GANI REVISITED: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE MARIANA ARCHIPELAGO'S NORTHERN ISLANDS

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The small volcanic islands composing the northern half of the Mariana Archipelago have received little scholarly attention, a situation resulting from their difficult access and small size. Limited archaeological research suggests that these islands, now commonly referred to as the "Northern Islands," were settled by at least A.D. 1300, and at the time of initial European contact in the early 1500s, all but two had sizable resident populations. During the early mission period, the Northern Islands were the last strongholds of traditional Chamorro culture until their residents were forcibly resettled into church villages on Saipan and Guam in the late 1690s. For the next 250 years a succession of colonial regimes used the islands principally as sites for small-scale economic development, a process interrupted by World War II. This article presents an initial overview of this long-neglected part of the Mariana Islands, which, in spite of a challenging environment, has been the stage for a wide variety of human activities for at least the last seven hundred years.

The appearance of the northern islands varies considerably from that of the other islands of the Marianas. . . . The majestic groves of coconut trees reaching to the very water's edge, the lush natural growth of tropical plants and flowers, and the mountains rising to great heights lend an air of South Sea Island enchantment.

(Johnson 1957:12)

MANY STUDENTS of Pacific history are familiar with the Mariana Archipelago, comprising fifteen small and ruggedly beautiful islands situated at the north-

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western corner of Micronesia. During World War II, a few of these islands gained worldwide notoriety as scenes of bloody battles between Japanese and American troops, and as the launching point for the atomic-bomb attacks that forced Japan's capitulation. In addition to their prominent role in recent military history, the Marianas have the dual distinction of being the first group of islands in Micronesia settled in prehistoric times and the first to be subjected to European colonization.

While much has been written concerning the relatively large southern islands of Guam, Rota, Tinian, and Saipan, archaeologists and historians largely have ignored the ten primarily volcanic islands that lie in a gently curving arc to the north of Saipan.[1] These islands are small, ranging from tiny Farallon de Medinilla with less than one square kilometer of dry land to Pagan, measuring nearly fifty square kilometers in extent. All are extremely rugged, with Agrigan possessing an elevation of 964 meters (3,181 feet) above sea level. Seven of these islands have undergone volcanic eruptions during historic times, with Uracas and Pagan being particularly active. In addition to unstable geological conditions, their lack of developed reef systems, limited areas of flat land, sporadic rainfall, and few protected landing spots have combined to make these islands difficult locations for settlement and commercial activities. In spite of their size, challenging environments, and relative isolation, these islands have played a significant role in Marianas history. What follows is an overview of this long-neglected part of the archipelago now commonly referred to as the Northern Islands.[2]

Prehistory

The results of archaeological and linguistic research suggest that the Mariana Islands were first colonized at least thirty-five hundred years ago by Austronesian-speaking peoples who departed directly from Island Southeast Asia, most likely from the Philippines (Hunter-Anderson and Butler 1995: 29–30). These settlers, the ancestors of the modern Chamorro people, brought with them sophisticated canoe and ceramic technologies and a subsistence system based on sea fishing and the cultivation of tree and root crops.

During the earlier period of Marianas prehistory, commonly referred to as the Prelatte Phase, Chamorros apparently resided in small, scattered villages that were situated in coastal beach environments on the larger southern islands of Guam, Rota, Saipan, and Tinian (Butler 1994:16). Presently, there is no evidence suggesting that any of the Northern Islands was occupied permanently during the Prelatte Phase, although it is quite likely that they were visited periodically for resource exploitation.

