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**The Higa-unon *Kutiapi*:  
A Two-Stringed Plectrum Lute**

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On Mindanao Island, southern Philippines, numerous non-Muslim, non-Christian tribal groups—collectively categorized as the Mindanao *lumad* (tribes)—still perform their traditional music. These musical genres existed long before the advent of Islam in 1490 and Christianity in 1521 in the Philippines. This paper on the indigenous plectrum lute, the *kutiapi*, of one *lumad*, the Higa-unons of Rogongon, a barangay (village) in the City of Iligan, province of Lanao del Norte, documents one such oral tradition. The paper will present the findings of the study of Higa-unon *kutiapi* music, namely, its mythological evolutions, role in the society, repertoire and performance practice, and music making techniques. It will also include organological descriptions of the *kutiapi* as an instrument with a zoomorphic corpus. It is evident that the tribe's cultural heritage, if not already acculturated, is fast disappearing. Thus the study tried to find out what remained of the traditional *kutiapi* music and what the people still know about the origin of *kutiapi*. This was done through field investigation, interviews, audio documentation of actual *kutiapi* playing and qualitative description of the instrument, as well as observation and analysis of the socio-economic and political conditions obtaining in the community, which maybe factors for culture change. It is hoped that this presentation will provide the impetus for further research on Higa-unon music, especially in the areas of Higa-unon's preferences in the organization of their music, the identification of specific repertoire for other instruments, the *kutiapi*'s possible 21st century transformations, and the possible transcription into notation of various archaic ritual songs.

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## INTRODUCTION

"Several academic scholars have come to our place to study our way of life, thinking this could easily be understood in a few encounters. The truth is that it will take almost a lifetime to fully understand 'ang kinatibuk-an sa among kinabuhi ug pamaagi.' In other words, our aspirations, intuitions, insights, and all other aspects of our life and traditional practices."<sup>1</sup>

Datu Rajah Pintu

Many non-Muslim, non-Christian tribal groups—collectively categorized as the Mindanao *lumad* (indigenous tribes)—still perform their traditional music in Mindanao, southern Philippines. These musical genres existed long before the advent of Islam, which was first brought to Maguindanao by Sharif Awliya around 1460 and by Sharif Kabungsuan sometime in 1515 (Rudil, 2003:7), and before the Spaniards brought Christianity to the Philippines in 1521. The *kutiapi*, the indigenous plectrum lute, of the Higa-unons of Rogongon in the City of Iligan, province of Lanao del Norte, is one such musical tradition.

A glimpse of their rich musical heritage is still evident among the older generation of Higa-unon. They live in the upper hinterlands of Bukidnon province in the north central portion of Mindanao, in the mountain chains between Bukidnon and Agusan Provinces in the northeast, in the upland areas of Cagayan de Oro City, Misamis Oriental, and most especially in Iligan City in the northwest. This paper focuses on the inhabitants of the area around Iligan City, Misamis Oriental. Understanding the name of the tribe is deemed necessary in determining the origin of the Higa-unon.

The use of the term Higa-unon (invariably spelled Higa-onon or Higaonon by some scholars and by government agencies) first appeared in two reports from 1967. One was an article published by a member of the culture, Ricardo de la Camara, also known as Datu Mibalao among the Higa-unon, in which he identified three provinces as their habitat (Camara, n.d.). Another report is by social scientists, Juan R. Francisco and Angelo Bernardo, who carried out a cultural and demographic survey of the Higa-unon in Agusan del Norte between March 1 and April 26, 1967 (Francisco & Bernardo, 1979). According to Francisco, "the name Higaonon became a part of the ethnographic vocabulary only about the early 1960s" (1980:46). In some articles about this tribe, it has been normal to use a dash within the term, thus "Higa-unon." The term variously means "hinterland dwellers" (Biernatzki, 1973: 16) or "mountain dwellers" (Cole, F-C. 1956: 5). The term was derived from the root word *gaun*. Edvilla Talaroc reported that to the Higa-unon in the western part of Misamis Oriental province, the term *gaon* (sic) generally means "mountain" and literally as "dry lands" (Talaroc, 1975:7). Ricardo D. Caluen, however, made an etymological definition of the term based on a personal interview with the Higa-unon in Rogongon, Iligan City, stating that:

The term is a derivative of two "Higa-unon" words: *higad* and *gaon*. The former refers to a situation wherein something is placed on a flat surface as *palay* [rice] on mats to dry. However, *gaon* could mean "to alight from or arise from." Putting the two together, *higa-unon* literally means "one who rises from" (Caluen, 1982:66).

The root word of Higa-unon is actually *gaun*, which means "going up" or one who "rises from" (the water). The phrase "going up" is appropriate to this tribe in Rogongon as suggested by their folktales, the *Gugud* (also known as *Batbat*, "to narrate"), which traces their legendary migration from the mouth of the Bayug river to the interior upland areas, reminiscent of and identical to the rolling hills of Rogongon (Caluen, 1982:75-78). The prefix *hi-* may refer to a third person, either singular or plural, signifying one "who is going up," and the suffix *non* serves as an inflectional ending, signifying a "people who." Using the above description, one can conclude that the term Higa-unon (especially that referring to the *lumad* of Rogongon) means "people who went up."<sup>2</sup> The use of a dash, therefore, between *Higa* and *unon* does not actually refer to the root word. It is suggested, however, that the dash probably aids in the proper pronunciation of the term.

Although the term Higa-unon did not appear officially in ethnographic literature until the 1960s, there was one earlier reference in a report by Fay-Cooper Cole done in 1910, which is often quoted by local and foreign social scientists studying the tribes of Bukidnon Province, Mindanao. According to Cole, "these people usually refer to themselves as *Higaonon* [sic] 'mountain dwellers,' but they are better known as Bukidnon, a name applied to the mountain people by the coastal Bisayan" (Cole, 1956: 5). Cole's findings are echoed in the later fieldwork by Biernatzki who concluded that *Higa-onon* is an "old word in the Bukidnon language (*Binukid*) [that] denotes exactly the same Mindanao group as does *Bukidnon*" (Biernatzki, 1973: 16). Cole's and Biernatzki's findings strengthen the hypothesis that both the Bukidnons (as a tribe) and the Higa-unons are of the same origin. Unabia further underscores this hypothesis by adding that the term *Bukidnon* refers to the various inhabitants of the north-central part of Bukidnon province, including those whose names refer to places or rivers where they reside, for example, the Tagoloanun, the Pulangion, the Higa-unen [sic], and the Talaandig. Furthermore, these natives speak a common language, believe in a common god, *Magbabaya*, practice the *Kaliga* ritual, follow a common set of customs and

traditions, and share a folk literature (Unabia, 1976:6-7).

