

# Avanata: A Possible Late Lapita Site on Fergusson Island, Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea

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**ABSTRACT.** West Fergusson obsidian has been identified in a number of Lapita and Early Papuan pottery (EPP) sites on the south coast of Papua New Guinea and wider afield in the Pacific. Yet, the archaeological history of the island and its obsidian sources remains mostly unknown. Recent fieldwork aimed at establishing a chronological sequence for human occupation of the island, identified the site of Avanata, on the south coast of the Kukuia Peninsula. It has a pottery assemblage decorated with shell impression and paint, techniques not previously recorded on Massim pottery. Although no dateable material was obtained from the site, we argue that archaeological correlates on the Papuan mainland indicate that Avanata belongs to an early ceramic occupation of Fergusson Island dating > 1000 years ago and possibly to the late Lapita period.

## Introduction

Papua New Guinea is home to four different, geochemically distinct obsidian regions: the Admiralties, West New Britain (WNB), East Fergusson and West Fergusson (Fig. 1). Of these, the WNB and Admiralties sources both have histories of use during the Late Pleistocene (Fredericksen, 1997; Torrence *et al.*, 2004; Summerhayes and Allen, 1993). In the late Holocene, new patterns emerged for the Admiralties and WNB sources with the arrival of the Lapita peoples. Obsidian from these two regions is found in the earliest Lapita sites in the Bismarck Archipelago and is also part of the material cultural package that is transported into the Western Pacific as part of the Lapita migration into this previously uninhabited region (Reepmeyer *et al.*, 2010). Because of their long history of use, most previous research on obsidian sources in Papua New Guinea has focused on the Admiralties and WNB. This includes Robin Torrence's

seminal work in WNB where she mapped the spatial extent of the different obsidian sources, and described their physical nature, quality and accessibility to better understand how these factors impacted obsidian source selection (Torrence, 2004; Torrence *et al.*, 1992; Torrence *et al.*, 1996).

While Fergusson Island obsidian does not occur in Lapita sites as commonly as the Admiralty and WNB sources, it had a wide distribution along the Papuan south coast, being present in Lapita sites (Mialanes *et al.*, 2016; Skelly *et al.*, 2016) and later EPP sites (Irwin, 1991; Allen *et al.*, 2011). However, little is yet known about the archaeology of Fergusson Island itself, including whether there is possible Lapita occupation. Evidence for Lapita presence within the Massim region is growing, with two sites now dated: Wari Island (Chynoweth *et al.*, 2020; Negishi and Ono, 2009) and Malakai on Nimowa Island (Shaw *et al.*, 2020), and a third site identified based on the presence of Late Lapita pottery styles (site BQN on Tubetube Island) (Shaw, 2016a).

**Keywords:** Fergusson Island; Massim; Papua New Guinea; Lapita; pottery; obsidian

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