The term “Tagbanua” (also spelled “Tagbanwa” and “Tagbanuwa”) may have been derived from “taga” meaning “people from” and “banua” meaning “countryside,” and therefore means “people from the inland area,” as contrasted to “from the shore or sea area.” The word could have been used by later settlers to refer to the aboriginal inhabitants of Palawan who retreated inland (Llamzon 1978).

The Tagbanua are the most widely distributed group on Palawan Island. They occupy areas in southcentral Palawan, northern Palawan, Kalamian, Coron, and Busuanga. In 1947, Fox (1982) placed the number of the Tagbanua at 7,000 people. In 1981, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) reported 5,000 speakers of Tagbanua Kalamian and 8,000 in central Palawan. The SIL also listed 2,000 northern Tagbanua speakers in 1985 (Grimes 1996). To the north of the main Tagbanua communities live the small and dwindling Palawan group known as Ken-uy, and the southern highlands dwellers known as the Palawan. On Culion Island, at the northern end of Palawan, also live some Tagbanua groups.

The Tagbanua have always been mainly coastal or near-coastal and riverine dwellers, although they were reported during the Spanish colonial period as having occupied some interior areas, perhaps in reaction to the frequency of invasions by Mindanao Muslims along the eastern coast of the island. The Tagbanua have been concentrated on the eastern side of Palawan as a result of the island’s geography. The western region is generally mountainous, while the eastern region is where much of the lowlands are located. Palawan’s river systems,though of little importance as means of transportation, are valuable sources of food, such as fish and shells, and drinking water. Thus, many Tagbanua villages are located near rivers and streams.

The Tagbanua speak a language which is closely related to other Palawan groups, such as the Palawanon, Batak, and Cuyunon. It is believed that Tagbanua and Palawanon may have derived from a common protoculture, and their languages may have separated only circa 800 AD. Today, the Tagbanua still use their ancient native syllabary in writing (Fox 1982:13-14), like the Palawan and Mangyan Buhid and Patag.

History

The Tagbanua, who according to Kress (1977: 34), are very ancient inhabitants of Palawan, may be said to have undergone three main historical periods: the indigenous period, during which there were protohistoric contacts and trade with Hindu-Indonesian culture; the Muslim period, which included contacts with the sultanates of Borneo, and the Muslims of Sulu and Mindanao; and the Spanish, American, and contemporary periods.

According to folk history, the Tagbanua had an early relationship with Brunei, with the first *masikampu* or *sultan* of Brunyu, from a place called Burnay, a long time ago (Fox 1982:18). Their formal history, however, begins with the Spanish colonization

of the Philippines. In 1521 Magellan's ships docked in Palawan for provisions, and Antonio Pigafetta recorded that the Tagbanua practiced the ritual of blood compact, cultivated their fields, hunted with blowpipes and thick wooden arrows, valued brass rings and chains, bells, knives, and copper wire for binding fish hooks, raised large and very tame cocks which they pitted against one another and laid bets on, and distilled rice wine.

Until the latter part of the 17th century, southern Palawan was under the jurisdiction of the Sultan of Brunei, leading to friction between the Spaniards and the Sultan. During this time, and indeed for almost three hundred years, the Spaniards and the Muslims of Sulu, Mindanao, Palawan, and north Borneo were at war.

In the 19th century, the Tagbanua continued to believe in their native gods, specifically in four gods. The first, the lord of the heavens, was called Magnisda or Nagabacaban. The god of the sea was named Poco and was deemed a benevolent spirit. His help was invoked in times of illness. The third was the god of the earth named Sedumunadoc, whose favor was sought in order to have a good harvest. The fourth was called Tabiacoud, who lived in the deep bowels of the earth.

For these gods, the Tagbanua celebrated a big feast each year, right after the harvest. The *babaylan* (shaman) called for the people to converge at the seashore, carrying food offerings of all kinds. The babaylan took the chickens and roosters brought for the ceremony, and hung them by their legs on tree branches, killing them by beating with a stick. They were allowed only one blow for each animal, and those who survived went free, never to be harmed again, because Poco, the sea god, took them under his protection. The fowl which died from the first blow were seasoned, cooked, and eaten. After all had eaten, they danced and drank rice wine. At midnight, as *Buntala*, a heavenly body, passed the meridian, the babaylan entered the sea waist deep, all the while dancing and pushing a raft made of bamboo, which had offerings on it. If the offering was returned to the shore by waves and wind, it meant the sea god refused the people's offering. But if the raft disappeared and floated out to sea, there was rejoicing. Their offering was accepted, and their year would be a happy one (Marche 1970:236-237).

With the end of Spanish colonial domination and the entry of the United States as the new colonial administrator, change came to the island of Palawan, and to the Tagbanua. In 1904, Iwahig became the site of a penal colony, which displaced the Tagbanua as it expanded. In 1910 a "reservation" for the Tagbanua was put up by the Americans. In succeeding years, internal migration from the Visayan islands and from Luzon, the dominance of the Christian religion, and the absorption of the island into the economic and political mainstream marginalized the Tagbanua, especially those who had not been fully acculturated.

Economy

The Tagbanua are shifting cultivators of dry or upland rice, a staple crop dependent upon rainfall. Rice, which the Tagbanua call *paray*, is regarded as a kind of "divine gift" and "perfect food," which, moreover, is the source of the rice beer *tabad*, the "perfect drink," used in their religious ritual. Rice is extensively grown because of its ritual importance.

