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Bauko and Its People

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Notes and Comments

Bauko and Its People

N O R M A N. L U A

Twenty-seven kilometers southwest of Bontoc and 120 kilometers northwest of Baguio City, Bauko lies in the center of the area inhabited by the cultural group known as Kankanay or Lepanto-Igorot.¹ In Spanish times, the town belonged to the province of Lepanto-Bontoc, which explains the nomenclature Lepanto-Igorot as distinguished from Bontoc-Igorot.² During the American regime, it became part of the subprovince of Lepanto in the then newly-created Mountain Province, which was subdivided along ethnic lines into seven subprovinces: Amburayan, Apayao, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga, and Lepanto.³ When this Mountain Province, with its seven divisions, was dissolved in 1966 with the elevations of Benguet, Ifugao, and Kalinga-Apayao to the status of provinces, Bauko became a municipality of the new Mountain Province, whose capital is Bontoc.⁴

The people of Bauko belong to that group of mountain peoples generally known as *Igorot*. A word which comes from a combination of the Tagalog rootword *golot* (mountain chain) and the prefix *i* (dweller in or people of), *Igorot* has come to designate practically all those who dwell on the Cordillera.⁵ Actually, these peoples may be subdivided into six groups: Ibaloy or Benguet Igorot, Kankanay or Lepanto-Igorot, Ifugao, Bontoc-Igorot, Kalinga, and Isneg or Apayao.⁶

1. Felix Keesing, *The Ethnohistory of Northern Luzon* (California: Stanford University Press, 1962), p. 93.

2. Morice Vanoverbergh, C.I.C.M., "Kankanay Religion" *Anthropos* 67 (1972):73.

3. William Henry Scott, *History on the Cordillera* (Baguio City: Baguio Printing, 1975), p. 1.

4. *Ibid.*

5. T.H. Pardo de Tavera, cited by Morice Vanoverbergh, C.I.C.M., "Dress and Ornaments in the Mountain Province of Luzon, Philippine Islands," *Catholic Anthropological Conference* 5 (November 1929):121.

6. *Ibid.*

To be more specific then, the people of Bauko belong to the Kankanay or Lepanto-Igorot group who are found in northern Benguet, almost all of Amburayan, and southern Lepanto of the old territorial subdivisions (see Maps), and who speak the same tongue, possess similar customs, and refer to themselves by the same name—Kankanay.⁷ However, they share with the Bontocs, Ifugaos, and Ibaloy, who surround them on the north, west, and south, respectively, many of their institutions and customs.⁸ It is in the Kayan-Bauko district of the then Lepanto subprovince where the typical patterns of the Lepanto-Igorot culture are most evident.⁹

PHYSICAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Located on the Gran Cordillera, the region inhabited by the Kankanay is a hardy territory where survival has always been largely dependent on the natural environment. The rugged mountainous terrain leaves its mark on the typical Kankanay village. The living site is usually on a knoll, which puts the houses on the slope so that they

... stand upon a series of levelled earth and stone platforms. Between these are dividing walls, usually of stone but sometimes of bamboo—and the stone walls serve as the village pathways.¹⁰

The terrain also places constraints on the population's main source of livelihood—farming. Aside from the fact that land suitable for farming and water to irrigate it are difficult to locate,¹¹ the sloping farm sites make for difficult irrigation.¹²

In earlier times, this dependence on nature was made even greater by the traditional methods of carving out an existence from this rugged environment. The slash-and-burn type of agriculture that was practised had a built-in quality of impermanence.¹³ Hunting, which was done mostly with dogs, nets, and traps, was mainly a contest of will and cunning with the animal world, if not entirely a game of luck.

7. C.R. Moss, "Kankanay Ceremonies," *University of California Publications in American Archeology and Ethnology* 4 (October 1920):344.

8. Lawrence Lee Wilson, "Some Notes on the Mountain Peoples of Northern Luzon," *University of Manila Journal of East Asiatic Studies* (UMJEAS) 3 (April 1954):313.

9. Felix Keesing, "A Brief Classification of Lepanto Society, Northern Luzon (1934)," *Sagada Special Studies* no. 13 (1968):6. (Mimeographed.)

10. *Ibid.*, 8.

