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## THE MARTYRDOM OF FATHER JUAN CANTOVA ON ULITHI ATOLL:

### The hegemonic struggle between Spanish colonialism and a Micronesian island polity

#### ABSTRACT

An investigation of the 1731 murder of Father Juan Antonio Cantova using a combined archaeological and ethnohistoric approach contributes vital information about Micronesian island communities' abilities to resist missionary rivals to their authoritative structures. Missionary letters are integrated with archaeological data for an enriched understanding of Ulithian and Yapese agency, and the motive for Cantova's murder. Despite Cantova's familiarity with the nature of the region's power structure, I suggest that Cantova was killed because his proselytisation attempts undermined the local supremacy of Mogmog in Ulithi Atoll and the regional dominance of Yap. **KEYWORDS:** Ulithi, Yap, Jesuit missions, culture contact, hegemony, Fr. Juan Cantova

#### INTRODUCTION

Missionary letters contribute some of the earliest and most detailed reports of cross-cultural engagements between Oceanic peoples and Europeans. In a letter dated 1 March 1734 from Father Wolfgang Berchtold to Father Maliardi (Document 1734B1, Lévesque 1999), we learn that on 9 June 1731, Father Juan Antonio Cantova, an Italian Jesuit, and almost every other non-Micronesian person that came in his mission three months earlier were killed after a short and unsuccessful attempt to Christianize Ulithi Atoll in the Western Caroline Islands of Micronesia (Figure 1). Cantova, lured by the sacraments of his religion created the opportunity and venue for the murder. The priest was summoned to the island of Mogmog to baptize a dying man, a clever invitation that appealed to the duties of Cantova's vocation. Cantova's underestimation of Yapese hegemony and the Ulithian understanding of the cultural consequences of accepting Christianity proved fatal. After Cantova was killed on Mogmog,

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Ulithians overpowered the mission on Falalop and killed the remaining men (Burney 1967:28).

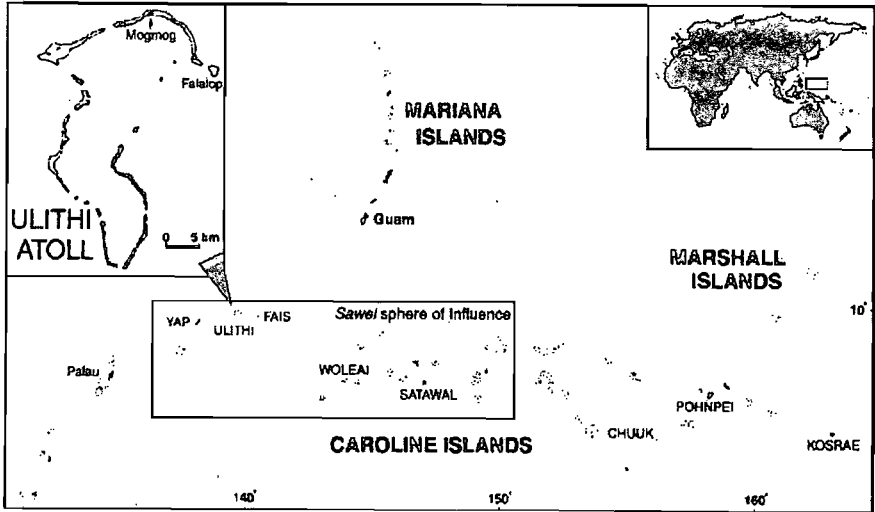


Figure 1:

Ulithi Atoll is located in the Western Caroline Islands of Micronesia. Mogmog and Falalop are two of four inhabited islets in Ulithi Atoll. Eight islets were inhabited during Cantova's residence in the atoll. Politically, Ulithi Atoll is today part of Yap State in the Federated States of Micronesia.

Two years after the murder (1733) a kidnapped Ulithian recounted the details of the failed mission to his captor, Father Victor Walter. Walter, another Jesuit of the Falalop mission had left 10 days prior to the murders to obtain much needed supplies. After several mishaps he had finally returned to Falalop, Ulithi where he lured the Ulithian informant to his boat. The informant related that before being struck down by three spears, Cantova asked, "Why?" The islanders replied, "They could no longer tolerate the preaching of the new law so opposed to their own, in which they wished to continue to live, and die, like their ancestors" (Document 1734B1, Lévesque 1999:296). Since then, several explanations have been

suggested for the murder, including possible abuses by the mission's accompanying soldiers, a Carolinian traitor, rumours of Spanish cruelty, and even vengeance for a rape committed by Captain Don Bernardo de Egui in 1712. This paper brings to the forefront contextual information of the Yap-Ulithi socio-political relationship to offer yet another rationale for the murder of Cantova.

A more textured understanding of the indigenous responses to European encounters is constructed from the linked histories manifested in the archaeological and ethnohistoric records (see Mitchell 2000; Turnbaugh 1993). The integration of archaeological and documentary records permits a more comprehensive understanding of why things happened in the past, and in so doing confers agency to indigenous people. Agency in this paper refers to "putting people back into the past", where the actions or reactions of people are a product of the interplay or dialectic between their cultural structures and actions (Dobres & Robb 2000; Giddens 1979). A general cultural structure, or what I have called in places a socio-political context, can be constructed from investigating the archaeological and ethnohistoric records of the time. The additional integration of more recent ethnographic works on Ulithian society adds essential depth to their cultural structure. Actions, behaviours, and attitudes of the priests and the Micronesians are reported in the Jesuit letters.

