Shards of Meaning: Archaeology and the Melanesia–Polynesia Divide

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WHEN MODERN SCIENTIFIC ARCHAEOLOGY BEGAN IN THE PACIFIC SOON AFTER WORLD War II a prevailing and deeply entrenched view, popularised by J.-S.-C. Dumont d’Urville in 1832, held that Melanesian and Polynesian people were distinct from one another because of their separate origins. The older of the population strata, the Melanesians, came from New Guinea or nearby islands and had spread east to Fiji. Polyynesians were seen as relatively recent arrivals from Island Southeast Asia who had largely bypassed western Melanesia and spread to the three points of the Polynesian triangle — Hawai‘i, Easter Island (Rapa Nui) and New Zealand (Aotearoa) — and all the islands within.

Archaeologists initially shaped their research assumptions and findings in terms of the leading two-population-strata paradigm, with ceramics providing evidence of the anticipated early Melanesian substratum. Pottery had long been identified with a ‘Melanesian’ people, since its manufacture in Oceania had a distribution congruent with Dumont d’Urville’s geo-cultural zone of Melanesia. Accumulating evidence of an ancient ceramic horizon, now known as Lapita, that crossed the Melanesia–Polynesia geographical divide and which had similarities with pottery from Island Southeast Asia, soon meant, however, that the two-stratum model in its original form was no longer supportable.

In a pivotal move, the contradictions posed by the new archaeological data were resolved by inverting the sequence of population movements, and in the process retaining much of the structure and logic of the original two-stratum model. As Jack Golson concisely noted in 1961, the presence of a unified prehistoric pottery style found from New Britain in the west to Samoa in the east meant that the cultural divide between Melanesia and Polynesia must have developed out of an ‘early community of culture linking New Caledonia [Vanuatu and Fiji], Tonga, and Samoa, antedating … the “Melanesian” cultures of the first and ancestral to the historic West Polynesian cultures of the other two’.3

It was the movement, subsequent to the Lapita dispersal, of Melanesian people that was now seen as contributing to the staggering degree of human diversity

2 Note on terms. Oceania includes the islands of the Pacific Ocean, excluding Australia, Japan, and the Galapagos Islands, and those within Dumont d’Urville’s division of Malaysia. The latter are now generally considered to lie within Island Southeast Asia. The West Pacific refers to New Guinea and islands across a zone extending east to New Caledonia and Fiji. Island Melanesia excludes New Guinea but otherwise includes all the other islands of the West Pacific except for Australia and New Zealand. The latter is often included in geological definitions.
witnessed in the West Pacific by early European observers, and which was contrasted, often unfavourably, with the attractive simplicity of the apparent population homogeneity in Polynesia. Where Melanesians came ashore, they were seen as having added new components to the existing cultural repertoire as well as increasing the biological and linguistic variation of an island's population. The pattern of Melanesian expansion was clinal. Its strongest expression was in its western 'homeland' comprising New Guinea and adjacent islands, declining in New Caledonia, and weakest at its eastern terminus in Fiji. In Tonga and Samoa, where the composition of colonising groups was unaffected by significant post-settlement population inputs from the west, the people had a similar culture, language and physical appearance that linked them with the other indigenous inhabitants of Polynesia.

Since the 1960s when it was first outlined, this most recent version of the two-stratum model has provided a powerful explanation of the population variation found on Pacific Islands, even if prehistorians, and other users of archaeological information, are seldom explicit about either the model or its influence on their discipline. Thus, in modern archaeology, for better and for worse, Dumont d'Urville's designations of Melanesia and Polynesia still arguably retain relevance by signalling the diverging historical trajectories of the two culture areas, despite cogent criticism about their definition and meaning, and whether the racism that accompanied their formation is implicit in current usage.4

This paper examines the development of the influential two-stratum model that underpins the Melanesia–Polynesia divide, and traces its impact on the nascent discipline of Pacific prehistory. Particularly important has been a lengthy, and largely unsuccessful, search for a ceramic correlate of a postulated movement of Melanesians into Oceania, which would balance the formative 'pre-Polynesian' Austronesian stratum represented by the distinctive pottery and material culture of the well-known Lapita cultural complex.

It is argued that the historical development of the two-stratum model has forced the interpretation of Oceania's ceramics into a binary framework which is not well supported by material evidence. Archaeologists, along with historians, linguists and geneticists, are now beginning to move away from the essentialism which characterises the two-stratum concept, instead focusing on indigenous interaction and inter-island/archipelago gene flow as meta-historical processes. The emerging change in perspective further weakens the motivation to find a unified 'Melanesian' pottery tradition that equates with a prehistoric expansion of Melanesian peoples, and challenges researchers to develop better models that take into account what Roger Green has described as Oceania's 'real historical complexity'.5 This requires


R.C. Green, 'Linguistic, biological, and cultural origins of the initial inhabitants of remote Oceania', New Zealand Journal of Archaeology, 17 (1995), 19.
new ways of interpreting the past, in addition to reviews and critiques of our conceptual frameworks that are informed by historical perspectives.

