P. Metcalf

Birds and deities in Borneo

In: Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 132 (1976), no: 1, Leiden, 96-123

This PDF-file was downloaded from <http://www.kitlv-journals.nl>

PETER METCALF

BIRDS AND DEITIES IN BORNEO

From the earliest days of contact, Western observers have been struck by the deep significance of birds in Bornean religions. Birds are a well-nigh universal feature of religious symbolism, but in Borneo systems of augury are found that are unparalleled in their complexity and in the compelling nature of the omens taken from them. Not only the domain of ritual, but also economic activity, social organisation, even warfare, are in part regulated by them. For those with a classical education, Roman and Greek comparisons immediately suggested themselves. Hose, who wrote extensively about his experiences as an officer of the Brooke regime in Sarawak, tells us that after watching a Kenyah chief call an omen bird he "felt as though I had just lived through a book of the Aeneid" (Hose and McDougall 1912, vol. II: 54). The classical scholar W. Warde Fowler, having stumbled onto Hose's account, developed the comparison further (1920).

Despite this early interest, accounts of particular systems of augury are almost entirely lacking, with the exception of Dr. Freeman's pioneer work among the Iban of Western Borneo. The first aim of this paper is to describe another system, that of the Berawan¹ of Central North

¹ The Berawan are usually, and dubiously, classified as part of the Kenyah tribe. There are also Kayan houses in close proximity to them (see Metcalf 1974 for further details of the other tribes in the Baram). They comprise four large longhouses, two in the Tutoh and two in the Tinjar, both major tributaries of the Baram River in Sarawak's Fourth Division. At the center of this geographical distribution, Long Teru and Batu Belah, in the lower Tinjar and Tutoh respectively, have essentially identical languages. Long Jegan in the middle Tinjar, has a slightly different dialect, but still easily intelligible to natives of the first two houses. Long Terawan in the middle Tutoh, has a more deviant dialect. These four communities make up the Berawan proper, with a total of some one and a half thousand souls. In addition there are close links to other groups in the lower Baram, such as the people of Long Kiput and Kampong Narom, with whom they are sometimes categorized as the *Lepo Pu'un*, the connotation of which is something like "the original owners of the soil." Most of the fieldwork was done at Long

Sketch map showing the location of Berawan longhouses

For details, see fn. 1.

Borneo. The second aim of the paper is to compare Iban and Berawan augury, and to show that they share a number of fundamental features. However, there are also important differences between the two systems, revealing a rigidity of form and doctrine in the Iban system that the

Teru, where the majority of the house still follows the old religion (*adad luná*), and it is, as far as I know, the only longhouse of the Central North Borneo culture area that does. Long Jegan converted to the Bungan revivalist cult in 1959, and some have since gone Christian, while the houses in the Tutoh are both Christian now. They had small, non-Christian minorities until quite recently. Fieldwork was conducted among the Berawan from January 1972 to January 1974. It was supported by the Foreign Area Fellowship Program, the National Science Foundation, and the Wenner-Gren Foundation. The true autonym of this ethnic group is *Melawan* but I have used the Malay version of the name here because it has already appeared in print. I would like to acknowledge the helpful suggestions made by James J. Fox during the preparation of this paper.

Berawan system lacks. When we come to examine the nature of the spirit worlds from which the augural animals are messengers, we find the same pattern repeated: formalism in Iban belief versus openness to new teaching in Berawan religion.

The comparison also sheds light on a difficult question in connection with the relationship between Berawan omen animals and the spirit world. The problem is this: it is a tenet of both Iban and Berawan augury that the omen birds only advise, they cannot act independently either to help or harm men. The Iban, with the aid of a little sophistry, maintain this tenet unbreached. But it is clear that the major Berawan omen bird is accorded a status as deity in his own right. What is it that causes this anomaly? We shall conclude that it is the result of the structural parallelism of the Berawan spirit world and their augural system.

PLAKE AND THE LESSER OMEN CREATURES ²

Of the omen animals (*aman*) observed by the Berawan, one stands out as of supreme importance, the eagle *plake*. Of secondary importance are some dozen or so other birds, and a couple of species of snakes and deer. On the vague fringes of formal augury, animal life ranging from crocodiles to insects may be seen as omen-bearing in special circumstances. This contrast between *plake* and the lesser *aman* may be observed in every phase of augury: in the identification of relevant species in the first place, in the way omens are obtained, and in the way that they are interpreted. The details of the contrast are set out below, dealing with each phase in turn.

THE AUGURAL ANIMALS

Plake

The major omen bird of the Kenyah and Kayan, who live in close proximity to the Berawan, is called *flaki* and has been identified as the Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus intermedius*) (Hose and McDougall 1912, vol. II: 51, Hose 1926: 220, Haddon 1901: 384). It seemed likely to me at first that the identification would hold good for the Berawan *plake*, but it does not, and this discovery leads me to suspect that the original identification of *flaki* is incorrect.³ I was at an advantage over

² The text of a myth explaining the origin of the omen animals, who emerged to help a hero called *Anak Tau* or *Tot Manyim*, will be published elsewhere.

³ This is despite the fact that the Brahminy Kite is an important bird in the mythology of the entire Indonesian area.

earlier travellers in the area in that I was able to show my informants the colored pictures in Mr. Smythies' book *The Birds of Borneo* (1960). The situation regarding the Berawan omen bird called *plake* is as follows. All of the hawks, kites, and eagles occurring in their sub-montane habitat are referred to by Berawan as *plake*. Technically, any of these species may provide an omen if they display appropriate flight patterns: circling high over the jungle canopy. Large birds with dark plumage are preferred. If one asks to be shown a *plake*, it is likely that a Brahminy Kite will be the first to appear, since they are the most common of the hawks and eagles, and because their habit is to cruise along the river banks where houses are also located. However, the kite is not usually employed as an omen bird because it generally flies too low, and because its plumage is reddish with a white head. (It is called *plake uló puteh* in Berawan, the "white-headed *plake*".) The preferred species for augury is the Black Eagle (*Ictinaetus malayensis*), called in Berawan *plake tudok uló*, the "*plake* with a crest on its head." Smythies says that this bird is found throughout Borneo from the coasts to the mountains, but is not common anywhere. This is consistent with the conclusion that all the Kayan and Kenyah, whether in the hilly interior or the coastal plain, employ the same species, and with the general assumption by Berawan themselves that sightings of the augural *plake* will not be commonplace. Smythies also states that black eagles usually move in pairs, are "usually seen sailing in small circles over a forested hillside," and have a "slow deliberate round winged flight" (1960: 154), all features that lend themselves to Berawan interpretation of omens. My informants also stated that Blyth's Eagle-Hawk (*Spizaetus alboniger*) would make a satisfactory augural *plake*.

While outsiders may have been confused in identifying *plake*, it is important to note that Berawan were not. In each of the four main communities I sought out a man skilled at augury, and they were unanimous in the identification set out above.

