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THE RICE CULTIVATION
AND RICE-HARVEST FEAST OF
THE BONTOC IGOROT

BY

KAJ BIRKET-SMITH



København

i kommission hos Ejnar Munksgaard

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Introduction.

Thanks to the Carlsberg Foundation and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research I had, in 1951, the good fortune of being able to join the Danish Deep-Sea Expedition on H.D.M.S. *Galathea* during its cruise in the East Indian waters and the western Pacific. My principal object was an ethnological study of the Polynesian population on Rennell Island in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. As it happened, however, I also got the opportunity of visiting one of the villages of the Bontoc Igorot in northern Luzon and taking part in the rites connected with the rice harvest. On the following pages I shall give an account of my observations in general and particularly a description of the ceremonies, which to my knowledge have not been delineated previously in detail.

Immediately after our arrival in Manila I met, to our mutual surprise, an old friend and school fellow, Dr. TAGE ELLINGER, then professor of zoology in the University of the Philippines, and his charming wife, who is an Igorot by birth. During the subsequent conversation I soon realized that here was a unique opportunity of studying an aspect of native life of which very little was known. Besides, Mr. HAKON MIELCHE, the information officer of the *Galathea* Expedition, wanted to take a film of Igorot life, and in less than an hour it was arranged that Mrs. ELLINGER, Mr. PETER RASMUSSEN, chief photographer of the expedition, and I should undertake a trip to Balili, one of the villages of the Bontoc Igorot, where members of Mrs. ELLINGER's family were still living. The information service kindly took charge of the travelling expenses.

The Geographical and Cultural Background.

Like the rest of the Philippines, northern Luzon is extremely mountainous. The western part, between Rio Grande de Cagayan

and the South China Sea, is entirely taken up by old and strongly eroded folding chains known collectively as the Caraballos Occidentales. It is wild and splendid scenery with deep gorges, V-shaped valleys, and sharp mountain crests rising to a height of more than 2600 m above sea level. Only rarely do the ridges give place to small, undulating plateaux which are probably all that remains of the former surface of the land. Numerous rivers, the most important of which is the Rio Chico, the main tributary of the Rio Grande, wind their way through the valleys and are fed by innumerable narrow streams rushing torrentiously down the steep slopes. The river beds are full of enormous boulders and often dangerous to pass during the rainy season, i. e. from June till well into October. The precipitation is very considerable—in Baguio, about midway between Manila and Bontoc, the annual rainfall amounts to 453.5 cm¹—and the valleys are covered with a luxurious tropical vegetation, which higher up on the mountain sides is replaced by grass land with scattered trees or by open pine woods.

More or less all the native inhabitants are known as Igorot. This name does not refer to a single people but is a common designation for several tribes living in the mountains west of the Rio Grande.² Just how many tribes should be included under this term seems somewhat arbitrary. In his survey of the ethnology of the Philippines, KROEBER³ includes only the Bontoc, Kankanai, and Nabaloi or Benguet, whereas BARTON⁴ adds the Apayao, Kalinga, Tinggian, and Ifugao. On the other hand Mrs. ELLINGER was of opinion that the term Igorot applied to the Apayao, Kalinga, Ifugao, Bontoc, and Benguet, by which she seemed to understand not only the Nabaloi but also the Kankanai.

The main thing is, however, that we have here to do with a number of tribes with different languages and, in spite of the fact that they are all prominent agriculturists and, until recently, were notorious head hunters, also possessing distinct cultural types. BARTON, to whom we owe a detailed study of Igorot eth-

¹ DOBBY, p. 321.

² According to JENKS (p. 27) it is derived from two Tagalog words: *golot*, mountain chain, and *i*, dweller of, and thus really means nothing but Mountaineer or Highlander.

³ KROEBER, p. 59. On tribal classification and synonymy in northern Luzon cf. WORCESTER, pp. 791 ff.

⁴ BARTON 1946, p. 9.

nology, has described their culture as "so to speak built of the same materials, yet . . . of quite different patterns." The Kalinga, for instance, are characterized by their political institutions and the Ifugao by "the most extensive and pervasive religion that has yet been reported, outside of India at least, in ethnographical literature".¹ In the same way, the distinctive marks of the Bontoc are their loose social organization and their "trial marriages."² Says EGGAN: "As one goes from the interior down to the coast, from Ifugao through Bontoc, Tinguian, and Ilocano, a regular series of changes takes place in social, political, economic, and religious institutions, a series which has a definite direction".³

The Bontoc tribe occupies a central position among the Igorot, between the Tinggian and Kalinga to the north, the Gaddang to the east, and the Ifugao and Kankanaï to the south. According to the census of 1939 they number some 21,000 individuals.⁴ They take their name from the town of Bontoc, the capital of the Mountain Province and situated on the Rio Chico 400 km north of Manila. The first Spaniards arrived in the neighbourhood in 1665 and were followed by other expeditions in the 18th century, but it was not till 1852 that an organized government was established.⁵ Nevertheless the Bontoc as well as the other Igorot tribes maintained their independence and yielded long and violent resistance against the Spanish rule. As late as 25 years ago a visit to Bontoc involved a laborious and difficult journey on foot or horseback along steep and narrow mountain paths. Shortly before World War II, however, the Americans built the present military highway, a masterpiece of engineering work, and to-day there is a regular autobus connection between Manila and Bontoc. But even under these circumstances the Bontoc are virtually independent and cling to their pagan customs. Only two or three years ago two American professors were killed by some Igorot, and the Philippine authorities dare not visit their villages without an armed escort. Fortunately, however, we avoided having a rifle-armed constable trudging on our heels, as it would, of course, have meant a serious obstacle to our work.

¹ Ibid., p. 9.

² JENKS, p. 33.

³ EGGAN, p. 13.

⁴ BARTON 1946, p. 9.

⁵ JENKS, p. 35.

The village of Balili, where we stayed from July 12th to July 18th, is situated high up on the mountain slope in the Chico valley and only a few kilometres from Bontoc. There is a wonderful view over the green rice terraces lower down and across the foaming river to the distant hills on the other side. Outside the lowest situated house, which is, of course, the first one met with when a visitor follows the path from the bottom of the valley, there are two rather small and crude human figures, one of wood and the other one of the roots of a fern-tree. They are supposed to ward off evil spirits who want to enter the village. The houses of the village, which has about 400 inhabitants, are scattered over a considerable area. In between there are small cultivated patches of sweet potatoes, maize, sugar cane, beans, tobacco, etc. and bananas, breadfruit, mangos or other fruit trees are often planted near the houses. Owing to the steepness of the ground all buildings have to be erected on stone-lines terraces. JENKS has given a detailed description of the typical Bontoc habitations and their interior arrangement.¹ Except for the fact that some of them are now built on poles and one or two are provided with roofs of corrugated iron, they still look very much the same as in JENKS's time. The walls are made of thick planks, and they are covered with high roofs of heavy straw sloping in four directions from a short ridge-pole, under which there is a smoke hole at either end. Inside, on the other hand, the Bontoc do not seem to adhere to the original pattern as strictly as formerly, and in stead of the fire places on the ground floor there are now often separate kitchens.

