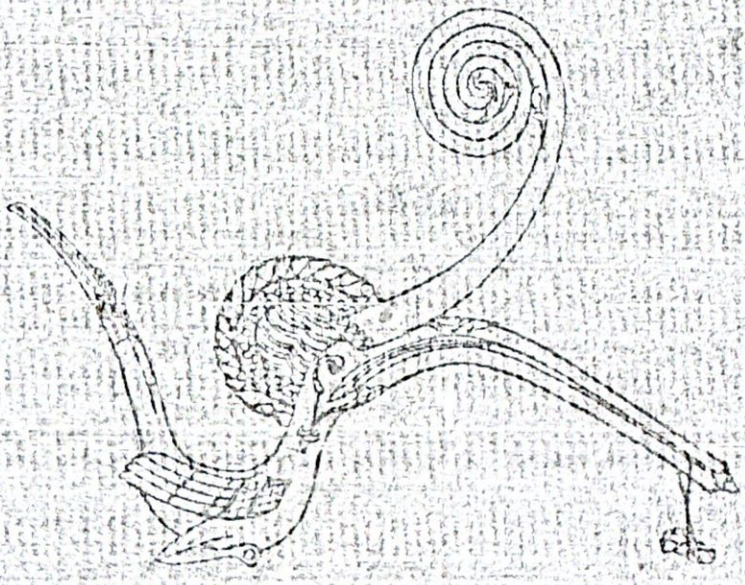
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Vol. XXIV No. 45 (New Series)

THE SARAWAK MUSEUM JOURNAL



ISSUED BY THE MUSEUM, KUCHING, SARAWAK

JULY : DECEMBER : 1976

Form and Function of Punan Bah Ethno-historical Tradition*

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Introduction

The exploration of the historical background of the many ethnic groups and the investigation of the socio-cultural dynamics that have resulted in the present plural society, are key issues in social science in Borneo today. For quite some time efforts have been made to entangle the history of a great many groups, and to systematize the existing knowledge of their cultural and linguistic affinities and their structural characteristics. In Sarawak the attention has focussed on the Land-Dayak, Iban, Malay, and on major inland groups like the Kayan and Kenyah. Historical material as well as more recent studies are available on these groups. However, a striking feature of the society of Sarawak is the great number of minor ethnic groups that form pieces of the social jig-saw puzzle. So far these groups have not received the same amount of attention, and very little in general has been published on them. This is definitely true of the groups living mainly on the Rajang River classified by Leach as Kajang, i.e. the Sekapan, Kejaman, Lahanan, Punan Bah, Sipeng, and Bamali (Leach, 1950, p.55). But it applies as much to other small groups living along this river like the Sihan, Ukit, Tanjong, and the Bukitan, and to some minor groups elsewhere in Sarawak.

The object of the present paper is to fill part of this gap by presenting an ethno-historical account of one of these tiny groups, the Punan Bah. An attempt is made to link the Punan Bah oral tradition with other sources on the history of this group, in order to provide some insight into the socio-cultural dynamics in central parts of Sarawak. The role played by the ethno-historical tradition and its interrelationship with the ethnic identity of the Punan Bah is investigated. I am here arguing, on basis of the Punan Bah example, that ethno-history is to be analysed not only as history providing us with some of the prerequisites for an understanding of present-day societies. Ethno-history serves in addition as an important factor for the maintenance of ethnic identity, and it is used in the struggle for the

*I owe my sincere thanks to the Government of Sarawak, the Sarawak Museum, and the Punan Bah especially the longhouse of Tua Rumah Kupa Kayan.

preservation of economic and political rights. These functions are has to be taken into consideration when evaluating the tradition as a historical account.

The people[1]

The Punan Bah is one of the minor ethnic groups of Sarawak. Their total number is about 1,430 persons, some of whom live in the Seventh Division, others in the Fourth Division. Their name stems from the two rivers along the banks of which they traditionally made their living. They do have other names as well, Mikuang Bungulan or simply Mikuang and Aveang Buan. But these terms are only used ritually these days. They form one cultural group, although they display some variation regarding the subsistence system due to different ecological adaptations. The Punan Bah base their living on a mixed economy. Swidden-agriculture with hill padi as the main crop, supplemented by a range of tropical plants such as maniok, taro, sugar cane, tobacco, etc.—and the collection of sago—secure their basic foodstuff. Hunting, especially wild pigs, fishing, and the gathering of fruits and wild plants are other important factors in their economy. Cash is earned by collecting jungle products and cutting timber, and quite recently also by selling fish and wild pigs to Chinese buyers. Rubber-and-pepper-gardens are planted, but they are of minor importance. The Punan Bah are skilled in erecting magnificent huge timber constructions as focal points of their social life. The longhouses are divided into several rooms, usually inhabited by extended families. The Punan Bah is a class society comprising the *lajar* or aristocrats, the *panyin* or ordinary Punan Bah, and the *lipien* or slaves. The latter are, however, not found as a distinct class today. Residence is predominantly matrilocal for ordinary Punan Bah, so often the families comprise a number of sisters with husbands and offspring. The kinship system is cognatic with systems of terminology of the Eskimo type for the terms of address and of the Hawaii type for terms of reference. The Punan Bah adhere to the Bungan religion.

Older sources are generally uninformative on the Punan Bah. We have no detailed account of the group, nor any description of their society or history. They are mentioned in passing by administrative officers and reported on briefly in the *Sarawak Gazette*, but the information is most scarce and at times even confusing, the reason being that the Punan Bah have been mixed up with the nomadic Punan and Penan. The misunderstanding was cleared up and some systematic information made available only when Edmund Leach and Rodney Needham published their writings (Leach 1950, Needham 1955).[2] Hence the only coherent account we have of the Punan Bah history is their own oral tradition, and we shall make this our starting point.

Furthermore we shall limit ourselves to those aspects of the tradition which are concerned with the origin and dispersal of the group.

The Punan Bah consider themselves one ethnic group sharing a common language, common traditions, and a common origin. They possess a distinct notion of a traditional territory, and they locate the group's territory unanimously to the parts of the Seventh Division where some of them live today. More specifically, they believe that their original homeland is the upper Bah River, a tributary of the Rajang. This is the place where their history began. The Punan Bah society is, as already mentioned, a stratified society, a fact that has determined the type of historical traditions that have been preserved. Just as most of the history of the European Middle Ages is linked to and mainly concerned with the various ruling monarchs, so are the historical and the mythical traditions of the Punan Bah closely connected to the ruling aristocrats. By establishing a line of succession of the aristocrats, the Punan Bah trace their history back in time to a primary origin. The succession line becomes so to speak the backbone of their understanding not only of their history as an ethnic group, but also as we shall see of the origin of their territory. The aristocratic genealogy serves as a measurement of time, and all historical events have to be tied in with it, in order to be placed in time. The genealogy of the ruling class can be traced back about 12 generations to the very first ancestor by the name of *Bua*. This is where history so to speak begins, this is the very time of the creation of the Punan Bah themselves and of their territory.

The Punan Bah ethno-historical tradition

The origin of the Punan Bah

According to Punan Bah traditions Bua came from the Sekapan area where he was married to *Lapan*, or *Jali* as the Puan Bah call her. Bua was an *etun oa*, that is a supernatural being, and gifted with special powers. Once upon a time he arrived in the Bah area, and here he created the Bah River and the Punan Bah people.[3] Bua then left the area for some time, only to find upon his return that people were quarreling and fighting. Consequently he gave up his initial intention of creating more Punan Bah people. He fled the country never to return, but in his haste he left his quiver behind. The quiver has turned into a stone and is still to be seen up the Bah River. Another stone bears the imprint of his posteriors, proving to the Punan Bah that Bua was once resting here.

Bua had two children, *Tadou* and *Taga*, through whom the Punan Bah trace their descent (see diagram 1). They and their close descendants were all etun ca, but in successive generations the supernatural powers faded away. *Balauan* and *Yuan Mikuang*, for example, had already lost much of their supernatural capacities, and later generations had no such powers.

Though apparently this descent line tells the story of the aristocrats only, it is in Punan Bah opinion the story of their society in general. The Punan Bah believe that they all are descendants of Bua. Those who achieved chieftainship and a few others are the only ones to be remembered today, but they all stem from the same root. Ordinary Punan Bah, or ÷ *panyin*, are descendants of Bua, and so are the slaves, *lipien*.

According to the myth the Punan Bah were thus created at the lower Bah River. But Bua's great-grandson, *Aviang Yabu*, moved up the river with all his followers and settled at the Sematai-Bah Junction.

There are no precise memories about the number of settlements in this early phase of Punan Bah history.[4] The number of longhouses generally agreed upon are the following: the longhouse of *Kavu Oko* at Sungei Sematai, the long house of *Pajou at* Sungei Ayo, the longhouse of *Kavo Oka* at Sungei Punan, the longhouse of *Gele* at Sungai Punan, the longhouse of *Geleang* at Sungei Punan, the longhouse of *Beang* at Sungei Sematai, and the longhouse of *Seriang* at Sungei Sematai.

The first dispersal

The tradition states that due to internal fights the Punan Bah eventually left the Upper-Bah region. The splitting up of the group is contained in a favourite myth, the story of the fight between two brothers—the above-mentioned Kavu Oko and Kavu Oka—over a beautiful girl and name of *Oro Saka*. Though the fight escalated to a point where it threatened the very existence of Punan Bah society, reconciliation at first proved futile. The fight made a number of Punan Bah take flight in all directions. Some went to the Baram, some to the Mahakkam, and some to the Kapuas rivers. The strife was not put to an end until a cousin of the two brothers, named *Payou*, eliminated the very object of quarrel. Payou looked up Oro Saka one day she was busy trampling sago, and killed her with a poisoned arrow from his blow-pipe. The Punan Bah then agreed to make peace, and they all swore to this on a holy piece of wood-carving (see plate 1) and on the tail of a dog, swearing on dogs being the most powerful of all oaths of the Punan Bah. Upon peace-making Kavu Oko's son

Salaui decided to move down the Bah River to settle at the Bah-Rajang Junction. The longhouses which had remained in spite of the fight moved downriver, too, except for the longhouse of Payou. We shall later return to the myths regarding the expansions of the Punan Bah, to see to what extent the information can be enlighted and further confirmed. But first we shall pursue Punan Bah tradition on their own ethnohistory.

