

Chasing Dragons through Time and Space:

Martabani dragon jars in the Kelabit highlands, Sarawak, East
Malaysia

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In the memory of Barbara Harrison (1922-2015)

Abstract

Title: Chasing Dragons through Time and Space: Martabani dragon jars in the Kelabit highlands, Sarawak, East Malaysia

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This thesis explores how a special group of objects, referred to as dragon jars in Southeast Asia, cross cultural and geographical boundaries and acquire new meanings within different social and temporal settings. The object biographical approach serves as the main theoretical framework for the dragon jar enquiry within which the complex histories of jars are revealed and a closer study of object-agency takes place. The mosaic of jar biographies is investigated through the dual methodologies of anthropology and archaeology recovering information which may otherwise have remained difficult to interpret from a singular disciplinary perspective.

Dragon jars – or Martabans or Martavans as they are referred to in specialist literature – are large stoneware vessels, decorated with a pair of eponymous dragons. The manufacture of these objects can be traced back to the workshops of southern China, where jars were first produced to service the burgeoning early global maritime trade. Their primary function was to contain fresh water and consumables on long sea-journeys and to serve as non-permeable packaging materials for commodities. However, as soon as dragon jars reached Southeast Asian shores, not only their contents but the jars themselves became sought-after items by indigenous communities. Here, dragon jars were transformed into local symbols of status and ritual paraphernalia while acquiring new meanings, taking on magical, even human-like properties. The case study area is located in the remote Kelabit highlands of Borneo (East Malaysia), where 230 jars dating from the 17th to 20th centuries were recorded in mortuary contexts and domestic settings. The thesis investigates how jars were incorporated into indigenous funerary practices and commensal feasting events, and explores the spiritual roles of dragon jars. A large influx of jars in the late 19th and early 20th century documented in the archaeological assemblage was interpreted with regard to the wider political, economic, and religious changes that took place during the transition from pre-colonial, to colonial, and then post-colonial periods. Dragon jars further serve as the means for an object-focused enquiry to unravel the complex relationship between jars and their Kelabit counterparts, and contribute to broader theoretical debates on material culture in shifting spatio-temporal and religious contexts.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Aims, objectives and context of research

The aim of this thesis is to explore how objects cross cultural and geographical boundaries and are (re-)conceptualised within a variety of social and temporal settings. The re-contextualisation and conceptualisation of objects is examined through a special segment of material culture referred to as *dragon jars* across the region of Southeast Asia. An object biographical approach was devised to serve as the main theoretical framework for the dragon jar enquiry within which the complex histories of jars are revealed and a closer study of object-agency takes place. The case-study area is located in the Kelabit highlands, in the heart of Borneo. Here, the mosaic of jar biographies is investigated through the dual methodologies of anthropology and archaeology, recovering information which may otherwise have remained in the 'blind-spot' of a singular disciplinary perspective. In this thesis, dragon jars facilitate a detailed object-focused enquiry which aims to unravel the complex relationship between jars and their human counterparts, and contribute to broader theoretical debates on material culture in shifting spatio-temporal and religious contexts.

Dragon jars – or Martabans / Martavans as they are referred to in specialist literature – lie at the heart of this multidisciplinary investigation. Dragon jars are large stoneware vessels, coated in rich brown glazes and decorated with a pair of eponymous dragons. Despite their wide utilisation for many centuries, the history of dragon jars has not been subject to a thorough investigation. Jar-manufacture can be traced back to the workshops of southern China, where large container jars were first produced in the 9th-10th centuries CE to service the burgeoning early global maritime trade. Their primary function was to store fresh water and consumables on long sea-journeys or to serve as non-permeable packaging materials for commodities circulating between the ports of China, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. However, as soon as these large stoneware vessels reached the shores of Borneo, not only their contents but the jars themselves became sought-after items by indigenous communities. Here, dragon jars were transformed into local symbols of status and ritual paraphernalia while acquiring new meanings, taking on magical, even human-like properties.

The journeys jars have made and continue to make underpin the framework of object biographies explored in this thesis. These journeys began with the production of stoneware jars

in China before becoming incorporated into networks of trade in Southeast Asia, from where they then made their way to the Kelabit highlands in central Borneo. In the past, the Kelabit utilised large jars in three ways: to brew rice wine for major celebrations, to signal social standing as valuable heirlooms, and to contain the bones of the dead. An anthropological approach was employed to explore the 'domestic stages' of jar journeys; to reveal their use in ethnographic settings as signifiers of social rank and the roles they are still playing in the Kelabit society today. An archaeological perspective was applied to investigate the 'mortuary stages' of jar journeys; to provide a detailed examination of jar types selected for burials, explore the landscape settings of dragon jar cemeteries and chart the changes which took place in burial practice during the transition from precolonial to colonial and then post-colonial periods. These combined approaches were further supplemented by a close reading of colonial literature and a critical review of ethnographic writings. This grounded the study firmly within the ethno-political histories of the Sultanate of Brunei and Sarawak, enabling a broader interpretation of the dragon jar assemblages in light of social, economic and religious shifts that have occurred in the Kelabit highlands over the past 150 years.

Situating the study of dragon jars within broader disciplinary research contexts is not an easy task. Although the time period under consideration would qualify as the subject of 'historical', 'post-medieval' or 'later historical' archaeology (Tarlow and West 1999), its definition and remit in the Southeast Asian region is still unclear (Stark 2014). Historical archaeology has generally been defined either by the presence of written records, or by the date of 1500 CE designated as the beginning of the historical era (Hicks and Beaudry 2006). From the perspective of 'inland archaeologies' both definitions are ambiguous, since the first written records from the Kelabit highlands only appear in the late 1800s, which results in lumping together the long history of the highlands prior to European colonisation under 'prehistory'. Although the confinement of the historical period between 1500 CE and the present is more applicable from an archaeological point of view, its relevancy – so far – has been limited to coastal sites that participated in global networks of trade. At present, historical archaeology in Borneo is limited to the typological classification of tradeware ceramics (Harrison, T. 1955b; Moore 1970; Chin 1977; Ko and Chia 2012, etc.) and to a handful of coastal site-investigations reflecting Hindu-Buddhist and later Chinese influences (Harrison and O'Connor 1967; McKinnon 2000; Doherty *et al.* 2007).

The multidisciplinary approach I have adopted in this thesis was key to contextualising and unravelling the diverse roles of dragon jars in Kelabit highlands. The ethnographic investigations

shed light on the practices involved with the everyday use of jars in the past, as well as their present perceptions, but provided no explanation to why certain locations in the landscape were selected for jar-burial depositions nor how long particular mortuary practices had been employed in the region. Archaeological surveys, on the other hand, elucidated the composition and distribution of dragon jar cemeteries, potentially reflecting past socio-economic processes, but with little relevance for understanding the roles jars play in expressions of religious or ethnic identities today.

While archaeology throughout its history maintained its ties to anthropology, an archaeologically informed anthropology only surfaces in engagements concerned with deep prehistory or in debates on colonialism (Gosden 1999, 2004; van Dommelen 2006). This is also true in the case of Borneo, where thus far a single anthropological study considered archaeology (even if in a poetic-historical sense) in its scope, and included a critical view on the effects of colonialism in its ethnographic interpretation (Metcalf 2010). Thus this thesis paces on a largely untrodden path bringing historical archaeology and anthropology together in a region which has long been regarded as ‘remote’ or ‘marginal’. While holding material culture, dragon jars in particular, firmly under the analytical gaze the study touches upon broader anthropological themes, some which have been occupying the research landscape of Bornean ethnography since its 19th century infancy, such as marginality (Tsing 1993; Horstmann and Wadley 2006; Eilenberg 2012), eschatology and spirituality (Hertz 1960 [1907-9]; Metcalf 1987, 1991; Couderc and Sillander 2012); and more recent topics on religious conversion and indigenous identities (Rousseau 1998; Chua 2012a, 2012b, 2015).

1.2 Case study region: Southeast Asia, Borneo and the Kelabit highlands

Southeast Asia’s current geopolitical definition divides the region into two main territorial swathes. Mainland Southeast Asia consists of the countries of Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, West (Peninsular) Malaysia and Singapore. Island Southeast Asia encompasses the Indonesian archipelago, East Timor and the Philippines, along with the island of Borneo, which is divided between the East Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah, the independent Sultanate of Brunei and the Indonesian province of Kalimantan (Fig. 1.1). The island of Borneo has an area of 743,330 square kilometers – making it the third largest island in the world after Greenland and Papua New Guinea. Its landmass spans four degrees each side of the equator determining its tropical, monsoonal climate. Borneo is situated in a fairly complex tectonic region where the Indo-Australian, the Philippine-Pacific and Asian plates collide, forming the

geological (and ecological) boundary between Borneo and Sulawesi termed as the Wallace-line (Wallace 1869). This bio-geological complexity is reflected in a variety of outstandingly rich biological habitats from coastal mangrove swamps to the alpine ecosystem of Mount Kinabalu.

The ecological complexity also determines the island's socio-political and subsistence strategies based on which three main zones can be outlined: the uplands, the middle zone and the coastal areas (Avé and King 1986; King 1993). The rugged upland region is dominated by Borneo's main watershed forming the international boundary between Malaysia and Indonesia; in the case study area of the Kelabit Highlands in the northwest Sarawak this watershed is known as the Apad Uat range. From here the main rivers of north Sarawak – the Baram, Limbang, Tutoh, and Trusan drain to into the South China Sea, either side of the Sultanate of Brunei (Fig. 1.1). The drainage pattern of Borneo is used a collective term for inland people: 'Orang Ulu' or 'upriver people' describing ethnic groups occupying this central expanse. Upland populations include the hunter-gatherer Penan and the swidden agriculturalist Punan Bah, Kayan, Kenyah, Lun Bawang, Tagal, Potok, Berau, Milau, and Saban (Bala 2002:16). The Kelabit are an exception in this regard, relying mainly on wet-rice agriculture (Bala 2002; Janowski 2003). The middle zone is characterised by a system of low ridges and numerous waterways serving as 'highways' of transport and communication between ethnic groups. Some of the Orang Ulu tribes also inhabit the upper part of this zone, but it is mainly dominated by swidden hill-rice cultivators commonly referred to as 'Dayak'. The third, coastal or lowland zone is shaped by rivers creating floodplains, swamps and estuaries, where the modern towns of Sarawak are situated today. Since the establishment of coastal centres in the 15th century, these places have served as dwellings for an ethnically diverse, Malay, Chinese and Indian population, who relied chiefly on fishing and were key mediators of trade (Avé and King 1986; King 1993).

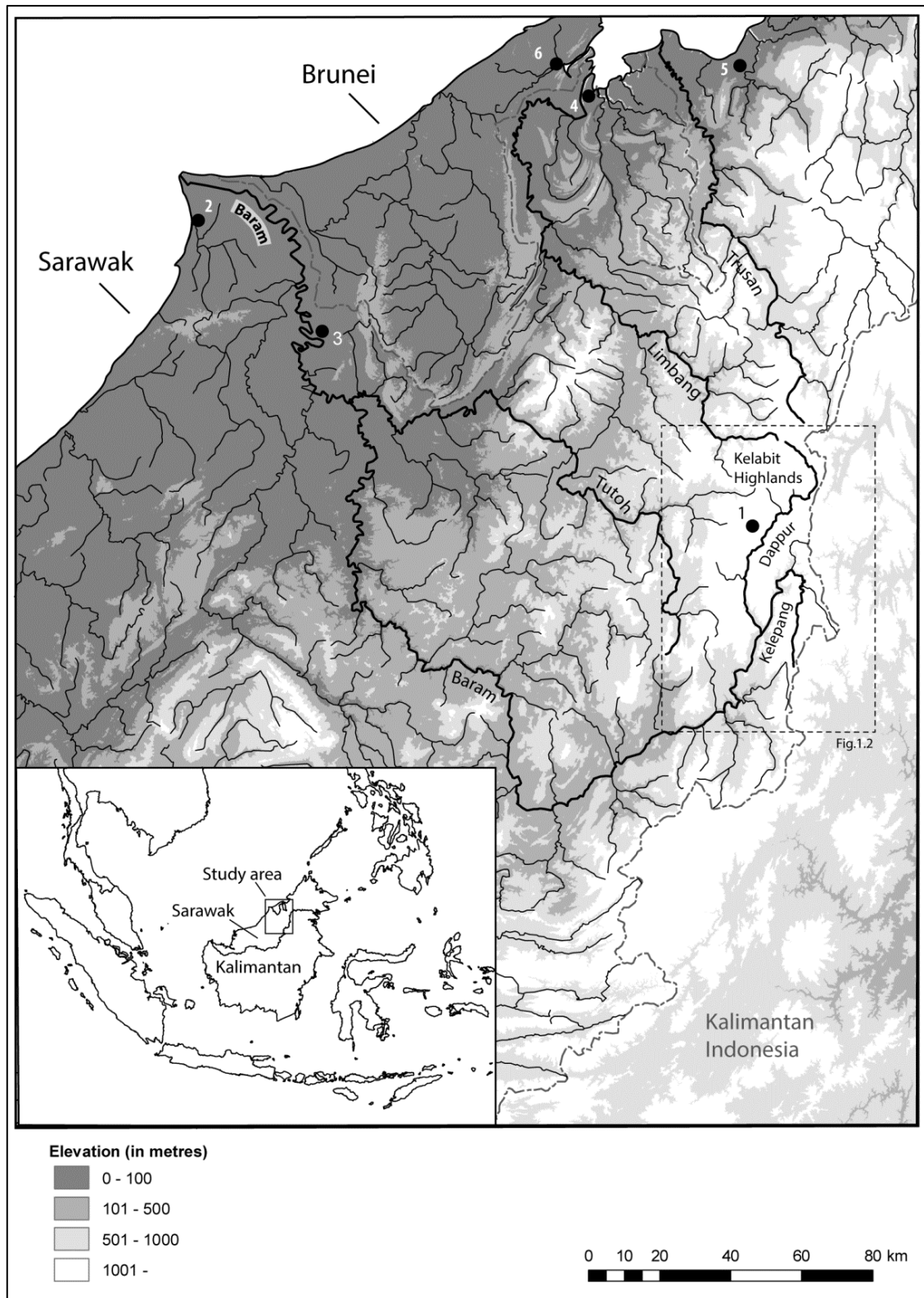


Figure 1.1 - Map showing the location of the Kelabit highlands study area in northern Sarawak, East Malaysia, with principle towns indicated. 1. Bario; 2. Miri; 3. Marudi; 4. Limbang; 5. Lawas; 6. Bandar Seri Begawan (capital of Brunei). Illustration: L. Farr and L. Lloyd-Smith.

1.2.1 The Kelabit and the Kelabit highlands

The Kelabit highlands span approximately 2500 square kilometres in the middle of the island, approximately 200 km from the coast, at the north-eastern fringes of Sarawak, and at about 1000 meters above sea level (Fig 1.2). The plateau is bordered by the Tamabo mountain range on the west and the Apad Uat range on the east forming the natural boundaries for the micro-region. The highlands comprise of two main areas: the northern highlands is dominated by peat swamps, *kerangas* (heath) forests, and irrigated rice-fields, and the southern highlands where river valleys, old oxbow lakes, rice-fields and large grazing areas dot the landscape in midst of secondary rainforest. The present international border drawn up by the Anglo-Dutch Treaty in 1891, runs along the Apad Uat mountain range, right across the Kelabit highlands geopolitically separating related native groups (Kelabit and the Lun Bawang, Lun Dayeh, and Lun Kerayan) living in the region, imposing fixed boundaries on fluid communities (Amster 2006).

The Kelabit have been rice farmers as long as their cultural memory reaches back in the past. Rice agriculture – both swidden and wet-rice farming – is a major constituting factor of Kelabit identity even today (Janowski 1995, 2003). Communities have been exploiting old river channels and turning them into wet-rice fields for centuries – and palaeoecological research shows that similar subsistence strategies were established as long ago as 2000 years (Jones *et al.* 2013, 2015). The rainforest still plays a key role in Kelabit life, men source meat and raw materials from the ‘big forest’ (*polong raya*), while women collect jungle produce from the ‘small forest’ (*polong i’it*) located near their farms and longhouses (Janowski 2003). Rice remains central to Kelabit families and serves as a vehicle for expressing social standing from organising and reciprocating labour, to providing daily (*kuman nuba*) or communal (*kuman poroyong*) rice-meals, and to participating in large inter-community feasts (*irau*) (Janowski 2003) (Fig. 1.3).

Up until the 1950s, the Kelabit predominantly lived in traditional longhouses incorporating 20 or more ‘hearth-groups’ (*tetek ruma*) or extended families (Bala 2002; Janowski 2003) (Fig. 1.4). World War II marked a significant change in Kelabit lifestyle, after which families had increasingly moved out from the large communal longhouses and set up their own individual homes. Longhouse communities used to shift location every decade or so, since the timber stilts used for buildings did not last long in the tropical environment (Fig. 1.5). Up until the 1960s there were ten longhouse settlements dotted about the Kelabit highlands (Fig. 1.2). However, during the border dispute between Malaysia and Indonesia in 1963-66 (referred to as the Confrontation) longhouse communities residing close to the border region were evacuated,

and inhabitants of Pa' Main and Pa' Bangar were relocated to Bario, which now consists of nine longhouse communities.¹ Bario today is the centre for the rural population and an entry point to the Kelabit highlands with a permanent airstrip, secondary school, police force and immigration office. From the 1960s onwards the outmigration from rural villages to urban centres has been on the rise, resulting in dwindling (and aging) populations in the Kelabit highlands leaving fewer than 5000 permanent residents distributing across the three longhouses in the southern region (Ramudu, Pa' Dalih and Pa' Mada), the core community of Bario, and the four small villages in the north (Pa' Dapur, Pa' Umor, Pa' Ukat and Pa' Lungan). Today, the majority of the Kelabit population (70-80% - Amster 1998) lives in the towns of Marudi, Miri and Kuching, pursuing professional careers and opportunities for higher education.

¹ Bario Asal, Arur Dalan, Arur Layun, Ulung Palang Dita, Ulung Palang Benah, Pa' Ramapuh Benah, Pa' Ramapuh Dita, Padang Pasir and Kampong Baru.

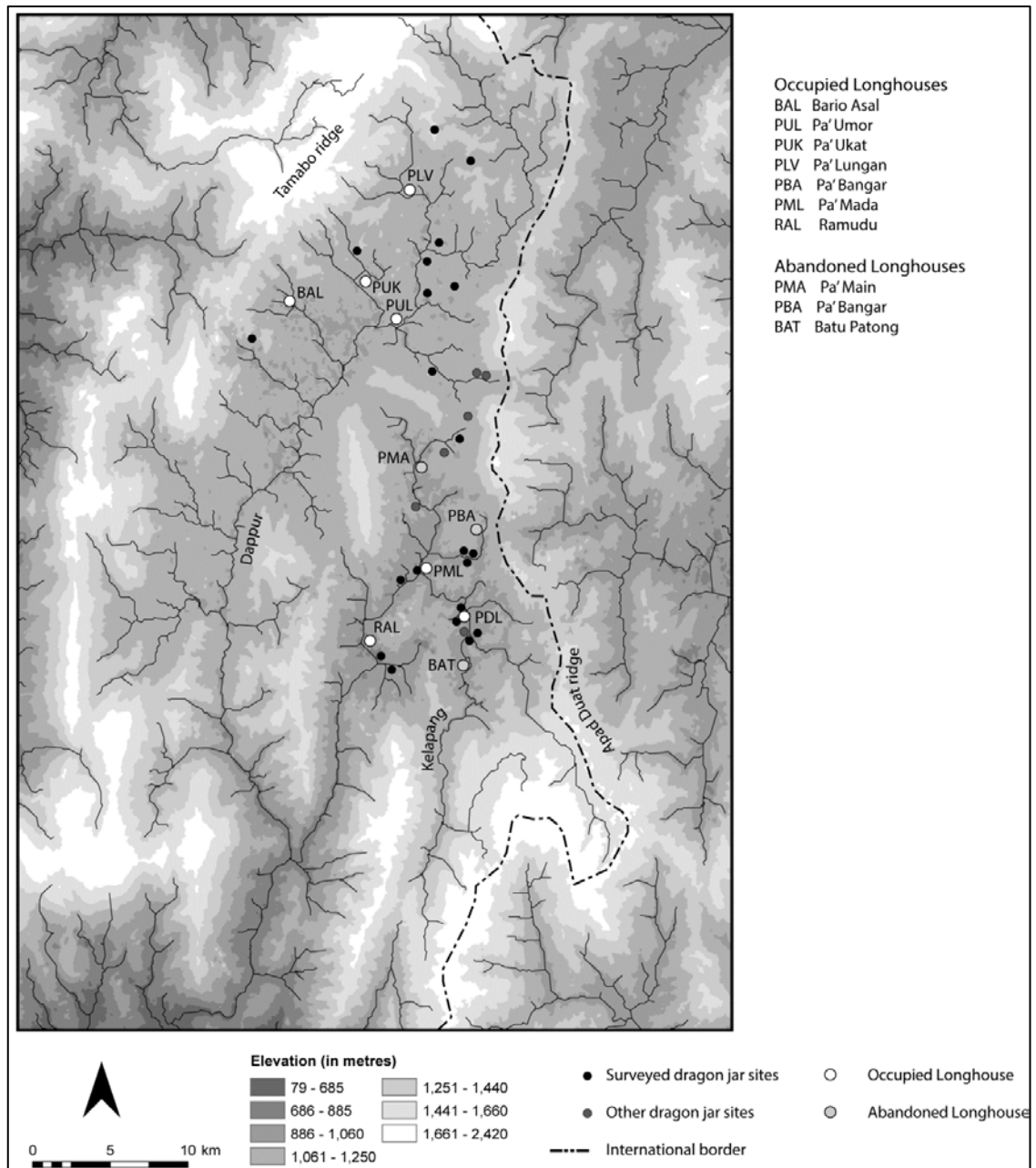


Figure 1.2 - Detailed map of the Kelabit highlands showing locations of current and abandoned longhouses, and dragon jar cemeteries. Illustration: L. Farr and L. Lloyd-Smith.

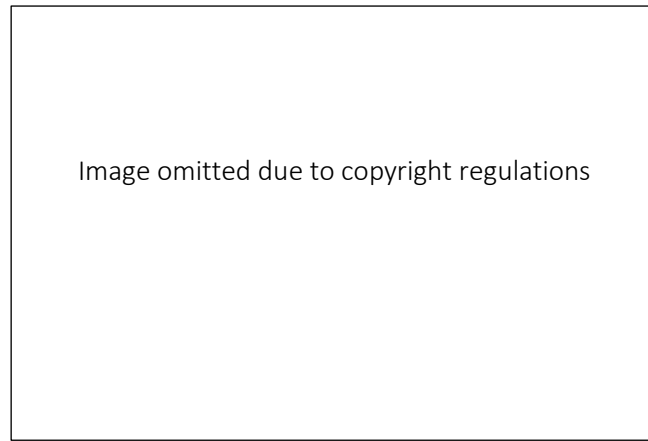


Figure 1.3 - Kelabit lady cooking rice in a longhouse sometime in the 1950s. Image source: courtesy of the Sarawak Museum Photography Archive.

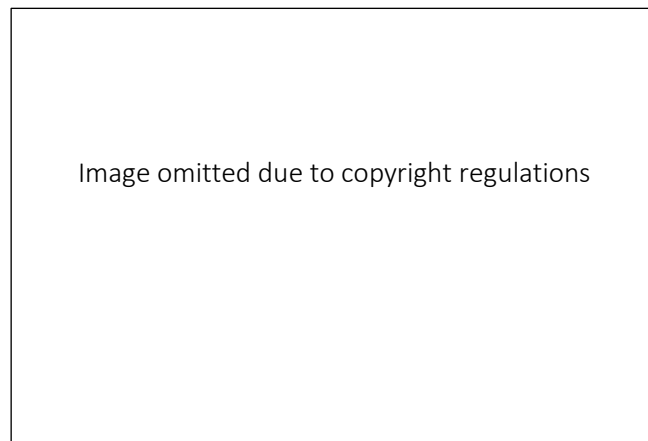


Figure 1.4 - Interior of the Bario longhouse in the 1950s. Image source: courtesy of the Sarawak Museum Photography Archive.

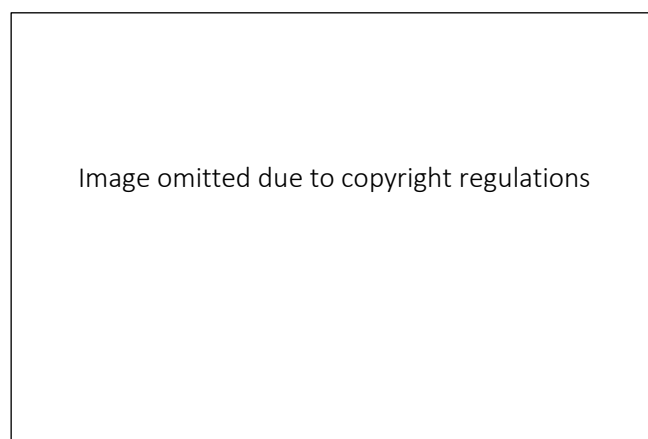


Figure 1.5 - View of the Bario longhouse from the surrounding rice fields in the 1950s. Image source: courtesy of the Sarawak Museum Photography Archive.

From the 1840s until World War II, Sarawak was under the governance of the so-called 'White Rajahs'; three consecutive generations of the British Brooke family. The Baram, Trusan and Limbang river basins previously under the suzerainty of the Sultanate of Brunei, were brought under British control between 1884 and 1890, including the Kelabit highlands (Runciman 1960; Pringle 1970; Ewart 2009). It is a widely held ethnographic conviction that the name 'Kelabit' is an exonym, a product of the categorising efforts of the colonial administration (Harrisson, T. 1959:182; Lian-Saging 1976-7; Amster 1998; Bala 2002; Ewart 2009). However, references in the form of 'Klabit' and 'Blabit' indicate that the term had been in circulation among local upriver groups prior to the British governance in the region (Low 1882:65; Talla 1979:6). While some colonial labels like 'Klemantan'² bracketing upriver people were later discarded (Hose and McDougall 1966 [1912]; Lebar 1972:147), others, such as the moniker of 'Murut' remains to be employed as an umbrella term for 'hill people' in Sarawak and Sabah (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Lebar 1972), chiefly in reference to their Kelabitic-Murut culture-linguistic heritage (Lebar 1972; Hudson 1974; Langub 1987).

The British colonial expansion at the beginning of the 20th century inextricably transformed traditional Kelabit lifeways. The government put a stop to headhunting, which was practiced widely across Borneo to a varying degree, but which came close to spiralling out of control in the Baram and Rejang regions at the turn of the last century (Metcalf 2010). The solidification of the colonial rule, apart from establishing peace in the region, manifested through taxation and trade. In 1911, the Brooke government set up a permanent trading post at the southern fringes of the Kelabit highlands, which resulted in an increased traffic of jungle produce via the southern trade route. However, the bulk of the commerce was still conducted through the traditional routes of exchange departing from the northern territories, which also served as an entry point for luxury goods acquired increasingly through monetary transactions. These shifting economic circumstances had a profound effect on the traditional Kelabit social hierarchy, realigning social distinctions and the indexing of status. The other major change came with the introduction of Christianity. From the 1930s onwards Australian evangelical missionaries had been proselytising in the broader region, and although the adoption of Christianity remained sporadic and fairly nominal until after World War II, it was certainly making advances among native groups in the highlands.

² The term 'Klemantan' or 'Kelamantan' was a generic 'residual pigeonhole' introduced by the British colonial administration clustering minor ethnic groups at the middle and upper reaches of Sarawak's main rivers (Lebar 1972).

The Japanese invaded Borneo in 1941, primarily targeting the oil-fields discovered off the shores of Brunei and Miri (north Sarawak) to power the Japanese war machine. The Japanese occupation also marked a new chapter in Kelabit history, particularly with the dramatic re-entry of Tom Harrisson to the region. Harrisson was a self-taught British polymath, whose familiarity with the region³ made him ideal to lead an Allied Forces mission behind enemy lines. The object of the military campaign was to gather intelligence and organise local resistance against the Japanese. In 1945, accompanied by six Australian soldiers Tom Harrisson was parachuted into the Kelabit plateau, signalling the beginning of a long and controversial history between himself and the Kelabit people (Harrisson, T. 1959; see also Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979; Bala 2002; Bulan and Bulan-Dorai 2004, etc.).

Although by the 1940s the Kelabit had already been exposed to Christian teachings, conversion rates remained low and traditional practices dominated everyday life. The arrival of the Allied troops hindered the process even further. Rice wine (*borak*) played a central role in Kelabit society, and its embeddedness in a cycle of rituals made it difficult for people to abstain from, (especially when they had Westerners to entertain). Local animism was still prevalent, people relied routinely on omens transmitted by birds and other animals to navigate their way through the physical and spiritual landscape populated by a plethora of spirit beings. Nevertheless, the transformation had been set into motion, and chiefly through indigenous proselytising the Kelabit gradually traded in their traditional beliefs for a 'life in Christ' (Bulan and Bulan-Dorai 2004).

As far as the cultural memory reaches back into the past, dragon jars had been particularly important items of the Kelabit material culture. Jars were used to brew rice wine during major feasting events, served as primary and secondary burial containers for bones of the dead and were signifiers of social status and outstanding genealogy. Old heirloom jars were passed down through generations and were held in high esteem, some of them even believed to possess magical powers and exhibit human-like properties. With the economic and spiritual shift however, the perception of dragon jars changed. Jars were now seen as uncomfortable reminders of the Kelabit animistic past, and came to be associated with drunkenness, debauchery, ostentatious displays of wealth, and personal vanity; a view that received a further impetus during a 'Spiritual Revival' that started in Bario in 1973. As people gave up alcohol and switched to simple burials using wooden coffins, jars became redundant and dropped out of Kelabit everyday life. Some of them were sold to antique dealers in towns for cash which in

³ Tom Harrisson was part of an Oxford University expedition in 1932 to the middle reaches of the Baram River (Harrisson, T. 1938).

return helped to purchase commodities prerequisite for modern life: motorbikes, generators or the education of children. Today, jars stand as silent mementoes of distant lives in burial grounds deep in the rainforest, or are banished under the longhouse, into the gloomiest of corners, away from prying eyes.

In 1963, when Sarawak, Sabah and West Malaysia joined together to form the modern state of Malaysia, the political and ethnic status of *bumiputera* (lit. 'sons of the soil') was extended to all Bornean indigenous groups, including the Kelabit. The *bumiputera* policy grew out of a postcolonial, strongly nationalistic tendency which politically acknowledged and cemented the special position of the Malay Muslim minority (*Ketuanan Melayu*). Theoretically, *bumiputeras* enjoy the same privileges as the Malay, have access to substantial political and economic benefits, entry quotas to civil service and higher education, and most of all 'an inalienable right to the land and its fruits' (Chua 2012a:40). However, there is a strong sense among indigenous Sarawakians that they are regarded only as '*second-class bumiputera*' (Bruton 1993:201), in contrast to their Muslim counterparts: the Malays, who dominate the government in Malaysia, and the Melanau, the Muslim-majority (indigenous) group who dominates the politics in Sarawak (Chua 2012a:41-2). The Kelabit, particularly in rural environments, share similar sentiments of being left behind by the government's development (*pembangunan*) programme, exacerbated further by recent native customary land-right disputes. Therefore, Christianity today stands as a key constitutive component of Kelabit identity; utilised as a strategy to set themselves apart from the Muslim Malay population, and serves as the spiritual framework for the expression (or re-invention?) of Kelabit cultural heritage – the latter, as we will see, is not without controversy.

1.3 Research questions

It is against this shifting ethnic, historical, political, social and spiritual backdrop (termed as 'unstable spaces' – Spyer 1998) that my thesis sets out to explore how objects that cross cultural boundaries are (re-)conceptualised within different social and temporal contexts. To answer this main research question a series of specific questions were asked to tease out the nuances of jars' complex roles in funerary, social and spiritual settings:

- Funerary context: Upon their arrival to the Kelabit highlands how were jars perceived and incorporated into a non-European, pre-colonial indigenous social and mortuary environment? How did this change with the dawn of stoneware production by immigrant Chinese potters during the colonial period? Along what trajectories did jars

reach the Kelabit highlands? Did the accessibility to trade routes effect their distribution? Could other factors, e.g. aesthetic preference, or the jar's own particular history or age have played a role in their selection for burial? How were these burials deposited in relation to the landscape and how did this change with the solidification of colonial rule?

- Ethnographic context: How did the Kelabit classify jars? Did material properties enjoy primacy during jar-evaluation processes or was the object's biography an important factor as well? How did the Kelabit evaluation of jars correspond with the broader ethnographic utilisation of these vessels across Borneo? Does the perceived age and local economic 'value' of jars correlate with their chronological antiquity? How did the spiritual roles of jars change with the adoption of Christianity and how are these vessels perceived today?

Threading together the answers to these questions will allow a number of overarching themes to be explored:

- How did indigenous (Kelabit) agency affect the production and distribution of dragon jars?
- Do the Kelabit recognise the agency of objects, or does the agency of jars arise from the relationship with their human counterparts?

1.4 Organisation of the thesis

Having defined the key research questions of this thesis and introduced the case study area – the Kelabit highlands and the lifeways of the Kelabit ethnic group before, during and after the colonial encounter and the conversion to Christianity – Chapter 2 will summarise recent theoretical approaches to material culture studies. Here I will also examine how certain objects were aligned with concepts of power in Southeast Asia and how these supernatural attributes are played out within the context of animism and Pentecostal Christianity. Chapter 3 then reviews the history of production and distribution of dragon jars over the course of a thousand years and investigates how indigenous consumption of jars in Southeast Asia and Borneo influenced the trade and manufacture of large stoneware vessels. Chapter 4 outlines the methods used in recording the vessels, including a new typological inventory developed for this study that formed the basis of my ceramic analysis. This chapter also includes discussion of the

methods used in surveying cemetery sites and conducting ethnographic interviews. Chapter 5 discusses the archaeological dataset in detail, examines dragon jar cemeteries in the context of the (animistic) landscape and outlines the changes in burial practice and their social implications taking place at the turn of the last century. Chapter 6 reviews key themes revealed through a series of ethnographic interviews with emphasis on the materiality of jars and whether Kelabit jar-evaluation schemes were informed by their assessments of the vessels' chronological age. Chapter 7 pulls the strands of archaeology and anthropology together by discussing jars within the themes of 'trade', 'feasting' and 'spirituality' in order to reveal how these objects were understood and utilised over the past two hundred years; the aim, to define and locate the agency of jars within the Kelabit worldview. Chapter 8 brings the discussion to a close by considering the broader implications of the study and how it contributes to wider debates on material culture studies.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Approaches to Material Culture in the Context of Southeast Asia

2.1 Introduction

An object biographical approach forms the principal theoretical pathway for this thesis. By this overarching narrative the study follows jars on their journeys as they cross geographical, cultural and economic boundaries from production to indigenous consumption. To identify the properties of jars and to understand how these properties enabled large stoneware vessels to transgress physical and immaterial boundaries, elements of agentive, phenomenologist and material culture studies inspired theories will also be drawn upon. The Strathernian and Gellian reading of objects as distributed persons will be key in exploring the construction of jars' value and in examining how the accumulation of people's biographies were inextricably linked to the economic, social and spiritual perceptions of jars. Sensory enquiries form a crucial element in establishing how local jar-evaluation schemes could have operated in the past and were reproduced within the Kelabit social milieu, while studies engaging with the materiality of objects – in this case treating jars as heuristic pieces throughout the analysis – have the potential to highlight jars' shifting spiritual and social roles. This chapter begins with the brief description and contextualisation of the theoretical tools employed in the thesis, focusing primarily on approaches to material culture. To apply these theoretical tools in a Southeast Asian context, the concept of *sēmangat*, a quintessentially Austronesian notion of power, then needs to be introduced in the second part of the chapter as this will be vital in the understanding of how the relationship between objects and humans was/is conceptualised in the region. The final section of the chapter focuses in on the particular case study area and discusses how *sēmangat* was understood within the Kelabit animistic universe, contrasted with the current theoretical debates of the emergent discipline of the 'Anthropology of Christianity', which in the later chapters of the thesis will help to contextualise changes in spirituality and the attitudes towards objects and their efficacy.

2.2 Theoretical approaches to material culture employed in the analysis of Martabani jars

Cartesian thinking which drove an 'irretrievable wedge' between the material world and the human mind (Olsen *et al.* 2012:19) remained the principal ontological template for archaeology and anthropology upon which later evolutionist, Marxist and structuralist theoretical models were drawn. While material culture continued to be firmly planted in the focus of archaeology,

British anthropology became primarily concerned with the social, reducing artefacts to indices of social action (Chua and Salmond 2012). The collapse of the colonial empire in the 1960s engendered a 'reflective turn' in Western academia (Rabinow 1977; Bialecki *et al.* 2008), forcing anthropologists and archaeologists to take a critical look at their fields and to acknowledge the roles of Protestant Christian thought and colonial endeavours played in bringing about these disciplines in the first place (Gosden 1999, 2004; Buchli 2002; van Dommelen 2006). From the 1980s onwards, both archaeology and anthropology redressed their disciplinary approaches to material culture, and began interrogating the relationship between subjects and objects in more nuanced ways. Although this new 'material turn' has frequently been addressed by its critics as a form of renewed fetishism, it certainly led to a range of innovative theoretical understandings of artefacts stretching beyond their materially bounded forms (Tilley *et al.* 2006; Hicks and Beaudry 2010; Chua and Salmond 2012). This thesis employs an interdisciplinary approach and engages with a number of theoretical perspectives which came to fruition within the past 40 years, to explore multiple facets of objects' biographies and to unpick the complex roles dragon jars played in a society undergoing economic, social and religious change in the early 20th century.

The idea of objects being likened to humans was first put forward by Arjun Appadurai and his colleagues in the volume of *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (1986). The most significant contribution of this work was to pull objects back into the focus of academic debates by exploring how artefacts can illuminate their social contexts while transgressing geographical, historical and socio-political boundaries. This methodological advantage will be utilised in interrogating jars in a range of diverse settings, from their production in China, through their indigenous use, until their final deposition in cemeteries of central Borneo. In a similar vein, I am also drawing upon Chris Gosden's and Yvonne Marshall's proposal that object biographies can serve as a flexible framework in the understanding of the performative or material agency of artefacts (Gosden and Marshall 1999), by taking a closer look at the active roles dragon jars played in trade, feasting and spirituality (Chapter 7). Although slightly different in its approach, Janet Hoskins' *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives* (1998) directly influenced how I thought about the process of my object-focussed interviews and how these conversations had the potential to reveal social and spiritual motivations towards jars which would have otherwise remained hidden (see Chapter 3 and 7).

Besides its methodological trend-setting, Appadurai's work fed into ongoing debates about gifts and commodities, that emerged initially from Southeast Asian and Oceanian ethnographic case studies (see Malinowski 1922; Mauss 2002 [1924]; Gregory 1982; Leach and Leach 1983). This anthropological dialogue provided a particularly fertile ground for forging new, unconventional, non-Western perspectives on objects, moving beyond the traditional inalienable gift – alienable commodity, things – persons dichotomy (Weiner 1985; Munn 1986; Strathern 1988; MacKenzie 1991; Thomas 1991; Myers 2001; Campbell 2002; Küchler 2002, etc.). Marilyn Strathern utilised the Melanesian understanding of the 'gift' to create a theoretical scheme where objects are seen as detachable parts of people ('partible persons') circulating through the social realm, making persons not only multiple, but also distributed entities. She asserted that humans are composed of all the objects they have ever produced, gifted or exchanged, representing bounded forms of agency, which remains active independently of the individual's body. However, Strathern leaves the *personal* relationship between people and objects unexplored; an aspect which was later critiqued and developed further by Janet Hoskins in her aforementioned study (1998). Thus, from a Melanesian/Strathernian point of view, people can be understood as objects and *vice versa*, moving through a complex web of social relations (Strathern 1988).

In the 1990s, the discipline of anthropology and archaeology experienced a so-called 'agentive turn' (Hoskins 2006:74; Hicks 2010; Jones and Boivin 2010), whereby scholars began to focus on what artefacts do, rather than viewing them as metaphors, symbols and representations. The agentive turn had been chiefly motivated by the works of Alfred Gell (1992, 1998), who essentially adopted the Strathernian framework of reference in exploring the relationships between (art) objects and people. In his posthumously published *Art and Agency* (1998) Gell distinguished different forms and levels of agency, claiming that in certain analytical contexts persons and objects can be considered interchangeable. However, he considered the agency of objects either as primary ('intentional beings') or as secondary ('mere things or artefacts') agency of objects, but always derivative of human action (1998:20-1; cf. Gosden 2005; Robb 2005). He illustrates this with the memorable example of Pol Pot's army and the destruction caused by planting landmines. From one perspective the soldiers themselves are the agents, who could have acted differently, while the mines '*could not help* exploding once trodden on' (1998:20, emphasis original). Gell also used the concept of agency to highlight the ability of objects to evoke emotional responses through their skilfully created appearances ('technology of enchantment') (1992). By embodying the intentionality of their creators, artefacts came to be infused with people's biographies ('distributed personhood') (1998). In Gell's reading,

distributed personhood is an aspect of the object's agency which derives from human intentionality, and is a product of social relations, not to be conflated with the effects of inanimate objects. Thinking about objects as distributed persons is key in exploring the construction of jars' value in the Kelabit highlands and in examining how accumulation of people's biographies were linked to the economic, social and spiritual perceptions of jars, while the 'technology of enchantment' idea is considered in relation to the local reception of jars in the context of Borneo.

If agentic approaches to artefacts unsettled the subject-object dichotomy by redistributing agency between them, phenomenology-inspired scholarship sidestepped the issue and denied the relevance of such dualisms altogether by emphasising the multi-dimensional and multi-sensory nature of human engagements with the world (Chua and Salmond 2012). Tim Ingold, reaching back to the Heideggerian roots of 'being-in-the-world' (*In-der-Welt-sein*) (Heidegger 1982 [1927]), called for the reinstatement of 'the realities of lived experience' where humans along with other things of the material environment emerge out and interact within a 'dwelt-in' world (2000:1-5). Although Ingold avoids using the term 'agency', by replacing the object-subject divide with concepts such as 'growing', 'affordances' and 'skill' (2000), he assigns a similar capacity to a relational 'meshwork' of interactions (2006). Apart from Ingold's work, academic studies engaging with the sensory aspects of phenomenology have also been on the rise in the past two decades (Tilley 1994, 1996; Helliwell 1996; Pinney 2002; Howes 2003, 2006; Young 2006; Edwards *et al.* 2006; Pink 2009; Harris and Sørensen 2010; Dudley 2012, etc.). Within these sensory frameworks, human senses have been equated by some to 'skills'; a set of psychologically grounded abilities essential in comprehending the material world (Howes 1991, 2003; Classen 1993). Another, phenomenology-informed pathway which gained considerable mileage in recent years – particularly in archaeology and museum studies – has made 'materiality' its primary focus (Boivin 2004; DeMarrais *et al.* 2004; Tilley 2004; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2006; Knappet and Malafouris 2008; Dudley 2010, etc.). These 'relational' approaches integrated objects and senses into one theoretical and interpretive scheme, within which sensory experiences and material properties are seen not as supplementaries, but as intrinsic components of academic enquiry (Chua and Salmond 2012). In a similar vein, Chapter 6 will elucidate how sensory experiences and corporal interactions with the materiality of jars constituted a part of a heuristic praxis among the Kelabit, and how these interplays influenced their understandings of jars' efficacy, age and value.

The 'thinginess of things' (Miller 1987) has been at the centre of the agenda of Material Culture Studies, calling for the re-examination of objects within the context of (mass) consumption where '[their] unproblematic materiality is taken for granted' (Miller 2005:44). Although the 'vulgar' approach of Material Culture Studies have been criticised for privileging consumption over production and objects over humans, it influenced a range of overlapping disciplines, enabling the exploration of cross-cultural consumption and the re-conceptualisation of objects (e.g. Thomas 1991, 1999; Spyer 1998; Foster 1998). This thesis to some extent pursues the Material Culture Studies agenda by looking at the local utilisation of (foreign) mass-produced items: the physical properties of jars which made their cross-cultural consumption possible are scrutinised in Chapter 3, while Chapter 7 details how these qualities translated to and led to the adoption of jars within the Kelabit pre-Christian spiritual environment, and how the vessels acquired yet another set of meanings with the shift to Pentecostal worship.

While Miller's programme aimed to take the 'vulgar' conceptualisation of objects seriously by bringing them under the single ontology of 'objectification' (1987, 2005), the approach failed to capture the alternative epistemological and ontological potentials of artefacts particularly in the context of ethnographic fieldwork (Chua and Salmond 2012). However, within the past decade, a new body of – principally anthropological – scholarship has emerged challenging the theoretical frameworks of a single ontology by proposing 'ontological diversity'. Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad and Sari Wastell (2007) have reiterated Eduardo Vivieros de Castro's imperative (1998, 2003) calling for ethnographers not to dismiss their informants' statements about their beliefs as cultural perspectives or 'worldviews', but to consider these as different ontological realities (Henare *et al.* 2007:10-12). Besides enlivening archaeological dialogues on animism (Conneller 2004; Alberti and Bray 2009, Alberti and Marshall 2009; Alberti *et al.* 2011; Watts 2013, etc.), Vivieros de Castro's 'perspectivist' approach influenced Henare and her colleagues in constructing their methodological framework termed *Thinking Through Things*, and referred to as the 'TTT' approach. Drawing upon the idea of 'differentiating the indifference' (Vivieros de Castro 2004:18-9) and the Deleuzian concept of 'radical constructivism' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994), the 'TTT' approach emphasises how close attention to artefacts and the forms in which they appear can inform anthropological analysis. Perhaps the most significant contribution of this theoretical strategy was dissolving the boundary between concepts and things, exemplified by Martin Holbraad's study on the Cuban Ifá diviners, whose use of *aché*-powder does not only act as 'the catalyst of divinatory power', but it provides conditions necessary for the deities' presence; their ability 'to come out' and 'speak' (Holbraad 2007:208).

While the overall theoretical framework of this thesis rests on object biographies, it does not follow a single perspective, but engages with a range of different approaches outlined above. The justification for this multivariate theoretical thrust lays in the interdisciplinary nature of the research which interrogates jars in diverse spatio-temporal settings within which crucial details could be easily overlooked by the application of a singular disciplinary approach. Therefore, as the 'TTT' emerged on principally ethnographic grounds, this direction comes through to an admittedly lesser degree during the archaeological analysis, where the theoretical enquiry takes more of a phenomenologist-animistic slant, given the nature of the funerary data (Chapter 5). The ethnographic investigation (Chapter 6) on the other hand is driven by an artefact-oriented strategy, where jars will be given the opportunity to 'speak' both through people, and through their materiality. As the thesis negotiates the different weights and analytical potentials of the above outlined theories, the final, concluding chapter, will take a closer look at the advantages and the shortfalls of these approaches and their applicability for future research.

2.3 Southeast Asian concepts of power and their relationship with materiality

In order to apply these theoretical tools in the study of material assemblages in Southeast Asia, the concept of *sěmangat* (divine energy or power) needs to be discussed briefly here. The conceptualisation of objects' efficacy and materiality in Southeast Asia is, in many respects, quite different from the ways artefacts are perceived in a European environment (Chua *et al.* 2012). Objects and people were imagined to be bound up in a universe where the all-encompassing power was both a substantive and a transcendental essence, to be manipulated by people or mediated by objects. The Kelabit understanding of *sěmangat* and its relevancy within the Kelabit animistic cosmos is touched upon in the final section of the chapter, since it had a crucial influence on how the Kelabit perceived their physical environment and interacted with the objects within it.

The Southeast Asian notion of power has long been part of a wider debate on the Austronesian terms of *mana* and *hau*; formative of both French (see Mauss 2001 [Hubert and Mauss 1902]; Durkheim 1995 [1912]; Lévi-Strauss 1987 [1950]) and British (see Hocart 1914; Malinowski 1922; Hogbin 1936; Firth 1940; Keesing 1984; Shore 1989) anthropological perspectives on cultural universalism and relativism (Holbraad 2007; Alberti and Bray 2009). Benedict Anderson's classic study, *The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture* (1972), has become a point of departure for the analysis of power in the region. Briefly, Anderson argues that as opposed to European – i.e. Weberian (2001 [1930]) – thought, power is not an abstract aspect of

relationships, but it is something concrete, an 'existential reality' (1972:7). In a Javanese context, power is amoral, homogenous, its quantity in the universe is constant (*ibid.* p. 7-8), with the potential to be embodied: either accumulated by a person or concentrated in an object or a place (Errington 1983, 1989; Allerton 2012).

This notion of substantive power was known in Southeast Asia as *sěmangat* or *sumangé*. Walter Skeat in his pioneering study argued that the concept of *sěmangat* was deeply rooted in Malay animistic folklore (Skeat 1900), while Richard Winstedt considered it as the remnant of pre-Islamic Sufism (Winstedt 1961). Besides its widely recognised cosmic nature (Errington 1989), *sěmangat* was understood in a number of different ways across the region; as a vital principle animating humans, animals, plants and minerals (Skeat 1900) or as a detachable component of the human soul (Cuisinier 1951), with the ability to transform into ghosts and lycanthropes (Endicott 1981 [1970]). In the Hindu context of Bali, *sěmangat* was known as *sakti* (Sanskrit: 'spiritual energy') particularly attributed to persons, while the Malays distinguished a form of *sěmangat*, referred to as *kramat* which settled in objects, places and in people (Edicott 1981 [1970]: 90-95). This kind of recognition of supernatural sources of power was later incorporated into state institutions; Malay sultans were thought to possess *dualat*, a concept acknowledging the immutable power of the ruler and the sacredness of his person (Walker 2002:19). Leaders were expected to display visible signs of their potency (Anderson 1972:13-19), and to 'radiate divine energy' (*ibid.* 16-17). To enhance and replenish power:

'[...] the ruler should concentrate around him any objects or persons held to have or contain unusual Power. His palace would be filled not only with the traditional array of pusaka (heirlooms), such as krisses,⁴ spears, sacred musical instruments, carriages and the like, but also various types of extraordinary human beings, such as albinos, clowns, dwarves and fortunetellers. Being in the palace with the ruler, their power was absorbed by, and further added to, his own. Their loss, by whatever means, was seen as an actual diminution of the king's Power and often as a sign of the impending collapse of the dynasty.' (1972:12)

This personified variety of *sěmangat* is often translated as *charisma* in the academic literature despite the latter's problematic connotations with the Weberian model (Anderson 1972; Walker 2002). Nevertheless a number of native Bornean societies shared this notion of embodied *sěmangat* (Freeman 1970 [1955]; Geddes 1954), and looked for clear indications of

⁴ Krisses are ceremonial daggers with an asymmetrical, wavy blade used distinctly in the region of Southeast Asia.

spiritual endowment in their leaders. *Sěmangat* was believed to be passed down through generations which enabled the solidification of ascribed ranks in the society, while being continually contested by achieved forms of *sěmangat*, generated through a range of activities (e.g. trade missions), individual skills (e.g. oratory) and most importantly, headhunting (Hoskins 1996; Walker 2002). Although headhunting in the Kelabit highlands was employed to a lesser degree in establishing social standing, nevertheless the Kelabit did recognise a form of cosmic energy similar to *sěmangat*, known as *lalud* or life-force (Janowski 2003, 2016). *Lalud* was thought to saturate the universe, sustaining the existence (*ulun*) of all living things: humans, animals, plants and supernatural beings. Powerful leaders were believed to be able to manipulate *lalud* for their own means, making their community prosperous and providing protection from malevolent spirits. Besides endowing humans, *lalud* had a range of other physical manifestations of the sensory kind. In Kelabit myths cultural heroes ‘shimmered’ with *lalud* (Janowski 2014a), while life-force present in the landscape was thought to solidify in rocks, permeate water and take unusual physical forms in ‘natural’ objects such as prehistoric sago-pounders (believed to be the teeth of the thunder god – see, Janowski and Barton 2012) or curiously twisting creeper plants. This perception of substantive potency among the Kelabit is somewhat atypical in the ethnographic context of Borneo (Couderc and Sillander 2012:30) where indigenous belief systems were aligned with more ‘classic’ forms of animism which considered distinctive spirits to reside in objects (and subjects). Despite the uncertainties surrounding Kelabit animism and the notion of *lalud* (see below), local ethnographic accounts testify that particular objects – most notably tradeware jars – were thought to be repositories of magical powers; a perception which chimes with the concept of *pusaka* in the broader region of Southeast Asia.

Pusaka

The term *pusaka* is generally translated to English as ‘heirlooms’ (Kreps 2004; Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]), however, the word carries a range of meanings in Southeast Asia:

‘1. something inherited from a deceased person (analogous to the English word inheritance). 2. something that ‘comes down’ from one’s ancestors (analogous to heirloom) 3. an inheritance of a special value to a community that cannot be disposed of without specific common descent (analogous to heritage in the sense of “something possessed as a result of one’s natural situation of birth”)’ (Soebadio 1992:15)

Any tangible or intangible cultural property could become *pusaka*: textiles, ceramics, jewellery, weapons, even land or songs, including foreign objects acquired through trade, warfare, gift or marriage exchange (Hoskins 1993, 1998; Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]; Kreps 2004). The concept was most developed in Java, where the greatest of *pusaka* (distinguished by the term *pusoko*) were in the possession the royal family, housed in their palace complex (*kraton*). As Suwati Kartiwa, the former director of the National Museum in Jakarta puts it:

‘[...] a *pusoko* is much more than merely an object; in fact, it has many human qualities. *Pusoko* have names, feel desires and have wishes, and they can communicate through signs with humans. They may possess great power; to foretell events auspicious and inauspicious, and to protect the people and help them to avoid danger and disaster. To ensure that *pusoko* continue to act in this benevolent way, the people must in turn perform certain services to them, such as the periodic provision of offerings, fumigations with incense and ritual bathings.’
(Kartiwa 1992:159)

What this short description reiterates is that certain kinds of *pusaka* objects were believed to be efficacious, were associated with powerful people (or places), exhibited human-like properties and required ‘management’ by regular offerings. The notion of *pusaka* were widely recognised by indigenous groups across Borneo (Low 1848; Walker 2002; and to be discussed in detail in Chapter 6 and 7) and although the precise phrase is missing from the Kelabit vocabulary, the concept was certainly shared by people in the highlands as well, represented by exotic goods: large stoneware jars, headhunting machetes (*parangs*), brass gongs and beads. Perhaps not surprisingly, given their ‘luxury’ qualities, *pusaka* objects concentrated in the hands of local elites, and were perceived as being (mutually) constitutive of Kelabit leadership (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979; cf. Gosden and Marshall 1999). Some jars were evidently valued more highly than others by a range of criteria based on previous ownership, materiality and spiritual potency (see, Chapter 6 and 7). Although most of these characteristics are now forgotten (or ambiguous at best), some of the conceptual vestiges of animistic jar-perceptions manifest in current Pentecostal Christian attitudes towards objects (and serve as a proxy indicators in assessing the roles of jars prior to conversion).

2.4 Kelabit animism, becoming Christians and the ‘anthropology of Christianity’

Kelabit animism can only be defined retrospectively and in very broad terms. Most of the narratives on the subject were produced by devout Christian Kelabit ethnographers, reliant on a

handful of elderly informants whose experiences had been coloured strongly by Christian worship. Thus such narratives on *lalud*, omen birds, headhunting, divination practices and spirit beings are distinctively short given the rapid disappearance of animistic beliefs following World War II, and slightly condescending in their demeanour towards their own pagan past (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979; Bala 2002). More recent studies touched upon aspects of Kelabit animism from the perspective of Christian re-sacralisation of the landscape (Amster 2003b, 2009), and in relation to social cohesion and consumption (Janowski 2003, 2007, 2011). However, despite these works involving years of participant observation, Matthew Amster repeatedly mentions the refusal encountered during his interviews about animistic traditions (Amster 1998), while Monica Janowski's key informant, a Kelabit ritual practitioner upon whose accounts Janowski bases her interpretations (Janowski 2003, 2016), represents an 'insider' point of view, which might have not been representative of the Kelabit spiritual participation as a whole.

Nevertheless, apart from the substantive nature of the *lalud* life-force, there are two aspects of Kelabit animism which I would like to highlight here. First, as mentioned before, the Kelabit cosmos was thought to be populated by a variety of beings, ranging from humans to animals, spirits and deities. Although the exact spiritual framework is now long forgotten (if one had ever existed), it is clear from the ethnographic evidence that animal sacrifice and divination played a key role and were used as means of communication with non-human beings (Douglas 1909a, 1912; Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979). Despite the lack of details regarding the precise nature of Kelabit animism, it is perhaps not such a stretch to claim that (similarly to other indigenous Bornean groups – see Chua 2012a, 2012b, 2015) the relationship between humans and spirit beings was principally *amoral* and *lateral*, within which humans were forced to constantly (re)negotiate their position in the world by manipulating and managing spirits through the observance of taboos, ritual prayer and offerings, often carried out on a communal level (Amster 1998; 2016; Janowski 2003). Successful negotiations ensured plentiful harvests, the abundance of children and good health, as opposed to ineffective arbitrations which threatened the existence of the entire community. The second aspect of the Kelabit animistic worldview is what Monica Janowski describes as '*othering*' (2016). Rice cultivation being strongly associated with the longhouse and its societal structures, comprises a key 'othering' strategy for the Kelabit in distinguishing themselves from the hunter-gatherer Penan, but most importantly, in demarcating the spiritual and spatial boundaries of Kelabit inhabitancy from the 'untamed' environment of the wild forest (*polong*). Therefore, similarly to offerings and

divination, 'othering' could be considered as part of the wider Kelabit negotiatory scheme with the universe, which Janowski addresses as the 'cosmic conversation' (2016).

In 1973, Kelabit spirituality arrived at a crucial and, in many respects, formative turning point towards a modern indigenous identity. The Bario Revival which swept across the Kelabit highlands within the duration of a mere four weeks, resulted in the Christian conversion of 95 percent of the Kelabit population (Bulan and Bulan-Dorai 2004). Despite exhibiting all the signs (which from a European intellectual perspective could be suggestive) of mass hysteria, the Bario Revival had a vast, spiritually constitutive effect on the entire Kelabit community, with lasting legacies until today. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, the majority of the Kelabit now belong to the church of Sidang Injil Borneo (SIB); a charismatic but officially non-denominational religious cohort, currently spearheading the Sarawakian Pentecostal movement. The religious conversion of indigenous peoples has increasingly been in the scope of anthropological scholarship, prompted by the expansion of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania and Latin America in the past 50 years (Barker 1990; Martin 1990; Brouwer *et al.* 1996; Walls 1996; Jenkins 2002), nevertheless the sub-discipline of the 'anthropology of Christianity' only began to gain ground in its own right within the last decade (Robbins 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2007; Cannell 2006; Engelke and Tomlinson 2006; Bialecki *et al.* 2008).

This new sub-discipline has recently been concerned with some key theoretical and methodological issues that have direct relevance to local forms of worship in the Kelabit highlands and in the re-conceptualisation of objects of prestige to be discussed in Chapter 7. There are many reasons why the anthropology of Christianity has only emerged within the last decade. Perhaps the most obvious is the familiarity of Christianity to most Western anthropologists, for whom the subject lacked the degree of cultural alterity expected by disciplinary standards (Robbins 2003). Christians have generally been considered to be too similar, too conservative and politically quiet, which made them, as David Maxwell put it: 'disappointing subalterns' (Maxwell 1998:10). Another, deeply entrenched reason for resistance, particularly in relation to recent converts, is that anthropology has preferred to study cultural continuities as opposed to recent changes, from which perspective Christian conversion appears 'as a veneer laid over an enduring prior culture and as such not worthy of research' (Bialecki *et al.* 2008:1141); a standpoint which dominated early Western scholarship in the Kelabit highlands.

The study of social and spiritual continuity and discontinuity following Christian conversion represents a special field of enquiry within the (sub-) discipline. Until recently, anthropologists

have interpreted non-Western Christianity as a form of syncretism, a continuation of previous spiritual traditions gathered under the umbrella of cosmopolitanism. However, current research shows that from the perspective of recent converts, the adoption of Christianity is understood as *a point of rupture* from the pre-Christian past towards a participation in global and modern religious and economic frameworks (Meyer 1999; Engelke 2004; Robbins 2003, 2004a; Keane 2007). This reading of the rupture as a complete break with the past, turned out to be extremely complex when applied to localised social phenomena (Meyer 1999; Robbins 2004; Keane 2007). These localised re-interpretations of the Christian message have led to the questioning of the sharp break with the past, claiming that Christianity is never encountered as a whole in a non-Christian cultural context, and it is only understood in relation to pre-existing cultural forms, resulting in a series of 'ethno-theological bricoleurs' (Bialecki *et al.* 2008:1145). However, as Joel Robbins argued, this kind of syncretistic approach ignores the transformative effects of Christianity and misses its enabling of converts to enter into larger transcultural networks with other self-identified Christians; it also dissolves the analytical mileage that could be drawn from comparative studies of Christian communities (Robbins 2007).

The *individuating force* of Christianity needs to be underscored here too, as a key component of the anthropological discourse, since it had a profound effect among Kelabit and other communities in the broader region of Borneo (Amster 1998, 2003b, 2009; Chua 2012a, 2012b, 2015). Liana Chua convincingly argues that with Christian conversion the previous horizontal relationship between humans and spirit beings has been reconfigured into a *vertical hierarchy* with God (Chua 2015). This newly constructed relation is intimate and founded on individual devotion, in contrast to pre-Christian practices aimed at the manipulation of spirit beings through offerings. While individualist tendencies of Christian worship have loosened the bonds between members of the Kelabit community, shifting away from traditional, dividualist social norms, the situation presented the Kelabit with trajectories to fulfil themselves as modern Malaysian citizens and as global Christian devotees. These reconfigured Kelabit social realities are subject to discussion in Chapter 7 and 8 which also explore how people's relationship to objects of the past became (or not) realigned with the dominant thrust of the Pentecostal movement. However, before examining these details, the thesis embarks on a journey following jars through time and space, which begins with exploring the production and distribution of large stoneware vessels in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 Jar Journeys: Production, provenance and distribution of glazed stoneware jars

3.1 Introduction

Since its beginnings in the late 19th century, the scholarship of Asian ceramics has been overwhelmingly concerned with Chinese blue-and-white or polychrome imperial porcelain in possession of European museums and private collections, while large stoneware jars have been dismissed as no more than coarse, utilitarian containers with the primary purpose to service the maritime trade in the Southeast Asian region. Despite the long history of Chinese stonewares spanning over a thousand years, this lower end of the ceramic spectrum represented by domestic and tradeware ceramics including dragon jars, was little explored until Barbara Harrison's pioneering study in the 1970s (1990 [1986]). Her work examined jars curated by local museums in Borneo and, for the first time, attempted to trace these vessels back to their original production locales in southern China. In this chapter I am following suit, but as opposed to museum objects, the focus here is on jars documented in the Kelabit highlands of central Borneo. As the dating of this assemblage ranges between the 17th and the 20th centuries – equivalent to the late Ming period until approximately the present day – the chapter pays particular attention to jar-styles and manufacturing techniques involved in the production of stoneware jars during the last four hundred years. The chapter also presents a brief overview of the development of ceramic technologies leading up to the late Ming period in order to highlight and provide historical depth to indigenous ceramic consumption practices in island Southeast Asia and Borneo in particular. While relying heavily on critically evaluated published literature, the chapter's overall aim is to place the Kelabit jar assemblage into the broader historical context of regional stoneware production and distribution, and in so doing establish a more nuanced typo-chronology for this material. The closer dating of jars will aid the sequencing of dragon jar cemeteries outlined in Chapter 5, and will contribute to the detailed assessment of traditional Kelabit jar evaluation schemes discussed in Chapter 6.

3.2 Pre-Ming Chinese stonewares

As a class of objects, the biography of dragon jars begins with the invention of stoneware ceramics in the Central Plains of China around 1500 BCE (Medley 2001 [1976]; Holcombe 2011 – Table 3.1). Almost half a century later, during the time of the Shang and the subsequent Zhou dynasties (1046-256 BCE), two major technological innovations occurred with direct relevance

to the later production of dragon jars. First was the introduction of a new kiln-design, which turned a simple updraught furnace into a downdraught kiln by adding wall-flues and dampers to the chamber-structure. The new design of a bun-shaped kiln ultimately led to reducing conditions and the achievement of sufficiently high temperatures of over 1200 °C for the production of stonewares (Medley 2001 [1976]:36-7). The second innovation was the conscious stimulation of kiln glost formation on vessel surfaces. Consistent application of feldspathic glazes and the usage of high kaolinic clays for vessel building were firmly established during the early Western Zhou (Medley 2001 [1976]:44-8; Rice 2005 [1987]:15), nevertheless stoneware production remained small-scale until the 8th century CE.

Dynasty	Reign
Xia	c. 2000-1500 BCE
Shang	1700-1027 BCE
Western Zhou	1027-771 BCE
Eastern Zhou	770-221 BCE
Qin	221-207 BCE
Western Han	206 BCE - 9 CE
Xin	9-24 CE
Eastern Han	25-220 CE
Three Kingdoms	220-280 CE
Western Jin	265-316 CE
Eastern Jin	317-420 CE
Southern and Northern Dynasties	420-588 CE
Sui	581-617 CE
Tang	618-906 CE
Five dynasties	907-960 CE
Northern Song	960-1127 CE
Southern Song	1128-1279 CE
Yuan	1279-1368 CE
Ming	1368-1644 CE
Qing	1644-1911 CE

Table 3.1 - Ruling dynasties relevant to the south eastern territories of China

3.2.1 The emergence of stoneware jars during the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE)

The Tang Empire (618-907 CE) possessed military dominance in the East-Asian region, gradually expanding its control over territories along the Silk Road into Central Asia (Table 3.1). But this dominance did not last, and the empire soon faced the Islamic Abbasid caliphate (and its allies) pushing towards the east from its base in the Middle East. The Tang armies suffered a devastating defeat by the Arabs in 751, at the battle of Talas, one of the first pivotal battles in world history. The loss of control over the territories of Central Asia resulted in the rupture of trade networks along the Silk Road. The insecurity made mercantile interests shift over to

maritime routes as a faster and more practical alternative in transporting goods between the Middle East, India, China and Southeast Asia. Stoneware jars played an important role in maritime trade as containers and packaging materials. Since the earliest time of maritime travel jars were used to preserve fresh water on ships, and from the 9th century onwards fragile and valuable merchandise – including perishable and non-perishable goods (such as smaller pieces of ceramics, spices or liquids) – were stacked inside large container jars (Krahl *et al.* 2010a; Dupoizat 1997:224, Fig. 3.1). The fully packed jars were then loaded and/or transhipped at major trading ports, where the purchase and (re)assembling of commercial cargoes took place.



Image omitted due to copyright regulations

Figure 3.1 - Tang dynasty stoneware jar recovered from the Belitung wreck. Image source: Krahl et al. 2010:55, Fig. 47.

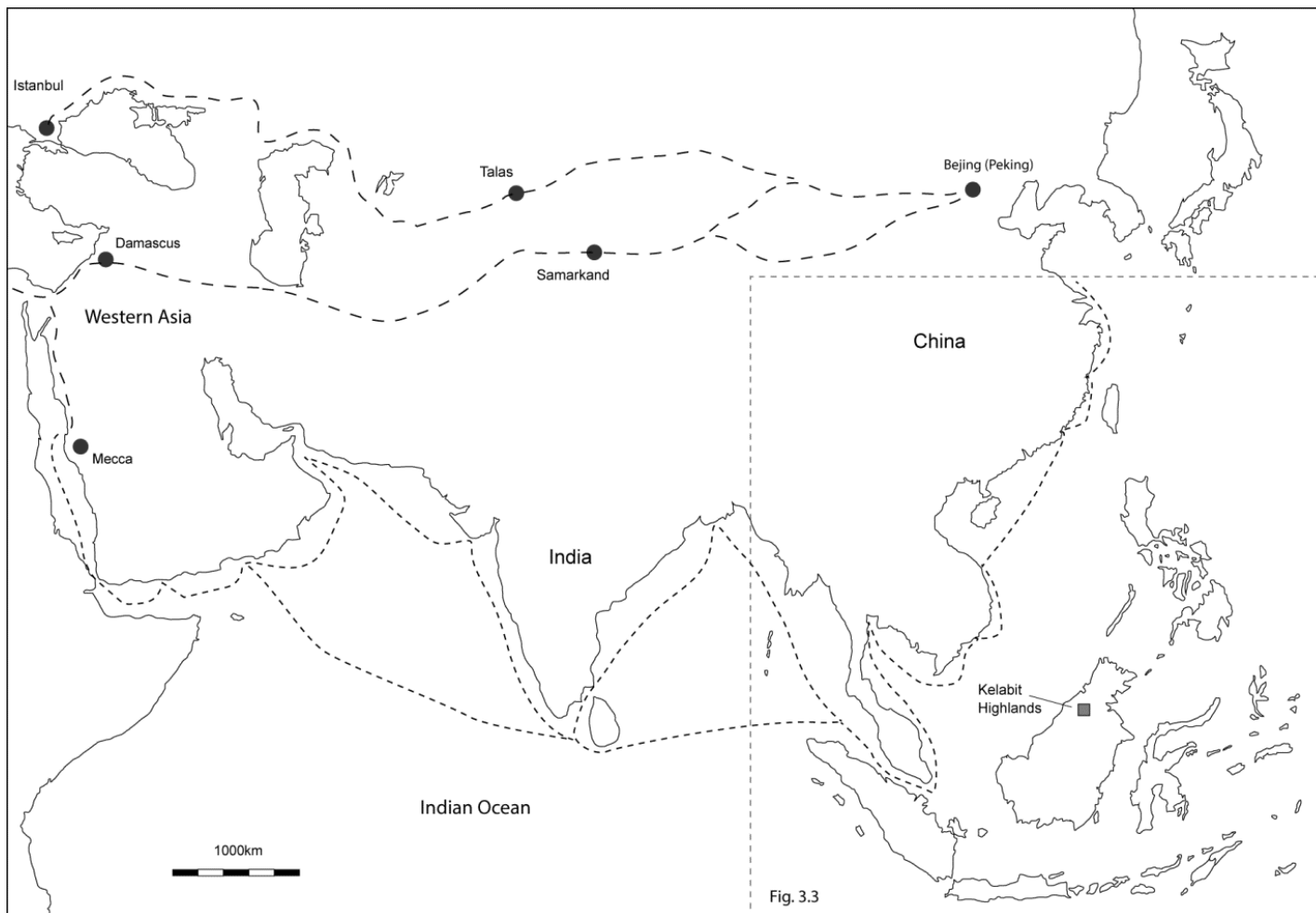


Figure 3.2 - Map of Asia with the land and maritime Silk routes indicated. Illustration: L. Lloyd-Smith.



Figure 3.3 - Map of Southeast Asia with places mentioned in the text indicated. 1. Palembang (centre of the Srivijaya Empire); 2. Kota Batu; 3. Kutei; 4. Sarawak River Delta (Sungai Ja'ong); 5. Sambas; 6. Butuan; 7. Shiwan kilns; 8. Trowulan (capital of the Majapahit Empire); 9. Jingdezhen; 10. Sawankhalok (Si Satchanalai); 11. San Kamphaeng; 12. Sukhothai; 13. Suphanburi (Ban Bang Pun); 14. Singburi (Maenam Noi); 15. Go Sanh; 16. Bien Hoa and Gia Dinh; 17. Martaban; 18. Malacca; 19. Macau; 20. Manila; 21. Pinghe county; 22. Shantou; 23. Zhangzhou kiln sites; 24. Sukadana; 25. Landak (Mandor); 26. Banjarmasin; 27. Batavia (Jakarta); 28. Guangzhou (Canton); 29. Montrado; 30. Singkawang; 31. Bau; 32. Pontianak. 33. Sibui; 34. Kota Kinabalu. Illustration: L. Lloyd-Smith.

The jars produced during this period were heavily potted, distinctly ovoid containers, covered with an olive-green or light brown, well-adhered glaze on both interior and exterior. There seems to be a consensus among scholars that the manufacture of such shapes began by the early 9th century CE and continued into the Northern Song dynasty, 11th century CE (Adhyatman and Ridho 1984; Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]; Nguyen Long 1992; Miksic 2009). At this time the number of ceramic workshops increased throughout the province of Guangdong, in southeast China, turning out utilitarian wares in large quantities (Krahl 2010), and recent archaeological data suggest that kilns were in operation in the Chaozhou and Zhanjiang regions as well (Wong 2015) (Fig. 3.2). Furthermore, fragmentary evidence from kiln sites of Northern Vietnam implies, that stoneware jar production also took place there, prior to the 11th century and the end of direct Chinese influence over Viet territories (Guy 1986; Wisniewski 2015).

Tang dynasty stoneware jars were fired twice; first they received a so-called biscuit-firing to attain a stone-hard clay fabric that could be handled for glazing, then, following the application and drying of the glaze, jars were fired again to a high temperature to vitrify the stoneware body and fuse the glaze. This two-stage firing technique developed in the Tang period and remained unchanged until modern times, despite the kiln structures undergoing a major transformation later during the Song era (Kerr and Wood 2004). A number of these vessels recovered from both maritime and land sites bear inscriptions of a Pseudo-Arab/Persian script (Guy 2010; Ströber 2015), referring mainly to the contents (such as ‘wine’ – Zhao Bing pers. comm.; also see Moore 1970:34-5) which implies that these jars were considered principally as ‘packaging materials’, where their *content* was of primary importance (Krahl 2010).

Early historic maritime trade between Borneo, China and Southeast Asia

Aromatic woods, resins and incense from Western Asia were among the most sought after items in China’s domestic markets. The demand for these goods increased even more with the spread of Mahayana Buddhism in Southeast Asia, along with the use of incense for ceremonies. However, transport across the Indian Ocean was lengthy and expensive, therefore resources in Southeast Asia were increasingly targeted. By the 8th century the majority of forest products was sourced from the Southeast Asian region and were distributed under the control of the Srivijaya Empire (650–1377 CE) (Fig. 3.3). Srivijaya’s thalassocracy, although with a political centre at present day Palembang in southern Sumatra, consisted of loosely connected entrepôts located along principal waterways or at estuaries on the coast (Manguin 1996, 2009). Such patterns of diffuse political power were characteristic throughout the region until the time

of European presence. These federations or *maṇḍalas*, as they are generally referred to in scholarly discourse⁵ (Geertz 1980; Wolters 1999 [1982]), relied on trade as a primary resource and were sustained by often remote hinterlands providing agricultural and forest products (Hall 1992; Munoz 2006). The profits of maritime trade seem to have collected in the hand of local elites, who passed luxury goods further down in the social-chain in order to forge relations and to maintain alliances (Hall 1992:213). Chinese stoneware ceramics were among the exotic items being exchanged in this way, furthermore, material recovered from temple sites suggest that ceramic imports such as olive-green glazed storage jars, bowls and ewers were incorporated into local Hindu-Buddhist ritual paraphernalia (Adhyatman 1983).

