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The First Islanders

FROM SUNDA TO SAHUL

Sea levels were as much as 120 metres lower than today's during the last Ice Age – the Pleistocene epoch – which lasted from 1.8 million to 12 000 years ago. Southeast Asia then included the maritime subcontinent of Sunda, that ancient and immense 'Boot of Asia' which separated the South China Sea from the Indian Ocean. East and southeast of the Sunda subcontinent lay enormous Sahul: ancient Australia, Tasmania and New Guinea, which were then still connected as one massive continent.

Sahul's separation from Sunda throughout the Pleistocene epoch demarcated not only land, but also mammals. Sahul's primitive marsupials (pouch-bearers like kangaroos and opossums) and monotremes (primitive mammals like the duck-billed platypus and several species of anteater) remained distinct from the more evolved placental mammals of the 'Old World': that is, of Asia, Europe and Africa. This is an important consideration with regard to the presence of humans in the Pacific. For humans are also placental mammals. From this one can deduce that any early humans in Sahul had to come, then, from the Old World. However, many Aboriginal Australians and Papuans (the indigenous people of New Guinea and parts of the Solomon Islands) believe humans are autochthons, descendants of the spiritual ancestors of Dreamtime.

There might be something tangible to the indigenous belief, though the true story would differ significantly from the Aboriginal Australian and Papuan account. Sunda, or sub-continental Southeast Asia, was already home to the hominid species *Homo erectus* by the beginning of the Pleistocene epoch some 1.8 million years ago. We now know that sometime between 900 000 and 800 000 years ago a small flotilla of *Homo erectus* migrants, probably carrying an entire community which had devised watercraft of bamboo-log rafts expressly for the purpose, deliberately crossed Wallace's Line. This was the strait of 17 (now 24) kilometres in width separating Sunda from the Indonesian island of Lombok. It has always been one of the world's major biological boundaries, separating the fauna of Asia from that of Australia and Oceania. That this *Homo erectus* community would have effected the sea migration deliberately is deduced from the fact that they drifted even further than Lombok: they went on to settle Flores Island east of Lombok, rapidly causing the extinction there of pygmy stegodons (bony-plated quadrupeds) nearly one million years ago. On Flores Island they also left behind stone tools and dietary remains, which archæologists discovered in 1997.

It is a contentious issue whether *Homo erectus* ever ventured further than Sunda's offshore islands. Only related or descendant hominid species appear to have progressed all the way to the continent of Sahul. The exact origin of the first hominids in Sahul is still unclear. Australian archæologists announced in 2001 that an archaic human skeleton had been discovered at Lake Mungo in eastern Australia, subsequently dated, using three different techniques, as being 60 000 years old. As the skeleton indicated a DNA sequencing different from that of Australia's Aborigines, it was suggested that it might represent a hominid species which had not survived evolution. Perhaps it had been a precursor of *Homo sapiens sapiens* or modern humans in the region, as some now hypothesize. Archaic human societies were likely to be far more genetically complex than that Trinity of early human species – *Homo erectus*,

Homo neanderthalensis and *Homo sapiens* – still popularly peddled today. But the results of the Lake Mungo discovery require external confirmation through other, comparative analyses. It is too soon to definitively evaluate the discovery. Still, one should appreciate that the trend of the past half century has been one of ever-earlier dates for a hominid presence in Sahul.

All *living* humans in the region are, as most scholars agree, descendants of *Homo sapiens sapiens* who more recently came ‘out of Africa’, as particularly modern genetic studies witness. From 100 000 to 50 000 years ago, modern humans were ranging out to populate nearly all the Old World (and perhaps the Americas, too, as some scholars are now claiming). Migrating southwards from Asia down into the Sunda ‘Boot’, they would have crossed the sea also in small flotillas of bamboo-log rafts or perhaps dug-out canoes. They made their first traverses north via Celebes and the Moluccas to occupy northern Sahul. Others would have ranged further south, along the detached Lesser Sunda islands of Lombok, Flores, Timor and others to occupy the coastal regions of northwestern Sahul. Coming from both directions, Sahul could be reached only after several successive sea-crossings, some as far as 100 kilometres in distance: that is, beyond visible land.

It appears these migrants of around 50 000 years ago would be the Aboriginal Australians’ and Papuans’ ultimate ancestors, those true spirits and lawgivers of Dreamtime.

