

The word “Bilaan” could have derived from “bila,” meaning “house,” and the suffix “an,” meaning “people,” so that the term may be taken to mean “people living in houses.” Other terms that have been used to refer to this group are Blaen, Bira-an Baraan, Vilanes, Bilanes. Names such as Tagalagad, Tagakogon, and Buluan have also been used; however, these denote the kind of site where some Bilaan groups were located. The Bilaan inhabit the southern part of South Cotabato and southeastern part of Davao del Sur, as well as the areas around Buluan Lake in North Cotabato. Some Bilaan live on Sarangani Island, off the coast of Davao del Sur, although they are referred to as Sarangani Manobo. Other Bilaan groups on this island have been referred to as Balud or Tumanao. The Bilaan share similarities in culture and physical features with the neighboring Tagacaolo and the Tagabawa. As of 1988, the Bilaan numbered some 250,000.

History

In the 19th century, the Bilaan inhabited the hilly region behind the west coast of Davao Gulf. Their territory extended all the way into Bagobo country to the north and westward into the Davao-Cotabato watershed. Culturally, the Bilaan are related to the Bagobo and the Mandaya as evidenced by pronounced similarities in architecture, clothing, ornamentation, and socioreligious practices. By 1910, the estimated Bilaan population was about 10,000, of whom some 1,500 lived on Sarangani. Because of the mountainous terrain and environment, there was practically no local group organization; houses were separated by long stretches. Whenever there was a neighborhood, the number of houses was small. Over the years, settlers from the Visayan islands came to Mindanao and occupied the coastal plains and foothills on the western coast of the Davao Gulf, which was traditionally part of Bilaan country. Gradually, the Bilaan were pushed deeper back into the interior, without much resistance on their part. In the distant past, the Bilaan were actively engaged in warfare. Along with the Manobo, Mandaya, Bagobo, and Tagacaolo, they had at one time or another reduced their neighbors in southwest Mindanao to the status of tribute-paying “colonies” (Casal 1986:55).

Economy

Swidden farming is the main agricultural method used by the Bilaan. In their rather small clearings, they grow rice, corn, millet, sweet potato, sugarcane, banana, papaya, pineapple, vegetables, tobacco, and abaca. What is left after domestic consumption is brought to the market to be sold. The last two commodities are produced as barter items, for which they get the food articles, utensils, and tools they need. The domestic animals include a few chickens, dogs, cats, and occasionally a pig or horse. The Bilaan fish in the river, and hunt and trap wild pigs, deer, and other animals. They also gather rattan and almaciga from the forest to augment their income.

In recent times, the introduction of foreign articles and goods has had an effect on

traditional ways and values, a phenomenon not uncommon among other groups who come into contact with lowland cultures. For instance, some Bilaan were known to have consented to a barter of seven *ganta* of palay or unmilled rice for a can of sardines, or two sacks of corn for 1 meter of cloth. Unscrupulous traders and merchants have taken advantage of the Bilaan who are not familiar with exchange values in the market.

The Bilaan observe certain rituals for each major stage in the planting of rice; the *mabah* or offering to the deities requesting for omens to help them choose the field for planting; the *abmigo* or clearing of the fields; the *amlah* or planting of the fields; and the *kamto* or harvest of the rice. Each place follows an established pattern.

Before the rains come, a new clearing is chosen for the planting season. Before cutting the first bush, a ritual, the *mabah*, is performed to consult the gods or deities of the fields. Altars, sacrificial animals, and food offerings are prepared to ensure the blessings of the benevolent spirits who may be lurking somewhere in the woods and trees. Forgiveness, for having transgressed their abode, is asked of the malevolent spirits who can cause sickness and crop failure.

In the dead of night, a couple—both farmers—constructs a small bamboo platform with a grass roof and slender post in the middle of the field. Only the two are allowed to perform the *mabah*. Food offerings consist of cooked glutinous rice, fresh meat, fish (when available), betel chew, and fruits. These are arranged on a red cloth on the altar platform. Candles are lighted. These offerings are laid out at night, so that predators such as rats, birds, wild animals, and even human beings will have difficulty locating the future harvest. The first person who passes by the clearing at daybreak is considered lucky, for he/she is given the rice and other goodies to eat. The one who comes in good faith is rewarded. After the man has fulfilled all the obligations to the *diwata* (spirits), he proceeds to ask for a good omen on the choice of the new swidden farm.

