

# Archaeological site significance

-The connection between archaeology  
and oral history in Palau



Traditional stonework village, Earthworks, and stories illustrated on the beams of a *bai*.

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## ***Abstract***

Oral history is an important component of Palauan heritage and living culture. Interaction of oral history and archaeology is regarded as a policy when conducting research in Palau, both within the Bureau of Arts and Culture, responsible for protection and preservation of cultural remains in Palau, and among researchers not representing BAC. Legally, a material remain is proven significance if it is connected with intangible resources, such as “lyrics, folklore and traditions associated with Palauan culture”.

This paper examines and discusses the connection of oral history and archaeology, which will be presented through three case studies: the earthworks on Babeldaob, the traditional stonework village of Edangel in Ngardmau state, and the process of nominating a cultural remain for inclusion in the National Register for Historic Places. The nomination is a good reflection of the interaction between archaeology and oral history, where association with intangible resources is virtually necessary. The two specified types of archaeological remains are compared to one another regarding presence in oral traditions and significance for Palauans. Based on the information obtained from personal experience, interviews and literature, it can be concluded that an archaeological or historical site is valued more by its connection to oral history than to its archaeological qualities, which in turn effects how protection and preservation is administrated, financed, and carried out.

***Key words:*** Palau, Micronesia, oral history, archaeology, traditional stonework village, earthwork, Register for Historic Places

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# 1. Introduction

Oral history and archaeology are two fields that are exceedingly interactive when conducting research in Palau. The Bureau of Arts and Culture, responsible for protection and preservation of cultural remains, has two of its five sections, archaeology and oral history, collaborate when conducting field work and surveys.

Oral history can give archaeological remains a social context that archaeology cannot accomplish alone. The presence of oral history can also aid to engage the public in cultural heritage issues, as oral traditions are an important component of Palauan heritage and living culture. Ultimately, archaeological and cultural remains are valued more by their connection to oral history than their archaeological qualities, which in turn effects future protection and preservation management of the sites. Two types of archaeological remains: earthworks and traditional villages, are compared to one another regarding connection to oral traditions and significance to Palauans.

The ideas for the subject of this paper awoke during an internship at the Bureau of Arts and Culture during January and February 2011. I was there tasked to prepare one archaeological remain for nomination for potential inclusion in the National Register for Historic Places. The theme of this thesis will partially be presented through the nomination process, and particularly exemplify the property of which I was tasked to prepare; Edangel traditional stonework village. What makes this property exceptionally interesting is that it's located on the hillsides of a previously built earthwork, which make the area inherit the two types of material remains of discussion. The authority landowners has to their lands is also taken in perception, as their decisions regarding development and potential registration effects the future protection and preservation of the historical and cultural resources within their lands.

Cultural heritage may be exceedingly loaded with political values, and the difference in how different types of archaeological and cultural remains are valued, preserved and consequently how preservation is financed, then becomes very important matters in a global heritage perspective. This subject is, however too extensive to be approached in detail, but deserves to be mentioned.

Even though most material has been collected through formal and informal discussions with Palauans, this paper cannot provide a full Palauan perspective, and is thus mainly viewed from an outside perception. I do although dare to think that the conclusions will become useful for both Palauans and non Palauans, for researchers as well as the general public.

## ***1.1 Research aim and questions***

The aim of this paper is to examine the connection between archaeology and oral history in Palau, and hopefully to bring awareness among Palauans of how interaction of the two fields effects the protection and preservation management of prehistoric and historic properties. The questions I have decided to focus on are:

- To what extent does oral history and archaeology collaborate, and how does oral traditions affect archaeological research in Palau?
- In what way is the relationship between archaeology and oral history reflected in the nomination process for inclusion in the Register for Historic places, and what power does the landowner have?
- Are there differences in archaeological site significance due to the presence of oral history?

## **1.2 Materials and methods**

The connection between oral history and archaeology is presented through three case studies: Edangel traditional village, the earthworks on Babeldaob, and the process of nominating a cultural remain for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

The material is based on personal experience, interviews, and literature such as field-and survey reports. All interviews have been conducted during a timeframe of several months from February to June 2011. Although previously consented to be cited and referred to in texts and publications, all interviewees have, if possible, been consulted afterwards to approve their participation in the thesis. With respect to the interviewees and the Palauan community, the interviews are not published in their entire forms.

A one month long internship at the Bureau of Arts and Culture during January and February 2011 provided me with an insight into the nomination process, and it will thus be described from a personal experience. The material concerning the traditional stonework village of Edangel is based on a nomination form that was prepared for Ngardmau state and the Bureau of Arts and Culture and includes, aside from literature, information obtained during a site survey and through oral history interviews in February 2011. A literature study provides a broader perspective, and a deeper insight of the topic. The main literature has been produced within the last 15-20 years. All data is compiled and discussed using qualitative methods, where the two types of archaeological remains are compared to one another regarding connection to oral traditions and significance to Palauans.

### **1.2.1 Definitions**

During my stay in Palau, ten persons were interviewed regarding the topic of this thesis, and is throughout the text, if not by their name and/or, title, referred to as “informants” or “consultants”. They include the following: Governor Akiko C. Sugiyama, Chief Arrangac Ananias, Chief Beouch Sakazuro Demk, Mercy Beketaut, Ronald Kumangai, The Minister of Cummonity and Cultural Affairs, Remurang Renguul, Lora Ruluked, Inajo Soalablai, and Iyechad Tkel.

Jolie Liston, Sunny Ngirmang, and the Historic Preservation Specialist at BAC have all been consulted via email, and are not defined as “informants” or “consultants”. Due to respect for integrity, some interviewees are referred to by title, and not by name.

The term “historical site” means, according to §103 of The Historical and Cultural Preservation Act (Title 19 PNC), “any location, site, structure, building, or landmark located in the Republic which is of outstanding prehistoric, historic archaeological or cultural significance”.

It has been decided to primarily use the term “traditional village” when addressing the village settlement pattern that were constructed and in use during the Stonework Era (see section 2.2 and 4.3.3). This is the term most commonly used by Palauans, and is the name for registered stonework village sites. Traditional villages are also referred to as “stonework villages”, and “traditional stonework villages”. Some components of a traditional village are, to some extent still in use, such as the *bai*. Earthworks are also referred to as “terraces”.

B:NR-1:5 is the archaeological site code for Edangel traditional village. The code system for archaeological sites in Palau consists of “B”, the country code for *Belau* (Palau), two letters identifying the state, the third part distinguishing the archaeological village area within the state, and the final number identifying the site number (Hampton Adams 1997a: 10f).

### **1.3 Demarcation**

This text centers on the relationship between archaeology and oral history in the Republic of Palau, focusing on earthworks on Babeldaob in general, one particular traditional village, Edangel in Ngardmau state, and the nomination process for archaeological properties to be included in the National Register for Historic Places. The nomination process is partly presented through the case of Edangel traditional village. All the interviewees are residents of Palau, each with different level of training in archaeology, oral history and cultural heritage. The entire field- and survey reports concern Palau, and as this thesis to some extent also deals with cultural heritage issues in a global perspective, the remaining literature is extended to include areas outside Palau.

Although most material has been collected through formal and informal discussions with Palauans, this paper cannot provide a full Palauan perspective, and is thus mainly viewed from an outside perception.

## 2. Background, Palau

### 2.1 Geographical setting

Palau is an archipelago of some 350 islands located outside the coast of the Philippines in western Micronesia, just above the equator (see fig. 2). The archipelago forms part of the Caroline Islands. The 150 km long main archipelago lies within a coral reef, and includes volcanic islands, limestone islands, reefs and atolls. Far north lies the island Kayangel, isolated from the rest of the archipelago. The largest island, Babeldaob covers approximately 75 % of the total landmass, and is made of volcanic rocks (Liston 209: 57). It is by several bridges connected with the smaller islands Ngerekebesang, Malakal and Koror to the south, the latter containing the city of Koror, where most of the country's ca. 21 000 inhabitants live (Etpison 2004: 216). Hundreds of the coralline limestone Rock islands cover the area south of Babeldaob. These are only accessible by boat and smaller air driven vehicles, and have not been inhabited during the last few centuries at least. Far south of the main island group lies the islands of Peleliu and Angaur (see fig. 1).

The islands have a tropical climate with a rain season from May to October. Mangrove forests cover the base of the islands along the beaches, and further inland grows thick forests of palmtrees, betelnut trees and bamboos. The Mangrove forests and coral reefs house a rich marine wildlife, which make tourism and fishing industries a natural part of Palau's economy (Deichmann *et.al* 2001: 19ff).

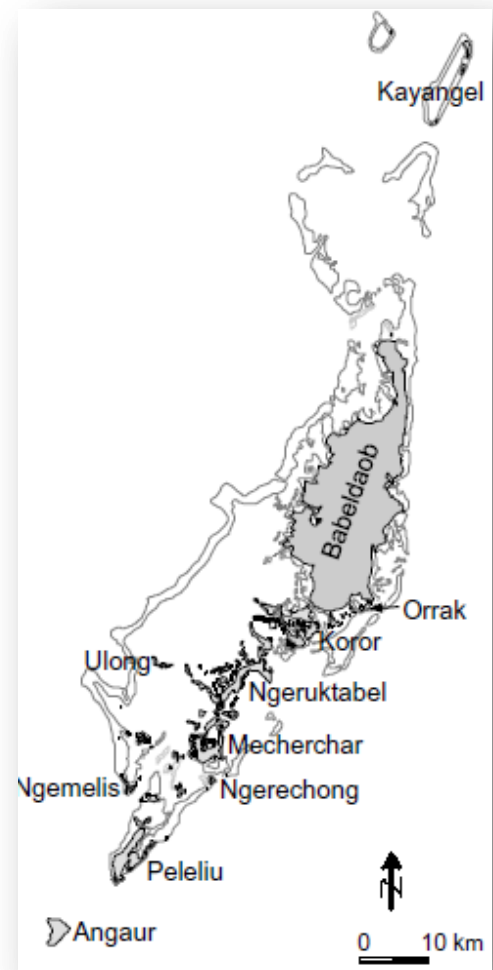


Figure 1. Map of Palau.