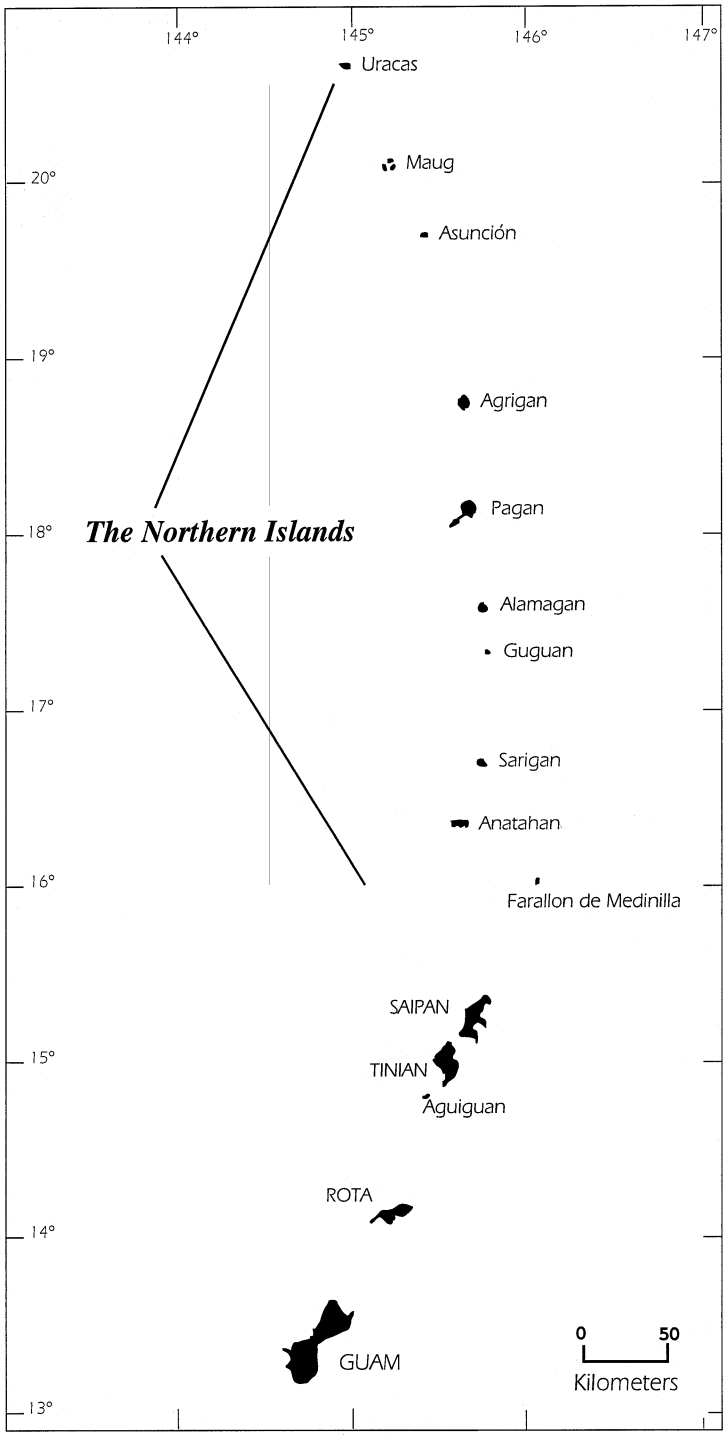

FIGURE 1. **Map of the Mariana Archipelago.**

Beginning roughly one thousand years ago, Chamorro culture underwent significant changes. Among these were subsistence adaptations, including the addition of rice to the crop repertory, increased competition for land and its resources, and the development of megalithic architecture. Perhaps the most dramatic change in this later period, commonly referred to as the Latte Phase after the stone shafts and caps ("*latte* stones") used to support Chamorro residential structures, was a significant expansion of settlements outside of the optimal coastal beach zones (Hunter-Anderson and Butler 1995:66–68). In addition to expanding into less desirable coastal areas and inland locations on the southern islands, Chamorros also established settlements on several of the Northern Islands late in this period.

It is not clear when the Northern Islands were first settled or what the nature of the first settlements was. Although the islands were subjected to cursory investigations during the Spanish, German, and Japanese colonial administrations, few modern archaeological projects have been completed, and there is a paucity of archaeological data from this area. Only one small-scale survey and testing project undertaken at a *latte* village site on the eastern coast of Pagan included radiocarbon analyses (Egami and Saito 1973: 203–226). The dates resulting from this project suggest that the site was occupied by A.D. 1300, which is consistent with the generally accepted view that the Northern Islands were settled relatively late in the prehistoric sequence.

Latte stone sites also have been observed on Alamagan and Sarigan (Fritz 1902:96–118; Russell 1996:2). It is possible that they are present on several other islands as well, particularly Anatahan and Agrigan. However, the small, nearly barren island of Farallon de Medinilla and Uracas, an active volcanic cone located at the extreme northern end of the archipelago, probably never were settled.

Observations made by the Japanese archaeologist Yawata in the pre–World War II years indicate that caves on Pagan, Alamagan, and Asunción were used as mortuary areas, and artifact assemblages at ancient sites resembled those found in the southern islands but were not as numerous (Chapman 1964:81). Without systematic survey data, however, little more can be said regarding the nature or distribution of ancient sites in these islands.

Owing to the local geology, *latte* in the Northern Islands were fashioned from several types of volcanic rock. *Latte* of softer rock varieties sometimes were shaped, but those of hard basalt normally were used with little modification. One notable aspect of *latte* in the Northern Islands, at least on Alamagan, were platformlike extensions constructed immediately adjacent to the long axis of the *latte* house (Chapman 1968:70; Russell 1996:2). The

function of these platforms is not known, although they may have provided a clean area for domestic activities.

There is some evidence to suggest that basalt rock, used to make tools, primarily late in prehistoric times, was being transported from Anatahan and Agrigan to Chamorro communities in the south (Mangold 1997). Conversely, pottery, an important class of ancient artifact, was being brought into the Northern Islands. Since the Northern Islands lacked suitable clay sources, pottery production on islands north of Saipan would have been impossible. A study of a small collection of ceramic sherds recovered from a *latte* site on Alamagan suggests that pots were imported from the southern islands, including Saipan and perhaps Rota (Butler 1996:3–4).

Life on these small, rugged islands was tenuous, and their inhabitants undoubtedly were reliant, at least in part, on periodic assistance from larger communities residing in the relatively resource-rich southern islands. A support system would have been essential for the survival of these small settlements particularly following natural disasters such as tropical storms and droughts.

The Spanish Period

The Mariana Islands enter the written historical record following Ferdinand Magellan's brief but fateful visit in March 1521. Magellan commanded a Spanish expedition that sought to reach the valuable Spice Islands by sailing westward to avoid Portuguese-controlled waters. Although Magellan's landfall was not mentioned by name, most historians believe that it was Guam, the largest and southernmost island of the archipelago (Rogers and Ballendorf 1989:193–208). Desperate for supplies, Magellan sought to acquire food and water from the native inhabitants before continuing westward. The ensuing first encounter between the two cultures quickly turned violent, when the Spanish killed several Chamorros in retaliation for the theft of a ship's boat. Believing that the Spanish had been misused by the natives, Magellan disparagingly named the islands Islas de los Ladrones, or Islands of Thieves, a designation that would appear on maps and in documents well into the nineteenth century.