A description of each record, the ethnohistoric and the archaeological, is investigated separately before combining the different records pertaining to the question of why Cantova was killed. Both records are fragmented, have undergone numerous transformations, and have their strengths and limitations. In principle neither record is given priority over the other; dependence on the historical documents is weighted due to their direct relevance to the question at hand.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

The archaeological record of Mogmog, the island location of Cantova's death, is investigated to illuminate the socio-political context of Ulithi during the short-lived Jesuit mission. Archaeological data used in this paper derive from doctoral fieldwork conducted on Mogmog, Ulithi during 1994-1995. Originally, the purpose of this investigation was analysis of the interaction history between households on Mogmog, Ulithi and Gachpar, Yap (Figure 2). Twenty-nine 1 by 1 metre test units, most placed beneath

household stone platforms, were excavated. The ubiquitous stone house platforms on the Ulithian landscape embody and symbolize the ownership and prerogatives of Ulithian households. The local term "*dayii*" for these platforms is Yapese; therefore evidence for past Yap-Ulithi interactions. I use the archaeological deposits beneath the platforms to demonstrate that Yap-Ulithi interactions were intensive during the time of Cantova's visit in 1731. The archaeological work presented here is not "mission archaeology" as defined by Graham (1998:25) focusing on "an archaeology of mission sites" or an examination of the "material culture of missions", however, it does illuminate the historical and socio-cultural context of mission encounters. The earliest reference of a missionary visit to Ulithi since the ill-fated mission of 1731 was in 1898 by Father Daniel Arbacegui, the Capuchin superior of Yap (personal communication, Father Francis X. Hezel 2004). The modern evangelization of Ulithi began in earnest with the visits of Spanish Jesuit Father Bernardo Espriella who dedicated the church of Assumption in March 1928 (Hezel 2003:18, 42). Archaeological evidence for the catechisation of Ulithi Atoll includes two similar brass crucifixes, one found beneath a habitation platform (Mog-53) and the other under a nearby cookhouse (see Figure 3). Island interaction between the inhabitants of this region in protohistory and prehistory is a well-established fact (e.g., see D'Arcy 2001; Descantes 1998; Descantes et al. 2001; Fitzpatrick et al. 2003; Intoh, 1996; Intoh & Dickinson 1994)<sup>1</sup>. According to the Mogmog archaeological record, the complex interaction history between Ulithi and Yap began in the seventh century (Descantes 1998:202). The actual start of interaction between these two island societies should be earlier given that Intoh (1996) has found older evidence for interaction in the region. Intoh (1996) discovered Yapese greenschist and ceramics from radiocarbon-dated contexts 500 years earlier on the island of Fais, 65 km east of Ulithi Atoll (see Figure 1). Similar to Fais, Yapese potsherds are the most conspicuous and ubiquitous evidence of past Yap-Ulithi interactions found in Mogmog's coralline archaeological contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> The protohistoric is defined as the period beginning after European entry into the Pacific in 1521 and ending before European traders attempted to settle Yap in 1843. The early historic period follows the protohistoric and extends to 1885 after which Yap was claimed as a colony by the Spanish.

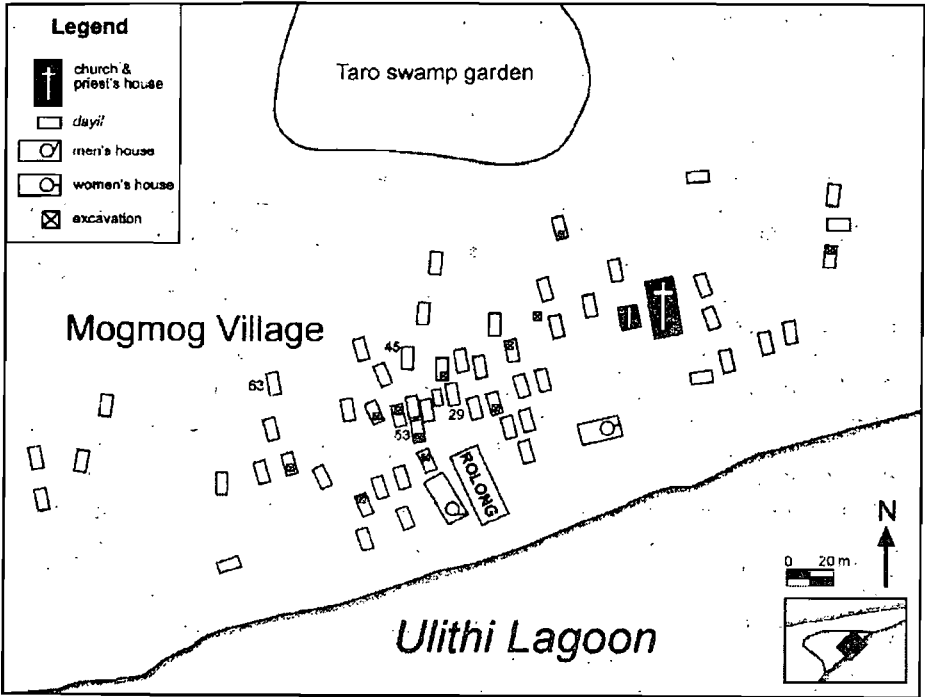


Figure 2.

Mogmog, Ulithi with platform and excavation locations, March 1995. Only a portion of the village is depicted; certain features, such as the cemetery locations, the dispensary, and the World War II era wharfs are not shown.

The density of ceramics in Mogmog's archaeological sites serve as a useful measure of exchange intensity if one assumes that the Yapese ceramic potsherds are an accurate proxy of Yap-Ulithi interaction. Ceramic density for the purposes of this paper is defined as the weight of ceramics divided by the volume of the excavated material. Measuring the density of ceramics in several Mogmog archaeological contexts beneath household platforms, it can be shown that Yapese ceramics increase dramatically with the advent of a particular Yapese technological type called "Laminated ware". The Yapese made laminated pottery between approximately 1290 and 1950 (Descantes 2001).

