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SOCIOECONOMIC TIES.

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LAMOTREK ATOLL AND INTER-ISLAND
SOCIOECONOMIC TIES

BY

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY
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Mr. Philip Young and Miss Pat O'Brien did the cartography for the base maps included herein from field maps provided by the author and U.S. Hydrographic Office Nautical Charts 6042, 5425, and 5417.

Ngang, isa fatufat mela pabwior rel ilagul aramat Lamotrek,
Elat, mû Satawal. Iwe, ibwe sur hasa hashigûshig reimelep.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Problem

The inhabitants of the many small atolls and islands of the Western Pacific rarely constitute wholly independent economic, social and political societies despite their comparative isolation from one another over many miles of ocean. Island populations in anthropological research are often studied, however, from the viewpoint that the society is synonymous with the island, but few islands of the world--even aboriginally--have been completely isolated. This thesis, which is an analysis of structure and not of content, is primarily concerned with the people of Lamotrek Atoll in the Western Caroline Islands of Micronesia. In this case, though, the society in question is not limited to this island alone, but that population which interacts in terms of a single pattern and, thus, embraces several other islands of the area as well. If the study of the social organization of this area were not defined in this broader sense and groups of islands were not treated as participating in cohesive social systems, then inter-island communication and exchange--although often reported for the area--would remain unexplained. A fundamental premise of this study is that inter-island modes of interaction are of the same social structure as that which organizes activities of the residents of a single island within an interacting group. Uberti (1962) has demonstrated the value of this approach in his recent re-analysis of the political aspects of the kula (Malinowski 1961) and Davenport (1964) has noted the presence of similar systems elsewhere in Melanesia.

The following factors will emerge in the course of this analysis:

(1) There are features of the natural environmental setting of the Western Carolines which encourage the development of a system of inter-island social ties. Among such environmental characteristics are, (a) the restricted land areas of Western Caroline islands, (b) the limited range of agricultural staples available, (c) the hazards and uncertainties of marine exploitation and, most important, (d) the destructive effects of tropical storms.

Human survival on the coral islands of the Western Carolines is precarious owing to the low elevation of the land area above sea level and the frequent ravages of tropical storms. When natural disaster diminishes the food supply and threatens the survival of a population, the people often take refuge upon or seek assistance from neighboring islands and atolls with which they maintain ties of reciprocity. Lamotrek, like most other small islands of the area, is reasonably fertile under normal conditions and its resources have often supported a fairly dense population and a relatively complex local kinship, political and religious system. But destruction of resources has been sufficiently frequent for survival to have required that Lamotrek and other islands be linked by systems of mutual economic aid which, in turn, have involved kinship and other ties. The establishment of inter-island bonds allows a wider distribution of economic goods, hence, a greater resource base than that available to any single island. In this way, any shortage, whether due to the individual characteristics of a particular island or to the effects of a natural disaster can be offset by dependence upon materials obtained from another

island within the network. If such exchange is to occur smoothly a structured means of dealing with the situation is necessary. The superior position of Yap among the Western Caroline Islands (which is described more fully below) is not the result of mere conquest--although this island may have used such force at times in the past-- but rather of the greater abundance and reliability of its resources which have given it a prominence in a reciprocal system.

(2) One of the main characteristics of the social organization of these islands is flexibility in adapting to changing conditions by recognizing legitimate alternatives of action. This fact is directly related to the need of Western Caroline social organization to be adapted to an environment which might unexpectedly and rapidly change. When, later in the text, the problems of depopulation, land tenure and inheritance, inter-island exchange of economic goods and personnel, and the integration of foreign influences are discussed, alternative choices sanctioned by the traditional social organization should be evident. The particular course of action followed depends on the existing complex of circumstances. For example, the fact that normally "Course A" would prevail eighty percent of the time does not mean that "Course B", chosen the other twenty percent of the time--when altered conditions exist--is any less traditional or legitimate. A structural analysis can only be considered complete when it encompasses all legitimate cultural alternatives related to the complex of circumstances in which they occur.