Guiding Formulations

Maps of the Pacific from 1780 to 1846 illustrate in a simple yet clear manner the developing concretisation of a boundary between Melanesia and Polynesia. In Djurberg’s 1780 map,6 the Pacific Ocean was shown as a broad, undifferentiated expanse called Polynésia (Figure 1). By 1816, it had been informally divided into a southwest area called Australasia and a northeast zone of ocean termed Polynésia.7 In Dumont d’Urville’s 1832 map,8 the subdivisions of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia were drawn in with their borders tentatively outlined in thin dotted lines. The growing acceptance of Dumont d’Urville’s tripartite classification of Pacific Islands and their peoples can be seen in the maps of scholars such as Horatio Hale,9 and those of popular cartographers such as Emile Levasseur (1847) who replaced Dumont d’Urville’s permeable boundaries with solid, colourised borders within which were contained three apparently discrete populations (Figure 2).10

Yet, within Dumont d’Urville’s tripartite cultural geography, not all boundaries were of equal significance. The greatest distinction was between what he thought was an ancient Melanesian population and the more recently arrived Polynesians. The difference between Polynesian and Micronesian populations was less marked due to both races having a similar, though not identical, Asian ancestry. In his 1832 article, Dumont d’Urville, however, recognised that his principal Melanesia–Polynesia division recapitulated Johann Reinhold Forster’s explicit and influential idea, published in 1778, that Island Southeast Asia and the Pacific had been settled by two races.11

Forster was the naturalist on Cook’s second voyage and had in 1772, before leaving for the Pacific, translated Bougainville’s Voyage Round the World,12 in which two types of men were claimed to be found in Tahiti. He also had access, well before its publication, to the account of J. Crozet — the French lieutenant who travelled to New Zealand with Marion du Fresne in 1772 — in which it was asserted that New Zealand was inhabited by three races.13 The first race was

6 D. Djurberg, ‘Karta over Polynesien eller femte delen af jordklotet/Carte de la Polynésie ou la cinquième partie de la terre af Daniel Djurberg’ (Upsala 1780).
7 P. Lapie, ‘Océanie ou Australasie et Polynésie dressée par P. Lapie, Geographe’ (Paris 1816).
10 E. Levasseur, ‘Océanie gravé par la laguermerie rue St Jacques No. 82 illustrée par Raimond Bonheur Peintre’ (Paris 1847).
11 J.R. Forster, Observations made during a Voyage Round the World, on Physical Geography, Natural History and Ethic Philosophy (London 1778).
12 Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, Voyage autour du monde par la frégate du roi la Boussole et la flûte l’Étoile en 1766, 1767, 1768 & 1769 (Paris 1771).
autochthonous, the second was of mixed descent, whereas the third he believed came from Australia.\textsuperscript{14} These descriptions almost certainly influenced Forster, as did the earlier Spanish observations of Mendaña and Quiros, who noted substantial hair and skin colour variation amongst the people they encountered in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

The importance of Forster’s work to the development of Dumont d’Urville’s Melanesia–Polynesia divide was threefold. First was the partitioning of the people of the South Sea Islands into a western race typified by the inhabitants of New Caledonia and Vanuatu, and an eastern race that included the populations of Tahiti, Marquesas, Tonga, Easter Island and New Zealand. Second and third was the use of comparative linguistics, among other cultural and physical traits, to identify the probable homelands of the two races, and to propose a settlement sequence and mechanism for their distribution.

In the Moluccas and Philippines, Forster distinguished between a coastal and an interior race. Coastal Malays were physically similar to, and shared some words with, the race inhabiting the Eastern South Sea Isles.\textsuperscript{15} The ‘Alfoories’ of the hilly and mountainous interior spoke different languages and were, in temper and appearance, like the race found in New Guinea, New Caledonia, Tanna and Malakula. The confinement of the ‘Alfoories’ to the interior was caused by Malay peoples who had ‘over-run all the East India islands before the arrival of Europeans’, and he thought a similar event had evidently taken place in the South Sea Islands.\textsuperscript{16}

Forster was a talented linguist who knew 17 languages, and his inferences about the sequence and process of settlement in the Pacific appear to have been drawn largely from his understanding of European language affinities. He drew an explicit parallel, for instance, between the distribution of the Malay language in Asia and the closely related dialects spoken in the Eastern South Sea Isles, and the relationship of the Germanic languages in western Europe. The similarity between Dutch, Low German Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Icelandic and English showed they were dialects of the ‘same general [Germanic] language’\textsuperscript{17} that had spread widely due to the superior social and technological qualities of its people. By analogy, so, too, must the Malays and the Eastern South Sea Islanders have been culturally advantaged relative to the people they displaced, not just in their social institutions and intellectual capacity, but also in the technological and artistic development of their material culture.

\textsuperscript{14} J. Crozet, Croyet’s Voyage to Tasmania, New Zealand, The Ladrone Islands, and the Phillippines in the Years 1771-1772, trans. H. Ling Roth (London 1891), 28.

\textsuperscript{15} Forster’s ‘Eastern South Sea Isles’ is, therefore, similar to Dumont d’Urville’s division of ‘Polynesia’.


\textsuperscript{17} Forster, Observations, 276-7, 282
FIGURE 1. The Pacific undivided (1780). D. Djurberg, 'Karta over Polynesien eller femte delen af jordklotet/Carte de la Polynésie ou la cinquième partie de la terre af Daniel Djurberg' (Upsala, 1780).
Pottery and the Bow

The seeds of racial stratification embedded within Forster’s framework should not, of course, be overlooked; nor should the intellectual context in which the two-stratum model was elaborated during the 19th century. Scientific classification and unilineal ideas of progressive sociocultural human evolution provided a means of categorising and ranking past and present human societies by recording their physical and cultural traits, including the use of different kinds of material culture among which pottery and the bow and arrow were prominent.

