

Visayan Religion at the Time of Spanish Advent

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The following article is a chapter of a forthcoming study of Philippine culture and society at the time of Spanish advent. It is based on contemporary sources, compared, assessed and combined to present a general description of native Visayan religion in the second half of the 16th century.

Among these sources are the reports of early explorers or settlers like Antonio Pigafetta, Miguel López de Legazpi and Martín de Rada, and longer accounts like Miguel de Loarca's 1582 *Relación*, Pedro Chirino's 1604 *Relación de las Islas Filipinas*, and the so-called Boxer Codex written by one of the Governors, Dasmariñas or somebody who traveled in their company. The earliest Visayan dictionaries also provide some check on the subjectivity of these descriptions - Mateo Sánchez's *Vocabulario de la Lengua Bisaya* compiled in Dagami, Leyte, in 1615-1617, and Alonso de Méndrida's 1637 *Diccionario de la Lengua Bisaya, Hiligueina y Haraya de la Isla de Panay*. In addition, Francisco Alcina's four-volume 1668 *Historia de las Islas e Indios de Bisayas* attempts to reconstruct prehispanic practices by interviews with the oldest Christian converts, and collect "superstitions" connected with birth, marriage, medicine, death, farming, hunting, fishing and warfare.

All these accounts must be read against the religious background of 16th century Spain common to conquistador and friar alike. They generally believed in witches, ghosts, demons-possession, miracle-working talismans, and pacts with the Devil, and sought pagan parallels to Christian cosmogony - a supreme deity, creator god, and a heaven and hell where the departed were rewarded or punished

according to European standards of morality. On the other hand, they had all come from Mexico with its ruins of monumental temples and idols, and vivid memory of altars caked with human blood, and so regarded Philippine paganism more with scorn or pity than horror. And missionary fathers were actually moved to sympathy for natives they considered child-like victims of Satanic deceit and delusions.

Visayan Religion

Visayans worshipped nature spirits, gods or particular localities or activities, and their own ancestors. Religious practitioners were male or female mediums who contacted spirit patrons in a state of trance to determine the cause and cure of illness. Sacrifices included foodstuffs, beverages, and live fowl, hogs or human beings, and ancestors, spirits and deities were invoked at feasts in which these were offered up. Ancestors were also invited to partake of any meal or drinking, and their well being in the next world depended on sacrifices offered by their descendants both before and after their death and burial.

Nature Spirits

Natural forces like celestial bodies or flowing waters were personified for reverence or worship. Chief among them were sun and moon, especially the new moon whose regular waxing from a thin silver to full brilliance so strongly suggested prosperity and fertility. Stars and constellations connected with the agricultural cycle were invoked for good crops, and prayers for fair weather and favorable winds were addressed to the winds themselves. There were river gods, both in general and as resident in particular streams, and important gods and spirits of the sea which received all these waters. Part of ordinary river traffic were little rafts - or, in the case of community sacrifices, large ones - headed downstream bearing the offerings and paraphernalia of ceremonies celebrated along their banks. And hunters were sure to offer their first catch to the spirits dwelling in the mountain, *banwanum*.

Crocodiles were held in special veneration because of their obvious danger: they were addressed as Grandfather, and were offered symbolic foodstuffs by the prudent when crossing rivers or even on entering boats. The spirit of the strangler fig, or balete tree, Palahi, was also given offerings in recognition of its sinister powers: as Father Chirino said, "There's no ancient tree to whom they do not attribute divinity, and it was a sacrilege to think of cutting one under any

circumstances."¹ Dangerous cliffs or strange rock formations were also invoked for safe passage: many porcelain plates that had contained offerings were to be found on a rocky promontory on Poto Point, the north-western headland of Panay, and so, too, a natural formation along the Araut River that looked like a man paddling a canoe was venerated as epic hero Labaw Donggon.

The Unseen World

Visayans considered themselves vastly outnumbered by a variety of invisible beings, spirits, and deities. Gods and goddesses were called *diwata* and ancestor spirits, *umalagad*, both words still in use among Visayans living in the remote mountains of Panay. These were generally benevolent or neutral and could be approached ritually for good crops, health and fortune, but they also caused illness or misfortune if not given due respect. They thus functioned to sanction approved social behavior. Naturally malevolent beings, on the other hand, had to be avoided or kept off by precautionary acts, and ranged from the mischievous to the ghoulish, the most common and fearful being those who ate away the livers of living persons. They had no single name as a class - Spanish *hechiceros* - lexicographers simply called them witches, *brujas* or *hechiceros* - a lack which has been supplied in modern Visayan by Spanish *duende*, hobgoblin, or *encanto*, enchanted.

Diwata is a Malay-Sanskrit term for gods or godhead, and Visayan *maniwata* or *magdiwata* meant to invoke or deify them, and *diya* was a Panay synonym. They had individual personalities and names, which differed from place to place: as Juan de la Isla said, "In every town they have their god, all called Diwata in general, but as a personal name, that of their town."² And their number was legion because individual shamans during seances named different ones with whom they were in communication or who took possession of them. Some, however, constituted a genuine pantheon, a hierarchy with specific roles to play, particularly in connection with birth, longevity, death and the afterlife. Others were the patrons of specific human conditions: Dalikmata, a diwata with many eyes, was invoked in the case of eye ailments, while Makabosog moved men to gluttony. And Cebuanos referred to the image of the Holy Child which Magellan gave

¹Pedro Chirino, *Relación de las Islas Filipinas* (Rome 1604, Manila 1969), p. 62.

