

THE LEGEND OF BIAG, AN IGOROT CULTURE HERO

By WILLIAM HENRY SCOTT

Biag was a seventeenth-century hero remembered today as the most important figure in the history of Sagada, an Igorot settlement on the western shoulder of the Cordillera Central of Northern Luzon in the Philippines. Celebrated as the introducer of new rites and the progenitor of a significant portion of the present population, he has been near deified as a multiplier of village prosperity. Although biographical details are scanty and vital statistics completely lacking, the study of what facts are known about his life are worthwhile for the light they cast upon the social and economic conditions of Sagada in its early days.

The sources for the legend of Biag are twofold. The primary source is the text of the *Dangtey* and *Pisang* prayers as recorded by Fred Eggan and the late R.F. Barton, both of which describe his introduction of these rites and give other details of his life. Within these prayers, the details that are agreed upon by all old men who have memorized them may be considered a sort of canon to which appeal may be made for authority. The secondary sources are popular tales and folklore, some of which have been included in *Sagada Secular Literature: Prose* (Scott), and incidental information from neighboring villages.

The legend contained in the religious texts is a brief account of Biag's trip to the lowlands and subsequent wanderings before settling in Sagada to become an enlightener and founding father. He is introduced as one of four siblings—along with Dina-ongan, Doday and Galay—who left a place called Mabika for Candon, where Galay was married and baptized, her three brothers leaving again to settle temporarily in various locations

around Tirad Pass and Angaki.¹ They finally decided to separate, one going north, one south, and Biag himself returning to the Cordillera to settle for a while on the mountain between Agawa and Sagada, and then in several locations just northeast of the present town. His wanderings finally ended when he established a permanent residence in what is now ward Malingeb of Dagdag in the municipal center, the scene of those ritual introductions which were credited with his people's subsequent prosperity and profligacy.

Mabika is today barren pastureland on a hill between Ankileng and Balili. Sixty years ago there were some flat stones there which were pointed out as the remains of Biag's *dap-ay* (a kind of stone-paved male gathering place), but they have since disappeared and there is nothing today to suggest former habitation or profitable archaeological investigation. The name Mabika itself presumably derives from the *bika* bamboo, a useful vinelike rattan which grows today neither in Mabika nor any other of Sagada's denuded or lately reforested environs. The likelihood of a mixed forest in earlier times, however, is suggested by an irrigated ricefield in adjacent Payag-ew said to contain an old tree root too difficult for the original builders to remove, the root of a tree, that is, of much greater diameter than that attained by the Benguet pines which are the only timber within miles of Sagada at present.

The Balili people—whose dialect and intonation is most like Sagada's of all surrounding barrios—have preserved a legend of Mabika, too. They recall it as an evacuation site for some people fleeing an epidemic pestilence who later moved away to the neighborhood of Mainit to the north, burying their valuables in a cave and coming back for them after establishing a new home. The people of Ankileng also look to Mabika as their former home—their first settler, buried under the stones of *dap-ay* Kawayan in the center of the village, was a man of Mabika, and certain heirloom beads and jars are believed to have been brought from that place (where they were made by, or obtained from, spirits).

1) Igorot kinship terminology doesn't reveal the sex of the four siblings, and older informants are frank to state their ignorance of which were brothers and which sisters, although Galay has popularly come to be thought of as a woman.

According to Eugenio Bayang of Sagada, Biag was one of ten families living in Mabika, who left because they were afraid of their enemies. The popular account also says that when Biag and his companions started out for Candon, they left a cat to guard the house. This is a curious detail, for cats are not even nowadays common among Igorots, but it occurs in several sources. There is a Balugan legend of a man named Gansowan who one day entered a cave near the abandoned site of Mabika to rest in the shade while pasturing his carabaos, and observed a cat entering a deeper recess. Curious, he followed and discovered a chamber full of precious Chinese jars, gongs, beads, and rice; but when he returned with companions and ropes for carrying off the treasure, they could not even find the cave. This is alluded to in a Sagada lullaby which, interesting enough, has also been reported from the streets of Candon:

<i>Ay eggay eggay, engnga,</i>	Oh hush hush, little baby,
<i>Igiginekmo pod ay,</i>	Don't cry,
<i>Ta siay mo gomgomtekka</i>	So that when you grow up
<i>Esat en ila-en</i>	We'll go and see
<i>San gameng id Mabika</i>	That treasure in Mabika
<i>Ay banbantayan san kosa.</i> ²	Guarded by the cat.

