

# ***Batek*: Traditional Tattoos and Identities in Contemporary Kalinga, North Luzon Philippines**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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*In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, traditional tattooing is widespread in the Philippines, but very little is known or written about the practice. Sources for the study of traditional tattoos in Northern Luzon are very inadequate and merely make vague statements on the function and symbolic meaning of tattoos, as well as the relationship between the practice and culture as a whole. The statements likewise reveal a distinctly ethnocentric department. Until today, tattooing and tattoo designs in the Cordilleras are best understood within the context of headhunting. Headhunting was the only known reason for tattooing, and, to this day, no one knows exactly what tattoos signify. This paper provides insights into the roles and functions of the tattoos, and how the tattoos (batek) become cultural symbols of the intricate rituals brought about by community regimens of the Ilubo, Kalinga. No longer practiced, the batek of the Ilubo is a visually powerful rendering of symmetry and unity of designs. Batek now serve as an archive of culture for the group.*

Keywords: *Tattoo, rites of passage, body adornment, identity, Kalinga*

## **INTRODUCTION**

My anthropological interest in body ornamentation, specifically in traditional tattoos, began in 1990. I met an old Bontoc woman who sold *balatinao* (red rice) in one of the old market stalls in Baguio City. She was known to me only as *Apong* (grandmother), and her tattooed arms fascinated me each time she would pick up

the grains and place them on her palm. The thick, black, geometric tattoos seemed to me quite odd and outlandish. They were different and out of the ordinary, and I was then unaware of the fact that my reaction was indicative of my ethnocentric bias. My unfamiliarity with her tattoos revealed the consequence of my “modern” values. Each time I bought her red rice, I would look at her wrists and upper arms, and admire her beautiful tattoos. She concealed them by wearing long sleeves. Eventually, she acceded to my endless requests for her to show me her tattoos. After some time, I did not see her anymore. I was told that she had kidney failure, and was brought back to the province. She never came back.

I regret that I did not engage her in conversation on the secrets of her *fatek*, the local term for her tattoos. The only thing I knew was that she was from a village much farther than Mainit in Mountain Province, Northern Luzon.

It was only then that I realized that *fatek*, as well as the older generation of Igorots (the collective term to refer to the ethnolinguistic groups in Luzon), are the vestiges of a valuable culture and tradition. I thought of the questions that I would ask *Apong* if she were still alive: **why do they tattoo their body? how are the *fatek* made? and what do the designs stand for?**

My passion for the *fatek* of the Cordillera grew, and I found myself scouring the Philippine National Archives, Lopez Museum and Archives, Rizal Library, UP Main Library, Museum of Anthropology and the Special Collections of the University of Michigan, but I could not find ample data on the subject, except for old photographs and short sentences on tattoos. It also brought me to Kabayan, Benguet where the lost mummy, Appo Anno, stolen by foreign antique collectors, but later retrieved by the National Museum, was finally returned to his home in 1999 after 87 years. The mummy is clad in elaborate body tattoos (fingertips, wrists, toes, legs, buttocks, back and chest), and I was hopeful that its return would be an opportunity to study his tattoos. This, however, was not to be the case especially after the Benguet people and the National Museum prohibited anyone from touching or examining the mummy. The seated mummy is held sacred by the people and, as such, I had to rely on photographs of the body

parts which were tattooed. Although designs and motifs were deciphered and drawn on paper, the meanings are a mystery until now. Attempts to explain the mummy's origin, identity, and his elaborate tattoos are mere speculation. Even the surviving descendants could not tell stories of his elaborate tattoos: how they were made, and in what way they were earned by the bearer.

In 1994, Gran Cordillera Festivals were celebrated in different mountain provinces. Ethnic groups were invited to perform the *cañao* (ritual feasts). Aside from the young people attending the celebration, there were also old people who came and proudly showed their tattoos as they danced to the infectious and rhythmic beating of the gongs. Recently, in the 1998-2001 Gran Cordillera Festival held in Lubuagan, Kalinga and Baguio City, I was alarmed to see only a few old people in attendance. There were only about two or three representatives from each ethnic group. Questions raced in my mind. I remembered *Apong* from the Baguio City market whose tattoos had fascinated me. Were these the last of the tattooed people? I asked about the other *apong* and *lalakay* (the elders), and I was informed that they were ill and were back in the *ili* (village).

In 1990, initial visits and fieldwork in Baguio City and other areas in Benguet were made in search of these old tattooed people. Since 1992 to 2006, I have been making yearly visits to the remote villages of the Cordillera during summer and in October in the interest of a rigorous investigation on the subject matter of *fatek*. Very few of the tattooed people remain: many have died with their hard-earned tattoos buried with them. Initially, I felt that it was enough to document what is left of the tattoos, but, in March 2000, I found myself in Tabuk, northern Kalinga and met Lakay Jacob Angnganai. Lakay Jacob is probably the oldest surviving *manbatek* (tattoo artist) of Lubo, Tanudan, Kalinga province. Reportedly over a hundred years old, he claims to have witnessed the passing of three generations of warriors from Lubo. He had not practised this painful, traditional way of tattooing for a long time, and remembered having last tattooed a woman from the village 40 years ago. However, my interest and his memories of the past probably gave him the courage and strength to tattoo a young Ilubo lad one last time.

During the tattoo session, the patterns were made, dipped in ink; and needles were used to pierce to the skin. The tapping of the *pat-ik* (stick) to the *gisi* (tattoo instrument) were heard, and the first lines appeared. The designs on the newly tattooed skin were undeniably similar to those I had previously seen, and were of amazing beauty. With pride and happiness on the success of his last task, Lakay Jacob gave his equipment to me and my companion. What we witnessed was the *manbatek's* last tattoo session. Halfway into the process, Lakay Jacob broke down and softly stuttered: “*Adipon manbatek*” (I cannot tattoo any more). He had gotten old: his eyesight was beginning to fail him and tears clearly indicated that he could no longer be a *manbatek*.

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Critical Terms*, the word *tatow* first appeared in Captain Cook's written accounts in First Voyage (1769) in Tahiti Island. The word denotes the markings found on the skin of Polynesians (Tahiti, Samoan and Tongan): “both sexes paint their bodies; this is done by inlaying the colour of black under their skin in such a manner that it becomes indelible.” Furthermore, *tatow* is also characterized by a “painful operation to form permanent marks or designs found on the skin by puncturing it and inserting a pigment or pigments.” Other variations of *tatow* include *tatu*, *tatau*, and *tataou*, as the expression for “to strike or to stamp.”

In the Philippines, the general term for tattoos is *batuk*, and, in some places, *patik*: this meant the marking of snakes or lizards or any design printed or stamped on (Scott 20). Among the different groups found in Northern Luzon, the word *batek* (in Kalinga), *fatek* (Bontoc) and *fatok* (Benguet) were all derived from the sound of the tapping of the stick to the tattoo instrument which pierces the skin. The word *tek* (*tik*) translates: “to hit slowly.” This is differentiated from *batek* (pronounced as *battik*) in Indonesia and Malaysia, which refers to an intricate textile technique developed in the early 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> century. *Batik* is a method of applying colored designs to a cloth surface. The process entails the use of wax to cover the designs not to be dyed. When dyed, the covered parts resist the dye. For

more than one color, sequences of dyeing and waxing are used (Gittinger 233).

