

The Livunganen-Arumanen Manobo tribe is found in the province of North Cotabato. According to the Manobo of North Cotabato, the term “Manobo” derives from the native term *minovo* or *minobo* which means “person” or “people.” The word may also have been derived from “Banobo,” the name of a creek that flows to Pulangi River, about two kilometers south of Cotabato City. The northern Cotabato Manobo say that their ancestors settled along the Banobo and later in the 15th century fled up this river using vinta (sailboats) to avoid forced conversion to Islam. This exodus might be the historical basis for the events recounted in the prologue to the Livunganen-Arumanen epic *Ulahingan*. Another theory is that the term Manobo comes from “Mansuba” or “river people” (Blumentritt 1901).

The Livunganen-Arumanen Manobo belong to the original proto-Philippine or proto-Austronesian people who came from south China thousands of years ago, earlier than the Ifugao and other terrace-building peoples of northern Luzon. The term “Proto-Manobo” was coined to designate this stock of aboriginal non-Negritoid people of Mindanao. The first Manobo settlers lived in northern Mindanao: Camiguin, Cagayan, and the areas of Bukidnon and Misamis Oriental. There are at least 19 Manobo languages and major dialects. Other sources claim there are 21, including the Bagobo, Tboli, and Ubo groups.

The Livunganen-Arumanen are concentrated in the barrios of the Libungan municipality in the western part of North Cotabato. They share a common history and culture with another western Manobo group, also called the Arumanen (also referred to as the Ilianon Manobo), concentrated in the Arakan Valley, North Cotabato. According to Elkins (1966), the Arumanen of Arakan Valley and the Livunganen-Arumanen were originally from Aruman, now a barangay of the municipality of Carmen, North Cotabato. According to legend, however, famine drove the Arumanen out, and most of them eventually settled in what is now the barangay of Borongis in Libungan municipality. Some spread out to neighboring Pigcawayan and Carmen and are now called the Livunganen-Arumanen or simply the Arumanen. Although the Livunganen-Arumanen and the Arakan-Arumanen/Ilianon Manobo are now considered separate groups, the languages they speak are mutually intelligible in spite of dialect differences. In 1977, there were a total of 240 Arumanen families or 1,200 people living in Libungan, 40 percent of whom were in Barongis and the rest scattered in the sitios and other Livungan barangays, such as Pigcawayan, Midsayap, and Carmen. Barongis, the center of the Arumanen population, is bordered by Melitueveg River in the east, Libungan River in the west, barangays Makulintang in the north and Sinapangan in the south.

Economy

The Livunganen-Arumanen’s major means of subsistence are food gathering and swidden agriculture. The men build houses, hunt, fish, trap, and fell trees in preparation for clearing the fields. They hunt pigs, deer, chicken, and various kinds of fowl with traps, spears, bows and arrows, and hunting dogs. They catch fish with

baskets, hook and line, nets, traps, and spears, and gather honey in the forest. They are expected to defend their settlement, a task which was important before World War II, when they were engaged in much intertribal fighting.

Women bear a great part of the burden of work. They clear the fields, plant, weed, and harvest. They make earthen pots, weave, sew, and embroider. They do all the household work, including heavy chores such as drawing water, often from sources far from the house. They take care of the children and serve guests.

Political System

The head of the whole Livunganen-Arumanen tribe is the *timuay* or *datu* who calls the people to meetings (*timuay* can also refer to the meeting place). In earlier times, the *timuay* was obliged to acknowledge the authority of the ruling Maguindanao sultan, to whom he had to pay tribute of rice and forest products once or twice a year. In return he received bolo, axes, salt, and clothing, among others.

