

David Castillo, Andrew M. Coleman-Brown, Sebastian Hoang, and Leslie Ramirez (editors)

*Administrative Frustrations and Linguistic Explorations:
Panama (1889) and Malaysia (1914) in European Letters*

Shelfmark

California State University, Fullerton (CSUF).

University Archives and Special Collections (UA&SC).

SC-RF-0-13, Box 1, Folder 25 and Folder 19.

“Panama Letter” (Folder 25),

Gustave Sautereau to Yves Guyot, Minister of Public Works, July 22, 1889.

“Kinabalu Letter” (Folder 19),

Ivor Hugh Norman Evans to Edward Owen Rutter, November 25, 1914.

Introduction

The “Panama Letter” (written in French) resides among the Rare Files in the University Archives and Special Collections (UA&SC) at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF), but it is unknown how and when CSUF acquired it. The letter, which is well preserved, is written in black ink on the first two pages of a bifolium measuring 27.5 x 21 cm when folded. The “Kinabalu Letter” (written in English and containing words in the Austronesian Dusun language) resides in the same box of Rare Files. According to an archival note from November 19, 1970, it was found in a book CSUF’s Pollak Library had “recently bought from Academic Library Service,” namely, Ivor H. N. Evans, *Studies in Religion, Folk-Lore, and Custom in British North Borneo and the Malay Peninsula* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), which is significant as Evans is also the author of this document. The letter, which is well preserved, is written (one-sided) in black ink on three pages measuring 25 x 20 cm.

Written in Paris, France, on July 22, 1889, by Gustave Sautereau, the director of the “Société Internationale d’Etudes pour l’Achèvement du Canal Interocéanique de Panama” (i.e., the International Society of Studies for the Completion of the Interoceanic Canal of Panama), and addressed to Yves Guyot, the “Ministre des Travaux Publics” (i.e., the French government’s Secretary of Public Works), the “Panama Letter” underscores its author’s efforts with regard to the matter at hand. Sautereau references his proposal for the completion of the Panama Canal (which apparently accompanied the letter, although this particular proposal is not held by the UA&SC), mentions his interventions with a committee of the French Senate, assures the Minister that he and his associates are ready and able to complete the project, and states that abandoning the project would lead to “the irredeemable loss of the prestige of France.”

The “Kinabalu Letter,” written by British anthropologist Ivor Hugh Norman Evans on November 25, 1914, at the Perak Museum in Taiping, Malaysia, and

addressed to British historian Edward Owen Rutter, relates its author's discoveries pertaining to the Dusun language and culture of North Borneo and references correspondence from Father Duxneuney of the Roman Catholic Mission at Putatan (Malaysia), who shares their passion for the Dusun language. Evans discusses several Dusun words, particularly "Kinabalu," the name of Borneo's highest mountain, explains that certain letters in the Dusun language are interchangeable, and provides examples to demonstrate this point. He requests Rutter's assistance to better understand certain Dusun practices, especially death rituals and the meaning of words related to death. He concludes that Father Duxneuney offers a compelling interpretation of the meaning of the word "Kinabalu."

The "Panama Letter" and the "Kinabalu Letter" should interest those studying late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French, Latin American, British, and Malaysian history, particularly from the perspectives of political science and cultural anthropology. The "Panama Letter" adds to our knowledge of French political history, offers insights into France's political climate at the time, and emphasizes the nation's aspiration to demonstrate global power through achievements in engineering. It also alludes to the financial and political turmoil the project was facing in 1889. The "Kinabalu Letter" provides a window into the intellectual debates on the Dusun language and culture during British rule in Malaysia from the perspectives of British scholars and a Catholic clergy, reflecting the relationship between Indigenous groups and colonial powers. Both documents showcase the imperial interests of two prominent European nations.

The transcriptions below preserve the spelling, capitalization, and line breaks of the original documents. Any additions are enclosed by square brackets. Identifiable individuals, locations, and technical terms have been referenced in the footnotes. The "literal" English translation of the French "Panama Letter" makes every effort to imitate the original document's highly formal tone.

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Société Internationale d'Etudes
pour l'achèvement
du Canal Interocéanique de Panama
3. RUE LOUIS-LE-GRAND
Paris, le 22 Juillet 1880.

