

LIFE, ART AND CULTURE  
IN THE COUNTRYSIDE V



▲ The golden rice fields of Ilocos Sur (ZA).

▼ A panoramic view of the South China Sea off the coast of Ilocos Sur (ZA).

## Chapter V

### Life, Art and Culture in the Countryside

Vigan is composed of nine barangays and thirty villages or hamlets. The villages are as follows: Ayusan Norte, Ayusan Sur, Barraca, Beddeng Daya, Beddeng Laud, Bongtolan, Bulala, Cabalangen, Cabaroan Daya, Cabaroan Laud, Camanggan, Capangpangan, Mindoro, Nagsangalan, Pantay Fatima, Pantay Laud, Paoa, Paratong, Pong-ol, Purok A Bassit, Pantay Daya, Purok A Dakkel, Raois, Rugsuanan, Salindeng, San Jose, San Julian Norte, San Julian Sur, San Pedro and Tamag. Upon departing the city proper, one almost immediately comes to expansive and breathtakingly beautiful vistas of irrigated rice, vegetable, corn, and tobacco fields, with the the backdrop of the high Cordillera Mountains to one side, and multitudinous coves along the South China Sea to the other. Traveling upon the grand Spanish coastal highway between Narvacan and Santa in the summertime, one's attention is arrested by the sight of fire trees iridescent with red blooms moving against the frosty white waves of the surf. Depending on the time of year, the country roads are either muddy or dusty, but always deeply shaded by bamboo foliage and the ubiquitous mango tree. They convey the traveler to any number of tiny hamlets where he would do well to take in the fresh country air at some lean-to shed set up for that purpose or else at the local *sari-sari* (variety) store which likely would be tended by some elderly woman cooing some little grandchild to sleep. Life for the men and women and children in these hamlets is lived in continual proximity to the sights, sounds, aromas, and textures of a wide array of flowers, birds, butterflies, farm animals, freshly harvested rice, cut grass, smoked tobacco leaves, mango tree blossoms, and leaves burning.

Vigaños generally uphold traditions that mandate that they live in or near the village of their ancestors, on lands that have been passed down from one generation to the next. Family and community welfare take precedence over individual needs. This finds expression in their architecture, farming, weaving and pot-making techniques, and their observance of religious traditions. Traditional Ilocano farm architecture, for example, through a variety of time-honored

techniques, turns indigenous materials such as nipa, bamboo, sawali, hard woods into the constituent parts of the typical Ilocano dwelling which, because it takes the region's hot and humid climate into account, will enclose only the household's sleeping quarters, and sometimes its kitchen, and make provision for all other activities, whether work related or of a social nature, to get played out in an open air setting. As the sun rises, it shines down on family compounds, already alive with activity: roosters crowing, dogs barking, children crying, mothers hurrying back from their morning bath at the river, eager to begin the day's work in their outdoor kitchens, fathers on their carabao-drawn carts heading for the fields, elderly men priming their fighting cocks, elderly women putting a fire to the cooking stove with coconut husks. Within these walled compounds work and leisure are played out always in a communal setting.

The village of Bulala provides a showcase of Ilocano communal living. There, over two hundred families collaborate in the manufacture of the famous Vigan tiles and other terracotta products such as pots, stoves, water wells, palayoks, benches and other decorative items. The village of Mindoro, adjacent to Bulala, is a showcase of the region's spellbinding beauty. Famous for its sand dunes, its beach glinting black and gold in the sun (yes, from real specks of gold present in the its black sand), it truly is one of the most beautiful, if generally not too well known, natural wonders of Vigan. Mindoro is renowned as well for its handwoven fabrics, called the *abel* and *binakul*, which used highly sophisticated designs and motifs interlacing sheer beauty with pure whimsy, enough to create a smile, a reminder to us all that life is not meant to be taken too seriously. The agricultural fields of Mindoro, San Pedro, Pantay Daya, Pantay Fatima, Paratong, Salindag, Barraca, Ayusan Norte, and Ayusan Sur, planted to corn, rice, garlic, onions, tomatoes, other vegetables, provide Vigan and the Ilocos Region with its food supply.

