

The underwater cultural heritage of the Federated States of Micronesia

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Abstract

Of all the United Nation member states, the Federated States of Micronesia's (FSM) total land area is one of the smallest (191st out of 193 UN member states), yet the length of its coastline connecting its 607 islands ranks 21st in the world - after India and Chile. The people from the FSM are world-renown navigators and boat builders and they have developed and maintain many cultural practices, customs and legends associated with the sea. The FSM contains a variety of tangible heritage related to their traditional use of the sea and coast, material remains of foreign traders, pirates, colonial powers, and from World War II. This presentation will provide details about this significant heritage related to the sea and the FSM's recording and training programs, in context with the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage 2001, and the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003.

Key words: Federated States of Micronesia, Pohnpei State, Underwater cultural heritage, UNESCO

Background

The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) is a recently formed nation - formally recognized by the United Nations in 1990 - comprising the island states of Yap (9°30'N; 138°E) in the west, Chuuk (formerly Truk), Pohnpei (comprising the FSM capital, Palikir), and Kosrae (5°20'N; 163°E) in the east. It covers an area in the Western Pacific of over three million sq km, of which only 702 sq km is land and is home to about 110,000 people (Fig. 1). 'Micronesia' is a recent (c.200 years old) European term given to some of the many tiny islands in the western Pacific Ocean to differentiate them from Melanesia and Polynesia (Meller, 1998: 1). The Micronesian region includes the group of islands known as the Caroline Islands (the FSM and the Republic of Palau), the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Republic of Nauru and the Republic of Kiribati. These islands have been occupied at various times dating back to about 3,500 years ago (Dixon et al., 2013: 351). Starting with the Spanish, Micronesia has had a succession of colonial rulers

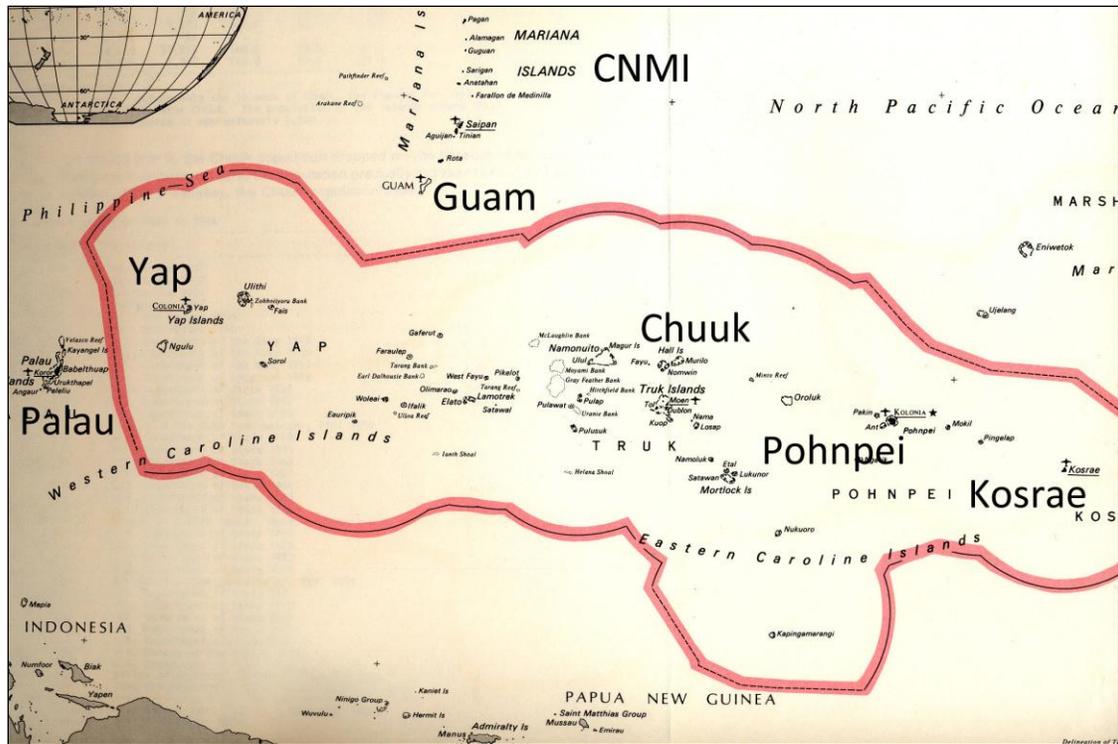


Fig. 1 Location of the four states of the Federated States of Micronesia: Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei and Kosrae.

