

may yet be required on our part. On all disciplinary fronts, however, this volume is a good place to start.

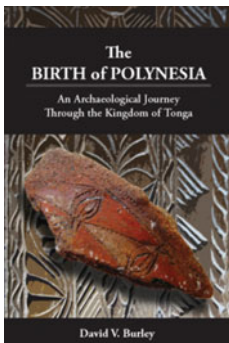
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DAVID V. BURLEY. 2023. *The birth of Polynesia: an archaeological journey through the Kingdom of Tonga*. Burnaby: Archaeology Press Simon Fraser University; 979-8-37847-48-2 hardback £39.49.



David Burley's 35 years of experience in researching and documenting Tonga's past are brought to life in this archaeological synthesis on what has long been regarded as the 'birthplace' of Polynesian culture. Written partly as an autobiography, the book blends fieldwork narrative and amusing anecdotes with scientific descriptions of Tonga's early period of human settlement. The data presented are derived mostly from archaeological materials, but also include relevant information from ethnography, historical linguistics, biological anthropology, genomics and environmental sciences. The period covered is from first settlement with the appearance of Lapita pottery through the Polynesian Plainware phase, a time when 'Ancestral

Polynesian' culture is argued to have emerged.

The amply illustrated volume is divided into eight chapters, with references conveniently placed at the conclusion of each. Burley's accessible style of writing begins with the

juxtaposition of Polynesian ancestors' 'very long voyage' of discovery and island settlement to his own investigative journey along the entire length of the Tongan Archipelago and the integration of new data within the existing body of archaeological literature published nearly a century ago.

Crucial to understanding the origins of Polynesia is the need to examine currently available evidence documenting human expansion into what are referred to as Near and Remote Oceania. These geographical labels—used since the 1990s by most Pacific archaeologists—help differentiate the cultural landscape during the early phases of voyaging and island discovery. The former goes back about 35 000 years for islands north of New Guinea, inhabited since the late Pleistocene; and the latter describes more recent presence of people to the east of the substantial ocean gap separating the main Solomon Islands Chain from the nearest Remote Oceanian outpost in the Reef-Santa Cruz Islands. Of relevance to this volume is the second period which is commonly associated with the dispersal of Austronesian speakers out of Island Southeast Asia eastward into Remote Oceania some 3000 years ago. This period of human dispersal and settlement continues to fascinate archaeologists and other scholars with its characteristic trail of a distinct cultural marker: Lapita pottery. Indeed, the wide distribution of a ceramic style on both sides of the boundary between Near and Remote Oceania and encompassing islands labelled 'Melanesian', as well as (western) 'Polynesian' by early European discoverers, has conclusively demonstrated that European cultural categories that are notably based on skin tone and other traits cannot be uncritically applied when viewing the distant past. A small error appears in Chapter 2 (p.25) in the statement about distance-decay in the Lapita design system trending 'east-to-west'. This should read 'west-to-east'.

Chapter 3, 'First landfall at Nukuleka', recounts the story of an early settlement near today's entrance to the Fanga 'Uta Lagoon on the main island of Tongatapu. The site dates between 2900 and 2850 cal BP (950–900 BC) and yielded decorated Lapita pottery with designs classified as 'western' as they are found as well elsewhere at sites of comparable age in the Reef-Santa Cruz Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji, as well as Near Oceania. Burley boldly declares (p.55) that Nukuleka is both "the first landfall for Lapita peoples in Tonga" and "the birthplace for all of Polynesia". One can forgive the author, who reinvestigated the site in 1999, for romanticising this important discovery, which on present evidence *appears* to be the earliest known site in Tonga and in all of Polynesia. Some caution, however, should be exercised here in that even supposedly benign interpretations of the past by researchers might sometimes clash with indigenous narratives of creation and origins and thus perpetuate a measure of mistrust between scientists and local communities. Burley's close association with community members is, fortunately, to his credit.

Further expansion of human settlements along the Tongatapu Lagoon was accomplished quickly, within the first two or three generations after landfall; this assessment is based on a series of well-dated materials. Although environmental change might have influenced the distribution and dynamics of hamlets, there is no evidence to suggest that population pressure was the triggering mechanism for the movement of people, including the expansion north to the Ha'apai and Vava'u group of islands. Rather, Burley favours the *territorial imperative*, made popular by Robert Ardrey (1971) whereby colonising groups are driven to expand and stake out territory. This behaviour might account for early Lapita expansion across its

vast pristine (i.e. devoid of previously established human presence) realm of Remote Oceania where an abundance of near-shore resources—such as shellfish, turtles, a host of bird species and other coastal resources—were magnets to highly mobile communities. There is clear evidence that even small groups of people had significant impacts on some of those resources. The extinction of a giant pigeon and iguana species in Tonga adds to the corpus of animals that were wiped out by human hunting/foraging. Some *Tridacninae* (giant clam species) were also affected, although it remains unclear if this occurred primarily during the early Lapita period across various locations. Environmental change, notably sea-level fall dated to cal 2570 BP (620 BC), must also have had a negative effect on several shellfish taxa. This might have led to the abandonment of Lapita near-shore settlements and a move towards more intensive use of inland sites with the concomitant increasing dependence on terrestrial food production.

