

Trade in Ceramics on Guam in the Wake of the Manila Galleon

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Abstract

Various colonial factors led to the Mariana Islands being one of the most economically isolated areas of the Pacific from the late 17th century until the late 18th century. This isolation is reflected in the dearth of artifacts of European and Asian origin in the archaeological record. Starting in the late 18th century rules on public trade were relaxed and outside goods became more readily available in the Marianas, if still uncommon. This paper considers the ceramic collection from the Rosario House located in Hagatna, Guam. The Rosario House has the largest data set of imported Euro-American and Asian historical artifacts that has been discovered in the Mariana Islands to date. The collection is dominated by Provincial Chinese porcelains and stonewares but also includes a sample of refined European earthenwares.

Key words: Guam, Pacific Islands, Manila Galleon, Ceramics

Introduction

The Mariana Islands are some of the most geographically isolated islands in the Western Pacific. They lie on the western periphery of Oceania, located approximately 1200 miles southeast of Japan and 1500 miles east of the Philippines (Fig. 1). Spanish colonial policies of the late 17th century further isolated the Chamorro people of the Marianas from other indigenous polities in the Pacific. This solitude and segregation from the rest of Oceania would last through the late 19th century. This isolation extended to economic exchange even as they acted as a key nexus in the Manila Galleon trade. This paper will examine Guam's place in world trade

at the end of the Manila Galleon trade through archaeologically recovered ceramics.

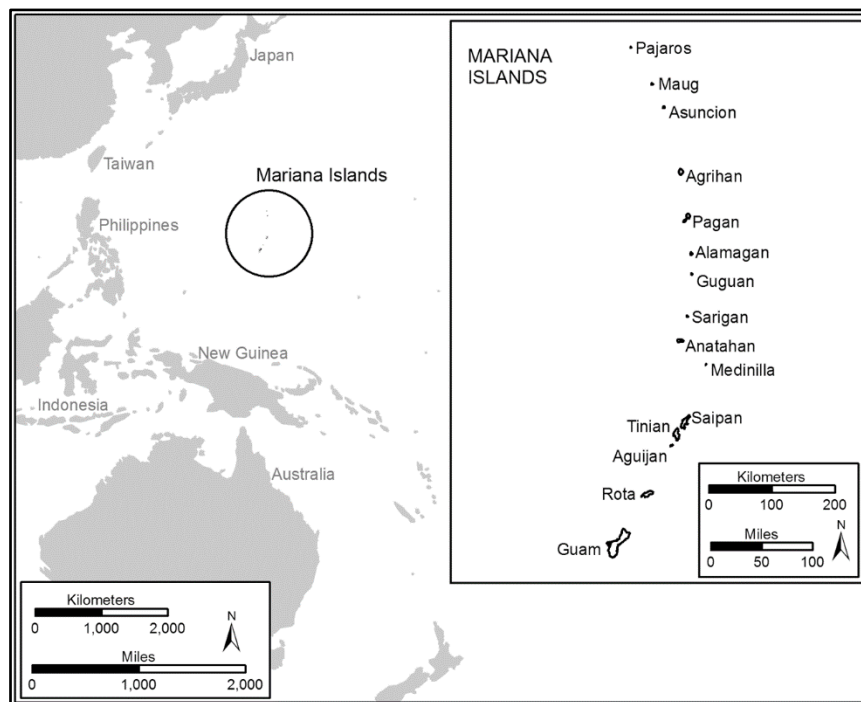


Fig. 1: Map of the Mariana Islands. (Mike Carson)

Historic Background

Guam was the first landfall in the Pacific of an occupied island by Magellan and his exhausted scurvy-ridden crew in his quest to reach the Spice Islands. When Magellan and his crew made anchor on Guam on that first long trek across the Pacific they felt both saved and threatened in the initial lifesaving exchanges of food and water that were made with indigenous Chamorro inhabitants. The day after contact Magellan's men launched an assault on a Chamorro village and burnt most of it down in the course of recovering a ships boat needed to sound future anchorages. Yet, at the same time that these Europeans were conducting a raid against one Chamorro village they were busy trading for fresh food and water with others. This ambiguity involving violence continued through the early Manila Galleon trade (Rogers 1995; Giraldez 2015).

