

José Villa Panganiban, *Diksiyunaryo-Tesaurus Pilipino-Ingles*. Quezon City, Philippines: Manlapaz Publishing Co. 1972.

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## PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS IN URAK LAWOI'

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### PART 2: CONTEXTUALIZING THE SUPERNATURAL

Part 1 of this paper concluded that the lists of terms for "principalities and powers" in the New Testament referred to "powerful supernatural beings or forces with at least the potential of being harmful to people's best interests, often directly opposed to God's purposes, but clearly subjected to Christ by his death, ascension and ultimate victory." We will now investigate how these terms can best be rendered in the language of the animistic Urak Lawoi' people of South Thailand.

#### SPIRITS, ANCESTORS AND ANGELS

The Urak Lawoi' share many of the components of their world-view with people of primal religions throughout the world.<sup>1</sup> Although the tribal religious practices are in places falling into neglect, the outlook remains dominant. The world around them contains many invisible actors, spiritual powers which must be taken into account in any plan or activity. These include ancestral spirits, evil spirits and local guardian spirits. Some may be able to be manipulated but they are ignored at one's peril. By contrast, the "Great God Above" (*tuhat besal deq ataih*) is relatively uninterested in daily affairs and consequently receives little attention. Impersonal forces, as such, play only a limited role in Urak Lawoi' thought because they derive their power from personal spirits. Magic (*aye lemu*) is a powerful force but a practitioner relies on his spirit teacher to effect it. The word *guru* is said by some to refer to the spirit teacher, but by others to the magic phrase which he teaches to his pupil. (This term has had to be avoided in the gospels where the disciples refer to Jesus as "Teacher".) Once learnt, however, such a phrase has independent power in itself. Luck (*groh*) is another powerful influence and the bi-annual cleansing ceremonies for the village are intended to clear bad luck away. But again, bad luck is administered by bad spirits. There is no independent concept of destiny or impersonal fate. Thus the impersonal forces fail to provide us with suitable vocabulary to translate the spiritual powers.

Research into the different names and characteristics of the various supernatural beings suggests they can be broadly classified into two groups: Spirit Beings, which are frequently encountered in daily life, and

1 See, e.g., Burnett (1988), 17-21.

Mythological Beings, which for the most part are only met in the legends. We will examine some of these for potential use in translating the New Testament terms above.

### Spirit Beings

*hatu* This term is by far the most common one and can refer either to an evil spirit, or to the spirit of a dead person. They are considered as living locally, are thoroughly bad and can cause considerable nuisance to individuals, families or the whole village. On the other hand they are not very powerful and can be appeased, manipulated or driven off by a person with the right knowledge or skills. Some individuals care for *hatu* and can then send them to harm people. Unexplained illness, poverty, bad luck or death are often attributed to them. Occasionally the *hatu* are described as *hatu sitat* (where *sitat* is cognate with Satan) but with no clear distinction of meaning, except that this term seems to exclude the spirits of dead people. There are many different kinds of *hatu*, and they can also be qualified as *jahai'* (wicked) *ta'arah* (dirty) *kraih* (strong, hard) or *maset* (salty) – such description would also normally exclude the spirits of the dead.

*jit* (from Arabic *Jinn*) These are far more powerful beings and are also completely wicked. They can live in the air, but are most often associated with the sea, capes, river-mouths and reefs (probably the places where the sea-going Urak Lawoi' encounter the most danger). They can affect the weather and cause thunderstorms and are usually considered too powerful for people to control. The best one can do is to make appropriate offerings and hope to escape their notice. Different varieties of *jit* are thought to exist.

*dato'* These are local spiritual powers, often associated with a particular place (in which case they are called *dato' kramai'*). The village has a local *dato'*, who is generally beneficent but tends to be rather capricious. Thus if well looked after by appropriate offerings, dances and drinking bouts, they will protect the village. Otherwise they can cause disease, bad luck, poor catches of fish etc. They are considered more powerful than *hatu* but lower than the *jit*. Twice a year the villagers hold a feast to honour the local *dato'* and seek his protection for the coming season.

*semengai'* This term refers to the spirit of a person. It has an individual existence and leaves a person when he is dreaming. On the person's death, the *semengai'* continues to exist, usually living locally and wishing to have certain needs met by living family members. At this point the concept overlaps with both *hatu* and *bilakel*.

*bilakel* This essentially means ancestor and can on occasion be used of older living family members. But it is most often used of those who have passed on, usually in the distant past. Their continued existence in the spirit realm and influence on living family members is one of the most important aspects of Urak Lawoi' spirituality. Sometimes a shaman will determine that a particular ancestor is behind a problem, but the *bilakel* corporately are the guardians of the tribal custom and life: to offend them is to invite retribution.

Of these terms, the last two must be ruled out for the purposes of

translating *archai* and *exousiai*, because they both refer to human spirits, whether of the living or the dead and there is no suggestion that the Greek terms can take this reference.

### Mythological Beings

*kedemay* This would seem to be a unique, giant figure something like an ogre. He could turn people into stone just by a glance or by pointing at them (this is the origin of some of the *dato' kramai'*). Different informants have identified him with Buddha (the god of the Thai) or Allah (the god of the Malay) - but not with *Tuhat Besal de' Ataih*. In fact some say *Tuhat* has caused *kedemay* to cease to exist, or we would all be turned to stone.

*terpetri* These are winged creatures who lived in caves and would sometimes eat people. They could be driven off by hurling fermented fish-paste at them. Leaving fish-paste by the mouth of caves was a way of dealing with them permanently and most people consider that they no longer exist.

*gasi* These were giants with tusks, probably similar to the temple-guardian figures common in Thailand and India.

*mumin* Eight-foot tall humanoid figures who walk with unbent knees appear in one legend.

The power of *kedemay* and the fear of the *terpetri* might seem to make them candidates for powers that hold people captive, but they are disqualified by the relationship (or lack of it) with the contemporary community. None of these beings have any direct relevance to Urak Lawoi' daily life. In fact they would be unknown, or known only by name, to many people.

*Hulu-balak* This type of being is difficult to place positively in one of the classes above. The *hulu-balak* figure in mythology as winged creatures of form similar to humans and able to interbreed with humans. However some informants describe them as messengers of *Tuhat*, others as minor servants of the *jit*. The term is also used, though not commonly, of government servants! People of a neighbouring tribe, the Moken, describe the cognate *hulu-balang* as the chief of the *hatu* in a village.<sup>2</sup> This term has long been used in Christian circles for "angel", and the identification is on the whole suitable, but it seems necessary, when specifically speaking of angels of God, to qualify them as such: *hulu-balak naq tuhat* (God's *hulu-balak*).

### Socio-linguistic Conclusions

The Urak Lawoi' cosmology, or world-view, would seem to have a number of points of contact with the first-century world-view presupposed in the NT's use of the various terms we are studying. In both views the universe is populated by a large number of "beings" or "powers", intermediate between humans and the Supreme God. These beings have a significant effect on the lives of people. On the whole they are opposed to people's best interests, or at best capricious in their favours. In order to secure

<sup>2</sup> In standard Malay *hulubalang* means a leader of a war party, or a territorial chief.

happiness or prosperity it is necessary to propitiate them in the correct way. It is, in fact, the relationship of the “powers” to humans that is most similar in the two cultures. They could be said to occupy the same relational space. Unredeemed humanity is captive to them, a captivity broken only by the work of Christ. These similarities encourage us to attempt to use indigenous Urak Lawoi’ terms, in particular *hatu*, *jit* and *dato*, to translate the “principalities and powers”. This will allow the liberating message of the NT to speak powerfully to Urak Lawoi’ society. Louw and Nida<sup>3</sup> state “In many languages it is simply not possible to speak of such supernatural powers without in some way identifying them with various kinds of spirits”. Our study would suggest that it may be not only necessary but also desirable to do so.

However, there are significant differences. Urak Lawoi’ “powers” are more localised, less cosmic, more unambiguously evil, probably more personal and more open to manipulation, rather than worship. Thus, by using the indigenous terms we are open to the criticism that we have neglected the “otherness” of the NT text. It is not a 20th century Urak Lawoi’ document, but a first century Greek one. We will have to take this into account in examining the possible choices for translating these terms.

## TRANSLATION CHOICES

In the light of the linguistic and cultural evidence gathered we must now evaluate the possible approaches to translating these terms into Urak Lawoi’.

### Review of Versions

Most traditional versions in English (KJV, RSV, NIV, NRSV) have chosen to use terms such as principality, rule, power, authority etc which will parallel the usage in the Greek NT. Sometimes the usage is abstract, “rule” (where the Greek is singular), sometimes concrete – “rulers”. In none of these versions is there total verbal consistency. NIV uses dominion, rule, power and demon<sup>4</sup> to translate *archē*; “power” translates *archē*, *exousia*, *dunamis* and *kuriotēs* on different occasions. The NRSV achieves near total verbal consistency but is also the most “demythologising”. “The rulers and the authorities” in normal English would naturally refer only to human powers. In any of these versions, it is doubtful whether this approach successfully communicates much of the “spiritual” connotation of the original to today’s English speakers.

Other versions attempt to make explicit the spiritual nature of the powers by various means. JB (not NJB) uses capital letters<sup>5</sup> and occasional footnotes, the overall effect of which is to identify the powers with good angelic beings. REB varies its approach, sometimes using words like “cosmic”, “superhuman” or invisible, at other places, opting for a more ambiguous or even primarily human rendering.<sup>6</sup> TEV manages to be

3 1988, 147.

4 Rom 8.38, the one exception to this version’s pattern.

5 e.g. Sovereignities and Powers, Col 2.15. Capitals are not used in Rom 8.38 or 1 Cor 15.24.

6 e.g. Eph 1.21, “all government and authority, all power and dominion”; also Col 2.10.

verbally consistent (*archē* ruler, *exousia* authority, *dunamis* power, *kuriotēs* lord) and does not use the abstract forms. The qualifiers used to indicate the nature of the powers include "heavenly" (e.g. Rom 8.38), "spiritual" (e.g. 1 Cor 15.24) and "angelic" (Eph 3.10). The first and third of these almost certainly carry positive connotation and it would be an interesting study to investigate the difference in connotation conveyed to Christian and non-Christian speakers of English. All three versions make it quite clear that Titus 3.1 is speaking of human government.

Moving to the closer linguistic and sociological environment of the Urak Lawoi', Malay and Indonesian versions generally use affixed words with overlapping meanings in the area of government, power or authority. In the 1975 Indonesian version, it is not always clear whether these are to be understood in human or supernatural terms. Today's Malay Version frequently qualifies them as "invisible". Pattani Malay most often uses a single phrase meaning "various kinds of powers", sometimes further described as "in heaven and on earth", and in both the unambiguous occurrences (Eph 6.12 and Col 2.15) specified as demonic or evil. This is the only version of all those reviewed which does not translate the lists as lists, but seeks to cover the area of meaning with a single phrase.

The older Thai (1951) version, follows the more traditional approach, using terms which could sometimes be taken as referring to human rulers and with many of the same crossovers of the meaning of terms seen in English. The differences are that the words for "power" (though not for "ruler") have more explicit supernatural overtones, and the choice of word for *archai* in Tit 3.1 makes the different reference quite clear. The newer Thai (1971) version chooses to use a single root word (*thep* or sometimes *thew*), meaning a divine being or god, and qualifying it with words for power, authority etc. It also manages to be consistent verbally, with only a few exceptions, and clearly marks Tit 3.1 as human by using a conventional paired phrase for temporal rulers. By contrast, the Thai common language translation has achieved a singular degree of confusion, sometimes explicitly labelling the powers as human (*archai* in Rom 8.38), sometimes as angelic (Eph 3.10), often using elegant abstract terms and making no clear distinction in the usage in Tit 3.1.

### Urak Lawoi' translation options

**Literal rendering** Urak Lawoi', unlike Standard Malay, uses a minimum of affixation and thus has almost no abstract terminology. There are few terms for rulers or government officials. It is not possible to construct expressions such as "those who rule" without specifying whether the subject is a human or a spirit. And while it is just possible to say "that which is strong" etc. such expressions are unnatural and quite obscure. Thus there is no real possibility of producing a literal rendering which conveys any meaning at all.

**One generic term (+/- modifiers)** *Hatu* is the nearest to a generic term among the Urak Lawoi' words and it would be possible to translate all the lists by *ko' hatu rata macap* ("all kinds of evil spirits"). But this is, to say the least, a colourless expression, rather too local in reference and open to

include spirits of the dead. *Hatu* has several other disadvantages for using even with modifiers to clarify the meaning: they are not considered to be particularly powerful spirits, therefore informants reject such combinations as “*hatu* who are powerful”, “*hatu* who rule the world”. They are considered to be earth-bound, ruling out “*hatu* in the sky above”<sup>7</sup> If Christ conquered only various *hatu*, is he perhaps, like us, powerless in the face of the *jit*? *Dato*’ and *hulu-balak* were briefly tried as generic terms but were ruled out, the former because it is too local as well as having many of the same drawbacks as *hatu*, the latter because of its irrelevance in the Urak Lawoi’ hierarchy of power. *Jit*, although less commonly used than *hatu*, overcomes most of the difficulties above and was used with different modifiers in many places in Ephesians, where the recurring *en tois epouraniois* restricts the use of *hatu*.