²Juan de la Isla, "Relación de las Islas del Poniente," *Colección de Documentos inéditos relativos al Descubrimiento, Conquista y Organización de las antiguos Posesiones españolas de Ultramar*: Segunda Serie, Tomo 3 (Madrid 1887), pp. 233-234.

Humabon's wife as "the Spaniards' diwata," and supposedly rendered it homage after Magellan's death, or took it down to the shore and immersed it in time of drought.

Our earliest list was recorded by Miguel de Loarca in Panay in 1582.³ Si Dapa was a diwata who marked out one's mortal lifespan on a tree-trunk on Mount Madyaas at the time of birth; Magwayan ferried the souls of the deceased across to a kind of Inferno, and Pandaki rescued the deserving for a more pleasant fate. Lalahon was the fire-breathing goddess of Mount Canlaon who could be invoked for good crops but who sent out swarms of locusts if angered, while Mayong was the diwata of the volcano in Ibalon (Albay) which bears her name. Inaginid and Malanduk were invoked for success in battle and plunder, and Nagine, Arapayan and Makbarubak could be appealed to when concocting a poisonous oil. A few were actually hostile to mankind - Makaptan, for example, who lived in the highest heaven and so had never tested human food or drink and, presumably for this reason, capriciously caused them death and disease.

One of the first questions Spanish explorers always asked Filipinos was what their religion was. When Magellan asked Rajah Kolambu whether they were Muslims or pagans or what they believed in, he was told "they didn't worship anything but raised their face and clasped hands to heaven, and called their god Abba."⁴ This was an understandable confusion. Magellan's interpreter was a Malay-speaking Sumatran and *aba* is a Malay-Arabic word for father, while in Visayan, *Aba!* was a common expression of wonder or admiration - like "Hail" in the Ave Maria. Five years later, Sebastián de Puerto reported from the Surigao coast that the natives sacrificed to a god called Amito - i.e., *anito*, the ordinary Visayan term for sacrifice or religious offerings.

Father Chirino, on the other hand, stated of the multitude of Filipino gods, "They make one the principal and superior of all, whom the Tagalogs call *Bathala Mei-Capal*, which means the creator god or maker, and the Bisayans, *Laon*, which denotes antiquity."⁵ the Tagalog Bathala was well known in Chirino's day, but he

³Miguel de Loarca, "Relación de las Islas Filipinas," Emma Helen Blair and James Alexander Robertson, *The Philippine Islands 1493-1898* (Cleveland 1903-1909), vol. 5, pp. 120-140.

⁴Antonio Pigafetta, "Primo Viaggio intorno al Mondo" (1522), Blair and Robertson, op. cit., vol. 33, p. 126.

⁵Chirino, op. cit., p. 60.

was the first to mention a Visayan equivalent, though his statement was repeated verbatim by Jesuits of the next generation like Diego de Bobadilla and Francisco Colín. But not by Father Alcina: rather, he devoted one whole chapter to the thesis that *Malaon* was simply one of many names which Visayans applied to the True Godhead of which they had some hazy knowledge. Thus he equated *Malaon* - who the Samareños thought was a female - with the Ancient of Days, *Makapatag* (to level or seize) with the Old Testament God of Vengeance, and *Makaobus* (to finish) with the Alpha and Omega, attributing these coincidences to some long-forgotten contact with Jews in China or India.

However, none of Chirino's contemporaries mentioned any Visayan deity by the name of *Laon* or a creator god by any name, least of all when recording origin myths, nor did the early dictionaries. *Laon* was not said of persons but of things: it meant aged or seasoned like root crops or grain left from last year's harvest, or a barren domestic animal. But *manlaon* appeared as the name of a mountain peak. Thus *Laon* may well have been the goddess of Mount Canlaon in Negros-Loarca's *Lalahon* - but it is unlikely that the Visayans had a supreme deity by that name.

The soul or elan vital was *kalag*: when people set new rice aside for the deceased, they said, "*Himulaw, himulaw, manga kalag: ayaw kami pagsuli* - Eat, souls, eat: let it not be bad for us," and a spirited, forceful man was called *kalagan nga tao*.⁶ The *kalag* might separate from the body during dreams, illness or insanity, or be carried off by a *diwata* for envy or desire, especially those who were *bugus*, perfect, handsome, or otherwise enviable. *Daay* was the *diwata*'s desire for such a person, a beautiful woman for himself, a powerful man for a son. Women were therefore advised, "*Dika mag bukas sang pano sa olo mo kay daayon ka* - don't uncover you head lest you be desired."⁷ The loss of *kalag* might also result in a kind of enchanted death - *linahos inkamatay* - of which Father Sánchez said, "There are these among the Visayans who remain like dead for two or three days, and afterwards revive and recount visions."⁸

Ancestor spirits specifically were called *umalagad*, from *alagad*, a follower or voluntary assistant, and they were venerated as personal guardians or compan-

⁶Francisco Alcina, *Historia de las Islas e Indios de Bisayas* (MS 1668), Part I, book 3, chapter 14.