What role the island of Borneo played in the Srivijaya maritime sphere is still largely unknown. Borneo is associated with a plethora of products but when exactly the exploitation and trade of these items begun it remains unexplored. The earliest Chinese source by the travelling Buddhist monk Faxian⁶ dating to the 5th century CE, mentions the entrepôt of Yeh-po'-t'i which could be identified with one of the Indianised polities of Borneo (Hall 1985). Toponyms like P'o-ni or P'u-lo-chung appearing in the Chinese records are similarly elusive. Some scholars argue that P'o-ni refers to Brunei (Nicholl 1983; Miksic 2010) while others think it could be associated with the north-western regions of Borneo (Christie 1985). The oldest artefact so far representing contacts with India or Indianised territories is the Sanskrit-engraved *yūpa* (sacrificial post) of Kutei, which dates to around 400 CE on palaeographic grounds, almost two hundred years prior to the emergence of Srivijaya (de Casparis 1975). Sporadic archaeological evidence suggests connections with Indianised states at a slightly later date, nevertheless these appear to be fairly localised phenomena exemplified by a cluster of sites in the Sarawak River delta and the Mahakam River region (Harrison, T. 1949, 1955a; Harrison and O'Connor 1967, 1970; Christie 1985; McKinnon 2000). The majority of these sites were investigated during the 1950s-60s, hence the ceramic material was dated on relatively broad terms, reflecting the state of the discipline at the time. Although the re-evaluation of these sites is long overdue, the assemblage from Sungai Ja'ong (based on Tang dynasty copper coins) and the nine bronze Buddhas of the Sambas-hoard seem to outline an early phase of communication between Indianised polities of Southeast Asia and Borneo dating to the 8th-9th century (Harrison and O'Connor 1970; Somers Heidhues 2003).

⁵ The term *maṇḍala* (Sanskrit, lit. 'circle') is used to refer to a particularly Southeast Asian political model, consisting of a loose network of polities where economic, political, social and spiritual power rested on suzerain-tributary relationships.

⁶ Throughout the thesis the *pinyin* standard Romanisation of Chinese characters is being used.

The small number of artefacts and archaeological reports seems to imply that this early sporadic network had – beyond the obvious mercantile interest – a strong religious component, but it failed to make an impact further inland. However, it is difficult to ascertain the relationship between the coastal entrepôts and sites upriver, particularly in the absence of archaeologically investigated sites. Historical records emphasise the importance of camphor and alluvial gold as primary products, along with aromatic woods, bees wax, birds’ nests, rhinoceros horns and feathers (McKinnon 2000; Metcalf 2010; also see Table 7.1). The bulk of these items was sourced from the ‘remote’ inlands of Southeast Asia, and were exchanged via intermediary networks of trade (see Chapter 7). Large Tang dynasty olive-green glazed jars made at kilns in Guangdong province demonstrate that such networks worked both ways; interregional trade items and perhaps even the products some of the vessels contained had reached peoples living further inland. In fact, Anglo-Saxon scholarship refers to this ceramic group as ‘Dusun’-type jars (see also Chapter 6); a term coined by Tom Harrisson (1955b, see also White 1955) after a native group in the northern highlands of Borneo, who considered these jars especially old and valuable (Fig. 3.4). In the coastal areas of Borneo they were known as *gusi* (see Chapter 6), while in a broader Southeast Asian context, similar jars were referred to as *usong*, *liwau* or ‘Hindu-Javanese’ depending on the region and discipline (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]:24-5). ‘Dusun’-type jars travelled a long way from their original place of production and it is still unclear how and when these jars entered local exchange systems of island Southeast Asia, but the indigenous appreciation and curation of these objects indicate significant local agency, and – more importantly – an accurate understanding of jars’ chronological age (Harrison, T. 1955b, 1967; Valdes *et al.* 1992; Junker 1998).

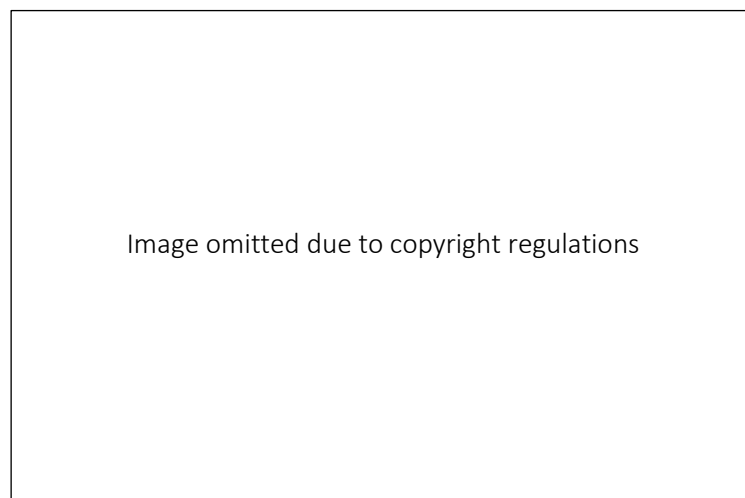


Figure 3.4 - ‘Sebop boy with two of the highest value jars of the northern interior. Pale olive green sub-celadon glaze.’ Image source: Sarawak Museum Journal, 1955 (20/5): frontispiece.

3.2.2 Stoneware jars of the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE)

Following the turbulent years of the Five Dynasties period, the Han Chinese Song came to rule much of East Asia between 960 and 1279 CE. The continuous military threat along China's northern borders prompted the Song government to rely heavily on revenues derived from maritime trade. Since the Tang, tribute missions had been under full imperial control, which was now extended to facilitate private trade. For the first time imperial edicts encouraged Chinese merchants to engage in foreign trade, along with a major investment by the Song government to building a fleet of 800 vessels. These Chinese junks were sturdy, ocean-going ships with a large hold to accommodate substantial cargoes (Guy 1986:16-9). This was also the time of innovation in nautical technologies, the invention of the compass enabled the Chinese to move away from maritime routes hugging the coastline and undertake open-sea voyages (Guy 1986; Stargardt 2014). This initiative had a significant impact on the dynamics of maritime missions. During the 9th-10th centuries, trade was dominated by long-distance enterprises, varied shipments, and multiple stoppages between destinations. Shipwreck evidence shows that by the late 10th-11th centuries commerce was becoming more specialised and merchants were trading in particular segments of the large maritime network. This specialisation is reflected in cargoes; the range of goods narrowed while kilns supplied tradesmen with lower-grade, mass-produced ceramics intended for foreign markets (Stargardt 2014:50).

New, advanced kiln technologies contributed significantly to the boom of ceramic production during the Song period (Fig. 3.5). Long 'dragon' kilns came to dominate the complexes of Zhejiang and Fujian in South China, replacing smaller bun-shaped kilns, which originated from the northern Chinese territories. Dragon kilns existed in number of versions contemporaneously, furnished with single or multiple firing-chambers. The multiple-chambered variety later developed into the stepped (sectioned) or climbing dragon kiln towards the second half of the Song reign, with the capacity of firing large ceramic pieces (Kerr and Wood 2004). Bun-shaped kilns, however, remained important in the following Ming era for firing smaller batches of high-quality imperial porcelain. The location of workshops in the landscape was of primary importance. The production of stonewares required large volumes of water, firewood and the right type of kaolinic clays. Regions of Fujian, Guangdong and Zhejiang lacked deposits of porcelain stone, but were rich in clays suitable for high-quality stoneware and glaze manufacture. The surface elevation of hillslopes and riverbanks were utilised for the construction of climbing dragon kilns (which often reached the length of over a hundred meters) in order to achieve the updraught effect. The construction of kilns, positioning the vessels, control over firing temperatures etc. all required highly-skilled specialists. Labour

division at ceramic workshops has been in place since the Tang dynasty, but as production reached a whole new level; it required a large apparatus of skilled and unskilled workforce. However, despite the thus far unprecedented number of workshops, ceramic production remained to operate on an intensive, but seasonal *corvée* basis until the Ming period (Harrison-Hall 2001).

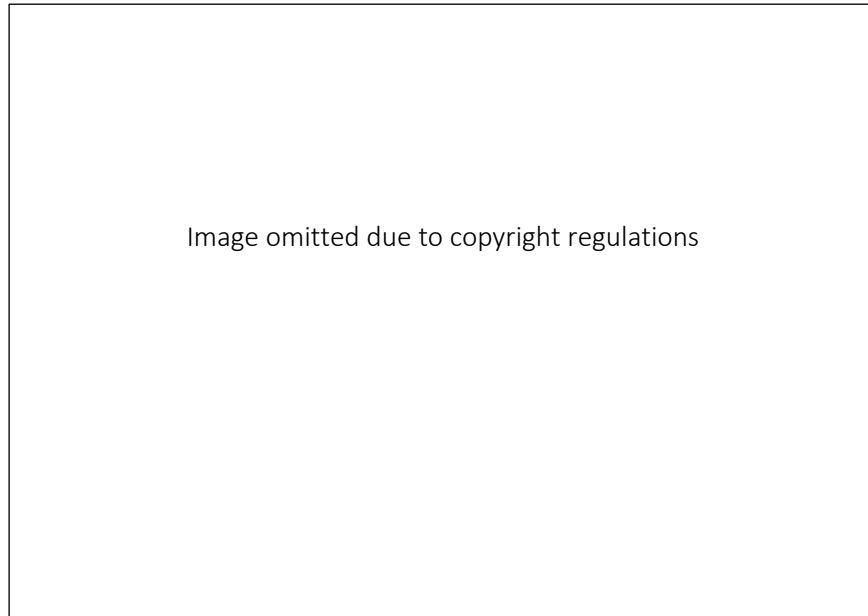


Figure 3.5 - Firing a dragon kiln, c. 1825; Guangzhou, China. Image source: Gouache on paper; Museum purchase 1983; E81592.14, Peabody Essex Museum 2007. Photo by Jeffrey R. Dykes. MIT Visualizing Cultures Program.

Historical records testify that in 977 CE, Borneo established contact with the Song court and the Kingdom of Brunei entered into a tributary status with China (Scott 1989 in Valdes *et al.* 1992:44-5). The envoys reported Brunei being 30 days' sailing away from Mindoro (Philippines) and Champa (Central and Southern Vietnam) which suggest the 'Western Route'⁷ as the favoured maritime trade itinerary (Fig. 3.6). However, in 1011 CE a tributary mission dispatched from Butuan (southern Philippines) arrived at the Song court bearing gifts, among them camphor, which (as it is not grown in the Philippines) was likely to have been sourced from Borneo (*ibid.*). By the 14th century the Chinese were describing locations in the Philippine archipelago in great detail, suggesting direct contact with local inhabitants, and the utilisation of the 'Eastern Route' (*ibid.*) (Fig. 3.6). Thus it is assumed that the large amount of Chinese tradeware recovered at key trading ports in northern Borneo and the Philippines had reached their destinations via the Eastern Route (Nguyen Long 1992:45, cf. Zaine and Harrisson 1967;

⁷ The term 'Western Route' reflects the dominant Chinese (political and geographical) worldview which imagines the Chinese Empire as the centre of civilisation surrounded by inferior states of 'barbarians' (Holcombe 2011).

Moore 1970; Chin 1988; Ko and Chia 2012), while the southern and western parts of Borneo were participating in exchange networks primarily within the Srivijaya interest sphere.

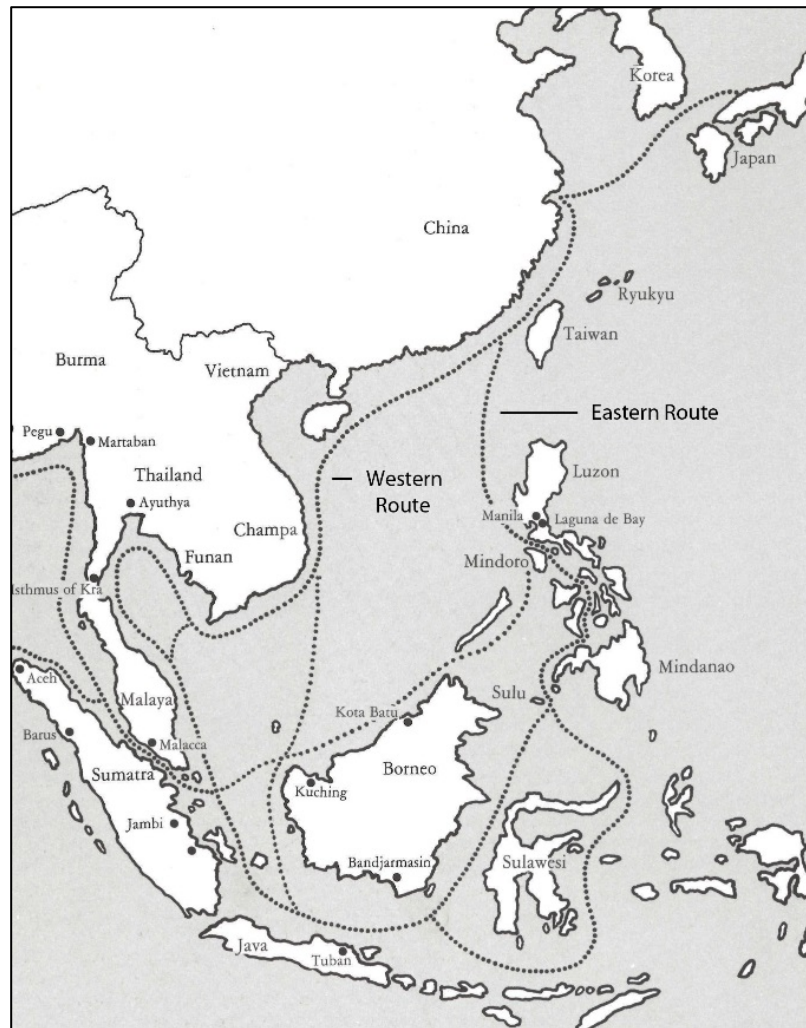


Figure 3.6 - Map showing the Eastern and Western trade routes. Image from: Guy 1980:10, Fig. 1. 'China and Southeast Asia. Principal trade routes.'

Mainstream jar production during the Song dynasty responded to demands of the market by manufacturing ceramics on an unprecedented scale. A major contrast to storage vessels of the Tang era was the diversity of vessel types being produced, perhaps due to a variety of products shipped in jars. Early Song jars were lightly potted, globular, with incised or stamped floral decoration, covered with a thin, brown or ochre glaze which has a tendency to peel. It is important to point out here is that the dragon motif also makes its first appearance during the early Song period, impressed onto the surfaces of small (20-30 cm tall), jars of the so-called brown ware variety (Locsin and Locsin 1970; Adhyatman 1981; Miksic 2010) (Fig. 3.7). Debate is ongoing regarding the provenance of these vessels; some scholars relate the early impressed dragons to the Shiwan kilns in Guangdong (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986], while others suggested workshops of Fujian as the origin of production for these vessels (Lam 1985).

The final quarter of the Southern Song period witnessed the emergence of proper, large-sized (50-60 cm tall) stoneware jars; the precursors of ‘real’ dragon jars. A rich variety of decoration techniques (incising, modelling, sprigging) ⁸ were applied on a wide range of vessel forms: a creative trend which remained unmatched until the 16th-17th century. A group of late Song dynasty jars need to be mentioned here specifically. These vessels distribute almost exclusively in the Philippines (with a single example collected from Indonesia: Harrisson 1990 [1986], Fig. 41), despite being in production for at least a hundred years (Nguyen Long 1992:186-7, Nos. 16-18b; Locsin and Locsin 1970, Fig. 105). These jars have a 50-60 cm tall, elongated body with a flaring mouth, their exterior is covered with either monochrome brown or a combination of green and amber splashed glaze. The dragon designs attached onto the shoulders are highly stylised and formed by hand (Fig. 3.8). While in many respects this group of jars resemble many other late Song vessels, their construction is certainly not as sophisticated and the whole build appears to be somewhat experimental. I would suggest that since the jars distribution is localised to the Philippines, these objects could represent the first tradewares produced exclusively for an indigenous market by creating a particular shape and decoration that was perhaps not part of the repertoire of Chinese potters at the time. These vessels could also signal the beginnings of Chinese workshops’ response to local tastes and jars’ assuming roles *beyond* their primary, container function.

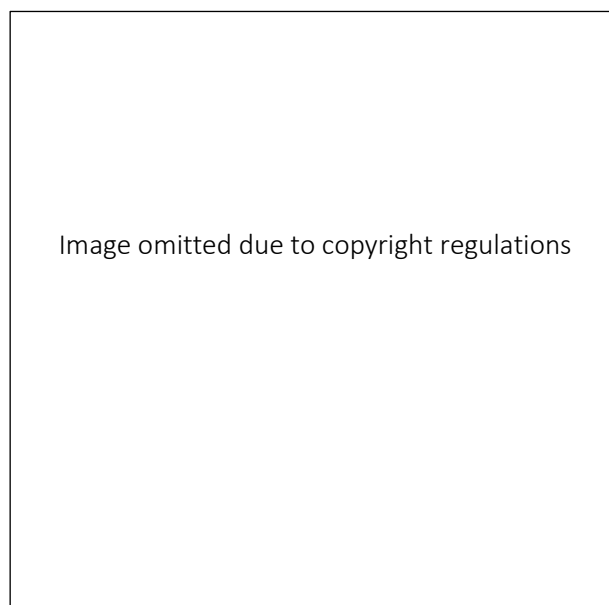


Figure 3.7 - Small dragon jar of the so-called ‘brown ware’ variety, on which the dragon motif was first applied. Image source: Mranata and Susanto 2012, Fig. 16.

⁸ For the detailed definition of decoration techniques used in the thesis, see Chapter 4, Table 4.2.

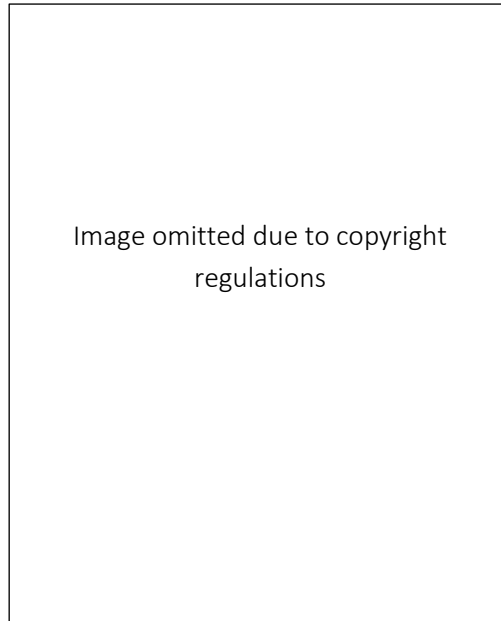


Figure 3.8 - Jar with modelled dragon on the exterior. Image source: Valdes et al. 1992, Fig. no. 16.

3.2.3 Ceramics of the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368 CE)

Prior to the assembling of their forces under the rule of Genghis Khan, the Mongols were just one of the many nomadic tribes living in the steppe beyond China's northern borders. In 1210, the Mongol army attacked the Jin dynasty ruling in northern China before launching a successful military campaign against the Southern Song dynasty in 1235. After Genghis Khan's death the Mongol empire was divided into four independent khanates, one of which became known as the Yuan dynasty in China. Ship-building was revitalised during the Mongol Yuan period and the navy became an instrument of aggression besides being utilised for commerce. Large-scale military campaigns were led against neighbouring countries, sparking considerable local resistance by the emerging Hindu-Buddhist Majapahit Kingdom in island Southeast Asia with its capital at Trowulan in eastern Java (Hall 1992; Holcombe 2011). Nevertheless, trade continued to be encouraged and by the beginning of the Yuan period the Eastern Route allowed Chinese traders to penetrate local Southeast Asian markets directly without the assistance of middlemen. These merchants began to settle down in colonies across the islands, their presence impacting significantly on the supply, consumption and distribution of ceramics. The new maritime routes made trade more efficient and products readily available. Remote territories with sporadic commercial ties began to plug into these regional maritime networks and developed regionally specific tastes for luxury items, which in turn, had an effect on indigenous social complexities (Junker 1998, 1999, 2001).

It remains problematic to assign particular jar types to this period considering the long duration of jar-manufacture as opposed to the less than a hundred years of Mongol control, along with the uncertainties involved with the classification of Song-Yuan stoneware material (see below). Archaeological assemblages recovered from coastal sites of Borneo and the Philippines suggest that the volume of trade remained more or less unchanged, and that the large majority of Song type jars continued to be manufactured during the Yuan period until the beginning of the Ming dynasty (Locsin and Locsin 1970; Moore 1970; Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]; Valdes *et al.* 1992). In contrast to the continuing traditions of low-end, utilitarian ceramic manufacture, the Mongol Yuan period also marked a significant shift in high-end ceramic consumption. Workshops had been experimenting with the usage of cobalt since the Tang period, yet the colour was not much favoured by the Chinese domestic market. However, during the Yuan era, court officials of Central and Western Asian origin had strong preferences for ceramics resembling the shapes of metal vessels and delicate blue floral designs, which reflected more of an Islamic rather than a Chinese taste, laying the foundations for the famous blue-and-white Ming imperial porcelain (Harrison-Hall 2001).

3.2.4 Methodological concerns of pre-Ming ceramic research

In this section I would like to draw attention briefly to certain methodological issues still prevalent in the Asian ceramicist discipline in relation to dating and provenancing stonewares, including jars. At present, utilitarian, mass-produced stonewares can only be dated within the range of a century at best, and some jar variants, especially during the Song-Yuan and early Ming dynasties, are often assigned to contradictory periods depending on the time and context of research. The difficulty stems from the long period of production of standardised jar types, similar levels of technological command among specialists, and the resemblance of the raw materials exploited by workshops in different geographical areas (Moore 1970; Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]; Valdes *et al.* 1992, etc.). In an attempt to overcome chronological uncertainties, studies published between the 1960s and 1980s had the tendency to lump Song dynasty wares together with the later Yuan dynasty ceramics and refer to these under the umbrella term of 'Song-Yuan vessels' (Zaine and Harrison 1967; Moore 1970; Chin 1988). Although today scholars have better ceramic typologies to rely on, standardised tradewares recovered in a highly eroded and fragmented state are still being 'lumped' into the category of Song-Yuan, particularly in Southeast Asia (Ko and Chia 2012).

Eine Moore faced a similar issue while working on ceramic assemblages from Sarawak (both from archaeological and ethnographic contexts); the material was either in poor condition or stood without known typological analogues. Thus, she suggested grouping the sherds by clay fabric (based on macroscopic observations) which could be more indicative of their age and provenance (1970:75-6). Based on the Sarawak material Moore distinguished between 'Brittle wares' with greyish buff stoneware bodies, and 'Kwantung wares' which were made of finer and better levigated clay, but otherwise fairly similar to the 'Brittle' fabrics. 'Brittle' wares were thought to cease around the 17th-18th century, while 'Kwantung' wares carried on into the 18th-19th century. Moore assumed that 'Brittle' and 'Kwantung' wares represented contemporaneous but different workshops in Shiwan district, Guangdong province, producing throughout a long period of time.

Barbara Harrison followed in Moore's footsteps and refined her classification by using assemblages unearthed at Kota Batu, in Brunei (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]). Harrison concluded that the fabric group of 'Brittle wares' is broadly characteristic of ceramics produced during the Song-Yuan period, whereas the 'Kwantung' or 'Guangdong wares' could be identified with vessels manufactured from the early Ming onwards. By her understanding, fabric groups indeed indicated a chronological sequence, rather than a production locale (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]:45). Yet, Harrison draws attention to the serious limitations of this dating and provenancing technique. Firstly, the categories were too crude and shared too many similarities to be applicable across jar groups. Secondly, particularly in case of the Kota Batu material, it was not possible to cross-examine fabric groups with complete vessels. There were also considerable overlaps between the two fabric groups: a distinctive jar-type from Sarawak identified by Moore as 'Kwantung ware' fitted into the category of 'Brittle' from Brunei. Therefore, fabric groups at present could not be used as provenancing tools, and until substantial archaeological reference collections have been assembled from mainland China, the labels of 'Kwantung' and 'Brittle' remain an index for ceramic typology rather than a basis of classification.

3.3 Stoneware jars of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644 CE)

The Ming dynasty emerged amidst of turbulent historical times following the collapse of the Yuan reign. The first hundred or so years of the Ming rule was defined by maritime exploration and territorial expansion (Harrison-Hall 2001). The Hongwu emperor (1328-98 CE) restored the tributary trading system which had largely lapsed in the Song-Yuan period under the dominance

of private commercialism. In 1371 CE, an edict prohibited private transactions and forbade Chinese to participate in overseas trade. The prohibition remained in force until the 1500s, although in practice, it was never strictly adhered to (Harrison-Hall 2001:28). Despite the isolationist stereotypes associated with the Ming era, the dynasty invested heavily into expanding the naval force in order to strengthen China's overland and maritime position. Over a thousand ocean-going ships were constructed during Yongle emperor's reign (1360-1424 CE), a quarter of the fleet specifically dedicated to tributary missions to foreign countries (e.g. the seven voyages of Zheng Ho: Harrison-Hall 2001). Strict policies of the early Ming had a significant effect on overseas trade. Many merchants exploited a legal loophole, and attached their private enterprises to tribute bearing diplomatic missions. In 1381 CE, the court issued an edict forbidding Java and other areas of Southeast Asia to use this privilege in order to curtail smuggling and stamp out piracy in the waters of the South China Sea. As a consequence, a large number of Chinese migrated from the southern coastal regions to Southeast Asia, to continue to operate illegal commercial businesses from overseas (Guy 1986). The territorial expansion and the consolidation of the Ming in China were mirrored by similar trends on the other side of the world. The markets of Europe were recovering from the horrors of the Black Death, and from the 14th century onwards there was a growing demand for products, spices in particular, coming from China and Southeast Asia.

3.3.1 The early Ming (1368- c.1505 CE)

The three hundred years of the Ming reign are considered the peak of ceramic production and the heyday of technological dexterity. Although the technological infrastructure for large-scale ceramic production had been in place since the Song dynasty, the new regulations during the Hongwu reign introduced a number of changes in how workshops operated and organised their labour force. The area of Jingdezhen in Jiangxi province came to play a particularly important role, as workshops located here produced porcelain of the highest quality. Production was split between imperial or official workshops (*guanyao*) established in 1369 CE, specialising in vessels commissioned by the imperial court (Liu in Brown 2009:30), and private kilns (*minyao*) producing low-end ceramics for domestic use or (illegally) for export. The manufacture of imperial kilns was strictly regulated and limited to a certain variety of objects: ceramics to be used in the court or presented as gifts abroad (Harrison-Hall 2001). However, imperial commissions were often beyond the capacities of the *guanyao*, therefore some of the orders were carried out by private kilns centred around Jingdezhen or in Fujian province. This system was called *guan da min shao*, i.e. 'government order, people fire' in which, hundreds of

privately owned kilns participated (Harrison-Hall 2001:19-25; Ströber 2013:14-5). It is feasible to assume that the majority of kilns in Guangdong, Fujian and Zhejiang involved with the production of jars were privately owned and financed by merchant syndicates. The trade of ceramics was carried out by a number of intermediaries; brokers arranged the production of samples and transport for batches, fixed the prices and placed orders on behalf of their buyers. A fair number of these intermediaries could have been Chinese with connections to extended family members living in Southeast Asia, arranging cargoes for customers based in the archipelago.

The 'Ming gap' and the production of stonewares in mainland Southeast Asia

From a Southeast Asian perspective, the early Ming period presents a curious scenario: the absence of early Ming Chinese tradewares in the archaeological record. The phenomenon was coined as the 'Ming gap' (or ban) by Tom Harrisson who first described the issue in relation to sites excavated in the Sarawak River delta in the 1950s (Harrison, T. 1958). The term was used to refer to an archaeological ambiguity: a total lack of early Ming blue-and-white material in the Sarawak delta, in contrast to its presence farther north, at Kota Batu in Brunei. It later became clear that the underrepresentation of early Ming blue-and-white material was not restricted to Borneo, but was present across the entire Southeast Asian region. As a result of Roxanna Brown's pioneering research on Southeast Asian shipwreck-, and land-sites over the past three decades (2009), the phenomenon of the 'Ming gap' was revealed to be complex matter. The 'gap' itself was characterised by a series of surges and shortages in ceramic production (but never a complete deficit) depending on the political situation throughout a 200-year period, until the mid-16th century (Brown 2009). The absence of Chinese tradewares in Southeast Asia also exposed the lack of archaeologically investigated sites in the region and the need for a finer-grained typo-chronology of the ceramic material.

But how does the 'Ming gap' and the sequencing of *minyao* blue-and-white wares feature in the discussion about stoneware jars? First of all, it once again draws attention to the primacy of high-end (or even mediocre) blue-and-white porcelain in ceramicist research. Also, the 'Ming gap' debate helped to disperse the concept of the early Ming Empire as an omnipotent economic force in the East and refined the picture of Chinese hegemony over ceramic export; a level of control which was only achieved during the second half of the reign. But perhaps most importantly the 'Ming gap' is reflected not only by the shortage of Chinese ceramics in the archaeological record, but by the increase of Southeast Asian wares, suggesting that the 'Ming

gap' was filled immediately by producers based in Southeast Asia responding swiftly to the demands and possibilities of ceramic economy.

There is no clear evidence to prove that the 'Ming gap' was the direct cause for the rise of Southeast Asian export in the region, but certainly the first ceramics produced on the Southeast Asian mainland appear during the years of the official ban and remain on the scene until the cease of the ban in 1567 (Brown 2009:19). It is also impossible to ascertain whether Vietnam or Thailand exported first, as the earliest shipwreck cargoes include both wares (Brown 2009:19-20). Thai export ceramics can be traced back to five main production centres: Sawankhalok (Si Satchanalai), San Kamphaeng, Sukhothai, Suphanburi (Ban Bang Pun) and Singburi (Maenam Noi) (Cort 2008b-e) (Fig. 3.3). In central Thailand, excavations at the Maenam Noi kiln-complex at Singburi province, along a tributary of the Chao Phraya River revealed sherds with dark-brown or black glaze that have re-written the provenancing of Thai stoneware jars (Nguyen Long 1992:40-41; Cort 2008d) (Fig. 3.9). The primary products of the Maenam Noi kilns were stoneware jars ranging from small to medium size, covered with a dark brown or black iron glaze. Until the publication of the Maenam Noi kiln sites these jars were commonly mistaken for Sawankhalok wares (produced further northwest) even until recently (Brown 2000 [1977]; Guy 1987; Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]) or were simply discussed as Thai jars (Adhyatman and Ridho 1984; Mranata and Susanto 2012). Eine Moore refers to the Maenam Noi jars as 'Kalong wares' in the Sarawak assemblage (Moore 1970:58-60, Pl. 12 b-d, 13 a-b). Barbara Harrison grouped distinct jar fragments found at Kota Batu under the 'Sawankhaloke' category (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]:36-7, Figs 7.2-7.4, Pls 50-55). According to colonial literature, Maenam Noi jars were known widely across Borneo as Siam jars (see Chapter 6) and were held in relatively high esteem, and Tom Harrison lists a number of 'Siamese jars' (most probably of the Maenam Noi variety) among acquisitions of the Sarawak Museum in 1947-8 collected from the Kelabit plateau (Sarawak Museum Accession nos: 3409-11).

Along the central coast of Vietnam the independent polities of the Indianised Cham kingdom (Champa) were established sometime around the 3rd century CE. Champa produced its own stoneware ceramics for export; one of the kiln-complexes was the site of Goh Sanh, near the regional capital of Vijaya (modern Qui Nhon in Binh Dinh province) (Fig. 3.3). The Goh Sanh kilns and their 'alleged' products caused further confusion in Southeast Asian ceramic research. Roxanna Brown in her study of mainland Southeast Asian wares, for which she assembled data in the 1970s, refers to the Go Sanh kilns as a probable site of production for the red-bodied,

brown glazed 'classic' dragon jars.⁹ This observation was later reproduced by Barbara Harrison in the mid-1980s (1990 [1986]:38-9, 46-7), but to be fair she also emphasises that: 'One should remember, however, that the evidence from Goh Sanh is unconfirmed by excavation...' (1990 [1986]:47). Harrison labelled the Kota Batu fragments with fine-paste red fabric as 'Goh Sanh Red' (1990 [1986]: 38-9, Figs 7.7-7.8), while also establishing a group called 'Coarse Red' based on the class outlined by Eine Moore under the name of 'Red-bodied ware' in relation to the Sarawak material (1970:61-2, Pls. 13 c-d, 14 a) (Fig. 3.10). Harrison ascribed both of these vessel groups to a probable Vietnamese place of origin. The Goh Sanh kilns are assumed to have started operating around the 13-14th century and ceased production sometime during the 15th century when the manufacture of ceramics in Cham territories dropped off caused by the increasing availability of Chinese tradewares. However, so far there is no direct evidence supporting the production of dragon jars in the area of Vietnam before the 17th century, when a large number of Ming-loyal Chinese took refuge in Vietnam after the dynasty's collapse, and were allowed to settle at Bien Hoa and Gia Dinh (southern Vietnam, present suburbs of Ho Chi Minh City) (Cort 2008a). A smaller group of Ming refugees, largely from Guangdong, Fujian and Zhejiang province were permitted to re-establish themselves at a number of places along the coast of Vietnam (Nguyen Long 1992:34). The beginnings of 'Chinese-style' kiln complexes in Southern and Central Vietnam are generally associated with this wave of immigration in the 17th century.¹⁰

Burmese jars and the issue of the term 'Martaban'

The term 'martaban' derives from the name of a major trading port along the Gyaing River in Lower Burma operating actively until the mid-16th century, and which for a brief period of time, was also the capital of the Mon kingdom (Borell 2014). The first reference to Martaban jars appears in the Arabic traveller, Ibn Battuta's *Rihla* around the mid-14th century (Borell 2014:281-2), but when and where the label 'martaban' came to be used in a more general sense, remains an open question. It is likely that the production of dark glazed stoneware jars (Fig. 3.11) commenced sometime during the 14th century CE, in kilns east of Martaban port, where eleven workshop sites have recently been identified (Borell 2014:265, note 41, also see the issue of Myanmar Times on 26th of November 2012). The term 'martaban' circulated widely

⁹ This detail has particular significance in the light of indigenous groups in central Borneo valued 'red-bodied jars amongst the highest, see Chapter 6.

¹⁰ It is possible that some old jars venerated by locals in Borneo could have been produced by Chinese immigrant potters settling in Vietnam (see the jars documented by Luu Hung and Louise Cort in the central highlands of Vietnam in 2008, and their resemblance with the Ningka jar published by Charles Hose 1966 [1912] Pl. 46 – cf. Fig. 6.4).

in European (mainly Dutch and Portuguese) and Ottoman sources during the 16th-17th century, explicitly referring to Martaban not only as a port of transshipment, but as site of production as well. By the early 1820s, Dutch officers of the East India Company colloquially called all types of jars ‘martevanen’ including small earthenwares (Borell 2014:286). The true confusion began with the first publications of specialised ceramic collections, by which the phrase *Martaban*, *Martavan* or *Martabani* was adopted as a blanket term used to describe all kinds of large-sized jars, transhipped, purchased or sold at the port of Martaban, regardless of origin (Ottema 1943; Krah1 1986, etc.).

Initially, Burmese jars were classified as Chinese (de Flines 1972 [1949]), Vietnamese (Chin 1988) and more recently, as Thai Si Satchanalai (Adhyatman and Ridho 1984; Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]), until Pamela Gutman’s study in 1978, which relied on epigraphic and literary evidence, arguing that there was in fact an active ceramic production in Burma going back for centuries (Gutman 2001). Scholars being aware of the fuzziness of the ‘martaban’ term and the lack of archaeological evidence until the early 2000s, tried to avoid using the phrase altogether (Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]: Pusaka – ‘heirlooms’) or applied it with caution (Adhyatman and Ridho 1984: Tempayan Martavans – ‘stoneware jars’) or even suggested alternatives (Cort forthcoming: ‘container jars’). Nevertheless, ‘martaban’ is still being employed by ceramicist research (Vainker 2005 [1991]; Harrison-Hall 2001). The term ‘Martaban’ is used in the title of this thesis (as a broad reference), but I refer to stoneware jars simply as ‘jars’ or ‘dragon jars’ throughout the text.

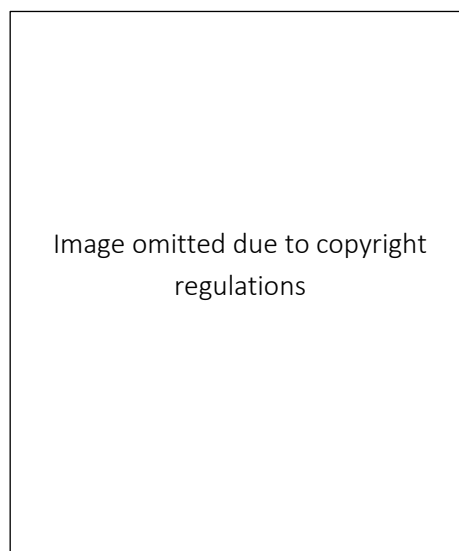


Figure 3.9 - Thai Maenam Noi jar with dark brown iron glaze. Image source: Mranata and Susanto 2012, Fig. 285.

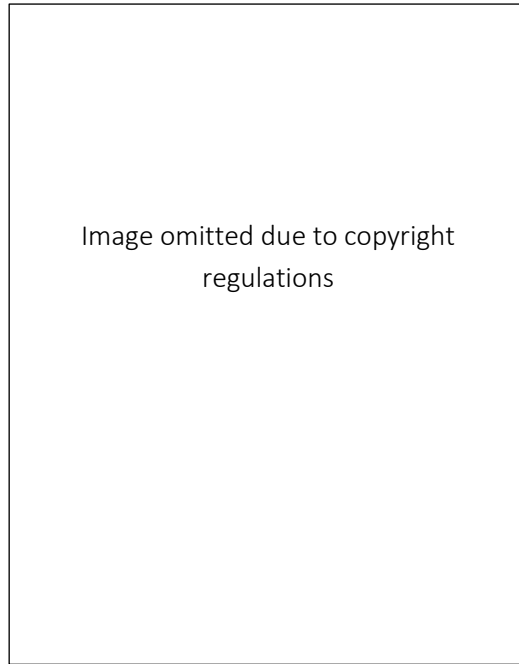


Figure 3.10 - Red-bodied jar attributed to a central Vietnamese place of origin. Image source: Harrison, B. 1990 [1986], Pl. 106 – Brunei Museum 1966.519.



Figure 3.11 - Burmese jar. Image source: Mranata and Susanto 2012, Fig. 293.

3.3.2 Stoneware jars of the late Ming (c. 1505-1644 CE)

The 15th-17th century signalled a tumultuous period known as the 'Age of Commerce' (Reid 1993). Following the decades of consolidation, the Ming government began to see fruits of its tributary arrangements with Southeast Asian states, and by the 15th century the spice trade between Europe and Asia reached unprecedented levels. In the west, business was initially channelled through the Middle East and distributed to the rest of Europe by the Venetians, prompting the Spanish and the Portuguese to seek alternative routes for sourcing spice from the Southeast Asian archipelago.¹¹ While the Spanish targeted the Atlantic route (ultimately resulting in the discovery of America in 1492), the Portuguese followed in the footsteps of Vasco de Gama and sailed around the Cape of Good Hope towards the Indian Ocean. Maritime commerce, which was previously in the hands of Muslim merchants, was gradually taken over by the Portuguese, whom in 1511, by capturing the Sultanate of Malacca (on the western flank of the Malay Peninsula) assumed full control over trade passing between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean.

In 1509, the Zhengde emperor (1506-1521 CE) found a way to profit from the revenues, while shielding his kingdom from 'barbaric influences' by opening up the port of Guangzhou for foreign (private) trade. The promise of direct trade with China soon attracted the interest of Europeans, first of all the Portuguese, whose ambassador, Tomé Pires arrived on the country's shores in 1517. Pires' visit to China marked the beginning the commercial trade of blue-and-white porcelain with Europe, gaining momentum after the Portuguese conquest of the port of Macau, in 1557. In 1567, the nearly two centuries long 'Ming ban' was officially lifted by the Jiajing emperor (1507-1567 CE), and the so-called 'Boom Years' began in earnest (Reid 1993). Rising populations were now servicing and facilitating China's growing exports, while transactions were increasingly reliant on cash in a form of silver. The shortage of silver had been a major issue for the Chinese economy since the onset of commercial enterprises in the Tang era. This void in the 16th century was plugged with silver coming from mines of Mexico and Peru, now under Spanish control. In 1565, the Spanish established a trading station in the Philippines and shipped goods (including ceramic cargoes) regularly between Manila and Acapulco; an enterprise known as the Galleon Trade (Reid 1993; Harrison-Hall 2001).

The relaxation of foreign policies and the looser regulation of markets had an effect on the ceramics manufacture as well. Workshops became more specialised, supplying both domestic

¹¹ The most lucrative items: nutmeg, mace and cloves were all sourced from the Moluccas, a small group of islands between Sulawesi and Papua New Guinea.

and foreign markets, while the surplus was marketed through guilds. Kilns increased their workforce in order to keep up with the demand, contributing to the migration of people from rural areas to urban centres, and the phasing out of *corvée* labour in favour of wage-economy (Harrison-Hall 2001). The real surge in ceramic production came about after the Dutch, whose involvement until this point was focussed on the spice trade, established direct contacts with China. While the Portuguese and the Spanish had religious agendas as well as commercial goals, the Dutch were purely motivated by mercantile interests. People in the Low Countries developed a taste for porcelain following the capture in 1603 of two Portuguese ships, whose ceramic cargoes were auctioned in Amsterdam for a record profit. The Dutch East India Company began to ship large consignments of porcelain, designed particularly for European tastes and manufactured in the workshops of Jingdezhen. These wares became known as Kraak porcelain (after the Portuguese *caracca* merchant ships) leading to significant changes in European attitudes towards ceramics (see, '*La maladie de porcelaine*', the porcelain craze of the 18th century – Ströber 2001) (Fig. 3.12).



Figure 3.12 - Jacob van Hulsdonck (1582-1647), *Strawberries with a carnation in a Ming bowl*, c. 1615-1630. Image source: Wikipedia creative commons.

Zhangzhou (Swatow) wares

The enormous success of the late Ming potters lay in their ability to diversify their products, creating designs for a range of customers, be it domestic elites or foreign residents. By catering for different needs, the *minyao* (private kilns) incorporated new, creative designs into their repertoire, some markedly different from tastes of the Chinese court (Ströber 2013). In fact Europe (which, during the course of the 17th century received 16 million pieces of porcelain;

Brook 1998) was a relatively small market for mass-produced Chinese ceramics, in a sphere of consumption where Southeast Asia and Japan represented the major players (Ströber 2013). Southeast Asia (and Japan) especially favoured crude, vigorously painted porcelain, which used to be known as Swatow wares in ceramicist scholarship. The name referred to the port of Shantou, in Guangdong province, transcribed as Swatow in historical Dutch and English records (Harrison, B. 1979; Tan 2007; Ströber 2013). However, excavations conducted between 1994 and 1998 in Pinghe county, Fujian province revealed that these ceramics – although they might have been shipped from Shantou – were produced in the kilns of Zhangzhou (Huazhilou, Da Long, Er Long, Tiankeng, Dongkou sites; Tan 2007:36-40). Zhangzhou ceramics were manufactured in a limited variety of shapes: bowls, jars, jarlets, covered boxes and plates, but the trademark of these kilns was most certainly the family of large plates. These plates were particularly sought after by native groups in island Southeast Asia for ceremonial and feasting purposes (practices, which could have brought these ceramic forms about in the first place). The height of the productions of Zhangzhou wares dates to the 16th to 17th centuries, but some workshops could have carried on until the Qing dynasty (1644–1912 CE).

Although remains of large stoneware jars were not identified among the material of recently excavated kiln sites, from the perspective of consumption, dragon jars can be regarded as part of the Zhangzhou range. The ceramic manufacturing boom had an effect on jar-industries as well, reflected clearly by the numbers and the distribution of vessels across Southeast Asia (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]; Nguyen Long 1992). The fashioning of late Ming jars seem to follow three main styles. The first group includes jars with vigorously sculpted dragons, placed on the shoulders, often incorporated into handles (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986], Pls 66-71; Nguyen Long 1992:189, Nos. 52-64) (Fig. 3.13). The size of the jars varies between small, and proper, large forms with warm brown glaze covering the upper third of the body. The design is not restricted to dragons, other creatures, like pheasants, phoenixes or even human figures also occur (see, Grabowski's list for Brahan Kowong, Fig. 6.3, no. 9). The decoration appears to have been formed in a crude mould, then attached onto the body before the sculpting of the head was carried out – perhaps directly on the vessel (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]: Pl. 67; Nguyen Long 1992:126, no. 63). Incised motifs were used to add detail, but on some jars the technique was employed on its own to create the main design (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]: Pl. 75; Nguyen Long 1992:123, Nos. 56-7). Handles were formed in a mould before being attached onto the vessel, finished off by stamped motifs. Barbara Harrison originated this variety from the Vietnamese Go-Sanh kilns (1990 [1986], Pls 66-71), while more recently, Kerry Nguyen Long assigned these jars to the Shiwan workshops near Foshan, in Guangdong province (1992:31-2). The output of

the Shiwan kilns peaked during the Ming and Qing dynasties, and some of the workshops appear to have been specialised in the manufacture of sculptural elements which makes it more likely to be the production locale for this jar group. A small, fragmented example was recorded from the cemetery of Pa' Badong (T17 – see the Ceramic Catalogue, Table 4.3), in the southern Kelabit highlands, dating perhaps as early as the 16th-17th century, while numerous larger jars of this type are being curated by regional museums in Sarawak, Sabah and Kalimantan.

The second group, as Kerry Nguyen Long suggests, is stylistically related to the so-called Tradescant jars (1992:191). Tradescant wares were small vessels (approx. 30 cm tall), decorated with delicately sprigged motifs, coated in monochrome and polychrome (green, yellow and brown) lead glazes dating to the 16th century. The jars were named after the collector, Sir John Tradescant, who bequeathed an example to Elias Ashmole, to be included in his cabinet of curiosities (Fig. 3.14). Although the similarities between the Tradescant and the large jars of the second late Ming group which Eine Moore classified as 'Brittle wares' in Sarawak might not be obvious at the first glance (1970), their thinly potted bodies, coarse buff fabrics, and sprigged-rouletted decorations suggest that these jars could indeed share common roots. Jars of this group come in three varieties: 1) a vase-like variant with bulbous body and segmented neck (Fig. 3.15); 2) a large, ovoid type (Fig. 3.16) and 3) a style with elongated body and cylindrical or flaring neck (Fig. 3.17). All three varieties exhibit elegant compositions of sprigged dragons, deer and flowering branches framed by rouletted bands, resembling the blue painted and enamelled designs of the Zhangzhou plates. Furthermore, their distribution shows a certain degree of regionality, localised to the Philippines and Japan (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986], Pls 84-96; Nguyen Long 1992:191-2, Nos. 76-91; Cort pers. comm.). What is notable about variants 2 and 3, is that they were among the most highly valued jars in the Kelabit highlands. Variant 2 (T5 – see Table 4.3) was locally known as *monokul*; utilised for brewing rice wine and as secondary burial container. Variant 3 (T11, T12 and T16 – see Table 4.3), called *tiluan* or *bazazan* depending on the style of the dragon ('flying' or 'walking'), appear to represent the oldest group of jar burials in the Kelabit highlands the jars themselves probably dating to the 17th-18th century (see Chapter 6).

The third group of jars of the late Ming period is a type with bulbous body, short neck and flaring rim (Fig. 3.18). The design of this type consists of a pair of sprigged dragons placed on the shoulder above rows of incised wavy lines; a much simpler composition compared to the design of the previous group. A representatives of the type appear both among Moore's

'Brittle' (1970, Pl. 3a), and 'Kwantung' wares (Pl. 9d), perhaps indicating various production locales or a long period of manufacture. Barbara Harrison while matching early colonial illustrations with jars curated in the museums of Sabah and Sarawak, noted that jars of this style were held in high esteem by locals of south and west Borneo, who used to distinguish varieties within this third late Ming group, based on the dragon design (1990 [1986]: Pls 12-14, 19,-20, *belanga*, *lakian*, *rantian*, *sambas* and *harimau*, see also the sketch by Grabowski: Fig. 6.3). The popularity and the existing variations indicate that this style was indeed in production for a long period of time, starting sometime in the 17th-18th centuries.

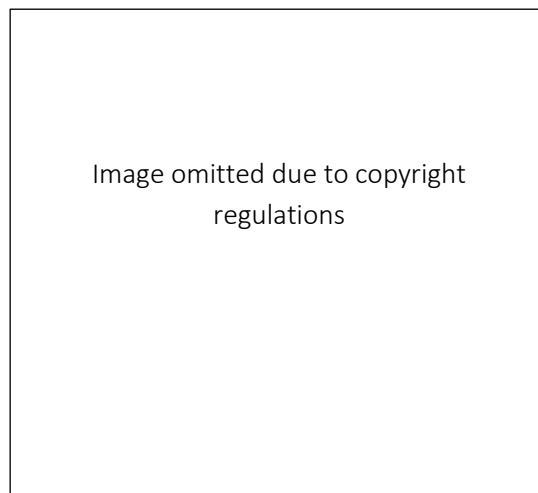


Figure 3.13 - Jar with sculpted-modelled dragons. Image source: Mranata and Susanto 2012, Fig. 39.

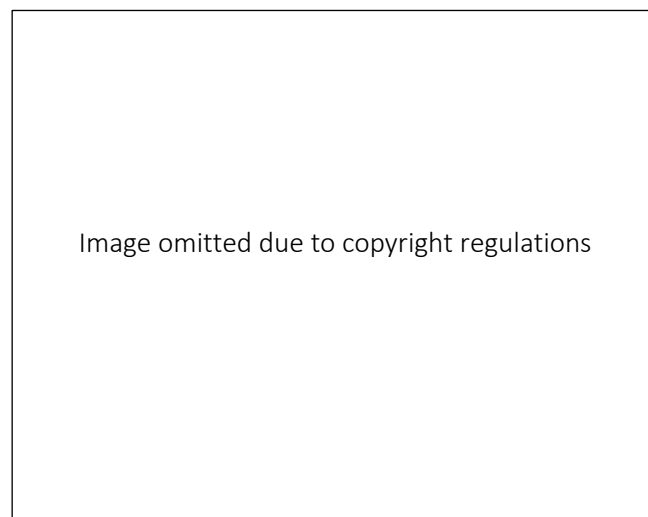


Figure 3.14 - So-called Tradescant jar. Image source: Mranata and Susanto 2012, Fig. 55.



Figure 3.15 - Vase-like jar with bulbous neck. Image source: Mranata and Susanto 2012, Fig. 265.



Figure 3.16 - Large jar known as 'monokul' in the Kelabit highlands. Image source: Mranata and Susanto 2012, Fig. 153.

Image omitted due to copyright regulations

Figure 3.17 - Jar with flaring neck with a 'walking' dragon known as 'bazazan' in central Borneo. Image source: Mranata and Susanto 2012, Fig. 266.

Image omitted due to copyright regulations

Figure 3.18 - Jar with bulbous body and flaring neck known generally as 'belanga' in the Bornean lowlands. Image source: Mranata and Susanto 2012, Fig. 271.

In summary, the late Ming period in the 16th-17th centuries marked an explosion in ceramic production. Large consignments of porcelain were produced especially for the markets of Europe, while cruder tradewares, including jars, were aimed at consumers in Southeast Asia and Japan. Kilns of Guangdong and Fujian manufactured a wide range of items, applying a number of different techniques in creative ways unseen since the late Song dynasty. Although certain jar varieties produced during the late Song reflect attempts by Chinese producers to cater for the demands of Southeast Asian indigenous markets, as networks of trade expanded and intensified during the following centuries, manufacturers of the late Ming had the means to consciously target consumers in the Southeast Asian archipelago and to create products suitable for local tastes. This surge in ceramic production and consumption is reflected in the number of jars known from Borneo (Moore 1970; Harrison 1990 [1986]), the Philippines (Valdes *et al.* 1992) and Indonesia (Adhyatman and Ridho 1984), while the distribution of particular jar types hint towards the existence of local (ethnic?) ceramic preferences; regionality is reflected by the above described second jar group being localised to north Borneo and the Philippines, and the third group favoured by peoples of western and southern Borneo. In fact, the late Ming period signalled a new era in jar manufacture and trade driven by indigenous perceptions of jars, within which their container function was rendered secondary.

Southeast Asia and Borneo during the late Ming

Tradewares found at coastal entrepôts of Borneo imply that these initially small settlements controlling the exchange of jungle produce and channelling foreign goods towards the interior, were increasingly participating in regional networks of commerce by the 15th century (Harrison 1990 [1986]). The southern, western and northern coastal areas of Borneo were part of the Hindu-Buddhist Majapahit interest sphere for over two hundred years until its collapse in the 15th century (Miksic 2010). The gradual demise of the Majapahit Kingdom is accounted to the spread of Islam along the trajectories of maritime trade and the growing influence of Islamic commercial centres both in mainland and island Southeast Asia (Miksic 2010). The Portuguese conquest of Malacca in 1511, left wealthy Muslim merchant-rulers in search of new bases, one of them – as official historiographies claim – resettled in Brunei and became the founder of the present Islamic sultanate (Church 2003). However, historical records show that Muslim traders had been operating on the island since the 13th century, organising themselves into small-scale states around the 1500s (Sambas, Sukadana, and Landak on the west coast, and Banjarmasin in

the south), incorporating a significant number of Javanese, Bugenese ¹² and Malay migrants from other parts of the Indonesian archipelago (Avé and King 1986).

Because of the Portuguese presence in Malacca, they were the first Europeans to be in regular contact with Brunei. The first detailed description of the sultanate was penned by Antonio Pigafetta, a member of Magellan's crew, who visited the kingdom in 1521 (Nicholl 2007 [1975]). Borneo was also subject to attacks by the Spanish, who launched several forays against the island in the late 1500s from their base in the Philippines (Valdes *et al.* 1992). Meanwhile, the Dutch established permanent trading posts in Banten, West Java (1611) and in Batavia (1619, now Jakarta), for the direct control of spice collected from the islands of Indonesia, where they faced growing competition by the British East India Company (Avé and King 1986). By this time, at the height of its power, Brunei claimed dominance over the riverine communities of north and west Borneo, the Sulu archipelago and Manila. The sultanate also shared a strong alliance with the king of Luzon granting the kingdom monopoly over maritime trade in the Philippine archipelago, a sphere of interest that managed to resist European control until the 19th century (Valdes *et al.* 1992).

3.4 Qing dynasty (1644–1912 CE) and modern jar production

Although the later decades of the 1600s are still technically considered part of the 'Age of Commerce' (Reid 1993), the 17th century in Europe signalled the beginning of a general economic crisis (Hobsbawm 1954a-b; Parker 2013), ultimately resulting in the orchestration of commercial interests and the creation of the colonial establishment two centuries later. Since networks of trade were global, the crisis began to send shockwaves throughout regional and local economies, and China was no exception. Trade between the Spanish and the Ming declined in the 1620s, which meant that Spain's supply of silver from America took a sharp downturn, and European presence in the region further weakened China's influence over commerce (Holcombe 2011). By the mid-17th century the Ming government was essentially bankrupt, leading to rebellions and the suicide of the last Ming emperor in 1644. Power was assumed by the Manchu Qing dynasty which commanded a considerable military force expanding from the northern territories eventually taking over the entire country (Holcombe 2011).

Western maritime commercial activity was officially confined by the Qing government to a single port of Guangzhou (Canton), where during the short trading season Chinese associations

¹² Indigenous group of traders from southern Sulawesi.

handled every aspect of contact with European merchants, including their heavy taxation. By the 1700s the British, who developed a serious appetite for tea, were the most prominent among the Western traders, however, they had little to offer in exchange – the cotton obtained from India attracted little interest on the Chinese market. The British, therefore, made it their priority to find a product which could be successfully marketed to China, and by the late 1700s they finally did: opium from Bengal, mixed with tobacco from the New World was sold in large quantities (Holcombe 2011). The Qing government aware of the dangers, ruled the opium trade illegal almost immediately, but the British ignored the ruling, especially after the Boston Tea Party having left a considerable dent in their profits in 1773. The conflict of mercantile interests led to two full-blown military campaigns between China and Britain in 1840 and 1860, played out primarily in the coastal territories of the south east, where China's ceramic industries were located.

3.4.1 Borneo and the Brooke rule

During the 17th and 18th centuries the Dutch and the English East India Companies made several unsuccessful attempts to establish permanent trading posts in Borneo, to control the trade of pepper, gold and diamonds. The Dutch administration became embroiled in local dynastic quarrels (Avé and King 1986; Rousseau 1989), while the English concentrated their efforts on the trade with India and China. By the early 1800s the Industrial Revolution in Europe was in full swing, hungry for raw materials and new markets, and territories of the Southeast Asian region were soon in the frontline of Western imperialistic advances. The Dutch began to reassert their claims over the southern and western parts of Borneo, resulting in a series of treaties with local sultanates in the late 1800s. In the northern territories the Sultan of Brunei with declining power was struggling to contain a Sarawak-based rebellion, and was threatened with the prospect of political and military chaos. Thus, when the Englishman James Brooke arrived on the shores of Borneo in 1839, with a single, but well-armed ship, the Sultan was keen to gain his support (Runciman 1960; Pringle 1970; Walker 2002). After much political manoeuvring the rebellion was quelled, and in return the Sultan ceded the southern territories of Sarawak to Brooke (Runciman 1960). Until his death in 1868, James Brooke was engaged in an endless series of raids and disputes with local leaders, but also managed to wield their considerable support against the Brunei aristocracy (Runciman 1960; Walker 2002). His successor, Charles Brooke extended the territories of Sarawak, by absorbing territories of the Brunei sultanate riddled by conflict, including the north-western fringes of the Kelabit plateau: in 1883-4 the

Baram and the Trusan River basins, and in 1890 the Limbang region were brought nominally under the Brooke rule (Ewart 2009).

In terms of stoneware ceramics, there is no information on when and where the first Chinese ceramic workshop was established in Borneo. Although the Chinese had been trading on the island for centuries, permanent settlements were established only around the mid-18th century, when the Chinese were invited by local Malay rulers to work in the gold and diamond mines of west Borneo. By the late 1810s – early 1820s, a substantial Chinese population existed in the vicinity of Mandor, Montrado and Singkawang, powerful Chinese associations (*kongsis*) controlling the mining-business (Avé and King 1986; Somers Heidhues 2003) (Fig. 3.19). In the 1840s rivalry between *kongsis* and local rulers was rife, and by the 1850s the situation became so volatile that it required military intervention by the Dutch, who were in the process of re-establishing their claims over territories of Kalimantan (Avé and King 1986). The revolts coincided with the exhaustion of gold-mines prompting a large number of Chinese labourers to move into other professions or over to the mines in Bau, Sarawak. The period was also marked by a wave of immigration from the Chinese mainland to Borneo – people fleeing from the impact of the Opium Wars and the following domestic rebellions and famines. The industrialisation of Sarawak, supported by the second Rajah Brooke's welcoming policies accommodated a large proportion of the Chinese labour-force as construction workers, rubber-tappers, and more importantly for this argument – as potters (Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]).



Figure 3.19 - Map of Borneo showing main rivers and locations of places mentioned in the text. 1. Kota Batu; 2. Kutei; 3. Sarawak River Delta (Sungai Ja'ong); 4. Sambas; 5. Sukadana; 6. Landak (Mandor); 7. Banjarmasin; 8. Montrado; 9. Singkawang; 10. Bau; 11. Pontianak; 12. Kuching; 13. Sibul; 14. Kota Kinabalu. Illustration: L. Lloyd-Smith.

Until the 1880s, stoneware ceramics continued to be imported from China, which due to the free port of Singapore, still proved to be a profitable business. Foreign ships were only allowed to dock at the port of Brunei in the north, Pontianak in the West and Banjarmasin in the south, where goods had to be declared (see Table 3.2, under the column of 'Foreign trade' showing the import of new jars from abroad). It is unknown how accurately items were documented in the category of coastal trade, nevertheless the amount of jars (which probably included new jars from China and Vietnam, old heirloom jars and re-used utilitarian container vessels) passing through coastal trading posts is impressive, given how unsafe the waters of Borneo were in the

mid- to late 1800s (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]:14-5). Piracy remained a considerable threat, fuelled by the slave-trade between Brunei and the sultanate of Sulu, the latter reigning over the southern islands of the Philippines and the northern territories of Borneo until the late 1800s (Warren 2007 [1981]). It is very likely that a significant number of jars entered Borneo via these illegal routes, and made their way further inland, perhaps being exchanged for captives.¹³

Year	Coastal trade (number of jars)	Foreign trade (number of jars)	Gazette of	
1879	2,221	67	March	1880
1880	2,581	306	May	1881
1881	\$10,059	\$580	May	1882
1882	1,298	432	April	1883
1883	6,010	390	April	1884
1884	4,319	107	May	1885
1885	2,633	661	April	1886
1886	4,580	104	May	1887
1887	2,517	151	May	1888

Table 3.2 - Jars imported into Sarawak, 1879-1887. Table by Barbara Harrison (1990 [1986]: Chapter 4) based on figures reported in volumes of the Sarawak Gazette. Figures represent the number of jars, apart from 1881, when the value of jars was given in Strait dollars.

By 1887, a Chinese ceramic workshop was established in Tanah Putih (lit. 'White Earth') in the outskirts of Kuching (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]:5), operated by potters who moved to Borneo from the provinces of Guangdong and Fujian, most affected by the Opium Wars and domestic unrest. It is possible, however, that kilns set up in Singkawang in west Kalimantan, had started producing decades earlier (Ridho and Wahyono 1983). Stoneware production was a family business, requiring a precise set of skills and knowledge passed down from father to son (or nephew), including clay-recipes, building techniques and firing strategies. No records exist of the first Chinese potter family in Sarawak, the longest history is claimed by the Ng clan based in Kuching, whose forefather was an employee at the Shiwan factories in Guangdong province before moving to Sarawak in 1905 (Dupoizat 1983; Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]:5-7). Kilns established in the early 1900s in the suburbs of Kuching, Sibu and Kota Kinabalu (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]; Dupoizat 1983), exploited local kaolinic clays (which had very similar properties to the ones utilised in mainland China) and relied on locally available raw materials for producing glazes (rice husks, seashells, iron-dioxide) and firing their kilns (Dupoizat 1983; Ridho and Wahyono 1983; Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]) (Fig. 3.19).

¹³ The first colonial account describes tribes occupying the upper reaches of the Trusan and the Limbang rivers, including the Kelabit, as 'The Main Muruts are not only salt, but slave dealers.' (St John 1863:117; see also Metcalf 2010 and Chapter 7).

3.4.2 Stoneware jars of the Qing and modern jar production

Workshops located in Fujian and Guangdong provinces continued to be the leading ceramic producers during the Qing era, relentlessly turning out jars in large quantities. Jars were assembled from two or three parts thrown on the wheel, then joined together by hand, using a paddle and an anvil (Fig. 3.20). Following on from Ming traditions, Qing jars exhibit a wide range of designs, which from the 18th century began to take a schematised form, due to the increased use of stamps and moulds, lending a commercial impression to later jars. Creativity was expressed through the use of vibrant, polychrome glazes implying the wider availability of raw materials generally used in the decoration tablewares and thus implies the cheaper manufacturing costs of large vessels. Jars were glazed all the way down to their bases, sometimes the foot and mouth coated in brown slip to prevent the jars sticking to each other in the kiln. Polychrome glazes and large designs covering at least two-third of the surfaces indicate that the decorative function of Qing jars was just as important as their utilisation as container vessels. Surfaces were divided into two or three bands, separated by applied clay rolls, with panels of stamp-impressed, sprigged or moulded designs placed in between. The *sgraffito* technique also continued to be applied during the Qing era, but while incisions were used to create entire compositions on jars date to the 18th-19th centuries (T7, T14, T15 – see Table 4.3), *sgraffito* was used chiefly as a complementary motif on 19th-20th century jars (T3, T4, T9 – see, Table 4.3; cf. Nguyen Long 1992:195, Nos. 136-9).

While a rich repertoire of decoration techniques have been used on jars since the late Ming creative explosion, the utilisation of latex moulds and the so-called ‘raised-in-the-mould’ method (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]) is a clear indicator of later jars.¹⁴ Latex moulds and stamps allowed the potter to place large panels of decoration on curving surfaces. Similarly the raised-in-the-mould method afforded the quick creation of sizeable, long dragons on ovoid bodies. Over half of the jars recorded in funerary contexts in the Kelabit highlands represent these later decoration categories (108 out of 177 vessels), and the same trend is reflected by the jars documented in ethnographic settings (30 out of 53 examples). The most favoured style appears to be a large jar type with a pair of dragons placed horizontally (or diagonally) their heads facing upwards (T1, see Table 4.3, Fig. 3.21; cf. Harrison, B. 1990 [1986] Pls. 103a-c; Nguyen Long 1992, No. 120). The design is further embellished by stamp-impressed cloud-scrolls in between. I would suggest that the prototype of this design was a variant with hand-applied decoration (T30, said to be old heirloom jar, see Table 4.3), which was then developed into a range of

¹⁴ The application of latex moulds is likely to be related to the increase in rubber manufacture in the late 19th – early 20th century.

raised-in-the-mould variants, preserving the key characteristics (T20, T25, T28, T38 – see Table 4.3), before the standardisation of the design more suited to the industrial production of the 19th-20th centuries.¹⁵

The spectrum of motifs other than dragons range from stamp-impressed floral designs, to human figures, birds, palettes, medallions and buttons divided by clay rolls; often accompanied by a so-called pie-crust rim on the jar's mouth characteristic of recent jars (T3, T9, T24, T34 – see Table 4.3, Fig. 3.22, cf. Harrison, B. 1990 [1986], Pls. 138-148; Nguyen Long 1992:191-2, Nos: 92-101). The occurrence of the stamp-impressed types in Kelabit cemeteries is minimal (8 out of 177 burial jars) and a single example was documented in the village of Pa' Lungan. Full-*sgraffito* composition indicating a somewhat earlier date (18th-19th century – Fig. 3.23) occurred in slightly larger numbers in funerary contexts than the stamp-impressions (17 out of 177 burials) (T6/19, T7, T14, T15, T22 – see Table 4.3), while the quarter of jars recorded in longhouses were decorated with incised motifs only (14 out of 53 examples) (T7, T14, T15, T22, T26, T29, T36, T39 – see Table 4.3).¹⁶

The dating and provenancing of 19th and 20th century jars remains problematic even after over 40 years of jar-research. While jar production was still ongoing in mainland China, potters who trained in large coastal ceramic centres moved over to Borneo in the mid- to late 1800s, in search of a better life. The techniques and styles applied by Bornean potters were identical to the ones used in mainland China; even master potters were at loss if they had to distinguish between locally produced Bornean and Chinese jars, unless it was their own work (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]:7). Ceramic workshops on Borneo were established with the intention to produce vessels directly to local indigenous markets, and it is likely that the increased number of recent jars recorded in archaeological contexts in the Kelabit highlands were in fact the products of the booming Bornean ceramic industry in the turn of the late 19th – early 20th century. The majority of the workshops set up at this time in the outskirts of Kuching have now closed down, and when I visited the remaining four in 2013, I was told that none of them produced dragon jars any longer. The kilns outside Kota Kinabalu, in Sabah, on the other hand, still manufacture jars used traditionally by indigenous groups as bride price. The master potter Barbara Harrison interviewed in the 1970s continues to run his business (Soon Yii Seng pottery), and has now switched to the use of electric kilns (Fig. 3.24). In contrast, workshops near to Singkawang in

¹⁵ Stephen Dueppen, in contrast, argues that jars of this particular category with raised-in-the-mould design precede the hand-applied version, based on his study of jars in the 'Guthe' Collection at the University of Michigan (Dueppen 2014).

¹⁶ This date range only represents an estimate, since the majority of heirloom jars could not be securely dated due to the lack of typological guidance and ceramic analogues (see Chapter 6).

Kalimantan (Sinarterang and Tajau Mas potteries) still produce a fairly wide range of jars using local raw materials, firing their products in long, wood-fired dragon kilns (Fig. 3.25).

3.5 Summary

In this chapter we have followed stoneware jars through the first stages of their journeys, commencing with their initial production and utilisation as container vessels servicing the maritime trade during the Tang dynasty (7th-10th century). The Song era (10th-13th century) saw the appearance of the dragon motif on jars for the first time, which could have contributed to jars' popularity among indigenous groups in Southeast Asia, enabling jars to assume roles beyond their primary container function. Perhaps spurred by the first glints of indigenous demand, jars were produced in a variety of shapes, sizes and designs, and by then, were fired in large dragon kilns; a mass-manufacturing technology which remained practically unchanged for over 700 years. The Yuan dynasty (13th-14th century) represents an uncertain period in jar-research, followed by the similarly nebulous era of the early Ming (14th-16th century), during which jars produced in Thai, Vietnamese and Burmese kilns seem to have filled the temporary void left in jar-distribution by the 'Ming ban'. The late Ming period (16th-17th century), in contrast, signalled China's transformation and the consolidation of the Ming rule, with increased demand both by European and Southeast Asian/Japanese markets for ceramics customised to fulfil local preferences. The earliest jars in the Kelabit highlands recorded in this research date to late Ming – early Qing dynasty period (17th-18th century) and likely to have been the results of the boom in Chinese ceramic production, the expansion and intensification of trading-networks, and also from the perspective of central Borneo, the intensification of rice agriculture (see Chapter 7). The Qing dynasty (18th-20th century) heralded turbulent years for workshops operating in southeast China; the Opium Wars, a series of domestic rebellions followed by bouts of famine prompted many potters to relocate their businesses to Southeast Asia, and to Borneo in particular. Workshops springing up in Sarawak from the mid-1800s catered especially for local demand, turning out jars cheaply, efficiently and very much resembling ancient issues. These recent jars saturated the markets of Borneo, making their ways into the Kelabit highlands in fair numbers, and present the century-long challenge to researchers in distinguishing between old and new jars simply on typological grounds; it is to this fundamental question that we turn to in the next chapter.



Figure 3.20 - Potter joining two, wheel-thrown jar halves together by hand at the Tajau Mas Pottery, Singkawang, Kalimantan, Indonesia, 2013. Image by BN.



Figure 3.21 - Jar with upturned head, one of the most common designs during the Qing period. Image by BN.



Figure 3.22 - Jar with stamp-impressed design and pie-crust rim. Image source: Mranata and Susanto 2012, Fig. 177.

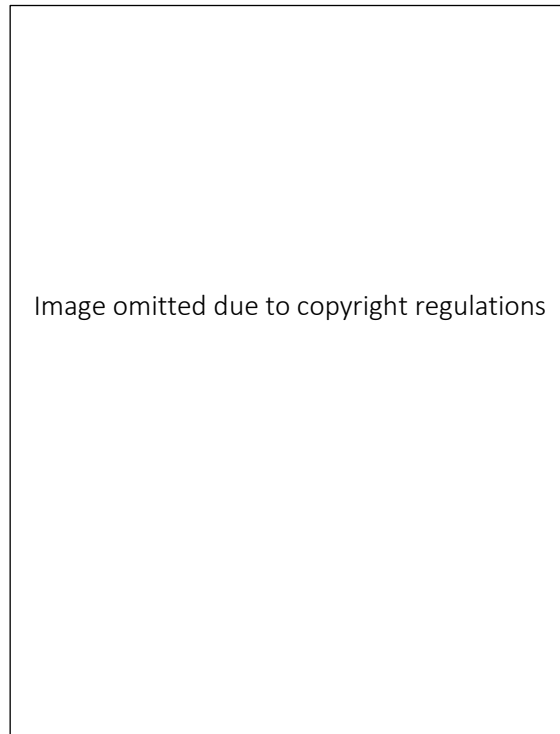


Figure 3.23 - Jar decorated with sgraffito motifs. Image source: Mranata and Susanto 2012, Fig. 207.



Figure 3.24 - Soon Yii Seng pottery in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, with electric kilns. Image by BN.



Figure 3.25 - Wood-fired, traditional dragon kiln still being used by the Tajau Mas Pottery, Singkawang, Kalimantan, Indonesia 2013. Image by BN.

Chapter 4 Data and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Typological assessment of dragon jars represents the key analytical component of this research, utilised as a common denominator in streamlining the ceramic data recorded in archaeological and ethnographic contexts. Typology has long been employed in the classification, dating and serialisation of material culture (MacGregor 1994; Gosden 1999, 2004; Hicks 2010), and still constitutes a key methodological tool for ceramic-focussed enquiries (Krahl *et al.* 1986; Rice 2005 [1987]; Valdes *et al.* 1992, etc.). In this chapter I first outline the recording strategies developed for the ceramic material derived from the Kelabit highlands. Styles of decoration are discussed in particular detail, since this aspect had vital significance in local jar-assessment schemes and served as indicators for chronological dating. A tabulated version of the complete catalogue of jar types recorded in the Kelabit highlands forms part of the chapter; the types established here provided the diagnostic templates for the ceramic analysis. The second half of the chapter outlines the archaeological data and surveying methodologies, followed by a discussion of the ethnographic interviewing strategies and their relevance in object-focussed research. As such, this chapter provides an overview of the complete ceramic dataset and presents a justification for chronological dating of jars upon which the sequencing of cemeteries were established (Chapter 5) and Kelabit jar-evaluation practices were assessed ethnographically (Chapter 6).

4.2 Ceramic data recording strategy

The ceramic dataset for this thesis was recorded using standard typological descriptions (Rice 2005 [1987]), which included diagnostic details generally considered as the bases of typological assessment (e.g. rim and base diameter, number of handles, glaze colour, decoration etc., Rye 1981). A so-called *Vessel Identification Sheet* (VIS) was developed to document the key characteristics and measurements. Each recorded jar received an identification number, starting with a 'B' if the vessel was a burial jar, or with an 'H' in the case of an heirloom jar (see Appendix 1 – CD-ROM for individual jar records). By this scheme, two series of continuous numbers were produced and entered into a single Excel database (see Appendix 2 – CD-ROM). However, since ceramic assemblages were often found in poor condition, particularly at burial grounds, the circumstances necessitated the refinement of typological details, including characteristics such as the presence/absence of slip, glaze texture etc., to achieve maximum

comparability between the archaeological and the ethnographic datasets: the ultimate goal of the devised typological recording strategy.