For the next 150 years or so, the Mariana Islands were common stopping places on the southern leg of the Manila Galleon route to take on water, fruit, and fresh food. Trade was done at a distance with laughing Chamorros making sea-borne trades of rice and other victuals that often turned out to mostly consist of baskets of rocks and sand or coconut oil heavily diluted with seawater (Pigafetta 1521 and Legaspi 1564 in Barratt 2003: 56 and 61-62). The Chamorros had to maintain a safe distance from the Spanish ships or they might find themselves impressed as involuntary translators for future voyages or worse yet working the pumps all the way to Manila in the stinking, over heated bilges of leaking galleons (Giraldez 2015:49).

The Spanish mission and the colonization that rapidly followed in the Marianas were directly related to the glimpses of the islands from the passing galleons that inflamed the imaginations of various churchmen who saw them as fertile fields for the harvest of souls (Driver 1989). The Spanish crown showed initially little interest in acquiring a string of tiny islands without spice, textile, or mineral resources. Zealous religious first jumped ship to convert the Chamorro. After a campaign conducted by the politically connected Father San Vittores a Jesuit mission was established (McDonough 2004; Coomans 1997). The Marianas mission rapidly found itself embroiled in cultural and political conflict with local power structures and called for protection from the Crown (Lesveque 1995; Levesque 1996). However, the military companies sent for their protection were “like a rich armor worn in heat of day that scalds with safety” (Shakespeare Henry IV PtII.). The churchmen spent much of the next century or so complaining about the character and behavior of the troops and their captains. Still without the military presence the Catholic Church would have been unable to further their mission of conversion. The Spanish

controlled islands became safe harbors for galleons battered by typhoons or just poorly captained or incompetently crewed in the Acapulco crossing. These islands were also a welcome stop to take on fresh fruit and vegetables during the Manila crossing.

Prior to European Contact the Chamorro people had maintained limited trading contact and social ties with the Caroline Island groups of Chuuk and Yap to the south and with the Philippines to the west (Farrell 2011:211; Quimby 2011). The punctuated natures of these trade ties are reflected in the sparse evidence of long distance trade in the archaeological record. Linguistic and historic accounts have been interpreted to represent a limited trade in iron with the Philippines (Quimby 2011) and perhaps iron fragments discovered at the Obyan latte site (Spoehr 1957) on Saipan may reflect a Pre-Contact trade in iron. Ethnohistoric evidence and historical accounts of the Carolinian contacts with the Marianas, however, are clear on the trade and interaction. The descendents of migrants from the outer islands of Yap and Chuuk make up a small but significant population of the Northern Mariana Islands and their relatives still visit Saipan using the traditional navigation chants to guide their way. At some time in the late 17th century the navigation routes disseminated and controlled by chants between the islands to the south to Guam were magically closed by the master navigators of the Carolines in response to stories of Spanish cruelty related by Guam Chamorros (Smith 2003:79; Farrell 2011:211). The Marianas were now isolated from their traditional Pacific trade partners.

By the early 19th century Spanish policies of isolation, the Catholic mission, and the relentless hammering taken by the Chamorro people from introduced European and Asian diseases had eliminated the limited ties that once had bound them with their neighbors in the Pacific (Farrell

2011). The Spanish mission in the Marianas concentrated not only on the introduction of the Catholic faith but also inculcation and enforcement of European social and gender roles (Russell 1998). A primary goal was to eliminate the animistic beliefs and ancestor worship of the Chamorro. To this end, indigenous songs, dances, and oral histories were actively discouraged by the Jesuit Fathers. Indigenous knowledge systems that did not explicitly find favor with the Church rapidly eroded. Proprietary knowledge of all kinds was made vulnerable by the need to limit transmission to chosen heirs, the association with non-Catholic ancestors, and the unpredictable appearances of diseases that swept away the living repositories. Seafaring and navigational knowledge and expertise were heavily impacted by this social revolution. A people capable of making rapid voyages up and down the Marianas chain and of delivering passengers from Guam to Manila in 4 to 6 days as late as 1704 were barely capable of sailing beyond the northern tip of Guam by 1819 (Freyrcinet 2003, Originally 1827).

