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## PRE-CONTACT MARIANAS FOLKLORE, LEGENDS, AND LITERATURE A Critical Commentary

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*Saipan*

There is a substantial body of pre-colonial literature, folklore and legends, which has been collected by various scholars and organizations. Chamorro cultural history was altered and its traditions and values overwhelmed by those of the arriving foreigners. The stories and traditions that have survived have thus been filtered by 300 years of external influences. This paper reviews and provides a critical commentary on a selection of material available in print.

The goal of this paper is to review the scope of literature and folklore of the Mariana Island group in Micronesia and discuss the emergence of a written body of literature from what was originally an oral tradition. Through the years, many of the legends, myths, and folklore of the islands have been transcribed from the oral and produced as texts for all levels in primary and secondary education. In addition, with the advent of an increasingly literate generation of Chamorros and Carolinians in terms of post-secondary education, there has also come about a new literature that is written for a regional audience as opposed to a national audience. The regional writing is in English intended for a non-native, English reading audience unfamiliar, yet interested in the Marianas literary tradition. National literature is written in the Chamorro vernacular and includes themes of ethnicity, identity, cultural traditions as well as political themes in relation to history. However, since most of the population is bilingual, many new stories and texts are written in English and not in the vernaculars of Chamorro and Carolinian. Moreover, the issue

of authenticity in authorship must be addressed since the oral tradition and native experience that has been appropriated by writers has become widespread, following Western and European models in literature.

Since Ferdinand Magellan's landing on Guam in 1521, the Marianas have been under continuous colonial domination through Spanish, German, Japanese, and American administrations. The effect of this on the oral literary tradition of the Marianas is pivotal when looking at the new literature being produced by the present generation of writers. Subramani writes that the literary oral tradition that existed before colonialism was broken by colonization and produced a fragmented history that is the fusion of the various controlling influences; he notes that "the new literature in English belongs to the period of disengagement and post-colonial reconstruction," which is the way many native writers in the Marianas today are attempting to recover as well as preserve what is left of their culture (Subramani 1985, p. 5).

Although the original pre-colonial literature and culture cannot be fully restored in an ideal

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scheme, there must be authentic attempts in the literature of today to continue the spirit of the oral literary tradition. Today, the literature is no longer intended for continuing the spirit of traditional folklore and oral traditions, but rather more towards a Westernized and Eurocentric, regional perspective. For example, the journal *Xanadu*, published by the University of Guam in the mid 1960s and revived in the late 1980s incorporates a variety of prose and poetry without a clear definition of its intended audience. Writers and poets, native or Caucasian, are published in Chamorro and English. The journal's title itself is Eurocentric, taking its inspiration from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan." One may argue that the publication of any and all writing is significant for it creates literature and continues the tradition; however, there is a problem with *Xanadu* for it fosters the colonial influence in the islands' folklore and history through a Eurocentric perspective. It makes no attempt to separate native prose and poetry from those by non-natives. Readers are unable to distinguish between native and non-native writers and Chamorro, which is not a written language, must compete with more sophisticated English prose. This is an important issue because in order to produce literature in the spirit of the pre-colonial models, there must be a separation between prose by traditional writers and modern writers. Literature, as Subramani (1985, p. 11) notes, "can produce a partial view of reality, or present a false interpretation of history". Contemporary Marianas literature reflects the condition of the people today—deterritorialized and estranged from its past. Chamorro, the native tongue, becomes the foreign language; the new society that has emerged out of the ashes of World War II is Western and distant from the traditional Chamorro culture; images in folklore have been appropriated and reworked according to a Eurocentric model; history has been defined with a colonial eye.

This paper views the traditional folklore as models for a new local literature that takes into consideration the historical events and literary movements have made literature in the Marianas marginal and deterritorialized. In

order to forge this local tradition, we must accept present condition as the breed of amalgamated Chamorros and Carolinians who preserve traditional lore and literature while creating a new body that reflects the composite culture through local writers.

The challenge of this comparative analyses and interpretations of traditional and modern Marianas literature is to find an answer to Jean-Paul Sartre's question "What is Literature?" as it has figured in this culture. Upon what grounds and terms has its literary tradition been established? And how do ancient texts and legends reflect the islands' history, and in what way do they inform literature as it is defined today? These are the main questions this study addresses.

#### **BRIDGING COLONIAL HISTORY AND LITERARY TRADITION**

Because the Chamorros have lived under continuous outside control for hundred of years, their culture and language have undergone changes, some of which are reflected in their self-esteem as a people. Spanish Christianization brought about the Hispanicization of the Chamorros, and new religious and government holidays were observed (Hezel 1989, p. 60). New codes of conduct and dress became law, and those who failed to follow those rules were severely punished. The people were forced to labor for the controlling country. As Spanish, German, Japanese, and English became the privileged languages, Chamorro became marginalized. Fluency in these alien languages and acceptance of the colonizing culture were ways to improve one's class-standing in colonial Marianas. Albert Memmi describes the relationship between colonizer and colonized as the legitimizing of an illegitimate relationship:

*From the time they were instituted, nothing else has happened in the life of that people. That is, nothing peculiar to their own existence which deserves to be retained by the collective consciousness and celebrated. Nothing except a great void. Finally, the few material traces of that past are slowly erased and the future remnants will no longer carry the stamp of the colonized group. The few statues which decorate the city represent the great*

*deeds of colonization* (Memmi 1965, p. 103-105).

