USE OF THESES

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PREHISTORY WITHOUT POTS

Prehistoric Settlement and Economy of North-west
Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

by

David Roe

VOLUME 1

A thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The Australian National University

February 1993
This thesis is the product of the author's research. For the provision and analysis of some data specialist assistance has been sought and is acknowledged. Except for these instances the thesis is my own original work.

D.Roe
FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The island of Guadalcanal is very large: I do not give the size of it, because it is a great piece of land, and to go round it would take half a year.

from: A True and Correct Account of the Voyage to the Western Isles in the Southern Ocean, made by Hernando Gallego, Native of the Town of La Coruña in the Kingdom of Galicia, in the year of our Lord Jesus Christ one thousand five hundred and sixty-six (Amherst and Thomson 1901:46-47).

Guadalcanal is shaped like a paramecium, or a flat limp letter S on its side. Though different in dimensions, and though mostly uninhabitable, the Canal is about the size of Long Island.

(Manchester 1982:197).

This island of Guadalcanal, for its fertility and the mildness of its air, for water, for agriculture, for cattle, and for fitness for growing things of Castille, is the best of those in the region. .... There are fields full of ginger, cinnamon, sugar-cane, almond of Castille, long-shaped filberts, plantanos [plantains ?], cocoa-nuts, fowls, pigs, fish, sandalwood of various scents (drogas), and many other things.

from: A Short Account collected from the papers which they found in the city of La Plata concerning The Voyage and Discovery of the Western Islands, in the Southern Ocean, commonly called the Isles of Solomon [The Narrative of Pedro Sarmiento] (Amherst and Thomson 1901:91).

.... serpents, crocodiles, centipedes which could crawl across the flesh leaving a trail of swollen skin, land crabs, ... scorpions, lizards, tree leeches, ... wasps as long as your finger and spiders as large as your fist, and mosquitoes, mosquitoes, mosquitoes, all carriers of malaria.

(Manchester 1982:193).

Say a prayer for your pal on Guadalcanal

DEDICATION

to

Bati, Meredith, Rhiannon and Mamere

for putting up with and supporting a part-time husband and father for so long and with so little complaint

and to

Peter and Kasiano

for being patient teachers, skilled assistants and great friends
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The production of this thesis has owed much to the generosity and help of a large number of people and institutions. I am sure that in listing my debts of gratitude I may have unwittingly omitted several sources of aid that should rightly have been specifically acknowledged; to those people I offer my apologies - the thanks are no less sincere.

In the first instance I owe a special debt to those who supported my application to undertake a PhD programme - Doug Yen, Roger Green, Jack Golson, Matthew Spriggs and Darrell Tryon - and to the Australian National University for granting a scholarship and for providing such excellent facilities in which to study. My supervisory panel - Jack Golson, Doug Yen, Paul Gorecki and Matthew Spriggs - were constant in their support and advice. Jack Golson and Matthew Spriggs have worked overtime in their efforts to make my chapter drafts look a little more like purses than sow's ears and have thankfully dissuaded me from following some of my wilder flights of fancy. I am in debt to Jack Golson to the tune of several, and expertly wielded, red pens that served to reduce the tower-block of flaws in my writing "style". Matthew Spriggs had the onerous task of reading, correcting and re-reading last minute chapter drafts in the hectic lead-up to submission; for his labours and generous moral support I am most grateful.

In the Solomons no fieldwork would have been possible without the support of the Guadalcanal Provincial Government (especially the Hon. Casiano Lovoli, Provincial Minister for Cultural Affairs), and the landowners of Visale and of the Poha and Vura valleys. The personal interest and support of the Hon. Ezekiel Aleuba, M.P. (then Prime Minister of Solomon Islands) was critical to the conclusion of the fieldwork programme.

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This thesis relies heavily on a quantity of environmental data. For their major contributions I am sincerely grateful for the time and effort expended on my behalf by Simon Haberle and Mike Green. The results of Simon Haberle’s pollen coring fieldwork in Guadalcanal are presented in an appendix and are fundamental to some of the arguments in this thesis. Mike Green’s study of the human bone from the 1966-68 excavations at Vatuluma Posovi is also presented here as an appendix. His work has added important new information to the data from this site. I received expert help from Doug Yen in the identification and interpretation of plant remains, particularly those of *Canarium* nuts. The entire complement of bone from the Guadalcanal excavations was inspected by Tim Flannery at the Australian Museum. I am grateful to him not only for the identifications but also for the time taken in the field and at the Museum in discussion. Phil Colman, also at the Australian Museum, provided identifications of a number of ‘problem’ molluscan shells. Corrie Williams, Jerry van Tets and Pat Rich worked on, and identified the majority of, the bird bone and Sarah Colley did the same for the fish material. The Entomology Division of the CSIRO in Canberra provided identifications of Solomon Islands arachnids. Robyn Westcott and David Ellis of the Geology Department at ANU prepared and identified several rock specimens on my behalf. In Honiara Jim Cheatle, Alan Smith and Peter Hopson provided important
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NOTES ON CONVENTIONS

