

LUN BAWANG BEADS

Heidi Munan

The Lun Bawang and related peoples of east Sarawak, west Sabah and Brunei have a long tradition of using beads for personal ornamentation and as value objects. They share in the general Borneo bead heritage, but follow their own tastes and fashions. Some Lun Bawang have started reproducing their favorite opaque beads from clay to sell as well as to wear on informal occasions. This new cottage industry brings a satisfactory income to the beadmakers, and helps to preserve their heirloom property.

THE LUN BAWANG

Their Name

The Lun Bawang of Sarawak were referred to as "Murut" in the past, this being "... a name given by the people of the coast to any upriver heathen race, whether ethnologically the same or not" (Pollard 1933:139). Elsewhere in Borneo, "Dayak" was applied in an equally haphazard fashion. In older anthropological texts, confusion reigns; there *are* a people called Murut who live in the western portion of Sarawak's neighbor, Sabah. (There was never any confusion for the bead researcher; until quite recently the "Sabah Murut" wore different beads.)

As recently as 1972, a then-retired curator of the Sarawak Museum referred to the people settled in various areas of Lawas and Limbang between the headwaters of the Trusan and Limbang rivers as the "Muruts;" a group "larger than any other racial group of people in the area today" (Sandin 1972:50). The Lun Bawang, the Lun Dayeh (upriver) and the Lun Lod (downriver) live in adjacent regions of Sarawak, Sabah and Brunei. One early writer linked the Kelabit and Lun Bawang (or Murut) on sartorial terms: "the short skirt and bead headdress are common to both"

(Pollard 1935:225). J.B. Crain (1978:124ff.) prefers "Lun Dayeh" ("we people of the interior"), generally used in Sabah, to cover not only Lun Bawang, Lun Dayeh and Lun Lod, but also the Kelabit and related people of central Borneo.

"Lun Bawang", now generally used in Sarawak, means "people of the land" or "people of this place." It is in its way a question-begging term, like "person of the house," implying permanency of occupation and undisputed property status. In this paper, *Lun Bawang* refers to the people living in Sarawak who call themselves thus; *Lun Dayeh* to their fellows in Sabah, Brunei and Kalimantan. "Muruts" in quotation marks is used when quoting historical sources which refer to the same people.

Their Territory

The majority of the people on the island of Borneo who call themselves Lun Bawang live in the Lawas District of the Limbang Division of Sarawak and in the Temburong District of Brunei (Fig. 1). Their oral tradition, confirmed by approximately 200 years of recorded history, indicates that they originated in the central Borneo highlands which now lie in the Indonesian part of Kalimantan where the bulk of this group, variously called Lun Bawang or Lun Dayeh, still lives.

Sarawak's Lun Bawang are aware of their origins and maintain contact with their relations to the south. There is much pedestrian and motorcycle traffic across the shallow watershed; consumer goods from Tarakan on the Kalimantan coast find their way into the highlands of Sarawak and Sabah by this route.

