

# Oceanic Connections in Deep Time

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## *Author's note*

THIS PAPER WAS GIVEN as a keynote to the April 2008 AAAPS Conference, held at the ANU in Canberra. The presentation was itself a revision and expansion of a paper given at an earlier UNESCO Symposium held in the Seychelles in 2007 (Spriggs in press). To distinguish the two papers I have altered the title of this one from when it was given. The requirements of an orally-presented paper are quite different than those of an academic print publication. For one thing there are usually far more visual stimuli, in the form of photographs and other images that play off against the speaker's words in an oral presentation. A more conversational or informal tone is usually adopted by more experienced speakers, designed not least to prevent the audience from lulling off. Neither of these practices is entirely transferable to the written form, to do with copyright concerns and/or cost on the one hand and stylistic ones on the other. I apologise that lack of time to sort out the copyright issues has prevented me from including any of the illustrative material of the day, but the addition of fuller referencing in the version here at least allows the reader to track down many of the sources for the powerpoint slides that were used. Apart from the addition of conventional academic references I have not altered the content of the paper beyond stylistic changes. Where new references have since come to hand I have added footnotes to point out developments subsequent to the paper's original delivery.

## TRADITIONAL GEOGRAPHIC KNOWLEDGE IN THE PACIFIC

THE SETTLEMENT OF THE ISLANDS OF THE VAST PACIFIC OCEAN, stretching some 10,000 km from east to west, was the greatest sea migration ever undertaken. The Pacific was in fact the first of the World's great oceans to be explored. The story of this migration could provide a powerful "origin myth" to unite the people of the many nations situated there, but it is a story as yet better known outside the region than it is within.

The English explorer Lieutenant James Cook and other members of his crew were impressed during a sojourn on Tahiti in 1769 by the wide knowledge held by the priest-navigator Tupaia of other islands and island groups of the eastern part of the Pacific Ocean (Cook [Beaglehole] 1968:117). His knowledge was distilled (and inevitably filtered) into a notional chart of the Pacific with the islands marked on it (Lewthwaite 1970). Tupaia could list the names of 130 islands and 74 of these were presented on the chart, based on their

direction from Rai'atea in the Society Islands and a notional distance based on how many days sail away they were located.

Many of the islands can be identified, but the pronunciation of the names of others, and thus the spellings that have come down to us, were garbled by the European recorders. Names of some islands were archaic, suggesting they had been passed down for many generations by oral tradition rather than being places with which Tahitians were still in contact; or was it rather that Tupaia was giving ritual names for these islands? The names of others remain obscure, and have led to controversial or contested interpretations—such as the idea that two names refer to New Zealand, settled some 500 or so years earlier from the Tahitian region (see discussion in Denning 1962, Lewthwaite 1970, and references therein).<sup>1</sup>

Tupaia had himself visited some twelve of the islands, eight in the Society Group, two in the Austral Islands to the south, and two whose identification is uncertain. Various authors have suggested he travelled to places in Samoa or Tonga, or less likely in the Cook Islands. As the geographer Oskar Spate (1988:26) noted, Tupaia's chart covered some 4,700 km, some 43 degrees of longitude between the Marquesas and Rotuma, to the northwest of Fiji. Given the weather systems of this part of the Pacific, the latitudinal range was nowhere near as great, some fifteen degrees or 1650 km. It extended south, possibly as far as Mangareva and Pitcairn but more likely only as far as the Austral Islands, and to the north to the Marquesas.

David Lewis (1978:68) wrote: "...every major island group in Eastern and Western Polynesia and Fiji, except Hawai'i, New Zealand and Easter Island is indicated. The Tahitians' geographical sphere, which spanned 2,600 miles, the width of the Atlantic or more than the width of the United States, far exceeded their then voyaging range".

Some centuries before, Hawaiian oral traditions record culture-changing visits by chiefs from Tahiti, perhaps in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, but these had long ceased by the 18<sup>th</sup> century and appear to have been forgotten in Tahiti (Cachola-Abad 1993). It seems that, after a period of inter-island voyaging following initial colonisation of the region, regular voyaging between distant archipelagos had largely ceased by the time of European contact in eastern Polynesia; but it continued (as we shall see) in western Polynesia and other parts of the Western Pacific. I suspect it actually continued in Eastern Polynesia too, to a greater extent than is often realised.

Polynesians of course soon took to voyaging to distant lands again (if they had ever in fact stopped). Tupaia went with Cook to New Zealand, where he was able immediately to understand Maori and to translate between that language and English, then on to Australia. Sadly he died en route to England in what is now Jakarta in Indonesia. Even when he reached there, he was unerring in his accuracy in being able to point back in the direction where Raiatea lay. Other Polynesians soon voyaged further. As well as the celebrated Omai, a Tahitian who cut a fine figure in London in 1774–1777 and then returned home, we should not forget those two Tahitian adventurers who took part in European local disputes a few decades later: they are recorded as fighting in 1815 as British soldiers at the Battle of

Waterloo (Tagart 1832:284–292, cited in Lewis 1972:298).

Cook also visited Tonga and various people there between them gave him (or rather William Anderson) the names of 153 islands "in that neighbourhood" (Cook and King 1784:367–368; cf. Geraghty 1994). Ninety-five of them not seen by Cook were listed in the 1784 publication of Cook's Voyages, which also notes that 61 further names could be found on charts of the relevant voyage of 1777 (ibid. 367). The discrepancy is because three names—and I have checked—are in fact duplicated on the charts and list.<sup>2</sup> The full listing of 153 includes the islands of the Tongan chain, some islands in the Samoan and Fijian archipelagos, Wallis and Futuna, Rotuma, two or three islands in Kiribati and Vaitupu in Tuvalu, the latter some 1600 km to the north-northwest of Tonga (as quoted by Denning 1962:110).

