

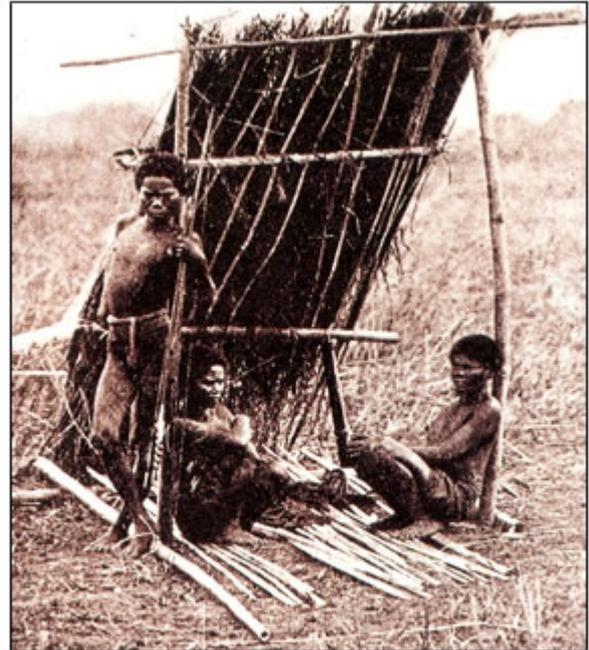
Early Shelters and Houses

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Tuklas Sining: Essays on the Philippine Arts

Very likely, man's earliest shelter was not built by him. He simply found it – or found himself in it. It was nature herself who fashioned hollows on cliffs and mountain sides that offered protection from heat, rain and wind. In Angono, Rizal evidence of ancient cave dwellers exists in carved figures on cave walls, the earliest known Philippine mural. The Tabon Cave in Palawan is considered to have sheltered the earliest men of the Philippines.

Meanwhile, the food gatherer, the fisherman, or the hunter, who moved from one place to another in his search for food and game, needed a shelter that was portable. Thus, he fashioned the lean-to from a frame made of tree branches and twigs, using leaves and fronds for sidings. A screen resting on the ground and held up at an angle by one or several poles, the lean-to is both roof and wall, protecting dwellers from rain the heat of the sun.



EARLY SHELTERS. The portable lean-to which was both roof and wall, suited the lifestyle of the nomadic Negrito.

The floor can be the ground itself, or a bed of leaves, or a platform slightly above the ground. The lean-to is light enough to be carried to another site. However, the dweller can simply abandon it and build another. A pair of lean-tos can be joined together to form a tent-like shelter, or a double-slope roof, which, in effect, is the beginning of a house.

Swidden-farming or *kaingin* led to a relatively settled life. After making a clearing in the forest, the swidden farmer could cultivate it for two years, let it lie fallow, the return to it a few years later. Although dwellings became larger and were better built, they were neither permanent nor durable because sometimes, the *kaingin* farmer had to move on.

With the development of wet-rice culture, farmers became rooted to the land. Though hints of the *kaingin* lifestyle persisted in the makeshift character of various dwellings, houses were built to last. The Mangyan of Mindoro, who are swidden-farmers, have two types of houses – the single-family dwelling and the communal house. Although the communal house is occupied by several families, its interior is not divided by partitions. The area for each family is defined by a mat on the floor.

When a Mangyan house is built on a slope, the entrance faces the rise. The steep roof is of cogon grass, the sidings, of tree bark, and the floor, of logs and saplings. The house appears to have no windows. However, it has a narrow strip of opening between roof and wall.

For added protection from floods, wild animals, and enemies, houses were built on trees, anywhere from two to twenty meters above the ground. Such houses have been found among the Ilongot, Tingguian and Gaddang in Northern Luzon, and among the Mandaya, Manobo, Tiruray and Bukidnon



MOUNTAIN HOUSE. The thick roof of the Ifugao fale and its windowless house cage protect the occupants from the cold, the sun and the rains. The shoulder-high posts, fitted with rat guards below the girders, prevent dampness and vermin from entering the house.

in Mindanao. One type of tree house nestles on the branches of a tree. Another type rests partly on a tall tree stump and partly on a cluster of tall stilts.

The people of the Cordilleras in Northern Luzon are swidden farmers. But some, particularly the Ifugao, Bontoc and Kalinga, are known for their rice terraces. With massive, towering walls and a skillfully devised irrigation system, the rice terraces are a wonder of primitive engineering. It is no surprise that the terrace builders were able to construct sturdy dwellings remarkable for both simplicity and ingenuity.

