

Two Forms of Primitive Art in Micronesia¹

Paul R. Henrickson

College of Guam

1. The Drawings at Inarajan and Talofoyo, Guam

These drawings are relatively unknown and infrequently visited. One reason for this is related to superstitions surrounding "Taotao Mona". It is maintained by Guamanians now in their twenties that with them the controlling belief in "Taotao Mona" (beings inhabiting certain quarters who render retribution on those failing to ask their pardon for trespassing)² is no longer operative. This may be so, but only in few cases has the lack of fear overcome the tabu and



Fig. 1. Map of Guam showing locations of Talofoyo, Inarajan, and Agana.

¹ It has not been the intention of the author to establish anything beyond a serious approach to questions pertaining to the authenticity of the drawings at Inarajan or the rock paintings of the Palau islands. Questions as to authorship, dating and motive could not be deeply considered. It is felt that conclusions in this area would be premature. It has been considered proper to indicate avenues for further investigation. At this writing Dr. Fred Reinman from the Chicago Museum of Natural History is on Guam investigating other archeological evidence. It may well be that his discoveries will shed light on the questions related to the drawings at Inarajan and Talofoyo. References to the rock paintings of Palau are rare. In Leonard Mason's contribution to the *Encyclopedia of World Art* they are not mentioned.

² Actually "Taotao Mona" means "people of earlier time" but popular legends persist indicating the belief that these spirits may curse, and a profession designed to counteract the effects of these curses is still operative.

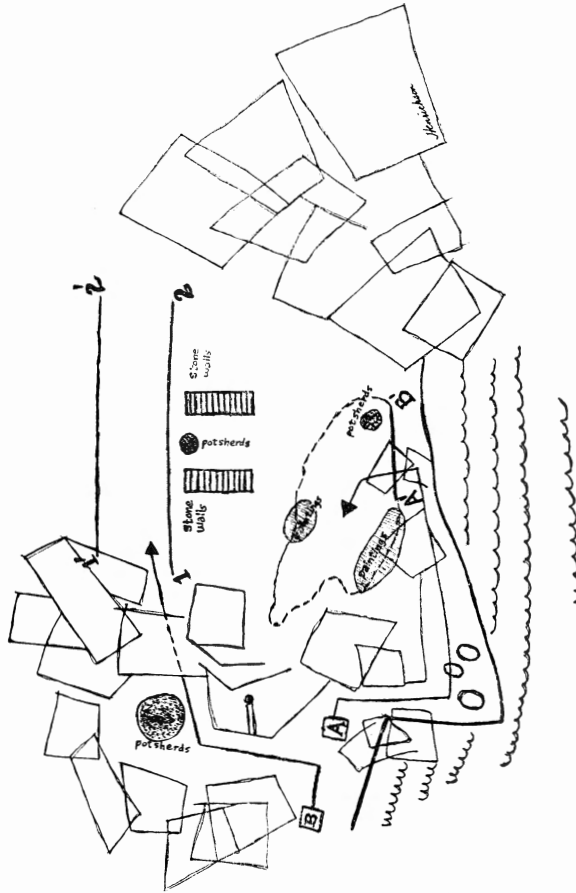


Fig. 2. General aerial view of the Inarajan Cave and environs. The stone walls are located on the upper level which is situated about 15-20 ft. higher than the level of the "cave" where the drawings are found. The character of the site suggests that at one time line 1-2 and 1'-2' were in closer proximity than they are at present, and that it was the part of the ceiling indicated by 1-2 which dropped 2 or 3 ft. down and several feet forward (toward the water). This drop probably increased the angle of incline by 20-30 degrees. The existence of two rock walls in the upper section indicates the possibility of this upper section having at one time been divided into three rooms. It was not possible to determine whether the walls had been built before or after the roof slippage. The present entrance to this upper section is indicated by arrow "B", while the entrance to the section containing the drawings is shown by arrow "A". Line A-B indicates the approximate width of this entrance. Dotted line A'-B' is an estimate only of the size and contour of the cave wherein occur the drawings. One local informant believed that the occupants of the cave had purposely collapsed it in an effort to hide or preserve their valuables. It may be however that the shift is due to an earthquake in the past, as earth tremors are frequent in the Marianas.

encouraged a lively curiosity about certain areas.

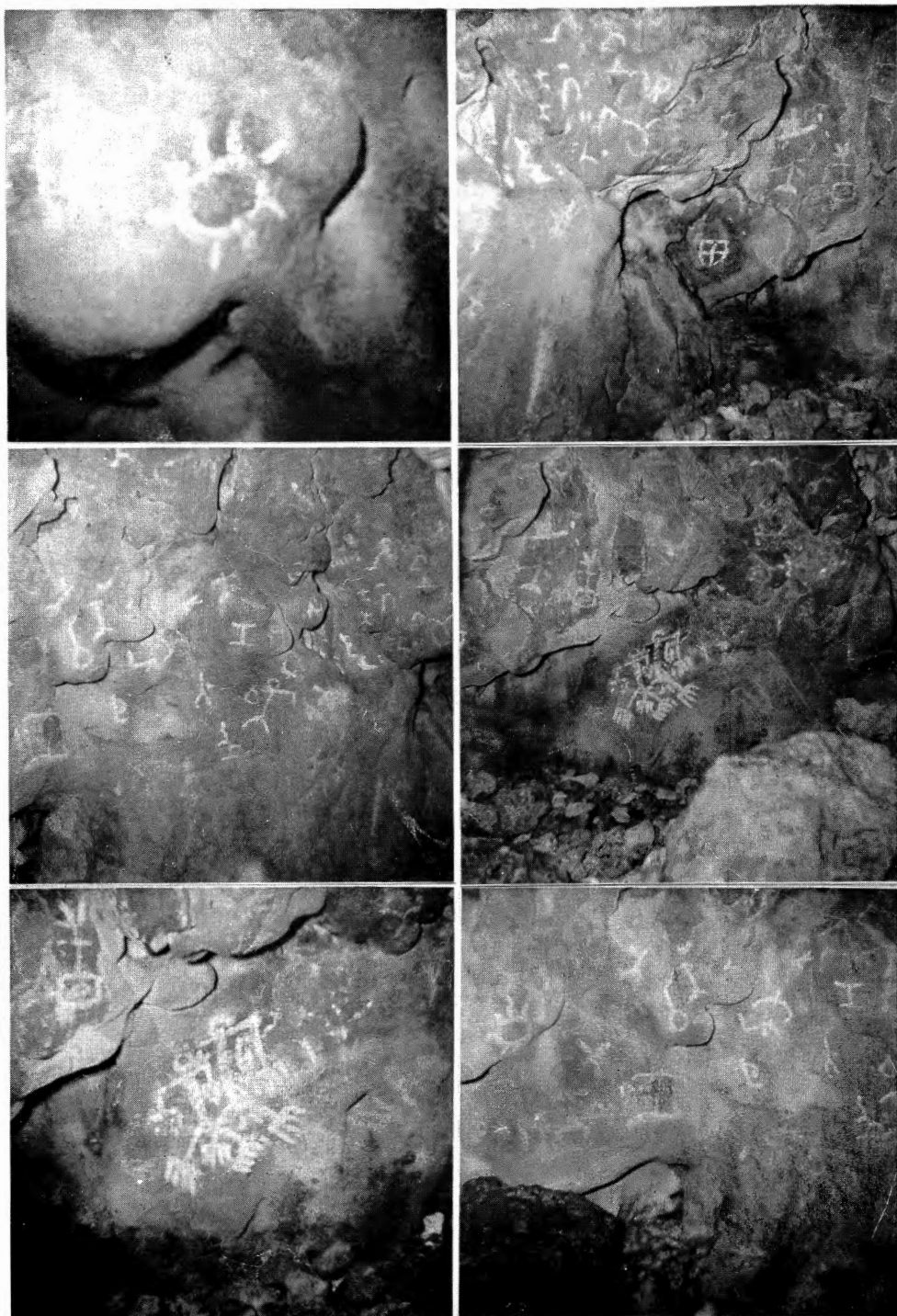
The most informative reference to these drawings is "Archaeology of the Mariana Islands" (Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Bulletin 100) by Laura Maude Thompson, published in 1932. Miss Thompson indicates that there are, in addition to those in the Inarajan cave, drawings on walls of two caves at Talofoto situated 400 feet above the sea and several miles from Inarajan. She reports that there were ruins of two walls in front of the entrances to these caves. I have found one cave at Talofoto which contains drawings, but these are few in number compared to those found in the cave near Inarajan (see map). I never did locate the reported walls at the entrances to the two caves at Talofoto.