The *timuay* is chosen for certain qualities and does not inherit his position. A prospective leader should know the traditional laws and customs of the tribe. He should be able to lead his people in war but must also be kind and hardworking. He is preferably married; if single, his family is expected to do all the household work that a Livunganen *timuay*'s wife normally does, especially preparing and serving the *batuung* (special food) for festive or religious occasions. He is the arbiter and judge in matters of dispute between tribal members. In the past, there was a *saliling* (alternate *timuay*) who took over when the *timuay* was unable to fulfill his duties, due, for instance, to illness. During the American colonial period, the last traditional *timuay* was replaced by an appointed official, first designated as the "head," then the "barrio lieutenant," and finally the "barangay captain." In 1974, however, the Mindanao Highlanders Association held an assembly at Barongis and restored the position of *timuay*. The *timuay* is now expected to possess the traditional qualities and the characteristics required of a modern political leader, i.e., he must be highly educated, respected by government institutions and officials, and open to ideas for the social and economic development of his tribe. Tribal members go to him for advice or to seek representation in government. He is expected to work with the *pekilukesen*, the council of elders that advises him.

The *pekilukesen* recommends decisions to the *timuay*, who approves them. It also decides when to hold the *bulangan* (the annual harvest festival). It functions within a smaller sphere, for there is a *pekilukesen* in every barangay. Aside from advising the *timuay*, it also intercedes for village members, passes on the tribal laws and customs, arranges marriages, and chooses the *timuay*.

The Arumanen word for law or legal code is *kukuman*. There are four kinds of codes covering Arumanen life. The *kukuman te mehinged* (civil code) preserves harmony among community members. For example, it forbids anyone from chopping

down trees that are at least 1.7 meters tall and outside a person's property. To do otherwise is to show malice against the community and the occupants of the house near the tree. A fine of three articles, such as a bolo, chicken, and clothing, is imposed on the culprit.

The *kukuman te suriman* (code of ethics) maintains proper behavior among the people. For example, a man meeting a woman (of any civil status) on the street must step to the left and allow the woman to pass to his right. To do otherwise indicates malice toward the woman, and he must pay a maximum of 15 household articles. Another ethical code stipulates that it is not proper for a man to enter the house of a woman when her husband is out. Otherwise, the husband can demand a retribution of brass and cloth.

The *kukuman te bunu* (criminal code) states that under no circumstances is killing justified. The penalty is one carabao plus articles to be paid to the aggrieved family.

The *kukuman te esei* (marriage code) forbids elopement and imposes punishment on the offending man even if the elopement is instigated by the woman. If a younger sister is engaged ahead of her older sister, her fiance must pay her parents one carabao.

Social Organization and Customs

The traditional social structure consisted of five classes: the ruling class, the *walian* (shaman), the warrior, the commoner, and the slave. In earlier times, the Maguindanao sultan conferred the ranks of nobility. The *walian*, who can be either male or female, were village priests and healers. They interpreted dreams and omens, foretold the future, and healed the sick with herbal medicine and elaborate mystic rites. During these rites they were invariably possessed by the *diwata* or spirits. Their powers were either inherited or conferred upon them by the spirits. In the past, Arumanen warriors defended the community and engaged in battle. The commoners were farmers. The slaves seized in raids belonged to the ruler. The warrior and slave classes no longer exist.

The *talaulahingan*, the singer of the Livunganen-Arumanen epic called *Ulahingan*, enjoys a special status conferred upon him by one *diwata*—the muse of epic poetry.

Certain rites and customs attend the significant stages in the Arumanen's life, such as childbirth, courtship, marriage, and death. After childbirth, the placenta is placed in a basket, which is hung at arm's reach from a tree. The *walian*, with the consent of the grandparents, names the infant three days later. If the child is sickly, its name is changed. When the child is three months old, the parents and grandparents sprinkle chicken blood on its forehead and palms to ward off evil spirits. A baby boy is given a spear or bolo.

The onset of puberty used to be marked by the girl wearing the *malung* (tubular

skirt) for the first time and the boy, his first pair of trousers.

Courtship involves much circumlocutory language, especially when the man declares his intentions, and during negotiations for the bride-price. The man sends his spokesperson, called *ad-ugpu*, to notify the woman's parents of his wish to call on them. During the visit, the *ad-ugpu* of both parties conduct the negotiations for the dowry, which may consist of carabaos, brass gongs, heirloom articles, and several cavans of rice. The dowry size depends upon the woman's position in the family, the eldest and the youngest commanding the highest price.

