

## MEGALITHIC SITES IN PUNANG KELAPANG, UPPER BARAM, SARAWAK: A PRELIMINARY SURVEY

*(TAPAK MEGALITIK DI PUNANG KELAPANG, ULU BARAM, SARAWAK:  
SATU TINJAUAN AWAL)*

Nicholas Gani

### Abstract

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Most of what is presently known about megalithic remains in Sarawak have come from research conducted in the Kelabit Highlands, in the Upper Baram. Another area in the Upper Baram where megalithic remains are known to be present is Punang Kelapang, south of the Kelabit Highlands. Compared to their counterparts in the Kelabit Highlands, however, much less is known about the megalithic remains in Punang Kelapang. In order to obtain more information about the megaliths in Punang Kelapang, an archaeological survey was conducted over a period of about five-and-a-half weeks in March, April and August 2016. This article presents the results of the survey. A total of twenty megalithic sites were recorded, out of which fourteen were visited. The megaliths in Punang Kelapang consist of megalithic cemeteries such as dolmens, stone jars, stone trough, cist graves, and rock burials; and non-cemetery megaliths such as stone mounds, carved stones and a standing stone.

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**Keywords:** Megalith, archaeology, Baram, Sarawak, Borneo

### Abstrak

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*Sehingga kini, apa yang diketahui tentang tinggalan megalitik di Sarawak kebanyakannya adalah hasil daripada kajian-kajian terdahulu yang telah dijalankan di kawasan Kelabit Highlands, di Ulu Baram. Satu lagi kawasan di Ulu Baram di mana batu-batu megalit diketahui wujud adalah Punang Kelapang, di selatan Kelabit Highlands. Jika dibandingkan dengan batu-batu megalit di Kelabit Highlands, tidak banyak yang diketahui tentang batu-batu megalit di Punang Kelapang. Bagi mendapatkan lebih banyak lagi data berkenaan batu-batu megalit di Punang Kelapang, satu survei telah dijalankan dalam tempoh lebih lima minggu pada Mac, April dan Ogos 2016. Makalah ini membentangkan hasil survei tersebut. Sebanyak dua puluh tapak megalit telah direkodkan. Daripada jumlah ini, empat belas tapak telah dilawati. Batu-batu megalit di Punang Kelapang boleh dibahagikan kepada tapak perkuburan megalit seperti dolmen, tempayan atau keranda batu, kubur kepingan batu, dan pengkebumian di batuan semulajadi. Selain itu, terdapat juga batu-batu megalit seperti timbunan batu, batu berukir dan batu tegak.*

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**Kata kunci:** Megalit, arkeologi, Baram, Sarawak, Borneo

## INTRODUCTION

Most of what is presently known about megalithic remains in Sarawak have come from research conducted in the Kelabit Highlands, in the Upper Baram. First made known through writings by European officers of the Brooke government (see Banks 1937; Douglas 1912), the megalithic remains in the Kelabit Highlands were the subjects of various studies by Tom Harrisson between the late 1940s and the 1960s (Harrisson 1949, 1958a, 1958b, 1959, 1962, 1973, 1974). In recent years, more extensive documentations and surveys of megaliths in the Kelabit Highlands have been carried out (Cluny and Chai 2007; Hitchner 2009). Archaeological investigations of a number of upland megalithic sites have also been conducted within the past decade (Lloyd-Smith 2012; Lloyd-Smith et al. 2010; Lloyd-Smith et al. 2013; Lloyd-Smith et al. 2015). These studies have revealed a wealth of information on the typology, origin and development of megalithic practices in the highlands. In terms of classification, the megaliths of the Kelabit Highlands comprise various types such as dolmens, cist graves, stone vats, rock cut grottoes, stone mounds, carved rocks, and standing stones (see Harrisson 1958a). Based on present data, the Kelabit Highlands megalithic tradition is thought to have developed in at least three different phases defined by a combination of megalith typology, radiocarbon dates and ethnographic evidence. Large stone mounds are thought to be the earliest megalithic type dating back to as early as 2,500 years ago (Lloyd-Smith et al. 2015). The appearance of large stone mounds is believed to have coincided with the beginning of the exploitation and management of sago palm, and with the appearance of open-air sites in the highlands (Jones et al. 2016). The second phase of megalith-building, on the other hand, is characterised by the construction of small stone mounds, dolmens and stone jars between AD 1400 and AD 1800 (Lloyd-Smith et al. 2013). Finally, the third and final phase is characterised by the making of standing stones (or menhirs), which has been observed until around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Harrisson 1958b). Historically, megalithic monuments were built by the Kelabit and other related groups (e.g. the Lun Bawang or the Lun Dayeh, the Sa'ban, and the Ngurek) as funerary and commemorative monuments, usually at death ceremonies of elite individuals, and accompanied by grand feasts. Constructions of megaliths were huge undertakings, in terms of cost and labour, and thus, megaliths were also often seen as markers of status.

