BOOK REVIEWS


Reviewed by Rasmi Shoocongdej, Silpakorn University

It is always a pleasure to read a comprehensive book about Thailand. In Sacred Rocks and Buddhist Caves in Thailand, French scholar Christophe Munier makes a wonderful effort to integrate archaeological data with his knowledge of Thai Buddhist culture and his experiences traveling in Thailand between 1985 and 1994.

The focus of this volume is a study of the symbolic value of rocks and caves within historical, cultural, and religious contexts. The volume is illustrated with 300 plates, maps, and diagrams. Information on other Asian countries is also included, providing useful information for both the interested reader and the tourist.

Munier defines "sacred" rocks as those that are widely worshipped by the Thai, not exclusively from the Buddhist context, and he covers myths, animism, and other religious beliefs. "Buddhist caves" refers to caves with cosmogonic elements of the Buddhist landscape that are not commonly found in the present-day context.

The introduction gives a brief survey of historical development in Thailand prior to the Sukhothai period (Sukhothai is the first kingdom of the "Thai" people) through the Chakri dynasty of the Bangkok period. It also outlines the concept of sacred rocks and Buddhist caves found in Asia and raises several issues. Munier reviews the evidence of sacred and worshipped rocks and Buddhist caves that have been discovered throughout Asia—from Sri Lanka, Burma, Cambodia, Thailand, India, China, Vietnam, and Malaysia—by comparing the similarities and differences of the symbolic meanings and the worship practices. Here, the subheadings are not well structured and it would have been helpful to have a brief explanation about the organization of this section before launching into the history of Thailand right away.

In the section that focuses on sacred rocks in Thailand, Munier hypothesizes that the sacred rocks are linked to the Buddha as a person and everyday utilitarian objects in the Buddha's life, as well as special Buddhist events. He classifies these into ten parts: the introduction of Buddhism at the end of prehistory, rock umbrellas and canopies, the Buddha's shadows, the Buddha's footprints, the Buddha's alms bowl, the Buddha's throne and bed, the divine balance, animals, a rock offered by the angels, and phallic rocks. The materials presented cover a wide time frame, from prehistory to the present day. However, this section seems to focus largely on the Dvaravati culture (the earliest Buddhist state founded in northeastern Thailand, c. A.D. 6) and the Phu Phra Bat site, a Buddhist shelter in Udonthani Province in particular. Munier also mentions the sites in northern, southern, western, and eastern Thailand.
according to the above classification. At the end of each part, he provides a map and guide to the sites.

The section on Thai Buddhist caves that follows is divided into five parts, including an introduction to Thai Buddhist caves, caves used as ritual and religious places from prehistoric time to the present, high and low reliefs, painted caves, and text and signatures. Under each of these topics, a brief summary of the most interesting caves around Thailand and guides on how to get there are given. At this point, Munier includes some material that does not entirely relate to the concept of the Buddhist cave; for example, he includes the historical records (text and signatures) of King Rama V of the Chakri dynasty’s visit to one cave. It seems that most of the descriptive information and interpretations contained in this part are a summary of archaeological data on prehistoric rock paintings and historical caves that has been researched by Thai archaeologists from the Royal Thai Fine Arts Department over a number of decades. Unfortunately, apart from acknowledging Srisuchat, Munier does not give any credit to the Fine Arts Department’s work in his notes to sections 12–17 on pages 49–251. He does, however, include their studies in the bibliography.

The strength of this book is the rich information about the sacred rocks and Buddhist cave sites in Thailand. Muntier successfully brings together a large amount of data and a variety of interpretations in an accessible way that may be particularly useful as an informative introductory guide for people unfamiliar with the literature on this topic.

However, this book has certain weaknesses that could be improved in further editions. I am disappointed that Munier does not examine and explain the change or the continuity of sacred rocks or Buddhist caves through time. For instance, what was the nature of worship in each period? When and how were animist and supernatural beliefs harmoniously integrated with Buddhism? What are the similarities or differences of sacred rocks and Buddhist caves among the various regions of Thailand? Are there any differences in the practices of worshiping sacred rocks and Buddhist caves between Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism?

Another problem is the structure of the book. Although this volume attempts to provide an overview for readers unfamiliar with Thailand and Buddhism, the book itself is not well structured and may lead to confusion for some readers. It is difficult to follow through to the end, due to the arrangement of parts in a discontinuous sequence. As a result, each part fails to deliver coherent and integrative content. Chapter summaries of each part would have been useful. Although Munier provides great detail of historical information in each part, he does not manage to smoothly link this data with the concepts of sacred rocks and the Buddhist caves that he sets out in the general introduction.