Each jar was numbered and photographed at the site location (either burial ground or longhouse), generating a separate, photographic record based on the ID numbers of jars noted on each VIS. During the documentation of dragon jar cemeteries, archaeological survey plans were produced and jar locations were marked on the plans in relation to landmarks (e.g. megalithic monuments) or landscape features (e.g. river banks, rock-outcrops or fields). The information was later collated on *Site Survey Record* sheets devised for each site (see Appendix 1 – CD-ROM); components of the site-register produced for the entire region of the Kelabit highlands.

4.2.1 Typological characteristics

The ‘traditional’ typological measurements such as height, rim and base diameters turned out to be mostly irrelevant in the chronological assessment of jars, due to the high fragmentation rate of vessels in archaeological contexts, and the standardised dimensions of jars of recent manufacture. In contrast, the rim type, glaze colour and texture, and the clay fabric were crucial indicators of chronological age and represented the physical characteristics which weighed significantly in Kelabit jar-evaluation practices (see Chapter 6 for details). Decoration, as will be discussed below, was another key factor. Based on typological features, I categorised jars into ‘Types’; some of these categories followed previously established templates devised by leading scholars of the field, whereas others were recorded for the first time during my fieldwork and currently stand without typological analogues. These jar ‘Types’ served as basic units of comparison between vessels across the archaeological and ethnographic datasets, and are referred to as T1, T2 etc. throughout the thesis (see Table 4.3).

Settings	Number of jars	Number of jar types
Archaeological context	177	22
Ethnographic context	53	24
Total	230	40 (overlap between 6 types)




Table 4.1 - Summary table showing the number of jar types and number of jars recorded in the Kelabit highlands.

Although the number of jar types recorded in archaeological and ethnographic contexts were similar, the same trend was not reflected in jar numbers across the whole dataset (Table 4.1). The *number* of jars recorded in archaeological settings (177 items) was three times higher than the number of vessels documented in ethnographic contexts (53 items), but compared to the

amount of vessels, the *types* of jars showed a much higher variability within the ethnographic context. As I will argue further on, this is due to past historical and social changes reflected in the funerary assemblages (see Chapter 5), and also the Kelabit concept of ‘ancient’ or heirloom jars in ethnographic settings (see Chapter 6 and 7).

4.2.2 Decoration styles

The decoration style appears to have played a critical role in indigenous jar-assessment and selection processes (see Chapter 6), and serves as key component for typologies upon which the broad chronological framework of jars had been established. Nevertheless, there has been little scholarly attention invested in the technological details of the motifs themselves. This partly stems from the classic ‘antiquarian’ (rather than a craftsman’s) approach by ceramic scholars, focussing primarily on design elements and composition (Adhyatman and Ridho 1984; Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]; Valdes *et al.* 1992; Mranata and Susanto 2012; etc.) rather than how the decoration was produced in the first place. A further issue here is that even for a trained eye, it is quite difficult to determine the exact technique employed in creating the motifs (especially on a photograph), unless one has the opportunity to handle the object itself. Moreover, studies on ceramics often fail to define their terminologies, making it problematic for others to compare examples. In this thesis I rely on the classification scheme (Table 4.2) set up by Barbara Harrison (1990 [1986]) and Kerry Nguyen Long (1992); a combined framework which proved to be an adequate approach (although inevitably somewhat blunt) in assigning vessels from the highlands to broad chronological categories. It is worth restating here, that since large stoneware jars were among the first mass-produced items in Asia (if not the entire world), at present typologies are still too crude to establish a reliable chronological sequence for these vessels. At the moment, jars can only be dated within the range of two centuries, and the situation is not likely to change until detailed excavations at production sites are carried out.

<p>Incised decoration and <i>sgraffito</i></p> 	<p>Incised decoration and <i>sgraffito</i>¹⁷ although similar, they represent two different techniques often difficult to distinguish. Incised lines were carved into the vessel surface prior to the application of glaze, while the <i>sgraffito</i> method takes place after the biscuit-firing stage, by the scraping off the dark-coloured glaze in a fine line in order to reveal the lighter-coloured clay fabric underneath. In the ceramic dataset nine jar types exhibit a design composed fully of <i>sgraffito</i> motifs (Table 4.3: T6/19, T7, T14-15, T26, T29, T36 and T39) whereas the incised decoration, which tends to occur on vessels as complementary detail, is present on three jar types (Table 4.3: T4, T22 and T30). The analysis carried out for this thesis shows that jars where the incised decoration occurs in combination with other techniques range from the 17th to the 20th century (see Table 6.5), while the use of <i>sgraffito</i> as the main design component appears to flourish during the 19th century. Incised motifs arranged into floral patterns or wavy lines were perhaps the earliest forms of decoration to appear on large stoneware vessels (c. 12th-13th centuries). Although jars with incised decoration were without doubt overshadowed by the popularity of the dragon motif, certain examples of jars with incised designs were among the most valuable vessels in Borneo (see the <i>rusa</i> and <i>ningka</i> jars in Chapter 6).</p>
<p>Rouletted decoration</p> 	<p>Rouletting was created by the application of a soft clay strip onto the leather-hard vessel surface, before running a roller horizontally along the clay-piece. It is most frequently used as a framing motif (T11-12, T16), but also occurs on its own on larger jars, chiefly in funerary context (T5) (Table 4.3, see Table 5.2). The rouletted technique makes its first entrance sometime during the 17th-18th centuries, and it is present on jars thought to be the earliest burial vessels in the Kelabit highlands. It seems that rouletting is particularly linked to Types 5, 11, 12 and 16, jars which follow the so-called 'Tradescant' tradition (see Chapter 3, Fig. 3.14; Table 4.3).</p>
<p>Sprigged decoration</p> 	<p>This technique involves the creation of the pattern in a negative, shallow wooden or plaster mould (hence the sharp outline of the motif) before applying it onto the vessel surface. On jars recorded in the highlands, sprigging is represented exclusively by the dragon design, smaller details like whiskers, eyes or claws were added by hand. Although the application of sprigging on jars goes back to at least the 13th-14th centuries, between the 16th and 18th century sprigging takes a particularly delicate form, depicting a plethora of animals and plants (Nguyen Long 1992, Nos 76a-91). The use of sprigged decorations is closely associated with the above mentioned rouletted technique, and in the Kelabit highlands it occurs primarily on burial jars dating to the 17th-18th centuries (Table 4.3: T11-12, T16, T23, see Table 5.2).</p>

¹⁷ The term *sgraffito* originates from the Italian *graffiare* 'to scratch'.






<p>Decoration applied by hand</p> 	<p>The early forms of this style consisted of simple, hand-formed clay rolls attached on the vessel to create the dragon's body, with additional smaller clay rolls to shape the head and limbs. This decoration scheme first came to be applied on stoneware jars in the 13th-14th centuries (see Fig. 3.8). The technique had its renaissance during the 16th-17th centuries, characterised by the production flamboyant, sculpted dragons, sometimes covering entire vessel surfaces. An example of the design was recorded on a single, small-sized jar in the Kelabit highlands in a mortuary context (Table 4.3: T17: B061, Table 5.2). Another variety of applied decoration made an appearance slightly later, but given the technique is particularly dominant on heirloom jars that still stand without typological parallels, it is difficult to establish even an approximate date for these vessels. The applied design of this phase is comprised of a pair of large, vigorously modelled dragons as centrepieces (Table 4.3: T27, T30).</p>
<p>Stamp-impressed decoration</p> 	<p>Similarly to incised details, stamp-impressions were used as complementary motifs on jars during the 17th-18th centuries; patterns created by pressing a positive wooden or plaster stamp onto the soft vessel surface (Table 4.3: T22, T30, T40). In the following period, or perhaps even during the course of the 17th-18th centuries (see, Nguyen Long 1992, Nos 92-94) potters switched to using latex stamps which enabled them to create large designs on jar-surfaces (Table 4.3: T3, T9, T24, T34). The roots of stamp-impressed designs had been present on utilitarian wares since the 13th-14th centuries (Fig. 3.7). Nevertheless, stamp-impressed motifs are one of the most difficult to identify, as the glaze has a tendency to cover up the details of the patterns created by this technique.</p>
<p>Raised-in-the-mould technique</p> 	<p>The 'raised-in-the-mould' term was coined by Barbara Harrison, whose examination of modern potting techniques led her to identify the method on jars in museum collections (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]: Chapter 3). The style is technologically related to the impressed design, but in this case, both a positive and negative mould was used to create the pattern. Over half of the jars recorded in Kelabit burial grounds (96 out of 177 vessels) exhibit motifs produced by the raised-in-the-mould method (Table 4.3: T1, T2, T4, T10, T21), and a similar trend is reflected by jars in longhouses (25 out of 53 examples) (Table 4.3: T1, T4, T20, T25, T28, T31, T33, T38, T40). However, in all instances, the use of the positive mould was omitted, and potters used their fingers to press the soft clay into the large, negative mould held tight against the exterior. The technique probably originated in the 18th century, perhaps as part of the technological movement related to the use of latex moulds, also reflected by the increase of large, impressed designs. The technique is particularly dominant on jars dating to the 19th-20th centuries.</p>


Table 4.2 – Summary table of decoration styles, their definition and technological characteristics based on jars recorded in the Kelabit highlands.

Table 4.3 – Ceramic catalogue summarising the types of jars documented in archaeological and ethnographic contexts in the Kelabit highlands between 2007 and 2012.

Jar type	Assumed date	Production locale	Description
Type 1 Image omitted due to copyright regulations	19 th -20 th century	Borneo	Tall, ovoid jar. The rim is rolled and thickened, smeared with a chocolate brown slip and left unglazed. The interior surface of the neck is also coated in a brown slip so as the lower quarter of the body and the base. Reddish brown glaze covers the exterior, the neck and the upper three quarters of the body. On the slanting shoulder there are eight vertical, thumb-pressed, loop handles present with four grooves. The decorative elements are more or less standard in all recorded cases, four bands of decoration can be distinguished. No. 1: Under the handles there are six cloud scrolls. No. 2: Two cloud/wind motifs. These occur either horizontally or diagonally. No. 3: Pair of horned dragons with upturned heads. The two dragons placed horizontally to encircle the vessel surface have elongated bodies, short legs and four (3-1) clawed toes. The two dragons are separated by two cloud/wind scrolls. No. 4: Below the dragons there are two cloud scrolls. The decoration was carried out by the raised-in-the-mould technique. The clay fabric is even, fires to a beige, buff colour. This type is classified as <i>belanai meching</i> (recent jar) by the Kelabit.
Type 2 Image omitted due to copyright regulations	19 th -20 th century	Borneo	Tall, ovoid jar type. The decoration is emphasized by the use of different colours, on a beige/light mustard-coloured base-glaze. The decorative elements are similar to Type 1 jars, the same motifs were employed in this case although executed in different colours. Four bands of decoration can be distinguished. No. 1: The root of the neck is framed by a dark blue glazed band pattern which has eight stemmed trefoils attached between each handle. No. 2: Below the trefoils, turquoise glazed lion-dogs with brown paws and yellow glazed cranes with brown feet and beak alternate (4-4). No. 3: Pair of horned dragons with upturned heads glazed dark blue. The two dragons placed horizontally to encircle the vessel surface have elongated bodies, short legs and four (3-1) clawed toes (feet glazed brown). The two cloud/wind scroll separating the creatures on Type 1 jars are missing here. No. 4: Below the dragons, larger (turquoise) and smaller (yellow) circular medallions alternate. The glaze stops right above the vessel's foot making the chocolate brown slip-wash visible. The decoration was carried out by the raised-in-the-mould technique.
Type 3 Image omitted due to copyright regulations	Late 19 th - early 20 th century	South China or Kalimantan?	The jar is ovoid with a thickened lip and a plain neck. A twisted clay roll was applied to the rim's edge, the cording is repeated on the body as well. The vessel has six horizontal, incised, loop handles with thumb-pressed ends sitting on the rounded shoulder. The vessel exhibits two bands of decoration divided and framed by a twisted clay roll. No. 1: 14 cm below the rim, under the handles a twisted clay roll has been applied horizontally, beneath which four rounded and four rhomboid rosettes alternate. No. 2: Below the rosettes divided by another horizontal twisted roll, pillar motifs are visible surrounded by curving incised lines; 25 cm above the base the decoration is framed by another line of twisted clay roll. The details of the pillar were elaborated by further incisions. The twisted clay roll was applied to the exterior whereas the major motifs were carried out by the raised-in-the-mould technique. Known as <i>kalakian</i> in Kalimantan.


Jar type	Assumed date	Production locale	Description
Type 4 	Late 19 th - early 20 th century	Borneo, Kalimantan?	Tall, ovoid vessel with outcurving rim, slender neck and flat base. There are eight vertical loop handles with four grooves and pinched ends attached to the rounded shoulder. Orangey brown glaze covers the exterior and it stops a few centimetres above the foot. Chocolate brown slip visible on the foot, and covers the interior and the lip where the glaze had been wiped off. The decoration was carried out by the raised-in-the-mould and stamp-impression technique with finer details were added by hand. A pair of horizontal dragons with elongated bodies each chasing a pearl (flying from left to right) are separated by two flower palettes below and flower rosettes above. The dragons have long, waving snake-like bodies, proportionate limbs and four (3-1) well-formed claws. The head is detailed with a clear beard, whiskers, tongue and bulging eyes. The bodies of the creatures were formed by the raised-in-the-mould technique although the smaller details like claws were attached individually and the scales were emphasized by incisions afterwards. The flower palettes were stamp impressed.
Type 5 Image omitted due to copyright regulations	17 th -18 th century	South China?	Large, ovoid vessel with folded, flattened rim, short straight neck, and flat base. There are six large vertical loop handles with one groove and thumb-pressed ends attached to the rounded shoulder. Light yellowish brown glaze covers the exterior, except the lip and stops 20 cm above the foot. The glaze has a tendency to erode easily. Reddish brown slip coats the rim, interior and the foot. Decoration was carried out by application. There is a groove under the lip, and another one at the root of the neck. There are two horizontal applied clay bands: one is on the shoulder, and the second 17 cm below this. They are both 4 cm wide and have floral rouletted design pressed into them. There is a single horizontal clay roll applied 15 cm underneath, balancing the design. This type of jar is known as <i>monokul</i> locally.
Type 6/19 ¹⁸ 	Unknown	Unknown	This type could only be recorded in a highly fragmented condition, therefore the description might not be accurate. The vessel's rim is outcurving, the neck is short and slender. Red slip covers the interior and the rim, while a shiny, orangey brown glaze coats the exterior. Eight smoothed, plain loop handles with thumb-pressed ends sit on the rounded shoulder. The colour of clay was buff after firing and the glaze retains its shine even after a long period of being out in the open. The decorative elements detected on the fragments suggest several rows of wavy lines framed by horizontal incised lines. Presumably there is only one band of decoration. The line decoration was created by using the <i>sgraffito</i> technique on the exterior (incisions in the glaze reveal the clay fabric underneath).


¹⁸ Type 6 and 19 was treated as separate types at beginning of the classification process. As the assemblage became more detailed, the two categories were merged as they probably represent the same style.




Jar type	Assumed date	Production locale	Description
Type 7 Image omitted due to copyright regulations	19 th century	South China or Vietnam?	Tall, ovoid vessel with outcurving rim, cylindrical neck, and flat base. There are eight vertical, smooth loop handles with elongated pinched ends attached to the rounded shoulder. Dark brown glaze covers the exterior, the lip and the interior of the neck. Glaze stops 10 cm above the foot. Chocolate brown slip coats the foot. The decoration was carried out by the <i>sgraffito</i> technique. Right below the handles there is a horizontal band of triple wavy lines framed by double horizontal incisions (13 cm wide). The main band of decoration is 26 cm wide and consists of semi-circular stem-motifs with additional floral designs. There is a fairly irregular band of a single wavy line closing the decoration on the bottom framed by double horizontal lines.
Type 8 ¹⁹ 	19 th -20 th century	Borneo	This is a 38 cm tall, small-sized jar. Red slip covers the in- and exterior of the straight rim and the foot of the vessel. Brown glaze coats the entire exterior and stops short above the base. Four horizontally pierced lion-dog bosses are placed on the top of the round shoulder. The colour of clay is buff after firing (visible on the interior), throwing striations are visible on the body. The jar's base was missing in this case, but the vessel was otherwise complete, which perhaps assumes that it was not used as a burial container, but rather to store belongings. The local Kelabit name for such small-sized jars placed in larger vessels' mouth is <i>sorangur</i> .
Type 9 Image omitted due to copyright regulations	Late 19 th - early 20 th century	South China or Kalimantan?	A fairly tall, ovoid vessel type. The jar has an outcurving rim and short but slender neck. Eight horizontal, incised flat loop handles with thumb-pressed ends are attached to the rounded shoulder. The vessel is coated in reddish brown slip on the interior, and covered by a relatively shiny, light orangey brown glaze on the exterior. The glaze covers the upper interior of the rim as well. A groove emphasizes the root of the neck. The decorative elements form four major bands. No. 1: Below the handles there are eight round flower rosettes. No. 2: Underneath the rosettes, parallel clay rolls had been applied horizontally detailed with thumb impressions (cording). Between the two rolls, small round blisters can be observed. No. 3: In the middle of the body, a lotus plant had been placed with several stems growing from the same root tuber. The plant was depicted in different stages of growth, some stems' ends are in flower and some show the rhomboid pods with seeds. The entire motif has been applied on the surface externally, finer details like the leaves were created by incisions. No. 4: Below the main decoration, 25 cm above the base, the parallel clay rolls were repeated. This type is known as <i>kalakian</i> in Kalimantan.



¹⁹ This small-sized jar was recorded as a separate type at the beginning of the classification process. As it later became obvious, small-sized jars were occasionally deposited with or accompanied dragon jars in graveyards, however their use remained/s dominantly domestic. Therefore the type was removed from the database before the statistical analysis of the assemblage commenced.




Jar type	Assumed date	Production locale	Description
Type 10 Image omitted due to copyright regulations	Late 19 th - early 20 th century	Borneo	This vessel type is perhaps a reissue of an earlier form (Harrison 1990 [1986], Pl. 101 a, b). The neck is cylindrical with an almost flaring, outcurving rim. Six masked handles are attached to the angled shoulder; the base is flat. Chocolate brown slip coats the exterior base and the upper part of the interior dripping further down inside the vessel. Light brown glaze covers the exterior and spreads even inside the jar's mouth. Harrison notes that this type is called "Belaney" (belanai?) in Sarawak. The jar exhibits four bands of decoration. No. 1: Between each masked handles a trefoil flower motif is present attached directly to the root of the neck. No. 2: Below the handles in a horizontal band framed by double incised lines, stamp impressed simple flower and tendril patterns are visible. Also in this band a circular and a rectangular shop-mark are present. Unfortunately the marks are too weathered to decipher the characters. No. 3: Attached to the bottom of the frame, eight trefoil flower motifs are repeated. No. 4: Four vertical horned dragons with short body and short limbs form two pairs on the surface. Each pair is facing a flaming pearl floating on a cloud scroll, and a separated cloud scroll beneath. Incised horizontal lines serve as a boundary for the decoration on the bottom. The dragons and the pearls motifs were created by the raised-in-the-mould technique.
Type 11 Image omitted due to copyright regulations	17 th -18 th century	South China	Gracile jar type with funnel neck, outcurving and rectangular (faceted) rim. The vessel wall is thin but the rounded shoulder is relatively wide. At the root of the neck, five or six vertical handles with elongated ends are attached on the round shoulder. Handles are usually embossed with monster masks, or with a central rib applied in the middle. Brown slip covers the ex- and interior of the rim and neck; olive brown glaze coats the exterior below the neck. The glaze forms "scallop" on the neck. No. 1: Below the handles, a horizontal dragon is present (presumably repeated on the other side), flying from left to right. The body is nearly horizontal with a proportionate body and upturned head. The dragon has a short horn and ears, pronounced whiskers and tongue but no beard. Longer spines enhance the tail, and the limbs are well-proportioned with 3-1 claws. The dragon has been applied to the exterior by sprigging. Type 11 could tentatively be identified with the sub-type called <i>bacasan</i> or <i>bazazan</i> .
Type 12 Image omitted due to copyright regulations	17 th -18 th century	South China	So far only one example of this type has been recorded in the highlands. This vessel had an unusual clay fabric: greyish blue colour with occasional small, dark inclusions. The texture is quite light compared to the jars with beige fabric. The rim is outcurving but tapered, the root of the cylindrical neck has been emphasized by a groove. Six striped loop handles with a large flower motif, with round petals. Slip covers the in- and exterior of the mouth; light brown glaze erodes quickly from the surface. As the vessel was heavily fragmented the determination of the decoration was problematic. Presumably a pair of dragons form the main decoration (a dragon's body is visible on a body sherd). The dragon's body was created by the sprigging technique, then the claws were attached (four equally spread claws) and the scales were incised later on. Type 12 could tentatively be identified with the sub-type called <i>tiluan</i> or <i>terawan</i> .




Jar type	Assumed date	Production locale	Description
Type 13 	19 th -20 th century	Borneo	Small jar type, with a short, rolled rim and also a short, bulging neck. Four vertical loop handles with two grooves and thumb-pressed ends were applied on the rounded shoulder. The clay has yellowish beige colour after firing. Brown slip covers and drips on the interior while brown glaze covers the exterior. The jar's top was separated from the base, which suggests a use as a burial container for perhaps a baby or small child. The vessel is a highly utilitarian style, and could perhaps have been in production for several centuries. Small-sized jars like this are termed as <i>angai</i> by the Kelabit.
Type 14 Image omitted due to copyright regulations	19 th century	South China or Borneo?	Tall, ovoid vessel with outcurving rim, cylindrical neck and flat base. There are eight vertical smooth loop handles attached to the rounded shoulder. Chocolate brown glaze cover the exterior, scalloping below the lip. As the clay's colour is red it is difficult to tell whether the interior been coated in a slip. The glaze had been wiped off the foot (5 cm). The decoration was carried out by the incised <i>sgraffito</i> technique. The main panel is 22 cm wide and it is framed by double horizontal incised lines; 9 cm below this frame there are couple of rows of wavy lines separated by horizontal lines. There are a few more horizontal lines visible below. The main panel of decoration consists of some type of floral motif framed by semi-circular stems.
Type 15 Image omitted due to copyright regulations	18 th -19 th century	South China or Vietnam?	Tall, ovoid vessel with slightly outcurving rim, slender neck, and concave base. There are eight vertical loop handles with three grooves and pinched ends attached to the slightly angled shoulder. Dark brown glaze covers the exterior, except the lip and stops 4 cm above the foot. Chocolate brown slip coats the rim and the interior of the neck. The decoration was carried out by the <i>sgraffito</i> technique. The vessel exhibits only one, main decoration pattern (30 cm wide). Six rectangular units (15x20 cm) are represented on the body with Buddhist symbols (variations of a pair of fish, lotus flower, parasol, conch shell, endless knot, wheel, banner and a vase). This band of decoration is framed by horizontal double lines. Known as <i>selapa</i> among the Kelabit.




Jar type	Assumed date	Production locale	Description
Type 16 Image omitted due to copyright regulations	17 th -18 th century	South China	So far only one example of the type has been recorded in the highlands in a funerary context. The clay has a buff, well-sorted texture, and a reddish brown slip covers the exterior of the base. Thin-walled vessel. Six vertical handles were applied to the rounded shoulder. The glaze was light brown, but only present in patches, eroding badly from the surface. Due to the high level of fragmentation it is difficult to establish the decoration style. There is a rouletted floral band running horizontally on the side of the vessel framed by two incised lines. A sprigged, rhomboid flaming pearl is also present on one of the fragments, which is likely to have been framed by a pair of dragons originally.
Type 17 Image omitted due to copyright regulations	16 th -17 th century?	South China?	So far only one example of this type has been recorded in the highlands. The vessel is highly fragmented. The olive brown glaze has mostly eroded, and was only present in patches. No slip was detected. The clay fabric is coarse grey, with medium sized inclusions. Due to the level of fragmentation it is difficult to establish the style of decoration. Parts of a well-pronounced applied dragon with incised scales were present on two vessel fragments.
Type 18 	Unknown	Unknown	Black, globular jar with rolled rim and no neck. The four (?) horizontal lug handles with thumb-pressed ends are attached to the rounded shoulder. The clay has a buff colour after firing. Light brown slip covers the in- and exterior; the dark black shiny glaze on the exterior surface is flaking off. Without decoration. The Kelabit term this small-sized variety as <i>angai</i> .
Type 19			Same as Type 6, see above.




Jar type	Assumed date	Production locale	Description
Type 20 	Unknown	Unknown	Tall and ovoid jar with an outcurving rim, slender neck and flat base. There are eight vertical loop handles with three grooves and thumb-pressed ends attached to the rounded shoulder. The decoration was carried out by using the raised-in-the-mould technique. 10 cm below the handles there are two triangular cloud scrolls placed right above the dragons' bodies. The dragons below fly from the left to the right, with curving bodies, muscular limbs, and open mouths. The head is turning upwards and slightly back to the left. No further decoration present.
Type 21 	19 th - early 20 th century	Vietnam, Guangdong or Sarawak?	Presumably tall, ovoid jar. The rim is outcurving and flattened; the neck is cylindrical. The root of the neck is emphasised by parallel grooving. There are six horizontal loop handles with four grooves and thumb-pressed ends sitting on the rounded shoulder. The base is flat. Reddish brown glaze covers the exterior and stops 7 cm above the foot. Reddish brown slip coats the entire interior, exterior of the lip and base. It is difficult to determine the whole decoration pattern as the vessel is fragmented. No.1: 11 cloud scrolls 5 cm below the handles. No.2: A pair of dragons with bulging eyes and well-formed limbs (both flying from left to right). No. 3: Below the dragons hexagonal flower palettes (6) and column/spur motifs (6) alternate, but they are not aligned. Decoration was carried out by the raised-in-the-mould technique.
Type 22 	17 th -18 th century	South China?	Ovoid vessel with outcurving rim, slender neck and flat base. There are eight vertical loop handles with three/four grooves and pinched ends attached to the rounded shoulder. Light brown glaze covers the exterior and stops 5 cm above the foot. The clay fabric is reddish brown; chocolate brown slip visible on the interior. The decoration is a combination of the <i>sgraffito</i> and the raised-in-the-mould technique. There are four stamped 'baby' dragons in between the handles, in a slightly oblique angle. Below this is a floral motif surrounded by semi-circular stems and framed by double horizontal lines. Under the main panel (25 cm wide) there is a double wavy line also framed by a double horizontal incisions.



Jar type	Assumed date	Production locale	Description
Type 23 	17 th -18 th century	Guangdong?	A version of the big, bulky jar with bulging neck/rim. The rim is created by folding over a sheet of clay and flattening it on the top. In this case the neck is straight. There are six vertical, wide strap handles with and impressed flower motif on each (thumb-pressed ends) attached to the rounded shoulder. The jar presumably had a dark brown glaze (now eroded). The interior is covered with chocolate brown slip. No. 1: rouletted flower motif right below the handles. No. 2: Sprigged dragon motif (flying from right to left) chasing a pearl. Claws and smaller details were all applied. The rest of the decoration is unknown, there is possibly another rouletted band below the dragon. The short neck is emphasised by a groove. This variety is known as <i>monokul</i> locally.
Type 24 Image omitted due to copyright regulations	18 th -19 th century	Guangdong?	The original form is tall and ovoid. There are seven vertical pinched loop handles with three grooves applied onto the slanting shoulder. The exterior surface is smooth except the main panel of applied decoration. The bottom of the jar is buried. Light brown glaze covers the exterior, while reddish brown slip is visible on the interior. There is only one main decoration panel present on the exterior: a blooming peony flower with many stems and smaller flowers. The design was applied to the exterior by stamp-impression.
Type 25 	Unknown	Unknown	Tall, ovoid vessel with rolled rim, slender neck and flat base. There are eight vertical loop handles with three grooves and thumb-pressed ends attached to the rounded shoulder. Reddish brown glaze covers the exterior. The clay fabric is red; chocolate brown slip visible on the interior. There is a pair of raised-in-the-mould dragons applied below the shoulders. The dragons have upturned heads, well-formed limbs and a waving bodies (they fly from the left to the right). There is no other decoration visible, and there are no motifs separating the two dragons.

Jar type	Assumed date	Production locale	Description
Type 26 	Unknown	Unknown	Tall, ovoid vessel with outcurving rim, slender neck and flat base. There are eight vertical smooth, loop handles with thumb-pressed ends attached to the rounded shoulder. Reddish brown glaze covers the exterior, forming scallops right below the lip which it also covers; the glaze stops 4 cm above the foot. The clay fabric is reddish brown; there is no slip visible on the interior. The decoration is a combination of stamp-impressions and the incised <i>sgraffito</i> technique. Between the handles there are four stamp-impressed 'baby' dragons (flying from left to right). The main panel is framed by double horizontal incised lines and consists of a series of vertical floral designs. Below this is a band of triple wavy lines also framed by double horizontal incisions.
Type 27 	Unknown	Unknown	Tall, ovoid vessel with outcurving rim, slender neck and flat base. There are eight vertical loop handles with four-five grooves and pinched ends attached to the rounded shoulder. Light yellowish brown glaze covers the exterior, forming scallops right below the lip, covering it partially. The glaze stops 6 cm above the foot but it drips further down. The clay fabric is red, there is chocolate brown slip visible on the interior and on the lip. The decoration was carried out by the application technique. The main motif consists of two large lizard-like applied dragons flying from the right to the left then turning back to the right again (40 cm long, 22 cm wide). The dragons have well-formed limbs, scales; their mouths are open with the tongue sticking out. They almost meet in the middle. No other decoration is present.
Type 28 	Unknown	Unknown	Tall, ovoid vessel with a rolled, slightly outcurving rim, slender neck and flat base. There are eight vertical smooth loop handles with thumb-pressed ends attached to the slightly slanting shoulder. Light brown glaze covers the exterior, apart from the lip and it stops above the foot. The clay fabric is reddish brown, there is chocolate brown slip visible on the interior and it covers the lip, the interior of the neck and the foot. The decoration was carried out by the raised-in-the-mould technique. There is a groove emphasizing the root of the neck. Right below the handles there are two long dragons flying from the right to the left, their heads turning back to the right. The dragons almost touch in the middle. There are two upside-down cloud scrolls above their heads (6x4 cm). There is a row of twelve similar cloud scrolls – placed the right way up – below the dragon design. The lower 50 cm of the jar surface is left undecorated.

Jar type	Assumed date	Production locale	Description
Type 29 	Unknown	Unknown	Tall, ovoid vessel with outcurving rim, slender neck and flat base. There are eight vertical smooth, loop handles with thumb-pressed ends attached to the slanting shoulder. Light brown glaze covers the exterior, forming scallops right below the lip. The glaze stops 5 cm above the foot but drips towards the bottom. The clay fabric is red, traces of chocolate brown slip visible on the lip and on the foot of the exterior. The decoration was carried out by using the <i>sgraffito</i> technique. The main panel of decoration resembles a version of Type 14. 12 cm below the handles a 20 cm wide sketchy floral motif decorates the middle, framed by double horizontal lines. Below this are two bands of wavy lines alternating with horizontal incisions.
Type 30 	18 th -19 th century	South China?	Tall, ovoid vessel with outcurving rim, slender neck and flat base. There are eight vertical, smooth loop handles with pinched ends attached to the rounded shoulder. Thick, light brown glaze covers the exterior and it stops 11-12 cm above the foot but coats 5 cm of the interior of the neck and the lip as well. Dark chocolate brown slip visible on the lip and on the foot, and perhaps covers the interior. The decoration was carried out by stamp impressions and application. Right below the handles there are two large cloud scrolls (12x9 cm). Under these is a pair of large dragons flying from the left to the right. The dragons have been applied to the surface from the exterior (49x24 cm). There are two cloud scrolls separating the dragons. The dragons have an almost lizard-like appearance with well-defined limbs, scales and other details, and protrude 0.5 cm of the surface – glaze has chipped off in patches on this part. The cloud scrolls are stamp-impressed.
Type 31 	Unknown	Unknown	Tall, ovoid vessel with outcurving rim, short neck and flat base. There are eight vertical, loop handles with four grooves and pinched ends attached to the rounded shoulder. Light reddish brown glaze covers the exterior, and stops 10 cm above the foot. The clay fabric is reddish brown, dark brown slip covers the lip, foot and the interior of the neck. The decoration was carried out by using the raised-in-the-mould technique. 10 cm below the handles is a pair of large 'walking' dragons facing forward with slightly stretched limbs. The dragons fly from the right to the left. There is no other decoration visible on the surface.

Jar type	Assumed date	Production locale	Description
Type 32 	18 th -19 th century	South China? Sarawak?	Tall, ovoid vessel with outcurving, flattened rim, cylindrical neck and flat base. There are eight vertical loop handles with three grooves and pinched ends attached to the slightly angled shoulder. Light brown glaze covers the exterior and it stops 4 cm above the foot. The clay fabric is dark reddish brown, with a chocolate brown slip visible on the lip and foot, and covers the interior of the neck. The decoration is stamp-impressed. There are four rectangular flower rosettes placed 3 cm below the handles. Under these are three stamped (early Ming-style) 'walking' dragons, flying from the right to the left. There is no further decoration visible on the surface.
Type 33 	Unknown	Unknown	Tall, ovoid vessel with outcurving rim, cylindrical neck and flat base. There are eight vertical loop handles with three grooves and thumb-pressed ends attached to the slightly angled shoulder. Light brown glaze covers the exterior and it stops 7 cm above the foot, but coats 3 cm of the interior of the neck. Chocolate brown slip visible on the lip and on the foot, and perhaps covers the interior. The decoration is a combination of the raised-in-the-mould technique and stamp-impressions, producing two main bands of design. No. 1: 3 cm below the handles there are eight triangular flower/cloud scrolls. No. 2: A pair of 'walking' dragons flying from the right to the left, following each other. The head is fierce-looking with an open mouth, teeth visible, big eyes and beard. Front legs are under the body, hind legs are set apart. A hexagonal flower palette are separating the dragons; one of each over and below.
Type 34 	18 th -19 th century	South China? Sarawak?	Smaller ovoid vessel with outcurving, corded rim, cylindrical neck and flat base. There are six vertical loop handles with three grooves and thumb-pressed ends attached to the rounded shoulder. Dark brown glaze covers the exterior and stops 5 cm above the foot but coats 3 cm of the interior of the neck. Reddish brown slip visible on the lip and on the foot, and perhaps covers the interior. The decoration was carried out by stamp-impressions, applied to the exterior. 4 cm below the handles there is a row of seven rounded flower rosettes (4.2 cm) alternating with seven triangular cloud scrolls. 3 cm below this, a twisted cord separates the next band of decoration. 5 cm below the cord there are five tailed cloud scrolls (8 cm) alternate with five round flower rosettes. 6 cm below this another horizontal twisted clay roll closes the panel. The bottom 25 cm of the vessel is undecorated.

Jar type	Assumed date	Production locale	Description
Type 35 	17 th -18 th century	Vietnam?	Short, ovoid vessel with rolled rim, very short neck and flat base. There are four vertical, smooth loop handles with thumb-pressed ends attached to the slightly angled shoulder. Deep dark brown glaze covers the exterior and it stops 5 cm above the foot. Chocolate brown slip visible on the foot, and covers the interior and the lip. Undecorated.
Type 36 	Unknown	Unknown	Tall, ovoid vessel, its neck and rim missing. There are six vertical, smooth loop handles with pinched ends attached to the rounded shoulder. Thick, dark purple glaze covers the exterior and stops 5 cm above the foot. No slip visible. There is a single, large incised dragon on the exterior, flying from left to right. The curves of the body take up most of the surface; the head is detailed with horns and whiskers, and has an open mouth. The motif is framed by double horizontal incised lines on both sides.
Type 37 	20 th century	Sarawak	Short ovoid vessel with outcurving rim, funnel neck with a slight curve and a flat base. There are five vertical, loop handles with four grooves and thumb-pressed ends attached to the rounded shoulder. Chocolate brown glaze covers the exterior, except the lip and stops 1 cm above the base. Brown slip coats the lip and the interior. The decoration was achieved by moulding. The five handles are surrounded by heart shaped incisions. Double horizontal line divides these from a band containing wavy lines and small floral motifs. The main panel – again – is separated by double horizontal incisions. This consists of four oval registers framing a flower in the middle with additional floral details on the sides. This is also closed by double horizontal lines. Below this are four bands of chevron designs. The Kelabit refer to this style as 'kibut', a smaller jar used for storing animal fat.

Jar type	Assumed date	Production locale	Description
Type 38 	(18 th ?) 19 th - early 20 th century	South China? Sarawak?	Ovoid vessel with outcurving rim, cylindrical neck, and flat base. There are eight vertical, smooth loop handles with pinched ends attached to the slightly angled shoulder. Brown glaze covers the exterior, except the lip and stops 10 cm above the foot. Chocolate brown slip coats the rim and the interior of the neck. This is a version of Type 4 and it is also similar to Type 30. Decoration was carried out by using the raised-in-the-mould technique. Right below the handles there is a pair of dragons flying from the left to the right chasing a pearl (flower rosette). The dragons have 'wriggling' bodies, short legs, their mouths are open; the teeth are visible. Their heads are turning upwards and slightly to the left. There is no other decoration present.
Type 39 	Unknown	Unknown	Tall, ovoid vessel with rolled, slightly outcurving rim, slender neck, and flat base. There are eight vertical loop handles with five grooves and thumb-pressed ends attached to the slanting shoulder. Light brown glaze covers the exterior, except the lip and stops 6 cm above the foot. Chocolate brown slip coats the rim and the interior of the neck. The decoration was carried out by the sgraffito technique. 10 cm below the handles there is a horizontal wavy line framed by double horizontal incisions (11 cm wide). Underneath is the main motif consisting of four semi-circular registers containing floral details (25 cm wide). The main motif is separated from the bottom band again by double horizontal incisions. The wavy line motif is repeated on the lower quarter of the exterior (12 cm wide).
Type 40 Image omitted due to copyright regulations	17 th 18 th century	Vietnam? South China?	Tall, ovoid vessel with outcurving rim, short cylindrical neck, and flat base. There are eight vertical loop handles with four grooves and thumb-pressed ends attached to the rounded shoulder. Dark reddish brown glaze covers the exterior, except the lip and stops 2-3 cm above the foot. Chocolate brown slip coats the rim, interior and the foot. Decoration was carried out by using the raised-in-the-mould technique (or application, difficult to tell). No. 1: There are four fairly large cloud scrolls. No. 2: Right below these are two large moulded dragons flying from the right to the left and upwards chasing a flower rosette pearl. The dragons resemble Foo-dogs, with a large head, bushy manes and beards, their mouths wide open and tongues sticking out. The body is short compared to the heads. There are two small cloud motifs separating them. No. 3: There are six rectangular cloud scrolls below the dragons. The additional, smaller motifs are stamp-impressed.

4.3 The archaeological dataset

Between 2007 and 2011, the Cultured Rainforest Project (CRF) of which I was a participating member, investigated long-term and present-day interactions between people and the rainforest in the Kelabit highlands, with the aim to better understand past and present agricultural and hunter-gatherer lifestyles and landscapes. The archaeological strand of the project was focussed on site surveys and the excavation of selected sites, completing the documentation of altogether 152 archaeological features located in the southern Kelabit highlands (Barker *et al.* 2008, 2009; Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2010). Dragon jar cemeteries formed part of this initial survey, which I was able to utilise for my thesis and build upon during my own fieldwork. The CRF project relied heavily on the blanket survey of cultural sites carried out by the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO) in 2005, prior to the first stage of logging in the area (Cluny and Chai 2007). In 2012, within the framework of my own field-research, I visited and recorded further key sites in the southern highlands, complemented with detailed description of cemeteries from the northern highlands. The ITTO's dataset, with additional information collected by anthropologist Sarah Hitchner (2009a-b) served as the basis for my own investigations in the northern Kelabit highlands. Areas on the western and southern fringes of the Kelabit highlands however, had to be omitted from the research framework due to time constraints, furthermore the surrounding areas of Bario, Pa' Berang and most of Pa' Main were also left unvisited because of the lack of guides familiar with the site locations (see Chapter 5, Fig. 5.7).

4.3.1 Archaeological site surveys

All sites included in this thesis were investigated by entirely non-invasive methods (since jars were not fully buried, only stabilised in an upright position). The burial grounds were cleared of vegetation; saplings were cut down, and leaf and occasional uppermost root matting was removed to aid the visibility of the vessel fragments. As described above, a detailed typological description and photographic record was produced of each jar, which was later digitised and entered into the main ceramic database (see Appendix 2 – CD-ROM). Detailed site-plans with measurements and references to nearby landmarks were also completed, along with GPS recordings and overall site-photographs. Altogether, 22 burial sites were recorded: eleven in the southern highlands, nine in the northern highlands, and two in the Pa' Main region, incorporating a total of 177 jars (Table 4.4). As some of these sites were investigated in the past by Tom Harrison, in these cases, the archaeological survey data was later supplemented by the

entries in the Sarawak Museum Accession catalogue. The archaeological surveys were within the remit of the research permit provided by the Sarawak State Planning Unit and in accordance with the 1993 Sarawak Heritage Act.

Sites in the southern Kelabit highlands		Number of jars
1	Menatoh Batu Liban (MBL)	1 (B052)
2	Menatoh Rayeh (MRP)	6 < (B073-B078)
3	Menatoh Pa' Badong (MPB)	18 < (B055-B072)
4	Menatoh Pa' Diit (BDT)	13 (B020-B032)
5	Menatoh Tang Belanai (MTB)	5 (B036-B040)
6	Menatoh Belanai Bangar (MBB)	2 (B079-B080)
7	Menatoh Sembario (MSB)	11< (B041-B051)
8	Menatoh Lidong Kitong (MLK)	Fragments collected by Tom Harrisson
9	Menatoh Payeh Belanai (BYB)	19 (B001-B019)
10	Menatoh Batu Kating (MBK)	2 (B053-B054)
11	Reddish's Rice Field (RRF)	1 (B175)
Sites in the Pa' Main area		Number of jars
12	Menatoh Long Main 1 (MLM1)	2 (B165-B166)
13	Menatoh Long Main 2 (MLM2)	8 (B167-B174)
Sites in the northern Kelabit highlands		Number of jars
14	Menatoh Arur Salad (MAS)	2 < (B034-B035)
15	Menatoh Pa' Dapur (MPD)	27 < (B107-B133)
16	Menatoh Payeh Taratik (MPT)	2 (B088-B089)
17	Menatoh Sekulub (MSK)	6 < (B136-B141)
18	Menatoh Pa' Dara'an (MPR)	2 (B176-B177)
19	Menatoh Bulu Puren (MBP)	7 (B081-B087)
20	Menatoh Long Layan (MLL)	17 (B090-B106)
21	Menatoh Lobangiung (MAR)	23 (B142-B164)
22	Menatoh Pa' Rembaya (MPR)	2 (B134-B135)
		Total: 177

Table 4.4 – Summary table of burial sites surveyed between 2007 and 2012 in the Kelabit highlands.

4.4 The ethnographic dataset and interviews

The ethnographic data collection for this thesis was aimed at exploring a segment of Kelabit material culture, rather than writing a complete corpus of Kelabit ethnography. To collect ethnographic data for the thesis I needed to devise a methodology suitable for conducting short, but high-intensity research in the field since both of these stints coincided with one of the busiest periods of the Kelabit agricultural calendar: rice-planting season. In establishing a design for my ethnography project, I drew upon my experiences as a member of the Cultured Rainforest Project (CRF; 2007-2011). Although I was primarily involved with archaeological site-investigations during the four CRF field-seasons, I also had the opportunity to collect a significant amount of ethnographic data on jars from the southern Kelabit highlands. This data-collection, however, did not follow a certain prescribed or structured methodology, as my main

objective at the time was to identify key informants and to familiarise myself with the broader context of research. This 'pre-fieldwork' preparation was vital for getting my project off the ground; a stage which is now regarded as a standard component of ethnographic fieldwork (Bernard 1998; Watson 1999).

Thus, by the time I embarked on my own fieldwork in 2012-3, I was familiar with the physical and cultural environment of the Kelabit highlands, and aware of the social and religious sensitivities involved with studying dragon jars. My field research was devised to be a principally object-driven enquiry, whereby in many respects, I followed in the footsteps of ethnographies influenced by the 'reflective turn' in anthropology (Rabinow 1977; Faubion 2001). These postmodernist ethnographies were radically different in their approaches from the 'classic' participant observatory studies requiring lengthy stints of cultural immersion (Malinowski 1922; Mead 1928, etc.), or from the scientific positivist approaches dealing with ethnographic 'hard data' (Boas 1961 [1940]; Radcliffe-Brown 1968 [1952], etc.) or the textual interpretive methodologies of hermeneutical anthropologies (Geertz 1975, 1983, etc.). Postmodernist ethnographies placed special emphasis on historical embeddedness, relativistic stances, multivocality (by lending voice to the 'Other' in particular) (Schwiezer 1998) and more importantly, reflexivity (Salzman 2002). Reflexivity has been used in a number of different ways in ethnographic writing (Briggs 1970; Belmonte 1979; Rosaldo 2000 [1989]), aligned with notions of self-analysis, critical subjectivity (Salzman 2002) both during the process of fieldwork and more crucially post-fieldwork; while writing ethnographies (Watson 1999; particularly highlighted by Peter Metcalf's book reflecting on his fieldwork in Borneo: *They Lie, We Lie* – 2002). Reflexivity featured strongly in my interactions with the Kelabit since my (dual) position as an ethnographer and person (age, gender, race, etc.), while it also constructively informed the collaborative process of object-focussed interviews.

4.4.1 Ethnographic interviews

Most scholars agree that cross-cultural knowledge and understanding grow out of prolonged ethnographic encounters, through which shifting social realities can be gleaned (Watson 1999; Salzman 2002). Fieldwork is to enable these encounters, while interviews are devised to provide it a framework. Given the timing of my field research and the nature how the Kelabit longhouse community operates, I anticipated the interviewing process to be hectic, interrupted, and non-linear. Therefore an ethnographic questionnaire was prepared centred on dragon jars, their object histories, local perceptions, expertise and bases of comparison (Appendix 1 – CD-ROM).

Since the interviews themselves were principally exploratory and semi-structured, but often free-flowing, loose conversations, the questionnaire served more as a guide to keep the focus of the interactions and to remind myself of key points I needed my participants to detail. During the interviewing process I followed the combination of Steinar Kvale's 'traveller-style' and 'miner-style' approach (Kvale 1996). Each interview contained 'traveller-style' (i.e. lateral) elements whereby the conversation had its twists and turns further nuancing the subject; and 'miner-style' (i.e. vertical) components, focusing on 'digging up' and distilling crucial pieces of information (Kvale 1996:3-5).

The advantage of the semi-structured interviews was that I could gain meaningful pieces of information on jars even by a brief interaction with an informant (i.e. on his way to his rice-field or in between serving dinner to guests), while the informal structure enabled more intimate conversations with multiple participants. The questionnaire also made it possible for the interviews to be comparable, given their largely overlapping content. The main disadvantages stemmed from the time constraints involved with this type of fieldwork and the briefness of the interviews which frequently resulted in even more questions (and puzzlement) on my part. Moreover, since the lack of lengthy immersion into Kelabit culture, my language skills ranged from minimal to insufficient which in a number of cases made me reliant on interpreters. Although the intricacies of the language were certainly lost, interview-situation which started out between three participants (informant, interpreter and myself), generated a kind of 'pull factor' that given the Kelabit social norms, drawn more people into the conversation with an overall positive effect.

The ethnographic dataset

A total of 29 semi-structured interviews were conducted; 26 in rural longhouse settlements and three in urban homes – transcriptions are referred to by the prefix 'I' in the main text (Table 4.5). In total I had 16 female and 25 male participants, and the interviews also received input from three Kelabit interpreters, a local Sarawakian (Malay was used as the common language) and two Western researchers, who speak Kelabit fluently. The rest of the interviews were conducted in English. The majority of the interview-sessions included more than one informant, partly because 13 cases required the presence of an interpreter (who him/herself played an active role in the conversation providing additional information), and partly because in 18 instances, multiple people happened to be present or were willing to participate in the conversations.

Southern Kelabit highlands: Village names and codes		Number of jars / Jar IDs	Number of interviews
1	Long Peluan village (LPV)	11 (H040-H050)	3
2	Ramudu longhouse (RAL)	1 (H027)	1
3	Pa' Dalih village (PDV)	11 (H028-H038)	3
4	Pa' Mada longhouse (PML)	1 (H039)	2
Northern Kelabit highlands: Village names and codes		Number of jars / Jar IDs	Number of interviews
5	Bario, Reddish's lodge (BRL)	2 (H001-H002)	1
6	Bario Asal longhouse (BAL)	11 (H003-H013)	4
7	Ulung Palang rice hut (UPR)	2 (H014-H015)	1
8	Ngimat Ayu's lodge (NAL)	1 (H016)	1
9	Pa' Umor longhouse (PUL)	3 (H017-H019)	6
10	Pa' Lungan village (PLV)	7 (H020-H026)	4
Town homes		Number of jars / Jar IDs	Number of interviews
11	Miri (MIR)	1 (H051)	1
12	Kuching (KUC)	2 (H052-H053)	2
		Total: 53	Total: 29

Table 4.5 - Summary table of jars recorded in longhouses and town homes, with the number of interviews conducted at each location in 2012-3.

Out of the 41 interviewees, 29 were subsistence rice farmers living permanently in highland longhouses (with the occasional visit to the towns of Marudi or Miri). Nine of my informants were residents of coastal towns, but spend time in their longhouses overseeing work on the buildings and in the rice-fields. Three interviewees were based permanently in towns visiting the highlands only during religious holidays. There was a strong correlation between my informants' age and their residency; subsistence rice farmers tend to be of the older generation (in their 70s and 80s). Growing up during the 1940s-50s, they received only a limited amount of schooling which despite its efforts often left them illiterate. The majority of the younger generation (in their 20s, 30s and 40s) now reside in urban homes. However, there has been a recent movement of (predominantly) men, who took early retirement (in their 50s) from their high-intensity jobs and have returned to live in the Kelabit highlands. These people generally speak excellent English and volunteered multiple times to be my interpreters (five interview sessions).

My ethnographic research project received approval from the Sarawak State Planning Unit, the Sarawak Museum and the Rurum Kelabit,²⁰ along with the School of Archaeology and Ancient History's Ethics Committee. A description of the project's design and aims were provided to the informants along with the participant consent form. However, since a number of my informants were illiterate, and given the brief nature of some of the interviews, there was only an opportunity to obtain verbal consent. Since the formal discrepancies in conduct and because

²⁰ Kelabit indigenous association overseeing local affairs.

the interviews contained sensitive personal information (such as financial issues, health problems, grievances, etc., transcribed along with the main content), I decided not to include the transcripts in the appendix of my thesis, and only refer to information with direct relevance to jars.

Besides the interviews, jars recorded in the context of longhouses and town homes formed the second component of the ethnographic dataset. Altogether 53 jars were documented; 50 vessels recorded in rural villages in the Kelabit highlands, and the remaining three in urban environments. It is worth mentioning here that at least half of the jars are now being stored in not easily accessible places (the display and visibility of jars will be discussed in Chapter 6), however, a number of owners/keepers made an actual effort to bring the object out, granting me the opportunity to observe the physical engagements between the Kelabit and their jars (moving them around, dusting, washing, changing the cord in the loops, etc.) and making it convenient for me to fully examine jars' physical properties (e.g. decoration technique, in-, and exterior, rims, etc.) (Pink 2009), which – as it will be detailed in Chapter 6 – had further significance in local jar-assessment processes.

Chapter 5 Jars for the Dead: Dragon jar cemeteries in the Kelabit highlands

5.1 Introduction

Western ethnography has long been fascinated by Bornean indigenous burial traditions and their spiritual connotations (Ling Roth 1980 [1896]; Hertz 1960 [1907-9]; Hose and McDougall 1966 [1912]; Freeman 1970 [1955]; Metcalf and Huntington 1991, etc.). However, the temporal depth of these practices was not subject to scholarly considerations and has only been investigated tangentially by Tom Harrisson in the Kelabit highlands.²¹ Kelabit megalith-building heritage and the utilisation of these monuments for secondary mortuary purposes assumes a continuity between the deeper past and recent, pre-Christian burial practices. Although the examination of Kelabit megalithic activity lays beyond the scope of this study, to establish a chronological framework for dragon jar depositions and to better understand how this relatively recent tradition fits into the wider physical and spiritual context of the Kelabit landscape, the detailed interrogation of dragon jar cemeteries in relation to stone monuments and prominent landscape features (either anthropogenic or natural) constitutes the primary focus of this chapter. The first section of the chapter summarises and critically evaluates the ethnographic information available on Kelabit primary and secondary burial ceremonies practiced before World War II. The second section presents the core archaeological data: a series of site surveys and the chronological classification of dragon jars, supplemented by indirect archaeological evidence collected by Tom Harrisson, in the form of museum catalogue entries. The third and final section places the archaeological evidence within the broader context of Kelabit commemorative traditions and mortuary rituals documented by British colonial officers and Kelabit ethnographers, while considering the impact of colonialism in the highlands, and on burial practice in particular. Through the chronological and spatial analysis of dragon jar cemeteries, this chapter will highlight the major social transition taking place in the Kelabit highlands at the turn of the last century; a transition which brought about a marked spiritual shift from the 1930s onwards, substantially influencing traditional perceptions of jars to be discussed in Chapter 6 and 7.

²¹ Although the summaries of these investigations were published (1962, 1964), the detailed archaeological reports only survive in Tom Harrisson's notes.

5.2 Kelabit social stratification and its relevancy in burial practices

Kelabit society has long been described – similarly to other Orang Ulu ethnic groups – as having a highly stratified structure (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979; Bala 2002). Although class distinctions were not outwardly vocalised in the same way as the neighbouring Kayan or Kenyah groups (Whittier 1973; Rousseau 1979); social divisions were acknowledged across the whole of society, were fairly rigid and intensely sustained. Social mobility however, was possible by the means of marriage, achievements during conflict or by economic accomplishments. Indigenous Kelabit ethnographers, despite the slight differences in the descriptions provided, all seem to agree that the Kelabit society was divided into four main classes (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979; Bala 2002). The *Lun Merar* (big people) occupied the upper levels of Kelabit social strata and included two sub-groups: the *Lun Paran* (mighty people) and the *Lun Doo'* (good people). The basis of distinction between these two groups lay in the possession of slaves by the *Lun Paran*, indexing the highest social status achievable in the past. However, apart from the ownership of slaves, the *Lun Doo'*'s economic and social wealth differed little from the *Lun Paran*'s; they also possessed a number of valuable objects such as jars, beads, gongs and animals (water buffaloes, pigs and humpback cattle). The *Lun Merar* are generally referred to as the aristocratic class of the Kelabit society from which leaders derived exclusively (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979; Bala 2002). The *Lun Pupa* (half people) ranked below the aristocrats, who were descendants of an interclass marriage between the *Lun Merar* and the *Lun Da'at*. The *Lun Da'at* (bad people) occupied the bottom layers of society, had little possessions, but retained ownership over rice-fields, buffalo pastures and longhouse apartments. The *Demulun* (slaves) were people without possessions, provided for by their owners, and were sometimes of different ethnic background (captives).

Recent historical, social, economic and religious changes, as well as the aspirations of becoming 'modern' greatly blurred the boundaries between social classes (Amster 1998; Chua 2012). However, differences in status – either traditional or newly acquired – still play a key role in how the Kelabit perceive one another. Although indigenous Kelabit anthropologists tend to argue that Christian conversion (and the following Bario Revival in the 1970s) eradicated all traces of past social divisions (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979; Bala 2002), experience shows that leadership roles, scholarly and economic achievements, and marriage arrangements are still being strongly aligned with traditional views on social rank (Amster 1998, 2012). Nevertheless, thick-ethnographies produced over the past thirty years have begun to question whether Kelabit societal structures were as strict as described; drawing attention to social cohesion (Janowski 2003), local agency (Bala 2008), epistemological and social change (Amster 1998,

2009), and ethnic identity (Mashman forthcoming) instead. Undoubtedly, the Kelabit concept of social rank and individual worth has undergone radical changes in the last two hundred years, but it would also be a mistake to assume that the Kelabit existed in a cultural and social vacuum in the past, shielded from the influences of neighbouring groups and the broader outside world. It is also necessary to keep in mind that ethnographic descriptions of pre-World War II societal structures had already been written somewhat retrospectively, by and from the perspective of the Kelabit literati, who themselves were from upper class backgrounds.

Yet, what indigenous Kelabit ethnographers unequivocally state is that lavish secondary burial ceremonies involving memorial feasts and the creation of landmarks were the exclusive privileges of the *Lun Merar*. High social rank was also expressed through the possession of exotic items such as export ceramics, particularly before the late 19th – early 20th century. Since the archaeological evidence at burial sites constitutes predominantly of non-perishable, high-fired stonewares, it is feasible to assume that the available dataset is skewed towards the elite, and represents a fairly small section of the Kelabit society. Thus it is necessary to indicate here, that dragon jars, especially the ones dating to the pre-1900s, index individuals of high social standing, whereas lower classes remain largely under- or unrepresented in cemeteries surveyed by the current project.

5.3 Death of a *Lun Merar*

The funerary arrangements required for an upper class individual were lengthy and complex. As soon as the death of a *Lun Merar* was confirmed, gongs were beaten and messengers (*lawá*) were sent out to inform people in the neighbouring villages. The corpse was dressed in his/her best attire, covered with a woven mat and placed in the *dalam* (families' living quarters and food preparation area). A group of men volunteered to go to the forest in search of suitable timber for the coffin, or if the family possessed (and the deceased reserved him/herself) a jar, then a jar was used as a primary burial container. No-one in the village was allowed to eat or drink, until the men returned with the crudely-shaped coffin, and placed a piece of the coffin-wood next to the body. The group was then required to undergo a cleansing ritual: 'It was believed that the wandering spirits returned to the longhouse [...] if they saw an empty coffin.' (Talla 1979:227-8). This brief ceremony signalled the lifting of restrictions and the commencement of the initial mourning period (Talla 1979:225).

The corpse was kept in the *dalam* from a three (Lian-Saging 1976-7:146) to ten days period (Talla 1979:223), while the coffin was given the finishing touches. Local craftsmen were

commissioned by the family to carve the finer details, which took place in the *tawah* (roofed communal veranda of the longhouse). The craftsmen were paid either in salt, beads or jars, depending on the status of the deceased. Two types of coffins were used by the members of the Kelabit upper class: the *lungun balang* (tiger coffin) was restricted exclusively for (male) descendants of the *balang* (tiger) lineage, whereas a *lungun payeh* (deer coffin) was carved for others of slightly lesser status. The finished coffin then had to re-enter the longhouse: the outer wall of the *dalam* was dismantled and the *lungun* was carried through the gap to be placed in the family's living quarters (Talla 1979:227).

In the next stage, the body was prepared for interment. Valuable beads were tied to the middle finger and the big toe, and a string of long, red straw beads (*ba'o rarwir*) was attached to the wrist. Men were buried with their knives (*iyo*), rattan basket (*uyut*) and a piece of sugar cane, while women had their weeding knife (*balu'ing*), a yam shoot (*abang*) and a locally made pot (*tuning*) placed with them in the coffin (Talla 1979: 224, 231). During my fieldwork in the Upper Kelapang area, my informants remarked that in the past it was custom to ornament the dead with red (a colour strongly associated with the spirit world) and blue beads (a certain type especially reserved for funerary use). The coffin's lid was sealed by using local gum and was secured with rattan strings.

The treatment of the body was similar if a dragon jar was used as a burial container. The jar's mouth was too narrow for a corpse to be admitted through, therefore the top of the vessel had to be removed. Talla mentions that this was done by using a piece of red-hot wire (1979:222, the brief mention of this technique first appears in Harrisson, T. 1962:10). Barbara Harrisson, on the other hand, describes a different method – originally noted by Charles Hose (1966 [1912]:49) the jar was taken down to the river, and while submerged in water, it was hit repeatedly with the blunt edge of a sword along the potter's seam²² (Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]:27). Jars recorded in cemeteries in the Kelabit highlands suggest that vessel tops were removed by a continuous incision aligned with the maximum breadth at the jar's shoulder (equalling approximately the upper quarter of the vessel, and not at the joint), similarly to the practice described by Peter Metcalf among the Berawan (1991:81). The body was then tied up in a foetal position, placed into the jar, and the top was resealed. Similarly to the coffin, the

²² Potters seam refers to the joint created by the attachment of the upper half of the jar onto the lower part of the vessel.

burial jar had to enter the *dalam* through the outer wall (or by dismantling the floorboards).²³ Meanwhile the deceased's prized personal possessions such as his machete (*parang*), shield, spear, pieces of garment, and tobacco container (*tik*) was hung from the outer wall, behind the corpse, coffin, or burial jar. Other valuable items, like heirloom jars and brass gongs were also stood along the wall. According to Talla (1979:224) 'It was said that the spirits of his things would go with him.' If the deceased was a female, her beadcaps and necklaces were put on display (Talla 1979:231-2). After the funeral the display of possessions was dismantled and the belongings bequeathed to the descendants.

On the eleventh day of the mourning, the coffin was ready to be moved to its temporary location. In reference to the primary burial ritual, there are slight discrepancies in the accounts given by local ethnographers. Lian-Saging mentions that the coffin remained in a private corner of the family's *dalam* (1976-7:146). In contrast, Talla describes (1979: 234-5) that a separate, roofed platform (*iyuk lun mate*) was erected for the coffin, which was joined to the *dalam* by a plank-bridge. When the coffin was set down in the hut, a bamboo tube was attached to its base, channelling the liquids directly into the ground as the body decomposed. If the corpse was interred in a jar, the vessel was treated similarly. A plate was hung from the roof and a small fireplace was constructed on the hut's floor. The deceased, until the secondary burial took place, remained a member of the family and part of the longhouse community. Before each meal, a small amount of food was placed on the plate, and every night embers brought to the fireplace; 'It was believed that the spirit of the deceased had not left him and therefore had to be looked after.' (Talla 1979:234). One of my informants remarked that even the dogs that belonged to the (male) individual were sometimes encouraged to huddle around the coffin²⁴ or were tied to the post below and left to die (Amster 2003:270). Perhaps as a vestige of an older tradition (see the brief discussion on the Nulang-arc below) two sites in the Pa' Dalih area (Long Arur Lidung Binatuh and the nearby Lungun Belanai Batuh Kating) are said to be utilised for 'nulang' or drying of the corpse (i.e. in preparation for secondary burial – Hitchner 2009a-b). The description of the practice suggests that directly after the internment of the body, the coffins or jars were removed from the longhouse and taken to the 'nulang' site, where the body was left to decompose, before the secondary burial took place. Both the recorded 'nulang' sites were in close vicinity of the permanent burial grounds.

²³ Irregular entrances and exits of coffins or burial jars stand to symbolise the division between the world of the living and the dead (see, Metcalf 2010:245). Such 'irregularity' retains special significance in recent years' jar-exorcism procedures (see Chapter 7).

²⁴ Hunters while out camping in the rainforest, construct sleeping platforms, under which the dogs are gathered. Their body-heat provides warmth during the cool highland's night.

As soon as the news broke about a *Lun Merar*'s death, a continuous flow of visitors arrived from neighbouring longhouses and from villages far afield. Relatives brought their heirloom jars and a number of pigs with them in anticipation of the burial feast. On the second day of mourning the preparation of *borak* (rice-wine) began. During the whole time the spouse or the closest relative held vigil, and received expressions of condolences. Condolences were conveyed in a form of a free-flowing lament or dirge called *sido*, and were not directed only to close family, but to the entire longhouse community. The end of the eleven-day mourning period was indicated by the primary burial feast, *borak peped* (literally, 'rice-wine drinking feast', marking the end of mourning). Accompanying the Kelabit essential rice-meal (*kuman nuba*), pigs were slaughtered and large amount of *borak* was prepared in jars. Although the majority of restrictions and taboos were lifted with the *borak peped*, the family appointed a member, usually the spouse or the eldest son, to continue with the mourning (*nadtung*) until the secondary burial feast (*borak ate*) took place. Wealthy families employed an elderly member of the community to *nadtung* (literally, 'to be sorrowful') on their behalf. This person was not allowed to laugh, smile or shave and was required to cover his/her head with a white cloth (Talla 1979:232-3). The set of practices surrounding the primary burial ceremony leading up to the *borak ate*' were to represent *continuity*, and were believed to ease the transition of the deceased's soul into the afterlife. This transitional period lasted for a year or two while the family made the necessary arrangements to carry out the secondary burial ritual. This was a considerable economic and social undertaking (some of my informants remarked that their families became destitute as a result – Lian-Saging 1976-7:148) however, the status gained by organising such lavish event provided members of the family with fresh political and social opportunities.

5.4 The secondary burial ceremony: *borak ate*'

The *borak ate*' took place – usually a year or two after the *borak peped* – when the family accumulated enough material wealth to host an *irau* (a broad Kelabit term for 'feast'). The festivities sometimes lasted for weeks as the *borak ate*' included several stages during which a large number of people needed to be fed and housed (Banks 1937; Harrisson 1959a). Although the heirs of the deceased *Lun Merar* were chiefly responsible for providing the lion's share (fundamentally the rice/*borak* for the feast), the secondary burial ceremony was a collaborative affair between several longhouse communities. Similarly to the primary burial ceremony, all the invited families were expected to contribute to the feast: either by labour or by bringing along material goods such as firewood, animals to be slaughtered, jars for brewing rice wine etc. In

return, guests were given gifts in the form of rods of salt (which served as a basic currency in the highlands, cf. Chapter 6 and 7), beads and sometimes even jars.

The first stage of the secondary burial ceremony was dedicated to the commemoration of the late *Lun Merar* individual by etching his memory into the landscape. This was carried out in accordance with family traditions that prescribed the character of the monument (Talla 1979:240-1). Traditionally – as far as Kelabit oral histories stretch back – monuments (*etuu*) could take a variety of shapes such as a *kawang* (a gap cut in the canopy-line, Fig. 5.1), a *nabang* (ditch-cutting, Fig. 5.3), an *abang* (water-channel to create wet-rice fields), a *batu senuped* (standing stone, Fig. 5.2), a *batu narit* (carved stone, Fig. 5.4). The construction of these landmarks was preceded by ceremonies at the site, generally involving animal sacrifice (pig, goat or chicken), divination, and offerings of *borak* to spirits and deities. However, some contradiction exists in local ethnographers' accounts surrounding the construction process itself; Talla remarks that monument-building took place without the participation of the guests (1979:236), whereas Lian-Saging argues that the creation of landmarks was a result of an inter-communal effort, under the primary command of the heirs (1976-7:147). These varying narratives infer that perhaps the coordination and management of such events differed by region or by longhouse community depending on available resources or customs of certain lineages. The localised pattern of monuments appear to corroborate this assumption (Cluny and Chai 2007; Hitchner 2009a-b; Barker *et al.* 2008, 2009; Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2010).

The permanent disposal of the body was performed at the second stage of the burial ceremony. A day or two after the completion of the monument, people gathered in the village in preparation for a buffalo sacrifice. The animal was ritually slaughtered by person of high status who belonged to a different longhouse, while the *dayung* (ritual practitioner or shaman) called upon the spirit of the deceased to peacefully abandon the world of the living. The burial feast commenced in the evening, when the buffalo-meat was cooked and the rice prepared, accompanied by large amounts of *borak*. Late in the morning the following day, a group of strong, mature men removed the coffin or jar from its temporary hut or from the *dalam*. If a jar was used as permanent burial container the bones were taken out, cleaned, then placed back into the vessel or, if the family was well-off, into a new jar. If the deceased was originally from a different longhouse, certain bones, such as the skull, finger and toe bones were taken out and sent back to the cemetery to which his/her lineage belonged²⁵ (Talla 1979:248-9; Batu Bala

²⁵ The Berawan believed that fingers, toes and the skull were the locations of a person's soul, and since both ethnic groups share the tradition of secondary burial, it is possible that the Kelabit held similar beliefs (Metcalf 1991).

2013:274-5). It was tradition for close relatives to try to prevent the coffin leaving the house; people climbed on top or clung onto it amidst loud wails (Talla 1979:247-8; cf. Metcalf 1991:85-93). The party of men led by the *dayung* carried the coffin to the burial ground in the forest. Here the group split up, some men began preparing the grave while others went looking for a large piece of bamboo for the *tukad* (gate). The grave was usually fairly shallow, only deep enough to accommodate (or rather to stabilise) the coffin or the burial jar. Meanwhile, the *tukad* was split in the middle, held apart by a piece of wood and dug into the ground forming a symbolic gateway between the human world and the spirit realm. When the burial container was set in its permanent position, the ritual practitioner called upon the spirits of deceased's relatives, asking them to take his/her soul with them to the spirit world. When the prayer was finished the men stepped through the bamboo gate one by one. The *dayung* was the last to leave the cemetery, knocking out the piece of wood letting the bamboo pole to shut behind. It was believed that the spirits will try to follow the party to the village, unless the gate was closed (Talla 1979:249-50). Pa' Dalih informants described an alternative practice for creating a barrier, whereby the local shaman burnt a piece of resin to generate a smoke-screen. Physical evidence for this custom was recovered from the Pa' Diit cemetery in 2007 (Barker *et al.* 2008:163).

When the group of men returned to the village, they underwent one final but important ceremony; the so-called *ngelua* ('cleansing by blood') ritual. A domesticated pig was slaughtered by the *dayung* and its blood sprinkled on the party of men, then smeared on the rest of the community in order to 'wash away' any harmful spirits (Talla 1979:250).²⁶ The *ngelua* ceremony marked the end of the mourning period; the *nadtung* person was ritually restored into his/her regular daily dealings, and the taboos appending the duration of bereavement were lifted (Talla 1979:250-4; Lian Saging 1976-7:147-8). The *irau* feast carried on for days, revolving around the consumption of copious amount of food and alcohol. Banks' account on witnessing a burial feast, attests to his astonishment by the scale of the event:

'Pretty well unlimited drink is prepared for the "wake" which once attended is enough. Such a ceremony I once saw at Long Lelang at the head of the Akah [River], where less than a hundred adults in two nights and a day finished two buffaloes, innumerable pigs and fowls and thirty-six jars of drink ranging from one to ten gallons and each filled three times.' (1937:430)

²⁶ As it will be explained later, I would suggest the *ngelua* ceremony was to 'counteract' or 'tame' the *lalud* that potentially came in contact with the members of the group, by cleansing them with the blood of a domesticated pig (i.e. 'tamed liquid *lalud*').

Highly competitive games such as wrestling, weight-lifting also featured strongly during the festivities along with singing and dancing and the loud display of hunted enemy heads. Secondary burial feasts, beyond the fanfare of material wealth and leadership skills, provided a platform for other social opportunities such as the strengthening of group cohesion, arranging marriages, settling debts etc. A lesser-explored consequence of the *borak ate* was the organisation of headhunting expeditions, taking place directly after the secondary burial ceremony. This aspect of the Kelabit culture is almost completely ‘forgotten’ as a result of Christian conversion, despite that in the past headhunting raids were significant elements of the Kelabit ritual calendar (Hoskins 1996; Amster 2016). Headhunting in the highlands was practised to a fairly low degree (at least compared to the Iban in the lowlands), nonetheless the obtainment of a head was essential in placating the soul of an accomplished leader, and served as necessary paraphernalia for child-initiation rituals (Amster 2016).

The secondary burial rites practiced in the Kelabit highlands fit into a broader scheme of funerary traditions characteristic to central and north Borneo, coined as the ‘Nulang Arc’ (Metcalf 1976a, 2010). The phenomenon of the Nulang Arc is defined by an unusually precise correspondence between the Apo Duat ²⁷ and the Rejang-Baram ²⁸ linguistic groups, and the *nulang* or secondary burial tradition (Hudson 1974; Metcalf 1976a). The peoples of Borneo practicing secondary treatment distributed in a broad arc from the Kelabit highlands, through the Trusan and Limbang watershed, across the lower Baram region, and south along the coast to the mouth of the Rejang – centring around the plateau of the Usun Apau (the homeland of the Berawan), which Metcalf hypothesises to have been the hub of dispersal sometime in the distant past (1976a:97-103; see Fig. 6.1)

²⁷ Apo Duat linguistic group consists of the *Kelabitic* (Kelabit) and the *Sesayap-Trusan* (Lun Dayeh, Lun Bawang, Tabun, Tring, Sa’ban) subgroups.

²⁸ The Rejang-Baram linguistic group includes the *Baram-Tinjar* (Lelak, Dali’, Narom, Miri Belait, Long Kiput, Tutong, Berawan), *Rejang-Bintulu* (Bintulu, Lahanan, Kejaman, Sekapan, Bukitani, Ukit, Sru), *Lower Rejang* (Melanau, Kanowit, Tanjong), *Rejang-Sajau* (Punan Bah) subgroups.

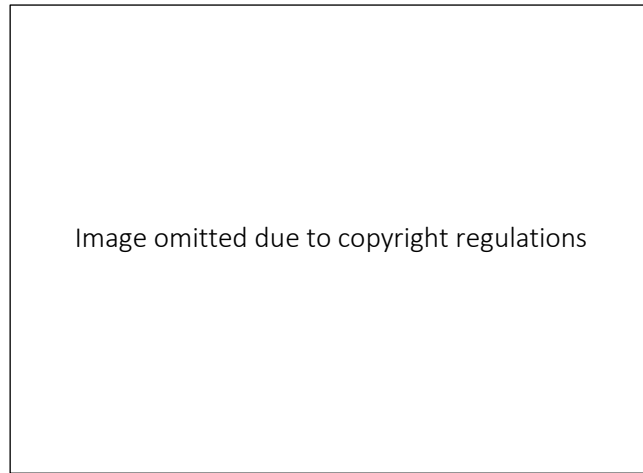


Figure 5.1 - Kawang (gap in a canopy line) cut in the Tamabo range west of the Bario longhouse. Image source: courtesy of the Sarawak Museum Photography Archive.

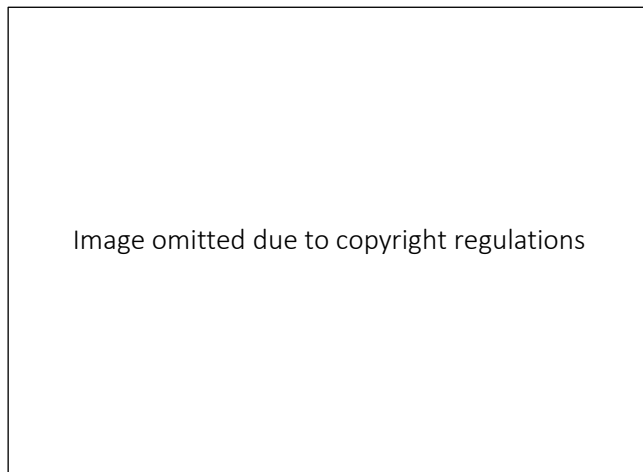


Figure 5.2 - Anyi Pirak (Telutu Ulun) from Pa' Bangar posing with a standing stone at the Menatoh Sembario site. Image source: courtesy of the Sarawak Museum Photography Archive.

