

Terraces and Traditions of Uluang: Ethnographic and Archaeological Perspectives on a Prehistoric Belauan Site

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Abstract—This paper combines ethnographic and archaeological perspectives in a study of the earthen terraces of Uluang, an abandoned prehistoric village on Babeldaob Island, Belau. Oral traditions detail the founding and ultimate destruction of Uluang but do not mention the terraces. Archaeological evidence suggests that the Uluang terraces were built well prior to the founding of the village. Their original uses may have been defensive and agricultural.

Introduction

This paper is the product of collaborative research by an ethnographer (Parmentier) and an archaeologist (Lucking), who both carried out field research in the Republic of Belau (Palau) between 1978 and 1980. Parmentier's investigation into the oral traditions of Ngeremlengui district, carried out in the Belauan language, resulted in a corpus of materials illustrating various indigenous perspectives on Belauan political history (Parmentier 1987). Although primarily interested in mythological and historical narratives and political oratory, Parmentier mapped abandoned villages, documented sacred stones, and explored terraces in order to locate the places named in stories, chants, and songs. Lucking, whose primary interest was in the terraces of Belau and their relationship to historic villages (see Lucking 1980) met with Parmentier, who had just returned from the field, to discuss specific locations known to have been important prehistoric sites in Ngeremlengui to which Lucking could direct archaeological attention, while completing a broad multi-district terrace survey. It was decided that the site of most interest was the abandoned village of Uluang.

A series of separate lines of inquiry generated by distinct subdisciplinary concerns turned out to be fundamentally linked. The ethnographic question begging for solution pertained to the role of the destruction of Uluang village by the allies of Imeiong, the capital village of Ngeremlengui district, in the transformation of that district's political organization. The pressing archaeological questions concerned the function of the extensive terraced formations which dot the mountainous slopes of Babeldaob and other islands in the archipelago—in particular the possibility of documenting a connection between ter-

ances and village sites through the analysis of house platform distribution, soil horizons, and *in situ* pottery, and through the use of dating techniques. The fact that Uluang is the site of elaborate terraces as well as the location of a large village made the collaboration between ethnographic and archaeological methodologies a promising research strategy.

Platforms and pottery on terraces have been accepted as indicative of living areas on the terraces but it has not been determined what the relationship was between terraces and villages, whether the terraces were actually constructed as living areas or whether the village centers postdate the abandonment of the terraces. Evidence of residential use does not necessarily imply that the terraces were originally constructed for that purpose. Uluang is the only extensive village system on a terrace complex encountered in Lucking's survey, although informants said there were others elsewhere. Another reason for studying Uluang was that there was an extensive narrative history of the rise and fall of the village, which Parmentier recorded from storytellers in the area. In fact, the narrative is so complete that the date of the destruction of the village can be specified as the mid- to late-1600's.

To investigate these two related questions, the now-abandoned village of Uluang seemed to be an ideal site, except for the fact that the spectacular elaboration and distinctive configuration of the terraces themselves are matched by an equally marked lack of specific reference in the record of oral traditions dealing with pre-contact Belau. The situation today is not much different from that described by the trader Andrew Cheyne, who asked villagers about the terraces of Babeldaob in 1864: "The Pelew Islanders when questioned about the terraced hills and forts say it was either done by the gods, or by the sea at the flood" (cited in Parmentier 1987: 30). Like the extensive megalithic remains (Hidikata 1973) still visible throughout the islands, the terraces are today "reminders of the past" (*ngesechel a cherechar*), a past seemingly without connection with the Belauan ethnographic present. The stories collected in the district describe the people, history, and features of Uluang in detail but make no mention of the construction or utilization of the terraced slopes or the prominent crowned hillcrests.