### 2.2 History

Recent archaeological and paleo-environmental evidence supports the theory that the islands were first populated ca. 3200-4300 BP (e.g. Athens and Ward 2005: 113; Clark 2004; Welch 1998), during the suggested Colonization Era. The earliest archaeological dates are obtained from the Rock Islands. Babeldaob is believed to have been inhabited during the following centuries, during the period known as the Expansion Era (ca. 3200 – 2400 BP). People there started to move inland and construct hillsides into massive earthworks. This period is referred to as the Earthwork Era (ca. 2400 – 1200 BP). During the Transitional Era (ca. 1200 – 700 BP), the population is believed to have moved back to the coastline to start constructing villages made of stone. This cultural sequence is called the Stonework Era (ca. 700 – 150 BP). Earthworks were

partly still in use, and integrated into the villages' defense system. Stonework villages were also established on the Rock Islands, but they were eventually abandoned, as no habitation has been recorded on the islands since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Stonework villages on Babeldaob were still in use during the time of European contact, and became known as traditional villages (Liston 2009: 61f).



**Figure 2.** Map of the Pacific Ocean, showing location of Palau.

Europeans arrived for the first time in 1783 (Clark 2007; Nero 1987: 199), and the islands were thereafter incorporated into European trade systems across the Pacific, eventually becoming part of the Spanish administration of the Caroline Islands between 1886- 1899 (Nero 1987: 227, 317; Useem 1945: 572). The Caroline Islands, including Palau was sold to Germany in 1899, who's administration controlled the Palauans in judicial matters (Nero 1987: 323ff). In 1914, the beginning of World War I, the Japanese arrived to take control of the islands (*Ibid*: 335), under who's rule the Palauans experienced domination and suppression of their traditional way of life (Useem 1945: 577ff; Nero 1987: 339). Palau was lost by the Japanese to the United States in 1944, after the bloody battles at Peleliu and Angaur (Nero 1987: 340). The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands administrated by the U.S provoked numerous of changes in Palauan social systems and culture, including the political realm (see section 2.3). The goal of the Trust Territory was to prepare the Pacific Islands for independence (Hampton-Adams 1997a: 5). The Republic of Palau, or *Belau*, which is its traditional name (Olsudong 2002) became an independent nation in 1994, under a Compact of Free Association with the United States (Hampton-Adams 1997a: 5, 1997b: 16). The nation is to a large extent dependent on financial support from the United States, and has also been economically aided by Japan, Taiwan and international organizations such as UNESCO (Shuster 2009: 325ff). Although self-governing, the republic is not allowed to lead foreign policy that conflict against the interests of the U.S., who may also use the islands for military purposes (Shuster 2009: 329).

## **2.3 Government authorities and tenure system**

The Palauan government is constituted by three independent authorities; national, state, and traditional. There are 16 states within the country, which are all subordinates to, and obtain their power from the national government (Constitution of the Republic of Palau, article 11, §1-3). The traditional government is represented by the Council of Chiefs<sup>1</sup> within each state (Palau Conservation Society: 1ff; Constitution, article 8, §6). One chief of each state also joins a national level Council of Chiefs, which only has advisory authorities to the President (Nero 1990: 7).

Even though the traditional government has largely been replaced by the constitutional government, it is to some extent still incorporated into it (Constitution of the Republic of Palau, article 5, section 1). The majority of states have titled leaders in their legislative and, or, executive branches, but the amount of authority the titled leaders have varies between the states. In some states, titled leaders have complete power of decisions, in others there may be no traditional participation at all. This also concerns election (Nero 1990: 7f; Palau Conservation Society: 1ff). According to Palau Conservation Society (1ff), traditional titled leaders in Ngardmau state have no decision making authority, although, according to personal experience, they are advised when decisions concerning, for instance, historic properties are to be made. In my experience, it seemed that the Ngardmau state government and the Council of Chiefs had a close working relationship.

Traditionally, land in Palau was divided into political units known as villages, or *beluu*. The tenure system within these units was based on private ownership, either by clan, lineage and individuals, or on public ownership, which was managed by the Council of Chiefs. The major change in tenure today is that the public land is managed by government or state instead of the Council of Chiefs (Palau Conservation Society: 2f).

## **2.4 The Bureau of Arts and Culture**

Operating under the Ministry of Community and Cultural affairs, the Bureau of Arts and Culture (BAC), also known as Palau Historic Preservation Office (PHPO) or Division of Cultural Affairs, administrates those issues regarding the Historical and Cultural Preservation Act (Title 19 PNC) (Title 19 PNC §131). The Historical and Cultural Preservation Act, which was incorporated as a frame work for maintenance of cultural resources, was adopted after Section 106 of the U.S. National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, with some adjustment in relation to Palauan standards and beliefs (Liston and Miko 2011: 4). One such change is that all archaeological remains, both natural and cultural, are significant if they are “associated with lyrics, folklore and traditions in Palauan culture” (*Ibid*; see Criteria for inclusion on the Palau Register of Historic Places).

The Bureau of Arts and Culture, partly funded by the U.S National Park Service, answers for protection and preservation of tangible and intangible historic and

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<sup>1</sup> In the traditional power structure, chiefs were the senior ranking members of the elite class known as *metet* (Useem 1960: 143f). The Council of Chiefs, called *klobak*, was thus the highest authorized bureaucracy of each island (Useem 1945: 568).

cultural resources in Palau, and that Palau's cultural heritage can be enjoyed by everyone through education opportunities (Palau Government, website 2008; Title 19 PNC §131). Of its five sections, three are dealing with material cultural resources: Archaeology/Survey and Inventory, Oral History/Ethnography, and the Register for Historic Places. The BAC, much due to land development such as the construction of the Compact Road throughout Babeldaob, started in 1997 to identify all archaeological remains in Palau (Olsudong 2006: 150; see e.g. Olsudong *et.al* 2003). In 2006 one quarter of the area of Babeldaob had been surveyed. (Olsudong 2006: 550). According to Olsudong (*Ibid.*), BAC is facing a considerable amount of work to record all archaeological properties, which is impacted by limitations in budget and staff.

## 3. Previous research evaluation

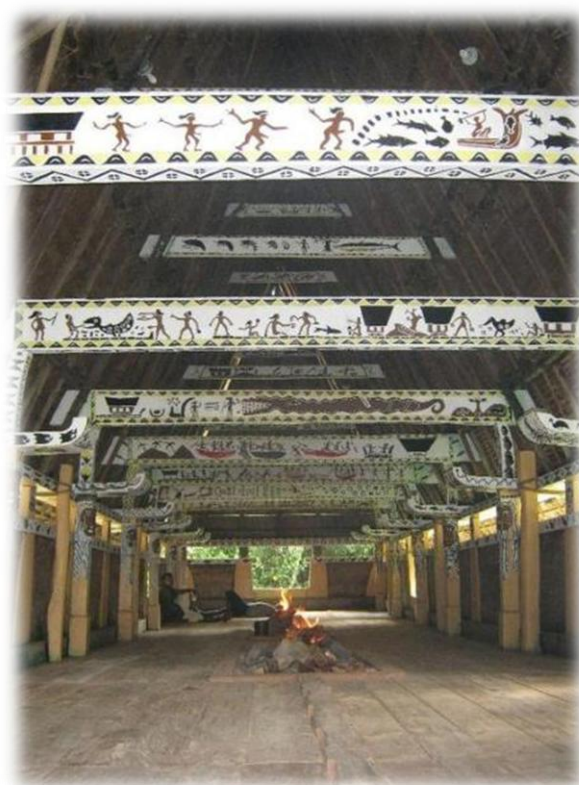
### 3.1 Palau's cultural identity: oral history

#### 3.1.1 The stories

One of the most significant elements of Palau's traditional living culture is the oral traditions. Storytelling traditionally was, and still is, a education technique used by the elders of the clan or family, and this way, the stories are kept alive by passing them on to the next generation (The Palau Society of Historians and Bureau of Arts and Culture 2008: 1). Starting from the era known in the stories as *the Ancient Times*, the oral traditions cover the time span from the birth of Palau to modern times (Nero 1987: 72ff). *The Ancient Times*, also known as *the Time of the Gods*, tell of the creation of the islands of Palau, the birth of its people and villages, the formation of the Council of Chiefs, and of the Gods naming the highest chief (*Ibid.*). Stories from this era do not fit in any chronological framework, neither are they considered as true; rather are they regarded as myths and legends (*Ibid.*). Next in chronological order are the stories representing the time known as *the Olden Days*, *the Foundation time*, or *the Time of the Ancestors*. These are considered historical.

They depict mainly significant events associated with clans and villages, such as how the gods assisted the ancestors of today's chiefs. The stories from this era also describe *kelulau* (inversions of chiefly titles and responsibilities) and political changes up to the time of European contact in 1783 (*Ibid*: 118ff). The year 1783 marks the shift to the era known as *the Recent Past* (*Ibid*: 199).

A selection of the legends and stories are illustrated on the carved wooden beams of the traditional *bai* (meeting houses) that has existed, and in some



**Figure 3.** Some of the stories and legends painted on the interior wooden beams of a *bai*, Aimelik state. Photo by Linnea Lövgren

extent still are in use within several villages (*Ibid*: 104). The painted and carved beams include stories significant for the village, the state, and the Republic of Palau (Lövgren, personal comm. 2011-05-25) (see fig. 3). This illustrative tradition was during the 1920s replicated onto carved wooden planks, known as *storyboards*, where the most popular legends are depicted (*Ibid*: 430). This local tradition is still very popular in Palau (Etpison 2004: 239) (see fig. 4).

