

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

Batak-Palawano

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

Batak:Bya

Palawano-Brooke's Point:plw

Palawano-central:plc

Palawano-southwest: plv

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

They are located on the island of Palawan in the Philippines, at 9.5275° N, 118.3975° E

1.4 Brief history:

The Palawano are restricted to the south side of the island while the Batak are on the northern side. It is believed that they migrated along a land bridge that connected the island with the main continent through Borneo. While this island was a major stopping point on trade lines for thousands of years, the people were able to restrain from acculturation while taking benefit of useful tools and other items through trade. In the sixteenth century the Spanish took control of the Philippine islands, but Palawan was not completely controlled until the latter part of the nineteenth century. Only in the twentieth century did they begin facing acculturation. The population is now affected by the influence of Islam, as significant proportions of their tribes are now converted Muslims. (1)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

The Palawano of the southern part of the Palawan island have been subject to Islam acculturation for several centuries, while the Batak, until recently, have been left alone. In recent times, the Batak have begun to accept Christianity as their primary religion. (1,2)

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

The island is surrounded by a coral beach, and will record rainfall of over 100 inches annually. The island traditionally was covered in a typical tropical rainforest found on other islands in the region. (1)

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density:

The Palawano prefer small settlements of 2-10 houses per village. These villages are usually members of immediate family such as groups of sisters, and the size of a household is no greater than 25 individuals. Houses are usually built on high slopes looking over a valley.

Traditionally the Batak were nomadic hunters who roamed with their small family units from area to area, making roughly 20 temporary camps throughout the course of a year. In recent years, due to external pressures they have been forced to make permanent villages (13 total) and have small traveling parties gather food. As of 1972, the total Batak population in all villages was less than 400. (1,2)

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Rice, yams, taro, and manioc. The Batak also collect honey. (1)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Wild game such as deer, boars, birds, fish and shellfish. (1,2)

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

Blowguns with poison darts are very common within the tribes as are spears. They will also fashion traps to catch small game such as ground birds, squirrels and rodents. The Batak also use a bow and arrow. (1,2)

2.4 Food storage:

Food is stored in special made containers constructed of bamboo. These can store nuts and tobacco. Women will also construct baskets for storing rice and other vegetables from their gardens. There is little indication of meat storage, most probably due to environmental factors. (1)

2.5 Sexual division of production:

All hunting is performed by the male. The females are typically in charge of gathering food from the forests. In the Batak, both men and women share duties in gathering honey, although it is the men who make the storage and extracting vessels. Women will also weave baskets and sleeping mats. Men will manufacture cloth mad of bark from a paper mulberry tree. (1)

2.6 Land tenure:

There is no direct evidence for specified "ownership" of land. It seems that the land is universally used by both tribes within each tribe's given home range.

2.7 Ceramics:

Nothing was specified within the text. It is possible that ceramics have made their way to the island through trade, but there is no active manufacturing of ceramics within the tribes.

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

The Batak would share their collected foods within their nuclear family first before sharing with others within the group. Fortunately, often times large game items were killed, allowing the "owner" of the meat to be able to share accordingly.(1)

2.9 Food taboos:

Not specified.

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

Not specified.

3. Anthropometry *all from source* (2)

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

Batak: 1.53 meters, 46.5 kg

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

Batak: 1.43 meters, 40.5 kg

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

Not specified.

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

The earliest age of first birth within the Batak population is 15 for women. No information on men was available. (2)

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

Not specified.

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

Not specified.

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

Not specified.

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

Not specified.

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

No percentage was provided, although the Batak to permit polygamy within their society. However, this has become increasingly rare.

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

The Palawano do exhibit bride purchase through a ceremony explained later. In recent years it has become more in the form of money and less materialistic in terms of giving the bride's family gifts of food and tools. (1)

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

There is no indication of specified patterns of inheritance except that the territory is passed down in somewhat of a matrilinear fashion.

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

The Batak have increasingly spent more time caring and playing with their young. Fathers may stop their work to sing for the children or play a song with a pontigonggong, a stinged instrument. (1)

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

No information available.

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

The Batak do prefer to marry individuals who are close to their childhood "home" territory for obvious reasons—they know the area and are familiar with navigating it. However, there are many instances where they will marry individuals across the nation in order to promote peace within the society and avoid incestual restrictions. (1)

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?

There is no evidence of partible paternity within either tribes.

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows")

There are no documented examples of the view on the mother's role in pregnancy and motherhood.

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

No evidence for belief in an incremental process.

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

No information available.

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

No information available.

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

Not specified in the literature.

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

Not specified in the literature. Furthermore, there was no evidence of extramarital partners or offspring.

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

Not specified.

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

No definitive numbers were available for either population to provide a proper calculation of the ratio.

4.22 Evidence for couvades

No evidence of couvades.

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

There was no evidence provided in the literature for extramarital partners, so there is no distinction for potential fathers. Given the small village sizes of the Palawano and the family nomadic traditional ways of the Batak, it is highly likely that any extramarital actions would either be highly incestual or would be rapidly known within the group.

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

No evidence provided in the literature.

4.24 Joking relationships?

No indications of joking relationships.

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

All decent is matrilineal within the Palawano. The tiny villages are made up of groups of sisters and their respective families. (1)

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

The Batak people have special rules concerning incest avoidance, although (unfortunately) none were specifically outlined within the sources. (1)

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

In the Palawano, there is a very intricate ritual for marriage. It begins with a feast at the bride's family's house, followed by a traditional "discussion" about why the two should be married. The conversation can go on for hours. The couple to be married will enter the room, both ornately dressed. They will circle the central place of honor 7 times before they are seated. Once seated, magical acts are presented to the couple for good luck. They are asked to give verbal proof that they are truly in love before members of both bride and the groom's families begin to lay down the rule for a happy marriage.

There is a marriage gift given to the family of the bride by the family of the groom. It is usually bowls and containers for women, weapons such as spears and sabers for the men as well as ornaments for the female are traditional gifts provided by the groom's family. However, in recent years money has become a more common gift than the traditional items listed previously. (1)

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

There was no information in the literature about name changing within either the Batak or the Palawano tribes.

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

Marriages in the Batak are preferred to be maintained within their immediate territory (traditionally), but many were also permitted throughout the Batak nation, which meant that one individual had kin in many villages, which aided in uniting the nation. (1)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

There are arranged marriages within the history of the Palawano people, specifically between the central (traditional) Palawano and the costal Islamic Palawano, although the sources never indicate who initiated the exchange or any specified ground rules for the mate exchange. (1)

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

No evidence of marriage conflict.

Warfare/homicide

Neither the Batak nor the Palawano seem to actively take part in inter tribal warfare. The Palawano people are described as being an extremely peaceful race, especially between members of their tribe. However, historical references suggest that the Batak were an intimidating, warlike group, especially in encounters with individuals from the outside world. There is no evidence in any of the sources for continued warfare however.

There are some reports of warfare between the Muslims and the Palawano people, although there are no statistical data to interpret. (1,2)

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

4.18 Cannibalism?

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

Not specified.

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

There are no mobility patterns. The Batak-Palawano people have established houses where they reside and do not migrate with changing seasons. The Batak will travel for trading and gathering of resources/hunting, and they will build small, temporary shelters when traveling away from their main village. (1)

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

The Palawano and Batak are strictly egalitarian as they remain in such small villages. There are meetings between local villages if the need arises such as a large conflict that cannot be controlled locally. (1)

5.4 Post marital residence:

The Batak people typically reside in the same settlement as the bride's family, further suggesting matrilineal decent within the tribes. (1)

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

There are no examples of defined boundaries within either tribe, nor is there an active defense. The Batak do tend to stay in a localized area, although there is no evidence for violent encounters concerning territory.

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

Not specified.

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

The Palawano have a special "blood bond," which is essentially the distinction of a family member. However, this blood bond is not limited to only the nuclear family. Close relatives and friends may also go through a blood pact ceremony. (1)

5.8 Village and house organization:

The Palawano have an interesting 3 level house. The topmost level is the sleeping level, where the family will reside for sleeping as well as the storage of the household's weapons and tools. The middle level is the "social level" where the family will entertain guests and have active discussions. The bottom most level is the food preparation level.

The Batak house is elevated off of the ground and require stairs or a ladder for entry. They are built almost entirely out of bamboo, which makes up the house's frame, siding and flooring. Houses close to the ocean are covered roofed with salted palm leaves, which prevents insect infestation. There is an open porch at the front of the house for working, resting and entertaining guests. The single room is used for storing weapons, food and for sleeping. Cooking is not performed in the house, but is instead performed a short distance away. (1)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

No specialized structures were presented in the literature.