In addition to scholarly speculation about the origins of the terraces (Bellwood, 1979, Craib 1983, Takayama 1982), much attention has been devoted to the comparative analysis of pottery, megaliths, language, rock paintings, exchange valuables, and social structure (see Parmentier 1987: 25–39 for a summary). Yet there are no conclusive findings as to the origins of the Belauan people—other than that the culture derives from the general eastward movement of Austronesian-speakers from Taiwan, the Philippines, or Indonesia—and than that the islands seem to have been inhabited for the last two millennia. The precontact presence of pig has been documented but there is no evidence for prehistoric rice cultivation (Masse *et al.* 1984). Both archaeological research and traditional narratives do, however, point to extensive intra-archipelagic migrations, with individuals, social groups, and entire villages moving from Ngeruangel and Ngcheangel atolls in the north and from the "rock islands" such as Ulong and Ngeruktabel in the central zone to the high islands of Oreor, Ngerekebesang, and Babeldaob. In addition, many stories describe extensive and continuous contact between the high islands of the "upper sea" (*bab el daob*) and the islands of the "lower sea" (*eou el daob*), including reverse migration, trade in pottery and valuables, and warfare (Parmentier 1987).

Uluang is located in Ngeremlengui district (now State) on the west coast of

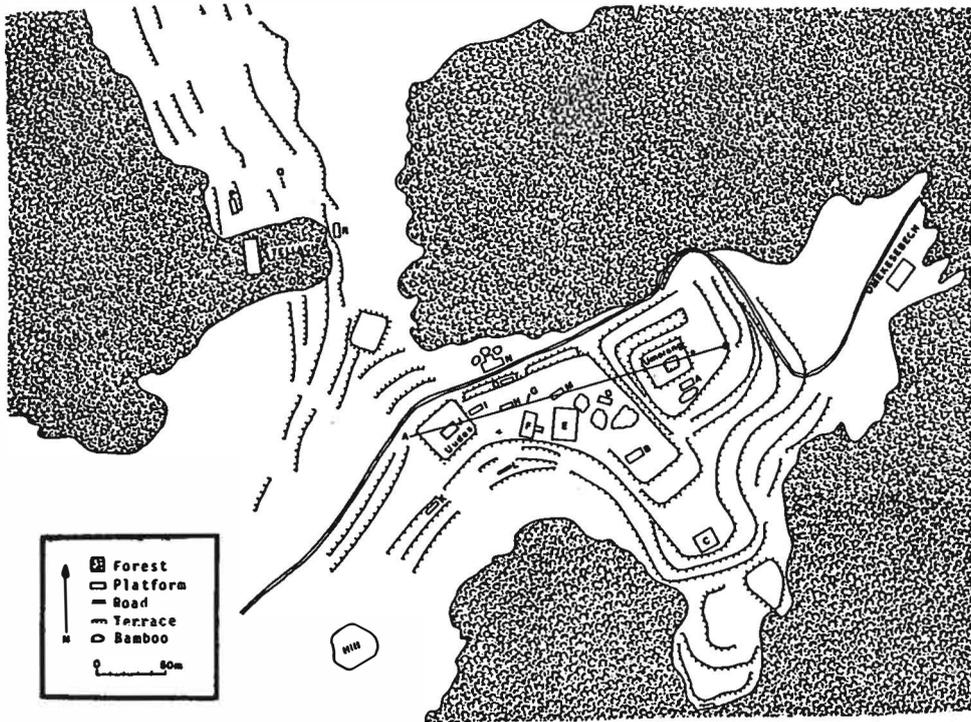


Figure 1. Map of Uluang

Babeldaob halfway between Imeiong and Ngeremetengel villages. The river flowing into the lagoon at Ngeluong opening cuts three lengthy passages through the coastal mangrove swamp. The original location of Imeiong (called Imiungs in local narratives and chants) occupies the high ground just south of the northern arm of the river; Uluang is located on a triangular promontory between the southern arm and the mangrove swamp at Orull to the west. (A third village, Ngerutechei, once stood at the border of the mangrove swamp at the end of a small branch of this southern arm.) The extensive river system in this part of Babeldaob is the result of runoff from the slopes of the central mountain range which rises to the southwest of all three villages. The Japanese-built road passes through the village just to the north of the two prominent crowned hills (Figure 1) although the original path following the curve of the terraces is still visible in the southern portion of the area.

