

# Chamorro Folktales





# Chamorro Folktales

*Chamorro Folktales*

©2011

Cover Illustration by BJ Bell

ISBN-978-0-9848603-1-9

UOG Station

Mangilao, Guam 96923

[www.guampedia.com](http://www.guampedia.com)



# Table of Contents

Introduction	ii
Special Acknowledgements	iii
Maps	1
Puntan and Fu'una	2
Chafe's Lost Soul	4
The Young Maidens That Saved Guahan	7
Alu and Pang	11
Dinagi Laolao	14
Puntan Patgon	17
Gadao's Strength	19
Puntan Dos Amantes	23
Santa Marian Kamalen	25
Sirena	28
Glossary	32
People Named in Legends	33

# Introduction

Storytelling is a custom treasured in Chamorro culture. Storytelling can happen anywhere, and on any given time or occasion. A sharp wit or a flair with words are highly regarded by the Chamorro people. In olden days storytelling, the retelling of family histories, *chamorita* (improvisational singing) and *mari* (debate) were all considered art forms, and a master of any of these skills was considered to be as great as a warrior on the battlefield.

Ancient Chamorros held regular large *gupot siha* (community events) and the displaying of these oratory skills was an important part of the entertainment. Individuals would vie against each other, families would compete and mock each other, and sometimes entire villages would become embroiled in debates or displays of who had the better storyteller or singer.

Guampedia has collected 10 enduring Chamorro folktales that have been passed on for centuries. Some were found in magazines, others in books and a few were found on the World Wide Web. We have edited the folktales to reflect what we know about Chamorro culture and the history of the Mariana Islands and illustrated them with some new, original, and some borrowed artwork.

We hope you enjoy them!

**Guampedia Foundation**

# Special Acknowledgements

All images used in this publication belong to Guampedia.com except for the following

Map of the Mariana Islands	Page 1	Illustration provided by Emelinda Cabrera CNMI Public School System
Chaife	Page 5	Image provided by Raph Unpingco
Women Weaving	Page 10	Image provided by BJ Bell
Alu	Page 12	Image provided by BJ Bell
Pon and Patte	Page 15	Image provided by BJ Bell
Boy Leaps	Page 18	Image provided by Judy S. Flores from <i>Nana's Legends of Guahan</i> by Dottie Wintterle, 1999
Two Lovers	Page 24	Image provided by Ric Castro
Guahan Sirena	Page 29	Image provided by Monica D. Baza

Side banner images not belonging to Guampedia.com are as listed:

Mt. Sasalaguan	Page 4	Image provided by Kin Guzman
Isle de Guahan	Page 7	Altered detail of a Rare Illustration from the Guahan Public Library System
Canoes in the Water	Page 9	Altered detail of a Rare Illustration from Balthazar Aguon

# About Guahan

Guahan (Guam), the largest and southernmost of the Mariana Islands, is located in the Western Pacific in the geographic region known as Micronesia. Guahan is well known for its strategic military and economic position between Asia and the North American continent, but is less known for its remarkable history and resilient people.

Inhabited for thousands of years, the Marianas are home to one of the oldest Pacific Island cultures. Archaeological evidence indicates that the Marianas were one of the first places to be settled by seafaring peoples, possibly from Island Southeast Asia, over 4,000 years ago. Although it is uncertain whether the islands were settled in waves of migration or all at once, the Marianas appear to have been continuously occupied by people who shared the same culture and language that eventually became known as Chamorro.

Guahan not only has a unique ancient history, but a complex colonial history as well. Guahan is the site of the first Roman Catholic mission and formal European colony in the Pacific Islands. In fact, the last 400 years of Guahan's history are marked by administrations of three different colonial powers: Spain, the United States and Japan. An unincorporated territory of the United States, today, Guahan is a cosmopolitan Pacific island, home to a diverse population and rich cultural resources. The island is sustained by a large tourist economy and military industry, with the Chamorro culture and people as focal point of the island's identity within the Pacific region.



# Maps

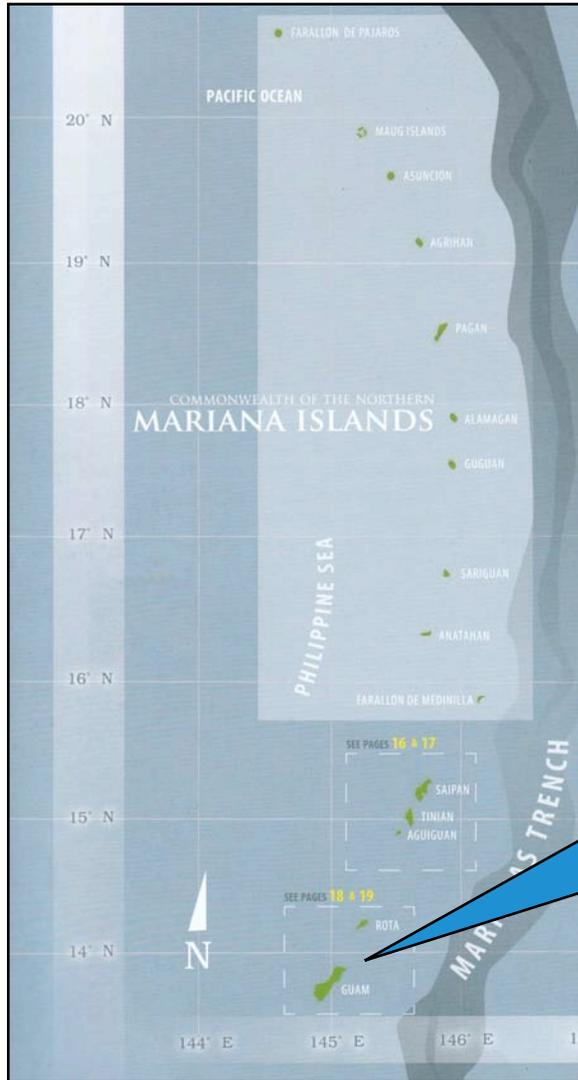


ILLUSTRATION BY EMELINDA CABRERA  
CNMI PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM



GUAMPEDIA.COM

## Puntan and Fu'una

*A* long, long time ago, two powerful gods, Puntan and Fu'una created the earth and the Chamorro people. Puntan, a man, and Fu'una, a woman, were brother and sister.

