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### CULTURAL HERITAGE AND COMMUNITIES IN PALAU

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The increase of population including Palauans and foreigners in the Republic of Palau is a threat to the protection and preservation of historic properties that Palau Historic Preservation has to address. The population increases is competing with land use that hold the historic properties. Increase of foreign contact and ideals are undermining the cultural sensitivity that stimulate Palauans, the stakeholders of the historic properties to consider the properties as obstacles or nuisance that have to be got rid of. Palau Historic Preservation Office is struggling to alleviate this threat with small staff and funding

For this paper I would like to concentrate on threats or a challenges that Palau Historic Preservation office is facing in protection and preservation of Palau cultural heritage. Increase in human population is an increase in developments that demand more land space threatening cultural landscapes that hold historic properties. Palau population is increasing every year that includes both Palauans and foreigners. With an increase of population is an increase of foreign contact, interaction and ideas that are threatening Palau culture and traditions that stimulate sensitivity to Palauan culture and historic properties promoting the stakeholders of the historic properties to regard historic properties as obstacles to developments or nuisance that have to be rid off.

#### **GEOGRAPHY OF PALAU**

Republic of Palau is the western most island ground in Micronesia located approximately 7 degrees north of the equator (Fig. 1). Palau archipelago contains approximately 350 high and low islands. The main archipelago consist of a chain of islands that stretch 160 kilometers

in northwest to southeast direction and 25 kilometers at its widest. Most of the islands are encompassed in a barrier reef except for Kayangel islands to the north and Angaur and Southwest Island group to the south. The Southwest Island group is located approximately 389 kilometers south of the main archipelago. The inhabited islands of Palau included from north to south: Kayangel, Babeldaob, Koror, Ngerkebesang, Meyuns, Peleliu, Angaur and the Southwest Island group. The Southwest Islands are made of two states namely Hatohobei and Sonsorol state.

Palau islands are of several geological formations including volcanic, atoll and raised coral island and high limestone (Snyder et al 1990). Babeldaob is the largest island with an approximate area of 363 square kilometers that amount for about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of total land area of Palau. It is a volcanic island that reaches an elevation of 242 meters above sea level. Peleliu, Angaur and parts of Koror are raised limestone islands. Kayangel is the only true atoll. The Southwest islands are raised coral islands that have elevations of a few meters above sea level.

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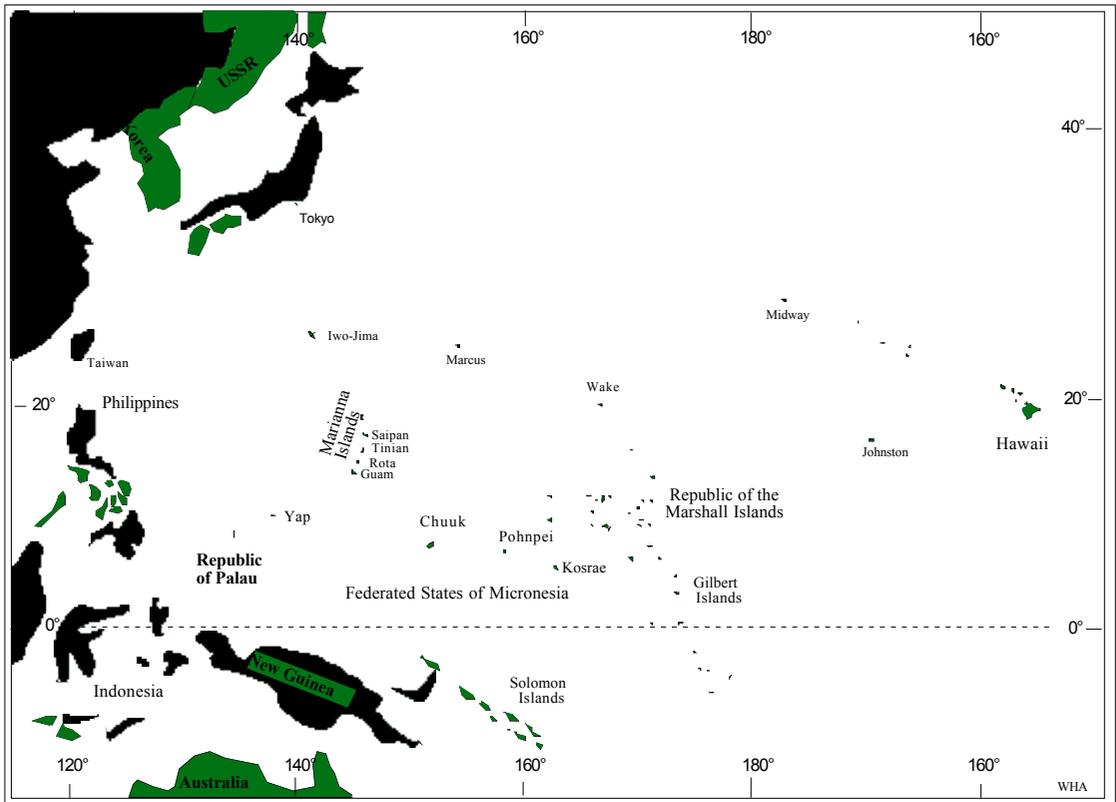