While I commend Munier’s efforts in reviewing numerous documents and archaeological data, I also feel a bit uneasy with the author’s interpretation of archaeological evidence. For instance, on pages 5 and 6, he writes that the “Mon” people (an ethnic group in Thailand who speak an Austro-Asiatic language) were a population of the Dvaravati culture. This is a continuing source of debate among scholars, and archaeologists still haven’t come to an agreement about the definite racial group of the Dvaravati culture. In this case, it would have been better if Munier had presented the different hypotheses on this issue, as he did on the issue of the origin of Thai people on page 244.

It should be noted that in such a book, which deals with a range of topics and covers a long period of time, it is easy for the nonarchaeologist to misinterpret the archaeological records or to use the material without understanding the status of arts in the field of archaeology. Munier is not alone in this regard.

Another minor observation is that the rationale for selecting particular case studies is not always clear, and some examples given do not accurately represent all the topics and regions. Because of marketing, Munier also incorporates information that does not relate to the concept of sacred rocks and Buddhist caves at all. For in-
stance, he includes information on sites that are curiosities of nature, such as Ko Tapu in Pangnga, southern Thailand, or famous, such as the rock filmed in the James Bond movie. Personally, I feel this tends to discount the value of the book.

Although the author intended to provide more information on the sites to meet the needs of the tourist, some information seems to be quite irrelevant while more important data are missing. For example, on page 235 in “Other Caves,” information on the important features found in the caves and how to get there are omitted. I strongly feel that this part of the book is unnecessary.

Overall, there are several good sections and it contains a wealth of information. The photographs are well printed on good quality paper. It is a worthy addition to any collection about Thailand.


**Reviewed by Ben Finney, University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa**

Those of us who have worked on issues of indigenous sailing and navigation in the Pacific Islands have long wondered to what extent Indonesian sailors still practice old ways of navigating and sailing, and how these might relate to methods once employed throughout the open Pacific. We had read the journalistic accounts of sailing on romantic looking part-Malay and part-European craft, and poured over the few papers that seemed to indicate that despite the presence of magnetic compasses on board these vessels, their navigators still paid attention to the stars, swells, and currents. Now with Gene Ammarell’s fine book we at last have a detailed study of Bugis navigation, one that fills an immense gap in Southeast Asian ethnography and also offers comparative data and insights valuable for analyzing the much more fragmentary data on navigation in ancient Polynesia.

In 1991–1992 Ammarell spent 17 months with the Bugis people of South Sulawesi, famed traders who for the last several centuries have ranged over the seas that join the many islands of what is now Indonesia. He focused on a trading community of 145 households based on the atoll community of Balobaloang located in the Flores Sea some 120 nautical miles south-southwest of the port of Ujang Padang (formerly Makasar). Sailing in vessels that range from the Indonesian equivalents of small sloops to medium-sized tall ships, these traders range over the Flores and Banda seas, calling on ports in South Sulawesi, Maluku (the Moluccas), and Nusa Tenggara (the Lesser Sundas). Their wooden, locally built vessels carry a wide variety of goods, ranging from timber, nails, bricks, and other construction materials to copra, cashew nuts, coffee, rice, flour, shallots, fruits, and other products. To learn their navigation system the author apprenticed himself to master navigators, and sailed with them at various times of the year to learn firsthand about wind and weather conditions and navigational challenges throughout the entire monsoon cycle.

The craft employed by the Balobaloang are hybrid in design and to some extent, in materials, and are equipped with auxiliary engines and compasses. Nonetheless, these wooden vessels are a far cry from the container behemoths that now dominate world trade. Although the traders may use their engines to power through calms and in and out of harbors, many cannot afford to run them all the time. And, above all, they still sail according to the alternation of the monsoon winds. During the steady easterly monsoon winds from March through September and extending into the calmer months of October through December, most of the able-bodied men are at sea on the island’s trading vessels. During the January–February height of the rainy and often stormy west monsoon, all but the
largest ships stay in port. Similarly, although some younger sailors can only sail by a magnetic compass, most older sailors can still use the stars, wind, and other cues from their environment to set courses and steer. And, like sailors elsewhere, at night the Bugis still mostly steer by the stars, rather than slavishly trying to follow the gyrations of a compass needle.

