

## A Shield for the Rajah – a Gift from the Kenyah Badeng of Borneo in Rome

Valerie Mashman  
Associate Research Fellow  
Institute of Borneo Studies  
[mashmanval@gmail.com](mailto:mashmanval@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

Exotic objects are often displayed in western museums for their powerful aesthetic rather than historical value because little is known regarding the provenance and history of the object. A chance encounter with a colleague's photograph of a shield in the Vatican Anima Mundi Museum reveals a series of transactions. A trusted Madang (Badeng) chief Saba Irang gave a shield in 1899 to Resident Charles Hose to be presented to Rajah Charles Brooke as a sign of peaceful acceptance of Brooke Rule, in Sarawak, Borneo. This came after a series of uprisings, punitive expeditions, displacement and reconciliation. The context and act of giving this shield is examined in the context of peace-making and trade. This gift did not stay in Sarawak as a reminder of the relationship this chief had forged with the Rajah but disappeared only to be found exhibited in the Vatican Museum some 120 years later. A case is made for this object to be exhibited in Sarawak for its story to be told with the source community who have spent the intervening time straddling the borderlands in Borneo between Kalimantan Indonesia and Sarawak Malaysia, vying for recognition and their rights as citizens of the state of Sarawak. Their story on the borders of the state is encapsulated in the provenance of the shield and its presence in an exhibition in Sarawak can provide a voice for the telling of an alternative history of peace-making from the margins.

*Keywords: Decolonizing history, Borneo, Kenyah Badeng, object biography, peace-making.*

Copyright: This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, for non-commercial purposes, provided the original work is properly cited.

## INTRODUCTION



*Figure 1: Kenyah Shield Vatican Anima Mundi Museum Inv. 125698, Inventory Card AU 2004/B (photo © Vatican Museums all rights reserved)*

While working as a researcher for the Sarawak Museum Campus project, I had a chance encounter with my colleague Mona's photograph of a Kenyah shield (Catalogue No. Inv. 125698 Inventory Card AU 2004/B) in the Vatican Ethnological Museum now the Anima Mundi Museum, bearing the name of its indigenous donor Saba Irang: "His Highness the Raja from Saba Irang Madang Chief." This prompted me to research a series of transactions. A trusted Kenyah Badeng (Madang) chief Saba Irang gave a shield in 1898 to the local administrator, Resident Charles Hose, to be given to Rajah Charles Brooke as a sign of peaceful acceptance of Brooke rule in Sarawak, Borneo. This came after a series of uprisings, punitive expeditions, relocation of communities and reconciliation. The act of giving this shield is examined in the context of peace-making.

This article makes a case for this shield to be exhibited in Sarawak where the community of origin, the Kenyah Badeng live, because of the survival of the unique association with its donor throughout the history of the artefact. The story of the Badeng migrations on the borders of the state and their struggle for recognition is encapsulated in the biography of the shield. Its presence in Sarawak can provide an impetus for the telling of the history of peace-making in Sarawak from the margins and the consequence of the establishment of Sarawak as a sovereign state. At the same time, it is possible to detect alternative responses to peace-making on the part the Badeng. Peace-making for the Badeng did mean protection by the Brooke state. Peace-making did not bring an end to warfare with the Iban, nor did it curtail attempts to force their resettlement by Brooke officials. This explains the subsequent migrations of the Badeng away from the Brooke state.

This article begins with a brief outline of the provenance of the shield. It is useful at this point to consider meanings for the term provenance- the museum definition is as follows: "The full history and ownership of an item from the time of its discovery or creation to the present day, through which

authenticity and ownership are determined.”<sup>1</sup> Jos van Beurden takes this further by suggesting it is important also to consider the trajectories of an object as it changes hands from the source community to intermediaries and eventually the museum. His definition of provenance is much wider: “[T]he history of an object in terms of the context which it was made and who made it, of its use value and exchange value through time, of the ways in which it has passed from the maker to subsequent possessors. Provenance is also called an object’s biography” (Van Beurden 2017, p.38). Thus, in order to establish the provenance of the shield, and its biography, the discussion will detail the historical background and then a description of the shield which is the focus of this paper. The article will then focus on the circumstances which led to the giving of the shield and an interpretation of giving the shield as an act of peacemaking. After this, the question is put as to what happened to the shield? This gift, a symbol of the relationship Saba Irang, the Kenyah Badeng indigenous chief, had forged with the incipient Brooke state, was not kept for posterity in Sarawak, but disappeared only to be found exhibited in the Vatican Anima Mundi Museum, still associated with the original donor Saba Irang, some 120 years later.

It is important to add that the process of documenting this history has sought reference to the source community through dialogue and through their oral histories. This dialogue began with an event at the Rainforest Fringe Festival in 2018 organized by the Friends of the Sarawak Museum. The descendants of Saba Irang led by Maren Uma Nyaban Kulleh with other Badeng leaders gathered in Kuching at the invitation of the Director of the Sarawak Museum in 2018 to attend a presentation of history of Badeng looted objects in the museum and the story of Saba Irang’s shield.<sup>2</sup> Badeng individuals living in Kuching also participated in the preparation and delivery of the presentation.



*Figure 2: Badeng group at presentation and dialogue, Kuching 7 July 2018. Maren Uma Nyaban Kulleh, a direct descendant of Saba Irang, from Uma Badeng, Sungei Koyan is third from the right in the front row. Note the descendants of Saba Irang are all wearing white Saba Irang T shirts (Valerie Mashman).*

The value of this approach is highlighted by Christina Kreps, who states that with the new museology the dominant view of museum specialists, anthropologists and art historians is muted and authority is given to the voices of the source community: “In the post-colonial museum, the voice of authority is no longer that of anthropologist, art historians and professional museum workers, but the voices of the people whose cultures are represented in museums” (Kreps 2011, p.74). It is not my purpose to dwell on the bigger issues implicit in this statement regarding the eurocentric basis for museum collections, built as the tools and products of colonialism. Rather, my aim is to provide a basis for discussion for the source community and Sarawak leaders to work on, to determine the next steps to be taken regarding the future exhibition of this object.