It was probably some time in the second half of the seventeenth century that Biag and his brothers and sister, Dina-ongan, Doday and Galay, left Mabika for Candon, whether from fear of enemies or epidemic, to sell *bika*-bamboo, or to seek a better fortune that they could expect back home in the hills. Candon was a logical place for them to head for, since Candon has a long history of connections with Mountain Province peoples. It appears in Spanish records as having been founded in 1591, and local legend says that the first church was built on the site of a *kandong* tree under which Igorot travelers used to gather. Its largest and most prominent family is the Abayas whose scion was the son of Ayadong, daughter of the founder of barrio Tetep-an in Western Bontoc, and whose name was proudly maintained even in the face of Governor Claveria's 1848 decree requiring Filipinos to choose surnames from a prescribed list, a decree which left other Candon families with names like Gacula, Gacusan,

2) Text supplied by Mrs. Soledad Killip, Acting Principal of St. Mary's School.

Gadut, Gadia, Gacoscos and Gadong. The people of Tetep-an, otherwise known for their ferocity and success as *cortacabezas*, maintained trading relations with Candon up until the present century—which may be why their name was applied by Spanish geographer Buzeta in 1850 to all Cordillera tribes as far east as Isabella.³ Old *Lacay* Dantugan of Tetep-an reports that when his late wife, who died in 1960 at the age of 90, visited Candon in her teens, she was shown an ancient bark-cloth skirt as an actual heirloom from old Ayadong herself.

In Candon one of the four Mabika migrants embraced Christianity—Galay, who was baptized Abaya—that is to say, was baptized and became an Abaya, either by adopting her god-parents' surname, a common practice among Igorots a generation ago, or by marriage.⁴ Doday, Dina-ongan and Biag, in the words of the *Dangtey* and *Pisang* prayers, "were afraid to be baptized," and the same source says that when they parted with Galay, she gave them a *sowit*-stone and a blacksmith's-bellows, admonishing them to take good care of them as they would later prove very useful. Further details supplied by a popular story add a sugarcane-press and vat, and a return gift to Galay of a

3) Buzeta y Bravo's *Diccionario geográfico estadístico histórico de las Filipinas* describes Candon as a city of 3,000 houses in whose eastern environs the missions of Sto. Tomas and San Agustin were little by little converting the Tinguianes and Igorots in the *rancherías de infieles* of Gatimuyod, Lidlida, Liyagan, Bacsayan, Cabisilang, Galimugtong, Daldagan, Pagampan, Alalangigan and Pila. The statement that the people of these barrios lived by agriculture and hunting and maintained trade with the people of Candon, makes them sound like rather permanent settlements in contrast to such entries as those for Atabay (Santa Lucia)—*una de las misiones destinadas a la conversión de infieles al cristianismo*, Babayoan (Santa Cruz)—*ranchería de nuevos cristianos y catecúmenos*, Banrell (Narvacan)—*nuevo pueblo formado de infieles*, or Tundingan (San Fernando)—*barrio formado de igorrotos reducidos al cristianismo*.

4) It is a pity the parish records of the Candon church are not available to establish the date of this event, but they were carried off during the Revolution by the local Aglipayan priest and at the present time only go back as far as 1868. The connection has been memorialized in Sagada legend, however, in a story that the belfry of this church fell to the ground when somebody cut a branch off one of the sacred trees in Sagada. Mons. Daniel Cortes, present parish priest, considers the ill-matched upper stories of the belfry to be evidence that the tower did actually collapse at some time, probably due to an earthquake.

blouse and Igorot-style belt (*bakget*) in response to her sentimental request for some sort of Igorot keepsake—a request couched in the Bayang version in rather anachronistic terminology, as a matter of fact, since the word “Igorot” does not appear in any of the older prayer texts. More probable is another story which lists the Igorot memento as beads and a belt, both distinctive and valued items of Sagada attire even today. Before the Second World War, children were shown what were presumably the genuine articles carried up from Candon, but old men today are frankly sceptical about their authenticity, making no claims for the sugar mill, saying the original *sowit*-stone was destroyed in a fire, and presuming that the bellows were made in Sagada, although most probably by Biag himself.

