

The Barlig Bontok: Research in Progress

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The customs of the Eastern Bontok of Northern Luzon have never been studied intensively. That is why I selected the town of Barlig as a field site. Barlig is the most westerly of these towns, and it lies by road approximately one and a half hours east of the Bontok-Banawe road. A trail leads farther east to Lias, Kadaklan, and then on to the Natonin area.

In my 18 months of anthropological field work in Barlig, I have been studying the language, the traditional customs, and the coming of modernity. This report will outline some of the things that I have learned.

The language, Finalig, is similar to the Central Bontok languages, although some vocabulary differs, and Finalig has a possessive pronoun series that precedes nouns. *B*, *d*, and *g* do not occur syllable-initially, being replaced by *f*, *ch*, and *k*. Each town in the area has a distinctive dialect; even students from Lias staying in Barlig find it difficult sometimes to understand Finalig. Iloko is often used here: in all three churches, in political campaigns, in much casual conversation. Anyone preparing for field work in the general area should attempt to learn some Iloko beforehand.

Legends of both Barlig and Lias point to the Chico River Valley north of Bontok as the home of their ancestors. However, no genealogical connections are made between the town-site discoverers (who were hunters) and present-day inhabitants. Barlig's extensive stone-walled irrigated terraces suggest a certain antiquity. But rice successfully replaced wet gabi, or taro, in the higher terraces only during this century (Barlig lies at 5,000 feet). These data suggest that the original settlers were hunters and terracers who settled in the area several centuries ago.

In a sense it is "archeological" traditional ethnography that I have been attempting, since many older customs have been abandoned. But it seems that Barlig did not fit exactly Jenk's

classic picture of the Bontok. Kinship and *ator* membership appear to have been more integrated here. Barlig never had distinct social classes, nor gave the prestige feasts that are still important in many Central Bontok towns. Lumawig is known but there are no extensive legends concerning him. Most traditional prayers that I have been able to collect tell how various supernaturals helped either a sibling pair or Fukian and Wikian at a time of trouble, which suggests an Ifugao (Bugan, Wigan) influence here.

In spite of the inaccessibility of the region and its more recent direct contact with the "outside" world, Barlig and the towns farther east give the impression that they have modernized more rapidly than the Central Bontok towns. Changes in Barlig include the abandonment of head-hunting, or traditional agricultural ceremonies, of the *patpatay* (sacred "grove"), of the "rest day," and of the *ator*; modern clothing; conversion to Christianity; frequent use of Iloko; galvanized-iron house roofing; a desire for schooling; and emigration to other areas.

Barlig today well exemplifies a "modern Igorot" style of life. New modes of life co-exist with many of the old. The town itself, consisting of about 1,300 people, is the municipal center, and its *barrio* high school will graduate its first class this year. Nearby is the Eastern Bontok Agricultural High School which was just established. The major crops of Barlig are rice and camotes. Only one crop of rice is produced, without benefit of animal or machine power, but this is not simply conservatism: the only rice varieties known here take about 10 months to produce in the cool, rather wet climate, and it is impractical to take a carabao to the rice terraces, most of which are located on mountain sides. Cash is not plentiful, but may be earned through field labor (although there is hardly a family without some land), rattan-weaving,

coffee-raising, vegetable production, and shop-keeping. The natural beauty of the location and the friendliness of the people may some day lead to a tourist industry, but it has not yet been started. Family loyalties have remained very strong, yet the discipline of the younger men is missed. The *kanyeo* is still celebrated but usually for happy occasions, and often none of the old prayers are said. The very popular gong-playing and dancing which were formerly restricted to the *kanyeo* are now also performed at the fiesta. Most of the people have adopted Christianity whole-heartedly, yet traditional beliefs are a second approach for many, especially the older people.

Barlig is a beautiful, quite peaceful town. Yet Barligians frequently say, "Life is hard in Barlig," and the observer can only agree. It is hard to cultivate rice by hand and by foot, to carry firewood and boards down from the mountain sides, and to carry heavy stones up to repair typhoon-damaged terrace walls. Therefore

many people manage to find the money to educate their children in the hope that they will be better off. And, during this century, many emigrants from Barlig have sought better economic situations in the mines near Baguio, in Tabuk, and in Isabela. These sons and daughters of Barlig, while tied emotionally to the town, are now located elsewhere, applying their adaptability, intelligence, and industriousness in contributing to the development of the Philippines.

Note

Miss Flattery, a Ph.D. candidate of the department of anthropology, University of Chicago, took up residence in Barlig, Bontok, in mid-July 1970. Hence this note was written after 18 months in the field. While in the Philippines Miss Flattery is a visiting research associate of the Institute of Philippine Culture, Ateneo de Manila. Her field research is supported by the Philippine Studies Program (University of Chicago) and the American Association of University Women.

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