Despite that, there are still areas in the interior highlands of Sarawak, where knowledge about their megalithic monuments remains lacking. One such area is Punang Kelapang, south of the Kelabit Highlands. This article presents the results of a recent survey of megalithic sites in Punang Kelapang. This survey was conducted in two separate phases of fieldwork: 29 March-25 April 2016, and 16-27 August 2016, as part of the author's ongoing doctoral research. The final week (20-27 August 2016) of the survey, in particular, was conducted in collaboration with Mohammad Sherman Sauffi, Acting Curator of the Archaeology section in the Sarawak Museums Department in Kuching. This article begins with a general description of the Punang Kelapang area. Following that, the megalithic sites that were recorded and visited are described.

## THE AREA: PUNANG KELAPANG

The Punang Kelapang region is located in the Upper Baram, in the northeastern interior of Sarawak (Fig. 1). It is situated in the southernmost part of the Kelabit Highlands. Etymologically, the name 'Punang Kelapang' refers to the headwaters of the Kelapang River, which is the Kelabit name for the Baram River. The region is drained by the Bale and the Balong rivers, and their tributaries. Both the Bale and the Balong are themselves tributaries of the main Baram River (Fig. 2).

Population-wise, the Punang Kelapang area is multi-ethnic. The settlements in the area comprise the Kelabit community of Long Peluan, the mixed Sa'ban and Kenyah Lepo Ke' communities of Long Banga, the Sa'ban community of Long Puak, and the Penan communities of Long Lamai, Long Beruang and Ba Lai. In terms migration history, it is generally accepted that the Kelabit and the Sa'ban arrived in the area around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Further migrations of the Sa'ban and the Kenyah Lepo' Ke from Indonesian Kalimantan to Long Balong and Long Banga happened after the Second World War. In regard to the Penan, there are indications to show that they have been present in the area for more than 200 years (Egay 2009). Unlike their

neighbours who are all agriculturalists, the Penan were traditionally nomadic hunter-gatherers (Needham 1972), who became settled beginning in the 1950s. It should also be mentioned that in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the area was inhabited by a group of people called the Ngurek (Jalong 1989, Sellato 1995). As will be apparent further below, some of the megalithic monuments in Punang Kelapang have been attributed to the activities of the Ngurek (see also Mashman 2017). At present, the Ngurek can be found living in Long Semiyang, Long Banyok and Long Ikgang, further downriver on the Baram.



Figure 1. Map showing the location of Punang Kelapang, within the Upper Baram region in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo, with major towns indicated: 1) Bario; 2) Long Banga; 3) Miri; 4) Marudi; and 5) Bandar Seri Begawan

(Map data ©OpenStreetMap contributors. Inset map from Nyiri [2016])

In the old days, the Punang Kelapang region used to be quite isolated. A journey to Marudi, the nearest district administrative centre, for example, would typically take five days comprising “two days on foot over rugged terrain rising up to more than 1300 metres above sea level and the other 3 days down the Baram River by outboard engine” (Murang 1993:85). Nowadays, the Malaysian Airlines rural air service (MAS Wings) provides regular (twice weekly) flights from Miri and Marudi to Long Banga. Punang Kelapang is also connected by road (mostly logging road) to Miri. From Miri to Long Banga, a journey on a four-wheel-drive vehicle typically takes around ten hours, depending on weather and road condition.

## THE MEGALITHIC SITES

Most of the megalithic sites in Punang Kelapang that were surveyed were located on river banks, or at river confluences, except for one (Lekad Kelesan, see below), which was located on a hilltop. Some of the megalithic sites were located within the vicinity of villages. Others were located further away, requiring hours of walking in the forest environment, sometimes on steep and slippery terrains, and with various river crossings. A few megalithic sites were accessed by boat. Visits to megalithic sites in Punang Kelapang were made with guides, who were villagers from Long Banga, Long Peluan and Long Beruang.