(Magellan arrived in Guam in 1521). From 1919, Micronesia was formally recognized as a mandated territory of Japan by the League of Nations. Following World War II, the US was granted a strategic trusteeship of the region by the United Nations (UN), and the region became known as the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI). Over the next 40 years, the Marshalls, Palau and the North Mariana Islands left the federation, leaving Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei and Kosrae to form the FSM, accepting a Constitution in 1979 and entering into a Compact of Free Association with the US in 1986.

Tangible and Intangible Underwater Cultural Heritage

Many of the initial inhabitants of the FSM were coastal dwellers living in stilt houses (Rainbird, 1993). They have been building and using canoes for short and long distance voyaging for a long time, providing Micronesians with a ‘certain cohesiveness’ (Kiste, 1999: 434). The FSM coral atoll dwellers are some of the most renowned Pacific Island navigators and many cultural practices, customs and legends are associated with building and sailing canoes. They include the early settling of places such as Chuuk, which is reputed to have been settled from either Pohnpei or Kosrae, ‘from whence the

first woman arrived pregnant, sailing on a coconut frond' (Gladwin, 1970: 4). Dances, chants and storyboards convey information of these many Micronesian legends and customs (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 Dancing is carried out in all the FSM states - this one is of Yapese dancing and chanting near a (Faluw) men's meeting house/stone money bank. (Bill Jeffery, 2009)

Tangible UCH in the FSM range from c. 2,000 year old indigenous habitation sites; sacred, cultural sites; fish weirs; seventeenth century Spanish ships; 19th century trading and whaling vessels; and Japanese and American World War II remains (aircraft, naval and merchant ships) (Bailey, 2000; Carrell, 1991; Hezel and Graham, 1997; Jeffery, 2012a) (Fig. 3). Some of the oldest underwater cultural heritage sites (stone tools) have been found off Fefan (an island in Chuuk Lagoon, which Rainbird (2004: 89) dated between 2350 and 1650 years ago, and Craib (1997: 13) argues that they are the oldest pottery-bearing sites in central and eastern Micronesia. Pacific Island countries have pointed out that their UCH is extensive and argued for international recognition and protection of this wide remit of UCH at a UNESCO Meeting in Vanuatu in 1999:

"Protection of Underwater Heritage", within the Pacific, at the moment seems to refer more often to underwater wrecks from World War II, despite the existence of other underwater sites such as sacred cultural sites existing in many areas of the

Pacific. The meeting urged the protection of these sites as well as those on land that may be protected by the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO 1999) (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3 World War II Japanese aircraft in the hold of the Fujikawa Maru. (Bill Jeffery, 2004)

FSM Underwater Cultural Heritage programs and legislation

The FSM states are committed to maintaining their traditions and customs, in addition to using them to preserve terrestrial and underwater cultural heritage sites and they have enshrined relevant provisions in their Constitutions and state codes. Some examples of these aspects can be found in Pohnpei State where the Government of Pohnpei respects and protects the customs and traditions of Pohnpei¹. In Yap, two councils made up of traditional chiefs, the Council of Pilung and Council of Tamol, have been established to advise the governor and legislature, and to promote and preserve the traditions and customs of the people of the state in a manner consistent with the Constitution of the FSM and the Constitution of the State of Yap².

The Kosrae State Code 1997 (Title 11: Land and Environment, Chapter 14: Antiquities) provides for impact assessments on 'antiquities and traditional culture' located on land and in state waters to be reported to the governor³. In Chuuk, in addition to the protection of local customs and traditions and the roles of traditional leaders,' the Chuuk

State Constitution recognizes all traditional rights and ownership over all reefs, tidelands, and other submerged lands subject to legislative regulation of their reasonable use⁴. The only specific UCH law in the FSM is found in Chuuk. It forms part of the Chuuk State Code and is known as Title 25: Maritime and Marine Resources, Chapter 8: Chuuk Lagoon Monument⁵. This law applies only to Japanese World War II sites located underwater, whereas the other FSM state laws are generic ones that cover the identification, protection and preservation of indigenous and non-indigenous sites and traditions on land and underwater.

