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Looking at the big motifs: a typology of the central band decorations of the Lapita ceramic tradition of New Caledonia (Southern Melanesia) and preliminary regional comparisons

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Introduction

For decades, the study of Lapita pottery has been limited by the often small size of the ceramic remains that archaeologists recovered in their test-pit excavations. Although the very first Lapita sherds published at the turn of the twentieth century by Father Meyer comprised some half pots (Meyer 1909, 1910; Green 2000), successive generations of researchers were mostly unlucky in their search for well-preserved Lapita remains. Consequently, up until the last few decades, most studies that focused on Lapita designs and the related ceramic forms on which the decorations were applied, were largely constructed on often very fragmented sherds. The progressive discovery of well preserved sites (Green 1976; Kirch 1987) has, amongst other things, allowed us to start to get a better understanding of the main categories of motifs that form the Lapita design system. Starting in the late 1970s Green was able to convincingly show a marked difference between the dentate-stamped motifs produced in the Melanesian crescent and the Fiji / West Polynesian region (Green 1978, 1979). Subsequent to Green's initial Western and Eastern Lapita styles a number of discrete Lapita Provinces have now been defined (Anson 1983; Kirch 1997; Summerhayes 2000). Amongst these, New Caledonia has been argued as forming a Southern Province, with a whole series of local specificities developing after first settlement (Sand 2000).

Although it is acknowledged that non-ceramic data greatly contributes to our knowledge of the Lapita Cultural Complex (Green 2003), it must be said that our working models still largely rest on the study of the intricately decorated Lapita pots. Not surprisingly, different types of analysis of the dentate-stamped and incised motifs have been adopted over the years. Moving away from the recording system proposed

by Mead (Mead *et al.* 1975) and from the seriation tables compiled by Anson (1983), Siorat was amongst the first to propose an analysis of the Lapita designs based on the study of the decorative method and the tools employed to produce the dentate-stamped patterns (1990). This approach, applied to the Lapita collection of site WBR001 of Nessadiou in New Caledonia (Siorat 1992), enabled him to propose a typology of friezes as well as central decorative bands, much in common with what Donovan (1973) had obtained for the Reef/Santa Cruz material. Over the last decade, this type of analysis has been expanded by our local Department of Archaeology for the other Lapita collections excavated in New Caledonia, showing its benefits in identifying the main decorative patterns that compose the Southern Lapita “repertoire” (Sand 2006). This paper presents a general review of the studies underway on this topic. The first part will discuss the new information that has been gained through a detailed analysis of the decorative technique employed to stamp the dentate motifs. This methodological approach will introduce a proposed typology for the Lapita motifs of New Caledonia (Figure 1), before a preliminary regional comparison of presence/absence of the main motifs in the different Lapita Provinces is presented.

Stamping the clay: methods and rules

Since their first discovery, the intricacy of the decorated Lapita sherds have led to multiple interpretations on the technique used to obtain these regular patterns. Needles and a type of roulette were proposed by the first observers (see Best 2002:46 for a review), although by the 1960s, the use of a comb with an alignment of teeth was firmly established (Poulsen 1967). The identification of a comb, traditionally used for Pacific tattooing, rapidly led to a series of parallels between the motifs printed on the clay and the art

Figure 1. Map of New Caledonia, with the main Lapita sites discovered to date across the archipelago.

of tattooing. Siorat (1990) has identified the existence of two main forms of tools to achieve the dentate-stamping, along with a rounded tube for full stamps. Although challenged for a period by Basek, who advocated that “dentate Lapita pottery decoration (...) do not (...) need to use a series of toothed stamps with straight and curved teeth rows to impress straight and curved lines” (Basek 1993:63), the proposal has proven its validity though more recent studies (cf. Ambrose 1999, this volume; Sand 2006). Detailed study and profiling of the imprints from different potsherd collections has provided a fairly good knowledge of the two main tool-types used in the Southern Lapita Province. The first type of tool is straight, with the use of combs of at least two different sizes: one is short, with 7 to 12 teeth on average and

the other is long, with between 20 and 30 teeth. The second form of tool is curved, composed of 10 to 18 teeth in general. On some pots the use of two sizes of curved combs can be identified (Figure 2).

