

## KELABIT BEADS

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The visitor to the Kelabit Highlands is immediately struck by the beads worn by the women of Bario. Bario, a large cluster of longhouse communities, is nowadays the focal center of the Kelabit Highlands. Practically all women in Bario wear necklaces made of "ancient beads" (*ba'o ma'on*) nearly all of the time that they are outside their own longhouse, and many of them - probably all those who own them - also wear bead caps - *petaa* - made up of the most highly valued beads.

Beads are of great importance in the Kelabit Highlands. There are dozens of named varieties. In this paper I shall give an overview of the wearing of beads in the Highlands, and explore a little the rationale behind the possession of them.

Bario is today the major Kelabit center of population, consisting of eight longhouse communities within less than an hour's walk from each other but separate in jural and administrative terms and in terms of land use. Outside the immediate Bario area there are seven other longhouse communities, three within a few hours' walk of Bario and four in the southern part of the Highlands a days' walk or more away. Within the immediate Bario area there is also a community of traders by the airstrip, consisting of people coming from a number of different longhouses. Until recently, these people did not live in longhouses but in separate houses; they have recently built a longhouse approximately 40 minutes' walk from the airstrip where they all have apartments, but many spend little time there.

