

## People are more than just Pots

What is Lapita? This question, as many have noted, continuing to stimulate debate amongst those who are interested in the archaeology of Oceania.

Although this student is not qualified to discuss many of the issues raised (particularly linguistics), an attempt will be made to address this question.

There is no doubt something (temporal horizon, cultural phenomena etc) is represented by the artefacts associated with the distinctive pottery known as Lapita. It seems to this student that Lapita should be addressed as an archaeological culture rather than as an ethnic culture representing a homogenous group of people. In the first instance, what is known about Lapita

will be outlined. The question of whether Lapita is more than just pots will be discussed before the criticisms of Terrell (1989) are reviewed. Finally the stamped decorated ceramics (Ambrose 1997), as depicted in Figure 1 and 2,

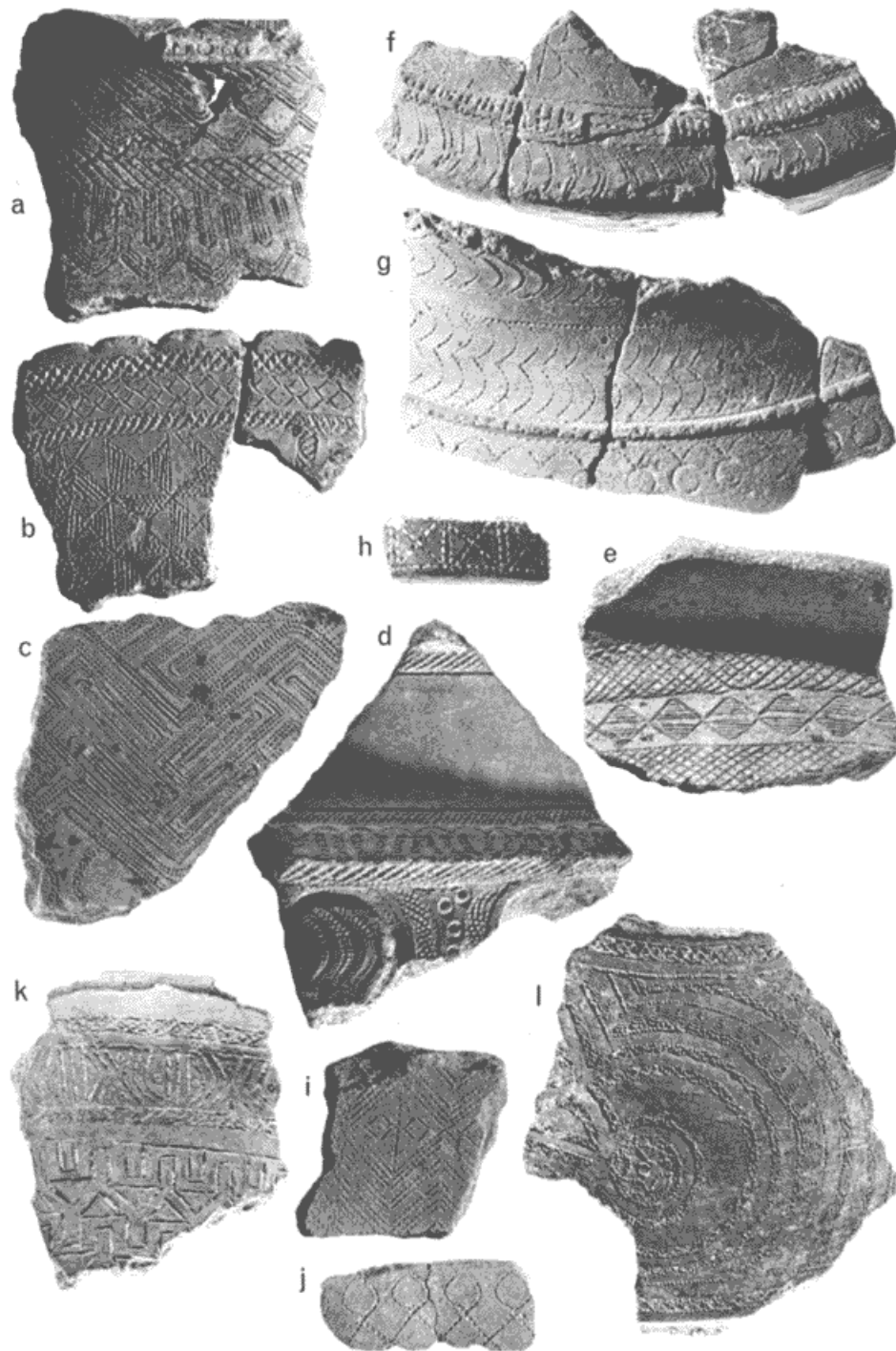
theories of Lapita origin will be discussed in an attempt to show that not only extended 'down the Melanesian island chain from New Guinea to Tonga'

is Lapita more than just pots, but also the peoples who created the pots where (Allen 1996:11). Kirch noted that the spatial extent of Lapita is some four

thousand kilometres 'as the frigate bird flies' (1996:61). This is illustrated in

