

Sacred Mountains

B'LAAN, DAVAO DEL SUR PROVINCE, SOUTHEASTERN MINDANAO ISLAND, SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES. *There are places held with deep respect by the B'laan called lagafradongamdono, which are watched over by a guardian entity or a spirit. It may be a mountain, a stream or river, waterfalls, cave or any physical environment that reveals the intimacy of the B'laan with their physical world. In their culture, there are three kinds of sacred places: nafe or a place that is respected or held in awe due to the presence of supernatural beings; dansuan or the place where a sacrifice has been offered; and dansuan bolol or the place where a ritual is usually performed.*



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MOST MOUNTAINS in the region are held sacred since these were all created by the deity, *Almabet*, and are considered the mountains of the ancestors. These include Bolol Afu (Mt. Apo), Male Bato (Mt. Parker/Mt. Maughan), Amtutung (Mt. Matutum) and Bolol Lomot. The last two are particularly held in reverence because they are considered the navel of the earth.

Rituals are performed on the mountainsides when making offerings. A *sabak*, a segment of bamboo with the top split into strips and woven into a receptacle, is erected. The offerings placed in the receptacle consist of varied things like a ring (*tising*), small bells, morsels of food or even coins. Sometimes a chicken is offered. All these are left behind after the recitation of some invocations or to request the supernaturals' permission to allow them to clear a field for planting. At times, spirits with a dual nature, such as those who are guardian and punisher

at the same time, like the *bosaw*, are invoked when making the offering. Bolol Klutang, in particular, is considered the mountain inhabited by the bosaw.

Mountain hunting grounds like Bolol Sufe and Bolol Kleb are held in awe by hunters such that they make offerings even just to enter the forest and catch birds, especially the omen birds like the pigeon, *almugan*. Coins are usually dropped in holes dug on the ground at the edge of the clearing. There is a firm belief that the bird, *almugan*, was placed in Bolol Atdo to tell hunters whether or not they should enter the mountain. When the bird call described as *abnen* comes from the front, back, left or right sides of a person, it is a sign not to proceed with whatever activity is planned, even if it is as trivial as putting an arm through a sleeve. When the bird call is not *abnen*, or when there is no call at all, one can enter at will since permission is presumed to have been granted.

JTP

(opposite page) In the minds of the B'laan, the sacred Mount Matutum is the navel of the earth.