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NEWS & NOTES

Early Human Burials from the Naton Beach Site, Tumon Bay, Island of Guam, Mariana Islands

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Recent fieldwork conducted by archaeologists from Paul H. Rosendahl Ph.D., Inc. (PHRI) working at the Naton Beach site on Tumon Bay resulted in the recovery of 177 human skeletons dated between approximately 800 and 300 BC. This discovery, associated with archaeological excavations related to the renovation of the Guam Aurora Resort Villas & Spa, offers tremendous potential to increase our understanding of early settlement in the Marianas and the relationship of these people to contemporaneous populations throughout the Western Pacific.

Of the 367 prehistoric human skeletons recovered from the Naton Beach Site, 177 formed a large, spatially distinct cluster associated with the Middle Unai Period (1000–500 BC) of Marianas prehistory (see Moore 2002). This period subsumes portions of the timeframes previously defined as the Early Pre-Latte and the Intermediate Pre-Latte Phases (Moore 1983:176–177). The remaining burials appear to date primarily from a Latte Period (AD 1000–1521) occupation of the site. *Conus* shell bead necklaces recovered from four different burials within the early burial cluster yielded calibrated AMS $^{14}$C age ranges (at 2σ) of 770–400 BC (Beta-238483), 590–330 BC (Beta-238484), 720–360 BC (Beta-238485), and 790–490 BC (Beta-238486) (Table 1). The dates were calibrated using the Calib program MARINE04 database with a $\Delta R$ value of 115 ± 50 years to compensate for the regional marine reservoir effect (see Athens 1986:113). Further radiocarbon
Table 1. Radiocarbon dates from Naton Beach site, Tumon Bay, Guam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample No.</th>
<th>Provenience</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Measured radiocarbon age</th>
<th>Conventional radiocarbon age</th>
<th>Calibrated 2σ age range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beta-238482</td>
<td>Feature 2</td>
<td>Soil</td>
<td>1700 ± 40 BP</td>
<td>1680 ± 40 BP</td>
<td>AD 250–430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta-238483</td>
<td>Burial 173</td>
<td>Conus shell beads</td>
<td>2490 ± 40 BP</td>
<td>2940 ± 40 BP</td>
<td>770–400 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta-238484</td>
<td>Burial 156</td>
<td>Conus shell beads</td>
<td>2330 ± 40 BP</td>
<td>2790 ± 40 BP</td>
<td>590–330 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta-238485</td>
<td>Burial 273</td>
<td>Conus shell beads</td>
<td>2490 ± 40 BP</td>
<td>2860 ± 40 BP</td>
<td>720–360 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta-238486</td>
<td>Burial 286</td>
<td>Conus shell beads</td>
<td>2640 ± 40 BP</td>
<td>2970 ± 40 BP</td>
<td>790–490 BC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

dating is planned to better define the chronology of the burial population and the larger site area.

All but a few of the early burials from the Naton Beach Site were found underneath a swimming pool and restaurant structure removed in 2006 as part of the hotel renovation. These early inhumations were differentiated from nearby Latte Phase burials by their greater depth, relative state of preservation, and lack of visible burial pit features (Figure 1). Differences in artifact association and mortuary treatment were also evident. Any cultural deposits originally associated with these burials were likely

Figure 1. Photograph of Burials 306 and 307, Naton Beach Site.
destroyed during construction of the swimming pool and restaurant in the early 1970s.

The majority of the Latte Period burials were identified within three burial clusters which likely represent the location of the distinctive Latte stone house structures (Craib 1986; Graves 1986:145–148; Morgan 1988:116–149) characteristic of this period of Marianas prehistory. A sediment sample from a cultural stratum located 30 m seaward of the early burial cluster yielded a calibrated $^{14}$C age range ($2\sigma$) of AD 250–430 (Beta-238482). This age range is similar to radiocarbon dates on marine shells obtained by Davis et al. (1992) from deposits about 50 m to the south.

Relative to Latte Phase burials, the early Naton Beach burials display a greater frequency and diversity of grave good inclusions. Grave goods associated with the early interments include complete or nearly complete ceramic vessels, shell bead necklaces, shell bracelets, stone and shell adzes, stone pestles, shell fish gorges, stone net sinkers, large unmodified oyster (*Pinctada sp.*) shells, a shell fishhook, and a shell net sinker. Many of the tools recovered as grave goods from the early burials are consistent with artifacts recovered from other sites of similar age, while others have not been previously identified in early Marianas contexts.

Stone tools included as grave goods with the early burials included small adzes (rounded in cross section), thin trapezoidal adzes (quadrangular in cross-section) (Figure 2), and several pestles presumably used for processing plant materials. Many of the stone tools were made of a volcanic material that appears to be exotic to Guam.

The shell tools recovered as grave goods with the early burials are notable

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*Figure 2. Photograph of selected stone tools recovered with early burials at Naton Beach Site.*
given the variety of artifact forms and species utilized. Shell bead necklaces, predominately of *Conus* shell, were prevalent as were shell bracelets. Large crescent-shaped fish gorges made of shell were also recovered with some of the early burials.

The calcareous sand tempered (CST) sherds recovered in association with the early burials included both thin and thick-walled flat-bottomed forms and rim sherds with simple lime-filled impressed decorations (Figure 3). Two complete or nearly complete early ceramic vessels were found associated with the early burials.

All the early burials were fully extended with no clear pattern as to orientation. Notably, only a few subadult skeletons were identified within the early burial population. One of these was an infant that contained both a *Conus* shell necklace and shell bracelets.

The early inhumations recovered from the Naton Beach Site represent one of the largest and best preserved early (pre-AD 1000) mortuary populations yet identified in Micronesia and perhaps the whole of the Western Pacific (Nelson and Fitzpatrick 2006). Relative to the Latte Phase, very little is known of the antecedent (1800 BC–AD 1000) cultural complexes of the Mariana Islands. In fact, the early Marianas chronological sequence is based largely on ceramic attributes with little reference to other aspects of the ancient sociocultural system. The identification of distinct mortuary behaviors and artifact associations within the Naton Beach Site population offers a unique opportunity to broaden our understanding of early Marianas cultural complexes and their relationship to subsequent Marianas populations, as well as contemporary early populations living elsewhere in the Western

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**Figure 3.** Photograph of decorated sherds from Naton Beach Site.
Pacific. Critical to this research are forthcoming analyses of the associated artifacts and ecofactual material, along with analysis of the demography, health, and genetic relationships of the burial population.

REFERENCES