### 3.1.2 Their roles and significance among Palauans

Access to historical knowledge has for long been restricted to the rulers of the elite class. The information given depends on the knowledge and transition rights of the narrator as well as the receiver (Nero 1987: 155f). Some stories are known by the general public; while some which inherit certain information is to be kept from the public; from people with no right to receive the knowledge, such as political matters of the state (Nero 1990: 5). Nero explains the legends and stories depicted on the *bai* beams, which only a few of the elders knew and could retell, of which one was responsible of explaining them to visitors (*Ibid*: 104, 1990: 9). For instance, those stories from *the Olden Days* that include inversions of chiefly titles and responsibilities are only known by the *meteet*, and only they can discuss them properly (*Ibid* 1987: 118). A story is always colored by the raconteur, so if only the elders of the elite class are entitled to retell the stories of Palau, the story and the content of the story are shaped and selected by the elite. The majority of the oral traditions also represent the history of the elite (Nero 1987: 119). The mythology and historical events are thus incorporated and embedded in the social positions and relationships of the chiefly hierarchy (*Ibid*: 1, 117), where the past may function to validate one's social position and power, especially in such a hierarchical society as Palau (*Ibid*: 119; 1990: 2).



**Figure 4.** Illustrations and carvings on a storyboard, Koror State.

In the absence of written material, a story is sometimes changed when retold. There can be several geographical variations of the same story, regarding both the events and the people associated with them, and only a selected piece of the story is transmitted to the next generation. This is due to the fact that only the most important part- the essence of the story- is forwarded in full detail, perhaps the part discussing the relevant issue at hand (*Ibid*: 129, 157; Nero 1990: 5). The storyteller doesn't always necessarily have a reason for the

selection and variation process, as described above, it can also simply be explained by memory loss (Liston and Miko 2011: 2).

The oral traditions have gone through a dramatic change during the past 100 years, due to principally European influence, including change in religion. The generation growing up during the Japanese and German regime had a strong, sacred connection to the stories, and believes them to be true. (Jacobs 1971: 430) R.M. Jacobs (*Ibid.*) implies that younger generations often have a “fairy tale”-relationship towards the stories, and thus they are not as eager as older generations to remember all the details, except for some, which may be essential to the story. Jacobs (*Ibid.*) explains that the change in attitude towards the stories is due to the loss of respect for them. Another problem when stories are transmitted between older and younger generations lies in language differences, as younger Palauans have a vocabulary full of loan words from English and Japanese, with limited knowledge of the language spoken by elders, including traditional Palauan concepts and phrases (Nero 1987: 64).

While the oral traditions may have lost their credibility and sanctity, they now represent a common bond and cultural identity for all Palauans, and thus are considered extremely important (Jacobs 1971: 433, Olsudong 2006: 547).

### **3.2 Interaction of oral history and archaeology in Palau**

In the early years of historic preservation in Palau, there was no interest from the Palauan part to preserve cultural knowledge, and archaeological research was seen as satisfactory enough to cover the needs of the Historical and Cultural Preservation Act (Title 19 PNC). Gradually, a change in perspective following the deaths of many elders, and ultimately great loss of important knowledge, led to unification of the archaeological and oral history fields (Hampton-Adams 1997b: 38).

BAC have two of its five sections, oral history and archaeology, collaborate on a regular basis by conducting annual joint surveys (Olsudong 2002; see e.g. Olsudong *et.al* 2003), where both archaeological reports and documented oral history are included in the final reports of each state. BAC work closely with the Society of Oral Historians, which consists of one representative of each state, recognized for his or her historical knowledge. These are good examples of how BAC administrates the Historic Preservation Act in the parts stating that tangible resources are approved significance if associated with intangible resources.

Archaeologists working in Palau, who do not represent BAC, are also required to follow this policy. The collection of oral history associated with the material remains is a compulsory element in archaeological field surveys. The intense archaeological inventories associated with the construction of the Compact Road throughout Babeldaob during 1999-2006 (Etpison 2004: 38; Olsudong 2006: 550) and the installments of the PNCC telecommunication system are such examples (see e.g. Liston 1998, 1999; Tellei *et.al* 2005). The reports from these inventories include both one section for archaeological data, and one for oral history, representing both the scientific data from the general non-Palauan

and the traditional history from a Palauan perspective. The oral history is primarily recorded by an oral historian (Liston and Miko 2011: 5).

Oral history have provided an analogical interpretation for material remains, as exemplified by Liston and Rieth (2010), where a famous Palauan history is compared to a petroglyph marked in a stone set in a cultural environment. Olsudong (2002) has sought the possibility for traditional cultural norms and practices related to the construction of a *bai* to be verified in the archaeological data, while Wickler (2002a) and Olsudong (1995) have tested traditional, organizational, social, and construction models on traditional village sites against archaeological records. Oral traditions has also functioned as a mean to locate, identify and date cultural remains, in particular the traditional village of Uluang and its surrounding earthworks (Lucking and Parmentier 1990).

### 3.2.1 Evaluation

Oral traditions are described as an “exceptionally rich source of knowledge among Palauan cultures” (Wickler 2002a: 39), and they can provide a social context for the archaeological record that could not be accomplished by the material culture alone (*Ibid*: 42). According to the late Rita Olsudong, Palauan archaeologist, oral traditions can provide potential guidelines for interpretation of archaeological remains, for instance, to distinguish cultural features, and to different one culture from another, that may have similarities in their material culture. (Olsudong 2002: 153).

In Palau, where most archaeological properties lies in privately owned land, the Bureau of Arts and Culture is depended on the intervention of the local communities (Olsudong 2006: 551). Interaction of oral history with archaeology can be valuable as a mean to engage the public in scientific work (Schmidt and Halle 1999: 171). Schmidt and Halle (*Ibid*.) explain that the general communities tend to appreciate stories associated with mysticism and unseen power, over the often boring scientific fact. Folklore associated with an archaeological property is thus easier to market than the historic value of the remains alone (Burström 1999: 158).

Although providing archaeology with many benefits, there are limitations to its use. Oral tradition should be used with caution and critical analysis in a manner similar to historical accounts. The stories are only transmitted by people with the right eligibility; the traditional leaders, and thus shaped by their motifs and intentions. Oral traditional has been used to pass on knowledge about the society that is important and favorable for the elite (Alkire 1984: 9; Olsudong 1995, Wickler 2002: 40f). As mentioned in section 3.1.2, not all parts of a story are transmitted to the next generation, due to both purposed selection and memory loss (Liston and Miko 2011: 2; Nero 1987: 129, 157; 1990: 5). Thus, the major question raised when using oral history as data for archaeological interpretation lies in its historical accuracy. Gazin-Schwartz and Holtorf (1999: 4) argue that this concern derives from inadequate views of evidence regarding both folklore and archaeology.

There is also an important difference in the perceptions of time, space and cause between folklore traditions and archaeology, which may not always be in

favor of archaeological research and methodology, including dating (Burström 1999: 35; Layton 1999: 31). Folklore rather focuses on the importance and placement of an object, rather than plain data (Burström 1999: 35). Layton (1999: 31) explains that archaeology and folklore, two sometimes interacting models of representing the past, provide different accounts of the same events and objects, where the researcher must identify what tangible the oral traditions refers to. In the search for interaction between archaeology and oral history, it is important to create a dialogue between the two disciplines (Gazin-Schwartz and Holtorf 1999: 4).

## **4. Material presentation**

### ***4.1 Palauans' opinion regarding their oral history***

#### **4.1.1 The role of the stories**

Storytelling is very appreciated among Palauans. In my own experience during my stay on Babeldaob, no one would hesitate to share some of the local stories they knew, whether the stories would be classified as myths and legends, or to depict some truth, in which the events happened not too long ago. When asked about their general feeling towards the stories, Iyechad Tkel (personal comm. 2011-02-10) explained he considered them as 'fairy tales', and Ronald Kumangai (personal comm. 2011-02-10) claimed them to be "good stories to tell the kids and foreigners". The two informants were born in the 1960s' or 70s'. The same views were also shared by Remurang Renguul (2011-02-02). After interviewing Chief Beouch Sakazuro Demk, who was born during the Japanese regime, (1914-1944), it seemed to me that he perceived them more as some level of historical accounts, than what most people from the younger generations do. This view was not shared in the same extent by Chief Arrengas Ananias, age 59, who seemed to have a more flexible attitude towards the legends. The more recent stories and traditions, especially concerning his ancestry and clan, were although taken very seriously.

A Historic Preservation Specialist at BAC explains that oral history has the role to enrich the Palauan culture. The stories are delineations of events and concepts of the current functions of the society that, although sometimes changed, have been kept alive through oral tradition. Such examples are ancient wars, origins of relationships between clans, villages and districts, property ownership, particularly land, the origin beginnings of ancestral traditions, and migration of people and villages (personal comm. 2011-05-23).

The general feeling towards the traditions and stories, even the ones that primarily are considered as "fairy tales" is enormous respect and dignity, and consequentially the material remains connected to them. Chief Beouch Sakazuro Demk (personal comm. 2011-02-02) states that "Here, you respect the tradition", and listen to the elders to learn what things not to do. He explains that "we will always be Palauans. We will always believe in our history, but we can learn from science." Chief Beouch Sakazuro Demk claims he's unafraid that people will lose the knowledge of the traditional ways in favor of science, as

the history will never fade. "The customs, traditions will keep going, even if archaeology come and make up new stories", he says (*Ibid.*). All other informants doubt that the stories will be in danger of becoming lost, as they are too important to Palauans. One informant explained, "You can never take the story out of the Palauans" (Soalablai, personal comm. 2011-02-02).

#### **4.1.2 Interaction of archaeology and oral history in research and fieldwork**

According to the Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs (personal comm. 2011-02.11), archaeology is a misunderstood science among Palauans, and there are mixed feelings towards it, as some historical and cultural places are considered sacred, and, if visited, the spirits may not be happy for disturbing them. These places are thus not allowed to be visited. Even for the Minister, who has an academic background, these rules are to be followed, as "you might get sick or affected by the spirits because they are not happy for you to do something". The Minister says that even though overwhelmed with curiosity to visit such places, it's better to err on the side of caution.