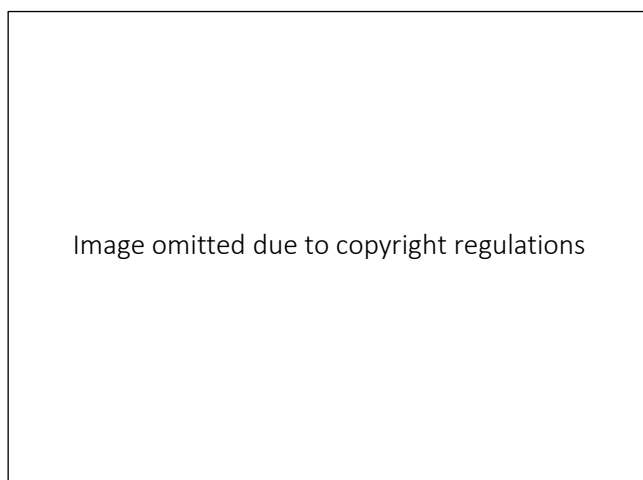


Figure 5.3 - Kelabit man standing in a freshly cut nabang somewhere in the northern Kelabit highlands. Image source: courtesy of the Sarawak Museum Photography Archive.

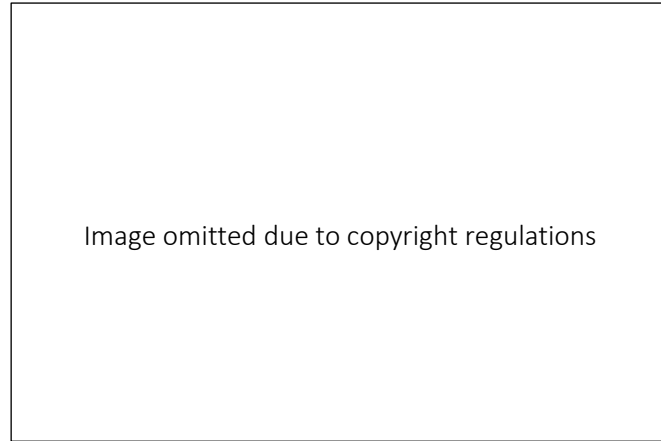


Figure 5.4 - Carved stone with a human figure depicted in a characteristic 'spread-eagle' pose near Pa' Mada. Image source: courtesy of the Sarawak Museum Photography Archive.

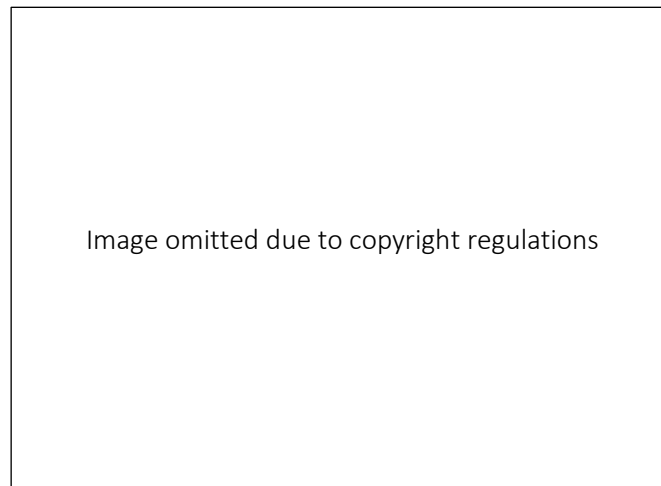


Figure 5.5 - The slab-structure called Batu Ritong near the village of Pa' Lungan in the northern highlands. Image source: courtesy of the Sarawak Museum Photography Archive.

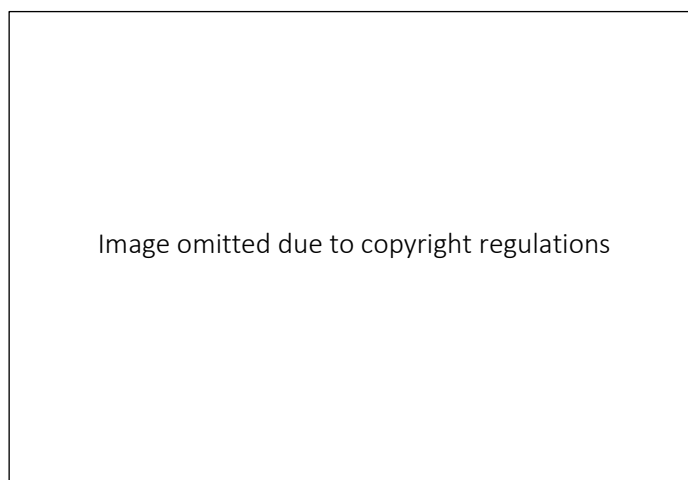


Figure 5.6 - Tom Harrison's cat in a batu nawi (stone jar) at the site of Menatoh Arur Tara in the southern highlands. Image source: courtesy of the Sarawak Museum Photography Archive.

5.5 Burial grounds and their location in the Kelabit landscape

In order to understand why certain locations were preferred over others for burial depositions, a few words need to be spared on how the Kelabit perceived their physical and spiritual environment around them in the past. Contemporary narratives assert that the Kelabit cosmos was imagined as a series of alternative universes amalgamated by an omnipresent life-force; *lalud*. *Lalud* was thought to flow through the human world, saturating the realms of the ‘wild’ deeper than domestic spheres. *Lalud* could materialise in the form of waterways (*pa’* – was considered as ‘liquid’ *lalud*) or as stones (*batu* – ‘solidified’ *lalud*) (Janowski 2012; Janowski and Barton 2012). Ridges and mountain-tops were also conceived as places where *lalud* accumulated (Amster 2009; Janowski 2012). The concentration of *lalud* made boundaries between the physical world and the spirit realm permeable; *lalud* manifested in objects and could be manipulated by people.

In Kelabit cosmology the spirit-world formed a kind of parallel animated reality, inhabited by an array of spirits (*ada’*) and supreme beings (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979; Janowski 2012). This was also the realm where human souls transitioned after death. As described above, the Kelabit considered death not as an event but rather a transition. The life-force of a human being did not diminish with death, but gradually transformed. It was believed that following the permanent deposition of the body, the deceased joined the realm of the spirits where accomplished, high-ranking leaders transformed into ancestors (cf. Metcalf 1991; Couderc and Sillander 2012). In order to facilitate this transition, certain landscape features or geological formations where *lalud* was believed to ‘pool’ were repeatedly selected both for landscape modifications and for the placement of the dead. While Kelabit communities cyclically moved, merged, split and rebuilt their longhouses within a certain catchment area (*bawang*), cemeteries were permanent fixtures on the inhabited landscape. Rock-outcrops (*batu*), confluences of waterways (*long*), mountain ridge-passes (*ra’an*) were utilised regularly for burial depositions, indexing the spiritual significance of these spots that were also perceived as permanent ties between people and places in the ever-fluid Kelabit cosmos.

Prior to examining the archaeological dataset itself, a few words need to be spared on the megalithic monuments prevalent and so unique to the Kelabit highlands. Some of these structures register in local oral histories as landmarks linked to *Lun Merar* secondary burial ceremonies (*batu senuped* – standing stones, *batu narit* – carved stones, and sometimes the construction of new rice-fields). Whereas other monuments, while absent from cultural memory, appear to be components of the imagined mythical past. These landmarks were

locally known as *perupun* (mounds constructed of river-rolled cobbles), *batu nawi* (stone vats) and *batu nangan* (stone slab structures). The creation of these monuments are generally ascribed to mythical heroes, demigods or ancestors during the mythical age referred to as *getoman lalud* (literally 'joining with power') when human beings were believed to have far superior abilities compared to what people possess at the present day (Janowski 2003; 2012).

The first extensive account on the megalithic monuments scattered across the Kelabit plateau was penned by Edward Banks, who carried out a series of visits to the highlands as the curator of the Sarawak Museum in the 1930s. Banks was not the first colonial officer to brave the journey to the interior, but a pioneer in providing a detailed description of the monuments and critically evaluate previous hypotheses. Reflecting on his 1937 field-trip, Banks corroborates Douglas' previous remarks (1912) about the unique and still ongoing megalith-building culture of the Kelabit and dismisses Ernesto Andreini's (1921) rather bizarre claims about the Chinese or Mongol origins of the practice (1937:422). He even 'excavated' a stone slab at the Punga Pawan pass between Bario and Pa' Tik, collecting a group of artefacts related to a 'Chinese menhir', although it is not clear where these objects were exactly recovered from (Ewart 2009). Banks also notes the association between *nabangs*, *kawangas*, *batu senuped* and burial jars (*belanai*) as local means of commemoration (1937:415-6), and more importantly draws attention to a different kind of monument; a stone vat:

'The urn was now empty but the Pa Mudoh [Ramudu] Kelabits freely admitted that they were formerly used as a receptacle for the deceased's bones at the time when jars were rare and unobtainable, the urn being presumably fashioned by themselves though they have long given it up now jars are comparatively easily obtained.' (1937:416).

This description of a megalithic structure makes two crucial points: a) stone vats were linked to burials; b) despite their alleged mythical origins, stone vats were utilised for mortuary purposes; a practice which found a new medium in stoneware jars and continued right through the time of observation.

Following Banks's expeditions about a decade later, megaliths were further investigated by Tom Harrisson, who visited the highlands first as a military officer during and directly after World War II, and later in 1959 and 1961/2 as the curator of the Sarawak Museum. Harrisson had an abiding interest in megalithic architecture and developed a strong personal connection with the Kelabit during and after the war. Harrisson has often been depicted as the epitome of a selfish,

colonial treasure-hunter (Talla 1979; Hitchner 2009a) due to his close but controversial relationship with the Kelabit, nevertheless, from a disciplinary point of view his excavations conducted all over the highlands were well-documented even by today's standards, and the finds unearthed were accurately catalogued in the Sarawak Museum's inventory (Accession nos: 3568-4240). These archaeological assemblages testify that megalithic sites were indeed used for burial purposes and that they continued to be utilised as such, given the presence of later funerary depositions like dragon jars at these locations.

5.5.1 Case-study areas and dragon jar cemeteries

In the second half of this chapter I examine permanent burial grounds from an archaeological perspective in order to establish a chronology stretching back into a deeper past, which lays beyond the boundaries of the Kelabit cultural memory. By contrasting traces of 'earlier' practices with the 'reconstructed' traditions of the pre-WWII period, my goal is to identify and pinpoint the manifestation of social change projected against the background of precolonial, colonial and postcolonial history of the region. The discussion of the dragon jar dataset pursues the archaeologically and ethnographically informed approach established by Banks and Harrison nearly fifty years prior to this study. The examination of burial sites and related material is carried out on two levels. First, cemeteries are divided into three main clusters based on their geographical locations in order to outline regional patterns of deposition practices and to assess the presence or absence of certain jar types. Second, dragon jar cemeteries are analysed in the broader context of the Kelabit physical and spiritual landscape, with emphasis on their proximity to landmarks. For this 'relational' or 'contextual' approach, sites were classified according to their components:

1. Multi-component cemeteries sites which included dragon jar burials in association with anthropogenic or geological landmarks, landscape modifications or megalithic structures, and
2. Single-component cemetery sites which consisted exclusively of dragon jar depositions.

The Cultured Rainforest Project (CRF, 2007-2011) and the subsequent dragon jar cemetery survey (2012) focussed on two case-study areas: the southern and the northern Kelabit highlands, documenting altogether twenty-one jar burial sites in the entire highland region, plus archive research identified a megalithic site which probably was also utilised as a dragon jar burial site in the past (for detailed description of sites and archaeological material, see Table 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and Appendix 1). Some of these locations were visited briefly by the International

Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO) in 2005-7 ahead of logging (Cluny and Chai 2007) and by anthropologist Sarah Hitchner in 2006-8 (2009a-b), providing GPS coordinates and basic descriptions. However, due to the different focus of these inquiries, the site descriptions often lack details of contextual characterisation. Within the framework of the CRF and dragon jar survey project, eleven cemetery sites were documented in the southern, and nine sites in the northern highlands. Out of the ten dragon jar cemeteries recorded in the southern Kelabit highlands, eight were classified as multi-component sites: *Menatoh Batu Liban*, *Menatoh Pa' Badong*, *Menato Pa' Diit*, *Menatoh Tang Belanai*, *Menatoh Belanai Bangar*, *Menatoh Sembario* and *Menatoh Rayeh Pa' Bangar*. *Menato Payeh Belanai* represented the only clear example of a single component burial ground in the southern Kelabit highlands, whereas the categorisation of *Menatoh Batu Kating* remains ambiguous due to its highly diffuse state. An additional site, *Menatoh Lidong Kitong*, was identified during archival research (Table 5.1 and Fig. 5.7).

The burial grounds surveyed in *Pa' Main area* are treated separately in this study. The territories around Pa' Main currently form a kind of 'in-between area' between the northern and the southern highlands. The low number of sites surveyed here does not provide an accurate representation for dragon jar cemeteries of this sub-region. However, the sample of recorded ten jars proved to be *typologically* comparative with the northern and southern regions. The ITTO surveyed a further three sites in the Pa' Main area: *Benatuh Long Buko* (multiple jars), *Benatuh Buduk Batu* (multiple jars), and *Benatuh Ra'an Berungan* (no data), and another two at the boundaries between Pa' Main and Pa' Umor: *Benatuh Dutur Isep* (single jar) and *Kura Benatuh* (multiple jars) (Cluny and Chai 2007) – due to time-constraints and the lack of guides however, I was unable to visit these locations. The number and distribution of cemetery sites show similarities with other parts of the highlands, which is not surprising given the intense habitation of the area before the Confrontation (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979) (Table 5.2 and Fig. 5.7).

The territories of northern Kelabit highlands extends over a slightly larger but less densely populated area compared to the southern regions. Pa' Lungan marks the northernmost point in the distribution of landmarks and cemeteries the Kelabit associate with, territories further north from here are settled by the Lun Bawang ethnic group. Pa' Umor shares its southern boundaries with Pa' Main, whereas Pa' Ukat neighbours the extensive *bawang* of Bario on the southwest. Complementing the survey carried out by the Cultured Rainforest Project (2007-2011), another nine dragon jar cemetery sites in the northern highland area were documented by the current study in 2012. Five of these were classified as multi-component sites: *Menatoh*

Arur Salad, Menatoh Pa' Dapur, Menatoh Payeh Taratik, Menatoh Sekulub and Menatoh Pa' Dara'an. In contrast to the southern areas, four of these graveyards were single component sites: *Menatoh Bulu Puren*, *Menatoh Long Layan*, *Menatoh Pa' Rembaya* and *Menatoh Arur Lobangiung* (Table 5.3 and Fig. 5.7).

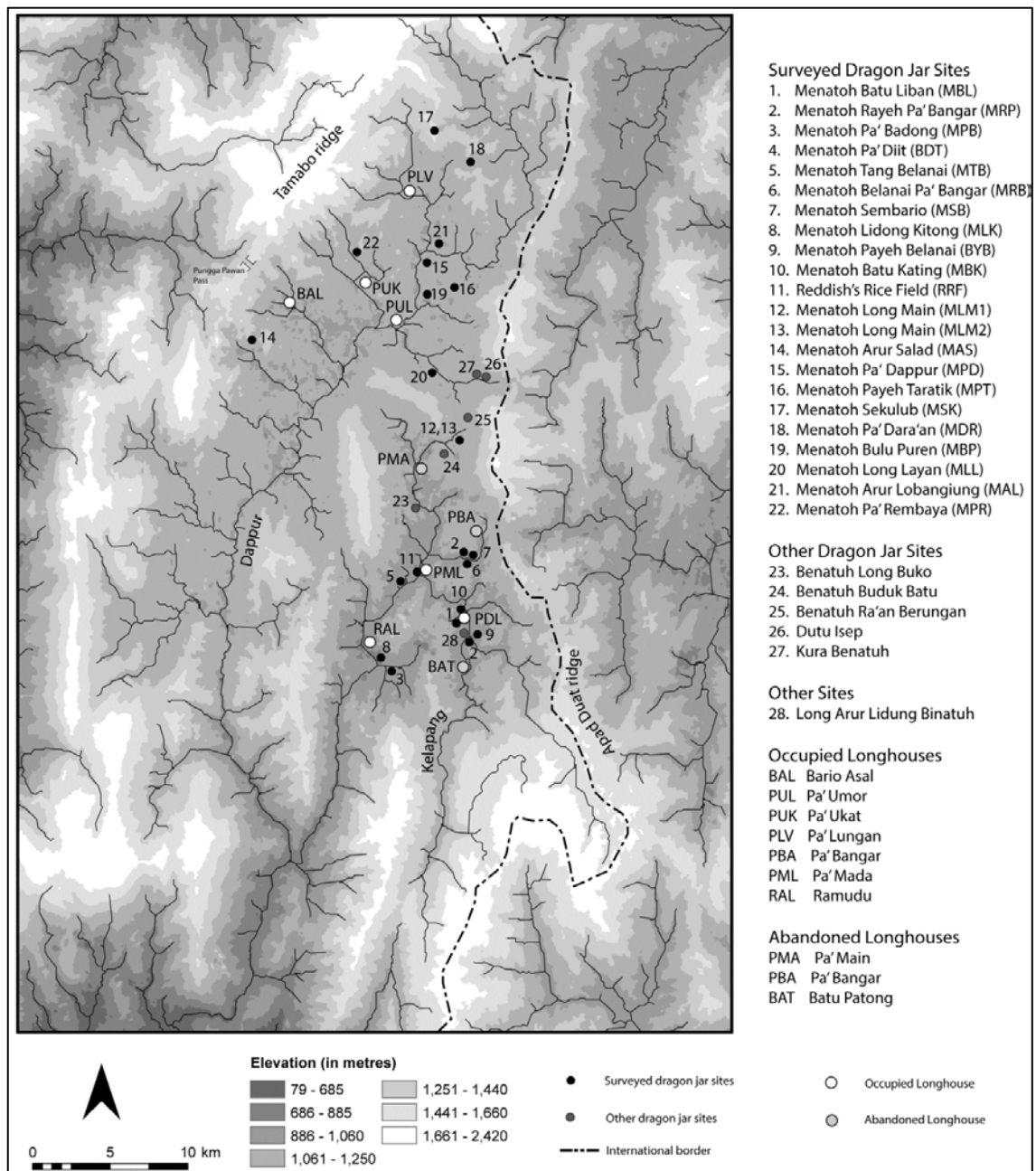


Figure 5.7 – Map of dragon jar cemeteries across the Kelabit highlands. Illustration: L. Farr and L. Lloyd-Smith.

No. in Fig. 5.7	Sites in the southern Kelabit highlands	Dragon jars	Components	Brief description of the site and archaeological material
1	Menatoh Batu Liban (MBL)	1 (B052)	Multi-component site: Rock-outcrop, 3 rock-cut niches, 2 <i>batu senupeds</i> , 1 <i>batu nangan</i> , 1 jar	The site is located in the outskirts of the village of Pa' Dalih and represents a unique case in the highlands as a whole. The site's main component is a large sandstone rock-outcrop, into which three niches were carved (Fig. 5.8). The middle, most prominent shelf contained an assemblage of earthenware pots, a broad variety of tradeware vessels of (celadons, stonewares and porcelains) and a broken, but otherwise complete dragon jar which dates tentatively to the 18 th -19 th century (B052). At the foot of the rock-outcrop a single horizontal slab forms a platform, accompanied by two <i>batu senupeds</i> (standing stones). A short distance away lies a now collapsed <i>batu nangan</i> (slab-structure) locally addressed as Batu Kerayan.
2	Menatoh Rayeh (MRP)	6 < (B073-B078)	Multi-component site: Rock-outcrop, more than 6 jars	The site is located in the vicinity of Pa' Bangar. Over 20 jars were packed tightly together under the outcrop's overhang (Fig. 5.9). Two jars were still in a standing upright (B073-74), and another four jars were identifiable among the heap of ceramic fragments (B075-B078). Altogether six jars were in a suitable enough condition to be classified, four of these dated to the 19 th -20 th century, and one probably to the 19 th century. A dark-glazed, squat jar is without analogue, thus could not be assigned to a time period. Smaller stoneware bowls and earthenware vessels (<i>tunings</i>) were also mixed in with the jars which infer the presence of either offerings or wooden coffins at the site. The majority of stonewares could be identified as Swatow export wares (with a possible Vietnamese export piece) dating approximately to the early-mid 17 th century (Fig. 5.10). In the deepest fissure of the outcrop, human long bones and cranial fragments were documented.
3	Menatoh Pa' Badong (MPB)	18 < (B055-B072)	Multi-component site: Site 1: 16 <i>batu nawis</i> Site 2: <i>batu nangan</i> made of 6 cists, <i>perupun</i> , 9 <i>batu nawis</i> , more than 18 jars	A large site located about two hours walk from the village of Ramudu. There are in fact two discrete site clusters at the location: the first site is dominated by a group of 16 <i>batu nawis</i> (stone vats), one of them carved with a human figure; the second site is situated 50 meters north of the stone jars, including a so far unique <i>batu nangan</i> (slab-structure) made up of two parallel rows of six cists which appear to be erected on top of a <i>perupun</i> (stone mound), surrounded by nine <i>batu nawi</i> (stone vats) and 18 dragon jars (B055-B072). Human remains were still present among the slabs at the time of the survey. Dragon jars were placed either in clusters or individually between and around the slabs. Seven out of 18 jars were too fragmented to be assigned to any chronological period. One highly fragmented vessel can be identified as perhaps the earliest jar in the region dating tentatively to 16 th -17 th century (B061). Two jars date to the 17 th -18 th century, another to the 18 th -19 th century, whereas one is still without analogues. Six jars were most probably produced during the 19 th -20 th century, out of which three belonged to the same type.

Table 5.1 - Summary table of dragon jar cemetery sites (including their components and brief description) recorded in the southern Kelabit highlands between 2007 and 2012.

No. in Fig. 5.7	Sites in the southern Kelabit highlands	Dragon jars	Components	Brief description of the site and archaeological material
4	Menatoh Pa' Diit (BDT)	13 (B020-B032)	Multi-component site: Site 1: 14 <i>batu nawis</i> , 7 <i>batu nangans</i> Site 2: 13 jars	The site is located on a low river terrace, near the village of Pa' Dalih, with two distinct areas for burial depositions. The first site is a combination of 14 <i>batu nawis</i> (stone vats) and seven <i>batu nangans</i> (slab structures) (Fig. 5.11); whereas the second site, which is situated 60 meters to the SE, consists of 13 dragon jars exclusively (B020-B032). The jars were placed in loose clusters, aligned in an approximately E-W direction parallel to the Kelapang River. The burials represented potentially seven different jar types, ranging from 17-18th century to the 19-20th century, with a significant later component (<i>circa</i> 10 out of 13) dating to a fairly recent period. One jar contained human remains which underscores the relative late deposition of some of the burials.
5	Menatoh Tang Belanai (MTB)	5 (B036-B040)	Multi-component site: 6 <i>nabangs</i> , 2 <i>batu senupeds</i> , 5 jars	The site is located on a high riverbank, overlooking the Kelapang River, near the village of Pa' Mada. The site is a combination of six <i>nabangs</i> (ditch-cuttings), two <i>batu senupeds</i> (standing stones) and five dragon jars arranged in a cluster at the foot of adjoining low ridges. The jars are clearly associated with one of the standing stones, forming a loose group around it (B036-B040). Two of the jars were too fragmented to be securely classified, whereas each of the remaining three vessels belonged to a different type. Nevertheless, the jars all date consistently to the 17 th -18 th centuries, suggesting either the greater antiquity of the site or the conscious burial of people in old, valuable jars. A jar-top (B175) that has been recently removed from the site by Reddish Aran from Pa' Mada and re-deposited near to his rice hut in the village (RRF) is consistent both in dating and style with the rest of the assemblage (the site is treated separately both in the database and the catalogue, but it is considered part of Menatoh Tang Belanai in the discussion).
6	Menatoh Belanai Bangar (MBB)	2 (B079-B080)	Multi-component site: rock-outcrop, 2 <i>batu senupeds</i> , 2 jars	A small site located at the edge of a wide ridge running approximately in N-S direction, near the Pa' Bangar river. On the open ground there were two discrete scatters of jar fragments (B079-B080) and a Chinese blue-and-white tradeware bowl documented, at a fairly close proximity with an intact and a fallen <i>batu senuped</i> (standing stone). The vessels were in a highly fragmented and eroded state, however the design suggest a date of around 17 th -18 th century which also corresponds with the classification of the Zhangzhou style tradeware bowl.

Table 5.1 – Cont. Summary table of dragon jar cemetery sites (including their components and brief description) recorded in the southern Kelabit highlands between 2007 and 2012.

No. in Fig. 5.7	Sites in the southern Kelabit highlands	Dragon jars	Components	Brief description of the site and archaeological material
7	Menatoh Sembario (MSB)	11< (B041-B051)	Multi-component site: Natural dip modified into a <i>nabang</i> , 7 <i>batu senupeds</i> , over 11 jars	The site is located near the abandoned longhouse of Pa' Bangar, and it is comprised of three different archaeological features: a <i>nabang</i> (ditch-cutting), seven <i>batu senuped</i> (standing stones) and <i>belanai</i> dragon jars (Fig. 5.12). A collection of jars and standing stones distribute in the dip formed between the two ridges. The ridge on the east was modified into a large <i>nabang</i> . In total 11 jars were documented (B041-B051), forming loose clusters between the two low ridges. The centre of the cemetery appears to be <i>circa</i> five meters SW from the ditch entrance, where four jars were placed next to the standing stones. Three jars were set further away to the SW, whereas a cluster of three had been dug into the side of the ditch-cutting. Four jars out of the eleven vessels belonged to a late Ming variety dating to the 17 th -18 th century, while five vessels classified to a fairly recent, 19 th -20 th century period. Tom Harrisson visited the site in 1947 and collected a variety of ceramic fragments and brass bells. His finds descriptions imply an early, 17 th -18 th century classification for the ceramic sherds suggesting that the cemetery contained an approximately equal amount of ancient and recent jars.
8	Menatoh Lidong Kitong (MLK)	Collected fragments	Multi-component site: rock-outcrop, 4 <i>batu nangans</i>	Rock-outcrop located on a terrace formed by the Kelapang River near the village of Ramudu. On the top of the outcrop, four stone slab constructions were documented. Human skeletal remains (femurs and crania) were still visible under the structures, accompanied by a number of small tradeware vessels, although there were no remains of dragon jars present at the site. Another slab-structure was documented a few meters away, but with no trace of recent inhumations. Lidong Kitong was visited by Tom Harrisson in 1947, who collected a variety of artefacts including ceramic fragments and beads from the slab-graves on the top of the outcrop (Sarawak Museum Accession list nos: 'Batu Raye Binatu Ledang Kidong' 4083-4118). His object descriptions put the site into a significant new light as they account for at least five fragments of 'large jars' one specifically labelled as a 'piece of Terawan type dragon jar', which indicates that Lidong Kitong was indeed a location for jar depositions in the past. This, although indirect, archaeological evidence along with the morphological similarities between the three sites places Lidong Kitong on par with Batu Liban and Menatoh Rayeh Pa' Bangar in the southern highland region.

Table 5.1 – Cont. Summary table of dragon jar cemetery sites (including their components and brief description) recorded in the southern Kelabit highlands between 2007 and 2012.

No. in Fig. 5.7	Sites in the southern Kelabit highlands	Dragon jars	Components	Brief description of the site and archaeological material
9	Menatoh Payeh Belanai (BYB)	19 (B001-B019)	Single component site: 19 jars	The site is a single component burial ground, located near the village of Pa' Dalih. The site is on a low rise promontory bordered by a small stream on the south and east. The cemetery consists of 19 jars (B001-B019) placed in loose clusters of 2-3 (B001-3) aligned in SE-NW direction (Fig. 5.13). One jar was recorded a few meters away to the NW (B018), another on the slope (B019) towards the stream. There were two jars (B011 and B013) still standing. The lone jar to the NW (B018) and a jar in the middle of the row (B009) represent different types, whereas the rest of the jars belonged to Type 1, dating to a fairly recent period, around the 19 th -20 th century. B009 is the only multi-coloured burial jar recorded in the entire Kelabit highlands. Moreover, Tom Harrisson collected a 'blue medting piece' from this site in 1948, further supporting the later character of the cemetery.
10	Menatoh Batu Kating (MBK)	2 (B053-B054)	Ambiguous site: 2 jars (rock-outcrop? and a <i>nabang</i>)	The site is represented by a single remaining burial in the village of Pa' Dalih. The site is located on a low hilltop overlooking the Kelapang River, with a small <i>nabang</i> (ditch-cutting) leading to it from the north. The promontory itself is a rock-formation, cut by the river resulting in almost vertical river bank – a fairly unusual landscape feature in the highlands. A little further north the river widens into a pool (<i>rabruh</i>), believed to be inhabited by a powerful water-spirit. In the past the dragon jar cemetery stretched over the entire hilltop, forming part of a promontory that now collapsed into the river. According to oral histories the one remaining burial represented the southernmost tip of the cemetery. The jar is fragmented and has been 'put together' by using two different vessels (a bottom and a top part) (B053-B054). Both vessels belong to the same type and date around the 19 th century. The site is also known to be used as a <i>nulang</i> , or a 'drying place' for corpses before secondary interment.
11	Reddish's Rice Field (RRF)	1 (B175)	N/A	See the entry for Menatoh Tang Belanai above.

Table 5.1 – Cont. Summary table of dragon jar cemetery sites (including their components and brief description) recorded in the southern Kelabit highlands between 2007 and 2012.

No. in Fig. 5.7	Sites in the Pa' Main area	Dragon jars	Components	Brief description of the site and archaeological material
12	Menatoh Long Main 1 (MLM1)	2 (B165-B166)	Multi-component site: <i>Nabang</i> and 2 jars	The site is located at the joining of two ridges overlooking the Main River to the east. This natural depression was later shaped into a ten meter long <i>nabang</i> (ditch-cutting) in the bottom of which the two jars and a small stoneware vessel were placed (B165-B166). Another <i>nabang</i> was documented about 30-40 meters to the north. The jars belong to two different types, one of them dates to the 18 th -19 th century, whereas the other to the 19 th -20 th century. The proximity of the vessels suggests contemporaneous deposition, or deposition in close succession one after the other, sometime around the late 19 th early 20 th century.
13	Menatoh Long Main 2 (MLM2)	8 (B167-B174)	Single component site: 8 jars	The site is a single component burial ground located on the gentle SW sloping foot of a ridge running along the Main River, approximately a 100 meters SW from Menatoh Long Main 1. The burial site contains eight dragon jar depositions (B167-B174) set in a loose cluster, aligned approximately NW-SE. Five jars belonged to the same, Type 1, dating to either the 19 th to 20 th century. The remaining three jars each represent a different style. One of these vessels dated to the 17 th -18 th century, one to the 19 th century, and one to the 19 th -20 th century. The overall character of the cemetery suggests a fairly recent deposition.

Table 5.2 - Summary table of dragon jar cemetery sites (including their components and brief description) recorded in the Pa' Main area of the Kelabit highlands in 2012.

No. in Fig. 5.7	Sites in the northern Kelabit highlands	Dragon jars	Components	Brief description of the site and archaeological material
14	Menatoh Arur Salad (MAS)	2 < (B034-B035)	Multi-component site: rock-outcrop and 2 jars	The site is located on the western bank of a disused wet rice field, across from the longhouse of Pa' Derung. The site comprises a large rock-outcrop of boulders, with crevices between and under the rocks. Dragon jar fragments were found at the base of the southern façade of the outcrop and were visible in the crevices. Two dragon jars (B034-B035) and a small earthenware vessel (<i>tuning</i>) were documented at the site. The two vessels, although they belonged to different styles, both date to the 19 th -20 th century. There were no human remains detected among the ceramic fragments, and according to locals some jars have been recently removed from the burial ground which implies perhaps a larger number of depositions than what is now present at the site.
15	Menatoh Pa' Dapur (MPD)	27 < (B107-B133)	Multi-component site: rock-outcrop and over 27 jars	The site is comprised of a massive sandstone rock outcrop, including two platform-like terraces at its northern, western and southern edges (Fig. 5.14). The formation stretches in a N-S direction, ridden with crevices, small caves and overhang shelters. Altogether 27 jars were recorded at the site; nine forming a loose cluster at the northern end of the outcrop, the rest of the vessels was placed on the platforms and into the crevices (B107-B133). Out of the 27 jars, nine was too fragmented to be classified, the remainder 18 distributed between five types. One jar presumably dates the 19 th century. The rest of the jars were recent styles of the 19 th -20 th century, out of which 12 belonged to Type 1, two to Type 9, one to Type 3 and one to Type 4, giving the depositions a recent character. Tom Harrison collected a number of artefacts from the site in 1947, in which pottery, namely stoneware sherds, dominated.
16	Menatoh Payeh Taratik (MPT)	2 (B088-B089)	Multi-component site: <i>nabang</i> and 2 jars on ridge	The site is located near the village of Pa' Umor, at a northern end of a SW-NE ridge (Fig. 5.15). The site consists of a dragon jar and a <i>nabang</i> (ditch-cutting). The burial is set on the <i>nabang</i> 's northern side, and in fact includes two jars (B088-B089). Both jars had their tops removed. One of the bases had been dug into the ground, and a top placed on it upside down. Another jar-top was then installed on top of these, the right way up. The second base is missing. Both vessels belong to the same type and date to around the 17 th -18 th century.

Table 5.3 - Summary table of dragon jar cemetery sites (including their components and brief description) recorded in the northern Kelabit highlands in 2012.

No. in Fig. 5.7	Sites in the northern Kelabit highlands	Dragon jars	Components	Brief description of the site and archaeological material
17	Menatoh Sekulub (MSK)	6 < (B136-B141)	Multi-component site: <i>nabang</i> and 6 jars on ridge	The site is located on a five meter wide ridge-crest, a two hour walk north of the village of Pa' Lungan. The jars were all placed on an elbow of the ridge line (Fig. 5.16). About 30 meters north of the jars a <i>nabang</i> cuts across the ridge. Sarah Hitchner recorded around ten jars at the site in 2006, but during the survey in 2012 only six jars were visible (B136-B141). Five out of six jars were only present in fragments or bases, and only one jar had a diagnostic body sherd with a section of a dragon design to be assigned possibly to Type 11 (with the tentative date of 17 th -18 th century). One of my Pa' Lungan informants noted that the site was cleared in the early 2000s, at that time over 20 jars were visible along the ridge. Although, the typological date of the jar suggest a potentially early dating for the site, due to the vessels' highly degraded state, it is very difficult to determine when and for how long the cemetery was utilised.
18	Menatoh Pa' Dara'an (MPR)	2 (B176-B177)	Multi-component site: <i>nabang</i> and 2 jars on ridge	The site is located on a narrow crest of a ridge, dropping down sharply on both sides. The jars were found on a relatively flat area, placed two-three meters south of a <i>nabang</i> , cutting across the ridge. The burial site was in a degraded state, which given its location on a mountain crest is perhaps not surprising (exposed to the elements, on migration routes for wildlife etc.). Two jars were documented at the site, both of them very fragmented (B176-B177). The larger one was decorated with floral motifs (B176) and dates approximately to the 18 th -19 th century, whereas the other was only present in a few nondescript sherds. Similarly to Menatoh Sekulub, it is difficult to determine the time of deposition or the utilisation of the site based on such fragmented evidence.
19	Menatoh Bulu Puren (MBP)	7 (B081-B087)	Single component site: 7 jars	The site is located approximately c.100 meters south of the Bulu Puren Stream. There were seven jars arranged in N-S direction, forming two clusters (B081-B087) (Fig. 5.17). The vessels all belonged to Type 1 dating to the 19 th -20 th century, making Menatoh Bulu Puren perhaps one of the most recent cemeteries in the northern Kelabit highlands.

Table 5.3 – Cont. Summary table of dragon jar cemetery sites (including their components and brief description) recorded in the northern Kelabit highlands in 2012.

No. in Fig. 5.7	Sites in the northern Kelabit highlands	Dragon jars	Components	Brief description of the site and archaeological material
20	Menatoh Long Layan (MLL)	17 (B090-B106)	Single component site: 17 jars	The site is located on a flat, swampy terrace created by the Umor River, directly on the northern bank of a water channel. The graveyard closely resembles Menatoh Payeh Belanai in the southern Kelabit highlands burials were aligned parallel to the waterway in an approximately E-W direction. The site consisted of 17 jar burials (B090-B106), two of which were set a little away on the slope of the channel. Three of the jars were too fragmented to be classified. One vessel (B090) belonged to Type 20 which currently stands without an analogue and therefore could not be assigned to a time period. One jar has a provisional date of the 17 th -18 th century, and another three dated to the 19 th century. The remaining 11 jars can be assigned to the 19 th -20 th century out of which 7 belonged to Type 1. Thus, the cemetery has a large later component, with a few examples of earlier vessels perhaps deposited at the same time or in close succession of each other.
21	Menatoh Lobangiung (MAR)	23 (B142-B164)	Single component site: 23 jars	The site is located on a relatively flat alluvial plain of the Pa' Dappur valley near the village of Pa' Lungan. The Arur Lobangiung stream flows north of the site forming a four meter deep ravine, hence the name. The site consists of a dense concentration of dragon jars distributing in an approximately 12 m long line SSW-NNE. The jars form loose clusters of three or four vessels (Fig. 5.18). Around 13 jars form the main spine of the cemetery, with a group of seven off to the north and one jar located off the SE end of the line. Altogether 23 jars were documented (B142-B164), but it is likely that the number of jars deposited here was much higher. Three jars were too fragmented to be identified. One vessel dated to the 17 th -18 th century, and another to the 19 th century. The rest of the 13 jars classified to the 19 th -20 th century period, out of which 12 belonged to Type 1, and one to Type 3. The site has a dominant recent character. One jar was intact, and perhaps belonged to a high status individual who was able to afford either two jars for primary and secondary burial, or a coffin and a jar.
22	Menatoh Pa' Rembaya (MPR)	2 (B134-B135)	Single component site: 2 jars (near a rock-outcrop)	The site is located at the base of west facing valley side slope terminating in a rock-outcrop, approximately ten meters east of the stream bank. The two jars (B134-B135) were aligned with the flow of the stream in a north-south direction. Both jars belong to Type 1 and date to the 19 th -20 th century, one of them represents a slightly more gracile variety (B135). The exact classification of the Menatoh Pa' Rembaya site however remains uncertain. The burials' proximity to the stream would suggest its classification as a single component burial ground, but the jars association with the rock-outcrop, and the overall 'memorial' character of the site is making it difficult slot it into a clear site category.

Table 5.3 – Cont. Summary table of dragon jar cemetery sites (including their components and brief description) recorded in the northern Kelabit highlands in 2012.

Site	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6/19	T7	T9	T10	T11	T12	T13	T14	T15	T16	T17	T18	T20	T21	T22	T23	T24	unknown
	19-20 th c.	19-20 th c.	19-20 th c.	19-20 th c.	17-18 th c.	unknown	19 th c.	19-20 th c.	19-20 th c.	17-18 th c.	17-18 th c.	unknown	19 th c.	18-19 th c.	17-18 th c.	16-17 th c.	unknown	unknown	19-20 th c.	19 th c.	17-18 th c.	19 th c.	
MBL														1									
MPB	3			2	1	1								1	1	1							7
BDT	3			4	2	2	1	1															
MBK							2																
MTB					1					3	1												
RRF																					1		
MBB										2													
MSB	5									4		1											1
MRP	2		1			1							1				1						
BYB	17	1	1																				
MLM1	1													1									
MLM2	5								1				1							1			
MAS	1								1														
MPD	12		1	1				2					1										9
MPT					2																		
MSK										1													5
MDR																						1	1
MBP	7																						
MLL	7			3	1								1					1	1				3
MPR	2																						
MAL	12		1							1			1										3
Total	77	1	4	10	7	4	3	3	2	11	1	1	5	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	29

Total: 177

Table 5.4 -Table summarising the number of jars and jar types in 21 dragon jar cemeteries across the Kelabit highlands. Types with dark grey background also occur in the ethnographic dataset. (MBL: Menatoh Batu Liban, MPB: Menatoh Pa' Badong, BDT: Menatoh Pa' Diit, MBK: Menatoh Batuh Kaing, MTB: Menatoh Tang Belanai, RRF: Reddish's Rice Field, MBB: Menatoh Belanai Bangar, MSB: Menatoh Sembario, MRP: Menatoh Rayeh Pa' Bangar, BYB: Menatoh Payeh Belanai, MLM1: Menatoh Long Main 1, MLM2: Menatoh Long Main 2, MAS: Menatoh Arur Salad, MPD: Menatoh Pa' Dapur, MPT: Menatoh Payeh Taratik, MSK: Menatoh Sekulub, MDR: Menatoh Pa' Dara'an, MBP: Menatoh Bulu Puren, MLL: Menatoh Long Layan, MPR: Menatoh Pa' Rembaya, MAL: Menatoh Arur Lobangiung).



Figure 5.8 - Batu Liban ancestral burial complex with rock-cut niche and two small batu senupeds visible at the foot of the outcrop. Image by the CRF project.



Figure 5.9 - Menatoh Rayeh Pa' Bangar, ancestral burial ground with dragon jar depositions. Image by BN.



Figure 5.10 – Zhangzhou (Swatow) ware small vessels mixed with fragments of jars at Menatoh Rayeh Pa' Bangar. Image by BN.



Figure 5.11 - Menatoh Pa' Diit ancestral megalithic site with stone vats and slab-structures. Image by the CRF project.



Figure 5.12 - Menatoh Sembario commemorative site with standing stones and fragments of dragon jars. Image by BN.



Figure 5.13 - Menatoh Payeh Belanai communal burial ground with dragon jars arranged in a row. Image by the CRF project.

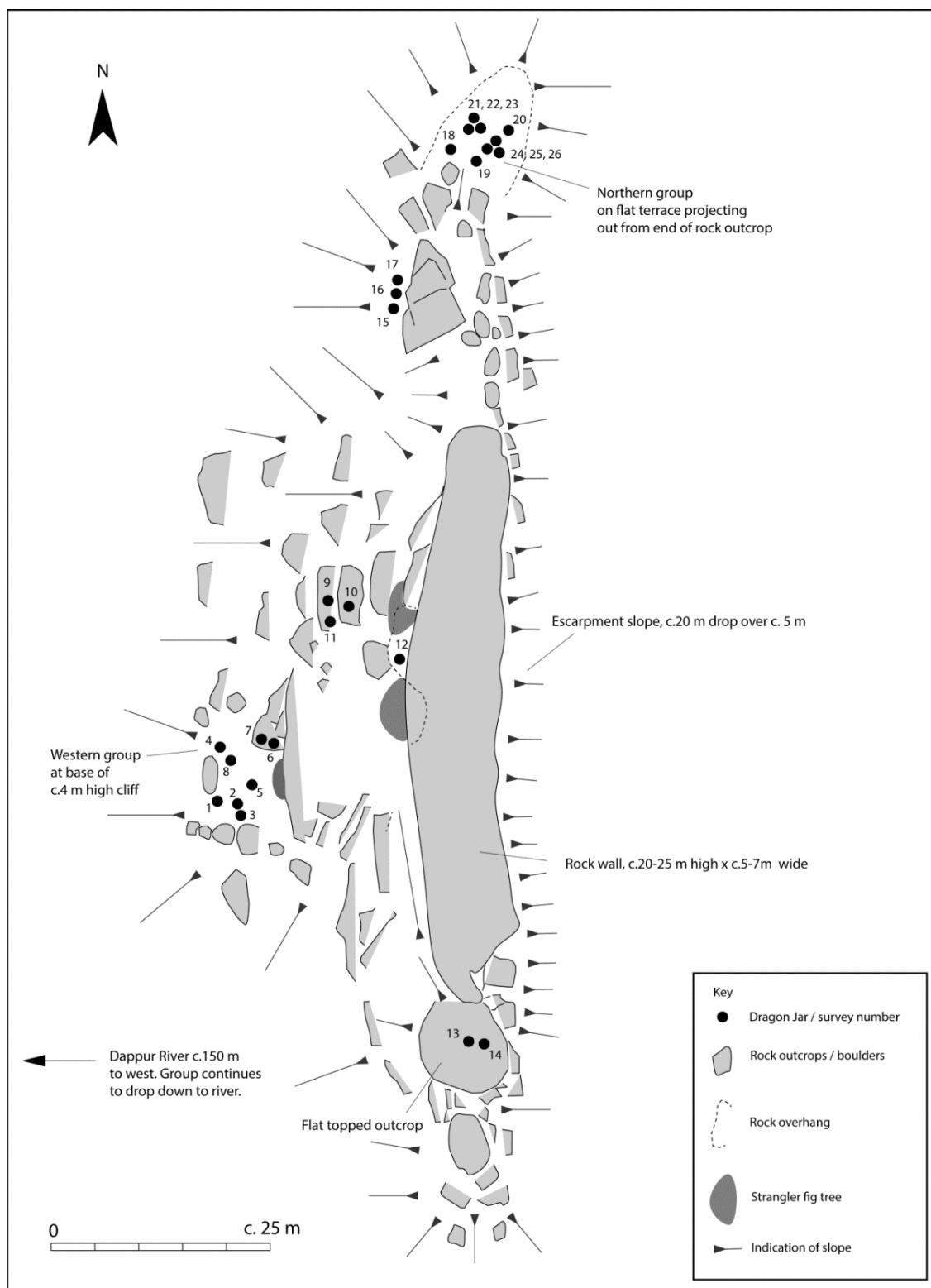


Figure 5.14 - Sketch plan of dragon jar cemetery Menatoh Pa' Dapur, showing locations of recorded jars. Scale is approximate. Illustration: L. Lloyd-Smith.



Figure 5.15 - Menatoh Payeh Taratik – a lone commemorative burial placed on a ridge. Image by BN.



Figure 5.16 - Menatoh Sekulub commemorative site with jars placed along the mountain ridge (the depressions indicating the bases of jars). Image by BN.

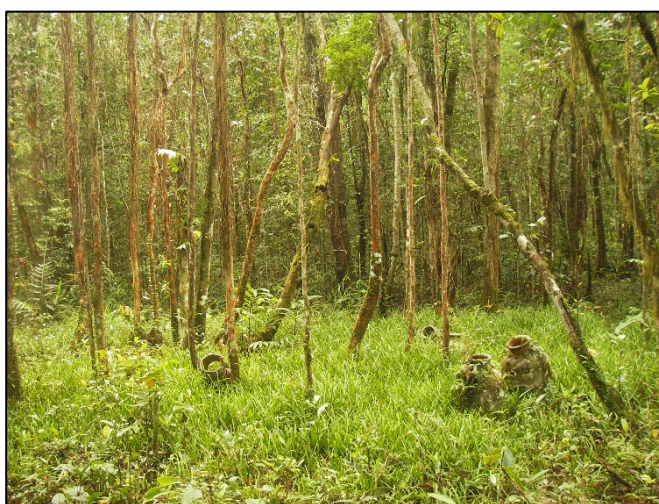


Figure 5.17 - Menatoh Bulu Puren communal burial ground with jars arranged in clusters. Image by BN.

5.6 Discussion and interpretation of dragon jar cemeteries

In this final section the chronological dating of dragon jar cemeteries informed by their position in the physical landscape will be discussed from an historical perspective. By viewing the archaeological data through an ethnographically sensitive lens this material can be inserted into the broader historical scheme ranging from the 17th-18th to the early 20th century. We will then be in a position to better understand the long-term burial deposition processes in relation to the rapid social and economic change that took place in more recent years.

5.6.1 Ancestral burial grounds

Archaeological evidence implies that rock-outcrops have been among the many stone-related features in the highlands that were associated with mortuary practices. Rock-outcrops often – but not in all cases – were linked with megalithic activities, which is especially characteristic in the south where two out of three sites (Menatoh Batu Liban and Menatoh Lidong Kitong) had stone-slabs (and standing stones) present at the same location (Table 5.6). Although, the site of Batu Liban was not subject to a thorough archaeological investigation in recent years, its rock-cut niches stand without comparison in the region so far. Stoneware export ceramics deposited at the rock-outcrop sites date from the late 17th century. However, in both the southern and the northern highlands, jars at these sites represent fairly recent examples ranging from the 17th-18th centuries to the 19th-20th centuries, with the dominance of later jars. The recent utilisation of rock-outcrops for burial purposes is further evidenced by ethnographic accounts. Upon visiting the site of Lidong Kitong in 2007, my guide from Pa' Dalih remarked that the outcrop is known to have been used by the people of Ramudu; bones of their relatives were dropped into the rock fissures, which after passing through the hollows, ended up in the river. Sarah Hitchner recorded a similar story about the site, according to which victims of epidemics – when there was no time for adhering to the customary burial rites – were thrown into the crevices; body parts were later seen swirling around in the river – hence the name: 'going around in circles' (2009b:18). Sagau Batu Bala in his book describes that Menatoh Arur Salad was being used by people of the Bario Asal longhouse as a permanent burial site up until World War II (2013:274-5). Certain bones (skull, finger and big toe bones) were selected to be dropped into the crevices of the *binatuh lobang* (burial cave) while other parts of the body were taken into 'Buduk Butal or other burial site'²⁹ (2013:274). Similarly, one of my Pa' Dalih informants recalled that his grandfather's bones – who was originally from Ba Siok, just over the border in Indonesia – were

²⁹ I.e. communal burial grounds.

sent to Menatoh Rayeh Pa' Bangar. Tom Harrisson refers to this particular practice as tertiary burials (K60 type in Table 5.5). Depositions of fairly new jar types at Menatoh Arur Salad, Menatoh Rayeh and Menatoh Pa' Dapur certainly appear to underscore practices directly linked to the recent past. The latter two sites, however, stand out by the sheer number of broken ceramics deposited here. A minimum of twenty-seven jars were documented at Menatoh Pa' Dapur in 2012, with no evidence for further, smaller vessels. However, based on Tom Harrisson's entries in the Sarawak Museum Accession list, at least thirty small-sized ceramics were collected from the site ranging from celadons, to porcelain bowls and dishes (Nos: 3699-3727). This makes the character of the site very similar to Menatoh Rayeh Pa' Bangar, where the ground under the overhang is still covered in broken fragments of smaller stoneware vessels (Fig. 5.9).

The range of burial and ceramic depositions infers that the utilisation of rock-outcrop sites was certainly varied. Ethnographic descriptions suggest that these places retained a certain 'draw' in the landscape to which members of a particular community 'returned' after death. Archaeologically, however, it is difficult to prove such continuity into the deeper past. Human bone (unless it is cremated) does not survive in the rainforest environment, thus the practice of placing human remains in crevices cannot be proven archaeologically beyond a hundred years or so. Ceramic vessels at these sites on the other hand, particularly the smaller-sized Zhangzhou export wares, could potentially lend some guidance in establishing a chronological framework (Harrison, B. 1979, 1995). The production date of small export wares ranges from the early 16th century technically until the early 20th century, which more or less corresponds with the dates of the dragon jars. With the caveat in mind that production dates and the time of deposition did not necessarily overlap in the past; the archaeological evidence implies that export stonewares reach the highlands as early as the 14th century (a piece of Song dynasty brown ware was found in the small stone mound of Perupun Long Kelit, Barker *et al.* 2009), increasing in numbers by the late 16th – early 17th century (like those excavated at the stone jar site of Menatoh Pa' Diit, by Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2010, and see below). It appears that the distribution of small stonewares slightly precede the wider dispersion of jars in the region, which might be explained by the size and transportability of Zhangzhou bowls and dishes (dating to the 16th-17th century, see Chapter 3).

The presence of small vessels at these sites is in fact intriguing and highlights the complexity of mortuary traditions. Kelabit oral histories do not recall the practice of offerings; written literature and informants explicitly claim that personal possessions were placed either in the

coffin or in the jar with the remains of the individual (Talla 1979:224). Tom Harrisson provides a description of ‘wooden lidded coffins’ being ‘carried to the rock-shelter, without being opened’ (K57 type, Table 5.5, Fig. 5.18) along with examples of ‘whole jar carried to rock-shelter or high point’ (K58 type, Table 5.5) as part of secondary burial ceremonies (1962:11), but he does not mention the deposition of smaller-sized ceramics at these sites. In contrast however, his entries in the Sarawak Museum’s acquisition list testify – along with the 2012 survey of dragon jar cemeteries – to the presence of small stoneware and earthenware pots at rock-outcrop sites. Taking into account both the archaeological and ethnographic information, the accumulation of small export wares posits the following: 1) small vessels did, in fact, accompany burial depositions;³⁰ 2) given the exotic nature of these artefacts they most likely indicate the elite; 3) considering the date of the export wares, they probably slightly pre-date the utilisation of dragon jars in the region, i.e. these depositions could represent a burial practice directly prior to the use of jars; 4) if the latter is true, it also indicates a shift in burial practice sometime around the late 16th century, when the elite gradually takes up the custom of burying their dead in jars as an alternative to coffins.

Another compelling aspect of rock-outcrops found in the highlands is the distinction between rock formations utilised as cemeteries and large boulders of similar appearance referred to by locals as *batu balio* (cursed stones). According to Kelabit belief, the *batu balio* used to be structures, either longhouses, rice huts or chicken coops (depending on the size), turned to stone during a *masab adto* (stone rain) or *udan batu* (hail) event. The *masab adto* is said to have been brought on by members of the community who were disrespectful towards animals. In the Kelabit world certain wild animals were thought to possess high levels of *lalud* and if upset, could engender *masab adto*. Jars, however, seem to have come useful at such an event; by turning them upside down and placing them into doorways, people who were trapped inside could break out easily and escape (Janowski 2012:150, 2003; Cluny and Chai 2007:43-44). The ITTO recorded four *batu balio* sites in the Upper Pa’ Dapur area in the north, and another site east of the village of Pa’ Dalih, in the southern highlands (Cluny and Chai 2007:43-6). Batu A’ur A’ur is located in the near vicinity of Pa’ Lungan, whereas the rest of the cursed stones are boulders of uplifted sandstone forming the lower parts of the Apad Uat range; the watershed between Malaysia and Indonesia. The mountain range farther southeast of Pa’ Dalih takes the shape of a flat peak known as Rumah Batu (stone longhouse), which has similar connotations in

³⁰ Similarly to the practice of the related Berawan group, who chip or fragment small stonewares before depositing them with the deceased in the burial mausoleum (Metcalf 1991:90).

local mythology; it is believed to be a longhouse that turned into stone when an old woman laughed at a frog (Janowski 2003:41).

The Kelabit perception of stone being permeated with *lalud* has been pointed out before (Janowski 2012; Janowski and Barton 2012), but I would argue here that perhaps it is the kind of *lalud* being channelled by the *batu balio* that sets them aside from other rock-outcrops and megalithic monuments. Janowski described the rainforest wilderness being a source ‘untamed’ pure *lalud*, whereas the domestic spheres being associated with ‘tamed’ but somewhat less potent sources of life force (Janowski 2003, 2012). Therefore it is feasible to assume that all rock formations were regarded as potential sources of ‘wild’ *lalud* by the Kelabit. This untamed *lalud* saturating the outcrops was ‘managed’ by a range of ritual practices and connected to the ‘domestic’ realm by the repeated deposition of the dead. I would suggest that the ‘cultivation’ of *lalud* and cyclical ‘plantation’ of the deceased created strong ties between people, the landscape and its materiality.

Megalithic burial grounds including slab structures and stone jars reflect a similar relationship between communities and places in the landscape. By looking at the distribution of megalithic sites, it is striking that cist graves seem to concentrate in the southern Kelabit highlands, represented by only a couple of examples in the north. Stone vats have a clear – and localised – distribution around the villages of Ramudu and Pa’ Dalih, which could be linked to the potential source of the raw material at Bukit Kelit (Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2010:97). Menatoh Pa’ Badong represents the southernmost cemetery where cist graves (appear to have been raised on an even earlier stone mound) occurred together with dragon jars in between the collapsed slabs, along with a discrete cluster of stone vats a few meters away. Almost half of the jars were only present in fragments, but the age distribution of the assemblage reflects similar trends documented at rock-outcrop sites. A smaller proportion of the jars dated to the 17th and 18th century, along with potentially the earliest jar recorded in the highlands (tentatively dating to the 16th-17th century). The larger percentage of the vessels ranged between the 19th and 20th century which correspond with the assumed age of human remains still visible at the site.

Menatoh Pa’ Diit is very similar in its composition of megalithic monuments, but here, the dragon jar cemetery formed its own discrete cluster a little further away from the main site. The Cultured Rainforest Project excavated the location between 2007 and 2009, revealing the deeper history of the direct area. In Trench 4, a few meters east from the stone jars, a layer of stone packing was exposed and identified as an architectural feature, possibly a ‘drip-gully’. Beneath the stone packing a posthole was uncovered from which a charcoal sample yielded a

¹⁴C date of 400-350 cal. BC (Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2010: 81). The lower layers of Trench 2 produced at least one or possibly two collapsed earthenware vessels, under which a ¹⁴C sample was dated to cal. 240-420 CE. These features indicate that prior to the construction of megalithic monuments some form of settlement activity was taking place at the site. Trench 1 was opened at the foot of a stone jar, a ¹⁴C sample taken from the stone packing beneath yielded a date of cal. 688-870 CE, which either signals the time of the erection of the vat or pre-megalithic activity at the site (Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2010:71). Furthermore, Trench 1 revealed a sequence of depositions: earthenware and stoneware ceramics, beads, iron knives and bells – artefacts strongly associated with mortuary practices. Cremated human bone was also obtained from the deposits, with a fragment producing a ¹⁴C date of cal. 1430-1530 CE, the later end of the date range corresponding, more or less, with the dating of the stoneware and porcelain found in the same layer. While the full ceramic analysis awaits to be completed, the production dates of two small vessels (a rice-bowl and a dish) places them firmly between 1506 and 1566, the Jiajing period of the Ming dynasty.

It is difficult to ascertain the length of time the archaeological evidence represents here. What is clear is that the function of the site has changed (at least once) within the last 1500 years, but whether this utilisation was continuous or periodical, is difficult to determine at this point. The Kelabit do not remember cremating their dead, and the practice has not been referred to in oral histories either. However, the most recent use of Menatoh Pa' Diit as pre-Christian burial ground by the community of Batu Patong is widely acknowledged. A key local informant and previous ritual practitioner described corpses being taken to the graveyard in wooden coffins, and sometimes human remains were placed in the stone vats, or under the slabs (Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2010:71). This latter description corresponds with Tom Harrisson's account on secondary burials: 'Bones direct into stone cyst or "slab grave" (K50 type, Table 5.5), 'bones placed (sometimes buried or in a small pot) under a stone table' (K51 type, Table 5.5), remains inside stone urn or vat [...] (K52 type, Table 5.5) (1962:11). The archaeological investigation recovered a piece of resin from Trench 1 which was reportedly used during the most recent burial interments suggesting that the upper deposition layers at the site could be linked to the early 20th century and the decades leading up to WWII.

The adjacent dragon jar cemetery however, paints a somehow contrasting picture to the megalithic site. The age distribution of jars is very similar to the range outlined by the cemetery at Menatoh Pa' Badong; the large majority of the vessels date to the 19th-20th, whereas a smaller percentage to the 17th-18th century. It is intriguing, that despite the megalithic site being

used for burials up until WWII, there is no cultural memory of the dragon jar depositions nearby (some of these burials have to be quite recent, since human remains were still visible among the fragments). The megalithic site certainly existed by the time the first jar was deposited, and is likely to have influenced the selection of the location for the jar burials. Despite the jars' close proximity to the megaliths, the overall character of the jar depositions make this graveyard more alike to single component cemeteries which provides a further meaningful angle when it comes to the interpretation of dragon jar cemeteries in the highlands as a whole.

Primary burials		
Type	Sub-type	Description
K (Kelabit) 41		Wooden lidded coffin in house; on legs and with drainage bamboo
K 41	(a)	<i>balang</i> type ("tiger dragon")
K 41	(b)	<i>payou</i> type ("antlered stag")
K 41	(c)	complicated decoration but not carved
K 41	(d)	Simple
K 42		Direct, tied up, crouched, into a Chinese stoneware jar, cut open along medium joint with red-hot wire.
K 43		With or without a few planks as coffin, but direct into ground on a knoll, in grassland or scrub.
K 44		Buried in ground under the house (still-born child).
K 45		Body left out in jungle, far away (exceptional; usually "crime" or "outsider").
K 46		Bodies taken by father in basket and buried in jungle near normal cemetery (twins).
Secondary burials		
K 47		Jar placed on top of high ground – sometimes singly on a mountain pass beside the path, sometimes several in line on a lower knoll. (Jars run from heavy T'ang stoneware to Ming porcelain and later; all Chinese made).
K 48		Jar with stone menhir erected alongside (or sometimes another form of megalithic monument).
K 49		Jar placed at one end of <i>nabang</i> ditch, intersecting a path; or as part of an irrigation project, or river diversion scheme.
K 50		Bones direct into stone cyst or "slab grave".
K 51		Bones placed (sometimes buried or in small pot) under stone table.
K 52		Remains inside stone urn or vat (made of soft sandstone, some 5 ft. long).
K 53		Remains placed specifically made small grottos worked into big sandstone boulder.
K 54		Stone pile on knoll beside stream – relics of the deceased and all his value objects, covered with thousands of stones carried up from riverbeds.
K 55		Bones taken in basket and hung up in association with somebody else's jar/megalithic or other secondary burial (childless widow, etc.); basket may also be placed among rocks.
K 56		Bones buried separately under a lean-to roof on a knoll or thrown into a deep crevasse.
K 57		Whole coffin carried to rock-shelter, without being opened (direct transfer of K 41).
K 58		Whole jar carried to rock-shelter or high point (direct transfer of K 42).
K 59		Jar with bones; jar tied up in tree – only seen at Bawang valley, six instances.
Tertiary burials		
K 60		Hiding skull, finger and some other bones (local variants) in remote rock crevice or riverbed hollow.

Table 5.5 - Tom Harrisson's classification of Kelabit burial practices (in: *Borneo Death*, 1962: 10-11).

	Site	Dragon jars	Water-ways	Rock-outcrops, crevices	Ridge-tops	Ditch-cuttings	Standing stones	Stone slabs	Stone vats	Rock-cut niches
Southern Kelabit highlands										
1	Menatoh Pa' Badong	18 < (B055-B072)								
2	Menatoh Payeh Belanai	19 (B001-B019)								
3	Menatoh Pa' Diit	13 (B020-B032)								
4	Menatoh Batu Liban	1 (B052)								
5	Menatoh Batu Kating	2 (B053-B054)								
6	Menatoh Tang Belanai	5 (B036-B040)								
7	Reddish's Rice Field	1 (B175)								
8	Menatoh Belanai Bangar	2 (B079-B080)								
9	Menatoh Sembario	11 < (B041-B051)								
10	Menatoh Rayeh	6 < (B073-B078)								
11	Menatoh Lidong Kitong	Jar fragments								
Pa' Main area										
12	Menatoh Long Main 1	2 (B165-B166)								
13	Menatoh Long Main 2	8 (B167-B174)								
Northern Kelabit highlands										
14	Menatoh Arur Salad	2 < (B034-B035)								
15	Menatoh Bulu Puren	7 (B081-B087)								
16	Menatoh Payeh Taratik	2 (B088-B089)								
17	Menatoh Long Layan	17 (B090-B106)								
18	Menatoh Pa' Dapur	27 < (B107-B133)								
19	Menatoh Pa' Rembaya	2 (B134-B135)								
20	Menatoh Arur Lobangiung	23 (B142-B164)								
21	Menatoh Sekulub	6 < (B136-B141)								
22	Menatoh Pa' Dara'an	2 (B176-B177)								

Table 5.6 - Location of dragon jar cemeteries associated with other landmarks in the Kelabit highlands.

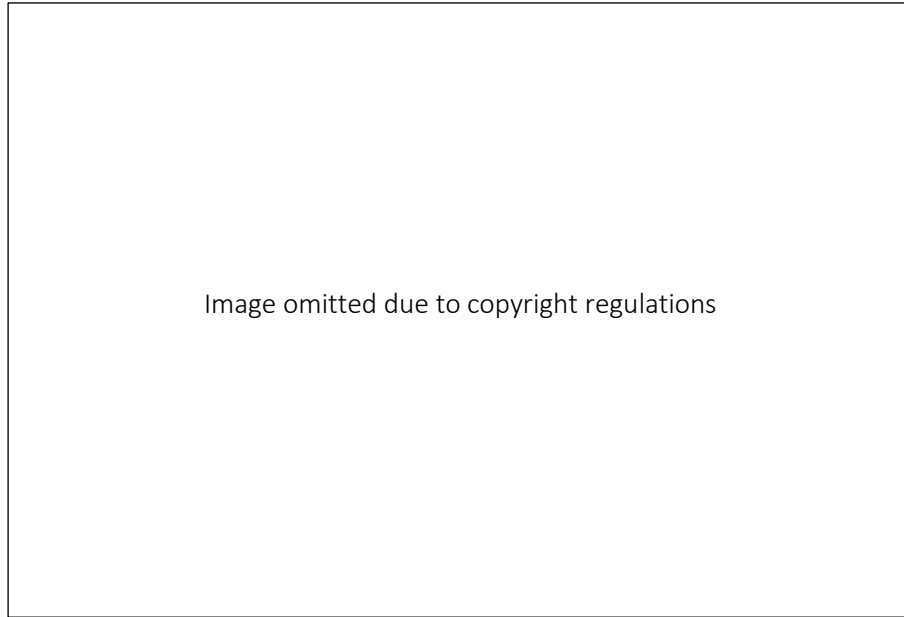


Figure 5.18 - Wooden coffin and a jar placed at a rock-shelter, somewhere along the Tamabo range in the northern highlands. Image source: courtesy of the Sarawak Museum Photography Archive.

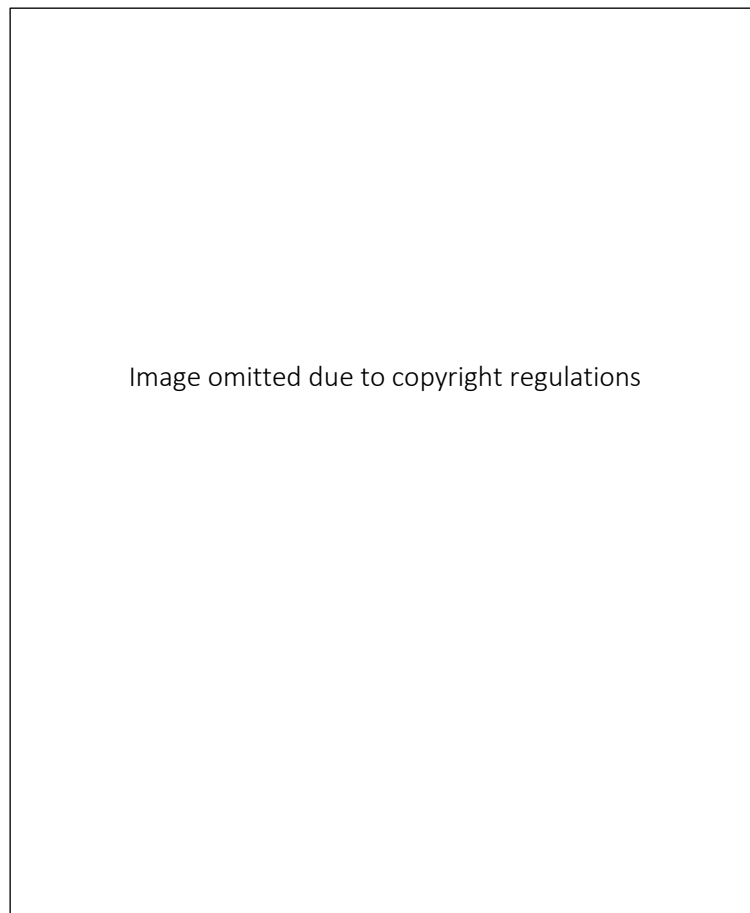


Figure 5.19 - Kelabit man with the batu senuped erected in honour of Pun Pitan. Image source: courtesy of the Sarawak Museum Photography Archive.

5.6.2 Commemorative burial grounds

Dragon jar burials associated with *nabangs* (ditch-cuttings), *kawang*s (gaps cut in the canopy line), *abangs* (water-channels) and *batu senupeds* (standing stones) represent a slightly different tradition within the context of secondary burial ceremonies. Etching a high-ranking individual's memory into the landscape or raising standing stones in his honour had been in practice until World War II. The first documented report on the Kelabit marking the landscape within the framework of a commemorative event comes from Douglas, who writes during his visit to the highlands in 1911:

'[...] passed several large stones standing up by the side of the path, and on inquiry informed that they were to denote that some big chief had had "irop" or drunk there.' (1911:27)

Two decades later, Banks noted dragon jars being placed next to ditch-cuttings:

'[...] old and now broken burial jar[s] containing the bones of the deceased who was honoured by the "nabang"; even to this day, comparatively fresh jars may be passed by and I have sometimes seen the remains of quite old ones, notably on the top of Pungga Pawan, (ridge pass between Bario and Pa' Tik to the west) at a spot about 5500 feet high whence once may overlook the true Kelabit country stretching away below far into Dutch Borneo.' (1937:416)

Tom Harrisson, in his 1962 study, provides a more detailed classification: 'Jar with stone menhir erected alongside [...]' (K48 type, Table 5.5), as well as; 'Jar placed at one end of a *nabang* ditch, intersecting a path; or as part of an irrigation project, or river diversion scheme.' (K49 type, Table 5.5) (1962:11). Harrisson describes the K48-9 method as forming part of the Kelabit secondary burial repertoire.

The distribution of dragon jar depositions associated with ditch-cuttings and standing stones appear to outline a regional pattern (Table 5.5). While jars occur with ditch-cuttings across the entire highlands, jars placed in close proximity to standing stones seem to be limited only to the southern highland region. At Menatoh Tang Belanai and Menatoh Sembario dragon jars were closely associated with both *nabangs* and *batu senupeds*. Two of the ditch-cuttings at Menatoh Tang Belanai are still remembered by oral histories as being dedicated to local leaders, while on the other hand, the jars represent somewhat greater antiquity: all five of them date to the 17th-18th centuries. Menatoh Sembario exemplifies a similar situation, although here, the chronological ambiguity manifested through burial jars. Four of the vessels belonged to types

classified to the 17th-18th century, while five of them date to the 19th-20th century, perhaps indicating two different stages of depositions at the site. The third location, Menatoh Belanai Bangar, stands out from this pattern; here two old, heavily fragmented 17th-18th century jars were placed near two standing stones. Menatoh Long Main 1, however, in the Pa' Main area represents a slightly different scenario; here the two jars placed at the bottom of a ditch-cutting seem to reflect two separate time periods (18th-19th and 19th-20th centuries), which again mirrors a minor chronological discrepancy (if the dating of the jars is correct). In this case, it is likely that the two depositions were close family relations, and if the interment happened in close succession one of the individuals was buried in a somewhat earlier jar type than the other.

The northern highlands on the other hand represent a slightly contrasting picture to the southern region. The ITTO recorded approximately the same amount of standing stones (*batu senuped*) in the southern highlands as in the north (Cluny and Chai 2007:35-9), but it seems that in the northern territories these were more closely linked with commemoration activities rather than with the secondary burial depositions themselves. Instead, jar burials were placed along ridge-tops, associated with ditch-cuttings in all the three recorded cases. Based on early colonial accounts, this form of burial dates back to at least a century ago; first documented by Spencer St. John during his visit to the Murut (i.e. Lun Bawang) areas in the 1860s:

‘As I have advanced into the country I have noticed many clearings, perhaps fifty yards in length, on the ridges of the highest hills. It is in these places that the bones of their chief men rest. As far as I understand their ways, they place the corpse in a sort of box, fashioned sometimes like a body of a deer, or what a Murut fancies to be a resemblance, until all the flesh is dissolved from the bones, which are then placed in a jar, and left on the lofty spots, I have mentioned.’ (1863:119)

St. John's passage draws attention to two things. First, ridges were selected as locations for final resting places of high-ranking individuals or community leaders. Second, the burials deposited here represent secondary interments. Since the neighbouring Lun Bawang and Lun Dayeh populations share strong linguistic, ethnographic and cultural traits with the Kelabit, it is plausible to assume that the Kelabit had a similar secondary burial tradition. This assumption is further supported by Werner Schneeberger, who describes a similar practice during his visit to the Karayan area in Kalimantan (on the other side of the Apad Uat range) in 1939 (i.e. jars being deposited on mountain ridges, in association with *nabangs* and *kawang*s³¹) (Schneeberger

³¹ Schneeberger also reports on the presence of 'native art' while visiting a *kawang* with standing stones placed in the clearing: 'At the edge of the clearing a tree had been blazed. On the light coloured wood

1979). Tom Harrison lists two (although somewhat opaque) varieties of the same practice: ‘Jar placed on top of high ground – sometimes singly on a mountain pass beside the path [...]’ (K47) and ‘Whole jar carried to rock-shelter or high point [...]’ (K58). Furthermore, Peter Metcalf also remarks that according to Berawan oral histories, a ridge-top burial was the exclusive privilege of respected leaders in the late 1900s, who instructed their heirs to place their bones in ancient jars (Metcalf 1991:80-4; see also Hose and McDougall 1966 [1912]:49-50). Sites recorded in the northern highlands seem to closely correspond with these descriptions. Menatoh Sekulub and Menatoh Pa’ Dara’an were very similar in character, containing multiple jars arranged along a mountain ridge. Menatoh Payeh Taratik represents a particular case where one and a half (!) jars were placed at the terminal of a ridge crest. It is uncertain whether this deposition was actually two burials later combined into one, or originally set into the ground in this unusual manner. What is common, however, among these sites is that all the identifiable jars date to a fairly early, 17th-18th (-19th) century period, and all locations had a ditch-cutting recorded within a 20 meter radius.

