

Philippine Demonological Legends and Their Cultural Bearings

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Angngalo was of enormous size but feared the bite of ants. In another Iloko legend about this giant, the folk once crossed the sea on Angngalo's leg to get salt. They filled their bags with salt, bore these on their heads, and were walking home on the giant's outstretched leg when he dipped it in the sea because he could not bear the bites of the ants swarming on it. That, too, was how the sea became salt.

In a tale reported by Morice Vanoverbergh, two young Isneg hunters once went to the giant Guisurab's house to ask for fire. "Who is there?" Guisurab asked them.

"We, sir, come to ask for fire," they replied.

"What will you do with the fire?" asked Guisurab.

"To roast a *sisiat* (a kind of insect), sir," they replied.

"I shall come and eat the *sisiat*, too," said Guisurab.

"We mean a *siab* (another small insect)," said the children.

"I, too, shall eat the *siab*," replied Guisurab.

"We mean a *pilagay* (still another kind of insect)," said the children.

"I shall also come and eat the *pilagay*," replied Guisurab.

"We mean a wild boar," the children admitted.

"Let's go and singe it," said Guisurab, taking a live coal and going to singe it beside the river with the children.

The Apayao tell a cognate to that tale. A hunter kills a wild pig and goes to Gisarub, a giant, to ask him for fire.

"What will you do with the fire, little man?" Gis-arub asked.

"To roast locusts," the man lied.

"I must come with you. I like to eat locusts," replied Gisarub.

"I mean crabs," said the man to scare the giant since giants are said to greatly fear crabs.

"Did you say you will roast crabs?" asked Gisarub. "Crabs are even better-tasting than locusts. I will come with you."

"It's really to roast a wild pig," said the men.

"I will give you fire, little man. Carry this basket for me and show me the way. Pig's meat is the best meat for me."

The stupidity of giants is illustrated by what the two children did to Gisarub in the tale reported by Vanoverbergh. After roasting and chopping up the wild pig, Gisarub put all the meat in his burden basket. The boys then challenged him to a diving contest before they parted. They quickly replaced the meat in his basket with stones while he was under water. Then the bottom of Gisarub's wife's pot fell when he dropped the stones in his burden basket when he got home. He then hurried back to the pond with his axe, saw the boys' reflection on the water, tried to cut down the tree where they were, and cut his own leg instead.

The ikugan which the Manobo tell tales about suspended themselves by their long tails over forest trails while waiting for wayfarers to come along. When they did, they overpowered them and killed them.

The Apayao giant Sappaw wed Gungay, his own sister. Their only son wrecked their human neighbors' fences and stoned their dogs and pigs to death. The people then tried catching Sappaw with a bamboo fish trap but he tore it to pieces. They finally set up bamboo spears under the water where he often went to dive and killed him by making him spear himself.

Some of the intellectual and spiritual traits of the giants of Philippine folklore may be summed up by the statement that they had great muscular strength but were remarkably stupid. A bannog bullied six animal friends varying in size from a ponderous carabao to a tiny tortoise to give up their collective catch each had been assigned to stay behind and watch. The larger



animals failed, but when its turn to watch came, the tiny tortoise tricked the large bully into getting itself entombed in a hole it dug.

The gullibility of giants the world over illustrated by the English tale about Jack and the Beanstalk has abundant parallels in Philippine tales. Bekat, the Isneg giant, had a diving contest in a lake with two children whom she had cheated of the meat of the wild boar they had killed. The children promptly rose to breathe after Bekat dived in, put stones in her basket in place of the meat she had put in it, and climbed up into an overhanging tree. When she rose to the surface again, she carried her basket home and poured its contents into a clay pot, and the bottom of the pot fell. It then dawned on her that the children had tricked her. She went back for them, saw their reflection on the surface of the pond, dived in for them, failed to find them there, looked up, and saw them in the tree. She hurried home for her axe, walked back, and started chopping down the tree. She cut her knee instead.

In the Batangas tale, a giant pulled hair from the head of Carangal, a span-tall child, and tied Carangal's companion to a post with it. Carangal then induced the giant to tie himself to the post with a strong rope and to smear himself with wax. Carangal then set the giant on fire. This is just one of the numerous incidents in Philippine folklore that tell of humans outwitting giants in their encounters. Vanoverberg's monograph on Isneg tales has an entire section on the exploits of Little Finger who handily outwits a variety of giants.

"Who is there?" a giant in a Tagalog tale shouted before entering his own house. A lame man and a blind man, who had entered the house not knowing that it was a giant's, replied from the ceiling where they had retreated: "We are large men." From where they were they then dropped a ray's tail to the floor saying it was a strand of their hair, and the giant was frightened and fled. In a cognate Bikol tale, a man dropped a piece of rope to the floor saying it was a strand of his head hair and then a duck he said was a louse from his head. He then fired a gun and said he had thumped his chest. The giant fled in terror.

Three little children in a Tagalog tale entered the house of the one-eyed giant Buringcantada by mistake and hid in the ceiling—the typical Philippine home had no other convenient compartment to hide in—when that giant and his friends got in and began eating. The children then yelled from the ceiling:

Tawi cami

Sa quisame.

Que masaran

Na ulaman!

(A corrupt mix of Tagalog and Spanish meaning:

We are people

In the ceiling.

How nice the viand!)

The giant was infuriated by the evidence of intruders and said, "If you are as large as you say, let me see a strand of your hair!"

They dropped a piece of rope to the floor.

The giant then asked to see a tooth from their mouth, and they dropped the head of an axe.

Then the giant asked them to thump their chest. They beat on a bass drum and the giant fled.

In a Bagobo tale recorded in an extended monograph by Laura Watson Benedict, a giant saw a monkey gathering vines. The monkey said it needed the vines to protect itself from an imminent typhoon. The giant begged the monkey to tie him to a tree so that the typhoon would not blow him away. The monkey did so and then thrashed him without mercy. Later the monkey told the giant to strike a hive of wild bees. It did so and the bees swarmed on him and stung him. The giant was killed when the monkey lured it to enter the open mouth of a large crocodile which the monkey said was the king's room he had been assigned to guard.

Legends and tales about giants and ogres chiefly serve for emotional release for those who listen to them. Children repeatedly and almost invariably best want giants and ogres in folktales. These triumphs help release emotional tension born of the listeners' handicap as puny creatures comparatively powerless but by use of their superior wit and skill can easily beat their hulking but feeble-minded adversaries.