Mégalithismes vivants et passés : approches croisées

Living and Past Megalithisms: interwoven approaches

sous la direction de/edited by

Christian Jeunesse, Pierre Le Roux et Bruno Boulestin

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Couverture/Cover image: left, a monumental *kelirieng*, a carved hardwood funeral post topped by a heavy stone slab, Punan Ba group, Balui River, Sarawak (Sarawak Museum archives, ref. #ZL5); right, after Jacques Cambry, *Monumens celtiques, ou recherches sur le culte des Pierres* (Paris, chez madame Johanneau, libraire, 1805), pl. V.

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Sommaire / *Contents*

Participants aux tables rondes ii

Avant-propos : archéologues et ethnologues autour du mégalithisme, une approche interdisciplinaire. iii

Hommage à Alain Testart (1945-2013) v
Valérie Lécrivain

L'homme de l'alliance : Alain Testart ix
Pierre Le Roux

Mégalithismes entre passé et présent

De l'Île de Pâques aux mégalithes du Morbihan. Un demi-siècle de confrontation entre ethnologie et archéologie autour du mégalithisme 3
Christian Jeunesse

Quelles interrogations pour les études mégalithiques ? 19
Alain Gallay

Qu'est-ce que le mégalithisme ? 57
Bruno Boulestin

Indonésie – Madagascar

Big Animals and Big Stones: An Ethnoarchaeological Exploration of the Social Dynamics of Livestock Use in Megalithic Societies of Eastern Indonesia 97
Ron L. Adams

The Ngorek of the Central Highlands and 'Megalithic' Activity in Borneo 117
Bernard Sellato

Pertinence du modèle ethnographique malgache pour l'étude des sépultures collectives du Néolithique récent-final du Bassin parisien (Somme, Marne, Aisne) 151
Marie Théry

Éthiopie

François Bernardin Azaïs et les débuts de l'archéologie éthiopienne 165
Jean-Paul Cros

Une expédition allemande chez les Konso en 1934-1935 181
Christian Jeunesse

Monumentalisme et populations de langues est-couchitiques en Éthiopie.
1 – Une approche anthropologique 191
Alain Gallay

Monumentalisme et populations de langues est-couchitiques en Éthiopie.
2 – Une approche historique 219
Alain Gallay

Sites anciens à stèles et sociétés mégalithiques récentes de la Rift Valley éthiopienne 245
Roger Joussaume

Aux confins de l'Éthiopie, du Soudan et du Kenya. Un Béotien sur les traces de « mégalithismes » 269
Serge Tornay

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The Ngorek of the Central Highlands and ‘Megalithic’ Activity in Borneo

Bernard Sellato

Abstract:

Archaeological and ethnohistorical inquiries into the Ngorek Dayak and culturally related groups formerly or presently occupying vast expanses in the central northern highlands of Borneo and into their funerary and other types of stone monuments have allowed for a reconstruction of their history and a description of their cultural practices, particularly their staged treatment of the dead. A discussion of what ‘megalithic’ means in Borneo suggests that, while monument size, actual use of stone material, and funerary function are not suitable defining criteria, practices of performing various types of monumental works to fulfill various functions are primarily meant to leave durably visible testimonies to wealthy individuals’ or family groups’ capacity to mobilize large work forces. The lavish redistributive feasts held by these sponsors on such occasions, being both a display of power and a means to gain more prestige, can only make sense in open competitive societies with high spatial and social mobility, in which people are compelled to convert whatever excess wealth they have into social prestige. ‘Megalithic’ activity, therefore, should be regarded here as but one feature among others of a more or less universal and timeless expression of standard social strategies in such types of competitive societies.

Résumé :

Les Ngorek des hautes terres centrales et l’activité « mégalithique » à Bornéo

Des études archéologiques et ethnohistoriques sur les Ngorek et divers groupes Dayak apparentés, résidents présents ou passés de vastes territoires dans la chaîne montagneuse du centre-nord de Bornéo, ainsi que sur leurs monuments de pierre (funéraires, entre autres), ont permis une reconstruction de leur histoire et une appréhension de leurs pratiques culturelles, en particulier leur traitement secondaire des défunts. Une discussion du « mégalithisme » dans le cadre bornéen suggère que, tandis que les dimensions des monuments, leur usage de la pierre, ou leurs fonctions ne constituent pas des critères déterminants, la création de divers types d’ouvrages monumentaux aux fonctions diverses vise avant tout à établir des preuves visibles et durables de la capacité d’un individu ou d’une famille prospère à mobiliser une importante force de travail. Les extravagantes fêtes de redistribution organisées par ces sponsors en ces occasions constituent à la fois une démonstration de pouvoir et un moyen d’en acquérir plus et ne peuvent se comprendre que dans le contexte de sociétés ouvertes et compétitives à forte mobilité spatiale et sociale, où un surplus de richesse ne peut qu’être converti en prestige social. Le « mégalithisme » devra alors n’être envisagé que comme un trait, parmi d’autres, d’une expression plus ou moins universelle et panchronique de stratégies sociales normales dans un tel contexte compétitif.

Introduction

Sites of megalithic monuments in Southeast Asia have long been known, studied, and discussed (Heine-Geldern 1928, 1934, 1945; Münsterberger 1939; Quaritch Wales 1957; Loofs 1967; Christie 1979; Kim 1982). Various theories envisioned two successive ‘waves’ –an ‘Older Megalithic’ and a ‘Younger Megalithic’, reaching this region respectively at Late Neolithic times and in the early Metal Age– or a unique ‘megalithic culture’, but interest in such theories may have waned somewhat in recent decades (see Heine-Geldern 1966; Bellwood 2007: 287).

In insular Southeast Asia, from early times, much archaeological work focused on Java (e.g., Hoop 1935; Sukendar 1985a), with some studies in other Indonesian islands (see Soejono 1982), on both major ancient sites and ongoing ethnic practices –e.g., on Sumatra, see Hoop 1932; Schnitger 1964; Sukendar 1979; on Sulawesi, see Kaudern 1938; Crystal 1974; Sukendar 1980; on eastern Indonesia (Sumba, Flores, etc.), see Arndt 1932; Sukendar 1985b, 2003; Adams 2007. Broader-scope works range from Perry (1918) to Sukendar (1976, 1982).

On Borneo, some work was carried out in Sarawak, principally (e.g., Mjöberg 1925; Banks 1937 and T. Harrisson’s numerous articles), and in Sabah (e.g., Harrisson and Harrisson 1969-70), whereas in Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo), apart from Schneeberger (1979), only a few megalithic sites were cursorily surveyed or simply visited (Sierevelt 1927, 1930; Tillema 1938; Baier 1979).

Borneo, the world’s third largest island (about 750,000sq km), is a solid land mass located right in the middle of peninsular and insular Southeast Asia (Figure 1), and therefore very likely has been a kind of hub for most

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Figure 1. Southeast Asia.

southward migrations originating in continental Asia. However, due to its equatorial climate and dense forest cover, altogether few archaeological works have been carried out so far, and data on its prehistory remains sparse. Recent advances in historical linguistics and population genetic studies are expected to contribute to a better understanding of the island's remote past.

Kalimantan, comprising about two thirds of the island, is now divided into five Indonesian provinces, while the northern states of Sarawak and Sabah are part of the federal state of Malaysia, and tiny Brunei Darussalam is a hydrocarbon-rich independent sultanate. This study focuses on the central northern mountain range, extending northeast to southwest (Figure 2), and primarily on its highlands on the Kalimantan side, along the border with Sarawak. These highlands were the site of a research project (Culture and Conservation, henceforth C&C) on interactions between people and the forest, with which I was involved from 1990 till 1997. They include three morphologic regions: the Upper Bahau river basin, the Apo Kayan plateau to the southwest, and the Kerayan plateau to the north (Figure 3). Various Dayak traditional communities occupy these areas, principally Kenyah subgroups in the Bahau and Apo Kayan, and Lun Daye (now Lundayeh) in Kerayan.

In the course of the C&C project, I took on the task of investigating these communities' respective migration histories in the region in order to better comprehend past interactions with their natural environment. Based on their oral historical traditions, we visited scores of ancient sites of settlements and graveyards. A number of megalithic structures were found on the upper reaches of the Bahau River and along its tributaries, consisting primarily of 'urn dolmen' funerary monuments. According to present Kenyah residents, these monuments were erected by the Ngorek (see Sellato 1992a, 1995a). Surveys in Apo Kayan and Kerayan areas allowed us to document different other types of megalithic structures, not all of them funerary monuments. In order to bring in comparative data, this article also briefly reviews the information available in the published literature regarding megalithic in several adjacent areas in Sarawak and Sabah.

An extensive, albeit far from exhaustive, list of references has been appended, with relevance to the Ngorek, their past and present neighbors, the regional historical and cultural setting, and the wider set of questions related to this study's

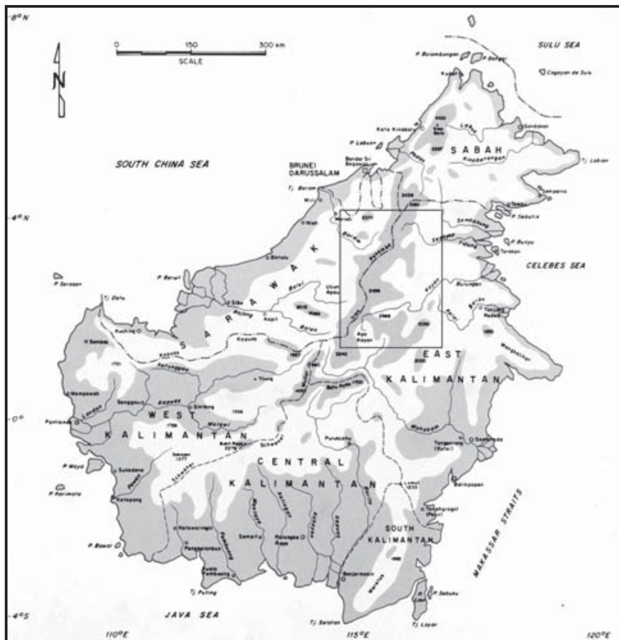


FIGURE 2. BORNEO, PHYSIOGRAPHY.
WITH POSITION OF MAP 3.

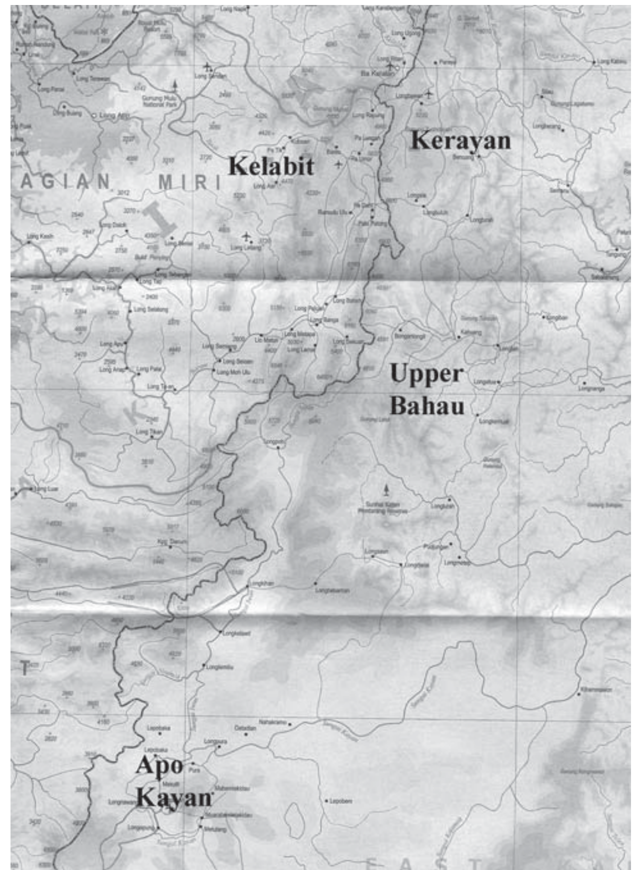


FIGURE 3. THE CENTRAL NORTHERN REGION.
ELEVATIONS IN FEET.

focus. It is intended to be of service to researchers who may wish to find their way through the literature before pursuing investigations in this region.

