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Spain Voyages to the Marianas

In 1521, the CHamoru people would become the first in the vast Pacific region to interact with Western explorers. These explorers would set off from the shores of Spain with the goal to find a new passageway to the East Indies. Along their voyage, the expedition would find itself on the verge of death in the midst of the Pacific Ocean, ultimately saved due to a fateful encounter with an island civilization that inhabited the archipelago known today as the Mariana Islands.

In 2019, the Kumision I Estoriã-ta was created to act as ambassadors between Guam and Spain as the island prepares for the 500th year anniversary of this meeting. To commemorate the first circumnavigation voyage and honor the role the CHamoru people played, the Kumision I Estoriã-ta would work to bring this moment in history to the forefront through a series of celebrations and publications. This will include a traveling exhibition, highlighting the CHamoru perspective, to be showcased in the Senator Antonio M. Palomo Guam Museum and eventually in Spain as well.

While the implications of this encounter have been a point of debate for countless decades, what is certain though is that upon the arrival of these Spanish vessels on the shores of Guam in 1521, an undeniable relationship was forged between Spain and the CHamorus. This event, no matter how one chooses to view it, is an integral part of history. By retelling the story of this encounter from an islander centered historiography, we build upon global history by bringing to light our indigenous perspective and pay respect to *I Taotao Tãno Marianas* (the people of the Marianas).



Print originating from Gottfried's *Neue Welt und Americanische Historen*, 1631, depicting trade between CHamorus and the Spanish. Courtesy of Johann Ludwig Gottfried/Guam Public Library

To stay up to date with advancements in the 500 Year Commemoration and listen to committee discussions, check out the [Estoriã-Ta Commission's official Facebook page](#).

Here are entries found on Guampedia that you can read as we prepare to commemorate this historic encounter. [Ferdinand Magellan Trade Between Guam and Spain](#)

From the Desk of Guam's Historian

In this new series, "From the Desk of Guam's Historian," we will be featuring reflections written by the current historian at the Department of Parks and Recreation Historic Resources Division, Anthony "Malia" Ramirez. This will be the first of three reflections leading up to the official commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the first circumnavigation voyage in

March of this year. In this article, Malia shares with us how she uses her knowledge in oral history and CHamoru language to provide a unique perspective of the historic encounter between the CHamorus and Spanish explorers.

On March 6, 2021, *Las Islas Mariãnas* will mark the 500 year arrival of Ferdinand Magellan

and Juan Sebastian Elcano's historic expedition, as the first to circumnavigate the world. This visit to the Marianas is one of the most pivotal dates in our historical timeline. It was the beginning of *fanatahguiyan* (the winds of change).

As a CHamoru traditional scholar, I look at CHamoru oral histories relayed through the

Continued on page 1



Canoes arriving on the first day of the 12th Festival of the Pacific Arts in Guam. Photo copyright © Manny Crisostomo

CHamoru language: *finu'hâya*. The written accounts, especially of chronicler Antonio Pigafetta, describe the first CHamoru-Spanish encounter through the cultural lens of a *gilâgu*, a foreigner. I direct my research, however, through the cultural lens of the CHamoru experience, as perceived by the CHamoru *saina*, our elders.

A review of the CHamoru language helps provide an in depth analysis of this first encounter. I wonder about the first impressions of CHamorus when they saw the three Spanish *carracks* (merchant ships of that era) approaching. Did they have words or phrases to describe these *carracks*? Could they have called them *dângkulu na sâhyan tâsi* (large ocean vessels)? Magellan first named the islands *Las Islas de las Velas Latinas* (Islands of the Lateen Sails). He was impressed with the agility and technology of the CHamoru *galaidi* (proa). How would CHamorus describe the Spanish crew? Maybe they called them *man tautau gilâgu* (people who arrived from the eastern horizon)?

CHamorus had earlier *tulaika* (trade) contacts as there was active trading that Western Carolinians still use the reference *Guâhan*, not Guam. Their descriptions were preserved through CHamoru language as *gupalau*. Perhaps more significant is the use of the word *salâpi'* (money) which both CHamorus and the Western Carolinians use.

Perhaps one of the most

significant CHamoru words from the initial encounter was *luluk* (nail or metal). The CHamorus did not borrow the Spanish word for metal which was *clavos*. This word provides evidence that the CHamorus were cognizant of *luluk* but did not have it in abundance.

After more than 50 years I have learned that CHamoru language, especially significant CHamoru words, provided evidence of our past. The CHamorus of the past did not write down their history. They, however, preserved the past through the CHamoru language.

There is also what occurred after the misunderstanding of the encounter of *tulaika*. After the CHamorus removed objects from the *carracks*, Magellan retaliated and eventually called the islands *Islas de Ladrones* (Islands of Thieves). Did the CHamorus have a reference for the visiting Spanish expedition? Did the CHamorus call them *man sakki* (thieves) also? They did not reciprocate! *Sakki* is not a Spanish word.

Did the CHamorus have a word to describe the destruction or actions of the crew members when their dwellings were destroyed? Could the word have been *tailâyi* (insidious or evil)? The reference would have been a plural marker, *man tailayi* (Insidious, ungrateful or evil visitors)! *Tailâyi* is not a Spanish word.

In the summer of 2016, I was an official delegate to the 12th Festival of Pacific Arts held on *Guâhan*. As one person of the 500 delegation of

Guâhan artists, writers and canoe builders, we were required to attend the opening ceremony at the Paseo de Susana, a historic landmark of Hagåtña.