Figure 1. Map of the Pacific Ocean showing the location of the Palau islands.

### CLIMATE AND VEGETATION

Palau has a maritime climate characterized by little seasonal variation. The mean annual temperature is 27 degrees Celsius and mean annual rainfall of 3,700 mm. The weather of Palau is divided into dry and wet seasons. The dry season is from February to April and wet season is from July to December.

Babeldaob Island consists generally of rolling uplands and deep valleys covered with savannas and thick primary growth forests. Dense mangroves cover most of the coastline. The limestone islands vary in elevations from a few meters above sea level to more than 200 meters in height. Atoll and coral raised platforms have elevations of a few meters above sea level. These are covered with dense stands of mixed tropical forest.

### PREHISTORY OF PALAU

Archaeological evidence suggest that Palau was settled as early as 1520-1260 BC (Liston 2005).

Another early radiocarbon date of 1000-830 BC was collected at a cave site in Chelechol ra Orrak rock island (Fitzpatrick 2002; 2003, Liston 2005). Two dominant archaeological type-sites included step-terraces and traditional villages. Terraces included massive earth sculpting using cut and fill techniques to create step-terraces with associated features such as crowns, ditches, and brims (Osborne 1966; Lucking 1984; Liston 1999; Phears 2004). Terraces began to appear around 400 BC and ceased around AD 1200 (Liston 1999; Phears 2004). Based on different architectural form, it was speculate that some terraces were for defense purpose, agriculture, settlement and religion purpose (Figure 3).

Traditional villages contain different types of stone platforms such as *odesongel* (clan's burial site) and *ilind* (resting stone platform), stone paths, docks, and paved bathing pools (Osborn 1966; Snyder, D. and B.M. Butler 1990; Liston 1999). Figure 2 is a map of

Ngimis traditional village showing a typical traditional village layout.