The 1990-1993 C&C surveys and related works

Research into the history of the Ngorek and their connection with the megalithic monuments was started during my early survey in the Upper Bahau area in 1990. A brief literature research then indicated that some megalithic monuments had been reported by Jongejans (1922: 217; see also Anonymous 1937) and, later, by Schneeberger (1979: 67-68), who visited the 'urn-dolmen' sites of Long Pulung and Long Berini in the course of a geological survey in the 1930s (see also Harrisson 1959d; Piazzini 1959, 1960; Pfeffer 1990/1963; Baier 1987).

In 1991, I carried out a more systematic site survey. From ethnohistorical data, it was possible to learn more about those Ngorek. In 1992, a brief archaeological survey was undertaken in the Apau Ping area. Prof. P.-Y. Manguin, a French archaeologist, visited for one week and Drs. Kiwok Rampai, an archaeologist from Palangkaraya, Central Kalimantan, spent two weeks going around the sites of the Upper Bahau. Several sites were visited, including one thought to be a former settlement, as well as seven graveyard sites (see Manguin 1995). A few test pits and scrapings were also opened in Apau Ping. Earthenware shards were found in abundance, part of them sharing similarities with the earthenware made in Apau Ping today (Sellato 1995a). It was also possible to record from informants approximately 70 urn-dolmen graveyard sites and 15 settlement sites. In addition, more than 100 stone tools were collected from local inhabitants, of which 90 percent originated in Apau Ping village.

In 1993, while work was being carried out in Jakarta on stone tools and pottery shards from Apau Ping (Novita and Krisprihartini 1995), field work included a visit to several more urn-dolmen sites in the Upper Bahau area to procure a clearer picture of their range of variation and distribution; a survey of Ngorek settlement sites and of possible stone extraction or stone-tool workshop sites; a survey of megalithic sites in Kerayan, Apo Kayan, and Malinau areas, for comparative interpretative purposes; an inventory and mapping of several sites in the Apau Ping and Long Berini areas (Dody *et al.* 1995); and the opening of test pits in two former settlement sites (Apau Ping and Long Beraa), to try to clarify the existence of cultural strata discriminating Ngorek remains from those of later Kenyah residents and to improve our understanding of Ngorek cultural features.

In addition, an ethnographic survey was carried out and data were collected on the funerary practices of several ethnic groups now living in the Upper Bahau, Kerayan, and Malinau areas (see Arifin 1999). Ethnographic information was collected on the manufacture of Kenyah earthenware, through collecting surface shards in villages and documenting on film the pottery-making process (see Arifin 1995; Arifin and Sellato 1999, 2003; Manguin and Sellato 1997). In 1992, a proposal was submitted to UNESCO in Jakarta (Sellato 1992c), but only minor

components could be funded, leading to A. Soriente's (2004) PhD thesis in linguistics.

Who were/are the Ngorek?

According to Kenyah informants, the large numbers of megalithic structures found along the Upper Bahau and its tributaries were erected by the so-called Ngorek people, who had earlier lived there. Investigation into the various local oral historical traditions, along with research in the published literature, allowed for a tentative reconstruction of the history of some ten Ngorek sub-groups (see Sellato 1992a, 1995a; Arifin and Sellato 1999, 2003).

The Ngorek people who settled in the Upper Bahau area had come from the upper reaches of the Baram River, Sarawak (Figure 3). Protracted war waged by the groups then living in the Kelabit Highlands forced some of them to move east across the watershed in approximately AD 1700. By about 1750, these Ngorek groups are believed to have occupied the whole area of the upper Lurah and Bahau rivers. Ethnohistorical and archeological investigations offer some insights into their cultural background.

Based on the profusion of lithic tools found in the upper Bahau, hinting at the absence or dire scarcity of metals, it may be inferred that the Ngorek possibly were not swidden rice farmers, nor perhaps were they rice farmers at all. According to Padoch (1983: 36), their northern neighbors, the Lun Daye, state that, around the time of World War II, iron tools were almost totally missing in Kerayan villages (see also Harrisson 1984: 317; Lian and Bulan 1989: 110; Sellato 1997; see also Dove 1989). These Lun Daye had inundated rice fields in freshwater marshes, with only wooden and bamboo tools to till the soft soil (see Padoch 1983; Surya *et al.* 1985-86: 72, 83). In contrast, the Upper Bahau area shows a rather rough hilly countryside with no substantial tracts of flat land. With only stone tools, large-scale swidden rice cultivation, such as practiced by other groups, dedicated swidden rice farmers (such as the Modang and various Kayan, see below), would have been difficult, though not quite impossible. The early Ngorek seem to have favored swampy spots. Although they may have grown some wet rice there, taro likely played a more important role in their diet. To this day, the Pua' (a former Ngorek group) have tiny plots of wet rice with plenty of taro planted along dikes. Moreover, contrasting with Kenyah groups in other regions, most Kenyah in the Bahau still favor 'soft rice', that is, rice mixed with taro, as opposed to 'hard rice', cooked dry the Kayan way (on Kayan agriculture, see Rousseau 1977; Okushima 1999). This would suggest that early Ngorek in the Bahau area were mainly, if not solely, subsisting on tubers (particularly taro, possibly Dioscorea yams, and later cassava), as well as on palm sago (*Arenga undulatifolia*, quite abundant in the Bahau area).

It is also probable, based on both the available historical traditions and the village and graveyard sites surveyed, that most Ngorek communities were small and scattered, likely with no supra-village social organization. They probably had no formal social stratification, a fact that would suggest the existence of important redistributive feasts, which, in the broader Borneo context, would be consistent with their practice of staged treatment of the dead and their building of stone monuments. All this, combined with an absence or scarcity of iron weapons, probably made them easy prey to enemies.

By the mid-18th century, groups of socially stratified swidden rice farmers (Modang and related Kayanic groups; see Schneeberger 1979: 82-83; and detailed historical reconstructions in Okushima 2006, 2008), demographically and militarily powerful (and equipped with iron weaponry), and their Kenyah affiliates (possibly former nomadic bands) launched massive attacks on Ngorek settlements in the Bahau, Pujungan, and Lurah areas (Figure 3). In a matter of a few decades, some Ngorek groups were defeated in battle, shared amongst their victors, and displaced to other regions (lower Kayan River, Apo Kayan); others yielded, became subordinate communities (e.g., Walchren 1907: 767), and were either left staying put or removed away from the Bahau (Apo Kayan); and the rest scattered away and found refuge, first, in returning to the upper Baram, to possibly later spread farther to the west; and second, on the uppermost reaches of the Bahau, to later migrate into the Tubu and Malinau drainages in the east and northeast. This whole process can readily be paralleled with the 18th-century conquest of the upper Mahakam area by other Kayan and Modang groups over the local Pin groups, which also were small, scattered, non-stratified, tuber farming communities (Sellato 1986, 1992b). While a command of iron technology was a crucial means to achieve agricultural and, therefore, demographic expansion (see Sellato 1993a), the combination of social stratification and iron weapons clearly was a reliable recipe for successful military territorial expansion.

Today the entire Bahau area is occupied by various 'Kenyah' groups. On the basis of our reconstructions, the history of these megalithic remains is believed, as stated above, to be traceable as far back as the turn of the 18th century. The most recent structures, however, may date to the 19th century and, interestingly, there is some recognized connection between local genealogical knowledge and the stone monuments; e.g., informants state that one carved urn-dolmen at the Long Pulung graveyard site contains the bones of one Paran La'ing, said to have been a Ngorek chieftain (Sellato 1995a) –more recent bones were added later by his descendants.

Although the Ngorek as separate autonomous groups have long moved out of –or been removed from– the Bahau region, some minor subordinate groups remained there, mixed with Kenyah incoming groups, and are now included in the Kenyah ethno-cultural category. The present-day Pua' (on the Pujungan) and Nyibun (on the uppermost Bahau) speak Kenyah dialects with obvious Kayanic phonological influence (Sellato 1995b; Njau 2003; Soriente 2004; also, Walchren 1907). Also, some

Kenyah individuals today claim to have Ngorek blood through intermarriage, and historical traditions concerning the Ngorek have been handed down to the present generation of Kenyah and Saben of the upper Bahau. The last person in the upper Bahau area who could 'speak Ngorek language' (whatever this means) died in 1991 at Long Berini.

The term Ngorek is probably a late exonym, maybe from *kuri'* ('how many [are they]?'), in the sense of 'very few [people remaining]' (on this name, see Sellato 1995a, 1996). Among one former Ngorek group now settled on the lower Kayan River, it is claimed that Ngorek was a derogatory name given them by Kenyah Leppo' Ma'ut, while their true overall autonym is (was) Hweng Mbau, literally, 'people of the Bahau'.

In Apo Kayan, Baier (1992) described several sites with stone remains (troughs or vats), which had been mentioned earlier by Sierevelt (1927, 1930) and/or Tillema (1938). Present-day Kenyah residents attribute them to their predecessors, whom they call 'Ga'ai' (a Modang group) and/or 'Kayan'. Schneeberger (1979: 68) mentions one urn-dolmen in the nearby upper Malinau drainage.

A number of ethnic groups now living in either nearby or distant regions still acknowledge their Ngorek or Mbau ancestry (Sellato 1992a, 1995a). Some have retained the name Ngorek, albeit with phonetic variation, like the Ngurek, Murik, or Urik of eastern Sarawak (upper Baram area; see Douglas 1911; Elshout 1926; Philip 1989; Soriente 2004; also Blust 1974a). These are now culturally assimilated into this area's dominant Kenyah population, while the Pu of the Akah, cousins of the Pua', are now called Kayan Uma' Poh. Others have maintained ethnonyms either reminiscent of their earlier territory (the Bahau River) –the Tembau or Uma Bau now in the Malinau area, or the Bahau of the middle Mahakam– or linked to a more specific area –e.g., the Merap now on the Malinau river, who were already called Berap on the Lurah River; or the Long Pulung, now on the lower Kayan River, who once lived at Long Pulung on the upper Bahau. It is also possible that the ethnonyms Berau (a sub-group of Saben) and Merau or Milau (both in the Tubu-Malinau area), referring to the Berau River (a tributary of the uppermost Bahau), really are doublets of the term Bahau. Other ethnonyms, derived from toponyms, like Mandun or Tering, refer to various locations, either on the Bahau River or in Apo Kayan.