Of the few histories of the Marianas, none have addressed the repercussions of outside control on the culture, memory, and oral and written literary traditions of the Chamorros. Bilingualism has become widespread and Spanish and English words have been assumed into Chamorro and “Chamorrized.” Native, pre-contact traditions have been erased by outside cultures; a new history and tradition begins that bears the trappings of the colonizing country. Memmi raises the issue of why a colonized society, apart from its traditional legends and folklore, does not have its own literature in the native language. He remarks that this is because of the extraordinary value placed upon the colonizer’s language, to the point where the native vernacular is disdained by the native himself. The result is cultural suspension with the colonial writers caught between their own language and culture and that of the governing outsiders. In this situation, the audience for the colonized writers is not their native brethren but rather the invaders. Memmi writes that “it is a curious fate to write for a people other than one’s own, and it is even stranger to write to the conquerors of one’s people” (Memmi 1965, p. 110).

This problem is the crossroad of literature in the Marianas today. Writers must look at their present situation and understand that they are intricately connected to the colonial past. Also, the language in which they write plays a major role in terms of content and audience. In order to make a commentary about the future direction of literature in the Marianas, one must look at the historical roots of literature from the past up to the present in order to project the course of the literary tradition of the islands. The paradox of this project is that this writer is composing in a colonial language and it his ultimate wish to have been able to write this in Chamorro.

Subramani, a theorist from the University of the South Pacific, outlined the beginning of a literary tradition in the South Pacific up to its present state. He articulates the Pacific islands’ development in literature and its formulation.

He comments that the tradition which has stimulated the written literature in English is the indigenous oral tradition:

Oral literature, where cultural transmission takes place by word of mouth, in face-to-face contact, and which depends for its survival on memory and habits of thought and action, belongs to the pre-literate state but continues to be added to up to the present day. (Subramani 1985, p. 5)

In the case of the literature of the Marianas, much of the oral tradition has only recently begun to be written down and documented. There were early accounts of creation myths by Father Sanvitores, but, in terms of oral folklore, many of the traditions passed down through generations have only been written within the past four decades. Mavis Van Peenen’s *Chamorro Legends on the Island of Guam*, written in Spanish in 1945 and translated by her into English in 1971, represents the first thorough compilation of folklore and legends of the Marianas.

The main thrust for the collection of Marianas folklore in more recent times was the establishment of the Micronesian Area Research Center at the University of Guam in 1967. The ESEA Title III Chamorro Materials Project in the 1970s provided Federal funding for the gathering and comprehensive compilation of the oral traditions of Guam and the rest of the Mariana Islands. It is my understanding that the source of the folklore was taken from many of the elderly on Guam and their recitations of the legends from memory.

It was not until the period of colonial domination waned that literature began to flourish in the Marianas. Although much writing was done with regards to Marianas history and culture, as well as some folklore in the 1930s, it was in the generation following World War II that literature and literary tradition became a field of interest to both natives and outside scholars alike. The Marianas provided fertile ground for exploration of folklore and oral tradition because there was little written documentation of its legends and folktales. As mentioned earlier, the staff of the Nieves M. Flores Library on Guam compiled a collection of folklore from the elderly on the island and

produced an anthology entitled *Legends of Guam*. In 1981 the Guam Department of Education, through a Federal grant, compiled its own *Legends of Guam*. There is some overlap in these anthologies as well as variation, but along with Van Peenen's work, they comprise the three major print sources of folklore and legends of the Marianas. The *Guam Recorder*, a magazine published in the early 1920s, 1930s, and 1970s on Guam, was largely responsible for becoming the literary stepping stone towards recovering the cultures and customs of the islands. Many of its cultural articles were written by scholars, including folklorists. Many of the legends and stories first published in the magazine found their way to one or another of the anthologies.

It is probably because of Guam's stability under American Naval administration that the old lore survived better than in the rest of the Marianas. The Naval administrators were kindly disposed toward native culture and took steps to ensure that what was left was preserved and maintained, while administering the daily affairs of the island government and the people (Sanchez 1965, p. 90).

In more recent times, there has been a proliferation of literature in the Marianas—poetry, short stories, and novels, and magazines. However, one problem with the literature today is that some non-native writers have borrowed the stories and appropriated them for a wider, regional audience. This is a problem because of the editing and reworking of the folklore to suit the western audience unfamiliar with Marianas culture. Also, some of the more recent folklore shows the influence of European models such as William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in its themes and motifs. Surprisingly, there appears no influence of Spanish tales or legends.

One writer whose work will be discussed later, has created her own legend of Saipan. It is a purely creative work but one that trivializes the islands' traditional folklore. Subramani noted that because the emergence of literature requires a literate audience, most of whom tend to belong to the elite and educated class, writers must distinguish the audience of their works in order to appeal to all class levels as

well as bilingual readers. The traditional writers must go on expressing a world-vision that is easily recognized by his audience, but the modern writer must discover new ways of expressing himself to this increasingly literate generation of natives (Subramani 1985, p. 30).