Arriving at the ceremonial site attended by over 4,000 representatives from 27 Pacific Island nations, we were situated adjacent to the *Ut* (Western Caroline canoe house). Immediately, I knew I was in the incorrect location. I knew I had to abandon the *Guâhan* delegation and view the *galaidi* situated near the reef of the Paseo de Susana. I had to see the *galaidi* to visualize what Magellan and Elcano experienced when they arrived at *Las Islas Marianas* 500 years ago! This was a visualization of a lifetime!

Walking out to the boulders at about 5 a.m., I saw the lanterns of each *galaidi* perhaps numbering 15. Mesmerized to almost a spiritual experience, I knew this was the initial sight of the Spanish *carracks*. Crew members were sick and weak after nearly 120 days of ocean voyaging, depleted of provisions! I could hear the Spanish words, *La Tierra! La Tierra! La Tierra* (Land! Land! Land!)! I sense the *lâgu* (tears) of the crew members! It was a pivotal timeline in *Las Islas Marianas* history and world history! *Hami I Man Islas Mariânas* (We are the Mariana Islands)!

Gi mina'âsi', la sangri yâma yan fanatahguiyan I ha'âni
(With gratitude, the blood calls the winds of change).

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Voices of Our Elders

They say that you don't really value something until it's gone. Well this year, the COVID-19 pandemic brought with it the fear and, for many of us, the reality of losing those closest to us. This global situation brought to the forefront a new sense of appreciation for life-long friends, family, and most especially, our elders, who were at high risk of developing advanced symptoms.

When we truly reflect upon our *mañaina*, we are reminded of the countless experiences, the many triumphs and tragedies that they endured, that brought them to where they are now. It was this pandemic that urged many of us to look at the lives of the oldest among us and value the stories they shared.

This past year, we were honored to receive two

reflections from local storytellers, [Peter Onedera](#) and Emily Sablan, to be adapted as new entries on Guampedia's website. They shared with us memories from their childhood that spoke about the richness of the island's history and strength of its culture. The following are excerpts from their reflections. *Click on their titles to read the full entries.*



A Toto Christmas, Circa 1964 By: Emily Sablan

In the 1960s, in our small village of [Toto](#), Christmas was a joyous time. As a youngster then, I wasn't aware that it had only been 20 years since the [war ended](#) and people's lives and homes were just beginning to rebuild from the devastation of the bombardment by the US forces in reclaiming the island from the Japanese and two devastating typhoons – Typhoon Lola in 1959 and [Typhoon Karen](#) in 1962.

Our entire predominantly Catholic village was involved in the preparation of the *belen* at the church, which overflowed into helping those having *nobenas* in their homes. By the second Sunday of Advent, the Holy Name men would begin building the platform for the Belen inside the church, the Boy Scouts and

Continued on page 4



Christmas was a special time for families on Guam in the 1960s. Photo courtesy of the Sablan Family of Agat.

Continued from page 3

young catechism boy students would be in charge of finding and gathering the *lumot* (moss), and the Christian Mothers and Sodality girls would make a plan for the flowers and ornaments. In our home, *Nâna* always had her godson David Materne assigned to get the *lumot*, the *galak feda'* and the *pi'ao* for her *belen*.

CHamoru Christmases are like no other. Part of the joy and meaning of the construction of the *belen* is the labor of gathering the usually all-natural materials, for that beautiful earthen scent of the moss, the fern, and the bamboo. I share

this story, as I know many readers who remember their part in Christmases past however small, but still memorable. I did carry on the traditional *Nobenan Niño* while living in the mainland (Alaska, Washington, and Georgia). The most hilarious of these was our *nobena* in Lacey, Washington when an uninvited nosy neighbor called the sheriff to report that there seems to be something cultish going on, as there had been people every night for the past four nights chanting, praying and singing with loud voices. What laughter we had being cult members!

CHamoru Duhendes

By: Peter R. Onedera

I've grown up with a tremendous fascination for "talk-story." I'm going to share a bit of folklore in the hope that the young ones will initiate discussions at home especially because stay-at-home situations, as we have throughout this pandemic, foster talking and sharing.

I believe in the *duhendes* and everything connected to them. Stories abounded in childhood and often I'd put myself in a trance just concocting tales of adventure and mischief. I consider the *duhendes* an important part of my culture. I learned about them when I'd massage my mother in the dead of night. While doing this, she'd regale me with stories of the *duhendes*.

She described them as little people, not any larger than the fingers of the hand, that of a child or even an adult. She said that they didn't speak a word, only

gibberish, and the only one who'd understand them was a child who was very active, tireless, energetic and loved to talk. The *duhendes* played. They'd be very active especially on rainy nights when the wind was still. They engaged in hide-and-seek, tag, pull hair among one another, swing on vines and slide down leaves of trees and shrubs dripping from the rain. They loved the rainstorm but any wind would blow about their fragile bodies and when it was windy they'd stay in the shadows of limbs, roots, and other vegetation until the wind stopped. Their presence was unpredictable and many sightings occurred and they were seen by people who were often caught off guard.



Depiction of duhendes from the children's book "The Duendes Hunter" by Vivian Lujan Bryan

By highlighting the voices of our elders, we give history a new meaning in our lives. By listening to these stories, we begin to view history as something more than just simple facts in a book, but rather, as complex events that were experienced by people who lived on our islands, just like us. As we enter this new year, we encourage all of you to reach out to the *mañaina* that you are blessed to still have in your lives. Listen to them and commit their stories to memory so that your kids can come to know and love the people responsible for making you the person you are today. If you would like to share these stories with us to have them published on our site, send us an email at guampedia@gmail.com, we would love to hear from the voices of our elders!