In New Caledonia, very few sherds have dot impressions of around 0.5 mm, a size that characterises the Early Lapita pots of the Bismarck Archipelago (Anson 1983; Summerhayes 2000). Elongated impressed dots of Eastern Lapita type (Burley *et al.* 2002), measuring 2-3 mm long and up to 1-1.5 mm wide, are also extremely rare in New Caledonia. Most dots can be grouped in the size 1 mm to 1.5 mm, with a square or elongated shape. Close-up observations of the imprints of curved tools have identified “both trapezoidal and rectangular spaced intervals” (Ambrose 1997:527) between the teeth, thus showing in the Southern Province the same pattern of possible bent turtle scute as for the site of Ambitle in Northern Melanesia (Ambrose 1999). The identification of this specific bended tool across the Lapita area might tell us something about the process of development of the dentate-stamped Lapita technique in Near Oceania and/or further west, as this tool on turtle scute is not directly usable as a tattooing chisel. Significantly, the dentate-stamped sherds of pre-Lapita chronology in Island Southeast Asia (cf. Tsang 2007: Fig. 2) have mostly straight dotted lines, compatible with known tattooing tools. The absence of curved stamps on these pots may indicate that the transfer of the tattooing methods to clay was not straight forward as often advocated (Kirch 1997:142-143), but included an adaptation and innovation process, with the creation of the curved, bended comb (Sand 2006). The outcome of this is that probably, part of the Lapita patterns were not used as tattoo designs but were developed during this innovation process, seemingly as part of the development of new traditions linked to the first Austronesian expansion into the region.

The different tools were each used for specific purposes during the decoration process. The long straight comb appears mainly identifiable in the lines dividing different bands of the decoration, as well as in some large straight motifs like the labyrinth. Aside from its use in complex motifs, the short straight comb is mainly used in successive alignments of vertical imprints or in different types of triangular patterns in the friezes. The curved tool can be used to form individual imprints in successive rows, but also partly superimposed imprints, allowing to obtain dense alignments forming some of the dividing bands that Mead had termed “zone markers” (Mead 1975). The macroscopic observation of these specific imprints on numerous Lapita sherds

Figure 2. Dentate-stamped patterns around a face-motif, demonstrating the use of different sized straight and curved toothed tools.

Figure 3. Close-up view of Figure 2, highlighting the imprints of a straight and a curved tool to create two types of “zone marker”.

(Figure 3), leads to the rejection of the proposal made by Best with reference to material from New Caledonia (Best 2002:47), of the use of a “roulette” to obtain the densely imprinted “zone markers” characterising Lapita patterns in Island Melanesia (Best 2002:46-50). Without any doubt, all these alignments have been achieved simply with a curved (or small straight) comb, the superimposition of the successive curved imprints that partly cover the preceding print being clearly visible under a microscope (cf. Sand 2006, Fig. 3.42-3.43) (see also Ambrose this volume).

Typology of dentate-stamped motifs for New Caledonia

The study of the actual tools that were used to produce the Lapita patterns as a preliminary stage in the construction of a typology of motifs, has proven essential in understanding the rules governing the decoration. As already identified by Siorat nearly two decades ago (1990), the principle of decoration for the Southern Lapita Province has been systematically constructed around a two-part structure: a central motif horizontally encircling the pot and always surrounded by a series of horizontal friezes over and under the central motif. No example of two successive central bands has been identified in New Caledonia, contrary to some Bismarck Archipelago and Reef/Santa Cruz sites for example (Green 1976: Fig. 77; Summerhayes 2000: Fig. 5.17 and 5.18). Sometimes, three-dimensional adding, mainly in the form of vertical clay bands and nubbins, allowed the division of these successive horizontal alignments into different blocs (Figure 4). On the carinated pots, which form the principal ceramic form identified for Southern Lapita, the decoration is restricted mainly to the upper part of the vessel, with one to three friezes present under the carination of some of the pots of small size. On most of the flat bottom dishes, the decoration is limited to the visible outer part of the dish, but it can be continued on the flat bottom for those dishes that appear to have had a pedestal. Variation is also identifiable on the rims, with decoration sometimes placed on the upper part of the inner side of the vessel.

