

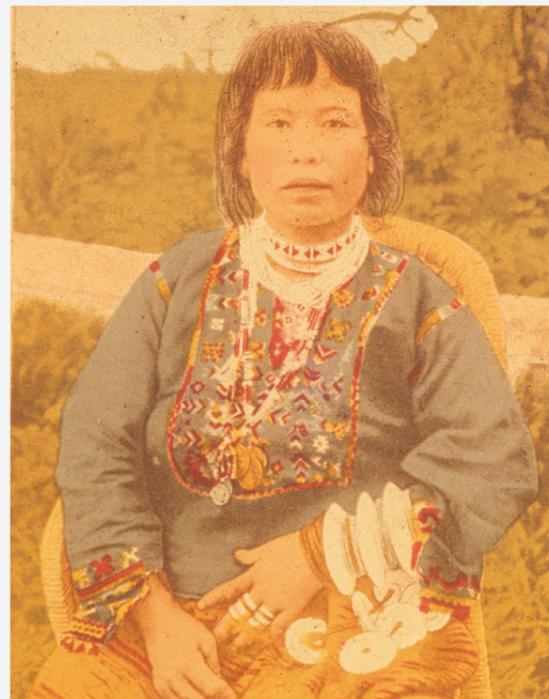
Ulaging Epic

TALAANDIG MANOBO, BUKIDNON PROVINCE, CENTRAL MINDANAO ISLAND, SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES. *This is an epic cycle among the Talaandig Manobo of Bukidnon in Mindanao. It is widely dispersed among many groups in the south, with many variations.*

LIKE MOST EPICS, the *Ulaging* is associated with the sacred as the deities are invoked (*pamada*). It is believed that during the chanting, the singer is guided by spirit teachers (*mulin ulin*) whose guidance is obtained only through the conduct of a ritual called *paulin*.

The chanting starts with the invocation, *pamada*, which is immediately followed by the description of the setting of the epic, the mythical *Nalandangan*. The characters are then delineated, together with their respective genealogies. Only then can the body of the story begin. The final phase is the resolution of all the conflicts, the return to *Nalandangan* and the peaceful life ever after.

The story is about the search for the enemy or the wait for an impending invasion. The usual battle follows and a subsequent final victory after difficulties. The resolution usually comes when victory becomes attainable. At times, the forebears of the people who dwell in the upper world intervene before the resolution is finally made. During the course of the chant, the singers at times make personal comments. Sometimes, after the *Ulaging*, chanters give the audience commentaries on the incidents.



Archival Photo

Among these people, the *Ulaging* is chanted.

The epic may be chanted in two styles. One is the *linegkitan*, which means glutinous, as it is profuse with detail and with more elaboration in the choice of words. The other is called *pamubungan*, suggesting a direction towards the top register, which uses a much simpler story line and minimal descriptions. Although there

is a wide variance in the singing, depending on the locality and exigencies of personal styles, three melodies are generally recognized: *umanen*, the most common of the three, done with a direct delivery; *ilangiten*, meaning heavenly or sung with a celestial voice, resulting in a longer chant; and *nanangenen*, which is the most mellow and lightest of the three.

The *pamada* is sung as prelude to the main body of the epic, as in all the other chants of the Talaandig Manobo. It is primarily to safeguard the singer from being reprimanded by those who do not wish to be disturbed by the chanting and secondly, in order to ensure a good voice with the guidance of the spirits. On occasion, the chanter even goes into a trance when the spirits take over the chanter's being after the *pamada*.

There are at least four variations of the *Ulaging* stories: *Agyu: Yumuganud ku Bagyu* or *Tumulín ku Kayamag* (Strong Wind Agyu); *Bunuanen Kagwasen* (Handsome and Happy Man); *Agyu: Dayandayan ta Yandang* (Jewel of the Peaceful Realm); *Agyu: Nabayaw ha Dayuen* (Praised Sun); and *Agyu: Nakinuyung Sakilay* (Beautiful Brows).

The epic is considered to be an oral history of the Manobo with two basic materials: a mythic lore of the deities, their alliances, fights and dalliances as they co-exist with the other Manobo and the base of the history of the Manobo. It traces their migration from Kagay'an in the central Mindanao region to the east to escape the Spaniards. The mythical author of the epic is *Baybayan* (The Journeyman) who is supposedly the eldest but illegitimate son of Agyu with a deity he chanced upon near a mountain stream.

The epic is a narration of the life of Agyu, his kin and people in their native land Kagay'an or Yambaguhun in Mindanao. The arrival of foreign enemies, the Spaniards, upset their peaceful life when they were subjugated. They decide to escape, but were relentlessly pursued by the foreigners. Arriving at a river, they construct a raft and float downstream making their way through brambles, then to a place guarded by a violently hacking sword, then again into a wildly tossing sea, passing a moor with gigantic mosquitoes, into an ocean of fire with towering waves, and finally, to a precipitous ocean. The tilting ocean eventually brings them to calm waters. They land in a place occupied by the merciful *Pignanaw*, the "overseer of the earth," who ordered them to stay there. They, however, resist the command, which brings them into confrontation with *Pignanaw*. A battle follows but Agyu wins the fight.

The epic is usually sung at dusk. The tales can be narrated (*mantukaw*) during the day or even at dusk. The chanter teaches social values while chanting. Manobo ancestors are depicted as heroes, described in elegant ancient lyrical language filled with metaphors and other figures of speech. The events and situations are set in locally familiar landscape, where the conflicts, issues and resolutions are settled through the provisions of the customary law. During the performance, the audience usually participates by loudly empathizing with the characters and shouting out loud comments.

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