Based on the spiritual respect for some historical properties, archaeologists, and other scientists have to get permission to perform any actions at the site (*Ibid.*). When visiting a sacred site, photographing is prohibited. But once Palauans get aware of and understand the importance of archaeology, they appreciate it, and support it. This concerns both locals and people with a position in government. The Minister describes archaeology a science field that is "catching up in Palau, and people are starting to appreciate the fact that it is an important aspect of the society" (*Ibid.*).

All of my Palauan informants expressed opinions that archaeology and oral history should continue to be used closely together when conducting scientific research, and not, as in most western sciences, be separated into two distinctive fields. The stories that people retell about a cultural remain gives the place or object depth (Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs, personal comm. 2011-02-11), as they are renditions of what have happened, either literally, or with the use of metaphors and idioms (Historic Preservation Specialist, personal comm. 2011-05-23). Chief Arraniac Ananias (personal comm. 2011-02-11), who consider archaeology as a very important field that needs to be further researched in Palau, also expressed his feeling of not wanting to lose the myths.

Some things that are found archaeologically already exist in oral history or chants, and thus, the two fields are good compliments to each other (Historic Preservation Specialist, personal comm. 2011-05-23). According to several informants, if a story that concerns an historical property exists, archaeology can contribute to the already existing story- to 'prove' the story true or not. When asked about archaeology research that contradicts a story, the informants have mixed feelings what they would choose to believe. While one (Soalablai, personal comm. 2011-02-02) considers the stories almost equal to fact, the majority would choose to believe archaeology or science, while not valuating the oral history any less (Chief Beouch Sakazuro Demk, personal comm. 2011-02-02; Beketaut, personal comm. 2011-02-08; Kumangai, personal

comm. 2011-02-08; Renguul, personal comm. 2011-02-02; Ruluked, personal comm. 2011-02-08; Tkel, personal comm. 2011-02-08).

#### **4.1.3 The importance of having stories to archaeological properties**

According to all informants, it is considered highly important that a historical property has a story. A Historic Preservation Specialist at BAC (personal comm. 2011-05-23) explains the importance of a cultural remain to be mentioned in oral history, as the presence of oral history authenticates what have happened; some events have only been recorded through oral history. Ronald Kumangai (personal comm. 2011-02-08) states that “it’s important for history, to know ancestors lived in that place”. The Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs (personal comm. 2011-02-11) claims that all sites have a story, “there’s always something, it’s just not that you go to the site, there’s always a story to that site”. Also Chief Beouch Sakazuro Demk (personal comm. 2011-02-02) agrees with this statement; all sites have a story, even if no one wrote it down.

Many stories associated with a historical and cultural property tell of important events, but there are also those who depict everyday activities. Information derived from these kinds of stories can, for instance, be used to legitimate clan ownership of a place or a property (Governor Akiko C. Sugiyama, personal comm. 2011-02-11). The Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs explains that these types of stories are part of the site, but they are not necessarily mythical. Examples of stories associated with mysticism are creation stories, like the one Chief Beouch Sakazuro Demk (personal comm. 2011-02-02) told concerning the creation of terraces (see section 4.4.1). Myths are often associated with a deep meaning (Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs, personal comm. 2011-02-11). All informants believe archaeology is an important field, which can teach Palauans about their history, and thus agree that a story also can be an archaeological story (Chief Arrengas Ananias, personal comm. 2011-02-11; Chief Beouch Sakazuro Demk, personal comm. 2011-02-02; Beketaut, personal comm. 2011-02-08; Kumangai, personal comm. 2011-02-08; Renguul, personal comm. 2011-02-02; Ruluked, personal comm. 2011-02-08; Tkel, personal comm. 2011-02-08).

The majority of the consultants claim historical sites of having equal importance whether they have a story or not, but there are different opinions about what is considered an historical site. Chief Beouch Sakazuro Demk, for instance, directly associates the word “historical site” with *traditional village*. All historical sites are illustrated on storyboards, he says, and are more important than non-historical sites. Chief Beouch Sakazuro Demk, Remurang Renguul and Inajo Soalablai (all personal comm. 2011-02-02) do not consider terraces as historical sites.

The Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs thinks that Palauans consider the terraces important, but that they don’t have the right connection to them. “My theory is that terraces probably were of the first wave of migrants ...and then the second wave came and then the other component of the culture.” The Minister believes that once Palauans receive more education about the terraces, they will definitely appreciate them more (personal comm. 2011-02-11).

After the Ngardmau state Governor had become aware of terraces, she was overcome by their history and explained that she inscribed terraces and traditional villages of equal importance, and would consider protecting the terraces if the government received enough funding to do so (Governor Akiko C. Sugiyama, personal comm. 2011-02-11).

#### ***4.2 Nominating a site for inclusion in the National Register for Historic Places***

Not all prehistoric and historic properties are included in the Palau Register of Historic Places. A Registrar at BAC (personal comm. 2011-04-22) states that “properties that are nominated (or currently listed) represent the different types of sites within Palau's history and prehistory”. Inclusion in the register means that a property receives judicial protection and all impacting activities require prior preview (Title 19 PNC §181; Hampton-Adams 1997a: 43). Legal protection is fundamental for a property's future protection and preservation. To be included in the Register of Historic Places, the property must pass through a long nomination process that includes numerous steps. My task as an intern at the Bureau of Arts and Culture was to prepare one property, the traditional village of Edangel (No B:NR-1:5), for nomination, which gave me insight into the nomination process, and it will thus be described from personal experience.

Any person, organization, state, agency etc. is allowed to submit a site for nomination that they believe is of cultural and archaeological significance (BAC Registrar, personal comm. 2011-04-14; Title 19 PNC §114). In the case of Edangel traditional village, the nomination was initiated by the Governor of Ngardmau state, the state in which the property was located. It was decided by Ngardmau's traditional Council of Chiefs, with consultation from the Governor, that the traditional village of Edangel was to be submitted for consideration as a registered site.

The preparation of the property for nomination included the following steps: data collection from local resources and government departments, archaeological site survey, site/feature identification, clearing of newly identified features site survey (identifying new features is not an requirement, but clearing in general is required), documentation of the property through maps, photographs, and written description, oral history interviews with several of Ngardmau's chiefs and elders, receiving permission from the landowner, and completion of the National Register of Historic Places form. All the data is compiled by the Register for Historic Places, one section of the Bureau of Arts and Culture (Ngirmang, personal comm. 2011-04-13). The Palau Historical & Cultural Advisory Board at the Bureau of Arts and Culture will thereafter, if the nomination is supported by the landowner, review the nomination and either approve of the property becoming included in the Palau Register of Historic Places, or defer the nomination (*Ibid*; 2011-04-21; Title 19 PNC §114). Inclusion is based on overall site significance. If there is not enough information that supports the nomination, the nomination is deferred for a later reading. (Ngirmang, personal comm. 2011-04-13, 2011-04-21).

To become included in the Palau Register of Historic Places, the property must meet one or more of the following criteria (Criteria for inclusion on the Palau Register of Historic Places):

“Significant districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects are those that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, association, and

1. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Palauan history;
2. That are associated with the lives of persons significant in Palauan history or culture;
3. That are associated with lyrics, folklores, and traditions significant in Palau culture;
4. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction;
5. That have yielded or may be likely to yield”

A place or property, no matter how well it meets these criteria, cannot become included on the Palau Register of Historic Places unless permission from the landowner is granted, prescribed by law during the Trust Territory Government (Ngirmang, personal comm. 2011-04-22). However, if eligible for registration, the board member representing the state where the property is located can lobby with the landowner, in the attempt to make the landowner aware of the property’s significance and agree a register inclusion (Ngirmang, personal comm. 2011-06-06). Olsudong (2006: 551) writes:

“Under Palau Historic Preservation Act, historic properties in land owned or controlled by the National Government are governed by Palau Historic Preservation Office (PHPO) and properties listed in the Palau Register of Historic Places. States have control over their historic properties in states’ lands while landowners have control over historic properties in their land. During the course of the PHPO Preservation it was found that most of the properties are in privately owned land”.

A property of archaeological significance that lies within privately owned, even if eligible for inclusion, is legally managed and administrated by the landowner, and thus the decisions regarding preservation and development must correspond with the wishes of the individual, clan or lineage entitled to the land. The landowner has the final decision, as “BAC does not deter any individual, clan, or lineage, etc. from using the property” (Ngirmang, personal comm. 2011-04-13). Before any development of land that would impact a historical property, the landowner is beholden to hand in an application of “historical clearance” to the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for review (Ngirmang, personal comm. 2011-06-06). According to §154 of PNC Title 19, all impact on historical sites delimited to those included on the Register, must be reviewed by the BAC before commencement. In these circumstances, the BAC may choose to either purchase the historical property, permit the landowner to proceed the project or development, or start or permit investigation, recording, preservation,

and salvage of historical data that is considered necessary to preserve Palauan history or Culture (PNC Title 19, §154).

According to Sunny Ngirmang, Registrar at BAC (personal comm. 2011-04-22), there is currently an even breakdown of which types of properties the landowner chooses to decline for nomination. She explains that the reason for declining nomination varies on the type of property, but a common reason, which is a misconception, is that the landowner believes he or she would be unable to develop their lands.

Ngirmang (*Ibid*: 2011-06-06) explains that some nominations are delayed due to land dispute between the parties with interest of the property, such as the state or clan. Incomplete oral history collection to support site significance is named as a reason for the Board to defer a nomination. The registration staff will after a nomination is deferred collect the data requested by the Advisory Board for a later review (*Ibid*.).

