



Introduction

This issue of *Expedition* contains articles that focus on the island of Borneo and its peoples. It is being published to coincide with the opening on February 25, 1989, of a major exhibition, "The Dayaks: Peoples of the Borneo Rainforest." The University Museum has good reason to be concerned with Borneo. It owns major ethnological collections from the region that have not been exhibited for many years and have never before been presented with the careful attention to display that they deserve. Our Borneo collections are special for another reason. They were made on that island between 1896 and 1898, which were formative years for the Museum, and they therefore comprise some of the Museum's founding collections (see article by Katz in this issue).

While "Borneo" is anything but a household word in the United States, quite likely it conjures up in the minds of some Americans images of dense tropical forests, exotic plants and animals, and, perhaps to the older generation, the phrase "wild men of Borneo." Some of these associations have sound bases in fact. Borneo is very much in the tropics; the equator passes right across it. It is a heavily forested island and, in fact, supports one of the most expansive areas of tropical forest remaining in the world. Since Borneo does have such a vast area of tropical rainforest, and also because it is situated close to the Asian mainland, it is home to an extraordi-

nary array of Asiatic species that are especially adapted to such environments.

But what about the so-called Wild Men of Borneo? Who are (or were) they, and why did they receive this unflattering appellation? The peoples who live in the interior of Borneo, collectively called Dayaks, were given this description during the last century because some of them were notorious fighters. For religious and other purposes, they kept the heads of their slain enemies as trophies—in other words, they were headhunters. Peace was established among the Dayak peoples in the late 19th century by British and Dutch colonial regimes, and headhunting, officially at least, came to an end. But in many Dayak communities today, nearly a century after the practice was forcibly abolished, old trophy heads are still displayed and the exploits of famous headhunting ancestors are recounted with pride.

In the first half of the 19th century, there was also some piracy directed against European ships in the seas around Borneo and the adjacent islands of the Philippines. The time and setting of Joseph Conrad's novel *Lord Jim* depicts this situation very poignantly. Although a few Dayak groups were involved in the piracy, namely those who were called the Sea Dayaks (now called the Iban), for the most part it was other non-Dayak peoples who were responsible. Nevertheless, the linking of piracy to some Dayak peoples

certainly amplified the "wild" image. It is quite possible, too, that in the minds of some Europeans a vague and totally erroneous association was made between the headhunting Dayaks and the orang-utan, one of the celebrated animal inhabitants of the Borneo rainforest.

In defense of the Dayaks, the great 19th century naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace, who spent 14 months in Borneo between 1854 and 1856, had this to say: "The moral character of the Dyaks [Dayaks] is undoubtedly high—a statement which will seem strange to those who have heard of them only as head-hunters and pirates. The Hill Dayaks of whom I am speaking, however, have never been pirates, since they never go to sea; and head-hunting is a custom originating in the petty wars of village with village, and tribe with tribe...." (*Malay Archipelago*, 10th ed., New York, 1902, p. 68).

Although all the human inhabitants of Borneo belong to the same basic racial stock, the peoples and cultures can be divided into two kinds: one that has a strong coastal and maritime orientation and whose people are known by such ethnic names as Malays, Bruneians, Banjars, and Bugis; and one that is adapted to living in and exploiting the resources of a tropical forest environment (see Padoch, and Jessup and Vayda). The latter are the Dayaks. In the long course of cultural adaptation that produced these two contrasting orientations, some quite specific cultural and social dif-

ferences evolved. Among the coastal peoples, trade and commerce were highly developed and small kingdoms arose (see Brown), while the inland peoples developed in the direction of greater reliance upon local resources and the maintenance of smaller and less politically centralized societies. In brief, the coastal societies became relatively large, politically centralized, and culturally uniform, while Dayak societies became divided into many relatively small, politically decentralized, and culturally heterogeneous social entities.