The progression of human development through the periods of savagery, barbarism and civilisation used by Charles de Montesquieu (1748), Adam Ferguson (1767) and William Robertson (1777), and popularised in Lewis H. Morgan’s Ancient Society (1877), allowed ethnographic observations of Pacific societies to be fitted to one of three immutable stages of human development. In Morgan’s schema, the invention and use of pottery came about after the bow and arrow and divided ‘Barbarism’ from ‘Savagery’. The introduction of pottery in a society produced a ‘new epoch in human progress in the direction of an improved living and increased domestic conveniences’. Equally influential was J. Lubbock’s (1869) division of the past into a Palaeolithic and a Neolithic period, with the Neolithic defined by cultural traits that included the coeval introduction of pottery and the bow.

Both Dumont d’Urville in 1832 and Horatio Hale in 1846 had noted that pottery and the bow and arrow were associated with West Pacific Melanesians rather than with Polynesians. In the evolutionary models of the 19th century this suggested, contrary to the orthodox view, that Melanesians were superior in their socio-technical development to Polynesians. This minor inconsistency in the socio-evolutionary hierarchy of the two-stratum model was explained in three ways. First, due to the long journey from Asia and the limited environmental resources of the small islands they eventually inhabited, Polynesians had lost the art of making pottery and the habit of using the bow. Secondly, Melanesians had only learnt to make pottery and use the bow from their more advanced western neighbours during episodes of population expansion, like the eastward movement of Malays postulated by Forster. Lastly, Australian Aborigines were used as the comparative ‘West Pacific’ population, allowing the evolutionary hierarchy placing Polynesians above Melanesians to be maintained. Morgan, for example, put Australians and Polynesians in his ‘Status of Savagery’ because they lacked pottery and the bow, but ranked Polynesians higher by arguing that their social institutions were more developed.

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19 L.H. Morgan, Ancient Society, or, researches in the lines of human progress from savagery through barbarism to civilization (Calcutta, repr. of 1877 edn), 14.
20 J. Lubbock, Pre-historic Times as Illustrated by Ancient Remains and the Manners and Customs of Modern Savages, 2nd edn (Edinburgh 1869).
21 A.L. Kroeber, Anthropology (London 1948), 760.
23 Morgan, Ancient Society.
Whatever the reason for its absence in Polynesia, it was clear that the people living within the area called Melanesia made and used pottery.24

Like other cultural traits, the distribution of pottery and the bow allowed Melanesia to be separated from Polynesia in the more complicated models of Pacific settlement advanced by the first anthropologists and ethnologists working in the region. For instance in W.H. Rivers’s *The History of Melanesian Society* the distribution of the bow and arrow was taken as evidence of a migrant ‘kava-people’ from Indonesia, who introduced the bow as a weapon of war as they spread through Melanesia.25 Similarly, the distribution of pottery terms in the Pacific was used by W. Churchill to posit the migration of a ‘Pottery Culture’ people that had spread along the north coast of New Guinea through Vanuatu and New Caledonia before reaching Fiji.26 Although more than two population movements were put forward in these models, the binary structure of the two-stratum concept was maintained. Rivers, for example, said that the original people to inhabit Melanesia could be traced as far east as Fiji, effectively recapitulating, in a more complex system incorporating population blending, the basic Melanesia–Polynesia divide.27

An ethnological approach that failed to distinguish between an indigenous society’s past and its present was shaped by evolutionary views of social development which saw ‘primitive’ societies as unevolved, static and virtually changeless. This perspective had important ramifications for the study of Pacific material culture, particularly of pottery, since both modern and prehistoric ceramics were thought to contain the ‘fossilised’ history of Melanesian societies, in the same way as kinship forms, different kinds of burial practice and language features did. The great advantage of material culture over social and religious structures, according to Rivers, was that ‘a material object tends to persist with little change from its original form or to disappear; it does not undergo the exceedingly various modifications to which the less material elements of human culture are subject’.28

Rivers was principally interested in studying how the interaction between indigenous and migrant groups created the diverse social structures of Melanesia, so the apparent immutability of material culture through time was for his purposes a hindrance rather than a benefit.29 For other researchers, particularly the soon-to-arrive practitioners of archaeology, the durability, distribution, stylistic affinities and social practices surrounding the production of pottery provided a new method of revealing the culture history of the West and East Pacific.

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24 E.g., Churchill: ‘we may feel confident that fictile art is a Melanesian possession and is quite lacking to the Polynesians’, W. Churchill, *Sissano: movements of migration within and through Melanesia* (Washington 1916), 157.


28 Ibid., 440.

29 Ibid., 441.
Archaeology and the Melanesian Stratum

When Edward Gifford inaugurated stratigraphic archaeology in Fiji in 1947, pottery was viewed as the quintessential Melanesian artefact type, in the same way that the distribution of adzes with a rectangular cross-section was used to follow the migration tracks of the Polynesians. The strength of the association was such that the discovery of pottery at the base of Gifford's Fijian excavations 'ruled out any likelihood that the first settlers at these two sites were Polynesians, since no pottery has been excavated in Polynesia'. The exception was Tonga where, in 1920, W.C. McKern, with Gifford in attendance, had recovered large numbers of pot shards, but, in keeping with the tenets of the two-stratum model which equated pottery as a Melanesian trait, the Tongan ceramics were seen as representing recent cultural influence from Fiji.