Subramani agrees with Terry Eagleton's position that literary production requires and presupposes certain levels of literacy, physical and mental well-being, leisure and material affluence: the material conditions for writing and reading (Subramani 1985, p. 4). Like Virginia Woolf's feminist position in *A Room of One's Own*, women (and the colonial writer) must have the financial and socio-political security in order to produce their own literature, one free of oppression—be it patriarchal or colonial.

It has only been in recent times that conditions for print literature have come about. The Mariana Islands, including Guam, are undergoing tremendous economic development, from which many Chamorros have benefited. Likewise, the island governments are stable in their relationship of quasi-independence with the United States. It seems that the parameters for the advent of a literary tradition have been established, but not without problems. Such problems include the issue of in which language the literature should be written; the literacy of the audience in reading Chamorro, a difficult task for most natives because of Chamorro being an oral language; and whether the Carolinian folkloric tradition can be included in Marianas literature as a way of addressing their position in the culture of the islands. It is these problems with the new literature in the Marianas that need to be addressed by today's writers as a way of advocating a local literature that considers history, politics, ethnicity, and language as part of the baggage attached to the literature of today.

In the following the theoretical methodology of literary interpretation and of New Historicism will be applied to selected examples of traditional folklore and post-colonial Marianas literature. The legends and stories will be examined for motifs, themes, and colonial imagery to show, through comparative analyses and interpretations, how this literature reflects and expresses the historical scheme and strug-

gle of the islands. After considering these traditional works, some modern Marianas literature will be analyzed and compared to the traditional folklore.

It is important to note that most of the oral literary heritage of the islands is authentically native, having been passed down through generations, notwithstanding colonization and domination. The literature being produced recently probably falls under the term "minor literature." Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari define a minor literature as literature by a minority that is written in the majority's language; furthermore, in their view, a minor literature is political and takes on a collective value, speaking for its suppressed minority (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, pp. 16-19). These are the issues facing the new generation of writers in the Marianas today. Chamorro and Carolinian are spoken languages while only English is the major language of written literature. The people of the islands are writing in a language that is not their own; the native has been deterritorialized or estranged from his own tongue because the advent of writing and English is a non-native experience (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, p. 19). Chamorro and Carolinian are oral languages and the folklore has been passed down in such manner for centuries; the transcription of the stories into English and Chamorro is more for preservation than transmission.

A minor literature is beneficial to the colonial writer because being marginalized allows the writer the possibility to raise a new level of consciousness by pointing out the problems that biculturalism brings. The literature by these "border" writers is continuously political for they are writing in the colonizer's language yet addressing the native experience under colonialism (Memmi 1965, p. 108). The marginalized writer is constantly reminding his dual audience of natives and colonists that what he is writing must always take note of the oppressed history of his culture. This condition of deterritorialization is being felt by today's new generation of Chamorros. Many young Chamorros do not know their own culture, folklore, nor their native tongue. They have become deterritorialized, foreign to their own

culture. It is the hope of this writer that the collections of stories from the past are continually taught in the classrooms and homes for they are the last remnants of the great Chamorro culture and remain the last vestiges of community identity for the people of the Marianas.

#### **PRE-CONTACT FOLKLORE AND MOTIFS**

Katharine Luomala remarked that comparative studies of Micronesian mythology are few and very little is known about them (Luomala 1972). In addition to this is the fact that only Mavis Van Peenen's work constitutes a thorough discussion of Marianas folklore, using sources from the Basque Capuchin Friars and repositories in Rome and Manila. Still, there are many stories not included in her 1945 anthology. Additional stories surfaced in the two anthologies mentioned earlier, by the Nieves M. Flores Library Staff (1971) and Guam DOE (1981).

The pre-contact folklore and myths discussed in this paper constitute a selection of material available in print, but it is in no way a comprehensive commentary on this literature. There remains much more to be said about the legends and how they do in fact parallel or counter historical documents about the Chamorros of the Marianas.

Van Peenen noted in her introduction that the literature, music, art, and culture of the native Chamorros were not permitted to develop completely because of outside domination (Van Peenen 1974, p. vi). Consequently, it became apparent that the native cultural history was altered and its traditions and values overwhelmed by those of the arriving foreigners. Even so the oral tradition persisted. Early, pre-contact legends coexisted with legends of Spanish domination, but they were subverted by Christian values and ideals. As Van Peenen remarked, "in his legends, the free, then the conquered Chamorro expressed himself: gentle, mischievous, delightfully fey. In them he escaped bondage—and laughed" (Van Peenen 1974, p. v).

In the imagery and motifs of the pre-conquest legends and tales we find distinctly native themes dealing with natural phenomena

and events. Of the myths and legends preserved, the ones discussed will be: "The Creation Myth" (including Jeff Busha's "Creation of Woman"), "Legends of the Taotaomona," "The Legend of the Coconut," "The Legend of the Breadfruit Tree," "The Legend of the Mosquito," "The Legend of the Two Chiefs of Guam," "How Gadao became Chieftain of Guam," "Ucude of Guam," and "The Legend of Chief Taga." In addition, the analysis of a pre-contact legend of a mythical giant fish that ate Guam will show how difficult it is at this point in Marianas history to differentiate and ascertain the authenticity of ancient legends against those variants that followed the arrival of the Spanish.