Magellan's expedition eventually reached the Spice Islands, where its two surviving ships, *Victoria* and *Trinidad*, were loaded with spices and readied for the return voyage. Rather than staying together, their captains decided to take different routes back to Spain. The *Victoria* continued westward and reached Seville in 1522, thus completing the first circumnavigation of the earth. The *Trinidad*'s commander, Gonzalo Gomez de Espinosa, wishing to avoid Portuguese-controlled waters, unwisely decided to return home by

recrossing the Pacific. While passing through the northern end of the Ladrones chain, Espinosa seized a Chamorro in a canoe off Asunción, intending to take him back to Europe (Lévesque 1992:324). However, after weeks of battling contrary winds and rough weather, the Spanish were forced to abandon their easterly course and attempt a return to the Spice Islands, a move that once again brought *Trinidad* through the northern end of the Ladrones group.

Following an aborted landing at a high island, probably Asunción, *Trinidad* anchored in the middle of three tiny islets that the Chamorro captive said were collectively called Maug. The Spanish found little of use at Maug; only twenty people and limited supplies of fresh water and sugarcane (Lévesque 1992:325). During this brief stopover, three Europeans—two Portuguese and a Spaniard—fearing that they would perish at sea, deserted and took refuge on Maug. The Portuguese deserters were quickly killed by the islanders, but the Spaniard, Gonzalo de Vigo, was not ill treated (Lévesque 1992:438). De Vigo spent the following four years among the Chamorro people learning their language and many aspects of their culture. He was later picked up by a Spanish expedition and provided much useful information about the islands (many of which he must have visited personally) and their inhabitants.

For 140 years following de Vigo's departure, the Northern Islands disappear from the written records. Although the Spanish formally claimed the archipelago as a royal possession in 1565, their activities were limited to periodic provisioning stops at Guam and Rota by galleons plying the Manila-Acapulco trading route. This period of relative seclusion ended in 1668 with the establishment of a Jesuit mission on Guam (Garcia 1985; Le Gobien 1949). From its headquarters in the village of Hagatña, a small band of priests, lay helpers, and soldiers led by Father Luis de Sanvitores aggressively sought to convert the animistic Chamorros to Christianity.

In recognition of essential assistance received from the queen regent of Spain, Mariana de Austria, Sanvitores renamed the islands in her honor. Henceforth, the archipelago was known as Islas Marianas, or Mariana Islands. The priests also assigned Christian names to many of the islands, although with the exception of Asunción these did not supplant indigenous nomenclature.

Although initial mission activities were focused on Guam, Sanvitores and a fellow priest, Father Luis de Morales, visited Tinian and Saipan in October 1668. While on Saipan, Sanvitores ordered Morales to visit the other islands to the north that the Chamorros collectively referred to as Gani (Lévesque 1995:207). During a six-month period, Morales, traveling aboard a Chamorro canoe, reached as far north as Agrigan. Morales found

the Gani Chamorros to be peaceful, and he reportedly enjoyed some success baptizing children and adults.

The following year, Sanvitores traveled north, reaching distant Maug, the last inhabited island of the archipelago. Like Morales, Sanvitores found the Gani islanders peaceful and generally supportive of mission activities, a situation he credited to their ignorance of Choco, a Chinese castaway residing on Guam who had convinced many Chamorros that the priests were poisoning their children with baptismal water. Sanvitores's peaceful sojourn in the Northern Islands was interrupted at Anatahan, where islanders slew his secular companion, Lorenzo, when he tried to baptize a young girl (Garcia 1985:11). Sanvitores might have suffered a similar fate had sympathetic islanders not refused to take him to the scene of the killing.

Among the most important products of these Jesuit expeditions to the Northern Islands was the first detailed and accurate map of the archipelago. Produced by Father Lopez in 1671, the map depicted fifteen islands in their proper positions and listed their indigenous and Spanish designations (Lévesque 1995:383). Information collected on these trips undoubtedly also served as the basis for a detailed report prepared by Father Peter Coomans in 1673 (Coomans 1997). In this report Coomans described the Gani islands in some detail and provided the only known early population estimates for the islands north of Saipan. Particularly interesting was his observation that Chamorros at given times of the year voyaged to uninhabited Uracas to hunt sea birds. During these expeditions large numbers of birds were killed, salted, and then transported to Chamorro communities throughout the archipelago. Coomans also noted that Agrigan was renowned for a certain type of tree that was sought after for canoe construction by Chamorros on other islands (1997:24).

In spite of initial cordial relations between the mission and islanders, cultural differences, misunderstandings, and the priests' persistent efforts to end certain indigenous practices led to growing tensions and periodic violence. In 1672 the mission sustained a serious loss with the death of Sanvitores. For the next twelve years, the priests were forced to concentrate their efforts on Guam, leaving Chamorro communities to the north free to practice their traditional lifestyle.

To effect religious and cultural conversion in an efficient manner, the Spanish implemented a program called the *reducción* that relocated Chamorros residing in scattered, traditional settlements into a few mission villages in which they received daily religious instruction (Lévesque 1996b: 311). This program, which brought about the eventual collapse of traditional Chamorro society, was well under way on Guam by the early 1680s.

By 1684 the mission had once again turned its attention to Chamorro

communities in the islands north of Guam. Since the establishment of the mission, these islands had served as a refuge for Chamorros seeking to escape foreign domination and for others accused of capital crimes. The Spanish believed that until these islands were brought under control, peace on Guam could not be maintained.

In June of that year, a sizable force, under the command of the tenacious military commander José Quiroga, headed north to subjugate resisting Chamorro communities. The Spanish particularly desired to pacify Saipan, which was to serve as an advance base for operations farther north. On Quiroga's orders, twenty-five soldiers and a priest, under the command of José de Tapia, departed Saipan aboard several canoes manned by Chamorro helmsmen. Their mission was to prepare Gani residents for eventual resettlement on Saipan (Lévesque 1996a:201). Tapia's force was well received at all of the islands except one, probably Asunción, where a brief skirmish erupted. So successful was the visit that many of the Gani islanders accepted the relocation plan and permitted their children to be baptized (Lévesque 1996b:243).