<sup>1</sup> <https://icom.museum/en/activities/standards-guidelines/code-of-ethics/> accessed 24/11/2018.

<sup>2</sup> For more about looted objects in the Sarawak Museum, see Mashman (2019)



*Figure 3: Badeng leaders inspecting Badeng museum artefacts (Valerie Mashman)*



*Figure 4: Shireen Lade leading a presentation (Valerie Mashman)*

## THE SHIELD: DESCRIPTION



Figure 5: Kenyah Shield Vatican Anima Mundi Museum Catalogue No. Inv. 125698 Inventory Card AU 2004/B. Dimensions 150 X 50cm (photo © Vatican Museums all rights reserved)

This shield is known in Kenyah as *klebit bok*, *kelavit bok*, *kelembit bok* or hairy shield. It is typically carved into a wedge shape out of single piece of wood, with a grip carved longitudinally at the centre of the reverse side of the shield. The shield is strengthened by two bands of rattan at the apex and base, which are stitched into the shield to reinforce it and prevent it from splitting, once a weapon hits it.

At the centre of the shield is a large face with huge eyes drawn as circles and a double row of teeth with fang-like tusks. This style of face is called an *udo* and is designed to instil fear in the enemies of the owner and to repel evil.

At the apex and the bottom of the shield are smaller human face patterns. The outer part of the shield is decorated with human hair, usually taken from the heads of enemies. The hair is inserted into the surface of the shield in rows and is held in with resin. The rows of hair frame the main face figure and the smaller faces at the top and bottom ends.

The reverse of the shield is painted with *aso* (dog/dragon motifs) at the apex and base and two stylized human-like figures, protectors of the bearer of the shield, at the centre. All these motifs are believed to be ritually powerful.

Many similar shields have been collected by many European museums, for example Weltmuseum Vienna, the British Museum, the Pitt Rivers Museum and the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, as a consequence of warfare, contact with British and Dutch administrators, traders and collectors and peace-making agreements in Borneo at the end of the nineteenth century

## GAPS IN HISTORIES AND SOURCES

Underlying the moment of the giving of the shield by Saba Irang is a narrative of resistance, and agency which comes through the oral histories collected from Long Geng, Long Busang and Data Kakus by Vom Roy, a Badeng, (Vom Roy 1993) and Alan Maxwell (Maxwell 1990). Other Kenyah oral histories have been sourced from the Echols collection at Cornell University. These perspectives of the Kenyah Badeng community provide an alternative history, in contrast with the triumphalist official histories provided by Brooke administrator Hose (Hose 1900, Hose 1988), Hose and McDougall (1993) and visiting anthropologist Alfred Cort Haddon, (1899, 1901) facilitating a critique of the established representations of events.

Maxwell highlights why the Badeng were a problem to the Brooke administration: they were the most powerful group resisting Brooke rule and preventing the extension of peace to the headwaters of the Baram, Tinjar and Balui Rivers. At the same time, they were difficult to contact as they were living in one of the remotest parts of Sarawak, in the interior surrounding the Usun Apau (Maxwell 1990, p.5).

More recently, anthropologist Rita Armstrong draws on oral history and historical records to trace significant events in Badeng history, making the case for Badeng autonomy and their marginality (Armstrong 1994). Nevertheless, all these scholars overlook the references in the *Sarawak Gazette* to the major punitive expeditions by the Brooke administration to attack the populations of the upper Rejang, including the Badeng, in 1895 and 1896, which displaced thousands of people who sought refuge in the Baram district, leading to the peace-makings of 1898 and 1899.

## WHO ARE THE MADANGS?

The Badeng are described as Madangs by Hose and other Brooke administrators in the pages of the *Sarawak Gazette*. The word *madeng* means to fly in Badeng and they came to be called Madang because of a legend which stated they flew on a sugar-cane crusher to the Badeng River from the Usun Apau (Armstrong 1991, p.3). They are now classified as a sub-tribe of the Kenyah. The Badeng once lived on the edge of the Usun Apau, an upland plateau close to the headwaters of the Rajang, Baram and Kayan rivers. The Lepo' Aga', Badeng and Jamok originated from a community in Usun Apau known as Jamok, and are closely interrelated. Some, then migrated to Long Aga' and some went to Long Badeng. Thus, the Badeng were so called as they took their name from a small tributary of the Iwan River called the Badeng, where they lived in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in a very large settlement. They then divided into two groups based on the Danum and the Plieran rivers, where they were subject to attacks from Iban (Maxwell 1990, p.46, Armstrong 1991, p.3, Hose and Mc Dougall 1993, p.282).

The Badeng eventually split again as they had to escape two major attacks in 1895 and 1896; some fled to the Apau Data, which is in the headwaters of the Plieran and Data rivers, others went to the Apau Kayan and the Bahau in Dutch Borneo. Although Hose negotiated with the Badeng to move to the Baram through a series of peace-makings, as will be discussed in this paper, the majority of the community eventually moved to the Apau Kayan. Tasi Balan took his community to the Apau Kayan, because "the elders in those days thought the white people wanted to make Badeng children work in factories or take their blood" (Armstrong 1991, p.19). The communities of the Danum and Plieran combined at Long Buoï on the Kayan river in around 1909 (Vom Roy 1993, p.45). Meanwhile, some of the Badeng from the Data under Tugau Ajang did not manage to join the migration to the Apau Kayan and went to settle at Lio Mato on the Baram River. Another group eventually went to Long Jeeh on the Baram with the Jamok (Tan Chee Beng 1993, p.45).