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

In both groups, sleeping is done in their elevated houses. Although there is nothing specified for the Palawano, the Batak sleep on specially woven sleeping mats that the women of the household have made. (1)

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

The social organization is strictly egalitarian in both cases, although there may be figureheads such as an elder man. On occasion, there will be meetings between two different villages over larger issues that one village alone cannot settle. (1,2)

5.12 Trade:

The people of the Palawan Island have been a part of the major trade routes in the area for over 1000 years. There have been remains discovered which suggest that they have traded as far away as the Mediterranean and the Middle East. This trade led to the introduction of Islam on the island. They will trade beeswax, rattan and tree resins to the outside world in exchange for metals and fabrics. They also actively participate in the trade of Manila copal, a resin like substance known for its odiferous qualities. (1)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

As they are an egalitarian society, there are no social hierarchies.

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

Not specified.

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

There are shamans within the tribes. (1)

6.2 Stimulants:

Not specified.

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

The Batak have a special ritual concerning the coming of age of an adolescent called umbay. To perform this ritual, another youth of similar age but of opposite sex (suggesting a potential "mate") is required. The first child, the one that is actually having the umbay performed on him or her, is kidnapped by his family, and is made to lay down on the floor next to their umbay partner. They are covered in bark cloth and grass and are to lie motionless for up to an hour while family members tell stories and sing songs, all while laughing at the discomfort of the two children.

The Batak also have a ritual concerning planting and harvesting. In June, they erect wooden poles on their plots and place offerings of rice on the top while a medicine man recites a prayer to the natural spirits. Also in March or April they perform a lambay, which is a traditional thanksgiving celebration in sync with the abundant harvest of honey. It is a celebratory feast with a traditional vengeance dance called the sagda. Men dress in festive headbands and read loin cloths and carry wooden sabers and depict a battle with the bees. The women provide a rhythm by beating on a bamboo tube set in the ground called a sabagan.

A traditional ritual is pagdiwata, which is a ceremony of illness. The babalyan, the medicine man, will appeal to the spirits for help. He does this by singing and dancing to the accompaniment of drums, gongs, the lampung (piece of wood hung from the rafters of a house) and a sabagan. He will also ritualistically place his hands on the individual, trying to remove the pain. In modern times it is common for the babalyan to perform this ritual for multiple people at once, taking several hours to complete.

The Palawano have two special rituals. The first is a tambilaw, which is an agrarian ritual to the Ampuq. The villages each provide an offering of fermented rice and rice cooked in coconut milk in special containers to Ampuq. The second is ulit, which requires a shaman known as a baljan. Through this ritual he is thought to be able to see into the future or to heal the sick. (1,2)

6.4 Other rituals:

See above.

6.5 Myths (Creation):

Myths on creation were not presented for either the Batak or the Palawano.

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

Colorful and unique baskets are made by both people, and there is evidence of song and dance within the Batak people. One instrument is a pontigonggong, which is a guitar like instrument with two strings. They also have drums and gongs for music. (1)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

Not specified.

6.8 Missionary effect:

Individuals from both tribes are increasingly becoming Muslim (Palawano) or Christian (Batak). (1,2)

6.9 RCR revival:

As there has been limited interactions with outside cultures, there has been no true need for a revival in culture.

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

No information provided in literature

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

No evidence of naming dead people.

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

Not specified.

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

The Palawano believe in two supreme beings. The first is Ampuq, which is the god of creation and of the dead. The second is Diwata, who is the intermediate being between the Palawano people and Ampuq.

The Batak believe in natural spirits that dictate how any given situation will turn out. (1,2)

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

Not specified.

7.2 Piercings:

Through all of the sources I was only able to find one picture that depicted a woman with an ear piercing, and she was of the Batak tribe (1)

7.3 Haircut:

Men will typically keep their hair short, while the women's hair length varies from short to shoulder length. (1, from pictures)

7.4 Scarification:

No evidence of scarification.

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

Adornment information was limited, however from picture one can see beaded necklaces, belts and earrings. Others mentioned included special loincloths and skirts as well as headbands (1,2)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

The Batak men would wear a special red loincloth and headpiece during one special ritual. (see above, 1)

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

Through the photographic evidence, it would seem that females will wear more in terms of adornment than males will. Males wear a typical loincloth, while women wear skirts that may have fancy patterns on the cloth, necklaces and belts. (1)

7.8 Missionary effect:

No evidence provided in the literature.

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

Not specified.

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

Not specified in any of the literature.

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

No indication of sororate or levirate.

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

No notable kinship typologies presented in the literature.

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Numbered references

1. Forest Peoples of the Philippines: The Batak and the Palawano. Terry Yarvo LeVine. UCLA Museum of Cultural History, published 1981
2. On the Road to Tribal Extinction: Depopulation, Deculturation, and Adaptive Well-being among the Batak of the Philippines. James F. Eder. University of California Press, Published 1987. Available on line at:
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