The Spanish were interested in maintaining this isolation for geo-political as well as religious reasons, primarily to deny access to rival European powers. The Marianas were an important stop off point for the Manila galleons making their voyages between Manila and Acapulco, carrying New World silver in exchange for the spices, silks, and gold of Asia. The Pacific route of the galleons was composed of extremely empty distances with very few points where fresh water and food could be brought on board. The galleon routes could be approached by pirates from only a few points and the Spanish wanted to limit this. Denying access to the Marianas was a way to keep English and Dutch at bay. Accordingly the Spanish crown did not allow trade with foreign nationals in the Marianas. They maintained their own garrison and mission on Guam with an annual

situado or subsidy (Farrell 2011:192) that arrived on a very irregular basis. A series of venal governors usually managed to reacquire the majority or entirety of this subsidy before they were recalled, actively cheating their troops as well as the local subjects. The economies on the inhabited islands of Guam, Rota, and Saipan were subsistence based with limited internal trade and no outside trade to speak of. Local people saw little to no benefit from the galleon trade or the government (Rogers 1995).

After the political unrest and revolutions in South and Central America starting in 1808, the Spanish money making machine, trading silver mined by *encomienda* labor in the New World for Asian gold and goods in the Philippines totally broke down (Giraldez 2015). The structural position of the Mariana Islands changed for the Spanish crown. No longer were the islands an essential supply stop and defensive shield for the Manila galleons located within a “Spanish lake”. Now they were at the ends of the earth, just beyond the Philippines, and a fiscal drain. Accordingly, the yearly *situado*, of New World silver, that provided payment for the Mission and the garrison was radically reduced (Rodgers 1995:93). Economically, changes had already been made in the trade policy in the Marianas before the revolutions. Governor Cerain, 1776-1786, had issued a proclamation allowing both internal trade as well as trade with passing ships. This was due to a deteriorating economy and the increase of foreign whaling vessels in the Pacific.

The 19th century saw a slow opening and reintegration of the Marianas with the rest of the world. The Pacific whaling fleet composed primarily of U.S. and British vessels consistently wintered a few ships at Guam and Saipan. Sailors came ashore looking for leisure, fresh food, liquor and companionship, not necessarily in that order. The 19th century also saw a reappearance of Carolinians in the Marianas. The chief and master-

navigator Aghurubw reopened the navigational ways to the Marianas and led a fleet of canoes of Carolinean families north (Driver and Brunal-Perry 1996; Smith 2003). The governor of Guam gave them permission to settle on Saipan. More canoes would come north in the continuing decades and would help to spur interisland trade. The Marianas remained underdeveloped with land ownership becoming more concentrated in the hands of the Church and elite families (Rogers 1995:75). Many of the smaller landholding families slipped into debt peonage (Rogers 1995).

During the stay over on Saipan and Guam, many whalers lodged with local families and presumably paid primarily in goods for room and board. The annual supply ship from the Philippines usually also wintered in the Marianas until the trade winds were steady. Some wealthy families also contracted with visiting ships to provide provisions. Providing fresh foods and salt meats would have required large land holdings so presumably only those families with significant crown grants would have been major players in the trade (Madrid 2006:14). Regardless of the participants this trade would have decreased, as the whaling fleets declined, through the mid to late 19th century (Rogers 1995:105).

The lives of average Chamorro families were not much affected by these economic changes. They continued in their yearly rounds of religious festivals. They conducted small scale agriculture, fished and hunted, collected wild foods, and practiced limited animal husbandry. Most Chamorros retained two residences under the Spanish. During the week they lived on small farms called *lancho* and returned to their formal residence on the weekend to attend religious services (Madrid 2006:8; Rogers 1995).