At the time when most of the Punan Bah moved to the Bah-Rajang Junction, the Rajang River was fairly sparsely populated. Neighbours were quite far away, the Sekapans lived upstreams approximately where they live today, i.e. very close to the Belaga Bazaar, and downstreams the Punan Bah had to paddle as far as to the Kapit area to meet the Tanjong people. The frontiers were the Bungan Rapids between the Punan Bah and the Sekapan, and the Pelagus Rapids which constituted an almost insurpassable barrier between the Punan Bah and the Tanjong. The Punan Bah have continued to see themsevles as the lawful holders of the area between these rapids.

The Punan Bah themselves were limited in number due to the previous fights. Traditions on the initial settlement at the Rajang are few, but the following longhouses are said to have existed:

(1) The longhouse of Kavu Oko, the stem of which is the lower longhouse at Long Bah or the people Rumah Kupa of today. Another part split off and is now called the Punan Sama.

(2) The longhouse of *Keruang* which was disseminated to about 5 rooms two generations ago. Three of the rooms joined the Punan Sama, and the remaining amalgamated with the Punan Biau.

(3) The longhouse of *Lumiang*. Once situated at Long Bah, the whole longhouse moved downriver to Kanowit and mixed with the people there. This happened while Bapai was chief of the Punan Sama (see diagram 1).

(4) The longhouse of Saran. At Saran's death there was no-one to take the leadership, and the longhouse amalgamated with the Punan Sama while the latter were staying at the Keruang River. *Jiui* was then head of the Punan Sama.

(5) The longhouse of *Jaua*. Traditions of this longhouse are few. There seems to have been no slaves, and at the death of Jaua the longhouse joined the lower longhouse at Long Bah. This happened at the time when Salaui was headman at Long Bah.

(6) The longhouse of *Luyu*, which amalgamated with the Punan Biau at the turn of this century.

(7) The longhouse of the Punan Biau. The knowledge of the origin of this longhouse is lost, as are the names of its first rulers.

No sooner had the Punan Bah settled down and built new longhouses at the Bah-Rajang Junction, when expansive Kayan groups invaded their territory. The Kayan came down the Balleh River, then turned up the Rajang. According to some traditions the Kayan were later closing in on Punan Bah territory from the Upper Rajang as well, so that for some time the Punan Bah were being squeezed between different Kayan groups. Fighting broke out immediately, and stories of raids and headhunting against the Kayan in those days are numerous. According to the dominant tradition the Punan Bah fought successfully, and peace was established. The famous Kayan headman, *Dian*, had to give his daughter *Usun Dian* in marriage to Salaui when accepting peace. Other daughters were married off to the Sekapan, Kejaman, and La'anan aristocrats. Over the years the Kayan left Punan Bah territory, all settling further up the Rajang.

One can have some doubt, however, as to how successful the Punan Bah really were in opposing the intruders. Some stories say that the Kayan tried to submerge the Punan Bah completely. Once the chief of the Punan Bah, *Baliang the Great*, the son of Salaui, was even, captured and detained as a hostage in the Kayan longhouse at the Pila River further down the Rajang. The Punan Bah had to sneak him out under the noses of the Kayan, carrying him off at a time when he came down the river bank unguarded to take his bath.

The Second Dispersal: Emigration to the Kakus and Kemena Rivers, Fourth Division

The Punan Kakus

The Punan Bah did not stick together for long at the Bah-Rajang Junction. Followed by their slaves and by commoners, aristocrats moved away and formed new longhouse settlements. Some went to the Kakus River under the leadership of an aristocrat named *Tigeang*. Tigeang was closely related to Salaui, some say he was a brother, others a son. Another group went as far as Pandan at the Kemena River with a son of Salaui named *Sagiang*. However, most groups did not move that far but settled just further up the Rajang.

According to Punan Bah tradition, ambition for fame was the motive for Tigeang and Sagiang to break away and form their own longhouses. Staying at Long Bah without a longhouse of their own

would leave them no memories as the Punan Bah put it. Moving into a new territory gave them a chance of gaining a reputation for themselves, of becoming founders of famous settlements and as such remain remembered.

On his arrival at Kakus Tigeang married a local girl, *Siki*. Some sources have it that the rationality behind this marriage was to put an end to raids and headhunting between the Punan Bah and the Tatau, others claim that it was the marriage that brought Tigeang to Kakus. Tigeang stayed at first at Long Seanyar, then moved on to the Anap River for a while, only to return to Long Seanyar again. Here his burial post or *keliriang* is still to be seen. The following years the Punan Bah had longhouses at a number of places at the Kakus River, for the last two generations constantly at the place called Long Beleong. Since Tigeang's days his longhouse has been ruled by his male descendants. However, the present chief, Biluang (Bilong) is adopted, as the direct male line ceased with Tigeang's great-grandson *Kasiang* (see diagram 1).

At the time when Tigeang arrived at the Kakus-Anap Rivers, the area was inhabited exclusively by the Tatau people, an ethnic group that is considered to be culturally related to the Punan Bah. However, the Tatau group was quite few in number. According to the tradition of the Tatau people, and recorded by the Punan Bah as well, the Tatau had been repeatedly struck by *Selid*, i.e. by supernatural sanctions due to the violation of taboos. Entire longhouses may be extirpated in this way, and this happened to some Tatau settlements. The group had also become severely diminished by small-pox epidemics, in spite of all efforts to avoid the plague.

There are different opinions regarding the size of the initial Punan Bah emigration to Kakus. Punan Bah descendants claim that quite a number of Punan Bah people went off to Kakus with Tigeang. On the other hand, descendants of the Tatau people say that only a few Punan Bah came to Kakus to begin with, but over the years Punan Bah have continuously moved from the Rajang to the Kakus because of the better economic conditions in the Kakus area. Both groups agree, however, that the Punan Bah's success in becoming culturally dominant was due only to the weak position of the Tatau.

The Punan Pandan

Also Salaui's son Sagiang broke up from the Bah-Rajang Junction. With his slaves and followers of the common class he went to the Kemena River in the Fourth Division. But according to some traditions Sagiang was not the first Punan Bah to leave for the Kemena. Some

had found it advantageous to leave the Rajang River already at an earlier date to settle at the Kemena River, as it was uninhabited. A man by the name of *Kulan* went off followed by three families. Travelling along the old trading route between the Upper Rajang and "the outer world", i.e. Brunei, he and his followers went up the Belaga River and down the Tubau until they settled at Laveang (Labang). When Kulan died his bones were placed in a keliriang here.

The Punan Bah claim as mentioned that the territory along the Kemena River was uninhabited. Only the Penan were staying in the jungle subsisting as hunters and gatherers. They were, however, urged to take up residence at the riverside, whenever the Punan Bah came into contact with them. At the beginning the Punan Bah called the Penan for Laveang, but with time, as these groups had mixed with Malay and Melanau and had taken the Islamic faith, they were called Segaan. Segaan was originally a term applied only to a Melanau group living around Bintulu. Today the term is used for all natives of the Kemena who adhere to Islam and speak the Bintulu dialect.

Some Punan Bah stayed on at Labang, and until recently 5-6 keliriang could be seen here as a testimony of their former presence. With time these Punan Bah mixed heavily with other groups and became Muslims, too. So although the Punan Bah can still trace relationships to some aristocrats living at Labang today, they do not consider them as Punan Bah any more.

Sagiang came to Labang as well, stayed for a while but left to go further down the Kemena River together with some followers. They settled finally at Pandan, and the Punan Bah have had a permanent settlement here ever since. At first it was situated at the site of the present Kedai, but already Sagiang's daughter moved to the present-day location which is opposite the Bazaar.

As Tigeang had married Siki, a local Tatau girl, so Sagiang married *Njaladai*, a Segaan girl from Bintulu, whereby peace was secured between the Punan Bah and the Segaan. At Sagiang's time the area had been under the rule of the Sultan of Brunei, and to this very day the Punan Bah remember some of the laws of this government. Head-hunting was still carried out by the Punan Bah, and during the rule of Sagiang they went raiding among the Penan as far as the Baram in order to secure both heads and slaves.

The first Punan Bah settlers were joined later by more Punan Bah from the Rajang. Sagiang's elder brother Baliang who had remained at Bah had only two daughters, *Tipuang* and *Bulan*. When their father had died they shared the longhouse between them, and Bulan, the

younger one, split off to found a new settlement of her own together with part of the Punan Bah commoners and slaves. Bulan again had only one son, *Dian*. He married Sagiang's daughter *Duloa*, and moved to Pandan followed by both Punan Bah commoners and slaves. Bulan herself divorced and joined her son with even more people. Dian succeeded Sagiang as chief of the Pandan longhouse, but upon his death there was no obvious heir, the only son of Dian and Duloa having died an infant. Duloa had a son, *Lasa*, by her first marriage to a Malay, but being a Muslim he was not acceptable to the longhouse people. Dian, too, had a son, the result of a love affair with an ordinary Punan Bah girl, but he, *Tugeang*, was unable to take over due to his descendance. After a period without any accepted leader Dian's and Duloa's elder daughter, Ubuang, took charge of the noble room. Ubuang had returned from Kakus where she had been married to *Nipa*, the ruling aristocrat of this longhouse. She married three more times but had no children of her own. An adopted sister's son, *Balasap*, became chief when he came of age, but he again died childless, and none of his adopted children have been able to take over the leadership of the longhouse. Today an old sister of his, *Liwan*, is staying quite alone in the aristocratic room formerly representing the traditional regime. For a great part of her lifetime she was married to the Kakus headman, Kasiang, but as nobody was looking after the room and the heirlooms she returned to Pandan when her husband had died. She was still alive in 1975, and most concerned about the future of the aristocratic line at Pandan and the unsolved problems of succession.

The Third Dispersal: Emigration to Sungei Jelalong
The Punan Jelalong

According to Punan Bah traditions there was still another expansion, not to mention the pendling of individuals and single families between the settlements. This expansion was sparked off by Iban raids along the Rajang. The raids took place when the members of the present old generation were children. The general insurrection made the Punan Bah move to Belaga to take refuge. The Punan Bah claim that they stayed almost ten years in the Belaga area until peace was restored by the Brookes, who finally fought the Iban in a great battle. During the years they stayed near the Belaga Fort a great many Punan Bah visited Pandan. One occasion is recalled to have been a major secondary burial at Pandan in which especially the Punan Sama people had wanted to participate. But during the visit some of them settled down to farm, and about ten families stayed on for no less than seven successive years, building a temporary longhouse at Long Kelaved. Then they decided to move up the Kemena River, and finally the

families settled by themselves far up the Sungei Jelalong, at a tributary called Ma'an. After about five years of residence here, the longhouse moved down Sungei Jelalong to Long Sebuang where it has had its place ever since. The present Tua Rumah is a middle-aged man called Adi. Adi is an adopted son of *Avit*, a Punan Bah of ordinary descent who became the first official spokesman and ritual leader of this new longhouse.