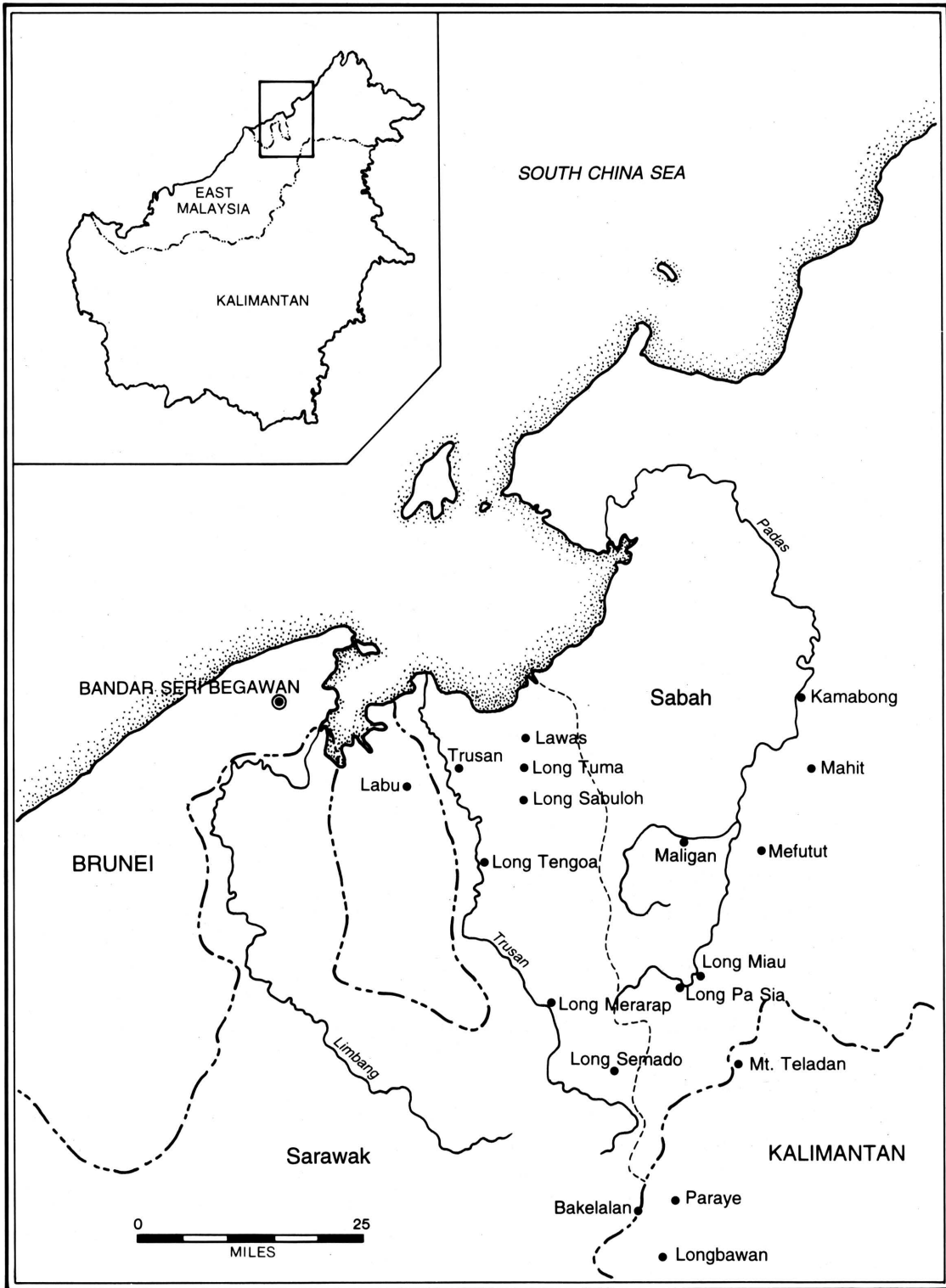


Figure 1. Map showing the principal settlements of the Lun Bawang in East Malaysia, Brunei and East Kalimantan (drawing by Carol Pillar).

Their History

In the last century, the Lun Bawang were known throughout the highlands and down to Brunei Bay as fearless warriors, raiders and headhunters. Mountain lore and physical stamina gave them the edge over enemies from the lowlands. As they spread down river towards the sea, they learned to handle boats but are not expert sailors.

The Rajah of Sarawak acquired the Trusan district in 1885. A fort was built, and a few Chinese and Malay traders' shops sprang up in its shelter. Soon there was law and order in the Trusan, at least within firing distance of the fort. Ulu Trusan was another story. Here feuds were carried on as usual during the "open season" between rice harvest and planting. It took several punitive expeditions to subdue the more reckless of the Lun Bawang leaders, among them Okong, Dayong and Dawat Tubu.

The Lawas district reports of the 1920s contain depressing entries: disease, drunkenness and population decline. The observation of omens and portents at the peak agricultural seasons caused food shortages. A smallpox epidemic wiped out half the Lun Bawang. Survivors grabbed such children as looked uninfected and took to the jungle, abandoning the dead and dying.¹ Christian missionaries who entered the region were told by the civil authorities to concentrate their efforts on the more worthwhile heathens and to leave the moribund "Murut" to their fate.

How could warriors who had threatened Brunei sink to near-extinction within a few decades? Leadership in the old days depended partly on hereditary status and partly on personal achievement. Besides the traditional qualities of wisdom, legal knowledge and persuasive oratory, a leader needed sufficient wealth for display and hospitality, and to raise and provision the labor force needed to make the memorials connected with aristocratic mourning (Pollard 1935). This wealth could be obtained by inheritance, by trading or by raiding; the latter offered the extra advantage of procuring head trophies and/or slaves, both necessary adjuncts to aristocratic prestige (Datan 1989:149).

The Rajah's punitive expeditions aimed at destroying the main leaders' fighting power. This they did, and subverted the leaders' authority in the process. A Lun Bawang chief had to ratify his position

from time to time. Once the main venues for such re-enablement had been cut off, he no longer led. People respected him as the descendant of worthy lineage, but his executive power, and with it the center of society, had collapsed.

But the Lun Bawang persevered. The majority embraced Christianity in the late 1930s. They preserved such of their old customs as were seen to be compatible with their new way of life; the leaders of old often became the religious teachers and pastors. Formal education opened a way for industrious and gifted persons from the lower classes to rise in status. When Europeans (including foreign missionaries) in Borneo were interned by the invading Japanese forces in 1942, local leaders kept the Lun Bawang community and church together during the trying time of war.

The war hardly touched the uplands, except that imported commodities became scarce. In September of 1945, 600 Japanese soldiers moved upriver and inland, intending to cross into Indonesian Borneo. They did not know that the highlands were a center of the Allied Z Force, assisted by enthusiastic local guerillas who harassed the Japanese mercilessly in the inhospitable terrain. The surviving Japanese surrendered on 30 October 1945, beside a tumbledown farm hut in the rice fields of Ba Kelalan. And that was the end of the war in the highlands.

Their Society, Culture and Economy

The present concern is with the people of the Lawas District of Sarawak who call themselves Lun Bawang. A considerable number of them live in the township of Lawas and elsewhere "downriver," engaging in business or paid employment, and living country-town lifestyles. Almost all of them are in regular contact with their villages, either along the Lawas and Trusan rivers, or in the highlands.

The terms "highlands" and "lowlands" mean a lot in this context. Central Borneo's high plateau ends in a rugged edge; rivers roar through rapids on their fall to the undulating lowlands. Before aviation reached the island, the highlands lay days of trekking from the lowlands. A center of Lun Bawang population, Ba Kelalan (Fig. 2) on the upper Trusan River was a tough week's walk from the downriver town of Lawas. Now the journey is done in one rough day by jeep, on



Figure 2. The Lun Bawang heartland, the fertile upland plains of Ba Kelalan (photo by H. Munan).

logging roads which cut ever deeper into the interior. But the civilized way to travel to and from this fertile, isolated, highland valley is by light plane.

The Lun Bawang/Lun Dayeh of the uplands and lowlands share a mutually intelligible language. They have a common culture of rice farming, livestock rearing and strong commercial interests. All their heirloom goods have come to them by way of trade; today's Lun Bawang take to modern business in a very competent way.

