



Illustrated Historical Folktales.
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Nine historical Philippine folktales on Cagayan de Oro and Mindanao come together in one rare compilation

The unique *komiks* format of these tales, which brings together history, folklore, and visual art in one easy-to-read compilation, offers a window into a Mindanaoan past not often mentioned in published historical books and other, more mainstream collections.

These historical tales make up the first volume of a total of four volumes and spans seventy-six pages. The collection includes brief, rarely-chronicled historical tales on some of the most prominent heroes of Cagayan de Oro during the Philippine-Spanish and Philippine-American wars and portrays a yet-untold story of Rizal's secret visit, from his place of exile in Dapitan during the Spanish occupation in the Philippines, to his friend Don Urbano Alvarez in Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental. Moreover, this illustrated edition encompasses tales that explore the historical derivations of the present-day names of Cagayan de Oro and Mindanao and retell the myth of Camiguin Island as an original part of Surigao mainland.

Some of the tales in this edition are told in two versions. *The Origin of Cagayan de Oro* mentions *Kalambagohan* as the old name of the city and *Cagayha-an* as the name of the sultan's beautiful daughter, so revered for her beauty that even the river, which has since borne her name, had claimed her by taking her life away. In the next tale, *The Origin of the Name Cagayan and Mindanao*, the Muslim princess is not named, although *Cagayha-an* was mentioned as the old name of Cagayan de Oro. In both

versions, *Cagayha-an* bears roughly the same translation: “the place where the people of Lanao—specifically the men who sought the hand of the sultan’s daughter—was put to shame”.

The story of “The Battle of Agusan”, set in Agusan, Cagayan de Oro during a Philippine-American encounter at the turn of the twentieth century, features the astute leadership and heroism of Captain Vicente Roa and also comes in two versions. The first portrayal highlights the plan of operations of the *Kagayanon* soldiers, while the second version emphasizes the land, sea, and riverine battle strategies of the Americans as they sought to beat down the Filipinos. The two versions conclude with the defeat of the Filipino soldiers, although the first story recounts the death of Captain Roa at the point of a bayonet. By contrast, the second rendition depicts the beheading of the brave captain as his final mortal blow.

The tales of Iponan’s patron saint, San Guillermo, and the statue’s supposed ‘participation’ in the battle that resisted the invasion of the Muslims are also included in this compilation, although no historical personages are mentioned in any of the stories. Two other tales, namely, “Rizal’s Clandestine Visit to Tagoloan” and “Sarjento Bravo and His Sister” unravel a side to war and revolution that is more personal but, as Bravo’s tale depicts, no less harrowing. It comes as a surprise that a Spanish authority had helped Rizal in his plan to visit an old friend in Tagoloan from Dapitan, but equally astonishing is the story of Sergeant Bravo and his sister, who discovered each other’s identities only after the former has already killed the husband of the latter, a Spanish lieutenant from Malaybalay. Such are the subtle repercussions of war, and the people of Mindanao, specifically Cagayan de Oro, have not been exempt from its many-sided blows.

The tales in this collection are illustrated in the tradition of the Filipino *komiks*, with the text done mostly in English. Paneled images accompany the text, although some of the images may be improved in terms of contrast and visibility. Nonetheless, the art illustrations of Estarte and Vamenta effectively bring to life the historical tales often handed down orally from one Mindanaoan generation to the next, making this illustrated edition a valuable material in and out of the classroom.

Where oral literature and mainstream historical accounts have failed, these pictorially-depicted folktales have succeeded. To fill the gap between folklore and 'official' history is one of the achievements of this collection. *Illustrated Historical Folktales* provides a visual representation of a Mindanaoan past so remote and so obscured by centuries of colonization it is, by all rights, a rare cultural gem and a historical artifact in itself. 🚢