

# Potential for Spanish Colonial Archaeology in the Northern Mariana Islands

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## **Abstract**

Spanish cultural heritage continues to play a role in social, cultural and political developments in Micronesia and can contribute to a broader understanding of Indigenous and Spanish histories in the Pacific. Thus, Spanish cultural heritage should be appropriately identified and incorporated into a cultural heritage management and research framework in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). Unfortunately, this is not the case and Spanish cultural heritage is long overdue for serious investigation and research in the CNMI.

This paper is the result of a preliminary project conducted in 2009 into the potential for research on Spanish cultural heritage in the CNMI. This project aimed at facilitating the process of documenting Spanish cultural heritage by identifying known and potential heritage recorded in disparate sources such as grey literature, primary and secondary historical sources located in library, archive and museum holdings and conversations with heritage practitioners. The methodology used during this survey included a thematic assessment framework whereby the known and potential Spanish cultural heritage was categorised into research themes. It is hoped that this approach will contribute to evaluating the significance of Spanish cultural heritage for research and management purposes in the CNMI.

## **Introduction**

This year marks the 490<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first recorded landing of the Spanish in the Mariana Islands. This occurred when Ferdinand Magellan became the first European to visit the islands on 6 March 1521 and named the archipelago *Islas de los Ladrones* (Islands of the Thieves) due to a misunderstanding in trade practices (Russell 1998). Over a century later in 1667 Spain officially claimed the island chain and named it *Las Marianas* in honour of Queen Mariana of Austria (Coomans 2000). Spanish occupation of the islands began in 1668, a point at which the lives of both the colonizing Spaniards and the Indigenous Chamorro peoples who had inhabited the islands for thousands of years were forever altered (Hezel 2000). The Marianas served as a strategic provisioning location for Spanish trading ships voyaging between Manila and Acapulco for 250 years and were vital to the success of Spain's commerce system (Cushner 1971). The islands remained a Spanish colony until 1898 when Guam was taken by the United States (U.S.) in the Spanish-American War and the Northern Mariana Islands were transferred to Germany (Carrell 2009).

For over two hundred years (1668-1898) Spanish colonists interacted with the Chamorro peoples and constructed forts, ports, towns and missions in the Mariana Islands. As a result, these islands demonstrate a rich and diverse Spanish cultural heritage. Spanish cultural heritage places in the Marianas represent some of the most culturally and archaeologically significant European heritage places in Micronesia. However today, these sites are poorly understood from an archaeological perspective and very little is known about where they were located or specifically what may be preserved in the archaeological record.

To date, no comprehensive archaeological survey of Spanish cultural heritage sites in the Northern Mariana Islands has been conducted.

Nevertheless, a small network of historians has researched the history of Spanish heritage in the archipelago over the last thirty years. The Micronesian Area Research Center (MARC) on Guam has translated an astonishing amount of primary documents and produced secondary histories on individuals and events from the Spanish period (Brunal-Perry, *et al.* 2009; Driver 1987; Driver 1990; Driver 1993a; Driver 1993b; Driver 1994). In addition, Francis Hezel's (2000) publication *From Conquest to Colonization: Spain in the Mariana Islands 1690 to 1740* reviews primary source documents related to this period and has introduced this subject to a larger audience and confirmed the need for more research. The research of both Marjorie Driver and Hezel, among others, has provided the basis for historical investigations into the Spanish period in the Mariana Islands.

While this time period has been the interest of historians, the archaeology of these events and interactions has yet to be explored. In other areas of the world such as the south-eastern United States (Florida, Georgia, Texas, Louisiana), the southwest and west coast of the United States (New Mexico, Arizona, California) and Latin America, the archaeology of Spanish cultural heritage is well-developed. The Pacific region, with the exception of the Philippines (Skowronek 2009), has some distance to go in terms of catching up with current scholarship on this subject and remains open for long-term investigations and research (see Orillenada and Ronquillo this volume).