In 1898 the United States seized Guam during the Spanish American War. Following its defeat Spain sold the remainder of the archipelago, the

Northern Mariana Islands, to Germany. Japan seized the Northern Marianas from Germany in 1914 during World War I and Guam from the U.S, in 1941 during World War II. The United States took Saipan, Tinian, and Guam in amphibious assaults in 1944 and retained the entire archipelago after WWII (Rogers 1995).

Historical Archaeology and Rosario House

Historical archaeological investigations into the Spanish Period in the Marianas have been limited. Almost all investigations have focused on the island of Guam where the vast majority of the population, the Catholic Mission, and colonial government were located.

There are two principle challenges in conducting historical archaeology in the Mariana Islands. The first is the paucity of identifiable historic artifacts and the second is the direct involvement of the island chain in the ground combat of World War II.

The paucity of identifiable historic artifacts is rooted in two separate factors. The primary factor is the economic isolation of the archipelago previously discussed. The second is the hostile preservation conditions. High heat and humidity, acidic soils and high levels of salt combined with termites, mildew, and periodic typhoons, rapidly decay most materials including metal.

The effects of WWII can not be overemphasized in the historic archaeology of the Marianas. The majority of Saipan and Tinian and a significant portion of Guam were subjected to naval and aerial

bombardment and combat ground operations. More importantly, post battle cleanup and the WWII logistical buildup subjected huge portions of the islands to the not so tender mercy of the Seabees, who never did anything with hand tools when it could be done mechanically. Their “Can Do” spirit was a war winning attitude but it wreaked havoc on the archaeological sites of the Marianas. This damage was particularly acute because of the aforementioned lancho residence system. The three largest towns and commercial centers on Guam; Hagatna, Sumay, and Agat were destroyed and built over, as was Garapan, the largest town on Saipan. In the case of Hagatna significant portions were bulldozed into the sea to create additional land. Garapan also suffered extreme earthmoving. These actions eliminated most of the formal residences in the Marianas where imported materials were present for archaeologists to study. Asian and European artifacts have been discovered at former lancho sites but they are not common finds and they are present in low densities.

The Rosario House (Fig. 2) is one of the few surviving Pre-WWII buildings and intact archaeological sites remaining in Hagatna on Guam. The site was investigated by archaeologists from Micronesian Archaeological Research Services in 1988 (Moore et.al. 1993). The largest historic ceramic collection discovered in the Marianas was recovered from these excavations. In 2009 the Guam Preservation Trust funded the cataloging of this important collection (Bulgrin 2010).



Fig. 2: The Rosario House. (Guam Preservation Trust)

Stratigraphical interpretation of the excavations at the Rosario House indicates historical processes that caused disturbance and soil mixing in the areas tested. A leaching field and potential excavation for garbage disposal appear to have mixed PreContact and historical deposits. Laboratory analyses agreed with these interpretations. Uncertain contexts have limited chronological interpretations so the collection needs to be addressed as a totality.

The Rosario House Ceramic Collection

A large variety of European and Asian ceramics were recovered from the initial testing at the Rosario House. The vast majority of the ceramics dated from the late 18th century to the late 19th century. European ceramics made up 24% of the Rosario House collection and were dominated by wares manufactured in the United Kingdom. This is no surprise given the English domination of ceramic production at that time (Tames 1995:39). Asian ceramics present at Rosario House were manufactured in both China and Japan. The Chinese ceramics, porcelain and stoneware, composed 71% of the collection and tended to cluster in the late 18th to mid-19th century. Japanese porcelain and stoneware made

up the remaining 5% of the collection and dated from the late 19th century to the 20th century.