Datu Rajah Pinto, a major informant for this paper, also made the following observations when asked which of these two terms is authentic. According to him, "*Bukidnon*" is a term used by Christian Visayan settlers when referring to the *lumad* who dwell in the mountains (*bukid*). However, Pinto argues that since the Higa-unons refer to a mountain or a hill as *buntud*, the use of "*Bukidnon*," as in Bukidnon Province, is consequently a misnomer. In accordance with the Higa-unon language, therefore, the province should be renamed "*Ibuntudan Province*" rather than Bukidnon.<sup>3</sup> This would, according to the argument, give due justice to the original settlers of the area. There are also similarities among the Bukidnon tribes' social enjoyment, especially in music and dance. Predictably, slight variations in cultural settings differentiate indigenous tribal groups from one another. Unfortunately, their customs and traditions have become vulnerable to the onslaught of westernization and modernization.

The Higa-unon share certain affinities with other *lumad* co-existing in and around the neighboring provinces of Bukidnon and Mindanao. Foremost among these other *lumad* are the Manobos, whose origin is not known except that they are scattered throughout Mindanao. Elena G. Maquiso, in her comprehensive study of a Manobo epic, *Ulahingan* (1977), cited several manuscripts from Blair and Robertson's *The Philippine Island*, on the whereabouts of the Manobos in Mindanao:

When the Spaniards reach Mindanao, they found Manobos in different parts of the islands. They were "in the interior about the watershed of Agusan river (Blair and Robertson 1906 vol. 40:123, footnote 46); "in the province of Iligan, which borders in Caraga" as well as the entire coast of Northern Mindanao and the island of Camiguin (Blair and Robertson, vol. 38:106); "along the various points of the coast from the Malalag to Sarangani;" in the Cotabato and Davao areas and "around the headwaters of the Rio Grande de Mindanao" (Blair and Robertson, vol. 43:241, footnote 106; 275-276; 197, footnote 82 in Maquiso, 1977:6).

One relationship of the Manobo and Higa-unon is seen in their musical practices and musical instruments. Richard Elkins's findings on the language structure of the eighteen linguistic groups confirm the relationship between the Higa-unon and the other *lumad* communities in Mindanao. According to this study, a proto-Manobo language existed initially among some eighteen language groups including the Higa-unon and the Binukid (Elkins, 1976-78, 2:525).

The name of the area studied, Rogongon, comes from the Higa-

unon word *lugung*, which means thunder. Tribal folktales preserve several versions of the origin of the word. One of these folktales describes a tree that grew in Rogongon, which was the original Higa-unon settlement along the Bayug river now named the Mandulog. According to this tale, this tree was so huge, its branches reached out to several mountains surrounding the lower valley of old Rogongon. During strong winds, thunderous sounds emanating from the giant branches of this tree could be heard even in distant areas, thus the name *lugungen*.<sup>4</sup> A separate account provided by an informant claimed that the name was given by Apo-a Tominocul, a legendary ancestor of the Higa-unons, for a tree believed to be the abode of *diwatas* (spirits), which produced thunder (Caluen, 1982:82)

The Higa-unons have retained some of their pre-Islamic and pre-Hispanic traditional culture. The group studied in Barangay Rogongon bears close affinity to the Maranao Muslims, thus, their categorization as a "Marginal-Islamic" group. This link could be seen in their knowledge of the Maranao style of playing the *kutiapi*. Unfortunately, it is evident that the tribe's cultural heritage, if not already acculturated, is fast disappearing. Thus this study is an attempt to find out what remains of the traditional *kutiapi* music and what the people still know about the origin of *kutiapi*. At the same time, this study will describe the instrument organologically.<sup>5</sup>

Studies suggest that Higa-unon vocal and musical instruments are becoming rare. In fact, there is a strong evidence that these may soon be extinct. During my fieldwork for this study, I found only two authentic performers who could discuss the repertoire in its original social context (e.g., mythological, lore, and the evolution of certain music pieces). The majority of the young Higa-unons never had a chance to learn these musical practices, let alone appreciate them, although they know a little about their traditional dances.