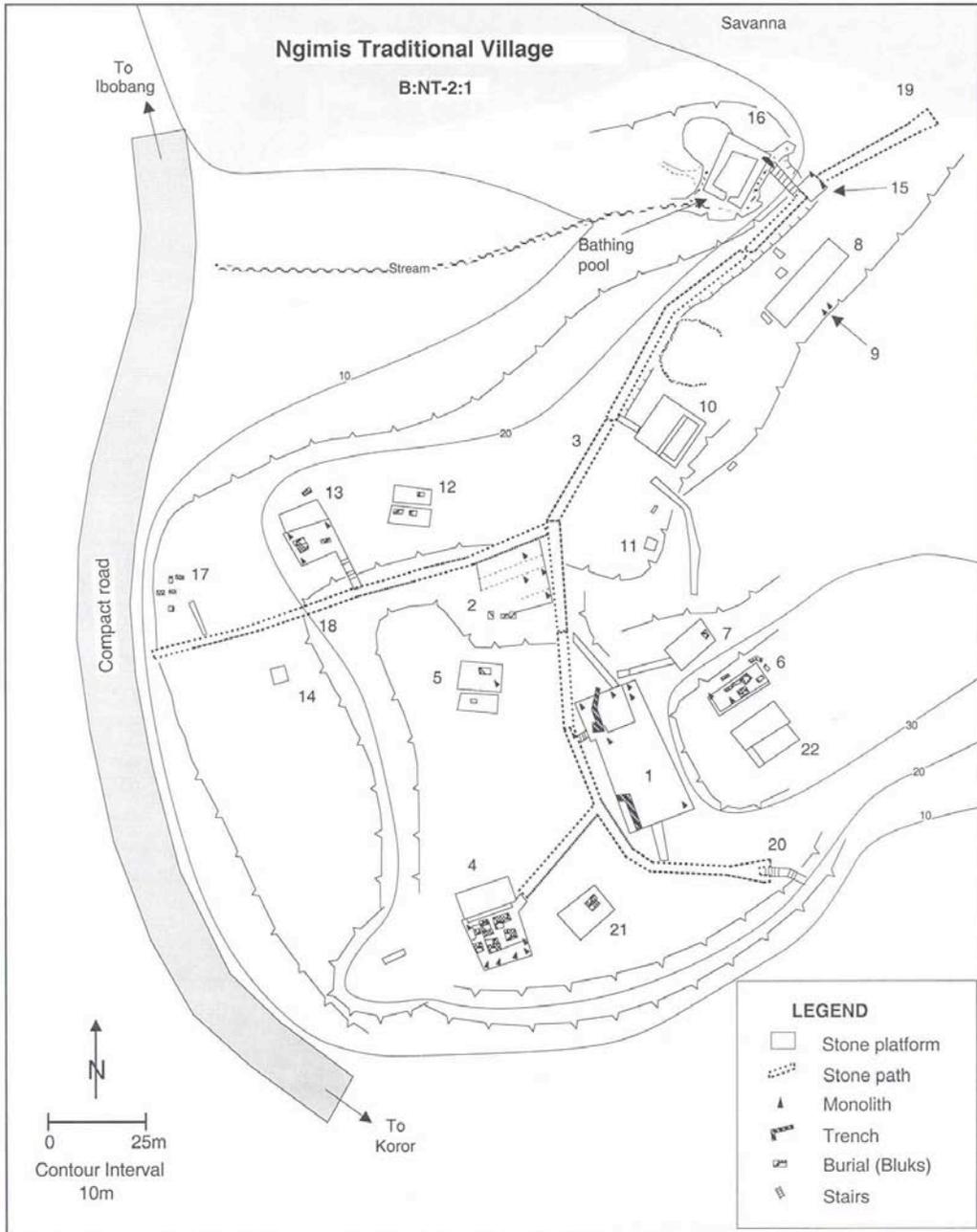


Figure 2. Map of Ngimis traditional village (After Wickler et al. 1997)

Traditional village appeared around 1200 AD and continued up to the present. First comprehensive documentation of Palau culture was an account of Antelope galleon wreck at Ulong Island in Palau in 1783 (Keate1793)

showing that Palauans have well-developed social structure and living in traditional villages.

**PALAU CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Palau archaeological resources are tangible resources that anchor us to Palau islands and production of our unique culture. Archaeologi-

cal features such as *odesongel* is our birthright left by our ancestors to proclaim ourselves as Palauans, control over our land and water, gives us privilege under our constitution. Our archaeological resources are testament of our ancestors who have shaped our land and have left us legacy that has brought us to where we are today. These are being threatened and will be gone if we don't take steps now to preserve them.