⁷Alonso de Méntrida, *Diccionario de la Lengua bisaya, hiliagueina y haraya de la Isla de Panay* (Manila 1637, 1841), p. 116.

⁸Mateo Sánchez, *Vocabulario de la Lengua bisaya* (Dagami 1617 MS, Manila 1711), fol. 29 lv.

ions. They were invoked on leaving the house and during agricultural rites in the field, and were considered essential shipmates on any sea raid, sometimes going on board in the form of a python. Indeed, some were said to have been born as snake twins from the same womb as the persons they were destined to protect. It was these umalagad and kalag, rather than the diwata, who were the main objects of Visayan adoration, receiving not only formal worship conducted by priests and priestesses, but domestic offerings and routinary acts of reverence on the part of laymen.

The Spirit Underworld

Visayans also believed in a demimonde of monsters and ghouls who had the characteristics modern medicine assigns to germs - invisible, ubiquitous, harmful, avoidable by simple health precautions and home remedies, but requiring professional diagnosis, prescription and treatment in the event of serious infection. Twentieth century folklore considers them invisible creatures who sometimes permit themselves to be seen in their true shape in the form of human beings, but 16th century Spaniards thought they were really human beings who could assume such monstrous forms, witches whose abnormal behavior and powers were the result of demon possession or pacts with the Devil. But in either case, if Visayans became convinced that a death had been caused by one of their townmates who was such a creature, he or she was put to death - along with their whole family if the victim had been a datu.

The most common but most feared were the *aswang*, flesh-eaters who devoured the liver like a slow cancer. At the least liverish symptom, people said, "*Kinibitan ang atay* - Liver's being chipped away," and conducted a *tingalok* omen-seeking rite to discover the progress of the disease. If it appeared that the organ was completely consumed, emergency appeal had to be made promptly to some diwata to restore it. Aswang also ate the flesh of corpses, disinterring them if not well guarded, or actually causing them to disappear in the plain sight of mourners at a wake. Their presence was often revealed by level spots of ground they had trampled down during their witches' dance at night, or their singing, which sounded like the cackling of a hen - *nangangakak*. But like all other evil creatures, they were afraid of noise and so could be kept at bay by pounding on bamboo-slat floors.

Spanish lexicons listed *alok*, *balbal*, *kakag*, *oko*, *onglo* and *wakwak* as synonyms of aswang, but *tiktik* as one that flew around at night, and *tanggal* one that left the lower half of the body behind, or even the whole body with only the head flying off by itself. *Mantiw* were ghosts or apparitions, and *landung* were any

imaginary vision or phantoms. *Yawa* was a general term for demons which came to be adopted for non-Christians - e.g., "*Yawa ka pa*" - Are you still pagan?"⁹ *Ogima* were man-shaped demons with the hind quarters of a beast and were therefore called satyrs or fauns by Father Métrida, who soberly reported, "Plenty of them were seen in Aklan and Ibahay in 1600 and before 1599."¹⁰ *Baliw* was to change - that is, from one thing into another, like Lot's wife into a pillar of salt - and a demon by this name had to be kept away from the sick. *Binaliw* was a witch who had become invisible, but also anyone suffering a change attributed to divine retribution, like crossed eyes or a withered limb, so that *Binaliw ka!* was one of the worst possible curses.

Omens and Divination

Visayans also believed that supernatural forces filled the natural world with signs and portents that it would be unwise to ignore. These were indicated by the behavior of birds and reptiles, or could be elicited by casting lots or omen-seeking ceremonies conducted by babaylan or other diviners. Spanish missionaries and commanders often had to cancel their plans because Filipino guides refused to continue on after hearing the cry of some bird.

Any snake or lizard crossing the path, even a common house lizard that "spoke to" somebody descending the house-steps, was a warning to turn back. A sneeze was also enough to interrupt any activity, including business transactions that were going badly, and hunters turned around if somebody happened to ask them about their plans because their quarry would be forewarned and hide. A monitor lizard under the house was a sure sign of impending death or disaster, though if it was killed, enshrouded and buried like a human being, its life might be accepted as a substitute for the householder's. But the most famous of these omens was the *limokon*, a kind of turtledove with striking green and white plumage and red feet and beak, also called *koro-koro* from its call. In a Suban-on epic, as Taake sinks into the depths of the sea, he laments, "Had the *limokon* sounded, I would not have come."¹¹

Fortune-telling by palmistry was *himalad*, from *palad*, the lines in the palm of the hand. (Old folks were said to be "broken" because they had as many cracks

⁹Ibid., fol. 264.

¹⁰Métrida, op. cit., p. 274.