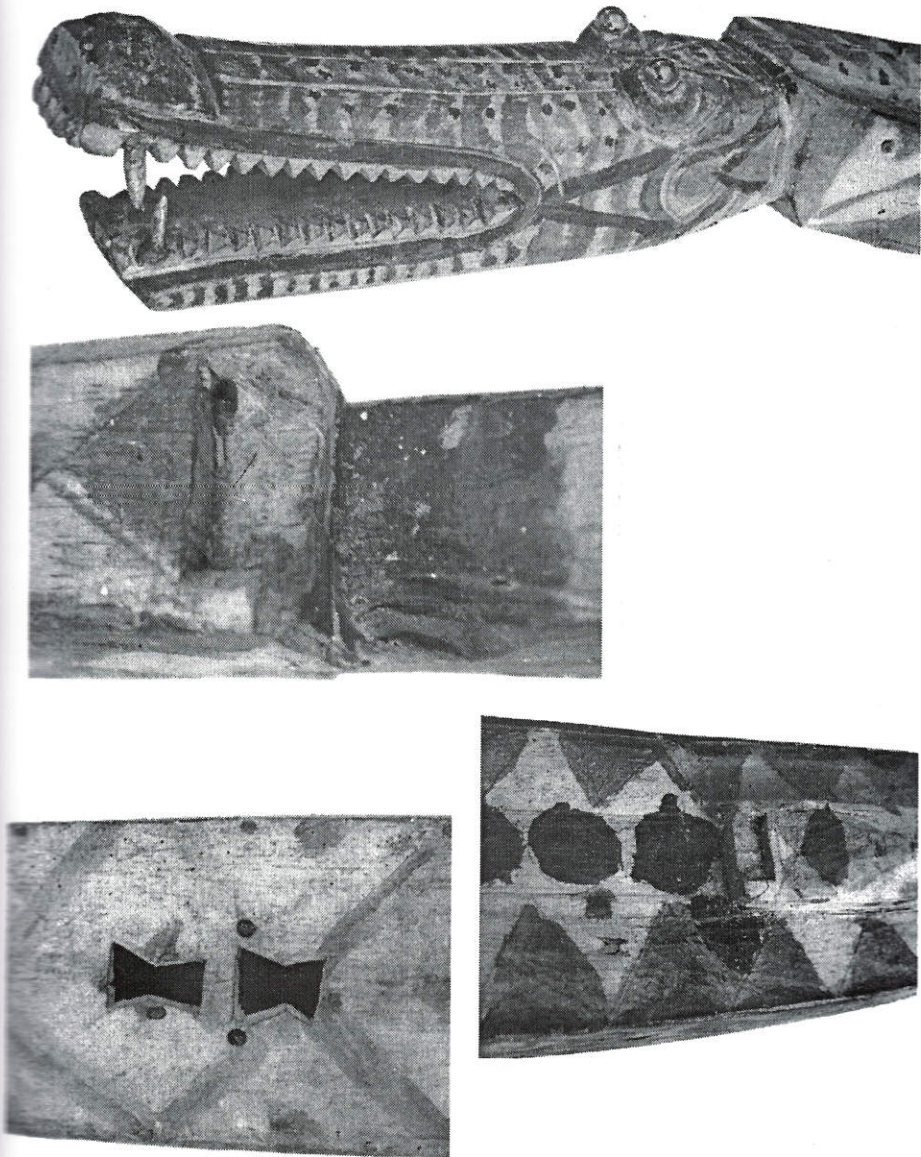
### THE KUTIAPI

Of the various solo melodic instruments of the Higa-unon in Rogongon, the two-stringed lute called *kutiapi* (also spelled *kudyapi*) clearly stands out. Among the other Mindanao *lumad*, this instrument is also known but by different names. It is called *hegalung* by the T'bolis, *kuglong* by the Manobos and Bagobos, *kotapi* by the Subanons, and *kutiapi* among the Higa-unons and other Bukidnon tribes (e.g. Talaandig), as well as by the Muslim groups, especially the Maranaos and Maguindanaos of Lanao and Maguindanao provinces,



Fig. 1. Higa-unon in their traditional attire. From lower left, clockwise: (A) Playing the *lantuy* flute (B) a *bagani* (warrior) (C) Higa-unon couple (D) old Higa-unon woman (E) playing the *dayuday*. PHOTOS FROM THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION. PHOTO CREDITS: FRANCISCO ENGLIS

respectively. Maceda alluded to an account by Francisco de Alzina's *Historia de Bisaya* (*History of the Visayan*, 1668), which mentioned a *codiapi* (lute) as one of the seventeenth century musical instruments of the Visayans in the Visayas Islands in the central part of the Philippines (Maceda, 1963, 1978, 1:35). One can therefore conjecture that in the



Figs. 2.1-2.4. Photos of the Kutiapi from Francisco Englis' collection. PHOTO CREDITS: HANS BRANDEIS

Philippines, the term *kutiapi* or *kudyapi* is a generic name for this 2-stringed plectrum lute.

In Rogongon today there are few authentic players and instrument makers left, and all belong to the older generation. At the time of the study there were only two outstanding performers in the area, and they served as the main informants for this portion of the paper. One of them was Datu Amay Mansalumay, a *baylan* (or healer), who died a few years ago. The other was the left-handed virtuoso lutenist, Sowili Gikanan, who was about fifty years old at the time the study was conducted.

### SOME KUTIAPI MYTHS

The origin of the *kutiapi* has roots in tribal mythology. The following version is a translation of its mythological evolution as narrated by Datu Amay Mansalumay:

Datu Laud, son of Baybayan, dreamed of Daiday, a female spirit who dwelt in the east (*subangan*). In that dream, Datu Laud was watching Daiday play a strange musical instrument that had a crocodile-like head and produced a sweet and gentle sound. Daiday told him that this musical instrument, a lute, was called a *kablitun* (meaning, to be plucked) and urged him to get his people to make their own lutes. Thus, upon waking up, Datu Laud started to make his own lute. Because he forgot to ask the spirit which kind of wood to use to make this instrument, Datu Laud took a nap at mid-day so he could again meet Daiday in his dream.

In this second dream, he was told by the female spirit that the wood used came from a rare tree called *takuken*. When he awoke, Datu Laud carved an exact replica of the *kablitun* as he saw it in his dream, showing a crocodile-like head, known as *talabasan* (lizard), on its base. For the strings, he used a *bislig* (a special kind of vine usually found on big trees). But there was one important thing that Datu Laud did not know—the proper placement (*dataging*) of the frets used called *damalan*. His son Piaw suggested taking the lute around to try to find someone who might know the proper fretting, and Datu Laud agreed. While Piaw was making his journey, he was unaware that he was being followed by a spirit named *Kurukuk* (also *Kukuk*), who was intrigued by the thing that Piaw was carrying.

*Kurukuk* had the chance when Piaw, who had to answer a call of nature, placed the lute aside. Stealthily, *Kurukuk* came out of the shadows and played the lute while dancing to its music. When Piaw returned and picked up the lute again, he was surprised to see that the frets were already in their proper places. When he tried to strum it, Piaw discovered that it was easy for him to play several tunes on the instrument. From then on he became the first virtuoso player of the lute, which was then called *kablitun*, and introduced it to the whole village. The name *kablitun* later became *kutiapi*.<sup>6</sup>

Datu Amay Mansalumay alluded to the myth which gave the



lute its early name of *kablitun* because a line in a *kaliga* prayer mentions "*kablitun su Baylan na Kulambisan*" (trans. to call the attention by finger-tapping the Baylan who is a *Kulambisan*).

The belief that the female spirit is the source of the kutiapi is likewise prevalent among the T'boli tribe in southern Mindanao. According to tribal beliefs, a T'boli male lutenist is guided by a female spirit named Diolinda. This guiding spirit of the T'boli two-stringed lute called *hegalung* is also believed to protect and give the lutenist a long life as well as the gift healing (Busch, n.d).

