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## COMBINING CURIOSITY WITH POLITICAL SKILL The Antiquarian Interests and Cultural Politics of Georg Fritz

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Georg Fritz was the first administrator of the German colonial district of the Mariana Islands. Given wide powers to make laws and regulations on behalf of the German Empire, Fritz set out to shape the policies of the German colonial administration according to his own views. Quite unlike other German administrations, the administration in the Marianas valued and actively fostered the continuation of Chamorro language, culture and practices, often at the expense of the (perceived) rights of German nationals. The physical manifestation of Fritz' policies were nine large imitations of latte stones—the first use of latte as a symbol of Chamorro culture and identity. This paper reviews Georg Fritz' antiquarian interests and his cultural politics.

The world around us is replete with the physical manifestations of a society's interactions with its environment: buildings, infrastructure developments (such as roads or powerlines), as well as cultural landscapes (such as agricultural or horticultural land use), brought about a lasting modification of the physical environment. While we deplore some developments, we do cherish others. Combined, the manifestations of past actions make up part of our cultural heritage. When considering decisions in land use and urban planning, governments make political decisions about the preservation of that past. These decisions are essentially political ones, where the personal ideologies of the decision makers, covertly or overtly, come into play (Spennemann 2006a),

In the case of colonial administrations the cultures of those ruled are commonly deemed far less important than the developments envisaged by the colonial power—assuming that the local cultural interests are taken into account in the first instance.

In the case of German Micronesia we have the opportunity to investigate how an incoming colonial administration relates the traditional cultural properties of the subjects they ruled. This paper will examine how the German administration of the Northern Mariana Islands dealt with the manifestations of Chamorro culture and how end-of-nineteenth century Chamorro culture was treated by the German administrators.

### GEORG FRITZ—A BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

Having bought the Northern Mariana Islands from Spain in 1899, the Imperial Germany established a colonial district office on Saipan in November 1899 (Spennemann 1999; 2003). Germany was to retain the Mariana Islands (with the exception of the US possession Guam) until the early days of World War I in October 1914. Given the generally low number of colonial officers Imperial Germany employed to administer its Micronesian colonies, these individuals made a difference—good or

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bad. The impact of the German colonial administration in the Northern Mariana Islands on the local Chamorro and Carolinian population cannot be understood without an appreciation of the protagonist: Georg Fritz.

Of all administrators in the Marianas, Georg Fritz (24 November 1865–18 November 1944) looms large. He was the first district administrator ('Bezirksamtmann') on Saipan starting on the day of the hand-over on 17 November 1899. Born in Alzey in Rhineland, Fritz studied forestry and finding no suitable position, went to South America. He worked as a surveyor and lived as a colonist in the Gran Chaco area of Uruguay and Paraguay, where he learned Spanish. Later, returning to Germany he studied finance and public administration and upon graduation in 1894, worked at various locations for the financial administration of the Grand-duchy of Hesse-Darmstadt. From 1896 he was involved in the German Colonial Society and in 1899 entered the colonial service. His fluency in Spanish, his overseas experience, and his fiscal management skills recommended him for the position as district administrator.

Fritz was 'Bezirksamtmann' in Saipan from the commencement of the colony in November 1899 until March 1907. He spent his last year as acting Bezirksamtmann of the Western Carolines and Palau in Yap, from April 1906 filling in for Dr. Arno Senfft. While he would have preferred to remain at this post after the administrative restructuring in 1907, he was transferred to Pohnpei and tasked with the implementation of very unpopular measures, especially head tax and labour obligations. Trying to solve the local resistance to German plans through persistent and patient negotiations, he did not perform to the expectations of a colonial office desirous of obtaining quick results.

While on recreation leave to Japan in 1909, Fritz was removed from his post and put in charge of the enlarged district of the Western Carolines and Saipan, based in Yap —the position he had previously sought. Taking this transfer as a criticism of his administrative capabilities, Fritz retired from the colonial service in late 1910 citing health reasons.



*Figure 1. Georg Fritz in the formal uniform of a German colonial administrator*

Fritz was very sensitive to professional status and esteem. As a strong nationalist he was eager to uphold the honour and prestige of Imperial Germany among the people he ruled.

Believing in the importance of work and the joys of 'modern' society, namely a nuclear family and private property, he tried to mould his charges in this ideal. Fritz had a patronising but very benevolent attitude towards the Micronesians and he attempted, where possible, to effect cultural change in a fashion where decisions were mutually agreed upon by the local leaders and the German government, even if this process was a tedious and drawn out one. In this he was very much in line with the traditional power yet consensus-based approach to decision making prevalent in traditional Micronesia.

