

# Buklog Rites

SUBANON, ZAMBOANGA DEL NORTE AND ZAMBOANGA DEL SUR PROVINCES, WESTERN MINDANAO ISLAND, SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES. *The buklog is the most spectacular ritual of the Subanon.*

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An unusually high buklogan being constructed in Zamboanga by the Subanon.



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THE BUKLOG is a multi-purpose complex of rituals held for prestige, thanksgiving, curing of an illness, reception for a new home, final burials, greeting an honored guest, elevation of a new *timuay* (leader), even rites for a recently dead infant.

A single occasion may last for days, even months or years, like the *palantu* version.

Some of its versions include:

**Menonot** – performed to greet home-comers or a new *timuay*, or locating a new rice field;

**Gungog/Buklog jinuyun/Buklog dungoy/Jinyun** – a prestige feast of an important individual;

**Manganawa/Mengenawa** – done to appease spirits after an illness;

**Palanto** – performed to honor the spirits of the dead;

**Pimala** – held for the recently dead;

**Plento** – done after a good harvest;

**Pelohob** – done on the death anniversary of grandparents, loved ones;

**Denion** – performed for the final or secondary burial of a forebear;

**Samaya getao/Benua** – held for the recovery of the sick; and

**Gaus** – done as thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest.

The *buklog menonot* observes a series of rituals before the actual rites. It is usually done in December or January when people are free from agricultural work. This lasts for at least seven days. The community and visitors from other villages are fed all throughout the event. For this, pigs, cattle and chicken are butchered.

First, they erect a *sulampang*, a small offering platform resting on four small posts. The posts are tied together at the bottom the night before and spread out in the morning to support an offering stand. This is a sign for people to assemble for the start of the buklog. No offerings are placed yet. The next day, another

offering stand, *ampang*, is built near a river. This is where offerings of chicken, eggs, rice and betel-nut chew are placed. Its posts are also tied together as a sign that the buklog is about to begin. The offerings are to prevent the *menenulay* spirits from coming to the ceremony or else negative things might happen.

Other stands are erected for the barrier offerings such as the *bibalay* which are single layer offering stands with four posts stuck into the ground or into a container of grain or grain hulls. This is the generic term for *sulampang*, *ampang* and *tapi* stands. Stands are placed on the eastern and on the western side of the house. A bamboo beam is placed across the trail from one side to the other so that the *memaluy* (transformer) spirit will not attend. This spirit is believed to have the capacity to turn the *buklogan* and the people into stone.

Then the distinctive feature of the rituals, the buklogan, is built. This is a structure raised some 10 to 30 feet high, consisting of a highly flexible platform, supported at the corners and edges by upright posts. A long pole is passed through the middle of the platform and extends like a maypole upwards. Below, on the ground where it reaches, is a short horizontal thick hollowed log. The log lies across a trench filled with empty jars that act as resonating chambers. This pole is secured to the flexible platform that rises and drops when dancers simultaneously jump from the edges to the center on top of the platform. The resulting booming sound when the pole hits the log invites people to come and join in the ritual and festival.

A rattan strip is strung across the platform on which new clothing (not yet worn) are suspended as decoration. This signals to the gods that an important ceremony is being held.

The ritual starts with the *getean*, the cutting of the strip of rattan by the *timuay* on top of the buklog. The *beliyan* ritualist (called *megilogi*, if male; *memuati*, if female) goes up the platform to start the ritual opening.





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Atop the flexible platform of the buklogan (spread photo), the belian prepares the ritual offering. In front of her, attached to the flexible floor, is the long pole that drums on the hollowed log below on the ground during the dancing.

In the *palinwasan*, which is performed at twilight, the belian goes to the river first and chants the *mamuati* to call the deity Apo Asug and the spirits of dead ancestors to partake of the food and wear the clothes hanging on the stage (*manadlay*). Then the belian goes to the platform entrance to watch the *samayang* or fairies dance, which he alone can see. He chants the *magiloy*, inviting Apo Asug and other spirits to join in the dance. Then he cuts the *nawi* or rattan strip (getean). The ritual specialist then places the offerings on the platform, after which the buklog dancing starts. There is feasting, drinking and dancing that last for days, with around two hundred people dancing on the buklogan continuously, day and night.

**Getas lati** – After days of dancing, some pieces of the wood of the platform are removed and the rattan binds are partially cut to weaken the structure. Dancing continues until the agreed upon final day.

**Diabu-don** – This is the closing ritual. All the banana leaves used as trays and as wrapping

for food eaten during the days of mass feeding are thrown out, signaling the end of the buklog ceremonies. The platform is left to collapse on its own through time.

If the sponsor of the event is wealthy, six preparatory rituals are celebrated, one each year for six years. Then, on the seventh year, the buklog menonot is finally celebrated. In this case, two platforms are made: one on the eastern side of the house and the other on the western side (*buklog phetaongan*). This is where the people dance. This lasts for a month. The sponsor not only feeds the guests but also the ants, fish and birds in a ritual called *medlumang*.

**Sigakad** – This is another ritual performed in the adjacent main room of the house connected to the buklogan. A whole pig is suspended near the offering trays. The pig, with a necklace of eggs, is referred to as “the suspended one”. If an important person attends, he is invited to stand in front of the pig. Doing this means that the person accepted the challenge to hold another sacrifice the following year.