Taking four bamboo sticks, each about 60 centimeters long, he chooses a part of the forest where he silently awaits the call of the *almugan* bird. The *almugan*'s call determines whether the place is suitable for good crops or not. It may take a while before he hears the omen call from an *almugan* perched on a tree. When he does, he quickly drives the four sticks side by side into the ground, their ends diagonally pointing towards the source of the call. If he finds that the sticks stand almost vertically, he is sure of harvest that will be tall and bountiful. If the sticks point diagonally too low and almost close to the ground, he should move on to another place and await a more propitious omen. When the place has been identified, he expresses his gratitude to the deities by preparing two sets of chew, one for the gods which he puts on a tree stump, the other for himself.

The man then announces to his neighbors and friends how the *almugan* bird helped him choose his clearing. Now he calls upon them to help him undertake the *abmigo* or clearing a site of shrubs, trees, grass, and underbrush (it is customary for Bilaan farmers to ask the help of others in working new fields). As work progresses, the women come to the *kaingin* site to bring food and water for the men. With the trees felled and the

grass and bush piled up to dry, the farmer starts a ceremonial fire by rubbing two bamboo pieces together. The ritual burning of the branches is called *amtan abmigo*.

The field is now cleared and ready for planting. Musicians carry a whole *tungungo* set to the new field, so that they can play the gongs as accompaniment to the *amlah*, a dance performed while planting. Men use planting sticks called *ahak* to drill holes in the ground, moving quickly forward. Women with *alban* (grain baskets) tucked to their sides follow the men, bending down and accurately dropping several palay seeds in each hole. There are definite patterns or lines followed in planting. Two or three women carrying bigger baskets filled with grains replenish the empty *alban* of the women. All the while the *tungungo* music is being played. Each one works to the rhythm of the music, prancing, skipping, stomping in time with it. Even the musicians dance to the music they create. The burden of work is greatly lightened by this interplay of manual work and music. Before the planters realize it, the entire field has been planted with palay seeds. At the end of the day, the farmers leave. There is no monetary compensation for having helped plant the new field, but each is assured of the same kind of help when their turn comes.

After three or four months of patient wait, the rice grains fatten and ripen. It is now time for the *kamto* (harvest). The women take primary responsibility for this work. They come carrying big baskets on their backs, supported with straps slung around their foreheads. The rice stalks are gathered one by one, using a small hand scythe, and swiftly, effortlessly collected in the baskets. The women always look forward to harvest time because this is the season when other women from neighboring fields or villages come to help in the work. This makes for a grand reunion. The *mdel*, a flat board with a bottom resonator, is pounded simultaneously by three or four men and women who produce a syncopated sound which can be heard in distant villages. It is an invitation for people in those villages to come join the harvest. As compensation, these guest harvesters are paid with palay or other items.

Political System

Bilaan communities are dispersed into small clusters of houses over great distances. This has inhibited the evolution of a central authority system. The long stretch between two river valley settlements never allowed easy communication. Instead of a central authority, what developed was a settlement-based strong local leader. The position is hereditary. A local leader can be succeeded by his son. But if the latter proved to be incapable, someone else, a courageous man known as a *lebe* (“renowned warrior”) who is analogous to the *magani*, *bagani*, or *bahani* in other *lumad* groups, can take his place. In the past, in order to gain the highly prized status of *lebe*, raids were undertaken to take captives for slavery or human sacrifice. The local leader acts as an arbiter in disputes.

Social Organization and Customs

The single, nuclear family is common, but the man who can afford to raise the bride-price can have as many wives as he wishes. Ordinarily, a man below 20 years of age tells his parents about his choice. A preliminary move is made to find out whether the man is acceptable to the prospective bride and her family. When this is ascertained, the bride-price is negotiated, and the marriage celebration is held. The highlight of the ceremony is reached when the man and the woman feed each other. The newlyweds stay with the woman's parents, and after the birth of a child, may decide to have their own house where they can raise their family.

Mutual assistance is characteristic of Bilaan culture, as manifested in the building of a house, clearing of a swidden, and in the formation of an avenging party to exact retribution on aggressors or offenders.

Social control is based mainly on fear of retaliation, hence people are constrained to observe customs and not to stray from correct conduct. In the Bilaan system of judgment and punishment, the thief or unfaithful spouse may be killed, unless he or she is able to return the stolen article, or in the latter case, to come up with appropriate fines for the damages.