The one-room Ifugao house known as *fale* is a little marvel of construction. Outside, the Ifugao house seems to be nothing more than a pyramid resting on four posts. The interior space enclosed by slanting walls, sloping roof and ceiling formed by the loft appears nearly spherical. The dark, windowless chamber suggests a womb.

Four wooden posts rest on a pavement and support two wooden girders which, in turn, support three wooden transverse joists. On the posts are wooden discs that prevent rats from entering the house. The ladder is drawn up at night or is hung across the front when the occupants are away. The floor joists, floor sills, vertical studs and horizontal beams at about head level form a cage that rests on the posts and girders. Floor boards are fitted between the joists. Wooden sidings slant outward and rise to waist height to form the lower half of the wall. The upper half of the wall is formed by the inner side of the roof.

Boards flanking the front and rear doors rise to the beams. The rafters of the roof rest on the beams and extend downward close to floor level. The roof frame is sheathed with reed-like *runo*, then covered with thatch.



UPLAND HOMES. The Isneg house binuron, built slightly above the ground, is also a one-room dwelling like the fale but has more light and is bigger. It's bamboo layered, gabled roof ensembles an inverted boat, a design unique to the Isneg who are boatbuilders.

At an inner corner of the house is the fireplace. At the level of the beam is a storage loft with a floor of *runo* stalks. The wooden parts of this house are joined by rabbeting and by mortise and tenon. Other parts are fastened by lashing. Since nails are not used, the house can easily be dismantled, carried to a new site and reassembled.

The solitary room is also the sleeping room, kitchen, dining room, storeroom and shrine for rituals. Only husband and wife and youngest child or children in infancy live in this house. Upon reaching the age of reason, sons and daughters sleep in separate communal dormitories. Next to this house stands its twin. This one is actually a granary with the same design as the house.

In Mayoyao, the Ifugao house is distinguished by its classic simplicity. Its roof is high and steep. Low stone walls and a pavement form the setting of this house. With the smooth, fine-grained, hardwood posts, rat guards are not necessary.

The elevated living space in the *fale* becomes a granary in the Bontoc house, as the living quarters move down to ground level. A low wall encloses the ground floor. The four-post-two girder-three-joint structure of the Ifugao is also used in the Bontoc house.

The Sagada house resembles the Bontoc house but is fully covered. It is a wooden box with a steep thatch roof as a lid. With the granary within, the Sagada house is a "house within a house".

The Kankanai house is still another variation of the Ifugao prototype. The roof is higher and wider, thereby providing a spacious loft above the living space. On the ground level, wooden planks are laid to create more livable space.

The Ibaloi house has a larger room, a flaring roof, and a small porch.

Some of the Kalinga live in octagonal houses. The central portion of the octagonal house rests on a four-post-two-girder-and-three-joist structure. Beyond this frame, eight posts are added to form the eight sides of the house. Wooden laths resting on joists support the runo floor which can be rolled up like a mat and taken to the river for washing.



TAUSOG HOUSE. To the seafaring Tausog of Sulu, a house built on flat dry land or a site that slopes towards Mecca is lucky. The one-room, gabled roof house known as **bay sinug** has a separate kitchen accessible through a side porch.

Boat forms appear to have inspired the Isneg house. The bamboo roof suggests an inverted boat, and wooden floor joists have the profile of a boat. The Isneg house has two sets of posts, the inner set supporting the floor, and the outer set supporting the roof. As in the Kalinga house, the floor can be rolled up.

The walls are vertical boards set into grooves that are cut into beams at floor and roof eaves level. A window is created by simply taking out a few boards. All the wall boards can be removed to make the house a roofed platform for village celebrations. The Isneg house is the largest among the Cordillera houses, since the entire family, and even married offsprings could live in it.

It is not known when and how Cordillera houses developed into their present form. What is clear, however, is that these house forms developed in isolation and were untouched by Western influence, for the Spanish colonizers did not succeed in bringing the region and its people under their rule.

On hilltops and rolling land, the T'boli of Southern Cotabato in Mindanao build large (me-room houses on stilts. The roof is of dried grass, the walls of woven bamboo, and the posts of whole bamboo and, occasionally, tree stumps. The central portion of the floor is slightly lower than the areas around it. The side sections are for working or resting. At one end is the entrance and the fireplace, and at the other is the place of honor for the head of the house. The interior of the T'boli house is one example of a characteristic feature of Philippine houses - space surrounded by space.

Islam was established in Sulu in the 14th century and in Mindanao in the 15th century. The combination of a strong, organized religion and a high degree of political organization enabled the Muslim people of Mindanao to resist Spain's attempts to bring them under her dominion.

