

Looking to the future of *latte* research and Marianas regional archaeology

MIKE T. CARSON

Micronesian Area Research Center, University of Guam, Mangilao, GU, 96923

Abstract—The future of *latte* research and generally of archaeology in the Marianas region will depend on coordinated efforts in scholarly investigations, academic education, practical technical training, government management systems, and public appreciation. Significant improvements will be needed in each of these fields, as well as in the ways they can cooperate.

Introduction

The final contribution in this special issue of *Micronesica* offers some musings about the future of *latte* research and of Marianas regional archaeology in general. When contemplating the future, naturally the details cannot be specified with total confidence, but hopefully the following speculations can help toward planning the best outcomes.

Current conditions and issues for the future are considered in terms of: a) scholarly investigations; b) academic education; c) practical technical training; d) government management systems; e) public appreciation; and f) coordination and cooperation among these different parts.

Scholarly Investigations

Scholarly advance involves learning new knowledge and testing significant ideas, thereby generating new substantive and theoretical information. The other contributions in this special issue summarize what is currently known and in the process of being explored about *latte* and also about Marianas regional archaeology generally. Considering the last several of decades of research, scholarly advance in the Marianas region has been rather slow but positive. As more scholars engage in the region, further new data and interpretations presumably will result.

Research requires professionally trained and experienced investigators, preferably in sustained activity. Knowledge and skill with archaeological theory, method, and practice continually must be updated. Single research projects potentially can make important new contributions, but long-term sustained efforts can maximize the development of questions and interpretations.

Most scholarly research has focused on the social functioning and meaning of *latte* sets, sites, and landscapes although not necessarily using these exact same loaded words. Related topics have included the manufacture and use of pottery and other artifacts, rock art especially in caves, and food production economies mostly during the *latte* period but occasionally in a longer-term perspective when data are available from more ancient sites.

Based largely on two recent advances in scholarly thinking, new directions in understanding the *latte* period very likely will involve exploring the *latte* period not in its own terms but rather in a long-term developmental perspective. First has been a renewed attention for discovery of the earliest settlement period in the Marianas in relation to other parts of the western Pacific. Second has been a realization that the full scope of chronology in the Marianas can inform on long-term human cultural processes and on long-term human-environment relational studies. Both of these pursuits are possible only by identifying and then gathering substantial data from sites of multiple time periods and especially of the earliest settlement period around 1500 B.C., whereas previously the *latte* period post-dating A.D. 900 has dominated the scope of Marianas regional research.

Another future trend in scholarly research likely will involve asking archaeological questions but using a combination of methods from multiple disciplines to address these questions in a more fully comprehensive manner. This inter-disciplinary approach is not at all new for archaeology in general or for the Pacific Islands region overall, but it has not yet been explored in a sustained serious program for *latte* research or for Marianas archaeology. Future efforts likely will join archaeology with geology, geography, history, linguistics, ecology, mythology, and biology as well as perhaps other fields.

One further trend likely will entail cross-regional research. As more scholars learn expertise in multiple regions, the opportunities will increase for including studies in the Mariana Islands within larger cross-regional research programs. Previously, Marianas research has been slow due to lack of cross-regional expertise in the geographic areas of relevance for improving scientific knowledge about the Marianas. This situation now is beginning to change.

Scholarly advance depends on publication of new results and funding for new research, both in turn depending on recognition by other researchers and peers agreeing that this new work makes a significant new contribution. Availability of funding for new research continually will be limited and challenging, but archaeologists can find new ways to make their work more appealing in a broader sense. Inter-disciplinary and cross-regional studies are good candidates in this regard, further effective for increasing the likelihood of publishing new research findings. Publication venues appear to be increasing in diversity and opportunities for new researchers, potentially enhancing the likelihood of future publications involving *latte* research and Marianas

archaeology more generally.