Figure 3. The temporal dimensions of Lapita, determined through radiocarbon

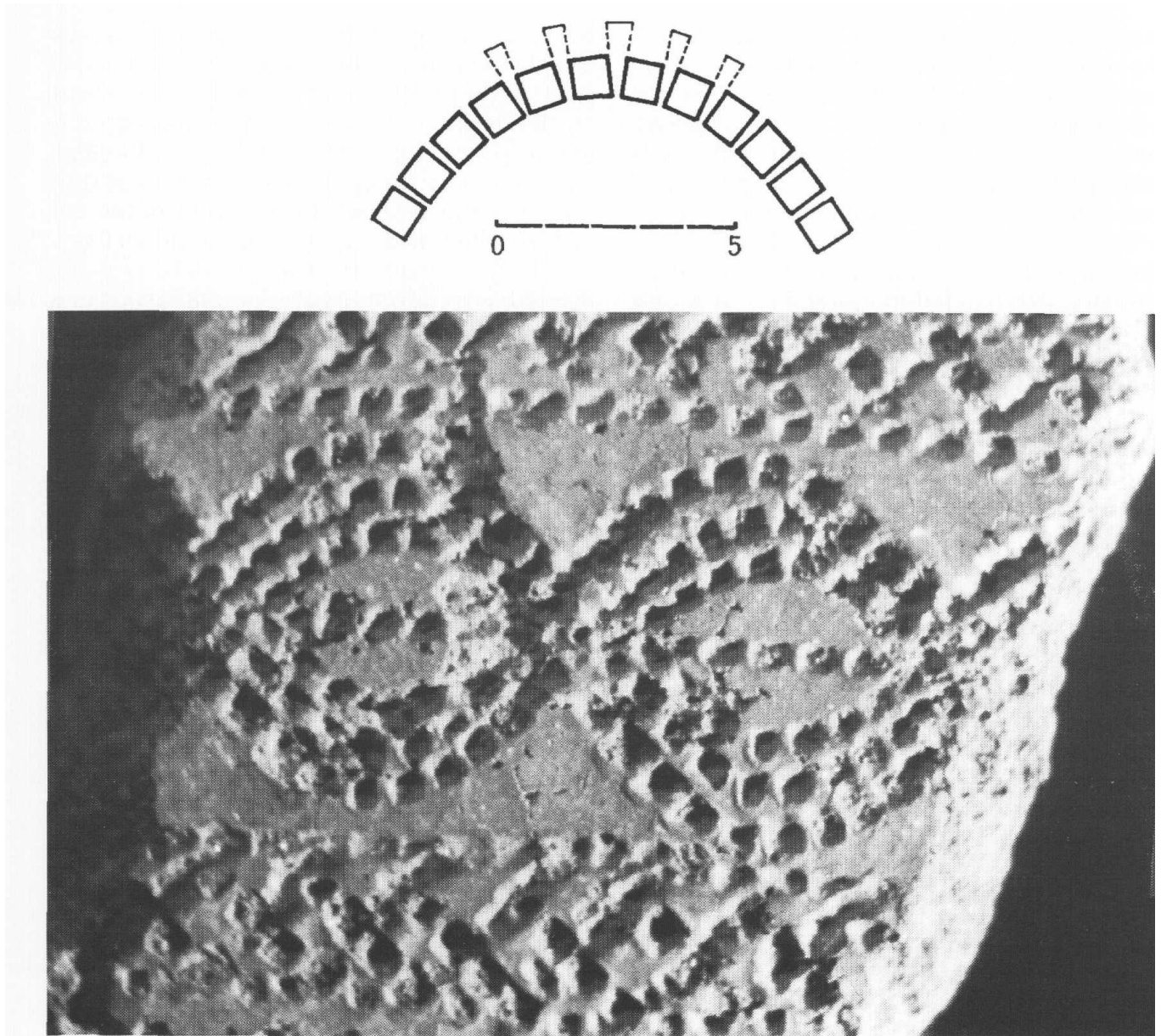
(C<sup>14</sup>) dating, began around three and a half thousand years ago (i.e. 1500 B.C), lasted about one millennia and ended around two and a half thousand years ago (i.e. 500 B. C.)(Kirch 1996). The name Lapita comes from the first excavated site found to contain the distinctive ceramic, this was in New Caledonia (Allen 1996).



