

BORNEO RESEARCH BULLETIN

ISSN: 0006-7806

VOL. 37

2006



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The *Borneo Research Bulletin* is published by the Borneo Research Council, Inc. Please address all inquiries and contributions for publication to Dr. Clifford Sather, Editor, *Borneo Research Bulletin*, 10048 SW Balmer Circle, Portland, OR 97219-7363, U.S.A. Single issues are available at \$25.00.

NGAJU SAPUYUNG HATS: A BRIEF NOTE

Junita Arneld Maiullari and Paolo Maiullari

photos: Junita Arneld Maiullari

At 7 a.m., on August 11, 2001, we are in a small village, Telangkah, on the Katingan River in Central Kalimantan. Arneld and Mina (Aunt) Sile are looking for transportation which will take us northward. Today we are on a family journey and will stop at different villages along the way until we reach Pa' Sayen's home.

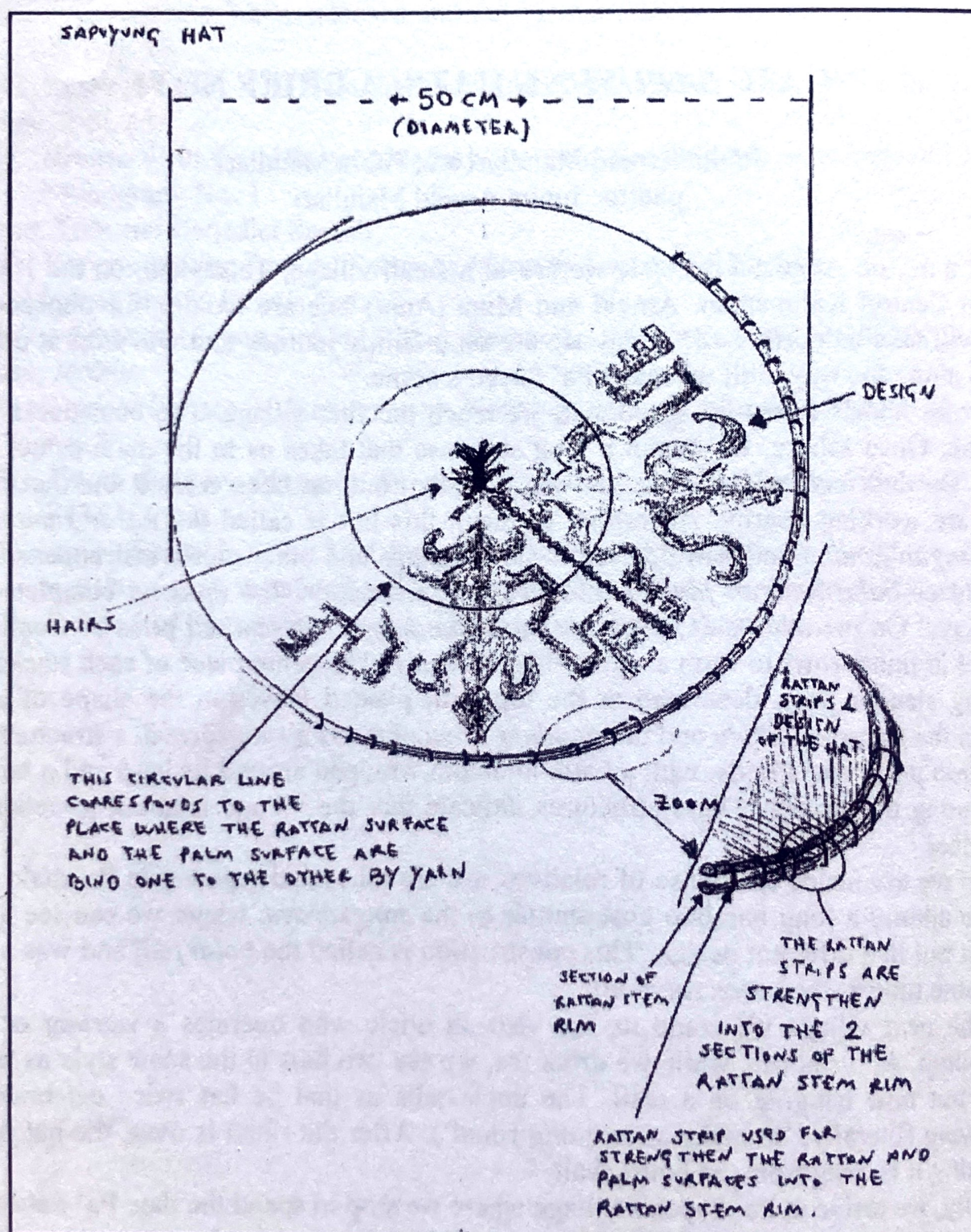
After an hour's travel by speedboat, we reach the first village. The boat docks at the riverbank. Once ashore, we mount a long staircase that takes us to the main center in the village. On the riverbank side, we see that a kind of hut has been erected and that several people are working nearby. According to them, this hut is called the *pasar sababulu* or *balai pangun jandau* and will be used to house gongs and other music instruments. *Pasar sababulu* or *balai pangun jandau* refers to a "construction that must be completed in a single day." On the other side, there are three *pandung kayu*, stacked piles of small wood arranged in linear rows to form a square-like structure. The centerpiece of each stacked pile is a long slender pole, decorated at the top with pleated leaves in the shape of a bird. Between the *pasar sababulu* and the *pandung kayu*, there is a *sangkaraya*, a structure made of bamboo poles and fronds, with a batik loincloth wrapped around its base and a large hat hung among the fronds. These structures indicate that the village is about to celebrate a *tiwah* ritual.

Once we are inside the house of relatives, we are all seated together in the main room. Here we admire a long bamboo post similar to the *sangkaraya*, where we can see again a large hat but in a different design. This construction is called the *balai pali* and was erected at the same time as the *pasar sababulu*.

At the next village we come to, we visit an uncle who operates a *warung* or small village shop. At his house, while we drink tea, we see two hats in the same style as we saw before, but now hanging on a wall. The uncle tells us that he has twice celebrated the *basangiang* (literally, 'to make a *sangiang* ritual'). After the ritual is over, the hat used in performing it is hung from the house wall.

Finally, we arrive at Pa' Sayen's village where we stop to spend the day. Pa' Sayen is an expert rattan-weaver, who weaves in the evenings whenever he has spare time. In Pa' Sayen's house, we see again, hanging on the wall, three hats of the same type as we saw before. He tells us that they are *sapuyung* hats and were used for *basangiang*.

The *sapuyung* are wide, round hats decorated with red designs and a hair lock attached at the center. The designs are created by interlacing rattan strips during the weaving of the hat. The strips are peeled by the weaver from larger lengths of rattan and the color is applied before weaving by boiling the rattan strips in water containing rattan fruits. The woven rattan is fastened on an undersurface made of woven palm leaves. The two surfaces are bound together with yarn, about ten centimeters from the center of the hat, as can be seen from the drawing. The outer rim of the *sapuyung* is fashioned from a small length of unsplit rattan. This is cut horizontally in two in order to hold together the outer edges of the woven rattan and palm-leaf surfaces. These two halves are tightly bound together with rattan strips to form a strong outer rim.



Sketch showing the construction of a *sapuyung* hat.

Regarding the three *sapuyung* hats about which we collected information, two (Plates 1 and 2) have a diameter of 50 cm., while the third (Plate 3) is larger, having a diameter of approximately 60 cm.

Plate 1 shows a hat called the *sapuyung bahatara tulah*. In the Katingan Ngaju language, *bahatara* refers to the supreme divinity and *tulah* to a curse. Hence the name of the hat's design, *bahatara tulah*, refers to the hat's function, that of providing the person who wears it with the protection of the supreme divinity against a curse.



Plate 1: *Bahatara tulah* hat.

Plate 2 shows a *sapuyung antang hakawit*. The *atang hakawit* design represents eagles interconnected with one another. In Katingan Ngaju, *atang* means 'eagle,' while *hakawit* means 'interconnected.'