### **Box 1: Where the Badeng and related groups live today in Sarawak**

1. Uma Badeng of Long Geng on the Linau live at the Asap Settlement. Splinter groups moved to Long Lawen and the Tegulang Resettlement Scheme, because of the Murum Dam. Others are at Apau Dangang, Apau Magan and Long Malin.
2. A large group of Long Busang Kenyah Badeng left Long Busang in the late 1970s to go to Long Dungan below the Belaga bazaar. In the late 1980s, a sizeable number moved to Data Kakus, Tatau. Some splinter groups are at Kampong Senep and Long Biyak on the Burok River.
3. Some Badeng at Long Busang, who converted to Islam, remain there, together with a number of Evangelical Christians.
4. A small group of Kenyah Badeng, who lived with the Uma Pawa in upper Belaga River, moved to the Tinjar River in the Baram in the 1960s, and came back to the upper Belaga River in the 1980s where they still live today at Rumah Asmadi Agau. Another group live at Long Urun.
5. There is a Badeng community at Lio Mato in the upper Baram.
6. At Long Jeeh, there is a mixed Lepo' Aga' and Jamok community which has split into four groups:
  - a) the first group moved down to Long Silat from Long Jeeh.
  - b) the second group moved above Long Jeeh at Long Belaung.
  - c) the third group migrated to Long Telawan (Selawan) below Long Jeeh.
  - d) the fourth group remained at Long Jeeh.
7. There are a few Lepo' Aga and Badeng families at Long Teran on the Tinjar.
8. Long Tungan is a Jamok settlement.

On the Kayan River, they lived close to Lepo Tau and other Kenyah groups. It was here they experienced fission and frequent migrations. In the 1920s, after the Kapit Peace-Making of 1924, the Badeng began to move to the Linau River in Sarawak (Rousseau 1990, p.337). After the 1966-67 peace-makings at Long Nawang and Kapit, some 2,000 Badeng moved into the upper Balui River (Lumenta 2011, p.139). By 1970, there were 1,700 people living at Long Busang (Armstrong 1991, p.14). In the subsequent decades some moved to Long Dungan and Data Kakus. In the 1990s, most of the Badeng at Long Geng were resettled at Uma Badeng at the Sungei Koyan Resettlement Scheme as a consequence of the commissioning of the Bakun Hydroelectric Dam (Liwana anak Numpang 2012, p.359).

They are recognized for their industriousness and their economic pre-eminence in the Belaga district achieved after their return to Sarawak, where they maintain a position of independence and autonomy derived from "cultural notions of self-worth" (Armstrong 1994, p.44). However, another picture emerges from more recent research based on a large number of Badeng who have been relocated at Uma Badeng at the Sungei Koyan Resettlement Scheme as a result of the commissioning of the Bakun Dam. Many of the settlers are facing economic and social displacement as a consequence of the loss of resources, affecting their livelihood and their sense of community (Welyne Jehom 2017, p.363).

Most of the Badeng have converted either to evangelical Christianity or Catholicism, and there are still a few adherents of Bungan, a traditional belief system that emerged after head-hunting was abolished.

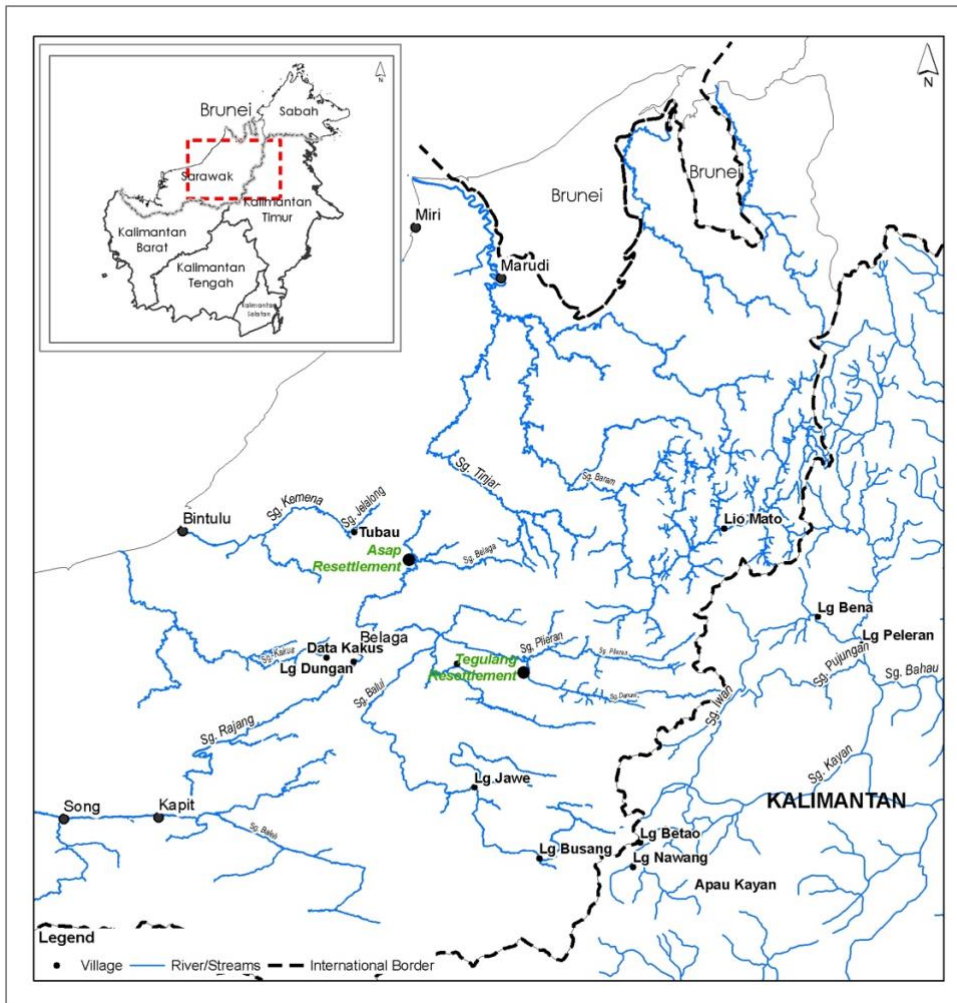


Figure 6: Map of sites in Sarawak and Kalimantan where Badeng communities have settled (Lee Guan Heng)