Figure 4. Carinated pot with vertical clay-bands separating the central band and the friezes in three parts (site LP0023, Kurin).

The significant number of excavations conducted on Lapita sites in New Caledonia over the last 50 years and the good preservation of some sites, makes it one of the archipelagos of the Western Pacific where the largest amount of large sherds as well as nearly complete or complete pots has been discovered to date (Sand 1999; Sand *et al.* 1998) (Figure 5). This unique situation has allowed us to gain a fairly complete view of the main motifs that were stamped and/or incised on the Lapita pots in the Southern Lapita Province. Although no detailed presentation is proposed in the context of the present paper, it must though be emphasised that the typology of dentate-stamped friezes can be subdivided into three main categories: the motifs made with only the straight tool, those made with only the curved tool, and the friezes combining two or three tools, with the adding of the round imprint. As had been highlighted in Anson's tables (1983) as well as in the figures published by Donovan (1973) and Siorat (1990), a fairly large amount of designs combining the possibilities offered by the three tools was developed on the Lapita pots (Sand 2006: Figs. 3.102-3.104).

Figure 5. Example of a nearly complete carinated pot profile bearing a “long nose” anthropomorphic motif with “earplugs” (site WK0013A, Lapita).

Surprisingly, for the central band that forms the main decoration of the pots, only 9 categories of dentate-stamped geometric patterns (divided into 6 main types and 3 sets of uncommon types), 4 categories of dentate-stamped anthropomorphic patterns and one principal category of incised pattern have been identified to date in New Caledonia amongst tens of thousands of decorated sherds. This section of the paper proposes to detail each category in turn, specifying the principal inner variations¹.

a. The geometric motifs

i. The “labyrinth” category (Anson’s codes 426-430)

The “labyrinth” category (Figure 6) is probably the most complex graphic pattern applied on Lapita pots. It is characterised by a succession of interlocking rectangles succeeding each other and placed each time at a near right angle to one another. Structurally, this pattern can be compared to mat weaving, defined through one to three parallel lines for each rectangle. The complexity of the design and the need to follow a standard rule of construction, does not allow for major variations. The main variation identified relates to the direction of the pattern, which can in some cases be reversed from the direction observed on most pots. The number of successive vertical rectangles is evidently dependent on the overall size of the central band, the larger pots having two interlocking rows. The only areas where specific patterns can be applied are the lower and upper triangles that are not filled by the main design, along the borders of the central band. When they were not left plain, a whole series of motifs have been used to fill-in these triangles, ranking from possible zoomorphs to interlocking triangles or squares (cf. Sand 2006, fig. 3.64).

Figure 6. Examples of "labyrinths".

ii. The "undulated" category (no Anson equivalent, Donovan's motif 86)

This category (Figure 7) is constructed around a standard basis: a series of successive X imprints, whose points are connected horizontally by two curved imprints with their central part turned downwards. Often a third curved imprint is placed in-between, unconnected to the central part of the X. Usually, only one row of the undulated motif is present, but on some larger pots have been identified two successive rows (Figure 8), and even a specific pattern with interlocking successions of curved imprints. While the lower part of the central band of this category shows diverse sets of design, the upper part appears to

Figure 7. Examples of "undulated" motifs.

