

SLEEPING ARCHIVE



The Unseen, Reawakened



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Sleeping Archive explores how traditional cultural knowledge can be reinterpreted and carried forward through contemporary forms. Inspired by Borneo's weaving traditions, the project considers motifs as living expressions of memory, belief, identity and relationships between people and their environment.

This accompanying publication looks beyond the interactive installation to document and introduce the diverse weaving traditions of Sarawak. It brings together research on ethnic communities, weaving practices, motifs, meanings, histories and material traditions, covering communities including the Iban, Lun Bawang, Kelabit, Bidayuh, Penan, Kenyah, Kayan, Melanau Rajang and Sarawak Malay. Rather than treating motifs as fixed symbols, the publication acknowledges differences in interpretation, local practices and generations of knowledge transmission. It also identifies areas where research remains limited, encouraging further study and engagement with cultural practitioners and knowledge holders. Through this collection, Sleeping Archive presents weaving not simply as a form of decoration, but as a way in which cultural knowledge is remembered, carried and continually renewed.



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SCOPE & INTERPRETATION FRAMEWORK

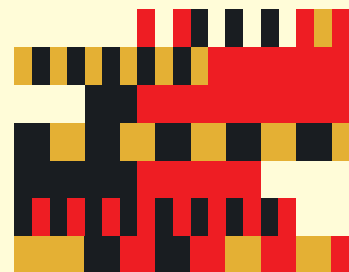
This database is restricted to motifs documented in textile weaving, mat weaving, basketry, plaiting and closely related woven material traditions. Tattoo, beadwork and carving motifs are excluded unless the research evidence also places the motif in a woven medium.

Research-status key

- Documented Meaning
A cultural, symbolic, practical or historical interpretation is explicitly reported in research.
- Literal / mnemonic
The motif name or represented form is documented, but research does not support a deeper symbolic interpretation.
- Name documented
The name is recorded, but a reliable meaning is not established in the accessible evidence.
- Comparative evidence
The motif is documented among a closely related community or outside Sarawak and is useful comparatively, but should not be treated as confirmed Sarawak-local evidence.
- Research gap
The weaving tradition exists, but motif-level names or meanings remain insufficiently documented.

Interpretation Principle: A motif name is not automatically a symbolic meaning. This is especially important for Kelabit weaving, where researchers recorded weavers explaining that names can function as mnemonic labels for geometric structures. A motif called “banana flower,” for example, should not be assigned fertility or botanical symbolism unless a source explicitly documents such an interpretation.







AT-A-GLANCE ETHNIC-GROUP INDEX



(Doe n.d., *Pua Kumbu*)

Iban Community

Tradition: Pua Kumbu / Pua Kebat

Medium: Warp-ikat textile

Motif Documentation: Large repertoire; dozens/hundreds of named designs

Research Interpretation: Ritual, mythic, social and historical meanings are extensively documented.



(Ong 2025, *Fine fiber covered box*)

Lun Bawang Community

Tradition: Ugam / ugam sier

Medium: Mat weaving / plaiting

Motif Documentation: 9 major motifs in a 2022 field study + older named sets

Research Interpretation: Strong links to courage, warfare, agriculture, hunting and daily life.



(Borneo Cultures Musuem n.d., *Bidayuh Basket*)

Bidayuh Community

Tradition: Kasah

Medium: Rattan/bark mat weaving

Motif Documentation: Several documented motifs

Research Interpretation: Technical heritage, landscape memory and paddy-related use.



(Pope 2026, *Kelabit woman*)

Kelabit Community

Tradition: Barit

Medium: Basket and mat plaiting

Motif Documentation: 3+ clearly documented names

Research Interpretation: Names may be mnemonic labels rather than symbols.



(Thambiah 2016, *Kayan Basket*)

Kayan Community

Tradition: Ingan and other plaiting

Medium: Basket and mat weaving

Motif Documentation: Motif dictionary incomplete

Research Interpretation: Weaving and social-rank functions documented; names/meanings need more research.



(Borneo Cultures Musuem n.d., *Penan Basket*)

Penan Community

Tradition: Betek

Medium: Rattan mats and basketry

Motif Documentation: 4 basic motifs in recent research

Research Interpretation: Forest-material identity and intergenerational transmission.



