Understanding the Diffusion of Coconut Architecture Through an Analysis of Thatching Applied on Traditional Tongan and Lauan (Fijian) Architectures

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the thatching used on traditional Tongan and Lauan (Fijian) architectures to extend our understanding of the diffusion of coconut architecture from Tonga to the Lau group, Fiji’s south-eastern islands. Thus, highlighting amongst various other interactions that there were architectural exchanges between early Tongans and Fijians, particularly after the contact period. Furthermore by using thatching as a focus for comparative analysis of key archival documents by William Mariner (Mariner & Martin, 1981) and Reverend Thomas Williams (1858; 1884) the essay reveals that sophisticated coconut thatching technologies—now used widely in Lau—most likely originated from Tonga. In summary, the Tongan form of coconut architecture was quickly appropriated in Lau during the nineteenth century, however, Lauans were slow to appropriate coconut thatching ideas and provided Tongans alternatives. Certainly, as the architectural findings show, there was a strong but non-linear diffusion of Tongan building traits to Lau.