



Sea-Lanes of Antiquity

Canoe Voyaging in the Mariana Islands

Presenter: Eric Metzgar, Ph.D.
5th Marianas History Conference
Panel: Traditional Seafaring
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This presentation examines the ethnohistorical evidence of canoe voyaging in the Marianas archipelago by Chamorros and Carolinians.

Information regarding pre-European contact as well as Spanish era voyaging events between the islands is drawn from both historical records and ethnographic data.

The evidence supports the view that Chamorros were capable of voyaging throughout the Marianas chain and that Carolinians were voyaging in the Mariana Islands before the Spanish colonization of Guam in 1668.

Part 1

Chamorro Voyaging

What is the earliest evidence we have of canoes in the Mariana Islands?

The earliest evidence before European contact comes from archeological studies.

At the entrance to the Liyang Kalabera “Cave of Skulls” in Saipan,
there is a pictograph called “Man in Canoe.”



Photo by Hans Hornbostel

When the image is highlighted it is clear that the pictograph depicts a human figure in a canoe with upturned prows.

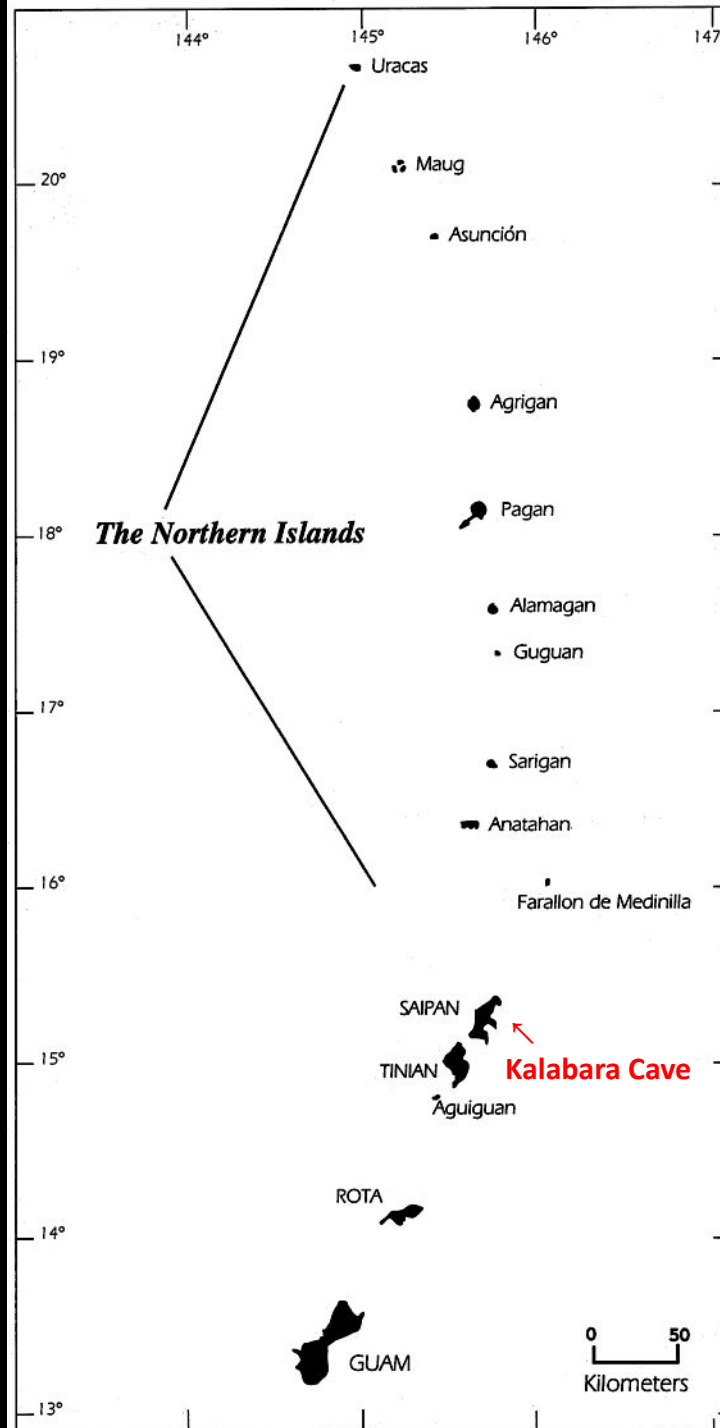


Archaeologists have determined that artifacts found in Kalabera cave indicate *latte* activities, which suggests that this image may have been created circa 1,000 AD.



Map of the Mariana Archipelago

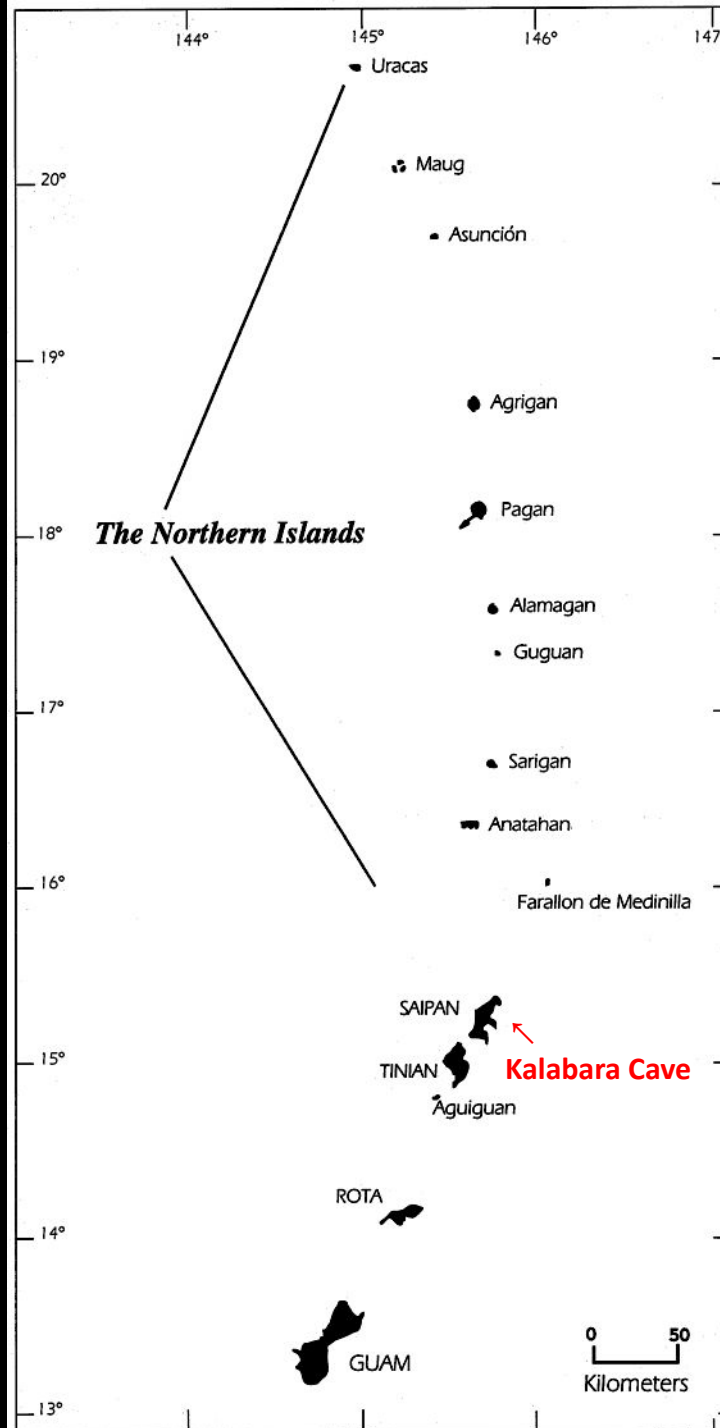
After Scott Russell, 1998. *Pacific Studies*, Vol. 21, No.4, p. 85.



Saipan, where the Kalabara Cave is located, was settled circa 1,500 BC along with Tinian, Rota, and Guam in the southern part of the Marianas chain — approximately 2,500 years before the “Man in Canoe” pictograph was made.

Map of the Mariana Archipelago

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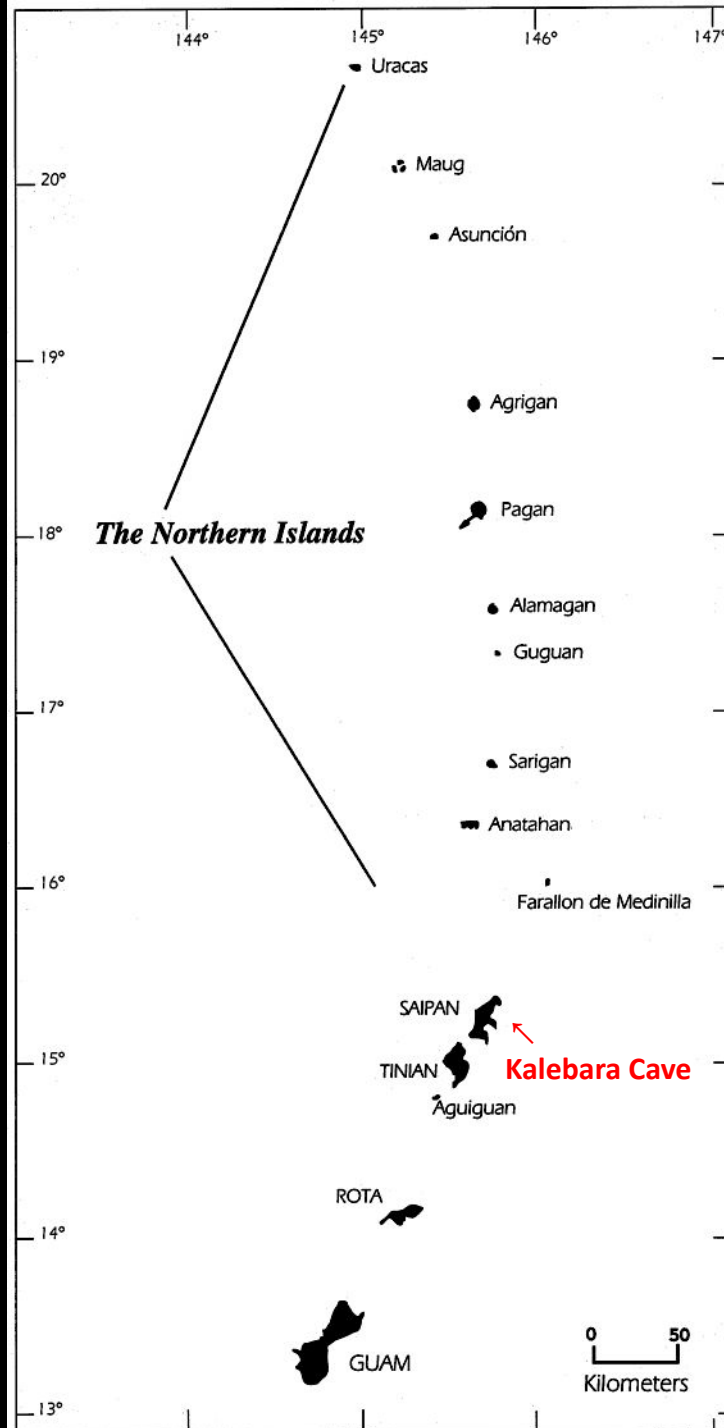
It is not clear when the Northern Islands were inhabited but current thinking is that they were settled much later than Saipan, Tinian, Rota, and Guam.

The earliest radiocarbon dates for Pagan Island suggest that The Northern Islands capable of supporting settlement were occupied by 1,300 AD — which is after the time that archeologists believe the making of the Kalabara canoe pictograph was created.

Map of the Mariana Archipelago

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What kind of watercraft were used to settle these islands?