¹¹Gaudiosa Martínez Ochotorena, "Ag Tobig nog Keboklagan: a Suban-on Folk Epic," *Kinaadman* 3 (1981): 420.

in their palm as a worn-out pot.) *Luknit* was to cast lots by four crocodile teeth or boar's tusks, and *tali* was a stone or egg which the diviner made stand upright on a plate. The most popular method was to ask the diwata to answer questions by causing some inanimate object to move. *Abiyog* was to swing, like a bolo suspended from a cord, and *kibang* was to move or wiggle, like a winnowing tray or a shield laid convex-side down. Mangayaw raiders before putting to sea were sure to board a small baroto without outriggers and, sitting perfectly still on the centerline, ask the diwata to rock the boat if it was propitious to proceed with the expedition. If they received a favorable response, they asked who it was who had rocked the boat, naming a list of possibilities, and then offered a predeparture sacrifice to the one who had favored them.

Sorcerers were believed to derive their secret knowledge of black magic - spells and charms - from these unnatural forces. *Habit* was a spell and *ginhabit* the one bewitched by it: *bakwit*, for example, was one by which women detained their lovers, *lumay* a love potion, and *buringot* the opposite. Buringot also made its possessor fearless in the face of danger. *Mantala* were incantations or verbal formulas - e.g., to request crocodiles not to bite or hot iron not to burn. *Awug* was a spell put on coconut palms to make a thief's stomach swell up; *tiwtiw* made fish follow the fisherman to shore or will boar follow the hunter out of the woods, and *oropok* caused rats to multiply in somebody's field. *Tagosilangan* were persons with a charm which enabled them to see hidden things, and *tagarlum* was a charmed herb that rendered its owner invisible.

A powerful datu's power was enhanced by popular fear of his arcane knowledge of black magic, sometimes reputed to be handed down from one generation to another. *Ropok* was a charm which caused the one who received it to obey like a slave, and *panlus* was a pear or G-string which caused leg pains or swelling in the victim as soon as he stepped over it. *Bosong* caused intestinal swelling in those who crossed him; *hokhok* was to kill simply with a breath or the touch of a hand, and *kaykay* was to pierce somebody through just by pointing a finger at him from a distance. A reputation for such powers no doubt both facilitated a datu's effective control over his subjects, and arose from it.

Worship

Anito was a sacrifice, a formal act of worship conducted by a babaylan. This same word was reported from Luzon as meaning an idol, ancestor spirit, or deity - that is, an object of worship - but although Visayan missionaries sometimes used the word in this sense, their dictionary definitions are unambiguous. *Anito* was the root of the words *paganito/maganito*, an act of sacrifice, *naga anito*, to perform

that act, and *iganito*, the thing being sacrificed. But the idol, diwata or umalagad being worshipped - Father Sánchez said - was *paganitohan*.¹²

Paganito were basically seances - that is, ceremonies in which a medium established audible communications with spirits. They were conducted for fertility of crops, newlyweds or domestic animals, for rain or fair weather, for victory in war or plunder in raids, recovery from illness or the control of epidemics, or the placating of the souls of the deceased. Minor paganito, however, could be performed by any householder. *Pagobo*, for instance, was offered to the diwata of the family hearth when drought threatened - a wild hen and a bird-shaped rice cake together with leaves or sprouts from the crops threatened. *Pabto* was conducted when a hunting dog's poor performance was attributed to witchcraft: a node of hot bamboo was struck on the ground to explode in front of the dog while the hunter said, "*Palas na an palhi!* - Out with all spells and curses!"¹³ But solemn paganito had to be conducted by a babaylan.

Babaylan were shamans or spirit mediums, given to seizures and trances in which they spoke with the voice of diwata or other spirits and acted out conflicts in the spirit world, brandishing spears, foaming at the mouth, and often becoming violent enough to require restraint. They were also called *daitan*, befriended, in recognition of their patronage by particular diwata. They could be either male or female, or male transvestites called *asog*, but were most commonly women. They came to their calling through attacks of illness or insanity which could only be cured by accepting the call, and then attached themselves as *alabay*, apprentices, to some older babaylan, frequently a relative. Their remuneration was a designated share of the offerings, usually choice cuts of the hog or the head, but in fullscale paganito sponsored by prominent datus, they went home with heirloom valuables like porcelain plates or gold ornaments.

This worship took place in private homes or fields, at gravesites or sacred spots outside the community, or along beaches or streams where rafts could be launched with disease and bad luck abroad, or live pests like locusts or rats. There were no temples, though there were little platforms or sheds at the entrance to the village where offerings were made. Some paganito were for the benefit of individuals or kindred, some were by nature seasonal, and some sought relief from a public crisis like drought or pestilence. A solemn paganito in Cebu was described in the 16th century as follows:

¹²Sánchez, op. cit., fol. 25-25v.

¹³Ibid., fol. 387v.

The site was adorned with green branches, palm-leaf cloths and colorful blankets, and the offerings were set out on large plates—red blossoms, roasted fish, rice and millet cakes wrapped in leaves, and a piece of imported Cambay cloth. A large hog, raised and fattened for this end, lay bound on a grass mat, and cocophonous music was provided by gongs, drums, and resonant porcelain plates. The babaylan was an old woman wearing a headdress topped by a pair of horns and accompanied by a second medium, both of them carrying bamboo trumpets which they either played or spoke through. They both proceeded to dance around the hog with scarfs in their hand, acting out a dialogue between the spirits possessing them, drinking wine on their behalf, and sprinkling some of it on the hog.

