

The Spirit World of the Bukidnon

By

VINCENT G. CULLON, S. J.

Kalabugao, Impasug-ong, Bukidnon, Philippines

The following is a brief and in complete description of the spirit world of the Bukidnon of the upper Pulangi river valley. The Bukidnon are a minority group living mainly in the uplands and mountains of the provinces of Agusan, Bukidnon and Misamis Oriental on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines. Some of the information was obtained from Mr. Pablo Salonca, a resident of Kalabugao, Impasugong, Bukidnon, and a shaman, and some was obtained from Mr. Sixto Dahino of Dumalaguing, Impasugong, Bukidnon, and some from personal observation.

The world, as the Bukidnon of the upper Pulangi river valley knows it, is peopled by a host of spirits or invisible beings; some beneficent, some neutral and some malignant, all of whom must be propitiated or guarded against. Invisible beings is probably a better term than spirits, since the Bukidnon do not have a clear idea of spirit, and all these beings are thought to have bodies of an invisible and different kind. Some are described as large and others as small, and it is believed that they partake of the sacrifices offered them by feasting on the scent. In general it can be said that the Bukidnon idea of the spirit world is anthropomorphic in that they, the spirits, share human characteristics and are dealt with accordingly. To some extent the spirit world seems to reflect the social structure of the Bukidnon in its mixture of personal freedom and respect for and dependence on clan leaders, war leaders and chieftains.

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 - C. *sumápay, út-út, managkiláwan, twadhágin*
 - D. *kúk-kúk*
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I. The supreme being:

In the upper Pulangi river valley there does seem to be a notion of one supreme being, but it is not certain whether or not this is due to the influence of Christianity. I am inclined to believe that Christianity has at least modified the notion. The name given to the supreme being is *magbabáya*/, which comes from the root *bayá*/ meaning 'to will, rule or own'. The form *magbabáya*/ seems to be plural, for in Binukid the reduplication is sometimes used to denote the plural. The name *magbabáya*/ seems to be a shortened form of *hári/hu magbabáya*/ 'king of the rulers', and thus *magbabáya*/ is considered the lord of the ruling or guardian spirits. He is also known as *kapitán hu mga tumánod*, 'leader of the spirit companions'. Thus *magbabáya*/ who lives in heaven, which is above, is the maker of the universe and the lord of the lesser spirits, though it is not certain that he is the creator of those spirits. He is an omniscient and all powerful being, who rewards and punishes, but who is thought of as rather remote from human affairs.

Along with the titles *magbabáya*/ or *hári/ hu magbabáya*/ there often occur in the ceremonial chants the names: *migsálsal. miglimbag* and *migtanghága*. These names are derived from the roots, *sálsal* 'forge', *limbag* 'form' and *tánghag* 'make present by preternatural power'. The titles seem to refer to the creation of the universe.

1. The mark / indicates the glottal stop.

The Bukidnon who claim that *magbabáya/* is the one supreme being, the *dios* of the Visayan lowlanders, explain that the titles, *migsálsal*, *miglímbag* and *migtanghága* are merely poetic names used to describe *magbabáya/*. Granted that it is common in the ceremonial chants to use different descriptive titles in addressing a spirit, still I am not certain that it is really clear in the minds of the Bukidnon that those four names refer to the same being. The best we can do at present is to describe the Bukidnon spirit world as a modified monotheism with *magbabáya/*, the supreme being as *primus inter pares*, or probably better as a gradated polytheism. Even if *magbabáya/* is thought to be the supreme being in some sense, he is not the main recipient of cult, for while he is invoked in most of the ceremonies, it is the *migbayá/*, the ruling or guardian spirit of the place, object or action, who, being closer at hand and more involved, is the main recipient of the cult.

II. Guardian spirits of places, action and things:

A. *Migbayá/*: This is a populous, powerful class of beneficent spirits who rule over the different parts of the universe, and the objects and actions of men. There seems to be but one *migbayá/* for each part of the universe and each type of object or action. For example; there is a *migbayá/ hu wáhig* 'ruler of water'; a *migbayá/ hu káyu* 'ruler of trees'; a *migbayá/ hu mamáün*² 'ruler of betelnut'. There is a *migbayá/ hu ábu* 'ruler of the hearth'. For certain actions there are also ruling spirits, for example; *migbayá/ hu pagsaküm* 'ruler of the clearing of land'; *migbayá/ hu panghábul* 'ruler of blanket weaving', and *migbayá/ hu pangásu* 'ruler of hunting'. There is also one ruling spirit of all men, *migbayá/ hu ütáo*, who seems to be distinct from the guardian spirits of individuals.