11. Felix Keesing and Marie Keesing, *Taming Philippine Headhunters* (California: Stanford University Press, 1934), p. 160.

12. Keesing, "Lepanto Society," p. 8.

13. Scott, *History*, p. 31.

A major portion of the diet of early Kankanay—birds, frogs, locusts, snails, deer, and wild boar—came entirely from the bounty of capricious nature.¹⁴ Even trade was dependent on the gifts of the natural environment. Gold, honey, wax, animal hide, and rattan were traded with the inhabitants of Ilocos and La Union.¹⁵

This dependence on the natural environment and the traditional culture's limited technology makes physical labor a daily reality. Farming is a chore performed by man and hoe or, less frequently, beast of burden.¹⁶ In fact, the toll exacted by the heavy burden of work and the frequent exposure to the elements make disease a major preoccupation of the people and, in earlier times, threatened not only the individual Kankanay but also the survival of the group as evidenced by the exceedingly low birth rate.¹⁷ This extreme need for physical labor is such that, in the past, there were cases where infants who were obvious liabilities (congenitally deformed, issues of frequent pregnancies) were left to die.¹⁸

The social climate does little to alleviate the sense of insecurity evoked by the physical and economic realities.

A major problem for the traditional Kankanay is the presence of enemies. Settlements which are near each other are known to cherish feuds handed down from long ago.¹⁹ Although community warfare and the subsequent hunting expeditions were no longer evident by the turn of the present century,²⁰ the inhabitants of Lepanto and Bontoc began to feel the threatening presence of unfamiliar enemies as early as 1667 when the Spaniards made their first excursions into Kankanay territory.²¹ These new enemies wrought destruction upon the villages, forced the inhabitants to submit to their authority, and drove them to remoter mountain ranges where life was even more wretched.²²

However, even without these external enemies, the social reality of the traditional Kankanay leaves much to be desired. Poverty is a fact of life, with a major segment of the population subject to a ruling

14. George Sy-Chuan Guy, "The Economic Life of the Mountain Tribes of Northern Luzon," *UMJEAS* 1 (January 1958):44.

15. Keesing and Keesing, *Taming*, p. 207.

16. Lazaro Dilem, "Cultural Practices of the Bauko People in Relation to Agricultural Production," (M.A. thesis, Central Luzon Teacher's College, 1978), p. 3.

17. Keesing and Keesing, *Taming*, p. 144.

18. William Henry Scott, *The Discovery of the Igorots* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1973), p. 308.

19. Keesing and Keesing, *Taming*, p. 72.

20. Scott, *Discovery*, p. 308.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

22. Scott, *History*, p. 134.

class constituted by a few families.²³ This ruling class (the *kadangian*, meaning wealthy) own all arable land and thereby control the local economy.²⁴ Indebtedness is common among the Kankanay and is difficult to get out of because of usurious rates of interest.²⁵ In addition, social mobility is almost nonexistent since the *kadangian* class manage to consolidate their wealth and position by intermarriage.²⁶ This lack of social mobility is accompanied by definite class distinctions most visible in clothing, with the rich wearing distinctive g-strings, *tapis*, and ornaments.²⁷

Against this socioeconomic backdrop, the numerous religious feasts are an added material burden. Tradition compels each household within the area of the *cañao* (religious feast) to contribute goods like rice, in exchange for a tiny piece of sacrificial meat, to the owner of the animals to be butchered.²⁸ People feel obliged to contribute despite their poverty, not only because they believe in the blessings attendant on participation but also because they do not want to offend the offerer who usually is the owner of the land they are tilling.²⁹

With these conditions of the traditional Kankanay's physical and socioeconomic environment, it is not surprising that the traditional Kankanay society revolves around a communal kind of existence where the *other* (family, community, tradition, and religion) figures as an indispensable ally in the search for a better life.

THE OTHER IN KANKANAY LIFE

In the traditional Kankanay culture, having a family is a much-desired goal. So important is family that spinsterhood is considered a blight deserving scorn and ridicule.³⁰ Except for the *kadangian* class, courtship in Lepanto is characterized by relative freedom.³¹ However, physical integrity and industry are primary considerations, as made explicit in the dialogue songs.³² Once married, couples are obliged to remain monogamous, although they are allowed to separate and

23. Keesing and Keesing, *Taming*, p. 58.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

25. Guy, "The Economic Life," p. 22.

26. Keesing and Keesing, *Taming*, p. 57.

27. Vanoverbergh, "Dress," pp. 193-8.

28. *Idem*, "Kankanay Religion," p. 96.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

30. This surfaces as a common theme in the non-narrative songs. See Morice Vanoverbergh's "Kankanay Folksongs," *Asian Folklore Studies* 2 (1978).

31. Moss, "Kankanay Ceremonies," p. 346.

32. Vanoverbergh, "Kankanay Folksongs."

remarry.³³ The standards of conduct demanded of married women are very rigorous, and custom law provides intricate settlements and stipulates compensation for all kinds of marital troubles.³⁴

In the traditional society, marriage serves two purposes. One is partnership in hard physical labor. The amount of physical labor needed to eke out a living from a capricious environment is such that the Kankanay male cannot possibly do all the work. What is obviously required is a sharing of burdensome labor, and culture has found a way of justifying this sharing through taboos which impose a rigid division of labor between the sexes.³⁵ This division is so strict that no man can do the work assigned to women without risking criticism. Thus, according to custom, men build terraces and till the fields, while women transplant seedlings, weed the fields, and cultivate secondary crops like sweet potatoes.³⁶

A more obvious reason for marriage is, of course, procreation. Children are valued highly in the traditional society, and one indication of this high valuation is the custom which holds the inability to have children as the primary ground for divorce.³⁷ The importance attached to children is also intimated in the custom whereby the individual property of the couple becomes vested in the child upon its birth, with the parents holding everything in trust.³⁸ In the traditional Kankanay's bare-subsistence economy, children are economic assets. The smaller children perform such tasks as weeding the fields and driving birds away,³⁹ while the older ones earn wages by the working the fields.⁴⁰ And in extreme circumstances, children may be held for debts incurred by parents.⁴¹

However, the importance of children among the traditional Kankanay clearly goes beyond economic considerations. Against the contingent forces which threaten to snuff life out at any moment, children are the best insurance for the perpetuation of self, clan, and tribe. And in the light of the active role of the dead in the traditional society, having children means that one will go on living, if not in the flesh, then in the minds and lives of future generations. This explains why

33. Scott, *Discovery*, p. 188.

34. Keesing and Keesing, *Taming*, p. 51.

35. Guy, "Kankanay Ceremonies," p. 64.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

37. Keesing and Keesing, *Taming*, p. 145.

38. Guy, "Kankanay Ceremonies," p. 33.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

40. Lawrence Lee Wilson, "Occupational Acculturation in the Mountain Province," *UMJEAS* 1 (October 1943):90.

41. Guy, "Kankanay Ceremonies," p. 66.

succession is considered a duty not only to one's self but to one's ancestors as well.⁴²

A pronounced feature of the traditional Kankanay society is the presence of the community in almost every human activity. It is evident that in the traditional culture, community support is a panacea for a difficult and tedious life.

Nowhere is group support more conspicuous than in farming. Among the traditional Kankanay, farming is always a communal affair. Individuals seldom work in isolation but in groups, as in the transplanting of rice seedlings and in harvesting, and as a result, work which otherwise would be taxing and monotonous becomes an occasion for pleasant social exchange.⁴³

Another sphere for communal activity is religion. Participation in religious feasts is not limited to mere presence. Each household within the vicinity of the sacrifice is compelled to contribute according to its economic status. Furthermore, taboos related to ritual make all villagers jointly responsible for the success of the undertaking. For example, no villager should go to the fields while the ceremonies are in progress (usually for two days), and every villager should make sure that no one enters the village.⁴⁴ Just as everyone is supposed to contribute to the success of the undertaking, everyone also partakes of the blessings received. The eventual outcome, of course, will be seen in abundant harvest, nonoccurrence of natural disasters, etc. but the immediate blessing is in the form of meat, a rare commodity, which is distributed to every participant after it is ritually offered and cooked.⁴⁵

At the foundation of the traditional Kankanay life is tradition. Wisdom or knowledge handed down from generation to generation supports the Kankanay at every turn. Tradition permeates the economic life of the people. As mentioned earlier, taboos ensure the necessary division of labor between the sexes. Farming techniques, too, have been defined by experience, which significantly reduces unnecessary wastage brought about by trial and error.⁴⁶

The sociopolitical field is another area presided over by tradition. A typical Kankanay village is divided into geographical and political units known as the *at-ato*, to which are attached institutional struc-

42. Keesing and Keesing, *Taming*, p. 144.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

44. Vanoverbergh, "Kankanay Religion," p. 92.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

46. Keesing and Keesing, *Taming*, 191.

tures as well as social and ritual functions.⁴⁷ Averaging twenty-five households,⁴⁸ the at-ato is governed by custom law, which covers every aspect of personal and social life and provides definite penalties for violations.⁴⁹ Defined as major crimes by custom law are homicide, adultery, and larceny.⁵⁰ Custom law is obeyed by everyone regardless of social status, and its deterrent ability is remarkable.⁵¹ Notes one chronicler:

The violator. . . believes all manner of ill luck will follow him, and, of course, it does, and that fear, while the creed holds, is worth several companies of constabulary as deterrent to crime.⁵²

Another sphere within the influence of tradition is religion. According to Kankanay belief, religious tradition is traceable to primeval times. An ever-present feature of Kankanay prayers is the recounting of the transference of ritual knowledge from the original teachers and performers to the present. The following excerpt from a narrative prayer is typical:

Then they say, they hand it down at Kalawittan and Pilakan receives it; then he hands it down at Bontoc, and Pilakan receives it; then he ascends with it to Depayan, and Bintoa receives it; then he ascends with it to Pulis, and they hand it down at Bila and Kimayan receives it; he takes it and offers it; then he uses the *sedey* ceremony at the outskirts of the town, and he becomes productive and lives long; then he brings it to Bauco, here X [the offerer] receives it and offers it.⁵³

The carriers of tradition, naturally, are the old. Old men compose the *lallakay* (council of old men) which runs the affairs of the at-ato.⁵⁴ Old men also preside over sacrifices.⁵⁵ As recounted by one ethnographer,

The sayings of the oldest, 'very wisest' man and other older men with special titles and functions, either individually or in family and group councils, are controlling factors in the area. Familiar with ancient lore,

47. Fred Eggan, "Some Social Institutions in the Mountain Province and Their Significance for Historical and Comparative Studies," *UMJEAS* 3 (April 1954):331.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Keesing and Keesing, *Taming*, p. 140.

50. Scott, *Discovery*, p. 188.

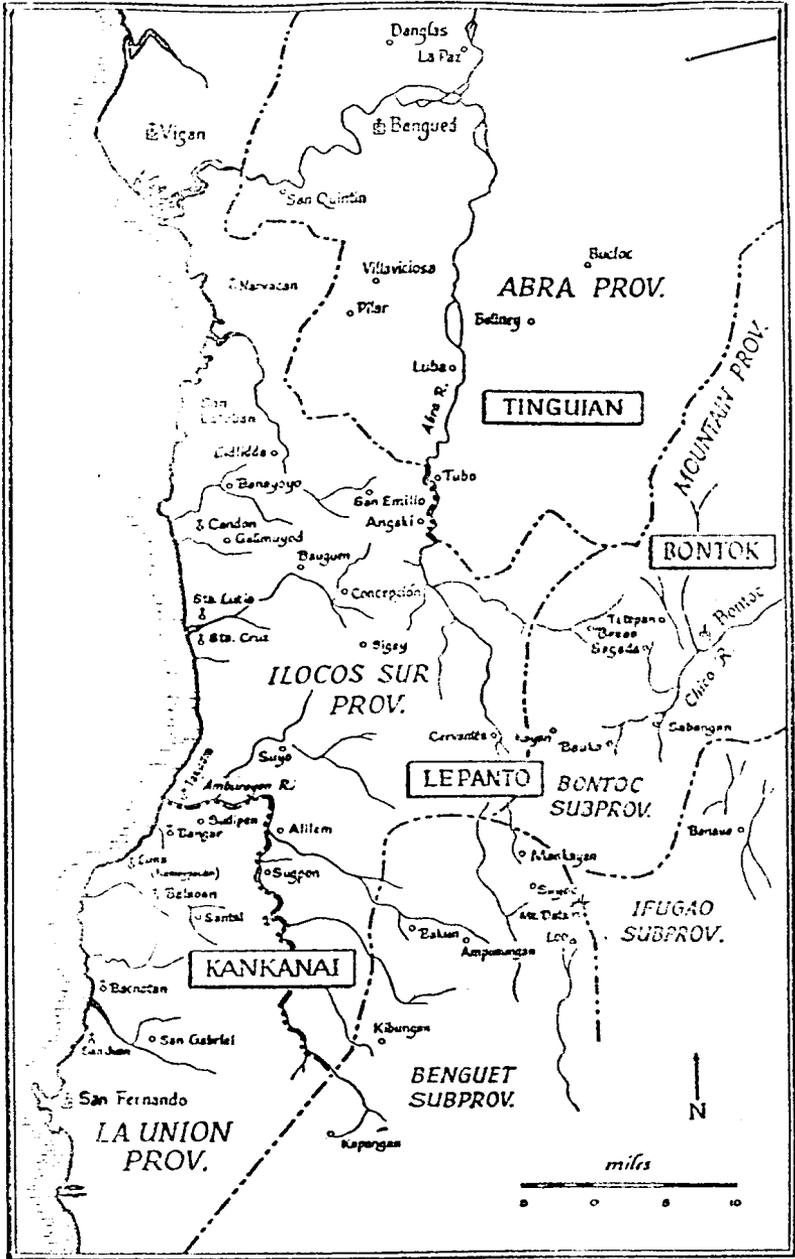
51. Wilson, "Occupational Acculturation," p. 89.

52. Keesing and Keesing, *Taming*, p. 140.

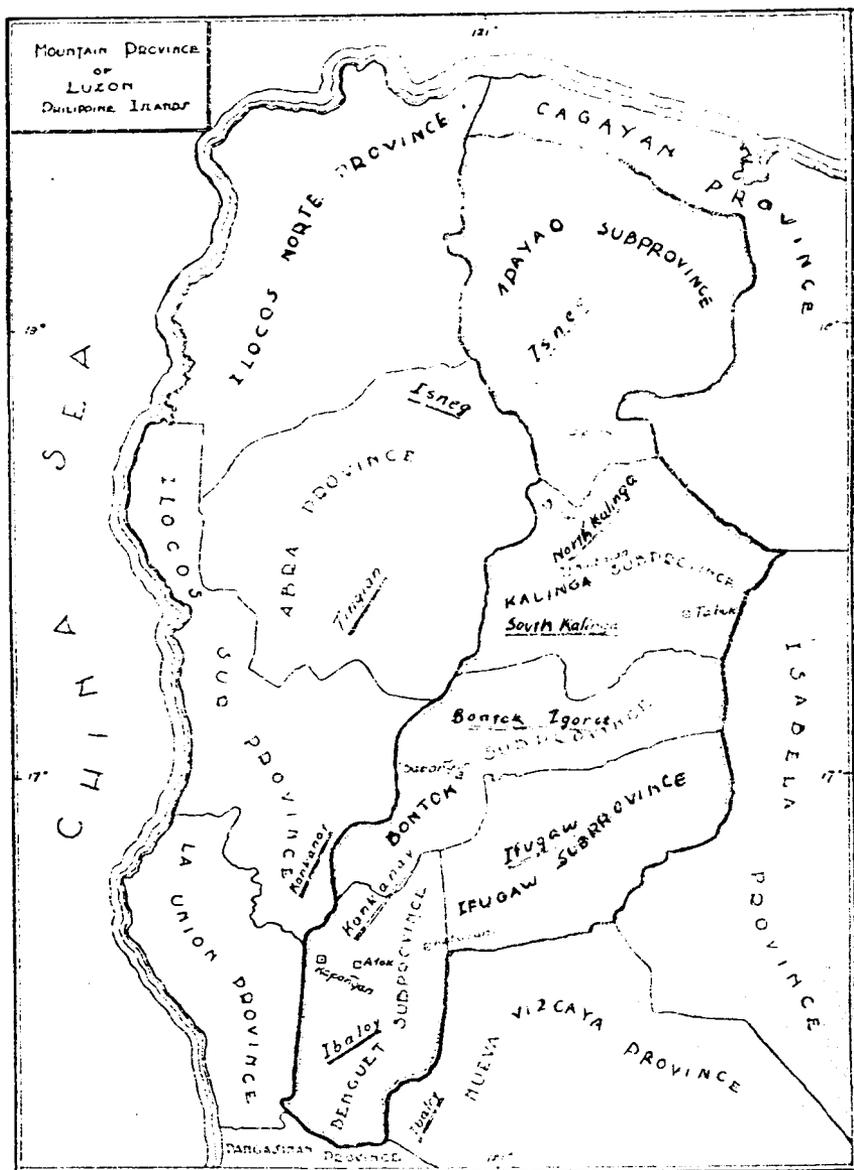
53. Vanoverbergh, "Prayers in Lepanto-Igorot as It Is Spoken at Bauco," *UMJEAS* 2 (January 1953):14.

