

Uhag Ritual

TUWALI IFUGAO, IFUGAO PROVINCE, NORTHERN LUZON ISLAND, NORTHERN PHILIPPINES. *Renowned terrace builders, the Tuwali Ifugao are a hard working, fun-loving lot. Banaue's sunny month is the season of the bakis or feasts where many ceremonies and rituals are performed. In any of these occasions, it is almost certain that they will perform the uhag, one of the simplest and most common prestige feasts they have. It is performed depending upon the needs of the community or settlement; be it to ask the gods to cure an ailing member, a thanksgiving feast after a good harvest, to remember a long dead ancestor, or for any occasion for that matter.*

THE UHAG is considered the simplest and cheapest among the rituals based on the animals to be sacrificed and the musical instruments used to accompany the ritual. Only one pig is sacrificed. The only musical instrument used is a cut of bamboo tube (*bubo*) of the thin variety, split down the middle, with a portion removed to form a fork. They call this *hangar*. When hit upon a hard object, the hangar produces a mellow, tangy sound.

When two pigs are sacrificed, the *pattung/paktong* or *bangibang* is used. This is a wooden stick, made of resonant hard wood coated with chicken blood. It is slightly curved, about three inches wide and two feet long, tapering on both ends. The player beats upon the bangibang, which gives out varying sounds depending on its size, the wood it is made of and the part where the wood is hit.

The most elaborate of these feasts is the *dinupdup* where the feast-giver expects the deities to secure his well-being and prosperity. He asks for a miraculous increase of rice

and animals or to stabilize his position if he is already prosperous. To attain his request, he has to offer several pigs, several coops of chicken and plenty of rice wine and of course, good gong music and bangibang or pattung accompaniments. This feast may last for nine days and nights or more.

The preliminary preparations and rituals are held several days before the event. Village people cooperate in the grand preparation, particularly in the making of rice wine, gathering of firewood and in securing animals for sacrifice.

The reading of the chicken's bile as an oracle is the principal rite of the first day of preparations. A chicken is killed and its bile examined. A blackish green bile is considered a good omen, whereas a pale one spells bad luck and the subsequent cancellation of the feast for another day.

When the rites are completed, people from neighboring villages gather on the grounds of

the host of the feast. The pig to be sacrificed is laid on the middle of the feast ground. Its legs are tied securely together by rattan strips. Priests, depending upon the number invited, go upstairs to the feast giver's hut and squat in a circle chanting prayers.

Everyone is asked to be quiet and still. Nobody is allowed to move in and out of the dwelling place nor are they allowed to walk around. Then two priests come down from the hut, one of them carrying a small bundle of *palay* (rice stalks) in his right hand. Slowly, both face the ladder of the hut. The priest with the palay bundle stands on the left side of the other priest then they join hands. They swing their joined and free hands upwards and downwards four times in a manner of offering the palay to their gods of harvest and together, they chant a short prayer. They climb back towards the house and return the palay bundle with the rest in a winnowing basket.

Ritual dancing follows. The *inyuhag* part of the uhag is where all the priests come out of the hut and one by one dance around the sacrificial pig, each one carrying a spear. They perform the ritual dance called *chu-nor*. Their backs are covered with *inapnutan*, a boar-hair covering. Instead of carrying a spear, the head priest brings a *hungot* (coconut shell cup) filled with rice wine. They dance around the pig several times pointing their spears at the pig. At first, no musical instruments accompany their dancing. They just work out a silent rhythm which everybody follows. With more pigs to offer, gongs and paktong accompany the dancing. Then, the *namudbud* or head priest spills the wine on the pig's armpit closest to the heart to signify that this pig is what the feast giver offers to the gods. As he does this, the spear-bearing priest withdraws into the crowd. Now, everybody is free to move about and talk.

Later, the head priest moves towards the pig with a knife. Everybody is asked to keep still. With royal bearing and a fearless expression, he quickly thrusts his knife into the pig's heart and withdraws it at once. Then using a sharpened stake, he reinserts this into the heart, continuously jabbing, until the pig is dead. When he sees that the pig is still, the priest gets a *hangar* (forked bamboo tube) and taps the pig's body with it. The rest of the priests form a circle around the pig with the *mamudbud* and chant the *hangar*, a prayer named after the musical instrument. A part of it goes:

Hangalon mi chi fafuy mi. Utang'e ... Chi pun hangan chi tulang mi.

(We have plenty of bones so please accept our sacrificial pig instead.)

The pig is placed over a big fire supported by two strong fresh poles to burn off its hair. The Ifugao believe that pig or fowl meat tastes better when it is cleared of hair this way than when dipped in boiling water. The pig is washed and cleaned and brought up the house by the priest. There, it is cut open, the entrails cleaned, cooked and shared by the priest and some older men. The rest of the meat is cut and cooked in any desired way, prayed over by the priests and distributed to the attending crowd. Aside from the meat dishes, other foods are prepared separately and distributed with rice and plenty of rice wine.

With the feast over, the people start homeward leaving the feast-giver an assurance that his request has been granted by the divinities.

William Beyer