Examples of Lapita pottery decoration: (a-e) Ambitle Island; (f-j) Tongatapu; (k, l) Watom Island.

Figure 1. Lapita Pottery (Source Bellwood 1979: 246)

The temporal and spatial homogeneity of sites containing this pottery led archaeologists to classify the sites as belonging to one culture, albeit an archaeological culture.



*A Lapita sherd from Ambitle with characteristic dentate-stamped decoration. The line drawing illustrates the effect of producing serrations on a straight strip that is subsequently bent to provide a stamp for curved repeating decorative units, such as those in the photograph. The scale indicates 5 mm.*

Figure 2. Dentated-Stamped Ceramic (Source Ambrose 1997: 528)

Irwin notes 'Lapita pottery is a conspicuous element of integration among

dispersed communities' (1992:211). Although , it is not the only element

common to these dispersed archaeological sites. Kirch suggests 'Lapita

material culture was rich and complex' (1996: 60). The two to three thousand year old sites associated with Lapita pottery also contain shell tools and jewellery (Allen 1996), wood-working adzes made of stone (Kirch 1996), as well as plant remains associated with a shared subsistence strategy. It is also suggested from the distribution of obsidian that Lapita culture commanded an advanced voyaging technology for inter -regional exchange (Green 2000). This suit of traits directs archaeologists to distinguish Lapita as a cultural complex. It is argued that Lapita is an archaeological, not ethnological, culture.



Figure 3. Map of the western Pacific showing the distribution of Lapita sites (Source The Metropolitan Museum of Art 2004)

Terrell believes that the search for an 'ethnically exclusive' (1989: 625) Lapita group is misguided. Irwin supports this view, stating 'Lapita is an uncertain and variable archaeological category...it does not begin to approach an ethnic category' (1992: 34). Terrell suggests that there is no single archaeological indicator of Lapita. He cites Gosden and associates and Bellwood & Koon, when he states that Lapita sites are found without pottery and decorated pottery is found that is not Lapita. Hodder suggests 'material culture has to be understood both as part of an aesthetic tradition and as part of an ideology within strategies of domination' (1991: 65) and not as an indicator of ethnicity.

Terrell also suggests there is 'distrust of the family-tree model' of the Austronesian language and its 'assumptions about linguistic isolation' (1989: 624). Terrell and Welsh (1997) have suggested that Lapita is approached by archaeologists from two directions. Initially it was argued that Lapita originated in Island Southeast Asia and was carried east by Austronesian speaking horticulturists with advanced sailing technology. Although Allen suggests 'it is traditions and strategies of domination not Hermetically-sealed off or isolated, no longer apparent in the archaeological evidence that we need invoke any significant migration to explain Lapita sites' (1996: 12). The other approach is

island Melanesian origin . As Ambrose notes ‘there appears to be no precursor pottery bearing the same dente-stamp technique to the west of Bismarck Archipelago’ (1997: 526). Terrell & Welsh state there is ‘insufficient evidence in both cases’ (1997: 563). Terrell cautions that rarely if ever can archaeologists ‘reduce the complexities they deal w ith down to A or B must be true hypotheses’ (2000: 333). Terrell & Welsh (1997) argue for a compromise between the Asian and Melanesian models of Lapita. They support Irwin’s (1992) “voyaging corridor” model of Lapita. This seems reasonable when it is considered that ‘Lapita is an uncertain category...conspicuously associated with the settlement of a large part of the world ... [but] being Lapita did not always mean the same thing’ (Irwin 1992: 210 ). Terrell & Welsh’s discussion is summarised in Table 1.



<b>model</b>	<b>Asians in the Pacific</b>	<b>Melanesian homeland</b>	<b>voyaging corridor</b>
<b>type</b>	culture historical	evolutionary	historical
<b>process</b>	migration	local development and colonization	interaction, settlement expansion
<b>agency</b>	Austronesian speakers	Lapita cultural complex	individuals, social groups
<b>duration</b>	c. 5000 BP–present	c. 3500–2500 BP	variable and situational
<b>distribution</b>	Taiwan to eastern Polynesia	Bismarcks to eastern Polynesia	overlapping social fields
<b>driving force</b>	population growth, the Neolithic arts	wanderlust?, exploration as a cultural norm?	post-Pleistocene environmental change and other circumstances, mostly undocumented
<b>phases</b>	some elements of Lapita culture arose during a pause in the Bismarcks; basic Polynesian innovations developed during a pause in western Polynesia	basic Polynesian innovations developed during a pause in western Polynesia	

