Review
Reviewed Work(s): Upon a Stone Altar: A History of the Island of Pohnpei to 1890. by David Hanlon
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and their effects on cultural symbols and the distribution of knowledge opens up a promising direction for future research.

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In 1836, after living on Pohnpei, eastern Caroline Islands, for about five years, an Irish beachcomber, James F. O’Connell, published a book that is now an unparalleled source for all who write on Pohnpeian history. Hanlon cites O’Connell repeatedly in one of his early chapters, but in one instance he emphatically disagrees with him. He says: “O’Connell believed the segregation in Pohnpeian society followed racial lines. He was wrong . . . Pohnpeian society distinguished between the soupeidi ‘nobles’ and the aramas mual ‘common people’. The difference in skin colour, if indeed one existed, resulted from the quite different lifestyles of the two groups; the soupeidi governed from the raised platform of the naks [feast house] while the aramas mual worked outside, performing the physical labor required of them” (p. 39).

Hanlon’s disagreement with O’Connell highlights an underlying ideology in his work. However, while it is pleasant to think that Pohnpei was once an elysium where ethnic differences played no part, its position in relation to Melanesian Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands and to predominantly Mongoloid Southeast Asia — the likely ultimate sources of its early population — makes this highly improbable.

The most remarkable occurrence in Pohnpei’s prehistory was the construction of a megalithic complex of buildings on ninety-six artificial islands off the southeastern coast. The complex, known as Nan Madol, covers about two hundred acres. On genealogical grounds, Nan Madol is estimated to have been built between the tenth and twelfth centuries after a large voyaging party arrived from a place called Katau Peidi. One man became Pohnpei’s first Saudeleur, or “master of Deleur.” He and his successors ruled Pohnpei from Nan Madol for about five hundred years.

The Saudeleurs’ rule is estimated to have ended in about 1628 after a man called Isohkelekel reached Pohnpei, reputedly with 333 companions, and overthrew the last of the line. Thereafter, Hanlon says, the people set about “restructuring the political order of the island, an order that would be essentially Pohnpeian” (p. 20).

The first European encounter with Pohnpei occurred about the time of Isohkelekel’s roughly dated arrival. In 1595, three ships of the Mendana expedition, on their way to Manila, approached the island from the south after an unsuccessful attempt to establish a settlement in the Santa Cruz group of the Solomons. One ship, the frigate Santa Catalina, was leaking
badly. Four days before her companions sighted Pohnpei, she fell behind them and was never heard of again (C. Markham, ed., The Voyages of Pedro Fernández de Quiros, 1595-1606 [London: Hakluyt Society, 1904]).

Hanlon does not mention the ill-fated Santa Catalina, but refers to a tradition about a ship that anchored off Pohnpei's south coast after Mendana's flagship had passed by. A party from the ship went ashore, some wearing "hard skins." One man was "dressed in black" with "a shiny object hanging around his neck." The voyagers, it is said, eventually sailed on. But did they?

In the early nineteenth century, when Europeans again made contact with Pohnpei, some curious items came to light there — a cannon, a crucifix, some silver coins, etc. — which Hanlon mentions only in a footnote. The discoveries suggest to this reviewer that the people in the leaking frigate actually settled on Pohnpei, performing the exploits now attributed to Isohkelekel. They would certainly have diversified Pohnpei's ethnic make-up. Besides Spaniards, the Santa Catalina's complement probably included Peruvian Indians, Negroes and mulattoes, some of them women.

With a less dogmatic view on Pohnpeian ethnicity and an eye for what is not recorded in documents, Hanlon might have made something of the Santa Catalina. As it is, he has provided us with a useful summary of what has so far been deduced about Pohnpei's prehistory as well as a solidly documented account of Pohnpeian contact with dissolute beachcombers, sex-starved whaling crews, rascally trading captains, strait-laced American Protestant missionaries and inept Spanish administrators from the 1820s to 1890. One theme runs through the whole: the Pohnpeians (whoever their ancestors were) have always insisted on governing themselves. The book, originally a doctoral thesis, is a welcome addition to the growing library of detailed histories of individual Pacific islands.

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BRIEFLY NOTED


This is a timely book on the "growing sector," an apt description of the public sector in practically all countries. As the editor shows, to a large extent differences in employment in the public sector of different countries reflect income per capita. As Parkinson might have said, "As resources grow, the number of public servants rises in order to dispose of them." This is not the whole story, and Edgren's "Overview" considers some of the other factors which influence the public employment level. He and the contributors also analyze other aspects, such as different wage levels in public and private sec-

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