A man may also conduct his own courtship by offering the woman's parents food products, betel chew, firewood, and a period of service. An opportunity to publicly declare his affections is a big gathering like a festival, wedding, or funeral wake. The man sings of or declaims on the beauty and virtue of the woman and hints at her identity by poetically alluding to her place of residence, since he is forbidden to mention her name. The woman cannot reply to the man, but an older female relative replies with a challenge for the man to prove his love with acts of gallantry and wisdom, such as gathering honey from the tallest tree, clearing a seven-hectare field, and reciting the tribal laws. A more daring man might bury a love potion at the foot of the ladder of the woman's house on a Friday afternoon. If she steps on it as she comes down the steps, she will fall under his spell when he visits her sleeping room two nights later. In a betrothal ceremony, the boy's parents offer a spear to the girl's parents. The marriage arrangements, however, are done when the children come of age. When the husband dies, his family can choose a new spouse for his widow, who cannot refuse the match. A widower, however, is free to choose his next wife. The father, or in his absence, the eldest son, is the head of the family. The extended family includes the grandparents, uncles, aunts, and in-laws. When a person dies, all the clothes in the house are hung on a clothesline strung over the body. The spirit of the deceased takes them into the afterworld. The coffin is a log cut lengthwise in half, with the upper half serving as cover. The man is buried facing the east so he can work on his farm at sunrise. The woman is buried facing the west so she can gather food before sunset.

Mourners returning home from the funeral spit on the fire near the entrance of the house. They try to put out the fire so that the spirit of the dead will not see them in the dark. On the third day, they place a meal on the stairs for the soul. Footprints left on the ashes spread over the steps of the ladder are evidence that the soul has come and gone. During the mourning period, there is much music and dancing, although the sound of the *agung* (brass gong) is prohibited.

Religious Beliefs and Practices

The Livunganen believe in one supreme *diwata* called *Kerenen*, whom they address in prayer in several ways. He is *Midlimbag*, the creator of the world; *Megbeveya*, its ruler; *Memintaran*, the people's guiding light; *Misuara*, the "voice and giver of

different languages and ways of speaking.” When he is referred to in the third person, he is Alataala (sacred or holy). He lives in the “seventh heaven” far enough not to smell human odor, which offends him.

On the second plane of the cosmological hierarchy are six male diwata, called *katulusan*: the Diwata te Idsila or Tsilaan (god of the east), who controls sunrise; Diwata te Lambungan (god of the west) who controls sunset; Diwata te Belengkayen (god of the north) and Diwata te Belevahan (god of the south), who hold the world steady between them to prevent floods and control the direction of typhoons and rains; the Diwata te Udtuwan (god of the zenith), who holds up the heavens; and the Diwata te Insanal (god of the base of the world), who is tinier than “the pupil of one’s eye” but “holds the goldenpillar of the world in the palm of his right hand.” An earthquake occurs when he cleans the pillar (Maquiso 1977:25).

On the third plane are four sets of lower diwata. The first set consists of the diwata of agriculture and food: Ivebasuk (god of the kaingin and farm tools), Kelayag (god of plants), Pemarey (god of grains), Pemanlew (god of palm trees), Kalamkalam (god of root crops), and Mehumenay (god of wildlife). The second set of diwata consists of Lelawag or Pengalap (god of animals), Yakan (god of wild pigs), Peneyangan (god of the bees), and Alimugkat (goddess of fish and the waters), the only female diwata in this set. She is half-woman, half-fish, has long golden hair, and lives in a golden palace under the sea.

On the fourth plane are the diwata which control the course of human life: Undi or Yayawag (goddess of fate), Kahrang (goddess of love), Penewamuk or Penennemuk (god of good fortune and wealth), and Kakum (god of justice and law).

