

Watom: the People

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ABSTRACT. The human material from the Reber-Rakival Lapita site on Watom Island has been analysed. Eight adults and a two year old child are defined in addition to scattered adult material. Mean age at death of the adults, comprising two females and six males, was about 30 years. Mean stature of three males was 1,784 mm, and that of a female was 1,659 mm. Long bones were moderately robust, and bowed to accommodate a considerable musculature. One substantially-complete mandible showed Polynesian 'rocker' characteristics, and it is probable that two adult mandibular fragments shared this morphology. Another substantially-complete mandible, though very robust, did not show this form. The morphology of this group displays the large-bodied characteristics of oceanic voyagers and small-island dwellers. Statistical analyses of mandibular and dental metric data support the morphological evidence of affinities with prehistoric Polynesians of rather later date.

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Material

This paper discusses the human remains from locality SAC at Reber-Rakival on Watom Island.

The human remains were recovered from Rectangles I, III and IV, during two separate excavations, in 1966 and in 1985 (Specht, 1968; Green & Anson, 1987; see also Green, Anson & Specht, this volume). The 1966 excavation identified three individuals from Rectangle I. The 1985 excavation identified a further five individuals from Rectangles III and IV, and in addition recovered an amount of dispersed human bone from Rectangle IV. The material thus comprised the incomplete remains of eight individuals recognised at excavation, and mixed material from Rectangle IV that could neither be clearly assigned to any of the recognised individuals, nor ascribed to another single person. In addition, remains of another discrete individual from Rectangle I were identified in the laboratory.

In general the remains are incomplete and broken, and the bone, having been exposed to the fluctuations of tidal sea water through the soil, is poorly preserved.

Methods

Ageing was done by standard biological criteria of maturation or degeneration. However, the very scanty skeletal representation means that for most individuals the age estimate is only an informed guess. The bone was unsuitable for histological methods of ageing. Sexing was based on pelvic morphology wherever possible, and was supplemented by citrate analysis (Dennison, 1979), which allowed sexing of all adults. Stature was assessed from overall lengths of long bones, or segments of bone. Two sets of estimates were made, using the formulae of Trotter (1970) derived for white Americans, and those of Houghton *et al.* (1975) for Polynesians. Standard metric data were