The interaction intensity between both island societies, as indicated by the ceramic densities, remains high throughout the

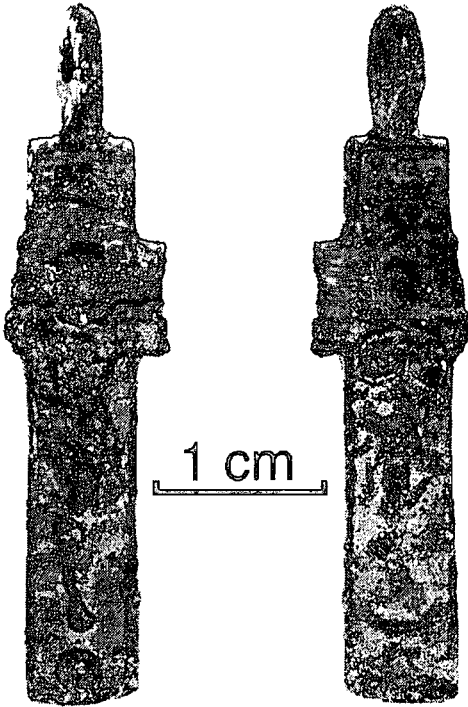


Figure 3.

Enamelled brass crucifix recovered from an archaeological deposit beneath a Mogmog cookhouse is probably evidence of twentieth-century catechisation (personal communication, Father Francis X. Hezel 2004). One side of the crucifix has a figure of Jesus Christ; the other side has the letters "VIRG" above an *orans* figure of what looks to be the Virgin Mary. The copper-zinc alloy composition of the crucifix was determined by a non-destructive energy dispersive X-Ray fluorescence (EDXRF) spectrometer.

protohistoric and the early historic period. The archaeological record is the biased representation of select events in the past, and an understanding of the nature and integrity of Mogmog's archaeological resources is essential before their interpretation. Ulithi has substantial archaeological resources, although some of them have undergone considerable disturbance.

From interviews in 1995 I learned that much modification to house

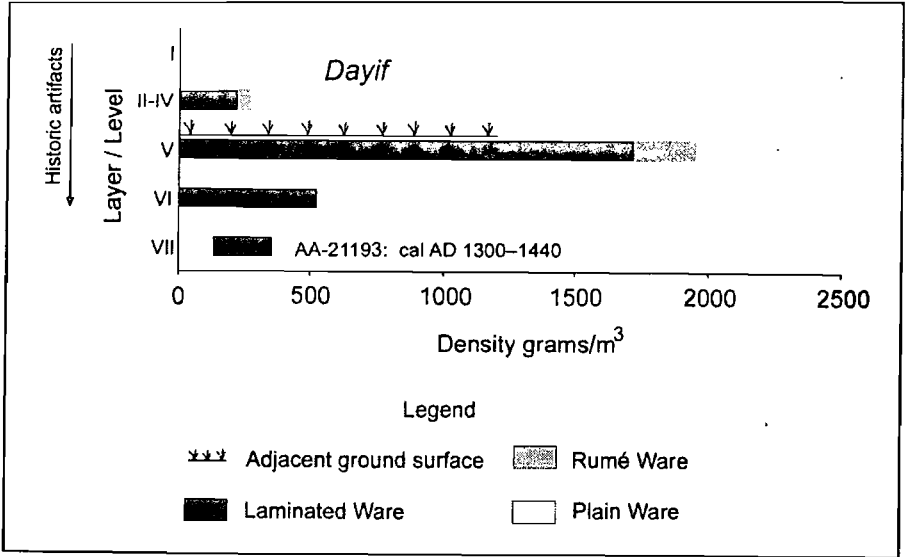


Figure 4.

Ceramic density in archaeological contexts beneath platform Mog-43. Laminated and Plain wares both originate from Yap. Rumé ware comprises large high-fired jars and is likely from the Philippines. AA-21193 is an AMS date from an associated piece of charcoal that was analyzed at the NSF Arizona AMS Facility. The radiocarbon age of the sample is  $546 \pm 46$  years BP. The calibrated two standard deviation time range was calculated using the OxCal v3.9 software program and based on the atmospheric data from Stuiver et al.'s (1998) INTCAL 1998 calibration curve.

platforms occurred while Mogmog was converted into a "Rest & Relaxation" island/military base between 1944-1946 by the United States Navy (see also Lessa 1987:127; Craib 1981:51).

In particular, some platforms were shortened and destroyed to make way for new facilities or to widen paths for the more than one million servicemen who visited the island. Although natural disasters, such as typhoons (e.g., 1907, 1960) have also impacted on Mogmog's landscape, the damage to stone house platforms has been minor compared to that endured by habitations. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) of the United States has also transformed the archaeological landscape by building cement typhoon-proof houses over certain pre-existing *dayif*, (e.g., Mog-29, Mog-45, and Mog-63).

## HISTORICAL RECORD

Jesuit missionary letters are a treasure trove of ethnohistoric descriptions of indigenous cultures. The archaeological evidence, which implies high levels of interaction between the people of Yap and Ulithi, alone would not provide the details or the nature of the relationship. In the light of an understanding of Yapese and Ulithian culture from later ethnographic and ethnohistoric records, events reported in the letters can be reconsidered and aid in understanding what transpired almost 300 years ago. Cantova's letters provide abundant ethnographic details of Carolinian life as well as persuasive arguments to his superiors for subsidizing his life's ambition of establishing a mission in the Caroline Islands.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, despite Ulithi's rich oral history (see Lessa 1961, 1980), Cantova's death is not part of the extant Ulithian lore or oral history (Lessa 1986:7).