Lun Bawang society used to be loosely stratified and it still is to some extent. It may be compared to English country society of the 18th-19th centuries — there was never any question as to who were “gentry” and who were not, but there was ample room for energy and talent to rise upward.

The main strata in Lun Bawang society were called the *lun do* (“people of quality”), the *lun tap-tap* (“ordinary people”) and the *demulun* (slaves). Uneasily fitted between the latter two were the *lun petabpar* (“those who work for others”), poor farmers who eked out their meager incomes by doing day labor for the rich.

Much was expected of the “good” classes by way of leadership and example; the actual rulers (*lun mebala* or “illustrious people”) sprang from their ranks. Individual leaders needed to be successful and sufficiently rich in goods and buffalos to provision big feasts, equip raiding parties, lead migrations or longhouse building. Upper-class marriages involved a complicated exchange of valuable prestige objects like heirlooms (antique jars [Fig. 3], beads and weapons), slaves, livestock and money (Crain 1978). Today's headman, appointed by the government, is usually drawn from among the leading families, but this is not automatic.

The middle classes farmed on their own account. It was the aim of each family to be self-sufficient in rice. A chief sometimes had to adjudicate disputes about access to the most fertile land to be cleared for the year's rice crop. In areas of swidden cultivation, the question of land ownership did not arise as strongly as it did in places where land could be banded and irrigated, and farmed year after year.

Religious and civil laws have abolished slavery in Sarawak. Today it is not only rude but actionable to refer to anyone's slave descent. The Lun Bawang's



Figure 3. Family group at Rumah Kurus, near Long Tuma (lowlands), posing with a valuable heirloom jar, ca. 1947 (courtesy of the Sarawak Museum). Note the necklaces and bead caps of the women.

slaves were nearly always war captives who became absorbed into the master community's very lowest class. They had to perform a certain amount of *corvée* labor, and submit to being traded off as part of a high-class dowry payment on occasion.

The Lun Bawang, like most Borneo people, have a system of agricultural labor pooling and labor exchange. This is not a communal labor system (neither is a longhouse communal living — private property is well demarcated and respected): each family contributes to the pool and is entitled to the relevant number of man-days in turn. Sometimes such obligations are paid off in kind, usually unhusked rice, but workday for workday is the norm. The labor pool is needed for the heavy farming tasks like

clearing/burning, planting and harvesting. Weeding is done mostly by the women.

Some rural Lun Bawang are swidden farmers, others cultivate irrigated rice fields. Swiddens are hillsides which need to be cleared of jungle cover, burned off and planted for one or, at the most, two seasons. Irrigated rice fields, painstakingly banded and watered for weed control and optimum growth of the precious crop, permit a community to settle down for the long term. The question of land ownership then arises, and with it more complex problems of inheritance.

The Lun Bawang used to live in longhouses with separate family rooms, but nearly all occupy single-family houses now (one purpose of the longhouse was defense). A few features of the old style have been retained, however, especially in the kitchen. Though kerosene and gas may be used for cooking, most houses still have a large floor-level hearth. A slight haze of smoke pervades the kitchen; it discourages insects, and billows upwards slowly to escape through the rafters. Near the hearth is a narrow slit window, closed by a sliding or hinged plank, which helps to regulate draft; it also allows the womenfolk to keep an eye on what is going on outside.

The Lun Bawang use such modern facilities as are available. Larger villages have electric power produced by a generator, usually run by the Sarawak government. Gravity-fed water supplies are the norm in their hilly, well-watered home terrain. Radios and TV sets, dish antennae to improve reception (bought in Indonesian Borneo where they are cheaper) keep the villagers in touch with the world. The Malaysia Airline's Rural Air Services are well patronized; if there are empty seats on the return flight to town they are occupied by sacks of rice.

Rice trade is an integral part of today's Lun Bawang economy. The delicately flavored Highland Rice is much esteemed "downriver." Local farmers and their Indonesian cousins bring the grain to highland villages that have airstrips. Here a local entrepreneur buys it and then sells it to shops in the coastal towns.

Air-freighting is a new aspect; the trade itself is not, as I learned in a Ba Kelalan kitchen. A troop of sellers arrived in the early afternoon, each laden with a tall back basket full of rice. The group was hospitably entertained by the buyer's wife and offered

houseroom for an overnight stay. The rice was measured with a *gantang*, a container holding about 4 liters. For each tinful scooped from the basket to the storage containers, a pinch of rice was placed on the mat. When the basket was empty, the tally of mounds established the count. "This is an old method, and a good one!" buyer and seller agreed; "if we chat while we're measuring we might lose count" (pers. obs.: Tagal Paran's house, Ba Kalalang).

The social life of a Lun Bawang village centers around the church which is not only a place of worship, but a meeting place for young and old alike. Once notorious slave-owners and feared headhunters, the Lun Bawang turned over a completely new leaf. The leadership frowns on smoking, drinking and all forms of impure behavior. Great value is laid on education.

LUN BAWANG BEADS

Use and Value

Every Lun Bawang informant stated utility as the principal purpose for wearing beads. The bead cap held the hair in place; a woman who did not have a cap always wore a headband or a scrap of cloth tied around her head in the old days. The bead belt held up the skirt (*sarong*); there were rattan, brass and silver substitutes available for this purpose as well. The bead necklaces and bracelets? They show social and economic status, and are decorative.

