

Batuh Narit Arur Bilit of Pa' Umor: A Visual Analysis onto a Carved Stone from the Megalithic Monuments of the Kelabit Highlands

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Abstract: *This paper seeks to investigate on the Kelabit's material culture based on a visual archaeological study of the megalithic stone, particularly the carved stone known as Batuh Narit Arur Bilit, from the district of Pa' Umor in Bario, Sarawak, Malaysia. The primary focus of this paper is to advance knowledge within the practice, especially in the visual art research, and how it can be used as a digital content to promote eco-tourism in the rural area. Previously, there were lack of techniques that can be used as an example on how visual art can be used to explore other disciplines such as anthropology. Thus, this study will highlight several issues pertaining to the visual documentation process of the megalith, notably on the relation of the symbol and drawing carved on the surface of the stone. By using empirical research, the biography of the monument will be explored via experiential learning and visual analysis, especially in considering our sensory with practical experience. These findings are the result of visual recording practices such as drawing, photography and video as well as site observations, with the highlight of the discovery of the long-lost stone carvings. What started as an unintentional discovery has evolved into a rich visual study of the cultural narratives and has developed as an identity that also has a historical impact and cultural content for the eco-tourism sector in the Kelabit society.*

Index Terms: *Material Culture, Practice-led, Megalith, Kelabit Highlands, Visual Analysis.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism plays an important role in the Sarawak economy as it is one of the cornerstones of the state's economy. Current tourism initiatives focus only on popular tourism destinations and neglecting other sites, particularly in the rural areas. Tourism helps local communities in improving their standard of living by creating more employment opportunities and

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contributing to the development of better infrastructure and facilities. Promoting any tourism-related event in rural areas is a challenging job, unlike in urban areas where all the infrastructures are already in place. Tourism products and services, especially in fulfilling the needs of cultural content for tourism have indirectly pushed rural folks to the digital economy's path. Thus, promoting eco-tourism content by exploring the potential of the digital approach in rural tourism or eco-tourism based on visual representation of art, culture, and heritage such as megalithic monument is an opportunity to assist the development of the eco-tourism sector in the rural community in Sarawak.

Megalithic cultures refer to ancient societies that used very large engraved or shaped stones to build monuments and has a potential to be exploited as a material culture for tourist attraction. This research is a fundamental study of exploring onto the megalithic structure of the Kelabit Highlands based on practice-led research and will investigate the potential of engaging the visual arts approach in an anthropological study. At a same time, this research will be a platform to provide a digital content for the eco-tourism sector in the rural area of Sarawak. Bario, one of the popular destinations for rural tourism is a remote village located on the Kelabit Highlands in the northeast of Sarawak and close to the Sarawak-Kalimantan border. Although most of the megalithic stones associated with the Kelabit tradition can be found here and have been destroyed or extinct, there are still some dolmens, urns, stone carvings and ossuaries that have been used in custom such as funerals to be found today [1].

The researcher had an opportunity to study one of the megaliths in the Kelabit Highlands known as Batuh Narit Arur Bilit at Pa' Umor. Bario, Sarawak. This study has investigated the biography of the stone and interpret the drawing that has been carved before looking at its connection with the folklore tales that has been handed down by their forefathers. In line with this, one of the other purposes of the research is to reinforce the suggested time appearance, and to suggest the purpose of the stone and the possible nature of the persons commemorated on it as explained by Clancy [2]. It is hoped that the findings from this research can be used to enhance the implementation of digital and multimedia technology with innovative and creative visual art approaches in assisting the development of tourism sector in the rural community.