Ethnographic Perspective on Uluang

The narrative of the destruction of Uluang (Parmentier 1987: 258–71) illustrates several important processes of Belauan political development. Uluang is described as a “war-like” (*bekeu*) and “haughty” (*otingaol*) village whose leaders used their military might and financial resources to oppress neighboring Imeiong. Villagers from Uluang constantly harassed even high-ranking women from Imeiong when they passed through Uluang on

their way to work in nearby taro swamps near present-day Ngeremetengel. These high-ranking women, especially the women from the chiefly house of Klang, preferred to labor in the taro swamps west of Imeiong because the sun would be at their backs both in the morning and again in the evening. These women were detained at Omekesebech meeting-house, the name of which, Self-restraint, points to the sexual molestation of these high-ranking women. Further, the leaders of Uluang consistently ridiculed the decisions of their Imeiong neighbors and named their own meetinghouse Tellach (Law) as a sign of their refusal to acknowledge Imeiong's laws. After a period of enduring the sexual humiliation of its women, Imeiong's male leaders requested military assistance from a group of allied villages within the district (such as low-ranking Ngeremetengel) and outside the district (such as Ngellau on the eastern side of Babeldaob). The attack was coordinated by the famous warfare expert Ngirairung. The plan was to draw the warriors from Uluang down to the mangrove channel while members of the warparty from Ngeremetengel entered the village from the west. One reason for this particular plan was that the chiefs at Imeiong wanted to appear "above the fray," that is, to give the impression that Uluang was attacked in all directions except from Imeiong. The strategy was successful, and Uluang's residential houses and meetinghouses were burned to the ground, its people fleeing in all directions. Ironically, some people fled to Imeiong and settled there, thus illustrating the principle that brave and rich people are always welcome as additional members of a village. Two prominent groups of people from Uluang migrated to Melekeok, where they established the important houses named Uudes and Umerang, the names of two of the terrace crowns at Uluang. So grateful was Imeiong that it awarded the Imiungselbad, the sacred stone emblematic of the village, to the leader of the allied forces. It is because the destruction of Uluang is so well-connected with other narratives, events (exchange rituals, wars, headhunting raids, migrations), house and title names and sacred stones that it is possible to calculate that the event occurred in the mid- to late-1600's.

The obvious interpretation of this narrative, that Imeiong's struggle for supremacy over Uluang resulted in its becoming the recognized capital of Ngeremlengui district, is an interpretation specifically denied by local storytellers. From their perspective, Imeiong is an inherently high-ranking capital due to the fact, attested in widely reported myths (Parmentier 1987), that the village is the oldest son of the goddess Milad, who gave birth to the Belauan people after a flood had destroyed an earlier race of islanders. The "new world" of Milad was symbolically coded by a quadripartite organization of prominent villages, including Imeiong, Melekeok, Imeliik, and Oreor, all said to be Milad's "children." In defeating Uluang, Imeiong was not achieving political rank but rather defending it against the illegitimate usurping potential of warlike Uluang.

The interest of both archaeologists and ethnographers grows, however, with the realization that this story is paralleled by other narratives which describe the overthrow of dominant villages located near two of the other capital villages in the Belauan polity described in the Milad myth, namely, Oreor and Melekeok, and that these oppressive villages are also located on high ground near extensive terraces. People from Oreor were subject to the mockery of warriors from Ngerekebesang, who would enter their village and pull down the roofs of their houses to use as raingear. Drawing on the assistance of villages located in the rock island area, Oreor managed to overthrow Ngerekebesang, whose people fled to northern Babeldaob. Similarly, Melekeok was forced to endure the violation of its women by people from nearby Oliuch. Chief Tmekei also recruited

Ngirairung to lead a victorious assault on Oliuch, leaving Melekeok the undisputed capital of Ngetelngal district.