Finally, a spear was given the presiding babaylan, and with it she began a series of feints at the hog as the tempo of her movements increased to a frenzy, and then, with a sudden thrust, ran the victim through the heart with unerring aim. The foreheads of the main beneficiaries of the ceremony were marked with the victims's blood, the wounds were stanced, and the mat bloodied during the sacrifice was carefully burned. The babaylan was then divested of her accoutrements and awakened from her trance, while the hog was singed, butchered and cooked. The feasting then began, everybody receiving a share, though the flesh touched by the spear was reserved for the babaylan. Some of the meat was taken down to an altar on the seashore or river bank where, after prayers, it was placed on a little raft together with the altar and all other paraphernalia, and set adrift. This brought the ritual to a close though the celebrating continued.¹⁴

Naturally these ceremonies had their own vocabulary. *Ginayaw* were offerings of spherical yellow-rice cakes; *tinorlok* was the hog reserved for sacrifice, and *bani* was the tabu requiring the mat to be burned. *Taruk* was the babaylan's dance, *bodyong* her bamboo trumpet, and *banay* a fan or fly whisk with which she kept time. *Hola*, *hulak* and *tagduk* all meant spirit possession, with *saob* including even animals, and *taho* was the whistling sound when the diwata was speaking. The little houses or altars on the river bank were *latangan*, or *maglantang* if large enough for major community sacrifices. And the babaylan's healing prowess was described in dramatic terms: *agaw*, to carry off by force, was to snatch a pain from the sufferer; *tawag*, to call out, was to summon the spirit that had kidnapped the soul; and *bawi*, to rescue, was to free the invalid from the grip of the afflicting spirit.

¹⁴Pigafetta, op. cit., pp. 168-170; Isla, op. cit., pp. 233-234.

Paglehe or *magrehe* were religious restrictions or tabus, like mourning restrictions following a datu's death, or a seven-day thanksgiving period following harvest during which rice could not be pounded nor outsiders enter the house. Ordinary activities which involved risk or doubt were always accompanied by prescribed tabus - planting, setting traps, starting dogs on the hunt, or the swarming of locusts or the arrival of alien datos, who were considered naturally hostile if not actually bent on mischief. Missionaries adopted the world *lehe* for Lenten abstinences and restrictions on eating meat on Fridays, and also accepted the pre-Christian term *harang* or *halad* for offering. So too, Christians continued *darangin*, a perfunctory invocation of ancestor spirits when leaving the house, only they were supposed to murmur, "Jesus," instead of "Apo-Apo."

Idols

Visayans kept small idols in their homes called *taotao*, *batabata* or *larawan*, guardians of family welfare and the first recourse in the case of sickness or trouble. *Taotao* meant a manikin or little *tao*, human being; *batabata* was a little *bata*, great grandparent; and *ladaw* or *larawan* was an image, mould or model. Idols of individual diwata with their names and properties, however, did not figure prominently in Visayan worship. Nor were they annointed, perfumed or decked with gold and jewels as they were in the lake regions of Manila. Thus members of the Legazpi expedition, fresh from Mexico with its monumental Aztec imagery, reported that Cebuanos had neither temples nor idols. But the household idols were common enough and visible enough to attract Magellan's disapproving attention. Why were they not all burned? he demanded after the mass baptisms he instigated.

Hernando de la Torre reported that the natives of Surigao worshipped idols of wood, "and they paint them as well as they can, as we do Santos,"¹⁵ and Pigafetta left the following description of one in Cebu:

These idols are made of wood, and are hollow, and lack the back parts. Their arms are open and their feet turned up under them with the legs open. They have a large face with four huge tusks like those of the wild boar; and are painted all over.¹⁶

¹⁵Hernando de la Torre, "Relación del Viaje y Navegación de la Armada de Laoisa," Martín Fernández de Navarrete, *Colección de los Viajes y Descubrimientos que hicieron por Mar los Españoles desde Fines del Siglo XV* (Madrid 1825-1837), vol. 5, p. 280.

¹⁶Pigafetta, op. cit., p. 166.

But one would wonder if Visayans really represented their ancestral spirits in such monstrous form. Moreover, the description is at best confusing, what with its open arms and legs, turned-up feet and lack of back parts. Perhaps what Pigafetta was describing was really an animal-shaped ritual bowl for offerings like rice cakes and betelnut, a container intended to stand on its four legs, being hollow and open along its back, of course, in order to serve its purpose.

Further confusion is added to the picture of Visayan idol-worship by the fact that the English word "idol" inevitably suggests an actual carved figure. But Spanish *ídolo* means not only a graven image, but anything worshipped, idolized or deified - like an ancestor or a balete tree. Father Métrida defined diwata as "God, idol of the pagans, not the images because they worship the Demon in the spirit."¹⁷ Thus modern English translations obscure the fact that the "idols" invoked by a babaylan during a solemn paganito were not wooden statues, but invisible spirits.

