durability, megaliths persist across hundreds or even thousands of years. Even in the ruinous state that most of them are

currently found, megalithic remains can still be seen, felt, and experienced not only by archaeologists, but by anyone who comes into contact with them. This has led to a wide array of perceptions and interpretations of ancient megaliths, which at times is in stark contrast to explanations put forward by archaeologists and prehistorians. For example, over the years, folk stories or myths have been generated to explain the origins of megalithic monuments (Daniel 1972; Grinsell 1976; Holtorf 1998). Megalithic monuments like Stonehenge have also become gathering sites for 'alternative' cultures (Bender 1993b). In addition, ancient monuments (stone or otherwise) have inspired many works in art and literature (see Thorpe 2014). Thus, long after they were originally built and used, megaliths have continued to interact with many different groups of people, who have perceived and interpreted them in myriad ways depending on the contexts of their times, leading to the creation of multiple meanings of the megaliths.

Arguably, one of the most apparent meanings and uses of megaliths today is as sites of heritage, which attract a large number of visitors year by year. A number of megalithic monuments, such as Stonehenge and Avebury (and associated sites) in England, the Brú na Bóinne megalithic burial mounds (Knowth, Newgrange and Dowth) in Ireland, the megalithic temples of Malta, the stone circles of Senegambia, and the Plain of Jars in Laos, have been recognised by international organisations like the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) as 'World Heritage Sites'. Thus, these megalithic sites have been the focus of numerous efforts of heritage preservation and safeguarding, involving various stakeholders such as academic

scholars, governments, non-governmental organisations (local and international), heritage managers and practitioners, tourism-related businesses and local communities (see Emerick 2014; Mason and Kuo 2006; Theuma and Grima 2006).

Despite the possibilities for newer or more present meanings of megaliths, until today in Bornean archaeology, research on megaliths (see Chapter 3 for a review) has mainly trodden along the traditional line in prioritising the study of their past significance. For example, the Cultured Rainforest Project (2007-2010), as part of their larger research on the long-term relationship between humans and the rainforest in the Kelabit Highlands, investigated megalithic monuments with the aim of establishing "patterns in their [megalithic sites] landscape setting and contextual associations, and…a tentative relative chronology" (Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2013: 43). Therefore, what remains lacking in Borneo is an understanding of what the megalithic monuments mean to the people of today, especially the local communities who reside in the places where such monuments are found. Without taking into account new and/or present meanings, our understanding of the significance of the megalithic monuments is incomplete. This is a problem that has persisted not only in the field of archaeology in Borneo, but also in other parts of the world. As Holtorf (2015: 168) recently pointed out, "how [megalithic monuments] have been re-used and re-interpreted over several millennia, have been missing in many archaeologists' stories."

This thesis is an attempt to address the problem outlined above by presenting a case study of the different ways how people have engaged with the megalithic monuments in the Upper Baram in more recent times, from around 1950 until today –

that is the period after megalithic practices have ceased in the area. I would further argue that a study of localised meanings of megalithic sites, which this thesis offers, is crucial in order to gain a more holistic and nuanced understanding of their importance and values as socially-significant sites (see Hodder 1986). It is also of critical importance especially in the context of archaeology (in general, not just in terms of megalithic sites) in Malaysia, where local views have often been sidelined by archaeological and heritage management work, for example, as have been observed in the Lenggong Valley (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and at the Tambun rock art site (Goh 2014, 2015; Goh *et al.* 2019). Such is also the case where indigenous communities are found living near archaeological sites in Sarawak, for example, in Niah (Chia 2017). The sidelining of local views in archaeological and heritage work is often despite the fact that indigenous and local communities are often the recipients, whether intended or otherwise, of the impacts brought about by such projects (Atalay 2012). The lack of local or public engagement in archaeological and heritage practices has also continued to be a problem in the wider region of Southeast Asia, as pointed out recently by Stark (2020), as well as by a host of other scholars working in the region (see Cayron 2017; Lertcharnrit 2017; Shoocongdej 2011). The need to include local views in the interpretation of archaeological sites has been stressed by many writers in the fields of contextual (Hodder 1986), postcolonial (Gosden 2001; Liebmann and Rizvi 2010; Lydon and Rizvi 2010) and indigenous (Godwin and Weiner 2006; Preucel and Cipolla 2010) archaeologies, as well as archaeological ethnography (Meskell 2010).

## 1.1. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To reiterate, a central assumption of this thesis is that megalithic monuments accumulate different meanings as they interact with different groups of people in different periods of time. Building on this premise, the aim of this thesis is to examine the construction of meanings of megalithic monuments in the Upper Baram region in the recent period, or more specifically in the period of roughly the last seventy years, since megalithic monuments were last constructed around the middle of the 20$^{th}$ century, as mentioned above. Since then, there have been considerable changes affecting the local communities and megalithic monuments in the study area. As will be discussed in Chapter 2 and in the case study chapters (Chapters 4-7), some of these changes include the religious conversion of the local people, the colonial rule in Sarawak, the introduction of education, modernisation, the independence of Sarawak, the historical and post-independence migration of communities into or within the Upper Baram region, outmigration, and more recently, the arrival of logging activities, and the growth of local tourism and heritage awareness. Thus, the aim of this thesis also addresses the wider question of how people make meanings of monuments, or objects from the past in general, especially in the context of wide societal changes. Consequently, this thesis has several objectives:

1) to identify the new meanings that the megaliths in the Upper Baram have acquired since the middle of the 20th century,
2) to explore how these meanings have changed over the years,
3) to analyse the various social processes that have underlain the changing meanings of the megaliths.

## 1.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to analyse and understand the changing meanings of the megaliths in the Upper Baram, and how they have been shaped by various processes in historical and recent times, the theoretical framework of this thesis builds on and is guided by approaches that have been used in the past fifty years or so, to study how people relate to and make meanings of things (including lived environments) from the past. They include theoretical notions such as monument and monumentality (Bradley 1993, 1998; Osborne 2014a; Rosenswig and Burger 2012), place and landscape (Basso 1996a; Cresswell 2003; Ingold 1993; Tilley 1994; Tuan 1977), and the cultural biography of things (Appadurai 1986; Gosden and Marshall 1999; Holtorf 1998; Kopytoff 1986). These approaches, which will be discussed below, originated from diverse disciplines such as human geography, cultural or social anthropology, and archaeology, which following the postprocessual, interpretive and material-cultural turn in archaeology and other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities beginning in the 1970s, and continuing through the 1980s and 1990s, have contributed to more nuanced ways of studying and understanding the social dimensions of material culture and the complex

interactions between people and things (see Harris and Cippola 2017; Hicks 2010; Hodder 1986, 1991). What has developed from the approaches mentioned above, which is crucial in this study of the changing meanings of megaliths, is the realisation that interpretations of things from the past are made in the present, and that in the present, there are multiple ways of "reading" the past (see Hodder 1986). Archaeologists are not the only ones who are interested in the past; the past is also important to minority groups such as indigenous people, ethnic minorities, women and children, whose views are often marginalised or excluded from archaeological or historical interpretations (see Gathercole and Lowenthal 1994; Layton 1994). Different groups will view the past, and the objects that represent it, differently according to their particular cultural and personal backgrounds and experiences, which are in turn shaped by different values, and shifting political, social and economic realities (see Layton 1994; Smith and Wobst 2005). Thus, as will be discussed below, what these approaches offer is the emphasis on the multivocality or multivalence of things and the importance of contexts in analysing the meanings that things may acquire, which are aspects that I would argue are key in this thesis that examines how meanings of megaliths have changed over the years among the local communities in the Upper Baram. The application of a diverse set of approaches in the analysis of the relationship between people and megaliths in this thesis is also deliberate due to the interdisciplinary nature of this research, which applies methods of archaeology, history and anthropology in considering the different engagements with the megalithic monuments in both past and present times (see section 1.3 below). In the sections below, I will expound on the different theoretical approaches and demonstrate how they have been useful in investigating the long term and contemporary relationships

between people and things, and additionally, how they can be applied to analyse the changing meanings of the megalithic monuments. Following that, in order to tie the different approaches together in this study of how people make sense of megalithic remains, I will also discuss the importance of memory in understanding engagements with the past and its objects.

### 1.2.1. Monument and monumentality

In this thesis, the megaliths of the Upper Baram are first and foremost considered as 'monuments'. The term 'monument' is derived from the Latin word *monere*, which means 'to remind' (Bradley 1993: 2). Thus, a simple definition of a monument is that it is "something that reminds", and what they remind people of are memories (Glassberg 1991: 145). Essentially, many of the megaliths in the Upper Baram are (in Glassberg's sense of the word) monuments because traditionally, until the middle of the 20$^{th}$ century, they were built as memorials for the dead and to commemorate important events (Harrisson 1958c; see also Chapter 3 of this thesis). More than that, this thesis posits the megaliths as contemporary monuments in the sense that today they have also become objects that, in providing present-day people with a sense of connection with the past, have become important in the formation of identities and sense of belonging to place. In this way, the megaliths monuments can be seen repositories of collective memories (see Halbwachs 1992), and like other things from the past, they play a role in cultural transmission (Jones 2007; Rowlands 1993). Moreover, monuments trigger memories, which are then reproduced in various performances and rituals of memorialisation (see Rubertone 2008c; Winter 2007; Withers 1996). The role

of memories in the creation of meanings of monuments will be further explored below, but first, the next paragraphs will turn to discussing the notion of monumentality.

The terms 'monument' and 'monumental' are usually used to refer to large-scale constructions, which may range from megaliths (Diaz-Guardamino *et al*. 2015: 4) to "large houses, public building, and special purpose structures" (Trigger 1990: 2; see also Rosenswig and Burger 2012). Other scholars, however, have argued that a monument is essentially an idea (Bradley 1993), or a "construction of the mind" (Rainbird 2008: 21). What this means is that, a monument is a monument only if we see it as such (i.e. as "something that reminds", to borrow Glassberg's phrase). In this regard, emphasis is given not to form or physical attribute, but to the qualities that we imagine a monument to possess, in other words, its 'monumentality'. As Pauketat (2014: 442) argues "monuments, to be monuments, must be more than big memorials. They must possess the qualities of monumentality, the foremost of which is the imaginary."

Following this view, various things may also be considered as monuments, regardless of size and physical property. Even small objects – for example, the Proto-Elamite (c. 3000 B.C.) Guennol Lioness statue, which is only 3.25 inches in height – can also be seen as monumental (see Osborne 2014b). Nor do monuments have to be fixed to a specific location. Some monuments obtain their monumentality from their mobility, as in the case of the Egyptian obelisks during Roman times (Parker 2014). Monuments may not even necessarily be purposefully built. Even natural, nondescript and unmarked objects or locations may also serve as monuments (Bradley 2000;

Rubertone 2008b). For example, Uluru Rock, a prominent sandstone rock formation in Australia's Northern Territory, is an important monument for the country's Aboriginal people as it features significantly in their origin stories (Rainbird 2008). Additionally, certain archaeological sites and landscapes are regarded as monuments due to their importance to people's sense of history, belonging and identity (see Rothman 1989; Nicholas 2005) – as is also the case with the megalithic remains in the Upper Baram, as this thesis will demonstrate. What this means is that monuments are constructions or ideas created by people to serve some kind of purpose in the present, usually in connection with some aspects of the past that people want to continue to remember (i.e. Halbwachs' [1992] 'collective memory'). This key idea will be utilised in this thesis to examine the present roles of the megaliths as monuments that carry archaeological, ancestral and heritage significance in the Upper Baram.

Monuments, by nature, are durable: "they last for a very long time" (Bradley 1993: 5). Because of this, monuments (in the larger sense, not just megalithic monuments) in various geographical regions in the world have long and complex relationships with peoples, and this human-monument relationship has continued to be a subject of scholarly interest, as shown by Richard Bradley's extensive writings (Bradley 1993, 1998, 2000, 2002), and by the various chapters in the edited volumes by Martinsson-Wallin and Thomas (2014), Osborne (2014a), and Rubertone (2008a). Some of the themes that have emerged from these and other studies of past and recent human-monument relationships include the roles of monuments in ideology, legitimisation of power, and social memory (Clark 2014; Crowley 2007; Liston 2014); the re-use of monuments (see the special volume of the *World Archaeology* journal

published in 1998, which carried the theme 'The past in the past: the reuse of ancient monuments'); and relatedly the biographies of monuments (Gillings and Pollard 1999; Holtorf 1998; and see section 1.2.3 below). Other scholars have attempted to shed light on the social processes of monumentalisation (Dietler 1998; Hamilakis 2008). Additionally, a number of studies have demonstrated monuments to be contested places (Fontein 2006), or sites of resistance (Dillehay 2007). The examples that I mentioned above suggest that monuments are interpreted in diverse ways. This is because monuments embody people's ideas about the world, and these ideas vary depending on social, political and historical contexts. Thus, another key idea that will be applied in this thesis is the importance of contexts as the basis for the megaliths' varied meanings, following Osborne, who opines, "a monument, then, should be considered an object or a suite of objects, that possess an agreed-upon special meaning to a community of people. But since this meaning can never be immutable, we can only consider an object's monumentality in the context of its relationship to the community of which it forms a part" (2014b: 4).

From Osborne's statement above, it is clear that the meaning of a monument is not constant. As Bradley (1993: 5) also states, "a monument may change its meanings from one period to another without necessarily changing its form." The changing meanings of a monument also open it to contestations, and in certain cases, lead to 'counter-monumental' practices (Osborne 2017), which would include the destruction, defacement or the vandalisation of a monument. Monuments may also be viewed differently by different groups of people living in the same time period and geographical location. For instance, Goode (2007) observes that in the Middle East in

the period between the two World Wars, while Western archaeologists were making significant archaeological discoveries of ancient civilisations, the region's 'newly discovered' ancient monuments, in colonised places like Khorsabad in northern Iraq and Persepolis in Iran, became reminders to the natives of the great empires that once existed in their lands, and were appropriated to represent the spirit of nationalism in the struggle against colonialism. In this thesis, the idea that megalithic monuments may be contested objects is explored in Chapter 7.

This leads to another salient point concerning monuments. As objects that 'remind' people of certain things, monuments have been viewed as intrinsically active and imbued with agency (see Gell 1998; Gosden 2005; Hoskins 2006, for discussions on the agency of objects). As different people impart different meanings to the monuments that they encounter in their lives, so too do monuments influence the behaviours of people. As Osborne (2014b: 3) notes, "monuments are not simply things, they are things-that-do, motionless objects that nevertheless possess an active force, accomplishing real work among those surrounding them." As an active object, a monument's monumentality (i.e. the meanings imparted by people) should then be regarded as a process, or as Osborne (2014b: 3) proposes, as the "ongoing, constantly negotiated relationship between thing and person, between the monument(s) and the person(s) experiencing the monument." This thesis, in showing how meanings of the megaliths in the Upper Baram have changed over years, also regards their meanings as a process, rather than as static.

### 1.2.2. Monument as place and landscape

In the previous section, I have discussed the idea of monuments as objects with varied meanings. This is linked to the conceptualisation of monuments as meaningful places, which is another theoretical approach that can be used to understand the roles and meanings of megaliths in the Upper Baram. Let us begin this section by discussing the idea of 'place'. Beginning in the 1970s with the development of the discipline of human geography, many scholars have put forward their own definitions of and perspectives on 'place'. One common ground between the different opinions is the view of 'place' as a location embedded with imparted meanings, which is in contrast to the meaningless and abstract 'space'. As Tim Cresswell (2004: 10) aptly summarised, "when humans invest meaning into a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way...it becomes a place." One of the aims of this thesis is to identify the various meanings that the megaliths in the Upper Baram have accrued over the years. In other words, this thesis will shed light on how the megaliths have become meaningful places. Related to the idea of 'place' is that of 'landscape', which in essence, is "a network of related places" (Thomas 2001: 173). If the megaliths are meaningful places, they can also be seen to exist in a landscape filled with other culturally or socially significant monuments and locations (see Chapter 6).

But how do the megaliths in the Upper Baram acquire their meanings? This is a central question of this thesis, and the application of the concept of place and landscape in examining the megaliths in the Upper Baram will help to address it. Like the concept of monument discussed above, the concepts of place and landscape too

are viewed as social constructs, or in the words of Schama (1995: 6), “the work of the mind.” Thus, a key idea in the notions of place and landcape is the human involvement or role in their creation. In this way, places and landscapes are “social” (Gosden and Head 1994). Places and landscapes acquire meanings, or are “socialised’ (Tacon 1994), through the activities and memories of people who interact with them. For example, one way of giving meaning to place is by naming it (Cresswell 2004; Tilley 1994). One of the most illuminating writings on the subject is Keith Basso’s book entitled ‘Wisdom sits in places: landscape and language among the Western Apache’ (Basso 1996a; see also Basso 1996b). In this book, Basso also shows the significance of places as embodiments of memories. Other scholars have also touched on the theme of the connection between places/landscapes and memory. For example, Rubertone (2008b: 13) mentions that places are “specific portions of landscapes entwined with personal experiences and historical narratives.” Furthermore, she refers to ‘placemaking’ as “the social practices of constructing place and inscribing memories” (Rubertone 2008b: 13). Additionally, Fox (2006b: 7) points out that “a landscape of places forms a complex structure of social memory.” In assuming the megaliths as meaningful places in the lived Upper Baram landscape, this thesis will highlight the placemaking processes, which include the different activities, engagements, and memories that are connected with the megaliths, which have shaped their meanings.

It has further been argued that places and landscapes are not just things, but are also ways of understanding the world (Cresswell 2004; Ingold 2000). Thus, previous discussions on the concepts of ‘place’ and ‘landscape’ have emphasised the importance of subjectivity in human relationships with the environment. In his book ‘Space and

Place', Yi Fu Tuan (1977) highlights that it is through human perception and experience that people become attached to places, and places acquire values and meanings. Ingold's (2000) 'dwelling perspective' expands on this idea. According to Ingold (2000: 173), "it is through being inhabited...that the world becomes a meaningful environment for people." One approach that has been used to examine how people experience, and thereby give meanings to places and landscape is phenomenology. In British landscape archaeology, the phenomenological approach has been applied notably by Tilley (1994) in his study of the significance of particular locations in the siting of monuments. In his study, Tilley emphasises the archaeologist's own personal experience of the landscape and monuments. This use of the phenomenological approach in landscape archaeology, however, has been criticised particularly by Fleming (1999, 2006) for the highly subjective manner in which the evidence is interpreted and presented by Tilley. In addition, Tilley's use of phenomenology was problematic because it is questionable whether interpretations of the landscape based on the archaeologist's experience and perception are appropriate analogies for explaining the significance of monuments in the past. Despite its shortcomings, the phenomenological approach does demonstrate one key characteristic of place: its meanings are varied, which reflects the diversity of the human experience in our interaction with the environment.

As alluded to previously, meanings of places and landscapes are also culturally and socially-situated. As Basso (1996a: 7) notes, "what people make of their places is closely connected to what they make of themselves as members of society and inhabitants of the earth." Similarly, Lucas (2004: 128) argues that "values and meanings

attached to a place are embedded in continually shifting social and political realities." In this sense, places and landscapes are continually being constructed and re-constructed as a result of constant human activity in the landscape, and thus, their meanings, like the idea of 'monumentality' discussed above, should be regarded as a process (Cresswell 2004: 37; Hirsch 1995: 5). Over the years, this is a theme that has been highlighted by various works in archaeology and anthropology, for example, in the edited volumes by Bender (1993a), Feld and Basso (1996), Fox (2006), Janowski and Ingold (2012), Hirsch and O'Hanlon (1995), Stewart and Strathern (2003), and Ucko and Layton (1999). In this thesis, the different engagements with and perceptions of megalithic places in the Upper Baram will be shown to be the results of political, social and economic changes over the years, for example, religious conversion and the development of archaeology during British colonial times in Sarawak (Chapter 4), economic development (Chapter 5), migration of communities (Chapter 6), and land struggles (Chapter 7).

In this thesis, I would argue, following the notions discussed above, that the megaliths in the Upper Baram can be understood concurrently as both monuments and places. As Bradley notes, the construction of a monument "creates a new sense of place" (1993: 5). However, this does not necessarily mean that prior to the construction of the monument, the location was devoid of meaning because as Bradley (2000) has also observed, many monuments in the late prehistory were built in 'natural' locations that were already sacred or socially significant in the past. Nevertheless, what is most pertinent to this thesis is that, in the long term, monuments continue to be significant places, albeit in potentially many different ways. Because of a

prominent monument, a place becomes more visible and may turn into a site of various human activities. As the place grows in significance, people return to the same place repeatedly in various times. Bradley considers the example of a monument in the Avebury area: "long after the earthworks of Windmill Hill fell into disrepair, the site seems to have retained its local importance and deposits of artefacts continued to be placed in the tops of its ditches" (Bradley 2000: 106). Thus, the continuing significance of monuments can be observed in a number of different ways: in their re-use, modification, recreation, and destruction, as well as in the stories created to explain their existence.

In archaeology, the landscape approach has been used to explore how people in the past have engaged with the world or the environment in which they lived. In relation to the study of monuments, the landscape approach has been particularly useful in investigating the development of monuments in the late prehistory, which has demonstrated how the construction of monuments is related to local topography, and is a reflection of prehistoric peoples' perceptions and understanding of the physical or natural environment, and the cosmological order (Richards 1996; Scarre 2002; Owoc 2008). Additionally, the landscape approach has also allowed the study of monuments not just in their own terms, but as part of a wider landscape of prehistoric human activity. In this way, a monument is examined in relation to other monuments and socially-significant places in the landscape. For example, based on studies carried out in Cranborne Chase in southern England, Barrett *et al*. (1991) have shown how, in a timespan of around 2,000 years (from the Neolithic to the Iron Age), the building and presence of monuments have affected settlement and activity patterns, and thus, have

shaped the entire (social) landscape of the area. More pertinent to this thesis, because landscapes are created over a long period of time, the landscape approach has also been useful in examining more recent (and long-term) human engagements with monuments, which in turn illuminates wider historical and social changes. This has been demonstrated particularly by Bender in her study of the different ways how the Stonehenge landscape has been appropriated and contested from the Medieval to recent times, as people negotiated their way through the dynamics of power and social relations (Bender 1993b; see also Bender 1992, 1998; Bender and Winer 2001).

### 1.2.3. The cultural biography (or life-history) of monument

Another approach that is useful for understanding the relationship between people and megaliths in the Upper Baram, or how the megaliths gather meanings, is cultural biography. The cultural biography approach treats objects as having lives (Kopytoff 1986; see also Holtorf 1998; Diaz Guardamino *et al*. 2015). Thus, like humans, objects too accumulate biographies or life-histories (see Holtorf 1998) as they "gather time, movement and change" (Gosden and Marshall 1999: 169). Kopytoff (1986: 66, emphasis my own) elaborates:

> In doing the biography of a thing, *one would ask questions similar to those one asks about people*: What, sociologically, are the biographical possibilities inherent in its 'status' and in the period and culture, and how are these possibilities realized? Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognized 'ages' or periods in the the thing's 'life', and what are the cultural markers for them? How does the thing's use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness?

To say that a biography is cultural is to acknowledge the social or cultural context of its creation. An object's biography encompasses the various meanings that it has attained in its interactions with different people in different stages of its life. In turn, the meanings that people give to an object will also, inevitably, be culturally-specific. Thus, the cultural biography approach "seeks to understand the way objects become invested with meaning through the social interactions they are caught up in. These meanings change and are renegotiated through the life of an object" (Gosden and Marshall 1999: 170). As an object may have multiple and varied meanings derived from different stages of its life, it thus has many biographies.

Megalithic monuments are durable objects, which allows them to have long and complicated histories (Daniel 1972), and this is why the notion of cultural biography has been particularly useful in recent years in the study of how meanings of megalithic remains have changed across different time periods. Over the past few decades, the biographies of certain megalithic monuments and their landscapes have been the subject of a number of archaeological investigations (e.g. Holtorf 1998; Gillings and Pollard 1999; Garcia Sanjuan and Diaz-Guardamino 2015; Papmehl-Dufay 2015). Other studies focusing more on archaeological landscapes – for example, the Stonehenge and Avebury landscapes (see Bender 1993b; Parker Pearson and Ramilisonina 1998; Gaffney *et al.* 2012; Gaffney *et al.* 2018; Gaffney *et al.* 2020; Pollard and Reynolds 2002) – have also demonstrated the complex biographies accumulated by these monuments (or perhaps more appropriately, monumental landscapes) over millenia. As especially highlighted by Bender's (1993b) work on the Stonehenge landscape, the biographies of monuments may even extend to recent or contemporary times. All of

the studies mentioned above have demonstrated the social and historical processes involved in the re-use and re-interpretation of monuments and monumental landscapes across different periods in prehistory, history and contemporary times. To investigate such processes that have contributed to the meaning making of the megaliths in the Upper Baram is one of the aims of this thesis, as mentioned above.

### 1.2.4. The role of memory

In his seminal work 'The past is a foreign country', which examined how the past shapes lives in the present, Lowenthal (2015: 303) asserts, "all past awareness depends on memory." As the megaliths in the Upper Baram are shown in this thesis to be objects that connect people to, and thus, make them aware of the past, here I argue that memory plays a crucial role in the shaping of their meanings as 'monuments' and as meaningful 'places', which enables them to have 'biographies' (these notions have been described above). As will be shown in this thesis, in their present-day 'construction' (as an idea, see above), the megalithic monuments embody the memory of various aspects of the past that people desire to remember in the present – for example, the memory of ancestral homeland, of previous cultural practices no longer practised today, and of various histories of people and events connected to megalithic sites. In this way, the megalithic monuments are not only repositories of memory, they are also *aide memoire* or mnemonic devices that aid the retention or retrieval of memory (Jones 2007; see also Hoskin [1998] for an examination of the role of material culture as memory prompts). This is a theme has been explored particularly in studies that highlight how memories are embodied or materialised in places and landscapes

(Basso 1996a; Hoelscher and Alderman 2004; Lavers 2003; Lowenthal 1975; Rubertone 2008a; Stewart and Strathern 2003; Till 2003), which have provided a rich set of historical and ethnographic examples that show the diversity of engagements with and views of monuments (see various chapters in edited volume by Rubertone [2008a]).

Further, it has been observed that memories are understandings of the past constructed by social groups in particular social and historical contexts. This has been variably referred to as 'collective memory' (Halbwach 1992), or 'social memory' (Connerton 1989), or 'cultural memory' (Holtorf 1997). As Connerton (1989:36, citing Halbwachs 1992) notes, "it is through their membership of a social group – particularly kinship, religious and class affiliations – that individuals are able to acquire, to localise and to recall their memories." This collective memory or understanding of the past would in turn shape how we experience the present, for example in the formation and negotiations of identity (see edited volumes by Moore and Whelan [2007], and Tilmans *et al.* [2010]). As Black (2011: 421) mentions, "if the history of a group is about its past, collective memory is about the continual presence of that past in the present." In this thesis, this is apparent for example in the way how the megalithic remains invoke memories of colonial engagements (e.g. with missionaries and colonial officials) (Chapter 4), and in the way they are used today as cultural heritage (Chapter 5), as objects providing sense of identity and belonging (Chapter 6), and as evidence for land claims (Chapter 7). The collective memory of the local communities is not just linked to the uses of the megalithic monuments, but also their disuse and neglect in the decades after the people's religious conversion in the 1940s, and before the heightening of heritage awareness around the late 1990s and early 2000s, as an outcome of the

'forgetting' of pre-Christian beliefs and practices, as Chapters 4 and 5 will especially highlight. Over time, this 'forgetting' of the megalithic monuments has led to instances of intentional and non-intentional destruction of megaliths by local people and outsiders alike (Hitchner 2009a; Mashman 2017; see also Tzortzopolou-Gregory 2010). In addition, as will be discussed in Chapter 7, new claims of ownership over megalithic monuments in the Punang Kelapang region may also reflect selective remembrance or forgetting of previous memories (see Mitter 2014).

The above examples show that memories are not static but are adaptable to contexts as different groups may have different things that they want or choose to remember about the past. In other words, people in different times will shape and reshape what is remembered about the past, basically to serve the group needs of the present (Connerton 1989). Thus, another fertile ground for the study of the intersection between monuments and memory has been in the context of power, which determines what memories associated with monuments are remembered, and conversely, forgotten, and additionally, how versions of the past commemorated by certain monuments are used to provide legitimacy and to justify political actions (see Mitchell 2003). Examples of such study include those conducted by Withers (1996), who examines contemporary monuments that commemorate late 19$^{th}$ century rural protests in Highland Scotland; Dietler (1998), who examines the political dimensions behind the modern commemoration of Iron Age fortified hilltop settlements (*oppida*) in France; and Crowley (2007), who examines the monumental landscapes that commemorate the Great Irish Famine (1845-1852). These studies further suggest that not only can memories be selective or misrepresented – people only remember

memories that are relevant to them in specific times and contexts (see Kerlogue 2011) – they can also be forgotten or revised. As Lowenthal (2015: 320) notes, "the remembered past is malleable and flexible; what seems to have happened undergoes continual change." A consequence of the various versions of history as espoused by different groups is the contestations of memories (see Waterson and Kwok 2012) – the relevance of which to this study of the changing meanings of megalithic monuments in the Upper Baram will be particularly apparent in Chapter 7.

Lowenthal (2015) has shown how the past is kept alive and engaged with through various ways of memory reproduction, for example by way of commemoration events, historical re-enactments, and popular culture (e.g. cinema, music, and writings) (see also Tilmans *et al.* 2010). Other works have demonstrated performances of memory in cultural practices like the curation of material culture (Kuchler 1987), museum collections or historical representations (Black 2011; Carneiro and Johnson 2015; Tilche 2015), and photography (Kuhn 2007). This thesis will show that the performances of memory related to the megalithic monuments in the Upper Baram include the photographic documentation of megaliths (Chapter 4), megalith conservation efforts and cultural exhibitions of megaliths (Chapter 5), and the linking of megalithic remains with histories of past settlements and movements (e.g. through narratives and map-making) (Chapters 6 and 7), leading to their monumentalisation (see Hamilakis 2008). The various ways of preserving the collective memory of megalithic monuments can also be linked to Nora's (1989: 1) idea that memory is the result of the "acceleration of history", where as material culture or practices disappear because of rapid social changes, memory is thus created to bridge people's feeling of

disconnect with the past (see also Clark 2014). Spurred by a sense of loss, the practice of preservation, which can be seen as an effort to save the past, is essentially a people's response to societal change or to the uncertainty of cultural continuity (Lowenthal 2015).

Studies of local engagements with memory of the past or how memories are used in the present have also been conducted in the context of heritage (Haldrup and Bærenholdt 2015; Sather-Wagstaff 2015; Smith 2006), and relatedly (as heritage is something that relates to groups and a part of collective memory), identity (Anheier and Isar 2011; Moore and Whelan 2007). With regards to monuments, studies in the contexts of cultural heritage management and tourism, and their intersections, have also been useful for shedding light on contemporary engagements with and differing perspectives of monuments and the memories that accompany them (see Cole 2003; Gazin-Schwartz 2004; Martinsson-Wallin and Thomas 2014). The role that megalithic monuments play in the cultural heritage of the Upper Baram will be explored in Chapter 5.

## 1.3. METHODOLOGY AND FIELDWORK

In order to study the long-term relationship between people and megalithic sites in Borneo in a way that bridges the past and the present, the methodology of this thesis combines archaeological, anthropological and historical approaches through the use of site recordings, ethnographic interviews and direct observations conducted in the field,

as well as the study of archival data. The application of these different but complementary approaches is necessary in order to adequately explore the changes in people's engagements with megalithic sites across a broad range of time - from the distant past to contemporary times. In this way, a more nuanced understanding of the megaliths' multivalence, as well as the social and historical processes that contributed to it can be gained.

Prior to conducting fieldwork for this research, a preliminary visit was made to the Upper Baram in July 2015 in order to relay my research intentions to the local communities and to identify suitable field sites and key informants. Approval to conduct the research in the local communities were obtained verbally from village leaders (*Ketua Kampung*). Permission in terms of an official research permit to conduct the fieldwork in Sarawak was also obtained from the Sarawak State Planning Unit (the government department that monitors social research in Sarawak) and the Sarawak Museums Department (the government department that monitors research on archaeological or heritage sites). Furthermore, as a study that involves human participants particularly for interviews (see below), this research had also received ethical considerations and approval by the Social Sciences and Humanities Inter-divisional Research Ethics Committee (IDREC) of the University of Oxford.

The main fieldwork for this research was conducted from March to September 2016, primarily in the Kelabit Highlands and Punang Kelapang, two adjoining areas in the Upper Baram. Besides being places known for the presence of megalithic monuments, these two areas are also home to various indigenous groups. The Kelabit

Highlands, as its name implies, is settled by communities belonging to the Kelabit ethnic group. On the other hand, Punang Kelapang, located just south of the Kelabit Highlands, is more multicultural, being home to several ethnic groups: the Kelabit, the Sa'ban, the Penan, and the Kenyah Leppo' Ke. Out of these distinct ethnic groups, the Kelabit and the Sa'ban are the two that are associated with past megalithic practices. Thus, my fieldwork was mainly conducted in areas populated by communities of these two groups of former megalith builders. Details of the regional, ethnographic and historical contexts of the study areas, as well as a review of the megalithic remains and culture of the region will be provided in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of this thesis.

As Chapter 3 will show, most of the present knowledge on the past megalithic culture of the Upper Baram has largely developed out of research conducted in the Kelabit Highlands. Building on the previous research, two of the chapters in this present thesis (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 5) are also centred on the megaliths of the Kelabit Highlands. Nevertheless, this thesis also gives attention to the megaliths (and their cultural or social significance) in two other areas neighbouring the Kelabit Highlands: the aforementioned Punang Kelapang, as well as the Kubaan river valley in the Upper Tutoh (a tributary of the Baram River) (see Chapter 6 and Chapter 7).

One of the main reasons for the inclusion of the Punang Kelapang and Kubaan megaliths in this study is that compared to their counterparts in the Kelabit Highlands, the megalithic remains in these two areas are less known and have remained understudied. By including the Kubaan and Punang Kelapang regions and their megaliths in this present study, this thesis has produced the first systematic

documentation of megalithic remains in these two areas, the results of which are included in Chapters 6 and 7 of this thesis. In the process of documenting the megaliths in these two areas, visits to all the sites recorded would have been an ideal outcome. However, due to time and logistical constraints (see Chapter 6), I was able to visit only the megalithic sites that are located in the Punang Kelapang region (see Chapter 7). For the megalithic sites that were visited, GPS locations, photographs and site descriptions were recorded. Nevertheless, the process of documenting the Kubaan and Punang Kelapang megaliths is in itself valuable to this thesis because it presented two unique situations in which present-day relationships with the megalithic remains in the study area can be observed, as discussed in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 of this thesis.

The documentation of previously unknown megalithic sites in the Kubaan and Punang Kelapang regions is in a way a continuation of previous documentation efforts initiated by the local communities with the assistance of outside institutions and researchers (see Chapter 5), which due to the size and complexity of the task, have remained unfinished. For various reasons that will become apparent in this thesis, the local communities in the Upper Baram continue to show interest in the recording and study of the megalithic monuments in their area. Indeed, another reason why I have included the documentation of megaliths as part of this study is due to the response that I obtained from certain community leaders and members during the preliminary visit made to the Upper Baram in July 2015, who expressed their eagerness to have these megalithic sites properly recorded and studied.

The field data of this research were mostly collected through formal (semi-structured) and informal (unstructured) interviews (Table 1.1). Interviews were conducted in order to obtain valuable insights pertaining to the historical and contemporary meanings of the megaliths to the local population. More specifically, the interview questions sought to understand the local people's perceptions of and their interactions with the megaliths in their area, and in turn, the roles of the megaliths in the lives of the indigenous people in the Upper Baram today. Where the documentation of megalithic sites is concerned, interviews were also conducted in order to obtain information regarding the names, locations and significance of the megalithic sites.

In the Kelabit Highlands, a portion of my interviews was conducted using a particular technique called photo-elicitation (Collier 1957; Collier and Collier 1986), which is basically "a method of interviewing in which researchers ask respondents to talk about a set of photographs" (Buckley 2014: 721). To conduct my photo-elicitation interviews, I used copies of photographs that were produced by the Sarawak Museum's megalithic research in the Kelabit Highlands in 1962 (see Chapter 4). Following methods of interviewing using 'repatriated' photographs as described by Payne (2016), my interview participants were initially asked if they could identify the individuals and places (megalithic sites) depicted in the photographs. The photographs further elicited memories and stories not only of Kelabit relationships with the monuments, but also of the Kelabit's involvement with the Sarawak Museum during the time of its pioneering study of megaliths in the highlands during colonial times. Thus, the study of historical photographs, in addition to field notes of the

aforementioned archaeological expedition, which are currently kept in the Sarawak Museum archive, has revealed valuable information about local and colonial engagements with megalithic remains in pre-independence Sarawak (see Chapter 4). As the colonial-era photographs depict only megalithic remains and Kelabit people from the Kelabit Highlands, photo-elicitation interviews were not carried out among the Punang Kelapang communities.

Table 1.1. Number of interviews conducted at various field locations.

| **Kelabit Highlands villages** | | **Number of interviews** |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Arur Dalan | 12 |
| 2 | Bario Asal | 2 |
| 3 | Bario (general/town) | 10 |
| 4 | Ulung Palang A | 2 |
| 5 | Pa’ Umor | 1 |
| 6 | Pa’ Lungan | 3 |
| **Punang Kelapang villages** | | **Number of interviews** |
| 7 | Long Banga | 7 |
| 8 | Long Peluan | 6 |
| 9 | Long Beruang | 2 |
| 10 | Long Lamai | 1 |
| | **Total** | **46** |

My field interviews were carried out in Malay or English, or a combination of both languages. Malay is the national language of Malaysia, and thus widely spoken, while the use of English is also common for two reasons. Firstly, Sarawak was a British colony until 1963, and so English was the main language of communication in government and schools in colonial and early post-independence times. Secondly, English is taught as a second language in all levels of education in Malaysian schools until today. As most locals are fluent or at least have basic competency in either one or both of these languages, I did not employ any translators or interpreters in this research. The interviews were conducted in a variety of settings: in the homes or villages of informants, at village shops, or while making visits to megalithic sites.

Prior to conducting the interviews, informed consent was obtained from my informants. In order to reduce the formality of the interview sessions, the informed consent was obtained orally. Nevertheless, a printed copy of my informed consent form was made readily available for the reference of my informants if necessary. My informants were made aware of the purpose of my interviews, which was to collect information as part of a research, and that I was interested in learning about the megalithic remains in the area. My informant were also aware that the interviews were being recorded, either by a voice-recorder or by note-taking, and that interview participation is entirely voluntary. No coercion was exerted on informants to speak about things that might be of sensitive nature – for example, pre-Christian rituals that were connected to megalith-building in the past (see Chapter 6). My informants understood that my research would result in a "book", or that the information that I obtain would eventually be used for publications. Overall, I sensed that the local

people were forthcoming with providing information during my interviews. One reason for this could be the presently ongoing local interest in the recording, preservation and study of cultural sites in the area (Cluny and Chai 2007; Hitchner 2009a; see also Chapter 5 of this thesis). Where informants are named in this thesis, for the most part, real names of informants are used. Permission to use the real names was obtained as part of the obtaining of informed consent from my informants. However, when quoting statements expressed by informants that are related to potentially sensitive matters (for example, matters related to personal, community and land conflicts, and spiritual beliefs), I have ensured that the informants' identities are not revealed by not mentioning real names or by using pseudonyms.

The interview participants consisted of a variety of individuals, including both community leaders and ordinary villagers, who were selected because they are people who are knowledgeable about the megalithic sites in the local area and the past megalithic culture of the local people, and/or have past or present engagements with the megalithic remains. These include people who are well-versed in the local culture and oral history, people who have been involved in local land and heritage activism (for example, individuals who have been actively involved in community-based efforts to record and conserve local cultural sites, see Chapter 5) and the tourism industry (village homestay operators and local guides), and farmers and hunters who frequently encounter megalithic remains located on farmlands and in the surrounding forests.

As I have previous travel and field research experience in the Upper Baram (including investigating megalithic remains in the Kelabit Highlands as part of an

archaeological research, see Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2017), the selection of some of my interview subjects was based on my own knowledge of previously known key persons. Further, my interview subjects were also selected based on recommendations by my other informants. In the case of the photo-elicitation interviews, I was led to a number of subjects who were either descendants or relatives of the persons, or in one case, the actual person, depicted in the colonial-era photographs, whom were identified with the help of my other informants. As described above, the application of purposive or purposeful sampling, which is a non-random sampling method, is useful in this research in order to gather as much information as possible in a limited period of time not only on the different ways people have engaged with the megalithic remains, but also for the recording of megalithic sites. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016: 96) notes, "purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned." However, the drawback of the use of the purposive sampling method is that most of my field informants were males and/or members of the older generation, who in connecting the megalithic remains to particular political, socio-cultural and economic issues, as reflected in the case study chapters of this thesis (see Chapters 4-7), may view the megalithic remains in certain shared or biased ways.

In the Kelabit Highlands, the "main [centre] of life and commerce" is a small town called Bario (Amster 1998: 20), and surrounding it are a number of Kelabit villages, some of which are located in close vicinity of each other (see Chapter 2). While conducting fieldwork in the Kelabit Highlands, I was for the most part based in Bario, in the village of Arur Dalan, which is a Kelabit settlement made up of two groups (Arur

Dalan Kubaan and Arur Dalan Pa' Tik) that were previously based in the Kubaan river valley prior to their relocation to Bario in the 1960s (see Chapter 6). While staying in Arur Dalan, I made numerous trips, usually by walking, to some of the other villages in the Bario area to conduct my interviews. On a number of occassions, interviews were also conducted in the shops in the small commercial centre in Bario.

Unlike in Bario, villages are less centralised in the Punang Kelapang area. For my fieldwork in the area, I divided my stay between two villages, Long Banga and Long Peluan. My visits to the megalithic sites in Punang Kelapang were arranged while staying in these two communities and were made with knowledgable local guides/informants from both Long Banga and Long Peluan. While staying in Long Banga, a mixed Sa'ban and Kenyah Leppo' Ke community, I also visited and conducted interviews in the Penan village of Long Lamai. Similarly, I visited and conducted interviews in the Penan village of Long Beruang, while staying at the Kelabit village of Long Peluan. In fact, several trips to the megalithic sites in the surrounding area were made with Penan guides/informants from Long Beruang. A part of the fieldwork in Punang Kelapang (20-27 August 2016) was conducted in collaboration with Mohammad Sherman Sauffi, Acting Curator of Archaeology in the Sarawak Museums Department in Kuching at the time.

In the course of carrying out my research, I collaborated with the Kelabit community (represented by the Rurum Kelabit Sarawak, or the Kelabit Association of Sarawak) in preparing an exhibition on the cultural and archaeological significance of megalithic monuments in the Kelabit Highlands for the opening of the Kelabit

Community Museum in Bario in July 2016. Besides contributing to the local community, this has also allowed me to see firsthand, the present significance of megaliths as tourism and heritage objects, which I discuss in detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

In addition to conducting the main fieldwork, which as mentioned above consisted of site recordings and ethnographic interviews in the Upper Baram, a significant amount of time (May, June and September 2016) was spent in Kuching (the capital city of Sarawak, located in the western part of the state, and also my hometown) and Miri (the coastal city nearest to the Upper Baram region, in the northeast of the state) in order to conduct archival and library research and to process the data that I obtained from the field. The latter included the transcribing of recorded interviews and the detailed and careful analysis of my interview transcripts and notes in order to extrapolate key themes related to the relationships between people and megaliths in the Upper Baram by using the inductive approach, which is used for "creating meaning in complex data through the development of summary themes or categories from the raw data" (Thomas 2006: 239). These key themes were eventually developed to become the case study chapters (Chapters 4-7) of this thesis.

## 1.4. ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. The first (current) chapter of this thesis provides the outline and rationale of the research. Chapter 2 provides the regional, ethnographic and historical contexts of the study area, the Upper Baram region in

Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo. In this chapter, I describe the region's geography and environment, and the three megalithic areas (Kelabit Highlands, Punang Kelapang and the Kubaan valley), as well as the settlements found in Kelabit Highlands and Punang Kelapang, the two fieldwork areas of this thesis. In particular, I also discuss the cultural aspects of the two specific groups; the Kelabit and the Sa'ban, amongst whom fieldwork for this research was carried out. Additionally, this chapter describes the history of the Upper Baram region, as well as the contemporary issues that have impacted the local communities.

Chapter 3 is a broad overview of the megalithic monuments in Borneo. Firstly, I discuss the megalithic monuments found in the Sarawak River Delta, Western Sabah and the northern interior region of Borneo. Following that, this chapter turns its attention to the megalithic monuments of the Kelabit Highlands in the Upper Baram. In this chapter, I discuss the cultural and social contexts of monument building, and the cultural significance of the megaliths. Additionaly, I discuss the typology of monuments and previous archaeological research that has been conducted on the megalithic remains of the Kelabit Highlands.

Chapter 4 to Chapter 7 of this thesis are four separate case study chapters, which highlight the various ways how people have engaged with the megalithic monuments in the Upper Baram, and how the meanings of the megaliths have been recreated or reinterpreted to suit present needs. Chapter 4 examines the changing attitudes towards the megalithic monuments of the Kelabit Highlands in the colonial period of Sarawak. Specifically, this chapter discusses the cessation of megalithic

practice in the Kelabit Highlands, and the development of colonial-era megalithic research in the state, the latter of which turned the megalithic sites into archaeological sites.

In Chapter 5, I examine the production, representation and use of the megalithic monuments as cultural heritage of the Kelabit people. I discuss how the Kelabit's interest in megalithic conservation is tied to wider concerns regarding the lack of awareness and preservation of their traditional culture due to the impacts of social and environmental changes. In addition, I show the impacts of the arrival of logging activities and the growth of the local tourism industry towards the beginning of megalithic conservation in the Kelabit Highlands in the early 2000s. I also discuss the different ways how the megalithic monuments of the Kelabit Highlands have been represented as Kelabit heritage.

Chapter 6 concerns the megalithic monuments in the Kubaan valley, in the western Kelabit Highlands, which were the subject of a recent documentation project, and their present significance to the displaced community of Arur Dalan – a community that was derived from two former Kelabit communities in the Kubaan valley that migrated to the Bario area in the 1960s. I consider the megalithic monuments within the context of the cultural landscape of the Kubaan valley, and show that they are the embodiments of various personal and collective memories. Thus, I also highlight the importance of the megalithic monuments to the Arur Dalan community's sense of history, belonging and identity.

Chapter 7 explores the contestations of megalithic monuments in Punang Kelapang, south of the Kelabit Highlands. In this chapter, I discuss the various narratives regarding the historical origin of the megalithic remains in the region. In particular, I examine how social competition over power and the control over land is changing ideas about place and history among the Kelabit and Sa'ban communities in the area. Lastly, Chapter 8 provides the conclusions of this thesis.

The next chapter is the first of two contextual chapters of this thesis, and it describes in detail the study area: the Upper Baram region of Sarawak in Malaysian Borneo from the perspectives of geography, population and culture, as well as history.

# CHAPTER 2

# REGIONAL, ETHNOGRAPHIC AND HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

This chapter provides the regional, ethnographic and historical settings of the study area of this thesis. It begins with a brief introduction to the island of Borneo, and then more specifically, the Upper Baram region in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo, in terms of their general geography and environment. Following that, this chapter describes more specifically the Kelabit Highlands, Punang Kelapang and the Kubaan region, which are the three megalithic areas in the Upper Baram that are relevant to this thesis. This chapter also describes the settlements in the Kelabit Highlands and Punang Kelapang, where, as mentioned in the previous chapter, fieldwork for this research was carried out. Following that, specific attention is given to the cultural aspects of the Kelabit and the Sa'ban, which are the two ethnic groups in the Upper Baram that are known for their past megalithic practices and among whose communities the fieldwork was conducted. This chapter then provides a brief history of the Upper Baram region, with specific focus given to the various historical changes that have impacted and shaped the lives of the local populations. The last section of this chapter, in attempting to sketch a present-day picture of the region, also outlines some contemporary issues affecting the local communities.

## 2.1. THE ISLAND OF BORNEO IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The island of Borneo, with its size of about 746,000 square kilometres, is the third largest island in the world after Greenland and New Guinea. Geographically, it is centrally located in Southeast Asia. Surrounding Borneo are mainland Southeast Asia (including Peninsular or West Malaysia) in the northwest; the islands of Singapore and Sumatra (Indonesia) in the west; Java (Indonesia) in the south; the Philippines in the northeast; and Sulawesi (Indonesia) in the southeast (Fig. 2.1).

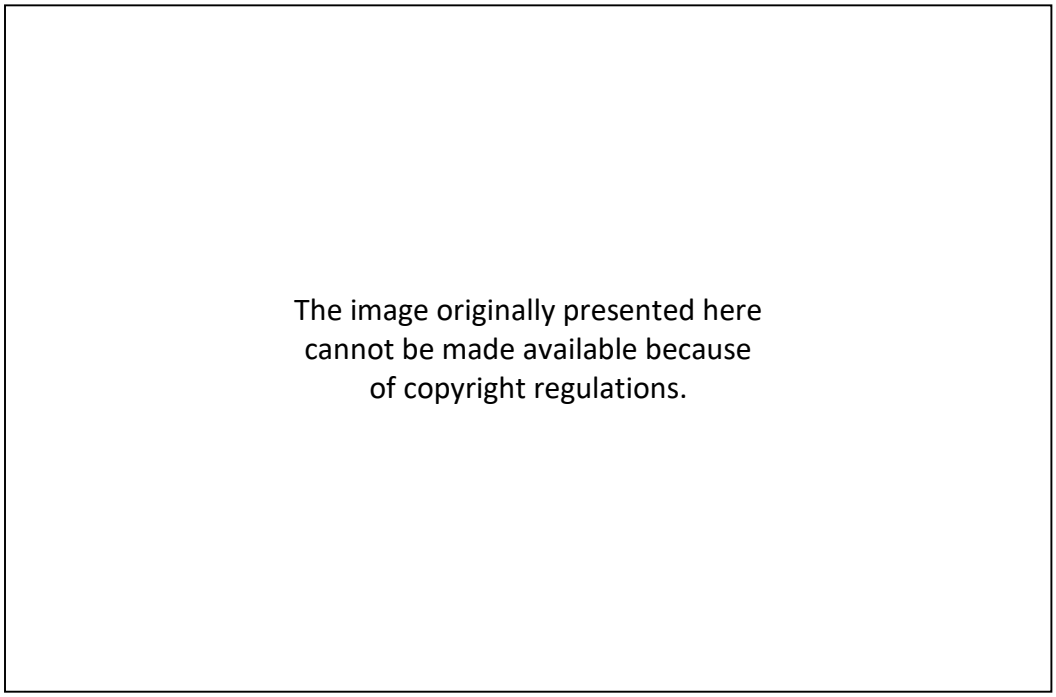



Figure 2.1. Borneo in Southeast Asia (from King 1993).

The name 'Borneo' is thought to derive from 'Burni' (or 'Brunei' today), the name of the sultanate, which during its peak between the 15th and 17th centuries, ruled over a significant part of the island's coastal regions (King 1993; Saunders 1994).

Today, Borneo is politically divided between the aforementioned sultanate of Brunei Darussalam, the Indonesian region of Kalimantan, and the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak.

Ecologically, Borneo can be divided into several zones, namely the coastal region, the interior lowlands and interior uplands (Ave and King 1986; King 1978a). The coastal region is characterised by mangrove, nipah and sago palm swamp forests, and heavy peat soil. At various points in history, trading and administrative centres were established at strategic coastal and river mouth locations, where populations were then concentrated. These centres, in areas such as the Brunei Bay, the Sarawak River delta, and Banjarmasin – in the northern, northwestern and southern parts of Borneo, respectively – controlled the historical trade of forest products from the interior, and were linked to international trade networks (King 1993). In Sarawak, the coastal region is traditionally populated by the Malay and the Melanau ethnic groups. The interior lowlands, on the other hand, consist of "areas of low undulating hills, inter-penetrated and surrounded by alluvial flood-plains" (King 1978a: 4). In this intermediate zone, Malay and indigenous Dayak communities live in close contact with one another. Further in the island's interior is the upland region that is covered in dense and extensive rainforests, which in recent times have been heavily logged. The chain of uplands in central Borneo is the source of several major rivers such the Kapuas, the Rejang, the Kayan, and the Mahakam. Together with their tributaries, these major rivers drain the island of Borneo and "provide the most important means of communication" (King 1978a: 3). The Bornean uplands are populated by a diverse group of indigenous peoples. In the Sarawakian portion of the uplands, the

predominant subsistence agriculturalist groups (e.g. the Kelabit and the Sa'ban; see below for a description of these ethnic groups) live in close proximity with minority hunter-gatherer groups (e.g. the Penan). Located in the upland zone of Sarawak is the study area of this thesis, the Upper Baram region, which is further described in the following section.

## 2.2. THE UPPER BARAM IN SARAWAK, MALAYSIAN BORNEO

The Upper Baram is located in the northern interior of Borneo island, in the northeast of the Malaysian state of Sarawak. It is situated about 100 kilometres from the South China Sea coast along northern Borneo, and is close to the Malaysian-Indonesian border (Fig. 2.2). As its name implies, and following Haile (1962), the Upper Baram refers to an upland region drained by the headwaters of the Baram River, beyond its navigable limits. Away from the uplands, the Baram River flows past the administrative town of Marudi and ends near the coastal city of Miri, close to the Malaysia-Brunei international border. The river basin of the Upper Baram covers an area of more than 5,000 square kilometres (or approximately 2,000 square miles) and corresponds to roughly the area between latitudes 3° 00' N and 4° 00' N, and between longitudes 115° 15' E and 115° 45' E.




Figure 2.2. Map showing the location of the Upper Baram region (indicated by the red-lined box) in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo, and major towns: 1) Bario; 2) Long Banga; 3) Miri; 4) Marudi; and 5) Bandar Seri Begawan.

(Map data ©OpenStreetMap contributors. Inset map from Nyiri [2016])

Being an upland region, the Upper Baram has valleys – in which settlements of various upland communities are found scattered (see below) – that reach up to around 1,000 metres above sea level, and mountains that reach over 2,000 metres (see Fig. 2.5 below). The highest peak in this region, and in fact in all of Sarawak, is Mount Murud, which stands at around 2,400 metres. Another significant feature of this highland landscape is the Batuh Lawi. Standing at around 2,000 metres, the Batuh Lawi is a rock outcrop famed for its picturesque twin limestone peaks, and is significant in the legends and beliefs of the upland populations (Clement 1911; Haile 1962: 11) (Fig. 2.3). Further, it is said that the traditional erection of standing stone pairs (*batuh senuped*, in Kelabit) – one of several megalithic types observed in the Upper Baram (see Chapter 3) – is in emulation of the Batuh Lawi's unique morphology.