### **4.3 Archaeological treasures**

#### **4.3.1 Earthworks**

Perhaps the most striking architecture in the cultural landscape in Palau is the massive earthwork districts found on Babeldaob. An earthwork is defined by a terrain that has been modified intentionally by human hands. The Babeldaob earthworks vary in both types and sizes, including modified ridgelines, transverse and lateral ditches, embankments, earth platforms, step-terraces, raised earth paths, leveled plains, ring-ditches, modified gullies or swales, and steep-sided and flat-topped hilltops called “crowns”. Earthworks can be found as a separate structure and as complexes of several interlinked earthworks (which don’t necessarily have to be from the same time period). These can together cover an area of up to 27 km<sup>2</sup>, stretching all the way from the coast to the very center of the inland, and their size can be enormous, with solely the crowns reaching up to ten meters high (Liston 2009: 57f). Twenty percent of Babeldaob’s surface is sculpted into earthworks (Liston and Tuggle 2006: 160), but an estimated 78 % remains relatively invisible, as they are covered by forest (Liston *et. al*, in prep.).

The earthworks represent a long usage of the cultural landscape, and are believed to have been multifunctional. Every structure or complex didn’t necessarily share the same role, and their functions and purposes may well have changed over time. Proposed functions include agricultural, ritual and ceremonial, burial, boundary markers, defense, lookouts (see fig. 6), social display etc, with the clusters also defining sociopolitical districts (Liston 2009: 58f, Liston and Tuggle 2006: 162ff; Osbourne 1966: 152f; Phear 2007; Wickler 2002b).



**Figure 5.** Massive earthwork districts, Aimelik state. Step-terraces leading up to a crown with a surrounding ditch to the right.

The most significant structure is the step-terrace, which primarily follows natural land formations. Ditches and embankments are generally cut between, or on top of the step-terraces. The highest point of the hills are often cut and, or, filled into a hat, or a “crown” (Osborne 1966: 151). The base of the crowns is marked by a ring-ditch, some which are marked by postholes after palisades (Liston and Tuggle 2006: 160) (see fig. 5 and fig.7).

Based on radiocarbon determinations, paleoecological evidence and material cultural data, Jolie Liston has established a chronology for Palau’s earthworks. She suggests that people started to construct earthworks around 2400 BP, perhaps a bit earlier. The following 1200 years is referred to as *The Earthwork Era*, because of the large scale-built structures, and is divided into early, middle and late stages. During the centuries before the Earthwork era, the population was concentrated to the coast, while the inland of the island was used mainly as pathways for hunting and gathering of resources. The *Early phase* of the Earthwork era (ca. 2400 – 2150 BP) is characterized by growth and development of various earthworks. These may have been built upon the preexisted habitation utilization of the inland. During the *Middle phase* (ca. 2150 – 1500 BP), many earthworks reached monumental size and were now spread out over large areas. The sculpting of crowns intensified during the *Late phase* (ca. 1500 – 1200 BP), perhaps indicating conflict increase. The inland earthwork districts were abandoned, and only small size structures were built beyond the older larger ones. The construction and use of earthworks continued in a smaller scale during the post-Earthwork periods known as the Transitional (ca. 1200 – 700 BP) and Stone work eras (ca. 700 – 150 BP). During the latter, they may have functioned as structural foundations for coastal villages, together with defensive and ritual purposes (Liston 2009: 56, 60ff; Liston and Tuggle 2006: 170).

Whatever functions the earthworks may have filled, most scholars (e.g. Liston 1999, 2009; Liston and Tuggle 1998, 2006; Wickler 2002b) believe that the

building of them symbolizes a centralized form of sociopolitical power. This is expressed in the great labor force put into construction, which must have been organized and led by a strong ruler. Most structures are constructed in a way that reaches far beyond the requirements of their basic functions, and could thus have worked as expressions of power and prestige (Liston 2009: 68).



**Figure 6.** View from the top of a crown, Ngardmau state. Ngaraards' earthwork districts are glimpsed in the background.

Structures like the Palauan earthworks are not found anywhere else in Micronesia (Kirch 2000: 188). Monumental architecture in the rest of the Pacific includes stone and earth fortifications, tombs, boundary markers, elite or ceremonial platforms and vast agricultural landscapes, but these did not reach



**Figure 7.** Earthwork complex to the left with steep sided step terraces, ridgelines, ditches and a crown, Ngardmau state. The traditional village of Edangel is located in the forest, far to the right.

monumental size until ca. 950- 650 BP (Clark and Martinsson-Wallin 2007: 31ff, Kirch 2000: 255). This is 700 – 800 years later than when monumental architecture started to emerge on Palau. The construction dates of monuments

(especially platforms and mounds) in Western Polynesia, e.g. in Samoa and Tonga, is related to the development of hierarchical chiefdoms (Clark and Martinsson-Wallin 2007: 37; Kirch 2000: 254ff). Since monumental architecture correlates with an increasing political power, Liston (2009: 68f) argues that this could be similar on Palau, but centuries earlier.

#### 4.3.2 Traditional Stonework Villages

During the Transitional Era (ca. 1200 - 700 BP), the large inland earthwork districts were generally abandoned. Most people are believed to have moved back to the coastline, with substantial changes in village organization, architecture and defense. They eventually started to build villages made of stone (Liston 2009: 66; Liston and Tuggle 2006: 166; Wickler 2002b) (see fig. 8).



**Figure 8.** Retained stone wall located in a traditional stonework village, Ulong Island.

Stone work village construction began around 1000 – 800 BP, and was primarily situated along the coastlines with easy access to irrigated taro fields. Mangrove forests, which started to grow following partially earthwork erosion (Liston and Tuggle 2006: 166; Masse *et.al* 2006) worked as a natural defense barrier to the villagers against incursion from sea (Liston and Tuggle 2006: 166; Liston 2009: 63). These settlement types were in use during European contact in the late 1700, and became known as “traditional villages” (Liston and Tuggle 2006: 166). The main components of the villages were different types of stone platforms, including *bai* platforms (communal men’s houses), house platforms with *bluks* (burial markers), known as *odesongel* and *olbed*, cooking platforms, and resting platforms known as *iliud*. Other stone features are pathways, bathing structures, shrines, wells, canoe houses, docks and fortresses by the entrance known as an *euatel* (Liston and Tuggle 2006: 166, Olsudong 2006: 155ff; Tellei *et.al* 2005: 39). Most villages were constructed on small, low step-terraces which were part of previously built earthworks (Liston 2009: 66; Liston and Tuggle 2006: 170; Wickler 2002b: 87; Lucking and Parmentier 1990: 134; Butler 1984: 36). Each household had its own terrace. The older earthworks were also integrated into village defense systems and ritual activities (Liston 2009: 66; Liston and Tuggle 2006: 170; Wickler 2002b: 87f).

Stephen Wickler proposes a settlement chronology of three distinctive periods, on the basis of stratigraphic evidence and radiocarbon dates (Wickler 2002a: 44). Activities associated with the first period (ca. 700 – 500 BP) are relatively uncertain, and may be of horticultural use and temporal habitation of earthworks the villages were constructed on. The second period (ca. 500- 300 BP) is marked by nuclear village settlements, with postholes, refuse pits and dense middens reflecting increasing use of the area. Most of the current existing structures remnants from the third period (ca. 300 BP – ), with continued use until the 1950s (*Ibid.*: 44f). Jolie Liston is, due to the immense construction of stone structures, referring to the period from ca. 700 – 150 BP as the Stonework Era (Liston 2009: 61f).

As with earthworks, construction of traditional stonework villages required a large labor investment. It was thus the primarily expressions of sociopolitical competition during the Stonework Era, which, for instance was materialized by settlement size, location, and size and number of the village *bai* (Liston and Tuggle 2006: 168ff; Wickler 2002a: 43f).

Stonework villages were also established on the Rock islands. Dating of numerous of excavated middens indicates a settlement period for about a thousand years between 1350-350 BP (Masse 1990: 216). The settlements were eventually abandoned, as no evidence of habitation was recorded during the time of European contact, and the islands have not been inhabited since (Liston 2009: 66).

#### 4.3.3 Edangel traditional village (No: B:NR-1:5)

Edangel is a traditional stonework village site (Olsudong *et.al* 2003: 41) that contains numerous stone platforms (see fig. 10), some with *bluks* and concrete, stone paths, scattered rocks, and a retaining stone wall interpreted as an *euatel*. All of these features are significant to stonework villages. The area also contains a shell midden, and World War II remains such as Japanese trenches (see fig. 9).

The Edangel area is entirely terraced and contains numerous stone platforms, which are accessible through the village's main entrance by a *euatel*.

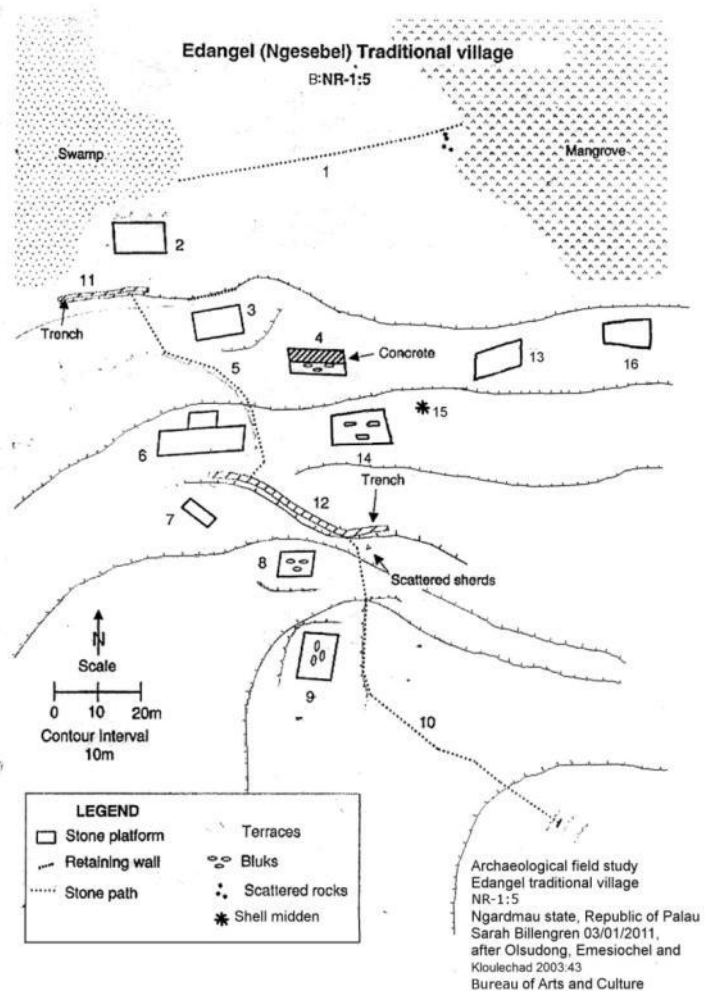


Figure 9. Map of Edangel traditional village

Numerous additional stone platforms constructed on step-terraces are passed uphill south from the village until reaching a savanna capped by a sculpted crown with a surrounding ditch (see fig. 11). The descent down to the village site in a northwestern direction is marked by steep step-terraces (risers), long terrace threads and ridges. This shows that Edangel was integrated in a probable pre-existing massive earthwork system. This not only changes the view of Edangel's environmental setting and its sociopolitical role, but also of the area itself as being used for a severe period even before the traditional stone work village was constructed.