Leaving Candon, the three brothers settled for a while in Sagsagada, a legendary site now unknown but believed to have been between the coast and Tirad Pass and “near Sapowan” (lit., “praying place”), scene of the Igorot god Lumawig’s descent from heaven. After some time they migrated eastward through Tirad (Langyatan), and settled successively in Gadagad and Malannoti, identified respectively as a hillside of Angaki and a stream between the modern barrios of Legleg and Cabaroan, which would be the Abra River itself. This region is one with long and close relations with the Igorots of Western Bontoc, one where pagan sacrifices are conducted even now in the Northern Kankanay dialect. The ridge itself (Kayos)—the Malaya Range or Western Cordillera which separates the Abra Valley from the Ilocos plain—, was formerly the site of a settlement called Dalican from which both the founders of Masla and Banguitan fled during a tribal war, and which was traditionally so named (viz., “stove”) because Lumawig stopped there to cook his first meal after reaching the earth, bringing forth a spring for the purpose. This spring is still utilized by Igorot travelers following the trade route of their ancestors, but the spot is otherwise abandoned and barren.

Story-tellers find it significant that Biag and his companions lived off squash in this region, some recounting how pleasantly surprised they were to discover that this crop matured in just a month, others giving the exact length of time they stayed in each place—e.g., a year and a half in Sagsagada and two years in Malannoti (Bayang). The canonical legend goes on to say the brothers then decided to split up, one going downstream,

another up the Abra to Kayan, and Biag back to the Cordillera Central to settle in the neighborhood of Agawa. The late Pedro Lopus, a local savant who acted as informant to American anthropologists both before and after the War, stated succinctly: "Dina-ongan went to Ma-eng and made his living by swiddens; Doday went south and made his living by pasture and plow." (Barton 1940) Some informants think Biag and his brothers were members of a larger party and that Dina-ongan and Doday left this group to seek their separate fortunes. At any rate, Biag presumably arrived in Agawa with companions for the Agawa people have a legend about the "Sagada settlers" who once lived among them, though not mentioning Biag by name.

The Agawa story tells how a group of people from Sangilo (i.e., San Emilio, Ilocos Sur, about ten kilometers from Tirad Pass) left that place because of tribal warfare, and settled in Sodsodoweg, directly below the present site of the Episcopal Church in Nabanig. They later moved up to Malobban above Lommiyeng, where the post-War village of Lacmaan is located, and while there buried their dead in a shallow cave called Dogodogan Na-isakyay on the northern face of the spur on which Nabanig is located, where four of their coffins are still to be seen. Then they crossed over the watershed to what is now the Bangaan side of the mountain, moving successively to Kitang, Ata-at, Dawangan and Malingeb. This tallies nicely with the Sagada version as recorded by Bayang:

Biag and his companions went to Malobban to settle. But after three months one of them died, so they were frightened and moved over to Kitang. But five months later they settled at Ata-at, and Pomangdew was where they performed *Pes-ay*. Five years later, a dog went to Mabengbeng and had puppies, and didn't go back to Ata-at for two days. On the third day she came home, and they took care of her. When the dog went out again, they followed her and discovered she had delivered in Mabengbeng. So Biag cleared the brush out of Mabengbeng and built a tribunal [*dap-ay*] in Malingeb. Then Biag remained permanently Malingeb, and that became his village. (37-38)

On the mountain slope of Kitang, three small streams converge in a spot called Banbani and it was there that the migrants lived for a while. These waters then flow southward for about a kilometer, past Pomangdew where Biag was later to perform the agricultural rite of *Pes-ay*, past a twenty-foot outcropping of limestone with a natural tunnel near the top into which the

Banbani folk inserted the coffins of five more of their dead, and finally disappear into a small sinkhole. Such caverns characterize the eroded coral reef on which Sagada stands, and their fantastic canyons suck streams down into such restricted passages they are spewed forth again in rainy season under sufficient pressure to knock about boulders the size of houses and lay down new floors of sand in the lower chambers of the larger caves; it is small wonder they have appealed to Biag's descendants as appropriate for gravesites and the abodes of ghosts and evil spirits. Ata-at is located in the fold of a hill above one of these subterranean streams, and was planted to vegetables by American missionaries early in the twentieth century, the whole area from Kitang to Ata-at having been long deserted and deforested at the time of their arrival. (Ken-Salaw or Makamkamlis, immediately adjacent, are named by some storytellers instead of Ata-at.) Of the wooded area to the southwest into which Biag's dog wandered to deliver, only two trees are left, both of which have been protected as sacred and one of which still receives pagan sacrifices today.

