

Are the Earliest Field Monuments of the Pacific Landscape Serial Sites?

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ABSTRACT. Explanations of the origin and genesis of Pacific field monuments commonly assume they reflect local social change in islands or island groups which were increasingly isolated following colonization. A recent review of early West Polynesian archaeology suggests that the pene-contemporaneous appearance of various kinds of field monuments from eastern Melanesia to Polynesia may be better explained as evidence of interaction and the movement of people and/or ideas, possibly associated with the colonization of East Polynesia.

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The first appearance of field monuments in the landscapes of East and West Polynesia, Fiji and parts of eastern Melanesia (Fig. 1) have been argued to reflect social changes in relatively isolated islands or island groups, long after their initial colonization. This paper argues the need to rethink this interpretation in light of a recent review of the evidence for the early West Polynesian cultural chronology (Smith, 1999, 2002). The findings suggest that field monuments may first appear in the context of pene-contemporaneous regional social change indicating a movement of ideas and/or people and in East Polynesia, this may be associated with the initial colonization of the region in the late or recent model of Spriggs & Anderson (1993).

The origin and genesis of field monuments in the Pacific landscape has been given new emphasis at meetings of experts from Pacific nations under the auspices of UNESCO's World Heritage program. The aim of these meetings, held in 1997 and 1999, was to initiate a process redressing the current under-representation of Pacific cultural (and natural) heritage sites on the World Heritage list. In Fiji in 1997 representatives of Pacific nations met to discuss this issue and identified the kinds of sites that they

consider will reflect the uniqueness of the Pacific region and should be the focus of tentative nominations.

Potential world heritage sites in the Pacific Islands region are likely to be serial sites and multi-layered cultural landscapes...[S]erial sites attest to the history of voyaging, land and sea routes, and of trade, the first landings, activities, settlements and agriculture in the Pacific Islands region. Other series of sites reflect the different waves of migrations...As serial sites they form lines crossing boundaries between countries and are therefore transborder and transnational sites. (UNESCO, 1997)

This statement recognizes that many kinds of Pacific cultural sites are not limited to islands or even archipelagos, and reflect the interconnectedness and shared history of the Pacific peoples. Although Pacific heritage managers have not precisely defined the site types that would be included as serial sites, it can be argued that they would be sites that are common over large regions in the Pacific and reflect a similar activity, belief system, social system or event.

Although monuments of earth, stone or coral are found from New Caledonia to East Polynesia they are not usually