Ethnohistoric sources used in this paper are primarily Jesuit missionary letters from the Ulithi mission, and others reporting on information from other letters. Some of the earliest detailed ethnographic reports of Carolinians are found not in first hand observations, but instead from interrogations of peoples who had unintentionally sailed to islands with missionaries. Lessa (1962) refers to such a text as an "ethnography in absentia", a collection of ethnographic details without the author actually observing the particular society. Cantova's first letter (Document 1722D, Lévesque 1998) about Carolinian culture is an example of an "ethnography in absentia", when he collected ethnographic information from Carolinians who landed on Guam in 1721. This letter, an incredibly detailed account divided into four parts and an epilogue, includes a description of Carolinian watercraft, clothes, political structure, worldview, social customs, the sexual division of labour, and subsistence activities. Cantova's understanding of the Carolinian language (Ulithian and/or Woleaian) makes his letter particularly substantive. He learned the language from Digal, an earlier Carolinian castaway who lived on Guam, and who later accompanied Cantova at the Ulithi mission. Father Fulcherio de Spilimbergo writes:

He applied himself so completely to this task [learning the Carolinian language] that within a short time he was able to understand it, and

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<sup>2</sup> The term "Carolinian" refers to the people living on the low coral islands of the Caroline Islands.



speak it, and he was able to translate the prayers and the essentials tenets of the Catechism, and also to write a sort of grammar, and lexicon of it. [Document 1734C, Lévesque 1999:332].

According to Walter's letter from Ulithi, "we taught them all our mysteries in their mother tongue" (Document 1731A1, Lévesque 1999:191).

Ulithians were not unfamiliar with Europeans or Filipinos before Cantova and his men arrived in 1731. It is likely that Ulithians had heard about Ferdinand Magellan's 1521 visit to Guam from the Chamorros. The Spanish considered this part of the Pacific filled with navigational hazards and had the Manila galleon route between Mexico and the Philippines avoid the region (Hezel & del Valle 1972:28). Diogo da Rocha is credited as being the first European to reach Ulithi Atoll in 1525. According to Luis de Ibáñez y García (1992), Captain Egui also made a brief visit to the atoll in 1712 (Krämer 1917:105). In addition, seven white European castaways are also said to have been received in Ulithi in 1684 (Hezel & del Valle 1972:43; Lessa 1962:337). Other early European visits to Carolinian islands includes Gomez de Espinosa's visit to Sonsorol in 1522, Ruy Lopez de Villalobos's visit to Fais in 1543, and Alonso de Arellano's visit to Ngulu in 1565. The Yapese were also acquainted with Europeans, and had been visited at least 100 years before Cantova sailed for Ulithi.

Caution is advised when trying to reconstruct ancient cultures based on ethnographic and ethnohistoric texts. These accounts are constructions by persons from specific culture-historical contexts holding particular opinions and views that influence the texts and their interpretation. Ethnohistoric records comprise numerous select *reports* of events and their interpretations in particular literary traditions, and at times they are contradictory (Galloway 1991, 1992). An understanding of the context of composition and the author's views can limit and avoid the misuse of such data. Not unlike their role in the Spanish-American colonies, missions were agencies of the state and the church (see Bolton 1917:47). As a key frontier institution, dependent on royal treasury money, missions served not only to convert neophytes, but also to *civilize* and exploit. The ideology and tone in the letters from the crown and the missionaries casts the colonial expansion into the Carolines as an "altruistic crusade": the missions Christianized indigenous people for their salvation (see Lincoln 1985:271). This tone is expressed in the 19 October 1705 decree of the Spanish monarch Manuel de Apelegui (Philip V) for the conversion of the Caroline Islands to the viceroy of New Spain, the

Archbishop of Manila, and the governor of the Philippines, as instigated by Jesuit Father Andrés Serrano:

There is a large number of islands full of heathens; these islands are called Pais, or Palaos [Caroline Islands], and are well populated with people of a docile character, and without any semblance of idolatry; and, from the information that was collected about, and experienced with, their inhabitants, they are well disposed to receive the Catholic truth, and the light of the Holy Gospel; and so he begs me to be pleased to order that the conversion of these islands be carried out, without any delay or excuses ... [Document 1705K, Lévesque 1997:511].

Cantova, the focal point of this paper and its primary authoritative source, was born 15 March 1686 in the town of Intra (unified into present-day Verbania) located on the western shore of Lake Maggiore, Italy situated at the foot of the Alps (Spilimbergo 1740:1). According to Father Spilimbergo, a Jesuit colleague who wrote Cantova's biography, Cantova belonged to a prominent family who sent him to Milan for a Jesuit education under the care of his uncle. Juan Cantova excelled in all things academic: grammar, literature, philosophy, poetry, and theology – particularly rhetoric. Overcoming serious health problems, Cantova joined the Society of Jesus in 1703. After additional coursework and study, he finally left for mission work in 1717, when he served as rector of the seminary college on Guam and instructed the Chamorro boys and the men of the Spanish garrison.

Cantova's tenure in the Marianas can be characterised as one critical of the government and empathetic towards the Chamorro peoples. Indeed, Cantova and a Jesuit colleague were banished to the outlying villages of Guam for denouncing the abuses and excesses of Governor Don José Antonio Pimentel (Hezel & Driver 1988). Under the pretext of refusing to hand over account books of the seminary to the governor, Cantova was almost deported for sedition in 1719 (Driver 1992:106). The charge and exile imposed against Cantova were eventually dropped.