The Lesser Aman

The unanimity of augurs from different houses broke down however when they began to discuss the less important omen creatures. Indeed there is considerable variation, both in the species that are considered to be omen animals, and in the names given to them locally. This data is summarized in Table 1. Most informants also mentioned one or two species of deer or snakes from among the following: Barking deer

TABLE 1
The Lesser Omen Birds

English and Latin Name	Berawan name at:		
	Batu Belah	Long Teru	Long Jegan
Malaysian eagle owl <i>Bubo sumatrana strepitans</i>			<i>kong *</i>
Diard's & Whitehead's trogons <i>Harpactes diardi diardi</i> & <i>H. whiteheadi</i>	<i>pəngəñok *</i>	<i>pəngəñok *</i>	<i>pəngəñok *</i>
Scarlet-rumped, orange-breasted & cinnamon-rumped trogons <i>Harpactes duvauceli</i> , <i>H. Oreskios dulitensis</i> & <i>H. orrhopaeus viduus</i>		<i>lurok *</i>	<i>lurok *</i>
Spiderhunter (all local species) <i>Arachnothera</i>	<i>chit *</i>	<i>chit *</i>	<i>chit *</i>
Rufous piculet <i>Sasia abnormis abnormis</i>	<i>bukəng *</i>	<i>bukəng *</i>	<i>bukiəng *</i>
Grey-and-buff and fulvous- rumped barred woodpeckers <i>Hermircus concretus sodidus</i> , <i>Meiglyptes tristis macropternus</i>	<i>kəliɾə *</i>	<i>kəliɾə *</i>	
Tailorbird (all four local species) <i>Orthotomus</i>	<i>səkotek *</i>	<i>səkotek *</i>	<i>kotaiek *</i>
Oriental pygmy pied woodpecker <i>Dendrocopus canicapillus</i> <i>aurantiventris</i>	<i>pəngapə *</i>	<i>sirek *</i>	
Buff-necked barred woodpecker <i>Meiglyptes tukki tukki</i>			
Hair-crested drongo <i>Dicrurus aeneus malayensis</i>			<i>sirek *</i> or <i>chirerk</i>
Banded and forest kingfishers <i>Lacedo pulchella melanops</i> & <i>Ceyx erithacus rufidorsus</i>	<i>asə *</i>	<i>achə</i> or <i>matə səmə</i>	<i>matə</i>
Stork-billed kingfisher <i>Pelargopsis capensis freseri</i>			<i>təmənggang</i> <i>achá</i>
Crested jay <i>Platylophus</i> <i>galericulatus coronatus</i>			<i>piyek</i>

* Indicates the seven most cited species. Data from Long Terawan is incomplete, and therefore not included in this table.

Cervulus muntjac (*təla.o*), Sambhur deer *Cervus unicolor* (*payau*), Mouse deer *Tragulus napu* (*palannok*), and the snakes *Maticora intestinalis* (*ñawan*) and *Oligodon octolineatus* (*jiruñong* or *jalongngong*). In addition to this already lengthy list, there were others cited only rarely or in special contexts.

Despite the relative abundance of omen creatures, it is often asserted that the *aman* are eight in number. This is because of the magical significance of the number eight in Berawan thought, and in particular its place in the construction of prayer sites (*tapó*). These are constructed before every major act of worship, and include eight upright sticks and an horizontal rail into which are inserted eight small crudely carved figures representing the omen birds. In this way their participation in the act of worship is assured. If one enquires about the names of these eight birds, one is given those of *plake* plus seven of the lesser omen birds, and these are indicated by the star in Table 1. Thus there is another division in the ranks of the omen creatures, between the eight birds cited in connection with the *tapó* and the remainder of the lesser *aman*.

THE SEEKING OF OMENS

The distinction between *plake* and the other omen creatures is most clear in the way that omens are obtained. Sometimes a chance sighting of *plake* will be taken as an omen, but primarily *plake* is summoned to a location previously prepared for the purpose. The augur's prayers entreat him to appear and give council to men. The lesser omen animals give promise of success or warning of danger through (from our point of view) chance encounters in the jungle, on the farm, or by the river. *Plake* is called, the other *aman* never are.

The calling of *plake* is a serious matter not to be undertaken lightly. Of the half dozen occasions that I saw *plake* called, one was to ask after the chances of a good rice harvest, two concerned the chances of recovery of critically ill persons, two inquired about the likelihood of further deaths in the community after the completion of mortuary rites, and one, the least serious matter, was to reverse a man's bad luck at hunting. Formerly, *plake* was consulted before all major decisions in warfare and headhunting. Indeed, there is a general symbolic association between *plake* and warfare, so that Hose describes him as a god of war (Hose and McDougall 1912, vol. II: 15). That he is seen as powerful is illustrated by the nature of shamans who are possessed by his spirit. They are expected to be violent and unpredictable, but of great use

to the community. But *plake* is not associated with death as, for instance, the crow is in Western mythology. Rather he is seen as life-giving: he is said to be “hot” and “red”.

CALLING PLAKE

The procedures for calling *plake* (*ngalake*) are well defined and not greatly subject to idiosyncratic variation. A location is prepared early in the morning, since the process may be a long one. It may continue for four to six hours on one day, and resume on the next day, up to a limit of three days. After a few days break, the augur may try again, if he has the stamina. The day should be fine, and the threat of rain will cause immediate cancellation, since it is tactless to ask *plake* to appear in inclement weather. The spot chosen needs a good view of the surrounding jungle and the sky, such as a knoll in the middle of a rice field, preferably with a shade tree. If the augury is taken at the long-house, a spot on the riverbank, looking across the river, and in front of the augur's family apartment, is invariably chosen.

First, two sticks (*tələjang*), crudely carved with ruffs of raised shavings, are set up so as to frame a segment of the sky for the augur who sits behind them. *Plake* must appear within this restricted field of vision. The augur is also equipped with a small tray of offerings for the bird, consisting of some rice wrapped in little bundles (*kəlupe*), some sliced hard-boiled eggs, a cigarette, and maybe some candy, often contained in a small upturned gong. He also needs two bottles (nowadays usually discarded beer bottles) half filled with water (*pī plake*) and with a crudely carved stick figure (*lengai plake*) inserted in the neck of each, and a chicken, often a tiny chick. Some adepts keep “luck hooks” (*angek*), small forked pieces of twig, in the bottle necks as well, in order that they may gain *plake*'s blessing also. The adept lights a small fire of twigs, which he will keep burning throughout the performance, and settles himself comfortably behind his two sticks. He begins his prayer to *plake* with a high-pitched humming noise, maintained as long as possible, and then launches into a rapidly spoken prayer (*piat*) full of alliteration and well-turned phrases. The text of a *piat* for calling *plake* is given in the appendix and illustrates the nature of such prayers. The ability to *piat* elegantly is one mark of the augur. During the prayer he makes mention of the chicken that will be sacrificed on a successful augury, and pulling out a feather from the chick's stomach sings it in the fire releasing a pungent smell. He then sits back and waits, chatting

FIGURE 1

Procedures for calling plake

FIGURE 2

Interpretation of omens in the flight of plake

N.B. dotted lines indicate field of vision of the augur.

to any observers or passers-by. At intervals of twenty minutes or so he will repeat his prayer, or should a *plake* appear, he will immediately begin the *piat*. People nearby, hearing the urgent note in the prayer, will rush up to watch.

