

Chicago Natural History Museum 1949-50 Anthropological
Expedition to the Marianas Islands

Quarterly Report
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by
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Dr. Alexander Spoehr is engaged in research for the Chicago Natural History Museum. This expedition to the Marianas Islands is classified by the Pacific Science Board of the National Research Council as an extension to the Scientific Investigation of Micronesia (SIM) program. Dr. Spoehr is working closely with the Administrative Authorities in the area, and receiving facilities to assist his project through the cooperation of the Navy.

During the second quarter of 1950, the archaeological project was completed and further field work conducted on the ethnological project. An outline of the quarter's work is presented below:

Archaeological project. The archaeological work during the quarter was concentrated on Tinian Island. This work consisted of a survey of the archaeological sites on Tinian, followed by the excavation of two of the most important sites remaining on the island. A complete survey was made of the island and I believe that all stone column, or latte, sites have been located, as well as those which do not possess this characteristic prehistoric feature. Eleven major latte sites were found on the island. As on Saipan, these tended to be located along the coastal beaches, adjacent to good farm land. Three were built in an interior valley possessing exceptionally good soil. In addition, there are numerous sherd areas on Tinian, found wherever the soil is particularly good. As on Saipan, there has been very considerable destruction of archaeological sites, first through the pre-war commercial and agricultural activities of the Japanese, and secondly through war-time base construction. In the archaeological survey, a great deal of aid and cooperation was received from the U. S. Geological Survey field party on Tinian.

Following the survey, excavations were conducted at the Blue Site, and at the House of Taga. A brief description follows:

The Blue Site. This site consists of a prehistoric village of 12 lattes, forming an irregular line immediately to the east of the beach designated as Blue Beach during the invasion. At one time it is probable that there were additional lattes here which were destroyed by Japanese sugar cane operations. The site was mapped, and the center latte of the group excavated. This center

latte was the largest in the village. It consisted of twelve stone columns, the length of the house being approximately 60 feet. The soil was very shallow at the site and no stratigraphy was found, although two dump heaps were also excavated. From the extremely abundant pottery and other cultural material, this site can be allocated to the same cultural horizon as the Saipan latte sites. The importance of the Blue Site is that it afforded an opportunity to determine the settlement pattern of a prehistoric latte village. In the case of other latte villages, there has been so much natural and man-made destruction that this pattern is no longer to be seen. At the Blue Site it was clearly evident. The characteristic features of this settlement pattern are: The end-to-end alignment of the lattes, paralleling the shore line; the location of the largest and most impressive house in the center of this alignment, this house probably forming a council or chief's house; the presence of numerous small dump heaps to the seaward side of the lattes; and the location of burials beneath the houses. The farm land of the villagers lay immediately back of the village.

The House of Taga. The House of Taga consists of a single latte house, the only one left of a series of 18, which originally-- according to fragmentary accounts--formed a village similar to the Blue Site. The lattes at the House of Taga are the largest and most impressive in the entire Marianas, each stone column having been 16 feet high. There is only one column left intact and standing, surmounted by a capstone which unfortunately is partly broken off, possibly as the result of shell fire during the American attack on Tinian. Although the House of Taga has been known for years, to my knowledge it has never been adequately described. Accordingly, it was carefully mapped and photographed. In addition, four stratigraphic tests were made at the site. Cultural material was found to a depth of 5.5' below the surface. There has been no opportunity as yet to examine the material from these strati-tests, but it can at least be stated that the Taga lattes represent the latest stage in a relatively long period of occupation of the site.

During the Japanese regime, a park was made of the House of Taga. Since then it has been considerably neglected, though American military authorities were careful to prevent its being vandalized. During the course of work at the site, it was bushed and cleaned by the Museum expedition. Unless this is continued, the site will rapidly deteriorate, as the limestone has developed soft spots through weathering, and vegetation growing in these soft spots will crack and disintegrate the lattes. The writer has strongly urged the Trust Territory authorities, as part of their conservation program, to designate the House of Taga an official historic monument, and to take the few simple steps necessary for its preservation.

The lattes for the House of Taga were quarried from a limestone bed located about one mile south of the site. This quarry was also carefully mapped and described. It has also been recommended that the Taga quarry be included with the Taga House as an official historic monument.