*Batek* is the Kalinga term for the traditional tattoos, or inscriptions found on their skin. The *batek* of the Kalinga are known for their symmetry and elaborate tattoo designs. They may also have the largest number of surviving practitioners of the tradition from the Bontoc, Ifugao, Tingguian and Ibaloy in the Mountain Provinces. The tattoos on their body are the only living testament of the practice of traditional tattooing. *Batek* is characterized by the marking, decorating and designing on a material permanently. No longer practiced, the *batek* of the Ilubo is a visually powerful rendering of symmetry and unity of designs.

*Batek* is done through hand-tapped pricking, the traditional method of tattooing done by a *manbatek* (tattoo artist) in the village (See Slide 1: *Manbatek*). The instruments are made from carabao horn (*gisi*), bent by fire with lemon thorns and/or four needles (*gambang*) attached at the tip. Other traditional tattoo instruments found in Polynesia are the comblike or knifelike barbs made from turtle shells (Blackburn 13). Today, tattoos can now be made with the tattugraph or electric tattoo machines which reduce the pain entailed from the tattooing process.

The Ilubo patterns are initially applied onto the skin, using a piece of wood carved with tattoo patterns (*kammai*) which had been dipped in ink (*merteka*). The skin is then pierced and the design filled in through repeated tapping of the stick (*pat-ik*) on the *gisi* (See Slides 2 to 4). Tattooing is a lengthy and painful process. It takes a day to a week to finish a tattoo design primarily because of the four-needle instrument which requires 90 to 120 taps per minute to render a design on the skin. The healing process takes one to three months.

The Ilubo have devised a systematic process of paying for services rendered by the *manbatek*. For instance, payment for a tattooed chest may come in the form of an *addongan* bead, which is also equivalent to one carabao and/or five *kinubar* beads, which are equivalent to two medium sized pigs or even a pair of *baag* (loincloth) and *kain* (wraparound skirt). For the tattoos found on the lower and upper arm of both men and women, silver coins could be given in payment.

In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, traditional tattooing is widespread in the Philippines (Van Dinter 85), but very little is known or written about the practice. My research has revealed that the sources for the study of traditional tattoos in Northern Luzon are very few and unrevealing, except for a few isolated samples of the tattoos from the past written about and documented by the Spaniards in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Such accounts are inadequate and merely make vague statements on the function and symbolic meaning of tattoos, as well as the relationship between the practice and culture as a whole. The statements likewise reveal a distinctly ethnocentric department.

In 16<sup>th</sup> century culture and society, tattooing was already a common practice among the major warrior groups in the Cordillera, i.e., the Bontoc, the Ifugao and the Kalinga. At the time of the arrival of the Spaniards, headhunting and tattooing were being practised more extensively than at the time of the coming of the Americans (Krieger 89). Moreover, foreign ethnographers reinforced the idea that tattooing was done primarily and solely in connection with the practice of headhunting.

Tattoos were symbols of male valor: these were applied only after a man had performed in battle with fitting courage. Like modern military decorations, warriors accumulated tattoos with each act of bravery (Scott 20; De Raedt 95-100). Until today, tattooing and tattoo designs in the Cordilleras are best understood within the context of headhunting and of the *mai'ngor* (warriors) (Roces 153). Headhunting was the only known reason for tattooing and, to this day, no one knows exactly what tattoos signify. Through this study, I hope to provide insights into the roles and functions of the tattoos, and explanations of how the tattoos are cultural symbols of the intricate social and cultural relations of the Ilubo, Kalinga.

After the Spanish friars successfully eliminated the “savage custom” through Christianity and baptism, the practice of tattooing eventually waned and was forgotten in the following century. Today, *batek* (traditional tattoos) is an extant culture among a distinct group in the Cordillera — the *Ilubo* of southern Kalinga. The Ilubo are found in the most isolated and remotest area in the province, where the village is enclosed by a long mountain range.

## TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF *BATEK*

The importance of rituals and their symbolism cannot begin, until one recognizes that ritual is an attempt to create or maintain a particular culture, a particular set of assumptions by which stages of rites of passage are evident. These rites embody the bases for social relations; they are **visible expressions** or **ritual symbols** which enable the people to identify and know their society. At the same time, the people achieve the total personhood through these regimens in their community (Salvador 20).

Anthropologists have taken an increased interest in the symbolic nature of culture. The **theory on the symbolic approach to culture** inevitably leads to concern with meanings: “if culture is symbolic, then it follows that it is used to create and convey meanings since that is the purpose of symbols” (Moore 212). For instance, Victor Turner asserts that to understand the cultural life requires isolating symbols, identifying their meanings, and showing how symbols resonate within a specific, dynamic cultural context. Turner developed the idea of *communitas*, which involved social integration associated with the power of symbols. This approach focused on the ways in which public ritual, particularly in initiation rites, reinforced a sense of solidarity, and, in some cases, provided a source of cultural change.

Kalinga tattoos are deeply ingrained symbols within the specific fields of Kalinga’s sophisticated sphere of social action and different rites of passage in the context of the tattooing tradition. As a Kalinga passes from childhood, adulthood (*igam*) and old age (*baratang/baraker*), his or her place in society changes. Individuals undergo transitions from one status to the other, and the changes in nature and destiny and/or changes in their bodies are denoted by the tattoos accorded to each transition. The Ilubo tattooing practice periodic or incremental ritualistic performances to achieve the full status, and signifies one’s membership and belongingness to the community.

Turner argues that ritual, on the acting out of beliefs and symbolic meanings, plays the vital role of holding things together. On the nature of symbols, Turner writes:

I found I could not analyze ritual symbols without studying them in a time series in relation to other “events,” for symbols are essentially involved in social processes. From this standpoint the ritual symbol becomes a factor in social action, a positive force in an activity field. **The symbol becomes associated with human interests, purposes, ends, and, means, whether these are explicitly formulated or to have been inferred from the observed behavior.** The structure and properties of a symbol become those of a dynamic entity, at least within its appropriate context of action (20).

For instance, the Ilubo of Kalinga passes through a series of rituals to denote passage from one stage to another. In each of these rites, the boundary-markers are made through the ritual of tattooing (this is accompanied by complex rituals performed by the *manbatek* and the kin groups) by piercing their body with symbolic patterns and designs, bearing significant meanings which are mutually intelligible to the members of the group. It is also through rituals that symbols focalize the attention to evoke collective memory or to imbue the Ilubo individual/s with a sense of membership or “a community of memory and solidarity.” This in turn gives the authority to the community to build their collective Kalinga identity.

## **PERMANENT MARKINGS ON THE SKIN: WHY THE KALINGA TATTOO THEIR BODIES**

### ***Tattoos in Rites of Passage***

Van Gennep finds it useful to analyze and divide ceremonies for these life events into three stages: **rites of separation, rites of transition, and rites of incorporation** (p.10). Although the complete scheme of rites of passage theoretically includes preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation) in some instances, these classifications are not always important equally. The rites of separation have value in the ritual removal of the individual from society, just as in funeral ceremonies; the rites of transition highlight the isolation/separation of the individual prior to incorporation as in the case of pregnancy,

brotherhood and initiation; and rites of incorporation are those which involve the reunion of the individual with society in his or her new status. The changes of condition produce social disturbance (*perturbation sociale*), and it is the function of rites to reduce the harmful effects of the latter by restoring social equilibrium. For purposes of discussion and analysis of the significance of *batek* in the rites of passage of the Ilubo, Van Gennep's schema was used with variations made in the interest of consistency and coherence.

