

The classical beauty of the Iranun *bayuk*

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The Iranun of Sabah are one ethnic minority on the island of Borneo. Iranun is an Austronesian language and a distinct member of the Danao subfamily, which also includes Maranao and Maguindanaon in Mindanao, Philippines. Datu' Bandira Alang (1996:3), an Iranun, writes that the name *Iranun* comes from the root *ranun* 'love and affection'. He adds, "When *I* is added to the word *ranun* it becomes *Iranun*, which means 'beloved'." *Igkaranun ku seka* means 'I love you'-or according to Cikgu Ismail, 'I remember you with a deep longing' (personal communication 2006). The root in *igkaranun* is *ranun*.

In 1996 Howard McKaughan, Professor Emeritus of Linguistics, University of Hawai'i, and consultant to SIL Malaysia came to Sabah. This was in response to the request that Tan Sri Pandikar Amin Haji Mulia, a recognized leader of the Iranun, had made to SIL Malaysia branch for someone to start working in his language. After McKaughan's arrival, T. S. Pandikar pointed him in the direction of two men; the late Datu' Bandira Alang, who had collected some Iranun traditional stories, and Haji Masrin Haji Hassin, known to be one of the best in the Iranun language. Masrin is an Iranun native judge, working in the district office of Kota Belud where the majority of the Iranun are located. After a two-month visit meeting people and starting work, McKaughan returned to the United States with fifteen of Datu' Bandira's traditional stories. These played a major role in his analysis of the Iranun language.

Within a month of arriving in Sabah, McKaughan lived with the Jim and Karla Smith family. He endeared himself to the family and became "Grandpa". He has five girls of his own and already had grandchildren at the time, so he and Grandma Bobie had no problem adding the Smith girls to their grandchildren list. On subsequent visits Grandpa always stayed with the Smiths, who were happy that Grandma Bobie was able to accompany him on three occasions.

In 1997 he made another visit, accompanied by Grandma Bobie, and started working with Haji Masrin on the *bayuks* and other material. They stayed a few days at Masrin's house with his family, and it was during this visit that he arranged for Masrin to go to Hawai'i later that year to continue working with him for a few months on the *bayuks*. During this 1997 trip to Sabah, the Smith family visited the Iranun community for the first time when they took Grandpa Howard and Grandma Bobie to see Rampayan Laut, the home village of both T. S. Pandikar and Haji Masrin. T. S. Pandikar wanted a researcher to move to Rampayan Laut and study the Iranun language, since this village is considered to be the heartland of his

* Grandpa (as you are known to our family and a number of the Iranun), we, your Smith family, give you this tribute which includes a couple of the *bayuks* on which you worked so hard as editor and translator. Without your inspiration and perspiration, Haji Masrin Haji Hassin, narrator, complier, and transcriber, would not have been motivated to work alongside you (Hassin & McKaughan 1998) to figure out the meaning of these *bayuks*. We hope that Haji will accept the challenge to complete the rest of the *bayuks* so that future generations can benefit from these classics.

people. As the Iranun people took root in their hearts, the McKaughans started talking and dreaming about the time when a family could move out to live in this beautiful area by the sea. However, it was six years before the Smiths were finally able to do so.

The Smiths' first home in the Iranun community was in Payas-Payas village. Cikgu Ismail Sidik graciously allowed them to build two rooms under his stilt house so they could share his home with his family of ten children. They also built a small room for the McKaughans when Grandma Bobie came. Cikgu ('teacher', as that was Ismail's profession) and his wife Sayurana loved having Grandpa and Grandma in their home. Although they had limited communication in English, there was a lot of smiling, warmth, and love between them. When the house for the Smiths was finally built in Rampayan Laut, Cikgu and family were sad. However, the Smiths assured Cikgu that they would still visit regularly and still stay there at times. Grandpa also continued to visit and stay at Payas-Payas on his subsequent trips.

As a boy, Haji Masrin had started collecting a twelve-generation genealogy of his Iranun family, as well as learning many Iranun stories and poems. His mother was one of the storytellers in the village and knew the old literature. From her, Masrin learned many of the *bayuks* and their explanations. "Since these Bayuk represent very early oral tradition, and because of the metaphoric style, they are often hard to understand, even for many of the Iranun speakers" (Hassin & McKaughan 1998:ii).

Masrin narrated, compiled, and transcribed a number of the *bayuks*. McKaughan encouraged Masrin and together they worked on the *bayuks*, putting thirty in a booklet in 1998, fifteen of which were translated; they also annotated most of these. The remaining fifteen *bayuks* still need translation. Besides these, Masrin says there are more that he has now written down; however, those too need editing and translation.

Using his knowledge of Maranao and the related Danao languages, McKaughan worked on the linguistics of Iranun, starting with a preliminary phonology paper (McKaughan 2000). Not speaking Iranun or Malay limited who he could work with, so the Smiths took this suggested orthography and checked it with other Iranun speakers. In November 1998, they presented it at an orthography seminar. This was a forum for speakers of Iranun to ask questions and to see if they were in agreement. After this time, the Smiths started using the orthography in writers' workshops. They saw what the speakers intuitively wrote and also presented the proposed alphabet to them. This ongoing testing, making minor revisions, continued in various workshops. Before long, the Iranun were able to write and read using their alphabet, thus enabling them to start producing literature for both pleasure and teaching.¹ McKaughan also analyzed the grammar and in 1999 the Sabah State Museum published his paper on Iranun verb structure. During this time, he also compiled a wordlist based on the traditional narratives that Datu' Bandira had collected, as well as stories that had been written by the Iranun people at workshops held in 1999 and 2000.