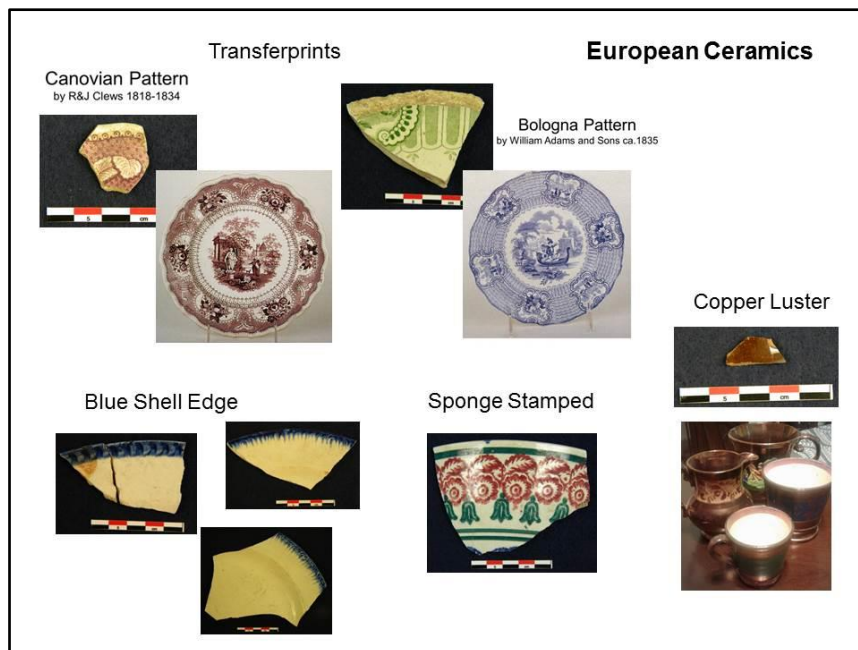


Fig. 3: European Ceramics. (Adapted from Bulgrin 2010)

European ceramics (Fig. 3) are uncommon finds on historic sites in the Marianas and the Rosario House is unique in the quantity and richness of their discovery. European refined earthen wares present were produced for food service or hygienic purposes. The more utilitarian earthenwares of the time produced for food preparation and storage such as yellow ware, Rockingham glazed yellow wares, and annular whitewares were present but in very low numbers.

Decorated refined earthenwares predominated. Creamwares, pearlwares, whitewares, and a very few semi-porcelain sherds were recovered. The only wares that were not decorated were the creamwares and a single tin glazed earthenware sherd. These are presumably some of the earliest European ceramic type introduced into the Marianas (other than a very few majolica vessels, none of which were discovered at the Rosario House). Decoration ranges from inexpensive shell edged wares

and sponge stamped wares to transfer prints. Transferprints were recovered in all colors produced, but blue was the most common. Plates and large serving or hygienic vessels predominated as vessel forms with cups and bowls making up the majority of the rest of the collection. Unusual vessel types include an open vegetable dish, a chamber pot or spittoon, a child's chamber pot, a possible candlestick and a teapot. Importantly, none of the recovered ceramics matched any other within the collection and it appears that they were acquired individually. Two unusual finds include a copper luster sherd and a fragment of an animal figurine.

Chinese porcelains and stonewares made up by far the largest proportion of the ceramics collected from excavations at Rosario House. This study does not address the large quantity of utilitarian stoneware recovered at the site. Asian stoneware jars of various makes and national origins were ubiquitous in trade within Southeast Asia and the Manila Galleons, being the shipping containers of their day.

Almost all of the Chinese porcelain (Fig. 4) present was of the type commonly referred to as Provincial ware whose production was centered in Fujian province (Macintosh 1977; Sheaf and Kilburn 1988). These wares were produced for Asian tastes rather than European and are of a different quality and aesthetic to the porcelain exported to the West. Porcelain bodies were a uniform light grey. Glazes ranged from pale blue through pale grey for most sherds. More unusual glaze tints included pale greenish grey and pale cream colored. Most vessels were decorated with blue underglaze handpainting but there are examples of underglaze block printing and overglaze hand painting as well. Unglazed rings on both the interior and exterior are another common technique present. Unglazed footings and sand adhesions are also common. Several sherds were

clearly of inferior production runs as they appeared to be over oxidized perhaps due to an early opening of the kiln.

