

Ulithi Atoll, Micronesia: Recalling the Past, Reaffirming the Future

Reviewed by JAMES D. SELLMANN

Ulithi Atoll, Micronesia: Recalling the Past, Reaffirming the Future, by Rebecca A. Stephenson and Mary L. Spencer. Mangilao: University of Guam Press, 2019. ISBN-13: 978-0692034859, 247 pages (hardcover).

Drs. Rebecca A. Stephenson and Mary L. Spencer have produced an outstanding piece of scholarship with their latest book on *Ulithi Atoll, Micronesia: Recalling the Past, Reaffirming the Future*. I highly recommend it to anyone interested in Pacific Island Studies.

The book *Ulithi Atoll, Micronesia* makes a lasting academic contribution to Micronesian and Pacific Island Studies by publishing unique and detailed scholarly work about Ulithi Atoll. The book can be used at all academic levels from high school through undergraduate to graduate level courses, will be of interest to tourists, and especially to the students of Ulithi and Yap. The book will also be of interest to other private and public institutions and employers who have immigrants from Ulithi or other islands in Micronesia.

A special feature of *Ulithi Atoll* is that it contains diverse contributions by indigenous Ulithians and other Micronesians, University of Guam students, professors, and professionals. To help the remote reader situate and understand the atoll, the book provides two maps; eight tables; six-and-a-half pages listing various and numerous figures that are mostly archive or modern photographs; a long list of Acknowledgments; fourteen chapters; an Afterword; and a helpful Index.

After the “Historical Overview and Introduction,” Part 1, entitled “Encountering Ulithi—A University of Guam Field School in Cultural Anthropology,” is comprised of six chapters.

Part 2, entitled “Culture, Economics, Learning, and Life Challenges in Ulithi,” contains seven chapters.

In the “Historical Overview and Introduction” the authors provide an in-depth introduction and cultural-historical survey of Ulithi focusing on indigenous agency, contacts with explorers, traders and especially the military encounters of WWI and WWII, atoll life, economics, and their government. The Introduction concludes with a brief outline of Parts 1 and 2, and a note concerning the authors’ intentions: “Each chapter in this volume draws readers directly into the research process employed to examine distinct questions, including those regarding culture and society, life science, agriculture, the economy, child development, and artistic activities within Ulithi Atoll” (p. 39).

The first chapter of Part 1, entitled “Field Report: Discovering Aspects of Life, Culture, and Environment on Ulithi Atoll,” by Becky Stephenson, relates her field school experiences from 1992. It should be noted that the research in the respective chapters has been updated, citing sources published after the 1990s. The Field Report is also offered as an example of a model “capstone course learning experience” for students. Subsequent chapters in Part 1 are papers written by the field school participants.

In the next chapter, by Shawn Holstrum, entitled “Material Culture of Ulithi: A Fusion of Past and Present,” focuses on Ulithi’s artifacts, especially those involving fishing practices and technology.

Dr. Yosihiko H. Sinoto is the author of the next chapter entitled “Catching Flying-Fish in Ulithi Atoll: A Study of Gorges,” offering a detailed study of the different types of fishhooks and gorges used.

The fourth chapter, entitled “Notes on Some Traditional and Contemporary Ulithian Economics,” by Melvin D. Cruz, focuses on the island of Falalop. After discussing the post WWII subsistence economy, Cruz portrays the everyday life on Falalop, discussing extended family reciprocity, modernization, and the lack of tourism in the 1990s.

The fifth chapter by Becky Stephenson and Eulalia J. Harui-Walsh is entitled “A Tale of Two Islands: Being Disabled in the Western Pacific, Perspectives from Guam and Ulithi.” The authors highlight their perspectives on the significantly different responses to disability in the two islands.

The concluding chapter “Resources in Print Concerning Ulithi Atoll” provides a thirteen-page, annotated bibliography by Deborah Piscusa Bratt with the assistance of Becky Stephenson.

There are seven chapters in Part 2, “Culture, Economics, Learning, and Life Challenges in Ulithi.”

The first chapter in this section, by Joliene G. Hasugulayag, “Ulithi, Yap: Navigating the Seas of Cultural Tradition and Change,” discusses far more than navigation. After presenting the relationship to the land, Hasugulayag relates information from the perspective of an indigenous Ulithian about subsistence and sustainability, education, family life and structure, gender roles, and adoption. She continues relating information about the social structure and post WWII life, economics, modernization and social work.

In the second chapter of Part 2, “My Parents Named Me Joshua,” Joshua Depmar Walsh offers a touching personal account of his family life, his parents, and his role in the community.

In the third chapter, titled “Lava Lava: Hallmark of Ulithian Culture,” Eulalia J. Harui-Walsh with Becky Stephenson provides a detailed description of the *ghow* or lava lava article of clothing; from the weaving of the cloth to its ceremonial uses, and a comprehensive discussion of the lava lava collection in the museum of New Zealand.

Dr. Ann Ames presents her findings in the fourth chapter, “Economic Well-Being in a Substance Economy: Production, Marketing, and Micro-Finance on Yap Proper and Falalop Islet, Ulithi, Yap State.” Her chapter concludes with an interesting presentation of what it would take to establish a micro-finance program on Falalop.

In the fifth chapter of Part 2, “Field Notes from Ulithi,” Todd Ames employs a narrative style to present the results of his subsistence farming and fishing research.

In the sixth chapter of this section, “Glimpses of Ulithian and Other Yap Outer Island Learning Traditions for Children,” Mary L Spencer summarizes some of her early field research on cross cultural child development from 1985.

The concluding chapter of Part 2, by Harley I. Manner, offers a seventeen-page annotated bibliography entitled “Ulithi: Physical Environment Bibliography.” The contents of this chapter will be indispensable to anyone interested in finding the published resources available about Ulithi’s ecology.

In the “Afterword” the Editors discuss the specific purpose and significance of the various photographs in the book. The five page “Index” will be useful to the serious reader.

The book is clearly written and a joy to read. The extensive references given in each article are a valuable resource for other scholars. *Ulithi Atoll* is an outstanding contribution to Micronesian social, political, economic, environmental scholarship. I highly recommend this book to you.