*Le dossier est
parvenu au
Ministre*

A Monsieur Le Ministre des Travaux Publics
à Paris.

Monsieur Le Ministre,

J'ai l'honneur de vous adresser,
en vous priant de vouloir bien en accepter le
respectueux hommage, les plans, profils, devis
estimatif etc... de mon projet d'achèvement des
travaux du Canal de Panama, projet que j'ai eu
l'honneur de soumettre le 12 Juin dernier à
Monsieur le Liquidateur de la Compagnie et
qu'il a communiqué aux Commissions parlementaires
de la Chambre et du Sénat chargées d'
élaborer la Loi sur les obligations à être votées à
mettre.

La plupart des Comités des ports de l'isthme de
Panama se sont déjà ralliés à ce projet, et vous
trouverez jointes au dossier, Monsieur le Ministre,
les résolutions des comités de Toulouse, Lyon,
Bordeaux, etc... sur lesquels j'ose appeler
A Monsieur Yves Guichet Ministre des Travaux Publics.

Figure 1: "Panama Letter," page 1, UA&SC, CSUF.

Letter
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Paraki Museum

Nov 25th 1914.

Dear Rutter

I have been meaning to write to you for a long time about your interesting reply to my letter in the B. N. B. Herald. I have received another reply privately from Fr Duxneury of Putatan which I am inclined to think has solved the mystery of the name Kinabalu. He agrees with you in saying that the word should be divided thus Ki-na-balu, and also with regard to na being a prefix which often denotes past time. He remarks, however, that the Duoms call the mountain ^{habaku} Habaku or habaku (in talking among themselves), and he says when he first went to Putatan nobody understood the word Kinabalu. (If you remember I draw attention to this point in my letter.) He also remarks that H or ~~H~~ are interchangeable (e.g; "here we say hamin (house) a few villages higher up it becomes hamin". In the same way mori (to go home) becomes moli. This is well worth noting as it has an important bearing on what follows in his letter. He goes on to tell me that when a person dies, the body is washed, and then taken out of the room and laid on the veranda. Here a kind of hut is built over the body which is covered with very old and costly clothes. This hut is called baku = house of the dead; the clothes themselves are also termed baku and Fr Duxneury remarks that thus baku comes to get a meaning of pertaining to the dead. Mr Hamilton in his recent

Figure 2: "Kinabalu Letter," page 1, UA&SC, CSUF.

Edition: "Panama Letter,"
[Gustave] Sautereau to Yves Guyot,
Paris [France], July 22, 1889

[page 1, left margin/pencil, different hand: *Ce dossier est personnel au Ministre*; printed letterhead, date, month, and last two digits of the year inserted in black ink; bottom of the page/black ink, different hand: *A Monsieur Yves Guyot Ministre des Travaux Publics.*]

Société Internationale d'Etudes
pour l'Achèvement
du Canal Interocéanique de Panama
3, RUE LOUIS-LE-GRAND

Paris, le 22 Juillet 18 89

A Monsieur Le Ministre des Travaux Publics
a Paris

Monsieur Le Ministre

*J'ai l'honneur de vous adresser,
en vous priant de vouloir bien en accepter le
respectueux hommage, les plan, profils, devis
estimatif etc... de mon projet d'achèvement des
travaux du Canal de Panama, projet que j'ai eu
l'honneur de soumettre le 12 Juin dernier à
Monsieur le Liquidateur de la Compagnie et
qu'il a communiqué aux Commissions parlement-
-aires de la Chambre et du Sénat chargées d'
élaborer la Loi sur les obligations a lots restant à
émettre.*

*La plupart des comités des porteurs de titres de
Panama se sont déjà ralliés a ce projet, et, vous
trouverez jointes au dossier, Monsieur de Ministre,
les circulaires des comités de Toulouse, Lyon
Bordeaux etc.... Sur lesquelles j'ose appeler*

[page 2, bottom of the page/black ink, different hand: author's signature and title, see below]

votre bienveillante attention.

