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Austronesian, Indo-European, and Bantu Migrations, 2005

In this selection, a modern world historian who is a specialist in African and migration history, sketches out the three great long migrations between 3000 B.C.E. and the first millennium C.E. The Austronesians of Southeast Asia and Oceania were themselves descended from people who migrated from Yunan in southwest China to Taiwan. From there the Austronesians brought their culture to Southeast Asia and the islands of New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago of the southwestern Pacific. There assimilation eventually produced the people we call Polynesians who settled the islands of the Pacific in the first millennium C.E. The Indo-Europeans, or Aryans, traveled with their horses and chariots from the grasslands north of the Black Sea and Caspian Sea in what is today southern Russia eastward through Europe to the Atlantic and southwestward to India over the period from 3000 B.C.E. to 1500 B.C.E. The Bantu people migrated south and east from Cameroon in West Africa, assimilating with forest dwellers in the south and East Africans before settling much of southern Africa.

What are the different ways in which these migrations occurred? In what ways were they similar? How might these migrations be considered early steps of globalization?

THINKING HISTORICALLY

Historians normally consider migration to be part of the study of demography, the study of human populations—a part of social history. In these three cases, however, much of the evidence for the movement of people comes from the study of language. Such terms as *Austronesian*, *Polynesian*, *Indo-European*, and *Bantu* are names for related languages. Thus, the evidence for the movement or changes in language usage is dependent on the work of philologists who study literary sources and linguists who study language. In terms of our distinction between political, social, economic, and cultural history, which factor(s) would be most appropriate in studying this aspect of the historical record?

Notice how Manning's migration history also contains evidence of foods and other subjects. What are these subjects? Under which of the four categories would you classify them?

Source: Patrick Manning, *Migrations in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 80–84.

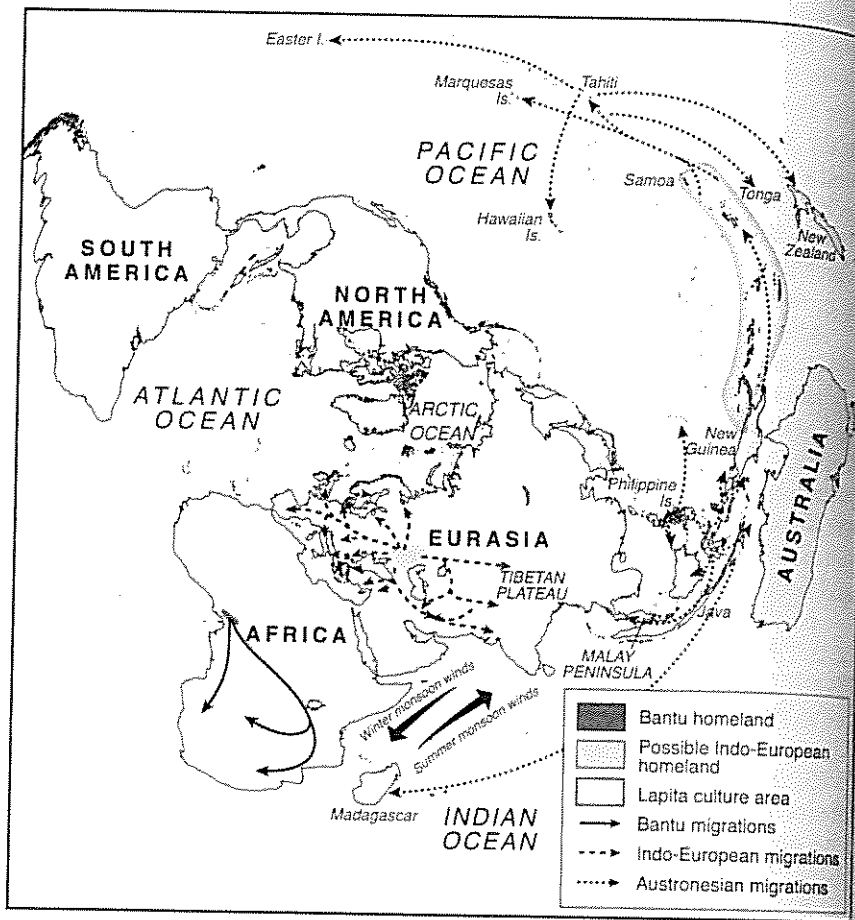
The human habit of migration, by small and large groups, made itself felt in this era [after 3000 B.C.E.] as in previous times. The difference is that after 3000 BCE migrations are easier to document in detail because of the availability of written records. Still, some of the most significant migratory movements of this era are documented by linguistic and archaeological evidence rather than through written records. In this section I will describe migrations that linked rural areas to each other, and which in so doing led to significant change in world population distribution, and to opening of new linkages among populations.

Migrations in Southeast Asia, in this period as in earlier times, set trends affecting much of the eastern hemisphere. Sino-Tibetan-speakers, with an ancestral homeland in the deep valleys to the east of the Himalayas, had periodically sent migrants out in various directions. . . . In the period leading up to 3000 BCE, the Tibetan plateau yielded to new technology, including domestication of the yak (a high-altitude relative of cattle), and the Tibetan population and language took shape. In the same period, Burmese-speakers moved south along the Salween and Irrawaddy valleys and occupied lands up to the shores of the Indian Ocean.

Meanwhile the neighboring Austric family of languages, with an ancestral homeland only slightly further lower in the same valleys, also spread from Yunnan in various directions, especially to the south and the east. The Austric languages, spoken in an area overlapping Sino-Tibetan languages, were nonetheless distinct. Most speakers of these languages remained on the Southeast Asian mainland, where today they predominate in the nations of Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. The northern range of the Austric homeland, over time, came to be shared with southward-moving groups of Chinese-speakers.

Best documented, however, are the migrations of those among the speakers of Austric languages who left the mainland and populated the islands of Southeast Asia and the Pacific. [See Map 8.1.] The ancestors of Austronesian-speakers had developed a homeland downriver from Yunnan, with advanced rice production, but also with boats. These canoes with outriggers for stability may have been developed in the inland rivers, but when fitted with sails they proved to have special benefits for oceanic travel. [See Figure 8.1.] After crossing the strait of over 100 kilometers to Taiwan, the developing Austronesian populations were then able to sail with shorter crossings north along the chain of islands leading to Okinawa and toward Japan, and south to the Philippines. This migration began in about 3000 BCE, or perhaps somewhat before that time. Setting up farms of rice, yams, chickens, and pigs as well as harvesting the sea, Austronesian-speakers settled throughout the Indonesian archipelago and even moved northwest to the Malayan mainland.

Some of the Austronesians headed further west, and their languages survive in Madagascar—where languages are most closely



Map 8.1 Bantu, Indo-European, and Austronesian Migrations.

related to languages of Borneo. These mariners appear to have made their travels at the beginning of the Common Era or perhaps even earlier. They thus appear to have been sailing the Indian Ocean at the same time as Greek, Roman, Indian, and Persian ships were sailing the same waters. This is also the era that Lynda Shaffer has called "Southernization," in which Indonesian and Indian mariners knit together the whole Indian Ocean.

Austronesian-speakers spreading into Taiwan, the Philippines, and the Indonesian archipelago encountered local populations who, presumably, spoke Indo-Pacific languages and lived by fishing, hunting, and gathering. (Language-distribution studies indicate that the Indo-Pacific languages once covered a huge area, including most of Indonesia and areas of the eastern Indian Ocean, as well as islands surrounding New Guinea, and Tasmania as well.) The Austronesian-speakers, with their

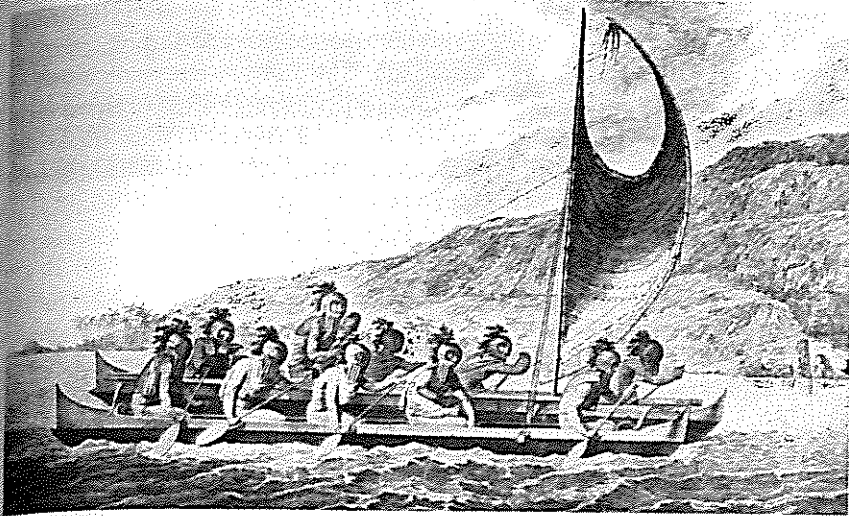


Figure 8.1 Polynesian double-hulled canoe from Captain James Cook's *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean*, c. 1784.

Source: The Granger Collection, New York.

economy relying on rice and yams, became more populous and absorbed the Indo-Pacific-speakers until they got to Papua New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago, where Indo-Pacific-speakers had long since developed agriculture relying on taro, bananas, sugar cane, and other crops. The Papuans were too numerous to be absorbed by the visitors. The incoming Austronesian-speakers, however, were able to establish a firm presence in the coastal areas of New Guinea and neighboring islands. The stage was set for intermarriage, an exchange of traditions, and development of a new tradition.

Out of this social crucible came populations that occupied lands across the far reaches of the Pacific. These populations were the sole groups to inhabit the area now known as Polynesia, and they shared with other groups the lands of Micronesia and Melanesia. They speak Austronesian languages, but their culture and their genetic composition rely substantially on the Indo-Pacific-speaking peoples of New Guinea. This culture thrived beginning about 3000 BCE along the northern coast of New Guinea and the neighboring Bismarck Islands. By 1000 BCE these settlers had reached Tonga and Samoa, thousands of kilometers to the southeast. Rice lost its importance among these farmers, but Southeast Asian yams, chickens, and pigs combined with Papuan taro and bananas and with seafood to provide a varied cuisine. The development of a characteristic style of pottery known as Lapita

marks the archaeological remains of these peoples. Equally important was the double-hulled sailing craft developed by the Lapita peoples, which eased the sailing of the high seas. The Polynesian double-hulled vessels had stability, speed, maneuverability, and the capacity to hold large numbers of sailors and supplies for long voyages. With these vessels, navigation skills could be developed to a high level. Without writing or instruments, but with intensive observation of stars, winds, the currents, and the patterns of birds, mariners of the Pacific were able to develop pinpoint navigation.

From their homeland, Polynesian mariners reached the Marquesas Islands, from which they were able to carry out voyages of discovery north to Hawaii, east to Easter Island, and south to New Zealand. It is likely even that these mariners reached and settled on the coast of South America. The evidence is indirect but, I find, convincing. There they learned to cultivate sweet potatoes from the peoples of the Peruvian coast, and brought cuttings with them to the islands. Ultimately, the sweet potato made possible the development of a large Polynesian population on the islands of New Zealand—a region where the normal Polynesian crops, especially taro, could not thrive. These Lapita societies maintained an active trade network until about 500 CE, then allowed it to decline. In the western Pacific, however, the network of rapid connection among islands through double-hulled and outrigger canoes continued to the nineteenth century.

Meanwhile, at the opposite, western fringe of the Austronesian diaspora, the occupation of Madagascar and the Comoros may have been parallel to that of Polynesia and Micronesia in two fashions. First, Austronesian-speaking mariners led in the settlement. Second, it may be that Austronesian connection with East African populations led to a social and biological synthesis that distinguished this stage of migration from those before it. That is, we may seek an East African equivalent to the Lapita homeland of the Pacific. In each case, the argument is that cross-community exchanges may have been important even in migrations that appear from a distance to be a massive colonization effort.

At about the time when the Austronesian mariners began their voyages, Indo-European-speakers in the steppes north of the Black Sea took steps beyond their practice of hunting horses and were able to domesticate them. The result soon led to horse-drawn chariots and then to mounted warriors, especially among Indo-European speakers but also among neighboring groups speaking Altaic or Semitic languages. Horses, harnessed to two-wheeled chariots, became a potent military force, and were associated with the expansion of several Indo-European-speaking groups, including the Hittites of the Anatolian peninsula. Among the eastern groups of Indo-European languages were the Indo-Iranian languages. [See Map 8.1.]

This expansion of Indo-European horse-keepers was a development subsequent to the spread of agriculture throughout Eurasia, which had begun several thousand years earlier. The Indo-Iranian subgroup of Indo-Europeans filtered into Iran and, in a related movement, into north India. Those in Iran gave rise to the religious tradition of Zoroaster and then to the Achaemenid dynasty that created the first large empire. Those in India brought the religious poetry known as the Vedas.

Horses spread beyond Indo-European-speakers soon enough. Speakers of Altaic languages, also reliant on horses (and, in the opinion of some, the first to domesticate them), moved periodically from the East and Central Asian homelands far to the west and somewhat to the south. The Avars and Scythians were such groups in the first millennium BCE, and were followed in the fifth century CE by the Xiongnu in the east and the Huns in the west. Domestication of camels—both in Central Asia and in Arabia—took place in the first millennium CE.

At much the same time as the Aryan migrations into Iran and India, another set of movements remade the map of a similarly sized region of Africa. This was the dispersal of Bantu-speakers into Central and eastern Africa. [See Map 8.1.] Their style of movement, however, was on foot rather than by chariot, and warfare appears to have been less important than farming in their expansion. They were farmers like the Aryans, but lacked horses. They slowly advanced into the forests that are now Cameroon and Congo, displacing and absorbing previous inhabitants in a fashion parallel to that of the Austronesians and the Aryans. When Bantu migrants reached the highland areas of East Africa late in the first millennium BCE, they encountered other farming groups. There, as had been the case in Melanesia, a more complex set of interactions and a new set of innovations developed. Through combination with peoples from Afroasiatic and perhaps Nilo-Saharan language groups, the Bantu-speakers adopted cattle, sheep, and millet, and expanded more rapidly into eastern and southern Africa.

To show that these three stories of rural migration were not only similar but connected, we need only return to the Austronesian voyages to the western Indian Ocean. On the eastern coast of Africa, Austronesian-speakers introduced bananas, Asian yams, the music of xylophones, and outrigger canoes. The first three of these innovations spread across the African continent from hand to hand; bananas were of particular importance in the valleys and highlands of Bantu-speaking Central Africa, where they became a crop of first importance.

By the same token, the Austronesian migrants had to pass through Indian waters on their way to East Africa, and surely camped and settled at several points along the coast, probably as merchants. Along the coasts of north India and Iran, they would therefore have encountered Indo-Iranian-speakers whose ancestors had entered the region over a thousand years earlier.