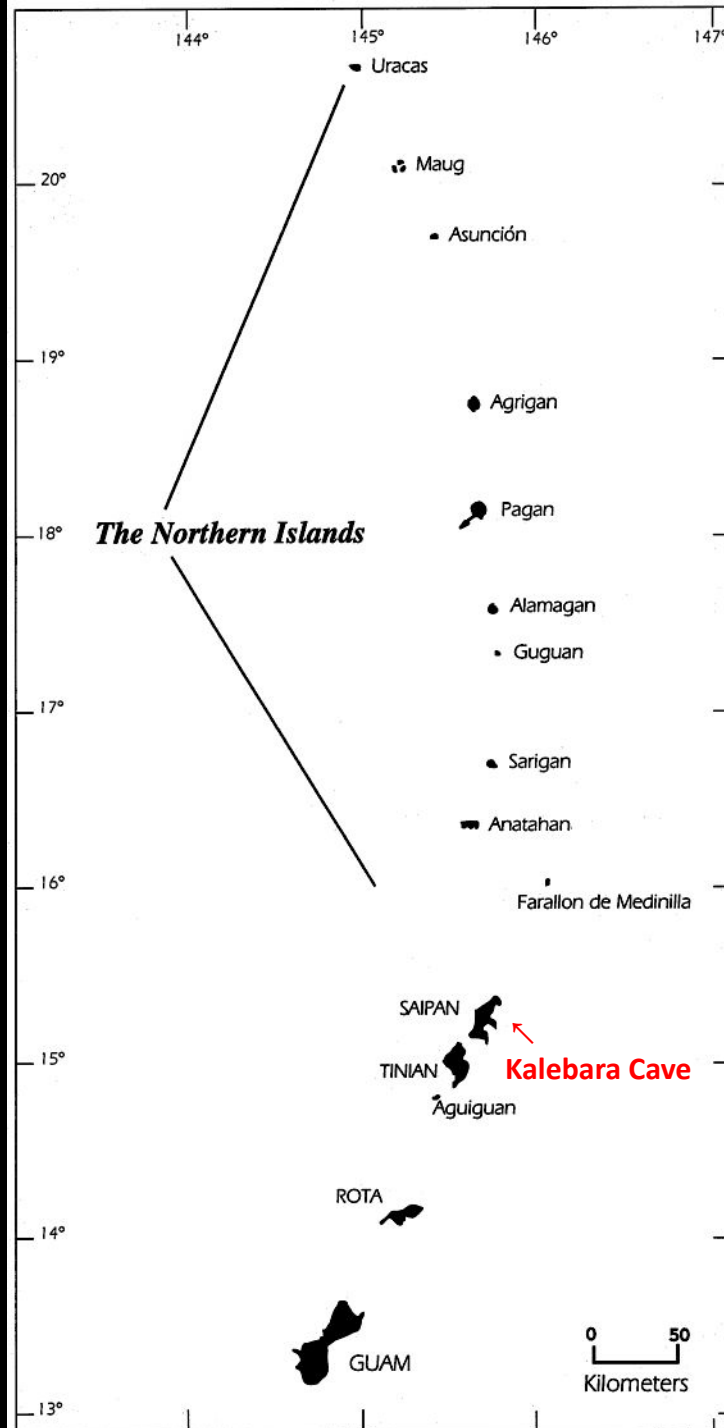
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What kind of watercraft were used to settle these islands?

Unfortunately we do not know.

No archaeological remains of canoes have been found. Probably because it is almost certain that the materials that went into their making were entirely biodegradable.



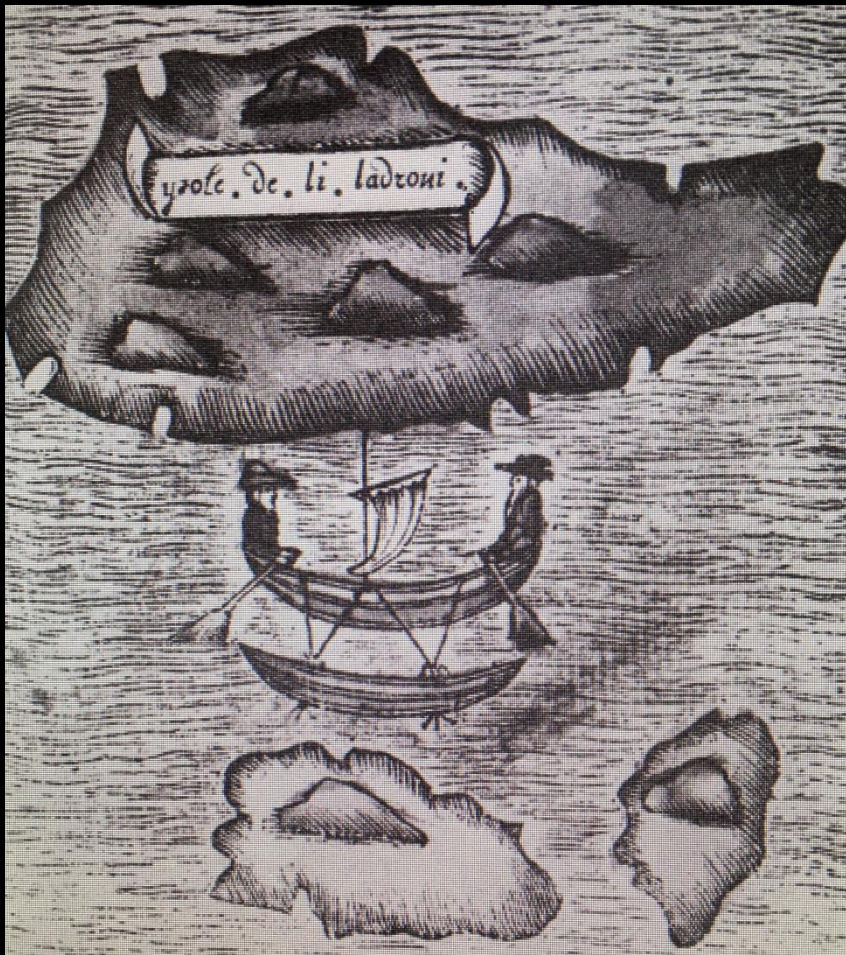
What is some of the early historical evidence that we have of Chamorro voyaging canoes?

This evidence comes mainly from Spanish documents but also from ship logs and expedition reports from other European countries.



- In 1521 when the Spanish expedition led by Ferdinand Magellan visited Guam, Francisco Alvaro made this observation:

“... many small sails approched the ship sailing so swiftly they appeared to be flying.”

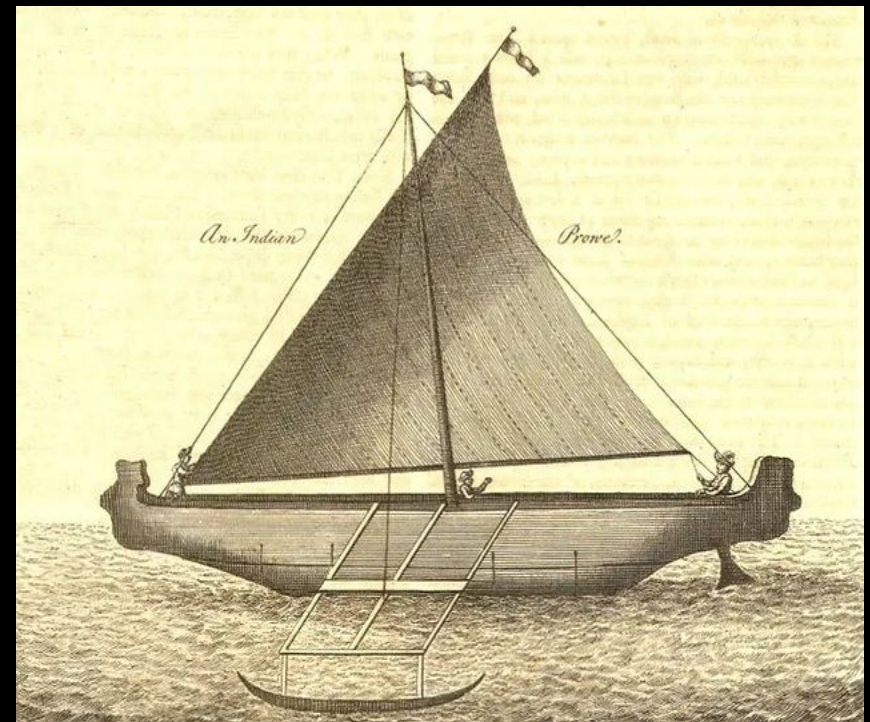
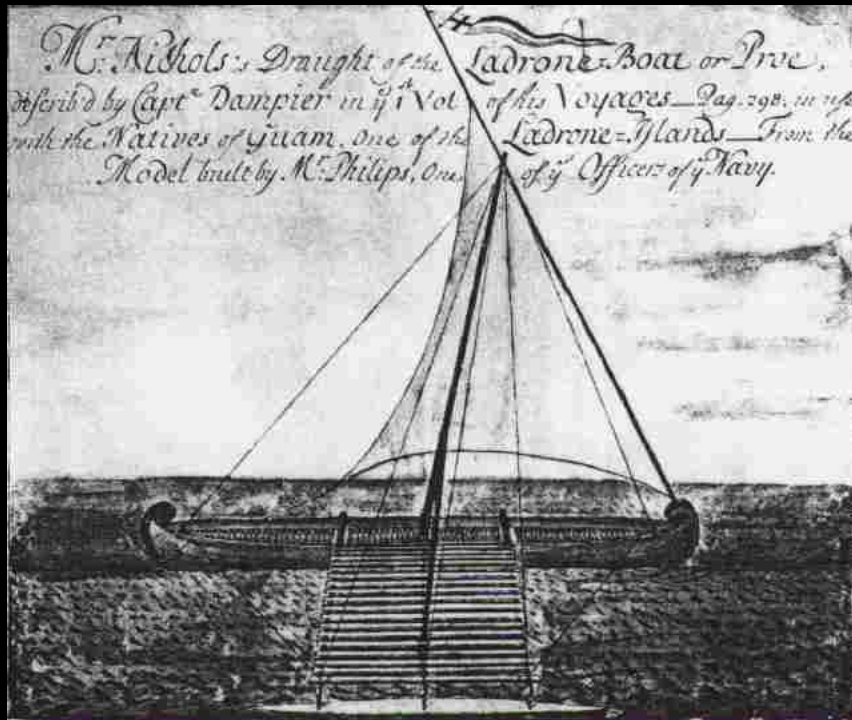


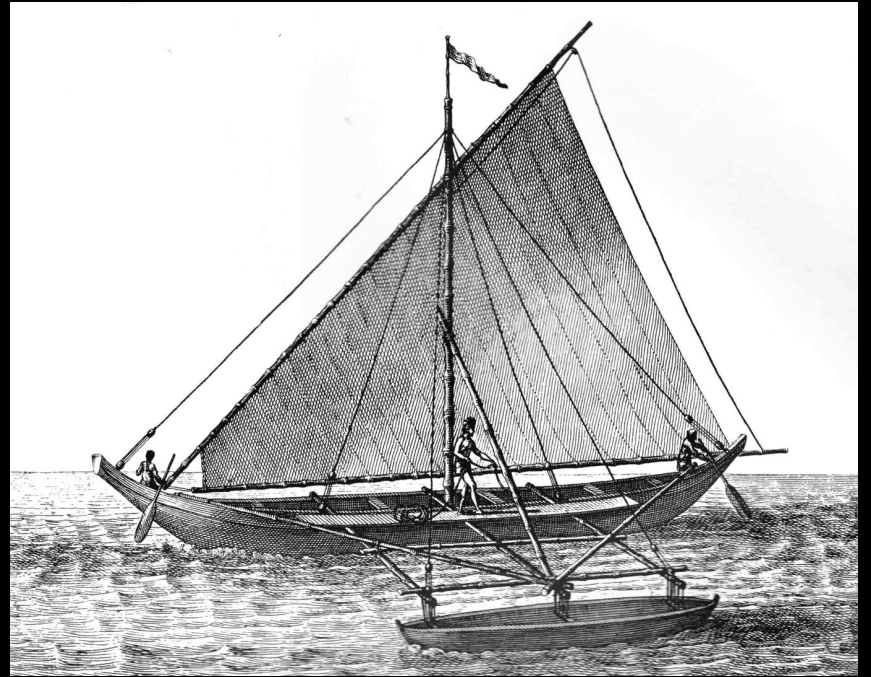
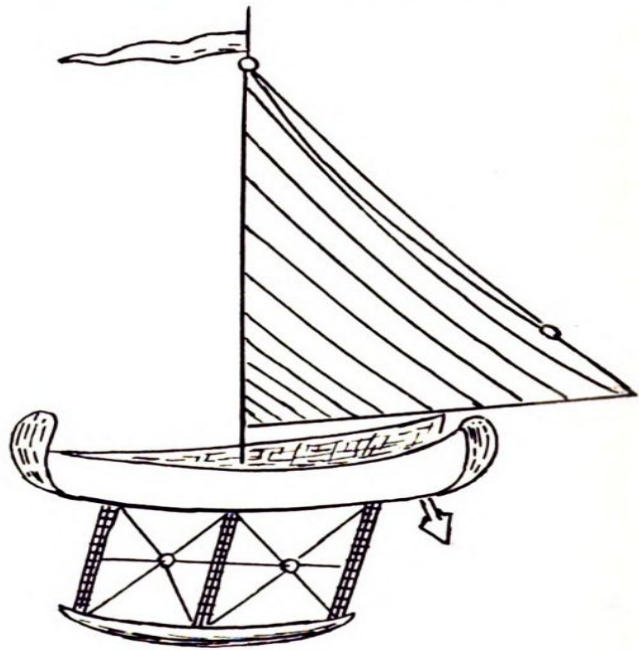
- Although inaccurate with regards to the rigging of the sail, this early sketch by Antonio Pigafetta during the time of Magellan's visit in 1521 shows the basic features of a Chamorro sailing vessel: a canoe hull, a mast with sail, and a single outrigger.