Understanding multi-component, commemorative burials from a recent ethnographic perspective could potentially reveal a further, spiritual facet to this variety of mortuary practice. Tom Harrison mentions that commemorative ditch-cuttings and cuts in the canopy line served the purpose of leading the soul of the deceased into the afterlife (1964:332). Mountain ridges, by their material relatedness to stone and their physical height were perceived to be infused with a strong spiritual life-source, whereof – similarly to rock-outcrops – ‘untamed’ *lalud* was abound, creating a fold between the realm of the ancestors and the human world. The utilisation of these places either for burial depositions or for landmark creations (or both) were primarily to aid the transformation of the honoured individual into an ancestor (Couderc and Sillander 2012). However, commemorative performances worked both ways and carried significance to the people conducting or participating in such activities. The Kelabit believed that the ability to interrupt and channel *lalud* was limited to individuals of certain lineages encompassing a number of powerful ancestors. High-ranking members of the community could trace their genealogies back into the mythical past of *getoman lalud* (when humans possessed supernatural abilities) and were thus believed to have a greater capacity in tapping into the life-force (Janowski 2012). Interrupting and channelling *lalud* was expressed through the manipulation of the landscape, but was also played out in a social sphere by leadership skills

surface the pictures of four urns, two gongs and five buffaloes were drawn in charcoal. On a branch of a nearby shrub the lower jaw of a pig had been hung.’ (1979:39). This description indicates that the practice of commemoration might have included a range of media, currently invisible in the archaeological record.

and labour-organisation (see discussion of *sēmangat* in Chapter 2). The *nabangs*, *kawang*s on ridge-tops, and *abangs*, irrigation ditches cut for creating new rice-fields, served as visual reminders for the community and kept the memory of powerful individuals (now ancestors) alive in the landscape (cf. Chapter 7).

The standing stones represent a slightly different category within the practice of commemorative burials, since their local utilisation was not limited to memorial events. Some of the raised monoliths served as boundary markers between longhouse territories, whereas a smaller percentage was erected during secondary burial rituals. The last *batu senuped* raised in the honour of a known individual was carried out in the village of Pa' Trap, commemorating the person of Pun Pitan in 1948 (Fig. 5.19). In fact, the slab for Pun Pitan's standing stone was sourced by partially dismantling the capstone of a nearby *batu nangan* (slab-structure) referred to as Perupun Rayeh, currently located in the vicinity of Pa' Lungan (Lloyd-Smith *et al.* forthcoming). This undertaking is intriguing as it suggests that the person in charge was fully aware of the gravity of his lineage (including the powerful abilities of his ancestors and the *lalud* they possessed) to disturb and utilise a monument strongly associated with the *ada'* (spirits). Or perhaps – as Christianity was on the rise among the Kelabit in the 1940s – he felt legitimised under theegis of the new religion to dismantle a monument considered to be ancient and recycle it into a commemorative landmark (although in a manner that admittedly resembled pagan rituals).

5.6.3 Communal burial grounds

Single component burial grounds consisting only of clusters of dragon jars are often referred to by locals as the final resting places of entire longhouse communities who fell victims to epidemics in the past. Oral histories do not seem to recall any further details about these cemeteries. Similarly to the commemorative burials, the distribution of single component depositions appears to outline a regional pattern. While in the southern highlands Menatoh Payeh Belanai, and perhaps the highly diffuse Menatoh Batu Kating, represent single component burial grounds, this picture stands in stark contrast with the northern region, where Menatoh Bulu Puren, Menatoh Long Layan and Menatoh Arur Lobangiung classify as jar-only cemeteries. In this respect, Menatoh Long Main 2 which is situated in between the northern and the southern territories perhaps bears more southern characteristics, but due to a bias in site-survey data the clear classification of the Pa' Main burial grounds remains uncertain.

All the recorded cemetery sites are located near waterways, which is not remarkable given the abundant sources of water in the rainforest environment (Table 5.6). Nevertheless, flowing water had an especially strong significance in the Kelabit understanding of the cosmos, as it was associated with ‘liquid’ *lalud*, which through its materiality – similarly to stone – created permeable boundaries between the spirit and the human world (Janowski 2012). Single component cemeteries are characteristically positioned next to so-called *longs* (confluences of waterways), or on wetlands referred to as *payeh* (swamp), or simply arranged along an *arur* (stream) or *pa’* (river). I would take this thought a step further in arguing that the Kelabit perhaps perceived waterways partly as necessary elements of ‘lubrication’ aiding the transmission of souls to the afterlife, and partly as ‘delimiters’ that separated this world from the realm of the spirits; a boundary that humans were only able to cross after death, whereas spirits used certain waterways as a portal to enter the human world.

The chronological classification of jars in single component cemeteries outlines another intriguing pattern. All 19 jars recorded at Menatoh Payeh Belanai in the southern Kelabit highlands date to the 19th-20th centuries, whereas at Batu Kating both fragmented vessels classified to the 19th century (Table 5.8-9). The situation is very similar at Menatoh Long Main 2, where six out of seven jars date to the 19th-20th century, with one remaining vessel belonging to the 19th century. In the northern highlands the age distribution of jars in single component cemeteries follows a similar trend (Table 5.8-9). Menatoh Bulu Puren included seven jars, all of them representing the same type, dating to the 19th-20th centuries. Recent jar types also dominate at Menatoh Long Layan where eleven jars date to the 19th-20th century, one to the 19th century, with a single jar representing the 17th-18th century period (the remaining four are of unknown date); however here, the recent jars distributed among three different types. A very similar pattern is reflected by the jars at Menatoh Arur Lobangiung, where the majority of the vessels (13 jars) date to the 19th-20th centuries, one to the 19th century and one to the 17th-18th centuries (with three unidentifiable jars). What is striking however is the difference in the number of jars (and single component cemeteries) documented between the northern and the southern Kelabit highlands (Table 5.7). Altogether 21 (29 including the Pa’ Main area) jars were recorded in the south, as opposed to 49 vessels in the northern region. This difference in jar burials is certainly curious given that the overall number of recorded jars in the two territories is nearly equal (79 in the south; 88 in the north). I would argue that the dominance of recent jars in these cemeteries and their prevalence in the northern Kelabit highlands is a reflection of a social-economic change that swept across the region at the beginning of the 20th century.

Without going into too much detail – as this facet of the Kelabit past will be discussed in depth in Chapter 7 – I would like to draw attention to the historical setting of the highland region as a whole at the turn of the last century, which provides further details for the interpretation of single component burial grounds. The political shift between the pre-colonial era and the British administration in Sarawak signalled a change in many aspects of indigenous lifeways. Whilst the Brooke's government control expanded in Sarawak, the colonial administration in the Kelabit highlands manifested itself only sporadically until the establishment of the Miri division in 1889, followed closely by the construction of the Lio Mato fort sometime between 1910 and 1920 (Murang 1989). The British administration from the 1890s onwards focused its efforts on achieving political stability in a notoriously maraud-ridden area by offering military, and a limited amount of financial support, to local communities. As intertribal alliances solidified, political security spread slowly but steadily in the region, thus making travel and trade less treacherous between the highlands and the lowlands. Colonial administration, which remained temporary until the 1940s, demonstrated itself primarily through taxation, bringing with it a new economic infrastructure based on monetary values. Locals were encouraged to raise animals and grow cash-crops for profit, creating new market conditions and opportunities for participation. Trade ceased to be a privilege for the elite, and people from various social backgrounds were able to engage in profit-earning activities. This also meant that an increasing number of Kelabit had access to goods previously only limited to the upper-classes. New economic opportunities were converted into social capital, resulting in a broadening stratum, who could now afford jars both for brewing rice wine and as burial containers.

In the Kelabit highlands the economic and social shift taking place in the early 1900s manifests very clearly in the distribution of dragon jars. Archaeological evidence shows a significant influx of burial jars dating to the 19th-20th centuries. A particular jar type (Type 1) dominated this influx; this style is most prevalent in single component cemeteries, but also present in the majority of multi-component burial grounds as well. There are a number of possible reasons why Type 1 jars was deemed so popular among the Kelabit (see Chapter 6 and 7), but here I would like to focus on how the emerging 'middle class' could have been instrumental in the influx of jars to the region. While there is hardly any difference in the number of recorded burial depositions between the northern and the southern highlands, there are marginally more 'early' jars (17th-18th centuries) documented in the southern than in the northern territories. However, looking at the distribution of 'recent' jars (19th-20th centuries) the picture is reversed, and the new arrivals concentrate in the north where they are almost fifty percent more than in the south. Thus, I would argue that while access to jars during the pre-colonial era was equally

difficult across the highlands as a whole, at around the turn of the last century the situation changed dramatically. In pre-colonial times the journey from the highlands to the coast was a risky undertaking; the travel took several months and led across swathes of *terra nullius* or tribal territories under enemy control (St. John 1863). As the region became gradually more secure from the early 1900s onwards, travel-time was notably reduced to a couple of weeks, which consequently facilitated the swift transport of trade goods in increased quantities. The surge in trade was further aided by the introduction of the water buffalo as a form of transport sometime during the 19th century (see footnote 45). Both Lian-Saging (1976-7) and Talla (1979) claim that the two major trade routes – leading from the coast to the uplands – converged in the northern highlands (see Chapter 7, Fig. 7.1), which could explain the concentration of jars recorded in cemeteries in the north.³² But the increased movement of people and goods had its downsides. The Kelabit were suddenly exposed to new strains of disease; oral histories recall sweeping smallpox and typhoid epidemics during the 1920s-30s wiping out entire villages (Ewart 2009:236). Mortality could have been especially prevalent in the north, given communities close proximity to the main trade routes, which could have contributed to larger number of dragon jar burials and cemeteries in the northern highlands.

Considering the above, I would argue that the combination of political, social and economic factors at the turn of the last century could explain the deposition of predominantly newer jars in single component or ‘communal’ cemeteries established at the time. I would also suggest that the higher representation of recent jars in the northern highlands and the lower numbers of vessels in the southern regions are part of the same trend: an imbalance in the access to trade routes. Archaeological evidence implies that the social transformation and its expression through single component burial grounds was more characteristic in the north, whereas communities in the south were affected to a somewhat lesser degree and continued to bury their dead in ancestral or commemorative burial grounds either in jars or wooden coffins (Table 5.8-9).

The expression of newly acquired social and economic standing however, had its limits within the Kelabit cultural and societal framework. It seems that apart from very specific political situations, there was no control over the purchase, ownership or trade of dragon jars within the Kelabit society. Mortuary practices on the other hand appear to be strictly prescriptive when it comes to indexing social rank, although – as it was described above in relation to commemorative burials – certain flexibility did exist in the system to be exploited by a select

³² The southern route was opened a couple of decades after a splinter community from Pa’ Diit established Long Peluan, at the southern fringe of the highlands in the early 1900s (Murang 1989).

few. Based on the jars themselves recorded at burial sites, it is difficult to ascertain whether they were intended for primary or secondary depositions, as in most cases the bones were placed back into the primary burial container. There is so far only a single example documented at Menatoh Arur Lobangiung where an intact jar was used for final interment, all the other sufficiently complete jars in the dataset show signs of modification (tops removed, bases pierced). However, the almost uniform composition and the location of single component cemeteries in relation to other burial sites in the landscape imply a purposeful expression of self-distinction within the repertoire of dragon jar mortuary practices. I would suggest that these burials either represent a specific (non-aristocratic) stratum of Kelabit communities, or perhaps reflect splinter groups of larger longhouse communities of the recent past, who wished to assert their newly established identities through single component dragon jar burials (or both, since the two motives are not necessarily mutually exclusive).

5.7 Summary

Ancestral burials

Rock-outcrops and megalithic monuments (slab-structures and stone jars) in the past served as physical and spiritual focal points in the landscape for communities who despite their settled lifeways, moved around at regular intervals. The repeated deposition of the dead at these locations, created a pool of ancestors that anchored communities or family lineages (which in reality often overlapped) firmly to certain places and legitimated claims over land. Archaeological evidence is still too sporadic to securely assert the continuous utilisation of rock formations and megalithic sites for mortuary purposes (although it is tempting to visualise an uninterrupted tradition of bone deposition progressing from the use of stone jars to the employment of stoneware jars, given the similarities in material properties). The few available ¹⁴C dates appear to outline a period of megalith-building activity around 1500 CE (Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2010), followed closely by the deposition of smaller, Zhangzhou-type vessels dating from the mid-16th century. The appearance of Chinese tradewares in the archaeological record suggests an increased participation in long-distance trading networks; items which became the material signifiers of social standing and prestige.

The next chronological stage is represented by a small percentage of dragon jars dating to around the 17th-18th century. These, I propose indicate the beginning of the jar-burial tradition, and perhaps the onset of feasting practices in the Kelabit highlands (see Chapter 6 and 7).

Although the detailed typology of dragon jars remains so far unrefined, archaeological survey data suggest a low-key, but more or less continuous deposition of burials until the 19th century at rock-outcrop and megalithic sites. The 19th-20th century signals an unprecedented influx of jar burials at rock-outcrop and megalithic sites; a trend that seems to be repeated elsewhere in the highland region (Table 5.8). Ethnographic accounts describing primary and secondary burial depositions prior to World War II seem to underscore the tendencies reflected in the archaeological evidence. These narratives nuance the secondary burial practices further by recalling that in some cases, body parts of the descendant of a particular lineage had to be returned to the designated ancestral burial ground. Nevertheless, not all megalithic and rock-outcrop sites were associated with dragon jar depositions which might be due to local taboos (such as the *batu balio*), taphonomic factors or fluctuation in population (epidemics, community mergers etc.). Displacement and population decrease seem to have played a key role in the severing the ties between communities and the landscape, so much so that by the 1940's historical links between megalithic monuments and any known community faded into the (mythical) past (Harrison, T. 1959, 1964).

Commemorative burials

The distribution of commemorative burials reflects certain regionality in their association with landmarks across the Kelabit highlands. The practice of placing jars close to ditch-cuttings and standing stones is characteristic in the southern highlands, while jars deposited on ridge-tops, mountain passes (and nearby ditch cuttings) dominate in the northern highlands. The latter tradition is perhaps an adoption of a custom widely practiced north and east of the highlands proper by neighbouring ethnic groups (St John 1863; Schneeberger 1979). Interestingly, almost ninety percent of commemorative burials recorded in the northern highlands represent vessel types of the 17th-18th century that can either be chronologically indicative of the supposed external influence, or the depositions represent a mortuary tradition that ceased by the early 19th-20th century. On the other hand, memorial depositions in the southern Kelabit highlands reveal a slightly different picture. While two-thirds of the jars here date to the an early, 17th-18th century period at Menatoh Tang Belanai and Menatoh Belanai Bangar (a trend analogous with patterns reflected in the north), the vessel depositions at Menatoh Sembario seem to have continued into the 19th-20th century. The example of this particular location suggests that the definition of a site's character was not absolute; Menatoh Sembario perhaps started out as commemorative location for burials then continued to be utilised and potentially transformed into an ancestral or communal funerary ground in later decades.

Based on ethnographic accounts recorded during the past forty years, it is very likely that the jars discovered at commemorative sites contained the remains of the individuals in whose honour the associated landmarks were created. This assumption is further supported by the relatively low number of jars documented at these locations, highlighting the fact that this form of interment was limited to a select few. Jar burials placed on ridge-crests and mountain passes represent a slightly different category within the commemorative mortuary practice. Here, like in the case of Menatoh Singkulub and Menatoh Pa' Dara'an a number of jars were lined up along the ridge, likely to reflect high-ranking members of the community of the same lineage, whereas the unique 2-in-1 jar at Menatoh Payeh Taratik perhaps memorialises a single individual. All three of the recorded sites are located on the lower ridges of the Apad Uat range, which constitutes the main watershed in the Kelabit highlands, most probably with special connotations to the transcendental realm. On one hand, the selection of such locations elucidate the spiritual motivations behind these burial depositions (and the creation of landmarks as well), signalling the significance of liminal but physically fixed spaces in the Kelabit cosmos. On the other, commemorative depositions draw attention to certain flexibilities within the structure of secondary burial codes; namely that high-ranking individuals had the opportunity to express individual choices regarding their final interment, as opposed to being buried according to the prescribed customs of their lineages. At this point I would also argue, that despite the jars' overwhelmingly early date (17th-18th centuries), the tradition of commemorative burials might, in fact, be relatively recent (Metcalf 1991; 2010); elite leaders employing ancient jars and making their own mark on the landscape, as a strategy to distinguish themselves from the emerging 'nouveau riche' who themselves increasingly utilised dragon jars for burials.

On a final note, one should not overlook the fact that the memorialisation of a person (or a lineage) in a form of a landmark carries on until today (although sporadically and not without controversy). In 2009, a member of the Pa' Dalih longhouse re-cut the *nabang* that was created in the honour of his great-grandfather using modern machinery, and there is a continuous dispute over the rightful ownership of a stone-seat, called Batu Pinlukung (Cluny and Chay 2007:41), in the Pa' Umor area, being repeatedly re-erected at different locations by members of rival families. These current pursuits can help to elucidate not only the Kelabits' 'modern' relationship to their animistic pasts but also to nuance the material and spiritual beliefs attached to landmarks across the highlands (Amster 2009; cf. Chapter 7).

Communal burials

Single component or communal burial sites containing only dragon jar depositions show distinct regionality in both their numbers and distribution. Cemeteries located in the northern highlands are more abundant both in their occurrence and the number of jars represented at the sites than in the southern region. The types of jars documented in single component cemeteries are limited, compared with the multi-component burial grounds where the variation of vessel styles is significantly higher. Jars of 19th-20th century types (particularly Type 1) dominate single component cemeteries; a trend, which I argue, reflects the shift to the new, monetary-based economy as the influence of the colonial administration solidified in the region. The influx of recent jars signalled the intensification of trade, which due to the direction of commercial routes resulted in higher concentration of vessels in the northern highlands. The diversified economy brought about fresh social opportunities, facilitating the emergence of a new Kelabit 'middle class' whom – either members of a larger community or a splinter group – held it important to express their distinct social identities by burying their dead at separate locations from ancestral or commemorative cemeteries, in newly established burial grounds using recently acquired jars (Table 5.10).

It is difficult to ascertain whether single component sites represent primary or secondary burials. In contrast to other Orang Ulu groups in Borneo (e.g. Metcalf 1991; Rousseau 1998) there is very little information concerning the pre-war, pre-Christian eschatologies of the Kelabit. Consequently, it is impossible to safely explore the animistic beliefs related to the transformation of human soul after death. The archaeological and ethnographic evidence strongly implies that the elite reserved its entitlement to secondary burial ceremonies including the creation of commemorative landmarks and lavish *borak ate'* feasts. It is also probable that by the beginning of the 20th century the arrangement of such events could have been within the economic and social means of the emerging middle classes. Thus, I would argue that secondary burial ceremonies were the exclusive privileges restricted to the *Lun Merar*, reflected spiritually in their pantheon of 'canonised' ancestors, along with their abilities to manipulate *lalud* (cf. Chapter 3 and 7). Nevertheless, it has to be taken into account that by the beginning of the 20th century (approximately as far as most oral histories stretch back) there was – although sporadic – missionary presence in the broader region, which might have begun to impact on Kelabit spirituality, loosening the traditional mortuary codes of conduct. As this chapter has shown, social (and spiritual) differences played a key role in designating not only the mode and place of burial deposition in the landscape but also the broad selection of jars

available for burial, and it is this use of the jars by the living that we shall turn to in the next chapter.

Type of cemeteries	No. of cemeteries	~16 th -17 th c.	~17 th -18 th c.	~18 th -19 th c.	~19 th c.	~19 th -20 th c.	unknown	Total
Southern highlands								
Multi-component	10	1	16	2	2	23	14	58
Single component	1	-	-	-	2	19	-	21
Subtotal	11	1	16	-	4	42	14	79
Pa' Main area								
Multi-component	1	-		1		1	-	2
Single component	1	-	1	-	1	6	-	8
Subtotal	2	-	1	1	1	7	-	10
Northern highlands								
Multi-component	5	-	3	-	2	19	15	39
Single component	4	-	2	-	3	37	7	49
Subtotal	9	-	5	-	5	56	22	88
Total	22	1	22	3	10	105	36	177

Table 5.7 – Summary table of cemetery types and jar numbers in cemeteries.

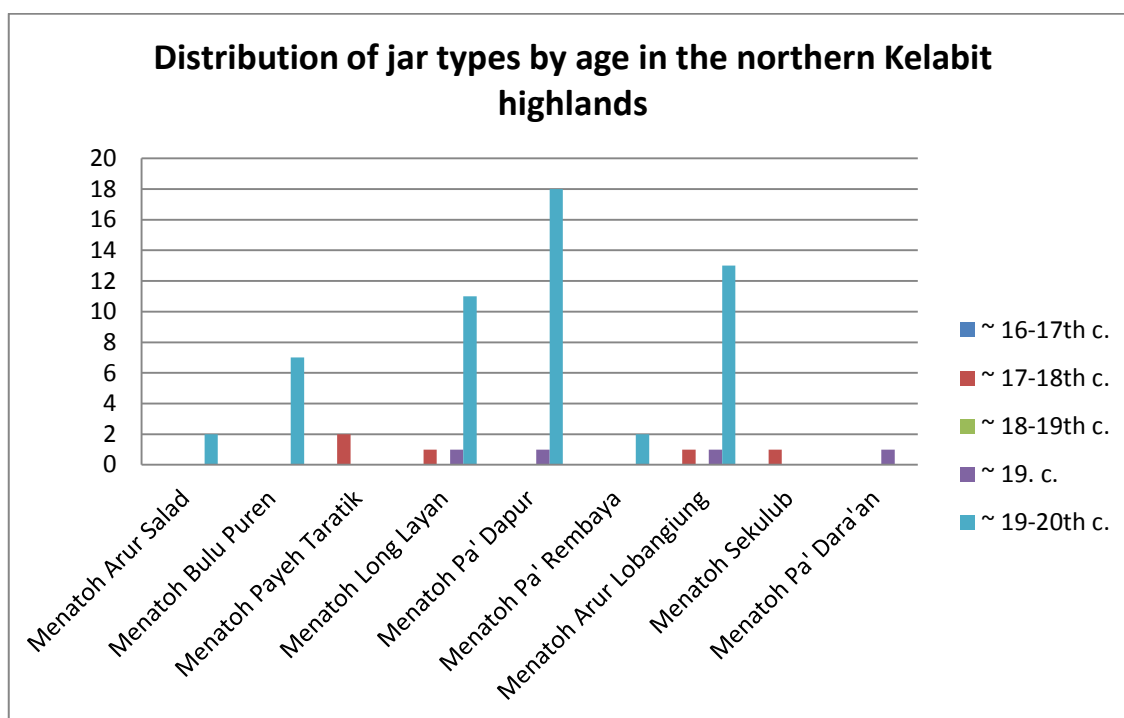
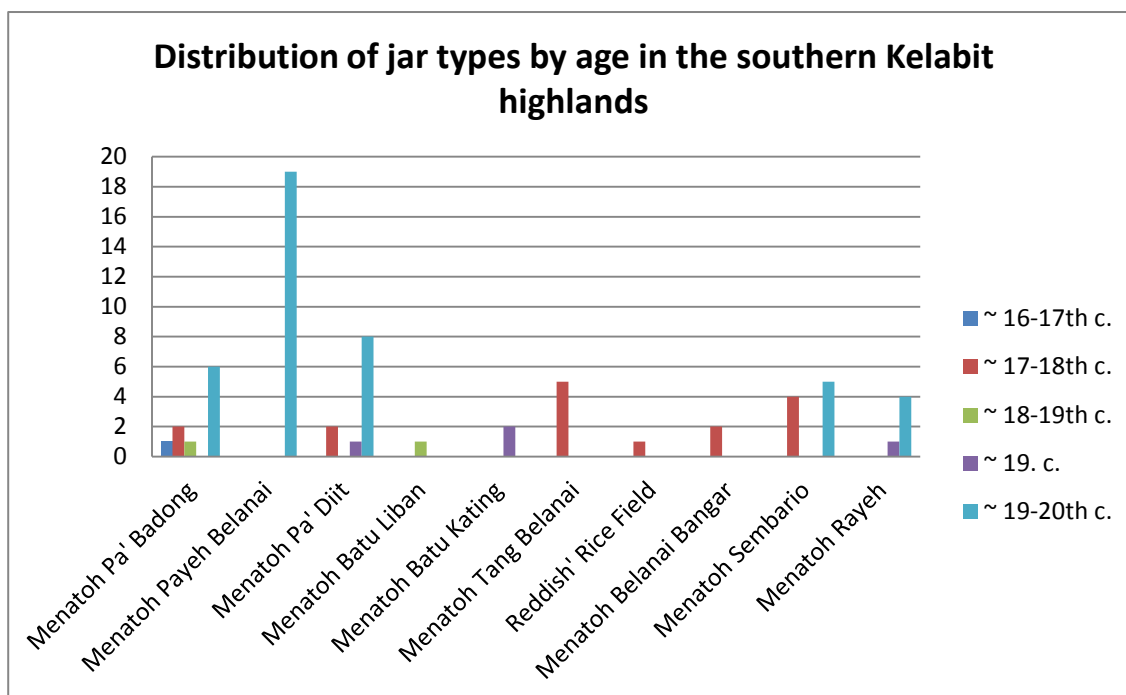


Table 5.8 – Dragon jars' distribution by chronological age across the southern and northern Kelabit highlands.

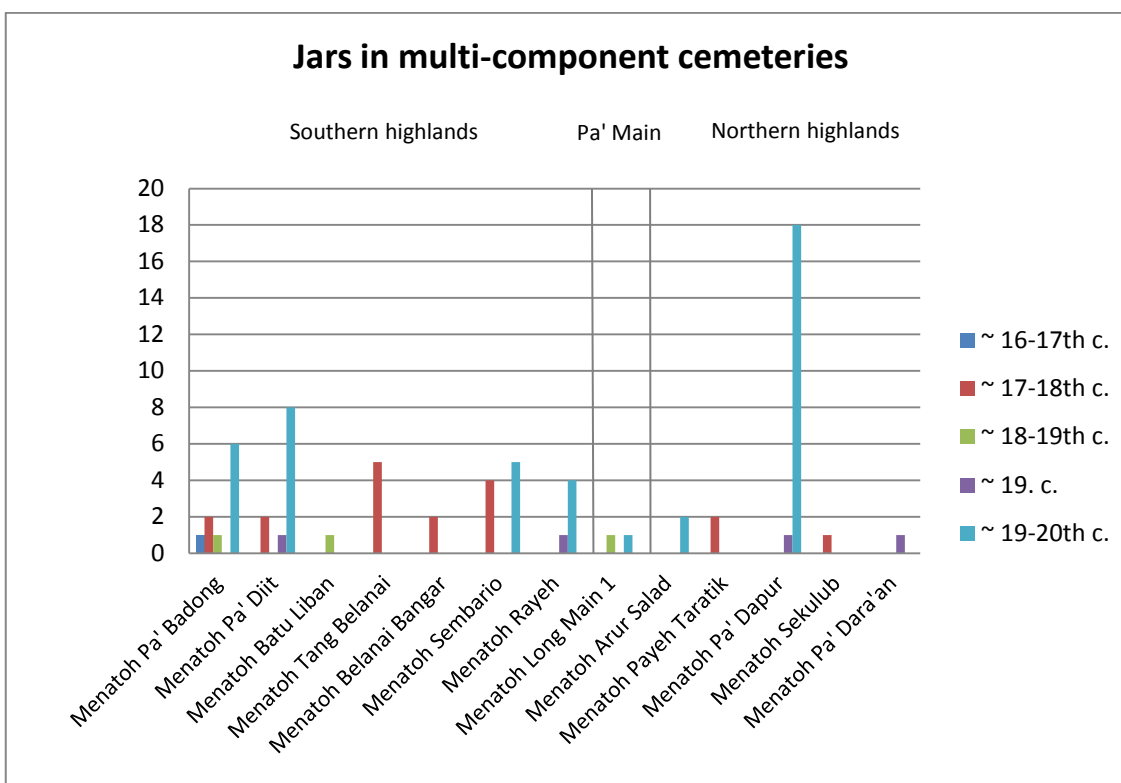
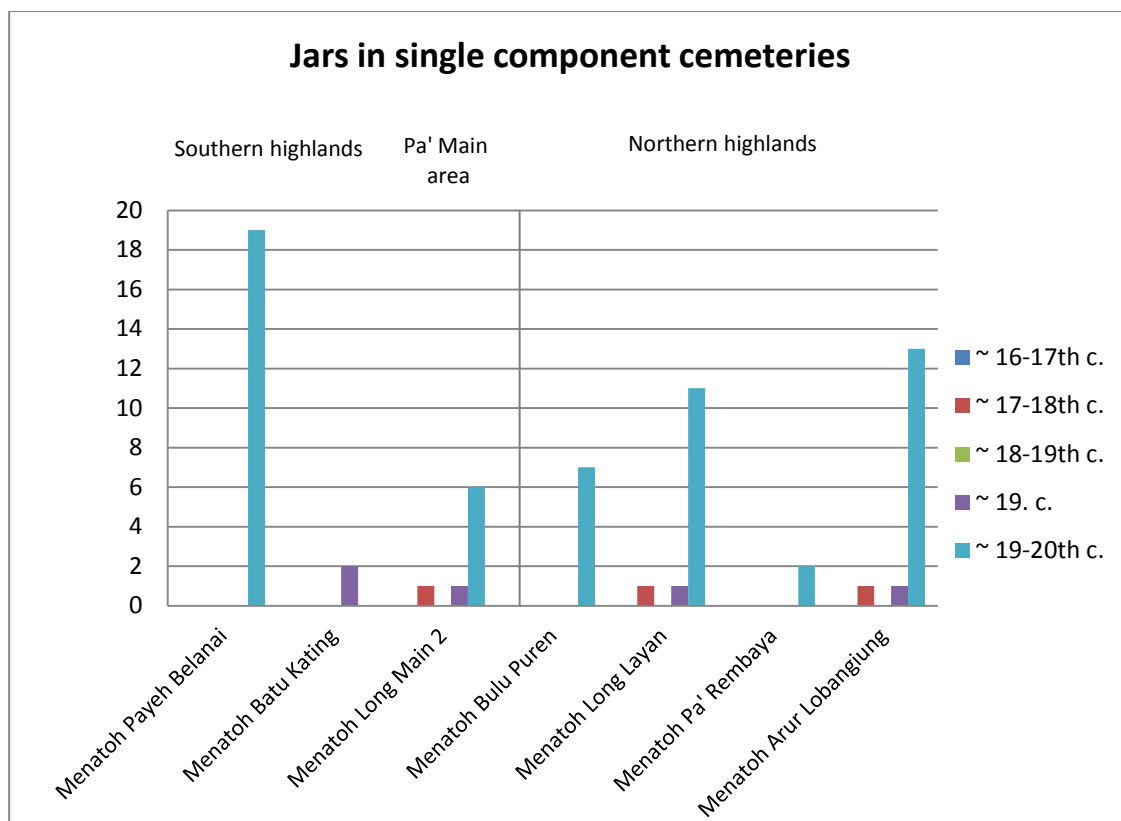


Table 5.9 – Distribution of jars in different types of cemeteries in the southern and the northern Kelabit highlands.

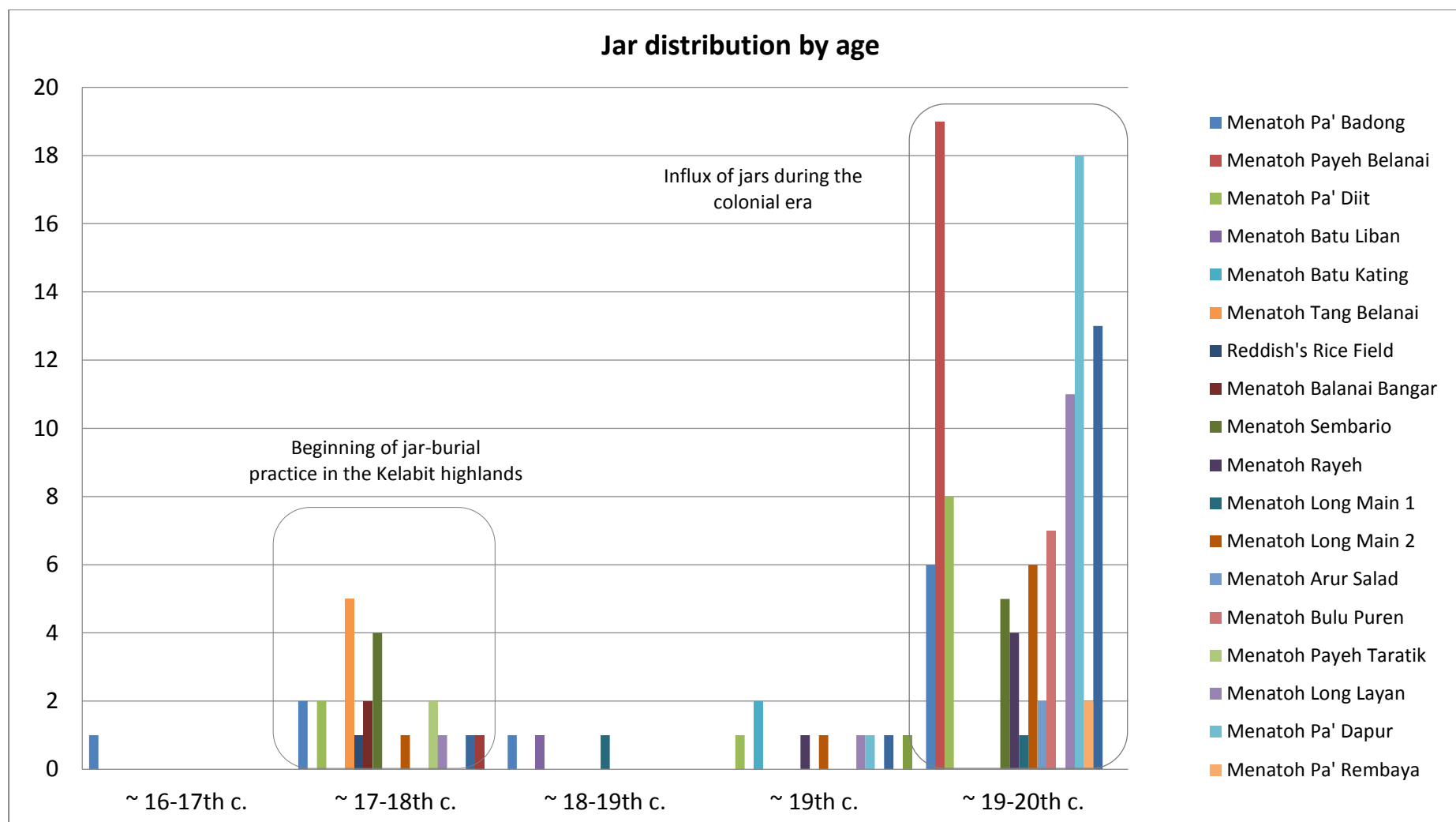


Table 5.10 - Distribution of dragon jars in single and multi-component cemeteries indicating the main trends of burial jar selection in the Kelabit highlands.

Chapter 6 Jars for the Living: Heirloom jars in longhouses and town homes

6.1 Introduction

This chapter further details the picture outlined by the archaeological evidence in the previous section, and elucidates the ethnographic context of jars by placing them in a local Kelabit and a broader Bornean perspective. The chapter draws heavily on colonial literature, ethnographic writings produced by indigenous and Western ethnographers and on interviews conducted within the framework of the present study. Instead of a quantitative analysis of interviews, the focus remains on the jars and their local perception and classification. Kelabit jar-narratives are then contrasted with the typological examination of vessels both in funerary and in ethnographic settings. I also touch upon sensory elements of local evaluation, which are less explicit but could have played a key role how jars were perceived and experienced in the past. Jars are also examined from the perspective of visibility within the context of their present locations, highlighting local sensitivities. By bringing these elements together, the chapter considers whether there is a genuine correlation between the chronological age of jars and their local classifications, or if Kelabit jar-values were constructed on entirely different grounds.

6.2 Classification of jars from a Bornean indigenous perspective

Perhaps there is no indigenous group on Borneo, or in fact in Southeast Asia as a whole, whom had not venerated large stoneware jars in one way or another (Freeman 1970 [1955]; Uchibori 1978 [Iban, Sarawak], Schiller 1997 [Ngaju Dayak, Central Kalimantan], Lumholtz 1991 [1920] [Kahayan Kapuas, Central Kalimantan], Kaboy and Moore 1967; Appleton 2004 [Melanau, Sarawak], Rousseau 1998 [Kayan, Sarawak], Metcalf 1991 [Berawan, Sarawak], Hung 2008 [highlands of Central Vietnam], Barbosa 1992 [Philippines] etc., Fig. 6.1). Ancient jars were believed to possess extraordinary powers, which, if the jar was looked after properly, could rub off on its owner(s). *Vice versa*, the potency of a renowned leader could transfer onto his personal items including jars, even if these appeared to be mediocre items at first glance. People only parted with their jars under unusually difficult circumstances; otherwise vessels remained the family's prized possessions or *pusaka* (heirlooms) for many generations (Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]:17). These enmeshed and interdependent relationships between objects and persons resulted in complex biographies and a range of values that were difficult to

express in monetary terms, let alone cross-culturally, even within the close geographical boundaries of Borneo.



Figure 6.1 - Map of Borneo indicating the distribution of indigenous groups, and principal towns mentioned in the text. 1. Banjarmasin; 2. Sintang; 3. Pontianak; 4. Kapuas Murang; 5. Samarinda; 6. Sukadana; 7. Kuching; 8. Miri; 9. Marudi (Claudetown); 10. Bandar Seri Begawan; 11. Kota Kinabalu. Illustration: L. Lloyd-Smith.

6.2.1 Brief overview of jars in Southeast Asia and their representation in the relevant literature

As the Age of Commerce gained momentum in the Southeast Asian region in the 16th-17th century (Reid 1993), there was a gradual but significant increase in the output of southern Chinese kilns producing for export (Harrisson, B. 1979, 1990 [1986], 1995; Nguyen Long 1992). It appears that jars had an already established market in Borneo: according to the Dongxi Yankao, an early 17th century Chinese text, ‘people in Banjarmasin wanted to be buried in jars decorated with dragons’ (Zhang Xie in Chambert-Loire and Dupoizat 2003). By the time the first European traders and members of the colonial apparatus began to report on indigenous customs, the indigenous peoples of Borneo had a long-standing tradition within which a variety of jars was considered antique, some which could have been in circulation since the 10th-11th centuries (Harrisson, T. 1955b; White 1955). Southeast Asia was a lucrative market for jars, spurring mainland Chinese potters to produce replicas fashioned according to indigenous tastes reaping even higher profits.

The presence of fakes was first noted by a German traveller, Frederik Müller in 1836, during his time in Banjarmasin (south Kalimantan) (1857). A decade later another German, the geologist Carl Schwaner reported on the circulation of ‘false Belangas’ (the highest value jars) among the Barito Dayak in south Kalimantan (1853). About 20 years later Colonel Michel Perealer, a member of the Dutch colonial administration expressed similar concerns while stationed in the Kapuas Murong region (central Kalimantan) (1870). He specifically mentions Chinese craftsmen getting hold of genuine antique jars and ‘have taken the trouble to travel to China with samples in order to have them copied to the smallest detail’ (Perealer in Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]:21).

But the jar trade that promised high profits was laden with potential pitfalls. By the beginning of the 19th century, the Bornean market was saturated with newly manufactured jars including copies of antique variants which, within a generation or two, became genuine valued items themselves. Indigenous customers were equally difficult for traders to navigate. Bornean village elders acted as gatekeepers of local jar-knowledge, and they were not easily fooled by copies. Their expertise encompassed not only physical criteria but genealogies of jars’ (and their owners’) as well (Barbosa 1992; Césard 2014). Many indigenous groups regarded transactions involving jars as a communal matter, during which the consultation with the older generation was obligatory (Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]:21). Diverse local tastes presented another obstacle for traders; while certain vessels were held in high esteem by one ethnic group, they could seem worthless in the eyes of another, substantially impacting on the jars’ monetary value.

To counter these difficulties, by 1839, the so-called Sintang³³ manual was in circulation among the Malay merchants in the Kapuas region (west Kalimantan), containing illustrations of highly valued local jar types. The content of the manual was considered lost and thought to have survived only in a form of an excerpt by Cornelius Kater, a Dutch colonial officer (Kater 1867; Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]:24), until the discovery of a copy of its original Jawi version in 2003 (Chambert-Loire and Dupoizat 2003). The manual provides a rare insight to jar-nomenclature, existing varieties and the assessment of values by the standards of the Ngaju Dayak in the early-mid 1800s (Fig. 6.2). The other illustrated guide known from Borneo dates to the late 1800s, and, as opposed to the Sintang manual, it served part of a broader ethnographic enquiry in the Kapuas Murong delta (central Kalimantan). This discussion on the traditions of the Ngaju Dayak by a German physician, Franz Grabowski was supplemented with a catalogue of vessels he encountered in the nearby villages, in which jars' market values were also indicated (1885) (Fig. 6.3, Table 6.1).

³³ Sintang is located in West Borneo, at the middle reaches of the Kapuas River. It was famous for its jar fairs where trade between the Ngaju Dayaks living in the highlands and upriver regions of the Kapuas, and Malay merchants travelling up from Pontianak took place in the hope of making a profit (Césard 2014).

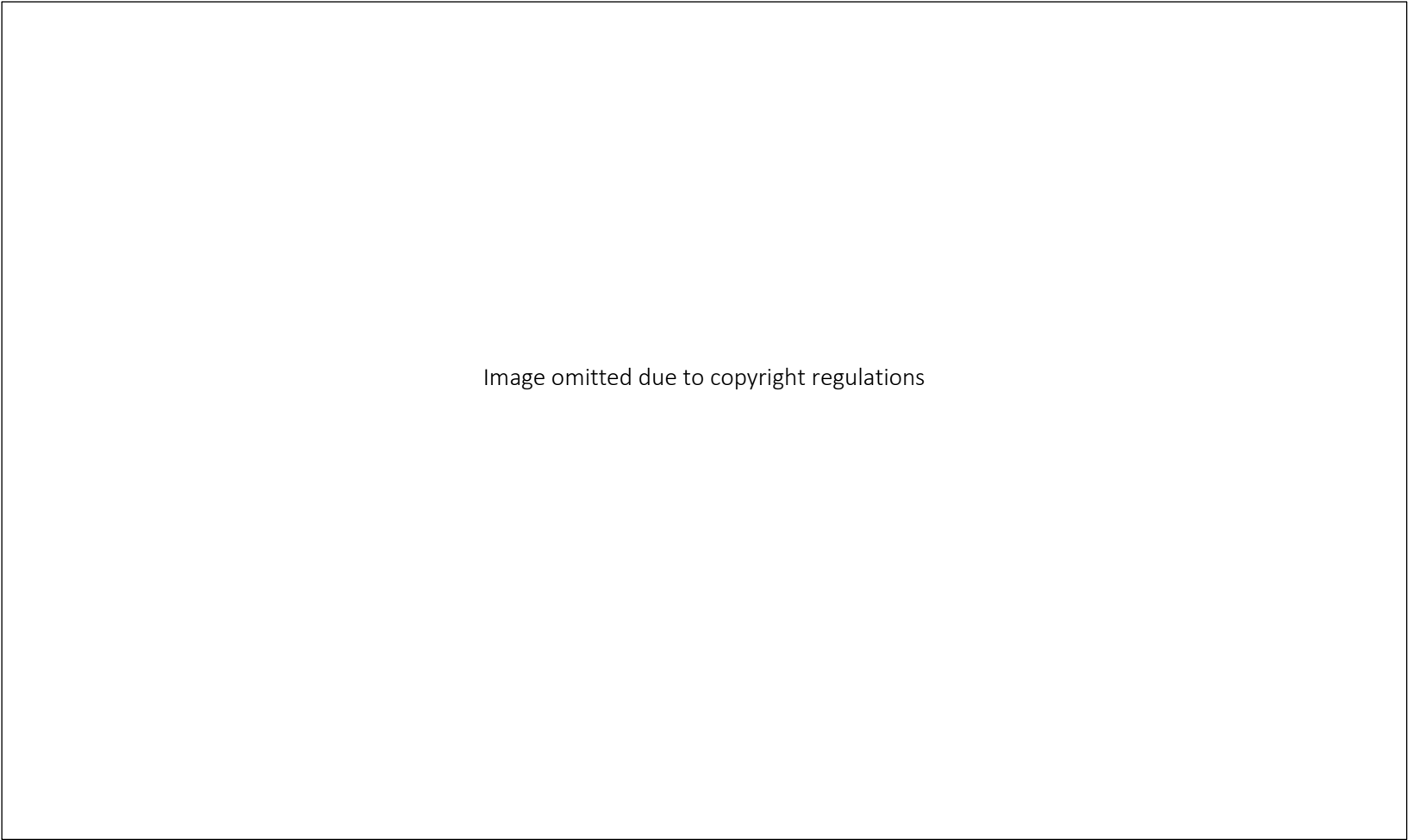


Image omitted due to copyright regulations

Figure 6.2 - A page from the so-called Sintang manual produced in 1839 in the region of West Kalimantan, detailing local jar preferences (Chambert-Loire and Dupoizat 2003:43, fr. 3r).

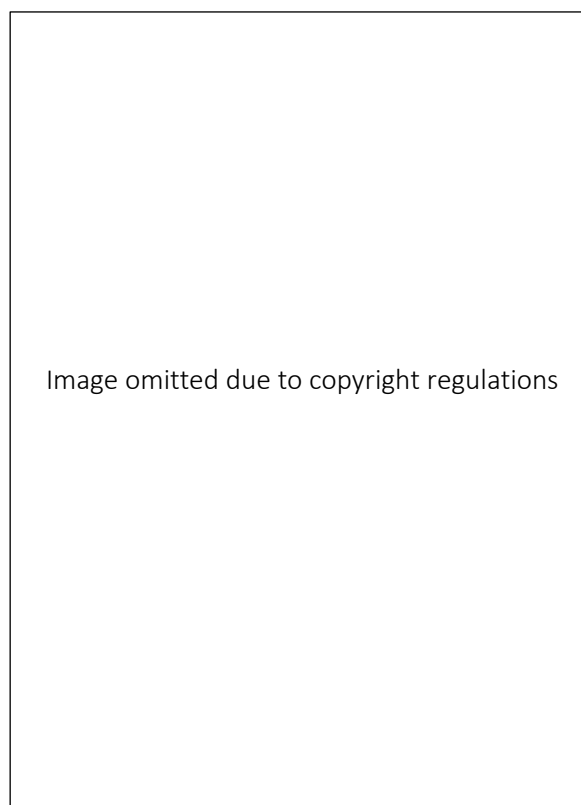


Figure 6.3 - Jars recorded in the Kapuas Murong Delta by Grabowski in 1885. Image source: Harrison, B. 1990 [1986], Fig. 6.4.

	Name of jar	Monetary value (in 1881)
1	Hatuan Belanga Habohot: the property of an old chief	f2,000 (~ €21,000 today)
2	Hatuan Belanga Rempa: wooden neck and mouth	f1,800
3	Hatuan Harimau	f1,200
4	Hatuan Harimau: nicknamed 'Bakikis' because of its peeling glaze	f1,000
5	Harimau Haso: a fairly common type	f600
6	Hatuan Rantian	f500
7	Bazir Rantian	f180
8	Kasisik Bintiling	f300
9	Brahan Kowong	f70
10	Ika Matali: the only white glazed jar	f60
11	Lalang Pantoh	f30
12	Lalang Rangkang	f30
13	Sambas	f30
14	Gusi	f30
15	Kalatta Belanga	f25
16	Syam	f12
17	Patoran Poru	f12
18	Bukong: common water jar (added for comparison)	f3 (~ €31.50 today)

Table 6.1 - Summary table collated by Barbara Harrison (based on Grabowski's original German paper). 'f' stands for Dutch florins (later guilder), f1 in the 1880s had the purchasing power of around €10.50 today. The converted values in italics are mine. The International Institute for Social History's website (Amsterdam, The Netherlands) was used for calculating values: <http://www.iisg.nl/hpw/calculate.php>.

The solidification of the colonial rule in the entire Southeast Asian region brought about a surge in the ethnographic writing from the mid-1800s onwards (St John 1863; Bock 1984 [1881]; Ling Roth 1980 [1896]; Hose and McDougall 1966 [1912]; Mallinckrodt 1924; Rutter 1985 [1929]; Evans 1923, 1953 etc.), but apart from short sections dedicated to jars' roles in indigenous practices (Kaboy and Moore 1967; Chin 1984 [1980]), the subject remained largely unexplored, especially outside Borneo. Nevertheless, there is one exception; the work of Paul Guilleminet, a French colonial officer stationed in Indochina during the early 1930s. Guilleminet and his partner Jules Alberty from the Paris Foreign Missions Society spent eight years in the mountainous regions of Vietnam collecting linguistic and ethnographic material for a Bahnar-French dictionary.³⁴ Within this body of work Guilleminet described 141 individual jars classified into 55 'Families', supplementing his study with illustrations of 63 types (Guilleminet and Alberty 1959, 1963). Although the manuscript was never fully published, Marie-France Dupoizat summarised its key findings on the categorisation, evaluation and use of jars by indigenous communities (Dupoizat 2000). Guilleminet's study remained the only work on jars in Mainland Southeast Asia until the Smithsonian Institute's collaboration with Vietnamese ethnographers took place in 2006 (Hung 2008; Cort and Lefferts 2013). This latter study still stands as a unique piece of research which explicitly explored the understanding of jars within a variety of ethnic cultural spheres.

By the 1960s-70s scholars working in the region faced with a different kind of challenge: the rapid fading of indigenous jar expertise. By this time, the once extensive local jar-knowledge was growing increasingly redundant; family heirlooms were sold off and converted into hard cash in order to pay for children's education, motorbikes or petrol. These changing circumstances prompted the devising of new strategies to jar-research, and given the lack of representation of utilitarian vessels in ceramicist literature, scholars had the freedom to come up with their own approaches. Barbara Harrisson turned her attention back to the illustrated manuscripts of Kater and Grabowski and to the historical records. In her pioneering work she matched illustrations with specimens curated in the Brunei, Sabah and Sarawak Museums, while drawing upon local jar terminologies retained in historical and ethnographic literature (Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]). Barbara, similarly to Eine Moore (1970) studied archaeological material as well for comparison, and concluded that without reference collections and scientific analyses, it is difficult to draw any kind of parallels between jar fragments, complete vessels and their production locale (Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]:44 and cf. Chapter 3). In contrast, Sumarah Adhyatman and Abu Ridho in Jakarta, and Lucas Chin in Kuching focussed on the classification and dating of existing museum

³⁴ The Bahnar (or Ba Na) ethnic group belongs to the Mon-Khmer language family. They now primarily live in Central Highland provinces of Gai La and Kon Tum and coastal regions of Bình Định and Phú Yên.

collections with a short chapter in each publication dedicated to the local use and myths surrounding jars (Adhyatman and Ridho 1984; Chin 1988). The third approach to jars involved the documentation of manufacturing technologies, and investigated workshops ran by the descendants of Chinese immigrant potters in Borneo, who still applied traditional techniques in the construction of large stoneware vessels (Dupoizat 1983; Ridho and Wahyono 1983).

Nevertheless, the direction of research seemed to take a new turn in the 1990s, when Philippine scholars published an extensive volume very much in the vein of Barbara Harrisson's work, including a lengthy study detailing the local use of jars by nine different indigenous groups (Valdes *et al.* 1992). Around the same time archaeological assemblages excavated in the 1950s and 60s were reassessed by young scholars (Baretto-Tesoro 2003, 2008; Chang 2008), followed closely by two major scientific analyses on jar assemblages in recent years (Grave *et al.* 2005; Sinopoli *et al.* 2006). Jars began to appear in new light as spectacular shipwreck-cargoes were recovered and displayed in a series of high-end exhibitions across the region (Goddio *et al.* 2002; Flecker 2009; Krahel *et al.* 2010). The advancements of both archaeology and tangible / intangible heritage management in Southeast Asia during the past few decades generated a fortuitous discourse on jars and tradewares in general which, by now, extends beyond conventional vessel typologies and the broad frameworks of dating (Pierson 2013; Ströber 2013; Césard 2014; Dueppen 2014). Concurrently, issues related to nomenclature, that have long been causing confusion in the literature, are being tackled with competence (Gutman 2002; Borell 2014) while Southeast Asian export wares are being incorporated into wider debates on social cohesion (Klarich 2010), complexity (Junker 1999) and global trade (Pijl-Ketel 1982; Desroches *et al.* 1997, etc.).

6.2.2 Jar nomenclature in Borneo

The existence of stoneware jars was certainly well known by the time the word *tempayan* appears in the Malay Annals around 1612 (Dupoizat 2000:201 quoting Wilkinson 1959). According to Orsoy de Flines the term derived from '*tapa*' (rice wine) and referred explicitly to containers of alcohol within the category of stoneware vessels (1972 [1949]). The phrase was used across the entire Southeast Asian archipelago along with the terms of *gusi* (*gusih*, *guchi*, *gutshi*), *tajau* (*tajow*) and *blanga* (or *belanga*) (Adhyatman and Ridho 1984). However, as the following section will demonstrate, these terms often included a variety of jar styles, with a gamut of economic, social and spiritual values attached to them depending on the cultural setting within which they circulated.

Gusi

Asian ceramicist research directly associates *gusi* jars with a particular type of stoneware of ovoid-shape, coated with light, olive-coloured glaze. The origin of *gusi* jars can be traced back to the late Tang dynasty (10th century AD), to workshops of Xinhui and Foshan districts in Guangdong province (Krahl 2010a) (Fig. 6.3, no. 14, see Fig. 3.3). *Gusis* were widely recognised as the oldest of jar varieties across Borneo (including the highland regions – see Harrisson, T. 1955, 1967), and were referred to as ‘Dusun-type’ (reflecting an ethnic association, see White 1955; Harrisson, T. 1967) or Hindu-Javanese in the archaeological literature (indicating geographical distribution, see Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]; Miksic 2009, see also Chapter 3). However, the term *gusi* – beyond the definition of a singular, ancient jar type – seem to have taken on an extensive meaning among the peoples of Borneo describing jars of esteem well before the first colonial encounter (Hoskins 1996).

Early European ethnographic writing unequivocally described *gusi* jars as being highly valued items by the locals (St John 1863:39-40; Ling Roth 1980[1896]:284 quoting Grant 1864, Rutter 1985 [1929]:241-4); they were venerated heirlooms that required the attention of their owners. Indeed, Henry Ling Roth (1980 [1896]:285-6) remarked on the jars’ potency manifesting through extraordinary deeds:

‘Perhaps the most remarkable jar in Borneo is the one possessed by the present Sultan of Brunei, as it not only has all the valuable properties of the other sacred vases, but speaks. [...] He [i.e. the Sultan] said, the night before his first wife died, it moaned sorrowfully, and on every occasion of impending misfortune it utters the same melancholy sounds. [...] As a rule, it is covered over with gold-embroidered brocade, and seldom exposed, except when about to be consulted.’ (Roth 1980 [1896]:286 quoting Sir Charles Brooke)

Owen Rutter dedicated a whole section to ‘*The Gusi Cult*’ in his book – including a brief portrayal of jars in healing rituals – and was the first to point out that *gusi* jars were believed to have spirits residing in them (1985 [1929]:243). On the whole, these early descriptions encapsulate the key aspects of local jar-classification fairly well, that is: the correct assessment of a jar’s antiquity, regionality reflected in jar-values, the hierarchy within jar categories, and the local perception of jars as being more than mere objects.

Syam

With their moderate size, thick black glaze and lack of decoration, *syam* jars represent perhaps the most utilitarian of varieties (Fig. 6.3, no. 16 and Fig. 3.3). The heyday of the *syam* jars' production dates to the 14th-15th centuries, manufactured in the workshops of Maenam Noi complex (Nguyen Long 1992; Cort 2008d, see also Chapter 3). *Syam* jars (or to be more precise, their contents) were shipped in masses all over island Southeast Asia, therefore it is not surprising that their Thai origins were fossilised by the Bornean jar-phraseology. Regardless of the cessation of their manufacture in the 16th century, *syam* jars seem to have remained in circulation, but despite their considerable antiquity by the 19th century, they still ranked low on the local commodity scale (Grabowski 1885).

Belanga and brahan

There were, however, more nebulous jar categories. The terms *belanga* and *brahan* occur frequently in the literature referring to jars of the greatest antiquity and value, with attributions such as 'miraculous' (Ling Roth 1980 [1896]:clxxvi) and of 'mythical origin' (ibid., Bock 1984 [1881]:197-8; Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]:23-4) (Fig. 6.3, no. 1, 2, 15). Carl Bock, while travelling in the Mahakam, region mentions 'a series of *gudji blanga*, a sort of glazed jar imported from China, in green, blue or brown, ornamented with figures of lizards and serpents in relief' (1984 [1881]:197). 30 years later, the Norwegian ethnographer Carl Lumholtz recalls an encounter with a Katingan³⁵ chief, who consented to his ordinary '*gutshi*' to be photographed, but 'to remove the real *blanga*, he said, would necessitate the sacrifice of a fowl' (1991 [1920]:350).

Upon closer inspection of the literature it is apparent that the names *belanga* and *brahan* were kind of umbrella-terms including a variety of jar sub-types of greater or lesser value (Grabowski 1885; Harrisson B., 1990 [1986]; Chambert-Loire and Dupoizat 2003). *Belanga* and *brahan* jars generally stand with qualifiers which were to indicate distinct characteristics like colour, shape or design. Descriptions suggest a close association between jars' appearance and their qualifiers, referring to anthropo-, and zoomorphic, and plant-like properties or even gender (Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]:24; Roth 1980 [1896]:clxxvii). The Sintang manual goes into great detail describing the decorations and the ranking of *belanga* and *brahan* jars accordingly (i.e. whether the dragons have their feet under their bodies, or on both sides, and whether multiple dragons are following each other or are placed face-to-face, etc.) (Chambert-Loire and Dupoizat 2003). However, even

³⁵ The Katingan ethnic group occupies the peatlands stretching between the Sampit and Mengkadang River in Central Kalimantan.

in possession of the relevant illustrations, it is difficult to evaluate these types retrospectively, especially in the light of contemporary (and subsequent) reproductions. Based on Grabowski's catalogue, where local names of jars were clearly indicated, Barbara Harrisson (1990 [1986]) proposed that the *belanga* and *brahan* terms encompassed all ancient jars dating pre-Ming or to the Ming dynasty (14th-17th century); implying a vague (but correct) indigenous understanding of ceramic typo-chronology.

Harimau and menaga

The coinage of *harimau* and *menaga* (*benaga*) also occur along with qualifiers, but never in association with *belanga* or *brahan* (Grabowski 1885; Harrisson B., 1990 [1986]) (Fig. 6.3, no. 3, 4). Therefore, following Barbara Harrisson's argument, we have to assume that these terms represent somewhat later jar varieties. She provides explanations for the two terms: *harimau* derives from the Malay word 'rimau' meaning tiger, whereas *menaga* refers to the phrase 'naga'; the Sanskrit mythical snake (1990 [1986]:28; 'ornamented with a Chinese dragon moulded in relief' Hose and McDougall 1966 [1912]:62). *Harimau* was used more commonly in the southern regions of Borneo, while *menaga* in the north (which from the Kelabit point of view bears special significance, see Chapter 7). It appears that both terms were explicitly applied to jars with dragon designs, including a number of variants. However it is possible, that beyond regional distinctions, the *harimau* and *menaga* did genuinely represent two very different jar types.

Rusa and ningka

Indigenous myths of jars' origin evoke *belanga* and *brahan* jars as divine creations, while *rusa* jars as works of a skilful, but low-ranking servant of the creator deity (Perealer 1870; Grabowski 1885; Mallinckrodt 1924; Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]). The *rusa* category seems to include old, valuable and more recent jars, while showing clear regionality towards the northern areas. In fact, *rusas* are still recognised by Iban groups in the lowland regions of Sarawak but are certainly valued less than *menaga* jars for instance (Sarawak Museum Permanent exhibition). Barbara Harrisson classifies all jar types with alternative designs to dragons in the *rusa* category, 'commonly scroll-, and wave-bands' (1990 [1986]:25-8). Neither the Sintang manual, nor Grabowski's catalogue mentions the type, which underscores the possibility that *rusa* was not a commonly known jar category, but a class more familiar to people in the north (Sarawak, Brunei and Sabah). *Ningka* jars, similarly to the *rusas*, only occur in ethnographic writings derived from north Borneo (Hose and McDougall 1966 [1912]). Based on a photograph in the Hose collection in the Museum of

Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, the *ningka* appears to be a fairly short jar variety with *sgraffito* scroll decoration; nevertheless it was an object of significant value (ibid, p. 62) (Fig. 6.4).

6.3 Kelabit classification of jars

Ethnographic interviews conducted for this study outline three distinct groups of jars recognised by the Kelabit: 1) *belanai ma'on* (old or ancient jars), 2) *belanai abai* ('Malay' jars) and 3) *belanai meching* ('new arrivals' or recent jars). This broad classification corresponds with jar types referred to by Kelabit ethnographers (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979; Bala 2002); however, these works never explicitly state the principles and physical characteristics upon which the distinctions were based and tend to describe jars against specific social backdrops such as feasting, compensation or burial ceremonies.

Ancient, valuable jars seem to feature strongly in ethnographic narratives, yet the characteristics or physical properties of what constitutes a *belanai ma'o* remain nebulous. Rather surprisingly, a smattering of concrete clues referring to the appearance of ancient jars was first provided by an outsider; Tom Harrisson:

'[...] perfectly unscathed, richly brown-glazed, powerfully shaped and strongest decorated with dragons – three.' (1959a:29)

The descriptions given by my Kelabit interviewees echo similar properties such as the dark-coloured glaze (I1, I2, I4, I8) and the presence of dragons (I1, I2, I8, I23). However, views are less consistent regarding the condition of ancient jars: some say chipped, worn surfaces and repairs testify for intense use and thus enhance the value (I2, I13) whereas a small minority argue that jars ought to remain pristine (I4). Despite the varying opinions, it appears that jars bearing the imprint of past festivities value higher in the eyes of the modern Kelabit. To my query 'How can one tell whether a jar is old?' I was given some wonderfully practical answers: 'Because the jar was broken [an implication of frequent use] but later repaired [i.e. it was held in high enough esteem to be preserved]' (I2). Or 'the glaze is not so good [i.e. chipped], the dragons have 'seen a lot of party' (I13). In fact the presence of repair could be a crucial sign of a valuable object, given that fixing jars was a complicated and risky undertaking. The other, perhaps more perceptible attribute of ancient jars was a pair of dragons. Similarly to the jar's condition, there are contrasting views on the rendering of dragons on vessels; some people say that textured, protruding dragon-reliefs are indicators of ancient makes (I1, I23), while others claim that

dragons are 'less visible' on the surface of old jars (I2, I8). This latter characteristic is perhaps again, more of a reflection on the jars' wear-and-tear than the execution of the decoration. According to my interviewees, jars displaying floral designs or panelling could also qualify as *belanai ma'on*, but there is a clear dominance of jars with dragon motifs within this category.

The *belanai meching* represent another cluster of dragon jars widely recognised by people in the Kelabit highlands. My informants describe *meching* jars as being the most recent types (hence the coinage of 'new arrivals'). The glaze of these jars is recalled as being predominantly of light colour (I1, I4, I23) 'that shines like varnish' (I4). One of my interviewees remarked on the *meching* jars' 'plain design' [I1 – however, he did not elucidate what he meant by 'plain']. One person commented on the *meching* jars being heavier than the *belanai ma'on* (I4), whereas someone else mentioned that recent jars were larger in size than all the other types (I1).

The *belanai abai* is perhaps the fuzziest of jar-categories. As it will be demonstrated later through the examination of the ethnographic jar data, the group of *belanai abai* cannot be ascribed to a clear typological class. Most of my Kelabit interviewees described the physical appearance and properties of *abai* jars in relational terms, in comparison to *ma'on* and *meching* jars. *Abai* jars were reported to have light, reddish-coloured glaze (I4, I8, I23) but not as light as in the case of *meching* jars (I1). The design was different from the decoration occurring in the other two jar categories; someone recalled that *abai* jars lacked ornamentation (I2), while another person said that *abais* were decorated, but not with dragons (I8). The '*abai*' coinage refers to Malay merchants, who used to trade jars up to the highlands, resulting in an association to a certain ethnic group, rather than the vessel's age or origin.³⁶ Linking jars to 'traders' rather than 'producers' is not exclusive to the Kelabit; a similar tradition has been documented from the central highlands of Vietnam, where specific jars were known as 'Cham jars' referring to Cham middlemen (Nguyen Long 1992: 37; Hung 2008; Cort and Lefferts 2013). Nevertheless, *abai* jars ranked between the *ma'on* and the *meching* jars in the eyes of the Kelabit both in terms of their perceived value and antiquity, providing a hint for their provisional chronological periodisation.

6.3.1 Jars' Kelabit names

Within the three main groups of large jars, the Kelabit also recognised sub-categories of jars based chiefly on decoration style, size and function. The intricacies of jar sub-categories, however, have now been mostly forgotten; distinctions only survive in vague descriptions. From

³⁶ My informants unequivocally stated that by 'abai' the Kelabit refer to the Malay and not the Abai Dayak ethnic group who live in East Kalimantan.

the narratives of my interviewees, I was able to outline the following three jar sub-categories which can still be matched with currently existing types.

Tiluan

The first reference to *teruwan*, *terwan*, *teluan* or *tiluan* jars comes from Tom Harrisson, who recounts them thus: 'Old jar of class 'Teruwan', [...] Kelabits consider this type very ancient, though not the most valued' (Sarawak Museum Accession no: 3515-6, 3657-8). Harrisson repeats this comment in relation to the longhouse headman Raja Omong's (known as Penghulu Miri) jar donated to the Sarawak Museum in 1947-8 where it currently remains (Fig. 6.5). This particular jar also appears on an archive photograph (R0010734) taken in the 1940s, as the property of a Murut (Lun Dayeh) family (Fig. 6.6). Jars of this style were fairly small, light-weight, partially glazed with a pair of dragons flying downwards on the body. *Tiluan* jars were/still are widely recognised by neighbouring Murut groups; in Sabah this type was referred to as '*teruwan*', while in Kalimantan as *belanga* (Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986], Pl. 96). The Murut considered certain jar-types as necessary paraphernalia for bride wealth (*berian* or *purut*) (Harrisson, T. 1959, 1967). Although the Kelabit did not subscribe to the custom of bride price themselves, in the case of inter-tribal marriages the alliance between the two families was required to be sealed by an exchange of gifts, including jars (Harrisson, T. 1959). The Murut appreciation for jars has been briefly documented (Morrison 1965; Harrisson, T. 1967; Lau 1999), although research exploring local values or selection criteria remains tangential (see the Sabah Museum display assembled by Barbara Harrisson and Jimmy Foo in 1985). Murut groups, especially in the Sabah region, still observe the practice of gifting jars, therefore it is perhaps not surprising that local workshops in Sabah – and in Sarawak as well to a lesser degree – continue to produce jars of certain types in order to meet specific indigenous needs. One of the two potteries I visited in the outskirts of Kota Kinabalu in Sabah in 2013 (Soon Yii Seng Trading, see Fig. 3.24) was especially targeting the Murut niche market and still manufactures the *tiluan* with apparent success (Figs. 6.7). Given the continuing production (and popularity) of *tiluan* jars, and furthermore considering Tom Harrisson's comments from the 1940, it is feasible to assume that this jar group featured as a sub-type of the *belanai ma'on*. In this rare instance, the Sarawak Museum curates a specimen identified directly as a *tiluan* jar, but the typological variation within the subgroup remains unknown. Considering the above, I would suggest that the *tiluan* sub-type corresponds with Type 12 in the Ceramic Catalogue (Table 4.3, B040). An example of a *tiluan* jar was recoded at the commemorative burial ground of Menatoh Tang Belanai near Pa' Mada (in very poor condition:

B040); whereas Tom Harrisson collected fragments from Menatoh Lidong Kitong (Sarawak Museum Accession no: 4095), Pa' Berang (3830) and Menatoh Pa' Badong (3871).

Monokul

Another jar sub-type described to me by inhabitants of the Long Peluan longhouse (I23, I24) is a class called *monokul* (Fig. 6.8). This voluminous type is the largest in size recorded in the highlands, occurring either with horizontal rouletted (applied) bands or without decoration (B050). *Monokuls* equate to the Type 5 jars in the Ceramic Catalogue and perhaps Type 23 which represents another variety (Table 4.3). Interestingly, *monokuls* were the only type in the Kelabit jar-repertoire recognised outside the highlands as well (*menukul*: an example is displayed in the Sarawak Museum's permanent exhibition), however the term in the Iban territories was associated with an entirely different, much smaller style. *Monokul* jars were sought after among the Kelabit and by groups in the neighbouring Kerayan region because of its capacity for brewing large quantities of *borak*, but was still fairly light-weight considering its size. One of my interviewees briefly described a large jar that belonged to her mother that was thought to be very powerful (I22). Although she could not recall its exact features, given the description ('bigger than the rest of the vessels in the village') it is possible that jar could be classified as a *monokul*. Although the ethnographic information regarding the *monokuls* was predominantly sourced from the southern highlands, specimens occurring in the archaeological record do not follow such regionality and seem to distribute evenly across the entire Kelabit highlands (Menatoh Pa' Badong: B71; Menatoh Pa' Diit: B022, B028; Menatoh Tang Belanai: B039; RRF: B175; Menatoh Payeh Taratik: B088-9; Menatoh Long Layan: B092).

Selapa

The third, identifiable jar type is referred to as *selapa* by an elderly informant (I14) (Fig. 6.9). *Selapa* means coconut in Malay/Indonesian, but here the term is more likely to refer to the *selepa* or *selapa* betel-box, used for containing areca nuts, sireh leaves and lime; ingredients of a mild stimulant chewed across Southeast Asia. The jar exhibits six *sgraffito* panels on its side depicting Buddhist symbols, some of which could indeed resemble contents of the *selapa* for someone who is not familiar with Buddhist imagery. The style corresponds with Type 15 in the Ceramic Catalogue (Table 4.3), and occurs in low numbers across the Kelabit highlands (Menatoh Pa' Badong: B072, Menatoh Batu Liban: B052; Menatoh Long Main 1: B166; Pa' Lungan: H020; Long Peluan: H044).

My interviewees also recalled jar types such as *belanai baye aram* (dragon design with scales akin to a pangolin's) (I14), or *belanai arid kabok* (jar with a lizard-like dragon) (I23) but without actual examples it is difficult to equate them with specific styles.

Others

Besides the large *belanai*, the Kelabit also recognised a variety of medium and small-sized stoneware jars. The term *pelayung*, *playung* or *belayung* was used to describe medium-sized vessels employed for brewing rice wine. Similarly, the phrase *blakan*, *bratan* or *blatan* (which perhaps related to the term *brahan* used widely across Borneo) referred to jars of moderate size (I1, I5, I7) (Figs. 6.10). The vessel called *kibut* was a small to medium-sized jar that existed both in stoneware (Fig. 6.11; H038) and in porcelain form (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986], Pl. 21) and was used to keep animal fat (I1, I8, I10). The *keduit* or *kruit* was the smallest of known jar types, servicing as scoops for decanting rice wine out of larger vessels (I1, I8, I10). The *tabu* was also mentioned briefly as a small-sized jar (I7, I14, Cluny and Chai 2007, Fig. 32). Within the category of small jars, the Kelabit distinguish a group referred to as *angai*; squat stoneware vessels, used for storing pure, undiluted rice wine for celebrations (I1, I10). The *angai* came in many colours, designs and shapes; some of them claimed to be as ancient as the *belanai ma'on* (I1). Similarly to the large jars, the *angai* had their own repertoire of sub-types in the past, but only a few are remembered today. The *batu angai* (Fig. 6.12) and the *angai ta'o ma'on* were considered contemporary and very old, although still stand without exact typological definitions. *Sorangur* is perhaps the least elusive *angai* type; these jars were used as lids, set into the mouth of larger jars (and probably aiding the distribution of *borak* as well) (Fig. 6.13).

However, local vessel typologies are not without their vagaries, overlaps and contradictions stemming from the fact that the boundaries between the vessels' shape and function were/are often blurred. The same type of jar (Type 10, see the Ceramic Catalogue – Table 4.3) was identified both as a *blakan* (I5) and as a *pelayung* (I23) to me by different informants which perhaps implies that their practical utilisation (i.e. containers for rice wine and secondary burials) might have been similar. Taking this thought further, in the case of medium and small-sized jars, functionality was perhaps more important than their design or, in fact the material; *tabus* existed both in earthenware and stoneware forms, whereas *keduits* were shaped out of local clay or organic material (gourds). Tom Harrison also mentions the use of 'nut-spoons' (*abak*) for ladling *borak* (Sarawak Museum Accession No. 4532a-4536). *Sorangurs* were employed predominantly as jar-covers; their function tied intimately to the vessel's shape. A Kelabit acquaintance

recounted that upon his visit to the nearby pagan cemetery, he felt compelled to pick up a *sorangur* which happened to be lying on the ground, and place it into the mouth of a burial jar ‘because it felt like a right thing to do’ (B026-7). Type 8 (see the Ceramic Catalogue) can be classified as a *sorangur angai*, a fairly recent product and it is possible that the term could have included other varieties as well. On a final note, it is intriguing however that medium-sized polychrome porcelain jars which were reportedly so sought-after by the Kelabit (and other Orang Ulu groups – Kaboy and Chin 1991:121; Hose 1990 [1926]:88-89³⁷) are almost entirely absent in the dataset compiled for this present study.

Image omitted due to
copyright regulations

Figure 6.4 - Ningka jar recorded by Charles Hose. Image source: Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge. Catalogue number: P.52783. ACH2, published in Hose-McDougall 1966 [1912], Pl. 46.



Figure 6.5 - Penghulu Miri's jar in the Sarawak Museum's Sekama Store. Image by BN.

³⁷ Charles Hose presented the Rajah Brooke with the first object from the Kelabit highlands, an enamelled porcelain jar dating to the 18th-19th centuries, which is now being curated by the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge, UK.

Image omitted due to
copyright regulations

Figure 6.6 - Lun Dayeh family with their heirloom jar (same vessel as on the previous photograph). Image source: courtesy of the Sarawak Museum's Photography Archive.



Figure 6.7 - Soon Yii Seng pottery in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, still manufacturing ancient jar types, among them the 'tiluan'. Image by BN.



Figure 6.8 - A monokul jar recorded in the village of Long Peluan in 2013. Image by BN.



Figure 6.9 - A selapa jar documented in Pa' Lungan village in 2013. Image by BN.

Image omitted due to
copyright regulations

Figure 6.10 - Jar known as pelayung by the Kelabit. Image source: Mranata and Susanto 2012. Pl. 114.



Figure 6.11 - Kibut jar used to store animal fat, recoded in Pa' Dalih village in 2009. Image by BN.



Figure 6.12 - Small-sized jar known as batu angai by the Kelabit. Image by BN.



Figure 6.13 - Sorangur jar placed in the mouth of a burial jar. Image by BN.

