Project Highlight

Impact of typhoons on traditional societies in Micronesia

With most of their elevation below 2m above mean high water, the atolls of Micronesia are extremely prone to the impact of storm events and particularly typhoons. Attaining speeds of up to 250knots (~380km/h) these circular wind systems set up a storm surge that can easily flood the islets, while the pulsating, salt laden winds destroy or damage vegetation, beached canoes, houses and community infrastructure.

While modern weather monitoring systems, as well as modern disaster mitigation operations, provide relief, this was not the case in the past. On record are storm events so severe that entire islands were washed away, drowning most inhabitants and subjecting the survivors to prolonged starvation because all food supplies were spoilt and the plantations destroyed.

The project studies the history of the typhoon events at the historic interface between traditional life styles and traditional responses to such disasters and beginning of the German colonial governments disaster mitigation efforts.

The time span between 1890 and 1914 is unique as the Micronesian responses were still traditional, but detailed historic and often photographic records of the events exist that provide opportunities for critical analysis.

Further information is available from:

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