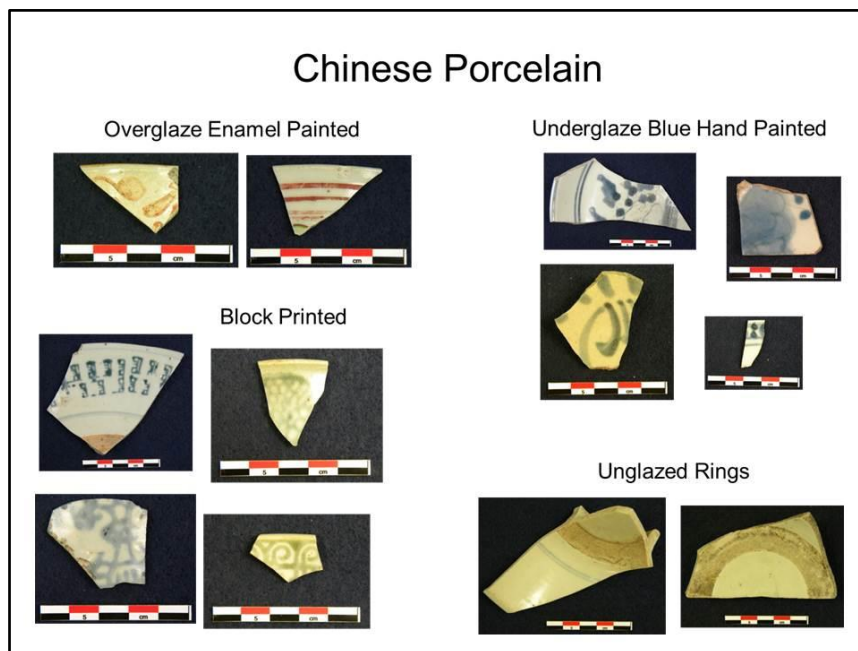


Fig. 4: Chinese Porcelain. (Adapted from Bulgrin 2010)

A small number of porcelain sherds were clearly produced for the European export trade based on quality, form, and painting style. One sherd has characteristics of early 19th century English porcelain and another higher quality painted sherd has an Empire Shape lobed body (Berthoud 1990:105).

Many porcelain sherds from Rosario House are identical to ceramics recovered from the wreck of the Junk Tek Sing that sank in 1822 (Pickford and Hatcher 2000). These include motifs such as stylized peach sprays, stylized Sanskrit printing, floral sprays, and lingzhi fungus and flower heads within a spiral or bloom. Koh (2013) has identified the majority of the porcelain from the Tek Sing as Dehua Blue and White. Dehua blue and white porcelains were a lesser quality ware that was principally marketed to Southeast Asia. Koh (2013) has also proposed that the Tek Sing cargo serves as a reference collection for the late

Qianlong/Daoguang period (late 18th century – 1850). Nevertheless, the variety of glazes present and different painting techniques and quality among the porcelain collection make it unlikely that all of the collection is the product of the Dehua kilns.

Porcelain vessel types are overwhelmingly for food service, predominantly bowls and cups. The general impression from working with the collection is that sets of bowls and cups are present at the site but this can not be stated with certainty due to the small size of most of the sherds recovered and the few cross mends that could be made. A number of sherds from small plates with a dark blue edge with lotus blossoms was found in two of the excavation units and were almost certainly a set. Similar decorated plates are dated from 1825-1850 (Mudge 1986:182). Block printed “debased Sanskrit” pattern bowls are another possible set present in the assemblage. The availability of these as sets is reinforced by block printed “Sanskrit” bowl sherds recovered from excavations at the Governor’s palace at Hagatna (Schuetz 2007:139).