Biag's manner of selecting a permanent location combines the features of the two most popular Western Bontoc methods—following a faithful dog or a farrowing sow. Masla, Banguitan and Fidelisan were traditionally named after dogs who led their masters to those places; Agawa, Sabeyan and Payeo were all selected by pregnant pigs whose behavior suggested future fertility; and Alab and Amtadao were settled by Bontocs following a wild boar and sow respectively during a pestilence of domestic swine. Where Biag got his wife the canonical sources do not say, but speculation on the part of savants has suggested Agawa or prior settlers in Sagada, while literary ingenuity has produced real romances making the search for a bride an integral part of his travels. Although the Biag legend is usually told in English under some such title as "The First Settlers in Sagada," there is nothing in the tradition itself to suggest that he was literally the founder of the town. Quite the opposite, Bayang's published account of "The Founding of Sagada" opens with the story of Pose who founded *dap-ay* Daw-angan (now defunct), and the late Pedro Lopus told R. F. Barton in 1940 that Biag stopped off in Daw-angan on his way to Candon. This Pose came from Kakawa-an, now a barren pasture just north of the Mabika site, and the Peng-as who founded *dap-ay* Matoba is

believed to have been his son, while another of his children gave his name to the tiny burial cave of Ke-ilek.

A *dap-ay* is a stone-paved male gathering place with a dormitory for old men, boys and bachelors, which serves as the center of the "ward" divisions of the town and the settlement of intravillage disputes (hence the Spanish appellation, tribunal), but our sources provide no evidence of these functions in Biag's day, the word *dap-ay* itself meaning simply "stone paving" in Bontoc dialect. There appear to have been seven of them in Sagada when Biag settled there (or at least contemporaneous with him), four of which—Daw-angan, Podpod-aw, Soyok and Bana-aw—have disappeared as organizations but left their stones behind as gathering spots for gossiping women. The names of the other three have also disappeared but by another process: Pey-asan was transferred to Akikis as Payayeng was to Losban (also leaving their paving intact), while Pidlan, whose stones survived until after World War II, was transferred by Biag's own son Bandowa to Dalolog, now known by the name Bilig. Another *dap-ay* was founded in Pikong by Biag's daughter Konyap, and the three Biag-associated *dap-ay* (i.e., Malingeb, Bilig and Pikong) have unique religious significance during certain festivals. Membership in them, however, is neither hereditary nor particularly cherished: the progeny of one of Biag's two children is completely unknown, and one of the important religious functions of Pikong is regularly performed in neighboring *dap-ay* Losban simply because the houses around Pikong in times past made it too crowded.⁵

Four communal ceremonies are believed to have been taught Biag by divine revelation—the *Dangtey*, the *Pisang* (or *Oton di Tapey*), the *Tegma* and the "Begnans of the Waste Grains." In common parlance the revealing deity is referred to as Lumawig, but in the prayer texts themselves the term is the common noun *kabonyan* or *atbayan*; the former may reasonably be translated "god" or "deity", while the latter is a verb meaning "to guard, protect" in nearby Bauko, the equivalent of Sagada and Ilocano *bantayan*. *Dangtey* and *Pisang* are connected and occur no more often than every ten years (e.g., 1905, 1951, 1962), taking place in the three Biag-associated ward centers. *Tegma* is the third and last of the series of marriage rites a successful

5) The other Sagada *dap-ay* at present are Bang-owaw, Tokipa, Lokong, Mabalay, Matoba, Dolkigan and Patay.

Sagadan expects to perform during his lifetime, and the *Begnas* of the Waste Grains is a traditional ritual here given seasonal significance by association with those grains which drop from the basket on the way home from harvest. It may be that Biag should also be associated with the *O-o* ceremony in which meat is weighed against that *sowit*-stone he carried up to Sagada from the Ilocos coast.

Dangtey is an elaborate series of fertility and head-hunting rites whose elements are to be found in the common *Wange* and *Begnas* ceremonies which are performed seasonally throughout the year. *Wange* is celebrated for the growth of crops and is characterized by the carrying around of the sacrificial hog from *dap-ay* to *dap-ay*, emphasizing the concept of village unity even in matters of fertility. *Begnas* is a traditional complex of communal welfare rites harking back to headhunting days in which the spirits of both living and deceased Sagadans are called home to bring protection, fertility and vengeance with them, omens are read in the gall bladders of sacrificed pigs and chickens and the songs of certain forest birds, and two tree-dwelling guardian spirits, the two major water sources, and even the houses, houseyards and paving stones of the *dap-ay* platforms themselves are invoked and petitioned for village permanence, cooperation and peace. Although the component parts of the *Dangtey* involve no real innovations, the manner of its revelation was suitably mysterious.

Biag's wife, returning home with a water jar during a holiday, was seen by the people sitting around to fall, but those who went to her aid discovered that the water jar had miraculously broken into two pieces, both still full of water, and that she was holding the tailfeathers of a rooster. Following this strange experience, she went home to bed and had a dream that a strange rooster would join their flock and that they should remove its tailfeathers for a new kind of ritual crown. Popular versions of the story differ as to the sequence and manner of the rest of the revelation of the new rite, but all remark the strange fowl which was to provide the novel headdress. It is called a *baboyan* in the canon, a word of no recognized meaning today although apparently cognate with *baboy*, "fat pig," and pagan theologs have speculated that it may have been some new domestic species like a goose or turkey. As old Pekdasin, late "dean" of priests, told an American visitor in 1950, "They

were afraid to butcher it for other people might say they had stolen it because no one in the area had seen a turkey like this one." (Hart) In response to a dream instructing him to consider it one of his own chickens, Biag is supposed to have said, "How could we claim that—it looks like a chicken of the *tolay* [official, boss]." (Eggan 1950)

The *Pisang*, or *Oton di Tapey* ("Cooking of Rice-Wine"), on the other hand, was a truly novel revelation in which Biag and his family were instructed to feed the whole town after their *Tegma* ceremony, an unlikely event which has captured the imagination of a basically hungry community ever since. A high school student wrote in a 1955 composition: "Even a day-old baby is given an equal share. . . . If a person is sick, he is carried to the clubhouse [*dap-ay*] because there is a belief that otherwise an evil spirit will effect his death." (Abeya) The "wine" referred to is a food rather than a beverage—fermenting glutinous rice which produces an alcoholic liquid but which at the time it is carried by the bushelbasket to the three sacred centers is still a yeasty confection. The canonical text calls attention to the fact that it was glutinous rice which satisfied the multitude rather than whatever food was the ordinary fare.

Imbagan nan atbayan, "Men-otoka ta pakanem nan omili." Nin-otowet si Biag, pakanena pay nan men-ili dadat egay kabsog Ya kasin imbagan nan atbayan, "Men-otokas saliket ta pakanem kasin nan men-ili."
(Text from Eggan 1960:6)

The *atbayan* said, "Cook and feed the people." So Biag cooked and fed the people but they weren't satisfied. So the *atbayan* spoke again, "Cook glutinous rice and feed the people again."

So Biag fermented rice to feed the people and they were satisfied, and then the voice of revelation told him to repeat the feast every ten years. "And that's what Biag always did in Malingeb, and had many children, fruitful crops, and lots of pigs and chickens."

The canon states that this dramatic feeding of the multitude was to be a function of Biag's immediate family (viz., "Biag said to his children, 'One of you go to Pikong and the other to Bilig to there will be three of us to feed the townsfolk during *Pisang*'"—*Bayang*), and the extension of eligibility to all who have married off their children in the preceding decade or performed *Tegma* themselves is probably an empty technicality amid a

population more than half of which can claim direct descent from the founder. The feeding still takes place, however, in the three prescribed sites, dramatic lines of citizens carrying in their meat and rice-wine from all the other wards during the big event, and the significance of the three *dap-ay* is permanently memorialized in the formula with which the master-of-ceremonies starts the butchering in the thrice-annual community nuptial rites:

<i>Nay di koan di Idalolog ay amgaganakan. Nay di koan di Ipikong ay amloloweban. Nay di koan di Idagdag ay mamakedse.</i>	Here's the share for the Dalolog people who are so prolific.
(Bayang: 41)	Here's the share for the Pikong people so rich in pigs. Here's the share for the Dagdag people who are so fierce. ⁶

Biag's reputation as a feeder of the entire community is expanded in a popular legend identifying him with what Barton has called the "miraculous increase"—*sika*, classically illustrated by deities or culture heroes who throw a handful of rice into a pot which on cooking becomes full to overflowing. (This is a fairly normal phenomenon of boiling rice, as a matter of fact, and it is not inconceivable that the whole concept of *sika* may be the reaction of a root-eating people to the introduction of this cereal.) Every child knows the story of how the Tetep-an or Amtadao people kept coming up to barter rice from Biag, only to find that his house seemed to be stacked up just as full after the transaction as before. "*Sika-an obpay nan si Biag!*" they cried—"Boy, Biag's really got the magic touch!"—, and from then on Biag was nicknamed *si Kaan*.⁷ (Barton) Miracle-working of the loaves-and-fishes variety is the stock-in-trade of Cordillera demigods, and it may be that such a process of deification in Biag's case was forestalled by the influence of the Bontoc Lumawig legend and modern Christian acculturation. At least *Lacay* Pekdasin once equated him with Lumawig and told Dr. Donn Hart, "Biag is the most powerful of all gods in Sagada—he can talk to God." (Hart)

6) Malingebe is located in the half of town called Dagdag, Bilig and Pikong in Demang.