The Punan Bah at the Rajang

The Punan Bah who had remained at the Rajang stayed together at first, as we have heard, erecting their longhouses in the same neighbourhood. But when the fight with the Kayans came to an end, the Punan Bah were no longer forced to defend themselves to the same extent, and the longhouses slowly dispersed.

The Punan Sama

One longhouse that moved away was Lovo *Tepeleang*.[5] It got its name, Tepeleang, i.e. crosswise, because contrary to tradition it had been placed at right angles with the other longhouses to find room among them. It had come into existence through fission of the longhouse of Kavu Oko. Kavu Oko's elder son, Salaui, continued to rule the stem-house, while a younger son, *Bejeang*, split off with a section of the longhouse to form a separate community. Today this longhouse is ruled by *Kuleh*, a Kayan who took over from his father in law who was the great-great-grand son of Bejeang (see diagram 1). Bejeang's daughter and son-in-law moved the longhouse just across the Rajang, first to Sungei Susou and then on to the Meah-Rajang Junction, still but a few minutes of paddling from Long Bah. At Meah the longhouse stayed for quite a long time; there are keliriang erected here for the aristocrats, and it is still a common notion that the land of the Meah belongs to the Punan Tepelang should they ever return to claim it. Under Jiui's rule the Punan Tepeleang made their way further up the Rajang River, making longhouses at Sungei Keruang, Sungei Pii, Sungei Bua, and at the mouth of Sungei Boon. This last longhouse was burnt down by the Iban, and the inhabitants fled to Belaga together with the Punan of the other settlements, as we have heard. Today these Punan Bah have settled just above the Bao rapids. The longhouse is now commonly known as Punan Sama, after a former location.

The Punan Biau

Another longhouse that moved up the Rajang away from Long Bah in those days and still persists, is the longhouse of the Punan Biau. Its history is obscure. The Punan Biau longhouse is unique among the traditional Punan Bah longhouses in having no ruling aristocratic family, and it is the pervasive notion that there never were any. There

are no slaves or slave descendants at Biau either, a fact often mentioned by the Punan Bah in support of the view that the longhouse never had any aristocrats. There is an oral tradition of a certain *Ungom* and his son *Ludeang*, by some informants described as aristocrats. But Ludeang went off to Kalcus, and the Brooke administration appointed a commoner, *Gnori*, head of the longhouse. Since then a number of commoners have succeeded one another as representatives of the longhouse. Lately several families have made claims on the position as Tua Rumah. One old woman, *Sedup*, claims the position for her adopted son, arguing that she is a daughter's daughter of the deceased Ludeang (see diagram 1).

The Punan Bah at Long Bah

Only one longhouse has remained continuously to this very day close to the mouth of the Bah River, and that is the longhouse of Kavu Oko. Today it is ruled by the aristocrat *Kupa* (see diagram 1).

However, others have joined it most lately the longhouse of *Pajou*. As earlier mentioned, Pajou and his people had remained at the upper reaches of the Bah River, more precisely at the Sungei Ajo. But during the rule of Jelaiang they eventually decided to move to the mouth of the Bah River. They did not stay here for long, however, but continued down the Rajang River to a place somewhat beyond Nanga Merit. Later they moved upriver again and built a longhouse at a place just above the Bikiei Rapids, then one opposite Long Bah on the left bank of the Rajang River. Finally they constructed their longhouse at Long Bah just above Kavu Oko's. *Tilip* was then the ruling aristocrat, but he had no male heir, only three daughters, and this is one of the reasons why the longhouse lost its political independence when Tilip died. Today the longhouse is ruled by Kupa, although one of Tilip's daughters as well as other descendants of his are still alive (see diagram 2).

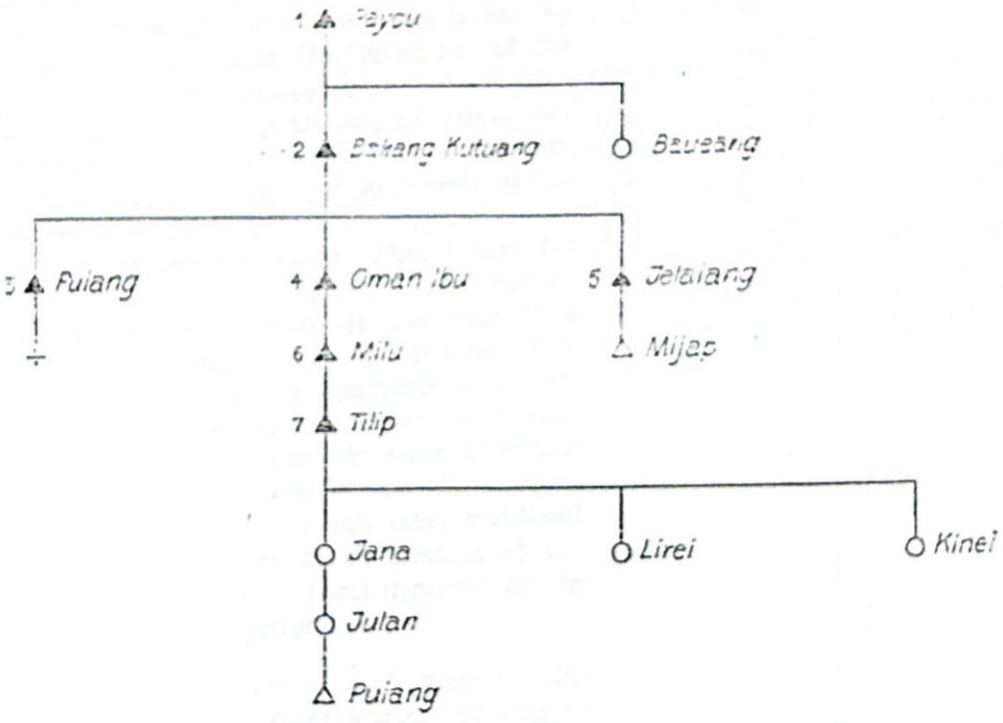
Reconstructing the Punan Bah history

So far we have dealt with that part of the ethno-historical tradition that regards the origin and dispersal of the Punan Bah. Let us now turn to an evaluation of this tradition, and look for what other evidence we have on these matters.

In recent years, ethno-historical traditions have received considerable attention from social scientists. It is realized that oral traditions can produce valuable historical insight if analysed in a methodologically appropriate way. Efforts are made to account as fully as possible for all versions of a given tradition, and the different versions are seen merely as different reflections or rather different forms of processed

Diagram 2

The longhouse of Payou



and manipulated historical events. It is also my point of view that a critical comparison of all versions will lead to a better assessment of the historical value of the tradition. However a striking feature of the ethno-historical traditions of the Punan Bah is the perfect agreement between the versions of the main theme. All informants transmit basically the same story, and knowledge of the traditions is held by aristocrats, commoners, and "slaves" alike. An informant of the common class may produce additional material to link his or her personal descent line with that of the aristocrats, and differences may occur due to lapses of memory. But the traditions as reproduced here, that are the ethno-historical traditions with the aristocrats as the main actors, are transmitted in substantially the same way irrespective of the informant's class and longhouse affiliation. Thus I have felt it justified to produce one version only. This does not mean that we have to do with an exceptionally correct tradition. The tradition is rather the minimal version generally agreed upon by all Punan Bah. The very fact that not only aristocrats but also commoners and slaves see this version as giving a true picture of their ethno-history, does of course imply that the tradition is restricted. In order to explain why it is transmitted in this way we shall have to relate the tradition to the wider political structure, including not only other traditional groups but also the government. The specific contribution of this tradition to the understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics can be outlined only if seen in such a wider perspective.

But before proceeding in this direction let us first see to what extent the tradition can be supported by other sources and thus be confirmed as a historical account. I shall not deal here with the time prior to Kavu Oko, a time when the Punan Bah had supernatural powers. This is the mythical past reflected in the fact that the Punan Bah reckon with a span of only five generations from Kavu Oko to the creation of the world. One is reminded of Evans-Pritchard's account of the Nuer people in Sudan, and of how the Nuer can point out the tree in western Nuer-Land under which the first Nuer was born (Evans-Pritchard, 1940, p.108).

The 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries

No written sources are at hand to document those parts of the Punan Bah traditions that deal with their existence at the Upper Bah River. But remnants of earlier societies are still found in these areas today in the form of keliriang or burial posts. These tall billian-posts with their elaborate carvings functioned traditionally as depositories for jars containing the bones of deceased aristocrats. Other traditional groups in Sarawak had similar memorials, but there is no reason to

doubt that the keliriang at the Upper Bah River do in fact contain the bones of Punan Bah aristocrats. Considering the present condition of the keliriang as well as the slow putrefying process of billian wood, these burial posts may well be several hundred years old. Possibly the keliriang can be taken as evidence that the society was stratified. Moreover the Punan Bah can point out a number of longhouse sites which indicate that the Punan Bah were already settled and thus most likely familiar with the cultivation of rice. All these facts point to the conclusion that major characteristics of Punan Bah society and culture were manifest at least three to four hundred years ago.

The Punan Bah have traditions of a time when they were not rice growing but mainly subsisted on sago, and even were without canoes[6]. According to one informant they did not get canoes until about the time of Salaui, when they came down to the Rajang. Some Punan Bah would deny the information with indignation, but a number of old men insisted on its truth, as former generations had told it. The information supports another oral tradition, namely the close relationship of the Punan Bah with the Melanau, a relationship that is claimed by several scientists (Clayre, 1972, p.23-25). It is not surprising that some Punan Bah definitely deny that once upon a time they were living on sago. It can be understood in view of their attitude towards the nomadic Penan. This ethnic group is generally looked down upon by the rice-growing peoples who see themselves as culturally superior. The Punan Bah are especially conscious of the cultural difference, as they have quite often been confused with the nomads because of their name. Any hint that they at a certain stage have been living in a way that resembles the nomadic one is hence denied.

The Punan Bah do not link the tradition of a different type of subsistence economy to their genealogies, nor do they in any other way tie this information up with their general conception of the ethno-historical sequence. We are not able to do so either, but will have to await more precise information and datings on these early periods of Punan Bah history provided by archaeological excavations of the longhouse sites.