The Tagbanua practice what Conklin (1957:2) termed as "integral" swidden; that is, traditional, year round, community wide, largely self-contained, and ritually sanctioned. Such tradition is a viable practice in a tropical forest environment (Warner 1981:16).

Men and women in traditional Tagbanua society maintain their own swidden (*uma*). Site selection is normally done by men. Primary forests (*giba*) or mature secondary forests (*bunglay*) are chosen by men while women make their cultivation (*tagudal*i) in the previous fields but not yet on the fallow of their spouse. Rituals are observed by the Tagbanua in every swidden stage. For example, there are two village-wide ceremonies called *lambay* which have something to do with the burning of forests and secondary growth for planting, and with praying for moderate rain when planting season comes. Forests are only opened if signs of permission are given by the spirits. The size of swidden fields is dictated by the ability of the household to maintain their swidden. Since production is generally for consumption and a few surplus for exchange, the average size of each swidden is less than a hectare.

Labor requirement is provided by the household, and cooperation from nearby relatives is also practiced and reciprocated. Among the Tagbanua, exchange labor activities are held with feasting (*kisig*). Burning of the fields is the responsibility of the men. During the planting stage, the males punch a hole in the ground with a dibble stick as the women and children plant the seeds (*bi'ni*). Long maturing rice varieties are planted in the Tagbanua men's field while in the women's field short maturing rice. In Palawan society, women have to carry out most of the agricultural tasks.

Maintaining the swidden is a woman's task, although her husband may assist when she is pregnant and/or when nursing children. Weeding is performed at least three times to protect the rice plant. Tagbanua males are normally unavailable during this stage for it coincides with the fishing season.

During the harvesting stage, Tagbanua families with a large harvest require extra labor. Helpers earn a share and women are usually the harvesters. The obligation to give part of the harvested rice to those who helped in planting (*binlad*) is fulfilled. Relatives can also ask for a basket of rice from their kin with no labor exchange expected.

In recent years there are marked changes in subsistence roles by Tagbanua men and women. The former have increased their exploitation of forest products, while the latter have almost completely abandoned their traditional forest activities. Women contribute more to swidden labor in addition to their household management and being caretakers of children (Conelly 1996:80-81).

Permanent agriculture has been introduced to the Palawan indigenous peoples in recent past in two ways: first, by adopting the agricultural practices of the migrant settlers, either through imitation or as a result of their experiences while working as laborers in the migrants' fields. Second, through the state program of resettling them and forcing them to learn the techniques of lowland agriculture by introducing the plow and dispersing draft animals.

Aside from rice, the Tagbanua grow other crops like camote, corn, millet, taro, and cassava, in smaller quantities.

Highly valued Philippine woods are found in central Palawan, such as the almaciga which is the source of gum or resin known as *bagtik* used for industrial products such as varnish. The gathering of bagtik during the dry months of January, February, and March is the Tagbanua's principal source of cash income, and enables them, as a result, to purchase imported merchandise.

Aside from bagtik gathering, most fishing and hunting take place during this dry period. The Tagbanua have traditionally employed six typical fishing methods: pole and line; catching shrimps by hand or with a small jig; fish poisons, usually from herbs and vines; damming or drying of streams, and installing fish weirs in openings through the small dams; using a fishing gun, with rubber slings and arrows; and illuminating a stream at night with a torch, and killing the fish or eel with a long bolo (Fox 1982:49). During the dry season, streams and rivers become clear and shallow, which is ideal for these fishing techniques. Fish poison is best used in deep, still pools of water remaining in dried-up streams. Hunting wild pigs with spears and dogs is also ideal during this season, since the prey come out of the forest when upstream waters and brooks dry up, and go to the riverbanks where they are more easily caught. From January to July, the Tagbanua also collect honey, edible young bees, and the beeswax which is used for some ritual occasions.

The Tagbanua on the western coast weave sleeping mats to be sold in the market. Apart from the gathering and sale of bagtik (which gives so little income despite the amount of backbreaking work), split rattan and local rice have also been traditional sources of cash. In the municipal district of Aborlan in central Palawan, where the main group of the Tagbanua have settled, there has been commerce between the indigenous Tagbanua and the entrepreneur settlers. Many Tagbanua settle their debts with the stores by paying with their rice harvests. This rice they would later buy back for consumption at inflated prices.

Today, the Tagbanua have carabao and a few cattle, used for hauling sleds loaded with bagtik to be sold in Aborlan, as well as for transportation. However, these are not used by them in the swidden as agricultural work animals. Neither has the carabao been slaughtered for food.

Political System

Social stratification defines the traditional Tagbanua political hierarchy. The *uripun* (slaves) and *duluan* or *timawa* (low bloods) follow the *ginuu* (high bloods), the class of all *masikampu* or leaders. The ginuu participate in the *surugid* or councils, and exercise judicial and legislative functions. Succession therein is lineal rather than collateral, e.g., sons eventually assume their fathers' titles.

The masikampu is at the apex of this hereditary chieftain class that the Tagbanua inherited from the Moro or Islamized Bornean chiefs. It probably replaced an earlier leadership by elders; however, authority is still identified with seniority. The masikampu's traditional residence in Inagawan Village has been moved to Baraki. Moreover, his once supreme political and economic status has significantly diminished through time. Today, a masikampu is a relatively poor citizen, supported mainly by minimal fees and the postharvest gift of a small portion of rice from subject families.

There are secondary hereditary leaders entitled Laksamana, Mudadi, Pangara, Tumindung, among many others. Legal guardians of clans, their counsel may extend to cases involving nonrelatives which may be regarded as interfamilial. Their offices are largely independent and, unlike the masikampu, their powers depend on personal ability and popularity. However, among these leaders, the Maradya, Saribangsawan, Nakib, and Sabander are by tradition and custom superior designations.