New Guinea, today less than 200 kilometres north of Australia’s Cape York Peninsula, was evidently an early centre of *Homo sapiens sapiens* intrusion when New Guinea still comprised Sahul’s elongated northern appendage. Its great diversity of cultures and large population testify to perhaps as long as 50 000 years of uninterrupted human development on the island, Earth’s second largest. Various Highland and Lowland societies speak of their descent from ocean gods or from ancestors who rose up from an underworld; various coastal tribes tell of legendary voyages of settlement. Using Western scientific methods, practitioners of modern archaeology and

genetic profiling can confirm prehistoric migration paths, particularly through Sahul's northern reaches, which were plied tens of thousands of years ago.

The region's tangible archæological record is impressive, and continually deepening. We now know, for example, that one northern site on New Guinea's Huon Peninsula served Archaic Papuans as prolonged shelter as early as 40 000 years ago. The Matenkupkum cave site on New Ireland in the Bismarck Archipelago, northeast of Papua New Guinea, apparently accommodated a small community around 33 000 years ago. Five thousand years later other Archaic Papuans were calling a site on Buka Island in the northern Solomon Islands, south of the Bismarcks, their home. By about 25 000 years ago, Near Oceania – that is, New Guinea, the Bismarcks (comprising the Admiralties, New Britain and New Ireland) and the Solomons – would certainly have held hundreds of discrete Archaic Papuan communities.

These Archaic Papuans, who are sometimes called Australoids, were preoccupied with various methods of food acquisition. In the New Guinea Highlands, at ancient sites such as Kosipe, local Papuan communities primarily comprised hunter-gatherers. Occupants of lowland settlements engaged in both hunting-gathering and marine-life activities. But marine pursuits, including shellfish and urchin gathering, dominated the lives of coastal Papuans in the shoreline settlements of New Britain, New Ireland and Bougainville in the Solomons. Changing domiciles often in search of new habitats, Archaic Papuans were a migrant people who seem to have seldom shied from close sea-crossings.

With such movements and differentiated settlement patterns, networks of exchange increased and diversified. Some archæologists hold that obsidian (volcanic glass) from New Britain's Talasea site made its way to a number of further sites within the Bismarck Archipelago as early as 20 000 years ago; the trade continued for thousands of years. Having adapted to a variety of local coastal and inland environments, the First Islanders were already benefiting from established societies

which evidently practised sophisticated techniques of exchange involving repeated sea-crossings.

New Guinea's earliest stone tools – hoe-like waisted blades and flaked ax-adzes – suggest that forest-edge clearance was taking place. It has been hypothesized that this Palæolithic (Old Stone Age) population was already practising a rudimentary form of horticulture, that is, of cultivating simple crop gardens. If true, then New Guinea's Archaic Papuans would have been among the world's first crop gardeners (in contrast to the hunting-gathering practised everywhere else on Earth during the Palæolithic era). However, the required evidence to confirm the hypothesis, such as drainage ditches and measurable pollen changes, has not been forthcoming. It is believed that New Guinea's earliest assemblage of flaked-stone tools – a mainstay of comparative archæology – reveals features characteristic of those of both Palæolithic Australia (Sahul) and Southeast Asia.

However, external connections of lineage and trade began gradually to decline around 12 000 years ago. Sea levels started rising as kilometre-thick sheets of ice which, until then, had covered large parts of Earth melted in warmer mean temperatures that have continued up to the present day. Entire land masses 'detached', one from the other, as waters rose. In geological perspective, this happened overnight. In human cultural terms, it was an extremely protracted process. Maximum sea levels were not reached until around 8000 years ago, when the neck of land near Cape York, Australia, connecting Sahul to its northern appendage (New Guinea) finally disappeared under what became Torres Strait.

New Guinea had become a separate island, part of Near Oceania. (Near Oceania itself demarcates the distribution of major fauna and flora from those of northern, southern and particularly eastern islands, all known as Remote Oceania.) Well before 12 000 years ago, Archaic Papuan hunter-gatherers had occupied Highland, Lowland and coastal regions of New Guinea, the Bismarcks and the Solomons (it is assumed). As most ancient coastal sites were gradually inundated over the

4000 years of rising sea levels, those sites which had once represented the most densely populated Archaic Papuan settlements now lay underwater. (This explains why discovered Archaic Papuan sites comprise exclusively the erstwhile higher habitats and cave or rock shelters which, back then, had been only sparsely populated; most ancient sites, pending improved technology, are still too deeply submerged to investigate.) New Papuan societies and languages began differentiating under drastically changed geographical and environmental conditions.

ANCIENT NEAR OCEANIA

The outgrowth of these changed conditions, 'Pacific Islands' as a human habitat began in New Guinea and the Bismarck and Solomon Archipelagos. Near Oceania's profound human history – far longer than Remote Oceania's – reveals a vast social diversity and immense cultural variation. Isolated from its Sahul parent continent since the filling of Torres Strait around 8000 years ago, New Guinea houses the world's richest treasury of languages within one confined geographical area: over a thousand Papuan and Austronesian tongues. Though one would expect genetic connections with the languages of Australia, whose Aborigines once shared Sahul with their northern neighbours the Archaic Papuans, none with reliable systematic correspondences has ever been found (perhaps because of the profound time depth which thwarts the limited capabilities of historical linguistics).