The megalithic remains were found in various states of preservation, from intact to totally damaged. Threats to megalithic sites that were observed include human-induced ones such as logging activities, roadworks, farming-related clearing activities and vandalism, as well as natural threats such as floods, tree-fall, and animal and tree-root disturbance.

For many years, the megaliths have been neglected, and their lack of preservation, or destruction in some cases, have been treated by the locals with indifference or passive resignation. This is what Mashman (2017:413-414) has termed the ‘forgetting’ of the sites, and furthermore:

the forgetting and damage to these sites took place at a time when there was little awareness of the importance of having such places gazetted, before the resurgence of interest in the stone culture in the highlands....One could argue that these places have only become meaningful through the recent gazettement of Kelabit cultural sites after 2000 (Mashman 2017:414).

The megaliths in Punang Kelapang consist of megalithic cemeteries such as dolmens, stone jars, stone trough, cist graves, or burials at natural rocky places; and non-cemetery megaliths such as stone mounds, carved stones and a standing stone. A total of twenty megalithic sites were recorded (Table 1), out of which fourteen were visited (Fig. 2). For the sites that were visited, their GPS locations, photographs and site descriptions were taken.

Table 1. Megalithic sites in Punang Kelapang.

No.	Type	Sub-type	Site location/name	
1.	Megalithic cemetery	Dolmen	Menatoh Buduk Dusur	
2.			Menatoh Long Belibat	
3.			Menatoh Tang Lapao	
4.			Menatoh Long Belilin	
5.			Menatoh Long Nonar	
6.			Binatau Long Pulong	
7.			Binatau Long Sena	
8.	Stone jar	Stone jar	Lekad Kelesan	
9.			Long Punyao	
10.			Long Jilen	
11.			Long Sebuat'	
12.	Rock burial	Rock burial	Batuh Long Lingap	
13.			Long Ma'o	
14.	Non-cemetery megaliths	Stone mound	Perupun Lio Ayu	
15.			Perupun Long Senibong	
16.			Pelpuun Arool Batang	
17.			Carved stone	Batuh Narit Punang Arur Mering
18.				Batuh Narit Pa' Peluan
19.	Standing stone	Standing stone	Batu Kalong Long Banga	
20.			Pa' Merir	

