

Ator / Dap'ay

BONTOC AND KANKANAY, MOUNTAIN PROVINCE, NORTHERN LUZON ISLAND, NORTHERN PHILIPPINES. *Unique to the culture of both the eastern and western areas of the Mountain Province of the Cordilleras is the grouping of families represented by the male head of each family. This grouping (referred to as “wards” by anthropologists) is variably known as ator, ababungan, avuwan, dap'ay or abong. It functions as a political, economic and religious unit in the community.*



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(spread photos) The stone pavings of a Kankanay dap'ay in Barangay Dapdappig in Gregorio del Pilar, Ilocos Sur.



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THE PHYSICAL manifestation of the *ator* is an earthen mound, the sides of which are buttressed with stone, just like the walls of the rice terraces. It is elevated from about 20 centimeters to seven and a half meters. The top of the mound is leveled and paved with stone. The greater portion of the ator is occupied by a low-roofed structure which serves as sleeping quarters for the unmarried and widowed male members. It has stone walling about a meter high. The ridged roof reaches a height two and a half meters. Prior to 1980, the roofing was of cogon grass with eaves that reach the ground to effectively keep the cold away. The sleeping platform is round, six to seven meters long and two and a half meters wide, and is provided with sleeping boards or reed mats arranged along the walls, leaving the central floor space for building fires that are kept alive all through nights.

Before the entrance to the sleeping quarters is an open space. It is a semi-circular area measuring at least four and a half square meters, paved with stone, except for a place for building a fire. Also in the area are upright wooden poles where backpacks or display trophies are hung. This serves as a meeting place for the members to conduct rituals and other community activities and for the older members to spend hours sunning themselves.

Lining the edge of the area are larger flat stones where members can sit. Some of these seats are provided with back rests of flat, elongated stone slabs.

The ator, as a social unit, exercises political-economic and religious functions. These include settlement of disputes, whether internal or external to the ator, including questions of territorial boundaries, establishment of *fechen* or peace pacts or the revival of broken pacts; coordination and distribution of community work; declarations of *tengao* or ritual holidays; enactment of rites for bountiful harvests, planting of fields, call for rain, healing, protection, or vengeance; entertainment of guests; and a place where the youth learn traditions, beliefs, values, customs and all other aspects of life among the Bontoc.

There could be several ators in a community or village. Among the ators, there is always a head or central ator where the elders of each ator converge to discuss more serious matters that affect the villages as a whole.

Traditional ators have undergone changes to adapt to modern times, not only with regard to its physical structure, but also in social functions.