Do beads have a religious/spiritual meaning or power? This is a difficult question for a staunch evangelical Christian to answer. Most informants listed the purpose of beads in this order: 1) practical utility, 2) status marker, 3) value object and 4) personal ornament. The fact that the Christian missionaries, European or Indonesian, never disapproved of the wearing and use of beads sustains this position; they would have endeavored to root out "heathen practices" had they suspected the beads were used for such purposes (Munan 1991:186-187).

Beads used to be the medium for paying the traditional healer whose function was part medical and part religious. He or she was given beads before a healing ceremony started to "protect the soul," and more beads were presented as a fee when the patient recovered. Beads were sometimes buried with the

dead, but it does not appear that this was meant as provision for the underworld, as will be discussed below.

In a song called *Nawar Ada'* — formerly associated with the agricultural cycle — a female rice spirit was exhorted to dress nicely: "... [wear] a belt of yellow beads, a necklace of long carnelian beads, a cap of antique yellow beads, bring an umbrella, bring a straw hat..." (Deegan 1970:271-272). Thus attired did she work beneficent magic upon the growing crops.

Beads showed a person's status in a society not given to elaborate, ceremonial personal titles and honorifics. The Lun Bawang use first names rather more freely than some of their neighbors. Members of the leading families live, work and dress like any other villager; a stranger could, however, identify them by their ornaments.

Beads are value objects to most East Sarawak people. They are acquired in times of prosperity and sold in times of need, though Lun Bawang of the upper class feel strongly that heirloom beads should never be sold. One accepted reason for disposing of beads is to provision a festival. A Kelabit lady who found it difficult to assess the value of a bead cap (*pata*, also spelled *peta*) in currency stated it unhesitatingly in buffalos: five head (Munan-Oettli 1983:90). A Lun Bawang lady suggested the following rates: for a cherry-sized yellow bead used to make caps, ten *gantang* (ca. 40 liters) of unhusked rice; for 50 long thin orange beads or ten strands of yellow belt beads, one buffalo. However, it was pointed out that few people sell and buy goods with beads nowadays; a person might sell beads to buy other desired items with the money obtained.

After the upheavals of this century, when the Lun Bawang teetered on the brink of extinction and then drastically changed their lifestyle, traditional values — including the bead culture — were questioned. Money replaced beads as a medium of exchange; gold became a preferred prestige ornament/capital investment. In addition to this, large numbers of beads were lost. During the epidemics, when longhouses were abandoned, no survivor dared to return to an empty, ghost-ridden ruin to poke around for treasure among the unburied dead. In the violent final weeks of World War II, a number of longhouses in the upper Trusan were burned to the ground. With these

structures perished not only a lifestyle (villages of separate houses were built instead), but large amounts of heirloom property as well.

In the aftermath of war, immediate material problems relegated heritage preservation to a very low priority. People who had beads hardly wore them. Beads were sold for the fulfilment of more pressing needs; the seller noting that prices had dropped severely. A few far-sighted wealthy women bought top-quality beads very cheaply at that time. They were a "dead investment" for 20 years. However, since the 1970s, when local and foreign collectors entered the market, they have steadily risen in value.

In the past, Lun Bawang ladies wore a bead cap or some other form of headband to keep their hair in place; nowadays, short hairstyles are very common, and most of the ladies who keep their hair long coil it into a chignon. The bead belt is no longer necessary. Even if a lady wears a *sarong*, it is made of fine Indonesian cotton. The old Lun Bawang skirts of bark cloth were rather stiff and would not stay up without a belt of some kind.

A conservative upper-class Lun Bawang lady living in a village may wear a string or two of beads as she goes about her housework. She does not wear her bead cap for everyday use, though she may put it on for visiting or receiving visitors. For an outdoor function, a flat conical hat coiled from palm-root fiber is worn over the cap.

Beads may be bought and sold freely, but the normal "respectable" way to obtain beads is by inheritance or as dowry. A daughter is provided with valuables before marriage: "to give her respect among her new in-laws. She can wear the beads when she likes, or she can use them to buy things for herself or her family" (Mdm. Yamu Pengiran, Ba Kalalang: pers. comm.). Things to buy include other beads or ornaments, food in times of scarcity (though this reflects on her husband's ability as a provider) or, in the past, land.

Beads can be given to a daughter-in-law. Such a gift is usually made after the marriage, as a token of good family relationships. The younger woman does not expect it; the elder is not obliged to give it. Disposal of beads, to a relative or friend, is entirely at the owner's discretion; men refrain from meddling in what is women's business.



Figure 4. A group of Lun Bawang women from Ba Belawit, Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo, highlands), ca. 1947 (courtesy of the Sarawak Museum). They wear bead caps and multi-strand necklaces.

Beads pass from mother to daughter, not only as dowry but also as inheritance. The mourning mother of a daughter (more rarely a son) who died unmarried may put some beads in her child's coffin, but this is unusual. Normally beads are shared after the mother's death. An owner is not obliged to bequeath beads to her daughters, or to other relatives even if she was childless and they cared for her in her declining days. Childless women sometimes sell their beads; if no instructions were given during her lifetime, beads may be buried with the owner after her death.

Most Lun Bawang disapprove of burying beads and valuables with the dead. Nobody disputes the fact that the beads are the property of the deceased; she has a right to keep them. But, in this wicked age, a tomb



Figure 5. Mdm. Yamu Pengiran of Ba Kelalan wearing a valuable 11-strand *pata* (bead cap) and two multi-strand necklaces (photo by H. Munan).

known to contain treasures may not be safe from sacrilegious antique hunters. Grave robberies have occurred in many parts of Sarawak. The response has been interesting: I heard of one case of a wealthy woman who requested that her beads be pounded to grit and then buried with her — and so they were! (Mdm. Budi Tadam, Long Tuma: pers. comm.).