Vigan's Spanish-Mexican cuisine, heavy with spices and condiments, was enjoyed mainly by Spanish families. As a result, only the Spanish *empanada*, *longaniza*, *lechon*, and *pipian*, a Mexican soup, survived the Spaniards' departure from the Ilocos Region. The region, however, boasts of other culinary delights. Typical Ilocano dishes, cooked in outdoor open yards (depending on the weather), utilizing

firewood for extra flavor, include *pinakbet* (mixed vegetables), *ukoy* (vegetable patties), *bagnet* (deep-fried pork), *puke-puke* (eggplant and onion), *ipon* (small fish), *pinapaitan* (cow entrails soup), *mikki* (noodle soup), *dinengden* (vegetables with shrimp paste), *dinidikan* (pig entrails soup), and *kilawin* (pickled meat or fish). Desserts include *tinubong*, *dudul*, *patupat*, *linga* and the *bibingka pasko*. The cassava *bibingka*, or Royal Bibingka, is an especially hot item among tourists. It is the *tinubong*, however, made of glutinous or *malagkit* rice is the most interesting of all the local desserts. Prepared with brown sugar, known as *buri sang-san*, it is steamed inside a bamboo tube called a *buo*. A popular summer fruit is the *silag*, a berry from the *buri* palm that tastes similar to the Tagalog *kaong*. Only the true Ilocano enjoys the *silag* and *karamay*—a local version of the sour *kamias*.

Barangay VII, adjacent to the village of Paoa, is home to the jar manufacturing industry known as *pinagburnayan*. Called *burnay* in the Ilocos Region, Vigan jars make strong, if unpretentious, dark brown receptacles for storing water, and for fermenting *bagoong* (shrimp paste), vinegar and *basi* wine. To ensure that the contents of the jar remain clean and undisturbed during the fermentation process, the mouth of the jar is wrapped in a dried pig's bladder, fastened with banana leaves and sealed with a terracotta cover.

Ilocano overseas workers, who remit much of their savings home to build new homes, to improve their farms, to establish new businesses, and to upgrade their village infrastructure, have in recent decades done very much to change the face of Vigan and its environs. Traditional nipa, sawali and bamboo structures are rapidly being replaced by modern, over-decorated, concrete ones, and these homes are filling with modern gadgetry—whether for good or ill remains to be seen.