(3) Contact with World Powers has not yet led to any fundamental structural changes in Western Caroline atoll society. If one were to

assume that the traditional culture under consideration were that of a single island's people, then certain features of contemporary social organization on Lamotrek, for example, might be explained as changes brought about by contact with foreign powers. Thus, they would be classified as symptomatic of a break-down in traditional cultural organization. However, when the islands of the Western Carolines are viewed as components of a larger social system, where socio-economic decisions are often made on an inter-island level, many of the trends in recent cultural change are no more than adjustments to and integration of new environmental conditions through means contained within the traditional structure.

Foreign administrative influence has, for all practical purposes, replaced Yapese suzerainty over the outer islands. Contact between the outer islands and the administering government has never been frequent. The resources available in the outer islands for exploitation were not of such value or quantity as to warrant forced cultural changes by an administration. Thus, there has been no alteration in the islanders' basic reliance on a subsistence economy. The appearance of foreign administrators can be viewed as merely another environmental change--a substitution of Japanese or Americans for Yapese. Even the depopulation which occurred, directly and indirectly, because of this contact was not an event completely alien to the Western Carolinians. Conditions which often led to food and resource shortages also reduced or limited the population numbers of an island. Hence, post-contact depopulation did not result in a break-down of traditional social organization; the means for the orderly integration of such change were contained in the existing

social system.

In summary, this analysis will show that the societies of Lamotrek, Elato, and Satawal are components in a single social system. Many of the features of the local social organization of each can only be adequately explained with reference to this larger supra-island structure and, furthermore, the processes involved in cultural change, whether stimulated internally or externally, can only be understood as taking place in the context of an inter-island organization.

The Western Caroline Islands

For the purposes of this thesis I shall hereafter refer to all islands from Yap to Namonuito as the Western Caroline Islands.

Aboriginally, a network of outlying low coral islands and atolls was presided over by Gagil District on the volcanic island of Yap. The islands of Ulithi, Fais, Sorol, Woleai, Eauripik, Ifaluk, Faraulep, Elato, Lamotrek, Satawal, Puluwat, Pulusuk, Pulap, and Namonuito (Map 1) were linked to Yap by a system of political, economic, and religious ties.

W. A. Lessa (1950) from information gathered on Ulithi, reconstructed the system in some detail as it existed into the recent past. His article, which is primarily concerned with Ulithian-Yapese relationships, deals with the political center of the network. Lessa's analysis should be consulted for many details; for I shall only restate here those aspects of the system which directly relate to the islands at the eastern periphery of Yapese control.

Subservience to Yap was evidenced in the following way. All of the outer islands, at specified intervals, were obliged to send objects of tribute (pitigil tamol) to the chief of Gagil District on Yap. In addition, outer island representatives presented religious gifts (mepel) to the head religious functionary of Gagil, and sawei gift exchange occurred between the peoples of the outer islands and specific Yapese "overlords."

Originating on individual outer islands, the aforementioned material flowed in a specified way from islands of low status through those of equal or higher standing until it reached the Yapese of Gatchepar Village, Gagil District. A representative of each island or atoll would usually accompany the tribute of his island. At each intermediate island, the chief with the highest rank is in charge of the whole expedition. For this reason the chief of Mogmog, Ulithi, who represented the highest ranking outer island, made the tribute presentation to the Yapese chief when the canoe fleet landed. This superior status of Mogmog among the outer islands also meant that any political or religious directives Yap wished to send to any outer island were always relayed through this Ulithian chief.

Puluwat, Pulúsuk, Pulap, and Namonuito, all islands at the eastern periphery of Yapese control, ceased to participate in tribute payments sometime during German administration of the Carolines (1899-1914). Lessa (1950) states that among the remaining outer islands, though, the system began to atrophy only during Japanese (1914-1945) and American (1945 to present) periods of administration. He cites four reasons for the declining influence of Yap over her former "empire."

(1) A Japanese prohibition on distant inter-island canoe travel disrupted communication. (2) The advent of Christianity removed traditional Yapese sanctions. (3) Introduction of general education by foreign administrations re-oriented islanders' thinking. (4) Depopulation on Yap resulted in a scarcity of individuals able to fulfill the reciprocal obligations of sawei (Lessa 1950:50).

One might assume that with this decline of influence and power at the political center, the total system of inter-island ties would disintegrate. Such an assumption would only be justified if the network were considered wholly of a hierarchical political and religious nature, held together by the leadership of Yap. The evidence to be presented in this thesis should demonstrate that the basis of the system was not Yapese domination. Thus, even though Yapese control has largely disappeared, the basic ties between outer islands persist.

Any attempt to determine how Yap came to extend its political domination over the outer islands would not be profitable so long after the origin of the system and, especially now, after its decline. On the other hand, because basic inter-island ties persist, at least among outer islanders, it is reasonable to assume that the conditions which have promoted their persistence from the start may not have changed. An attempt will be made to delineate the basis of these inter-island ties and their relationship both to Western Carolinian social organization as a whole and to the environment in which they function.

Research Procedures

The islands here chosen for intensive analysis have been purposely selected from among those at the periphery of former Yapese influence. A view from this outlying region may more readily expose certain basic structural features which might otherwise be obscured by superficial elements in islands closer to the center of political influence.

Lamotrek was chosen as the main island for field work not only because of its distance from Yap and Ulithi, but also because it is the politically superior island of the peripheral group which now includes Elato and Satawal and which once included those islands further east.

Fifteen months, from March, 1962 to June, 1963, were spent on Lamotr  k, including side-trips of three weeks to Elato, two and a half weeks to Satawal, and one week to Olimarao. Comparative data were also gathered on Lamotrek from Elatoan and Satawalese visitors.

Prior to arriving on Lamotrek a month had been spent consulting on Yap Trust Territory Administration files on the outer islands. Several Yapese in Gatchepar and Wanyan Villages of Gag  l District were also interviewed at that time.

On arrival at Lamotrek, in March, 1962, I first conferred with the three district chiefs of the island. At that time I could neither speak nor understand the local language so the meeting was carried out with the aid of an interpreter-assistant I had hired on Ulithi. I had been told by administration officials on Yap that it was highly doubtful that anyone on Lamotrek knew enough English to fill this position. It was decided at this meeting that I should take up residence in the island

dispensary (Map 9), a two room thatched building used for medicinal storage and by the administration doctors on their periodic visits to the island.

The initial three months of field work were devoted to gathering and recording basic data upon which later intensive work would depend. Lamotrek Island was mapped, using plane table and alidade, and all structures as well as the area of taro cultivation were plotted. I took a census of the island on the basis of which I inserted the boundaries of all residence, or homestead, plots. The boundaries of other land holdings on the island were discovered and noted as time permitted throughout the rest of my stay. It was during these initial months of residence on the island that an intensive effort was made to gain a basic knowledge of the Lamotrekan language.

Records were begun on diet, hours spent in marine and agricultural tasks, travel, and community labor. Although these schedules of information were not religiously kept for my entire stay on the island, mainly because of the pressure of other work, the records for each do span four or more months time, so that the figures can be projected with some accuracy into yearly averages. Rainfall statistics were kept for the entire 15 months of my residency using a rain-gauge lent to me by the U.S. Weather Bureau representative on Yap.

My own participation in local events increased as time went on and as my linguistic ability improved. In addition to accompanying the men on a fishing expedition once a week, I made several longer canoe voyages to the uninhabited islands in Elato and Olimarao atolls,

either on copra-making or turtle-hunting expeditions. Voyages were also made to Elato and Satawal for the specific purpose of carrying out my own work.

Direct questioning of informants, with and without the aid of an interpreter, provided the detailed information on economic, political, and religious organization. Informants were rewarded with gifts, and, at one time or another during my stay, every individual on the island received a gift. My interpreter-assistant was the only individual to whom I paid a wage, and he was not a local resident.

I soon found that the use of an interpreter from an island other than the one I was working on had distinct disadvantages. First, the dialectal difference between Ulithian and Lamotrekese was great enough to make it difficult and confusing to attempt to learn Lamotrekese with the aid of a Ulithian speaker. It was much easier, and more accurate, to work directly with Lamotrekans, no matter how limited their knowledge of English, than to learn proper Lamotrekese after it had been filtered through a Ulithian. Second, and more important, I found that because of the traditional status distinctions between islands of the Western Carolines, Lamotrekans were often reluctant to speak, frankly or at length, about political or religious concerns in the presence of a Ulithian. When informants were questioned about such matters, and my assistant was present, they would either attempt to learn his feelings on the topic then voice agreement or, if this were not possible, give a neutral answer which would neither offend a Ulithian nor oppose traditional Ulithian attitudes on the topic.

For these reasons, midway through my field work, I sent this assistant back to his home island. After his departure I found that not only did my linguistic ability accelerate, but also that I was able to gather data on political and religious affairs which had been unobtainable before. I was able to compare Lamotrekan attitudes toward Ulithians which had been expressed when a Ulithian was present on the island with attitudes expressed after this individual had left the island. This proved to be an ideal occasion for comparing observations of political and religious beliefs as professed to a higher status authority (the Ulithian) with those actually practiced. The experience confirmed some hypotheses and suggested others relevant to Western Carolinian inter-island ties.

II. THE SETTING

Lamotrek Atoll lies at $7^{\circ} 30' \text{ N.}$, $146^{\circ} 20' \text{ E.}$ Elato is fourteen nautical miles to the west and Satawal is approximately forty nautical miles east of Lamotrek. Linguistic and cultural evidence indicates that the settling of these islands occurred from the region of Truk, but a date for this settlement has yet to be determined.

The first recorded European sighting of these islands was made by the English captain, James Wilson in October of 1797 (Wilson 1799: 293). There is evidence, however, that the islanders had earlier contact with Europeans, either at Lamotrek itself, or possibly on Guam where they often made canoe voyages for the purpose of trade (Lessa 1962b:331).

Augustin Krämer (1937:9) mentions several vessels which visited the island subsequent to 1797 but it was not until 1880, when the islands were nominally under Spanish control, that an English trader named Lewis settled on the island and the people of Lamotrek came into prolonged contact with Westerners. Even after Spain sold her Micronesian possessions to Germany in 1899 Krämer states that contact was infrequent up to the time of his arrival in 1909. Krämer was the first ethnologist to visit Lamotrek. He and his wife were on the island from November 21, to December 10, 1909. The results of their work were published in 1937 in a volume of the Ergebnisse der Südsee Expedition 1908-1910, edited by G. Thilenius.

In 1914 Germany lost control of the Carolines to Japan as a result of World War I. Subsequently, several Japanese established residence

on Lamotrek and Satawal. United States administration of the Carolines, as a part of the United Nations Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, began in 1945 and continues to the present. Initial administration was by the Navy (Richard 1957) but was later transferred to the Department of the Interior. Since 1945 no American or non-Carolinian had remained on Lamotrek for longer than two or three weeks until this writer arrived there in 1962. One other anthropologist--Shigeru Kaneshiro, an employee of the Trust Territory Government--spent ten days on the island in 1950. At the time of my study an administration copra-trading ship visited the island once every three or four months. The effects of these contacts and of the foreign administration of the area will be discussed in Chapter VII.

One premise of this analysis is that the natural environment of the Western Carolines is not only limited in its range of subsistence resources, but also is subject to rapid or unpredictable change which can threaten the productivity of individual islands or island groups. This chapter will describe that environment in detail.

The Islands

Island types .

There are three physiographically distinct island types in the Western Carolines. They can be classified as volcanic-continental, coral atoll, and raised coral. The first is often referred to as a "high" island and the latter two collectively called "low" islands. Of those islands which once were included in the Yapese political