At the heart of this book are two chapters on navigation. The first is devoted to offshore navigation in which conceptual compasses, one denoted by wind directions and the other by the rising and setting points of stars, are employed along with the magnetic compass. The second chapter focuses on piloting, that is guiding a ship through reference landmarks, depth soundings, tidal patterns, coastal currents, and other land-related phenomena. The wealth of material presented in these two chapters is much too rich to summarize here. Let me just say that it is one of the best integrated presentations of indigenous navigation I have read, and one that suggests a continuity of Austronesian practices extending at least from Indonesian waters through to the far reaches of Remote Oceania. In particular I appreciate Ammarell’s analysis of how the Bugis employ their wind compass, along with bearings derived from the rising and setting points of stars and observations of the sun, moon, ocean swells, and birds as a system. These same elements were employed in Polynesia, but we do not have a similarly complete analysis of exactly how they fit together as a coherent whole. For those readers who can’t or don’t want to follow the author’s detailed analysis, I recommend his diagrams (p. 129) of how Bugis and Western navigators group the same stars into completely different asterisms as clear examples of the cultural construction of navigational astronomy. For example, where Westerners see the Southern Cross (Crux), the pointer stars (Alpha and Beta Centauri), and the adjacent coal sack, Bugis see window-before-marriage, incomplete house stars, and the goat.

When Ammarell was conducting his study during the early 1990s Indonesia had enjoyed a long run of stability and economic growth, during which time engines and compasses (as well as cordage and sails made from synthetic materials and other innovations) had been introduced or became more widespread. This made Ammarell wonder whether the apparent erosion of indigenous ways of navigating and other traditional practices might eventually lead to their effective disappearance. However, now I wonder if the recent economic and political turmoil may have forced some retreat from the rapid pace of change over the last thirty years, and a consequently greater reliance of sail over engine power and of navigating by the winds, stars, and other traditional means over relying heavily on magnetic compasses. Still, I also cannot help but speculate if, despite the current turmoil, increasingly cheaper GPS receivers may one day prove to be the one piece of exogenous navigation technology that most seriously challenges the old ways. Or will these resourceful sailors continue to organize directions by the winds and steer by the stars, all the while using these handy new devices to pinpoint their position?


Reviewed by Brian Fagan, University of California, Santa Barbara

Jean Auel, Glyn Daniel, and James Michener started the trend. Since then, a veritable flood of novels with archaeological themes have arrived in the marketplace,
everything from detective stories to out-and-out thrillers. A handful of archaeologists have themselves tried writing novels, both as a creative alternative to the serious business of reporting on their research, and sometimes because they want to explore topics that are beyond the relatively limited reach of archaeological data. The two novels reviewed here are the work of professional archaeologists working in Japan and Korea, whose own experiences add color and authenticity to the narratives.

Peter Bleed teaches at the University of Nebraska and is a respected authority not only on Japan’s archaeology, but on Japanese swords as well. *National Treasure* begins in A.D. 1340, when a retainer of the Emperor Go-Tembo dedicates a sword made by master swordsmith Munemasa to a shrine at Takasaka. Nearly eight centuries later, a Midwestern dentist who collects pistols attends the Des Moines Gun Show, where he buys the same sword from the widow of a World War II veteran. Meanwhile, back in Japan, a Japanese businessman and the leader of an underworld syndicate join forces in an attempt to locate the missing sword, which was designated a “National treasure” in the 1930s. The plot twists and turns, with the inevitable happy ending when the sword returns to the National Museum in Japan. The main fascination of the story lies in the intricacies of swords and swordmaking, and in the author’s expert knowledge of the dealmaking world of gun and sword dealers. But the American characters have little dimension and their Japanese protagonists are only a little more sophisticated. The plot engages, but the book never becomes much more than a pleasant page turner.

Korean specialist Sarah Nelson’s *Spirit Bird Journey* follows Clara, an American student of Korean birth, who journeys to Korea to study archaeology and get away from her boyfriend’s parents. She excavates at the site of Bird Mountain Village. A shamanistic ceremony takes her to the remote past, which she enters as a bird. A child of the Golden clan is born just as Clara appears and is named Flyingbird from this event. Clara as a golden bird becomes the spirit protector of Golden Flyingbird. Flyingbird was born to become the leader of the Golden Clan in Bird Mountain Village, but she must find six amulets and learn the songs and rituals associated with them to earn the approval of the spirits. She raises a bear club destined for sacrifice, makes a household with two husbands, has four children, and becomes the village leader. Clara has the opportunity to visit many of the places to which Flyingbird journeyed in the past. Nelson floats Clara effortlessly between the worlds of ancient and modern Korea, as only someone with a firsthand familiarity with its archaeology can do. And, in the end, the heroine unearths the burial of a village leader, perhaps Flyingbird herself. The author reveals a thorough knowledge of recent scholarship on ethnic and gender issues and offers a pragmatic view of archaeologists at work in Korea today. A useful note at the end reveals some of her sources and inspirations. This is an at times lyrical novel, which both entertains and informs without being self-indulgent. At the same time, the reader learns some of the thought processes that lie behind the interpretation of the Korean archaeological record. The fiction milieu allows a working archaeologist to wander far beyond the narrow confines of archaeological data.

