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5th Marianas History Conference

By Dr. Carlos Madrid and LaVonne Meno, Micronesian Area Research Center

Despite the challenges the global pandemic presents all of us, the 5th Marianas History Conference will be held on February 19. This conference was first organized in 2011 to focus on the history and experiences of the people of the Mariana Islands, reflected in its overarching theme: One Archipelago, Many Stories. The conference alternates between Saipan and Guam. For the first time, though, the conference will convene over 10 days exclusively online.

Open to the public and free of charge, the conference will feature more than 60 presentations, in line with the sub-theme, "Navigating 500 Years of Cross-Cultural Contact." Scholars, researchers, students and cultural agents will present their work related to history, cultural heritage, archaeology, political status, and the process of adaptation that the people from the Mariana Islands experienced following Western contact.

The first recorded encounter between CHamorus with people from the other side of the world took place in 1521. The encounter was not an easy one, however, as an incident triggered by mutual misunderstanding and a lack of communication resulted in the death of at least seven islanders.

Led by [Ferdinand Magellan](#), this expedition marked what at that time was the finding of a new continent — a whole part of the planet that had remained unknown to the

Western world. The transcendence of this contact can hardly be overstated. In our globalized world today, many of the current issues we face were triggered by Western exploration and colonization. These issues raise questions ranging from the legitimacy of military interventions, sovereignty of territories and natural resources, to processes of social development, decolonization and self-determination.

In line with the University of Guam's *Para Hulo'* strategic plan and the Micronesian Area Research Center's study and promotion of Micronesian Traditional Navigation, the 5th Marianas History Conference presents a showcase of diversity, island wisdom, cultural heritage and traditions. Chaired by the Micronesian Area Research Center, the virtual conference is hosted by the University of Guam and the Northern Marianas Humanities Council, with the co-organizing support of our partners from Humanities Guåhan, Guampedia, Northern Marianas College, and Guam Preservation Trust.

The conference will feature opening and closing keynote speakers from Guam and the Northern Marianas: Malia A. Ramirez and Theresa (Isa) H. Arriola. The conference serves to foster a broad collaboration on the part of historians, archeologists, anthropologists, community leaders and those with interest in the history of the Mariana Islands. It calls on the combined efforts of the community in Guam and the Northern Marianas to tell the many stories that define the history and identity of one archipelago.

For more information and conference registration, [click here](#).



From the Desk of Guam's Historian

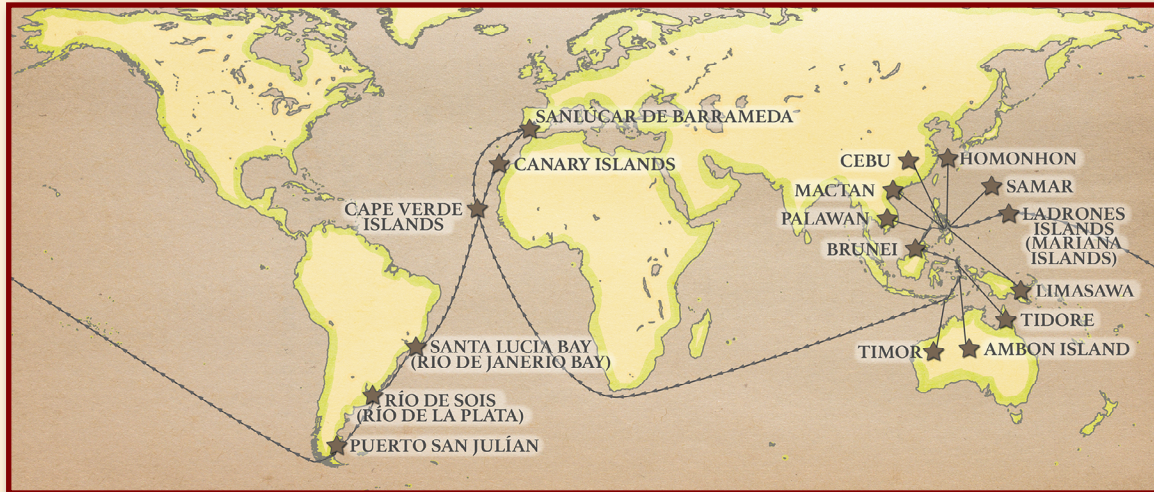


Illustration of the stops along the Ferdinand Magellan and Juan Sebastian Elcano Circumnavigation Voyage

This is the second in a series from Toni "Malia" Ramirez of Guam's Department of Parks and Recreation on the first recorded Western contact with the Marianas 500 years ago. The first was an effort to describe the initial encounter; this focuses on the CHamoru language and cultural attributes in contrast to the recorded perspective.