Figure 3. Terrace system in Aimeliik state

**DEVELOPMENTS**

Under the authority of Historical and Preservation Act (PNC Title 19, Chapter 1) Bureau of Arts and Culture also known as Palau Historic Preservation Office has a regulation that requires any earthmoving in Palau to file an application for a historic clearance in our office and allow our office to review and comment on the undertaking before its implementation. Over the years there has been an increase of developments (Table 1). Developments included residential houses, capital improvement projects such as waterlines, sewer lines and roads. The pie charts below show the percentage of different types of developments (Fig. 3). Areas not previously occupied are now opened to accommodate this increase.

Table 1 Number of Historic Clearance issued

Year	Number of Historic Clearance
1995	43
2000	142
2005	283

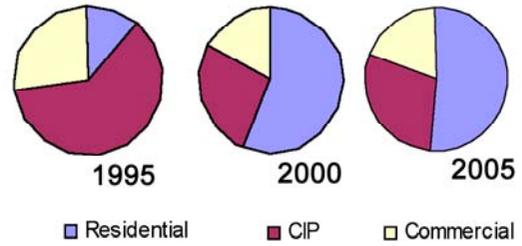


Figure 3. Pie charts of different developments in Palau through the years (in % of permits)

The increase in developments is a reflection of an increase of human population that included both Palauans and foreigners (Palau Office of Planning and Statistics). This trend will continue and with the anticipated completion of the Compact Road around Babeldaob Island at the end of 2006, many of the abandoned sites including terraces and traditional villages will be accessible for developments.

Table 2 Number of human population in Palau

Year	Palauan	Foreign	Total
1995	12,508	4,717	17,225
2000	13,364	5,765	19,129
2005	14,438	5,467	19,905

Palau Historic Preservation Office is anticipating this increase of developments in Babeldaob, and started in 1997 to identify all historic properties in Palau (Olsudong et al. 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2003a, 2004). Until now approximately one-fourth of Babeldaob total land area has been surveyed (Fig. 4).

Palau Historic Preservation is under staffed with limited budget and is facing a massive undertaking of documenting historic properties in Palau. It is estimated that a reconnaissance level survey would take up to year 2030 to complete the whole survey of Babeldaob Island only. Under Palau Historic Preservation Act, historic properties in land own or controlled by the National Government are governed by Palau Historic Preservation Office (PHPO) and properties listed in the Palau Register of Historic Places. States have control over their historic properties in states' lands while landowners have control over historic proper-

ties in their land. During the course of the PHPO Preservation it was found that most of

the properties are in privately own land.