I chose to embrace all these now scattered groups, including the 'Kayan' megalith builders of Apo Kayan, under the name Ngorek. Indeed, all these groups took away with them, when they left the region, part of the Ngorek historical traditions, some of which is still available to the investigator: e.g., a history of the Ngurek of Sarawak was collected by Philip (1989); see also Ose' Murang's (1989) history of the Saben (Sa'ban, possibly of mixed Ngorek and Lun Daye ancestry). While the historical territory of the Ngorek groups spreads on both sides of the watershed between the upper Baram and the upper Bahau, descendants of these groups are now found distributed over a much larger region, from the Baram to the lower Kayan, the southern Kerayan plateau, the Malinau and Tubu drainages, Apo Kayan, and as far as the middle Mahakam.

While the ancestral language/s of Ngorek groups can only be speculated on by linguists, groups derived from Ngorek communities, in the broader sense that I have given to this denomination, now speak tongues classified by Hudson (1978) as part of his Kayan-Kenyah group. While Blust's (1974b) Kenyah group curiously excludes Kayanic isolects, Soriente (2004: 190) classified as Kayanic (as one of two branches of an ancient Kayan-Kenyah group) the languages of our scattered Ngorek splinter groups in East and North Kalimantan provinces and in the Baram area of Sarawak.

Moreover, I believe that our Ngorek were part of a wider ethno-cultural entity, including the Kajang groups of the Balui, the Melanau of coastal Sarawak, the Berawan and various so-called 'Leppo' Pu'un' (now known as 'Kenyah') groups of the middle Baram (see Pollard and Banks 1937; Metcalf 1974; De Martinoir 1974; Blust 1984), which possibly once covered the whole highland area of central-northern Borneo, an entity I have earlier called the Central-Northern Groups (Sellato 1989: 22; compare Zgusta 1978). Linguistically, this entity would encompass Hudson's Kayan-Kenyah and Rejang-Baram groups, more or less similar to Blust's Kenyah and Berawan-Lower Baram branches of his North Sarawak family (notwithstanding his exclusion of Kayanic languages from the first group).

This ethno-cultural entity, I believe, also included the present-day Kelabit and Lun Daye groups, which speak languages of Hudson's (1978) Apo Duat group, equivalent to Blust's (1974b) Dayic branch of the same North Sarawak family. Interestingly, this now broader ethno-cultural entity is congruent with Dyen's (1965) Kalabitic language cluster. Among this entity's common cultural traits are the practice of staged treatment of the dead and the erection of funerary monuments involving the use of stone, as well as the custom of holding large prestige feasts (e.g., see Metcalf 1975, 1982).

Moving one step further afield, Metcalf's (1976a) *nulang* arc, encompassing central-northern Borneo groups practicing staged treatment of the dead, could readily be connected to the southern half of the island, where this practice is widespread, as De Martinoir (1974: 269) proposed, following Leach (1948; see a discussion in Sellato 1994: 189-190). It should be stressed that, among these northern and southern groups, the lexical corpus concerning funerary practices and monuments is strikingly consistent. This would suggest a very ancient pan-Borneo cultural setting with such practices as norm.

Figure 4. Standard urn-dolmen, Upper Bahau.
Photo P.-Y. Manguin, 1992.

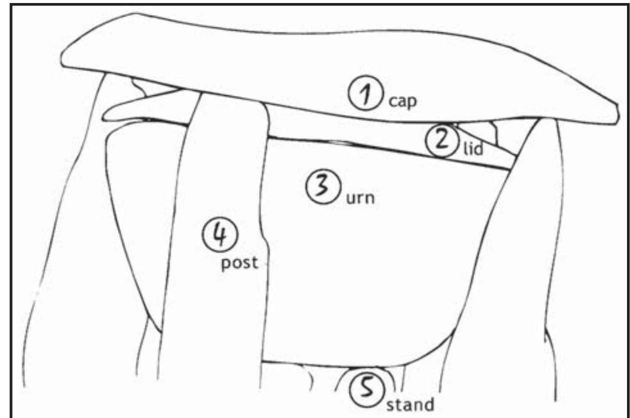


Figure 5. Terminology of the urn-dolmen.
After Arifin and Sellato 2003: 203.

The Upper Bahau area

Several surveys in this area yielded information on sites of ancient megalithic monuments, more recent monuments of wood and stone, stone carvings, lithic tools, local earthenware and imported ceramics, and village sites.

Megalithic sites

Along the upper Bahau and its tributaries, the most common structure is a bowl-shaped stone container covered by a dolmen (Figure 4). These containers were meant to receive the bones of one or several individuals, likely a kin group, sometimes with grave goods (small gongs, earthenware pots and cups).

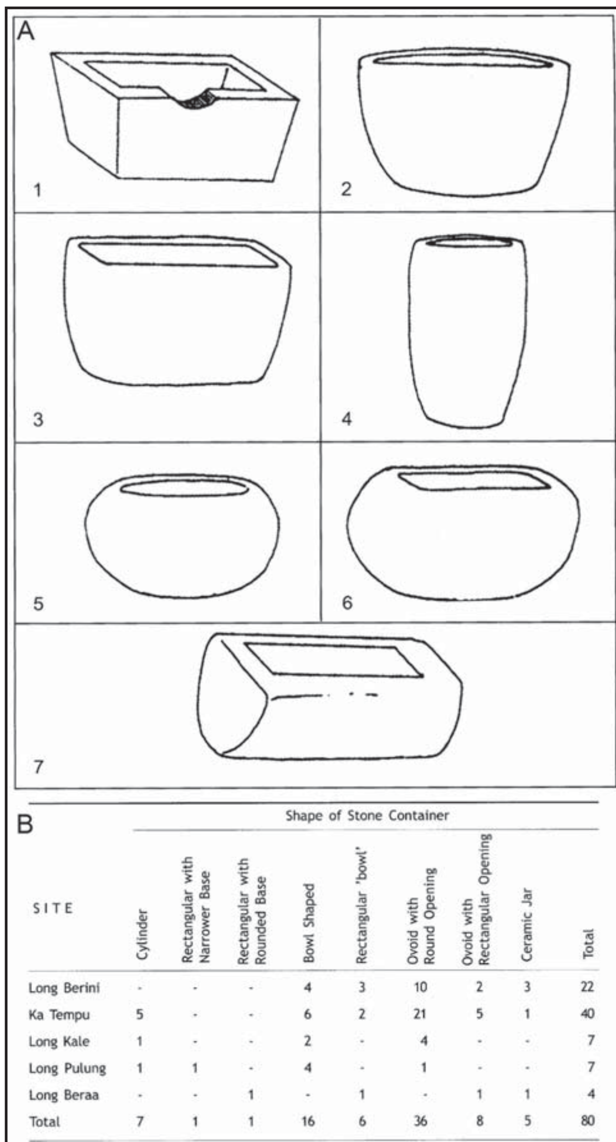
Schneeberger (1979: 67 68) referred to the megalithic remains he surveyed as 'urn dolmens', on the basis of the standard in their construction. An urn-dolmen includes a large stone urn placed on top of four river stones or two stone slabs, and protected by a large stone slab supported by two or more upright slabs (Figure 5). Sometimes, the large slab is placed directly on top of the urn as a cover, without supporting slabs. Explanations for these and other remains have also been offered by Baier (1987, 1992) in his discussion of various stone funerary structures in the Bahau area. In only a few cases were human remains (skulls) still visible in their containers (Harrer 1988: 173; Puri 1993; Sellato 1995a).

Seven sites were documented in 1993 in the Apau Ping area and five in the Lurah drainage. They range in area from 30 to 6000sq m and are located five to twenty meters from a stream. Generally, they extend parallel to the stream. Apart from this, the layout of the sites differs from one site to the next: e.g., at Ka Tempu, there are two separate concentrations of graves, believed to point to the existence of two distinct social (family?) groups; and occasionally, a number of smaller structures, near or attached to large structures, form a cluster.

Figure 6. Graveyard site damaged by tree felling, Upper Bahau.
Photo B. Sellato.

At the five sites mapped, a total of 155 graves were documented, over 50 percent of which at one single site. Only an average 10 percent are intact, due to destruction by firing and farming, erosion of the river banks, growth of trees and roots, and digging by animals such as wild pigs (Figure 6). The size of the monuments varies: the highest is close to 2m, with its container alone reaching 1m in

Figure 7. A medium-sized urn-dolmen, Upper Bahau.
Photo B. Sellato.



SITE	Shape of Stone Container								
	Cylinder	Rectangular with Narrower Base	Rectangular with Rounded Base	Bowl Shaped	Rectangular 'bowl'	Ovoid with Round Opening	Ovoid with Rectangular Opening	Ceramic Jar	Total
Long Berini	-	-	-	4	3	10	2	3	22
Ka Tempu	5	-	-	6	2	21	5	1	40
Long Kale	1	-	-	2	-	4	-	-	7
Long Pulung	1	1	-	4	-	1	-	-	7
Long Beraa	-	-	1	-	1	-	1	1	4
Total	7	1	1	16	6	36	8	5	80

Figure 8. Typology of stone containers (A) and Distribution of container shapes (B) in the Upper Bahau.
A: 1. rectangular with narrowed base; 2. bowl shaped; 3.rectangular 'bowl'; 4. cylinder; 5. ovoid with oval opening; 6. ovoid with rectangular opening. 7. rectangular with rounded base. After Arifin and Sellato 2003: 219, 226.

Figure 9. Rectangular vat with hole, Upper Bahau.
Photo B. Sellato.

Figure 10. Small grave monument without a container, Upper Bahau.
Photo B. Sellato.

Figure 11. Rectangular container with side stone walls, Upper Bahau.
Photo B. Sellato.

Figure 12. Cylindrical container, Upper Bahau.
Photo B. Sellato.

length; yet, more commonly found are graves about 50cm high (Figure 7).

For 80 graves (some 50 percent), it was possible to determine the type and shape of the funerary container, which varies significantly (Figure 8). Its mouth may be rectangular, oval, or circular, while its bottom is round, but Schneeberger (1979: 68, 142) also mentions conical urns. The rectangular containers at Long Pulung and Long Lenjau Ca have a base smaller than their opening, so that their walls slope (Figure 9). The smaller monuments, hardly 20cm high, do not include a container (Figure 10) and may be children's graves (Schneeberger 1979: 137, 142).

The overall structure of the monument shows also varies considerably, following the type of container. At Long Beraa, dolmen pillars are found only on two sides of the grave, as the container is rectangular (Figure 11). Likewise, supporting stones are used for bowl-shaped stone urns, whereas cylindrical stone containers and ceramic jars are partly buried in the ground. The cylindrical containers found at Ka Tempu and Lepu'un Nyibun and reaching 1.5m in length apparently had not been protected by a dolmen, but only by a stone slab as a lid (Figure 12).

The roof and pillars of the dolmen and the container's supporting stones usually are not finely fashioned, simply adjusted to the size of the container. Pillars may resemble a square beam, or be somewhat convex ('onion skin'; Figure 13), or just retain the natural shape of the stone used. There are also pillars of a rectangular shape, or made of carefully shaped flat slabs. Only two stone graves have been found showing carvings, on the container's flank or lid (Figures 14 and 15).

Figure 13. 'Onion-skin' or dome-shaped cap, Upper Bahau.
Photo P.-Y. Manguin, 1992.

Figure 14. Carved lid with frog motif, Upper Bahau.
Photo B. Sellato.

Figure 15. Carved cylindrical container, Upper Bahau.
Photo B. Sellato.