At present, the villages fall within the jurisdiction of the Municipal District of Aborlan, though native participation here remains ambiguous. The district is principally administered by the mayor, vice-mayor, three councilors, and police chiefs. Theoretically, the mayor of Aborlan's views outweigh those of the masikampu.

The district is composed of 16 official barrios, 12 of which correspond to actual Tagbanua villages. The minor Tagbanua settlements are classified as sitios. The barrio is headed by a barrio captain or lieutenant called *tininti*. A municipal appointee, he mediates between the district and barrio. Internally he operates within the traditional political structure, and his post is equivalent to that of a hereditary leader. In many instances he upholds the native before the municipal law.

Notwithstanding adaptations to the national system, Tagbanua political organization maintains considerable autonomy. Interpersonal relations are guided by kinship and a judicial system which preserves custom law. Said law involves a series of interrelated rights and obligations which must be satisfied by the payment of fines and fees.**Social Organization and Customs**

In Tagbanua society, the basic unit is the family, and matrilocality is practiced. This means that the man goes to live in the place of the woman he marries. The household consists of a father, a mother, unmarried children, even widows and widowers maintaining separate residences. Village life is defined by ritual and social obligations.

Tagbanua society recognizes three social classes: the upper, the lower, and the servile members. The first social class is traditionally hereditary. This is the class from which were traditionally drawn the leaders or masikampu. The second social class includes the common people from which local leaders and babaylan (or *babalyan*) are recruited. The lowest class are made up of debtors who are unable to pay their obligations. The stratification gives rise to a hierarchy of authority. The settlement of disputes is the prerogative of a committee composed of local settlers coming from the second class, whose decisions may be appealed to the masikampu. The introduction of barrio, later barangay, government has not altered the functions of these middle-class settlers regarding disputes. The barangay captain may participate in the settlement, but he usually leaves the decision making to the native leaders.

The Tagbanua family is formed through parental arrangement, though there have been cases of young people getting married without prior arrangements due to premarital relations resulting in pregnancy. After marriage, the Tagbanua couple live with the parents of the woman, or a new house is constructed for them nearby. The birth of a child stabilizes the family, the child being recognized bilaterally. Couples who do not have children or have lost them resort to adoption. The Tagbanua consider having children as the main purpose of marriage, and children are very much desired and loved.

Monogamy is the ideal norm, though polygyny is practiced, in which case the consent of the first wife is needed. Besides this privilege of the first wife, she has a preferential share in the earnings of the household. Divorce is recognized, and a fine is imposed on the spouse who gave cause for the separation.

A phenomenon which might be called “wife stealing” occurs in Tagbanua society. This traditional practice, called *pang-agaw*, is not considered an act of “adultery” on the part of a married woman or “concubinage” on the part of a married man (there are no such concepts in Tagbanua morality or custom law), since all cases of pang-agaw end up in divorce and remarriage. While physical aggression or violence may sometimes follow an act of wife stealing, this is frowned upon and shocking to the Tagbanua. There are rituals and a legal system of arbitration and compensation which are designed to prevent any personal and social conflict arising from wife stealing, especially when it occurs between relatives. “Guilt” is erased with the payment of necessary fines.

There are three possible situations of wife stealing and fines associated with them. First, if an unmarried man “steals” (i.e., proposes marriage and wins) a married woman, he pays the ex-husband a “divorce fine” called *bagay*, usually three times the amount of the woman’s original bride-price. He also pays a new bride-price to the woman’s parents. Second, if a married man takes an unmarried woman (technically not wife stealing, but a prelude to either polygyny or divorce), he pays his first wife a *kapaduwayan* (from *duwa*, meaning two) or “polygyny fee,” if she and her parents agree to the polygynous marriage; or he pays her parents a bagay if she demands a divorce. In either case, he pays a bride-price to his new in-laws.

Third, if a married man and woman agree to live together, the man pays the bagay to the ex-husband, and another bagay to his first wife if she chooses divorce. If she accepts the polygyny, he pays her a bagay, on top of the bride-price to be paid to his additional set of in-laws.

Religious Beliefs and Practices

The Tagbanua's relationship with the spirit world is the basis for their rituals, celebrations, and dances. The many ceremonial feasts punctuating Tagbanua life are based on a firm belief in a natural interaction between the world of the living and the world of the dead. These ceremonies and rituals take place on all levels, ranging from rituals performed within the family, to those which are led by the community's leader on behalf of the people. Such celebrations call for special structures to be built, such as ceremonial platforms and rafts, with leaf streamers attached to high poles. Ritual offerings include rice, chicken, and betel nut.

The focal point of Tagbanua life is the period immediately following the harvest, when there is much singing, dancing, courting, and conclusion of blood compacts. It is a season for the abundant flow of tabad, the rice brew, which is indispensable since it improves the well-being of the ritual participants, and lures the spirits of the dead to join in the celebration.

The mountains and forests are believed to be the abode of the countless benevolent as well as malevolent spirits that the Tagbanua can ill-afford to antagonize. For this reason, no trees are cut down. They recognize the existence of a supreme being called Mangindusa who sits up in the sky and lets his feet dangle below, above the earth. Other spirits inhabit the forests and environment, and belief in their existence necessitates rituals to placate them or gain their favors. The babaylan, who is often a woman, performs the rituals of life, from birth to death. It is believed that there is a deity who accompanies the soul of the dead to its final destination. Hunters invoke the assistance of the spirits of dead relatives in asking the owners of the wild pigs to allow their hunting dogs to locate the prey. A *mutya* (charm) is commonly used to help its possessor succeed in the hunt, a fishing expedition, or a litigation.

