

# STUDIES IN PHILIPPINE LANGUAGES & CULTURES

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### 6. *Ya zita na Āgta* / The Agtas' poison Pedro Cababag (1980) 42–48



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6 YA ZITA NA ĀGTA  
 N,NP poison G,NP Agta  
 By Pedro Cababag (1980)

1. A ya zita\* in ta polu  
 CJ N,NP zita.arrow ID1 O,NP first  
 kid=en da=dāgkal\* ā n=aka=ita kid ta kwa  
 PL=ID4 AG=large CJ CM=APT=see 3PLN O,NP thing  
 kān,\* ya polu kid=en da=dāgkal, ta  
 RS N,NP first PL=ID4 AG=large O,NP  
 zita. 2. "O," kun=na kān hā, "ā parubān  
 zita.tree hey QT=3SG RS again CJ try:OF  
 tām ye=yan, te ittā ya polu,  
 1PLIN,G AG=D1,N because EXT N,NP first  
 po=polu da=dāgkal, yen hapa ya  
 AG=first AG=large D4,N also N,NP  
 n=aka=itān ku," kun=na hapa na da=dāgkal  
 CM=APT=see:LF 1SG QT=3SG also G,NP AG=large  
 mi kid=en. 3. K=in=attab da kān ya  
 1PLEX,G PL=ID4 cut=CM=cut 3PLG RS N,NP  
 zita en ā t=in=amtam da kān ya  
 zita.tree ID4 CJ taste=CM=taste 3PLG RS N,PN  
 tavug na en. 4. A namnam=ān da kān ā  
 sap 3SG ID4 CJ taste=OF 3PLG RS CJ  
 ma=dagat\* kān. 5. "Atsi, māppya yan o, ta  
 ST=stingy RS INJ ST:good D1,N INJ O,NP  
 m=ang=alāp kitām te i=laok\* tām haen  
 INC=SP=get 1PLIN,N because ACF=mix 1PLIN,G RQ  
 ta lamān,\* kun=da kān. 6. A n=ang=alāp  
 O,NP wild.pig QT=3PLG RS CJ CM=SP=get  
 kid kān ta zita en, "Ammi anu ya  
 3PLN RS O,NP zita.tree ID4 but what N,NP  
 pamayān tām o?" kun=da. 7. "O!" "Hā?"  
 presume.do 1PLIN,G INJ QT=3PLG hey what

## THE AGTAS' POISON

1. The poison arrow for the forefathers: they happened to see the what's-its-name they say (that is, the first forefathers), a zita tree. 2. "Hey," one reportedly said, "let's try this here, because our very first forefathers were the ones I saw use it," said our elders. 3. They say they cut into the zita tree and tasted the sap. 4. They say they tasted it and it was stingy. 5. "Hey, this is just right; we should get some, and combine it with wild pig," they said according to stories. 6. So they reportedly got some from the zita tree; "but what will we presume to do?" they said. 7. "Hey!" "What?" "Let's put in a bamboo tube, because we'll put it on the palmwood arrow so it will adhere to the palmwood." 8. "All right then, let's put it on the palmwood," said the older people according to stories. 9. "And do you think it will adhere?" they said. 10. "Sure it will adhere because they also heated it over the fire," said

"i=abyāt\* tām, te i=kwa  
ACF=bamboo.tube 1PLIN,G because ACF:thing

the older people, as  
it was reported.

tām ta ballāng\* petta g=um=afut  
1PLIN,G O,NP palm.wood so.that grab=NU=grab

ta ballāng=en." 8. "A on ǎ i=tun tām  
O,NP palm.wood=ID4 CJ yes CJ ACF=put 1PLIN,G

ta ballāng=en," kun=na kǎn na da=dǎgkal  
O,NP palm.wood=ID4 QT=3SG RS G,NP AG=large

kid=en. 9. "A g=um=afut panaw?" kun=da kǎn.  
PL=ID4 CJ grab=NU=grab suppose QT=3PLG RS