(Etsy n.d., *Kenyah wedding basket*)

Kenyah Community

Tradition: Kalong

Medium: Basket and mat plaiting

Motif Documentation: 20+ motifs in comparative Kenyah research

Research Interpretation: Natural forms, geometry, rank and social identity; Sarawak-local confirmation varies.



(Sarawak Tribune n.d., *Melanau weaving textile*)

Melanau Rajang Community

Tradition: Kain Suket Ajang

Medium: Textile weaving

Motif Documentation: At least 7 researched motifs

Research Interpretation: Ecology, local identity and Sifir Ajang pattern calculation.



(Ismail 2022, *Songket Sarawak*)

Sarawak Malay Community

Tradition: Songket Sarawak

Medium: Supplementary-weft textile

Motif Documentation: 20+ documented names

Research Interpretation: Flora, fauna, natural phenomena and Brunei-linked historical tradition.



(Thambiah 2016, *Bhuket textile*)

Other Community

Tradition: Various

Medium: Basket/mat/plaiting traditions

Motif Documentation: Under-documented

Research Interpretation: Berawan, Punan Bah, Bhuket/Bukat, Kejaman/Kajang, Sekapan, Saban, Bisaya and others require further motif-level documentation.

IBAN COMMUNITY

Historical & cultural context



(Doe n.d., *Pua Kumbu*)

Pua kumbu is a warp-ikat textile tradition with long-standing roles in birth, marriage, agriculture, healing, funerals and historically head-taking and major ritual contexts. Sarawak Museum research notes that pua kumbu became especially visible to museums and collectors after about 1920, although the tradition itself is much older. Traditional knowledge also distinguished powerful motifs and appropriate ritual observances for accomplished weavers.

Research position: Iban motif scholarship is the most extensive among Sarawak weaving traditions. The repertoire cannot be reduced to a fixed short list: historical and ethnographic sources record dozens to hundreds of named designs.

Motif / local name with interpretations

- **Ular** (Snake)

Powerful and potentially dangerous reptile motif; traditional accounts describe protective observances associated with weaving such designs.

- **Nabau** (Giant serpent / python)



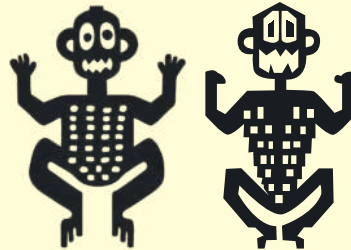
High-status and potentially dangerous supernatural serpent motif. Some accounts describe “food” motifs woven nearby so the creature is symbolically fed rather than threatening the weaver.

- **Baya / Buaya** (Crocodile)



Associated in research with courage, endurance or heroism, protection and ritual caution. The crocodile can be treated as a spiritually potent presence within the cloth.

- **Engkeramba / Antu Engkeramba** (Human or spirit figure)



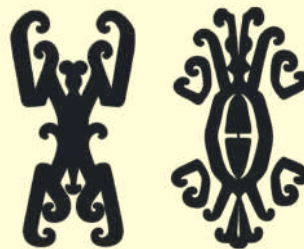
Protective figure associated with guarding people, fields and longhouses against evil, accidents, disasters or harmful beings.

- **Rang Jugah** (Anthropomorphic heroic figure)



Associated with courage, greatness, success, honour and heroic standing.

- **Remaung / Rimau** (Tiger)



Associated with courage and strength; some scholarship also describes a protective, generous and respected figure.

- **Tikus Kasturi** (Musk mouse)

Grouped in one belief study with courage/bravery-associated motifs.

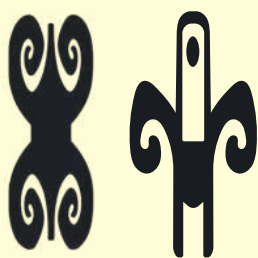
- **Deer motif**

Associated in one study with success or good fortune in hunting.

- **Sempepat** (Firefly)

Named insect/natural motif appearing in Iban pua terminology; no single universal symbolic meaning is established here.

- **Frog**
Traditional pua symbol recorded in museum material.
- **Scorpion**
Recorded insect motif; no universal symbolic meaning established in the cited studies.
- **Centipede**
Traditional natural/animal motif recorded by Sarawak Museum.
- **Burung** (Birds / omen birds)



Depending on design and context, associated with auspicious signs, healing, prosperity, wealth, agricultural success or safe travel.

