

Begnas Ritual

BONTOC, MOUNTAIN PROVINCE, NORTHERN LUZON ISLAND, NORTHERN PHILIPPINES. *The papatayan is a big tree considered sacred by the Bontoc in the Cordilleras. It is the oldest tree in the community where sacrificial animals are butchered in honor of a pantheon of deities, the most supreme of which is Lumawig and his female counterpart, Bangan.*



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Beside a papatayan tree, a Bontoc elder addresses the deities.

WHEN THE PALAY is ripe, the thanksgiving rite, *begnas*, is done. It starts with the *giyaw* or the shouting of old men early in the morning. The people meet and select men to go to the edge of the village. Some of these men hold spears while others beat their *kasay* or shields along the way. Upon reaching the edge of the village, the men shout in unison. When they hear birds answering, they stick a sharpened stake into the ground and again shout. They return to the village still beating shields for good luck.

If a blackbird crosses their path on the way to the *giyaw*, they choose another direction.

From the end of the village, they proceed to the *dap'ay*. Wine is drunk, gongs played and the *linlina* and *ab-yeng* are sung. Everyone dances and sings until morning.

The following morning is called *patay*. A small pig is brought to the patayan or sacred tree and butchered there. Selected men, excluding widowers, are sent to do this. From the papatayan, the men return to the *dap'ay* where the pig is butchered.

In the event that a pig is not sacrificed, the *dao'es* ritual is conducted where a dog is butchered. The meat is cooked and apportioned to the old men of the *dap'ay*. The men may eat the meat or take it home. After the meat is apportioned, gong playing stops and the elders decide on the rest day. If the *palay* are ripe already, the elders declare a short period of holiday, say three days, which is strictly observed. Violators pay the expenses incurred in the *begnas*.