A wealthy man has also his own rice granary similar to the dwelling house but without openings except the door, and a number of hog pens according to the number of pigs he owns, since each animal has always its own sty. The pen, which is also the place where the family does its business in the early morning hours, is dug slightly into the ground and surrounded by a semi-circular wall of heavy, unfashioned stones more than one meter high. At the back of the open enclosure there is a small house with low stone walls and covered with a roof of straw. Inside the pen there is a crude stone trough where the pig is fed regularly with boiled vines and peelings of sweet potatoes. Similar, though

¹ Ibid., p. 55 ff.

sometimes much bigger stone vessels are lying in many places between the houses and are used for washing vegetables. The upper edges of the hog pens and the stone walls of the terraces are often the only paths in the village. In other places a narrow defile may be cut through the rising ground. Even the shortest walk in the village means constant mountain climbing, going either up or down.

It takes but a short time to find out that the village is, at least potentially, nearly self-supporting economically. Agriculture and animal breeding, eked out by some fishing, hunting, and gathering of vegetable products, invertebrates, etc., supply the food, while timber and other necessities are obtained from the natural vegetation. Basket weaving, which is always done by the men, is one of the most important crafts. There are many types of baskets, and the small caps of the men, which are also used as receptacles for tobacco leaves, pipes, and other small belongings, are likewise made of basketry. Most, if not all of these caps are, however, bought from Bayo. Another common industry is wood-work. As a rule the Bontoc do not carve figures as the Ifugao do,¹ and their artistic skill is not great, but many wooden containers, dishes, etc., are rather well made. At least now-a-days they do not smelt iron, but they work their own spears, axes, and so on. For forging they have bellows of the type known all over southeastern Asia, consisting of two vertical bamboo tubes with a common mouth-piece of baked clay. The anvil is nothing but a flat stone, whereas the stone hammers mentioned by JENKS² have now been replaced by ordinary iron tools. They also make pipes and ear ornaments of brass, the casting being performed by the *cire-perdu* method.³ Cooking is done in plain, globular pots of baked clay, but all pots in Balili have been imported from the villages of Samoki or Tata, because there is no suitable clay in the neighbourhood. When they have been shaped by hand, they are left to dry for five days; then they are baked and rubbed with bees-wax or pine resin, and before they are put to use it is necessary to boil some water in them.

¹ Wooden figures representing ancestors are, however, figured by MEYER & SCHADENBERG, pl. I, figg. 2, 5, and 8.

² JENKS, p. 126. A stone hammer is figured by MEYER & SCHADENBERG, pl. XVI, fig. 12.

³ JENKS, p. 131.

Whereas formerly the clothing was manufactured of bark cloth or woven plant fibres,¹ it is now common to buy dyed cotton yarn from the lowlands. The loom is of the ordinary horizontal Indonesian type where the warp is straitened by means of a girth round the back of the weaver. In spite of the modern anilin dyes, rather simple but as a rule very pleasing designs are obtained in this primitive manner. Originally the men's costume consisted of a breech-cloth, to which a blanket might be added in cold weather. Besides this, they wore the afore-mentioned basketry cap and ornaments of boars' tusks and buffalo teeth around the neck and the arms. In rainy weather they used a short cape made of strips of palm leaves similar to that of Chinese and Japanese peasants. All these pieces of apparel are still in common use, but to this they sometimes add a tattered shirt or an old jacket of American manufacture. After the war cast-off Japanese steel hats have become fashionable head coverings. The original woman's dress was a skirt reaching a little below the knees and kept in place by a girdle. Now, most women add a cheap cotton blouse, but many old women and even some young girls still do not trouble to cover the upper parts of their bodies, and small children of both sexes always scamper around entirely naked. Formerly, tattooing was common, and the taking of a head entitled a man to a special pattern on the chest. The arms and sometimes the chests of the older women are still elaborately tattooed, but their most characteristic ornament is a head band consisting of several strings of glass beads interspersed with big, oblong beads of white shell or snake vertebræ; the latter are very valuable, because they are supposed to protect against lightening. To keep off the rain the women wear a sort of hood not unlike those of New Guinea and some parts of Melanesia. It is scoop-shaped and roughly triangular, made of palm leaves and a double weave of coarse splints, and covers both the head and the upper part of the back.

The almost complete lack of organization is probably the most characteristic feature of Bontoc society. There are no chiefs, and all authority belongs to the elderly men, who decide any matter of importance. Not even the village is a political unit. A Bontoc village is always an aggregate of mutually independent

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

groups, each of which has its own public building or buildings. A group of this kind is called *dâp'ai*¹ in Balili. Writing about the inhabitants of the town of Bontoc, JENKS tells us that each group, which is there called an *ato*, has two buildings, one of which, the *pabafunan*, is the place where ceremonies are performed and therefore taboo to the women, whereas the *fawi* is more especially a council house for the men; both kinds also serve as club houses during the day time, and all boys more than three or four years old and all youths sleep there.² He adds, however, that in Samoki there is only one type of public house. The same thing applies to Balili, where there are two *dâp'ai*, each one possessing only a single building. They are situated some distance apart, one near the upper outskirts of the village, the other one somewhat lower down. It is a remarkable fact that a man does not belong to his *dâp'ai* by rights of birth but is simply attached to the one the building of which is closest to his own house.

There is a very curious resemblance between these public buildings and the hog pens. Like the latter they have low walls of unfashioned stones and roofs of straw, and in front there is a small open space paved with stone slabs and surrounded by a low stone fence. A few of the stones are bigger than the rest, and here the skulls of the slain enemies are said to be buried. Inside, the house is so low that it is hardly possible to stand erect. To the right of the door is a wooden platform where the old men use to sleep, while the boys have their sleeping place in a similar room behind. There is no light inside except from the diminutive door, and the whole room is full of smoke from the open fire place. In the town of Bontoc there are still at least two dormitories for young girls, who are there visited by their lovers during the night. They look very much like the men's houses but have no open courts in front. In Balili, however, no such houses are found. On the other hand the "trial marriage" exists, in so far as a girl often lives with her lover for years, and even has several children with him, before the actual wedding ceremony takes place. Both the men's and the girls' houses are undoubtedly very

¹ â = the vowel in English "law", Danish "â"; ' designates a short pause (not glottal stop).