Origin Myths

In the beginning there was only sea and sky - so says a Visayan myth well known to Spanish chroniclers. The following is the account attributed to Legazpi himself in 1567:

In the beginning of the world there was nothing more than sky and water, and between the two, a hawk was flying, which, getting angry at finding no place to alight or rest, turned the water against the sky, which was offended and so scattered the water with islands and then the hawk had some place to rest. And when it was on one of them along the seashore, the current threw up a piece of bamboo at its feet, which the hawk grabbed and opened by pecking, and from the two sections of the bamboo, a man came out of one and a woman from the other. These, they say, married with the approval of Linog, which is the earthquake, and in time they had many children, who fled when their parents got angry and wanted to drive them out of the house and began to hit them with sticks. Some got in the inner room of the house, and from these the grandees or nobles are descended; others went down the steps and from these the *timawa* are descended, who are the plebian people; and from the children who remained hidden in the kitchen, they say the slaves are descended.¹⁸

¹⁷Métrida, op. cit., p. 132.

¹⁸Gaspar de San Agustín, *Conquistas de las Islas Filipinas* (Madrid 1698, 1975), pp. 293-294.

With local variations, the myth was known all over the Visayas. In a Panay version, the bamboo itself was produced by a marriage between the sea breeze and the land breeze - probably the primordial pair of deities, Kaptan and Magwayan - but in Leyte and Samar, the first man and woman issued from two young coconuts floating on the water and pecked open by the bird. And the highlanders of Panay listed two other categories of fleeing children - those who hid in the kitchen ashbox and became the ancestors of the blacks, and those who fled to the open sea, the progenitors of the Spaniards. The most detailed account was recorded by Loarca from the coastal people of Panay, probably in Oton (Iloilo) where he was operating a Spanish shipyard.

In this version, the man and woman who came forth from the bamboo were Si Kalak (i.e., *laki*, male) and Si Kabai (female), and they had three children - two sons, Sibo and Pandagwan, and a daughter, Samar. Samar and Sibo married and had a daughter named Lupuban, who married her uncle Pandagwan, the inventor of the fishnet, and they, in turn, had a son named Anoranor, whose son Panas was the inventor of war. Pandagwan's first catch was a shark which died when he took it out of the water, the first death in the world; grieved, he mourned its death and blamed the gods Kaptan and Magwayan, who, angered, killed him with a thunderbolt. But 30 days later they revived him from the underworld and restored him to the land of the living. But during his absence his wife had been won over by Marakoyrun with a stolen pig and would not now return to him. So he went back to the land of the dead, setting the pattern of mortality for all mankind.

The Visayan origin myth thus describes the creation of man and woman, accounts for the introduction of death, theft, concubinage, war, and class and race differences into the world, and provides a human genealogy with divine roots. But it does not contain any creator god. Christians, however, called the Creator "the Potter," Mamarikpik, from *pikpik* or *pakpak*, the slaps the potter gives the clay in the paddle-and-anvil technique. Father Sánchez quoted an educated Cebuano as saying, "*Kanino pikpik inin kalibutan, dile kanan Dios? - who made this world if not God? An Dios in mamarappak sinin ngatanan mga yada - God made everything there is.*"¹⁹

Death and Burial

When all healing paganito failed to revive the moribund, one last desperate rite was performed to call back the departed soul - the *Paguli*. A coconut shell of

¹⁹Sánchez, op. cit., fol. 388v.

water was placed on the stomach of the inert invalid and rotated to chants of "*Uli, uli, kalag* - come back, soul, come back."²⁰ In the case of a datu, some of his slaves was sacrificed in the hope they would be accepted in his stead by the ancestor spirit who was calling him away. Or an *itatanun* expedition would be sent to take captives in some other community.

These captives were sacrificed in a variety of brutal ways, though after first being intoxicated. In Cebu they were speared on the edge of the houseporch to drop into graves already dug for them, and in Carigara, a boat was rolled over their prostrate bodies. And in Butuan, they were bound to a cross, tortured all day with bamboo spikes, and finally run through with a spear and cast into the river at dawn - "cross and all," pioneer missionary Martín de Rada said.²¹ This violence testifies to the conviction of men he has vanquished, and that fitting retribution is therefore required to satisfy his own ancestors.

The cadaver was usually anointed and groomed as in life, though in Cebu subjected to a ritual haircut: Pigafetta attended a funeral in which the widow lay on the body, mouth to mouth, while this mournful ritual was performed. So as to be assured of a ready reception in the next life, the deceased was bedecked with the jewelry he was accustomed to wear on festive occasions, and as much gold as possible, some even being placed in his mouth and between the layers of as many as ten blankets with which he was shrouded. Aromatics like camphor were applied for their embalming effect, and the house was meanwhile fumigated with porcelain jars of burning incense.

During a wake which lasted as long as the bereaved family could supply food and drink for guests, the widow or widower, together with first-degree kin, were secluded behind tattered white hangings - actually, *mapuraw*, undyed, not *maputi*, white. Professional mourners, generally old women, sang dirges which emphasized the grief of the survivors (who responded with keening wails), and eulogized the qualities of the deceased - the bravery and generosity of men, the beauty and industry of women, and the sexual fulfillment of either. These eulogies were addressed directly to the deceased and included prayers of petition: they were therefore a form of ancestor worship, one of such vigor that Spanish missionaries were never able to eradicate it.