To assist the FSM in implementing UCH activities, the US Submerged Resources Unit spent some time in Micronesia and the FSM during the 1980s and early 1990s primarily conducting site surveys and developing a catalogue of sites and strategic plans for site management in association with the National and State Historic Preservation Offices (HPO) (Carrell, 1991). More recent UCH programs including capacity building programs have been carried out by the author in Guam from 2006 to 2012 (Jeffery 2012b). Additional UCH surveys have been implemented (see Applegate-Palmer this volume), by the author (Jeffery and Drew, 2007; Jeffery and Moran, 2007) and a number of other types of UCH surveys and research have been implemented such as that on fishing and the associated intangible and tangible heritage (Dixon et al., 2013; Jennison-Nolan, 1979). Building and using traditional Guamanian and Micronesian boats is being maintained by a Traditional Seafaring Society in Guam (Cunningham et al., 2006).

In Chuuk, through the FSM National Historic Preservation Office a program of documenting Chuuk's UCH has been implemented by Jeffery (2006, 2007). This has included the development of tourism/community awareness raising through production of signs and a booklet, as well as building the capacity of staff at the Chuuk HPO although the office has now been closed (Jeffery, 2003, 2004b). Staff from Pohnpei, Kosrae and Yap HPO also participated in this training which included development of a document in recording and monitoring the natural and cultural heritage values of UCH sites as well as the corrosion/conservation aspects, and all four offices gained equipment to assist in implementing these activities (Jeffery et al., 2007). From 2006-2008, an Earthwatch Institute funded project was implemented in Chuuk to assess the values and health of the submerged World War II sites and to assist the Chuuk

government in their management (Emslie et al., 2007; Jeffery, 2012a: 25-28). This included discovery of oil leaking from one of the shipwrecks, an issue the President of the Federated States of Micronesia, H.E. Emanuel Mori raised at the 66th United Nations General Assembly in New York on 23 September 2011 (Jeffery, 2012a: 27-28). As a result of this work in Chuuk, three television documentaries have been produced and shown world-wide about the values and issues associated with the World War II sites (Prospero's 'Shipwreck Detectives'; the French television series 'Thalassa' and the Australian Broadcasting Commission's series 'Foreign Correspondent'). In recent times, canoes built in the traditional manner, and a traditional canoe house have been built in Chuuk (pers. comm., Meter, T., 2011).

In Pohnpei, reconnaissance surveys have been carried out on some of its fish weirs and the remains of whaling activities (Jeffery, 2013), and extensive research and surveys have been implemented at Nan Madol. Covering an area of about 100 ha, located in the inter-tidal area on the eastern coast of Pohnpei, the complex of 90+ enclosures (islets) built of massive column-shaped basalt rocks, is considered to be an important political, residential and ritual center that dates back about 1,000 years BP (Ayers, 1983) (Fig. 4). The site is being documented for World Heritage listing together with the Lelu ruins on Kosrae. Traditional canoe building is also being revived in Pohnpei. In Yap, in association with the HPO, a comprehensive survey has been implemented on its extensive fish weirs (*aech*), a program that was directed by HPO and aimed at reviving their construction, use, maintenance and associated cultural practices (Jeffery and Pitmag, 2010; Jeffery, 2013) (Fig. 5). Maintaining Yap's traditional boatbuilding, navigation and sailing heritage is being supported by groups and are a feature of annual event 'Yap Day', and the Yap Traditional Navigation Society hold an annual two-day celebration of building and sailing traditional canoes (Fig. 6). Yap and Palau HPO are working together on a World Heritage nomination of the Yapese stone money quarries (in Palau), and banks (on Yap, and underwater between the two islands which are still greatly valued by people in Yap). In Kosrae, where 19th century whaling and trading era shipwrecks form the majority of the shipwrecks, the SRU implemented a survey of 'pirate' Bully Hayes's vessel *Leonora* to confirm its identity and recommend a management strategy. Kosrae also contains Lelu, a basalt built rock settlement similar

to Nan Madol located in the inter-tidal area and consisting of about 100 enclosures (islets) that were used by the chiefs, as mortuary compounds, and for commoners from about 800 BP. There are still strong known oral history connections with this site, although as with Nan Madol, the construction techniques used are not known.



