THE PEOPLING OF PACIFIC OCEANIA

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Summary Chart:

THE PEOPLING OF POLYNESIA

FIRST WAVE	**MELANESIAN** MIGRANTS ARRIVE IN NEW GUINEA (& AUSTRALIA) → MIGRATIONS INTO INSULAR MELANESIA (BISMARCKS & SOLOMONS)	60,000 BC 30,000 BC
	AUSTRONESIAN MIGRANTS FROM TAIWAN ENTER INSULAR SOUTHEAST ASIA (PHILIPPINES, INDONESIA, NEW GUINEA)	4000 BC
	'THE LAPITA EXPANSION' INTO FIJI, THEN TONGA → SAMOA ('Primeval Polynesian Homeland')	1500 BC 800 BC
SECOND WAVE *AGAINST THE WIND*	POLYNESIANS REACH **TAHITI AND MARQUESAS** FROM SAMOA (Note: significant uncertainty still exists as to sequence and dates)	700 AD
	POLYNESIANS REACH **HAWAII** FROM MARQUESAS & SOCIETIES	900AD
	POLYNESIANS REACH **EASTER ISLAND** FROM MARQUESAS or MANGAREVA in the GAMBIERS	900-1000 AD
	POLYNESIANS REACH **NEW ZEALAND** FROM SOCIETIES OR COOKS	1200 AD

Notes: The dates above are approximate and consensus-based. Migrations are complex and most are multi-directional or bi-directional. The timeline and pathway of eastward migration to Tahiti and the Marquesas from Samoa remains controversial due to limited archaeologic evidence and some conflicting evidence. Likewise, Hawaiian settlement dates and origjns have been subject to controversy, with some positing that it may have occurred much earlier, c. 300-500AD. DNA haplotype analysis and 'molecular clock' chronometrics may soon provide stronger evidence for dates and pathways of migration. The above chart provides a useful 'work-in-progress' schema for grasping the spectacular human achievement of oceanic voyages that peopled the vast Pacific over tens of thousands of years.

MORE DETAILED TIMELINE:

The Melanesian Expansion

- **60,000 years ago:** The first wave of human migration into **'Near Oceania'** begins. *Homo sapiens* hunter-gatherers, originating from mainland Asia, move south and east through the Indonesian archipelago. While much of southeast Asia was then connected by land bridges, inter-island oceanic expanses existed with distances over 100 miles in **Wallacea** (eastern Indonesia today - see map infographic in my **EARLY PACIFIC MIGRATIONS handout**) thus requiring significant maritime technology and skills - this was likely our species' first oceanic sailing.
- **40,000 BC:** Australoid peoples with dark-skin reach **New Guinea and Australia**. These are the ancestors of modern-day Melanesians including Australia's indigenous people.
- **30,000 BC:** Melanesian seafarers expand eastward from New Guinea through the Bismarck Islands, reaching Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and the Solomon Islands. This region is sometimes referred to as 'Near Oceania'. This momentous maritime movement would be followed by a long pause (over 27,000 years!) in further human expansion into more distant parts of Oceania. During this period, the descendants of the settlers of Near Oceania would diversify, leading to hundreds of distinct ethnolinguistic and cultural groups.

The Austronesian Expansion (from 3000 BC) and the Lapita Culture (from 1600 BC):

- **3000 BC:** A second major wave of migration begins **from Taiwan**. These seafaring people spread southward through the Philippines and into the Indonesian archipelago.
- **1600 BC:** The Austronesian-speaking **Lapita Culture** emerges in the Bismarck Archipelago northeast of New Guinea and spreads to Vanuatu, New Caledonia and the northern Solomons. This culture synergizes Melanesian and Austronesian elements into what would emerge as a new 'proto-Polynesian' culture, characterized archaeologically by distinctive pottery with intricate geometric designs, characteristic bone fish hooks, and shell arm bracelets.
- **1500 BC**: **Guam and the Marianas** settled by Austronesians from the Philippines- these are the first human inhabittants of Micronesia
- **1000 BC:** The Lapita reach **Fiji** and then expand into 'Remote Oceania' to **Tonga and Samoa**, further evolving into a distinctly Polynesian culture. Tonga and Samoa are often considered 'the cradle of Polynesian culture'. This expansion into Remote Oceania involved navigating much larger stretches of open ocean.

The Settlement of 'Remote Oceania'/Micronesia/Eastern Polynesia (800 BC - 1200 AD):

- **800BC- 700AD:** Polynesian culture develops in Samoa and Tonga. Maritime technology to sail against the wind would not emerge for 1500 years - at which time a massive new wave of distant migration was enabled:
- **700 - 1200 AD:**
    - **Micronesia** settled by Lapita 'backflow' beginning early in this period c. 700AD - except for Guam and the Marianas which had been settled much earlier c. 1500 BC by Austronesians from the Philippines - see Austronesian Migration above
    - The Cook Islands, Tahiti, and the Marquesas are settled early in this period
    - **Hawaii** settled around **800-900 AD**, likely from Tahiti and likely after an earlier wave from the Marquesas which had less lasting cultural impact
    - **Easter Island (Rapa Nui)** settled, likely from the Marquesas, around **900 AD**, though some historians have postulated first contact as early as 300 BC
    - **New Zealand (Aotearoa**) settled around **1200 AD**, likely from the Cooks or Society islands of eastern Polynesia, marking the last 'peopling' event of the Pacific. From the larger perspective this also marks the end of the epic Austronesian expansion into the Pacific.
    - **By 1250 AD, a complex web of interconnected communities existed across Oceania**, utilizing sophisticated maritime technology to maintain trade and cultural contact. interaction also occurred between the Pacific Islands and mainland Asia. Genetic evidence also indicates that there was contact between Polynesians of the Tuamotus and South American populations of Colombia.

- **March 6, 1521**: **Magellan arrives in Guam**, ushering in a new age of European exploration and exploitation in Pacific Oceania.

SEE MAP NEXT PAGE


Before
3000 BC
TAIWAN
MARIANAS
1500 BC
GUAM
2500 BC
AUSTRONESIAN
PHILIPPINES
2000BC
MÍCRONESIA
700 AD
MELANESIAN
ISLANDS
POLYNESIAN
60,000 BC
MELANESIAN
1600BC
LAPITA
1300 BC
SAMOA
800 BC
FIJI
900 BC
NIUE
TONGA
800 BC
1200 BC
COOK
ISLANDS
AD 700
TAHITI
800-900
AD
HAWAI'I
MARQUESAS
?300-700 AD
TUAMOTU
ARCHIPELAGO
PITCAIRN
AD 900
RAPA NUI
(EASTER ISLAND)
AUSTRALIA
AOTEAROA
(NEW ZEALAND)
AD 1200