

Peace-Making, Adat and Tama Bulan Wang

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ABSTRACT

Resident Charles Hose was credited with “the true civilization of the Baram people.” However, a careful examination of the role of Penghulu Tama Bulan Wang demonstrates that pacification of the Baram was achieved less by the mediation of Charles Hose and more by the role of local chiefs such as Penghulu Tama Bulan Wang. His source of power was the existing customary institution of chieftainship and the *adat* or system of customary law, which provided safeguards for preventing conflict, for making peace and creating alliances. The role of this local cultural component in establishment of the state of Sarawak has been underplayed in colonial accounts of peace-making and the contemporary written history of the state.

Key words: *Adat, Baram, Hose, Kenyah, Peace-making, Tama Bulan*

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INTRODUCTION

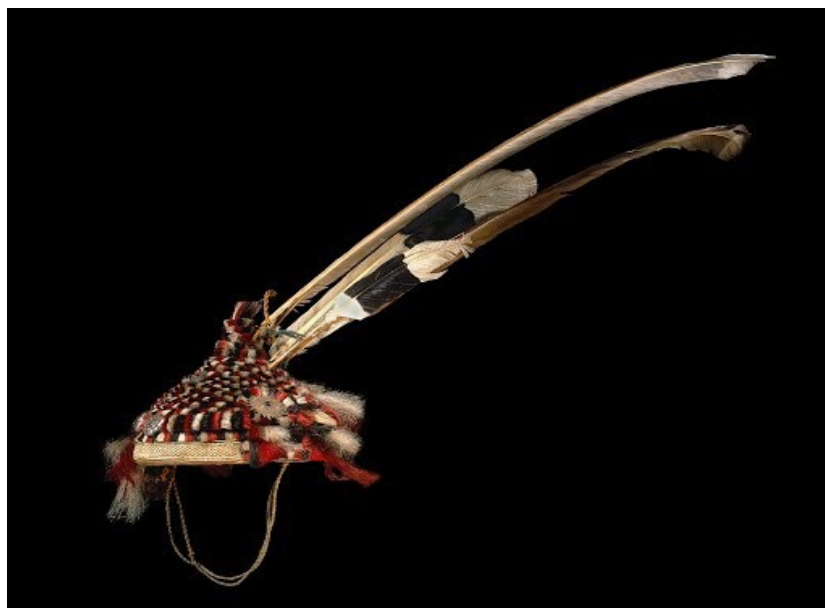


Plate 1: War-cap of Tama Bulan³²

³² Image sourced from https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_As1900-680

Tama Bulan's war cap in the British Museum acquired by Resident Charles Hose, and his shield in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge, a personal gift to visiting anthropologist Alfred Cort Haddon, are very significant artefacts which are important to the narrative of the establishment of the state of Sarawak (Plates 1 and 2).

This is because without Tama Bulan, out of all the chiefs of the Baram district, the pacification of the Baram, of which the climax was the grand peace-making of 1899 in Marudi, would not have come about. This eventually led to the peace-makings in the Kelabit highlands in 1908, which included the Kelabit and the "border tribes," and in the Kapit peace-making in 1924 which brought together the local populations of Iban, Kayan, Kenyah, Kajang and their counterparts from the Apo-Kayan in Dutch Borneo. This is a departure from the conventional view that the transformation of the Baram is generally attributed to the Resident Charles Hose who according to Ranee Margaret, the wife of Rajah Charles Brooke, "achieved magnificent results...in the true civilization of the Baram people" (Brooke 1992:146).

In this article, I analyse the career of Tama Bulan and demonstrate how peace-making came about less by the influence and actions of Charles Hose and more through the agency of Tama Bulan, who worked through the existing customary institution of chieftainship, and the adat or system of customary law, which provided safeguards for preventing conflict from arising and for making peace and creating alliances. The pacification of the Baram was a key period in the establishment of the state of Sarawak, and this essential local contribution has hitherto been underplayed in written histories of the state.



Plate 2: Shield of Tama Bulan³³

³³ Image sourced from Elliot and Thomas (2011:42).