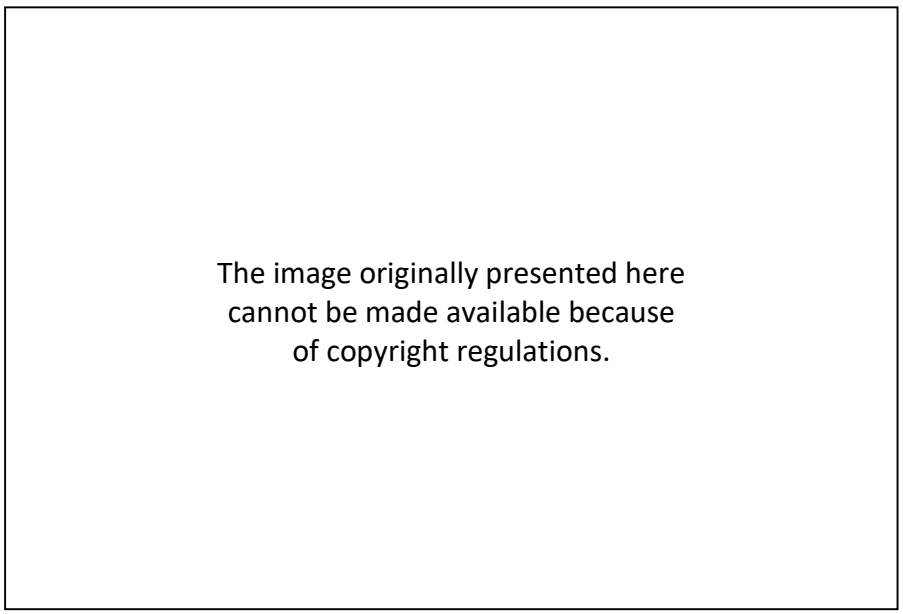



Figure 2.3. The Batuh Lawi, a significant feature of the highland landscape. Image downloaded from https://sarawaktourism.com/attraction/batu-lawi in December 2020.

In terms of climate, the Upper Baram, like Borneo in general, is humid and receives abundant rainfall. Temperatures in the highlands vary with elevation. In general, mid-day temperatures may reach around 30-32°C. In the higher mountain valleys, where a number of settlements are located, temperatures can be cooler, with averages falling between 12-14°C (night time) and 26-28°C (day time).

The Upper Baram is covered by forests of the montane, *kerangas* (heath forest), and dipterocarp (in lower altitudes) varieties. These forests are homes to rich flora and fauna (Hose and McDougall 1912; Ismail and Din 1998; Schneeberger 1945) and provide crucial resources for the food, economic subsistence and material cultures of the upland peoples (Hoare 2002; Janowski 2003a, 2014a).

## 2.3. THE KELABIT HIGHLANDS, PUNANG KELAPANG AND THE KUBAAN REGION

In this thesis, I refer to several distinct areas: Kelabit Highlands, Punang Kelapang and the Kubaan region (Fig. 2.4), which are all known previously for the presence of megalithic monuments (see Harrisson 1958b). Furthermore, they are significant to the present study because it is the relationships between the megalithic monuments in these areas and the people in the Upper Baram that are examined as case studies in this thesis (see Chapters 4 to 7). As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Kelabit Highlands and Punang Kelapang are my primary fieldwork areas. Nevertheless, while actual fieldwork was not conducted in the Kubaan area, its megalithic monuments were documented as part of this research. The connection between the megalithic monuments in the

Kubaan region and a particular Kelabit community in the Kelabit Highlands were also studied as part of this thesis (see Chapter 6). The three aforementioned megalithic areas are further described below.

Located in the extreme headwaters of the Baram, the Kelabit Highlands is a highland plateau that is drained by two upper tributaries: the Dappur and Kelapang rivers (Fig. 2.4). In the west, the Kelabit Highlands is bordered by the Tamabu Range, and in the east by the Apad Wat Range, which also serves as part of the international border between Sarawak and Indonesian Kalimantan. South of the Kelabit Highlands is an area known as Punang Kelapang. Its name refers to the headwaters of the Kelapang, which is the Kelabit name for the Baram River. West of the Tamabu Range, and hence in the western fringe of the Kelabit Highlands, is a region called Kubaan. As the name indicates, this area is drained by the Kubaan River and its tributaries. The Kubaan River is an upper tributary of the Tutoh, which itself is a tributary of the Baram River. It should also be pointed out that despite their locations in the fringes of the Kelabit Highlands proper, the Punang Kelapang and Kubaan regions are sometimes considered as the southern and western Kelabit Highlands, respectively (see S.B. Bala 2014). The next section describes the settlements and communities in the Kelabit Highlands and Punang Kelapang, where as mentioned above, fieldwork for this thesis was carried out.

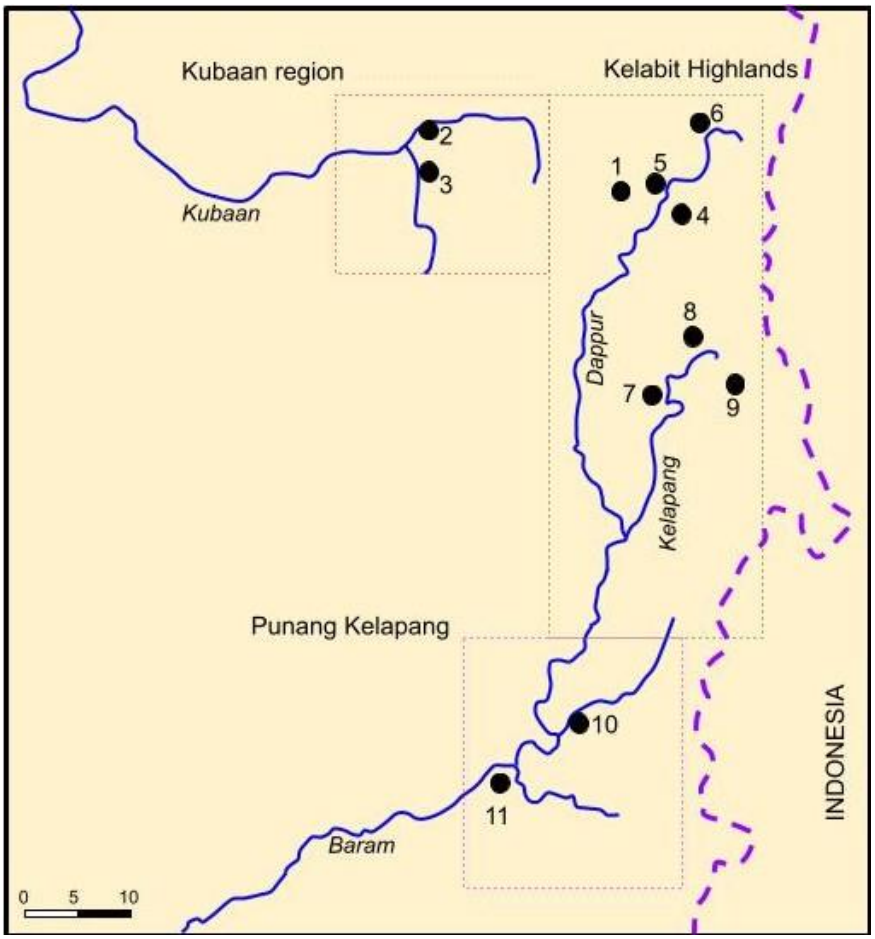



Figure 2.4. Map indicating the Kelabit Highlands, Punang Kelapang and Kubaan regions. Villages named in the main text are indicated: 1) Bario; 2) Kubaan; 3) Pa' Tik; 4) Pa' Umor; 5) Pa' Ukat; 6) Pa' Lungan; 7) Ramudu; 8) Pa' Mada; 9) Pa' Dalih; 10) Long Peluan; and 11) Long Banga.

## 2.4. SETTLEMENTS IN THE KELABIT HIGHLANDS AND PUNANG KELAPANG

Presently, several distinct ethnic groups populate the Upper Baram (Table 2.1). The Kelabit are predominantly found in the Kelabit Highlands. Their current settlements are mostly centred in and around Bario, a place described by Amster (1998: 20) as being "the main [centre] of life and commerce in the Kelabit Highlands" (Fig. 2.5). There, the Kelabit communities include Bario Asal, Arur Layun, Bued Main Beruh A (formerly Ulung Palang Dita'), Bued Main Beruh B (formerly Ulung Palang Benah), Pa' Ramapoh Dita' (or Pa' Ramapoh A), Pa' Ramapoh Benah (or Pa' Ramapoh B), Arur Dalan, Pa' Derong, Padang Pasir and Kampung Baru. Bario Asal (literally 'original Bario') is commonly regarded as the pioneer settlement in the Bario area. The other surrounding villages were established following the resettlement of various Kelabit communities from all across the highlands to Bario in the 1960s, as a result of security concerns during the Brunei Revolt (1962) and the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation or *Konfrontasi* (1963-1966), which grew out of regional political movements that opposed the formation of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963 (see Farrell 2011).

Pertinent to Chapter 6 of this thesis, among the Kelabit communities that were resettled in the 1960s were the Kubaan and Pa' Tik villages, which prior to the 1960s were based in the Kubaan valley (not to be confused with its namesake, the aforementioned Kubaan village or community). Today, descendants of these communities reside in the Arur Dalan village (Fig. 2.6) in Bario. The connections between the present Arur Dalan community and the megaliths and other cultural sites in the Kubaan area will be examined in Chapter 6. It is perhaps important to note that

before the resettling of Kelabit communities beginning in the 1960s, the Kubaan region used to be one of the main areas of Kelabit settlement and the main passage into the Kelabit Highlands (Banks 1937; Douglas 1912; Mjoberg 1925). Today, however, it is home to several Penan communities (Langub 2011). To the east and northeast of Bario are three other Kelabit communities: Pa’ Umor, Pa’ Ukat and Pa’ Lungan. Outside of Bario, to the south, are the Kelabit communities of Ramudu, Pa' Mada (Long Dano), Pa’ Dalih and Batu Patong.



Figure 2.5. The Bario area in the Kelabit Highlands. Such scenery is typical of the Upper Baram, where settlements are located in valleys surrounded by forested mountains.

Table 2.1. Ethnic groups and their present settlements in the Upper Baram

| **Ethnic group** | **Settlements** |
|---|---|
| Kelabit | <u>Kelabit Highlands</u><br>1) Bario Asal<br>2) Arur Layun<br>3) Bued Main A<br>4) Bued Main B<br>5) Pa' Ramapoh Dita'<br>6) Pa' Ramapoh Benah<br>7) Arur Dalan<br>8) Pa' Derong<br>9) Padang Pasir<br>10) Kampung Baru<br>11) Pa' Umor<br>12) Pa' Ukat<br>13) Pa' Lungan<br>14) Ramudu<br>15) Pa' Mada<br>16) Pa' Dalih<br>17) Batu Patong<br><br><u>Punang Kelapang</u><br>1) Long Peluan |
| Sa'ban | <u>Punang Kelapang</u><br>1) Long Puak<br>2) Long Banga |
| Penan | <u>Punang Kelapang</u><br>1) Long Lamai<br>2) Long Beruang<br>3) Ba' Lai |
| Kenyah Leppo' Ke | <u>Punang Kelapang</u><br>1) Long Banga |



Figure 2.6. The village of Arur Dalan

Punang Kelapang, on the other hand, is populated by several ethnic communities, namely the Kelabit, Sa'ban, Penan and Kenyah Leppo' Ke. The Kelabit are found in a settlement called Long Peluan (Fig. 2.7), which was established by Kelabit who migrated from the Kelapang River area around 1900 (Murang 1989). The Sa'ban, who generally trace their origin to the Bahau region in East Kalimantan, are today found in the settlements of Long Puak and Long Banga (Fig. 2.8). The Penan, on the other hand, are found in the settlements of Long Lamai, Long Beruang and Ba' Lai. The Kenyah Leppo' Ke are found in Long Banga, where they live side by side with the Sa'ban.



Figure 2.7. The village of Long Peluan.



Figure 2.8. The village of Long Banga.

Out of all the groups mentioned above, the Kelabit and the Sa'ban are the two groups that are associated with past megalithic activities. Thus, they were also the two groups amongst whom fieldwork for this thesis was conducted. The next section introduces the Kelabit and the Sa'ban peoples and aspects of their culture.

## 2.5. THE KELABIT AND THE SA'BAN

Compared to the total population of around 2.81 million in Sarawak, and around 32.6 million in Malaysia in 2019 (based on statistics obtained from the website of Department of Statistics Malaysia: www.dosm.gov.my), the Kelabit and the Sa'ban constitute very small minority groups. The total number of Kelabit in Sarawak is recently estimated to be around 6,000 (Hemmings 2016), while the total number of Sa'ban is estimated to be around 1,100 (Egay 2009).

Various writers have noted the relationship between the Kelabit and the Sa'ban peoples. Scholars have classified the Kelabit and the Sa'ban, as well as the 'Murut' (present-day Lun Bawang or Lun Dayeh; see Crain 1978, and Datan 1989), who speak the Kelabitic and Murutic languages (see section 2.5.1 below), under the language-based cultural grouping 'Kelabitic-Murut', which also includes other related upland peoples such as the Lun Berian, the Lun Kerayan, the Milau, the Nyibun and the Potok (LeBar 1972; Rousseau 1990). Hose and McDougall (1912: 35) mention both the 'Kalabits' [Kelabit] and the 'Sabans' [Sa'ban], living in the headwaters of the Baram and the Kerayan (in East Kalimantan), respectively, as being related to the 'Murut' tribal group. Also observing the similarities between the two groups, Harrisson (1959b: 18) mentions the Sa'ban and the Kelabit as being "partly related."

Today, the Kelabit and Sa'ban are also referred to as 'Orang Ulu'. While the 'Kelabitic-Murut' grouping mentioned above is one that is based on linguistical affinities, the 'Orang Ulu' (literally 'upriver people') grouping is geographical. As an

umbrella term, ‘Orang Ulu’ is used to refer to a diverse group of peoples living in the upper reaches of the Baram, Trusan, Limbang and Belaga areas in interior Sarawak. Originally used in the Native Customary Law Ordinance in the 1950s to refer specifically to the Kayan and Kenyah groups, the term ‘Orang Ulu’ came into its current (and wider) meaning and use with the formation of the Orang Ulu National Association (OUNA) in 1966. As cited by Seling and Langub (1989: 20), the Orang Ulu National Association (OUNA)’s Rule 3(11) states: “The Orang Ulu shall mean Bukitan, Bisaya, Kayan, Kajang (including Sekapan, Kejaman, Lahanan, Punan, Tanjong and Kanowit), *Kelabit*, Kenyah (including Sebop, Sipeng, Kiput, Badang and Berawan), Lugat, Lisum, Murut (Lun Bawang), Penan, Sian, Tabun, Ukit, *Saban* [Sa’ban]” (emphasis added). Thus, the term is furthermore political, or as Rousseau observes, “it has recently taken an ethnic connotation” (1990: 14), and has been used by its members who are linked by “geographical, socio-cultural and linguistic factors” to differentiate themselves from other (and more numerous) Dayaks or indigenous (and riverine/lowland or coastal) non-Muslim groups such as the Iban, Bidayuh and Melanau (Seling and Langub 1989: 20).

In the academic literature, much more has been written about the Kelabit compared to the Sa’ban. Besides the early and extensive writings by Tom Harrisson (e.g. Harrisson 1946, 1954, 1959a, 1959b), historical and anthropological studies on the Kelabit people have also been conducted in detail by Kelabit scholars such as Bala (2002, 2008, 2009, 2014, 2016), Lian-Saging (1976/77) and Talla (1979), as well as by foreign researchers such as Amster (1998, 1999, 2005a, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2016), Ewart (2009, 2011), Hitchner (2009a, 2009b) and Janowski (1991, 1995, 2003a, 2014a, 2014b,

2016). More recently, Hemmings (2016) and Nyiri (2016) have produced doctoral theses on the typology of Kelabit language, and the cultural and archaeological significance of imported 'dragon jars' among the Kelabit, respectively. In contrast, as Egay (2009) points out, there has been a lack of ethnographical research conducted among the Sa'ban. While attention was paid to the Sa'ban language in the 1970s (see below), the chief reference concerning the Sa'ban ethnic group remains the brief ethnographic article written by Murang (1989). The difference in the amount of research attention that the two communities receive possibly reflects the fact that in the past the much smaller (population-wise) Sa'ban were often regarded as a Kelabit sub-group. For example, Harrisson (1958b: 398) refers to the group as the [Sa'ban]-Kelabit. The following sections provide brief discussions on the cultural similarities and differences between the Kelabit and the Sa'ban.

### 2.5.1. Language

The Kelabit and Sa'ban languages are Kelabitic languages that belong to the Dayic sub-group (also known as the Apo Duat group, see Hudson 1978) of the North Sarawak language group (Blust 2010; Smith 2015) (Table 2.2). As can be seen in Table 2.2 below, the larger North Sarawak language group includes the Penan and Kenyah languages, both of which also have speakers in the Upper Baram (see section 2.4 above). Similarities between the Kelabit and the Sa'ban languages have been noted by scholars such as Bolang and Harrisson (1949), Beatrice Clayre (1970, 1972) and Iain F.C.S. Clayre (1970a, 1970b). Beatrice Clayre (1970), in particular, estimates that lexically the Sa'ban language is 73% similar to the Kelabit. It is interesting to note that the Sa'ban claim

language origin with a group of people called the Ngurek (I.F.C.S. Clayre 1970b). However, scholars consider the Ngurek language to be Kayanic (Blust 1974), and thus not closely related to the Sa'ban language (B. Clayre 1970). Nevertheless, the Sa'ban's claim may reflect the close relationship that they shared with the Ngurek, prior to the migration of the two groups into Sarawak in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (see Chapter 7).

Table 2.2. The North Sarawak language group (see Blust 2010; Smith 2015).

| **Sub-group** | **Language** |
|---|---|
| Bintulu | Bintulu |
| Berawan-Lower Baram | 1. Berawan<br>2. Lower Baram |
| Kenyah | 1. Highland<br>2. Lowland<br>3. Penan-Sebop |
| Dayic | 1. Murutic: Lun Bawang (or Lun Dayeh)<br>2. Kelabitic: Kelabit, Sa'ban, Tring |

### 2.5.2. Culture and religion

Besides language, the Kelabit and the Sa'ban share many cultural similarities, for example, in "farming, child birth, child adoption, *ngalua* offering of children [a child initiation rite, see Amster 1999], games and oral culture" (Murang 1989: 191). Despite that, Murang also notes some differences, for example in tattoo patterns for women, as well as in the lack of the elaborate usage of teknonyms – a teknonym is basically "a name which indicates that the person designated by it is the parent of a child" (Needham 1954: 416) – among the Sa'ban compared to the Kelabit.

Similar to other upland or upriver communities, the Kelabit and the Sa'ban are traditionally longhouse-dwelling peoples. The sizes of longhouses vary, but generally a longhouse accommodates around 100 to 200 residents (LeBar 1972). A possible difference in longhouse structure is in terms of the importance given to private space. Kelabit longhouses lack such space (Harrisson 1946), although among other Kelabitic-Murut groups, the longhouse may also be divided into private compartments (LeBar 1972: 160). In all longhouses, a typical feature is the open public area (*tawa'*) in front of the longhouse, where social or communal activities are conducted. In the past, longhouse locations would shift every four or five years following swidden agriculture. Besides that, prior to conversion to Christianity, the moving of longhouse communities could also be influenced by "bad omens, fear of spirits and curses pronounced on the longhouse" (Bulan 2003: 25).

Crain's (1970, 1978) observation of the decline of longhouse residence among the Lun Dayeh of Sabah (previously known as the 'Murut', the Lun Dayeh, like the Kelabit and the Sa'ban, are also a part of the Kelabitic-Murut grouping mentioned above) in modern times can also be applied to the Upper Baram peoples. While longhouse communities still exist, individual or private houses are becoming more and more popular and are found in every village in the Upper Baram today. It is also observable that in some villages, there are more households living in individual houses than in longhouses. While this may be due to myriad social and economic factors, Bala (2016: 28) notes the increasing influence of the Christian church in replacing the longhouse as the centre of social life in the highlands.

The pre-Christian belief system of the Kelabitic-Murut peoples was animistic. Practices such as farming and hunting, as well as the construction and movement of longhouses, were governed by belief in omens communicated by animals and spirits (see Amster 2009). Also, as is common among other Bornean ethnic groups, the mockery of animals is considered taboo, the breaking of which is believed to cause petrification (Rousseau 1990: 27). Mortuary and child initiation rites are "major ritual complexes" accompanied by communal feasting (Amster 2009: 314). The death of a member of the aristocratic class (see below) in Kelabit and Sa'ban societies is typically commemorated by the construction of megalithic structures during secondary funeral rites (Harrisson 1958b, 1958c; B. Clayre 2010). In the past, these events would have been accompanied by ritual animal sacrifices and offerings, and the drinking of copious amounts of rice beer (see Chapter 3). The secondary funeral or the secondary treatment of the dead is also a feature that distinguishes the Kelabitic-Murut groups from their neighbours: the Kenyah and the Penan. However, after the Second World War (WW2), a spiritual shift occurred among the peoples of the Upper Baram when they converted *en masse* to Christianity, beginning in the 1940s for the Kelabit and 1950s for the Sa'ban.

### 2.5.3. Economy

The traditional economy of the Kelabit and the Sa'ban is based on diverse agriculture. Rice, grown in swidden and wet fields, is the most important crop and is consumed at almost every meal. The centrality of rice in the cultural and social spheres, particularly among the Kelabit, has been previously discussed by the anthropologist Monica

Janowski (1991, 1995, 2003a). Beginning in 2011, the mechanisation of rice farming was introduced to Bario and the commercialisation of rice makes it an increasingly important economic crop particularly among the Kelabit (Bala 2016). Besides rice, vegetables and fruit trees are also planted. In addition to plant-based agriculture, livestock such as buffalo, cattle and chicken are also reared. The upland forest environment provides for the subsistence economy of the Kelabit and the Sa'ban, who hunt wild game, gather wild food plants, and fish in the rivers. Forest produce is typically gathered for domestic consumption, but is sometimes sold.

A unique geological feature of the highlands is the occurrence of salt springs, the brine from which is utilised for cooking by the Kelabit and the Sa'ban. The Kelabit, in particular, are well known for their traditional salt production (Douglas 1909b). Among the upland groups in northern interior Borneo, salt was and continues to be an important trade commodity (Egay 2012; Gani 2012; Langub 2012). In the olden days, using salt as exchange, the Kelabit obtained iron blades and carved handles from the Kenyah (Murang 1995: 45; Schneeberger 1979: 77), as well as other goods such as mats, local pots, Chinese pots and gongs (Harrisson 1959b: 25-26). It has also been argued that salt production was one of the factors that allowed the Kelabit to achieve relative wealth and independence from outside control (Harrisson 1959b: 25; Rousseau 1990: 161).

### 2.5.4. Social stratification

Like other peoples of Central Borneo, Kelabitic-Murut groups have social stratification (Rousseau 1990). The number of strata that exists in a stratification system may vary. For example, Crain (1978: 136) identifies three social strata for the Lun Dayeh system, while for the Kelabit, four social strata are usually recognised (see below). In general, however, the hierarchical categories in a stratification system can be divided into aristocrats or nobles (ruling and lower aristocrats); commoners or followers; and slaves.

In this stratification system, social status is hereditary and leaders are members of the aristocratic class. However, as class status is also dependent on personal industry, character, accomplishments and the accumulation (and transfer) of wealth, social mobility is possible (see below). This is why it has been argued that the Kelabitic groups have a less rigid social stratification compared to other Bornean groups like the Kayan and the Kenyah (see Datan 1989). Traditionally, elaborate headhunting and death rites, which are usually accompanied by expensive communal feasts, constitute the field where members of the Kelabitic societies compete for prestige. As Rousseau notes, “maintenance of high status is linked to the performance of feasts with conspicuous consumption”, and that within the Kelabitic system, there is a high social competition, where “leaders must compete for followers” (1990: 209).

The Kelabit stratification system has been discussed in great detail by Lian-Saging (1976/77), Talla (1979) and Bala (2016). To my present knowledge, no detailed description of the Sa'ban stratification system has ever been written. However, because the Sa'ban are also a Kelabitic-Murut group, it is assumed that their traditional stratification system is similar to that of the Kelabit and the Lun Dayeh or Lun Bawang (Bala 1993; Crain 1978). The different social strata according to the Kelabit stratification system are summarised below.

***Lun Paran* or *Lun Doo (Anak Lun Merar)***

The aristocrats or nobles of the Kelabit society comprise members of the *Lun Paran* or *Lun Doo* ('good people') class (Lian-Saging 1976/77; Bala 2016). They are people of considerable wealth (in terms of rice, livestock animals and heirlooms such as jars, gongs and beads) and are known for their bravery and leadership qualities. Leaders (*Laih Rayeh*, literally 'big people') are chosen from the *Lun Paran* class, and their dwelling quarters are situated in the centre of the longhouse. In the olden days, only men from the noble class are permitted or are able to lead headhunting expeditions. There is a slight difference between the *Lun Paran* and the *Lun Doo*, in that while both are rich and influential, only the former are slave owners. Therefore, the *Lun Paran* is smaller in number compared to the *Lun Doo*. Collectively, the *Lun Paran* and *Lun Doo* are *Anak Lun Merar* ('children of big men'), which Talla (1979) argues, is the more proper name for the Kelabit aristocratic class.

The mark of an aristocrat is the sponsoring of grand feasts held in conjunction with headhunting, rite of passage and death ceremonies. Additionally, the megalithic

structures built to commemorate the death of an aristocrat, are also symbols of status for the Kelabit elites. According to Talla (1979: 78), the number of megaliths and feasts sponsored signifies and elevates the Kelabit personal and/or family status.

***Lun Pupa or Lun Upa-upa***

The *Lun Pupa* or *Lun Upa-upa* ('half people') can be considered as the intermediate class of the traditional Kelabit society, and is the result of marriages between members of *Lun Doo* and members of the lower class (Bala 2016). As members of the *Lun Pupa* class inherit property from parents or other ancestors who were once *Lun Paran*, they are of relative wealth, although not as wealthy as the *Lun Paran* or the *Lun Doo*. It is possible for the descendant of a *Lun Pupa* to rise up in rank to become a *Lun Doo* through marriage and through "good reputation, hardwork and the accumulation of considerable wealth" (Lian-Saging 1976/77: 116).

***Anak Katu***

The lower or the follower class is known as *Anak Katu* (Lian-Saging 1976/77; Bala 2016), although Talla (1979:84) argues that *Lun Daat* ('bad people') is the more appropriate term. Members of this stratum lack the wealth of the *Lun Paran*, and to a certain extent, also the *Lun Pupa*. As Lian-Saging (1976/77: 121) puts it, the difference between the *Lun Pupa* and the *Anak Katu* is that the former are "the haves", while the latter are the "have-nots". In the longhouse, members of the *Anak Katu* typically have their dwelling quarters at the ends of the longhouse. At times, the *Anak Katu* are dependent on members of the upper classes for their daily needs.

***Demulun***

The *Demulun* are slaves captured as prisoners of war or during headhunting raids, or are people with unsettled debts. They are treated as 'properties' of the *Lun Paran* that could be bought and sold.

One impact that the introduction of Christianity has had on the formerly stratified societies of the Upper Baram is the democratisation of the society, where the former (or traditional) social status of families and individuals are less relevant socially today compared to in the past. As Lian-Saging (1976/77: 115) observes for the Kelabit, "emphasis shifted into the equality of all believers under one God." Nevertheless, as LeBar (1972: 162) notes, "class differences are seldom expressed overtly in everyday life, but in times of crisis the leading aristocrat has the final word." Today, marriages may also continue to be informed by social statuses of the past (Talla 1979). However, as Talla (1979: 88) further points out, with the attainment of education and the accumulation of property through jobs and other economic opportunities, "concern with inherited rank is disappearing."

## 2.6. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UPPER BARAM

It is uncertain when humans first populated the interior highlands. Archaeological research suggests that the earliest possible indication of human activity in the Kelabit Highlands dates back to around 4,000 BC, based on coring and palynological evidence of forest clearance (Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2010). Securely dated ancient settlement sites,

however, extend back to less than 3,000 years ago, based on recent excavations of several open-air sites in the northern and southern Kelabit Highlands (Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2010, Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2017). Associated with these early settlements sites are findings of earthenwares, stone pounders (*batu perahit*), and most notably iron tools and glass beads, which lend to the attribution of these early upland settlement sites to the Metal Age period in Borneo (see Bellwood 2007 for an overview of the Metal Age in Island Southeast Asia in general). One particular site, Ruma Ma'on Taa Payo in the southern Kelabit Highlands, is unique in uncovering a possible stone wall structure. This is said to represent an "intensity of Metal Age occupation in interior Borneo in the early first millennium AD" (Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2010: 102).

While archaeological evidence of the beginning of human occupation in Borneo's interior highlands is sparse, the indigenous populations nevertheless believe that they have lived in the highlands since time immemorial as attested by oral histories telling of their origins. For example, according to one Kelabit legend, as documented by Lian-Saging (1976/77: 51), all humans originated in the highlands, before a 'great flood' caused people to become more dispersed. The Kelabit who had the heaviest rafts remained in the highlands, while other groups of people with lighter rafts drifted further away. This explains why various groups of people are found where they are living today. It is said that the Malays, for example, had the lightest rafts, so they drifted the furthest and eventually settled near the coast.

As will be apparent in this thesis, the megalithic remains in the Upper Baram are considered by the indigenous population to be evidence of their long history of

occupation in the highlands. There are various local folklores, which explain the existence of these megaliths. For example, one story mentions how rock carvings were first made by Seluyah, a mythical ancestor of the Kelabit (Balang 1965, and see also Janowski 2014b). Recent archaeological evidence also suggests the considerable antiquity of megalith building in the Upper Baram, with some of the oldest megaliths possibly dating back to more than 2,000 years ago (Lloyd-Smith 2012; Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2017). Furthermore, ethnographic evidence has demonstrated the link between megalith building and the indigenous population. Among the Kelabit for example, the tradition of megalith building is well documented (see Lian-Saging 1976/77; Talla 1979), and the building of megaliths was observed until around the middle of the 20th century (Harrisson 1958b). Like the Kelabit, the Sa'ban are also known to have built megalithic graves as part of their secondary funeral rites in their pre-Christian past (Clayre 2010).

While the Kelabit claim to have originated in the Kelabit Highlands since time immemorial, the Sa'ban in general trace their origin to the Bahau region in East Kalimantan, where a large number of megalithic monuments has also been recorded (see Chapter 3). According to Murang (1989), beginning around 1900, some groups of Sa'ban migrated from the Bahau to areas along the Balong and the Puak rivers in the Upper Baram. This was followed by a larger migration of the Sa'ban people into the Upper Baram after the Second World War. Despite this, Kelabit oral history suggests a common origin in the Kelabit Highlands for both the Kelabit and the Sa'ban. In other words, the Kelabit and the Sa'ban lived together in the Kelabit Highlands in the past before population pressure led the Sa'ban to move into the Bahau region, where and

when they then began to speak “a different slang or accent of Kelabitic-Murut language” (Lian-Saging 1976/77: 28). While Lian-Saging (1976/77: 27) dismisses stories like this as “pure legend”, he rightly highlights the fact that the oral legends indicate the long history of settlements by related groups of people in the upland areas on both sides of the current international border. In terms of the population history of Punang Kelapang, it should be mentioned that prior to the arrival of Kelabit and Sa’ban groups around 1900, in the 18th and early 19th century, the area was previously settled by a group of people called the Ngurek (Jalong 1989). The past history of the Ngurek in the Upper Baram is especially significant as it has shaped present understanding regarding the origin of the megalithic monuments in Punang Kelapang, as will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Scholars generally point out that up to the period of the Brooke family’s rule in Sarawak beginning in 1841 (see below), the peoples of the Upper Baram highlands lived in relative isolation due to their locations in the extreme headwaters and thus, beyond the navigable range of the Baram River. Therefore, they were independent of outside control (King 1993; Rousseau 1990). This is despite Sarawak, including the Baram area, being under control of the Brunei Sultanate since the early 16th century. As Ewart (2009: 232) notes, between the period of Brunei and Brooke rule, “political control of the interior remained tenuous, and depended on indigenous power structures.” Nevertheless, the highlands and the coast were evidently linked by trade and this is best exemplified through the influx of trade goods such as glass beads, gongs, and Chinese ‘dragon jars’, which were brought to Borneo by Brunei’s international trade links, into the highlands. Such goods were accumulated by the

native peoples as prestige items and in turn were distributed across generations as heirlooms. Thus, they were symbols of status among the various stratified societies of interior Borneo. In the opposite direction, the Bornean interior supplied the international trade network with forests goods such as camphor, *gaharu* wood (or agarwood) and birds' nests.

There were further links between Brunei and the interior highlands and its peoples. The history of Brunei even suggests an indigenous root for the kingdom. According to Brunei chronicles, Sultan Muhammad, the first Muslim Sultan of Brunei and founder of the Brunei Sultanate in the 14th century, is said to be of partly indigenous 'Murut' descent (Saunders 1994). There are also indications to suggest that the Kelabitic-Murut groups were once more widespread (Harrisson 1959b), occupying not only the highlands, but also areas near the coast and Brunei Bay, but were pushed inland into the highlands by the more numerous and more aggressive Kayan people (Rousseau 1990).

From 1841 until the start of the Second World War, Sarawak came under the rule of the Brooke family from England, who would come to be known as the 'White Rajahs' (Runciman 1960). An important historical consequence of this political shift was that between 1884 and 1890, the Baram, Trusan and Limbang areas, where various Kelabitic-Murut groups lived, were seceded from Brunei control into the hands of the Brooke government of Sarawak (Pringle 1970; Runciman 1960). The Brooke government ruled the interior from Claudetown (today Marudi), the administrative centre on the Baram River. In order to exert control over the native population in the

interior, the Brooke government outlawed headhunting and initiated 'peace-making' between feuding tribes, at times by 'punitive' ways (Douglas 1912). As Rousseau (1990: 35) notes, "the main effects of colonial rule on central Borneo was the disappearance of headhunting and warfare by 1910-1925." Apart from maintaining the peace in the upland frontier region and taxing the local populations in exchange for their loyalty (see Hose 1898a, 1898b), control was for the most part indirect and the upland peoples and their cultures were left largely uninfluenced by colonial rule. Nevertheless, in 1911 a fort, which also acted as a permanent trading post, was built in Lio Mato at the uppermost navigable portion of the Baram River in order to monitor the security and raiding activities in the area.

The writings of European administrators provided some of the earliest glimpse of the upland peoples and cultures. In some of these accounts, for example, in a report written by R.S. Douglas on the peace-making expedition of 1908 (Douglas 1909a, 1912), mentions of the upland megalithic culture were made. Although Douglas' description of megalithic construction was simplistic: "they were to denote that some chief had had a big '*irop*' or drunk there", it nevertheless indicates a still ongoing tradition (Douglas 1912: 28). Other than Douglas, visits to the interior highlands were also made by Mjoberg and Banks, both of whom were curators of the Sarawak Museum in the 1920s and 1930s. Banks (1937) in particular produced arguably the first focused account of the Kelabit's megalithic culture. In his writing, Banks (1937: 413) notably refutes Captain E.V. Andreini's (another European colonial administrator) claim of a Chinese origin for the upland megaliths. Banks instead attributes them to the making of the local Kelabit people.

The Second World War (WW2) opened up the highlands to the outside world in greater ways than ever before. In order to quell the Japanese invasion of Borneo, which began in 1941, the Allied Forces established military bases in Bario and Long Banga. Not only did the region receive the arrivals of foreign soldiers, the war time also saw the introduction of many foreign materials: “corrugated tin sheets, wire rope, steel nails, sheets of plywood, saws, hammers, and other metal tools” (Ewart 2012: 9). Many of these ‘new’ materials were left behind after the war, and were subsequently re-used by the local population as building materials.

The war period also saw the arrival of a figure by the name of Tom Harrisson. Prior to the war, Harrisson had already achieved fame for his anthropological work in the South Pacific, and for pioneering the Mass-Observation social research organisation in Britain (Heimann 2002). Harrisson first came to Borneo as part of University of Oxford Expedition in 1932 (Harrisson 1938). During this initial trip, however, Harrisson did not reach the highlands proper, but only the Kelabit-settled areas in the Tutoh and Malinau lowlands. In 1944, during the course of the war, Harrisson, who by then was a Major in the Allied Forces, parachuted down in the Kelabit Highlands, where he led the Z-Special Unit, as well as many Kelabit and Lun Dayeh recruits, in the fight against the Japanese army. Tom Harrisson’s war exploits and his subsequent stay with the Kelabit after the war have been extensively documented in Harrisson (1959b) and Heimann (2002).

Until today, Harrisson is someone who is fondly remembered for his contributions towards the development of the Kelabit people, with whom he had

developed a close personal relationship (see Bulan and Bulan-Dorai 2004; P. Bala 2016; S.B. Bala 2014). As Bulan and Bulan-Dorai (2004: 47) summarise, Harrisson "had commendably helped them [the Kelabit] towards a more [civilised] existence. He brought in farming implements, money, and taught the folks how to use them. His greatest contribution to the Kelabits, however, was the setting up of a school", in the village of Pa' Main in 1946 (see also Chapter 4).

After WW2, Sarawak, formerly ruled by the Brooke family, became a British Crown Colony when it was ceded to the British government in 1946. Harrisson himself would serve in the British colonial government of Sarawak as the Curator of the Sarawak Museum, and as Government Ethnologist from 1947 to 1966. As will be shown in Chapter 4 of this thesis, it was during Harrisson's helm at the Sarawak Museum that extensive research on the megaliths of the Kelabit Highlands began that eventually led to the megalithic monuments acquiring their current status as important cultural heritage of the state. Tom Harrisson apparently played a part in another significant post-war event, which eventually shaped the demography of the region. This event was the migration of the Sa'ban. According to Murang (1989: 188), the Sa'ban were encouraged to migrate from neighbouring East Kalimantan (in Indonesian Borneo) to the Upper Baram by Tom Harrisson, "as a reward to the Sa'ban community for killing the two Ibans who murdered the District Officer of the Baram District." Besides the Sa'ban, the Kenyah Leppo Ke' also underwent similar migration after WW2. As mentioned previously, today they live alongside the Sa'ban community in Long Banga.

The colonial period, which brought about development and modernity, was a time of rapid change for Sarawak and her peoples, as will be discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis. It was also in the colonial period that mass religious conversion of the upland peoples took place. Missionary activity by the Australian-based Borneo Evangelical Mission (BEM) began among the Lun Bawang population in Limbang and Lawas in the 1930s. However, it is only after the Second World War that the Kelabit (1940s) and the Sa'ban (1950s) in the Upper Baram converted *en masse* to the new religion (see Chapter 4 of this thesis for more details on the Kelabit conversion experience). The relative delay was due to several factors, including the Brooke government's policy of controlling missionary activities among indigenous populations (see Lees 1979: 31-32), the remote location of the highlands, and the outbreak of the Second World War.

Nevertheless, as Chapter 4 will show, Christianity has been a major force of change in the Upper Baram. It has influenced almost every aspect of life in the highlands (Amster 1998). Amster further notes that Christian and Kelabit identities are deeply intertwined, and that deep belief in Christianity has resulted in a desire among the Kelabit to "break from the past" (1998: 7), so much so that he discovered while conducting research among the people that "knowledge about the past was sometimes intentionally suppressed, avoided, or discredited by elders" (1998: 6). Conversion to Christianity has also significantly changed the ways indigenous communities perceive their natural and spiritual landscapes (Amster 2016; Ewart 2011). Since the religious conversion, certain traditional practices have also ceased. These include headhunting, infanticide, drinking of rice beer (*burak*), secondary treatment of the dead and

megalith building. On the other hand, the *ngelua* initiation rite for children has been reinvented as the name-changing ceremony, which is a major social event among the Kelabit of today (Amster 1999). The role that Christian missionaries played in the education and development of the people living in the Kelabit Highlands and Punang Kelapang regions has also been emphasised by Alasdair Clayre (1989).

In addition, attitudes towards antique objects accumulated as heirlooms and as symbols of status (e.g. jars, gongs and beads), which are connected to pre-Christian beliefs and social stratification, are also changing. Nyiri (2016: 11-12), for example, has documented the changing perceptions of antique jars among the Kelabit. While in the past they were treasured heirloom items, many jar collections have been sold off or kept hidden in closed sections of the longhouse. In some instances, jars and other items from the pre-Christian past were discarded or destroyed (Mashman 2006: 141). In the forest, megalithic and jar burial cemeteries have been neglected. But as Nyiri (2016) and this thesis demonstrate, attitudes towards old objects can be complex. Nyiri notes that some Kelabit families, especially those dwelling in urban areas continue to proudly display old heirloom jars in their homes.

In 1963, Sarawak gained her independence from British rule and merged with Malaya, Singapore and Sabah (formerly North Borneo) to form the Federation of Malaysia. The effect of this is the partitioning of the northern interior highlands into areas belonging to either Malaysia or Indonesia, which affected movements across what was once a more porous border. This had large impacts on the social relations and identities of peoples on both sides of the border. As Poline Bala (2001, 2002)

explains, the newly created international border separates closely related groups into different peoples, which would from thenceforth undergo different economic and social trajectories as separate citizens of the modern nations of Malaysia and Indonesia.

The formation of Malaysia received opposition from Indonesia and resulted in the Malaysia-Indonesia Confrontation from 1963 to 1966 (Farrell 2011). During the Confrontation, British military and Border Scouts set up bases of operations in Bario and Long Banga, which were close to the international border. Due to security concerns at the time, a number of Kelabit communities were relocated to Bario, where they are settled until today (see above).

## 2.7. THE UPPER BARAM TODAY

Today, the Upper Baram is no longer as remote as it was in the past. Nowadays, the Kelabit Highlands and Punang Kelapang are connected to the coastal or downriver cities of Miri and Marudi by the Malaysia Airlines rural air service, which flies regularly to Bario (up to three flights daily) and Long Banga (two flights weekly). Beginning in the 1990s, logging roads have also brought further connectivity to the coast. From Miri, a journey on a four-wheel-drive vehicle on mostly logging road takes around 8 to 10 hours to reach Long Banga, and around 12 to 14 hours to reach Bario, depending on weather and road conditions. Besides the airstrips, other government facilities in Bario and Long Banga include primary and secondary (in Bario) schools, government clinics

and agricultural stations. In 2015, Bario was declared by the Sarawak state government as an administrative sub-district.

Tourism has developed since the late 1990s, particularly in the Kelabit Highlands, to become a significant economic activity for the local population (Harris 2009; Rodger 2005). A number of local residents now operate homestays or guesthouses, or work as local tourist guides. Events such as the Bario Food and Cultural Festival, which has been organised annually since 2006, also attract visitors to the highlands. Tourism in the Punang Kelapang region has not yet reached the level of development as in Bario. However, the tourism potentials of the area are now being discovered and developed (see news article entitled 'Long Banga holds many eco-tourism treasures, reveals pensioner' in Borneo Post Online 2016, November 12).

Over the years, the peoples of the Upper Baram, in parallel with the problems faced by indigenous peoples worldwide (see Champagne *et al*. 2005; Howard 2003), have confronted issues of economic and political marginalisation in post-independence Malaysia. Furthermore, it has generally been observed that in Malaysia there is unequal growth between the rural areas (populated by indigenous peoples) and urban areas, where development is more concentrated. Because of that, Aiken and Leigh (2011: 476) note, "benefits of growth are enjoyed by Malay/[Melanau] and Chinese urban dwellers, while the predominantly rural-dwelling natives continue to suffer from widespread and persistent poverty, high rates of illiteracy, and limited access to medical care." In the recent past, the failure of the state in bringing infrastructural development to the Upper Baram has resulted in feelings of frustration and of being

neglected by the government among certain portion of the population (Clayre 1989: 30).

Furthermore, while the native ethnic groups of Sarawak are recognised as indigenous by the state, and thus given the *Bumiputera* ('sons of the soil') status, which carries with it certain reserved rights and privileges, Chin (2014) notes that compared to the majority Malay-Muslim population, the other indigenous groups are often treated as second-class *Bumiputera*. The Sa'ban in particular have, in the recent past, faced issues with the recognition of their indigeneity and thus, their citizenship in Malaysia (see news article entitled 'Sa'ban are legitimate as indigenous of Sarawak' [in Malay] in Utusan Borneo 2009, August 17).

Perhaps one of the biggest changes impacting local lives in the Upper Baram in recent years is the arrival of commercial logging activities in the 1990s. As mentioned above, logging roads have offered better connectivity to the coastal cities, and thus have largely been welcomed by the local population (see Amster 2008). Logging activities have also provided opportunities for obtaining cash income. Some locals have worked with logging companies or have sold village products to workers at logging camps. On the other hand, the better access to market goods as provided by the logging roads, and the wider economic opportunities have affected traditional craft production and use, and changed the pattern of farming. Farms were opened closer to roads, and farmers started to commute to their farms using motorcyles bought with salaries obtained from working with logging companies (Mashman 2006). Nevertheless, the damaging effects of logging to the environment have also been

documented. Logging activities have depleted forest resources, which are important to the subsistence economy of the local population (Brosius 1986; Janowski 2003a, 2014a), and destroyed cultural (including megalithic) sites (Cluny and Chai 2007; Mashman 2017). Thus, logging activities have come to a head with concerns regarding cultural heritage and conservation (see Chapter 5).

Additionally, another issue regularly connected to logging activities in Sarawak is their infringement of native customary land rights (King 1993: 296). Aiken and Leigh (2011: 472), notes that "in Malaysia, lands long occupied by indigenous people have been increasingly targeted for resource extraction, conversion to plantation crops, and development of infrastructure." Often, this is conducted at the expense of native land rights, which further contributes to the experience of marginalisation among indigenous peoples. Besides pressure on land from state-led or state-endorsed development, land rights are also contested between the different ethnic groups living side by side in the Upper Baram. For example, Murang (1993) explains that since the Penan, who were formerly nomadic hunter-gatherers, have started settling down from the 1950s and have adopted agriculture, issues of land rights have become a concern among the Kelabit and the Sa'ban who see themselves as the earlier settlers in the Punang Kelapang area, and thus have more rights to the land compared to the Penan. As cultural sites are often used as evidence for land claims, this has implications on local perceptions of the origins of the megalithic remains in the area (see Chapter 7).

Besides issues concerning the deterioration of the local environmental and cultural landscapes, and land rights, another issue close to the heart of the local

peoples of the Upper Baram is the preservation of cultural heritage (see Chapter 5). There is a general feeling that traditional knowledge and cultural identity are becoming lost, and that the old lifestyle is being abandoned (see Bala 2002: 53). Amster (1998: 93) observes among the Kelabit: "knowledge about the past is extremely limited among contemporary Kelabit, largely due to the advent of Christianity. Young people have only a vague familiarity with events of the past." Besides the influence of new beliefs and education on the fading of traditional practices and knowledge, another contributing factor is the outmigration of people to urban areas (local and overseas) in search of education and work. The younger generation have thus become more educated, urbanised, and are less dependent on farming. Among those who have migrated out of the highlands, many continue to live away, and a number have intermarried with individuals from other ethnic groups (see Amster 1998: 82-87). Taking the Kelabit as an example, Poline Bala (2001) estimates that 75% of the Kelabit population in Sarawak are presently living away from the Kelabit Highlands. As a result, children of urbanised Kelabit or Sa'ban are less fluent in their parents' languages and heritage (Amster 1998). Another impact of outmigration is the changing demography of the longhouses or villages in the highlands. The number of households currently living in the villages has decreased, while the proportion of old folks has increased. Due to the lack of workforce, farms have become smaller and there has been a dependency on migrant workers (Amster 2006; Bala 2001).

**SUMMARY**

This chapter has introduced the study area of this thesis: the Upper Baram region of Sarawak, in Malaysian Borneo, in terms of its geography, population, culture and history. As described in this chapter, the Upper Baram in this thesis refers to a region that encompasses the Kelabit Highlands, Punang Kelapang and the Kubaan valley, where megalithic monuments are known to occur. The latter two, although not actually parts of the Kelabit Highlands proper, are nevertheless sometimes referred to as the southern and western Kelabit Highlands, respectively. As mentioned in this chapter, fieldwork was mainly conducted in the Kelabit Highlands and Punang Kelapang. The Kubaan area is nevertheless pertinent to this thesis, as the importance of the megalithic monuments in the area to a particular community in the Kelabit Highlands will be the subject of interest in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

After describing the wider geographical and environmental aspects of the Upper Baram, as well as the settlements found in the Kelabit Highlands and Punang Kelapang, the main focus of this chapter was on two ethnic communities: the Kelabit and the Sa'ban, among whom fieldwork for this thesis was carried out, and thus, whose relationships with the megalithic monuments in the Upper Baram are studied in this thesis. As described in this chapter, the Sa'ban presently reside in two settlements in the Punang Kelapang, while the more numerous Kelabit are found in a number of settlements in the Kelabit Highlands and one in Punang Kelapang. One of the things highlighted in this chapter is the fact that the Kelabit and the Sa'ban are related linguistically, culturally and historically. Both are considered speakers of the Apo Duat

languages, and have been grouped under the Kelabitic-Murut language grouping. Oral histories have also suggested a common origin in the highlands for the Kelabit and the Sa'ban. Most pertinent to this thesis, one of the cultural similarities observed is the custom of megalith building as part of traditional funerary rites of elite individuals.

Nevertheless, this chapter has demonstrated the complex settlement and population history of the Upper Baram region, which is also presently home to communities other than the Kelabit and the Sa'ban – namely the Penan and the Kenyah Leppo' Ke. For the Kelabit, a significant factor in their recent settlement history was the resettlement of longhouse communities in the 1960s as a result of security concerns at the outbreak of the Brunei Revolt and the *Konfrontasi*. On the other hand, the recent Sa'ban history was marked by migrations from Indonesian Kalimantan to the Upper Baram area around the turn of the 20$^{th}$ century, and further, after the end of the Second World War. Finally, this chapter has also shown the Upper Baram to be a dynamic region where various changes have occurred in historical and contemporary times. These changes include the peoples' spiritual or religious conversion and widespread modernisation, which have led to the abandonment of certain traditional practices. More recently, the region and its peoples have faced increasing pressures from the interconnected web of modern development, the arrival of logging and tourism, and issues of land ownership or rights. As will become apparent in the case study chapters of this thesis (Chapters 4 to 7), the above are all driving factors that have influenced how megaliths are perceived and experienced in contemporary times. Before that, the next chapter provides an overview of the megalithic monuments in Borneo.

# CHAPTER 3

# MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS IN BORNEO

As I have mentioned in Chapter 1, the term 'megalith' has been traditionally used in the fields of archaeology and prehistory to refer to large constructions made usually from undressed stone of the Neolithic and Bronze Ages in Europe (Daniel 1958; Renfrew 1983). In the context of Borneo, megaliths have been defined as "stones or rocks, deliberately placed or worked (incised, carved, shaped, hollowed out, balanced) by man" (Harrisson and Harrisson 1970: 130). This includes stone structures of various configurations such as dolmens, stone vats, standing stones and stone mounds, as well as rock carvings, which sometimes may be referred to as megalithic art. In Borneo, as well as in other parts of island Southeast Asia such as Nias, Sumba and Flores in the Indonesian archipelago, megaliths are not just the works of prehistoric peoples. In these areas, megalithic practices have been shown ethnographically to have persisted until very recently (see Adams 2007; Harrisson 1958c; Mulia 1981; Sukendar 1985; Ziegler and Viaro 1998). In the Upper Baram in particular, the practice is a part of a wider culture of making funerary or commemorative monuments, some of which are non-megalithic (see below).

This leads to a consideration of a few issues regarding the use of the term 'megalith', which needs to be clarified. Firstly, as alluded to above, monuments that are usually megalithic may also exist in non-megalithic varieties, such is the case with the chamber tombs in Western Europe, as pointed out by Daniel (1958: 28). In this

way, it can be assumed that it is the function of the monument, rather than the material used, that is of higher importance to the builders of 'megalithic' monuments. In Kelabit culture, for example, the commemoration of a person or event is achieved by making conspicuous marks or *etuu* (see Janowski and Barton 2012) on the landscape, and the making of monuments out of stone is but one of several ways of achieving this. Thus, while some make stone monuments, others create monuments by modifying the landscape, as will be further explained in section 3.4.1 below. It has been noted that the Kelabit do not distinguish greatly between megalithic and non-megalithic monuments, and that for all intents and purposes, the non-lithic monuments are also considered to be equally 'megalithic' in their making (Harrisson 1958c: 699). Furthermore, in the present day, all megalithic and non-megalithic constructions are equally seen as monuments or marks left behind by their ancestors (see Janowski and Barton 2012; Janowski and Langub 2011). There is another clarification that has to be made. Contrary to the original meaning of the term, what are known as megaliths may not necessarily be constructed using large stones (Joussaume 1988: 16). An example of this is the cairn, which is "made solely of small stones" (Joussaume 1988: 20), a parallel Bornean example of which is what has been referred to as stone mounds, or stone piles (see Harrisson 1958c).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the megalithic monuments found in Borneo. In order to provide a wider context, the megaliths in the Sarawak River Delta area in western Sarawak, western Sabah, and the northern interior of Borneo are first described. These are main regions in Borneo where concentrations of megaliths can be found (Figure 3.1). Next, this chapter narrows down its focus to the

megaliths in the Kelabit Highlands in the Upper Baram. The reason for this focus is because the Kelabit Highlands is the region where most of the studies on megalithic remains in the northern interior region, since the colonial period until present times (the various studies are discussed further below), have been conducted. I have mentioned above that among the Kelabit can be found both megalithic and non-megalithic monuments. Both of these will be discussed in detail following Daniel (1958: 28), who stresses that "megalithic architecture cannot be studied in isolation…but only in relation to the monuments built with megaliths and the societies that built them." Specifically, the cultural and social contexts of monument construction in the highlands, and the cultural significance of megaliths to the highland peoples will be explored. Following that, I propose a typology (based on forms and functions) of monuments that will be employed in this thesis to describe the megalithic and non-megalithic monuments found in the Upper Baram region. Finally, the archaeology of the Kelabit Highlands megaliths will be discussed.

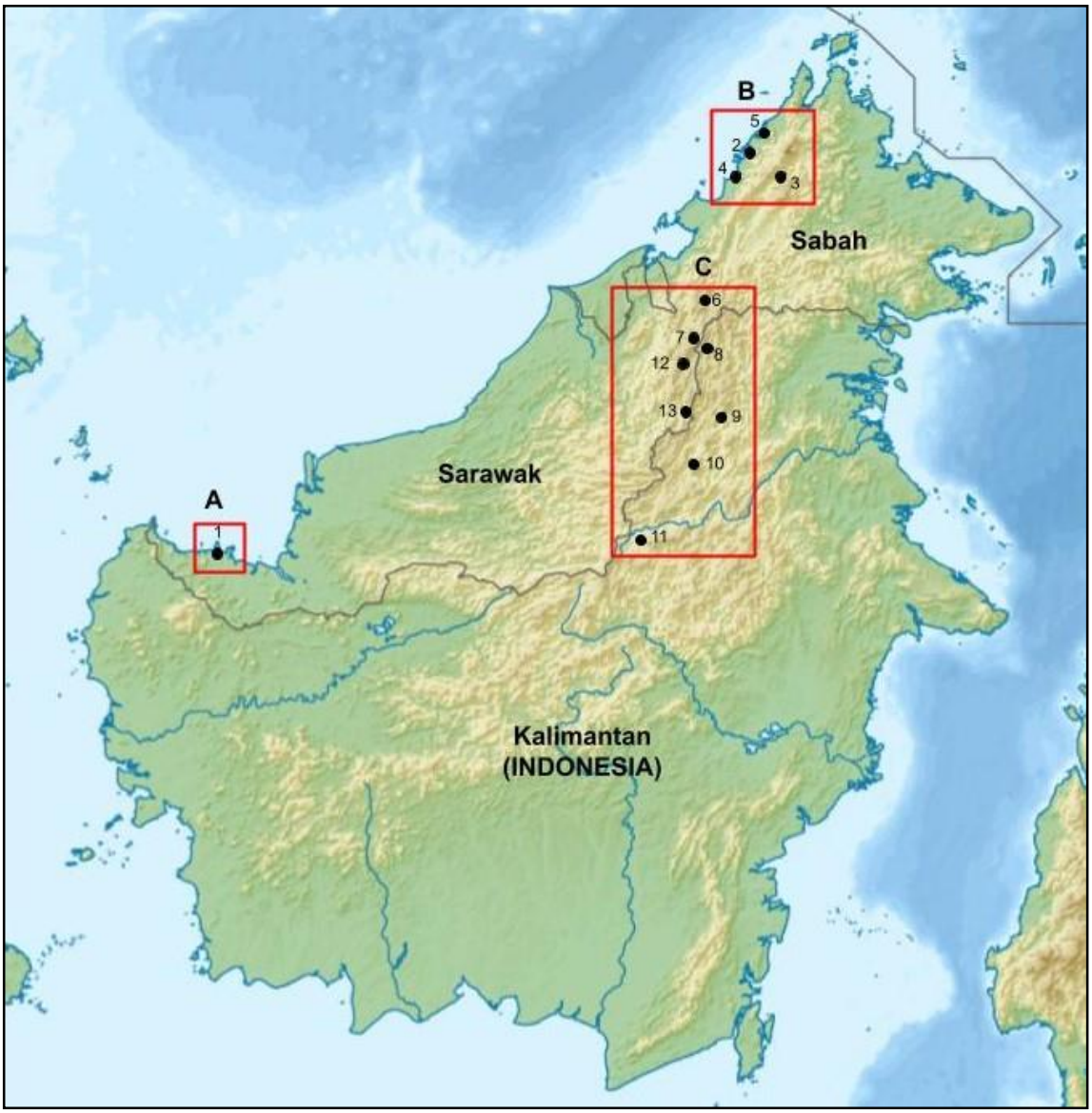



Figure 3.1. Megalithic zones in Borneo: A - Sarawak River Delta; B - Western Sabah; C - northern interior of Borneo. Names of places mentioned in the main text are indicated: 1) Santubong; 2) Kota Kinabalu; 3) Tambunan; 4) Papar; 5) Tuaran; 6) Long Pasia; 7) Ba Kelalan; 8) Kerayan; 9) Bahau; 10) Pujungan; 11) Apo Kayan; 12) Bario; and 13) Long Banga (Original "Relief Map of Borneo" by Nzeemin is licensed under the Creative Commons Share Alike 3.0 Unported license. Modified by author).

## 3.1. ROCK CARVINGS IN THE SARAWAK RIVER DELTA

One of the earliest documented megalithic sites in Sarawak is situated in Sungai Jaong, near Santubong, in an area known as the Sarawak River Delta (see Ling-Roth 1896, vol.2: 280). The megalithic monuments at the site consist of 16 large natural stone boulders engraved with human figures and other symbols. The most recognisable among them is the *Batu Gambar*, decorated with a bas-relief carving of a human figure in a spread-eagle position (Fig. 3.2). Although the origin of the *Batu Gambar* is unclear, the Sungai Jaong site has been dated to between AD 700 and AD 1,000, based on associated findings of iron slag, beads, gold objects, ceramics and stone tools (Harrisson and 0'Connor 1968). In addition, Harrisson (1958b: 396) reports other rock carvings and cut stones discovered between Sungai Jaong and the Santubong village that are said to be "probably of later date and with 'Indian' associations." One conclusion that has been made regarding these stone carvings is that "these are not casual doodles in stone, they are expressions of a powerfully held set of ideas" (Harrisson and O'Connor 1968: 46).

More recently in 2010, a total of 11 newly discovered engraved rock boulders were recorded in the Santubong area (Tacon *et al*. 2010). Two of these engraved boulders are thought to be of indigenous origins based on similarities (in terms of the engraving technique and designs) with wood and stone carvings made by native groups in Borneo. The other nine engravings, on the other hand, appear to resemble Pali inscription and Hindu symbols, and thus may possibly date to between the 10$^{th}$ and

13th centuries AD, with possible links to the 'Indian' finds discovered at the nearby Bongkissam and Bukit Maras sites (see Harrisson and O'Connor Jr. 1967).



Figure 3.2. The *Batu Gambar* in Sungai Jaong, Santubong, Sarawak.

## 3.2. MEGALITHS IN WESTERN SABAH

The megalithic monuments of western Sabah predominantly consist of unhewn or undecorated menhirs (Phelan 1997: 2), and they are found among the Dusun-Kadazan ethnic group in the coastal plains in and around Kota Kinabalu (for example, in Putatan, Penampang and Kinarut), and also in the higher interior region (around 600 metres above sea level) in Tambunan. Detailed survey of megaliths and ethnographic investigations of megalithic practices in western Sabah were previously conducted by Tom and Barbara Harrisson, who recorded a total of 133 menhirs through aerial and

land surveys following the roads in the Kota Kinabalu-Tuaran-Papar area (see Harrisson and Harrisson 1970). A short article written later in the 1970s mentioned the discovery of more than 300 menhirs between Papar and Tuaran (Chandran 1978). Another important ethnographic work on the megaliths of western Sabah was conducted by Peter Phelan, who investigated the megaliths as part of his study on the 'Traditional stone and wood monuments in Sabah' (Phelan 1997). More recently, more than 80 megaliths in Penampang and Kinarut were investigated by researchers from the Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang (Azlin Samsudin *et al*. 2015; Ratnah Wati 2014).

The megalithic tradition in Sabah is believed to be of considerable antiquity as the origins of many of the megaliths are unknown to living memory. Despite the lack of chronometric dating, the construction and use of megaliths in the lowlands of western Sabah are thought to have begun as early as between 500 BC and AD 500, that is, "after the advent of iron in Sabah" (Harrisson and Harrisson 1970: 131). The megalithic tradition in Sabah has also been observed to be a living one, as attested by the erection of a menhir as recently as 1989, as part of the opening of a *tamu* (local market) in Tambunan (Phelan 1997: 2-3).

Over the years, various folk explanations that are connected to stories about spirits, people, events, and past practices (e.g. headhunting, ritual) have been posited to explain the origins of the megaliths in Sabah. These inevitably have complicated the study of the stones' origins. As Phelan (1997: 17) notes concerning the menhirs in the Tambunan area: "suggestions from local people about the origins of these menhirs are so varied and vague and possibly conjectural that one is tempted to give up as hopeless

any attempt at recording any type of systematic and accurate account." Nevertheless, the menhirs are commonly said to be boundary markers. Harrisson and Harrisson (1970), however, argue that the menhirs' function as boundary markers is a more recent use of older stone monuments. Historically, it is known that megaliths were marked on a survey map made for the issuance of title deeds in 1904 (Phelan 1997).

Despite the uncertainties in the megaliths' origin and function, Phelan suggests that the megaliths in Sabah can be divided into six general categories according to function: "menhirs in areas of wet rice cultivation, oath stones, guardian stones, burial stones, stones erected to commemorate a person, and stones erected to commemorate an event" (Phelan 1997: 5). Phelan further suggests the association of the megaliths' various functions with local beliefs about stones being residing places of supernatural power. Thus, rituals and offerings were conducted at menhirs to honour the rice spirit in order to guarantee a good harvest and also to ensure success in headhunting expeditions. In addition, beliefs about the power of stones are also evident in the practice of keeping stones in rice containers or in rice huts, as observed in Tambunan, to ensure the continuing abundance of rice (Phelan 1997: 101). According to information obtained by Phelan, such stones are known as *Bambarayon*, which is the name the Dusun-Kadazan people of Sabah generally use to refer to the rice spirit. Throughout Borneo, the keeping of certain types of stones to aid in achieving rice-farming, hunting and headhunting successes has also been documented (see Janowski and Barton 2012). In their use as guardian stones, the megaliths are believed to protect people from illness and harm. On the other hand, because spirits are

believed to reside in megaliths, the use of megaliths as boundary stones reminds people of the potential danger of trespassing into other people's fields.

Some menhirs are associated with jar burials. Recent excavations at several megalithic sites in Sabah by the Sabah Museum in 2000, 2007 and 2008 discovered as many as 19 burial jars, dated to within 200-300 years ago (Ratnah Wati 2014). Similar placement of jar burials near menhirs has also been observed in the Kelabit Highlands in Sarawak (Harrisson 1958c; Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2010).

### 3.3. MEGALITHS IN THE NORTHERN INTERIOR OF BORNEO

Besides western Sarawak and western Sabah, another megalithic zone in Borneo is what I would call in this thesis as the northern interior region. To avoid potential confusion, it should be explained that owing to the island's irregular shape, this region has also been referred to in the literature as central Borneo (Harrisson 1958b), north-central Borneo (Harrisson 1962a), or central northeast Borneo (Schneeberger 1949). This expansive region that cuts across national and international boundaries includes, on the Malaysian side, areas such as the Kelabit Highlands (Upper Baram) and the Upper Trusan in Sarawak, and the Upper Padas in Sabah; and across the border in the regency (*kabupaten*) of North Kalimantan, Indonesia, the districts (*kacamatan*) of Kerayan, Bahau, Pujungan, Kayan Hulu and Kayan Hilir. The megaliths of the Kelabit Highlands will be reviewed in detail in the next section of this chapter. Here, I will briefly describe the megaliths in the other areas of the northern interior region. Before

that, it is important to note that the megalithic remains in the northern interior region are found among, or have been attributed to, the activities of related peoples: the Kelabit, the Lun Dayeh (or Lun Bawang in Sarawak), the Sa'ban and the Ngurek. They would have been part of a "wider ethno-cultural entity" that Sellato calls "the Central-Northern Group", who shared the customs of secondary burial and the making of funerary monuments (1995: 10).

Among the Lun Dayeh in the Upper Trusan, Upper Padas and Kerayan, megalithic monuments comprising carved stones, slab-built dolmens, stone mounds and standing stones similar to the ones in the Kelabit Highlands have been reported (Arifin and Sellato 2003; Cluny and Chai 2007; Schneeberger 1979; Sellato 2016). Like their Kelabit Highlands counterparts (see below), the megaliths in the Lun Dayeh areas also functioned as funerary and commemorative monuments, and were built during secondary burial events. Some megaliths are also attributed to the activities of Upai Semaring, a common cultural hero and ancestor of both the Lun Dayeh and the Kelabit peoples. For example, in Long Pasia in the Upper Padas, there are stone boulders engraved with "circles and swirls" that are said to have been carved by Upai Semaring using his fingers, as well as stones that bear his footprints (Hoare 2002: 189). In addition, there are boulders known as *batuh angan* in Long Pasia, and also in Ba Kelalan (in the Upper Trusan) that are said to have been carried by Upai Semaring in a show of strength and used as his 'kitchen' or cooking place (Hoare 2002; Cluny and Chai 2007).

In Kerayan Hulu ('Upper Kerayan'), along the Bulu and Kuyur rivers, there are a number of stone graves that are associated with the Sa'ban people (Topp and Eghenter 2005: 104). These consists of rectangular stone vats and jar-shaped stone urns found with pieces of skulls and bones, fragments of stoneware jars and porcelain jars, bowls and plates (Arifin and Sellato 2003: 208).

In the Bahau, Pujungan, and Apo Kayan, megalithic monuments consisting of predominantly urn-dolmen graves (dated to the 18$^{th}$ and 19$^{th}$ century) and stone vats have been reported (Arifin and Sellato 2003; Schneeberger 1979; Sellato 1995, 2016). The occurences of these megalithic types appear to be more localised, which suggest a distinct local tradition (see also Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2010: 97). Indeed, the megaliths have been attributed to the Ngurek (Schneeberger 1979: 68-69; Sellato 2016; Topp and Eghenter 2005), a group of people with Kelabitic roots (see Rousseau 1990) who inhabited the region in the past. For example, one carved urn in Long Pulung in the Upper Bahau is said to be the grave of Paran La'ing, a Ngurek chief (Sellato 2016).

Interestingly, Schneeberger (1979) mentions a menhir pair and a stone mortar (*lesung batu*) found among the Berau, as the Sa'ban are called in the Bahau (see Rousseau 1990: 19). Nevertheless, Schneeberger (1979: 68) points out that when the Berau migrated to the Upper Bahau, they moved into an area with pre-existing megalithic graves (some of which still contained human bones). Further, the Berau themselves attributed the megalithic graves to the Ngurek.

## 3.4. MEGALITHIC AND NON-MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS IN THE KELABIT HIGHLANDS

> No other Bornean people (as far as I know) have such an active megalithic life today or in the recent past. Indeed the whole area is rich with a vigorous mythology of culture heroes and monsters and with complicated social competition and material exchange, centred on the priorities of those who pay for the monuments, which are superficially no more than 'loving reminders' of the late great (Harrisson 1954: 107).

The megalithic and non-megalithic monuments of the Kelabit Highlands constitute one of the best known examples of funerary and commemorative monuments in Borneo. First encountered and described by European colonial officers in the first half of the twentieth century (Douglas 1912; Banks 1937), they gained prominence particularly through the research of Tom Harrisson from the late 1940s to the 1970s (e.g. Harrisson 1949b, 1958b, 1958c, 1962a, 1973a, 1974). Following work done by Tom Harrisson, other historical and ethnographic writings, for example by Lian-Saging (1976/1977) and Talla (1979), also contributed to further knowledge of the types and cultural significance of monuments among the Kelabit people in the Kelabit Highlands. In recent years, the monuments of the Kelabit Highlands have also been extensively recorded as part of efforts to protect and conserve local cultural sites (Cluny and Chai 2007; Hitchner 2009a; see also Chapter 5 of this thesis).

The monuments of the Kelabit Highlands consist of various types of megalithic (e.g. dolmen or slab-built structures, stone vats or jars, standing stones, and stone mounds) and non-megalithic monuments (e.g. ridge canopy cutting, ditch cutting), which I will discuss in more detail in section 3.5 below. In terms of distribution, megalithic and non-megalithic monuments are found throughout the Kelabit

Highlands, including its western and southern fringes – areas respectively known as the Kubaan and Punang Kelapang regions (see Chapter 2) in this thesis (see also Harrisson 1958b). Further below, I will discuss the typology of monuments and the archaeology of megaliths in the Kelabit Highlands. In the following sections, focus is given to the cultural and social contexts of monument building and the cultural significance of monuments to the Kelabit people.

### 3.4.1. The cultural and social contexts of monument building

To be clear, commemorative monuments, megalithic or otherwise, were occasionally built as part of other social events, for instance during the *ngelua* or initiation rite for children (see Sagau Batu Bala 2014: 143). Nevertheless, monuments are usually associated with the funerary rites of aristocrats, and it is to the burial customs of the Kelabit that I will turn to next. The different stages of the Kelabit funeral have been described in great detail by Lian-Saging (1976/77), Maran (1969b) and Talla (1979). Meanwhile, the burial custom of the Sa'ban (similar in many ways to that of the Kelabit) has been described by Beatrice Clayre (2010).

There are two stages (primary and secondary) in a Kelabit funeral. During both stages, guests from all neighbouring longhouses would be invited and an *irau* (feast) will be held, where and when food and *burak* (rice beer) will be prepared and served to all. The funerary *irau* is arguably the grandest occasion in upland life. As Banks (1937: 429) notes: "I really believe that the Kelabits' greatest joy is mourning or burying his own and other people's relations." This observation, I would argue, not only reflects

the grand nature of the *irau*, but also the centrality of funerary rites in Kelabit culture. Further, Harrisson (1958c: 697) notes that an *irau* consisted of "maybe 500 guests eating and drinking all they can for 4-5 days."

In the primary burial, the dead is placed in an elaborately carved wooden coffin (*lungun*) or in a stoneware jar. The coffin is then kept in a small shelter or a hut built adjacent to the longhouse (Maran 1969b; Talla 1979), or in the family's longhouse apartment (Lian-Saging 1976/77). In the Sa'ban's case, the coffin is kept in a shelter at the edge of the forest (Clayre 2010). The deceased's body is left to decompose for about a year or two, during which time, mourning continues.

After a year or two have passed, during which time the family of the deceased has made enough preparation to accumulate rice, rice beer and animals (e.g. pig and buffalo), the *burak nulang* (secondary burial feast) is held and once again invited guests would come from all over. Before the arrival of the guests, the deceased would be commemorated by his or her family by the making of megalithic and/or non-megalithic monuments, which "were meant to be admired and brought prestige to the sponsoring head of the family" (Talla 1979: 237). The bones from the coffin used in the primary burial are then cleaned and transferred into a burial jar, which is subsequently interred in a burial ground (*binatuh* or *menatoh*), or tied to a tree (Talla 1979). Alternatively, the bones are placed directly into a stone cist, a slab-built grave, a dolmen or a stone vat (see section 3.5 below), or in caves or among huge rocks. The *irau* then continues for about a month, or until the rice beer is finished.

The building of monuments in conjuction with death rites and the holding of the accompanying *irau* are massive undertakings in terms of both labour and cost. Therefore, monument building is often associated with wealthy aristocrats, as only they would have the necessary means to sponsor the costly *irau* and to commission the building of monuments. Additionally, members of the aristocratic class (see Chapter 2 for a description of the Kelabit social stratification) have the social standing and influence to attract the attendance of faraway visitors and to organise the huge amount of labour involved. Thus, death feasts are occasions to emphasise or to enhance one's status or to gain prestige. As Talla (1979: 219) notes, "the distinction between social classes was emphasized at death. The aristocrats practiced complex funerary rites while the lesser class had unelaborated ones." Status is also displayed in the type of coffin used in a primary burial. For aristocrats, the coffin is made of fine timber and is ornately carved with specific motifs indicating rank. For Kelabit aristocrats, the *lungun* is carved with a tiger or deer motif (Lian-Saging 1976/77; Talla 1979), and tiger or hornbill for a high-rank Sa'ban (Clayre 2010). Also during primary burial ceremonies, expensive family heirlooms comprising "jars, beaded skull caps, necklaces, etc." are displayed, with the belief that the spirits of the heirlooms would also accompany the deceased in the afterlife (Talla 1979: 231).

In Chapter 2, it was noted that in Kelabitic societies, there is a high level of social competition in the accumulation of wealth and prestige, which in turn offers upward social mobility for one's own self and family. How the funerary *irau* figures in this is demonstrated by LeBar (1972: 163), who observes:

> aristocratic families vie with one another with respect to the elaborateness of these 'feast of merit' for deceased members. A deceased aristocrat is remembered for the size and expense of his *irau*, and the relative status of aristocratic families is in part determined by remembered headhunting prowess and expensive death feasts of former members.

Further, "those heirs or in-laws who contribute or intrigue the most on these occasions can lay claim to the largest share of the inheritance" (LeBar 1972: 161).

Death ceremonies are also of considerable political and social importance. During death feasts, new debts are made and old ones are settled (LeBar 1972: 163; Lian-Saging and Bulan 1986). In an *irau*, all longhouse community members and invited guests contribute labour and/or rice, rice beer, animals, and firewood. The males would also contribute their labour for the gathering and transporting of stones for the building of megaliths, or the cuttting of trees and digging for the building of non-megalithic monuments. In turn, the family of the deceased is obliged to repay this debt during future *irau* organised by other families. Before returning to their respective longhouses, guests are given salt and other small items (Talla 1979), or "rice cooked in bamboo and meat…to eat on the way home" (Lian-Saging 1976/77: 148). Additionally, during death feasts, political and marriage alliances are made (LeBar 1972), and headhunting expeditions are planned (Talla 1979: 252).

In making megalithic monuments, the Kelabit do not differentiate between the various types: they all serve the same purpose, which is to make marks in the landscape. As Harrisson (1958c: 696) notes, "any combination, overlap or intermix could occur in Kelabit inspiration and execution", depending on family tradition, the

wish of the deceased, the local topography of the longhouse, the climatic season, omens or dreams, and current trends (Talla 1979), as well as the ability of the sponsors and the availability of materials (Lian-Saging and Bulan 1986). The construction of megaliths makes use of locally available sandstone, and in the case of the stone mound, of river-rolled stones. Stones from older monuments are also reused in the making of newer megalithic graves or monuments (Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2010).

### 3.4.2. Cultural significance of megaliths

The upland megalithic culture is unique because of its continuity into modern times. Ethnographically, megalithic monuments are known to have been built right up to the middle of the 20th century. Schneeberger (1979: 63) notes, while conducting a geological survey in the Kerayan-Kelabit Highlands in 1939, that the megaliths he encountered were "an integral part of a lively megalithic tradition whose bearers are the peoples of the Kelabit tribal groups." In his study of the upland megaliths, Harrisson claims to "have seen new ones [megaliths] erected" (1958b: 397), and to have "participated in their [the Kelabit] megalithic rites extensively" (Harrisson 1958c: 694) between the years 1949 and 1951.

Nevertheless, Harrisson also notes the decline of the upland megalithic tradition (this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 of this thesis) in his description of

the last erection of a megalithic monument, which he claimed took place in 1951.[1] Harrisson (1958c: 699, emphasis in original) notes:

> Under Christian pressure, probably the *last* fully megalithic act took place at [Pa' Umor] soon after, when two rather poor sandstone slabs were carried up to a hill on poles and erected at the summit, on the edge of an earlier ditch-cut.

Aside from this brief note however, Harrisson did not offer much detail regarding the context of the construction, although Talla (1979: 241) mentions that the building of the monument was "sponsored by Pun Ngidir of [Pa' Umor]" (see also Lian-Saging 1976/1977: 74), and that "these stone slabs were brought up from the foothills or the streams." Beside that, another stone monument built in historical times is the standing stone erected in 1948 (based on the legible engraving on the stone, which clearly states the date of 27 June 1948) in the village of Pa' Lungan in the northern Kelabit Highlands as a memorial to a person named Pun Pitan (Fig. 3.3). Additionally, a stone carving was made in the southern Kelabit Highlands to commemorate the death of a Kelabit leader, *Penghulu* ('paramount chief') Tingang, in the 1930s (Janowski and Langub 2011).

Although some megaliths certainly date to historical times, many others are of unknown antiquity and origin, which suggests that they are older than the living population's memory. Nevertheless, the upland peoples who believe that they have inhabited the highlands since time immemorial regard the presence of megalithic

[1] Talla (1979: 241), however, claims that the erection of the standing stones took place in 1948. This is supported by Barbara Harrisson, who points out that this final megalithic act was probably connected to the burial feast that Tom Harrisson witnessed sometime between 1947 and 1949 (B. Harrisson 1977: 5).

remains as marks left behind by their ancestors (Bala 2016). A number of the megaliths are attributed to the activities of mythical figures or spirits. A Kelabit origin story, for instance, tells of how Seluyah, a cultural hero and ancestor of the Kelabit, "made holes in rocks as caves…Some of these rocks were given designs upon them, pictures of men and of animals" (Balang 1965: 152). Meanwhile, some megalithic sites are linked to the legends of Tuked Rini (Labang 1958, 1962; Janowski 2014b).

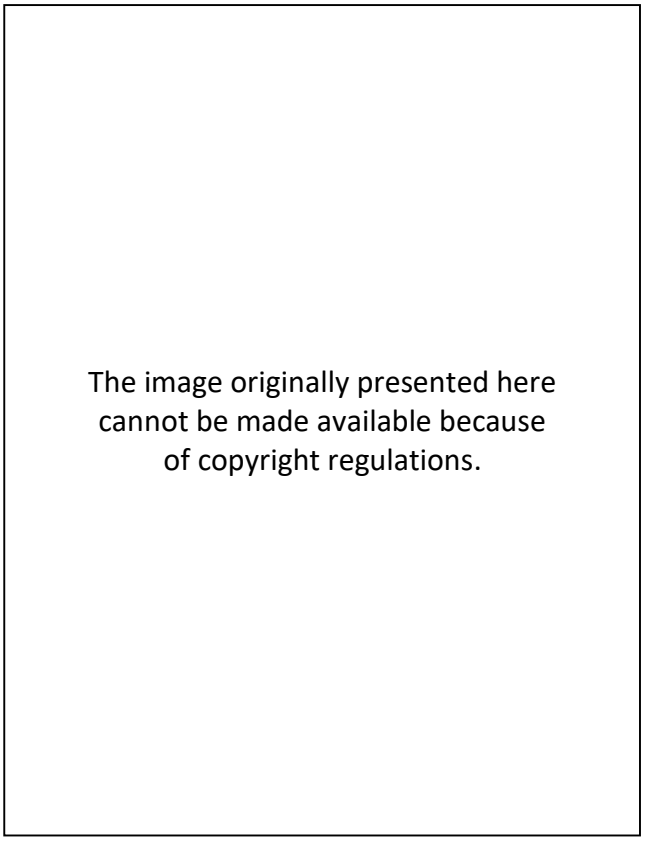



Figure 3.3. Batuh Senuped Pun Pitan, near Pa' Lungan, Kelabit Highlands. The man standing beside it is unidentified (Photo: Sarawak Museum).

According to Kelabit oral history as collected by the Kelabit anthropologist, Poline Bala (2016), the mythical ages of the Kelabit can be divided into six different periods, all named after great legendary figures, whose exploits were told in various

songs or poems (Table 3.1). The first age was the time of the first man, Buyun. Megalithic activities began in the Seluyah Age, as attested by the story of how Seluyah carved rocks as mentioned above. The Seluyah Age is followed by the Agan Tadun Age and the Balang Lipang Age, which were characterised by the intensification of cultivation. Interestingly, the connection between agriculture and the beginning of megalithic constructions in the Kelabit Highlands has been suggested by Jones *et al*. (2016) (see below). It was also in the Agan Tadun Age that the Kelabit were said to have acquired iron technology and valuable items or ornaments such as beads, both of which have been found in some early settlement and megalithic burial sites in the highlands.

In some areas in the highlands, recent graves were placed near (ancient) megalithic ones that are of unknown origin, but which were nevertheless believed to belong to Kelabit ancestors. For example, in Pa' Dalih in the southern Kelabit Highlands, megalithic sites were used for burials until around 1950. According to Barker *et al*. (2008: 163), “the makers of the megalithic site were believed to be ancestors of the people of Pa' Dalih even though their names were not known, and it was important for the recent dead to be with their ancestors.”

Table 3.1. Mythical ages of the Kelabit according to oral history (based on Bala 2016).

| **Age** | **Myth** |
|---|---|
| Buyun Age | Buyun (or Guyun in Balang 1965), the first man, lived in the highlands with his wife. There, they subsisted by hunting wild game and gathering forest produce. |
| Seluyah Age | The upland population increased. The people were led by Seluyah, who is believed to be the first man to have roamed the entire highland plateau. In this age, people were physically larger and stronger, which enabled them to build megalithic monuments, the remains of which are now seen throughout the highlands. |
| Agan Tadun Age | This age is the longest period of all, and is named after the famed warrior, Agan Tadun. During this time people began to obtain weapons like spears, parang, shields. Cultural practices such as the wearing of earrings, bangles, necklaces, and bead hat (*peta*), and the making tattoos also began in this age. Population pressure led to infighting as people competed for land for cultivation. |
| Balang Lipang Age | This age is named after the warrior Balang Lipang. During this period, people continued to cultivate the land in the highlands. The cultivation of wet rice began in this period. |
| Upai Semaring Age | The cultural hero Upai Semaring was known to be strong and capable of hacking stones using his *parang* (bush knife). During this time, Upai Semaring led all of the Apo Duat groups (this includes the Kelabit, the Lun Dayeh and other related groups of northern interior Borneo; see Chapter 2). |
| Semaun Age | During this time, a conflict with his brother caused Semaun to migrate to Brunei where he became influential. The absence of Semaun from the highlands led to a period of tribal warfare and headhunting. Beginning this period, there was increased contact with outsiders, which led to the transition into the historical or modern period. This time was also marked by political, economic and social changes. This was also the time that saw the rule of the Brookes and the modern day separation of Apo Duat communities by the international border. |

In her study of the Kelabit relationship with the forest, Janowski (2003a) suggests that the Kelabit perception of the megaliths in the landscape is related to their beliefs about the 'wild', and the life force (*lalud*) contained in the natural environment. Certain topographical features in the landscape − high mountain ranges, especially craggy ones, as well as rocky places in general − are believed to possess higher concentrations of *lalud*, and therefore have powerful spiritual significance. Thus in the animistic past, burials were often placed near rocks, on mountain ranges, or in megalithic graves (see also, Phelan [1997] and Sheppard [1936] for discussions on the spiritual potency of megalithic sites in Sabah and Peninsular Malaysia, respectively). The erection of the standing stone (*batuh senuped*) among the Kelabit in particular, is said to emulate the twin limestone peaks of the Batuh Lawi (Janowski 2003a), which is an important landmark that features in the origin stories of the upland peoples (B. Bala 1993; Balang 1965; Clement 1911). Elsewhere, the construction of megalithic monuments that mimic natural features or landmarks in the landscape has also been suggested by Scarre (2002), who pointed out the example of the prehistoric monuments on the Grée de Cojoux, in Brittany, northwest France. In the Kelabit Highlands, some mountains or rocks are connected to beliefs about *batuh baliu* ('transformed stone'). The *batuh baliu* are commonly said to be petrified longhouses caused by the breaking of the taboo of laughing at animals *(masab)*, which illustrates the potentially dangerous nature of *lalud*. The building of megalithic monuments is also considered as making 'marks' (*etuu*) on the landscape, which is seen as a way how the Kelabit actively engage with or manipulate the cosmic power present in the environment (Janowski and Barton 2012).

Why is stone a spiritually potent material? Certain scholars believe that stones are seen as powerful because of their durability (Phelan 1997; Janowski 2003a). In tropical environments, where most things are made using forest materials such as wood, bamboo and rattan that rot away rapidly, a high value is placed on things made from stone and other materials that are relatively more permanent. Thus, in the interest of preserving the memory of the deceased, and at the same time, to display status and to record individual and family achievements, various monuments were built out of stone. As Phelan (1997: 4) notes for the stone monuments of Sabah, but which can also be applied to the megaliths of northern interior Borneo:

> The predominant factor determining the use of stone in Sabah as a historical record is its durability; this fact can hardly be fully appreciated by people who have never lived in Southeast Asia. Here everything is very transient with the result that records of the past are very scarce and in extensive areas none seem to exist.

However, as the Kelabit non-megalithic monuments (e.g. the *nabang*, *kawang*, and *bakut*, see below) show, it is clear that not all monuments were made from stone. This can be explained in a manner that does not necessarily discount the significance of stone as discussed above. As mentioned previously, and as Talla (1979) explains, one of the factors determining the choice of monument that one builds is the availability of suitable material in the local environment. In areas that are further downriver, it has been observed that mausoleums for elites among peoples such as the Berawan (see Metcalf 1976, 1982) and the coastal Melanau (see Jamuh 1949) were built out of ironwood (*Eusideroxylon zwageri*; local name *belian*). In terms of durability, ironwood lasts more than a hundred years. Meanwhile, in terms of availability, compared to large stones, ironwood is more readily available in the downriver areas. In the opposite way,

the simple reason why megalithic graves are more prominent in the highlands is that stone is more ubiquitous, while ironwood trees do not grow in upland areas. Thus, ironwood mausoleum constructions echo similar ideas of achieving permanence for both the monument and the memory of the deceased. Furthermore, there are indications to suggest that while monuments like the *kawang* and the *nabang* were not built from stones, they were often constructed near spiritually potent places (e.g. on mountain ridges), and their constructions were acccompanied by rituals to placate the spirits (see Talla 1979: 239).

### 3.5. TYPOLOGY OF MONUMENTS

In this section, a typology of monuments is proposed, which will be employed in this thesis to refer to the various types of monuments found in the Upper Baram region. This typology is based on the forms and functions of megalithic and non-megalithic monuments that have been recorded by previous studies, particularly those conducted by Tom Harrisson on the monuments of the Kelabit Highlands as mentioned above. The various monument types in the Kelabit Highlands are also known by their Kelabit terms, as have been documented in Harrisson (1958b, 1958c, 1959b), Hitchner (2009a), Lian-Saging (1976/1977) and Talla (1979). As the monuments of the Kelabit Highlands form the basis of this present typology, the associated Kelabit term for the various types of monuments are also included (see Table 3.2). This is similar to other wider regional surveys − for example, the survey that was conducted in the Kelabit Highlands and the neighbouring Meligan Highlands (see Cluny and Chai 2007) − that have also

predominantly used the Kelabit terms to refer to the monument types (see Cluny and Chai 2007). Furthermore, the inclusion of the Kelabit terms for the various types of monuments is also useful for this thesis, as most of the case study chapters pertain to historical and present-day Kelabit engagements with the monuments. However, where known, I will also mention the alternative or other ethnic terms that have been used to refer to the monument types when found in neighbouring regions or among neighbouring communities. The monuments of the Kelabit Highlands can be generally classified into two main categories: megaliths and landscape modifications. These two main categories can be further divided into several sub-categories, as described below (Table 3.2).

**Megaliths**

The first type of megalith is the megalithic cemetery, which is associated with the Kelabit practice of secondary burial or *nulang* (see below). Megalithic cemeteries can be divided into several different types. The local (Kelabit) term *batuh nangan* ('propped stone') is used to refer to a range of slab-built structures (including small and large dolmens, as well as cist graves), which functioned as ossuaries (Harrisson 1958a). Among the Lun Dayeh or Lun Bawang, such stone structures are known as *batuh angan* (Cluny and Chai 2007). Large slab-built dolmens were usually constructed on top of stone mounds, as exemplified by the Batuh Ritung monument, the only large dolmen still standing today (Fig. 3.4).

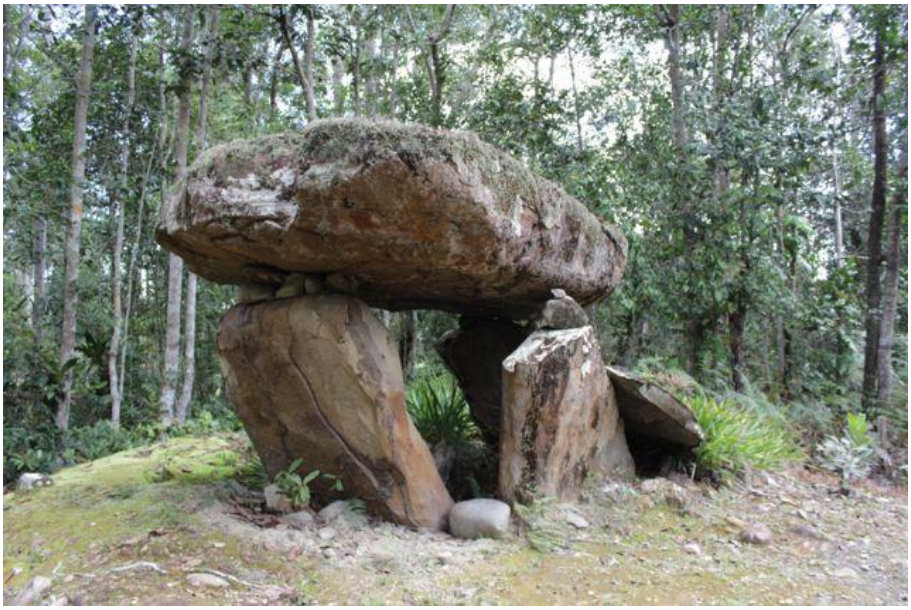


Figure 3.4. Batuh Ritung in Pa' Lungan, Kelabit Highlands.

Another type of megalithic burial is the stone vat or jar (Kelabit: *lungun batuh* or *batuh nawi*), used for secondary burial of human bones. In terms of distribution, they are normally found in the southern part of the highlands. The *lungun batuh* ('stone coffin') is usually a cylindrical container (i.e. like a jar) hewn out of stone, occasionally topped with a flat stone slab (Fig. 3.5), although some may also be found shaped like troughs. In general, the l*ungun batuh* are not dressed, although some are carved on the outer surface. It is thought that burials in stone jars were the precursor to the more recent Kelabit practice of using stoneware jars for burials (see Nyiri 2016).

Table 3.2. Typology of monuments in the Upper Baram,

with the associated Kelabit terms included.

| **Category** | **Sub-category** | **Function/significance** |
|---|---|---|
| Megalith | <u>Megalithic cemetery</u><br>• slab-built structures (i.e. dolmen) and cist graves (*batuh nangan*)<br>• stone vats or jars (*lungun batuh* or *batuh nawi*)<br>• rock-cut grottoes | Burial ossuaries. Usually associated with secondary burials. |
| | <u>Non-cemetery megalith</u><br>• Stone mounds (*perupun*)<br>• Standing stones (*batuh senuped*)<br>• Carved rock (*batuh narit*)<br>• Rarer types include the stone bridge (*apir batuh*) and the stone 'seat' | All types were built during funerary events for the commemoration of the deceased. Certain types are associated with more specific functions as below.<br><br>Function of *perupun*: built as repository of property for heirless aristocrats.<br><br>Function of *batuh senuped*: built as show of strength, rite of passage into manhood, boundary markers, and symbolic passage into the afterlife for the spirit of the dead.<br><br>Function of *batuh narit*: built as commemoration of people and events (e.g. death, successful war or headhunting, and hunting success). Some *batuh narit* were attributed to the activities of cultural heroes or mythical figures. |
| Landscape modification | • Ridge canopy cuttings (*kawang*)<br>• Ditch cuttings (*nabang*)<br>• Oxbow (*taka*)<br>• Path widening *(bakut*) | Built during funerary rites for the commemoration of the deceased, and family achievements.<br><br>*Kawang* and *nabang* are also symbolic passages into the afterlife for the spirit of the dead. |

Other than in dolmen graves or in stone vats or jars, burials were also placed in rock-cut grottoes (Harrisson 1958c; see also Fig. 14 in Barker *et al*. 2008: 158). In variations of this practice, burials may also be placed near rockshelters or in rock crevices.

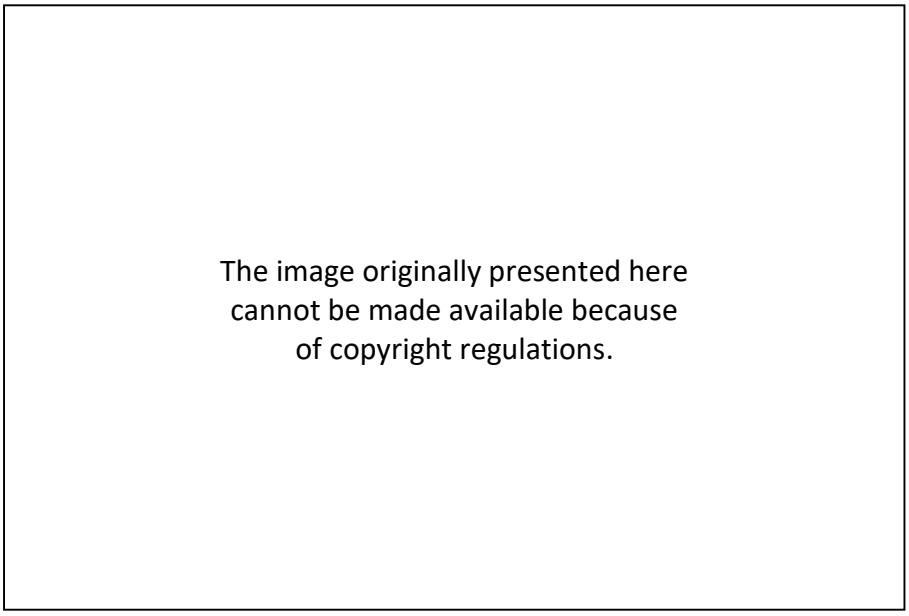



Figure 3.5. Stone jars at Menatoh Long Di'it (Photo: Cultured Rainforest Project).

The second category of megaliths are the non-cemetery megaliths, the most common of which are standing stones or menhirs (Kelabit: *batuh senuped*) and stone mounds (Kelabit: *perupun*, but also known as *terupun*, or *pelpuun* in the Kerayan region of East Kalimantan, see Arifin and Sellato [2003]). Less common are the stone bridge (Kelabit: *apir batuh*) and the stone 'seat' (Harrisson 1958b). The *batuh senuped* is usually in the form of a single standing stone, although some may be found in pairs or in clusters (Fig. 3.6). Besides commemorating the deceased during secondary burial events, the *batuh senuped* is also associated with a range of different uses. They were

built as a show of strength and as a rite of passage into manhood. They may also be used as boundary markers. In connection with death rites, they also symbolise the passage into the afterlife for the spirit of the dead.



Figure 3.6. A pair of *batuh senuped* in a paddy field in Bario, Kelabit Highlands.

A peculiar function of standing stones has also been suggested by Schneeberger (1979) based on information gained from informants from Pa' Imai in the Upper Bahau. That is, standing stones serve as astronomical-calendrical aids and are used to determine the start of the planting season. Although Schneeberger doubted the suggestion – because the menhir pairs pointed out by his informants were "standing on either side of a much travelled path" (1979: 64) – he acknowledges (citing Nieuwenhuis 1904) that such use of stone pair has been reported in the Upper Mahakam. Schneeberger (1979) further mentions (citing Hose 1929) the use of sundials among the Kenyah of Borneo, although as Ammarell has shown, the solar gnomons – "simply a

vertical pole or other similar devide that is used to cast a shadow" (1988: 88) – of the Kenyah are made of hardwood. Nevertheless, the astronomical-calendrical function for menhirs and dolmens in Southeast Asia has also been suggested by Christie (1979). As far as I know, however, this kind of function has never been associated with any of the standing stones in the Kelabit Highlands.

The *perupun* on the other hand are stone mounds of various sizes, which were built not only as memorials, but also as final repositories for the property (valuables such as beads, jars, and gongs) of heirless aristocrats (Fig. 3.7). It is said that this serves to prevent potential squabbles among close relatives over rightful inheritance of the property of the deceased. In his book, 'World within: A Borneo story', Tom Harrisson (1959b: 111-112) describes the construction of a stone mound for such a purpose, in the voice of a middle-aged, wealthy aristocrat:

> On the last day I will declare my monument. All my imperishable property is to be collected in a heap on the ground over there, a dart's flight from the long-house ladder. Every man present will come out when it has stopped raining and form a line from the fine old dragon jar in the centre of the slope down to the shingle bank in the stream bed. Along this living chain, from hand to hand, should pass first the small surface stones and gradually, as the work goes down, larger stones and then boulders. All this will travel from the river bed up the bank on to the little knoll above flood level, slowly shaping a pile of stone. Presently this will grow into a mound higher than the long-house is off the ground, and twice the width anyone can leap. All mine.
>
> Thus will my belongings be secured for ever. Thus my own memory will stand to eternity. It will be larger than any ordinary man's can be, because so many come to my feast and are so well entertained - since I have nothing to keep and pass on, I can, I will spend the lot in one great final display; and in consequence make a mighty effort to do well by me, piling rock upon boulder upon pebble upon stone.




Figure 3.7. Perupun Pa' Buda, near Batu Patong, in the southern Kelabit Highlands, photographed in 2015 by Lindsay Lloyd-Smith.

*Batuh narit* (in Kelabit, and also in Lun Dayeh [see Hoare 2002]) is the local term for stone boulders that are decorated with incised or relief carvings of human or animal figures and/or symbols (Harrisson 1958c). These carvings are commonly connected to local myths and legends. For example, Batuh Narit Arur Bilit in Pa' Umor is a stone boulder with a carved human figure (Fig. 3.8) that is believed to be a self-portrait carved by Upai Semaring, a cultural hero of both the Kelabit and the Lun Bawang (Cluny and Chai 2007). Additionally, the *batuh narit* is connected to past headhunting practices. The presence of a series of engraved lines on some *batuh narit* is said to signify the number of heads a brave warrior has taken. Due to the carved stones' connection with local myths and legends, they are thought to be perhaps some of the oldest monuments in the highlands (Harrisson 1958c). Nevertheless, carved rocks were also made in historical times. In the southern Kelabit Highlands in the

1930s, the Kelabit artist, Anyi (see Manis 1949), was commissioned to carve a *batuh narit* to commemorate the death of the Kelabit Chief, *Penghulu* Tinggang (Janowski and Langub 2011), as mentioned above. In the Apo Kayan and the Upper Bahau in East Kalimantan (also in Long Banga in the Upper Baram, see Chapter 7), stones with carved designs have been called *batu kalong* (see Arifin and Sellato 2003; Schneeberger 1979; Sellato 2016).

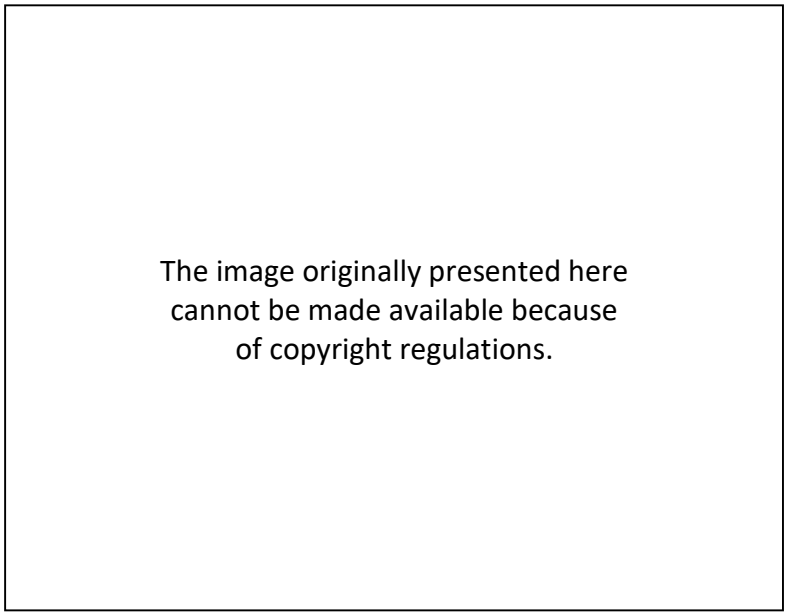



Figure 3.8. Batuh Narit Arur Bilit in Pa' Umor, Kelabit Highlands (Photo: Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts, University Malaysia Sarawak).

**Landscape modifications**

As mentioned previously, monumental constructions in the Kelabit Highlands consist not only of megaliths, but also of commemorative marks made in the landscape. Four common types are what the Kelabit call as *kawang*, *nabang*, *taka*, or *bakut*, each of which is described below.

The *kawang* is a cut or notch on a prominent mountain ridge, achieved by the felling or clearing of trees, and made so as to be visible from the distant valleys. In a secondary burial event, a jar containing the bones of the deceased would sometimes be placed near a *kawang*. A modern-day *kawang* can also be seen today in Bario, Kelabit Highlands. Known as the Millennium Kawang, it was made around the end of 1999 to commemorate the turn of the new millennium (Fig. 3.9).



Figure 3.9. The Millennium Kawang in Bario, Kelabit Highlands.

The *nabang*, on the other hand, is a ditch cutting, traditionally cut using simple tools such as the *parang* (similar to a machete or a bush knife) and the *ukat* (wooden spade). In general, *nabang* are straight ditches, although circular ditches are also known. According to Talla (1979: 240), besides serving as commemorative monuments, the *nabang* also have some practical uses. They are constructed in order to make a pass across a mountain ridge, or to redirect water into or around rice fields. A *nabang*

can also be intended to change a river's course by the cutting of a bend in a river, with an oxbow lake (*taka*) being the end result.

Traditionally built during burial events or other distributive feasts (*irau*, see below), the *kawang* and the *nabang* commemorate important people and events, as well as family achievements. They are also seen by the Kelabit as symbolic passages for the spirit in the journey to the afterlife (Lian-Saging and Bulan 1989: 96). With conversion to Christianity beginning in the 1940s, the primary movitation for such monumental constructions shifted towards practicality and the communal benefit. Thus, in modern times, the *bakut* (path widening) has replaced the *kawang* and *nabang* as the preferred type of monumental construction (Bulan 2003: 44). Nevertheless, the principal purpose for the commemoration of individuals and for the gaining of prestige is retained.

### 3.6. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE MEGALITHS IN THE KELABIT HIGHLANDS

Despite the availability of a rich body of material and ethnographic evidence of megalithic activities, archaeological research on the megaliths in the Kelabit Highlands has been rather limited. Although they were the subjects of exploratory investigations by Tom Harrisson between the late 1940s and the 1960s (see Chapter 4), it is only in recent years that systematic archaeological research has been conducted on the megalithic remains of the Kelabit Highlands, beginning with the Cultured Rainforest Project (Barker *et al*. 2008; Barker *et al*. 2009; Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2010), and followed by

the Early Central Borneo Project (Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2017). As such, the history and past significance of the megaliths are still poorly understood. In the sections below, I will first discuss briefly the previous megalithic research conducted by Tom Harrisson, the Cultured Rainforest Project, and the Early Central Borneo Project. Following that, I will discuss how the results of these researchers have contributed towards an understanding of the chronology of monument building in the highlands.

### 3.6.1. Previous archaeological research

Some of the earliest diggings at megalithic sites in the Kelabit Highlands (in fact, also in the whole of Sarawak) were conducted by Tom Harrisson in the late 1940s with the primary aim of obtaining materials for the Sarawak Museum collection (Harrisson 1951). Unlike his excavations at other archaeological sites in Sarawak (most notably, at the Niah Caves and the Sarawak River Delta area), Harrisson's excavations at megalithic sites in the Kelabit Highlands were largely exploratory. Although a large number of articles documenting the megalithic tradition of the highlands were produced (see Harrisson 1949b, 1958b, 1958c, 1962a, 1973a, 1974), no detailed reports of the excavations of megalithic sites were ever published. However, we know that these investigations were carried out because field notes and photographs that document the work exist in the archives of the Sarawak Museum. Further, brief mentions of the excavation were made by Harrisson in some of his publications. For example, in an article that discussed the megalithic culture of upland Borneo, Harrisson (1958c: 700) mentions diggings that were carried out under the 'Batu Tokid Rini' (see Labang 1958 for a legend of this stone monument) dolmen near Pa' Mada, which recovered local

and imported (pre-14th century) pottery. In another article, Harrisson (1970: 26) vaguely mentions the diggings at "some of the largest megaliths", which produced findings of imported Siamese ceramics, some of which were dated to the 13th or 14th century. One particular series of excavations (which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4) was conducted at several megalithic sites in the Kelabit Highlands by Tom Harrisson and the Sarawak Museum in 1962. These excavations, although crudely executed, revealed findings of imported (Chinese Ming and Song-period, as well as Siamese or Thai) ceramics, earthenwares, metal objects, beads and cremated bones.

Lacking radiocarbon dates for the upland megaliths, Tom Harrisson could only speculate on the origins of the megalithic tradition of the Kelabit Highlands. Harrisson (1958b, 1958c) opines that the height of megalith building in the Kelabit Highlands occured during the Bronze Age or Iron Age, and not before the second half of the first millennium AD. This conclusion was largely based on the assumption that the carving of stones required the use of metal tools (Harrisson 1958c: 695), and based on comparison with the *Batu Gambar* (a stone carved with a human figure) in Sungai Jaong, in the Sarawak River Delta area in western Sarawak, which was associated with findings of iron slag dated to between AD 700 and AD 1000 (Harrisson 1958b: 396) (see above). Harrisson thus notes, "they [the upland megaliths] in all cases can be dated without doubt to or *later than* the same period as the finds in [Sungai] Jaong around Batu Gambar" (1958b: 399, emphasis in original). As will be seen below, however, the results of recent archaeological research would suggest earlier dates for some of the megaliths, in particular the large stone mound (*perupun*) type.

Based on the results of his surveys and excavations, Harrisson divided the megaliths into three broad ages: those that were made in recent times (i.e. their origins are known), those that were ancient but with folk explanations, and those that were prehistoric (i.e. their origins are unknown, or attributed to spirits) (Harrisson 1958c: 695, 1973a: 127).

Due to their often unknown origin, carved stones (*batuh narit*), especially those decorated with symbolic patterns, were considered by Harrisson to be the oldest (prehistoric) type of stone monument in the Kelabit Highlands (Harrisson 1973a: 127). Stone mounds and dolmens were for the most part considered to be prehistoric. Slab or cist graves (*batuh nangan*), and stone vats (*lungun batuh*), on the other hand, were regarded as either prehistoric or ancient, as they were sometimes re-used, or their existence explained by folk stories (see Labang 1958). Menhirs (*batuh senuped*), ridge cuttings (*kawang*) and ditch cuttings (*nabang*), many of which have known histories, or have been observed in historical times, were all considered as belonging to recent times. Thus, Harrisson concluded that the upland megaliths were part of a long and continuous tradition. Harrisson (1958:c: 695, emphasis in original) notes:

> Although the Kelabits know nothing of some of the megaliths in their country, there can be little doubt that these do not *merely* represent the carry-over of any separate, earlier, very ancient culture drastically severed in time and continuity from the present people who actively continued working stone into the second half of the 20th century.

From 2007 to 2010, a multi-disciplinary team of researchers led by Graeme Barker of the University of Cambridge conducted the Cultured Rainforest (CRF) Project that examined the history of past and present land use and human-environment

interactions in the highland region of Borneo. Primarily based around Pa' Dalih in the southern Kelabit Highlands, the project included anthropological, archaeological and palaeoecological investigations, which revealed a long and complex history of how people have shaped, and in turn, have been shaped by the environment as evidenced in folk stories, forest material use, settlement and megalithic sites, human modifications of the landscape and attachments to places. The results of the various strands of the CRF Project have been extensively documented (Barker *et al*. 2008; Barker *et al*. 2009; Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2010; Ewart 2011; Janowski and Langub 2011; Janowski and Barton 2012; Jones 2012; Lloyd-Smith 2012; Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2013; Jones *et al*. 2016). In this section, I wish to highlight the archaeological investigations that were conducted.

The archaeological component of the CRF Project included the excavations of "five settlement sites, two rock shelters, four megalithic cemeteries (or monuments), and two humanly-cut ditches (*nabang*)" (Lloyd Smith *et al*. 2010: 96). The four megalithic sites referred to are namely Perupun Payeh Telipa, Perupun Long Kelit, Menatoh Long Kelit and Menatoh Long Di'it (Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2013). The excavations of these megalithic sites represent, arguably, the first systematic archaeological excavations of megalithic sites in Sarawak, and perhaps, even Borneo.

Perupun Payeh Telipa (or Perupun Payeh Pali Pa' in Barker *et al.* 2008), measuring 14-15 metres in diameter and 1.5 metres in height, is a large stone mound that was entirely reconstructed and relocated after it was destroyed by a bulldozer during land clearance. Thus, its excavation failed to yield significant archaeological

results owing to the monument's disturbed nature or lack of intact archaeological deposit. On the other hand, excavations at another stone mound site, Perupun Long Kelit (small stone mound measuring around 4 metres in diameter and 0.8 metres in height), revealed a date of 501 ± 22 BP or cal. AD 1408-1441 (UBA-1221), based on radiocarbon dating of a charcoal sample obtained from buried soil under the basal stone layer of the stone mound. There was also evidence to indicate past looting at the site (Lloyd-Smith 2012). Nevertheless, artefacts such as Chinese brittleware sherd dated to the 13$^{th}$/14$^{th}$ century and a whetstone fragment were recovered (Lloyd-Smith 2012; Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2013: 46).