Figure 8. Partly complete pots bearing classic “undulated” motifs (site WK0013A, Lapita).

have had a fairly standard decoration. This consists of two vertical imprints placed over the centre of the curved imprints composing the main motif, each connected to the next vertical imprint by two curved imprints in horizontal succession, with their central part usually turned upwards.

iii. The “interlocking triangles” category (Anson’s codes 129-132/146-148)

This category (Figure 9) is characterised by a succession of mostly double-lined V-shaped triangles placed one inside the other, leading necessarily to a progressive reduction of the size of the triangles. The lower parts of the triangles are either rounded, pointed, or rest on the horizontal line forming the lower border of the central band. The upper parts of each V-shaped triangle are topped face-to-face by a curved imprint placed vertically, with the front part towards the centre of the pattern. On some large central bands, a reversed series of interlocking triangles, with the point towards the top, has been added to the main pattern, starting on-top of the curved imprints. A few odd motifs probably representing a deviation of this category have been identified in the New Caledonian collections.

Figure 9. Examples of “interlocking triangles”.

iv. The “rectangles” category (Anson’s codes 278-289/370/422-424)

The geometric pattern represented by the rectangle, allowing the formation of one to five horizontal bands and as many vertical divisions as permitted by the size of the pot, is one of the most simple graphic structures of the Lapita design tradition. At the same time, the rectangular motif has allowed for the development of a large variety of different infill, making this category the most diverse of the typology

identified to date in New Caledonia (Figure 10). These rank from the simplest types, open boxes left empty, to the insertion of simple horizontal, vertical or diagonal bars often put in reverse sense from one box to the next, providing a clear difference. On some pots, the vertical and horizontal divisions of the rectangles have disappeared, leaving only a diamond-shaped pattern. Rectangles can be divided into triangles, one being left plain while the other is filled, or each triangle being filled with a specific pattern. The most complex graphic structure is obtained through the division of each rectangle into four triangles, with specific infill. The full diversity of this category certainly remains to be completed.

Figure 10. Variety of "rectangular" motifs.

v. The “joined triangles” category
(Anson’s codes 187-195)

This category is defined by a succession of joining triangles in one row, one out of two being reversed (Figure 11). This motif appears to be present exclusively on small pots and the category might be seen as only a derivation from the rectangular motif, adapted to the small size of some vessels.

Figure 11. Examples of “joined triangles”.

vi. The “simple zigzags” category
(Anson’s codes 267-269)

This is the simplest dentate-stamped decoration identified in the New Caledonian collections. It consists of successive imprints of a straight or curved tool in a balanced movement, creating a loose pattern of zigzags. On large pots bearing this motif (Figure 12), the zigzags were placed vertically, mainly on the upper body and horizontally above the carination. Although this motif was present from the very start of the Lapita period, it developed mainly in the Loyalty Islands over the following two centuries, the toothed comb being finally replaced by a tool without teeth.

Figure 12. Large oval-shaped pot with “simple zigzag” patterns (site WK0013B, Lapita).

vii. The “vertical zigzags” category
(Anson’s codes 270-275)

This category is defined by small straight imprints placed in opposite angles, forming successive vertical zigzag patterns. Very few sherds bearing this motif have been discovered in New Caledonia (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Examples of the “vertical zigzag” motif.

viii. The “wave” category (no Anson equivalent)

A few sherds have shown the existence of a simple wavy curved motif that appears to be developed in one single direction on some pots but in opposite directions on some flat bottom dishes (Figure 14). This category appears at present to be unique to New Caledonia.

Figure 14. A “wave” motif on a flat-bottom Lapita dish (Site KV0003, St Maurice - Vatcha).

ix. Other rare motifs

Surprisingly few sherds do not fit in the main categories defined above. The first case is composed of motifs present on small sherds, for which the identification of the overall design is difficult. This is especially the case for the partial designs probably part of complex face motifs (see below). The second case is formed of motifs that are mainly used as patterns of friezes, but multiplied in different rows to fill-in a central band. Regional comparisons show that this tradition was developed also in the other Lapita Provinces. Finally, some motifs, known in other Lapita Provinces, appear almost absent from the Southern Province, having been identified on only one or a few sherds. This is the case for example of a large pot bearing a specific V-shaped motif (Sand *et al.* 1998, Fig. 4b) identified mainly in Fiji (Anson’s codes 224-227). Another case is the well-known complex motif with a flower pattern (Figure 15) (see Spriggs 1990, Fig. 27), that bears

