

Patrick V. Kirch and Terry L. Hunt, eds., *Archaeology of the Lapita Cultural Complex: A Critical Review*. Thomas Burke Memorial Washington State Museum Research Report, no. 5. Seattle: Burke Museum, 1988. Pp. iv, 181. US\$17.00 paper.

*Reviewed by Jim Specht, Australian Museum, Sydney*

The last five years have witnessed a major reorientation of field studies of Lapita pottery sites in the western Pacific, from the western Polynesia and southern Melanesian geographic areas to the Bismarck Archipelago and North Solomons Province of Papua New Guinea. Almost all of that work has developed out of the highly successful Lapita Homeland Project of 1985, so imaginatively put together by Professor Jim Allen. With primary funding through the Research School of Pacific Studies at the Australian National University, Canberra, and with supplementary funding from the National Geographic Society and other participating institutions, that project has generated an enormous amount of data from newly discovered as well as previously known Lapita sites in the region. This volume, the result of a graduate seminar course at the University of Washington (Seattle), summarizes aspects of this new data and reviews in broad outlines the one hundred or so Lapita sites now known from Papua New Guinea to Western Samoa.

The volume contains ten chapters by eight authors, with five chapters individually and jointly written by Kirch and Hunt. It is the most comprehensive review of Lapita sites ever attempted and is an invaluable and welcome update of Roger Green's 1979 review of the main Lapita sites then known. The collation of data and bibliography alone make this volume an essential addition to the libraries of all who profess any interest in the history of Pacific peoples. Yet those involved in Lapita studies will find many inadequacies.

The most significant inadequacy is probably a result of the way in which the volume was developed. Several chapters are, to put it kindly, lacking in delivery of the "critical review" promised in the volume title.

Most of the data are taken from published reports (and most of these, sad to say, are woefully incomplete). Such material allows only a very imprecise understanding of either Lapita sites or their contents.

Lepofsky's site catchment and locational analysis would have benefited from firsthand observation of Lapita site contexts. I am more than skeptical about the generalized approach she uses to characterize both site catchments and locations. Her observation that Lapita sites "are located on both reef-lagoon systems and the open ocean" (p. 46) leaves much to be desired. What is an "open ocean" aspect? If I understand her correctly, then I have to disagree that any Lapita site is truly oriented to the "open sea." Moreover, not all sites with Lapita pottery are on beaches. In my preliminary report on Watom Island (Specht 1968) I briefly discussed the Vunailau site, set on a hillside some distance inland from the beach. Let us put to rest once and for all time the myth that Lapita sites are always on beaches. We will find Lapita sites only on beaches if we never look for them elsewhere.

The range of locational variables associated with the beachside locations is broader than that perpetuated in the literature. If we are to use site catchment analysis for Lapita or any other category of site in the Pacific, we must generate our own catchment models that adequately encapsulate insular environments. Drawing circles of standard diameters around sites is not only old-hat, but virtually meaningless. I agree, however, with Lepofsky's plea for better descriptions of site location, both current and reconstructed. In the meantime, we would be well advised to use the available data with some caution, and avoid discussions of site densities on large and small islands (figs. 3.4, 3.6): Are Lapita sites more visible on small islands than on large ones? Are small islands more carefully and thoroughly surveyed than large ones?

Hunt's paper on pottery technology and composition is a useful review and highlights just how little is known about either aspect. We all await with great interest his own work on the Mussau-area Lapita pottery that, from word-of-mouth reports, promises to set new benchmarks for these kinds of studies. We have come a long way in terms of techniques and instrumentation since the pioneer work of Bill Dickinson and Con Key. Anson's work (1983) on Bismarck Lapita pottery composition raised some challenging propositions about production and exchange that must now be addressed using larger samples.

Sharp's contribution usefully advances the study of Lapita design composition begun by Sidney M. Mead. She addresses a central difficulty with Mead's scheme, that of defining design elements and combining these to form motifs. Her paper formed a central part of discussions

on how to analyze Lapita decoration at a Lapita design workshop held at the Australian National University in December 1988. Now, as then, I remain unconvinced that only one analytical approach should be adopted by all, since each approach serves different ends. Our major difficulties at present are defining those ends and then identifying a relevant approach.

Most attention to stone artifacts from Lapita sites has been directed to exotics such as obsidian, particularly in sourcing studies. Allen and Bell's chapter, therefore, is a welcome inclusion in the volume, though they are severely hampered by the lack of information about flaked stone materials in terms of technology and function. The chapter is disappointing, nevertheless, as it can offer little beyond a restatement of data, even though its assembly here is useful.

Two chapters address meat protein sources in Lapita subsistence. Butler reviews fish remains while Nagaoka covers other animals, including molluscs. Both chapters would have been greatly improved, and of much greater value, if they had been structured in terms of a site catchment model, with attention to habitat data and to site/resource spatial relationships. Both identify some real problems in recovery, identification, and quantification. Despite the widespread use of 5 mm mesh sieves, we are still losing, it seems, an enormous amount of small material. Add to that the problem faced by many in getting even genus-level identifications for some animal groups and the ongoing difficulties surrounding how to count the animals represented, and one is left wondering just how reliable are many published statements on subsistence. Butler's conclusion that fishing may have been overemphasized by previous authors deserves careful reflection. I remain skeptical about the value of detailed mollusc species lists (e.g., tables 8.4 and 8.5). If most of these remains are food residues, then there was little selectivity.

