

## BRIEF COMMUNICATIONS AND RESEARCH NOTES

### The B'lit Manobo and the Tasaday

FRANK LYNCH and TEODORO A. LLAMZON

At the suggestion of Dr. Robert B. Fox, director of research for the Presidential Assistant on National Minorities (Panamin), we were invited by Manuel Elizalde, Jr., to visit the Tasaday shortly after they had come to Panamin's attention in June 1971. Arrangements were made, and we traveled from and to Manila as Elizalde's guests, leaving the metropolis July 16 and returning July 18.

In those two days we were with four different culture-language groups of South Cotabato. Our base was Kamato, off the Allah River Valley, at Panamin's T'boli center. From there we went by helicopter the first morning (July 16) to a 3,000-foot-high hilltop clearing some 40 kilometers due west, for a meeting with the Tasaday forest people. We stayed with them till late afternoon. Moving on, we spent the rest of the afternoon, the evening, night, and early next morning with the nearby Manobo B'lit. We then returned once again to the Tasaday, leaving them in the early afternoon of that day. We interrupted our flight back to Kamato for a visit with Datu Ma Falen's Ubo people, but before dark we were at the T'boli center. Here we spent that night and the next morning, when we left for Davao and Manila.

A whirlwind, superficial visit to be sure, but one in which breadth of view compensated con-

siderably for the lack of depth. We gladly confess, however, the extremely tentative nature of our findings and related interpretation. Because our immediate concern is the Tasaday people and their relation to the Manobo B'lit, we speak only of these two groups.

*Assumption.* The B'lit Manobo, so called because they live in a valley through which runs the B'lit River, had been known to Panamin for some time prior to June 1971. Among the natives of the B'lit settlement in which we later stayed was a man named Dafal, trapper of wild pig and a collector of coconut pith, for both of which delicacies he had a good market in his own settlement and in neighboring communities. As Dafal tells the story, he first ran into a group of Tasaday in 1967. With some difficulty because of their shyness and the strangeness of their dialect, he eventually came to terms with them, the agreement being that in return for his instructing them in the necessary techniques and furnishing them the tools, weapons, and devices they would need, they would trap, hunt, and gather for him. Until he put his part of the bargain into effect, Dafal says, the Tasaday did no hunting at all and had no tools other than digging sticks and several stone scrapers, hammers, and axes. They were simply

food gatherers. What follows is premised on the accuracy of Dafal's testimony.

*Findings.* Living back to back, as it were, each absorbed in the exploitation of its own environment in its own particular way, we find two groups of people, the B'lit Manobo and the Tasaday. Despite their living so near one another, preliminary observation indicates that they share very little other than their physical appearance and closely-related languages. The B'lit Manobo live in pile-built houses of bamboo and cogon, go about fully dressed and adorned, raise corn in hillside clearings, hunt for wild pigs and birds, fish, use the bolo, bow and arrow, and spear, ride horses, drive carabao, and are subject to the leadership of one or more *datus* who live in their settlement.

In a dense rain forest, the outer edge of which is about two ridges and one kilometer away, lives a very different kind of people, the Tasaday. These people use only temporary ground-level shelters; they wear no clothing at all, or simply a long, thin ground-orchid leaf drawn tightly under the crotch and tied at both ends to a rattan waist-string; they cultivate no plants, ride no horses or carabaos, have no formal leadership structure, and, until 1967 (we are told) had no bolos, no bows and arrows, no spears — only stone scrapers and rattan-handled stone axes and hammers. Until four years ago they sustained themselves merely by gathering what products of forest and stream they could, apparently using little more than bare hands and wit. Their diet, as a consequence, was one of wild yam as a staple, to which were added berries, fruits, tadpoles, fish, crabs, and anything else they could find. The poverty of this inventory of techniques and foods is striking, and is undoubtedly due in part to its having been made, not on grounds of lengthy participant observation, but from the answers to questions asked during limited contact with the Tasaday, away from their usual habitat.