One day, Puntan and Fu'una devised a plan in which their supernatural forces would be put to extremely powerful use. Puntan instructed his sister to take apart his body and create the different parts of the world.

One of his eyes would become the sun, and the other would be transformed into the moon. Puntan's eyebrows would become rainbows. His back would become the earth.

Fu'una had supernatural powers of her own. She used her energy and spirit to bring to life the parts of her brother's body that now formed the world. With her power, she made the sun shine and the earth blossom.

After she completed her task of bringing new life to Puntan's body parts, Fu'una decided to create life out of her body, as she had her brother's. She threw her body into the earth and created Fouha Rock, sometimes called Creation Point.

Out of Fouha Rock, the first human beings, the Chamorro people, emerged.

This rock can be found close to Humatak (Umatac) Bay in the southern part of Guahan.





GUAMPEDIA.COM

## Chaife's Lost Soul



Chaife was the god of the underworld. He controlled the wind, water and fire. Chaife lived in Sasalåguan where he created souls, or spirits, forging them from fire. Chaife used the souls he created as slaves and tortured them endlessly. People who died violent deaths were sent back to Chaife's home, where he cooked them in a cauldron which he continually stirred.

One day as Chaife hurriedly created a new soul, he made the fire too hot and it exploded. Sparks, rock and ash spewed out of Sasalåguan, allowing one of the tortured souls to escape. The soul fell to earth, landing in a bay on Guahan near the present-day southern village of Humåtak (Umatac). The soul that escaped turned into a rock as it touched the ocean waters.

Over time, weathered by water and wind, the rock formation softened and eventually became a man, the first Chamorro. The man saw how beautiful it was to be alive and enjoyed the paradise he found, but grew weary of the solitude.

RAPH UNPINGCO

He took red clay and mixed it with water, and began to form human figures, both men and women. He gave the figures souls by heating them with the rays of the sun. His creation, the first people, he called, the “children of the earth.”

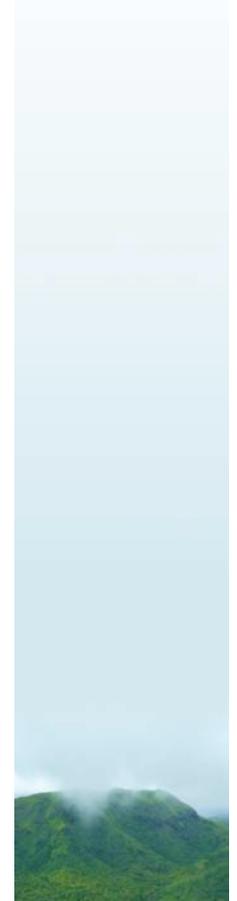
Meanwhile, in Sasalåguan, Chaife finally gained control over the fire. He counted his souls but saw that one was missing. When Chaife realized that one of the souls had escaped during the explosion, he was angry and searched for the soul to destroy it.

After many days of looking, Chaife found a child playing along the shore and believed it was the escaped soul.

Chaife thought, “I am the god of wind, waves and fire. Since the soul is on the beach, I will send a big wave to drown him.” A huge wave came into the bay and covered the child of the earth. But the boy was unharmed for he had turned into a fish and swam away. In anger, Chaife set a great fire underneath the lagoon and boiled all the water away. But the fish did not die. When there was no water remaining, the fish turned into a *hilitai* (monitor lizard) and disappeared into the woods. Chaife turned up the flames and set the jungle on fire. As the blaze roared, Chaife could not believe his eyes. Out of the ashes the *hilitai* transformed itself into a bird that flew away.

Chaife’s anger grew into a raging typhoon. The typhoon dashed the bird against a cliff and broke its wing. But just as Chaife was about to pounce, the bird changed into a child. The child of the earth said to Chaife, “You can try with the wind, waves, fire, and all your power, but you can never destroy me. My soul comes from the sun.”

Chaife, outraged at this said, “Your soul comes from Sasalåguan. I created your soul. You are my slave!”



The child replied, "I am not your slave. Your lost soul is at Fouha Bay, making more souls from the heat of the sun. You see, he made me, a soul from the sun, which you can not control."

In frustration, Chaife withdrew in humiliation and continued to pursue the escaped soul with more determination. But unbeknownst to Chaife, the soul had already turned himself back into a rock. That rock is believed to be in Fouha Bay near Humatak (Umatac).

Realizing he had no power over the souls created by the sun, Chaife returned to Sasalaguan.



# The Young Maidens That Saved Guahan

**D**id you ever notice the odd shape of Guahan, the southernmost island of the Mariana Islands in Micronesia? It looks as though large bites were taken from either side. The island is fairly wide at both ends and narrow in the middle. The Chamorro people have a legend about how Guahan got its unusual shape.

*Antes na tiempo* (a long time ago), before the ancestors of the modern day Chamorros came to the Marianas, a mighty race of people lived here. They were called *taotaomo'na* which means "the people of before." It is said that the *taotaomo'na* were giants, very clever and wise, and that they possessed magical powers.

During that time a group of fishermen who fished in Hagåtña Bay noticed that the mouth of the bay was growing larger and larger quite quickly. They could not understand what was causing it to grow. Similarly, a group of fishermen from Pago noticed that Pago Bay was also growing larger and larger. It seemed that the center of the island was being eaten away on both sides.

The people could no longer ignore what was happening. The land between Hagåtña and Pago Bay was becoming narrower each day. They realized that if this trend continued much longer the island would soon become two separate islands.