### **Batek in the Rites of Separation**

The ceremonies of pregnancy and childbirth (*umanak*) among the Ilubo Kalinga are one case that will demonstrate a weakness of Van Gennep's scheme. The *umanak* is probably the first rite performed upon separation of a child from the womb of his/her mother. In all the customs and traditions of the Ilubo from the time they are born until they die, the role of the *mandadawak* (female shamans) is vital in the performance of important rites (Magannon 49). One of the important tattoos found in the context of rites of separation is the *lin-lingao*, x-marks found on the forehead, both sides of the cheeks and nose of a married and/or pregnant woman (Figure 1). The *lin-lingao* is tattooed before women marry their partners. Bangayon, an old woman from Lubo, explains that *lin-lingao* provide protection from the *alan-alan*, or spirits that dwell in the village, especially right after a headhunt. These are believed to be spirits of the enemies killed by the warriors. She says that the spirits will come and take revenge by "taking their children away." Bangayon recalls that the spirits are believed to be the cause of sudden and unexplained deaths of children and infants. Furthermore, the spirit of a deceased grandparent or another near relative is also believed to have the ability to make a child ill, so that the child may join him in the afterworld.

In order to "scare" and "drive the spirits away," the women have themselves tattooed, not only on their bodies but also their faces. The *lin-lingao* (x-marks) "confuse" the spirits, as the spirits then are unable to recognize the person they want to exact revenge on. The *batek*, in a way, is a means to deceive the malevolent spirits and impede their machinations, and to foster the belief that the *lin-lingao* and other rites are effective means of protection.

Van Gennep notes the confusion of the rites of passage with another rite called rites of protection and this may very well explain why the former have not been accorded much importance. The *lin-lingao*, for example, is intended to shelter the woman and the child from malevolent powers and to ensure good health.

When the child reaches two or three years old, he or she is made to undergo the *gammid*, the traditional manner by which grandparents recognize and accept a grandchild. The child is brought to the grandfather's paternal house, where the grandfather tenders a small party and gives a gift to the child. The gift is usually a necklace of beads to be treasured by the child for the rest of his life (Abellera 88 and Dozier 93). At the age of 10 to 15 years, the adolescents are taught how to kill:

The boys were allowed to hack and spear the corpses of enemies that were carried home for the purpose. For sons of the *pangats* . . . they would take his little son, sneak up behind some citizen, and help the boy jab a spear into one of the citizen's buttocks. Then the *pangat* would pick up his young hopeful and hurry into his house. He would later pay wergilds. The boy would immediately attain great prestige in his own age group and be entitled to his tattoo as soon as he came of age (Barton 42-43).

Boys at this stage develop pride in warfare-related activities. They are like young apprentices under the supervision of older males (*apong*) and other male adults (*olitog*). They become proficient in the use of the spear, shield, and head axe in preparation for war-related activities. Today, these activities have become insignificant to the youth who have gone out of Lubo to study and to work in the cities.

### **Batek and Rites of Transition**

In the Ilubo, childhood lasts until the performance of an important ceremony called the *igam*. This marks the beginning of adolescence. At the age of 15 to 18 years, a Lubo male goes on to his *igam*, a ceremony reserved for the men in early adulthood, as this is an initiation to manhood. The initiation rites are a means of establishing sexual identity and adult status.

Lakay Ollasic (90+ years old), a *pangat* (leader), describes his initiation. The elders told him to go to the river and fish or to the forest to hunt. This preparatory rite for the actual *igam* is called *lames ni wangwang*. He returned to the village after his successful hunting, and, while on his way back to the village, he recounts that he sang the *dinayan* song, boasting of his success and bringing in the catch. During this initial stage of the ritual, the animals are said to be the substitutes for the head/s to be taken during the actual headtaking.

Lakay Ollasic, who participated in the *kayaw* (headhunting), had his *igam* performed when he was 19-20 years old. He joined and participated in the killings in the anti-Japanese military movement in Lubuagan and Tanglag. The Kalinga harbored the Americans, and were feared guerilla warriors. A number of Kalinga proudly exhibit tattooed chests that they acquired because they had killed Japanese soldiers (Dozier 46). While returning home, the young Ollasic and his companions, undergoing *igam*, had to jump over an *ardan* (ladder) in the village entrance called the *sipotan*. The *sipotan* is like a point of passage and a boundary that separates the individual from the enemy world (separation). Ollasic explained that the symbolic jumping over the ladder is a physical expression of not leaving their soul or sanity in the outside (enemy's) world. Therefore, crossing a threshold is symbolic of a reunion with or a reincorporation into the community.

Upon entry to the village, they were stripped off all their clothes (*karaka*), and they only had wide leaves to cover themselves. Ollasic recalls "*karakain nan kami*," meaning, the people took away all the possessions of the returning warrior, like clothes, beads, *durao* (headdress), *baag* (loincloth), spears or shield. The *karaka* is a ritual believed to bestow good health and luck to the people, and is supposed to transfer the luck of a successful warrior to the people. For the warriors, the act is believed to make them strong and sturdy like the warriors of the past.

The *igam* also entails the men's participation in the *baruknit* (intervillage conflicts), where they kill or literally bring home an enemy's head. The *igam* continues with another rite, where the neophyte warrior is given a *durao*, a warrior or headhunter's plume, and is brought to the *kayaw* for the first time to join the headhunting

expedition with the rest of the male neophytes in the community. *Kayaw* means the mass invasion of a village by the inhabitants of another village. This involves open clashes between two hostile groups. Even teenagers who are able to bear arms are allowed to go along with their elders (Sugguiyao 196). Warriors who are against their *kabusor* (an enemy) from another village are encouraged to *mangkayaw* or to kill someone (*papatay*).

Lakay Ollasic continues: the next day, his mother Sapgatin called the *mandadawak* to perform the *dawak* (chants). There was chanting and the rhythmic beating of the *gangsá* (gongs) by Ollasic's other companions. He danced while holding a chicken. The *mandadawak* placed a red scarf (*bandela*) around his head, and stuck rooster feathers as head plumes. The priestess prayed that, whenever he wears the *durao*, he would always be brave and strong. The *mandadawak* then tied the *baag* (loincloth) around his waist.

When Ollasic turned 21, the process of tattooing was performed. He was tattooed by the *manbatek* in the village. Right after the war against the Japanese, Ollasic and his other male companions, numbering over 50 young men, were simultaneously tattooed by all *manbateks* in the village. It took three days to tattoo them, and the men had to bear the painful pricking of their skin. The *batek* session of the *maingor* (warrior) is the solemn milestone in maturity for Ilubo males. It marks the total departure from childhood and adolescence. The tattoos include the (a) *binulibud*, three parallel lines found at the lower to the upper arm; and (b) the *bikking*, chest tattoos (Figure 1-2).

One of the important rites that are not openly discussed by the old Ilubo warriors is circumcision. There is a notion that initiation rites coincide with puberty, and that this physiological phenomenon is the point of departure for all such ceremonies (Van Gennep 65). In an effort to approximate their ages and to delineate the mark of physiological and social puberty, I have found out that circumcision, or the ritual of *sigyat* can be performed later and that tattooing is a priority among the Ilubo males. In other words, the *batek* comes before circumcision.