Figure 15. Large dentate-stamped Lapita vessel bearing a unique pattern with a flower-motif (site WBR001, Nessadiou).

resemblances with partial motifs of the Bismarck Archipelago. On the contrary, some widespread design patterns appear nearly totally absent from the Southern Lapita design system. This is for example the case of the “house-like” motif (Anson’s code 503), identified on only three small sherds for the entire New Caledonian corpus. Although future studies will have to incorporate these rare designs into a general motif classification, it does not appear useful at this stage to create a specific category for each of these patterns.

b. The anthropomorphic motifs

i. The “double-faced” category

The double face motif is defined by a stylised representation of a human body, with an oval head, a triangular body and extensions figuring the arms. The body is highlighted by a triangular anthropomorphic figure, the whole motif being enclosed in a round-shaped envelope. The double-faced motif has been clearly identified to date on only one sherd found in Isle of Pines (Figure 16). Other less well preserved sherds bearing rounded patterns and triangular faces that fit this category have been identified in various other sites of the Archipelago.

Figure 16. Computer reconstruction of the double-face sherd discovered on site KV0003 of St Maurice - Vatcha (Isle of Pines).

ii. The “simple triangular-faced” category

A different category is composed of anthropomorphic representations of one single triangular face (Figure 17). The designs surrounding the face are often complex, probably a sign that this category was developed in parallel to the double-faced motif and not simply as its simplification. On a number of the well-preserved examples, the head is covered by a sort of hat, sometimes topped by what appears to be

Figure 17. Examples of "triangular face" motifs.

an ornament of plumes or leaves. The design of the eyes and nose are fairly standard, the main differences of treatment being restricted to the decoration of the cheeks and what appears to be eyelashes. No mouth is present. A more stylised use of the triangular face has been identified on some sherds, with a partial superimposition of two triangles, leading to the sharing of the same eye by two faces (Figure 18). One unique example of a more naturalistic face has been discovered at the site of Lapita, probably printed on a large flat-bottom dish (Sand 1999:44).

Figure 18. Examples of stylised "triangular face" motifs.

iii. The "long-nose anthropomorphic with earplugs" category

This other classic Lapita face motif is characterized by an anthropomorphic face (see Terrell and Schechter 2007 for an alternative hypothesis) with a long nose, two clearly marked eyes, no mouth, separated from the next face by a rounded or oval motif defined as an "earplug" by Spriggs (1990) or an "emblem" by Kirch (1997:136). This category is present on all the main Lapita sites of New Caledonia, on flat-bottom dishes as well as on carinated jars (Figure 19). It has not been possible to show in the Southern Province

Figure 19. Examples of "long-nose" faces.

Figure 20. Large carinated vessel with two different motifs defining the “earplugs” (site WK0013A, Lapita).

the existence of two successive “earplugs” separating faces (cf. Spriggs 1990: Fig. 18). On one well preserved carinated pot of the site of Lapita, the inner motifs of the “earplugs” are repeated each two faces (Figure 20).

iv. The “stylised long-nose” category (Anson’s codes 344-352)

As for the triangular face category, the New Caledonian collections have revealed a *simplification* of the main long-nose motif, by removing the “earplugs” and creating a succession of eye-nose-eye-nose. This simpler pattern has allowed a diversification of the treatment of the face motif, defined by one to three lines, different forms of nose as well as eye treatments (Figure 21). In some extreme examples, the eye

Figure 21. Diversity of the “stylised long nose” category still bearing a naturalistic representation of the eye.

Figure 22. Diversity of the “stylised long nose” category with curved motifs replacing the eye.

becomes illustrated by only a rounded circle or a curved imprint. In other cases, the eye is replaced by curved imprints placed in various directions (Figure 22), successions of crosses, or the space is left empty (Figure 23). These changes witnessed by the stylised long-nose face have led to the regular inclusion of a rectangle to define the upper part of the motif and multiple ways to illustrate the “nose”.