In order to achieve future success in scholarly publications and research funding as described above, some sort of “break-through” must first occur for calling attention to Marianas regional archaeology as worthy of the world’s interest. As hinted above, this future success likely will involve a conscious effort to link Marianas archaeology with other research fields and with other regions. This approach inevitably involves opening the narrow and esoteric field of Marianas archaeology to a set of “newcomers” and “outsiders,” including at least a few eventually to become invested in long-term scholarly research in the region.

Academic Education

Academic education quite clearly will be essential for preparing and encouraging new generations of researchers in the Marianas region, just as would be the case anywhere in the world. The Marianas region, like Micronesia generally, relies on University of Guam for its primary academic education, with important input from other institutions outside the region. The external input varies from time to time, depending on the number of overseas scholars with active research interest in the Marianas region.

Within just the last few years, archaeological field schools and introductory undergraduate-level coursework have been promoted heavily at University of Guam, largely due to the intensive efforts by the Micronesian Area Research Center to encourage new research programs and student opportunities within Guam. These efforts further involved University of Hawaii for increasing the overall capacity of the field school program and for reaching a far greater variety of students world-wide than otherwise could be the case for University of Guam alone. Another positive outcome is that ideally students from these training programs will continue to pursue research interests and future careers involving Marianas regional archaeology.

In cooperation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), an ongoing multi-year research program at the Ritidian Unit of Guam National Wildlife Refuge (GNWR) has grown to include repeated archaeological field schools. This cooperation has supported archaeological field school coursework for students during the regular academic semester at University of Guam (Figures 1 and 2), as well as an intensive summer-time program coordinated jointly by University of Guam and University of Hawaii (Figures 3 and 4).

A successful future of academic education will require funding for recruiting appropriate teaching staff and for supporting students in various levels of undergraduate and post-graduate programs. Such funding will be possible only if archaeology can be recognized as valuable in education at universities, relative to



Figure 1. University of Guam archaeology field school students, practicing excavation techniques at Ritidian, 2010.



Figure 2. University of Guam archaeology field school students, practicing skills of screening for artifacts in excavated sediment at Ritidian, 2010.



Figure 3. University of Hawaii archaeology field school students, reviewing notes and records of excavation at Ritidian, 2009. Photograph by Hiro Kurashina.



Figure 4. University of Hawaii archaeology field school students, learning about cave art at Ritidian, 2010. Photograph by Hiro Kurashina.

other fields of study. Furthermore, the Marianas region ideally can attract broader interest within education programs external to the region itself.

Practical Technical Training

Academic education by its nature operates within university degree programs, yet practical technical training is needed for a range of government and private-sector employees. These laborers often are skilled and knowledgeable due to hands-on experience, but more formalized training certainly can improve their skills and further justify increased wage rates.

Practical technical training may seem awkward and unnecessary from the perspective of those already employed as technicians, and employers similarly may consider it unjustifiable. However, updating of practical skills is a necessity in any job, not only for the individual employees but also for the best outcome of the overall work being performed ultimately under the responsibility of the employer. Without a formal program of continued training, both employers and employees guarantee a stagnation of skills and an inability to deliver the best quality of work.

One example of a practical training program occurred in 2008 at University of Guam. During a series of routine resource management projects for compliance with government regulations in advance of new land-use planning, the technical staff laborers of various Historic Preservation Offices (HPO) in Micronesia came to Guam to work as technical assistants (Figures 5 and 6). Not only did they contribute positively to the projects, but also they learned and practiced new skills using global positioning system (GPS) technology in field surveys and integrating the field data into updated geographic information system (GIS) software for analysis.

The most successful practical training will entail a long-term program for continued updating of skill-sets. As outlined above, all employers can improve the quality of their operations by investing in some sort of formalized training program for employees.

Government Management Systems

Government management offices are responsible in some way for nearly all archaeological work throughout the U.S. and now in many countries world-wide, and such is abundantly clear in the Marianas region. Most daily archaeological work occurs within the private sector in compliance with resource management laws and regulations. Many such projects involve U.S. government agencies in Guam and the CNMI, and others in private lands or local government lands involve the local Historic Preservation Office (HPO) either in Guam or in the CNMI as needed. The Guam Museum and CNMI Museum have additional responsibilities related to curation of discovered artifacts.



