

Moving On or Settling Down? Studying the Nature of Mobility through Lapita Pottery from the Anir Islands, Papua New Guinea

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ABSTRACT. Summerhayes has argued that changes in the mobility of Lapita communities within the Bismarck Archipelago of Papua New Guinea is reflected in numerous aspects of their pottery assemblages. Such changes are seen most markedly in a reduction in the number of clay and temper combinations over time, which indicates less movement across the landscape to collect clays and tempers for pottery production. This pattern was identified in the Arawe Islands and Mussau Islands, and more tentatively in the Anir Islands of southern New Ireland Province. This research reviews and re-interprets the previous studies of the Anir pottery assemblages through mineralogical and geochemical analyses to test whether the Arawe and Mussau model applies in this region. Previous work upon pottery assemblages from the Tanga islands is also brought into the discussion as a means of comparison and to identify possible exchange relationships between the Anir and Tanga groups.

Introduction

Extensive research by Anson (1983, 1986), Hunt (1989) and Summerhayes (2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2003, 2010) upon Lapita ceramic assemblages from sites of the Bismarck Archipelago of Papua New Guinea, has begun to isolate clear differences between Early Lapita ceramic assemblages and those from Middle/Late Lapita contexts. The differences stem from both the function of the ceramic assemblages and changes occurring within Lapita society.

Based upon a comparison of assemblages from the Arawe Islands and the mid north coast of New Britain, the Mussau Islands off northern New Ireland, and the results of preliminary analyses conducted on the Anir Islands sites, Summerhayes (2000a: 231–233, 2001a, 2001b: 61) argued that Lapita ceramic assemblages could be functionally divided between vessels with dentate stamping and those without, and these two components had variable rates of change, where the former changed dramatically over time while the latter changed very little.

This pattern was first identified in the Arawe Islands assemblages, whereby the ratio of dentate stamped wares and the vessel forms primarily associated with such decoration (bowls and stands) declined over time from the Early to Middle Lapita periods, while vessels without dentate stamping, such as outcurving jars, remained the same in terms of decoration and numbers (Summerhayes, 2000a: 155–156, 231; 2000c: 301). Similar observations were made with preliminary research undertaken on material from the Anir Islands, where Early Lapita deposits in Kamgot (ERA) have higher proportions of dentate stamping as well as bowls and stands, as opposed to the later sites of Balbalankin (ERC) and Malekolon (EAQ) which have a much higher proportion of carinated jars lacking dentate stamping. Additionally, such patterns can also be seen in the Early and Middle/Late Mussau Lapita assemblages (Summerhayes, 2000a: 232–233; 2000b: 57–62; 2003: 139–140).

Alongside the changes occurring with form and decoration, Summerhayes (2000a: 225–290) also argued for changes in pottery production, whereby Early Lapita

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