Orthography

The orthography employed in this thesis is based on the system proposed by Hackman (1968). Spellings of place names and vernacular terms therefore employ the following conventions:

- **ch** similar in sound to English 'ch' as in 'church', but more explosive; sometimes rendered elsewhere as 'ts' or 'tz'
- **ng** as in 'sing'
- **g** as in 'got' and always following ng
- **mb** prenasalized b
- **nd** prenasalized d as in 'sand'
- **nj** prenasalized j
- **gh** voiced velar fricative.

C¹⁴ Dates

The conventions of the journal *Antiquity* are used for the reporting of radiocarbon determinations. Uncalibrated radiocarbon dates are indicated by 'bp'; calibrated dates have been calculated using the CALIB computer program (v. 2.0) of Stuiver and Reimer (1986) and are indicated by 'BP'. Calibrations for radiocarbon dating determinations on charcoal samples were calculated using the ATM20 option of the CALIB program (Pearson and Stuiver 1986, Pearson and Stuiver 1986). Marine shell calibrations use the values given in Stuiver et al. (1986) and employ a Delta-R value of zero as no specific local marine reservoir correction value is available.

Site Numbers

Site numbers have been ascribed in accordance with the Solomon Islands Museum's National Site Survey designation codes (Green 1972, Miller 1979:5-7). Under this system sites are given unique numbers consisting of a two letter prefix indicating the island in which the site is located, a number indicating the relevant 1:50,000 topographical map sheet (Ministry of Overseas Development 1975) and an individual site number. Thus sites in the north-west cape area are prefixed SG-1- (Solomon Islands/Guadalcanal-map sheet no. 9/159/7); those of the Poha and Vura valleys are prefixed SG-2- (map sheet 9/159/8).

Footnotes

The texts of footnotes are given at the end of each chapter.
SUMMARY

This thesis seeks to address some basic problems and issues concerning the archaeology and prehistory of the central Solomon Islands. In particular the archaeological data from a series of excavations and detailed field surveys conducted on the island of Guadalcanal are used to construct a framework for the culture history of this apparently aceramic region and to define a set of questions that must be addressed in future enquiries in this relatively unknown area.

Chapter 1 sets out the main problems which this thesis addresses. The equivocal results from a single excavation in 1966-1968 suggested an aceramic occupation of Guadalcanal and the central Solomons at a time when, elsewhere in the group, well-documented prehistoric settlement sequences are articulated with a regional cultural tradition associated with Lapita ceramics. The major issues stem from a long-standing need to document the central Solomon Islands sequences with a view to filling a major lacuna in our knowledge of the prehistory of island Melanesia.

Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 set out the data upon which the inferences and conclusions of chapter 7 are based. Chapter 2 gives a brief overview of the main aspects of Guadalcanal's natural environment and ethnography that have a bearing on the interpretation of the archaeological evidence. The results of the site surveys in the Poha and Vura Valleys and the north-west cape area of Guadalcanal which formed the initial work in this study are discussed also. In chapter 3 the 1966-1968 excavations at the Vatuluma Posovi site are re-evaluated based upon a critical examination of the original records and the results of new work, including important new C¹⁴ dates, from excavations and surveys in 1987-1988. Additional data from a series of excavations in other caves and rockshelters, given in chapter 4, serve to extend our knowledge of the prehistoric occupations of the Poha and Vura valleys and introduce a suite of environmental evidence not available from the Vatuluma Posovi site. Chapter 5 of the thesis discusses a largely unconsidered artefact of Melanesian prehistory - the engraved rock art. The re-evaluation of the Vatuluma Posovi site allowed for the dating of this art tradition and its incorporation into discussions of cultural relationships both in Solomon Islands and the wider Melanesian sphere. In chapter 6 the geographical focus moves from the Poha and Vura valleys to the north-west cape of Guadalcanal enabling the consideration of a number of open settlement and agricultural sites, including a series of irrigated taro pond-field systems.

The thesis conclusion attempts a synthesis of the data as a first step in the formulation of a prehistory for Guadalcanal. The problems of defining the Guadalcanal sequences and their incorporation into a regional framework are discussed, and suggestions for future research requirements are made.
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