

IV.—STORIES OF THE FIRST BRUNEI CONQUESTS ON THE  
SARAWAK COAST.—BY A. E. LAWRENCE,  
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The following account of the conquest by Brunei of all the Milano coastal districts from Tutong and Belait to the Rejang delta, was for the most part obtained from natives at Mukah some three years ago.

At that time I had no means of testing the story in any way, or even of fixing the period when the events enumerated were said to have taken place, the only thing insisted upon being that the Brunei people were not yet Mohamedan.

Lately however, on looking up the "Selisilah of the Rajas of Brunei" in the Sarawak Museum Library, (Journal Roy. Asiatic Soc. Straits Branch, No. 5, June 1880) the following facts came to light. In this story Alak Betatar was ruler of Brunei when the conquest took place, and Pateh Berbi was his fighting chief. In the Selisilah Alak Betatar is mentioned as the first ruler of Brunei to become Mohamedan, being converted during his rule together with his chief minister, Pateh Berbi.

Alak Betatar, who took the name of Mohamed and the title of Sultan on conversion, ruled about 1400 A. D. Pateh Berbi is sometimes given in Brunei records as a younger brother of Alak Betatar, and it is so also in this story.

This verifies the names of two important people, and gives an approximate date to the events narrated.

In those days the most powerful and populous Milano settlement along the coast was in the Igan river\* and

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\* For the benefit of those readers who are unacquainted with the geography of Sarawak I append a brief description of the names of rivers and places mentioned in this article.

The Sarawak Coast here mentioned stretches from the mouth of the Belait River south-west to Tanjong Datu. The river *Tutong* is north of the *Belait River*, in Brunei Territory. Proceeding south-west, after the *Belait River* comes the *Baram River*, then a long stretch before coming to Kedurong Point near which the *Bintulu River* flows into the sea. Continuing along the coast we come to *Mukah*, *Oya* and the *Igan River* of which the *Rutus* is a tributary. *Matu* lies between this and the delta of the great *River Rejang*.



the ruler of it, Tugau, lived in the Rütus, a large tributary of the Igan. To this day many stories and legends about Tugau and his relations are told by the Milanos from Matu to Bintulu, especially in those families which are descended from him or any of the other chiefs famous in his day—of his miraculous birth, his size and strength,—(his sago was baked into balls as big as a hen's egg)—of his death at the hands of his own people, etc., etc.† Remains of the *billian* posts of Tugau's house are still to be seen on the banks of the Rütus, and below them, if any man is brave enough to dig there, is hidden an enormous treasure of gold, besides the bones of the slaves sacrificed according to custom when the posts of a new house are erected.

Besiong, a near connection of Tugau, was also a famous person, and had many adventures, miraculous and otherwise.

Besides ruling over his own people at Rütus, Tugau had great influence in many other districts along the coast. Kedāhat, chief of Oya, was related to him and acknowledged his supremacy. The Mukah chief, Busui, whose burial post is still to be seen in the Tillian river, although the urn at the top containing his bones has long since been lost, was married to a near relation of Tugau, who could count on the Mukah people following him to war if he required them.

Tutong, under its chief Bēniban, and Bēlait, then ruled by a man named Jam, were also friendly to Tugau, so that he really had quite a large and powerful, if somewhat scattered, following.

Thinking that he was strong enough to overcome the rising Brunei power, Tugau sent a message to Alak Betatar demanding tribute and submission from him. This was refused, and Alak Betatar in return made the same demands from Tugau, with the alternative of war if he did not yield to them. The answer was prompt enough, as, without waiting for Brunei to take the aggressive, Tugau's brother-in-law, Besiong, raised Tutong and Belait, and made a raid into their territory. Here they met a Brunei force under Pateh Berbi and Sēmaun, also said to be a brother of Alak Betatar, and

† One of these stories will be found in the *Sarawak Gazette* for May 1907, p. 99.



were repulsed, falling back again on Tutong and Belait. There the Bruneis attacked and beat them; but Besiong, with a few followers, made his escape by boat, and sailed down coast as fast as he could to get back to his brother-in-law at Rütus, report his failure, and raise the country. Besiong reached the Rütus safely, but before he and Tugau could collect all their followers or send word to the neighbouring districts, Pateh Berbi and Sêmaun, who had followed by sea from Tutong with all their people, were upon them.

