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ALOIS BUCHER, BORNEO ANTHROPOLOGIST AND MUSICAL MISSIONARY A Restless Life in the Müller Mountains, the Swiss Alps, and St. Peter's Basilica

Adrian Linder & Bernard Sellato

[Note: A. Linder is an independent anthropologist and theologian working in Switzerland and Borneo; B. Sellato is a senior researcher with Centre Asie du Sud-Est (CNRS & EHESS), PSL Research University, Paris]

Abstract

Swiss anthropologist Alois Bucher, unknown to most of his colleagues, certainly spent more time doing fieldwork among nomadic and formerly nomadic groups of interior Borneo than any other. Between 1965 and 1975 he crisscrossed the Müller mountain range, collecting among these groups a variety of data – ethnographic, historical, oral literature, music – hardly any of which was ever located, let alone published. In 1981, one of us (BS) submitted to this Bulletin a short article (unpublished) partly based on the oral testimonies of the local people, among which Bucher had reached the status of a legendary figure. Twenty-seven years later, new, follow-up research (by AL) in Switzerland unexpectedly allowed for a considerably enriched reconstruction of Alois Bucher's life and deeds in Borneo. Young Alois' deeply religious background, rich and complex inner life, and mystical inclination led him to wish to become a missionary. After two years in a Swiss seminary and higher theological studies, he took a PhD in Ethnology (1963) at Fribourg University, and some time later left for Borneo as a mission school teacher. Then, in the course of an exotic decade marked by restless travel, quixotic tricks and manic antics, he turned away from teaching to focus on agricultural extension work, anthropological and linguistic research among Punan. Back in his native Alps, he became Büchel-Wisi, an itinerant missionary, original musicologist, and well-known folk musician performing on streets and in churches from central Switzerland until St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. This article makes use of all available information to explore an extraordinary character's many facets.

A WELL-TRAVELED BUSKER: FORTY YEARS IN SEARCH OF A MISSING ANTHROPOLOGIST

“The Birth of a Fairy-Tale, early September 2002, Sunday evening. I just got off a train in the Zurich Hauptbahnhof [Central Station]. I enter the big hall with its turn-of-the-[20th]-century glass roof. The hall seems empty, except for a mysteriously beautiful sound – long suspended vocal tones – circling around its cavernous walls. Magically I am drawn to this sound but am unable to tell where it is coming from. Then I see a lone passenger, an old man pushing a luggage cart. Like many Swiss, he was wearing corduroy knickerbocker pants, and mountain boots, a white shirt, a vest and a red bandana tied neatly around his neck. He is short in stature and has a neatly trimmed white beard as he pushed his cart slowly and randomly in this vast empty public space, and yodeled in a full powerful and extremely pure voice, as if in the open Berner Oberland – and with a naturalness of someone who had discovered the perfect acoustical space for their own music. He moved here, then there, stopping – moving – singing with no apparent purpose other than to savor the acoustic delays and reverberation of his own voice. Always, as I later found out, came to the Bahnhof periodically to sing for pure pleasure. He came from the Mountains. He even looked like a charming mountain goat himself. His spontaneous music which intersected the space and lives of anyone who happened to pass through there must have seemed, too, the most natural of events – for it was not some plastic muzak, nor urban boom-boxing nor a mendicant's busking song – it was the sound, par excellence of the Mountain People, of fabled men women and animals who live in all the magical childrens' books. Could I have had a more inspiring experience to begin a new piece of radio art?”¹

This hymnic account is the opening paragraph of celebrated contemporary composer Alvin Curran's program notes on the background of his composition “I Dreamt John Cage Yodeling in the Zurich Hauptbahnhof”, which makes extensive use of recorded samples of the mysterious singer's yodeling, as well as talking.

¹ Curran 2004; Curran later quotes “Alowys” name in full (Alois Bucher) in the notes on this work (Curran 2007), along with those of Maria Callas, Luciano Pavarotti, and Shelley Hirsch – although his “Inuit throat singing” and “Aboriginal chanting” remain anonymous.



Bucher playing alphorn at Zurich's main train station, where his music was "found" by Alvin Curran. Photo: Margareta Peters (used with permission).

The mythical yodeler and presumptive mountain man was Dr. Alois Bucher, an ethnologist who received a Ph.D. in 1963 from the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). He then spent most of the following ten years, until 1975, among small former nomadic groups of the interior of Borneo. In spite of this extended sojourn and research in these then little known areas, his name appears only sporadically in the literature on Borneo.² No academic publications of his are known besides the Ph.D. thesis, which was published in *Anthropos*.³

In 1975, Sellato, walking across the Müller Mountains from the upper Mahakam (East Kalimantan) into West Kalimantan, visited the Bungan River area, but did not hear about Bucher. It was only in 1980, when he returned to the upper Kapuas, working in the same area and among the same ethnic groups, that he collected information from various villagers and other witnesses, and tried to figure out the enigmatic researcher and his research. Although Bucher had already begun to reach the status of a mythical character in local oral traditions, some of which suggested that he had died, Sellato suspected that Bucher was still alive in Switzerland, but had been unable to carry on his studies in Borneo.⁴ A brief request for information on Bucher's work, documents, and current situation posted by Sellato in 1982 in the *Borneo Research Bulletin*⁵ remained without any echo at the time.

² Notably, King 1974 a, 1974 b, 1979, and 1985

³ Bucher 1963, 1964, 1965

⁴ Sellato 1981

⁵ Sellato 1982



The Müller Mountains range, viewed from the Bungan area, West Kalimantan. Photo: Sellato, 1975

It took twenty-seven years until a partial answer came. In 2009, Adrian Linder was preparing to leave for a three-year assignment as a consultant to a local Dayak church in East Kalimantan. Shortly before departure, he happened to read the obituary of one Alois Bucher in a local newspaper left by a passenger on a waiting bench in the railway station of Lucerne. The obituary mentioned that Bucher, who died on July 24, 2009, had lived for ten years among “primitive peoples” (*Urvölker*) in Asia as a researcher on languages and peoples, that he was better known regionally under the name of “Büchel-Wisi” (regional short name for Alois; also written “Wysi”). Under that name he travelled through Switzerland and beyond as an itinerant street musician and self-termed ambassador of peace with his *Alphorn* and *Büchel*,⁶ that he blew his horn during High Mass in Rome's St. Peter's Basilica and that his bugle sounds were “immortalized in recordings”. In a flash, Linder recalled that he had met the man many years before in front of a Swiss railway station, probably in Lucerne, and been fascinated by the incredibly beautiful sounds of his bugle, not unlike Curran by Bucher's yodeling in Zurich. The musician soon had picked out his uncommonly attentive listener, who learnt in the subsequent conversation that they were actually professional colleagues, and that Bucher had worked as an ethnologist among the Punan in Borneo.

And now Bucher was gone. Linder began researching on this remarkable character and found Sellato's 1982 inquiry. Since the obituary found by chance answered at least one part of Sellato's questions, Linder got in touch with him. The subsequent communication eventually resulted in the project of preparing a biographical sketch, using Sellato's unpublished 1981 manuscript, complemented by information gathered by Linder in Switzerland. Alois Bucher's brother, theologian Dr. Theodor Bucher in Vaduz (Liechtenstein), gave his wholehearted support to the project from the beginning and provided invaluable information on Alois' legacy, as well as biographical details. Unfortunately, Theodor Bucher, who passed away on

⁶ The *Büchel*, or alpine bugle, a rare, shorter and loop-shaped, relative of the famous *Alphorn*, is made of mountain wood and wound with birch bark strips or, more recently, rattan.

October 21, 2013, will not see this article, but we would like here to express our gratitude to him as well as to his sister, Mrs. Anna Furrer-Bucher.

ALOIS BUCHER'S EARLY DAYS

Alois Bucher was born on August 28, 1928, the sixth of ten children of Theodor Wilhelm Bucher and Sophie Bucher-Emmenegger of Kerns (Obwalden).⁷ His father, a farmer and local building contractor,⁸ was a direct descendant of Niklaus von Flüe (1417-1487), the Swiss national saint.⁹ An early photograph shows a jaunty eighteen-month old with curly blond hair – the family's star, as his brother Theodor later remembered.¹⁰ He went to school at Küssnacht a. R., at the same time living the hard life of a farmer's child: every day, until 9 PM, he had to help his father, and school work was only possible late at night. At five o'clock the next day he had to get up again.¹¹ No wonder he fell asleep at school, where he nonetheless had very good marks.¹² Although they demanded too much of their children and gave them a morally very strict education, Alois spoke of his parents with much respect.¹³

Youth and Quest for Perfection

At 14 he entered the Gymnasium of the Bethlehem Missionary Society at Immensee, with the aim of becoming a missionary¹⁴ – then a not untypical choice for at least one son among farmers' large families in Catholic interior Switzerland,¹⁵ who otherwise had hardly any possibility to provide for their children's higher education. After his baccalaureate he spent the Society's novitiate and two years' philosophy curriculum at the Seminary in Schöneck, above Beckenried (on Lake Lucerne, where his earlier years were spent).¹⁶

Alois was a very pious young man, inclined on mysticism. Increasingly, a perfectionist streak came to the fore. After three years, he left the Seminary to take up a search for the spiritual and ascetic life style that would suit him. As he recalled later in life, he might have become a missionary if only his teachers at the Seminary had better understood and guided him.¹⁷ For seven years he searched for his calling, travelling through Europe, practicing asceticism and meditation in Trappist and Carthusian monasteries “of strict to ultra-strict observance; always on the search for the yet stricter and more perfect.”¹⁸ “I wanted to become a saint, maybe even a martyr, yes, actually a martyr”, he later told M. Meier. At age 24, he wrote in a letter of “the inner bitterness and trial into which I am constantly immersed – for inner atonement and purification. It is indeed very bitter and most of the time I don't know how it could ever change again.”¹⁹

⁷ Bucher 1987

⁸ Meier 1993: 46

⁹ Bucher 1987; Oberli 2000

¹⁰ Bucher 2009

¹¹ Meier 1993; Bucher 2009

¹² Oberli 2000

¹³ Meier 1993

¹⁴ Bucher 2009

¹⁵ Imfeld, Al: pers. com.

¹⁶ Bucher 2009

¹⁷ Meier 1993; Bucher, Th.: pers. com.