Like the Higa-unon kutiapi, the evolution of the Maranao kutiapi also mentions the involvement of a spirit called *Kukuk*.<sup>7</sup> Mamitua Saber, a respected authority on Maranao culture at the Mindanao State University Research Center, recounted the following legend on the evolution of the lute as narrated to him by an old musician:

A long time ago, a brave hunter went deep into the forest and heard a haunting music coming from a distance. Searching for the source of the sound, he found a *Kokok* (mysterious forest dweller) sitting on the stump of a tree and playing a strange instrument. Unnoticed by the *Kokok*, the hunter hid himself behind a tree to better enjoy the music and examine the string instrument. Attracted by the beauty of the unique object and the sweet music it produced, the hunter crawled up noiselessly and grabbed the instrument from the *Kokok*, who fled in fright. With his stolen trophy, the hunter returned to the village to introduce the kutiapi to the lakeshore dwellers, who still play it today (Saber, 1977:3).

In Saber's narrative this *Kokok* had a human form with wide lips that covered his eyes when he laughed. This description matches that of the mythological creature of the Higa-unon in the neighboring Rogongon area. In Bornean folklore, according to Saber, the *Kokok* was a mysterious giant who lured human beings into the world of spirits (Saber, 1977:3). Even as he remarked that its origin had been lost to history, Saber spoke of a pre-Islamic instrumental tradition of the Maranaos' kutiapi, which was supposedly patterned after a beautiful crocodile-like spirit named *Pinatola i-kilid*, believed to be a water spirit of Lake Lanao.

#### PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION AND CONSTRUCTION OF KUTIAPI

The description of the instrument as a "long-necked lute" like those believed to have originated in Mesopotamia and its neighboring civilization in the Ancient Near East seems inappropriate to the Higa-

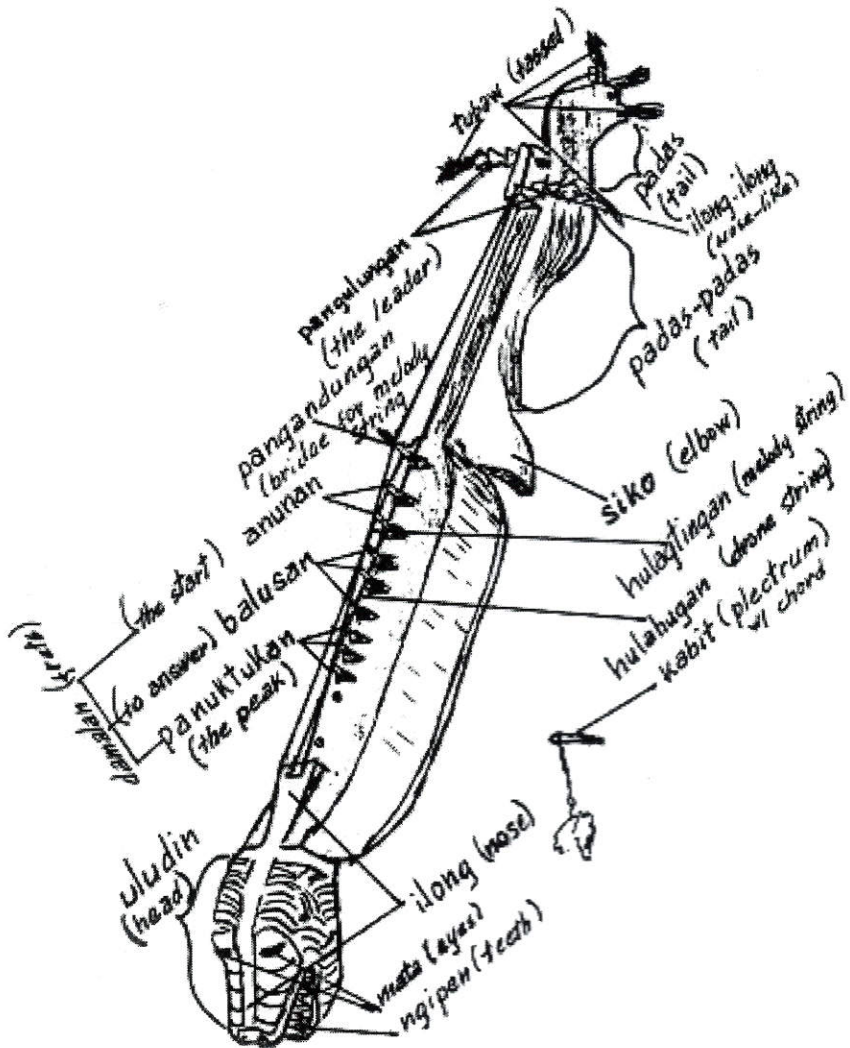


Fig. 3. Drawings/illustrations from the author's original M.A. Thesis, "The Music of the Higaunon in Rogongon: An Introductory Study." DRAWINGS/ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR AND BERT MONTERONA.

unons' two-stringed lute (Turnbull, 1972:58). Among the Higa-unons, *kutiapi* is described as a 'long-tailed lute.' The local names of the different parts of the instrument in fact correspond to the body parts of a lizard (*talabasan*), alligator, or crocodile, which are all members of the reptile family. The *kutiapi* has a reptile head carved on the base end. The opposite end, which looks like the fingering board and where the tuning pegs (*pangalungan*) are located, is called invariably *padas-padas* or *padas*, which literally means "tail" and "tail-end" respectively.

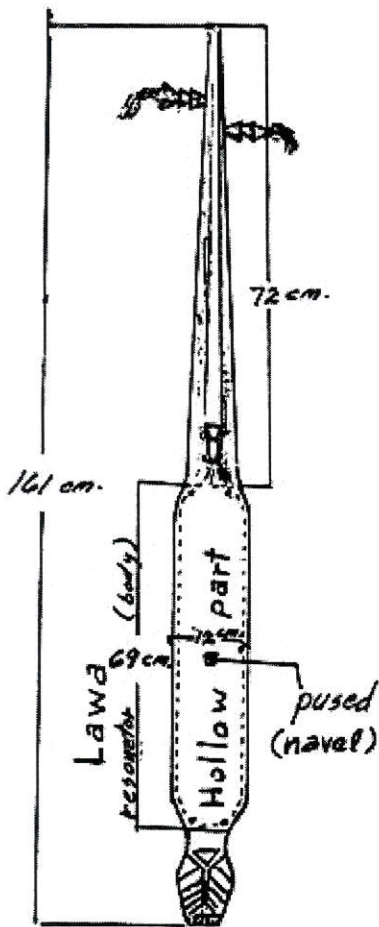


Fig. 4. The Higa-unon Kutiapi (back view)