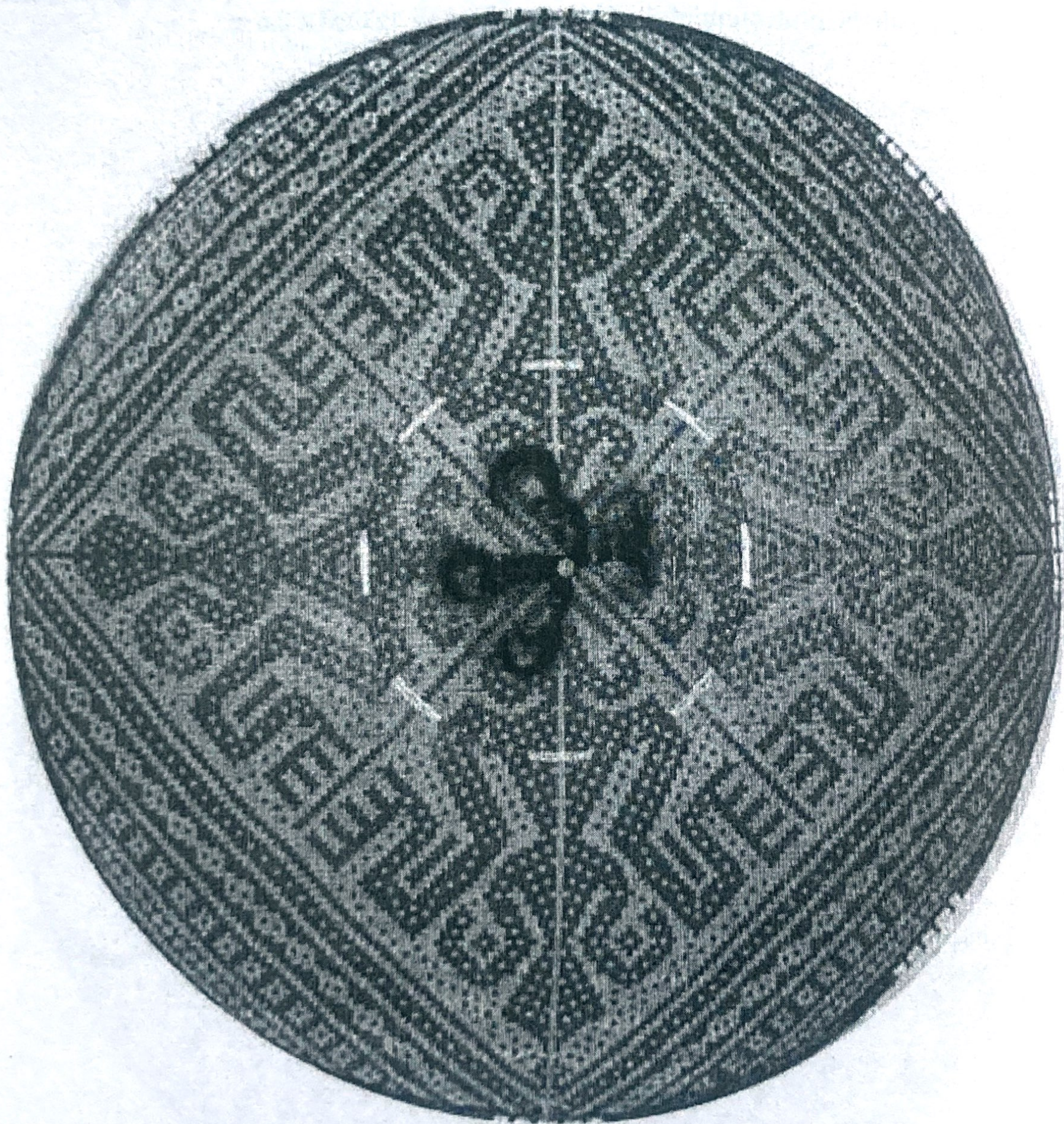


Plate 2: *atang hakawit* hat.

Plate 3, a *sapuyung liau haguti*. *Liau* refers to the soul of a dead person and *haguti* to the act of removing fleas from a person's hair. Thus, the design called *liau haguti* depicts the act of a deceased's soul as it removes the fleas from the hair of another soul (this is a habitual practice which the dead person used to do when he or she was alive).

