

A Lapita-associated Skeleton from Natunuku, Fiji

MICHAEL PIETRUSEWSKY

Department of Anthropology, University of Hawaii-Manoa,
2424 Maile Way, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822, USA

ABSTRACT. The fragmentary and generally poorly preserved remains of an approximately 3,000 year old skeleton found in association with Lapita cultural material at Natunuku, Fiji, are described. The skeleton, represented by diaphyseal fragments of the major limb bones, fragments of skull and other parts of the skeleton, isolated teeth and a partially edentulous mandible fragment, is that of an elderly (50 year old) male. The mandible is the best preserved bone in these remains. Stature is estimated to be 172 cm. The limb skeleton suggests that the individual is of moderately robust dimensions. Only minimal expressions of osteoarthritis are observed in these remains but opportunities for observations are limited. The teeth exhibit considerable wear and caries are present. The cause of death cannot be determined. There is no evidence that any of the human remains were burned or charred. Univariate comparisons of morphological details of the skeleton and associated teeth suggest Polynesian similarities such as tall stature, limb robusticity, small tooth crown diameters, and partial rocker jaw. Other aspects of skeletal morphology, limb proportions and the shapes of the leg bones, however, suggest Melanesian affinities. Multivariate analyses of mandibular measurements further suggest Melanesian affinities while similar analyses of a limited number of non-metric traits suggest Polynesian relationships. Until much larger and more representative samples of Lapita-associated skeletons become available, the biological origins of Polynesians, using the human palaeontological record from the Pacific, remains obscure.

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