The basis for the analysis of motifs and imagery in this traditional material is Bacil Kirtley's *A Motif-Index of Polynesian, Melanesian, and Micronesian Narratives*, compiled in 1955. This work corresponds with Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* which was being written at the same time. Unfortunately, much of Kirtley's entries for Marianas folklore were based on Laura Thompson's *Archaeology of the Marianas Islands* (1945), which included an appendix of Chamorro texts by Hans Gertrude Horbostel, a German ethnographer who lived in the Marianas and was fluent in Chamorro. Thompson's initial text, along with her *Native Culture of the Mariana Islands*, is remarkable in its scholarship, which was based on earlier Spanish, and German texts and documents. However, it appears Kirtley was not aware of Van Peenen's anthology, which was written in 1945 in Spanish but not translated into English until 1971. This limited Kirtley's entries on the motifs from the Marianas.

My study attempts to update some of the motifs in Kirtley's entries through Van Peenen's, the Guam DOE's, and the Nieves M. Flores Library Staff's anthologies. The motifs pointed out are consistent with Stith Thompson's and Kirtley's indexes. I have attempted to include as much of the motifs and themes to give a representative analysis of the selected folklore; yet, time constraints prevent a more inclusive discussion into other minor legends, as well as thematic comparisons with Micronesian folklore.

### The Marianas Creation Myth

There are three written versions of this creation myth: Laura Thompson's, Van Peenen's, and probably the most detailed and comprehensive of all, Jeff Busha's *The Creation of Woman: A Mariano Indio Tale of Our Before Time Ancestors*, which was published in 1980. He draws on Thompson's version, which was taken from Father Luis Sanvitores's notes, as well as Van Peenen's, which did not list a source. It is Busha's composite version that will be used. The creation myth followed a thematic pattern of the creation of the universe from the body of a god.

The first motif in the creation myth is that of the creation of the earth, which Van Peenen (1974, p.44) noted shared similarities with the Japanese Shinto belief that the world was created from the body of a god. There were the parent gods, whom Busha called Father Eternity and Mother Nature and their children: Puntan, whose body parts were used to make the universe; Fuuna the daughter who created the universe; and Chaifi; the god of the underworld. Guam was created from Puntan's heart. One may argue that the shared motif with the Shinto tradition supports the migration theory of the aboriginal Chamorros coming to the islands from Japan. However, Van Peenen did not attempt to deal with this parallel. Lawrence Cunningham (1984, p.27) argues that the Chamorro creation myth not only followed the Shinto belief but also reflects a matrilineal motif in that the goddess Fuuna created the earth upon Puntan's death. With Puntan's body, Fuuna fashioned the earth from his breast and back, from his eyes came the sun and moon, rainbows from his eyebrows, from his back the earth from, his chest the heavens, and from his chest hairs the stars (Busha 1980, p. 2).

Another ontological theme is that of god as creator of man. In the myth Chaifi, the god of fire and the underworld, lived in *sasalaguan* or hell. Chaifi was the blacksmith creator of souls because he needed slaves, but when an explosion occurred, one of the souls escaped through an opening in a volcano, and became man. Thus, man's soft body and keen intellect were the result of the tears of Puntan, who protected him (Busha 1980, p. 8).

As with most such creation myths, the Chamorros' was an attempt to explain their physical world and its complex, mysterious origins. They believed that the purpose of these original humans was to populate the earth. Curiously, there are no known migration legends in Chamorro lore, which Van Peenen (1974, pp. 43-44) attributes to the long period of isolation and seclusion from the other islands following the initial landings. Thompson adds that the Chamorros knew of the existence of the Caroline islands and, following Magellan's arrival, incorporated the view that man had first appeared on the island of Guam from where he scattered all over the earth (Thompson 1945, p. 25).

Busha's version includes an additional motif—the creation of woman from clay, sand, and water. The image of woman occurred to Fuuna in a dream and was offered to man. From that vision, man fashioned woman out of sand and volcanic clay. The ocean waters molded and fastened the shape together in a softer image. Busha also identified the motif of man as protector and provider, with woman being subservient to man's needs, yet strong-willed. Fuuna's contribution to woman was keen intellect and wit. Atdao, the god of life, gave woman pleasant features, brown skin, and brought sunshine upon the earth. The gods also gave the primeval pair the knowledge of reproduction with which to populate the earth (Busha 1980, p. 26-42).

Chamorro myth also explained the origins of typhoons and tidal waves. These phenomena occur because of Chaifi's rage and anger at having lost a soul he could not destroy because man was protected by Puntan. Another motif accounts for the origin of a physical landmark on Guam called Fuuna Point or fertility rock. Here man turned himself into a stone at the edge of a cliff to protect his children against Chaifi's rage. Thompson points out that Father Sanvitores believed the veneration of this rock by Chamorros was connected with a belief that it was man's origin (Thompson 1945, p. 25).