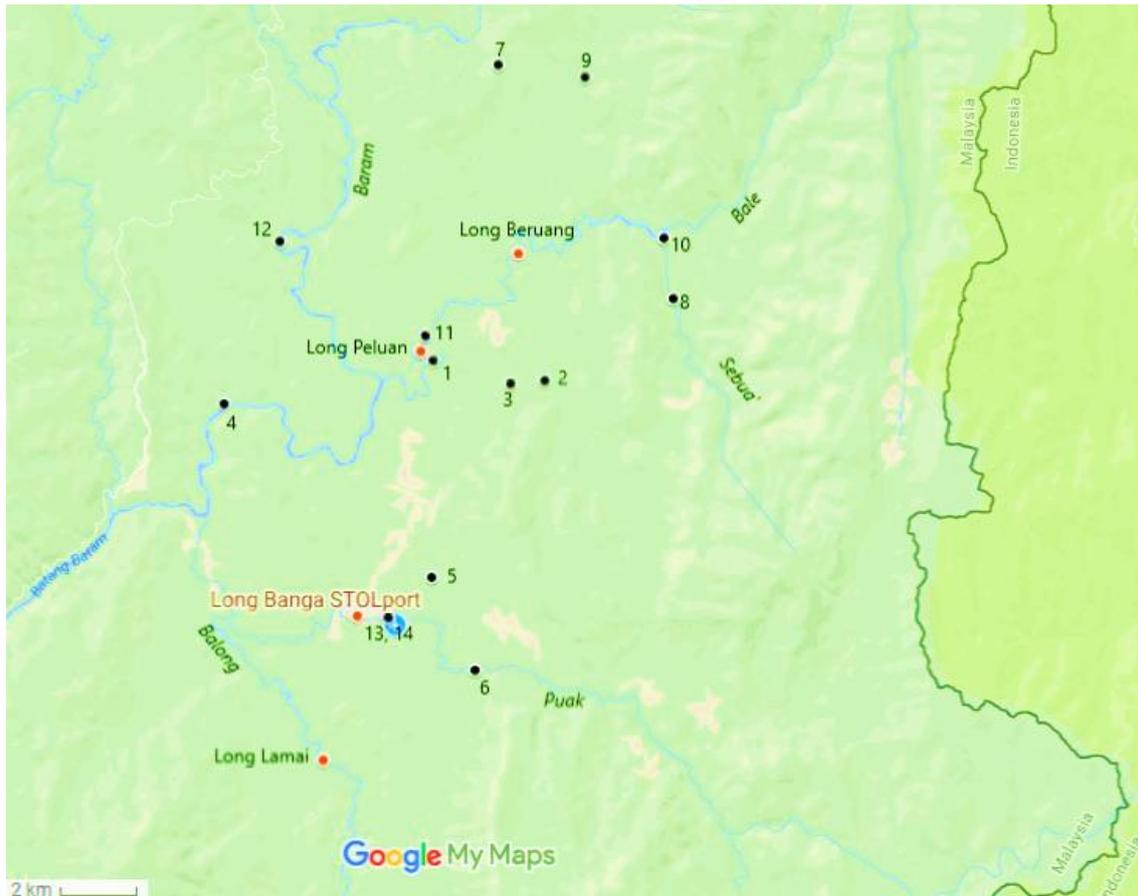


Figure 2. Megalithic sites in Punang Kelapang. Only those that were visited are shown on the map: 1) Menatoh Buduk Dusur; 2) Menatoh Long Belibat; 3) Menatoh Tang Lapao; 4) Menatoh Long Belilin; 5) Binatau Long Pulong; 6) Binatau Long Sena; 7) Lekad Kelesan; 8) Long Jilen; 9) Long Sebua'; 10) Long Punyao; 11) Perupun Lio Ayu; 12) Perupun Long Senibong; 13) Pelpuun Arool Batang; 14) Batu Kalong Long Banga (Modified from Google Map).

## DOLMENS

Dolmens are considered burial places and the sites where they are found are often called cemeteries (Kelabit: *menatoh* or Sa'ban: *binatau*) by the local population. Most of the dolmens encountered were damaged and fragmented. Some reasonably intact ones can be found at Menatoh Buduk Dusur, Menatoh Long Belibat, Menatoh Tang Lapao, Binatau Long Pulong and Binatau Long Sena. Measurements taken of the intact ones indicate a variety of sizes. Except for the stoneware fragments discovered at Binatau Long Sena, the dolmen sites were all devoid of associated artefacts.

### *Menatoh Buduk Dusur*

Menatoh Buduk Dusur, or Menatoh Lem Dusur in Mashman (2018:118), is located on a promontory bounded by the Bale River near the village of Long Peluan. At least ten dolmens were visible at the site, most of which have collapsed or have partially collapsed, due to tree action. One dolmen, however, was in reasonably good condition to be measured. It measured approximately 1.6 m in length, 1.05 m in width and 0.6 m in height (Fig. 3). The dolmens were seemingly oriented east-west lengthwise. Being close to the village, the area surrounding the site has been farmed, although the dolmens have been largely undisturbed by farming activities.



Figure 3. A dolmen at Menatoh Buduk Dusur.

### ***Menatoh Long Belibat***

Menatoh Long Belibat is located on a promontory near the confluence (*long*) of the Belibat and Peluan rivers. Initially, dolmens were first seen in an area roughly six by ten square metres (Fig. 4). Here, two dolmens were discovered to be intact, one had partially collapsed, while seven others had collapsed. All of these dolmens were found placed between 0.5 m and 1 m apart from each other. The two intact dolmens vary in size. The bigger of the two measured approximately 2.05 m in length, 1.05 m in width and 0.33 m in height. The smaller dolmen, on the other hand, was about 0.95 m in length, 0.95 m in width and 0.36 m in height. Further clearing of the surrounding area revealed previously hidden or buried dolmens, all of which have collapsed. All in all, at least twenty-four dolmens were visible, with no regularity observed in their orientations. It is assumed that more dolmens are to be discovered if the whole area were to be cleared. In terms of area size and number of dolmens, Menatoh Long Belibat appeared to be a relatively large burial ground in the past.



Figure 4. Dolmens at Long Belibat.

### ***Menatoh Tang Lapao***

Menatoh Tang Lapao is located on a small hillock surrounded by paddy fields near the Peluan River. The site of Menatoh Tang Lapao consists of two dolmens, one partially collapsed, and the other, collapsed and broken (Fig. 5). The partially collapsed dolmen measured about 1.75 m in length, 1.45 m in width and 0.75 m in height. The dolmens are oriented north-south lengthwise. The surrounding area is said to be a formerly cultivated land belonging to a member of the Long Peluan village.



Figure 5. Two dolmens at Menatoh Tang Lapao.

### ***Menatoh Long Belilin***

The site of Menatoh Long Belilin is located near the confluence of the Belilin and the Baram (Kelapang) rivers. According to Mashman (2018:119), “this is close to Long Moyo, the site where the Kelabit and the Ngurek settled.” The Long Belilin site was damaged by logging activities in the 1990s (Fig. 6). Therefore, it was difficult to estimate the number of dolmens that used to be present in the area. Logging activities have since ceased. Nowadays, the surrounding area is frequented by hunters, as evidenced by the presence of a hunter’s camp near the site. According to my informant, the camp is used by Penan hunters from the village of Ba’ Lai.



Figure 6. The damaged site of Menatoh Long Belilin.

### ***Menatoh Long Nonar***

Based on local information, Menatoh Long Nonar is located near the confluence of the Nonar and Kelapang rivers, which is situated about a five-hour journey away (by boat and on foot) from Long Peluan. It is said that the dolmens at the site were graves built during the time when the Ngurek occupied the area (Mashman 2017:410). More specifically, Mashman (2018:119), mentions that the site “is associated with the ancestors of Araya Ajin, one of the founders of Long Peluan, whose father Bilong Salo’ is said to be Ngurek, and with Telen Sang, the leader of the migration to Long Di’it.” When I enquired about the possibility of visiting to the site, I was told by villagers at Long Peluan that the site no longer exists, or that there would be nothing to see because the dolmens

have all been damaged. This response, I believe, was based on the villagers' experience of a previous trip made by Valerie Mashman, which failed to locate the site. Mashman's trip (see Mashman 2017), however, was made with younger generation Kelabit, who may not have known the precise location of the site. Nevertheless, it is generally believed that the site has been damaged by logging activities.

### ***Binatau Long Pulong***

Binatau Long Pulong is located on the Pulong River, about 45-minutes' walk from the village of Long Banga, near an area presently farmed by members of the Kenyah Leppo' Ke community. The site consists of at least 16 dolmens, most of which have collapsed, either partially or entirely. The dolmens appeared to be of various sizes. The biggest dolmen discovered on a small hill on the left (following river flow) bank of the Pulong River is approximately 3 m in length, 1.8 m in width and 1 m in height (Fig. 7).



Figure 7. A dolmen at Binatau Long Pulong.

A smaller intact dolmen found on the right bank of the Pulong River measured approximately 1.75 m in length, 0.75 m in width and 0.5 m in height (Fig. 8). According to Kenyah Leppo' Ke informants, the Long Pulong dolmens are believed to have been constructed by the Ngurek. I was also informed that the site was visited and cleared by a group of Ngurek from Long Semiyang in 1995 (Charles Gau, personal communication, January 20, 2017).



Figure 8. Another (smaller) dolmen at Binatau Long Pulong.

### ***Binatau Long Sena***

A single dolmen was observed at Binatau Long Sena and it was located on a farmland, high on the left bank of the Puak River, not far from the confluence of the Sena and the Puak (Fig. 9). The dolmen was found entirely covered by vegetation and a fallen tree trunk. Clearing of the surrounding had to be done in order to take measurements and photographs of the dolmen. At a certain point, however, clearing had to be stopped due to the discovery of a big ant's nest on top of the dolmen. Thus, the dolmen was not entirely exposed, which resulted in incomplete measurement of its dimensions. While measurement of its length was unobtainable, its width and height were approximately 1.1 m and 0.5 m, respectively. The dolmen was oriented east-west lengthwise, roughly parallel to the Puak River.



Figure 9. A partially exposed dolmen at Binatau Long Sena.

Inside the dolmen, three stoneware jar fragments were visible, all of which could have belonged to a single vessel (Fig. 10). No bone remains or other artefacts, which could have been the contents of the stoneware jar, were observed. It was also unclear whether the jar fragments were contemporaneous with the dolmen, or a later deposit.



Figure 10. Stoneware jar fragments found inside the dolmen at Long Sena.