These stories highlight three sources of political power in Belau: cosmologically-grounded rank (legitimized in myth and essentialized in sacred stones), military strength (demonstrated as much by the extent of alliance networks as by the size of the local war-party), and financial wealth (based on the possession of valuables or money pieces). The stories also indicate the hierarchical character of district political order, since the consolidation of Ngeremlengui depends on a rigid distinction between capital and member villages (like Ngeremetengel) and between high-ranking chiefs and commoners (that is, people without titles and without valuables). Finally, the narratives suggest that in Belau (as elsewhere on high islands in Micronesia) political relationships extended as frequently across district boundaries as within them.

Archaeological Perspective on Uluang

Evidence from terrace formations in other locations in Belau can be used to develop a typology which helps illuminate the particular terrace forms found at Uluang. Three general categories can be distinguished (Lucking 1984: 35–36; cf. Osborne 1966: 150–55). *Terraces*: elongated, stepped formations, occurring as three types:

- Type 1: brimmed terraces, often found in association with crowns; those found at the top of terrace systems have brims often 1–2 m above the basin and those found on lower slopes have brims only 50 cm high
- Type 2: stepped terraces with flat surfaces and very steep risers (sometimes more than 5 m in height), usually looking like narrow stairs with long treads
- Type 3: terraces with short treads and low risers, with backsloping surfaces which can retain water

Crowns: circular, triangular, or rectangular hat-like formations (called *bukl*) found at the top of some but not all terrace systems; may exhibit a central depression and side peaks
Other Earthworks: a residual category including ditches and “foot-catchers” (Osborne 1966: 151) associated with terraces and crowns.

The ditches and foot-catchers in this residual category are situated in such a way that they block easy passage across surface systems and unterraced ridges. The problem in assuming that these earthworks were constructed for military defense is that most of them can be easily bypassed and, in at least one instance, can actually facilitate access to the terrace crown. It is possible that some of the large ditches acted as storm drains, by directing water flow during strong rains or typhoon conditions. Osborne (1966, 1979) speculates that the terraces had multiple functions: agricultural, social, religious, and defensive; he also notes (Osborne 1966: 152) that “in the old, but still remembered days” villages were located half-way up terraces. Cordy (1979), Hidikata (in Chapman 1968), Osborne (1979), and Yawata (1930) cite the presence of stone platforms and pottery on a number of terraces as support for the hypothesis that some of the terraces had been used for residence.

The most striking earthwork features at Uluang are the three crowns. The largest,

named Umerang (Truth), is a four-sided crown about 8 m high located near the east end of the complex. Atop a rectangular base of stepped terraces, Umerang is the highest point in the area and offers excellent views of the reef to the west, mountains to the east, and neighboring villages to the northeast and southwest. To the east and south of the crown are found Type 2 terraces descending to the edge of the forest. The northern and western ends of the crown are bordered by a Type 1 brimmed terrace of such exaggerated proportion that it resembles a defensive earthwall. The top of Umerang has been hollowed out to form a basin-like depression, which contained at least 6 inches of standing water during the fieldwork period. Umerang is separated from the nearly level terrace apron to the west by a shallow (2 m deep) footcatcher, the outlines of which are slightly distorted by a World War II bomb crater. The terrace apron extends in a southwesterly curve to a small hill marking the western boundary of the terrace complex. The apron is bordered on its southern curve by Type 2 and Type 3 terraces descending the slopes of the mangrove swamp and to the abandoned pond-field taro swamp, Ngeruuchel, created, according to the origin myth, by the goddess Milad to feed the Belauan people reborn after the flood (Parmentier 1967). Type 2 terraces are found immediately off the northern edge of the apron. They lead to another ridge which, facing westward, extends toward the lagoon. The second largest crown, named Uudes (Navel), is also a four-sided formation reaching a height of just over 4 m. The top of this crown is completely flat and contains what may be a house pavement. The third four-sided crown, located just north of Uudes on top of a ridge descending to the lagoon, is about 3 m high but the northern edge is slightly higher than the southern edge. To the south and west of this third crown are the only other brimmed terraces observed at Uluang. The rest of the terraces stretching from this crown to the west and east are Type 3 terraces—shallow, uneven, and roughly outlined.