RKLOG Press has published these two novels in an “Antiquity Alive” series, presumably an opportunity for archaeologists to stretch their literary wings into new genres. These two first novels lead one to hope that more tantalizing offerings lie ahead. Both authors have allowed their expertise to flower in new directions, which must have been a satisfying experience. The result for the reader is uneven at times, but nevertheless enjoyable.
This compilation is based on the proceedings of "The 4th USA-USSR Archaeological Exchange Symposium: The Development of Ancient Metallurgy in the Old World," held in Tbilisi and Signakhi, Republic of Georgia, 27 September–8 October 1988. It has had a long gestation, as described by the editor in his introductory comments. It finally contains six papers on archaeometallurgy presented by U.S. participants, together with an invited paper on copper-based metallurgy in South Asia, and an English translation of a Russian summary of the proceedings included as an appendix. The majority of the final manuscripts was received in 1996 with some updating to include references up to 1998. Final publication was in 1999.

Given this lengthy evolution, any review must address the question of whether the final volume justifies its publication. To some extent more recent published research has superseded it, but it does make accessible material that might not be readily available. For example, papers by J. N. Kemoyer and H.M.-L. Miller on "Metal technologies in the Indus Valley tradition in Pakistan and western India" (pp. 107–152) and G. L. Possehl and P. Gullapalli on "The Early Iron Age in South Asia" (pp. 153–176) ably summarize material not easily available. This is also true of the editor's paper on "The development of metal production on the Iranian Plateau: An archaeometallurgical perspective" (pp. 73–106) but this is in part duplicated elsewhere in the author's own writings.

The reviewer must also consider the presentation of the data and the quality of the discussion presented. There is no space for detailed criticism of each paper and any such review would be uneven depending on the knowledge and experience of the reviewer. Consequently the review will center on how the individual papers address archaeometallurgical questions of general relevance throughout the Asian Old World. With a background in physical metallurgy, my main concern is how the authors explore how the knowledge and exploitation of metal properties developed; issues of provenance and trade in this region, although important, are still hemmed in by limited analytical and archaeological data.

How are the metallurgical data marshalled in support of the arguments? One can almost say that the data are not presented. A volume like this is not the place to tabulate large bodies of analytical data (although the copper and iron alloy analyses in the two papers on South Asia are certainly not out of place). However, graphical summaries of available data would have made several arguments more comprehensible. One example is the reference by Stech to the Mesopotamian Metals Project in “Aspects of early metallurgy in Mesopotamia and Anatolia” (pp. 59–72). These data have been long awaited but the only glimpse allowed here is a tabulation of the number of objects analyzed and the number found to be bronze. Graphics of tin and arsenic contents would not have compromised the full publication of this material and would have avoided the need for the rather dubious numerical definition of bronze used in constructing the table.

This applies to all of the discussions of copper-based metallurgy in the volume. In the same context, Piggott in his introduction notes that in the third millennium B.C., weapons and edged tools are generally not made of bronze although “these are the artifacts that would function most effectively from being made of a copper alloy with a tin content close to 10% that could then be work hardened to produce a metal with useful mechanical properties” (p. 5). This illustrates the assumptions made throughout the copper alloy discussions that actually hinder debate on how alloying developed. Sadly, insufficient objects are...
studied metallographically to determine how the metal in them was actually used—there are no micrographs anywhere in this volume, a regrettable omission. For the purposes in which bronze was used in the ancient world, a wide range of tin contents, from 5 percent to 15 percent, would suffice, and was used satisfactorily. Equally, existing copper compositions were competitive, with a Cu–2 percent arsenic composition providing blade edges as hard as the bronzes that replaced them in a metal that was easier to forge. Even the iron impurity found in many ancient Near Eastern coppers could make a significant contribution to mechanical properties. This knowledge has been available to metallurgists since the 1920s.

This reliance on a numerical definition of the act of alloying is part of a rather old-fashioned approach to ancient metallurgy. This is exemplified by Muhly’s contribution on “Copper and bronze in the eastern Mediterranean,” and to a lesser extent Stech’s paper, although Muhly recognizes more than others the place of recycling. The papers read like lists of copper alloy objects containing tin, which, without maps or graphics, is extremely unhelpful to the reader not already informed about the material. The papers on Iran and on South Asia suffer from similar definitions of alloying but are more useful in their discussion of chronology and of the contexts in which metalworking was undertaken.