54. Wilson, "Occupational Acculturation," p. 89.

55. Vanoverbergh, "Kankanay Religion," p. 114.



Map A — from Felix M. Keesing's *The Ethnohistory of Northern Luzon* (California: Stanford University Press, 1962), p. 94.



Map B — from Morice Vanoverbergh's "Dress and Adornment in the Mountain Province of Luzon," *Catholic Anthropological Conference* 1 (November 1929): 183.

masters of religious and agricultural ceremonies, interpreters of omens, adjudicators of disputes, privileged members of both family and community, they have the general welfare largely in their hands.⁵⁶

Although traditional religion is characterized by an absence of clear doctrines and systematic theory, it permeates all aspects of traditional life.⁵⁷ Every important activity is preceded or followed by some kind of ritual, and prayers exist for every known affliction.

Worship is mainly in the form of ritual (sacrifices, prayers, and libations) addressed to mysterious beings, spirits of varied types (ancestral spirits included), and natural phenomena.⁵⁸ Sacrifices may be public or private. Public sacrifices are offered for concerns relevant to the whole village such as sowing or harvesting, which are communal activities, while private sacrifices are for familial or individual concerns such as a wedding or an illness.⁵⁹ Both types have a repertoire of essential ceremonies,⁶⁰ and always entail the ritual killing of animals, the kind and number of which depend on the type of sacrifice and on what the offerer can afford.⁶¹ There are prescribed ways of killing the victim:

Hogs are killed by thrusting a sharp-pointed stick somewhere under one of the forelegs and piercing the heart of the animal. Dogs are killed by clubbing them to death. Chickens are killed by beating their necks and the inside of their wings with small sticks.⁶²

When a person cannot afford a sacrifice, simple prayers may take its place, as in simple ailments like fever or a cracked tongue.⁶³ Simple prayers also accompany ordinary activities like going on a trip, walking a good distance, or even when someone suspects that he has lost his way.

Overseeing Kankanay ritual are three types of religious leaders: old men who preside over most of the ceremonies, old women who take charge of illnesses, and agricultural priests who are entrusted with the ceremonies related to agriculture.⁶⁴ Although priesthood is an institution, the religious ceremonies are not cloaked in mystery,

56. Keesing and Keesing, *Taming*, p. 114.

57. Vanoverbergh, "Kankanay Religion," p. 73.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 92-97.

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*, pp. 92-94.

62. *Ibid.*

63. Vanoverbergh, "Prayers," pp. 68-71.

64. Keesing, "Lepanto Society," p. 34.

for the people possess a general knowledge of them.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the old zealously guard their knowledge of the prayers and pass it only to those whom they can trust to be their successors.⁶⁶

So central is worship in the Kankanay reality that it is given spatial deference in the village topography. Behind or above the living site is a grove or a tree under which community sacrifices are held. An adjacent peak is picked out as the "the sacred mountain," and various places outside the village are set aside for auguries and other specific ceremonies.⁶⁷ The preeminence of traditional religion has given it sociopolitical significance. Through the holding of the so-called prestige cañao, which emphasizes the number of animals butchered, the rich manage to enhance their reputation and escalate their influence on the whole social fabric.⁶⁸ As noted in one study:

For the rich cañao were like bank savings but safer. One's standing in the community absolutely depended upon the size of the cañao he gave, and his generosity in giving to other cañao.⁶⁹

WESTERN INFLUENCE

The traditional Kankanay society first experienced Western influence in 1667 when the Spanish government ordered a military expedition into Lepanto and Bontoc for an exploration of the area.⁷⁰ Aimed at subjecting the mountain tribes to Spanish rule and at locating the reputed mines, the expeditionary force, which was accompanied by some Augustinians, explored some 150 villages around Kayan.⁷¹ In September, 1669, the first church was founded in Kayan, which is fourteen kilometers from Bauko.⁷² From 1829 to 1837, various military expeditions were conducted through Lepanto, Ifugao, and Nabaloi territories,⁷³ but it was only in 1852 that Lepanto was made a military district.⁷⁴ In 1868 the mountain tribes revolted against Spanish rule, but the revolt was eventually put down.⁷⁵

65. Moss, "Kankanay Ceremonies," p. 350.

66. Dilem, "Cultural Practices of the Bauko People," p. 51.

67. Keesing, "Lepanto Society," p. 8.

68. Moss, "Kankanay Ceremonies," p. 349.

69. Wilson, "Occupational," p. 90.

70. Scott, *Discovery*, pp. 57-58.

71. Henry Geeroms, "Former Spanish Missions in the Cordillera," *Saint Louis Quarterly* 3 (September 1966):573.

72. Scott, *Discovery*, p. 60.

73. Guy, "The Economic Life," p. 14.

74. Scott, *History*, p. 19.

75. Keesing and Keesing, *Taming*, p. 67.

Direct Spanish occupation covered a period of fifty years. With the Philippine Revolution in 1896, all missionaries left their outposts.⁷⁶ After 1900 American presence started to manifest itself with the political and geographical reorganization of the Gran Cordillera.⁷⁷

It was the area of belief which experienced considerable pressure from Western influence, but chroniclers say that the mountaineers tried to resist. One Augustinian account, for instance, reports that after putting up with a missionary's idol-smashing for six months, the native leader told him:

It is no easier for the people to give up their ancient practices for the word of a priest than for him to give up what he believes, and their priestess, looking him straight in the eye, said coolly, 'If you're the priest of the Christians, so am I of the Igorots, and if you have your god, I have mine.'⁷⁸

In Bauko, Christianity, which was introduced in 1754, received impetus with the establishment of a mission station by the Belgian C.I.C.M. missionaries in 1907.⁷⁹ By 1932, 69 of the 6,371 inhabitants were Christians.⁸⁰ With the arrival of the Belgian I.C.M. sisters in 1933, the Christianization of Bauko proceeded in earnest, so that now a majority of the people are Catholics.⁸¹

Despite these encroachments, tradition dies hard in Bauko. Approximately one-fifth of the population still hold *cañao*.⁸² From all appearances, however, the institutional supports of the traditional culture have all but disappeared. A researcher reports that there is not a single *at-ato* house in Bauko today, and in 1969 there were only four native priests left.⁸³ Conflict exists between the old who still cling to tradition and the Christian young.⁸⁴ Given the Christian doctrines, conflict is bound to arise in several areas—e.g., divorce and remarriage. All this seems to point to a discontinuity between Christianity and the traditional culture. But does opposition really exist? How does one explain one mountaineer's viewpoint: "We are Christians, but our old customs have to be preserved"?⁸⁵

76. Guy, "The Economic Life," p. 15.

77. *Ibid.*

78. Scott, *History*, p. 195.

79. Mario Pasay-an, "Some Marriage Practices Observed Among the Bauko People," *Sound and Sense* 2 (October 1970):220.

80. Keesing and Keesing, *Taming*, p. 91.

81. Mario Pasay-an, "The Disintegrating Kankanay Culture," *Sound and Sense* 3 (February 1969):312.

82. Dilem, "Cultural Practices of the Bauko People," p. 38.

83. Pasay-an, "Kankanay Culture," p. 313.

84. *Ibid.*

85. Keesing and Keesing, *Taming*, p. 227.