At Menatoh Long Di'it, archaeological investigations revealed the presence of 14 stone jars (average dimensions: 1.6 metres high by 0.6 metres wide) and 5 stone slab structures, one of which incorporated a re-used stone jar fragment as one of its upright (Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2010; Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2013). Excavations at the base of one of the stone jars recovered various artefacts found in stratified sequences, including earthenware vessels and cylinder-shaped objects thought to be ear-lobe stoppers, as well as stoneware (Thai Sawanhalok bowl, 14$^{th}$/15$^{th}$ century) and Late Ming-period (16$^{th}$ century) porcelain bowls, whetstones, iron blades, bronze ear-rings and bells, and more than 400 glass beads. In addition, cremated human remains (bones and teeth) were found. Overall, these findings represented "depositional events associated with (since decayed) secondary cremation burials" (Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2010: 70). Furthermore, the findings of cremated human remains represented a significantly early use of the site as a burial ground, with probable links to the stone jars and/or slab structures, since cremation of the dead is unknown in Kelabit tradition (Lloyd-Smith *et*

*al*. 2010). Radiocarbon dating of charcoal sample obtained from the packing stone foundation revealed a date of 1238 ± 22 BP or cal. AD 688-870 (UBA-12420), which was thought to relate "to the erection of the stone jar or pre-megalithic activity at the site" (Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2010: 71).

In contrast to the large stone jar burial site of Menatoh Long Di'it, Menatoh Long Kelit consists of a solitary stone jar. Amongst the packing stones in the stone jar foundation, the excavations recovered findings of "iron blades, glass beads, bronze bells, and whetstones in near perfect condition", as well as unburnt fragments of human skull (Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2013: 44). Additionally, earthenware pottery sherds, possibly belonging to the same vessel, were found in the basal fill of the foundation trench. From the lower packing fill, a charcoal sample was obtained and dated to 240 ± 40 BP or cal. AD 1510-1960 (Beta-237848) (Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2013). This significantly younger age compared to the date obtained from Menatoh Long Di'it, however, was taken to represent the stone jar's relocation to its present position. The stone jar itself was assumed to be much older, and in fact, stone jars in general were thought to be some of the oldest megalithic monuments in the southern Kelabit Highlands (Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2013: 49). This was supported by the stone jars' general state of preservation, re-use (see above), and the early date obtained at Menatoh Long Di'it.

The CRF project also included the side-study of small cremated bone sample (of a medium-sized mammal) originally thought to be collected from the large stone mound site of Perupun Rayeh in Pa' Lungan (from the depth of 24-36 inches) by the Sarawak Museum in 1962. Radiocarbon dating of the bone sample, which was

conducted by the Cultured Rainforest Project in 2010, returned a date of 1980 ± 40 BP or cal. 87 BC – AD 124 (Beta-280504) (Lloyd-Smith 2012: 121). Further investigations by the Early Central Borneo (ECB) Project in 2013, however, suggested Batuh Ritung to be the likelier origin of the cremated bone sample (see Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2017). This was especially because no evidence of cremated bones was observed during excavations at Perupun Rayeh in 2013 (see below). Furthermore, detailed examination of the 1962 excavation field notes suggested the possibility of the mixing of artefacts from Batuh Ritung and Perupun Rayeh (Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2017). Despite that, this radiocarbon date was significant because it revealed a possibly early age for large stone mound construction. This early date was later on substantiated by the further dating of the Perupun Rayeh and Perupun Arur Ritan stone mound sites in Pa' Lungan by the ECB Project (see below).

The CRF Project's team of investigators proposed the development of megalithic practices that corresponded with two "cultural waves of human-plant interactions" (Jones *et al*. 2016: 80). The first wave, which began around 3,000 BP, was characterised by the beginning of the exploitation and management of sago palm (*Eugeissona*) and was marked by the appearance of open-air and large stone mound sites. The second wave, on the other hand, began from about 450 BP, possibly corresponding with trade with the coastal areas and the introduction of iron and Chinese ceramics. Also during the second wave, rice farming became important and there was a proliferation in megalithic activity and palm management (Jones *et al*. 2016). Historically, successful rice farming was associated with the attainment of high social status, and the consumption of rice and rice beer (*burak*) featured prominently

in status-giving feasts (*irau*) held during death and other rites of passage, in conjuction with which megalithic monuments were traditionally constructed (Janowski 2003a). The connection between megalithic activities and rice cultivation has also been made by other scholars. For example, Hitchner (2009a) notes that one of the cultural factors which enabled megalith building in the Kelabit Highlands is the wet rice farming system employed by the Kelabit, which generated food surplus and did not require all day labour.

Building on the results of the CRF Project, the Early Central Borneo (ECB) Project (a project I was personally involved in) conducted its first two seasons of fieldwork in 2013 and 2014 in the village of Pa' Lungan in the northern Kelabit Highlands. Its aims were to excavate the stone mound sites of Perupun Rayeh and Perupun Arur Ritan, and the open-air old settlement site of Ra'an Ubud Pa'it, as well as to record the Nabang Pa' Libong circular ditch monument. Here, as in my overview of the CRF Project above, I wish to highlight the main results of archaeological investigations conducted at megalithic sites, namely at Perupun Rayeh and Perupun Arur Ritan. A more detailed discussion of other findings of the research is available in a report written by Lloyd-Smith *et al*. (2017).

Perupun Rayeh is a large stone mound site measuring 15 metres in diameter and 1.5 metres in height. Lying on top of the mound are three large stone slabs, which are possibly the remains of a fallen dolmen (*batuh nangan*) structure. Excavations at Perupun Rayeh in 2013 recovered a variety of artefacts including earthenware, stoneware and porcelain sherds, glass and stone beads and a whetstone fragment,

most of which were likely to be associated with the fallen dolmen. Compared to Perupun Arur Ritan (see below), no cremated bones were observed during excavations at Perupun Rayeh. A charcoal sample was obtained from buried soil under the basal stone layer of the mound and it was dated to 2,540 ± 30 BP or 700-405 Cal. BC (Beta-400542) (Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2017). This date represented the earliest possible date for the construction of the stone mound. If it does prove to date the monument, and not some pre-megalithic activity, this date is thus far the oldest date for a stone monument not only in the Kelabit Highlands, but also Borneo.

Perupun Arur Ritan, on the other hand, is a stone mound measuring 10 metres in diameter and about 1 metre in height. Two broken stone slabs were found on top of the stone mound, one of which was partially buried. These stone slabs may have also been parts of a former dolmen structure. Excavations at Perupun Arur Ritan in 2014 recovered glass beads, cuprous metal fragments, earthenware sherds, two possible stone flakes, as well as cremated bones and teeth remains. Like Perupun Rayeh, Perupun Arur Ritan may have been constructed more than 2,000 years ago. This is indicated by the date of 2,430 ± 30 BP or 750 - 405 Cal. BC (Beta-400542) obtained from the dating of a charcoal sample obtained from a burnt layer under the basal stone layer of the mound. In addition, the dating of a cremated bone sample, recovered from amongst stone and the backfill of the 1962 excavations, revealed a date of 2,200 ± 30 BP or 370-180 cal. BC (Beta-443080), which is about a couple of centuries earlier than the bone date from Batuh Ritung mentioned earlier.

While the radiocarbon dates suggest that large stone mounds were possibly constructed between 2,500 and 2,000 years ago, the discovery of more recent artefacts such as stoneware and porcelain ceramics (Perupun Rayeh), metal objects and beads (Perupun Rayeh and Perupun Arur Ritan) indicates subsequent re-use of the mounds within the last 500 years. This was presumably when dolmen structures were added on top of the large stone mounds.

### 3.6.2. Chronology of monument building

Admittedly, due to the fact that systematic archaeological investigations and radiocardon dating of the megalithic sites in the Kelabit Highlands only began within the past two decades, the accumulated archaeological evidence is still too limited to suggest a definite timeline for the development of the megalithic tradition. Nevertheless, based on the results of previous studies, a few observations can be made.

The Kelabit Highland megalithic tradition developed in at least three different phases defined by a combination of megalith typology, radiocarbon dates and ethnographic evidence (Table 3.3). It appears that possibly the earliest megalithic construction began around 2,500 years ago in the form of stone mounds (*perupun*), based on radiocarbon dates obtained for Perupun Rayeh (2,540 ± 30 BP or 700-405 Cal. BC) and Perupun Arur Ritan (2,430 ± 30 BP) or 750 - 405 Cal. BC in Pa' Lungan. Since these dates were obtained through the radiocarbon dating of charcoal samples gathered from buried soil beneath the basal layers of the stone mounds, and assuming

that they were the results of activities related to the building of the stone mounds (e.g. land clearing), these early dates represent the maximum possible age for the stone mounds. At present, the possibility that these dates represent pre-megalithic activities at the stone mound sites also could not be discarded. However, the similarity of the two dates is suggestive.

Many questions regarding the functions of large stone mounds, however, remain unanswered. In the oral tradition of the Kelabit people, these stone mounds or *perupun*, are said to be the final repositories for the properties of heirless Kelabit aristocrats, as mentioned previously. Whether or not they were built for human burials is still uncertain. While cremated bones were recovered at Perupun Arur Ritan and at the stone mound under the Batuh Ritung monument, they were not observed at Perupun Rayeh. Based on their location and distribution, however, Lloyd-Smith *et al*. (2017) suggest that the stone mounds could have been used as gathering places.

The second phase of the upland megalithic tradition consists of the construction of small stone mounds, dolmens and stone jars between AD 1400 and AD 1800. This is evident based on findings at Perupun Long Kelit (which produced a radiocarbon date of 501 ± 22 BP or cal. AD 1408-1411 and the recovery of a 13$^{th}$-14$^{th}$ century brittleware bowl), as well as at Batuh Ritung, Perupun Rayeh and Perupun Arur Ritan in Pa Lungan (where slab structures or dolmens were erected on top of large stone mounds, perhaps as early as around 400-500 years ago, based on associated findings of stoneware and porcelain ceramics, metal objects and glass beads). In addition, despite the early radiocarbon date (1238 ± 22 BP or cal. AD 688-870)

obtained from the packing stone foundation of a stone jar at Menatoh Long Diit (and hence, could represent pre-megalithic activity), it appears that the stone jars were more likely to be associated with burials accompanied by goods such as Thai Sawanhalok (14th/15th century) stoneware, and Late Ming-period (16th century) porcelain bowls, iron blades, bronze ear-rings and bells, and glass beads. Furthermore, the findings at Menatoh Long Kelit indicate that stone jars were used (in this case, possibly re-used) until around 240±40 BP or AD 1510-1960, or within the past 400 to 500 years.

The third and final phase of megalith building is characterised by the erecting of menhirs (*batuh senuped*), which coincided with the making of 'megalithic' landscape modifications (e.g. *kawang* and *nabang*). In many cases, the origins of these monuments are known (Bulan 2003; Hitchner 2009a; Lian-Saging 1976/77; Talla 1979). For instance, Bulan (2003: 44) notes, "people are still able to tell the exact ridges where they or their ancestors created a *perupun*, *kawang*, *batu sinuped*, or *nabang*, many of which may have been done by them or their parents." This most recent phase of megalith building may have begun around 200-300 years ago based on the association of the *batuh senuped* with Martavan or 'dragon' jars (Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2010) and lasted until the middle of the 20th century, before the adoption of Christianity resulted in the abandonment of most traditional practices, as alluded to previously (see also Chapter 4). In addition, carved stones (*batuh narit*) were also known to have been made until around 1950. Most, however, are of unknown origin, while some are attributed to the activities of legendary figures. Thus, most of the carved stones may actually belong to prehistoric times, or to a time longer than existing memory, as

Harrisson opined (see above). Without solid radiocarbon dating, the origin of carved stones remains a conjecture.

Table 3.3. Megalithic phases and their associated dates in the Kelabit Highlands (based on Lloyd-Smith and Gani 2014).

| **Timeframe** | **Monument type** | **Dating** | **References** |
|---|---|---|---|
| c. 2,500 years ago until ? | Large stone mounds | Batuh Ritung (not Perupun Rayeh as originally thought, see main text above)<br>*C-14 date*:<br>1980 ± 40 BP or cal. 87 BC – AD 124 (Beta-280504) (Cremated bone sample from Sarawak Museum).<br><br>Perupun Rayeh<br>*C-14 date*:<br>2,540 ± 30 BP or 700-405 Cal. BC (Beta-400542) (Charcoal sample from buried soil under the basal stone layer of the stone mound).<br><br>Perupun Arur Ritan<br>*C-14 date*:<br>2,430 ± 30 BP or 750 - 405 Cal. BC (Beta-400542) (Charcoal sample obtained from burnt layer under the basal stone layer of the mound).<br><br>2,200 ± 30 BP or 370-180 cal. BC (Beta-443080) (cremated bone sample obtained from amongst stone and 1962 backfill). | Lloyd-Smith 2012; Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2017 |

Table 3.3. (cont.)

| Timeframe | Monument type | Dating | References |
|---|---|---|---|
| Post AD 1400 until c. AD 1800 | Small stone mounds, dolmens, and stone vats or jars | Perupun Long Kelit (stone mound)<br>*C-14 date*:<br>501 ± 22 BP or cal. AD 1408-1441 (UBA-1221) (Charcoal sample from buried soil under the basal stone layer of the stone mound).<br><br>*Associated artefacts*:<br>Chinese brittleware sherd dated to the 13th/14th century and whetstone fragment.<br><br>Menatoh Long Diit (stone jars)<br>*C-14 date*:<br>1238 ± 22 BP or cal. AD 688-870 (UBA-12420) (Charcoal from packing stone foundation. Date represents pre-megalithic activity?).<br><br>*Associated artefacts*:<br>stoneware (Thai Sawanhalok bowl, 14th/15th century) and Late Ming-period (16th century) porcelain bowls, whetstones, iron blades, bronze ear-rings and bells, glass beads, and cremated human remains.<br><br>Menatoh Long Kelit (stone jar)<br>*C-14 date*:<br>240 ± 40 BP or cal. AD 1510-1960 (Beta-237848) (Charcoal sample from the lower packing fill. Relatively late date possibly representing the re-use and relocation of stone jar.)<br><br>*Associated artefacts*:<br>iron blades, glass beads, bronze bells, and whetstones.<br><br>(continued on next page) | Lloyd-Smith 2012; Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2010; Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2013 |

Table 3.3. (cont.)

| Timeframe | Monument type | Dating | References |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Dolmen structures built on top of older stone mounds: Batuh Ritung, Perupun Rayeh, and Perupun Arur Ritan<br>*Associated artefacts*: stoneware, porcelain ceramics, metal objects, and glass beads possibly dating to 400-500 years ago. | |
| From c.200-300 years ago until 1950 | Standing stones, ridge canopy cuttings and ditch cuttings, carved stones | No C-14 dates, but constructions were known in historical and ethnographic times.<br><br>Note, however, that for carved stones, most are of unknown origin. Thus, carved stones may have been made from prehistoric until recent times. | Banks 1937; Bulan 2003; Douglas 1912; Harrisson 1958b, 1958c; Hitchner 2009; Lian-Saging 1976/77; Schneeberger 1979; Talla 1979 |

**SUMMARY**

This chapter has reviewed the present state of knowledge on the megalithic cultures of Borneo. While this chapter has also provided an overview of other megaliths found on the island (in the Sarawak River Delta, in western Sabah, and in the northern interior of Borneo), it has specifically focused on the megalithic tradition of the Kelabit Highlands in the Upper Baram, Sarawak. From the discussions provided in this chapter regarding the traditional contexts of monument construction and the traditional beliefs related to megaliths, as well as the typology and archaeology of monuments, it is clear that the

megaliths of the Kelabit Highlands in the Upper Baram belong to a long and possibly continuous tradition, beginning at least around 2,500 years ago with the constructions of large stone mounds (*perupun*), which corresponded with the appearance of open-air settlement sites and initial evidence of the exploitation and management of sago palm in the Kelabit Highlands. Over time, various configurations of stone-made monuments were constructed, including slab-built structures or dolmens (*batuh nangan*), stone vats or jars (*lungun batuh*), standing stones (*batuh senuped*) and rock carvings (*batuh narit*). These megaliths functioned as graves and memorials, which were usually built in conjunction with the secondary burial rites of the Kelabit elites. They are also part of the wider Kelabit culture of making funerary and commemorative monuments, which included non-megalithic ones. Ethnographically, it is known that megalithic monuments were constructed until around the middle of the 20$^{th}$ century, before conversion to Christianity and the adoption of more modern ways of life resulted in the abandonment of most traditional beliefs and practices, including the practice of building megaliths.

The abandonment of megalithic practices, however, did not necessarily mean that the megalithic remains ceased to become meaningful to the local population. In the next four chapters, this thesis will examine the new meanings that people have created for the megalithic monuments in the Upper Baram. The next chapter begins this examination by considering how the meanings of the megaliths changed during the colonial period of Sarawak.

# CHAPTER 4

# MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD

This chapter examines changing attitudes towards the megalithic culture and monuments of the Kelabit Highlands in the colonial period of Sarawak (1946-1963). The discussions in this chapter are divided into two main sections. Firstly, this chapter examines the Kelabit people's abandonment of their megalithic tradition. The second section of this chapter discusses the colonial-era megalithic research in Sarawak. Analysis of these 'new' and contrasting treatments of megalithic monuments demonstrates that the colonial period represents a crucial stage in the life-history or biography (see Chapter 1) of the upland megaliths. It was during this time that the megaliths ceased being outcomes of a living tradition, but instead were recreated as cultural objects that belong to the past.

## 4.1. CESSATION OF MEGALITHIC PRACTICE IN THE KELABIT HIGHLANDS

In the previous chapter, I have discussed the cultural significance of monument-making (megalithic or otherwise) as a major component of elite funerary ceremonies, as well as an arena for social competition, among the Kelabitic-Murut peoples of the interior highlands of Sarawak. However, as the middle of the 20$^{th}$ century approached, the practice was on the wane. Harrisson notes that although the Kelabit monument-building that he observed in the second half of the 1940s was still at the time an

ongoing practice, it was "probably the ghost of a more lavish past" (Harrisson 1973a: 134). By 1950, "probably the *last* fully megalithic act" (Harrisson 1958c: 699, emphasis in original) took place with the erection of two standing stones in the village of Pa' Umor (see Fig. 4.1 below), signalling the end of a tradition, which may have begun more than 2,000 years ago (see Chapter 3). It is important to underscore that the cessation of megalithic practice among the Kelabit occurred as part of widespread social changes that took place in the colonial period. Therefore, before discussing in greater detail the abandonment of the megalithic tradition, this section first paints a picture of the colonial-era changes and social transformation experienced by the Kelabit. Following that, section 4.1.2 will focus on the Kelabit's conversion to Christianity, which many have considered to be one of the main influences of social change among the people. Section 4.1.3 will discuss the impact of Christianity on the cessation of megalithic practice among the Kelabit.

### 4.1.1. Change in the Kelabit Highlands in the colonial period

The British colony of Sarawak existed from 1946, when the state that was formerly ruled by the Brooke 'White Rajahs' (see Runciman 1960) was ceded to Britain after the end of the Second World War, to 1963, when it gained independence as part of the Federation of Malaysia. In general, the colonial period was a time of great change for the state and its peoples. As Porritt (1997: ix) summarises in the preface of his book, 'British colonial rule in Sarawak, 1946-1963', "the colonial era…was one of rapid economic, political and social change in pursuing the pledges made and obligations undertaken by the British government at the time of annexation" (for other discussions

on the impacts of colonial rule in Sarawak, see Morrison 1988; Ooi 1990; Kaur 1998). In the colonial period, changes were not only sweeping though the coastal regions of Sarawak, where major towns were located, but also its interior, where the traditional ways of the native population underwent rapid change as they began to embrace modernity and new ways of living under colonial and missionary influences. A government report at the time describes the situation succinctly (Colonial Reports Sarawak 1958: 148):

> In particular, the influence of [colonial] Government education and of Mission activities has very generally been to create with extreme rapidity a new set of values…Ten years ago every young Kenyah, Kayan or Kelabit was proud of his leopard teeth ear-rings…and his tattoos. Today these fashions are in many areas being replaced by short hair, short trousers and skin clear of any design except vaccination.

In the Kelabit Highlands, similar rapid changes have also been observed. The Kelabit anthropologist, Poline Bala (2016) lists economic change, and greater contact with and access to the outside world as two major changes that occurred in the Kelabit Highlands during the colonial period. For example, an Agricultural Station was opened up by the colonial government in 1958, in order to improve local economic livelihood and to develop new ways of agriculture. New wet rice farming techniques were introduced. Other than that, the opening of a new airstrip in Bario in 1961 facilitated contact with the coastal towns, and enabled easier access to market goods. Toynbee (1965: 218) also notes that under colonial rule, “a complete revolution has taken place in the Kelabit’s pattern of living.” Although Toynbee did not elaborate, he attributed the drastic change to the “opening of schools” (1965: 218). The impact of the introduction of formal education on Kelabit lives is further explored below.

Previously, under the Brooke administration, the education system in Sarawak was a fragmented one (Tan 2012). Educational institutions in the state were limited to missionary, as well as Malay and Chinese vernacular schools, all of which were predominantly based in urban centres. As a result, Porritt (1997: 278) stresses that "education was not accessible to most of the rural population." Although efforts to remedy this situation were initiated by the Brooke government with the opening of a rural school in Belaga in 1940, progress was impeded by the start of the Japanese occupation in 1941. After the war, however, the first school among the Kelabit was established in Pa' Main in 1946 by Tom Harrisson, the British anthropologist who served in the Allied Forces and operated in the highlands during the war (see Chapter 2), and who later became the Curator of the Sarawak Museum (see below). This, according to Sagau Batu Bala (a Kelabit and a former schoolteacher), was "one of the greatest contributions that Tom Harrisson had made to the Kelabit community" (2014: 198). The Pa' Main school started with 36 students, many of whom were adults, and the first teacher to be hired was the Timorese preacher Paul Kohuan, who, prior to the war, served in the Christian Missionary Alliance in Belawit, Dutch Borneo (now Long Bawan in East Kalimantan, Indonesia) (Toynbee 1965).

After the success of the Pa' Main school, more schools were established in the different Kelabit communities: Long Lellang (1952), Kubaan (1957), Long Seridan (1961), Pa' Lungan (1961), Bario (1962) and Pa' Dalih (1962) (Bala 2016). These schools were served by Kelabit teachers, who were products of the earlier Pa' Main school, and who received teacher's training at the Batu Lintang Training College (BLTC) in the state capital of Kuching. The BLTC was itself established by the colonial government in 1948,

with Colonial Development and Welfare (CDW) funding, which according to Porritt (1997: 179) was "the largest external source of assistance to Sarawak's development plans between 1946 and 1963." As a way to train native teachers, it has been described as "one of the most enduring CDW initiatives" (Morrison 1988: 37).

Education opened doors to new opportunities and greater integration with the outside world in the form of job employments. The successes achieved by many Kelabit individuals who were graduates of the early schools in the Kelabit Highlands have been well-documented (see P. Bala 2016; S.B. Bala 2014). Writing on the educational progress of the Kelabit in 1965, Toynbee (1965: 219) points out that in the less than two decades since the opening of the Pa' Main school, more than eighty Kelabit individuals had been employed "by Baram District Council, the Medical Department, the Agriculture Department, the Civil Aviation Department, the Sarawak Museum, and the Sarawak Constabulary and Field Force." The advancement of the Kelabit was also a personal interest of Tom Harrisson, who assisted a number of Kelabit individuals in obtaining education and jobs in Kuching (Heimann 2002: 270). One such individual was Lian Labang, who became a staff member of the Sarawak Museum. Notably, Lian Labang contributed to the museum's study of the upland megalithic culture (see Labang 1958, 1962) and excavation of megalithic sites in the highlands (see section 4.2.2 below).

Along with education, the religious conversion to Christianity is often seen by the Kelabit as a major force of positive change in their lives, leading to their "rapid progress and transformation" (S. B. Bala 2014: 198; see also Lian-Saging and Bulan

1989). Christianity has even been portrayed as one of the greatest influence of change among the Kelabit (see Amster 1998). Further below, I will consider the influence of Christianity on the Kelabit's abandonment of their megalithic practice. Before that, the following section describes the introduction and adoption of Christianity among the Kelabit.

### 4.1.2. The Kelabit's conversion to Christianity

#### Brief history of the religious conversion

Christianity was brought to the upland peoples of Sarawak (e.g. the Kelabit and the Lun Bawang, who are culturally and linguistically related, as mentioned in Chapter 2) by the Borneo Evangelical Mission (BEM) (Lees 1979; Southwell 1999). It has been said that "the Kelabits and the Lun Bawangs are perhaps the only ethnic groups in Sarawak who had, as a people, abandoned their traditional beliefs to convert to Christianity en masse" (Bulan and Bulan-Dorai 2004: 43). Unlike the rapidity of the Lun Bawang's conversion (see Deegan 1973), which occurred within a decade (from 1930 to 1940), the Kelabit's conversion was a more gradual one, beginning in the late 1930s and only reaching completion in the 1970s (Amster 1998), as will be described below.

After successfully converting the Lun Bawang people in the Limbang area in the 1930s, BEM expanded its activity to the Kelabit Highlands, and in December 1939, the missionaries C. Hudson Southwell and Frank Davidson visited the Bario and Pa' Trap (now Pa' Lungan) longhouse communities. However, this first attempt at converting the Kelabit was rather unfruitful. As Southwell (1999: 98) reports regarding the

outcome of a Gospel preaching in Pa' Trap, "here the Headman gave us a good hearing as we preached the gospel, but the people were not yet willing for a complete change from the old pagan ways."

Nevertheless, in the following month (January 1940), when the missionaries were in Kubaan on their journey out of the highlands, it was reported that a Kelabit man by the name of Pun Abi made a declaration of faith and thereby became the first Kelabit convert (Bulan and Bulan-Dorai 2004: 46; Lees 1979: 66). Furthermore, unbeknown to the missionaries, their earlier preaching in Pa' Trap had managed to gain ground. When Southwell returned to Pa' Trap after the war in 1947, he discovered that many villagers had already converted to Christianity. Southwell (1999: 190) describes what he discovered about the conversion (see also Talla 1979; Amster 1998):

> I learned that following the visit Frank Davidson and I had made to this area in 1939, Tama Bulan, who was then Headman of [Pa' Trap] resolved to trust God. He was a powerful Headman and was still spoken of with great deference and respect. Tama Bulan gave up drinking and spirit worship and gradually influenced others, until in 1943 [1941, according to Talla (1979)] the people sent messengers to Aris Doemat [an American missionary] in Belawit, inviting Aris and others to come and teach them.

However, while "the people gave up all the old taboos and learned some hymns and how to pray" (Southwell 1999: 190), certain practice like the drinking of rice beer (*burak*) persisted. Amster (1998: 40) attributes the persistence of *burak* drinking to its centrality in Kelabit social and ritual life:

> All large events required the consumption of large amounts of *burak* and even small events, such as the hosting of agricultural work groups, could only be accomplished if the host served *burak* to the participants in such communal labor.

Relatedly, Mashman (2018: 242) notes, "the difficulty with giving up drinking was that it was related to the underlying prestige system, which brought together *lun tauh* (our people) through large-scale hospitality and kinship and this hampered its abolition."

Because of the inability to cut themselves completely off their old ways, Amster points out that many Kelabit feel that the first stage of their conversion was "an incomplete and superficial adoption of Christianity" (1998: 53), and that it was only after the religious 'Revival' in Bario in 1973 (see Bulan and Bulan-Dorai 2004) that the conversion was deemed complete. Nevertheless, incomplete as it may seem, the religious conversion process in the 1940s had resulted in the gradual abandoning of many other traditional practices by the Kelabit, as will be discussed in section 4.1.3 below.

**Advantages of religious conversion**

Conversion to Christianity appealed to the Kelabit for the improvements that it brought to their standards of living. Firstly, Christian missionaries improved general hygiene and health as they discouraged the keeping of pigs under longhouses and unhealthy habits such as smoking and the drinking of rice beer (Amster 1998: 39). Furthermore, as part of their proselytising strategy, BEM missionaries were known to provide basic medical care to the rural communities they visited (Tan 2012). Besides religious teachings, the missionaries also brought literacy to the upland communities. For example, the three

Kelabit men from Pa' Trap, who travelled to Belawit in the 1940s to learn about Christianity (see above), also attended school there to learn to read and write (Amster 1998). That Christianity went hand in hand with education was also observed by Tan (2012: 64), who mentions that in the rural schools set up by the missionaries, "there was a thin line between education and evangelism."

In general, as Bala (2016) observes, the Kelabit's acceptance of Christianity (and conversely, their rejection of pre-Christian beliefs and practices) is driven by the desire to be exposed to the outside world, as well as to free themselves from the restrictive and burdensome beliefs in taboos and omens, and fear of malevolent spirits, which governed traditional Kelabit life (see also Amster 1998: 264). In the past, observances of omens and taboos had impeded travel and agricultural productivity, disrupted marriages, and in some cases, influenced the practice of infanticide (S.B. Bala 2014). Many Kelabit thus view their pre-Christian society negatively. Amster (1998: 289) observes that most Kelabit are of the opinion that "before becoming Christian, they had no religion at all, only 'superstitions'." Pre-Christian customs, beliefs and practices have come to be seen by Christian Kelabit as "demeaning and archaic", while 'pagan' Kelabit of the past have been described as "taboo-ridden", and characterised as "heavy smokers and drinkers" (Bulan and Bulan-Dorai 2004: 40, 44-45). Furthermore, Amster (2008: 77) notes that "for the most part, today, the former beliefs are highly stigmatized and often cited as examples of Satan's influence on the Kelabit prior to conversion." Similarly, among the Lun Bawang, Crain and Pearson-Rounds (2011: 5) note that "many today still describe their pre-Christian society as evil and licentious." In contrast, life under Christianity is seen to be more open and free. As Lian-Saging and

Bulan (1989: 114) describe, “the advent of Christianity with its liberating influence was like a breath of fresh air…a gateway from the yoke of opression under paganism.”

Appell explains the motive of religious conversion in terms of economic gains. Besides freeing people from beliefs in omens and taboos, which restricted economic productivity and the traveling in pursuit of economic opportunities, he mentions that “with Christianity, there is no longer the need for expenditure of large amounts of food, drink and domestic animals for sacrifice in ceremonies for sickness, fertility, death, etc.” (Appell 1997a: 65). The extent to which this explanation can be aplied to the Kelabit situation is, however, debatable. As Amster has shown, large and costly ceremonies, celebrations or gatherings (*irau*) are still commonplace among the Christian Kelabit, although “substantially transformed and modified to suit current concerns” (1998: 43), which means being devoid of ritual sacrifice and the consumption of alcoholic drinks. Instead, the Kelabit *irau* of today is typically accompanied by Christian prayers, hymns, and Bible readings. An example of the continuation of lavish *irau* is the Kelabit name-changing ceremony of today, which Amster (1999) argues has replaced the child initiation ceremony or *burak lua’* (see Lian-Saging 1976/77: 138-145; Talla 1979: 198-210; Amster 1998: 256-263) of pre-Christian times.

Conversion to Christianity has also been associated with progress and modernisation (Appell 1997). The transformative influence of Christianity has been stressed by a number of Kelabit writers (see P. Bala 2016; S.B. Bala 2014; Bulan and Bulan-Dorai 2004; Lian-Saging 1976/77; Lian-Saging and Bulan 1989; Talla 1979).

Today, most Kelabit are staunch Christians, who consider Christianity to be a profoundly positive influence on their lives, as well as a catalyst for further improvements within the Kelabit society. For instance, Lian-Saging and Bulan note that the "acceptance by the Kelabit of the Christian religion in the [1940s] has brought about a drastic change for the better amongst the Kelabits" (1989: 89), and that "the teaching of Christianity came hand in hand with literacy and health consciousness so that change in Kelabit society was quite dramatic towards the second half of [the 1900s]" (1989: 114). In relation to this, in acknowledging religious conversion as a vehicle that has carried the Kelabit forward towards progress and modernity, Bala (2009: 175-176) observes that "the Kelabit envision Christianity as an entry point as well as an integral part of modernity…Christianity is a catalyst for change that propels the Kelabit onwards to search for a better future – economically, spiritually and socially."

**Social impacts of Christianity**

It has been observed that Christianity has influenced almost every facet of life in the Kelabit Highlands. Its impacts on the Kelabit social, economic and political spheres have been summarised by Amster (1998: 47):

> The church has become the focal point for community organization and interaction, and the church in rural Kelabit settlements now administers such things as communal labor and agricultural work groups. Many longhouse leaders and headmen today are also pastors who received training at the bible school in Lawas. From the 1950s onwards, missionaries were welcome as regular visitors to the Kelabit Highlands. Holidays such as Easter…and Christmas have come to be major celebrations for the Kelabit. In each Kelabit rural community, church services are held not only on Sundays but every weekday and Saturday morning (usually at 5.30 AM) and in the evening on Wednesday and Sunday.

Christianity has also brought new ideas concerning social relations. Under Christianity, all members of the Kelabit society are seen as equal to one another. This means that today, in Christian Kelabit society, less importance is given to the social stratification or class system (see Chapter 3), and the gender roles of the past (Amster 1998: 294-299; Bulan and Bulan-Dorai 2004: 40). This is not to say that preoccupation over previous social status has completely disappeared. Indeed, as Amster (1998) has shown, for some Kelabit of today, individual and family status continue to matter, for example in marriages. However, Amster (1998: 297) adds that "[social] differences remain downplayed and disguised in Kelabit life, since it is neither good Christian behavior nor good 'aristocratic' behavior to emphasize that one is a member of an elite social group." In terms of gender roles, while ritual was a cultural domain traditionally dominated by men, in today's Christian Kelabit society, both men and women are able to become pastors and, as such, would preside equally in church ceremonies.

### 4.1.3. The impact of Christianity on the Kelabit's megalithic practice

The findings of studies conducted among various indigenous groups in the wider region suggest that there is no obvious causal relationship between religious conversion and the discontinuation of traditional practices. This is to be expected considering the different cultural, historical, religious and socio-economic circumstances underlying the processes and experiences of religious conversion. For example, in her study among the Bidayuh of Sarawak, Chua notes that in contrast to the situation in interior Sarawak, "Christianity in Bidayuh areas was never adopted as 'a new culture whole'" (2012: 514, citing Robbins 2004: 3), and that in a few Christian Bidayuh communities, the continuation of the traditional *gawai* ritual practices can be observed. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, religious conversion among the Toraja has led to the discontinuation of some traditional practices, but at the same time, the revitalisation of death rituals (Adams 1984; Volkman 1990). Furthermore, among the people of West Sumba (Adams 2007), and among the Ngadha in Flores (Cole 2003), megalithic practices have persisted in spite of the peoples' conversion to Christianity. The continuation of traditional beliefs and practices alongside Christian ones in some indigenous societies may be due to the more accomodating nature of certain denominations of Christianity, for example Roman-Catholicism (see Molnar 1997). Furthermore, in the case of the Christianised indigenous communities in Indonesia, there exists a separation between religion (*agama*) and custom or tradition (*adat*) (Schroter 2010).

However, to many observers, religious conversion among the Kelabit and other upland or interior peoples of Sarawak has clearly resulted in the discontinuation of

most traditional practices. In the Kelabit case, this may be connected to their strong desire to "break with the past" (Lian-Saging 1976/77; see also Amster 1998: 7), following religious conversion to Christianity. Bala (2009: 175) refers to this distancing or rupture as the Kelabit's "overt rejection of their past." For example, Amster (1998: 266) observes, "what is clear is that the *burak lua'* [child initiation rite], and many other aspects of pre-Christian rites, were abandoned after Kelabits adopted Christianity." Similarly, Datan (2011: 31, citing Lees 1979) points out that "the mass and rapid conversion of the Lun Bawang and the Lundayeh to Christianity (Borneo Evangelical Mission) in the early 1930s…resulted in the abandonment of nearly all their traditional culture." During the spread of fundamentalist Christianity among the various indigenous groups in the interior of Sarawak between the 1930s and the 1950s, campaigns to dispose potent objects related to pre-Christian beliefs and rituals (e.g. skulls obtained through headhunting, charms and fetishes, old jars, shrines and carved wooden images) were also conducted at longhouses at the behest of the missionaries (Lees 1979; Southwell 1999; Talla 1979). This active disposal of objects that are perceived to be 'dangerous', according to Nyiri (2016: 244), constituted acts of "spiritual warfare" by proselytising missionaries.

In regard to the cessation of megalithic activities among the Kelabit, Harrisson clearly attributes it to "Christian pressure" (Harrisson 1958c: 699). Similarly, Talla (1979: 489), a Kelabit scholar, observes that with the adoption of Christianity, "no one will ever throw a feast to construct *kawang*, *nabang* or megalithic monuments." I propose that the main reason why this is so is because of the incompatibility of the rituals of megalith building with Christian beliefs. The cessation of megalith building

followed the discontinuation of the Kelabit death feasts: the *burak ate* (the primary burial feast) and the *burak nulang* (the secondary burial feast) (Southwell 1999), which as discussed in Chapter 3, were traditionally the central occasions for the construction of megalithic graves and commemorative monuments. Clearly, the Kelabit practice of two-stage burials is contradictory to the Christian funerary practice. The *nulang* practice in particular, which involved the cleaning of the bones of the dead prior to secondary burial, was rejected as "'heathen' re-disposal of bones" (Harrisson 1958c: 699). The *burak ate* and the *burak nulang* were also problematic from the Christian point of view because, like all large gatherings (*burak* or *irau*) of the Kelabit, they involved extravagant feastings and heavy drinking of rice beer. As documented by Talla (1979: 253), at the *burak ate* feast, "everybody drank until they were drunk. They slept on the floor and woke up only to eat."

In addition, the spiritual aspect of monument building involved the ritual offerings of rice beer and animal sacrifice in order to invoke and to placate the spirits of Kelabit ancestors. As Talla (1979: 238-239) describes the rites involved in the making of a *kawang* burial monument:

> When the party arrived at the spot where the *kawang* or clearing was to be made the ritualist would slash the goat standing on the ground allowing the blood to splash over the place. Just before the party started felling, the ritualist would stand forward from his fellow-men and the pig was handed to him. He would first address Buyan [Buyun? See Chapter 3], then Seluyah, the two great mythical ancestors of the Kelabit and ask them to help in burying the dead man. He would plead with them to ensure that they would not encounter any mishaps and explained that they intended to make a mark among the trees in his [the deceased] memory. He would continue to tell them not to harm the dead man's children and kinsmen; he begged them and told them the quantity of [*burak*], of buffaloes, of deer, and cows to be slaughtered for

> the festivities, and that they wish to share these gifts of food and drink with the great spirits (*ada'*) of Buyan and Seluyah.
>
> He then sprinkled some [*burak*] on the hill for them (Buyan and Seluyah) and said, "This is the pig we brought for you". He went on imploring them not to haunt the deceased's relatives should ever any of them come to the mountains to hunt, but instead provide them with luck and make it an enjoyable hunting trip. "We slaughter the pig now. [Its] pork is for us but also [its] spirit is for you". He then killed the pig and cut down the first tree to mark the commencement of the clearing and felling of the *kawang*.

In this sense, the cessation of megalith building is comparable to that of the *burak lua'* (child initiation) ceremony. As Amster notes, "the holding of *burak lua'* ceased as a direct result of conversion to Christianity, as it was clearly perceived to be in contradiction to Christianity" (Amster 1998: 250). There were several reasons why the *burak lua'* was considered to be in contradiction to Christianity. Firstly, like the *burak ate* and the *burak nulang* mentioned above, the *burak lua'* included "two aspects which were strongly objected to by missionaries": the excessive consumption of rice beer, and ritual sacrifice. The ritual sacrifice of the *burak lua'* is called *ngelua'*, and it consisted of the ritual slaughtering of a pig and the smearing of the pig's blood on the initiated child in a ceremony known as *ngelua' anak* that was done to protect the child from harm (Amster 1999: 187). Furthermore, the *burak lua'* was frowned upon by missionaries because of its link to headhunting. Hunted skulls played important roles in the rituals of *burak lua'*. One of the rituals is *nu'i ulung* or the "raising of a wooden or bamboo pole (*ulung*), in the compound of the longhouse" (Amster 1999: 188), from the top of which, skulls would be hung. Skulls also played a prominent part in the *ngutek* ceremony, which was "performed primarily to instill young boys with qualities they would need to become successful headhunters in the future" (Amster 1998: 259). It

involved "immersing a human skull (again, presumably one obtained from headhunting) in a river and then pouring water from this skull over male children" (Amster 1999: 189). Another version of this ceremony was described as "involving an older man placing a spear in a young boy's hand while guiding him in the act of piercing the skull, again being held in the river" (Amster 1999: 189).

At this point, it is also important to note the role of the changing social dynamics in Christian Kelabit society on the cessation of the traditional megalithic practice. As mentioned previously, the adoption of Christianity has impacted views on social relations whereby the social stratification system of the past is given less importance in Christian (modern) times. Thus, megalithic monuments have become less relevant in the Kelabit social life of modern times as they are no longer seen as necessary to mark the social status or prestige of Kelabit elites. Also, the megalithic feast no longer provides the arena of social competition, where Kelabit elites display their power and influence, and maintain their *doo*-ness.[2] In modern Kelabit society, instead of being measured by one's inherent social standing and the ability in terms of wealth and influence to hold large feasts and to commission the construction of monuments, one's status or *doo*-ness is now commonly measured in terms of success in education and employment (Amster 1998; Janowski 2003b), and in the pursuit of religious life (Bala 2009). Nevertheless, the organisation of the grand Kelabit *irau* in order to commemorate important events has continued to this day, although today,

[2] Bala (2009: 178) defines *doo*-ness as "the [Kelabit] notion of goodness, success and well-being, or rather, the qualities required to constitute a good person such as knowledge, endurance, perseverance, self-discipline, hospitality and strength." She further states that *doo*-ness is "an indicator of social status."

the *irau* has evolved to become a Christianised event. Thus, the *irau* has continued to serve the social function of generating prestige for the host(s), as well as creating and reinforcing "a web of mutual obligations", which in turn, provides social cohesion (Amster 1998: 270). Further to this, Amster (1998: 266) observes that modern-day *irau* events, such as the Kelabit name-changing ceremony, "provide a socially acceptable forum for holding large-scale feasts, filling a void created with the cessation of *burak lua'* and other [e.g. megalithic] *burak* feasts that were an important part of Kelabit life."

### 4.1.4. Kelabit attitudes towards megaliths after Christianity

Previously, I mentioned that when missionaries spread Christianity to longhouse communities in interior Sarawak, many potent objects related to pre-Christian rituals of the indigenous peoples were disposed or destroyed. To my knowledge, however, no destruction of megalithic monuments as a result of Christian influence has ever been recorded. In my experiences in the field, I have also never heard of any story of such an event occurring in the past. Such a conclusion is also implied by Hitchner (2009a), who in discussing threats to cultural sites in the Kelabit Highlands, did not make any mention of damages to megaliths caused by zealous Christian missionaries and converts. This is despite a claim that "megalithic stone structures were under threat of being destroyed because most of the local Kelabit had embraced Christianity and denounced the worshipping of these stone structures" (Chia 2003: 58). There are some explanations for this. Firstly, most megalithic sites are considered graves of Kelabit ancestors. Therefore, like all cemeteries, megalithic sites are places to be respected,

not disturbed. Additionally, unlike the skulls, charms and fetishes, which were disposed at the the time of conversion, megaliths were not domestic objects kept in or near longhouses (most megaliths are found in the surrounding forests), and thus were less prone to the scrutiny and objection by visiting missionaries.

Nevertheless, in certain cases, megalithic sites have become taboo places that are to be avoided. On one hand, this could be because megalithic monuments have now become objects that are associated with the 'sinful' pre-Christian past (see above). Consequently, many Kelabit, especially elders, prefer not to come into contact with, or to even talk about the megaliths. I experienced this unwillingness to talk about the Kelabit's pre-Christian past during one of my interviews, when my informant attributed his reluctance to speak to his fear of "contradicting the Bible" (see also Amster 1998). On the other hand, certain beliefs about the environment have persisted, despite the Kelabit's conversion to Christianity (Amster 2008). Thus, megaliths in the forests have continued to be seen as spiritually potent places. They are laden with *lalud* (life force) because of their materiality (see Janowski and Barton 2012), and they are also commonly believed to be the residing places of forest spirits (*ada'*). Thus, for fear of spiritual retribution, megalithic sites have at times been regarded as places that should be left undisturbed, or best avoided. In some instances, this has provided a new avenue for the performance of Christian 'spiritual warfare'. As Nyiri (2016: 246) notes, "negative views [of the megaliths] still persist, calling for the (regular) ritual cleansing of such locations: sprinkling salt and oil on stone mounds, or casting exorcised jar fragments under stone monuments."

The distancing of the Kelabit from the megalithic monuments has contributed to their neglect. Mashman (2017) refers to this as the 'forgetting' of the stone monuments. Over the years, this has led to the loss of historical knowledge concerning the megaliths. Local appreciation of the historical and cultural values of the megalithic sites have also deteriorated. Until recently in the late 1990s, when local communities began to seriously consider the conservation of their culture (see Chapter 5), the megaliths in the highlands have generally been treated with neglect and ignorance. For example, among the Lun Bawang, Datan (2011: 31) observes that it was common for the people "not to look after the sites and to pose little objection when the sites are threatened by development projects or to be levelled to give way to farms or houses." Similarly, Mashman notes that among the Kelabit, "custody of such [megalithic] sites is overlooked" (2017: 413), and that the Kelabit response to known destruction of megalithic sites is one of "passive acceptance" (2017: 414).

## 4.2. MEGALITHIC RESEARCH IN COLONIAL SARAWAK

Around the time the Kelabit were abandoning their megalithic practice due to its incompatibility with their newly acquired Christian belief, the upland megalithic remains were attracting the attention of colonial individuals and institutions, who recognised their archaeological values and initiated efforts to study them. The beginning of megalithic research in Sarawak is especially linked to the activities of the Sarawak Museum after WW2, and in particular, to the birth of archaeological research in the state (see Chia 2018).

### 4.2.1. The development of megalithic research in Sarawak

The Sarawak Museum in Kuching was officially opened in 1891 during the rule of Charles Brooke, the second White Rajah of Sarawak. While the Museum's progress was impeded as a result of the economic downturn in the 1930s and the war in the 1940s (see Chin *et al*. 1983), it flourished under British colonial rule (1946-1963) with the appointment of Tom Harrisson as Curator of the Sarawak Museum and Government Ethnologist from 1947 to 1966. This was the same Tom Harrisson, who conducted military activities in the highlands during WW2, and who, following the end of the war, opened the first school among the Kelabit, as mentioned above. Like in many other formerly colonised territories, archaeology as "the 'science of objects' and fieldwork" (Farrujia 2014: 25) only began in Sarawak in colonial times. Harrisson, in particular, has been credited for introducing "systematic work in ethnology and archaeology" in the Sarawak Museum (Cheng 1969: xi). Harrisson's time at the helm of the Sarawak Museum has also been considered as the period of "greatest activity" for archaeology in Sarawak, in contrast to the Museum's pre-war years, which produced only rare and random finds of artefacts (Solheim 1983: 35).

Harrisson's work in Sarawak, as well as in other parts of Borneo, is extensive, and he is best known for the archaeological investigation of the Niah Caves and the Sarawak River Delta sites (see summaries in Solheim 1977, 1983). Beside that, Harrisson was also known for his study of the megalithic culture in Borneo. It can be argued that Harrisson's interest in the archaeology of Borneo was stimulated by his encounters with the megalithic remains during his early exploration of the highlands

(see Solheim 1977). Some of these explorations were conducted as part of his war-time duties, while others were conducted during Harrisson's year-long (up to August 1946) stay with the Kelabit following the conclusion of the war (see Harrisson 1959b, 1974). Harrisson's preliminary observations on the highland's megalithic culture were presented in a few papers (Harrisson 1946, 1948, 1949a). In one of the papers, which was read to the Royal Geographical Society in 1947, Harrisson mentioned "clearings, 'rides' on peaks and passes, which are 'doors' for the passage of the ancestral spirits into the after-life" (1949a: 137), essentially describing the *kawang*, a funerary monument of the Kelabit (see Chapter 3). Other than that, Harrisson mentioned "peculiar stone monuments and carvings" (1949a: 138), and their construction in conjunction with elaborate death feasts (1949a: 145).

However, Tom Harrisson was not the first Westerner to have encountered the upland megalithic monuments. Prior to Harrisson's accounts, the presence of megalithic remains in the interior highlands of Sarawak was already made known in the early 20$^{th}$ century through the writings of European officers in the Brooke government. One of the earliest accounts to mention the upland megalithic remains was written by Douglas (1912), the Resident of the Baram Division at the time, who encountered the stones while on a peace-making expedition to the interior in 1909. Later in the 1930s, the upland megalithic remains were the focus of an article written by Banks (1937), entitled 'Some megalithic remains from the Kelabit country in Sarawak with some notes on the Kelabit themselves.' However, as Ewart (2009: 245) mentions, these early references to the upland megaliths were based primarily on "brief encounters." It was not until Harrisson's time at the Sarawak Museum that attempts were made to study

the megaliths in a more systematic manner. Shortly after becoming the Curator of the Sarawak Museum in 1947, Harrisson "commenced a long-term study of megalithic remains in British Borneo, especially Sarawak" (Harrisson and Tweedie 1951: 164).

In the case of colonial India, it has been noted that "*accessibility* (to archaeological material and knowledge), *individual interest*, and in few cases, *concern shown by higher authorities*, seem to be the motivation for early studies in Megalithic culture" (Sawant 2015: 418, emphasis added). Similar points can also be made about the development of megalithic research in colonial Sarawak. In terms of 'accessibility', based on what I have discussed above, it should be clear that Harrisson had first-hand experience of the megalithic remains in the Kelabit Highlands, and access to prior descriptions of the megaliths by European officers before him. Both of the aforementioned writings by Douglas and Banks were published in the museum's own publication, the Sarawak Museum Journal. Edward Banks, especially, was Harrisson's predecessor as museum curator. In terms of 'individual interest', Harrisson's research on the upland megaliths was related to and spurred by his own personal and profound interest in the Kelabit people (with whom he had built a close relationship) and their culture. The link between Harrisson's role in the Sarawak Museum, his affinity with the Kelabit, and his interest in the Kelabit's megalithic culture has also been made by other writers. For example, Janowski (2003a: 7, emphasis added) notes:

> He [Tom Harrisson] took great interest in the Kelabit after the war when he became Curator of the Sarawak Museum, and wrote about them during the 1950s and 1960s, with many of his articles appearing in the new series of the Sarawak Museum Journal. One of the features of the Kelabit Highlands and of Kelabit life which particularly interested him was *the megaliths of the highlands*.

In addition, Winzeler observes that Harrisson "made field research among the Kelabit a priority" (Winzeler 2008: 38), and "was especially concerned with documenting [Kelabit] material culture, including the *megalithic burial structures*, and acquiring Kelabit art and other objects for the museum" (Winzeler 2008: 39, emphasis added). Harrisson had a further reason for prioritising the study of the Kelabit and the different aspects of their life, including their megalithic culture, and that was the rapid socio-cultural transformation that the Kelabit were undergoing under British colonial rule (see above). Thus, Winzeler (2008: 36) observes, "Harrisson was also aware that the Kelabit were an ethnological opportunity that would not last, and indeed did not, as contact with outside world increased drastically and as they converted to fundamentalist Christianity." In emphasising the value of the Sarawak Museum's material collection, Harrisson (1947: 190) observes that "many native peoples are now changing their ways of life. Old customs, crafts and arts, are dying out rapidly in some areas." Therefore, it can be said that the development of megalithic research in Sarawak in the colonial period was also partly driven by the realisation that the megalithic tradition was one that would not endure.

In its initial phase, Harrisson's study of the Kelabit was also linked to the colonial office's interest in the ethnology and socio-economic conditions of the native peoples in Sarawak, which in classic colonial fashion was intended for the formulation of the (colonial) government's social and economic policies. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, under the auspices of the Colonial Social Science Research Council (CSSRC), a number of social studies were conducted on and among the peoples of Sarawak. These studies were sponsored by the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of the British

government, which as mentioned previously also funded much of Sarawak's early development. First of all, there was the general social-economic survey of the peoples of Sarawak that was carried out by Leach (1950), and this was followed by (based on Leach's recommendation) ethnological studies of specific ethnic groups: the Iban (Freeman 1955a, 1955b), the Melanau (Morris 1953), the Bidayuh (Geddes 1954), and the Chinese (T'ien 1953). Although Tom Harrisson's study of the Kelabit was not directly commissioned by the CSSRC, it was in this prevalent mood that Harrisson was first tasked in 1947 to conduct a census of the *Orang Ulu* (the 'upriver people'), which included the Kelabit people of the Upper Baram, "as part of an over-all census of Sarawak" (Heimann 2002: 249). Overall, between 1947 and 1949, Harrisson made two expeditions into interior Sarawak. Along with conducting the aforementioned census, these expeditions were also aimed at studying the cultures and lifeways of the native peoples, as well as to collect material culture and zoological specimens for the Sarawak Museum (Colonial Reports Sarawak 1947, 1948, 1949). A government report specifically notes that Harrisson was tasked to "bring back with him a large and valuable collection of articles principally connected with the Kelabits in the far-away [Bario] country" (Colonial Reports Sarawak 1947: 87). Among the material objects collected were stone implements (see Harrisson 1949c), jars, pots and porcelain objects, basketwork, weaving, native looms, weapons, beads, dancing clothes and ritual objects (Colonial Report Sarawak 1948).

It was perhaps in the interest of collecting material culture for the Museum that diggings were conducted at some unnamed slab-graves and a large dolmen in 1949, which produced findings of "early Chinese and Siamese pottery with ancient beads"

(Harrisson 1951: 153; see also Harrisson 1954, 1970). Prior to 1949, no archaeological excavations have ever been carried out in Sarawak, or Borneo for that matter (Harrisson 1951). Thus, Harrisson's diggings in 1949, although crude, represented some of the earliest excavations in Sarawak aimed at recovering archaeological materials. At the time however, the Museum's archaeological programme was in the early stage of its development. In the beginning, Harrisson himself was not a trained archaeologist. In order to train himself and the Sarawak Museum staff, Harrisson initiated training digs at Santubong and the Bau caves in 1950 with the help of Michael Tweedie, the Director of the Raffles Museum in Singapore at the time (Harrisson 1951; Harrisson and Tweedie 1951).

### 4.2.2. Tom Harrisson and the study of the upland megaliths

Under Harrisson's leadership, the Museum conducted extensive explorations, documentation, and analyses of the upland megalithic sites (Harrisson 1958b, 1958c, 1962a, 1973a, 1974).[3] Harrisson himself claims to have "travelled and searched" (Harrisson 1958b: 397), and "have visited several hundred megalithic structures in the Kelabit uplands" (Harrisson 1958c: 695). He further claims to have "seen new ones erected" (Harrisson 1958b: 397) between 1945 and 1953 (Fig. 4.1). The Museum also collected oral stories related to megalithic sites (see Labang 1958, 1962). With data obtained from numerous fieldwork, Harrisson produced typological, functional and chronological ("based on a relative time scale", see Solheim 1983: 40) classifications of

[3] Besides in the uplands of Sarawak, Harrisson also studied the megaliths in Western Sarawak (Harrisson and O'Connor 1970), Sabah (Harrisson 1962b, 1973b; Harrisson and Harrisson 1970), and Peninsular Malaysia (Harrisson 1962a).

the upland megaliths. For instance, Harrisson identified a number of megalithic types including rock carvings, dolmens, menhirs (single, paired, or lines of), stone 'bridges', stone vats, slab graves, cliff grottoes, and "stone 'tables', seats and a variety of other forms" that he generalised, based on his observations, as "directly associated nowadays, with the funereal feasts of persons of means" (Harrisson 1958b: 397). Through his observations, Harrisson also realised that megaliths are but one component of Kelabit monument making, and rightly pointed out examples of non-stone monuments (i.e. landscape modifications, see Chapter 3) that are "equally 'megalithic' in Kelabit thinking" (Harrisson 1958c: 699). Harrisson also realised that what was socially significant about the Kelabit megalithic tradition was not the type of monument built, nor the materials involved, but the actual act of monument making and the holding of the megalithic *irau* or feast, which both demonstrate and confer prestige to the host and his or her family.