During the 17th, the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century the Indonesian Archipelago and the whole of the China Sea were haunted by pirates. It is a commonly held opinion that the piracy was more or less caused by Dutch interference with the economies and trading systems of this vast area. The Dutch had come to Java in 1612, and they soon extended their influence to large parts of the Indonesian Archipelago by monopolizing and controlling the trade of the region. It seems that this policy more than any other factor was the cause of piracy. Deprived of their traditional economic enterprises and means

of subsistence a large number of people turned to piracy to make a living. At the beginning the pirates mainly came from the Sulus, from Mindanao and from other islands northeast of Borneo. But in a later phase a great many Malays partly from the coastland of Borneo, as well as inland tribes from Sarawak like the Saribas and Skrang Sea-Dayaks, became very active in piracy (Baring-Gould and Bampfylde, 1909, p.93 ff). The pirates did not confine themselves to the boarding of merchant vessels, they went plundering villages for goods and slaves. The whole of the coastal area in Sarawak was seriously disturbed and partly depopulated at the beginning of the 18th century. Trading was hampered almost to a point of stand-still, a fact that certainly had its effect on the inland groups, most seriously on their supplies of salt.

That also the Punan Bah were affected by the general insurrection in the coastal areas is beyond doubt. They learned what was going on, and still tell stories of the Lanun. The Lanun or Illanun of Mindanao were among the foremost of the pirates. Their way of fighting is still described, and the general terror they spread wherever they went is well remembered. One may still hear some Punan Bah claim that they are more afraid of the Lanun than anything else. How deeply the general insurrection affected inland groups like the Punan Bah is hard to tell. It is a possibility that the situation in the 17th century was such that it actually made the Punan Bah leave the lower regions of the Bah River to take refuge at the upper. The myth of Bua who at one time found but fighting people at the Lower Bah River, could be a reflection of these events. This is only speculation, however, and it is doubtful if we shall ever be able to penetrate into the mysteries of the history of these early periods.

While the Punan Bah lived at the upper reaches of the Bah River they were according to their own traditions, at one time plagued by internal fights, fights that made some of them flee and take up residence as far away as the Baram, Mahakkam, and the Kapuas rivers. Contact was not upheld between these groups and those who remained in the Rajang area, and when talking about this early dispersal, the Punan Bah are usually most careful in their statements underscoring that it all happened so long ago that one cannot be absolutely sure as to the reliability of the tradition.

It is the more interesting that there is a possibility that a part of this oral tradition may be verified.

During the 1930s the Borneo Company Ltd. opened up for timber-logging on the Rajang in Punan Bah territory. This attracted a great many workers, some of whom came from as far away as Indonesia.

Punan Bah informants have told me that amongst these there had been a few who claimed to be descendants of the people who had fled during the fight about Oro Saka. It was also stated that the Indonesian workers spoke a Punan Bah language. During my last field-trip I happened to meet a Punan Bah man in the Fourth Division who claimed that he was in fact a Punan Bah from Kalimantan. He had come before World War II to log timber as the others, but had settled down at Pandan and had never returned. Other informants maintained that there were several Punan Bah from Kalimantan working presently along the Miri-Sibu road. Unfortunately I was unable to get in touch with them.

According to the informant from Pandan the Punan Bah from Kalimantan have preserved the tradition of Kavu Oko and Kavu Oka and the beautiful girl Oro Saka. They associate their emigration six generations ago with the internal fights of the Punan Bah arising from the two brothers' rivalry over the girl.

When these Punan Bah had left the Rajang they went up the Balleh River and finally reached their present location at the Madai River. The migration was led by an aristocrat by the name of *Abah*, according to their tradition a son of Payou. In the 1930ies, when the informant left the area, the Punan Bah were the only group living at the Upper Madai River.

They called themselves after the River, i.e. the Punan Madai, but at times they used the label Punan Pangin. The individual longhouses, lovo, had names after tributaries of the Madai River. All in all there were the following seven settlements: Lovo Raun, Lovo Tanjung, Lovo Arpang, Lovo Kanavang, Lovo Sarai, Lovo Ubiang, and Lovo Labangan. The settlement at Nanga Raun was farthest down the Madai, and was far the biggest comprising no less than three longhouses. It was ruled by a descendant of the above-mentioned Abah.

Although the information I gathered on the Punan Madai sustains the structural and cultural similarities between this group and the Punan Bah in Sarawak, it poses a major problem, because more detailed evidence on the population of the Madai River is not available.

There is no doubt that the Madai River of the oral tradition of the Punan Bah is the same as the Mandai River, a major tributary of the Upper Kapuas River, just below Poetus Sibau. In P.J. Veth's account the term Madai is used for this river, while the riverine basin is termed Mandai (Veth, 1856, vol. I, p.56). The latter term, however, is now generally applied to the river.

The settlement at Nanga Raun can also be found on maps and in the records, although the spelling of the name varies. Most common is Nanga Raoen, but sometimes it is spelled Nanga Raong, or Nanga Raun.

Detailed evidence on the population of this river is scarce. This is a pity, the more so as a number of scholars have actually been up the Mandai and have even stayed for some time.

In 1893-94 the Dutch Borneo Expedition with Molengraaf, Büttikoefer, Hallier, and Nieuwenhuis went up the Mandai River. Molengraaf stayed only for about ten days, but the other scientists remained for a longer period. Nieuwenhuis even settled in a hut at Nanga Raoen for several months. Unfortunately he never wrote a proper account of his visit. He only provides sparse information in the form of analogies in his writings on other ethnic groups (Nieuwenhuis, 1900 and 1904). However, none of this information can be used to test the relationship between the Mandai groups and the Punan Bah on the Rajang.

Another report on the Mandai peoples is that of J.J.K. Enthoven. Enthoven distinguishes between four different ethnic groups in the Mandai riverine system: the Laoeh Dajak, who are related to the Embaloeh tribe, the Kalis Dajak, who presumably immigrated from the Melawi River, the Oeloe-Ajer Dajak, who settled mainly at the Penijoing and at Oelak Kengkoewang, and finally the Pangin Dajak. Enthoven presumes that this group has immigrated from the Melawi River and is related to the Pangin tribe up the Ella River.

It is this fourth and last group that is of interest to us in this connection. The Pangin Dajak, Enthoven tells, live in two settlements, one at Nangah Raoen which in fact consists of two longhouses with 39 and 18 doors, respectively, and another at Tőekoeng Aoe (Goeroeng Beroewang), a longhouse with 15 doors. Enthoven's account, however, does not allow us to establish a relationship between this ethnic group and the Punan Bah. Interestingly the word Pangin is used by the Punan Bah in Sarawak as a ritual term for the Rajang River. When the Punan Bah in Kalimantan use the term as a proper name, they may thus denote themselves by their river of origin, the Rajang. If this is the case, then the term Pangin cannot, as Enthoven thought, be taken as evidence of the affiliation of this group with ethnic groups at the Melawi. We are further told by Enthoven that these groups trade a great deal with the Penan (Enthoven, 1903, vol. I, p.73-76). This is in agreement with information that I obtained in Sarawak.

More information on the Upper Mandai peoples can be found in an article by M.A. Bouman (Bouman, 1924, p.176-178). He says that the people used to call themselves Benoa Ra, and that they had also been called Oeloa Daän after a river of that name. Originally they had two large settlements, one at Nanga Raong and one at Nanga Aroeng. They had to abandon their settlements when the Kayan raided under the leadership of Bo Ledjo. (This indicates that the events took place at the very beginning of the 19th century). For some time the Benoa Ra took refuge among related groups, the Pangin and Oeloe Air Dajak, at the Melawi River. On their return they were called the Oeloe Air by the Malay, while they were still known as the Benoa Ra by other Dajak groups. Although Bouman provides some information on the customs of these Benoa Ra people, the fact that he transmits are not sufficient to establish a definite link between them and the Punan Bah. There are some positive similarities between the groups. The Benoa Ra, e.g. also practice secondary burial, and they place the bones of their dead in a 'Keriring', a burial chamber in the form of a single pillar. Bouman also mentions that this group is the only one to use these 'keriring'. Their burial posts are however, not exactly like the keliriang of the Punan Bah (see picture in Roth, 1896, vol. I, p.147). We learn about sacrificial rites including the offering of slaves in former days, that remind us of similar rites of the Punan Bah. We are also told of impressive longhouses, though not exact replica of the longhouses among the Punan Bah at the Rajang. Bouman finally mentions that the Oeloe Air had no social classes and no tribal chiefs. The leaders of the different longhouses were elected. Bouman does, however, as mentioned, speak of slaves in another connection, so it is plain that this information must regard the division into aristocrats and commoners only. My informant in Sarawak gave the same information except for the fact that he maintained that the longhouse at Nanga Raun, as the only one, was ruled by an aristocrat. The informant, it should be added, maintained that his brother was the ruling aristocrat at Nanga Raun at the time when he had left the area.

The scholars who have visited the Mandai River more recently are apparently few, and to my knowledge nothing has been published lately on the ethnic groups here (confirmed by Victor King, personal communication).

We must therefore conclude that although a number of facts demonstrate that there are similarities between the Punan Bah in Sarawak and the Upper Mandai groups exemplified by the Nanga Raun, no ultimate proof of their relationship has been established yet.

But what about the Punan Bah traditions. Let us turn to Sarawak again to see if other kinds of information available to us can help us illuminate the history of this group.

The 19th and 20th centuries

According to the Punan Bah tradition it was Salaui who led them down the Bah River to the Rajang. If we take the Punan Bah tradition on the succession line of aristocrats at face value, and estimate the ruling period of each chief at an average of 20—25 years we may date the reign of Salaui and the dispersal to the end of the 18th century. What actually made them break up from the Upper Bah River is on the other hand a bit of a puzzle.

Their own tradition of internal fighting caused by Oro Saka may contain part of the truth. Rivalry between aristocrats is a current theme among the Punan Bah, and in a strained situation a girl might easily become the trigger of hostilities. Demographic factors, however, may have been the ultimate reason for the fighting. The Punan Bah relate that they were most numerous prior of the strife, and according to one story they were so many that the ordinary way of taking a census did not work out. Not counting women the custom was to let each man blow an arrow into a floating coconut and then count the arrows. But the story goes that the method could not be used as the coconut would sink before the men had finished blowing their arrows into it. A demographic pressure might have built up, resulting in internal fighting and the subsequent breaking up of the groups.

For the Punan Bah, however, life was not peaceful for very long. They had hardly settled at the mouth of the Bah River when fighting broke out with invading Kayan groups. The fact that such an invasion took place at the turn of the 19th century is confirmed by several sources.

