

# A NOTE ON THE PA'GANG, A TAGBANUWA BAMBOO MUSICAL INSTRUMENT \*

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## Introduction

THE TAGBANUWA, ONE OF THE ETHNIC GROUPS IN THE Philippines which has preserved their system of writing in spite of the inroads of modernization, live in an area in Palawan known in the maps as Aborlan,<sup>1</sup> approximately sixty kilometers south of Puerto Princesa, the provincial capital. Aborlan, before it was opened for settlement by other ethnic peoples of the Philippines, was a reservation set apart by the government at the beginning of the American occupation for the Tagbanuwa. With the opening of this region for settlement by alien groups, the Tagbanuwa was given more freedom of movement. Anterior to its organization as a regular municipality after the war—1946—Aborlan was governed by the Provincial Governor in Puerto Princesa through the administrator of the Palawan National Regional Agricultural High School in the town.<sup>2</sup>

The population<sup>3</sup> of Aborlan is now a composite of settlers from the various ethnic groups of the Philippines, due to the opening of the reservation and more particularly due to the National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Administration (NARRA, now the Land Authority) resettlement project of the Philippine government which was opened a few years after

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\* The materials used in this brief essay are part of a mass of data collected during a field work conducted among the Tagbanuwa of Palawan in 1963 and 1966 in connection with the research project on the ancient systems of writing in the Philippines. This project is financed by the Social Science Research Council of the University. I wish, therefore, to express my gratitude to the Council for the financial help it has given me to conduct this research. The manuscript is now completed and is being prepared for publication.

<sup>1</sup> To the Tagbanuwa, the name is *Abúlman*, which literally means "where the cloth (*abúl*) was traded." According to the traditions of the Tagbanuwa, Aborlan was originally located at the mouth of the Aborlan River just a few hundred meters south of the present site of the town.

<sup>2</sup> *Vide* my paper "The New Function of Ancient Philippine Scripts," *Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 4 (October-December 1963), pp. 416-423. The Palawan National Regional Agricultural High School has been chartered to operate as a National Agricultural College since 1964.

<sup>3</sup> According to the 1960 Census (Bureau of Census and Statistics, R.P., Census of the Philippines 1960; Population and Housing-Palawan), the population of Aborlan on February 15, 1960 was 17,530. In the 1948 (October 1) Census, there were only 6,351 people in Aborlan, which showed an increase of 11,189 within approximately 12 years or 176.0%. It may be surmised that with the acceleration of migration and settlement in the area the population would considerably have increased.

the second world war. This was accelerated with the "Land for the Landless" programme of the same government.<sup>4</sup>

The Tagbanuwa's general cultural characteristics may broadly be described as belonging to the type which has survived the incursions of the more aggressive cultural complexes, like the Spanish and perhaps the American. In broad outline, the Tagbanuwa cultural features may be described as coastal in orientation;<sup>5</sup> the traits and characteristics of its syllabary would belong to the same palaeographic tradition to which all the other Philippine scripts would belong;<sup>6</sup> in religion the cult of the dead which is organized in terms of the basic social unit, the elementary family is the central nave;<sup>7</sup> in legal system, the jural responsibilities of its individual members is strictly emphasized with imposition of fines;<sup>8</sup> in social organization, it is bilateral<sup>9</sup> (a child is related equally to both maternal and paternal kin); and its society stratified into two social classes: the "low bloods" or *timawa* and the "high bloods" or *ginuu*.<sup>10</sup> However, details of the description of this culture may be found in the works of Robert B. Fox<sup>11</sup> and Manuel Hugo Venturrello<sup>12</sup> to name only two of those who have worked with the Tagbanuwa.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Newspaper reports within the last ten or twelve months regarding the departure of migrants from Luzon on the invitation of Representative Ramon Mitra Jr. of the lone district of Palawan, particularly from the Batangas Province as a result of the eruption of the Taal Volcano, have added undoubtedly to the increase of population in the area.

