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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 (Map 1). 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 Asia, Europe and Africa. This is an important consideration with regard to the presence of humans in the Pacific as humans are also placental mammals. From this consideration one can deduce that any early humans in Sahul probably came from the Old World. However, many Aboriginal Australians and Papuans (the indigenous people of New Guinea and parts of the Solomon Islands) believe that 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 subcontinental Southeast Asia, was already home to the hominin species *Homo erectus* at the beginning of the Pleistocene epoch. 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 that had devised watercraft of bamboo-log rafts expressly for the purpose, deliberately crossed Wallace's Line, the 17 (now 24)-kilometre wide strait separating Sunda from the Indonesian island of Lombok. The line 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 of pygmy stegodons (bony-plated quadrupeds) there nearly one million years ago. On Flores Island they also left behind stone tools and dietary remains, which archaeologists discovered in 1997.

It is a contentious issue whether *Homo erectus* ever ventured further than Sunda's offshore islands. Only related or descendant hominin species appear to have progressed all the way to the continent of Sahul. Discovered on Flores in 2003 were the remains of what appeared to be diminutive humans, since named *Homo floresiensis*—otherwise known as 'hobbits'. Fossil hominins between 90,000 and 18,000 years old, the forms of the hobbits can be explained by one of three hypotheses: that their very small heads were the result of a congenital condition, that they were dwarf *Australopithecus* or early *Homo* or that island dwarfism led to their evolution from *Homo erectus* or even from *Homo sapiens*. At present, the second explanation finds greatest acceptance. The exact origin of the first hominins in Sahul itself is equally unclear.

Australian archaeologists announced in 2001 that an archaic human skeleton had been discovered at Lake Mungo – today a dry lake in southwestern New South Wales – and subsequently dated, using three different techniques, as being 60,000 years old; other studies, however, estimate that it is 40,000 years old. As the skeleton indicated a DNA sequencing different from that of Australia's Aborigines, it was suggested that it might represent a hominin species which had not survived evolution. Perhaps it had been a precursor of *Homo sapiens sapiens* or anatomically 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. Still, one should appreciate that the trend of the past half century has been one of ever-earlier dates for a hominin presence in Sahul. Findings on Rottneest Island, for example, 18 kilometres off Western Australia's coast near Fremantle, indicate a possible hominin occupation as early as 70,000 years ago. And Jinmium, a sandstone rock shelter in the Northern Territory, has revealed stone artefacts dated through thermoluminescence at over 100,000 years old; this remarkable finding, however, still awaits verification.

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 show. However, today's Aboriginal, Papuan and Melanesian populations as well as some scattered groups in Southeast Asia and the Philippines also share around 4–6 per cent of their genome with Denisova hominins, very recently recognized to be co-members of the *Homo* genus during the Palaeolithic era (Old Stone Age). The most parsimonious explanation for this is that the earliest migrating populations of *Homo sapiens sapiens* interbred in Southeast Asia with these other hominins before continuing east and south.

On Luzón, the largest and northernmost island of the Philippines, a French team recently unearthed a hominin foot bone at least 67,000 years old, the earliest date for a hominoid presence on any Southeast Asian island. Bone size suggests that either *Homo habilis* or *Homo floresiensis* were present there. This not only confirms the use of very early seafaring technology but also the sophisticated language (gestural and/or oral) which planning for such a voyage requires. These island occupations occurred during the so-called depletion-and-search migrations, whereby small tribes would migrate at the rate of around 50 kilometres per generation. From 100,000 to 50,000 years ago, modern humans ranged out to populate nearly all the Old World (and perhaps the Americas, too, as some scholars are now claiming). Migrating also southwards from Asia down into the Sunda 'Boot', they would have crossed the sea similarly in small flotillas of bamboo-log rafts or perhaps dug-out canoes. They made their first traverses towards north via Celebes and the Moluccas to occupy northern Sahul. Others 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 long as 100 kilometres in distance: that is, beyond visible land.

It appears that these migrants, who existed around 50,000 years ago, were 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 certainly no less than 50,000 years of uninterrupted human development on the island, Earth's second largest (after Greenland). 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 archaeological 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 a long-term shelter as early as 40,000 years ago. The Matenkupkum cave site on New Ireland in the Bismarck Archipelago, northeast of Papua New Guinea (eastern New Guinea), apparently accommodated a small community around 33,000 years ago. Five thousand years later, other Archaic Papuans called 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 – could 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 archaeologists 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 that evidently practised sophisticated techniques of exchange involving repeated sea-crossings.

New Guinea's earliest stone tools – hoe-like waisted blades and flaked axe-adzes – suggest that forest-edge clearance was taking place. It has been hypothesized that this Palaeolithic population was already practising a rudimentary form of horticulture, that is 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 Palaeolithic 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 archaeology – reveals features characteristic of the occupations of both Palaeolithic 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 became 'detached', one from the other, as waters rose. From a 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 the eastern islands, all known as Remote Oceania.) Well before 12,000 years ago, Archaic Papuan hunter-gatherers had, it is assumed, occupied the Highland,

Lowland and coastal regions of New Guinea, the Bismarcks and the Solomons. 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 exclusively comprise the erstwhile higher habitats and cave or rock shelters that, 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: perhaps over 500 Papuan and Austronesian tongues here and on neighbouring islands, possibly comprising Earth’s third largest language family (Trans-New Guinea). Though one would expect genetic connections with the languages of Australia, whose Aborigines once shared Sahul with their northern neighbours the Archaic Papuans, no reliable systematic correspondence 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 archaeological evidence, that Archaic Papuans had already settled in the southernmost islands of the Solomon Archipelago by the height of the last glaciation, around 18,000 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 in 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, and comprised '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 a minimum of 25 couples was needed with the 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 fishermen, then, who possessed intricate strategies that 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 worldwide 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 of 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. It appears that Archaic Papuans, at that 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.) However, no obsidian or animal was 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 kudzu plant (*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.

The fact that New Guinea Highlanders engaged in frequent exchanges 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 that are today submerged 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 that 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 axe-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 that time, too. Fruit and nut species were 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 that 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 above-mentioned developments were the result of contact with more culturally 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, Cambodia, Vietnam) in the west to the Solomon Islands in the east. With the arrival of Austronesian-speaking Island Southeast Asians around 4500 years ago, 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 hybrid features now so evident in Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji probably 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 origin and some of ultimately coastal Chinese origin. By then, the indigenous Papuans had already elaborated a rudimentary horticulture, based partly on such Southeast Asian plant species as taro and ti. However, they had never attained the agricultural and fishing skills that were suddenly witnessed in the archaeological record of Near Oceania once the Austronesians had arrived. More significantly, Austronesians were expert seafarers, capable of both deep-sea fishing (as opposed to shoreline fishing and angling) and 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 in Taiwan where, over centuries, their language(s) developed into Proto Austronesian. Having increased their numbers significantly in Taiwan, descendant Austronesian speakers sailed south to recolonize the nearby Philippines, then west and southwest to establish settlements in eastern Vietnam and Cambodia, 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, Papua and West Papua (Western New Guinea). Speakers of a protolanguage which, in time, would develop into 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 1000 or 20 per cent of all the world's languages (if one accepts there are currently around 5000). Spoken today by approximately 386 million people, the Austronesian language 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 made by incisions or stamped on their surface. For stamping, a small-toothed instrument was used, one very similar to the later Polynesian tattooing chisel.

In time Lapita came to define 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 in the Bismarck Archipelago and throughout Island Melanesia, with the exception of the contiguous Solomons, to as far as Samoa more than 4000 kilometres away (Map 5). 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 for 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. The first branches of Lapita tentatively advanced throughout Island Melanesia around 3300 years ago and continued on to settle Fiji about a century later. (Tonga and Samoa soon followed.) 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 that 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, the Lapita culture was Austronesian. However, it integrated indigenous elements from the various Papuan communities it encountered as well as Austronesian solutions to specifically Bismarck problems. Lapita culture became therefore no Austronesian 'importation' but the indigenous creation of the new arrivals in Pacific Islands. Around 4000 years ago, the 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 Lapita-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, the 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 that these are human artefacts, which is not impossible. But recent studies have suggested that they are the remains of the nesting mounds of an extinct megapode: ground-living birds of ancient Sahul and its adjacent islands. It appears that 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 incision work and clay reliefs. The later complexity of New Caledonian culture suggests that there might have been two or three different settlements on 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 out 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 3700 years ago. After an initial period of consolidation, the Fijian Lapitans sailed, around 3000 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 300 or 1300 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 the open sea. It could well have demanded up to several weeks' sailing, depending on winds. On arriving 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 the western, the other in the 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 the west and the 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 between the west and the east occurred with nowhere near the frequency of that between 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 prerequisite 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 that 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 the 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 the 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 tall, thin, straight-haired and long-headed Rapa Nui 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 that 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 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 approximately 7.5 million people chiefly speak Papuan languages.

In comparison, the populations of Remote Oceania have generally remained small, until the very recent European, American and Asian colonization of New Zealand and Hawaii. 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. The discovery of 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 uniqueness. Papuan society there had invented singular items relating to agriculture. 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, are some characteristic items. 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 associations, used for healing, garments, wrapping food as well as for invoking or warding off magic and sorcery. Holy to Papuans and Austronesians 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) encouraged more frequent exchanges with immediately neighbouring communities, promoting exogamy – marriage outside one’s tribe. Valuable commodities, like obsidian, made 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 ‘new-comers’ 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: Micronesian and Polynesian.

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