During the 19th century the Upper Rajang River was the scene of continuous fighting, mainly between the Kayan and the Iban whom the Kayan were strong enough to oppose. The smaller ethnic groups got their share of the troubles. More detailed evidence of their fate in this period is not available.

Only indirectly can we grasp the history of the Punan Bah during the first half of the 19th century, and verify their own tradition. Writing on the Kayan in 1848, Burns mentions the Punan Bah together with the "Kanawit, Bakatan, Lugat, Tanyong, Tatau, Balinian, Sakapan, Kajaman, Bintulu and Tilian." According to his information these ethnic

groups were living between the Kayan and the Malay, and most of them were tributary to the Kayan (Needham, 1955a, p.24). This record is in congruence with the Punan Bah tradition in which it is said that they were so oppressed that their ruling chief Baliang had actually been kept prisoner by the Kayan.

Not until 1863 when the punitive expedition of the Tuan Muda chased the Kayan beyond the Bakun rapids, did the influence and warfare of this group become restrained. It took the expedition five days to reach Belaga from the Pelagus rapids. The only settlements, they came across were two abandoned Kayan longhouses, until they reached the longhouse of the Sekapan which they set on fire. The records mention no farmland except around the Sekapan settlement. (Baring-Gould and Bampfylde, 1909, p.287-291). This total lack of information on the Punan Bah may be taken as an indication of their painful situation at the time. Most probably they had no real longhouses; their own traditions include descriptions of how the head-hunting Kayan constantly burn down their dwellings.

It was during the early days of Kayan dominance that some of the Punan Bah moved to the Fourth Division, and there is no doubt that the general political and economic situation has to be taken into account in order to explain these migrations.

The Punan Kakus emigration

According to Punan Bah tradition the emigration to Kakus was led by Tigeang. An estimate made on the basis of the aristocratic genealogies dates the event to around 1820, and is supported by other evidence, the detailed description of the life of Sagiang, the Punan Bah man who went off to settle in Pandan. It is related that early in his life—he died a very old man in 1868—he went to "Tatau, where an uncle by the name of Tugang (Tigeang) has established his quarters, having married the heiress of the Malongs." (S.G., Jan. 22nd, 1878). Malong was the term of one of the Tatau longhouses (Sandin, 1970, p.118). The Punan Bah explain Tigeang's emigration by his personal ambition for fame. It is true that aristocrats among the Punan Bah are most concerned about their reputation. It is also true that a younger brother of a ruling aristocrat without a longhouse of his own had very little political influence, so by moving to Tatau and by marrying a girl who belonged to the aristocracy, according to the Punan Bah tradition, Tigeang had made a match of several advantages. First and foremost political bonds were established which brought an end to head-hunting between the Punan Bah and the Tatau. This may have

been most important as the Punan Bah were having enough problems with the Kayan. At the same time Tigeang gained political control over the Tatau group.

These factors may well explain why Tigeang went off to Tatau himself followed by his personal slaves. It was not the normal custom, however, that a noble man who married into and settled with a different ethnic group was followed by Punan Bah of the ordinary class, as it happened in this case. It is my view that the Punan Bah of the ordinary class who followed Tigeang to Kakus did so for several reasons. There were "pushes" like the general insurrection caused by the Kayan along the Rajang River, and there were "pulls" such as the political stability of the Kakus area as well as economic advantages. The Kakus area was tranquil and had only few Tatau inhabitants, the Iban had not yet migrated up the Tatau River, and the Kayan did not extend their influence beyond the Rajang and the Baram. In short, it was an area outside the control of the larger ethnic groups. The attractions, from an economic point of view, were not only the chance of being allowed to farm in peace but also the access to one particularly valued item, birdnests. There are a number of caves in the Kakus area where to collect birdnests. For centuries they had been exported from Borneo to meet the constant demand from the Chinese, and in the 19th century they were a most important object of trade.

The collection of birdnests has continuously contributed to the economy of the longhouse people in the Kakus River area. At times the buyers monopolized the market and kept the prices down, so people only had a meagre profit out of their dangerous work (Lawrence, 1912, p.174). Yet the collection of birdnests has always remained a supplementary source of cash earning in this area.

The Punan Bah continued to find the Kakus-Anap area economically attractive, and ever since the first emigration they have taken up residence in the Fouth Division, some permanently, other only periodically. In 1892 C.A. Bampfylde for instance reports that "A good many Punan from Bah have shifted to Nipa's Kampong in Tatau. I have sent orders for their return." (Bampfylde, 1892, p.15). These emigrations reflect the economic opportunities of the area, and seem to vary in scale the world's demand for the various jungle products.

During early Brooke administration it was mainly the above-mentioned birdnests and jungle products like gutta percha and India rubber that were collected. Towards the end of the century products like rattan became important. During the last 40 years, a period on

which I have been able to collect first-hand information, those who have moved to Kakus have done so mainly in order to log timber. Timber logging is less strenuous and far more rewarding in the Fourth Division than in the Seventh. The area is not mountaineous rendering the logging and dragging of the timber to the rivers much easier, and the rivers have few if any rapids, so rafting presents no particular problems. It was chiefly the young men who were tempted by the opportunities to earn money for a period of time in the Kakus area. But some married and settled down permanently. Also whole families may take residence in the area for a period for the same economic reasons, but they usually combine the trip with visits to relatives. A wish to break the monotony of everyday life may also be the incitement to spend some time in Kakus.

Of course the Punan Kakus people come to the Rajang, too, but never for economic reasons and rarely to settle for good. Their visits are social; they wish to look up relatives or feel obliged to attend a social occasion such as for instance a secondary burial.

We have no information whatsoever about the actual size of the Punan Bah emigration to the Kakus area over the years, and it is difficult to undertake an estimate as we lack information of the processes of amalgamation that took place between the Punan Bah and the Tatau. But at least we know that the populaion of one longhouse, Rumah Bilong, identifies itself as Punan Bah today. Including some single-family dwellings this settlement comprises 55 rooms with a total population of 339 individuals. A small longhouse nearby, Rumah Minah, comprises 15 rooms with 109 persons (personal census 1975). The ethnic identity of the population here is much more complicated, as we shall see later.

The Punan Pandan emigration

Almost at the same time as some Punan Bah went off to Kakus others left for the Kemena River. In the Punan Bah version, as it will be recalled, a man named Sagiang was the leader of this emigration. That Sagiang did in fact go to Kemena can be considered a historical fact. The Sarawak Gazette brings a full account of his life-story. According to this record Sagiang (or Saghieng as he is called here) travelled about a great deal before he, at quite a late stage of his life, settled at Pandan. We learn that he was a Punan Bah from the Rajang by birth, and that as a young man he aroused trouble here. He fell in love with a girl belonging to the common class and kept returning to her even when his family had married him off to a Kayan girl of

aristocratic descent (see also Leach, 1950, p.77). This infuriated the Kayan to such an extent that his family found it advisable that Sagiang left the Rajang area. First he visited his uncle Tugang (Tigeang) at Taiau, then for some years he lived as a rolling stone. After that he spent ten years in Brunei where he raised his rank at court, took a Malay wife and became a Muslim. After the years in Brunei he went to Tubau up the Kemena River where he settled for some time, and then moved down-river to Labang and later further on to Pandan, which became his last residence. He remarried twice and died an old man in 1868 (*S.G.*, Jan. 22nd, 1978, p.8).

It is interesting that this record agrees well with the Punan Bah traditions as far as the later phases of Sagiang's life are concerned. We do not know what made Sagiang settle at Tubau after the period of ten years in Brunei. Most likely it was in order to look after the trade. As long as the central parts of Sarawak remained under the rule of the Brunei sultans, and also for quite some time during Brooke rule, Tubau was a most important trading center. All trade between Brunei and the upper Rajang went by Tubau. Malay traders went up the Kemena and Tubau Rivers, walked across the land and then travelled down the Belaga River to the Rajang. This route was followed for several decades after the Brooke rule, until Kapit had assumed sufficient size and trading capacity. Brunei sultans were most interested in promoting trade in the interior regions. To that end Baliang, who was a brother of Sagiang and the ruling aristocrat of Long Bah, Matu, the Sekapan chief, and Oman Tipuang, the Kejerman chief, were all invited to Brunei and personally urged to encourage trade among their subjects. According to the Punan Bah a result of the trip was the erection of a simple trading station at Belaga. It seems however to have deteriorated whe Brooke administration set up its first fort here in 1884 (Low, 1884, p.33).

It is most likely then that Sagiang settled at Tubau in agreement with the Brunei sultan, to take control of the trade route.

An early first-hand description of the Kemena River is given by the Italian scientist Beccari. He travelled in August 1865 and stayed at Pandan, then a village of 10-12 houses. Beccari states that the inhabitants were of mixed Bintulu-Mellanao and Penan origin. The same was true of the population at Labang, a small place of merely four houses. Except for these villages Beccari met no settlements until he reached a Kayan longhouse up the Tubau River (Beccari, 1904, p.267, 285ff). This description sustains the Punan Bah tradition that the Kemena River had been almost uninhabited when they arrived. On the other

hand it gives no support to the tradition itself, as Beccari mentions nothing about the Punan Bah here.

Later on his trip he meets the Punan Bah at the Rajang, and he is definitely mystified to have come across "Punan" as well as "Penan" and "Puenan" on the very same trip.

Beccari's remark on the Pandan settlement as being all Mellanao-Penan is understandable. We know that Sagiang's wife was a Melanau, and Sagiang had, as it be remembered, turned a Muslim in Brunei. Moreover Sagiang's wife had brought a great many slaves along from the coast, all Melanau. Their descendants form the core of the present Segaan population at Pandan according to the Punan Bah. The Penan, Beccari met may have been members of the original groups in the area, or they may have been the Penan slaves that Sagiang had fetched at the Baram River according to the Punan Bah tradition. The actual number of Punan Bah settled in Pandan in those early days thus remains an open question. Even if Beccari does not mention any Punan Bah, some way well have been in the area living up the tributaries. According to their own tradition, they did build intermediate longhouses up the Pandan River in those days, and it was the normal custom that the aristocrats remained at the main river, leaving the commoners to farm for them. A proper longhouse was not built before Dian had become chief, they say, i.e. after 1868. It is probable, however, that the number of Punan Bah was negligible until Dian's mother Bulan joined him with her Punan Bah subjects, which was sometime after 1868 and before 1882 when we know she was dead and buried (Low, 1882, p.62). The one thing that may speak for a major Punan Bah influence prior to or around the middle of the 19th century are the keliriang. Beccari was impressed by the one he saw at Pandan, and there are more and older ones at Labang according to the Punan Bah. The fact that they were able to raise these monuments indicates that there must have been more people at the Kemena than one would immediately conclude from Beccari. The Punan Bah see these monuments as proofs of their staying in the area for a long time. I think they are right, but the keliriang may of course have been erected by the Melanau people. According to Morris, the Melanau adhered orginally to the same burial custom. (Morris, 1953, p.146). A comparative study of the ornamentation of the keliriang among the groups that practised this form of secondary burial, may reveal the origin of these burial posts.