The fact that other Near Oceanian islands reveal a similar extreme of linguistic diversity indicates that these islands, too, were initially settled by the two genetically and linguistically distinct peoples. The continued development and interaction of these diverse cultures produced one of Earth's most ancient and elaborate cultural complexes.

It is assumed, for want of hard archæological evidence, that Archaic Papuans had already settled the southernmost islands

of the Solomon Archipelago by the height of the last glaciation, around 18000 years ago. There is no indication that Papuans proceeded further than this – that is, into Remote Oceania – until shortly before the arrival of Austronesians many thousands of years later. Scholars now believe that it was probably not the greater sea distances (that is, beyond visible landfall) between islands and archipelagos which prevented Papuans from extensively settling Remote Oceania. The reluctance to do this was probably attributable instead to the paucity of naturally occurring fauna and flora in Remote Oceania to provide long-term sustenance after arrival. Such natural resources prevailed only in Near Oceania. Throughout Near Oceania – from the northwest Admiralties to the southeast Solomons – Papuans had adapted to various environments. They established sophisticated networks of exchange and rapidly grew in numbers, with accelerating complexity and further differentiation.

Nothing has disrupted the Papuan continuum up to the present day.

Early Papuan sea-crossings were hardly the famed open-ocean voyages of those celebrated Micronesian and Polynesian seafarers who came much later. Early voyages probably occurred in bamboo-log rafts or dug-out canoes, with minimum navigational control. Voyages nearly always took place between nearby shorelines, ‘hopping’ from one visible island to the next. Papuan mariners clearly relied on the time-honoured principle of the shortest crossing. The crucial factor in such early crossings was time: the danger of a raft or canoe becoming waterlogged – and as a result its occupants drowning – was always present. As large numbers of people were needed with a first settlement in order to avoid human extinction within two or three generations of arrival on a previously uninhabited island, early sea-crossings could not have been accidental. They were clearly intentional. But why did Archaic Papuans, time after time, drift away on tiny rafts or canoes to distant, hazy islands on the horizon? It was evidently their way of experiencing the world. Archaic Papuans, too, had no other

motive in mind but to search out new habitats, exploit the exploitable and thrive where possible. It was the very purpose of life, and offered continued survival.

The First Islanders were hunter-gatherers and fishers, then, who possessed intricate strategies which transcended mere subsistence. Before the end of the last Ice Age, Archaic Papuans were even introducing mammals to New Ireland in the offshore Bismarcks. The best defined archaeological sequence of early human presence in the region comes from New Guinea's Highlands. By around 15 000 years ago, the Kaironk Valley had become home to hunter-gatherers. However, actual Highland regions were occupied only once Ice Age glaciers had receded globally (no glaciers were ever in New Guinea itself). Before then, coastal regions, warmed by ocean currents, had been preferred habitats. The rock shelters at Kafiavana and Kiowa in the Eastern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea accommodated hunter-gatherers over 10 000 years ago. One may assume that rising mean temperatures world-wide finally allowed the general settlement of the Highlands at about this period, as evidenced by pollen changes over the following millennia, indicating forest clearance.

At this time in Near Oceania, Archaic Papuans lived in villages of some 30 individuals who often relocated to other sites. Networks of exchange remained internal within a given archipelago. Ocean gaps did not link but divided the First Islanders, who in this way continued to differentiate culturally. Rising sea levels and mean temperatures enabled crop cultivation in the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea. There is convincing evidence for the earliest ditch and drainage systems, such as those at the swamp margins of Kuk in the Mount Hagen region. Taro was apparently cultivated in Kuk's hollows and gutters from 9000 to 5500 years ago.

Taro had originally come from Southeast Asia. The name taro includes a number of plant species belonging to the Arum family, *Araceae*. There is evidence that taro was already being used by the northern Solomon Islanders of Buka as early as

28 000 years ago. Purposely cultivated in New Guinea for more than 6000 years, taro is used for its large, starchy rhizomes (root-like stems emitting roots and usually producing leaves). Cultivated taro, *Colocasia esculenta*, was to become a staple food crop throughout Pacific Islands. It is still popular today.