## Other Ontological Myths and Legends

### *The Legend of the Coconut*

Many of the legends from Micronesia, of which the Marianas is a part, have tales that attempt to explain the origins and sources of vegetation or animals. "The Legend of the Coconut" is the Chamorro effort to explain the origin of the coconut tree in the Marianas. The legend was that the beautiful daughter of a chief of the Achoti tribe was thirsty for a particular kind of fruit, which no one could find and became ill. A short time later, she died and was buried on a hill overlooking the village. Months later, some of the villagers noticed a strange plant growing on her grave. After five years, the unknown plant grew to a height of approximately 20 feet. When one of the fruits fell to the ground, it cracked open and the liquid was drunk and the fruit eaten by the dead girl's mother, who named it coconut (Guam DOE 1981, p.42).

The legend is of particular interest because of its inconsistency with traditional burials of prestiged Chamorros. Normally, the dead were buried in either house sites, caves, or in earthen urns (Thompson 1945, p. 25). In this case, the legend tells of her being buried upon a hill. It is quite possible that the legend was adapted to accommodate a coconut tree's size and its need for sunshine. It could neither fit nor grow under the traditional *latte* stones of the ancient Chamorro house. On the other hand, traditional burial practices may have been altered during the post-contact adaptation, but this would still not resolve this discrepancy.

It is also worth noting that Van Peenen's text does not contain this legend, nor is it recounted in any other collection except that published by the Guam Department of Education. One may speculate as to its origin and how this legend was overlooked. I think it is possible that Van Peenen felt it was not credible as a native legend at the time she compiled hers. Nevertheless, the coconut origin myth certainly reflects pre-Spanish lore because its imagery is consistent with that of other Micronesian islands.

### *The Legend of the Breadfruit Tree*

The particular motif this myth shares with the "Legend of the Coconut" is that of food growing out of human graves. As with the coconut story, the origin of the breadfruit tree is connected to the death of youth people. According to the legend, the breadfruit tree grew from the graves of the children of two chiefs. The children had starved to death in an island wide famine. The exhausted chiefs had fallen asleep after placing *latte* stones at the heads of their children's graves. Upon awakening they saw full-grown breadfruit trees on each site where the *latte* stones had been, and upon tasting the strange fruit, called it *lemmai* or breadfruit (Guam DOE 1981, p. 44-51).

The Coconut and Breadfruit legends, of course, deal with food sources, life being fed by death. These pre-contact trees were the natives' main source of sustenance. Similar legends have been collected in other Micronesian islands that account for the origins of coconut and breadfruit.

### *The Legend of the Mosquito*

This legend too, touches on burial practices. The story is of a young couple from different villages who marry and live with the bridegroom's parents. When the young wife becomes sick and dies, the distraught husband fashions a raft and goes out to sea with her. This burial method is striking because it too does not follow the traditional Chamorro method of burial. In fact placing the dead on an ocean barge or boat is more common in European traditions than in Micronesia. The wife is brought back to life by a *Taotaomona*, or "Before Time Ancestor," who achieves this by pricking the husband with a bamboo pin and dripping his blood on the dead wife's body. Later, when the husband discovers that his reincarnated wife has been unfaithful, he pricks her again with a bamboo pin and she dies, whereupon mosquitoes form and emerge from her blood. Thus, when a mosquito bites people, it is the revenge of the *Taotaomona* for the destruction of the woman's life and the mosquito is the transformed soul of the young wife (Guam DOE 1981, p. 69-82).

Resuscitation by a god themes and the creation of animals motifs are common in early pre-contact legends. Besides explaining natural phenomena, these ontological myths possess as characteristic elements an organized plot theme that is appropriate to its action. Once the Chamorros came in contact with the Spanish, this kind of significant organization disappeared (Van Peenen 1974, p. 40).

## **Legends of Strength**

### *How Gadao became chieftain of Guam*

This legend deals with the great Chamorro strong man, Gadao, and its theme is labor. Gadao's labors began, according to the legend, in his effort to become head of all the chiefs of Guam. Gadao was ordered by all the island's chiefs to perform three great tasks: first, he had to swim twenty-five times around the island; secondly, he had to break a coconut tree into ten pieces by hand; lastly, he would have to level Mount Lamlam, the largest mountain on Guam. After accomplishing all three feats, Gadao proved his worth and was accorded the title of head chieftain. Gadao's labors echoed the ancient image of the Chamorro chiefs as great, strong, and powerful men who could perform gargantuan feats beyond those of the normal man (Nieves M. Flores Library Staff 1971, p. 7-8).

Such tales of the feats of the aboriginal Chamorro man in pre-contact legends were not uncommon. They reflected the spirit of the Chamorros who prided themselves on extraordinary physical strength and other superhuman abilities. Even Mendoza's notes refer to Chamorro's brawn:

They are as large as giants, and of so great strength, that it has actually happened that one of them, while standing of the ground, has laid hold of two Spaniards of good stature, seizing each of them by one foot with his hands, and lifting them as easily as if they were two children (cited in Thompson 1945, p. 8)

Thompson's collection also contains a tale of two noblemen of Agana (Guam) who agreed that the stronger of the two would become chief. One squeezed a rock and a drop of water fell from it. The other threw a rock and it



flew through the air like a bird. Seeing each other's strength, the two men then fell upon each other with clubs, with the loser leaping to the nearby island of Rota (Thompson 1945, p. 8).