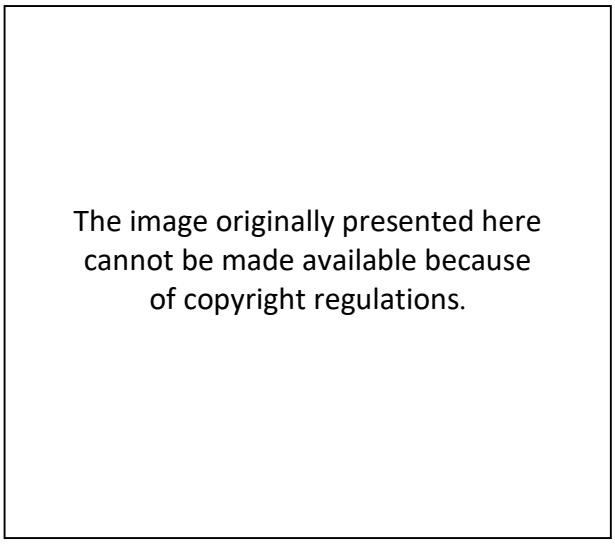



Figure 4.1. The erection of standing stones at Pa' Umor

(Photo: Sarawak Museum).

Harrisson also compared the upland megaliths of Borneo to those discovered in the wider region of Southeast Asia. For example, in comparing the megaliths of the Kelabit Highlands to those found in Negeri Sembilan in Malaya (now Peninsular Malaysia), Harrisson concludes that the latter "*could* well have been erected in the same general mood ('spirit' is maybe the term) and as a similar integral part of a similar general culture" as the upland megaliths of Borneo (Harrisson 1962a: 377, emphasis in original). Moreover, compared to the megaliths found in Java and Sumatera, Harrisson notes, "broadly speaking, it would seem that here [in the Kelabit Highlands] is an isolated stone working activity, clearly linked to other 'cultures', yet with peculiarities of its own" (Harrisson 1949b: 94, citing Heine-Geldern 1945).

In explaining the origin of the megalithic culture in the highlands, Harrisson speculated (due to the lack of chronometric dating) that the earliest megalith may possibly date back to the second half of the first millennium AD (see discussion in Chapter 3). Furthermore, as explained in Chapter 3, Harrisson divided the megaliths into three broad categories of age: those that were made in recent times; those that were ancient but with folk explanation; and those that were prehistoric.

Harrisson and the Sarawak Museum also carried out a number of excavations at various megalithic sites in the Kelabit Highlands from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. However, compared to the detailed archaeological investigations that Harrisson carried out at the Niah Caves and at the Santubong sites, his excavations of the megalithic sites were largely exploratory in nature. Moreover, aside from brief mentions in some publications (see Harrisson 1951: 153, 1958c: 700, 1964: 331, 1973a), the details of

these excavations have never been fully reported. Based on examination of archival records, we know that one of Harrisson's main attempts at investigating the archaeology of the upland megaliths took place in 1962. In order to shed light on the type of archaeological work done at megalithic sites in the colonial period, the Museum's fieldwork in 1962 is further discussed below.

### 4.2.3. The Sarawak Museum's megalithic research in 1962

The Sarawak Museum's megalithic research in 1962 consisted of archaeological survey and excavation work conducted over a period of six weeks in September and October 1962 at selected megalithic sites in the Kelabit Highlands (Sarawak Annual Report 1962). This particular fieldwork represented an extension of the Museum's archaeological work in Sarawak, which throughout the 1950s were mainly concentrated at the Niah Caves and the Sarawak River Delta sites (Harrisson 1964: 331). As mentioned in a government report, its aim was "to determine their [megalithic monuments] antiquity more precisely" (Sarawak Annual Report 1962: 297). However, the full results of the fieldwork in 1962 were never published, due to the prioritising of other research work (the work at the Niah Caves and at the Sarawak River Delta sites was still ongoing in the 1960s), and perhaps also partly due to the outbreak of the Brunei Revolt (December 1962) and the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation (1963-1966), and following that, Harrisson's retirement from work at the Sarawak Museum in 1966, and departure from Sarawak in 1967 (Heimann 2002). Nevertheless, documentation of this fieldwork exists in the form of field notebooks and photographs kept at the Sarawak Museum's archives. As no diaries of Tom Harrisson's visit to the

highlands in 1962 were preserved (B. Harrisson 1977), these notebooks (see Table 4.1) and photographs represent valuable documentary evidence of colonial-era archaeological investigation of megalithic monuments in the Kelabit Highlands. Pertinent to this chapter, they provide a picture of a new form of engagement with the megalithic monuments as objects of archaeological study.

Table 4.1. Field notebooks of the megalithic research in 1962.

| **No.** | **Title**[4] | **Contents** |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Pa Trap Megaliths – Paya Batu Ritong and Parupun Arur Etan | Notes of the excavations of Perupun Rayeh and Perupun Arur Ritan (by Barbara Harrisson, with additional notes by Tom Harrisson). |
| 2. | Batu Ritong – Pa Trap megaliths, 9/62 | Notes of the excavation of Batuh Ritung (by Barbara Harrisson, with additional notes by Tom Harrisson, and one page of notes by Lian Labang). |
| 3. | Megalithic I, Bario, 9-10/62 | Notes of megalithic sites that were surveyed in Bario, Pa' Berang and Pa' Ra' (by Tom Harrisson). |
| 4. | Megalithic II, 10/62, Pa Trap | Notes of various megalithic sites in the highlands (by Tom Harrisson). |
| 5. | Megalithic III, Pa Trap, 10/62 | Notes of the excavations of Batuh Ritung, Perupun Rayeh, Perupun Arur Ritan, and Nabang Pa' Libong (by Tom Harrisson). |

Examination of the field notes and photographs indicates that the Museum's fieldwork in 1962 was carried out at a number of selected megalithic sites consisting of various types (Table 4.2). These include a large slab-built dolmen (Batuh Ritung); slab graves and small dolmens (Arur Tang Barat and Binatuh Pa' Berang); stone mounds (Perupun Rayeh and Perupun Arur Ritan); standing stones (Batuh Senuped Arur Tang

[4] The titles listed in the table are the actual titles hand-written on the cover of the field notebooks. The numbers in the title indicate the month and year of the fieldwork. For example, in the notebook titled 'Batu Ritong – Pa Trap megaliths, 9/62' (notebook no. 2 in Table 4.1 above), "9/62" refers to September 1962.

Barat and Batuh Senuped Bario); rock carvings (Batuh Narit Pa' Ukat); circular ditch (Nabang Pa' Libong); and other culturally-significant stones (Batuh Ipak and Batuh Emung Ada') (Fig. 4.2). Out of these, four sites in the Pa' Trap (present-day Pa' Lungan) area, in the northern Kelabit Highlands - Batuh Ritung, Perupun Rayeh, Perupun Arur Ritan and Nabang Pa' Libong - were selected for test excavations (Harrisson 1964). Despite Harrisson's long association with the Kelabit and Kelabit Highlands, these sites were new to his knowledge at the time. As Harrisson (1964:331) writes:

> The Kelabits long tended to be uninformative about parts of their culture connected with their deep death-fears. But over the last eighteen years, they have slowly been more forthcoming; nevertheless, I was not shown some of the most important [Pa'] Trap sites until 1962.

Single test trenches were dug at Batuh Ritung, Perupun Rayeh, and Perupun Arur Ritan, while three were dug at Nabang Pa' Libong. Under the supervision of Tom Harrisson and Barbara Harrisson, the excavation of these sites were carried out by Lian Labang, a Kelabit staff member of the Sarawak Museum, with the assistance of Balang Umong and Tama Sullui, two local Kelabit men from Pa' Trap (Fig. 4.3). The excavations, however, were crude. Single test trenches were mostly dug in a day, and excavation notes were scant. Furthermore, no dating of the megalithic sites was obtained. However, the findings of these excavations (see below) led Harrisson to surmise in a later article (Harrisson 1964: 332):

> the results show that much of this major prehistoric activity still falls well within the 'Iron Age' and continuing into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; as indicated for instance, by the burial urns and other import ceramics buried under the piles.

Table 4.2. Megalithic sites investigated by the Sarawak Museum fieldwork in 1962

| No. | Site names |
|---|---|
| 1. | Batuh Ritung, Pa' Lungan |
| 2. | Perupun Rayeh, Pa' Lungan |
| 3. | Perupun Arur Ritan, Pa' Lungan |
| 4. | Nabang Pa' Libong, Pa' Lungan |
| 5. | Batuh Narit, Pa' Ukat |
| 6. | Batuh Ipak, Pa' Umor |
| 7. | Batuh Senuped Arur Tang Barat, Pa' Berang |
| 8. | Binatuh Pa' Berang (megalithic and jar burials) |
| 9. | Batuh Senuped, Bario |
| 10. | Pa' Ra' (including Batuh Narit, Batuh Nangan and Batuh Emung Ada') |

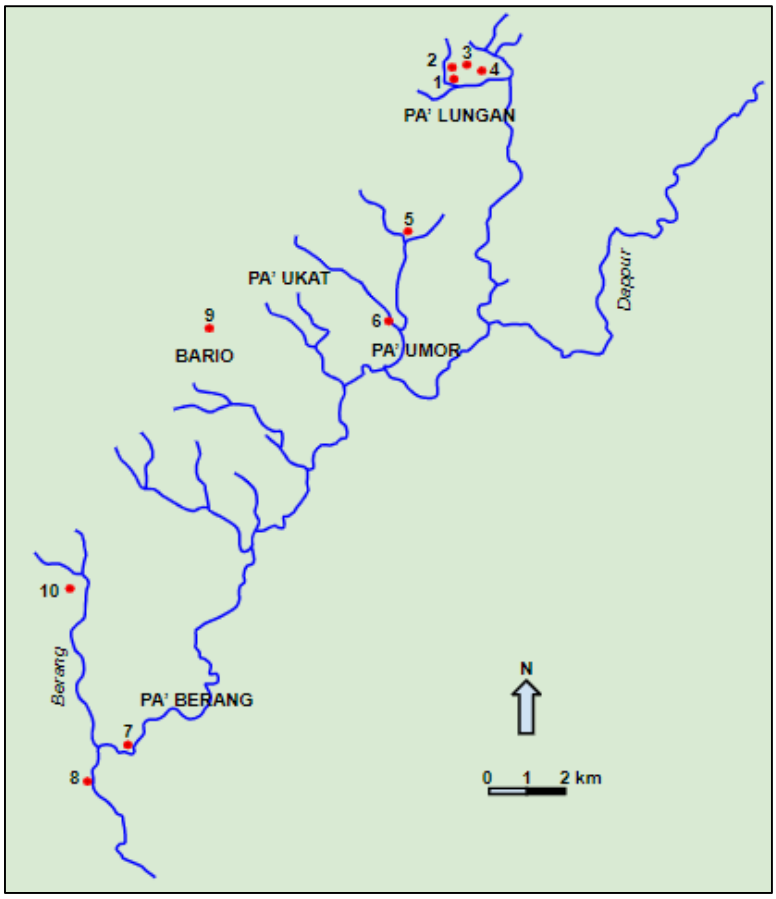



Figure 4.2. Map showing the locations of the megalithic sites investigated by the Sarawak Museum in 1962.

Batuh Ritung ('Batu Ritong', in the museum field notes) was excavated on 25 September 1962. The excavation of a single test trench (8 feet by 3 feet, depth 4 feet) recovered materials including stoneware and porcelain sherds, and glass and carnelian beads from the depths of 0-12 inches. Additionally, earthenware sherds, metal objects (bangle fragments), and a cylindrically-shaped stone were recovered from depths of 12-24 inches. The excavation record also notes the recovery of "small quantity of cremated bone including sub-adult skull", from unspecified depth.

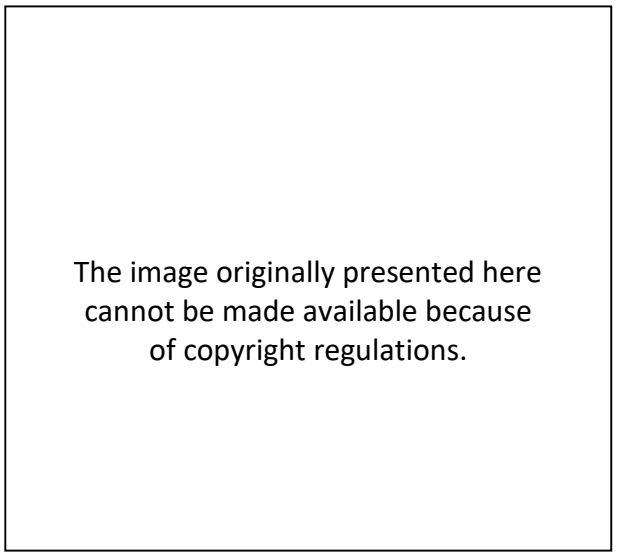



Figure 4.3. Image showing from left to right: Tama Sullui, Tom Harrisson, Ballang Umong and Lian Labang (in the trench at the centre of the picture) at Batuh Ritung in Pa' Lungan (Photo KH/1, Sarawak Museum photographic archive)[5].

Perupun Payeh ('Paya Batu Ritong' or 'Parapun Paya Batu Ritong', in the museum field notes) was excavated on 26 September 1962. Like the excavation at

[5] For Figures 4.3 - 4.7, the photograph numbers refer to the contact print numbers as kept in the Sarawak Museum archive.

Batuh Ritung, the excavation at Perupun Rayeh also consisted of the digging of a single test trench measuring 8 feet by 4 feet, which as excavated up to a maximum depth of 4 feet (Fig. 4.4). The museum's field notes reported the findings of at least 10 stoneware and porcelain sherds, 37 earthenware sherds, 2 iron knives, 15 glass beads, and one whetstone, all of which came from the depths of 12-24 inches. Furthermore, a "small amount" of cremated bone fragments was recovered from the depths of 24-36 inches. However, more recent investigations suggest that mistakes may have been made in the original recording of the excavated materials' provenience, and that the bones recorded as originating from Perupun Rayeh in 1962 were more likely to have been recovered from Batuh Ritung (Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2017).




Figure 4.4. Lian Labang, a Kelabit staff member of the Sarawak Museum, conducting measurements at Perupun Rayeh, Pa' Lungan

(Photo KH/34, Sarawak Museum photographic archive).

The excavation at Perupun Arur Ritan ('Parapun Arur Etan', in the museum field notes) consisted of the digging of a single test trench measuring 8 feet by 4 feet, with the depth of about 3 feet (Fig. 4.5). In the museum's field notes, it was noted that Perupun Arur Ritan is "poor in artefacts compared to Batu Ritong." Materials recovered from this excavation included two glass beads, four stone artefacts, and cremated human bones.

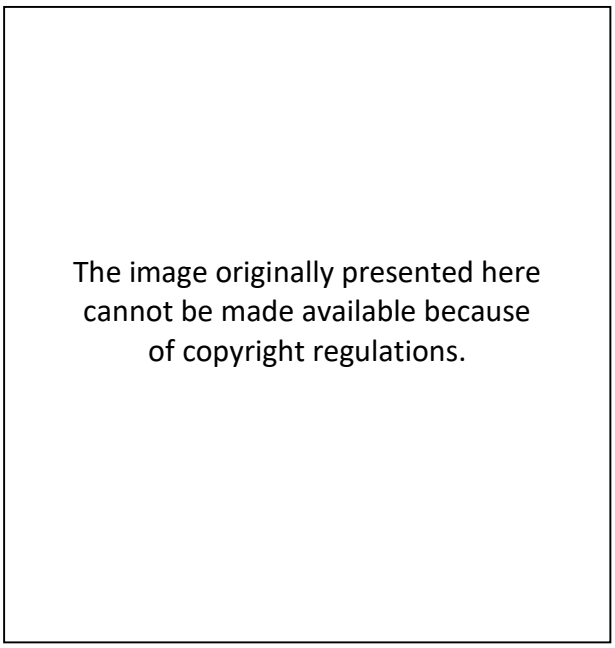



Figure 4.5. Tom Harrisson inspecting the trench at Perupun Arur Ritan

(Photo KH/41, Sarawak Museum photographic archive).

Nabang Pa' Libong was investigated on 4-5 October 1962. Three test trenches (labeled as trenches A, B and C in the museum field notes) were excavated (Fig. 4.6). However, no artefacts were recovered from these excavations.

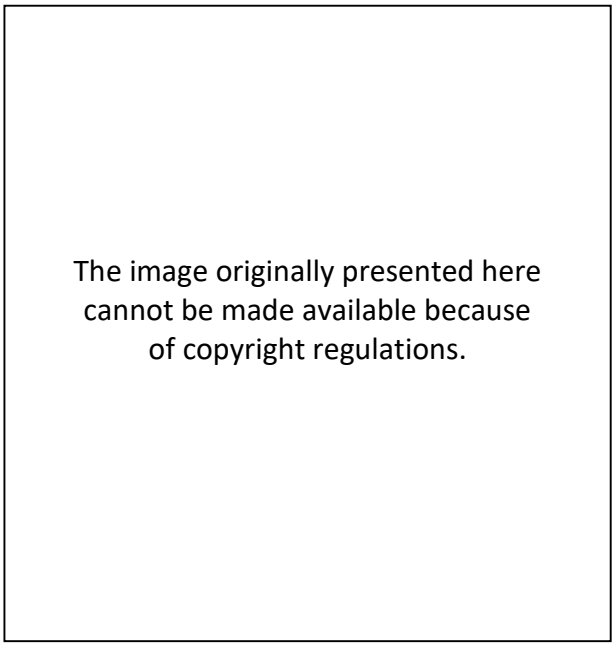



Figure 4.6. One of the trenches excavated at Nabang Pa' Libong.

(Photo KH/59, Sarawak Museum photographic archive).

Besides the excavations of megalithic sites in the Pa' Trap area, the museum's fieldwork in 1962 also included the survey of several megalithic sites located in different locations across the highlands (sites 5-10 in Table 4.2). In addition to documenting the different megalithic sites, this survey produced a notable photographic collection, which not only depicted the sites, but also the various Kelabit individuals who served as local informants and/or workers (Fig. 4.7). Some of these photographs have appeared as illustrations in Harrisson's publications on the archaeological monuments of the Kelabit Highlands (e.g. Harrisson 1964; 1973a).




Figure 4.7. Tama Tidan, pictured at the Arur Tang Barat site in Pa' Berang

(Photo KH/88, Sarawak Museum photographic archive).

**CONCLUSION**

Studies of the long-term histories of megalithic sites have demonstrated their abilities to accumulate various meanings over time (e.g. Gillings and Pollard 1999, 2004; Holtorf 1998). As discussed in Chapter 1, the meanings that megalithic monuments may acquire are the results of their interactions with various groups of people in different contextual situations. In the case of the megaliths in the Kelabit Highlands, this chapter has shown the colonial period to be a crucial stage in their biographies (see Kopytoff 1986), at it was during this time that the megaliths transitioned from being the monumental outcome of a *living* culture centred around elaborate funerary rites and lavish ceremonial feasts of the Kelabit society (see Chapter 3) to being cultural objects

associated with, or belonging to, the *past*.

In this chapter, I have discussed the underlying processes, which have led to this transition. I have shown that beginning in the colonial period, as the worldview of the Kelabit changed when they embraced Christianity and modernity as a new way of life beginning in the 1940s (see Bala 2009), we begin to see a distancing of the people from their traditional culture, and subsequently, megalithic practices were abandoned. I have argued that while this occurred as part of the general modernisation of the Kelabit, a particular factor was the incompatibility of traditional megalithic rituals with the people's newly adopted religion of Christianity. Along with the abandonment of megalithic practices by the Kelabit after the arrival of Christianity, megalithic monuments then became objects associated with the Kelabit's pre-Christian or 'pagan' past, and thus should be avoided or left behind. Consequently, this view has led to the megaliths being neglected and, to a certain extent, forgotten.

This chapter has also demonstrated a different way in which the megaliths were treated as objects of the past, and that was through the colonial-era archaeological investigation of the upland megaliths by the Sarawak Museum. Archaeological work contributes to the creation of a new conception of place. Specifically, archaeological work turns a location into an 'archaeological site', or in other words, into a site associated with past human activities. By applying the approaches and methods of archaeology in the analysis and reporting of the megalithic monuments, which "sorted their [the megaliths'] components into the linear, vertical and essentialist order", it can be said that the Sarawak Museum's archaeological work on the megaliths essentially

amounted to the "active *construction* of archaeological sites" (see Kallen and Karlstrom 2010: 304, emphasis in original). In shaping contemporary or popular imaginings of the megalithic monuments, both of the historical processes discussed in this chapter – the abandonment of megalithic practice by the Kelabit, and the development of megalithic research in colonial Sarawak – have contributed to the monumentalisation (see Dietler 1998; Hamilakis 2008) of the megaliths of the Kelabit Highlands as "physical residue of human activity" (Rainbird 2008: 16).

Previously in Chapter 3, I mentioned that there is evidence that shows the re-use of megalithic sites and their materials in the Kelabit Highlands in pre-Christian times, which perhaps suggests a continuation of their previous meanings into different periods. However, could there have been times in the pre-Christian past, as we have seen in the post-conversion years, when meanings of megalithic monuments were also deliberately erased or forgotten by the local upland people? Or in other words, were there other times in the more distant past when pre-existent megalithic remains also fell into disuse? Although presently this is unknown, one would imagine that it would not be an impossible scenario. Nevertheless, considering this possibility and based on the findings of this chapter, I would suggest that over the long term megalithic monuments may proceed through cycles of use/re-use and disuse, or of memorialisation and forgetting, depending on the particular social contexts of different times, which determine how people relate to previously existing monuments. As Holtorf notes, the meanings that monuments attain at a particular time depends on "what each people in each situation consider to be the ideal career for monuments, and what is thought to be the adequate reaction should they reach the (temporary?)

end of their usefulness" (1998: 35, citing Kopytoff 1986).

The megalithic remains' loss of usefulness to the local people in the Upper Baram after their conversion to Christianity, which is evident in the way there were subsequently abandoned and neglected, would indeed prove to be temporary as the next three chapters, which will cover more contemporary engagements with the megaliths, will demonstrate. The following chapter will explore specifically the present role of megalithic monuments as heritage objects.

# CHAPTER 5

## MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS AS KELABIT CULTURAL HERITAGE

> Today the secondary burial ceremony is no longer conducted by the Kelabit…But this does not mean that aspects of the secondary burial practice is no longer meaningful to the Kelabit. Although the significance of this activity is fading, the monuments built hundreds of years ago still function as a reminder to the younger generation and to visitors to Bario of the history and life of the Kelabit people of the Kelabit Highlands (Bala 2016: 128-129).[6]

This chapter examines the megalithic monuments of the Kelabit Highlands in the Upper Baram as part of the heritage of the Kelabit people of Sarawak. The megalithic monuments may be viewed as such because, as the epigraph above indicates, in one way they are "tangible and concrete elements of the [Kelabit] past which are presented and re-presented in the present" (Hitchcock and King 2003: 3), in this case, as a reminder of the Kelabit's history in the Kelabit Highlands. Furthermore, in emphasising its socially constructed nature, Melanie Smith (2003: 82) defines heritage as "the contemporary use of the past, including both its interpretation and representation." Drawing from the conceptualisation of heritage as present-day cultural and social processes, rather than just being a thing of value that is handed down from the past or from previous generations, this chapter examines the production, representation and use of the megalithic heritage among the Kelabit people of Sarawak, set against the backdrop of social, economic and environmental transformations in the Kelabit Highlands. In their present status as heritage objects, it is clear that the megalithic monuments have been revalorised by the Kelabit people. In this way, the present-day

[6] Publication in Malay. Translations are my own.

Kelabit attitude towards the megalithic monuments is markedly different compared to that during and immediately following colonial times, which following the adoption of modernity and the Christian religion in the 1940s, rejected the past and its associated beliefs and practices, which in turn led to the undervaluing and consequent neglect and forgetting of the megalithic monuments (see Chapter 4).

To begin with, this chapter will discuss the factors that have influenced this shift in attitude towards the megalithic monuments. Firstly, this chapter will discuss the beginning of heritage awareness among the Kelabit in the 1960s, which changed local attitudes towards the past and resulted in the people's greater appreciation and consideration of their traditional culture. Following that, this chapter will explore the impacts of the arrival of commercial logging activities and the growing local tourism industry on the beginning of megalithic conservation in the Kelabit Highlands. This chapter will also discuss the various megalithic conservation efforts that have been carried out over the years; all of which have been community-based. An outcome of these conservation efforts has been the further realisation of the tourism potentials of the megaliths, and their subsequent development and promotion as Kelabit cultural heritage for tourism purposes. Finally, this chapter considers the representation and use of the megalithic heritage in the Kelabit Highlands by way of three examples: the megalithic (touristic) attractions of the Kelabit Highlands, the construction of the Millennium Kawang monument, and the megalithic exhibitions at the Kelabit Community Museum in Bario. Through an analysis of heritage as a "cultural performance" (L. Smith 2017), this chapter will attempt to shed light on how the megalithic monuments of the Kelabit Highlands have been "continually recreated and

reinterpreted to address the political and social needs and problems of the present" (L. Smith 2017: 16; see also L. Smith 2006).

## 5.1. THE BEGINNING OF HERITAGE AWARENESS AMONG THE KELABIT

As alluded to in the previous chapter, the socio-cultural transformation that occurred among the Kelabit in the colonial period (1946-1963) had resulted in the abandonment of many of their traditional practices (see also Bala 2009; Amster 1998). Furthermore, appreciation for traditional (i.e. pre-Christian) material culture had also dwindled following the Kelabit people's conversion to Christianity. As Sweet and Kelly (2014: 8) note on the loss of Kelabit material culture: "a great number of artefacts that had survived from before [World War 2] were simply disposed of. So much so that in many longhouses there are now relatively few keepsakes that have been handed down through families." The modernisation of the Kelabit, their religious conversion, and their desire, as Amster (1998: 7) puts it, to "break from the past", inevitably led to the poor preservation of traditional and historical knowledge among the people. For example, the Kelabit scholar Yahya Talla notes the difficulty in obtaining information about traditional or pre-Christian Kelabit beliefs and practices in the 1970s: "these beliefs, and the ritual practices associated with them, have entirely fallen into disuse and most are poorly known, or not known at all, to younger Kelabit" (Talla 1979: 7).

In terms of the Kelabit's relationship with the megalithic monuments in the highlands, I have argued in the previous chapter (see section 4.1.4) that after the

1950s, the megaliths were treated with ambivalence and neglect, and for the most part, they were forgotten. Due to the local people's ignorance of their cultural significance, stones from megalithic sites have over the years been quarried to be used as construction materials. Additionally, some megalithic sites were cleared or removed to make way for agriculture or the building of infrastructure (Hitchner 2009a). This general trend continued until around the late 1990s or early 2000s, when the Kelabit began to seriously consider the megaliths' conservation, as I will discuss further below.

Beginning in the 1960s, educated Kelabit individuals began to question the Kelabit people's whole rejection of their past. This so-called 'awakening of heritage counciousness' (Sweet and Kelly 2014; see also Sweet *et al*. 2015) entailed a renegotiation of what Kelabit culture meant to the people. Of particular concern were the traditional practices that were being shunned, but which were nevertheless important to Kelabit identity. A recollection by Lucy Bulan, a retired teacher, which appeared in the writings of Sweet and his colleagues (Sweet and Kelly 2014: 11; Sweet *et al*. 2015: 193-194, emphasis in original) illustrates this cultural renegotiation:

> I remember in the sixties when we started going to school, when almost everything was gone, that we discovered that even our dances were no longer being practiced, and then we started saying 'surely not [everything] Kelabit is wrong, it cannot be that [everything] western is right, it cannot be that everything western is Christian and everything Kelabit is non-Christian, *it can not be, there must be something in our culture that surely can be considered still good*, not un-Christian, in particular'. So, very consciously, we brought back the dancers, which we had thrown away, and there were discussions, I remember, about what are the things that we could still keep doing and what are the sorts of things we must not do anymore.

According to Sweet and his colleagues, a major influence in the Kelabit's awakening of heritage consciousness was Tom Harrisson, Curator of the Sarawak Museum, and Government Ethnologist from 1947 to 1966, a figure whom by now should already be familiar to the reader of this thesis. It has been said that Harrisson was "an important advocate for the conservation of indigenous tangible and intangible cultural heritage in Borneo", and his anthropological and archaeological work has "influenced local (and international) attitudes and approaches to cultural heritage conservation" (Sweet and Kelly 2014: 9). In this way, Harrisson was "a counterpoint to the work of the missionaries" (Sweet *et al*. 2015: 193). As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the reasons for Harrisson's interest in studying the Kelabit people and their culture was his realisation that the Kelabit culture, like all other native cultures during the time of colonisation, was one that was rapidly changing (Winzeler 2008). There is even a claim, regardless of whether or not it is justified, that Harrisson "encouraged the people to revert to their pre-Christian practices, so that they could be a living study in anthropology" (Bulan and Bulan-Dorai 2004: 48). Nevertheless, Harrisson documented the Kelabit way of life and the various aspects of their longhouse culture in various publications (e.g. Harrisson 1946, 1954, 1959a), most notably in a memoir entitled 'World Within: A Borneo Story' (Harrisson 1959b), which recorded his experience of living among the Kelabit people in the period around the end of WW2. Furthermore, Harrisson recorded and collected the Kelabit oral and material (including archaeological) culture, and acquired zoological specimens from the Kelabit Highlands for the Sarawak Museum. Harrisson also showed a particular interest in the upland megalithic culture (see Harrisson 1958b, 1958c, 1962a, 1973a, 1974). Through his work, various aspects of the Kelabit culture were made known to the outside world as

they were featured in academic and non-academic literature, museum exhibitions and film documentaries (e.g. 'Highlanders of the Equator', a documentary on Kelabit life that was produced for British television in the 1960s). The results of Harrisson's study of the megalithic culture of the Kelabit Highlands, in particular, contributed to the recognition of the upland megaliths as an important cultural heritage of not only Sarawak (Chin 1980), but also Malaysia (Chandran 1982). This was further evidenced by the gazetting of the Batuh Ritung monument in Pa' Lungan as a state historical site under the Sarawak Cultural Heritage Ordinance in 1993.

The local people's close relationship and cooperation with Tom Harrisson led several Kelabit individuals to begin to document various aspects of their traditional knowledge and culture in the late 1950s and the 1960s. Lian Labang, who worked under Tom Harrisson in the Sarawak Museum, documented oral legends connected to the upland megalithic tradition (see Labang 1958, 1962). He also conducted archaeological surveys and excavations at a number of megalithic sites in the Kelabit Highlands (see Chapter 4 of this thesis). Beside that, Galih Balang (1965) documented the origin story of the Kelabit-Murut peoples of the highlands, while Malarn Maran (1969b) wrote about the Kelabit burial custom. The Kelabit made great progress in education in the 1950s and 1960s (Toynbee 1965), and a number of bright Kelabit students went on to pursue higher education in West Malaysia and beyond. In the 1970s, two Kelabit scholars, Robert Lian-Saging and Yahya Talla, produced undergraduate work (see Lian-Saging 1976/77; Talla 1979), which comprehensively documented various aspects of Kelabit history and culture, including the pre-Christian practices that have been abandoned, such as the social stratification system,

headhunting, secondary burial feasts, the *burak lua'* child initiation ceremony, and animal sacrifice. These works by Lian-Saging and Talla contributed to a greater awareness of Kelabit culture and heritage, and they continue to be important scholarly references today. The works by Lian-Saging and Talla were also inspired by the realisation that traditional Kelabit knowledge was rapidly fading. For instance, Lian-Saging (1979: 15) mentions that his study was motivated by "the realization of the need to write a history of the Kelabit tribe, however brief, before it vanishes altogether." He adds that "every society must have some past, and the Kelabit's past is really fast disappearing as the memories are vanishing under the 'bleaching' effect of the present."

Concerns over Kelabit cultural heritage and its preservation have continued ever since. In a paper presented as part of the 'Orang Ulu Cultural Heritage Seminar' held by the Sarawak Museum in 1988, Lian-Saging and Bulan (1989) stressed:

> A vast amount of research of Kelabit history has yet to be undertaken, especially those related to material culture, social etiquette, language documentation, music etc. There is an urgent need to pursue this today, before the last vestiges of Kelabit culture disappear completely under the wave of modernisation with all its attractive contraptions.

Over the years, Kelabit scholars have been addressing this concern, as evidenced by the historical and ethnographic writings by Bilcher Bala (1993) and Poline Bala (2016), as well as other works that have highlighted the various aspects of Kelabit culture and heritage (e.g. Bala 2010a, 2014; Murang 1995). Importantly, in recent years, Kelabit scholars have also investigated the local responses to the various social changes brought about by development and modernisation, and pertinently, the continued

relevance of Kelabit traditional customs and practices, as well as cultural and historical sites, in today's transforming society (see Bala 2002, 2009; Bulan 2003, 2011, 2015). Conscious efforts have also been made to conserve and to promote Kelabit cultural heritage. Some examples that are pertinent to the Kelabit's megalithic heritage will be discussed further below. It has to be noted, however, that cultural heritage conservation among the Kelabit is predominantly a pursuit of the urban and educated middle- and upper-class Kelabit (Amster 2008). Heritage conservation efforts are usually carried out under the banner of the Rurum Kelabit Sarawak (the Kelabit Association of Sarawak), an urban-based Kelabit association, which represents the collective aspirations of both urban and rural Kelabit (see Amster 1998). In many cases, as we shall see below, these heritage conservation efforts have been conducted with the collaboration of outside researchers and institutions, which demonstrates the extensive networks of the urban Kelabit elites.

## 5.2. THE IMPACTS OF LOGGING AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT ON MEGALITHIC CONSERVATION

Commercial logging activities began in the fringes of the Kelabit Highlands in the late 1990s, and by 2005, they began to encroach on settlement areas in the Kelabit Highlands (Amster 2008: 88; Janowski 2014a). Among the local population, there were differing attitudes towards the arrival of the logging companies. Some felt that it was an unavoidable development and that the Kelabit, as "disenfranchised and passive agents", were to some extent powerless to stop commercial logging activities, which

with the state's support have been active in other areas of interior Sarawak, from extending into the Kelabit Highlands (Amster 2008: 90). A section of the Kelabit community welcomed the logging roads, which they felt would improve connection and transportation of goods into the highlands. On the other hand, there was a genuine worry about the impacts of logging on agricultural land, the forest environment, and historical or cultural sites. The negative impacts of logging activities have already been observed. For instance, forested areas have been reduced and the ecosystem has been damaged leading to reduced availability of wild game and other forest resources. Formerly pristine rivers have also become muddy due to increased soil erosion, which is a by-product of logging (Janowski 2014a). Besides damages to the environment, the local communities were also concerned about the impact of logging on their way of life, in particular with regards to the threats it could pose to their land resources and traditional land ownership. As Amster (2008: 89) notes, "most Kelabit are nervous about logging, many citing fear that the coming of a road and the 'opening' of the highlands could lead to destructive effects that will threaten their way of life and lead to a loss of autonomy and control on their native lands." Most significantly, at least to where preservation of megalithic sites is concerned, logging activities have threatened and destroyed a number of cultural (including megalithic) sites in the Kelabit Highlands. Concerns over the preservation of the megalithic sites have led to various initiatives to document and to mark them for protection, as we shall see below.

The other factor that has had an impact on megalithic conservation in the Kelabit Highlands is the growth of local tourism. Taking the definition of a tourist as "someone who travels to an 'alien' location for the purpose of some form of

enjoyment and/or personal enrichment" (Esman 1984: 453), tourism in the Kelabit Highlands can be said to be a recent development beginning in the late 1990s. Historically, however, despite its geographically isolated location, the highland region has been known to European colonial administrators and explorers since the early 20th century. Their travel accounts provided early descriptions of the area, its inhabitants and their culture (see Banks 1936, 1937; Douglas 1909a, 1909b, 1912; Mjoberg 1925; Moulton 1912). In the 1930s and 1940s, foreign visitors to the highlands included Christian missionaries from the Borneo Evangelical Mission (BEM) who proselytised among the various native groups of interior Sarawak (Lees 1979; Newton 1988), and British and Australian soldiers who came during the Second World War. After the war, the airstrip originally built and used by the foreign missionaries and soldiers, and which were subsequently taken over by the Department of Civil Aviation in 1957 for general use, facilitated travels in and out of the highlands and further opened the Kelabit Highlands to the outside world. In 1996, a new concrete airstrip was built in Bario, the administrative and trade centre of the Kelabit Highlands (see Chapter 2), and today the Malaysian Airlines rural service (MAS Wings) offers regular (three times daily) flight connections to Bario from the coastal towns of Marudi and Miri. This rural air service (together with the logging roads mentioned above) serves not only the local communities in the highlands, but also brings in a considerable number of outside visitors to the region. For a relatively remote region, today, the tourism industry in the Kelabit Highlands is a significant contributor to the local economy, and tourist numbers have been increasing significantly over the years (Harris 2009; Rodger 2005).

Harris (2009) observes that tourism in Bario is an outgrowth of the e-Bario project, which was a rural information and communication technologies (ICT) development initiative by a team of researchers from the University Malaysia Sarawak that began in 1998 (see Harris *et al*. 2001). The project was centred around the establishment of a telecentre in 2001 (see Bala 2014), which is "a community centre that offers shared access to information and communication technologies for the purpose of community-led development and poverty reduction" (Harris 2009: 128). Harris further adds that as a "stimulus to tourism", the e-Bario project "has provided a significant boost to the tourism industry by facilitating the growth of websites for promotion and the exchange of information between potential visitors and the homestay operators in the community" (Harris 2009: 128). In addition to being a boost for tourism in its early years, the e-Bario project has also played an instrumental role in aiding efforts to preserve Kelabit traditional knowledge and cultural heritage. For example, the project's ICT facilities served as a platform for the creation of the Bario Lakuh Digital Library, which aimed to preserve the Kelabit oral tradition (Yeo *et al*. 2006), and a GIS-based cultural site database (Hitchner 2009a, 2012).

One particular type of tourism in the Kelabit Highlands is ethnic or cultural tourism, which normally includes travel in areas that are considered off the "beaten path", and which offers opportunities of "visits to native homes and villages, observation of dances and ceremonies, and shopping for primitive wares or curios" (Smith 1989: 4). In this particular form of tourism, the visitors' experience of the local culture is given emphasis. In the Kelabit Highlands, visitors can visit the longhouses, some of which offer homestay packages that include meals of traditional Kelabit food,

and the chance to participate in activities such as fishing and collecting wild plants for food from the "jungle supermarket" (see Barbour 2010), and to observe cultural performances. Handicrafts and other local products (e.g. highland rice, salt and pineapple) are also sold at guesthouses and shops around Bario for visitors to purchase as souvenirs. In the Kelabit Highlands, there are also various cultural sites to visit such as the salt springs and salt production sites, and the Christian 'prayer hills'. The megalithic monuments of the Kelabit Highlands have also become one of the region's main tourist attractions (see section 5.4.1 below). Since 2006, an annual cultural event that pulls in huge volumes of visitors to the Kelabit Highlands is the Bario Food and Cultural Festival, which showcases Kelabit cuisines, as well as other aspects of Kelabit traditional culture, such as song, music and dance performances, contests of traditional games and exhibitions of material culture.

In the case of the megalithic monuments in the Kelabit Highlands, tourism has played an important role in increasing its value as a local heritage. Moreover, I would argue that the beginning of megalithic conservation in the Kelabit Highlands is closely linked to tourism. Since the late 1990s, the Kelabit Highlands has received the annual arrivals of youth volunteer-tourists under the World Challenge Expeditions and Trekforce Expeditions programmes in the United Kingdom, which organise expeditions and survival training that are combined with community development work (Harris 2009). One of the earliest local efforts to conserve the megalithic monuments of the Kelabit Highlands was done in collaboration with these foreign tourist-volunteers. As Poline Bala mentions in the Bario Food and Cultural Festival 2014 booklet, in 2002, "the Trekforce Group from the UK was directed by the community to help identify and mark

some of these [megalithic] sites. It was a first attempt to [*sic*] by the community to conduct a cultural audit of the stone monuments." Since then, different groups of World Challenge and Trekforce volunteers have been recruited to assist in the community mapping of cultural sites (see Bala 2010b). In a newspaper coverage, it was reported that from late 2009 to 2011, Trekforce volunteers have assisted the Kelabit community to mark 105 cultural sites, including megalithic monuments, in Bario, Pa' Umor and Pa' Main (Sman 2011).

Although not normally seen as tourists, another group of visitors to the Kelabit Highlands who have contributed in elevating the status of the megalithic monuments as heritage objects is outside researchers. In recent years, 'research tourism', which is "a newly recognized concept that values the contributions that researchers can make to the communities that they study" (Harris 2009: 130) has increased local awareness of the archaeological and cultural significance of the upland megaliths. As we shall see further below (see section 5.4.3), the results of recent research and the expertise of outside researchers have also been incorporated in cultural exhibitions that aimed to promote the megalithic monuments as Kelabit cultural heritage. These exhibitions are normally staged in conjuction with cultural festivals and thus, they also demonstrate the role that megalithic monuments play today in the local tourism industry. Beside that, other research outputs that have promoted the megalithic heritage of the Kelabit Highlands include a visitor's guide to the megaliths of the highland region, which was produced by the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and the Sarawak Forest Department (SFD) based on a survey of cultural sites that was conducted in 2005 in areas bordering the Pulong Tau National Park (see below), as well as information

leaflets produced by the Cultured Rainforest Project. These research outputs have been disseminated among the various local communities, and in some cases, they have been displayed in guesthouses as information material for visitors.

### 5.3. COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION OF MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS

With the exception of the gazetting of the Batuh Ritung monument as a state historical site in 1993, the state has played a limited role in the protection and conservation of megalithic monuments in the Kelabit Highlands. For the most part, megalithic conservation efforts in the Kelabit Highlands have been community-based. These community-based efforts are situated within the wider initiative to conserve the natural and cultural resources of the Kelabit Highlands, as well as of the greater interior highland region of Borneo (see Topp and Eghenter 2005), in response to the threats posed by modern development. In modern times, the preservation of old cultural sites is especially a concern since local memory and knowledge of these sites are disappearing. As Hitchner (2009a: 3) notes, "many of these sites have mythological, genealogical, historical, or cultural significance, and although the Kelabit are now enthusiastic Christians, they are anxious to preserve these sites for future generations." Due to this concern, beginning in the early 2000s, local community members have mobilised, with the support of various organisations, to document and to protect known cultural sites in the highlands. Over the years, a large number of megalithic and other cultural sites have been marked for protection from logging activities, and discussions with logging companies concerning the importance of the

megalithic sites to the local communities have also been conducted (see Hitchner *et al*. 2009).

As mentioned previously, the earliest community-based megalithic conservation efforts is linked to the development of tourism in Bario, and was conducted in 2002 with the assistance of foreign tourist-volunteers. Following that, another notable effort to document and to protect the cultural sites in the Kelabit Highlands is the socio-economic and cultural study conducted in 2005, as part of the 'Transboundary Biodiversity Conservation: The Pulong Tau National Park' programme, by the Sarawak Forest Department (SFD) and the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO). This study, which was conducted among the indigenous communities living in the highland region bordering the eastern part of the Pulong Tau National Park was initiated "at the request of the Kelabit communities who were serious about preserving their precious cultural heritage" (Cluny and Chai 2007: iv), and "who are very concerned that their cultural relics may be destroyed or damaged by looting, vandalism and logging activities" (Cluny and Chai 2007: v). In this survey, a total of 88 cultural sites were recorded, 74 of which were located within timber concession areas. Out of the 88 cultural sites recorded, 42 sites were megalithic monuments, while 41 were burial sites, which included megalithic and jar (*belanai*) burials. Additionally, five non-stone monuments (i.e. *nabang* and *kawang*, see Chapter 3 for typological descriptions) were also identified. In order to protect the cultural sites from damage by logging activities, the site locations were mapped and buffer zones surrounding individual sites were marked. Maps and other site information were also distributed to the timber companies, community leaders, and the Sarawak Museum.

Building on the work done by SFD and ITTO, a later survey was conducted by the anthropologist Sarah Hitchner as part of her doctoral research on the Kelabit engagements with conservation. It has to be highlighted that like SFD and ITTO survey, Hitchner's survey was also driven by the interest of the local Kelabit community. In her own words, Hitchner (2009a: 2) mentions: "I was asked by the community to focus on documenting the sites of cultural interest to them." In other words, Hitchner's study was shaped in order to serve the interest of a Kelabit community mapping of cultural sites project. Reiterating the concern over threats posed by logging to Kelabit cultural sites, in the project's unpublished report, Bala (2010b: 8) mentions the purpose of the cultural mapping exercise:

> As most of the land in the Kelabit Highlands has now been concessioned for logging and is now currently being logged, or soon will be logged, it is imperative that the Kelabit people submit to the timber companies and relevant government agencies legally-valid maps showing the areas they want to protect from the detrimental effects of logging, and also that they mark these sites/boundaries on the ground to prevent logging contractors from accidentally damaging these areas.

This more extensive survey listed a total of 540 cultural sites throughout most of the Kelabit Highlands, including sites previously recorded by Cluny and Chai (2007). In addition to megalithic monuments, burial sites (megalithic and jar burials), monumental landscape modifications (*kawang*, *nabang*, *taka*), old longhouse sites (*ruma' ma'on*) and other culturally-significant sites such as salt springs (*main tudtu'*), animal salt licks (*rupan*, which are the traditional hunting grounds of the Kelabit), mountain passes (*ra'an*) and caves (*lubang*) were also recorded (Hitchner 2009a). An outcome of this community-mapping of cultural sites project was the creation of a GIS-based cultural site database, which as mentioned previously, made use of ICT facilities

provided by the e-Bario project.

A further outcome of these conservation efforts is the changing perception of megalithic sites, and the increasing awareness among the local people of the importance to protect and to preserve their natural and cultural resources. It has been noted that it was because of the aforementioned cultural mapping project that "the local community became aware of the huge importance of the jungle in their lives and began to think of ways to conserve it" (Pasan 2013: 1). Furthermore, in my interview with John Pasan, who is a member of the Pa' Umor community and presently a passionate local heritage advocate, he admitted that despite having grown up in the Kelabit Highlands, in his younger years he was ignorant of the megalithic sites in the area. It was through his involvement in the Kelabit community mapping project, and observation of the megaliths' tourism potentials (he runs a village homestay in Pa' Umor and occasionally guides tourists) that he developed a more serious interest in the megalithic sites in the highlands. In my interview with him, he remarked, "the more I get to know about the megaliths, the more I like to take care of them, and to protect them, to see ways how I can help to preserve them." This, of course, is in direct contrast to the previous Kelabit attitude that generally treated the megalithic sites with ambivalence and neglect (see above, and also Chapter 4).

## 5.4. REPRESENTATIONS OF THE MEGALITHIC HERITAGE

In this section, I discuss three examples of how megalithic monuments are represented as Kelabit cultural heritage. I begin with a discussion of the representation of the megaliths as tourist attractions.

### 5.4.1. Megalithic attractions of the Kelabit Highlands

Monumental constructions that are linked to the cultures of indigenous peoples in Borneo are increasingly seen as tourism commodities that could attract the visits of tourists. For example, Datan (2011) proposes that the crocodile-shaped earthen effigies made traditionally by the Lun Bawang or Lun Dayeh for ritual purposes be promoted as the people's cultural heritage and preserved for tourism purposes. Similarly, previous studies of the megalithic monuments in the Kelabit Highlands (see above) have also highlighted the megaliths' tourism potentials. For example, based on the survey that was conducted in 2005, SFD and ITTO recommended that the megalithic sites be preserved and used for tourism activities (Cluny and Chai 2007; Tay 2007). In discussing the outcome of the Kelabit community mapping project, Bala (2010b: 10) also notes:

> With their deep historical significance and meanings, the preservation of these sites as cultural heritage will help the people of the Kelabit Highlands navigate an uncertain future which will come about as the forests in which they live is logged. This is especially beneficial to the business of eco-tourism in the Kelabit Highlands, which provides long-term sustainable revenue to people here and possibilities for future development in this sector.

Additionally, in a separate study, Adeyinka-Ojo and Nair (2016: 117) observe that "archaeological sites are becoming tourist attractions in Bario."

Today, in the Kelabit Highlands, megalithic monuments are an important aspect of the local tourism industry. In Pa' Lungan, Batu Ritong [or Batuh Ritung] is not only the name of an iconic monument, it is also the name of a guesthouse. In tourist literature (print and online), megalithic monuments are often portrayed as one of the main attractions of the Kelabit Highlands. For example, in the Lonely Planet's travel guidebook on Borneo, the Kelabit Highlands' megaliths are highlighted under a "Don't Miss" section (Albiston *et al*. 2016: 185). Megalithic monuments are also commonly associated with traditional Kelabit culture (see Chin 1980: 23), and thus, have become one of the 'ethnic markers' (see Adams 1984) of the Kelabit. However, unlike for example, the megaliths of the Ngadha in Flores, Eastern Indonesia (see Cole 2003), the megalithic monuments of the Kelabit Highlands are not part of an ongoing or a living tradition. Because of that, they are often romanticised and portrayed as objects belonging to a distant and enigmatic past. For instance, the same Lonely Planet guidebook mentioned above described the upland megaliths as "Bario's mysterious megaliths." They are also commonly associated with legends about mythical giants and spiritual powers. In this way, the megaliths are made 'exotic', and thus, more attractive to outside visitors (see Adams 1984).

Guesthouses in the Bario area often recommend to tourists the megalithic sites that are located within the vicinity of villages (Fig. 5.1) as places to be visited. For megalithic sites that are located further away, guided tours could be arranged, or

alternatively, some guesthouses also provide trail maps that are readily marked with the locations of megalithic sites for the more independent visitors to 'discover' on their own (Fig. 5.2). In the case of the 'Pa Umor Conservation Camp Trail', which is an ecotourism effort initiated by members of the Pa' Umor village, megalithic monuments are incorporated as attractions along jungle trekking and camping routes (Fig. 5.3). These megaliths and other cultural sites, which are linked by trails to several jungle camps, are considered "great attraction" for the tourists, and "would educate them about the local history and customs as well as providing a source of income and economic support for the local community" (Pasan 2013: 2).

The above statement indicates that as a tourism commodity, megalithic sites are of significant economic value to the Kelabit community. Today, any damage or disturbance to megalithic sites are taken very seriously as it has the potential to affect the livelihood of villagers, particularly those who work as local tourist guides. During my fieldwork, I was approached by one such villager, who reported to me with evident displeasure the recent disturbance of a particular megalithic site, which was caused by tree-cutting activities by people from a neighbouring village. The importance of megalithic sites to locals like him was implied by one of his comments. He remarked, "if the stones are not there anymore, what do we have to show to the tourists." This comment, I argue, reflects the megaliths' current tourism and economic significance, as much as it does their value as a cultural heritage that ought to be preserved for future generations.



Figure 5.1. Two standing stones or *batuh senuped* in a paddy field in Bario, and the Millennium Kawang (indicated by the arrow) in the background.

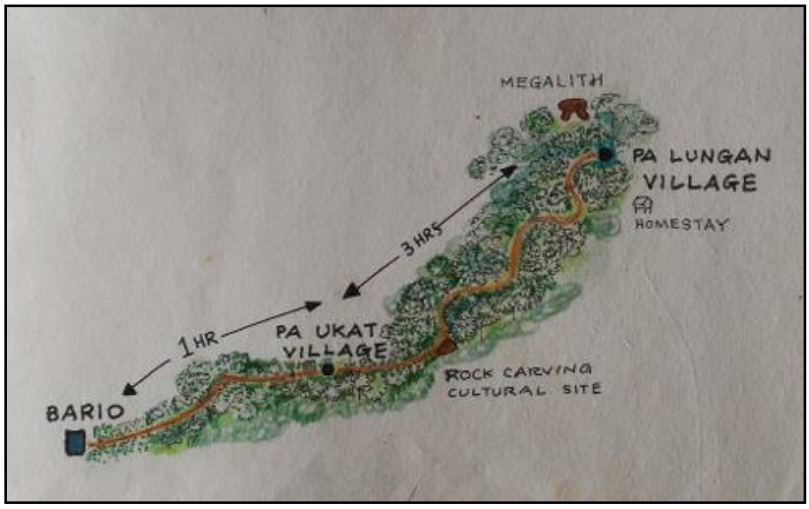



Figure 5.2. A Bario-Pa' Lungan trail map provided by the Junglebluesdream Guesthouse, which shows the locations of the Batuh Narit Pa' Ukat ("Rock carving cultural site") and the Batuh Ritung monument ("Megalith").

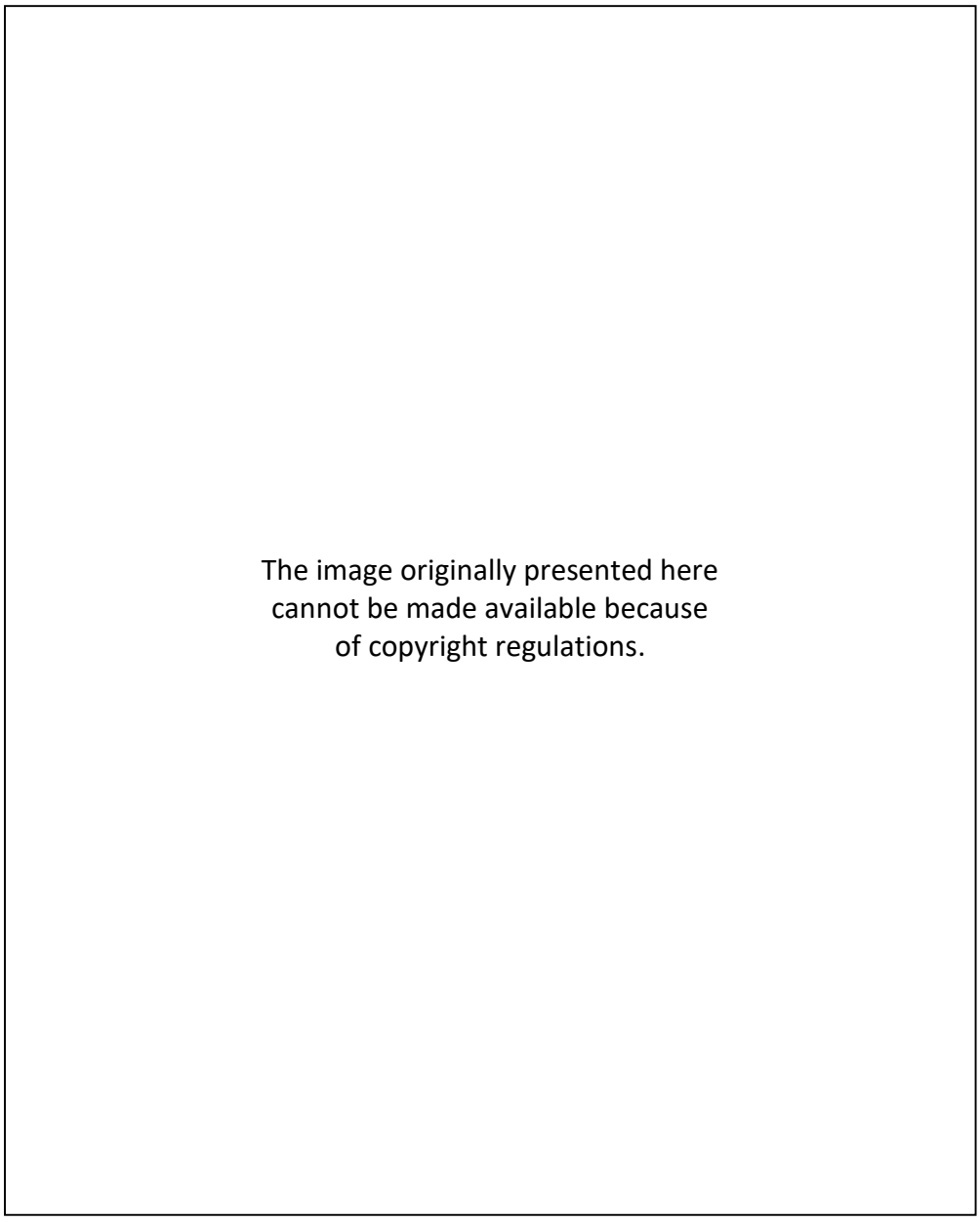



Figure 5.3. A map of the Pa' Umor Conservation Camp Trail, which incorporates jungle camps, trekking trails, and megalithic/cultural sites for eco-tourism (Map courtesy of John Pasan).

