

Ethnography and Historic Preservation

Palauan Challenges

The ethnography/oral history program of the Historic Preservation Office (HPO) of the Republic of Palau is concerned primarily with the documentation and preservation of traditional knowledge about both cultural practices and significant archeological, traditional, and historic sites within Palau. Because the people of Palau recognize that they are subject to the pressures of globalization and culture change, it has become increasingly important to them that they find ways to actively preserve their tangible and intangible cultural properties. The HPO's Historic Preservation Program enjoys a measure of support within the community, and is actively working to expand its community base. The HPO is also concerned with making traditional knowledge available to a larger audience through publications and community programming to stimulate discussion and motivate action. The next decade will witness massive change in Palau, and the problem of how Palauans respond to acculturative pressures within the global environment is paramount.

Prior to the establishment of the Division of Cultural Affairs (which incorporates the HPO), McKnight¹ conducted some anthropological research in Palau for the Trust Territory government. Even earlier, Endo,² followed by Kramer,³ conducted research in Palau under the

auspices of the Japanese and German administrations. While these efforts help to provide a valuable background for today's work, they were not carried out guided by local needs. Present work in historic preservation is conceived and directed by Palauans. Local people set priorities based on an indigenous understanding of what is valued and what has the potential to make the greatest contribution to preserving Palau's traditional culture. The objectives of the oral history/ethnography program are in keeping with the broader objectives of the preservation ethic. However, they are first of all objectives developed to benefit the Palauan people.

The ethnography/oral history section of the HPO arranges regular sessions of the Society of Historians. The Historians are officially recognized as living national treasures by the Republic of Palau because they are repositories of knowledge about Palau's history and traditions. The Historians are appointed by the HPO, in consultation with the president of the Republic and the state government. A Historian, either male or female, is appointed from each state. The objective is to select someone who is knowledgeable and respected throughout the community. They are drawn from the ranks of the elders of the community and are appointed for life. They are not actually a part of the Division of Cultural Affairs, but they work closely with the ethnography section.

Every year, the Historians gather under the auspices of the section to discuss an aspect of traditional knowledge. This year, for example, they completed a booklet on the topic of medicine and therapy. To date, the subjects chosen have been drawn from the publication, *Rechuodel* Volume 1.⁴ This work was produced by the Society of Historians and the meetings are intended to provide an opportunity for the Historians to expand and improve the chapters. The results of the meetings are published by topic in booklet form, in both Palauan and English. It is problematic to attempt to record an oral tradition in written form, since the informa-

Historians prepare to embark for field trip to Angaur. Photo courtesy Palau Division of Cultural Affairs.



tion is disputed, and because the very act of writing changes the nature of the information. This is a challenging problem and indicative of the changing nature of Palauan society. It is important to produce these works for a number of reasons. They stimulate discussion about these traditions within the community. This helps to ensure that younger people are exposed to these ideas. The documents themselves help to teach younger people about their traditions, and encourage them to ask the elders of the community to explain and clarify. The meetings of the Historians and the publication of the booklets mean that these traditional methods and ideas are preserved, so that even if they are not passed down orally, they are still available to be studied and perhaps revived by present and future generations of Palauans.

The ethnography/oral history section works closely with the survey and inventory section for the preservation of important cultural sites. When a development project submits an application for historic clearance it is often the case that the survey section must inspect the site. Sometimes, they request the ethnography section to assist the survey section in determining land ownership and use. This entails tracking down knowledgeable individuals and learning from them the traditions of mythology, use, and history for a site or property. Sometimes, slightly different or even competing versions of oral history will emerge. It is the job of the ethnography section to assess and present this information in such a way that the most complete oral history emerges. This work is particularly challenging and important when undocumented burial sites are discovered. Determining the lineage affiliation of the deceased is sensitive and controversial, due to disputes over land tenure. When the oral history has been collected, it is included in the report on site significance issued by the survey section and thus plays a role in the negotiations with the developer to issue a memorandum of agreement (MOA) regarding the site. The MOA usually provides for mitigation measures that allow for archeological investigation of the site, although at times the final outcome is full or partial preservation of the site.

The other joint undertaking between the ethnography section and the survey section is the annual state historic and cultural resource survey. The objective of the survey is to document traditional and historic sites so that they are identified and protected from accidental harm by develop-

ment projects. The ethnography section's responsibility is to collate and expand documented traditional knowledge and oral history that relates to historical and cultural resources in the targeted state. This will help to identify sites for nomination to the Palau Register of Historic Sites, and allow the Division of Cultural Affairs to identify which sites are endangered by proposed development. Beyond that, these oral histories are inherently valuable and in danger of being lost. By collecting them, the Division of Cultural Affairs is taking steps to ensure that the traditional knowledge of Palau is preserved and available for future generations.