#### *Legend of the two chiefs of Guam*

This legend, collected by the Nieves M. Flores Library Staff in 1971, has both ontological elements that account for geographical features and continues the tradition of legendary feats of the strong man, Gadao. It deals with an encounter between Malaguana of Tumon and Gadao of Inarajan, is cast in poetic form. In the 1973 Guam DOE version told by Simon Camacho in Chamorro, the two chiefs are Alu and Pang, from which, following their epic battle, produced the rock known as Alupang on Guam.

It is also worth noting that the story, "Taga the Great," written by Frances S. Baker in 1975 also contains a version of Chief Taga's battle with another chief similar to the two previous compilations. I will be referring to the Guam DOE version in this discussion.

In this version, Chief Alu, upon hearing of the deeds of a chief of another village, decides to find him and challenge him to a contest of strength. Unknowing to Alu, the other chief, Pang, has disguised himself as a cook. Chief Alu shows his strength by shaking a coconut tree so violently all the nuts fall to the ground. Chief Pang, still disguised as a cook, nonchalantly counters this by squeezing one of the coconuts and grinding the meat in one hand to make a meal for his new acquaintance. After seeing what he supposed was just an ordinary man's strength, Alu wonders about the his ability to conquer the chief he supposed he will have to meet and desires to return to his village. He asks the cook to take him there in a canoe. Once in the canoe, they each paddle in opposite directions, breaking the canoe in half, but their strength is so great, neither notices. It isn't until Alu reaches his home village that he realizes the true identity of the cook.

One possible reason for the variant in terms of would be to explain the Alupang landmark on Guam. Another possible explanation might be to add to the legendary feats of Chief Taga

by fusing the deeds of the various strong men in other legends with the Baker version. It is also possible that the original legend may not have had any actual names, as in the example given in Thompson's rival noblemen of Agana, and the ancient version served as an example of aboriginal Chamorro brawn and strength.

#### *Legend of Chief Taga*

This legend is of particular interest because there is a version on Guam that seems to be a variant of the Tinian tale of the feats of the great Chief Taga. Chief Masala in the Guam legend was a *Taotaomona* of prodigious stature, so strong he could snap a coconut tree in half (Guam DOE 1980, p. 4). Chief Taga of the island of Tinian was just as gigantic and strong. He could lift a giant *latte* stone by himself (Baker 1975, p. 5). Although the character descriptions and names were different, both versions coincide in plot and themes. Masala and Taga were strong and boisterous chiefs of enormous size, able to perform gargantuan feats. Each could build a huge *latte* stone house with the massive stones. Each also had a precociously strong son. The Masala legend tells of the son playing with a coconut crab that escaped, and hid in a hole under a coconut tree. When Masala refused to help him retrieve the animal, the angry boy grabbed and uprooted the entire tree. Masala, seeing his son's strength as a threat to him, tries to kill the boy. The fleeing child leaps to the island of Rota, located between Guam and Tinian, a great distance away. There is a landmark on Rota called *Puntan Patgon* or "Child's Point," where the boy supposedly landed and lived in exile from his jealous father (Guam DOE 1980, p. 14-16).

The themes in this particular legend depict the obsessive pride of the aboriginal Chamorro male, refusing to be outdone by anyone, even by their children. The legend also accounts for the child's footprint landmark on Rota; thus, there is supposed physical evidence that the great Taga did exist. The great *latte* stone ruins associated with this legend can still be seen on the island of Tinian today.

These legends that tell of the Chamorro's impressive physical prowess bear testimony of a strong and proud people before the arrival of

the Spanish conquistadors. The motifs reflect an almost god-like race of giants who ruled the islands without fear and performed great feats. I subscribe to the opinion that these legends remained popular during the Spanish occupation because they reminded the subjugated natives of a time when the Chamorro was in control of his islands and roamed them with pride not even exceeded by their foreign intruders. The folklore that developed during the Spanish occupation is starkly different from that which preceded it. Tales of strength yielded to those of trickery and deception of the Spanish.

#### *The Legend of Ucude of Guam*

Van Peenen's anthology included the legend of Chief Ucude who duped the people of Rota. Because Rota's great chief was dying, Ucude persuaded them that he had an herbal cure; however, he claimed that he could only find the ingredients if he was given the most beautiful maiden on the island to accompany his search. His trick was that he convinced them not to give the medicine to the chief until Ucude had exited the island's bay with the girl. Needless to say, the herb was worthless, the chief died, and Ucude escaped from Rota with the maiden. When the Rotanese chased Ucude to Guam so fast they arrived before him, Ucude manages to outwit them by pleading a last request, to walk a hundred paces to the North and another hundred to the South before being executed. Ucude again dupes the Rotanese and escapes into the jungle with the maiden and remained on Guam with her (Van Peenen 1974, p. 7).