The Bilaan call upon their *alamoos* (healer) in times of illness. She is usually a middle-aged woman. Another practitioner on whom they rely is the local midwife.

The Bilaan on the western side of the mountain range in South Cotabato have been influenced by the culture of the Christian settlers, although they have managed to preserve and observe many of their age-old traditions.

The entire Bilaan life cycle—birth, growing up, love and marriage, raising a family, struggling for survival in their swidden world, death—is depicted, recreated, and commemorated in a wealth of rituals that form part of their daily existence.

One of the most important rituals is the *koswo libon*, which encompasses a long period of time, since it involves the entire ritual process beginning with the contract between parents to marry off their babies in the future, to the time the wedding takes place. The first stage of this process is the *aslobok aban* or the exchange of cradles and blankets by the parents. The second is the *ye dayon* or the singing of a love song by the grown-up male to the woman to whom he is engaged. The third is the *astalo*, a ritual performed by the parents of the betrothed. The girl must be 9 or 10 years old, the boy 12 or 13. The *kasfala* (dowry or bride-price) worthy of the girl is then discussed by the contracting parties. Bilaan parents usually prefer an early marriage. At the house of the girl, where the parents discuss wedding arrangements, the young groom sits beside his parents with his head bowed in submission. He observes and listens in silence. He is not allowed to take part in the transactions. He is duty-bound to obey whatever is decided upon by the elders.

Through the *saktad*, a singsong manner of speaking, the two fathers agree on what one is prepared to give and what the other is willing to receive. The bride-price usually

consists of five *agong* (gongs), two water buffaloes, five horses, and two *kumagi* necklaces. Other useful items such as betel boxes, *paes* (bolo), *kabasi* (knives), and bead and gold necklaces are also thrown into the bargain. The girl's parents demand more if they know the boy's parents are well-off and can afford to give more. If the demands are too high and cannot be met, a walkout may ensue. This is prevented from occurring by the intervention of the *bangkulong* or wise man of the village. He asks the girl's parents to lower their demands. He pacifies the boy's parents, and requests them to be patient. After a lengthy period of haggling over demands and counterdemands, the two parties come to an agreement. The *bangkulong* summons the boy's relatives and instructs them to bring the gifts.

The gift giving is called *kafni*. The bride's father and mother inspect the *kasfala*, putting on an air of indifference, displaying dislike for the items. This attitude is expected of the girl's parents. If they show joy or satisfaction right away with the dowry, they would be branded as extremely materialistic and only too glad to sell off their daughter.

After inspecting and scrutinizing each item, the couple return to their seats apparently satisfied. They then boastfully announce that they too have gifts for the boy's parents. Woven *tabi* materials called *binlang* and *lasok*, made from fine abaca fibers and tie-dyed into exquisite designs, are handed over to the parents of the boy. The reciprocation signifies that the bride's parents have not totally "sold" their girl, because there is an actual exchange of gifts, however lopsided. To make the union stronger, the two fathers exchange their bolo while chanting goodwill to each other.

As the negotiations go on, the bride-to-be hides in a makeshift enclosure somewhere inside the house, which does not have any private room. Several women friends and relatives sit with her, keeping her company. She is not allowed to show herself to the crowd. When the day of the wedding is finally set and announced by the *bangkulong*, the people start to be noisy, commenting and laughing, conversing, passing food and betel chew to every one inside the house.

The fourth stage is the *samsung* or the wedding, which takes place usually in the afternoon at the house of the girl. A large mat is laid out in the middle of the sala, with two square pillows covered with expensive *tabi*, for the bride and groom. The girl's family awaits the arrival of the groom's entourage. The groom arrives with his parents, relatives, friends, and other villagers (if he is from another village). They are led by the bride's parents to sit on the mat. The visitors either sit or mill around the house socializing, talking, laughing, and joking about how the newlyweds will fare as husband and wife. Music is played on the *tangungo* and the *faglong* or two-stringed boat-shaped lute to add a festive touch to the cordial air. Other activities in the house continue as usual. The bride sits in one corner, as the other women do much teasing and giggling. The topic of conversation is the *kasfala*, both of this marriage and of marriages past in both families. A *malong*, a piece of expensive *tabi* material, is spread out on the mat, a signal for the groom to walk towards the center of the room (he has been sitting quietly in one corner of the room with some male friends). He is accompanied by two

of his friends. As he sits on one of the pillows, an old Chinese plate with betel chew is set in front of him.