Much evidence of stone construction remains at Uluang, despite extensive disturbance of the site. Although the ethnographic evidence indicates that Belauan residential houses (*blai*), canoe sheds (*diangel*), cookhouses (*uum*), religious shrines (*sob*, *tet*), and meetinghouses (*bai*) were all constructed of mortised lumber, roughly fitted stones (*cheldukt*) were used for the foundation platforms of meetinghouses for titleholders and men's club members. Stones were also used in the construction of raised paths (*chades*) leading out from the village or across low-lying land and of smaller walkways (*ledes*) connecting buildings. Various public facilities were also built of stone: central village squares, the site of meetinghouses, village shrines, and sacred stones of various types; roadside resting places (*olengrull*); terminus pavements (*bdelulechang* "head of the road"), usually marking the end of a road or the juncture of roads belonging to different political divisions; outdoor sitting areas (*iliud*), often found with upright backrest stones (*btangch*) arranged in either a circle or square; and defensive walls (*cheluatl*), typically located near the mangrove channel entrance. Of particular importance for archaeological and ethnographic study of demography and social stratification is the residential house, the size of which—in particular the number of front doors—indicated the social rank of the occupant. Belauan houses were not normally built on stone platforms but the rectangular stone pavements in front (*odesongel*, *olbed*) contained the gravestones (*debull*) of ancestral residents, as well as the stone backrest reserved for the male titleholder. The greater the number of ancestors buried at the house, the larger the grave pavement, and the stronger the claim to high social status (Parmentier 1988).

Most of the house pavements and meetinghouse platforms still visible at Uluang are located in the area of the apron and along the nearby Type 2 and Type 3 terraces (Figure 1). A total of 20 pavements and platforms (full or remnant) was found although the surface of the terrace apron indicated that many more stoneworks had at one time existed there. The stones at Uluang have been subject to substantial removal and reuse. Belauans built several houses at the extreme edge of the terrace apron in the 1930s, and the Japanese fortified the area with trenches prior to World War II. A tall monolith which, according to local informants, once stood near the western entrance to the village has disappeared. Thirteen rectangular stone formations, measuring between 4 and 6.75 m wide and 4.7 to 12.6 m long, may represent house pavements (Lucking 1984). Two unclassified platforms of unusual size and configuration are depicted in Figure 1.

Three stoneworks deserve particular mention. The platform Tellach (Law) mentioned in the narratives still stands just inside a forested grove northwest of Uudes crown. This platform, measuring approximately 36 m by 18 m, was the site of the meeting house of the decision-making council of titleholders at Uluang. A second platform Omekesebech (Self-restraint), also mentioned in the narrative, was located at the eastern boundary of the village, just as the path descends to Umad bridge; this was the location of the meeting-house of untitled men of Uluang. (This platform was removed in 1980 when the road was widened to make room for a school bus stop.) The third notable feature is the central village square, a rectangular pavement approximately 50 m by 21 m, filling much of the relatively flat space between Umerang and Uudes crowns (Figure 2). The northern perimeter of this pavement is constructed of squared boulders measuring almost 1 m on each side and 0.6 m high.

Four test pits were excavated at Uluang and numerous soil cores were obtained from the crowns. In addition, five fresh road cuts between Uluang and Imeiong were examined.