¹⁸ Bucher 2009; also, Meier 1993

¹⁹ Bucher 2009

In 1952 he took up theological studies in Fribourg (Switzerland), which he gave up again to spend a hard winter in Paris as a helper to Abbé Pierre, the renowned priest of the poor and homeless. The following nine months were spent on two voyages as a seaman's aide on freighters around Africa and as far as East Asia.²⁰

Ethnological Studies

Realizing that he “yet wanted to take up a task out in the world”, he returned to the University of Fribourg in 1958, this time to study Ethnology, with Sociology and Religious Studies (*Religionswissenschaft*) as minors.²¹ Fascinated by the perspective of studying exotic peoples in far-off countries, he retained his earlier missionary interests, a.o. by presiding over the Swiss Catholic Missionary Association for two years. He completed his studies with a Ph.D. in 1963; his doctoral dissertation dealt with the “Sun and Moon cycles in myth and cult among the peoples of Assam, Burma, and neighboring regions”.²²

At the time when he began, the Ethnological Seminar (Institute) at the University of Fribourg was ideologically dominated by the so-called “Vienna School” under P. W. Schmidt, an anti-evolutionist group of German-speaking Catholic scholars associated with the journal *Anthropos*. Their purpose was to substantiate their theologically based theories through extensive ethnographical and linguistic work among the world's surviving hunters and gatherers, who were considered the most “primitive” people, in the positive sense of being closest to a presumed original state of mankind and divine “Ur-revelation”, from which more advanced societies were thought to have degenerated. Ethnologists sent to different regions of the world were expected to bring back evidence for original beliefs in a high god or monotheism, and institutions of monogamy and private property, in order to refute nineteenth-century evolutionist-socialist theories arguing to the contrary. Reflections of these ideas can be detected in Bucher's few surviving writings.²³

After his promotion, Bucher taught for one year at secondary schools in Isenthal and Altdorf (Canton of Uri).²⁴ He also worked intermittently as a tourist guide.²⁵

In September 1964, he left for Borneo through the intercession of the Dutch *Katholieke Centrale Emigratie Stichting* (KCES; Catholic Central Emigration Foundation)²⁶ to take up a teaching position in the service of the Capucines at the Little Seminary of the Pontianak Arch-Diocese²⁷ and in Dayak villages.²⁸ His actual goal, however, was to carry ethnographic research among indigenous people in the interior.²⁹

²⁰ Bucher 2009

²¹ Bucher 2009; Meier 1993; Oberli 2000

²² Bucher 1963; see also Bucher 1964 & 1965

²³ Bucher 1975, 1976, 1977 a & d. For a brief discussion of the “Vienna School”, see, e.g., Rössler 2007: 9- 15.

²⁴ Meier 1993: 46

²⁵ Alfons Bürgler, pers. com.

²⁶ Van Campen 1964. This may be the source of a probably erroneous information in a note from the Federal Political Department that Bucher was in the service of a Dutch mission society during his first year in Borneo (Diener 1968 a).

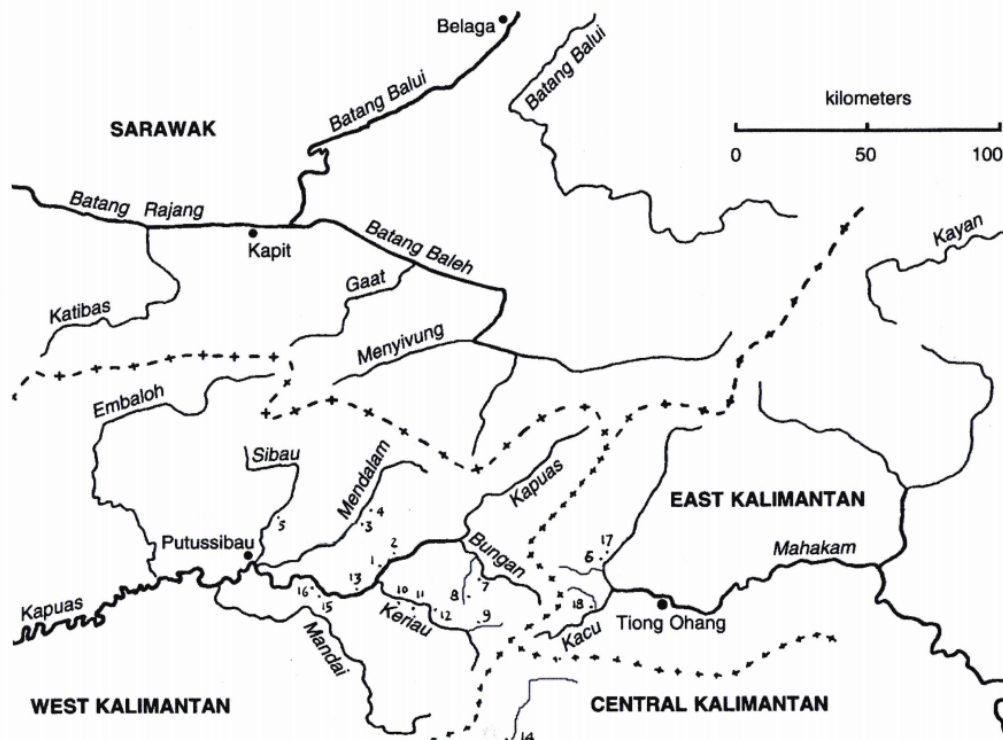
²⁷ Bucher 2009

²⁸ Van Vluiten 1981

²⁹ Bucher 2009; Van Campen 1964

THE BORNEO YEARS: A TENTATIVE RECONSTRUCTED CHRONOLOGY

Bucher arrived in Jakarta in October 1964,³⁰ presumably to continue on to Pontianak to take up his assignment. The Capucine mission, situated at Pontianak, Bodok, and Sanggau Kapuas, consisted of nine priests, two lay brothers, and an elderly Swiss technician. They lived isolated, coming together only once a year for exercises. Swiss Capucine personnel had replaced in 1959 the Dutch missionaries, who were no longer permitted to remain in Indonesia.³¹



Location of groups visited by Bucher (1965-75)

[Names of villages in administrative usage; AB = Bucher's names; (in brackets) = ethnic group]

1 Metelunai (Bukat); 2 Menjuei = AB Bedjuwai (Bukat); 3 Nanga Obat = AB Alung Howat (Bukat); 4 Nanga Selirung = AB Alung Salirung (Bukat); 5 Nanga Putan = AB Alung Putan (Bukat); 6 Naha Tiwap = AB Linga Tibab (Bukat); 7 Tanjung Lokang (Hovongan); 8 Bo'ung or Hovoro'i = AB Howor'ii (Hovongan); 9 Belatung (Hovongan); 10 Nanga Sepan = AB Sulok Tössapan (Kerého); 11 Nanga Talai = ? AB Pulau Linau (Kerého); 12 Nanga Salin = AB Sulok Salin (Kerého); 13 Nanga Balang = AB Alung Balang (Kerého + Bukat); 14 Tamaloe = AB Penjawung (Kerého Busang); 15 Nanga Ira' (Semukung + various); 16 Nanga Enap (Aoheng + various); 17 Long Apari (Aoheng = AB P'nihing); 18 Long Penane (Seputan = AB Saputan).

Bucher soon tried to start full-time field work among Punan and Bukat on the upper Kapuas, living with them and learning their languages.³² However, in October 1965, he was ordered by the Capucine Mission to return to Switzerland, because he was doing ethnographic fieldwork rather than teaching. Instead, he flew to Bangkok, where he sold his plane ticket provided by

³⁰ Bieri 1964 b

³¹ Bieri 1964 a; Brantschen 1963

³² Bucher 2009

the Mission, and he later returned to Indonesia.³³ It was probably during that trip to Thailand that he visited Meo, Yao, Lissu, Ikho, and Lahu people in the country's northwest and on the Thai-Burmese border, as mentioned in a 1970 article.³⁴ In Jakarta he managed to obtain several recommendations, including one from the Swiss ambassador to Indonesia, and a permit from LIPI (the Indonesian Institute of Sciences) to do research among Punan and Bukat in East, Central, and West Kalimantan,³⁵ having submitted a research project that was at first planned to last until 1971.³⁶

Among (Former) Hunter-Gatherers

On 23rd January 1967, he resumed work among Punan and Bukat on the upper Kapuas.³⁷ He and his family seem to have spent important amounts of money in the realization of his ideals, which, besides his research, consisted in helping small isolated tribes to develop.



Daryanto, aka Guru Toto, Bucher's Javanese assistant, at Nanga Bulit, Bungan.
Photo: Sellato, 1975

He began by recruiting assistants: two young men with an SMA (senior high school) diploma, Daryanto (a Javanese, later locally known as Guru Toto *[3]) and Simandjuntak (a Batak from Tapanuli).³⁸ He took a young Bukat man from Metelunai, Rojan, to Jakarta as a personal servant,³⁹ also meant to teach his assistants the Bukat language prior to their going to Kalimantan.⁴⁰ More assistants were recruited: J. Henoh (from Cigugur, West Java), Paulus Karjioedjo, his wife and their children (from Muntilan, Central Java), Purwanto (from Yogyakarta),⁴¹ and Pakpahan (a Batak), who joined later – Bucher called them his *tim antropologi*. They signed a pledge until 1972, and each of them was assigned an ethnic group or language to study and a place of residence.⁴² They were at the same time supposed to be “pioneer farmers” or “pioneers of development” and teach wet rice cultivation, an idea much *en vogue* among Indonesian church circles in those years.⁴³ One of the original assistants, probably Simandjuntak, was sent to Putussibau as an agriculture

³³ Van Vluiten 1981

³⁴ Bucher 1970 b Nr. 8 & 9

³⁵ Swiss Consulate in Jakarta 1981

³⁶ Bucher 1975

³⁷ *Harian Kami* 1968

³⁸ Daryanto 1981; *Harian Kami* 1968; *Kompas* 1968 a

³⁹ Jemala 1981

⁴⁰ Daryanto 1981

⁴¹ *Harian Kami* 1968; Daryanto 1981

⁴² Daryanto 1981

⁴³ *Harian Kami* 1968; Schmidt 1979

expert to start work in Bungan, but Bucher did not obtain permission from local officials for this until much later.⁴⁴



The Bukat village of Noha Tivap (Bucher's Linga Tibab), upper Mahakam. Photo: Sellato, 1975

July and August 1967 were spent among the Bukat at Noha Tivap, on the upper Mahakam.⁴⁵ He acted as a teacher, e.g., discussing rockets, stars, and planets with the Bukat. “We are close to the moon and planets but far from the Punan and Bukat people”, he would later remind readers in the capital.⁴⁶

The First of August, the Swiss National Day, was celebrated with a bonfire together with Bukat friends on the upper Mahakam, an occasion for “explaining the meaning of democracy”. These Bukat, who had moved long ago to the Mahakam from the Kapuas valley, “liked the system”. In his articles, he stressed the local economic problems, mainly due to the high prices of trade goods because of the very long distance from the coast, and a child mortality rate above 61 percent.⁴⁷