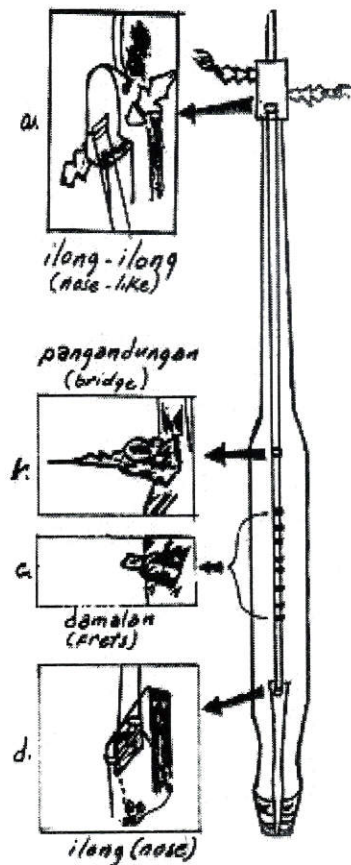


Fig. 5. The Higa-unon Kutiapi (front view)

The reptile-like appearance of the instrument has roots in mythology. Quoting several works on Philippine ethnography, such as that of *Mass* in 1842, Blumentritt stated that among the Manobos "the caiman, a crocodile-like reptile, is held by them as sacred, a belief that is similar to that of the Tagalogs" (Blumentritt 1881, trans. Maceda, 1980:126). However, the Higa-unons in Rogongon found the only source explaining the origin of this reptile-like appearance in the *Batbat* (lit. to tell; also refers to a tale or narrative) recounting the dream of Datu Laud, as told by Datu Mansalumay, and in the iconographic description by the neighboring Maranao tribe mentioned earlier.

The whole corpus of the *kutiapi* is artistically shaped out of a light and soft wood from any of the following trees: *maggulingan daha*,<sup>8</sup> *copa* (*Agathis philippinensis* Warb.), and *kalantas* (*Toona calantas* Merr. and Rolfe) which are found locally. Today the most commonly used wood is the jackfruit tree (*Artocarpus heterophylla* Lmk.), also used by guitar makers in the Philippines, and the strings (*tagpes*) used are similar to the steel strings of modern guitars.

Traditional *kutiapi* strings were made from a kind of vine (*bagun*) called *bislig* found only on big tree trunks in the deep forest. Unfortunately these days, this vine is already hard to find mainly due to the unabated denudation of forests. Furthermore, contemporary Higa-unon lutenists prefer steel strings for these enhance the sound. The player uses a plectrum called *kabit* made from the hard outer skin of a rattan vine or bamboo. This is set on the middle finger (*inlalabaw*), fastened firmly by a hemp string. The eight frets are made from chips carved from the core of a tree called *anotong* (*Cyathea cantaminans*) and are fastened to the board using beeswax. These frets, however, can be removed by lightly heating (with a candle or lighter flame) the base of the hardened beeswax and then fastening them back immediately before they cool. Applying this heating process, a player can therefore make his own desired tuning scale by merely rearranging the distances between frets. Today, however, this special beeswax, which is taken from the beehives of tiny bees called *kiot*, is hard to find. Instead, contemporary lute makers and players use a melted cell from damaged flashlight batteries.

#### KUTIAPI'S IMPORTANCE AND PLAYING TECHNIQUES

Among the Higa-unon in Rogongon, the *kutiapi* is played by both men and women. Among other Mindanao tribes, the lutenist plays and dances with the instrument.<sup>9</sup> Unlike their lumad counterparts,

however, Higa-unon lutenists generally sit or squat while playing. There is, however, the utilization of the kutiapi as a prop in a popular solo male dance called *kinukuk*, which reenacts the legendary tale of the *kukuk* playing with a kutiapi earlier described by Datu Mansalumay. The most famous *kinukuk* dancer found was Datu Bubong, who only plucked and stopped the strings (*pamikpik*) rhythmically along to the accompaniment of the drum and/or *agong*. In addition, no ensemble is known in which the kutiapi is included.

A significant social role of the kutiapi is connected with courting. Sometimes a visiting suitor plays the kutiapi while the lady prepares a betel chew. Later, the suitor will hand over the kutiapi to the lady and ask her to play, too. As she receives the kutiapi, the betel chew is also handed over inconspicuously.<sup>10</sup>

At a performance Sowili Gikanan demonstrated the techniques in playing the kutiapi. When playing the lute, he used only three fingers, the index (*intutudu*), the middle (*inlalabaw*), and the ring (*inlalalung*) in stopping the melodic strings. Generally he employed an upstroke in strumming the strings. He also combined both down and upstrokes in fast *paanun* pieces, and used his thumb to slap the board, called *basal*, while strumming, a movement Higa-unon acknowledge as a Maranao technique. In the middle of a piece entitled *Pandaka-pandaka* (short girl), Sowili Gikanan created the effect of a "musical flirtation" by knocking on the board of the instrument from the body up to the tail end and then gesturing as if wiping his eyes and sobbing rhythmically with the music. Sowili's other hand stopped while his finger hammered and plucked the string simultaneously. This plucking and finger hammering of the string by the same hand stopping the string (pressing against the frets) is also common in ornamental passages.

### KUTIAPI TUNING AND NAMES OF FRETS

The Higa-unon kutiapi has two strings. One string provides the drone called *hulabugan* (off the frets) and the other provides the melody called *hulagtingan* (on the frets). In western diatonic terms, the interval between these two strings (in open position) is a major sixth. The eight frets are in three groups, each having a name. From the open position, which is the lowest note, they are called the *anunan*, *balusan*, and *panektekan*. Below are the groupings of the frets and the equivalent notes for each fret (stop) with cents and hertz measurement using a portable tuning machine (Boss Chromatic Tuner TU-100):

*Kutiapi Tuning: (refer to previous drawing for the location of the frets)*

Drone string =  $C_1$  = +20 cents or 445 Hz (an octave below middle C)

Fret Grouping	Fret No.	Scale Degree	Note	Cents	Or	Hz
<i>Anunan</i> (first or beginning)	0	VI <sup>1</sup>	A <sup>1</sup>	-10	Or	438
	1	I	C	0	Or	440
	2	II	D <sup>b</sup>	+20	Or	445
<i>Balusan</i> (to respond)	3	III	E	+20	Or	445
	4	V	G	+10	or	442
	5	VI	A	-10	or	438
<i>Panektekan</i> (the peak)	6	VIII	C <sup>1</sup>	0	or	440
	7	II <sup>1</sup>	D <sup>1</sup>	+30	or	448
	8	III <sup>1</sup>	E <sup>1</sup>	+40	or	450

Table. 1.