Disaster struck Tapia's expedition on its return to Guam. While en route, the Chamorro boatmen, having learned that a major revolt against the mission had begun on Guam, threw most of the Spanish and Filipino troops into the sea. Only seven men survived: the expedition's priest, Father Coomans, and three soldiers were saved by a Christian Chamorro, while another three soldiers, who had been thrown overboard, were picked up by Gani Chamorros on their way to Guam. These men were taken to Alamagan, where they were protected by an influential chief (Lévesque 1996a:206).

The Chamorro uprising on Guam once again forced the Spanish to focus their attention and limited resources on that island, and not until 1695 were they ready to launch a final expedition to subjugate the stubborn northern islanders. With a contingent of soldiers, supplemented by a substantial number of Chamorro auxiliaries, Quiroga quickly brought Rota, Aguiguan, Tinian, and Saipan under control (Hezel 1989:8–10). Soon after, canoes bearing the news of the Spanish victory were sent to the Gani islands with orders for their inhabitants to resettle into Fatiguan, one of the newly established mission villages on Saipan (Hezel 1989:10).

Although the Gani Chamorros offered no physical resistance to this forced resettlement, it soon became clear to the Spanish that they were not happy with life on Saipan. On a rainy night in July 1697, four hundred islanders abandoned Saipan and returned to their former homes in the Northern Islands (Lévesque 1997:157). Alarmed by this mass exodus, the resident priest on Saipan, Father Gerard Bowens, sought the assistance of

Governor José Madrazo. In response, Madrazo organized a large fleet totaling more than one hundred canoes and four hundred men, whose orders were to round up these reluctant islanders, burn their houses, and relocate them once and for all into mission villages (Lévesque 1997:195).

The fleet departed Guam in early September 1697, and after a brief layover at Saipan to pick up Father Bowens, it proceeded northward, stopping at each island. Thanks to the active support of Ignacio Nuun, a Christian chief from Agrigan, operations for the most part went smoothly, although bad weather resulted in the loss of several canoes and their passengers. Only at Agrigan and Anatahan did islanders actively resist the resettlement orders by fleeing into the rugged mountains, where they hoped to hide out until the expedition departed. With much difficulty, Spanish troops and their Chamorro allies located the holdouts and forced them to return to the villages, whence they were transported south (Lévesque 1997:192–199).

In all, nearly twelve hundred Chamorros were removed from the Northern Islands and temporarily resettled on Saipan. With the arrival of calm seas four months later, the Gani Chamorros were taken to Guam, where they were settled in Inarajan and other southern villages (Lévesque 1997:198). They joined the Tinian and Aguiguan people who had resided in Pago and Hagatña for the previous three years.

Following these dramatic events, the Northern Islands, now uninhabited, once again slipped into obscurity. During the early part of the eighteenth century, it is probable that these islands were visited from time to time by their former inhabitants. In 1709, for instance, four canoes departed Saipan to visit Gani, but they were lost along with their eighteen occupants, a tragedy attesting to the dangers of travel to these isolated islands (Hezel 1989:26). Later in the century, with the archipelago's tiny population residing only on Guam and Rota, there was little reason for such risky trips. Even if there had been, the loss of indigenous maritime skills and the colonial government's chronic lack of a seaworthy ship made travel to these distant islands nearly impossible.

One of the few documented events of the eighteenth century involving the Northern Islands was a brief visit in 1742 by HMS *Centurion*, an English warship under the command of George Anson (Barratt 1988). In critical need of supplies, Anson ordered a cutter to reconnoiter the small, rugged island of Anatahan. He was disappointed with the results; the island lacked a safe anchorage and possessed no food or water. The only useful items found on Anatahan were coconut trees, which were present in large numbers (Barratt 1988:9). Fortunately for Anson and his crew, favorable winds and currents carried *Centurion* to the more fertile island of Tinian, where the Englishmen regained their health.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, small groups comprising Englishmen, Americans, and Native Hawaiians reportedly attempted to establish repair and reprovisioning ports of call in the Northern Islands to service ships engaged in the sandalwood and whaling trades (Freycinet 1996:42). In 1809 or 1810, the American ship *Derby* reportedly departed Hawai'i with an American named Johnson, four Europeans, two blacks, and twenty-two Hawaiians bound for Agrigan (Kotzebue 1821:87–89). They missed that island and ended up on Tinian, where they eventually were discovered by the Spanish and taken to Guam.

Another group apparently reached Agrigan a few years later. According to one source, upon learning of the intruders, Governor Medinilla sent an armed force to Agrigan in 1815 and transported forty-eight persons to Guam (Freycinet 1996:42). As they had little business in the remote Northern Islands, it is unclear how the Spanish administration learned of the Agrigan settlement. One European visitor to Guam in 1819 stated that this colony went undetected for a substantial period of time and only came to the attention of local authorities via news from the Philippines (Golovnin 1979:235). It is also possible that the foreigners' presence was noted by natives of the Central Carolines who, by this time, were traveling throughout the Mariana Archipelago in their finely made voyaging canoes.

Although the available historical sources are sketchy, it is probable that only a single colony was established on Agrigan and that its settlers were brought to Guam aboard the *Concepción*, a Guam-based schooner. The possibility that foreign settlements in the Northern Islands might be used to support assaults on their valuable colony in the Philippines was of grave concern to the Spanish administration, and several preventive strategies were proposed. These included establishing permanent populations on all of the islands of the archipelago and launching annual expeditions to search for and expel any foreigners who might be present. The most radical and impractical plan proposed felling trees on all of the islands except Guam to discourage would-be settlers and to make it difficult for foreign ships to be resupplied (Valle 1991:37).