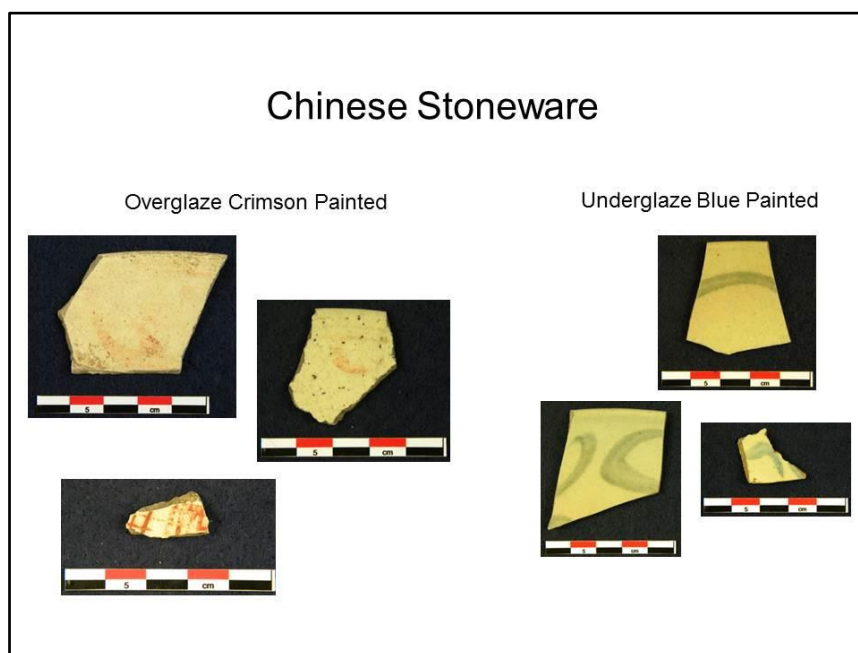


Fig. 5: Chinese Stoneware. (Adapted from Bulgrin 2010)

Chinese stoneware (Fig. 5) makes up a small proportion of the Rosario House collection. Two distinct types are present in the collection. The first type has a buff body and cream colored glaze. Decoration consists of crimson overglaze painting. The second type has a body varying from grey to pale buff to pinkish buff, glazes ranging from pale greyish blue to cream, and underglaze blue painting.

The ceramic collection from Rosario House seems to be a direct reflection of economic opportunities for an elite family on Guam. The earliest architectural remains at Rosario House date to approximately 1750 but there are no imported artifacts from that period. Upon legalization of private trade, foreign artifacts immediately appeared but in low quantities. With the advent of the whalers quantities increase and more varied goods are available. European ceramics appear to be individually acquired and may reflect lodging and board transactions for whaling crews. Chinese ceramics are available in greater quantity and possibly in sets. However, the porcelain's quality is low and lower quality stoneware copies are sometimes substituted for porcelain vessels. Provincial porcelain is difficult to date, particularly as fragmented as it is in the Rosario House collection. However, the porcelain recovered from the Rosario House site is extremely similar in style to the cargo recovered from the Tek Sing wreck of 1822 (Pickford and Hatcher 2000). Logically the porcelain at both location dates to approximately the same date. Given that cargoes may have been assembled over time from wares in storage a time frame of the late 18th century – 1830s seems appropriate for the porcelain. Ceramics at Rosario House dating to the late 19th century and early 20th century are almost entirely Japanese stenciled porcelains.

Two different ceramic types, Chinese Provisional porcelain and English refined earthenwares are predominant in the Rosario House collection.

Clearly these ceramics were manufactured in two different areas of the world under very different conditions and their distribution in tandem is unlikely. It is also interesting that European ceramics appear to have been acquired singly while Chinese ceramics were available in sets or small lots of similar decoration. These patterns indicate two different streams of availability.

It is likely that the European ceramics were acquired in serial transactions with Euro-American sailors as payments for lodging, meals, or commodities such as dried meat, coffee or tobacco, that were locally available. Whaling ships may have carried ceramics as part of a suite of trade goods to reprovision and refit ships over the whaling voyage. It is possible that crews were able to draw from these against future wages for their needs or they may have brought their own trade goods in their sea chests against future need.

Chinese porcelain availability in sets (Fig. 6) indicates a different kind and direction of trade. These were available for trade or purchase in bulk, if not necessarily on a regular basis. Provincial porcelain was produced for and marketed to the Southeast Asian market. It is unlikely that whaling ships would have chosen to load these ceramics in bulk at their home ports in New England or the United Kingdom when cheaper industrially produced English earthenwares were available. It is also unlikely that these ceramics are tied to the Manila Galleon. These porcelains would have been readily available in Manila but in order to be transported to Guam via the galleon trade they would have had to be trans-shipped through Acapulco and back to Guam. This is an unlikely scenario as separate taxes and fees would have had to be paid and the ceramics could have already been sold for a substantial profit in Mexico. In addition, the bulk of the Provincial porcelain in the Rosario collection postdates the

Manila Galleon. Therefore, it appears that these ceramics were being shipped directly from the Philippines to Guam, most likely by the annual supply ship or mail schooners. It is ironic that the demise of the galleon trade actually led to an increased availability of consumer goods on Guam. It is not clear whether this was speculative trade or orders put in by local consumers or retailers for delivery.