Beaded Objects

Lun Bawang, Lun Dayeh, Murut and Kelabit ladies share a bead fashion that is not found elsewhere in Sarawak. They wear caps (*pata*) composed entirely of beads. These caps, formed of beads strung on creeper or pineapple fiber without any rattan framework or support, used to be worn every day by ladies of the upper classes (Fig. 4). The *pata* is a status symbol. In these democratic days, nobody will say that a lower-class person would have been prevented from wearing one in the past. The question probably

did not arise; no lower-class or slave woman could have afforded such finery.

A Lun Bawang bead cap consists of six to eight strands of beads (a valuable specimen may be as wide as ten strands [Fig. 5]) which decrease in length towards the top to fit the size of the head. The top is open so that the wearer can twist her hair outside the hat and tuck it in through the hole (Pl. IVC). The front section of the cap is made of spherical opaque yellow beads 5-7 mm in diameter. The side panels are constructed of black beads, about the same size, spotted with white “eyes.” The rear portion (Fig. 6) may be made of any less-important beads: spherical opaque turquoise and spherical opaque brick-red beads of glass, and cylindrical white shell beads.

Besides the *pata*, Lun Bawang ladies wear massed necklaces, and belts consisting of many strands of small glass beads (*bengin*) (Pl. IVD). Favorite beads for both are yellow, turquoise, pale orange, green or blue opaque monochromes of the type used for necklace type b (*see below*). Some valuable belts have less strands but contain more ancient and respected beads, including a black barrel-shaped bead decorated with longitudinal stripes of light yellow, green, white or pink, which has been nicknamed the “pyjama bead” by some Sarawak collectors. The individual strands of a belt are kept in order by spacers. The traditionally preferred material for this purpose was twisted brass wire, but other types of wire or covered cable are also used (perforated hardwood spacers are sometimes used though they are not common). Some craftswomen make spacers of the threading string. Now very rare is a roughly shaped round disc of carnelian, 5-8 cm in diameter, with two or even three longitudinal perforations. This disc is usually at the end of the belt, before the two or three strings pass through a few large single beads adjacent to the fastener.

The Lun Bawang bead collections I was permitted to inspect contain several bead belts and necklaces which contain similar beads, and are similarly constructed. There are three main types of necklaces:

- a. A single strand of individually valuable beads, including Venetian lampworked beads, small “Amsterdam” chevrons and the very highly prized, longish, yellow *let alai* (Pls. VA-VB). If Lun Bawang men wear bead necklaces, they are of the one-strand type, usually of the heaviest beads



Figure 6. The back portion of a 7-strand *pata*. Yellow *alet birar mon* beads comprise the bulk of the cap. Other beads include white monochromes, black specimens decorated with various dark red and white elements, and long, faceted, imitation carnelian beads (photo by H. Munan).

available. Men seem to have worn more beads in the past. The fashion was practically discontinued, but is now being taken up again.

- b. Single-strand necklaces consisting entirely of one type of bead (Pl. VA), often the decorated, yellow *let alai barit* or the long, thin, orange *let tulang*. In this type of ornament the first and last bead, where the string is fastened, may be a black “fake chevron.”
- c. Necklaces composed of six or more strands of fine (rice-grain to peanut-sized) monochrome glass beads (Pl. VC). Favorite colors are yellow, turquoise, brick red and coral red, all opaque, of wound as well as drawn manufacture. It is possible to achieve the massed effect by wearing a number of the fine beads described for necklace type b above. The beads may also be strung in multiple strands but joined at the back; 7.6 cm of either end of the necklace is composed of larger beads through which all the strings pass. This makes fitting the fastening, a loop to catch the last bead, easier. Wire hooks and standard jeweller’s

findings are also used, or whatever the stringer has at hand.

Bead necklaces follow fashion, too. They used to reach to about mid-chest; today’s clothing styles favor a shorter necklace (Mdm. Lua Langub, Long Semado: pers. comm.). Bead necklaces for men are short enough to be worn in an open collar; the elegant batik shirt which is Malaysian semi-formal evening wear is enhanced by a few “good” beads worn in this way. Mdm. Yamu Pengiran (pers. comm.) described to me an old bead fashion that I have not personally seen: a bead bracelet consisting of twelve or more strands of small beads like those used for the type b necklaces, shaped to closely fit the forearm from the wrist towards the elbow.

The Types of Beads

The Lun Bawang utilize a variety of beads, the 20 most important of which are described below. These are listed in order from the most to the least valuable.

Table 1. Selected Lun Bawang Bead Vocabulary.*

| | |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| <i>alai</i> | bead |
| <i>alet, let</i> | bead |
| <i>amas</i> | gold |
| <i>aki</i> | carnelian bead |
| <i>bané</i> | bead necklace |
| <i>barit</i> | decorated |
| <i>baru</i> | new |
| <i>bau</i> | bead |
| <i>bengin</i> | small (red) bead |
| <i>beret</i> | bead belt |
| <i>birar</i> | yellow |
| <i>buda</i> | white |
| <i>buror</i> | old (antique) |
| <i>buso</i> | orange |
| <i>labak</i> | melon (gourd) |
| <i>manaa</i> | small (pink) bead |
| <i>meching</i> | "not so old," recent |
| <i>mon</i> | old |
| <i>pata, peta</i> | bead cap |
| <i>rabang</i> | small (orange) bead |
| <i>rebuyong</i> | zig-zag |
| <i>sia</i> | red |
| <i>sukur</i> | spotted dove |
| <i>tabu</i> | jar |
| <i>tebelu</i> | shell bead |
| <i>tepalang</i> | traverse |
| <i>tina</i> | small |
| <i>tulang</i> | bone |

*Based on Pur (1965) and oral information from bead owners

The material is glass unless otherwise stated. A selected vocabulary of Lun Bawang bead terms is presented in Table 1.

