THE DARANGEN is an epic chanted by the Maranao people in the core area of Lanao del Sur in Mindanao. Although other variations exist among Maranao ethnic communities, such as the Maguindanao ethnic group and Manobo groups to the east of the island, the one in Lanao del Sur is considered the most definitive. It is a pre-Islamic form of oral literature presently existing in an Islamic context. Parts of the epic point to influences from Southeast Asian cultures, reaching as far west as India.

The recorded Darangen is composed of about seventeen cycles in iambic tetrameter or catalectic trochaic tetrameter. Each cycle is independent of the others, if taken individually, but a study of the adventures and lives of the characters in the songs show that the cycles are connected to one another in a logical progression.

The first division deals with the reign of Diwatandao Gibon, the first ruler of Bembaran, and how hesingle-handedly built and organized his kingdom before handing it down to his sons. It is a treatise on governance and partly relates the genealogy of the earliest sultans of Lanao. According to the Darangen, the people of Mindanao can trace their ancestry to the five sons and daughter of Aya Dwata Mokom sa Ka’adiyong a Lopá and Daromoyod a Olan.

The second division focuses on the journeys of Bantogen and his sons, their search for suitable brides, their courtship and eventual marriages. The third division deals with the art and techniques of warfare. While the second division has a section on how to play the kalintang (a set of graduated gongs) and other Maranao musical instruments, the third division is on the different ways of holding the kampilan or sword in relation to fighting.

The last division focuses on the disagreements between the characters of the Darangen, particularly between Bantogen and the wives and sweethearts, which lead to divorce. The cycle is replete with lines about how love is used to bring happiness. The last song-cycle focuses on the aging Bantogen, who is on a rock, gazing in the distance, recalling his past adventures and the excitement of being a young man.

The word “Darangen” comes from the Maranao word “darang,” which means “to narrate in the form of a song or chant.” Hence, Darangen means “that which is sung or chanted.” It is in listening to the lines of the extravagantly worded Darangen that one discovers its beauty. The eloquent expression of sentiments finds its power in the liquid flow of vowels and consonants of the classical Maranao language. It also employs literary devices that are used to manipulate words and phrases to produce the desired effects and imagery. The listeners’ attention is captured by these language devices. Moreover, it is rich in allegories, similes and metaphors, personifications, irony and satire. The epic also uses symbolism to maximum effect. The imagery is laden with meaning.

THE AGYU HAS TWO PARTS: pemalaw/pamara or the invocation and the udalhungon or the narrative proper. The udalhungon has two parts. The first is agyu-un, which is a standard narrative about the history of Agyu’s family and how they fled to Nalandangan and became immortal. This is recited rather than chanted. The second is songadong, which is chanted and continues the history. It deals with the continuing adventures of Agyu and his relatives in Nalandangan, which is a paradise on earth. There are many Agyu stories.

The heroes, Vanlak/Banlak, Agyu and Kuyasu are the sons of Pemulaw/Pamulaw. Agyu has four sisters. They gather beeswax in the forest to trade with the Moro. One day, Agyu sends nine lumps of beeswax to his trading partner, the Moro datu. The datu did not like the amount and throws it down, hitting Kuyasu’s foot which has an ulcer. Kuyasu stung by bees. They locate the beehive. Agyu returns with the people to Ayuman, but they find Mungan having already ascended to heaven leaving only a golden house. They decide to continue their journey until they reach Tigyandang, known as Nalandangan.

Agyu returns to Pinamatun and tells Agyu that Mungan has turned immortal having eaten golden betel-nut and golden rice. Banlak wanted to return to his wife but Agyu forbids him, having abandoned her before. When the betel-nut and young rice were distributed, the people felt new life. Agyu returns with the people to Ayuman, but they find Mungan having already ascended to heaven leaving only a golden house. They decide to continue their journey until they reach Tigyandang, known as Nalandangan.

Other episodes have been documented; e.g., The Songadong of Tumagung, the Son of Agyu; The Battle of Nalandangan; Agyu Gets a Husband for His Sister; The Marriage of Tabagka; Tagakukas and the Black Drake; Capture of Nalandangan; The Warriors of Saliga Attack Nalandangan and; Matabagka Searches for the Deity of the Wind.