Fritz published a range of papers on the geography, culture, history and economy of the islands under his care, both in official outlets, such as *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* and semi-official journals and in the German ethnographic journals of the day.<sup>1</sup>

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

One of the duties Fritz was tasked with as a German colonial officer entailed the collection of ethnographic and scientific specimens for the Imperial Museums in Berlin. While many officers treated this as a nuisance and did as little as possible, Fritz took the mandate very seriously and took an active, but also an entrepreneurial interest. He collected widely, offered specimens to the Berlin museums and retained other ethnographic material in his own hand, disposing of it for profit after he had left the colonial service. A good example for this is the sale of a small collection to the Museum in Darmstadt in 1924 (Will 1926).

Without doubt, Fritz had an entrepreneurial streak and a finely honed sense of a commercial opportunity—all within the ethical boundaries of propriety and legality. His philatelic endeavours and business acumen, for example, are well documented (Anon. 1911; Friedemann 1910; 1917; Huch 1910; Spennemann 2006b).

For the Berlin museums and for own use he collected on all islands he visited a rich haul of insects (Anon 1905; 1907) deer antlers and other mammalian skeletal material (Anon 1906a-b), marine life (Anon 1906a), pressed plant samples (Engler 1903; 1904),<sup>2</sup> and geological specimens (Fritz 1902; Kaiser 1903; Anon. 1908). In addition to the natural history aspect, Fritz conducted extensive ethnographic research. He collected artefacts, noted and photographed *latte* sites, and speculated about the former use of the monuments. Much of the detail known today about Chamorro culture is a result of Fritz' work. In some of his work Fritz was doubtlessly too quick to define and to describe.

As can be appreciated, there was a need for the incoming administration to understand the local culture. Fritz took this one step further and in 1903 compiled an ethnographic study of the local culture (Fritz 1904). Fritz' study remains to be the main early twentieth century source on Chamorro culture.

Fritz took an active interest in the antiquities that he encountered on his travels. This is evidenced both in his official reporting which made frequent references to archaeological remains he had seen and by the comments on the matter he made in the private letters to his parents in Germany.

### Latte Sites

Quite early in his 'reign', Fritz travelled to Rota to assert German authority there. His paper on Rota contains a brief description given of latte sets at Halum Anite, Gaola, As Mamimis and Mochong (Figure 2) (Fritz 1901a). The latter two sites are illustrated and a reconstruction of a latte as a house/roof foundation is given. Fritz comments on the presence of pottery, *lusung*, shell midden material and stone adzes, as well as numerous sling stones. He draws particular attention to (but does not illustrate) semi-spherical bronze vessels with a ribbed outer surface, that were at first interpreted at parts of grenades from earlier wars—and which are now known to be decorative end pieces of copper nails on Spanish ships.

In addition to his notes on the latte columns, Fritz proposed a reconstruction of the original appearance which saw the floor of a raised house supported by the latte (Figure 3).

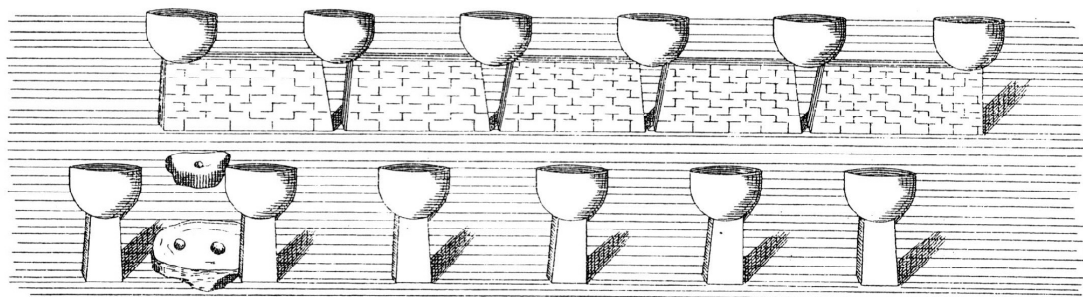


Figure 2. Georg Fritz' sketch of the latte set at As Mochong (Fritz 1901)

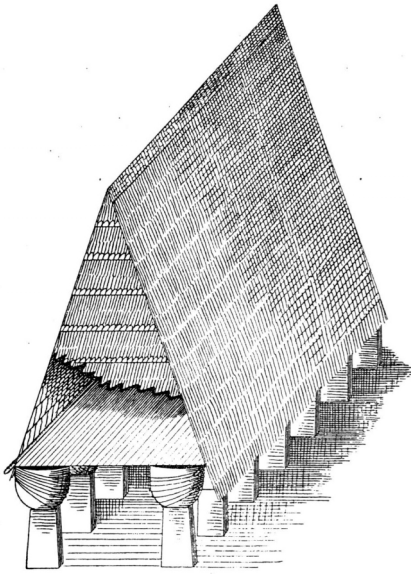


Figure 3. Chamorro ruins on Rota and its reconstruction by Georg Fritz (Fritz 1901).

From 1 to 20 May 1901 Fritz undertook a trip to the northern islands. On all islands, Fritz (1902) also carried out archaeological observations. While the island of Mendinilla was uninhabited at the time, Fritz found caves with evidence of charcoal and pottery indicating prior occupation. On Anatahan he found the remains of the huts of Carolinian workers who had until recently harvested copra, but could not find any archaeological traces. He found, however, cultural plants such as breadfruit, papaya and taro—indications of earlier settlement. A survey of Sarigan he encountered several traces of archaeological sites, mainly pottery scatters, but also some latte sets, as well as a complete vessel in one of the caves. An attempt to locate sites on the northern part of Guguan failed. On Alamagan Fritz found several latte sets made of basalt columns, a stone-paved area and a stone lined well or pit filled with pottery. Just before his arrival workers had found sixteen crescent shaped stones with holes at each end (three were sent to Berlin). Similar items had been found on Saipan and Rota. On Pagan Fritz found some basalt-type latte sets similar to those on Alamagan, as well as sling stones. Cultivated plants provided further evidence of prior settlement. On Assongson Fritz encountered ample evidence of older

cultivation with breadfruit, coconuts, papaya, banana, and Pandanus.

In addition to the documentation of some latte sets in photos (Figure 4) and sketches (Figure 2), Fritz collected archaeological material and also sent sample of stone material collected at a latte site at Marpi for petrographic identification to Berlin (Kaiser 1903).



Figure 4. Latte set at Lamlau Bay, exposed during land clearing as part of a new township development.

### Rock Art

In 1901 Fritz spent a brief time on Guam. During that time he not only carried out the work expected of him as a German colonial officer, ie the development of political relations with the American administration, Fritz also found the time to visit Liyang Gadao (Gadao's Cave) near Inarajan at the southern end of Guam. In his 1904 publication *Die Chamorro* Fritz provides his sketch of the main panel (Figure 5). In addition, he depicted the main panel of Liyang Kalabera (Figure 6).

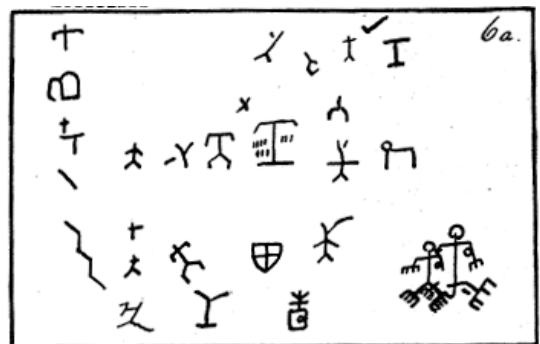


Figure 5. The main panel of Liyang Gadao, Guam, as represented by Georg Fritz in 1904.

While Fritz' recording was at times fanciful (especially in the case of Liyang Kalabera; see Cabrera and Tudela 2006), it remains the first publication on rock art in Micronesia—and seems to have escaped the attention of many archaeologists, probably because it was a German-language publication.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 6. The main panel of Liyang Kalabera, Saipan, as represented by Georg Fritz in 1904.

### Crania

As discussed elsewhere (Spennemann 2006d), in his first quarterly report, dated 9 March 1900, Fritz commented on the atrocities of the last days of the Spanish regime on Saipan and generalises on the excesses of Spanish colonial policy. He noted that he investigated a cave recovering a number of crania from what he suspects to be mass grave of Chamorro killed by the Spanish or by an introduced disease (Fritz 1900a; 1900b).

By 1905, the German ethnologist and anthropologist Otto Schlaginhaufen could write a paper on the “physical anthropology of the inhabitants of the Mariana Islands,” drawing on 45 crania and cranial fragments collected by

Georg Fritz and sent to the Museum of Ethnography in Berlin. Most of the crania had been collected in 1903 and 1904 in karst caves near Tanapag on Saipan (Schlaginhaufen 1905; Anon. 1906), some of which had come from ‘Calaberas Cave’ where Fritz had noted twelve crania lined up near the entrance (Fritz 1904a).

### Spanish Artefacts

Rota was known as a source of what appeared to be small decorated bronze vessels (Fritz 1904a)—which we now know to be the decorative ends of large nails used in the construction of Spanish ships. Fritz was keen on obtaining them every time he went to Rota.

### CULTURAL POLICY

When Fritz commenced his duty as district administrator in the Mariana Islands he faced a population weary of the incoming colonial administration. Prior to the Spanish-American War of 1898 the Marianas, and indeed all of Spanish Micronesia, were administered from Guam. Following the partition of the Marianas as result of Spain's loss in the war, with Guam being captured by the USA and the sale of the rest of the islands to Germany (Spennemann 2003), Spain established a caretaker government on Saipan. Made up of Filipino soldiers loyal to Spain, that administration run by General Blanco created a climate of fear and terror among Chamorro and less so among Carolinians, leading to an exodus of Chamorro from Saipan to Rota and Guam. It is against this backdrop that we must interpret Fritz' cultural policies.

While the US administration on Guam applied American standards of dress and behaviour, Fritz practiced cultural self-determination and religious freedom as long as the people acknowledged the German authority. An example are the Carolinians on Guam who felt strongly about their customs. Driven by prudish notions of propriety, soon after establishing US rule, Governor Leary formally forbade the Carolinians from appearing in the ‘nude,’ *i.e.* wearing their customary scanty dress. Much to the chagrin of the US administration this did not result in any cultural changes. Leary's successor did not bother to argue with Carolinian

mores: in 1901 almost 100 Carolinians from a settlement at Barrio Maria Christina near Agaña on Guam were deported to Saipan, where they were received with open arms (Spennemann 1999, p. 43).

Beyond the mere collection of material, Fritz took an active interest in fostering Chamorro cultural identity and society. An example are the land laws that limited land ownership in the Mariana Islands to Chamorro and Carolinians, but excluded all foreigners, including the colonial masters, the Germans (Spennemann 1999, p. 47ff).

### Preservation of Chamorro language

In the cultural policy arena, Fritz effectively legislated the use of Chamorro (and later also Carolinian) as the language of instruction in the lower levee; classes of the public systems and that German should be taught as a second language. Fritz himself took an active role, quickly learning Chamorro<sup>4</sup> and writing a grammar (Fritz 1904b), a dictionary (Fritz 1904b), an exercise book (never printed; Fritz 1905). And later he repeated this with a study of the Carolinian language (Fritz 1913)

When Fritz established the first German school system in the Marianas, he used texts of his own writing, but with local subject matter, as German-language readers. An example of this *The Chaiñi. A fairy tale from the Marianas*. While printed in 1906 (Fritz 1906), it was first locally produced and distributed in reneographed form in Fritz' handwriting.<sup>5</sup> Other articles were used as higher level text books. Examples are his *Brief history of the Marianas* (Fritz 1907) *Die Chamorro: Eine Geschichte und Ethnographie der Marianen* (Fritz 1904a).

The psychological impact of this on the local population should never be underestimated: Chamorro had never been taught in the schools and had been actively discouraged and at best been tolerated. The new administration not only tolerated the language and afforded cultural self-determination to the community, but also actively promoted Chamorro. In part, however, Fritz' desire to promote Chamorro was borne by his intense dislike of any form of Creole/Pidgin. With the increased Americanisation of Guam, which *inter alia* required all

children to be instructed in English only, Fritz could foresee a danger of the German Mariana Islands also turning to Pidgin (given the frequent inter-island communication).

### Recreations of Latte as political symbols

Possibly the most spectacular manifestation of Georg Fritz' shrewd approach to cultural politics are the latte columns that he had erected in front of the new German administration building. When the German administration took over from the Spanish, it continued the use of the Spanish government facilities. The Imperial German administration developed the area near the church as the centre of its administration. The position was chosen with care both for its logistic and for its symbolic location. To understand this, we have to visualize a southern German village square, with the City Hall at one end and the main church at the side. The Plaza of many Spanish colonial cities were of similar layout.

In the case of Garapan, the presence of the church, as well as the presence of a small landing area, predetermined the choices Georg Fritz could make. He fully realized the focal role the Catholic church played in the lives of the Chamorro he had been appointed to rule. The symbolic center of Garapan was, like it or not, Mount Carmel, where all people would congregate at least on Sundays (Spennemann 2007b). Rather than relocating the symbolic centre of the settlement, he capitalized on this and sited the German administration building on the Pleistocene shoreline terrace, just back from Mount Carmel church (Figure 7). Fritz played on the vista this plaza would provide. The German administration building was elevated above the surrounding buildings, dominating the future plaza.

Fritz moved quickly to erect a formal German government building with funds made available in the 1900/1901 financial year. His building was to be imposing, and well placed to dominate the landscape. In 20 April 1900 he mentioned his plans in a letter to his parents:

*“As the Spaniards have undertaken no economic development here I have no legacy to continue. Everything is new construction. On a rise*



near the official space is the two-storey administration building which is surrounded by a verandah up to the first floor. On the ground floor are large cool and liveable rooms, which I intend to use as storage rooms. Height of the rooms on on both ground floor and first floor is 3 metres [~10 feet]. The walls are 1m thick [~40 inches], and are carried out in stone all the way to the roof, which will be covered with tin.”<sup>6</sup>

A plan sketch accompanying the letter sets out that the building was to be 21.5m long, surrounded by a six foot wide verandah on the sides and a ten foot wide verandah on the front (western façade). By September 1900 the building was well under way and Fritz’ plans had become more elaborate. He now chose to make better use of the small rise on which the administration was built. In a letter to his parents he noted:

“The roof is just being erected. During the construction the plans for the building have become more and more grandiose. It will be a representative building second to none in our South Seas colonies. Hopefully it can be completed by the end of the year, but the landscaping of the gardens will continue for another two years...the rise is some 6-7m high. I will have the slope cut down for the whole length of the administration building and will set up a portico in the style of the old Chamorro columns, with a flight of steps leading up to the entrance.”<sup>7</sup>



Figure 7. The Seat of Power: Erected on a small hill, the German administration building in Garapan towers over Mount Carmel (left) demonstrating the dominance of the new center of power over the old  
Note the well maintained road leading to the building.

Fritz also envisaged a formal French-style garden with an alley of orange trees from the steps to the pier. It can be speculated that he wished to emulate the arrangement at Sans Souci, the palace of the Prussian kings near Berlin.

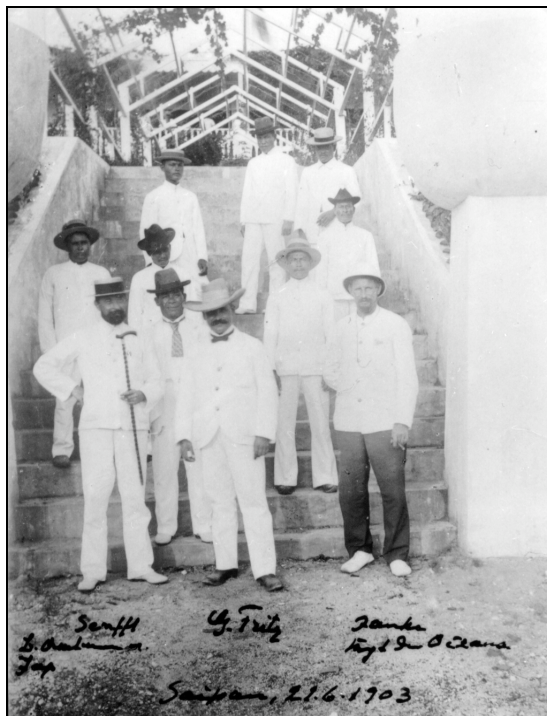


Figure 8. Arno Senfft (front, left), Georg Fritz (centre), Captain Janke of the Oceana (right), and party of island leaders, on the steps of government house on 21 June 1903. Note the imitation latte to the right and left.

The significant part is that Fritz was the first to use replica latte as a symbol for Chamorro culture. Their placement at the base of the hill creates the desired visual impression and a visitor coming arriving at the pier and moving through the plaza would have been in no doubt as to the triple symbolism: Through its elevated position, the German administration lords over the plaza. Visually, the German colonial power, represented by the administration building, sits directly atop the Chamorro people it ruled, the latter represented by the columns (Figure 9); at the same time, the image projected can also be interpreted as the Chamorro people supporting the German administration, with the Chamorro culture providing the foundation for the new German

Northern Marianas. The final symbolism encoded in that image is that the German administration in the Marianas was the direct successor to Chamorro culture. As such the placement of the latte is a powerful symbol of

continuity between the traditional Chamorro past and the new future under German rule. The painful Spanish period had been visually erased.



Figure 9. The German Administration building in Garapan. Note the concrete latte pillars at the front.

These concrete latte were of quite substantial size. Interpreting a close-up photograph (Figure 8) suggests that a column shaft stood about 2 to 2.2m in height (~7 feet) and measured approximately 0.6 m (~2 feet) in thickness. The ‘capstone’ would have measured about 0.6m in height and approximately 1 m (~3 feet) in diameter. There were altogether nine such columns set in a very shallow arc.



Figure 10. Postcard ‘Greetings from the Marianas’ showing the three symbols of German power: the administration building (top left), the workshop (top right) and the government launch (bottom).

The administration building was a political statement, and it is not surprising that as a symbol of German colonial power it soon found depiction on the postcards (Figure 10) (Spennemann 2006c).

On a lesser scale Fritz used the latte theme again in the design of the workroom building (‘Werkstätte’) which was also under construction in late 1900.<sup>8</sup> In this case, the detailing of the walls posts, had latte-shaped pilasters (Figure 11).

These two uses remained the only imitations of latte until the mid 1970s when imitation latte were again created, first in Guam and then in the 1980s in Saipan. Fritz original monumental latte remained in place throughout the Japanese period. Their demise is not altogether clear. Either they were removed by the Japanese military during the Pacific War and found use in landfill or a breakwater development; or they were removed as part of post-World War II clean up of the heavily damaged Garapan. The German workroom was removed sometime during the Japanese civilian period before the late 1930s.



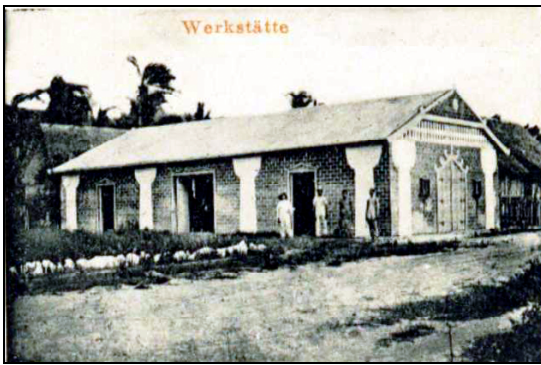


Figure 11. The work room building.  
Inset of the postcard shown in Figure 10.

## CONCLUSIONS

Georg Fritz had a personal interest in Chamorro antiquities and pursued his investigations wherever he went. Fritz had had no formal training in anthropology and as far as we know also no informal training or external guidance. His personal antiquarian interests and his genuine concern for Chamorro culture influenced the way he shaped the German colonial cultural policies as they affected the Mariana Islands. By placing the Chamorro first in both education and especially in land management matters Fritz ensured the support of the local population but alienated some German nationals. Conscious of symbolism, Fritz chose the latte as the icon of the Marianas. A set of imitation latte of truly monumental dimensions graced the slope in front of the German administration building. Fritz was shrewdly aware that both the setting and the choice of the latte as icons were deeply imbued with multiple levels of symbolism.

Although Fritz' own latte are no longer extant, they remained throughout most of the Japanese period and have to be regarded as the 'ancestors' of all modern latte imitations.

## ENDNOTES

1. Digital copies of the German sources can be accessed at <http://micronesia.csu.edu.au/CNMI/CNMIBIB/CNMIBIB.html>.
2. Noteworthy is the species description for *Zeixine Fritzii* named after Fritz (Schlechter 1915)
3. The 1984 translation (Fritz 1984; 2001) lacks the plate with Fritz' depictions of the rock art.

4. Even though some personal critics attacked his grasp of the language: Costenoble 1940.
5. On record in the German colonial files.
6. Letter Georg Fritz to his parents in Alzey, dated Saipan, 20 April 1900 (courtesy of Fritz' Grand niece, Gudrun Möller, Frankfurt).
7. Letter Georg Fritz to his parents in Alzey, dated Saipan, 23 September 1900 (courtesy G Möller).
8. Letter Georg Fritz to his parents in Alzey, dated Saipan, 23 September 1900 (courtesy G Möller).

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