## STONE JARS

Like dolmens, stone jars - basically, hollowed-out cylindrical vessels hewn from sandstone - were also burial monuments. It is thought that stone jars were used for secondary burials prior to the arrival of imported stoneware jars in the highlands (Schneeberger 1979). All of the stone jars encountered were undecorated. Some were found with their stone slab covers nearby. However, most of the stone jars were fragmented. Most of them appear to be more or less similar in size with diameters ranging from 0.4 to 0.5 m.

### *Lekad Kelesan*

This stone jar site is located on the Lekad Kelesan hill, about 900 metres above sea level. It was reached via a two and a half hours' walk from the Penan village of Long Beruang. To the east of Lekad Kelesan is the site of Long Jilen (see below). Approaching the top of Lekad Kelesan, several Penan hunters' camps were observed. During my visit to the site, I was told by my Penan informants that there were supposed to be two stone jars at Lekad Kelesan, but only one was found. This stone jar was undecorated, and it stood slightly slanted about 0.62 m above the ground surface, with a diameter of about 0.5 m, and rim thickness of about 7-8 cm (Fig. 11). The other stone jar, which we were not able to locate, was said to have fallen and was 'white' in colour. This I believe referred to the original grey colour of the sandstone material, as opposed to the usual 'green' colour of moss-covered stone jars found in the jungle environment. Compared to the other stone jar sites that I recorded in the Punang Kelapang area, the Lekad Kelesan site was the only one that was located on a hilltop, and not on a river bank.



Figure 11. Stone urn at Lekad Kelesan.

### *Long Punyao*

The site of Long Punyao is located on the right bank of the Sebu'a River. It was reached by way of a three-hours' walk from the village of Long Beruang. Long Punyao is said to be an old settlement or camp site (*la'a sahan*) of the Penan. Most of the stone jars observed at Long Punyao were fragmented. According to my Penan informants, the site had been damaged by logging activities. I was told that a decade ago, most of the stone jars were still intact. Another disturbance to the site, which is also connected to the impact of logging activities, is flooding. In the past, the stone jars at Long Punyao stood erect and exposed above ground level, but because of recent sedimentation caused by floodings, many of them are currently buried (Fig. 12). Floods in the area can be severely damaging. In early 2015, suspension bridges in the village of Long Peluan were swept away by heavy flooding of the Bale River.



Figure 12. Partially buried stone jar with slab cover at Long Punyao.

Two of the stone jars observed at Long Punyao were reasonably intact to be measured. One stood 0.13 m above the ground surface, with a maximum diameter of 0.4 m, and rim thickness of about 5 cm (Fig. 12). A stone slab, which could have been the cover of the stone, was found next to it, partially buried. The exposed part of the stone slab measured 0.6 m in length and 0.25 m in width, with a thickness of about 7 cm. Another stone jar in the vicinity was found fragmented towards the top, with a maximum height of 0.27 m, maximum diameter of 0.54 m, and rim thickness of 6 cm.

### *Long Jilen*

The site of Long Jilen is located on left bank of the Beruang River, near its confluence with the Jilen River. It is situated about two-hours' walk from the Penan village of Long Beruang on an old jungle trail heading northwards to Bario. A total of three stone jars were observed; all of them fragmented, which made estimation of their dimensions difficult. Nevertheless, their maximum diameters were approximately 0.5 m. A single stone slab, which may have been a jar cover, was found next to one of the broken jars (Fig. 13). A few metres southwest of the stone jars, two small upright stones (rising no more than 0.7 m above ground) were observed. Near the upright stones, there were two partially buried stone slabs. It is possible that the upright stones and stone slabs were fragments of former stone jar burials.



Figure 13. Fragmented stone jar with slab cover at Long Jilen.

### *Long Sebuat*

The Long Sebuat site is located on the right bank of the Sebuat River, near the confluence of the Sebuat and the Bale rivers. At the Long Sebuat site, at least nine stone jars were found, two of them still reasonably intact. The larger of the two measured about 0.97 m in height and 0.7 m in diameter, with a rim thickness of about 9 cm (Fig. 14). A large stone slab jar cover measuring 1.53 m in length, 1.1 m in width, and 0.12 m in thickness was found leaning on the large stone urn. The other smaller stone jar, on the other hand, measured approximately 0.95 m in height and 0.44 m in diameter, with thickness of around 6 cm. Closer examination revealed the presence of grooves on the rim of this stone jar, which may have functioned to stop the slab cover from slipping off the top of the stone jar.



Figure 14. Stone jar with slab cover at Long Sebuat.