In western staff: (hemitonic pentatonic scale)

*Melody string:* m3 dim2 aug2 m3 M2 m3 M2 M2  
CENTS: -10 0 +20 +20 +10 -10 0 +30 +40

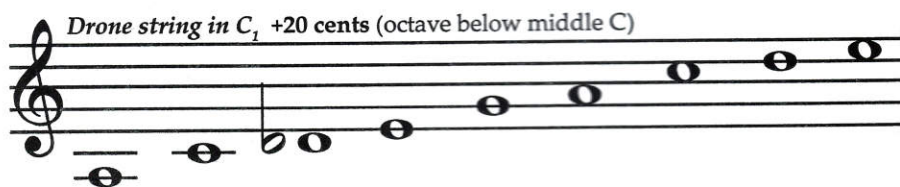


Fig. 6.

## THE REPERTOIRE

There are two types of music played on the *kutiapi*, the *paanun*, an instrumental piece of both slow or fast tempo, and the *epad*, based on verses. The term *paanun*, according to Datu Mansalunay, means walking leisurely.<sup>11</sup> The root word *paa* in the Higa-unon language literally means "foot." Sowili Gikanan recounts a tale describing the playing of a fast *paanun*:

Once upon a time, there was a traveler who was in a hurry to reach his village, which was located upstream, before dusk. Following the path along the riverside, he met a

lute player. As they greeted each other, the lutenist invited the traveler to stop for a rest and soothed his tiredness by playing the kutiapi. Because the traveler was in a hurry, the lutenist played in a fast tempo.<sup>12</sup>

Using the flow of the river as a metaphor, Sowili likened the slow *paanun* to the gentle current of the lower river. In contrast, the fast *paanun* is compared to the fast surge of the upper river.

Neither fast nor slow *paanun* music has specific titles; they simply speak of the music being produced by the finger stopping the strings (*pamikpik*). The later part of this paper will discuss the musical characteristics of the two kinds of *paanun*.

The second type of kutiapi music is called *epad*. Generally, this is music using verses as reference in constructing the melody. Many revolve around one's feelings especially toward a loved one. Earlier descriptions of the kutiapi as a "talking instrument" by cultural researchers are vague in the literal sense. Today young Higa-unon cannot decipher a single line of the verse-reference of *epad* music although the words of the verse-reference are poetic and not too archaic. Only the old people can decipher them and then only the over-all meaning of the *epad* played. It must be noted that the verses used as references in this music are not sung or recited while playing the instrument; for the player, they only serve as a reference in constructing a melodic motif and the over-all plot of the imaginative drama (e.g., loneliness, longing, flirting, programmatic, etc.). We can surmise, then, that there is a reciprocal relationship between the musical elements (e.g., melody and rhythm) and the verses of *epad* music.

### PAMIKPIK – A PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

In the Visayan language of the lowland Christian communities, the root word *pikpik* brings up images of a mother caressing a child to sleep by gently patting the child's buttocks. In the musical practice of the kutiapi, *pamikpik* generally refers to the finger-stopping of the melodic string. It is also used during the opening and ending of a piece and between sections, especially after one melodic line as in *epad* music. This *pamikpik* consists of about two to five notes called a unit; it is somewhat similar to the western motif. However, the *pamikpik* (unit) is not used as unifying element of the melody. Further, it does not derive from themes. In *epad* pieces, therefore, one can conjecture that this unit serves as short sections for the player to settle in (or pause by sounding) while intuitively designing a melodic motif for the line that can best portray the natural inflection of the text. In *paanun*

pieces, the *pamikpik* provides a kind of “security” for the player so he can continue the sound (without rest) while designing a theme and its variations. Below are the common *pamikpik* used.

THE SLOW *PAANUN*

The slow *paanun* is also referred to as the apprentice piece. Sowili Gikanan believes that once the student can perfect this apprentice piece, he will be able to play all the other pieces. The following are the procedures for playing the slow *paanun*:

1. First is the preparatory *pamikpik* in open position

♩ = c. 90 m.m.

m    ʷ    ʷ

played several times

2. Then the second *pamikpik*

m    ʷ    ʷ    \*

m    ʷ    ʷ    i

played several times

3. The third and last *pamikpik*, which includes the first note of the main melody

m    ʷ    ʷ    \*    m    ʷ    ʷ    \*    m

Fig. 7-11.



4. The main melody preceded by the third type of *pamikipik*

Play third *pamikipik* once or thrice

The above slow *paanun* piece can be extended using variations.

The slow *paanun* piece can be extended using variations, permutations, and extensions of *kutiapi* music. The form can be freely or intuitively arranged with the following considerations:

1. Section B is always preceded by section A.
2. The *pamikipik* is played within the two sections and before or after the main sections.
3. Section A and *pamikipik* are played when ending.

### THE EPAD MUSIC

Most of the *epad* verses transcribed deal with love, descriptions of a lady or events, or advice. Generally the music is based on the proper way of articulating the text when spoken. Although not all *epad* verses are poetic when compared to their vocal music, they are generally symmetrical in length and rhyme and are organized to emphasize the main line (e.g., repetition of the main line). Some of the words used in

this music are archaic so that even the natives themselves are no longer able to translate or describe their exact meanings. Further study of the text will be left to the care of linguists and future works on *epad* music.

Despite this limitation, though, eight verses of *epad* have been transcribed with their corresponding "sense."

1.

***Tinggaw Put***

(A tinggaw bird)

By Mahanyag Piansa

Tp. 03-A-338

Tinggaw Put, Tingaw Put  
Di kag layun sa layun  
Panglit-aga sa layun

(Name of the bird)

Don't cross to the other side (of the river bank)  
There's a trap on that side

2.

***Tata Hindu Ka Du-un***

(A song of longing)

By Sowili Gikanan

Tp. 03-A-406

Tata hindu ka du-un  
Dini ka tag dulug ki  
Hadek ata pipi nu  
Tag ibit a ta susu nu  
Tag dampa a ta segpaw nu  
Sa angga ko sa mata nu,  
Tata...

