



Guåhan: A Bibliographic History

Review by MICHAEL CLEMENT

Guåhan: A Bibliographic History by Nicholas Goetzfridt. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011. 664 pp. \$58.00.

At the 29 November 2011 dedication of this unique and very useful book, author, and long time University of Guam librarian Nicholas Goetzfridt shared his perspective on the current state of Guam historiography.

After having read so much of the historical literature—which goes directly against a rather persistent, common belief that this literature is sparse – and after having thought and written about this literature for a few years, I am convinced that the gates to Guam's history are only now beginning to open themselves wider than they ever have been before (Guampedia.com "Nicholas Goetzfridt" link to dedication").

Guåhan: A Bibliographic History is Goetzfridt's challenge to this misconception that Guam's historiographical heritage is sparse, but, as he alludes in the passage, there is potential for much greater understanding of Guam's past. This book comes at a time of unprecedented interest in Guam history and Chamorro culture and it provides an opportunity for scholars to take stock of what currently constitutes the field. The 326 items examined in this impressive volume constitute virtually all major English language secondary sources about Guam's past and a good number of minor works that offer important contributions to Guam historiography.

The entries, arranged in alphabetical order by author's name, allow easy access to information on this wide range of sources that no normal research project would ever lead one to discover. Additionally three indexes in the back of the book, arranged much like a card catalog or library search engine, allow one to search by name, place, or subject. These indexes are particularly helpful because they alert the researcher to material that might not be evident in a volume's title. Often times, Goetzfridt indexes information that is tangential to a book's main subject, but is otherwise undocumented in more obvious sources. With this resource, scholars can quickly compile a preliminary bibliography of secondary sources for virtually any Guam history project.

Guåhan: A Bibliographic History is also, however, an unconventional volume which will catch both librarians and historians off-guard. Goetzfridt is aware of this, and he takes great care in his introduction to explain the theoretical approach he took compiling and organizing the material. As the title suggests, it is not easily categorized as a work of historiography, nor is it simply an annotated bibliography. Goetzfridt calls this book a "revisionist bibliography" (2). What this means becomes clear as one reads through the entries. It is a hybrid of a reference book that directs readers to important historical resources, and a historiographical statement

about what constitutes a significant contribution to currently available knowledge about Guam's past.

As a librarian, Goetzfridt anticipates the dissatisfaction of librarians who expect a "bibliography" or "reference book" (2). He writes that while bibliographic reference books might be expected to "offer quick, easy access to facts or at least brief summaries with limited substance from which one can then elect to go further," Goetzfridt's entries are based instead on "the substance of the bibliographic item in relation to the history being addressed, its relation to other items, and more specifically, to other thought and the totality of its place in the historical literature" (2). As a result, he foregoes any attempt at a systematic treatment of sources. Based on the contribution to this "totality," several pages may be devoted to a short article. Full-length books that do not vary significantly from earlier writings about the same subject may be summarized in a few paragraphs. Attention to "contribution" above over overall content creates a view of the sources that at times may tell the reader more about a certain part of the book at the expense of others. This unconventional approach to bibliography nevertheless proves useful, as already mentioned, when, through the use of an index search, a researcher discovers information that would have been left out of a more traditional bibliography.

Another filter that guides Goetzfridt's summarizations of books and articles is his attention to both the abuses of colonial governments and the ways in which dominant colonial discourses have marginalized Chamorro agency in the historical record. In the Introduction, he provides an overview of Guam historiography that focuses on these themes. From a discussion of the early written record dominated by observations and impressions of foreign visitors and colonial officials, he goes on to document developments in Guam historiography since the mid-twentieth century. The theme of rescuing marginalized histories is evident in the book's dedication to J.Q.T. and L.R.R., two Hansen's disease victims, one blind, one crippled, who briefly escaped pre-war Naval Authorities before being sent off, with other Chamorros who shared their plight, to a leprosarium in the Philippines (6-7). Their experiences were first brought to life by Dr. Anne Hattori, in her 2004 book *Colonial Dis-Ease* when she framed this brief escape as a marginalized story of Chamorro resistance to Naval Government Health policies. Goetzfridt takes the story further by identifying these individual's by their initials and by directing readers to references, wherever they are found in the historical literature. In fact, there are 29 entries in *Guåhan* that bring attention to leprosy in Naval Era Guam. This approach is used to highlight similarly marginalized topics ranging from music to class tensions in Chamorro society, and also to controversial, heavily documented and contested issues, such as the details of the Chamorro-Spanish Wars.