In 1819 the Mariana Islands were visited by a French scientific expedition, under the command of Louis de Freycinet (Freycinet 1996). Following a three-month layover at Guam, the expedition sailed north to conduct a hydrographic study of the other islands in the archipelago. A resulting map, later published in an atlas by L. I. Duperrey, was the first of the Mariana Archipelago since Father Lopez's map of 1671. Unfortunately, it turned out to be much less accurate than the Jesuit map and led to confusion regarding the placement and names of some of the Northern Islands. Much of this confusion stemmed from Freycinet's decision to rename Guguan in honor of the Chamorro vice governor, Luis de Torres. Although this designation

did not last, it was largely responsible for the erroneous cartographic placement of all of the islands to the north of Sarigan (Driver 1987:xiii).

While the expedition's mapping work was flawed, Freycinet effected one permanent change by naming the tiny, barren island immediately north of Saipan after the governor of Guam. Henceforth, this island, which originally may have been known as Noos, became Farallon de Medinilla (Lévesque 1995:86). Owing to its small size and lack of residents, the early Jesuit missionaries did not assign it a Christian name but simply referred to it as Rocher, or "Rock."

A few years later, the Northern Islands figured in a bizarre story of piracy and buried treasure quite in keeping with the popular image of the South Seas. Sometime between 1822 and 1825, the English vessel *Peruvian* stopped at one of the Northern Islands, where its captain was reported to have buried a substantial quantity of silver plate and jewels (Corte 1870:106–108). These valuables, looted by rebels attempting to overthrow Spanish colonial regimes in South America, were turned over to the British navy for safekeeping. Seizing the opportunity, an English captain absconded with the treasure and buried it on one of the Northern Islands. Spanish authorities on Guam eventually learned of this intrusion and reportedly captured the Englishman as he attempted a return to the Northern Islands to recover the valuables. Although the renegade captain reportedly committed suicide soon after his capture, information contained in his personal papers suggested that the treasure was buried on Pagan. This information prompted an unsuccessful eight-month effort by the Spanish to locate these valuables (Corte 1870:107–108).

The first major settlement in the Northern Islands since the *reducción* was established on Pagan in 1865. In August of that year, George Johnson, the American son-in-law of the Spanish governor of the Marianas, brought in 265 Carolinians from Pulusuk to produce copra under the auspices of an agricultural society known as La Sociedad Agrícola de la Concepción. Johnson secured temporary possession of the island with the proviso that he maintain a permanent population of at least one hundred individuals (Ibanez and Resano 1976:21).

Soon after settling the Pulusuk people on Pagan, Johnson, no doubt using his family connections, secured formal leases for Tinian, Pagan, and Agrigan under favorable terms. So favorable were the terms, in fact, that in 1868 the queen of Spain directed the colonial administration to make available all documents and correspondence associated with these transactions (Driver and Brunal-Perry 1996:74–75). The Crown was concerned that irregularities had occurred and that Johnson was exploiting these islands rather than ensuring their permanent colonization.

The Pagan settlement lasted until 1869, when its entire population was

relocated to Saipan (Ibanez and Resano 1976:21). In spite of having a leasehold on Agrigan, Johnson made no effort to exploit its resources. The reasons behind the abandonment of Pagan and Johnson's inactivity at Agrigan are not entirely clear, but they probably involved economic considerations. These isolated islands were just too far from Guam to sustain commercially viable operations, even though Johnson owned and operated a schooner, the *Ana*. By 1869 Johnson focused his agricultural efforts on Tinian, which, in addition to possessing fertile soil and herds of feral cattle, was located closer to Guam.

In 1888 the Belgian naturalist Alfred Marche traveled to the Northern Islands aboard the schooner *Esmeralda* to collect natural and cultural specimens for a Paris museum. Marche visited Pagan twice and investigated *latte* ruins scattered about the rugged landscape dominated by two smoking volcanic cones (Marche 1982:18–21). The island's only inhabitants were a few itinerant Carolinian agricultural laborers who produced copra for a Captain Williams, the master of the *Esmeralda*. During his visits, Marche experienced difficulty acquiring faunal specimens, a situation he attributed to the effects of a recent typhoon that ravaged the island.

Although the available historical sources are sketchy, there is some evidence to suggest that Japanese businessmen were involved in small-scale ventures in the Northern Islands during the 1890s. These included guano mining on distant Asunción and Uracas, and copra-making operations carried out in conjunction with Chamorro associates from Saipan (Bowers 1950:41).

German Administration

In 1899 Germany purchased from Spain all of the islands north of Guam, thus ending three centuries of Spanish control. The small German administration, headed by District Officer Georg Fritz, was headquartered on Saipan. Economic development, centered on copra production, became its top priority. Fritz took an active interest in the islands and their native inhabitants, and conducted an inspection trip of the Northern Islands soon after his arrival, no doubt to assess their development potential and to examine their archaeological remnants (Fritz 1902:96–118).

In keeping with the priorities of his administration, Fritz quickly executed a lease for several of the Northern Islands with the Pagan Company, an enterprise comprising Chamorro and Japanese partners. Under the terms of the lease, the Pagan Company was obliged to pay eight thousand marks per year, to provide regular transportation between Saipan and the Northern Islands, and to plant three thousand coconut trees on Alamagan,

Pagan, Agrigan, and Anatahan (Fritz 1905). By the turn of the century, the Pagan Company had approximately 140 Chamorro and Carolinian agricultural workers in the Northern Islands, and their annual production for 1899 amounted to over four hundred tons of copra (Fritz 1900a). The finished copra was purchased by Japanese traders for 120 to 140 marks per ton and shipped to Japan, where it was used in a variety of products, including soap and livestock feed.

