

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

Part I

Ceramic Sites on the Duke of York Islands

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ABSTRACT. Surveys and surface collections of pottery and obsidian from 21 localities in the Duke of York Islands are reported. Test pits dug in seven of these revealed similar stratigraphies in nearly all, with pottery, obsidian, and sometimes other stone, animal bone and shell, underlying Rabaul volcanic ash dated to c. 1400 BP. The pottery decoration is extensively figured.

WHITE, J. PETER, 2007. Archaeological Studies of the Middle and Late Holocene, Papua New Guinea. Part I. Ceramic sites on the Duke of York Islands. *Technical Reports of the Australian Museum* 20: 3–50 [published online].

This paper reports details of the 21 localities with ceramics and test pits dug at seven of these locations in the Duke of York Islands, East New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea during July 4–17 and August 9–28, 1993. Analyses of some of the material, especially from sites SDP and SEE, have already been published (White & Harris, 1997 on dating and obsidian sourcing; Thomson & White, 2000 on the pottery and resource procurement zones for tempers), and further data on these topics exist in the respective Honours theses (Harris, 1994; Thomson, 1998). These data are not duplicated here. Some sites have many dentate-stamped sherds and others have very few, even though they are of the same age. I continue to see no reason to question the dating of these two kinds of sites, and accept them as contemporary. The following account refers to the location of villages, etc. on the islands at the time of the survey.

Background

The 12 islands and islets of the Duke of York group lie in St George's Channel some 20 km from New Britain and 8 km from New Ireland (Fig. 1). Both are clearly visible from the group. With the exception of Makada, all the islands are composed of raised coral and even the largest, Duke of York Island, rises no more than 80 m a.s.l. Makada, 120 m high, has a volcanic core which outcrops on the western side, but most of the island's surface consists of raised coral and, like the rest of the islands, its beaches are all coral sand. There are extensive reefs around the southern islands, with deep passages into sheltered water on the eastern sides of Kerawara and Mioko. There are reefs along the north side of Makada, but otherwise there are only occasional outcrops of coral in the northern part of the group.