On the fifth plane are the diwata of trouble: Mengilala (god of war), Tuhawa (god of death), and Inanit (goddess of evil).

The lowest class of diwata, called *inggaib*, consists of evil or mischievous spirits, called the *busaw*, and the helpful but naughty spirits who live in trees, springs, cliffs, houses, rivers, brooks, and the like.

The walian uses two important items in rituals: betel chew and the blood of a white chicken. The betel chew is offered to the spirits and the blood is sprinkled on the object that the shaman is blessing. To ensure a good harvest, for instance, chicken blood is sprinkled on the seeds. An important thanksgiving ritual practiced by all North Cotabato Manobo is the Bulangan Festival, which is held at the timuay. The Livunganen hold theirsat Barongis.

Illness occurs when the person is being punished by ancestral spirits or by a diwata, or when the person’s soul temporarily leaves the body. The walian diagnoses the illness by consulting with the spirits which instruct through possession. The walian is then able to treat the sick with rituals and herbal medicine.

It is believed that when a person is on the brink of death, the soul, which has wandered away from the body, comes upon a big baliti tree, the trunk of which the soul taps. If a leaf falls while the sap is flowing, the person will die soon; if not, the person will recover.

The afterworld is divided into *suruga* (heaven) and *nereka* (hell). It is believed that the soul initially goes to *kelenganen*, where its final destination—*suruga* or *nereka*—is decided.

In 1920, a sect called the Langkat was founded by a walian, who claimed to be the intermediary between the spirits and the people. Today most Livunganen have retained their traditional beliefs and practices, although a significant number have become Langkat. Some are Evangelical Christians.

Visual Arts and Crafts

The traditional clothing of the Livunganen is a fine example of Manobo embroidery art. Blue, white, yellow, and black geometric shapes and conventional designs based on objects in their environment, are embroidered against a bright or dark red background. Abaca fiber, dyed by the ikat process, was the main clothing material until it was replaced by cotton. The women wear the malung, which is folded in front with the upper corner tucked securely at the waist. Linear or checkered designs in multicolored threads are inwoven. If cotton trade cloth is bought, big floral designs are preferred. The blouse is V-necked, tight fitting, and long sleeved. The embroidery runs along the neckline and the edges of the sleeves. Geometric designs consist of horizontal lines, zigzags, and shapes such as circles, triangles, and trapezoids.

The Arumanen wear anklets with about 15 tiny slit bells. Several layers of bead necklaces draped from the upper chest to the upper neck, disks hanging from slits in their earlobes, and toe and finger rings.

The men wear loose trousers reaching to just below the knee. A drawstring at the waist holds them up. The lower part of the trousers is thickly embroidered with similar designs as the women's clothing. The jacket reaches down to the waist, has tight, long sleeves, and is closed in front. The embroidery work is also similar to that on the women's blouses. Strands of nito vine are braided to make tight-fitting leglets called *tikes* (bands of manhood).

Both men and women used to sport tattoos on their wrists, arms, chest, and legs. Women's calves, and sometimes their whole legs, used to be elaborately tattooed. Except for the addition of conventional designs like crocodiles, stars, and leaves, tattoo designs were of the same type as those used in embroidery. Nowadays, the practice of tattooing has largely disappeared.

Some still file their teeth with sharp stones and blacken them with the sap of

the *bunggay* tree. **Literary Arts**

No samples of Livunganen folk speech, such as proverbs and riddles, have been recorded, although there are examples of proverbs and maxims identified as Cotabato-Manobo.

*Ka tanris ne pakadazaat te putso izing te limo
Napakaamin do't pusong.*

Nothing destroys iron like its own rust.

Limo te kurata ne dalid te langon ne sala.

Love of money is the root of all evil.

Ke talad ne otang ne kenano palilipati.

A promise is a debt; do not forget it.

*Ka manisan ne maritan ne bulawan,
Ka mapia ne maritan ne Iambus.*

A beautiful woman is a jewel,
A good woman is a treasure.

