

## **Mapping Ancient Social Networks**

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As Austronesians migrated through Near Oceania at around 3500 years ago, they left behind a new cultural horizon recognized by archaeologists called the Lapita Culture Complex, before they moved further into Remote Oceania. The most significant cultural icon of this complex is a type of pottery, decorated with both simple geometric and complex naturalistic motifs, called ‘Lapita pottery.’ It has been hypothesized that these materialized symbols might have represented both unique social identities and affiliations of a house-based group to its relatives and friends, while at the same time signifying social ranking within the group itself.

It has been demonstrated that an effective means of understanding the possible social mechanisms at work for the Lapita people as they migrated from island to island, is through the investigation of how these material symbols helped to reproduce and formulate their social networks. To do so requires the cross-comparison of motifs across seven Pacific countries where Lapita pottery was produced. In this paper I am going to present the preliminary results of such a comparison generated from the Lapita Pottery Online Database, a product of international collaboration during the past 10 years, and discuss how these results facilitate the identification of new research directions for understanding ancient social relationships of the Lapita people. With more lines of evidence such as petrographic and chemical compositional data of Lapita pottery, especially in the case of New Caledonia, I will demonstrate how archaeologists may finally start to generate new hypotheses for mapping ancient social networks.