Figure 23. Diversity of the “stylised long nose” category with squares and X motifs.

c. The incised motifs

Although incised sherds represent about a fifth of the decorated items in the overall collections of the Lapita sites in New Caledonia, only one main incised type of central band design and two other rare categories have been identified to date.

i. The “triangles in a row” category (no Anson equivalent)

The main category consists of a succession of triangles (Figure 24 a-b), with one point placed in the centre of the band and the two extremes touching the horizontal incised lines marking the upper and lower end of the band. The two lines joining these points are straight or curved inwards, while the line joining the high and low points of the triangle is straight or curved towards the outside, a new triangle being positioned in the centre of this crescent. The inner part of each triangle is filled with parallel curved lines, as is the space between the triangles and the upper and lower limits of the central band. Although on most large sherds, the succession of triangles appears to be in only one direction, some more complete pots are decorated with triangles that are mirror-faced in one part of the central band (Figure 24 c).

Figure 24. Examples of incised “triangles in a row” category.

ii. The “joined triangles” category (Anson’s codes 433-434)

One rare motif is characterised by a succession of joined curved triangles forming a horizontal band, one in two being reversed (Figure 25). The infill of each triangle is made with parallel curved incisions, whose directions are reversed from one triangle to the other, in order to highlight the overall pattern.

iii. The “diamond-shaped” category (Anson’s code 230)

A rare incised motif is made of simple opposed diagonal lines, creating diamond-shaped patterns, limited by the horizontal incisions that define the limits of the central band.

Figure 25. Example of incised “joined triangles” category.

Southern Lapita central band motifs in regional perspective

As noted in the introduction of this paper, it has since long been identified that major regional variations were present amongst the main dentate-stamped motifs produced in the different Provinces of the Lapita area (cf. Kirch 1997). The study of the Cultural Complex has led over the last decades to progressive refinements in the overall understanding of the subtle differences developed between the main archipelagos, starting with the division of the Lapita region into a Western and an Eastern Province by Green in the 1970s (1979), then a definition of a Far Western Province by Anson (1983) and a Southern Province by Kirch (1997; Sand 2000), before the probable future definition of a Central Province in the years to come (Sand 2001) (Figure 26). The comparisons have shown a series of local trends, and already 25 years ago, Anson could for example identify a specific development of stylised Lapita faces in the New Caledonian collections (Anson 1983, codes 344-352; see Chiu 2003 and this volume for an update). Studies focusing on the tools as a starting point for the analysis of the Lapita repertoire, can today broaden our understanding of the Lapita design corpus and its production, by identifying different elements that might have influenced regional variation. For example, it is probably not mere coincidence if the finest dentate imprints are found on pots produced in regions where obsidian was readily available through short (Bismarcks) or long-distance (Reef/Santa Cruz, Northern Vanuatu) trade (Galipaud and Swete-Kelly this volume; Sheppard 1993; Summerhayes 2003), while the coarsest and largest tooth imprints are found in Western Polynesia, where small sharp flakes are rare in Lapita sites (Kirch 1988; Poulsen 1987; Sand 1993). Observations on the overall structuring of the decorations highlights differences between Provinces that have already been shown through other methods of analysis, with a more complex set of rules in the Bismarck archipelago than in Remote Oceania (Figure 27), like the presence of the two successive central bands around pots. Examples could be multiplied, all underlining regional variability as well as chronological changes in each Province, that need to be taken into consideration when we deal with the Lapita ceramic repertoire.

The presentation in this paper of a structured typology of the motifs identified on the central bands of the Lapita pots produced in the Southern Province, provides an illustration of these differences through an approach focusing on the main categories of designs instead of the multiple variations between sherds and individual sites (Anson 1983; Chiu 2003; Summerhayes 2000; Wickler 2001). This is by necessity a preliminary

Figure 26. Location of the different Lapita Provinces defined to date.