7) The pun is somewhat labored: *si* is an article or honorific introducing a proper name, but the nickname itself is pronounced not *ka-an* as in *sika-an*, but *Kayan*, with *ɾ* representing an affricative *g* cognate with *r* or *l* in neighboring dialects.

What in western cultures would be a wedding ceremony is among Igorots a lifelong series of fertility rites and prestige feasts performed either after successful parenthood and prosperity or to induce such results where they are wanting. In Sagada, Biag's *Tegma* is a climax to the series so rare many young folk have never even seen it. Its introduction and its special crown of rooster-tail feathers are associated with Biag's *Dangtey-Pisang* theophanies, and may echo similar ceremonies in Bontoc and Ifugao to the east. The *Begnas* which Biag scheduled for the time of the waste grains (*ogas*) is one of five regularly performed during the year nowadays. Three of these include full-fledged headtaking rituals—one in connection with the March sugarcane milling (or, more accurately, the former sugarcane milling, for this activity disappeared about a generation ago), another in May when mushrooms and such wild food as edible insects used to be the major source of food, and the third in October between the sowing of the seeds and the transplanting of the seedlings. A fourth *Begnas*, smaller and lacking the major warfare sacrifice, is scheduled just after the December weddings, and the one Biag introduced following the rice harvest (that is, when the grains fall from the harvesters' baskets) is also a small one.

Most of the old men who may be considered authorities on the Biag legend are his direct descendants of the ninth or tenth generations who trace their line through Konyap,—but there are two schools of thought as to whether this is the Konyap who was Biag's daughter and the founder of *dap-ay* Pikong, or Konyap, the daughter of Bandowa, Biag's son. (An examination of this genealogy shows that although Sagada people are nowadays frequently named for their grandparents, in earlier days the more common custom was for parents to name their children for their own brothers and sisters.) In either case, she was widowed before producing any issue known to modern genealogists and then married Liyaso, a man of Alab, whence all the descendants of this union, plus their spouses, are today called the Men-iyalab ("the De Alabs"). If Biag sired any other offspring, they have left no memory of their accomplishments or gravesites behind, despite a colorful story which attributes to Biag the same number of children as that produced by the pig [*sic*] he followed to Malingeb—nine.

It is the Sagada burial custom to place the deceased in a sturdy coffin hewn from a single tree trunk in the mouth of

one of the caves to the east or on a rock ledge in the same neighborhood, the more inaccessible the better. Biag, Bandowa and Konyap were all entombed in the latter manner, but both Biag's and Bandowa's caskets have disappeared. The site of Konyap's burial today contains thirteen coffins of varying age under which are the crumbled, rotten fragments of what is most likely her own last resting place. Biag's coffin survived on an impressive rock ledge on the face of a cliff in Paytokan some forty feet above the valley floor until this century, eliciting admiration and perplexity over the difficulty of having placed it there. A local tradition in keeping with the other supernatural events of Biag's life has suggested that it was placed there by crows, but less respectful modern observers have noted that the bare limestone just below the spot has not yet weathered to the deep blue-purple of the long-exposed rock and so have cynically speculated that the original site may once have been quite accessible from an earthen slope since eroded away. Old men who remember the coffin before an unfortuitous grass fire consumed it in their childhood, say that it was the nesting place of a large hawk, popularly known as "Biag's chicken," which kept rats away from his mortal remains. (Bees that make their home in other cliff-face coffins nowadays, we might add, serve much the same function in the case of anthropologists.)

The blacksmith's bellows that was associated with Biag's name before World War II was what has been called the Malayan forge—two upright wooden or bamboo cylinders whose pistons were ringed with chicken feathers so set as to collapse on the return stroke. Although it is highly unlikely that Biag and his companions dragged around so cumbersome an object during their odyssey as those to be seen in all the Cordillera sub-provinces today, Jenks in 1905 found the central Bontocs working one of such tiny proportions there is no reason why Biag might not have introduced a similar model into Sagada. (Jenks: pl. CIX) But there are reasons why he should not be considered the introducer of blacksmithing. His name in the oral literature has never been used in this connection, and there is an old ritual text which does describe the supernatural origin of this art. Moreover, no such complex equipment is necessary: tempered tools are produced even now by Cordillera blacksmiths with no more of a forge than a bamboo tube through which to blow charcoal piled around the raw iron to a cherry red.