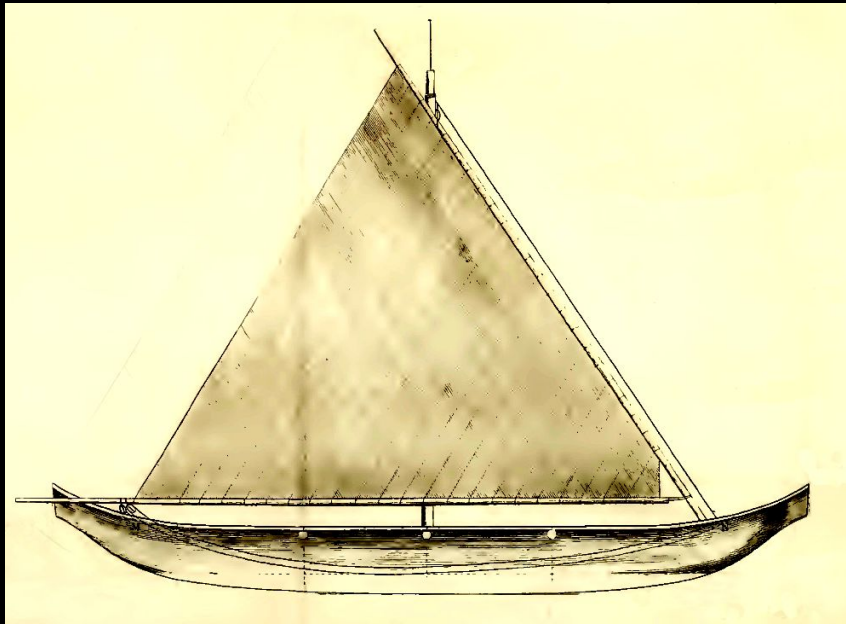


- In 1565 Miguel Legazpi's ships anchored at Guam and it was estimated that between 400 and 500 canoes came out to meet them.
- The swift, lateen sail, single outrigger canoes made such a favorable impression on all who saw them that they became known as "flying proas."

Illustrations of Chamorro "Flying Proas"

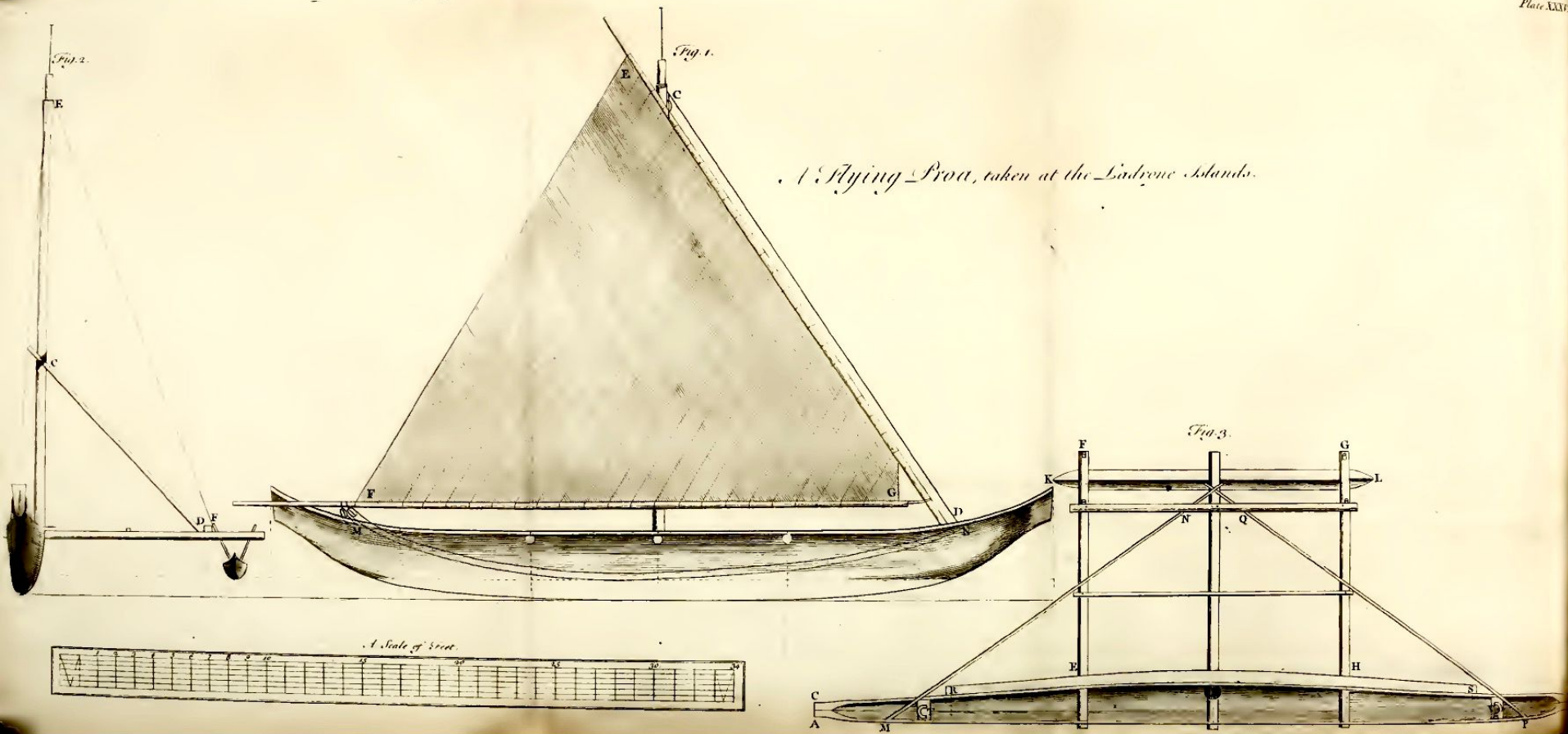






- In 1742 the Anson Expedition captured a flying proa near Tinian Island which was dismantled by Lt. Piercy Brett in order to make an accurate scale drawing of its measurements.
- Called *sakman* and measuring 40 feet from end to end, the flying proa was considered the premier voyaging canoe in Chamorro culture.

This drawing is believed to be the most accurate representation of a flying proa known to exist



Documented Reports of Chamorro Voyages

- 1597 — Fr. Fray Los Angeles, who is considered the first missionary to the Mariana Islands, was the first to report that Chamorros voyaged in their flying proas between the Mariana Islands for the purpose of bartering fish.
- 1639 — Two Chamorro proas and crews were used by Esteban Ramos and 17 survivors to sail from Guam to the Philippines after the wreck of the Spanish galleon Concepcion in Saipan.
- Between 1668 and 1672 — Fr. Diego San Vitores is reported to have used flying proas to sail to the Northern Islands to baptize Chamorros.
- 1686 — The Englishman William Dampier described Chamorro sailing canoes capable of navigating 400 leagues (approximately 1,500 miles) from Guam to the Philippines in just four days and further reported that a flying proa was able to voyage from Guam to another island 30 leagues off (approximately 100 miles), and there do their business, and return again in less than 12 hours.
- 1688 — Governor Damian Esplana sailed to the Philippines in a flying proa and left José de Quiroga in charge as acting governor. In the same year Quiroga left Guam with a frigate and 20 proas to attack and conquer Tinian.
- 1697 — Fr. Gerard Bouwens reported that the Governor José de Madrazo sent 112 sailing canoes from Guam, Rota and Saipan to remove the inhabitants from the Northern Islands for resettlement to Saipan and eventually Guam.
- Between 1709-1720 — During the administration of governor Juan Pimentel it was reported that there were usually three or four Rota-to-Guam crossings by proas to deliver meat and produce to the garrison in Guam.
- 1719 — Governor Pimentel sent several flying proas from Guam to the Northern Islands to intercept the Manila-to-Acapulco galleon and to deliver letters to the galleon's general.
- 1724 — A fleet including 3 Chamorro sailing canoes, 2 Carolinian sailing canoes and a small Spanish ship sailed with Fr. Juan Cantova to find the Caroline Islands. The ship that Cantova was on got separated from the fleet and ended up in the Philippines. Two of the Chamorro canoes got badly battered by storms and after 10 days were forced to turn back to Guam. It is not known whether or not the 1 remaining Chamorro canoe was able to stay with the 2 Carolinian sailing canoes but it is reported that after 5 weeks the Chamorro sailing canoe returned to Guam.

The Demise of the Flying Proa

It is difficult to say when the last traditionally-made Chamorro flying proa sailed. In 1742 the English Commodore George Anson observed several of them sailing between Tinian and Guam.

With the genocidal “reduction” of Chamorros and destruction of their flying proas by the Spanish who wanted to control the population, the indigenous maritime tradition of contact with neighboring islands all but vanished. In addition, with the drastic drop in population from an estimated 40,000 to less than 4,000 it is no wonder that traditional shipbuilding skills suffered as well.

In any case, by the time the Freycinet Expedition visited the Marianas in 1819 the Chamorros no longer were building and sailing flying proas, much less attempting voyages to other islands.

Moreover, with the settlement of Carolinian islanders in the Marianas beginning in the early 1800s, there was an increased Spanish dependence on Carolinian proas to perform the necessary inter-island travel.

Part 2

Carolinian Voyaging

What is the earliest evidence we have of Carolinian sailing canoes in the Mariana Islands?

The earliest evidence before European contact comes from oral history accounts in the form of songs and chants.

“... he goes to Fais and then sails from Fais and goes to Guam ...”

“History of Yongulug”

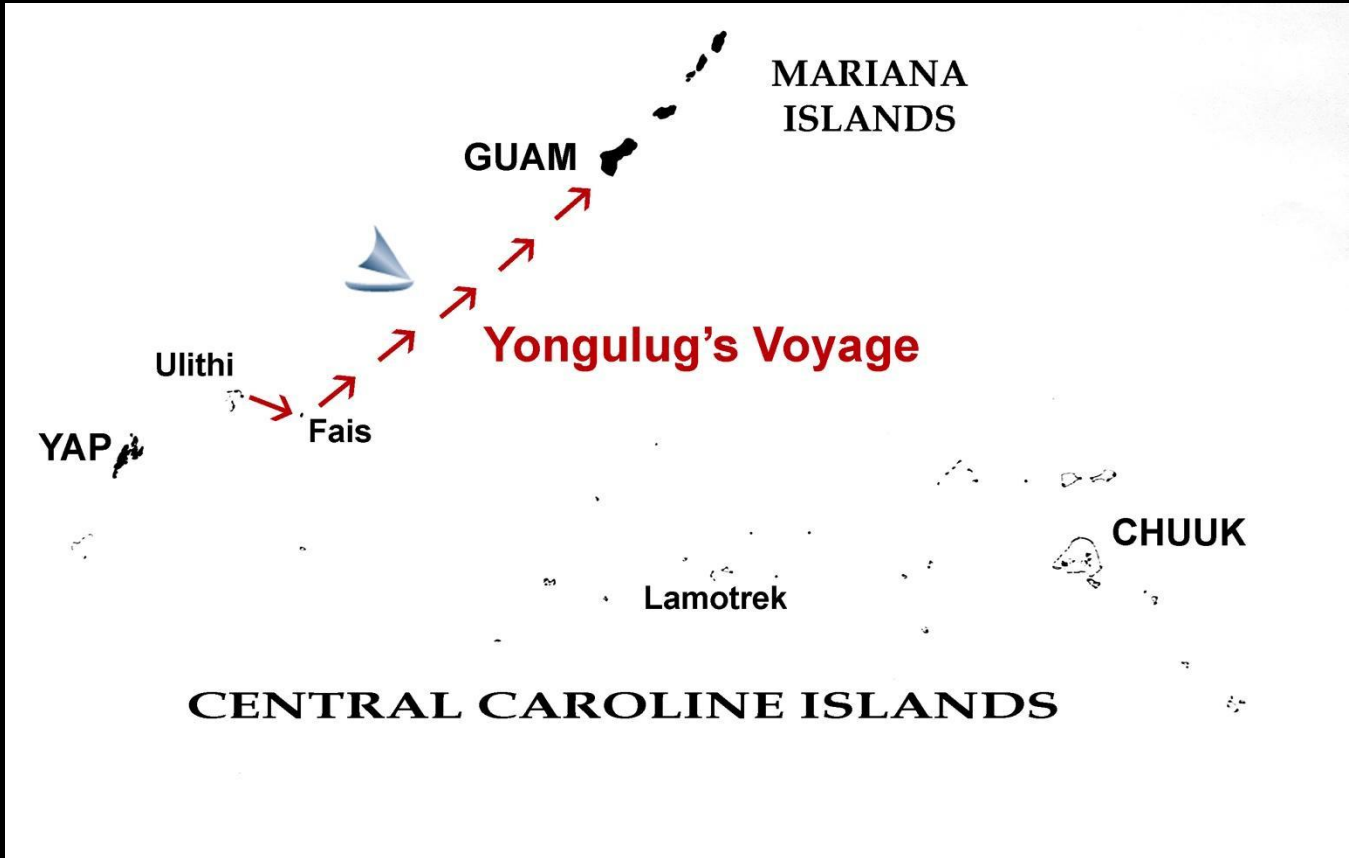
Erzählt nach dem gleichnamigen Mogemog-Gesang von Rüepón in Gatsápár.

yönülüg ē vē ū fonálop i-táreg yönülüg ū ūgōj
Yönülüg siehe einer in Fonálop immer er segelt Yönülüg aus Mogemog
ná·v ná ūáv má táreg ū·roj nē y-án ná nülú má
dann er kommt nach Yap dann segelt von dort und er geht nach Nülú dann
táreg ū nülú nē y-án ná válap má y-án ū valaj ná márir
segelt aus Nülú und er geht nach Palau dann er geht aus Palau nach Meliel
má y-án ū márir ná gōōgōvél má y-án ū gōōgōvél ū¹
dann er geht aus Meliel nach Togove (Tobi) dann er geht aus Togove nach
sónótsól má y-án ū sónótsól ná ki^uán² má táreg ū
Songosör (Sonserol) dann er geht aus Songosör nach Guiuan dann segelt aus
ki^uán ná·v má dá·tál ū·áv má y-án ná “áyā
Guiuan dann er kommt und nicht er landet in Yap dann er geht nach Fais
má táreg ū “áyā nē y-án ná “ón má sül ū “ón
dann segelt aus Fais und er geht nach Guam dann kehrt um aus Guam
ná·v ná “áyā nē y-án ná lán ē ná·k má
dann er kommt nach Fais und wieder er segelt aus Fais und er geht nach
lán ē ná·k má pát ná vū lūgótš ní yátsólē gāmsēgūl
innen des Ostens dann findet nach einem Felsen nämlich Yátsólē gāmsēgūl
fi^uná·n má tál náj nē kál vó·ts ē gāmgūl i·kaj máéré
sein Name dann landet dahin und fängt einige gamaigul-Fische er ißt alsdann
k-i-táreg nē y-án má k-i-pát ná vū lūgótš ní
wieder er segelt und er geht und wieder er findet nach einem Felsen nämlich
pásólē fómóg fi^uná·n má táreg nē y-án má k-i-pát ná
Pásólē fómóg sein Name dann segelt und er geht und wieder er findet nach
vū ūlún i ál pálielág fi^uná·n má k-i-táreg nē y-án
einem Haufen Treibholz Pálielág sein Name und wieder er segelt und er geht

¹ So im Text, es müßte korrekt: ná heißen.