The Tagbanua cosmology, as described by a *maglambay* (male spiritual leader), a *katungkulan* (female spiritual leader), and a babaylan from the Tagbanua settlements of Baraki and Kaibigan, includes the sky called *langit*, "an infinitely high canopy" which encompasses the visible celestial region, beyond which the Tagbanua know nothing about. A being called Tungkuyanin sits on the edge of this celestial region, his feet dangling in the vastness of the cosmos, his eyes always cast down towards the earth. Should he look up at what lies beyond, he would fall into the dark void or nothingness. Rain is the gift of Mangindusa, the highest ranking deity in the Tagbanua pantheon. It falls to the earth through a hole in the sky. The sky is held up in place by two immense tree trunks. One may be found in Babatan, the east, where the sun rises; the other is in Sidpan the west, where the sun sets. In Babatan

lives a deity called *diwata kat libatan*, while in Sidpan is the deity known as *diwata kat sidpan*. Both of them jointly control the rains. A being called Tumangkuyun is tasked with washing and cleaning the trunks of the two immense trees with the blood of Tagbanua who died in epidemics, and this is the explanation for the red color of the rising and setting sun.

Below the langit is the skyworld which includes the clouds. This region is called *dibuwat* meaning "high," and here dwell quite a number of deities and one class of dead ancestors. In the dibuwat live the *bangkay*, the spirits of Tagbanua who died violently or were poisoned, as well as spirits of women who died while giving birth. Beneath the dibuwat reside the *bulalakaw* or *diwata kat dibuwat*, flying deities who roam the region of the clouds, ready to come to the aid of any Tagbanua needing their help.

Interestingly, Mangindusa does not necessarily dwell in the highest celestial region, but in a sacred area called *Awan-awan*. It lies just beyond the langut (sunset), in a region between the skyworld and the earth. In this place Mangindusa lives with an entourage: Bugawasin, his wife; the *dibuwatanin*, his messengers, and other celestial beings. He never descends from Awan-awan, but eternally sits in his domain, and swings back and forth in a *bintayawan* or *barbarangan*, a contraption used in the diwata ceremonies which are attended by many deities. It is dibuwatanin who convey the Tagbanua's *pasalamat* (expressions of gratitude), their offerings of rice, tobacco, betel and wax, to the median region of the highest deity, as the lower deities cannot enter his abode.

In the Tagbanua cosmos, *kiyabusan* (from kabus, "lacking") is the place where there is no wind, virtually the end of the world, where only the void exists. But this is also the place where the northeast winds come from, the hot dry winds called *amyan* which facilitates the burning of cleared land. The Tagbanua call on the *diwata kat amyan* when the rains do not stop and dry winds are already needed. Since the amyan also brings the fearsome *salakap*, the spirits of epidemic sickness into the world, Kiyabusan is likewise considered the realm of spirits of those who die from epidemics.

An *adyung*, a huge outrigger boat, steered by the salakap, sails with the amyan through the celestial regions to the kiyabusan, bearing the souls of those who have died from *panglubaw* (smallpox), *tai-tai* (dysentery), and tarangkaso (flu). The salakap are said to plant a tree called *daunu* during the season of the amyan, the scent of whose flowers strikes down with illness any person who smells it in the winds. The salakap actually include Tumungkuyan (who wash with blood the sky-supporting trees), Tandayag, Lumalayag, and Sumurutun, who is the captain of the vessel of the epidemic victims. The outrigger, according to Fox's informants, is seen by them in their dreams, "filled with the spirits of their loved ones."

The Tagbanua describe the salakap as small, dark kinky-haired beings, their bodies and faces covered with *pangkot* (pockmarks). In their myths, the salakap are said to

be beings who once lived alongside the Tagbanua as friendly neighbors, but a perfidy committed by the Tagbanua created in the salakap a desire to devour their former friends. The *runsay* ceremony had its beginnings in the belief that the salakap must be placated.

While Mangindusa is considered the highest ranking deity, there is no traditional ascription to him as the sole "creator" of the world, although Christian mythology has had some influence in imbuing Mangindusa with more powers than he used to possess. In fact, the creation of the world and of human beings is said to have been the handiwork of the diwata. Mangindusa, on the other hand, has always been traditionally considered as the punisher of *dusa* (crime). In Tagbanua society, the only recognized public dusa is *sumbang* (incest), the universal taboo. In this case, Mangindusa holds the society responsible for the sumbang, rather than the individual. Mangindusa's punishment of society may take the form of withholding the rains. In the past, society punished the offenders by drowning them in the sea. In present society, a huge fine is imposed. On top of this, a special *lambay* ritual must be given in honor of Mangindusa.

A Tagbanua is believed to have six souls in all; a "true soul" called *kiyarulwa*, and five secondary souls called the *payu*. The kiyarulwa is a gift of Mangindusa to a child emerging from the mother's womb, while the other souls appear only during the lambay ritual for the child upon reaching one month or two. Lambay is any ceremony or part of a ceremony which is directly addressed to Mangindusa. These other souls are found at the extremities of the hands and feet, and on top of the head. When a person dies, the kiyarulwa wanders to four possible destinations. If the cause of death is epidemic sickness, the salakap bring the soul to the kiyabusan. If a person dies from poisoning or through violence, the soul becomes a bangkay and goes to inhabit the "high regions." Those who die of *sabu*— meaning that their souls were "caught" by the *panyaan* (environmental spirits) or the *damdam* (evil spirits)—have their souls transformed into *biyaladbad* which then inhabit the environment. If a person dies a natural death, the soul travels to *basad*, the underworld. While the main soul kiyarulwa becomes a spirit inhabiting the world of the dead, and continues to interact with the living through rituals, the five secondary souls are absorbed into the environment.

