

***The Lapita Peoples: Ancestors of the Oceanic World, Peoples  
of South-East  
Asia and the Pacific***

by  
Patrick V. Kirch

This is the first account of the Lapita peoples, the common ancestor of the Polynesians, Micronesians, and Austronesian-speaking Melanesians who over the last 4000 years colonized the islands of the Pacific, including New Zealand and territories as far afield as Fiji and Hawaii. Its purpose is to provide answers to some of the most puzzling archaeological and anthropological questions: who were the Lapita peoples? what was their history? how were they able to travel such great distances? and why did they do so? Recent discoveries (several by the author of this book) have begun at last to yield a coherent picture of these elusive peoples.

Professor Kirch takes the reader back many thousands of years to the earliest evidence of the Lapita peoples. He describes the research itself and conveys the excitement of the first discoveries of Lapita settlements, tools and pottery. He then traces the remarkable cultural development and spread of the Lapita peoples across the unoccupied islands of Eastern Melanesia, Micronesia and Western Polynesia. He shows how they became the progenitors of the Polynesian and Austronesian-speaking Melanesian peoples.

The author describes Lapita sites, communities and landscapes, the development of their decorated ceramics, and their shell-tool industry. He reveals the means by which they accomplished such prodigious voyages and explains why they undertook them. He illustrates his account with specially drawn maps and with a wide range of photographs, many published for the first time.

Drawing on the latest research in archaeology, anthropology, biology and linguistics, and written in clear, non-specialized language, this is an outstanding book of great importance to the history of South-East Asia and the Pacific.

The term Lapita refers to an ancient Pacific culture that archaeologists believe to be the common ancestor of the contemporary cultures of Polynesia, Micronesia, and some areas of Melanesia. The culture takes its name from the site of Lapita in New Caledonia, one of the first places in which its distinctive pottery was discovered. While archaeologists debate the precise region where Lapita culture itself developed, the ancestors of the Lapita people came originally from Southeast Asia. This is the first account of the Lapita peoples, the common ancestor of the Polynesians, Micronesians, and Austronesian-speaking Melanesians who over the last 4000 years colonized the islands of the Pacific, including New Zealand and territories as far afield as Fiji and Hawaii. Its purpose is to provide answers to some of the most puzzling archaeological and anthropological questions: who were the Lapita peoples? what was their history? how were they able to travel such great distances? and why did they do so? He then traces the remarkable cultural development and spread of the Lapita peoples across the unoccupied islands of Eastern Melanesia, Micronesia and Western Polynesia. The Lapita culture was a prehistoric Pacific Ocean people who flourished in the Pacific Islands from about 1600 BCE to about 500 BCE.

Archaeologists believe that the Lapita are the ancestors of historic cultures in Polynesia, Micronesia, and some coastal areas of Melanesia. The characteristics of the Lapita culture are the extension of human settlement to previously uninhabited islands scattered over a large area in the Pacific Ocean, the spread of Oceanic languages in that area, the distinctive