

David Damas, *Bountiful Island: A Study of Land Tenure on a Micronesian Atoll*. Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1994. Pp. xvi, 272, illustrated, bibliography, index. \$55 cloth.

Reviewed by Lin Poyer, University of Cincinnati

David Damas, known for his work in cultural ecology in the Arctic, has moved south. In writing *Bountiful Island*, he contributes to the ethnography of the Eastern Caroline Islands and renews a conversation about land tenure in the Pacific that has lain dormant for awhile.

The book begins with a personal introduction to his experience on Pingelap and a statement of objectives. In brief, Damas searches for a link between changes in the land-tenure system and an expanding population. The body of the book begins with a summary of the history and culture of Pingelap, with particular attention to demographically important events such as typhoons and a basic review of habitat and economy. He evaluates Pingelap as an atoll environment with relatively rich land resources that at times may have sustained as many as fifteen hundred persons.

The book's central chapters investigate the atoll's land-tenure system. He argues that land plots are individually owned, marked by precise boundaries, and show a patrilineal bias in inheritance. Damas presents statistical information (with some admitted sampling problems) and a series of helpful case studies. Chapter 6 introduces an interesting discussion of the ceremony, "held in order to validate passing of property to one's heirs" (p. 129). Issues of adoption, women's control of property, and usufruct are also addressed. *derak*

Damas devotes a chapter to comparing, and examining the links between, land tenure on the atoll and in two sizable Pingelapese settlements on the nearby high island of Pohnpei. The concept of "stewardship," by

which migrant owners convey use rights to their atoll land, has had a significant impact on land use and tenure on the home atoll. Damas's historical and ethnographic discussion of this issue is useful. A penultimate chapter explores the history and impact of external relations, including emigration, German and Japanese land-tenure laws, the copra trade, and food imports.

In his final chapter, Damas puts the Pingelap case in comparative context, first reviewing historical changes in the atoll's land-tenure system. He then compares it to the system in nearby Mwaekil (Mokil) Atoll and to several other Micronesian and Polynesian examples. He concludes with tentative support from the Pingelap case for George Collier's (1975) hypothesis: "first, the strengthening of unilineal control of land under conditions of population pressures, accompanied by moves toward individual ownership" with some evidence of "reversion to larger landholding units, at least on the usufruct level" as pressures on land increase (p. 229).

The book's greatest value is that it increases available information about Pingelap (previous recent work was by Jane Hurd and the human biology-oriented publications of N. E. Morton et al.). This alone makes the book must for students of Micronesia. But those familiar with Micronesian ethnography will find challenges and problems in Damas's presentation. One question is his interpretation of ownership and usufruct (especially since to argue for individual ownership is bound to be controversial). His presentation of women's rights in land, which he analyzes as dowry, lacks clarity. Power relations and political activity are given relatively little attention: although we learn about the transfer of traditional titles, we do not learn what rights and responsibilities titleholders possessed. Damas gives solid evidence for inequities in landholdings and clearly realizes the importance of the topic, but he does not systematically explore the potential impact of inequities on social and land-tenure systems.

In addition to the virtue of making available more information about Pingelap, the description of the *derak* ceremony and the study of migrant communities are welcome contributions. Damas's historical approach to the changing relations between Pingelapese on Pohnpei and on the home atoll--in the context of German, Japanese, and American administrations, and especially in terms of land rights--is valuable and suggests ideas for investigation in other migrant-community situations.

Readers interested in theories of the evolution of land-tenure systems may find food for thought here, but they will also find that the unique qualities of atoll environments and the particular histories of each atoll make generalization difficult. Damas admits this conclusion, while making a valiant effort to work the data of Pingelap into a broader contribution to theory. Perhaps as someone who has come to work in the Pacific as a second area of

expertise, he is more aware than relatively parochial Pacific scholars of the potential of this region to contribute to wider theoretical issues in anthropology. In that case, Oceanists' disagreements with his analysis should serve as a challenge for us to make broader arguments, to a broader audience.

REFERENCE

Collier, George A.

1975 *Fields of the Tzotzil: The Ecological Bases of Tradition in Highland Chiapas*.
Austin: University of Texas Press.