*La Divina Pastora and her bahay kubo (ZA).*

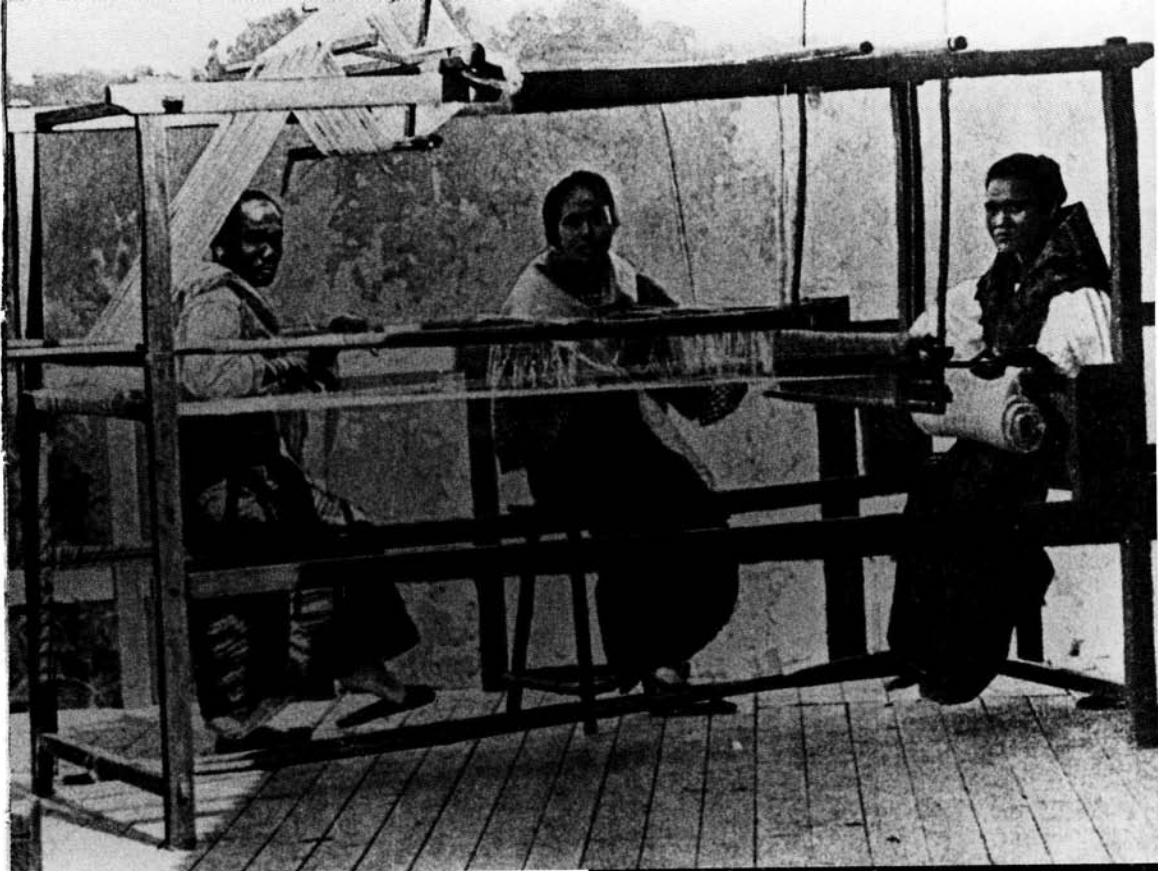




▲ A young boy winding four threads into a ball (Ilocos Sur, 1912) (ZA).



▼ A woman twisting two strands at once (Ilocos Sur, 1912) (ZA).