² Ibid., p. 50 ff.

old institutions, and their primitive architecture, which is so similar to the hog pens, may very well be a survival of the original Bontoc style of dwellings, whereas the wooden house has been introduced from without.

Economic Activities.

The striking discrepancy between the general cultural level and the highly developed agriculture of the Igorot has been pointed out by WORCESTER and KROEBER.¹ Indeed, rice cultivation has here reached a stage of perfection which is exceptional among primitive tribes and almost comparable to that of the highest civilisations of southern and eastern Asia. This is a remarkable contrast to the pagan tribes of Mindanao, who grow upland rice only and are ignorant of irrigation.² Swamp rice occurs among the Bontoc in two varieties. One of them, called *ginōlod*, is said to be the original one and is harvested in July, while the other variety, *linōko*, has been introduced from the lowlands in recent times and is ready for harvest in December. The rice-terrace culture is probably of considerable antiquity in northern Luzon, where it is supposed to have been introduced from northern Indo-China or South China in the last phase of the Philippine Stone Age around 800 B. C. or even a little earlier.³ It should be added here that although there are many ceremonies connected with the cultivation, the Rice Mother myth, so well known in many parts of Indonesia, seems to be completely lacking among the Bontoc,⁴ nor do we find the idea that the rice in bloom should be protected like a pregnant woman. Another custom, which occurs for instance on Java, is also unknown, viz. that a married couple should have sexual intercourse in the rice fields in order to increase the crop.⁵

Rice fields constitute the most valuable real estate of the Bontoc. They are always individually owned, and in this respect

¹ WORCESTER, p. 839. KROEBER, p. 82.

² COLE 1913, pp. 52, 184. GARVAN, p. 73.

³ BEYER, p. 55.

⁴ In order to be certain on this point I wrote to Professor ELLINGER, who asked both his wife, some of his Igorot students, and Professor OTLEY BEYER, who is probably the greatest authority on Igorot ethnology. All of them agreed that they had heard nothing of the concept in question.

⁵ MAYER, pp. 446 f.

men and women have equal rights. Even in married life husband and wife have their own fields. A newly married couple will get sufficient soil from their parents; the father will provide it for his son, and the mother for her daughter, and when the parents die, their fields are inherited by the children according to the same rules. A son who defrays the expenses for the death feast of his father—and they are very considerable—has a right to all the rice fields, but if several children share the expenses, the fields are divided among them.

The order of inheritance is stated by JENKS¹ in the following manner: 1, lineal descendants; 2, ascendants; 3, lateral descendants; 4, the surviving spouse; 5, the person who, supposing there is no kin, takes care of the property. To this may be added that the oldest son takes precedence over his younger brothers, and after him the youngest son over the rest, the only exception being that a house is always inherited by the youngest son, if he is still living in it when his father dies. Potato fields are inherited according to the same rules as the rice fields but are not considered so valuable. Mrs. ELLINGER and her younger sister own some potato fields in Balili, which they have inherited from their mother, but if she wanted, Mrs. ELLINGER might claim them all by virtue of her superior age.

The amount of labour spent in building and keeping the rice terraces in repair is really impressive. On gentle slopes the walls bordering the terraces are low and built of mud, but on steep mountain sides they are erected of big boulders, which must be carried from the river bed or distant stone slides. The width of the fields and the height of the walls vary of course according to the acclivity of the ground, but walls up to 15 m or more occur among the Bontoc,² even if they do not attain quite this height at Balili.

In connection with the rice fields there is an elaborate system of irrigation. The water is conducted from the mountain streams through wooden aqueducts to the uppermost terraces, from where it passes on to the lower fields through openings made temporarily in the walls. Another method mentioned by JENKS,³ by which

¹ JENKS, p. 164 f.

² JENKS (p. 90) gives a maximum height of 25 m, but this is an exaggeration (BARTON 1922, 400).

³ JENKS, p. 93.

the water is simply carried in pots and poured over the ground, is hardly used at Balili, where even the lowest situated terraces are at a rather considerable distance from the river.

Formerly when only one variety of rice, the *ginōlod*, was cultivated, sweet potatoes were grown on the dry rice terraces after the rice harvest in July,¹ but now the fields are prepared immediately again for a crop of *linōko*. Originally, the irrigated soil was worked solely by means of a primitive digging stick, whereas the ordinary Philippine plough has been introduced in recent years. It is a rather crude implement made entirely of wood except for the iron share, and belongs to the so-called "square" type with a horizontal foot, a curved handle, a short sheath, and a strongly curved beam. Moreover, there is a single mould board. JAGOR, and after him KROEBER,² have both suggested that the Philippine plough is of Spanish origin. FAY-COOPER COLE, on the other hand,³ rightly observes that although its name among the Tinggian, *alado*, is doubtless a corruption of the Spanish *arado*, "this of course does not prove that the plow itself was derived from the Spaniards". In fact, exactly the same type occurs on Java, Bali, and Celebes as well as in China and Japan, whereas nothing like it is known on the Iberian Peninsula, and therefore LESER is probably right when he ascribes it to Chinese influence.⁴ This may also be true of a kind of curved, paddle-shaped wooden shovel now in use among the Bontoc,⁵ and to-day they have a few ordinary farming implements such as hoes, spades, and dungforks of Japanese manufacture.

The preparation of the soil for the rice which is to be harvested in the summer begins some time in December. The left-over straws of the old crop are used as fertiliser and is first stamped with the feet and afterwards covered with a layer of earth. Pigs' dung is used as manure, too, but is not covered like the straw. Before ploughing the water is allowed to flood the field, which is thus turned into a shallow lake with 7 to 10 cm of water

¹ JENKS, p. 89.

² JAGOR, p. 120 fig. KROEBER, p. 85.

³ COLE 1922, p. 390 note 3.

⁴ LESER, pp. 459, 463 note 17.