Bismarck sites of similar antiquity reveal plantings of *Canarium indicum*, an almond and tree crop probably brought from New Guinea in the late Pleistocene. It appears Archaic Papuans at this time also intentionally introduced such wild fauna as large rats and bandicoots (insect-eating Sahul marsupials) to Manus Island in the Admiralties, and rats and possums to New Ireland in the Bismarcks. (Later migrants introduced the small wallaby as well.) No obsidian or animals were taken by Papuans to the Solomons, however, suggesting infrequent contact with the southernmost archipelago of Near Oceania.

In the Eastern Highlands, agriculture developed at a slower pace. Here, hunting-gathering still prevailed and the root *Pueraria lobata* – not taro – was cultivated.

One assumes that other crops which later formed the basis of Pacific Islands horticulture and agriculture, such as certain species of bananas and sugarcane, were also cultivated at a relatively early date in New Guinea.

That New Guinea Highlanders practised frequent exchange with coastal regions is evidenced by the discovery in Highland sites of marine shell ornaments dating from around 9000 years ago. One assumes that the shells came from the many Papuan coastal settlements today under the sea. But around 4500 years ago, polished stone tools and pottery-making also appear to have reached New Guinea's Highlands from the coast. At this time, Highland Papuan communities were rapidly becoming mixed hunting-gathering and horticultural societies. Highland swamp management comprised complex systems of channelling water – such as at Manton in the Western Highlands, whose archaic stone ax-adzes and wooden spades are almost indistinguishable from today's. (These demonstrate

a continuity of local culture over a span of approximately 4500 years.)

Highlanders perhaps began clearing swathes of forest for food production at this time, too. Fruit and nut species were being cultivated in the Sepik-Ranu region. In the islands of Near Oceania, a low-level vegetation impact distinguishes the pollen record from around 4500 years ago. One might surmise that a rapid population increase caused an increased demand for food which was only satisfied by an intensification of production, leading to intentional forest clearance. (However, there might be other, non-agricultural explanations for forest loss at this time.) Domestic animals (pigs, dogs, fowl) appear for the first time in the cultural assemblage, sustained by Highlanders who obviously had sufficiently diversified their agriculture to feed these animals. Some scholars believe that this Papuan development prepared the way for a subsequent settlement of Remote Oceania by Papuans. However, the cumulative weight of evidence suggests that many, if not all, of the abovementioned developments were the result of contact with culturally more sophisticated intruders arriving from Island Southeast Asia:

The Austronesians.

THE AUSTRONESIANS AND LAPITA

The first Islanders had been Archaic Papuans or Australoids, the first *Homo sapiens sapiens* to settle, perhaps as early as 60 000 years ago, all the ancient lands from continental Southeast Asia (Malaysia, Kampuchea, Vietnam) in the west to the Solomon Islands in the east. With the arrival around 4500 years ago of Austronesian-speaking Island Southeast Asians, a people of Southern Mongoloid stock – ultimately hailing from Southern China – made Pacific Islands their tenure.

They are still there today.

Constant change – that is, internal development, migration, adaptation to environmental and climatic variations, and

external contact – was affecting the human history of early Pacific Islands as much as it was all other regions on Earth around 4500 years ago. The constant change continued. No archaeological discoveries show Papuan settlement beyond the Solomon Islands before the arrival of Austronesians. Yet today's Melanesians in this region comprise a Papuan-Austronesian (Australoid-Southern Mongoloid) hybrid people. The Papuan-Austronesian features now so evident in Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji would have emerged within the last 2000 years. Before then, Remote Oceania was exclusively Austronesian. Micronesians and Polynesians owe most of their genetic and cultural make-up to Austronesian (Southern Mongoloid) ancestors. As Papuans were the first Islanders of Near Oceania, Austronesians were the first Islanders of Remote Oceania.

Around 4500 years ago Austronesians brought with them to the northern coastline of New Guinea their food plants, domesticated animals, polished stone tools and agricultural and sea-voyaging skills. Most of this cultural baggage was of immediate Island Southeast Asian, some of ultimately coastal Chinese origin. By then, the indigenous Papuans had already elaborated a rudimentary horticulture, based in part on such Southeast Asian plant species as taro and ti. However, they had never attained to the agricultural and fishing skills suddenly witnessed in the archaeological record of Near Oceania once Austronesians had arrived. More significantly, Austronesians were expert seafarers, capable both of deep-sea fishing (as opposed to shoreline fishing and angling) and of extensive voyaging for trade and exploration. They were Earth's premier mariners.

The Austronesians' saga is fascinating. Some 8000 years ago, once rising seas had attained maximum levels and global mean temperatures had effected a major climate change, a distinct cultural complex (only now being identified by scholars) singled out a diverse, but interrelated Southern Mongoloid population which was settled along China's southern coast. Around 6000 years ago members of this complex

left the Asian mainland – probably sailing, not drifting, approximately 130 kilometres of open ocean – to settle Taiwan where, over centuries, their language(s) developed into Proto-Austronesian. Having increased their numbers significantly on Taiwan, descendant Austronesian speakers sailed south to colonize the nearby Philippines, then west and southwest to establish settlements in eastern Vietnam and Kampuchea, on the Malay Peninsula and on the islands of Borneo, Sumatra and Java. Other Austronesians sailed directly south of the Philippines to colonize Sulawesi, Timor, southern Halmahera and Irian Jaya (Western New Guinea). Speakers of a proto-language which, in time, would become the Oceanic languages were probably settling regions of Papua New Guinea's northern coast beginning around 4500 years ago. They finally settled on the islands of New Britain and New Ireland in the Bismarcks around 4000 years ago. Here, Austronesians colonized coastal regions, generally keeping apart from the indigenous Papuans.

Austronesians' peregrinations are perhaps best followed through historical linguistics. Formerly known as Malayo-Polynesian, the Austronesian language family contains the world's greatest number of member tongues: around 1200, or 30 per cent of all the world's languages (if one accepts there are currently around 4000). Spoken today by approximately 270 million people, the Austronesian family includes nearly all the languages of the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Madagascar (east of Africa), Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. It is the first language family in history to be spoken in over two-thirds of the globe. In Near Oceania, Austronesian languages still coexist alongside numerous Papuan languages, generally in coastal regions.

Most Austronesian settlements in the Bismarcks and Solomons had not been previously inhabited by Papuans. Austronesians were the ones who first brought New Britain's Talasea obsidian to the Solomon Islands. They also brought the first pottery to Island Melanesia. (New Guinea had had pottery, but of a different type.) Indeed, it was their characteristic

pottery – possibly elaborated in the Bismarcks, along with a new and distinctive culture – which provided a name for these first Austronesians in Pacific Islands:

The Lapita people.

The name comes from the site on New Caledonia's west coast where this representative pottery came to light in significant quantities in the 1950s. 'Lapita ware' is an earthenware formed of slabs of clay usually tempered with sand and fired in the open (not in kilns). The ware encompasses open bowls, shouldered pots, globular cooking pots and flat-bottomed dishes. Lapita ware is commonly undecorated, though some pieces carry a red 'slip' – that is, clay mixed with water to a creamy consistency and used for decoration or patching. Others bear a highly distinctive and intricate assortment of patterns either incised or stamped into their surface. For stamping, a small-toothed instrument was used, one very similar to the later Polynesian tattooing chisel.

In time Lapita came to identify the Austronesians' entire cultural complex in Pacific Islands. It is believed that Lapita ware may have been fired in the Bismarcks as early as 4000 years ago. Already by this time, stable settlements of more than a hectare (2.47 acres) were providing long-term residence to sizeable populations of Austronesians engaged in long-distance trade. Early Lapita ware – those pieces older than 2800 years – bearing similar patterns appear from the Bismarck Archipelago throughout Island Melanesia, with the exception of the contiguous Solomons, to as far as Samoa more than 4000 kilometres away (Map 4). Fragments of a Lapita pot have also been discovered in New Guinea, at Aitape. It is clear that it was this Lapita people who initiated expansion into Remote Oceania. That is to say, the colonization of Remote Oceania was an Austronesian initiative.

The Lapita complex embraced an entire cultural assemblage of ornaments, tools (stone axes and adzes, shell adzes, shell scrapers, fishhooks, files of sea-urchin and coral spines), permanent villages of stilt houses, animal domestication, an array of agricultural techniques, sophisticated seafaring skills

and vessels, and other things. The Lapita people characteristically cooked, for example, with hot stones in earth ovens – still a commonplace in Pacific Islands today.

It was also around 4000 years ago that specifically Melanesian languages and cultures, as distinct from indigenous Papuan languages and cultures, first emerged. They arose out of Austronesian traditions which admitted a restricted Papuan contribution. (Micronesian and Polynesian languages and cultures were to emerge around a thousand years later, at the northern and eastern peripheries of the Lapita culture, on islands uninhabited until then.) A revealing characteristic of Lapita sites is that these occur almost exclusively on coastlines. This is true also of the settlements on previously unoccupied islands. Some Lapita settlements were built on piles over the water of fringing coral reefs, a practice still common among many Southeast Asian communities. Though the Lapita people perpetuated the cultivation of common Island Southeast Asian crops such as taro, yam and banana, and the husbandry of pigs, dogs and fowl, their preferred resource was the sea.

INTO REMOTE OCEANIA

If it ever existed, Lapita ‘unity’ in the Bismarcks – genetically, culturally, linguistically – would certainly have been of extremely brief duration. Lapita expanded far, and it expanded rapidly. First branches of Lapita tentatively advanced throughout Island Melanesia around 3300 years ago then continued on to settle Fiji about a century later. (Tonga and Samoa would soon follow.) In such different locales the imported culture mutated rapidly under altered environmental and social conditions. For this reason one cannot speak of ‘Lapita society’. There were many Lapita societies. Those in Near Oceania included Papuan communities which did not always enjoy Lapita’s full complement of plants and animals, for example, while those in Remote Oceania beyond the Solomons appeared

to experience only Lapita – that is, essentially Oceanic Austronesian – refinements.

Papuans had practised a maritime tradition of bamboo-log rafts and dug-out canoes which, until then, had allowed adequate sight-crossings. Lapita people, whose Austronesian antecedents had been sailing vast expanses of ocean since the settling of Taiwan around 2000 years earlier, either brought with them or invented in the Bismarcks the outrigger canoe, double-boom triangular sails and complex open-ocean navigational techniques which no longer required sight of land. In particular, Lapitans invented the double-hulled canoe, one of the greatest technological innovations in the history of seafaring. The double-hulled canoe allowed greater loads to be carried, meaning that Lapitans could take on board not merely provisions for one voyage but an entire culture, ensuring sustenance on distant islands lacking basic resources. In this way, settler populations could thrive, with the existences of settlers' children and grandchildren secured. This, more than anything else, allowed the Lapita people to colonize Remote Oceania.

Ultimately of Island Southeast Asian origin, Lapita was, then, an Austronesian culture. However, it integrated indigenous elements from the various Papuan communities it encountered as well as Austronesian solutions to specifically Bismarck problems. Lapita culture was therefore no Austronesian 'importation', but the indigenous creation of the new arrivals in Pacific Islands. Around 4000 years ago, Lapita first emerged with a small group of Proto-Oceanic speakers who first fired a distinctive type of pottery. Within around 500 years, however, members of this community – or influenced neighbours of shared pedigree – began moving out of New Britain and New Ireland, ranging eastern coastlines and sailing narrow ocean gaps. Their culture first spread through the Solomon Islands (it is assumed). Around 1300 BC, Lapita people left the Solomons and dared to sail into Remote Oceania in large double-hulled canoes: east to the Santa Cruz Islands, and south to Vanuatu and New Caledonia.

New Caledonia's mainland is the Grande Terre; a small offshore island, the Île des Pins, punctuates its southeastern tip. Around 80 kilometres east of the Grande Terre lie the Loyalty Islands, from northwest to southeast: West 'Uvea, Lifu and Mare. Though not found in the Loyalties, hundreds of earthen mounds, each about 2.5 metres tall and 8000 years old or more, dot both the Grande Terre and the Île des Pins. Some writers have alleged these are human artefacts, which is not impossible. But recent studies have suggested they are the remains of the nesting mounds of an extinct megapode: ground-living birds of ancient Sahul and adjacent islands. It appears the Austronesian-speaking Lapita people, the first humans to arrive on New Caledonia around 3300 years ago, were responsible, either directly or indirectly, for the megapode's extinction at around this time or slightly later. Archaic New Caledonians produced two types of pottery: Lapita ware, and one decorated by impression (using dies of carved wooden paddles) which was sometimes supplemented by incise work and clay reliefs. The later complexity of New Caledonian culture suggests there might have been two or three different settlements of the island.

New Caledonia's first settlement was paralleled by a series of Lapita migrations in multiple directions. A Western Oceanic subgroup of Austronesian speakers spread from Papua New Guinea's coast to Santa Isabel in the Solomon Islands, then later westwards and southwards into the Papuan Gulf. From Vanuatu, southeast of the Solomons, one community sailed southeast to Fiji, arriving around 3200 years ago. After an initial period of consolidation, the Fijian Lapitans sailed, around 2900 years ago, to the southeast to colonize Tonga. (Within two centuries, during which time Lapita potters had developed a distinctive Polynesian Plainware type of pottery on Tonga, the settlers' heavy reliance on natural resources had caused several species' extinction there.) Descendants, who were then developing an ancestral Polynesian society, set sail for the northeast and colonized Samoa. And it was there, at distant Samoa in the Central Pacific, that the Lapita seafarers

apparently came to a halt after many generations of almost continuous colonization.

The settlement of Fiji had been a watershed in Austronesian exploration. (Austronesians of southeastern Borneo and Sumatra would not set sail for Madagascar east of Africa until approximately AD 700, or 1900 years later.) As measured from the southernmost tip of the Vanuatu chain, Fiji lies around 850 kilometres away, east-northeast. A voyage there meant an unheard-of distance in open sea. It could well have demanded up to several weeks' sailing, depending on winds. Once arrived at Fiji, the Lapita voyagers would have had to accept this isolation as a kind of sentence: limited exchange with the western homeland and its resources would have been the acknowledged price of permanent settlement there.

The settlers established 'gateway communities' on Fiji through which subsequent settlers and goods were funnelled throughout a protracted period of colonization there. Communities were then connected to less complex secondary sites serving as dispersal areas for tertiary hinterlands.

The great distance between Vanuatu and Fiji produced, in time, two distinct Lapita cultures: one in western, the other in eastern Pacific Islands. As generations passed, several 'provinces' of Lapita emerged: Far Western (New Guinea, Admiralty Islands, Bismarck Islands), Western (Solomon Islands, Bellona, Rennell, Santa Cruz, Tikopia), Southern (Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Loyalty Islands) and Eastern (Fiji, Tonga, Futuna, East 'Uvea, Samoa). Exchange still continued between west and east. Indeed, it was during the Lapita era that New Britain's Talasea obsidian finally realized its widest geographical distribution: from Borneo to Fiji, a distance of some 7000 kilometres. But the exchange occurred with nowhere near the frequency of that within neighbouring provinces. This is clearly demonstrated by those Lapita ware patterns that are almost indistinguishable from New Britain to New Caledonia: these are seldom, if ever, found in Eastern Province. Linguistically, the several languages of Remote Oceanic (Far Eastern Solomons, Micronesian, North Central

Vanuatu, Southern Vanuatu, New Caledonia) were also not at all involved in the many innovations which were now taking place in the emerging Central Pacific languages (Rotuman-West Fijian and Tokalau Fijian).

Judging by the immediate prerequisites of colonizing distant islands, one would conclude that settler societies of Remote Oceania had to be strongly hierarchical in their structure; only a strong hierarchy of command ensured survival in settlement events, maintaining social order while safeguarding food production. Initial settlement of a previously unoccupied island in Lapita times would have been small: one or two canoes of approximately 70 settlers, consisting almost entirely of an equal gender ratio of young adults. Whereas Near Oceania would have allowed local recruitment to stimulate population growth, Remote Oceania saw their populations increasing only naturally.

Lapita settlers' crops comprised both Southeast Asian and Near Oceanian cultivars, a package of foodstuffs which, once combined with the Austronesians' pigs, dogs and fowl, created a sophisticated agricultural collection. Many scholars believe it was this collection, borne on long-distance double-hulled canoes, which enabled Near Islanders to become Remote Islanders in the first place, providing necessary sustenance for prolonged settlement of islands lacking these staples. The Lapita colonization of both Near and Remote Oceania caused the extinction of many species of fauna and flora. In addition, forest clearance on a scale far exceeding that of earlier Papuans had caused irreversible environmental degradation. Once land became unusable, conservation practices such as terracing had to be introduced to safeguard crop production, particularly on the high islands of Remote Oceania. These and other measures ravaged island ecologies.

Today's Melanesians – that is, the indigenous people of Near Oceania and neighbouring archipelagos (now including Fiji) – still reveal contrasting degrees of Papuan-Austronesian mixture, the greatest being in western Near Oceania. Subsequent migrations of Near Oceanians into Remote Oceania

over the last 2000 years have considerably raised the east's Papuan contribution. Before these migrations, Austronesian ethnicity and culture characterized all of Remote Oceania. Settling Fijians, for example, would have been 'Archaic Polynesian' in appearance: more the tall, thin, straight-haired and long-headed Rapanui Polynesians than modern Melanesians. This is because, many centuries ago, Island Melanesians with a stronger Papuan strain had overtaken Fiji and covered Lapitan roots. Most scholars believe the same thing occurred on Vanuatu and New Caledonia.

Lapita encompasses one of the most important homogeneous voyaging and colonizing events in Earth's human history. The nearly 3000-year-old Lapita ware found from the Bismarcks to Samoa attests to the early Lapita people's extraordinary seafaring skills. Such skills of course heralded the possibility of more distant colonies: the settlement of Micronesia and Polynesia (see Chapter 2). No direct genetic link exists between Micronesians and Polynesians. That is, Micronesia was not settled from Polynesia, nor Polynesia from Micronesia. All Micronesians, though extremely diverse, also originated in an Austronesian (Island Southeast Asian) population; southern Micronesians display varying degrees of Melanesian admixture. However, even before the Lapita people started ranging southeastwards, related Austronesian speakers were migrating from islands southeast of the Philippines to colonize Palau (now Belau) in western Micronesia. It is revealing that these first Island Southeast Asian settlers of Micronesia were evidently employing a sailing technology remarkably similar to that of the related Lapita people.

ARCHAIC PACIFIC ISLANDS

Despite the fact that prehistoric Austronesians had come to populate most of Pacific Islands, statistically fewer than half of all Pacific Islanders speak Austronesian tongues today. This is largely because of New Guinea, whose 6.5 million people

chiefly speak Papuan languages. In comparison, populations of Remote Oceania have generally remained small, until the very recent European and American colonization of New Zealand and Hawai'i. Individual communities of archaic Pacific Islanders – little, isolated and with infrequent contact outside their respective region – differentiated rapidly into autonomous descent groups with characteristic traits. External influences and genetic replenishing occurred only with infrequent trading visits of distant neighbours who nearly always belonged to the same archipelago.

Along with Lapita ware these Pacific traders of 3000 years ago trucked in pottery-making materials, oven stones, chert, adzes...and the ever-prized obsidian. During the 'Lapita Millennium' – the era of principal Lapita activity that lasted from c. 1500 to 500 BC – obsidian remained one of the Pacific's most valuable trade items, used chiefly for fashioning cutting tools. The Talasea site on New Britain continued to be an important source for Pacific Islands obsidian, its stock traded in Vanuatu, New Caledonia, the Santa Cruz Islands and even in remote Fiji. Both Lapita ware and Talasea obsidian, above all, prove that interregional trading was indeed taking place, though far less frequently than inner-archipelagic trading.

The colonization of Archaic Pacific Islands did not occur as sporadic settlement events by disconnected 'exiles': it comprised regular human investments by connected entrepreneurs. Participants on both ends remained actively involved in maintaining exchange. Why did the Lapita Austronesians populate Remote Oceania? Austronesians had already been populating islands for well over two millennia. Colonizing remote islands was apparently their way of experiencing the world. They simply continued doing in the Pacific what they had been doing before they got there, until nearly every inhabitable Pacific island was reached and settled.

'Lapita-like' pottery was still being produced around AD 200. But already 700 years before this, Lapita ware was everywhere gradually being replaced by a different kind of pottery or by a similar plain style known as 'Lapitoid'. Lapita soon lost most

of its distinctive features. The unifying identity of its dynamic creators had weakened. Communities had started developing in different directions, creating their own island societies which required new forms of expression.

New Guinea displayed its own uniquenesses. Papuan society there had elaborated singular items relating to agriculture. Characteristic are the stone mortars and pestles already in use before 1000 BC which are limited to the Western Highlands, the island's northeast, the Bismarcks and the Solomons. Often assuming decorative forms such as stylized birds, the stone pestles were perhaps used to grind kernels and seeds. Such artefacts are indicative of the Papuans' continued development while the Lapita people were differentiating within Remote Oceania.

By around 2700 years ago, the expanding Pacific Islanders – and their hybrid progeny – of both Near and Remote Oceania were harvesting taro, yam, sugarcane, breadfruit, ti, coconuts and many other crops. To all Islanders ti, for example, was a very special plant with supernatural affinities, used for healing, garments, wrapping food, as well as for invoking or warding off magic and sorcery. Holy to Papuans and Austro-nesians alike, ti was indigenous to Island Southeast Asia. It was included in a variety of rituals performed to herald war or peace; it also marked boundaries, holy precincts and altars. When other foodstuffs failed, ti would become an important part of the diet. The specifically Papuan contribution to Pacific Islands alimentation comprised kava, breadfruit, certain species of banana, sugarcane and a variety of nuts. For protein, all Islanders kept pigs, dogs and fowl. Maritime resources – fish, eels, shellfish, seaweed, sea urchins and other things – assumed a principal dietary role for all coastal dwellers; such items could also be traded for the crops of inlanders. Deep-sea fishing supplied surpluses for coastal communities, allowing the leisure time which inland communities often lacked. It is assumed that a local specialization (such as a food crop) or resource (such as a special type of stone) would encourage more frequent exchange with immediately neighbouring

communities, promoting exogamy – marriage outside one’s tribe. Valuable commodities, like obsidian, would make long-distance voyages profitable, in terms of wealth and prestige for oneself and one’s community.

In New Guinea, the Bismarcks and the Solomons, the ‘first Islanders’ or Papuans were still living alongside the ‘newcomers’ or Austronesians much in the same way as they had done for well over a thousand years, with only infrequent union. In Remote Oceania, however, from Vanuatu to Samoa, Austronesians were on their own, creating wholly new identities:

Micronesians and Polynesians.

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