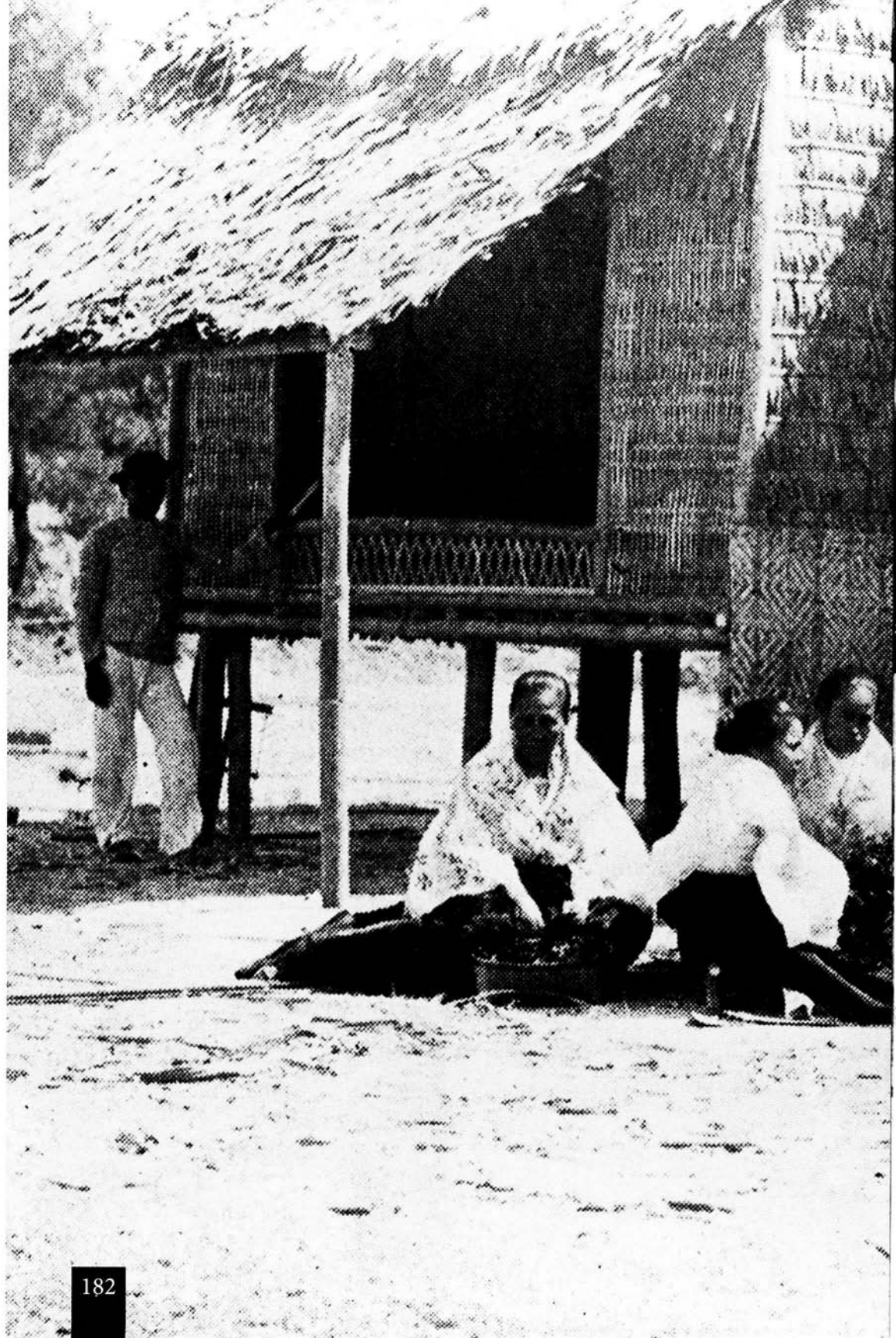


Three Ilocano women weaving ▲  
(Ilocos Sur, 1898) (ZA).

An Ilocano woman winding ►  
the *kinalkal* on bamboo spools  
(Ilocos Norte, 1933) (ZA).







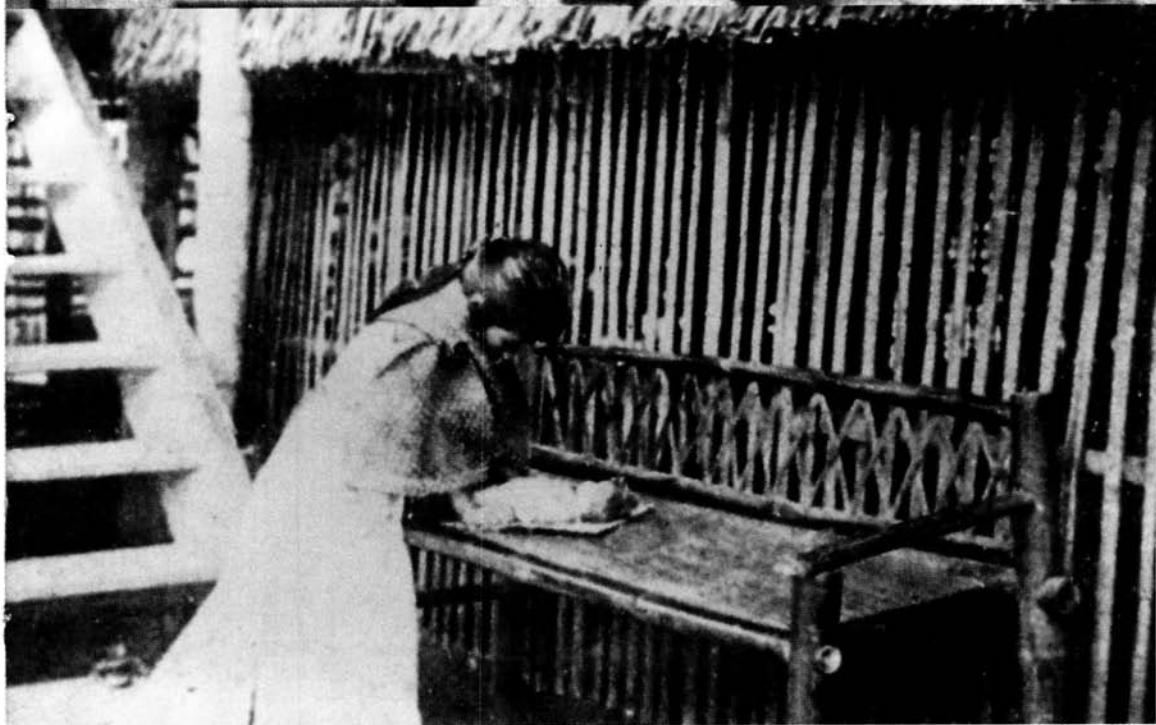
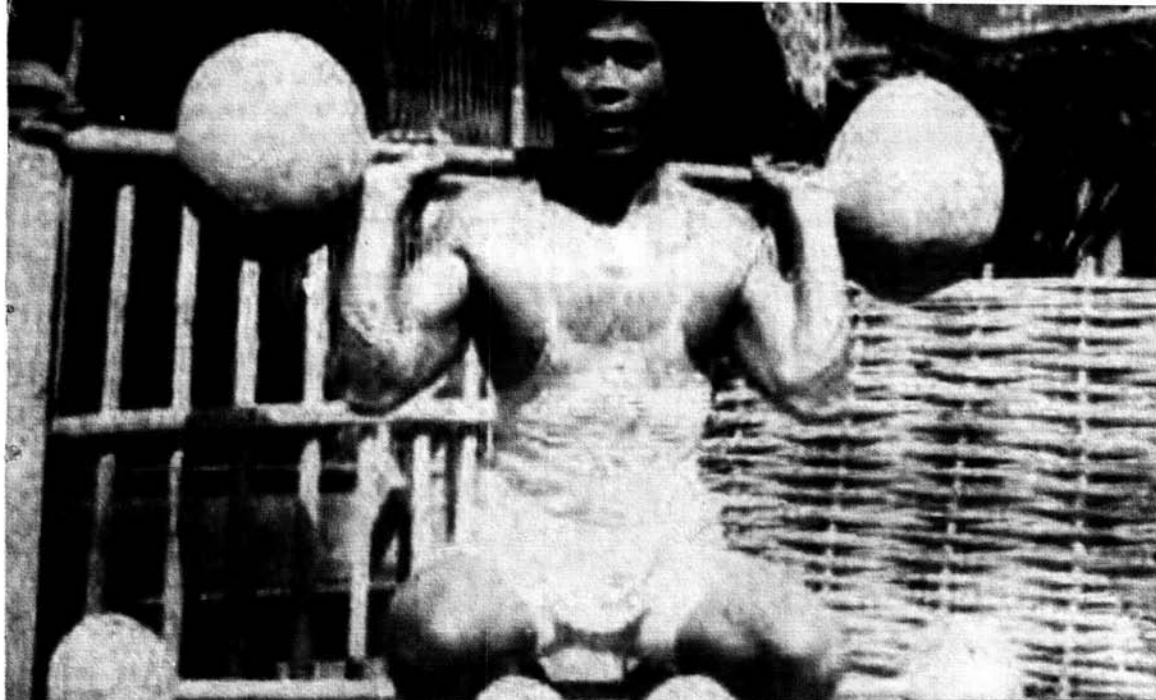


Ilocano women preparing tobacco leaves for rolling into cigars  
(Ilocos Sur, 1895) (ZA).