Figure 27. Diversity of flat bottom dishes and bowl-shaped vessels between the different regions of the Lapita area. (a) Bismarck Archipelago; (b) Reef/Santa Cruz; (c) New Caledonia; (d) Tonga.

attempt not taking into account the chronological changes of the motifs over time, this data being mostly unavailable, as numerous Lapita sites in Island Melanesia are awaiting full publication. The summary comparisons proposed for this paper draw on multiple publications of material, in final monographs or grey literature, as well as personal recording of collections². For the scope of the exercise, it has been decided to limit the study of the categories identified in New Caledonia, to their presence / absence in major sites of each Province, focussing on the sites whose material is the most accessible in published form. Two categories have been removed: the “wavy motif” and the “unique motifs”, that appear for most to be unique to New Caledonia at this stage. For the final table, the West New Britain area is represented by the sites of the Arawes (Phelan 1997; Summerhayes 2000), East New Britain by the sites of Watom and Duke of York (Anson 1983; Green and Anson 2000; White pers. comm. 2002), with the sites of Ambitle-Kamgot (Ambrose pers. comm. 2003; Summerhayes pers. comm. 2005) illustrating the data for the east of the Bismarcks. The different Lapita sites of the Reef / Santa Cruz (RF-2, SZ-8 and RL-6) have been grouped in one column (Donovan 1973; Green pers. comm. 2004), as have the sites of Vanuatu (Malo and Teouma) (Hedrick nd; Green pers. comm. 2004; Bedford pers. comm. 2005). For this archipelago, the table is certainly incomplete, a large amount of as yet unpublished data having been collected over the last years in northern as well as central Vanuatu (Bedford 2007; Galipaud and Swete-Kelly this volume). The Lapita sites of Western Fiji (Natunuku, Yanuca, Naigani) (Mead *et al.* 1975; Kay 1984) have been grouped in one column, separate from the sites of Eastern Fiji and West Polynesia (Best 1984; Poulsen 1987). There has been no attempt to create new categories, or to identify specific motifs in each site.

The final table (Table 1) shows a composite set of results. Depending on each site, there appears to be a strong variability in the categories of motifs present / absent. The clinal West to East diversity of the overall Lapita motifs is nevertheless clearly visible, the sites in the Bismarck Archipelago on one side and Eastern Fiji / West Polynesia on the other side having the least shared categories with New Caledonia (Figure 28). This is especially the case for Watom, which often appears in the comparative graphs as closely related to the Southern

Table 1. Presence/absence in major Lapita sites/regions, of the motif categories identified for the Southern Lapita Province.

	West New Britain	East New Britain	Anir Islands	Reef/Santa Cruz	Vanuatu	New Caledonia	West Fiji	East Fiji/West Polynesia
labyrinths		x	?	x	x	x	P	?
undulated motifs			P	x		x	P	
interlocking triangles		x		x	x	x	x	x
rectangular motifs			x	x	x	x		x
joined triangles		x	x	x		x	?	
simple zig-zag					x	x	x	
vertical zig-zag	x	x	x		x	P	x	
double-face motif		x		x	?	x		
triangular face motif	P	P		x	?	x		
long-nose face		x	x	x	x	x	P	
stylised long nose face				x	x	x		
incised triangles in a row	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
incised joined triangles	x					x	x	x
incised diamond-shaped triangles	x		x	x	x	x	x	