The instructions that the augur gives to *plake* and the subsequent interpretation of the bird's behaviour are basically simple. But since they are not clearly described in the literature to date,⁴ they will be explained in detail here, together with two diagrams that may help to make them clear. Having entered the augur's field of vision, and preferably approached near the middle of it, the bird should circle. This is a "holding pattern", taken as indicating a willingness to begin. Sometimes this is called *ngalachó*, "to dance". All this time the augur is vigorously urging the bird to fly to the left (*ngaberng*), and if he eventually does so a shout of triumph goes up, for this is a good omen, the bird having followed the augur's instruction. The augur will grab up one of the bottles and, waving it after the disappearing *plake*, bless the water which thereby is imbued with the power to ward off harm (*pī plake ngaberng*). If, however, it sails off to the right, then neither a good nor bad omen is deduced. People say that the bird is "playing", or that it is an inexperienced bird, or even that it does not hear well! They then settle down to persevere in their attempt to have one fly left. Should the *plake* fly directly towards the onlookers and over their heads (*mupok*), then a gasp of dismay emerges from the crowd, for this is clearly a bad omen. The augury is over, and everyone drifts off disconsolately. Again, if it should suddenly disappear from sight (*lacheek*),⁵ or if it should suddenly dive (*tukong*) or fly in a violently ungraceful manner, then a similar reaction will be provoked, and a similar meaning

⁴ Haddon 1901:381-393 only hints at the importance of *plake*. Hose and McDougall 1912: 52-53 give a sketchy account of an evidently rather different Kenyah system, as does Furness 1902:161-162 for a very different Kayan system. Several accounts assert that the bird must fly left, or conversely, must fly right, which is misleading.

⁵ The word *lacheek* has a wider meaning. In general it refers to things mysteriously vanished, and presumed removed by potentially dangerous spirits or the ghosts of the recent dead. This particularly applies to small objects associated with the person, such as a comb. As we might remark "the fairies took it!" of something we had a moment ago but cannot now find, so the Berawan say it is *lacheek*, but with much more sinister implications. In particular if a kinsman has recently died, it will be assumed that the spirit of the dead man plans to take the victim's soul for company to the land of the dead. A shaman's services are then required to guard against the danger. That Europeans have not always taken theft by fairies so lightly is demonstrated by several of the stories of O'Faolain (1965).

construed. Should it fly directly away from the onlookers, or diagonally to right or left, then the omen is mixed, partly good and partly bad.

If a good or mixed omen is received on the first part, the augur will then proceed to the second part, summoning *plake* to fly to the right this time. Ideally it should be a different bird that answers the call, and it is in this respect that the habit of the Black Eagle to move in pairs is convenient. Sometimes the augur will even mention that he calls *plake's* wife now, as if aware that the birds are a pair. But if the first bird flies out of vision and then reappears, this will suffice. Failing to sight another bird, the augur may continue on the following day, up to the maximum of three days. This time the bird must fly right, of course, in order to provide a favorable outcome, and the augur can dedicate the other bottle of water (*pī plake ulong*),⁶ which is even more potent to cure illness than the first bottle. Flying left, conversely, will be described as playing, and the other omens are as before.

A range of possible outcomes is thus possible. A bad omen in either part of the performance is final. A good omen in both parts is the happiest possible outcome, or it may be diluted with a mixed omen in one part or the other. A mixed omen in both parts is not very confidence inspiring. If omens were being taken before a war party set out, for instance, such a result might cause abandonment or delay of the entire project.

The only occasion on which I saw these basic procedures modified in any substantial way concerned a case where more than a yes/no answer was required from *plake*. These were the circumstances. The only grandchild of one of the augurs of Long Teru was sick in an unusual way: he was subject to fits of muscular paroxysms during which his eyes rolled up and his body became stiff like a corpse, much to the horror of his family.⁷ The grandfather was unsure of the appropriate curing ritual, and so he decided to consult *plake*. He set up three *talajang* sticks instead of the usual two, one in front of him and one at each side, pointing slightly forward. He then settled himself to call *plake*, and it is the text of his first *piat* on that occasion that is given in the appendix. After some introductory invocations to helpful spirits (lines 1-12), he explained to *plake* the nature of his problem (lines 21-36). Then he instructed *plake* as to where he should appear, that

⁶ *Ulong* is a cognate of *mulong*, "to live".

⁷ I suspected slight brain damage due to birth trauma. Berawan midwives press hard on the fetus to move it down the birth canal, sometimes resulting in over-rapid delivery.

is he explained the “code” of their communication (lines 46-70). The instructions were as follows: if the child was under attack from an evil spirit (*kənachau bīlī*), *plake* was to appear in the part of the sky where the left-hand stick was pointing; if the child was sick because his parents had broken one of the many taboos on pregnant mothers or their husbands (*palē*), above the middle stick; and if sick from any other cause whatever, above the right-hand stick. The augur also asked (line 96) that *plake* fly off to the left, as an assurance that the child would finally be cured. After calling for two days the augur was rewarded by a sighting, and it was deduced from the bird’s behaviour that the child was sick because of the infringement of a taboo, but would recover if proper ritual were carried out.⁸

Who can call *plake*? At Long Teru, for example, there are two men who call *plake* with about equal frequency. One is old, the other middle-aged. One is a shaman, the other not. I never heard of anyone else attempting to do it, and certainly no woman could try. There is no ritual by which a man qualifies to call *plake*. He must acquire by study and practice the art of *piat*, and he should have some supernatural inspiration, usually a dream in which the spirit of *plake* is encountered. Beyond this all he needs is the daring to try, and I think it is the fear of public ridicule should the first attempt go awry, rather than any supernatural sanction, that inhibits the neophyte. The novice may slowly build a reputation as *manai ngəlake*, “skilled at calling *plake*”, if his efforts are generally fruitful, and then he will be asked to officiate whenever need arises, and be paid a small amount for the services. For instance, after the completion of mortuary rites, the kin of the dead man must make arrangements for the calling of *plake* to make sure that no more deaths are in the offing.