Several Manobo tribes inhabiting the contiguous area along Cotabato, Bukidnon, and Davao in Central Mindanao have an epic hero named Agyu. The Manobo tribe Kulamenen/Kuamanon has an epic hero called Tuialang, the cousin of Agyu. He is also the epic hero of the Manuvu, who call him Tuwaang. The Bukidnon/Higaonon/Talaandig of Bukidnon province have ***The Epic of Nalandangan***, which tells not only about the heroic exploits of Agyu but also of Matabagka, his sister, and Baybayan, his son/younger brother. The Livunganen, as well as all those who speak Arumanen and inhabit the Libungan River area, have nine versions of an epic called the *Ulahingan*, which is about Agyu and his people.

Ulahing means “to chant in a particular style of poetry, language and music” (Maquiso 1977:34). The epic, called a *bendingan*, is chanted in the language of the diwata, which is also the language used by the god Kerenen when he communicates with the people.

The *Ulahingan* has two parts: the *kepuunpuun*, which is the prologue that also contains the synopsis, and the numerous *sengedurug* or episodes. The longest version found so far has 1,355 *sengedurug*, or an average of 30 *sengedurug* for each major epic character: Agyu, his brothers, sisters, wife, cousins, and his children. The Livunganen believe Agyu and his people to be the origin of the human race. He is “the supreme ruler and judge of all,” although he was originally human.

An episode in the *Ulahingan* explains how this epic came to be. Heaven has several

territories to which are assigned various people. Nelendangan is the heavenly territory assigned to Agyu and his people; Agyu's son Bayvayan, however, is assigned his own place. Bayvayan's grandfather orders him to circle the earth seven times in a grander variation of the *saut* (war dance), and convert people of various races and religions to follow him. One day, during a famine, Bayvayan chants a prayer for food. This is the first *ulahing*. When Bayvayan finally ascends to heaven, the Supreme Being tells him that he can best serve Agyu by inspiring people to chant the *ulahing*, thereby preserving the ideals of the Arumanen as represented by Agyu. Bayvayan inspires the *talaulahingan* to chant the story of Agyu in the *bendingan* language.

The *kepuunpuun* of the epic summarizes the origins of the various Manobo groups. Banobo lived two brothers: Tabunaway, who was the *timuay*, and Mamalu. In the 15th century, two strangers, Sarip Kabungsuwan and Rajah Baginda, came with a wealth of goods: "gold, plates, Chinese jars, brass ornaments, clothing, brass pots and ladles, spears of iron, daggers of different shapes, etc." (Maquiso 1977:60). Kabungsuwan then went about converting the people to Islam. Tabunaway refused conversion, but advised his younger brother to "accept the new religion." The two brothers had their last meal together, in which Mamalu ate pork for the last time.

After Mamalu's baptism, Tabunaway and his followers went to the mountains. They stopped at a certain spot where Tabunaway defiantly danced the *saut*. His movements were so powerful that the *kulungkulung* (bell) hanging on his spear flew off into the sea. The place is now called *Kulungkulung*. They then went up the Pulangi River, and at another stop, they decided to part ways. Tabunaway and his group who went to Libungan became the *Livunganen*. The others became the *Kirinteken*, *Mulitaan*, *Kulamanen*, and *Tenenenen*. The *Kulamanen* split into the *Pulangiyan* and *Metidsalug* or *Matigsalug*. Branches of the *Tenenenen* are the *Keretanen*, *Lundugbatneg*, and *Rangiranen*. A group stayed along the river in Lanuan and built an *iliyan* (fort) and became the *Ilianon*. Those who went to the *divava* (downriver) became the *Divavaanen*, some of whom branched into the *Kidapawanen*. From Mamalu's son Mangigin sprang the first Maguindanao sultanate.