Fig. 4 One of the dominant enclosures at Nan Madol. (Bill Jeffery, 2004)



Fig. 5 Fish Weir (Aech) Daqoloch in Gagil, Yap. (Bill Jeffery, 2008)

Issues arising from FSM programs in context with UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage 2001

The FSM's Historic Preservation Offices, supported by the US National Park Service's Micronesia and American Samoa Historic Preservation Program implement a range of historic preservation activities, including UCH, archaeological and anthropological research and surveys, which have been published with the assistance of a Micronesian NGO⁶. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage 2001 (2001 UCH Convention) at March 2014 has been ratified by 46 countries and is aimed at preserving "Underwater cultural heritage" [being] all traces of human existence having a cultural, historical or archaeological character which have been partially or totally under water, periodically or continuously, for at least 100 years...'

Some of the main aims of the UNESCO Convention 2001 are to preserve sites *in situ*, as a first option; to stop commercial exploitation of sites and artifacts; facilitate international collaboration; encourage public access; maintain sovereign rights; and to ensure that - where excavation is permitted - it is carried out in accordance with international best practice, i.e. the Rules contained in the Convention's Annex. These

aims are consistent with how sites in the FSM and particularly the World War II sites in Chuuk should be managed given dive tourism is an important industry in the economy of the region. In fact, it could be interpreted that the management of shipwrecks is the overriding aim of the 2001 UCH Convention, even though the term 'shipwrecks' is not used in it. 'Underwater Cultural Heritage' is used in an attempt to have the 2001 UCH Convention cover all types of UCH although many of its aims do not seem appropriate to non-shipwreck sites. There are a number of other issues in how potentially inappropriate the 2001 UCH Convention is to the FSM, greater



Fig. 6 Drawing of Yapese transporting stone money from Palau to Yap using a traditional canoe. (Unknown Yapese artist)

Micronesia, in fact many other countries that value traditional sites over colonial shipwrecks (see Jeffery 2004a, 2006, 2011), although this needs to be considered on a case by case or country by country basis. For example in Chuuk the Japanese World War II shipwrecks are not valued historically by local residents - there is no sense of place or belonging to these sites. They are valued economically through dive tourism, souveniring, and through the fish that can be caught using dynamite - causing considerable damage to the shipwrecks and the environment. Souveniring has contributed to many artifacts being removed from the shipwrecks and the Chuuk government, even with their legislation, seem powerless to control it. In Palau, souveniring of the Japanese World War II shipwrecks has brought swift legal action and two individuals were

fined and imprisoned for this activity in 2006⁷. The government of Palau regards these sites as an important part of their history and heritage and warrant protection.

Neither the FSM nor any other Pacific Island nation has ratified the 2001 UCH Convention. The FSM ratified the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003 ICH Convention) on the 13 February 2013, and the Republic of Palau, ratified it on 2 November 2011⁸. In the 2003 ICH Convention, the definition of intangible cultural heritage is seen as 'the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge,

skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage’ (emphasis by the author)⁹. Some of the main aims of the 2003 ICH Convention are to: safeguard the intangible cultural heritage through ‘the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion. This heritage is ‘constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity’ (emphasis by the author).

On its own, the 2001 UCH Convention would not appear to be an answer in terms of managing FSM’s diverse UCH given much of what FSM and other Pacific Islanders value is intangible heritage associated with the sea and UCH. Even some tangible sites which have strong intangible aspects, such as fish weirs, if they are in use, may not be ‘protected’ under the 2001 UCH Convention (pers. comm. Azner-Gómez, M.J., 2013). Western constructs of heritage and the separation of intangible and tangible heritage in research and management, much like the separation of natural and cultural heritage is not appropriate with Pacific Island nations.