**Indigenous set of terms** The other possibility investigated was to use a set of terms from the indigenous culture and let the set stand for the set of terms or area of meaning in Greek. *Jit*, *hatu* and *dato*’ seem good candidates here as they cover a range of types of spiritual powers, even some that are potentially beneficial<sup>8</sup> In this approach there is no necessity either to match terms one-to-one or to have the same number of terms in the source and target languages. Examples stand for the whole, and many languages have conventional expressions which reflect this.<sup>9</sup> While there is no such common expression in Urak Lawoi’ to express all types of powerful spiritual forces, using the three terms above produces the same effect. However it is still open to the criticism that it is too specifically local and indigenous to this particular culture. For this reason, when using this approach we added modifiers to the words, which give a sense of “strangeness”, while still conveying the same meaning. This is the approach used in the Colossians passages below.<sup>10</sup>

**Sample translations** In the examples that follow, the Greek terms occurring in each reference are listed. The Urak Lawoi’ translation (UL) is then followed by a literal back-translation into English (Eng).

Eph 1.21 (*archai, exousiai, dunameis, kuriotēs*)

UL: *..nya dudo’ tingi de’ ataih ko’ jit nu berbela, nu megah semuha, de’ ataih ko’ hatu kraitih, ko’ dato’ kramai’ semuha ler.*

Eng: “he sits high above all ruling and powerful Jinn, above all strong evil spirits and local spirits.”

Eph 3.10 (*archai, exousiai*)

UL: *lumoh jit nu berbela de’ so’ ataih, nu megah.*

Eng: “the group of Jinn who rule above, who are powerful.”

Eph 6.12 (*archai, exousiai, kosmokratorai.., pneumatika tes ponerias..* )

UL: *..blawat jangan ko’ jit nu berbela, nu megah, blawat jangan ko’ hatu*

<sup>7</sup> *En tois epouraniois* presents its own problems in Urak Lawoi’, outside the scope of this paper.

<sup>8</sup> *dato*’ - this is deliberately omitted from the list in Eph 6.12.

<sup>9</sup> e.g. English: “lock, stock and barrel”, “flesh and blood”.

<sup>10</sup> The Urak Lawoi’ NT exists at present in loose-leaf clasp folders, new books being added as they are completed. The difference in approach between the Ephesians and Colossians passages will probably be ironed out through testing in use in the church before the NT is finally published.

*kraih nu berbela de' deniya nu kelap ini, blawat jangan ko' jit nu jahac nu berbela de' so' ataih ter.*

Eng: "...struggle against the Jinn who rule, who are powerful, against the strong evil spirits who rule in this dark world, against the evil Jinn who rule above."

Col 1.16 (*thronoi, kuriotēs, archai, exousiai*)

UL: *..tet-ca' jadi ko' jit de' ataih ter, ko' dato' kramai' ter, ko' jit nu hukop semiya ter, ko' hatu kraih ter.*

Eng: "...whether they are the Jinn above, the local spirits, the Jinn who rule people, the strong evil spirits.."

Col 2.10 (*archai, exousiai*)

UL: *..ko' lumoh jit, ko' lumoh hatu nu kraih semuha..*

Eng: "...all groups of Jinn and strong evil spirits.."

Col 2.15 (*archai, exousiai*)

UL: *..ko' jit, ko' hatu kraih..*

Eng: "...the Jinn and the strong evil spirits.."

## CONCLUSIONS

Forty years ago MacGregor<sup>11</sup>, in discussing the meaning of the "spiritual powers", suggested that "the nearest parallel would be found in parts of the Foreign Mission field where servitude to unseen spirits and dread of them is that above all else from which Christ is felt to save". While this is far from the only (or even necessarily the "nearest") contextualisation of *archai kai exousiai*, we have been able to show that it is a very relevant one. Examination of the contextual meaning of the New Testament terms for "spiritual powers" has shown that they occupy a very similar "conceptual space" to at least three classes of Urak Lawoi' spirit being. This has encouraged us to use indigenous terms to translate the NT lists of such powers. The precise combinations of terms, and the qualifiers used with them, are slightly unusual, but we have tried not to violate the native speakers' ideas concerning these powers. Thus attention is not focussed on the identity of the powers themselves but on the new information the scripture provides about them. To a people fearful of the various spirits they perceive as powerfully affecting their daily lives, the truth of Christ as supreme and victorious over all spiritual forces comes as a directly relevant and liberating message.

(For bibliography see part 1 of this article, January 1994)

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11 (1954), 25.