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## THE A.D. 1300 EVENT IN THE PACIFIC BASIN\*

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**ABSTRACT.** Around A.D. 1300 the entire Pacific Basin (continental Pacific Rim and oceanic Pacific Islands) was affected by comparatively rapid cooling and sea-level fall, and possibly increased storminess, that caused massive and enduring changes to Pacific environments and societies. For most Pacific societies, adapted to the warmer, drier, and more stable climates of the preceding Medieval Climate Anomaly (A.D. 750–1250), the effects of this A.D. 1300 Event were profoundly disruptive, largely because of the reduction in food resources available in coastal zones attributable to the 70–80-centimeter sea-level fall. This disruption was manifested by the outbreak of persistent conflict, shifts in settlements from coasts to refugia inland or on unoccupied offshore islands, changes in subsistence strategies, and an abrupt end to long-distance cross-ocean interaction during the ensuing Little Ice Age (A.D. 1350–1800). The A.D. 1300 Event provides a good example of the disruptive potential for human societies of abrupt, short-lived climate changes. *Keywords:* A.D. 1300 Event, climate change, cultural change, Pacific Basin, sea-level change, storm frequency.

It has been clear for a long time to scientists studying recent climate changes that two periods of climate distinct from that of the last 200 years or so occurred within the preceding millennium (for example, Lamb 1977; Broecker 2001). The earlier of these periods, known as the “Medieval Climate Anomaly,” or “Little Climatic Optimum,” lasted from circa A.D. 750 to circa A.D. 1250. The later of these periods, known worldwide as the “Little Ice Age,” and took place circa A.D. 1350–1800. Scholars have focused on the contrasts between these periods and the problems caused to living things by the cooler temperatures, apparently increased climatic variability, and more marked extremes during the latter (Mayewski and others 2004). Comparatively little attention has focused on the transition between the Medieval Climate Anomaly and Little Ice Age, even though in most parts of the world it was perhaps the most rapid period of climate change to have occurred within the past several millennia.

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\* Many people have criticized earlier manifestations of the synthesis expressed in this article, but none has given me cause to doubt its validity. More important, I thank the increasing number of archaeologists and others working in the Pacific Basin who have told me that this synthesis has merit and who have demonstrated this with their data. I thank Viola Haarmann, Douglas L. Johnson, and David Lowe for comments on an earlier draft of this article. Thanks also to Lenny Kouwenberg for a preprint of his work on atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> fluctuations during the last millennium and to Frank Thomas for information about Chuuk.

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