For the next few years the German administration attempted to force Japanese businessmen out of the Northern Marianas. By 1904 Fritz was pleased to report to his superiors in New Guinea that the Pagan Company was completely controlled by Germans and German nationals, including Pedro Ada, an influential Chamorro businessman. Early in the German administration, Ada, carrying an official letter of introduction from Fritz, had traveled to Japan and China to purchase sailing ships for his Northern Islands operations (Fritz 1900b).

The fledgling copra industry was dealt a crippling blow in July 1905, when Pagan was devastated by a powerful typhoon. This disaster followed a storm that had struck Alamagan only months before. With coconut trees heavily damaged, copra production fell dramatically; for the remainder of the German administration it never reached pre-1905 levels (Fritz 1906).

In addition to economic development, the German administration found one additional use for the Northern Islands: as a penal colony. Crime was rare in the German Marianas, but those few individuals who committed serious offenses found themselves exiled on lonely Sarigan, a small but fertile island just north of Anatahan. By 1901 eight prisoners and their families resided on Sarigan, supervised by two guards (Fritz 1905). In addition to raising their own food, prisoners were required to plant coconut trees, an activity Fritz undoubtedly viewed as a prudent investment in the growing copra industry. Fritz also used the threat of exile to Sarigan against those Chamorros and Carolinians who persisted in using Pidgin English rather than German, the official language of the district.

Japanese Rule

Soon after the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Japan, a rising Pacific power allied with Great Britain, seized Germany's colonial holdings in Micronesia. Japan's initial interest in these remote islands was solely for their potential strategic value; early attempts at economic development, particularly in the Marianas, ended in failure (Peattie 1988:124). However, within a few years of officially being awarded the islands by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, the colonial administration, in close cooperation with

private enterprise, set about making their newly acquired possessions productive parts of the empire.

Although major economic efforts involving sugarcane agriculture were focused on Saipan, Tinian, and Rota, Japanese businessmen also turned their attention to the Northern Islands. Sugarcane agriculture was impractical on these tiny bits of land. Consequently, small groups of Japanese, Chamorros, and Carolinians relied on copra, the economic staple since German times. Initial efforts were modest. In 1929 five Chamorro men and their wives settled on Anatahan and began producing copra for Nan'yo Boeki Kaisha (South Seas Trading Company), or Nambo, as it was known to Japanese and islanders alike (Peattie 1988:119). By the mid-1930s, however, nearly four hundred Japanese, Okinawans, Chamorros, and Carolinians were residing on the largest and most fertile of the Northern Islands, including Pagan, Alamagan, Agrigan, and Anatahan (OPNAV 1944:34). Copra plantations were also established on the smaller islands of Sarigan and Asunción.

In addition to copra, Japanese businessmen also exploited the rich marine resources present in the Northern Islands. Bonito and tuna were the principal targets of commercial fishermen, who by the mid-1930s were catching roughly four thousand tons annually (Bowers 1950:45). To facilitate operations in the Northern Islands, the Japanese constructed a fish processing plant on Maug, which they considered to possess the best fishing grounds in the archipelago (Johnson 1957:44).

With characteristic industriousness, the pioneers, as the Japanese settlers referred to themselves, set about developing these tiny, isolated bits of land. On Pagan, where the largest population resided, the Japanese established several villages and constructed a concrete dock and tide-gauging station, a rope-making factory, and a weather observatory (Corwin et al. 1957:92). Pagan also boasted a branch office of Nambo, attesting to its relative importance as a center of commercial activity. On the smaller islands, settlers built wooden frame houses, copra drying and storage facilities, and concrete cisterns to deal with the chronic shortage of drinking water. These isolated settlements were sustained by Nambo steamers that brought in needed supplies and materials, and carried out copra and other products a dozen times each year (Peattie 1988:122).

Even at the height of commercial operations, the Northern Islands contributed only a tiny fraction of the overall Marianas exports to Japan. In spite of the determination of the agricultural workers who labored under difficult conditions, these islands were simply too small to sustain large-scale agricultural enterprises. Those who chose to live far from the bustle of the more developed southern islands eked out a living in lonely isolation. This isola-

tion must have been particularly hard on the islands' Japanese residents, who, living far from home, reportedly experienced difficulties adjusting to tropical foods and climate (Peattie 1988:202–206).

The orderly routine of nearly three decades of Japanese rule of the Marianas came to an end with the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941. Guam, an American territory since 1898, was quickly seized by Japanese forces, an action that unified the administration of the archipelago for the first time in forty-three years. During the early stages of the war, the Marianas served Japan as supply and logistics bases for battles being fought to the south and the east. It wasn't until early 1944, with the fall of key strongholds in the Marshall Islands, that Japanese military planners began a last-minute program to transform the Marianas into an impregnable bulwark to defend air and sea approaches to the home islands (Crowl 1960:56). The main southern islands of Guam, Tinian, and Saipan, with their large areas of flat land, were strategically important. Should they fall into American hands, the Japanese home islands would be exposed to long-range bomber attacks. Accordingly, these islands became focal points for Japanese defensive efforts in anticipation of American amphibious assaults.