The individual names of the *migbayá/* are descriptive and are taken from the place, object or action they rule. Thus the *migbayá/* of land clearing is called *ibabásük*, from *básük* to clear the land of vegetation. The relationship between the *migbayá/* and *magbabáya/* is not very clear except that the *migbayá/* are considered the *sulugú-ün hu magbabáya/* 'the servants of *magbabáya/*'; and their power is thought to be derived from him. Even though

2. The letter ü refers to the high mid-back unrounded vowel which is phonemic in Binukid.

the power of the *migbayá/* is derived from and inferior to that of *magbabáya/*, the *migbayá/* seem to exercise sovereign power within their own domain. This may be the reason they are accorded a more important place in the ceremonies than *magbabáya/*.

The *migbayá/* are beneficent, but will punish by causing crop failure or sickness if the irldomain is entered or tampered with, unless their permission and assistance are first requested by the offering of sacrifice. The *migbayá/* are invoked by means of the sacrifice of pigs or chickens, and other food. For example, before the clearing of land the sacrificial ceremony known as *panalabúgta/* is performed in honor of the *migbayá/ hu pagsaküm, ibabasük*. In this ceremony a chicken is killed and eaten in honor of the spirit, whose assistance and protection are sought to insure a good harvest. In case there is punishment for failure to make the initial appropriate sacrifice, then the sacrificial ceremony known as *manaluhida* or *manúhid* 'asking pardon', is performed.

B. *Timamánuwa*: Unlike the *migbayá/* who rule or own certain parts of the universe, certain objects and actions, but do not reside in them, and it is not very clear where the *migbayá/* do reside, the *timamánuwa* are localized spirits who reside in particular places, especially *balete* trees, cliffs, large stones and the confluence of streams, but do not rule or own the whole class of such objects. The *timamánuwa* seem to be the equivalent of the *incánto* of the lowland Visayans. The root of *timamánuwa* appears to be derived from the roots, *tima* 'dwell' and *bánuwa* 'settlement', and thus the *timamánuwa* are the indwellers. According to one legend, the *timamánuwa* live in these places as a punishment from *magbabáya/*, because in the olden times they refused to believe that they would be taken up to heaven in a special *caromáta* 'cart'. So they were left behind to inhabit wild places. While not regarded as beneficent, they are not really malignant either. Rather they are described as *makadánüt básta hadi/ pakayükün* 'can cause harm if not propitiated'. Consequently people passing their abodes will ask for pity or make some small offering of food. They can cause sickness by imprisoning the soul, in which case a sacrifice is required. This punishment is called *hábay* and it is one of the main functions of the *surojáno* 'medicine man' to diagnose the source of the *hábay* and prescribe the suitable sacrifice.

The following story illustrates the attitude of the people towards the *timamánuwa*. Bunlagáyan creek just north of barrio

Kalabugao gets its name from a nearby *balete* tree, supposedly inhabited by a powerful *timamánuwa*, *tagbulágay* 'one who makes a noise like an explosion'. People say that the noise is made by the *timamánuwa* shooting at sickness to drive it out of the barrio. For years no one would claim the land around the *balete* tree out of fear of the *timamánuwa*, until Mr. Sixto Dahino took it. He wanted to have the *balete* tree cut down to make room for planting, but the people were afraid to touch it. In such cases if someone can be found to cut down a *balete* tree it is customary for the cutter to say: "*habáyan si juan, iyán migsúgu* let the punishment fall on Juan, he ordered it". Mr. Dahino did get one other man to help him, and after they both recited some Christian prayers they cut it down. Some months after Mr. Dahino did develop a rheumatic condition in his right arm, and although he doesn't believe that the illness had anything to do with the *balete* tree as he still farms there, the people of Kalabugao believe that it was a punishment from the *timamánuwa*. Whether Mr. Dahino's helper used the above formula under his breaths is not known.