² Südspitze der Philippineninsel Samar.

- In the oral history of the Caroline Islands, Yongulug was a legendary navigator from Ulithi Atoll near Yap who sailed the length and breadth of Micronesia and made voyages from the western Caroline Islands to the Philippines and back.
- In this song Yongulug is voyaging from Fais Island, which is about 400 miles southwest of Guam. He then returns to Fais the same way.



“... he goes to Fais and then sails from Fais and goes to Guam ...”



- No one knows the age of the song for certain, but from other oral histories about Yongulug we know that it is ancient.
- The song suggests that Carolinian voyagers were aware of the Mariana Islands and were sailing there before contact with Europeans.

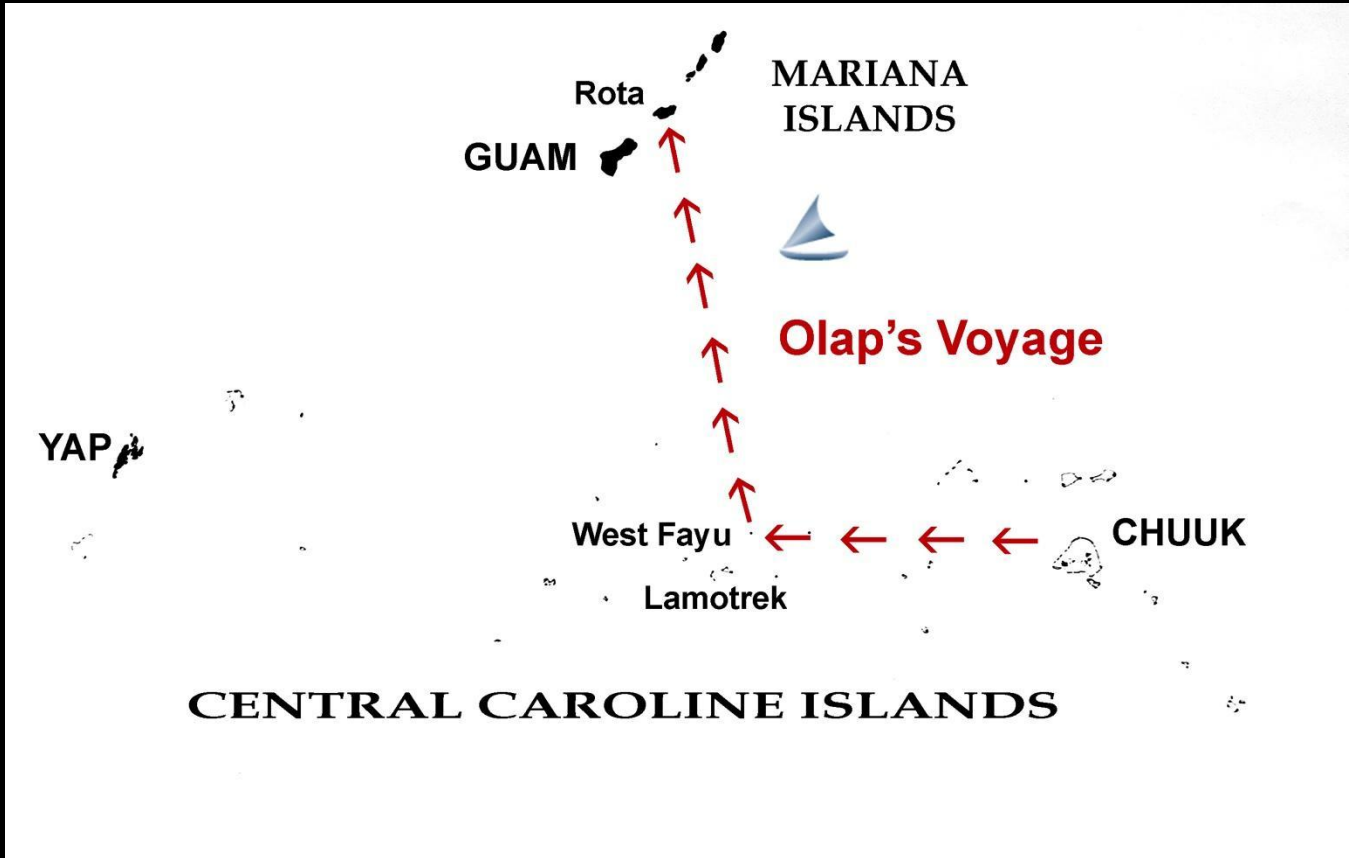
The Pulling of Olap's Canoe

Translated by Theophil Saret Reuney

Part I: Pukueu

Looking for the suitable time, Pukueu
Went to observe the break of day at the other end of the island.¹
A steering wind blew, it blew from the east,
His canoe would be pulled out from its headrests:
Yet suddenly came his asipwar²
To stop Pukueu's voyage.
But he did not change his mind; his eager heart sought the
satisfaction
To open up those dark seas.³
Knowledgeable in the art of navigation, he begged indulgence from
Nemwes,⁴

- In the oral history of the Caroline Islands, Olap was a legendary navigator from Uman Island in Chuuk.
- In this chant voyages are being made to islands east, west, south and north of Chuuk. Evidence in the chant suggests that on one of these voyages Olap sailed from the Caroline Islands to Rota Island in the Marianas.



“But Manina is there, and Sorota is here.”

- There is evidence that the name “Sorota” refers to the island of Rota in the Marianas. A similar name appears on one of the earliest maps made of the Mariana Islands circa 1545.
- It is unlikely, however, that the name “Manina” in the chant refers to the Mariana Islands because the Carolinian term “Manina” has been documented as referring to Manila and the Philippines.*

* Saul Riesenber, 1972. "The Organisation of Navigational Knowledge on Puluwat." *Journal of the Polynesian Society*. Vol. 81, p 46.

Part III: The Second Voyage of Paluelap

Getting ready was Paluelap's voyage to depart from Tawaruk¹²
He would sail the sea of Fayeu.¹³
"Rub your mast, and tap it with reverence,
Tie it with young yellow palm shoots for those sea-openers,¹⁴
They will blow the conch shell
To shorten the ocean
So that the difficulties of navigation will not overwhelm us."
We sailed toward the rising Aldebaran
To meet the white-arm shark
Which usually drank the flow of those over-flowing passes.
"Using the rising Corvus, we will unpluck
From Atinmwar¹⁵ its seashells.
But there is Weito¹⁶ situated against the front of the outrigger,
Fonuen soma¹⁷ is then located at the setting of Corvus
And the constellation Crux was hidden between the booms."
We were afraid for we had seen
The inhabitants of the land of anu fa¹⁸
As they swam with their hair buns pointed upward, at Karueleng.¹⁹
"Let us use the rising of Vega, and we will meet
The whale whose names are Urasa and Pwourasa²⁰
They guard those pompano fish which belong to wasofo.²¹
But Manina²² is there, and Sorota²³ is here.
Let us stop at Tawanior²⁴

12. Tawaruk: sea pass of Unanu.

13. Fayeu: East Fayu in Truk.

14. sea-openers: those journeying navigators.

15. Atinmwar: a rock on the reef of East Fayu.

16. Weito: a group of islands in the northwest of Truk.

17. Fonuen soma: reference is not clear, but it probably refers to one of the western islands in Truk, or to all of them as a group.

18. anu fa: perhaps a legendary land.

19. Karueleng: also known as "lon anufa," referring to a place in the ocean, perhaps for the ghosts' dwelling only.

20. Urasa and Pwourasa: it is not clear whether these two names are given to just one whale or to two different whales.

21. wasofo: literally means "new canoe," but here it means "new navigator."

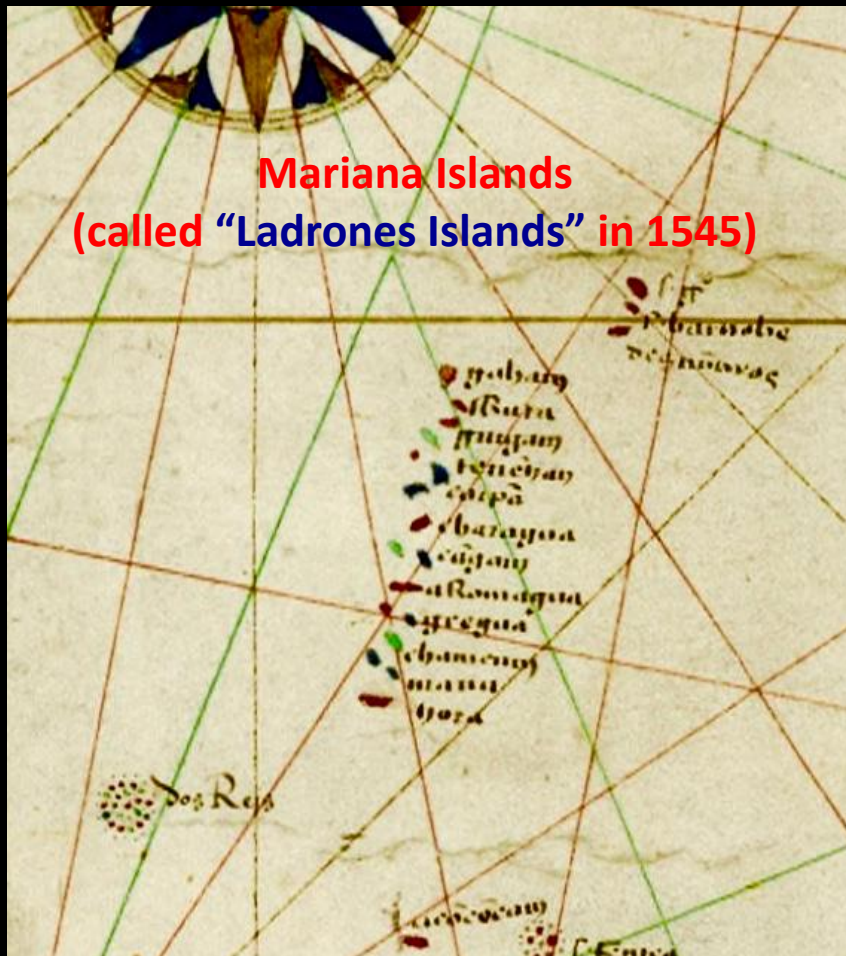
22. Manina: it is not clear whether this refers to Manila or to the Mariana Islands.

23. Sorota: some say this refers to Rota in the southern Mariana Islands.

24. Tawanior: the sea pass of West Fayu.

Saret Theophil Reuney (translator), 1995 "The Pulling of Olap's Canoe." *Asia/Pacific as Space of Cultural Production*. Rob Wilson and Arif Dirlik (eds). Duke University Press, pp. 347.

Portuguese Antonio Pereira's Map circa 1545



Map detail

Portuguese historian Armando Cortesão makes the case that "sRuta" is Rota Island in the "Ladrones Islands" (Mariana Islands).