⁵ Cf. BISHOP, pl. 6 fig. 1. BISHOP suggests that the paddle-shaped shovel came to Japan from southern China together with irrigated rice culture, etc. On the other hand, the ordinary Chinese shovel has a rectangular blade (cf. FRANKE, pl. XLIII and XLIX).

and, immediately after the ploughing has started, becomes a yellow mud puddle. The plough is drawn by a single buffalo, but since it is far from all Bontoc who are in the lucky possession of one of these animals, many people have to borrow one from their more wealthy neighbours. In the meantime the rice which has been sown about two months previously in one of the small seed beds has attained a suitable height, and the transplanting to the proper fields takes place. This is generally done by the women. In the beginning of April the rice begins to bloom, and the following months until the harvest is a busy time, because the crop has to be protected against birds, mice, monkeys, and wild pigs. JENKS describes several clever devices for scaring away these pests.¹

Needless to say, a number of rites are performed in order to increase the crop. A full account of them as they were carried out in the town of Bontoc fifty years ago has been given by JENKS.² As far as Balili is concerned I can only say that there are ceremonies connected with both the sowing and the transplanting of the rice. At the time when it begins to bloom there is a ceremony called *apui*. Each family carries a chicken and some pork to one of its own fields where the meat is cooked over a small fire and a little of it eaten. The rest is taken to another field, and so on, till all fields have been visited. A chicken is also taken to the sacred tree (cf. the description of the harvest feast) where it is killed and eaten. This, I suppose, is done by one or two priests. The purpose of the ceremony is to increase the crop. In Balili no rites are performed to procure rain, but they are said to be known in Alap, one of the neighbouring villages.

In this context we may include some remarks on a custom which has some bearing on the growth of the crop although, to be sure, it has been ignored for several years and even in former times was not considered an agricultural rite in the proper sense of the word, viz. head-hunting. It is highly probable that head-hunting once existed among all primitive tribes of the Philippines, even if it has disappeared for instance among the Bagobo of Mindanao and the Nabaloi.³ Among the Bontoc it was largely a

¹ JENKS, pp. 100 ff.

² Ibid., pp. 207 ff.

³ BENEDICT, pp. 161 f. COLE 1913, pp. 94 f. MOSS 1920 a, p. 214.

matter of village feuds and revenge as well as an exciting sport, and in this manner it is understood by JENKS,¹ but at the same time my informants fully realized that it would bring good luck and improve the harvest. Similar ideas occur among the Tinggian and Kalinga.²

The description of the Bontoc head-hunting rites given by JENKS³ differs somewhat from the account I obtained in Balili. In both places not only the head but sometimes also the hands and feet were brought back to the men's house, where all the men of the *dâp'ai* gathered and danced. The returning party was not allowed to eat for two days and one night. After that their first meal should consist of pork, the second one of chicken, while big pigs and buffalo were killed for their third meal. In all cases the meat had to be blessed beforehand by the old men (i. e. the priests?). In connection with the last-mentioned meal the heads were buried under the stone fence of the men's house. Afterwards fishing takes place in the river—we shall see later on that this is a part of the harvest rites, too—and a chicken is sacrificed at the sacred tree. Then the whole village has to rest for five or six days, and when the men go to the rice fields again they always do so in company and armed with their spears. Two or three weeks later another chicken is killed and eaten in the men's house, and a chicken is again sacrificed at the sacred tree, followed by two or three days of rest. Then the men fetch a big stone or a pine log in the mountains and erect it at the place where the head is buried. If it is a log, it is carved previously to represent a human figure.⁴ Finally, the men carry slow-burning torches of rice straw wrapped in sugar-cane leaves to the place where the enemy has been killed, and throw them away there, after which they return to the men's house and have a feast of chicken and pork.

Both men and women take part in the harvest. From JENKS's description⁵ it seems that in his time the ears were gathered by hand, but now the Bontoc use a knife of the ordinary Indonesian

¹ JENKS, p. 175.

² COLE 1922, p. 372.

³ JENKS, pp. 175 ff.

⁴ Speaking of the men's houses in Bontoc, JENKS (p. 51) mentions that "the tops of some posts are rudely carved to represent a human head". It seems probable that they indicate the places where heads have been buried.

⁵ JENKS, p. 104.

type with an iron blade placed crosswise in a short handle. Similar knives are found among the Nabaloi, Ifugao, Ilocano, Gaddang, and Tinggian,¹ and have probably been introduced from one of these tribes. Each ear is cut off separately, and as soon as a small bundle is ready, it is tied firmly together with a strip of rattan in such a way that the ears appear spread out fanwise. The sheaf is then placed in a carrying basket, and the whole procedure is repeated. Each sex has its own type of carrying basket. That of the women is rather shallow and carried on the head, while the men's baskets are deeper and are always used pairwise, fastened to a wooden yoke resting on the shoulder.

JENKS² tells us that before the harvest is begun, the owner of the field will make a small fire on the path leading to it, and while his assistants are squatting around the fire, he will ask the rice to increase greatly in the granary. Then two long stalks of a certain grass are placed near the path as a sign that nobody is allowed to approach as long as the harvest is going on. In Balili, on the other hand, it was stated that the stalks, which are here supposed to be three in number, are not planted till after the first basket of sheaves is filled. Among the Nabaloi and Kankanai the same custom of keeping intruders away from the field prevails,³ but in Balili it seems to be on the decline; at least no one objected when Mr. RASMUSSEN and I visited a field where the harvesters were in full activity.

When the rice has been brought back to the village, the sheafs are placed on the house roof for a couple of days so that they may dry, and are afterwards stored away in the granary. When the rice is to be put to use, it is beaten in a mortar by the house wife. In this way it is hulled and the pellicle removed. The mortar is either of wood or of stone and of very considerable size; sometimes it is even double, i. e. provided with two depressions. For winnowing the woman uses a flat basketwork tray. Rice is the staple food of the Bontoc, but it is also used for making beer, which is highly appreciated and consumed in great quantities at the feasts. It is generally kept in big earthenware jars of Chinese manufacture, which are held in very high price.

¹ MOSS 1920a, p. 223. BARTON 1922, p. 404. COLE 1922, p. 393.

² JENKS, pp. 103 f.

³ MOSS 1920a, p. 334. MOSS 1920b, p. 376.

Next to rice, sweet potatoes are probably the most important crop. They are grown on un-irrigated soil either on the mountain slopes or on small terraces between the houses. It is easy to understand that a potato field has not by far the same value as a rice field. Some other cultivated plants have been mentioned before. In the Spanish period the Bontoc had millet, maize, sugar cane, taro, yams, manioc, string beans, black beans, winged beans, mouse beans, bananas, pineapples, breadfruit, coffee, tobacco, oranges, lemons, and grapefruit. The Americans added tomatos, pawpaw, soya beans, avocado pears, peanuts, cabbage, and ordinary potatoes.

