



*Maritime History and Archaeology of the
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands*

Toni L. Carrell (Ed.)

Reviewed by BILL JEFFERY

Toni L. Carrell, (Ed.) (2009), Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, U.S. National Park Service, Historic Preservation Fund. 14 chapters, 526 pp, 367 figures, 36 tables, bibliographic references per chapter, author biographies, 3 appendices.

The objectives of this publication were to “...provide a synthesis and overview of the long maritime history and the variety of watercraft types of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), including Guam due to its long and closely linked relationship with the entire island chain.” In fact, a major objective of the publication was to document a baseline inventory of the different types of maritime related, and submerged cultural resources of the CNMI that would assist in their management by the CNMI Historic Preservation Office, as required under the U.S. Historic Preservation Program. This is quite a daunting task when you consider the CNMI has a varied cultural history inextricably linked to the sea from about 3,500 years ago and therefore potentially many related types of sites located on its islands and in its waters. A number of authors with many years experience in researching and writing about CNMI, Guam and Micronesian history collaborated to compile the publication, including Scott Russell, Omaira Brunal-Perry, Marjorie Driver, Dirk Spennemann, Mark Ombrello and Don Farrell, with Toni Carrell as author of nine of the 14 chapters. The publication drew extensively on Carrell’s 1991 work, *Micronesia: Submerged Cultural Resources Assessment*.

An overview of the long maritime history of the island chain commenced with an understanding of its geographic and geologic features occurring in an extraordinary and very volatile setting. Located in the Northwestern Pacific Ocean adjacent to the Mariana Trench, and formed as a result of the Pacific tectonic plate being forced under the Philippine plate, the 15-island chain comprises active and inactive volcanoes. Largest of the islands are Guam, Saipan, Tinian, and Rota, their total land surface excluding Guam (the largest island), is 247 square miles. The region is under the influence of east to west winds for a greater part of the year, a condition that assisted in the migration of Carolinians to CNMI. Frequent and violent typhoons impact the region.

The following Chapter 3 on Prehistoric Settlement and Indigenous Watercraft of the Northern Mariana Islands by Scott Russell draws on the work of archaeologists including Bellwood, Butler and Dizon in outlining the migration of the first inhabitants into CNMI, Palau and Yap from Island Southeast Asia at about 3500 BP and possibly from Taiwan via the

Philippines or directly. A second more modern wave of migration from Melanesia into eastern Micronesia (c. 2000 BP) is consistent with their being two subgroups of the Austronesian language group in Micronesia in addition to the differences in the archaeological record found in eastern Micronesia and CNMI. This migration and subsequent inter-island voyaging brought about through necessity (particularly between the low and high islands) and the maintenance of clan and lineage relationships throughout Micronesia, meant that very efficient watercraft and navigation techniques developed.

Much of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of Chamorro canoes and recorded by some of the early Spanish and English traders. Canoes were used for different purposes and built accordingly. Many canoes recorded by the early traders were the fast fishing canoes. A great example of how fearless and skilled Chamorro fishers were is provided by Driver in this chapter:

...a very large blue marlin took the hook. His line was very thin and, as he did not want to break it, he hesitated to pull it in. Yet he was very anxious to land the fish; therefore he very cautiously began playing and tiring it. Meanwhile, a large shark appeared and attacked the marlin in the midsection of its back. In order not to let go of his line, the fisherman allowed his boat to capsize. Then he tied the end of the line to the capsized boat, followed the line through to the water to the shark and diverted him from his catch. He then brought the marlin back to his boat, righted the craft, and sailed home, flying a woven mat as a banner from the masthead.

Unfortunately, as pointed out by Russell no remains of any historic Chamorro canoes are known to exist today.¹ They appear to have stopped being built about the late 18th century. An English privateer, Woodes Rogers acquired a canoe in Guam in 1710 and took it back to England where it was reportedly placed on display in a canal in St James's Park in London. Maybe it survives today to be the last surviving evidence? Currently, a non-profit group of enthusiasts in Guam, Traditions About Seafaring Islands (TASI), is constructing and sailing Chamorro and Carolinian canoes to keep alive this important heritage of CNMI, Guam and greater Micronesia.

Other maritime related and submerged cultural resources from the indigenous settlement of the CNMI islands, such as the stone *latte* sets (and related quarry sites and landings) which are found on or near beaches, other coastal settlement remains, submerged caves with evidence of habitation, and fish weirs, are covered in Chapter 12 where it is reported that no new sites have been found.