²⁰Alcina, op. cit., loc. cit.

²¹"Carta del P. Martín de Rada," Isacio R. Rodríguez, *Historia de la Provincia agustiniana del Smo. Nombre de Jesús de Filipinas*, vol. 14 (Manila 1978), p. 480.

Though poor Visayans were buried wrapped in a banana leaf in simple caskets of thin boards or even bamboo, the standard Visayan coffin was made of a hardwood like ipil, incorruptible enough to outlast its contents. It was hewn from a single tree trunk with a lid cut from the same piece, fitted, pegged and caulked airtight with resin. (This hermetic seal was an essential feature since coffins were often kept unburied in the house.) These were called *longon*, a term Visayans did not apply to the sort of casket introduced by the missionary fathers. All datu or prominent persons wanted to be buried in a traditional *longon*, decorated with fanciful carvings often executed by the future occupant himself during his lifetime.

The corpse was placed in the coffin with all body cavities filled with buyo sap, together with its finery and such heirloom valuables as porcelain jars or plates and saucers placed under the head like a pillow or over the face and breasts. Some wore actual masks and mouthpieces of beaten gold, or were provided with bejeweled sidearms, and an ax handle was placed in the coffin of a *bingil*, a woman who had known no man other than her husband - just as the hole in the ax handle fit only the axhead made for it. Naturally, all this gold and porcelain attracted grave robbers in the 16th century just as it does in the 20th: Father Alcina sent a gold earring to Spain which he purchased from this source. (*Langab* meant to bury a coffin in a secret location in hopes of protecting its contents).

Infants and newborn or aborted babies were buried in crocks or jars, sometimes Chinese porcelains with matching lids, but no Spanish observer seems to have witnessed an adult jar burial. Alcina, however, was aware of the practice. He said that Visayans buried not only in *longon*, "but in large jars, glazed and strong, in which they placed the bodies seated, and all the wealth they had when alive."²² He received this information from Boholano workmen who had dug into a burial site full of them when excavating for the Jesuit chapel in Baklongan earlier in the century, a discovery which attracted Spaniards from Cebu to do some digging of their own. Some of these must have been secondary burials since the "dragon jars" mentioned - what Visayans called *ihalasan* from *ih*, snake, and valued at the price of a slave - would have been too small to accommodate an adult body, even with the knees drawn up under the chin.

There was considerable local variation in Visayan grave sites. There were graveyards outside village limits, frequently dug into the banks of upstream rivers or the seacoast, where they were often exposed by natural erosion: more than a

²²Alcina, op. cit., ch. 16.

kilometer of them were revealed along the Mandawi waterfront in Cebu. Caves were also used where available, or small islets reserved for this purpose: the reason Homonhon was uninhabited when Magellan landed there was that Visayans considered it haunted. But shamans and members of the datu class were never buried in these public graveyards: their caskets were kept in or under their houses or, in the case of babaylan, exposed to the elements in the branches of the balete trees where they had established spirit contact.

Renowned sea raiders sometimes left instructions for their burial. One in Leyte directed that his longon be placed in a shrine on the seacoast between Abuyog and Dulag, where his kalag could serve as a patron for followers in his tradition. Many were interred in actual boats: the most celebrated case was a Bohol chieftain who was buried a few years before Legazpi's arrival in a caracoa with 70 slaves, a full complement of oarsmen. Or a slave called *dayo* might be stationed at a datu's tomb for the rest of his life to guard it against robbers or aswang, with the right to feed himself off anybody's fields, a security considered enviable in a subsistence economy: men with permanent positions said, "*Baga dayo na kita dinhi* - We're like *dayo* here."²³ Slaves were also sacrificed at a datu's death, even being killed in the same manner in which he had died - e.g., by drowning. These slaves were usually foreign captives, but occasionally a lifelong personal attendant, *atobang*, who expected to follow his master to the grave.

Most prestigious, and regarded as especially respectful and affectionate, was secondary burial - that is, the reburial of bones exhumed from a primary burial after the body had decomposed. For one year, the coffin was kept in the house suspended from the rafters, or in a small chamber extended to one side, a shed underneath, or in a field. If it was hung in the house, purified matter was drained off as necessary by caulking a bamboo tube into a small hole in the bottom which was resealed afterwards. If it was removed from the house, it was not taken out the door - lest the spirits of the living follow it - but through a temporary opening in the wall. A year or so later, the bones were removed, given a ritual cleansing by a babaylan, and placed in a smaller chest: here they were permanently preserved, venerated, and carried along if the family moved.