*La communication du ce projet que
Monsieur le Liquidateur a faite spontanément
a la Commission Sénatoriale a suffi pour démontrer
aux honorables Sénateurs qui avaient perdu
la confiance dans le succès définitif de*

*l'œuvre de Panama, que cette œuvre était
réalisable dans des conditions relativement
faciles; j'espère que son examen attentif vous
amènera à reconnaître les efforts déjà faits
pour ramener la confiance parmi les
intéressés et à vous convaincre que nous sommes
prêts, mes amis et moi à mettre tout ce
que nous avons de force, d'énergie et de
dévouement au service de cette entreprise
gigantesque dont l'abandon serait à l'
intérieur, la ruine de notre épargne et à
l'Étranger, la perte irrémédiable du prestige de
la France.*

*J'ai l'honneur d'être
avec un profond respect
Monsieur le Ministre
votre très honoré serviteur*

*Le Directeur.
Sautereau*

*Translation: "Panama Letter,"
[Gustave] Sautereau to Yves Guyot,
Paris [France], July 22, 1889*

[page 1, left margin/pencil, different hand: "This file is for the Minister personally";
printed letterhead, date, month, and last two digits of the year inserted in black ink;
bottom of the page/black ink, different hand: "To My Lord Yves Guyot, Minister of
Public Works."]

International Society of Studies
for the Completion
of the Interoceanic Canal of Panama¹
3, RUE LOUIS-LE-GRAND²

Paris,³ July 22nd 18 89

To My Lord Minister of Public Works⁴ in Paris

¹ Organization est. 1889, with G. Sautereau as director and M. Saléta as deputy director.

² Street address in Paris's second arrondissement, near the Palais Garnier (Opéra).

³ Capital of France.

⁴ Yves Guyot (1843–1928), cabinet member of the French government.

My Lord Minister,

I have the honor to send to you – asking you that you would kindly accept it as a respectful service – the plans, profiles, estimated quote, etc. ... of my project for the completion of the labors of the Panama Canal⁵ – a project which I had the honor to submit, on the last June 12th, to My Lord Liquidator⁶ of the Company, and which he presented to the parliamentary commissions of the Chamber and the Senate⁷ charged with drawing up the Law concerning the bonds that remain to be issued.

Most of the committees of the titles holders of Panama⁸ have already rallied to the project, and you will find attached to the file, My Lord Minister, the circulars of the committees of Toulouse,⁹ Lyon,¹⁰ Bordeaux¹¹ etc. ... to which I presume to call

[page 2, bottom of the page/black ink, different hand: author's signature and title, see below]

your benevolent attention.

The presentation of this project, which My Lord Liquidator made spontaneously to the Senate Commission, was sufficient to show to the honorable Senators, who had lost confidence in the ultimate success of the work in Panama, that this work is achievable under relatively easy conditions. I hope that its attentive examination will cause you to recognize the efforts [that have] already [been] made to restore the confidence among those concerned and to convince you that we – my friends and I – are ready to place everything we have [in terms] of strength, energy, and dedication to the service of this gigantic endeavor, the abandonment of which would be – at home – the ruin of our savings and – abroad – the irredeemable loss of the prestige of France.

I have the honor to be – with profound respect – My Lord Minister, your very honored servant.

The Director.
Sautereau¹²

⁵ Waterway connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, built 1904–1914, originally proposed by Ferdinand de Lesseps, builder of the Suez Canal.

⁶ Individual appointed to dissolve a company and its assets.

⁷ Bicameral parliament of the French Third Republic.

⁸ Country linking Central and South America.

⁹ City in southwestern France.

¹⁰ City in southeastern France.

¹¹ City in southwestern France.

¹² French engineer, promoter of the Panama Canal.

Edition: "Kinabalu Letter,"

I[gor]. H[ugh Norman] Evans to [Edward Owen] Rutter,
Perak Museum [Taiping, Malaysia], November 25, 1914

[page 1, top left/pencil, different hand: Letter 28/7]

Perak Museum¹³

Nov[ember] 25th 1914.