- ▲ An old man adds *samak* bark, used in the preparation of *basi* wine from sugarcane juice (Ilocos Sur, 1897) (ZA).
- ▼ A man heating sugar cane juice in a large vat to make *basi* wine (Ilocos Sur, 1897) (ZA).





▲ An Ilocano man performing squats with homemade concrete weights (Ilocos Sur, 1922) (ZA).

▼ A barrio girl playing with her doll (Ilocos Sur, 1898)



▲ A typical barrio funeral procession (Ilocos Sur, 1898) (ZA).

▼ A family portrait taken after a funeral (Ilocos Sur, 1900) (ZA).





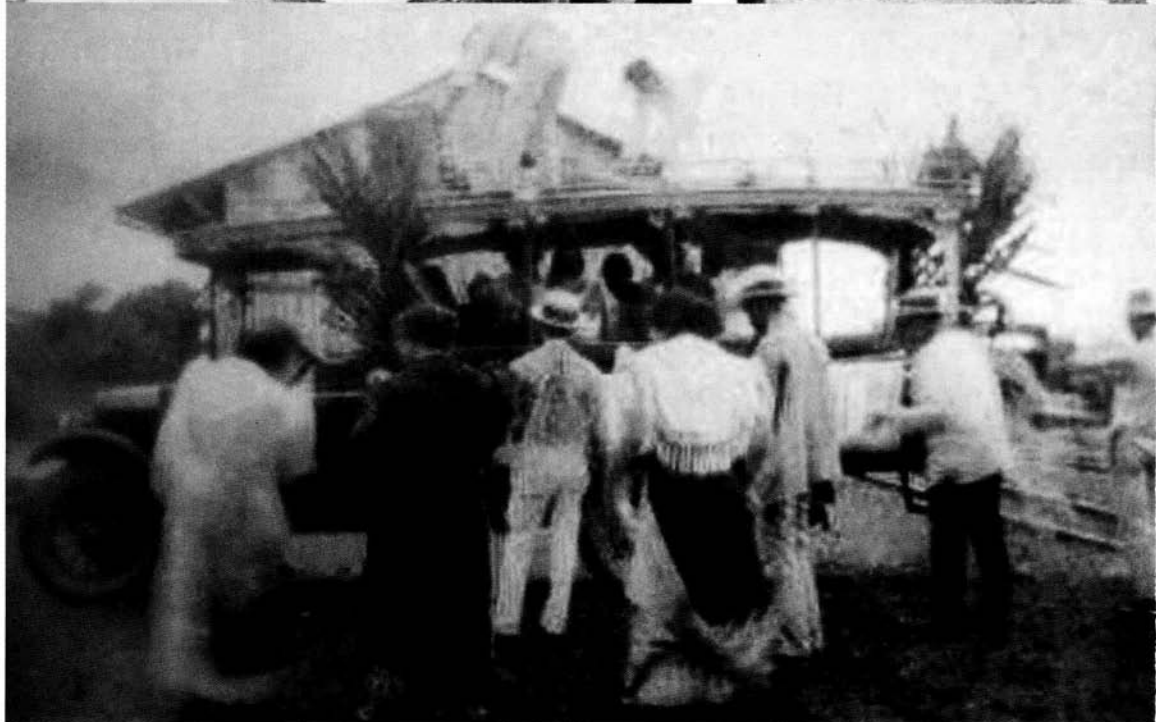
An informal dinner which took ▲  
place in the last year of the  
Spanish regime (Vigan, 1898).

A picnic held under a mango tree ►  
(Ilocos Sur, 1920) (ZA).





▲ An all-woman brass band (Ilocos Sur, 1920) (ZA).



▼ Manila passengers boarding a bus bound for Ilocos Sur at the Damortis Railroad Station (La Union, 1915) (ZA).