### SABA IRANG AND THE EXPEDITIONS OF 1895 AND 1896

The story of the shield leads to a profile of the donor Saba Irang, whose photograph was taken by A.C. Haddon during the peace-making ceremony in April 1899. He would have been at least 25-30 years old at the time of the photo being taken, as such a prominent leader would have had to have earned his position through experience in warfare. It is possible to reckon that he was likely to have been born around 1870. According to headman Nyaban Kulleh, his descendant, he died as an elderly man in Data Bung in the headwaters of the Linau River in Sarawak in 1939.

He was first mentioned in the *Sarawak Gazette* as one of a group of leaders who went to visit the fort at Claudetown during the aftermath of the punitive expeditions against the peoples of the Usun Apau in 1895 and 1896 by the Brooke administration (Hose 1896, p.248). These expeditions have received scant attention to date from historians and the details in the *Sarawak Gazette* are limited due to the fact that they were headed by the Iban chief Munan and other Iban leaders rather than any European officers. According to the *Sarawak Gazette*, a punitive expedition was commissioned in February 1895 against the Kenyah groups which included the Badeng and their allies of the upper Rajang (Bampfylde 1895, p.72). These peoples were said to have been responsible for the deaths of a Malay, a Chinese trader and some Saribas Iban collectors of *gutta* (wild rubber) in the upper Belaga river, a year previously.



The local story is that a Lepo Jingan man was shortchanged by a Chinese trader who bought his *enkabang* fruits and took his head (Seling Sawing 1974, p.332). This expedition was led, not by a Brooke officer, but by the Iban chief called Munan, trusted by Rajah Charles Brooke as a leader of many government-sponsored expeditions (Pringle 2010, p.182).

A second expedition was launched in 1896 which targeted the Badeng, as they had led a spirited counterattack against the Rajah's forces led by Munan in the 1895 expedition. During this attack, it was reported that the government-backed forces while they were looting deserted upriver settlements, met an attack by a force of Badeng and their allies. As a result, it was announced that the forces involved in this counterattack were to be severely punished with fines from the Rajah because other groups on the Balui felt threatened by them (Bampfylde 1895, p.71). This punishment led to a second punitive expedition against a group erroneously called the "Kayan," but presumed to be the Badeng, given that the Iban call all upriver groups "Kayan." During this expedition, it was claimed that four hundred of "the enemy" were killed. Given the subsequent reports of the displacement of peoples, including the Badeng, seeking refuge in the Baram, this second expedition attacked the homes of the Badeng (Anonymous 1896, p.126). These attacks are recounted in Badeng oral histories, narrating how the Rajah sent an expedition against the Kenyah. In their histories they do not distinguish between the Rajah's forces and the Iban, to them they are one and the same:

The Tuan Raja gathered the Iban, all the Iban who burned and burned. They went to the Usun Apau, wanting to burn the Usun Apau, to oppose the Usun Apau (Maxwell 1990, p.83).

After these expeditions had wiped out their longhouses and farms, the destitute Badeng sought refuge in the Silat and Tinjar rivers. Clues to the devastating nature of these expeditions come through in fragments of the Baram district reports: a number of women were killed because they were left undefended (Anonymous 1896, p.126). Thousands of refugees fled into the Baram (Hose 1896, p.247) and hundreds died of starvation (Hose 1897, p.113).

Saba Irang went to visit the Resident in Claudetown,<sup>3</sup> with a group of other leaders who had survived these attacks to seek protection and reassurance in the aftermath of these events in October 1896 and Hose describes the peace-making meeting as "jovial" and "spirited (Hose 1896, p.247). The next peace-making that was reported in the *Sarawak Gazette* took place over March and April 1897 in Claudetown, after some further 2000 Badeng had moved into the Silat River. After this meeting, the Badeng chiefs, Saba Irang and Usun Tassi and Saba Lahing the chief of the Uma Longs, went to the house of Tama Bulan, an important Kenyah chief, at Long Dalo on the Pata River where they made peace with the Baram people (Hose 1897, p.113). Tama Bulan provided hospitality and food for a thousand guests over five days. This makes a stark contrast with the descriptions of displaced peoples starving to death in official reports.

The following year Saba Irang was commended for his leadership qualities by Charles Hose in the *Sarawak Gazette*. He was described as an exemplary leader restraining his men from starting a feud that would lead to warfare. This happened when three Badeng were killed in the Silat, he held his followers back from hastily avenging their deaths. He was commended by Hose for his ability to act on his own authority and his influence in controlling his men (Hose 1898, p.42). He was also recognized as a diplomat and was sent to create ties of friendship between Kenyah chiefs in Dutch Borneo, the chiefs on the Baram river in Sarawak, and the Brooke government. He was entrusted with

---

<sup>3</sup> Claudetown was named after its first Resident Claude de Crespigny. It was subsequently renamed Marudi.

this mission at the next peace-making in the Silat, which was the occasion of the giving of the gift of the shield.