Together with attempts to understand changing patterns of resource use, Burley addresses the question of Lapita social transformation and a trend toward a more simplified design system accompanied by the loss of vessel shapes characteristic of the Eastern Lapita series. The aforementioned distance-decay can be further illustrated by the demise of expert potters among small colonising populations far away from the core islands, who were challenged in replenishing their ranks by a steady stream of new migrants, as not enough craftsmen were coming in, and it was difficult to transmit their attendant knowledge to new generations. While pottery persisted during the Polynesian Plainware ceramic phase—which is thought to correlate with the emergence Ancestral Polynesian society and the development of the Proto-Polynesian linguistic stage by 2700 cal BP—its abrupt loss, dated to 2350 cal BP (400 BC), cannot be easily explained.

Subsequent chapters describe the cultural and environmental history of Ha'apai and Vava'u, which have yielded collections of Eastern Lapita and Polynesian Plainware ceramics. The former's small landmass was compensated by a high coastline-to-land ratio, which encouraged Lapita expansion from Fanga 'Uta Lagoon. Due to their small size, however, the islands provided few refugia for vulnerable turtle, iguana and bird species, which resulted in their sharp decline and extinction. In contrast, Vava'u's limited inshore fisheries are reflected in the archaeological record, although bird bones dominate the assemblages by number and relative volume. During both the Lapita and Polynesian Plainware phases, Vava'u's population remained small. The limited reef resources compelled people to focus more on the growing of food crops, notably with the establishment of ponded wetlands and the use of swampy lowlands to grow aroid plants.

The chapter focusing on Ancestral Polynesia and the Polynesian Plainware phase emphasises Burley's opinion of continuity with many aspects of Lapita material culture in contrast to the changes witnessed during the period that followed the abandonment of pottery. This ushered in the so-called 'Tongan Dark Ages' (for the relative lack of archaeological data) and the better-known centuries that saw the further development of social complexity, maritime expansion in what has been referred to as a period of 'empire' building by Tongans in the southwest Pacific and the well-documented ethnohistorical ties with neighbouring Fiji and Samoa.

The birth of Polynesia is sure to enthral audiences beyond Tonga and those specialising in the archaeology of western Polynesia. Pacific 'prehistorians', notably those who have an

interest in Lapita, will be given the opportunity to critically evaluate the conclusions reached by the author about Tonga's position in Lapita settlement and subsequent cultural transformations.

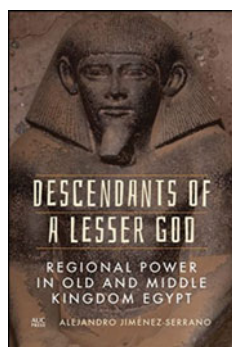
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ALEJANDRO JIMÉNEZ-SERRANO. 2023. *Descendants of a lesser god: regional power in Old and Middle Kingdom Egypt*. Cairo/New York: The American University in Cairo Press; 978-1-649-03175-4 hardback 65\$.



Located in the southernmost province or *nome*, which was called Ta-sety in ancient Egyptian, and serving as the cemetery for the high elite of its capital Elephantine (in modern Assuan), the Qubbet el-Hawa is one of the better-researched provincial cemeteries of ancient Egypt. The burial site is renowned for the autobiographies adorning the walls of certain tombs, which detail the involvement of the local elite, specifically in the adjacent region of Nubia. These inscriptions offer valuable insights into the interactions between Egyptians and the diverse Nubian populations during the Old to Middle Kingdom periods in the First Cataract region, as well as with other Nilotic cultures further south.

Descendants of a lesser god is a much-needed study that highlights the importance of exploring the sociocultural and historical significance of a provincial region to fully understand the ancient Egyptian society. Alejandro Jiménez-Serrano's novel approach provides a local history of the southernmost Egyptian *nome*, allowing readers to delve into the lives of the elite and their kin groups. This exploration recognises the importance of kinship and social organisation in a region geographically detached from the state capital. It also analyses in detail the social processes that occurred throughout the entire country.

The book's informative Introduction outlines the necessity and objectives of the study. It also discusses the sources used to illustrate the daily life of the people who resided in Elephantine and how novel research approaches to existing evidence led to new information. The rationale for selecting Elephantine as a case study is that the region is well-documented