BOOK REVIEW


reviewed by

James M. Vincent
Northern Marianas College

The ever-productive Micronesian Area Resource Center offers these two collections of nineteenth Century primary sources, attractively presented, to historians and the general reader interested in Marianas history.

The Chronicle of the Mariana Islands, a bilingual English-Spanish document collection, grants the reader a simultaneous insider-outsider view of Guam during the latter half of the nineteenth Century, for the main author of these annals, Father Aniceto, was a cosmopolitan fluent in English and Chamorro and well aware of the importance of the events in Apra Harbor both to world events and to the local community. The Chronicle lists visits of Spanish and foreign vessels along with commentaries on their officers and crews: in 1870, the Russian warship Almar; in 1876, the German warship Hertha; etc. But the most significant ship arrival was that of the American schooner Frost arriving from Manila in 1856 carrying smallpox; the resulting epidemic killed 3,463 out of Guam’s total population of 8,368.

The Marianas, although the most remote of Spain’s remaining colonies, still were influenced by events, both domestic and foreign, reflecting the metropole’s decline as a world power. Spanish political exiles, consisting of middle-class carlistas and republicanos, begin to arrive after 1870. And large numbers of deportados from the Philippines filled Agaña’s prison following the Cavite revolt of 1872. The end of over 200 years of Spanish rule in the Marianas occurred almost as a farce. When the American cruiser Charleston entered Apra Harbor in 1898 firing its three-inch guns at Fort Santa Cruz, the incident was interpreted as courtesy salute by the harbor authorities who, being without cable connections, were unaware of the beginnings of the Spanish-American War.
The *Memorias* present reports to Madrid by two governors and one naval officer. The documents contain a plethora of statistics on population, market prices, agricultural produce, and budget allotments. As such, they offer the historian with some useful hard data. Of more interest to the general reader are the comments on some perennial problems of the Marianas: insufficient population to support industry, lack of agricultural development, meager and unsanitary water supplies, high infant mortality rates, etc. The modern observer familiar with the Marianas cannot help but feel a sense of *déjà vu* upon reading this litany of complaints.

The book concludes with a prescient “Plan for the Reorganization of the General Government of the Mariana and Caroline Islands” suggesting sensible administrative measures for a future Spanish Micronesia only four years before the colony’s demise. Many of these suggestions would later be implemented by future Japanese and American colonial administrators.