

EARLY PACIFIC MIGRATIONS

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The earliest *Homo sapiens* migration to the southwest Pacific region - **THE MELANESIAN MIGRATION** - reached New Guinea (which was then connected to Australia) about 50-60,000 years ago. Amazingly, these migrants had to do some oceanic island-hopping through Wallacea in order to get to New Guinea from southeast Asia. This represents the first and one of the greatest seafaring feats in human history. (Even more amazingly: recent DNA evidence shows that the Melanesian arrivals in New Guinea were preceded by another human species, the Denisovans, closely related to Neanderthals, who had made the same journey as much as 100-200,000 years earlier!). Beginning about 6000 years ago, seafarers of **THE AUSTRONESIAN MIGRATION** left coastal China - and would eventually people the entire Pacific. The Melanesians in New Guinea (known as Papuans) and the Austronesians who passed through would meet and mingle in coastal New Guinea, the Bismarcks, and the northern Solomons. A syncretic culture would emerge, THE LAPITA CULTURE, which would evolve into a proto-Polynesian seafaring culture. **THE LAPITA EXPANSION** would see this culture expand eastward into the Pacific until its skilled mariners reached Samoa and Tonga, the cradle of Polynesian civilization. Further expansion into remote Oceania as far as Easter Island, Hawaii, and back to New Zealand would give us the vertices of what is today known as THE POLYNESIAN TRIANGLE.