A meeting was called to bring together all the wise *taotaomo'na*. After comparing their observations everyone agreed that something had to be done - and quickly! They realized there must be an answer about what was causing the narrowing center of Guahan, but unfortunately, no one knew what it was. The group disbanded without knowing quite what to do.

A few days later a Pago fisherman was out early in the morning doing his day's work when he spotted a giant fish! The fisherman, curious to find out more about the large creature, tried to approach it. As he neared, he saw that it was eating big chunks of land! But when he came even closer the giant fish saw him and quickly swam away.

The fisherman ran to tell everyone about the giant fish that he had seen chewing away at the land in Pago Bay. When they heard his account, the people were outraged and vowed to fend off the giant fish.

Early the next morning all the strong men of Guahan gathered with their weapons and started out on their mission. They were going to stop the giant fish from chewing through the island!



Hagåtña and Pago Bays were filled with canoes of fishermen and others who wanted to help. The men paddled into the bay looking for the terrible fish. Some searched along the coral reef while others looked in the deep ocean outside the reef. The men searched for hours, but no giant fish was seen. As nightfall came everyone returned home filled with disappointment.

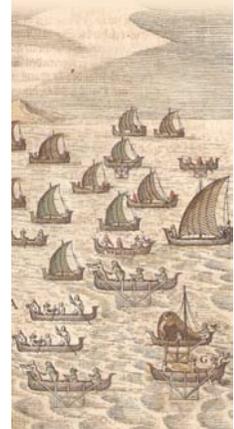
The search for the giant island-eating fish continued for many days. Enthusiasm to find it lasted a long time. But no matter how hard the men searched, the fish eluded them.

The news of the failure to find and destroy the giant fish spread from village to village. Some of the young maidens heard the news and were fascinated by the efforts to catch the fish.

The young women talked about the giant fish whenever they gathered to wash their hair and rinse it with fresh water scented with lemons. Their favorite spot to gather for this task was at the Hagåtña Springs. When they finished, the pool would be covered with lemon peels.

One day a young maiden in Pago noticed these same peels floating in Pago Bay. She was puzzled by their appearance. After some thought, she realized that the giant fish must have eaten a hole all the way under the island from Pago Bay to Hagåtña Springs! She told the other maidens, that must be where the giant fish was hiding.

The next day the maidens gathered at the Hagåtña Springs. They were amused the brave, strong men were unable to capture the giant fish. The maidens then decided they would catch the fish themselves. Cutting off their dark tresses, they wove a net with their long black hair. Because their hair had magical powers, they knew their net would have magical powers, too.





BJ BELL

While they wove they began to sing. They sang for hours, and as they continued to sing, the net grew larger and larger. Even the giant fish could hear their singing from underwater. Enchanted by the sound of their beautiful voices, the fish swam out from its hiding place to listen to the singing maidens. As the fish approached the mouth of the spring, the maidens drew closer to the fish, still singing and carrying their net of hair. Suddenly they spread their magic net over the spring and dived into the pool, surrounding the fish. The giant fish was trapped and could not escape! In triumph, the maidens then summoned some of the men to help dispose of the giant fish. With their wisdom, magic and beautiful singing, the young maidens had saved Guahan!

# Alu and Pang

**I**n ancient times the people of the Mariana Islands lived in villages ruled by a *maga'låhi* or *maga'håga* (chief or high-ranking son or daughter), who made all the rules and decisions for his or her people. In the area of Guahan now known as Tamuning, there lived a great *maga'låhi* whose name was Alu. People say he had supernatural strength. If he wanted a drink, he could shake a *niyok* (coconut) tree and the juice-filled, young, green coconuts would fall to the ground.

In the Marianas, at this time, many of the events of different villages were told by traveling storytellers. One day a storyteller from northern Guahan was visiting in southern Guahan, telling about the remarkable strength of Alu.

Pang, who was a *maga'låhi* in one of the villages in the south, heard the storyteller and became *ekgo'* (jealous) because he, Pang, was also known for his great strength. He could even squeeze the juice from a *niyok* whenever he wanted a drink.

Pang said, "Bring the storyteller to me so that I might hear the story of this great Alu and ask questions about his strength."

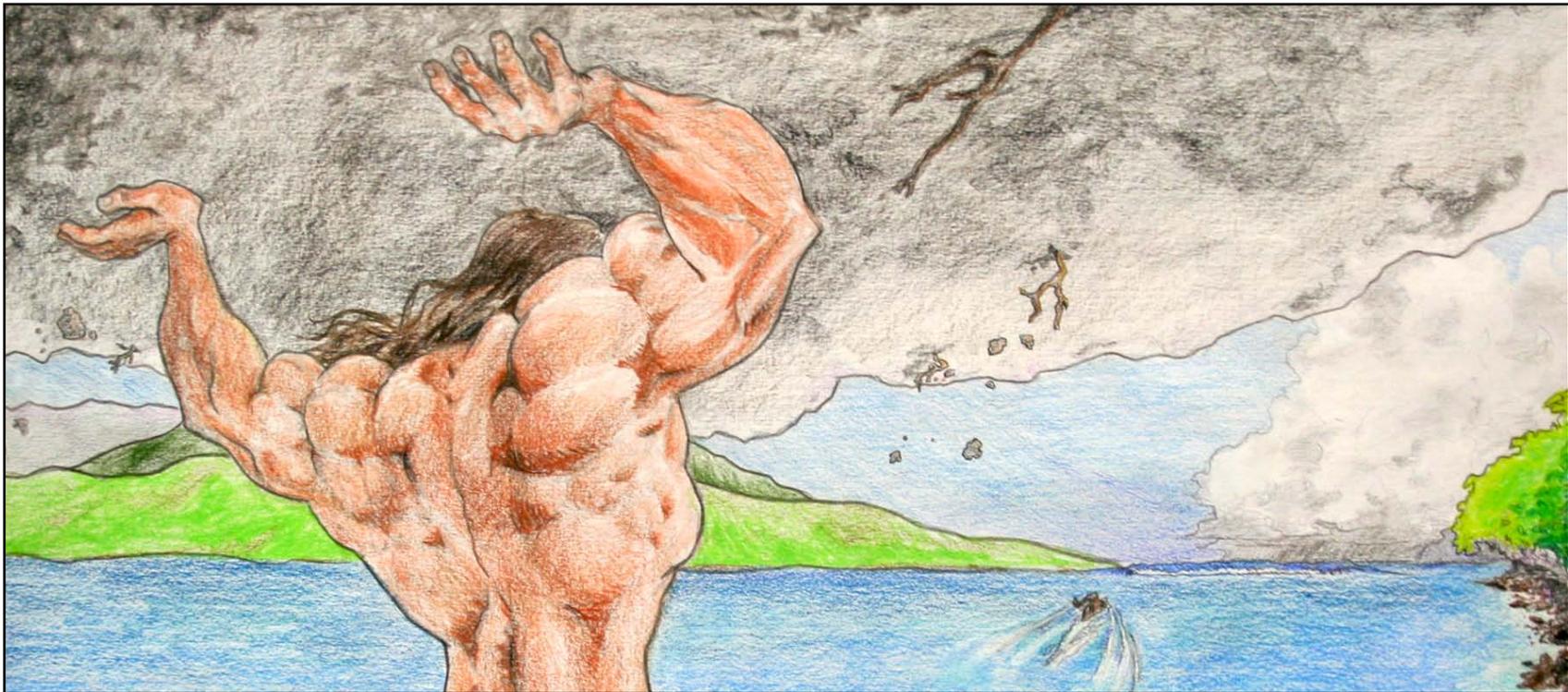
The storyteller was brought forth and Pang listened to his tale. Pang then told him, "Go back to Alu and tell him that Pang challenges him to a duel of strength."



Alu immediately accepted the challenge and a date was set for the great match. When the day finally came the people from the south journeyed with their *maga'låhi* to the north. Great preparations were underway when they arrived. Taro, yams, fish, *ayuyu* (coconut crab), *fanihi* (fruit bat) and other dishes were being prepared to serve at the great duel that was about to take place.

The women needed *niyok* juice for the *fanihi*. Alu, seeing this, went and asked, "Should I shake some *niyok* down for you?"

The women said yes, so he shook some loose for them. Pang, not to be outdone, said, "I will get the juice out for you," and took each *niyok* and squeezed out the juice with his bare hands.



After the great feast the people gathered together near the beach where the match was to take place. Alu and Pang stood glaring at each other in the center of the group of people, waiting for the signal for the fight to begin.

The signal sounded and the two great *manmaga'låhi* charged at each other. The thud of their bodies knocking against each other shook the earth so hard that all of the trees fell down. The ground around them was soon torn up. The fight continued on toward evening with both *manmaga'låhi* pounding on each other. Both were hurt and bloody, but Pang was beginning to tire. He could see he was no match for Alu. He ran out to the beach and began swimming away.

Alu grabbed a large rock and hurled it after Pang who was quickly swimming away. The rock found its mark, burying Pang on the spot.

When you are in Tamuning, looking out to the ocean, you can see a rock near the reef. This rock is called Alupang after the great battle of Alu and Pang.



## Dinagi Laolao

Back in the ancient days, giants with supernatural strength inhabited the Mariana Islands. The giant men of the different villages and clans occasionally fought or argued with each other. However, they banded together when they believed their island was being threatened by foreign invaders.

One day, a ship was seen out on the horizon. The *manmaga'låhi* (chiefs) of the island were concerned that outsiders were trying to invade Guahan at Hagåtña Bay. They got together to figure out how to stop the invaders.

The *manmaga'låhi* decided that a huge rock should be placed in the channel to Hagåtña Bay. The *maga'låhi* from Orote declared that there were many huge rocks around his village that would be suitable for blocking the bay. The task of getting the rock and placing it in the channel was entrusted to the proud warrior clan of Agueda. When Naguadog, *maga'låhi* of Agueda, told his clan the size of the rock needed, the other men laughed scornfully and said, "Naguadog, you don't need your warriors. That task is child's play. Give the task to Pon and Patte, your sons."

Naguadog thought for a moment, then raised his voice loud and clear and called out to his sons. The boys' names bounced like thunder from tree to tree. Quicker than lightning, two small boys, aged three and four, came bounding up to their father, saying, "Naguadog, what do you wish of us?"

Naguadog, putting his strong arms around his sons, spoke: "My sons, go to Orote Point and get a big loose rock and quickly place it in the entrance of Hagåtña Bay."

Obediently the boys ran off to Orote. They were proud to have been entrusted with such an important task. It was nighttime by the time the boys arrived at Orote, and the moon was full. By the light of the moon, the boys found a loose rock along the cliff which measured roughly 120 feet long, 60 feet wide and 20 feet high. Together they picked up the huge rock and headed back to Hagåtña, playing catch with the rock as they walked along the shore.

As the boys approached the village of Assan (Asan), they stopped to rest. It was about midnight, but, looking up into the night sky, they saw a bright twinkling star. The boys suddenly became nervous. They remembered that the village elders had set a curfew for the children that was strictly enforced.



When Venus, which looks like a bright shiny star, appeared in the sky, all the village children were to return to their homes. Indeed, all children could not be away from their parents or their homes between midnight and early dawn - around six o'clock in the morning.

Thinking this was Venus, they quickly dropped the rock in the water and ran for shelter in the Agueda Caves.

Because the men had given such an important task to children, the job was not completed. The boys failed to block the entrance to Hagåtña Bay, and so the outsiders entered, settled on Guahan and intermarried with the natives. The children of these unions were without superhuman strength, thereby making the natives of the Marianas ordinary human beings like you and me.

The "star" that the boys saw in the night sky has been called "*Dinagi Laolao*" which means "fooled by a twinkling star," because the boys were fooled and failed to complete their task.

The rock which they dropped in the water off Assan is called Gapang Rock, which means, "unfinished task." It is a reminder of the days long ago when people of supernatural strength lived in these islands. Today it is known as Camel Rock because of its shape which resembles the hump of a kneeling camel.



# Puntan Patgon

Long, long ago giants are said to have lived in the Mariana Islands. Among them was a proud and strong man named Masala who lived on Guahan. He was the most powerful man in the Marianas and his strength could not be matched by any other.

Masala's wife gave birth to a son. At first Masala was very proud of his child, boasting about him and presenting him to everyone. However, as the child grew into a toddler, people began to notice of his strength and power. Masala grew envious of the attention given to his child.

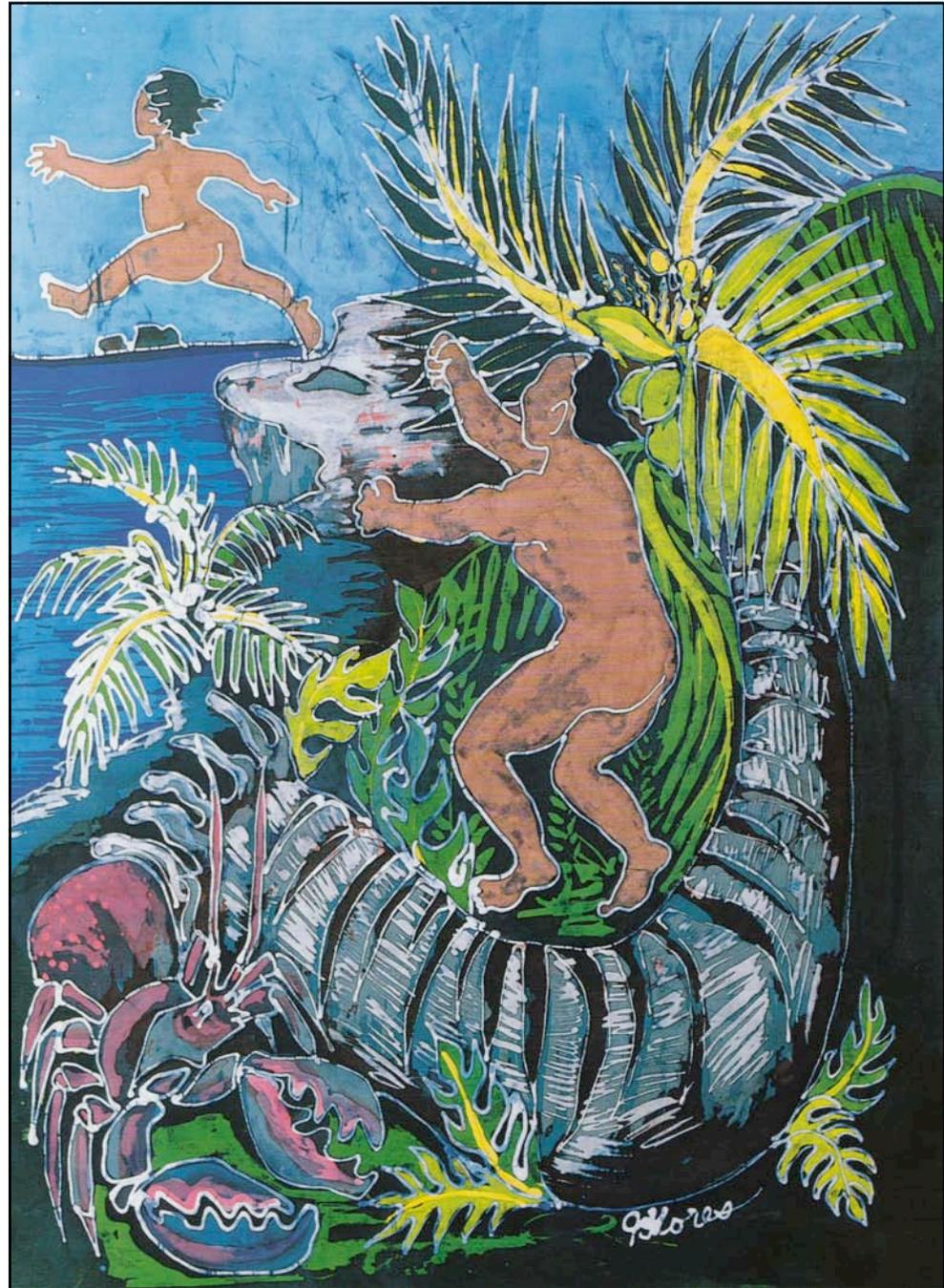
One day, Masala's son caught an *ayuyu* (coconut crab) and spent many hours playing with it. Eventually, though, as crabs do, it disappeared into a hole near a *niyok* (coconut) tree. When the child noticed the *ayuyu* was gone, he reached down into the hole to get his pet but couldn't get a hold of it. He grabbed the *niyok* tree near the crab hole and tore it completely out of the ground to uncover the hidden *ayuyu*.

Masala, watching the child at the time, was about to help his son fetch the *ayuyu* before he uprooted the tree. Masala flew into a jealous rage and went after his son. The little boy, frightened by his father's anger, ran as fast as he could toward the northernmost tip of Guahan. When he reached Hinapsan (Jinapsan) Point he took a giant leap, landing on the southernmost point of the neighboring island of Luta (Rota), about forty miles north of Guahan.



To this day, there is an imprint of a giant foot in the rock on Guahan believed to be the child's and on Luta there is another footprint at the point where he is said to have landed.

Some believe that the child remained on Luta and became the great legendary Chamorro Maga'låhi Taga.



JUDY S. FLORES

# Gadao's Strength

Once upon a time, a long time ago, on the island of Guahan in the Mariana Islands there lived two *manmaga'låhi* (chiefs) named Malaguana and Gadao. Malaguana was the *maga'låhi* of Tomhom (Tumon) in Northern Guahan. Gadao was from southern Guahan and was the *maga'låhi* of Inalahan (Inarajan).

The *manmaga'låhi*, in those days, were usually the strongest and wisest members of their clans. However, there was much debate about who was the strongest and mightiest *maga'låhi* of the entire island. Legend had it that because of his tremendous strength, Malaguana was widely regarded as being the greatest *maga'låhi* of Guahan. This unofficial title was something that Malaguana and the villagers of Tomhom were proud of and quick to defend. However, there was one skeptic from another village who, during a visit to his relatives in Tomhom, expressed his belief that Malaguana was no match for Gadao.

"Although Malaguana is one of the strongest and mightiest *manmaga'låhi* of Guahan, his strength is nothing compared to that of Gadao of Inalahan village," said the visitor.

When Malaguana heard about the visitor's remark he was eager to visit Inalahan to prove that he was stronger and mightier than Gadao. "I am the strongest and the greatest *maga'låhi* of Guahan and I will prove it by defeating Gadao in a duel of strength!" boasted Malaguana.



Determined to end the debate over who was the strongest *maga'låhi* of Guahan Malaguana made his way to Inalahan. As he entered the southern coastal village Malaguana met up with a man who appeared to be a village farmer. Little did he know that the farmer was Maga'låhi Gadao.

"Hafa adai!" Malaguana called out, "I am Maga'låhi Malaguana of Tomhom, the greatest *maga'låhi* of Guahan, and I am here to challenge the strength of Gadao. Bring me to him at once!"

Gadao was surprised at Malaguana's words. He decided not to reveal his true identity just yet. He said in a friendly tone, "Welcome to Inalahan, Maga'låhi Malaguana. If you wish to meet Gadao I will certainly take you to him. But since you've traveled such a long way, I would first like you to join me for some refreshing coconut juice."



"Thank you," Malaguana said gladly.

Gadao went to the nearest coconut tree and with incredible force shook the tree until all the coconuts came falling down. Gadao picked one up from the ground and, with his bare hands, cracked it into two perfect halves, giving one half to Malaguana.

Malaguana was astonished by what he had just witnessed. He could not believe that an ordinary man could possess such tremendous strength. When Gadao looked the other way, Malaguana picked up one of the fallen coconuts and attempted to crack it open with his bare hands. He couldn't do it, and began to doubt his superiority over Gadao.

"If an ordinary Inalahan farmer possesses this much strength, how much stronger is their Maga'låhi Gadao?" Malaguana thought to himself. Unwilling to risk defeat and ruin his reputation, Malaguana decided to return to Tomhom.

"I thought you wanted me to introduce you to Gadao?" said Gadao, as he observed Malaguana getting ready to depart. For a moment Malaguana was silent as he thought of an excuse. He finally said, "I'm sorry, I must go home now. I have been away from Tomhom too long and I feel that my leadership is greatly needed back home."

Gadao was quite pleased at this outcome because he was able to intimidate Malaguana without actually challenging him. Gadao decided against revealing his true identity because he knew that Malaguana would go home thinking that Gadao was more powerful than he actually was.



Gadao, however, felt sorry for Malaguana and decided to offer to take him home by canoe and Malaguana accepted Gadao's offer. The two *maga'låhi* got into Gadao's canoe and began to paddle in opposite directions. Unaware that the other was paddling in the opposing direction, both *maga'låhi* paddled harder and harder as they noticed that the canoe wasn't moving. Finally, the opposing forces, the canoe split in half and both *maga'låhi* were thrust in opposite directions.

As a remembrance of this event, Gadao drew the story on a wall in a cave. Today, this same petroglyph is still well preserved in Gadao's Cave in Inalahan. In honor of Gadao, a statue was placed alongside Inalahan Bay. The statue is a huge figure of Gadao sitting in his portion of the ripped canoe and holding a paddle.



# Puntan Dos Amantes

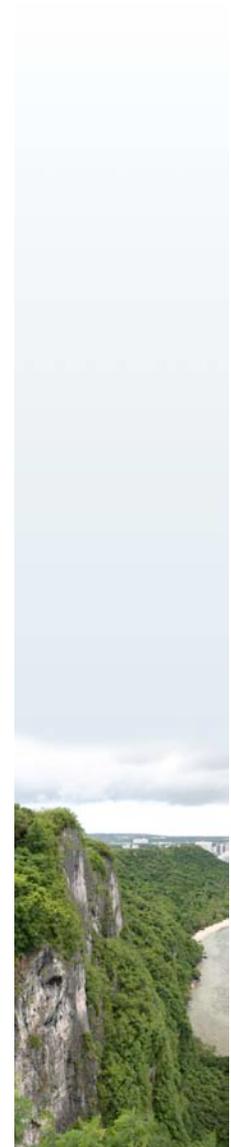
Once, long ago, during a time when Spain claimed the Mariana Islands, there was a family who lived in Hagåtña, the capital city of Guahan. The father was a wealthy Spanish businessman and the mother, a daughter of a great *maga'låhi* or Chamorro chief. This family owned much land and were highly respected by Chamorros and Spanish alike.

Their oldest daughter was a beautiful young woman, admired by all for her honesty, modesty, and natural charm. One day, as was Spanish custom, the girl's father arranged for her to take a powerful Spanish captain as her husband. When the girl discovered this, she was so distraught that she ran from Hagåtña all the way to the north of Guahan until she found a secluded and peaceful shore.

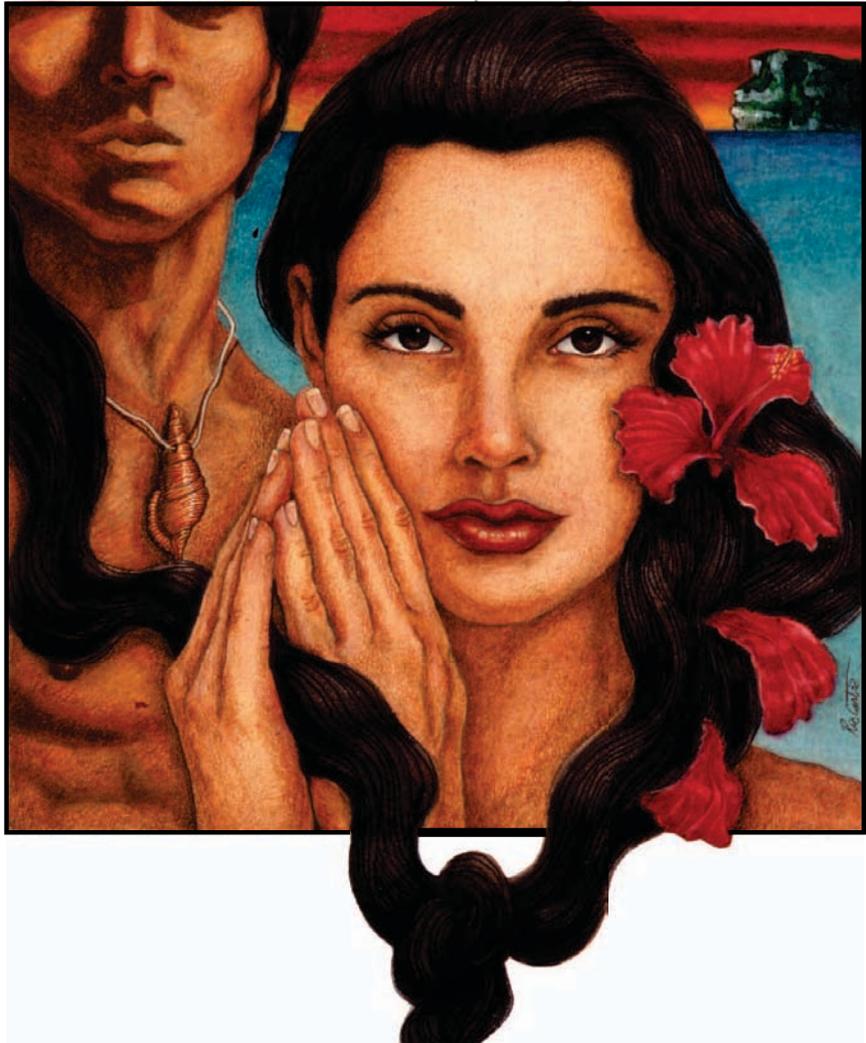
There, on the moonlit shore, she met and fell in love with a young man from a modest Chamorro family. He was gentle, with a strong build and eyes that searched for meaning in the stars.

She returned home with a promise to see him again.

When the girl's father learned of the two lovers, he grew angry and demanded that she marry the Spanish captain at once. However, that day at sundown, she stole away to the same high point along the shore, and once again met her Chamorro lover.



Her father, the captain and all the Spanish soldiers pursued the lovers up to the high cliff above Tomhom (Tumon) Bay. The lovers found themselves trapped between the edge of the cliff and the approaching soldiers. All the young man could do was warn them to stay back. The father ordered the soldiers to halt.



RIC CASTRO

The lovers tied their long black hair together into a single knot. Acting as if they were entirely alone, they looked deeply into each other's eyes and kissed for the final time. Then they leaped over the long, steep cliff into the roaring waters below. Her father and all who remained rushed to the edge and stared in great anguish at the ocean below.

The lovers were gone, never to be seen again.

Today the place where they jumped is known as *Puntan dos Amântes* or Two Lover's Point. Visitors still pay homage there to great love.



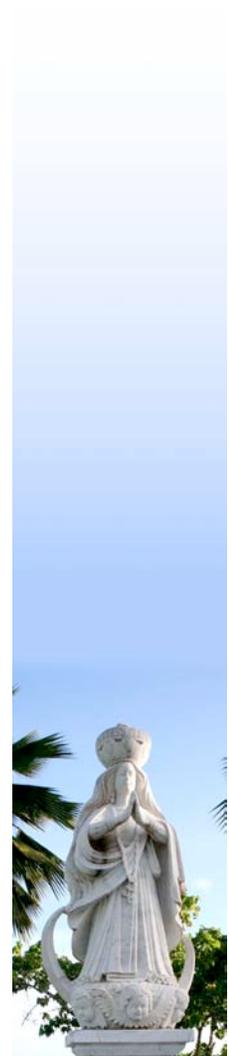
GUAMPEDIA.COM

# Santa Marian Kamalen

About 350 years ago, during a time when the Spanish were introducing Catholicism to the Chamorro people in the Mariana Islands, a fisherman from Malesso' (Merizo), Guahan, went spearfishing in Babang Bay, between Malesso' and Cocos Island. With astonishment he spotted a statue of the Virgin Mary on the ocean floor. He swam underwater to try to approach the statue, but to his surprise it retreated. No matter how hard he tried, he could not close the distance between the statue and himself.

Puzzled, he returned to shore and sought advice from the village priest. The priest told the fisherman to dress in his Sunday clothes and try again. He did so, and this time had no trouble getting to the statue. He brought it ashore for all to see. The heavy wooden statue was beautifully painted.

The fisherman, who was a member of the *Dotación*, or native militia, left Malesso' and went to Hagåtña to fulfill his required two months of active duty. He took the statue of the Virgin Mary to the *Presidio*, or main barracks, which were under construction at the time. There, the statue was placed in a tool shed (known as a *camarin* in Spanish, or *kamalen* in Chamorro). Thus, she became known as Our Lady of Camarin, or Santa Marian Kamalen in Chamorro.





Santa Marian Kamalen was adopted as the *Dotación's* patroness and when the *Presidio* was completed in 1736, her statue was placed in its chapel. The *Dotación* celebrated the feast day of their patroness on December 8, which today is the feast of the Immaculate Conception for the whole Catholic Church. This tradition continued until the *Dotación* was disbanded in 1884 after several of its members were involved in assassinating the Spanish governor, Don Angel de Pazos Vela-Hidalgo. The statue of Santa Marian Kamalen was then placed in the Hagåtña church of Dulce Nombre de Maria, which later became a cathedral-basilica.

Oral history tells us that when the Spanish militia men were about to retire for the day the doors of the niche where the statue was kept would slam shut if they had indulged in more *tuba* (fermented coconut palm sap) and *aguayente* (high-potency alcoholic beverage) than was prudent, or if they fell asleep while saying their prayers or acted immodestly before the statue. In the great earthquake of 1902 the Dulce Nombre de Maria was severely damaged. Many of the statues of the church were broken but not that of Santa Marian Kamalen, which the pastor, Father José Palomo, found standing intact on the ground.

The statue also survived a fire, when on December 8, 1945, it was rescued from a burning float by Jose D. Leon Guerrero.

Because the statue has suffered discolorations, nicks and other minor defects over the course of time, minor repairs have been made. According to one story, while the statue was being repaired, the scraping of her face was too rough, and the face began to bleed.

Many people attribute miracles to Santa Marian Kamalen, and still others believe in her powers of intercession, cures of dreadful diseases, and protection from great danger. She has long been considered by many the protectress of the island and its people.

The statue of Santa Marian Kamalen has real human hair and two crowns are used to dress the statue. The real Santa Marian Kamalen is displayed only for the islandwide procession on December 8. On other occasions a replica is used instead.



## Sirena

A playful young woman named Sirena once lived near the Hagåtña River, right at the place where fresh spring waters dividing the city met the ocean at the river's mouth. Sirena loved the water, swimming whenever she could steal a moment from her many chores.

One day, Sirena's *nana* (mother) sent her to gather coconut shells so she could make coal for the clothes iron. While gathering the shells Sirena couldn't resist the refreshing river. There she swam for a long time, paying little attention to anything else while her *nana* called for her impatiently.

Sirena's *matlina* (godmother) happened to come by for a visit while Sirena's *nana* waited for her daughter to return. Sirena's *nana* began complaining about her daughter, becoming angrier the more she spoke. She knew Sirena was probably swimming in the river rather than completing her chores. In irritation, Sirena's *nana* angrily cursed her daughter with the words, "Since Sirena loves the water more than anything, she should become a fish!" However, her *matlina*, realizing the harshness and power of the woman's words, quickly interjected, "Leave the part of her that belongs to me as human.

Suddenly, Sirena, still swimming in the river, began to feel a change coming over her. To her surprise and dismay, the lower half of her body transformed into the tail of a fish! She had fins like a fish, and her skin was covered with scales! However, from the waist up, she remained a girl. She was transformed into a mermaid!



In her new form, Sirena was unable to leave the water. Her *nana* soon saw what had happened to her daughter. Regretful of her curse, she tried to take back her harsh words, but she could not undo Sirena's fate.

So as not to be seen or caught by any passerby Sirena gave a final farewell to her mother before she swam out to sea:

"Oh *Nana*, do not worry about me, for I am a mistress of the sea, which I love so much.

I would rather be back home with you. I know you were angry when you cursed me, but I wish you had punished me some other way. I would rather you had whipped me with your strap than to be the way I am now.

*Nana*, take a good look at me, for this will be the last time we will see each other."

With these words, Sirena disappeared among the waves. Many stories have been told of sailors who have caught a glimpse of her at sea. According to legend, though, she can only be captured with a net of human hair.







# Glossary

## Glossary of Chamorro terms

**Aguayente:** Liquor made from coconut juice

**Åntes na tiempo:** Before this time, in times of old, the olden days

**Ayuyu:** Coconut crab or purse crab, so called for the purse-like appendage on its back

**Dinagi:** Lie, untruthfulness, deception

**Ekgo':** Extremely inclined to jealousy

**Fanihi:** Marianas fruit bat, now endangered

**Hilitai:** Monitor lizard

**Kamalen:** Tool or storage shed

**Laolao:** To shake, move, shiver, and tremble

**Magå'håga:** Leader, chief, oldest female in a Chamorro clan

**Maga'låhi:** Leader, chief, oldest man in a Chamorro clan

**Manmaga'låhi:** Plural form of maga'låhi

**Matlina:** Godmother, godparent

**Niyok:** Coconut

**Nana:** Mother

**Taotaomo'na:** People of before (taotao: people, mo'na: before)

**Tuba:** Fermented coconut juice (alcoholic beverage)

# People Named in Legends

## **A guide to people named in the Chamorro Folktales**

*To learn more about people who made a difference in Marianas history go to Guampedia.com ([www.Guampedia.com](http://www.Guampedia.com)). Click on the “People” category.*

**Padre Jose Palomo:** Jose Bernardo Palomo y Torres, the first Chamorro priest, was a diplomat and a leader in the Marianas around the turn of the century. Born in 1836 and serving in Saipan, Tinian, Rota and Guahan, he died in 1919 at the age of 82. A park is named in his honor along the beach in Hagåtña, next to the Naval Cemetery.

**Jose D. Leon Guerrero:** A Yigo man and government official who was instrumental in having the United States transfer Guahan Port facilities and properties to the Government of Guahan at no cost in 1968. He rescued the statue of Santa Marian Kamalen from a burning float in 1945.

**Gov. Angel de Pazon Vela-Hidalgo:** Spanish-appointed governor of Guahan who was assassinated in 1884 by José de Salas, a Chamorro guard, in front of the governor’s Palacio in Hagåtña as part of an unrealized plan to seize control of the government.





# About Guampedia.com

Guampedia.com, Guahan's Online Encyclopedia, exists to inform a global audience of the unique history, culture, environment and present-day society of the Pacific Island of Guahan.

Guampedia.com is a comprehensive, freely accessible resource and repository of a variety of publications, visual and audio media for people interested in learning about Guahan. A work in progress, Guampedia.com is made possible largely through grant support and strong community partnerships and will continue to grow as history unfolds and technology allows.



**Guampedia.com**  
Click to know!