These prior observations recorded during a site survey at Edangel in February 2011 support the theory that people could have used or lived in the environmental area of Edangel as early as ca. 2400 BP, perhaps even earlier, when massive earthworks were being constructed and integrated into people's social, agricultural, spiritual and political life. The village Edangel may have been constructed on a previously built earthwork somewhere from 700 to 150 BP, according to typological dating methods and geological observations. The more ancient earthworks appear to have been integrated into the traditional stonework village's defenses and ritual activities. The WWII Japanese trenches within the village show that the area was being used during the mid 1900s when Palauans may have still inhabited the village. Elders also remember people living below the village until ca. 50 years ago (see section 4.4.2). Archaeological excavation can assist in solving these chronological questions.



**Figure 10.** Stone platform with *bluks* (burial markers) (smaller rocks), interpreted as an *odesongel*. Edangel traditional village, Ngardmau state.

## **4.4 Traditional stories of archaeological and historical sites**

### **4.4.1 Earthworks**

The presence of earthworks in oral narratives is extremely obscure. At the time of European contact in 1783, the unoccupied earthworks did not play a role in the local oral traditions (Liston 2009: 56). There is today no known story or legend about terraces (Liston and Miko 2011:2; Osbourne 1966: 152; Tellei et.al 2005: 36). After educated about earthworks by Liston, Ronald Kumangai and

Iyechad Tkel (both personal comm. 2011-02-08) said it was the first time they heard stories about the terraces, and as far as they knew, Palau doesn't have stories about them. When consultants during interview were asked about earthworks, they don't know what they are, or even less that they were built by humans. Some informants confuse them with the hollowed hillsides resulted from Japanese boxite mining. When Liston asks the Palauans if they built the terraces, they find it hard in general to believe that their ancestors were capable of building such things (Liston and Miko 2011: 12). Liston and Tuggle (2006: 160) explain that people are surprised to learn that their ancestors had once lived on the terraces. In the majority of cases, oral traditions don't describe the earthworks as being imbued with meaning or serving a function (Liston and Miko 2011: 22). Liston (1998: 240) explains that Palauans do not seem to know the origin of the earthworks; some believe they were created by the gods as their path between heaven and earth. Elders do not appear to see the physical and/or social connection between the earthworks and the traditional villages, as no obvious evidence of a characteristic village set up is apparent on the earthwork tops or hillsides (*Ibid.*).

When asked about the origin of the earthworks, Chief Beouch Sakazuro Demk, (personal comm. 2011-02-02) had heard that they were created by a huge tsunami thousands of years ago. This theory has also been discussed by others (see Parmentier 1987: 162f; Tellei et.al 2005: 37), and refers to the great flood after the time of Milad, who is a central figure in the Palauan creation myth. According to the legend, terraces were formed after the water had receded, and were trapped in the depressions of the earth (Tellei et.al 2005: 37).

The stories of earthworks do not appear among the decoration on the wooden beams of *bai er a rubak* (Chiefly meeting hall) in some villages. The beams, described in section 3.1.1, contain pictographs of legends, historic events, and important symbols that are significant to the village, the state, and the Republic of Palau (Liston and Miko 2011: 12; Lövgren, personal comm. 2011-05-25; Tellei et. al 2005: 36). Another cultural artifact of great narrative importance are the storyboards; wooded planks with carved pictographs representing oral histories. There is only one known storyboard that contains a picture of an earthwork (Liston and Miko 2011: 12f).

The Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs (personal comm. 2011-02-11) believe the terraces were created by the population belonging to the migration wave before the ancestors of today's Palauans arrived, explaining why Palauans don't have a connection to the earthworks (see section 4.1.3). Tellei et. al (2005: 36) lists informants who have made a similar statement.

In a recent oral history collection by Liston and Miko (2011), seven out of ten elders, who lived by one of the largest earthwork districts on Palau told stories about the earthworks' association with humans' relationship with deities. According to these seven informants, the terraces were built by humans for ritual, ceremonial and sacred purposes, and that the earthworks were considered sacred and *mekull* (places not to go) because they were part of the ancient world. "Villages were built on stair-shaped hills to allow the gods and goddesses to easily travel between the upper and lower worlds" (*Ibid*: 10). It was also important for the people to live close to the deities, so they built altars

on top of the earthworks. It was believed that great things would happen to the people who built their villages on the earthworks, close to the upper world where the deities lived, which, as the elders explain, was one of the many reasons why people built villages on terraces. Later on, the villages were covered by sediment during the flood of Milad, and became forgotten, which explains why they no longer exist in oral traditions (*Ibid*: 27).



**Figure 11.** Savannah and crown surrounded by a ring-ditch located just above Edangel traditional village, Ngardmau state.

#### **4.4.2 Traditional Stonework Villages and Edangel**

Oral traditions that mention traditional villages are, according to my own experience, very common, as many of the stories that were told to me depicts events, sometimes with elements of mysticism, associated with people living in villages. It is not regarded as exceptional to hear several stories concerning one, single village. I will in the following sections share the stories of the traditional village of Edangel in Ngardmau state on Babeldaob, as recounted to me by informants while collecting oral history data of the site:

Long ago, there was a single mother who gave birth to two sons. One of the sons grew up to be left handed, and one became right handed, thus, they were called by the names “Lefty” and “Righty”. The two brothers were both great spear fishermen, a reputation that finally reached the chief of Ngaraard’s ears. The chief was currently at war, which led him to seek the two brothers and ask them to help him in the war. The brothers accepted, and their brilliance made the Ngaraard winners of the war. This is the story of the war heroes from Edangel (Chief Arrengas Ananias, personal comm. 2011-02-11; Beketaut, Mercy, personal comm. 2011-02-08; Kumanyai, Ronald, personal comm. 2011-02-08).

According to Chief Beouch Sakazuro Demk, Chief Arrengas Ananias, and Governor Akiko C. Sugiyama, Edangel village together with nearby villages Ngardau and Imengel formed the hamlet of Ngesebei. Apart from the story of the two brothers, no informant knew what events occurred in the village during the time of habitation (Governor Akiko C. Sugiyama, personal comm. 2011-02-11; Chief Arrengas Ananias, personal comm. 2011-02-11; Chief Beouch Sakazuro Demk, personal comm. 2011-02-02)

Edangel was long ago inhabited by rich people, and was considered a big village. Its close connection to Ngardau was reflected not only geographically, but also politically and spiritually. The sacred village Ngardau, “that came from above”, is believed to have been a small village where priests lived, while most villagers lived in Edangel. The villagers are believed to have belonged to the *Modeknge*<sup>2</sup> religion, and they visited Ngardau for spiritual reasons (Chief Beouch Sakazuro Demk, personal comm. 2011-02-02).

The state of Ngardmau is believed to have had high outposts close to its boundaries, where people would signal, either with fire or shell horns, to the villages below if something important were at hand, such as war. Given the geographical location, somewhere in Ngesebei, probably in Edangel, a signal outpost is thought to have existed (Governor Akiko C. Sugiyama, personal comm. 2011-02-11; Chief Arrengas Ananias, personal comm. 2011-02-11).

It is not known when and why Edangel village was abandoned. It was not inhabited during the lifetime of any of the living generations. Chief Beouch Sakazuro Demk and Chief Arrengas Ananias believe it was abandoned after the time the Europeans arrived, probably during the German or Japanese regime, due to corruption. The Japanese, afraid of unity among Palauans, forbade practice of the *Morekngei* religion, forcing the inhabitants of Ngardau, and consequently the villagers of Edangel, to leave the area (Chief Beouch Sakazuro Demk, personal comm. 2011-02-02; Chief Arrengas Ananias, personal comm. 2011-02-11).

Even though the village itself was abandoned, Chief Arrengas Ananias remembers people living below the village area when he was little (Chief Arrengas Ananias, personal comm. 2011-02-11).

## 5. Discussion

Storytelling is appreciated by Palauans. Embedded with deep meaning and moral education, the stories are illustrative delineations of certain events, people and places that have taken place or appeared through time. The collection of oral histories include both myths and legends from the most ancient time, and stories from the recent past which are considered as historical. Even though the perspective of the stories during later years have changed from considered as true to merely myth and legends, the stories today

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<sup>2</sup> *Modekngei* was a partly Christian, partly traditional religion, which primarily was practiced during the Japanese regim (Nero 1987: 339).

has the role of uniting Palauans of sharing a common bond and cultural identity, and all stories are embalmed with deep respect. The importance of oral history has led to interaction with archaeology, and today, the collaboration between the two fields is inevitable in scientific research.

