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The 7th International Lapita Conference held in 2007 in Honiara, Solomon Islands, brought together scholars who were not merely interested in reporting on the latest findings related to the Lapita cultural complex, but to link these to broader issues of continuity and transformation—ancestors and descendants. More than 25 years have elapsed since the Lapita Homeland Project was launched in the Bismarck Archipelago. Research into Lapita has a much longer history, ever since the distinctive dentate-stamped pottery was described in the first decade of the 20th century. There is now general agreement that several items of material culture, including, but not limited to decorated pottery can be correlated with the expansion of Austronesian speakers out of Southeast Asia into Near and Remote Oceania more than 3,000 years ago. Settlement patterns studies and analyses of subsistence strategies, as well as reconstruction of proto-languages, equally support a Southeast Asian connection. The genetic trail, although displaying a great of complexity, is also consistent with the appearance of intrusive populations mixing to various degrees with pre-existing groups in Near Oceania, prior to establishing the founding settlements in Remote Oceania.

As Sheppard notes in the introductory chapter, the conference aimed to understand “pre- and post-Lapita as a means of shedding light on the Lapita archaeological phenomenon” (p. 1). This is a major undertaking that succeeds very well in 12 chapters, with more than half focusing on the Solomons.

Chronology and sampling are at the core for understanding continuity or discontinuity between aceramic and ceramic horizons in the Bismarcks, as explained by Specht. Several Pleistocene and early Holocene sites have been identified in the area known as the Lapita Homeland. If we accept Roger Green’s “Triple-I model” of intrusion, innovation, and integration, a variant of the “slow train” model for Lapita’s entry into Near Oceania, then we might expect to find more evidence for stratigraphic continuity between pre-Lapita (aceramic) and Lapita layers. Specht, however, remains sceptical that this necessarily marks a “significant cultural shift” (p. 24). Even if we could
establish a clear, regional gap spanning centuries or perhaps a millennium, it
would not invalidate the above models of cultural interaction and merging.

While Lapita sites in the Reef/Santa Cruz Islands are by far the best
documented in the Solomons, largely through the efforts of the Southeast
Solomon Islands Culture History Project in the 1970s, evidence for early
Lapita settlement in the western Solomons has thus far eluded researchers.
Sheppard and Walter, drawing on geotectonic data, argue that the absence of
early sites is unlikely to be attributed to tectonics that might have obscured
traces of early occupation. They conclude that early Lapita groups bypassed
the main Solomons. About 2700 B.P., the northern and western islands were
colonised from the west, as attested by late Lapita pottery findings, with
the central and southeastern islands settled by aceramic populations from
the Reef/Santa Cruz area. Aside from Kulu Cave on Buka, at the northern
end of the chain, no other Pleistocene occupation has been identified thus
far, calling on more research, as well as the extent of mid-to-late Holocene
pre-ceramic settlement.

Inter-island contacts are examined by Findlater and colleagues through
chemical and petrographic analyses of late Lapita pottery from Kolombangara
Island (western Solomons).

Tim Thomas’ work in the Georgia Group focuses on post-Lapita cultural
developments. The Munda Tradition (700-100 B.P.), expressed by a common
set of cultural practices, such as trade and head-hunting, can be linked to 19th
century ethnographic descriptions, and demonstrates the dynamic character
of a system that waxed and waned.

The Southeast Solomon Islands Culture History Project is described
in two chapters by Green and Yen; the latter focusing on ethnobotany.
Doherty reports on post-Lapita datasets from the same area. Pottery and
other artifacts, as well as architectural evidence and subsistence essentially
indicate continuity, but with evidence of external influences as well, such
that the “history in the islands is reticulate” (p. 208).

Three field seasons (2004-2006) of research are reported from the Teouma
Lapita site on Efate, Vanuatu, by Bedford and colleagues. The area yielded the
largest known and best-preserved Lapita-era burial ground. Initial settlement is
believed to have occurred between 3200 and 3000 B.P., suggesting a more rapid
dispersal from the Bismarcks area than previously thought. Isotopic analyses
of adult burials indicate a mixed marine and terrestrial diet. Interestingly,
Teouma has not yielded late Erueti or Mangaasi-style pottery (c.2500-1200
B.P.), found in several other sites on Efate and the Shepherd Group.

Nunn and Heorake review the geomorphological contexts of several Lapita
coastal sites, including the oldest known site in Fiji, Bourewa, southwest Viti
Levu. The degree to which early Lapita colonisers relied on wild resources, particularly marine resources, is still debated. And while it appears reasonable to assume that Lapita communities had a worldview very much centred on the ocean, a parallel with ethnographic “sea nomads” of Island Southeast Asia (p. 251) should not be accepted at face value, as the latter have established ties with neighbouring groups to obtain commodities such as sago, tobacco and metal tools. Assuming that Lapita communities were to first to have colonised Remote Oceania, ethnographic analogies of this sort should always be treated cautiously.

Terrell concludes the volume with the belief that given the complexity of cultural interaction over millennia before, during and after Lapita times, it would be well nigh impossible to identify phylogenetic linkages among populations which have inhabited the region. Instead, we are left with an “entangled bank” (p. 255). This reviewer expresses more faith in our ability to find and refine those linkages, particularly with the assistance of genetic studies, in conjunction with linguistic and archaeological models.

The various contributions to Lapita archaeology and the linkages to Pleistocene, aceramic Holocene and post-Lapita cultural developments in the southwestern Pacific are to be commended.
King Pōtatau: An Account of the Life of Pōtatau Te Wherowhero the First Māori King
By Pei Te Hurinui and edited by Jenifer Curnow.

This book details the background to the Kingitanga and also tells the story of the first king, Pōtatau Te Wherowhero. It details all the momentous events of Te Wherowhero’s life from around 1775 to his death in 1860, including his status as Lord of the Waikato and the famous battles and conflicts with other tribes, his raising up as the First Māori King, and Mana Motuhake, the Māori Kingship, set apart as the symbol of the spiritual and cultural life of the Māori.

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