Meat is not eaten to any great extent and mostly on special occasions, and, it seems, even then usually in small quantities. Black pigs and chicken are probably the most important domesticated animals but are rarely killed except for sacrifices. A pig is killed by cutting its throat, and the blood is mixed with the soup. When a chicken is sacrificed, a long stalk of grass is put in the ground outside the house. It is killed in the most cruel and repulsive fashion: a man grasps the bird by the legs, holding its head downwards, and beats it with a small stick—not even particularly hard—on its wings and neck until the screaming fowl expires after ten or fifteen minutes. The Bontoc claim that the meat is improved in this way, but there is probably some magic or religious reason connected with head hunting, too. JENKS makes the observation, at any rate, that “the old men say it is bad to cut off a chicken’s head”.¹ Dogs are kept for hunting, but their meat is also appreciated. Buffalos are not plenty, and before the introduction of the plough they were used for sacrifice only. According to JENKS² they are killed with spears. In Balili, however, they are poleaxed, and at the same time the hind legs are hamstrung. Afterwards, the skulls are placed on the house under the eaves.

Fishing occupies a very insignificant place in the economic life of the Bontoc. In the Rio Chico there are some small fish, probably a species of freshwater goby, which are taken either simply with the naked hands or in a basketry trap. In consideration of their size, which only amounts to about 10 cm or less, it is rather astonishing that the eating of fish plays an indispensable

¹ JENKS, p. 209.

² *Ibid.*, p. 142.

part in some of the agricultural rites. Game is scarce around Balili, and therefore hunting is of even less importance than fishing. Sometimes wild boars are taken in pitfalls, or hunted with spears, and wild fowl are caught in snares suspended in a circle, inside of which a tame cock is tied as a decoy. Small fish as well as crustaceans, snails, and other invertebrates are taken in the inundated rice fields in traps or with the hands. Women working in the fields usually carry a small basket at their belts for gathering food of this kind.

The Harvest Feast.

One of the main ceremonies in connection with rice cultivation takes place at the harvest. We have more or less detailed descriptions from a number of tribes both in northern Luzon¹ and in Mindanao,² but all of them differ considerably from what we saw in Balili. There are a few points of resemblance between our observations and the so-called *chaka* ceremonies celebrated in Bontoc at the transplantation of the young rice,³ but there are also essential differences.

When we arrived in Balili, the rice harvest was almost finished. Of course we were anxious to witness the harvest ceremonial, but that was no easy matter, for the rice still remained in a few fields, and therefore our wish aroused serious scruples. When, however, we promised to defray the expenses, the men finally agreed, but it took two nights of heated discussion in the men's houses before the matter was settled. Another difficulty was that a pig was needed, and nobody wanted to part with their pigs, because they had not yet attained a proper size. An attempt to buy one in a neighbouring village failed, and so we had to rest content with buying meat from the town of Bontoc.

When the final difficulties were overcome, however, every one went into the matter heart and soul. Early in the morning on July 15th, Mr. RASMUSSEN and I went to one of the men's houses, whereas neither Mrs. ELLINGER nor any woman of the village

¹ Bontoc (JENKS, pp. 212 f.). Ifugao (BARTON 1946, pp. 114 ff.). Nabaloi (MOSS 1920a, p. 335). Kankanai (MOSS 1920b, pp. 376 f.). Tinggian (COLE 1922, p. 402).

² Manobo (GARVAN, pp. 76 f.). Bagobo (BENEDICT, pp. 174 ff. COLE 1913, pp. 88 ff.). Bila'an, Mandaya (COLE 1913, pp. 140, 185).

³ JENKS, pp. 207 ff.

were allowed to attend the ceremonies. Some of the men had arrived already and were sitting outside the house, and by and bye others appeared. It was a motley crowd. Some of them were dressed in their old-fashioned breech-cloths, with long cock feathers stuck into their basketry caps and tufts of feathers or hair fastened to their boar-tusk armlets. One was wearing a head-band bristling with horse hair. Others had their ordinary ragged shirts, and one man boasted with a complete khaki suit that looked like a cast-off American army uniform. Everybody carried a basket with new rice of his own harvest. One basket, in which there were an axe, a small wooden bowl for eating, a bamboo container for meat, and a wooden ladle, was profusely decorated with waving feathers, boars' tusks, two iron spear heads, and a wooden figurine representing a man, evidently made by the Ifugao. One person carried a long bamboo tube filled with rice beer. Most of the men were armed with spears, many of them with wooden shields, and one or two had head axes. The Bontoc have three types of spears. One of them, which is intended for hunting, has a broad, lanceolate blade; the head of the war spear is provided with one or two powerful barbs on either side; the ceremonial spear has a single pair of barbs, but their points are curved upwards, and when the spear during the ceremonies is stuck into the ground, the carrying basket is suspended from them. The shields are of the well-known northern Luzon shape, rather narrow and with three projections at the top and two at the lower edge. Like all Igorot axes, the Bontoc axe has a blade terminating at the rear in a long pick used for striking at the temple of the enemy, but in contradistinction to the strongly concave edge of the Kalinga type, the edge is here nearly straight.

When all seemed to be assembled, the men struck the shields, and shouts rang out over the village in order to call eventual laggards and announce that now the procession started to the sacred place. Presently we began to ascend the steep mountain path, walking in single file, the men continuously shouting and beating time on their shields with short sticks. At the uppermost of the men's houses the rest of the male population joined the procession. Near the top of the mountain we came to a small pine grove where close to the edge of the wood there is an old tree, the crooked stem and twisted branches of which are nearly

horizontal. This is the *patpatayan* or *patai*, the sacred tree; but for the moment nobody paid any attention to it.

After having passed the ridge we are on an open, grassclad upland with undulating hills. Here, close to a low, rocky wall is the *bawi* or sacred place. Its only mark of distinction is two rows of long-leaved grass straws stuck into the ground. Before squatting in a circle, the men plant their spears in the same way—but then there is an accident: one of the spears turns over. This is a bad omen, and therefore it is necessary to take certain precautions. Four men are sent away across the nearest hills in order to listen to the song of the birds, for if they hear a bird the voice of which sounds somewhat like a prolonged rrr . . . it is an unfailing sign that the whole thing must be given up. Fortunately, however, everything is all-right when they return half an hour later, and the ceremony can continue.

A fire of dry sticks and green pine boughs is started, and two big lumps of pork's fat are put on cleft sticks and roasted over the fire. At the same time three old men, probably priests,¹ proceed to a place about fifty metres away, and RASMUSSEN and I are informed that we must neither move nor smoke. A man passes one of the ordinary basketry caps full of small sticks, and everybody present takes one of them. If there is not a sufficient number of sticks, it is a forebode that somebody in the village is to die before the next harvest. Immediately afterwards the sticks are gathered again and taken to the three old men, who are supposed to bless them and bury them in the ground. Then, however, another accident takes place; one of the sticks is dropped, and consequently the whole procedure must be repeated.