Cantova's life ambition was to Christianise the Carolines. With incredible determination, he pursued this goal relentlessly for 10 years and was not deterred by the several failures and obstacles in his way. Cantova's strong motivation to convert the Carolinians is evident when the 10-month visit of some 30 Carolinians to Guam in 1721 produced the following reaction, "[m]ay His Divine Majesty not look upon my great failings, so that they will not prevent my becoming lucky enough to be able to raise the standard of Our Holy Faith in those islands [Caroline Islands]

and to illuminate them with the light of the Holy Gospel" (Document 1722D, Lévesque 1998:473).

Several of Cantova's judgements of the Carolinians may be viewed as attempts to persuade and gain permission for his Christianization agenda from his reluctant superiors in the Philippines. His statement below is contrary to his description of their religion and beliefs and likely a familiar recitation of the accepted belief of the time:

These islanders live in total ignorance of God and His attributes, without basic education, without religion, without doctrine, but ready to receive the truth of the Catholic doctrine, if only because they do not have their mind preoccupied by the lies of any sect [Document 1722D, Lévesque 1998:465].

Despite Cantova's zeal, invaluable glimpses of Carolinian culture in the early eighteenth century are found in his letters. His reports are testimonies of his acute observations and ability to communicate with the people. He was so perceptive of his standing with the Ulithians, that in the postscript of his last letter (Document 1731A2, Lévesque 1999:203), Cantova noted a reluctance on the part of the Ulithians, and therefore chose to endure the difficult conditions in Ulithi rather than go to Guam for supplies.

## SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE REGION

The nature and context of island relations in Ulithi and the Western Carolines is vital to understanding Ulithian agency and the impetus for Cantova's murder. The socio-political context constructed from the archaeological and ethnohistoric records are congruent. Integrating the archaeological and ethnohistoric data, I suggest that the interaction between Mogmog and Yap, when Cantova was killed, was frequent and not unlike the formalized exchange system that existed up until the beginning of the twentieth century (Descantes 1998). From the ethnohistoric data, we can add that the nature of the relationship between the people of Yap and Ulithi was hegemonic. In Antonio Gramsci's sense of the term, hegemony is dynamic and draws upon cultural beliefs and symbols to consolidate political control without the recourse to force (Bocock 1986). The Yapese used their ideology to persuade the Ulithians of Yapese supremacy through mutual accommodations that did not undermine its own privileged position. Besides the ideology expressed in its myths and fictive kin relations, Gachpar hegemony over the Carolinians

was also materialized in *dayif*, ceramics, dances, *lavalavas*, stone money, and turmeric powder. By the same token, Mogmog's ancestral lineages, legendary history, paramount chief, and atoll-wide men's meeting house (Rolong) made it the unequivocal sacred and political capital of the atoll.

Early Jesuit documents are clear in describing a complex island network system throughout region. In 1669, Fr. Francisco Miedes serving on Siao, a small island off the northern end of Sulawesi (Celebes), met four Carolinians from Ifalik Atoll. Five years earlier, these four had drifted to the Moluccas while attempting to sail to Chuuk, 700 km away, in a fleet of 30 canoes to attend a wedding. Miedes (Document 1664D) states:

Their sort of government is, they say, that they have a king in Piguitape (Ifalik) who rules over the surrounding islands. He is just a king in name, because he does not command other than respect as such, without anyone pressured from doing whatever he pleases [Lévesque 1995:246].

Fr. Clain (also spelled Klein), another Jesuit missionary reported the existence of an island empire or "nation" made up of 32 islands, 29 of which were heavily populated from interviews with 30 Carolinian castaways in 1696 (Hezel & del Valle 1972:30). The social disparities manifested by signs of respect and deference as shown to particular Carolinians were also noted.

As previously noted, Cantova received castaways who drifted to Guam in 1721, which resulted in an "ethnography in absentia", more detailed than earlier Jesuit letters. According to the Carolinian castaways, the political geography of the region consisted of five provinces. Information about oral history, religious beliefs, social customs, division of labour and warfare were also reported. An indication of Yapese hegemonic ideology is intimated when in 1721, Cantova noted that the Carolinians venerated a Yapese lizard, one of longolap's forms. Cantova remarks:

The inhabitants of the Island of Yap stand out as more barbarians by the veneration they show toward crocodiles; the devil exercises his tyranny by means of monstrous figures in that shape, and he extirpates sacrilegious cults from them by fear, because there are sorcerers who are in contact with that wild beast and through it render people sick or kill them, if they become annoyed out of their own special interests, or to intimidate other enemical (sic) persons [Document 1722D, Lévesque 1998:468].

Ethnohistoric research conducted by twentieth-century anthropologists in Yap, Ulithi, and other Caroline Islands some two

centuries later can contribute more details about the past political conditions of the Carolinian region. By introducing twentieth century ethnographic data, I do not suggest that the nature of the political system did not change in the interim, only that a general sense can be gleaned for what the earlier political structure may have resembled. In the "traditional past" Yap was superordinate to the coral islands and at the head of what Lessa (1950b, 1950c, 1986) has called the "Yap Empire" (e.g., Alkire 1989; Damm 1938; Lingenfelter 1975; Ushijima 1987) – a region of, originally 15 coral island communities extending approximately 1,300 km (see Figure 1). No monarch or political head with absolute control over the Outer Islands is implied by the word "empire" (see also Hunter-Anderson & Zan 1996; Petersen 2000). The political nature of the relationship between Yap and the Outer Islands and the extent of Yap's power in 1731 can only be surmised. Mogmog lay at the head of the chain of authority among Ulithi's political districts (Lessa 1950a:92-94). Commands followed a structured path to particular district chiefs in the atoll; orders that did not follow the set path of the time did not have to be obeyed. Even commands for tribute originating from Yap had to go through Mogmog before reaching any of the other atoll districts.

