Social Practices, Rituals and Festive Events

AT NIGHTFALL, elder men from an ato, the men’s ward in a village, go to Mt. Kalawitan to keep fire and watch in the fawi, the place of the great ancestors. They go fully armed with their spears, head-axes and shields. One of the youngest in the group carries a chick in a fiki, a small basket. While going up the mountain, the chick is induced to chirp along the way. The chirping announces to the anitos (spirits) that men are coming and to make their intentions clear. Upon reaching the fawi, they begin to dance to a rhythm created by the beating of their shields. Others gather firewood and build a fire to be kept burning through the night. The oldest in the group recites the kapya, the prayer pleading for rain, so that the plants in the terraces will not die.

The following day, they perform the puls in the ato, where a chicken is again offered for the same purpose. In the evening, they have the gong, pattong, playing through the whole night. If the rains still fail to come, the elders gather in their ato and decide to undertake the pal-laying ritual. This time, five pigs are prepared for sacrifice. Someone is asked to go to the mountains to get tikem (sacred plant) for a sangfo, a kind of canao or ritual feast. Again, the elders gather to select the house in the village where the sacrifices will be made and will bear the tikem. On the same day, the village observes a tengao. The women go out for the pasuk’ey bearing gifts of tobacco leaves to all men in the different ato. If after these the rains still do not come, they perform a group prayer, manaing, to beg rain from Lumawig. But if the deity is still adamant, they again observe a tengao and then perform the layaw where they club or beat one another, or run away with the possessions of others in a show of general chaos to show Lumawig their desperation. If the plea remains unheeded, they go on an extended tengao. At the end of this period, usually, the rains fall.

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BONTOC, MOUNTAIN PROVINCE, NORTHERN LUZON ISLAND, NORTHERN PHILIPPINES. This fire ritual is observed by the Bontoc in the municipality of Besao, in Mountain Province, Northern Luzon.

THE CEREMONY BEGINS the day before when all the houses in the barrio are thoroughly cleaned, swept and washed, including the grounds. Everyone takes a bath in the river. At night, every single fire in the barrio is allowed to go out.

The next morning, all those who are physically able, dress in clean clothes and go up to the designated sacred place with each householder carrying a piece of saleng (pine pitch). The sacred place in the barrio is an ancient volcanic fumarole on the shoulder of the mountain. There, a small hut has been built. They squat in a circle, in the center of which is an old priest who chants the ancient ritual, a prayer to fire. As the chanting proceeds, an old priestess starts to make a new fire saw. She holds down on the ground a pithy bamboo-like stick, about three inches in diameter, on which a notch has been made. A young priest places a hard piece of stick on the notch then saws vigorously. Soon, smoke appears and when the young priest removes his saw, there is a small ember. A ritual place where mounted carabao horns indicate the animals sacrificed.