When this is finished, this time without mishappenings, one of the priests rises to his feet and delivers a long invocation to the spirits, shouting in three different directions. As Mrs. ELLINGER, who acted as our interpreter, was not allowed to be present—in fact, a woman who happened to pass by at a rather considerable distance was most energetically waived away—it was, unfortunately, impossible to obtain the text of the address, but the contents were to the effect that the spirits should take part in the meal, and the village and its inhabitants should grow strong

¹ JENKS (pp. 203 ff.) mentions three kinds of hereditary priests among the Bontoc.

and prosper. Then the ritual eating of the new rice together with tiny bits of pork started, the three priests consuming their shares first and apart. Rice beer was served in small wooden bowls, and every one drank to his heart's content.

By and bye the people grow rather animated, thanks partly to the conviction that in spite of the accidents everything has fallen out as wanted, and partly, I dare say, to the strong beer. The whole crowd commences singing, occasionally interrupted by a thundering shout, the spears and grass stalks are gathered, and the descent to the village begins under continuous singing and shouting. About halfway they halt and sit down in a semi-circle. A young man is sent away to a small mountain stream in order to fetch a bowl of water, and the same man who conducted the ceremony at the *bawi* makes a long speech and finally throws the water backwards over his right shoulder. This is supposed to ward off sickness and bad luck. When we arrived at the men's house it was intended to spend the rest of the day dancing, but the rainy season had begun, and now, an hour or so after noon, the first heavy drops announced that the rain was going to pour down the rest of the day, so the men agreed to put off the dance, which is always performed in the open in the small court outside the house.

Later in the afternoon an incident occurred outside the ordinary programme of the feast and caused considerable excitement. I was sitting in our house, when all of a sudden there was a violent shouting outside: "Do not touch him! Here is a chicken! Take a chicken instead!" I ran out and saw a crowd of men rushing down the mountain, roaring and brandishing their spears. The reason of the whole row was that a small boy had suddenly got a fit and become unconscious. This, we were told, was because the spirit of his uncle who had drowned some time before had returned to the village in order to steal the boy's soul, and now the men were trying to pacify and drive away the ghost by offering a chicken as a substitute. Fortunately, the boy soon recovered, but the chicken was, of course, sacrificed, and the whole evening the family remained assembled in the house, singing and conjuring. Other men went from one house to another, and in each one a chicken was killed and blessings and good wishes for the coming year were expressed.

Next day the postponed dance commenced outside the two men's houses. Most of the men carried a small brass gong on which they beat the time, while they moved slowly in a circle around a full rice bowl swinging up and down with their bodies bent forward and with short, hopping steps, always in the direction against the sun. The younger women were standing around as spectators, but the old ones took part in the dance according to their own fashion, sometimes taking a step to one side or another, but most of the time remaining in the same place, lifting their feet alternately and waving their outstretched arms as if in unsuccessful attempts to fly. Now and then a man would jump into the circle and dance there, brandishing his spear violently, and at intervals all the dancers bent their knees low, hopping sideways in this position and swinging their gongs inverted over their heads.

In this manner the dance continued the whole day, only interrupted occasionally by short resting pauses. In the evening the men again visited the houses, where chicken were sacrificed. Early the next morning they made preparations for the ritual meal of the day. All of them went down the steep slope to the valley where they stripped naked and started fishing. Two stone weirs were built across the stream between the river side and a mud bank farther out, and a basket trap was placed in an opening in the lower weir. By and by as the water became shallow, the fish gathered in the trap, or were taken by the hands under the stones in the river bed. The total yield was far from being impressive, but it was necessary for the meal consisting of rice, fish, and chicken which later in the afternoon was cooked in the men's houses.

This day was the last one we spent in Balili, but we were informed that in the morning after our departure some of the old men would declare that all work had to stop for five days. The ceremonial announcement "*pigau!*" would be shouted over the village and be repeated by the boys at the top of their voices, and if anybody was so rash as to break the days of rest, he would be fined a chicken or more. On the morning when these days were over, two old men (priests?) would take a chicken to the *patpatayan*, or sacred tree, where it would be sacrificed and some of it eaten on the spot together with rice and rice beer,

the rest being brought back to the men's house and consumed there.

JENKS¹ tells of a mock fight with stones and mud clods which takes place between the inhabitants of the town of Bontoc in connection with the harvest rites. This custom is still found there, but it seems that it has never prevailed in Balili. On the whole it is rather astonishing to see how great are the differences in the ceremonial within the same tribe and between two places so close together as Bontoc and Balili. This is a suggestive indication of how much still remains to be done even in an area otherwise supposed to be so well known ethnologically as northern Luzon.

¹ JENKS, pp. 212 f.

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Fig. 1. Balili. The village is situated high up on the mountain side. Rice terraces are seen below.



Fig. 2. A corner of the village, Balili. One of the men is killing a chicken.

PLATE II



Fig. 3. Bontoc men, wearing the characteristic basketry caps.



Fig. 4. Bontoc men, armed with spears and shield. One is wearing a fillet of horse hair.



Fig. 5. Group of men with spears and shields.



Fig. 6. Mother, daughter and grandchild. Skirts and belts are of local manufacture.

PLATE IV



Fig. 7. Hog pen.

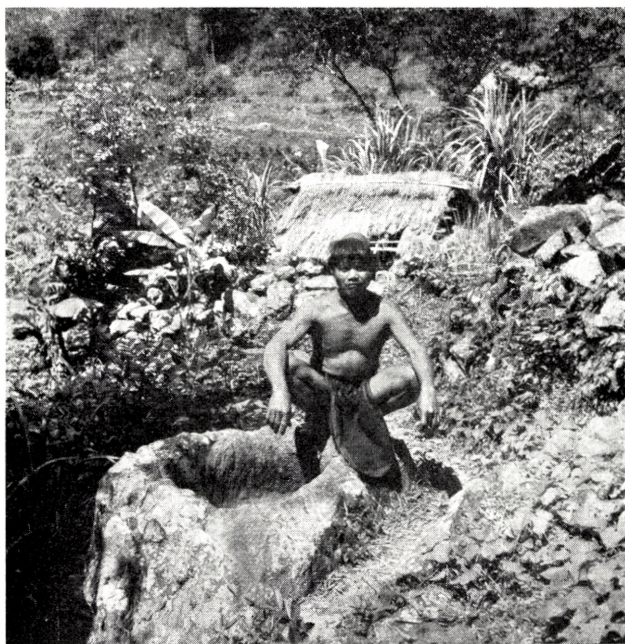


Fig. 8. Vessel for washing vegetables, excavated in solid rock.



Fig. 9. Man weaving a woman's basket for carrying rice.



Fig. 10. A smith and his assistant.