Prior to visiting the Long Sebuat site, I was informed that it was a stone jar site. However, besides stone jars, there were also three slab-built cist graves, similar in appearance and form to others found in the Kelapang River area, for example, at Pa Di'it and Arur Tara (Lindsay Lloyd-Smith, personal communication, October 18, 2016) (Fig. 15). Two of these cist-graves at Long Sebuat were reasonably intact to be measured. They measured 1.2 m by 0.8 m by 0.2 m, and 1 m by 0.65 m by 0.3 m, respectively.



Figure 15. Slab-built cist grave at Long Sebuat.

Another interesting find was a stone trough, measuring about 1.07 m in length, 0.3 m in width, with a maximum thickness of around 0.12 m. Near the stone trough were five stones, which could have functioned as stands (Fig. 16). In terms of form, the stone trough is similar to the “rectangular with rounded base” type (Sellato 2016:123), found in the Bahau region in Indonesian Kalimantan, which have been attributed to the Ngurek.



Figure 16. Stone trough at Long Sebuat’.

## ROCK BURIALS

Another ‘megalithic’ cemetery type are burial sites located at natural rocky places. Two of them were recorded in the Punang Kelapang area and they are described as follows.

### *Batuh Long Lingap*

The story of Batuh Long Lingap (see Mashman 2018:125) is one that is quite well known in the Punang Kelapang area. According to the story, it was the place where two young lovers (some versions say that one is Kelabit and the other Ngurek, while others say that they were of different social ranks), whose parents wanted them to separate, jumped to their deaths. The burial at the site, which supposedly belonged to the lovers, consists of “a wooden coffin, which is wedged in the rock” (Mashman 2017:414). Mashman adds that Batuh Long Lingap is a site that has been damaged by road works.

### *Long Ma’o*

According to descriptions provided by locals at Long Banga, the burial site at Long Ma’o consists of human bones found in a rock crevice; possibly the remains of a secondary burial. Long Ma’o is situated on the route through which the Ngurek and the Sa’ban passed on their migration from the Bahau to the Upper Baram (Lower Kelapang) around the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In recent times, a logging road passed through the area and damaged the site.

## Stone Mounds

It is said that stone mounds (*perupun* or *pelpuun* in the Kelabit and Sa’ban languages, respectively) were built as memorials for important individuals. Furthermore, they are said to have functioned as

final repositories for the property of wealthy elites, who had no direct heirs (Harrison 1959). As part of this survey, three stone mound sites were recorded, and they are described below.

### ***Perupun Lio Ayu***

Perupun Lio Ayu, or “Perupun Oloh Lio’ Ayu” in Mashman (2018:118), is a stone mound site located on the right bank of the Bale River, a short walk’s away from the village of Long Peluan (Fig. 17). The stone mound was estimated to be about 20-30 m in diameter and about 2-3 m in height. Surrounding Perupun Lio Ayu were farmland and wet rice fields. The stones used for building the mound were probably sourced from the nearby Bale River. Perupun Lio Ayu is another megalithic site associated with the Ngurek. According to Mashman (2018:116), *Lio Ayu* means ‘island of the enemies’ in the Ngurek language, and that “it recalls the time of warfare and alliances with the Ngurek.”



Figure 17. Part of Perupun Lio Ayu, near the Kelabit village of Long Peluan.

### ***Perupun Long Senibong***

Perupun Long Senibong is located on the left bank of the Baram River, and it was reached by way of a 30-minute longboat ride from the confluence of the Bale and the Baram rivers. Perupun Long Senibong is a large stone mound - “the largest...in the area” (Mashman 2018:117) - measuring more than 30 m in diameter, with a height of about 5 m (Fig. 18). The *perupun* is constructed using river-rolled stones probably sourced from the Baram River nearby. An exposed side section of the *perupun* suggests that it was constructed by deliberate arranging of the stones; in other words, the stones were not randomly piled. This is consistent with the findings of recent excavations at two stone mound sites in Pa’ Lungan, north of the Kelabit Highlands (Lloyd-Smith et al. 2015). At the top of the *perupun*, there was a big depression, roughly 8-10 m in diameter, with a maximum depth of about 2 m. This may have been the results of previous diggings. According to Kelabit informants from Long Peluan, upriver from Long Senibong is a place called Patar Rayah, which is said to be the location of an old Kelabit settlement.



Figure 18. Perupun Long Senibong.