The oral literature that continues to be written down is being recorded not just for posterity, but also for practical use now within the Iranun communities. The hope in the near future is for the Iranun language to be used in playschool, kindergarten, and primary school. Some of the Iranun have dreams of using it up through secondary school and onwards.

The *bayuks* are not known by the younger generation, and few of even the older people know or understand them. They are one of the beautiful genres of the rich Iranun language. These poems or songs are the classical representation of one of the oldest forms of their oral tradition that are passed down through the generations. Before the arrival of mass media or outside entertainment in the Iranun villages, the people created *bayuks* for various occasions.

¹ Without Jim Smith's commitment, the Smith family's work with the Iranun would have been impossible.

Masrin reports that his mother was able to create them as the situation warranted and had also memorized others. The *bayuks* have an obvious meaning and generally a hidden one too, so one would need to get the meaning from the person who passed them on.

The *bayuks* were used on special occasions such as weddings, welcoming guests, and giving advice to youth; they were also a way of expressing feelings. According to Masrin, the topics would vary; lighter *bayuks* giving advice were more suitable for the children, whereas for the teens the topic could be more about relationships and for the adults, about the future and nationalism.

The *bayuks* are poetic and use the classic language, not everyday speech. They are recited in a special rhythm. They also use beautiful words that Masrin said is like Shakespeare's poetry in that they give a different feeling and leave one satisfied. Normal language speaks just to one's hearing and mind, whereas the *bayuk* would speak to the emotions and touch one's feelings. Anyone could learn the *bayuk*, but the author would require both the interest and the time. Today, the children are focusing on school and the outside world; however, a number of the Iranun people aspire for the children to have a program, maybe in school, where they can again learn these *bayuks*.

The following *bayuks* are excerpted from Hassin & McKaughan (1998:7, 15 respectively). In the first poem, which only a man could recite, the singer is expressing his emotions for the one sought. *Sabandar* refers to a rich man, who is so wealthy that he can just look down at the compass and go anywhere. In the second stanza the man addresses his belt, which is considered very important and which follows along doing whatever he does.²

Bayuk a ilat

Oh Sabandar aku bu';
A tumulung sa paduman;
Paguaya ka tabai;
Ka seka suda' rimbanga;
Panggulu ku pigkandak.
Oh Saudagar aku;
A milai sa pata alam;
Pagunud ka patula;
Ka seka suda' ku kisagubai;
A muna ku pigkarendem.

A subtle poem (A suitor's desire)

If I were only a wealthy man,
Looking down on the compass,
Then you, Tabai, would say yes,
For you yourself cannot be matched,
And I have wanted you more than any other.
If I were a merchant,
Looking down at the map of the world,
Then you, oh Belt, would imitate me
For you cannot be duplicated
You, who I have held first in my thoughts.

This second poem we list for its beauty in showing the Iranun-Maranao connection.³

² Grandpa, we change slightly what you have written in the comments preceding the first *bayuk* in order to personalize it, so that it fits this tribute to you. However, the meaning will still be the same. The first *bayuk* we give as a tribute to your Bobie, whom you held dear to your heart for more than sixty years. You were wealthy because you won her heart and she traveled the world with you. Bobie came out with you to the Iranun people when she could, and helped at home to keep things going when she couldn't, so that you could still come. Tibai in the poem is your Bobie and, like the belt, is the closest thing to you and has supported you through thick and thin.

³ Grandpa, both groups—Maranao and Iranun—you have worked with and loved.

Bayuk a bangsa'

Pamumula'an sa Ranau;
 Su andang ah kapelulut;
 A di' midtatarimbara;
 Ka kuta a panarigan.
 Kasapadan sa Iranun;
 Su kaisa u bangsa';
 A di' mindarainun
 Ka ilian a lindungan.

A poem of solidarity (A poem of national unity)

The growing plant of the Maranao
 With its ancient family line,
 Cannot be set to one side,
 For it is a stronghold of trust.
 The established garden of the Iranun
 Which is unified in its ancient lineage,
 Cannot be forgotten,
 Because it is a kingdom for refuge.

The Iranun leaders consider themselves indebted to McKaughan. Tan Sri Pandikar Mulia (2003:7–8) recalls: “He told me that I need professionals to help me. ‘First’ [McKaughan] said, ‘you have to solve the problem of orthography, if you want the Iranun literature to be put into writing. And that,’ he said, ‘can only be done after a phonological study has been done.’ The words orthography and phonology were something new to me and I did not see its relevance to the project at that time. Now I fully understand the relevance.” McKaughan pointed the Iranun people towards the path of being able to write their language, thus enabling them to capture oral literature for future generations. This is what they wanted: the ability to write in their language like others who write Malay, English, and other languages. As one Iranun recently noted, this literature gives “insight to the community as a whole to appreciate every value our ancestors have passed on” (e-mail message, 2006).

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