During the years 1967-68 Bucher seems to have travelled a lot, also along the Mahakam, for example in Long Lunuk (Long-Gelat and Busang people) and Long Pahangai (Busang), in Long Paka' (Kayan), Long Kerio' (Aoheng). One Aoheng resident recalled her surprise at his strange attire (e.g., he had a rattan vine in place of a belt), but he played his recordings of lute (*sape* ') music to the delight of villagers, who to this day still play the *sape* ' *swit* (Swiss lute) dance tune.⁴⁸ He was among other groups of Punan (Lisum and Beketan), on the upper

⁴⁴ Koeng Bato' 1981

⁴⁵ Bucher 1970 b Nr. 2 & 3

⁴⁶ Bucher 1970 b Nr. 2 & 3

⁴⁷ Bucher 1970 b Nr. 2

⁴⁸ Hangin Bang Donggo, 2015

Tabang (Belayan) River,⁴⁹ probably in 1968. It was probably also in 1968 that he spent seven months in the house of Bukat priest “Dschenahang” (Jenahang), who became a major informant on the “very elaborate beliefs” of the Bukat.⁵⁰

The start of the realization of his farming help project seems to have been delayed for a long time. In 1968, through a (supposedly planned) campaign of articles in the Indonesian press (*Harian Kami* 1968, *Kompas* 1968, *Api Pantjasila* 1968, and probably more) and through official contacts in Jakarta, Bucher managed to raise support and funds and to gather material help. He obtained assistance from the Catholic Relief Services, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Health Department, International Red Cross, as well as private pharmaceutical companies and was granted up to one ton of medicines, large amounts of cloth and used clothing, 212 hoes, 50 spades, shovels, hammers, nails and other tools, one ton of salt, a quintal of oatmeal, over a ton of powdered milk as well as Rp 100,000 in cash. Transportation facilities were provided by the Indonesian Air Force, shipping companies, and provincial government.⁵¹ However, an important part of these goods was said not to have reached its final destination.⁵²

According to the introduction to his 1970 series of articles in *The Djakarta Times*,⁵³ he later also received assistance from the Department of Information and Social Affairs, which developed and printed some 1,500 photographs of his past work.⁵⁴ From initially 84 melodies and folksongs he had recorded, he handed over (copies of) music tapes to Radio Republik Indonesia in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Pontianak.⁵⁵ Over time this collection grew up to 300 titles.⁵⁶

Administrative and Financial Difficulties

On 31st July 1968, the Swiss ambassador in Jakarta wrote a confidential letter to the Political Affairs Division at the Federal Political Department in Bern about Bucher’s activities and financial difficulties.⁵⁷

According to the letter, he was supposed to devote 50 percent of his time to teaching at the mission and was permitted to use the rest for ethnographic studies. After a few months he left the mission in order to carry on his studies on full time. He “delved into the jungle, living with the natives and learning their language.” His employers disliked his activities, particularly fearing difficulties for the mission’s work because he might draw suspicion for working near the Sarawak border at the time of the Indonesian Confrontation with Malaysia.

Consequently, “very highly placed religious clergy” asked the ambassador to suggest Bucher’s return to Switzerland in the interest of Catholic missions in Indonesia. The ambassador’s intervention, however, had no effect on Bucher, who was “passionate about the life he was leading and by the mission he believed he was fulfilling in favor of the Dayaks.”

⁴⁹ Jipun 1981

⁵⁰ Bucher 1970 b Nr. 9.

⁵¹ *Kompas* 1968; *Harian Kami* 1968

⁵² Unidentified village informants in Upper Kapuas

⁵³ Bucher 1970 b Nr. 1

⁵⁴ Bucher 1970 b Nr. 1.

⁵⁵ *Harian Kami* 1968

⁵⁶ Bucher 1970 b Nr. 1; *The Djakarta Times* 1970

⁵⁷ Revilliod 1968 a

He returned to Jakarta from time to time, mainly to borrow money, later reimbursed by his family.

According to the same letter, Bucher's support to West Kalimantan Chinese refugees suffering from Dayak massacres was highly valued by protestant Basel Missionary Roland Dumartheray, a longtime close friend of the Hakka Chinese community. Bucher's involvement, however, was less appreciated by other parties, and he was said to have interfered in "local affairs that didn't concern him" by siding with certain members of the Pontianak authorities against others, criticizing the Indonesian Red Cross, and "talking about the delicate subject of corruption", which led to his being threatened with expulsion by the local Bupati (regent). This was prevented by the West Kalimantan Governor, who took his side. Still there were complaints about this involvement by the Indonesian Red Cross and the visiting ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) delegate. Bucher was described as "overly shrewd and tricky under a naïve appearance."

He realized that, in order to be allowed to stay in the country and renew his residence permit, he had to give up his concern with refugees and concentrate instead fully on his work with the Dayak of the interior. Consequently, he collected medicines and other material from pharmaceutical company representatives, with the help of the Ministry of Social Affairs and other official agencies in the capital. He also procured in Singapore some agricultural equipment, films, and further equipment for an ethnographic mission. However, now without any institution to back his personal mission, he lacked the money to travel to Kalimantan from Jakarta with his three assistants and 200 kg of materials. The Air Force generals who had earlier facilitated his transport by military airplanes had been replaced. There was, moreover, so far no evidence of his ethnographic capacities, since he had failed to send the required reports to the Indonesian Institute of Sciences. The ambassador complained that Bucher was living "at everybody's expense", incurring costs based on vague promises by the Ministry.

Therefore, in this letter to the Political Affairs Division, the ambassador, unwilling to further support him, requested that the situation be reported to Bucher's family, as well as to individuals and institutions likely to agree to support his work.⁵⁸ This was followed up by another short letter on August 6, informing the Division that Bucher had left Jakarta for Borneo two days before by airplane in the company of a Belgian photographer commissioned by *The National Geographic Magazine*, who had paid for the trip.⁵⁹

Consequently, the Political Affairs Division drafted a letter to Bucher's brother Theodor (at first wrongly thought to be his father) on August 6 echoing in detail the whole gamut of the ambassador's complaints, but without mentioning Bucher's activities in favor of the Chinese refugees.⁶⁰ It appears that the letter was not sent, but replaced by a telephone call two days later, during which a very understanding and well informed Theodor promised to raise once again as much funds as possible, together with other family members. Because of their limited means, it certainly would not have sufficed, by far, to cover the necessary sum. According to the employee's note, Theodor described his brother as "an idealist who doesn't have his feet on the ground".⁶¹ A handwritten note on the following day states that 2,000 Swiss Francs were raised to be transferred to Jakarta.

⁵⁸ Revilliod 1968 a

⁵⁹ Revilliod 1968 b

⁶⁰ EPD 1968

⁶¹ Diener 1968 a

The steps taken by the Political Affairs Division were reported back to the ambassador on August 12.⁶² Bucher's mother, who was contacted upon reception of the news that his trip had been paid for by the Belgian journalist, decided that the collected sum should be kept by the Embassy in view of future needs. The last note in the file, dated 16 September 1968, states that the money, six weeks later, had yet to reach Jakarta, probably because the check was sent by surface mail.⁶³

Anthropological Research in Kalimantan

The following one and a half years seem to have been spent continuously travelling in the interior, most probably still without his assistants. In January of 1969, Bucher was again in Metelunai, among the Bukat of the Kapuas, where he remained until March.⁶⁴



"Hinan the village chief with his wife and one of his seven children" (Kerého / "Penjawung") in August 1969. Photo by Alois Bucher (1970 b Nr. 10)

April and May were spent on the Keriau (Kereho) river among the so-called Punan Penyavung ("Penjawung" in Bucher's notation; they call themselves Kereho), where he gathered a 1,000-word vocabulary and recorded some 100 stories and folksongs, purportedly totaling some 1,000 pages of notation and translation.⁶⁵ From May to July 1969 he stayed on the Mendalam River among Kayan and Mendalam Bukat.⁶⁶ He went back up the Keriau River

⁶² Leippert 1968

⁶³ Diener 1968 b

⁶⁴ Bucher 1970 b Nr. 7 & 11

⁶⁵ Bucher 1970 b Nr. 5

⁶⁶ Bucher 1970 b Nr. 3 & 6

in July,⁶⁷ and further up, at the end of August, to Belatung (a Punan Bungan or Hovongan village), from where he sent a report to Jakarta.⁶⁸ He stayed in Belatung till the end of October,⁶⁹ and moved over to Bo'ung (or Hovo'ung, another sub-group of Hovongan) to study the language and “age-old culture” of the Hovongan.⁷⁰



The 1,317-m-high Diang Sara' peak, which Bucher climbed in 1969, upper Bungan.
Photo: Sellato, 1981

There he learnt of his father's death and became deeply upset; this is when he decided to climb Diang Sara', a 1,317m-high rocky sacred peak, much feared by the natives.⁷¹ He managed to convince Tidun, at that time the headman at Bo'ung, to take him there, and they stayed two nights on the top of the peak. Bucher contracted bad malaria, supposedly caused by evil spirits, and “subsequently lost his mind”.⁷² The malaria bout lasted for ten days. Later he remembered fondly how he was “faithfully nursed by the chief and former headhunter”, probably the same Tidun, “as if I were their own brother, even their son”; this remained “a totally unforgettable, one of the greatest experiences of my life”.⁷³

⁶⁷ Bucher 1970 b Nr. 10 & 14

⁶⁸ Mentioned in Bucher 1970 a

⁶⁹ Bucher 1970 b Nr. 8; at the time of Sellato's visit (1981), scores of people in this village were suffering from leprosy.

⁷⁰ Bucher 1977 a

⁷¹ Koeng Bato' 1981; the spectacular view from the top of Mt. Sara' is described in the report of February 1970 in the context of a one day walk from Belatung to Bo'ung at the end of October 1969, in the company of five Belatung friends (Bucher 1970 a). The ascent and the events related by the informant are not mentioned by Bucher himself.

⁷² Informant in Bo'ung 1981

⁷³ Bucher 1977 a

Tidun died soon afterwards of an illness also attributed to spirit intervention.⁷⁴ Bucher went to Bungan at the end of November, and back to Putussibau in December; he stayed among the Bukat of the Sibau River from December 1969 to January 1970, noting interesting observations on formal trade friendship pacts between Bukat and Taman residents.⁷⁵ He wrote his field notes in German⁷⁶ and was perpetually accompanied by his pet civet cat.⁷⁷

Another official report was written at Alung Putan (Nanga Putan), on the Sibau, in February.⁷⁸ Bucher opened a school in Metelunai, along with Simandjuntak, and taught there. He announced in the press that he had recorded 300 original Dayak songs (see above) and that he planned to return to Switzerland in 1971.⁷⁹ He also stated that the Aoheng and American Indians had similar builds and traditions.⁸⁰ From May to December 1970 the Bukat suffered from famine and lived on sago they procured from Belatung valley.⁸¹

During the first half of 1970, Bucher arranged for a new media campaign in Jakarta⁸² to rally further support. He also probably spent time in East Kalimantan. Sellato heard that Mulawarman University in Samarinda had appointed an assistant, one Mr. Muhlis,⁸³ to help him, but Sellato was unable to get in touch with him. One of Bucher's 1970 articles tells of his trip up the Mahakam from Samarinda to the Bukat village of Noha Tivap. From there, he presumably walked (back?) to the Hovongan.