Despite the great cultural difference between these two peoples — the first a food-producing, iron- and steel-using group that hunts and traps and fishes, using bow and arrow,

spear, *balatik* (spring trap), and a variety of other devices, the second a simple gathering group — there are similarities that bespeak a common origin, common ancestors. Most obvious, perhaps, is their physical similarity, for the Tasaday and the B'lit seem to have approximately the same stature, skin color, eye form, and straight-to-wavy hair. Take away a Tasaday's shyness, clothe him as a B'lit, and he could pass for one in a crowd.

The second similarity is in the languages, both of which are of the Malayo-Polynesian Philippine group. More than that, a preliminary comparison by Fr. Llamzon indicates that they share about 82 per cent of words for non-cultural items. If one accepts Robert Lee's lexico-statistical formula, which in effect equates the loss of 20 per cent of non-cultural vocabulary with the passage of one millennium from the split-off point, he will estimate that the common ancestors of B'lit and Tasaday were one people (We shall call them the Pre-BT) about 700–900 years ago, or about 1100–1300 A.D. This was about 25–30 generations ago. Among the terms found among the B'lit, but *not among the Tasaday*, are words for chicken, dog, crocodile, egg, salt, sugarcane, rice, palay, mortar, pestle, grind, straw, lake, saw, needle, and write.

*Interpretation.* Now, we know that planting, bows and arrows, and the use of iron were found in Mindanao and the Philippines long before 1100 A.D. But were they available to the Pre-BT people? It is certainly conceivable that they were — that the Tasaday might be, in other words, like certain peoples of the tropical-forest zones of South America, "the wreckage of evolved agricultural societies forced into an environment unsuitable to the basic [earlier] economic pattern" (Lathrap 1968:29), but we think there is a simpler and more reasonable explanation. It seems more likely that the Tasaday's ancestors never knew how to plant or to make and use bows and arrows than that, having had this knowledge, they lost it. The reason is that in an environment where it would immensely increase their chances for survival, and where the opportunity

for planting and the materials for bow-and-arrow construction were at hand — we assume these conditions — these practices would most certainly have been continued through the centuries of separation from their source. It is possible, on the other hand, that, for lack of metal, any pre-existing knowledge of iron-working and use of the bolo might have been lost over time.

With this in mind, we can reconstruct the origins of the Tasaday very tentatively by starting from a point in time some 1,000-years ago, when the Pre-BT in this and nearby areas of the mountains west of the Allah River Valley were all forest people, like the Tasaday.

Other groups or individuals, who knew how to plant, and who had the bow-and-arrow and spear, and perhaps the bolo, gradually moved into those portions of the Pre-BT territory that were less rugged. Some Pre-BTs joined the newcomers and learned from them, while others retreated into the fastnesses of the rougher and higher terrain. And so the split began, we conjecture. Those who retreated some 27 genera-

tions ago were the forebears of the Tasaday. Those who chose to leave the forest now live on in the B'lit of today.

We are currently gathering additional information on the languages, cultures, and pre-history of other people living in and near the highlands of the Tasaday. When these data have been assembled and analyzed, we shall be in a more knowledgeable position to approach the Tasaday once more, this time in a less artificial situation, hopefully at the rock-shelter home base of which they speak, and at a considerably less frantic pace. If what we have seen and heard so far is confirmed by what we later discover, the Tasaday may well emerge as one of the few known groups in the world who live purely by means of a food-gathering economy.

#### Reference

- Lathrap, Donald W.  
1968 The "hunting" economies of the tropical forest zone of south America: an attempt at historical perspective. *In* Man the hunter. R. B. Lees and I. De Vore, eds. Chicago, Aldine Publishing Co. Pp. 23-29.

## A Statement on Language Policy

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Realizing the important role language plays in nation building, The Linguistic Society of the Philippines and The Philippine Association of Language Teachers make the following statement of position:

We accept Tagalog as basis of the National Language, not in the sense of an artificial language but in the sense that loanwords from other Philippine languages should enrich its stock of vocabulary and expressions. We endorse the

naming of the emerging Tagalog-based National Language "Pilipino." We endorse the policy that as rapidly as is feasible Pilipino be made the medium of instruction of the educational system on all levels except in the early grades where the local vernacular should be used. This endorsement is premised on a realistic program of financial support which will make possible the adequate preparation of teachers and instructional materials. Since language develops through usage and not by legislative fiat, its propagation should