6.4 Physical properties of jars

In non-literate societies, such as the Kelabit was before the 1950s, the learning and transfer of knowledge occurs primarily along verbal and non-discursive engagements (Olssen 2010). These practices tend to prevail in the fields of craft and manual labour until the present day and there is emerging archaeological evidence that similar avenues of learning were pursued (potentially dominated in certain periods) in the past (Budden-Sofaer 2009; cf. Ingold 2000). The following sections will discuss a series of sensory engagements with jars and the experiences these produced, and suggest that these encounters of a physical nature played a crucial role in assessing jars' age and value.

Visual appearance and tactility

A single glance at large storage vessels from anywhere around the world and their resemblance to the human body becomes instantly obvious (Rice 2005 [1987]). This similarity is perhaps even stronger in the case of dragon jars, whose proportions are noticeably anthropomorphic; the height equates to a child of 5-6 years, the long neck, pronounced shoulder and narrow base – definitions also used by ceramicist nomenclature – are frequently likened to the dimensions of human anatomy. The interaction between jars and the human body began with their manufacture; with the sourcing and shaping of the clay, which then continues through the process of building, assembling and firing. Physical contact is maintained throughout the practical utilisation of jars, culminating in the enshrining and depositing of human bodies during mortuary rituals.

Visually, a dragon jar was expected to bear a pair of fierce dragons on its exterior (I1, I2, I8, I23). Out of the 24 jar types (including 53 individual vessels) recorded in ethnographic context, 13 (35 individual jars) correspond with the strict typological definition of dragon jars (Table 6.2). However, for reasons that will be discussed further below, among the Kelabit there was no prescribed template to which the dragon design was supposed to adhere to, or upon which value was determined, as opposed to other native groups in Borneo such as the Ngaju Dayak or the Iban (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]; Sandin 1967). My interviewees referred to ‘protruding’, ‘relief’ or simply to ‘big’ dragons when describing the design related to valuable jars during casual conversations; a few of them even ran their fingers along the dragons’ body while telling their stories. At this point it is suffice to say that moulded, stamped or applied decoration techniques produce very different designs both visually and tactually. The decoration technique in most cases appears to be indicative of the age of the object, implying that multi-sensory perceptions must have aided the evaluation of dragon jars substantially (Fig. 6.14-5).

Dragon jars’ structural features seem to have played an equally important role in assessing age and value. An interviewee recalled that when her husband received four jars as payment from the Iban, her father, who was a local ceramic connoisseur, inspected the jars closely by touching their rims. The informant claimed that her father was able to determine whether a jar was a *ma’on* or a *meching* depending on the shape of the rim (I7). In fact, data does indeed show a correlation between certain rim types and the make of the jars, i.e. rolled rims are dominantly associated with *meching* jars, whereas outcurving and flattened rims are characteristic of *ma’on* jars (the trend is clearly noticeable among jars in ethnographic contexts where 44 jars out of 53 had rims other than the rolled variety – Table 6.3). This tactile assessment of vessels is perhaps not

unusual in the light of jars having been commonly handled by holding onto the rim with one hand and gripping the rattan string running through the loop-handles with the other; instead of the riskier lifting, jars were routinely ‘walked’ along the longhouse floor (Figs. 6.16). Such tactile experiences of jars of renowned types must have produced a ‘sensory imprint’; a point of reference, upon which people were able to build and later assess unknown jar varieties.

However, to build up a repertoire of ‘sensory jar-imprints’ one needed access to comparatives. Fortunately for jar-novices, periodic communal festivities provided the ideal platform for the thorough examination of jars. This kind of full-sensory engagement with the objects stood in stark contrast to the ordinary, everyday encounters where jars tended to blend into the background:

‘Family rooms are cast in deep shadows. As one enters, blinded by tropical light, one can hardly see. Grime and soot from open fires, where meals are cooked daily cover jars in layers of dirt.’ (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]:2)

For celebrations jars were brought out from the gloomy private quarters of faraway longhouses, cleaned and gathered in a lavish display for everyone to see (I4, I5). This very public display of jars afforded the vessels to be viewed, touched and heard; thus to be compared with each other. The majority of physical features defining the jars’ value such as the dark glaze of *ma’ons* or the light glaze of *mechings* were only comprehensible within this kind of experiential framework, where well-known jars served as bases for comparison. Moreover, it is perhaps notable that the Kelabit language does not differentiate between the colour red and brown; the word *sia’* is used to describe both shades. This does not mean that the Kelabit cannot see or cognitively understand the difference between the two colours, but it suggests that to ‘read’, comprehend and to communicate these nuances – especially when it came to hues of glaze and fabric – comparative (verbal or non-discursive) practices had critical importance.

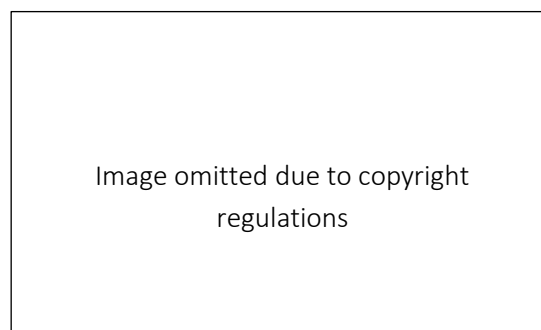


Figure 6.14 - ‘Ibans bargaining over old jars’ holding onto the rim. Image source: Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge. Catalogue number: P.52785. ACH2, published in Hose-McDougall 1966 [1912], Pl. 48.

Image omitted due to copyright regulations

Figure 6.15 - Iban couple inspecting jars. Image source: courtesy of the Sarawak Museum Photography Archive.



Figure 6.16 - Walter Paran posing with his uncle's jar in the village of Pa' Lungan in 2013. Image by BN.

Clay fabric

Following on from the previous point, the colour of the clay body was another aspect of jars that provided a further visual clue for evaluation. I noted this characteristic while documenting burial jars at cemetery sites; a handful of vessels that had red, orange or dark brown bodies stood out of the dataset which was otherwise dominated by beige or buff bodied jars (14 cases out of 176). The significance of this trait became obvious during the ethnographic research whereby 29 jars (out of 53) were recorded as having red, orange or dark brown clay fabrics. Although many of my informants did not recall this feature as being significant, Tom Harrisson mentions multiple times

‘dragon jars of red-bodied stoneware’³⁸ as the most valued forms of ceramics by Kelabit standards in the 1940s (Harrison, T. 1959:27, Sarawak Museum Accession no: 3574-5). So far only one variety, the characteristically red-bodied *tiluan* jars can be linked directly to this description. Harrison’s reference of *tiluans* being ‘ancient but *not* the most valuable’ jar types suggest that perhaps an array of different styles existed within the category of the esteemed ‘red-bodied’ jars. Despite the relatively small ethnographic dataset, it is intriguing that red, orange and brown bodied jars dominate among the heirloom jars; a trait that could perhaps be indicative of the production locale (and age) of jars, but without scientific testing, it is difficult to be sure at this point.

Repair

Damage and repair is a somewhat ambiguous feature of jars. Small-scale damage provided an opportunity for further examination, i.e. a chip revealing the colour of the fabric otherwise covered by glaze had the potential to increase or decrease the value. Extensive damage that limited the jar’s functioning was naturally undesirable, but small-scale repair could have the potential to positively influence the item’s evaluation. Furthermore, there is a possibility that a similar notion to the Japanese *kintsugi*³⁹ could have existed among the Kelabit. This concept treats breakage and repair as part of the object’s history, something that enhances its appreciation rather than a flaw to be disguised. This kind of approach to artefacts dates back (allegedly) to the 15th century, and it is closely related to Japanese tea-ceremonies and Zen Buddhist attitudes to material culture (Roma 2013). Interestingly, the close reading of Carl Bock’s account on replica jars reveals a similar perspective to *kintsugi* among the native groups of Borneo:

‘This china craze among the Dyaks has proved, as in England, an excellent opportunity for the exercise of John Chinaman’s skill; and *very clever imitations of old vases, with cracks, chips, age-stains, and other indications of antiquity, most exactly reproduced by them*, are offered for sale at Samarinda at five florins each; but unlike many London connoisseurs, your Dyak is never taken in by spurious gudji blangas, preferring to give hundreds of guilders for a real specimen.’ (1984 [1881]:198, emphasis added)

³⁸ It needs to be pointed out that Tom Harrison in his attribution did not specify explicitly whether by ‘red-bodied stoneware’ he meant the clay fabric or the glaze colour. In my argument, I assume that he indeed used the term in relation to the clay fabric, based on this solid experience with archaeological material and familiarity with Kelabit jar-evaluation practices.

³⁹ The Japanese craft of ‘Golden Joinery’; the repair of ceramic objects with lacquer and gold paint.

This brief description shows that the Dayak groups in the east Kalimantan region did in fact ascribe some notion of value to repair and signs of wear-and-tear; visible indicators of the object's history. Therefore, the examination of damage and repair on jars still in Kelabit possession could provide further insights into the construction of value and how this changed in the past few decades.

Personification

Perhaps the most fascinating feature of jars is their ability to exhibit almost human-like characteristics. The blurred lines between 'object-ness' and 'human-ness' (or subject and object) will be returned to in the concluding chapter, however I feel that it is important to briefly introduce the concept here, since this facet of objects is crucial for understanding how material culture operates within various social and cultural spheres of the broader geographic region.

Some jars were (are still...) believed to be able to make noises, eat, hunt, and even change their appearance. This perception of objects being 'animated' is not exclusive to the Kelabit, but shared widely among the indigenous groups of Borneo, and in fact across island Southeast Asia (Harrison, T. 1959; Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]; Hoskins 1998, also see Chapter 2 of this thesis, and Ling Roth quoting Charles Brooke earlier in this chapter). In the Kelabit highlands jars were/are associated with a certain repertoire of behaviour, some benevolent and auspicious, others less so. Jars could appear in dreams conveying good omens derived from the spirit world and bring prosperity to their owners. On the other hand, jars sometimes acted in a sinister, if not malicious manner; an aspect that has been strongly emphasised by my informants, perhaps not surprisingly given the modern, charismatic Christian view on artefacts related to the animistic past. Jars were reported to omit deep humming noises, whispers and howls, or to eat bundles of leaves (I2, I5, I7, I9, I10, I12, I13, I16, I19, I20, I21, I30). They could also become heavy when lifted or found in a pool of 'urine' in the morning (I15, I18). These physical signs were generally interpreted as indicators of the jars being discontent or demanding attention. In order to keep the jar's (or the jar-spirit's) behaviour under control, offerings were required. Interviewees (for the above reasons) were particularly cagey about the methods of jar-placation which either involved 'feeding' the jars with packets of rice (or *borak*), or in more serious cases providing them with blood (souls of animals or human beings) (I5, I7). It is said that if a jar had been left unsatisfied, it could turn against its owner (one of my informants used the expression of the jar 'eating his children'). Presenting a powerful artefact with offerings within regular intervals was not an uncommon feature of the Kelabit relationship with material culture. Beads, machetes and other

charms were also among the items mentioned by foreign missionaries or devout Kelabit Christians later in the 1970s, as materials calling for attention (Southwell 1999 [1973]; Lees 1979; Bulan and Bulan-Dorai 2004).

The jars' (or their spirits') 'will' manifesting in such anthropomorphically physical ways is intriguing, considering that the source of their potency was/is believed to derive from the supernatural. The Kelabit claim that human beings cannot 'see' (*ne'ar*) the spirits, nevertheless supernatural beings can certainly be perceived in a kind of intuitive way (*kelit*) (Janowski 2012). Narratives testify that the perception of the jars' efficacy (and through them the supernatural) involved at least three of the senses directly (hearing, touch, vision) and one indirectly (taste – *borak*). But beyond the physical, jars were also active in the realm of the spiritual, interacting with people when they entered an altered state of consciousness (i.e. either in trance or dreaming or being drunk). From this perspective objects were not much different from humans; they shared the same spiritual and physical landscape which was mutually transgressible for both.

Besides having their own 'personality' or 'spirits', the jars had links to powerful individuals seemed to increase their potency (and therefore their value). High-ranking aristocrats with strong leadership skills were believed to possess excessive levels of *lalud* (life-force) that could rub off on their material possessions (and on the people associated with them) (Janowski 2012). *Paran* leaders were the only members of the community who were spiritually strong enough to own old powerful jars without harming themselves or their relations. In exchange, potent jars enhanced their owners' spiritual powers but they were notoriously difficult to control and it was believed that they demanded a share from their owners' (head) hunting successes (Janowski 2012). Powerful jars frequently occupied prime spaces in longhouse galleries during festivities, thus jars and their associated 'genealogies' were widely known and remembered by generations. Even today the Kelabit have a remarkable awareness of their fellow tribesmen's jar-posessions; ownership is still recognised (although often quietly judged) and jar-transactions seem to linger in people's minds for many decades (I4, I10).

Site / type	T1 19- 20 th c.	T4 19- 20 th c.	T5 17- 18 th c.	T7 19 th c.	T14 19 th c.	T15 18- 19 th c.	T20 Unk.	T22 17- 18 th c.	T25 Unk.	T26 Unk.	T27 Unk.	T28 Unk.	T29 Unk.	T30 18- 19 th c.	T31 Unk.	T32 18- 19 th c.	T33 Unk.	T34 18- 19 th c.	T35 17- 18 th c.	T36 Unk.	T37 20 th c.	T38 (18 th ?) 19 - 20 th c.	T39 Unk.	T40 17- 18 th c.	Unk.
BRL					1		1																		
BAL	1				2			1	1	1	2	1	1	1											
UPR														1	1										
NAL					1																				
PUL												2				1									
PLV	2					1						1		1			1	1							
RAL														1											
PDV	2	3						1						1					1	1	1				1
PML	1																								
LPV	2	1	1	1		1																3	1	1	
MIR											1														
KUC	1				1																				
Total	9	4	1	1	5	2	1	2	1	1	3	4	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1

Total: 53

Table 6.2 - Summary table showing the distribution of jar types in longhouses across the Kelabit highlands with the additional town homes in Kuching and Miri. The first eight types (dark grey) also occur in cemeteries in the Kelabit highlands (BRL: Bario Reddish's Lodge, BAL: Bario Asal Longhouse, UPR: Ulung Palang rice hut, NAL: Ngimat Ayu's Lodge, PUL: Pa' Umor Longhouse, PLV: Pa' Lungan Longhouse, RAL: Ramudu Longhouse, PDV: Pa' Dalih Village, PML: Pa' Mada Longhouse, LPV: Long Peluan Village, MIR: Miri, KUC: Kuching).

6.5 Jars in the ethnographic dataset

The rest of this chapter continues to examine the physical properties of jars following the above outlined themes (although in a slightly different order). The discussion considers the ceramic dataset documented in rural Kelabit longhouses and town homes in the light of the ethnographic interviews combined with the perspective of ceramic typologies outlined in Chapters 3 and 4. The purpose is to assess the consistency and the relevancy of indigenous Kelabit jar categories (i.e. the particulars of *ma'on*, *abai* and *meching* jars), explore their limitations and to assess how local jar evaluation schemes correspond with the dates and typologies outlined by ceramicist research.

6.5.1 Jars' characteristics and dating in light of Kelabit ceramic typologies

My primary research enquiry driving the ethnographic fieldwork was whether Kelabit jar categories corresponded with the genuine chronological age of these vessels or – to phrase it differently – whether indigenous, sensory assessment of dragon jars reflected the vessels' antiquity. Out of the 53 recorded jars, 19 were said to be *belanai ma'on* (ancient, valuable jars), three were categorised as *belanai abai* ('Malay' jars), and six as *belanai meching* ('new arrivals'). In the remaining 25 cases, the classification of jars remained unknown, due mainly to the decline of traditional jar-expertise among the Kelabit and the limited interest in dragon jars in the recent decades (Table 6.3). Perhaps not surprisingly, the ethnographic assemblage of classified jars was dominated by old, valuable jars. The majority of these items are still in the possession of descendants of Kelabit aristocrats who are now in their 70s and 80s, and who had both the right social background and age to recall their jars' classification (H005-6, H023-7, H030, H032, H034, H036, H040-1, H047, H049, H050). A smaller portion of old jars are owned by young, upper class town residents (H052-3), whereas others came in the possession of valuable jars by marriage or other family relationships (H027, H036). 'New arrivals' were identified to a lesser extent, although with certainty by their owners, who were from mixed social backgrounds and age groups. Some of these items were recent purchases (I10, I24). The least number of examples identified were of the *abai* jars. They all belonged to two 'jar connoisseurs' of the Kelabit upper-class, renowned locally for their expertise (H042, H045, H046), indicating that '*abai*' jars were perhaps the most difficult to classify. The highest number of jars recorded in the villages of Bario Asal (11), Pa' Dalih (11) and Long Peluan (11), reflect the length of time I spent at these places (compared to other locations) and the personal relationship I had with my informants and interpreters here. Based on my interviews I believe

that these numbers reflect the average jar count in villages across the highlands (with the occasional minor differences).

Location	Ma'on	Abai	Meching	Unknown	No. of jars
Bario, Reddish's Lodge	-	-	-	2	2
Bario Asal Longhouse	2	-	-	9	11
Ulung Palang	-	-	-	2	2
Ngimat Ayu's Lodge	-	-	-	1	1
Pa' Umor Longhouse	1	-	1	1	3
Pa' Lungan Village	4	-	1	2	7
Ramudu Longhouse	1	-	-	-	1
Pa' Dalih Village	4	-	3	4	11
Pa' Mada Longhouse	-	-	-	1	1
Long Peluan Village	5	3	1	2	11
Miri	-	-	-	1	1
Kuching	2	-	-	-	2
Total	19	3	6	25	53

Table 6.3 - Distribution of ma'on, abai and meching jars in villages of the Kelabit highlands and town homes.

The main issue I faced during the documentation of jars still kept in longhouses was that the majority of these vessels did not fit into the typological categories established for describing jars in cemeteries (24 jar types: T1-T24); there was an overlap of only eight type categories between the two contexts (T1, T4-5, T7, T14-5, T20, T22). Therefore another 16 types (T25-T40) needed to be introduced during the ethnographic survey. One of the fundamental observations of this work was that a large proportion of jars in ethnographic settings represented unique types; 53 jars distributed among 24 type categories (Table 6.2) in contrast to 177 jars classified into 22 types from cemetery sites (Table 5.2). The chronological age of ten jar types remains unknown due to the lack of analogues in published literature or even in museum collections, enhancing the importance of ethnographic interviews and the information preserved by local memory regarding the jars' chronological age.

In the sections to follow I outline jar-characteristics the Kelabit found indicative of vessels' age and value, and whether these characteristics are reflected in the present jar-assemblage kept in longhouses (or if they are not, why not). I also insert these local perceptions of jars into broader Bornean schemes on ceramic evaluation to see how these compare with the chronological dating established in the relevant literature. However, before commencing with the comparison between ethnographic accounts and typological classification, I would like to draw attention to socio-historical factors that could have influenced the categorisation of jars in the highlands. Firstly, there have been considerable changes taking place within the jar-assemblage in the recent decades. Personal accounts reveal that a significant number of jars were destroyed during the Revival in the mid-1970s, and that longhouse residents have been selling off (or

replacing) their old jars over the past 40 years (Talla 1979). These circumstances could have impacted on the composition of the jar-assemblage as a whole; while oral histories preserved a kind of 'mental template' of jar categories probably reflecting choices of a deeper past. And at this point, a second issue arises, namely the accuracy or reliability of my interviewees' narratives. It should *not* be assumed that informants intentionally gave false answers when asked about their jars' antiquity (although it is possible in a fraction of cases – given the nature of the interview-situations, see Chapter 4). It is more likely that interviewees genuinely thought that they owned an old jar, or perhaps presumed that jars which were identified by their parents or grandparents as new jars can now be classified as old varieties, after all 30-60 years has passed since their acquisition. These nuances could account for the fairly wide range of jar varieties recorded in ethnographic settings.

Glaze colour (and texture)

Glaze colour was one of the most difficult characteristics to record. Partly this was due to the circumstances of the documentation process itself; jars were studied under very different light-conditions (i.e. some were brought outside, others were examined in longhouses or in storage facilities by torchlight etc.), and partly because the description of colour is highly subjective (no Munsell colour chart was used). An additional issue is that jars fired in a traditional, wood-fuelled dragon kilns never come out exactly the same colour, due to their position in the kiln and exposure to the heat source. Therefore, glaze colour as a defining typological feature has limited applicability and can only be used in a broad sense; altogether 15 different hues were distinguished during the recording process ranging from light brown, through yellowish, orangey and reddish brown to chocolate and dark brown. There was a single case of a dark purple-glazed vessel. Among the *ma'on* jars which were generally described as having dark coloured glazes, there were only two examples, with explicitly 'dark reddish brown' (H027) and 'dark brown' (H047), in stark contrast with three instances of 'light brown' (H006, H014, H023) and two 'yellowish brown' glazes (H050-52) at the other end of the colour spectrum. The glaze colour of the 12 other *ma'on* jars ranged in between. Within the category of *abai* jars both 'light brown' and 'dark brown' (but no reddish brown) glazes occurred. Over half of the *meching* jars which were said to have been identified by their light coloured glazes were recorded with 'dark reddish brown' (H017), 'dark brown' (H020, H048) and 'chocolate brown' (H038) glazes. Thus, at first glance, there seems to be little correspondence between the jars' actual glaze colour and the traditional characterisation of vessels provided by Kelabit informants.

However, apart from the colour, ceramic glazes have another crucial feature; their texture. Texture, similarly to glaze colour, is difficult to describe, often subjective and depends on the manufacturing technologies and the degree of usage/exposure of jars (Table 6.4). References to glaze texture appear in the early colonial ethnographic literature either as a qualifier for jars (e.g. '*bakikis*', is a direct reference to a skin condition, used to describe jars with peeling glaze; Grabowski 1885, in Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]:30), or as a quality upon which jars' value was assessed:

'Whereas every Dayak was able to indicate, without hesitation, which jars were heirlooms and which others were not, I could not detect any differences between them. Asked how they could tell, they said they were judging *the state of the glaze*.' (Mallinckrodt, in Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]:21, emphasis added)

Yet, these accounts – along with a remark by a Kelabit informant on *meching* jars' glaze that 'shines like varnish' (14) – speak more about the condition of the glazes (and the process of degradation) rather than the texture itself. Although stoneware jars were fired at high temperatures, glazes being the outermost layer were the most exposed to the elements, and had a tendency to lose their lustre gradually over time. The majority of jars produced in Chinese, Vietnamese or local Chinese-run Bornean workshops were covered in a shiny, uneven, semi-transparent glaze that turned dull with the passing of decades. In the ethnographic assemblage under review most of the jars exhibit a matt glaze-coat (37 out of 53), approximately equal the ratio of moderately eroded or flaking glazes within the archaeological dataset (147 out of 177, with the caveat that the degree of degeneration is significantly higher among burial jars due to the intensity of weathering in the rainforest). In longhouses, out of seven jars that retained their shiny glazes, two were characterised as *mechings* by their owners (H038, H048), whereas the rest belonged to an unknown category (H001-2, H008, H011, H051).

However, not all jars had a semi-transparent, lustrous finish in a first place; some vessels (especially the ones produced in Thai or Burmese potteries) were coated in an even, thick, opaque glaze. There is a small number of jars in the ethnographic collection (six items) that exhibit opaque, even glazes; four of these were classified as *belanai ma'on* (H032, H036, H040, H049), while the other two were of unknown jar type (H022, H031). Although it is still unknown where these particular vessels originated from, their uniqueness in the highlands and low representation in museum collections (and none in the literature) may imply that they are of considerable antiquity.

In sum, I would argue that while on its own the colour of the glaze as a feature has limited relevancy to Kelabit jar categories, its juxtaposition with the glaze texture can provide a fairly accurate picture of jars' perceived age and value in the highlands. Based upon my personal experience,⁴⁰ and Kelabit informants' accounts, jars with light yellowish brown coloured, semi-transparent, shiny glazes tend to be more recent products (represented predominantly by T1 in the highlands, both in archaeological and ethnographic settings – Harrison, B. 1990 [1986], Pl. 103, b, c). Whereas the old, valuable jars are characterised by 'richly brown-glazed' varieties, as Tom Harrison put it, with darker, thick opaque glazes (most of which stand without analogues so far, except T40 which possibly dates to the 17th-18th centuries). The rest of the jars recorded in the Kelabit highlands range between these two 'extremes', representing an array of brown shades and glaze textures. Colonial accounts attest that the locals observed the degeneration of glazes including the wear-and-tear by its previous owner(s) and evaluated jars accordingly – as will be discussed further below. And on a final note, since there is (and probably has been) a fair degree of subjectivity involved in determining the colour and texture of glazes, comparative examples could have been crucial in assessing the age and value of newly acquired jars.

⁴⁰ In 2013 I made extensive visits to museum collections in Brunei, Kalimantan, Sabah and Sarawak, along with visits to contemporary pottery workshops in Kuching, Kota Kinabalu and Singkawang. The research trip was funded by the Evans Trust, University of Cambridge.

ID	Type	Location	Condition	Rim type	Glaze colour	Glaze texture	Fabric colour	Design
H005	Type 25	Bario Asal	repaired	rolled, thickened	reddish brown	matt, thick, uneven	red	dragons
H006	Type 22	Bario Asal	intact	outcurving	light brown	matt, thick, uneven	reddish brown	floral
H018	Type 28	Pa' Umor	repaired (+hole)	outcurving	light brown	matt, uneven	dark reddish brown	dragons
H023	Type 30	Pa' Lungan	fractured lip	outcurving	light brown	thick, uneven	red	dragons
H024	Type 1	Pa' Lungan	fractured lip	outcurving	chocolate brown	matt, uneven	reddish orange	dragons
H025	Type 1	Pa' Lungan	repaired	outcurving	chocolate brown	matt, thick, uneven	reddish brown	dragons
H026	Type 28	Pa' Lungan	4 small holes	outcurving	chocolate brown	matt, thick, uneven	reddish brown	dragons
H027	Type 30	Ramudu	repaired	outcurving	dark reddish brown	matt, thick, uneven	reddish brown	dragons
H030	Type 30	Pa' Dalih	fractured lip	outcurving	orangey brown	thick, uneven	red	dragons
H032	unknown	Pa' Dalih	fragmented (top)	outcurving	reddish brown	matt, thick, even	red	dragons
H034	Type 22	Pa' Dalih	fractured lip	outcurving	reddish brown	uneven	red	floral
H036	Type 36	Pa' Dalih	broken neck	Unknown	dark purple	matt, thick, even	red	dragons
H040	Type 1	Long Peluan	repaired	outcurving, angled	orangey brown	matt, thick, even	buff	dragons
H041	Type 38	Long Peluan	intact	outcurving	brown	matt, uneven	unknown	dragons
H047	Type 7	Long Peluan	intact	outcurving	dark brown	matt, thick, uneven	buff	floral
H049	Type 40	Long Peluan	intact	outcurving	bright reddish brown	thick, even	unknown	dragons
H050	Type 5	Long Peluan	intact	folded, flattened	yellowish brown	matt, uneven	unknown	no decoration
H052	Type 14	Kuching	repaired	outcurving	yellowish brown	matt, uneven	brown	floral
H053	Type 1	Kuching	chipped lip	outcurving	brown	matt, uneven	buff	dragons
H042	Type 38	Long Peluan	intact	outcurving	dark brown	matt, thick, uneven	brown	dragons
H045	Type 39	Long Peluan	intact	outcurving	light brown	matt, uneven	buff	floral
H046	Type 4	Long Peluan	intact	outcurving	light brown	matt, uneven	buff	dragons
H017	Type 28	Pa' Umor	chipped lip	outcurving	dark reddish brown	matt, thick, uneven	dark reddish brown	dragons
H020	Type 15	Pa' Lungan	chipped lip	outcurving	dark brown	matt, thick, uneven	buff	Buddhist symbols
H028	Type 4	Pa' Dalih	intact	outcurving	orangey brown	thick, uneven	buff	dragons
H029	Type 4	Pa' Dalih	intact	outcurving	orangey brown	matt, uneven	buff	dragons
H038	Type 37	Pa' Dalih	intact	outcurving	chocolate brown	shiny, uneven	buff	floral
H048	Type 1	Long Peluan	intact	outcurving	dark brown	shiny, uneven	buff	dragons

Table 6.4 - Summary table showing the correlations between jar types and key characteristics of ma'on (dark grey), abai (light grey) and meching (white) jars.

Clay fabric

Since the manufacture of jars required a substantial amount of economic investment (including raw materials, labour, and not least the potters' skill), clay recipes needed to be perfected in order to reduce the risk of spoil to the minimum. While the shades and textures of glazes are highly dependent on external factors such as kiln temperatures, the clay fabric is less variable, producing relatively standard results in each vessel depending on the mineral composition of its raw material. Scientific studies in recent years have attempted to outline the compositional signatures of jars' clay fabric groups (Sinopoli *et al.* 2006). Unfortunately, though the study can define distinct compositional clusters, these cannot so far be linked to exact workshops or production locales. However, on the other hand, the chronological and provenancing potentials of clay fabrics have been on the radar of scholars since the beginnings of jar-research. As it was outlined in Chapter 3, Eine Moore's distinguished between 'Brittle', 'Red-bodied' and 'Kwantung' clay fabric groups (Moore 1970), describing the 'Red-bodied wares' as being amongst the most valued heirlooms in Sarawak (Sarawak Museum Accession no: 222/374) (1970:61-2, Pl. 13 c, d, Pl. 14 a). A decade later, Barbara Harrisson applied this classification to archaeological material (Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]). While expanding upon Moore's framework, she recognised that this kind of macroscopic analysis was 'too crude for establishing their [i.e. the ceramics] respective ranges of variation' (1990 [1986]:40). In her work, she re-classified Moore's 'Red-bodied' ware as 'Coarse red', characterised by fabrics ranging from orange to purple in colour with small inclusions.

Although Tom Harrisson refers to 'red-bodied stoneware jars' as being the most valued type by the Kelabit (Harrisson, T. 1959:27, Sarawak Museum Accession no: 3574-5), this physical trait was never mentioned to me explicitly as an attribute of old jars. Describing the clay fabric was perhaps less subjective than the glaze colour, however, the 'sensory' scope in this case was equally broad too, ranging from 'dark reddish brown' through 'red' and 'reddish orange' to lighter 'buff' shades. Interestingly, over half of the jars documented in ethnographic contexts (29 vessels out of 53) had fabrics of red, orangey red or brown colour, while in the remaining 17 cases the clay obtained a buff tone after firing. In seven instances the jars were intact, thus the colour of the fabric was undetectable. By taking a closer look at locally characterised jars; 13 vessels out of 19 *ma'on* jars had red fabric, as opposed to only three jars with buff clays (Table 6.4). Among the *belanai abai* one jar had brown, whereas the other two had buff coloured fabrics. *Meching* jars on the other hand were dominantly of buff coloured clay (five examples) with one exception of dark reddish fabric. Thus far, there seems to be a strong correlation

between *ma'on* jars – and jars still kept in longhouses on a whole – and ‘red’ clay fabrics. The number of jars with ‘red’ fabrics in the ethnographic dataset forms a stark contrast with the clay bodies documented in jars at burial grounds. In the cemetery material the buff or yellowish beige fabric dominates extensively across the Kelabit highlands (150 vessels out of 177), with reddish fabrics represented only to a smaller extent (14 jars), along with a minority of ten vessels with grey (or similar) fabrics. This clear contextual distinction between ‘red’ and ‘buff’-bodied wares implies that fabric colour could have indeed been used as a baseline for the evaluation of jars by the Kelabit in the past; ‘red’ clay being characteristic of old, heirloom jars, while ‘buff’ fabric associated with recent varieties. However, since the lack of scientific research in the field, it is difficult to determine whether fabric colour – beyond indigenous perceptions – represents a genuine chronological and geographical difference in jar production.

Rim type

The shape of the rim, as an indicator of jars’ antiquity, was once tangentially remarked upon by an informant in the course of a casual conversation (I7). At the time, I did not give a second thought to this remark. However, when carrying out the analysis of the ceramic datasets, its significance became clear. Rims come in many shapes and sizes, functionally related to the methods of covering jars (and their contents); of which archaeological (Dupoizat 1997) and ethnographic evidence (Hung 2008) is extremely scarce. During my fieldwork I observed large jars in longhouses covered with sun-hats (H005-11), baskets (H001-2), potted plants (H036) and other objects (H016, H036) for decorative reasons and to prevent debris falling into the disused vessels. In one case I was shown a jar that still functioned as a container for animal fat, sealed by a porcelain lid of a long broken old jar (H038). Two jars in modern town homes were covered by using plastic plants (H052-3) and in one instance I recorded a jar in a cemetery with a small jar placed in its mouth (B26-7). However, it seems that the finish of the jars’ rim has little to do with these fairly modern methods of coverage.

By the late Ming era when the manufacture of large stoneware jars increased considerably, all rim varieties had been in production for hundreds of years. However, jar assemblages in museum collections and in published literature suggest that during the 17th-18th century vessels were applied with outcurving, angled or folded rims, whereas rolled, thickened lip constructions came into fashion during the 18th-19th centuries (Nguyen Long 1992; Adhyatman and Ridho 1986; Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]). At the moment, scholarship cannot account for this shift in styles, which might have been due to a new utilisation of jars or their contents. Jar types such

as the *tiluan*, the *bazazan* and the *monokul* recognised as old and valuable by the Kelabit (also supported by fairly accurate chronological dates) all have outcurving, flattened or folded rims (T11, T12 and T5), whereas recent varieties (like T1, T2, T3, T4) were almost without exception finished with rolled rims. What is intriguing however, is the distribution of the supposedly older ‘outcurving’ rim group contrasted with the younger ‘rolled’ rim varieties. In cemeteries, jars with rolled rims were associated with four types of recent origin (T1-4, 60 jars out of 177) along with low number of vessels of slightly earlier or unknown date (T13, T14, T18, eight specimens). The number of burial jars applied with outcurving rims does not fall far behind the rolled varieties (53 out of 177), but distributes amongst altogether 16 jars types (T1, T4, T5, T6/19, T7-12, T14, T15, T20-23). This phenomenon perhaps suggests that jars with rolled rims were the products of a particular (recent and brief) chronological period or related to the output of a specific workshop.

In addition, the rim types of jars in ethnographic contexts reveal a slightly more nuanced picture (Table 6.4). All 28 locally characterised jars including *ma’ons*, *abais* and *mechings* had outcurving (folded or angled) rims, with one exception of a *ma’on* jar (!) which was applied with a rolled lip. The unquestionable dominance of the outcurving rim variety stretching across local categories raises a number of issues. First, as pointed out at the beginning of this section, in some cases the accuracy of the jar-categories reported by locals today could be subjected to scrutiny. Second, it is also possible that jars with outcurving rims were in production throughout a long period of time (hence their representation in all local jar categories), and it is perhaps not the rim, but some other property that makes them valued heirloom objects. Third, since the chronological date of heirlooms jars is still largely elusive, it is possible that the outcurving rim was indeed the signature of value in the eyes of the Kelabit in the past, as it was related to me by my informant. And finally, it is more than feasible that workshops recognising that an outcurving rim was a necessary feature of a valuable vessel, produced (or copied) jars of this kind in order to realise higher profits.

Decoration technique

Undeniably, the most striking characteristic of stoneware jars is their design. Workshops in China and across Southeast Asia manufactured a variety of jars in large quantities, applying a range of different decoration techniques and compositional schemes. Nevertheless, the distribution of these ceramics appears to be markedly uneven across island Southeast Asia or even Borneo. As discussed in Chapter 3, there could be many reasons behind this regional

discrepancy, including the courses of maritime trade routes, access to local markets, particular indigenous preferences, or even recent economic or iconoclastic activities. In this short section I will discuss the range of decoration techniques occurring on jars documented in the Kelabit highlands, to ascertain the relationship between design, chronological age and local classification of jars.

One of the biggest and most fundamental difficulties of Asian ceramicist research is to establish a secure chronological framework for each jar type. What makes this work especially challenging – besides the extensive periods of manufacture and the lack of evidence for production locales – is that the decoration techniques applied on stoneware vessels, which are normally good indicators of age, had been part of the Chinese potters' toolkit since the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE) (Medley 2001 [1976]; Vainker 2005 [1991]). Applied motifs, sprigging, moulding and *sgraffito* had commonly been used for centuries in workshops all over China, and the trend continued with the establishment of local Chinese potteries on Borneo in the late 1800s (see Chapter 4). Although there are broad schemes, decoration, glazing, and firing techniques, that make certain 'wares' distinguishable, these ceramic styles can still only be placed within a broad interval of a couple hundred years (see Chapter 3). The jar assemblage from the Kelabit highlands is no exception, which is particularly evident in the case of the ethnographic dataset where 10 out of 24 jar types – despite being complete vessels – still stand without analogues, leaving 28% of the jars recorded in longhouses devoid of chronological classification.

The themes depicted on the vessels under study were limited to a small number of schemes consisting mainly of dragons, floral motifs, or the combination of the two. The pair of dragons is the dominant design on heirloom jars (13 types – 35 vessels), which is not remarkable given that dragon jars were generally the preferred choice by all Bornean indigenous groups. A smaller proportion of the vessels were decorated with the incised *sgraffito* technique; floral motifs appear on approximately the quarter of the jars (8 types – 13 vessels), while Buddhist symbols were recorded in two cases (1 type – 2 vessels). An additional two jars were documented without decoration (2 types – 2 vessels) (Table 6.5). Comparing these numbers with Kelabit jar categories it appears that the proportion of *ma'on* jars decorated with dragons (13 examples) and *ma'on* jars with floral motifs (four jars) is more or less equal to the overall number of dragon (35) and floral (13) decorated vessels in the assemblage. This clearly implies that the *ma'on* jars were defined by more than simply the characteristics of their design (Table 6.5).

Funerary data collected from the Kelabit highlands shows that the tradition of utilising jars as burial containers – based on the approximate typological date of the vessels – goes back to the 17th-18th centuries. It is feasible to assume that everyday activities could have employed even earlier jars at one time, but these vessels were not incorporated in burials and disappeared from longhouses without a trace (except from the rare examples of the venerated Dusun *gusis* recoded in ethnographic photographs from the mid-20th century, see Fig. 3.4). Although jars documented in archaeological contexts in the highlands reflect some general trends occurring in the Southeast Asian and Chinese ceramics production during the late Ming period, they also indicate selection processes taking place at points along the chain before the vessels end up in burial grounds.

Ceramicist literature and museum collections testify that from the 16th century onwards – perhaps as China reinstated its position as a major player in maritime trade following the Ming ban – the output of Chinese workshops increased compared to the previous early Ming period. The combination of applied, rouletted, sprigged and *sgraffito* techniques began to prevail on large stoneware jars from the 16th-17th centuries; usually restricted to two of these techniques per vessel (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]; Valdes *et al.* 1992). Certain well-established jar models (i.e. a particular shape associated with a fixed design scheme) remained in manufacture throughout a long period of time, whereas others had only a brief run. The earliest jars identified in the cemeteries of the Kelabit highlands reflect some of the typical products of the 17th-18th centuries (but definitely not the entire repertoire of the period). These early vessels display sprigged decoration in the form of dragons and flaming pearls applied onto the surfaces (see Ceramic Catalogue, Fig. 4.3: T11, T12 – *tiluan* and *bazazan*). Rouletted designs also occur on slightly larger, otherwise undecorated vessels (T5 – *monokul*), identified as a *ma'on* jar by local informants (H050 - I24). Other, more robust jar types with fairly large applied dragons and additional stamp-impressed palettes seem to have survived only in ethnographic settings; all of these distinctly classified by locals as *ma'on* jars (Fig. 4.3: T30, H23 – I7; T40, H049 – I24). This particular model with a pair of large dragons appears to have been highly sought after by the Kelabit, as further examples continue to occur throughout the 18th-19th and then also in the 19th-20th centuries, without any significant modification to the main design scheme. The only change detectable is in the decoration technique: early (17th-18th century) varieties had dragons applied onto the exterior (T22), while on later (19th-20th century) types the dragons were created by using the raised-into-the-mould technique (T1, T2, T4 etc.).

Jars decorated by three different decoration techniques (most often raised-in-the-mould, stamp impressed and *sgraffito*) began to appear during the 18th-19th centuries and carry on into the 20th century (T4). It is impossible to say whether the Kelabit appreciated the increased labour and skill involved in producing these jars (nevertheless, two examples of these are classified as *ma'ons* in the ethnographic dataset). Jar with incised *sgraffito* design were already present in the earliest of dragon jar cemeteries dating from the 17th-18th centuries, however, *sgraffito* only begins to occur on large stoneware jars as the centre piece arranged into floral scrolls from the 18th century onwards (Fig. 4.3: T7, T14, T22, T34, T37). Similar varieties known in the lowlands by the name *rusa*, exhibiting purely incised decoration probably date to the same period (Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]). Jars solely ornamented with *sgraffito* motifs are represented across all three jar Kelabit jar categories, and this is perhaps the only jar type associated largely, but not exclusively, with female heirs (I13).

Undoubtedly, jars with a pair of raised-in-the-mould dragons dominate both in the archaeological and ethnographic assemblage. As pointed out above, this particular design could be regarded as the reinterpretation of the large, applied dragon motifs of the 17th-18th centuries, continuing right into the present day, represented typically by Type 1 and 2 in the Ceramic Catalogue (Fig. 3.2). There is no indication of when exactly the raised-in-the-mould technique was first employed by potters, but its wide distribution on jars seems to correlate with the increased production of large stonewares and the opening up of new markets in Southeast Asia from the 18th century onwards. In fact, I would suggest that the application of the raised-in-the-mould technique chronologically overlapped – at least for a short while – with the earlier, applied motifs on jars, before it became widely employed in the 19th-20th centuries. There is one example from the Kelabit highlands which supports this proposition; although, the heirloom jar H040 recorded in Long Peluan fulfils the criteria for Type 1 vessels, it has a glaze texture and detailed raised-in-the-mould decoration style that lends it a very similar appearance to H023 (Type 30) documented in Pa' Lungan with an applied dragon design (see Table 4.3). Even though the chronological date of both these types is uncertain, H040 appears to be a prototype, potentially one of the earliest appearances of Type 1 (raised-in-the-mould) jars.

It appears that from the mid-1800s – which corresponds with the influx of immigrant potters from China settling in Borneo and the start of Rajah Brookes' rule – the production of jars grew more standardised, with fixed schemes of decoration due to the plaster and latex moulds used in the process (see Chapter 4). Stoneware vessels with raised-in-the-mould dragons became

widespread across Borneo from around the 19th century; this trend is clearly mirrored by burial jars documented in cemeteries in the Kelabit highlands (Table 5.8). These jar types, although to a lesser degree, are also represented in the ethnographic assemblage, and despite their fairly recent origin, some of them were even classified as *ma'on* jars by local informants.

But what could be behind this discrepancy of jars' chronological date and their local perception? First, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, there is the issue of the occasional inaccuracy of locals' understandings of their material culture, simply because the amount of time that has passed since it was in active use, combined with lack of interest towards relics of the animistic past. Second, as early colonial accounts attest (Schwaner 1853; Bock 1984 [1881]), old, valued jars that fetched high prices at local markets had routinely been reproduced in large numbers by Chinese potters. Thus, it is not surprising that in the Kelabit ethnographic dataset there are jars with fairly archaic decoration schemes and structural details (such as the outcurving rim) classified as *ma'ons* (T1, T7, T17), despite their more likely recent origin. Third, World War II and the spread of Christianity contributed to heirloom jars gradually becoming redundant and their commodity aspect more enhanced. Many families sold their old, valuable jars; however, some people of the older generation insisted on the replacement of heirloom jars even if with modern replicas (I10, Metcalf 1991). Nevertheless, a number of these jars might have been 'marketed' during the transaction as *ma'ons*, whereas others were recognised as recent *meching* jars (I1 – H028-9) or *vice versa* (I10 – H18). And lastly, the histories of jars themselves and their association with powerful leaders or their acquisition as war booty was more important than their actual chronological age. This could explain why a few not particularly old or unique jars were held in such high esteem and classified as *ma'on* jars by their owners.

ID	Type	Rim type	Local typology	Decoration technique	Design	Date
H050	Type 5	folded, flattened	ma'on	applied, rouletted	undecorated	c. 17 th -18 th century
H049	Type 40	outcurving	ma'on	stamp-impression, applied	dragons	c. 17 th -18 th century
H023	Type 30	outcurving	ma'on	stamp-impression, applied	dragons	c. 18 th -19 th century
H006	Type 22	outcurving	ma'on	stamp-impression, sgraffito	floral	c. 17 th -18 th century
H034	Type 22	outcurving	ma'on	raised-in-the-mould, sgraffito	floral	c. 17 th -18 th century
H027	Type 30	outcurving	ma'on	raised-in-the-mould, stamp impression, sgraffito	dragons	c. 18 th -19 th century
H030	Type 30	outcurving	ma'on	raised-in-the-mould, stamp impressions, sgraffito	dragons	c. 18 th -19 th century
H029	Type 4	outcurving	meching	raised-in-the-mould, stamp impression, sgraffito	dragons	c. 19 th -20 th century
H036	Type 36	unknown	ma'on	sgraffito	dragons	unknown
H045	Type 39	outcurving	abai	sgraffito	floral	unknown
H020	Type 15	outcurving	meching	sgraffito	Buddhist symbols	c. 18 th -19 th century
H047	Type 7	outcurving	ma'on	sgraffito	floral	c. 19 th century
H052	Type 14	outcurving	ma'on	sgraffito	floral	c. 19 th century
H038	Type 37	outcurving	meching	sgraffito	floral	20 th century
H005	Type 25	rolled, thickened	ma'on	raised-in-the-mould	dragons	unknown
H017	Type 28	outcurving	meching	raised-in-the-mould	dragons	unknown
H018	Type 28	outcurving	ma'on	raised-in-the-mould	dragons	unknown
H026	Type 28	outcurving	ma'on	raised-in-the-mould	dragons	unknown
H032	unknown	outcurving	ma'on	raised-in-the-mould	unknown	unknown
H024	Type 1	outcurving	ma'on	raised-in-the-mould	dragons	c. (18 th ?) 19 th -20 th century
H025	Type 1	outcurving	ma'on	raised-in-the-mould	dragons	c. (18 th ?) 19 th -20 th century
H040	Type 1	outcurving, angled	ma'on	raised-in-the-mould	dragons	c. (18 th ?) 19 th -20 th century
H041	Type 38	outcurving	ma'on	raised-in-the-mould	dragons	c. (18 th ?) 19 th -20 th century
H042	Type 38	outcurving	abai	raised-in-the-mould	dragons	c. (18 th ?) 19 th -20 th century
H053	Type 1	outcurving	ma'on	raised-in-the-mould	dragons	c. (18 th ?) 19 th -20 th century
H046	Type 4	outcurving	abai	raised-in-the-mould	dragons	c. 19 th -20 th century
H048	Type 1	outcurving	meching	raised-in-the-mould	dragons	c. 19 th -20 th century
H028	Type 4	outcurving	meching	raised-in-the-mould, stamp impression, applied	dragons	c. 19 th -20 th century

Table 6.5 - Decoration styles, rim types and their correspondence with local jar categories - ma'on (dark grey), abai (light grey) and meching (white) jars.

Repair

Stoneware jars were capable of withstanding a fair amount of mechanical impact that occurred during transport and handling. Even today, in contrast to my perhaps overly cautious approach to the *belanai*, the Kelabit handle their jars with confidence, being clearly aware how much ‘bashing around’ a jar can take, stemming from the close physical engagement with these objects since early childhood. Out of 53 jars recorded in longhouses or town homes, over half of them (29 vessels) showed signs of repair or minor damage (chipped lips/surfaces, broken necks etc.). Fifteen jars were fractured to a point that repair was unavoidable for the vessel to continue to function as a container for liquids. Given that larger jars were assembled in two or three parts (base, body and the upper section), cracks tended to appear along the horizontal joints where the vessel was structurally weaker (H003, H012, H013, H027) (Fig. 6.17). In a couple of cases, a significant proportion of the jar was fractured and pieces fully separated, but despite the extensive damage the vessel was later restored (H003, H008). According to my informants, minor damage such as a broken lug handle did not require urgent replacement, while for major functional restorations the vessels were taken outside of the highlands, and placed into the care of a specialist. The repair was carried out either by a potter or a metalworker in workshops located in coastal market-towns (Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]:32). Sometimes, however, itinerant metalworkers, or a craftsperson residing at a riverine longhouse community happened to be closer at hand.

Jar-repairs documented on vessels in the Kelabit highlands demonstrate the craftsman’s skill and understanding of the ceramic structure. The sherds were carefully drilled through, before re-attaching them by using a brace or a bundle of thin wire (Fig. 6.17). To complete the repair, resin was smeared over the cracks from the inside, making the vessel watertight again (Fig. 6.18). In all recorded cases the repair was carried out with confidence, there was no indication of the redundancy or repositioning of holes. Despite the lack of contemporary use – except for display – 13 out of 15 jars appear to be fit to function as a container for liquids following the restoration.

Transport and handling were the two primary causes of unintentional damage. Dragon jars were rented or borrowed for communal feasts on a regular basis; carrying them along slippery paths on peoples’ backs involved a high risk of injury (Fig. 6.19). However, the majority of cracks, chips and fractures most probably occurred during the preparation of *borak* or careless handling of jars amidst the festivities. The handles and the rim suffered damage most commonly (Table 6.6). Minor impairments were often left untouched as their effect on the jars’ function was minimal,

but in four recorded cases the damage to the rim was so extensive that repair was attempted (H004, H007, H027, H052). In 13 documented examples major structural fractures developed as a result of a larger force, such as an impact from a fall or a serious knock against another hard object. The damage was repaired in all cases without exception.

In contrast, in nine out of 29 cases, the damage caused to jars could have been intentional. These breakages appear to be fairly recent (i.e. the fracture is clean, showing no sign of weathering) and dominantly affecting the lip/rim area (H001, H002, H023, H024, H030, H037, H051, H053). Although it remains unclear whether the damage to these jars occurred accidentally or was carried out on purpose, the injuries seem to be consistent with a fracture documented on a jar (H034) which has reportedly been damaged by its owner (I30). Holes punctured on the jars' body strongly point towards intentionality; in the case of H018, the jar was pierced by its previous keeper (I10). The hole on H003 indicates that it was done with such force that caused considerable damage to the rest of the jar's body. It is significant, however, that both fractures were repaired; the crack on H018 was small enough to be filled in with resin, while the hole on H003 was rounded off, indicating that perhaps the original fracture was too large and irregular to be simply smeared over with resin – it might have required a plug of some kind or it is possible that the jar was punctured for an altogether different reason and the hole was never going to be filled. A small hole on the H035 jar's body showed no sign of repair either (Fig. 6.20). Besides intentional fractures and punctures, tiny holes drilled into the jars' rim were recorded in two cases (H003, H026), whereas in one instance (H036) the neck and a rim of the jar suffered extensive damage so that the edge of the fracture had to be evened out by filing it down to its root (Fig. 6.21). Similar jar-repair appears in Grabowski's descriptions where the missing neck of a vessel was replaced by a wooden substitute (Grabowski 1885 in Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]:29, Fig. 6.3, no. 2). Another example is currently being curated by the Prinsessehof Museum in Leeuwarden (OKS 1961-014, Fig. 6.22). Nevertheless, whether the damage was intentional or accidental, jars were expertly mended inferring that they were worth the expense and the risk involved with the procedure, and were expected to service as before.

In the eyes of the Kelabit small-scale repair was a clear sign that the jar has seen a fair amount of use during its lifetime, thus it must be 'old' (I2, I13). Repair on a jar indicated that the object was valued by its owner, even if the restoration carried the risk of potentially rendering a jar useless. However, it is more difficult to account for pierced holes on the body/lip or fresh fractures occurring on the rim of the vessels. These, most probably intentional modifications to a jar's

integrity will gain a special significance in the light of the vessel's spiritual roles and utilisation, discussed in Chapter 7.



Figure 6.17 –Horizontal crack on jar, fixed with metal braces. Image by BN.



Figure 6.18 -‘Damar’ resin covering the crack on the interior in order to make the jar watertight. Image by BN.

Image omitted due to
copyright regulations

Figure 6.19 - Pah Brian man carrying a jar. Image source: Sarawak Museum Journal 1937, Vol. 4 (4/15), Pl. B4, Fig. 1.



Figure 6.20 - Hole and fracture on jar. Image by BN.



Figure 6.21 - Jar with horizontally filed neck recorded in the village of Pa' Dalih in 2007. Image by BN.



Figure 6.22 – Jar being curated by the Prinsessehof Museum in Leeuwarden, with neck filed down. Image by BN.

Jar ID	Unintentional damage	Intentional damage	Repair
H001	Fractured lip (piece missing)		No sign of repair
H002	Significant fracturing to the lip		No sign of repair
H003	Multiple horizontal and diagonal cracks	Hole (d:3 cm) on body, smaller hole on lip	Probably two separate repairing events, indicated by brass and iron braces, resin smeared on the cracks. No sign of repair on either hole.
H004	Horizontal and vertical cracks, fractured lip (piece missing)		Brass braces and resin, holes for replacement of fractured lip (not present)
H005	Potter's error (mould design too deep)?		Hole filled with resin
H007	Slight diagonal crack, fractured lip (piece missing)		Brass braces and resin, holes for replacement of fractured lip (not present)
H008	Significant fracturing of body, fractured lip (piece missing)		Brass braces and resin, no sign of repair on lip
H010	Slight diagonal crack, fractured lip (piece missing)		Brass braces and resin, no sign of repair on lip
H012	Multiple horizontal and diagonal cracks		Brass braces, bundle of wire and resin
H013	Horizontal and vertical cracks		Brass braces and resin
H014	Vertical crack and fractured lip (piece missing)		Brass braces and resin, no sign of repair on lip
H015	Horizontal crack		Brass braces and resin
H017	Chipped lip		No sign of repair
H018		Small hole on body	Hole filled in with resin
H020	Chipped lip		No sign of repair
H023	Fractured lip (piece missing)		No sign of repair on lip, missing lug replaced with brass brace
H024	Fractured lip (piece missing)		No sign of repair
H025	Slight vertical crack		Brass braces and resin
H026		4 small holes on lip	No sign of repair
H027	Horizontal crack, fractured lip (piece missing)		Brass braces and resin, holes for replacement of fractured lip (not present)
H030	Fractured lip		No sign of repair
H032	Extensive damage to jar, only the top remains		Hole present for repair, brace missing
H034		Fractured lip	No sign of repair
H035		Small hole on body	No sign of repair
H036	Extensive fracture of neck and rim	The edge of fracture was filed down horizontally (perhaps wooden neck-replacement?)	
H037	Fractured lip		No sign of repair
H040	Diagonal crack		Brass braces and resin
H051	Chipped lip		No sign of repair
H052	Fractured lip/rim (piece present)		Brass braces
H053	Two seemingly regular chips on lip's edge		No sign of repair

Table 6.6 - Evidence of damage and repair documented on jars in Kelabit longhouses and town homes.

Visibility of jars and choices of display

The visibility and display of jars in the present Kelabit context should deserve a separate essay, but here, I would like draw on some key details which could be informative on the ethnographic discussion of jars. During my fieldwork I noted a marked difference in the visibility (i.e. public access) of jars between the ones possessed by longhouse residents and the items kept by owners of individual private homes or homestays. Jars in longhouses were recorded either 1) in the families' private quarters (*dalim* – seven jars), or 2) in rice/storage-huts (14 jars), or 3) under the longhouse (11 jars) (Table 6.7). This is perhaps not surprising as jars were traditionally stored either in the *dalim* sections or kept in rice-huts where the husking and winnowing activities took place (when jars were not used for *borak*, they served as containers for harvested rice) (Fig. 6.23). Informants recalled that people in the past routinely divided up their heirlooms (mainly jars and gongs) and stored some of them in the longhouse apartment, while others in storage huts, or even out in the rainforest; as a contingency plan in case of a fire (I24).⁴¹ Keeping jars under the longhouse (where each family has a storage compartment) is a development of the past 60 or so years. Before WWII, pigs were kept in pens under the longhouse; a custom which was abolished shortly after the war by the influence of Christian missionaries. The Kelabit conversion to Christianity resulted in the reduced presence of alcohol at feasts: jars' primary function was becoming redundant while their local perception – in the light of the newly adopted religion – was undergoing a change, increasingly addressing objects imbued with past spiritual significance as 'demonic'.

Location	Context	No. of jars
Reddish's Lodge, Ngimat Ayu's Lodge, Batu Ritung Lodge	Homestay	7
Bario Asal, Pa' Umor, Long Peluan	Longhouse apartment	7
Bario Asal, Pa' Lungan, Pa' Dalih	Private home (highlands)	11
Miri, Kuching	Private home (town)	3
Ulung Palang, Pa' Lungan, Pa' Dalih, Long Peluan	Storage hut	14
Pa' Umor, Pa' Lungan, Ramudu, Pa' Dalih, Pa' Mada, Long Peluan	Under the house storage	11
Total		53

Table 6.7 – Jars' location and context of display in longhouses, private and town homes.

⁴¹ The practice of hiding jars in the forest was remarked upon by European ethnographers from the late 1800s: 'to secure them from the greedy hands of the enemies' (Schwaner 1853-4, in Ling Roth 1980 [1896]: clxxvii; Mallinckrodt 1924, in Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]:25), or 'buried in the wild at places known only to the owner' (Lumholtz 1991 [1920]:351). The practice still survives in the highland regions of Vietnam (see Hung 2008, Fig. 4.). But beyond practical explanations, Christina Kreps recently suggested a link between the sacredness of the rice-huts and the efficacy of heirloom jars across Borneo and parts of Indonesia (Kreps 2004).

I would argue that this negative perception of jars informed by Christian teachings is linked to the physical and visual disappearance of jars from the communal and private spheres of longhouses: 25 jars out of the overall 53 vessels were being stored either in rice/storage huts, or in storage facilities under the longhouse. However, the considerations behind this practice could be nuanced further. The primary concern of longhouse residents was towards their wider community; i.e. to remove items of 'danger' from public spheres which went hand-in-hand with the demonstration of one's Christian devotion. Secondly, hiding jars rather than selling or destroying them implies a sentimental attachment; informants still in possession of heirlooms often expressed their wish of passing the jars on to their children as a family keepsake (I1, I2, I10). Thirdly, despite religious preferences, the squandering of heirlooms for money to outsiders was (and still is, to a certain extent) frowned upon by the Kelabit. If such transactions were unavoidable, it was best done out of the view of prying eyes.

Over the past 50 years as the Kelabit moved away from traditional spiritual and social norms, the longhouse structure as a cohesive unit began to loosen. The increasing reliance on cash economies and tourism resulted in people having the financial means to build their own separate homes and to establish homestays as a source of income. Twenty-eight out of 53 jars were recorded in the context of private apartments or homestays exemplifying an increasingly diverse attitude towards jars since their 'blanket ban' in the 1970s. Private home residents kept their jars in visible, 'public' spheres such as the living room or the veranda (6 jars). There was a single exception, where the jar's owner purchased the item for his wife back in the 1960s-70s, and since she passed away, he maintains a deep sentimental connection with the vessel, and keeps it in his bedroom (H020 - I14). The decorative roles of seven jars (H007-013) were given a further perspective (in every sense of the word) by their 'curator' who owns five of vessels and looks after another two on behalf of her cousins (I16) (Fig. 6.24). The jars are being displayed on a purpose-built platform, secured by a piece of rope; an installation that resonates strongly with traditional ways of jar-presentation in a longhouse setting (Fig. 6.25). This particular lady and her husband are both descendants of Kelabit aristocrats and command high respect within the community. This proud demonstration of family heritage, social standing – and in some way a disregard of SIB religious teachings – would certainly result in controversy if the display was put on in the context of a longhouse. But in the present day, there seems to be less criticism expressed towards people's choices in their own private homes, or in fact, towards the design preferences of homestay owners. All three of my informants currently running a homestay were/are from high ranking families, by whom the display of jars was a conscious decision (H001-2, H016, H023-6 – I6, I7, I27). They all emphasised their sentimental connection to the

vessels and through them to their forefathers, responding to my queries along the lines of ‘to show tourists a part of our cultural heritage and the objects used in the olden days’ (I7) or ‘because it reminds me of my parents and grandparents; jars were like furniture while I was growing up’ (I6). One of my interviewees even transported his family’s jars by helicopter (!) in the 1990s, when his parents moved to Bario due to poor health (H001-2, I6). These people made a conscious decision to hold onto their family-valuables (or to find other ways to keep them safe) despite the SIB’s religious stance on objects that signalled social distinction and which were/are a source of spiritual ‘danger’. This kind of open expression of a firm personal opinion (and religious interpretation) by descendants of the leading class is – again – strongly rooted in the traditional Kelabit concept of leadership and indications of high social standing (i.e. *parans*: Lian-Saging 1976-77; Talla 1979; ‘*doo-ness*’: Janowski 2003; Bala 2008), and also – as it will be discussed in Chapter 7 – linked to recent forms of religious devotion and to the pursuit towards a modern, fully-fledged Malaysian citizenship.

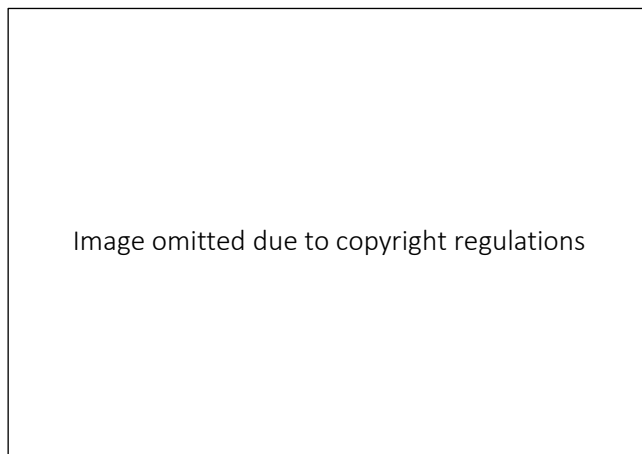


Figure 6.23 - Jars in the rice-hut. Image source: courtesy of the Sarawak Museum’s Photography Archive.



Figure 6.24 - Kelabit lady with her heirloom jars displayed at her private home. Image by BN.

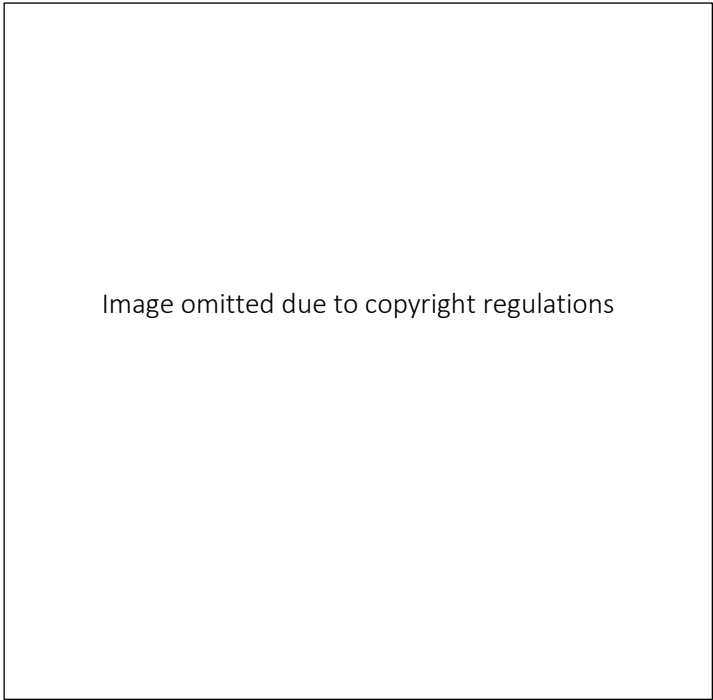


Image omitted due to copyright regulations

Figure 6.25 - Ladies chatting in the longhouse interior, jars visible in the background. Image source: H. Morrison 1965:302.

6.6 Summary

The demand for jars by the peoples of Borneo had long been recognised by Chinese producers, and their significance in local, indigenous societies was noted immediately by Europeans upon their arrival on Borneo. The rich body of colonial literature reveals an elaborate system of jar-evaluation which varied from group to group and from region to region. So far, the heavily-potted, olive-glazed *gusi* represents the only jar category recognised as ancient and valuable by all ethnic groups in Borneo. Other varieties, like the *brahan* and the *belanga* were more likely to have signified the antiquity of jars rather than the association with a particular type: *belanga* jars among the Ngaju Dayak in the 1800s referred to very different varieties than *belanga* jars in Kalimantan in the early 1900s. *Rusa* and *ningka* jars were traditionally regarded as of slightly lesser value, which could have had some relation to their design, as most of these jars were decorated with incised motifs (as opposed to the dragon design dominating on *brahans* and *belangas*). Nevertheless, colonial records testify that *rusas* and *ningkas* were valued among Borneans, including the Kelabit who also hold certain types of *sgraffito* jars in high esteem. Although Kelabit oral histories indicate the existence of a variety of jar types in the past, informants today can only recall the three main categories: *belanai ma'on* (ancient, valuable jars), *belanai abai* ('Malay' jars) and *belanai meching* ('new arrivals'). Ma'ons were described as dark coloured jars with protruding dragon design, while *mechings* are remembered to be

coated with light coloured glaze and embellished with 'less visible' dragons. The *abai* jars represented the fuzziest of categories during the survey, perhaps because the term was used to refer to the Malay jar-traders (at a particular point in the past) rather than an exact vessel type.

The typological characteristics of jars also weighed significantly in their evaluation. Although *ma'on* jars were generally associated with dark-coloured glazes and *mechings* with light-brown coatings, it appears that the glaze colour on its own is not sufficiently indicative of a certain jar-category. The examination of *ma'on* and *meching* vessels show that the texture of the glaze plays a complementing role here: thick glazes tend to be associated with *ma'ons*, whereas transparent, shiny glazes are linked to *mechings*. The fabric of the clay also appears to be a significant characteristic of old jars, so as outcurving or flattened rims. When it comes to design, however, the picture seems to be more complex. Jars representing earlier periods (17th-18th century) exhibit a variety of different techniques: *sgraffito*, sprigging, stamp-impressions, rouletted motifs along with elements applied and embellished by hand. In contrast, the techniques on more recent jars (19th-20th century) seem to be reduced to the raised-in-the-mould method, with the occasional *sgraffito* design.

In sum, it can be concluded that through the detailed analysis of jars' physical properties, a picture of a particular Kelabit taste emerges which attached high values to jars with dark glazes, pronounced dragons, outcurving or folded rims and red clay bodies. The juxtaposition of the ethnographic data with ceramicist literature demonstrates that the three main Kelabit jar-categories indeed reflect the jars' chronological age fairly accurately. A few exceptions, however, hint that the definition of valued jars hinged on more than simply their style of decoration or in fact their physical appearance (vessels with *sgraffito* motifs were also among the most treasured heirlooms), and points towards further criteria being also at play within local jar-evaluation schemes. Examinations furthermore revealed that damage to jars was not always accidental, which is perhaps linked to the changing perception of jars and their roles in society, to be discussed in detail in Chapter 7. Although jars are still largely kept out of sight in Kelabit villages, there is a growing trend among people of certain occupation and class, who began to express their 'progressivist' attitudes (in an economic, social and religious sense) through the display of their family heritage; an aspect which will be further explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 7 Dragons in Flux: Indigenous approaches to material culture

7.1 Introduction

This chapter brings together the archaeological and the ethnographic observations to highlight the key roles jars played as commodities, ceramic containers, objects of status and spirituality. Although there are many other aspects of jars that could be emphasised here, examining these artefacts within the contexts of trade, feasting and ritual has particular potential to put some unusual properties of these vessels into focus and direct attention to uniquely Southeast Asian concepts related to objects and personhood. This chapter is neither an attempt to reconstruct social, economic or ritual realities of the Kelabit highlands before, during and after the colonial era, nor an exercise to describe stages of social complexity or systems of trade networks. Rather it is seeking to better understand the range and flexibility of the regimes of values within which jars operated and how these changed during the past 60 years of ethnographic and historical reportage.

7.2 Jars as commodities: trade in the Kelabit highlands at the turn of the last century

All accounts, either written of, or by the Kelabit highlight the remoteness and the isolated nature of the highlands, emphasising its limited contact with the outside world until the late 19th century (Harrisson, T. 1959; Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979; Bala 2002; Bulan and Bulan-Dorai 2004). However, these descriptions tend to utilise this geographical – and as Tom Harrisson puts it, psychological – remoteness for their own means, disregarding the fact that inhabitants of the Kelabit plateau had long been participating, even if to a fluctuating degree, in regional and even global networks of trade. Such depictions are not limited to regions of the hinterland, but also accord with historical perceptions of Borneo as a whole, aligned with notions such as ‘remoteness’ or ‘marginality’ (Tsing 1993; Scott 2009). From a historical perspective Borneo had often been portrayed as a minor actor that teetered on the peripheries of Hindu-Buddhist maritime kingdoms, and which remained a participant of minor significance on the fringes of Chinese, European or Peninsular networks in the following centuries. Such portrayal of Borneo is not unusual within the context of the historiography of Southeast Asia, the economic and politico-historical roles of which have largely been overlooked, even by specialist scholarship until the 1980s and 90s (Marr and Milner 1986; Hall 1985, 1992; Tarling 1992; Reid 1992, 1993, 1999; Watson Andaya 1992; Munoz 2006; Gunn 2011, 2014, etc.).

Borneo's perceived marginality is manifested clearly by the absence of fine-grained historical evidence. Tangential records produced by Chinese and Arab bureaucrats as part of tributary or mercantile missions during the pre-Islamic era (prior to the 15th century) were concerned with little else than the island's profitable resources (Wheatley 1959). In the following centuries sporadic written records describe small sultanates flourishing in strategically located trading entrepôts, among them the polity of Brunei which grew into a considerable mercantile player in the 16th-17th centuries (Nicholl 1983; Walker 2002). The rising economic prowess of Brunei spurred an increase in court administration, producing a heavy bias in written evidence that determined the trajectories for future scholarly works (Brown 1970; Nicholl 1983, 2007 [1975]; Fanselow 2014). This partiality towards coastal political systems continued after the establishment of Dutch colonial outposts in Kalimantan, and the foundations of the Brooke's rule in Sarawak in the mid-19th century. While the Dutch colonial empire regarded their enterprises in the Outer Islands as '*lastposten*' (nuisances) and was careful to preserve the *status quo* (Black 1985); the White Rajahs' governance was actively pushing the boundaries of Sarawak in all senses of the word (Walker 2002). As the colonial control expanded, so did the administration that underpinned it. Beyond the goals of territorial gain and exploitation of resources however, European-style infrastructure provided new grounds for the fledglings of new academic disciplines like anthropology; although in Borneo, such intellectual exercises were rendered strongly unto political goals, with the chief aim to provide information on the state's new subjects (For example, Low 1848; St. John 1863; Hose and McDougall 1966 [1912]; Rutter 1985 [1929]; Fanselow 2014, etc.).

Despite the growing ethnographic corpus and the Sarawak government's heavily mercantile policies, the documentation of trade had either taken secondary place or was reduced to dry figures of profits and taxation (Hose and McDougall 1966 [1912]; Ling Roth 1980 [1896]; Evans 1990 [1922], etc., and columns of the Sarawak Gazette from 1870). Even studies produced well after the collapse of colonial power structure employed cultural-evolutionist approaches that tended to describe the local economic development in the region as a linear process that progressed from small-scale systems of barter exchange to globalised cash economies in the 21st century (Evers 1988; Evers and Schrader 1994). The works concerned with the development of trade in Borneo focussed largely on the political economies of jungle produce trade in regional contexts (Warren 2007 [1981]; Peluso 1983; Rousseau 1989; King 1993; Cleary 1995, etc.). Although there have been studies which drew upon indigenous components of trade (Chew 1990; Brosius 1995), ethnohistorical accounts on the local organisation and participation in trade networks are still few and far between (Eghenter 2001; Metcalf 2010).

While trade related pre-, and pericolonial ethnographic records are scarce, systematic archaeological investigations targeting such networks within their broader remit – particularly in inland areas of Southeast Asia – are even scarcer. Until now there have only been two projects, both conducted in the Philippines, exploring the precolonial and colonial interactions (16th-17th centuries) between coastal and highland regions that have yielded sufficient archaeological evidence (Junker 1998, 1999; Acabado 2016). Laura Junker's work in the Tanjay region of the Island of Negros spans from the Metal Age (first millennium BCE) to the Spanish colonial period (1521-1898 CE) and examined how the participation in maritime trade induced changes in the political economies of small Philippine chiefdoms. Combining archaeological evidence with historical sources, she was able to show that it was the chiefdoms' involvement in the luxury maritime trade that drove their progress into complex political economies rather than simply their contacts with foreign power structures. She also draws attention to the significance of the highly personalised power bases of chiefs, being heavily dependent on personal charisma, exchange of luxury goods and lavish ritual displays (Junker 1999). Stephen Acabado's extensive study on the Ifugao in the highlands of Luzon demonstrates another form of indigenous economy as a response to Spanish colonial advances. His archaeological work stands in contrast to the available historical records written by Spanish colonialists in which natives were relegated to the sidelines of historical events. Archaeological evidence from the Luzon highlands suggests that during the pericolonial era, the Ifugao shifted to intensive wet-rice cultivation and increased their participation in long-distance luxury trade. These strategies were to enhance social cohesion to counteract attempts of subjugation by the Spanish colonialists, which have proven successful in the long term (Acabado 2016).

Unfortunately, the archaeological data recovered from the Kelabit highlands thus far is not fine-grained enough to undertake such reconstructions. Hence for this study I had to rely heavily on 1) ethnographic accounts (Janowski 2003, 2012), some written by the Kelabit themselves (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979; Bala 2002), 2) sporadic historical accounts published in the *Sarawak Gazette*, 3) works produced by European explorers before and after World War II (Banks 1931; Harrison, T. 1959; Arnold 1959; Southwell 1999 [1973], etc.), and 4) ethnographic interviews collected in 2013. I was also dependant on Peter Metcalf's (1991, 1996, 2010) excellent studies on the Berawan (related indigenous group living in the middle reaches of the Baram river), which provides a valuable insight into pericolonial lifeways, comparable with traditional Kelabit practices during the same epoch.