Chapters 4 to 13, a total of 426 of the 526 pages, focus largely on the non-indigenous history of CNMI and a description of the associated sites, from the time Magellan arrived in the Mariana Islands in 1521 and his contact with Chamorro people, through to the post World War II period of the 1960s. The importance of this history of CNMI and its prevalence in this publication would seem to come from a combination of factors: The availability of historical documentation, the quantity of the remaining material culture, and the devastating impact colonial rulers and World War II had on Chamorro people and the cultural landscape of their islands. An additional chapter on oral histories from local people would have been of great interest to get their views on the importance and domination of these histories. The 370 years of

Spanish influence (Chapter 4, European Exploration and the Spanish Period 1521-1898), and the short but dramatic 30 years of Japanese rule (Chapter 7, Japanese Mandate in the Northern Mariana Islands 1914-1941), greatly overshadow the impact of the 15 years of German rule (Chapter 6, Transport, Trade and Communications in the German Mariana Islands 1899-1914), and this is effectively communicated in these chapters.

World War II was no less devastating to CNMI and its people. The first use of Napalm on Tinian, the near total destruction of parts of Saipan (effectively illustrated in the publication), the 50,000+ military personnel deaths and injuries, and over 20,000 civilian deaths from suicide is difficult to comprehend when you now view the beautiful and peaceful islands. However, many, many tangible remains from these battles can be seen on and around the islands. Chapters 10-13 provide considerable historical documentation, and some site information of which all were obtained during separate exercises to this publication project. This included the remote sensing surveys of some waters adjacent to Saipan and the results are documented together with some diver verifications in Chapters 11 and 13.

While this is a useful publication as it updates Carrell's previous publication with additional background and some site information, it is also a frustrating publication and falls short in some regards in its intended objectives. There are a number of reasons for this. In Chapter 1, Guam is referred to as being included in the scope of the publication, given its "... long and closely linked relationship with the entire chain." This is however not followed through in a consistent manner. Some chapters include Guam in an appropriate manner, such as Chapter 5 which focuses exclusively on Guam. Other chapters sideline its place in the history of the region. Chapters 11-13 do not include it, and in Chapter 10 it is both included when listing shipwrecks from 1552-1899, and not included in regard to its shipwrecks from 1941-1946 as "...Guam is outside the project area" (although earlier in Chapter 10 it was documented that the Mariana Archipelago contained 147 known ship losses, including "Guam vicinity" from 1552-1959.²) The reason for the inconsistent inclusion of Guam is not clear. Other inconsistencies, such as between Table 10.4 (Japanese Merchant Auxiliary Vessels sunk in and around the CNMI) and Table 11.1 (WWII Japanese ship losses in Saipan) are very stark and together highlight a number of minor but concerning issues (text duplication, figures with incorrect captions and page numbers) showing that the publication did not receive the editing it required. This editing would have also seen the need to pull all the main points from the various chapters together into the final Chapter 14, Conclusion and Recommendations, and to come up with a comprehensive, coherent, and effective overview of the nature, extent, and management of CNMI's maritime and underwater cultural heritage. As it stands the 2-page final chapter provides no effective structure for setting priorities for future work (such as the Theme Studies used by the U.S. National Historic Landmarks program, or the Context Categories used by Guam HPO). There is no summary listing of CNMI sites, nor a comprehensive appreciation of what are the significant sites, issues, and management requirements. What is clear in the current final chapter is that non-indigenous sites, particularly shipwrecks and those from World War II are the priority, even though Carrell's 1991 publication recommended as a priority a survey and examination of the caves off Rota for prehistoric sites.

I think it is also very clear these days that Cultural Resource Management (CRM) or Cultural Heritage Management (CHM), to be effective, need to be relevant to the community (all

stakeholders) and therefore need to engage the community on how sites are valued. This must include an understanding of the associated intangible heritage when recommending how and why sites should be managed, and therefore recording and documenting any songs, stories, beliefs, customs and practices as they pertain to CNMI's maritime and underwater cultural heritage. Then it would be possible to relate an effective CRM or CHM program to the cultural identity of people.

Notes

¹ In 2007, this reviewer and V. Moran, as part of a two week contract for Guam Historic Preservation Office, documented 13 canoes in Guam, seven being modern Carolinian and Chamorro canoe replicas, and six that were original Carolinian canoes, the oldest reportedly 50-100 years old.

² This reviewer together with V. Moran and T. Drew during a two week desk-top contract with the Guam Historic Preservation Office in 2007, documented c. 100 potential shipwrecks around Guam.

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