- **Buah Bangkit** (Plant / fruit-form motif)



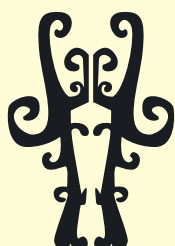
Reported as representing an attractive or desirable young woman and associated particularly with unmarried women and Gawai contexts.

- **Bau Aji Bulan** (Composite anthropomorphic motif)



Described as protecting a person during a journey.

- **Pating Betulak** (Plant-derived form)



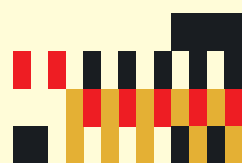
Plant-derived motif; a specific symbolic interpretation is not established in the cited material.

- **Lintah** (Leech)
Traditional zoomorphic motif; interpretations vary or remain under-documented.
- **Spider** (Spider / arachnid)
Recorded nature motif; no single universal interpretation established.
- **Squirrel**
Recorded traditional animal symbol; deeper meaning not consistently documented.

Classic pua design names preserved in historical research

These are names of complete pua designs/corak. The translated description is not necessarily the same thing as a symbolic meaning.

- **Lebur Api / Lebor Api** ("Red as the flames of fire"): Historical descriptive translation.
- **Bali Mensuga** (Design containing metal ornaments): Historical design description.
- **Bali Kelikut / Kelibut** (Lions, tigers, demons and other figures/objects): Composite design description; meanings depend on context.
- **Bali Sempepat / Sapepat** (Firefly design): Historical motif/design name.
- **Kumbu Muau** (Stripes across / in the heavens): Historical description.
- **Bandau Nulang** (Monitor-lizard design): Historical zoomorphic design name.
- **Begerasi / Gerasi** (Demonic figures): Historical design name involving demonic figures.
- **Tangga Beji** (Beji's ladder reaching heaven): Mythic/historical design description.
- **Lemba Bumbun** (Sacred lemba bumbun poles): Associated with poles used in the Bird Festival.
- **Tangkai Ranyai / Ranyai** (Stalk of the mythical ranyai palm): Associated with the ranyai palm of the other world.
- **Tiang Sandong** (Sacred Sandong pole): Associated with the Bird Festival.
- **Tiang Sandau Liau** (Sandau Liau pole): Pole used during the Bird Festival.



LUN BAWANG COMMUNITY

Historical & cultural context



(Ong 2025, *Fine fiber covered box*)

Field research in Lawas describes ugam as an inherited Lun Bawang plaiting tradition. Motifs encode aspects of warfare, agricultural timing, hunting, household protection, tools and everyday relationships with animals and the environment.

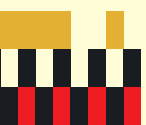


Motif / local name with interpretations

- **Kiung Balang** (“Tiger face”)
Strength and courage; wider Orang Ulu symbolism also connects tiger imagery with power, leadership and high status.
- **Batek Buayeh** (Crocodile belly)
Victory, especially in historical warfare; crocodile characteristics are linked with bravery, calmness, confidence, versatility and loyalty.
- **Arit Buayeh Lumi** (Crocodile turning back to attack again)
Achievement, honour, agreement/treaty and festivity; lumi refers to turning back to confront an enemy again.
- **Bulan Rayeh / Bulan Isut** (Large moon / small moon)
Moon phases guide agricultural and hunting activities such as clearing, burning, planting, harvesting and hunting.
- **Gituen** (Five- or eight-pointed star)
Associated with good weather and dry season; used conceptually to guide agricultural activity and linked with light/radiance.
- **Sawai Wai** (Traditional implement called wai)
Reflects agricultural/daily working life and a traditional tool.
- **Aud** (Hanging hook)
Associated with keeping children away from sharp objects and protecting/hanging useful or valuable household items.
- **Arit Kukud Uko’** (Dog footprint)
Remembers the service and loyalty of dogs in hunting, guarding houses and protecting people in forests; wider Orang Ulu belief can connect dog imagery with spiritual protection.