Despite the lighthearted tone of many of the appeals addressed to him (he is sometimes told to leave his wife alone in bed, for instance, or leave his rice untasted) calling *plake* is a serious matter that could be dangerous for the whole community if *plake* were offended. It would be a cause for public censure if he were called on too small a pretext. In the past, one of the most important men in a war party was the man selected to *dukəp aman* “hold the omen creatures”. In a large party

⁸ No shamanistic rite will cure an illness due to broken taboos. A shaman can evict lesser spirits, but the results of being *palē* follow automatically the breaking of a taboo (*ñileng*), and this has been so since the creation. Only the supreme deity himself can undo the harm, since he is the creator. So the augur made a *tapó* and sacrificed a pig.

the job might be divided among several men; one to *dukəp plake* (the senior man), one to *dukəp aman manok* "hold the other omen birds", and one to *dukəp aman lipá* "hold the omen snakes". The unsolicited signs of *plake* also have overtones of war. If *plake* (in this case including the Brahminy Kite) cuts across the bows of a canoe on the river, then violence is predicted and it is best to return to the point of departure. If it swoops from left to right, an old man is in danger of death, if in the reverse direction a young man. If it overtakes a boat from behind, then there is a hostile war party behind them. Any kind of erratic flight such as a dive, directly over a longhouse predicts death for someone within.

INTERPRETING OMENS - THE LESSER AMAN

In contrast to the cut-and-dried procedures for reading *plake*, the interpretation of omens from the lesser omen creatures is much more idiosyncratic: a mixture of imaginative symbolism, personal preference and previous experience, and subject to only vague rules. The result is a large body of lore that is impossible to describe exhaustively. I give a few examples only, to show the preference for the right-hand side, the type of symbolism evoked, and the situational nature of the reading.

In general *aman* seen or heard to the left side, or that move left, give a weaker reading than the same species to the right. A Long Jegan informant explained that to see *chit*, *lurok*, *pəngəñok*, *piyek*, *sirek*, or *bukiəng* to the right is a good omen, one should proceed after a brief pause, but on the left they are bad omens and it is best to return to the house. A long Teru expert advised differently: if any of these birds cut across in front of you (*muton jumē*), as across the bows of a boat, for instance, one must return to the point of departure at once. This is irrespective of the direction of flight, though he conceded that flying towards the right in this situation is probably more emphatic.

Symbolism often turns on the color of plumage. *Achē*, *pəngəñok*, and *lurok* all have red feathers on their head or breast, suggesting blood. So they are good to see when going hunting, for they predict a kill, large game if to the right, small if to the left. But they are bad if seen when going to the farms for they suggest that someone will be accidentally injured whilst cutting timber or some such. The work party should then return to the house and rest that day. The voice of the bird is also important. *Kəlirē* has a rhythmical call that reminds Berawan of their death songs (*gu*), and so his voice warns of danger ahead. *Sirek* has

a bad voice too, sounding angry. He warns of meeting large dangerous animals, or of thunder. In the early morning, he foretells rain. *Sākotek* and *chit* on the other hand, have “cool” liquid voices, hinting at pleasant outcomes, and they are popular little birds to see.

The symbolic interpretation of omens can become positively delphic at times. On one occasion two old men fell into dispute about the *tek-tek-tek* cry of *pāngapē* if heard at the site of a new farm. One maintained that the sound was like the creaking timbers of a rice barn stuffed to overflowing with the new rice; clearly it was a good omen. The other old man contested that the sound was of nails being hammered into the coffins of those who died of hunger because they were stupid enough to ignore such an obvious warning! It would be hard to imagine more contradictory interpretations. Finally the latter old man conceded that, whilst for him *pāngapē* had always been bad, maybe the other man’s experiences had been different. It is as if each individual, over a lifetime of observation, slowly builds up a personal relationship with the omen birds. We might say that they “speak each other’s language”, which might not be identical to the mutual communication of other *aman* with other augurs. Note, however, that even a bad omen is a friendly act on the part of the omen bird, for he gives warning so that danger may be avoided.

Unlike calling *plake*, most adults know something about reading the lesser omen animals. In each family apartment (*ukuk*) of the longhouse there is somebody, usually a man but it could be a woman, who is accepted as the most skilled in interpretation, and his co-residents will follow his teaching. Thus there tends to grow up a body of lore peculiar to each *ukuk*.

Interest in omen creatures is intense around the time of choosing (*pālilei*) a new farm site. They are felt to have an intimate knowledge of the terrain and of the spirits of the place, that make their advice particularly valuable at this time. Slash and burn farming is a risky livelihood, and much is felt to turn on the choice of a good site. In addition to such practical factors as soil type and elevation, supernatural circumstances are best attended to. Old men have special birds that they like to see. Generally, *kālrē* and *pāngāñok* are good to see there, and *bukāng* and *asē* are bad. A dead mouse deer on the farm is very bad, and the site will be abandoned at once. Also bad is the *ñawan* snake. If he leaves in due course, the harm can be undone by making a *tapó* at his point of exit, but if he should disappear down a hole, there is no choice but to abandon the new farm and start over.

Finally, there are omens that are only significant in very specific circumstances. For example, the sound of a barking deer on the night before a wedding will cause postponement or cancellation. If heard whilst the wedding party is on its way to the wedding, it predicts short life for the wife if heard to the left, for the groom if to the right. The snake *nawan* is usually bad because, people say, his skin resembles the design on a death house (*salong*), but it is very lucky to see him where a canoe is being built for then the boat will be as fast as the snake himself.

This last example makes explicit a general feature of the symbolism of the omen creatures. No animal, and no piece of behaviour, is always good or always bad. The meanings of symbols and their positive or negative connotations are dependent upon the context in which they are observed. The meanings of symbols are relational in nature.

At the indistinct edges of augury proper, a few creatures, whilst having no particular sign, are felt to be vaguely lucky to have around. The small lizard *pəngigen* is an example of this.

COMPARISON OF IBAN AND BERAUAN AUGURY⁹

Having outlined the Berawan way of augury, it may be instructive to compare it to the only other system from Borneo that has been systematically described, that of the Iban, a large, expansionary people of West Borneo. In what follows I shall discuss some features of Iban augury, as I understand them from Dr. Freeman's paper. The interested reader should refer to the original for further details (Freeman, 1960).

Both systems share a number of underlying assumptions. If omen

⁹ Early observers conjectured that the Iban had copied the practice of augury from the peoples of the Baram and Rejang, or *vice-versa* that the latter had copied it from the former. The two peoples first encountered each other when the northward expansion of the Iban brought them into the upper Rejang area in the mid-nineteenth century (Pringle 1970: 252). A small Iban colony was established in the Baram in 1891, and this was the first contact between the Berawan and the Iban. In view of the relatively recent date of first contact, and considering the close integration that both systems of augury exhibit with other phases of the cultures to which they belong, it is very unlikely that either system owes much to recent borrowing. The Berawan, in fact, strongly resist the importation of Iban practices (apart from the ubiquitous cock-fighting) and this reflects the distaste with which Berawan often regard the Iban, whose land-hungry ways are resented. More ancient cultural connections are unfortunately only conjecture.

animals are seen or heard by men, and if they behave in such a way that their behaviour is interpretable, then it is axiomatic that the spirits have something to communicate to men. Omens are never accidental and it is for men to plumb their meaning correctly. Omen creatures always seek to help men; when they give bad omens they only warn of danger, they do not cause it. The process of interpretation is basically similar in both systems. It is situational in nature. If an activity is in progress or about to commence, then an omen will be taken as referring to that activity, but if nothing in particular is happening then various interpretations can be entertained and individuals can decide on the correct one according to their own plans and intentions. Both systems of augury employ eight major omen birds, although the species used are for the most part different. Preference for the right side and some details of voice and color symbolism are also shared.

