

A layered mosaic: synthesising linguistic, cultural and genetic evidence in understanding the deep history of Southern New Guinea

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Southern New Guinea comprises the lowland areas of the island of New Guinea, between the Maro river to the west (in Merauke Province, Indonesia) and the Fly River to the east (in Western Province, Papua New Guinea). It is one of the most linguistically diverse regions of the planet, counting over fifty languages in nine currently unrelatable maximal clades (maximal lineages: unrelatable families or isolates). Much of it is low, and relatively new land, built up by progradation. As a region without written records before the mid-nineteenth century, and with next to no archaeological research, evidence from linguistics and genetics play a central role in understanding its deep past. In this talk I will survey some recent findings in this area, which simultaneously underline the importance and feasibility of combining linguistics and genetics and this way, and the need to embed it in culturally appropriate models where intermarriage between groups is very much the norm, but plays out in different ways down the male and female lines of transmission.