1. Long thin orange (*bau tulang buror*). These are composed of a very fine, smooth, opaque pale dusty-orange glass, and come in lengths of 15-25 mm. Visually, they are "drawn" beads of the Indo-Pacific type described by Francis (1989), but not cut into short segments. The Gardener

Collection (located in Johore Lama at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula) contains similar specimens (card II, row 18), but their color appears darker and their surface is less smooth than that of the *bau tulang buror*.

2. Yellow spherical, for caps (*bau alet*). This and the next two types are visually almost the same. About 7 mm in diameter, they are of opaque glass with a matte surface which is often pitted or marked from age and use. Expert eyes can

distinguish a very old from a not-so-old specimen at a glance.

3. Yellow spherical (*alet birar mon*).
4. Yellow spherical (*alet mon meching*).
5. Shiny yellow, long oval (*let alai*). This is a top value bead for the Lun Bawang and their cousins, the Kelabit. The place of origin of types 2-5 has not yet been determined, though opaque yellow glass is found elsewhere in the region. Visually similar beads (of the same shape but of a paler color and with a "glassier" appearance) are in the Gardener Collection (card II, row 16).
6. Decorated yellow, long oval (*alai barit*). This is a newer, less valuable version of type 5.
7. Yellow "melon" (*let labak*). Not particularly old.
8. Small yellow (*bengin birar*). This and the following type are very common throughout the Insulindies, variants of the Chinese coiled bead (Francis 1990).
9. Small brick red "mutisalah" (*bengin, bau tina sia*).
10. Long faceted carnelian (*aki*). Both genuine carnelian beads and their glass imitations (Francis 1979) are used in heavy necklaces, and to form the sides of caps.
11. Small orange doughnut (*rabang*). Of opaque glass, 4-6 mm in diameter.
12. "Fake chevron" with black zigzag bands (*rebuyong*). A black cylindrical bead which is fairly common in Borneo.
13. "Amsterdam" chevron (*bau mon*). Dubbed "Amsterdam" chevrons by van der Sleen (1963:173); it is likely that some Borneo beads originated in Holland. This type must have been available for a long time; a sample card (Murano, 1926) in the Sarawak Museum features it in several colors.
14. "Gold-decorated" bead (*rebuyong amas*). These are beads decorated with aventurine, a suspension of fine copper particles in glass which impart the appearance of gold.
15. Simple black "lukut" (*alet sukur*). A lampworked bead, probably from Venice. Good new copies of this bead, said to be from Java, have recently become available.
16. Black with white dots (*let sukur* or "spotted dove"). The dots may be white, pink/white,

blue/white or turquoise/white. These beads are used to form the sides of bead caps.

17. Large brick-red spherical (*alet sia*). A common bead in Borneo, well regarded but not usually top value (Francis 1991:Pl. 2, central item; Munan-Oettli 1981:21-22). It is used to make the sides or backs of bead caps.
18. Shell, cylindrical or spherical (*tebelu*). Large opaque white beads are called "shell" and sometimes "pebble" without much investigation.
19. Ceramic (*alai tabu* or "jar" bead). A few ceramic beads, presumably 19th- or 20th-century Chinese, are present. These are curios of no great value.
20. Big white spherical (*alet buda*). Generally of opaque glass, occasionally of shell, these can be used to fashion the backs of caps.

The Source of Lun Bawang Beads

Lun Bawang ladies are vague about the origin of their beads. A long faceted carnelian is occasionally found in the earth, presumably lost by somebody in the past (Mdm. Yamu Pengiran, Ba Kelalan: pers. comm.). There is a general idea that beads come "from Brunei," but there is no great insistence of this, or explanation. As the Lun Bawang people have only moved into the orbit of Brunei within the last 200 years, and the family heirlooms are "many generations" old, it is more likely that their main trade access was Borneo's east coast, not the north.

In the old days, women seldom left their natal or nuptial regions; their longest trips were usually to neighboring longhouses. Men did the trading and raiding, and came home laden with treasure. Bead preference had to adapt itself to what was available. Considering this fact, it is interesting to compare the bead fashions of the Lun Bawang and the Kelabit, related peoples who share a mutually intelligible language and similar cultures. The two groups lived within reach of each other in the central highlands of Borneo, and must have shared an almost identical bead pool at one time. Both Kelabit and Lun Bawang women wear bead caps, the Kelabit one closed at the top. Multi-strand belts and necklaces of both tribes look identical. Both value the long, thin, orange *tulang* bead, the shiny oval *let alai*, and the small coiled beads (*bengin*) which they string into similar articles.

The Lun Bawang used to make and wear bead jackets of the type the Kelabit still treasure (Mdm. Yamu Pengiran, Ba Kelalan: pers. comm.). But the Lun Bawang hardly use the Kelabit's top value bead, the transparent or translucent dark-blue cylinder (Francis 1991:Pl. 5; Munan-Oettli 1983:93-94). They know it, and call it *bau Kelabit* (Mdm. Alau Maru, Long Tuma: pers. comm.). The Kelabit used long, faceted, biconical carnelian beads for making caps in the past. Now they prefer the long orange *tulang* and a variety of other small beads. None of these are used by the Lun Bawang to make caps. The copious use of the yellow spherical *alet birar mon*, especially for the fronts of caps (Pl. IVC), distinguishes the Lun Bawang. Another yellow bead, the *let alai* (Pl. VB), is longish and oval in shape (ca. 5 mm x 10 mm), of a brighter shade than the *alet birar mon* and quite shiny. Very commonly used by the Kelabit, the type (no. 11) dubbed "doughnut" by A. Lamb (1961:50ff.) is used but not highly prized by the Lun Bawang. This is especially strange considering that it is the one bead that was certainly made in Borneo (Tillema 1938:179-181)!