But within this overall similarity, there are many differences of detail. Unlike the Berawan, the Iban have exactly eight omen animals, no more and no less. Of the eight, *Singalong Burong*¹⁰ is chief but is not treated much differently than the other birds, in contrast to the very special status of *plake* within the Berawan omen birds. The Iban do not *call* any birds in the sense that the Berawan call *plake*, but there is a method of seeking signs that is unlike anything the Berawan do. Briefly, if important undertakings are planned, a skilled augur will retire to a specially built shelter in the jungle. There he will stay until he has encountered all of the signs that he feels are necessary for the success of the venture. These may be numerous, and have to occur in a pre-arranged order, so that the process may take weeks. The Iban, unlike the Berawan, have complex, specific, and universally agreed on interpretations for the various cries and flight patterns of all their omen birds. Over a wide area, tens and even hundreds of thousands of Iban have an almost identical understanding of the symbolism of the behaviour of the birds (*Ibid*: 75). The Berawan, with less than two thousand souls, cannot agree about details of augury with their next-door neighbours. To make the contrast yet more specific, Table 2 details it point by point.

In sum, the ideology of Iban augury displays a rigid formalism compared to the fluidity of Berawan thought. It is interesting that the same contrast will be found when we come to compare Iban and Berawan conceptions of the spirit world.

¹⁰ *Burong* means simply "bird".

TABLE 2

Iban and Berawan augury compared

<i>Iban</i>	<i>Berawan</i>
omen animals exactly eight	indeterminate number of <i>aman</i>
Subdivided: (i) chief bird (ii) other seven	Subdivided: (i) chief bird (ii) seven others of major eight (iii) others
(i) has no special method of giving omens	(i) is <i>called</i> unlike (ii) or (iii)
all have clear rules for interpretation	(i) has clear rules for interpretation but (ii) and (iii) do not
rules universally agreed	rules variable

TABLE 3

Iban and Berawan cosmology compared

<i>Iban</i>	<i>Berawan</i>
well-defined pantheon	limitless spirit world
Subdivided: * (i) <i>Lang</i> (ii) other residents of the divine longhouse	Subdivided: (i) <i>Bili Ngaputong</i> (ii) heroes and ancestors (iii) nature spirits
(i) is <i>primus inter pares</i>	(i) is the creator
all are well known in detail	(i) is well known, but (ii) and (iii) are not known about in detail
cosmology widely agreed on	cosmology locally variable

* Freeman makes no mention of nature spirits, but the Iban do have them (see for example Jensen 1966). They are evidently of less importance than in Berawan belief.

OMEN ANIMALS AND THE SPIRIT WORLD

Let us first of all see how in Iban thought the omen birds are related to the spirit world. Each bird is the material personification of a spirit who, as it happens, is homonymous with the bird. The chief of them is *Lang*, or to give him his full title *Lang Singalong Burong*. Five of the other bird-deities are his sons-in-law, and they all live in one long-house, together with their kinsmen. All of these deities are named, and their characters and life histories are known. Stories about their individual adventures are told, much as the Greek myths tell about the gods of the Pantheon. Each deity has a special department of concern, and Freeman cites us one example: the father of the omen bird *Embuas* is called *Bujang Bungah Jajingah Tinggi Serukong* and his special task is to safeguard certain items of ritual apparatus concerned with head-hunting. The celestial longhouse duplicates the social order of its earthly Iban counterparts, and *Lang* holds sway there by virtue of his imposing presence (*Ibid*: 77-78).

The Berawan spirit world is very different. It is dominated by an all-pervading supreme god. His names hint at his character: *Bili Ngaputong* the creator (*ngaputong* = to create), *Bili Puwong* the owner of all things (*puwong* = to own). If a *tapó* (prayer site) is prepared, then it is primarily for him, only secondarily for other spirits. All manner of powers are reserved to him only, such as the power mentioned above to lift the spiritual harm (*palē*) of breaking a taboo (*ñileng*). He is the last recourse of appeal in any serious matter when all other attempts to manipulate the spirit world, as for instance by use of shamans, have failed.

But the supreme spirit is not the only spirit. The universe is assumed to contain a very large number of spirits some friendly to men, others not, yet others variably so. Berawan themselves make no attempt to subdivide this spirit world, and it is only for analytic purposes that I offer the following incomplete list. Perhaps closest in importance to the supreme god are a number of Berawan heroes who became divine, of whom the most important is *Anak Tau*, the originator of augury. These figures are mythical, but through a series of rather less stupendous ancestors, they are connected to the spirits of great Berawan who have died in living memory. These heroes and ancestors are appealed to in prayers to protect the community in death as they did in life. Ancestral spirits often provide shamans with their spirit helpers in the other world.

Berawan cosmology does not contain any equivalent of the named deities with very specific areas of concern that we noted as characteristic

of Iban belief. Instead, there extends beyond the ancestors a world filled with all manner of mysterious spirit entities: spirits of stars and crocodiles, of mountains and rivers, of the rainbow and of madness, in infinite variety. It is important to understand how the Berawan label these spirit entities, and what the names that they give to them imply about the knowledge that they claim to have of the spirit world. For instance, what does a Berawan mean by the expression *bilī tapó* (*bilī* = spirit, *tapó* = prayer site) which is often heard in prayers? Does he mean that his newly-prepared prayer site has been at once inhabited by a new spirit, or that there is a spirit that inhabits all *tapó* simultaneously? Neither, I believe. He refers to all the spirits, *whoever* they may be, that have come to his *tapó* in answer to his prayer. To take another example, there was once at Long Teru a jar that began to do odd things, "groaning" at night and moving around. People immediately spoke of *bilī gusi* (*gusi* = a kind of simple utilitarian jar), meaning that obviously some supernatural power was making the jar move. The neologism *bilī gusi* did not necessarily imply a new spirit entity peculiar to the jar, and no one would have used it had not the jar become exceptional. I asked what spirit was in the jar, and they replied typically "How should we know?" Later a shaman asked his spirit helper about the jar, and was told the name of the spirit moving it and how to befriend him. Berawan readily admit that their knowledge of the spirit world is incomplete. They assume that spirits are related to each other as men are, and live in groups as men do, but if one presses for details, or points out inconsistencies in their accounts, the only reply is "How should we know, we are only human".¹¹ It is clear that the time-honored term animism is inappropriate to describe their beliefs. Animism implies a *certainty* that all things have a spiritual existence counterpart to their physical existence; but the Berawan have no such certainty, their beliefs are full of *uncertainty* about spiritual existence.

