Lamotrek: Topography and Landscape

The coral atoll Lamotrek lies at a latitude of 7° 30’ north and a longitude of 146° 20’ east. The neighbouring islands Elato (approximately 14 nautical miles west) and Satawal (approximately 40 nautical miles east) belong politically to Lamotrek which provides the High Chief for all three areas. My husband and I visited this group of Caroline Islands in 2006 and 2007 to carry out anthropological research on Lamotrek (see Map 2.1).

When the Micro Spirit (see Picture 2.1) anchored in the late evening in the Lamotrek Lagoon, it seemed to me to be in the middle of the night because with only a narrow crescent moon and the tropical transition from day to night which is very short, the darkness engulfs all land and sea already in the evening. My senses were wide awake and ready to absorb all the new impressions. From the ‘swimming island’ Micro Spirit, we climbed into a small motorboat to go ashore. Three small fires showed us the way and signalled the limits of access for the boats – in the north, the middle and the south of the western shore, they provided orientation. Only a light breeze was blowing, sounds wafted gently from the middle of the island towards the water.

Gradually, the contours of the island, shaped by the outer fringe of coconut palm trees became silhouetted against the Pacific Ocean. Was this border really where the land ended? What lay behind? In which direction lay the rest of Lamotrek? Upon arrival at the shore, we disembarked and trudged behind our host mother up the beach behind which lay the land, a little way along a path which led us further along up a gently inclined dirt track. Soon we arrived at a concrete house, Elizabeth lit the way inside with a torch and ignited a kerosene lamp. There it was, our new home for the coming months.
Map 2.1: Lamotrek Island