It is sometimes considered that this list is evidence that Tahiti was not known to the Tongans, as it was not mentioned therein. But Cook makes it clear that these 153 islands were those claimed by the *matapule* Kepa as being under Tongan control or influence, not the sum total of their geographical knowledge (Cook [Beaglehole] 1967:100). The point to note though is that there is certainly considerable overlap in geographical knowledge between these two traditions of east and west Polynesia—the Tahitian and the Tongan—in the area of Tonga itself, the Fijian Islands possibly, and more certainly Rotuma, with Tutuila, Upolu and Savai'i in Samoa, and possibly Wallis or (East) Uvea.

Our knowledge of interactions between the islands of the Pacific can now be extended back considerably beyond the memory of oral traditions recorded in the early years of European contact. The evidence is predominantly archaeological, backed up by linguistic and genetic data (see Kirch 2000 for a general overview of Pacific archaeology).

## MELANESIA, POLYNESIA AND MICRONESIA: A COLONIAL TYPOLOGY

Before we examine the archaeological evidence for past interactions between Pacific Island groups we need to address the utility of the European division of Pacific peoples into Melanesians, Polynesians and Micronesians. This is an early 19<sup>th</sup> century division based on a coming-together of geography and racial typology. Dumont D'Urville is credited with at least the definitive setting forth of the three-fold division of the Pacific in an 1831 lecture published in French the following year, even if he did not invent the individual terms used (Tcherkézoff 2003). Despite the enduring influence of D'Urville's essay it was first published in English only in 2003 (Dumont D'Urville 2003). As noted by Geoff Clark (2003a:161), the tripartite division used by D'Urville of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia contains "racist, essentialist and socio-evolutionary elements which are now submerged and seldom obvious due to the entrenchment of the terms resulting from their frequent use over 170 years". Submerged perhaps, but still influential on the political alliances and divisions both between and even within Pacific Island nations; and still very much informing the academic understanding of the region's history, despite recent attempts at critique (see Clark 2003b,

D'Arcy 2003, and references therein). We can use these today as geographical shorthand, but (with the partial exception of Polynesia) they are in reality neither biological nor cultural divisions.

## AN ANCIENT HISTORY

The first true Pacific Islands to be reached by human beings were probably New Britain and New Ireland, just to the east of New Guinea (Spriggs 1997: Ch. 2). This was because 40–50,000 years ago New Guinea was part of the continent of Sahul and wasn't an island at all. It was joined to Australia, the Aru Islands in Eastern Indonesia and Tasmania. The Torres Strait between Australia and New Guinea did not exist at that time, and in fact the ancient land connection of New Guinea to Australia was only severed about 8000 years ago. While today the indigenous people of New Guinea (in the Indonesian provinces of Papua and in the independent nation of Papua New Guinea) and the Australian Aboriginals have little obvious cultural connection, they were once a single people (White and O'Connell 1982). Environments and boundaries change over time.

The colonising move of early modern humans ultimately from Africa (as we all are), through South and Southeast Asia and onto the continent of Sahul and beyond to the Pacific Islands of the time, soon reached as far as the end of the main Solomon Islands chain; probably not long after 40,000 years ago although our earliest dates for the Solomons at present only go back about 29,000 years (Wickler and Spriggs 1988). Island-hopping along the entire route between intervisible islands was possible at that time. The Solomon Islands too were different in appearance than they are today, many of them joined in a very long island called by specialists in the time period "Greater Bougainville" after what is today the largest remnant of this enormous single island (Spriggs 1997:25). Others of the Solomons chain were never joined to this landmass but all the main islands would have been intervisible.

Even during these "Ice Age" or Pleistocene times people continued to travel between islands after they had first reached there. Obsidian, a black glass-like stone used for knives, was exchanged from New Britain to New Ireland 20,000 years ago, and at least by 6000 years ago as far south as Nissan, a raised atoll in sight of the main Solomons chain (Spriggs 1997: Ch. 3).

As I noted, all of these islands were potentially visible from others along the route out from Southeast Asia. But there is one exception, the crossing to Manus or the Admiralty group; either from New Ireland, New Britain or what was then the northern coast of Sahul (today's island of New Guinea). Manus was reached over 26,000 years ago but it was not a one-off event as we have evidence of the introduction of animals—bandicoots and possums—from what is now New Guinea many thousands of years later. The significance is that Manus is never visible from anywhere else, it is our first evidence in the World of a "blind crossing". When people set off on that 200–230 km journey they could not see where they were heading to, and for about 60–90 km in the middle of the journey they could no longer see

where they had come from and the islands of Manus had not yet come into view (Spriggs 1997:29). To my mind, that Ice-Age episode of human voyaging is of greater significance than humans landing on the Moon. We have always been able to see the Moon, but these early voyagers were truly alone for that 60–90 km or so.

Such ancient chains of interconnections are traced by archaeologists using artefacts, animal bones and other evidence. The most recent interconnections are remembered too in oral traditions.

Although the Manus group was found more than 26,000 years ago, the next blind crossings in the Pacific were not made until just over 3000 years ago by bearers of the Lapita culture, named after an archaeological site in New Caledonia. The bearers of this culture colonised across some 4,500 kilometres of the Pacific Ocean within only some 8–10 generations (Kirch 1997) at the most—it is now looking more like 4 or 5 to get from the Bismarcks to Tonga.

#### THE LAPITA CULTURE

Participants in the Lapita culture were the first to venture beyond the end of the main Solomons chain, their advantage being an agricultural lifestyle and more advanced boat technology than had existed before. They discovered the Southeast Solomons, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. The Lapita colonisers were the first to break out of what specialists call "Near Oceania" (what is now the island of New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago and the main Solomons) and which had been settled tens of thousands of years ago by the first Pacific islanders. The rest of the Pacific, very largely pioneered for settlement by the Lapita people and their descendants is often called "Remote Oceania" (Green 1991) to mark the area as one only reached by humans during the last 3000 years.

Beyond that fact, Near and Remote Oceania actually have little meaning as geographical terms. It seems misplaced to see them as a more politically correct version of the Melanesia-Polynesia division as some do. Their salience is restricted to a particular time up to and around 3000 years ago.

The Lapita "homeland" is often described as being in the Bismarck Archipelago, centred on New Britain, New Ireland and Manus, as this is where all of its cultural elements came together and the earliest sites are found. But its roots are a mixture of "Near Oceanic" cultural patterns and those that came in with Neolithic voyagers from Island Southeast Asia, speaking Austronesian languages derived from Taiwan, and presumably originally from what is now southern China (Green 2000).

All indigenous groups in Remote Oceania speak Austronesian languages, as do many communities along the route from Taiwan (Pawley 2004). The other major language groups are those who speak Non-Austronesian or Papuan languages, descended no doubt in a

direct line from the languages of those first human settlers of New Guinea, the Bismarcks and Solomons. As direct descendants of a very ancient migration or set of migrations their languages have diverged so that links between many of them can no longer be traced by linguistic studies. It is these two processes: long-lived cultural traditions in place and more recent movements of people spreading out across the vast Pacific Ocean that make this region the most linguistically diverse in the world, with about a quarter of the world's individual languages spoken there.

All Polynesians, many Micronesians, the inhabitants of Fiji, Vanuatu and New Caledonia, and many of the coastal peoples of Near Oceania all descend linguistically and (to varying extents) culturally from the Lapita people of 3000 years ago. I say "many" Micronesians, because the indigenous inhabitants of Palau and the Mariana Islands in western Micronesia, although also speaking Austronesian languages, derive from Island Southeast Asia *directly* at about the same time period as other Neolithic Southeast Asians were venturing along the north coast of New Guinea to form part of the Lapita foundational culture in the Bismarck Archipelago (Craib 1999; Rainbird 2004). In New Guinea, the Bismarcks and Solomons there has been a further 3000 years of mixing of Austronesian and Papuan cultures—mainly

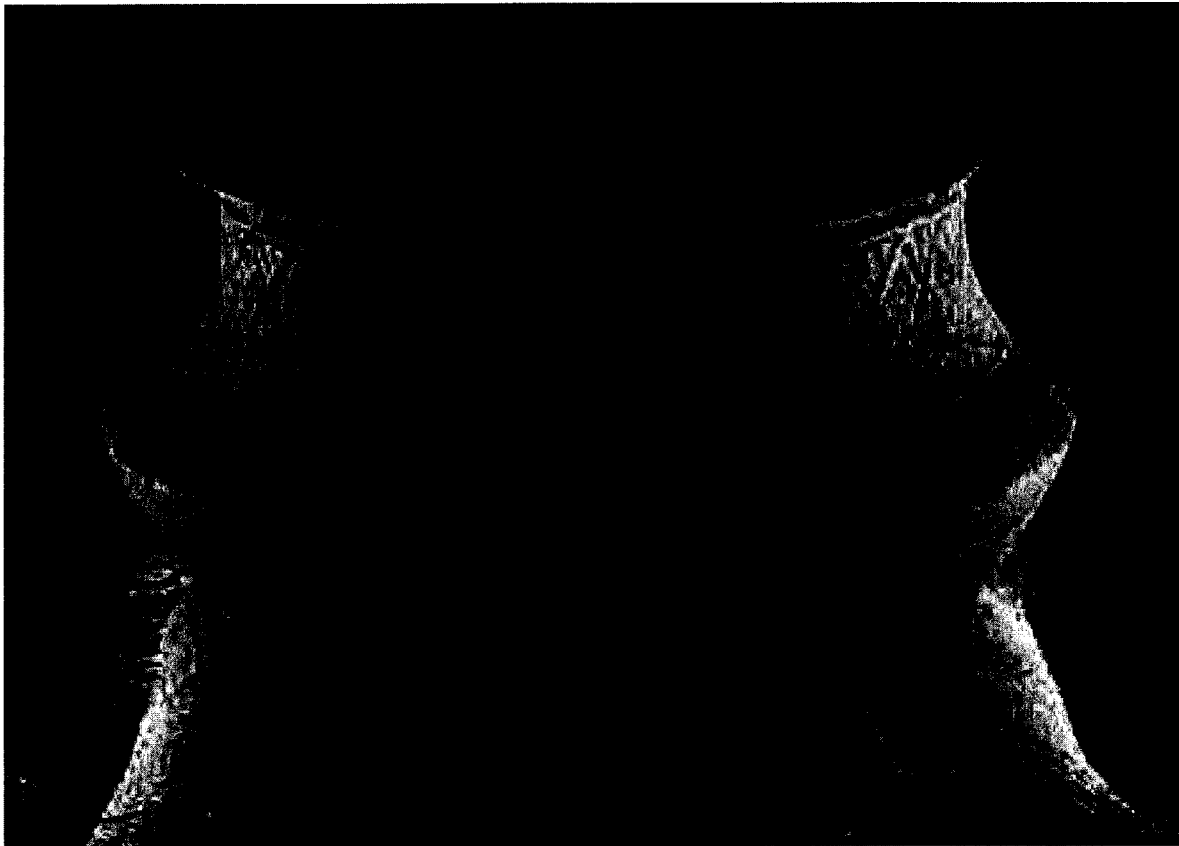


Photo 1. Lapita pottery from Teouma, Efate Island, Vanuatu. Photograph © Stephen Alvarez / National Geographic Society.

in the coastal areas, but also extending up major river systems in New Guinea such as the Markham Valley into the fringes of the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea. This has helped produce the cultural diversity seen today.

In the rest of the Pacific all of the indigenous populations derive from the initial mixing of Papuan and Austronesian cultures that occurred around 3000 years ago in the Lapita "homeland" and areas further west along the north coast of New Guinea. There is thus very much a shared history of *all* Pacific Islanders that is not always appreciated.

Much of the painted rock art of the New Guinea Highlands for instance derives from Austronesian art styles that came into the area within the last 3000 years. Pigs, so important in the Highlands, are again almost certainly an Austronesian introduction.

On the other hand many of the varieties of the crops enjoyed today by people all over the Pacific Islands, and which have now been exported to the rest of the world, were first domesticated by the Papuan speakers of the New Guinea area: taros, yams and sugarcane (Lebot 1999). All of these are thought to have been first cultivated in the New Guinea area; and some of the earliest physical evidence for agriculture anywhere in the world comes from the site of Kuk in the New Guinea Highlands at just over 10,000 years ago (Denham et al. 2004).

To reiterate: all Pacific Island cultures derive from two great population streams (and certainly many smaller undocumented movements in between); from that of the Papuan speakers some 40–50,000 years ago *and* from the spread into the area from Southeast Asia some 3400–3300 years ago of Austronesian speakers. In between, events such as the flooding of the Sunda and Sahul shelves would have led to further population movements.

Earlier I mentioned the exchange of the volcanic glass obsidian as showing that people in New Britain were in contact with people some hundreds of kilometres away in New Ireland some 20,000 years ago. Obsidian was equally valued by the Lapita people who extended the distribution of New Britain and Manus obsidian as far south and east as Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji, and as far west back into Island Southeast Asia as modern day Sabah in Malaysian Borneo. This is among the longest-distance exchange of a commodity in Neolithic societies anywhere in the world (Bellwood and Koon 1989). And as far as Central Vanuatu at least we are not just talking of the initial settlers carrying this valued stone with them on their first voyage to discover new lands, but of a continuing exchange network bringing obsidian from the Bismarcks over a period of a few generations at least (Bedford et al. 2006).

The Lapita people were the Pacific's first pottery makers and their distinctively decorated pot designs were spread from New Guinea out as far as Tonga and Samoa; They, along with designs on more perishable media such as tattoos, barkcloth etc., form the basis for many of the traditional art styles found in the Pacific today. I spoke of pot designs moving rather than pots and one of the most remarkable aspects of the Lapita culture was that the vast

majority of pottery that has been found was *not* moved from island to island, but was made on the island where it is found (Dickinson 2006). The idea of the designs and what they meant moved from island to island, but in the majority of cases the pots did not.

There are exceptions, which again give us further hints of the long voyages of the Lapita people: some pottery in Tonga is made from clay from the same source as pottery in the Reefs-Santa Cruz Islands of the Southeast Solomons. We don't yet know where the source is but it may well be somewhere in northern Vanuatu. Some pottery from Central Vanuatu comes from the same source as pottery from the Reef Islands in the Southeast Solomons, but that source is thought to be either in the main Solomon Islands or in the Bismarck Archipelago. Some Lapita pots manufactured in New Caledonia have been found in south, central and northern Vanuatu. There are also connections between Fiji and Tonga shown by individual Lapita pots that were exchanged between these island groups (Dickinson 2006, and pers. comm.).

We also have the evidence of the people themselves. In 2004 staff of the Vanuatu National Museum located what is to date the earliest cemetery site in the Pacific, dating from about 3100–3000 years ago and belonging to the first few generations of Lapita settlers of Vanuatu. This is the site of Teouma, just outside of Port Vila, the capital of Vanuatu (Bedford et al. 2006, in press). Analysis of Strontium isotopes and trace elements in the bones of this population have shown that at least 4 of the 18 skeletons tested so far had spent their childhood somewhere else and were first generation migrants to Vanuatu (Bentley et al. 2007).

The implications of this degree of mobility are profound: we need to adjust our ideas about how language sub-groups developed in the Pacific for instance. I now believe that Proto-Oceanic Austronesian was not spoken only in the Bismarck Archipelago or perhaps as a dialect chain down through parts of the Solomons, but was the universal language for Lapita communities from the Bismarcks to Tonga and Samoa. Linguistic diversification from Proto-Oceanic thus developed in place within each island group rather than as a step-by-step process as usually conceived by linguists (Spriggs 2007). We must also think of the possibility not just of a single homogeneous Lapita culture—that is obvious despite what is sometimes written by archaeologists with poorly-preserved sites—but of a single early Lapita society again from the Bismarcks to Samoa. Within the early Lapita sphere you might have met the same man or woman one year in Tonga, and the next on New Britain or in Vanuatu.

It would seem that about 3000 years ago people from the New Guinea Islands and out as far as Tonga and Samoa were more interconnected than at any time until the age of mass transportation began some two centuries ago. People were moving between islands, pots were moving, obsidian was being exchanged, and art styles that developed in one area could spread across many thousands of kilometres. The Lapita culture is the cultural heritage of almost all Pacific Islanders today, and could provide a powerful message of shared values and connections.



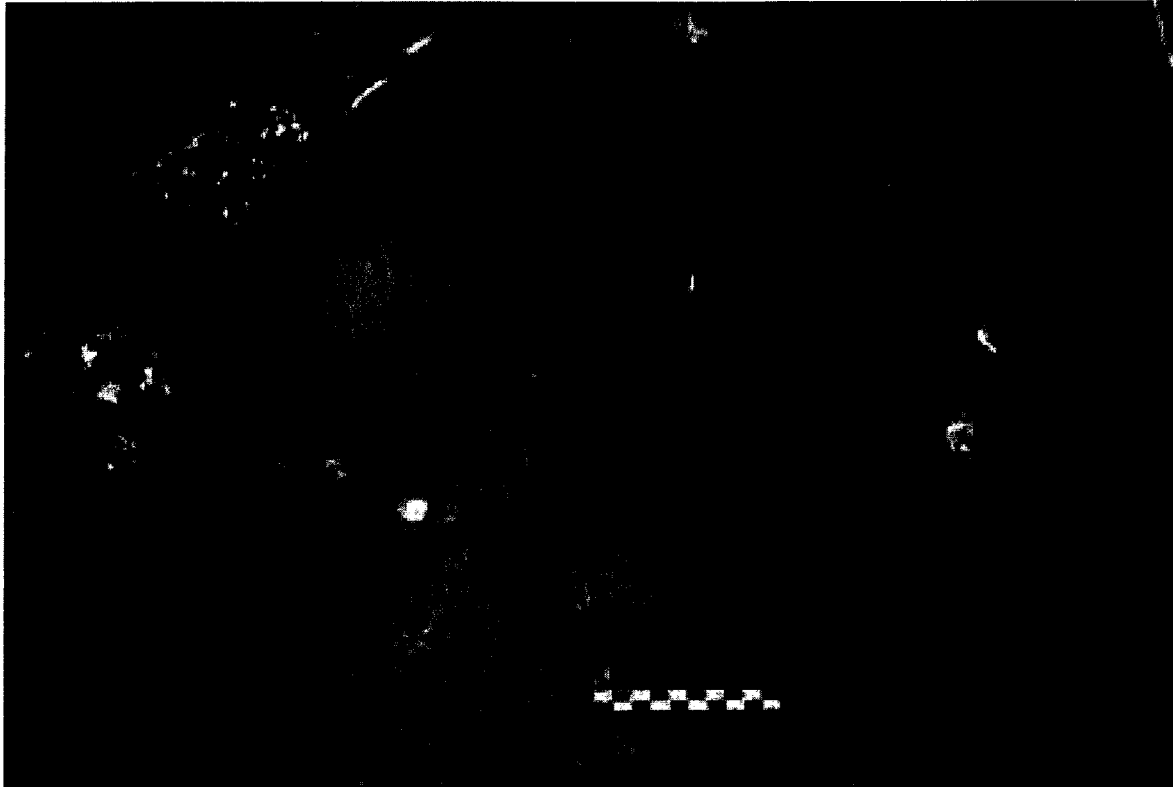


Photo 2. Flat-bottomed Lapita pot in situ, Teouma. Photograph © Matthew Spriggs.

As mentioned earlier, Palau and the Marianas Islands were settled from Island Southeast Asia by Neolithic cultures broadly similar to the Lapita culture at about the same time or slightly earlier than the Lapita spread. Yap, on linguistic grounds (Ross 1996) and from some evidence of human environmental impacts about 3000 years ago (Dodson and Intoh 1999), would appear to have been settled as part of the Lapita phenomenon, and from the Bismarck Archipelago. As yet we don't have any sites that early but I predict they will one day be found. Most of the rest of Micronesia, where "Nuclear Micronesian" languages are spoken today, appears to have been settled in the immediately post-Lapita period by Lapita descendants from somewhere in the region between Manus and central Vanuatu, say some time between 2800 and 2300 years ago for high islands such as Pohnpei, Chuuk and Kosrae (Rainbird 2004). But for the atoll societies of Micronesia, the picture is slightly different. They didn't yet exist at that time and appear to have only become habitable within the last 2000 years at the most. Even in the scale of recent time we have to contend with very different configurations of land and sea in parts of the Pacific.

Some time after 2000 years ago there was contact between the Polynesians of Tuvalu and the Micronesians of Kiribati, and some new sailing technologies and fishhook types were introduced into Polynesia. Micronesia also appears as an entry point to the Pacific from Southeast Asia over this same time period, with cultural items such as the backstrap

weaving loom and kite fishing spreading into Micronesia and then further out into the Pacific (Intoh 1999). Contact was not all one-way: the narcotic drug kava was introduced to Kosrae and Pohnpei from a Polynesian source (Crowley 1994) and there are two Polynesian speaking islands, Kapingamarangi and Nukuoro in the southern fringes of Micronesia. Geraghty (1994) has noted a large number of Polynesian, generally Samoan, loanwords in Kiribati, particularly relating to sailing and fishing terminology. He also lists Polynesian borrowings into the language of Pohnpei, including some interesting Tongan loans in Pohnpei "high language". Pohnpei is considerably farther from Polynesia than Kiribati.

Putting all together, this gives us origins for the people of the Micronesian area from at least five separate migrations over a period from about 3500 to 500 years ago from five distinct areas of Island Southeast Asia, Melanesia and Polynesia, along with evidence of post-colonisation interaction with Polynesia and other areas. Culturally, it might be argued that—like Melanesia—Micronesia does not exist; although most of it (but not all) shares a recent history of Japanese and American colonial administration that has tended to impose a superficial degree of unity. That said, there *is* archaeological and oral tradition evidence showing widespread interaction between island groups across Micronesia since its initial settlement (Lewis 1972:33).

#### THE FINAL CHAPTER: THE SETTLEMENT OF EASTERN POLYNESIA

Western Polynesia had been settled by the Lapita people, but there was then a pause of over a thousand years before people moved further out beyond Tonga, Samoa and Wallis and Futuna to settle Eastern Polynesia. During that pause the distinctive features of the Polynesian language sub-group developed (Pawley 1996). Starting perhaps 1500 years ago there was another explosive movement of people who had settled all of Eastern Polynesia, except New Zealand within about 500 years, the most amazing feat of trans-oceanic settlement, reaching Hawai'i to the northeast and Easter Island to the southeast. They must also have reached South America as they brought back with them the sweet potato, found as 1000-year old charred remains in a site in the Cook Islands and widespread in Eastern Polynesia at European contact (Kirch 2000). In exchange they may have given the South Americans the chicken, recently claimed as being present in Chile in immediately pre-Columbian times and of a Polynesian type (Storey et al. 2007; but see Gongora et al. 2008 for a contrary interpretation).

Some 8–700 years ago, around 1200–1300AD the final chapter of Pacific settlement was written when Eastern Polynesians headed out from the Cook Islands area down to the southwest to reach the third apex of the "Polynesian triangle", New Zealand (Hogg et al. 2003) and its satellite islands including the Chatham Islands. They also reached the Sub-Antarctic islands such as the Auckland Islands and perhaps even Campbell Island way to the south at 50 degrees latitude (for evidence of Polynesian visitors to these latter islands see Anderson and O'Regan 2000). Not surprisingly there isn't any evidence that they stayed down there very long!

These descendants of the Lapita voyagers had now visited almost every island in the Pacific Ocean and stayed to settle permanently on most of them. The settlement of Eastern Polynesia occurred recently enough—within the last 1200–700 years—such that oral traditions are still recounted relating to the initial settlement of many island groups such as Hawai'i, Easter Island and New Zealand, and some of the heroic navigators involved are named. I would note here that it seems necessary once again to revisit the Maori Fleet stories and other stories of the colonisation of Aotearoa. 1960s–70s revisionist history rejected them as telling us anything about the settlement of New Zealand, not least because it seemed that the islands had been settled much earlier, 800AD or even earlier than that (Simmons 1976). It wasn't so, therefore we need to look again with new eyes at this material.

Some of those oral traditions also relate to subsequent long-distance interactions between island groups in the Polynesian region and beyond. Tupaia's map shows us that voyaging continued between islands sometimes long after they were first settled, and were ongoing, or of relatively recent memory, even in the 1760s–70s.

Low-grade volcanic glass or obsidian does occur in Polynesia but was not exchanged as widely as that from the Bismarck Archipelago, and was usually only moved—if at all—between islands of the same archipelago, as in Hawai'i. By the time Eastern Polynesia was settled, pottery making had either died out or was in decline in Western Polynesia. Apart from a few pieces from the Cook Islands and (more surprisingly) the Marquesas, pottery did not find its way out to these more scattered and remote archipelagos (Dickinson 2006).

So our two main markers of ancient interaction, pottery and obsidian, are either not present or not informative for central and eastern Polynesia. But we do have some "hard evidence" in the form of basaltic stone adzes that *were* exchanged between archipelagos quite extensively. This included transport of adzes from Tutuila in the Samoan Islands of Western Polynesia to Mangaia in the Cook Islands in Eastern Polynesia, some 1600 km away (Weisler and Kirch 1996). Cultural differences between West and East Polynesia are often explained as being caused by isolation after initial settlement of the East, but the adze evidence shows that interaction probably continued throughout the Pre-Contact period. There are also Society Islands adzes in Cook Islands sites, showing continuing links too to the east (Allen and Johnson 1997). Let us not forget that James Cook encountered Tahitian drift voyagers during his own visit to Atiu in the Cooks in 1777 (Cook [Beaglehole] 1967:86).

Tutuila adzes have also been found in dated contexts in Fiji, Tokelau, Tonga, and in undated ones in Tuvalu and on Taumako in the Southeast Solomons (Weisler 1998).

But even more spectacular are the results of a recent adze sourcing study by Collerson and Weisler (2007). They analysed 19 stone adzes collected by Kenneth Emory in the Tuamotu archipelago between 1929–1934—never have I seen a better justification for work on old museum collections. Being coral atolls the Tuamotus had no suitable adze stone themselves so any adzes found there would have had to be imported from somewhere else. The 19

adzes between them came from Pitcairn way to the southeast, the Marquesas to the northeast, Rurutu in the Australs to the southwest, seven came from the Society Islands to the east, and one adze came from the island of Kaho'olawe in the Hawaiian chain, some 4040 km north of where it was found on Napuka atoll.



Photo 3. The author at the Teouma site in 2005. Photograph © Matthew Spriggs

As Collerson and Weisler note, near this last adze source is the western tip of Kaho'olawe Island, *Lae o Kealaikahiki*, "the headland of the way to Tahiti" long associated with traditional voyaging stories. Experimental voyages have suggested that the likely route from Hawai'i to Tahiti would have been via the Tuamotus (Finney 1994).

Weisler (1998) had earlier reported Marquesan-sourced adzes on Mo'orea in the Society Islands—about 1400 kms away to the southwest—and on Mangareva way to the south by some 1750 kms, and dated in the 1200s to 1400s AD period; so again demonstrating post-colonisation interaction.

I have mentioned several times that environments have changed radically during the time humans have been in the Pacific and here we have another example: the Tuamotu archipelago of coral islands did not rise above sea level to become habitable until about 1200AD, at least 200 years after initial habitation of the Hawai'i, the Societies and other nearby island groups, so all adzes found there relate to post-colonisation interaction between archipelagos. As Pitcairn was abandoned by its Polynesian settlers soon after about

1450AD the adze must date to before that time (Collerson and Weisler 2007).

## POLYNESIA, MICRONESIA AND MELANESIA REVISITED

It is often thought that Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia form distinct cultural areas with perhaps distinct histories. It is often claimed that these terms demarcate separate "races". Indeed such views have become internalised to various degrees among Pacific Islanders. But the early history of the Pacific that is being revealed by archaeologists shows that these divisions are colonial creations and have no clear basis in ancient history.

It is true that there is a well-marked subgroup of Austronesian languages labelled "Polynesian" (Pawley 1996). All indigenous people in geographical Polynesia speak or spoke a Polynesian language. As a cultural term it means more than Micronesian or Melanesian. But this language subgroup has arisen within Polynesia *since* the Lapita period. Around 3000 years ago people in Tonga and Samoa would have understood the speech of Lapita-associated groups as far away as New Britain and New Ireland just to the east of New Guinea: they were all speakers of dialects of Proto-Oceanic. Polynesian languages derive from it through a language stage shared with the indigenous people of Fiji—who are usually identified as "Melanesian" in culture. Fijians and Polynesians share a similar cultural origin in the Lapita culture, as do many other "Melanesians" as well. The Melanesia-Polynesia division did not exist 3000 years ago.

While linguistically Fiji and Polynesia did diverge over the succeeding centuries, this was not because of absolute isolation between these areas. Fiji had a lot closer relationship throughout its history with Western Polynesia than it did with the rest of what we call Melanesia. The 800 km or so gap between Vanuatu and Fiji was very rarely crossed from Lapita times until European contact on current archaeological evidence, but a complex exchange network linked Tonga, Samoa and Fiji during much of the period (Weisler 1997).

Geographical Melanesia is extremely diverse linguistically and culturally. It is hard to think of anything that unites it as a culture area. In the Remote Oceanic parts—the Southeast Solomons, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and Fiji—the foundation culture is Lapita and languages again derive from Proto-Oceanic Austronesian. But in Near Oceania, settled for many tens of thousands of years prior to the Lapita culture, we find both Austronesian and Papuan languages, the greatest genetic diversity among humans outside of Africa, and a bewildering variety of distinct cultures and cultural expressions.

Something of a new Melanesian identity has been created during and after the period of colonial domination of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. There are elements of shared colonial histories and shared histories of sometimes-forced indentured labour on various Pacific islands and in Queensland, Australia, where Islanders worked on both plantations and farms. People in Melanesia often identify each other with the term "*wantok*", literally 'people of one language'. New Guinea Tok Pisin, Solomon Islands Pidgin and Vanuatu Bislama are

indeed all closely-related forms of plantation-era Pidgin English and form a *lingua franca* across much of the region—but by no means all. In New Caledonia the common language is French, in (West) Papua it is in large part Bahasa Indonesia, and in Fiji the languages of intercultural communication are Standard Fijian and English. Many people in the region of PNG around the capital Port Moresby use another pidginised language, Motu, derived from a local Austronesian language.

Of the three named divisions in the Pacific, Micronesia or “small islands”, is least commented on. The area is not as culturally diverse as Melanesia and not as seemingly homogeneous as Polynesia (see Rainbird 2004). It was all settled between about 3500 and 2000 years ago, but not from one single place.

Some of the traditional interactions within Polynesia have been revived by the building (usually using modern materials) and sailing of large voyaging canoes such as the *Hokule'a*. These approximate traditional canoes in appearance to various degrees but their value is not as true representatives of ancient canoes. It is in culturally re-uniting parts of Polynesia long-separated such as Easter Island and Tahiti and other central-eastern Polynesian islands, Hawai'i and Tahiti, and the Cook Islands and New Zealand (Finney 1994, 1997). This cultural revival has not led, however, to an appreciation of that earlier Lapita culture connection that unites Island Melanesia and Western Polynesia.

To my mind that is a pity, merely reinforcing those old 19<sup>th</sup> century prejudices. For much of the Pacific Lapita is the foundation culture, and the languages, arts and many aspects of traditional culture and social organisation derive directly from Lapita, with its proximate “homeland” in the Bismarck Archipelago off the eastern end of New Guinea. As we have seen, all Polynesians and Island Melanesian cultures in Remote Oceania derive directly from Lapita, as do many in the Near Oceanic parts of Island Melanesia and most peoples and cultures in Micronesia with the exception of Palau and the Marianas. These latter countries trace back their cultural ancestry to Island Southeast Asian Neolithic cultures not much different than their eastern extension as Lapita, and part of the same general migration stream out of Taiwan.

This viewpoint might be seen to exclude New Guinea and the original inhabitants of the Bismarck Archipelago and the Solomons: but not really. Lapita itself was to some extent a hybrid of Island Southeast Asian and the earlier cultures of Continental and Island Melanesia. Many coastal populations of New Guinea that speak Austronesian languages today can also be seen to derive culturally from Lapita roots quite directly—I am talking of populations along both the north and south coasts of what is today Papua New Guinea. Lapita technologies such as pottery making spread beyond Austronesian-speaking groups into areas such as the Sepik River, and Lapita or Island Southeast Asian Neolithic art styles spread up into the interior of New Guinea into the New Guinea Highlands.

As I noted earlier, many of the crops and some cultural practices seen in Lapita such as the use of the ground or earth oven for cooking, and obsidian exploitation and exchange

go back pre-Lapita in the New Guinea region (Spriggs 1996). Lapita is thus not exclusively Southeast Asian in origin. It owes a lot to Near Oceania.

Some progress has been made in re-uniting the peoples of the ancient Lapita realm stretching from New Guinea to Tonga, Samoa, Uvea and Futuna and this is encouraging. The site of Lapita in New Caledonia gave its name to the Lapita culture. A moving ceremony was held there in 2002 as part of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the excavation of the eponymous Lapita site by Gifford and Shutler (Sand 2003). The traditional Kanak tribal owners of the Lapita site area welcomed onto their land representatives from all the areas where the Lapita culture has been found. Gifts were exchanged and hopefully some of that ancient unity was re-established. Also represented at the ceremony, by Kanak archaeologist Jacques Bole, was the new Pacific tribe of archaeologists. This new tribe can hopefully spearhead many further episodes of rediscovery and reconnection.

The participation at the ceremony of Western Polynesian representatives was a very good sign, given the colonial history of some antagonism by Polynesians to the idea of any shared ancestry with the peoples of the Melanesian region. The 1930s map of the New Zealand Maori scholar Peter Buck or Te Rangi Hiroa of supposed Polynesian migrations illustrated this antagonism (Buck 1938). It studiously avoided marking a route out of Asia for the Polynesians that included any Melanesian islands except Fiji. Buck, like many Polynesians of his generation, had clearly internalised D'Urville's ideas of racial hierarchy. Thus it was particularly heartening that as well as Western Polynesians in attendance at the Lapita site there was an eastern Polynesian representative in the person of a Maori woman potter from New Zealand, Colleen Waata Urlich.

Colleen has been inspired by Lapita pottery designs and forms to create beautiful modern pots whose production is rooted in a Maori cosmogony that recognises and is legitimised by ancient uses of clay in New Zealand (Urlich 2003). She notes that knowledge of the ancient links between contemporary Maori workers in clay and Lapita ceramicists provides "a sense of history, of continuity and an ancient *whakapapa* or genealogy, for the contemporary Maori clay movement" (2003:391).

## CONCLUSION

Wider knowledge of an ancient shared history between the peoples of the Pacific Islands can only be to the good. It helps, as the Tongan scholar Epele Hau'ofa also tried to do in his writings (see for instance Hau'ofa 1993), to redirect the frame of our experience away from just seeing "small islands in a big sea" to seeing the Pacific Ocean as a "sea of islands". This shifts the cultural focus from smallness and isolation to wider visions of co-operation and interaction. It also helps break down the lingering insidiousness of views of racial hierarchy still held by outsiders and internalised by some Pacific Islanders themselves, to the detriment of all. 🌀

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### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> Salmond (2003: 110, 459 fn 7) seems to support Beaglehole's suggestion that Tupaia knew of New Zealand (Cook [Beaglehole] 1968:294fn). But she corrects this impression in a later publication (Salmond 2008: 34) where she notes that the supporting evidence for his interpretation of 'Pooromatheha' as New Zealand postdates the Tahitian Hitihiti's journey to New Zealand with Cook's second voyage. Salmond's 2008 publication provides the most up-to-date list of identifications of the islands mentioned by Tupaia and other early Tahitian sources (2008: Appendix 1): Pooromatheha remains unidentified in her list. Among other sources she draws upon the persuasive reanalysis of Tupaia's chart by Di Piazza and Pearthree (2007).

<sup>2</sup> The charts are published in David (1997:66–75). The three islands in question are: Konnevy (Onevi on the chart), Toofagga and Koooa (O-ooa on the chart). Geraghty's (1994) paper is also a useful discussion of Polynesian loans in southern Vanuatu and New Caledonian languages and in Micronesian languages: a further marker of comparatively recent but pre-European contact connections between these regions.

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### *Abstract*

Oral traditions attest to widespread interaction up to European contact, even if only on an occasional basis, across much of the Pacific. Archaeological research, particularly evidence for the movement of stone artefacts and pottery, and from isotopes in the teeth of the skeletons of the earliest generations of inhabitants on particular Pacific islands, extends back our knowledge of such long-distance interaction into the remote past of the earliest Pacific voyagers and settlers: more than 40,000 years ago for the islands closest to New Guinea, and at least 3000 years for the region between the Southeast Solomons and Tonga and Samoa. The new knowledge gained from such studies shows that the conventional European colonial division of the Pacific into Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia has neither biological nor cultural reality, with the partial exception of Polynesia. This paper argues that greater knowledge within the region of its ancient shared history helps to break down old racial stereotypes, seemingly internalised by some Pacific Islanders themselves as well as by outsiders. Such knowledge also helps to shift the focus away from isolation and smallness—a focus found in much of the historical and development literature on the Pacific—to wider visions of potential cooperation and interaction.