Towards the end of the 19th century the Punan Bah were nevertheless quite influential at Pandan. Sagiang's son-in-low Dian, ruled the longhouse until he died in 1887. His wife brought his bones to the

Rajang to be buried at Long Bah. She took along a lot of valuables, too, a fact that caused resentment among her relatives in Pandan, and Brooke administration had to interfere and take action against her (Buck, 1887, a&b). From 1878 onwards the Punan Bah are frequently mentioned in the district reports. It is recorded that a number of Punan Bah came from the Rajang to Pandan in 1910-11, and that more were expected due to the economic prospects of collecting jelutong (Lawrence, 1911, p.60). This information confirms the Punan Bah tradition of their third and last major expansion. The reasons behind this migration are however not only the economic prospects mentioned by Lawrene. Again there seem to have been major "pushes" apart from the "pulls".

At the beginning of the 20th century the Iban were as mentioned raiding in the Rajang region. The Punan Bah tradition of the insurrection is fully confirmed by the records. Iban raiding escalated to a crucial point around 1905 when the Upper Rajang groups were unable to farm properly, and trade in jungle products was brought to a stand-still (Kirkpatrick, 1905, p.231). Quite a number of Punan Bah were killed and heads were taken. This state of affairs was not stopped until the government sent an armed expedition of 200 men against the Iban. In a great battle at Nanga Pila 200 Iban were shot and many drawned while attempting to escape (*S.G.*, May 1st 1916). When the battle was over the Punan Bah could resume their farming, and they are reported to have paid their revenue again (Gifford, 1919, p.22).

Also Burnett's account confirms that the Punan Bah had taken refuge near the Belaga fort during these years, and that no-one lived between Belaga and Nanga Pila (Burnett, 1923). No evidence exists of major emigrations to the Fourth Division later than 1910-1916. But a certain amount of pendling by individuals and single families between the Seventh and the Fourth Divisions do, as mentioned, still occur. The oral tradition is thus generally confirmed.

Today the Punan Pandan longhouse is inhabited by 177 individuals divided between 26 rooms. The Punan Jelalong comprise only 7 rooms with a total population of 46 individuals.

The Punan Bah is not the only Kajang group who have migrated to the Fourth Division. Some Kejaman for instance went as far as the Baram, others came several generations ago and settled at Sungei Jelalong at Rumah Keti. They have mixed heavily with the Penan but identify themselves as Kejaman, although surrounding societies seem to consider them as Penan.

The Punan Bah at the Rajang River

From the second half of the 19th century and even later, little information is available on the Punan Bah who remained at the Rajang. However, the evidence is sufficient to show that the oral tradition of the Punan Bah is basically correct. The traditions say that there were seven longhouses when the Punan Bah came down the Bah River to settle at the Bah-Rajang Junction towards the end of the 18th Century. The longhouse of Jaua soon amalgamated with the longhouse of Salaui, while the longhouse of Lumiang went off to Kanowit about one generation later. This leaves us with six longhouses around the turn of the 19th century, remembering that the Punan Sama split off at one time from the longhouse of Salaui, and this was exactly the number that Low found in 1882 (Low, 1882, p.62-63).

When Low visited the area the Kayan were still living in Punan Bah territory. They had two longhouses of no less than 18 doors in total situated at the Rajang very close to the mouth of the Bah River, whereas the Punan Bah were living in three longhouses under two chiefs, just around the corner as Low expresses it. We are told that Baliang's longhouse comprised 24 doors, *Nyipa's*[7] longhouse had 10 doors, and then there were an additional two doors.

Baliang's longhouse can easily be identified as the so-called lower longhouse at Long Bah today. Upon Baliang's death around 1892, his brother *Tuvar* ruled, as *Baliang's* son *Meriang* had not yet come of age, but when Tuvar died in an accident—he was eaten by a crocodile—Meriang became chief (Buck, 1892, p.109., Owen, 1909, p.76). After Meriang's death, which was probably at the beginning of the 1930os, his half-brother *Lotun* (Oman Sermunou) ruled for a period. Lotun was succeeded by Kupa, an adopted son, who now rules the longhouses at Long Bah. At present the lower longhouse has a size of 25 rooms, the upper has 11 rooms, and there are three additional rooms making a total of 38 rooms with 386 individuals (personal census 1973). There are no written records on the further fate of Nyipa's house. The Punan Bah says that some of the families went to Pandan to joint Nyipa's son Dian, and thus they amalgamated once again with families who had left at an earlier date with Nyipa's divorced wife, Bulan. The remaining families joined Baliang's house.

Low reports on two Punan Bah longhouses placed opposite one another further up the Rajang River: the longhouse of *Aman Siut* with 15 doors, and the longhouse of *Ledang* with 7 doors. There is no further information on the longhouse of Aman Siut in the records. The long-

house may be the same as the one called Punan Luju by the Penan Bah. According to their tradition this longhouse amalgamated with the longhouse of Ledang, or Ludeang as they call him around the turn of the century. This longhouse is today termed the Punan Biau. In 1971 a number of Iban immigrated to Punan Bah territory with the consent of the Tua Rumah *Jelauiang* who had married an Iban himself. This caused discontent among the Punan Biau. Only 4 families have followed Jelauiang who built a new longhouse on the other side of the river together with the Iban. 20 rooms have remained in the old longhouse. The total population of the Punan Biau was 148 individuals in 1973 (personal census). Furthest up the river was the longhouse of *Oyong Jin* with 18 doors, according to Low. Jin must be Jiui, and the longhouse is thus the present Punan Sama which today has a total population of 25 rooms with 221 individuals (personal census 1973).

Form and function of the ethno-historical tradition

On the preceding pages the ethno-historical tradition of the Punan Bah was correlated with what other historical information we have of the dispersal of this group. The historical authenticity of a great many of the aristocrats has been verified, and the place of various events has been established. On basis of our present knowledge the history of the Punan Bah has been delineated and to some extent explained. We must, however, also more specifically consider the wider socio-political system of which the Punan Bah are part, as this system influences the very form and function of the ethno-historical tradition.

In Sarawak we are faced with a plural society composed of a large number of ethnic groups, some of which are numerically very small. We rarely find a heterogeneous society where groups are based on so few individual carriers of separate cultural identities. Up the Rajang River this situation is most out-spoken. In 1973 the population of the Belaga District numbered around 10.000 individuals of whom some 6.500 were Kayan and Kenyah. (Belaga District Annual Report 1973). Nevertheless, this population consists of 17 ethnic groups. This means that some of the groups comprise just a few hundred individuals, some even less. The extreme lower limit is held by the Seping who number about six adults, but still they form a separate community. A somewhat larger Seping settlement is, however, found in the Fourth Division. Many of the ethnic groups are most similar culturally and structurally. The Punan Bah see the cultural variations between themselves and neighbouring groups on the Rajang like the Sekapan. Tanjong, and the Kejaman as what they term differences in *adet esut*, i.e. differences in minor or less important traditions. Demographic factors,

marriage rules, former customs like slavery, among other things, have meant that for generations the traditional ethnic groups have had a considerable cultural and social impact on each other. Brooke administration and the modern socio-economic development have resulted in a further levelling of cultural and structural differences. Nevertheless these many small groups have maintained separate languages and distinct identities.

It is my point that under these circumstances the myth of origin and the ethno-historical tradition are of vital importance for maintenance of identity. The myth of origin is not only a cognitive explanation of the perpetual question of the genesis of life and of the history of the group; it is at the same time a major factor for the preservation of an ethnic identity. In the Punan Bah situation, where the demographic flux is considerable and the cultural and social resemblance to traditionally neighbouring groups is great, and where cultural changes have taken place on a large scale further limiting the cultural differences, the number of overt signs that could lend themselves as symbols of group identity are limited. Under such circumstances the myth acquires a major significance. The historical situation at Kakus demonstrates this most convincingly. Although there is but little information on the amalgamation that took place when the Punan Bah had emigrated to Kakus River, originally the homeland of the Tatau people, we do know that the Punan Bah and the Tatau took residence in common in one longhouse, and that apparently the Punan Bah became politically dominant. Today outsiders will normally identify the population as Punan Bah, and the inhabitants usually agree to this view themselves. However, a closer examination will reveal that there have been situations in which this identification was questioned. In 1949 a number of families broke away and established themselves in a separate longhouse, Rumah Minah (Jacks; 1949, p.37), against the will of the Punan Bah aristocrat and the Brooke administration. According to the families concerned they had become dissatisfied with the leadership of their longhouse, but the main reason for the move was their wish to re-establish a pure Tatau settlement in order to preserve Tatau traditions and language. Today, almost thirty years later, one can doubt that this will happen. Although the grown-up generation understands the Tatau language only few are able to speak it, and the Punan Bah language is the usual means of communication. The 'Punan-fication' of the Tatau has gone so far that the two groups have identical culture and social structure. Hence Tatau identity can be expressed only by reference to the old oral ethno-historical traditions on the time prior to the advent of the Punan Bah.

There is no doubt that the people who claim Tatau origin are genuinely worried about the eventual loss of their historical and cultural traditions. But there are other matters at stake. The fight between the Punan Bah and the Tatau is basically a fight for economic and political privileges, it is a fight for economic rights to land, not only to farmland but also to tracts of the jungle and hence timber concessions. Further the fight concerns the control of other economic resources like the birdnest caves. Those who claim Tatau descendance are challenging the Punan Bah economic influence in an effort to establsh economic and political priorities for themselves. And again, as the cultural amalgamation between the Tatau and the Punan Bah has been almost complete, it is only by referring to oral traditions that the Tatau descendants can try to legitimize their claims.