In 1971 things seemed to turn well for Bucher. Rather than returning home, he managed to obtain a Swiss National Foundation research grant of CHF 40,489.- for one and a half years of "final/concluding linguistic and ethnological studies among the Punan tribes of West and East Borneo".⁸⁴ The "research and teaching team" was now posted in the target villages – and at work: Daryanto at Tanjung Lokang (among Punan-Bungan), Simandjuntak in Metelunai (Bukat), Henoh among Mendalam Kayan, Pakpahan among Penyavung on the Keriau, and Paulus at Nanga Ira' (Semukung) on the main Kapuas.⁸⁵ King (1974 b) mentions three elementary schools, in Bungan, Metelunai, and Nanga Ira', probably in conjunction with government plans to establish resettlement sites for the former nomads at these locations.

Jacobus Romeijn, the Catholic bishop of Samarinda, received a letter from Switzerland inquiring about Bucher, who was at that moment in Java, where it appears that he had become increasingly disturbed, showing signs of ablutomania and obsessively panicked by diseases.⁸⁶ Possibly related to this obsession was Bucher's earlier longing for a return to the ancient "Punan" ways: as early as around 1968, at Muara Atan (Tabang), he was refusing to use soap, rubbed his body with silty clay instead, using a wooden block as a pillow and a gunny as a

⁷⁴ Umang 1981

⁷⁵ Bucher 1970 b Nr. 7

⁷⁶ Daryanto 1981

⁷⁷ Jemala 1981 (at Nanga Tepai, a small Bukat hamlet); the civet (Indonesian *musang*) was usually perched on Bucher's shoulder and fed milk and bread; one day in Putussibau, it escaped, which upset Bucher to tears.

⁷⁸ Bucher 1970 a

⁷⁹ *The Djakarta Times* 1970

⁸⁰ *Api Pantjasila* 1968

⁸¹ Bucher 1970 b Nr. 7 & 8

⁸² *The Djakarta Times* 1970, Bucher 1970 b

⁸³ Unidentified civil servants in Tenggara

⁸⁴ Bucher 1975.

⁸⁵ Daryanto 1981

⁸⁶ Sombroek 1979

mat, and declaring that he wished he could wear a bark loincloth.⁸⁷ In any case, during his stay in Java in 1971, he seems to have repeatedly made himself persona non grata in the various Catholic religious communities among which he had sought accommodation and, when he later went to Samarinda, he got on such bad terms with the Catholic Mission, where he was given accommodation for a long time, that Bishop Romeijn sent a letter of complaint about him to Jakarta.⁸⁸

From 1972 on, information about Bucher becomes scarce. He may have made the trip (via Java?) back to the upper Kapuas and joined his team. But he left them again later in 1972 to return to the Mahakam,⁸⁹ and none of the team members ever heard from him again.⁹⁰ Sometime in 1972 or 1973, Bucher was (again?) in Java. In 1972, probably, he was spotted in Jakarta, and reported to be “acting strange”.⁹¹

In 1973, he was believed to be in Sarawak.⁹² However, he visited the Swiss Embassy in Jakarta in September 1973. At the end of that year, he must have been in East Kalimantan again, for he wrote a virulent article against those Catholics who destroy Dayak culture in *Membangun*, a Samarinda Government publication,⁹³ which we were not able to consult (archives have been lost). He stayed a long time in Tenggarong, borrowed money from the Kutai Regency government, and sold audio cassettes to the local Tourist Bureau, probably containing a collection similar to the one drafted for publication a few years after his return to Switzerland⁹⁴ (see below). He allegedly left his luggage in Tenggarong.⁹⁵

Meanwhile, Bucher’s brother Theodor was searching for him, writing to the Cistercian Monastery in Temanggung (Java). The monastery prior answered on 13 February 1973: “It is a pity. He is already gone away to Jakarta (550 km from here) and he hasn’t done [*sic*] his address. Many cases and boxes are still left in Yogyakarta. But the most precious things he has taken away. [...] I don’t know where he is.”⁹⁶ In 1974, he was encountered in Yogyakarta, sleeping on the pavement.⁹⁷ In the second half of the year, he granted an interview to the Indonesian-language daily *Kompas*.⁹⁸ In September 1974, he paid another visit to the Swiss Embassy.

Bucher probably did not return to Kalimantan in 1974 or 1975, as his “anthropology team” in the Kapuas never heard from him later than 1972, and neither did the missionaries in Samarinda. As for Sellato, who was in the upper Mahakam during these years, he was not aware of Bucher’s existence yet.

⁸⁷ Jipun 1981; Muara Atan was the first government resettlement village for nomadic groups in the Tabang area; Jipun, an upper Kapuas (Bukat?) man, said that “he replaced Bucher” there, suggesting that Bucher may have recruited him and tried to open a school or started development work among Bektetan at Muara Atan.

⁸⁸ Sombroek 1979

⁸⁹ Sjamsuarni Sjam 1979; she met him on the Mahakam in 1972.

⁹⁰ Daryanto 1981

⁹¹ Singka 1981; Bucher was constantly holding and rubbing a small stone in his hand.

⁹² Daryanto 1981

⁹³ Simon Devung 1981

⁹⁴ Bucher 1976

⁹⁵ Daryanto 1981

⁹⁶ Van der Ham 1973

⁹⁷ Johan Hang Kueng 1981

⁹⁸ Sjamsuarni Sjam, 1979

In 1979 and 1980, Sellato inquired in Samarinda, hearing that some ten iron chests containing field notes, recordings, and photographs, may have been stored at one Mr. Hasjim's house in Tenggara, but he was unable to locate this person;⁹⁹ eventually, he heard that the trunks and their contents had been damaged by a river flood and later discarded. As for the field data collected by Bucher's anthropology team in the upper Kapuas over several years, they were apparently meant by these associates, after hearing of Bucher's death in 1976, to be shipped to Jakarta.¹⁰⁰ It is not known whether they actually were shipped and, if so, to whom, nor whether the shipment included (part of) Bucher's own, locally stored, upper Kapuas documents.

BACK IN SWITZERLAND

As mentioned above, Linder picked up Bucher's track in Switzerland in 2009 and began researching his life and work there. Bucher's later life and musical achievements will be discussed in detail in another article in preparation by Linder.

It turned out that Bucher returned to Switzerland in 1975, only because of his mother, as he later stated.¹⁰¹ Shortly after his return he wrote another interim report (1975) at the prompting of his brother Theodor.¹⁰² He obviously intended to return to Borneo, which is why he had left his research material in Indonesia, and he sent a new research proposal to the Swiss National Foundation in late 1976.¹⁰³

Street Musician and Peace Missionary

After looking for a while after the old house handed over to him by his mother in Horw (Lucerne),¹⁰⁴ a call of God reached him, as he later told a journalist,¹⁰⁵ which brought him to dedicate more and more of his time to a new occupation, bound to turn into a full-grown profession, leading Bucher's life into an altogether different direction: He re-invented himself as an itinerant alphorn player and street missionary. He picked up the instrument around 1977 after being deeply touched by its sound at a traditional folkloristic festival in the Emmental: "It was so beautiful; tears were running down my face. It was like a sermon without words" he later recalled.¹⁰⁶ The new occupation suited the street lifestyle he had already got accustomed to in his earlier years in Indonesia. In the course of time he became a familiar sight on city squares and in train stations in places such as Lucerne, Zurich, Geneva, Lausanne, Bern, Interlaken, and Basel.¹⁰⁷ Busking became his only regular source of

⁹⁹ Sellato 1981

¹⁰⁰ Daryanto 1981; but Alfons Bürgler (pers. com.) remembers being told by Bucher that boxes or trunks containing his research material were lost when a dugout capsized on a river.

¹⁰¹ Meier 1993: 48. She had bequeathed the old house in Horw to her son, who felt responsible for its maintenance (a.o., Alfons Bürgel, pers. com.).

¹⁰² Bucher 1975; Theodor Bucher, pers. com.

¹⁰³ Bucher 1976

¹⁰⁴ Bucher 2009 a & b

¹⁰⁵ Oberli 2000

¹⁰⁶ Schmid 1990

¹⁰⁷ Steiner n.d.: 173; Meier 1993: 47; Stebler 2009 and pers. com.; cf. also Curran's story above.

¹⁰⁸ Meier 1993. In the beginning he collected money for the maintenance of the house in Horw, later for his Büchel project (see below).

income,¹⁰⁸ which brought him into occasional conflict with the law,¹⁰⁹ at one time costing him a fine of CHF 700.-, whereupon he was permitted to continue playing.¹¹⁰

Beyond mere musical entertainment, Bucher felt a mission to spiritually uplift his listeners. He liked to call himself a “peace missionary”, thus realizing his youthful wish in a way not thought of at the time. “Somehow I must have become a missionary yet,” he later stated.¹¹¹ In a description of his various occupations and projects, written in 1992 for the interested public and potential sponsors,¹¹² he mentioned his calling as “*Pfarrer und Missionar im offenen Raum*” (quotation marks in the original): priest and missionary in the public space (literally “open space”), quoting listeners who testified that they had found peace while listening to the sound of his alphorn on city streets.

Meanwhile Sellato had begun looking for Bucher, writing to an address in Switzerland in 1976 without success. There were rumors of his death: Father A.J. Ding Ngo, the Kayan Catholic priest of the Mendalam, and Father Van Vluiten and other Dutch Catholic missionaries in Putussibau, West Kalimantan, got word that he had died of malaria in Kuching, Sarawak, after crossing on foot from the Kapuas to Sarawak.¹¹³ Sellato’s inquiry at the Kuching Hospital in 1981 remained unanswered. He was able to meet Daryanto, who had remained among the Hovongan and married a Hovongan woman of Tanjung Lokang, and who provided him with part of the information given above. Simandjuntak was also still on the upper Kapuas at the time – having married a woman from Metelunai and residing in Putussibau¹¹⁴ – as well as, perhaps, other members of the team.

As for Bucher himself, he had not given up on his dream of returning to Borneo, in spite of his new profession, and he drafted a proposal to the Swiss National Foundation in December 1976. He wanted to continue the work he had started during a second trip in the winter 1976-77, foreseeing a possible extension with related groups in East Kalimantan after 1978.¹¹⁵ As late as 1979 the Swiss Embassy received a letter from his hand, dated May 21, written from his home community Horw.