The bride then makes her dramatic entrance. She is to be seen for the first time. There is a commotion in her corner. The bride refuses to leave her corner. Everybody sees her kicking, pushing, fighting, and screaming at her attendants and relatives who forcibly lead her out of the corner. They scold her and tell her to behave like a good girl and do what she is told. Her mother joins in, looks balefully at her, and angrily pulls her daughter from her seclusion. After many tense moments of refusal, persuasion, and physical struggle, the young bride is carried bodily and dumped in her place on the mat. At times the bride attempts a walkout, only to be restrained by her relatives. Crying, she throws a tantrum aimed at the groom and everyone else. Tradition dictates that a bride-to-be must show strong refusal to a wedding. But a nine-year-old about to get her life radically changed by marriage to an equally young groom may in fact be experiencing genuine terror. Her violent reactions eventually subside as the ceremony proceeds. Her fears, however, may not.

The wedding commences as the bangkulong stands behind the couple. He puts their heads together, holds their long hair, and ties them into a knot, symbolizing union. Uttering incantations, he parts them halfway and passes between them, as he prays, "May this union be blessed and no sickness befall them." As the couple sits in silence, they are exhorted to be faithful to one another, live happily as husband and wife, and accept the responsibilities of raising a new family. The homily done, the bangkulong motions the groom to stand and put his right foot on the left shoulder of his bride, leaving it there for a few seconds. Then he sits again. The bride likewise stands and puts her left foot on the right shoulder of her groom. But instead of resting her foot, she gives him a kick, and dejectedly drops back to her seat. This act of defiance makes everyone laugh and joke. "She's really still a child, but in time she will learn," they usually say.

The bangkulong prepares two sets of betel chew from the ingredients on the plate, and gives one each to the couple. The tangungo rises to a crescendo, signalling the start for everyone to perform the *maral* (generic name for all Bilaan dances). The visitors are expected to dance. The newlyweds are helped up so they can join in the festivities. The groom executes a unique dance sequence in imitation of a rooster pursuing his ladylove. One by one, the dancers get tired and stop. Soon, the visitors leave, and the newlyweds are left to start a new life together.

There are two important rituals related to death and burial, *narong* and *asfuk tu falame el*. *Narong* is a death ritual which includes the preparation of the corpse, activities accompanying the wake, and the final disposal of the body. The Bilaan, by tradition, keep their dead for no longer than 24 hours. Embalming is not familiar to them, so the corpse is disposed of as early as possible. There are cases, however, of bodies being kept for as long as two to three weeks, as a show of deep attachment, despite the great discomfort of having to live with a decomposing body.

While all Philippine groups have unique practices in their death rituals, the Bilaan probably stand out for the unusual ritual of “ambushing” and “stealing” a corpse as it is being carried by relatives and villagers to its final resting place. During the “ambush,” relatives attempt to grab, pull away, and hide the body from the other grieving relatives. This is supposed to be a manifestation of their love for the departed, to show how much they want the person to stay longer with them. In the process, the corpse may be torn apart and dismembered, but this is done in the name of filial piety. After this show of affection, the body is rolled in a mat, bundled, and hoisted up a branch of the tallest tree available, there to hang and decompose with time. Some would prefer the corpse to be laid in a nest on a treetop, away from pests and carrion-eating animals. The tree burial brings the dead closer to heaven, making it easier for the gods to welcome their spirits. A less popular way to dispose of the corpse is burying it in natural cracks of big tree trunks, where it is inserted standing up. Rocks and stones are used to seal the hole, and a bamboo fence surrounds the trunk as a warning, and as a sign that the place is hallowed.

Asfuk tu falame el is the postburial ritual performed on the river bank a week after interment. All the relatives of the dead gather for this event. They go down to a designated place on the river bank, wearing their finest clothes with matching body accessories. The *alamoos* (female shaman) anoints everyone present, with flowers of young betel nut and *palong-manok* (rooster's crown) dipped into the waters of the river. The *alamoos* moves from one person to the next, striking them on the feet, knees, legs, arms, torso, shoulders, and head, all the while supplicating the gods and asking that they return the strength of body and mind lost during the ordeal of losing and burying a loved one. She prays that no one in the family dies again. After the ritual, the relatives and friends of the dead head for the home of the bereaved family, where food and music await them.