### 5.4.2. The Millennium Kawang

The Millennium Kawang, as its name implies, is a *kawang* type monument (see Chapter 3) that was built by the Kelabit community of Bario Asal around the end of year 1999 to mark the coming of the new millennium (Fig. 5.1 above; see also Fig. 3.9 in Chapter 3). The *kawang* is technically not a megalithic monument as it is not made out of stone(s). However, as discussed in Chapter 3, to the Kelabit and to observers like Tom Harrisson, non-lithic monuments are also considered to be equally 'megalithic' in their making (Harrisson 1958c: 699). In this section, the Millennium Kawang is discussed because it provides a good example of how traditional monuments (their material notwithstanding) are represented as Kelabit heritage in the present. Nowadays, because of its conspicuity (it was built on the ridge of a prominent mountain range, the Punggupawan), accessibility (it is located near the Bario Asal longhouse), and cultural connection to an old Kelabit custom, it has become a place of interest for visitors to observe from afar, or even to visit, especially since its elevated location provides "magnificient views over the Bario plateau" (Leffman and Lim 2012: 385).

The Millennium Kawang is also interesting in the sense that it is a monument built in a time when traditional monument building was already a thing of the past, as it was a practice that was abandoned by the Kelabit after 1950 following their conversion to Christianity (see Chapter 4). It is important to note, however, that the Kelabit today continue to commemorate important events and people by building monuments. For example, modern commemorative monuments that can be found in Bario today include monuments that commemorate the (Christian) Revival of 1973 (Fig.

5.4), Second World War events (Fig. 5.5), and the memory of the victims (most of whom were Kelabit community leaders) of a deadly plane crash in 1991 (Fig. 5.6). Nevertheless, what is striking about the Millennium Kawang is that, in its form, it echoes a traditional monument type that was last built more than half a century ago.



Figure 5.4. A monument commemorating the Bario (Christian) Revival of 1973.



Figure 5.5. Monuments commemorating events of the Second World War.



Figure 5.6. A monument commemorating the memory of the victims of a deadly plane crash in 1991, which claimed the lives of many Kelabit leaders.

In a way, the construction of the Millennium Kawang may be seen as a revival of a traditional practice. Having said that, however, to my knowledge, the Millennium Kawang is the only example of a new construction of a 'traditional' Kelabit monument, although as Bulan (2015: 21) mentions, "there are talks of clearing and recreating some of the old [*kawang*], perpetuating the age old Kelabit custom." In the past, the making of the *kawang* monument is associated with pre-Christian funeral rites and feasts that involved spirit worship, ritual sacrifice and the consumption of copious amounts of rice beer. As discussed in Chapter 4, these are some of the main reasons why the practice of monument building was abandoned by the Kelabit following their conversion to Christianity in the late 1940s. Built in a time when most Kelabit are staunch Christians, the Millennium Kawang was constructed for secular reasons that do not contradict present-day religious beliefs. In an interview that I conducted with Robert Lian-Saging (a Kelabit scholar and a retired Director of Immigration, and an instrumental person

behind the construction of the Millennium Kawang), he mentioned that the idea to commemorate the new millennium by making a *kawang* was to celebrate and to mark the rare occasion when "we are fortunate to live in the age where we are starting the new century". He further explained:

> The concept of the Millennium Kawang was to show that in the 21st century, the Kelabit people are now ready to face the world. And they are ready to open up to new ideas from the outside. I think those were my original words I said when we built it. And then now it is a symbolic opening for the young Kelabit to go out there, to go out and conquer the world, so to say. We face the world with confidence. We are brave enough to face the world.

Furthermore, in a slightly different interpretation, according to Hitchner (2009a: 22), symbolically, the Millennium Kawang "is said to be the gateway for good fortune to enter the Kelabit Highlands."

A question that has to be asked is why did the Kelabit community revive a traditional monumental form in order to build a 21st century monument? In my opinion, there is more to the construction of the Millennium Kawang than just the reasons mentioned above. Firstly, I would argue that underlying the monument's construction was also a conscious and deliberate effort to pay homage to, and to bring to the fore, a Kelabit custom of the past. In my interview, Robert stressed the integral part that monument building played in traditional Kelabit culture and in the social lives of the Kelabit people in the past, which is a point that he has also made in his previous writings (see Lian-Saging 1976/77; Lian-Saging and Bulan 1989). As if to illustrate this, he pointed out to me the four *kawang* made by his grandfather, Semera Langit, on a hill named Buduk Arur Tekang, located nearby the Bario Asal longhouse (see also

Hitchner 2009a:42). The construction of the modern-day *kawang* also serves to remind the Kelabit people, especially the younger generation, of their cultural heritage, at a time when there is concern that the Kelabit are losing their sense of traditional culture, as a result of "cultural disturbances" (King 1978b: 15) brought about by socio-cultural transformations (i.e. the adoption of the modern ways of life and new beliefs, as well as the more recent cultural phenomena of intercultural marriage and outmigration to urban areas). Furthermore, environmental changes due to the pressures of development (e.g. logging, see above) have also made the Kelabit worry about the preservation of their culture and identity. Thus, the construction of the Millennium Kawang can also be understood as a revitalisation of a traditional (and previously abandoned) practice as a response or an adaptation to environmental stress (see Rubis 2017).

I would further argue that the building of the Millennium Kawang represents an exertive act that was meant to highlight the issue of the lack of preservation of Kelabit traditional monuments. As Hitcher (2009a: 21) notes "as most of the *kawang* have grown over, they are not visible from a distance anymore." According to Robert Lian-Saging, this is due to the lack of awareness among the Kelabit of the historical and cultural significance of the monuments. Thus, the construction of the Millennium Kawang is an important act in order to demonstrate and to maintain the Kelabit people's connection with their past, and to ensure that the cultural memory of the Kelabit monument building tradition is retained. Like the Kelabit name-changing ceremony (a practice that is thought to be derived from the pre-Christian *burak lua'* initiation ritual, see Amster 1999), the building of the Millennium Kawang, "satisfies

nostalgic impulses created by the loss of traditional culture itself, providing a sense of historical continuity with past practices" (Amster 1999: 184).

I would propose another underlying reason for the construction of the Millennium Kawang, and that is to provide the Kelabit community of Bario Asal specifically (as the monument was built by their community) with a sense of continuity with the land. Before discussing this further, it is necessary to gain an understanding of the settlement history of the area. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Bario Asal is often regarded as the pioneer settlement in the Bario area (the name 'Bario Asal' means 'original Bario') as the other communities surrounding Bario Asal of today were largely established in the 1960s following the resettlement of various Kelabit communities from different parts of the Kelabit Highlands as a result of security concerns during the events of the Brunei Rebellion and the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation (see S.B. Bala 2014, for a Kelabit account of the resettlement process). Because of the historical migration of other Kelabit communities into the area, as well as the growing population, and expanding settlements and farmland in the present, there has been an increased pressure on the land; land has now become a limited resource, leading to increasing anxiety over land control and ownership (see Bulan 2003). In his study of the rebuilding of traditional 'village temples' in Adonara Island in Eastern Indonesia, Barnes (2011) suggests village politics as a factor in the resurgence of a traditional practice. A similar argument can be made in the case of the construction of the Millennium Kawang. I would argue that the Millennium Kawang can be seen as a symbolic statement, or an assertion, by the Bario Asal community that they have more rights to the land in the Bario area compared to the other communities, by virtue of their

forebears being the pioneer settlers of the area. As stated to me by an elder villager, "This is our *kampong* [village] you know. Only Bario Asal people can make *kawang* in Bario…If Arur Dalan[7] wants to do it, they are able to do it with the agreement of the people of Bario Asal." The Millennium Kawang was built on a mountain range (the Punggupawan) that used to be the main pass to reach the Bario valley by foot in the past. Furthermore, according to Robert Lian-Saging, the location of the *kawang* was specifically chosen "because it is a prominent place, and it is also the main pass that guide (aeroplane) pilots into Bario." More than that, however, based on information that I gathered from my interviews, the Punggupawan range is also the location of a number of previous *kawang* (see also Hitchner 2009a). In fact, I was told that the Millennium Kawang itself was a reclearing of an old *kawang*, a fact that was also mentioned by Bulan (2015:21). Thus, tellingly, the location of the Millennium Kawang may have also been chosen to demonstrate the Bario Asal community's long history of occupation and to support their claim of rights to the land in the area.

### 5.4.3. Megalithic exhibitions in the Kelabit Community Museum

The proverbial seeds that grew to become the Kelabit Community Museum (KCM) (Fig. 5.7) were sown in 2011, when the Kelabit community represented by the Rurum Kelabit Sarawak began consulting museum and heritage experts from Deakin University, Australia (see Sweet and Horman 2012). According to Sweet and Kelly (2013: 27), "the motivation for the project is underpinned by the Kelabit people's

[7] A neighbouring village that is made up of groups who migrated from the Kubaan area to the Bario area in the 1960s, see Chapter 6.

strong sense of a shared destiny, as well as the evident need to preserve their cultural heritage." In this way, the establishment of the KCM is a continuation of previous cultural conservation efforts that were carried out in light of the various socio-cultural transformations and environmental alterations that were perceived to have threatened the preservation of Kelabit traditional knowledge and culture. Furthermore, as another effort to showcase and to promote Kelabit cultural heritage, the KCM can also be seen as an outgrowth of cultural tourism in the Kelabit Highlands. Thus, like other performances in cultural heritage, the conception and establishment of the KCM can be said to be a "vehicle for political positioning for the assertion of indigenous identities as well as an effort to capitalize on the economic potential of…heritage through tourism" (Cai 2018: 184). After several years of planning and building, the Kelabit Community Museum was officially opened in July 2016, as part of the events of the Bario Food and Cultural Festival 2016. In the Kelabit language, the museum is known as *Teripun*, which carries the meaning of "a safe storage place", and moreover, "it is the word that [the Kelabit] believe most approximates the preservation activities of a modern museum" (Sweet and Kelly 2014: 10).

At the heart of the establishment of the KCM were also concerns regarding Kelabit agency and control over their own culture and future. It has been said that the community museum was set up in order for the Kelabit community "to take back ownership of their own heritage and the representation of their identity" (Sweet and Kelly 2014: 11). In other words, the idea of a community-owned museum grew in response to issues of "representation of Kelabit identity and appropriate authority in the heritage interpretation" (Sweet and Kelly 2013: 28). In the eyes of the Kelabit,

cultural representations of their people by outsiders (e.g. European explorers and colonial officers, as well as foreign researchers) have not always been entirely accurate. Commenting on writings about the Kelabit people and culture by Western observers, Lian Saging (1979: 15) notes, “the writings of westerners are not bad intrinsically, but one cannot ignore the fact that these writers were people who visited the Kelabit only briefly, and may not really have understood the Kelabit.” More recently, controversy has also arisen over the gross simplification or misrepresentation of Kelabit culture by a foreign anthropologist (for the work in question, see Janowski 1997), which the Kelabit community has strongly objected to (see Bala 2002). To Poline Bala, a Kelabit anthropologist, such misrepresentation of the Kelabit culture “invoked feelings of disappointment, pain, and even being in danger, resulting from an erroneous cross-cultural representation” (Bala 2002: 4).



Figure 5.7. The Kelabit Community Museum in Bario, Kelabit Highlands.

There is also the perception that research conducted by outsiders in the Kelabit Highlands have at times led to the damage of cultural sites. In particular, archaeological

research has come to be seen as a potential threat to the preservation of megalithic sites (Hitchner 2009a: 26). Further to this, Hitchner (2009a: 1) observes that the Kelabit are aware of the previous excavation of megalithic sites by the archaeologist Tom Harrisson (for example, see Chapter 4) and "often with a tinge of resentment, they know which artefacts he took from them." I have also discovered similar sentiments in my field interviews. One of my informants, a man from the village of Pa' Ukat, expressed with regret: "he [Harrisson] dug them all, what a pity." Another man from the village of Arur Dalan, in expressing the not uncommon perception that Harrisson 'stole' from archaeological sites in the Kelabit Highlands, thought that it was fortunate that Harrisson had never excavated the megalithic sites in the Arur Dalan community's old homeland in the Kubaan valley.

One way the Kelabit community has attempted to regain control over the representation and preservation of Kelabit cultural heritage is by actively monitoring and steering the research conducted by outsiders. For example, I have mentioned above how previous surveys of cultural sites conducted by outside researchers and institutions were initiated by the request and needs of the Kelabit community. To oversee the research done by outsiders, the Kelabit community has set up a Community Research Steering Committee, which is tasked to "oversee all research done in the Kelabit Highlands, monitor outside researchers, and ensure repatriation of data and reports produced by them" (Hitchner 2009b: 241). Furthermore, this is to ensure that the community reaps the benefits from the research that is carried out amongst them (see for example, Amster 1995; Hitchner 2009b). A recent example of how research by outsiders have been used for the community's benefit is

demonstrated by the megalithic exhibitions held at the KCM, which I will discuss further below.

As an indigenous museum (see Stanley 2007), the KCM functions to showcase Kelabit culture. This can be seen in its building design that was inspired by features of the highland landscape, as well as by the traditional paddy storage hut and longhouse of the Kelabit people (Kelly 2016: 12). Some of the exhibitions at the KCM highlight the historical events and persons that have shaped the lives of the Kelabit people. The upper gallery of the KCM houses a display of photographic portraits of past and present Kelabit paramount chiefs, as well as exhibitions that highlight the life and work of Tom Harrisson,[8] and events of the Second World War that took place in the interior highland region of Borneo. Beside that, there are also exhibitions of Kelabit material culture, which includes heirloom objects such as beads and jars, as well as agricultural and carpentry tools. Further, the megalithic culture of the Kelabit Highlands has featured prominently in the museum exhibition, as discussed below.

I would argue that the megalithic culture of the Kelabit Highlands has occupied centre stage at the KCM since the museum's inception in 2016. On one hand, this reflects the central position that megalithic monuments occupied in traditional Kelabit culture (see Lian-Saging and Bulan 1989), as well as the megaliths' present importance as Kelabit cultural heritage. More widely, the megalithic monuments of the Kelabit

[8] The exhibition on "*Tuan Mayur* (Tom Harrisson): The Man Who Discovered *The World Within*" was designed and donated to the Kelabit Community Museum by the Malaysia Architect Association (PAM) Sarawak Chapter. It was previously exhibited at the Padang Merdeka in Kuching, in conjunction with the World Architecture Day (WAD) 2015.

Highlands are also recognised by the Sarawak government as cultural heritage of the state (Chin 1980), and over the years they have been featured as cultural heritage of the Kelabit people in a number of permanent and temporary exhibitions at the main Sarawak Museum in the state capital, Kuching, as well as in regional museums in Marudi (the Baram Regional Museum) and in Miri (the Petroleum Museum). Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the state's recognition of the megalithic monuments' significance as heritage objects is exemplified by the gazetting of the Batuh Ritung monument as a state historical site in 1993.

The centrality of the megalithic monuments in the KCM also reflects the increasing research interest in the megalithic monuments beginning in the middle of the 2000s, which went along with the growing interest in their preservation (see above). More than that, it is a manifestation of the control over the representation of Kelabit heritage that the Kelabit community has strived to achieve over the years. There are now three major exhibitions at the KCM that are related to the megalithic monuments of the Kelabit Highlands (see below). All of these exhibitions were set up by the KCM in collaboration with outside researchers (including myself, see below), who have conducted studies on the upland megaliths in recent years that arguably have also contributed to a growing sense of the megaliths' heritage importance. In this way, the Kelabit community has made use of recent research outputs in order to showcase and to promote their megalithic heritage to the outside world. It has also been reported that it is the hope of the Kelabit community that the KCM will become "a central reference point for current and future research of these cultural sites" (Sman 2016). Furthermore, through the setting up of the megalithic exhibitions as a way of

sharing the results of research, the Kelabit community has also ensured that outside researchers have reciprocated for the benefit of the local community.

The first two exhibitions were set up in 2016, in conjunction with the opening of the KCM. One of these carried the theme of 'The Living Landscape: Cultural Monuments and the Historical Landscape of the Kelabit Highlands' exhibition, and it was an exhibition that I helped to curate, in collaboration with the Rurum Kelabit Sarawak and Poline Bala, the Kelabit anthropologist and a colleague of mine at the University Malaysia Sarawak. This exhibition, through eleven panels of descriptive texts accompanied by large colour photographs (Fig. 5.8), highlighted the various types of megalithic burials and commemorative monuments, their cultural and historical significance to the Kelabit community, and the history of megalithic research in the Kelabit Highlands (for details on these, see Chapter 3 of this thesis).



Figure 5.8. Exhibition on 'The Living Landscape: Cultural Monuments and the Historical Landscape of the Kelabit Highlands' at the Kelabit Community Museum in Bario.

The second megalithic exhibition that was organised in 2016 constituted a part of the 'Cultured Rainforest' exhibition, which presented the main results of the Cultured Rainforest Project (2007-2010) that investigated the past and present relationships between people and the rainforest in the Kelabit Highlands (see Barker *et al*. 2008; Barker *et al*. 2009; Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2010). This exhibition, which comprised twelve exhibition panels and video displays, highlighted the various ways how humans have interacted with the forests over thousands of years in the Kelabit Highlands, as evidenced by palaeoecology, archaeology and ethnography. In terms of the archaeology, megalithic cemeteries in particular were presented as obvious traces of past human activities that can be read in the landscape, and in this exhibition, the key results of the archaeological excavations at the megalithic sites of Long Kelit and Long Di'it (see Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2010) in the southern Kelabit Highlands were selected for display.

In 2017, an additional megalithic exhibition took place at the KCM, entitled 'Megalith Culture of the Kelabit Highlands Through Time and Space'. This exhibition, which was based on new research conducted by a team from the Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts, University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), focused on the application of technology and artistic mediums in the visual documentation of two well-known megalithic monuments in the Kelabit Highlands: the large stone dolmen of Batuh Ritung and the carved boulder, Batuh Narit Arur Bilit (see Rafee *et al*. 2019). As arguably the main draw of this exhibition, visitors were able to try a novel way of interacting with the megaliths through a virtual reality headset.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter considered the megalithic monuments in the Kelabit Highlands as a cultural heritage of the Kelabit people. Furthermore, this chapter has shed light on the various historical and recent events and people that have contributed towards the making of the megalithic monuments as heritage. As this chapter has made clear, the megalithic monuments are today considered by the Kelabit community as cultural objects that are worth conserving. I argued that the Kelabit's present interest in the conservation of the megalithic monuments stemmed from wider and earlier (since the 1960s) concerns about heritage preservation due to the lack of awareness and preservation of the Kelabit traditional culture, which in turn is due to the social changes brought about by modernisation and religious conversion (see Chapter 4). Moreover, another influence on the Kelabit's awakening of heritage consciousness was Tom Harrisson, who through his work advocated for and inspired the study of Kelabit traditional culture, including the megalithic culture. This chapter has also shown the megalithic conservation efforts that began in the Kelabit Highlands in the early 2000s to be an immediate response to the arrival of commercial logging activities − which have encroached on Kelabit territories and, in some cases, have damaged existing megalithic sites − and the growth of local tourism. With the latter in particular, this chapter has shown that not only are the megalithic monuments increasingly seen as potential visitors' attractions, but some of the earliest conservation efforts were also initiated with the involvement of foreign volunteer-tourists. Nevertheless, as discussed in this chapter, because they are responding to immediate local concerns in regard to the aforementioned issue of the preservation of land and cultural resources in the

Kelabit Highlands, the megalithic conservation efforts, as part of wider efforts to conserve local culture and environment, have largely been community-based.

This chapter has also analysed representations of the megalithic monuments as heritage using three specific example: the megalithic monuments' role as a highland tourist attraction; the construction of the Millennium Kawang – a monument which, in its making around the end of 1999 to commemorate the turn of the new millennium, also revived a traditional form of Kelabit monument; and the megalithic exhibitions held at the Kelabit Community Museum in Bario. I suggested that these uses of the megalithic monuments as cultural heritage can be viewed as responses to various underlying issues affecting the Kelabit community. Besides to address the aforementioned issues of the lack of awareness and preservation of Kelabit traditional culture, other issues that are of concern include the issues of cultural continuity, rights to land, and control over research, as well as ownership and representations of cultural heritage.

In examining the megalithic monuments of the Kelabit Highlands as a cultural heritage, this chapter has demonstrated the various ways in which the megaliths have been reinterpreted and used by the Kelabit community in order to serve their present needs. Most importantly, this chapter has shown how after a period of being undervalued and shunned (see previous chapter), the megalithic monuments have regained their importance in the lives of the local people. The next chapter will continue to provide additional insights into this emerging theme.

# CHAPTER 6

# MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS AND THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF THE KUBAAN VALLEY, WESTERN KELABIT HIGHLANDS

This chapter presents the results of a recent documentation project that aimed to record the megalithic monuments in the Kubaan valley, in the western Kelabit Highlands. The Kubaan valley is the home of two previous Kelabit communities: Kubaan and Pa' Tik. In the early 1960s, however, due to security concerns brought about by the events of the Brunei Revolt and *Konfrontasi* or the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation (see Chapter 2), these two communities were relocated to Arur Dalan in the Bario area. As a result of this resettlement, members of the two communities were not only displaced from their former longhouses, farmlands and hunting grounds, but also the monuments and cultural sites in their old homeland. The aim of this chapter is to examine the present relationship between the Arur Dalan community and the megalithic sites in the Kubaan valley. This chapter begins by briefly describing the Arur Dalan community and its historical link with the Kubaan valley. A historical account of the former Kubaan and Pa' Tik communities, and the megalithic monuments in the region is also provided. Following that, this chapter discusses the recent documentation project and its results. I show that the megalithic remains in the Kubaan valley are a part of a cultural landscape, which also consists of various other cultural sites that resulted from previous long-term occupation of the area. Today, as repositories of personal and collective memories, the megalithic remains and other places in the cultural landscape provide the members of the present-day Arur Dalan

community with a sense of identity, history and belonging to their ancestral homeland in the Kubaan valley.

## 6.1. ARUR DALAN, AND THE FORMER KUBAAN AND PA' TIK COMMUNITIES

Presently, Arur Dalan is one out of nine Kelabit villages that are located in the Bario area in the Kelabit Highlands (Bala 2016). Historically, the earliest known settlement at Arur Dalan is said to date back to the 1800s, and over the years, various migrations in and out of the area have taken place (Lian-Saging 1976/77: 95). The present Arur Dalan village was established following the migration of two Kelabit communities, Kubaan and Pa' Tik, from the Kubaan river valley in the 1960s (Lian-Saging and Bulan 1989). The village of Arur Dalan today comprise around 30 households living in individual houses, as well as in two longhouses. The two longhouses are commonly known as the 'Kubaan' and the 'Pa' Tik' longhouses, which indicate that members of the Arur Dalan community continue to affiliate themselves according to which former community they are descended from. Accordingly, there are two community heads in Arur Dalan, one for each of the Kubaan- and Pa' Tik-descended groups. However, officially there is one government-appointed village head for Arur Dalan. At the time of fieldwork, this official post was held by the head of the Arur Dalan Kubaan group. Despite the division along the line of historical community affiliation, the two Arur Dalan groups share many cosanguine and affinal kin relationships.

Kubaan and Pa' Tik were two Kelabit settlements in the Kubaan river valley, in the western foothills of the Tamabu Range, which is the western boundary of the Kelabit Highlands. The Kubaan valley refers to the area drained by the Kubaan River, which flows westwards into the Tutoh River, which itself is a lower tributary of the Baram River (see Figs. 2.2 and 2.4 in Chapter 2). As is common practice in Borneo, the names of these two communities are indicative of their locations; on the Kubaan River and the Tik River, or *Pa' Kubaan* and *Pa' Tik* (in Kelabit), respectively. At present, there is no road connecting Bario and the Kubaan valley. From Arur Dalan in Bario, it takes around six to seven hours of walking on jungle footpaths to reach the former Kubaan settlement. From Kubaan, it takes an additional three hours' walk to reach Pa' Tik.

In terms of occupation history, it is unclear when the Kubaan valley was first settled. According to Kelabit oral history, however, the first major migration of the people into the western Kelabit Highlands took place after the passing of the Kelabit cultural hero, Agan Tadun (S.B. Bala 2014). Prior to that, Agan Tadun and others of his time are said to have inhabited the areas around Pa' Menaliu and Pa' Lubakan on the Dappur River in the eastern Kelabit Highlands.

In Brooke and British colonial times, Kubaan was a major 'gateway' into the Kelabit Highlands. In those days, in order to reach the Kelabit Highlands from the Baram administrative station in Claudetown (today Marudi), one would first make a journey upriver on the Baram and the Tutoh rivers to Kubaan. From here, one would then continue the journey on foot and cross the Punggupawan mountain range to reach the Bario (or the Bah) valley. This was the route taken by R.S. Douglas on his

expeditions into the interior highlands in the early 20th century (Douglas 1909a, 1909b, 1912). Douglas, who was the Resident of the Baram at the time, is said to be the first European visitor to have reached the highlands (Mjoberg 1925). It was on an expedition in 1911 that Douglas encountered what he described as "a friendly Kelabit village Panglah [Pa' Ngelah]" (Douglas 1912: 19). Pa' Ngelah would later become the Pa' Tik community, when it moved to a newer settlement established along the Tik River (a tributary of the Ngelah) nearby.

The exact dates for the establishment of the Kubaan and the Pa' Ngelah/Pa' Tik longhouses are unknown. However, by the time of Douglas' visit, two Kelabit longhouse communities were already in existence in the Kubaan valley. In a map that accompanied Douglas' article that was published in the Sarawak Museum Journal in 1912, two Kelabit communities on the Kubaan and Pa' Ngelah rivers were marked as 'Oan Baru's village' and 'Tama Abo Ang's village', respectively.

Another early visitor to the region was Eric Mjoberg, the Curator of the Sarawak Museum from 1922 to 1924, who passed through Pa' Ngelah and Kubaan in 1922 on his way to Mount Murud, the highest peak on the Tamabu Range, and indeed in the whole of Sarawak. The account of Mjoberg's trip is interesting because it included an early photograph of the Pa' Ngelah longhouse (Fig. 6.1). Mjoberg (1925: 416) also described the longhouse:

> It is of the general native type, covered with *atap* [thatched roof] and entirely waterproof and, one may add, mosquito-proof too, on account of the smoke from the permanent fires. Under the house the pigs and fowls live in filth. Near the house are small clearings where catella (*Manihot utilissima*), taro (*Caladium*, *Calocasia*), papayas (*Carica*), bananas, tobacco, etc. are grown in sufficient quantities to meet the local needs.

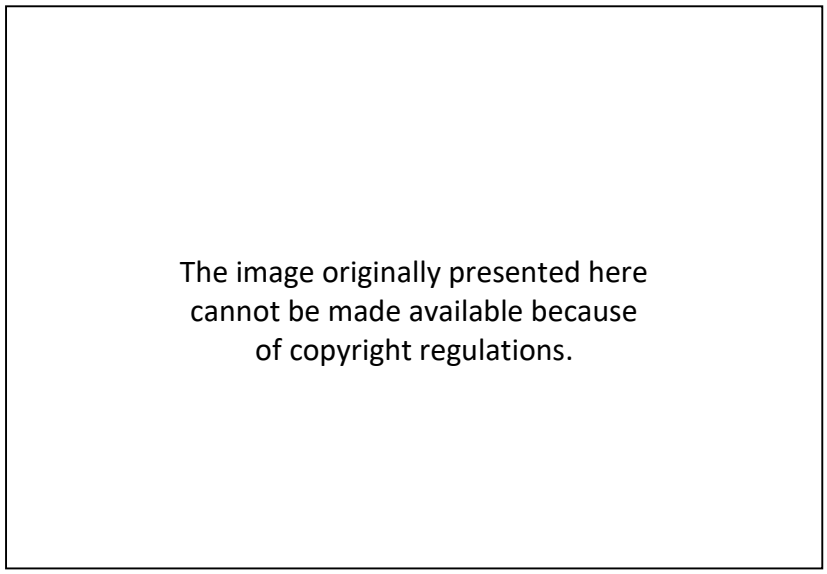



Figure 6.1. The Pa' Ngelah longhouse in the 1920s, from Mjoberg (1925).

From Pa' Ngelah, Mjoberg continued his journey upriver on the Kubaan, where he then reached the village of a Kelabit leader by the name of *Penghulu* ('paramount chief')[9] Tapo Boan (or Tepu Buang of Kubaan: see Lian-Saging 1976/77; Talla 1979). Mjoberg also noted the Kubaan village, which comprised two longhouses, as being the largest Kelabit village he had ever seen. As Mjoberg (1925: 418) describes:

[9] The Kelabit *Penghulu* refers to the paramount or tribal chief of the Kelabit, a leadership position that was introduced during the Brooke rule in Sarawak (see Talla 1979:104). During Brooke rule, there were in total four regional Kelabit *Penghulu* (see Lian-Saging 1976/77; Talla 1979). Administratively, at the time, Kubaan and Pa Ngelah (later Pa' Tik) were part of the Northern Kelabit group (*Lun Pedayeh*), which also comprised Lam Bah (Bario), Pa' Umor, Pa' Terap (presently, Pa' Lungan), Pa' Ukat and Pa' Main.

> The two longhouses, built close together, must have been at least 200 feet long and were surrounded by well-kept gardens of bananas, catellas, taro, pumpkins, etc. In front of the house was a big grass-covered clearing, where a herd of a dozen buffaloes were seen grazing. In the middle of the lawn a neat little atap-covered house had been erected for the exclusive use of distinguished visitors.

Beside that, Edward Banks, Mjoberg's successor as Curator of the Sarawak Museum, describes seeing in Kubaan "several Kelabit houses separated by the inevitable couple of thousand feet of hill" (1936: 158). In his account, which was written in the 1930s, he also mentioned both the Pa' Ngelah and Pa' Tik settlements. Compared to the Kubaan and Pa' Ngelah communities which were known since the first decade of the 1900s (see above), Banks' writing represents, to my knowledge, the first historical mention of the Pa' Tik community. It is likely then that the Pa' Tik settlement was established sometime between 1910 and 1930; that is between Douglas' and Banks' visits to area. Furthermore, Pa' Tik at the time was also known to be the village of the Kelabit *Penghulu*, Tama Pudeng (Banks 1937: 427). While Banks did not indicate the size of the Pa' Tik village, when Alastair Morrison, in his capacity as acting Baram District Officer, visited the various Kelabit communities in the Upper Baram in 1953, Pa' Tik was noted as being the smallest Kelabit settlement consisting of thirty-five people (Amster 2005b).

In the early 1960s, foreign political opposition to the formation of Malaysia resulted in the Brunei Revolt (1962) and the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation or *Konfrontasi* (1963-1966), which led to concerns over the security of the international border areas. At the behest of the British colonial government and military, a number of Kelabit longhouse communities, particularly those that were located near the

international border, were resettled in the Bario area. Although Kubaan and Pa' Tik were not one of the border communities, they were located on the route to the Kelabit Highlands and onwards to the border, and there were fears over the activity of the Brunei rebel soldiers who "were moving up the Limbang River [to cross] the Kelabit Highlands to join the TNKU [*Tentera Nasional Kalimantan Utara* or the North Kalimantan National Army] and the Indonesian Troops in Kalimantan" (S.B. Bala 2014: 228). For this reason, the Kubaan and Pa' Tik communities also decided to resettle in Bario. According to Sagau Batu Bala's historical account of the resettlement, "the people of Kubaan longhouse…decided to be evacuated over to Bario towards the end of 1963" (S.B. Bala 2014: 229). Soon after, the people of Pa' Tik also made the move, and "they built their longhouse at the same place alongside the longhouse of the people from Kubaan at Arur Dalan and called their longhouse Arur Dalan Pa' Tik" (S.B. Bala 2014: 233).

During the time of their relocation to Bario, the Kubaan and Pa' Tik communities were led by the headmen Ngelawan Raja and Lupong Bala, respectively. The relocation of the communities, however, was not a wholesale one as different families or groups of people moved at different times, and in some cases to different locations. It is known, for example, that there were some people from Pa' Tik, who moved at a later time and resettled in Pa' Derong instead of in Arur Dalan (Lian-Saging and Bulan 1989). There were also a few villagers who chose not to move. One such person was Lupong Bala himself, who remained in Pa' Tik with his wife (they were childless) until his death (see S.B. Bala 2014: 233). At present, several Penan communities can be found in the Kubaan area at Long Lobang, Ba' Tik A, Ba' Tik B, and

Ba' Medamut. The Penan settlement of Ba' Tik A, in particular, was established around the time of the Kelabit's relocation, "within the area of the former Kelabit village of Pa' Tik" (Langub 2011: 87).[10] The cultural and historical aspects of the Penan communities who are presently settling in the Kubaan area are beyond the scope of this chapter. These, however, have been discussed in much detail by Langub (2008, 2011).

It is also important to note that over the decades since their relocation, the Kelabit people of Arur Dalan have returned to Kubaan and Pa' Tik for various reasons, such as to visit family and community members who remained in the area, to tend to old farm, to collect fruits, to catch fish and to hunt wild games (see Hansen 1989). Other than that, visitors have also been known to visit the area on jungle trekking trips, usually accompanied by locals from Arur Dalan who work as tourist guides. In the recent past, before the logging road gave Bario road access to the coastal towns beginning in the 2000s (see Chapter 5), goods were known to be brought in from Limbang, and carried to Bario from Kubaan. All of these demonstrate that despite the relocation of their communities, the Kelabit have continued to maintain a connection with the Kubaan region.

[10] *Ba'* is the Penan word for 'river'. The Kelabit equivalent, as mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, is *pa'*. Thus, both Ba' Tik (Penan) and Pa' Tik (Kelabit) essentially refer to the Tik River.

## 6.2. HISTORICAL MENTIONS OF THE MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS

Compared to the megaliths of the Kelabit Highlands proper, which have been the subjects of extensive studies (see for example, Cluny and Chai 2007; Harrisson 1958b, 1958c; Hitchner 2009a; Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2013), the megalithic remains in the Kubaan valley (a fringe area of the highlands) are relatively unknown. In the paragraphs below, I will summarise what is presently known about the megalithic remains in the region.

Like the previous Kelabit settlements in the Kubaan valley, the region's megaliths were also first made known through the writings of European colonial officers. However, these early descriptions lack detail (see below) as they were based on "brief encounters" (Ewart 2009: 245). One of the earliest written accounts to focus on the megalithic remains of the Kelabit Highlands was an article written by Edward Banks that was published in the Sarawak Museum Journal in 1937. Although lacking in detail, this article is significant because apart from giving a general picture of the megalithic culture in the Kelabit Highlands, it also provided some of the earliest mentions of megalithic sites found in the Kubaan valley. For example, Banks 'discovered' pairs of menhirs or standing stones − "by far the most common stone objects" (Banks 1937: 413) − at several different places, for example between Bario and Kubaan, and between Kubaan and Pa' Tik. One of the menhir pairs, which was found near Kubaan ('Pa Baan' in the article) is said to mark a Kelabit burial site (Banks 1937). Beside that, Banks also notes the general occurrence of the *nabang* (ditch cuttings) near pair of menhirs, and occasionally near the location of burial jars containing human bone. Between Pa' Tik and Kubaan, in particular, Banks (1937: 415)

mentions finding “two pair of menhirs to the one ‘nabang’”.

Banks also mentioned the occurrence of a carved rock near Pa’ Ngelah (‘Pa Anglah’ in the article), which another European colonial administrator by the name of Captain E.V. Andreini had earlier claimed to be of Chinese origin (see also Hose 1929). This assumption was based on the finding of engravings of supposed “Chinese” characters on the rock. To his credit, Banks disputed Andreini’s uncorroborated assumption (1937: 419-20). Instead, Banks attributed the megaliths and rock carvings found in the area to the Kelabit, whose megalithic tradition was still ongoing at the time. As Banks mentions, regarding the origin of the megalithic remains that he encountered, “some of which [stones] it was obvious they had erected since my last visit [in 1930], as they [the Kelabit] indeed admitted” (1937: 413). Additionally, Banks reported a supposed “stone elephant” at Kubaan. Upon further investigation, however, he decided that “the whole thing proving to be quite a natural but odd shapped boulder” (Banks 1937: 423).

We also know about the presence of megalithic remains in the Kubaan valley from the writing of Tom Harrisson. However, despite being known for his study of the megalithic culture in Sarawak, and in particular the Kelabit Highlands (see Chapter 4), Tom Harrisson’s study of the megalithic remains in the Kubaan valley was rather limited. In his writing, one of the few occasions when he would mention the megalithic remains in the Kubaan area was in comments made about the overall distribution of megaliths in the highland region. For example, Harrisson very briefly notes Kubaan and Pa’ Tik as being two areas where megalithic monuments occur “more strongly”

compared to other areas west of the Tamabu Range (Harrisson 1958b: 398).

## 6.3. RECENT DOCUMENTATION OF THE MEGALITHIC AND OTHER CULTURAL SITES IN THE KUBAAN VALLEY

Due to the lack of previous study, little is known about the types, distribution, origin and use of the megalithic monuments in the Kubaan valley. In an attempt to address this issue, I conducted a project that was initially aimed at documenting the megalithic sites in the Kubaan valley. More than that, eventually, as I shall explain further below, the project also resulted in the recording of many other non-megalithic cultural sites in the area. The project was conducted among the Arur Dalan community in March and July 2016, as part of the fieldwork for this thesis. In the initial conception of the project, I had also planned to conduct a proper archaeological survey of the megalithic sites in the Kubaan valley. However, due to the constraints of distance (it takes seven to ten hours to walk from Bario to the former Kelabit settlements in the Kubaan area, and furthermore, the megalithic sites are scattered across a large region) and time (the planned survey period coincided with the new paddy-planting season, and the holding of the Bario Food and Cultural Festival), which contributed to the further difficulty of organising a survey team, none of the megalithic remains that were recorded were actually visited.

Despite not being able to carry out the archaeological survey, I was still able to gather a range of information on known megalithic monuments in the Kubaan region,

including their names and locations, their historical and/or cultural significance, and stories related to the sites. This was achieved primarily through field interviews (Fig. 6.2), the general methods of which I have already discussed in Chapter 1. As mentioned in Chapter 1, my informants consisted of community members who are knowledgable about the megalithic sites in a particular region. In the case of the Arur Dalan community, frequently, these are people who were born and/or grew up, or have spent some time in (for example, because of relocation through marriage) the previous Kubaan and Pa' Tik settlements in the Kubaan valley. Because of that, my informants tended to be people of the older generation (above 50 years). Some of my informants were also individuals who had occasionally returned to the Kubaan area in their younger years for various reasons, including to tend to old farmland and fruit trees, to hunt and fish, and to bring visitors. Occasionally, I would be led by previous informants to newer ones, who helped to add to and also verify previously collected information. The gathering of information on megalithic sites in the Kubaan region was also aided by the fact that one of my informants had in his possession a previously documented list of a total of twenty-six megalithic, as well as other cultural sites, which was used as part of documentation of previous Kelabit presence in the Kubaan region (see below).

Furthermore, in the interviews that I conducted, I found that my informants, in the process of telling me about the megalithic sites that they know about, also readily mentioned the other historical and cultural sites that are present in the area. Thus, the project has also revealed a wealth of information on other significant non-megalithic places in the region. Although my primary interest was in the megalithic sites, for the Arur Dalan community of today the megalithic sites are not different compared to the

other cultural sites in the Kubaan valley, in the sense that they are all places of historical significance that connect the community to their ancestral homeland, and that the community wishes to be recorded so that they can be made known to the outside world and protected, similar to what have been done to the megalithic sites in other areas of the highlands (see Chapter 5). All I shall discuss in section 6.4, the other cultural sites that can be found in the Kubaan valley include old longhouse sites, old burial grounds, places connected to legends and stories, and places associated with certain activities of the past.

There are several factors that determined the quality of the gathered information. As mentioned above, the knowledgeable informants belong to the older generation (50 and above). Compared to the younger generation, many of whom have never even set foot in the Kubaan region, the older generation of villagers are more familiar with the different places in the old homeland because they actually lived in the previous settlements of Kubaan and Pa' Tik prior to the resettlement of the two communities in the 1960s. Having said that, not all members of the older generation have good knowledge of the historical sites in the Kubaan valley. One of the reasons why this might be so is that because of the advancement of education among the Kelabit in the 1950s (see Chapter 4), a number of Kelabit youths who grew up at the time had to be away from their longhouses for prolonged periods of time in order to attend school in other areas, and this had reduced their familiarity with the local places. For example, Stanley Massey, the new leader of the Arur Dalan Pa' Tik community after the death of Balang Lugun (the previous headman, and also Stanley's father-in-law), who is now in his seventies, admitted during my interview with him that

despite being born in the former Kubaan village, and having grown up in both the Kubaan and Pa' Tik villages, he has limited knowledge of the historical or cultural sites in the area. He attributed this to the fact that he left the village at an early age to attend primary school in Long Lellang in the 1950s.



Figure 6.2. Interview with Laju Iboh, headman of Arur Dalan (left), together with Dayang Nalin (right), one of my hosts when I was staying at the village.

Furthermore, the knowledge of historical sites in the Kubaan valley is disappearing as a result of the fading memory and deaths of the elderly folks. I was told that one of the most knowledgable persons on the historical sites of the Kubaan region was Balang Lugun, who as aforementioned was the former headman of Arur Dalan Pa' Tik, who passed away because of old age in July 2016. When I conducted my fieldwork, although I managed to meet him, I was not able to conduct any interview due to his deteriotating health.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, since becoming Christians, there has also been a reluctance, particularly among the older generation Kelabit, to talk about things, beliefs and practices that are related to the Kelabit's pre-Christian past. This may have also limited the amount and quality of information that I have gathered. For example, in one of my interviews with an elder villager from Arur Dalan, my informant remarked, "I am afraid to tell the story. I am afraid that what I say would be contradicting the Bible. I don't want to unintentionally say the wrong thing, for fear of Jesus".

To certain Arur Dalan villagers, the present lack of knowledge about the historical and cultural sites in the old homeland in the Kubaan valley is a situation that is lamentable. As one middle-aged man mentioned to me, "it was our mistake. We didn't ask our fathers last time. They are gone already. It's not the old folks' fault. We are the ones at fault. We didn't do something." This sentiment regarding the disappearance of knowledge of old cultural sites is echoed in the frequent regret expressed by senior or elderly villagers, at the lack of interest in the younger generation of Kelabit in the old cultural sites in the former homeland, where many of them have never actually set foot on.

## 6.4. MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS, LANDSCAPE MODIFICATIONS AND OTHER CULTURAL SITES IN THE KUBAAN VALLEY

The documentation project has produced a working list of 71 known megalithic monuments, landscape modifications and other cultural sites in the Kubaan region

(Table 6.1). It is important to note that because the documentation work is still very much an ongoing project, the current list of megalithic and other cultural sites is far from exhaustive. It is expected that further interviews and surveys in the future would reveal many more hitherto unrecorded sites. In the sections below, I describe the different types of sites that were recorded.

### 6.4.1. Megalithic sites

A total of 20 megalithic sites were recorded as part of the documentation project. These megalithic sites consist of (following the typology mentioned in Chapter 3) standing stones or *batuh senuped* (N=13); stone mounds or *perupun* (N=3); carved stone or *batuh narit* (N=1); and megalithic burial sites or *binatuh* (N=3). As present memory as to the origins of the megaliths is limited, the dating of the megaliths based on the present work has proven to be difficult. However, as can be seen in Table 6.1, some of the megaliths, in particular the *batuh senuped*, are associated with known persons. Based on the names of the persons and recorded genealogy, it can be assumed that the *batuh senuped* (at least those that have names associated with them) date to within the first half of the 20$^{th}$ century, around the time when European colonial officers first encountered the Kelabit people and megalithic monuments in the Kubaan region, as well as the Kelabit Highlands in general (see above). As mentioned in Chapter 3, the *batuh senuped* were traditionally erected to commemorate important people and events. Some *batuh senuped* also served as boundary markers. For example, the *batuh senuped* made by Tama Pigan is also said to mark the boundary between Kubaan and Pa' Tik. In comparison, not much information was obtained

regarding the historical origin of the megalithic cemeteries (*binatuh*) and monuments like the *perupun* and the *batuh narit*. This suggests that they could belong to an earlier time period that is beyond living memory. As mentioned in Chapter 3, although no *batuh narit* have ever been dated, they are often associated with legends and the activities of cultural heroes. On the other hand, recent archaeological studies suggest that the *perupun* and megalithic burials may date to between 2,500 and 500 years ago (Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2017).

### 6.4.2. Landscape modifications

A total of 22 non-megalithic monuments, which are essentially landscape modifications (see Chapter 3 for definitions), was recorded. These consist of ridge canopy cuttings or *kawang* (N=3); ditch cuttings or *nabang* (N=17); and broad pathways or *bakut* (N=3). Like megalithic monuments, landscape modifications were traditionally constructed as memorials, usually to mark the deaths of important people. Certain *nabang* also mark the location of important places. For example, the two *nabang* at Ruma' Ma'un Salib, built by Ngawal Aran and Tenaan Bala, are said to mark the location of the old settlement site. Furthermore, Nabang Pa' Sedem, besides commemorating the deceased wife of Ngelawan Raja, also marks the territorial boundary between the Kelabit and their neighbours, the Kayan people of the Tutoh region. As can be seen in Table 6.1, some of the *nabang* and *kawang* in the Kubaan valley are associated with known persons. Thus, like some of the *batuh senuped*, whose builders are known (see above), it can also be assumed that the *nabang* and *kawang*, which are associated with known persons, were built within the first half of the 20$^{th}$ century.

### 6.4.3. Other cultural sites

Beside megalithic monuments and landscape modifications, a total of 29 other cultural sites in the Kubaan valley were recorded as part of the documentation project. They consist of old longhouse sites or *ruma' ma'un*; old (non-megalithic) burial grounds; and other miscellaneous cultural sites that are connected to legends and stories, as well as traditional knowledge and activities.

A total of eight old longhouse sites were recorded. Old longhouse sites are signs of previous occupations and movements across the landscape. It is said that in the past, before longhouse communities were established in the Kubaan area, the Kelabit lived in smaller groups of four or five families in a *lubung* (so-called 'temporary' house). Several *lubung* were usually found scattered in a particular area, and over time, these *lubung* merged to form a single larger unit that is the longhouse. One of the reasons for this was defense; with greater numbers, the Kelabit would be able to better defend themselves from attacks by other (and larger) rival groups, for example the Kayan tribes of the neighbouring river systems. Today, Kelabit settlements are more or less permanent, but in the past, it was common for longhouses to move every four to five years according to (swidden) agricultural cycles (Barker *et al.* 2008). Beside that, in pre-Christian times, "bad omens, fear of spirits and curses pronounced on the longhouse, or quarrels between residents" also influenced the movement or splitting up of Kelabit longhouse communities (Bulan 2003: 25). The present names given to some of the *ruma' ma'un* also reveal their connection to certain historical events that are significant to the Kelabit people. For example, Ruma' Ma'un Salib, in Upper Pa' Raburan, refers to

the former longhouse that is associated with the time when conversion to Christianity took place (*salib* refers the Christian cross or crucifix), most probably in the 1940s (see Chapter 4). Meanwhile, Ruma' Ma'un Sigup, near Arur Pa'it, is so-called because it is associated with the planting of the tobacco (*sigup*) plant near the longhouse by its residents. Old burial grounds also constitute evidence of past occupations in the landscape as cemeteries were often located nearby settlements. A total of eight old burial sites were recorded.

A number of cultural sites in the Kubaan valley are significant because they are connected to Kelabit legends, and beliefs about spirits and potent places. These legends and beliefs commonly explain the occurence of certain marks or features in the landscape (see Labang 1958; Janowski 2014b). One of the legendary places that I recorded is called Pagar Batu ('stone fence'), which is located near the old Kelabit settlement of Pa' Tik. The legend of Pagar Batu, as related to me by Johnson Puding, a resident of Arur Dalan, is as follows:

> There was a female *balang* [spirit tiger] that ate children. Three siblings from Pa' Tik, two boys and their younger sister, made a fence from stones in order to trap the tiger. The *pagar batu* that they made is still there in Pa' Tik, across Long Tik [the mouth of the Tik River]. One day, the siblings collected ashes and and wrapped them in leaves. Then, the two brothers tied up their sister, and tied the packets of ash on her. Then, they started a fire, after which the *balang* came and took the sister away to be fed to the *balang's* cubs. The two brothers then followed the trail of ash to Mount Murud, then all the way to Apad Runan near Pa' Dalih [in the southern Kelabit Highlands], where they eventually killed the *balang*.

Interestingly, there are similarities between the story above and other stories told in other areas of the Kelabit Highlands. For example, a legend told in the Kelapang valley,

in the southern Kelabit Highlands, tells of how Tuked Rini, a Kelabit cultural hero, also used his sister as 'bait' in the hunting and killing of the spirit tiger or *balang* (see Janowski 2014b).

A certain type of place that is connected to Kelabit legends and beliefs is the *batuh baliu* or 'transformed stone'. *Batuh baliu* in general are believed to be longhouses that were turned into stone because of *masab*, or the breaking of the taboo of laughing at or making fun of animals (Amster 2008; Janowski 2003a). Two examples of such petrified longhouses in the Kubaan valley are the *batuh baliu* near Pa' Redelung, and Batuh Tengtenga' at Long Aar. Batuh Baliu Pa' Redelung is also said to have also been formerly used by both Kubaan and Pa' Tik communities as a place to bury the bones and properties of the dead, which further demonstrates the power of certain 'natural' places or landscape features (Bradley 2000). As Janowski (2003a) points out, the Kelabit in general believe stony places to be spiritually potent.