Copper is balanced by three papers on iron. Waldbaum’s “The coming of iron in the eastern Mediterranean” (pp. 27–58) updates her previous reviews of the subject with refreshing clarity and critical acuity. The introduction and development of iron in the ancient world is a subject laden with doctrine and untested assumptions, which this paper does a great deal to clear away. Where next, though, as she points out, because of the limitations of the data so far collected. Again, the argument has a metallurgical component and it is clear that past contributors to the debate have not clearly understood the properties of iron and bronze and how they might compare. Possehl and Gullapalli’s work on the Iron Age in South India also offers a constructive survey of the region’s earliest iron together with a radiocarbon chronology. For many readers, this will be new information.

Finally, Bronson’s “The transition to iron in ancient China” is the least modified from the presentation made in 1988 with no new references; a footnote refers to D. B. Wagner’s Iron and Steel in Ancient China (E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1993). This book, and more recent research in China supersede this paper. As a summary for the interested nonspecialist, it has a place, but without any reference to the last 12 years’ research, it has no wider impact.

The appendix translating a Russian summary of the original conference shows what might have been if it had been possible to assemble a full set of papers. For this reviewer a variety of papers on the Caucasus and on Central Asia are sadly missed. These are areas of which we know little, but which had a large impact on metallurgical history. As to whether the remaining papers make a worthwhile whole, this reviewer must express his doubts. Certainly there are good things, although possibly not enough. However, the volume, with the exception mentioned in the previous paragraph, does fulfill one of the functions expected of such productions, and that is the quality of the bibliography attached to each paper.


*Reviewed by Lynne A. Schepartz, University of Cincinnati*
how many have more than a passing familiarity with South Asia? With the publication of this work, they can no longer excuse their ignorance.

In the preface to this impressive encyclopedic work, Kennedy writes that he is examining the established hypotheses regarding Asian prehistory and population history. Most notably, these are the view that Asia is the cradle of humanity (especially topical now as Chinese researchers reassert claims for the earliest Asian hominid sites); the assignment of different stone tool technologies to specific "races" with ties to living populations; the idea that the origins of the Bronze Age Harappans can be traced to Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent; and the notion that a sweeping movement of Indo-European-speaking Aryans coincided with, and probably caused, the decline of Harappan civilization. Underlying all of these ideas is the view that cultural advances and events in South Asia ultimately had their roots elsewhere—and primarily to the west. South Asia was merely the cauldron where diverse peoples and traditions met, clashed, and mingled.

Kennedy is one of the leading palaeoanthropologist/skeletal biologists working in South Asia today, with a research record spanning almost 40 years. With expertise ranging from the early pongids to modern populations, he is eminently qualified to synthesize the palaeoanthropology of the region. The book is strongest where he steps back from the factual coverage and provides his own views on the issues. This is especially true in the latter sections dealing with food-producing populations and the Aryan question.

God-Apes and Fossil Men's organization is straightforward and largely chronological. Chapter 1 provides a useful geographical introduction. Chapters 2–4 examine the development of prehistoric, evolutionary, and biological studies in Europe and how those frameworks were imposed on South Asia. While an understanding of these interactions is important, this portion of the book could have been shorter and better integrated. Chapter 5 covers the god-apes of the title: the Rama-, Siva-, Brahma-, and other -pithecines. Kennedy provides a clear discussion of their complex and fluid taxonomy and explains how they weathered the changes in hominid origins research. Only three illustrations are provided, and one of these (Fig. 22) needs an anatomically descriptive caption. More photographs would have enhanced this chapter.

The remaining portions of the book detail the human occupation of the region. Geological, archaeological, and faunal information is given first, followed by separate chapters on the human remains, for the earlier time periods. This arrangement has some minor disadvantages because the provenance and burial context are either repeated or given separately from the morphological descriptions.

The discussion of the earliest South Asian sites (Chapters 6–8) highlights how little we know from this vast area bridging Africa, Europe, and eastern Asia! While the Potwar Plateau is yielding evidence for some of the earliest stone tool traditions outside Africa, only the Narmada calvaria emerges as a well-documented premodern fossil find. The possibility of the earliest anatomically modern South Asian Homo sapiens coming from sites on Sri Lanka (c. 25–35,000 B.P.) is intriguing but difficult to evaluate without photographs and a more critical examination of the dates and the contexts of the discoveries.

The archaeological and human skeletal records expand exponentially for the later time periods, and the richness of South Asian adaptations is apparent. Chapters 9–11 cover the Holocene hunter-gatherer evidence, and Chapters 12 and 13 describe early farmers and pastoralists. Kennedy rightly highlights the diversity of synchronous developments across the subcontinent, in contrast to earlier accounts that emphasized the role of migration and broad-ranging cultural systems. His thorough examination of the biological and archaeological records reveals little evidence of population replacement, warfare, or aggression. Instead, we are provided a picture of populations who adapted a wide range of technological and economic components to meet the demands of their localized environments. Hence simple concepts like 'Mesolithic,' 'Neolithic,' and 'Iron Age' are
shown to be inadequate when describing South Asia.