Lapita Province sites (Anson 1983, Fig. LXVI). Western Fiji shares a significant number of categories with New Caledonia, although on detailed observation, most of these correspond to only a few sherds discovered in first settlement contexts. The main affinities remain clearly with the Reef/Santa Cruz and Vanuatu, even if the comparative study between the different collections has shown the existence, in these two archipelagos, of a series of patterns that do not appear in Southern Lapita. As specified in the typology part, one of the main motifs nearly totally absent of the New Caledonian collection, numbering three specimens amongst tens of thousands of decorated sherds, is the “house” motif (Anson’s codes 245-249/301-305/311-314/353-361/503), present in all the other Provinces (Anson 2000:127 for Watom; Donovan 1973:128 for the Reef/Santa Cruz; Bedford *et al.* 2006 for Teouma; Kay 1984:84 for Naigani). Less surprising is the absence of pot-stands with deep grooves or cut-outs, as well as the bowl-shaped vessels with a thickened rim and complex stylized faces restricted to the upper part of the pottery, that make up a significant amount of the early Lapita productions from the Bismarck Archipelago (Summerhayes 2000, Figs. 5.3b and 5.6a) to at least Aore in northern Vanuatu (Galipaud pers. comm. 2006). This Far Western production is also characterised by a series of specific motifs that have never been identified in New Caledonia, like the seed-like motif (Anson’s codes 111/120), the alignment of small squares with a rounded imprint in the centre (Anson’s codes 489-490), and the vertical imprint of multiple successive curved lines. Aside from the region-wide category of incised triangles in a row, the comparative study has highlighted the existence of a number of other rare incised motifs, without showing at this stage clear sub-regional groupings. The most important information gathered from this comparison of multiple collections through a rigid typology canvas has been to show that, with the removal of specific stylised face-motifs from the Bismarck Archipelago and unique Eastern Lapita patterns, there does not appear to be a significant number of other major motif categories in the Lapita repertoire.

Figure 28. Graph showing the motif categories shared amongst the different sites/regions with the Southern Lapita Province.

Conclusion

The construction of a typology for the central band of Lapita pots discovered in New Caledonia has allowed the identification of a definitive restricted range of main motifs. Although variations are present in all categories identified, the overall small number of distinct motifs in the collections is testimony that Lapita potters did not print freely-inspired patterns on the clay surface of their carinated pots, flat bottom dishes, pedestal stands and lids. This conclusion highlights once again the specific nature of the dentate-stamped Lapita decoration, which must have carried a type of meaning or message needing to be replicated from generation to generation during the Austronesian settlement process of Near and Remote Oceania. After a first phase of analysis which has favoured mainly time-distance decay to explain the observable changes in the dentate-stamped motif repertoire during the Oceanic settlement from West to East (Green 1978; Ishimura 2002), new analytical paths have recently appeared, with for example the proposal of two different Lapita groups spreading across the Western Pacific (Noury 2005) or the possible existence of various Lapita groups in the Bismarck Archipelago, which did not all expand into Remote Oceania and all at the same time (Sand 2007). To test these new hypotheses, we need to complete the large database that has been built over the last decades mainly on the friezes (Donovan 1973), to progressively incorporate a more structured typology of the different categories of central band motifs created during the Lapita period. This has been the task achieved for New Caledonia (Sand 2006), Tonga (Burley *et al.* 2002), and Fiji to a certain extent (Clark and Murray 2006). A regional effort of this kind will certainly lead, aside from the definition of the main categories, to the identification of minor motifs that may tell us far more about site-to-site connections than the classic labyrinth or long-nose designs that make up most of our studies. Hidden “emblems” (Kirch 1997:136), postulated by some to be “house-society symbols” (Chiu 2005) or “group” symbols (Noury 2005), these unique patterns isolated amongst thousands of potsherds,

await to be identified in their own right as links between far-distant regions, from Island Southeast Asia to Remote Oceania. Their social significance may be a reminder of the inappropriateness of building our archaeological models on simple scenarios. There is evidently in these dentate-stamped and incised Lapita potsherds much more information awaiting our scrutiny. It is vital information that will further emphasise the over-simplistic nature of the one-way directional arrows of Lapita spread out of the West towards New Caledonia and Fiji / West Polynesia, that still highlight most of our maps of the Austronesian spread out into Remote Oceania.

Notes

1. The detail on the origin of each sherd illustrated in the motif categories can be found in Sand 1996: 156.
2. I have had the opportunity to study first-hand a series of Lapita collections encompassing the whole region, thanks to the kindness of the excavators and / or custodians of these remains scattered in a number of institutions across the planet: material from the Arawes (Canberra and Melbourne), Ambitle (Canberra), Watom (Bale and Paris), Reef / Santa Cruz (Auckland), Teouma (Port Vila), Lapita (Berkeley), Natunuku and Yanuca (Suva), Tonga (Auckland, Vancouver).

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