Table 6.1. Megalithic monuments, landscape modifications and other cultural sites in the Kubaan valley, Western Kelabit Highlands

| **No.** | **Type** | **Place name/ location** | **Description/significance** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | *Batuh senuped* | Pungupawan Range | Located on the boundary between Kubaan and Bario. Made by Raja King. |
| 2 | *Batuh senuped* | Arur Nukul | Two standing stones, representing one male (*delaih*), one female (*dedtur*). The 'male' stone was once uprooted by Maran Ulun, who because of his action, fell sick and had to return the stone to its original position to get better. |
| 3 | *Batuh senuped* | Long Semirang | - |
| 4 | *Batuh senuped* | Long Arur Salad | - |
| 5 | *Batuh senuped* | Geta'an Tabungan | - |
| 6 | *Batuh senuped* | Pa' Dara' | A standing stone that has been fragmented into two. |
| 7 | *Batuh senuped* | Boundary between Kubaan and Pa' Tik | Standing stone erected by Tama Pigan (also known as Lun Naka), which also marks the boundary between Kubaan and Pa' Tik. |
| 8 | *Batuh senuped* | Kayu Pago (Logo?) | Also called Batuh Senuped Tenaan Bala. |
| 9 | *Batuh senuped* | Long Dele | A standing stone located near Long Menamud. |
| 10 | *Batuh senuped* | Pa' Repten | Made by Bala Ribuh, who moved to Long Seridan to get married. |
| 11 | *Batuh senuped* | Pa' Rekedeh | Also called Batuh Senuped Aban Paran. |
| 12 | *Batuh senuped* | Pa' Redano | Made by Tama Bulan and Nagung Aran. |
| 13 | *Batuh senuped* | Long Senuan | Made by Lian Lawe and Turun Raja. |
| 14 | *Perupun* | Long Semirang | - |
| 15 | *Perupun* | Arur Lembulu' | Located upriver from Pa' Manau. |
| 16 | *Perupun* | Long Tik | - |

Table 6.1 (cont.)

| No. | Type | Place name/ location | Description/significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| 17 | *Batuh narit* | Pa' Ngelah, at Long Redelung | A stone carved with a human figure. |
| 18 | Megalithic burial | Pa' Sepiah | Site consists of possible burial in rock crevice, and a nearby jar burial site, which apparently has been damaged by logging activities. |
| 19 | Megalithic burial | Awang Batuh | Burial in rock crevice. |
| 20 | Megalithic burial | Pa' Kadanum | Burial in rock crevice (?) |
| 21 | *Kawang* | Bukit Batu Buli' | Made by Lian Lawe (also known as Ngaruyud Paran). |
| 22 | *Kawang* | Between Bukit Kubaan and Pa' Dele | Made by Sebatuk (also known as Lun Naka), and wife. |
| 23 | *Kawang* | Unknown | Made by Tenaan Bala and Lian Lawe (also known as Ngaruyud Paran). |
| 24 | *Nabang* | Arur Nukul | Located on the right bank of Arur Nukul. |
| 25 | *Nabang* | Long Semirang | Made by Raja King, and nearby is a *Batuh Yung* ('stone mortar'). |
| 26 | *Nabang* | Long Arur Salad | Made by Lawa Tepun (also known as Pun Lawa). |
| 27 | *Nabang* | Pa' Sinabungan | Made by Ngawal Aran. |
| 28 | *Nabang* | Ruma' Ma'un Salib | Two *nabang* at Ruma' Ma'un Salib, made by Ngawal Aran and Tenaan Bala. |
| 29 | *Nabang* | Pa' Raburan | Made by Ngelun Paran dan Pun Marap, for the *ngelua* of Pun Ngagkang (also known as Liging). |
| 30 | *Nabang* | Sungai Singal Pa' Raburan | Made by Ubong (also known as Sina Radu), wife of Tama Radu. |
| 31 | *Nabang* | Pa' Rapisut | Made by Mayu Balang. |
| 32 | *Nabang* | Awang Batuh | Made by Agan Abai (also known as Ngelawan Raja). |
| 33 | *Nabang* | Tala Ubih | Two *nabang*, made by Tolong Raja and the Kubaan community. |
| 34 | *Nabang* | Kubaan | Located near the old primary school, on the *amug* (former cultivated land) of Nekap Ulun (also known as Belaan Libut). |

Table 6.1 (cont.)

| No. | Type | Place name/ location | Description/significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| 35 | *Nabang* | Near Pa' Tik | Two *nabang*, located before the hill on the way to Pa' Tik. |
| 36 | *Nabang* | Ruma' Ma'un Sigup | Two *nabang,* made by Lian Lawe and Turun Raja, and by Tama Radu and Nalin Paran, to mark the longhouse. |
| 37 | *Nabang* | Barat Utap | Made by grandfather of Lutu Ayu. |
| 38 | *Nabang* | Upper Pa' Belaban | Made by Agan Abai. |
| 39 | *Nabang* | Batu Iran | Made by Lugun Aran. |
| 40 | *Nabang* | Pa' Sedem | Made by Ngelawan Raja to commemorate his deceased wife. It also marks the boundary between Kelabit and Kayan territories. |
| 41 | *Bakut* | Geta'an Tabungan | - |
| 42 | *Bakut* | Singal Pa' Raburan | - |
| 43 | Burial | Binatuh Pa' Dara' | Old burial ground. |
| 44 | Burial | Binatuh Pa' Rapisut | Old burial ground. |
| 45 | Burial | Binatuh Long Menamud | Old burial ground, across Batuh Senuped Long Dele. |
| 46 | Burial | Binatuh Pa' Dele | Old burial ground consisting of old (jar) and new (wooden coffin) burials. |
| 47 | Burial | Binatuh Pa' Rian | Old burial ground. |
| 48 | Burial | Binatuh Pa' Redelung | Old burial ground. |
| 49 | Burial | Long Senuan | Location of the jar burial on the *amug* (formerly cultivated land) of Nekap Ulun. |
| 50 | Burial | Ra'an Kenangan | The location of the burial (*tanem*) of Salabput (in-law of Naol Raja or Pedara Ulun), and Dukung (grandchild of Salabput). Here is also the burial for Nalin Paran's deceased son, which was made by Naol Raja and Nalin Paran. |

Table 6.1 (cont.)

| No. | Type | Place name/ location | Description/significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| 51 | *Ruma' ma'un* | Ruma' Ma'un Salib | Located at Upper Pa' Raburan, this old longhouse site is associated with the people's conversion to Christianity (*salib* refers to the Christian cross). |
| 52 | *Ruma' ma'un* | Ruma' Ma'un Lenad | Old longhouse site of the former Kubaan village. |
| 53 | *Ruma' ma'un* | Ruma' Ma'un Asam | Old longhouse site of the former Kubaan village. |
| 54 | *Ruma' ma'un* | Ruma' Ma'un Kadti | Old longhouse site of the former Kubaan village. |
| 55 | *Ruma' ma'un* | Ruma' Ma'un Long Rebepan | Old longhouse site on the Rebepan River. |
| 56 | *Ruma' ma'un* | Ruma' Ma'un Sigup | Old longhouse site located at Arur Pa'it. The old longhouse is so-called because it was the place where people used to plant tobacco (*sigup*). |
| 57 | *Ruma' ma'un* | Ruma' Ma'un Bario | Old longhouse site at Upper Pa' Menamud. |
| 58 | *Ruma' ma'un* | Ruma' Ma'un Lidung Ruing | Old longhouse site, where Sina Batuh was 'eaten' by water spirit. |
| 59 | Cultural site | Barat Utap | Boundary between Kubaan and Pa' Tik, and also the location of a Kayan burial site. Probably the same site referred to by some people as *Tanem Kayan* ('Kayan cemetery'), which is said to be located on the hill that separates Kubaan and Pa' Tik. |
| 60 | Cultural site | Batuh Kidingan | Located near Arur Nukul, the site was a place where game of strength took place (see main text). |
| 61 | Cultural site | Reberuh Inan Upun | A deep river pool located downriver from Pa' Manau, into which people used to jump to test their bravery. |
| 62 | Cultural site | Kubu' (hut) at Long Semirang | A resting place between Bario and Kubaan. |
| 63 | Cultural site | La Pa' Dara' | A resting place on the Bario-Kubaan main path. |

Table 6.1 (cont.)

| No. | Type | Place name/ location | Description/significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| 64 | Cultural site | Geta'an Tabungan | A river crossing (*geta'an* in Kelabit) that is so called because it was the place where a child named Bungan drowned. |
| 65 | Cultural site | Batuh Tenidan | A rock outcrop located upriver from Pa' Manau (between Long Semirang and Pa' Manau, and across Pa' Rapisut), where people used to collect honey. |
| 66 | Cultural site | Adtan Rayeh | *Adtan rayeh* literally means 'big ladder'. Located at Awang Batuh, it was made (from *lemaan* wood) by Ngelawan Raja (also known as Pitan Ro) for the *ngelua'* ceremony of Anyie. Another story simply said that it was made by the Kubaan community. |
| 67 | Cultural site | Batuh Menelen | Located in the former Kubaan village, Batuh Menelen ('python rock') is so-called because it was the rock boulder on top of which a python was found resting. |
| 68 | Cultural site | Turud Pa' Rebepan | The mountain range that forms the boundary between the Kubaan and Pa' Tik communities. |
| 69 | Cultural site | Batuh Tengtenga' | Believed to be a petrified longhouse. Located at Long Aar, near Long Lubang. |
| 70 | Cultural site | Batuh Baliu | Believed to be a petrified longhouse, and may have been formerly used as a place for secondary burials. Located at Pa' Redelung. |
| 71 | Cultural site | Pagar Batu | Located across Long Tik and associated with legend of *balang* (see main text). |

Certain stones are not only imbued with *lalud* or life force, they are also residing places of spirits (*ada'*) that could potentially cause harm to people who disturb or disrespect the stones. Megalithic monuments and burials too are a part of this spiritual landscape (Amster 2008, 2009), and stories about people's experiences of being 'disturbed' by the spirits of megalithic sites are still being told today. One such story is associated with the Batuh Senuped Arur Nukul, a megalithic site that consists of

two standing stones, representing a 'male' (*delaih*) and a 'female' (*dedtur*). The story mentions how the 'male' stone was once uprooted (i.e. disturbed) by Maran Ulun. As a consequence of his action, he fell sick. Maran Ulun only got better after he returned the stone to its original position. The stories regarding *batuh baliu* and the spirits of megalithic sites serve as reminders to the local people about the powerful nature of the environment that needs to be respected. Thus, in this way, these places and their stories provide the local people with a 'moral teaching' (Basso 1996a:62).

Previously, I have mentioned the connection between the names of old longhouse sites and historical events that are significant to the Kelabit people. In a similar way, a number of places in the Kubaan valley are historically-significant to the Kelabit because in their names, certain events that happened in the past are recorded. For example, Geta'an Tabungan, which is a river crossing (*geta'an*, in Kelabit) between Long Semirang and Pa' Manau is so-called because it was the place where a young girl by the name of Bungan tragically drowned. Place names also record activities that were carried out at certain locations. For example, Batuh Kidingan (*batuh* is 'rock', and *ngiding* is the verb 'to lift'), near Long Arur Nukul, refers to the location where men used to compete with each other to lift a heavy rock, in a traditional game of strength of the Kelabit people. Beside that, Reberuh Inan Upun ('the deep pool jumping place') refers to the place where men demonstrated their courage and ability by jumping off a high cliff and into a deep river pool. Reberuh Inan Upun may have been the place located on the footpath between the Punggupawan mountain range and Kubaan that was described by Guy Arnold, who made expeditions into the interior of Borneo in the 1950s. Arnold (1959: 201) notes:

> The path was an old one with many signs of former use, a resting place among carved stones, or a gap near the path where, according to Kelabit tradition, men used to hold contests, daring each other to leap off a sixty-foot-high cliff into a river pool; those who dared were chosen by the women for their husbands.

Being locations where contests and shows of strength and courage were carried out in the past, these places also record the lofty achievements of people. For example, Pun Ngabi is remembered as one of the men who succeeded in lifting the heavy stone at Batuh Kidingan, and in jumping off the cliff and into the deep river pool at Reberuh Inan Upun.

Other examples of places that are connected to the activities that were carried out in the past, when the Kubaan region was previously occupied by the Kelabit people, are Batuh Tenidan and Awang Batuh. Batuh Tenidan is a rock outcrop where people used to collect honey. Awang Batuh, on the other hand, is the location where a monument in the form of an *adtan rayeh* ('big ladder') was constructed by Ngelawan Raja to commemorate the *ngelua'* (child initiation rite) of a person named Anyie.

A particular site called Barat Utap records the history of past conflicts between the Kelabit and the Kayan peoples (see Bala 2002; Bulan 2003; Douglas 1912; Maran 1969a; Ngau 1968). Barat Utap is said to be the burial place of Kayan individuals, who were victims of past tribal conflicts. Historically, Barat Utap is also significant as it is said to be the boundary (*tung* or *apu'*), as well as a meeting place for trade between the Kubaan and Pa' Tik communities in the past (see Bulan 2003).

## 6.5. THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF THE KUBAAN VALLEY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO THE PRESENT ARUR DALAN COMMUNITY

The presence of megalithic and non-megalithic monuments, as well as other sites that are of importance to the culture and history of the Kelabit people in the Kubaan valley, demonstrates the phenomenon of a cultural landscape (see Jacques 1995). Like other cultural landscapes that have been observed in Borneo (see Brosius 1986; Hitchner 2009a; Hoare 2002; Langub 2011) and elsewhere (see Thomas and Ross 2013), the cultural landscape of the Kubaan valley is formed by long-term human occupation, or 'dwelling' (see Ingold 2000). In addition, the various cultural places in the Kubaan area also constitute a 'taskscape', in that they represent places where previous generations of people had conducted various daily activities (Ingold 1993). For example, in the previous section, I have pointed out the occurrence of built monuments, longhouse sites, burial grounds, and other activity places in the Kubaan valley.

The Kubaan landscape is also a 'memory-scape' (Lavers 2010), or a 'landscape of memory' (Bruchac 2005), in which the memories of ancestors, historical events and past activities in the landscape are manifested in the various places, through their place names or the stories they are linked with. Consider for example the case of the megalithic monuments in the Kubaan valley. I have mentioned previously how some of the megaliths are associated with known persons. Thus, it is through the megalithic monuments, that "biographies of individuals, both living and dead, are written in the landscape" (Brosius 2001: 123), and memories of certain forebears are remembered by the present generation. In this way, the megalithic monuments represent what Morphy

(1995: 187) refers to as "the sedimenting of history and sentiment in the landscape."

Today, the megalithic remains also represent traces and evoke memories of cultural practices (e.g. megalithic feasts, two-stage burials, and other rites that necessitated the building of megalithic monuments) that have been abandoned since the 1950s because of socio-cultural changes that have occurred among the Kelabit people (see Chapter 4). Thus, when one of my informants, Monnie Radu, mentioned the *nabang* that was built by his grandfather, Ngelun Paran (Nabang Pa' Reburan, see Table 6.1), it was not just the memory of his grandfather that was evoked, but also the memory of the pre-Christian Kelabit child initiation rite, *ngelua'* (see Talla 1979: 207-210; see also Chapter 4), as the *nabang* was built to commemorate the *ngelua'* of Pun Ngagkang, the daughter of Ngelun Paran, and Monnie's aunt. As Monnie commented regarding the *ngelua'* practice, "our old folks last time, like our grandparents, that's what they do." In a similar way, megalithic and jar burial sites also remind the present-day Kelabit of the pre-Christian practice of *nulang* or the secondary treatment of the dead (see Chapter 3 for a description of the traditional Kelabit burial rites).

From the cultural landscape perspective, it is apparent that the different places in the landscape are inter-related, and entangled in a web of people, events, beliefs and practices of the past. In this way, the history of the people is recorded in the landscape (Basso 1996a). The cultural landscape can thus be viewed as a historical 'document', in which the people's history can be 'read' (Taylor 2003). Indeed, for the Kelabit people of today, these places are read as evidence of past customary practices, and places like the megalithic sites in particular are viewed as traces of ancestral

activities, and evidence that the Kelabit people have occupied various areas of the Kelabit Highlands since time immemorial (Bulan 2003, 2015).

In Halbwachs' (1926/1992) seminal work, he identified collective memory as crucial for the formation of group identity. For the Arur Dalan community, "made up of people who moved in from Kubaan and Pa' Tik on the Western foothills of Tamabu Range" (Lian-Saging and Bulan 1989: 92), it is the collective memory of their origins in the Kubaan area that has come to define the community's identity. This not only illustrates the Arur Dalan community's association with their old homeland, but also further demonstrates the importance of ancestral homelands (and the memories of their places) for a displaced people's sense of identity and belonging (Russell 2012). As personal and collective memories have been shown to be inscribed in the megalithic and other cultural sites, they represent a tangible connection between the displaced Arur Dalan community and the Kubaan homeland. It is through these places that a 'cultural continuity' (Nicholas 2005) exists between the local people and the landscape, that basically bridges the past and the present, and provides the people with an identity and a sense of belonging to the landscape.

In addition, and also in relation to their significance for the Arur Dalan community's identity and sense of belonging, I would argue that the megalithic and other cultural sites are also important for the community's legitimisation of land claims. As Lian-Saging and Bulan (1989: 96) notes, "the megalithic culture is no longer practised but is still important to the Kelabits…the remains of this culture can be used to demarcate customary land claims that the Kelabits need to make on the Kelabit

Highlands." For the Arur Dalan community, the megalithic monuments and other cultural places in the Kubaan landscape are seen as evidence of the Kelabit people's historical and long-term land use, and therefore, evidence of the community's rights to the land, of which they are now displaced from. Referring to the megalithic graves in Kubaan, and exemplifying the common belief that the megaliths represent marks left behind by Kelabit ancestors, one of my informants, a man in his late thirties, adamantly remarked, "how would the stone graves come to be there if not made by the Kelabit?" The general feeling among the Arur Dalan community is that the megalithic monuments in Kubaan should be recorded and knowledge of them preserved. One of the main reasons for this is to protect the community's rights to the land in the Kubaan region that is seen as traditionally belonging to the Kelabit people. As Laju Iboh, the headman of Arur Dalan, pointed out to me, "we worry we will lose our land." Besides threats to Kelabit land in the form of logging activities and the establishment of the Pulong Tau National Park, west of the Kelabit Highlands (see Chapter 5), another reason for the worry is because, as I mentioned earlier, the Kubaan region is currently home to several Penan settlements. The Kelabit of Arur Dalan maintain, however, that the Penan are now residing on Kelabit land. In the case of the former Kelabit village of Pa' Tik, where the present Penan settlement called Ba' Tik can be found, a resident of Arur Dalan Pa' Tik asserted: "they [the Penan] live there, but they don't disturb our old place. So it's our place until now in Pa' Tik." I was also told by certain villagers in Arur Dalan that if I were to carry out a survey of the sites in the Kubaan region, it would be more appropriate for me to go with the Kelabit community members and not with the Penan (because they live in the area, the Penan are also familiar with some of the Kelabit cultural sites). The community's opinion relates to their sentiments regarding

the land in the Kubaan region. I was also told to use Kelabit, instead of Penan terms, to record the names of the places in the Kubaan region. This is, as an elderly informant mentioned, “so that the Penan would not be able to claim (wrongly, from the perspective of the Kelabit) the area as theirs.”

The role of megalithic monuments and other cultural sites in local claims to land and authority is evident in another case. One of the persons interviewed for the documentation of megalithic monuments in Kubaan was Larry (a pseudonym), a retired government servant in his late seventies and a member of the former Kubaan community, but whose family, including himself, are now residing in Bario, but away from the Arur Dalan village. Larry claims (together with his adult son, who was also present during the interview) to be part of a group of people, all descendants of the former Kubaan community, who wish to return to the area to reestablish the former Kelabit settlement. During my interview with him, Larry showed to me a document that listed a total of twenty-six megalithic and non-megalithic sites, including landscape modifications, old burial sites and old settlements, which are spread out across the territory of the former Kubaan community (included in Table 6.1 above). In the document, these sites are considered *tanda-tanda* or ‘markers’ of the territory of the former Kubaan village. Accompanying this list of historical and cultural sites of the Kubaan community, was a letter (dated 24 October 1997), in which purportedly Ngelawan Raja, the former leader of the Kubaan village during the time of the relocation to Arur Dalan in the 1960s, hands over the authority and customary land rights over the Kubaan territory to Larry (the documents are not shown here due to its possible sensitive nature). The veracity and effectiveness of Larry’s claim, however, is

doubted by at least three of my other informants. While it is not the aim of this chapter to investigate the legitimacy of Larry's claim, what is interesting to note is that the knowledge and memory of the megalithic sites, as well as other places in the landscape, are transmitted and used, in this case, in a contemporary claim to authority and land. In this way, places and landscapes of the past are used to serve present needs (see Cooney 2001; Garner 2001).

**CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I have examined the relationship between a displaced community − the Arur Dalan community in Bario − and the megalithic monuments in its ancestral homeland − the Kubaan valley west of the Kelabit Highlands. Firstly, this chapter has shown the megalithic monuments to be a part of the (Kelabit) cultural landscape of the Kubaan valley that was formed by previous long-term occupation by the Kelabit people, including the two former Kelabit communities in the region – Kubaan and Pa' Tik – from which the present Arur Dalan community is derived. Besides megalithic monuments, the cultural landscape of the Kubaan region also consists of various other sites or places, including non-megalithic monuments (i.e. landscape modifications), old longhouse sites, burial grounds, and places connected to legends and stories, that are of cultural and historical importance to the Kelabit community. These places are essentially repositories of the memories of people, events and activities of the distant and recent pasts. Taking the example of the megalithic and non-megalithic monuments, some of them are affiliated with known persons (either the builder[s] of

the monument or the person commemorated by the monument), or marked significant locations, boundaries and events. I argue that it is the people's memories of these places and landscape that provide the Arur Dalan community with the strong sense of connection to their ancestral homeland. As Russell (2012: 415) notes, "memory and imagination play important roles in our connections to landscapes and places." This is especially so with regard to a displaced community like Arur Dalan. The importance of memory in preserving connections to distant places has been observed by Kray and her colleagues, who in their study of landscape memory in British Colonial Honduras note that "physical distance cannot sever the ties forged by memory" (Kray *et al*. 2017: 72).

The need for a continuing connection to the ancestral homeland is linked to several factors related to the historical changes that the Arur Dalan people have experienced as a community. To the community, these megalithic sites and cultural places mentioned above are monuments (in the actual sense of the word, as things that remind people of something) that remind people of their origins in the Kubaan valley. This in turn gives the Arur Dalan members a sense of identity, as a group of people that has ancestral ties to the Kubaan region, which is important now bearing in mind that Bario, the area in which they reside today, is populated by groups of Kelabit people who have migrated from all across the highlands to establish different villages or communities in the area (see Chapter 2). Connection to the Kubaan region also needs to be maintained in order for the people to be able to justify their continued claims to the land, which their ancestors used to inhabit, or have 'dwelt' in (Ingold 2000). This is especially so since the Kubaan region is now settled by several Penan communities. To the Kelabit, the Penan have basically moved into what they (the

Kelabit) see as their traditional lands. One of the proofs of this, in the eyes of the Kelabit, is the many megalithic remains that dot the Kubaan landscape: in contrast to the Kelabit, the Penan has no custom of megalith building. By presently settling in the Kubaan area, and in the absence of the Kelabit, the Penan are thus seen as potential threats to the Kelabit's continuous claims to the land in the Kubaan valley.

The role of megalithic monuments in supporting land claims is further explored in the next chapter, which will discuss the contestations of megaliths in the Punang Kelapang region, south of the Kelabit Highlands.

# CHAPTER 7

# CONTESTATION OF LAND AND MEGALITHS IN PUNANG KELAPANG[11]

This chapter examines changing perceptions of the megalithic monuments found in the Punang Kelapang region, which were recently recorded and surveyed. It would be clear to the reader that the previous three chapters were mainly focused on the Kelabit's relationships with the megalithic monuments in the areas where they and/or their ancestors have lived. What will be clear in this chapter is that the Kelabit are not the only group of people who associate themselves with the megalithic monuments in the Upper Baram. Based on the three previous chapters, it may appear to be so in the Kelabit Highlands, but there, the population, being dominated by the Kelabit people, is rather homogenous. On the other hand, as mentioned in Chapter 2, Punang Kelapang is a multi-ethnic region. Further, as this chapter will show, it has a complex history of movement of various peoples within the past three hundred years. Connected to this complicated population history and past movements are the megalithic remains in the Punang Kelapang landscape, which are of unknown origin, as to their original builders, until today. As a consequence, the origins and affiliations of the megalithic remains in the area are currently being contested by certain sections of the present day communities. In the past, the megalithic monuments in Punang Kelapang were commonly attributed to a group of people called the Ngurek. More recently, however, the Kelabit and the Sa'ban communities have increasingly been exerting their own claims to the stone monuments. In this chapter, I argue that the reimagining of the

[11] Parts of this chapter have been published in Gani (2019).

megaliths' origin, as a renegotiation of place and history, is tied to local contestations over ownership and control of land, which in the Upper Baram has become an increasingly limited resource due to pressures from development, growing population, and competition between different local communities, as I have alluded to in the previous chapters. To begin this chapter, I describe the Punang Kelapang area and its settlements, the recent survey of megalithic sites that were conducted, and the various megalithic sites that have been observed.

## 7.1. PUNANG KELAPANG AND ITS SETTLEMENTS

The Punang Kelapang region is located in the southern fringe of the Kelabit Highlands in the Upper Baram. The region is drained by the Baram, Bale and Balong rivers, and their tributaries. The Bale and Balong rivers are themselves tributaries of the main Baram River (see Fig. 7.1 below). 'Kelapang' is the Kelabit name for the Baram River, and in the Kelabit language, the name Punang Kelapang literally refers to the headwaters of the Kelapang or Baram River. The settlements in the Punang Kelapang region are located in mountain valleys around 400-500 metres above sea level. As an area, Punang Kelapang covers the territories of the Kelabit community of Long Peluan, the mixed Sa'ban and Kenyah Leppo' Ke communities of Long Banga, the Sa'ban community of Long Puak, and the Penan communities of Long Lamai, Long Beruang and Ba' Lai (Clayre 1989; Murang 1993).

The Kelabit migrated from the Kelapang River area to the Long Peluan area around 1900 (Murang 1989). On the other hand, the Sa'ban trace their origin to the Bahau region in East Kalimantan, where they lived with other groups of people including the Ngurek, who as will be shown below, are one of the groups who have been associated with the megalithic monuments in Punang Kelapang. While the sequence and events of the different peoples' migration into the area have been contested (see Egay 2009), it is generally accepted that the Kelabit and Sa'ban were present in the area around the turn of the 20th century. Further migrations of the Sa'ban from Indonesian Kalimantan to Long Balong and Long Banga happened after the Second World War. It should also be mentioned that in the 18th and early 19th centuries, the Punang Kelapang area was settled by the Ngurek. The historical presence of the Ngurek in the Upper Baram region and their connections with the megalithic monuments in Punang Kelapang will be further explored below. The Kelabit, Sa'ban and Ngurek are culturally-related groups, who are known for their megalithic traditions of the past (Rousseau 1990).

Another ethnic group with evidently a long history of presence in Punang Kelapang is the Penan. As a formerly nomadic group (see Needham 1972), it is claimed that the Penan have roamed the region for more than 200 years before the arrival of the Kelabit and the Sa'ban around 1900 (Egay 2009). In the 1950s, the Penan began to adopt sedentary life. The earliest Penan settlement was established at Long Belaka, which later moved to Long Lamai. Later on, at various times in the 1960s, splinter groups would settle in Long Beruang and Ba' Lai, as well as in Pa' Berang in the southern Kelabit Highlands (Murang 1993). The latter settlement, according to

Janowski and Langub (2011), existed only in the 1980s and 1990s, before the Penan were asked to move by the Kelabit who claim customary rights to the land.

The Kenyah Leppo' Ke is a group with a more recent history in the area. Originally from the Long Pujungan area in Indonesian Kalimantan (see Eghenter *et al*. 2003), they migrated to the Upper Baram after the Second World War, and are presently found living side by side with the Sa'ban community in Long Banga.

## 7.2. RECENT SURVEY OF MEGALITHIC SITES

In an article entitled 'Megaliths of Central and West Borneo' that was published in the Sarawak Museum Journal in 1958, the archaeologist Tom Harrisson briefly mentions the megalithic monuments in the southern part of the Kelabit Highlands as occurring "sporadically on the uninhabited mountains between Pa Dali and the submontane [Sa'ban]-Kelabit at Pa Balong where a few (slab graves and dolmens only) occur as low as 1500 ft." (Harrisson 1958c: 398). Despite this brief note, the megalithic remains in the southern fringe of the Kelabit Highlands were never studied in detail by Harrisson as his work on the upland megaliths was mainly concentrated on the sites in the northern Kelabit Highlands, in Pa' Trap (today Pa' Lungan) and in the Bario area (see Chapter 4). Until today, the megaliths in the Punang Kelapang area have remained understudied, and thus, largely unknown. However, more recent research, including this current one, has begun to address this void (see Mashman 2017, 2018).

In this attempt to address the lack of knowledge on the megalithic sites in the Punang Kelapang area, an archaeological survey was conducted in two separate phases: 29 March-25 April 2016, and 16-27 August 2016, as part of the fieldwork for this thesis.[12] The first stage in the survey consisted of the gathering of information in order to create a listing of known megalithic sites in the area. Then, visits to the megalithic sites were arranged. The informants and guides of this survey work consisted of villagers from the mixed Sa'ban and Kenyah Leppo' Ke community of Long Banga, the Kelabit community of Long Peluan and the Penan community of Long Beruang. A total of twenty megalithic sites were recorded in this survey (Table 7.1). This list, however, is not exhaustive. Out of the twenty sites, fourteen were visited (Fig. 7.2). The sites that were recorded but not visited are indicated in Table 7.1 below. Information about the sites that were not visited (six in total) was obtained from interviews and previous literature. However, because I did not personally visit these sites, I am not able to verify the information recorded. For the sites that were visited, their GPS (Global Positioning System) locations, photographs and site descriptions were taken. Some of the sites are located in the vicinity of villages, or near past and/or present farmed land. Others, however, are located further away in presently uninhabited areas. Trips to these relatively distant sites were all done on day-trips from the nearest village (see individual site descriptions in section 7.3 below). Because of the distance, these trips typically required many hours of walking along jungle paths on undulating, and sometimes steep and slippery terrains, and with various river crossings. On some journeys, particularly to sites that are located on the main Baram

[12] In the final week (20-27 August 2016) of the survey, I was joined by Mohammad Sherman Sauffi, Acting Curator of the Archaeology section in the Sarawak Museums Department in Kuching.

river, boat rides were also required.

## 7.3. DESCRIPTION OF THE MEGALITHIC SITES

The megalithic sites in Punang Kelapang consist of (following the typology discussed in Chapter 3) megalithic cemeteries such as dolmens, stone jars, stone trough, cist graves, or burials at natural rocky places; and non-cemetery megaliths such as stone mounds, carved stones and standing stones (Table 7.1). Most of the megalithic cemeteries are single-type sites comprising either dolmens or stone jars. However, at the Long Sebua' site, besides stone jars, a stone trough and slab-built cist graves were also observed (see below).

In general, the megalithic sites in Punang Kelapang are found in the areas drained by the Baram, Bale and Balong rivers, and their tributaries (Fig. 7.2). Most of the megalithic sites are located on river banks, or close to rivers, except for the Lekad Kelesan site (see below), which is located on a hilltop, around 900 metres above sea level. Because a number of the sites are located in presently uninhabited or unfarmed land, they are usually surrounded by forest trees and other vegetation. As can be seen in the descriptions below, some clearing of vegetation is necessary in order to expose the megaliths for proper documentation and measurement. The vegetational surrounding at the time of the megaliths' contruction or use, however, is not presently known.

Table 7.1. Megalithic sites in Punang Kelapang.

| No. | Type | Sub-type | Site location/name |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Megalithic cemetery | Dolmen | Menatoh Buduk Dusur |
| 2. | | | Menatoh Long Belibat |
| 3. | | | Menatoh Tang Lapao |
| 4. | | | Menatoh Long Belilin |
| 5. | | | Menatoh Long Nonar* |
| 6. | | | Binatau Long Pulong |
| 7. | | | Binatau Long Sena |
| 8. | | Stone jar | Lekad Kelesan |
| 9. | | | Long Punyao |
| 10. | | | Long Jilen |
| 11. | | Stone jar (plus stone trough and cist graves) | Long Sebua’ |
| 12. | | Rock burial | Batuh Long Lingap* |
| 13. | | | Long Ma’o* |
| 14. | Non-cemetery megaliths | Stone mound | Perupun Lio Ayu |
| 15. | | | Perupun Long Senibong |
| 16. | | | Arool Batang |
| 17. | | Carved stone | Batuh Narit Punang Arur Mering* |
| 18. | | | Batuh Narit Pa’ Peluan* |
| 19. | | | Batu Kalong Long Banga |
| 20. | | Standing stone | Pa’ Merir* |

*These sites were not visited as part of this study.

The site names, as is common in local practice, are based on local toponyms. For example, Menatoh Long Nonar is a gravesite (*menatoh*, in Kelabit) that is located at the confluence (*long*) of the Nonar and Kelapang rivers. For the Sa’ban, gravesites are called *binatau*. For instance, Binatau Long Sena is the name that the Sa’ban use to refer to the dolmen gravesite at Long Sena. The toponyms used in this chapter, although derived from the languages of different ethnic groups, do not in any way suggest the origin or the ethnic identity of the builders of the megaliths. They are simply the toponyms that were given to me by my informants or guides, who came from the four

different ethnic communities (Kelabit, Sa'ban, Penan, and Kenyah; see Chapter 2) currently residing in the area.

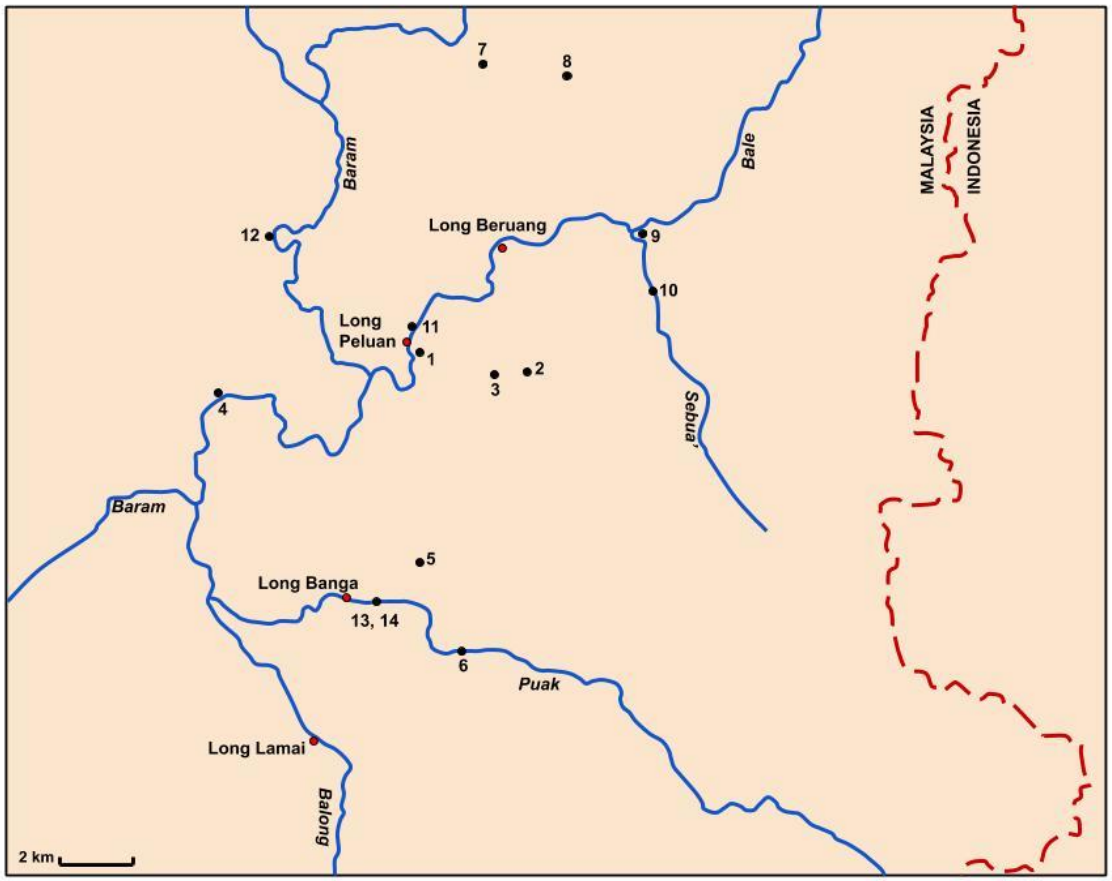



Figure 7.1. Megalithic sites in Punang Kelapang that were visited as part of the survey: 1) Menatoh Buduk Dusur; 2) Menatoh Long Belibat; 3) Menatoh Tang Lapao; 4) Menatoh Long Belilin; 5) Binatau Long Pulong; 6) Binatau Long Sena; 7) Lekad Kelesan; 8) Long Jilen; 9) Long Sebua'; 10) Long Punyao; 11) Perupun Lio Ayu; 12) Perupun Long Senibong; 13) Pelpuun Arool Batang; 14) Batu Kalong Long Banga.

The megalithic remains were found in various states of preservation, from intact to totally damaged. Threats to megalithic sites that were observed include human-induced ones such as logging activities, roadworks, farming-related clearing activities and vandalism; as well as natural threats such as floods, tree-fall, and animal and tree-root disturbances.

It is worth noting that megalithic sites in general have continued to be perceived as spiritually potent places (see Chapter 3). It is common to hear stories about spirits residing in the stones, and of the 'bad' things that have happened to people who 'disturbed' them (for example, see story about Batu Kalong Long Banga below). At times, this 'fear' of the stones contributed to minor difficulties in my fieldwork. For example, on one of the days of my fieldwork, I was informed that the person who had been arranged to take me to a megalithic site called Binatau Long Pulong (see below) had at the last minute declined to do so because of his previous experience of falling ill after doing some agricultural work near the stones. On another occasion, I and two Penan guides were on our journey back from the stone jar site of Long Sebua' (see below) when dark clouds appeared in the sky overhead signalling impending rain. According to my Penan guides, this 'bad luck' was the consequence of my 'disturbing' of the stones that we had just visited. This experience also helped to explain my earlier observation of my Penan companions' reluctance or half-hearted efforts to assist in clearing around the stone jars at Long Sebua' (to photograph the stone jars, I had to first expose them). Although they did not mention it to me at the time, essentially they were having reservations about disturbing the stones.

### 7.3.1. Dolmens

Dolmens are considered burial places and the sites where they are found are often called cemeteries (Kelabit: *menatoh* or Sa'ban: *binatau*). Most of the dolmens encountered were damaged and fragmented. Some reasonably intact ones can be found at Menatoh Buduk Dusur, Menatoh Long Balibat, Menatoh Tang Lapao', Binatau Long Pulong and Binatau Long Sena. Measurements taken of the intact ones indicate a variety of sizes. Except for the stoneware fragments discovered at Binatau Long Sena (see below), the dolmen sites were all devoid of associated artefacts.

**Menatoh Buduk Dusur**

Menatoh Buduk Dusur, or Menatoh Lem Dusur in Mashman (2018: 118), is located on a promontory bounded by the Bale River near the village of Long Peluan. At least ten dolmens were visible at the site, most of which have collapsed or have partially collapsed, due to tree action. One dolmen, however, was in reasonably good condition to be measured. It measured approximately 1.6 m in length, 1.05 m in width and 0.6 m in height (Fig. 7.2). The dolmens were seemingly oriented east-west lengthwise. Being close to the village, the area surrounding the site has been farmed, although the dolmens have been largely undisturbed by farming activities.



Figure 7.2. A dolmen at Menatoh Buduk Dusur.

**Menatoh Long Belibat**

Menatoh Long Belibat is located on a promontory near the confluence (*long*) of the Belibat and Peluan rivers. Initially, dolmens were first seen in an area roughly six by ten square metres (Fig. 7.3). Here, two dolmens were discovered to be intact, one had partially collapsed, while seven others had collapsed. All of these dolmens were found placed between 0.5 m to 1 m apart from each other. The two intact dolmens vary in size. The bigger of the two measured approximately 2.05 m in length, 1.05 m in width and 0.33 m in height. The smaller dolmen, on the other hand, was about 0.95 m in length, 0.95 m in width and 0.36 m in height. Further clearing of the surrounding area revealed previously hidden or buried dolmens, all of which have collapsed. All in all, at least twenty-four dolmens were visible, with no regularity observed in their orientations. It is assumed that more dolmens would be discovered if the whole area were to be cleared. In terms of area size and number of dolmens, Menatoh Long Belibat appeared to be a relatively large burial ground in the past.



Figure 7.3. Dolmens at Long Belibat.

**Menatoh Tang Lapao**

Menatoh Tang Lapao is located on a small hillock surrounded by paddy fields near the Peluan River. The site of Menatoh Tang Lapao consists of two dolmens, one partially collapsed, and the other, collapsed and broken (Fig. 7.4). The partially collapsed dolmen measured about 1.75 m in length, 1.45 m in width and 0.75 m in height. The dolmens are oriented north-south lengthwise. The surrounding area is said to be a formerly cultivated land belonging to a member of the Long Peluan village.



Figure 7.4. Two dolmens at Menatoh Tang Lapao.

**Menatoh Long Belilin**

The site of Menatoh Long Belilin is located near the confluence of the Belilin and the Baram (Kelapang) rivers. According to Mashman (2018: 119), "this is close to Long Moyo, the site where the Kelabit and the Ngurek settled." The Long Belilin site was damaged by logging activities in the 1990s (Fig. 7.5). Therefore, it was difficult to estimate the number of dolmens that used to be present in the area. Logging activities have since ceased. Nowadays, the surrounding area is frequented by hunters, as evidenced by the presence of a hunter's camp near the site. According to my informant, the camp is used by Penan hunters from the village of Ba' Lai.



Figure 7.5. The damaged site of Menatoh Long Belilin.

**Menatoh Long Nonar**

Based on local information, Long Nonar is located near the confluence of the Nonar and Kelapang rivers, which is about a five-hour journey away (by boat and on foot) from Long Peluan. It is said that the dolmens at the site were graves built during the time when the Ngurek occupied the area (Mashman 2017: 410). More specifically,

Mashman (2018: 119), mentions that the site "is associated with the ancestors of Araya Ajin, one of the founders of Long Peluan, whose father Bilong Salo' is said to be Ngurek, and with Telen Sang, the leader of the migration to Long Di'it." When I enquired about the possibility of visiting to the site, I was told by villagers at Long Peluan that the site no longer exists, or that there would be nothing to see because the dolmens have all been damaged. This response, I believe, was based on the villagers' experience of a previous trip made by Valerie Mashman, which failed to locate the site. Mashman's trip (see Mashman 2017), however, was made with younger generation Kelabit, who may not have known the precise location of the site. Nevertheless, it is generally believed that the site has been damaged by logging activities.

**Binatau Long Pulong**

Binatau Long Pulong is located on the Pulong River, about 45-minutes' walk from the village of Long Banga, near an area presently farmed by members of the Kenyah Leppo' Ke community. The site consists of at least 16 dolmens, most of which have collapsed, either partially or entirely. The dolmens appeared to be of various sizes. The biggest dolmen discovered on a small hill on the left (following river flow) bank of the Pulong River is approximately 3 m in length, 1.8 m in width and 1 m in height (Fig. 7.6). A smaller intact dolmen found on the right bank of the Pulong River measured approximately 1.75 m in length, 0.75 m in width and 0.5 m in height (Fig. 7.7). According to Kenyah Leppo' Ke informants, the Long Pulong dolmens are believed to have been constructed by the Ngurek. I was also informed that the site was visited and cleared by a group of Ngurek from Long Semiyang in 1995 (Charles Gau, personal communication, January 20, 2017).



Figure 7.6. A dolmen at Binatau Long Pulong.



Figure 7.7. Another (smaller) dolmen at Binatau Long Pulong.

**Binatau Long Sena**

A single dolmen was observed at Binatau Long Sena and it was located on a farmland, high on the left bank of the Puak River, not far from the confluence of the Sena and the Puak (Fig. 7.8). The dolmen was found entirely covered by vegetation and a fallen tree trunk. Clearing of the surrounding had to be done in order to take measurements and photographs of the dolmen. At a certain point, however, clearing had to be stopped

due to the discovery of a big ant's nest on top of the dolmen. Thus, the dolmen was not entirely exposed, which resulted in incomplete measurement of its dimensions. While measurement of its length was unobtainable, its width and height were approximately 1.1 m and 0.5 m, respectively. The dolmen was oriented east-west lengthwise, roughly parallel to the Puak River.



Figure 7.8. A partially exposed dolmen at Binatau Long Sena.

Inside the dolmen, three stoneware jar fragments were visible, all of which could have belonged to a single vessel (Fig. 7.9). No bone remains or other artefacts, which could have been the contents of the stoneware jar, were observed. It was also unclear whether the jar fragments were contemporary with the dolmen, or a later deposit. The finding of stoneware fragments in association with a dolmen site is, however, consistent with observations made elsewhere in the Kelabit Highlands (e.g. at Batuh Ritung and Perupun Rayeh in Pa' Lungan, see Chapter 3). Assuming that the dolmen and stoneware jar were contemporaneous, they most probably date to no longer than 500 years ago, based on known dates of stoneware jars in the highlands.



Figure 7.9. Stoneware jar fragments found inside the dolmen at Long Sena.

### 7.3.2. Stone Jars

Like dolmens, stone jars - basically, hollowed-out cylindrical vessels hewn from sandstone - were also burial monuments. It is thought that stone jars were used for secondary burials prior to the the arrival of imported stoneware jars in the highlands (Schneeberger 1979, citing Banks 1937). All of the stone jars encountered were undecorated. Some were found with their stone slab covers nearby. However, most of the stone jars were fragmented. Most of them appear to be more or less similar in size with diameters ranging from 0.4 to 0.5 m.

**Lekad Kelesan**

This stone jar site is located on the Lekad Kelesan hill (*tokong*, in Penan), about 900 metres above sea level. It was reached via a two and a half hours' walk from the Penan village of Long Beruang. To the east of Lekad Kelesan is the site of Long Jilen (see below). Approaching the top of Lekad Kelesan, several Penan hunters' camps were observed. During my visit to the site, I was told by my Penan informants that there were supposed to be two stone jars at Lekad Kelasan, but only one was found. This stone jar was undecorated, and it stood slightly slanted about 0.62 m above the ground surface, with a diameter of about 0.5 m, and rim thickness of about 7-8 cm (Fig. 7.10). The other stone jar, which we were not able to locate, was said to have fallen and was 'white' in colour. This I believe referred to the original grey colour of the sandstone material, as opposed to the usual 'green' colour of moss-covered stone jars found in the jungle environment. Compared to the other stone jar sites that I recorded in the Punang Kelapang, the Lekad Kelesan site was the only one that was located on a hilltop, and not on a river bank.



Figure 7.10. Stone jar at Lekad Kelesan.

**Long Punyao**

The site of Long Punyao is located on the right bank of the Sebua' River, about three-hours' walk from the village of Long Beruang. Long Punyao is said to be an old settlement or camp site (*la'a sahau*) of the Penan. Most of the stone jars observed at Long Punyao were fragmented. According to my Penan informants, the site had been damaged by logging activities. I was told that a decade ago, most of the stones jars were still intact. Another disturbance to the site, which is also connected to the impact of logging activities, is flooding. In the past, the stone jars at Long Punyao stood erect and exposed above ground level, but because of recent sedimentation caused by floodings, many of them are currently buried (Fig. 7.11). Floods in the area can be severely damaging. In early 2015, suspension bridges in the village of Long Peluan were swept away by heavy flooding of the Bale River.



Figure 7.11. Partially buried stone jar with slab cover at Long Punyao.

Two of the stone jars observed at Long Punyao were reasonably intact to be measured. One stood 0.13 m above the ground surface, with a maximum diameter of 0.4 m, and rim thickness or about 5 cm (Fig. 7.11). A stone slab, which could have been the cover of the stone, was found next to it, partially buried. The exposed part of the stone slab measured 0.6 m in length and 0.25 m in width, with a thickness of about 7 cm. Another stone jar in the vicinity was found fragmented towards the top, with a maximum height of 0.27 m, maximum diameter of 0.54 m, and rim thickness of 6 cm.

**Long Jilen**

The site of Long Jilen is located on left bank of the Beruang River, near its confluence with the Jilen River. It is situated about two-hours' walk from the Penan village of Long Beruang on an old jungle trail heading northwards to Bario. The Jilen River is named after the Penan name for the longan fruit (*Dimocarpus longan*), which were abundant in the area, and which the Penan used to collect. A total of three stone jars were observed; all of them fragmented, which made estimation of their dimensions difficult. Nevertheless, their maximum diameters were approximately 0.5 m. A single stone slab, which may have been a jar cover, was found next to one of the broken jars (Fig. 7.12). A few metres southwest of the stone jars, two small upright stones (rising no more than 0.7 m above ground) were observed. Near the upright stones, there were two partially buried stone slabs. It is possible that the upright stones and stone slabs were fragments of former stone jar burials.



Figure 7.12. Fragmented stone jar with slab cover at Long Jilen.

**Long Sebua'**

The Long Sebua' site is located on the right bank of the Sebua' River, near the confluence of the Sebua' and the Bale rivers. At the Long Sebua' site, at least nine stone jars were found, two of them still reasonably intact. The larger of the two measured about 0.97 m in height and 0.7 m in diameter, with a rim thickness of about 9 cm (Fig. 7.13). A large stone slab jar cover measuring 1.53 m in length, 1.1 m in width, and 0.12 m in thickness was found leaning on the large stone jar. The other smaller stone jar, on the other hand, measured approximately 0.95 m in height and 0.44 m in diameter, with thickness of around 6 cm. Closer examination revealed the presence of grooves on the rim of this stone jar, which may have functioned to stop the slab cover from slipping off the top of the stone jar.



Figure 7.13. Stone jar with slab cover at Long Sebua'.

Prior to visiting the Long Sebua' site, I was informed that it was a stone jar site. However, besides stone jars, there were also three slab-built cist graves, similar in appearance and form to others found in the Kelapang River area, for example, at Pa Di'it and Arur Tara (Lindsay Lloyd-Smith, personal communication, October 18, 2016) (Fig. 7.14). Two of these cist graves at Long Sebua' were reasonably intact to be measured. They measured 1.2 m by 0.8 m by 0.2 m, and 1 m by 0.65 m by 0.3 m, respectively.



Figure 7.14. Slab-built cist grave at Long Sebua'.

A notable find was the discovery of a stone trough, measuring about 1.07 m in length, 0.3 m in width, with a maximum thickness of around 0.12 m. Near the stone trough were five stones, which could have functioned as stands (Fig. 7.15). In terms of form, the stone trough is similar to the "rectangular with rounded base" type (Sellato 2016: 123), found in the Bahau region in Indonesian Kalimantan, which have been attributed to the Ngurek. Furthermore, according to Penan from Long Beruang, the stone graves at Long Sebua' are said to be burials of the Ngurek when they were living in the area after moving from downriver due to an epidemic. During this time, the Penan, who were also living in the area, were in contact with the Ngurek.



Figure 7.15. Stone trough at Long Sebua'.

### 7.3.3. Rock Burials

Another 'megalithic' cemetery type are burial sites located at natural rocky places. Two of them were recorded where while conducting fieldwork in the Punang Kelapang area. However, they were not visited. As alluded to above, information on these unvisited

sites were obtained from interviews and previous mentions in literature. The rock burials recorded are described as follows.

**Batuh Long Lingap**

The story of Batuh Long Lingap (see Mashman 2018: 125) is one that is quite well known in the Punang Kelapang area. According to the story, it was the place where two young lovers (some versions say that one is Kelabit and the other Ngurek, while others say that they were of different social ranks), whose parents wanted them to separate, jumped to their deaths. The burial at the site, which supposedly belonged to the lovers, consists of "a wooden coffin, which is wedged in the rock" (Mashman 2017: 414). Mashman adds that Batuh Long Lingap is a site that has been damaged by road works.

**Long Ma'o**

According to descriptions provided by locals at Long Banga, the burial site at Long Ma'o consists of human bones found in a rock crevice; possibly the remains of a secondary burial. Long Ma'o is situated on the route taken by the Ngurek and their allies, the Sa'ban and Kayan Uma Po, in their migration from the Bahau to the Upper Baram (Lower Kelapang) in the late 18$^{th}$ century (see below). It is said that while the Ngurek and the Kayan Uma Po continued their journey to the main Baram River, some Sa'ban chose to remain in the Ma'o River area (Jalong 1989: 160). I was informed that in recent times, a logging road passed through the area and damaged the site.

### 7.3.4. Stone Mounds

As mentioned in Chapter 3, stone mounds (*perupun* or *pelpuun* in the Kelabit and Sa'ban languages, respectively) were built as memorials for important individuals. Furthermore, they are said to have functioned as final repositories for the property of wealthy elites, who had no direct heirs. As part of this study, three stone mound sites were recorded, and they are described below.

**Perupun Lio Ayu**

Perupun Lio Ayu, or "Perupun Oloh Lio' Ayu" in Mashman (2018: 118), is a stone mound site located on the right bank of the Bale River, a short walk's away from the village of Long Peluan (Fig. 7.16). The stone mound was estimated to be about 20-30 m in diameter and about 2-3 m in height. Surrounding Perupun Lio Ayu were farmland and wet rice fields. The stones used for building the mound were probably sourced from the nearby Bale River. Perupun Lio Ayu is another megalithic site associated with the Ngurek. According to Mashman (2018: 116), *Lio Ayu* means 'island of the enemies' in the Ngurek language, and that "it recalls the time of warfare and alliances with the Ngurek."



Figure 7.16. Part of Perupun Lio Ayu, near the Kelabit village of Long Peluan.

**Perupun Long Senibong**

Perupun Long Senibong is located on the left bank of the Baram River, and it was reached by way of a 30-minute longboat ride from the confluence of the Bale and the Baram rivers. Perupun Long Senibong is a large stone mound – "the largest…in the area" (Mashman 2018: 117) – measuring more than 30 m in diameter, with a height of about 5 m (Fig. 7.17). The *perupun* is constructed using river-rolled stones probably sourced from the Baram River nearby. An exposed side section of the *perupun* suggests that it was constructed by deliberate arranging of the stones; in other words, the stones were not randomly piled. This is consistent with the findings of recent excavations at two stone mound sites in Pa' Lungan, north of the Kelabit Highlands (Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2017). At the top of the *perupun,* there was a big depression, roughly 8-10 m in diameter, with a maximum depth of about 2 m. This may have been

the results of previous diggings. According to Kelabit informants from Long Peluan, upriver from Long Senibong is a place called Patar Rayah, which is said to be the location of an old Kelabit settlement.



Figure 7.17. Perupun Long Senibong.

**Pelpuun Arool Batang**

Pelpuun Arool Batang is located on what is currently farmland, just south of the airstrip in the mixed Sa'ban and Kenyah Leppo' Ke village of Long Banga. When visited in 2015, the site was cleared for the planting of paddy, which exposed the stones to view (Fig. 7.18). There were at least seven or eight concentrations or piles of stones of various sizes. Local Sa'ban believe that stone mounds or *pelpuun* are burial places of people and property in the past.



Figure 7.18. Pelpuun Arool Batang.

### 7.3.5. Carved Stones

In the past, stone carvings were made for the purpose of commemorating important persons or events (see Chapter 3). Some carved stones were also attributed to the activities of ancestors, mythical figures or cultural heroes. The three carved stones that were recorded are described below. Out of the three, only one – Batu Kalong Long Banga – was visited. Not much is known about the two unvisited carved stones, which explains their rather sparse descriptions below.

#### Batuh Narit Punang Arur Mering

Batuh Narit Punang Arur Mering, or "Batuh Narit Araya Malian @ Tama Pasan" in Mashman (2018: 118), refers to the carved stone located in the upper Mering stream (*punang* means 'upper', *arur* means 'stream' in Kelabit). The carvings are said to have been made by Tama Pasang from the village of Long Peluan. Due to the nature of the

marks on the stone, I was told by informants from Long Peluan, that it may have also been used as a sharpening stone.

**Batuh Narit Pa' Peluan**

Batuh Narit Pa' Peluan is a carved stone located on the Peluan River. It is said to have been carved by a former headman of Long Peluan. The carved stone was accidentally upturned by a bulldozer during the construction of a nearby road (Mashman 2017).

**Batu Kalong Long Banga**

In Long Banga, there is a carved stone with spiral designs, which the locals call Batu Kalong (Fig. 7.19). Mashman refers to this carved stone as "Batuh Narit Long Polong" (2018: 118), and mentions its association with the Ngurek. In the Ngurek language, *batu kalong* basically means 'decorated stone' (see Jalong 1989: 160). The carved stone in Long Banga measured about 1.6 m in length, 0.2 m in width and 0.86 m in height. It is interesting to note that at the border with Indonesian Kalimantan, there is another carved stone called Batu Kalong, which has also been attributed to the Ngurek (Sellato 2016).



Figure 7.19. Batu Kalong Long Banga.

Originally, the stone was located in a central location in the village, not far from the present church and government clinic. Because of the belief that spirits in the stone were causing trouble (e.g. bad dreams, sickness) to some villagers (i.e. the stone's "evil aura", see Mashman 2018: 118), it was moved sometime in the 2000s to its present location near the current airstrip at the edge of the village, where it was deemed far enough to not cause any more harm. I was also told that the relocation of the Batu Kalong was initiated by some Sa'ban elders in order to save it from destruction, as they realised the cultural and historical importance of the stone. Belief in the power of the stone is manifested in another incident, when the death of a Sa'ban community leader in a tragic road accident several years ago was attributed by some to the 'disturbance' of the stone when it was relocated.

### 7.3.6. Standing stones

Traditionally, standing stones (*batuh senuped*, in Kelabit) were erected to commemorate important people and events (see Chapter 3). Besides serving a commemorative purpose, standing stones were also built as boundary markers between territories.

**Batuh Senuped Pa' Merir**

The only standing stone recorded in the Punang Kelapang area is located far from any of the present villages. It is situated on the boundary between Long Peluan and Ramudu in the Kelabit Highlands, and therefore, is said to be a boundary marker. This is another site that I was not able to visit during my fieldwork.

## 7.4. ORIGIN OF THE MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS

The previous section has shown the typological variety and distribution of megalithic sites in the Punang Kelapang region. However, due to the lack of archaeological investigations, the origin of the megaliths is still poorly understood. However, based on the results of research conducted on the megaliths in other areas of the Kelabit Highlands (see Chapter 3), it is possible that some of the megaliths in Punang Kelapang may be of considerable antiquity. For instance, large stone mounds like the Perupun Long Senibong and Perupun Lio Ayu may be as old as 2,500 years, while dolmen and stone jar sites may date to as early as 500 years ago (see Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2017).

