

## Archaeological Studies of the Middle and Late Holocene, Papua New Guinea

### Preface

In the 50 years since “modern” archaeology began in Papua New Guinea, several major themes have been pursued, such as colonization and origins, food production, and trade and exchange. While significant advances have been made in each of these, much of the basic evidence for many areas remains unpublished or reported only in summary form. This volume is a step towards redressing this situation through the publication of data from several areas of the Papua New Guinea island provinces and the north coast of the mainland. The nine papers cover a diverse range of topics and periods and do not follow a single theme.

Pavlides and Kennedy present a technological analysis of flaked obsidian assemblages from two Mid- to Late-Holocene sites in Manus Province that contrast with obsidian assemblages of comparable age in West New Britain Province, which are characterized by distinctive stemmed tools that were widely transported within and beyond New Britain (Araho *et al.*, 2002; Specht, 2005). The contrast is further reinforced by the lack of changes in technological organization of the Manus industries that have been interpreted in New Britain as reflecting shifts in settlement patterns and subsistence, though more and larger samples are needed from Manus to test this possibility.

The bulk of the volume comprises four papers on pottery sites of the Talasea area of West New Britain (Specht, Specht & Summerhayes, Specht & Torrence) and the Duke of York Islands of East New Britain Province (White). Most of this pottery belongs to the Lapita ceramic series dated c. 3350 to about 2000 BP (before present). Collectively these papers add to the growing body of data on Lapita sites of the Bismarck Archipelago, which is generally viewed as the “homeland” of Lapita prior to its subsequent dispersal into Remote Oceania. These papers focus on the local situation,

and suggest degrees of similarity and difference between sites within both their local and wider contexts that need to be explored independently of what occurred after Lapita pottery was transferred to more southerly regions.

In contrast to the highlands of the New Guinea mainland (e.g., Hope & Golson, 1995; Denham *et al.*, 2003), little work has yet been carried out on the early history of cultivated plant food production in the Papua New Guinea island provinces. Studies of vegetation history in central New Britain suggest patterns of landscape use after about 3450–3200 BP that generally support previous lithic analyses (Torrence, 1992; Boyd *et al.*, 2005; Pavlides, 2006). Leavesley and Troitzsch present the first attempt to interpret directly evidence for cultivation through a study of a linear earthwork at Lavongai on New Hanover Island, New Ireland Province that could be older than about 2000 BP. Whether or not this date can be validated, and perhaps a link made with users of Lapita pottery, remains to be tested. The Lavongai earthworks clearly warrant further examination.

Two papers deal with aspects of the pottery sequence on Huon Peninsula in Morobe Province. Lapita dentate-stamped pottery is present in the Siassi Islands, but has not yet been recorded on the adjacent Peninsula mainland, where pottery production might have begun one millennium after Lapita pottery (Lilley, 2002). Lilley and Specht propose a new chronology (1000–500 BP) for the unusual ware known as Type X. This pottery was contemporary, in part at least, with parallel developments that led to the emergence of the historically known pottery of Sio and Gitua that are discussed by Lilley in a separate paper. Whether these wares ultimately had their origins in late and post Lapita wares remains to be determined, though other possibilities cannot be ruled out at this stage.