The Ucude legend motif is of the shamanic magician who escapes death by a false appeal to his captors. It is of particular value because it marks a shift away from legends of strength to those of deception and wit, the trickster themes of oppressed people worldwide. This predominates in the post-contact legends as the Chamorro became ever more controlled by the Spaniards.

#### *The Taotaomona legends*

One myth associated with a quasi-religious motif is that of the numerous and various tales

of the *Taotaomona*, which Lawrence Cunningham (1984, p. 100) defines as "ghost, demon, disembodied souls, spirits, and literally, the People of Before (Time)." Van Peenen described the *Taotaomona* as composite, monstrous, ogre-like figures who existed before the Spanish conquest. They fulfilled the human need to explain unnatural or strange events (Van Peenen 1974, p. 39). Thompson notes that *Taotaomona* myths are not found in early Spanish reports, that they are a post-Spanish concept, the spirits of ancestors and deceased chiefs of the modern Chamorros (Thompson 1945, p. 22). Thompson's comments are consistent with the historical experience of the Chamorros and the emergence of the *Taotaomona* image served the natives' need to retain their ancestral ties during the conquest period.

There are numerous reports of encounters with the *Taotaomona*, and I provide samples from Thompson and Van Peenen and discuss their relevance in traditional Chamorro folklore. In the pre-contact legend, "The Legend of the Mosquito," it is the *Taotaomona* who appear to a widowed husband and reincarnate his deceased wife. But *Taotaomona* here serve to explain the origin of insects and as a powerful entity that provided strength and protection for the natives. Also, the function of the *Taotaomona* as powerful deity legitimized them as the spiritual forces that controlled life and death for the Chamorros. In contrast, during the colonial period, the *Taotaomona* functioned more as mischievous and superstitious entities than as protector of the Chamorros.

Thompson includes notes by Hans Gertrude Horbostel, who studied the islands in the early 1920s, in which he noted that the *Taotaomona* spirits dominated particular territorial boundaries:

It is permissible for a person who is a member of this family to visit his own section, but if he ventures too far afield the ancestral spirits of other families will harm him unless he is very careful in his behavior.. When a person decides to invade a strange district he first asks permission to enter and then again for each and every breach of the regulations. Even then it is dangerous to invade the territory of other

people's ancestral spirits (cited in Thompson 1945, p. 23).

Because the *Taotaomona* was a strong and proud spirit, those who ventured into his territory could not show any weakness; rather, they had to boast of strength and courage to avoid being frightened (Van Peenen 1974, p. 39). This tabu motif of offending a supernatural relative developed after the Spanish occupation where punishment usually followed the breaking this tabu. For example, I was warned as a young boy of the necessity to ask permission before relieving myself in an unknown area to avoid punishment by *Taotaomona* for being disrespectful. *Taotaomona* were also thought to be dangerous to pregnant women and young children because they did not like the odor of breast milk. They had to be protected with Catholic charms, strong-smelling objects, or salt (Thompson 1945, p. 23). Such motifs of punishment or sickness for the breaking of tabus associated with the *Taotaomona* spoke to the Chamorros' need to explain situations beyond their ability to control, which was probably associated with their response to Spanish occupation and the introduction of Christianity that ran counter to Chamorro concepts of belief in the supernatural. The legends of the *Taotaomona* bear witness for the Chamorro people under Spanish rule, physically weakened by disease and discouraged by Spanish conquest, who "turned to the memory of their Before Time Ancestors for pride and comfort" (Van Peenen 1974, p. 38).

Another example of *Taotaomona* myths in more recent times is one called the "Armless Hand." In this story a domestic employee recounts how an armless hand reached in through a window, turned off a lamp, took up an iron, and began to iron her employer's dress: "the hand was three times as large as the ordinary man's hand, and the nails were very long and sharp." The woman gave thanks to the *Taotaomona* for ironing the dress, but not until after it had played a trick on her first (Van Peenen 1974, p. 40).

Another *Taotaomona* tale, "Nocturnal Visitors," tells of a man who became ill while visiting a neighboring village. His parents were visited by strange, ogre-looking creatures that

evening, who told them of their son's illness. The man gives thanks to his village's *Taotaomona* for notifying his parents of his illness (Van Peenen 1974, p. 40). This tale illustrates the territoriality of the *Taotaomona*. It also is an example of the original depictions of the *Taotaomona* as protectors which coexisted with the new image of them as annoying and hideous spirits.

The *Taotaomona* beliefs remain to this day and many reports of strange events and occurrences at night are attributed to them. The *Taotaomona* myths of more recent times are different from the original myths. They have become simple, superstitious accounts that lack detail, character portrayal, plot, and charm (Van Peenen 1974, p. 40).

The history of the *Taotaomona* myths reflect changes in the mentality of the Chamorro following contact with the Western world. Subramani calls the impact of European contact a "negative influence," because the Western literary tradition and Catholicism relegated traditional lore to a trivial position in the culture. The *Taotaomona* myths are examples of the impact of Europeanization and Hispanicization on legends and myths. They reflect the Chamorro attempt to adjust to the harsh domination by external forces, which made them a mentally beaten people under colonial rule.