Table 1. *Key Points in Three Lapita Models* (Terrell & Welsh 1997)

It has been noted that ‘Melanesia, in ethnographic and late prehistoric times, is characterised by great diversity... [and] we cannot exclude diversity in Lapita’ (Irwin 1992:34). Greater Australia (Suhai), the islands of Southeast Asia and near Oceania have been peopled for some thirty thousand years before the appearance of Lapita (Allen 1996, Gosden 1993, Irwin 1992, Kirch 1996). This seems to allow ample time for diversification and as Irwin notes, the people of this region had some ‘25,000 years in which to mess about in boats’ (1992:31). It has been suggested that the duration of occupation of the

abovementioned region allowed 'shifting fields of contact to develop and a range of different participants to be involved' (Irwin 1992: 31). With this in mind one wonders what purpose the search for a Lapita homeland or ethnicity serves.

On initial inspection of Green's (2000) article this student was under the impression that the author was arguing for a Lapita homeland in the Bismarck Archipelago. On further consideration of the 'Triple -I' (Integration, Intrusion and Innovation) model of Lapita (Green 2000: 372) it is contended that Green is arguing, not for an ethnic Lapita origin, but for a spatial origin in the Bismarck Archipelago. So that The 'triple-I' model appears to be not incompatible but actually complimentary to the 'voyaging corridor' model of Terrell & Walsh (1997) and Irwin (1992) as noted by Green (2000: 373).

Green appears to be arguing for the origin of Lapita to be a spatial and That the peoples of remote Oceania speak languages of the Austronesian temporal event, hence not an ethnic phenomenon . Integration and intrusion in family and the language family has its origin in Asia seems generally the Bismarck Archipelago , combined with the innovation of the distinctive accepted. This suggests there must have been some form of contact between dentated-stamped designs, produced the archaeological cultural complex the two regions. Green (2000) and others argue that certain domesticates, known as Lapita.

such as pigs, dogs and chickens originated in Asia. It seems clear that for intrusion of a cultural trait to occur in the region being discussed voyaging is needed. It seems that both the 'Triple-I' and the 'voyaging corridor' models argue for interaction 'involving interchange between new arrivals and incumbent Melanesians' (Allen 1996: 12).

Green (2000) outlines quite clearly the data supporting integration or continuity within the Bismarck Archipelago and one wonders if Terrell & Walsh (1997) are not 'talking past' (Terrell 1989: 623) Green when defining integration as

Melanesian. However Terrell could just be one of those academics that 'are Green's ideas of integration and intrusion seems to be supported by Terrell & by nature a quarrelsome lot' (Terrell 1989: 623, also see Terrell 2000).

Welsch's conclusion that the;  
 ornate Lapita style found in the Bismarck Archipelago and farther to the east  
 in the Pacific was only one of several related, but not identical, early styles in

Irwin's voyaging corridor between Asia and Bismarck Archipelago (1997:

An examination of Green's definition of innovation as 'something arising which

has no direct antecedents' (2000: 373) would be questioned with reference to

Basalla's (1988) contention that technological change is more evolutionary

than revolutionary. For the purpose of this discussion it is suggested that

integration and intrusion in a voyaging corridor is a productive preparatory

hypothesis with which to test archaeological data. But it must be remembered that 'homogeneity and diversity are not only explained by different lengths of settlement, but also by a whole set of cultural mechanisms ' (Sand et al 2002:506 emphasis added). It is the cultural mechanisms, which form the interacting spheres (Terrell & Welsh 1997) where intrusion and integration (Green 2000) occur in Irwin's (1992) voyaging corridor, that are of most interest.

The literature does not give the impression that there is any contention to the assertion that Lapita pottery makes its earliest appearance in the Bismarck Archipelago. There does however seem to be contention as to the origin of Lapita peoples. It has been suggested that Terrell (1989) is justified in his caution against seeking an ethnic origin for Lapita. It has been argued that Green has not only presented a strong case for his Triple -I model of Lapita but has also demonstrated a productive approach to the spatial and temporal phenomena that is the archaeological cultural complex known as Lapita. Although, this paper makes no attempt to suggest an origin for the Lapita peoples, it is additionally argued that, due to the spatial and temporal extent of

Lapita, Archaeologists studying this region should approach Lapita as an archaeological culture complex . However they should remember that the people of this region and time were more than just Lapita .

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