The Lun Bawang use a bead not seen elsewhere in Sarawak, and not common among them either, in necklaces and, occasionally, belts. It is a very long faceted bicone of translucent glass, or just a "stick." This bead was manufactured in late 19th- and early 20th-century Bohemia in shades of deep red-brown and orange to imitate a much older carnelian bead (3-5 cm long) found all over the island and, indeed, everywhere in the Insulindies. But the "long glass carnelian" is up to 12 cm in length, and comes in additional colors: dark green (possibly in imitation of jade), midnight blue, dark red, violet, white and yellow. It is also found among Sabah's Muruts and Tagal who use it to make an angular headband that sits on the head rather than conforms to its contours. The Runggus in northeast Sabah wear it too, though not on their heads. The longer the bead, the greater the danger of breakage. It is considered sufficiently valuable that even broken sections have their sharp edges filed off and are then re-strung.

It is not clear why this conspicuous, if not very attractive, bead is hardly found in Sarawak. It may have originated with the German trade that tried to gain a foothold in the Sulu Sea in the 19th century. The time frame fits: the bead is not considered to be

very old; it seems to have gotten into east Borneo currency after the 1850s and left the market following World War II. The original village on the site of Sandakan, first capital of the North Borneo Company (1879), was called *Kampung Jerman* (German village) in honor of the gun runners who defied the Spanish ban on supplying firearms to the Sulu Archipelago. The Lun Bawang's traditional supply routes originated at the eastern and northeastern coast of Borneo, particularly Tarakan, comfortably within the radius of this trade. Sarawak's seaborne supplies came in mainly through Singapore, so English-approved Indian, European and Chinese² beads were much more common here in the Victorian age.

None of the informants had anything to suggest regarding the origin of the yellow beads, big or small. Neither had any of them heard of the quite recent manufacture of yellow beads (of a type they know, but do not particularly value) on the east coast of Borneo (see Tillema 1938). Nor had they heard of the manufacture of stone beads by the Saba'an of upper Bahau (Nieuwenhuis 1907:224), Central Borneo neighbors and distant cousins of the Lun Bawang with whom they share some bead tastes.

Locally Made Beads

The Lun Bawang used to make clay cooking ware in the past (Morrison 1955:295; Pollard 1935). The availability of good clay in the region may be what prompted the people of Long Tuyoh to start making clay beads in the late 1970s, in response to the rising demand for "real" beads. Initially they made large yellow beads for the production of caps. Reviving interest in the material culture of Borneo had driven up the value of genuine beads. A parallel folkloristic revival, partly for the purpose of entertaining visitors and tourists, created a demand for traditional costumes. The Lun Bawang costume demands large quantities of beads, only a few suitable examples of which were to be found among the plastic ones available as fashion jewellery.

Labo Tui and his wife, Lisabeth Murang, both Lun Bawang, started making beads at their house in Long Tuma in the early 1980s. They had heard that other people were making them so they decided to try it as well. The two think that the idea comes from Indonesian Borneo, where the bulk of the Lun Dayeh



Figure 7. Labo Tui of Long Tuma shaping a clay bead using a coconut-leaf rib to perforate it. His wife, Lisabeth, strings finished beads (photo by H. Munan).

live. Beadmaking, being a modern craft, is not restricted by taboos of any kind. Anybody who wants to can make beads, provided they have the materials, skill and patience.

Labo searches for a particular type of very fine clay, almost oily to the touch, which is found in small pockets in the river bank. He brings a few kilograms into the house at a time for further processing. First, he kneads and pounds the clay to perfect smoothness, and then shapes the beads by hand, perforating them with a wooden stick (Fig. 7). The beads are then dried at room temperature. After being threaded on lengths of wire which are formed into loops, the beads (600 - 800 at a time) are placed in an open fire until they glow red. When cool, the beads are colored individually using a paintbrush and enamel paint (Figs. 8-9). The beads are then allowed to dry, individually spiked on thin sticks, at which point they are strung for sale.

Labo and Lisabeth can produce 10-15 strings of beads a week. They have not abandoned farming, but spend one third to half their time making beads, depending on seasonal farm work. Beadmaking is a good source of income for subsistence farmers. Their product sells well among the Lun Bawang of Sarawak

and Sabah, also the Murut and Tagal (some of the latter have started wearing yellow *pata* in preference to their own traditional headgear which requires three or four strands of very large carnelian beads). "Long Tuma beads" (Pl. VD) are sold in shops as far afield as Kota Kinabalu, the capital of Sabah, and Kuching in Sarawak.

The main purpose of the beadmakers is to reproduce antique beads, *not* to produce fakes. Beadmakers, middlemen and sellers are all emphatic on this point: nobody tries to tell the buyer that the beads are "genuine antiques." Many Lun Bawang buy the new beads to conserve the old authentic ones which are only worn on gala occasions.

