

## Stories from the Kelabit Highlands. Folklore, Myths and Legends of the Kelabit tribe of Borneo collated and transcribed by Datin Nikki Lugun.

### Reviewed by:

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These stories convey a lively variety of themes, from animal stories about mouse deer and tigers, to stories from the epics about super heroes; to legends about features of the landscape and stories about comic characters. The first three stories feature the wily antics and survival tactics of the Borneo favourite, Agan Pelanuk, the mousedeer, whose feats are widely narrated by other Borneo ethnic groups. Next, comes the poignant story of a baby monkey, Bao Buda' who is shot by Ilan the hunter. This is followed by the love story of Dayang Bulan, the Moon Princess and a human, Lian the hunter. Once their son Agan is born, Lian the hunter mysteriously disappears from the story. The ending to this story is rather sudden with Dayang's impending departure from earth to return to the moon and her separation from her earthly son, Agan.

There is also a sequence of stories that relate to features on the landscape. A chapter deals with a legend about a rock, Batu Baliu on the landscape near Pa' Di'it. This rock is believed to be the petrified remains of a longhouse. The legend relates how its members became arrogant and lacked compassion for a widow who was forced to become an outcast, and was excluded from a head-hunting feast. She played a trick on them. The longhouse people, having drunk a lot at the feast laughed at a frog that appeared in the longhouse. The widow had dressed up the frog in a loin cloth and girded its legs with bells. As they laughed at the frog there was a thunderstorm and enormous hailstones engulfed the longhouse as it became turned to stone. The widow escaped running towards a mountain which is now names after her Apad Bawang Runan. It is interesting to note that this story is very similar to "The Tale of Batu Gading" (Harrison 1955), which focusses on a limestone outcrop near Long Lama, showing how similar themes resonate in different languages and cultures. Another story is about a feature on the landscape near Pa Mada, Toked Rini's rock which was the sharpening stone of a legendary giant called Toked Rini. The famous landmark of Batu Lawi features in another story. Its twin peaks, male and female, come to life as husband and wife and they encounter Batu Apoi a volcano. As a result of Batu Apoi's rejection by Batu Lawi's wife, the female peak, Batu Apoi beheads her. Her severed head is eventually rescued and is known as Batu Uluh. Batu Apoi is overcome in battle by Batu Lawi and becomes an inactive volcano. The origin of the great spirit Pun Tumid who haunts and protects the rainforest narrated in another story.

A complicated love story and a battle about the legendary hero Agan Tadun derived from an epic ballad, *adih*, feature in another story. Two more stories based on the epic *adih* is the heroic narrative of Berapui whose mother has to contend with Bao Buduk, the cunning witch. In another story, Berapui slays the dragon who has captured Ilan demonstrating his heroic qualities. Another story about human courage features a young woman Mujan who gives up herself to be taken by Balan the tiger to rid the village of his threatening attacks.