Yap and Ulithi belonged to the most extensive exchange system in Micronesia called *sawei*. *Sawei* is the popular term for the formal bicultural exchange system that existed between the resource-rich high island of Yap and its neighbouring low coral islands. Gachpar Village in Yap headed the system with Ulithi acting as its intermediary to the 14 other coral island communities.<sup>3</sup> Coral island peoples made tributary visits to Gachpar and received many essential materials during their stay every two or three years (Lessa 1986:36). Yapese households were paired with specific Carolinian households. Gifts between the people of Yap and the Outer Islands included services (navigation, tattooing) and both material and non-material items. Non-material gifts could include Ulithian labour, songs, and navigational knowledge or Yapese magical aid and prayers. Material items from Yap could comprise materials not attainable in the coralline islands, such as certain woods, stones, turmeric paste, and

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<sup>3</sup> Ngulu Atoll is often not reported in the list of islands practicing *sawei* with Gachpar because it had *sawei* ties with Guror Village in the Gilman District of southern Yap. I include Ngulu because it practiced *sawei* with Gachpar before a chief's daughter and *sawei* privileges were given to Guror (see Lingenfelter 1975:147).

ceramic pots. Numerous restrictions indicating deference to their Yapese hosts existed for visiting Carolinians.

The relationship between Yap and the Carolinians was also couched in a kinship idiom where the Yapese were the "parents" to their linguistically and culturally distinct Outer Island "children". This relationship gave the Carolinian "kin" the ability to ask their Yapese "parents" for almost anything they desired. Though Carolinians always remained in debt to their Yapese "parents", they did give gifts which nonetheless played a role in the political economy of Yap and became worthy alliance partners. Hunter-Anderson and Zan (1996:38) suggest that a better label for the "Yap Empire" is the "Yapese Alliance System" where *sawei* obligations and valuables communicated "alliance worthiness" to other competing alliances and bodies in the complex political organization of Yap.

## MOTIVE

With a reconstruction of the Ulithian eighteenth-century socio-political context, we are now ready for an investigation into the possible factors and motive that led to Cantova's death. Mission letters from Ulithi contain reports of events which I believe precipitated Cantova's murder. Three factors in particular are vital to understanding why the mission failed.

A pervasive underestimation of Carolinian culture by the mission priests is the first factor that led to the Ulithian revolt. Cantova perceived Carolinians to be docile and devoid of religion:

In their beliefs they are pure gentiles. ...but they have no temple, no altar, no idol, no sacrifice, but some coconuts which they offer at the foot of some tree where they think that Elluz [spirits] resides [Document 1731A2, Lévesque 1999:202].

Fr. Walter, Cantova's assistant, wrote to Fr. Schmitz about the Ulithian tribute to Yap, albeit in a sardonic tone, in a letter dated 10 May 1731:

They waste many hours in sleeping, dancing, jumping, smearing and massaging with oil, and the silly people consider themselves more handsome when they drip with palm oil and when they are painted in a most terrible fashion with red and white paint. The paints are obtained from the Island of Yap, where they go yearly to pay their tribute [Document 1731A1, Lévesque 1999:192].

Although Cantova's ethnographic observations are insightful and accurate, his belief in the superiority of his own religion and culture

prevented him from adequately perceiving the abilities of the Carolinians. Cantova recognized Yap's hegemonic relationship with Ulithi, "[t]hese islands, like many others of this archipelago, are subject to the King of Yap" (Document 1731A2, Lévesque 1999:198). Despite Cantova's understanding of the hegemonic political system of the region, he failed to adequately appreciate the spheres of influence in which Ulithian and Yapese actors could exact and implement demands.

In addition to underestimating Carolinian culture, Cantova openly ridiculed and challenged Ulithian religious beliefs and its practitioners. After a little less than three months on the atoll, Cantova reported, "now the boys laugh at them [native priests] and let us know when they see them performing their superstitious rites" and how a "witch doctor's" threats of death and drowning were confounded by God (Document 1731A2, Lévesque 1999:202). Cantova mentions demanding an Ulithian to cut down some trees in order to clear land to cultivate corn:

The Indian did not want to cut them down, saying that Elluz lived therein, and that 10 people died at different times for having dared to try and cut them down. I took a long knife and started to cut it down and then ordered a soldier to continue. The Indians remained astonished that no harm come (sic) to us [Document 1731A2, Lévesque 1999:202].

Fr. Walter writes much the same:

We have instilled in them such a great loathing of the superstitious practices of this country that they openly laugh at these, forcefully restrain their parents from participating in them, and thereby appreciably check the service of the Devil [Document 1731A1, Lévesque 1999:191].

The evangelisation of Ulithi Atoll was at the expense of the native community's religious practitioners. The spiritism of Ulithi was interlaced with ancestor worship, a system of taboos, and recourse to divination, mediums, and magic (see Lessa 1950a:113). The primary and secondary magicians described by Lessa (1950a:127–159) that included diviners (*rebwe*), weather magicians (*serawi*), fish magicians (*temalip*), doctors (*chai*), and navigators (*pelü*) would have suffered the most. Indigenous priests of white and black magic did not act on their own initiative, but followed orders from the chief and island's elder council. Ridiculing these experts, predominantly older males, would have offended these respected men and had repercussions in the political realm.

A third factor that led to Cantova's eventual murder on Mogmog was his choosing the island of Falalop as the centre for his new mission.