Likewise, young women in puberty are tattooed. For the women, however, the *dumara* (menstruation) is not a total taboo in

the society. The tattooing is done before and/or after the menstruation of a young woman. Many of my informants approximate that they were tattooed between the ages of 13 to 15 years, just right before or right after their menstruation. Some of the old women said that tattooing helps in the smooth flow of blood from the vagina. Menstruation is an indication of physiological puberty, and is a biological prerequisite for marriage. The women are tattooed with the (a) *nirafarafat* or *inufu-ufug* (centipede designs) on the arms, lower arm and on the shoulder blades (Figures 11-12).

Tattooing is also a preparatory rite for both males and females to enter another state of passage called the *adumba*. This is a dance ceremony of the retreating men, who beat the gongs suspended from human jawbones, and encircle the women, who mark time without locomotion and revolve in place to face the warriors dancing around them. In any Kalinga dance, physical contact among the dancers is taboo.

Apo Bayyang and Liddawa, two old women from Lubo, recall the *adumba* done while they were still young. They explained that tattooing was already done, so they could find prospective partners among the tattooed warriors during the celebration of the *sagang* (the victory feast). The women were reported to have the privilege of being tattooed whenever a male relative received his tattoo. Since all regional members are considered related, a woman is always able to find some tattooed male relative who gives her the right to be tattooed (Dozier 201). During the *adumba*, the women wear the *kain* adorned with platelets of silver and colored stones, creating an impact on the sight and sound of the dance. The tattoos also make them attractive to the men and vice versa. Apo Bayyang explains that the *adumba* is the event where the women can find a potential mate, and that this rite of *adumba* is an indication that a woman is of marrying age and capable of bearing a child. They are already considered marriageable after they complete the ceremonies. The sexual, reproductive, emotional, intellectual, and role changes result from the destiny and nature of the individual's body (Richards 78). The *mai'ngor* (warriors) and *bobaei* (women) now join the autonomous worlds of mature adults or ancestors. The *adumba* is a rite of passage, where changes take place in the total person.

*Batek* is not just for men but for women. The tattoos for women indicate initiation into adulthood and full participation in the social life of the group. Tattoos signify acceptance, a sense of belonging, and identity. Daughters of the *kadangyan* (the rich) members of the community are obliged to have their tattoos when they reach puberty. The pressure of being labeled “different” from the rest of the community is a cause of shame.

*Batek* also indicates permanent differentiation from peers. In different villages, there are stories of how the young girls without tattoos get teased by the young men. The young men would make fun of girls by spitting on their hands, and rubbing these on the girl’s arms. This was probably taken as a sign that the girls were entering a stage of maturity and, as such, obliged to accept their social functions such as getting tattoos or preparing for marriage.

### **Batek and Rites of Incorporation**

One of the markers for incorporation and/or advancement of a *mai’ngor* into a higher class is his participation in the *kayaw* (headhunt). Among the Ilubo Kalingas and other groups in the Cordillera, a young man cannot be sure of marrying the woman of his choice until he has taken part in a successful headhunt (Folkmar 56). Today, headhunting is no longer practised: it was outlawed extensively when the Americans came in the 1940s.

The men’s participation in the *kayaw* was inspired by the *dagdagas*, which literally means to bring home the head, and win the woman of his choice. Headhunting may be used in the accumulation of the “soul force” (Hoskins 8) beneficial for the warrior and the community. Hence, *kayaw* and *batek* are considered sources of much virility to the young warriors.

Marriage constitutes a clear mark of permanent incorporation among the Ilubo into a family. If certain arrangements and dowry exchange are done on both the male and the female, the *kopya* is performed. The *kopya* is the ceremonial blessing of the newly married couples. The union of the two individuals is also the union of collective groups like kindred brethren. Today, this ritual has found a substitute in church weddings and civil marriages.

In 1990, I met Apo Arrunai, one of the old women from Kalinga, who recalled that her father had tattoos all over his body, and he married her mother who also had full body tattoos. She was once told as a young child (while being pressured to get her arm tattoo) that the tattoos of her parents were a source of pride, and were responsible for the birth of 15 children. The old, especially the women, explained that one of the reasons for their fertility was the presence of their body tattoos. In cases where the mother had tattoos, the father was encouraged to have one. Furthermore, she explained that, to some, wealth was based not only on material wealth but also on the number of children. Many of the old men and women had seven to 12 children, as family planning was not practised in this society. However, some couples still preferred to have fewer children because this was a better assurance that the inheritance will stay in the family.

I asked most of the women (all 35 tattooed female informants) if they actually got their tattoos willingly. Many said they were obliged by their parents or pressured by the rest of the group. In some cases, the girls could no longer bear the pain, and refused to finish the process. There were 28 informants who had unfinished tattoos, i.e., 28 of them do not have the tattoos at the back of the hand; 32 do not have the *sinokray* (necklace tattoo) (Figure 14). Three informants had one-half of their arms tattooed, but most wore the upper and lower arm tattoos.

### ***Incorporation to the Maingor***

The prevalence of tattooing in the pre-Spanish period is also the perpetuation of the *kamaranan*, a dominant warrior class and the life force of Ilubo polity. A warrior (*mai'ngor*) is assured of membership to the *kamaranan* through his participation in a successful headtaking. In the past, offensive warfare was organized for the purpose of gaining renown, prestige, the right to manifest heroic deeds by way of tattoo designs tattooed on men's breasts, throats and shoulders (Billiet and Lambrecht 18). In *baruknit* (intervillage conflicts), spears were thrown; head axes were brandished, warriors killed, and heads were taken off. Actually, only a minority of the men were "headhunters," although many more had been part of the headhunting party (De Raedt 69). Only the

actual killer was accorded the honor of a tattoo, but in cases where more than one person claimed the honor for the same victim, all those who hacked the same victim to death could claim to have killed such a victim and, hence, earned tattoos (De Raedt 63).

Tattooing starts at the back of the hand and the wrists. The first kill is denoted with stripe patterns which appear like tie band called *gulot*, or *pinupungol* (Figure 1). The term *munggolot* refers to the chief of the headhunting raid and literally means the “cutter of the head” (Billiet and Lambrecht 31), so when the *gulot* tattoo is earned, this means that the person has killed someone or has become a “headtaker.” Those who have killed two individuals have tattoo patterns on their hands. Warriors who have killed ten or more are the individuals who are permitted to wear the chest tattoos and other elaborate insignias (like the head axe) at the side of their stomach, back, thighs and legs and even the cheeks to connote unrivalled bravery of a warrior in a certain village (warrior status as *mai'ngor* or *mu'urmut*) (Figures 3-8).

Tattooing increases in proportion to the number of heads or participation in headhunting forays. Barton (230) once called these tattoos: “badges of honor” similar to the badges worn by present-day military soldiers. However, these “badges” are earned the painful way, and are permanently inscribed. He cites the following conditions to earn a tattoo:

If in killing or disposing of an enemy, a warrior fell into either of the following categories, he was entitled to one or any succeeding stage of the tattoo. After having obtained the first five tattoos, he could have any or all the rest without any further “killings:” (1) wounder of the living enemy, *gimaiyang*; (2) giver of the coup de grace, *manela*; (3) taker of the lower jaw - it is taken before the head is severed *sami*; (4) taker of the head, *maniwat*; (5) wounder of the torso, *dumagin* (238).

The black tattoo pattern against the brown skin made warriors look fearsome to the other members of other tribes, and appear attractive to women. Headhunters inspired fear in other people, especially those not closely related to them, because the tattoos indicated that they had killed. At the same time, tattoos

also inspired confidence in their kinsmen and village mates because headhunters were chief protectors. A settlement with one or more renowned headhunters made people safe from invasion, and their relatives could also feel confident in case of grave local disputes (de Raedt 64-65).