The Ferdinand Magellan and Juan Sebastian Elcano Expedition departed Spain on September 20, 1519, with five ocean vessels (carracks) in search of a western passage to the Spice Islands. The ships were named La Santisima Trinidad, San Antonio, La Concepción, San Santiago and La Victoria. Of the five, only one, La Victoria, returned to Spain in March of 1522 which was under the command of Juan Sebastian Elcano. Ferdinand Magellan did not complete the voyage as he was killed in the Philippines on April 27, 1521, shortly after leaving the Marianas.

The three year expedition took 1,082 days to complete. From *Estrecho de Magallanes*, (Strait of Magellan) it took 100 days to reach Las Islas Marianas on March 6, 1521. Only three of the ships reached Las Mariana: La Victoria, La Santisima Trinidad and La Concepción. An extremely arduous voyage, the miscalculations of the vastness of the Pacific Ocean led to the crew members suffering severe illnesses due to lack of provisions including mental fatigue.

In comparison to these explorers, the CHamoru had a more advanced knowledge of ocean voyaging within our sphere. For centuries, our people ventured and sailed the Western Pacific Ocean long before the Age of Exploration by the Europeans.

However, there were no exceptions to the same plights when their ocean voyaging passages were also miscalculated. Thus, how did the CHamoru describe the *man gilagu* upon their arrival to Las islas Marianas? There was no written CHamoru language at the time. However, through extensive knowledge of CHamoru language phonology, lexicons, grammar and semantics, the encounter can be ascertained.

Language is powerful either through written documents or oral histories. For the CHamoru, oral histories take precedence! The CHamoru likely discussed the crew with the following phrases. *Man sen malangu!* (They were extremely sickened!). *Man gof ñalang!* (They are extremely malnourished!). *Man gof ma'u!* (They are extremely dehydrated).

As a traditional CHamoru scholar, I depend on the CHamoru language and its [Proto-Austronesian](#) language links to weave together CHamoru histories and attributes. The CHamoru accounts can be either slightly different or vastly different from written accounts. My first visit to the Western Carolines and Refaluwasch (Carolinian) encounters more than 50 years ago were one of the first preludes

of my understanding of what is CHamoru. Enlightened, I understood my heritage and my ancestors as ocean navigators, through the *galaidi* (canoe)! The cultural and historic CHamoru and Refaluwasch links are so evident prior to the arrival of the Spanish Expedition in March of 1521.

The CHamoru and the Refaluwasch practiced *inatulaikka* (trade) before the Spanish expedition. They both understood, *inatulaika* and *inatungu'* (understanding / agreement). Did the Expedition understand this concept of reciprocation? These fundamental cultural conflicts between the CHamoru and the Expedition eventually led to the mischaracterization of the CHamoru for centuries by the *man gilagu*, written and identified on maps: as *Islas de Ladrones* (Islands of Thieves). Only a three day encounter and the written history prevailed over the CHamoru oral history accounts.

Five hundred years ago! A *fanatahguayan* (winds of change) - a significant historical past for the man CHamoru and Las Islas Marianas! Spain and the Western world used the word "discovered." The CHamoru used the words, *man mattu!* (They arrived or came to shore). What a vast difference in the interpretation of the first encounter!

Two interpretations of the first Pacific Islanders to encounter the *man gilagu* - one was written, one was oral tradition. The written account prevailed! As a traditional CHamoru scholar, I always have questioned the written perspectives, preferring the oral tradition instead!

History Comes Alive in the Streets of Humåtak

Joe Quinata and son, Lazaro Quinata, give their personal reflections of celebrating CHamoru history and culture during the annual commemoration of Guam's first encounter with Spanish explorers in the village of Humåtak.



The experience of growing up in [Humåtak](#) was the best thing that could ever happen to me as a child. Every adult in the village was your parent and every child was your playmate. People did not go hungry and children did not go unguided. As you drive along the single road that passes through Humåtak, you are met with lush mountains on one side and pristine bays on the other. Along this road, you will also see the village mayor's office, a Catholic church, numerous homes, and the remnants of various Spanish fortifications that once protected this historic porting village.

In 1521, Ferdinand Magellan and his crew of Spanish explorers were met by CHamoru canoes when his expedition made landfall in Guam in the coastal settlement that CHamoru oral history says was this village of Humåtak. When the [Spanish returned](#) some four decades later, in 1565, it was at Humåtak that the island was officially claimed for Spain and a Catholic mass was celebrated. In the next three centuries following the claiming of Guam for Spain, Humåtak would become a primary port for the sailing vessels carrying out the empire's [Manila-Acapulco trade](#). This designated Humåtak as the seat of government during part of the year, thus allowing for the construction of churches, a governor's palace, forts, and other buildings. The remnants of several Spanish colonial structures, including the walls of a 17th century church, can still be seen today.