*Figure 7: Saba Irang (Catalogue number N.37574. ACH2. Image copyright University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology, reproduced with permission)*

### **THE VISIT TO THE SILAT**

The shield described above was given to Resident Charles Hose during his expedition to the Badeng country in the Data River, (described as the Lata River by Hose) a tributary of the upper Silat river in October 1898 (Hose 1899a, 1900). The purpose of this expedition was to establish “friendly relations” with the Madangs and the Kenyahs of the Batang Kayan, Dutch Borneo and to persuade them to attend a peace-making in Claudetown.

Hose was greatly encouraged by the outcome of the event and the compliance of the Badeng in paying taxes and delegated Saba Irang and Usun Tassi (also known as Tasi Balan, Tasek Balan) as ambassadors to encourage the Batang Kayan chiefs from Dutch Borneo to come for the next planned peace-making. Saba Irang appeared to be very happy to be entrusted with this mission and handed Hose a large shield to be given to the ruler of Sarawak, Rajah Charles Brooke, as a mark of his “good intentions” to live in peace (Hose 1899a, p.16). Hose reported success in the 1898 peace-making:

Saba Irang and the Madang chiefs appeared to be really pleased that this business was entrusted to them, and spoke very warmly of the treatment, that he and his people had received from the Baram people, and pointed out that the reason the Madangs had moved over into Baram waters with their wives and families, was because they had perfect confidence in the sincerity of the Baram tribes and that it was his desire to live in peace, like other Kayan and Kenyahs of the Baram district. He then handed me a large shield which he begged me to send to Your Highness, and asked me to make known to Your Highness his good intentions (Hose 1899a, p.16)

In return, Saba Irang received a Sarawak flag with “deafening cheers” (Anonymous 1899, p.7). The meaning of this peace-making in 1898 for Charles Hose was that Saba Irang and the Badeng had accepted Brooke rule and they had started paying taxes in the form of jungle produce. This final submission of paying taxes by the Badeng meant that all the tribes of the Baram had accepted the

power of government and that this would open greater opportunities for trade (Hose 1899a, p.16). This also meant that the Baram district was now loyal to the Brooke administration.

### **AFTERMATH: THE GRAND SAVAGE PEACE-MAKING WITH THE BADANG**

The Savage Peace Conference in Claudetown in April 1899, which 6000 people attended including Dr. Haddon, Dr. McDougall and other members of the Cambridge Torres Straits Expedition was the culmination of these events. The purpose of this meeting was to “encourage the Madang (Badeng) to be loyal subjects and to ensure a friendly recognition by them by the Baram people” (Haddon 1899, p.85). This grand peace-making was the final outcome after the peace-makings from 1896, 1897 and 1898 that the Badeng had accepted his control. He was convinced of their trust and loyalty:

The Madangs (Badeng) have taken an oath according to native custom in the presence of the principal chiefs of this river, and now appear to fully appreciate the feeling of the Baram people towards them, and also the Power of the Government. It is evident that the Madang chiefs are thoroughly sincere; not a sign of bad feeling was shown by anybody throughout the whole ceremony (Hose 1899b, p.241).

For the Badeng, swearing an oath was a serious part of a peace-making and violation would incur divine retribution. As missionary William Conely elucidates “...the *petutung* ritual served as a peace-making because the oaths made over animal sacrifices were considered ritually binding.” After the rituals, both sides were joined in a feast together to show goodwill towards each other (Conley 1976, p.118). Saba Irang was the Badeng chief who represented the Badeng at the oath taking ceremony:

He solemnly swore that he and his people would be friends with those now assembled, and would not combine with outside enemies against them, and him himself so far as he had the power, would endeavour to prevent others from breaking the peace (Haddon 1901, p.411).

Later on in a ‘great speech’ during the ceremony, Saba Irang declared that he and the Badeng were pleased to see the unity of everyone at the meeting and that they were very happy to be part of the Baram district and he anticipated that the Batang Kayan people would also wanted to be on good terms with the Baram people (Haddon 1901, p.412).

The finale of the Grand Savage Peace-Making represented the culmination of a series of peace-makings held in different locations, involving different local populations, with the donation of the shield coming the year before this major event.



*Figure 8: Madangs (Kenyahs) at the Peace-making at Claudetown (Catalogue number P.52806 ACH2. Image copyright University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology, reproduced with permission)*

This would make a triumphant ending to the story of the shield, with the affirmation of the loyalty of the Badeng to the Brooke administration. However, the different parties involved had different attitudes to the peace-making. For Hose, peace-making meant that differences had been settled through local custom: people had been induced to take oaths and rituals had been observed, omens taken, speeches made, and differences had been settled. The Badeng, however, lacked confidence in the Brooke peace-makings as is revealed in subsequent events which culminated in their migration to the Apo Kayan.

### **THE BADENG VERSION OF PEACE-MAKING**

Despite the description of this enthusiastic response to gift exchange, their payment of taxes, and the acceptance of the Sarawak flag by the Badeng, their oral histories and subsequent actions show that they were reluctant to settle in Sarawak. This is because there is a corresponding Badeng oral history of a Badeng peace-making at an unspecified time which shows how little the government understood the Badeng as it conveys their diffidence and mistrust. According to their version, at a peace-making meeting, Tasek Balan (Usun Tasi) was given a flag “a symbol of peace being maintained” and Temulau Erang (Saba Irang) was given an axe by the government to build new farms and collect wild sago.

An axe was a useful implement to clear land but as a gift it created suspicion and apprehension as it was not within the convention of customary gift-giving whereby gifts of prestige or ritual items such as gongs, jars or cloth are presented. People did not know what it meant and, as a consequence, Saba Irang began to plan to move further away into the Iwan River, a move which ran counter to Hose’s ambitious plans for the Badeng to migrate to the Baram River where they would be more easily under his control:

Temulau Erang (Saba Irang) told them he would lead his people to Iwan River as soon as possible. He could not understand why the government gave him the axe. He said the axe might mean ‘something that we do not know’ (Vom Roy 1993, p.41).