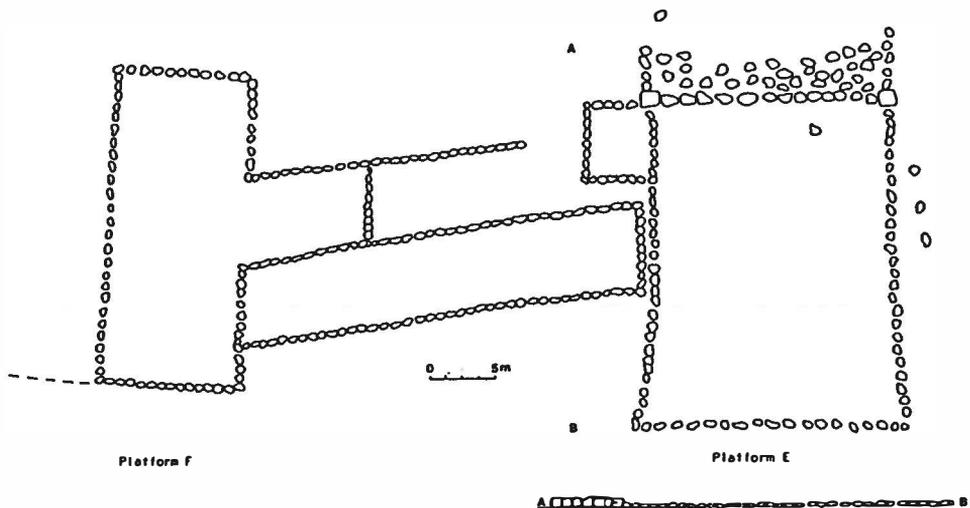


Figure 2. Plan of Village Square at Uluang

Two radiocarbon dates were obtained from charcoal recovered in Test Pit 2. A date of 285 ± 75 B.P. was obtained from the 7–10 cm level and a date of 420 ± 75 yrs B.P. from the 20 cm level (no corrections were made in radiocarbon dating for variations in atmospheric Carbon 14 (Lucking 1984). These dates were much later than those obtained in terrace fill in other Babeldaob sites, which ranged from 785–1230 B.P. Because of the widespread presence of charcoal at the 7–10 cm level, the 275 B.P. date is thought to mark the destruction of Uluang by fire and tallies very well with the estimated date for this event based on oral traditions. Test Pit 4 and the soil probes showed the crowns to be constructed of a fill material containing a mix of A, B, and C soil horizons.

One road cut showed the presence of a buried soil horizon from 27–35 cm. Whenever this A1b horizon was encountered in a terrace profile it was characterized by higher moisture, clay and organic contents than any of the horizons other than the A horizon (Table 1). These characteristics imply unnaturally and severely impeded drainage. The high organic matter content was probably primarily due to the high rainfall in the Belau islands, and the clay content in the soil would help stabilize the organic matter. The vast differences in the A1b and B2 horizons, as far as these characteristics are concerned, suggest that the A1b horizon may have been a fossil soil. The soils on the freshly cut terraces would probably not have been as infertile as the surfaces are now (Limbrely 1975). Burning of the vegetation cover and the addition of organic matter to the soil would help prolong fertility. The backsloping shape of the terraces would also promote the retention of organic matter. No definitive data exist on how long total soil depletion or laterization would take to occur under these conditions, so it is uncertain how long the terraces could have remained in use. Another road cut showed how fill material was used to level and extend a terrace surface. The fill material is characterized by the presence of concretions and pottery in an undifferentiated earth matrix. This fill material contrasts sharply with the natural soil horizons found 20 m farther east in the same road cut.

From these examinations and others, it can be concluded that terrace construction was accomplished in two ways (Lucking 1984; Osborne 1966: 150–55 and Fig. 48). Most of the Type 2 and Type 3 terraces were sculpted from existing ridges and slopes. Construction often removed most of the existing A and B horizons and left the C horizon very close to the surface of the terrace steps. These terrace surfaces were evened and extended out, using fill material either generated during construction (the removed horizons) or brought in from other sources. Most of the crowns and other artificial earthworks were built using fill material which often consists of a mixture of A, B, and C horizons. Even if the base were sculpted from the surrounding hillside it was formed into its distinctive shape using fill.