By contrast, the small, rugged Northern Islands were of little strategic or tactical value, with the exception of Pagan, on which the Japanese constructed a paved runway capable of handling fighter and bomber aircraft (JICPOA 1944). The Japanese also constructed troop barracks and storage bunkers for bombs and fuel. The airfield was protected by tank traps and anti-aircraft gun positions, and likely landing beaches, by well-camouflaged concrete pillboxes. Supply dumps, air-raid shelters, and gun positions were also set up in tunnels dug into ridges overlooking key areas (Corwin et al. 1957:91). Manning the airfield and defensive positions were 1,908 army and 331 navy personnel under the command of Major General Umahachi Amau (Richard 1957:21).

Reconnaissance missions carried out initially by American submarines and later by carrier-based aircraft confirmed the absence of significant Japanese defenses on the other islands with the exceptions of an observation post and weather station on Maug and a possible lookout tower on Medinilla (JICPOA 1944). Tiny and inaccessible, these islands warranted no troops or fixed defenses. While troops were absent, most of these islands possessed civilian populations effectively stranded by a sea blockade enforced by patrolling American submarines.

The expected American amphibious assault on the Marianas commenced on 15 June 1944 with the invasion of Saipan. Here, on the second largest island of the archipelago, three American divisions battled tenacious Japanese defenders in one of the bloodiest campaigns of the Pacific War (Crowl

1960:33–269). The six-week battle was followed by successful operations against Tinian and Guam during which Japanese defenders were killed almost to the last man. The Americans quickly converted these islands into large airbases designed to accommodate the newly developed B-29 Superfortress, a bomber possessing an extremely long range and large bomb capacity. From these bases the Americans launched massive bombing raids against now vulnerable Japanese cities (Denfeld and Russell 1984:19–24).

During the early stages of the Marianas campaign, Pagan's airfield was bombed and strafed by American aircraft launched from carriers assigned to the powerful Naval Task Force 58 (Crowl 1960:73). Subsequent attacks were carried out by Saipan-based aircraft of the 318th Fighter Group, but Japanese troops worked tenaciously to keep the field operational for replacement planes flown in from Iwo Jima. Other aerial sorties were flown by medium and heavy bombers, including an occasional raid by B-29 Superfortresses (Denfeld, pers. com., December 1997).

With the capture of Saipan, Tinian, and Guam, the Northern Islands joined the ranks of other bypassed islands in the Pacific whose residents, cut off from the outside world, were forced to fend for themselves. Food was not a critical problem on Agrigan, Anatahan, and Alamagan, but periodic strafing attacks by prowling American fighters forced residents to abandon villages and to take up residence in isolated jungle locations. Only at Pagan, with its large military garrison and sizable civilian population, numbering over seven hundred, was food in critically short supply (Richard 1957:21).

In February 1945 a Saipan-based B-29 bomber, returning from a raid against Japan, crashed into a high mountain peak on Anatahan. An American rescue party from Saipan succeeded in reaching the crash site on March 5. They found the partially burned wreckage of "T-Square 42" and the bodies of eight of the bomber's eleven-man crew. After burying the dead, the Americans removed to Saipan forty-three Carolinian civilians from Anatahan; these civilians informed them that a sizable band of armed Japanese was hiding in the interior (HQ Saipan 1945:11–15).

The Pacific War came to an end following the atomic-bomb attacks launched from Tinian in August 1945. The Pagan garrison surrendered to Commodore V. F. Grant, U.S. Navy, on September 2, following negotiations facilitated by American Nisei interpreters. An occupation force went ashore that same day, and the American flag was raised over the island (Richard 1957:21). Because of the extreme food shortage, 286 Chamorro civilian residents were taken to Saipan immediately, and plans were made to repatriate the Japanese nationals, both military and civilian, directly to the home islands. In the weeks that followed, all Chamorro and Carolinian civilians residing in the Northern Islands were removed to Saipan, where they were

given emergency medical attention (Johnson 1957:6–11). Japanese and Okinawan civilians were also removed and subsequently repatriated to their respective homes in 1946.

The Postwar Years

In 1950 the naval administration on Saipan made a concerted effort to effect the surrender of the Japanese holdouts on Anatahan (Peters 1973:40–46). Previous attempts by the military government during a five-year period had been unsuccessful. In June, Lieutenant Commander James Johnson led an expedition to Anatahan and picked up an Okinawan woman, Kazuko Higa, who had been on the island since 1943. Higa, the only female member of the group, was anxious to escape and managed to slip away from the twenty men with whom she shared the island. The holdouts, a mixture of military personnel, seamen, and fishermen, had been stranded on Anatahan in June 1944, when their ships had been sunk by American fighters. Refusing to believe the war was over, the men would not surrender.

In June 1951 Johnson launched a second expedition to Anatahan, which was code-named Operation Removal (Peters 1973:45). Aided by letters from relatives of the holdouts solicited by Higa and leaflets in Japanese dropped on the island by aircraft, Johnson successfully negotiated the surrender of the group's onetime leader Juni Inoue, an Imperial Navy petty officer. A few days later the remaining nineteen men, using a white flag fashioned out of a parachute from the wrecked B-29 bomber, surrendered to the small American contingent, thus concluding the final sizable Japanese capitulation of World War II. The six-year saga of the Anatahan holdouts received extensive media coverage in both the United States and Japan, no doubt stimulated by allegations of illicit sex and murder. Higa, an attractive thirty-year-old, reportedly established relationships with several of the men during the holdout. Ensuing jealousies were believed to have been responsible for as many as six murders. Dubbed the "queen bee" by the press, Higa returned to her native Okinawa and later opened a tea house that she named the "Anatahan Inn" (Peters 1973:42).

