

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

Pottery of the Talasea Area, West New Britain Province

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ABSTRACT. Pottery has been found at many locations in the Talasea area of Willaumez Peninsula of West New Britain Province in Papua New Guinea. Most of the pottery belongs to the Lapita ceramic series, and there are only three cases where the pottery represents recent trade wares. The find-spots are situated at beach level and on hills and ridges. Coastal changes caused by tectonic activity and other natural events during the late Holocene, together with human activities, have severely affected many localities. The main pottery sequence is bracketed by the W-K2 and W-K3 tephtras. It probably began c. 3370–3140 cal. BP and ended during the period c. 2350–1850 cal. BP. Most pottery was locally produced, though several exotic sherds indicate links with the south coast of New Br...itain. Early sites are located on islands as well as the mainland. Boduna Island might have been used for special, perhaps ritual, activities. After the W-K3 tephra, pottery was not used again in the Talasea area until the last few hundred years, when trade wares were imported from the New Guinea mainland.

SPECHT, JIM, & ROBIN TORRENCE, 2007. Archaeological Studies of the Middle and Late Holocene, Papua New Guinea. Part IV. Pottery of the Talasea Area, West New Britain Province. *Technical Reports of the Australian Museum* 20: 131–196 [published online].

Pottery, mostly attributable to the Lapita ceramic series, has been recorded at more than 60 localities on Willaumez Peninsula and its adjacent islands in West New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea (Fig. 1, Plate 1). Other parts of island Melanesia have clusters of ten or more Lapita sites with the distinctive dentate-stamped decoration and complex vessel forms (Anderson *et al.*, 2001: table 1; Specht, 2002: 42), but none matches the density of sites on the Willaumez Peninsula mainland and the adjacent islands. This exceptional concentration is not surprising, as the Talasea area of the Peninsula was one of the major source regions for

the obsidian, largely from the Kutau/Bao sub-source, that was transported widely throughout the western Pacific during the time of Lapita pottery (e.g., Torrence, 1992a; Summerhayes *et al.*, 1998; Specht, 2002). Recent publications about the Peninsula, however, have focused primarily on the history of procurement, use and movement of obsidian at the sources and beyond over more than 20,000 years (e.g., Torrence *et al.*, 1992, 1996; Torrence & Summerhayes, 1997; Summerhayes *et al.*, 1998; Araho *et al.*, 2002; Rath & Torrence, 2003; Symons, 2003; Torrence, 2003, 2004a, 2004b; Torrence *et al.*, 2004). Here we present an overview of the pottery finds

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