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Preliminary Report on the Archaeological Reserches in Western Solomon Islands

Masashi CHIKAMORI

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From August to the end of October 1964, Archaeological and Ethnological institute of KEIO University sent a reserch party to Western Solomon islands in Melanesia. As a member of this

party, the writer carried out archaeological investigations mainly concerned with the Megalithic monuments, the traces of irrigation terrace and ancient village sites at Vella Lavella, Ganonga, Simbo, Choiseul and New Georgia island.

Western Solomon islanders are Melanesian, but much darker in skin colour than those of surrounding islands. They have the typical black skin and frizzy hair. At present time, the villages situate all without exception on the coast around island, and the mountainous island forms uninhabited area. But in ancient time, people lived in the mountains according to some traditional informations, for example the legend on origin of Vella Lavella people.

As a result of the first reconnaissance some village sites were discovered at the inland of Vella Lavella island. Then the excavation work was conducted at Tu'umbuo mountain (about 600 meters above sea-level) and Veala mountain (about 300 meters above sea-level), two places of them. A story says that Tu'umbuo was the first settlement in all Vella Lavella island and Veala is originated place of the name of Vella Lavella. These old village sites are characterized by house-platforms or mounds and in the majority of cases the presence of visible remnants of the original kerbstones defining the house perimeter enables the house plan to be reconstructed. At Veala forty-eight dwelling sites were revealed on the top of mountain and along the narrow ridges. In view of a result of the excavation, these village sites are located within a limited area and constitute impressive regularity of layout. The settlement pattern observed is that some rectangular or oval house-platforms surround a round one which has a fireplace, and three or four groups of like this pattern make up one village. A large number of artificial remains were discovered from the trenches. They are stone adzes, shell bracelets, shell money, stone flatwares, stone jars, rubstone etc., and plenty of round stones or cooking stones came from each dwelling sites. The stone adze is the melanesian type as it is called, polished with oval or lenticular cross-section. But there

is no potsherd. At present time the pottery has not important role in native's life also, the absence of pottery making tradition is very interesting on cultural history in this area.

Nowadays, characteristics of these sites were escaped native's memory, but some traditional informations still offer the possibility of reconstructing the nature of the settlement. Nevertheless the settlement patterns are different between present and ancient village, it can be concluded that these old sites were left by the forerunners of the present village peoples. Then, for what reason and when the peoples came down to the cost area? The migration from mountain to cost, it occurred at beginning of the contact with European, because it is possibly accounted for by the fragments of glass which were dug out at E-3 section trench of Veala site. The writer considers that this migration is a reflection of culture change and a cultural adaptation, that the native culture adapted itself to outside influences by Christian missionaries, the traders and the governmental actions without changing the system of ecologic niche or frame of life area. The theoretical meaning of the migration is a transposition of arrangement in life area that is based on activities for livelihood. Therefore, the writer supposes, the migration took place with the decline of head-hunting and the decrease of defensive function of mountain region and began to break smoothly the exclusiveness on a part of cultural aspects.

Notes in this paper are very brief, the writer intends to report about each problem in detail on another day.