

New archaeological research project started in Pohnpei

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In February a team of Japanese archaeologists has started a four-year archaeological research project in Pohnpei in collaboration with the Pohnpei State Historic Preservation Office. The research project entitled “Archaeological Study of human migrations and inter-islands networks in Oceania” is funded by the Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research Program of the Japan Government (Principal Investigator: Dr. Ono Rintaro, 18KK0019).

The focus of the research is to shed light on the early Micronesian culture during the colonization period, when the ancestors of the Pohnpeian people first arrived on the island from Melanesia around 2000 years ago.

The team selected Lenger as the first fieldwork site because in 2007 Dr. Takuya Nagaoka of NGO Pasifika Renaissance excavated a small test pit there and recovered numerous ancient

artifacts. Most interestingly an obsidian (volcanic glass) artifact was found in the pit that according to geochemical analysis, was brought from Papua New Guinea. The artifacts suggest one of the oldest village sites in Pohnpei is in Lenger. The site is additionally suitable for archaeological excavation due to its location on land. It is difficult to carry out excavations at other early sites on Pohnpei due to their locations in coastal mangrove forests and shallow reef flats. Due to this difficulty, only small areas were excavated during the past investigations on this time period.

The team is planning to excavate larger areas during their four-year research to approach different research questions related to subsistence strategies, spatial use within village, interactions with other islands and social organizations.

From February 20 to 28, the team excavated the early village site on Lenger and found German-Japanese period artifacts such as glass bottles and iron artifacts in the upper layers. They found ancient artifacts such as pottery sherds, shell adzes, shell ornaments, and

shell midden in the lower layers. Before the team makes analysis it will wait for details on the results of the excavations, but various artifacts recovered during their investigation seemed to confirm the fruitfulness of pursuing research at the site.

With the assistance of the Pohnpei State Historic Preservation Office, the team endeavors to promote Pohnpeian people’s participation in the research project and to foster their interest in local history. They have offered volunteer opportunities to the public through announcements on radio and Facebook and many volunteers of different nationalities, such as FSM, French Polynesia, USA and Japan, have volunteered every day. A group of twenty some Micronesian Studies students from the College of Micronesia led by Professor Delihna Ehmes also visited the fieldwork of the team.

After completing the excavations on Lenger, the team organized a one-day exhibition on March 1 of excavated artifacts at the Pohnpei State Historic Preservation Office in Kolonia to

show the public the results of the archaeological research. More than a hundred people visited the exhibition.

During the exhibition, Nagaoka did powerpoint presentations about the archaeology of Micronesia and the project to eighth grade students from the Kolonia and Ohmine Elementary Schools and explained them about the excavated artifacts. The students showed interest in the ancient artifacts they saw for their first time.

The team will conduct various analyses on the excavated artifacts and is planning to continue the fieldwork in Pohnpei during this summer. It hopes to learn the history of the island with the people through the project during the next four years.

“It is our wish that students’ learning experiences with us will make them more interested in their own history, give them dreams, and raise future archaeologists,” Nagaoka said. “Kalahngan en kupwuromwail koaros, the chiefs, landowner and other people of Lenger who supported the project.”