A way forward for UCH management in FSM

Effective management of UCH in the FSM should be implemented in context with the broad tangible and intangible heritage of FSM. This would give relevance to all the different types of UCH and assist in their management. Development of a strategic management plan outlining how this could all come together and be implemented would be a good first step. Given the doubts about intangible cultural heritage and the associated objects of UCH being covered under the 2001 UCH Convention (such as fish weirs), but their appropriateness under the 2003 ICH Convention, the strategic management plan should outline the most pragmatic approach to managing UCH incorporating the most appropriate laws and agreements. The World War II shipwrecks and aircraft located throughout the FSM, particularly in Chuuk Lagoon, should be promoted and managed in context with the broad history of the region, in addition to their management as dive tourism sites, something which is catered for in the 2001 UCH Convention. This could mean the FSM developing agreements with Japan and the

US about the best way to manage the sites, which should mean gaining a better understanding of all the different values from the three stakeholder perspectives.

In 1989, the US National Park Service implemented the Truk (Chuuk) Lagoon Historical Park Study and made a number of recommendations about the future management of the shipwrecks (USNPS, 1989) which I believe are still relevant today. This report appears to be the first document which discusses any social values of the submerged World War II sites and the war in general from a Chuukese perspective. It concluded that Chuukese had been overlooked in commemorating their losses from the war: 'unfortunately nothing tangible remains of this aspect [how the war affected Micronesians] of World War II except the graves of the Nauruans on Tol. The establishment of an historical park provides a means to preserve these intangibles and, through interpretation, pass them on to others' (USNPS, 1989: 64). An aim of the study was to consider if the Chuuk Lagoon sites would meet the criteria for designation as a Historical Park within the USNPS system, and it found a number of management issues that needed to be addressed. It was concluded that the submerged WWII sites 'are utterly unique' and 'for the sunken wrecks, the establishment of a historical park or reserve seems to be particularly appropriate in light of the long-standing concerns over looting and vandalism' (USNPS, 1989: 61). The report recommended that a national park management agency and approach at a FSM national level be adopted given the significance of the submerged WWII sites. This could mean establishing a group of FSM employees to manage the park in the same manner as the Conservation Rangers of the Palau Rock Islands Southern Lagoon World Heritage area, a system that appears to be working very well. The idea of World Heritage listing of the Chuuk Lagoon World War II shipwrecks is an issue that the author and the Chuuk government have considered (Jeffery, 2004a, 2012: 28). Combining aspects of the 2003 ICH Convention that is community focused, takes a holistic perspective (natural and cultural heritage), and assists in providing a sense of identity, with aspects of the 2001 UCH Convention, would help to develop a relevant and beneficial underwater cultural heritage program for the FSM.

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Endnote

¹Constitution, Article 5, Section 2: see <http://www.fsmlaw.org/pohnpei/index.htm> (accessed 12 January 2014).

²See <http://www.fsmlaw.org/yap/code/index.htm> Chapter 4 of Title 5 of the Yap State Code, known as "State Historic Preservation Act of 1989" (accessed 12 January 2014).

³See <http://www.fsmlaw.org/kosrae/code/index.htm> (accessed 12 January 2014).

⁴*Nimeisa v. Department of Public Works*, 6 FSM Intrm. 205, 209 (Chk. S. Ct. Tr. 1993) (accessed 12 January 2014).

⁵See <http://www.fsmlaw.org/chuuk/index.htm> (accessed 12 January 2014).

⁶See <http://www.mehp.org/> (accessed 12 January 2014).

⁷See <http://pidp.org/archive/2006/May/05-24-12.htm> (accessed 12 January 2014).

⁸No other northern Pacific Island country has ratified the 2003 ICH Convention, although the Philippines, Indonesia, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Nauru, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea have ratified it.

⁹See <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00006> (accessed 7 January 2014).

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Biography

Bill Jeffery has been working as a maritime archaeologist for over 30 years. Bill formulated and coordinated a maritime heritage program for a state government agency, Heritage South Australia from 1981-2001. He went onto working with the Federated States of Micronesia National Historic Preservation Office and completing a PhD in maritime archaeology at James Cook University. He is a consulting maritime archaeologist to ERM Hong Kong, the CIE-Centre for International Heritage Activities and the Hong Kong Maritime Museum and has implemented various types of archaeological and heritage management programs in Australia, the Pacific Islands, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and various countries in Africa. He has conducted maritime archaeology field schools with the Flinders University, University of Guam and James Cook University in addition to teaching Nautical Archaeology Society (NAS) training programs in nine different countries.