Figure 5. Historic Preservation Office technical staff training, representatives from Pohnpei, Saipan, and Chuuk documenting a disturbed *latte* set in Guam, 2008.



Figure 6. Historic Preservation Office technical staff training, representatives from Saipan receiving certificates of completion of special training session in Guam, 2008.

Government employees are tasked with ensuring that laws and regulations are followed. Private-sector archaeological contractors must learn to work productively with the various government agencies to ensure smooth operations and for the best results of their work. Perhaps most importantly, government representatives must learn to cooperate productively with others.

At least during the last few years, U.S. government agencies operating in Guam and the CNMI have invested greatly in attracting high-quality employees and cooperating with a range of professional researchers at universities and private contracting firms. These results of these efforts have been exemplary for archaeological resource management as well as for research programs, most important at a time of preparing for a large-scale U.S. military build-up in the region. Naval Base Guam was awarded the “Cultural Resources Management Installation Award” for the year 2010, one of the most prestigious categories of the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Awards Recognition Program.

Funding and resources have been sparse for Guam and CNMI government agencies tasked with duties of historic preservation and cultural resource management. Qualified employees therefore are difficult to acquire and to maintain in local government offices. Several inefficiencies and deficiencies have arisen, although the situation is not beyond repair.

Public Appreciation

Increasing public appreciation probably will be the most effective way to increase the overall value of Marianas regional archaeology overall. These efforts will translate into promoting more enrollment in education and training, greater success in scholarly publishing and research funding, and more productive cooperation with various government agencies.

One possible approach for public appreciation is to make certain archaeological sites accessible to the public, of course with responsible safeguards and accurate scientific information. An exemplary new program in this regard includes a network of educational hiking trails at the Ritidian Unit of Guam National Wildlife Refuge (GNWR), where visitors learn about the integrated natural and cultural history of this place (Figures 7 and 8). Similar efforts can be expected in the near future at GNWR and hopefully at a number of sites in other locations where local communities have expressed considerable concern about protecting the heritage resources. Ultimately, these efforts require one person or a small group of people to lead by example.

An expected future effort will involve cooperation among professional researchers and local government agencies such as the Guam Museum, CNMI Museum, and the Historic Preservation Offices (HPO) in both Guam and CNMI. These local government entities are uniquely suited to interface with local communities and promote public appreciation, but they will need to cooperate



Figure 7. Public participation in archaeology, opening of new interpretive trail system at Ritidian, 2011.



Figure 8. Public participation in archaeology, Guam school children learning basic tasks of excavation at Ritidian, 2009. Photograph by Hiro Kurashina.

with professional researchers for the best results. Likewise, professional researchers with interests in public appreciation ideally can cooperate with the local government offices if possible.

Coordination of Efforts

Coordination and cooperation of efforts naturally will achieve the best results, ideally with some degree of synergistic value. Joining of scholarly research, academic education, practical technical training, government management systems, and public appreciation have been underway in limited fashion, but joining of all factors together indeed will be quite challenging. Perhaps the greatest challenges will entail long-term productive partnership of individuals and the ability to allow new individuals to take over responsibilities over time.

The scope of cooperation as prescribed here does not currently exist for Marianas regional archaeology. In order for it to occur, then significant change will need to develop in the current state of affairs, for example in new ways of thinking, new compelling incentives, and eventually new individual people participating and with new professional relationships among them.

Conclusions

The future of *latte* research and more generally of Marianas regional archaeology will depend on a new generation of scholars, government employees, and other professionals pursuing their goals as individuals and also collaboratively. This outlook further stresses the importance of education and training programs at present for the best preparation of a positive future.

The future of *latte* research and Marianas regional archaeology cannot be predicted, solved, or sabotaged by reading the foregoing text or by studying the many contributions in this special issue of *Micronesica*. At best, this special issue can offer a convenient reference for continuing efforts over the next several years, but presumably significant updates will be required as a healthy archaeological discipline will continue to generate new data.