The most dramatic expression of grief for a departed parent was to dismantle or burn the house in which he died, or cut down trees he had planted. All these things, like a slave sacrificed to accompany him, were called *onong*, something which shares the same fate. When placing heirloom wealth, bahandi, like gold or

²³Ibid.

porcelain in the grave, his children said, "*Iyonong ta inin bahandi kan ama* -May this bahandi accompany our father"; and when men swore by the sun, they said, "May I share the sun's fate, *nahaonong ako sa araw*, if I am not telling the truth" - that is, disappear at sunset. Not surprisingly, missionaries applied the term to the Christian sacrifice: "*An atun ginoo Yesu Christo napahaonong dakwa* - Our Lord Jesus Christ took on our fate."²⁴

Mourning

Both widows and widowers observed three days of fasting and silence during which they neither bathed or combed, and might even shave their hair and eyebrows as a special sign of grief, and until the full mourning period was ended, they did not eat cooked food. Family members draped undyed cloth over their heads when they went out, men let their G-strings drag in the dust, and young widowers did not don their red *pudong* or G-strings again until they had contracted another marriage. The house was fenced off, all seeds were taken out and planted lest they be contaminated with death, and all fires were extinguished and rekindled for each use. In the case of a datu's death, or one of his wives or children, the whole community was placed under strict mourning interdict, *pumaraw*. Nobody could wear colored clothes, climb palm trees or fish in certain streams, and spears were carried point down and sidearms blade up. A mournful silence was to be maintained, and families are said to have been enslaved as a punishment for breaking the tabu when their dogs barked or cocks crowed. A datu's mourning period only ended with the taking of a human life.

The same requirement pertained to any death by violence, drowning or suspected sorcery, though when the cause was not certain, a wild boar or deer could be speared instead. Men charged with responsibility for family honor would tie rings of irritating vines around their arms or neck, and swear not to remove them or partake of certain food or drink until they had fulfilled this duty. Once the requirement was satisfied, the end of the mourning period was announced by the ranking lady of the household presenting gifts of wine to allied communities, being rowed there by three respected warriors singing victory chants and boasting of their exploits. The oaths were called *balata* or *lalaw*, the *awut* was the promised fasting or abstinence. The fact that these same terms were applied to a pact two men would make when one of them was leaving on a trip, swearing to observe *awut* until they met again, suggests the insecurity of travel outside one's own community in the 16th Visayas.

²⁴Sánchez, op. cit., fol. 379v.

The Afterlife

The departing Visayan soul was delivered to the land of the dead, Saad or Sulad, by boat, a passage which is represented by little ceramic figures on the lid of a famous burial jar dated to 800 B.C. from Manunggul Cave in Palawan. The boatman sits in the stern with the steering oar in his hands, his ghostly passenger in front with hands folded across his chest, staring wide-eyed straight ahead. On the other shore, the kalag would be met by relatives who had predeceased him, but they only accepted him if he was well ornamented with gold jewelry. If rejected, he remained permanently in Sulad unless reprieved by a god called pandaki in response to rich paganito offered up by his survivors. In Panay, the boatman was called Magwayan, the lords of the underworld Mural and Ginarugan, and Sumpoy the one who rescued the souls on Pandaki's behalf and gave them to Siburanan who, in turn, delivered them to the place where they would live out their afterlife - Mount Madyaas, for instance, for the Kiniray-as, or Borneo for the Cebuanos and Boholanos.

In the afterlife, married couples were reunited to continue accustomed activities like farming, fishing, raiding, spinning and weaving, but did not bear children. (Babies, who had never engaged in adult activities, did not have an afterlife.) In this way, they spent their days for nine lifetimes, being reborn each time smaller than the last, until in their final reincarnation, they were buried in a coffin the size of a grain of rice. The souls of those who had drowned; however, remained in the sea; indeed, drowning was such a common cause of death that Samareños used the term figuratively for any death. Those who died in war, who were murdered or killed by crocodiles, traveled up the rainbow to the sky; in the Panay epic, Labaw Donggon, the rainbow itself is formed by their blood falling to earth. In the sky-world they became gods who, deprived of the company of their kin, were presumably ready to lend their aid to survivors who undertook to avenge their deaths.

Sulad was therefore not a Hell where evil-doers were punished, though, as Father Métrida said, "because they have no knowledge of the Inferno, they call the Inferno, Solar [i.e., Sulad], and those who dwell in the Inferno, *solanun*."²⁵ These solanun, of course, were simply those who went to the grave without sufficient gold and whose relatives could not afford the paganito to rescue them. And it was a common belief that there was a deep cave called Lalangban which was an entrance to his underworld, and that from it a loud noise like the slamming of a door could heard prior to a ruling datu's death.

²⁵Métrida, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

Nor was the sky a Heaven where the good were rewarded. It was the abode of Makaptan, that deity who killed and death on his descendants. "They did not realize," Father Alcina complained, "that the sky served as God's own house and the abode of the blessed."²⁶ Indeed, the Visayans long resisted the Christian of a heavenly paradise. Juan de la Isla wrote, "They believe that their souls go down below and say that this is better because they are cooler there than up above where it is very hot."²⁷ A century later, a wise old Visayan told Father Alcina:

Father, we do not doubt that there will be a heaven for the Castilians, but not for the Visayans, because God created us in this part of the world so very different from you; and since, as we see, the Spaniards will not even let us sit down in their houses here, nor show us any respect, how much less there where, as you say, all is grandeur, majesty and glory without end?"²⁸

²⁶Alcina, *op. cit.*, ch. 16.

²⁷Isla, *op. cit.*, loc. cit.

²⁸Alcina, *op. cit.*, ch. 12.