All the while the busking street missionary life continued. R. Spinnler, a diplomat from the Swiss Embassy met him in Lucerne in 1977, reporting to Sellato that he looked “unkempt”. Bucher had by the time adopted the typical look of an Interior Swiss mountain man that so impressed Curran, while less romantically inclined observers saw in him not much more than an ordinary tramp.¹¹⁶ It is probable that the “unkempt” “mountain goat” attire was at times a sort of professional dress, since there are also photographs showing a smartly dressed and trimmed musician¹¹⁷ or just a rather average looking person.¹¹⁸ He had numerous addresses of friends where he could spend some time off the street life, do his laundry and set up temporary offices for writing up his notes and do administrative work.¹¹⁹

¹⁰⁹ Bucher 2009 a & b

¹¹⁰ Bürer 1996, Oberli 2000

¹¹¹ Meier 1993: 48, cf. also Steiner n.d.

¹¹² Bucher 1992: 2

¹¹³ Daryanto 1981; Van Vluiten 1981; for Umang (1981), this was the fever he had contracted at Diang Sara’.

¹¹⁴ Jemala 1981

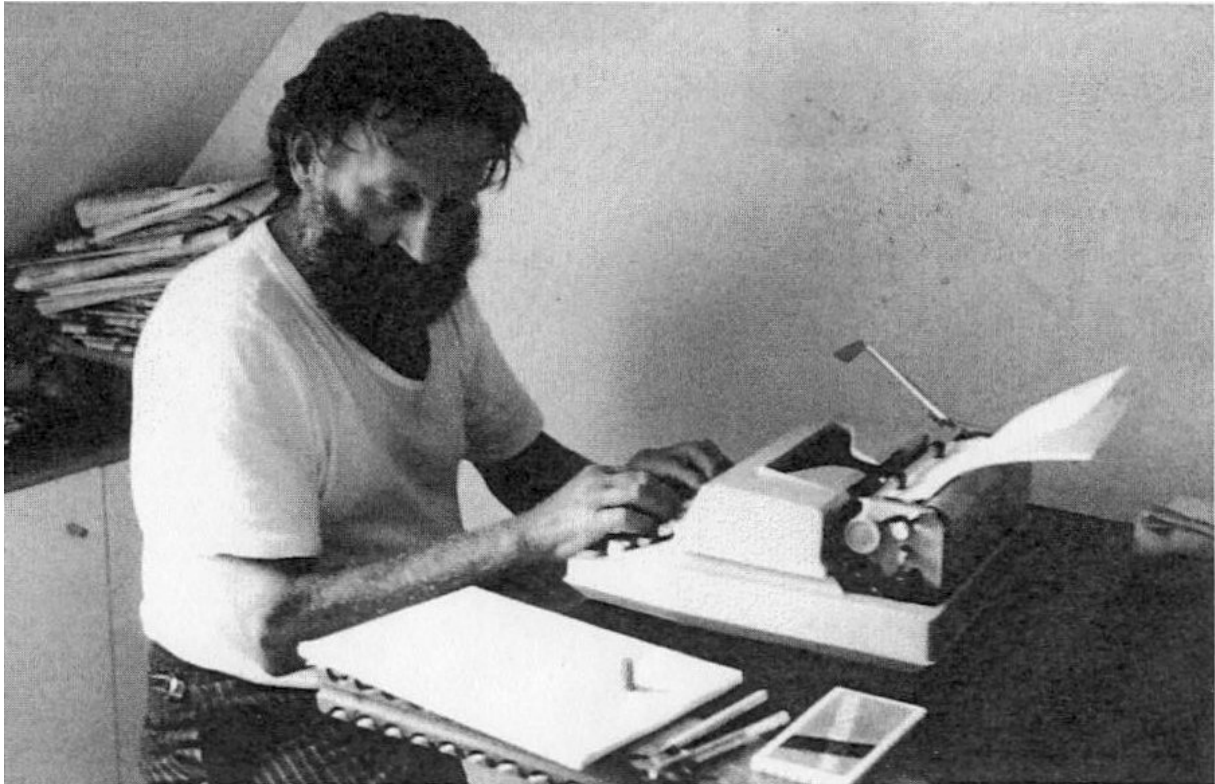
¹¹⁵ Bucher 1976

¹¹⁶ Oberli 2000; Spinnler pers. com.

¹¹⁷ Meier 1993: 47; also the postcards produced by Bucher himself.

¹¹⁸ Steiner n.d.

¹¹⁹ Steiner n.d.; Alfons Bürgler and Heinrich Stebler, pers. com.



Bucher typing up notes on traditional Swiss mountain music in one of his many temporary offices at the house of the late writer A.A. Steiner (reprinted with permission from Steiner n.d.)

Büchel-Wisi, Echo Researcher

His soulful and seemingly authentic playing triggered increased attention and brought him opportunities and audiences beyond street playing. There were performances in the Dome of Cologne, in , Munich's Brother Nicolaus Church (dedicated to Bucher's famous ancestor), in the cathedral of Chartres and numerous other churches all over western Europe, culminating in his honorific participation in a series of High Offices on Rome's St. Peter's Square in 1984, 1985, and 1987. The Christmas 1985 celebration is said to have been witnessed by some 500 million television watchers in more than 40 countries.¹²⁰ As the large alphorn became too cumbersome to handle on the road he increasingly changed to the lighter *Büchel*, on which he became a respected expert remembered to this day in Swiss folk music circles as *Büchel-Wisi*. From the late 1980s Bucher developed increasing activities for the preservation and promotion of this traditional instrument.¹²¹ In the nineties, his popularity reached its peak, and he often became the subject of newspaper and magazine articles, TV and radio features.¹²² His portrait was even immortalized on a coffee creamer lid, becoming part of this typical Swiss folk gallery of popular heroes, sights, and curiosities. Beyond the purely folkloristic sphere, his playing and yodeling also led to collaborations with various avant-garde musicians such as the encounter with Alvin Curran recounted at the beginning of this article. Studies and experiments with the echo in varying situations became an important part of Bucher's work, which included mystical and theological speculations.¹²³ He even added "Echo researcher" as an additional profession to his curriculum.¹²⁴ Often derided by representatives of the folklore

¹²⁰ Steiner n.d.: 172; Bucher 1992

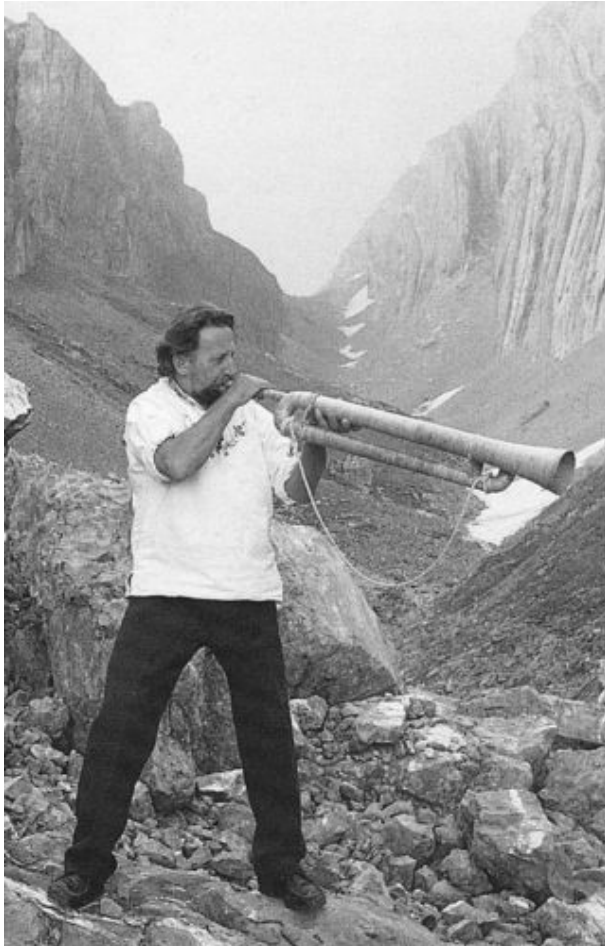
¹²¹ Bucher 1991 and 1992; Anon 1991

¹²² E.g. Bürer 1996; Gröbli 1992; Schmid 1990; Meier 1993; Anon 1991, 1992 a & b

¹²³ Schmid 1990; Seiler 1994

¹²⁴ *Soundscape Newsletter* 1992; Bucher 1987

establishment, these researches have left a lasting impression on some contemporary musicians who are pursuing and deepening to this day what he began.¹²⁵ A sample of Bucher's musical work is documented on a self-produced music cassette recorded in 1987 at one of his favorite echo spots and accompanied by an extensive sheet of interesting notes and commentary.¹²⁶



In search of the eleven-fold echo in *Gross Mälchthal*, Muothatal (Schwyz), July 1990. From a postcard sold by Bucher. Photo: Th. Studhalter (used with permission).

According to the quote (in dialect) on the back of the card, there are “two dozen little mountain men [dwarfs] spirits goblins fairies animals and a spaceman surrounding the bugleman, harking to the elevenfold echo...”

associate Dr. Martin Vosseler recalls the two men discussing during the “SonneSchweiz”

In the whole, Bucher's work represents an early example of the musical movement that became known as “New Folk Music” in Switzerland and other Alpine countries. The sympathetic portrait of “Büchel-Wysi”, published by Marco Meier in 1993 in the Swiss cultural magazine *Du*, appears in the fitting context of an issue on “The Sound of the Alpine Region”, together with reports on experiments by renowned rock and jazz musicians.¹²⁷

Eighteen years after leaving Borneo, he told an interviewer that he never was as happy again as during his time there.¹²⁸ To return there one day, together with the matching female partner he hoped to find, remained his great dream.¹²⁹ Yet neither his main pupil and traveling companion Heini Stebler, nor any of the other people who knew him in his later life, recalled hearing much about his Borneo years. Many were not even aware he had been; some spoke of Thailand, others of Java, or just “somewhere in Asia”, living with natives “in the trees”. Neither do any of the portraits written about him contain any details from those ten years.