The materials used generally can be found in the vicinity of the grave, yet, in some cases they must have been carried from a distance, and high up to certain hill sites. The container and its lid, as well as a number of dome-shaped dolmen roofs, consist of medium-to-coarse-grained, feldspar-rich sandstone of Cretaceous age, a formation found as loose boulders in several locations. Many flat

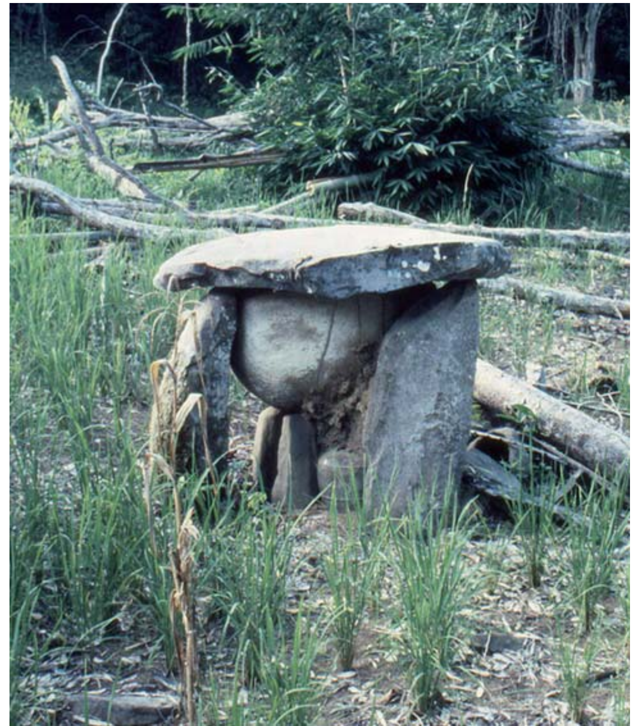


Figure 16. Urn-dolmen in a rice swidden, with ceramic jar, Upper Bahau.
Photo B. Sellato.

dolmen tables consist of Cretaceous siliceous siltstones or fine-grained sandstones, found along the Bahau River. The stones supporting the urns were made of random types of rocks (Sellato 1995a).

It appears difficult to establish links between sites based on style. From the similarities in the general shape of the monuments, however, it can be established that the people who built them had the same capabilities and technology, although with a somewhat different creativity. According to informants, graves can only be distinguished into the rare ones with carved containers (Ka Tempu, Long Pulung; see also Zahorka 2004), supposed to be those of chiefs, and those with plain containers. Actually, differences in other features of a grave –shape, size, material of the container, presence of stone supports for the urn– may reflect differences in social status or wealth, although they/some may just as well be of a ritual nature (e.g., gender or type of death). Moreover, local availability of certain rock formations may have placed constraints on style.

Ceramic jars were found at several sites, placed on the ground, between the pillars of large urn-dolmens, sometimes partly buried to prevent them from toppling (Figure 16). A fair number of jars with a red paste, coarse temper, and black lead glaze originated from 15-17th-century Thailand or Burma (Manguin 1995). Others were identified as 18-19th-century Chinese, such as the common brown jars with dragon motif.

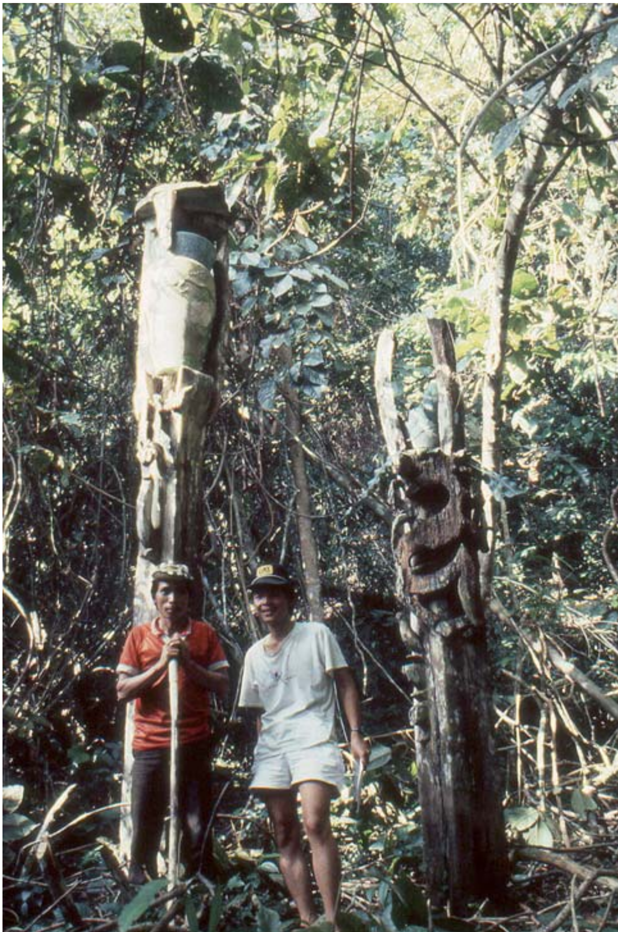


Figure 17. Nyibun *liang* with jar, gong, and stone cap, Upper Bahau.
Photo B. Sellato.

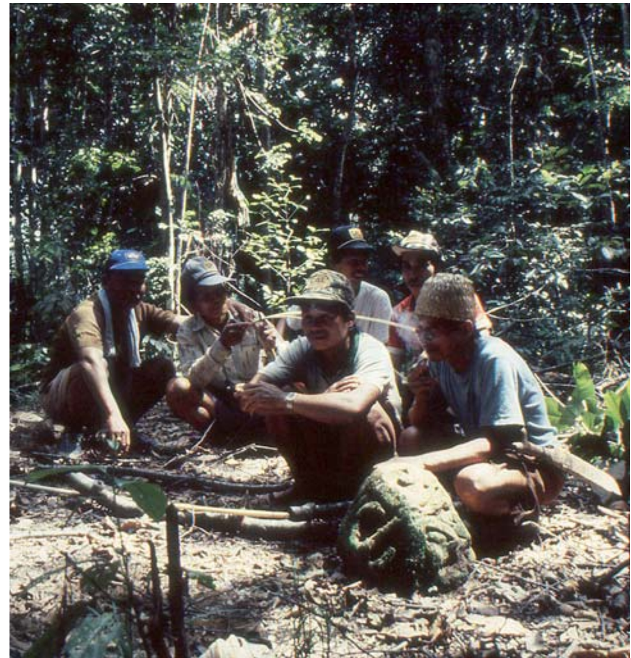


Figure 18. Carved rock with *aso'* motif, Upper Bahau.
Photo B. Sellato.

Recent wooden monuments

Up into the 1950s, the Nyibun, a small ethnic group derived from the Ngorek and now mixed with Kenyah – Nyibun history could be reconstructed back to about 1800 (Sellato 1995a; Njau 2003)– were still building funerary monuments made of a carved tree trunk set vertically in the ground, and cut in a fork at the top to receive a ceramic jar covered with a gong, the fork's prongs being capped by a flat stone slab (Figure 17).

The Nyibun state that they performed funerals in two stages (Arifin 1999: 439-441): first, the body was placed in a wooden coffin (*lungun*), itself resting on a platform outside of the village; then, about a year later, the *nulang* festival was held: part of the bones (skull and long bones) were retrieved, ritually washed, and transferred into a ceramic jar, lifted up the tree monument, called *liang* (see Schneeberger's 'pole-graves' and particular 'toadstool' children's graves, 1979: 41-42, 125, 128-129; also Bourdelon 1956; Piazzini 1959, 1960; Pfeffer 1990). Meanwhile, the surrounding Kenyah people practiced single-staged funerals.

Nyibun informants stressed that: 'in the old times, stones were soft; then, they became hard, and we stopped making stone urns.' This may well be interpreted as a consequence of their losing their independence to conquering groups, losing their chiefs and their wealth, and being forbidden or unable to perform prestige-based funerary feasts.

This type of monument is structurally and functionally identical with the urn-dolmen, and probably historically derived from it (see Schneeberger 1979: 74). Nyibun-like monuments are found elsewhere in Borneo, e.g., among the Kajang, Melanau, and Berawan of Sarawak (see below).

Other finds

Another 'megalithic' find in the upper Bahau is a stone of moderate size (called Batu Kalung, lit., 'carved stone'; Figure 18), carved with an *aso'* (dragon-dog) motif, which probably was a memorial or territorial marker. At another Batu Kalung locality, on the water divide between the upper Bahau and the Malong stream of the Baram, Schneeberger (1979: 70, 76) found two 80cm-high spread-eagle anthropomorphic figures, said to be a memorial of a visit with relatives on the other side, and a rock carved in *aso'* shape, probably a later boundary marker. It is quite possible that such stones with *aso'* motif do not belong to the Ngorek tradition. Schneeberger (1979: 78-80, 138, 143) also noted three so-called 'stone mortars' at Long Bangan, where they were used by the local population to pound paddy.

Quite surprising, at the time, and quite prominent, are the finds of lithic tools, mainly at Apau Ping, where research

Figure 19. Polished basalt adzes and gouges from Apau Ping.
Photo B. Sellato.

was carried out, as well as in other locations that were only briefly surveyed. Pottery is also briefly touched on.

Stone tools

Stone tools were discovered in abundance, as surface finds, under houses in the village of Apau Ping. These stone tools are called *batu nggau* ('lightning stones') by the Kenyah residents, who believe them to be the lightning's teeth/ fangs, found at the foot of trees struck by lightning (a belief common through Borneo; see Hose and McDougall 1966: II, 11 n3; Peranio 1959; McCredie 1981; Sellato 1983; Janowski and Barton 2012). Some are commonly kept in Kenyah granaries to invite the rice goddess' blessings. As they ring like metal, they were also used, by knocking two stones against each other, to call the rain in case of persistent drought.

The tools from Apau Ping (205 pieces), studied in Jakarta (Novita and Krisprihartini 1995) and classified as adzes, gouges, and scrapers, are made of a glassy black basalt (Figure 19). 'Adzes', the largest group (about 60) and ranging in size from 4 to 25cm, are very smoothly polished and show a half-circular section, but several display a roughly quadrangular section, and one a perfect quadrangular shape. One heavy polished adze has a lenticular section. Others are edge-ground and/or roughly or partly polished. Over 40 of them are unpolished. A few tools, called 'scrapers' and 'choppers', are roughly cut, with no trace of polishing. A large number (83) of broken tools could not be classified. Basalt flakes were recovered in test pits in Apau Ping (Arifin and Sellato 1999, 2003). Interestingly, informants mentioned basalt outcroppings on the Lurah River, but these have yet to be precisely located. Finally, two egg-shaped pounders (12.2-14.1cm long), with a concave pounding surface, and some sharpening stones were found. These artefacts, made of sandstone, are probably not part of the same assemblage (Sellato 1996, 2006).

As for basalt tools, one may wonder whether they refer to one or several distinct lithic traditions –e.g., polished vs. unpolished, quadrangular vs. half-circular. However, considering the quantity of pieces collected as surface finds, the existence of semi-polished and broken pieces and of basalt flakes in test pits, and local informants' awareness of basalt outcroppings, one should probably rather view Apau Ping as functioning as a workshop site. It should be noted that basalt tools, very similar to those of the upper Bahau, were also found in remote areas, such as in Apo Kayan (see below) and Kerayan (Rian Antoni pers. com.).

Of course, the basalt tool assemblage, or part of it, might be older than the Ngorek. If these tools, however, are to be attributed to Ngorek groups, they would be at most some three centuries old, making them the only such massive assemblage known in Borneo for such a recent period.