<sup>5</sup> *Vide* and *cf.* Robert B. Fox, "Ancient Filipino Communities," *Filipino Cultural Heritage*, Lecture Series No. 1 (Phil. Women's Univ., 1966) pp. 1-14. [Fox-1]

<sup>6</sup> Juan R. Francisco, *Philippine Palaeography*, Social Science Research Council, Univ. of the Philippines, 1966. Ms.

<sup>7</sup> Robert B. Fox, *Religion and Society among the Tagbanuwa of Palawan Island, Philippines*. Univ. of Chicago Ph.D. Dissert., 1954. p. 369. [Fox-2] Ampur Bungkas, one of my Tagbanuwa informants, gave me a relatively complete list of the gods to whom they offer their oblations and sacrifices. Chief among these gods is *Mangindusa*, followed by an array of lesser *diwatas* whose functions in the whole complex of Tagbanuwa religion are specific. These *diwatas* are called upon by the *maglambay*, one of the higher religious functionaries, in a *lambay* ritual, which is performed for rains or sun needed in their dry rice agriculture as well as to petition the gods for the forgiveness of their acts of incest they have committed. (p. 338)

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* *Vide* pp. 79ff.

<sup>9</sup> *Vide* and *cf.* F. Landa Jocano, "Filipino Social Structure and Value System," *Filipino Cultural Heritage*, Lecture Series No. 2 (Phil. Women's Univ., 1966), pp. 1-26. *Vide* Fox-2, p. 366.

<sup>10</sup> Fox-2, p. 367.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Manuel Hugo Venturrello, *Manners and Customs of the Tagbanuwa and other Tribes of the Island of Palawan, Philippines*. Smithsonian Misc. Coll., vol. XLVII, pt. 4 (1907), pp. 514-558.

<sup>13</sup> Other details of this culture are also found in H. Otley Beyer, "Origin Myths Among the Mountain Peoples of the Philippine." *Philippine Journal of Science*, Vol. VIII, No. 2 (April 1913), 86-117; Fletcher Gardener, *Philippine Indic Studies* (San Antonio, Texas: The Witte Memorial Museum, 1943), 105 pp.; Harold C. Conklin,

### The Pa'gang

The purpose of this essay is to give a physical description of the Tagbanuwa bamboo musical instrument known to them as *Pa'gang*. Any musical references shall not be made in this essay for the author is *not* qualified to embark upon such a task. The instrument is to be described only in terms of its associations with folklore and other points relevant to it, which were observed during this author's field studies.

The instrument is made of one whole node of bamboo which is partly slit to keep the node from splitting apart. The slit serves as a resonator when the "strings"—which are lifted out of the bamboo "skin" and kept up by wedges—are plucked. The "strings" are distanced equally around the node; hence when one looks at the instrument directly squarely at the slit, only two of the "strings" can be seen.

The *pa'gang* in the possession of the present author is inscribed. There are three lines of the inscription—line I<sup>14</sup> between the left top and left bottom strings (when the instrument is held with the slit facing the viewer); lines II and III are on both sides of the slit. The "strings" have been designated with numbers—number 1, that which is directly to the left of line I when the viewer looks at it squarely; number 2, to the left of line II; number 3 to the right of the slit (and line III); and number 4, would naturally be between strings number 3 and 1. The sequence of the string numbers follows that of the sequence of the lines when being written one after the other—from bottom to top (from proximal point—the body of the writer—to distal point), the next line would follow on the right of the first line, when the (bamboo is) rotated counterclockwise.

The inscriptions on the instrument are: I—the identifying "marks" which tell the reader who is the owner of the instrument—*tagpuñ si sa(r)-badu(r) mi(n)ta(t)*, translated literally, The owner (of this instrument) is Salbadur Mintat; II—the name of the instrument itself—*pama'gang*,<sup>15</sup> *ngara(n)ya kaitu pa'gang*, meaning "the sound of the *pa'gang*; the name of

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"Preliminary Report on Field Work on the Islands of Mindoro and Palawan, Philippines," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. LI, No. 2 (April-June 1949). *Vide* also Charles P. Warren, "Dream Interpretations of the Tagbanuwa," *Anthropology Tomorrow*, Vol. IV (1950), pp. 50-61.