The underworld of the Tagbanua, particularly the basad, has clearer outlines than the blurred and indeterminate skyworld. When a Tagbanua dies, his or her soul remains on earth for seven days, until the *kapupusan* or rites for the dead are finished. For seven days, the soul lingers on in the grave at daytime, but returns to its former house at night to observe the behavior of those left behind. In its journey to the underworld, the soul encounters several interesting places and characters. There is the sacred river, *kalabagang*, where the soul meets Taliyakad, the watcher who guards the vine bridge called *balugu*. Later it meets Anggugru, "keeper of the fires," who welcomes the soul to the underworld and gives it fire.

In basad, the spirits of the dead become known as *tiladmanin*, and live a life which

mirrors exactly that of the living—planting rice, raising families until they have died seven times. But the structure of basad is interesting: everything is the reverse of what happens in the world of the living. As the sun rises on earth, it goes down in basad. Rivers flow from the ocean to the mountains. Planting time on earth is harvest time in basad. This, according to Fox, is a logical way of explaining the continuity of the life processes.

Many of the Tagbanua beliefs and practices observed by the French scientist Alfred Marche in the 19th century remain. In fact, the challenge of acculturation and the actual process of dislocation that has taken place in the present century have arguably fortified the Tagbanua faith in the efficacy of ancient lifeways and values. Indeed, as Fox points out, it is not an accident that "the most notable feature of Tagbanua society today is the persistence and pervasive influence of native religious beliefs and practices", and that there continues to be an "intensification of ritual activities directed consciously" towards the reinforcement of the traditional world view. Significantly, while the Tagbanua deal with coastal Christians everyday, their ritual practices continue to function as expressions of the community (Fox 1982:145).

The lambay is a Tagbanua village ritual in central Palawan held two times a year. It is observed first in January, and involves ritual-appeal to the deities for days of sunshine and winds that would sufficiently dry the forests and prepare them for clearing and planting. A second one is held in May, when the people ask for moderate rains which will make their upland rice grow. In both rituals, Mangindusa is appealed to. The Tagbanua are led by the maglambay in asking the deity to forgive the villagers for acts of sumbang (incest) and the lesser offense of *darak*, so that the god would not withhold the rains and thus cause famine. The maglambay are hereditary religious leaders who enforce participation by all families in the village, and to whom the fines for incest are paid. Such is the weight of their responsibility to the highest ranking deity that the persons must present a convincing case for the forgiveness of their people for acts known and unknown to them, or else Mangindusa can cause the maglambay's death.

There are two rituals which seek protection for all Tagbanua wherever they may be, and from the feared salakap, the spirits of epidemic sickness and death. These two rituals are the *pagbuyis* and the runsay. The pagbuyis is performed by the *magbuyis* three times a year. The first is in November, and the second in December. During this whole period, the *amyan* (northeast winds) are blowing. The third is when the moon can be seen during the daytime, called *magkaaldawan* (from *aldaw*, "day"). During one ritual, the magbuyis calls upon the salakap to plead to them not to capture the souls of the Tagbanua as they sail with the northeast winds in their huge boat called *sakayan*, with their "cargo" of smallpox, cholera, dysentery, flu, and other epidemic diseases. The salakap are led by their captain Sumurutun, who has three lieutenants named Tuwan Ding, Tuwan Pagbuysan, and Tuwan Pagraskadan. For the pagbuyis, a large permanent ceremonial platform called *piyangaw* is built in front of the house of the magbuyis. Offerings of *katumbal* twigs with their red pepper fruits, the favored food of the salakap *datu*, are made on this platform.

The runsay is described as the most dramatic of all Tagbanua rituals. It is observed only once a year, at nighttime, on the fourth day after the full moon of December. It takes place on the beach near the mouth of the Aborlan River. The runsay, like the pagbuyis, is held to ask for protection against epidemics. The ritual begins at dusk and ends at dawn.

There are five distinct phases in the runsay. The first phase consists of building of the *bangkaran* or *banglay*, a 3.6-meter ceremonial raft, constructed from 14 poles of *lawas*, a kind of bamboo, with a beautiful sail made from split leaves of atap palm, and a matlike *kadiyang* used as platform for the offerings of *liyutyu*t (glutinous rice), *komuy* (a rice dish), and fermented rice in banana leaves. This is followed by the *panawag*, invocation to the spirits of the dead and the nine deities who rode the *kawa* (a metal cooking vat) on the sea. The third phase consists of the burning of incense on the kadiyang atop the bangkaran, and prayers by the ritual leader; the lighting of the candle and offering of ritual food to the deities; the second call to the nine deities to partake of the food, which is the signal for the children to dive into the mound of food on the raft, and eat as much as they can; and the cleaning up and repair of the raft, if this was damaged during the ritual food scramble. The fourth phase begins with the third invocation to the nine deities, followed by individual family offerings represented by a woman, of basketfuls of rice, cigarettes, areca nuts, and betel leaves; the tying of a small chicken to the platform and the lighting of candles beside it; the hoisting of the raft towards the sea; the relighting of candles blown out by the wind; the throwing of a pinch of rice to the sea; and the voyage seaward of the bangkaran. A spiritual group sings and dances—shortly after the raft has disappeared—from about midnight till the break of day.