In terms of the upper Bahau Ngorek's culture, all this, if confirmed, would suggest that:

Figure 20. Large rectangular stone vat with hole, Kayan Hilir.
After Tillema 1938: 208.

Figure 21. Rectangular stone vat, Long Nawang, Kayan Hulu.
Photo B. Sellato.

1. these Ngorek had no locally available iron ore deposits, and/or no knowledge of iron smelting, and/or no steady access to trade iron tools;
2. they fashioned their stone monuments without metal tools;
3. there must have been specific basalt extraction sites (not yet located), as well as workshop sites (e.g., Apau Ping);
4. stone tools must have been an important commodity, in relation with specific trade routes (see the case of salt in Kerayan; Schneeberger 1979: 53-61; Sellato 1993b; Egay 2012; Gani 2012; Langub 2012).

Pottery

These finds are distinguished into local earthenware and imported ceramics (the latter not discussed here; see Novita and Krisprihartini 1995). A total number of 676 shards of local pottery were studied, of which 487 unidentified and undecorated. Clay is in some pieces mixed with lime. The clay, with high iron content, is grey, black, or red. The temper is sand mixed with crushed old earthenware. The technique used is hand-modeling, and finger imprints were found on several shards. Firing temperature is low to medium, resulting in medium-to-coarse wares. At the end of the process, a sweeping technique was applied, possibly using straw, leaving fine lines visible on the pot's body. Pressure techniques of decoration were also used, employing paddles wrapped in string, resulting in parallel lines.

There are probably several local earthenware traditions, and it could not be clearly distinguished between Ngorek and Kenyah products, although certain pottery forms found are not known by current Kenyah residents who, moreover, do not mix clay with lime and fire their pots at low temperatures.

Neighboring areas

This section provides information, from both C&C surveys and the published literature, on megalithic remains in the Apo Kayan and Kerayan highland areas, as well as in the Malinau drainage.

Apo Kayan

Apo Kayan, a broad plateau located south of the Pujungan River, comprised at the time of the survey two districts, Kayan Hulu and Kayan Hilir. Its population includes a large majority of various Kenyah sub-groups (Tehupeiorij 1906; Fischer and Gramberg 1910; Jongejans 1922; Elshout 1926; Tillema 1938, 1989; Rudes 1965a; Henoch 1970; Whittier and Whittier 1974; Whittier 1978; Jacob 1989). One village is inhabited by Kayan Uma' Leken, and a couple of smaller settlements by former Punan nomads. The Kenyah groups started moving into Apo Kayan from the north in the 18th century, while earlier residents (Modang and Kayan groups) were moving away (see Okushima 2006, 2008). Some Ngorek groups, displaced from the Bahau, transited through Apo Kayan on their way to the Mahakam in the south (see Devung 1978). Later, in the 19th century several Kenyah sub-groups migrated to the southeast. Beginning in the 1960s, Kenyah massively moved out of Apo Kayan to eastern and southern downriver and coastal regions.

A short survey in the Long Nawang area allowed for gathering information on reported pre-Kenyah sites, principally in Kayan Hulu District, and two sites were visited and documented. In Kayan Hulu District, a number of the sites had been visited by Sierevelt (1927, 1930), Scheffelaar (1931), Tillema (1938), Whittier (1974), Harrisson (1959a, 1984), Muller (1990), or Baier (1992). Some were located and photographed in 1992 (J. Halapiry pers. com.).

Figure 22. Rectangular stone vat with lid, Kayan Hulu.
Photo J. Halapiry, 1992.

Figure 23. Vat pillar in feline shape, Kayan Hulu.
After Sierevelt 1930: 480.

For Kayan Hilir District, data and photographs were kindly made available by C. Eghenter (pers. com.) on a couple of sites near Data Dian. One site had been previously reported by Sierevelt (1927, 1930) and Tillema (1938), and photographs published. Another was also photographed by Sierevelt. Two sites were described by Harrisson (1959a, 1959c), rather inaccurately, but the Whittiers (1974) gave a good description of one of them and also mentioned, in the river nearby, a stone slab carved with a human figure. Harrisson also reports a spread-eagle figure carved on a boulder somewhere on the upper Iwan River (1959a). And Rudes (1965b) reports a site showing a unique four-feet-high stone figure in the round of a standing woman dressed in a skirt, with head and arms broken. Some five sites are said to feature stone vats, one of which has some carving.

More stone monuments are reported in large numbers in the Tekeje River and the adjacent section of the Kayan 'Ok (or Kayan I'ut), farther to the east. Also, stone vats were reported at Long Peleban and Busang Mayun, two locations close together, much farther down the Kayan River, in Long Peso' District.

The current Kenyah people of Apo Kayan do not know the name Ngorek, but refer to all pre-Kenyah sites of former settlers in the area as 'Kayan' and/or 'Ga'ai'. Some 45 such 'Kayan' sites were recorded from the local oral tradition. Of these, 27 are located in Kayan Hulu and the remainder in Kayan Hilir. In at least 30 of these sites, traces of a pre Kenyah settlement are visible; twelve sites contain stone graves; and five show carved stones (some of these belonging to stone graves).

Reported stone grave containers are not urn shaped, but rather rectangular, with a trapeze section, sitting on supporting pillars, and covered with a flat stone slab. One stone grave (at Data Kanuyang) shows a large rectangular vat (1.8m long and 1.2m high) with four partially carved pillars and a stone-slab cover (Figure 20). Other vats measure 0.9-1.2m in length, 0.5-1.0m in width, and 25-55cm in height (Figures 21 and 22). A hole in the side of the Data Kanuyang vat, possibly for draining bodily fluids (see also Figure 9), may suggest its use for primary disposal of the body or, possibly, for both primary and secondary disposal (see also Harrisson 1959c: 7; Rudes 1965b: 2).

Information was also obtained on sites with carved stones. Two sites show carved stones that obviously were pillars for a stone vat. Carved motifs are of feline and anthropomorphic figures, the latter with very large ears (Figures 23 and 24). These figures sometimes feature the funerary container's four 'carriers' (pallbearers): two in the front, facing ahead, and two at the back, facing the

Figure 24. Vat pillar with anthropomorphic carving, Kayan Hulu.
After Sierevelt 1930: 480.

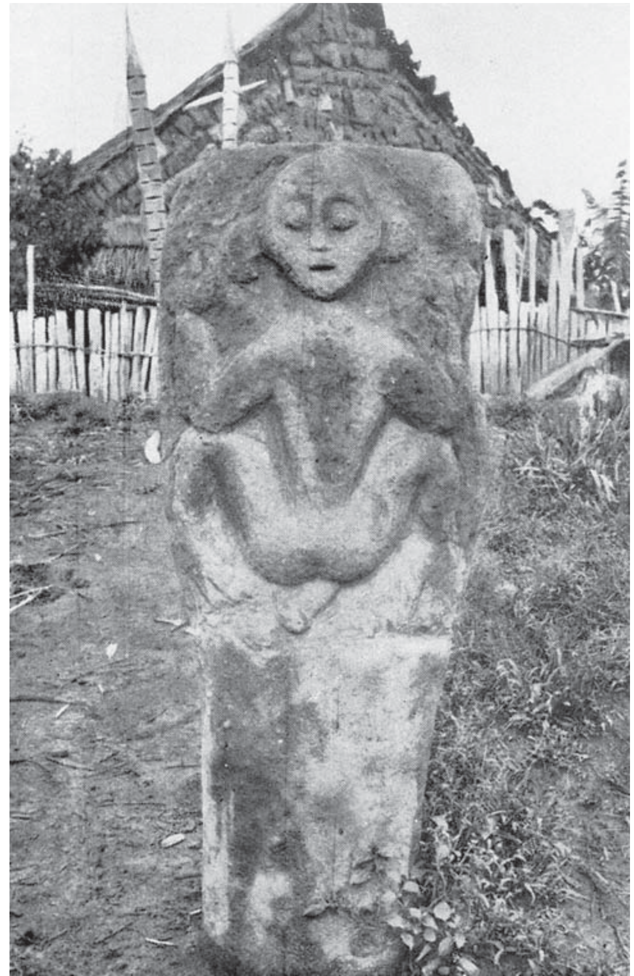


Figure 25. Vat pillar with squatting human shape, Kayan Hilir.
After Sierevelt 1930: 481.

container (Figures 25 and 26; the pillar in Figure 27 shows a flat corner upon which the container rested). However, there does not seem to be much information obtainable from the present resident population, who practice single-staged funerals, concerning the particulars of their predecessors' funerary practices, which we assume to be staged treatment of the remains, with possibly collective deposition.

Also worthy of note in Apo Kayan are an obviously man-made square cavity in a soft stone cliff (Figure 28), said to be have been used as a grave (Sierevelt 1930) and reminiscent of Toraja cliff graves (Sulawesi); a boulder, called Batu Kalung, incised with an *aso'* (dragon-dog) motif (Figure 29); and a 13cm-long basalt adze, found in the hands of a villager, closely resembling the Apau Ping finds (Arifin and Sellato 1999, 2003).

Kerayan

The Kerayan plateau is located north of the upper Bahau and contiguous to the Kelabit Highlands of Sarawak to the west. Indeed, both the Kerayan and Kelabit areas are part of the same region of sandy high plateaus, at an elevation of about 1000m (see Schneeberger 1945; Zahorka 2006). In both areas, the local people belongs to the same large ethnic grouping, known as Kelabit and Lun Bawang in Sarawak and Lun Daye or Putuk in Kalimantan (see Lian 1976-77; Deegan 1973, 1974; Crain 1978; Yahya 1979; Schneeberger 1979; Padoch 1983; Ipoi 1989; Lian and Bulan 1989; Meechang 1995; Bulan 2003; Ewart 2009). The latter themselves distinguish between several subgroups: the Lun Tanaa' Luun ('people of the high lands') or Lun Daye proper, swidden rice cultivators, in the northern part of the area; the Lengilu' and other minor sub-groups in the south, farming both dry and wet rice; the Lun Baa' ('people of the marshes'), in the west, dedicated wet-rice cultivators and closely related to the Kelabit of Sarawak. A splinter group is found in the southwestern corner of Sabah.

This survey was meant to obtain some information on the district's inhabitants, their traditional funerary practices (see Arifin 1999) and related archaeological remains, and their languages, history, economy, and customs. Archaeological information had been available only from written sources (e.g., Schneeberger 1979: Map), which mention scores of sites of upright stones, dolmens, carved figures, and other monumental works. While only a few sites could be visited during the survey, a large number were recorded from informants.

Figure 26. Vat pillar with squatting human shape, Kayan Hulu.
Photo J. Halapiry, 1992.

