

VII. CORAL ATOLLS AND MAN

1. The limited potentialities of the environment make the coral atoll of special interest in the study of man in his environmental relationships. The narrow basis for human subsistence entails a certain simplification of the relationships between man and his habitat, and facilitates the analysis of these relationships.
2. In discussing the relationship between man and nature in the atoll environment, one must first clarify what it is that is being related. Previous papers have served to elucidate the distinctive features of the environment. "Man" - the term to which "environment" is being related - can be considered in several ways. We may first consider man shorn of his principal distinguishing characteristic - his culture. The relationship between the atoll environment and man in this sense is primarily in what manner and how well the resources of an atoll supply man's biological needs for survival. When man is considered as a culture-bearer, however, the relationship changes its emphasis and increases in complexity. Here we are concerned with a complex set of relationships between a distinctive environment and a set of traditionally patterned ways of behavior that control man's adaptation to the environment and his adaptation to his fellows. Traditionally patterned modes of behavior as an aspect of culture.
3. The atoll and man's biological requirements. In this connection, food is the most important factor. The kinds of food available on coral atolls is well enough known, but there is yet to be made an adequate nutrition study of native diet. Furthermore, food is produced through the use of a special set of techniques, by men organized in social groups, and is distributed and consumed according to traditionally sanctioned ways. The study of food production and native diet is most fruitfully examined, therefore, in its cultural ramifications. This brings us to the relationship between the atoll environment and man as a culture bearer.
4. The atoll environment and culture. The first question we may ask is whether the atoll environment is associated with a special culture type. Distinctive aspects of atoll cultures. Examples from Micronesia and Polynesia. The manner in which the atoll environment is related to culture should first be examined with respect to those aspects of culture most closely connected to the utilization of natural resources: technology and material culture; economic organization; social organization. Control of land resources and food production in the Marshalls as an example of the nature of culture-environment relationships. Resumé of present knowledge.
5. Recommendations for atoll research. Kinds of environment-culture relationships needing analysis in the field. Importance of a comparative approach. Type atolls. The factor of change as it affects environment-culture relationships, and the importance of studies through time. High islands and coral atolls. Relevance of atoll studies to problems of native administration. Summary and conclusion.