Religious Beliefs and Practices

The Bilaan who live in the forested areas of Davao and Cotabato are called *kapil* or pagan by the people of Cotabato. In truth, however, their religious beliefs are characteristic of pre-Spanish folk religion. The Bilaan are monotheistic in the sense that they believe that there is but one supreme being ruling the cosmos. They also believe in the existence of the soul which upon leaving the body causes illness and death. Their concept of heaven or *kaluwalhatian* is under the earth. *Kaluwalhatian* has no space for planting rice or processing abaca. It is also a place where the chasing of deer is not allowed (Cuasay 1975:55).

Because of intermarriages, some Bilaan have today become Christians or Muslims (Cuasay 1975:56).

Architecture and Community Planning

The rugged terrain of Bilaan country requires that houses be built far apart, even when they form a compound or settlement. Houses are erected on shoulders of mountains, on stilts some 3.6 meters above the ground, and usually provided with a single notched log

for a ladder. This is lodged against the landing or the lowest platform of the house.

The Bilaan house is invariably found very near the swidden fields and is built with stilts which can be as high as 7 meters, with the flooring laid along 2 to 5 planes or levels, a few centimeters between each other.

The details of the Bilaan house may be gleaned from a description made by Cole in 1913:

Small hardwood poles about twenty feet long form the uprights to which the side beams and crossbeams are lashed. In the center of each end beam are smaller sticks, tied to form the king posts. From the ridgepole, small timbers extend to the side beams to form the framework on which is laid the formal topping of flattened bamboo. This roof is of one pitch, and overhangs the walls at the sides by about a foot. Twelve feet above the ground, other poles are lashed to the uprights. On these rest the cross timbers of the floor. These, in turn, are covered with broad strips of bark. The sidewalls extend up to the roof.

In a corner of this house one finds the cooking place, with its complement of baskets and utensils, gourds filled with grains, salt or ground pepper. On the walls of the interior are hung spears and shields and other weapons. For girls engaged in weaving, side rooms are provided for their looms.

An outer platform is sometimes placed halfway up the high stilts. This is where things are kept to dry under the sun. This is also where one finds the *dancalan*, a wooden plate with a handle, used in chopping meat. Under the house, there are usually cages or pens for horses, pigs, and dogs. Around the house, sharply pointed bamboo poles are dug into the ground. In the past these were effective defenses against interlopers, but are today useful in catching stray wild pigs.

Visual Arts and Crafts

Both men and women wear abaca cloth for the top and bottom pieces. The women's blouse is heavily decorated with embroidery, beads, and buttons. The women may also wear necklaces, anklets, and numerous tiny bells hanging around their waistline. There may also be some aromatic root or fragrant flower decorating their waist piece. The men's jackets are sometimes more ornately decorated than the women's. They wear their tight-fitting trousers kneelength. A long red sash is wound around their waist several times and is worn especially during certain social gatherings.

Men and women shave their eyebrows, file or cut their incisors, and blacken these together with their tongues. The men practice tattooing of arms, legs, chest, and back, and some still wear their hair long.

Like the Manobo and the Tboli, the Bilaan use soft thin strips of bamboo for weaving

two-tone baskets (black and natural) in varying sizes: personal carrying baskets hung from the shoulder or larger ones which serve as containers for their crops. Another type of basket for which both Bilaan and Bagobo are known is the wild chicken trap, “an implement that most men in these groups would possess” (Lane 1986:192). The actual trap or snare consists of a series of small loops made of long, thin, flexible, and braided rattan strips. They are set on the ground by means of three stakes that have carved finial on top. A woven looped rattan chain secures the prey to the stake, once it takes to the bait. This wild chicken trap usually goes with another kind of basket: a small backpack that a hunter carries when he goes to the forest. A small bamboo internode is sometimes fitted into it for carrying bait, such as seeds, ground corn, or grain. Elaborately carved wooden supports, feathers, horsehair, and small bells sometimes decorate this backpack.

Literary Arts

The legends and myths of the Bilaan are told in the form of tales and narrative songs. One of the most popular stories has been recorded by Mabel Cook Cole (1916). It tells the story of Melu the Supreme Being and the creation. In the beginning of time, four beings and a bird occupied an island no larger than a hat. These were Melu, Fiuweigh, Diwata, Saweigh, and the bird Buswit, who was sent across the world in search of new things. Buswit eventually returned with the following items: a handful of soil, a piece of rattan, and a fruit. From the soil, Melu fashioned the earth. From the seeds of the fruit, which he planted into the earth, he made trees, which filled the earth with more trees, rattan, and fruits. But something was amiss, thought the four beings, who finally decided to create people. Wax was used in the first instance, but was discovered to melt when brought to the fire. Soil was then used, and all was well except for a mistake made by one of the beings: the noses were fashioned upside down. Melu advised one of his companions of the danger to the people if their noses were left that way. His companion refused the advice. Melu took the opportunity when he wasn't looking to turn their noses the other side up. In his haste, the root of the nose was left with a mark, which can be seen today (Eugenio 1982:32-33).

The Bilaan have a collection of tales making up the epic which they call *Kaltulos*. These have not yet been recorded, and are known only by narrators from a fast disappearing generation. The *Kaltulos* is an epic about the exploits and deeds of great warriors in the tribe's ancient past. One of the tales in this long narrative is *the* “Flalok Kafay” (Story of Kafay), which recounts the adventures of the god-hero Kafay. The tale is narrated in a singsong manner by a few gifted old men and women of the village who have mastered names, events, places of great importance in the tribe's history. They thus earn the respect and admiration of the Bilaan who listen intently and with awe to their rendition of Bilaan oral history and heroic genealogies. Aside from the mythological Kafay, other heroes sung about are Bagis, Maranyal Tumalong, Langanay, Lilyangay, Ulya Siliman, and many others.

Among the narrative songs of the Bilaan are the following (Pfeiffer 1975:150): the

flalok to sawa (story of men and names of places), a series of different stories told in the evenings to entertain visitors, or when sung during harvest time, to help the harvesters forget the heat and fatigue and make them work faster and more vigorously; the *flalok*, a song about Datu Dilam Alfo Libon who lives in a grove of *limbahon* (a type of coconut), describing his house and comparing it to the moon floating in the sky, and recounting how the Datu and his warriors were attacked and how they fought back; the *flalok dawada*, a narrative which may last the entire night, and composed of four short songs, all of them legends; the *tamfang*, which refers to the name of a legendary brave warrior, and tells about his going off to war and his exploits; the *maglibon*, a legend in song, which tells of a very beautiful woman who lived in a house on a hill overlooking the sea, and of the many marvels that one may find in her enchanting house.

There are also songs with improvised texts, sung to traditional melodies, such as the *komokon*, which is a song that tells why the singer has come down from the mountains, or *dalmondon*, which is sung by a boy singer describing the recording session (i.e., the recording of the song). And then there are the lullabies, such as the *almalanga*, which has no words but only syllables that mean nothing in particular, akin to the “la la la” and similar forms.

Performing Arts

The Bilaan use musical instruments extensively with their rituals and dances. The instruments run the full range of idiophones (percussions), zithers (bamboo tubes with strings), chordophones (wooden lutes), and aerophones (flutes and reeds).

The *odol* percussion instrument is a wooden sonorant plank made of molave. This is also known to the Manobo and Tagacaolo groups of southern Davao. It produces drumlike rhythms when it is used to accompany the dance which is part of the odol performance. In the old days, the odol was an indispensable part of celebrations welcoming victorious warriors on their return. It would usually be played by female musicians. A player, holding two pieces of wood in her hands, squats in front of the wooden plank, pounding out an ostinato of beats with a steady tempo. Two dancers, wearing strings of belts around their colorful costumes, wrists, and ankles, dance around the odol plank in a proud, erect, and dignified manner. From time to time, they tap the ends of the plank with their wooden wands (Pfeiffer 1975:143).

The tangungo is a set of eight metal gongs hung on a harness, in contrast to the Maranao kulintang which usually has eight gongs of graduated sizes, laid out on a horizontal platform. The set consists of seven small-sized gongs, which produce a running melody, with the eight and biggest gong playing in syncopation to the rest to produce a particular rhythm. Another kind of gong played separately is called *falimak*, which is of medium size and made of cast iron. The *kubing* or jew's harp is known by the same name among the Bilaan, Bagobo, Bukidnon, Maguindanao, Mansaka, and Subanon. As with all other bamboo idiophones of this type, it uses a thin bamboo filament attached to the body, which is vibrated by plucking with the finger.

Several stringed instruments are played by the Bilaan. The *kitara* is a four-stringed plucked lute, carved out of a single piece of wood. It is not played chordally or with several fingers of the left hand pressing down simultaneously on various parts of the fingerboard, and with the right hand sounding multiple strings at one time; instead, the player performs in a rapid melodic style, plucking out a distinct melody from the strings. The kitara is either played solo, in which case a programmatic title for a specific occasion is given to the piece played, or as an accompaniment for songs of courtship.