In western Micronesia, prehistoric pottery was recorded from Palau, Yap and the Marianas, yet archaeologists like Alexander Spoehr, who worked in the Marianas from 1949 to 1950, did not connect its presence with a movement of Melanesian people, but rather saw it as evidence of a migration from the Philippines. The apparent reason for seeing pottery in the West Pacific as evidence of a Melanesian dispersal, but in Micronesia as evidence of a prehistoric settlement from Island Southeast Asia, was the detection of a 'Melanesian' pottery style that could be used to trace and potentially date, relatively, by stratigraphic position, an early Melanesian population stratum from the Solomon Islands to Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji.

The stylistic basis of a Melanesian ceramic was first extracted by researchers working with museum collections and published ethnographic accounts prior to the first stratigraphic excavations in the West Pacific. Lehmann in 1920 had recorded a continuous triangle design common to West Pacific ceramics, and Margarete Schurig, in a comprehensive survey of manufacturing methods and pottery designs published in 1926, identified a 'single division of Melanesian ceramics'. R.R.C. MacLachlan also drew parallels between the designs on Vanuatu pottery and ceramics from the Solomon Islands, New Caledonia and especially Fiji, while, in 1944, Margaret Surridge found a stylistic connection between Vanuatu and Fiji in motifs she termed the 'cord or rope', 'coconut leaf' (leaf), 'rickrack' (chevron) and 'pin point' (punctate). From Watom Island in New Britain, Patrick O'Reilly in 1940 divided a collection of surface and excavated pottery into a 'Melanesian' type

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32 W.C. McKern, 'Archaeology of Tonga', *Bernice P. Bishop Museum Bulletin*, 60 (1929), 118.
33 A. Spoehr, 'Marianas prehistory', *Fieldiana Anthropology*, 46 (1957).
carrying simple applied-relief and nail-incised markings, and a 'non-Melanesian' type marked by complex geometric designs made with a toothed tool.  

The characterisation of a Melanesian ceramic style typified by simple forms of decoration must be situated within the hierarchy implicit in the two-stratum concept, which had Melanesians as less advanced than Polynesians. Kroeber for instance mused that 'the culture of the blacks [Melanesians] looks like the continuation of something long isolated and retarded, that of the browns [Polynesians], like the remnant of something that was larger or more advanced'. In socio-evolutionary models a 'primitive' society produced a simple material culture which extended to the aesthetics and complexity of the designs applied to artefacts. For ceramics, this connection was explicitly stated by Lubbock who recorded that the earliest pottery designs of the Stone Age consisted of simple 'impressions made by the nail or the finger, and sometimes by a cord twisted round the soft clay. The lines are all straight, or if curved are very irregular and badly drawn. Ethnographic observations of Melanesian potters also tended to emphasise the lack of artistic skill and elaboration, at times claiming that a pot's form and design were copied from natural prototypes like coconuts, turtles and canoes.

In revealing a succession of pottery styles, archaeologists, especially Gifford in Fiji and Gifford and Shutler in New Caledonia, put pressure on the two-stratum model by demolishing the ethnological premise that the material culture of the past looked like that of the present. Potentially, any ceramic design technique or motif — Gifford noted at least four in Fiji — might individually or in combination represent a 'Melanesian' substratum. The variability in pottery design was, however, soon subsumed into two main ceramic groups that became known as 'Lapita' and the 'Incised and Applied Relief', preserving the structure of the two-stratum model, although in significantly modified form.

Lapita and the Incised and Applied Relief

If archaeology in the Pacific was initially conceived as a useful but minor adjunct to anthropological studies, its results soon led to a new historically informed view of the Melanesia–Polynesia divide. This was first outlined by Jack Golson, who recognised that the similarities in pottery design and decorative technique (described earlier as 'non-Melanesian' by O'Reilly) attested to a prehistoric culture with a distribution from Watom in the west to as far as Tonga in the east, that soon became known as Lapita.

With the advent of radiocarbon dating in the 1950s, the antiquity of this population expansion was able to be established, giving the unanticipated early age

39 Kroeber, Anthropology, 760.
40 Lubbock, Pre-historic Times, 16.
41 Schurig, Die Südseetöpferi, 138; C.F. Gordon-Cummings, At Home in Fiji (Edinburgh 1885), 250.
43 Golson, 'Report on New Zealand'.
of 846 BC for its presence in New Caledonia. The fundamental change these results brought to the two-stratum model was the inversion of population strata. Melanesians, although having an ancient tenure in New Guinea, were now seen as being relatively recent arrivals to the islands east of the Solomons. In the course of their eastward spread, they had encountered the descendants of the Lapita colonists who were the first people to inhabit the islands of Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji around 3,000 years ago.

Since the ‘Melanesian’ style of pottery that had been identified by ethnologists occurred only in Dumont d’Urville’s region of Melanesia, yet was found above the ‘non-Melanesian’ pottery of Lapita in archaeological sites, it followed that the movement of people from Melanesia must have occurred after the Lapita dispersal, and did not reach Tonga and Samoa. As succinctly stated by Golson: ‘The Lapita settlement of Tonga — and, it is here claimed, of Samoa — remains unaffected in any real sense by these intrusions into the islands further west and develops in substantial isolation the pattern of culture we call Polynesian’.

