

*E*rwap - Rain Ritual

BONTOC, MOUNTAIN PROVINCE, NORTHERN LUZON ISLAND, NORTHERN PHILIPPINES. *In times of severe drought, the Bontoc people of Mountain Province in the Philippine Cordilleras perform a ritual to implore their principal deity, Lumawig, to open the skies and allow rain to fall and water their rice terraces.*



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The ritual for rain begins with the lighting of a fire to be tended by elderly men in front of an ato.

AT NIGHTFALL, elder men from an *ato*, the men's ward in a village, go to Mt. Kalawitan to keep fire and watch in the *fawi*, the place of the great ancestors. They go fully armed with their spears, head-axes and shields. One of the youngest in the group carries a chick in a *fiki*, a small basket. While going up the mountain, the chick is induced to chirp along the way. The chirping announces to the *anitos* (spirits) that men are coming and to make their intentions clear. Upon reaching the *fawi*, they begin to dance to a rhythm created by the beating of their shields. Others gather firewood and build a fire to be kept burning through the night. The oldest in the group recites the *kapya*, the prayer pleading for rain, so that the plants in the terraces will not die.

The next morning, they go down the mountain and return to the *ili*, the village. Before reaching their *ato*, a group of villagers meets them and brings them food. The same night, they continue dancing, now with the playing of gongs through the night. The next day, they go to the river to perform the *mangatuling* – where they wash the gongs and then perform the *pat-tong*, the playing of the gongs. Upon returning to the *ato*, they bring a chicken to the *papatayan*, the place where animal sacrifices are made in the performance of the *fakir*.

The *fakir* is a *tengao*, a day of abstention from hard work. The people rest and make several offerings. Then they dance and make a great deal of noise to call the attention of the deities, whom they believe are only waiting for

the performance of the *fakir* to send rain. If a hawk does not appear during the ritual *lafa'an*, this means that the offering was not acceptable to the deities. They go back to the *ato* to fetch a pig as another offering. A house in the *ili* is selected for the ritual of the *chao-es*, where they offer the pig to ask Lumawig to send rain.

The following day, they perform the *palis* in the *ato*, where a chicken is again offered for the same purpose. In the evening, they have the gong, *patlong*, playing through the whole night.

If the rains still fail to come, the elders gather in their *ato* and decide to undertake the *pal-layog* ritual. This time, five pigs are prepared for sacrifice. Someone is asked to go to the mountains to get *tikem* (sacred plant) for a *sangfo*, a kind of *canao* or ritual feast. Again, the elders gather to select the house in the village where the sacrifices will be made and will bear the *tikem*. On the same day, the village observes a *tengao*. The women go out for the *pasuk'ey* bearing gifts of tobacco leaves to all men in the different *ato*. If after these the rains still do not come, they perform a group prayer, *manaing*, to beg rain from Lumawig. But if the deity is still adamant, they again observe a *tengao* and then perform the *layanaw* where they club or beat one another, or run away with the possessions of others in a show of general chaos to show Lumawig their desperation. If the plea remains unheeded, they go on an extended *tengao*. At the end of this period, usually, the rains fall.

JTP