Pottery concentrations on terraces correlate with areas known to have been inhabited in the relatively recent past, while these surface finds on terraces decline as one moves away from recently inhabited areas. Subsurface artifactual material in terraced areas is most dense in terrace fill and at the base of the A1b horizons, when encountered. Although the presence of pottery on the terraces and in the test pits in terrace steps has previously been taken to indicate some form of occupation of these locations, the number of sherds is suggestive of field breakage, and the sherd material may have been used to consolidate terrace fill.

Table 1. Analysis of soils from Uluang terraces.

Site	Horizon	Depth	% Moisture	pH	% Organic	% Sand	% Silt	% Clay
B:IR:20	A1b	38–48 cm	63.4	4.7	8.5	12.0	18.0	70.0
	A1b	48–68 cm	72.8	5.0	7.4	9.0	23.0	69.0
	A1b	40 cm	73.6	5.1	12.1	6.5	22.0	71.0
	B2	42 cm	47.4	5.0	4.3	10.0	23.0	67.0
	B2	55–60 cm	56.3	5.1	4.3	8.0	25.0	67.0
B:IR:27	A	0–10 cm	55.1	4.4	6.4	29.1	24.1	46.8
	B1/B2	10–20 cm	43.7	4.3	3.4	20.9	28.8	50.3
	B2	20–30 cm	41.3	4.3	3.1	20.8	29.9	49.3
	B2/C	30–40 cm	42.0	4.5	2.6	29.9	27.6	42.5
	C	40–50 cm	38.0	5.2	0.9	47.0	28.3	24.7
B:IR:36	C	50–60 cm	45.0	5.5	0.3	47.7	28.4	23.9
	A	0–10 cm	43.4	6.8	10.5	12.8	26.7	60.5
	B2	10–39 cm	44.3	7.7	4.1	24.8	24.2	51.0
	A1b	39–60 cm	55.2	6.6	7.8	4.7	16.0	79.3
B:IR:36	C	60 cm–1.5 m	60.3	7.1	1.9	13.3	36.6	50.1
	A	0–10 cm	41.0	7.4	8.6	25.8	17.6	56.6
	B1/B2	10–44 cm	41.0	7.6	6.7	25.2	17.9	56.9
	A1b	44–63 cm	63.0	7.0	11.0	3.6	21.1	75.3
B:IR:36	C	65 cm–1.0 m	53.0	7.0	2.4	11.2	33.8	55.0
	A		54.0	6.1	8.3	11.3	28.0	60.7
	B2		45.0	4.8	2.1	10.0	33.4	56.6
B:IR:36	C		50.0	4.8	0.9	20.1	47.6	32.3

Three pottery types are ubiquitous in assemblages recovered from test pits on the terraces. Type 1 is a very distinctive red exterior/black interior ware. Type 2 is a thin black ware, usually with rims and body sherds less than 6 mm thick. Type 3 has a flat, flared rim, about 20–40 mm wide, and a body less than 9 mm thick. There is a pronounced curve on even the smaller fragments, indicating a vessel with a narrow orifice. Samples of the first two types were sent to the University of Toronto for neutron activation analysis, in order to establish the relationship between the Uluang materials and similar wares from different sites. Clay samples from four different traditional clay-gathering areas were also tested. The standard deviations are consistent enough to indicate that there is no great variation in chemical composition between the two types of pottery and that they were most likely manufactured in Belau. Enough variation exists, however, between the composition of the pottery sherds and the clay samples to indicate that secondary (e.g., wells), not historically used purer primary, sources of the clay were used in their manufacture.