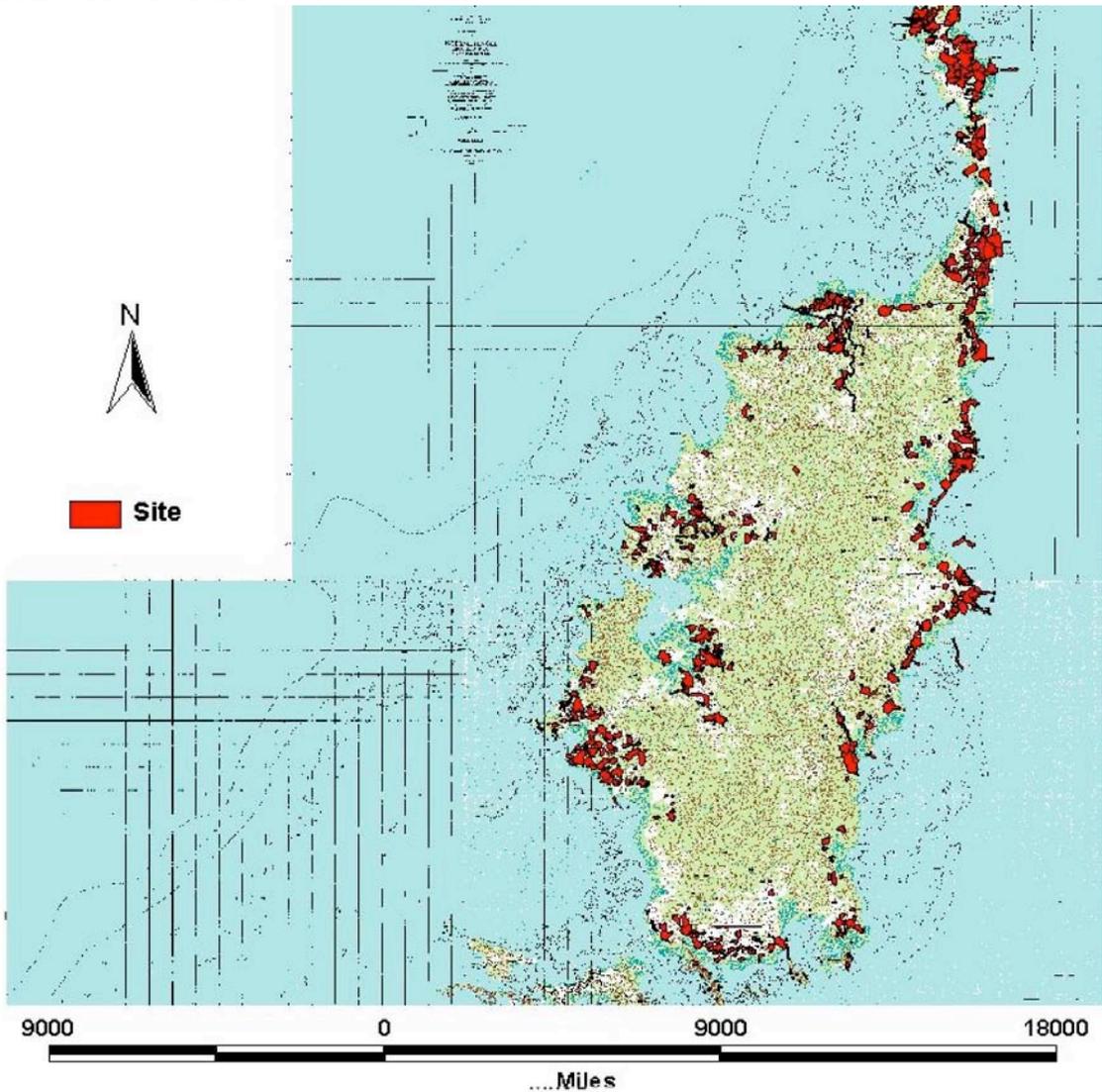


Figure 4. Map of Babeldaob showing identified historic properties

PHPO has managed to protect some of the historic properties from destruction because of the communities intervention and since many of the properties are in privately own land the communities have to be play a much bigger role in the preservation and protection program. Under our constitution only Palauans can own land. In order to eliminate or alleviate the threat pose by population increase would be for communities to assist in the protection of sites. This is easier said than done. Just like most of the things in live communities have to

have desire to want to protect the historical and cultural resources and PHPO has to campaign communities to get their support. However, with limited resources including funding and staff this is difficult.

Method and dissemination of right information to the communities is very important. Universities can be of tremendous assistance in providing valuable information and assistance that Preservation office can use in its campaign. A good example is study of Yapese quarry sites on Rock islands in Airai and Koror

state by Dr. Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick 2001 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2003a, 2003b) resulted from more than five (5) years of study. As a result of his study three (3) of the Yapese sites have been entered into the Palau Register of Historic Places with support from both states. During Dr. Fitzpatrick's study in Palau he not only worked with our office, but with the people of Oreor and Airai states and in the process of this working relationships, the chiefs and the state governments of these two states have become very protective of their Yapese quarry sites because they have learned of their scientific values and their potential tourist economic to the states.



Figure 5 Stone money at Uet el Daob me a Uet el Beluu Yapese quarry site, Airai State

Another former student was Dr. Sarah Phear who did her PhD. dissertation on Palau's terraces (Phear 2004). She concentrated on terraces in Babeldaob where significant information has been collected regarding Palau prehistory. With this information, Palau Register of Historic Places is in the process of nominating the sites where Dr. Phear worked, into the Palau Register of Historic Places.