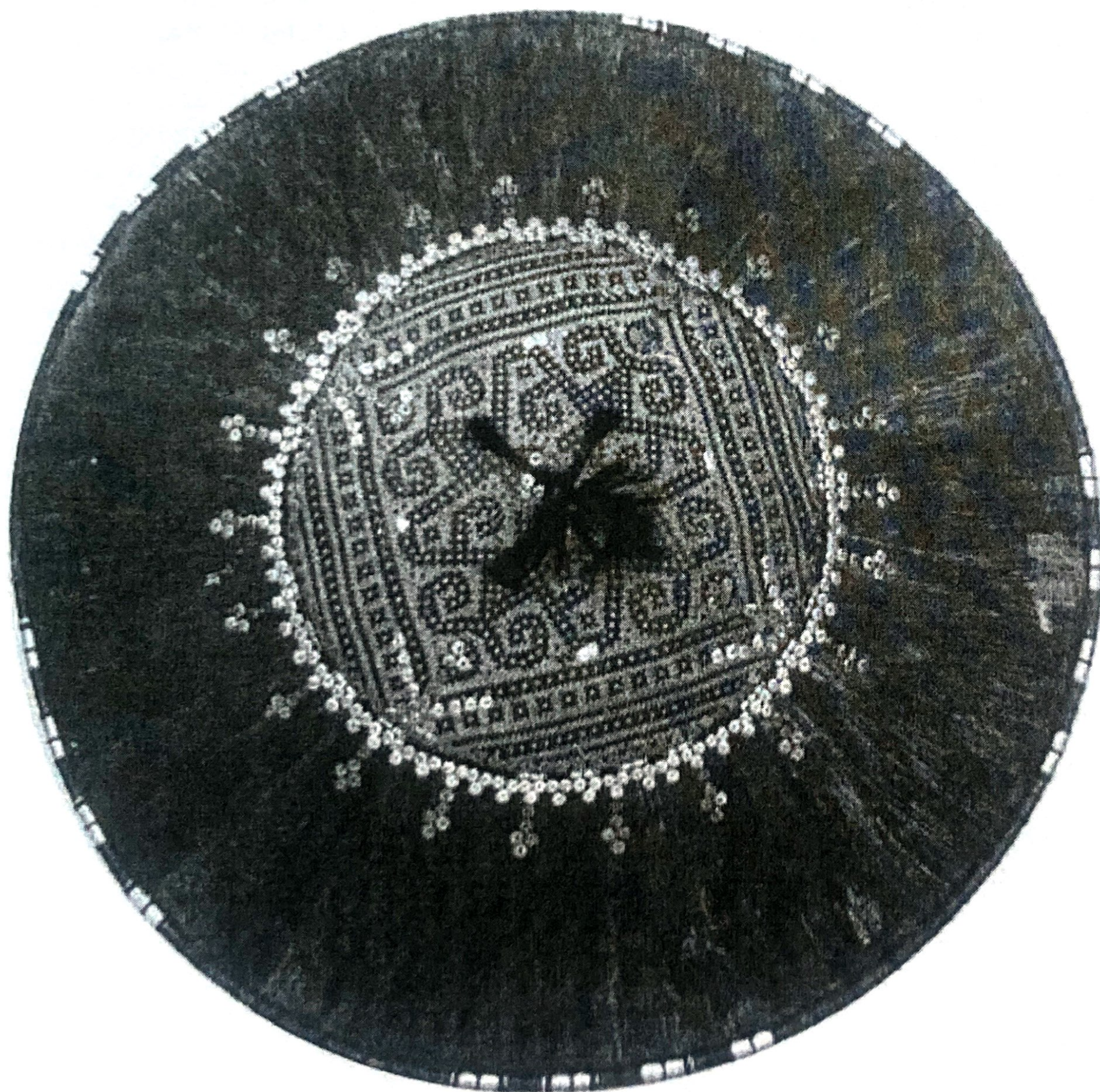


Plate 3: *Liau haguti* hat.

Later, we saw another type of *sapuyung* made in another village from rattan and palm leaves. This type of *sapuyung* has an inner circle woven of rattan like the other hats, but this is surrounded by an outer circular border made only of woven palm leaves. The inner circle has the same type of design as described before and there is again a hair lock

attached to its center. This last *sapuyung* (Plate 4) has the same dimensions as the hats shown in Plates 1 and 2, namely, a diameter of roughly 50 cm.

Plate 4 shows a *sapuyung antang bajela' bulau*. The design in this case represents an eagle with a golden tongue who utters words of truth which are as immutable as gold. *Antang* means 'eagle,' *bajela'* means 'tongue,' and *bulau*, 'golden.'



Plate 4: *Antang bajela' bulau* hat.

In addition to identifying the designs of the *sapuyung*, we are concentrating on the various contexts in which the hats are used and their functions. According to the information that we have so far collected, some *sapuyung* are also used in *tiwah* ceremonies, while others are worn by the *pisor*, the Ngaju Katingan name for the mediators who communicate between human beings and the divinities. We collected names for the

divinities called by the *pisor* during *sangiang* rituals and, in some cases, we identified at least some of their functions.

At this point, we had to leave KalimantanTengah. On our next trip we intend to pursue this subject further. We plan to meet Pa' Sayen, an 80 year-old rattan weaver; Idu Ubing, a 90 year-old retired *sihai* (the *sihai* also act as mediators between the spirits and human beings), Arneld Nadjir, our guide-translator, together with Linawatie and other people on the Katingan River.

To conclude this brief note, we would add that the *sangiang* healing ritual is considered by some people to be a frightening act, like, for us, undergoing an operation in a hospital. Indeed, in 2001, we met a cousin who had a goiter and was supposed to hold a *sangiang*. However, she had not done so because she was afraid of the ritual and of what the *pisor* would do.