The Tausog of Sulu, one of the Muslim peoples of the Philippines, are known as seafarers; but they build their houses on land, away from the shore. A site is considered lucky if it is flat and dry or if it gently slopes westward, that is, towards Mecca. The traditional Tausog house rests on nine posts, each signifying a part of the body the neck, shoulders, navel, ribs, groin, and hips. Basically a oneroom house, the Tausog dwelling includes a porch and a separate kitchen. A distinguishing feature of the house is an elaborately carved wooden finial called **tajuk pasung** placed at one or both ends of the roof ridge.



TOROGAN. This ancestral house home of the Maranao sultan or datu has a soaring, **salakot**-shaped roof, ornate beams and massive posts - all proclaiming exalted status

The Samal and the Badjao are people of the sea. The sea is their source of livelihood, the link to other people, and the place for celebration - and also home. The Samal build their houses on stilts over the water, along the shore, or farther out. The Samal

houses are grouped together in villages and are connected by bridges and catwalks.

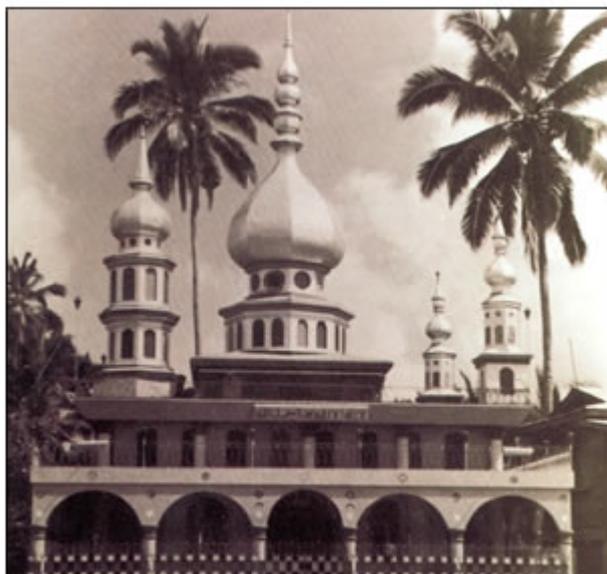
Unlike the Samal house, the Badjao landhouse stands alone on an expanse of water and is reached only by boat. It is not joined by bridges or catwalks to the shore or to other houses. It is a man-made island.

Among the Muslim Filipinos, there arose two institutions which did not develop among the other ethnic peoples, namely, a specific place for worship and the lordly residence of the ruler.

The earliest mosque in the Philippines is said to have been built in 1380 in Simunul Island, Tawi-Tawi. Mosques in the Philippines follow the traditional design which includes an onion-shaped dome and minarets. However, some mosques are closer to indigenous architecture with a multi-tiered pyramidal roof resembling a pagoda.

The Muslim chief resides in the **torogan**, a huge stately, towering house, with a single large room. Although "torogan" simply means a place for sleeping, the house is more than a residence. It is also used for official meetings, social gatherings, and religious rituals.

Only the chief - the Sultan or Datu - is entitled to own and live in a torogan. The soaring, flaring roof is, like a ceremonial umbrella, a proclamation of exalted status. The massive posts serve as solid support and signify established power. To protect the house from earthquakes, the over-sized posts rest on stones. With this device, the house sways with the tremor, playfully surviving it. Posts may be plain and bulky or may be carved to look like clay pots or outsized chess pieces. The most arresting feature of the torogan is the set of protruding beam ends called panolong. Flaring out from the facade, intricately carved and stunningly colored, the panolong resembles the prow of a boat and makes the splendid torogan appear to float like a royal barge.



MASJID. With the advent of Islam in the South in the 14th century, Philippine architecture absorbed Middle Eastern influences, the most common and distinctive being the onion-shaped dome and minaret of the masjid.

For all the variety of design and construction, Cordillera, Mindanao and Sulu houses are basically one-room dwellings covered by steep roofs and raised on stilts. They are all related to the **bahay kubo**, which in its simplicity is regarded as a prototype.

Largely of bamboo and thatch, and with parts woven, fitted, or tied together, the bahay kubo might be described as less of a building and more of a basket. While posts, beams and joists are assembled, the roof is put together separately and later fitted on top like the lid of a basket. The bamboo floor, with its slats set slightly apart is like the bottom of a basket and makes for incomparable ventilation. With air coming in through windows and floor and the crevices in thatch and bamboo walls, the bahay kubo is a house that breathes.

Houses take an entirely different form in the Batanes, the northernmost islands of the archipelago. With the frequency of high winds and strong rain, the Batanes house is built to hug the ground. Thick stone walls and a meter thick grass roof withstand the severest storm. The roof is supported by posts encased in the stone walls. Stone and mortar construction was introduced in the Batanes islands during the Spanish regime.