Conclusion

To summarize, the archaeological investigation located places mentioned in the Uluang narrative and obtained a carbon-14 date that appears to support the date of the de-

struction of Uluang calculated from the oral historical accounts. It also provided information about terrace construction, particularly the use of fill strengthened by the use of broken pottery. It showed the presence of a fossil soil horizon, which may indicate agricultural activity. The pottery obtained from the terrace fill was manufactured in Belau but from clays obtained in other areas of Babeldaob. Since Uluang is the only village *totally* constructed on terraces encountered in Lucking's terrace survey in six of the ten states of Babelbaob, it is unlikely that terraces were normally the sites of nucleated villages. Since the radiocarbon dates are very recent, it appears that the building and destruction of Uluang postdate terrace construction by several centuries. The disjuncture between the dating range of archaeological evidence and the dating range of ethnohistorical narratives about Uluang makes any attempt to read directly from stone remains to original terrace function extremely problematic.

One result of this collaboration has been the clarification of lines of future inquiry. In particular, there seems to be a remarkable parallelism between narrative and archaeological evidence concerning the occupational sequence of Uluang. The narratives recorded by Parmentier led to Lucking's relocating the archaeological site of Uluang as well as additional archaeological sites in Ngeremlengui referred to in oral traditions. At Uluang it was possible to identify specific named stone platforms and other stone and earthwork features. The dates obtained from charcoal at the site appear to confirm the date of the destruction of Uluang established on the basis of the narratives. And the migratory path Uluang's inhabitants followed in fleeing from Ngeremlengui was also located as part of the terrace survey. According to the stories, the people of Uluang migrated there from Ngeruangel, a now-submerged atoll at the extreme northern end of the archipelago, when that island was destroyed by a tidal wave. These people are said to have carried with them many valuable pieces of bead money—likely taken from ships sailing from China or island Southeast Asia (Parmentier 1987)—and to have used this wealth as a source of political strength. This migration from atoll to high-island village site parallels other well-known stories which describe the submergence of Ngibtal, off the east coast of Babeldaob, and Uchelbeluu, on the fringing reef southeast of Oreor. The possession of externally derived valuables and the link between these parallel migrations and village sites in the "classic" political order both suggest that the settlement of Uluang took place ca. A.D. 1600. In other words, the people living on the terraces of Uluang who were defeated by Imeiong's alliance had not been there for very long, a fact which may help explain the apparent absence of elaborated graves in front of the house pavements there.

The importance of these observations lies in the fact that radiocarbon dates for many of the terraces of Babeldaob put their construction and use within a range of A.D. 720 ± 220 to 1165 ± 75 . Thus, the occupation of Uluang by people from Ngeruangel probably represents a reoccupation of a site whose terraces were most likely constructed four- or five-hundred years previously. What initially appeared to be a contradiction to the differentiation in dates suggested by Masse *et al.* (1984) of "agricultural/defense terraces" and "traditional villages"—since Uluang is a residential village located on an extensive terrace system—in the end turns out to support that differentiation, once the distinction is made between the construction of the site and its later reoccupation. The absence of oral traditions about the terraces, lamented by Osborne and others, can be seen as indirect

confirmation of a lengthy break in the occupational sequence at Uluang, which in turn supports the suggestion by Masse & Snyder (1986) that the span from A.D. 1200 to 1450 represents the greatest use of the rock island sites. Three central and interconnected questions in Belauan prehistory emerge clearly: (1) Why did the original inhabitants or migrants from the islands in the "lower sea" expend so much effort building the terraces of the "upper sea"? (2) Why did the people using the terrace system—either for defense, agriculture, or residence—abandon these sites? (3) Why did the residents of ecologically precarious rock islands and atolls return to the high islands in the centuries prior to European contact? This paper has certainly not proposed a solution to any of these questions; our goal has been to establish the complementary role of ethnographic and archaeological perspectives in defining problems of interest to two subfields of anthropology.

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