This meant that even though a decisive peace-making had been with the Badeng, the Badeng planned to move away. This blunder on the part of the government reveals the counterpart value of a reciprocal gift had been underestimated. The gift of an axe was intended as a practical item used for clearing land – but it was not something valued by the Badeng as it suggested to them that the government wanted

them to move. Peace-making was a less decisive process for the Badeng, because of the issues arising from this receipt of an axe, despite oath-taking. Further to this, they continued to experience major conflict with the Iban and it was more pragmatic for their survival for them to move away to Dutch Borneo.

### **FURTHER CONFLICT WITH IBAN AFTER PEACE-MAKING**

A series of events eventually led to a massacre of ten Badeng longhouses at Long Taa in the in the Usun Apau. This is what happened. The Badeng brought complaints to Hose, the Resident, about Muling, a Dayak, who had married into their tribe (Hose 1901, p.57). The following year, it was reported that he had left for the Upper Rejang in search of a head. (Hose 1902: 14). A year later, he died as a result of injuries inflicted in a quarrel with a Madang named Tama Aping Asang in the upper Rejang. Muling was said to have stolen padi and property from Long Cha, a Badeng settlement which had recently been burned down by an Iban named Unyut (Hose 1903a, p.13). These were the events that led to the reported massacre of forty people, consisting mainly of women and children, at Long Taa in the Usun Apau in July 1903. This took place at a time when the able-bodied men were away. Hose indicates the attackers were “Dyaks from the Rejang” at Long Taa (Hose 1903b, p.204), whereas the local memory conveys they were attacked by a government expedition and many more people were killed.

There were only two young men defending the community. According to them, Brooke’s men, many in number, killed about 70 people, mainly children, women and old people. Their longhouses were also burnt down and their belongings taken away by the attackers (Vom Roy 1993, p.36).

Another version of this event comes from the oral histories from Long Geng, who say the Badeng killed Muling, an uncle of Temenggong Koh and as a consequence, Temenggong Koh led an expedition against them:

Temenggong Koh collected the Iban together with the government and burned Long Petan. Eight hundred, ah, eight thousand died caught by the head-hunting expedition, Temenggong Koh’s army. To the present day, the heads are in Temenggong Koh’s house. That’s why we fled, because of Tuan Raja’s army, the enemies of Tuan Raja we went to the Apo (Apau) Kayan (Maxwell 1990, p.84).

Thus, after the attacks on Long Taa and Long Petan in the Usun Apau, people fled to Long Buoi, close to Long Nawang, the home of the Lepo Tau. The government intervened after the 1903 attack and ensured that some of the Badeng captives were returned to their families and compensation was paid to them (Hose 1904, p.198).



Figure 9: Madangs or Pliran with two children newly restored to their parents by the government from captivity with the Ibans. (Catalogue number P.527559 ACH2. Image copyright University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology, reproduced with permission).

The Badeng at Lio Matu remember this event as their ancestors were involved in seeking the return of the children who were taken as captives. Kajan Uda, a Badeng chief, was urged to go to Kapit to negotiate for the release of the captives taken by the Iban. Only the girls were given back to the Badeng, not the boys. It is said one of the male Badeng captives rose to become an Iban leader, called Penghulu Bilong.<sup>4</sup>

However, a series of reports indicate persistent ambiguity and distrust on the part of the Badeng, despite the fact that they paid taxes as a pledge of loyalty to the government. The rumours that the Badeng under Saba Irang planned to re-migrate to the Batang Kayan unsettled the Brooke officials (Hose 1903a, p.13). This led to the Badeng being forced to move from the Data River to the main Baram River which is reported in the *Sarawak Gazette*. This was done by detaining their leader Tasek Balan in Marudi with his men, until the rest of the village consisting mainly of women had been forcibly moved into the Baram to Long Mujan (Douglas 1905, p.130). The Badeng version is as follows:

Then houses were built in Long Mujan by Tuan Aut's men. Houses built in Long Mujan for each Badeng family were the same in size with their former houses in Data. While their houses were built in Long Mujan, the Badeng men who were asked to attend the meeting in Marudi were not told about it. It was kept secret from the Badeng men in Marudi. They did not know their wives and children had been taken from the Data to Long Mujan. They knew nothing about it. In Marudi the men had nothing to do...but the government did not allow them to go back (Vom Roy 1993, p.44).

The Badeng oral history describes that the government wanted people to move in order to be closer to the administrative centre so the government could govern and control them. The Badeng men who had been detained in Marudi pretended to be sick and feigned a healing ceremony in order to be released from detention. The oral history goes on to describe how they tricked the government into thinking that they would be staying at Long Mujan by leaving behind their belongings there, when in fact their

---

<sup>4</sup> Personal communication, TK Peter Edom, Lio Matu, 24 February 2018.

belongings were bags stuffed with wood and stone. In effect, they were planning to make for the Apau Kayan. They presented gifts which symbolized loyalty to the government yet underlying the action of presentation is duplicity and deceit which conveys Badeng agency:

Before they left for Data they had a meeting with “Tuen.” They presented him a shield decorated with goat’s skin. They promised that they would follow his order to come back and live in Long Mujan after the *ngelunau* ceremony. They also presented a parang with a decorative cover to the “Tuen.” They told him if he received any news that they were moving away he should not believe it unless they came up to tell him (Vom Roy 1993, p.44).