III. Personal guardian spirits:

There are a number of personal guardian spirits; spirits who guard or enlighten an individual or who mediate between the man and the more powerful spirits.

A. *Tumánod*: The first class of personal guardian spirits is the *tumánod*. The word means "companion" from the root *tánod* 'accompany'. This class is also called *insalüngána* or *indüngan*. The *tumánod* is a beneficent spirit companion given to each person at the time of his birth according to the more prevalent belief, although some think that only adults or only the great have *tumánod*. If someone shows special ability in any field of endeavor he is said to be *tumanodán*, 'inhabited or influenced by a *tumánod*' because it is the *tumánod* which confers special ability on his charge. The *tumánod* is supposed to communicate with its charge in dreams and thus assist him. One's own *tumánod* and the *tumánod* of the great men of the past are invoked in the ceremonies. A *dalísay ha tumánod* is an especially powerful *tumánod*.

B. *Múlin-úlin*: This is a class of beneficent guardian spirits whose function is to teach or enlighten; the name being derived

from the root *úlin* 'teach'. The *múlin-úlin* is said to begin to accompany its charge either from the time of birth or when its charge first gives signs of learning. When a child shows special aptitude for learning he is said to be *tagulinán ha báta*/ "a child possessed of a *múlin-úlin*. Thus the *múlin-úlin*, which is described by Mr. Pablo Salonca as small in size, accompanies its charge all through life acting as its teacher and guide.

C. *Espiritu*: This is another class of beneficent spirit companions which accompany man throughout life, and are also called *mamúlig* 'helpers' from the root *bílig* 'help'. Their main function is to act as messengers or intercessors with *magbabáya*/, making known the needs and sins, presumably to ask pardon, of its charge. According to Mr. Dahino the word *espiritu* is merely a generic name for spirit when used around the poblacion of Impasugong.

D. *Dumalóngdong*: This is a class of personal guardian spirits more powerful than the *tumánod*, and it is not certain that everyone possesses one, for while Mr. Salonca holds that everyone does, Mr. Dahino, who comes from a different barrio holds that only the powerful have *dumalóngdong*, that is chieftains, war leaders, powerful shamans or medicine men and generally people in authority. This class of spirits is invoked especially at the meetings of chieftains, *daw hadi/ kuy mahabáyan* 'that we don't incur any punishment'. The *dumalóngdong* can punish by causing sickness, and is believed to do so when a lack of respect is shown to its charge. Thus the chieftains invoke the *dumalóngdong* at the time of their meetings to settle disputes, lest in the heat of argument should disrespect be shown, the victim's *dumalóngdong* might punish the offender.

IV. Malignant Spirits:

Whereas the *migbayá*/ and the personal guardian spirits are beneficent and the *timamánuwa* neutral, there is a host of malignant spirits that cause either fear or harm.

A. *Búsaw*: This is a general term for malignant spirits, some of which live in the mountains, while others wander around the world causing sickness by capturing and oppressing the souls of men.

B. *Kawá*: In the Kalabugao area this term refers to a personal malignant soul-companion and also to the man's shadow, its manifestation. The *kawá*/ is of the same size as the man's shadow, but I could elicit no explanation as to why it grows and shrinks depending on the position of the sun. The *kawá*/ accompanies a man throughout his life, but apparently does him no harm during his lifetime. However after death the *kawá*/ remains about the grave, eats the body of the dead and frightens people. People say of the *kawá*/: "*báŋgon ka tuyána, tagalápün kid hu bú saw, tagpapamulindáwan kid hu bú saw* hurry up leg or we will be confronted by a *bú saw*, we are being caught by sunset, we will encounter a *bú saw*". Around the poblacion Impasugong on the central plain, *kawá*/ simply means shadow, and the name of this class of spirits is the Visayan, Christian lowland dialect term for the human soul, *kalág*. This last use of the term *kalág* came as an unpleasant surprise to me, as I had for years exhorted a mixed Visayan and Bukidnon congregation to give a thought to the salvation of their *kalág*, that is in the minds of the Bukidnon, their personal malignant spirit. In the Impasugong area it is thought that after a man's death the personal malignant spirit lives on in the grave and frightens people, but does not eat the body of the dead.