The Tinian survey and excavations completed the archaeological project of the Museum expedition. Originally, it had also been planned to conduct work on Rota. However, a thorough job on Rota, the most promising remaining island for archaeological work in the Marianas, would take six months, and it was not feasible for the expedition to extend the archaeological investigations to Rota unless the ethnological project was abandoned. This did not seem a wise step. As it is, Saipan and Tinian, a natural geographic unit, have been given good archaeological coverage and the results have been most worth-while.

On the completion of the Tinian excavations, all specimens were transported to Saipan, and together with the Saipan material, were packed for shipment. In order to reduce the size of this shipment, approximately 12,000 sherds were analyzed, counted, and discarded. The remaining specimens are now en route to the Museum for detailed study.

Ethnological project. During the quarter, ethnological work was conducted on both Saipan and Tinian.

Tinian. During the period of archaeological work, and also for one week thereafter, ethnological investigations were made among the small Chamorro community on Tinian. This community consists, in the majority, of Chamorros moved from Yap to Tinian after the war, with the remaining families coming from either Rota or Saipan. The Tinian Chamorros therefore represent a displaced group and offer the opportunity of investigating the problems of adjustment among a small, easily observable unit that has been relocated in a new environment. The principal problems of adjustment revolve about the fact that on Yap the Chamorros were not farmers, while on Tinian their only sound future economy must be built on agriculture. Likewise, on Yap they formed a separate but loosely knit ethnic group, while on Tinian a successful adjustment demands a higher degree of community cooperation and a formulation of community goals, neither of which has been yet achieved. A preliminary report on the problems of adjustment of the Tinian Chamorros has been prepared. It is planned to visit the Tinian group again for a short period in September, to check on the conclusions contained in the preliminary report and observe any new developments that have taken place.

Saipan. Most of the ethnological work of the quarter was concentrated on Saipan. Except for brief trips to Tinian, Rota, and possibly Alamagan and Agrigan, the remaining period of field work will be concentrated on Saipan. The Saipan community is in process of formation, is hence in a state of flux, and presents complex problems difficult for a single observer to investigate. Hence it will be necessary to concentrate on Saipan.

During the quarter, work was continued with the Carolinian segment of the native population. Land ownership and use, the patterns of cooperation in daily activities, the organization of household and family, the kinship system and related forms of descent groupings, and the post war changes in Carolinian social organization formed the focal points of investigation. The principal contrasts between the Carolinians and the Chamorros have been outlined, and this phase of the investigation is nearly completed.

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Among the dominant Chamorro group, work has been concentrated on land ownership and use, inheritance customs, and the organization of agricultural production. This aspect of Chamorro culture is fundamental for an understanding of contemporary Chamorro life. It is an aspect of the culture that at present is highly unstable, and a number of serious administrative problems are associated with it. The information obtained to date will be of both theoretical and practical importance.

In general, the aim of the ethnological project on Saipan is to determine areas of relative stability and instability in contemporary Chamorro culture, insofar as these affect the formation of an integrated community based on a sound economy. To date, the relationships between the Carolinian and Chamorro groups, and customs associated with the ownership and use of land resources, have been the principal points of investigation. During the next quarter, the investigation will be extended to family and kinship organization, which exhibits a number of unstable features, the principal one being a relatively high incidence of juvenile delinquency, or at least non-cooperation and anti-social behavior. Also, it is planned to investigate the religious organization, an element of great stability in this community; the class structure; and the local political organization. These form the principal areas of future investigation.

Cooperative services rendered the U. S. Navy Civil Administration Unit. During the quarter, the following services were given the Saipan unit:

- (1) At the request of the Civil Administrator, a memorandum was prepared on the land problem, with recommendations concerning immediate procedures necessary for its solution.
- (2) Elementary training in surveying techniques with transit and stadia were given two Chamorro government employees so that land plats could be constructed more rapidly. A number of conferences were held with the Economic Officer, on particular land questions, and with the staff of the Civil Administrative Unit on general land problems.
- (3) A copy of a preliminary report on the problems of adjustment of the Tinian Chamorros was furnished the Civil Administrator.
- (4) As a public service, the Museum expedition bushed and cleaned the House of Taga archaeological site on Tinian. A memorandum strongly recommending that this site be designated an official historic monument and steps be taken to preserve this site was forwarded to the Conservation Officer of the Trust Territory, at his request. In addition, with the cooperation of the Civil Administrator, an adequate marker is being prepared for the Taga site.

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