Apart from the notes I accumulated during the field work I conducted with the Tagbanuwa while studying their system of writing, I have also written my diary, which is now in preparation for publication in the *U.P. Anthropology Bulletin*, Second Semester, 1966-67, entitled "Palawan Journal" fully annotated and commented upon.

<sup>14</sup> I marked the lines—I, II, III—on the instrument for convenience in reading and to indicate the proximal end of the line, at the same time the distal end, in relation to the direction of writing while the inscription is being done.

<sup>15</sup> According to my informant, Mintat, *Pama'gang* means "the sound of the *pa'gang*." From the meaning of the word itself, it seems that the infix -am- (or -am-?) generates the idea that the instrument has a peculiar sound. This instrument is mentioned in Fox-2, but no description is made of it.

this (instrument) is *pa'gang*;" and III—process of disintegration of a living organism like the human body, thus: *kuku ma(g)kaka(n)rasa(y) sua(ng) ma(g)kakata(ng)gay*, meaning "the fingernails and the jaws are falling off."

The third line, to the reader—particularly a non-Tagbanuwa, may not be understood in what context this short line has been "recited" without the necessary explanation. It is in fact a part of a folktale that was told to this author by the owner of the instrument. The folktale in text and translation is included to give the reader a better understanding of the citation.

#### TEXT<sup>16</sup>

(1) May duwa nga daraga mag-iba-iba. (2) dūlūm dūlūm magpangiga si lusiya duon it antuniya. (3) ka magpulau sira it ikamūn. (4) yang na'layna unu nga dūlūm daga nakapangiga. (5) yapaka ikapitu nga dūlūm miyabut magtataban it pagbuwatun ya nga ikamūn. (6) tumud daga miyapiyat miyadung lamang duun it agdan. (7) mag'at it tagbalay mapiyat ka linggan. (8) tumubag ipakawa mu daan it pa'gang. (9) pagpakawaya it pa'gang mag'at it pama'gang kuku magkakanrasay suang magkakatanggay. (10) paglūtūgya i iba-ibaya nga si lusiya minilamna ka magkaulugna i suangya pagpansūg ya. (11) miyusigna si lusiya ki antuniya. (12) mag'atya mulat ka milagyuka palan. (13) nagpaaduun na si antuniya it katungkulan mag'atya tabangun aku pagusigun aku it damdam. (14) paglampud it katungkulan tabanya it kumut nga kulit it kayu ngarangya salugun. (15) piyakumutanya it mag'usig nga si lusiya. (16) nagbaliyuna nga pasla it nimatay na nira. (17) tapus.

#### TRANSLATION<sup>17</sup>

(1) Two girls (who are) friends. (2) Every night Lusiya sleeps in the house of Antuniya. (3) They weave mat (almost) the whole night. (4) For some-time, (however), within six nights, Lusiya did not sleep in Antuniya's house. (5) On the seventh night, someone arrived (at Antuniya's house) carrying materials for weaving mats. (6) But she<sup>18</sup> did not go up, she just sat at (the foot of) the stairs. (7) Antuniya (lit. said the one who owns the house, that is Antuniya) said, "come up, friend." (8) Lusiya<sup>18</sup> answered, "kindly give me the pa'gang." (9) Upon getting the pa'gang it<sup>19</sup> said, "the fingernails and the jaws

<sup>16</sup> Transliteration from original script is based on the phonemicization I devised for my monograph on Philippine scripts: /a/, /i/, /u/, /u/, /û/, /l/, /m/, /d/, /g/, /t/, /n/, /k/, /b/, /s/, /p/, /y/, /ng/, /w/. The consonantal symbols are the International Phonetic Association sound equivalents. The vowels /a/, /i/ and /u/ also follow the IPA, while the /u/ and /û/ are transliterations of the front vowel o and the pepet vowel, respectively. The /u/ transliteration is retained with the distinguishing marks to indicate for the reader that in the original script the /u/ /u/ and /û/ are not distinguished, instead they are written with only one symbol.