10. "A g=um=afut ay te i=dǎngdǎng da  
CJ grab=NU=grab INJ because ACF=heat 3PLG

hapa ta afuy," kun=na kǎn hapa na da=dǎgkal  
also O,NP fire QT=3SG RS also G,NP AG=large

kid=en.  
PL=ID4

11. A gafu ta kuman=en n=ang=alǎp  
CJ since O,NP similar=ID4 CM=SP=get

kid ta tavug na zita en,  
3PLN O,NP sap G,NP zita.tree ID4

n=e=abyāt da. 12. A i=kwa\*  
CM=PAS:ACF=bamboo.tube 3PLG CJ ACF=thing

da ta abyāt=en ǎ kapye da  
3PLG O,NP bamboo.tube=ID4 CJ next 3PLG

n=e=dǎngdǎng ta kuman=en. 13. A kuga  
CM=PAS:ACF=heat O,NP similar=ID4 CJ PRS

m=ag=māga hǎ, ǎ i=kwa da hǎ, ǎ  
INC=GN=dry again CJ ACF=thing 3PLG again CJ

i=dǎngdǎng da hǎ ǎddet ta p=ag=puskul  
ACF=heat 3PLG again until O,NP AB=GN=thick

na tavug=en, m=ag=balin ta kuman na  
G,NP sap=ID4 INC=GN=finish O,NP similar G,NP

tagapulut.  
molasses

11. Therefore they  
got the sap of the  
zita tree; they put it  
in a bamboo container.  
12. And then they put  
it (palmwood arrow) in  
the bamboo container,  
and next they heated  
it like that. 13. And  
it became real dry  
afterward, and then  
they stick it in  
again, and then heat  
it again until the sap  
thickens, and it  
becomes like molasses.

14. A gafu ta kuman=en ya  
 CJ since O,NP similar=ID4 N,NP

da=dāgkal kid=en hapa e kid kǎn hapa  
 AG=large PL=ID4 also go 3PLN RS also

n=ag=angkāt.\* 15. A "O, i=parubǎ=k ya  
 CM=GN=hunt CJ hey ACF=try=1SG N,NP

zita in o, talo am ma=dagat,"\*  
 poison.arrow ID1 INJ OPT if ST=hot/poisonous

kun=na kǎn na lǎ-lǎy, dama ni  
 QT=3SG RS G,NP old.man father G,P

damǎ=k=en. 16. A n=e=long na kǎn  
 father=1SG=ID4 CJ CM=PAS:ACF=shoot 3SG RS

ta lamǎn, ǎ awe=na kǎn n=aka=adǎyu.\*  
 O,NP wild.pig CJ NEG=3SG RS CM=APT=far

17. "ǎy, kunna ten mantu hapa na ǎmu  
 INJ similar O,D4 CNF also G,NP know

na da=dāgkal kid=en, te ma=dagat hapa  
 G,NP AG=large PL=ID4 because ST=hot also

ya zita in," kun=na kǎn hapa ni  
 N,NP poison.arrow ID1 QT=3SG RS also G,P

damǎ=k=en.  
 father=1SG=ID4

18. Gafu ta kuman=en, "Awe=muy kwa  
 since O,NP similar=ID4 NEG=2PLG thing

o, awe=muy em indarǎkāt awe=muy  
 INJ NEG=2PLG go:OF:2SG misuse NEG=2PLG

i=lo=long ta mag=ma=ganud sina is=-isǎl  
 ACF=AG=shoot O,NP CN=ST=variety O,D2 CN=iguana

o am ǎn=-ǎnwǎng, te petta=m  
 or if CN=water.buffalo because so.that=??

awe=na m=amǎli na dagat na ina,"  
 NEG=3SG INC=SP:change G,NP hot 3SG ID2

kun=da kǎn hapa.  
 QT=3PLG RS also.