The Bureau of Arts and Culture, in part financed by the U.S. National Parks Service, and which operates under the Ministry of Community and Cultural affairs, is responsible for protection and preservation of cultural remains. BAC administrates the Historical and Cultural Preservation Act (Title 19 PNC), which states that tangible resources are proven significance if associated with intangible resources, such as folklore, lyrics, and legends. In accordance with the Historic Preservation Act, the BAC has two of its five sections; oral history and archaeology collaborate on a regular basis by conducting annual joint surveys. Also other researchers who don't represent BAC are required to follow the same policy, and oral history sections are thus incorporated into the archaeological reports. The majority of Palauan informants claimed that combining the two fields is the only way to conduct scientific research in Palau, as stories from the living culture gives the archaeological remain more depth. A common assumption is that archaeology can contribute to a previously known story by proving it true or not.

Oral history has, aside from providing archaeological data with interpretation models and a social context, proven valuable as a mean to engage the public in scientific research. BAC is in many part of the country dependent on the support from the local community (Olsudong 2006: 51), and thus, integration of oral history with archaeology is essential. The data obtained from oral history should always be carefully evaluated, as the past is often used to give people, places and objects legitimacy, and primarily focuses on the history of the elite, why it would seem favorable for the elite class (Alkire 1984: 9; Nero 1987: 117ff; Olsudong 1995; Wickler 2002: 40f). Some stories are known to the public, while other information is only transmitted by, and available for certain people of a certain clan or family (Nero 1990: 5). The sometimes changing contents of the stories, due to both intentional selection and memory loss can also lower the quality concerning the amount of information the storyteller provides (Liston and Miko 2011: 2; Nero 1987: 129, 157, Nero 1990: 5) .

Archaeological investigations can sometimes be difficult, as there are certain places which are not allowed to be visited because of their sacredness, and where archaeologists have to get local permission for any actions that would be performed at the site (Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs, personal comm. 2011-02-11).

The importance of oral history essentially effects the way in which certain types of material culture is valued and maintained differently than others, which I will argue lays in their presence in oral traditions, rather than their archaeological significance. This hypothesis has been tested on two types of material remains: earthworks and traditional stonework villages.

The constructed hills known as earthworks or terraces were built between 2400 – 750 BP, and cover about 20 % of the landscape on Babeldaob (Liston and

Toggle 2006: 160; Liston 2009: 57). The presence of earthworks in oral histories is very vague, and in most cases, they are not mentioned at all (Liston and Miko 2011: 9). Ronald Kumangai and Iyechad Tkel (both personal comm. 2011-02-10) explained that, as far as they knew, there are no stories of the terraces in Palau. According to information obtained through interviews, as well as previous research (e.g. Liston and Miko 2011: 12), few Palauans know that they were intentionally constructed by their ancestors. Chief Beouch Demk, for instance, thought them to have been created by a tsunami thousands of years ago (personal comm. 2011-02-02). However, there have been some recent surveys (e.g. Liston and Miko 2011), where elders have mentioned the earthworks' association with ritual activity. Traditional stone work villages, on the other hand, are frequently mentioned in the oral histories. Stories depicting *the Time of the Ancestors*, also known as *the Olden Days*, are primarily describing different villages and the people living within them. There can exist several stories associated with one, single village. The traditional village of Edangel is such an example. However, the stories collected about the Edangel area does only concern the village, not the earthwork of which it is located on.

The Historical and Cultural Preservation Act (Title 19 PNC) defines "historical site" as "any location, site, structure, building, or landmark located in the Republic which is of outstanding prehistoric, historic archaeological or cultural significance". According to the majority of my informants, all historical properties are considered as having equal value, although there are differences in what is considered as an actual historical site. One chief was, for instance, addressing the words "historical site" as synonymous with *traditional village*. There are informants, who after education about earthworks believe them to be classified as an historical site, as archaeology can take place of oral history when there is no previously known story about the remain. Others don't consider the earthworks as a cultural remain, i.e. not constructed by humans. This assumption has proven common in previous research regarding earthworks' connection to oral history (see e.g. Liston and Miko 2011: 2). The Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs (personal comm. 2011-02-11) believes Palauans don't have the right connection to the terraces, as, according to her theory, they were created by the population belonging to the migration wave before the ancestors of today's Palauans arrived, referring to oral traditions (Tellei *et. al* 2005: 36). This statement concludes that the significance of historic properties depends upon the role of oral traditions. A Historic Preservation Specialist at BAC (personal comm. 2011-05-23) clarifies that it's a big difference in terms of significance if a traditional site is connected to oral history or not. A site can be practically unknown, "just because there is no oral history to go with it" (*Ibid.*). Those cultural properties without connections to oral history are primarily not considered to be part of Palauan cultural identity, and are less likely to be inclined for future preservation than those with one (Liston, personal comm. 2011-05-14; Liston and Miko 2011: 2). There are, for instance, examples of a traditional leader opposing data collection of oral history, together with other mitigation methodologies of an earthwork before development into an apartment building, due to its purported non-connection to Palauan history (Liston, personal comm. 2011-05-14).

To become included in the National Register for Historic Places, a cultural property must pass through a nomination process, which is a good reflection of the collaboration of oral history and archaeology, where a property's presence in oral history is virtually necessary. Upon submitting the traditional village of Edangel for nomination, initiation was made by the Ngardmau state Governor, who was interested in the property because the stories she had heard about it. The traditional Council of Chiefs of Ngardmau state decided to choose Edangel. At least two of those traditional leaders knew stories about the traditional village, as revealed in interviews conducted later on. No earthwork was at the time considered for nomination.

Data collection of the property, including oral history interviews with several of Ngardmau's chiefs and elders (younger informants were also consulted) is one of the more important steps, as the criteria for inclusion states that the property has to be of significant value, which means association with one or more criteria, including events and people that have made important contributions to the history or culture of Palau, and is "associated with lyrics, folklores, and traditions significant in Palauan culture". These criteria are as important as archaeological qualities.

All people have a relationship with and opinions about different historic properties, and often value them according to personal connections. What matters in Palau, which sometimes becomes problematic, is the amount of claim a landowner has to his or her lands. Legally, landowners have the final decision regarding utilization of their lands (Ngirmang, personal comm. 2011-04-13). To increase the complexity of the issue, it has been discovered that most historic properties lie in privately owned land (Olsudong 2006: 551).

Cultural properties that are respected by the local community have a better chance to be preserved. Based on the answers received from interviews, the respect Palauans have for certain properties are embalmed in what elders have told them what to do and not to do, which is embedded in traditions and history (Chief Beouch Sakazuro Demk, personal comm. 2011-02-02; Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs, personal comm. 2011-02-11). Certain cultural remains, such as specific traditional villages, are deeply respected due to their sacredness.

As private landowners have the right to agree or decline inclusion of historic properties in the Palau Register of Historic Places, their decision essentially impact the future preservation and protection of the property. Sunny Ngirmang, Registrar at BAC explains that there is no trend of what types of cultural properties a landowner chooses to decline for possible register inclusion, but the most common reason is the misunderstanding of not to be able to develop their lands (personal comm. 2011-04-21). Aside the historical and traditional value, land also represents an economic value, which adds to the importance for the landowner to be in full control of the development, and use of land. It has been noted that some landowners tend to build their houses on top of earthworks.

As all impacting activities of a registered site require prior preview by law (Hampton-Adams 1997a: 43; Title 19 PNC §154), a landowner is not allowed to build or farm on the cultural remain unless permission is granted. Constructing a house on an unregistered earthwork is not illegal, but if the earthwork is listed as a registered site, such acts must be cleared through the permitting process by BAC. If the landowner is not permitted to proceed the project or development, BAC may choose to either purchase the property, or start or permit investigation, recording, preservation, and salvage of historical data that is considered necessary to preserve Palauan history or Culture (PNC Title 19, §154). According to Ngirmang (personal comm. 2011-06-06), all historical sites must be viewed by an agency if applied for clearance, and is not delimited to merely those sites included on the Register. Deep respect for a cultural property due to significance in living traditions would presumably make the site less desirable for destruction. However, on islands, where land is limited, usage of some land that is sacred does not make it any less sacred (Liston, personal comm. 2011-05-14).

Land use is a very complex situation, and association with oral traditions do not ensure protection of a cultural remain (Liston, personal comm. 2011-05-14; Liston and Miko 2011: 2). There are examples of a large part of the Palauan community opposing a transformation of earthwork segments into a baseball field, while a traditional stonework village with strong connections to the past was demolished in favor for a hotel construction (Liston, personal comm. 2011-05-14).

A register inclusion do not always guarantee a cultural remain from damage. At the time of survey of the traditional village of Edangel in February 2011, its neighboring sacred traditional village Ngardau, a registered site, was heavily overgrown, with several informants reported people stealing artifacts from the site.

To raise awareness and understanding, both to the local community in addition to the people with decision making authority, is essential for future preservation of archaeological and historical sites (Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs, personal comm. 2011-02-11; Liston, personal comm. 2011-05-14). Jolie Liston explains that it's always more important to educate people about their own culture than to educate others (Liston, personal comm. 2011-05-14). She has devoted a decade to inform Palauans about earthworks (Liston, personal comm. 2011-05-19). Rita Olsudong (2006: 551ff) explains the importance of the communities desire of wanting to preserve archaeological and cultural resources, and with understanding of Palauan heritage follows the feeling of pride and responsibility to protect it. The Ngardmau state Governor, after having been aware about earthworks, expressed her positive feelings towards them, and would sincerely consider protecting them, if she got the funding to do so (Governor Akiko C. Sugiyama, personal comm. 2011-02-11).