A man who must have shared Borneo memories with Bucher was Bruno Manser, himself on his way to becoming a legend both in Europe and in Borneo through his life among Penan in Sarawak and fight against deforestation, including spectacular publicity actions until his final mysterious disappearance. Manser's close friend and

¹²⁵ Margot pers. com.; Bachmann-Geiser 1999: 86 f

¹²⁶ Bucher 1987; cf. also Schmid 1990; Anon 1991

¹²⁷ Meier 1993; cf. also Seiler 1994

¹²⁸ Meier 1993

¹²⁹ Meier 1993; Schmid 1990; Alfons Bürgler and Heinrich Stebler, pers. com. Unconfirmed rumors speak of problematical love stories, both in Switzerland and in Borneo.

gathering, held for the first time in August 1993 to promote the use of solar energy, where Bucher led the participants in a self-invented sun dance.¹³⁰



Playing for a delegation of indigenous people on their way to a UN conference, at one of Bucher's echo performances on Bannalp (Nidwalden) on 11 July 1992. The original caption reads "No communication problems for bugle blower Wisi Bucher (...) with indigenous people from Australia, South America and Africa. This quaint, archaic Music was familiar to them also." (Reprinted with permission from Gröbli 1992)

Alois Bucher's Later Years

In 1987, the restless traveler was placed under his brother Josef's tutelage by the Community Council of Horw. Since he had twice fallen dangerously ill with tropical malaria and beriberi, his brother wondered whether this was the cause for his mental health becoming permanently impaired. This was the first in a series of increasingly severe administrative interventions against this non-conformist soul, which would continue until the end of his life. In 2003 he was interned in a psychiatric hospital for two months, after which he went to live in an old folks' home, where he was liked both for his peaceful character and his lively storytelling. But already the following spring, he self-confidently gave notice to take to his own life once more. In 2007 he was again interned in the psychiatric clinic and diagnosed as schizophrenic. He spent the remaining months until his death on July 24 2009 in a nursing home. "And now God the unfathomable one has called the pilgrim home into His eternal origin, into His rest", Theodor Bucher ends his brother's obituary.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Toni Reichmuth and Martin Vosseler, pers. com.

¹³¹ Bucher 2009 a and b



At the Christmas dinner organized by Lucerne's *Güggali-Zunft* in honor of local "originals", 13 December 2004. Photo: GZL (used with permission)

A legend already during his life, he might turn into some kind of ancestor figure since his death; a "Büchel-Wisi" impersonator was, for instance, seen haunting the town of Schwyz during Carnival in 2010. Meanwhile on the upper Kapuas, Bukat people interviewed in 2015 still had fond memories of Bucher "as if it were only yesterday", they spoke reverently of him as their benefactor and chronicler of their languages and culture, keeping him "in their hearts" to this day.¹³²

THE RESEARCHER'S BORNEO WORK (AND OUTPUT)

What do we know of Bucher's work in Borneo? How can we assess his research? As mentioned above, none of his "trunks" or other "luggage", as mentioned by himself or our informants, could ever be located, let alone recovered.

True enough, we have not investigated all of the possible locations. Some other documents, manuscripts, photographs, or audio tapes may eventually reappear. There is a slight possibility that some material might be found in Yogyakarta ("many cases and boxes"; letter from the Cistercian monastery¹³³); in Switzerland (Swiss National Foundation archive, National Library, National Archive, Capucine Archive, Alois Bucher's family); in Jakarta (Swiss Embassy archive, Ministry of Religion archive; LIPI archive, a.o.); in Tenggara (info. Daryanto) or in West Kalimantan (Catholic church and mission archives).

¹³² Eberle, P. & G.: pers. com.

¹³³ Van der Ham 1973

At his juncture, we do not have much, in terms of written work that we could view as scientific output of Bucher's research. His 1969 "detailed report" just disappeared into thin air; his 1970 *Report of Linguistic / Anthropological / Ethnological Research* (1970 a) amounts to a three-page letter; his 1975 *Interim Report*, to seven pages; his 1976 *Proposal to the Swiss National Foundation*, to nine pages; finally, his 1977 *Erfahrungen in Borneo, 1964-1974*, comprises five short texts (1977 a to 1977 e), altogether totaling nine pages. Not much, indeed.

This section, however, takes stock of whatever information can be derived from the few documents above, as well as from Bucher's newspaper articles. It sorts out this information into several sub-sections: areas visited; languages; history; anthropological work; and music recordings. All the documents in German were translated by Linder. It should be clearly stated from the onset that, most of the time, we have no way to extricate what Bucher really did from what he wrote (or said) that he did – if, indeed, he did do all that he wrote (or said) he did, then his research would constitute – or have constituted – an incredibly valuable corpus of data on central Borneo's former hunting-gathering groups. In any event, even the brief notes excerpted from these documents do possess some interest.

Areas Visited

The following lines attempt to establish, as precisely as possible, the locations that Bucher visited and where he carried out research.¹³⁴

In the 1970s, the Bukat were located at Metelunai and some at Nanga Balang (Alung Balang, a Kereho village) on the upper Kapuas; at Nanga Obat (Bucher's Alung Howat) and Nanga Selirung (or Salirung) on the Mendalam; and at Nanga Putan (Bucher's Alung Putan) on the Sibau (or Tawiou); as well in one village (Noha Tivap; Bucher's Linga Tibab), near Long Apari, on the upper Mahakam. They all speak the very same language, apart from some Aoheng loanwords at Noha Tivap. Bucher, clearly, visited all settlements, including Noha Tivap, the Bukat being one of his major focuses.

¹³⁴ Cf. map on p. 6. On the Bukat, Kereho, Hovongan, Aoheng, and Seputan, see King 1974 b; Sellato 1980, 1989, 1993, 1994, 2002, 2007 (Bucher's 'w' and Sellato's 'v' represent the voiced bilabial fricative [β] in median position).



The Hovongan village of Tanjung Lokang, with its unusual houses. Photo: Sellato, 1975

The Punan Buhngan (Bungan), who call themselves Hovongan and occupy the whole Bungan (or Hovongan) river drainage, comprise several sub-groups, including the Hovorit (originally from the Bulit or Hovorit tributary; then at Tanjung Lokang, on the main Hovongan River), the Hovo'ung (or Bo'ung; then located at Hovoror'i, Bucher's Howor'ii, in the Langau drainage), and the Belatung (Bucher's Punan Belatung, located on the upper Kereho River). They all speak the same language, with minor dialectal variation. All these settlements were visited, and apparently rather lengthily.

The Kereho (a.k.a. Punan Keriau; Bucher's Köreho) lived at Nanga Sepan (Bucher's Sulok Tössapan), Nanga Salin (Sulok Salin), and Pulau Linau (possibly Nanga Talai¹³⁵), on the Kereho (or Keriau) tributary of the Kapuas. Some were also living at Nanga Balang, Nanga Ira', and Nanga Enap, on the main Kapuas River. Another group was at Tamaloe, on the upper Busang River in Central Kalimantan, where it was called Punan Penyawung (sometimes transcribed by Bucher as Benjawung or Pönjawung). This last group called itself Kereho Busang,¹³⁶ as opposed to the Kereho Uheng of the Kapuas (Uheng is the "Punan" name of the uppermost course of the Kapuas). Bucher visited the settlements on the Kereho River and spent much time in some. He did not visit that on the Busang River, although he probably considered this option, since the research permit he applied for in 1975 included the province of Central Kalimantan.

The Aoheng (a.k.a. Penihing; Bucher's P'nihing) were living in five villages on the upper Mahakam, with one more village, already much mixed with Kayan and other neighboring groups, at Nanga Enap on the upper Kapuas. The three Seputan (Bucher's Saputan) sub-groups were on the Kacu (or Kasau; Bucher's Katschu) and its tributary, the Penane.

¹³⁵ See King 1974 b

¹³⁶ See Sellato 1989, 1994

According to local informants, Bucher stayed some time at Nanga Enap.¹³⁷ He briefly visited the Aoheng along the Mahakam, at least, it seems, those at Tiong Ohang and Long Kerio', and at Long Apari, and one Seputan group at Long Penane. He focused his work on the Bukat at Noha Tivap, and neither the Aoheng nor the Seputan appear to have been of much interest to him.



Berikum (right), the elderly headman of the Bukat at Noha Tivap, upper Mahakam, who most probably was Bucher's main informant in 1967. Photo: Sellato, 1975

One of Bucher's 1970 articles tells of his trip up the Mahakam from Samarinda and Tenggarong to Long Bagun, then up the great rapids to Long Tuyu' (his Lung Tujo), where he met the Lung Glat (Long-Glat), and further passing Long Pahangai and other Busang villages, to Lung Paka', the Khajan (Kayan Long Paka' or Kayan Mahakam) village, and up to the Aoheng area. From there, after staying with the local Bukat, he presumably walked (back?) to the Hovongan. Bucher was well aware of the two traditional footpaths from the Mahakam to the Kapuas, one starting from the Penane, the other from the Huvung, and he probably walked both routes, possibly back and forth. From Noha Tivap, he certainly took the Huvung path.

Curiously, Bucher seems to have totally overlooked the Semukung of Nanga Ira', close to Nanga Enap, on the upper Kapuas, and the few remaining Beketan (or Bukitan) of the Embaloh and Palin rivers.¹³⁸ However, he did visit the Beketan (whom he calls Punan Bekatan) of East Kalimantan, who were at Muara Tubo', in the headwaters of the Tawang (Tabang, or Belayan River). But he did not mention the Lisum, also in the Belayan

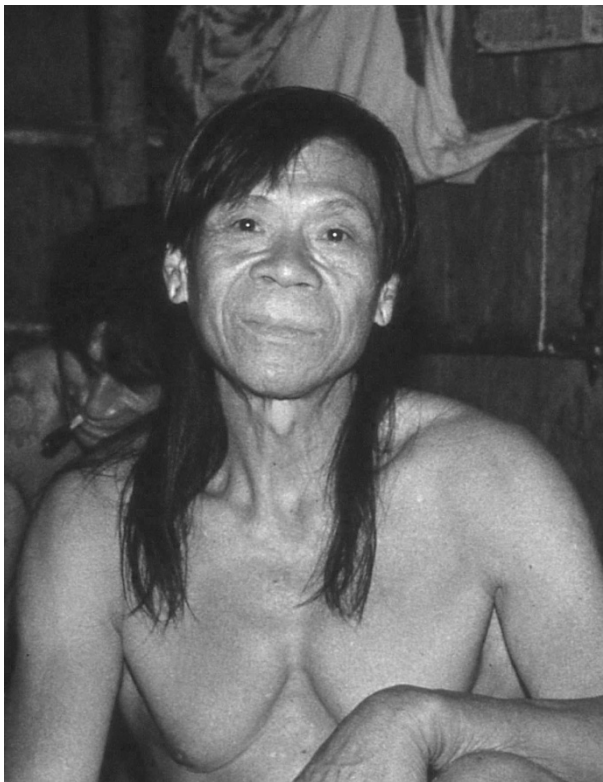
¹³⁷ Eberle, P. & G.: pers. com.

¹³⁸ See King 1974 b

drainage,¹³⁹ or their relatives, the Punan Merah, on the main Mahakam River, nor did he mention the Punan Ratah of the Ratah River.