<sup>17</sup> This translation is based partly on my Tagalog translation while in the field in 1963, and partly on my re-translation (now in English) when I re-visited the Tagbanuwa in 1966. It is partly literal.

<sup>18</sup> It appears that this would refer to Lusiya, her ghost?, because there is no one who would go to Antuniya to inform her that Lusiya had died.

<sup>19</sup> While this would refer to the *Pa'gang*, it appears that it would be the ghost of Lusiya that intoned the message with the aid of the instrument.

are falling off." (10) Upon seeing her friend Lusiya,<sup>20</sup> she (Antuniya) was frightened (because) she saw the jaw of Lusiya fall off; Antuniya ran. (11) Lusiya ran after Antuniya. (12) Lusiya said "wait, you are running," (13) Antuniya ran to the priest's house (duun. . . it katungkulan). She said, "Help me, the ghost is after me!" (14) The priest<sup>21</sup> came down the house holding a blanket made of tree bark called *salugun*.<sup>22</sup> (15) He covered the (ghost of) Lusiya (16) It (the ghost of Lusiya) turned into a forest cat. (17) Finis.

There are three points that need be clarified in spite of the rather extensive footnotes. First, the text refers to the *pa'gang* as having intoned or sang the verse inscribed on the bamboo (line III, and line 9 in text). This, however, could have been done by the ghost of the dead, with the sound of the instrument as symbolic of the message and not actually the verse itself. In the other words, in symbolic language, the sound of the *pa'gang* meant the verse: *kuku*, etc. Secondly, it appears that while the friend (Lusiya) had physically died, her spirit(?) or *karadua* in the Tagbanuwa language has been waiting to announce her death in as much as there was no way to tell the living friend (Antuniya) that she had died. The spirit (?) had not gone to the depths of the earth(?). Inferentially, when the latter (Antuniya) learned from the playing of the *pa'gang* of her friend's death, the spirit(?) went to its destination.

Note however the metamorphosis of the ghost to a mountain cat. The informant could not give any explanation of this fantastic transformation; rather he manifested the belief among the Tagbanuwa that the spirit does not leave for the depths of the earth until all the living friends have been informed of its departure from this material world.

Thirdly, line 10 seems to contradict the actual condition of time, since it was evening or early night (*vide* fn. 20). However, it may be explained that there might have been an inherent feeling of Antuniya about the death of her friend; but she was not sure. This would further explain the immediate recognition by Antuniya that the apparition was that of her friend Lusiya.

So far, my enquiries among my informants concerning the use of the *pa'gang* to announce death has not revealed this folktale reference in actual situation. Rather, the instrument has been used in inviting friends to occasions of light nature or in community work or endeavour, like weaving mats, building a house, resting from planting or harvesting rice in the *kaingin* (swidden). In other words, whether at work or at play, the *pa'gang* functions as a source of enlivening the occasion.

<sup>20</sup> This must be the ghost of Lusiya, but was not recognized by Antuniya because of the darkness of the evening.

<sup>21</sup> In Tagbanuwa, the *katungkulan* and the *maglambay*, two of the higher religious functionaries, are men. The *babaylan* is in most villages a woman.

<sup>22</sup> The line would literally mean "Upon coming down the priest holding a blanket that is the bark of a tree called *salugun* (*Antiaris taxicaria* lesch)."

### Postscript

As this essay is primarily descriptive and no comparative data have been brought in to bear upon, for instance, the distribution of such an instrument in the Philippines as well as its definite function in the entire musicological complex, no conclusions are therefore drawn. One of the most interesting observations made of the instrument is that in all the rituals—*bilang*,<sup>23</sup> *runsay*<sup>24</sup> and the *diwata ritual*<sup>25</sup>—that the Tagbanuwa performs where music plays a very important role, the use of the *pa'gang* is conspicuous by its absence. Apparently, the instrument has no associations with religious activities. Therefore, it would not find its use in the rituals, which utilize for their efficacy music to worship the *diwatas*. It is an instrument of very secular function rather than religious.

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<sup>23</sup> The *bilang* ritual is one during which the spirits of the dead are called and propitiated for the well-being of the members of the family—the nuclear unit in the Tagbanuwa society (Fox-2, p. 210). Gongs only are used in this ritual (*ibid.*, p. 281). During this ritual rice wine is served ritually, thereby attracting spirits of the dead for there is no rice wine in the other world.

<sup>24</sup> The *runsay* ritual is held at night once a year—the fourth after the full moon of December—on the beach near the mouth of the Aborlan River. The purpose of this ritual is . . . to protect all Tagbanuwa from the spirits of epidemic sickness. (Fox-2, pp. 357-359.)

<sup>25</sup> The *pagdiwata* rituals, three in a series, “are ceremonies for Mangindusa, the highest ranking deity, and for the many lesser classes of deities. These rituals are a *pasalamat*, a ‘thanks’ for the rice harvest and for the continued well-being of the people attending the ceremony, as well as an appeal to the deities for further cooperation and aid.” (Fox-2, 305.) *Vide* footnote 7 above regarding reference to the gods.