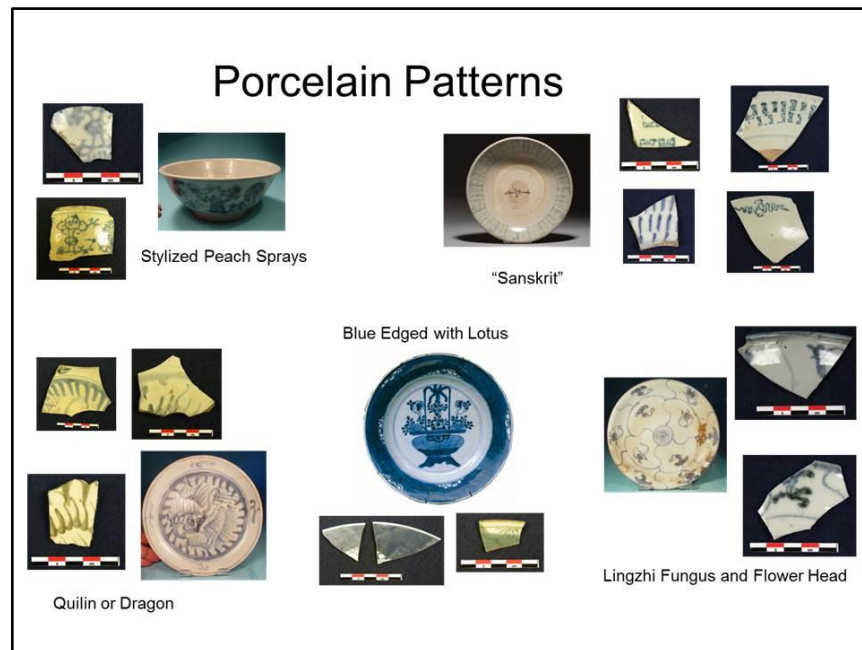


Fig. 6: Porcelain Patterns. (Adapted from Bulgrin 2010)

Conclusion

Several preliminary conclusions on consumer choice can be made for the family that lived at the Rosario House given the caveats of limited sample size. The first is that the end of the galleon trade and the political turmoil of the South and Central American revolutions expanded the availability of foreign commodities on Guam. This supposes that other non-preserved commodities such as fabric that presumably made up the bulk of trade followed the pattern for ceramics. The second is that options on the products available were still limited. Large serving bowls and other serving vessels, and hygienic vessels such as ewers and basins and chamber

pots were probably only available when European or American ships were in port. This hypothesized punctuated availability likely extended to other commodities as well. Rarity and inherent fragility possibly indicate use of these vessels primarily for display and prestige purposes. In the case of imported ceramics, there was a preference for food service vessels such as cups, bowls and plates, over utilitarian vessels such as pans, mixing bowls, bottles, and jars. Presumably food storage and preparation functions were being taken up by more durable though heavier stonewares. In the case of European ceramics, there was a preference for decorated wares and this continued over time. This is in contrast to the general trend by European manufacturers of producing plainer, whiter vessels such as molded ironstones. There was also a preference for blue decorated wares over other colors. Finally, even when broken, imported ceramics retained some value as there are multiple examples of broken sherds rechipped into circular gaming or tally pieces. Hopefully, more archaeological testing will be conducted at the Rosario House in conjunction with planned rehabilitation and these hypotheses can be tested with additional data.

(Please note that this research was conducted privately by the author under Guam Preservation Trust Grant GPTG-08-01 and does not represent the opinion or the policy of the U.S. Navy)

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