

Secondary Burial Rites

HANUNOO MANGYAN, MINDORO ISLAND PROVINCE, CENTRAL PHILIPPINES. *After a primary burial, the Hanunoo Mangyan may exhume the dead and give the body a secondary burial when so intimated by the deceased during the first burial rites. This is often held, more or less, one year after the death.*



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Exhumation of human bones at a grave.



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People gathering at the house yard of a deceased person, to participate in the ritual and feast for the exhumation of bones.

FOR THIS CEREMONY, a simple house is built in the yard – the *balay but'ol* (house of bones) with no regulations as to the disposition of the bones. The rite of exhumation (*kutkut*) and the feast (*panludan* or *ponsiyon*) are held on the same day. However, the feast is usually done during the dry season while there is still a stock of rice. The head of the household call his kin to the first or second degrees, one to two weeks before the event. The news spreads far, even to distant settlements.

A simple but larger house is built in the house yard called *balay ponsiyon* (house for a feast). The day before, close kin visit carrying cauldrons, coconut shell bowls, wicker trays, rice, pigs, chicken (only domestic animals) to contribute to the feast. They prepare the food for the following day. They spend the evening socializing, singing the *ambahan* and other celebratory activities. The *pandaniwan* (ritual specialist) is called to say a prayer to drive evil spirits away.

The next morning, visitors wait around the house, dressed in their best, many with *gitara* (guitar) and *gitgit* (native violins). By nine in the morning, food is placed in the center of the bone house. The family and kin enter and eat. After this, almost all of the guests walk toward the graveyard. Everyone makes it a point to remember who he follows and who is behind them in the line because the same sequence must be followed on the way back.

They approach the fence of the grave and remove it; the grass and bamboo pieces on the mound are taken away. When everything has been removed, the *panugkutkutan* (male person who exhumes a corpse) grasps the central portion of the blanket and murmurs a prayer to call the soul of the dead. A number of males present start digging the grave with their bare hands. The exhumed bones are handed to the *panugkutkutan* one by one, which he places on the ground, separating the bones



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A *panugkutkutan* arranging the exhumed bones.

of the right and left sides (in this part of the ceremony, instruments continue to play). When completely exhumed (no piece of bone may be left in the grave), the *panugkutkutan* places the bones in proper sequence. If male, the bones of the right side are placed on the blanket first. If female, it is the left bones. The bones are arranged as if it were seated. The corners of the blanket are brought together and the upper part is tied. If the bones are those of a male, it is dressed in loincloth and shirt; if female, skirt and blouse. Belts, necklaces and a round buri basket containing betel-nut chewing materials are placed on the bones. After this, the people go back to the house. Nearing the house, they pick *pamanglo* leaves near the path and place them on the outer surface of the walls of the bone house. The bones are placed at the rear of the house, facing the doorway. Food and water are placed before the bones and a wicker tray of rice is placed in the bone house. The participants enter and partake of the food.

Food is laid out in the main house and in the large *ponsiyon* house. The guests



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Exhumed bones dressed in the Hanunoo Mangyan traditional style.

wait around chatting and playing musical instruments. They eat when the food is ready. After the meal, the bones in the blanket are carried out to the *ponsiyon* house. People begin tapping their feet to the tune of the fast gong, *gitara* and *gitgit*. The feasting and dancing are gifts to the soul, temporarily returning to the world of the living.

Several days after the feast, the *taragu'an* is done. The set of exhumed bones are wrapped in a blanket and dressed in new clothes, then carried to a burial cave usually located in the sea coast. The soul of the dead returns to the world of the dead.

Subsequent offerings are given periodically when there is illness, poor harvest and other events. They make a miniature house at the yard corner facing the forest. At night, they offer food and clothes. This offering is called *pangabawan*, to show respect for the dead.

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