Two other important Tagbanua rituals are the *pagdiwata* or *diwata* and the *bilang*, which feature a babaylan who is possessed by the deities. These rituals comprise the most important form of theater among the Tagbanua.**Architecture and Community Planning**

In the 1870s, Marche noted that Tagbanua huts were built on piles. Formed out of trees, these piles were planted at distances of 2-4 meters. A house could have many posts, but the biggest were those in the four corners. The roofs and walls were made of tree leaves, and rarely was there a door. The hut of the leader was perched on the bank of the river 3 meters above the water.

The Tagbanua house has undergone only a slight transformation since then. Present-day houses are built lower, reaching up to only within 1.5 to 1.8 meters, and occasionally 2.4 meters, above the ground. They are basically rectangular, windowless, partitionless structures still resting on posts, with the floor, the sides, and the gabled roof made of bamboo, rattan, and palm fronds in various combinations. Inside the house, however, there could be as many as eight levels, some of which are: an entry level, a level for the hearth where cooking is done, a level where the dining area is located, a level for sleeping, a level or more for storing various objects and possessions. The highest level is allotted for pillows and blankets. Only the father, the mother, and unmarried children live in this house. Children who have married

move out to their own dwellings. Even the widows and widowers maintain separate residences.

Visual Arts and Crafts

The traditional costumes of the Tagbanua were fashioned from the bark of trees, particularly the *salugin*. The preparation of this bark was unique. After being felled, the tree would be cut around the trunk, the outer bark stripped off to expose the inner layer. This layer would be beaten with a wooden mallet, until it was soft and pliant enough to hang loose from the bole. This was then washed in the river and dried out under the sun. No dye was applied to it, and no decorations either. The Tagbanua have always depended on this inner tree bark because back-loom weaving is unknown to them, as with all Palawan groups. In the past, menfolk wore simple loincloths (G-strings), supported by a woven rattan waistband called *ambalad*, while the women wore only brief wraparound skirts made from bark. The Tagbanua later came to adopt some articles of Muslim clothing. At present, while many Tagbanua still wear their traditional apparel, Western-type clothing has found its way among the people.

The Tagbanua have had more aesthetically delicate creations in terms of body accessories. In the past, when both men and women wore their hair long, they filed and blackened their teeth, and carved earplugs from the hardwood *bantilinaw*. These ornately designed plugs were inlaid with mother-of-pearl in geometric patterns. The Tagbanua also carved wooden combs and bracelets. They strung bead necklaces to be used in covering women's necks. Anklets of copper and brass wire were also crafted and worn by women. The earlobe plugs, combs and bracelets, necklaces and anklets have now become quite rare.

Baskets and wood carvings are the more notable products of Tagbanua artistic crafts today. They excel in the number of designs which they apply to their *tingkop* (harvest baskets) made of hard-strip bamboo. These baskets are occasionally made of blackened and natural bamboo, which make the designs stand out. Sometimes, only the natural color of bamboo is used, and the design is created by an extremely subtle changing of the under-over pattern of the bamboo strips. The cone-shaped colander type of basket is another fine example of Tagbanua skilled artistry. Using black and natural color designs outside, the center of the cone has the bamboo strips skived slightly smaller, creating even holes for the screen. The funnel effect is accomplished through a close weaving of the bamboo strips towards the top. (Lane 1986:148)

The soft rice baskets, called *bayong-bayong*, are made with different unusual shapes. These have generally square bases and round tops. To produce interesting block and V-shapes, the plain buri sides are superimposed with colored buri. Color is woven into the Tagbanua basket with the use of dyed palm leaves. Among the colors used are red, blue, violet, grey, black, and green. There are at least three common designs

for hand baskets, which are used as tobacco containers (De los Reyes 1977:215).

Blackened wood carvings of animals, with simple etched or incised features exposing the original white grain of the wood, are the most well-known examples of Tagbanua wood carving or sculpture. Long since available in the market as tourist commodities, these wood carvings traditionally formed part of the ritual offerings.

The process begins with the cutting of the branches of the *alimutyugan* tree. This wood, soft and white, is cut into foot lengths, split in half, and debarked. Rough blocks are made with the bolo called *barong*. For carving the actual shape and the fine details of the object, a small curved knife called *pisay* is used. The sculpting done, the Tagbanua artist then uses a sandpaper leaf called *agupi* or *isis* to smoothen out the surface, after which sweet potato, yam, or cassava leaves are rubbed all over it, giving it a greenish color because of the leaf juice. For blackening, a piece of the almaciga resin is burned on the ground, and the object is passed over the burning resin to blacken it thoroughly with soot. The blackened object is given a second scrubbing with the leaves, then passed over the smoke again, this process being repeated until the black coloring no longer comes off despite rubbing. Finally, incisions, etchings, and scrapings, are made on the carving, using the knife. The strokes are swift and sure: eyes, polka dot designs, V-marks, white triangles, plant and leaf motifs, lines and geometric shapes, and other designs complete on the Tagbanua carving.

Some of the objects carved are *mammanuk* (rooster), a ritual bowl, *kiruman* (turtle), *kararaga* (a native bird), *dugyan* (a small ground animal), lizards, and wild pigs. Carved animals are used with rice, betel nut, and other offerings to attract the deities and spirit-relatives in the pagdiwata rituals. The turtle, for instance, floats on grains of palay in an ancient Ming trade bowl. Lizards, turtles, and wild pigs, when not used as ritual objects, become toys for children.