7.2.1 Precolonial era

Although forest products originating from the rainforests of Southeast Asia had been widely traded as early as the 9th-10th centuries from China to the Near East (Schafer 1963), the first Chinese descriptions concerned explicitly with the island regions' and Borneo's resources were penned during the Song dynasty, in the 10th-13th century CE (Wheatley 1959). These list *putchuk*, dragon's blood, myrrh, borax, asafoetida, frankincense, pearls and glass being traded at the entrepôt of Tanjungpura (tentatively identified as Banjarmasin on the south coast of Kalimantan) (Wheatley 1959:12-3, Table 7.1). Rhinoceros horn sourced from inland Borneo was also in great demand (Schafer 1963: 226) while archaeological evidence shows the exploitation of alluvial gold from the 10th-13th centuries at Santubong (Harrisson, T. and O'Connor 1967), or perhaps even earlier in the Kutei-Mahakam region in East Kalimantan (McKinnon 2000, see also Chapter 3). The first European, Portuguese records highlight the importance of camphor as the primary product, being channelled through Brunei in the 16th century along with *gaharu* wood and birds' nests (Medway 1963) shipped in large quantities supplying the markets of China (Nicholls 2007:3-5). In 1773, Captain John Herbert on behalf of the English East India Company was seeking to strike a deal with the Sultanate of Brunei. Although his plans came to nothing thanks to Sulu pirates, he provided a rich record of items sourced from the Brunei and its hinterland: 'gold, diamonds, bezoar, lignum, aloes, musk, civit (musk of a civet cat), Benjamin (benzoin), amber, dragons' blood, wax, rice and rattans' (in Logan 1848:525, Table 7.1). Even though it appears that the majority of products originated directly from the forested coastal regions, aromatic woods (including camphor), which Borneo was renowned for, required substantial efforts to be collected and transported from primary rainforests of the inlands.

	Product	Description	Usage
1	Putchuk	Probably an umbrella term incorporating a number of fragrant, aromatic roots.	Dried product was used in cooking and as medicine.
2	Dragon's blood	Red coloured fruit of a palm belonging to the genus <i>Daemonorops</i> .	As medicine in China (astringent), as a dye in SEA.
3	Myrrh	Probably meaning a type of local resinous plant, and not the Middle Eastern <i>Commiphora</i> .	Perfumes and incense in China (and the Middle East).
4	Borax	Water-soluble acid compound, with antifungal properties.	Enamel, glass and ceramic production.
5	Asafoetida	Possibly not identical to the perennial herb widespread from Iran to India, but could have been used in similar ways.	In cooking, and as a digestive aid.
6	Frankincense	Aromatic resin, again, probably an umbrella term including a variety of different plant products.	Perfumes, incense and as medicine.
7	Pearls	Pearls were harvested from the waters of north Borneo, some of unusually large size.	Jewellery, medicine.
8	Glass	No further information. Perhaps small-scale bead industry?	Jewellery ornaments.
9	Rhinoceros horn	The horn of <i>Rhinoceros sumatrans</i> the smallest rhino species in SEA, with a habitat in Borneo.	Craft items, antidote to poisons in powdered form.
10	Gold	Both alluvial (south and west Borneo) and mined gold (Northwest Borneo).	Craft products, textiles etc.
11	Diamond	Diamond deposits in Northwest Borneo in the Kapuas region.	Jewellery ornaments.
12	Bezoar stones	The gallstones of monkeys, civet cats, and porcupines.	As medicine in powdered form or as charms in China.
13	Lignum	Probably refers to the 'ironwood of Borneo', growing in forests of the inland areas.	Primary building material of longhouses.
14	Aloe	Fragrant wood referred to as <i>gaharu</i> in the region, including many tree varieties.	Fumigant, pain medicine, incense for ceremonies.
15	Musk (civit)	A substance secreted from a gland of deer and civet cat species.	Base component for perfumes.
16	Benjamin (benzoin)	Aromatic resin obtained from a tree <i>Styrax benzoin</i> .	Apotropaic and medicine in China, sealant in Borneo.
17	Amber	Fossilised resin found occasionally on the forest floor.	Jewellery, pendants, prayer beads in China.
18	Wax	Beeswax collected from beehives often attached to the crowns of exceptionally tall trees.	Anti-haemorrhaging medicine, sealant, candles.
19	Rice	Agricultural product grown in wet and dry fields in the hinterland of the Brunei sultanate.	Food supply for coastal settlements and ships.
20	Rattan	Tough, thorny creeper plant found in the jungles across Borneo.	Handicraft items, twines, furniture.
21	Camphor	Crystalline substance with a particular odour, a by-product of certain tree-species self-healing mechanism.	Perfumes, aphrodisiacs and medicines, used to cure eye-infections.
22	Birds' nest	Nests constructed by the sticky saliva of swiftlets attached to cave walls.	Collected in large quantities as foodstuff.
23	Hornbill casques	Extremely hard skulls, beaks (and feathers) of hornbills.	Craft production, jewellery.
24	Pepper	Spice produced in territories of southwest Borneo.	Seasoning of foodstuffs.
25	Trepang	Sea-cucumbers collected from warm, coastal waters on the north-eastern shores of Borneo.	Collected in large quantities as foodstuff.

Table 7.1 - Products of Brunei for export in the 18th century. 1-8: Wheatley 1959:12-3; 9: Schafer 1963:226; 10-20: Logan 1848:525; 21-22: Nicholl 2007:3-5; 23-24: Metcalf 2010:149-150.

The wealth of the Brunei Sultanate, since its very beginnings, was derived from trade. In the 16th century the elite of the former Hindu-Buddhist kingdom converted to Islam, followed by the non-Malay speaking locals, who were keen to participate in the polity's mercantile advances and relaxed tax rates. Its minor maritime force consisted of a fleet of *prahus*,⁴² assisted by a formidable network of independent merchants operating semi-illegally or in an openly piratic fashion (Nicholl 2007). Control was largely exercised through means of trade restrictions, taxation and not least violence in a form of slavery. Nevertheless, Brunei had limited authority in its hinterland; here it relied on a network of indigenous trade alliances and agents at small trading posts (Metcalf 2010). Commerce was carried out by itinerant peddlers who rarely entered far inland, and tended to shuttle back and forth between the coast and the middle reaches of riverine territories. Thus from this perspective the empire of Brunei resembled an entity close to what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describes as an 'Empire'; an abstract institution with constantly shifting, fuzzy boundaries (2000), which to some extent continued even during British or Dutch colonial administration (Amster 2006).

Historical background on the cusp of colonialism in the late 1800s

Before turning our attention to the modes of trade and items of exchange between the Kelabit highlands and the coastal regions, a few words need to be spared on describing the historical backdrop prior to and right on the cusp of British colonialism in the territories of Brunei and Sarawak. By the time James Brooke arrives on the shores of Sarawak in the mid-1800s, the so-called Great Iban Migration was already underway. Although displacement and migration in Borneo had not been unusual phenomena in a social environment where boundaries of ethnic groups were diffuse, and where even settled communities were fairly mobile, a population movement on this scale had a considerable impact throughout the region for many decades to come. The mythical homeland of the Iban lay in the area of the Kapuas (West Kalimantan) from where they spread far to the north and moved into the tributaries of the lower Rejang River, pushing the boundaries of Kayan and Kenyah territories (Freeman 1970 [1955]; Sandin 1967). The triggers behind this expansion are still vague, but as Peter Metcalf put it, it was a kind of 'cultural colonialism'; a forceful 'Ibanisation' of the neighbouring populations (2010:84). James Brooke himself came into serious, violent conflicts with Iban factions throughout his reign, but after a series of strenuous negotiations (and playing them against one another) they turned into his fiercest allies against the ruling Malay elite (Runciman 1960; Pringle 1970; Walker 2002).

⁴² Small trading boats with a triangular sail and outriggers, used primarily for inter-island or coastal travel.

The Iban migration continued to send shockwaves through the Orang Ulu communities of the inland regions, contributing to the already volatile political situation several years after the foundation of the Brooke's rule in Sarawak in 1842. In 1857, displaced Kayan groups who themselves migrated from the Apo Kayan area to upper Rejang - lower Baram region a few decades earlier, were threatening the capital of Brunei (St. John 1863; Rousseau 1998; Metcalf 2010). The sultan's commander managed to strike a secret deal with the Kayans, who went and pillaged Murut villages instead; a strategy which Brunei applied before (Metcalf 2010:134-5). Spencer St. John, the British Consul General of Brunei travelling in the area accompanied by Hugh Low reported on the devastation of the Adang Murut (a group related to the Kelabit) longhouses and that the refugees moved into the headwaters of the Trusan 'close to their cousins' (St. John 1863: chapter 3). As the effects of the Kayan 'push' were begun to be felt elsewhere in the region, it provoked a reaction by the Brooke government, culminating in the first Great Kayan Punitive Raid in 1863. The military campaign was designed to strengthen the position of Charles Brooke (the nephew and successor of James Brooke) and his alliance with the Iban, while keeping the hinterland native groups in check. The raid resulted in a massive loss of Orang Ulu lives, but it did not stop the Rajah authorising a second punitive campaign in 1869, this time purely under Iban leadership without colonial supervision (Metcalf 2010:84). There were only tight-lipped reports on this event later appearing in the columns of the Sarawak Gazette describing it as being a 'success' (1896, July:366) while noting that thousands of refugees fled into the Baram watershed (1896, September:368, December:371).

After the annexation of the Baram and the Trusan River basins in 1883-4, punitive raids carried out by indigenous forces were convenient tools in the hands of the colonial administration to penetrate and project jurisdiction in remote areas. However, tribal leaders were tricky to control and tended to act upon their own, personal grudges under the aegis of the Rajah Brooke's authority, which caused a fair number of headaches to the local colonial government (Hose and McDougall 1966 [1912]; Hose 1990 [1926]; Ewart 2009). Even though headhunting occurred only occasionally in the interior (a practice linked to the mourning cycle of high-ranking individuals), Kelabit ethnographic accounts testify that the effects of the 'Kayan push' in the late 1800s had led to escalating violence in the Apad Uat watershed region, often in a systematised form (Lian-Saging 1976-7:60-8; Talla 1979:13-8). The first (reported) punitive raid against the Kelabit was conducted in 1898, overseen by the flamboyant Kayan leader, Tama Bulan, who had the consent of the Baram Resident. The pretext of this campaign was revenge for murder committed by a Kelabit chief, and it resulted in the devastation of 30 Kelabit villages (Sarawak Gazette 22:155, 188, 202). In 1898, as the outcome of the Kayan-led raid, several

Kelabit headmen accepted the British rule, but skirmishes appear to have continued in the Upper Baram region for another ten years or so (Ewart 2009).

The last punitive raid in the highlands took place either in 1902 or in 1903, with the involvement of Kayan, Kenyah and Iban forces against Krayan groups over in Kalimantan; this time, at the instigation of the Kelabit living on the Sarawak side of the Apad Uat range. Reports of the campaign are obscure (and controversial), but it was clearly a significant event in Kelabit history, which was still remembered by the elderly informants of Robert Lian-Saging and Yahya Talla in the 1970s. The mosaics of accounts outline an extensive, large-scale expedition ('nearly a thousand men armed with rifles and shot guns' – Harrison, T. 1959:91) authorised by the Rajah, but carried out under indigenous leadership without the government's direct supervision. The campaign was a risky business: the Kayan, Kenyah and the Iban lacked local knowledge and were wholly reliant on their Kelabit allies, while the Kelabit tried to manoeuvre carefully around a force that could easily wreak havoc among their villages. The lowlanders were chiefly motivated by the promise of war-booty and by proving themselves in war, but were not so keen on entering further into a territory unknown to them. The Kelabit on the other hand, although probably driven by the same motives, did their best to divert attention from longhouses lying in close proximity, where their relatives resided. It is unclear whether the raid was finally carried out by a split force attacking two different longhouses at the same time, or if it was conducted in two consequent stages. What transpires from the narratives however, is an expedition led to the Pa' Bawang longhouse against the Brian and the Kelalan in northeast; and an attack on the Pa' Ebang longhouse of the Krayan community, southeast of the Kelabit highlands (Lian-Saging 1976-7:191-7, 188; Talla 1979:106-10, 118; Harrison, T. 1959: 90-1).

The campaign resulted in considerable bloodshed and a serious breakdown of relationships between communities on either side of the mountain range. Reports on the expedition appear to have been suppressed, only a brief mention two years after the event was published in the Sarawak Gazette (1905, 35:231), implying that the government deeply condemned the outcomes of the expedition. Although the raid remains a dark spot in Kelabit memory, it had important consequences on trade and the local jar assemblage, as Tom Harrison's lines reveal:

'The main booty consisted of heads of the slain, live captured boys and girls and valuable old jars. The vast prize was divided broadly so that the Kayans had most of the heads of which they needed ceremonially at that time; the Kenyahs most of the kids; *the Kelabits the jars* (too awkward to porter over the ranges [i.e. to the lowlands]). Although few of the active participants in this affair are still alive – for it

is rare to live into very old age – Bawang, from the non-Rajah side of the ranges [i.e. Kalimantan, Indonesia], keeps up a steady complaint. Every few years they put up a demonstration demanding retribution; and although they permit the Kelabits to go there and trade, only selected Bawang people (without relatives concerned) come westward in return' (1959:91 – emphasis added).

Spheres and items of exchange

Since there are no ethnohistorical records concerning the upper Baram region prior to the British rule, and as the Kelabit collective memory does not extend back beyond 3-4 generations (100-120 years the best), pre-colonial trade in the region can only be outlined in broad strokes. Based on studies carried out among ethnic groups in the lower Baram and Rajang region, it appears that the exchange of goods moved in a number of different spheres some of which continued to exist well into the 20th century (Rousseau 1990; Eghenter 2001; Metcalf 2010). Trade was primarily subsistence oriented and operated on a small-scale, either locally on a village level or within the wider area of the Kelabit highlands. This kind of exchange was characterised by the barter of locally produced food items such as rice or root-crops, handicraft products and livestock. However, the Kelabit highlands was renowned for its salt production; a widely sought-after item which acted as a kind of currency during inter-regional transactions. Salt attracted many inland groups who lived far away from the sea to trade with the Kelabit, allowing the Kelabit themselves to plug into a wider networks of communication. Inter-regional trade made locally specific goods available for the Kelabit either as raw materials or as final products by itinerant traders-cum-craftsmen. These small-scale and inter-regional exchanges took place on a fairly regular basis, and were linked tightly in with the agricultural cycle: for instance the period right before the rice-harvest was traditionally the time when people acquired or replaced their harvesting tools, baskets, and winnowing trays, while other items were produced throughout the year, stock-piled and traded all-year-round (earthenware pots, fishing equipment, carved containers etc. – Table 7.1).

Long-distance trade however was an entirely different matter that required a complex set of social and economic negotiations often years in the making. Peter Metcalf posits that long-distance trading expeditions only occurred once in a generation and were privileges of the ruling class (2010). He argues in relation to the Malay peddler trade that such missions were preceded by the slow accumulation of jungle produce by individual members of the community, whose products were called in and traded by their village leaders (2010:174). Slaves were

obliged to hand over their produce to their masters, whereas others were compensated in a number of ways; either by receiving items of craft/subsistence, labour or an invite to participate in future feasts. Similarly to inter-regional trade, long-distance expeditions had to fit around agricultural activities, and sometimes even around larger events like secondary burial ceremonies; thus it was not unusual that trading missions involving a large group of men were combined with opportunistic stints of headhunting (Metcalf 1991). Trading expeditions which required a significant number of the able bodied men to be away from their farms for an extended period of time necessitated serious negotiations of labour organisation and defence in times when violence was rife in the region. Therefore it is not difficult to see why only upper class men (and very occasionally women; Talla 1979) were involved in long distance trade: 1) they enjoyed the support of their slaves who continued to labour on their fields (re)producing the surplus required for maintaining status; 2) they had a number of followers who were willing to accompany their leaders on long, arduous and often life-threatening journeys; 3) had a network of allies in longhouses on the way to the coast; relatives or family acquaintances of reputable class, who could provide food, shelter and logistical support in villages within the realms of other ethnic groups.

But despite the significant investments and preparations needed for such missions, long-distance trade promised major gains to its participants. First of all, there was a widely shared cultural appreciation of people who travelled great distances and engaged in trading activities among most ethnic groups in Borneo (Bala 2002:23). Travel and trade were seen as something that increased one's influence and social prestige, especially if it materialised in the acquisitions of luxury items such as dragon jars, gongs or rare beads (Kedit 1989; Rousseau 1989). Second, the charisma and leadership skills demonstrated during these trips both by navigating safely through enemy territories and realising a good profit for jungle produce in coastal markets was again held in high esteem by the Kelabit (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979). And third, the *bejalai* – or 'travelling wide' – was an avenue of social mobility both in stratified (Kayan, Kelabit) and non-stratified societies (Iban, Berawan, Kenyah) of Borneo. Having successfully returned from a lengthy and dangerous journey, a young man of lower ranks not only had the opportunity to advance financially (and perhaps militarily) but also socially with a better chance to marry into the upper ranks, to assemble a labour force to open up new rice fields or to build their own longhouse apartment.

Nevertheless, as ethnographers have pointed out earlier, direct trade between the Kelabit highlands and the coastal region did not happen until the late 19th century, largely due to the volatile situation among inland groups, and even after the pacification of the Baram region it

was a rare occurrence (Harrisson, T. 1954; Bala 2002). It is more likely that long-distance trade was conducted through a series of intermediaries on a 'village-to-village' manner, closely supervised by village elders, who usually had the right to the first pickings (Harrisson, T. 1954; Metcalf 2010). In this way, jungle produce that could have potentially originated from the Kelabit highlands prior to colonial rule, like rhino horns, hornbill casques and feathers, beeswax, bezoar stones, dart poison and rattan went through the hands of a number of different participants, and were exchanged for other, locally non-available products and luxury items which again had already changed hands a number of occasions before reaching the highlands. Jars found their ways into Kelabit ownership through similar intermediary networks however, the acquisition of luxury goods required the accumulation of a large amount of other goods along with lengthy negotiations for the transaction to take place. Generally, no-one would part with a dragon jar unless they were under serious financial or moral pressure, or were forced to do so.

Alternative ways of jar-exchanges

'Old, valuable jars in Borneo were worth a human life' – is a statement that had become a kind of mantra in the modern ethnographic literature (Harrisson, T. 1959; Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979; Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]). Indeed, for the first European colonialists who arrived armed with post-Enlightenment, protestant Christian attitude to a strange land, it must have been unimaginable why some Bornean locals would rather sell their families into slavery than part with their valuable heirloom jars (Perelaer 1870 in Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]:17). But it is exactly this marked difference in the perception of material objects which is deemed worth mentioning by early colonialists; descriptions that could provide an insight into jars' roles within the customary (*adat*) laws (which we have to assume remained largely unchanged at least during the 19th century). Jars in the past were commonly used as items of compensation among many Bornean groups (Freeman 1970 [1955]; Rousseau 1990; Metcalf 2010), and the Kelabit were no exception (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979; Bala 2002; Janowski 2003). Overseeing the Kelabit *adat* and practicing jurisdiction came down to the village headman and reputable elders. They were the ones deciding on the charges and setting the fines according to the seriousness of crimes committed. Jars were involved in the most serious criminal cases, such as murder or stealing valuable possessions (slaves or livestock). In these instances, the highest possible compensation, the *dawi*, had to be paid by the guilty party; a failure to finalise the compensation made the accused himself the target of revenge (Lian-Saging 1976-7:166). Thus presumably when skirmishes were abundant between villages in the early-mid 1800s a number

of valuable jars could have changed hands between longhouses of the Kelabit highlands and beyond, in neighbouring Kayan, Kenyah, Lun Bawang and Lun Dayeh territories.

When Spenser St. John travelled in the upper reaches of the Limbang River, he encountered the 'Main Muruts' whom he described as collectors and traders of salt, and dealers of slaves (1863:116-7). The term of 'Murut' was used by early colonialists as a generic phrase for all native groups living in the hinterlands of Brunei (Bala 2002; Ewart 2009). But in this case 'Main Murut' ('main' means tasty in upland dialects) could actually describe the Kelabit or Kelabitic groups of the highlands, where the salt springs are located. The institution of slavery did exist among the Kelabit similarly to many Orang Ulu groups, until its formal abolishment in 1945 (Talla 1979:87). The *demulun* were either captives or debt-slaves without property often referred to as occupying the bottom section of the Kelabit class system (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979; Bala 2002). The capture and ownership of slaves was certainly not on par with practices of the Kayan, whose infamous territorial expansion was dependant on the labour provided by slaves (Metcalf 2010). Although slaves were regarded as the properties of their upper class masters, they were integral members of the society, sometimes even adopted by their owner-families. Nevertheless, ethnographic accounts recall a number of stories about slaves being treated as commodities; Lian-Saging refers to a case explicitly when an old female slave was exchanged for a valuable jar and a buffalo (1976-7:15), and an incident was related to me where a slave escaped her owners and left in secret for another family, who were obliged to pay a jar for her in compensation (I26).

Jars were also acquired through marriage and inheritance. Although the Kelabit themselves did not observe the practice of bride-price (*purut*), in the case of inter-tribal marriages of the upper class, the Kelabit groom was required to provide a jar along with other items in exchange for the hand of a bride; a custom that had carried on until the 1960s. Inter-tribal marriages were not unusual, particularly from the early 1900s onwards as the political situation stabilised in the highlands. In fact, the Kelabit consider the Lun Bawang (now living in Sabah) and Lun Dayeh (now in Kalimantan, Indonesia) as their closely related 'cousins' and despite the differences in their marriage customs (including the bride-price) they share similarities in their dialects and other cultural practices (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979; Bala 2002). Locality of the married couple was not a culturally prescribed rule among highland groups; Kelabit couples tended to spend the first few years living with the wife's parents before leaving for the husband's residence. Therefore, if the wife was originally from the Kalimantan side of the border, she brought her property with her. In the Kelabit society women could inherit material property just like men, although they were more likely to receive gender-specific items such as valuable

beads and smaller pieces of tradeware, while sons were given jars, gongs and machetes. Nevertheless, quite a few jars in my dataset were and are owned by women, who inherited these from their parents; although it has to be taken into account that jars' traditional value diminished in the past 60-70 years, and gender-specific inheritance – if it was ever strictly observed – has since been relaxed considerably.

As it was illustrated by the short passage above, jars were occasionally obtained as loot. The 1903-4 campaign against the neighbouring tribes still resonates with the Kelabit today, and some jars still in the possession of current longhouse residents are believed to be 'blood-jars', acquired by killing the vessels' owners and burning their villages (I19). Alternatively, jars were also gifted to distant relatives or followers from lower-class backgrounds (I14), although it is possible that this practice was not widespread before the colonial era, given the rarity of jars in the highlands.

In summary, it appears that until the Upper Baram region was nominally brought under colonial rule in 1883-4, or perhaps even until the presence of British administration in the upland area around 1910, the acquisition of jars involved a lot of time, effort and a series of social negotiations. As direct long-distance trade is thought to have occurred very rarely or not at all, jars were obtained by inter-regional exchanges, through a series of intermediaries; be it the barter of products or slaves, or the exchange of gifts during marriages. This means that jars could have taken years to reach the highlands after their production, indicating that some of these objects might have been decades, if not centuries old by the time they became possessions of the Kelabit. Also, as jars travelled through an inter-tribal network of exchange, they were also 'filtered' by various native groups, suggesting that the earliest of jars identified in the Kelabit highlands (dating to the 17th-18th centuries) are more likely to reflect preferences of neighbouring groups with more control over their choices of jars.

7.2.2 Colonial era: from the late 1800s until World War II

Despite their remote homeland, reports of the Kelabit begin to appear almost immediately after the annexation of the Baram region in 1883. The first 20 years passes in the gradual realisation and acknowledgement of the shift in political control, and the slow but steady establishment of colonial infrastructure in the inland territories. The British colonial office appointed the first penghulu (regional leader) for the southern Kelabit highlands in 1902; who acted on behalf of the colonial administration and was responsible to supervise local taxation (Lian-Saging 1976-7:176; Talla 1979:105). During these early years it was the Kelabit who made

the journey downriver to Claudetown (Marudi) to meet the resident officer; European explorations at the time skirted but never actually entered the highlands itself, until Douglas' visit in 1908. This expedition is significant in Kelabit history because it was organised with the government's clear intention to draw a line under the over-zealous punitive raid that took place in 1902-3. Douglas, the Resident Officer of the Baram division set out with an entourage of 200 men including a Kayan and a Kenyah chief with the objective to make peace with the Kelabit and the Kerayan. The party stopped over at the Kelabit longhouse of Pa' Anglah (just west of the plateau) where over a 100 Kelabit joined the force before reaching 'the big village of Pun Main' in the highlands proper (Douglas 1909a-b; 1912). According to Douglas, around 700-800 people gathered in the longhouse for the *berpirit* ceremony, to swear by the treaty (1912:22). From here they proceeded to Ramudu where the ceremony was repeated but this time with the participation of the Kerayan:

'We spent four days at this village and went through the same performance as at Ballang Maran's house [i.e. Pun Main] with the tribes from the Karayan River, with the exception that it was much more ticklish work, as these were the actual people who had been attacked by the Government. Tingang [headman of the Ramudu longhouse] had got all the chiefs ready to receive me, but at my first appearance they all bolted like rabbits into the house. However, everything passed off successfully.' (Douglas 1912:25)

Despite Douglas' efforts feuds continued to flare up in the region, with the government trying to do its best to settle the disputes. A few years after Douglas' trip, the District Officer David Owen travelled to the Trusan headwaters to arrange a peace treaty between the Brian and the Belawit tribes and their neighbours the Bah Muruts (most likely the Lun Bawang) (Owen 1919). His colourful report provides a valuable snapshot into lives of upriver peoples during the colonial era, including the Kelabit. Owen's description is important here for a number of reasons: 1) it shows that tensions among neighbouring groups were still running high, verging on violence; 2) despite the culturally fluid boundaries, locals had a very good understanding of where the territory of Sarawak ends and the Dutch rule begins; 3) there is mention of Kelabit leaders, Tai Iwan and Tingang, who loom large in local oral histories; 4) but more importantly, it demonstrates that by this time (1912) the southern route leading out of the highlands to Lio Mato was open and the permanent fort was completed, housing a small police force (Owen 1919).

Without exception, reports by European colonial officers and explorers venturing deep inland mention locals working jungle produce (Douglas 1907, 1909a, 1912; Owen 1919; Mjöberg 1925). *Damar* resin was collected in primary rainforests and was used by the locals as fuel for torches; basketfuls were sold at Lio Mato or at Chinese bazaars further downriver on either side of the border. *Damar* was used industrially in the production of paints and varnishes in the shipping and furniture industry, and according to my informants continued to be traded to the coast until after World War II (14). *Gutta percha*, a local rubber variety and its slightly poorer quality strain *jelitung* was also collected in considerable quantities. This material was used by the locals for hafting tools (machetes, knives, spears) and to seal boats and coffins – including burial jars. The British, given the success of their plantations in India and Malaya, were keen to establish a local rubber manufacture in Sarawak as well, on a smaller scale. Rattan was a similarly sought-after produce in the late 1800s (Bala 2002:24), while rhino horns⁴³ and hornbill helmets were collected on an occasional basis and traded down to the coast (Table 7.2).

Items traded from the highlands to the coast (1883-1943)	(1943-1980)
Damar (resin)	Damar (resin) – in low quantities
Gutta percha	Gutta percha – in very low quantities
Jelitung	Rice
Rhino horn	Pig fat
Hornbill casques	Deer antlers
Rattan	Rattan
Tobacco	Tobacco
Items traded from the coast to the highlands (1883-1943)	(1943-1980)
Tradeware ceramics	Guns
Gongs	Ammunition
Beads	Cooking utensils
Guns	Textiles
Gunpowder	Medicine
Ammunition	Soap
Cooking utensils	Kerosene and gasoline
Textiles	Generators and outboard motors
Medicine	Chainsaws
Chinese style pewter jewellery	Corrugated iron for roofing

Table 7.2 - Items traded between the Kelabit highlands and the coast. Table based on Harrison, T. 1959; Eghenter 2001; and interviews with Kelabit locals.

The collection and trade of jungle produce was a seasonal activity following the rice harvest; the assemblage and transport of goods to downriver forts (*kubu*) and bazaars (*tamu*) was a lengthy process (Bala 2002:40). While bazaars were solely private enterprises ran largely by Chinese traders (or by Malays to a lesser degree), forts operated both as trading posts and as units of

⁴³ The Sumatran rhino's habitat was in the mountainous regions of central Borneo now divided between Sarawak, Sabah and Kalimantan. Both Douglas and Owen mention rhinos roaming wild in the highland valleys, being hunted by locals for their horn which fetched \$40 per lbs. on the Chinese market in the early 1900s.

the governmental infrastructure (Rousseau 1989; Bala 2002; Metcalf 2010). At bazaars jungle produce was exchanged for commodities such as small tradeware ceramics, cooking utensils or textiles (canvas and gauze – I4) and other items. In contrast, at forts local produce entered the cash economy, and although taxes were still paid in *gantangs* and *katis*⁴⁴ of rice in the early 1900s, the government increasingly encouraged locals to grow cash-crops such as tobacco, and to breed water buffaloes and cattle for sale. Nevertheless, the inter-tribal trade did not diminish with the onset of colonial rule, luxury items like jars, beads and gongs were still principally exchanged within local networks. Such exchanges took place at *apu's*, or 'meeting places', designated locations where people of different ethnic or village backgrounds came to trade (Talla 1979:92). Local ethnographers mention that the Kelabit used to trade their salt, *damar*, rattan, dart poison, tobacco and handicraft items for machetes, tradeware bowls, jars and beads with the Kayan, Kenyah from the Baram region, and with the Lun Bawang, Kerayan, Berian and Potok from Kalimantan while the nomadic Penan often acted as intermediaries in transactions (Talla 1979; Bala 2002) (Table 7.3). From the late 1800s guns, ammunition and gunpowder began to replace blowpipes and dart poison, however these items remained to be traded illegally; Eric Mjöberg, the Director of the Sarawak Museum on an expedition to the highlands, even remarked on the 'antique looks' of some of the weapons making their ways up to the highlands from Dutch Borneo (1925:418).

Items exchanged in inter-tribal trade (reflective of the 1940s)			
Luxury items	Products	Handicrafts	Livestock
Tradeware ceramics	Rice	Tobacco boxes	Water buffaloes
Beads	Salt	Woven mats	Cattle
Gongs	Tobacco	Sun hats	Pigs
	Blowpipe poison	Baskets and trays	Chickens
	Iron bars	Beadwork	Ducks
	Metal products: knives, machetes, digging hoes	Earthenware pots	Eggs
		Fishing implements	Fish

Table 7.3 - Items exchanged in inter-tribal trade networks. Table based on Talla 1979; Eghenter 2001 and interviews with locals.

Small livestock such as chickens, ducks and fish were exchanged casually on a village or intra-village level, although Tom Harrison recalls that a certain type of catfish regarded as a delicacy was traded in from Kalimantan, transported in stoneware jars (1959:83). Exchange of large livestock which represented considerable economic (and social) value, even before the dawn of colonialism was a slightly different matter. Domesticated (and hunted wild) pigs and tame deer (Owen 1919:122) were regarded as currency and played an important social role during feasts,

⁴⁴ Local measurements of volume.

marriage exchanges and settling debts. Water buffaloes only became widespread in the highlands in the early 1900s, being herded upriver from the lowlands along major trading routes⁴⁵ (Hose and McDougall 1966 [1912]; Owen 1919:79; Janowski pers. comm.). The keeping of tame deer declined in the 1940s, while the 1960s saw a brief (fairly unsuccessful) stint of cattle breeding in the Bario area (Katharine Pearce pers. comm).

By the 1940s three items formed the key units of barter: water buffaloes, salt and *borak* (Harrison, T. 1959:26). Buffaloes represented the highest (and the least liquidable) asset, salt fulfilled the role of currency in the Kelabit economy, while *borak* operated much more in a social rather than an economic sphere, and – as will be discussed below – was a substance facilitating social cohesion. From the 1920s onwards the Kelabit increasingly participated in the broader Sarawakian cash economy, partly by selling cash crops and livestock for profit, and partly through taxation as the British rule solidified in the region. The abolishment of headhunting meant that travel became safer, and the promise of the direct purchase of luxury goods spurred more and more people into undertaking the journey from the highlands to the coastal region. The early 1900s also saw the opening up the southern route down to Lio Mato, and thereby facilitating the establishment of Long Peluan, the southernmost Kelabit-Sa'ban settlement (Murang 1989). Other, long-existing trade-routes leading to Lawas/Brunei Bay and to Kalimantan begun to conduct a growing traffic compared to the previous decades; these routes stayed in use pretty much until the 1980 (Bala 2002; Fig. 7.1). In fact, while trade routes in Sarawak have been replaced by logging roads and air-traffic in recent years, paths leading to Indonesia remained ephemeral but far from being underutilised: trodden regularly by the seasonal workforce of Indonesians crossing over to the rice-fields in Sarawak.

Jars in the Kelabit economy

Before the colonial era it was probably a rare occurrence for jars to be explicitly 'purchased', as vessels tended to switch ownership through inheritance, marriage, settlement of debts and compensation. However, the new political and economic order of the Brooke's rule heralded changes in the traditional lifeways of peoples of the inlands. I would suggest that it was not

⁴⁵ During his visit to the Trusan headwaters Owen mentions that buffaloes were bred in the lower Trusan region then transported upriver for feasts by the Murut (1919:78-9). Furthermore, Charles Hose writes around 1910s that 'The Kalabits, a tribe inhabiting the north-western corner of the Baram district, breed the water-buffalo and use it in cultivating their land. It has probably been introduced to this area from North Borneo at a recent date'.

primarily the growing participation in the cash economy⁴⁶ (or the use of cash itself, which until a few decades ago was negligible), but the establishment of relative security across broad swathes of the Baram region which had a significant impact on the lifeways of highland communities. Stability meant that a wider section of the society became involved in the production of cash crops (and the collection of jungle produce) and had the opportunity to trade it themselves. Stability and tradable items encouraged the Kelabit to engage in direct, long-distance trade to a greater extent, rather than relying on intermediaries and their local leaders to conduct exchanges on their behalf. Luxury goods, including jars became more readily available for laborious lower classes from the 1900s onwards (facilitated by the establishment of coastal potteries set up by Chinese immigrants, see Chapter 3), who in their ways of consumption followed the traditional cultural norms of their aristocracy. This surge in the acquisition of long-distance exotic goods is reflected archaeologically in the increase of jar burials and single-component cemeteries (i.e. containing only dragon jar burials) in the Kelabit highlands (Chapter 5), and ethnographically in the local jar-classification: jars within the category of the 'new arrivals' (*mechings*) I would suggest are evidently the outcomes of these fairly recent purchases (Chapter 6).

However, pinning down the exact economic values of jars of all categories, is a difficult task especially when delving into greater historical depths. Tom Harrisson provides a list of commodities' barter values from the 1940s, shedding some light on just how expensive even ordinary jars were, whereas ancient jars represented almost unimaginable wealth for a Kelabit of regular class (Table 7.4). Here, Harrisson explicitly draws a parallel between the value of an old jar and a human life, nevertheless, this was probably a statement made in retrospect. The traditional *adat* laws of jurisdiction were beginning to break down in the 1920s as the institution of penghuluship gained ground in the highlands, while slavery (which became largely nominal during the last few decades) was abolished in 1945 (Talla 1979). Also, the purchase of (new) jars directly from retailers in coastal markets must have been cheaper than the barter of the same jar type via inter, or intra-communal exchange, where the seller had the upper hand in setting the higher price given the time and effort already invested in the acquisition and the transport of the jar.

⁴⁶ Monetary units were no novelty in Borneo, the Sultanate of Brunei had been using both Chinese and Arab currencies along with their own (often in a non-official forms of crocodile ingots and canons) until the adoption of the Strait dollar in 1906. By the late 1800s there were at least four colonial currencies (Guilder, Florin in Kalimantan, British North Borneo dollar in Sabah, and the Sarawak dollar) in circulation along with local units of exchange.

Unit	Exchange value
1 packet of salt	One day's ordinary work / One Pa' Trap pot (earthenware)
2 packets of salt	One Bario-type mat / One Pa' Mada pot (earthenware, regarded as better quality - BN)
4 packets of salt	One Bawang-type mat
20 packets of salt	A tail of fish from the Kerayan (<i>Tor douronensis</i> – ikan semah - BN)
30 packets of salt	One small Chinese pot (two pint size) - <i>angai</i>
50 packets of salt	One small simple gong – <i>tawak</i>
2 gongs of this kind (~100 salt)	One half-size dragon jar - <i>belayung</i>
2 jars of this kind and 10 packets of salt	One ordinary large dragon jar (of recent make, presumably - BN)
4 ordinary dragon jars	One male buffalo calf
1 well-grown male buffalo	30 yellow glass ('bone') beads (beads worn in the front of women's caps)
5 buffaloes, 5 fat pigs, 3 hump-back bulls, 2 goats, 2 ordinary jars, 2 small jars, 2 gongs, 2 fine parang knives (machetes - BN), 10 mats, 10 fish nets, 10 fowls, 10 Pa' Mada pots, 10 rolls of best leaf tobacco, 100 yellow cane beads, 200 packets of salt	One old dragon jar of the red-bodied stoneware
1 old dragon jar	One human life

Table 7.4 – Summary table of exchange values, after Harrison, T. 1959:26-7. The values are reflective of the late 1940s, early 1950s.

Circulation of jars

As far as Kelabit oral histories remember, the economic value of jars has always been compared to, and measured in, large-sized livestock: water buffaloes, cattle or pigs (Harrison, T. 1959; Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979). A small number of my interviewees were able to recall their jars' exchange value at the time of their purchase (9 out of 53) (Table 7.5). All of these vessels except one were acquired before 1943, some may have been in the families' possession for as long as four generations. What is intriguing however, is that the economic value of jars expressed in livestock seems to have little correspondence with the 'local value' - based on perceived antiquity and physical characteristics: some *ma'on* jars were acquired relatively cheaply while there is an example of a *meching* jar exchanged for the cost of an ancient one. Nevertheless, placing these particular acquisitions in to a local and a regional socio-economic context has the potential to reveal how jars as commodities moved within and beyond systems of exchange in the Kelabit highlands between the 1930s and the 1980s.

ID	Type	Location	Origin	Acquisition/possession	Age /cost
H005	T25	Bario Asal Longhouse	Long Lallang	before the Japanese occ.	ma'on - 1 cow
H006	T22	Bario Asal Longhouse	Long Lallang	before the Japanese occ.	ma'on - 1 cow
H030	T30	Pa' Dalih Village	Indonesia	at least 4 generations	ma'on - 10 buffaloes
H040	T1	Long Peluan Village	Limbang	at least 2 generations	ma'on - 2 buffaloes
H047	T7	Long Peluan Village	Batu Patong	at least 3 generations	ma'on - 4 buffaloes
H048	T1	Long Peluan Village	Batu Patong	at least 3 generations	meching - 4 buffaloes
H049	T40	Long Peluan Village	Batu Patong	at least 3 generations	ma'on - 7 buffaloes
H053	T1	Kuching	Indonesia	at least 3 generations	ma'on - 5 buffaloes
H017	T28	Pa' Umor Longhouse	Indonesia	purchased in 1986	meching - 10 buffaloes

Table 7.5 - Summary table of jars' origins, duration of possession, exchange value and local classification based on ethnographic interviews.

It is difficult to assess from the interviews whether jars were obtained through direct long-distance or intermediary trade. In five cases, informants explicitly referred to Limbang/Lawas/Brunei as the place of the original acquisition for their jars (Fig. 7.1 - Map). Until the early 1900s the northern trade route leading to this closest of coastal regions was preferred by the Kelabit for a number of reasons; this route may have been used for centuries prior to the colonial era. First, if the circumstances were ideal, one was able to complete a one-way journey a little over a week; the walk from the Kelabit highlands to the Trusan or the Limbang headwaters took about a week, from where it was possible to continue downriver by boat. Second, the path led across the territories of related ethnic groups with whom the Kelabit often intermarried, providing food and shelter along the way. Third, the markets of Lawas and Limbang were until the late 1800s under the direct control of Brunei, flowing rich with foreign luxury goods along with jungle produce collected in the remote hinterlands. Jars were especially abundant by this time as a result of the *prahu* trade between Borneo and the Philippines (Sulu sultanate) (Nicholl 2007; Metcalf 2010) and the output of local ceramic workshops (Harrison, B. 1990 [1986]). From the coast, jars were transported back along the waterways, before being tied onto either buffaloes' or people's backs *en route* to the Kelabit highlands proper (Mjöberg 1925:420) (Fig. 6.19). The frequent use of the northern route at the turn of the last century manifests clearly in the archaeological record: reflected in the dominance of single-component cemeteries in the northern Kelabit plateau and the overall higher number of recent jar burials dating to the 19th-20th centuries (Table 5.8).

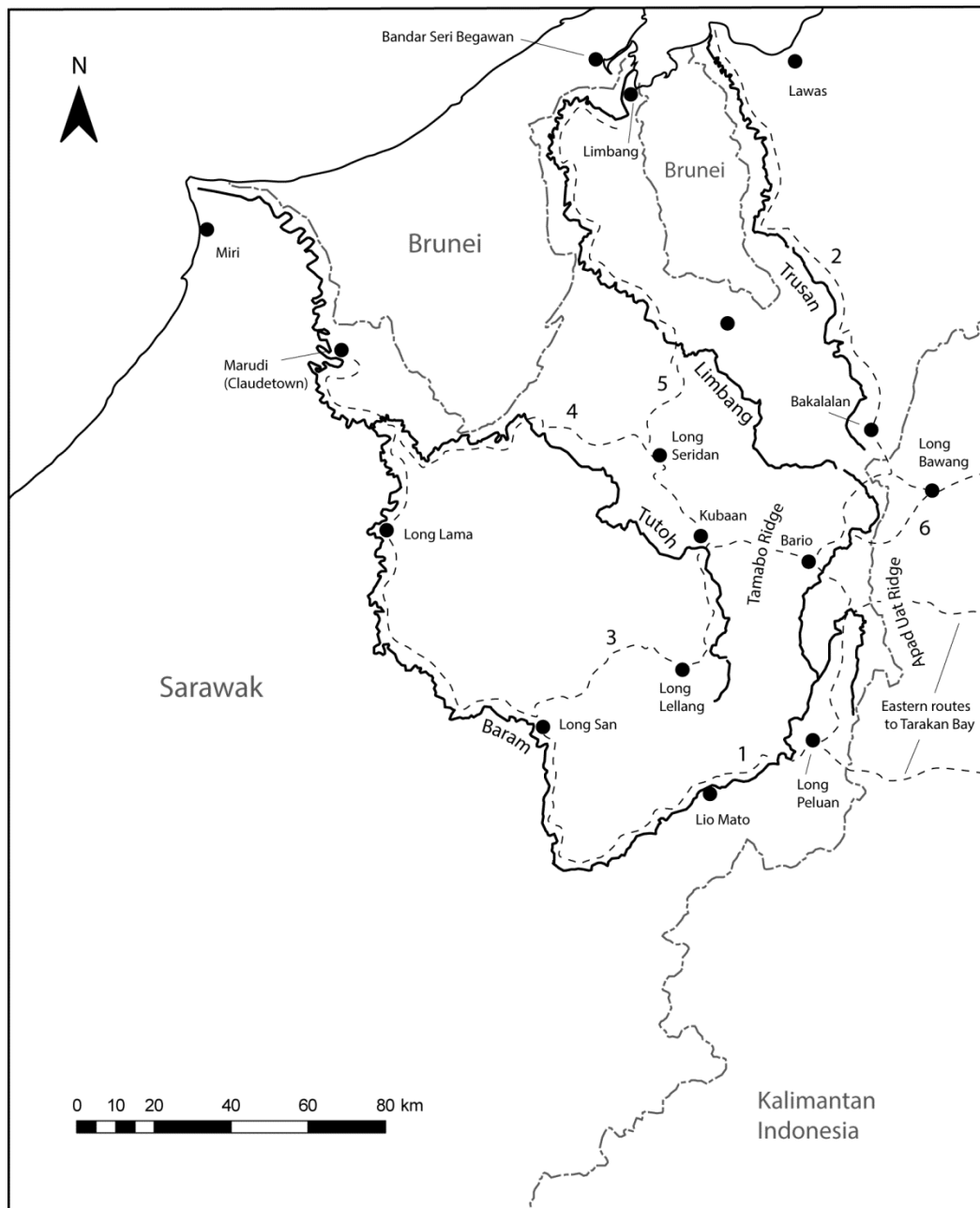


Figure 7.1 – Map of northern Sarawak showing Kelabit trade routes and with key locations indicated. Trade routes: 1. South via Kelabit longhouse at Long Peluan and Lio Mato fort/trading post, then down the Baram to Marudi; 2. North via Lun Dayeh longhouse at Bakalalan and down the Trusan River and onto Lawas; 3. West over the Tamabo Ridge and via Kelabit longhouses at Kubaan and Long Lellang, then on to the Baram River and Marudi; 4. West via Kelabit longhouses at Kubaan and Long Seridan, then down the Tutoh River to Marudi; 5. West via Kelabit longhouse at Kubaan and Long Seridan, then on to Limbang River to Limbang town and Brunei; 6. Eastern routes over the Apad Uat Ridge and down the Menterang River to Tarakan Bay (see Fig. 6.1). For further details see the 'Trade routes' pdf file in Appendices 1. Illustration: L. Lloyd-Smith.

In 16 instances jars reportedly originated from Indonesia, and my assumption is that the majority of these were acquired either through marriage, inheritance or by gifting, whereas a smaller proportion were traded purposefully into the Kelabit highlands (H017, H030, H051). In one case a jar was obtained as compensation (*dawi*) (H053 – I26) and there are stories of recently destroyed jars which were brought over from Indonesia as plunder following the 1902-3 raid (I19). The movement of jars was by no means one-way. Ethnographic accounts detail journeys of jars to Indonesia, being exchanged for various goods or cash up until the 1960s. A Pa' Dalih informant described that her husband traded one of their *abai* jars over to Kalimantan for 'salt, six parangs, two biscuit tins and a big bar of soap' in 1961 (I1). Another informant recalled that in the late 1940s, after World War II trading parties went regularly to Indonesia to obtain sugar, knives, soap, tin bangles, and for blue (canvas) and white (gauze) linen, in exchange for salt and craft products, and occasionally for jars (I4). I also recorded one example whereby an old, valuable jar believed to be possessed by spirits was 'sent back' to Indonesia by its custodian, who even paid 100 ringgits for its transport (I15). Although Tom Harrison mentions the Bay of Tarakan as the final destination of the eastern routes (1959:17), it is most likely that the Kelabit conducted largely inter-communal or village-to-village trade in the Kerayan region with their ethnically related neighbours.

The western routes had also been frequented especially from the late 1800s onwards as Marudi's (Claudetown) role as the station for the Baram district office increased. Nevertheless direct long-distance trade missions were rare occurrences, traders tended to terminate their journeys at Kelabit villages of Long Lellang (SW), Kuba'an (W) and Long Seridan (NW) just outside the plateau (Fig 7.1 - I13). It is still unknown why the southern route leading out of the Kelabit highlands along the Kelapang River to the confluence of the Dapur with the Baram Rivers remained virtually unused (at least for trade) until the early 1900s. The longhouses around Pa' Diit and the present day Pa' Dalih were believed to be the heartland of large Kelabit communities (Mashman pers. comm.; Owen 1919), while the archaeological record shows an abundance of tradeware goods in cemeteries in the south (Barker *et al.* 2009; Lloyd-Smith *et al.* 2010). It appears that travel was traditionally conducted through the western routes, perhaps because territories to the south deemed unsafe as the result of the Kayan-Kenyah intrusion. However, change came fast with the 1908 peace-ceremony, during which the building of a permanent fort at Lio Mato was proposed, and the plan obtained the nominal support of the colonial government (Ewart 2009:241). Subsequently, the negligible pathway leading southwards out of the highlands, utilised only by jungle produce collectors and nomadic Penan,

was widened upon the commission by penghulu Tinggang sometime around 1908-11 (Lian-Saging 1976-7: 185; Talla 1979:116).⁴⁷

From the 1910s-20s the fort of Lio Mato became a principal destination for jungle produce collectors and cash-crop producers who made the journey down from the highlands to exchange or sell their goods for cash. From a Kelabit perspective Lio Mato also represented a gateway to downriver bazaars where smaller purchases could be made (matchsticks, tins, linen etc.) or directly to the shop-houses of Marudi, a majority of which by this time were in Chinese hands who had easy access to jars (Metcalf 2010). Informants, especially from the southern highlands recalled their forefathers shuttling between their villages and Lio Mato to trade their produce; an interviewee from Long Peluan mentioned that his grandfather exchanged his locally grown tobacco for two *abai* jars (H045-6, I24) there, while an elderly member of the Pa' Mada community remembered the journeys he took with baskets full of *damar* to be sold for cash (\$30 per basket) right before World War II (I4). I would also suggest that this increased utilisation of the southern route left a tangible trace in the archaeological record too. The only single-component cemetery in the southern Kelabit highlands; Menatoh Payeh Belanai contained almost exclusively jars dating to the 19th-20th centuries, along with similarly recent jars from other burial grounds (Tables 5.8, 5.9, 5.10), which could in fact represent the last examples for dragon jar burials in the southern region before the shift in funerary practice with the conversion to Christianity.

Recent purchases

Kelabit attitudes towards jars have changed significantly over the past sixty or so years, due to the newly adopted teachings of Christianity, but also as cheaper containers made of metal and plastic came to replace the bulky and heavy ceramic jars. Many of my interviewees or even people I met in passing mentioned that their families used to own dragon jars in the past, but they were sold to cover children's education (I5), purchase medicines (I1) and other necessities of modern life. These transactions were either barter-based exchanges that took place on an inter-, or intra-community level, or were conducted within the context of the broader Sarawakian cash economy, carried out between an outsider (usually Chinese antique dealer) and a Kelabit local selling a family heirloom (I4). People also remember Tom Harrisson collecting

⁴⁷ Douglas' description of 'our route was all through the oldest jungle, absolutely untouched by the hands of man' (p. 26) suggest that the southern route did not exist at the time of his peace-making visit in 1908, whereas just four years later Owen describes the camps of Penan *gutta percha* collectors along the path (1919:144).

pieces of their material culture in the 1940s and 50s, two of my informants even recalled their fathers donating their oldest and most valuable jars to the Sarawak Museum (I8, I19). Nevertheless jars retained some of their economic and social values even after the conversion. Large stoneware vessels went through increased periods of use even during the 20th century; in the 1940s and 1960s foreign (mainly Western) troops stationed in the highlands were keen on the consumption of locally brewed *borak*. Although the Revival in the 1970s almost completely stamped out traditional uses of jars, occasional purchases did continue until the 1980s, as Maren Lupung's case testifies:

'Maren Lupung was a respectable member of his community with an old jar of his own. The jar had been in his family's possession for generations. Maren had three grandchildren and he felt the need of leaving each of them with a valuable object after he is gone. In 1986, he exchanged ten buffaloes for a jar carried over from Indonesia (H17). However, one of the female buffaloes had a calf while the transaction was being finalised. The journey back to Kalimantan would have been too difficult for a young buffalo, so its new owner decided to sell the calf locally to another resident who paid a chainsaw for it. Maren was in the process of acquiring the third jar when he was tragically killed in the plane crash in 1991.' (Excerpt from the transcribed interview – I10)

This recent jar acquisition is well-known among the Kelabit living in highland villages and was mentioned to me on numerous occasions. Maren Lupung's story and people's knowledge about the exchange taking place highlights a few important aspects of current Kelabit approaches to material culture within shifting social, economic and religious contexts. First, it is interesting that despite Christian teachings which deem jars as undesirable reminders of drunkenness and social exclusion, Maren personally found it important to adhere to past expressions of wealth and status along with traditional attitudes to inheritance within which material possessions played a central role (as opposed to cash, land or property in a rural environment). Second, the transaction was a barter-exchange involving no cash, despite the fact that the items being exchanged here represented considerable value (well over a 1000 ringgit, approx. £150). In this case, barter exchange must have been more convenient considering it took place between two highland residents living on either side of the border, both local farmers with limited access to cash. In this light it is not surprising that the transaction was conducted within the remnants of traditional networks of exchange, despite the highland's increasing involvement in the wider

cash economy.⁴⁸ Third, the number of people being aware and bringing up the subject of the purchase was remarkable, perhaps implying that the residents had mixed feelings about the decision (Maren Lupung lived in the longhouse of Pa' Umor, see section 6.5.1 of Chapter 6 on 'Visibility and choices of display'). Some of them must have felt that Maren's jar acquisition was inconsiderate towards his fellow residents and his act was uncomfortably similar to practices of the olden days. However, no-one actually expressed their discontent explicitly (a common attitude among longhouse communities – Metcalf 2010). I have no information on what Maren's grandchildren thought about their intended heritage; the jars are currently being kept in the longhouse apartment of Maren's daughter, herself a Miri resident who only comes to visit occasionally.

Summary

As it was demonstrated in Chapter 6, sensory perceptions of *ma'on*, *abai* and *meching* jars overall did show a convincing overlap between the chronological and indigenous understandings of object-antiquity. However, in a small number of cases there was a discrepancy detected between jar-categories and their exchange values (Table 7.5). This discrepancy could have derived from failing memories, erroneous assumptions or sometimes from the assertion of personal narratives including jars' exchange values. The diversity of values could also indicate the existence of further jar sub-categories in the past within each jar-group, which is entirely possible considering the variety of approaches to tradeware by other native groups in Borneo. However, I would suggest that none of these assumptions account for the overall fluctuation in jars' *exchange values* discussed in the paragraphs above. Although the selling of ancient heirlooms in the past was almost unheard of, and vessels were kept in the family for generations, occasionally a lesser-valued jar exchanged hands in marriages, or were paid as compensation. The key point here is that jars' exchange value depended on the circumstances, and more importantly for this argument, on the *jars' biography* (and their associations to powerful people). Therefore, even more recent *meching* jars could command higher prices if their owners were accomplished leaders of a successful bloodline, whereas *ma'on* jars with minor proprietors fetched relatively little in exchange. For the time being I would like to leave the discussion of Kelabit value construction with Tom Harrisson's words describing jars' rich and intermingled relationships with people (which is the subject we shall now turn to in the second half of this chapter):

⁴⁸ Cash only became a permanent fixture in the highland economy after the arrival of the logging roads in 2007, and the instalment of daily flights to the coast.

‘The best jars have each their separate mythology. There are about a dozen of them in the uplands. And although the Kelabits themselves cannot date them back to China and the T’ang dynasty, or Siam and Sung, they truly recognize the oldest group as regards manufacture. In fact, the value just given for such a jar is in a way – like all other Kelabit values – irrelevant, absolutely. It all depends on the buyer, the seller and the go-between: for no transaction is ever undertaken direct: let alone multiple variations, to the Kelabit eye, in each jar, buffalo, bead, or (for the flicker of that) any single package of salt, bellyful of borak. When a price has been agreed, naturally that does not mean that it is settled. Payment cannot be made on the spot. To owe is propriety. A thing has no true intrinsic value at any one moment (Harrisson, T. 1959:27-8)

7.3 Social roles of jars: from container vessels to objects of status

Perhaps the most straight-forward way to portray dragon jars is through their primary role as container vessels. Archaeological and historical evidence reveals that stoneware ceramics were known and used by people in the interior probably since the 13th century (the Song dynasty), but these occurrences were sporadic and dispersed over a large area (White 1955; Barker *et al.* 2009). Stoneware ceramics (predominantly smaller bowls and dishes) began to appear in upland region repeatedly around the 16th-17th century followed shortly by jars in the 17th-18th centuries. The gradual influx of foreign export wares correlates with the increased presence of rice in the palaeoecological record from *ca.* 450 cal. BP (~1500 CE) (Jones *et al.* 2013, 2015). A very similar trend, i.e. a progressive surge in the number of export ceramics, has been documented in the Tanjay region of the Philippines, where the sums of stoneware jars show a near threefold increase during the Late Ming period (15th-16th century) (Junker and Niziolek 2010). Despite the lack of fine-grained archaeology from the Kelabit highlands, it could be suggested (with caution) that the rising number of export wares found in cemeteries and the increased presence of rice in the environment indicate 1) economic surplus, and 2) that the social and economic structures for commensal feasting were firmly established by the 16th century.

7.3.1 Feasting

Following the pioneering works on the subject by Mauss (2002) [1924], Lévi-Strauss (1969), and Sahlins (1963, 1972), the practice of feasts and feasting has received renewed attention by

archaeologists (and ethnoarchaeologists) in the past decade, generating a now burgeoning body of literature (for overviews, see Dietler 1996, 2011; Dietler and Hayden 2001; Hayden 2003, 2014). Some of these works focussed on the physical remains of mass consumption as a proxy for feasting activities (Parker Pearson 2003; Ralph 2007; Harris and Hamilakis 2008; McNiven 2012; Madgwick and Mulville 2015, etc.) whereas the majority of studies engaged with the cultural, economic, ritual and social contexts of feasts (Wiessner 2001; Bray 2002; Adams 2004; Klarich 2010; Germillion 2011; Porter 2011; Zori *et al.* 2013, etc.). Feasts are defined as larger-than-quotidian meals (Smith 2014) or as a form of ritual activity centred on the consumption of food and drink (Dietler 2011). These occasions often involve labour intensive methods of food-preparation, luxury foodstuffs and special serving utensils. Feasts are generally grouped into three different types: 1) Feasts initiated by a single individual or household; 2) many households contribute to a community event (potluck); 3) community imposed feasts upon a single individual or household (cargo) (Smith 2014). Feasts initiated by a single individual or household were to demonstrate power, wealth and authority, in order to gain prestige, ritual fulfilment, labour commitments and alliances; thus served as a platform to re-establish inequalities (Hayden 2001; Smith 2014). Such events are described in the literature as 'empowering feasts' (Dietler 2001:76), 'patron-role feasts' (Dietler 2001:82) or 'promotional feasts' (Perodie 2001:196). These feasts could range from massive displays of affluence that required years for the resources to be assembled, to small scale work-party feasts convened on a short notice (Dietler 1996). Community participation feasts were contributed to by many households in order to testify solidarity and commensality through the pooling of resources. Although these feasts appear egalitarian on the surface by which there is an equal expectation on each household to supply the event according to their economic means, the inherent hierarchy involved becomes evident through the logistics and the management of such feasts (Smith 2014). Cargo feasts, in contrast, were sponsored by an individual (or a family) who was appointed on behalf of the whole community. These events were either initiated by the individual resulting in the dispersion of their surplus within a ritual framework, or were coaxed into hosting a feast by peer-pressure or social expectations (Smith 2014).

Boundaries between these conveniently outlined feasting categories however, can often be blurred. Participatory ethnographic studies point out that a particular feasting event can incorporate elements of two or more categories depending on the aspects of the feast hosts and participants wished to emphasise (Adams 2004; Hayden 2014). For instance, while sponsoring a cargo event, hosts may call in obligations from fellow kinsmen resulting in a patron-role/potluck hybrid feast (Smith 2014; Monaghan 1990). Both potluck and cargo feasts

share features of 'solidarity feasts'; where the aim is to promote and augment social cohesion between groups (Hayden 2001; Perodie 2001). A similarly complex picture of feasting transpires from Kelabit oral histories. Feasts were inextricably linked with the Kelabit ritual cycle and marked events such as childbirth and initiation, name-changing, rice-planting, weddings, death feasts and headhunting rituals. Others, which took place primarily on social/political grounds like ceremonies held to secure political alliances or providing feasts for visiting paramount leaders still involved ritual elements in their choreographies.

The Kelabit considered the *borak ate'* (secondary burial ceremony), and the *borak ngelua* (child initiation ceremony) as their most significant feasting events (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979; Janowski 2003). Both ceremonies had a number of stages which required the whole community to observe taboos and to adhere to ritual regulations in order to achieve the most beneficial outcome. As described in Chapter 5, the *borak ate'* (including the *borak peped*) was a lengthy procedure where the lion's share of the ceremony – organising, financing and managing – was borne by the deceased's direct upper class descendants. From this perspective *borak ate'* events very much resembled 'empowering' or 'promotional' feasts. However, approaching secondary burial feasts from a slightly different angle, it also demonstrates strong potluck-type characteristics as well. In a social environment where longhouse communities and kin groups were deeply intertwined, contributions by many relatives and lower class followers had to be called upon during such an event. Participants were expected to return donations either in a form identical to the original loan (i.e. stock animals) or, given the obligation to reciprocate, contributions were negotiated (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979). Raising pigs and water buffaloes was a costly undertaking therefore domestic animals (either sacrificial or consumption) were supplied largely by kinsmen occupying the wealthier strata of the Kelabit society. Hunted game, poultry and a range of vegetables (either foraged or cultivated) were donated by less well-off families, while the commission of craft objects (baskets, ladles, tongs, earthenware pots etc.) and the rent (or borrowing) of kitchen utensils (metal cooking pots, ceramic plates and jars) was carried out on a negotiatory (and perhaps sympathetic) basis (see also Adams 2004; Beck 2009).

The investment of labour has been repeatedly and thoroughly discussed in relation to feasting (Earle 1997; Hayden and Dietler 2001; Hayden 2014, etc.) while other, 'intangible' components of feasts tend to be overlooked by archaeologists, and/or examined as part of ritual traditions by ethnographers (Metcalf 1991; Rousseau 1998). Megalithic monuments and landmarks which are conveniently still visible in the Kelabit landscape are the epitomes of concerted labour investments, which strongly imply the presence of social authority and the importance of

collective memorialisation. The successful completion of such a substantial task, followed by a major feast, required years of planning, negotiating, placating, sweet-talking, and convincing by the hosts. The already existing or newly established bonds had to be acknowledged on a regular basis in order to maintain the participants' support for the event. This would have involved visiting relatives in faraway longhouses, loaning out pigs for breeding and rearing, hosting small-scale feasts, and the gradual acquisition or renewal of feasting paraphernalia, most importantly for this discussion: jars (cf. Rappaport 1968; Granada 1974; and on the Kelabit: Harrisson, T. 1959:124-5). These 'behind the scenes' activities, heavily reliant on people's diplomatic, managerial, organisational skills were absolutely necessary for the smooth running and facilitation of feasts. Monica Smith (2014) brilliantly demonstrates the risks, 'sunken costs', pitfalls and just how much of a social and economic gamble it was/is to bring about a feast. She also points out an often neglected, volatile aspect of feasts which have the potential to backfire and in the worst case scenario, breed violence among the participants (Smith 2014:1222-3). In the light of the above, I feel that Tom Harrisson's description from the 1940s sums up the essence of the Kelabit feast (*irau*) very aptly:

'It is the intention of the host to put on the biggest show possible. One they have decided to hold and *irau*, with ample rice in stock, then back and brain goes into making this a rip-roaring success. It is almost as if an obsession towards material suicide comes over the place. A people traditionally and naturally hospitable, proud and competitive between communities, now become engrossed in out-doing all others, thus making their name for the year (and other years to come). There is plenty of calculation along with all this. *Irau* is more than bringing together of people in mass enjoyment. It is as much centralizing of business, barter, bad and good debt, unsettled argument and uncertain inheritance, and economic occasion of such complexity that no one observer could ever hope to take in all that goes on as between groups and go-betweeners, sitting sipping, sucking buffalo meat and pork fat in great lumps, in among dancing, singing, boozing, wrestling and all the rest – including, always, at least one fight.' (1959:124).

***Borak* rice wine**

In all cases, be it burial or initiation feasts, the host family was expected to provide the key ingredient: rice (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979). The accumulation of large quantities of rice-grain required the steady investment of labour throughout several planting and harvesting

seasons, and also storage facilities where the yield could be kept amassed and safe from pests. The rice-meal played a central role in the life of the Kelabit, an aspect of social identity further reinforced by sharing food and drink during major celebrations (Janowski 1991, 1995, 2003, 2007). Rice also served as the fundamental component for brewing *borak* rice wine (technically rice beer). At the moment, given the sparse archaeological evidence, it is not possible to ascertain whether local earthenware pottery was used in the fermentation of plant-materials before the arrival of stoneware vessels in the 16th-17th centuries. As far as oral histories can attest, *borak* has traditionally been brewed in large stoneware jars.

Although the Kelabit today are almost unanimously teetotal Christians, alcohol-related themes surface regularly during casual conversations. On one occasion, the entire rice wine making process was related to me in detail, along with the fermentation of sago (*kenangan*), Job's tears (*kului*) and millet (*bua' lenamud*) which was also sporadically practiced. Tom Harrison reports in the 1940s, that apart from *borak*, the Kelabit used to make beer from cassava roots and sugar cane, but the end product was considered only second-rate (1959a:86). All my informants agreed that rice-based wine brewed in dragon jars produced a far better tasting and superior quality beverage than the other varieties (l1). Studies conducted among indigenous groups in the Philippines showed a clear preference for stoneware jars (and rice-based ingredients) when fermenting wine, based on similar sensory experiences (Valdes *et al.* 1992 cf. Geurts and Adikah 2006).

Before the conversion to Christianity (and in many ways until today), social and economic success was measured by the ability of growing rice. Surplus was then shared in a form of communal feasts in which *borak* played a crucial role. While sharing a rice-meal (i.e. feeding others) was considered to imply an inherently hierarchical relationship between the Kelabit hosts and their guests, *borak* in contrast was seen as a vehicle that ironed out class division (at least for the duration of the feast: Janowski 2011). As Tom Harrison described it:

‘The socially senior person is served first; the distinguished visitor has dish after dish pressed upon him. The lower classes sit out on the perimeter, until gradually all barriers break down and people are serving each other, amidst an indescribable babble of conversation and that loud laughter beloved of the Kelabit.’ (1959:146).

Undoubtedly, secondary burial ceremonies were the largest and most ostentatious of Kelabit feasts; where the consumption of *borak* peaked within its social boundaries. The preparation necessitated fair quantities of rice to be prepared in advance; the overall process, including the fermentation took about 4-5 days. Cooked rice shaped into balls (*penapa*) provided the

glutinous base for the beer then either tapioca or wild ginger was added as a fermenting agent (*lamud*) before the mixture was diluted with water. The brewing itself was carried out in a series of large dragon jars, which either belonged to the host, or were borrowed/rented from fellow kinsmen. The jars which were normally arranged in a neat line along the walls or stood on a platform within families' private quarters (see Figs. 6.24-5) were cleaned and gathered in the longhouse gallery to be filled up with *borak* (Fig. 7.2). The first brew of concentrated rice wine (*abpa pade*) was strained through a bamboo basket (*kidjan*), portioned out into smaller *angai* before being shared between 'old, respected members of the community' (I1). Other participants received the diluted version of the same batch or batches (Janowski 2011). The rice wine was either consumed by using a bamboo straw (although my interviewees claimed that this was the 'Murut fashion' – I1) or scooped out into stoneware or porcelain bowls (*bigan*) holding an average of 2 litres (Fig. 7.3) (I1).

'Kelabit beer is weaker, more bitter than most varieties. It is served in porcelain dishes or plates, some of fine design. The stuff can be prepared in five days, unfortunately, since quantities can be prepared at news of your approach – which will always be at least a week ahead of you. The consequent "party" may involve anything up to *sixty tall Chinese jars of beer*, constantly replenished by adding water from bamboos.' (Harrisson, T. 1959: 146; emphasis in italics added).

Although *borak* was supposed to even out the creases of social hierarchy, reinforce relationships and create new bonds (Janowski 2011), feasts as a whole, served as arenas for inter- and intra-communal competition. Ethnographic descriptions underscore that festivities provided the host (or the host community) with the opportunity to publicly assert their affluence of which material wealth was both a necessity and a consequence (Harrisson, T. 1959; Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979). Local informants unequivocally remember the presence of 20-30 jars being the norm at major celebrations (I2, I4, I5), one interviewee even described the teasing that went on between families: 'Where are your jars? How many do you have?' (I5). Another informant remarked that right before and after WWII, 'There was a great influx of *belanai mechings*. Suddenly everyone had to have one.' (I13). Feasts and *borak*-related drinking bouts continued until the Confrontation in 1963-66, even though by then the gradual conversion to Christianity had been underway for almost three decades (Harrisson, T. 1959; Southwell 1999 [1973]; Bulan and Bulan-Dorai 2004). Informants agreed that jars were used for brewing rice wine until the 1960s – for name-changing ceremonies (I1) and for entertaining the troops in Bario (Bulan and Bulan-Dorai 2004; Batu Bala 2013) – up until the Revival in the 1970s,

when the relationship to traditional Kelabit material culture took a whole new turn, as it will be discussed further below.

Image omitted due to copyright regulations

Figure 7.2 - Kelabit waiting to drink borak from dragon jars. Image by H. Morrisson, 1965:304.



Figure 7.3 - Kelabit lady from Pa' Dalih holding a bigan stoneware bowl used for drinking borak. Image by BN.

Irau: past and present

By the time ethnographic writing of the Kelabit begun in earnest, local attitudes towards animistic practices had already been shifting for many years, resulting in often contradictory accounts on ritual traditions (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979; Amster 1998; Janowski 2003). Despite the uncertain details, it appears that the Kelabit had two types of *borak rayeh* (big rice-wine drinking feasts): the *borak/irau ate'* (death feast) and the *borak/irau ngelua* (child initiation feast) (Lian-Saging 1976-7:138-44; Talla 1979:191-205; Amster 1998:240-81). While views on the *borak ate'* seem to be more or less consistent (see Chapter 5), the *borak ngelua* comes across as less ritually prescribed, perhaps because initiation rites might have taken different forms depending on the longhouse or kin group, and because events like this frequently included the initiation of many children at the same time, requiring the concerted effort of a number of families. Due to space constraints I will not be discussing the various details of the *borak ngelua* here, however I would like to draw on some key points others have made regarding the initiation ritual. The *borak ate'* and the *borak ngelua* appear to be the two crucial ceremonies Kelabit ritual life hinged on (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979). The accounts hint that the death of a high-ranking Kelabit was followed closely by a headhunting expedition which had both spiritual and social significance; the attainment of a head was essential for the completion of the secondary burial ceremony (and the *borak ate'*) and subsequently the *ngelua* ritual, as well as establishing one's status as a headhunter (Talla 1979). The custom of the *ngelua* comprised of a series of rituals: calling to the omen birds, preparation of *borak*, completion of the *ulung* post, singing and dancing in rows, followed by the *ngutek* ceremony ('playing with someone's brains') in the river where the freshly obtained enemy head was thrown and the children under initiation had to locate it (Talla 1979:198-9). The final stage of the ritual installed each child with the knowledge and social requirements of their respective genders by smearing them with the blood of a slaughtered pig,⁴⁹ after which the feasting commenced (ibid. 1979:207-10).

Although there is some uncertainty about the details of this practice in the ethnographic literature, it appears the Kelabit tradition of obtaining a new set of parental and grandparental names was part of the *ngelua* ceremony (Amster 1998:256-63; see also Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979; Janowski 2005). This was considered an important milestone in the life of every

⁴⁹ *Ngelua* in Kelabit means 'smearing someone with blood'.

Kelabit regardless of class; a platform to acknowledge achievement, status and prestige.⁵⁰ Marriages and the forging (or reinforcing) of political alliances also tended to coincide with the *ngelua* feasts perhaps because these gatherings were less centred on a single individual and had more of a communal appeal. These latter characteristics could well be the reasons why the *borak ngelua* was preserved and later transformed into one of the largest of Kelabit festivals of the present day: the *irau mekaa ngadan* or name-changing feast (Amster 1998; Janowski 2005). Although feasts are continuing to be part of the Kelabit lifestyle in modern times (weddings, funerals or Christian holidays), gatherings do not adhere to a strict choreography anymore and often occur on an *ad hoc* basis (i.e. visits by a dignitary, church deacon etc.). Name-changing ceremonies on the other hand became key expressions of Kelabit (Christian) identity in recent decades, and an important part of their ('re-invented') cultural heritage (cf. Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983). Both the *borak* and the *ngelua* aspects of the ceremony have been done away with, celebrating purely the social, cultural (and spiritual) prestige gained by hosting such an event, along with the strong sense of communal cohesion. The consumption of alcohol which ceased – officially – in the 1970s, was replaced by drinking sweetened tea and coffee at these large gatherings, being dispensed from dragon jars until the 1980s, when plastic and metal containers came to fulfil jars' roles as container vessels (I16; Janowski 2011). Nonetheless, dragon jars did not totally disappear from the feasting scene: several informants remarked that jars were re-installed during a wedding in 2012, generating a fair amount of debate among local Kelabit residents (I13, I19).

7.3.2 Objects of status

Contemporary Kelabit ethnographers unequivocally agree that the hereditary status of being *Lun Merar* (an aristocrat) was largely equated with the concept of leadership (see Chapter 5, Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979; Bala 2002). The 'head of the village' (*laih raya* – big man) title tended to be patrilineally inherited, while the council of elders also consisted of members of the upper class. The *Lun Merar* status and family lineage was maintained by carefully arranged marriages, serving as vehicles for political alliances, and were often means of preserving the peace on an inter-tribal level. Such endogamy between the aristocrats of different longhouse communities also aided to accumulate and to preserve economic and social wealth. The leading class was also expected to possess considerable amount of material wealth in order to settle

⁵⁰ Monica Janowski points out that the taking on of 'big names' was the privilege of people of high status, while lower-class descendants were addressed by teknonyms (e.g. Sinah Tadun – 'the mother of Tadun') (2005).

disputes, pay fines and organise large feasts on behalf of their community. Large dragon jars, glass beads and brass gongs were considered primary indicators of value and status, as Yahya Talla puts it:

‘The possession of the *belanai maun* (ancient holy jars) gives a family a prestigious position. The jar is a token of esteem for its owner’s

- i. Hereditary, ascribed leadership role,
- ii. Head-hunting and ancestry, and
- iii. Industry and prowess.

[...] *Without the belanai maun no family has full authority.*’ (1979:79, emphasis added)

However, there have been suggestions that the rigid class-system described so clearly by indigenous Kelabit ethnographers was the product of fairly recent historical times. Peter Metcalf argues that the expression of status and distinguished ancestry through luxury goods in the otherwise unstratified Berawan society,⁵¹ only came about as a response to colonial pressures and the Kayan-push (2010). Monica Janowski has also pointed out that there is little consensus even among Kelabit scholars about the terms upon which social divisions were constituted in the traditional Kelabit society (2003:45-6). Instead, she suggests that the so-called ‘*doo’-ness*’ and being a *Lun Merar* played a fundamental role in defining social standing, resonating strongly with the Kelabit until today. The notion of *doo’-ness*,⁵² she argues, did not reflect a particular class but rather described a quality of a married couple; whether they were able to provide for their hearth-groups (children, parents, siblings and slaves) (Janowski 2007). The status of being a *Lun Merar* was understood along similar lines, and was defined by two attributes: having children (and grandchildren), and being able to provide rice-meal for one’s dependants. Similar to Metcalf, Janowski suggests that Kelabit terms referring to distinct social classes might have been borrowed from the Kayan/Kenyah in the early 20th century when contact between local groups increased, while in reality the organisation of the Kelabit society itself remained on fairly fluid grounds (2003:45-7, 2007).

Both Metcalf and Janowski emphasise that despite the uncertainties in the definition of social class, the expression of status through material goods had long been important among Orang

⁵¹ Linguistically related group to the Kelabit, occupying the Usun Apau plateau in the middle reaches of the Baram.