Thus, the Badeng version shows how the Badeng presented themselves with true diplomacy to the Brooke administrators in spite of being detained and forced to move to a new location. At the same time, they were not passive victims of manipulation by the colonial authorities, but they exercised agency in their planning, to deceive the authorities. In fact, according to the oral history, this group of Badeng went back to the Apau Kayan, using a hidden footpath to avoid detection. From the Iwan River they travelled to Long Buoï to be close to Long Nawang where they joined other kin:

They did not want the government to know about it as they were afraid that the government would not let them go. Actually, in Data, they prepared a good footpath leading in a different direction so that if they were pursued, those chasing them would follow that footpath. They used a different path which was not properly cleared so that nobody could trace their journey. They journeyed over mountains and finally reached the Iwan River (Vom Roy 1993: 44).

Most of the Badeng eventually returned to Sarawak in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a consequence of two major peace-making ceremonies, the November 1924 peace-making in Kapit and the Long Nawang and Long Jawi peace-makings of 1967.

### **WHAT HAPPENED TO THE SHIELD?**

It is very likely that Saba Irang’s shield was displayed at Rajah Charles Brooke’s personal museum at Chesterton House, Cirencester. On his death, the museum was closed and objects on display were sold, sent back to Sarawak or given to the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.

Some natural history specimens which were displayed at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley, which was held from 1924 to 1925, came from Chesterton House, and it is likely that ethnographic items also came from the same source (Hose 1994: 255). This exhibition was curated by Charles Hose himself. Given its history, he would have had a particular interest in displaying this shield. This may also explain how the name of Saba Irang stayed with the shield. Objects from the Sarawak stand at Wembley, which included the shield, were then given to the Vatican for the Vatican Mission Exhibition in 1925 which was held in conjunction with the Holy Year. This donation was acknowledged by a gift of a gold token by the apostolic delegate Monsignor G. Dunn to Rajah Vyner Brooke:

On the 25th of November at the Astana His Highness the Rajah received at the hands of the Rev. Monsgr. G. Dunn, Prae. Apol., a gold Token, which, having been blessed, was entrusted to His Highness' care by His Holiness Pope Pius XI in appreciation of the interest and help accorded to the Catholic Mission in Sarawak by the Rajah, and for gifts from the Sarawak section at Wembley for an exhibition in Rome. His Highness the Rajah, in thanking His Holiness, dwelt upon the esteem in which he held, the good work of the

Mission in Sarawak; the self-sacrificing and untiring energy of the priests in their work, had always excited His Highness' admiration (Anonymous 1925: 309).

After this, this shield became part of the founding collection of the Missionary-Ethnological Museum which was founded by Pius XI in 1926, arranged on the upper floors of the Lateran Palace and later transferred, under Pope John XXIII, to the Vatican where it has been opened again to the public in the same building which housed the former Lateran collections.

## DISCUSSION

Saba Irang gave a gift of a shield intended for the Rajah to convey goodwill and confidence in the Brooke administration and in return he accepted the Sarawak flag as a symbol of his allegiance to the Rajah. This act showed the beginning of acceptance of Brooke rule by the Badeng in the incipient Brooke state. The giving of the shield to the Rajah was an important symbol of loyalty which took place during the tumultuous era of the transition from warfare to statehood. At the same time, while the Badeng presented themselves as being happy to cooperate with the efforts of peace-making, according to the official accounts, there was an undercurrent of ambivalence in the oral histories.

Remote minority groups such as the Badeng are left out of national histories and are at risk of being forgotten. The presence of this object in an exhibition at the Sarawak Museum would give them a voice. For the source community, the shield is a reminder of the struggles of their distinguished leader Saba Irang. At the same time, it serves as a trigger for the Badeng voice that comes through the oral histories which conveys agency, resistance and independence in the face of Brooke rule. The story behind this shield represents the struggles of the Badeng in accepting Brooke rule, making peace and the tensions between them and the Iban. There is a need to explore further the representation of different understandings of peace-making from the Brooke administrators to the significance local communities attributed to these events.

This shield was given to the Rajah as a symbol of Badeng goodwill towards the incipient Brooke state. It is now located in a place where its meaning is very different, and very far from this original context. This shield has taken on more meanings in its history from a gift of loyalty to the Rajah to becoming a symbol for the global breadth of Catholic faithful.

## CONCLUSION

The history of this shield raises issues relevant to the new museology whereby the meaning of the object is not derived solely from the aesthetics of the object itself, but from the historical, social and political settings. This takes the research beyond the documentation, description and aesthetics of the object to the context of the acquisition of the object, the historical records and most important to the oral histories of the communities of origin. This is accordance with the post-colonial approach to museology which is about muting the dominant view of history and giving voice to the source community. Further to this, the source community the Badeng live in the remote hinterland of Sarawak with no opportunities to see this object, now located in Rome for themselves. It is hoped that dialogue might begin with the relevant authorities at Vatican Anima Mundi Museum to make a case for its future exhibition in Sarawak to tell the story of the role of minority groups in the formation of the nation-state of Malaysia.



### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Research was conducted under a research fellowship at the Sarawak Museum Campus Project 2017-8. I am indebted to Ose Murang, Jayl Langub, T.K. Peter Edom, Maren Uma Nyaban Kulleh, Louise Macul, Hans Van De Bunte, Lade Kulong, Roy Kulong, Shereen Lade, Knot Atot, Romio Ding, Dora Jok, Mona Octavia Albans, Friends of the Sarawak Museum, His Grace Bishop Richard Ng of Miri, Father Nicola Mapelli at the Vatican Anima Mundi Museum and Dr. Barbara Jatta, Director, Vatican Museums, all of whom have played different parts the collection of information and the inspiration for this paper. An earlier version of this article was presented at a panel *Borneo and Beyond: Connecting the Local and the Global in Borneo's Past* at EuroSEAS 10<sup>th</sup> Conference, Berlin, September 2019. Many thanks to Dr. Jennifer R. Morris for hosting the panel and supporting this contribution.

