



Germany and Palau

Didellel a klauserechakl | Reciprocal Relationships



A traditional bai, photographed and described by Krämer



Augustin Krämer taking notes on a Caroline island

The Significance of Augustin Krämer to Palau

Augustin Krämer (1865-1941), originally a ship's doctor, became one of Germany's most prominent anthropologists of Pacific island cultures. His writings on Samoa and on Palau, to name the two most important fields of his research, are of particular importance as they preserve much original material that was in danger of being erased from memory. His wife Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow (1874-1945) was a renowned anthropologist herself. She wanted to turn Palau into a nature reserve where people should continue their traditional way of living and be restrained altogether from contact with the outside world. Both Krämers, like many other anthropologists, were not easy to get along with. Through their work and research, however, they contributed to keeping a cultural heritage alive that would otherwise have been lost.

Augustin Krämer on the correct Spelling of Palau, 1907

Pelau [Belau]. First the name which is in need of a precise stipulation at long last. ... Kubary ... very much favors the name Pelau [Belau] in this form of spelling and believes that it is connected to pelú [beluu], the meaning being "land as state, then also land as soil and really the whole existing land of their home". This is not correct. Pelú [Beluu] is only being used for the "village", the place where the spokesman lives. When you come across a man who is on his way home he always says he is going to his pelú [beluu]. ... Besides pelú [beluu] there is another word pélau [Belau], the designation for all red volcanic land in contrast to the limestone rocks that are called kogeáll [ocheall]. Almost all the native villages are on volcanic land whereas the kogeáll [ocheall] are uninhabited except the two most southerly islands, Pelílyu [Peleliu] and Ngeaur [Ngeaur or Angaur at present] (the new phosphate island a Ngěaur [Ngeaur], more correctly to be called Ngeaur only) and the small atoll island Ngeiangl [Ngcheangel or Kayangel at present] in the north. When a Pelauan [Palauan] is on his way home from one of these three places, he regularly says he is going to Pelau, *kid a mor Pelau* [Belau, ke de mo er a Belau]. Contrary, the limestone rocks are only called by the word Kogeáll [Ocheall]. As the volcanic land is not just the much bigger but also the more important land, it follows that the word Pelau [Belau] rightly exists and should be recommended for introduction in official use. Away with Palau, Palaos, Pelew! [Belau/Palau at present] Where the word comes from and what its meaning is, I couldn't establish. More than a dozen times I was discussing this with elderly people at various places. They all had only to say this: it would be an old word; one would not know what its meaning is. ... Over to the linguists!