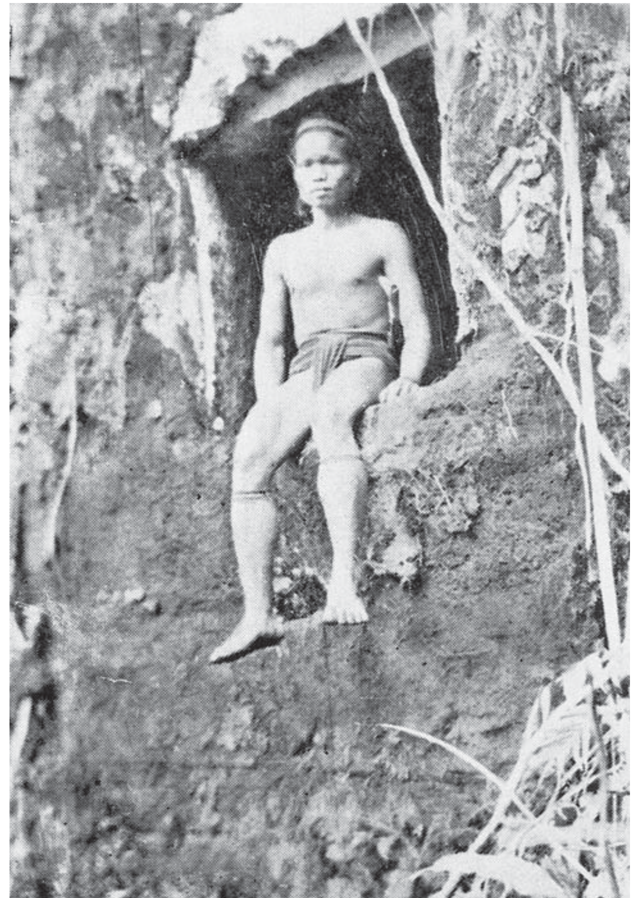


Figure 28. Man-made cliff cavity, used as a grave, Kayan Hulu.
After Sierevelt 1930: 481.

Figure 27. Stone pillar with flat corner to support the vat, Kayan Hilir.
After Sierevelt 1930: 481.

Figure 29. Carved boulder with *aso'* motif, Kayan Hulu.
After Arifin and Sellato 2003: 217.

Three main types of sites were recorded: various forms of funerary structures; rock-face or boulder carvings; and stones of various shapes erected at certain places (see Arifin and Sellato 1999, 2003; Sellato 1999). It should be mentioned that the people of the Kerayan have massively converted to an Evangelical brand of Christianity and are no longer practicing traditional funerary rituals –nor are they (openly) drinking rice beer.

Figure 30. Dolmen with stone urn (left) fashioned like a ceramic jar, southern Kerayan.
Photo B. Sellato.

Figure 31. Grave with anthropomorphic figure with large ears, southern Kerayan.
Photo B. Sellato.

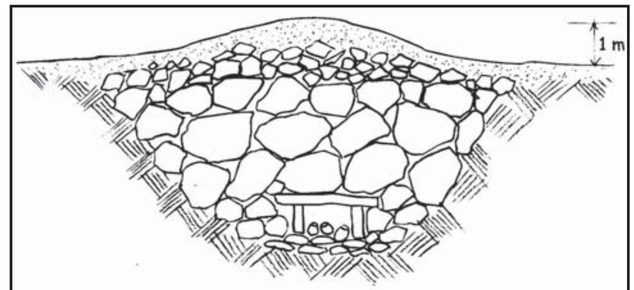


Figure 32. *Perupun manik* to hide away valuables, western Kerayan.
After Arifin 1999: 460.

Funerary monuments vary with sub-groups within the Kerayan area, along with funerary practices (see Arifin 1999). In western Kerayan, the body of a well-to-do person was bathed and tied with its legs flexed and its knees under its chin, then wrapped in a mat and leaned against the wall on the longhouse veranda. After a day or two, it was placed in a flexed position, into a large ceramic jar, which had been carefully cut around its wider diameter, and left there for about one month, while the family prepared food –rice, buffalo and pig meat– for visiting mourners, as well as many jars of rice beer (*borak*). Some years later, the bones were transferred from the house to the cemetery, and a big feast (*morak*, 'to drink *borak*') was held, with much rice, cattle meat, and even more rice beer (clearly, funerary feasting was equated to a big drinking party). Bones were transferred to another jar capped with a gong, and carried to the cemetery (*lemotan*) in the forest.

Figure 33. Dismantled and excavated *terupun*, western Kerayan.
Photo B. Sellato.

Dolmen structures do occur in western Kerayan, where they are called *battuh terupun* ('heaped stones') and often linked to a popular mythical character (see LeBar 1970, also Harrisson 1949), though not necessarily to the present residents' historical funerary practices (see below). In southern Kerayan, adjacent to the upper Bahau, dolmen structures, called *pelupun* ('heaped [stones]') featured prominently in local funerary practices. When a *nulang* festival (the equivalent of the *morak*) was held, the jar containing the bones was moved from the cemetery (*lematau*) where it had been deposited to another site, and placed there on the ground. Then, a dolmen structure was built around and over the jar, with pillars made of stone slabs and another slab on top as a cover (Figure 30; this particular grave shows a 90cm-high stone urn, shaped like a ceramic jar), in a way similar to that of the Bahau Ngorek. As a variation of the same type, two southern Kerayan sites show rectangular slab graves, consisting of stone slabs forming a continuous wall. Most of these grave sites have been dismantled. The wall of one grave shows a carved anthropomorphic figure with large ears and raised arms (Figure 31).

Figure 34. Boulder carved with low-relief figure, southern Kerayan.
Photo C. Eghenter, 2012.

Dolmens in western Kerayan (*battuh terupun*, *perupun*, *pelepuun*) consist in an accumulation of river stones upon which a dolmen of board-shaped pillars and table stand. Some are hefty, such as at Long Api (220cm-high pillars and 290x195cm table slab), though they remain small by western European standards. According to Arifin (1999), people who died without heirs were buried with all their belongings in such a structure that could not easily be vandalized. Some of these monuments, called *perupun manik* ('heap [of stones] for beads'), possibly were not funerary structures, but were meant to only store the valuables (beads, ceramic jars, etc.) of a person deceased without offspring, so that they would not become an object of dispute (see section on Sabah). As Arifin (1999)

Figure 35. Carved rock face, *battuh narit*, with two figures, southern Kerayan.
Photo B. Sellato.

Figure 36. *Battuh narit*, with human figure holding two heads, southern Kerayan.
Photo B. Sellato.

describes it, the valuables were placed in a three-meter-deep hole, which was filled with large stones until they formed a hillock (Figure 32). Alternatively, people planted a bamboo grove on the stone heap, the inextricable roots ensuring that the cache would stay undisturbed. While some *terupun* have been pounded to pieces to build airstrip runways, most have been destroyed and excavated by grave robbers in search of treasures (Figure 33).

Carved stones (*battuh narit*) in southern Kerayan feature anthropomorphic figures in low relief on loose boulders or rock faces on the river bank (Figure 34). They are represented with their hands raised up and their legs open. One has heels protruding and forming a spiral and wide rectangular ears displaying some sort of ornament (Figure 35; see similar "spread-eagle" figures in the Kelabit area of Sarawak; see T. Harrisson's articles). They may function as memorial or territorial markers. One particular carved stone in the upper Kerayan (Figure 36) is said to commemorate a successful headhunting expedition (the figure holds two human heads on its shoulders; Schneeberger 1979: 69, 137, 142).

Standing stones are common throughout the Kerayan area. Some, as in western Kerayan, were removed from

Figure 37. Upright stones set in front of a village school, western Kerayan.
Photo B. Sellato.

FIGURE 38. MUD CROCODILE, *BUAYE*, WITH RIVER STONES FOR EYES, WESTERN KERAYAN.
PHOTO B. SELLATO.

collapsed dolmens and erected as village markers, e.g., at the football playground's edge or in front of the school or church (Figure 37), and sometimes carry inscriptions in relation to their new use. Some tall upright stones ('menhirs'), however, were never part of a dolmen, as in southern Kerayan, and some may or may not have been used as a gnomon (Schneeberger 1979: 64-65). Clusters of upright stones also exist, one of which Schneeberger (1979: 65-66, 137, 139) called 'tetralith', and sometimes included a stone 'seat'.

Other stones were removed from earlier settlements: an upright stone was transported from the old village of Pa' Ibang, and various natural stones –called Battuh Sangui ('dragon stone'), Battuh Berek ('pig stone'), and Battuh La'al ('chicken stone'), as their shapes are vaguely reminiscent of those animals– were moved from Pa' Upan when the villagers settled at Tang La'an. Evidently, such stones are of concern to the local residents, and sometimes put to ritual use: e.g., one so-called 'stone mortar' is beaten during the dry season to bring on the rains.

Crocodile images are also part of the festive monumental work performed by the Kerayan people. A large crocodile image, *buaye*, was fashioned of earth and mud during the headhunting festival (*irau*), and given big river pebbles for its eyes. In the past, it is said, such images were up to 15 meters long (Pollard 1933: 145; see also Ricketts 1963: 284). Next to the crocodile, an *ulung* was erected, a tall pole similar in function to the Kenyah's *belawing*. In the course of the *irau*, the crocodile image was ritually killed (Figure 38; this one, made in 1993, is said to have been killed by gunshot). The image, of course, was soon damaged by the rain after the festival. Such images were possibly meant as both a psychopomp and fertility symbol (Schneeberger 1979: 71-73, 125, 127). In recent years, big *irau* festivals are held at the district or regency capital as an expression of regional ethnic culture (Figure 39; see Lalong 2014; elsewhere in Borneo, see Staal 1928).

Other monumental works, such as huge straight tracks cut across forested hillsides (*kawang*) or long deep trenches (*nabang*), as described by Schneeberger (1979: 38-40, 70-72), are no longer visible (see the section on Sarawak).

Malinau

The Malinau river drainage, located to the east of the Bahau, was occupied by the Bulusu', a group belonging to the Murutic language cluster. These were pushed farther to the east by the Merap, who came in from the Bahau (see Kaskija 1992). Later, several Kenyah sub-groups from the Bahau also moved in. The Malinau is also home to several groups of former Punan nomads.

Figure 39. Giant crocodile, over 30m long, made for *irau* feast at Malinau.
Photo P. Lalong, 2008.

An urn dolmen site is reported by Schneeberger (1979: 68, Map III) on the upper Malinau River, leading to the expectation that similar structures might be found further downriver on the Malinau. So far, in the areas visited, no remains of stone structures have been found. We may, however, assume that one Ngorek sub-group transited through the upper Malinau on its way from the Bahau to the lower Kayan. The funerary structures inventorized in the Malinau area (Arifin 1999) belong to the Merap and are built of wood. One rare type of Merap monument, called *langkang*, closely resembles the Nyibun *liang*: a huge carved tree trunk, with a hollowed top section to place a ceramic jar containing the deceased's bones and a thick ironwood slab to cap it (Figure 40; see Arifin 1999: 442-444, 458).

East Malaysia: Sarawak and Sabah

The discovery and investigation of megalithic sites in both Malaya (Peninsular Malaysia) and northern Borneo (East Malaysia) have a somewhat parallel history, and eventually they were comparatively, though possibly pointlessly, examined (e.g., Harrisson 1962a; Chandran 1982). While Malaya is not discussed here, data from the literature on Sarawak and Sabah are presented.

Sarawak

The Kelabit Highlands, forming the western, Malaysian, end of the Kerayan Plateau (Schneeberger 1945), are populated by Kelabit, a people very similar in language and culture to the western Kerayan groups (see Figure 3). Megalithic monuments there were reported at early times (e.g., Douglas 1907, 1912; Mjöberg 1925), and later investigated at length, and some excavated, by T. Harrisson (Harrisson 1948, 1949, 1952, 1954, 1958a, 1958b, 1959a, 1959b, 1962a, 1973a, 1974; Harrisson and O'Connor 1970) and a few others (Banks 1947; Arnold 1967) –Harrisson (1959b: 68) claimed to have visited and described over 200 stone monuments in the Kelabit area. The Kelabit were still erecting 'menhirs' in the 1950s –after which they became Christians.

