



The Sarawak Museum Journal

Vol. XXXVII No. 58

December 1987



ISSN: 0375-3050

E-ISSN: 3036-0188

Citation: Maxwell, A. R. (1987). The Second Exploration of The Balui Valley and The Founding of Belaga: Hugh Brooke Low's Diaries of 1882, 1883 and 1884. The Sarawak Museum Journal, XXXVII (58): 15-74

THE SECOND EXPLORATION OF THE BALUI VALLEY AND THE FOUNDING OF BELAGA: HUGH BROOKE LOW'S DIARIES OF 1882, 1883, AND 1884

Allen R. Maxwell

The University of Alabama

INTRODUCTION

The first European to visit the Balui Valley was, of course, Robert Burns, a grandson of the Scottish bard, in 1847 (Harrison 1951: 465). Burns published an account of the Kayan (1849a) and a Kayan vocabulary (1849b). He probably visited the Pelagus Rapids, Belaga, and quite possibly even further upstream (Harrison 1951: 489), before his untimely death in Marudu Bay in 1851 (see Rutter 1930: Ch. 20). But it is from the hand of Hugh Brooke Low that we have the most extensive and detailed descriptions of the Balui Valley and its people from an earlier time.

In the early 1880's the *Sarawak Gazette* published a series of accounts written by Hugh Brooke Low while he was Resident of the Third Division and stationed at Sibu. These reports are among the most incisive and vivid of any of the pre-20th century descriptions of the peoples of the Balui Valley. They are also unique, in that no other author spans anywhere near the broad range and diversity of both topics and different peoples. Somewhere within these diary entries there is discussion, or at least mention, of virtually every ethnic group now living in Balui, or known to have lived there in the past (see Appendix, Ethnic and Ethno-Geographical Groups Mentioned in Low's Diaries). They stand among the very best of the early sources on Sarawak.

Hugh Brooke Low was the son of (Sir) Hugh Low who had come to Sarawak as a botanist in 1845 and wrote *Sarawak; Its Inhabitants and Productions* (1848), one of the earliest general works on Sarawak. Hugh Low was also a noted scholar of Brunei (1880) and went on to a distinguished administrative career in Perak (Sadka 1954). Hugh Brooke Low was a member of the Sarawak Service from 1869 until his death in 1887 (Baring-Gould and Bampfyld 1909: 55). He served in the Third Division from 1875 to 1887, ending as its Resident (Pringle 1970: 120, 148).

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During his career Hugh Brooke Low pursued his interests as an amateur ethnologist and his notes later became the stimuli to Henry Ling Roth's two volume work, *The Natives of Sarawak and British North Borneo* (1896). In the Introduction, Roth relates the circumstances under which he came to write this work and gives a brief biography of Hugh Brooke Low. Roth's discussion deserves quotation in full (1896: xi-xii).

This book has its origin in the following circumstances. Some years ago my friend Prof. E.B. Tylor, F.R.S., placed in my hands a parcel of MSS., the writing of which was so fine and obliterated that I was obliged throughout to use a strong magnifying glass in order to be able to read it. The papers, which were largely written in pencil, were partly destroyed by moisture and by insects. These very incomplete MSS. were the posthumous papers of an eccentric young gentleman named Hugh Brooke Low, who, however, possessed a very intimate knowledge of the natives and who died shortly after his second arrival in England in 1887. "He was the son of Mr. (now Sir) Hugh Low, Secretary to the Governor of Labuan, a small colony established for the suppression of piracy by Her Majesty's Government in 1848. Hugh was born at Labuan on the 12th May, 1849, his mother being Catherine, daughter of Wm. Napier, Esq., Lieutenant Governor of Labuan. He was baptized on the 13th June, 1849, by Sir James Brooke, K.C.B., the Governor of the Island. He was sent home at an early age and received his education partly in Germany, at Neuweid, and partly in England where he was for two years a resident pupil of Professor Seeley, attending at the same time the classes at University College. He failed to pass the examination for the Indian Civil Service in 1869, and accepted an appointment which was offered to him by the present Raja of Sarawak, Sir Charles Brooke, G.C.M.G. He died in London on the 12th July, 1887, of pneumonia, and was buried in the Roman Catholic Cemetery at Mortlake, having been received into the Roman Catholic Church shortly before his death. His sister, Lady Pope Hennessy, who attended him with the utmost devotion during his illness, had long been devoted to that faith. During the eighteen years of his service under the Government of Sarawak, he was stationed principally on the Rejang river, which gave him great opportunities of studying the Dyak and Kayan races inhabiting the banks of this noble river, but he had also experience of many other parts of the territory of the Raja of Sarawak, and his death was much regretted by their Highnesses the Raja and Raneé of Sarawak and by all the native tribes with whom he had so long been in close contract." These notes were worked up and a fair portion of them published in the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, but while doing this I was much hampered by the want of a general work dealing with the subject. I therefore determined to prepare such a work, which was not intended to be a comparative study, and this is the book now placed before the reader.

The two articles which Roth refers to were published in the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* (later the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*) in 1892 and 1893 (see Roth 1892, 1893). A good deal of