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Mandated Marianas Islands

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131. Discovery and Early Contacts

Prehistory. The Marianas Islands appear to have been peopled originally by the same wave of migration from Indonesia that settled the rest of Micronesia, namely, the Caroline, Marshall, and Gilbert Islands. Many physical and cultural resemblances link the Micronesians to the Polynesian peoples of the remoter parts of the Pacific. Experts now believe that the Polynesians moved eastward into their present habitat by way of the Micronesian islands about 1200 A.D. They may well have represented the first part of the wave of migration which later brought the Micronesians themselves into the area, although they may have found the Micronesians already in possession and moved on to the remoter, unoccupied islands. It is clear, however, that the Polynesians, though resembling the Micronesians in many respects, differ appreciably from them in language and culture, and show fewer similarities to the peoples of Indonesia.

Of the various Micronesian peoples, the Chamorro of the Marianas, and to a lesser extent the natives of Palau and perhaps also of Yap, show the strongest resemblances in physique, language, and culture to the inhabitants of the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies. In part this is unquestionably due to early historic contacts with the Philippines, mediated by the Spaniards, and to the resulting racial admixture and cultural borrowing. On the whole, however, the similarities seem to be too fundamental to be thus accounted for, and it is probable that there were still earlier contacts, infiltration, or migration, occurring in prehistoric times but subsequently to the original outward movement of the earliest Micronesians and Polynesians.

Spectacular archaeological remains of an earlier culture are found scattered in abundance through the Marianas, particularly on Guam, Rota, Saipan, and Tinian. They consist mainly of double rows of stone columns 3 to 16 feet high, capped with hemispheric headpieces of coral. These pillars are now generally considered to be the foundations of large Chamorro houses and canoe sheds, some of which were reportedly still standing at the time of the earliest visits by Europeans.

Discovery and Exploration. Guam and Rota, and just possibly also Aguijan, Saipan, and Tinian, were discovered by Fernando Magellan on March 6, 1521. Ninety-eight days earlier Magellan's party, already reduced from five to three small ships of not over 130 tons and badly in need of provisions, had sailed from the Strait of Magellan into the Pacific. By the cruelest of mischances, they missed hundreds of South Pacific islands, and when at last they reached Guam many of the crew had died of scurvy and famine, and the rest had been reduced to eating rats and the salt-impregnated leather from the stand-the rigging. Naked natives riding in small outrigger canoes with triangular sails came out to meet the ships and to offer gifts of fruits and other food. The famished Spaniards gladly gave trifles of iron and clothing in return. The natives, emboldened by the weakened condition of the Spaniards, became increasingly curious and rapacious; they soon began to make off with whatever they could remove from the ship, and finally they cut loose the ship's boat and took it ashore. Some 40 of the Spaniards, led by Magellan himself, summoned strength to pursue. They used their firearms and bows and arrows to good effect upon the amazed natives, burned 40 or 50 houses in the village and many boats on the shore, killed 7 or 8 natives who ventured back, retrieved the ship's boat, loaded it with whatever provisions they found in the settlement, and returned to their ship. Three days later, after resting and taking on food and water, the company set sail again, branding the islands "Las Islas de las Ladrones," although they had earlier named them the Lazarus Archipelago, in honor of Saint Lazarus on whose day they had first made land.

In 1524 Magellan's subaltern, Eltano, who had commanded the only one of Magellan's ships which had actually returned to Spain, set out on a second voyage and revisited the island of Rota. The Spanish explorer Loaisa, whose expedition left Spain soon after Magellan's, reached Guam in 1526 and remained there for four days. Loaisa took on food and water and managed also to kidnap eleven natives, whom he compelled to man the ship's pumps. Spurred by glowing accounts of the extent, beauty, and riches of the Pacific islands, King Charles V of Spain dispatched General Ruy Lopez de Villalobos to substantiate the reports. Villalobos did not reach the Marianas, but Admiral Miguel Lopez de Legaspi, who was charged by Philip II with conquest of all the islands reported by Magellan and Villalobos, landed on Saipan in November, 1564, and there proclaimed Spanish sovereignty over the group, which he renamed "Las Islas de las Velas Latinas," after the peculiar sails employed in the region. Legaspi was accompanied by Augustinian fathers, who celebrated mass, set up the cross, and promised the friendly natives to send them preachers of the true religion. Inappropriately, the next visitor was the English pirate Cavendish, who in 1588, bartered with the natives for fresh food and then shot at them to be rid of them. The Spanish explorer Quiros touched at Saipan in 1596. During the next hundred