Performing Arts

Of all musical instruments, the *agung* is used most, except in times of mourning. It does, however, announce the death of a tribal member with a series of rapid then slow beats, that indicate the age of the deceased. Other bamboo percussion instruments include the *salurey*, which accompanies dancing, and the *talamba*. Bamboo flutes differing in length are the *pulandag*, *bansi*, and *pulala*. The *kubing* is a bamboo jew's harp; its sound is produced by a strip that is partially cut from the middle of a thin and narrow piece of bamboo. One end is held in the mouth with one hand while the other hand strikes the strip to make it vibrate. The *kutyapi* is the native guitar. The *dayorey/dayuray/dayuday* is a one-stringed fiddle also found among the Manobo.

The *Ulahingan* has four musical forms. The *andal* is an ordinary tune used to

call the people to gather around to listen to the *talaulahingan*. It is not yet part of the *bendingan*. The *undayag* is a musical phrase improvised by the chanter when trying to recall the next line. The beginning of the phrase, which is set at a high pitch, is sustained and determines the pitch of the rest of the chant. The *penehensan* is the characteristic musical form of the *bendingan*, consisting of one note stressed on each syllable. To break the monotony of this one-note chant, the *likuen*, which consists of melodic lines, is inserted.

Other songs are either religious or secular. *Susunan* is the generic term for any kind of song, "long or short, light or serious" (Maquiso 1977:24). The term may apply even to the *ulahing*. The *iringa* is a more melodious folk song in contemporary language. The *mandata* are love songs. The *delinday* are occupation or work songs, including war songs, lullabies, planting, and harvest songs. The *minudar* and *mauley* are funeral songs, which tell the story of "a hunter who journeyed to his favorite hunting ground from where he never returned because he was killed by a giant boar" (Maquiso 1977:31).

The Livunganen have three types of dance: the *saut*, the dance of the spirits, and the courtship dance. The last is performed by girls who put on a shy demeanor. With downcast eyes and raised arms, they sway their hands sideways to the beat of the *agung*.

Acts of worship center on one or more *walian* who go into a trance and are possessed by the spirit of their *diwata*. The opening rite of the *bulangan* festival is the *kebpemaya*, which originated among the *Kirinteken Manobo* tribe. It is said that an old *Kirintek* woman was transformed by the *diwata* into a python, which now resides in the *Meridegew* River. The people pray to her for enlightenment. Two *walian* chant a prayer to the old woman's spirit, asking for her blessing. The people respond in a chorus. After the seventh cycle of prayers, the old woman's spirit enters one of the *walian*, who begins to tremble and engages the crowd in a chanting dialogue. Through the possessed *walian*, the old woman asks the crowd why they are praying. Someone may consult her about the cause of a loved one's illness, or courteously ask whether she is pleased with the festival. The old woman replies through the *walian*.

Another occasion in which the *walian* may call for a religious gathering is when they receive a message from a spirit about an impending danger or sickness. They relay this to the *timuay*, who then calls for an assembly which should include all the other *walian* of the tribe. The ritual, which lasts about 2 to 3 hours, begins when the women offer the *diwata* baskets of food and betel chew that they lay on a rattan mat in the middle of the assembly. The sap extracted from a tree is burned to drive away human odor, which offends the spirits. The head *walian* takes a piece of food from each basket and offers it to the spirits. There is a break for supper, after which all the *walian*, now dressed in white ritual dress, sit around the betel chew offering. The spouses of the *walian* stand behind them, each rhythmically beating a sacred porcelain plate. The *walian* show signs of possession when they yawn, tremble, and stand up

for about 10 to 15 minutes or more; their movements become more and more frenzied as they march around and dance to the rhythm beaten on the floor by the spectators.

The Langkat sect has its own variation of this ritual, which is held every Friday in a one-room house called a *bintana*. The men and women are segregated on either side of the room. At one end of the room is an altar with a white mantelpiece. The ubiquitous betel chew is placed in each corner as an offering. Possession begins when the leader starts to chant in a low voice, which increases in pitch, volume, and intensity as the leader, swaying rhythmically, is gripped in a trance. Everyone then takes turns chanting as the spirits communicate with them. The leader conveys the people's needs, problems, and wishes to the spirits. • R.C. Lucero/ Reviewed by S.K. Tan

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