In the 1960s, it was still possible to buy transparent beads of blue, green and amber glass in Sarawak's townships. These are now gone from the market. For more than 20 years, the only new beads were plastic "fashion-jewellery" types. Now, in the 1990s, there are new glass beads. Various kinds of poorly finished millefiori from India are sold by peddlers who insist they are Tibetans; a whole conclave of them may be found in Petaling Street in Kuala Lumpur. Their wares are appreciated as



Figure 8. Lisabeth Murang covering plain yellow beads with enamel paint. She attaches the wire on which they were fired to the wall (photo by H. Munan).



Figure 9. Lisabeth Murang painting the decoration on imitation “lampworked beads” with a fine brush. The beads are mounted on a thin stick for this purpose (photo by H. Munan).

novelties, but could not be worn as part of the Lun Bawang costume. But the very latest are large-holed cylindrical beads, of the type used for the "corn-row" hairstyles of the 1980s, in rather garish colors. These beads are snapped up by such Lun Bawang ladies as have access to them and fashioned into bead belts, necklaces and even *pata* for informal use, school concerts and the like when they do not want to risk losing or damaging their heirloom property.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank The Bead Society of Greater Washington for a generous research grant to finance this study. My thanks also to Mr. Karlis Karklins and the Society of Bead Researchers for their support.

In Sarawak, thanks are due to the family of Daniel Selutan of Long Luping and his wife Mdm. Lua Langub of Long Semado, now living in Kuching, for help and information in the early stages of the project. Long Tuma teacher Ms. Nancy Pagag kindly helped with transportation and interpretation, and introduced me to her bead-wise mother, Mdm. Budi Tadam, as well as to Mdm. Alau Maru and such neighbors as inevitably drop in when there is talk about beads; Labo Tui and Lisabeth Murang gave up nearly a day's work to talk to me. Alfred Dawat and Mdm. Litad Selutan filled me in on the history and ethnogeography of Lawas and its hinterland. I especially wish to thank Dennis Ukung Langub and his wife in Lawas, Tagal Paran and Mdm. Yamu Pengiran in Ba Kelalan and their son Mutang Tagal in Miri for hospitality during my travels.

This report owes much to comments and criticism from Ipoi Datan, Deputy Director of Sarawak Museum, and Jayl Langub of the Native Customary Laws Council, Sarawak.

ENDNOTES

1. Personal communication from several elderly informants who were "salvaged" in this way as babies, and brought up by distant relatives.
2. "Sold in Chinese paper and Chinese boxes in Singapore... blue transparent and yellow opaque

beads, cylindrical, 7 mm long and 8 mm thick..." (Nieuwenhuis 1904:139-140).

REFERENCES CITED

- Crain, J.B.**
1978 The Lun Dayeh. In *Essays on Borneo Societies*, edited by V.T. King, pp. 122-142. University of Hull.
- Datan, I.**
1989 A Brief Ethnography of the Lun Bawang of Sarawak. *Sarawak Museum Journal* XL(61):143-156.
- Deegan, J.**
1970 Some Lun Bawang Spirit Chants. *Sarawak Museum Journal* XVIII(36-37):264-280.
- Francis, P., Jr.**
1979 The Czech Bead Story. *World of Beads Monograph Series 2*.
1989 Mantai: Bead Crossroads of the Medieval World. *Ornament* 12(3):82-91.
1990 Chinese Coil Beads. *Ornament* 14(1):66-67,69-70.
1991 Two Distinctive Chinese Glass Beads. *Ornament* 14(4):82-83.
- King, V.T. (ed.)**
1978 *Essays on Borneo Societies*. University of Hull.
- Lamb, A.**
1961 Miscellaneous Papers on Early Hindu and Buddhist Settlement in N. Malaya and S. Thailand. *Federation of Malaya Museum Journal* 6:48-55.
- Morrison, A.**
1955 Murut Pottery. *Sarawak Museum Journal* VI(5):295-296.
- Munan-Oettli, A. (Heidi Munan)**
1981 Bead Necklace 1598 in the Sarawak Museum Collection. *Sarawak Museum Journal* XXIX(50):17-26.
1983 Bead Cap 64/88 in the Sarawak Museum Collection. *Sarawak Museum Journal* XXXII(53):89-96.
1988 The Southwell Collection of Kayan Beads in the Sarawak Museum. *Sarawak Museum Journal* XXXIX(60):105-109.
1991 Bead Magic. In *Sarawak Cultural Legacy*, edited by L. Chin, pp. 186-187. Society Atelier Sarawak and Shell Companies of Malaysia, Kuching.

Nieuwenhuis, A.W.

- 1904 Kunstperlen und ihre kulturelle Bedeutung. *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie* 16:136-154. Leiden.
- 1907 *Quer durch Borneo*. E. Brill, Leiden.

Pollard, F.H.

- 1933 The Muruts of Sarawak. *Sarawak Museum Journal* IV(13):139-155.
- 1935 Some Comparative Notes on Muruts and Kelabits. *Sarawak Museum Journal* IV(14):223-227.

Pur, S.L.

- 1965 *Kamus Lundayeh*. Borneo Literature Bureau, Kuching.

Sandin, B.

- 1972 The Bisayah and Indigenous Peoples of Limbang. *Sarawak Museum Journal* XX(40-41):41-51.

Sleen, W.G.N. van der

- 1963 A Bead Factory in Amsterdam in the Seventeenth Century. *Man* 63(Art. 219):172-174.

Tillema, H.F.

- 1938 *Een Filmreis naar en door Centraal-Borneo*. Van Munsters's Uitgevers-Maatschappij, Amsterdam.

Heidi Munan
301 Golden Farm
6th Mile
93250 Kuching
Sarawak, Malaysia