14. So, as a result, the old people, they went hunting, as the story goes. 15. And, "Hey, I'm going to try this poison arrow to see if it's poisonous," said one old man, the father of my father. 16. So he shot it at a wild pig; and, according to him, it (pig) didn't get far away. 17. "Well, what do you know, so that's what the old people knew, because the poison arrow is poisonous," my father reported.

18. So because of that, they reportedly said, "Don't what's it, don't go misuse it; don't be shooting it at everything, lizards or water buffalo, so that its poison won't change."

19. A gafu ta kuman=en awe=da  
 CJ since O,NP similar=ID4 NEG=3PLG

n=e=lo=long ta mag=ma=ganud am awã  
 CM=PAS:ACF=AG=shoot O,NP CN=ST=variety if not

lamãn lã, lamãn lã ya  
 wild.pig only wild.pig only N,NP

p=ang=i=long=ãn da. 20. "Awe=muy hapa  
 NU=SP=ACF=shoot=LF 3PLG NEG=2PLG also

i=lo=long ta tolay te dulay,"  
 ACF=AG=shoot O,NP person because bad

kun=da hapa na da=dãgkal kid=en.  
 QT=3PLG also G,NP AG=large PL=ID4

21. A gafu ta kuman=en  
 CJ since O,NP similar=ID4

n=e=ãppiya da=n hapa yen na  
 CM=PAS:ACF=keep.safe 3PLG=CM also N,D1 G,NP

p=ang=long da. 22. Ittã hapa ya  
 AB=SP=shoot 3PLG EXT also N,NP

gilãt,\* mãppya hapa ya gilãt=ina  
 barbed.arrow ST:good also N,NP barbed.arrow=ID2

te am m=e=long da hapa a  
 because if INC=PAS:ACF=shoot 3PLG also CJ

m=e=sod hapa, n=e=galut hapa ta  
 INC=PAS:ACF=snag also CM=PAS:ACF=tie also O,NP

kayu. 23. Ammi ta gintab=ina\* ã "Awe=m  
 wood but O,NP bladed.arrow=ID2 CJ NEG=2SG

i=lo=long am awe=m long=an ta  
 ACF=AG=shoot if NEG=2SG shoot=OF O,NP

gilãt," kun=da hapa, te awe=na  
 barbed.arrow QT=3PLG also because NEG=3SG

m=e=sod am gintab na lã, am  
 INC=PAS:ACF=snag if bladed.arrow CM LM if

19. So therefore they didn't shoot it at any old thing except wild pig; wild pig is the only thing they were shooting it at. 20. "Don't be shooting it at people either because that's bad," the old people said.

21. And therefore they put that particular missile in a safe place. 22. There is also the barbed arrow: your barbed arrow is good too, because when they shoot it, it also gets snagged, it's tied to a piece of wood. 23. But as for the bladed arrow, they said, "Don't be shooting it unless you shoot it (pig) with the barbed arrow first," because it (pig) won't get snagged if it's just the bladed arrow; if it's your barbed arrow it will get snagged. 24. Use the barbed arrow first because if the wild pig gets snagged then go and shoot it with the bladed arrow--that's all right. 25. If you



4. madagat 'hot/stingy' (see note 15).

5. ilaok 'mix/combine', a figurative use meaning to use it for killing wild pig. lamān 'wild pig' traditionally is the main source of livelihood. As a hunter-gatherer society Agtas are dependent upon a forest product that is plentiful enough and in demand enough by neighboring lowland cultures to be a steady means of exchange for rice, which is the Agtas' staple diet. In recent years the logging industry and swidden farming, together with decades of hunting wild pig, have resulted in the decimation of wild game. So hunting no longer supports the Agta communities as it once did.

7. abyāt 'bamboo tube', usually from three inches to one foot in length, and from one to three inches in diameter, depending upon its use. It may be used as a container for tree sap, honey, or rice seed, or as a drinking vessel, etc.

ballāng 'palmwood', the wood of the *Livistona rotunditolia* Bart. It is used for ax handles, bows, hammer handles, etc., including the head or tip of one type of poisonous arrow. The ballang arrowhead is about 3/8 inch in diameter and from ten to twelve inches long. This arrow is often called arutang and may be used for shooting fish, but without the poison. With poison it may be called ballāng, arutang, or zita, and is always covered with a protective hood of small bamboo tube when not in actual use.