Relocating the spiritual centre to a rival island in the atoll challenged Mogmog's high political position in the atoll and the region. Mogmog was the sacred political capital of the atoll during Cantova's visit. Paramount chiefs of the Outer Islands were invested there and turtles of the atoll were killed, butchered, and distributed there. Mogmog's religious and political prerogatives less than a century after Cantova was killed were similar to those recorded by von Kotzebue (1821:207), the commander of a Russian exploring expedition, "[t]he boats lower their sails in sight of the island of Mogemug [Mogmog], the residence of the principal chief of the group of this name".

Today, no ancient locale is more prominent than Rolong (see Figure 2). The former location of a men's house served as the atoll-wide meeting place where the paramount chief of the Outer Islands was ordained (Lessa 1950a:95).<sup>4</sup> Rolong symbolized the politico-religious authority of Mogmog and was one of six *taliw* (taboo) places linking the Outer Island communities with Yap (Müller 1917:325). Rolong was for the worship of longolap, the great ancestral ghost to whom Outer Islanders brought tribute on Yap. Today, Rolong lacks free-standing structures and is simply an elevated area bordered on three sides by stone facing. This sacred place is respected and avoided and continues to serve as the place where turtles are butchered and distributed to the households of Mogmog.

Cantova understood that Mogmog was the residence of the paramount chief before ever even reaching the atoll. In spite of the awareness, I question whether he comprehended that Mogmog was the politico-religious capital of the atoll, where the legendary creator of the atoll had first settled:

But the lord of them all resides in Mogmog and his name is Caschaitel. When the canoes that sail through this sea arrive in sight of Mogmog, they lower their sail as a sign of respect for the ruler who lives there [Document 1722D, Lévesque 1998:462].

When Cantova finally reached Ulithi, he reiterated the political hierarchy of the atoll, "[t]hen we set foot on the Island of Mogmog, the home of the Tamol, or lord of the islands" (Document 1731A2, Lévesque 1999:198). It is unlikely that a single person in the atoll exerted arbitrary power (Lessa

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<sup>4</sup> The paramount chief of Ulithi would have had a sacred quality before their Christianization in the early twentieth century (Lessa 1950a:96).



1950a:87), nonetheless Cantova chose Falalop for his church site because Mogmog was too small in size with little land for cultivation and inadequate drinking water (Document 1731A2, Lévesque 1999:198). Informants from Falalop and Mogmog in 1995 acknowledged the long-standing competition between both islands, which still exists to this day.

It is instructive to examine how the Chamorros of the Mariana Islands initially reacted when confronted with Christianity and a similar undermining of the Chamorro socio-political dynamic (see Hezel 1982, 2000). The Chamorro, a complex Micronesian society, resisted conversion that conflicted with the *status quo* of high-ranking persons. The no less hierarchical Chamorros objected to allowing lower status members of their society Christian baptism for fear of them benefiting in economic, social, and political ways (Carano 1993:69; Velarde 1987:19–20). As in the Ulithian context, unfamiliar Christian concepts were not easily accepted and integrated into the structure of beliefs of this complex chiefdom. The Spanish colonial and Christianisation project defeated the Chamorro rebellion after a 20 year struggle with no less than 12 martyred Jesuits (Driver 1992:101). Cantova's *reducción* plan for the atoll included relocating the entire Ulithian population from inhabiting eight islands of the atoll to only one or two islets. I do not believe this was the main cause for the uprising in Ulithi Atoll, as suggested by Lévesque (1999:342) in a note to Document 1734C, because Cantova had not yet put his plan into action. Of course, if Ulithians suspected the resettlement plans, which the Spanish practiced in the Mariana Islands and elsewhere, then it certainly would have been an important factor in explaining the violent resistance to the mission.

A motive can now be suggested by integrating the reported events in the letters and comparing it to our constructed political context of the region: Cantova undermined the local supremacy of Mogmog in Ulithi Atoll and the regional dominance of Yap. Undermining the chain of authority in Ulithi forced particular individuals, such as the council of elders, district chiefs (*tamol*), and messengers (*raf*), to act. A successful Christian mission would have significantly impacted the social, political, and religious structure of the atoll. Mogmog's high position in Ulithi would have been compromised and the entire atoll's privileged intermediary position in the region, vis-à-vis the Carolinian island communities and Yap, would have suffered.

It has been suggested that a boatload of Carolinians with rumours of Spanish maltreatment persuaded the Ulithians against the mission (e.g.,

Document 1734C, Lévesque 1999:346). Soldier licentiousness was not uncommon in this region (Driver 1992; Hezel 2000:33-35). I, myself, discount the rumour suggestion because Ulithians and Carolinians were well aware of the soldiers and the harsh work conditions exacted by the new colonisers. Sea-faring Micronesians were also familiar with Spanish behaviours in the region. When Cantova was invited by the Carolinians to their islands, he writes 2 December 1728, "they told me that I could take along as many Indians and servants as I wished, but in no case should I bring along any soldier, because they were already aware of their misconduct in the Marianas (Document 1730A3, Lévesque 1999:128).

Gachpar, Yap stood to lose from Ulithi's Christian conversion, therefore they may have also been involved in the conspiracy against Cantova's mission. Eventually, the tribute voyages from Ulithi would have been affected. This threatened the socio-political and religious relationships between the peoples of Ulithi and Yap; not to mention the balance of power on Yap proper induced by *sawei* privileges. A realignment of *sawei* voyages with Fais as the intermediary between Yap, for example, would have benefited the village of Wonyan at the expense of Gachpar. These were important considerations given that Gachpar and Wonyan were political rivals (see Lingenfelter 1975). In a letter to the governor of the Philippines dated 25 May 1731, Cantova mentions Yapese-led conspiracies against the mission rebuffed by Ulithian chiefs:

Because, although these natives are very submissive, there are in these islands some men who have come from the Island of Yapo [i.e. Yap]; they, ever since we made port at these Islands, have offered themselves to their Tamol to fight with us, but the Tamol did not let them, because he is thankful to us for having brought him a relative of his who had drifted to the Marianas [Document 1731A4, Lévesque 1999:208].