These changes to the two-stratum model, that for long had had ceramic-using Melanesians as the first population in the archipelagos of the West Pacific, passed almost without comment, although both Golson and Spoehr reflected on whether the terms Melanesia and Polynesia had any relevance in describing the past. The original form of the two-stratum model might be seen, however, as persisting in recent but now increasingly unlikely claims for a pre-Lapita pottery of Melanesian derivation in New Caledonia, Vanuatu and New Guinea. Golson attributes what is, in hindsight, a surprising absence of comment about this major paradigm change to the presence of a new group of professionally trained archaeologists who were not bound to the concept of a Melanesian substratum evident in ethnoLOGY.

However, in three areas the new version of the two-stratum model retained key elements of the old, and the structural similarity between accounts might also have reduced the impact of the conceptual changes initiated by Golson. The notion that two populations with mutually distinct biological backgrounds had settled the Melanesia–Polynesia region was still central, as was the belief that the two populations must have migrated as coherent social groups, since their material culture could be used to trace their respective origins. Pottery and, to a lesser extent, adzes were the most useful artefact types with which to do this. Golson, for instance, grouped Lapita pottery and ‘non-Melanesian’ adzes of quadrangular cross-section, and contrasted them, albeit tentatively, with a ‘Melanesian’ assem-

45 Excluding Australia.
49 Golson, pers. comm.
blage containing pottery marked with incised and relief decoration, and adzes of round-to-oval cross-section.\textsuperscript{50} Similarly, Green noted that:

In Fiji and other areas of eastern Melanesia the pottery complex associated with the Lapita style of decoration is nearly everywhere replaced somewhere between the middle and the end of the first millennium B.C. by new pottery complexes with different styles of decoration and techniques of manufacture, whilst new types of adzes and other items of material culture either replace or are added to those from the previous period ... As a result although certain continuities exist between the earliest materials from eastern Melanesia and West Polynesia, such close continuity ceases some 2000 years ago.\textsuperscript{51}

It is important to acknowledge that the proliferation of Lapita studies since the 1970s has only served to strengthen Golson's prescient view of Lapita as an 'early community of culture'. Thus, the similarities in pottery form, decorative technique and motif structure in sites from the Bismarck Archipelago to Samoa represent an archaeological horizon, formally defined as 'a primary spatial continuity represented by cultural traits and assemblages whose nature and mode of occurrence permit the assumption of a broad and rapid spread'.\textsuperscript{52}

The discovery of Lapita, while changing the order of population movements, appears to have reinforced three key tenets of the two-stratum model. First, the discovery of a cultural stratum that represented foundation human settlement across a large part of the Pacific was compatible with older theories which had Oceania occupied by great waves or currents of human movement from several discrete 'homelands',\textsuperscript{53} rather than, for instance, a series of gradual and perhaps unrelated small dispersals. Secondly, it reinforced the notion that the identity and progress of a population stratum could be traced by isolating distinctive material—culture types, particularly kinds of decorated pottery. The discovery of Lapita, then, strengthened an expectation that a coherent Melanesian expansion — with a distribution only slightly less extensive than that of Lapita — had also taken place in the past, and that it should also have a distinctive ceramic correlate.

\textit{A Melanesian Ceramic Signature?}

In comparison with Lapita, the archaeological manifestation of a Melanesian stratum has always been less easy to identify. William Solheim in 1952 noted a homogeneous prehistoric pottery in New Guinea and Island Melanesia, and Golson referred to a 'generalized "Melanesian" ceramic tradition'.\textsuperscript{54} In a later paper published in 1972, Golson identified three ceramic styles: 'Lapita—Watom', 'paddle-

\textsuperscript{50} Golson, 'Report on New Zealand', 174, 176.


\textsuperscript{52} G.R. Willey and P. Phillips, \textit{Method and Theory in American Archaeology} (Chicago 1965), 33.


impressed’ and ‘incised and applied’,\textsuperscript{55} which José Garanger, in describing ceramics from his Vanuatu excavations, called the ‘incised and applied-relief’ or its synonym ‘Mangaasi’, after the site on Efate where the pottery was first found.\textsuperscript{56}

The incised and applied-relief ceramics are associated today with a post-Lapita population movement through the West Pacific.\textsuperscript{57} However, there are several difficulties in linking a hypothetical expansion of Melanesian people east to as far as Fiji with an incised and applied-relief ceramic tradition. Some of these have been canvassed recently by Stuart Bedford and the present author, who note patterns of island-specific ceramic change in Vanuatu rather than a widespread prehistoric ceramic style,\textsuperscript{58} but it is appropriate here to examine how the definition of an incised and relief ceramic has itself changed over time. The definitional instability has meant that almost any change in the ceramic sequences of the West Pacific can be attributed to the influence of a ‘Melanesian’ population, although the form of contact and its impact have tended to elude description. In addition, rather than being confined to Melanesia, many of the ceramic techniques and designs assigned to incised and applied relief are also found in parts of Asia.