In the same way as the Tatau descendants refer to their oral traditions in order to manifest themselves economically and politically vis à vis the Punah Bah, so do the latter stress a common identity in order to stand up against major socio-cultural changes. There are about 1,430 persons today who see themselves as Punan Bah, and though scattered over a vast area they nevertheless share the same identity. And the feeling of a common identity seems not to diminish but rather to strengthen in these years when the Punan Bah communities are undergoing profound socio-economic re-organisation. Rapid demographic changes create anxiety among the Punan Bah and other minor groups who see themselves economically threatened. Expanding groups like the Kayan, the Iban, and to some extent the Malay, are exerting increasing pressure on their traditional resources. At the same time the very economic system is undergoing a profound change. Land along the accessable rivers is becoming more valuable, and control over the jungle and its products has become vital. In order to keep up with this development the Punan Bah try to mobilize whatever claims they can make on their traditional resources, and to this end the ethno-historical traditions are important.

It is quite obvious that the Punan Bah are aware of the ethnohistorical tradition as an essential factor in their struggle for the preservation of economic and political rights. The oral tradition is seen as "the truth", as a proof of the legitimacy of their claims on a number of traditional rights within their territory, and is by them described as a weapon.

The function of the tradition in the present socio-economic situation is reflected in the form in which the tradition is presented. For instance,

the version brings no details of competition between the various Punan Bah longhouses as such internal quarrels are of little social significance in today's society. Instead of uniform version is presented, a version underlining the common origin, the common rights of all Punan Bah. This version is not without reliability, as I have tried to demonstrate, it can be verified to a large extent. The problem is not so much what is told as what has been left out, information that might have provided a much fuller picture of the history of the Punan Bah. The present form and the functions of the ethno-historical tradition of the Punan Bah can thus be explained only when set in a wider framework. The macro-political and economic structure, including the relationship to other ethnic groups and to the government, has to be taken into account.

FOOTNOTES

1. The fieldwork on which this article is based was carried out in two tempi: first from February till August 1973, and then from September till August 1974-75.
2. In his article on the Punan Bah, Rodney Needham (1955a) produces an extensive list of references for the study of this ethnic group.
3. The notion that the Punan Bah originally came from the Kajang River (cf. Needham 1955a, p.31, Urquhart 1949, p.207) is repudiated by all Punan Bah with whom I have discussed the matter. The term Kajang, which was adopted by Leach to label a number of minor ethnic groups up the Rajang, according to the Punan Bah stem from the same root as the word Lajang, their own term for the Rajang River. The Kajang groups thus being the original ethnic groups along the Rajang River. The idea of the Kajang River as the original homeland of the Punan Bah as well as the idea of an old "Kajang Kingdom" is a Sekapan notion that the Punan Bah requdiate (cf. Clayre 1969).
4. An evaluation of the demographic situation is rendered difficult due to the Punan Bah naming-practice regarding their longhouses. A longhouse is often called after its ruling aristocrat. But it happens that the longhouse-affiliation of distinct and famous individuals of earlier days is remembered without any further information as to their social role. Furthermore a longhouse is not invariably governed by an aristocratic family, so that individuals may be longhouse leaders without figuring in the aristocratic genealogy. Confusion can thus arise as to whether or not a given individual was the leader of an independent settlement. As longhouses can be named after places also, old and bygone longhouses may figure twice in the traditions. Finally, further uncertainty can occur because longhouses that have been built only as intermediate constructions for farming purposes are remembered for one reason or the other and thus sometimes mixed up with the more permanent settlements. For these reasons a proper estimate of the number of former Punan Bah settlements is difficult.
5. Lovo is the Punan Bah term for longhouse.
6. This information conflicts with that furthered by Needham (1955a, p.31) in which he states that "there is no evidence that the Punan Bah have ever been nomads, and they themselves deny it: they have always built longhouses and planted rice".
7. Nyipa is usually known as Bateang among the Punan Bah, cf. diagram 1.

When referring to the writings of other authors their way of spelling the names of ethnic groups has been followed.

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PLATE I: The famous carved tree-trunk, *kayu satoa au* i.e. "the wood where the dog was cut", on which the Punan Bah swore to keep peace among themselves.

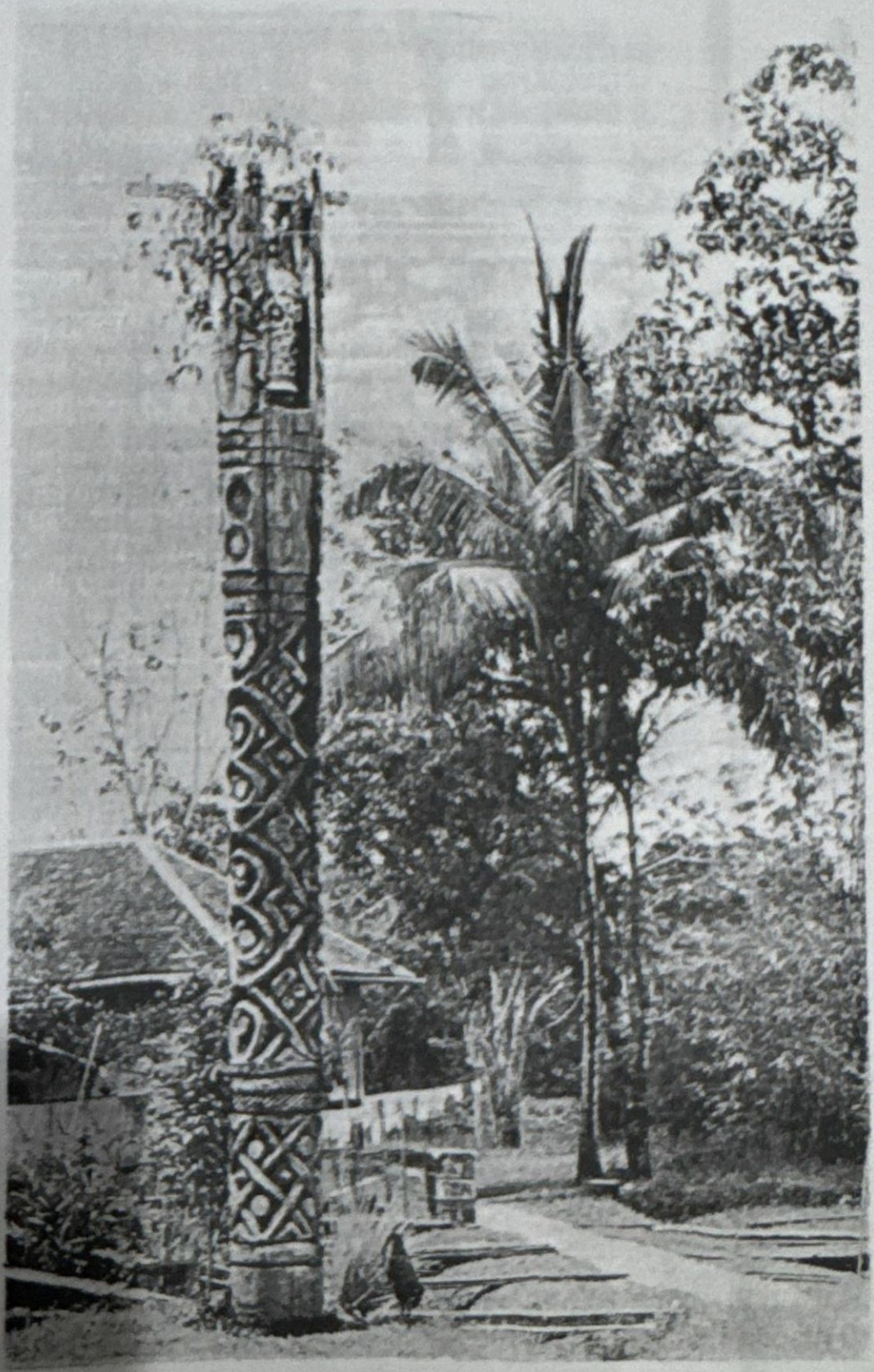
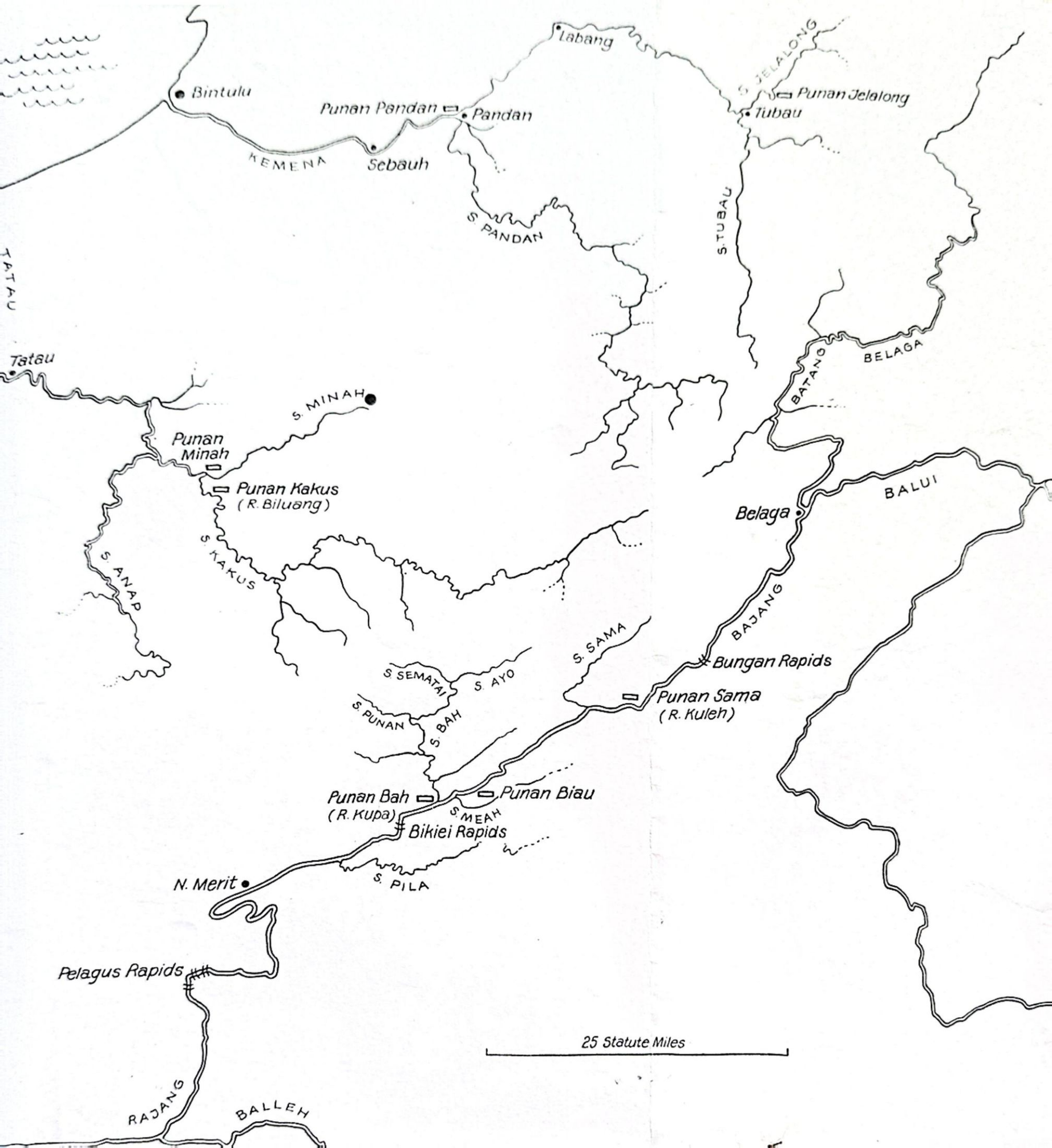


PLATE II: The keliriang at Pandan containing the bones of Sagiang, Keliboang, Kiu, Gada, and Savai—(*see* diagram 1).