The heterogeneous Harappans are presented in Chapters 14–15. Skeletal and dental analyses confirm their biological origins in the earlier populations of the northwestern portion of the subcontinent and their continuity with later peoples, including the ‘problematic’ post-Harappan cemetery H. No major role for population replacement or migration from Southwest Asia is substantiated. Accordingly, the role of Aryan marauders as destroyers of Harappan civilization is firmly discounted and relegated to the realm of myth. The diversity of the megalith builders, and their lack of direct links with particular historic and extant ‘tribal’ groups, is the subject of Chapter 16.

Questions of race, ethnicity, and linguistic identity are given serious attention by South Asian researchers. Are the roots of today’s socially stratified cultures to be found in the past (Chapter 17)? Can Indo-European roots in South Asia be traced as proposed by archaeologists (such as the Allchins and Renfrew) or genetic researchers (Cavalli-Sforza)? Kennedy finds little or no support for these arguments in the skeletal and dental evidence.

In sum, *God-Apes and Fossil Men* has an incredibly broad scope covering geography, geology, ecology, prehistory, protohistory, primate and human paleontology, skeletal biology, human variation, genetics, and linguistics. The details are all there, as are the basics and the history behind the discoveries. The book is not intended for a general audience as it contains much specialized terminology. Readers, depending on their backgrounds, may find that they need to look up certain geological (often local South Asian) or osteological terms. It is relatively free of errors for a work of its length. One notable exception is that Jericho is mistakenly located in Jordan (the Palestinian Authority, Palestine, or the West Bank are proper terms for its location).

Kennedy has put his heart, soul, and years of experience into this work, and all those with interests in the development of South Asian technologies and cultures are indebted to him for writing it. There is much to learn.


*Reviewed by J. Stephen Athens, International Archaeological Research Institute, Inc., Honolulu, HI*

As suggested by its title, this nicely produced book presents a compilation of knowledge concerning the prehistory and early contact history of the indigenous inhabitants of the Northern Mariana Islands, a region including all of the islands of the archipelago except Guam (the political designation for this area is the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, or CNMI). Given the nature of the subject and the fact that the book continually refers to Guam, the largest of the Mariana Islands, it is hard to understand why this island was not more directly represented in the book. Nevertheless, such a comprehensive treatment of ancient Chamorro culture, as the indigenous people are called, is long overdue given advances in archaeological and historical knowledge since Alexander Spoehr’s extensive work in the 1950s. Although written with primarily a popular readership in mind, the engaging
and clear writing style of Russell and his ability to integrate the subjects of prehistory and history so well will make this book a useful resource for the professional archaeologist and historian. Extensive notes following each chapter add to its academic value, along with its bibliography. One of the nice features of the book is that in subtle ways it does much to provide the public with an appreciation of the contribution of the CNMI and Guam historic preservation programs to the expansion of our knowledge about Mariana prehistory since the time of Alexander Spoehr, and later, Fred Reinman, who worked in Guam during the mid-1960s. Perhaps because it is primarily oriented toward the nonprofessional, Russell did not stint on figures; the book is profusely illustrated with photographs, maps, and drawings, many of which are from historical sources. This greatly adds to our appreciation and understanding of Chamorro culture, besides giving us a "feel" for what the archaeology is like.

Following a Forward by historian Francis Hezel, who introduces the volume, a Preface by the author that briefly recounts his introduction to Chamorro history and prehistory besides presenting an explanation of the book's organization along with acknowledgments to those who have helped, the Introduction succinctly orients the reader both geographically and environmentally. This sets the stage for Chapter I, which recounts the main characters—historic and modern—who have provided us with so much information about Chamorro culture. In doing so, Russell is also given a chance to briefly introduce the main outlines of Chamorro culture history to his readers. It is a clever way to humanize what in less capable hands often becomes a dry and dull presentation of facts. We also gain an appreciation right from the start of the main problems of Chamorro culture history and the difficulties faced by the various explorers, religious people, adventurers, civil servants, historians, and archaeologists who have sought to provide information. Russell is careful that the reader understands the historical and social context of those offering observations and information, something he does throughout the book (especially Chapter IV, which concerns the historical period).

Chapters II and III constitute the heart of the book, discussing archaeological findings and the chronological sequence (Chapter II), and also an ethnography of Chamorro culture as reconstructed from archaeology and ethnohistory (Chapter III). Russell's discussion of the Austronesian origins of Chamorro culture is particularly useful in that it helps us to understand the background to the colonizing of the Mariana Islands and some of the basic characteristics of Chamorro culture (language, subsistence, pottery), besides suggesting a possible origin for the earliest settlers (island Southeast Asia, possibly the Philippines).