Considering the continuation of megalithic practices in the Kelabit Highlands until around 1950 (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 4), a pertinent question to ask is whether the existence of the megaliths can be attributed to the communities presently living in the Punang Kelapang area, in particular the Kelabit and Sa'ban, the two communities who are associated with the practice of megalith building in the past. As discussed above, the present communities developed from migrations that occurred, at the earliest, around the turn of the 20th century. Based on records of the migration history of different groups into the Punang Kelapang region, it is probable that most of the megaliths pre-date the arrival of the present communities. For instance, Janowski and Barton (2012: 12) notes that when the Kelabit from the Kelapang valley in the southern Kelabit Highlands migrated to the Long Peluan area between the late 19th century and middle 20th century, they "found a megalithic cemetery, stone carvings and a mound of stone." In the case of the Sa'ban, it appears that by the time they migrated to the Punang Kelapang region, they had already ceased the practice of building megaliths. Clayre (2010: 282) notes that "no secondary burials [for which megalithic graves and monuments were usually built] have taken place since the main migration to Sarawak after World War II." Furthermore, Clayre's description of the Sa'ban secondary burial custom in Sarawak was actually based on an account of "secondary burial as it was practiced when the Sa'ban lived along the Upper Bahau river in Kalimantan", prior to their migration to the Upper Baram (2010: 282). Moreover, based on my own field experience, none of the megaliths in the Sa'ban areas in the Balong and Puak areas have been attributed to any known persons. This suggests that the megaliths are much older than living memory, and thus may be taken as possible indications that they were present before any of the present communities

migrated into the region.

### 7.4.1. The Ngurek connection

In the past, the megaliths in the Punang Kelapang region were commonly attributed to a group of people called the Ngurek. This was indeed the perception of the Sa'ban in the 1960s, according to Beatrice Clayre (personal communication, October 16, 2016), at the time when she was living and conducting work in the Long Banga area. At the time, more than a decade had already passed since the main migration of the Sa'ban into the area after the end of Second World War. Similarly, among the Kelabit, Mashman (2018: 115) notes that when she "first visited Long Peluan in 1983, people said [the megaliths] were Ngurek graves."

Who are the Ngurek and how are they connected to the megaliths in Punang Kelapang? As a distinct group (although culturally and historically related to the Kelabit and Sa'ban), today the Ngurek are settled in Long Banyok, Long Semiyang and Long Ikang, further downriver on the Baram. They generally trace their origin to the Bahau region in Indonesian Kalimantan. In fact, the name by which the Ngurek used to call themselves is *Hweng Mbau*, which means 'people of the Bahau' (Sellato 2016: 121). Presently there is no Ngurek settlement in the Upper Baram. However, they are known to have occupied the region in the late 18$^{th}$ century and early 19$^{th}$ century. Traces of past Ngurek occupation in Punang Kelapang are evident in oral history, local place names (which are still in use today) and the megalithic remains, as explained below.

Around the year 1700, the Ngurek, who were previously living in the upper reaches of the Baram, migrated to the Bahau region in present-day Indonesian Kalimantan. According to Ariffin and Sellato (2003), and Sellato (1995, 2016), this outmigration was due to war with other groups of people like the Kelabit, although, according to Mashman (2018: 111), "both contemporary and archive sources are unable to verify this." It was while living in Apau Kayan in the Bahau valley that "the Ngurek acquired the art of cutting stone for coffins" (Jalong 1989: 158). After some time in Apau Kayan, the Ngurek were attacked by their enemies (the Kayan, Modang and Kenyah), which resulted in them moving to the Lurah, a tributary of the Bahau. According to Sellato (2016: 120), "by about 1750, these Ngurek groups are believed to have occupied the whole area of the Upper Lurah and Bahau rivers." It was during this time in the Lurah that the Ngurek were joined by other groups that became their allies: the Sa'ban and Kayan Uma Po (Jalong 1989). Constant attacks by their enemies in the Lurah forced the Ngurek, together with the Sa'ban and the Kayan Uma Po, to move once again, possibly around 1770 (Sellato 1995: 28). This time, they went up the Bahau and crossed over to the Upper Baram (Lower Kelapang) in present-day Sarawak, and there they eventually settled in places like Long Puak, Long Balong, Long Peluan and Lulo Trong (or Long Moyo' to the Kelabit) (Jalong 1989: 160). According to Jalong (1989: 161), the Ngurek's "movement in the Upper Baram was largely unrestricted primarily because there was nobody else around."

By 1820, the Ngurek were clearly present in the Upper Baram (Sellato 1995: 28). In particular, at Lulo Trong or Long Moyo', the Ngurek were living side by side with the Kelabit (Mashman 2017: 417). It was here that the Ngurek and the Kelabit were

attacked by the Kenyah Lepo Tepu, which eventually caused them to split. While the Ngurek moved downriver on the Baram to eventually settle at Long Semiyang, the Kelabit went upriver, to Long Nonar, Ramudu, and eventually Long Di'it in the Kelapang. The present Long Peluan community are descendants of Kelabit who migrated from Long Di'it in the Kelapang around 1900 (Mashman 2018: 101).

The past Ngurek presence in the Upper Baram is also revealed by certain place names in Punang Kelapang. For example, some of the Ngurek place names which are still in common use today are Lio Ayu (where a stone mound is located near the Kelabit village of Long Peluan, see above), Lulao [Lulo] Terong, and the Ong Muang rapids (Mashman 2017: 417). River names such as the Banga ('staying on') and the Puak ('fast flowing') are also derived from Ngurek words (Mashman 2018: 130). Furthermore, as mentioned above, a carved stone in Long Banga is commonly called Batu Kalong, which in Ngurek means 'decorated stone' (Jalong 1989).

Like the Kelabit and the Sa'ban, the present-day Ngurek no longer build stone graves and monuments. It is not known when they last did so, and to my knowledge, the Ngurek's megalithic practice has never been observed directly or documented ethnographically. However, Sellato (1995: 12) has noted the use of megalithic graves in the traditional secondary burial practices of the Ngurek. Nonetheless, the Ngurek are associated with the megalithic graves both in the Bahau (see Chapter 3) and in Punang Kelapang. Jalong (1989: 167) notes that "in the Apau Kayan along the banks of the Bahau and its tributaries there are hundreds of coffins carved out of stone…by the Ngurek for putting the deads." Based on information gained from the survey I

conducted (see section 7.3 above), a number of megalithic remains in Punang Kelapang are also associated with the Ngurek. The Ngurek themselves "assert that their ancestors built the stone monuments in the area" (Mashman 2017: 417). In recent times, this belief is reflected in a visit to the Long Pulong dolmens, near Long Banga, by some Ngurek, as previously mentioned. Based on the reconstruction of the Ngurek's history in the Bahau, Sellato (1995) dates the megalithic remains there to between the 18$^{th}$ and early 19$^{th}$ centuries. One particular urn-dolmen grave in the Bahau was even associated with a Ngurek chief by the name of Paran La'ing (Sellato 2016: 120). In the case of the megalithic remains in Punang Kelapang, it is thought that some of them may date to between 1770 and 1820, in concordance of the time of the Ngurek's migration to the Upper Baram (Mashman 2018: 112). Based on current understanding of the chronology of megalith building in the Kelabit Highlands, this fits the time-frame for the appearance of dolmens and stone jars, which are believed to be not older than 500 years old (see Chapter 3). A further link between the megaliths in Punang Kelapang and the Bahau is suggested by the occurence of the stone trough type at Long Sebua', which as previously mentioned, is similar to stone troughs that have been found in the Bahau. Interestingly, the stone trough is rarely found in the Kelabit Highlands. Although it is tempting to suggest that the stone trough type is characteristic of the Ngurek megalithic tradition, until further research is carried out, this has to remain a speculation.

### 7.4.2. The Kelabit and Sa'ban perspectives

I mentioned above that in the past the megalithic monuments in Punang Kelapang were commonly perceived to be of Ngurek origin. To be clear, this explanation of the megaliths' origin is not one that has been replaced, and in many cases, it has continued to persist, as I have discovered in my survey (see section 7.3 above). In another example, in my conversation with Robin Udau, the government-appointed chief (*penghulu*) of the Kelapang area, who is also a Sa'ban from Long Banga, I was informed that the dolmen graves in the area were indeed built by the Ngurek, and were already present before the arrival of the Sa'ban people. Despite that, as I hope to illustrate in this section, contestations of the megaliths have arisen, and in recent times, a Kelabit or Sa'ban origin for the megaliths has been asserted in some quarters. I would like to make clear, however, that the discussions below do not in any way imply the correct origin of the megalithic remains. Nor is any part of this chapter endorsing any of the claims – regardless by the Ngurek, the Kelabit or the Sa'ban – of the megalithic remains. Indeed, more archaeological, historical and ethnographical work needs to be done before we can properly speculate on the origins of the megalithic remains in the Punang Kelapang region. What I am more interested to show in this section is the fact that currently there have arisen contesting narratives of the megaliths' origin.

In the historical (oral) narrative of the Long Peluan community, which I collected as part of my fieldwork, the megalithic remains in the Long Peluan area were said to have been made by Kelabit ancestors. This has also been noted by Valerie Mashman (2018). For example, in her doctoral thesis, Mashman quotes a story, similar

to one that I noted while conducting my own fieldwork, recently told by the headman of the Long Peluan village: "as the Kelabit moved upriver, one can see stone mounds and standing stones that they built along the river, and slab graves at Long Nonar. These are signs left by them" (Mashman 2018: 125).[13] This is despite the fact that when Mashman first arrived in Long Peluan in the 1980s, she noted the people's attribution of the megaliths to the Ngurek, as mentioned above. The present attribution of the megaliths to Kelabit forebears, however, is consistent with the general observation in other areas of the Kelabit Highlands, where megalithic remains are commonly "interpreted by the Kelabit as placed there or shaped by their ancestors, recent or distant" (Janowski and Barton 2012: 10).

In Long Banga, I have also observed on different occasions the ascription of the megaliths in the area to Sa'ban forebears. For example, to explain the origin of the megalithic graves in Long Ma'o and Long Sena, one man in his late sixties mentioned to me that "ancestors in the past made them." Additionally, a man in his seventies, in commenting on the visit made by the Ngurek people from Long Semiyang to the megalithic graves at Long Pulong (see above), mentioned: "it [the Long Pulong site] actually belongs to the Sa'ban. The Long Semiyang Ngurek are mistaken to think that Long Pulong is theirs." Additionally, and in a way that nevertheless also acknowledged the Ngurek's role in megalith making, I was told by Gabriel Jau Liran, the headman of the Long Banga village at the time of my fieldwork, that the megaliths in the area were built by both the Ngurek and the Sa'ban as they migrated from the Bahau to the Upper

[13] The narrative is part of a voice recording of oral history done by Malian Tepun, the Long Peluan headman, in 2006, and given to Mashman in 2010 (Mashman 2018: 2).

Baram together.

Nevertheless, there were also some Sa'ban who claimed that the Ngurek only built megalithic monuments when they were living together with the Sa'ban. In other words, the Ngurek were said to have adopted the megalithic culture from the Sa'ban during their stay in the Bahau. It should be mentioned that this is a point that is absent from previous discussions of the megalithic culture of the Ngurek. In my view, it is an opinion that appears to be confined to certain members of the Sa'ban community, and thus, is possibly a new interpretation of the megaliths' origin. According to one of my informants, who is also a local political and land activist in Long Banga, the seeming proof of this opinion is the presence of megalithic remains in the Balong area, where the Ngurek and the Sa'ban last lived together in the early 19th century, but not further downriver on the Baram, where the Ngurek have since moved to, which is taken to indicate that the Ngurek only built megaliths when they were with the Sa'ban and not on their own. Thus, according to this logic, the primary megalith builders in the Balong in the past were the Sa'ban and not the Ngurek. Further to this, an explanation was offered to me as to how the monuments in the area could have been wrongly (in the eyes of some Sa'ban) attributed to the Ngurek. It was mentioned that, "in order to prevent children from going to play in distant places, old folks used to scare them by saying, 'don't go there, there is a Ngurek *binatau* [cemetery] over there.' It was said so many times that people began to believe it." Regardless of its veracity, this anecdote is interesting in that it further demonstrates in a way the past association of the megalithic remains with the Ngurek.

## 7.5. CLAIMING THE STONES, CLAIMING THE LAND

The more recent assertions of the Kelabit or Sa'ban role in the making of the megalithic monuments in Punang Kelapang, which are in contrast with the previous popular perception that they were built by the Ngurek, represent a reimagining of the megaliths' origins. Furthermore, I would argue that they are a reflection and also a consequence of newly developed interest in the megalithic remains of the interior highlands within the past two decades. Prior to that, for many years, particularly after the local people's conversion to Christianity, the megalithic remains in Punang Kelapang have largely been neglected because of their association with pre-Christian beliefs and spirits (see for example, Chapter 4), while their lack of preservation, or in some cases, destruction – for example, a number of megalithic graves have been damaged by logging activities and one carved stone was known to have been upturned by road-building work (see above; see also Mashman 2017) – have been treated with indifference or passive resignation by the locals. This is what Mashman (2017) has termed the 'forgetting' of the sites. Based on observations among the Kelabit of Long Peluan, Mashman (2017: 414) notes that "the forgetting and damage to these sites took place at a time when there was little awareness of the importance of having such places gazetted…At that time, these places had little meaning to the Kelabit of Long Peluan." As Ose Murang, a Kelabit from Long Peluan, revealed, previously "people knew the monuments were there, but they didn't know what to do with them" (personal communication, July 5, 2016). The renewed and rise in interest in the megalithic monuments started with the "recent gazetting of Kelabit cultural sites after 2000." (Mashman 2017: 414). As I have discussed in Chapter 5, the Kelabit

community's interest in gazetting the cultural sites in the Kelabit Highlands is tied to growing concerns over the impact of development, especially commercial logging activities, on the people's control of their land and traditional culture. Here, it can also be argued that the new interest in the megalithic remains in Punang Kelapang, and new claims as to their origins from members of the Kelabit and Sa'ban communities are linked to the present need to establish communal claims over land in the area.

To indigenous communities in the Upper Baram, in Borneo, as well as in the world over, "land is life" (see Colchester *et al*. 2007) and is important in myriad ways. As places where agriculture, hunting and collecting of jungle produce are carried out, the land and forests are key to the subsistence economy of various indigenous peoples. Land also carries a symbolic and historical significance for the natives whose ancestors have lived in or traversed the land since time immemorial. People's relationships with the land are crucial to the identities and social well-being of various groups. As Cleary and Eaton (1996: 47) notes, "the land itself becomes essential to the identity of the group and its members; loss of the land may lead to a loss of this identity, psychological trauma, social alienation, and economic marginalization." Today, however, land is a dwindling resource as communities grow larger and land development intensifies. In the Punang Kelapang area, Mashman (2017: 406) mentions the "forest fires of 1997" as another factor that has reduced the extent of available land. External factors too have increased pressure on land. In the Upper Baram, commercial logging activities have encroached on native territories resulting in the loss of traditional land and forest resources (see Malone 2014).

Relationships with land reflect wider changes in society. In the past, when land was plentiful and population pressure was low, there was less emphasis on land boundaries. Nowadays, the scarcity of land resources and the changing of their values as a result of "timber logging activities…and the growth of monetary economy" have resulted in increased competition between the different communities for ownership or the rights to use the land (Bulan 2003: 47). In recent times, disputes over land, especially in areas occupied by different groups of people, have become more common (Bulan 2003). This is because as land availability is reduced, "boundaries tend to be more carefully defined and ancestral claims more vividly remembered and guarded" (Cleary and Eaton 1996: 51). Such is the case with Punang Kelapang, which as mentioned previously, is a multi-ethnic area where Kelabit, Sa'ban, Kenyah Leppo' Ke and Penan communities, each with their own versions of history and claims to the land, are found living in relatively close proximities to one another. Today, indigenous groups "live in an era where struggle over, and/or access to their customary resources has become a reality" (Bulan 2003: 50). As a result, native communities in Borneo as well as in other parts of the world (see Thom 2009) are pressured to map their land and resources according to present laws of land ownership derived from foreign notions of land and land use (see Ngidang 2005) "as a means of self protection, negotiation, and empowerment" (Bulan 2003: 50).

How do native communities in Sarawak establish their rights to the land, and what role do the megalithic monuments, particularly in the Upper Baram, play in local land claims? Among the indigenous peoples of Sarawak, traditional land tenure and customary rights over land are based on native customary law or *adat* that is

recognised by the Sarawak Land Code 1958 (Appell 1971, 1997b; Cleary and Eaton 1996; Cramb and Sujang 2011; Ngidang 2005; Richards 1961). In order to establish customary rights to land, onus is on the native communities to provide evidence of occupation and use of the land prior to the arbitrary cutoff date of 1 January 1958 (Majid Cooke 2006; Bulan and Locklear 2008). According to Section 5(2) of the Sarawak Land Code (SLC) 1958, customary rights to land are created through: (a) the felling of virgin jungle and the occupation of the land thereby cleared; (b) the planting of land with fruit trees; (c) the occupation or cultivation of land; (d) the use of land for a burial ground or shrine; or (e) the use of land of any class for rights of way. Customary rights to land confers to the natives "the rights to cultivate the land, rights to the produce of the jungle, hunting and fishing rights, rights to use the land for burial and ceremonial purposes, and rights of inheritance and transfer" (Bulan 2006: 46). It is thus in accordance to Section 5(2) of the SLC 1958, that the upland megalithic remains can be used by the natives as evidence of land use prior to 1958 in order to establish native customary land claims. Clearly the megalithic remains that can now be seen across the highland landscapes of the Upper Baram date to before 1958. One way how this is apparent is in the various documented encounters with the upland megalithic remains in the first half of the 20$^{th}$ century as written by Douglas (1912), Banks (1937), Harrisson (1948, 1949a, 1949b, 1951, 1958b, 1958c, 1959b) and Schneeberger (1979), among others. Also, it has been shown that megalithic practices in the Upper Baram region had generally ceased by 1950 (Harrisson 1958c; see also Chapter 4 of this thesis). Thus, in the Upper Baram region, the megalithic graves and monuments are clear signs of past human activity or use of land in the landscape (Janowski and Barton 2012). To the upland or upriver communities, megalithic burial monuments in

particular represent deep historical links between the people and the land. As Cleary and Eaton (1996: 47) notes, “burial places, the homes of the bones of the ancestors, have a special significance both as sacred areas not to be disturbed, and also as proofs of long occupation of the land.” To the Kelabit, for example, the megalithic remains are signs of previous settlements and ancestral practices, as well as proof that the Kelabit as a people had inhabited the Kelabit Highlands since time immemorial. As Bulan notes, “in relation to neighbouring tribes, cultural evidence of Kelabit occupation of the land was characterized in the past by a unique stone megalithic culture that set the highlands apart as unmistakably inhabited by the Kelabits” (2003: 19). In this way, the megalithic remains have become useful to the Kelabit people as one of the ways to claim customary rights to land in the Kelabit Highlands. Bulan also observes, “the presence of those burial sites and those monuments on the physical landscape are proof of connection and occupation of land through customary usage of lands” (Bulan 2015: 3). Thus, it has also been said that “remains of this [megalithic] culture can be used to demarcate customary land claims that the Kelabit may need to make on the Kelabit Highlands” (Lian-Saging and Bulan 1989: 96). In recent times, results from archaeological research conducted in Kelabit-lived areas, which have suggested the considerable antiquity of megalithic monuments (see Barker *et al.* 2008; Barker *et al.* 2009; Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2010; Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2013), have also provided Kelabit communities “with an endorsement to their claims to the stone culture” (Mashman 2017: 415).

In village land perimeter maps, which are to be used in perimeter survey exercises conducted by the government in order to recognise native customary lands

(Bulan 2006; Majid Cooke 2006), besides old longhouse sites, formerly cultivated land and burial sites, megalithic sites may be included as evidence of traditional land use and as markers of long-term occupation. One such vilage perimeter map, which was drawn for the purpose of a perimeter survey, was shown to me when I conducted fieldwork in the village of Long Peluan (Fig. 7.20). Besides showing the traditional areas used for farming, hunting, foraging and collecting of forest products, the map is of interest to this chapter for it included the locations of several megalithic sites as one of the features of traditional land use by the community. I was informed that the map was made by a prominent member of the Long Peluan community, who is a former practising lawyer, but who is now founder and manager of a private company in the oil and gas industry in the city of Miri. The effectiveness of this map, which was drawn "several years ago", in terms of its use for establishing native customary land claim, however, is less clear. Problems related to the perimeter survey as an instrument for establishing native customary land rights has been documented, for example, by Bulan (2006) and Majid Cooke (2006). There have also been recent contestations of the Kelabit land claim in the Long Peluan area by certain members of the neighbouring Penan community of Long Beruang, as documented by Mashman (2018). Nevertheless, it can be argued that recent claims of ownership over the megalithic remains in Punang Kelapang by members of the Kelabit community were made in order to bolster community claims to the land at a time when land pressures, due to logging activities, development and competing claims to land and territory, are being felt. As Mashman (2017: 406) notes, the Kelabit exclusive claim of the stone monuments in the area "is characteristic of situations when there is pressure on territory from outside forces." In other words, the Kelabit claim can be viewed as "as a response to contestation of its

territory" (Mashman 2018: 159).

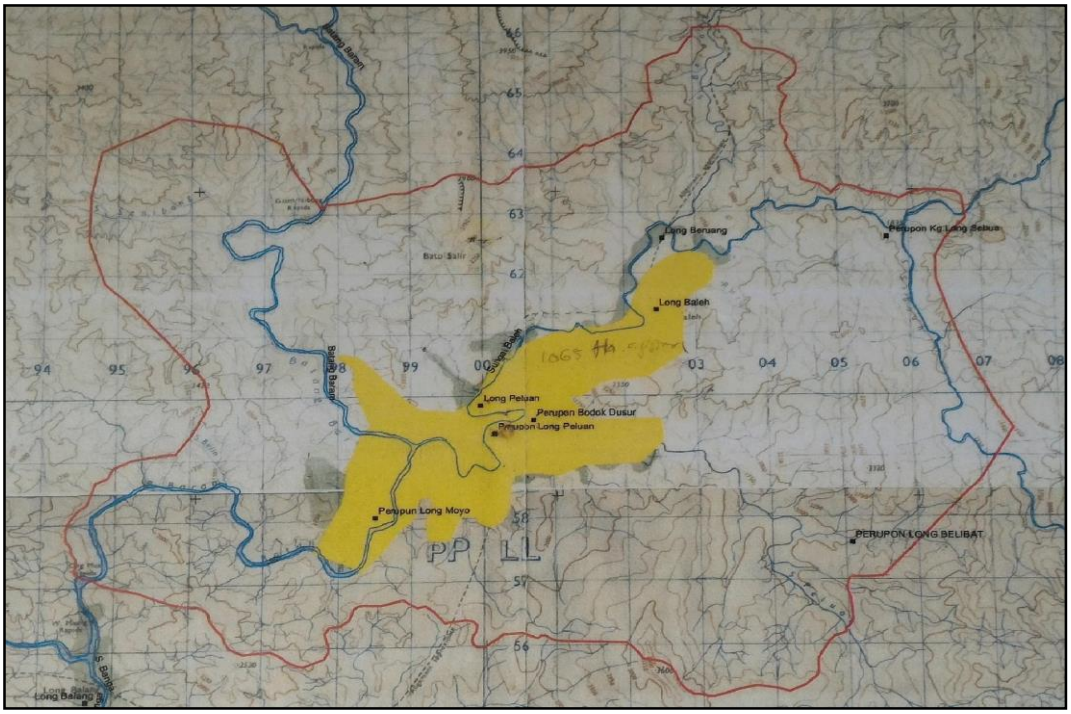



Figure 7.20. Map showing the boundary of the Long Peluan area and the locations of several megalithic sites.

Echoing what I discovered among the Kelabit community of Long Peluan, I also observed the present importance of megalithic remains for land claims among the Sa'ban community. To my initial Sa'ban contacts, my project to document the megalithic remains in the area was something that was well-received primarily because of its potential use as evidence for the community's future native customary land claim. As Robin Udau, the *Penghulu* or chief of the Kelapang region who is also a Sa'ban from Long Banga, mentioned, "it is good that you are recording our monuments so that we can use it in the future for our perimeter survey" (personal communication, April 4, 2016). Prior to that, upon hearing about my plans to study the megalithic remains in

the Long Banga area, one of my preliminary contacts − a Sa'ban from Long Banga who is presently a school teacher in Miri − prior to conducting my fieldwork opined that my research will help to further substantiate the Sa'ban's historical and long term occupation of the Balong and Puak areas, as is currently known through oral histories (personal communication, November 25, 2015).

The use of megalithic monuments in justifying claims to land can also be seen in the assertion by the Kelabit (of Long Peluan) and the Sa'ban (of Long Banga) of their greater rights to the land compared to their neighbours, the Penan communities in Long Beruang and Long Lamai, respectively. The Kelabit, in particular, view themselves as being the earliest settlers in the Punang Kelapang region (Murang 1993). By virtue of this, the Kelabit claim to "have all the rights to claim and control the land and forest in this region" and to be "the arbiter of any claims over land and forest in the region" (Murang 1993: 93). To the Kelabit, the Penan are seen as temporary occupants of land that traditionally belonged to the Kelabit. Furthermore, in response to previous land contestations between the Kelabit and the Penan in the Punang Kelapang region, Murang (1993) asserts that the establishment of Penan settlements and farms in the Long Lamai and Long Beruang areas was only possible because of the permission granted by the Kelabit community in the past. The Kelabit and Sa'ban claim to have more rights to the land compared to the Penan because in the past they (the Kelabit and Sa'ban) made permanent marks on the land, for example by establishing farms and rice fields, and additionally by building megalithic monuments, the remains of which have continued to be visible in the landscape. In contrast, the Penan, who were traditionally nomadic hunter-gatherers before the 1950s, did not cultivate the land or

mark their graves (Needham 1972). As a marker of ethnic identity, the megalithic remains have become useful for the Kelabit and Sa'ban "to reinforce their relationship with the land through the stone culture, distinguishing themselves from their neighbours" (Mashman 2018: 158), and thus, important for establishing their authority over the land. In the case of the Kelabit, Janowski and Barton (2012: 12) mentions that "on the basis of these [megalithic remains] the people of Long Peluan declare that they have more significant rights over the territory than the Penan, who themselves say that they were living in the area when the Kelabit arrived."[14] To the Kelabit, the megalithic remains in the area are "evidence of their early occupation of the land and, as a result, the land belongs to the Kelabit" (Mashman 2017: 406).

Historical accounts mention Sa'ban presence in the Long Banga and Long Balong area since the late 19th or early 20th century, and the beginning of Penan settlement in the Long Lamai area (with the influence of a Sa'ban preacher by the name of Lahang Apoi) in the late 1950s (see Murang 1993). It is in connection to this that some Sa'ban hold the view that the Penan in Long Lamai are presently living and farming on land in the Balong River area (the Lamai River is a tributary of the Balong) that belongs to the former. I suggest that such a view may have affected people's perception of monuments in the landscape. On the main walking path before reaching the village of Long Lamai, there are stone carvings (Fig. 7.21) that were apparently made by two Penan individuals some time in the early 2000s, based on information

[14] Although they did not make permanent settlements or cultivated the land, the Penan claim their rights to land through the history of their presence in the land as evidenced by place names and stories, old campsites (*la'a*) and their management (*molong*) of wild sago in their *tana' pengurip* or "land that provides the essentials of life, food and other resources" (Langub 2011: 96).

obtained from an interview that I conducted in Long Lamai. Two of my Sa'ban informants (one of whom guided me on my trip from Long Banga to Long Lamai), however, were adamant that the carvings, which to them appeared 'old', could not have been recently made by Penan. Firstly, in the minds of my Sa'ban informants, the Penan are 'new' in the area, as they only started to settle down near Long Lamai in the 1950s (despite the fact that, as I have mentioned in section 7.1 above, they were already present in the area as hunter-gatherers long before they adopted sedentary living). Furthermore, compared to the Sa'ban, the Penan as a group have no tradition of carving stone. Following this logic, according to my Sa'ban informants, the stone carvings must have been made by Sa'ban ancestors when they occupied the area around Long Lamai in the past, and not by the Penan, who came later. There is indication that the issue is possibly connected to recent disputes over communal territorial boundaries between the Sa'ban and the Penan communities. I was informed that the carved stone is located at the boundary between the Long Banga (Sa'ban) and Long Lamai (Penan) territories. According to my Sa'ban informants, the reason why the Penan would be interested in 'claiming ownership' over the stone carvings is because they know that they are living on Sa'ban land, and by claiming the stone, they are basically claiming rights to the land. I should note that the two Sa'ban informants are local land activists, and that their perceptions about the Long Lamai stone carvings may have been influenced by previous local land dispute, and thus are not representative of general opinion.

That the carving is old (made by the Sa'ban) and not new (made by the Penan) is however, debatable, and appears to be a newly formed assumption by certain

people. Firstly, I find that there is no reason to doubt that the carvings are recent. This is supported by information obtained from a Kelvin Egay, a Sarawakian anthropologist, (personal communication, April 26, 2016), who previously worked in the area (see Egay 2009), who saw the same stone carvings (I was also shown a photograph taken in 2005 by the anthropologist), and who identified the Penan person who carved the stone (one of the two names that were mentioned to me during my field interview; the person was also among my group of Penan informants). There is also no previously known record of old stone carvings in the Long Lamai area. Furthermore, the Sa'ban guide and informant mentioned above admitted to have never previously heard of stories from older people regarding old stone carvings in the Long Lamai area, and this is despite having asked around after 'discovering' the stone carvings some time in 2015. The same informant also apparently did not notice the carvings in previous visits to Long Lamai (prior to 2015). All these point to the misconception of the supposed antiquity of what is apparently a modern or recently-made carved stone, which is driven by present struggles to prove or disprove past or ancestral land use in light of recent competition over land.



Figure 7.21. Stone carving near the Penan village of Long Lamai.

It can also be argued that the recent Sa'ban claim over monuments in their present territory is a response to the perceived unequal relationship between the Sa'ban and the Kelabit. As mentioned previously, the Kelabit view themselves as the first settlers in the area, and therefore have the rights to all the land in the Punang Kelapang area. This claim however is not without dispute. The historical circumstances and events of early migrations of the Kelabit and the Sa'ban have been contested in the past, and the Sa'ban do not consider the Kelabit as first settlers (Egay 2009: 143). In my opinion, by laying their claims over the stone monuments, the Sa'ban are asserting that they have as much historical claim to the land as the Kelabit. The relationship between the Sa'ban and the Kelabit has also been described as "tenuous" and moreover, "the

Sa'bans are trying to dissociate themselves from the historical leadership control by the Kelabits" (Murang 1989: 189). Egay (2009: 134) also notes that the Sa'ban are "marginalised from the wider Malaysian society." In the past, the Sa'ban have faced issues concerning the recognition of their indigeneity, and thus, their citizenship in Malaysia (see news article 'Sa'ban are legitimate as indigenous of Sarawak' [original in Malay] in Utusan Borneo, August 17, 2009). The situation of the Sa'ban is in contrast to the Kelabit who are a state-recognised indigenous group, and who, despite their small numbers, are generally regarded as one of the most educated and successful ethnic communities in Sarawak (P. Bala 2014). Some Sa'ban are also not at ease with their historical status as a sub-group of the Kelabit. For example, one of my informants complained that the current government-appointed native chief (*Penghulu*) of the region (Robin Udau, a Sa'ban from Long Banga), whose jurisdiction covers the Kelabit and Sa'ban communities of the Kelapang area, is more widely known as the *Penghulu* of the Kelabit than a Sa'ban one. This is in contrast with the Penan, who since 1988, have had their own government-appointed *Penghulu* (Murang 1993). Furthermore, although many Long Peluan residents have Sa'ban ancestry or mixed marriages with the Sa'ban, the village is commonly seen as Kelabit. In light of the social dominance of the Kelabit in the region, the recent Sa'ban claim over the megalithic remains in the area is essentially a vehicle through which they are able to assert their own distinct cultural identity and sovereignty over the land that they currently occupy.

**CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I have examined the recent contestations over megalithic monuments in the Punang Kelapang region in the Upper Baram. The presence of these megalithic monuments constitute evidence of a long history of human occupation and land use in the area, possibly older than any of the present settlements. I have shown in this chapter that in the past, the megalithic remains were commonly attributed to the Ngurek – a group of people who now live further downriver on the Baram, but who historically were settled in the Punang Kelapang region. Increasingly, however, the Kelabit and the Sa'ban have been asserting their own claims to the megalithic remains in the region. Both the Kelabit and the Sa'ban have historical links with the Ngurek people. In the early 19th century, it is said that the Kelabit and the Ngurek were living side by side at a place called Lulo Trong (by the Ngurek) or Long Moyo' (by the Kelabit) in the Upper Baram. The Sa'ban, on the other hand, were allies with the Ngurek when both groups were living in the Upper Bahau region, across the present border in what is now Indonesian Kalimantan, in the 18th century, as well as when both groups eventually moved to the Upper Baram region later in the same century.

In this chapter, I mentioned that the new interest shown by certain members of the Kelabit and Sa'ban communities in the megalithic monuments in Punang Kelapang is related to the recent gazetting of megalithic sites in the Kelabit Highlands (see Chapter 5). More importantly, in this chapter I have also argued that the claims to the megalithic monuments, more than just being part of interest to preserve cultural heritage, can also be linked to current contestations over land, which in recent years

has become a limited resource due to the impacts of past logging activities, development work, and competition from different neighbouring communities. The Sarawak Land Code 1958, which establishes native customary rights to land in the state, require that evidence of long term and traditional occupation and use of the land (such as cultivation of land, settlement areas, and burial grounds used before 1958) be shown in order to support native claims of rights to land under the rule of law. Thus, because of their antiquity, durability, and conspicuousness in the landscape, megalithic monuments have become convenient evidence for groups like the Kelabit and the Sa'ban to prove their claims to rights over land. This is especially so because unlike the Penan, their present neighbours, the Kelabit and the Sa'ban have past traditions of megalith building. In addition, I further argued that for the Sa'ban in particular, the new claim to the megalithic monuments is also a way for them to assert their indigeneity, long history and social standing in the land, which in past years have been sidelined or questioned. Thus, in this chapter, in examining how the origin and ownership of megalithic monuments may be contested by different groups, I have shown how monuments in the landscape are implicated in the changing and flexible nature of claims to land and belonging.

# CHAPTER 8

# CONCLUSIONS

Proceeding from the premise that over time, and in many cases long after they were originally made and used, megalithic monuments are capable of accumulating new meanings as a result of their long-term interactions with different groups of people in different times and contexts (see Bender 1993b, 1998; Holtorf 1998), this thesis aimed to examine the changing meanings of the megalithic monuments in the Upper Baram. As described in this thesis, what was once an integral part of the funerary rites and memorialisation practices of the indigenous peoples of Borneo's northern interior, megalith building is no longer a practice that is seen today. In the Upper Baram region, this has been the case since the last known traditional construction of a megalithic monument was recorded among the Kelabit people of the Kelabit Highlands more or less seven decades ago (Harrisson 1958c). My findings suggest that despite the cessation of megalithic practice in the region, the megalithic remains in the Upper Baram, some of which may be more than 2,000 years old (Lloyd-Smith 2012; Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2017), have continued to be significant 'places' (see Cresswell 2004) in the lives of the local people, albeit in ways that are different than what they were originally built for. In this way, the megalithic monuments are more than just objects from the past that are valued (mostly by outsiders) for their archaeological significance. The evidence suggests that to the peoples (particularly the Kelabit and the Sa'ban, who are associated with past megalithic traditions) who reside in the areas where megalithic monuments are found, and who interact with the megalithic monuments in their daily

lives, they (the megalithic monuments) are also very much objects of the present, as will be summarised below. Thus, the significance of megalithic monuments may cut across different time periods, and the megaliths can also be said to have an afterlife in their overall cultural biography (see Holtorf 1998).

The various chapters of this thesis have highlighted the different ways how people have interacted with the megalithic monuments in recent times (i.e. the past seventy years). It is through these different interactions with the megaliths, which show the persistence of their memories, that we get a sense of the new meanings that the megalithic monuments have acquired, and how these meanings have changed over the years. Chapter 4 has shown that in colonial times, after the abandonment of the megalithic tradition, the megaliths in the Upper Baram were excavated and studied by archaeologists, and thus became archaeological objects. Yet, around the same time, the megaliths were avoided by the newly converted Christian Kelabit population because of the megaliths' association with heathen practices, or the 'paganization' of megaliths (see Holtorf 1998). Nevertheless, Chapter 5 has shown that eventually, beginning in the early 2000s, after decades of neglect, the megalithic monuments were revalorised as cultural heritage and tourism objects (see Cole 2003). To the local populations today, the megaliths are ancestral sites that are connected to communal and personal memories of people, historical events, and past cultural practices. The megalithic remains in the Upper Baram are thus 'monuments' (Glassberg 1991; Osborne 2014b) that remind people of their perceived (because the histories of many megalithic remains are still unknown) connections to the land, as well as their identity and culture, which are important for the people's sense of history and belonging (see

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6). As such, the megaliths have been used to mark and/or contest territorial boundaries, as Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of this thesis have alluded to.

The above paragraph indicates the multivalent nature of the megalithic remains in the Upper Baram as places that embody multiple meanings and uses. More than that, my analysis of the interactions between megaliths and people also suggests that the meanings that people impart on the megalithic monuments are flexible. The ways people perceive and interact with the megalithic monuments are influenced by a variety of factors, which may change according to the needs and interests of the day. My findings have shed light on the various historical and contemporary processes that have shaped the meanings of the megalithic monuments – processes that certain scholars may refer to as 'placemaking' (see Rubertone 2008a) or 'monumentalisation' (see Hamilakis 2008). Particularly, I have shown the interactions with the megalithic monuments, and the resulting meanings, to be essentially local responses to political, economic and social realities of life in modern-day Borneo.

In Chapter 4, I discussed the cessation of the Kelabit megalithic tradition in the context of wider colonial-era development and modernisation in Sarawak that changed the lifeways and worldviews of the native peoples. I argued that a particular driving factor in the cessation of megalithic practice among the Kelabit was the incompatibility of its rituals, which involved the consumption of alcoholic drinks, animal sacrifice and spirit worship, with the people's newly (since the 1940s) acquired Evangelical Christian beliefs. Moreover, the cessation of the practice of secondary burials (as discussed in Chapter 3, secondary burial feasts were the primary occasions for megalith building

among the Kelabit and other related groups in pre-Christian times), and the megalithic monuments' diminishing importance as markers of status in the Kelabit social life were pointed out as additional factors, which were related nonetheless to religious conversion, that contributed to the end of megalith building among the Kelabit. After the Kelabit's religious conversion, the megalithic remains were commonly viewed in negative terms as pagan objects of the past, and as spirit-laden or taboo places, which in turn led to the distancing of the people from the stone monuments, which had previously occupied a central position in the traditional sphere of life in the highlands.

Further in Chapter 4, I described the development of colonial-era megalithic research in Sarawak, primarily through the work of Tom Harrisson, who as Curator of the Sarawak Museum and Government Ethnologist from 1946 to 1966, was credited with pioneering archaeological research in Sarawak (Solheim 1977, 1983). He was particularly interested in and known for his study of the megaliths in the Kelabit Highlands in the Upper Baram, which as discussed in Chapter 4 was both a consequence of the colonial government's interest in studying the cultures of the native peoples for administrative purposes, and his own personal interest in the Kelabit, with whom he had cooperated and developed a close relationship during the time of the Second World War (Harrisson 1959b). In Chapter 4, I mentioned Harrisson's various explorations, documentations, and analysis of the upland megalithic sites (particularly as part of fieldwork that was conducted in 1962), which I argued have contributed to the transformation of the megalithic monuments into archaeological sites.

In more recent times, as apparent in Chapter 5, the megalithic monuments have been re-appropriated and promoted as Kelabit cultural heritage. I argued that this represented a change in Kelabit attitudes towards objects from their past, considering that after the people's conversion to Christianity, the megalithic remains were generally neglected, as I have already mentioned above. This shift in attitude can be viewed as an outcome of the "heritage awareness" that was sparked among educated Kelabit individuals beginning in the 1960s (Sweet and Kelly 2014). As discussed in Chapter 5, this heritage awareness was a process that was informed by the realisation that despite delivering progress and modernity to the Kelabit community, the major social transformations that have occurred since the end of the Second World War have also resulted in the gradual loss of traditional knowledge and practices that are central to the expression of Kelabit identity in modern times. Beginning in the 1990s, a particular threat to the preservation of Kelabit traditional culture arrived in the form of commercial logging activities, which impacted the natural environment that have provided for the livelihood and culture of the indigenous people, who according to current archaeological evidence may have a long chronology of settlements and various activities in the highland landscape since around 3,000 years ago (Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2010; Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2017). In certain cases, logging activities, which Hitchner (2009a: 26) considers as "the largest threat to cultural sites today", have also caused destruction to megalithic (see for example, Chapter 7 of this thesis) and other sites of cultural importance to the highland peoples. The potential damages to sites that could be caused by logging activities – without neglecting the damages to sites caused by the ignorance and the building and agricultural activities of local people themselves (see Hitchner 2009a) – together with the growth of local tourism, has triggered community-

based efforts to protect and conserve the megalithic monuments in the Kelabit Highlands (Cluny and Chai 2007; Hitchner 2009a). These conservation efforts have in turn further promoted the heritage, as well as tourism values of the megalithic sites.

In Chapter 5, in discussing the representation of megalithic monuments as cultural heritage, I have also shown their use in serving certain needs of the Kelabit community in the present. Firstly, the use of the megalithic remains as tourist attractions indicate their economic value to the local Kelabit community. The construction of the Millennium Kawang in 2000, which revived a traditional monument making practice not seen since pre-Christian times, to commemorate the turn of the new millennium further exemplified the present-day Kelabit interest in their past monumental practices. Besides being a response to issues regarding the lack of awareness and preservation of traditional culture, I further argued that the building of the Millennium Kawang also addressed issues concerning cultural continuity and communal rights over land. Finally, my discussion of the megalithic exhibitions at the recently established (in 2016) Kelabit Community Museum in Bario highlighted the Kelabit community's desire to establish control over research ownership, and representations of Kelabit cultural heritage.

Chapter 6 focused on the importance of megalithic monuments for the local people's sense of history, identity and belonging. It highlighted another factor that had impacted people's relationship with the upland megaliths, and that is the relocation of Kelabit communities that took place in the 1960s. The relocation of communities was a result of security concerns during the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation (1963-1966),

and involved the movement of people from different villages across the highlands to settle in newly formed settlements in Bario. One of these settlements is Arur Dalan, whose residents trace their origins to the Kubaan valley in the western Kelabit Highlands. Chapter 6 examined the present-day relationship between the Arur Dalan community and the megaliths in the Kubaan region. The megaliths were shown to be part of a cultural landscape constructed by previous long-term occupation of the Kubaan region. Chapter 6 also demonstrated the significance of the megalithic monuments, as well as other historical and cultural places, as repositories of the memories of people, events and activities of the past that date back to the time when the Kelabit settled the Kubaan region. Further, I argued that despite the people's displacement from their original homeland, it is through the memories of places and landscapes that the Arur Dalan community continues to maintain strong connections with the Kubaan region.

In Chapter 7, the attention of this thesis shifted to the investigation of the relationship between people and megalithic monuments in a different part of the Upper Baram, namely the Punang Kelapang region in the southern fringe of the Kelabit Highlands. In this chapter, I demonstrated how megalithic remains are implicated in processes of land or resource claims in the region, which resulted in changing perceptions of the origin of the megaliths. Previously, the megaliths in the Punang Kelapang region were commonly attributed to the Ngurek, a group of people who, according to oral history, settled the region at various times in the 18$^{th}$ and 19$^{th}$ centuries. Today, however, the Kelabit and Sa'ban communities, whose history in the Punang Kelapang area dates back to around 1900, are increasingly asserting their own

historical links with the megaliths. I argued that the re-imagining of the megaliths' origins is tied to current contestations over control and ownership of land in the region, which in recent years has become a dwindling resource.

From the chapter summaries provided above, it is clear that this thesis has focused on more recent or contemporary engagements with the megalithic monuments in the Upper Baram. By doing this, this thesis has contributed an up-to-date ethnography that sheds light on why megalithic monuments from the past continue to matter in the lives of people today. Although archaeological scholars have long realised that megalithic monuments may be reinterpreted or used in various ways in different periods following their abandonment (see Daniel 1972), this remains an important point to consider because, to recapitulate what was mentioned in Chapter 1, the study of the meanings that megalithic monuments may acquire in the subsequent periods after their original use has traditionally been underemphasised in archaeological studies (see Holtorf 2015), which more often than not are usually interested in investigating when or how megalithic monuments were built, what they were originally used for, and what they can tell us about the past societies who built or used them. The findings of this thesis have also led to a broader understanding of the social significance of the megalithic monuments, that in addition to the archaeological significance of the megaliths, has also included their historical and present meanings. The issue of the significance of megalithic monuments and archaeological sites in general to contemporary peoples or societies have been widely considered, particularly in fields such as anthropology and heritage studies, and increasingly in archaeology. This is especially so because many megalithic sites today – like the Stonehenge and

Avebury sites in the United Kingdom, the megalithic temples in Malta, and the Plain of Jars in Laos in Southeast Asia, to mention a few examples – have heritage values. As a result, there have been various interest over the years in the preservation or conservation of megalithic monuments (e.g. Cassar *et al.* 2011; Felden 1996; Theuma and Grima 2006), as well as in their management (e.g. chapters in volume edited by Pomeroy-Killinger and Scott [2007]), especially in light of the economic values that megalithic monuments hold due their significance as heritage, for example in their use as tourism products (e.g. Cole 2003; Gazin-Schwartz 2004; Kallen 2016; Mason and Kuo 2006). Moreover, attention has also been paid to the social and political significance of megalithic sites, particularly so in studies of the negotiations and contestations of megalithic heritage, and the impacts of archaeological studies and heritage management of archaeological or historical monuments on local communities (Bender 1993b; Rountree 2002). My thesis thus contributes to this growing body of knowledge on the present-day and ongoing relationships between people and monuments from the past.

As the various studies mentioned above have shown, relationships between contemporary people and archaeological, historical and heritage sites and monuments are as diverse as they are complex and multifaceted. Although studies of local views of heritage or historical sites have been conducted in Malaysia (see Cheng *et al*. 2014; Goh *et al.* 2019; Sukri 2017), there have been few examples where current views of megalithic monuments have been explored in a similar manner. Even so, whenever local or contemporary views of megalithic sites were mentioned in past writings, they were often done in a brief manner, and usually pertained to local beliefs or

superstitions (see Evans 1921; Sheppard 1936; Taha and Osman 1982). As a result of this thesis, Sarawak now has a detailed and emerging archaeology and ethnography of its megalithic monuments in a context where the megaliths are increasingly becoming important in shaping people's sense of themselves, in politics and inter-group relationships, as well as in economic areas such as tourism.

By including the documentation and survey of known megalithic sites in the Kubaan and Punang Kelapang regions (see Chapter 6 and Chapter 7) as part of its methodology (see Chapter 1), this thesis has also contributed new knowledge of previously unknown megalithic sites. Previously, knowledge of the upland megalithic sites in Borneo has predominantly been based on studies that were conducted on the megaliths in the Kelabit Highlands. Nevertheless, the list of megalithic sites gathered in this present study is far from exhaustive. Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, my research experienced several constraints, which resulted in the incompleteness of the data gathered on the newly recorded megalithic sites. Therefore, I hope that the survey of megalithic sites in the region can continue to be carried out in the future in order to enrich the present data.

Another contribution of this thesis is in the study of the relationships between indigenous communities and monuments, or archaeological sites in general. In the past 35 years, various studies throughout the world have emphasised the profound relationships between archaeological sites or monuments and indigenous communities (see Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2006; David *et al.* 2006; Ferguson *et al.* 2004; Layton 1994; Smith and Wobst 2005; Russell and McNiven 1998). In addition, there

have also been increasing calls and efforts made at community engagement and inclusion of local or indigenous views in archaeological and heritage interpretation and management, both by academic scholars (see Emerick 2014; Ferguson *et al.* 2004; Mydland and Grahn 2012; Waterton 2005; Waterton and Smith 2010), and also by international heritage organisations, as reflected in heritage instruments such as the the 'Burra Charter: the Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance 1979' (revised in 1999 and 2013), which according to Waterton *et al.* (2006: 340), "has been used as a reference point in promotion community inclusion in heritage conservation." However, in Borneo, where systematic archaeological research only began around the middle of the 20$^{th}$ century (Chia 2018; Sutlive *et al.* 1987), studies that have incorporated indigenous perspectives on archaeological sites have been lacking. As an in-depth study of the present-day relationship between indigenous communities (in particular the Kelabit and Sa'ban) and megalithic monuments, this thesis is therefore unique in the region, where past archaeological or heritage practices have been observed to lack consideration of local views and values (Chia 2017; Goh 2014).

Nevertheless, the results of this thesis have raised a number of questions related to the multivalent nature of the megaliths. For example, besides the Kelabit and the Sa'ban, how do other groups in the Upper Baram region view the megalithic monuments? One of the groups that come to mind is the Penan, who presently reside in three distinct settlements in the Punang Kelapang region (see Chapter 2), and who, as Egay (2009) pointed out, also have a long history of occupation in the region. The Penan are not known to have a megalithic culture. However, in the past, when they

were living a semi-nomadic lifestyle, and even today, they have frequently encountered megalithic remains in the forests surrounding their settlements. I observed during the course of my own fieldwork (see Chapter 7) that the Penan have beliefs concerning the megalithic remains (see also Janowski and Barton 2012), despite not being associated with past megalithic practices. In other words, although the Penan are not the makers of the megalithic monuments, the megaliths exist in the Penan landscape, and thus, the Penan may have an understanding of the megaliths that at present is not well understood. Moreover, Chapter 7 also demonstrated the significance of the megaliths in the Upper Baram to the Ngurek people, who don't presently reside in the area, but who believe that the megalithic remains are traces left behind by their ancestors when they occupied the Upper Baram region in the past. The observations mentioned above concerning the Penan's and the Ngurek's relationships with the megalithic remains in the Upper Baram can be compared to those made by researchers who investigated the relationships between Native American peoples and the archaeological sites in San Pedro Valley, Arizona (see Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2006; Colwell-Chanthaphonh *et al.* 2008; Ferguson *et al.* 2004). For example, the Ngurek's present-day affiliation to the Upper Baram may be comparable to the Tohono O'odham's historical connections to the San Pedro Valley, where the people's ancestors had lived until the 1760s (Colwell-Chanthaphonh *et al.* 2008). More than that, what these observations have also shown is that relationships with archaeological or historical sites do not necessarily have to be centred on tracing cultural origins or showing ancestral connections to places and artefacts, but instead may also be linked to group perceptions of the "power of place and symbolic associations that are attached to the ancient artefacts [found at the place]" (Colwell-Chanthaphonh *et al.*

2008: 72; see also Julien *et al.* 2008). For example, in the case of Reeve Ruin and the Davis Site, Colwell-Chanthaphonh and his colleagues observed that although these places are not considered ancestral to the Apache or O'odham peoples, they are still regarded as highly meaningful places. It is known, for example, that the Apache used objects such as "abalone shells, beads, stone points, turquoise, and groundstone" from the ancient sites in their rituals because they are seen as "imbued with a sense of power and sacredness", and that "at places like Davis and Reeve, it does not matter so much *when* they were occupied; only that their very antiquity is relevant to the Apache cultural practice of collecting artifacts from sites" (Colwell-Chanthaphonh *et al.* 2008: 72). Thus, in order to address the question posed above regarding the wider significance of the Upper Baram megaliths, it is recommended that future research should be extended to include other groups in the immediate and surrounding areas, such as the aforementioned Penan and Ngurek communities.

The findings of this thesis may also have implications on how we, as archaeologists or as researchers, approach archaeological sites in general. As this thesis has made clear, the local communities in the Upper Baram, like many indigenous groups in various regions in the world have profound historical and cultural connections, whether real or imagined, to archaeological sites. It is because of this realisation that many scholars have stressed the importance of including local views in the study and interpretation of archaeological sites, especially when the sites are found in areas occupied by native or local communities (see Atalay 2012; Colwell 2016; Meskell 2010; Preucel and Cipolla 2010). Moreover, it has been observed that local people often have different views and values of places and landscapes, in ways that

may not always be easily understood by outsiders (i.e. most researchers) (Gow 1995). Scholars have also observed that archaeological interpretations and heritage practices that do not take local views into consideration may have profound and long-lasting negative impacts on local peoples (see edited volume by Mortensen and Hollowell 2009). For example, the outcomes of archaeological and heritage work may "alienate people from the landscape and places of their ancestors" (Julien *et al.* 2008: 40), and suppress or come into conflict with local memories (Rubertone 2008b). Issues such as these have resulted in critiques of the practices and interpretations of Western-based archaeologists, who worked among, but not with, the indigenous communities who reside in the areas of their study (see Smith 2012). For instance, White (2014: 261) notes that "often those who argue for getting into the minds of the natives, ignore today's descendant communities and local residents." Seen from a cultural heritage perspective, opinions such as these are similar to previous critiques of heritage practices that originate from the views of foreign experts, which have so often been observed to be in conflict with the views and interests of local communities (see Mydland and Grahn 2012; Waterton 2005; Waterton *et al.* 2006). As a native of Sarawak myself (although not from the Upper Baram, and not Kelabit or Sa'ban), this thesis thus represents an effort to highlight the local perspectives of the megalithic remains, but at the same time realising that aside from archaeologists (both Malaysian and foreign), there are also other stakeholders (e.g non-archaeology researchers, state and non-state institutions, heritage managers and tourists and tourism brokers) with interests in the megaliths.

The multivalence of the megalithic monuments, which as mentioned above is one of the main ideas highlighted by this thesis, also requires that outside researchers be sensitive to their potentially contested nature. This has further implications for the preservation policies of megalithic monuments, as well as archaeological sites in general. Particularly for sites that are significant to a number of different groups (as some of the megaliths in the Upper Baram are, see above), in preserving the sites, what or whose narratives or memories are emphasised, or conversely, are suppressed? For indigenous people, this issue is crucial because of the possible impact of heritage or conservation work in undermining rights to land and resources, and in turn indigenous livelihood (see Egay 2007). Realising the impacts of archaeological research on indigenous communities, and the importance of archaeological sites to the creation and affirmation of indigenous cultural identity (see Raharijaona 1994), some scholars have called for more inclusive and collaborative research to be done (Colwell 2016; Murray 2011). By including local voices in the interpretation of archaeological sites and in preservation policies, indigenous communities are given control over interpretations of their past and a dialogue between scientific and indigenous communities that bridges the past and the present can be created.

The megalithic monuments in the Upper Baram are, to borrow a phrase from the title of an article by Colwell-Chanthaphonh *et al.* (2008), "always multivocal, always multivalent." As long as the megalithic monuments continue to exist, we can be sure that people will continue to interact with, and make new meanings of the stone monuments. Nevertheless, this thesis has shown the significance of the megalithic monuments in the Upper Baram to be social, political or economic constructs of

particular times. It is through this examination of how the meanings of the megalithic monuments have changed over the years that we can also understand how local communities in the Upper Baram have negotiated – through their various interactions with the megalithic remains – the political, social, religious, economic and environmental changes (e.g. the transition from colonial rule to national independence, religious transformation, modernisation, and development) that have impacted their lives over the year, as well as the shifting power relations with regards to the state and neighbouring communities in resource and land claims. Thus, this thesis has demonstrated the continuing relevance of megalithic monuments from the past in the lives of people in modern-day Borneo.

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