Digal, a Carolinian from Mogmog, Ulithi (Document 1731B6, Lévesque 1999:226) or Woleai (Document 1731A2, Lévesque 1999:200) was the interpreter for Cantova's spiritual conquest of the Carolines. In 1725, Marianas' Governor Manuel Argüelles y Valdés encountered Digal and a canoe-load of Micronesians in the open ocean. Digal was one of four that accepted the Governor's invitation to the Mariana Islands in his ship. After working some years for the governor, he later worked for the Jesuits, was baptised and became a catechist (Hezel 1983:58). While blaming him for the violent end of the Ulithi mission is open to debate (cf. García 1992:172; Document 1734B1, Lévesque 1999:296), it is likely that was once Cantova's sacristan, was later given as tribute to a Yapese chief

(Document 1734C, Lévesque 1999:347).<sup>5</sup> Mogmog, Ulithi and Gachpar, Yap stood to lose the most from the success of Cantova's ambitions. The annihilation of the Ulithi mission reaffirmed Mogmog's high position in the he participated in the conspiracy due to his Spanish and Carolinian language skills in addition to his privileged position with Cantova.

Yap wielded the threat of supernatural sanctions over Carolinians. It is unlikely the Yapese appreciated Cantova's affronts to the effectiveness of heir magicians who threatened Carolinians with typhoons, pestilence, barrenness, and tidal waves if their "children" did not bring tribute and respect to Yap. In fact, a 1907 typhoon on Woleai (see Figure 1) which killed over 200 people was attributed to the inhabitants having missed a tribute payment to Yap (Berg 1992:157). Alfred Tetens, the first trading agent for J. C. Godeffroy & Sons, who made a number of visits to Yap and Ulithi between 1865 and 1868, actually suggested that Cantova was killed because he attempted to dispel the myths used by the Yapese to keep Ulithians paying tribute. More than a hundred years after Cantova's mission, Tetens (1958:66) attempted to dissuade Ulithian chiefs from believing that the atoll would be "swallowed up by the sea" if they did not pay tribute to Gachpar. Although known to exaggerate, Tetens claims he narrowly escaped death on Mogmog. The eventual Christian conversion of many of the Outer Islanders freed the bulk of the population from the fear of supernatural reprisals by Yap (Lessa 1950c:50).

Gachpar Village and Yap proper did not hold political authority over Ulithi in the mid-twentieth century. If this political reality existed during Cantova's tenure in the atoll, then Mogmog chiefs would not have required direction or instigation from Yap to annihilate the mission. According to Governor Valdés Tamón's report (Document 1734B2) dated 6 July 1734, the Ulithian hostage's response concerning Cantova's whereabouts and Yap's culpability in the matter was not convincing:

[He] answered with an air of embarrassment, that he and his companions were gone to the great island Yap, but the terror (sic) that was painted in their faces and the absolute refusal they gave to our proposition of coming on board, though we endeavoured to allure them with biscuit and tobacco, left us no room to doubt, that Cantova and his people had perished by the hands of these barbarians [Lévesque 1999:297].

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<sup>5</sup> García (1992:172) claims that the Ulithians also gave some mission artefacts to the *reyezuelo* (principal chief) of Yap.

This could allude to or substantiate the position that the Ulithians acted solely on their own behalf in the annihilation of the mission.

Yap's role in the failure of the mission is uncertain. However, the only survivor of the mission, a Filipino boy called Domingo Lisardo, who atoll and its intermediary position between Yap and the Carolinian communities. In the end, the Ulithi mission and garrison were not strong enough to repel the revolt. The pre-existing political structure of the atoll and the region prevailed. The people of Ulithi maintained their customs and the *status quo* of their island polity that the Spanish threatened with the installation of a Christian mission on Falalop, Ulithi.

## CONCLUSION

By means of integrating archaeology and ethnohistory from the protohistoric period an analysis of the failure of a Jesuit mission and the martyrdom of Fr. Juan Cantova on the Micronesian atoll of Ulithi has been explored. From the integration of archaeological, ethnographic, and ethnohistoric reports, the socio-political context or structure of the region is constructed. The high densities of Yapese ceramics beneath Mogmog household platforms and ethnohistoric reports substantiate the pretence that Cantova stepped into a complex hegemonic socio-political system. The single-mindedness of his objective prevented him from appreciating the significance of his impact in the political system. Despite the detail-rich descriptions found in his ethnographic letters, he did not take into account the depth of society and structure that would resist his conversion attempts. Building a church on a rival island to Mogmog, and insulting the elders and magical practitioners, were important factors leading to his eventual murder and the demise of the mission. The chiefs of Mogmog and the religious practitioners of the atoll had a motive to instigate an insurgence against the mission. Instead of making Christianity their own as other Pacific communities had done, Ulithians chose to destroy the mission that undermined the political structure of the atoll and the region. In other words, Cantova's death and the failure of the mission, were structured by the indigenous hegemonic system in place. His actions were construed as direct challenges to the political and religious structure of Ulithi and the position of Gachpar Village in Yap. The Spanish colonial expansion into the political (cultural) domain of the region was not tolerated. Paradoxically, the fabled rationale for Cantova's death is not far off the mark: "They could no longer tolerate the preaching of the new law

so opposed to their own, in which they wished to continue to live, and die, like their ancestors" (Document 1734B1, Lévesque 1999:296).

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