The recognition of Spanish heritage in Micronesia continues to play a role in socio-political developments in the Marianas. Much like in Latin America, there are descendant communities who are interested in the circumstances of their historical roots. They want to understand how their ancestors resisted, embraced, negotiated, transformed and were transformed through the processes of colonisation and to what extent their families and communities are still involved in this process. Therefore, it would be expected that Spanish cultural heritage should be appropriately recognized in the cultural heritage management and research framework of the Northern Mariana Islands. Serious academic research on this topic is long overdue.

A preliminary investigation was conducted in 2009 into the potential for identifying Spanish cultural heritage in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). These investigations aimed at facilitating the process of documenting Spanish cultural heritage by identifying known and potential heritage that has been recorded in disparate sources such as grey literature (i.e. reports, site files), as well as primary and secondary historical sources located in library and museum holdings. This paper presents a summary of those findings and should be used simply as a guide for potential Spanish colonial research in the CNMI.

## ***Conceptual and Methodological Approach***

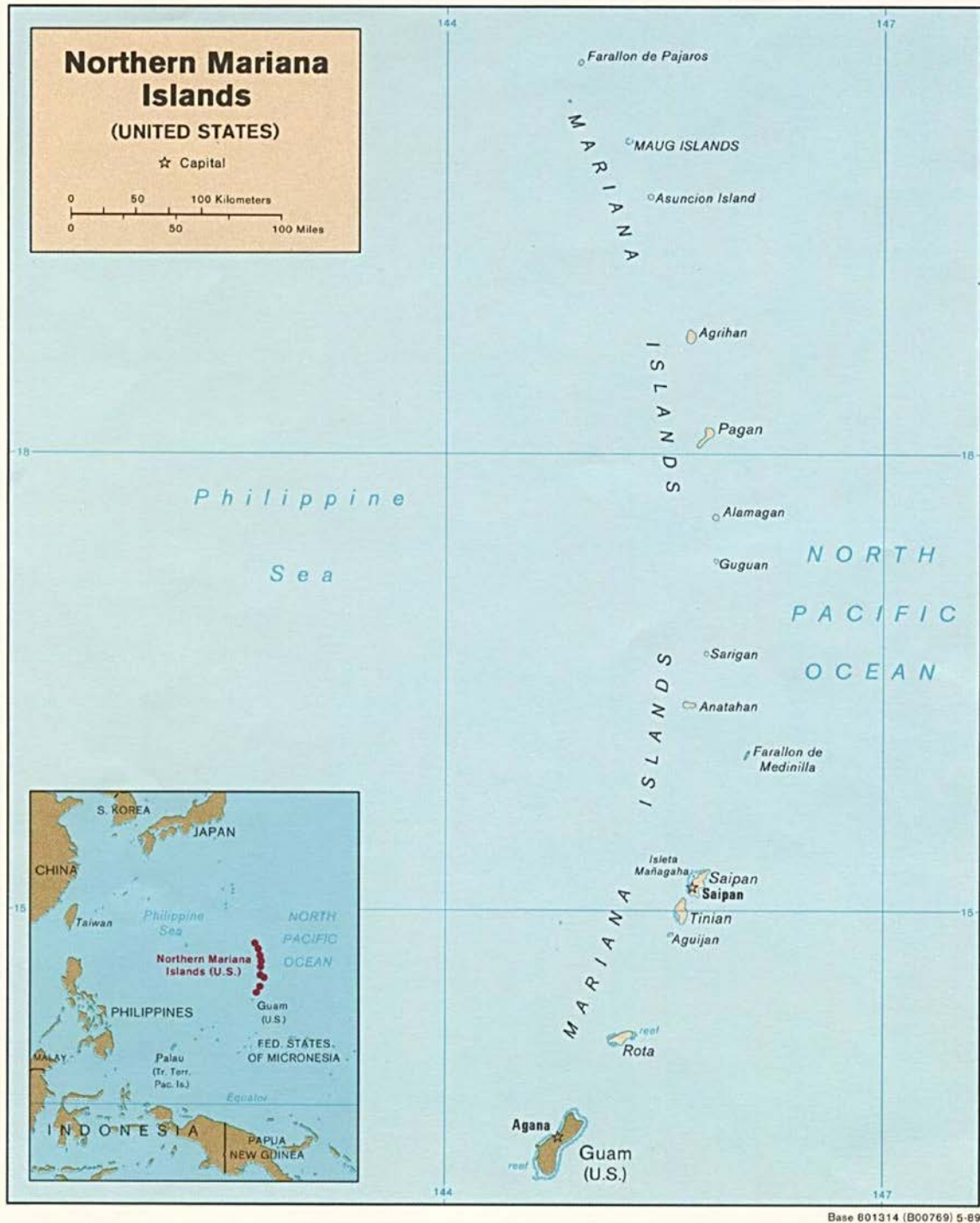
This project consisted primarily of an intensive literature review to identify and compile pertinent information into a searchable database that can be queried to develop heritage type profiles by which a thematic research framework could be created. The heritage type profiling is aimed at examining the full range of Spanish cultural heritage on the islands of Saipan, Tinian and Rota. Spanish cultural heritage ranges in size, location and features, and includes the richness and diversity of cultural materials from both European and Indigenous cultures. It may include tangible heritage such as landscapes, structures, burials, shipwrecks or ceramics, or intangible heritage such as place names, oral traditions or customs.