There can be no question that this differential cultural and social development, which must be seen as taking place over many centuries, was due in no small part to the varying effects that contact with outside cultures had on the coastal versus the interior peoples of Borneo. Influences from the centers of civilization in China, India, and the Middle East obviously had a greater impact on coastal peoples than they did on the more isolated interior peoples. The results were that, by the time Europeans first arrived at the shores of Borneo in the 16th century, the coastal peoples were not merely on the fringes of civilization, they *were* the fringe, while the Dayak peoples were tribal, which is to say they were beyond the pale of civilization.

The best example of the influences that radiated out from the great civilizations involves religion. At some time, possibly in the 8th or 9th century, Hinduism-Buddhism from south Asia reached the shores of Borneo and deeply affected the coastal peoples, while only slightly affecting the tribal peoples of the interior. Later, in the 13th century, Islam reached Borneo, and the coastal peoples adopted it along with many other items of culture that came from the Middle East and India. But again, only a few of these influences penetrated to the interior peoples, who continued to follow their own forms of religion. And so it appears that for several thousand years, wave after wave of cultural ideas from east and south Asia came to Borneo, affecting major changes in the lives of coastal peoples. This is not to say that influences from Asian civilizations had no effect at all on Dayak cultures.

One very important technological contribution from either China or south Asia, or both, that reached the Dayaks was metallurgy. Dayaks knew how to smelt local iron-bearing ores and to fashion very sophisticated weapons and tools, and even exported them, long before Europeans came on the scene. Also, durable goods from China, India, and beyond reached Dayak societies in relatively large quantities and were utilized in very special ways (see Chin).

From a more global perspective, then, Borneo was not an isolated island, largely cut off from the rest of the world. From at least A.D. 1000 onward, Borneo, along with other islands that came to be known as "The East Indies," was an important calling place in a vast network of maritime trade that extended from what is now southern China, Thailand, and the Philippine Islands to India, the Middle East, and the east coast of Africa. Borneo was so significant in this network that at some early date a Dayak language, now called Ma'anyan, was transported to the island of Madagascar off the eastern coast of Africa, and today all the dialects spoken in Madagascar (Malagache) are descendants of this Bornean language. We should not lose sight of the fact, either, that it was the search for sources of certain products that came via this Asian/Middle Eastern/East African trade network that drew the first European maritime explorers to this region.

Returning again to the two cultural divisions in Borneo, coastal and interior, while they represent different adaptations and orientations to their respective environments, the two also developed significant relationships with each other. Many of the commodities that moved along the routes of maritime trade, mentioned above, were products of the rain-forest. In Borneo, it was the Dayaks who collected these products and sent them down the rivers to the coastal societies which exported them and received foreign products in return. Therefore, between Dayak and coastal societies there was an economic relationship that was vital to both. Although this system of pre-colonial trade was greatly trans-

formed with the establishment of European empires in the East, remnants of it remain today. One can even now purchase in Philadelphia forest products that have been collected recently by Dayaks—for example, a type of rattan used for caning chairs.

As a final note to this Introduction, I wish to point out that Dayak cultures developed a very distinctive style of aesthetic expression, which is easily seen in many of their material productions (see articles by Drake and the Whittiers). Just as there were variations in language and other aspects of culture among the many different Dayak groups, so, too, there were local differences in their art. However, as in all tribal art traditions, certain similarities transcend the local differences, so that we can speak of regional styles. And, most certainly, there is a regional Dayak style that is unlike any other. Since there have been few exhibitions of Dayak materials in the United States, this art style is not known well here. Recently, however, an important category of traditional Dayak art has been introduced into men's and women's clothing in the U.S. This is the patterned cotton fabric, done by the *ikat* dyeing method, from the Ibanic peoples of Borneo (see the catalog section in this issue for examples). Unfortunately, only the countries of origin (usually Indonesia and Malaysia) and not the ethnic designations of the makers seem to accompany these materials. And so, some Dayak societies are still exporting, as they have for a thousand years or more, a few products that are carried on the currents of international trade far from Borneo. ➤

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