The remaining chapters on the temporal and spatial distributions of Lapita sites, exchange-network models, and "problems and issues" deserve to be taken together. Throughout the volume the subject of "Lapita exchange" recurs as a leitmotiv, coming into its own in Hunt's chapter on graph theory and network models of exchange.

Elsewhere, Kirch (1988) has discussed the difficulty of identifying archaeologically the movement of goods (e.g., shell artifacts, pigs, etc.) that cannot be sourced. This is likely to remain a continuing problem, so discussion of Lapita exchange activities will continue to be based on pottery and stone items. Some years ago Clark and Terrell (1978) queried the nature of the evidence then at hand for postulating long-distance exchange networks during Lapita times. Many of their criticisms

still hold. With the exception of obsidian from the three Bismarck source areas, we have no possible evidence for sustained long-distance exchange throughout the Lapita period. Even with obsidian, most of the finds are in the Bismarck-Solomons sites; south and east of these the total number of Bismarck obsidian pieces found on Lapita sites is, literally, a mere handful.

Since Wickler's demonstration of Pleistocene colonization of the North Solomons Province of Papua New Guinea (Wickler and Spriggs 1988), we can now assume settlement at that time as far south at least as Makira, if not beyond. It may not be a coincidence that the main Lapita distribution of Bismarck's obsidian matches the area of the Bismarcks and the Solomons with demonstrated and putative Pleistocene settlement. So little is yet known of Solomons prehistory that we cannot state with certainty that Bismarck obsidian was or was not transported to the Solomons during the Pleistocene. We must be wary, therefore, of concluding that with the appearance of Lapita pottery in the western Pacific, there was a simultaneous extension of the distribution of obsidian into the Solomons. We cannot assume that people associated with Lapita pottery created long-distance exchange networks or significantly extended previously existing ones.

As Hunt notes in his chapter on Lapita pottery composition studies, "surprisingly little is known for certain about the potential exchange of Lapita pottery over short or long distances" (p. 52). Despite nearly a quarter of a century of petrographic and other studies of clays and fillers used by Lapita potters, we are left with only a few analyzed sherds and of these only a small proportion that might have been transported to their sites of recovery. Anson's results (1983) on a small Bismarck sample suggested local production at Watom, Ambitle, and Talasea, and a possibility of importations to Eloaua. Larger and better samples are clearly required before we can discuss movement of Lapita pottery over even short distances. There is virtually no evidence to show movement over long distances. The likelihood obviously cannot be discounted at this stage, but we need evidence. Hunt's three models for ceramic exchange (chap. 4) are useful, if oversimplified, providing a starting point for organizing thoughts about this topic. They need, however, to be developed further.

Hunt's chapter on "graph theoretic network models for Lapita exchange" (chap. 9) contributes little to the subject matter of its title. Any one of the models based on our present knowledge of Lapita site distributions is susceptible to radical revision as new sites are located. Because of the large scale on which he chooses to operate, nodes contain

anywhere from one to a dozen sites. While this does not automatically invalidate the application of this graph-theory approach to the larger picture, it does run the danger of misleading our thoughts about local-level interactions. Were the major interactions only between those sites that today yield Lapita pottery? What about the populations of the Bismarck Archipelago-North Solomons areas who were contemporary with Lapita but whose sites do not contain the distinctive pottery (e.g., site FGT at Yambon, southwest New Britain)? Are they to be excluded from consideration? How do the models based on graph theory account for variations through time in the proportions of obsidian from the three Bismarck source areas? Many other queries could be raised along similar lines, reflecting how we need models of greater complexity than any presented in this volume.

The hypothetical geographic/straight-line link network for the Bismarck Archipelago (fig. 9.7) could apply to any period of the archipelago's history. I have severe doubts, however, that such a model, with arbitrarily defined nodes, has much utility. The inclusion of some but not all islands off the north coast of New Guinea while excluding that coastline itself, and the reduction of "large, elongate islands" (p. 145) to just three points (one at each end, one in the middle), seems a potentially misleading approach. Handled in this way, it is not surprising that small islands become prominent; indeed, I smell some circularity of reasoning here.

Kirch's final chapter on problems and issues is a challenging personal view of where we go next. It misses several major issues that must be addressed if Lapita studies are to progress beyond their present situation. Was there ever such a thing as "Lapita society"? What exactly does Lapita pottery signify? I feel uncomfortable with the reductionist approach that portrays the makers/users of Lapita pottery as *sui generis*, separate from other populations in its northern distribution. Are we really dealing with a distinct group of people migrating into and out of the Bismarck Archipelago? In part this question must be addressed through the study of the skeletal remains of the makers/users of Lapita pottery, of which little is yet available (cf. Green, Anson, and Specht 1989). I suspect, too, that the ghost of historical linguistics, as wedded to archaeology, and previous obsessions with Polynesian origins still dominate many perceptions of prehistory in Lapita's main area of distribution (which is not Polynesia).

That leads me to my final point, on which, I hope, Kirch and his co-authors would agree: not only do we need better excavated, better analyzed, and better reported data, we urgently need better models for all

levels of Lapita studies. The time for simple, reductionist models that pay little attention to other archaeological information is well and truly passed. Steps towards more complex and comprehensive models have already been taken (e.g., Allen and White 1989; Gosden 1989), and we can expect further developments in the next few years. This volume, in the meantime, can serve as a departure point for some of those developments.

Despite its deficiencies, which arise in part from problems of method and data quality, the volume contains much useful material both in data review and ideas. It will undoubtedly soon become outdated, but at this price no one should complain.

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