The *sowit*-stone which Biag got from his Christian sister—or one similar to it—is used once a year during the *O-o* rite to measure the portion of salt pork each of the participating men contribute; *sowit* literally means “balance” and in practice the stone is placed on one end of a little seesaw with the meat on the other. The following day these same men go out to the fields to perform that pre-harvest rite called *Pes-ay* which, it will be recalled, Biag used to perform in Pomangdew before he settled in Malingeb, but which nowadays takes place in Pepesayan south of the town. Biag’s use of a crude kilo-weight sounds strangely like the sort of introduction western missionaries make into societies innocent of any bureau of standard weights and measures, and it is tempting to think that some sort of steelyard in the lowlands suggested the idea to him. But the socio-religious use of round stones and their careful preservation is commonly encountered in interior Cordillera cultures: three families in Guinaang above Bontoc guard such stones and use them with sacramental implication during wedding rites, and round river pebbles are included in every Ifugao brave’s magical war-kit.⁸

Sugarcane milling went out of style in Sagada in the 1920’s, but the season is still ritually marked, and several times in the present generation an actual mill has been set up for the occasion. This was a type with wide distribution in the Mountain Province, consisting of three upright rollers geared together, between which the cane is pressed, and powered by a horizontal bar pushed round in a circle by men or draft animals. Biag’s connection with this implement may safely be dismissed as apocryphal, however, not only because the canonical texts in no way associate him with sugarcane wine but because local sugar-milling legends clearly refer to an older type of mill—one in which a long pole is hinged across the top of a tree stump about waist high, its natural springiness helping the operator to keep it bouncing up and down with one hand while he inserts the cane under it near the fulcrum with the other. The *Dawis*

8) These Guinaang stones are called *moling*, the name of a type of stone in Ifugao (cf. Villaverde, p. 333: “According to them, it [the sky] is composed of a dark blue stone such as is found in those parts; *múlin* is the name of this stone, and the same is applied to the vault of the heavens”), cognate with Sagada *molingan*, a kind of stone, and *moli*, any round stone.

prayer which describes Lumawig's construction of the first sugarcane press says he made it from a civet-cat's body, taking the long tail for the handle—a striking figure more appropriate to the motion of a pump-handle than to the circular sweep of the modern type of mill. Moreover, the ritual formula recited during the now pointless Sagada rite uses the term for such a vertically operated lever:

<i>Dapil, dapil,</i>	Lever, lever,
<i>Napno nan topil</i>	Let the basket be filled
<i>Isnan kinilkil.</i> ⁹	With sugar.

The Biag legend gives us a glimpse into the childhood, if not the birth, of an Igorot community. Sagada is a comparatively young settlement which either did not exist or was too small for the Spanish to take note of when they visited nearby Alab, Ankileng, Balugan, Amtadao, Tanulong and Pedlisan in 1665. (Díaz: 248) In the new community, life was hard to acquire, difficult to maintain, and likely to end suddenly. A pernicious infertility not only of crops and domestic animals but of human beings themselves is echoed in the petitions presented in the *Dangtey* and *Begnas* prayers, and mere survival hung from such a slender thread that even one who like Biag himself preserved his line through only one child could be celebrated as prolific and prosperous. Feasts like *Pisang* and *Tegma* which redistribute surplus food appear by the impression they made on the popular imagination to have been an essential feature of community survival. The *Pes-ay* rite, a kind of token pre-harvest tasting of the fruits without tempting fate by gathering in the whole crop in one fell swoop, and Biag's own institution of a ritual for the "waste grains," imply an agricultural humility born of insecurity. Biag's party, in the course of a few years' wandering, left four dead in Agawa and another five just north of Sagada, and the terse reference to his *dap-ay* as the home of people who were fierce reminds us of the headtaking warfare of which hoary Sagada veterans were boasting as late as the First World War.

The Sagadans of the Biag legend appear as a handful of homesteaders among whom a *dap-ay* was the private patio of some family, but from these beginnings a civic-minded com-

9) Text supplied by Mr. Eduardo Bete.

munity with intense local loyalty has developed, and a descendant of Biag's today may be a member of any *dap-ay* in town, indeed may spend his youth in one of them and then shift his adult membership to another simply because it's nearer a house he moves into. Redistribution of food, expansion of ego, and assumption of leadership are common aspects of prestige feasts in all Cordillera cultures, but such *Dangtey-Pisang* specifications as "Even a day-old baby gets an equal share" underscore village unity. Like the *Dangtey* and *Tegma*, the *O-o* rite—a sharing of sacrificial meat among "rich" men—is open to anybody who considers himself affluent enough to join, but any hereditary features of this incipient aristocracy had disappeared, if ever they existed, by the end of the nineteenth century. Missing, too, are such customs as that of Guinaang where the type and extent of wedding feasts are prescribed by lineage, or the Masla tradition by which each of the town's two descent groups butchers a different number of animals during the same sacrifice. Spot checking of burial sites in the caves indicates that even the distinct hereditary funeral patterns reported of the village forefathers were not carried out in actual practice.