## REFERENCES

- Anonymous. (1896). Punitive expedition against Kayan. *The Sarawak Gazette*, 36, 126.
- Anonymous. (1899). The Madang Tribes. *The Sarawak Gazette*, 396, 7.
- Anonymous. (1926, January 1). Vatican Exhibit Closed. Pope Announces Objects Will Be Kept as a Missionary Museum. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1926/01/11/archives/vatican-exhibit-closed-pope-announces-objects-will-be-kept-as-a.html> accessed 30/9/2020
- Armstrong, R. (1991). *People of the Same Heart: The Social World of the Kenyah Badeng*. PhD. Thesis. University of Sydney.
- Armstrong, R. (1994). From Difficult Natives to Good Citizens: Marginality and Autonomy in a Central Borneo Society. *ASSESS Journal*, 1, 36-47.
- Bampfylde, C.A. (1895). Sibu Monthly Report. *The Sarawak Gazette*, 351, 71-72.
- Beurden van, J. (2017) *Treasures in Trusted Hands: Negotiating the Future of Colonial Cultural Objects*. Sidestone Press.
- Conley, W. (1976). *The Kalimantan Kenyah: A Study of Tribal Conversion in Terms of Dynamic Cultural Themes*. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company.
- Dries, A. (2016) The 1925 Vatican Mission Exposition and the Interface between Catholic Mission Theory and World Religions. *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 40(2), 119-132. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/2396939316638334>
- Douglas, R.S. (1902). Baram Monthly Report. *Sarawak Gazette*, 439, 166.
- Douglas, R.S. (1904). Baram Monthly Report. *Sarawak Gazette*, 466, 218.
- Douglas, R.S. (1905). Baram Monthly Report. *Sarawak Gazette*, 472, 130.
- Haddon, A.C. (1899). Peace-making at Baram. *The Sarawak Gazette*, 400, 85-87.
- Haddon, A.C. (1901). *Head-hunters: Black, White, and Brown*. Methuen and Co.
- Hose, C.(1896). Baram Monthly Report. *The Sarawak Gazette*, 371, 247-8.
- Hose, C.(1897). Baram Monthly Report. *The Sarawak Gazette*, 377, 113.
- Hose, C.(1898). Baram Monthly Report. *The Sarawak Gazette*, 385, 42.
- Hose, C.(1899a). Baram Monthly Report. *The Sarawak Gazette*, 396, 16-17.
- Hose, C.(1899b). Baram Monthly Report. *The Sarawak Gazette*, 402, 241.
- Hose, C.(1900). Into the Heart of Borneo. *The Geographical Journal*, 16(1), 39-59.
- Hose, C. (1901). Baram Monthly Report. *The Sarawak Gazette*, 422, 57.

- Hose, C. (1902). Baram Monthly Report. *The Sarawak Gazette*, 432, 13-14.
- Hose, C. (1903a). Baram Monthly Report. *The Sarawak Gazette*, 444, 13.
- Hose, C. (1903b). Baram Monthly Report. *The Sarawak Gazette*. 452: 204.
- Hose, C. (1904). Rejang Monthly Report. *The Sarawak Gazette*, 465, 198-199.
- Hose, C.(1988). [1926]. *Natural Man: A Record from Borneo*. Oxford University Press.
- Hose, C. (1994). [1927]. *Fifty Years of Romance and Research in Borneo*. Oxford University Press.
- Hose, C. and Mc Dougall, W. (1993). [1912]. *The Pagan Tribes of Borneo*, Vol.2. Oxford University Press.
- Kreps, C.F. (2011). Changing Rules of the Road: Post-Colonialism and the New Ethics of Museum Anthropology. In J. Marstine (Ed.) *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics: Redefining Ethics for the Twenty First Century Museum*. (pp. 70-84). Routledge.
- Liwan anak Numpang (2012). *Journey Towards Progress Society (1962-2002)*. Lee Ming Press.
- Lumenta, D. (2011). Moving in a Hierarchized Landscape: Changing Border Regimes in Central Kalimantan. *Wacana*, 13(1), 121-145.
- Mashman, V.A. (2019) Looted in an Expedition against the Madangs: Decolonizing History for the Museum. *Volkskunde Tijdschrift Decultuur van Het Dagelijks Leven* 120(3), 407-432.
- Maxwell A.R. (1990). Balui Reconnaissances: The Badang Kenyah of Long Gang. *The Sarawak Museum Journal*, 62, 21-114.
- Pringle, R. (2010). [1970]. *Rajahs and Rebels. The Ibans of Sarawak under Brooke Rule, 1841-1941*. Universiti Malaysia Sarawak.
- Rousseau, J. (1990). *Central Borneo: Ethnic Identity and Social Life in a Stratified Society*. Clarendon Press.
- Seling Sawing (1974). The flight from the Usun Apau to the headwaters of the Tinjar. *The Sarawak Museum Journal*, 43, 331-348.
- Tan Chee Beng (1993). Introduction. In Vom Roy, *The Migration of the Kenyah Badang*. pp. xiii-iii. Institute of Advanced Studies, Universiti Malaya.
- Vom Roy (1993). *The Migration of the Kenyah Badang*. (Edited by Tan Chee Beng). Institute of Advanced Studies, Universiti Malaya.
- Welyne Jeffrey Jehom (2017). Kenyah -Badeng Displacement: Bakun Hydroelectric Project Resettlement. In Victory T. King, Zawawi Ibrahim and Noor Hasharina Hassan (Eds). *Borneo Studies in History Society and Culture*. pp.343-364. Springer and Universiti Brunei Darussalam.