Less than three years after the war, Chamorros and Carolinians on Saipan expressed their desire to resume commercial operations in the Northern Islands. In March 1948 the Northern Islands Development Company was chartered to collect and market products from Alamagan and Agrigan. In that year the company's president, Juan M. Ada, settled 127 Carolinians on Agrigan and fifty-seven Chamorros on Alamagan (Johnson 1957:3). In 1951 the company brought fifty-eight Chamorros to Pagan, and two years later it settled sixty Carolinians on Anatahan. All were engaged in copra produc-

tion, which reached a postwar peak of roughly five hundred tons in 1953 (Johnson 1957:4).

During the U.S. naval administration, the Northern Islands, with the exception of Pagan, were designated public lands. Pagan, with its airfield and protected anchorage, was administered under a "Land Use Agreement" with the U.S. government (Johnson 1957:5). The only government use of the island, however, involved a small contingent of U.S. marines that spent several months in 1950 repairing the landing strip and clearing overgrown roadways (Corwin et al. 1957:91).

As the naval administration finally was replaced by the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands in the early 1960s, a few of the more hospitable Northern Islands continued to be occupied by small groups of Chamorros and Carolinians, most of whom had lived there during the Japanese administration. Copra continued to be the primary cash crop, but only tiny amounts were produced and sold to the United Micronesian Development Association, a Saipan-based firm. By the mid-1970s, however, copra production was abandoned altogether, largely replaced by the periodic harvesting of betel nuts for sale in the southern islands. The small Carolinian and Chamorro communities were sustained by government-run "field trip" ships that brought in passengers, medicine, building supplies, and other essentials a few times a year. These communities were not self-sustaining, and emergency rescues were performed in cases of serious illness and natural disasters.

It was also in the 1970s that the Northern Marianas acquired commonwealth status with the United States. One of the provisions of this bilateral agreement was the long-term use of Farallon de Medinilla as a bombing target for American military aircraft. With internal self-government extended under the commonwealth arrangement, the Northern Marianas government officially designated the islands of Uracas, Maug, Asunción, and Guguan as wildlife preserves.

In May 1981 Mount Pagan underwent a major eruption, forcing the island's fifty-three residents to flee to Saipan. Because of safety considerations, the island was declared off-limits, thus ending settlement on the largest and most productive of the Northern Islands. Since that time tiny groups of Chamorros and Carolinians periodically have resided on Agrigan, Alamagan, and Anatahan. Current plans being pushed by municipal authorities call for substantial infrastructure development on these three islands to permit larger-scale homesteading. Plans also call for more-intensive commercial exploitation of these islands some government officials are calling the commonwealth's "Northern Frontier" (Northern Islands Mayor's Office 1996). The cost associated with such development combined with the potential for environmental degradation, however, may prevent these ambitious plans from being implemented.

Conclusion

As this overview illustrates, use patterns in the Northern Islands have changed significantly over time. Before European contact, Chamorros used these islands for resource exploitation and, later in prehistory, as sites for habitation. That sizable communities were able to exist under such challenging environmental conditions is an impressive testament to the subsistence, organizational, and maritime skills of their ancient inhabitants.

For 150 years following European discovery, the Northern Islands were left undisturbed save for occasional visits by passing ships. Following the establishment of the Jesuit mission in the mid–seventeenth century, the Spanish first viewed the Northern Islands as fertile, if isolated, fields for proselytization and, within a decade, as troublesome native strongholds requiring military conquest. Chamorros tenaciously held on to these tiny bits of land that, at the height of the *reducción,* served as peaceful refuges not only for Gani residents, but for other islanders seeking to avoid the oppressive Spanish regime.

Once the native populations of these islands had been removed, Spanish colonial officials expressed little interest in the Northern Islands, not even as potential sites for economic development. It wasn't until the mid–nineteenth century that the Spanish administration adopted a policy of strategic denial to ensure these islands were not used as bases for attacks on their valuable colony in the Philippines.

During the German administration, the Northern Islands were viewed primarily in economic terms, particularly as sites for copra production. Chamorros and Carolinians, with obligatory German participation, were encouraged to exploit these islands to the extent possible, but tropical storms and economic constraints combined to keep development at a minimum. Sarigan also served as a prison farm where dangerous criminals could be isolated at little expense to the colonial administration.

Economic development in the Northern Islands reached its apex following Japan's annexation of the Marianas in the early twentieth century. These islands, devoid of both development and inhabitants, proved tempting to enterprising Japanese who, by the 1930s, were pouring into the Marianas by the tens of thousands. Their modest but persistent efforts were interrupted by the outbreak of World War II. During the war, Pagan was developed as a small but formidable airbase defended by a sizable garrison, while the rest of the Northern Islands, cut off by American air and sea power, held on as ragged bits of empire until Japan's final capitulation.

The immediate postwar years witnessed the repopulation of several of the Northern Islands by Chamorros and Carolinians. Copra production experienced a brief revival only to be abandoned by the early 1970s, while

natural disasters kept settlements in a constant state of flux. Commonwealth status with the United States, which took effect in the late 1970s, ensured that the islands would not fall into foreign hands, thus extending a cold war version of strategic denial first implemented by the Spanish a century before.

Today, effective administrative control of the islands once again rests with the indigenous people. There is a growing effort on the part of the Northern Marianas government to establish larger homesteads and to exploit the considerable marine resources in this part of the archipelago now touted as the "Northern Frontier." Should these plans be realized, history will have come full circle.

NOTES

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1. The southernmost of the Northern Islands, Farallon de Medinilla, is a limestone terrace island that geologically is associated with the larger southern islands. The nine islands to the north of Medinilla are exclusively volcanic.

2. In ancient times Chamorros collectively referred to these islands as "Gani," but this designation is no longer used. In contemporary Chamorro, they are called "Islas San Kattan" (Northern Islands). The term "Northern Islands" is used throughout this discussion to refer to all of the islands to the north of Saipan.

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