Languages

Bucher claimed to have learnt, in the course of his years in Borneo, the “Bukat, Punan Buhngan, Punan Benjawung and Aoheng/P’nihing” languages.¹⁴⁰ He later told M. Meier that he had learnt seven dialects and languages, in addition to the nine European idioms he already spoke.¹⁴¹ Altogether, we find the following listed: Punan-Howongan, Punan-Buhngan (Sulok Howor’ii; actually, Hovoro’i), P. Buhngan, P. Penjawung, Bukat, Aoheng/P’nihing. Based on his own notes, he seems to have focused on only three languages, for each of which he proposed to prepare a dictionary and reader.¹⁴² Indeed, Bukat informants from the Nanga Obat (Bucher’s Alung Howat) area, interviewed in 2015, recalled that Bucher had set to learn “three local dialects”.¹⁴³



Juba', the Hovongan headman of Belatung and Bucher’s prime informant there.

Photo: Sellato, 1981

learn the Bukat language (although the Bukat were able to communicate in Indonesian, as Sellato could witness). As for the Kereho and Hovongan languages, he may have spoken one of them and then been able to communicate in the other (as he was considering them as “dialects”), or he may have viewed both of them only as comparative material “for further Bukat research”.

This would have concerned: 1) Bukat: About 3,500 words collected in villages of the upper Mahakam and upper Kapuas (Metelunai, Alung Balang, Alung Putan, Alung Howat, Bedjuwai, etc. [?]), as well as many phrases demonstrating morphological and grammatical constructions. 2) Kereho: Punan Penjawung: About 1,500 expressions, with examples of sentences and texts, as a basis for further Bukat research. Informants in Sulo’ Tessapan: village chief Nji’ap and adat chief Hirui. And 3) Hovongan: Punan Belatung: 1,500 words, with examples of sentences and texts, to be reviewed with village chief Djuba’ (Juba’, *[13]).

Hovongan, Kereho, Aoheng, and Seputan languages are closely related, while Bukat is quite distinct, and so is Beketan. From the few words and a couple of sentences in the vernaculars found in Bucher’s available pieces of writing, it is quite difficult to assess how far his spoken command of these languages went. It may be assumed, however, that he took the pains to properly

¹³⁹ See Sellato 2007

¹⁴⁰ Bucher 1970 b Nr. 1

¹⁴¹ Meier 1993: 47

¹⁴² Bucher 1976

¹⁴³ Eberle, P. & G.: pers. com.

Regarding transcription, again from the few available items in the vernaculars, inconsistencies in, e.g., Bucher's use of the apostrophe – sometimes to denote a glottal stop (e.g., Bu'ung), and sometimes a schwa (e.g., P'nihing), or else as an equivalent to /k/ (e.g., *sape'* vs. *sape(k)*) – or the fact that he may have changed his transcription system over time, one may surmise that he started his “linguistic research” with only minimal prior linguistic training. This, in any event, would not necessarily invalidate his ethnographic research.

History

Bucher proposed to bring together his data on Bukat history into an article in a scientific journal:¹⁴⁴ 1) Pre-settlement history of Punan Bukat in the border region between *Waliu* (Batang Rajang, Sarawak [actually, Waliu refers to the Balui branch of the Rajang]) and *Uhèng* (Kapuas). This early period is seen as having lasted “for millennia”. Life in *mungos*,¹⁴⁵ political organization, law and jurisdiction. Contacts with other Punan and Dayak groups, silent exchange, war and headhunting expeditions, particularly to the Iban in North Borneo. Subdivision in tribes or clans [*sic*], their names, characteristics, geographical distribution. And 2) Migration from the original *Waliu* and *Uhèng* areas to the present locations: 1) *Tawiou* (Sibau valley), 2) *Mendalam* (tributary of the upper Kapuas from the NE), 3) *Uhèng* (presently in the upper Kapuas main valley), 4) *Kéhéan* (upper Mahakam [Kehan is the local name of the uppermost course of the Mahakam]), 5) *Tawang* (in East Kalimantan), 6) *Waliu* (in Sarawak). For after 1978, Bucher proposed to carry on research on possible additional groups closely related to the Bukat in East Borneo.

Anthropological Work

In his writings, Bucher displayed a tendency to lump together Hovongan and Kereho as “Punan”, and sometimes even including the “Punan Bukat” or “Punan-Bukat”. He may have chosen to use “Punan” as a catch-all term for all “nomads”, and an easy way to expose common, general features of those peoples' cultures to the lay readership of his newspaper articles.¹⁴⁶ He may also have envisioned them as a whole as representative of the original inhabitants whose pre-settlement culture was thought to be “thousands of years old” (re. the ‘Vienna school’ of ethnology). In some of his more official pieces,¹⁴⁷ however, ethnic groups and locations are clearly identified.

Finally, it should be stressed that, in the 1970s, all these “nomadic” communities were already settled in villages and had become part-time agriculturalists, while some, like the Hovongan, had been swidden rice farmers for almost a century.¹⁴⁸

*The 1970 Report on Linguistic / Anthropological / Ethnological Research*¹⁴⁹

This three-page report is said to replace the one sent in August 1969 from Belatung, which “did not reach the outside world”. It covers research in 1969 among “Bukat and Punan” in the upper Kapuas and the Keriau, Bungan, Mendalam, and Sibau. Bucher claims that he “knew their languages by the beginning of the year”, enabling him “to carry on research work quickly.” He estimates that some 1,000 pages of texts in the local languages remain to be

¹⁴⁴ Bucher 1976

¹⁴⁵ Probably referring to the Bukat's temporary jungle camps (*menungo*); cf. Bucher 1970 b Nr. 6

¹⁴⁶ Bucher 1970 b

¹⁴⁷ Bucher 1976, 1977

¹⁴⁸ See Nieuwenhuis 1904 - 07

¹⁴⁹ Bucher 1970 a

transcribed. This material is expected to shed light on the thinking of “groups of mankind who lived in much earlier times.”

January to March: Metelunai (Bukat religion). April-May, July-August: Keriau, “Punan Penjawung” [Penyavung] (a 1000-word dictionary, customs and religion, historical traditions and myths, recordings of 100 stories and songs, several hundred photos). May-July: Mendalam valley (Bukat: 100 historical and religious accounts and folksongs; Kayan: 30 folk melodies). September-October: Hovongan at Belatung (recordings of 200 historical and mythical accounts and folksongs, 100 pages of notes, dictionary). November: Hovongan at Bo’ung (recording of some 25 folktales and songs) and at Tanjung Lokang. December-January: Nanga Putan, Sibau valley, Bukat (works with a specialist of religion and history).

The 1970 Djakarta Times set of articles¹⁵⁰

A series of 14 articles in English in *The Djakarta Times* [an English-language daily newspaper, Jakarta], June 1–24 1970. Popular illustrated reports on his travels and research among the “Punan and Bukat”, often not differentiated. Child rearing and education is a major topic (parts 9 to 12), along with details of geography and travelling routes in the style of travel literature, practical life, trade, hunting and fishing, marriage, and the region’s beautiful landscapes. The first article’s lead has a brief introduction of the author and his background: He had been studying “Punan and Bukat” of the upper Kapuas and upper Mahakam since 1965, learnt “the rather difficult languages of the Bukat, Bungan, Penjawung, and Aoheng”, recorded 300 melodies and songs, taken 1,500 pictures, discovered hundreds of “valuable philosophical, religious and historical accounts”.

The 1975 Interim Report to the Swiss National Foundation¹⁵¹

This seven-page letter was written after Bucher’s return, as a more detailed [*sic*] complement to the unavailable 9 December 1974 report. It is unclear to what extent the research listed had actually been carried out, even when a mention such as “have been studied” appears, or whether it was just being planned – a wish-list of sorts. The ethnographic data are generally presented as if they were features common to all the different ethnic groups, which may be true of fishing or farming, but certainly not of “social culture”, and even less of the “cosmology” (which appears here to refer to the Hovongan case). References to belief in a single “Supreme Spirit” (and his son!) and in “a continuing life of the soul after death” sound both inaccurate and possibly deliberately biased to fit other parties’ expectations: probably the Vienna School anthropologists in Fribourg. Here is an outline of the *Report*:

Research on Economy and Material Culture. 1) Hunting. a) Weapons; b) Construction of the blowpipe; c) Dog breeding; d) Hunting methods. 2) Fishing. a) Tools; b) Fish species. 3) Collecting of forest products. a) Useful timber species; b) Rattan and vines; c) Fruits, roots, tubers, etc. d) Wild bee honey; e) Gold panning. 4) Swidden farming, its successive stages.

Research on social culture. 1) Cooperation. a) In farming; b) In gathering timber or forest products, building huts or boats; c) Sharing game and fish. 2) Gender division of labor: a) Men; b) Women; c) Work done by both. 3) Equality between man and woman. 4) Marriage. Negotiations, bride-price, monogamy, divorce, residence. 5) Social behavior in death and burial ceremonies, special games and songs.

¹⁵⁰ Bucher 1970 b

¹⁵¹ Bucher 1975

World view. Preliminary results: 1) The earth. 2) The cosmos. Extensive recordings to be transcribed, translated, and edited.

Religion. 1) Belief in a personal supreme spirit who has created the world, men and animals, trees and plants. 2) “However, the Punan-Bukat also hold other kinds of spirits in regard; messenger spirits; evil spirits, helping spirits. 3) Punan priests, dreams and visions, spirit guidance. 4) The journey of the soul, belief in a continuing life of the soul after death. 5) Texts and formulas of prayers.

The 1976 Proposal to the Swiss National Foundation¹⁵²

This proposal includes sketches for detailed projects and themes to be treated on a second research trip in Borneo, in the winter of 1976-77. The data concerning languages and Bukat history have been given separately above. This ambitious program of complementary research and publication focuses on Bukat. Much of it recycles the data listed in the 1975 *Interim Report*, whether or not the collecting of these data had already been done. Here is an outline of a number of “Projects for articles in scientific journals” and a few “little books”:

Bukat Economy: 1) “Ur-economy”: sago production. 2) Hunting: methods and weapons. 3) Fishing: methods, fish species. 4) Forest products: food and drink, building materials, gold, resins. 5) Farming: swidden cycle.

Bukat Adat: 1) Rites of passage. 2) Law and jurisdiction. 3) Property, private and communal.

Punan Bukat Philosophy / World View: 1) Epistemology, logical thinking of Bukat “and other Punan tribes”. 2) Cosmology: creation, the earth, sun, moon, stars, myths, humans, ancestors, spirits, God. 3) Anthropology: ideas about men’s origin and destiny. 4) Psychology: different souls, indestructibility of soul, life after death, deep psychology, dreams. 5) Theodicy, natural knowledge of God. 6) Ethics: high standing ethical concepts, Bukat adat law.

