

## 2. Time Before

Thirty thousand years ago the original inhabitants of the Solomon Archipelago were an out-migration from New Guinea and spoke related languages. About 4,000 years ago, a new wave of migrants from Taiwan and Southeast Asia introduced what are now known as Austronesian languages, which now dominate. Linguists suggest that there are 74 languages extant in the Solomon Islands, and although some islands have only one language, the larger islands usually have several. The majority of the people live in small descent-based territories that relate to land and fringing lagoons and ocean by a mixture of matrilineal and patrilineal descent. There is no way of knowing the size of the population before large-scale contact with the outside world. The first colonial census in 1931 recorded 94,066 people. The population before contact with the outside world was probably in excess of 200,000 and could have been twice that. There was significant de-population during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mainly because of introduced diseases.

The earliest images of Solomon Islanders were drawings and etchings made by European explorers onwards from the sixteenth century. Photographs began to be taken in the final decades of the nineteenth century.



2.1. Tikopia Island youth, painted by Augustus Earle in 1827. Tikopia society appears to be a fusion of Polynesian and Melanesian elements, created by a combination of drift voyages from numerous islands and sustained long-distance trade and exchange. Archaeological evidence suggests that the island was first colonized in the first millennium BC. (National Library of Australia)

2.2. This hand-coloured etching of a Vanikolo warrior dates from 1855, and is a copy of a 1830s etching. Vanikolo (or Vanikoro) Island attracted early European visitors because it had been visited by the Spanish Mendaña expedition in the sixteenth century and was the site of wrecked ships from the 1778 French La Perouse expedition. The island is 1,000 m high but barely 24 km wide and has a barrier reef which forms a lagoon around the island. (Clive Moore Collection)



2.3. Some of the best early photos from Solomon Islands were taken in 1906 by John Beattie, a Tasmanian photographer. He travelled on board the Anglican's Melanesian Mission vessel *Southern Cross*. This is Maravovo Village in northwest Guadalcanal in 1906. It became the site of an Anglican mission station on Guadalcanal and later St. Mary's boarding school. (Anglican Church of Melanesia, J. W. Beattie Collection)



2.4. Women in a palm avenue, Maravovo, Guadalcanal, 1906. (Anglican Church of Melanesia, J. W. Beattie Collection)



2.5. Solomon Islanders lived in coastal and inland villages. This is Mindoru village, Pirihadi Bay, Isabel, 1906. (Anglican Church of Melanesia, J. W. Beattie Collection)



2.6. Women from Roas Bay, Small Malaita, 1906. (Anglican Church of Melanesia, J. W. Beattie Collection)





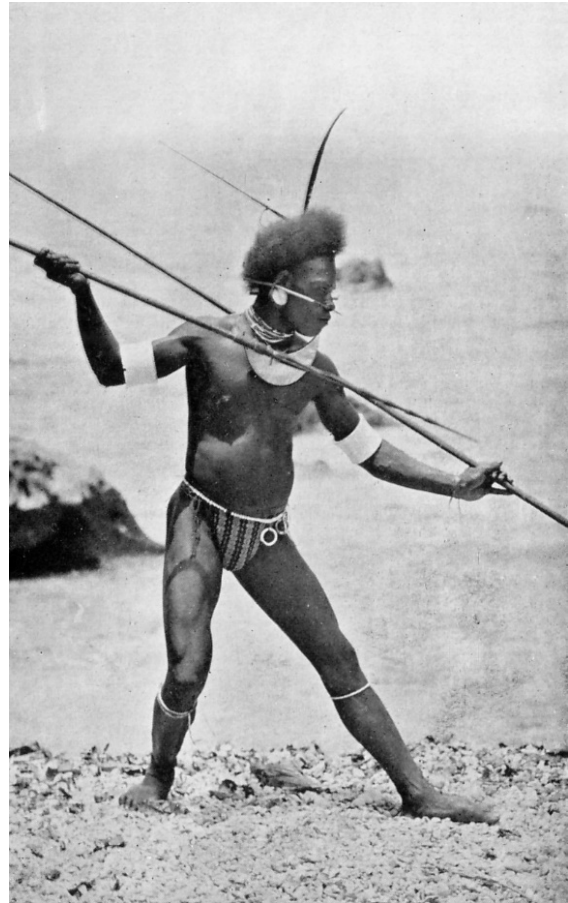
2.7. Pachu River at Cascades, Choiseul Island, 1906. (Anglican Church of Melanesia, J. W. Beattie Collection)



