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Abstract

This paper presents new findings on Austronesian migration to and within Nias, expanding upon the foundational genetic study of Oven et al. (2010), who demonstrated that Nias' genetic diversity is unexpectedly low, with severely reduced Y chromosome diversity (particularly in North Nias) and moderately reduced mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) diversity compared to most other populations in the Asia-Oceania region. While they suggested a near-total replacement of pre-Austronesian (Australomelanesoid, Hoabinhian-associated) populations, supporting what has traditionally been identified as a North-South Nias divide, our research provides additional archaeological, linguistic, and oral history evidence to refine this understanding.

Our interdisciplinary study confirms that Austronesians (with their megalithic traditions and advanced agricultural practices) first settled in the northern-central region of South Nias, in the areas now known as Boronadu and Tundrumbaho (Wiradnyana 2007, 2015), before expanding northward and also southward to the neighbouring islands in Kepulauan Batu, including Tello. The northward migration is reflected in both linguistic patterns and migration narratives recorded in traditional oral literature (*hoho*). Additionally, a close look at data collected in a recent Nias dialectal study (Zagötö 2018) and our own recent fieldwork supports this South-to-North migration model, with morpholexical and phonological evidence indicating an older Austronesian presence in the central-south; for example, the more archaic Austronesian lexicon, such as *batu* 'stone', and morphology, such as the Austronesian infix <um>, are typically maintained in the central and southern dialects of Nias, rather than in the North Nias dialect. Moreover, folklore detailing ancestral arrivals aligns with radiocarbon-dated archaeological sites, reinforcing a chronological framework for internal movements (Wiradnyana 2010).

Our findings provide new perspectives on social stratification and its role in shaping genetic and demographic-linguistic patterns. The persistence of elite patrilineal lineages, evident in both historical narratives and genetic bottlenecks, suggests that social structures influenced demographic shifts as much as external migration events. By integrating archaeogenetics, linguistic variation, and folkloric narratives, this study advances our understanding of Austronesian migration dynamics and highlights the value of interdisciplinary approaches in reconstructing population histories in Nias and beyond, particularly in Northern Sumatra and Southeast Asia.

References

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