Literary Arts

Much of Tagbanua religious beliefs and rituals are based on time-honored ancestral myths and stories which explain the origin of their world, and represent "a primeval, greater, and more relevant reality, by which the present life, fates, and activities of [humankind] are determined" (Fox 1982:151). Thus, the existence of the spirit world finds its explanation in myths, such as the origin of the salakap, who used to be on friendly terms with the Tagbanua. Once upon a time, it is said the salakap and the Tagbanua decided to go fishing at sea. It was agreed that the Tagbanua would leave some *komuy*, a rice dish wrapped in *alimutyugan* leaves, along the trail, so that the salakap would know where to go. But the Tagbanua decided to play a trick on their friends. When the salakap opened the package left for them, they found human waste instead of food, but they were so hungry they proceeded to eat it anyway. Having finished their meal, the salakap said it tasted good, their flesh should even be better. And so they decided to eat all the Tagbanua. All but one man and woman

were devoured by the salakap. The two were spared, provided they promised to hold a runsay ceremony once a year. And so the salakap sailed off towards kiyabusan. The descendants of the Tagbanua survivors have held a runsay yearly since that time. Touched with humor, the salakap myth explains the existence of kiyabusan, which plays a significant role in the agricultural life cycle of clearing, planting, and harvesting.

The Tagbanua have various creation myths. One story originating from the settlement of Baraki attributed creation to the collective acts of the deities. Fox recreates two versions of the myth, the first ascribing origins to the collective acts of the diwata:

First the deities made stone but the stone could not speak. Then they made earth and the earth could speak. The earth became a human being, the Tagbanua. Finally, the deities gave the human being the elements of fire, the flintlike stones, iron, and tinder, as well as rice and rice wine. Now that the people had rice wine, they could call the deities and the spirits of the dead. (Fox 1982: 154)

The second version is obviously a product of the blending of traditional Tagbanua belief and Christian mythology, and was told by a masikampu from another place (Fox 1982:155):

> The creator made the first man, Adan. But he was like a stone for he could not speak. Then the creator made earth and the man could speak. The creator felt a deep pity for Adan, as he had no companion. One day Adan went to sleep and when he awoke, he had a companion, Iba. Now the couple had three children. One afternoon Adan went to sleep. As he was only wearing his loincloth, his scrotum and penis were exposed. The first child laughed very hard at this sight and was exceedingly impolite. He became the father of the Tagbanua. The second child also laughed but not so hard. He became the father of the Moros. The third child took a blanket and carefully covered his father's exposed parts. He became the father of the Spaniards. This was the origin of the Tagbanua.

Comic sounding, the tale had a "sociological" postscript. Fox's informant is reported to have explained: "Look at the different people. The Tagbanua are very poor. They have nothing. The Moros have more. The Americans and Spaniards have most of all. They cover their bodies!"

The myths surrounding the origins of the runsay ritual are as dramatic as the ritual itself. One of the versions tells the story of how an ancient Tagbanua, Apu Pilas, met the nine deities while walking on the beach near the mouth of the Aborlan River, then called Ab Inan. He saw eight men and one woman riding a large kawa near the shore. They called out to the frightened Apu Pilas, who ran to call a companion. The nine seafarers, who turned out to be deities, told the two Tagbanua to hold a runsay every year on the fourth day after the full moon in December. Otherwise,

there would be sickness and death among the people. The nine deities introduced themselves as Mamuldaw, Nanalaykay Kat Bukas ("Among the Waves"), Sinamukray Kay Layag ("Riding with Sails"), Tumindug Kumana Kan ("Standing Gentlemen"), Ilintaw Kat Sabang ("Floater on the Deep Waters"), Linintas Kat Butas ("Crossing as Far as You Can See"), Nagsagubay, Nanalaytay Kat Langab ("Walker on the Waves"), and the lone female.

Performing Arts

Complementing the rich Tagbanua rituals and social gatherings in the past was an assortment of musical instruments some of which have, through the years, fallen into disuse. These included the *aruding* or jew's harp; the *babarak* or nose flute; the *tipanu* or mouth flute; the *pagang* and *tibuldu*, two variations of the bamboo zither; the *kudlung* or boat lute, similar to the kind used in Mindanao groups and in the Celebes; the *gimba*l or drum, whose top was made from the skin of the *bayawak* or monitor lizard; and the tiring, composed of lengths of bamboo with openings of various sizes producing different notes when struck with a stick. In addition, there were two generic types of gongs obtained from the shallow *babandil*. The mouth flute is still in use, and the drum and gongs are still played during rituals. The other instruments are rarely seen now, and have been supplanted by the modern acoustic type guitar and the ukulele, which is fashioned from half a coconut shell, similar to that used by the Christian Visayan (Fox 1982:38).

The known dances associated with rituals are the following: *abellano*, also called *soriano*, a traditional dance performed by males; *bugas-bugasan*, a dance for all participants of a pagdiwata, after they have drunk the ceremonial tabad (rice wine); *kalindapan*, solo dance by the female babaylan and her attendants; runsay, ritual dances performed by villagers on the seashore, where bamboo rafts laden with food offerings are floated for the gods; *sarungkay*, a healing dance by the main babaylan as she balances a sword on her head and waves *ugsang* or palm-leaf strips; *tugatak* and *tarindak*, dances performed by villagers who attend an *inim* or pagdiwata; *tamigan*, performed by male combatants using round winnowers or *bilao* to represent shields.