The rootlessness of the young community shows up in the fact that Biag's revelations were received in visions neither of one of his own ancestors nor of that prominent Bontoc enlightener, Lumawig, but simply of "a spirit" or "a deity". Unlike fellow Kankanay-speakers to the south who name celestial bodies and individual ancestors in their prayers, the people of Sagada never address deities by personal names. And when the legend of Lumawig is ritually recited during marriage ceremonies, Biag's descendants make a significant deviation from the Bontoc version—instead of drawing Lumawig down from heaven to a mountaintop conveniently overlooking Bontoc itself, they tell how the great begetter of fertility descended in that Ilocos region where their ancestors had traveled and travailed and one of them settled.

The urgency with which food is regarded in the Biag legend continued into the present century. Even today the majority of people have to rely on camotes instead of the rice grown in irrigated terraces they would prefer to eat. Old folks recall that this cereal was scarcer still in their own childhood, and believe their ancestors stored up supplies of sun-dried camote slices for food and carefully hoarded their rice for important feasts like

weddings which, indeed, may have saved the life of the community in the pre-harvest season of scanty rations, low vitality and loose bowels. That rice was not the staple crop in those days is also implied by certain ritual details—the agricultural year begins with the ceremonial planting of three taro roots, and in the common family welfare sacrifices a little pig-shaped bit of taro is left in the nearby camote patches. Against this background, Biag stands out as a kind of agricultural wonder-worker, if not the actual introducer of a new crop. One of his innovations was a harvest rite, and the popular legend associates him unambiguously not only with rice but with a surplus of rice, although the prayer texts only establish two less extravagant facts—that he had enough glutinous rice to satisfy his feasting townmates once a decade, and that he performed *Pes-ay* in a particular spot. (He is not, incidentally, ritually associated with terraces themselves; both the *Pes-ay* rite and those performed when building new fields were introduced, as the prayers themselves state, by a certain Bakodongan of Otucan.)

In view of Biag's own trip to Candon and the centuries-old trade connections of the Western Bontoc people with the Ilocos seacoast, it is tempting to interpret Biag's impact on Sagada as the introduction of some new lowland advantage. Probably that is why his name is associated with the blacksmith's-bellows, an implement no doubt of lowland provenance but one which has no other logical reason for being connected with the apostle of the miraculous increase of food. But fermented rice wine, the primary symbol of the Biag tradition, is a normal part of Ifugao feasts, and even the swidden-farming Kalingas to the north use glutinous rice cakes as holiday fare; while the *sowit*-stone, its preservation and its ritual use during weddings, have parallels in Guinaang to the east. Even the *Pes-ay* pre-harvest "sampling" has an Ifugao counterpart of which Barton writes, "This eating but a little sets a 'pattern' for the field workers, guests and family in eating the new crop throughout the year." (1946:113) The great terrace systems of the Cordillera Central may just as well have been what sparked Biag's genius as the material culture of seventeenth-century Candon, and Biag himself may therefore have been an inspired innovator of purely indigenous insight.

REFERENCE CITED

- Abeya, Rose. 1955. The most sacred pagan feast in Sagada. Unpublished MS in the possession of W. H. Scott.
- Barton, R. F. 1940. Unpublished collection of ritual texts. Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago.
- 1946. The religion of the Ifugaos. *American Anthropologist New Series* Vol. 4 No. 4 Part 2 (October). Menasha, Wisconsin.
- Bayang, Eugenio. 1955. Bayang's Demang Notes. *Sagada Social Studies* No. 3, Sagada, Mountain Province.
- Díaz, Casimiro. 1718. *Conquistas de las Islas Filipinas*. In Blair, Emma, H., and Robertson, James A., *The Philippine Islands* Vol. XXXVII, Cleveland, 1906.
- Eggan, Fred. 1950. Unpublished field notes. Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago.
- 1960. The *Pisang* Ceremony. Unpublished MS, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago.
- Hart, Donn V. 1950. Personal communication to Dr. Fred Eggan, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago.
- Jenks, A. E. 1905. *The Bontoc Igorot*. Manila.
- Scott, William Henry (ed.). 1956. *Sagada Secular Literature: Prose. *Sagada Social Studies* No. 9, Sagada, Mountain Province.
- Villaverde, Juan. 1912. *Supersticiones de los Igorrotes ifugaos*. *El Correo Sino-Anamita* Vol. XXXVIII: 295-455.