The *diwagay* is a one-stringed bowed lute, also called a “spike fiddle,” which is known as kagut among the Manobo and *kotet* among the Subanon.

The faglong, also known as *kuglong*, *hagalong*, *kutyapi*, is a two-stringed boat-shaped lute. Its two strings are of metal, with one played as a drone, and the other strummed to produce a melody using the pentatonic scale.

The *sluday* or *sloray* is a polychordal bamboo tube zither having an anhemitonic pentatonic tuning, on which melodic patterns are repeated over long periods. (This is the same instrument known as *tangkol* to the Bukidnon, *takol* to the Mansaka, *saluray* to the Ata, and *tangko* to the Mangguangan.)

The most common wind instrument is the *finagtong*, a short bamboo flute with five finger holes.

Apart from the odol ceremony, the Bilaan have dance dramas and dance rituals which depict their customs and traditions. An important, and probably the longest dance drama is the series of dances depicting the different stages of rice planting, which enacts to music the stages already described, namely: the mabah or plea for the gods to help a farmer choose the field to clear; the abmigo or clearing of the field; the amlah or planting of the rice; and the kamto or harvest of the rice. The *admulak* is a dance depicting bird hunting with bow and arrow. The thick rainforests of Bilaan country is haven to many kinds of birds and game. In this dance drama, three hunters hide under an *amlat* (bird shelter) built under trees of thick foliage, where birds flock to feed and rest. To provide tempo, a faglong player describes in song the movements of the dancers. All performers use a uniform dance step to keep in tune with the faglong, as they mime the movement of hunters. They look up at the big trees, discussing the source of the calls. They set thin arrows on their bows, slowly creeping towards a more propitious place, in order to conceal themselves while intently listening to bird sounds. Seeing birds alight, the group becomes spirited. A Bilaan standing at a distance imitates birdcalls, as he cups his hands around his mouth. Alerted and assured of a prey, the dancers crawl to a vantage position, arrows steadied on their bows now oriented towards the source of bird calls. A hunter shoots an arrow, and downs a bird. There is excitement as they scuffle for the catch. The bird is actually a bundle of dried leaves thrown in by a spectator at a given signal.

Traditionally, whoever shoots down the first bird must cook and eat it without sharing the catch with his companions. This is said to ensure a bountiful hunt. In the dance drama, the two unsuccessful hunters enviously look on as their comrade eats his catch. Suddenly, the latter gets an upset stomach, flails about, contorts, doubles over, writhes in pain, and throws up. His confused and frightened companions try to comfort him, then rush back to the village to fetch the alamoos.

The *amti* is a dance drama on fishing, which depicts a river fisher going through his daily routine of setting traps. His dance weaves around the choice of spots where he can set his *bubo* traps, where to spread dried banana leaves for his shelter, how to lure fish into his traps, and where to sprinkle the poison sap extracted from the roots of the tubli plant.

The fisher's trap movements are mimicked step by step in the dance sequence: the setting of traps, luring of the fish towards them, poisoning, and inspecting the catch. He builds a fire to warm himself. Then he goes to the water and catches an elusive fish between his legs. He skewers the fish and cooks it over the fire. Finally, he collects his catch in a side basket and happily dances away with the *bubo* over his shoulders and his fish in the basket.

The *muhag sugon* is a dance drama on gathering honey. The Bilaan woodlands abound with beehives. Honey is a delicacy among the people and is gathered by many Bilaan men. The dance drama *muhag sugon* unfolds with a man moving about in a walk-dance sequence. He looks around constantly, searching for a beehive. He is strumming a *faglong*, the music fast and melodic, soft but audible. His movements are small, monotonous, predictable, and are as soft as the music he plays. He spots a beehive, represented by a piece of *tabi*, an abaca cloth tied in a bundle. He strums the *faglong* faster, indicating glee. His dance steps accordingly become more expansive. He leaps here, skips there, as he comes closer and closer to the beehive. Putting down his *faglong*, he pulls out two pieces of bamboo sticks, and starts a fire by rubbing them vigorously against each other. He lights up a torch made from dried fiber and leaves, and smokes out the bees from their hive. He picks up his *faglong*, hurriedly tears off pieces of the hive and proceeds to sip the honey. He does this several times. Then the bees come back and attack him, making him drop the hive. He runs, slapping his body all over to drive the bees away. More beestings make him run faster. Mustering enough courage, he goes back to retrieve the beehive and runs home, still slapping off the bees and picking the dead ones off his skin.