Being a man in Kalinga used to be defined by earning the coveted *dakag* tattoos (Figure 8) found at the back of the body. The wearer of the *dakag* is a recognized for exceptional and unsurpassed bravery. It is also worthwhile to note that the Kalingas did not only go to the war front to fulfill their prime duty to defend their country but also to take advantage of the opportunity to be warriors like their forebears (Sugguiyao 29).

The *baruknit* of the past were justified by the needs of the community; tattoos were considered as “badges of honor.” The warrior becomes a legitimate member of the *kamaranan*, the warrior class which is the life force of Ilubo. Incorporation to the group entails courage and determination. For the young and new warriors called the *mai'ngor*, getting a tattoo at that instant is a public declaration of bravery and advantageous for them, most especially if they are unmarried as this makes them more attractive to the women. For the *mu'urmut* (revered warrior), the marking adds to his prestige, and he gains more respect from the community. Through this, the *mai'ngor* and *mu'urmut* may improve their social standing, and become a *lalakay* (respected elder).

A man who has earned tattoos has social privileges, religious roles and political influence in the community. As the *mai'ngor* grows older and becomes a *mu'urmut* (revered warrior), he also becomes a respected elder – a *pangat* (consultant) in *pudons*, or *buddongs* (peace pacts) between communities and other tribal groups. He is accorded respect and acknowledged as an elder: an elder who has a distinguished headhunting record, an aggressive personality and a persuasive arbiter. This is the case of the surviving tattooed men who, in their old age, continue to carry significant roles and maintain influence in the community to this day. Although the elders sustain the village polity, they now play a very limited role in the centralized political organization in Kalinga, and are largely called on for ceremonial purposes only.

Today, killing (using guns and arms) by revenge is done on a personal basis. In fact, educated people — even the innocent ones — have been the prized targets for revenge. In my last fieldwork in Kalinga, I witnessed indiscriminate firing and bombing due to intervillage conflicts. This endless conflict has resulted in employees leaving their jobs, and the cancellation of classes. Several have sought peace and refuge in other provinces. “Honor” is accorded to the perpetrator of various crimes.

### ***Liminality of Rites of Passage***

The transition from one stage to the other draws attention to the liminality of the rites of passage. The period has the properties of the threshold, a sacred boundary between two spaces, where antagonistic principles confront one another and the world is reversed. The rites of these moments also obey the principle of the maximization of magical profits (Bourdieu 70).

Once the *batek* is placed on the skin, an individual has to undergo a process of healing and recovery. The pain is both physical and psychological, and may explain why some women walk away from the process. For instance, when natives die of natural causes, the practice of putting the dead in a “chair,” called *sangidel*, results in the swelling of their arms. The swelling of the arms is very similar to what occurs during the tattoo process. This “probably” creates a psychological impact that made them walk away from the painful process. The swelling of the arms usually take about two weeks to subside after the tattooing process, and even if the swollen arms are given some time to rest and heal, work never ceases. Moreover, newly tattooed women still have to tend to their household chores and farming.

For three days, the swelling arms do not subside. Yet the men and women still continue with their daily chores. At this stage, there are taboos in tattooing: they are not allowed to eat food that can cause itchiness and irritation to the wounds, i.e., *sili*, *gabi*, and salt. Neither do they apply anything to heal the wound.

The wound dries after two weeks to one month and the newly tattooed bathe in the river, and wash their wounds so the dead skin peels off. Depending on how the wounds heal, coconut oil, or,

sometimes, pig fat is applied on the skin so as to keep it dry and the tattoos visible. This practice of applying coconut oil on tattooed skin is still performed by old men and women. The beautiful tattoos become clear and black. Oil applied to the skin enhances the wearer's healthy appearance and vivacity (Strathern 95).

Another psychological pain is the pressure from the parents, society and their male counterparts. Young women with tattoos are prepared for the *adumba*, the sign that a woman is ready to marry and give birth to a child. A woman who refuses to be tattooed is said to be barren.

When a tattoo is placed on the skin, there is no way to remove it because the ink is placed deep beneath the skin's outer layer. There are no other reasons why some women do not finish their tattoos. Some observed that when one gets old and the skin becomes wrinkled, especially the wrists, the skin looks very dark and ugly. Tattooed women between the ages of 45 to 50 years conspicuously have worn long-sleeved shirts to cover their tattoos and do not allow their wrists to be tattooed because of disgrace. In the earlier records, during the country's colonial history, people with tattoos were regarded as criminals. This kind of perception is still evident among the young Ilubo who have refused to be tattooed because of fear of being labeled as criminals.

The use of Van Gennep's schema has a theoretical value in studying the *batek* in relation to rites of passage. The movements or phases of the rites of separation, transition and incorporation cannot be treated in isolation, but taken as an aggregation of related symbolic acts in the life cycle of the Ilubo. The *batek* reflects physical or psychological changes or changes in status that take place, but also coincides with the chart of the individual's progress toward social maturity. The *batek*, which pervades the social world of the Ilubo, indicates the Ilubo's reintegration into the universe of their ancestors, and, more importantly, their community.

### ***Tattoos as Visual Imagery and Talisman***

Specific tattoo designs evoke visual imagery that are instantly understood by members of the *mai'ngor* class and the rest of the community as well. These images found on their body tattoos are

cultural referents of particular ideas held by the community. An excellent example is the tattoos of the warrior. The Ilubo were traditionally headhunters, and much of the imagery is concerned with headhunting. Lakay Tabbang (70+) has a tattoo of the *gayaman nan banas* (centipede-eating lizard) found at the back of his hand (Figure 6). He falls back on folk belief to provide an explanatory function for headhunting symbolism. In the *ili*, the centipedes are abundant, and people have observed how successful they are in catching their prey, the lizards. For him, the centipedes are the warriors successfully taking the enemy's head. It is tattooed on the arm, because it is the "taker of the enemy." He also proffers the information that among the attributes of lizards is that of being *bulon ti mangayaw* (friends of the warriors), since they are frequently encountered along the trails during headhunting forays. Other warriors have special insignias, like the *khaman* (headaxe), to symbolize that the person has participated in headhunting.

The *bituwon* (star), *sorag* (moon) and the *pingao* (bird) are expressions which draw from their environment. Jacob Angnganai, the old *manbatek* tells the story of the moon found on his nape. He said that the moon and the stars are the source of direct light in the dark, especially at night when they hold vigils before raiding the village.

The tattoos of the elders likewise reveal their social standing in the community. For instance, profusely tattooed men in the village are considered as *pangat* (respected elder) and are sometimes revered. Fully tattooed women are recognized as daughters of the *kadangyan* (the affluent class). However, for the Ilubo people, the practice of tattooing is not limited to a single class and one can be tattooed as long as the person is able to pay the *manbatek's* fee for tattooing. Tattooing not only indicates their social standing, but is also an equalizing factor in the context of the painful rite of passage. The Ilubo are aware of the collective force of their social group, and they express their awareness through the symbols of their tattoos. Being tattooed is a concrete realization of the sense of social unity of the members of the group.

For some old men and women, tattoos are talismans. The etchings on the human body of the figures of powerful beasts,

esoteric patterns and religious formulas confer on the body special powers, such as strength and invulnerability (Arriola 84). The *batek* is believed to be an effective means of protection from any disease. At one point, there was an outbreak of cholera and malaria that killed many, including the Spaniards who went up to the mountains in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The snakelike tattoo patterns on the skin were said to have protected the bearer from cholera and malaria. Some tattoo their throat because this is believed to cure goiter. For the warriors, the tattoos are their protection. Some report to have remained unharmed by the strike of the *bolo* or axe on their skin. The warriors believe that the tattoo marks, such as animal figures, give the wearer magical powers while in combat.

### ***Tattoos and Aesthetics***

The elaborateness of the body tattoos expresses an aesthetic component of *batek*. More importantly, it articulates *ambaru*, the Ilubo concept of beauty. Young men or women become *ambaru* (beautiful) when their bodies are tattooed. Tattoos make the males *mangkusdor* (handsome and strong) and the females, *bumaru* (beautiful). The bluish-black tattoo pattern against the brown skin incited fear among people of other villages, and make women attractive. The *dinuras*, or people without tattoos are regarded as weak beings, and considered as a bad omen for the community.

The tattoos share geometric visual designs with the Ilubo *baag* (loincloth for men) and the *kain* (skirt for women). It will be observed that *batek* creates an illusion of an upper garment. The *sinokray* tattoo (Figure 14) of the women, translates to “the sleeves of the shirt” which is an extension of the women’s *kain*. The tattoos were considered as cheap and inexpensive garment as early as the 1920s (Vanoverbergh 1926). Many of the women recall that, during important occasions such as *cañaos* (feasts), their tattoos are their best “costumes.”

The concept of *ambaru* is not confined to body tattoos, but also extends to concepts of craftsmanship in *fanga* (pottery), in *arasag* (shield design) and other forms of material culture where these tattoo designs are found.

## CHANGING IDENTITIES IN THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

*Batek* changes the role and status of an Ilubo. This is reflected in the distinctive regimens of body art. In their irreversible forms, the traces of such alterations of the body amount to a kind of biographical accumulation – “a dynamic, cumulative instrumentality representing the palimpsest of intense experiences that define the evolving person” (Rubin 14). The “naked” person has evolved to a “marked person”: his/her right as a member of the community or his/her kindred is acknowledged.

In the 1960s, the government and the church outlawed tattooing and headhunting. This augured the eventual breakdown of the context and the loss of the significance of *batek*. From the sixties onwards, there were very few young and educated men who persisted in adhering to the tradition. The Ilubos fought against invading New People’s Army (NPA) or rebel soldiers in the village, but, unlike in the past when warriors fought with their spears and axes, the young Ilubo men fought with guns and ammunition. The act of protecting the village is a form of bravery and, even in contemporary times, it is still an act that merits the accordance of tattoos. An old *manbatek* tattooed these young men, but with a different design – a combination of an eagle design (copied from a 25-centavo 1920 American coin) called *binau-bauka* and another bird called the *idao*, (Figure 9) combined with a *binulibud*, which is a traditional tattoo design for the warriors of the past.

Some of the younger informants (30-35 years old) have their surnames tattooed at the inner side of their lower arm; the “name tattoo” is also found among the old tattooed warriors. For instance, the younger people would tattoo themselves in a crude manner with their surnames such as “OLLASIC, DICANG, LIDDAWA” and others. Most of the Ilubo now residing and studying in the cities say they have refused to be tattooed the traditional way (full body tattoos) because they are embarrassed and afraid of being labeled as a “criminal.” They associate tattoos with notorious gangs or prisoners, and prefer not to be tattooed to avoid getting in trouble with other people. The widespread adoption of modern clothing (pants, sweatshirts) has also contributed to the erosion of a practice

that depended, in part, on the visibility of the tattoos. Today, many of the old Ilubo come and attend festivals, but conceal their tattoos by wearing long-sleeved shirts.

Likewise, women report the fear of “exploitation” as another deterrent to their acquiring tattoos. Many women relate they have refused to take off their shirts when asked by foreigners or other people who wanted to photograph them. Their tattoos, they say, are an “added attraction” and an unwelcome “invitation to exploitation.”

The highly educated son of the old *manbatek*, Lakay Jacob, who now lives in the city had traditional designs (*gayaman* and *binakuko*), and modern ones (a dagger and a rose) tattooed on his upper arm. The designs were done both by a modern tattoo artist at a shop in the city. The combination of the old and new best concretizes his current orientation. He has imbibed new values, but has not forgotten the customs of the past.

Despite these modifications in tattoo practice, certain forces are causing the waning of the practice, and possibly its eventual loss. These are migration, education and religion which have created new values running counter to the ethos of the Ilubo. Also because of the pain factor and lengthy process of *batek*, the young Ilubo prefers to have tattoos done by a tattugraph in shops found in the cities.

Perhaps, a deeper explanation why the Ilubos today do not persist in getting tattoos is the belief that the *batek* is hard-earned and reserved primarily for the “rightful persons.” These are the respected village elders, oftentimes revered warriors of the past and who participated in headtaking. By the time the present generation were born, headtaking had long been out of practice. Getting a tattoo without participating in the actual process of *igam* can be considered as an insult to their elders. Tattooing has disappeared following the gradual demise of headhunting and headtaking practices, along with transmission of new values to the present generation.

## CONCLUSION

The markers of the Kalinga body give us a notion of Kalinga reason and beauty, but can likewise be understood as deviations associated with the Kalinga themes of otherness and difference. The visual markers on the Igorot body give an individual a level of identification with a culturally defined collectivity – they enable a sense of community. The body is central to the transformation of the Kalinga self, and is associated with the different rituals brought about by community regimens. Although it is given that the Kalinga identity has experienced episodes of both growth and decline from the past to the present, tattoos still serve as an archive of culture for the group.

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## TATTOOS OF THE MEN

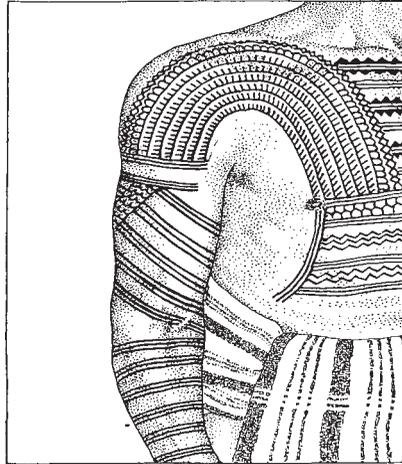


Figure 1: The *gulot* found on the wrists of the warrior. The designs are called the *binulibud*. The three parallel lines crossing the lower arm up to upper arm is called the *binulibud*, or tie band. From the word *gulot*, which literally means "cutter of the head," the marking means that a man has killed one or more and participated in a headhunting expedition.

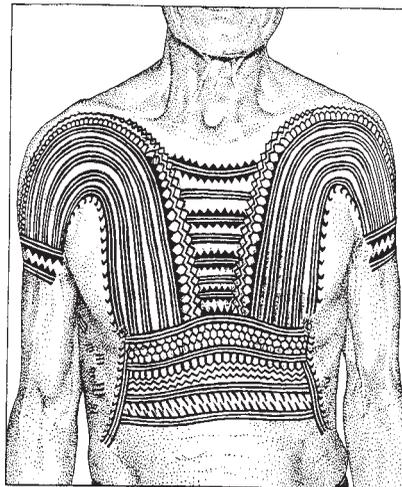


Figure 2: The *biking* or the chest tattoos of a warrior shows the unity and symmetry of the designs. This is the next stage of putting elaborate tattoos on the body after the upper arm tattoo.