Berawan knowledge of the spirit world is contained in a large body of lore derived from several sources. A great deal is the common patrimony of Berawan, handed down from their ancestors. Other bits of information, details about minor nature spirits mostly, are obtained from

¹¹ An old man was once explaining to me about the spirit of thunder (*bilī gau*) and his below-ground counterpart, who causes landslides and such (*bilī manali*) and he said: "These two are brothers . . . or maybe cousins, how should we know?" This is very reminiscent of what the Melanau say: "These are things that cannot be seen, how can we be sure what they are like?" (Morris 1967: 194).

their spirit helpers by shamans, and these are carefully noted. Finally, anyone may receive revelations about the spirit world in dreams, and there have been several prophets or religious innovators who claim new knowledge obtained in this way. Not surprisingly then, there are differences, sometimes major ones, in the pre-Christian beliefs of all the major longhouses. Even neighbors within the one house may not share exactly the same knowledge about the spirit world, depending upon their diligence in following the pronouncements of active shamans.

Given that Berawan admit that their knowledge is incomplete and that others may know something that they do not, it is reasonable to suppose that they would be willing to learn from those who impressed them as being specially expert. This is the case. An examination of the details of ritual and belief reveal items shared with the Punan Bah to the South, with the Kejaman and Sekapan in the Belaga, with the Sebop further up the Tinjar, and with many Kenyah sub-groups. Were it possible to make a complete checklist of cultural items, it would show some shared with all these peoples, some with only this group, some with only that group, in a complex network reflecting the closeness of ethnic and historical ties. It is perfectly clear that the entire culture area is characterised by variation and borrowing of bewildering complexity.

This readiness to borrow in the folk religions of Central North Borneo goes a long way towards explaining the rapid spread of a revivalist cult, called the *Bungan* movement, that swept through the Baram in the 1950's and 1960's. During this period pressure from Christian missionaries was intense, and in the interior especially, whole houses converted to the insurgent faith with a considerable show of fervor. There arose at this time several native prophets claiming new revelations received in dreams or trances, and calling for basic reforms in the old religion. They sought to elevate *Bungan*, a female deity variously believed to be the wife, sister, or daughter of the creator, to a position of dominance in the revived traditional religion. They attempted to draw on the religious enthusiasm that they saw mobilized by Christian missionaries, and they preached the abolition of the old taboos and simplification of the old rituals in order to remove what they considered the crushing inconvenience of the old way. They saw this reform as both a modernization of the traditional religion, allowing it to compete with Christianity, and at the same time as a return to the roots of their own indigenous religions by the purging of unessential elaboration. This stratagem did not in the end prove to be a good one, for in many ways the *Bungan* only succeeded in preparing the way for Christianity, but

its initial success was striking. What concerns us here is that basic epistemological concepts made the spread of the *Bungan* possible. It is interesting to note that the movement's expansion stopped abruptly when it reached the edges of Iban country, and the Iban have never produced any kind of revivalist movement themselves. They have also resisted the inroads of Christianity with more success than their Kayan and Kenyah neighbors. Evidently Iban doctrine is resistant to basic change.

We are now in a position to compare Iban and Berawan views of the spirit world. Where the former have a neatly delineated pantheon of named spirits, whose every foible is known, the Berawan have a vaguer, less comprehensively known spirit world. The Berawan have a supreme god incomparably greater than any other spirit; he is the creator. By contrast *Lang* is more of a *primus inter pares*; clearly boss, but only by virtue of his imposing appearance. He has kinship relations with the other gods, and shares his house with them. There is no mention of his being the creator. Finally Iban cosmology is homogeneous over a wide area, whilst Berawan disagree on many points. These contrasts are summarized in Table 3.

The reader will notice that Table 3 has been presented so as to resemble Table 2, and this is to demonstrate the conclusion that I have been leading up to: that for both the Iban and the Berawan the system of augury and the system of cosmology exhibit the same structure. Or, so to speak, the omen creatures map the spirit world.

What then is the relationship between *plake* and *Bili Ngaputong*? Certainly one is not synonymous with the other, as *Lang* is with *Singalong Burong*. When Iban see *Singalong Burong*, then they are seeing *Lang* himself, in a material manifestation. The relationship between *plake* and *Bili Ngaputong* is less direct and more subtle. In the prayer presented in the appendix, the augur asks *bili plake* to send a "trustworthy, responsible" bird, one that is "experienced" in giving signs (lines 139-152). The bird then is only a messenger from *bili plake*, not a personification of him. Who then is *bili plake*, is he a bird, or what is he? To this question there is in Berawan thought no answer, as I hope I have made plain.¹² The nature of the relationship can only be stated in structural terms:

Bili Ngaputong : other spirits :: *plake* : other *aman*.

¹² Berawan also speak of *bili aman*, the spirit or spirits of the omen animals together, and this is an equally undefined concept.

A parallel statement about Iban belief is possible:

Lang : other deities :: *Singalong Burong* : other omen birds
but it is trite, since identification of *Lang* and *Singalong Burong*, and of the other omen birds and their spirits, is explicit anyway.¹³

The first statement is not self-evident and it has a bearing on an issue that has not been discussed so far because there is an anomaly that we were not in a position to explain. The issue is this: can the omen animals of themselves help men, or can they only foretell and advise? In both Iban and Berawan augury, it is a tenet that the omen creatures only forecast and cannot directly interfere, and the Iban consistently adhere to this, albeit sometimes by the use of sophistry (Freeman 1960: 81, 88-89). But occasionally the Berawan seem to be unambiguously appealing to *plake* to aid them directly. For instance, *plake* was called at Long Teru in order to restore a man's good luck at hunting. As he expressed it, his gun had been failing to kill pigs, even when fired at targets in full view. The gun was *liang* (perhaps best glossed as "impotent") and he had asked the augur to summon *plake* to *katē liang* (*katē* = throw away). One informant conjectured that *bili plake*, hearing the augur's prayers, would supplicate *Bili Ngaputong* to help the poor man, so frustratingly wasting valuable cartridges, and having done so, would report the success of his appeal to the augur and his crowd of onlookers in the usual way. Even so, *plake's* intervention on the behalf of men is perfectly apparent.¹⁴ Again, in the case described above of the augur and his sick grandchild, it was clearly felt that calling *plake* in itself would somehow help. The calling of *plake* has become an act of worship. Hose remarked the ambiguous nature of *Flaki* many years ago: "*Bali Flaki* . . . is peculiar among the many omen birds of the Kenyah, in that an altar post before the house is assigned to him, . . . It seems to us . . . that *Bali Flaki* has driven into the background, and more-or-less completely taken the place of, a god of war whose name even has been forgotten" (Hose and McDougall 1912, vol. II: 15). What causes a basic tenet of Berawan augury to be

¹³ We could formulate other symbolic statements, e.g.:

seven most-cited *aman* : other lesser *aman* :: ancestors : other spirits.
The statement is acceptable, but hardly helpful, since on both sides of the equation the relationship is vague. Indeed the distinction itself is an analytic one, and not inherent in Berawan thought.

¹⁴ Hose and McDougall (1901: 179) quote a very similar statement about *Bali Flaki's* powers: "We were told by one very intelligent Kenyah that he supposed that the hawks, having been so frequently sent by Balli Penyalong to give them warnings, had learnt how to do this of their own will . . ."

flaunted in this manner? The answer is that the extension of the power of *bili plake* is a consequence of his structural identification with *Bili Ngaputong*. The latter cannot but lend such prestige to the former, that *bili plake* crosses the borderline from carrier of messages to deity in his own right.

CONCLUSION

In addition to describing Berawan augury, I have tried to relate it to the spirit world from which it seeks to obtain information. The place of the omen birds in Berawan cosmology is not obvious, but a comparison with Iban beliefs led to the conclusion that the relationship between the omen birds and the spirits, in particular that between the most important omen bird and the supreme god, is best seen as a structural relationship.

It would be interesting now to extend the comparison of augural and cosmological systems to other ethnic groups of Central North Borneo. The Kayan, who were in pre-Christian times even more concerned with signs from the omen birds than Berawan are, clearly do not have the same beliefs as Berawan about the spirit world. In particular, they have several main deities of nearly equal importance and with specialised functions. It would be interesting to see if and how this affects the beliefs and practice of augury. The Kenyah would present further variations. Luckily research is currently under way or recently completed amongst both these groups and our understanding of Bornean augury may be more complete in the future.

Department of Anthropology, Harvard University

Appendix

TEXT OF A PRAYER FOR CALLING PLAKE

The text of a prayer for calling *plake* is presented here, firstly to illustrate the discussion above, and secondly to furnish a further example of a style of ritual language characterised by structured parallelism, that is found throughout interior Borneo and is widespread in Indonesia (Fox 1971: 217-19). The Berawan version of this style is called *piat*, and skill at *piat* is essential to the performance of the augur and other religious functionaries. Parallelism is found at several levels in the text: in dyadic sets within one phrase, in paired phrases (sometimes composed of dyadic sets), and in the patterned repetition of the name of the spirit addressed. Typically, the first word of a dyadic set is one that occurs in everyday Berawan speech. Frequently it is paired with a word that does not occur in normal conversation, but is heard only in *piat*. Such words may be drawn from other languages, usually Kenyah dialects, if they happen to rhyme or alliterate, or they may be peculiar to Berawan *piat*. Many of these *piat*-words occur in formulas familiar to the audience, and their meaning is immediately recognized. Others are less familiar, and their meaning is deduced by the unskilled listener from the adjacent word in ordinary Berawan. Such *piat*-words have been indicated in the text by a star, thus *. The English gloss that has been given to the *piat*-words is, of necessity, only approximate, since they can not usually be elicited in other contexts. Dyadic sets do not seem to be entirely fixed, and Berawan *piat* evidently does leave some room for idiosyncratic variation and new invention. *Piat* is spoken loudly, and at great speed, producing a pleasing melodic sound. Because of the speed of delivery, however, even adepts make errors or slips of the tongue occasionally, and there are instances of such errors in the text, such as a lone word lacking the pair to its dyadic set.

In order to do as little violence as possible to the original *piat*, a minimum of punctuation has been inserted, and the English gloss has been kept as literal as possible, even though the resulting translation is stilted. Words shown in brackets in the translation are absent but understood in the original Berawan, and are inserted to make the English version comprehensible.

Note that the Kenyah form *bali plaki* is often used in place of the Berawan *bili plake*. *

- no bali plaki.
 Ka no uran sələwan
 ka no mətək səmilok
 bali plaki.
 Tu ran tələjang tu
 bali plaki.
 Tələjang kin kaking tu
 bili plake
 50 bi ñi kəlabə utət
 kənachau bili to wong kabe
 anē ā arn no [ñi
 madá ləchu madá bulu
 no bali plaki.
 Tu tələjang cho jume ko tu
 bali plaki
 bi ñi təkəna
 bi ñi pale
 anó kələja tina tama ñi disei
 60 jaka disei ñiləng uni
 bali plaki
 tu tələjang cho jume tu
 ā arn no lupó
 bali plaki.
 Bi ñi təkəna ino ino ka
 bali plaki
 ni tələjang lakīn kin kətu'o
 ni ā arn no lupó [ko
 bali plaki
 70 ni ā arn no madá ləchu
 [madá bulu
 bali plaki.
 Ka no marn sələwan
 bali plaki.
 Ka no səngətək səngilok
 bali plaki.
 Ooo... bali plaki.
 Kura no mapau
 matok sarok
 bali plaki.
 80 Ino kələja ino kədīn
 karm apiu bali plaki
 vai achi usā kəló
 mapau jiu ko
 bali plaki.
 Bira ko
 ngabong ngaberng
 ngabong ñirərng
 bali plaki.
- you spirit of *plake*.
 Do not waste time
 do not ignore (us) disregard (us)
 spirit of *plake*.
 These are the *tələjang* sticks
 spirit of *plake*.
 This *tələjang* stick on the left
 spirit of *plake*
 if he is troubled by a ghost
 disturbed by a spirit that bewitches him
 that is the place you
 show your body * show your feathers
 you spirit of *plake*.
 This *tələjang* stick in front of me
 spirit of *plake*
 if he is bewitched
 if he is *pale*
 because of the actions of his mother and father
 at the time when they were *ñiləng*
 spirit of *plake*
 this is the *tələjang* stick in front of me
 where you appear
 spirit of *plake*.
 If he is bewitched by anything else
 spirit of *plake*
 that is the main stick for you on my right
 that is the place you appear
 spirit of *plake*
 that is where you show your body * your
 [feathers
 spirit of *plake*.
 Do not dawdle
 spirit of *plake*.
 Do not hide * conceal * (yourself)
 spirit of *plake*.
 (calling noise) spirit of *plake*.
 Just answer my call
 a little while a brief moment *
 spirit of *plake*.
 Whatever you are doing however you are
 you (plural) spirits of *plake* up there
 come just one of you
 answer my call
 spirits of *plake*.
 I ask you
 to fly to the left side
 to fly to the left hand *
 spirit of *plake*.