Older Lun Bawang motif catalogue

Older cultural documentation records additional barit on ugam sier: Barit Kiung Balang, Barit Bua’ Pu’, Barit Lemulun, Barit Langit, Barit Sanai, Barit Batek Buayeh, Barit Tulang Lawid, Barit Lapad Ruma’ and Barit Siri. For the woven rinuh winnowing object, it records Barit Reku’ Leputung, Barit Belabpang, Barit Kiung Balang and Barit Tang Turan.



BIDAYUH COMMUNITY

Historical & cultural context

Kasah is a Bidayuh mat tradition using materials such as rattan and tree-bark elements. Historically it has practical and cultural roles, particularly drying paddy, household use and ceremonial contexts. Recent documentation focuses on Bau/Kuching and Padawan/Siburan-area weavers and highlights declining access to materials and ageing knowledge holders.

Research position: Kelabit evidence is especially important methodologically: researchers recorded weavers explaining that motif names can be memory aids for structures rather than symbols with fixed cultural meanings.

Motif / local name with interpretations

- **Rantai** (Chain-like form)



(Belinda Craft 2021, *Rantai Bidayuh*)

Recognized as a motif with visual-story potential, but the study does not assign one fixed symbolic meaning.

- **Zigzag** (Ascending / angular road)

Interpreted as an uphill road leading toward the mountains, reflecting historical Bidayuh settlement landscapes.

- **Mata Punai** (Eye of a punai bird / dove)

The literal name is documented; no single specific symbolic philosophy is established in the cited study.

- **Traditional wicker-weave motif** (Repeated wicker structure)

The most frequently produced form in the field study; illustrated but not supplied with a separate traditional motif name.



KELABIT COMMUNITY

Historical & cultural context



(Pope 2026, *Kelabit woman*)

Kelabit basketry and mat plaiting are strongly tied to the rice economy, including large carrying and storage baskets for padi. Sarawak Museum describes horizontal design bands used on padi-related baskets and situates the repertoire within a broader Pan-Bornean plaiting tradition.



Motif / local name with interpretations

- **Barit Po'o** (Banana flower)
Mnemonic label for a geometric motif. Research does not justify assigning banana-related symbolic meaning.
- **Barit Kukud Ada** (Ghosts' footprints)
Mnemonic/design name; the name alone is not evidence of a supernatural symbolic meaning.
- **Barit Tebangan** (Scales for weighing goods)
Mnemonic name; documented on the back of the lid of a padi carrier.

Research position: Kelabit evidence is especially important methodologically: researchers recorded weavers explaining that motif names can be memory aids for structures rather than symbols with fixed cultural meanings.



KAYAN COMMUNITY

Historical & cultural context



(Thambiah 2016, *Kayan Basket*)

Sarawak Museum identifies the cylindrical ingan as a typical Kayan carrying/storage basket. Research on Kayan communities of the Upper Balui in Sarawak also shows that woven mats and baskets can act as markers of social differentiation and rank.

Motif / local name

- Sarawak-local Kayan motif lexicon

PENAN COMMUNITY

Historical & cultural context



(Borneo Cultures Museum n.d., *Penan Basket*)

Recent UNIMAS research describes Penan rattan mat motifs as inherited visual knowledge copied, memorised and taught across generations. The word *betek* refers to a pattern/design. Sarawak Museum also notes light/dark Penan basket and mat designs involving hornbills, spiders and floral forms, although local names are not always attached.

Motif / local name with interpretations

- **Betek Pesun** (Traditional named pattern)

Reliable literal translation or deeper symbolic meaning is not established in the accessible research.

- **Betek Kelunan** (People / human design)

Earlier comparative basket research identifies it as a human/people design; deeper symbolic meaning requires further local documentation.

- **Betek Uheng** (Traditional named pattern)

- **Betek Maten Juhit** (Bird's eyes)

The design is identified as representing birds' eyes in comparative research; a deeper fixed symbolic meaning is not securely established.





KENYAH COMMUNITY

Historical & cultural context



(Etsy n.d., *Kenyah wedding basket*)

Kenyah communities span Sarawak and Kalimantan. One of the strongest technical motif catalogues comes from Kenyah communities in Long Alango, Kalimantan. Because it is outside Sarawak, the names are valuable comparative evidence but should not automatically be labelled as Sarawak-local usage without confirmation from Sarawak Kenyah weavers.