Thus taken by surprise Tugau was beaten, and made full submission to Alak Betatar through his brothers, promising to pay the tribute demanded.

Having got Tugau into their power, Pateh Berbi and Sêmaun did not give time for any possible combination of the neighbouring Milano chiefs, but went straight for Mukah, the most populous Milano settlement remaining.

There they were again successful, beating the chief, Busui, and receiving his submission also.

These two decisive victories seem to have effectually cowed the surrounding country, as Kédâhat of Oya and several other chiefs submitted without attempting resistance.

Alak Betatar therefore was now ruler, at least nominally, over all the coast districts from Brunei to the Igan, with the exception of Bintulu, the story of whose submission is somewhat different.

It appears that none of the Bintulu villages were very near the sea and it so happened that when Pateh Berbi and Semaun returned to Brunei from their conquering expedition, no Bintulu people were about in their boats off the mouth of the river, so that the Brunei fleet, although, on the look-out for other settlements to conquer, did not guess that the place was inhabited.

Later on Alak Betatar sent an expedition along the coast by sea with express orders to find and subdue any settlement they might come across. Even then they would have sailed past the mouth of Bintulu river, thinking it uninhabited, but for an accident. As they passed by someone saw fresh banana leaves and stems floating out to sea, and called attention to them. The



leaders decided to go up river and find out who had planted those bananas, and paddling inland for some time, came across a large Milano village, finding several more later on. The Bintulu people would seem to have been shyer and wilder than other coast Milanos, for whenever the Bruneis came near a village to land, all the inmates took to the jungle. However the Brunei people gradually coaxed them back and gained their friendship by presents and other means, finally making them subjects of Alak Betatar, and appointing a man to rule over the district, which before had been divided up among several petty chiefs, each holding his own village.

The district of Matu, from the Igan to Rejang mouth, is said to have been gained by Brunei at about this period too, but I have not yet gained any information as to the method by which it was subdued.

Tugau, Busui, Kêdâhat, and probably the lesser chiefs also, were allowed to go on ruling their people as dependants of Brunei, on condition that they acknowledged Alak Betatar as their supreme ruler and paid him a yearly tribute. Later on, when Brunei had become a Mohamedan state, the native Milano chiefs were replaced by Pangirans from Brunei, who very generally married into the families of the men they superseded.

Shortly before Mukah came under the Sarawak flag, the story goes that Pangiran Ursat and Pangiran Mathusin both of that place, had a serious quarrel which originated from two of these mixed marriages.

Busui, as mentioned above, was the last native Milano ruler of Mukah. His wife was a daughter of Tugau. The first Brunei Pangiran to rule Mukah is said to have married a daughter of Busui by this wife. Pangiran Ursat was descended from this marriage. Now Busui had once made a raid on Bintulu, defeated Lungah one of the chiefs there, and taken his sister, Ilim, back to Bintulu, where she became Busui's concubine. By Busui Ilim had six children, one of whom, a daughter, married Pangiran Mathusin's ancestor. Pangiran Mathusin is said to have asked Pangiran Ursat for the hand of one his daughters in marriage, and been



refused with scorn, Pangeran Ursat publicly saying that the descendant of a war captive and practically a slave was no match for any daughter of his. The insult rankled badly, and finally led, together with other causes, to the killing of Pangiran Ursat by Pangiran Mathusin's party. Pangiran Dipa or Nipa, son of Pangiran Ursat then took up the feud, helped by Sherif Mussahor, and the disturbances began which led to Mukah being taken over by Sarawak at the urgent request of the people, who were being oppressed beyond all bounds by Sherif Mussahor, then head of the most powerful faction.

In reading the above account it must be remembered that the stories from which it is gathered have never been written, but have been handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation, beginning 500 odd years ago, so that the account cannot pretend to any historical accuracy. With the stories too are interwoven many fables and legends about their various heroes and their relations, which have gradually grown up round any facts there may have been to begin with in the past.

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