Near the entrance to the Inarajan cave, as Thompson points out, one can find hollowed out cavities along the narrow shelf of rock a few feet above the water covering the reef below. These presumably were used as mortars for the grinding of a drug used in the capture of fish. On the interior of the cave it is still possible to find potsherds mixed with shells and coral sand in shallow depressions. In the area surrounding this small cave I have found rims of red and yellow clay bowls suggesting a size capable of holding 5 to 10 gallons or more, one curiously wedged in a horizontal cleft in the coral rock at a distance of about two-and-a-half feet from the exterior surface (see No. 3 in schematic rendering of site Fig. 2).

The drawings in the caves at Talofoto and Inarajan have the appearance of having been executed with a whitish or grayish pigment which in the course of time has become extremely hard. In any case, what Laura Thompson describes as a "white pigment"—it is actually closer to being pale, greyish-yellow in color—is extremely hard and durable and will not become separated from the rock surface in scraping except after long effort with a stout knife. It is more like rock than plaster in durability although the formation of the marks indicated that originally the material must have been close to the consistency of thinned window putty. It appears as though the index finger, loaded with the pigment, was used as the main applicator for at the endings of several lines there is either a lesser or a greater deposit of the pigment than is found in the main body of the strokes. This suggests in the first case that the finger ran out of pigment, and in the second, that the finger had an excess of pigment and as the finger left the surface of the rock wall there was a sufficient quality of cohesiveness to pull an additional amount free from the finger. Chemical analysis revealed the main components to be calcium carbonate and siliceous matter with doubtful traces of free carbon or carbonaceous matter, a form of clay or marl.³

Perhaps the single most interesting drawing, certainly the most complicated in graphic contour, is seen in figures 5 and 7. Quite clearly we have here two human figures, presumably men, in close association with each other either physically or, if this is totally symbolic, in status. At the time these photographs were taken, I was told that these men were supposed to represent two chiefs who came here to do battle. This continued local legend which had been told my informant by his grandmother is curiously similar to one of a group of tales

³ The author is indebted to Professor Earl R. Caley of the Department of Chemistry of the Ohio State University for his chemical identification of the pigments on both the Palauan Rock Paintings and the Inarajan drawings.



Figs. 3-8. Photographs of the drawings in Inarajan Caves, Guam. Upper left: Fig. 3. 1964, A. Center left: Fig. 4. 1964, B. Lower left: Fig. 5. 1964, C. Upper right: Fig. 6. 1964, D. Center right: Fig. 7. 1964, F. Lower right: Fig. 8. 1964, E.

reported by Laura Thompson:

Kiroga, a man of Talofoto, went in search of Talage of Inalahan. Talage also went in search of Kiroga to fight him. Said Kiroga, "Where are you going?" Said Talage, "I am looking for you so we can fight." Said Kiroga, "Come let us go, and we will go to my ranch and eat then we will fight". Said Kiroga when the food was nearly done, "Get me a coconut." And he bought a ripe nut. And Kiroga squeezed the nut, and it was as though grated. They then harassed each other and went to Padosa at the Tekae Dsuus⁴ (God's Bridge) Padosa went in search of Padsagnia. They chased Talage and Kiroga. They were defeated.

The oral accounts which have survived as traditional story property of particular locations lend credibility to the claim that these drawings are the legitimate graphic expression of an earlier, more primitive group of people than those who now inhabit the area. I have frequently heard, however, claims that these drawings are the work of some person or persons either wishing to entertain themselves or desiring to perpetrate a fraud on a gullible and unsuspecting public. Such expressions of scepticism leave me unimpressed. These assertions do not convince me for the following reasons: 1) The caves in which these drawings are found are, although not far from where people frequent, are remote in the sense and to the extent they are difficult to find and access to them involves some degree of physical hardship. 2) whether for purposes of private entertainment or public fraud the executant, if he were "modern" must have possessed considerable sophistication in the graphic behavior of primitive groups,⁵ 3) if these drawings were imitations of a primitive style what motive might explain their presence in an unprotected and unexploited area? Other than their being the product of a highly imaginative person I can suggest only a profit motive but find that I must discard this as improbable on the basis that although their existence has been known for at least several decades nothing has been done to protect or exploit them, and 4) the presence in the same area of numerous potsherds of different sizes and types of clay is difficult to explain away as an archaeological "plant". It is, however, possible to claim diminished authenticity, for those drawings are not unknown among the Guamanians, interested statesiders and other curiosity seekers. There is probably some validity to the claim that alterations have occurred as a result of whitening with chalk in order to secure a clearer image for purposes of photography. The illustrations

⁴ An alternative spelling in this word is YUUS.

⁵ The author acknowledges the fact that in public latrines and under special circumstances modern primitives resort to a means of graphic expression which is sometimes similar. In as much as these *graphiti* are relatively covert and are addressed to a limited and initiated audience in an extra-legal way their appearance may be considered more properly the property of the psychologist. Morphologically, also, these latrine examples are less primitive in the techniques of drawing and frequently exhibit a graphic sophistication as well as giving evidence of their author's having closely observed objective data in detail. Such characteristics are not usually found in truly primitive works. (The term *primitive* is here used to describe those art forms which are unsophisticated expressions divorced from identifiable creative movements associated with intellectually motivated and controlled behavior. Such forms need not be primitive in a technical sense but only conceptually impoverished. *Truly primitive* works are technically limited).

accompanying this article indicate however, that it was not necessary to do so. And in the case of the few remaining drawings in the cave at Talofoto there still exist pencil marks superimposed upon the original clay suggesting either vandalism or a crude attempt at tracing. Even considering damage to these drawings by the above means, I am of the opinion that its extent is minor and that the drawings remain in an acceptable state of preservation.

A report recently came to me from Professor Leonard Mason that Professor Robert McKnight saw some similarity between the Guam drawings and some petroglyphs in Hawaii, in the Puake Petroglyph Field and other fields such as the one near Kahakulea, Maui. There does appear to be a superficial similarity between the styles of Guam and the several Hawaiian islands (see Fig. 9). However, my first reaction to them after noticing their similarity is to state in addition that while the Hawaiian examples are more numerous as well as more rich in variety than are those on Guam the Inarajan examples appear more spontaneous and less stylistic. The Bernice P. Bishop Museum Publication, *Report of the Puake Petroglyph Field in the Proposed State Historic Petroglyph Park, Puako, South Kohala* in discussing the meaning of the petroglyphs says: "The main function of most of them, clearly, has been to mark the visit of the maker or his group at the spot where they appear...While petroglyphs had attained the status of symbols used to record a single event, they were not employed to tell stories, and so cannot be considered as picture writing, such as that used by some American Indian tribes".

The evidence available at Inarajan suggests that the Guamanian examples

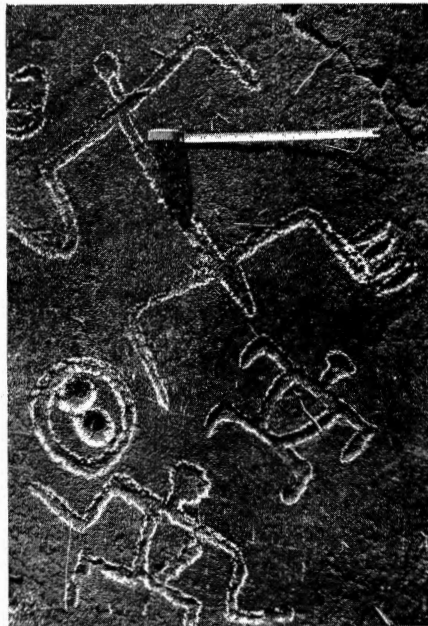


Fig. 9. Petroglyphs from the Petroglyph Park, Puako, South Kohala.
Photograph courtesy of the Bernice P. Bishop Museum.

very likely do tell stories; so in two minor ways the Guamanian and Hawaiian examples differ.

2. Other Micronesian Examples

Palauan Rock Paintings

The relationship between these drawings and others in the Western Pacific remains largely undetermined. It has been called to my attention by Dr. Vitarelli of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands that there exist drawings of an antiquity between four hundred and five hundred years on the Palau islands lying some seven hundred miles south-southwest of Guam. I investigated the Palauan rock paintings and found no profound similarity between them and the cave drawings at Inarajan. The drawings at Inarajan occupy an area approximately ten by five feet and the area in Talofoto is even smaller. Individual drawings in Guam range in height from a few inches to approximately ten inches while the Palauan paintings are frequently heroic in size and painted not



Fig. 15. Human and Animal Figures. Eurioure Western New South Wales.

Copied by the author from: *The Art of the Stone Age*, "The Rock Art of Australia," by Andreas Lammel, Crown Publishers, Inc., New York 1961 (pg. 205-231).

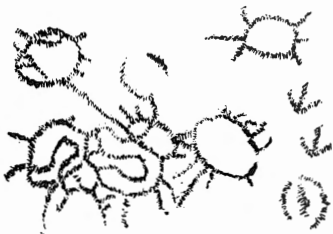


Fig. 16. Rock engraving Devon Downs, Southern Australia after D.S. Davidson. "The only rock engraving of ascertainable date- that at Devon Downs- which was produced in the third millennium B.C., is markedly inferior" Copied by the author.



Fig. 17. Lizard-like animal. Rock Painting Hawker, Southern Australia 3 ft. 2 in.

Copied by the author from: *The Art of the Stone Age*, "The Rock Art of Australia," by Andreas Lommel, Crown Publishers, Inc., New York 1961 (pg. 205-231).

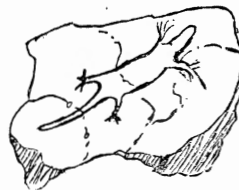


Fig. 18. Incised animal figure on Potsherd. Copied by the author from figure 14, page 27 of *Archaeology of the Marianas Islands* by Laura Maude Thompson with permission of the Bernice P. Bishop Museum.

in difficult to locate shallow caves but like modern billboards on rock faces or ledges from ten to thirty feet above the sea level and occupying as much as three-hundred square feet (see Figures 10-12). Individual drawings in the Palau group range in size from hand print to five feet or more in height (see Figs. 10-13). The Palauan Paintings are generally more complex graphically than are the drawings in the caves in Guam. In addition a chemical analysis of the pigments revealed that the red coloring in the Palauan paintings is ferric oxide and that the composition of the pigment used in the Inarajan drawings is a grey-tinted calcereous clay. The differences in pigments however, could be explained merely by the fact that there was a difference in the material available locally. It is the style rather than the medium which suggests that these drawings were executed by different groups. In general the Palauan paintings which were not in good condition bear little stylistic similarity except in the simplest of configurations to the drawings at Inarajan.

Pacific Basin "Styles"

At this point when we speak of similarities we are merely making use of a term which we intend should describe what we have observed initially. What at first may appear to bear similarities with another may upon a closer investigation not be a *real* similarity at all. At any rate, at this time, our *similarities* are morphological rather than causal. The *technical* matter of *how* a work of art is shaped need not be related to the psychological explanation of *why* a work was created.

This is one reason why we put the word *styles* in quotation marks. The author prefers to use the word *style* in the sense that it can apply to a body of work distinguished by a community of aesthetic response embracing not only the reason why it comes into being but also the manner of its coming. This could conceivably mean that superficial appearance need not be a matter of style at all and also that morphological similarities may not tell us much more than that the works *appear* to be alike.

Preliminary search among library sources reveals interesting, but as yet not very meaningful similarities between the Inarajan drawings and drawings found in Western and Southern Australia. Compare, for example, the illustrations found at Inarajan with the illustrations from Australia. Not only do general compositional characteristics appear similar (cf. Fig. 4, 6, 8 with Fig. 15 and 16), but individual figures such as the conventionalized figure in the upper left hand corner of Fig. 5 bear similarities to the two figures in the lower right hand corner of Fig. 15. Compare also the lizard-like figure of an animal found at Hawker, Southern Australia (Fig. 17) with the incised animal figure found on a potsherd at a depth of 50 inches on Saipan (Fig. 18).⁶ Saipan and Guam are part of what is identified as the Mariana group of islands and additional cultural similarities existing between these two islands have been noted by other researchers. To continue, let us note this kind of similarity between the feet of the Inarajan combatants (Fig. 5) and the foot of the large drawing in Fig. 13 or-to turn our

⁶ Professor Scott Wilson has noticed the similarity between this figure and one figure in the Palau group, which Dr. McKnight has remarked as having the appearance of a standing, hooded or masked human being.

attention to the Palauan paintings once again-let us compare the general configurations of the drawings in Fig. 11 from Palau and Fig. 17 which comes from South Australia.

In making comparisons and pointing out similarities between graphic facts of historical nature such as we have done in this report, the most one can hope to do is to establish actual similarities or differences in medium or location. To proceed from the point to conclusions concerning authorship, dating, style and the motive for the production of the works of art would require information outside the graphic arts area and at this time not available. In many cases, as far as I know, this information does not exist. In the case of the drawings at Inarajan, Carbon 14 tests have not, as yet, been possible, so information which might have been gained from this method of dating is not available to us. Geological methods employed to determine the history of the structure of the area (see explanatory note with the schematic drawing of the Inarajan site) might assist us in arriving at a theory explaining the age of the drawings, the purpose or purposes of both the drawings and the cave. The literary item supplied us by Laura Thompson and the information concerning Kiroga (a man of Talofolo or possibly Quiroga, a Spanish soldier) might suggest that these drawings could not be older than 1521 when Magellan landed at Umatac Bay on the Southern shores of Guam. It is also entirely possible that the oral accounts bear no relationship to the drawings, or, if any, a coincidental one. For example, the legends being transmitted orally could have been freely applied by those telling them to new situations superficially similar to the situation which originally gave birth to the story. On the other hand, it may be profitable to consider that Carbon 14 tests on Saipan date potsherds to 2nd millenium B. C.⁷ which should indicate the possibility that a similar dating might be applied to artifacts found on Guam. The similarity which we believe may exist between individual graphic devices found in Guam and south-western Australia should not encourage the conclusion that we are looking at marks created by similar people at a particular period or periods in time for similar purposes. It could be that these are not the same kinds of *graphic devices*. The so-called "Sun" design can be found in widely separated parts of the world and those which have been dated indicate widely separated points in time.

It is possible, also, that there can be a kind of evolution of graphic forms suggesting a level of graphic development at which a certain type of drawing may likely dominate. However, even such possibilities, as tempting as they are to encourage us to make conclusions based on them, would presuppose a patent evolutionary development of graphic devices of a cross-cultural nature.

Lacking, as we do, much contrary evidence from other sources it appears probable that the Inarajan drawings date from a period in time no later than 400 years ago and are a product of a people whose graphic devices and media were primitive. It is not possible for us to say much more about the Palauan Paintings at this time.

⁷ Dr. Reinman communicated this information in a talk given to the Guam Archeological Society in the Fall of 1965.

Source Material

- ADAM, LEONHARD**, 1954, *Primitive Art*, Penguin Books, Melbourne, 3rd ed.
- ANTHROPOLOGY**, Department of: Bernice P. Bishop Museum. 1964, *Report of the Puake Petroglyph Field in the Proposed State Historic Petroglyph Park, Puake, South Kohala*.
- BOAS, FRANZ**, 1955, *Primitive Art*, Dover, 372 pp.
- EMORY, K.** *Island of Lanai*, Bernice P. Bishop, Museum, Bull. pp. 94-121.
- MCKNIGHT, ROBERT K.**, *Orachl's Drawings, Palauan Rock Paintings*, Micronesian Research Working Papers, Number 1, Literature Production Center, Saipan, Mariana Islands, 1964, 28 pp.
- THOMPSON, LAURA MAUDE**, *Archeology of the Mariana Islands*, Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Bull. 100, 1932, 82 pp.

The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of the following persons in refining this report:

- PROFESSOR EARLE R. CALEY**, Department of Chemistry, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, for his contribution in identifying the components of the pigments used in the paintings found in Palau and the drawings on Guam.
- MRS. WILLIAM DOLPH, MANGILAO**, Guam, for her assistance in identifying place names, alternate spellings, the notes concerning Kiroga (Quiroga) and the suggestion that the "dwellers" of the Inarajan cave may have purposefully collapsed the cave.
- DR. ROBERT K. MCKNIGHT**, Department of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Wisconsin for his insight into the nature and use of the red pigment employed by the Palauan in the use of body paint, canoe paint, and the pigment probably used in the execution of the rock paintings.
- MR. DON PEDRO, KOROR**, Palau, for his description of the method of extraction and the use of the oil of the Eritem nut which, when mixed with the lime obtained from burned coral produces a red coloring.
- MRS. MARY UNDERWOOD**, for the use of her black and white photographs.
- MRS. PAULINE DILWEG**, for the use of her colored photographs of the cave drawings at Inarajan.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE

(Henrickson Manuscript)

Upper left

Taberrakl Site: This shows Mdechiibelau, a diety important to Airai, Ngatpang, Ngechesar, Ulimang, Chelap, Mengellake, Melekei in Babethaup. n.b. Large genitals. About $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet high.

Upper right

Taberrakl Site; North Ledge: This shows a hooded figure, c.f. fully masked Melanesian ceremonial figures. This one is about $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet high.

Lower left

Taberrakl Site; North Ledge: This shows a stylized face or mask, about $5\frac{1}{2}$ feet high. It lies about 30 feet above the sea.

Lower right

Taberrakl Site: This shows a "sun" figure or "wheel".

