
MYTHS AND THEIR MAGIC USE IN IFUGAO

By R. F. Barton

The Ifugaos, the pagan, head-hunting, rice-terrace-cultivating people in the mountains of Central Luzon, use myths in their rituals to a greater extent than has been reported for any other people, probably as a part of the excessive development of religion and magic among them. This hypertrophy must have been due largely to the general peril and uncertainty of their lives and their corresponding helplessness. The lack of governmental and territorial organizations, the internal dissensions which rive every village, the unending feuds with neighboring peoples, the sporadic head-hunting and slave-raiding, the capriciousness of the climate of their mountain home and the consequent precariousness of their main crop-rice, the frequency of borrowing and lending and the difficulty of paying and collecting, the dangers entailed in trading trips, the lack of medical and sanitary knowledge,—from all this the Ifugaos have turned to the supernatural as a way out, with the result that their magic and ritual have grown almost boundlessly and their god-creation has proceeded on an equal scale. Another factor in this hypertrophy of religion and magic, very likely, is the lack of masked spectacles and dances among them as outlets for exhibitionism—there is only one mimic dance, the cock-fight dance. It appears, too, that spoken magic has largely taken the place of enacted magic. The former requires less exertion, and, as Malinovski has pointed out, the attitude of both the savage and the child

toward speech is that it is essentially magical in its nature.

Myths enter into nearly every Ifugao ritual and they are, in fact, never recited except ritually. Many myths have individual names. From one to fifteen priests may officiate at such rituals, most of which are family affairs, the priests being drawn from both the husband's and the wife's kindred.

The priests, seated on mats of runo reeds laced together in parallel, whether the ritual is held in village or field, and amidst jars of rice-wine, large wooden bowls into which the wine is occasionally poured, and ritual chests piled with freshly-plucked betel nuts or betel flowers with pepper-vine leaves, first invoke their respective ancestral spirits and these spirits then "possess" them, and partake of the wine and promise the benefits desired through the bodies of the priests. For sipping the wine, the priests use coconut-shell cups with symmetrically notched rims.

The deities, of whom over a thousand are known by name, divided into some thirty classes, are next invoked; several hundred may be called through messenger deities on occasions of moderate importance. Each priest invokes from three to five at a time, after which he says a prayer and then invokes another group. These deities possess him as he sips wine for each group, they promise him whatever he has prayed for. Priests of more than ordinary prestige perform such special rites as invoking a live cock or they may swing knives and spears in a particular manner. In war and sorcery rites, the priests flourish their bolos, sharp edge forward, whenever they utter a "clinching" phrase.

Next, chickens or pigs, or both, are killed, the priests naming the gods to whom they are sacrificed as rapidly as possible while the victims are in their death-throes. After the meat has been cooked, it is piled in large, square, shallow baskets, and the principal actors in the myths to be recited are invoked. In some rites, wooden granary idols (*bulol*) stand on the mat, or there may be a sorcery box containing war charms.

The various myths are first allotted among the priests and each recites the myths assigned him simultaneously with the rest, one myth after another, the recitation consisting of short phrases barked out in two or three musical intonations. At a distance, one hears only a faint hum like that of a swarm of bees, which, as one approaches, goes into a murmur and finally into a roar like that suggesting an approaching mob on a stage. The Ifugaos appreciate the jumbled voices as mere sound; they say it "rises and falls like the sound of the bamboo harp." Boys and youths sometimes smuggle alongside a priest and turn their ear to him alone as to listen to his myth, and in this way begin their education for the priesthood. In Ifugao, every male eventually becomes a priest. Myths are never recited for mere entertainment.

The myths embody what is fundamentally a sympathetic magic. They

tell about hero-ancestors or gods or other supernatural beings who in the past were confronted with situations and problems similar to those which worry the one for whose benefit the ceremony is being performed. The language of the myth is always in the present tense but it is of the nature of a historical present. The myth sets up parallels in magic and these are "clinched" or made effective by phrases which I term "fiat" (*poltak*). In Central Ifugao the fiat is introduced by the phrase "*batdakana*" which may be resolved with a fair degree of plausibility into the ancient Indonesian prefix *b*, the root *at* meaning "like" or "so", the pronoun *daka*, "thou", and the contraction (*b*)'na, from *bina*, meaning "that which is nearer to the person spoken to than to the speaker." Thus the expression means, "Be (or act) thou in that"—most often addressed to omens, events, or magic forces, or sometimes to the power in the myth itself or to the powers that stand back of the myth. In Kiangán, besides *batdakana*, another phrase is often used: "It is not there, but here, in our village of . . . , so that . . .", the priest then naming whatever benefits it is desired to secure.

Many myths are followed by a *tulud*, the purpose of which is to bring to the place of the rites the principal actor or beings or powers of which the myth relates or the *mana* or virtue which it contains. The primary meaning of *tulud* is "pushing," but it also means "compelling." In Kiangán, it is mostly the actors who are brought, and they declare through the priests that they will confer the benefits of which the myth tells, that it shall be now as it was in the past. In "pushing" the myth character from the scene of the myth to the site of the recitation, the priest "pushes" him from place to place, has him going uphill, downhill, across a valley, over a ridge, wading streams, walking on rice-terrace dikes, and so on, according to the character of the country.

In Central Ifugao, the *tulud* usually takes a different form—the form of subordinate appended myths that are essential repetitions of each other. Charms and objects having inherent power, such as granary images and various talismans are called *Dinakwat*—"Endowments," "Obtainments". In this form of *tulud*, somebody living between the scene of the myth and the site of the recitation, borrows the power or talisman or obtains it as a gift and takes it home. There it repeats its wonder-working and, being much heard-about, is borrowed by another Ifugao who lives still nearer the site of the myth recitation. And so, by three or four stages, it is finally brought home. The last obtainer is, of course, he for whom the rites are performed. The *tulud* serves the function of a magic bridge from "there" to "here" and from "then" to "now." The first parts of it are in the historical present, the last part in the present tense.

At the end of the myth-*tulud* recital, there is the final clinching phrase. In Kiangán it is always, "It is not there, but here, so that . . ." In Central

Ifugao the ending is most often, *Tabina* . . . , “It was the source, beginning, or cause . . . (of such and such benefits),” followed by *Kalidi* . . . , a compelling or clinching word, after which the priest enumerates the benefits desired in the present and ends with the final phrase, “because thou art being mythed” or “for there ye have been mythed this myth of ours.”

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