- 90 Nak umi pun milek
 lima milek putē
 cho jume ko
 bali plaki
 anē ā arn no
 madá læchu madá bulu
 no bali plaki.
 Ni ā arn no
 madá ikor madá tó
 madá kəpīt madá pawīt
 madá pəchá madá timá
 100 madá təgən madá arən
 bali plaki.
 Iko məjung tau lo ni
 ngan məjung saga Kayan
 cho jume ko tu
 bali plaki.
 Bira ko
 ngabong ngabərng
 ngabong nūreng
 bali plaki
 110 cho ko ngabo cho ko maso
 cho ko masat cho ko ngabat
 cho ko katē cho ko pəla
 bali plaki
 sakək tuman
 cho linā cho usā
 tupo ukat
 bali plaki.
 Atē no pí
 bali plaki.
 120 Karm bilī plake
 pəkəna pəlika
 ulong nī
 bali plaki.
 Karm lo
 manai pətē manai pulē
 manai maso manai ngabo
 bali plaki.
 Diku kəlune diku sape
 diku kureng diku paging
 130 diku kəlurok
- Even though there is only a small piece of sky
 a small framed area of daylight
 in front of me
 spirit of *plake*
 there is the place you
 show your body * show your feathers
 you spirit of *plake*.
 That is the place you
 show your tail show your coverts *
 show your plumage * show your pinions
 show your breast down * show your belly down *
 show your nape * show your crown *
 spirit of *plake*.
 You should fly now
 fly as gracefully as a Kayan dance
 in front of me
 spirit of *plake*.
 I ask you
 to fly to the left side
 to fly to the left hand *
 spirit of *plake*
 that I may evict * that I may eject *
 that I may dislodge * that I may displace *
 that I may throw away that I may caste out *
 spirit of *plake*
 sickness from
 the person * the body
 of my grandchild
 spirit of *plake*.
 Throw it all away
 spirit of *plake*.
 You spirits of *plake*
 cure care for
 his health
 spirit of *plake*.
 You who are
 skilled at casting out skilled at exorcising *
 skilled at ejecting * skilled at evicting * (bad
 spirits) spirit of *plake*.
 Like the music of the *kəlune* the *sape*
 the *kureng* the *paging*
 the *kəlurok*²

² The *sape* and *paging* are string instruments, the former resembling a guitar, but carved from one piece of wood, the latter is made from a section of bamboo. The *kəlune* is a complex wind instrument making a noise somewhat like an harmonica, the *kureng* is a variety of mouth harp, and the *kəlurok* is a nose flute.

- atē ko tu,
saki cho da saki cho uma
saki cho lamīn saki cho dirīn
saki cho padong saki cho
[dong
karm bilī plake apiu ni.
Ka karm marn sələwan
ka karm səngətək səngilok
bali plaki.
Ka bira plake
140 lo nību lo muju.
Ka bira plake
lo kələjeo lo səluro.
Ā plake lo larn lo balarn
lo mukong liək mukong pawək
aki səma dirk səma bikui
- let my voice be,
arriving at your dwelling* your long house
at your room at your apartment *
at your high place at your eyrie *
you spirits of *plake* up there.
Do not dawdle
do not hide * conceal * (yourself)
spirit of *plake*.
Do not send a bird
that is untrustworthy that is a rogue *.
Do not send a bird
that is irresponsible that is slovenly *.
Where is the real bird the proper bird
that is practiced that is experienced
because of the blood of the chicken the blood
[of the pig
uvī sadī ukun dupun ko ni (given by) my forebears my grandfathers my
[ancestors my elders
- nī lo vai mapau jiu ko
minga jiu ko mika
Ā plake lo
150 sara turo sara padong
Bilī Ngaputong
nī lo mapau livai ko.
Tu dirk wa dirk liwa
- that is the one I ask to come
I call to approach.
Where is the bird that
is near the sleeping place the eyrie
of the Supreme God
that is the one I ask to come.
This is the chicken's spirit the chicken's
[life-force *
- dirk takip dirk turip
no bali plaki.
Tu pakarn tu supá
tu agung tu sanang.
Ka no lachik
bali plaki
160 ka no marn tənəwa
ka no uran sələwan
bali plaki.
Sadəng pun
bawa giku bawa gito
bawa miran bawa kapan
bali plaki
ma vai tənəwa de.
Atan no tubor lamulong
cho disā cho tanā
170 bali plaki.
Kura pa no mapau jiu ko
bali plaki.
Ooo . . . bali plaki.
Madá ləchu madá bulu
- the chicken of life the chicken of living *
you spirit of *plake*.
This is your food offering your betel nut
(in) this gong* this small gong.
Do not be timid
spirit of *plake*
do not be difficult to call
do not waste time
spirit of *plake*.
When there were
wars of thousands of hosts * (of men)
wars between great warriors wars of heroes *
spirit of *plake*
(then) they always called you.
(I call you) to save human life
in this land in this territory
spirit of *plake*.
Just come and hear what I have to say
spirit of *plake*.
(calling noise) spirit of *plake*.
show your body* show your feathers

- madá kəpīt madá pawīt show your plumage * show your pinions
 madá təká madá təgən show your head * show your nape *
 bali plaki. spirit of *plake*.
 Iko məjung ma tau You are the one that can
 lamaram pəjung saga Kayan fly as gracefully as a Kayan dance
 180 cho jume ko tu in front of me
 bali plaki. spirit of *plake*.
 Kura pa no sagəm sagəm Appear now quickly
 [lupó
 bali plaki. spirit of *plake*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Fowler, W. W.
 1920 "Ancient Italy and modern Borneo: a study in comparative culture," in Fowler, *Roman Essays and interpretations*. Clarendon, Oxford.
- Fox, J. J.
 1971 "Semantic parallelism in Rotinese ritual language." *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* vol. 127: 215-255.
- Freeman, J. D.
 1960 "Iban augury," in Smythies, *The birds of Borneo*, pp. 73-98, reprinted in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* vol. 127: 141-167.
- Furness, W. H.
 1902 *The home life of Borneo headhunters*. Lippincott, Philadelphia.
- Haddon, A. C.
 1901 *Headhunters, black, white and brown*. Methuen, London.
- Hose, C.
 1926 *Natural man: a record from Borneo*. Macmillan, London.
- Hose, C. and McDougall, W.
 1901 "The relations between men and animals in Sarawak." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* vol. XXI: 173-213.
 1912 *The pagan tribes of Borneo*, vols. I and II. Macmillan, London.
- Jensen, E.
 1966 "The Iban world." *Sarawak Museum Journal* vol. XIII no. 27: 1-32.
- Metcalf, P.
 1974 "Baram District: a survey of Kenyah, Kayan and Penan people." *Sarawak Museum Journal* special monograph no. 2, vol. 22, no. 43: 29-42.
- Morris, H. S.
 1967 "Shamanism among the Oya Melanau," in Freedman, M. (ed.), *Social Organisation*. Cass, London.
- O'Faolain, E.
 1965 *Children of the salmon and other Irish folk tales*. Atlantic, Boston.
- Smythies, B. E.
 1960 *The birds of Borneo*. Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh.