Cultural homogeneity and linguistic diversity: evidence from the Islands of northeast Malakula, Vanuatu

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Lapita settlement of the Pacific associated with Austronesian expansion speaking Proto-Oceanic. C. 3000 BP. Very initial colonisation aDNA indicates genetically Asian groups. Small sample and human remains are very rare. Almost 300 sites but a handful of sites with human remains.
30 Lapita sites found throughout the Vanuatu archipelago. Initially thought as marginal but sites were hard to find due to uplift and volcanic ashfall.
Lapita vessel, Teouma site, Efate
Whole range of vessel forms often with anthropomorphic motifs
Rapid simplification in design motif and range of vessel forms
Lapita period: rapid simplification along with diversification

Distinctive NE Malakula Lapita
While regional diversification is occurring, there is still evidence of contact. Zigzag motif and shell impression.
Immediately Post-Lapita Erromango (2800BP), south Vanuatu. Pottery production ends in the south c.2000BP
Immediately Post-Lapita Efate/Shepherds. Pottery production on Efate ends c. 1200 BP
Immediately Post-Lapita Malakula to c. 2300 BP. Pottery production continues here and in much of the north till European contact.
Islands of northeast Malakula all less than 2km sq. Subject to uplift and tephra-fall
Excavations on Uripiv, Wala, Atchin and Vao. Well preserved sites that represent 3000 years occupation. Almost identical stratigraphy and archaeological deposits.
Lapita vessels from Uripiv and Vao. Associated with first arrival but already regionally distinctive vessel forms and design motifs.
• Lapita occupation on the beach then 1000 years of occupation in similar zone
• Coral gravel imported from 2300 BP acting as free draining surface
• Massive Ambrym eruption c. 2000 BP and active ever since
• Dispersed settlement across the islands from 1500 BP and appearance of distinctive ceremonial structures (nasara) made of beach rock, fossil and reef coral from 400BP
Nasara of various forms found throughout Nthn Vanuatu and across Malakula. Central to social and political life. Beterial nasara Uripiv Island, platforms, tables, standing stones
Wala
Boyle Somerville 1891

Uripiv Island

A.B Lewis
1914
Peterhul, Vao Island
Coral dating has proved to be ideal method for establishing chronology. Acropora coral commonly used in nasara near the sea but often also found as part of burial shrines well in the interior.
Uripiv Is., NE Malakula

Sources :
Image satellite (C) 2013 DigitalGlobe Google Earth,
Bureau National des Statistiques (foyers du recensement 2009),
Les relevés GPS de sites archéologiques (nakamals, narasa, pierres sacrées)
on ont eu lieu en août-septembre 2011 et septembre 2013 (Stuart Bedford).
Réalisation cartographique : P. Siméoni - Géo-consult
Extensive local and inter-island connections.

Late pottery: distinctive form, manufacturing technique and design motifs and found across north Vanuatu.
Inter-island canoes NE Malakula 1900
External influences/connections? Generally considered to be very limited, almost no hard evidence. Banks Islands obsidian on Tikopia and presence of very distinctive cultural practises. aDNA also indicates contact through to later periods. VERY limited archaeological research associated with the last 1000 years anywhere in SW Pacific.
New Britain

Vanuatu

Fiji

Earliest dates are 400 BP