Motif / local name with interpretations

- **Kalong Sapuk Manjan / Kelambu Manjan** (Papaya flower; often an eight-pointed star)
- **Kalong Bukut** (Snake-like encircling form)
- **Kalong Sabong** (Line with two serrated edges)
- **Kalong Kulit Alim** (Skin of the alim mango)
Named for a flower-like peeled-skin appearance.
- **Kalong Belirau** (Triangle family)
- **Belirau Belata** (Parallel / identical rows of triangles)
- **Belirau Petuk** (Connected triangular / diamond arrangement)
- **Belirau Deng / Pedeng** (Standing triangles)
- **Belirau Utun** (Broken triangles)
- **Kalong Mata Bali** (Ghost's eyes)
Butterfly-like geometry; name should not be over-interpreted without local evidence.
- **Kalong Mata Manuk** (Bird's eye)
Concentric form with a central point.
- **Kalong Belimbing** ("Circling around")
Wavy or swirl-like band.

- **Kalong Asat Siku** (Path with many angles)
- **Kalong Uwek** (Curving / hook-like form)
- **Kalong Pukut Cah** (Single-heart form)
- **Kalong Pukut Dua** (Double-heart form)
- **Kalong Anjang Jipen** (Half / broken teeth)
- **Kalong Kawit** (Interlocking hooks / spirals)
The interlocking design as unity and cooperation within society.
- **Kalong Uwek Paku** (Curving fern tips)
- **Kalong Surat** ("Writing / script")
Highly complex and comparatively rare pattern.
- **Kalong Éla'** (Human figure)
Traditionally restricted to members of the paren/noble class in the documented community.
- **Kalong Bua' La'ut** (Bitter-gourd fruit)
Composition incorporating paired human figures.
- **Kalong Dok** (Zoomorphic monkey design)
Objects carrying these motifs include belanyat, ingen, pat mats and tediye. The social-status dimension is important: certain human/animal images historically related to rank and class rather than serving only as decoration.

MELANAU RAJANG COMMUNITY

Historical & cultural context



(SCHOLASTICA_LIM 2024, *Traditional Melanau headgear*)

A 2024 study at Kampung Rajang, Sarikei, investigated local Suket Ajang motifs through interviews with practitioners and motif records. Pattern construction uses calculated Sifir Ajang structures, making the tradition particularly relevant to studies of repetition, mathematics and encoded visual systems.





Motif / local name with interpretations

- **Tapok Pedadah** (Four/eight broken petal forms with a central “water-rope” element)

Honesty and openness; interpreted as reflecting cultural diversity and assimilation in Kampung Rajang.
- **Ros Ayeng** (Four fractured rose petals / blooming rose)

Softness and courage, combining gentleness with firmness.
- **Usog Rebung Amut** (Creeping / mangrove-root forms)

Meeting or clash of cultures, likened to fresh and salt water meeting among mangrove roots; also strength and resilience.
- **Usog Rebung Pakau** (Fern form)

Represents local daily life and food/environment, reflecting the importance of shoots and ferns in the surrounding community.
- **Bunga Pisang** (Published paper describes pineapple-inspired form)

Associated in the study with the pineapple and the interrelationship/perfection of woven threads. Terminology should be checked directly against local practitioners before standardising.
- **Buwak Tulau** (Four broken / fractured petals)

An early/basic motif linked with continuity of Melanau tradition, cultural values and heritage in Kampung Rajang.
- **Usog Rebung Ram** (Pucuk midin / fern shoot)

Strong Sarawak identity and meaningful connection to both the Rajang Melanau community and wider Sarawak cultural identity.



SARAWAK MALAY COMMUNITY

Historical & cultural context

Sarawak Malay songket is historically connected to Brunei Malay weaving traditions. Heritage documentation records the use of pineapple or banana fibre and natural dyes before silk and metallic threads became established. The repertoire includes floral, faunal, geometric and landscape-inspired forms.

Research position: More than twenty motif names can be documented, but most sources describe visual inspiration rather than a fixed metaphysical meaning. Bunga Tampuk Manggis is one of the clearer Sarawak-specific examples with an explicit interpretation.

Motif / local name with interpretations

- **Bunga Tampuk Manggis** (Mangosteen calyx / young fruit flower)
Gentleness, generosity and wisdom in speech.
- **Tampuk Kesemak / Tampuk Buah Kesemak** (Persimmon calyx)
- **Bunga Pecah Lapan** (Eight-part / eight-petalled flower)
- **Bunga Bintang** (Floral/star inspiration)
- **Pucuk Rebung** (Bamboo shoot)
- **Lawi Ayam** (Cockerel's tail / plume)
- **Gigi Yu** (Shark's teeth)
- **Awan Larat** (Trailing cloud / scroll form)
Natural/cloud-scroll inspiration.
- **Ombak** (Waves)
- **Gunung** (Mountains)
- **Air Muleh / Air Mulih** (Returning / swivelling water)
Water movement / swirl inspiration.
- **Tali Air** (Water line / trail)
Linear water-inspired pattern.
- **Bunga Cengkih** (Clove flower)
- **Bunga Cermai** (Cermai / gooseberry)
- **Ros Duduk** (Sitting rose)
- **Ros Terapung** (Floating rose)
Linear water-inspired pattern.
- **Tampok Pedada** (Pedada calyx / flower form)
- **Kuda Laut** (Seahorse)
- **Bunga Tanjung** (Tanjung flower)
- **Bunga Serong** (Diagonal / slanting flower arrangement)
- **Bunga Kemunting Cina** (Kemunting Cina flower)
- **Bunga Kuih Madu Manis** (Culinary/form inspiration)
- **Pucuk Rebung Bunga Kayohan** (Composite bamboo-shoot / floral motif)

Cloth-layout terms (not individual motifs)

Kain bertabur; kain bertas / berturus; kain belatak / songket penuh; and songket biasa / Kain Lungik are larger cloth or pattern-layout classifications rather than individual motif names.



OTHER COMMUNITY

The communities below have documented basket, mat, plaited or related material traditions, but the current source set does not provide a sufficiently dependable community-specific motif-name-and-meaning dictionary. “Research gap” therefore means motif-level documentation is incomplete—not that the community lacks patterns.

Community

- **Berawan**

Basket/plaited traditions; wider Orang Ulu comparative literature includes dog/aso imagery.

- **Punan Bah**

- **Bhuket / Bukat**

Mat and basket-making is researched in relation to social relationships with Kayan communities.

- **Kejaman / Kajang**

Weaving and basketry form part of material culture

- **Sekapan**

Substantial motif research exists for burial art/carving, but those should not automatically be classified as weaving patterns.

- **Saban**

Basket/mat craft exists within highland material culture.

- **Bisaya**

CROSS-CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

- **Iban Pua Kumbu**

A ritual and mythological language in which dreams, cosmology, spirits, animals, rank and ritual restrictions can shape a motif's use.

- **Lun Bawang Ugam**

A visual record of environmental knowledge, agriculture, hunting, courage, warfare and everyday social values.

- **Kelabit plaiting**

A strong reminder that motif names may be mnemonic rather than symbolic; geometric naming should not be over-interpreted.

- **Bidayuh Kasah**

Ancestral technical knowledge and landscape memory, including the documented mountain/uphill-road interpretation of the zigzag motif.

- **Penan mats/baskets**

Forest-material identity and intergenerational pattern knowledge; many deeper meanings remain orally held or under-documented.

- **Kenyah / Kayan / Orang Ulu plaiting**

Natural forms, geometry and in some cases social rank or community identity; cross-border and intercommunity borrowing requires careful localisation.

- **Sarawak Malay Songket**

Stylised flora, fauna, geometry and natural phenomena within a weaving tradition historically connected with Brunei Malay culture.

- **Melanau Suket Ajang**

Local ecology, identity and mathematically calculated Sifir Ajang structures, making it especially relevant to pattern/coding analysis.







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Research note

This publication is intended as a research foundation for Sleeping Archive, rather than a definitive catalogue of Sarawak weaving traditions. Motif names, meanings and practices may vary across communities, locations, weavers and generations. Where documentation is limited or interpretations remain uncertain, these gaps are identified rather than filled with assumptions. Further research and engagement with cultural practitioners and knowledge holders are encouraged as part of the continuing process of understanding and carrying forward Sarawak's weaving knowledge.