PLATE VI

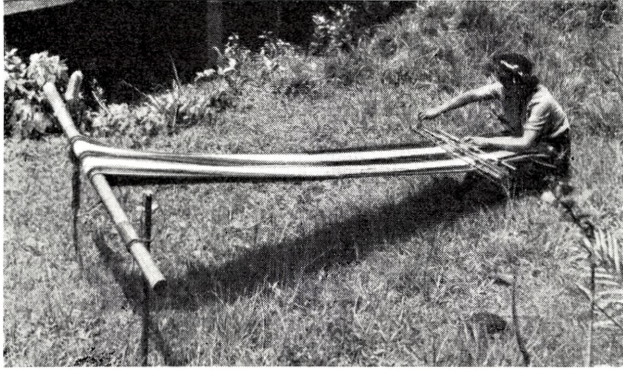


Fig. 11. Woman weaving skirts.



Fig. 12. One of the two men's houses in Balili, seen from the back.



Fig. 13. Rice terraces.



Fig. 14. Ploughing in the inundated rice field.

PLATE VIII

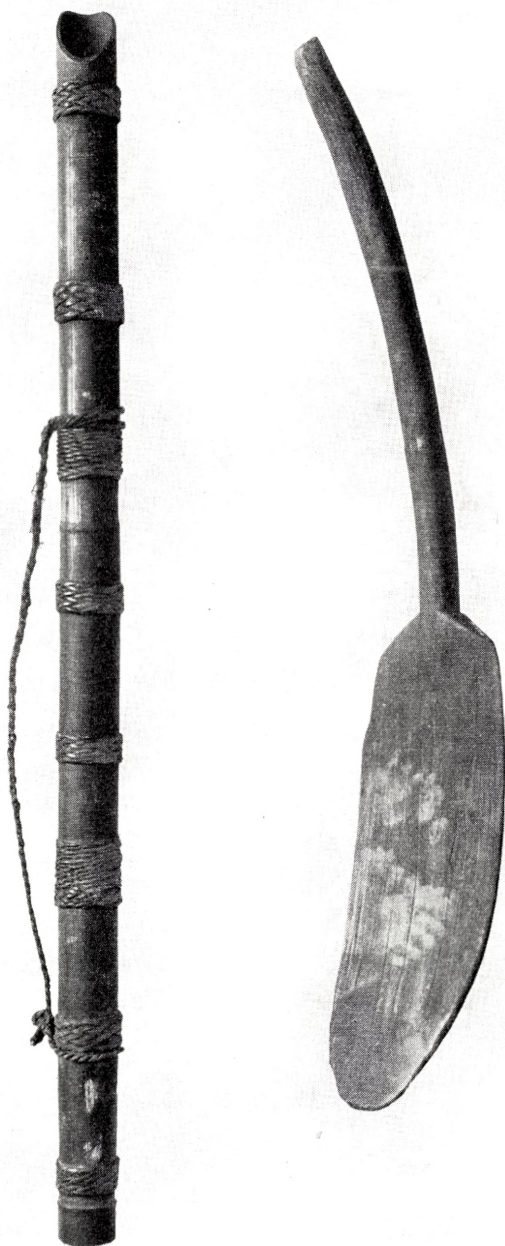


Fig. 15. Paddle-shaped shovel (right) and bamboo container for carrying rice beer (left). (National Museum).

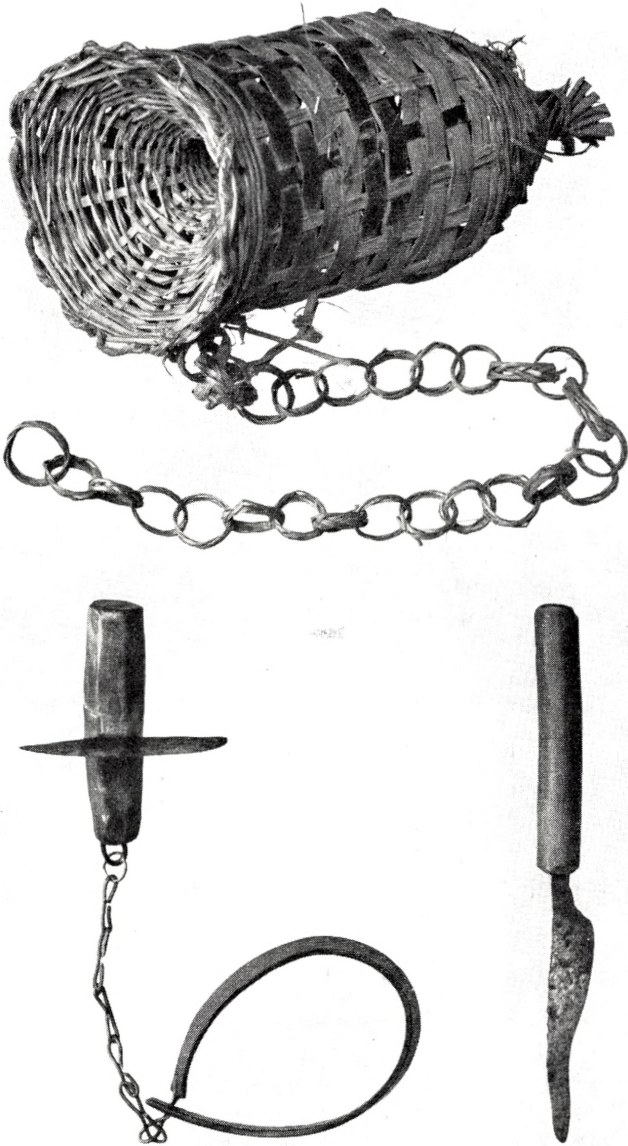


Fig. 16. Small trap for catching fish in the inundated rice fields (top). Harvesting knife with wrist strap and knife for peeling sweet potatoes (below). (National Museum).

PLATE X



Fig. 17. Woman pounding rice.



Fig. 18. Winnowing the rice. Behind the woman is a hog pen.



Fig. 19. Men drinking rice beer. The big jar is of Chinese manufacture.



Fig. 20. Woman cooking inside a house.

PLATE XII



Fig. 21. Baskets. Top row: small basket for gathering invertebrates, etc. in the rice fields; storing basket for rice; dish for serving rice. Below: winnowing tray and woman's carrying basket for rice. (National Museum).

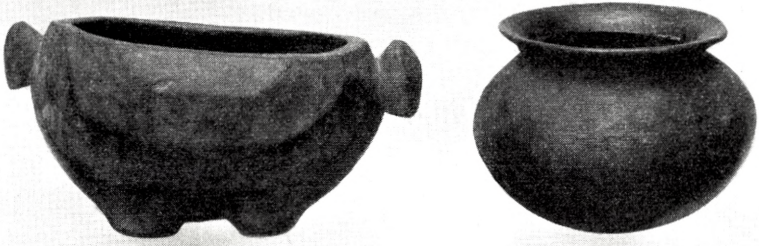


Fig. 22. Wooden food bowl and earthenware cooking pot. (National Museum).