Ilocano women in a hammock, ▲  
(Ilocos Sur, 1898) (ZA).

An Affluent Ilocano family ►  
and their car (1915) (ZA).

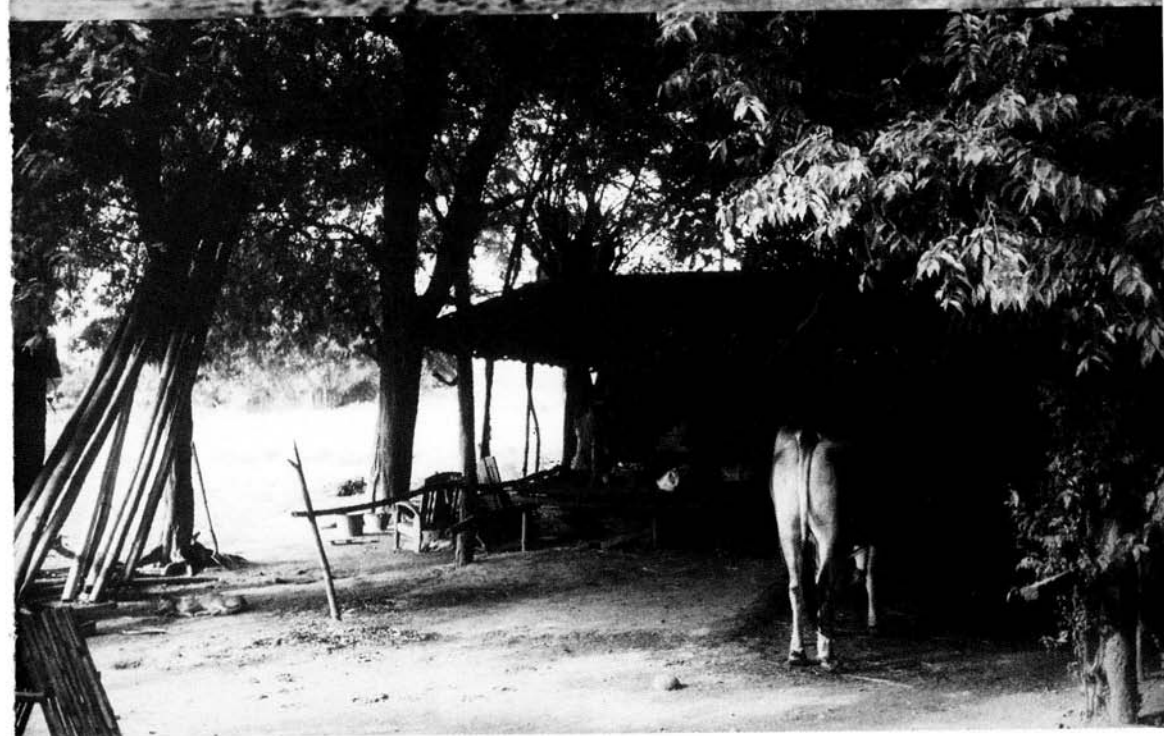




▲ *Going to the Market*, painted by Miguel A. Zaragoza (1878) (ZA).



▼ A country landscape painted by Carmen R. Zaragoza (1998) (ZA).



- ▲ Taking a *siesta* or afternoon nap in front of a roadside store, painted by Miguel A. Zaragoza (1884) (ZA).
- ▼ A farm stable in Santa Catalina Ilocos Sur (ZA).





◀ A woman weaving a handbag with material taken from the buri palm, San Juan, Ilocos Sur.

Strands of buri palm ▶  
being cut for weaving,  
San Juan, Ilocos Sur.