### ***Pelpuun Arool Batang***

Pelpuun Arool Batang is located on what is currently farmland, just south of the airstrip in Long Banga. When visited in 2015, the site was cleared for the planting of paddy, which exposed the stones to view (Fig. 19). There were at least seven or eight concentrations or piles of stones of various sizes. Local Sa'ban believe that stone mounds or *pelpuun* are burial places of people and property in the past.



Figure 19. Pelpuun Arool Batang.

### **CARVED STONES**

In the past, stone carvings were made for the purpose of commemorating important persons or events. Some carved stones were also attributed to the activities of ancestors, mythical figures or cultural heroes. The three carved stones that were recorded are described below.

#### ***Batuh Narit Punang Arur Mering***

Batuh Narit Punang Arur Mering, or “Batuh Narit Araya Malian @ Tama Pasan” in Mashman (2018:118), refers to the carved stone located in the upper reaches of the Mering stream (*punang*

means ‘upper’, *arur* means ‘stream’ in Kelabit). The carvings are said to have been made by Tama Pasang from the village of Long Peluan. Due to the nature of the marks on the stone, I was told by informants from Long Peluan, that it may have also been used as a sharpening stone.

### ***Batuh Narit Pa’ Peluan***

Batuh Narit Pa’ Peluan is a carved stone located on the Peluan River. It is said to have been carved by a former headman of Long Peluan. The carved stone was accidentally upturned by a bulldozer during the construction of a nearby road (Mashman 2017).

### ***Batu Kalong Long Banga***

In Long Banga, there is a carved stone with spiral designs, which the locals call Batu Kalong (Fig. 20). Mashman refers to this carved stone as “Batuh Narit Long Polong” (2018:118), and mentions its association with the Ngurek. In the Ngurek language, *batu kalong* basically means ‘decorated stone’ (see Jalong 1989:160). The carved stone in Long Banga measured about 1.6 m in length, 0.2 m in width and 0.86 m in height. It is interesting to note that at the border with Indonesian Kalimantan, there is another carved stone called Batu Kalong, which has also been attributed to the Ngurek (Sellato 2016).



Figure 20. Batu Kalong Long Banga

Originally, Batu Kalong Long Banga was located in a central location in the village, not far from the present church and government clinic. Because of the belief that spirits in the stone were causing trouble (e.g. bad dreams, sickness) to some villagers (i.e. the stone’s “evil aura”, see Mashman 2018:118), it was moved sometime in the 2000s to its present location near the current airstrip at the edge of the village, where it was deemed far enough to not cause any more harm. I was also told that the relocation of the Batu Kalong was initiated by some Sa’ban elders in order to save it from destruction, as they realised the cultural and historical importance of the stone. Belief in the power of the stone is manifested in another incident, when the death of a Sa’ban community leader in a tragic road accident several years ago was attributed by some to the ‘disturbance’ of the stone when it was relocated.

### **Standing stones**

Traditionally, standing stones (*batub senuped*, in Kelabit) were erected to commemorate important people and events. Besides serving a commemorative purpose, standing stones were also built as boundary markers between territories.

### ***Batuh Senuped Pa' Merir***

The only standing stone recorded in the Punang Kelapang area is located far from any of the present villages. It is situated on the boundary between Long Peluan and Ramudu in the Kelabit Highlands, and therefore, is said to be a boundary marker.

## **CONCLUSION**

A recent survey of megalithic sites in Punang Kelapang, Upper Baram, Sarawak has documented a total of twenty megalithic sites, out of which fourteen were visited. The megaliths consist of megalithic cemeteries such as dolmens, stone jars, stone trough, cist graves, and burials at natural rocky places; and non-cemetery megaliths such as stone mounds, carved stones and a standing stone. Based on present understanding of the chronology of megalith-building in the Kelabit Highlands, some of the megaliths in Punang Kelapang may be of considerable antiquity. If the present dates for stone mounds in the Kelabit Highlands are correct (see Lloyd-Smith 2012; Lloyd-Smith et al. 2015), large stone mounds like the Perupun Long Senibong and Perupun Lio Ayu may date to more than 2,000 years ago. On the other hand, the dolmen and stone jar sites may date to within 500 years ago (Lloyd-Smith et al. 2013). Until further archaeological investigations are carried out, however, these remain mere speculations. It is hoped that this article will help to spur new archaeological investigations on the megaliths in the area.

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Nicholas Gani  
Lecturer  
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities  
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak  
94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak  
Email: gnicholas@unimas.my

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