In Garanger’s 1971 paper, the incised and applied-relief ceramics of Vanuatu were defined for the first time.\textsuperscript{59} The incised decorations were simple, consisting of parallel incisions, chevrons, leaf designs and a quadrangular zone that was sometimes divided by diagonals and infilled with punctate impressions or incised lines. These four types of incision were generally associated with three kinds of applied relief: applied bands carrying impressed or incised markings, knobs and discontinuous round or long nubbins.\textsuperscript{60}

The stylistic content of the incised and applied relief was significantly broadened in Golson’s major review paper, ‘Both sides of the Wallace Line’, which illustrated designs on pot shards from the West Pacific.\textsuperscript{61} This allowed individual motifs, including new kinds of decoration not included in the original list, to be compared with one another, but broke an important association between different forms of incised decoration and a narrow range of applied markings made by Garanger. It was then possible to examine cultural relationships by comparing a relatively large number of individual incised or applied-relief designs instead of a smaller set of incised \textit{and} applied-relief designs. The significance of breaking up Garanger’s stylistic system lay in the relative simplicity of the incised designs identified in Vanuatu which, like different kinds of paddle impression, are potentially so


\textsuperscript{59} Garanger, ‘Incised and applied relief’, 53.

\textsuperscript{60} Interestingly, finger-nail impressing, often seen today as a key marker of the incised and applied relief, was not explicitly included by Garanger in his original list.

\textsuperscript{61} Golson, ‘Both sides of the Wallace line’.
widespread that their distribution need not demonstrate the significant movement of people in prehistory.

The inflation of design elements is also notable in the only study that has attempted to define the distribution of incised and applied-relief ceramics through a statistical analysis. In it, E. Wahome compared the presence and absence of 42 ceramic attributes in archaeological and published collections and concluded that "[t]he exploratory study ... has shown the reality of an applied and incised ceramic tradition in Island Melanesia and identified the characteristics by which it is defined". However, of the total attribute number, less than half are directly or indirectly comparable with Garanger's original set and the association between various kinds of decoration — which is essential to the concept of a Melanesian incised and applied ceramic — is decoupled in the study, weakening the extent of the areal unity claimed for it.

The expectation that a prehistoric Melanesian population movement has taken place and is manifest in the pottery sequences of the region has driven interpretations of pottery assemblages, particularly in Fiji. As the eastern outpost of Melanesian settlement in the two-stratum model, the correlation between archaeological remains and the arrival of an intrusive West Pacific population should be particularly clear in Fiji, but such is not the case.

Garanger put the arrival of incised and applied pottery in Fiji after the 11th century AD, remarking that it was 'exactly the same as the pottery of Mangaasi', a finding consistent with W.W. Howells's 1933 proposal that 'before the eleventh century Fiji was entirely Polynesian'. Other researchers, such as E.L. Frost, linked the development of Fijian fortifications in the 12th century AD with the arrival of a considerable Melanesian population from Vanuatu, who brought incised and applied pottery. However, this idea is no longer generally supported, because pottery manufacture in Vanuatu appears to have largely ceased in the second millennium AD. An earlier arrival of Melanesians into Fiji has also been seen in the presence of paddle-pressed ceramics some time after 200 BC and recently Simon Best has reiterated a claim that changes in Fijian ceramics represent contact from New Caledonia at 100 BC, with a more substantial population intrusion in the third century AD from Vanuatu.

An interesting aspect of these claims is not only the shifting chronology proposed for Melanesian arrival, but also the diminishing amount of ceramic evidence offered in its support. In Garanger's initial comparison, the incised and applied-relief

64 Garanger, 'Incised and applied relief', 62.
65 W.W. Howells, 'Anthropometry and blood types in Fiji and the Solomon Islands. (Based on data of Dr. William L. Moss)', *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, 33 (1933), 279–339.
67 But see P.V. Kirch, *On the Road of the Winds* (Berkeley 2001), 158.
pottery of Vanuatu and Fiji was considered to be ‘exactly the same’, while in Best’s recent study the similarity is reduced to three basic decorative techniques of asymmetric incision, finger pinching and rim notching. Since these are either not present in central Vanuatu, or if present are not synchronous with counterparts in Fiji, Best has them deriving from an as-yet-unknown ceramic assemblage in northern Vanuatu.70

Support for an incised and applied-relief ceramic and a specific population responsible for it might still be plausible if the traits defining it had a restricted distribution within Melanesia, leaving aside uncertainties about the dispersal chronology of this ceramic ware and its stylistic definition. If so, then the presence of simple incised designs such as the ‘leaf’, chevron, infilled triangles and applied bands might attest to ‘continuing communication throughout the [West Pacific] region’.71 However, many of the incised and applied-relief designs found in Melanesia also occur on prehistoric ceramics from Island and Mainland Southeast Asia, which have frequently been described, as in the Pacific, in terms of their incised, impressed and applied decoration.72 Direct parallels with incised and applied decoration from the Pacific include cross-hatch incision, incised triangles infilled with punctate or incision, chevrons, leaf, decorated applied bands and nubbins, finger-nail impression and punctuation. Pot sherds bearing these designs have been excavated on Sulawesi, Timor and the Philippines, and extend to the Kung-san Culture of northwest Korea, which has vessels featuring typical ‘Mangaasi’ combinations of punctate and incised designs, as do some of the incised marked Yayoi ceramics of Japan.73

Unlike Lapita-style ceramics, a clearly recognisable incised and applied pottery style cannot, on current data, be reliably extracted from the record of the West Pacific, and the validity of a hypothesis in which a coherent population expansion or the presence of a widespread Melanesian interaction network is demonstrated ceramically must, therefore, also be questioned.

