
WHAT IS A KRIS? AND WHERE IS
MALUDU BAY?

Our contemporary the *Times*, ever powerful when right, as it is just now in France, and ever adroit even when wrong, as it has been for a good long while in Borneo, has replied to our animadversion on its inaccuracies respecting the death of the grandson of the poet Burns. The *Times* would have us to understand that a man's head may be chopped off by the single blow of a kris, that is of a dagger, for the kris is only a Malay translation of a dagger, dirk, or poniard. No matter what its modification of form, and every tribe has its own—some of them indeed several—it is ever a thrusting or a stabbing weapon, and never a cutting one. To talk, therefore, of cutting a man's head off with a kris is about as correct as to say that a man was stabbed to the heart with a blunderbuss. The *Times* refers us to the Great Exhibition, where it fancies it saw a weapon called a kris which would have performed the needed decapitation, but we cannot accept the erroneous nomenclature of the Crystal Palace as good evidence.

The evidence for decapitation at a blow with a weapon not made to cut rests on the hearsay testimony of one who was not present. The evidence of those who were eye-witnesses, taken on oath before the English magistrate at Singapore, shows, as might well be expected, that there was no decapitation at all. The chief native officer of the schooner *Dolphin* deposed as follows: "The pirates said, 'these dead bodies throw overboard.' We lifted Mr Burns,—he had one wound across the forehead, one on the neck, and one on the side; he must have been struck from behind, as all the wounds were on the right side. We threw the corpse overboard." The testimony of a steersman is to the very same effect, with the exception that he did not notice the wound in the side.

The natives of the eastern islands have cutting as well as thrusting weapons, corresponding to our swords, cutlasses, and hangers; but these have their specific names. Even the murderers of Mr Burns are described by the sworn depositions of the crew of the *Dolphin* to have had such cutting weapons, called in their language, which is not Malay, *sundang*; but they deposed, also, to their having had *kris*es or daggers. Yet even with the *sundang*, it happened that no head was cut off, although five persons were murdered. The *Times* would include all manner of cutting and thrusting weapons under one category, just as it includes not only *Dyaks*, but natives of the Philippine Islands, the murderers in question, under the common head of *Borneans*. Some of the natives of the Philippines apply the Malay word for a dagger, to a sword; but no native of the Malayan Archipelago ever does so.

The *Times* states that it took its account of the murder of Mr Burns from the *Examiner* of the 17th of January. The account was first published on the 15th in the *Daily News*, and it was simply an abridgement of that account which appeared in this journal. The *Times*, if it had exercised its wonted diligence, ought to have quoted, not from us, or from the *Daily News*, but from its namesake of the Straits of Malacca, in which it first appeared.

The *Times* refers us to the best map, certain that we shall find that Maludu Bay is north-east, and not north of Labuan. We never said that Maludu Bay lay north of Labuan, nor did the *Times* say that it lay north-east of it, for it made no allusion at all to its bearing from the British settlement. The position of Maludu Bay with reference to Labuan was not in question, but only its general position in relation to the whole of Borneo. The actual words of the *Times* which we censured were—"Maludu Bay, a gulf situated at the north-eastern angle of Borneo, some leagues above Labuan." The reference here is to the island of Borneo, not the islet of Labuan. Moreover, neither "above" nor "below" will give the bearing of one place from another, for they are not points of the compass; nor can a vague "some leagues" be construed to mean,—near four degrees of latitude and longitude. Have we not reason to suspect that the *Times*, instead of looking at the best map, did not look at any map at all? Our indictment of the *Times*' article of the 20th of January consisted of five counts, and on the three most important it lets judgment go by default, while it attempts defence only on the two least considerable.
