

Darangen Epic Chant

MARANAO, LANAOS DEL SUR PROVINCE, NORTHWESTERN MINDANAO ISLAND, SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES. *This is the epic chant of the Maranao of Lanao del Sur province. It has been inscribed in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity having been declared a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2005. It was declared a National Cultural Treasure of the Philippines by the National Museum and a Provincial Treasure by the province of Lanao del Sur in 2002.*



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A Maranao onor or master chantress (back to the camera) recreates the tales of the Darangen, safeguarding its continuity among her young apprentices.

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 he single-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 Diwata 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 *kulintang* (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.

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(from left) The formal entry of the young Darangen chant apprentices to meet their onor for another day of training. A view of the mystical Lake Lanao. The Darangen chant is safeguarded in the voice of a child apprentice.