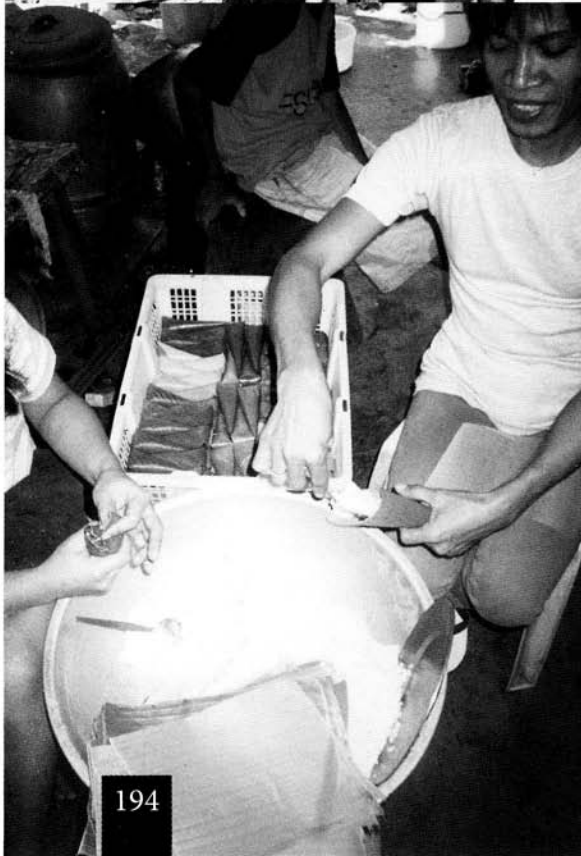


▲ *Dayo*, a system of auctioning or bartering farm animals, usually held on Wednesdays in Barangay Napo, Badoc, Ilocos Norte.

▼ *Dayo*, at Badoc, Ilocos Norte.



- ▲ *Tinubong*, an Ilocano delicacy made of glutinous rice and coconut baked inside a *buo* (bamboo tube) sold at Plaza Burgos, Vigan, Ilocos Sur.



- ◄ *Patupat* glutinous rice and coconut wrapped in banana leaves ready for steaming, Santa Catalina, Ilocos Sur.



Garlic sale at the Sinait ▲  
Market, Ilocos Sur.

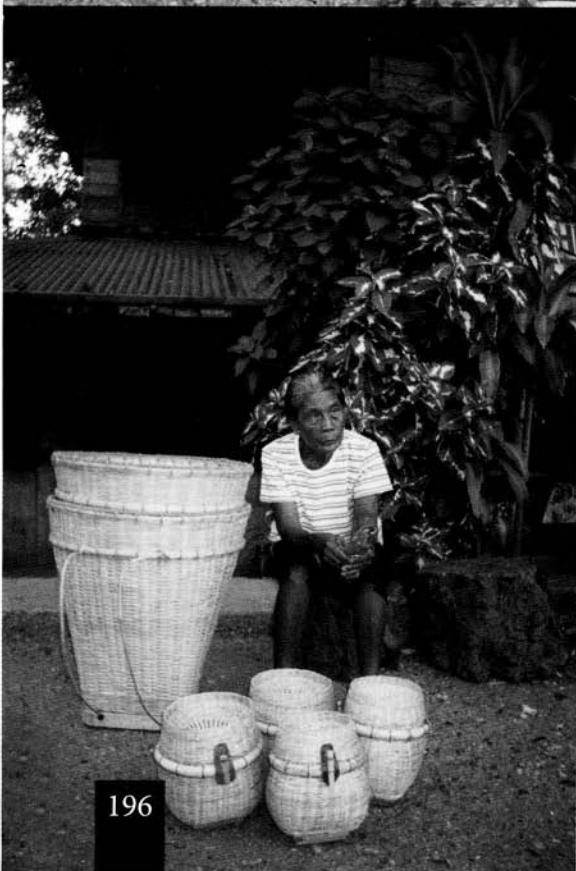
Young barrio boys ►  
preparing field rats  
for a barbecue.







▲ A stack of San Esteban stones used for flooring throughout the Ilocos Region.



◀ A basket weaver from Badoc, Ilocos Norte, selling her wares along the main highway.