#### *The giant fish of Guam*

There are three adaptations of one particular legend, "The Giant Fish of Guam," that tells why the middle part of Guam, which was once supposed to be its widest point, is now the narrowest part of the island. It is an example of how a possibly ancient legend was modified to include Christian images and themes in Chamorro folklore. On the other hand, it also gives proof of the difficulty in distinguishing between ancient pre-contact legends and post-conquest stories. With these variants I look at the images and motifs, whether they be Christian or Spanish, to show how the native oral tradition was beginning to be influenced by Western culture and Christianity.

1. *The fish that ate Guam*. Eve Grey's anthology, which was compiled as a folklore text for

Micronesian schools under the Trust Territory administration, contains a few legends particular to the Marianas. Her version tells of a giant fish that was gradually eating the island of Guam in half from the bottom. Three young Chamorro maidens capture the fish by baiting it with lemon peels and their captivating singing. They trap the great fish by luring it to a river and catch it with a net woven from their hair. The myth is that the great fish almost halved the island and its pounding tail can be heard near the ocean today (Grey 1951, p. 124).

The siren motif of this legend that lures the monster and saves the island is different from that of the sirens of Greek myths who drive men to madness and shipwrecks; yet, this is a near universal motif and its emergence here is surely connected with its European counterparts. On the other hand, the image of the Chamorro maiden was well known for her beautiful, long hair, which she washed each day by a river with lemon peels. This siren image can also be viewed as native to the Marianas. This merging of native and European motifs is not uncommon during the colonial period.

The image of the giant fish is consistent with many Micronesian tales of a mythical giant fish that was hostile and devastating to the natives. The image of a magical net or rope woven from human hair was also familiar in native Micronesian tales (Kirtley 1955, p. 453).

The *Taotaomona* men also appear in this colonial version but they are unable to capture the fish. The story focuses on images of strong, resourceful Chamorro women, more clever than the brawny Chamorro males. The maidens are gentle yet cunning and are able to overcome the brute strength of the animal.

2. *Why the central part of Guam is narrow* (variant form). With a variant version of this tale compiled by the Nieves M. Flores Library Staff, there is a commentary to the effect that some older people believed that Guam is the "Land of St. Mary," and for them it was the Virgin Mary who captured the fish by tying it with a strand of her hairs. The fish supposedly had been eating away at the bottom of the island from the time of Chaifi until the arrival of the Virgin Mary in the Marianas (Nieves M. Flores Library Staff 1971, p. 10).

The image of the *Taotaomona* leaders in Grey's version do not appear in this variant. It is quite possible that this 1971 legend was influenced by Van Peenen's version because they share similar imagery. For example, Van Peenen's detailed version told of how the fish emerged each night to from a tunnel to eat away at part of the island for its supper. Also, the Virgin Mary arrives and captures the fish with a strand from her hair (Van Peenen 1974, p. 34). It may also be that the Christian influence at the time of this legend's resurgence had become so deeply rooted that the feminine image of the maidens seemed less natural than of St. Mary. The island has been described as being "under her special blessings and protection during the past centuries since the introduction of Catholicism" (Nieves M. Flores Library Staff 1971, p. 10).

3. *A hair of the Virgin*. This is Van Peenen's version of the tale about the giant fish gradually eating away at the island. She notes that the fish had been eating away at Guam since the time of creation. The people were frightened by the fish until the arrival of the Virgin Mary, who became Guam's patron saint and protector. In this version, the great fish is captured by a rope fashioned from the Virgin's hair, which was "as fine as silk, but as strong as wire" (Van Peenen 1974, p. 34). The Virgin Mary appears to have been quickly accepted in the Marianas and each community, including Guam, wanted to associate her with its own geography (Van Peenen 1974, p. 34). This incorporation of Christian images into the lore of the conquered Chamorros marks a significant development in early legends and traditions. These elements appeared simultaneously with themes of resistance against the Spanish. Roger Mitchell adds that "the most vital body of Chamorro folklore is that allied to Spanish Catholicism, with the usual array of miraculous statues of the Virgin, signs of divine intervention, and martyred priests" (Van Peenen 1974, p. 42). The contrasting versions of the legend of the great fish probably illustrate a problem in the transcription of pre-conquest folklore after such a long period. The ancient versions have probably been significantly altered. Unfortunately, one cannot ascertain the purity and authenticity of

each variant let alone make evaluations based on a comparison between each adaptation. In more recent times there have been continuous collections of the various legends. For example, new variants appear in the *Xanadu* and local magazines with the assumption that they are new and original legends; yet, many times these are the same legends of earlier collections, sometimes lifted exactly from the earlier sources and under a new author or title (Mitchell 1972, p. 36).

At least in this particular legend there occurs a remarkable shift, from ancient legends and myths with motifs similar to others in Micronesia, to those that bear the themes and imagery of the Spanish conquest. The early pre-contact legends and myths tend to reflect a history of the Chamorro that exists only in memory, a history that the Spanish cross and sword severed.

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