The difference in site significance has been argued to lie in the comprehension of what Palauans consider to be part of their legacy, which, unfortunately contrast to what would be valued by the worldwide community. The traditional villages, with an essential place in the oral history, could be described as part of

a national and indigenous heritage, while earthworks- monumental architecture that, aside from being an important component of the Palauan past, ought to be considered as a global heritage. The latter are not respected by the Palauans in the same extent as the traditional villages. What would be more important to preserve: indigenous or global values? Who can claim heritage as their own? Aplin (2002: 2) explains that all people have ideas and motifs of what is important to preserve; what is considered significant on a local scale may not be equally appreciated on a national or global scale, and what is considered as a global heritage may not always be shared by the local community. The concept of who is deciding what part of the past is significant affects how protection and preservation is administrated, financed and carried out. Aplin states that “priorities in heritage management and funding to preserve heritage items are exceedingly controversial and political matters (*Ibid.*).

In Palau, where the traditional government system, represented by a Council of Chiefs in each state, to some extent is incorporated into the constitutional, a political dimension of the living culture, especially oral traditions, is evident. As oral history may be used to validate concepts such as ones social position and power, and ownership of land (Historic Preservation Specialist, personal comm. 2011-05-23), and also would seem favorable for the elite class (Alkire 1984: 9; Nero 1987: 117ff; Olsudong 1995; Wickler 2002: 40f), cultural heritage may become extremely loaded with political values and intentions.

The Republic of Palau is a developing country and is thus dependent on outside funding. The Ngardmau state Governor explained that applying for grants is very difficult, which means that the states cannot always manage and preserve those historical properties they desire to, due to economical difficulties. Through the Compact of Free Association with the United States, Palau has received a considerable economic support from the U.S., but have also been financially aided from Japan and Taiwan and international organization such as UNESCO (Shuster 2009: 325ff). The BAC, would not exist in its current form without financial support from the U.S. National Park Service (Liston, personal comm. 2011-05-14). It is possible that the interests of the supporting countries might have an impact on Palauan preservation management, however this topic needs further research to be addressed properly.

The strong desire to preserve what Palauans believe to be part of their heritage may partly derive from centuries of colonization by other nations. Even though dominated by foreigners, Palauans have in some extent managed to maintain and preserve what's part of their own heritage and identity: their history. To deny them to focus the preservation management on their traditional villages, an important aspect of their living culture and national heritage, in favor of those prehistoric and historic remains foreign powers care about, would, in my conviction, not be a suitable option for anyone. However, further data obtained from archaeological investigations and oral history regarding the terraces might contribute to Palau's history and strengthen the ties to the ancestors of today's Palauans who constructed the earthworks. A feeling of belonging may increase the interest amongst communities to preserve them. Earthwork districts are extremely potential for cultural heritage tourism, a valuable resource to Palau's heritage related economy. As with all cultural remains, development of land

must be carefully planned (Liston, personal comm. 2011-05-14), and not exploited carelessly, or there might not be anything left for future generations.

## 6. Conclusion

Oral history and archaeology work very closely when conducting research in Palau. The Bureau of Arts and Culture (BAC), who operate under the Ministry of Community and Cultural affairs, and is responsible for protection and management of cultural remains, have two of its five sections; archaeology and oral history, collaborate by e.g. conducting annual joint surveys. Also other researchers who don't represent BAC are working under this policy, and most of the time there are an oral history section incorporated into the archaeological reports. When asked about how to conduct scientific research, all Palauan informants claim that combining oral history with archaeology is the method that is the most fulfilling.

Oral traditions are embedded with deep respect; there are, as told by one informant, places that are considered sacred and thereby not allowed to be visited. This affects archaeological research, where the scientist in those circumstances is obligated to seek permission to perform any activities at the site.

To be included in the National Register for Historic Places, which ensures legal protection, a cultural property must go through a long nomination process. The process is a good reflection of how oral history and archaeology interact in the scope of work, where a property's presence in oral history is virtually necessary. Deciding what site to submit is initially colored by connection to oral traditions. A site can be chosen by the traditional Council of Chiefs that consists of traditional leaders that are knowledgeable about the history of their region. Collecting data through oral history interviews is an essential part of the process. An inclusion is based on overall site significance, with criteria including association "with lyrics, folklores, and traditions significant in Palauan culture". This criteria is as significant as the archaeological values.

A landowner has a considerable amount of power to the development of his or her land, and has always the right to defer a property a possible register inclusion. The Bureau of Arts and Culture do not prevent the landowners from using their lands, and as long as a cultural property remains unregistered, landowners has legally the final decision regarding development and preservation.

Based on the information obtained from personal experience, interviews and literature, it can be concluded that an archaeological or historical site is valued more by its connection to oral history than to its archaeological qualities. While earthworks, generally not represented in oral traditions, are not often considered from the Palauan part as their heritage; traditional villages, which are frequently mentioned in stories, are immensely appreciated for their historical and cultural value. Consequently, significance impact how protection and preservation is administrated, financed and carried out.

## 7. Summary

This thesis has examined and discussed connection of oral history and archaeology in Palau, which has been presented through three case studies: the earthworks on Babeldaob, the traditional village of Edangel in Ngardmau state, and the process of nominating a cultural remain for inclusion in the National Register for Historic Places. The material is demarcated to these case studies and is based on personal experience, interviews, and literature. The material concerning the traditional village of Edangel is based on a nomination form that was prepared for the Bureau of Arts and Culture and Ngardmau state during an internship in January and February 2011. The data has been compiled and discussed using qualitative methods, where the two types of archaeological remains are compared to one another. The questions I have chosen to focus on are:

- To what extent does oral history and archaeology collaborate, and how do oral traditions affect archaeological research in Palau?
- In what way is the relationship between archaeology and oral history reflected in the nomination process for inclusion in the Register for Historic places, and what power does the landowner have?
- Are there differences in archaeological site significance due to the presence of oral history?

Oral history is an important component of Palauan heritage and living culture. Interaction of oral history and archaeology is regarded as a policy when conducting research in Palau, both within the Bureau of Arts and Culture (BAC), who is responsible for protection and preservation of historical and cultural resources, and from researchers not representing BAC. Legally, a material remain is proven significance if it is associated with intangible resources, such as “lyrics, folklore and traditions associated with Palauan culture”.

Archaeological investigations can sometimes become problematic, as some cultural remains that are associated with oral traditions are considered sacred and not allowed to be visited. In those circumstances, archaeologists have to seek permission to perform any activities at the site.

To become included in the National Register for Historic Places, which ensures legal protection, a cultural remain must pass through a nomination process, which is a good reflection of the collaboration between oral history and archaeology, where connection to oral traditions is virtual necessary. An inclusion cannot be made without the permission from the landowner, who has the right to defer a nomination. Landowners have always the final decision regarding development, protection and preservation of historical and cultural resources within their lands, as long as it remains unregistered. However, all impacting activities require prior preview, especially to those sites that are included on the Register.

Based on the information obtained from personal experience, interviews and literature, it can be concluded that an archaeological site is valued more by its connection to oral history than to its archaeological qualities. Earthworks are

generally not represented in oral traditions, and are not considered from the Palauan part as their heritage. Traditional villages, on the other hand, are frequently mentioned in stories, and are immensely appreciated for their historical and cultural value. Significance of a site impact how protection and preservation is administrated, financed and carried out. However, strong ancestral ties does not ensure protection, and a registration cannot always guarantee a cultural remain from damage.

To bring awareness and understanding of archaeological resources has been argued as essential for future protection and preservation of them, especially of those that a community don't feel connected to.

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## **8.4 Personal communication**

### **8.4.1 Interviewed in Palau**

Governor Akiko C. Sugiyama, Governor of Ngardmau state. 2011-02-11. Interview in the Governor's office, regarding the oral history of Edangel traditional village, and archaeology and oral history

Chief Arrangac Ananias, Chief of Ngardmau state. 2011-02-11. Interview in the Governor's office, Koror, regarding the oral history of Edangel traditional village, and archaeology and oral history

Chief Beouch Sakazuro Demk, High chief of Ngardmau state. 2011-02-02. Interview at his house, Ngardmau, regarding the oral history of Edangel traditional village, and archaeology and oral history

Beketaut, Mercy, state worker of Ngardmau state. 2011-02-08. Interview and discussion at Edangel traditional village, Ngardmau, regarding archaeology and oral history, and the oral history of Edangel,

Kumangai, Ronald, state worker of Ngardmau state. 2011-02-08. Interview and discussion at Edangel traditional village, Ngardmau, regarding archaeology and oral history

Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs. 2011-02-11. Interview in Minister's office, Koror, regarding oral history and archaeology

Renguul, Remurang, Ngardmau state community member. 2011-02-02. Interview at the chief's house, Ngardmau, regarding Edangel traditional village, and archaeology and oral history

Ruluked, Lora, state worker of Ngardmau state. Interview and discussion at Edangel traditional village, Ngardmau, regarding archaeology and oral history, 2011-02-08

Soalablai, Inajo, Pelileu state community member. 2011-02-02. Interview at the chief's house, Ngardmau, regarding Edangel traditional village, and archaeology and oral history

Tkel, Iyechad, state worker of Ngardmau state. 2011-02-08. Interview and discussion at Edangel traditional village, Ngardmau, regarding archaeology and oral history

#### **8.4.2 Informal discussions and emails**

Historic preservation specialist at BAC. 2011-05-23. Interview and discussion via email regarding oral history and archaeology in Palau

Liston, Jolie, Research Scholar at Australian National University and Senior archaeologist. 2011-05-14, 2011-05-19. Interview and discussion via email regarding archaeology in Palau

Ngirmang, Sunny, BAC Registrar. 2011-04-13, 2011-04-14, 2011-04-21, 2011-06-06. Interview and discussion via email regarding the nomination process for inclusion in the National Register for Historic Places

Lövgren, Linnea, undergraduate student at Gotland University. 2011-05-25. Discussion at Gotland University, Visby regarding her work at a *bai* in Aimelik state

#### **8.5 Websites**

Palau Government. 2008. *Bureau of Arts and Culture*. (Online resource) (Updated 2008-07-15) Available at:  
<http://www.palau.gov.net/palau.gov/Executive/Ministries/MCCA/AAC.htm>  
(Accessed 2010-05-10)