The dancing accompanying the runsay, performed about midnight and lasting until daybreak, is possibly the most moving of all Tagbanua dances, since it is part of a sacred ritual that takes place only once a year, and is performed on the beach from where the ritual raft has been launched towards the seaworld. The women, their heads covered with various pieces of cloth, form a spiraling chain of figures by placing their hands on the shoulders of the women in front of them. The men hold hands and form themselves into a big circle around the spiral formation of women. As the women dance slowly in a clockwise direction, tightening the spiral chain, the men also move in a clockwise fashion around the women's circle. The two chains advance and retreat, the women spiraling, the men encircling, all the while following the rhythm of singing. The tune sung is called turun, which has two parts, one for

the men, the other for the women. Sometimes the two groups would interchange their verses, evoking laughter from the dancers. Singing, dancing, laughing, then circling again and spiraling again, the dance continues until dawn.

Guests who attend the *albarka* ritual watch dances such as the *busak-busak*, the spider dance; *batak ribid*, a dance simulating the gathering of camote; *bungalon*, a showing-off dance; *bugsay-bugsay*, a paddle dance using fans; *segutset*, a courtship dance; and tarek, a traditional dance. The *andardi* is a festival dance of the Tagbanua in and around Aborlan, performed at social gatherings. During moments of relaxation, the Tagbanua sing and dance the andardi to while away the time. When dancing during a festival, the performers are dressed in their costumes, and hold in each hand a dried palm leaf called *palaspas*, similar to the anahaw. The music of the andardi is composed of one part of 12 measures, played or sung continuously throughout the dance. A drum or a gong accompanies the music and the song.

Drama in Tagbanua society is expressed in the mimetic dances imitating animals, such as the busak-busak, and those showing occupations, such as the batak ribid and bugsay-bugsay.

But the most important mimetic forms are the rituals where the priestess is possessed by and plays the role of the deity to whom the offerings are being made. The most important of Tagbanua rituals is the diwata, also called pagdiwata or inim (drink), which is essentially an open invitation to the deities to partake of a lavish feast of ceremonial tabad, cooked rice, rice cakes, jewelry, music, and other offerings. The preparations for this celebration are extensive, and preoccupy the Tagbanua village.

The ritual is undertaken for any of various purposes: healing of the sick, supplication for a bountiful harvest or a successful hunt, thanksgiving for the rice harvest, and the general well-being of the village. The ritual is held in honor of Mangindusa, as well as other deities of lower standing (Fox 1982:207).

The jars of fermented rice wine play a most important role in these rituals, because they are the means by which the deities are attracted to participate in the feast, rice wine being the only thing absent in the spirit world. Rice wine is the ritual bond that draws together all the other parts of the feast, such as the blood pacts, songs, and dances. It is considered a recreational drink, a ritual strength-giving agent, and as medicine, it is liberally applied to wounds or parts of the body which are in pain. The bond formed through the rice wine is at once social and cosmological, since the beverage binds the individual to the group, and mortals to the gods and the spirits of the dead and the deities.

At the center of the diwata rituals is the babalyan, who has the responsibility of selecting the areas for a new clearing, placating the spirits of the surroundings, providing the magical charms for hunters and fishers, and curing all kinds of ailments. While any adult can invoke the spirits of the dead in other Tagbanua rituals, only

the babalyan can summon them in the pagdiwata.

The *bilang* ceremony is the all-important ritual for the dead. It takes place after the rice harvest, a time when tabad becomes plentiful. Every Tagbanua family is expected to host one or more bilang rituals. As in the pagdiwata and most other Tagbanua rites, tabad is indispensable in the bilang, because the ceremony revolves around the sharing of wine between living persons and the spirits of the dead, who share a fondness for wine. Since there is no wine in the underworld, the bilang is a welcome opportunity for the spirits to drink their favorite tabad, and for the living to have favors granted them, since the spirit-relatives are very open to entreaties of the family on occasions such as this.

The bilang ritual begins with the rite of divination, to determine which among the spirit-relatives has caused a person's illness. This makes use of the babaylan who performs the brief rite of *panawag* near the grave of the dead relative by making offerings of betel quids and ceremonial cigarettes, and promises tabad should the ill become well. A jar of tabad with sipping reeds is prepared by the celebrants together with the offerings which include: a *karung* or water container; a plate with betel quid and cigarettes; a glass of "orange gin," the cheap alcoholic drink brought from the stores of Aborlan and imported from Manila; two bowls with five or seven pieces of *amik*, a sweet fried rice cake; a kerosene wick lamp providing light for the ritual, also bought in Aborlan, and which replaced the traditional pitch lamp; two piles of husked rice, set aside at harvest time specifically for the bilang rituals; and a bowl of liyutyut, cooked glutinous rice which is sweetened, packed into green bamboo tubes, and recooked. This same liyutyut (called *lutlut* by the Palawan group of the Mantalingayan highlands in the south) is called *piyusupusu* and *suman* when wrapped in banana leaves. These three basic ritual foods—amik, liyutyut, and piyusupusu—are all considered divine gifts, and are believed to be so tasty they are fit to offer to the deities and the dead.

The bilang ceremony involves the *paurut* (invocation) of as many spirit-relatives as possible through incantation, and the burning of the *parina* (incense) whose pleasant smell attracts the deities and spirits of the dead. The gongs are played as the paurut is being performed, and their music is an added incentive for the spirits to descend on the gathering. After the ritual offering of the articles have been laid out on a mat, the food is distributed to the children first, and then to the guests; then the bilang mat is removed. The communal drinking of tabad through the reed straws follows, a very festive social event that lasts through the night. • E.B. Maranan/Reviewed by S.G. Padilla Jr. **References**

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