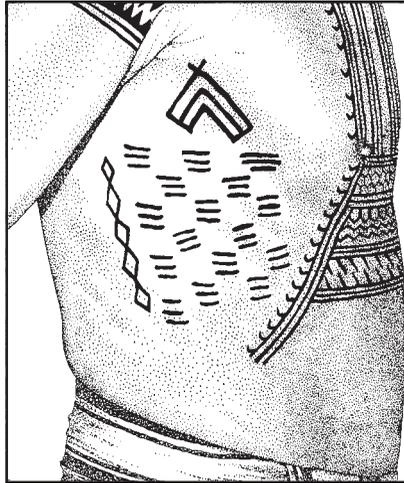


Figure 3: Detail of the *pinarparting* composed of the *khaman* (headaxe) used to brandish the head of the enemy. This is an important "badge" that clearly identifies the warrior. The *pinipingao* (bird) is a symbolic representation. The good sound of the bird is a good omen for their expedition, and the *parting* (three parallel lines) indicate where the villages where the warrior fought.

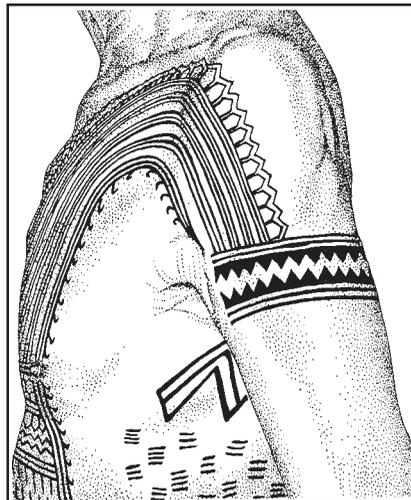


Figure 4: The *binakuko* design (crisscross) found on the upper arm of the warrior. The warriors say that this indicate the paths that the warrior crossed during the many expeditions.

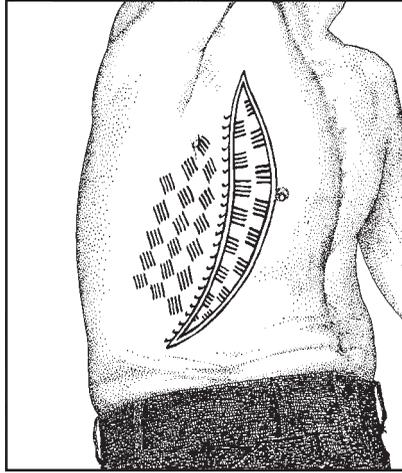


Figure 5: Another design of the *pinarparting* composed of the *parting* (three short lines) indicating that the warrior has fought in different villages. The *sorag* (moon) is their light and guide when caught in the darkness of the night.

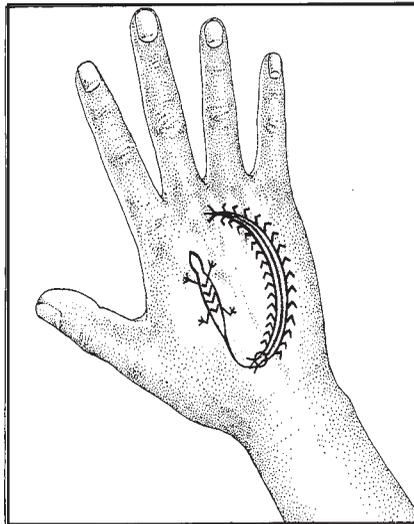


Figure 6: *Gayaman nan banas*, or centipede-eating lizard is a mythical story of the warriors, taking “prey” or the “enemy’s head.”

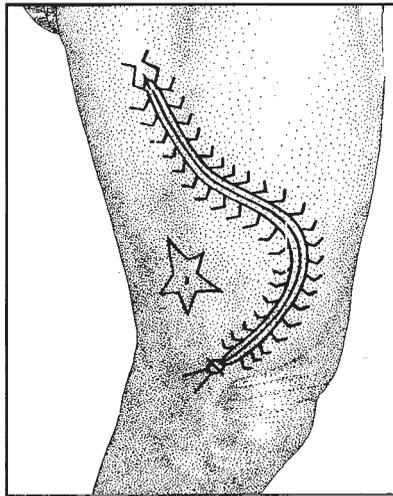


Figure 7: A special insignia of the *bituwon* (star) and the *gayaman* (centipede). Warriors believe that *bituwon* gives light to the path of the warriors.

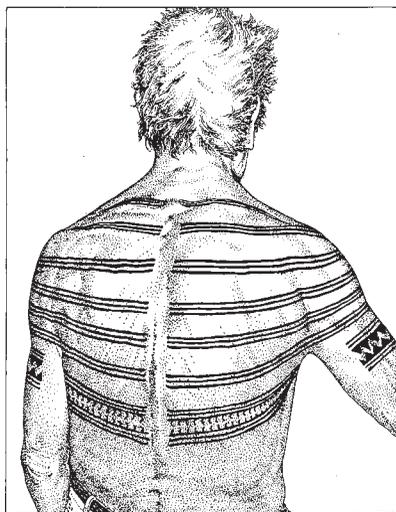


Figure 8: The *dakag* tattoos found at the back of the undaunted warrior (*mu'urmut*), is a combination of the *binulibud* and the *gayaman* designs. This is a very rare tattoo and indicates the culmination of Ilubo manhood called the *datum*. The wearer of the *dakag* displays them as a recognition of exceptional and unsurpassed bravery.

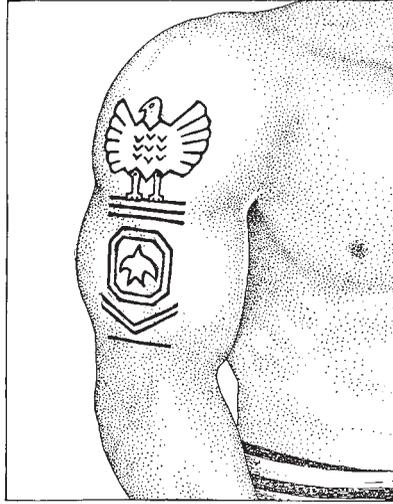


Figure 9: The new tattoo found on a 48-year-old Ilubo man who defended the village from intruders. The designs are a combination of a traditional tattoo design, and an eagle copied from an American coin.

## TATTOOS OF THE WOMEN

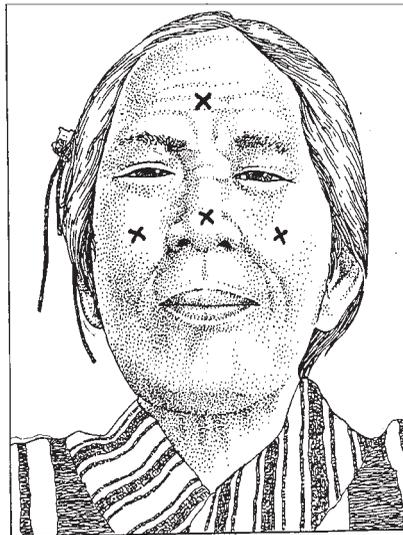


Figure 10: The *lin-lingao* tattoo found on the face of an old woman in the village.