years Spanish galleons plying between Mexico and the Philippine Islands frequently stopped in the Marianas to take on food and water. The Spaniards, made no effort, however, to administer the islands. Nor did the acquisitive Dutch dispute Spain's vague claims, although in the early seventeenth century a few Dutch vessels en route to the Moluccas found it convenient to put in at Guam for provisions. The first Europeans to remain in the islands were a few of the crew of the Spanish ship Concepcion, which was wrecked off Tinian in 1638. The survivors were so well treated by the natives that a few chose to remain behind when the rest managed to get away to the Philippines. Another 30 years passed, however, before the Spaniards, in 1668, dispatched missionaries and soldiers, who subsequently brought the Marianas under effective Spanish control.

The most important names, dates, and events in the history of the Marianas prior to the twentieth century are tabulated in the following list:

- Agrihan: discovered by Morales on his first mission journey (1668).
- Aguijan: possibly discovered by Magellan (1521); visited by Morales (1668).
- Alamagan: discovered by Morales (1668).
- Anatahan: discovered by Morales (1668).
- Asuncion: discovered by Sanvitores (1669); visited by the French scientist La Pérouse (1786).
- Guam: discovered by Magellan (1521); visited by the Spaniards Loaisa (1526), and Hernan Cortes (1527), by the English buccaneer Cavendish (1588), by the Dutch naval commanders Oliver van Noort (1600), Joris Spilbergen (1616), and Jacob l'Heremite (1625); Christianized and conquered by the Spaniards after 1668; visited by English buccaneers Swan (1686), Eaton and Cowley (1685), and Woodes Rogers (1710); visited and explored by scientific expeditions under the Spaniard Alessandro Malaspina (1792), the Russian Otto von Kotzebue (1817), and the Frenchmen Louis de Freycinet (1819) and Dumont d'Urville (1828 and 1839), regularly visited by many British and American whalers in the mid-nineteenth century; captured by the U. S. cruiser Charleston (1898).
- Guguan: discovered by Morales (1668).
- Maug: discovered by Sanvitores (1669).
- Medinilla: discovered by Spanish fathers (1668 or 1669).
- Pagan: discovered by Morales (1668).
- Pajaros: perhaps visited by the Spaniards between 1668 and 1695 but possibly first discovered by the Englishman Douglas (1789).
- Rota: discovered by Magellan (1521); revisited by Eltano (1524); Christianized and conquered by the Spaniards (1668); visited by Freycinet (1819).
- Saipan: possibly discovered by Magellan (1521); the scene of Legaspi's proclamation of Spanish conquest (1564); visited by Quiros (1596); Christianized and conquered by the Spaniards after 1668; the site of a brief-lived American colony (1810 to 1815).
- Sarigan: discovered by Morales (1668).
- Tinian: possibly discovered by Magellan (1521); the scene of the shipwreck of Spanish ship Concepcion (1638); Christianized and conquered by the Spaniards after 1668; visited by the Englishmen Lord Anson (1742), Lord Byron (1767), Captain Gilbert (1788), and Lieutenant Mortimer (1789), and by Freycinet (1819); leased to the Irishman Johnson and his sister (1869 to 1877).

132. Political History

Spanish Rule (1668-1898). On June 15, 1668, the Jesuit father, Diego Luis de Sanvitores, arrived in Guam from the Philippines via Mexico, and Spanish influence began to assert itself over the islands, which were now renamed the "Marianas" in honor of Queen Maria Ana, widow of Philip IV of Spain and patroness of this missionary undertaking. Sanvitores was accompanied by three other priests from the Philippines and Mexico, two novices, and a small guard, consisting of a Spanish captain, a Spanish sergeant-major, and 12 Spanish and 19 Filipino soldiers, whose mission was merely to offer every possible assistance to the missionaries in propagating the Catholic faith.