12. ikwa 'put'. The process described here involves inserting the arrow tip into the bamboo tube of raw sap, after which the arrow tip is held over a flame to cook and dry the sap. As much as six inches of the arrow tip may be covered with the sap. This process is repeated several times until a thick coat is formed.

14. nagangkāt 'hunt'. Such hunting is without the use of dogs. It involves one or two individuals hunting deer or wild pig. It may be done with either bow and arrow or a firearm, stalking silently or lying in wait for the game. Other types of hunting are: (1) mangāg 'hunt monkey'; (2) maglente 'hunt with a light at night' (literally, 'to use a light'—a battery or carbide-powered light is tied to the hunter's head positioned in such a way as to shine on whatever he takes aim at); (3) manganup 'hunt with dogs', a more elaborate, organized type of hunting, as several responsibilities are identified. While it is a generic term, it has specific application to the one who initiates the hunt. A dumaanup, often a female, is chosen to handle the dogs when a particular area has been selected in which to have a drive. The main group are referred to as manā-dag meaning that they station themselves about thirty yards apart in more or less of a semicircle at the opposite end of the hunting area from the dog handler, who, being familiar with the area, allows the main group to station themselves before releasing the dogs. Once released, the dogs run through the forest trying to pick up the scent of some wild animal. The dogs drive the wild game toward the manā-dag, one of whom will get the first shot, and then others usually will join in to finish it off. In the event that the wild game circles back, one person (called the manulyāt 'the one passing in the opposite direction') is

stationed parallel to the dumaanup. A related term is magtulyāt 'to pass someone or something going in opposite directions'.

15. madagat 'hot/stingy'. This term is applied to hot peppers, some topical as well as injectable medicines, poisonous snakes, and the sap of the zita tree.

16. nakaadāyu 'able to go far'. Some Agtas claim that an animal shot with the poison arrow will not run more than thirty to fifty yards before dropping dead. The last sentence in this text implies that it could be much further.

22. gilāt 'barbed arrow' (detachable from the arrow shaft). A cord about two feet long made from the inside bark layer of the dapir vine is attached to the shank of the arrowhead and also to the shaft about four inches below the socket of the tip. The cord is wrapped around the upper end of the wood shaft until the tip is seated tightly in the socket. The head is made of iron, about seven to nine inches long, with three sections: a double-edged blade in a delta shape about three inches long; a barbed section consisting of two to four barbs (which follow the contour begun in the blade); and the lower shank section about two to three inches long and having a bead about 3/4 inch from the end that serves as a catch for the cord. When a wild pig is shot with a gilāt, the shaft quickly works loose as the pig runs, the cord unravels allowing the shaft to be dragged along behind, and eventually it snags on the undergrowth. This stops the pig allowing the hunter to catch up to it and finish it off with the gintab.

23. gintab 'bladed arrow'. The head is a double-edged iron blade in somewhat of a teardrop shape, six to twelve inches in length. It is firmly seated in a strong reed bihaw, the shaft of which is about 1/2 to 5/8 inch in diameter. The gintab is the most common arrow in the Agta arsenal. A hunter will have only one gilat, and one arutang, but as many as two or three gintab in his hand when he goes hunting.

Other arrow types are sihil 'wire-pronged arrow' (used for shooting fish); albig 'bamboo arrowhead' (similar to gintab but with bamboo head); pulongot/palangot, an arrowhead with four barbs around the axis. The last two are rarely seen in recent years. Other materials used in making arrows are: sap from the taggāt (*Pterocarpus* sp.) used as a glue; inner bark of dapir vine for binding feathers and arrowhead in place; and tail feathers from the kalāw (*Rufus* hornbill), one white to mark the correct position of the arrow and two black.

25. balayāng 'iron', referring to gilāt or gintab.