

Archaeological Survey of Truk, Micronesia¹

FRANCIS J. CLUNE, JR.²

In a search of the literature of Micronesia it was noted that some areas had been reported on archaeologically and some areas had been either reported poorly or not at all. Truk, of the Caroline Islands, falls in the "not at all" category. As a result of this literary survey, it was felt that the islands of Truk deserved at least a site survey.

The Truk islands are of two types, small coral beached islands usually on the fringing reef; and the high islands with a volcanic core protruding well above sea level. The low islands in the lagoon may have been occupied over long periods of time but this type of deposit would be very difficult, and expensive to excavate due to the churning and mixing of the deposits and the large number of C-14 dates necessary to make an adequate analysis.

The Trukese have a basic myth that they came from the island of Kusaie. They also claim that the first settlements were on Moen since that is the first island of any size near the Northeast Pass, their entry way. The use of myths to back up archaeological reconstructions is hazardous for the simple reason that the myths are used to reinforce the current political structure and may in fact be superimposed on a defeated group to justify various actions. Therefore, the statement that Moen was first occupied by Kusaiens should be taken with caution. However, what appears as a distinct possibility is the occupation of Truk was due to a movement of people from the East moving to Truk in the West. The evidence for this is the artifacts collected during the survey.

The Trukese sites (Table 1) that were located during the one month survey period can be broken into two basic types with one subdivision. A) Defense structure—these consist of walls built in pre-contact times for refuge areas. A. I. Associated with the defence walls are occupation sites that were used for a period of time in the refuge zones during periods of attack. B) Occupation sites—several sites were found that could have been used in times previous to contact but only one could be identified positively as having some antiquity due to the presence of numerous shell adze blades, and one sling stone. There are also a few sites that do not fit either of the two categories previously mentioned, a petroglyph site on Moen which was reported in 1915 by the Thileneus expedition. Also a series of fish traps on

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² Department of Anthropology, State University College at Brockport, Brockport, New York 14420.

Romonum have been identified by local informants as being "old".

The defense sites are all found on the high ridge of the larger islands. These consist of a series of defense walls and in some instances midden deposits. They are in excellent defensive positions and in some instances the Japanese during WW II placed gun positions in the same places. On one of these Japanese sites a shell adze was found giving some antiquity to the site. Another site turned up not only shell debris but a cooked dog's jawbone, which might indicate some antiquity again. Since the Trukese were sea-going and lagoon fishermen they would have to have villages and canoe houses close to the water. I found only one of these sites with certainty, this was a site on Fefan Island which was bulldozed for a school. The local inhabitants had collected all of the shell adzes and sling stones that were turned up during the dozer operations. The author found a fragment of one adze in the school grounds. There are undoubtedly other such sites, but they would have to be located by test-pitting and time and money were not available for such operations. (Two other sites were seen on Moen in 1973—one in the village of Penia, the other on Polle, on Tol).

Future operations in the Truk area should consist of excavations of defense sites and an attempt to locate and excavate one of the larger village sites. The artifacts yielded by the survey gave some information about construction techniques, and the presence of shell adzes, numerous shells of edible varieties, a few sling stones and no pottery. Neither pottery, nor chipped stone tools, except for the sling stones were found in any of the survey, nor in the excavations carried out in 1973. This absence of pottery places Truk among the very few islands in the Pacific which do not have pottery. Truk does have ample clay of the correct type to manufacture pottery, but neither the archaeological nor the ethnographic records show any trace of aboriginal pottery. The most logical explanation for this oddity is that Truk was settled by people coming from the East, Ponape, the Gilberts and Marshall Islands, or even Kusaie. Every one of the islands mentioned has no recorded pottery.

There were no excavations undertaken during this survey and as a result the date of any of the archaeological material is still questionable but the fact that neither metal, nor glass were found in surface collections from several sites would indicate that the material probably was pre-contact, that is late 17th century or earlier.

Table 1. Sites on the Truk Islands.

Island	Number	Type
Moen	6	1 pictograph, 5 defense sites
Romonum (Ulalu)	2	1 fish trap, 1 defense site
Udot	3	all defense sites
Fefan	5	1 village coast site, 4 defense sites
Tsis	1	defense site
Tol	12	all defense sites
Total	29	26 defense site, 1 pictograph, 1 fish trap, 1 village site on the shore