Pereira Map circa 1545

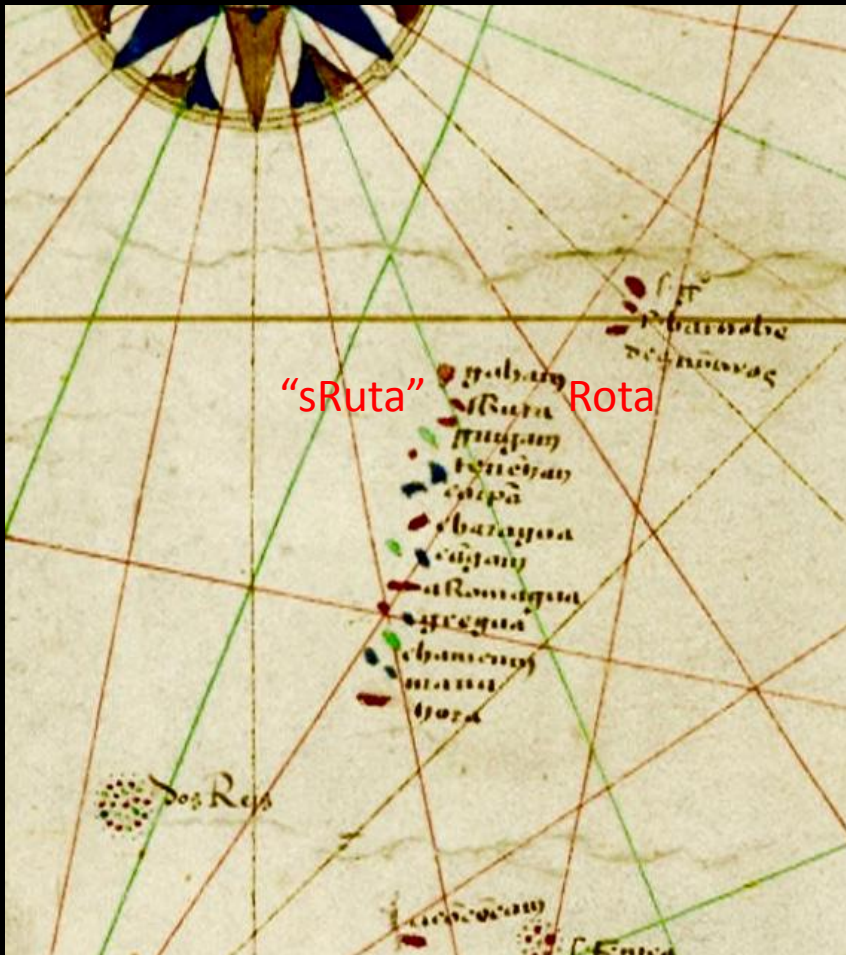
TABLE IV — THE LADRONES ISLANDS

A. PEREIRA	S. CABOT 1544	L. HOMEM 1554	D. HOMEM 1558	VAZ DOURADO 1568 (?)	MODERN CHART
1. sant° (?)	1. santiago				1. Farallon de Pajaros
2. s. barnabe de s...ras *	2. san bernabe de los martiles			1. las dos ermanas 2. mall abrigo	2. Supply Rf. 3. Maug I. 4. Asuncion I. 5. Agrihan I.
14. hora	3. hora				
13. manu	4. mahaa				
12. chameam	5. manõo 6. comoa				
11. gregua	7. gregua 8. pagan 9. guguan			3. Ilos Jardines	6. Pagan I.
10. aRomagua 9. cãgam	10. Aramagana				7. Alamagan I. 8. Guguan I. 9. Zealandia Bk. 10. Sariguan I. 11. Anatahan I. 12. Farallon de Medinilla 13. Saipan I.
8. charagua	11. chegua 12. naetan				14. Tinian I. 15. Esmeralda Bk. 16. Agiguan I. 17. Rota or Luta I.
7. caipã	13. saepan 14. guigan				
6. tenehan	15. temeian				
5. guigam 4. sRuta (?)	"sRuta"			"Rota"	
3. gaham	16. bathahum 17. baham				18. Guam or Guahan I.

Names of islands are inexplicably inverted with Guam being at the top of the island chain rather than at the bottom.

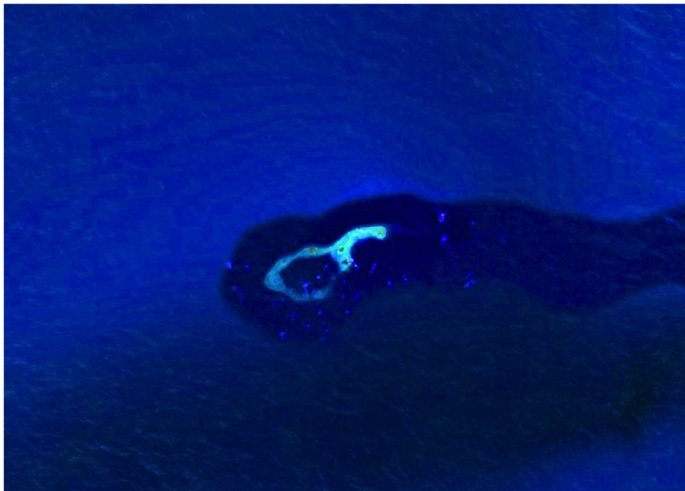
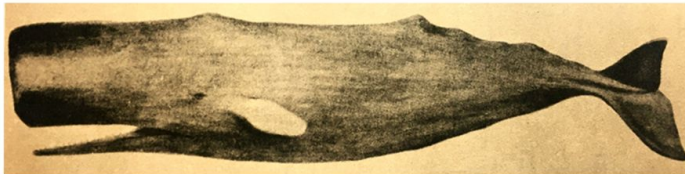
Armando Cortesão, 1975. "Antônio Pereira and His Map of Circa 1545: An Unknown Portuguese Cartographer and the Early Representation of Newfoundland, Lower California, the Amazon, and the Ladrones." *Espasos*, Vol. III, Portugal: Acta Universitatis Conimbrigesis, p. 252.

Sorota = sRuta = Rota Island?



- The name “Sorota” in the chant may be a cognate of the Chamorro name “sRuta” on Pereira’s Map of the Marianas Islands.
- Also, there is additional evidence in the “Pulling of Olap’s Canoe” chant which suggests that Sorota = Rota.

The chant gives two additional clues as to the region in the vicinity of the Marianas where the voyagers are sailing.



Part III: The Second Voyage of Paluelap

Getting ready was Paluelap's voyage to depart from Tawaruk¹²
He would sail the sea of Fayeu.¹³
"Rub your mast, and tap it with reverence,
Tie it with young yellow palm shoots for those sea-openers,¹⁴
They will blow the conch shell
To shorten the ocean

So that the difficulties of navigation will not overwhelm us."
We sailed toward the rising Aldebaran
To meet the white-arm shark
Which usually drank the flow of those over-flowing passes.

"Using the rising Corvus, we will unpluck
From Atinmwar¹⁵ its seashells.
But there is Weito¹⁶ situated against the front of the outrigger,
Fonuuén soma¹⁷ is then located at the setting of Corvus
And the constellation Crux was hidden between the booms."
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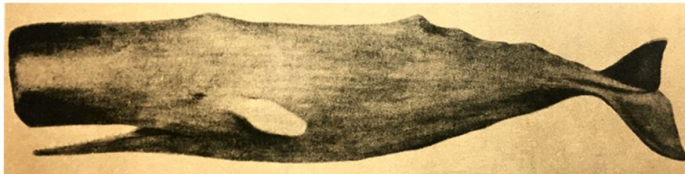
The inhabitants of the land of anu fa¹⁸
As they swam with their hair buns pointed upward, at Karueleng.¹⁹

"Let us use the rising of Vega, and we will meet
The whale whose names are Urasa and Pwourasa²⁰
They guard those pompano fish which belong to wasofo.²¹
But Manina²² is there, and Sorota²³ is here.
Let us stop at Tawanior²⁴

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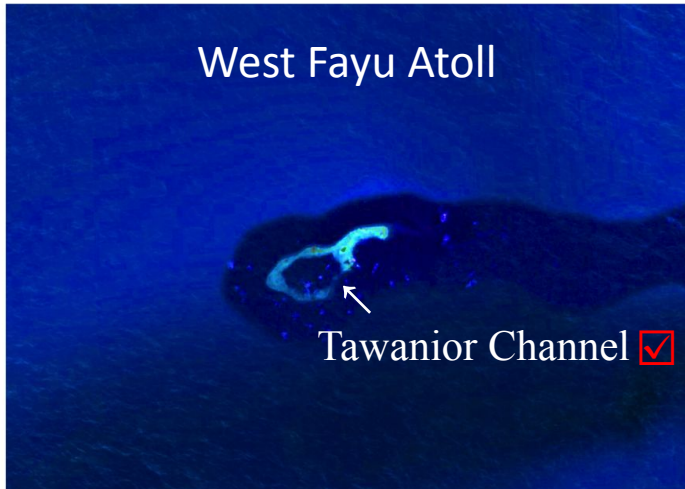
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Pworósá the whale



and

West Fayu Atoll



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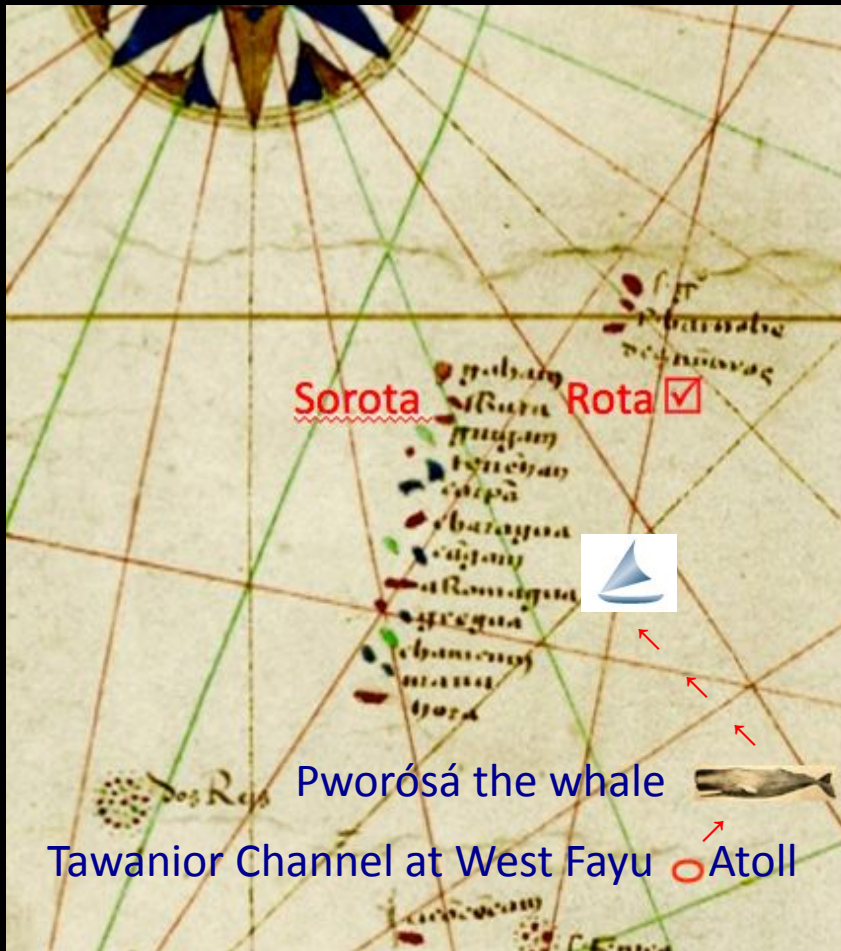
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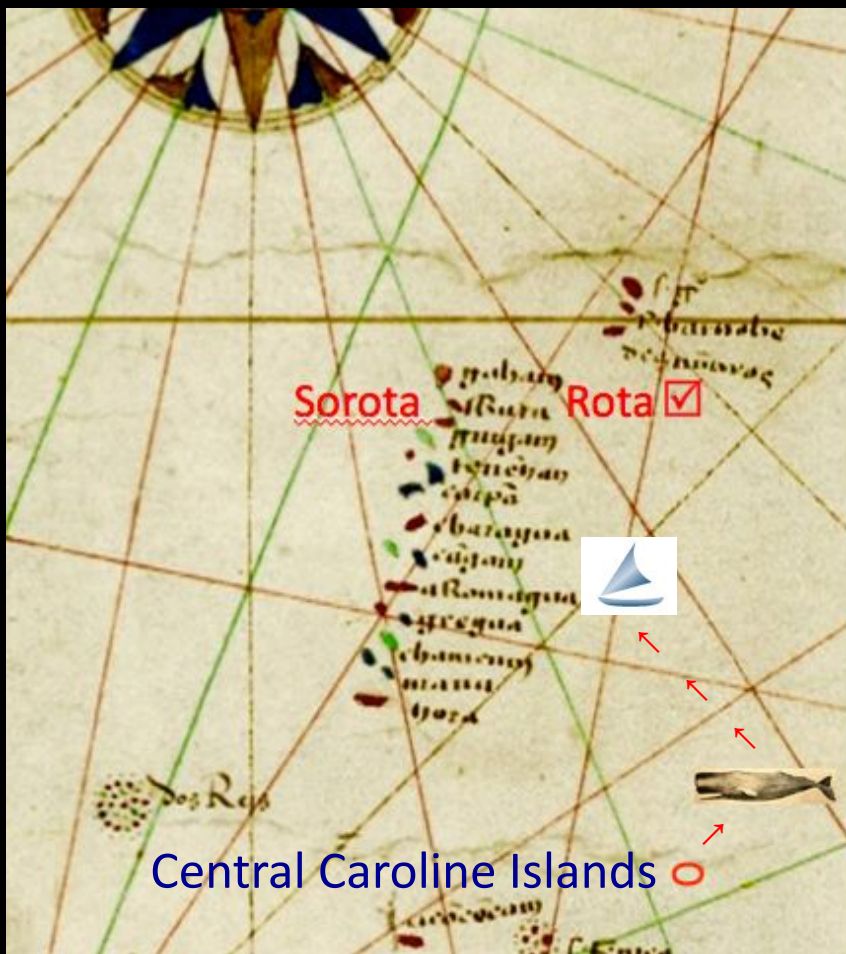
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Pworósá the whale and Tawanior Channel at West Fayu Atoll are two clues in the chant that are evidence of voyaging to the Marianas.