Thematic frameworks have proven to be successful in the assessment of cultural heritage values and the subsequent application of research and conservation strategies (ICOMOS 2005; Smith and Jones 2007). Thematic frameworks outline major themes and concepts that help identify, describe and analyse the multiple layers of human culture and interaction. The thematic research framework for this project was formulated on the basis of heritage type identification. The benefit of this framework is threefold:

- It can be used by future researchers to capture the complexity and meaning of human interaction and experience during culture contact events;
- It can be used by the CNMI Historic Preservation Office (HPO) or other regulatory agencies to evaluate the significance of such cultural heritage and to make efficient and effective decisions regarding its management and conservation; and
- It can be used by the island community to better understand this interesting and complex history and the unique interaction that occurs when two cultures made contact in the first instance.

## ***Data Collection Strategy***

The Mariana archipelago is located east of the Philippines, north of New Guinea, and south-southeast of Japan (see McKinnon this volume). From north to south the CNMI includes the islands of Farallon de Pajaros, Maug, Asuncion, Agrihan, Pagan, Alamagan, Guguan, Sarigan, Anatahan, Farallon de Medinilla, Saipan, Tinian, Aguijan, and Rota (Figure 1). Guam is part of the Mariana Islands but not part of the CNMI as it is an unincorporated territory of the United States. Thus, this study area only includes data concerning the islands in CNMI which from this point forward will be referred to as the Northern Mariana Islands.



**Figure 1. The Mariana Islands (Perry-Castañeda Library).**

The data collection strategy was designed on a basic principle of identifying and documenting known and previously unknown Spanish cultural heritage in the Northern Mariana Islands. The information recovered during this data capture project included information about heritage locations, heritage descriptions, excavation reports, photographs, archival material, and oral

histories. This data was collected through visits to the HPO on Saipan and Rota.

HPO is the agency charged with managing and protecting cultural heritage in the Northern Mariana Islands. As a result, they maintain the archaeological site files and reports from all archaeological surveys that have been conducted in the islands. At present these site files are not digitized and only paper copies are available for review. Five days were spent in the site files of Saipan and one day was spent in the site files of Rota. During these visits, a database query was conducted by searching for keywords such as “Spanish” for sites that were related to Spanish heritage. Identified file numbers were then investigated further for content. Locations, descriptions, dates, artefact descriptions, and additional information were recorded into a project database. In addition to the site files, all archaeological reports on file were reviewed for Spanish colonial heritage sites. The main methodology was to review the table of contents for relevant key words and to review the appendices or final chapters for discussions of Spanish heritage. Pertinent information was extracted and added to the project database.

In addition to the HPO visits, project personnel visited local museums, including the Northern Mariana Islands Museum of Culture and History on Saipan and the Cave Museum on Rota, to note and photograph relevant Spanish heritage material and speak with curators about their collections and provenance. Local historians and consulting archaeologists also were contacted for discussions concerning their knowledge of sites and the potential for investigating Spanish colonial period sites on the islands. Finally, some site visits were made to specific Spanish colonial sites to investigate research potential.

One limitation worth noting relates to the HPO site files. In the 1980s a fire destroyed many of the archaeological site files and reports stored at the Saipan HPO. While the HPO made attempts to retrieve copies of those reports from consultants and other offices, not all could be recovered. Thus, some files and reports prior to the 1980s were unavailable for review during this project.

### ***Database development of heritage type profiles***

A database was created using Microsoft Excel which consisted of multiple categories of data including: heritage type, name, location, time period, features, description, sources, dates investigated and comments. In addition, an Endnote database of bibliographic data was created in order to cross-reference data with sources. Once the databases were complete, heritage types were assigned and then organised into a thematic research framework which can be assessed for potential research areas and management considerations.

### ***Results***

Seventy heritage “sites” (including tangible and intangible heritage) were identified during this project. Of those 70, 25 were located on the island of Tinian, 21 on Rota, 14 on Saipan, four on Agrihan, four on Pagan, and two were located in the general vicinity of the Mariana Islands. It is unlikely that these numbers reflect the amount and type of activities that occurred in relation to the Spanish

colonial period but may be a better reflection of the amount of archaeological survey conducted on each island. The heritage ranged in nature from intangible heritage, such as the introduction of non-native foods and oral histories, to the tangible physical remains of Indigenous and Spanish activities. Table 1 includes a list of the heritage types recorded.

Table 1. Heritage types.

Indigenous site/ Latte site
Shipwreck
Mission
Cemetery
Government Building
Church
Leprosarium
Ranchero
Anchorage/Harbour/Port
Village/Settlement
Rock art
Burial
Artefact/ artefact scatters
Oral story or tradition
Landing
Bridge/Road/Trail/Wall/Navigational direction
Disease
Food/Subsistence
Temple
Salt production
Garrison
Encampment/house
Shipwreck survivor camp
Convento
Chapel
Rectory
Seminary
House
Barrack
Well
Hunting area
Warehouse

From these heritage types a thematic research framework was developed and several thematic research areas were identified in an effort to understand the activities and processes associated with this tangible and intangible heritage. The development of a thematic research framework should be grounded in existing areas of scholarship in the field of Spanish colonial research from other

parts of the world, but also account for an understanding of local and regional issues. For that reason, two recent publications were considered crucial to the development of a research framework in the Northern Mariana Islands: Russell Skowronek's (2009) *On the Fringes of New Spain: The Northern Borderlands and the Pacific* and Mary Van Buren's (2010) *The Archaeological Study of Spanish Colonialism in the Americas*. These two articles offer current reviews of both the general and more specific (Pacific) Spanish colonial research that has been conducted by archaeologists in the last half-century. Thus they provide a starting point for identifying key thematic research areas in the Northern Mariana Islands.

While the thematic areas identified in this project are inclusive of many activities and their resulting material culture, they are not exclusive and some heritage and genres of studies may fit within and overlap multiple areas. Further, these themes can be edited, expanded upon or further subdivided as necessary in the future. Below is a discussion of just five of the thematic research areas identified in this project.