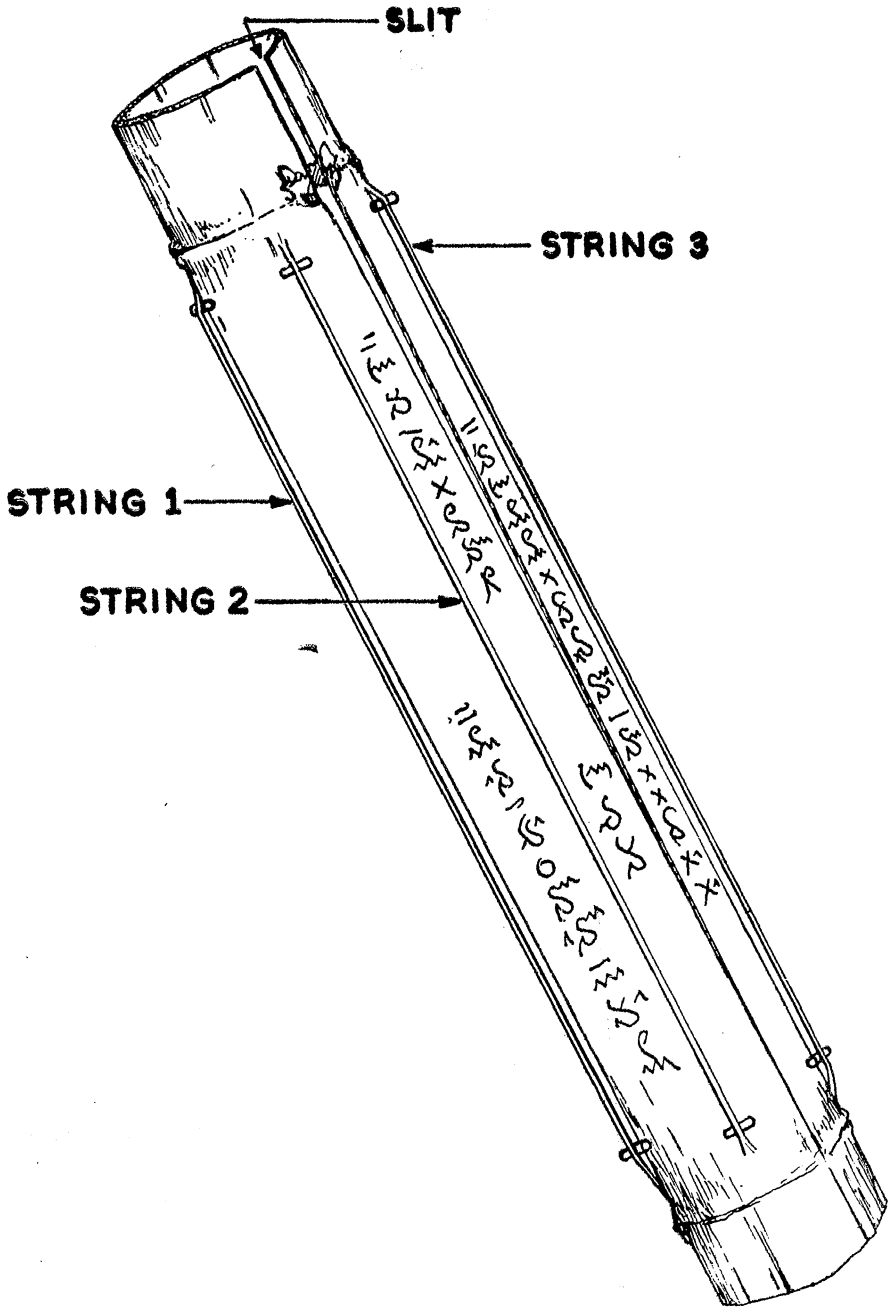
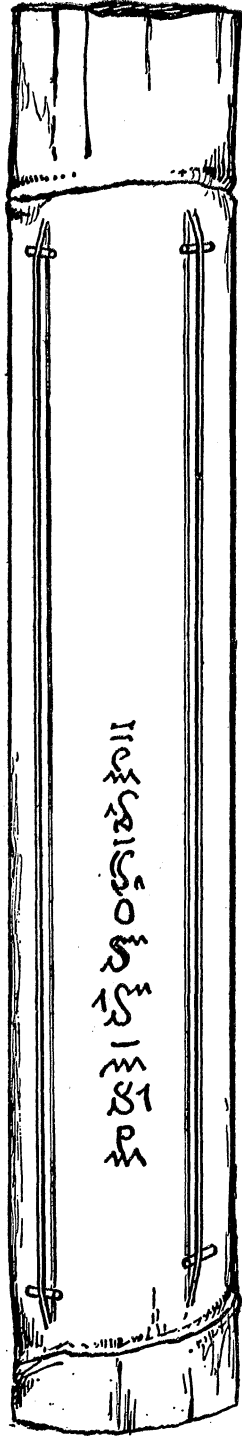
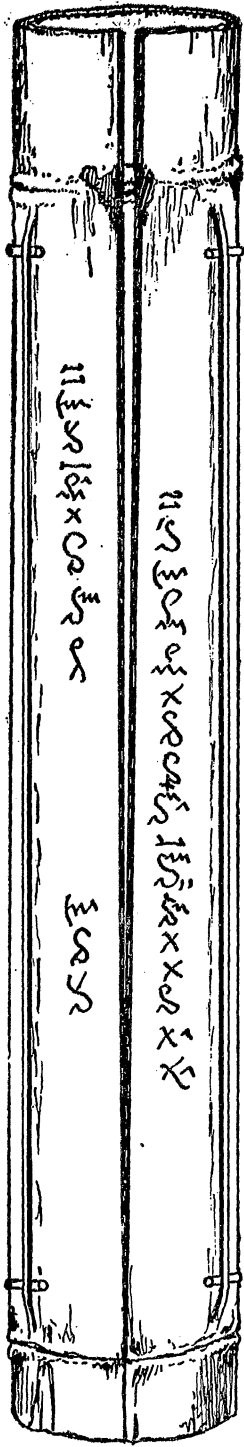


PLATE I



**INSCRIPTION I**





**INSCRIPTIONS II & III**