Dear Rutter¹⁴

I have been meaning to write to you for a long time ~~ask~~ about your interesting reply to my letter in the B. N. B Herald.¹⁵ I have received another reply privately from F[athe]r Duxneuney¹⁶ of Putatan¹⁷ which I am inclined to think has solved the mystery of the name Kinabalu.¹⁸ He agrees with you in saying that the word should be divided thus ~~Kin~~ Ki-na-balu, and also with regard to na being a prefix which often denotes past time. He remarks, however, that the Dusuns¹⁹ call the mountain ~~Habalu~~ Nabalul or Kabalu (~~in talking among themselves~~), and he says when he first went to Putatan nobody understood the word Kinabalu. (If you remember I drew attention to this point in my letter.) He also remarks that H & N L are interchangeable (eg; "here we say hamin (house) a few villages higher up it becomes lamin". In the same way mohi (to go home) becomes moli. This is well worth noting as it has an important bearing on what follows in his letter. He goes on to tell me that when a person dies, the body is washed, and then taken out of the room and laid on the verandas.²⁰ Here a kind of hut is built over the body which is covered with very old and costly cloths. "This hut is called bahu = house of the dead". The clothes themselves are also termed bahu and F[athe]r Duxneuney remarks

¹³ Public museum in Taiping, Malaysia, est. 1883.

¹⁴ Edward Owen Rutter (1889–1944), British historian, travel writer, and novelist.

¹⁵ British North Borneo Herald, government-published periodical (1883–1941).

¹⁶ Member of the Roman Catholic Mission in Putatan, North Borneo.

¹⁷ Municipality in North Borneo.

¹⁸ Mountain in North Borneo, elevation 13,435 feet.

¹⁹ Indigenous ethnic group in North Borneo.

²⁰ Porch.

that thus bahu comes to get a meaning of pertaining to the dead. Mr. Moulton²¹ in his recent

[page 2]

letter to the Herald asks for further information as to whether bahu is used to denote both widow & widower. (1) Can you tell me if it is used for either one or the other by the up country Dusuns, or only by down country people who would have a larger opportunity [*sic*] of adopting Malay words?

(2) Will you enquire whether up country, ~~at~~ at Tuarau²² or among the plain dwelling Dusuns of the Tempasuk²³ a bahu or balu hut is erected over the dead and whether the word can mean “belonging to the dead”?

The na part of Kinabalu you are both agreed upon so I think we may leave that.

Now for the Ki. F[athe]r Duxneuney considers that this is an abbreviation [*sic*] of the Dusun Kiwâo ~~au~~ = it is, it was, there is. (There seems a little contradiction here if the Dusuns never speak of Kinabalu); he thus translates Kinabalu

= There is place or home pertaining to the dead. He explains the na by saying that it denotes an action as passed but still existing and gives the following examples of its use in conjunction with Ki

1) Matai (I die), Kapalayan (death subst), ~~kuia~~ ki-na -palayan = the continuation of the death of the person. For instance for “one dies now to day he says napatai, (he dies); but to say his death occurred a week ago we use kinapalayan dan san mingo iyohu”.

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(2) memekobang (to bury), kobongan a burial, kohobongan a burial ground. “If I want to say mention a burial of some time ago – long passed – I have to twist my tongue to Kinapomohobongan (Ki here means there is – , na denotes the passed time,

²¹ John Coney Moulton (1886–1926), British military officer and amateur entomologist.

²² Tuaran, town North Borneo.

²³ Tempasuk, Indigenous ethnic group in North Borneo.

– pomohoban (be made buried) is the passive from memehobang to bury.”

He considers Kinabatangan²⁴ to be “~~a Dunsunized~~” the Malay word batang “Dusunized”: Ki-na-batang-an, which is I suppose may be roughly translated the place where there is a batang or large river.

I think that he seems to have made out a very good care for his interpretation of Kinabalu, especially the balu. The only ~~pro~~ contradiction is with regard to the Ki ~~which~~ since the Dusuns seem to speak only of kabalu nabalu or Habalu.

Yours sincerely

I[gor]. H[ugh Norman] Evans.²⁵

²⁴ Kinabatangan, town in North Borneo.

²⁵ Ivor Hugh Norman Evans (1885–1957), British anthropologist, ethnographer, archaeologist, and curator (1912–1932) at the Perak Museum in Taiping, Malaysia.