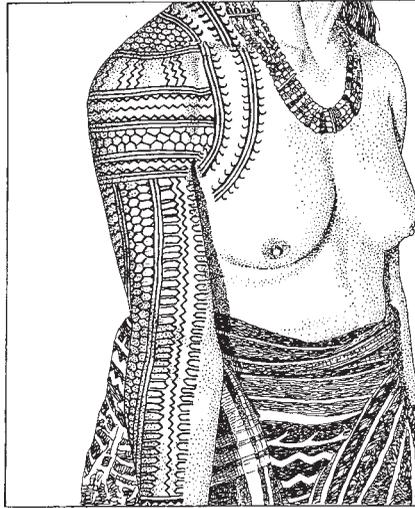


Figure 11: The *nirafa-rafat*, or *inufu-ufug* tattoo design are the scales of the centipede. The designs are from the *manbatek* (tattoo artist).

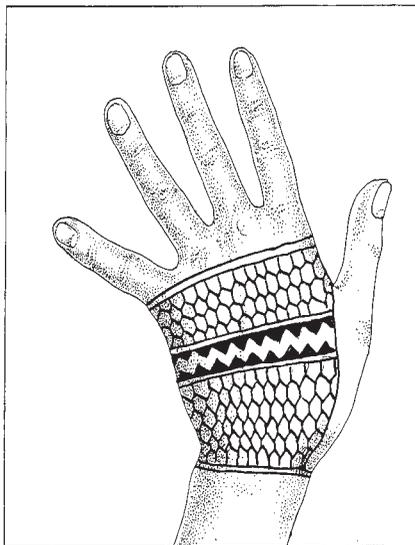


Figure 12: The same tattoo designs found on the arm of the women. This part is the most painful body part to be tattooed. Most women have unfinished tattoos on the lower arm.

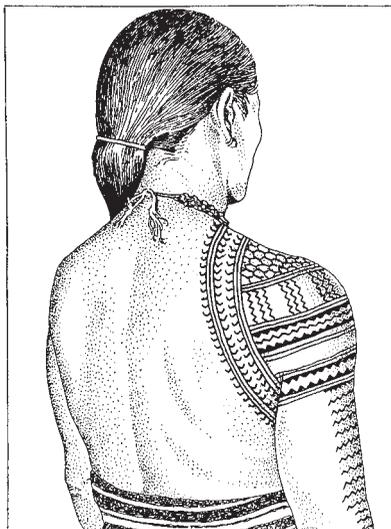


Figure 13: At the back of the shoulder blades is a combination of different tattoo designs, the most dominant is *ginay-gayaman* tattoo.

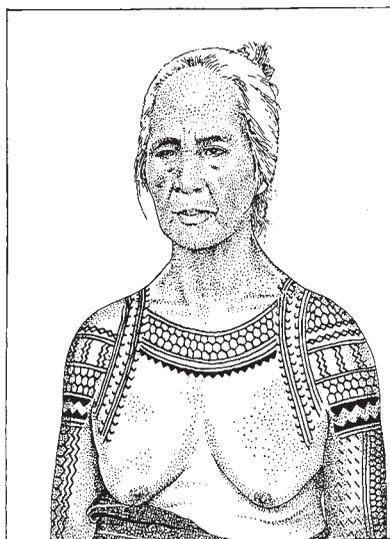


Figure 14: The *sinokray* that translates to the “sleeves of the shirt” translates to an illusion of the upper garment, an extension of the *kain* (women’s skirt). This is also a rare tattoo.

## PHOTOGRAPH/SLIDE DESCRIPTIONS



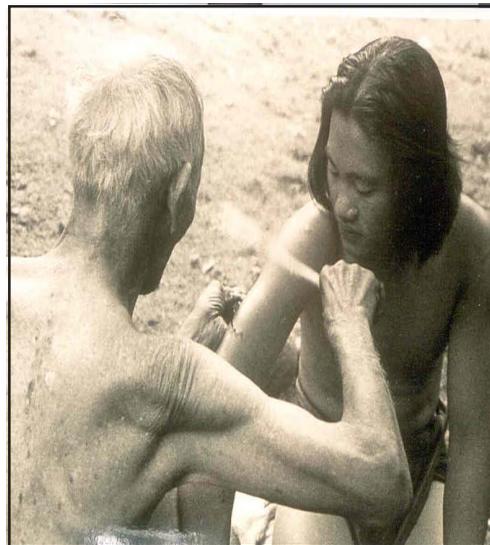
Slide 1: The traditional way of tattooing is the use of a *pat-ik* (stick) that hits the *gisi* (tattoo instrument with needles). The *manbatek* (tattoo artist) taps the *gisi*, the *gambang* (needles) pierces the skin and the first tattoo design will appear.



Slide 2: The *gisi* (the tattoo instrument) from a carabao horn bent over the fire. At the tip are four needles (*gambang*).



Slide 3: The *kammai*, a wood with carved tattoo designs, are stamped on the skin. This will serve as a guide in the actual tattooing.



Slide 4: Hand-tapped pricking.



Slide 5: The elaborate chest-piece, called the *binakuko* and *binulibud*, are dominant tattoos among the warriors.



Slide 6: The *gayaman* (centipede) is a warrior sign among the Kalinga warriors. The *bituwon* (star) is the guide of the warriors at night, most especially during the headhunting expedition.



Slide 8: The tattoos of the women found on the upper and lower arm.



Slide 9: The *bongor* (beads) complement the tattoos of the women found on the shoulder blades.

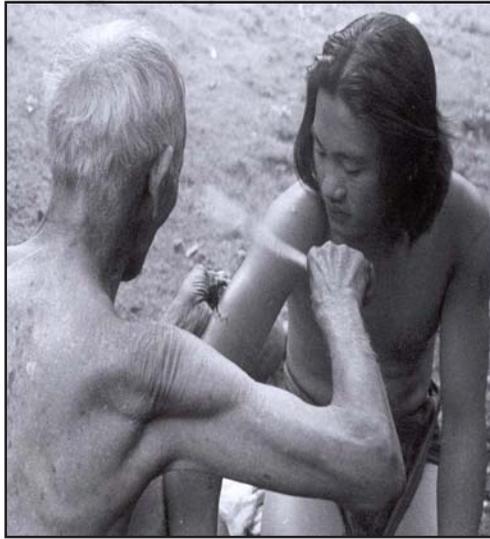


Photo 10: The same with Slide 4.

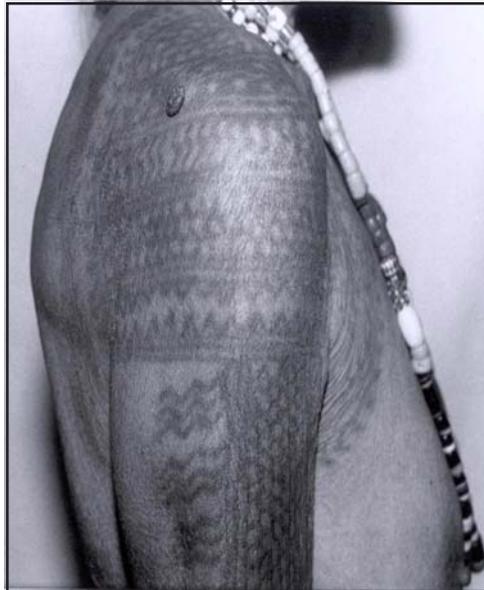


Photo 11: Tattoos of the women.



Photo 12: The *gulot* (cutter of the head) is the first tattoo marked on a Kalinga warrior.

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