Punan Bukat Religion: “Much will have to be written on this”: a first scientific article in 1977, later, after deepened research, a special book on religion. 1) Theism, belief in God, prayers. 2) Animism, spirits, categories, origin, function, position towards men. 3) Ancestor belief: ancestors as spirits remaining close to and helping men. 4) Magic: white and black.

The Bèö-Belief in Punan Bukat Religion: “An age-old belief of the Bukat and other Punan in omens, which regulates, guides, and rules their lives”. 1) Natural events: earthquakes, solar and lunar eclipses, rainbows, floods, epidemics, etc. 2) Behavior of animals: the sound and/or flight of certain jungle birds and other animals. 3) Human mental dispositions as omens: premonitions, dreams; various signs; reactions to omens; formulas, prayers, ceremonies, sacrifices; continuation or discontinuation of incepted work or endeavors.

Kèap budje ke hawun. The journey of the dead person’s soul to the hereafter among the Punan Bukat: an account of particular value for the history of religions, usually sung during the second night of the wake, before the body is buried on the following day.

The creation story of the Punan Penjawung in the Kreho valley, upper Kapuas, West Borneo: as told by village chief Nji’ap and his brother, adat chief Hirui, in Tessapan; in Penjawung language, with translation and commentary.

¹⁵² Bucher 1976

The death ceremonies among the Punan Penjawung: Project for an article in a scientific journal: photos and tape recordings exist; texts and commentaries to be reviewed in Tessapan.

Training for Bukat priesthood. A Bukat priest's testimony: Project for a small book: personal testimony and life story of Bukat priest Djenahang in Metelunai; 75 pages of text with translation and commentary; to be reviewed with Djenahang, particularly the notes.

Stories, legends, accounts, and myths of the Punan Bekatan in the upper Tawang, East Borneo: Project for a little book; as told by the village chief of the Punan Bekatan; visit not possible on the coming expedition, as the village is too remote from the planned route.

Stories, tales of heroes, accounts, myths, and fairy tales of the Punan Belatung in the Müller Mountains, East Borneo: Project for a little book; told by headman Djuba', Grandmother Ngoron, and others; written down with Djuba'; a bigger book will become possible later.

***The 1977 Erfahrungen in Borneo, 1964-1974*¹⁵³**

This nine-page manuscript includes five short texts, written at the instigation of his brother Theodor, are the only examples of the many research-based texts allegedly collected by Bucher in Borneo which have come to Linder's attention to date. These texts contain samples of native languages. Texts 2 to 5 are accompanied by explanatory footnotes. Texts 2, 3, and 5 relate to music recorded by Bucher (see below).

Der Kopffäger pflegte mich in todesgefährlichen Malariafiebern ["The head-hunter nursed me in deadly dangerous malaria fevers"], 2 pages, dated 19 November; an account of a ten-day bout of bad malaria in 1969; he was nursed by a Howongan chief and former headhunter; the text ends with the sentence: "Because he was a good man, that is why he helped me."

2) *Die magische Kraft des Tanzes der "Puun Mai" vom Mandai-Thal* ["The magical power of the dance of the 'Puun Mai' from the Mandai valley"], 1 page, dated 17 November; at Sulok Howor'ii, a Buhngan village, Langau valley; a legend explaining a recorded melody.

3) *Der wunderbare Gesang der Urwaldvögel Kungkulun, Kungkuan und Korohèhè hilft den Urwaldjägern und -wanderern* ["The wonderful singing of the jungle birds Kungkulun, Kungkuan und Korohèhè helps the jungle hunters and wanderers"], 2 pages, dated 15 November; from Bu'ung; it explains a three-stringed sape' tune recorded by Bucher.

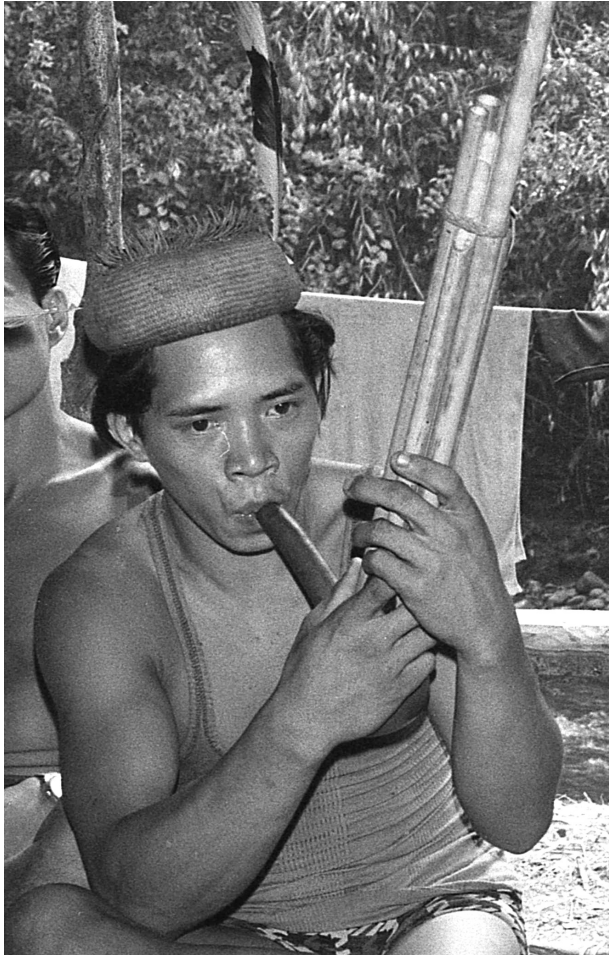
4) *Der Grosse Geist zeigt den Punan-Jägern im Urwald den Weg* ["The Great Spirit shows the Punan hunters the way in the jungle"], 2 pages, dated 15 November; an account of an experience by Penjawung adat chief and priest Hirui from Sulo(k) Tössapan, illustrating Bucher's theses on the power of dreams and the belief in a supreme being.

5) *Die Punan-Vorfahren in den Stromschnellen – "Löluca(k)"* ["The Punan ancestors in the rapids - 'Löluca(k)"], 2 pages, dated 15 November; a Buhngan account of the miraculous power of prayer-dance accompanied by *sapek*, and the origin of the tune *Lelupa'* (*Löluca(k)*), "Wave", recorded after the story was told.

¹⁵³ Bucher 1977

Music Recordings

Bucher claims to have recorded some 300 melodies or “traditional Dayak songs”, copies of which were handed over to government radio stations and tourist bureau officials in Indonesia (we have not contacted these agencies).



Muya, Temungung Dalung's son, playing the mouth organ, Hovongan. Photo: Sellato, 1975

The following was extracted from his notes and reports: 1) Sape(k) [three-stringed lute] of the “Punan and neighboring tribes”; “I could but wonder about the inner beauty and the meditative, contemplative power and radiation of this song”.¹⁵⁴ 2) Lölupa(k) (‘Wave’) tune: magical effects of sape playing and dance “that is like a prayer” (Buhngan);¹⁵⁵ recorded together¹⁵⁶ (n. 6). 3) Kerugung (mouth harp): A spirit asks to learn from a hunter.¹⁵⁷

*Music edition projects*¹⁵⁸

It appears that Bucher had made plans toward the archiving and edition of part of his Borneo music recordings. Whatever products of this project may have been realized seem to be irretrievably lost. Later in life he occasionally discussed effects on his own playing of the music he had heard and recorded on Borneo.

He wrote: Music, songs, and melodies of the Bukat, Penjawung, Howongan, Belatung; copies of existing recordings could be made for storage in an ethnological archive or a library, organized by instruments etc.; for instance eight tapes or cassettes: 1) Bussui of

the Bukat of West and East Borneo; shamanic curing ritual. 2) Monjangan of the Howongan, Belatung, and Penjawung in the upper Kapuas and Müller Mountains. 3) Sape’ tunes (two-stringed “Kayang lute”). 4) Sape’ melodies (three-stringed “Kenyah lute”). 5) Suling tunes (bamboo flute of the Bukat, Howongan, Penjawung, Belatung, etc.). 6) Kororie tunes (mouth organ of the Penjawung, Howongan, Bu’ung, Belatung; *[14]). 7) Tong tunes (Jew’s harp). 8) Satum tunes (four-stringed bamboo harp, only to be found among the Bukat).

¹⁵⁴ Bucher 1977 b, n. 4; 1977 d, n. 4

¹⁵⁵ Bucher 1977 d

¹⁵⁶ I.e., jointly with the performers. This detail, also mentioned elsewhere, shows Bucher’s collegial respect for his informants, whom he credits as co-authors of the recording.

¹⁵⁷ Bucher 1975

¹⁵⁸ Bucher 1976

Bucher apparently also planned to edit two long playing records: one with songs and melodies of the Bukat of West and East Borneo; another with songs and melodies of the Howongan, Bu'ung, Belatung, and Penjawung in the Müller Mountains.

EPILOGUE

As stressed above, given the relatively scant documentation that we have been able to locate, we have at this stage no way to determine what Alois Bucher actually did, or to what extent the vast body of data that he wrote (or said) he collected – field notes, typed reports, photographs, music recordings – actually existed. If, indeed, the famous trunks full of documents do, or did exist, they would contain – or have contained – a true treasure, an incredibly valuable corpus of data on central Borneo's former hunting-gathering groups.

This article is an opportunity to, again, call on this Bulletin's readers who may have information on these documents' whereabouts. They may be forever lost, but we would not be too surprised to learn that some of those trunks were found lying in some dusty archive room next to a church somewhere.

In any case, even the notes excerpted here do possess some interest for concerned scholars. And Alois Bucher's life story, from his small Alpine village and the Schöneck seminary to Fribourg University, and then to the upper Kapuas and to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, certainly is a most fascinating one – a legend, both in Borneo and in Switzerland.

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Kläng, Schrei und Riefbblase und gjuuzed uf " TOR" am 27. Oktober 1987 z Nachd / vom Alois Bucher. Schwyz: Dr. Alois Bucher [professionally produced didactic music cassette, containing a composition consisting of 61 traditional and original numbers (live outdoors recordings of alphorn, büchel, and vocals) and an explanatory leaflet by A.B.].

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BS (Indonesia, 1979-81): B.M. Daryanto, a.k.a Guru Toto (Tanjung Lokang); Drs G. Simon Devung (Samarinda); Jipun (Nanga Enap); Juba' (Belatung); Koeng Bato' (Nanga Enap); Janen (Nanga Enap); Sawing (Nanga Balang); Jemala (Nanga Tepai); Johan Hang Kueng (Samarinda); Sjamsuarni Sjam (Samarinda); Singka (Tanjung Lokang); Father Hermanus Sombroek (Long Pahangai); Roland Spinnler (Jakarta); Umang (Tanjung Lokang); Father Van Vluiten (Putussibau); and various unidentified officials in Samarinda and Tenggarong, as well as a number of unidentified village informants (as a result of group meetings and interviews).