⁵² The word *doo*’ has a complex meaning in Kelabit, translating as ‘good’ or ‘being good’ literally. It is also used to describe a person with strong work ethics, personality and high moral code, and in recent years, fortitude in one’s Christian faith (Bala 2008).

Ulu groups (Janowski 2003:45-7; Metcalf 1991, 2010). The installation of the colonial infrastructure made access to objects traditionally viewed as signifiers of social standing easier for the leading stratum of Kelabit communities. However, following Peter Metcalf's argument, I would suggest that the easy access to long-distance trade goods and the increasing participation in cash economy posed a new threat to the legitimacy of ruling classes, both economically and – more importantly for this discussion – from the perspective of material paraphernalia. By the late 19th – early 20th centuries, people from less privileged backgrounds were also able to afford luxury items, which began to undermine the social value of objects of status previously restricted to Kelabit aristocracy. As pointed out in Chapter 5, the increase in the use of burial jars, and the establishment of single-component dragon jar cemeteries can be seen as the manifestations of the economic and social shift taking place at the turn of the last century. Nevertheless, the ruling classes did not passively stand by and allow their material signifiers of status to be absorbed (and consumed) by the lower classes, but rather devised new ways of asserting their prominence over the rest of the society. Peter Metcalf proposes that one of the responses to new economic and social challenges given by the Berawan aristocracy was to retain their exclusive rights to the secondary burial ritual (2010:254). Colonial records seem to suggest a similar trend unfolding in the Kelabit highlands about the same time (Douglas 1912; Banks 1931, 1937), supported by oral histories of lavish burial feasts and etching the deceased individual's memory into the landscape either by creating ditch-, or canopy-cuttings or by the erection of standing stones (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979).

Objects and individuals – a summary

The changes sweeping through the broader Baram region at the beginning of the 20th century had a significant impact not only on the traditional social structures but on the relationship between the Kelabit and their objects of status. In order to better understand this 'individualistic' turn of the Kelabit upper classes prior to the religious conversion, I would like to draw both upon the archaeological and the ethnographic evidence discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 respectively. Chapter 5 outlined three main burial deposition traditions in the Kelabit highlands prior to World War II; ancestral, commemorative and communal – supported by oral historical accounts describing a variety of contemporaneous mortuary practices (Harrison 1962; Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979). While I argued that ancestral burial grounds were utilised by particular communities or lineages expressing their links to their land with depositions extending potentially a long way back in the past, commemorative and communal burials were results of depositions taking place from the 19th century onwards; the former dominated by the

presence of ancient jars, whereas the latter consisted mainly of recent vessel types. I also suggested that individual burials represent the period just prior to or at the beginnings of the 'explosion' of single-component burial grounds which could be identified with the enterprising, non-aristocratic stratum who received only primary burials, but were nevertheless placed in (newly purchased?) jars.

The custom of individual burials placed on mountain ridges could have been influenced by neighbouring Lun Bawang, Kayan and Kenyah groups (St John 1863; Schneeberger 1979; Metcalf 2010) while the tradition of raising stones or cutting ditches commemorating an individual is still being remembered by the Kelabit (Harrisson, T. 1958a-b, 1959a). This expression of individuality had deep roots in the Kelabit concept of leadership and charisma, strongly associated with the control or channelling of the *lalud* (life force). The social appreciation of such qualities reached their zenith during the lavish secondary burial feasts; a privilege of the Kelabit ruling class of impeccable ancestry (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979). It is clear that historical (Banks 1931; Harrisson, T. 1959) and ethnographic accounts describing 'as many as twenty jars being lined up along the gallery walls' (I1, I2, I4) refer to this fairly recent period of the past hundred or so years when jars were in abundance and made regular appearances during large celebrations.

Beyond ancient jars being part of the material necessities of leadership, conveyers of powerful visual messages and signifiers of social and economic prowess, jars' associations with their human owners were important constituents of (each other's) biographies. As discussed in Chapter 6, jars were often said to exhibit strange, human-like 'behaviour' manifesting in the form of noise, movement or sometimes as a physical 'product' such as urine or chewed-up food. Ancient jars were believed to have spirits (*ada'*) residing in them, requiring the attention and control of a powerful owner. Although the concept of animated objects had been recognised across Southeast Asia, including Borneo, for many centuries (see Chapter 2), I would argue that the agency of ancient jars among the Kelabit was further underscored during the past hundred or so years as a response to the influx of 'ordinary' jars. The Kelabit perceived their leaders' charisma or life-force to transfer onto their possessions (sometimes even on their followers) setting the *Lun Merar's* jars apart from objects of ordinary people; lending each other a somewhat supernatural quality (cf. Strathern 1988; Gell 1998). Powerful jars were feared by people who were deemed to have weaker spirits (i.e. members of the lower classes), and were said to be capable of causing significant harm; a belief which their owner certainly did not mind being maintained during an era of fierce social competition.

On a final note, along with the spread of British colonial control, the early 20th century presented the Kelabit with yet another gradual shift away from their traditional lifeways: Christianity. Early Christian missions faced many difficulties in the Baram, Limbang and Trusan regions, partly because of the tough living conditions and partly because of the second Rajah Brookes' unsupportive policies of Western religious activities among Sarawak natives. Nevertheless, by the 1920 and 30s Protestant missionaries began to reap the harvest of their efforts, and Christianity took hold among indigenous peoples of the interior. The accounts penned by missionaries contained lengthy details of the slow and hindered process of Christian conversion in the upper Baram region, paying little attention to the actual people to be converted or their motivations (Southwell 1999 [1973]; Lees 1979). Kelabit informants on the other hand emphasise the agency of their fathers and grandfathers who actively sought out missionaries preaching in the closer region, with a genuine desire to change their religious beliefs. According to these accounts, Kelabit chiefs and the ruling class were pivotal in leading their communities into the fold of Christianity which nevertheless could have presented them with a range of new opportunities in their contest with the *nouveau riche*. Thus it is not surprising that the first people to embrace the teachings of Christianity came from privileged, upper class backgrounds and were the first to receive education in mission-based schools (Bulan and Bulan-Dorai 2004; Batu Bala 2013), but who nonetheless had diverse attitudes towards objects of the animistic past.

7.4 Jars as ritual paraphernalia

In this final section of this chapter I wish to turn the focus to how Kelabit attitudes to dragon jars changed with the adoption of Christianity. Even today jars are far from neutral pieces of material culture, as demonstrated by this account, related to me during my fieldwork:

'Pian and his daughter, Monica, have been suffering from visions and illness. The family had two old jars, kept in the spare room of the house. When the spirit manifestations began, the family started to call it the 'Ghost Room'. Father and daughter requested the help of the local prayer group. The pastors along with 20 people set off to Pian's place to perform an exorcism. They all went to the rice-hut where the jars were moved beforehand, dismantled the floorboards and lowered the jars down on the ground. One of them was a *belanai ma'on* which cost 25 buffaloes (brown jar with dragon design). The other one was a *belayung* (smaller-sized jar) with 'monkey faces' – cost 6

buffaloes back in the day. The group of people started circling the jars, while praying. Then the Lord manifested himself through Sinah Balan Lupung and announced that there were 700 spirits in both jars. The group threw firewood and petrol on the vessels before setting them alight. While the fire was burning the strongest member smashed the jars with a piece of wood. At this moment all the spirits came out and started looking for a human host. First they entered Monica, she threw herself to the ground. The group prayed for her and she was delivered. Then the spirits entered the father, but prayers managed to deliver him as well. After the exorcism was complete the burnt jar-fragments were collected in a rice-sack and were taken to the Christian cemetery (*tanem*) to be buried in sacred ground. There was a very heavy downpour that night. A few months later Monica started to experience visions again and the spirits told her to dig up the jar fragments. She resisted and went to stay with relatives in Lawas, but the spirits chased after her. She then decided to return to Bario and requested the help of the prayer group. A prayer session was arranged for her and she was delivered once again. There has been no incident since.'

This account of a jar-exorcism was shared by the residents of the Pa' Umor longhouse in 2013, describing the events taking place a year before (I12). This story brings forcefully to the fore the perceived power and efficacy of dragon jars in the modern day Christian Kelabit world. In the following section, I will trace how changes to the perception of dragons jars following the adoption of Christianity are still being played out today. During this enquiry I am drawing upon several details of the Kelabit animistic past described by indigenous and western ethnographers, but the focus of this discussion remains centred on the objects themselves rather than on the analysis of past religious practices. Unfortunately, a study like this will always be incomplete since there no full written record exists of the Kelabit systems of beliefs prior to the Christian conversion, and what is available is fragmentary to say the least. The question why Pentecostal Christianity was so successful among Sarawakian Orang Ulu groups would deserve a separate essay too, but what I am really interested in exploring here is how religious change affected attitudes towards traditional material culture and how this is impacting upon present-day religious identities of Kelabit communities today.

7.4.1 Kelabit animism

The limited ethnographic material paints a picture of the Kelabit animistic cosmos where humans, spiritual-beings, gods and ancestors co-existed (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979; Janowski 2003, 2012, 2016). Supernatural beings were able to transgress boundaries between parallel realities, while humans' movements were restricted to their physical landscapes. Nevertheless, even people were believed to be able to cross over into the spirit-world either in an altered state of consciousness or by leaving behind their mortal coils. Kelabit daily life had been regulated by an elaborate system of taboos based on the sighting of certain animals and the flight of birds – interpreted as good or bad omens (Harrisson, T. 1960; Metcalf 1976b; Lian-Saging 1976-7:238-9). Good omens heralded abundant harvests, successful missions or prosperity for the community. Bad omens, on the other hand, forced people to abandon their work, neglect their fields or – in the most extreme cases – called for infanticide (Lian-Saging 1976-7:236-243; Talla 1979:256-300). Animal sacrifice was used to communicate with the spirits; haruspicy and the smearing of blood were fundamental elements of ritual practices (Douglas 1912; Lian-Saging 1976-7:138-142; Talla 1979: 191-210; Janowski 2014b).⁵³ The interpretation of omens and dreams was the task of the shaman (*dayung*), a (hereditary) position held by males of parental status. Shamans had an instrumental role in conducting healing and mortuary ceremonies, while initiation rituals were more inclusive and were led by village elders. If ethnographies are correct, the Kelabit did not differentiate between the religious roles of healers, spirit mediums or priests (or priestesses) common among many other Bornean groups (Whittier 1973; Rousseau 1998; Metcalf 2010; Chua 2012a); all major ceremonies were orchestrated by the *dayung* apart from fertility-rituals (rice-planting and harvesting) which belonged exclusively to the female realm (Bulan and Labang 1979; Janowski 2012).

Lalud

The concept of *lalud* or life-force was central to Kelabit spirituality in the past. *Lalud* is fundamental to the cosmos and essential to life (Janowski 2012:147). *Lalud* ties the many universes together, manifesting through living beings and also through things which Western schools of thought would categorise as 'inanimate' substances. Spiritual beings or *ada'* were believed to be pure forms of *lalud*. This life-force was imagined to be constantly moving;

⁵³ Domesticated pigs were believed to have souls similar to humans, hence their compatibility of carrying messages from the human to the spirit world. There also been assumptions that the offering of pigs came to replace human sacrifice sometime in the past (Metcalf 1987).

flowing through animals, people and the physical landscape (Fox 1980). *Lalud* could take on the characteristics of liquids, and was imagined to permeate boundaries by transferring *lalud* through waterways, blood and *borak* (Janowski 2012:148). Cemeteries were often established along streams and rivers, aiding the transition of souls to the spirit-world; the showering of pig-blood was part of major ceremonies involving a person's social transformation (initiation or death); and *borak* – besides generating and strengthening kinship – induced altered states of consciousness through which segments of the spirit-world could be experienced.

Lalud was also imagined to be able to solidify, and concentrate in hard objects; rocks, mountains or bones. People were regarded to become enriched with *lalud* as they aged, through the hardening of their bodies and souls. The Kelabit perceived middle-aged men to be the most solid, both in their physical and social statures, and in their spirituality; a quality which weighed considerably in their favour during the selection of community leaders and shamans. Bones were regarded as the repositories of a person's *lalud*, and were placed nearby rock-outcrops or ancient megalithic structures consisting of an akin substance, to join the deceased with his forefathers ossified essences. Powerful leaders' bones were deposited in jars on mountain ridges, where *lalud* was believed to coalesce and imbue the soul of the departed, accelerating its transformation into an ancestor (see Metcalf 1997). *Lalud* was also believed to settle in hard, unimpaired objects of unusual shape such as prehistoric sago-pounders (conceived as being the teeth of the deity of Thunder – *batuh pra'it*), crystals, or antlers. In the past, Kelabit men were seeking and collecting objects like these in the landscape hoping to harness the *lalud* concentrated in them (Janowski and Barton 2012). Stony places such as the oddly shaped sandstone peaks of Batu Lawi and the crest of the Apad Ke Runan⁵⁴ were closely associated with mythologies of petrification (*balio*), believed to be brought upon by the disregard of taboos (Janowski 2003, 2012). *Lalud* was also thought to pool in certain places of the landscape, collect in whirlpools or to froth in turbulent sections of rivers, similarly to places where the earth was disturbed by landslides (*toran*) or salt springs (*ropan*) (Amster 2009; Janowski 2016).

Spirit beings

The Kelabit cosmos was inhabited by a pantheon of creator deities, mythical heroes and powerful spirit beings (Talla 1979; Janowski 2012). Time, especially the 'Past' was conceived in a very fluid way; the Kelabit concept of the mythical past or *getoman lalud* ('joining with power')

⁵⁴ The twin peaks of Batu Lawi are said to be the petrified remains of a married couple, while the Apad Ke Runan is thought to be a longhouse turned into stone (Janowski 2012).

was defined by the pervasive infusion of *lalud* in the universe (which in many regards continues into the present day). During this time *lalud* was flowing in abundance, instilling people with superhuman abilities making them ‘shimmer with power’ (Janowski 2014a:99, see Chapter 2). The boundaries between living and non-living were blurred, so as the distinctions between humans, animals, plants (Janowski 2014a:97). People could cross over into the realm of the dead, and long-deceased ancestors could be summoned to fight on the side of the living against mythical spirit entities (Janowski 2014a:98).

The two most fearsome spirits manifested themselves in the form of a tiger (*balang*) and a water-serpent (*menagag* or *benagag*) (Talla 1979:273-276). They were thought to be able to traverse between universes and change their appearance as they wished. The *ada’ balang* was believed to dwell in deep limestone caves and crevices, while the *menagag* resided in pools and oxbow lakes. Kelabit oral histories preserved many stories of the *ada’ balang* and its mythical slayer, Tukad Rini (Rubenstein 1973; Janowski 2014a), meanwhile the *menagag* remains a somewhat elusive creature. Mythologies about the spirit tigers (*harimau* – Malay) and the water serpents (*menaga* – Malay) are shared widely among Bornean native groups (especially in the northern regions: Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]:28). The image of the *menagag* is often linked to, or even originated from the Hindu-Buddhist serpent cult (*nāga* – Sanskrit; Handa 2004), while the tiger, which does not exist in the flesh in Borneo since the late Pleistocene, is likely to have been borrowed from Mainland Southeast Asian folklore where it usually appears as a lycanthropic being or a spirit helper (Endicott 1981).

As well as tiger and water-serpent spirits, crocodiles were also considered as powerful spiritual entities across Borneo (Hose and McDougall 1966 [1912]; Chua 2012a). The Iban and the Kayan evoke ‘Grandfather Crocodile’, a spirit guardian to support them during (head) hunting missions (Hose and McDougall 1966 [1912]:68-9; St John 1863). Lun Bawang communities at the headwaters of the Limbang River, and the Kerayan people in Kalimantan used to commemorate headhunting raids and venerate their ancestors by building large crocodile effigies fashioned of earth (Schneeberger 1979; Sellato 2016; Datan forthcoming); an activity which became the expression of regional ethnic identity (Sellato 2016:135). Although the mountain ranges surrounding the Kelabit plateau form a boundary to crocodiles’ habitat, the concept of a spirit crocodile (*ada’ bayeh*) was widely recognised among the Kelabit (Talla 1979:274).

While the *ada’ balang* is distinctly associated with physical and spiritual strength in the Kelabit mythologies (some scholars go as far as drawing parallels between the spirit tiger, stoniness and the male principle; Janowski 2016), the roles played by the water-serpent and the spirit

crocodile remain unclear. Unfortunately, Kelabit ethnographies are not detailed enough to distinguish between powerful spiritual beings, familiars, or tutelary spirits, or in fact, whether these distinctions existed within the Kelabit worldview in the first place. The spirit tiger and the white crocodile had undoubtedly been important entities reflected by the grandparental titles of '*Balang*' and '*Bayeh*' favoured by upper-class men until the time of Christian conversion – whereas, the *menagag*, in contrast, disappeared (or was erased?) from the Kelabit spiritual pantheon and popular Kelabit imagination.

The *bayeh* and the *menagag* – imagery on jars

The Kelabit ethnographer Yahya Talla provides a list of spirit beings in his study (1979) which were still remembered by a generation of Kelabit who had first-hand (although likely limited) experiences of animistic practices. Among many entities, Talla describes the *ada' baya'* (crocodile spirit), the *benagag* ('Kelabit dragon'), the *ada' belanai* (jar spirit) and *ada' angai* (spirits of small jars) (Talla 1979:274-8). However, as his dissertation's focus lay elsewhere, only a brief examination was offered on the nature, classification or the *modus operandi* of particular spiritual entities. What transpires from Talla's depictions however, is that the spirit tiger and the spirit crocodile were entities related to the creator deity, Darayah, whereas the water-serpent and the jar spirits seem to have been associated with particular places or objects; and that there were not a single, but a variety of crocodile and water serpent spirits known to the Kelabit, some with benign intentions, while others malevolent (ibid. p. 274-5).

From the perspective of jar-design, there is an intriguing correlation between the spirit-crocodile, the jar-spirits and the water serpent. Jars being the product of Chinese manufacturers were embellished with motifs borrowed from Hindu-Buddhist symbolism. Here, I do not wish to delve into the rich meanings of dragons in Chinese mythology, but would like to underscore some key aspects of this popular imagery. Dragons were considered the mightiest of creatures, symbolising divine power, wealth and wisdom. Emperors of China even claimed their descent from these legendary creatures – hence the five-clawed dragon motif being restricted for the use of the imperial court (Bjaaland Welch 2008). Traditionally, there were three main types of dragons defined by their habitats: sky, water and mountains; and nine, lesser guardian dragon varieties endowed with human-like characteristics.⁵⁵ It is possible that the dragon design was applied to jars in order to 'guard' or refer to their contents, but at the

⁵⁵ Classical Chinese literature refers to over a hundred different kinds of dragons in various contexts, mainly related to Tibetan Buddhist (lamaistic) mysticism (Carr 1990).

moment, even basic information regarding the produce shipped in jars, is lacking (see the description by Ibn Battuta and J-V. Tavernier, in Dupoizat 1997).

When jars with *dragon motifs* first arrived on the shores of Borneo around the 13th-14th centuries, it is likely that local indigenous groups were oblivious to the range of meanings associated with dragons in a Chinese context. However, since Borneo was part of the interest sphere of both the Srivijaya and the Majapahit kingdoms, it is probable that the similar Hindu-Buddhist imagery could have been present in the indigenous repertoire. Nevertheless, stoneware jars with glazes glimmering in the tropical sunlight, could have appeared almost magical in the eyes of local communities. Although, as described in Chapter 3, regular contact between Mainland and Island Southeast Asia extends back to the early Metal Age (Barker 2013), stoneware products, or in fact, stoneware jars remained great rarities until the 18th-19th centuries. Building and firing technologies involved in the production of stonewares were far removed from realities of Bornean natives, making them to stand in stark contrast with locally produced, ephemeral earthenware of relatively small size. Besides the enchantment of their materiality: their hardness, smooth, shiny surfaces and anthropomorphic appearance, as well as the imagery used on these objects must have resonated with indigenous people in certain ways. We can only assume that some kind of serpent, lizard or crocodile ‘worship’ had already been in place among Bornean locals, into which dragon jars were ‘slotted’. No records exist regarding the local reception of dragon jars or the process of their adoption as prestige items, nevertheless, the Borneo-wide veneration and knowledge of jars’ antiquity (see Chapter 6) suggests that they were appreciated from their first appearance on the island.

Chinese agents and manufacturers responded to the demands of indigenous markets both on Borneo and in the Philippines by beginning to produce jars in a wide range of styles and decorations. The Iban and the Ngaju Dayak – perhaps because their close proximity to trade centres – developed an elaborate framework of jar classification (Chin 1988; Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]). Jars were ranked not only by their antiquity, but also by their design; e.g. dragons facing each other were valued more than, dragons facing the same way, while dragons depicted biting into the handles or with intertwined tails fetched the highest prices (Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]; Chambert-Loire and Dupoizat 2003). Dragons resembling local animals like lizards (*kabok*), serpents (*naga*) or flying lemur (*kowok*) were also held in high esteem (Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]:26-31). This must have been no different in the Kelabit highlands, the only contrast being that inland native groups had less choice over what types of jars they were receiving as the objects filtered through an inter-ethnic commodity chain. Perhaps because of the limited availability of jars in the precolonial era the Kelabit did not seem have a detailed system of

vessel evaluation (at least compared to Iban and Ngaju Dayak practices), but this does not mean that they did not recognise the differences between jar varieties or did not differentiate between dragon motifs (see Chapter 6).

We must also consider the dilemma of the appropriation of external symbols. The jars arriving into the Kelabit culture-sphere represented a variety of shapes, sizes with decorative motifs of which some could be fitted easily into local artistic schemes, while others required more abstract interpretations. Dragons resembled both the spirit crocodile (*ada' bayeh*) and the water serpent (*menagag*) in their appearance, but we have no information whether the Kelabit in the past drew an equation between either of these mythical creatures and the dragon as a signifier. The closer reading of Talla's text suggests that certain kinds of *menagag* 'had horns and possessed feet' whereas others did not (1979:276). He also says: 'Those having feet were said to be more powerful than the "legless" dragons, hence ancient jars with legged dragon designs were highly valued in the Kelabit traditional society.' (ibid. p. 276). However, this statement does not exclude the interpretation of dragon designs as crocodiles. In fact, during the interviewing process, some of my informants used the word '*bayeh*' (crocodile) (I14), while others the term '*slangui*' (snake) (I11) to describe jars' decorations, and there were instances when the two words were used interchangeably (as there is no term in Kelabit directly describing the concept of a – Chinese or Christian – dragon). It appears that there is a significant ambiguity concerning the (traditional) interpretation of the dragon-imagery among the Kelabit in the present day, and it is possible that even in the past there was no direct association between dragon jars and water serpent or the spirit crocodile. It is intriguing, however, that while the spirit crocodile is now mainly remembered as a powerful, but benign entity, the *menagag* (despite its equally benevolent varieties) is likened by the Kelabit to the biblical serpent or dragon, the symbol of evil.

Ada' belanai – jar spirits

Before I embark on the examination of this animistic concept, let me begin this section by describing my personal puzzlement which accompanied my weeks-long ethnographic fieldwork. Kelabit informants unequivocally agreed that old, powerful jars used to exhibit strange, human-like behaviour, manifesting in deep humming noises, whispers, movement, consumption of food or passing urine. When participants spoke English, they referred to both the 'jar' and the 'spirit of the jar' as actants in these processes, but during the interviews with old people only speaking Kelabit, informants consistently used the term '*ada*' in identifying the source of jars'

efficacy. To make matters even more obscure, ethnographic writing also uses these terms interchangeably, referring to the jars themselves as being ‘enspirited’ or ‘animated’ or the jar’s spirit, *ada*’ as a separate entity (Janowski 2012, 2016; Talla 1979, cf. Pietz 1985, 1987, 1988; Pels 1998). This apparent dichotomy, which took a while for me to articulate, had been in the back of my mind throughout the interviews. One morning, in a random attempt, I posed the question to a good friend Jaman, who himself had great interest in the Kelabit past and cultural remains. Jaman’s answer was the following:

‘I don’t know much about jars. I believe they can have either good or bad spirits. A jar is like a house, if people don’t use it, the spirits will move in.’ (I9)

His view corresponds with Talla’s and some of my informants’ understanding of ‘sovereign’ jar spirits going on a hunt at night, eating or killing people (Talla 1979: 277; I1, I5). This perception of jar-spirits inhabiting vessels seem to explain why the Kelabit traditionally cover their jars’ mouth either with smaller jars (the use of *sorangurs*, even in cemeteries) or nowadays with potted plants or plastic flower displays (Chapter 6).

This concept of spirits inhabiting jars has an interesting rendering in a religious Christian context, and at this point I would like to return to the subject of intentional damage discussed briefly in Chapter 6. In the ethnographic assemblage, nine out of 29 cases, the fractures on jars appear to be intentional, dominantly affecting the lip/rim area (Table 6.6). One of these jars was in the possession of a lady I interviewed back in 2007 (I29). She said the jar used to whistle and howl at night, until one day she had enough and whacked the vessel with a bamboo stick which resulted in a chip to the jar’s lip and the disturbance to stop. But this was not an isolated case, two other interviewees reported that before they installed their family heirloom jars in their new town homes, a prayer group carried out a ‘cleansing ritual’ whereby one of the jars’ rim was fractured (the other one had already a slight damaged to it) in order to chase out any potential spirits (I26). The spiritual cleansing of objects is clearly motivated by Christian beliefs in the present day, but I would argue that the practice itself is rooted in animism and the solidification of *lalud* (thus breakage and repair bear no resemblance to the Japanese concept of *kintsugi* raised in Chapter 6).

In the past, the Kelabit believed that *lalud* concentrated in hard, undamaged objects. This perception included objects occurring in the natural environment (rocks, crystals), but also, I would suggest, manufactured goods which – through their materiality (cf. Gell 1992) – appeared to them as solidified *lalud*. Stoneware ceramics were often described to me as being ‘*batuh*’ (stone) referring to their hardness in contrast to locally produced earthenware *kudins*

and *tunings*; similarly to glass beads which were believed to grow and proliferate in the ground like pebbles.⁵⁶ The Kelabit also regarded prehistoric sago pounders (*batuh pera'it*) as petrified *lalud*, and used to place these artefacts in rice barns to increase the yield (Janowski and Barton 2012; Janowski 2016). Some *batuh pera'it* were employed as whetstones for the sharpening of bush knives, transferring *lalud* onto machetes before setting out on a (wild pig/head) hunt (Janowski and Barton 2012:357). However, some argue that for a *lalud*-laden object, its unimpaired-ness was an essential criterion for efficacy:

‘[...] as this means that they are inhabited by a spirit [...] otherwise, they contain *lalud* but do not have the *individuated consciousness* which allows them to be actors vis-à-vis the rest of the cosmos.’ (Janowski 2016, emphasis added).

Thus, damaged objects were still considered to be powerful but their individuated *ada'* was gone, taking away the potential for the *lalud* to be channelled or controlled. I would suggest that this was no different in the case of jars.⁵⁷ In the past the management of the *ada' belanai* took place through carefully orchestrated ritual offerings; by placating the jar's spirit, its owner was able to tap into its power, manifested in personal achievements which then were converted into social and economic capital. In the present religious Christian context, people receive spiritual gifts through prayer by the Holy Spirit, and jar spirits, (which despite Jaman's above comment are now *all* regarded as evil), should be gotten rid of for good. The practice of damaging powerful objects, like the chipping of jars' lips, highlights the fact that some aspects of the traditional spiritual framework were preserved and actively utilised in a new religious context, particularly within the setting of Pentecostal Christianity.

7.4.2 Christianity

The 1920s and 30s signalled the beginning of a new – spiritual – era in the Baram region. These few decades before the Japanese occupation were characterised by light handed governance of the Rajah Brooke, verging on political lethargy (rooted in personal disinterest and the greater global events: Southwell 1999 [1973]; Metcalf 2010). The colonial administration delivered the

⁵⁶ The geology of the highlands is relatively soft, dominated by shale, mudstone and sandstone under deposits of clay, with the occasional sandstone outcrop. River rolled pebbles appear to be washed out from underground and often visible in sections of riverbanks, redeposited by floods and landslides – thus giving the impression that they ‘grow in mud’ as one of my informants put it.

⁵⁷ There are a small number of cases where holes were either drilled into or pierced through the jar's body. The drilled holes on the lip I would argue are remnants of Kelabit sympathetic magic (see, Owen 1919:107), whereas the holes on the body point towards a violent purge of the jars from evil spirits (i.e. piercing the vessel with a spear – I10).

bare minimum in the interior, while epidemics were rife (malaria: Jones 1966; influenza: Mjöberg 1925) and birth rates plummeted (Metcalf 2010:208-1). Into this political and economic stupor arrived in 1930, the three members of the Borneo Evangelical Mission (Southwell 1999 [1973]; Lees 1979; Amster 1998). The regimes of Sarawak and the North Borneo Chartered Company (Sabah) were outright unsupportive of missionizing among the local population, nevertheless mainstream denominations (Anglican, Catholic and Methodist) were allowed to establish schools and mission posts in larger towns. There were a few sporadic attempts to evangelise further inland, but these missions were soon abandoned as a result of physical hardship, basic conditions and the overall lack of progress in conversion (Green 1911).

For a while, it looked as if the BEM mission, which focussed its efforts specifically on remote rural areas, would end up as one of the many failed proselytizing pursuits in Borneo (Southwell 1999 [1973]). However, two members of the mission, Hudson Southwell and Carey Tolley settled among the Lun Bawang in the Limbang area and by the mid-1930s began to see some success in the local uptake, but progress was painfully slow (Ewart 2009). There is little known about the natives' inclinations towards Christian conversion, and why the BEM managed to reap success where other missions stumbled. Perhaps timing was key; the border areas of Sarawak have been exposed to the influences of American missionary activities from Dutch Borneo, and most upland groups encountered the Christian teachings through interaction and 'self-evangelisation' by their kin in Kalimantan a few decades prior to the BEM's presence in the region (Watson Andaya 2009; Mashman pers. comm.). Yet, the Kelabit highlands remained largely untouched by Western-led evangelising missions until the arrival of Hudson Southwell and Frank Davidson in 1939.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, they were faced with limited local enthusiasm, people were 'not yet willing for a complete change from the old pagan ways' (Southwell [1973] 1999:98).

The conversion process came to an abrupt halt with the Japanese occupation (*Prang Jipun*) in 1941, during which Western missionaries were interned and many of them died. But the destabilising effects of the war and the absence of European missionary activity in the region opened up new avenues for indigenous leadership and self-proselytizing continued in earnest in the interior (a time-period referred to as 'when the Baram flowed backward' – Metcalf 2010:295-6). After World War II, the BEM was strongly committed to establish a network of

⁵⁸ While in the Limbang area, Southwell heard rumours about the Kelabit being keen to become Christians, which supports oral histories of Kelabit leaders seeking out the missionaries on their own initiative (Rubin Jala and Milien Tupun pers. comm.).

indigenous ministries, and in 1958 the mission was handed over to native Sarawakians,⁵⁹ re-branding the organisation as Sidang Injil Borneo (SIB), which continues to this day (Lees 1979; Ewart 2009). From the 1970s the 'Pentecostal' aspects of the SIB became more evident, indicated by a number of 'spiritual awakenings' at the Lawas Bible School, which were on par with other (global) revivalist movements sweeping across the Indonesian Archipelago since the mid-1960s (Orr 1976; Whitaker 1984; Wiyono 2001).

The 1973 Bario Revival although very similar in its elements to contemporaneous events throughout Southeast Asia, was a fundamental collective religious experience for the Kelabit community, with a significant formative effect on their 'modern' spirituality, ethnic identity and Malaysian citizenship. As the movement itself has been described (and analysed) elsewhere in detail (Lees 1979; Amster 1998; Bulan and Bulan-Dorai 2004; Batu Bala 2012), here, I would only like to draw upon a few of its characteristics which impacted people's attitudes towards objects of the past and how these understandings have shifted slightly in the last decades, in accord with the changes taking place within the Pentecostal denomination. Pentecostalism is a charismatic Christian movement, which places special emphasis on personal experiences of the Holy Spirit, the reception of spiritual gifts (speaking of tongues, divine healing or prophesying), the belief in Christ's imminent Second Coming, a complete break from the pagan past, and crucially for the current argument: spiritual warfare. While this mystical aspect of Christianity might appear unusual in the context of European religiosity, spiritual warfare remains one of the major pull-factors of the present-day neo-charismatic Pentecostal movement worldwide (DeBernardi 1999; Robbins 2004a, cf. Jorgensen 2005), including the Kelabit.

Spiritual warfare

Spiritual warfare is conducted along two main strategies: deliverance from demonic spirits by the power of prayer, and the physical destruction of the demonic object. This latter method was routinely used by missionaries in the conversion process, and the burning or destruction of charms and hunted-heads was often regarded as the first step taken by the natives on their path towards the Kingdom of Christ (Southwell 1999 [1973]; Talla 1979). It is difficult to ascertain what qualified as a 'charm' in the past; traditionally both men and women owned 'sacred' objects which were considered highly taboo for the other gender (Amster 1998:298), and shamans possessed a repertoire of personal charms (i.e. different coloured stones – Janowski 2016 forthcoming) which they used in healing and other rituals. However, there were

⁵⁹ Urban Chinese form a strong component of the denomination while the majority of the flock is from native, predominantly Orang Ulu backgrounds.

certain objects which Kelabit converts considered 'dangerous' given their performative power in the olden days. I was told, that beautifully crafted headhunting *parangs* (machetes – which required regular 'feeding with blood') were among the first objects to disappear following the conversion, and old jars soon followed suit.

The Bario revival provided a new impetus for purging the community of hazardous possessions, informants remarked that over 20 jars were smashed during the movement, supported by Talla's claim in 1979: 'All these *belanai maun* have now been either destroyed completely or parts of them especially the mouths have been disfigured.' (p. 277). What is intriguing however, is that in some respects these iconoclastic rituals resemble the choreographies of past secondary burial rituals – and at this point, I would like to return to the jar-exorcism story described at the beginning of this section. The jars were removed from the storage hut by dismantling the floorboards and lowering them on the ground, as it was done when taking the jar-coffin out to the cemetery; the dead (or the spirit) should not leave the house the same way as the living (Metcalf 1991; see Chapter 5). This practice was also described by Hudson Southwell, during the Kayan conversion at Long Tabagan in 1947: 'In each family apartment they made a hole in the floor and lowered the fetishes and charms to us, beneath the house.' (1999 [1973]:217). The other similarity is in the treatment of the 'remains'; the jar's – body – fragments were gathered and taken to the Christian cemetery by *men*. In the past, men were considered spiritually stronger to enter the big forest (*polong raya*)⁶⁰ and encounter spirit entities (*ada'*) at the burial ground, while in the present Christian context this precaution makes little sense and should not be necessary.

When I inquired why people thought jars were the source of disturbance, the usual response was – apart from the vessels being strong reminders of drunkenness and disorderly behaviour – that they had the image of a dragon on their surface, a demonic symbol. The ambivalence in the native language was obvious (water serpent versus crocodile), but so were the negative associations. Upon further pressing, people either became irritated or provided fairly prescriptive answers based on the Scriptures, such as the dragon being the manifestation of the biblical serpent (I18) or the 'destroyer' battling archangel Michael in the Book of Revelations (I21). Nevertheless, what transpired from casual conversations is that there was no unequivocal view on the matter of imagery among the Kelabit. Some thought that jars with dragons were

⁶⁰ Janowski describes the *polong raya* (primary rainforest) as an essentially male realm, where *lalud* is abundant and brought into the longhouse through the substance of hunted meat, whereas the *polong i'it* (literally: small or secondary forest) was considered to be a female domain, where women collected wild fruits and vegetables (2003; 2014b).

spiritually dangerous as the imagery on them served as ‘portals’ for evil spirits to enter this world and cause discord, even illness in people (an informant drew a direct link between the mental disorder of a young Kelabit and the fact that his parents still owned an old dragon jar). Some of my participants claimed that old jars retained their powers, regardless their imagery, which manifested in threatening behaviour even until recently (one of my interviewee’s son decided to utilise the family heirloom as a stand for his speakers, but stopped immediately after, allegedly, spotting a face in the jar). Still, others thought that the image of a dragon is not a source of danger on its own (this came as a response when I pointed at the fairly large calendar print depicting a Chinese dragon on someone’s living room wall), but a dragon on an *old (stoneware) jar* could potentially be a cause for concern. Thus it appears that the imagery, the age, the efficacy and the jars’ materiality (along with their undetachable roles in the past) form part-and-parcel of their negative perception in the context of present-day Christian worldviews.

Spiritual warfare is a very real struggle, particularly for people living in the rural environment of the Kelabit highlands. Despite religious conversion which the Kelabit regard as a wholly positive turn freeing them from crippling superstitions and burdensome omens, their world remained to be populated by spirit entities (*ada’*) and places permeated by evil forces (*tana da’at*). However, the Kelabit believe that evil spirits are now kept at bay by the grace of the Holy Spirit and can be managed through religious devotion and the power of prayer (Amster 1998, 2009). ‘Sightings’ of spirit beings such as the Great Forest Spirit, *Pun Tumid* (Grandfather Heel – Janowski 2003, 2012, 2014a) or the *Ada’ Balang* (Spirit Tiger – Janowski 2003, 2016 forthcoming), prominent until the 1980s, decreased, while (re)encounters with other entities are on the rise (*Putri Rimba* – Princess of the Forest, and the Ghostly Buffalo: Amster 2003b, 2016; Mashman pers. comm.). Pagan burial grounds including jar burials remain spiritually dangerous; the threat of the *ada’* has now been re-aligned with Christian teachings, according to which all who died without embracing Christ are destined to hell (Bala pers. comm.). Although the local perception is changing in relation to stone monuments (*batu nangan*, *batu nawi*, *perupun* etc.) partly due to the archaeological work in the highlands (Lloyd-Smith *et al.* forthcoming), negative views still persist, calling for the (regular) ritual cleansing of such locations: sprinkling salt and oil on stone mounds, or casting exorcised jar fragments under stone monuments (Batu Ritong in Pa’ Lungan).⁶¹ Certain places in the landscape are still considered *tana da’at*, remaining in the grips of evil spirits: the area around Ramudu village is

⁶¹ A highland resident even referred to her prayer group as ‘a squad of spiritual warriors’, while the practices involved show striking similarities with a current charismatic trend called ‘Third Wave Evangelism’ especially prevalent in Africa, South-America and Papua New Guinea (Jorgensen 2005).

still regarded as the stronghold for harmful spirit entities (the killing of a BEM pastor in 1945: Lian-Saging 1976-7:201-2; and an accidental fatal (self-)shooting 2009: Ewart 2011:32), so as the mountain ridge between Ramudu and Pa' Dalih where loggers were killed by a landslide in 2006 (here a church was established in order to disperse evil powers – Janowski 2016). These locations now serve as arenas for the Kelabit to exercise their spiritual powers by re-sacralising their physical and spiritual landscapes (Amster 2003b, 2006, cf. Allerton 2009, 2012; Bovensiepen 2014).

Social changes and attitudes towards material culture

With the adoption of Christianity the Kelabit officially abandoned all forms of class distinction, however, egalitarianism remains a highly contested subject among people, principally in rural areas. The issue of 'class' continues to be a highly sensitive topic, despite the fact that the Kelabit social system was relatively permeable and that the forceful safeguarding of hereditary status (and its necessary paraphernalia) was probably a response to fairly recent socio-economic challenges. The 'portable potency' of Christianity and the advances of education in the 1960s and 70s enabled generations of Kelabit to leave their homeland and progress in a modern, urban environment as teachers, medics and business owners; hence opening up new avenues for the expression of *doo'-ness* (Amster 1998; Bala 2008). During the Revival, *doo'-ness* manifested through religious zeal and was directed against its previous signifiers; the material embodiments of hereditary privileges – jars, gongs, beads, and even craft objects and attire (Lian-Saging 1976-7; Talla 1979). It also found an outlet in spiritual gifts such as talking in tongues, visions, miracles and faith healing. Experiencing the workings of the Holy Spirit in such a close, communal setting stimulated the re-interpretation of social roles and placed emphasis on individual devotion while (seemingly) eradicating prestige differentials.

However, social distinctions downplayed during the Revival, made a resurgence in the following decades (Amster 1998; Janowski 2003). On an everyday, village-level these differences are hardly noticeable, 'class' does not seem to feature in one's participation in regular religious or communal events. Nevertheless, some more traditional aspects of *doo'-ness*, like the extensive knowledge of *adat* laws, social support network, and wealth in particular, certainly enabled people from prestigious backgrounds to excel both in education and in their new religious lives. It has further been in their advantage that personal qualities held in high esteem by the Kelabit, such as strong leadership, competition, and agency match closely the criteria of modern capitalist Malaysian citizenship. It is difficult to get a clear picture on how Kelabit descendancy

compares to material wealth and status in an urban context, but it is evident that one's parentage still weighs considerably during the selection of *tua kampongs* (headmen), *penghulus* (regional chiefs) or *pamanchas* (paramount chiefs). Even in the urban environment, efforts are still being made to create marriage alliances between *doo'* families (Amster 2012). Perhaps ironically, the institutional structure of the SIB appears to be the only (social) framework that continues to promote egalitarianism; here opportunities remained open to everyone regardless of genealogy, wealth or gender.

The Pentecostal movement itself has undergone a series of changes in the last decade, especially within its urban sphere. Neo-charismatic aspects of Pentecostalism became more enhanced as the composition of worshippers came to be dominated by emergent middle-classes: these predominantly urban church sermons now take an increasingly subdued, quiet form in contrast to the more expressive, emotionally heightened services; in some cases members are even allowed to consume alcohol or wear jewellery (Synan 1997; Robbins 2004a-b). According to Amster, by 1998 at least one of five SIB churches in Miri had attempted to move away from the classical Pentecostal forms of worship and subscribe to a 'calmer' style of religious observance (1998:307). Nevertheless, the majority of churches in the Kelabit highlands still subscribe to the charismatic tones of religious expression; speaking of tongues, raising up hands and faith healing occur on a regular basis, sprinkled with the occasional spiritual battle or exorcism. The SIB itself at present supports both styles of religious expressions as legitimate experiences of spiritual gifts as long as they accord with the Scriptures (Amster 1998:306-11), but it certainly serves as a basis of division, widening the gap between urban and rural Kelabit lifestyles (Amster 2016).

The softening of religious zeal in recent years, along with significant outmigration and slow rural development contributed to the gradual shift in attitude related to objects of the past and the Kelabit cultural heritage as a whole. Today, descendants of ruling families are more inclined to place their old heirlooms on display either in their homes or their homestays; jars have even embellished a recent wedding ceremony – although not without controversy – something that was unheard of in the last forty years. Narratives of the Revival also beginning to be nuanced, as people are less afraid of potential communal repercussions.⁶² Jars, gongs and old family beads began to gain new meanings as they progress from prestige objects, through dangerous

⁶² During a casual conversation someone related a story to me of a prominent member of the Kelabit community who refused to participate in the Revival. As a form of resistance, he buried his jars in the nearby forest. The vessels remained here until the late 1990s, when following his guidance, the person's grandchildren brought the jars back into the longhouse.

vehicles of evil spirits to paraphernalia signalling Kelabit heritage in the context of modern consumer goods, but also in the continuous contestation of Kelabit ethnicity and identity.

Chapter 8 Conclusions

8.1 Jar journeys

As dragon jars moved through time and space, from 10th century China, to 21st century central Borneo, they also moved beyond their simple container function, acquiring a rich repertoire of meanings on their journeys. The object-biographical model, which formed the overarching narrative framework for the thesis, has enabled a deep exploration of these meanings and facilitated the principal enquiry of this study: how objects cross cultural and geographical boundaries and are (re-)conceptualised within different social and temporal settings. In this final chapter I shall first review the thesis as a whole, before widening the perspective to consider the implications this case study has for questions of material agency. In drawing together the conclusions of each chapter, the specific research questions posed at the outset of this thesis are used to both link the sections together and build towards the final discussion.

Chapter 3 outlined the historical backdrop for the thesis and provided a point of departure for the jar-journeys, marked by the emergence of stoneware production in China. Stoneware jars became widely utilised during the Tang dynasty period (618-906 CE) as packaging materials for perishable commodities traded across the South China Sea region. Although Borneo's participation in these early maritime trading networks is so far unclear, Tang dynasty jars did reach the island's interior (via a series of exchange networks) and are recognised by many indigenous groups as the most ancient and valuable jar-type. The establishment of the eastern maritime route during the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE) enabled direct contact between China and island Southeast Asia, I would propose lay the foundations for specialised ceramic production by Chinese workshops to satisfy indigenous market demand. The period also saw the appearance of the dragon motif on jars for the first time, which could have contributed to jars' popularity among indigenous groups in Southeast Asia, and allowed jars to assume roles beyond their primary container functions. Jars were produced in a variety of shapes, sizes and designs, and by now, were fired in large dragon kilns; a mass-manufacturing technology which remained practically unchanged for more than the next 700 years. The Yuan dynasty era (1271-1368 CE) represents an uncertain period in jar-research, followed by the similarly nebulous epoch of the early Ming (1368- c. 1505 CE), during which jars produced in Thai, Vietnamese and Burmese kilns seem to have filled the temporary void left in jar-distribution created by the so-called 'Ming ban'. In the late Ming period (c. 1505-1644 CE) China experienced an increased demand from both European and Southeast Asian/Japanese markets for ceramics tailored to

suit local tastes (Kraak and Zhangzhou wares). The earliest jars in the Kelabit highlands document as part of this research date to late Ming – early Qing dynasty period (17th-18th century) and likely to have been the results of the boom in Chinese ceramic production, the expansion and intensification of trading-networks, and also from the perspective of central Borneo, the intensification of rice agriculture fuelling a local competitive feasting economy. The Qing dynasty (1644–1912 CE) heralded turbulent years for workshops operating in southeast China; the Opium Wars, a series of domestic rebellions followed by bouts of famine prompted many potters to relocate their businesses to Southeast Asia, and to Borneo in particular. Workshops springing up in Sarawak from the mid-1800s catered especially for local demand, turning out jars cheaply, efficiently and very much resembling ancient issues. I would argue that these recent jars saturated the markets of Borneo, making their ways into the Kelabit highlands in fair numbers. As such, they present a challenge to researchers to distinguish between old and new jars simply on typological grounds.

The establishment of clear typological categories was one of the key objectives of *Chapter 4*. Dragon jar assemblages from the case-study area – the Kelabit highlands – were recorded and analysed based on a typological template devised to render different ceramic datasets comparable, regardless of their finding circumstances (fragmentary archaeological assemblages versus complete ethnographic jars). Given that in the past jars in the Kelabit highlands were utilised for multiple purposes, including brewing rice wine, signifying social distinction, and containing the bones of the dead, an overarching methodology combining archaeology and anthropology was devised so as to cover these settings in sufficient detail. Jars were documented in mortuary contexts by using archaeological survey methods, and were investigated in domestic settings through a series of ethnographic interviews; along with the recording of the typological core-data itself. Combined, these methods were able to elucidate and nuance the various roles jars played in these social arenas and to answer the specific research questions posed in Chapter 1.

With the typological categories established, *Chapter 5* then moved onto explore the ‘funerary stage’ of jar-journeys, and discuss how jars were incorporated into mortuary assemblages in the Kelabit highlands. Archaeological surveys enabled the contextualisation of burial sites in the wider region of the highlands, while the typological analysis of jars established the chronological sequence for the cemeteries. Burial grounds were then juxtaposed to geological or anthropogenic landscape features to reveal further details of particular burial practices and people’s deeper relationship to their physical and spiritual environment. Based on the composition of the 22 surveyed burial grounds including altogether 177 jar burials, the

cemeteries were divided into two groups: 1) single and 2) multi-component cemeteries. Single component burial grounds contained only dragon jar depositions, while in multi-component cemeteries dragon jars were placed in association with geological formations such as waterways, rock-outcrops or deposited on ridge-tops, or were installed related to anthropogenic landscape features like megalithic monuments, standing stones or ditch-cuttings – with links to the mythical past and Kelabit secondary burial rituals. The distributional and compositional analysis of burial grounds outlined three types of jar-deposition practice in the Kelabit highlands: 1) ancestral, 2) commemorative and 3) communal cemeteries. The interpretation of jar burials within these three cemetery-categories provided answers to the research questions concerned with the vessels' roles in funerary settings, opening with:

- Upon their arrival to the Kelabit highlands how were jars perceived and incorporated into a non-European, pre-colonial indigenous mortuary environment?

The archaeological evidence suggests that dragon jars in the Kelabit highlands began to appear in mortuary contexts around the 17th-18th century in multi-component cemeteries associated with rock-outcrops and megalithic monuments. The practice of jar depositions at these sites were preceded by a period of megalith-building activity around 1500 CE, and the deposition of smaller, Zhangzhou-type vessels dating from the mid-16th century. The gradual influx of foreign export wares correlates with the increased presence of rice in the palaeoecological record – dating again – from around 1500 CE, which could be read as an indicator for communal feasting (surplus of rice) while luxury tradeware ceramics could be interpreted as material indices of growing social inequality. It would be tempting to visualise a continuity between the megalithic tradition and the use of stone jars (*batu nawi*) as secondary burial containers and burials placed in stoneware dragon jars at the same locations, but archaeological evidence is still too thin on the ground to draw a direct chronological link between these mortuary practices. It is so far unclear, how and why jar deposition practice commenced in the Kelabit highlands in the first place, but it is perhaps not too farfetched to assume that global events marked by the increasing European presence in Southeast Asia, the intensification of global trade including the Americas, the collapse of the Ming regime and the economic crisis in Europe at the time all contributed to a shift of balance, engendering social and economic changes even in the remote parts of Borneo which could have manifested in the beginnings of the jar-burial tradition in the late 17th- early 18th century. However, the location of cemeteries in the landscape, ancestral burial grounds in particular, threw new light on the relationship between the Kelabit people and their physical and spiritual environments in the past which relates to the second question posed at the start of the thesis:

- How were dragon jar burials deposited in relation to the landscape and how did this change with the solidification of colonial rule?

Before the adoption of Christianity, the Kelabit universe was ‘animated’ by the ever-present life-force or *lalud*; a concept widely known as *sěmangat* across Southeast Asia (Chapter 2). Rocks, megalithic monuments and mountain-ridges were believed to be locations where *lalud* pooled and solidified in the landscape (Janowski 2016). These locations had often been associated with burial depositions, where, I would suggest, the presence of *lalud* could have been a ‘pull-factor’, acting as a kind of conductor for the transition of departed souls into the afterlife. The manipulation of stone was believed to require high levels of *lalud*, thus the construction of megalithic monuments were thought to have been carried out by Kelabit culture heroes sometime in the mythical past (Janowski 2014a, 2016). Prior to Christianity, Kelabit chiefs and (male) members of the upper-classes were also associated with increased spiritual potency, which manifested through strong leadership skills, the acquisition of prestige items and heads, and the channelling of *lalud* by the creation of landmarks (following in the footsteps of mythical heroes). Ancestral burial grounds appear to represent funerary depositions with the deepest history in the Kelabit highlands, and as I argued, served as physical and spiritual focal points in the landscape for communities who changed location in regular intervals. In this way burial depositions at ancestral burial cemeteries with rock-outcrops and megalithic monuments created a pool of ancestors, anchoring these communities and family lineages to certain locations in the physical (and spiritual) environment and by this, legitimised their claims over land.

At this point I would like to reiterate an important detail: dragon jar depositions represent the mortuary practices of the Kelabit elite (so far the burials of the lower-classes remain invisible in the archaeological record). Commemorative and communal burial grounds however, exemplify a change in burial practice which, based upon the typo-chronology of the jar assemblage from these sites, took place in the late 19th- early 20th century, at the beginning of the colonial era. Single component or communal burial grounds were homogenous in their composition and only contained dragon jar burials which dated dominantly to the 19th-20th centuries. I would argue that the influx of recent jars signalled the intensification of trade and reflected a shift to the new, monetary-based economy as the influence of the colonial administration solidified in the region. The diversified economy provided fresh social opportunities, facilitating the emergence of a new Kelabit ‘middle class’ whom held it important to express their distinct social identities by burying their dead at separate locations from ancestral cemeteries. In these newly established, communal cemeteries people were buried in jars of recent makes – most

probably the products of immigrant Sarawakian Chinese workshops that flooded the market in the late 1800s.

At the turn of the last century as the presence of colonial administration increased and headhunting declined in the region, the conditions for both short and long distance trade improved, as discussed in detail in Chapter 7. By the time stoneware ceramics became widely available at coastal markets, the number of trading missions using overland routes and waterways were on the rise, resulting in an influx of recently made jars in the Kelabit highlands. The majority of newly acquired vessels reached the highlands through the key trade-routes running along the north-western territories; a phenomenon clearly reflected by the number and distribution of recent burial jars in communal cemeteries in the northern region. Thus, in terms of understanding the trajectories along which jars reached the Kelabit highlands, it is clear from combined the archaeological evidence with a close reading of historical account that, at least during the late 19th – early 20th century the distribution of dragon jars was indeed affected by access to trade routes.

I further argued in Chapter 5 that the socio-economic changes induced by the Brooke's rule in Sarawak in the late 1800s resulted in increased competition between the elites and the nouveau riche of the Kelabit society. One arena where such competition was played out was in the mortuary context, with the elite guarding its entitlement to secondary burial ceremonies including the creation of commemorative landmarks and lavish *borak ate'* feasts – a practice which had historical and ethnographic parallels documented among the Berawan (Metcalf 1997, 2010). From this interpretation I would conclude that burials associated with ditch-cuttings and standing stones, or placed on mountain ridges, represent prominent members of the old elite, who were commemorated by the creation of land-marks and by distinguished depositions. Commemorative burials reflected a certain regionality: burials in the northern highlands were deposited on ridge-tops while in the southern territories were placed near ditch-cuttings or standing stones. The regionality could be explained either by different external cultural influences or by more localised expressions of individuality. The other important detail regarding commemorative burials is the choice of burial container. It is difficult to ascertain along what criteria burial jars were chosen in the past, but it is apparent that old jars dating to the 17th-18th century dominate in commemorative depositions, which I argued was a conscious strategy of the old elite to set themselves apart from the up and coming Kelabit 'middle class'. It is highly likely that these jars were already a couple of centuries old by the time they were incorporated into burials, and likely to have possessed rich biographies closely intertwined with the owner (and his/her lineage), who was eventually deposited in them. This brings us to

consider the question of jar preference among the Kelabit, which I posed in the opening chapter as:

- Could other factors, e.g. aesthetic preference, or the jar's own particular history or age have played a role in their selection for burial?

From the perspective of commemorative burials it is most possible that the age and history of the jar *did* play a significant role in its selection as burial container. However, I also drew attention to a trend reflected in recently established communal burial grounds which showed the unmistakeable preference for Type 1 jars as burial containers – representing over 50% of jars used in funerary contexts.

Chapter 6 explored the 'domestic stage' of jar-journeys and investigated dragon jars in the context of longhouses and modern town homes through a series of ethnographic interviews. The 29 semi-structured interviews were conducted using a broad questionnaire, which made the content of the discussions comparable. Besides the interviews, typological information was also collected on the jars themselves. It needs to be underscored here, that the chronological dating of jars recorded in ethnographic settings remains uncertain, since over half of the vessels currently stand without typological analogues either in the literature or in museum collections. However, using this material to explore further the jars' domestic use brings additional insights on the question:

- Upon their arrival to the Kelabit highlands how were jars perceived and incorporated into a non-European, pre-colonial indigenous social environment?

It is still unclear when exactly stoneware jars reached the Kelabit highlands, however given that Tang dynasty *gusi* jars had been widely recognised across Borneo as the most ancient and valuable of jar varieties, the implications are, that stoneware jars were held in high esteem since their first arrival on the island. *Gusi* jars until recently had still been treasured as heirloom pieces by longhouse communities of the highland region (White 1955; Harrison, T. 1955b, 1967). Thereafter archaeological evidence shows an increase in jars in mortuary contexts from the 17th-18th century onwards, a date which could correspond with the intensification of rice agriculture in central Borneo, implying the utilisation of stoneware jars as rice wine containers from this period onwards.

- How did the Kelabit classify jars?

Kelabit oral histories indicate the existence of a number of jar varieties in the past, however today only the three main jar-categories can be remembered: *belanai ma'on* (ancient, valuable jars), *belanai abai* ('Malay' jars) and *belanai meching* ('new arrivals'). *Ma'on* jars were described as dark coloured jars with protruding dragon design, while *mechings* are recalled to be coated with light coloured glaze and embellished with 'less visible' dragons. The *abai* jars represented the fuzziest of jar categories, as the term was likely to refer to the Malay middlemen trading jars rather than an exact vessel type.

- How did the Kelabit evaluation of jars correspond with the broader ethnographic utilisation of these vessels across Borneo?

Ceramicist and colonial literature testifies that different ethnic groups preferred different jar-types, producing a fair amount of regionality in the preference of certain jar varieties. So far, the heavily-potted, olive-glazed *gusi* represents the only jar category recognised as ancient and valuable by all ethnic groups in Borneo. Other varieties, like the *brahan* and the *belanga* were more likely to have signified the antiquity of jars rather than the association with a particular type: *belanga* jars among the Ngaju Dayak in the 1800s referred to very different varieties than *belanga* jars in Kalimantan in the early 1900s. *Rusa* and *ningka* jars were traditionally regarded as of slightly lesser value, which could have had some relation to their design, as most of these jars were decorated with incised motifs (as opposed to the dragon design dominating on *brahans* and *belangas*). Nevertheless, *rusas* and *ningkas* were valued among Borneans, including the Kelabit who also hold certain types of *sgraffito* jars in high esteem. The general utilisation of jars were the same as among the Kelabit: storing rice wine, signifying status and enshrining human remains, however colonial records and ethnographies indicate that jars were frequently involved in fertility (Evans 1990 [1922]; Harrison and Harrison 1971) and healing rituals too (Kaboy and Moore 1967).

- Did material properties enjoy primacy during jar-evaluation processes or was the object's biography an important factor as well?

The detailed analysis of jars' physical properties identified a number of characteristics which the Kelabit regarded as determinates of the jars' age and value. Vessels with dark glazes, pronounced dragons, outcurving or folded rims and red clay bodies were valued especially high. A few exceptions, however, hint that the definition of valued jars hinged on more than simply their style of decoration or overall physical appearance, and points towards jars biographies being key contributing factors in local jar-evaluation schemes (see below).

- Does the perceived age and local economic 'value' of jars correlate with their chronological antiquity?

When the ethnographic data collected from the highlands is contrasted with the ceramicist literature it can be concluded that (despite the uncertainties of dating) the three main Kelabit jar-categories did indeed reflect the jars' chronological age fairly accurately. This was further supported by Eine Moore's observation of her Kelabit assistant, Lian Labang, at the Sarawak Museum, who could arrange jars 'unerringly according to date [...] without knowing anything about the clay, glaze or the making of pots' (Moore 1970:2). Local jar-evaluation schemes which relied heavily on the materiality and physical properties of vessels assumes the existence of indigenous connoisseurship (O'Connor 1983), which was most probably administered and managed by the gatekeepers of jar-knowledge (perhaps in the pattern of being well-versed in customary laws?). Indigenous connoisseurship is likely to have been restricted to members of the elite who owned jars of high value themselves and had a vested interest in keeping ancient jars within their social circles.

- How did the spiritual roles of jars change with the adoption of Christianity and how are these vessels perceived today?

With the adoption of Christianity, jars became uncomfortable reminders of pagan practices and social distinctions of the past. The analysis of repair on jars revealed that present Christian perceptions manifested in 'cleansing' performances (such as in chipping the lip of jars) which proved to be retrospectively informative of jars' efficacy prior to Christianity. Intentionally damaged jars were often said to have expressed human-like behaviour which was accounted to the spirit(s) residing in the vessel. The 'chipping' practice was also employed as a precaution by inheritors of old jars or jars with a dragon design, which today is regarded overwhelmingly as a 'demonic symbol'. Jars which belonged to known leaders, acquired as war booty or as compensation were the first to be destroyed, sold or donated to the Sarawak Museum during the Bario Revival. Today, jars are perceived as ambiguous and often dangerous objects. My investigations into jars' visibility and display practices concluded that jars in traditional longhouses are still being kept hidden as a consideration towards the rest of the religious community, while in private homes and homestays jars were employed more freely as expressions of family heritage, ethnic identity and also as an (overt) religious stance.

Chapter 7 contextualised the jar-journeys by unpicking jars' roles as trade items, containers used during communal feasts and as spiritually charged objects. These aspects of jar journeys

took place during the turbulent era of the past 200 years; marked by the transition from pre-colonialist to colonialist rule, World War II, the Confrontation between Malaysia and Indonesia, and more importantly from the jars' perspective: the adoption of Christianity. In this chapter I relied heavily upon colonial records and historical accounts; pieces of scholarship often overlooked in the process of writing ethnographies.

Following a historical overview of pre-colonial trade, the chapter concluded that trading expeditions were the privilege of the upper classes (and their followers) and required the careful organisation of labour. However, for people from lower-class backgrounds such missions served as trajectories for upward social mobility. Pre-colonial trade was indirect, conducted through a series of down-the-line exchanges via a number of intermediaries at inland trading stations. Jungle produce and, more importantly, salt was bartered for handicrafts and luxury items (such as jars), but because of the indirect nature of trade, customers had very little control over the choice of products presented to them. This situation changed markedly with the Brooke's rule and the shift to monetary economy. Although certain jungle produce remained sought-after, the Kelabit began to grow tobacco and raise buffalo for cash which were later sold at government trading stations, or directly at coastal markets where (recently made) jars could be easily acquired. As the colonial administration expanded in the region, travel became safer, resulting in an influx of 'ordinary' jars at the late 19th – early 20th century. Nevertheless, the circulation of heirloom jars continued within traditional spheres of exchange and were only parted with in case of marriage, compensation or forging alliances with other members of the elite. There was no fixed value attached to jars; value depended on the actual circumstances (Harrisson, T. 1959a:27-8) and, as I showed through the analysis of jar purchases, on jars' links to powerful people, i.e. their accrued object biographies. Jars and their human counterparts were mutually constitutive of each other's biographies; an aspect which feeds into wider debates on the conceptualisation of human-object relationships (see Chapter 2: 'distributed personhood' by Gell 1998; cf. Hoskins 1998; Gosden and Marshall 1999).

The examination of jars in a social context demonstrated that in the Kelabit society ancient jars were essential paraphernalia for fulfilling leadership roles, used to convey powerful visual messages and employed as signifiers of social and economic prowess. Large social gatherings such as communal feasts provided a platform for the physical properties of jars to be experienced. During the preparation process jars were handled and transported multiple times, before being incorporated into lavish displays along longhouse walls, where they could be viewed, touched, heard, and ultimately to be engaged with while in an altered state of consciousness. Communal gatherings also served as arenas for social interactions involving jar

exchanges: marriage proposals, lending and borrowing jars, or settling debts; a complex set of negotiations which Arjun Appadurai referred to as 'tournaments of value' (1986:21).

In the final section of Chapter 7, the efficacy of jars was interrogated through a spiritual lens. I argued that jars materiality and the resemblance of their materiality to stone made them embodiments, or mediators, of *lalud*, which then was thought to be channelled and utilised by the jar's owner. The materiality of stoneware jars furthermore represented a level of craftsmanship which was unknown to the Kelabit (and to Bornean indigenous groups in general), thus could have appeared 'magical' or as a 'product of a deity' as it is recalled in Malay origin-myths (Harrisson, B. 1990 [1986]:23-5, cf. Gell's 'technology of enchantment', 1992). The production of jars in China being so far removed from the sphere of consumption in Borneo could have been a further contributing factor in the conceptualisation of stoneware ceramics as of 'transcendental' origin; resonating well with Appadurai's argument on 'Knowledge and commodities' (1986:41-56). I would suggest also that the dragon imagery on jars was likely to have been significant in their popularity among the Kelabit and other Bornean communities, based on the assumption that a dragon-like creature already existed in the Kelabit spiritual pantheon (water spirit and the spirit crocodile). The discussion on past Kelabit beliefs of jar spirits highlighted the ambiguity between *spirits of jars* and *spirits in jars* (a distinction which I will return to below), while providing an explanation to current jar-exorcism and 'cleansing' practices. Thus, based on the examination of trade, feasting and spirituality I concluded that the imagery, the age, the efficacy and the jars' materiality (along with their undetachable social roles and function as ceramic vessels) form part-and-parcel of their popularity in the past, and their negative perception in the context of present-day Christian worldviews.

8.2 Contributions to broader debates on material culture theories

Before embarking on a more theoretically angled discussion concerning the key research questions of the thesis, I would like to briefly draw attention to the significance of the interdisciplinary methodology employed by this study. As discussed in the opening chapter, in the region of Southeast Asia and the Pacific the intellectual dialogue between archaeology and (social and cultural) anthropology has not been without its hurdles. The archaeologist, Peter Bellwood's 'Austronesian Dispersal Model' (1985) has rightly been criticised for drawing an equation between the past and the present by projecting contemporary Southeast Asian ethnographic examples back onto the lifeways of prehistoric communities. Anthropologists were not much better in their interpretations either; in search of the 'exotic' 'Other', the impact

of colonialism was often downplayed or overlooked completely (Gosden 1999:100-105). In contrast, however, Jack Golson's work combining historical ethnography and archaeology showed the potential of multidisciplinary approaches, proposing that the institution of the Sahlinsian 'bigmen' in the highlands of New Guinea had likely been the product of the colonial encounter (Golson 1982, cf. Bayliss-Smith *et al.* 2005). In recent years, the debate between Matthew Spriggs (2008) and Paul Roscoe (2009) further highlighted the issue of disciplinary approaches in questioning the relevance of European prehistoric reconstructions based on Melanesian examples (e.g. Tilley 1996; Fowler 2004, etc.).

From the island of Borneo there is so far only a single ethnographic study which considered historical sources and the impact of colonialism within its remit (Metcalf 2010). The present thesis therefore is the first of its kind to combine the methodologies of archaeology and anthropology with the close reading of the colonial literature. Without the archaeological surveys the shift in burial practice reflecting the social transformation that took place in the late 1800s would have remained invisible. Local jar-assessment schemes aiding the classification and evaluation of jars would have remained hidden, along with the close constitutive relationship between prestige objects and their owners (including jar-exorcisms) without the illuminating effect of ethnographic interviews. The colonial literature further nuanced the relationship between the 'remote' Kelabit highlands and coastal areas while highlighting the impact colonialism on traditional systems of exchange and social hierarchy. In sum, by employing an interdisciplinary approach, this thesis has been able to paint a more refined portrait of dragon jars and material culture in general in the Kelabit highlands that would have been impossible by approaching the assemblage from a single-disciplinary perspective.

To now return to the two key research questions posed at the beginning of this thesis:

- How did indigenous (Kelabit) agency affect the production and distribution of dragon jars?
- Do the Kelabit recognise the agency of objects, or does the agency of jars arise from the relationship with their human counterparts?

Unfortunately, the evidence considered by the thesis was not fine-grained enough to account for *Kelabit agency* in the present Southeast Asian ceramic dataset as a whole. However, upon closer inspection there are certain trends visible, both in the published ceramic literature and in the archaeological record, which could in fact be regarded as evidence for *indigenous agency*. As I pointed out in Chapter 3, as early as the 13th-14th century direct contact between Chinese

workshops and local markets in Southeast Asia could have resulted in the manufacture of specially tailored ceramics embellished with dragons which aimed to appeal to indigenous tastes. The distribution of the *tiluan* and *bazazan* type jars in the region of north Borneo and the Philippines may also indicate vessels produced explicitly for indigenous, local consumption. From the perspective of the Kelabit highlands, it is difficult to pin down any sign of local agency in terms of the selection and consumption of jars prior to colonialism. The majority of items at this time were firmly entangled in social relationships or down-the-line exchange networks, within which jars went through the hands of a number of intermediaries, leaving little choice to the 'customer' over selection. While accumulated object biographies played a key role in these rare jar-transactions, the situation changed dramatically with the shift to monetary economy during the colonial era. Historical, economic and social transformations enabled a wider strata of the Kelabit society to participate in the acquisition and trade of dragon jars, and provided better control over selection processes taking place directly at coastal markets. This trend is evident in dragon jar depositions dating to the 19th-20th centuries in the Kelabit highlands (including the ethnographic assemblage as well to a certain extent) where Type 1 jars clearly dominated. Therefore, I would suggest that this is indeed evidence for *a particular Kelabit taste in jars*, a 'dragon jar template' which existed prior to colonialism, and later guided the purchases of the nouveau riche.

Finding an answer to the second question is slightly more difficult. The thesis repeatedly underscored the fragmented and retrospective (re)construction of Kelabit animism and ritual practices of the past. Most of these narratives were produced by devout Christian Kelabit ethnographers, reliant on a handful of elderly informants whose experiences had been coloured strongly by Christian worship, therefore such portrayals ought to be handled with caution and cannot be projected back into the deep past. This makes all definitions of jars' agency largely hypothetical, nevertheless it draws into focus a couple of aspects of Kelabit material culture which are worth outlining. At this point I would like to reach back to the topic of jar spirits discussed in Chapter 7. As described, the majority of my informants hold the belief that some jars had a sovereign *ada' belanai* – jar spirit living/residing in the vessel, animating its materiality; the premise of object-animism, referred to by Peter Pels as the '*spirit in matter*' (1998:91). However, as it was indicated before, there has been a certain amount of ambiguity involved with the conceptualisation of jar spirits, which is evident through the description of jars being able to shape-shift, appear in dreams, eat food and pass urine, implying that this 'behaviour' originates from the 'corporeality of the jar' as Pels termed it '*spirit of matter*' (1998:91); the underlying concept of fetishism. I have grappled with this dilemma throughout

my fieldwork and the process of writing this thesis, especially in the light of the Kelabit understanding of the *lalud* life force, which had been described to take physical form and, as Janowski suggested, has the ability to acquire consciousness (2016).

So, where is power (or the animacy of objects) located? More importantly, is this question relevant from the Kelabit perspective? We do not know whether jars were considered as *sacralia* in the past, or if they were involved in any kind of ritual practice (apart from the 'curation' of jars by their owners – an example of relational agency), but if they were, it is likely that the intricacies of spirit 'manipulation' were not revealed to members of the wider community, but stayed within the realms of safeguarded shamanistic-knowledge. Furthermore, as Webb Keane pointed out, there is an ever present ambiguity, or slippage, between the animistic or fetishist conceptualisation of powerful objects stemming from the materiality of artefacts and the invisibility of transcendental beings (Keane 1998:18-9). Thus, for some people jars could have been understood as 'shells' for the spirit which expressed its own agency (demonstrated by abandoning its residence upon damage to its 'home'), while others could have conceived jars as the embodiment of spirits or solidified power itself (which by chipping could be extinguished altogether); or in fact jars could have been perceived as both, given the fluid boundaries between objects, people and spirits.

Nevertheless, the fluid Kelabit animistic worldview took a 'Cartesian turn' with the adoption of Christianity, manifesting in the destruction of 'charms' and 'fetishes' overseen by BEM missionaries. By this move the mutually constitutive and intricate web of relationships within the animistic cosmos was severed, and the manipulation, mediation and manifestation of *lalud* by, through and in, people, landscapes and objects, was realigned into a single, vertical (and hierarchical) relationship with God. Although, as Janowski suggested, the Kelabit did have a series of 'othering' strategies in the past to distinguish themselves from the rest of the cosmos, the newly adopted BEM Christian framework advocated for a complete rupture from pagan practices and the reconfiguration of the Kelabit spiritual universe.

To a certain degree, Kelabit Christianity lends itself to be interpreted in broadly syncretistic terms, within which a straight forward parallel could be drawn between the manipulations of *lalud* and the reception of divine gifts through prayer (Janowski 2016). However, based on Joel Robbins' work (2004a-b, 2007), I propose that this interpretation misses the point of how the Kelabit experience religious rupture on a day-to-day basis. Pentecostalism encourages a break from the past and the reinvention of one's self as a Christian individual, with the promise of participation in global economic and spiritual networks. Being modern today is equated with

being a Christian, and Kelabit Christianity is largely conceptualised through rupture, declaring all aspects of life prior to conversion as sinful and evil. This new framing of religious (and ethnic) identity is continuing to cause a fair amount of distress to of my informants, who find it difficult to accept that all their loved ones, relatives and forefathers are now eternally damned because they passed away before embracing the Holy Spirit. This indiscriminate reinterpretation of animistic spirits, and the objects associated with them as evil, provides an explanation for present negative attitudes towards dragon jars. New religious circumstances on the other hand, afforded the Kelabit with fresh ways to experience commensality: through the re-sacralisation and the re-creation of their bonds to the landscape (Amster 2003b, 2009, 2016), and through the reinvented tradition of name-changing ceremonies which came to replace boisterous feasting events (Amster 1998; Janowski 2011).

At this point I would like to return to the questions posed above: ‘where is power (or the animacy of objects) located?’ As it transpired from my interviews, the ambiguous character of jars remains unchanged today: what jars ‘do’ can be described in both animistic and fetishist terms. The crucial point here is whether this question is relevant from the Kelabit perspective: I would suggest it is not. Jars did powerful things or enabled events to happen in the past, so do they in the present, only under a different pretext. The majority of the Kelabit continue to perceive these objects to be efficacious, artefacts which have (negative) agency (i.e. irreducible entities – Chua 2012c:123), but being Christian converts, modern day Kelabit are not interested in the ‘how’, only in the ways to counteract the ‘what’, i.e. the spiritual danger these objects are able to generate.⁶³ It is easy to see how this attitude could be read from a Western viewpoint as religious supernaturalism resembling broader conceptualisations of power such as *sěmangat*, *sakti* and *dualat* in Southeast Asia (Anderson 1972), being more aligned with animism than with Christianity.⁶⁴ However, at this point I would like to reiterate Jon Bialecki and his collaborates call for moving away from regarding Christian converts as ‘disappointing subalterns’ and start taking their narratives seriously (Bialecki *et al.* 2008). A sentiment which chimes with Amiria Henare and her colleagues’ imperative proposed within the framework of ‘Thinking Trough Things’ (2007) – whereby, paying close attention to objects while privileging the conceptions and accounts of informants weighs crucially in formulating an anthropological interpretation of

⁶³ Martin Holbraad drew attention to a similar scenario among the Cuban Ifá diviners, where ‘powder is [equalled to the concept of] power’ (2007).

⁶⁴ It is further intriguing that despite Pentecostalism which regards even Christian religious paraphernalia as ‘fetishes’ (crosses, rosaries, communion wafers), it encourages – in many respects – a more ‘animistic’ reading of the Scriptures, culminating in spiritual warfare, which perhaps positions aspects of Pentecostal worship closer to past pagan beliefs than to ‘mainstream’ expressions of Christian devotion.

objects and subjects – something which I myself considered important during the process of writing this thesis.

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