Dumont D’Urville’s Melanesia–Polynesia divide was not in many respects particularly original, but it was based on straightforward geographical and bio-cultural criteria that provided an explanation for the somewhat counter-intuitive distributions of human variation noted in the Pacific by early European arrivals. The counter-intuitive distributions were that the populations of distant islands

70 Ibid., 31.
73 Glover, ‘Archaeology in East Timor’, 70, 72, 120, 150, 184, 211; Mulvaney and Soejoeno, ‘The Australian–Indonesian’, Pl. IV, IVa, IX, X; L. Malleret, ‘Quelques poteries de Sa-huynh dans leurs rapport avec divers sites du Sud-Est de l’Asie’, Asian Perspectives, 3 (1961), 113–19; Solheim, ‘Further note on the Kalanay’, Fig. 1; N.B. Khoach, ‘Phunh Nguyen’, Asian Perspectives, 23 (1980), 23–53, Figs 13c, 14b, 15a; W.Y. Kim, ‘Korea: new light on Korean archaeology’, Asian Perspectives, 10 (1967), 39–55, esp. Fig. 4. Golson, ‘Both sides of the Wallace Line’, also reviews parallels between decorated pottery from the Pacific and Island Southeast Asia.
separated by thousands of kilometres, such as Hawai‘i and New Zealand, disclosed correspondences, while groups in the closer-spaced archipelagos of the west evidenced a multiplicity of socio-linguistic forms and had physical traits different from the people occupying Forster’s Eastern South Sea Isles.

The first and pre- eminent research theme that came out of these observations focused on the whence, when and how of the Polynesian diaspora, the numerous and varied approaches sharing the common aim of understanding how a homogeneous Polynesian culture became so widely dispersed. The second and less examined theme is the important question of the diversity in Island Melanesia (Bismarck Archipelago to Fiji) and the processes that have generated differences in language, material culture and social customs between proximate human groups, within what is a much smaller geographic area than Polynesia.

The explanation offered by Dumont d’Urville was that two populations with different physical and cultural characteristics had entered the Pacific at different times. The Melanesians were the original inhabitants, not just of the region he called Melanesia, but also of Polynesia. In this, Dumont d’Urville echoed Bougainville’s idea about the dual origin of the Tahitians, and Forster’s comments about the derivation of the Maori:

In New-Zeeland, I am of the opinion, that the more civilized Malay tribes, mixed with aboriginals, … [and the mixing] contributed to preserve cannibalism: and to form a coalition of customs, wherein many points of civilization were totally lost.

Theorising of this kind led to the Melanesians being construed as ‘blacker’ and ‘earlier’ than the Polynesians, and ‘inferior’ to them, and to readings or interpretations of oral traditions in terms of a cultural replacement model (e.g. the Maori replacement of Moriori in New Zealand).

Archaeologists, building on the ethnological premise that Melanesians carried with them pottery during their settlement of the Pacific, excavated for decorated pot shards to identify the Melanesian substratum. Paradoxically, the search led to the discovery of the ancestors of the Polynesians, under the Lapita rubric, and caused the inversion of the model’s settlement sequence. However, the discovery of Lapita also strengthened crucial elements of the two-stratum concept. Namely, that some time after Lapita settlers had extended human occupation to the previously uninhabited archipelagos of Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji, a second movement of Melanesian people had occurred and its archaeological signature in those islands was incised and applied-relief decorated pottery.

The longevity of the two-stratum model results, in part, from the fact that the discovery of Lapita culture was compatible with older ideas about how the peopling of the Pacific was achieved, but it can also be related to the relatively few attempts to provide alternatives to Dumont d’Urville’s principal Melanesia–Polynesia division. Green’s formulation of Near and Remote Oceania is important because it groups a series of large and inter-visible island groups spanning New Guinea to the

75 Forster, Observations, 359–60.
Solomon Islands, called Near Oceania, from Remote Oceania, which includes all other Pacific islands — islands which are generally smaller than those in Near Oceania and separated by larger sea gaps. Human settlement of Near Oceania was accomplished, first, by pre-Austronesian populations in the Pleistocene, while Remote Oceania was occupied by Austronesian Lapita groups and their descendants, who were able to settle the relatively depauperate island environments of the east, facilitated by developments, particularly in marine technology, navigation and subsistence behaviour, in the late Holocene. Melanesia is disestablished in the process because it is not ‘ethnographically, linguistically, or biologically tied together by any overwhelming or obviously unifying factors’. A recent book by Matthew Spriggs, The Island Melanesians, re-establishes Melanesia as a zone in which older cultural traditions, languages and genes influenced the intrusive Austronesian Lapita culture. In the archaeological record, this is best seen in the replacement of Lapita pottery by incised and applied-relief ceramics.

Binary divisions of Melanesia–Polynesia and Near Oceania–Remote Oceania are useful frameworks for highlighting certain culture historical events and transformations, but the case for a widespread type of ‘Melanesian’ ceramic is disputed, and the reason for the greater bio-cultural and linguistic variation of the inhabitants of Vanuatu compared with that of the people of Fiji–West Polynesia is not clear in the delineation of Remote Oceania. Thus, while the Near Oceania–Remote Oceania divide accurately charts a boundary separating landmasses occupied in the Pleistocene from islands first settled in the late Holocene, it does not adequately explain when and how human diversity developed within the western archipelagos of Remote Oceania.