For the past seven decades, the residents of Humåtak have gathered on the shores of Salupa Bay to host an annual celebration of CHamoru culture and history, coinciding with the date of the island's first encounter with Spanish explorers. A popular feature at this event is the historical reenactment of the arrival of Ferdinand Magellan in 1521. This reenactment is portrayed by local residents and uses the natural landscape to depict the violent encounter between the people of Humåtak and the Spanish explorers. It is through this annual event that the people of Humåtak raise funds for the construction of schools, church repairs, and other capital projects within the village.

Every year in the month of March, the normally quiet village of Humåtak becomes a hub for visitors, both from Guam and abroad because of its annual tradition of commemorating the first encounter with Spanish explorers. While most people come for the food, music, and live reenactment of Magellan's landing, a new attraction that the village has developed has become just as memorable.

In 2012, the Humatak Community Foundation created the Humåtak Heritage Walking Tour. This program was created to instill the youth of Humåtak with the knowledge of our village's history. Youths from as young as middle school to as old as college gathered in the Humåtak Heritage Center twice a week to listen to elders, academics, and cultural professionals about various topics concerning the events that shaped the development of Humåtak. We would use this newfound knowledge, with research of online resources and written documents, to pinpoint ten historic sites within the village.

As soon as the first visitors arrived, in that first weekend of March, we would share with them all we had learned. Each of the ten sites working in unison created an immersive tour that truly made history come alive in our very own streets, transforming the village of Humåtak into a living museum.

I was a freshman in high school when this program first began and have been an active participant ever since. Many of us who were a part of this program from the beginning have remained, no longer as the young sharing our story with visitors, but as mentors, sharing all we know with those of the next generation. This yearly celebration in Humåtak has evolved for many of us from a month of just parties, to a deeply enriching experience that continually reminds us of the true interconnectedness between our present, past, and future.

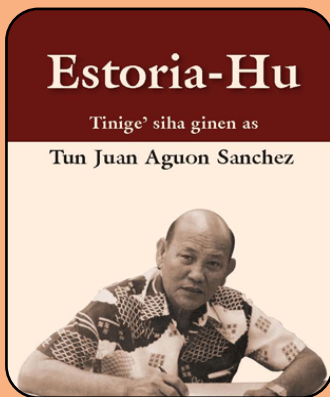


Guampedia Giftshop Expands Marianas Resources

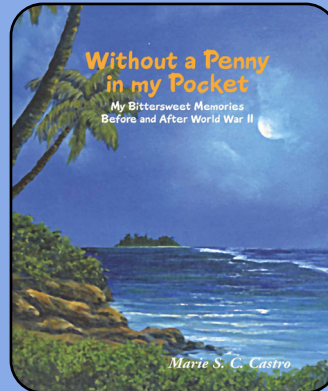
As part of Guampedia’s engagement theme, Culture of Connecting, we are committed to expanding our resources and offerings to truly reflect the Marianas as a whole! We have partnered with the Northern Marianas Humanities Council to offer their books in our online gift shop. These new additions were authored through the Micronesian Author’s Initiative with priority given to indigenous Micronesian authors, as well as community grants for research and publication. These newly added books offer an array of Northern Mariana Islands-centered personal narratives and historical research. These include perspectives of both of its people - Chamorro and Refaluwasch (Carolinian). Listed are just a few of the books now available! Click the book titles to view the full product profiles on our online giftshop.



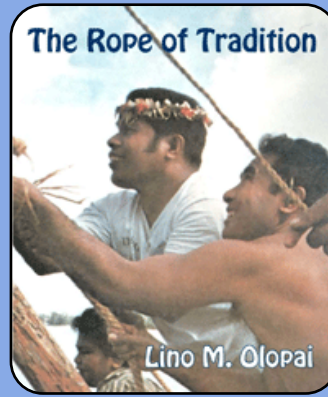
“Microchildren” is a collection of winning poems written by CNMI students in the first decade of the Valentine N. Sengebau Poetry Competition.



Tun Juan Sanchez’s book, “Estoria-Hu,” written in the Chamorro language, captures his personal narrative of the historic events that have impacted the people of the Marianas.



“Without a Penny in my Pocket,” is a personal account by Marie S.C. Castro, describing her experience growing up in a traditional Chamorro family in the 1930’s amidst the Battle of Saipan during WWII and years after the war.



“The Rope of Tradition,” by Lino Olopai, describes his longstanding efforts to document and better understand his rich cultural heritage and find a balance between traditional versus modern ways.



This past December, Guampedia was awarded \$10,000 from the Guam Council of the Arts and Humanities CARES grant program. With the shutdown of Guam’s tourism industry, this initiative will enhance Guampedia’s online gift shop and provide local artists and cultural producers access to its online marketplace.