Lady, where are you?  
Come and stay (sleep) with me  
I want to kiss your cheek  
I want to touch your breast  
I want to feel your "lower belly"  
And I like your eyes,  
Lady...

*Variation*

Tata ako gi atay  
Papait sa baba ko, Tata...

Lady, I'm going crazy  
And my mouth is becoming bitter, Lady...

3.

***Bukakang***

(A kind of Chicken with few feathers)

By Sowili Gikanan

Tp. 03-B-171

Tundug, Tundug Bukakang  
 Ta sasagubay siran  
 So tanan siran bukakang

Marching featherless chickens  
 Always going together  
 And they are all featherless chickens

4.

***Pandaka Pandaka***

(Short Lady)

By Sowili Gikanan

Tp. 03-B-248

Pandaka, Pandaka  
 Makempet tag Batugen  
 Su laga ha papanika

Short (Lady) 2X  
 Beautiful and nice to have  
 That lady in costume..

*Variation*

Masakit sa ulu ku  
 Lagkes pa sa kagpa ku

My head is aching  
 Including my chest

5.

***Kapukaw ka Lupandang***

(Wake-up my Beloved)

By Amay Mansalumay

Tp. 03-B-349

Lupandang, kapukaw ka Lupandang  
 Masakit sa getek ku  
 Sininda-a u busaw  
 Bulungenuk kan kanak  
 Ta sininda-a u busaw

Wake-up my Beloved  
 My stomach is aching  
 Induced by a devil  
 Treat me  
 Because it's induced by a devil

this music are archaic so that even the natives themselves are no longer able to translate or describe their exact meanings. Further study of the text will be left to the care of linguists and future works on *epad* music.

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Bulungenuk kan kanak  
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Induced by a devil  
Treat me  
Because it's induced by a devil

6.

***Buyungun***

(Missing Someone)

By Amay Mansalumay

Tp. 09-A-322

Buyungun kad en asem  
 Ku muli-ad sag Tangkulan  
 Haphapengen Kaden  
 [  
 Manakem be-an ad-em

Soon you'll miss me  
 When I go home to Tangkulan  
 You will miss me...  
 [  
 Soon you will miss me...

7.

***Tumangkad En Ulahu***

(A witch-mother's verse)

By Sowili Gikanan

Tp. 08-A-507

Tumangkad en ulahu  
 Susukad en su bata  
 Tag giya ki ta Datu aya  
 Sa minatay su bata din

Stop crying  
 My breast-fed baby  
 We'll go to the Datu's place  
 Because his son died.

8.

***Kag Matutung***

(To be on Fire)

By Sowili Gikanan

Tp. 08-A-412

Hinungaw ka, Diwata  
 Sa natutung bata dan  
 Masakit sag katutung  
 Labaw sag kalupahan

Look down (from your window) god  
 'cause the child is on fire (burned)  
 It is painful when burned  
 But there is more pain from those  
 who are left behind (relatives).

The above examples of verses for *epad* music illustrate a few indigenous musical treasures of the Higa-unon's lute music. This preliminary study revealed that some, if not all vocal music, can be included in the kutiapi repertoire. The Higa-unon lutenist also claimed to know the technique of "thumb slapping" on the sounding board called *basal*, which they acknowledged as a Maranao style. Informants Sowili Gikanan and Amay Mansalumay, pointed to out two types of tuning: one is believed to be that of the Higa-unon, called *salipongan*, and the other is that of the neighboring Maranaos called *lantal*. The latter is accomplished by slightly moving three frets of the instrument. This information, however, needs further investigation due to lack of evidence. This problem is exacerbated by the sheer difficulty of finding at present authentic Maranao kutiapi players.

### PEDAGOGY

Three indigenous methods of learning to play the kutiapi were identified.<sup>13</sup>

1. A very young student or child normally sits on the lap of the teacher. In this way, the teacher is right behind the student who is holding the kutiapi. However, this practice applies only when the student is a member of the teacher's family or is of the same sex. The basic traditional pedagogy includes: (a) first, the student practices the techniques of holding the plectrum (*kabit*) and proper strumming termed *pagkebit* while the teacher performs finger-stopping (pressing the string) on the various frets; (b) next, the student learns the specific fingering techniques for a specific piece while the teacher does the *pagkebit*; and (c) to help the student in the proper manipulation of the fingers, the teacher places his hand on top of the student's and guides his fingers. At this stage, it is expected that the student will loosen his grip. As learning proceeds, the teacher will remove his hand slowly until such time that the student can play by himself.
2. The second approach is used with older students and those who are not members of the family: (a) the teacher holds the instrument in playing position while the student sits on the head side of the instrument where the strumming is done. If the teacher is right handed, the student sits to his right. In this position the student

performs the *pagkebit* technique while the teacher does the *pamikpik*; and (b) the seating plan is reversed when the student is ready to practice the *pamikpik* with the teacher doing the *pagkebit*.

3. The third approach is used when the student and teacher face each other when playing. Both will hold an instrument or, if there is only one instrument, the student is asked to imitate the passages previously played by the teacher. In playing *epad* pieces, the student is advised to sing along or say the verses while playing.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The Higa-unons have retained some of their pre-Islamic and pre-Hispanic traditional culture. The group studied in Barangay Rogongon is close to the Muslim Maranaos hence their categorization as a "Marginal-Islamic" group. This affinity is also seen in their knowledge of the Maranao way of playing the *kutiapi*, the most widespread lute in the area. But it is evident that their cultural heritage is fast disappearing, if not already acculturated.

Several kinds of vocal music have been identified and defined in their social contexts during the field work. Although traces of epic songs of the *batbat* genre such as the *ulaging*, as well as the *unyag* prayer, the *kaliga*, and some *malingka* versions have been observed, locating other authentic and knowledgeable performers for these epic songs remains a major goal of future studies. For the present work, the collection of secular folk songs is sufficient. While musical instruments can still be found, there is evidence that they may soon be extinct. The repertoire for *kutiapi* has been identified, and several audio recordings were made. These will serve as reference as more of this lute music is collected, which must be done as soon as possible. As mentioned earlier, only two outstanding authentic performers, who could discuss the repertoire in its original social context (e.g., mythological, lore, and the evolution of certain music pieces), were found in Rongongon, and as of this writing, one of them already passed away.