### **Theme 1: Culture Change and Identity**

The concepts acculturation, creolization, transculturation, and ethnogenesis have been used by archaeologists to explore and understand the process of culture change and identity in relation to colonisation from the culture and community scale to specific individuals (see Van Buren 2010 for a discussion of this subject). These same processes occurred in the Mariana Islands from the point of first contact, through the process of occupation and colonial construction, Indigenous resistance and warfare, missionization, Indigenous negotiation, changes in demographics, colonial collapse and post-colonial deconstruction. Two foci of research that may be useful in the Mariana Islands with regard to culture change and identity would be the investigation of spatial organisation and material culture. The landscape and seascape itself and the built environment of the pre-contact, colonial and post-colonial periods and the maintenance and changes that were made are ripe for investigation; specifically, the movement to different islands, centralization, and resistance of Indigenous Chamorro peoples, the introduction of Filipino and Carolinian groups, and the Spanish private, commercial and government construction and control of the area (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. The Spanish government building located on Rota (J. McKinnon).**

For example, through the process of colonisation and missionization, restrictions were imposed on Chamorro people which eventually resulted in a loss of knowledge about the construction and use of ocean-going canoes, a tradition that had been around for thousands of years (Russell 2009:85). These restrictions particularly affected the cultural tradition and potential heritage and knowledge of watercraft construction within the Chamorro culture – an effect that is felt to this day with regards to the maintenance of a maritime identity. This example also demonstrates the wider view that needs to be taken in relation to control, in that it does not stop at the water's edge or with the building of structures, fences or walls; instead it extends onto the vast expanses of the water surrounding these islands. Thus, control over water transport and marine resources must be considered within the setting of Pacific island groups if archaeologists are to understand the whole picture.

Material culture with regards to culture change and identity is in immediate need of research. The location and function of the Mariana Islands as a provisioning station and a strategic holding raises some interesting questions concerning the availability of goods and the need for self-reliance. The combination of multiple culture groups in the form of Spanish, Chamorro, Carolinian, Filipino and visitors in the form of whalers, beche-de-mer fishers, scientific expeditions and traders creates an interesting case study for material culture and exchange. In the Marianas, there exists obvious evidence of a



synthesis of Indigenous and Spanish ceramics in the form of colonoware<sup>1</sup>, the reuse of Spanish shipwreck materials by Indigenous peoples such as *clavos* (decorative nails) for coconut oil lamps, and the decorative use of specie collected from shipwrecks by the Chamorro peoples (Figure 3). Unfortunately, as of yet, no attention has been given to these types of material culture studies or studies of spatial organisation with relation to culture change and identity on the Northern Marianas.



**Figure 3. *Clavos* (decorative nail heads) from the Santa Margarita wreck in collections at the Cave Museum on Rota. Local Chamorros salvaged *clavos* and used them as coconut oil lamps (J. McKinnon).**

## **Theme 2: Missionization**

An area of research that dominates Spanish colonial archaeology is the process of missionization. No archaeological research has been conducted to date on missions in the Northern Mariana Islands; thus baseline data needs to be acquired including site locations and assessment of preservation. Beyond this, addressing larger questions, the Marianas missions are an excellent opportunity for comparative research within the islands and with other areas of the world such as Florida, whose mission system was ongoing at the same time (McEwan 1993).

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<sup>1</sup> Colonoware is a type of Indigenous ceramic typically made using Indigenous ceramic technology but having European form. It is found in colonial archaeology settings such as the Northeast and Southeast of the U.S.

Within the Marianas were missions operated by Jesuit Orders; some of which were “successful” from the standpoint of Spanish administration (i.e. Rota mission), while others were resisted violently (i.e. Saipan) (Hezel 2000). While most of the missionaries on Guam were Spanish, other missionaries sent to the hinterlands were not Spanish but Bohemian, Dutch and Austrian, among others (Hezel 2000:25). Did the difference in cultural background have any effect on the missions’ successes or failures? Questions surrounding these issues could be addressed through investigating mission architecture and layout, burial practices, economic strategies that paralleled the mission process such as food production, and the indigenization of missionaries through ethnohistorical accounts and material culture studies at missions.