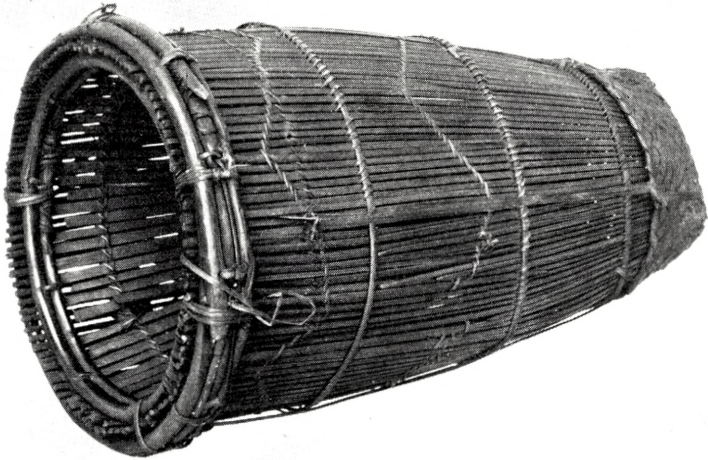


Fig. 23. Trap for fishing in the river. (National Museum).

PLATE XIV

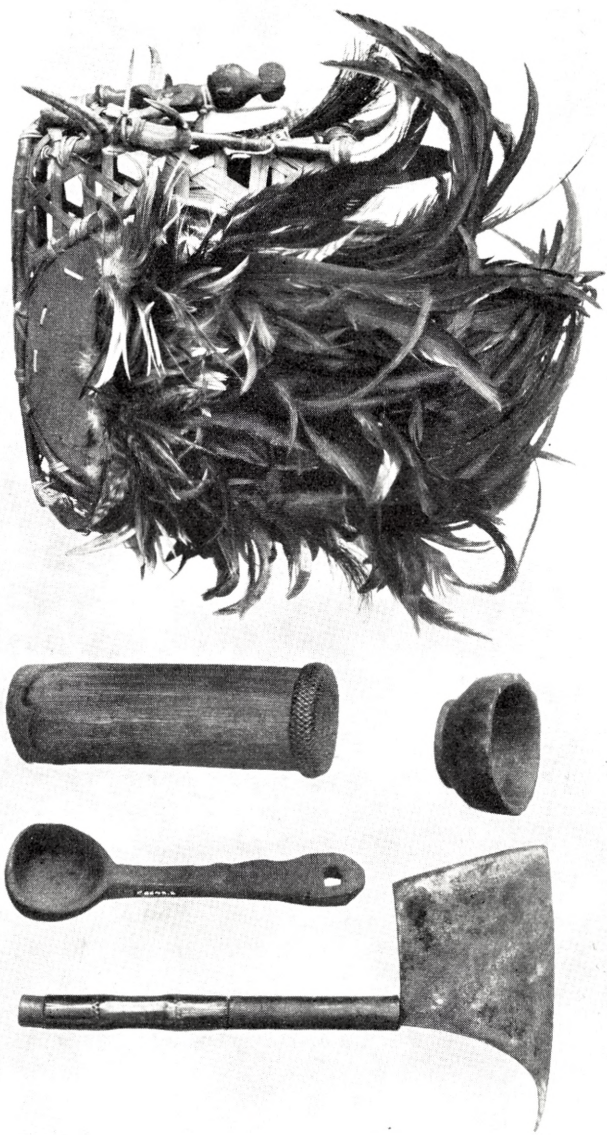


Fig. 21. Basket carried at the harvest feast, decorated with cocks' feathers, boars' tusks, wooden figurine, etc.; food bowl, bamboo container for meat, ladle, and head axe. (National Museum).



Fig. 25. The sacred pine tree at Balili.

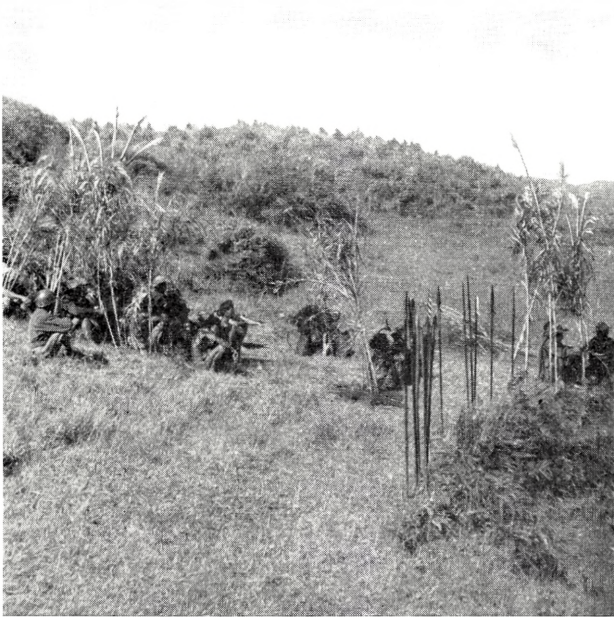


Fig. 26. The sacred place on the mountain near Balili.

PLATE XVI



Fig. 27. Dancing in front of the men's house.

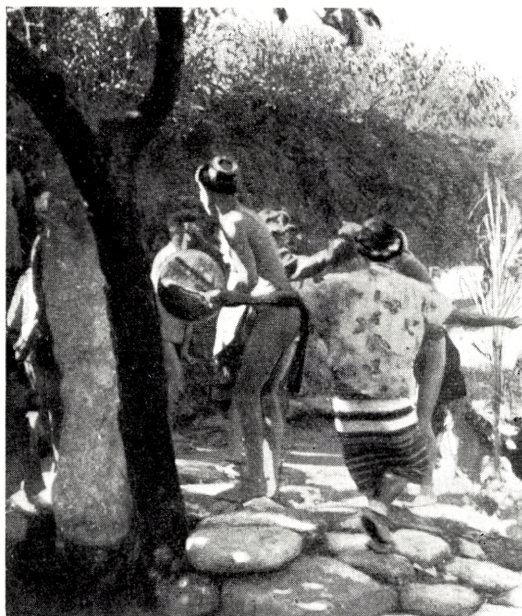


Fig. 28. Woman dancing at the men's house. Behind her a man beating a gong. To the left behind the tree one of the big stones where the enemies' heads are buried.

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