

THE IFUGAO *HAGABI*

By Raymundo Baguilat

The greatest ambition of an Ifugao is to attain the rank of *cadangyan*, to do which he must give a great public feast, called *uya-uy*, that begins with twenty consecutive nights of dancing, *naba*, and culminates in three full days of eating and drinking.

After a man has given the *uya-uy*, he is considered of the rank of a *Cadangyan* (wealthy), but it would be considered something is lacking if he does not also give another feast, the *bagabi*, in connection with the construction of a long, hardwood seat of the same name, which is the emblem of this rank. The *Cadangyan* are highly respected in Ifugao society. They are generally deferred to, take precedence on public occasions, their opinions have great weight, and when they die they are given extraordinary burial. Their wealth must be based on the ownership of real property, especially in the form of rice-fields. It is not enough to have merely much money to be considered as belonging to the aristocracy, because money is not thought of as a lasting possession such as the great, terraced rice-fields.

Ifugao custom dictates that one marry within one's class. The *Cadangyan* (rich) marry *Cadangyan* and the *Nawotwot* (poor) marry the *Nawotwot*. A *Cadangyan* who disregards this custom is looked down upon. As a result, the *Cadangyan* families of Ifugao are largely inter-related.

The wooden seat or *bagabi* is placed under the eaves in the stone-paved yard that surrounds the little wooden four-stilted house with the high-peaked, thatched roof, that is so typical of the country, and is used by the *Cadangyan* to recline on. In its original, crude form, it was called the *guinulguling*, which means, goat-like, as the two ends of the seat or couch resembled the heads of goats. The present *bagabi* is a somewhat improved form, the extremities, called *ngiwit*, resembling the head of an animal with a long snout and two big ears.

As to the origin of this piece of furniture, if so it may be called, the following story is told. At Camandag, a sitio of Barrio Antipolo, Kiangang, Ifugao, there once lived two brothers, Anniyan and Boyagon, who had two pet fishes, caught in the Camandag River, of which they were very fond. It happened that the parents of the two boys bought a number of rice-fields

and, as is the custom, gave a feast, the *ibbuy*, on the day the final payment was made, during which, disregarding the protests of the boys, they took the two fishes and served them as food to the guests. The boys were so hurt by this fact that they left their parent's house and went far down-stream to a place called Tutung. The parents sent messengers after them begging them to return home, but the boys would not come back. They then ordered a wooden couch, the *guinulguling*, to be made to replace the lost pets, and when it was finished they gave a great feast, inviting the boys to attend. But the boys still refused, and the parents, now filled with remorse, threw the *guinulguling* into the Camandag River. The swift current carried it far down to Naliwan, near Lamut, in the province now called Nueva Vizcaya. At Naliwan there was a man by the name of Cabbigat who found the *guinulguling* on the river bank, stuck in the mud. He carried it to his house and people from far and near came to look at it. Some took it into their heads to make couches like it as occasions for great feasts, and the custom then spread.

Among the Ifugaos, the *guinulguling*, now called the *bagabi*, is a symbol of wealth and social prestige, for only the rich can afford to perform the *bagabi* feast. Custom requires that he do this at the time of the year known as *tialgo*, when rice is scarce and many people are hungry. But first he must find out whether the gods favor the step, and this is determined by calling the *mumbaki*, or priests, who then perform a ceremony called the *mamaldang*.

They kill some chickens and study the gall-bladder and the bile. If the gall-bladder is small and pale, this is interpreted as an unfavorable sign and the *bagabi* is postponed.

The woodcutters and carpenters, *mumbabat*, then go to the forest where they carefully select a big narra or *ipil* tree, which they cut down and begin to fashion into a *bagabi*. These men are not paid, but are served good food, including carabao meat and pork, and plenty of rice-wine. When the *bagabi* is finished, many people go to the forest to bring it out, taking turns in carrying it, always an occasion for great fun and merriment. They vie with each other in feats of strength, and meat and drink is served at every stop. As the wine takes effect and the carriers struggle along with the heavy object, they may weave from side to side on the narrow trail, and sometimes the great couch may land in the mud, or crush some one's foot. It may take several days to get the *bagabi* to its destination. When it arrives at the house of the one who gives the feast, the people indulge in a sort of "snow-ball" fight, but instead of snow, a boiled, glutinous, hot rice (*dayacot*) is pressed into balls which are thrown about. Then follow three days of eating, drinking, and dancing.

Today the rich Ifugao with a practical bent of mind, may perform a *bagabi* feast, but for the purpose of building himself a modern house instead

of obtaining the wooden coach, which is of little use. With the present automobile roads, trucks instead of man-power are used to haul the materials. Much of the color of the *bagabi* has therefore been lost, but the general feasting remains a feature.

The early American Governors of Ifugao were greatly loved because of the interest they showed in the life of the people. One of them, the great Captain Tomlinson, gave a *bagabi* and permanently lodged himself in the hearts of the Ifugaos. They call him Capitan Toom, the real Cadangyan. He had two *bagabi* made, one of *ipil* and the other of stone. The transportation of the stone *bagabi* from the quarry to the Sub-Provincial Building in Kiangnan, caused many a broken shoulder, leg and toe. Not less than thirty-five carabaos were slaughtered and some forty-five pigs. Two-hundred sacks of rice were consumed. The boiled rice was served around on wheelbarrows. Today the wooden *bagabi* stands on the verandah of the residence of the Deputy-Governor and the stone one stands on the plaza of the Government Reservation.

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