### **Theme 3: Changing Nature of Economic Activities**

While much archaeological research with regards to Indigenous political and social economies has been conducted in the Marianas, little of that has focussed on the colonial or post-colonial periods. Chamorro peoples no doubt had a system of political and social organisation that was altered upon Spanish colonial occupation. Through disease and resettlement, the two-caste matrilineal system was disrupted (Carrell 2009). Further the repopulation of the islands with neighbouring Indigenous island groups (Carolinians) who were allowed to maintain a “maritime” lifestyle (i.e. continued tradition of boatbuilding and seafaring) would have also altered these economies. Additionally, the material remains of imported and assimilated non-native foods including livestock (i.e. cattle, pigs, deer) and other food products such as corn, as well as the coerced labour required to maintain the production of these resources, is an area of immediate interest with regards to changes in diet, production and export (Figure 4).

Alongside Indigenous economies, questions concerning production of goods for Spanish economies, specifically supplies for the Manila galleon trade, would be particularly interesting, as would the political structure of the Marianas and comparisons between urban cores (i.e. Guam) and rural outposts (i.e. Saipan, Rota, Tinian), and at a larger scale between the Philippines, Mexico and the Marianas.



**Figure 4. Metate used for grinding corn identified by HPO archaeologists on Saipan. Site unknown. (CNMI HPO).**

#### **Theme 4: Maritime Sphere**

Having a maritime archaeological interest, a research area that cannot be overlooked is that of the maritime sphere. The very fact that travel to, from and within the Mariana Islands necessitates watercraft, indicates that the material culture available relating to maritime activities is ever-present. Though the potential for investigating Manila galleon wrecks has been overshadowed by commercial treasure hunting enterprises, all is not lost with regards to research in this area (see Junco this volume). Shipwrecks of Spanish and other colonial nations have yet to be located and salvaged by treasure hunters; thus information concerning economy, illicit trade and contraband, intra-island transport, and colonial ship construction is available. The study of ports, harbours, maritime infrastructure, and trade routes can provide a vast amount of information about contemporary knowledge of seafaring, actions and reactions to environment, and defence. Further, understanding the distinctive situation created by Spanish authorization of Carolinian movement and the restriction of Chamorro in intra-island trade, communication and commerce would provide a unique area of research. The maintenance of a maritime identity for the Chamorro peoples is a contemporary concern of living populations on the islands today and an area where archaeology might play a key role in teasing out that process.

#### **Theme 5: Indigenous Histories**

Two areas of research that significantly overlap and contribute to Spanish colonial archaeology are ethnohistory and ethnoarchaeology. Much of the historical research that has been conducted on this period in the Mariana Islands has included translation of Spanish accounts, journals, and travel diaries. These sources are a wealth of information for archaeologists looking for a more holistic interpretation of the archaeological record. They may allow archaeologists to, “look sideways, so to speak, rather than just up and down, to examine the interaction of people who were not distinguished primarily by differences in power” (Van Buren 2010:179). Further in reaching the Indigenous experience, ethnoarchaeological approaches can fill in the gaps in our knowledge of the past and present, as well as helping us to understand continuity and changes in tradition. Indigenous peoples of the Northern Mariana Islands maintain a strong tradition of oral history and there are many, many stories about the Spanish period that have yet to be recorded and linked with material culture and heritage sites.

#### **Conclusion**

While this paper is only a brief introduction to cultural heritage associated with the Spanish colonial period of the Mariana Islands, it provides evidence that this heritage still very much exists in both tangible and intangible forms. While many

colonial occupiers passed through the Mariana archipelago, there still exists today a strong connection with the history of the Spanish colonial period which appears in every aspect of island life from food to religion (i.e. Catholicism). A more intensive and holistic archaeological investigation of this heritage will not only provide protection through identification and recognition of sites, it will provide the community of the Marianas with a fuller understanding of their shared heritage – a heritage shared not only between Spanish and Chamorro peoples, but of all the culture groups who lived in the islands during this period.

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