Goetzfridt's attention to various versions of stories and his stated desire, evident also in his choice of focus, to rescue marginalized historical figures, makes this book a work of historiography. His unconventional approach, however, will be frustrating to historians used to critical analyses of sources. These entries are in no way "review essays." Instead, they are a unique type of bibliographic entry. Goetzfridt's evaluation of sources is limited to cross-referencing. In most cases in which there is more than one version of an event, he simply alerts readers to the existence of a conflicting or complementary source through a parenthetical reference to another entry using the format. Other than information about the content of a work, the questions historians ask about sources are not answered. Entries rarely make reference to the background of an author, his or her training, political persuasion, or any other relevant relation to subject matter about which they write. There are also very few clues about academic rigor or other measures of a source's reliability. Information such as a source's origin as a Ph.D.

dissertation, or a sentence of biographical information explaining how an author's position in the community or scholarly field gave him/her authority on the topic are generally not included. Deeper analysis about how a work can be understood in relation to the dominant discourses of its time is also left out of entries. In summaries of the more academically oriented writings, Goetzfridt sometimes reports an author's stated intentions and theoretical positioning, but gives no personal view nor a historiographically situated perspective as to whether or not arguments seem substantiated, or whether stated intentions of a work are accomplished in the writing. Basically, authors are taken at their word.

If viewed as a "bibliography" rather than a history book, then such omissions are understandable. But this book is a hybrid of both and so readers will have varied expectations. The troubling aspect of this book is that, as arranged, it reinforces the power of the printed word, and more significantly, the bibliographic citation, to legitimize knowledge. An author's view gains legitimacy simply by being published. Such information cited by other scholars gains further legitimacy, even if a particular author is the only person to write on a topic. This is not a major problem in established scholarly fields such as "Civil War History" or "the French Revolution" where massive amounts of data have been poured over by thousands of scholars and explored from every conceivable historiographical position, but in Guam historiography many of the available publications warrant intense scrutiny.

A further caution regarding the value of this book is that because of its impressive breadth and the apparent cohesion provided by the cross-references to other entries, one can easily get the sense that it does represent a totality of available information about Guam's past. In fact, there are several filters consciously chosen in the selection of sources to be included. Such decisions are inevitable when defining a manageable topic for any book and Goetzfridt notes that he had to make some difficult choices. Most importantly, it should be emphasized that this is a book of secondary sources currently available in English. This makes sense considering that this book is directed at an English speaking audience but Goetzfridt could have written more, at least in the introduction, about how this limits any sense that this book represents the "totality" of relevant writings. Left out are Chamorro language writings by local scholars as are Spanish, German and Japanese language sources. One omission along these lines that is particularly glaring is Peter Onedera's 2007 University of Guam Micronesian Studies MA thesis. Several other MSP thesis are included in the book and it seems likely that Onedera's decision to write in the Chamorro language, a historiographically significant event in itself, was the reason that it was omitted. While the inclusion of non-English sources might have been impractical, a brief overview of the types of studies that are being produced in other parts of the world could have been noted in the introduction.

A second critical decision Goetzfridt makes is to exclude most books about the Northern Marianas. Goetzfridt specifically mentions Scott Russell's *Tiempon Manma'fo'na'* as an example of a book that is purposely left out. This choice was regrettable, however, given that Russell's book focuses entirely on the history of the Marianas prior to partition, and everything covered in the book is applicable to Guam history. By making this editorial decision, Goetzfridt's ends up enforcing an arbitrary bifurcation of pre-20th century Chamorro history that was imposed by colonial authorities. Despite exclusion of this important book, he inexplicably includes Georg Fritz's *The Chamorro* (1904), about this German administrator's overview of Chamorro and Carolinian culture in Saipan at a time when Guam and Saipan histories actually had begun to diverge. Such decisions about inclusion and exclusion of entries highlight the

inconsistency and sometimes even a sense of randomness that one gets as one tries to figure out how sources were selected for inclusion in this volume.

Despite the above mentioned limitations of the book and some qualms regarding the ambiguous value of individual entries, *Guåhan: A Bibliographic History*, when viewed as a whole, is a tremendously impressive and valuable resource. To read the book from cover to cover, or even to just look up a few topics in the index and then read through those entries, will leave the reader astonished at the immensity of Goetzfridt's enterprise. Scholars well-versed in the mass of available writings about Guam's past will be alerted to sources, and specific information within familiar sources that they may have forgotten about or overlooked. Students new to the field of Guam history and individuals who have, as noted by Goetzfridt, developed a view that knowledge of Guam's past is unattainable, will experience something of a baptism by fire, learning more about the scope of writings about Guam's past in a few hours of reading than some people who have studied specific areas of Guam history for years. Credit must be given to Goetzfridt for embarking on this project. This is a book that anyone interested in Guam's past should have on their shelf.

References

Dr. Goetzfridt's address at the dedication of this book on November 29, 2011 at the University of Guam Link provided at "Nicholas J. Goetzfridt" entry, Guampedia.com
http://issuu.com/guampedia/docs/ng_book?mode=window&viewMode=singlePage