- Pworósá the whale is a navigator sea marker northeast of West Fayu Atoll between the Caroline and Mariana Islands.
- A Pworósá marker in the *pwukof* system of navigational lore aids the navigator in orienting himself at sea during a voyage from the Carolines to the Marianas.
- West Fayu Atoll is a traditional jumping off island for Carolinian voyagers sailing to the Marianas.



- No one knows the age of the chant for certain, but from other oral histories about Olap we know that it is ancient.
- The chant suggests that Carolinian voyagers were aware of the Mariana Islands and were sailing there before contact with Europeans.

What is some of the early historical evidence that we have of Carolinians voyaging to the Marianas?

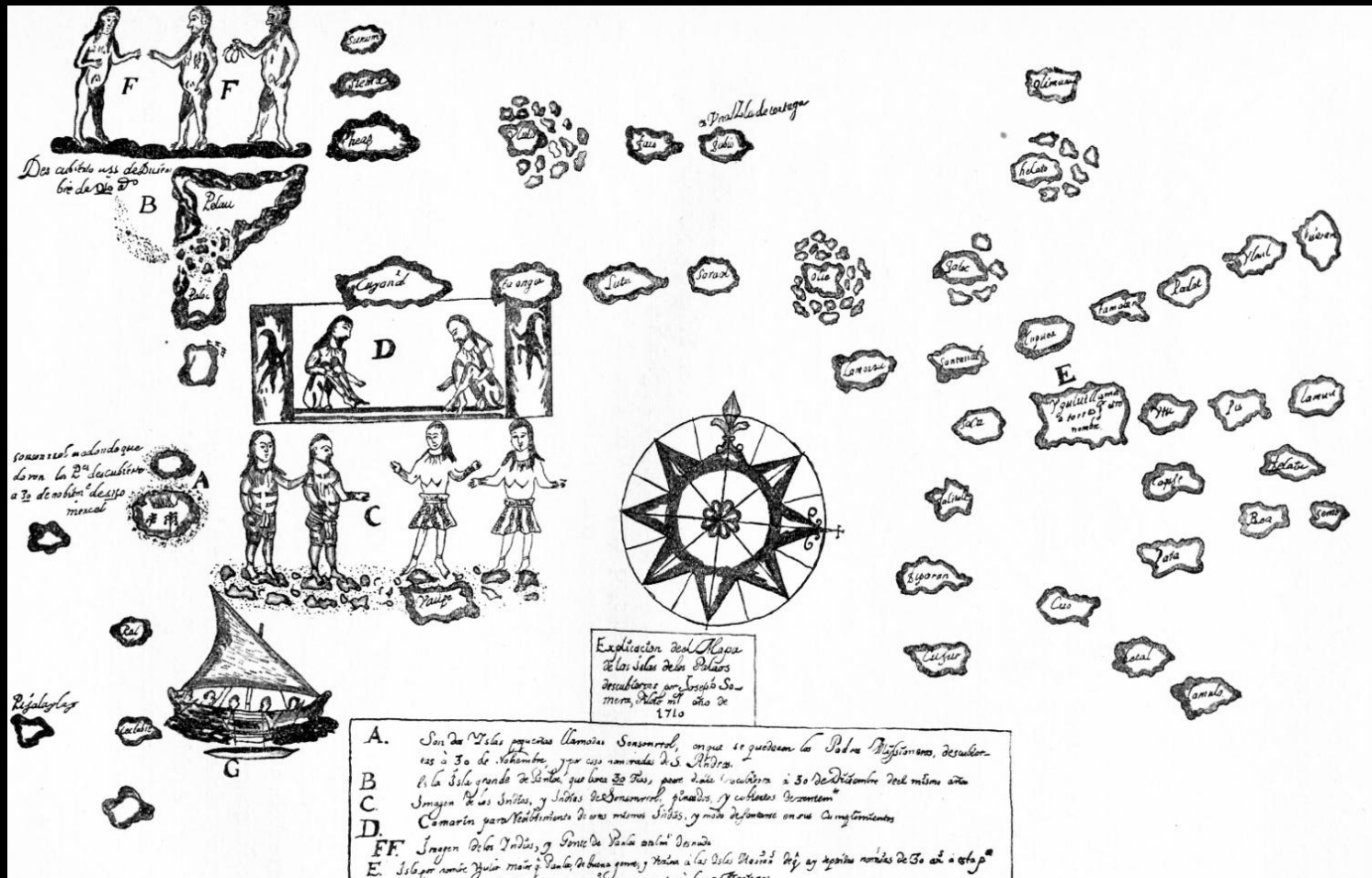
This evidence comes mainly from Spanish records but also from ship logs and expedition reports from other European countries.



In 1664, before the Spanish colonization of Guam began in 1668, a fleet of canoes from Ifaluk in the central Caroline Islands were storm driven to the Philippines. Five years later, four of the survivors were befriended by Fr. Francisco Miedes on Siau Island in what is now Indonesia.

The map the Ifalukans made of their island world has been lost but the information Fr. Miedes collected from them has been preserved in a letter he sent to Manila in 1671.

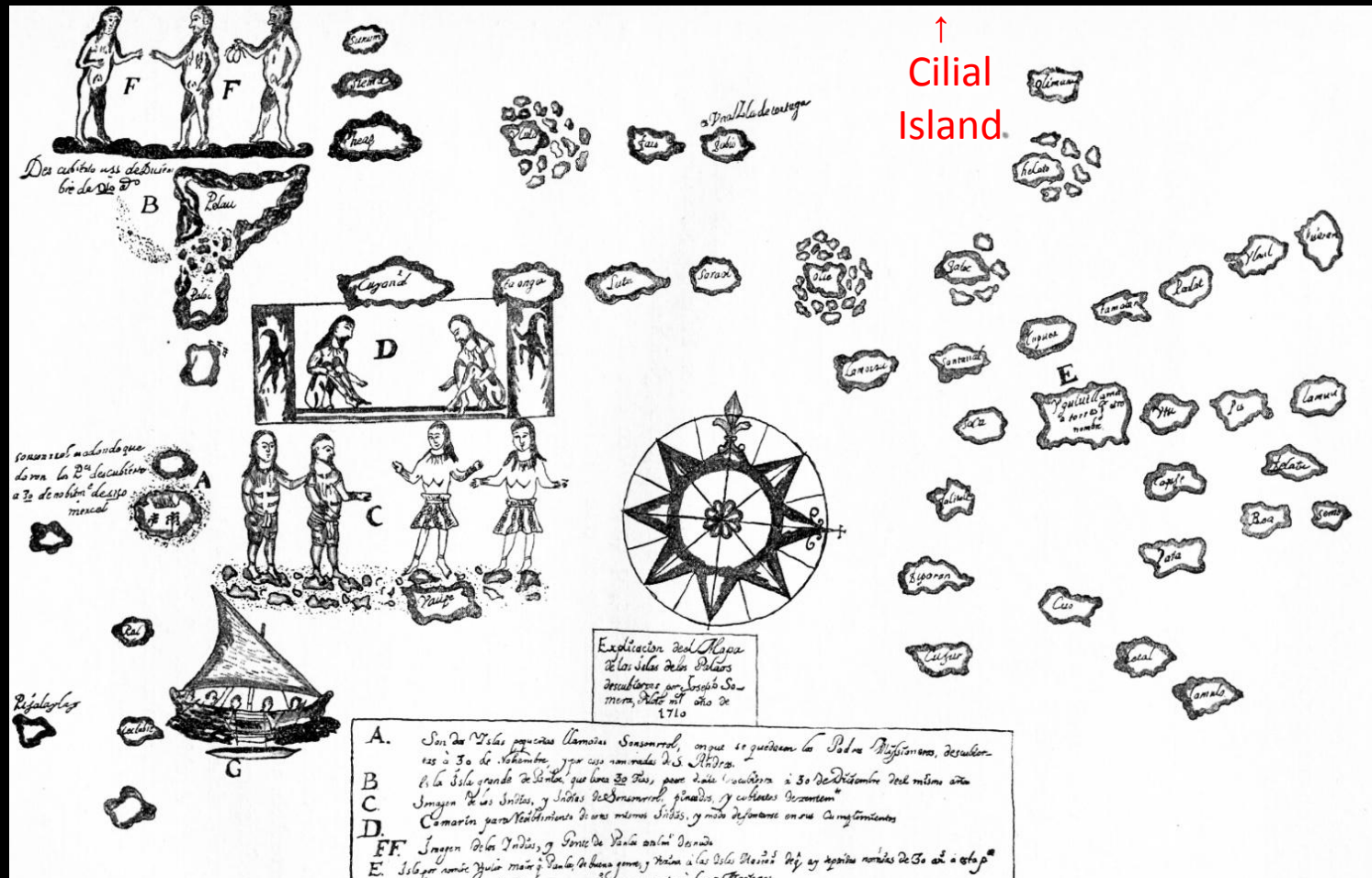
The map that the Ifalukans made for Fr. Miedes may have looked something like this later one drawn by a group of Sonsorolese islanders in 1710; but unlike this map the Ifalukans included an island in the north which the Ifalukans called "Cilial."



Sonsorolese Map of the Caroline Islands

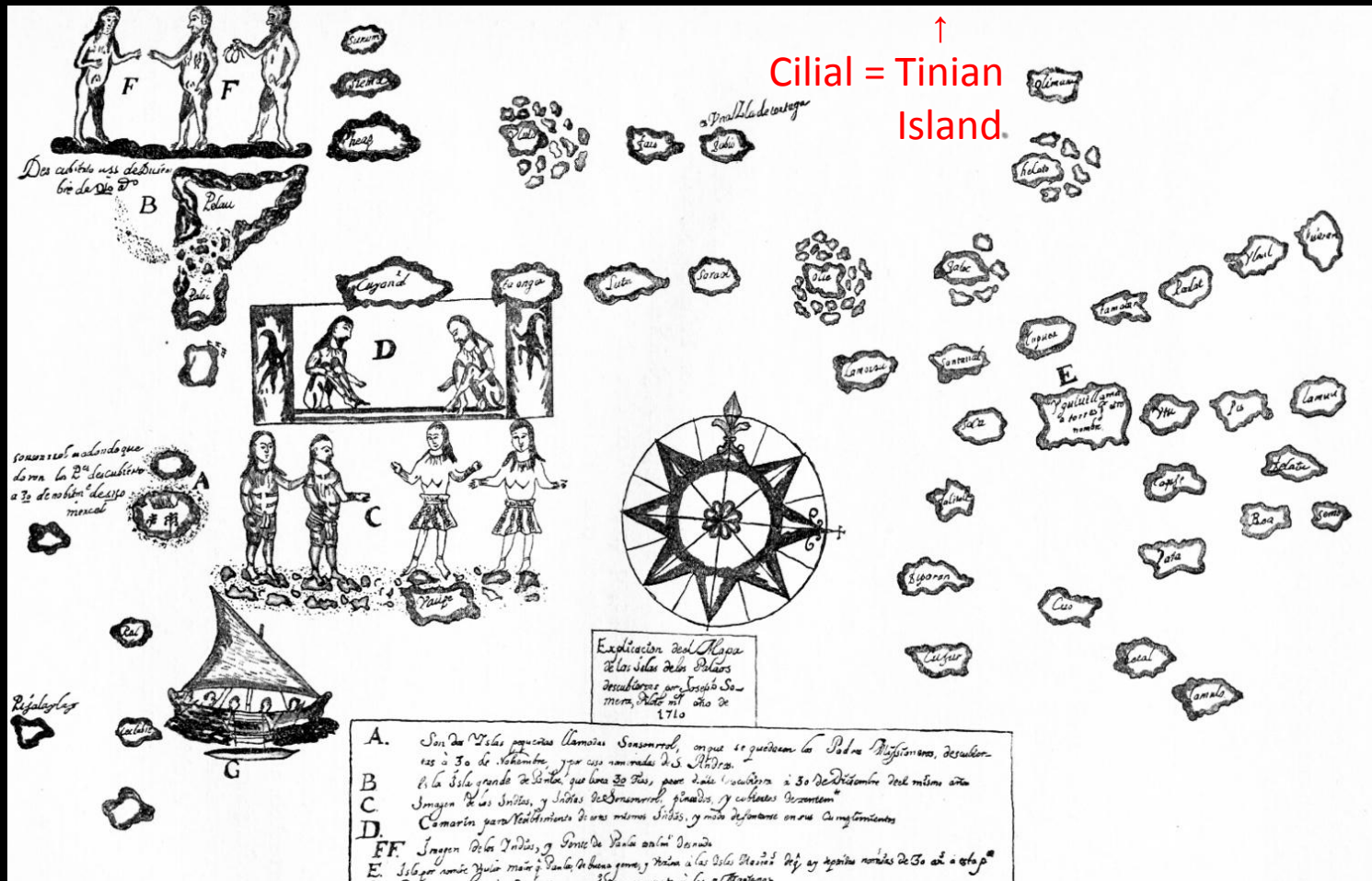
The Ifalukans told Fr. Miedes that they knew about Cilial Island before 1664 because **“some swords and a little iron come there as well.”**

This could only mean one thing — that the Carolinians were having trade relations with the Mariana Islands before the Spanish colonization of Guam in 1668.