#### LAWS AND REGULATIONS

There are laws and regulations protecting historic properties that the public does not have knowledge of or limited. Dissemination of the information by the other people other than PHPO have created a negative image of the office. However, because of PHPO effort through symposium, presenta-

tions and presence in the communities, there has been some positive response from the communities such as the stone path in Melekeok traditional village, Melekeok state. The stone path is part of the intact traditional village of Melekeok traditional ((Liston J. 1996; Olsudong *et al* 2004). A concerned citizen saw that the state project was encroaching a stone path listed in the Palau Register of Historic Places and informed the PHPO (Photo. 3). PHPO consulted the state government (the stakeholder of the stone path) and an agreement was reached where the state would not destroy the stone path and restore segment of the stone path that has deteriorated.

Because of PHPO's response to the public and presence in the communities, people are becoming more aware of its efforts and the significance of the historic properties. People are calling or people coming to office to ask questions or comments on their proposed or existing projects or other issues relating to historic properties.



Figure 6. Construction of Melekeok state building with the stone path to the left

#### COMMUNITY OUTREACH

One of the issues often spoken by elders is a lack of knowledge of Palau culture among the young people particularly students. This is because of a lack of interaction and exposure to historic properties. Also exposure of foreign

ideas and ideal is shifting the interest of the communities away from the cultural and historic heritage. PHPO has been documenting the historic properties in Palau and sending the reports to schools and colleges. However, this has little impact to the communities. Seeing, listening and interacting with the actual sites have more impact and students and young people have to be exposed to them.

This was more evident during Ebiil Society Summer Camp in June 2005. Ebiil Society is a non-profit organization of Ngarchelong state established in 2004 to assist Ngarchelong state and the people of Ngarchelong to protect, manage and promote historical and natural resources of Ngarchelong state for the benefit and well being of the people of Ngarchelong and generations to come.



Photo 4. Stone platform with monoliths at Kukau el Bad site after clearing.

The participants of the camp were students, age between 9 and 16 from Ngarchelong state, those living in and outside of Ngarchelong. PHPO was involved with a one week camp where Ms. Maked Besebes, Assistant Ethnographer, stayed with students at Ollei chiefs' meetinghouse. This also involved the whole Ollei community where young men and women came together to support the camp by volunteering to teach the students how to prepare and cook traditional food, provide moral supports and went with students to visit sites.

The camp participants cleared of one of the historic properties listed in the Palau Register

of Historic Places called Kukau el Bad (Photo 4). Kukau el Bad contains a stone platform and several monoliths (Olsudong et al 1999, Hijikata 1995) that were heavily overgrown with thick vegetation. None of the students have seen the site.

Part of the day was a trip to identify traditional boundaries of the eight hamlets of Ngarchelong with Rteruich Katsusi Skang. The students and young men and women who were helping with the camp did not know these boundaries. The students were also asked to name their clans and their *odesongel*, (clan's traditional burial ground), and none of them knew what *odesongel* were or where they were located. Even some of the young men and women did not know the locations of their *odesongel*.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as small islands increasing population in limited landmass, PHPO has to work with local communities to gain their support in regards to protection and management of historic properties. PHPO should be responsible in collection of information and disseminating of information to public and to make programs where public will be interacting with the tangible resources. This is one of the best ways to instill an understanding and awareness of the significance of Palau cultural heritage. With an understanding comes a pride and cultural obligation to protect their own heritage. PHPO has to compete with outside influence such as foreign ideas and advertisements that glorify images that threaten Palau culture. Historic preservation offices have to be more aggressive in advertising and promoting its islands' cultural heritages. Wealth of information can be accessed through our elders, Internet, universities, and information in their offices. With effort, these are the tools can use to get communities' support in protecting their historic properties that occupies limited land area where there is a demand for development. Because only when communities are involved in protection and management of historic properties can they really be preserved and protected.

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