Russell also does a good job indicating the interpretive difficulties faced by archaeologists, and conveying to the reader that there are still a number of uncertainties regarding our understanding of the past. Perhaps the main example of this concerns how to understand the signature symbol of Chamorro culture, the parallel latte stone uprights with capstones. With some justification from the historical literature, they are often considered to be pillars on which elevated houses were constructed. Although it is probably likely, as Michael Graves has suggested, that the latte houses were markers of social rank since there is a clear pattern in size and height of these structures, it is apparent that all Chamorro could not have lived in houses on top of latte as there are far too few of them. However, archaeology has thus far been largely silent on the possible existence of other habitation structures. An alternative view of latte, first put forth by Rosalind Hunter-Anderson, is that they may have served as highly visible symbols on the landscape to legitimize corporate land claims (i.e., territorial markers) of lineages. The usual presence of many burials around these sites may be related to just such a function. The notion that latte size and height differences may symbolize lineage rank could also be incorporated into such a model, or that their original construction was, in fact, for houses of ranked individuals, but that through time these locations were preserved and held
sacred by lineages as political-territorial symbols.

Chapter IV is an immensely interesting account of the initial period of Western contact with Chamorro society, beginning with Magellan’s discovery of the Mariana Islands on 6 March 1521 and his subsequent brief but unpleasant stop in Guam for a few days. As Russell notes, the Chamorro perspective of this first encounter, now lost to history, would undoubtedly be quite different from that presented by the Spanish. Despite the brief yearly Spanish galleon visits to the Mariana Islands to replenish water and food supplies on their passage between Acapulco and Manila, there was apparently very little change in Chamorro society until 1668, which was when Father Diego Luis de Sanvitores began his zealous missionizing efforts in Guam, aided by Spanish colonial authority and policies of subjugation. Although traditional Chamorro culture lingered on for a few more decades and there were episodes of strong and sometimes relatively protracted resistance, 1668 was clearly the beginning of what proved to be an avowed Spanish determination to destroy Chamorro culture. As Russell points out, the mission policy of reducción (resettlement into mission villages) was a blow from which Chamorro culture could not recover, though Spanish arms were obviously a decisive factor as well.

Only a few minor errors mar an otherwise stellar presentation. Pacific archaeologists will wince upon reading that Lapita culture originated in Melanesia at 2000 B.C. (the accepted date is about 1500 B.C.). Not as bad, but still probably disturbing to some archaeologists will be Russell’s reference to archaeological evidence for initial settlement of the Mariana Islands around 1800 B.C., rather than the commonly accepted and better supported date of 1500 B.C. (though palaeoenvironmental evidence, not available when Russell was writing, now suggests initial colonization around 2350–2550 B.C., or 4300 to 4500 cal. B.P.). Russell also mistakenly refers to the Spanish word, alahas, as a Chamorro word for jewelry (spelled alhajas in Spanish), which perhaps nicely illustrates the not unsurprising pervasiveness of Spanish in modern Chamorro language. Finally, most archaeologists will immediately note that the bivalve called a tellin in an illustration actually pertains to the Anadara genus. These are minor distractions, however, for a book that should be on every Micronesianist shelf, and seriously considered by those otherwise generally interested in Pacific history and prehistory.


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In Exalted Sits the Chief, Cordy strives “to form an overview of the history of Hawai‘i Island prior to its unification by Kamehameha in 1792” by “blending archaeology, oral history, and history” (pp. vii, 2). Cordy uses these domains in an additive, descriptive fashion but does not analyze them cohesively to produce new landmark interpretations.

Cordy’s opening chapter on c. 1795 Hawai‘i Island geography is a useful reference including particulars expected in more specific regional studies. Excellent maps play strong supporting roles here and throughout the book.

Chapter 2, which describes Hawaiian society during Kamehameha’s rule, balances generalizations of the society with the
diversity of Hawai'i Island's geopolitical regions. Cordy skillfully employs historical and archaeological records to substantiate many of his depictions. However, missing among the representations are insights revealing the core traits underlying Hawaiian society, exemplified by Cordy's cursory discussion of the relationship between Hawaiians and their deities—a crucial topic for understanding Hawaiian chiefly life. Also begging greater consideration are debatable stances Cordy adopts. He skirts Stannard's (1989) 800,000–1,000,000 1778 archipelago population estimate and, without explanation, uses 300,000 (p. 49). Cordy also casts doubt on whether labor specialization generally occurred outside "a high chief's or the ruler's court" (p. 54), in opposition to authoritative sources (e.g., Goldman 1970: 494; Kamakau 1992: 19; Malo 1996: 172, 179) and absent justification. He further contends that the extended family or 'ohana, as described by Handy and Pukui (1972), existed nowhere in Hawai'i in the late 1700s (p. 53), again without adequate rationale. Such incomplete scholarship is also apparent in this chapter and elsewhere in the form of numerous editorial oversights.