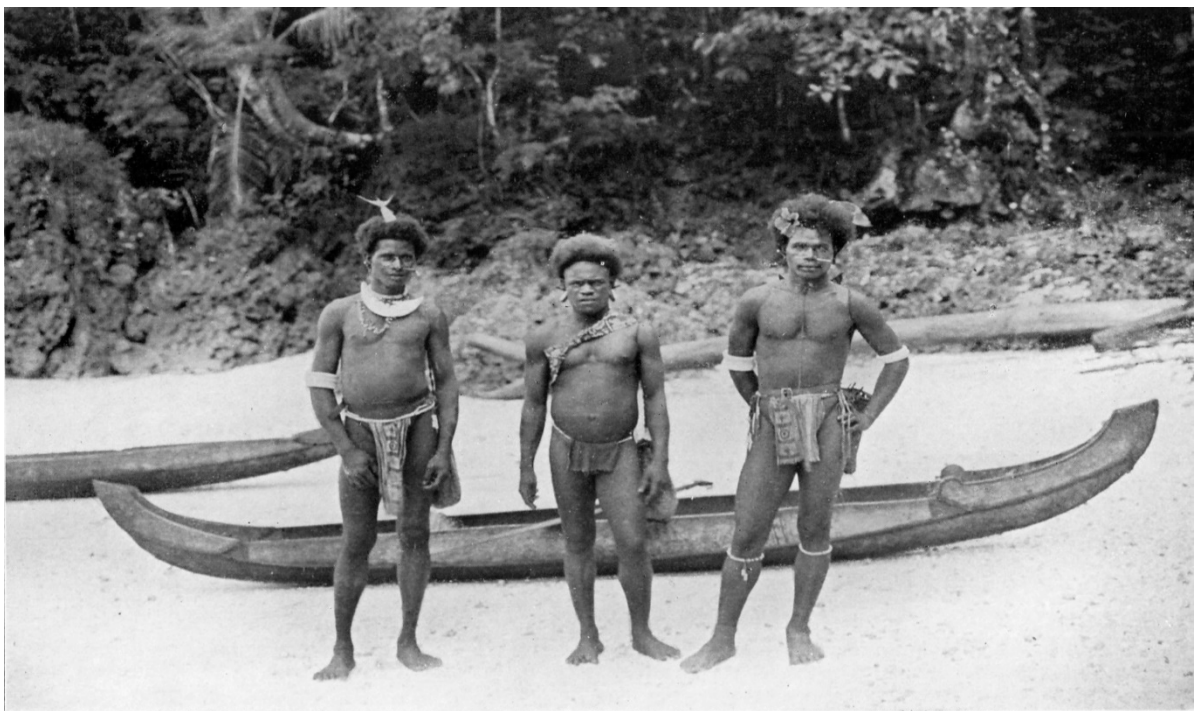
2.8. Santa Cruz villagers in canoes, trading with the *Southern Cross*, 1906. (Anglican Church of Melanesia, J. W. Beattie Collection)



2.9. Navala, a Choiseul chief, early 1930s. (Lynne McDonald Collection)



2.10. Warrior from Ahia, Malaita, 1906. (Anglican Church of Melanesia, J. W. Beattie Collection)



2.11. Young men with canoes, Ulawa, 1906. (Anglican Church of Melanesia, J. W. Beattie Collection)





2.12. Rennell man, 1930s. (Charles Templeton Crocker Expedition Collection, Solomon Islands National Museum)



2.13. Canoes from Pileni Island, Reef Islands, 1906. They are made from a dugout tree trunks. The one in the foreground has a balancing float and living-quarters. (Anglican Church of Melanesia, J. W. Beattie Collection)

Long distance voyaging canoes have been used for thousands of years. They are magnificent vessels, some propelled by oars and others with woven Pandanas sails to catch the winds. While now largely replaced by modern fibre glass canoes with outboard motors, there has been a recent rebirth in their manufacture and use of sea navigation systems to preserve the old skills. The canoes of Temotu Province are once more sailing the Solomon Sea. The 1906 photograph above is from the Reef Islands and the others below are from the Duff Islands.



2.14. Students weaving Pandanas panels for the sails of the TePuke Vaka canoe from Duff Islands, 2016. They make sleeping mats from Pandanas leaves by the same method. (Vaka Taumako Project)





2.15. Taumako school students help launch a new full-sized Vaka canoe with living-quarters platform and sails, at TePuke, 2016. A Vaka is treated as a person and requires respectful and appreciative behaviours. They are wearing traditional costumes for celebratory dancing. (Vaka Taumako Project)



2.16. Taumako voyaging students sailing two small training canoes. They are heading home after a day sailing in 2008. (Vaka Taumako Project)