C. *Sumisigbat*: This is a class of unclean spirits that can cause crop failure and sickness. It is also called *sumasulímao*, and *balahimbat*. During certain sacrificial ceremonies, e.g. for the dead, the *sumisigbat* is given the feet or entrails of the chicken placed at a distance from the sacrificial table or outside the door of the house so that it won't approach the table and cause sickness.

D. *Sumápay* and *út-út*: These are classes of *bú saw* that eat people.

E. *Managkiláwan*: These are malignant spirits that eat people alive or raw as the root *kilaw* indicates.

F. *Twadhágin*: These are malignant spirits which appear in the form of beautiful women who reside on the top of Mt. Saldab. The *twadhágin* have a preference for young men. If a man approaches their habitation carrying a bolo, the *twadhágin* are said to insert the bolo in their vagina. The wind on Mt. Saldab is thought to come from the anus or vagina of the *twadhágin*.

G. *Kúk-kúk*: They are mischievous rather than malignant spirits,

whose name is derived from the noise they make. They are said to carry away children, but apparently do them no serious harm. A mute child of the barrio Dumalaguing, Impasugong, Bukidnon, was missing for several days, and when it was found, it indicated that it had been carried away by two *kúk-kúk* to a cave where it was given good food. A child of Impasugong was said to have been taken by a *kúk-kúk*, and when it was found, there were, as the story goes, marks all over the body where it had been licked by the *kúk-kúk*.

H. *Bálbál*: These are large *búsaw* that live in the mountains, but also roam around causing sickness. An *alagási* is a giant *bálbál* that eats anything, cattle and men included. The *áswang* is the spirit dog belonging to the *alagási* and which is said to have the form of fire. This is the first spirit animal I have come across among the Bukidnon.

V. The spirit of man:

Man is composed of body, *láwa*, and spirit, *gimókod*. The soul is thought of in physical terms and even called the *matúud ha láwa*, the true body. It has the form and size of the man. The relationship of the soul to the body is like that of the body to the clothes it wears. When the body is weak it is thought that the soul has wandered, and there is a ceremony, *gimokodán*, in which the soul is invoked and entreated to return to the body. When one is sick it is supposed that the the soul has been imprisoned in the habitation of a *timamánuwa* or is under the power of a *búsaw*. The soul is also thought to travel in dreams. There is the story of a man from Impasugong who journeyed to Mt. Balatukan, an extinct volcano in Misamis Oriental and thought to be the home of departed souls, to search for the soul of his wife who was sick. He went to the great house of *Gumigunal*, as the story goes, and there found the soul of his wife in a bottle. He set it free and his wife recovered. At death the soul leaves the body as a man steps out of his clothes, and then goes to Mt. Balatukan, the abode of the dead.

Such then is the spirit world of the Bukidnon, and his religion consists mainly in keeping on good terms with the various spirits, or re-establishing amicable relations if they have been severed through the breaking of a taboo. The dominant attitude is one of *táhud*, respect mixed with fear, towards the spirits, except in the

case of the malignant spirits where it is mainly fear. This respectful relationship is maintained with *magbabáya/*, the *migbayá/* and the *timamánuwa* by the offering of sacrifices before entering their domain. In the case of the guardian spirits of persons, the proper relationship is maintained by avoiding disrespect towards their charges and by invoking the *tumánod* of famous men of old during the ceremonies. Protection against the malignant spirits is found in *ánting-ánting*, charms, and in recourse to one's own *tumánod*, and, should sickness or calamity befall, in the propitiation of the malignant spirits by means of sacrifices.

And so, these beliefs give the Bukidnon an explanation for the world forces whose workings he does not understand, and his ceremonies provide a means of dealing with them. While these beliefs do give him a sense of security amidst the uncertainties of life, they also tend to retard progress not only in the realm of religion, but since he does not make a very clear distinction between the sacred and the profane, but also in the field of socio-economic development, which he believes to be ruled by the spirits too. So very often his response to a situation that requires change is simply; "*hadí/ kud biyáan sa dálan hu mga láas* I can't abandon the ways of my forefathers".