Closing the background section, Cordy evaluates in Chapter 3 the strengths and weaknesses of his sources. Although he offers appropriate cautions about firsthand accounts and oral traditions, his assessment of Hawai'i Island archaeology is insufficient. He ignores the incomplete and skewed record resulting in part from widespread commercial sugar production and recent decades of contract archaeology focusing on leeward environments—critical issues for an islandwide research scope.

Also disregarded in Chapter 3 are obstacles involved in linking chiefs in oral traditions to sites not referenced in those traditions. The problems arise from the wide temporal range of radiocarbon dates for sites (when present) and the rough calendrical approximation of the reigns of rulers derived by assigning an arbitrary number of years to each generation in the chiefly genealogies. Whether described sites were used before, during, or after a given ruler's reign remains unclear, thus limiting Cordy's ability to infer relationships among variables in the oral traditions and the archaeological record.

In some respects such constraints proved irrelevant to Cordy in his largest set of chapters, wherein he describes Hawai'i Island's history using the temporal flow in the oral traditions, for here he unfortunately presents the archaeological record and oral traditions as largely separate realms. Cordy summarizes the oral traditions, weaving in segments describing archaeological sites that are organized geographically (e.g., we learn of the archaeology of Waipi'o in the section on Liloa, of Hōnaunau in the portion involving Keaweikekahiali'iokamoku). In such extended sidebars, Cordy often introduces information about eras beyond the estimated reign of a given focal ruler, which might have been better placed with discussions of other chiefs and times. When Cordy occasionally analyzes the archaeological and traditional records in concert, the difficulties of temporally correlating the data remain unresolved, creating questions regarding which factors in his reconstructions were indeed causes and which were effects.

Regardless of Cordy's primarily descriptive and somewhat disjoint approach, his archaeological and historical portraits interspersed throughout the oral traditions add dimension to those traditions and are valuable synthetic summaries. Moreover, incorporated in this patchwork are gems of information that will be new to many researchers—evidence of Cordy's facility with Hawai'i Island's archaeology, history, and oral traditions.


Cordy similarly excludes or underutilizes appropriate oral traditions. However, there
are greater shortcomings in his interpretations of them. For instance, he argues that Hawai‘i was settled in a single episode by "one or a few canoes" and that "most researchers today ... lean toward the view that the initial settlers ... never returned to their homeland" (pp. 113, 174–182). (In fact, most researchers do not share Cordy’s beliefs.) In holding steadfast to his earlier dictum (see Cordy 1974:97), Cordy dismisses the many voyages recounted in the oral traditions (and other pertinent data) and unconvincingly proposes that the voyages were actually interisland ones and that the foreign place-names mentioned were mere embellishments (pp. 179–180).

By not considering the full explanatory potential of oral traditions, Cordy misses opportunities to develop conclusions from them. For example, he fails to recognize the significant political changes associated with Pili, the administrative innovations of ‘Umi, the reasons for Kalani‘ōpu‘u’s multiple assaults on Maui, and most importantly the influences of the various islands’ histories on one another (discussed in Abad 2000).

Similarly, Cordy’s comments on chiefly genealogies are at times lacking. In a particularly egregious case, Cordy (p. 279) portrays Keawema‘uhili as belonging to Alapa‘i’s “junior lines” and says Alapa‘i arranged (to Alapa‘i’s advantage) to have Keawema‘uhili wed to Ululani, an ‘ī lineage chiefess (points not supported by Cordy’s footnote). Rather, the union occurred “for reasons now unknown” (Fornander 1996:309, fn. 1). Further, Keawema‘uhili did not descend from any lineage of Alapa‘i (head of Kohala’s Mahi family). Keawema‘uhili descended from ʻI (of Hilo) and Keaweikekahiali‘iokamoku (of Kona). As such, Keawema‘uhili’s marriage to Ululani threatened rather than helped Alapa‘i, for it joined the possible heirs of the lineages which were his potential opponents.

In the end, Exalted Sits the Chief will disappoint those expecting a full, consistently accurate rendering of Hawai‘i Island oral traditions and those seeking new insight from a combined analysis of multiple lines of evidence regarding Hawai‘i Island society evolved as it did. Nonetheless, Cordy’s work will certainly be appreciated for its useful descriptive summaries of regions, topics, and time periods.

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