History of Micronesia

Just how the islands of Micronesia were originally settled remains unclear. One theory suggests that about three to four thousand years ago, the earliest inhabitants sailed in outrigger canoes eastward from Indonesia and the Philippines to the larger islands of Yap. Another group traveled northward from Melanesia and Polynesia to Kosrae and Pohnpei. Current archaeological and linguistic evidence casts doubt on this theory, so researchers continue to look for clues.

Whatever its origins, the society eventually came under the leadership of powerful chiefs. One section of Yap extended its power east as far as Chuuk and north to the Mariana Islands. Outer islanders would sail to Yap to pay tribute to the chief with food and woven goods. The Yapese, in return, would give the outer islanders goods not available to them, such as clay pots and turmeric. Meanwhile, Lelu on Kosrae and Nan Madol on Pohnpei developed as centers of religious and political power. Both cities had grand basalt-walled compounds. Their ruins are still in place. Nan Madol is the largest archaeological site in Micronesia.

Micronesia’s first European contact was with Spanish and Portuguese explorers in the 1500s. Spanish attempts to introduce Christianity in the 1700s met with little success. The religion did not gain greater acceptance until the late 19th century. Micronesia did not have extensive contact with the West until 1899, when Germany bought the rights to Micronesia from Spain. Germany set up trading stations and exported copra (dried coconut) until after World War I, when Japan was given a League of Nations mandate to govern the region. Japanese rule was severe and alienated large tracts of land from Micronesians, even though it brought economic development to some islands. Preparations for war began in 1935; remains of airstrips, bunkers, and other structures are visible across the FSM today. After defeating Japan in 1944, the United States assumed control of Micronesia.

In 1947, the United Nations recognized the United States as the administering authority of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI). The TTPI included the Mariana Islands, Marshall Islands, Palau, Yap, Truk (now Chuuk), and Ponape (now Pohnpei). Kusaie (now Kosrae) was part of Ponape. Yap, Truk, Ponape, and Kusaie voted to become a separate entity in 1978. The Constitution of the Federated States of Micronesia went into effect on 10 May 1979.
History of Micronesia

The FSM entered into a Compact of Free Association with the United States in 1986. A new 20-year Compact was signed in 2003. Under the agreement, the United States recognizes the FSM’s sovereignty and control over national affairs, and it grants the FSM financial assistance, immigration rights, and access to U.S. federal programs. In exchange, the FSM grants the United States access to its territory and control of its national defense.

References: