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"Human-Environment Relationships in the Pacific Islands around AD 1300"

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Nunn, Patrick D., and James M. R. Britton. "Human-Environment Relationships in the Pacific Islands around AD 1300." *Environment and History* 7, no. 1 (Feb., 2001): 3–22. doi:10.3197/096734001129342388 . This paper traces the history of human-environment interactions in the Pacific Islands during the last millennium, focusing on three main periods: the Little Climatic Optimum, the Little Ice Age, and, in greatest detail, the transition around AD 1300 between the two. The Little Climatic Optimum (approximately AD 750–1300) was marked by warm, rising temperatures, rising sea level and probably increasing aridity. The latter condition was linked to development of water-conservatory strategies (agricultural terracing being the most common) requiring cooperation between human groups which facilitated formation of large nucleated settlements and increased sociopolitical complexity. The transition period (approximately AD 1270–1475) involved rapid temperature and sea-level fall, perhaps a short-lived precipitation increase. Temperature fall stressed crops and reef organisms, sea-level fall lowered water tables and exposed reef surfaces reducing their potential as food resources for coastal dwellers. Increased precipitation washed away exposed infrastructure. Consequently food resource bases on many islands diminished abruptly across the transition. The Little Ice Age (approximately AD 1300–1800) was marked by cooler temperatures and lower sea levels. The lingering effects of the earlier transition largely determined human lifestyles during this period. Conflict resulted from resource depletion. Unprotected coastal settlements were abandoned in favour of fortified inland, often upland, settlements. Climate change is suggested to have been a important determinant of human cultural change during the last millennium in the Pacific Islands. All rights reserved. © 2001 The White Horse Press

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