An important goal of the Division is to make the information we collect available to the public. The information collected during the state survey is published internally and is open to public inspection. The most prominent undertaking is the distribution of publications on topics of traditional lifeways, social organization, skills and practices. Initially, the Division published a number of volumes in English as part of the Micronesian Resources Study, along with Palauan language volumes devoted to culture and history. Subsequently, the Palauan language works have served as the basis for the production of a series of booklets addressing various aspects of Palauan traditions and social organization. All of these publications are made available to schools, non-governmental organizations, government offices, and other appropriate agencies. The purpose of disseminating these works is to stimulate discussion and debate about Palauan culture, especially among students. It is accepted that the various publications are not definitive, and it is hoped that the public will respond with constructive criticisms.

Clearly, the research undertaken by the Division is of a limited scope. However, it has revealed the degree to which traditional knowledge and values are still preserved in the rural communities of Palau. While Palau is subject to extensive acculturative forces, there is ample evidence that culture change in Palau is not monolithic. In contemporary Palau, the people are aware of the importance of their Palauan identity and of the role that their traditions play in creating and maintaining that identity. As development proceeds here, so does the consciousness of its potential effects on lifeways and values. The completion of the compact road will open up the rural areas of the nation to outlandish ideas, con-

sumer society, and economic transformation. The response of the people to these events, and the way in which they choose to adapt their society to cope with change, will want close watching.

Notes

- 1 McNight, Robert K. "Breadfruit Cultivation Practices and Beliefs in Palau." *Anthropological Working Papers #7*. Office of the Staff Anthropologist, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, Guam, Marianas Islands. 1960; *Palauan Culture Heroes as Agents of Change*. Paper presented

- at the Southwestern Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, San Diego. 1969
- 2 Endo, Hisashi. *Collective Works of Hijikata Hisakatsu*. Tokyo: Sasakawa Peace Foundation. 1993-1995.
- 3 Kramer, Augustin. *Ergebnisse der Sudsee Expedition 1908-1910, Palau*. Edited by G. Thilenius. Hamburg: Friederichsen. 1917.
- 4 Palau Society of Historians *Rechuodel*, Volume 1. *Oral History Research Series One*. Koror: Division of Cultural Affairs. 1995.

Lorne Todd Holyoak, Ph.D., cultural anthropologist, is an ethnographer in the Division of Cultural Affairs in Koror, Republic of Palau.

Ana Dittmar

Tourism and Native Cultures

Guam and American Samoa, two Western Pacific islands with U.S. national parks, are influenced by tourism in vastly different ways. Both native cultures pride themselves in their beautiful natural environments and cultural identities. Both persistently value and desire to continue their native traditions in the face of change, yet Guam has the influences of a 500-year-long history of colonialism while the physical and cultural environment on American Samoa has been touched more lightly. Both islands and traditional cultures are attractive destinations for tourists because of their tropical marine ecology and Pacific Island lifestyles. Contrasting responses to the tourist industry are apparent between these two Pacific islands whose native cultures both neighbor and interact with the U.S. National Park Service.

War in the Pacific National Historical Park on Guam contributes to an American presence on this densely populated island. Modern, native

Chamorros comprise about 40% of Guam's population, many of whom are employed by the island's most influential industry, tourism. The U.S. National Park Service on Guam also employs Chamorros at all levels, approximately 50% of their small park staff. Japanese tourists make up about 75% of the park's visitors to whom War in the Pacific National Historical Park must interpret both the events of World War II as well as Guam's traditional native heritage and marine island ecology.

Tourism on Guam is far-reaching, long-term, and historically based in its colonial past. Efforts to preserve the natural environment and traditional Chamorro culture swim against the established tide, but has gained a foothold on Guam.

On American Samoa, eco-tourism with its mainstay concepts of sustainability and sensitivity to the cultural and natural environment has been adopted by the U.S. National Park Service there. Used to adapt visitors to the native Samoan lifestyle, park literature instructs visitors in how to not offend native residents and to have minimal impact on their traditional culture and natural environment. With their innovative Home Stay Program, the National Park of American Samoa invites tourists to participate in village life while Samoans associated with the park set their own fees for accommodations and accompanying traditional activities. This is only the beginning of eco-tourism in the Western Pacific but represents native cultures seeking tourism on their own terms. Perhaps the results will be a better response to the challenge of preserving native integrity and the natural world.

Ana Dittmar, Ph.D., Anthropology, is the Museum Curator/Cultural Resources for War in the Pacific National Historical Park on Guam and American Memorial Park on Saipan.

Staff (including native Chamorro personnel) at War in the Pacific National Historical Park Headquarters on Guam. Photo by Steve Keane.