It is unfortunate that other than their familiarity with traditional dances, the majority of the young Higa-unon never had a chance to appreciate and learn these musical practices. No evidence of active transmission in the area studied has been observed, and most of the music studied was performed by old Higa-unon. Mainly because



instrumental music is usually performed only for personal use explains why it is fast disappearing. Moreover, there are no ensemble types in existence. Finally, during the period when the initial research for this study was undertaken (from October 1986), it was observed that in all gatherings (e.g., the *kaamulan*), where special entertainment was presented, only the traditional dances were most in demand. The only time the instrumental and vocal music was presented in public was at an evening concert held at MSU-Iligan Institute of Technology, which was videotaped for posterity. Yet, it is possible to conclude that remnants of Higa-unon traditional cultural practices still exist and these are found in Rogongon.

It is hoped that this introductory study will encourage future scholars of ethnic music or indigenous cultures to undertake further research on the subject, such as an in-depth analysis of the Higa-unon's preferences in the organization of their music, the identification of specific repertoire for other instruments, and the possibility of transcribing into notation various archaic ritual songs, among others. The involvement of scholars, agencies, local government, and cultural organizations in further research, not just among the Higa-unon but also among other Mindanao *lumad*, cannot be overstressed. Needless to emphasize, this urgent collaboration is imperative if this fast-disappearing tradition were to be salvaged from complete extinction. That today in Rogongon only a few members of the older generation have knowledge of their musical culture provides evidence of the effects of continuing acculturation.

This study is only the beginning, and it is hoped that many more will follow. To chart the path for future research on the subject, this paper's conclusion turns again for inspiration to the words of Datu Rajah Pinto Soong (Roberto Soong):

"Several academic scholars have come to our place to study our way of life, thinking this could easily be understood in a few encounters. The truth is that it will take almost a lifetime to fully understand '*ang kinatibuk-an sa among kinabuhi ug pama-agi.*' In other words, our aspirations, intuitions, insights, and all other aspects of our life and traditional practices."

The above statement is a reminder to consider these living traditions with care and reverence. Only as long as Higa-unon music is still performed, and the peoples' habitat is not destroyed by industrialization or the denudation of the area will this rich musical tradition live on.

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I am also indebted to my Higa-unon informants for allowing me to study their music: Barangay Captain Roberto Soong (a.k.a. Datu Rajah Pinto), who was the tribal chief at the time I carried out the fieldwork; Sowili Gikanan and the late Amay Mansalumay, my main sources on the kutiapi music; Jose Soong, Datu Bubong and his family, and several female singers for the various song types; Rudy Soong and Dugkugan Mansumayan, for helping in the translation and transcription of the song texts; Juan Sisayan, the Drummer; the late Mr. Apolinario Abungan, my main *lantuy* informant; to several Higa-unon singers and instrumentalist for their cooperation during the whole work.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Francisco A. Englis** is Professor of Humanities at the MSU-Iligan Institute of Technology in Mindanao, Philippines. He was an Asian Public Intellectuals Fellow for 2002-2003 of the Nippon Foundation of Japan.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> A free translation of a commentary made by Mr. Roberto Soong (a.k.a. Datu Rajah Pinto) in the dialect. From *The Music of the Higa-unon in Rogongon: An Introductory Study*, M.A. Thesis by Francisco A. Englis, Kent State University, USA, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Roberto Soong a.k.a. Datu Rajah Pinto, Barangay Captain. Interviewed by the author, Barangay Rogongon, March 10, 1986.

<sup>3</sup> Roberto Soong, Interviewed by the author, Rogongon, March 10, 1986.

<sup>4</sup> In the Higa-unon dialect, the letters r and l can be interchanged.

<sup>5</sup> From "*organology*," meaning the study of musical instruments, including their history and physical description, performance techniques, musical functions, ornaments and local names of parts, physical constructions, socio-cultural considerations like mythological and legendary evolutions.

<sup>6</sup> Amay Mansalumay. Interviewed by author. Tape recording, tp. 00-B-00, Rogongon, 25 April 1987.

<sup>7</sup> Invariably spelled Kokok.

<sup>8</sup> Possibly a species known only to the natives, and already extinct. No known equivalent Visayan term.

<sup>9</sup> The Bagobos and the T'bolis.

<sup>10</sup> Sowili Gikanan. Interviewed by the author during a performance, Iligan City, 2 February 1987.

<sup>11</sup> Amay Masalumay. Interviewed by author, Rogongon, Iligan City, 25 April 1987.

<sup>12</sup> Sowili Gikanan, 2 February 1987.

<sup>13</sup> Based on actual lessons and group discussion with Sowili Gikanan, Amay Mansalumay and other Higa-unon.

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APPENDIX

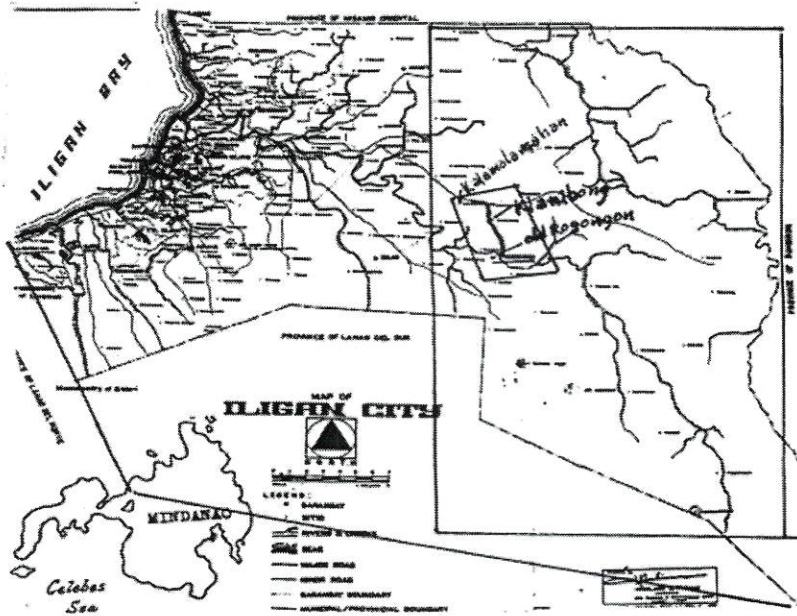


Fig. 12. Map of Iligan City showing Barangay Rogongan