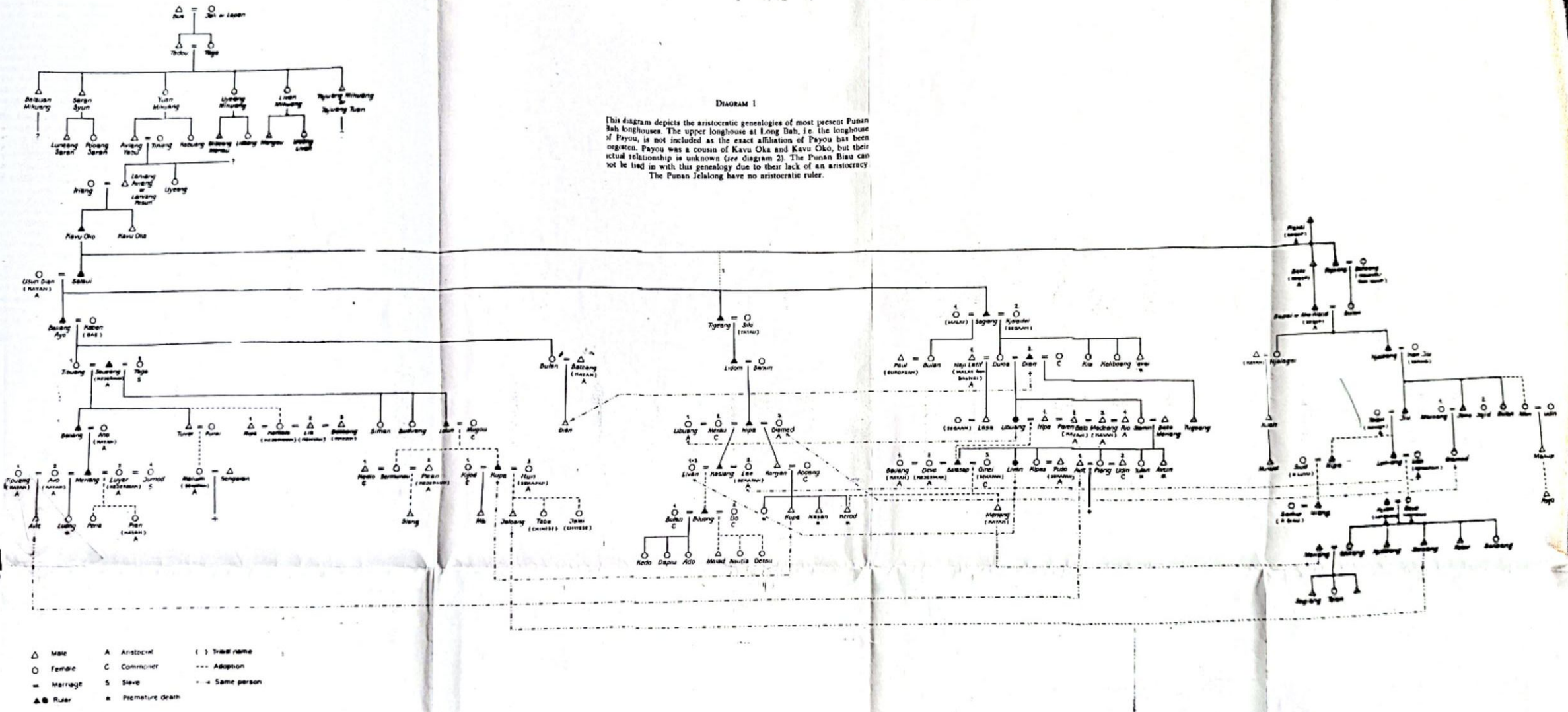

Labang
S. JELALONG
Punan Jelalong
Tubau
Bintulu
Punan Pandan
Pandan
KEMENA
Sebauh
S. PANDAN
S. TUBAU
TATAU
Tatau
BATANG
BELAGA
S. MINAH
Punan Minah
Punan Kakus
(R. Biluang)
Belaga
BALUI
S. KAKUS
S. ANAP
BAJANG
S. SAMA
Bungan Rapids
S. SEMATAI
S. AYO
Punan Sama
(R. Kuleh)
S. PUNAN
S. BAH
Punan Bah
(R. Kupa)
Punan Biau
S. MEAH
Bikiei Rapids
N. Merit
S. PILA
Pelagus Rapids
25 Statute Miles
RAJANG
BALLEH

Punan Bah

Punan Kakus

Punan Pandan

Punan Sama



△ Male
○ Female
= Marriage
▲● Ruler

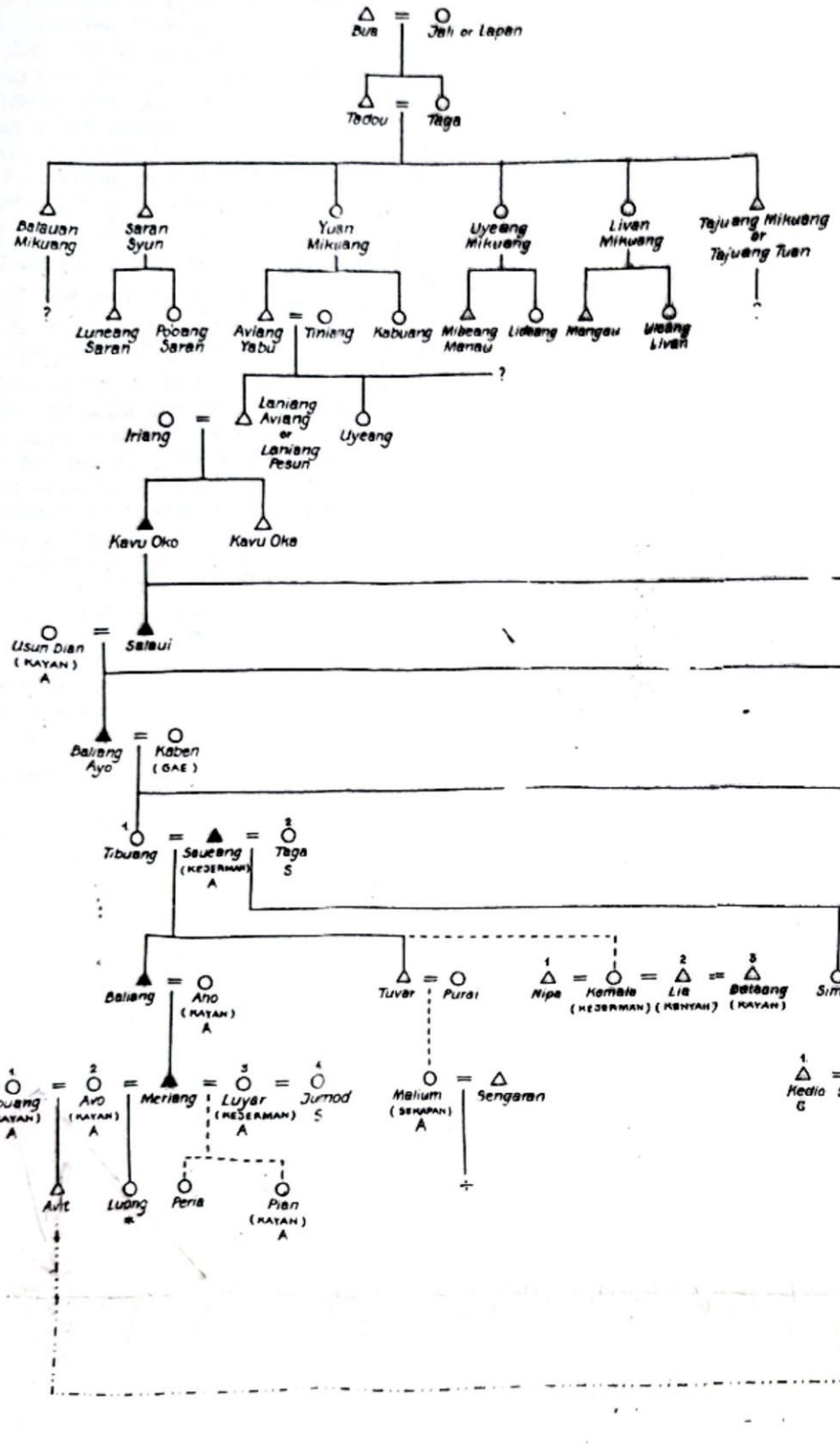
A Aristocrat
C Commoner
S Slave
× Premature death

( ) Tribal name
--- Adoption
- - = Same person

DIAGRAM 1

This diagram depicts the aristocratic genealogies of most present Punan Bah longhouses. The upper longhouse at Long Bah, i.e. the longhouse of Payou, is not included as the exact affiliation of Payou has been forgotten. Payou was a cousin of Kavu Oka and Kavu Oko, but their actual relationship is unknown (*see* diagram 2). The Punan Biau can not be tied in with this genealogy due to their lack of an aristocracy. The Punan Jelalong have no aristocratic ruler.

Punan Bah



△ Male — A Aristocrat — ( ) Tribal name

○ Female — C Commoner — --- Adoption

= Marriage — S Slave — ----→ Same person

▲● Ruler — * Premature death

Punan Kakus

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Punan Kakus

Punan Pandan

Punan Sama

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