Figure 40. Old wooden funerary monument, *langkang*, for Merap nobility, Malinau.
Photo B. Sellato.

FIGURE 41. CLUSTER OF UPRIGHT STONES, CAPPED WITH SLABS, AND STONE 'SEATS', KELABIT.
PHOTO SARAWAK MUSEUM (WITH PERMISSION), ARCHIVE NUMBER #KH88.

FIGURE 42. LARGE DOLMEN, KNOWN AS BATU RITONG, KELABIT.
PHOTO SARAWAK MUSEUM (WITH PERMISSION), ARCHIVE NUMBER #KH11.

FIGURE 43. COLLAPSED DOLMEN, BATUH NANGAN, WITH BROKEN CERAMIC JARS, KELABIT.
PHOTO SARAWAK MUSEUM (WITH PERMISSION), ARCHIVE NUMBER #AQ56.

Leaders of the past (Kelabit or their predecessors) proved, exhibited, and memorialized their status, associated with success in rice farming, through holding *irau* prestige feasts and through 'making marks in the landscape'. Such 'marks', called *etuu*, are found in a variety of forms, including upright stones or menhirs (*batuh senupid*), stone tables or dolmens (*batuh nangan*), stone funerary jars (*longon batuh*), stone carvings (*batuh narit*), stone bridges (*apir batuh*), stone mounds (*perupun*), ditches (*abang* and *nabang*), and notches in mountain ridges (*kawang*; see Schneeberger 1979; Janowski 2003: 47; Janowski *et al.* 2014: 170; see also Bulan 2003; Janowski 2013). *Irau* festivals involved the consumption of huge quantities of rice and meat, as well as, before conversion, lots of rice beer (*borak*; see above about Kerayan).

At death feasts (*borak ate* or *morak tulang*), held some time after death and involving secondary treatment of the bones (see, e.g., Harrisson 1959b; Malarn 1969; Yahya 1979; Schneeberger 1979: 38-40), the guests were put to work at 'making marks' in exchange for being fed, thus acknowledging the superior status of their host. Potency or life force (*lalud*) was expressed through the slaughtering of large animals and the handling of heavy chunks of stone (Janowski 2003: 47). This 'life force', of course, reflected the political and economic muscle of the prominent individuals or families (*lun do*) holding the *irau*, as well as their control over their clients. In such a society, which was not formally stratified, these lavishly expensive feasts comforted the *lun do*'s status.

Pairs or clusters of upright stones (*batuh senupid*), sometimes with stone 'seats', probably were ritual spots (Figure 41; see Banks 1937; Lian 1962; Harrisson 1973a; Chin 1987: 26; also Schneeberger 1979: 64). From under a few funerary dolmens (*batuh nangan*; Figures 42 and 43) that he excavated, Tom Harrisson, who calls them *parapun* (cf. *perupun*, above), extracted thousands of stones carried from a relatively distant river, mixed with broken ceramic jars, iron, glass and carnelian beads, as well as human bones (sometimes burned). As Harrisson and O'Connor (1970: 106) explain, this was to prevent disputes between the deceased's relatives over heirloom goods; however, a person could establish such a *parapun* while still alive, and hold a great *irau*, simultaneously demonstrating prominence and status and settling potential problems.

Carved boulders (*batuh narit*) are commonly found in this area, mainly showing anthropomorphic figures in low relief or simply incised, in the "spread-eagle" style (Figure 44), arms and legs open, often with large or elongated ears, while others show spirals, or a headdress and jewelry (Figure 45; e.g., Chin 1987: 24, 27). Rarely, animals –a dog, a rhinoceros (Harrisson 1958a), or even a 'tiger' (Banks 1937; Schneeberger 1979: 63)– are represented (Figure 46). A famous such spread-eagle boulder is found at Sungai Jaong, Santubong (Figure 47), far in coastal western Sarawak (Roth 1968: II, 280; Chin 1987: 25).

Figure 44. Anthropomorphic figure in high relief with large ears, Kelabit.
Photo Sarawak Museum (with permission), archive number #E224.

Figure 45. Boulder with incised female figure with ornaments, Kelabit.
Photo M. Villard, 1975.

Figure 46. Rock face incised with figures of man and dog, Kelabit.
Photo Sarawak Museum (with permission), archive number #ZM-10-108.

Figure 47. The famous 'spread-eagle' figure of Santubong, western Sarawak.
Photo Dicky WP.

Other large works, partaking in the necessity for prominent individuals to 'make marks', though not involving the use of stone, included broad and deep ditches (*abang*) and long trails cut across forested hillsides or mountain ridges (*kawang*).

Recent archaeological works in the Kelabit Highlands have recently begun yielding important insights in the region's prehistory (Lloyd-Smith 2012; Lloyd-Smith *et al*. 2010, 2013). Jones *et al.* (2015) recorded two cultural 'waves' in relation to subsistence systems in the Kelabit Highlands, suggesting that stone mounds appeared *c.* 3000 BP, whereas a broad range of megaliths and earthworks may only have appeared *c.* 450 BP. Pending confirmation

Figure 48. Carved *kelirieng* with stone slab, Punan Ba, Balui River, Sarawak.
Photo Dicky WP.

Figure 49. Upright stone standing at the edge of a rice field, Kinarut, western Sabah.
Photo B. Sellato.

of this local periodization, I shall not, in this paper, discriminate between 'waves', considering that, whatever the subsistence system, stone mounds, just like other (and later) sorts of 'marks', are expressions of wealth, prestige, and power and pertain to a similar competitive social context in which trade played a fair part.

Away from the Kelabit Highlands, in lowland Sarawak, funerary monuments related to staged treatment of the dead and based on the same general concept as those of the Nyibun of the Bahau are found among the Kajang of the middle Balui (Sekapan, Lahanan, Punan Ba/Bah, and others; see Needham 1955; Nicolaisen 1976, 1984; Luhat 1989), the Melanau of the central coastal region (see Buck 1933; Jamuh 1949), and the Berawan of the middle Baram (see Metcalf 1976b): a huge tree trunk, carved with motifs, with a ceramic jar containing bones at its top, and capped by a large flat stone or wooden slab (Figure 48).

Worthy of note is the 'good series' of stone tools collected among the Kelabit in 1945-48 by T. Harrisson (1949: 94-95).

Sabah

In the coastal plains of western Sabah (see Figure 2), among various groups, collectively known as Dusun or Kadazan (now Kadazandusun), upright stones are commonly found. Although who erected them or what their original function/s was/were (e.g., memorials, boundary markers, ritual loci, funerary monuments) is not always clear, they still have –or had not so long ago– some relevance to the lives of local residents (see Keith 1947; Evans 1953, 1970; Harrisson 1962b, 1973b; McCredie 1981; Lamb 1981-82; Phelan 1994, 2001).

T. and B. Harrisson (1969-70: 130-148), investigating 'menhirs' in this area, found some 100 monuments, all more or less similar. Most stand a short distance from a village, at the edge of wet rice fields or in reserved tree clumps (Figure 49). They mostly stand alone, but pairs of menhirs occur (Lamb 1981-82).

The Harrissons (1969-70: 138-143) list for the menhirs four uses:

1. distribution of property by the heirless (*minagang*);
2. 'status feasting', as a way to use surplus wealth to enhance a person's status;

Figure 50. Pouring rice beer on a wooden *sininggazanak*, western Sabah.
Photo Sarawak Museum (with permission), archive number #21.

3. funerary rites (possibly predating the Kadazan and not very relevant among them);
4. 'memorializing' someone (in the old days, every stone carried a personal name).

Whatever the use, it appears that it is all about social status, as on each type of occasion a large redistributive feast was held.

Such menhirs are also the objects of now rare rituals held in the *magang* festival, dealing with the transfer of old enemy skulls from someone's house to a special head house (now built of cement), during which a procession visits nearby stones (*vatu*), pouring on them blood from a sacrificial pig and rice beer (*tapai*), scattering around them cooked rice, with priestesses (*bobohizan*) chanting prayers to the spirits residing in them (Phelan 1994: 31-33). These rituals seem to have been associated in the past with headhunting expeditions, and enemy skulls, wrapped in *Licuala* palms, were hung from the *vatu*, (Phelan 1994: 33), which is strongly reminiscent of the *mamat* festival of the Kenyah, which concerns headhunting and features a tall post, skulls, and *Licuala* palms.

Sturdy carved wooden posts, called *senganak*, *sakaganak*, or *sininggazanak* ('child-less'), more recently replaced upright stones. They were erected as memorials for well-to-do child-less persons (next to their graves or not), or sometimes by these persons themselves before their death, and clearly are significant status markers (Harrisson and Harrisson 1969-70: 133, 139; Chay 1988: 59; Phelan 1973-74, 1994: 47-49). According to Phelan, *sininggazanak* are visited and treated in the same way as the upright stones during the *magang* rituals (Figure 50; see the Harrissons' *minagang* above). This suggests the historical convergence of several types of festivals, all major feasts of prestige.

Another distinct category of monuments concerns the so-called 'oath stones' or 'alliance stones', bearing witness, among the Dusun of Keningau and elsewhere in Sabah, to a peace treaty between two neighboring groups and,

Figure 51. Stone memorial of a treaty with smallpox spirits, Tempasuk, Sabah.
After Evans 1953: pl. 9.

among the Dusun of Tempasuk, to a treaty with spirits, here the smallpox spirits (Figures 51 and 52; see Evans 1953: pl. 9a; Harrisson and Harrisson 1969-70: 131-133; McCredie 1981; about the Murut in Sabah, see Harrisson 1967: 122;). Some clusters of upright stones, located near villages and called 'guardian stones', are meant to protect the village from diseases (e.g., Evans 1953, 1970: 28-30), most probably with regard to epidemics. Evans (1970) also noted a more or less man-shaped boulder to which villagers made offerings for protection against diseases. McCredie (1981) mentions one standing stone at Kimanis, which is worshipped for fertility.

Finally, one should mention a dolmen at Long Pa Sia' (in Lun Daye traditional domain), a few carved boulders and standing stones (see Harrisson 1973b; Anonymous 1980; Crawford 1986), which look similar to the carved stones of the Kelabit Highlands –although one displays smaller carvings 'of a conspicuously sexual nature' (McCredie 1981)– and various finds of stone tools, with specific beliefs associated with them (Evans 1913; McCredie 1981).

Concluding remarks

The following pages reflect on the definition and characteristic features of what we call megalithic monuments and megalithic activity, in relation to social and ritual features, particularly funerary feasts and social

Figure 52. Oath stone for a peace treaty between neighbors, Keningau, Sabah.
Photo Sarawak Museum (with permission), archive number #QZ130.