Another dance is the *asbulong* which depicts a healing ritual. The *asbulong* is officiated by the alamoos, also known as *malong*, usually female, who dances around the sick person, shouts incantations, and brandishes a handful of leaves and flowers. With these, she occasionally strikes the sick person's forehead, arms, torso, legs and feet. At times she holds his arms, and pulls him up in an effort to revive him. Putting down the plants, she squats on one side of the sick and extends her left arm over his chest. At this point, the alamoos is prepared to determine whether her patient will live or die. With a *dangkal* (span of her right palm), she measures her extended left arm from

shoulder to middle-finger tip. Usually, she gets three to three and a half dangkal, depending on her palm span. If her last dangkal goes beyond her left hand's middle finger, her patient will live. The extra finger length signifies a new lease on life. But if her last dangkal lands squarely at the tip of her middle-finger, it means the sick is going to die, unless sacrifices, offerings, and prayers are immediately made to the divinities and life-giving deities. The music of the faglong, which has been playing all the time, is slowly drowned by the music of the tangungo which is now played to a frenzy.

While the shaman is measuring life, 4 to 5 young women nervously dance behind her, their fingers stiffly stretched, their hands moving from side to side while they skip and bounce from left to right. The moral support they lend strengthens the healing powers of the alamoos. Menfolk bring two altars with offerings in front of the sick. The first is called maligay, a single bamboo pole 1 meter tall, festoned with elaborate bamboo skewers, which feature layered shavings made by delicately whittling, without removing, the outer skin of the stick. The shavings are formed like flowers at the top. Guava, makopa, and other fruits of the season, as well as fillets of meat and fish, are placed on the sharp ends of the skewers. The second is called sapak (a bamboo pole 1.3 meters tall). Its top is split into eight parts, pried open into the shape of a funnel, on which an antique blue and white china is firmly set. Offerings of cooked rice and betel chew are also set down nearby.

Faglong and tangungo music continues to be played during the healing ritual, creating an atmosphere of merriment. Feeling she has done all she can to heal the sick and fatigued by the whole process, the alamoos motions to some men to help her lift the sick. The tangungo strikes a lilting melody, making everybody move in quick animated fashion. Food and betel chew from the maligay and sapak altars are given to the sick. Though weak and unable to stand unaided, he is forced to walk and take slow dance steps. Seeing no improvement in his condition, more food is administered to him by the alamoos. Other participants help themselves to the altar food. Feeling well or not, the patient slowly swaggers and staggers into the dance. With great effort he tries to follow the tempo, falling and stumbling along the way. But his participation is supposed to signify that the power of prayer and incantation has alerted the diwata and has helped to cure the sick. • E. Maranan/F. Prudente/R. Obusan with notes from E.A. Manuel/
Reviewed by S.K. Tan

References

Casal, Gabriel S. *Kayamanan: Ma'i - Panoramas of Philippine Primeval*. Manila: Central Bank of the Philippines and Ayala Museum, 1986.

Cole, Fay-Cooper. *The Wild Tribes of Davao District, Mindanao*. Field Museum of Natural History Publication 170. Anthropological Series, Vol. XII, No. 2. Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1913.

Cole, Mabel Cook. *Philippine Folk Tales*. Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1916.

Cuasay, Pablo M. *Kalinangan ng Ating mga Katutubo*. Quezon City: Manlapaz Publishing Company, 1975.

Dacanay Jr, Julian E. *Ethnic Houses and Philippine Artistic Expression*. Manila: One-Man Show Studio, 1988.

Demetrio, Francisco, Gilda Cordero-Fernando, and Fernando Zialcita. *The Soul Book*. Quezon City: GCF Books, 1991.

Eugenio, Damiana L., ed. *Philippine Folk Literature: An Anthology*. Quezon City: Folklore Studies Program and The University of the Philippines Folklorists Inc., 1982.

Landor, A. Henry Savage. *The Gems of the East: Sixteen Thousand Mile Research Travel Among Wild and Tame Tribes*. New York: Harper and Brothers Publications, 1904.

Lane, Robert. *Philippine Basketry: An Appreciation*. Manila: Bookmark Inc., 1986.

Llamzon, Teodoro A. *Handbook of Philippine Language Groups*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1978.

Pfeiffer, William R. *Music of the Philippines*. Dumaguete City: Silliman Music Foundation Inc., 1975.