Deficiencies in our binary constructs appear to stem from a problem, common in archaeology, which is that the temporal and spatial parameters of a widespread material–culture complex like Lapita are generally more amenable to interpretation than small-scale movements and interactions, such as those likely to have taken place among the proximate archipelagos of the West Pacific. Archipelago proximity and size are useful proxy indices for thinking about prehistoric settlement and interaction because the pattern of human variability (linguistic, cultural and genetic) in the Pacific appears to conform with a basic tenet of island biogeography, which states that the probability of immigration and population contact decreases with increasing distance between source and objective. This is supported by studies of Oceania’s flora and fauna that show progressive impoverishment in numbers of

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76 Green, ‘Near and Remote Oceania’, 494.
77 Spriggs, The Island Melanesians.
80 As the Reef Island-Santa Cruz area has a Papuan language the Near-Remote Oceania boundary also does not separate Austronesian from Papuan languages, although it might have done so in the Lapita era.
families, genera and species in the smaller and more isolated islands of the east compared with the larger and often inter-visible islands of the west.81

A corollary of west–east diminishment in the number of marine and terrestrial species is the concomitant reduction of genetic diversity within a species with an insular distribution, including humans. A recent study of neutral, biparental loci, for instance, found that genetic and geographic distance were consistently correlated in Pacific populations, but genetic continuity was evident across Melanesia.82 Of course, different boundaries can be drawn according to whether the tools of language, biological systems or archaeology are employed, which itself is suggestive of the West Pacific's complicated human past.83 The implication of some genetic results, though, is that the region from New Guinea to the Solomon Islands was a zone of gene flow in the Pleistocene, which was extended in the late Holocene to include, minimally, the Reef Santa Cruz Islands, Vanuatu and perhaps New Caledonia. To reach these islands from the Solomon Islands proper required an open ocean voyage of 350 km, which was much shorter than the 850-km voyage to reach Fiji–West Polynesia, a distance that evidently posed a substantial obstacle to gene flow from communities in the west.

The important issue is not where a particular boundary might be drawn, but how archaeology and other disciplines with a historical focus might identify and interpret gene flow among diverse societies to obtain better models of Oceania's past. Better understanding is unlikely to be achieved with the two-stratum model and its incised and applied-relief ceramics, which has, in its simplest form, human diversity resulting from the movement of two distinct pottery-bearing populations. In the process the 'Melanesianisation'84 of the West Pacific is conceived erroneously as a Lapita-like event. But, whereas the Lapita cultural complex has material culture and language linkages consistent with a relatively rapid and widespread dispersal of Austronesian-speaking people, the presence of a second population stratum is not yet evident in Island Melanesia. The endeavour to make Melanesia a coherent culture area by positing a unified, but elastically defined, incised and applied-relief pottery style is not supported in ethnographic, biological or linguistic studies, which accent the heterogeneity of the region.85

The implications are clear. Circumstances of island colonisation and population expansion seen in the Lapita dispersal86 are a dubious analogue for examining human diversity in the West Pacific, where different patterns of human movement

83 See, e.g., Donald Walker, 'Biogeographical markers', in May and Nelson (eds), Melanesia, I, 11–15.
84 Golson, 'Book launch', 2.
86 Nor in the settlement of East Polynesia.
and interaction operated. Here, the longer tenure of resident non-Austronesian groups and the probability of long-term contact between them and Austronesian Lapita migrants, among relatively large and inter-visible islands, fostered a complex set of economic and social interactions in prehistory, whose nature is still unclear.\(^{87}\)

In this regard, renewed attention to archaeological sequences, including ceramics, could be usefully based on theories of material–culture change informed by the rich ethnographic and protohistoric records of inter-community exchange and relationships — such as the *kula* ring of the Massim region, the Siassi system linking New Guinea to New Britain, and the ‘red-feather money’ exchange of the Santa Cruz Islands.\(^{88}\) The variability among systems warns that no single answer is likely to the question of ‘Melanesian’ diversity, but a better understanding of the range of human interactions in these systems from a gene-flow and a material–culture perspective would be enlightening. A detailed understanding of such contacts, in comparison with other regions, might lead to the identification of features more or less characteristic of Melanesia. Whatever the case, it is suggested that ‘Melanesianisation’ is better construed archaeologically as an interactive process rather than as a dispersal event, as implied in the two-stratum model. Such work should also lead to a new view of Dumont d’Urville’s Melanesia–Polynesia divide — a ‘working hypothesis’\(^{89}\) with roots in the 18th century and a still palpable presence in archaeology in the 21st century.

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**ABSTRACT**

The primary divide between Melanesians and Polynesians, according to Dumont d’Urville, was due to the two groups having separate origins and arrival times in the Pacific. Anthropologists and ethnologists, along with the first archaeologists to work in the West Pacific, saw pottery as a fundamental marker of an early expansion of Melanesian peoples, while non-pottery-using Polynesians were seen as more recent arrivals. Although later archaeological work altered important aspects of this sequence, the concept of a Melanesian expansion has been retained through the creation of a ceramic entity known as the incised and applied-relief tradition, which has a distribution congruent with Melanesia. This paper argues that the attempt to make Melanesia a coherent culture area in prehistory provides an overly simplistic and logically flawed explanation for the region’s human diversity.

\(^{87}\) Friedlaender, *The Solomon Islands*.


\(^{89}\) Dumont d’Urville, ‘Sur les îles’, 1.