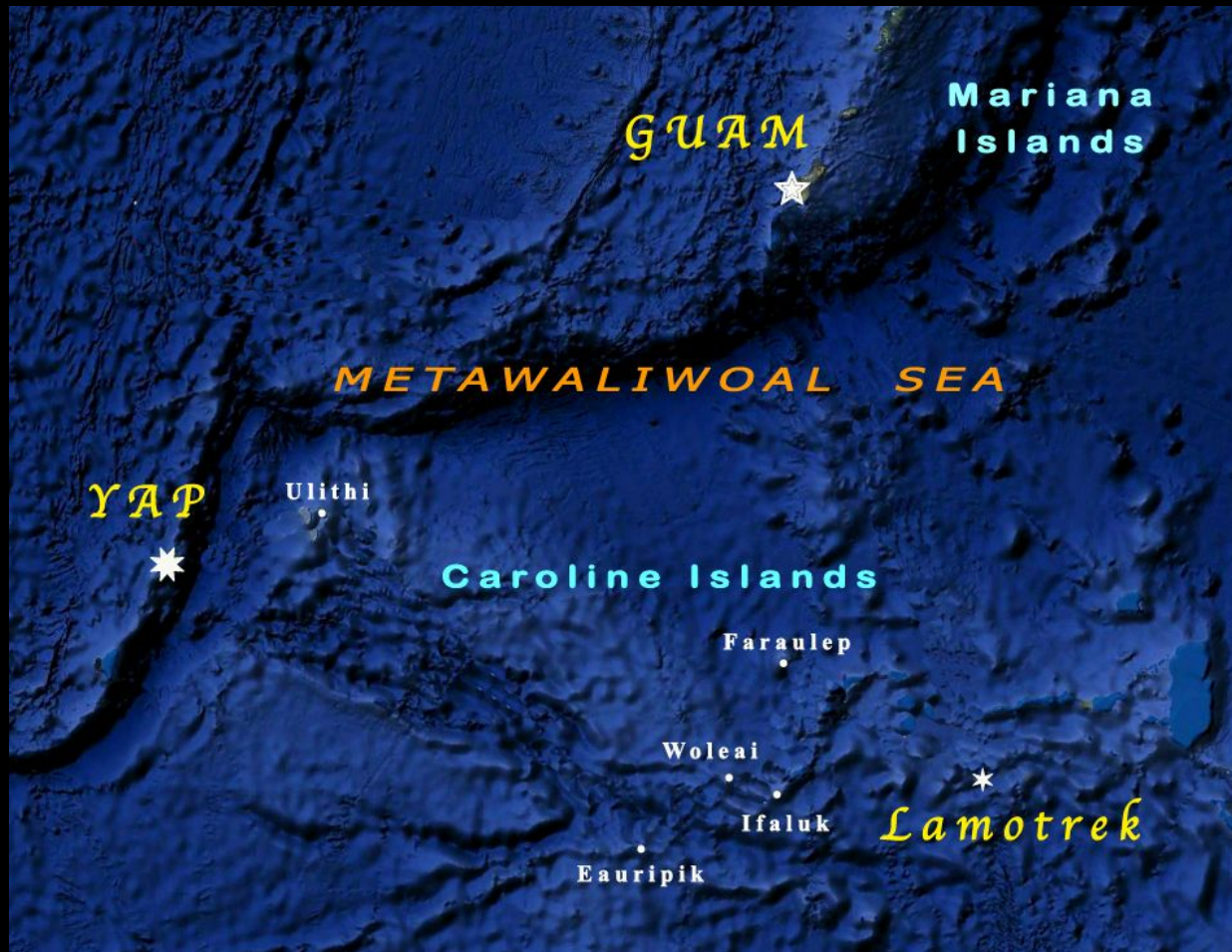
Sonsorolese Map of the Caroline Islands

Given the description of Ciliai island by the Ifalukans and its geographic location, Ciliai island could only be an island located in the Marianas archipelago. Unknown to Fr. Miedes at the time is that Ciliai is the traditional Ifalukan name for Tinian Island.

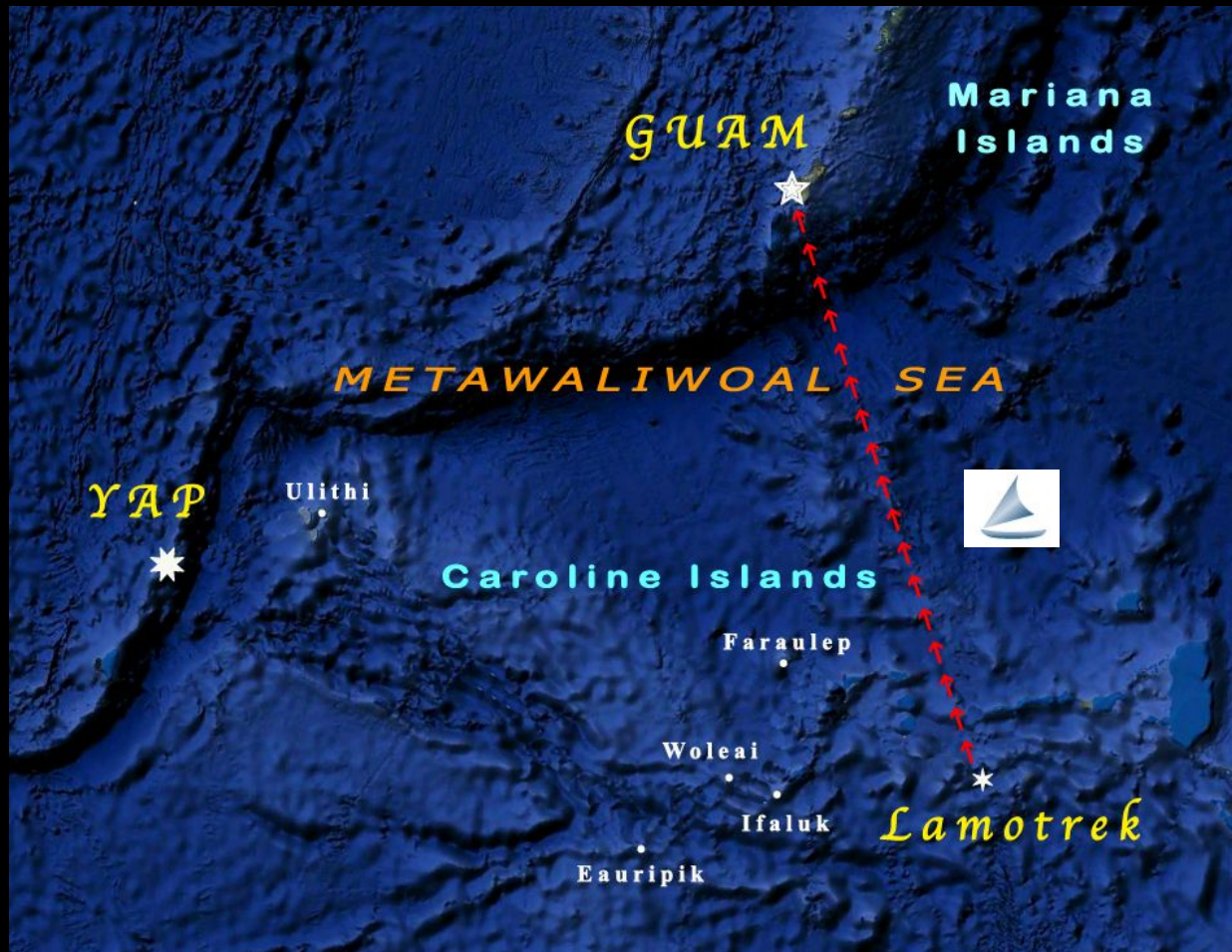


Sonsorolese Map of the Caroline Islands

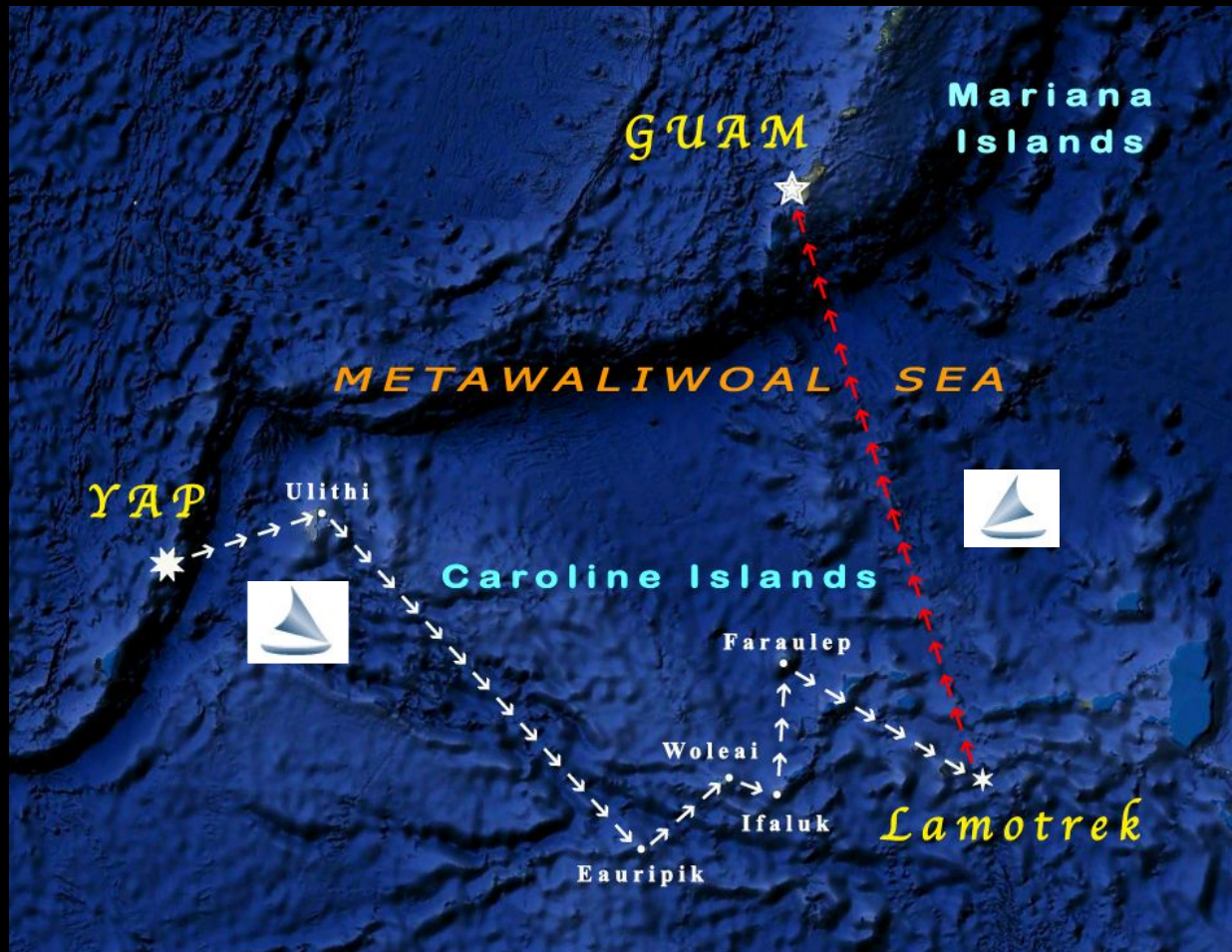
There is additional documentary evidence from the historical record that Luito, a navigator from Lamotrek, retraced the route to Guam with "a song from olden times" in 1788.



Luito told the Spaniards that their ancestors had previously traded with the Chamorros but had given it up after witnessing Spanish cruelty.



In the pre-Spanish era the Yapese, too, conducted voyages to the Marianas to trade. Since it was difficult and dangerous to sail directly into the prevailing northeast winds the Yapese would take a longer and more arduous route through the Caroline Islands to Guam.



Carolinian Proas in the Mariana Islands



In 1814 the Lamotrek fleet to Guam consisted of eighteen sailing canoes, and the islanders traded canoes, tortoise shell, and other curiosities for iron, glass beads, cloth and other items.



After 1815 Carolinians formed settlements in Saipan with permission of the Spanish governor.

In exchange, the Carolinians agreed to convert to Christianity and provide inter-island transportation as well as deliver meat and produce from Tinian to the garrison in Guam.

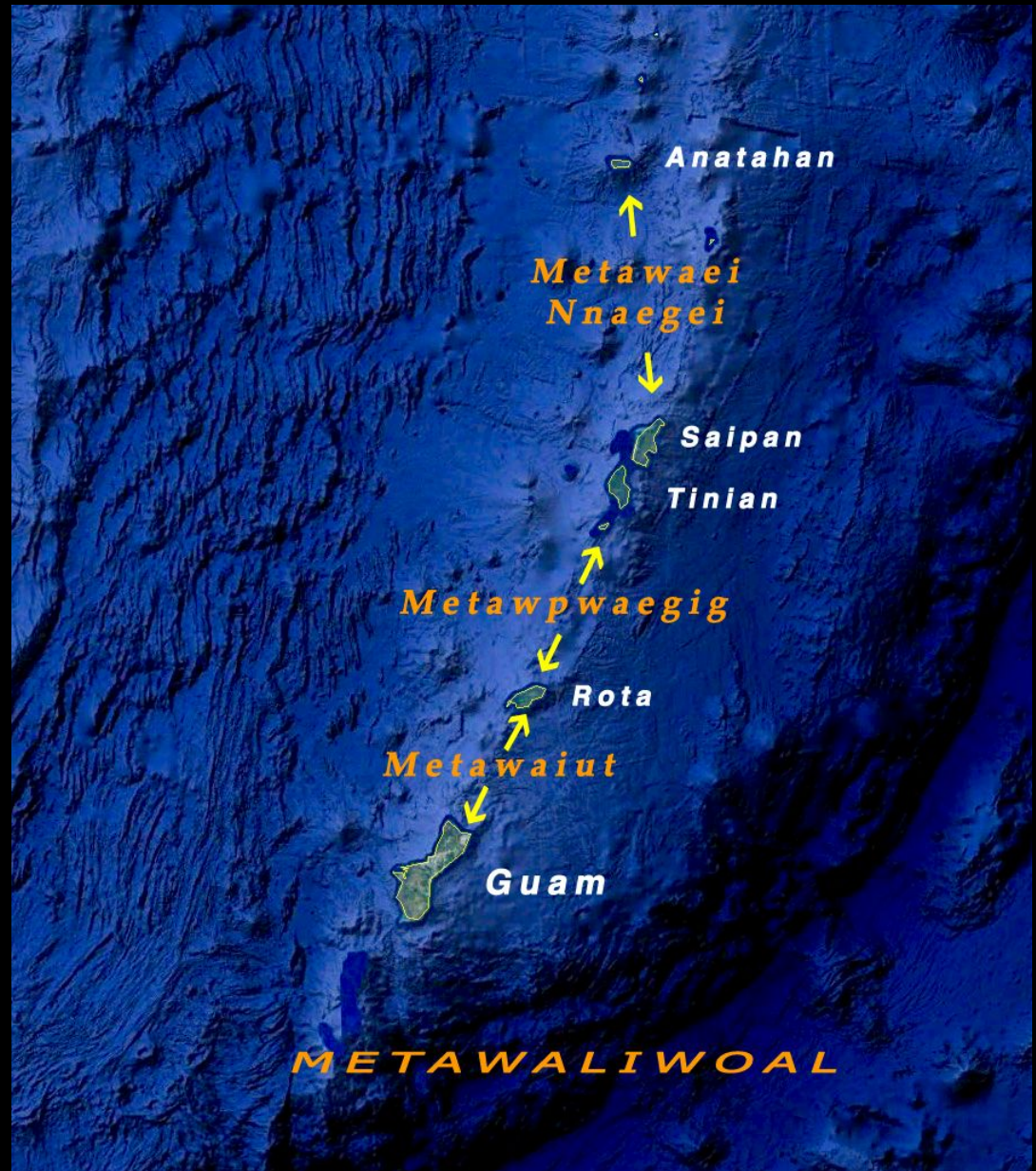
Which was similar to what the Chamorros had done for the Spanish with their flying proas 100 years earlier.

Carolinian Sea-Lanes in the Mariana Islands

One of the voyaging legacies the Carolinians left in the Mariana Islands are the names that they gave to the sea-lanes between the islands.

The body of ocean between the Mariana and Caroline Islands is called **Metawaliwoal**.

Because of its huge size the Metawaliwoal may be thought of as an ocean or sea separating the Mariana and Caroline Islands, but Carolinians view it as sea-lane connecting the two archipelagos.



The **Metawaliwoal** sea-lane between the Mariana and Caroline Islands may be translated as:

“Ocean to a Superior Place”

The other three sea-lanes have their own characteristics.

The **Metawaiut** sea-lane between Guam and Rota may be translated as:

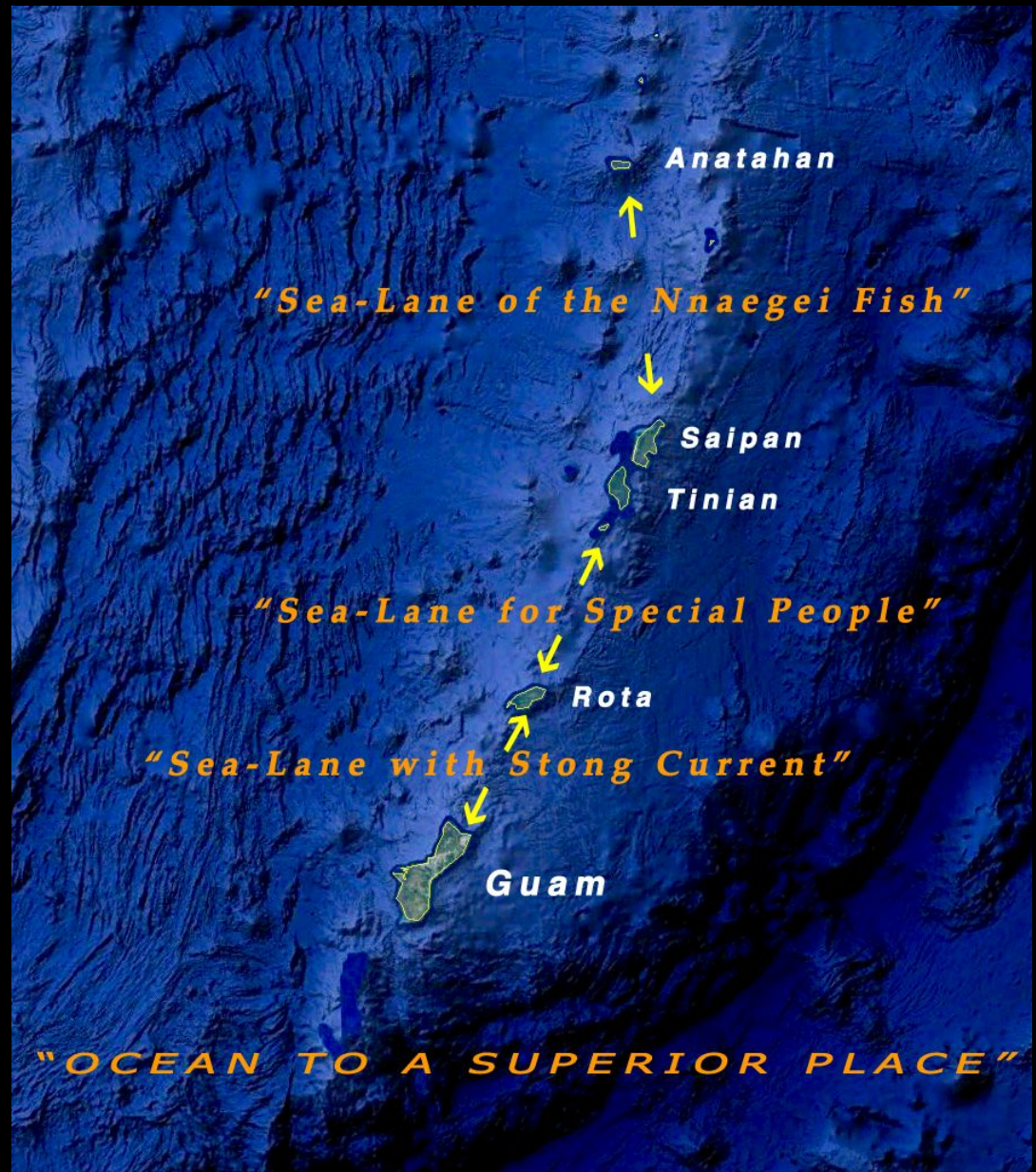
“Sea-Lane with Strong Current”

The **Metawpwaegig** sea-lane between Rota and Tinian (including Saipan) may be translated as:

“Sea-Lane for Special People”

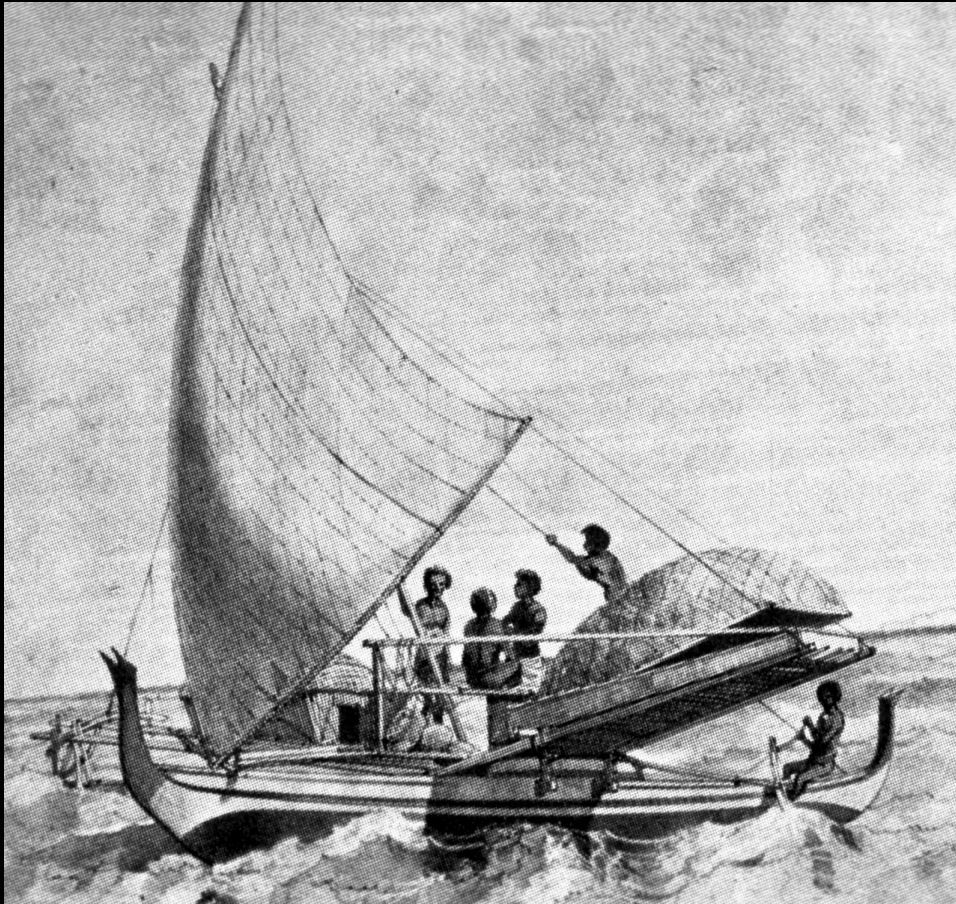
And the **Metaw Nnaegei** sea-lane between Saipan and Anatahan may be translated as:

“Sea-Lane of the Nnaegei Fish”*



* A surgeonfish

Song For Opening The Sea



It has been said earlier that Luito from Lamotrek navigated his way across the Metawaliwoal to Guam with "a song from olden times."

Carolinian oral traditions assert that there are songs for navigating to different islands, but these songs are not allowed to be shared outside the family.

The closest one can come to what they may sound like, I believe, is the *Sumetaw* or "Song for Opening the Sea."

To close this presentation the *Sumetaw* is recited by Satawalese grandmaster navigator Jesus Urupiy in the following film clip from the documentary "Spirits of the Voyage" ...

“Sumetaw” film clip from *Spirits of the Voyage* (also available on YouTube at: <https://youtu.be/B8DuUjwNW-o>.)

Song For Opening The Sea
"Sumetaw"

*We are entering this ocean, this sea of islands, this sea for navigators.
It is a small sea, it is a short sea, but this is not a sea! It is a garland of flowers!
We are entering this ocean, this sea of islands, this sea for navigators.
It is a small sea, it is a short sea, but this is not a sea! It is a beautiful breadfruit seed!
Come daughters of the Master of the Sea, let the door be open to His house!
Open it wide! Make it wide open! So that I might see the land! The land that I am sailing for!
Best of weather, excellent weather, best weather for sailing.
Great Spirit! I am not worthy before you.
So please, Spirit of the Sky! Make me pure, and happy I will be!
Calm sea, where the sacred bamboo drifts.
Crying out in this small ocean, in this short ocean.
Be awake! Stay awake!
But this is not a sea! It is a Mistress of Goodness!
Mistress of Goodness! Master of Goodness! Where the sacred bamboo drifts.
Crying out, in this small ocean, in this short ocean.
You drift in front of my canoe, so that I might reach land.
The land that I am coming to!*

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Stanley Retogral, Principal, NICHHS, Woleai



Eric Metzgar is an anthropologist and filmmaker who has been researching the seafaring traditions of Micronesia for over 40 years. He studied and sailed with the late Satawalese grandmaster navigator Jesus Urupiy and then later his Lamotrekese son, master navigator Ali Haleyalur. He was initiated into the Werieng school of traditional Carolinian navigation in a Pwo ceremony conducted by Ali Haleyalur in 2015 on Yap Island in the Federated States of Micronesia. He has an MFA in Motion Picture and Television Production from UCLA with specialization in Ethnographic Filmmaking; and a PhD in Comparative and International Education from UCLA with specialization in Educational Anthropology.

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