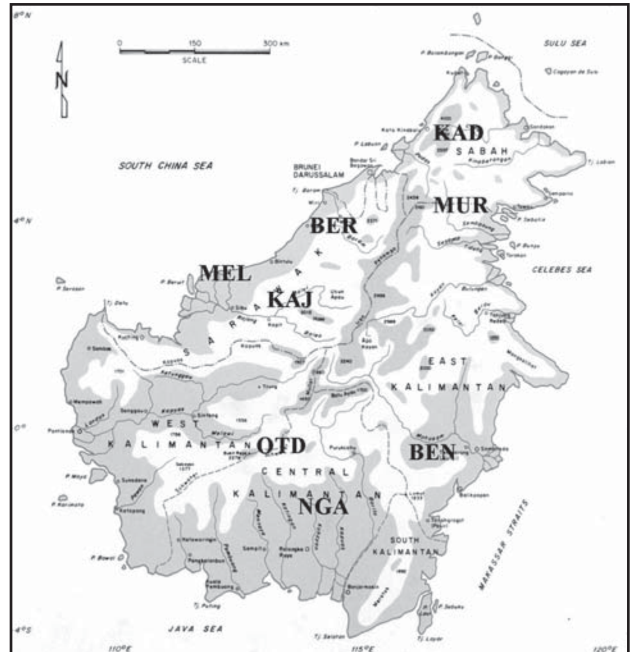


Figure 53. Ethnic groups practicing staged treatment of the dead.
BEN: Benua', BER: Berawan, KAD: Kadazan, KAJ: Kajang, MEL: Melanau, MUR: Murut, NGA: Ngaju, OTD: Ot Danum.

organization, in the region under scrutiny and beyond in Borneo.

Monuments and their social and ritual contexts

While the 'megalithic' activity of the Ngorek of the Upper Bahau (and related groups in Apo Kayan) principally included funerary monuments (notably stone 'urn-dolmens' and vats), sometimes decorated with carved motifs, and linked to practices of secondary treatment of the dead (*nulang*), current ethnic groups derived from them in the same region (e.g., the Nyibun) built wood-and-stone monuments for the same purpose. Similar funerary monuments are found among other groups in Sarawak (Kajang, Melanau, Berawan; see above). Other groups in the southern half of the island (e.g., Ngaju, Ot Danum or Uut Danum, Benua'; Figure 53), also themselves practicing staged treatment of the dead, build various types of large wooden monuments (see, e.g., Ten Cate 1922; Tillema 1931-32; Anonymous 1981; Schiller 1984; Devung *et al.* 1990-91). Among these groups, the final funerary rituals, variously called *tiwah*, *daro'*, or *kwangkey*, involving the erection of such monuments, to this day, are the occasion of extravagant feasts.

The Kerayan and Kelabit highlands display monuments in the shape of dolmens and slab graves associated with similar funerary practices. However, some dolmens standing on huge stone heaps were meant for burying valuable goods, rather than bodies. This area also exhibits scores of boulder or rock-face carvings of unclear antiquity, mostly anthropomorphic figures, some of which may be memorials of expeditions or territorial boundary markers. Upright stones ('menhirs'), sometimes in clusters, stone 'seats', and stone bridges stand in the vicinity of present or past settlement sites. According to Schneeberger (1979: 71), menhirs would be both memorials for the dead and fertility symbols, and may also be meant as 'sign-posts for the souls'. Other monumental works not involving the use of stone were carried out in a recent past, such as outsized mud images of crocodiles, as well as deep ditches and broad tracks across the forest, meant to leave durable 'marks' in the landscape. The execution of these monumental works was associated with lavish redistributive *irau* feasts sponsored by prominent individuals or families.

In western Sabah, large numbers of standing stones seem to have been erected to serve, through time, various functions among the Kadazan or their predecessors: distribution of property by the heirless, use of surplus wealth to enhance a person's status, funerary rites, commemoration of someone, and, today, transfer of old skulls. Whatever the use, it seems that on each type of occasion a large redistributive feast was held. Carved wooden posts have sometimes replaced upright stones for certain ritual purposes. Special stones, 'oath stones', were also erected as testimonies of 'treaties' between neighboring communities, or with spirits as protection ('guardian stones') against epidemic diseases.

In terms of the evolution of 'megalithic' practices through time in Borneo, it appears that, as in the Ngorek-Nyibun case, some people may build different types of monuments to serve the very same purpose and that, as in the Kadazan case, others may build or use the same type of monuments for very different purposes. One consistent feature associated with these practices is the redistributive feast.

'Megalithic' activity and the pursuit of prestige

The criteria commonly used to define 'megalithic activity' seem ambiguous. Size (the 'mega' bit), to begin with, varies widely: e.g., in Ngorek graveyards, monuments range, in a continuum, from massive, two-meter-high urn-dolmens to tiny, 20cm-high structures without even a bone container. Then, materials (the 'lithic' bit): there clearly is a historical, structural, and functional continuity between Ngorek stone urn-dolmens and Nyibun wooden 'pole-graves' with a ceramic jar covered with a stone slab. The functions of the diverse types of stone monuments, as we have noted above, also vary widely, covering a broad range of ritual, social, political, and possibly even plain decorative purposes. The case of 'shrine stones', round stones (*batu tuloi*) of the Kenyah or small upright stones (*tojahan*) of the Ot Danum, part of family or community shrines, will not be discussed here, nor will that of the *pantak* standing stones of the Kanayatn of West Borneo.

This readily compares with the use of stone in traditional and modern Western societies, which had/have graveyards with carved tombstones and mausoleums; monumental wayside crosses or statues; war memorials and triumphal arches; administrative boundary markers and road milestones; and ornamental sculptures and other related monuments. All these structures are of varying sizes and some were/are made of wood instead of stone (or concrete).

Returning now to the question of large stone monuments, one single criterion might be used, which is a social criterion: the preparation, transportation, and erection of a heavy stone object reflect the capacity of a given agent in a human community for mobilizing a large labor force. This agent may be a prominent individual (a political or ritual leader, or a wealthy person) or family group. The ultimate purpose is to establish some object, preferably of an imposing size, to bear witness in a durable way to its sponsor's power.

Therefore, the erection of a stone monument is associated to the collective action of a social group (kin and affines, dependents, allies, clients) mobilized by a powerful sponsor. This action involves a massive redistribution of goods by the sponsor –usually, food (rice, meat of slaughtered domestic animals, water buffalo and pigs) and alcoholic beverage (rice beer)– along the action's whole duration. Upon completion, the inauguration or consecration of the monument is the occasion of a great feast, to which the people of neighboring villages are invited. Among the fair number of Bornean groups still practicing final funerary rituals with wooden monuments today –such as the Ngaju in the south, the Ot Danum in the west, and the Benua' in the east (on the famous Ngaju's *tiwah* festival; see Grabowsky 1889; Stöhr 1959; Miles 1965; Dyson and Asharini 1980-81; Kiwok 1983; Couderc and Sillander 2012)– such collective action and subsequent feast may last several weeks and entail huge expenses for the sponsor (on expenses, see Miles 1965), who then finds himself bankrupt, but having gained much prestige and status. This held true for Sabah groups till not so long ago.

Schneeberger (1979: 85) quite confidently states that '[i]t is thus obvious that buffalo breeding and *sawah* [wet] rice cultivation are here an integral part of the megalithic complex', but I would be more cautious: first, the presence of water buffalo in the Kelabit-Kerayan highlands is of unknown antiquity, and this animal has yet to reach Apo Kayan or the upper Bahau area; second, the Lun Daye still recall the times when they entered Kerayan and first tried to sow their paddy seed in marshlands, and there is yet no evidence that their predecessors ever practiced wet rice farming. Therefore, I see no reason for a necessary association of water buffalo and wet rice cultivation with megalithic activity, and I certainly would rather avoid using such a phrase as 'megalithic complex'.

As noted above, redistributive prestige feasts may be (or have been) focused not only on funerary rituals, with or without the use of stone, but also on any kind of major social, political, or ritual event, such as a headhunting feast, a military victory, or a purely self-aggrandizing affair by a wealthy individual. Moreover, such feasts may not involve stone monuments, but rather 'marks', i.e., large-sized pieces of work that would remain visible in the landscape for a long time (e.g., ditches or tracks in the forest). Such monumental works must then be viewed as expressions of political power within particular social configurations.

Distributive feasting and social organization

Then, the social setting in which individuals and families may compete for prestige and status must be examined. Four major types of social organization are found in Borneo: the Moslem 'sultanate' type, an 'egalitarian' type (e.g., a band of forest nomads), a 'stratified' type (e.g., Kenyah), and a 'non-stratified' or competitive type (see Sellato 1987, 2002, 2009). While the first two types are of little relevance here, the last two will be described in some detail.

The Kenyah, including those in the Bahau area, display formal social stratification, comprising nobles, commoners and, formerly, slaves (war captives, but not debt slaves; see Whittier 1973, 1978; Rousseau 1990), with a crucial premise: the divine mythical origin and therefore distinct essential nature of the nobles. In olden times, social ascription was very strict, and commoner families belonged to a given noble family, had ritual rights and duties, and could not leave the village. Village endogamy was the norm for commoners, but noble

families wove a regional network of alliances with other villages. A community, often quite numerous, was a formally bounded political, economic, social, and ritual entity, owning a territory bounded by treaties with its neighbors. Economic activities and trading expeditions were coordinated by its chief at village level. In this strict social setting, commoners, as permanent dependents of noble families, had to perform corvée work for and remit part of their rice harvest to them. Conversely, the nobles, in a feudal-like fashion, took charge of protecting and feeding their commoners when needed. With hardly any vertical social mobility, no client-patron relations, no debt slaves, and no way to alter one's status –an impoverished noble person's status remained unchallenged, and a well-to-do commoner could never become a noble– the nobles had no necessity for competitive displays of wealth within their community. A substantial work force was always available for free to perform any collective action deemed useful by the nobles –including for display of wealth vis-à-vis other communities.

Contrasting with these, Kelabit and Lun Daye society was not formally stratified. Instead, it was highly competitive, and authority was rather diffuse (LeBar 1972; Crain 1978). Wealthy people (*lun do*, 'good people'), whose status was not secured by any notion of divine origin, strived to rally a following of free men (*lun daat*, 'poor people') and dependents (*demulun*, 'people'), some of which debt-slaves or war captives. They competed for prestige in lavish feasts (*irau*), e.g., for funerals, in which they spent most of their wealth. The rich and the poor not being in essence distinct, vertical social mobility was high: after several bad harvests, a *lun do* could lose his following and even fall into debt, while an enterprising and successful debt-slave could redeem himself and become a *lun do*. A community, usually a small hamlet, was not a bounded social grouping and did not collectively own a precisely delineated territory. Individuals and domestic families, constrained by no formal social or ritual ascription to the village (only to a *lun do* patron if they were in debt), operated freely within their own network of relationships. Due to this autonomy and instable social conditions, including endemic warfare and vendetta, spatial mobility was high, with villages splitting and families moving away. Status being constantly challenged and renegotiated, a crucial necessity was for wealthy people in quest of status to establish, upkeep, and expand their circle of affiliates and retainers. Redistributive feasts were the means to that goal.

In Borneo, it is in this latter type of social setting, which A. Testart (2005) labeled 'sociétés à richesses ostentatoires' (ostentatious-wealth societies, or 'show-off societies'), that redistributive feasts aimed at securing prestige and status can make sense, and that the erection of large stone monuments and the making of other types of great 'marks' can be understood –as both a show of power and a means for acquiring more of it. As the same author later wrote (Testart 2012), in such a type of society, rich people have no alternative strategy than to convert excess wealth into social prestige.

Megalithic activity, therefore –and whatever its definition– should not be regarded as a specific feature of a given culture area or a given prehistoric or historic period, but rather as one feature (among others, such as clientelism and debt slavery) of a more or less universal and timeless expression of competitive behaviors in particular types of societies. Fernand Braudel (1998: 119) wondered whether the European megalithic could be a 'natural feature', likely to appear anywhere; I believe the answer to be: yes, most probably.

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